

Compound Nouns and Derivative Nouns in OE Poetry

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0. Introduction

This paper treats compound nouns and derivative nouns in Old English poetry---seven elegies in *the Exeter Book*. As far as morphology in these elegiac poems is concerned, compound nouns have three types: (1) N + N, (2) Adj + N and (3) Ad + N. There are two types of derivative nouns: (1) Prefix + N and (2) N + Nominal Suffix.

The compounds and derivatives are further examined from the viewpoint of syntax. Lastly compound kennings as well as *kend heiti* are the object to investigate to draw the clear line between them.

It might safely be said that an Anglo-Saxon, not possessing a means of expression by using as large a number of loan-words from Latin, French and other foreign languages as we do in our time, resorted to word-formation such as compound and derivative formation. Thus he could "have a sufficient command of the vocabulary to express those subtle shades of thought and feeling, the nuances of meaning."¹ He used more compounds and derivatives instead of single words to express the nuances of his thought.

In this sense our attention is drawn to great numbers of compounds and derivatives in Old English.

1. Compound and Derivative Nouns

There are five types of combination under this heading, namely three types of compound nouns and two types of derivative nouns.

1.1 Noun + Noun Type

Here we have 10 sub-types in accordance with syntactical classification: subjective, objective, appositional, pleonastic, belonging and possessive, descriptive, indicating connection, purpose, and material, and cause and reason.

1.1.1 Subjective

Weal-steal(the Wand88)² is defined as 'a place where there are buildings,' but this compound noun is literally to be translated as 'wall+standing.' The first element of this compound is a subject in

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relation to the second element *steal* 'standing ← stand.' Therefore we call this heading subjective. The other examples go as follows:

eorð-grāp(Rui6) 'earth+grasp'→ 'grave'
hleō-mæg(Sea25) 'protecting+kinsman'→ 'near relation'
hægl-faru(Wand105) 'hail+going'→ 'hailstorm'

1.1.2. Objective

Sinc-þegu(Wand34) the first element of which literally means 'treasure' and the second element of which means 'taking' is defined as 'acceptance of treasure.' So *sinc* is an object of *þegu* 'taking.' The rest under this heading are as follows:

eard-stapa(Wand6) 'land+one who steps'→ 'wanderer'
flæsc-homa(Sea94) 'flesh+covering'→ 'body'
gold-giefa(Sea83) 'gold+giver'→ 'liberal lord'
hring-þegu(Sea44) 'ring+taking'→ 'acceptance of rings'
leōd-fruma(Wif8) 'nation, people+founder'→ 'king'
māþþ umg-gyfa(Wand92) 'treasure+giver'→ 'liberal prince'
medo-drinc(Sea22) 'mead+drink'→ 'mead-drinking'
niht-waco(Sea7) 'night+watch'→ 'night-watch'
sæ-fōr(Sea42) 'sea+traveling'→ 'voyage'

1.1.3. Appositional

Breōst-cōfa(Wand17), which is translated in modern English with a term like a 'mind', is the compound word whose first element *breōst* means a 'breast' and whose second element *cōfa* means a 'chamber.' The first element and the second are appositional, as in 'the subject of education.' The other examples are:

burg-stede(Rui2) 'city+stead'→ 'city-place' cf. homestead
cwide-giedd(Wand55) 'speech³+song'→ 'song'
hreþer-loca(Sea58) 'bosom+enclosure'→ 'breast'
niht-helm(Wand96) 'night+covering'→ 'night's curtain'

1.1.4. Pleonastic

Burg-tūn(Wif31) whose first element *burg* means 'a fortified town' and whose second element *tūn* means 'a village, town, etc.' still remains in a modernized form of spelling *borough-town*⁴. Since both *burg* and *tūn* are much the same in meaning, it can be said that it is pleonastic to use the compound *burgtūn*. The reason for this pleonastic use may be that, besides emphasizing by way of compounding, the OE poet took heed to prosodical restrictions; namely, metrical feet and alliteration. We will take a look at the line where this compound word appears:

bitre burgtúnas brérum beweaxne (1.31)

