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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Pastoral Epistles

ANDREAS DETTWILER

1. INTRODUCTION

The three so-called “Pastoral Epistles” (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus)¹ are generally considered a coherent deutero-Pauline corpus probably written by a single author.² Arguments favoring the pseudonymous character of the three letters are based not only on often discussed stylistic and semantic observations, but also on biographical data within the three letters. These details are hardly compatible with those of the proto-Pauline Letters (see Pauline Epistles) or the Acts of the Apostles, marked by substantial differences in terms of theology, polemics against the opponents and, last but not least, instructions about church structure and order better fitting a “post-apostolic” period. In this perspective, mention both of the author (Paul) and of the addressees (Timothy and Titus) has been considered fictitious. Proposed identifications of the historical author—for example the author of Luke-Acts (see Gospel of Luke) or Polycarp of Smyrna—are inconclusive. Thus, the Pastoral Epistles were written by an unknown author in the third generation of early Christianity. This author was familiar not only with many Pauline traditions, but also with other traditions of early Christianity—notably “synoptic” traditions—and, more broadly, other (Jewish-)Hellenistic traditions of the Greco-Roman world.

The exact date of composition is difficult to determine. The critical research tends to favor around 100 CE, but a later date of composition—in the first half of the second century—should

¹For detailed arguments, particularly helpful are, for example: Ingo Broer, in collaboration with Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 3rd ed. (Würzburg: Echter, 2010), 520–69; or Udo Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, UTB 1830, 8th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 403–25.

²Though this remains the majority opinion in contemporary research, the historical authenticity of the *corpus pastorale* continues to be defended by some scholars, especially in the English-speaking context. Correlation between the question of its historical authenticity and the question of the literary and thematic homogeneity of the corpus is strong, but not absolute. Jens Herzer, for example, defends a nuanced model: 1 Timothy presupposed 2 Timothy and Titus and was written by a different author in a later—towards the middle of the second century—and very different historical context. Consequently, 2 Timothy and Titus should be re-evaluated as possibly authentic Pauline letters (in this case, 2 Timothy would have been written in the Roman imprisonment around 62–64 CE, and Titus during the trip to Rome around 60 CE). On this proposal see for example: Jens Herzer, “Abschied vom Konsens? Die Pseudepigraphie der Pastoralbriefe als Herausforderung an die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft,” *TLZ* 129 (2004): 1267–82; “Pastoralbriefe,” *WiBiLex*, <http://bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/53866/> (published by the author April 2013; consulted August 17, 2018); “Zwischen Mythos und Wahrheit: Neue Perspektiven auf die sogenannten Pastoralbriefe,” *NTS* 63 (2017): 428–50.

not be excluded a priori.³ The original place of composition is unclear as well. While three examples within the letters may give some indication, two are especially vague: somewhere in Macedonia or Achaia for the first letter to Timothy (1 Tim 1:3); Rome for the second letter to Timothy (2 Tim 1:8, 17; 2:9); Nicopolis, or at least on the way to there, for the letter to Titus (Titus 3:12). These are probably fictitious, but Ephesus, or more generally Asia Minor—one of the major geographical spheres influenced by the Pauline tradition—seems a good hypothesis. The original literary order of the three letters also remains disputed. Whereas 2 Timothy, a letter of exhortation integrating elements of literary farewell traditions, was certainly intended to conclude the pastoral corpus, the order of the other two letters remains open. Should the corpus be read—in the sense of a coherent Pauline narrative and thus comparable to contemporary epistolary novels⁴—in the sequence 1 Tim > Titus > 2 Tim or, more plausibly, in the order Titus > 1 Tim > 2 Tim? Since this question is not decisive for our enquiry, no further discussion is needed here.

The letters, through the implied readers Timothy and Titus, seem to be primarily addressed to local leaders of communities comprising Christ believers attached to the Pauline tradition. Presupposed is the uncontested authority of Paul, the great—and seemingly unique—apostle of the past; otherwise the rhetorical strategy, based on Pauline pseudonymity, would not be effective. The *corpus pastorale* aims to maintain and strengthen the Pauline tradition and invites the audience to pursue a specific “Christian” life-style (εὐσεβεία: “piety,” “godliness”), comprising a whole set of moral behaviors such as temperance, self-control, purity, modesty, hospitality, etc. By taking up such conventional values and advocating intercession for political authorities (1 Tim 2:2), the letters aim to offer the audience a perspective of positive interaction with and adaptation to the “non-Christian” environment. On a more direct ecclesiological level, the Epistles advocate hierarchical relationships within the communities, based on the central ecclesiological metaphor of the “household (of God)” (οἶκος θεοῦ, 1 Tim 3:15), with God as the “owner of the house” (δεσπότης, 2 Tim 2:21) and the leaders of the communities as “stewards (of God)” (θεοῦ οἰκονόμος, Titus 1:7).⁵ The main ideological position of the Pastoral Epistles is not only imbedded in an overall theocentric, christological and soteriological framework, but also sharpened by polemical affirmations against opponents running through all three letters. The precise content of this “false teaching” is notoriously difficult to evaluate, since the Pastoral Epistles—contrary to the proto-Pauline Letters—no longer engage in nuanced argument with the opposite view; they “do not develop their theological convictions in an argumentative manner, but posit their content as an entity which is comprehensible as ‘doctrine’ and considered as completed.”⁶ This has consequences for the way we treat the question of Christology. We will analyze the Christology of the Pastoral Epistles

³Cf. Gerd Häfner, “Die Pastoralbriefe (1 Tim/2 Tim/Tit),” in *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, ed. Martin Ebner and Stefan Schreiber, Studienbücher Theologie 6 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 450–73 (463); Michael Theobald, *Israel-Vergessenheit in den Pastoralbriefen: Ein neuer Vorschlag zu ihrer historisch-theologischen Verortung im 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr. unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Ignatiusbriefe*, SBS 229 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2016), 349–72. Between 120 and 150 CE “die Pastoralbriefe . . . dürften . . . in die 20er bis 40er Jahren [of the second century CE] zu datieren sein” (353).

⁴In this sense, see Gerd Häfner, “Das Corpus Pastorale als literarisches Konstrukt,” *TQ* 187 (2007): 258–73, esp. 269–73; and above all, Timo Glaser, *Paulus als Briefroman erzählt: Studien zum antiken Briefroman und seiner christlichen Rezeption in den Pastoralbriefen*, NTOA/SUNT 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

⁵Cf. Broer and Weidemann, *Einleitung*, 551.

⁶Lukas Bormann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, UTB 4838 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 197 (this translation and all the subsequent ones are mine).

independently from the question of opponents. To incorporate this question would necessitate a more detailed study beyond present scope.

2. PORTRAYAL OF JESUS

Since no sharp differences in the three letters' Christology would challenge a basic assumption of unity in the *corpus pastorale*,⁷ we will present a synthetic view of the portrayal of Jesus in the three letters.

Far from being a heterogeneous patchwork of different traditional christological affirmations, the Christology of the Pastoral Epistles has a clear outline with a strong soteriological accent. Söding describes it as “a rock-solid and conservative Christology, but open towards the Hellenistic culture which emphasizes above all the presence of God in the person and action of Jesus Christ.”⁸ Two concepts are central for the Christology of the Pastoral Epistles: that of “savior” (σωτήρ) and of “epiphany (manifestation)” (ἐπιφάνεια).

Regarding the concept of “savior,” three aspects are most prominent. First, the title highlights the *theocentric* aspect of the Epistles' Christology, since six of the ten occurrences designate God (1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4), and the other four Christ (2 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6). God “saves” (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 1:9; 4:18; Titus 3:5; cf. also 1 Tim 2:15), as does Christ Jesus (1 Tim 1:15). This divine saving activity is not an accidental one; it is rooted in the salvific project which God has decided “before the ages began” (2 Tim 1:9; cf. Titus 1:2–3). This project is intrinsically related to the person of Christ, since the grace of God “has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10). Second, the concept “savior” underlines the *universalistic* orientation of the Epistles' theology: God, the Savior, “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). First, Tim 4:10 is similar, even though it explicitly affirms the conditions for receiving the saving event: “the living God [. . .] is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” (cf. also Titus 2:11: “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all”). Jung explains: “The universalism which is inherent in the semantic field of the title of Soter is used here to proclaim and to sharpen the Pauline position of the salvation beyond the borders of Israel.”⁹ Secondly, the concept is *hermeneutically* productive within the cultural context of the Roman imperial period. On the one hand, the title “savior” is rooted in the language

⁷Philip H. Towner, “Christology in the Letters to Timothy and Titus,” in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 219–44. Towner defends a different point of view: although the three letters have some Christological features in common—notably the designation of “Savior” and the epiphany motif—each of the three letters contains specific accents: “1 Timothy reflects a decided emphasis on the humanity of Christ. Titus explores in greater depth the co-equal status of God and Christ. 2 Timothy brings the promises of resurrection and vindication, as well as the eschatological functions of Christ, to bear on the harsh realities of suffering and death that confronts Timothy and challenged his faithful endurance” (243).