The scansion shows us that we do need the compound *burgtúnas* here, not a simple word *burg* or *tún*. The other examples:

eard-geard(Wand85) 'earth + land'→ 'earth, world'
lár-cwide(Wand38) 'doctrine + what is said' → 'precept,doctrine'
lond-stede(Wif16) 'land+place'→ 'land'
magu-þegn(Wand62) 'servant + servant'→ 'servant'
mere-flód(Sea59) 'sea + flood,sea'→ 'sea'
mere-streám(Hus44) 'sea + stream,sea in pl.'→ 'sea'
mōd-sefa(Sea59) 'spirit + mind'→ 'mind,spirit, soul' also Wand10/19/59
wæl-sleah(Wand91) 'carnage + slaughter'→ 'slaughter' also Wand6
wer-þeōd(Rui9) 'man(men)+people'→ 'a people'

1.1.5. Belonging and Possessive

Breōst-hord(Sea55) 'breast + hoard' can be analyzed as a 'hoard which a breast possesses'; thus this compound word whose Mod. E equivalent is a 'thought' can be classified under this heading.

Ceól-þelu(Hus9) 'keel + plank' whose modernization is the 'deck of a ship' can be put in other words; the 'deck which belongs to a ship.' The other examples are:

Breōst-cearu(Wif44) 'breast + sorrow'→ 'anxiety' also Sea4
eorð-wela(Sea67) 'earth + weal → fertility'
ferð-loca(Wand13) 'mind,soul, spirit + enclosure'→ 'breast'
folc-lond(Wif47) 'people + land'→ 'the land of the people'
hord-cofa(Wand14) 'treasure + chamber'→ 'heart'
mann-dryhten(Wand41) 'man(men) + lord'→ 'a lord of men,liege lord'
mōd-cearu(Wif40) 'heart + sorrow'→ 'grief'
mōd-lufu(Hus10) 'heart + love'→ 'affection'
sele-secg(Wand34) 'hall + man'→ 'retainer'

1.1.6. Descriptive

All the first elements of the compound words we will investigate serve as descriptive; they can be interchangeable with descriptive adjectives which stem from those nouns. Thus their modernizations are all adjective. The first elements under this heading are described as characteristic, stative and qualitative.

Bealo-sīþ(Sea28) 'bale + going'→ 'evil fortune'
Dreōr-sele(Wif50) 'blood + hall'→ 'dreary hall'
Earforð-hwile(Sea3) 'hardship + time'→ 'troublesome time'
Ecg-hete(Sea70) 'sword + hate'→ 'hostile hate, war'
El-þeōd(Hus37) 'other + nation'→ 'foreign nation'
Eorl-gestreōn(Hus47) 'earl + riches'→ 'noble treasure'
Freond-scype(Hus19) 'friend + condition'→ 'amicable state'
Geār-dagas(Wand44) 'yore + days'→ 'old days'
Geswinc-dæg(Sea2) 'labour + day'→ 'laborious day'
Gold-wine(Wand22) 'gold + friend'→ 'liberal patron'
Meodu-burg(Hus17) 'mead + city'→ 'mead-city'

Niht-scūa(Sea31) 'night + darkness' → 'nightly darkness' also Wand104
Sige-ƿeōd(Hus20) 'victory + people' → 'powerful people'
Sorg-lufu(Deo16) 'care + love' → 'hapless love'
Sōð-gied(Sea1) 'truth + lay' → 'true song'
Stān-hlīp(Wand101) 'stone + hill' → 'rocky slope'
Treō-cyn(Hus2) 'tree + kind' → 'a kind of tree'
Waldend-wyrhta(Rui7) 'master + wright' → 'mighty workman'
Weā-ƿearf(Wif10) 'woe + need' → 'grievous need'
Weorld-riċe(Wif13) 'world + kingdom' → 'earthly kingdom' also Wand65
Wine-māg(Sea16) 'friend + kinsman' → 'loving kinsman' also Wand7