⁸Thomas Söding, “Das Erscheinen des Retters. Zur Christologie der Pastoralbriefe,” in *Christologie in der Paulus-Schule: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des paulinischen Evangeliums*, ed. Klaus Scholtissek, SBS 181 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 182.

⁹Franz Jung, *ΣΩΤΗΡ: Studien zur Rezeption eines hellenistischen Ehrentitels im Neuen Testament*, NTA NF 39 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002), 332.

of the Greek Bible designating the God of Israel's salvific will towards his people.¹⁰ On the other, it is open to a (post-)Hellenistic context of reception, since the concept plays an important role "in the veneration of God and in the imperial cult of the Greco-Roman world."¹¹ Thus, the title is immediately understandable for people living in a non-Jewish context.

The typically Greek concept of "epiphany" seems to have first of all a classical eschatological signification pointing to the future event of Christ's second coming as judge (cf. 1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 4:1; Titus 2:13). In this respect it is identical with the more widespread concept of *παρουσία* in early Christian literature. Yet a closer look at the semantic field of *ἐπιφάνεια* (cf. also the verb *ἐπιφαίνω* in Titus 2:11; 3:4) shows that the term cannot be reduced to one aspect of the revelation in Christ. As Oberlinner rightly observed, "The concept comprises the totality of the salvific intervention of God, his being as Savior; it thus comprises the Christ-event in its entirety, not only individual phases."¹² In 2 Tim 1:10, for example, it designates the incarnation of Jesus Christ (cf. eventually also 2 Tim 4:8, even though the passage has more future eschatological connotations). The idea of Jesus's incarnation is also present in other passages (cf. 1 Tim 1:15; 3:16), and there is no doubt about the humanity of Jesus (cf. 1 Tim 2:5; 6:13; 2 Tim 2:8). Understanding the death of Jesus as a soteriologically productive event is here and there present (cf. 1 Tim 2:6; Titus 2:14), but the resurrection (elevation) of the exclusive mediator between God and humanity (cf. 1 Tim 2:5), and its consequences for the community of Christ-believers and the world seem to be even more powerfully emphasized (cf. 1 Tim 3:16, "vindicated in spirit" probably refers to the event of resurrection; see also 2 Tim 1:10, 2:8b). As is the case with the concept of "savior," the semantic field of the christological "epiphany" also is embedded within a larger *theocentric* framework, as made evident in Titus 2:11 ("for the grace of *God* has appeared, bringing salvation to all") and 3:4 ("But when the goodness and loving kindness of *God* our Savior appeared . . ."). These passages show at the same time that the Pastoral Epistles strongly underline the reality of God's saving action in Christ, already in the *present time*.

3. RECEPTION OF JESUS

The Pastoral Epistles are not a treatise on Christology, as their main concerns lie elsewhere in moral instructions, questions on internal ecclesial organization, and the place of Christ-believing communities within the larger, non-Christian society. Nevertheless, christological affirmations play an important role in reshaping the memory of the "Christian" tradition within a new, largely (post-) Hellenistic historical context of Pauline communities on the threshold of the second century. Since "tradition" is crucial for the theology of the Pastoral Epistles, it is not surprising that they take up extensively traditional material, including liturgical (theological and christological) confessions (1 Tim 2:5), doxologies (1 Tim 1:17; 6:15–16), hymns (1 Tim 3:16), catechetical material (probably 2 Tim 2:11–13; also Titus 3:4–7), parenetical domestic codes (1 Tim 2:8–15; 6:1–2; Titus 2:2–10), lists of virtues and vices (1 Tim 1:9–10; 6:11; 2 Tim 3:2–4, 10; Titus 2:2, 5; 3:3).¹³ Christological

¹⁰Lorenz Oberlinner, "Die 'Epiphaneia' des Heilswillens Gottes in Christus Jesus: Zur Grundstruktur der Christologie der Pastoralbriefe," ZNW 71 (1980): 192–213, here 197 with n. 24.

¹¹Oberlinner, "Epiphaneia," 198; cf. also the detailed analysis of Jung (ΣΩΤΗΡ, 177–238).

¹²Oberlinner, "Epiphaneia," 202: "Der Begriff umfasst die Gesamtheit des helfenden Eingreifens Gottes, seines Retter-Seins; und er umfasst deshalb auch das Christusgeschehen als ganzes, nicht nur einzelne Stationen."

¹³Cf. Häfner, "Pastoralbriefe," 455–56.

traditions in the Pastoral Epistles are closely related both to (pre-Pauline and) *synoptic traditions* and, even more importantly, to *Pauline traditions*. According to Söding, it is precisely the combination of Pauline and synoptic christological traditions that constitute an original achievement of the Pastoral Epistles for the later evolution of post-Pauline Christology.¹⁴ Concentrating on these two fields will best explain how the author of the pastoral corpus interpreted these traditions and integrated them in his overall understanding of Jesus.

Synoptic Jesus traditions

Is the implied reader of the Pastoral Epistles expected to know any sayings of Jesus? The polemical passage 1 Tim 6:3 could point in this direction: “Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ (ὅγαίνουσιν λόγοις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) and the teaching that is in accordance with piety . . .” However, the passage does not specify the content of these sayings and synoptic Jesus traditions in the Pastoral Epistles are nowhere explicitly qualified as traditions going back to Jesus. All these traditions are considered, within the literary context of the three Epistles, as “Pauline” traditions! In this respect, one should not overemphasize the existence of synoptic-like Jesus traditions in the Pastoral Epistles. Nevertheless, from a historical-critical perspective, some affirmations have intriguing similarities to synoptic traditions. The following four examples merit brief discussion.¹⁵

(1) First Timothy 1:15 (“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”) echoes Luke 19:10 (“The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost”; cf. Mark 2:17), and eventually also Johannine traditions. This reception in 1 Tim 1:15 emphasizes the universal (“cosmic”) dimension and understands the salvific activity of “Christ Jesus”—designating not just the earthly Jesus, contrary to Luke 19:10—as having a direct impact for future generations of Christ-believers, since “Paul” understands himself as the “foremost sinner” (1 Tim 1:15). This could indicate “a later phase of evolution of the tradition.”¹⁶ It fits very well into the overall universalistic and kerygmatic Christology of the Pastoral Epistles.

(2) First Timothy 2:5–6 combines Pauline (cf. 1 Cor 8:6), non-Pauline (cf. the motif of “mediator”), and synoptic traditions: “Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom (ἀντίλυτρον) for all.” This echoes clearly Mark 10:45: “the Son of Man came [. . .] to give his life a ransom (λύτρον) for many.” Once again, the universalizing and Hellenizing tendency is perceptible.

(3) Second Timothy 2:8 (“remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendent of David”) echoes first of all the pre-Pauline tradition preserved in Rom 1:3–4. Yet it is reminiscent of the synoptic tradition of Jesus’s Davidic sonship also, since the synoptic tradition is linked with the

¹⁴Söding, “Erscheinen,” 192. The Pastoral Epistles “leisten einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Entwicklung nachpaulinischer Christologie und zur Verbindung der Paulus-Schule mit anderen Traditionskreisen des Urchristentums, insbesondere der synoptischen Überlieferung.” See also: “Nicht die geringste theologische Leistung der Pastoralbriefe besteht darin, dass sie-als neutestamentliche Spätschriften – Verbindungen zwischen “paulinischer” und “synoptischer” Christologie knüpfen, so dass nicht etwa künstliche Kompromisse, sondern organische Einheiten entstehen, die ihre eigene Aussagekraft gewinnen” (181).

¹⁵See also Söding, “Erscheinen,” 178–79. See also Hanna Stettler, *Die Christologie der Pastoralbriefe*, WUNT 2.105 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 322–25.

¹⁶Söding, “Erscheinen,” 178.

figure of mercy (e.g. Mark 10:47–48)—a theological figure that is also important in the Pastoral Epistles (e.g. 2 Tim 1:18; Titus 3:5, etc.).

(4) Second Timothy 2:11b–13, a traditional fragment “of unknown origin, in the style of a hymn,”¹⁷ combines once again Pauline (2 Tim 2:11 // Rom 6:8) and synoptic traditions (2 Tim 2:12b // Luke 12:9 // Matt 10:33; the logion is part of the sayings source Q). It is interesting to see how the final affirmation of the fragment (2 Tim 2:13) “paulinizes” the harsh Q-tradition, insofar as “even the faithlessness does not revoke the faithfulness of Jesus towards the salvific work of God.”¹⁸

Pauline traditions

We have already observed to what extent synoptic traditions have been modified and integrated into a broadly “Pauline,” theocentric theology of grace. It is evident that the author of the Pastoral Epistles had extensive knowledge of Paul and the Pauline tradition, not only through awareness of at least several proto-Pauline Letters (notably Rom and 1–2 Cor) or even a whole collection of Pauline letters (including the deutero-Pauline Letters Colossians and Ephesians),¹⁹ but also through oral traditions stemming from Pauline communities or ancient collaborators of Paul. What about christological Pauline traditions and their integration in the *corpus pastorale*? The following three points should be emphasized.

(1) The stereotypical usage of the formula “in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 1:14; 3:12; 2 Tim 1:1, 9, 13; 2:1, 10; 3:12, 15)—its soteriological understanding should not be questioned—

is only conceivable on the basis of the Christ-Pneuma-theology of the main Pauline letters, especially of the letter to the Romans, even though the connection between Christology and pneumatology . . . is not as dynamic as in the case of Paul (1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:17; Rom 8:1–11).²⁰

Moreover, the Pastoral Epistles link the traditional Pauline formula to two key concepts of “Christian” life: “faith” (πίστις, in the sense of “orthodox faith,” based on the authoritative teaching of Paul) and “love.” This means that the Pauline formula “in Christ (Jesus)” is now embedded in the overall Christology of the Pastoral Epistles—the epiphany of the saving will of God in Christ, based on the “orthodox” faith taught by Paul.²¹

(2) First Timothy 2:5 (“there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human”) echoes the traditional Pauline formula of 1 Cor 8:6 (“there is one God . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist”), but the transformation is significant: the soteriological function of Christ is now interpreted by way

¹⁷Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 109.

¹⁸Söding, “Erscheinen,” 179.

¹⁹Cf. Theobald, *Israel-Vergessenheit*, 157–86.

²⁰Söding, “Erscheinen,” 175.

²¹Cf. Oberlinner, “‘Epiphaneia,’” 211.

of the non-Pauline concept of “mediator,” and his humanity seems to be underlined. Furthermore, the (proto- and deuter-) Pauline understanding of Christ as God’s agent of the universe (cf. Col 1:15–20, etc.)—a familiar figure of Jewish-Hellenistic wisdom traditions—is no longer present in the Pastoral Epistles, though the idea of Christ’s preexistence may be still discreetly present (cf. 1 Tim 1:15; 3:16).

(3) The Pastoral Epistles maintain, as already seen (p. 22), the conviction of the life-giving effectiveness of Jesus’s death (cf. 1 Tim 2:6; Titus 2:14). Yet we can no longer speak of a theology of the cross in the strong Pauline sense (cf. 1 Cor 1–4, etc.): the death of Jesus becomes in the Pastoral Epistles an “organic key event within the overall salvific action of God . . . who reveals himself through the epiphany of Jesus the savior.”²²

The new hermeneutical framework of the Epistles’ Christology focuses on Christ as universal Savior whose past, present, and future epiphany (in incarnation, death, resurrection, and coming as judge) is considered the ultimate expression of the transcendent God’s salvific will. This perspective thus determines the reception of virtually all traditional Pauline, pre-Pauline, and synoptic affirmations on Christ.

4. CONCLUSION

The deuter-Pauline Pastoral Epistles, on the basis of a large set of Pauline, pre-Pauline, synoptic, and other traditions, develop an overall coherent Christology that systematically emphasizes the life-giving effectiveness of Jesus’s action. The two Hellenistic key concepts “savior” (σωτήρ) and “epiphany” (ἐπιφάνεια, encompassing incarnation, death, resurrection, and the future coming of Christ) constitute the new hermeneutical framework henceforth determining the understanding of Jesus. Though synoptic Jesus sayings are present in the Pastoral Epistles, they are not explicitly qualified as such, since they are now considered genuine “Pauline” traditions and are, at least partly, reinterpreted by way of the Pauline theology of grace. This new Christology—the epiphany of the Savior—powerfully emphasizes not only its theocentric orientation, but also the soteriological and universalistic impact of the Christ-event. On the other hand, compared to the older Pauline heritage, the christological project of the Pastoral Epistles loses the dynamic link between Christology and pneumatology and abandons the Pauline paradigm of the theology of the cross.

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²²Söding, “Erscheinen,” 176.

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THE RECEPTION OF JESUS IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

*Edited by Chris Keith, Helen K. Bond,
Christine Jacobi, and Jens Schröter*

THE RECEPTION OF JESUS IN
THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

VOLUME TWO
FROM THOMAS TO TERTULLIAN:
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OF JESUS IN THE SECOND AND
THIRD CENTURIES CE

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Volume Two

From Thomas to Tertullian: Christian Literary Receptions of Jesus in the Second and Third Centuries CE

Eds. Jens Schröter and Christine Jacobi

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From Celsus to the Catacombs: Non-Christian, Visual, and Liturgical Receptions of Jesus

Ed. Chris Keith

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