1.1.7. Indicating Connection, Reference or Relation⁵

Brim-fugol(Wand48) 'sea + fowl' is what a modern man calls a sea bird. This kind of bird is a flying winged creature which frequents the sea or the land near it; therefore, that bird is in tight connection with the sea. The other compound words like this are as follows:

flot-weg(Hus43) 'sea + way' → 'sea-way, sea'
flōd-weg(Sea52) 'flood + way' → 'sea-way, sea'
hwæl-weg(Sea63) 'whale + way' → 'the way of the whale, sea'
lagu-lād(Wand3) 'sea + way' → 'sea-way, sea'
lond-ryht(Deor40) 'land + right' → 'estate'
wine-treōw(Hus52) 'friend + faith' → 'faith between friends'
wræc-lāst(Wand32) 'exile + track' → 'exile-track' also Sea57/Wand5
wræc-sīp(Wif5) 'exile + going' → 'pilgrimage, misery' also Wif38

1.1.8. Indicating Purpose or Use

*Ferð-loca*⁶(Wand33) 'life + enclosure' is what we modern-day people call a body, which is an enclosure for the purpose of containing a being's life, especially a human's. The other examples:

meodu-heall(Wand27) 'mead + hall, i.e. hall for drinking mead' → 'mead-hall'
sæ-naca(Hus27) 'sea + boat' → 'sea-going vessel'
scūr-beorg(Rui5) 'storm + protection' → 'a shelter against storm'
weal-stān(Rui1) 'wall + stone' → 'a stone for building' also Rui12
wīn-sæl(Wand78) 'wine + hall' → 'wine-hall'

1.1.9. Indicating Material or Substance

Eorð-sele(Wif29) 'earth + hall'; namely, an 'earth hall' is a hall which is made of earth as building material. Therefore, it is built under the earth. The 'earth-hall' is a so-called kenning for the 'grave'. The other examples are;

seono-bend(Deo6) 'sinew + bond' → 'a bond made of sinew'
stān-clif(Sea23) 'stone + cliff' → 'stone-cliff'

1.1.10. Indicating Cause and Reason

Sele-dreám(Wand93) ‘hall+joy’ means ‘mirth of the hall’ or ‘joyous life of the hall.’ The joy of a hall is a joy that is not merely caused by staying comfortably safe out of the stormy or cold outside but by drinking mead as well. The other example here under this heading is *úht-cearu* (Wif7) ‘the time just before daybreak + grief’ is defined as ‘care that comes in the early morning.’ *Uht* is the time warriors have to get up to go to war or the time when they have a severe hangover because of drinking mead the night before.⁷ Therefore, *úht* is not a comfortable time for old Anglo-Saxons.

1.2. Adjective + Noun Type

Adjectives as the first elements of compounds can be classified into two: descriptive⁸ (the first four examples) and limiting (the rest).

Ær-scaft(Rui16) ‘early+creation’→ ‘an ancient work’
Ær-dæg(Hus16) ‘early+day’→ ‘early day,in pl. early days’
Cear-seld(Sea5) ‘sorrowful+seat’→ ‘sorrowful place’
Fréó-mæg(Wand21) ‘free+kinsman’→ ‘(free)kinsman’
*Án-floga*⁹(Sea62) ‘one+fugitive’→ ‘solitary flier’
Middan-geard(Wand63) ‘mid+dwelling’→ ‘middle dwelling, world’

In *fréó-mæg* ‘free kinsman,’ the first element seems not to have such a strong sense, *fréómæg* being almost the same with *mæg*. D.C.Collins states to the same effect: ‘it may be that “*æod*” and “*siege*” in their various compounds had become in time merely intensive.’¹⁰

The exact formation of the first element *middan* of *middangeard* is obscure, but according to Brugmann the first element is Old Teutonic **miðjumo-*, superlative of **miðjo* ‘mid’.¹¹

1.3. Adverb + Noun Type

Nominal compounds in combination of adverb and noun stand out in that three of the five examples we have are in the form of adverb of place and noun of movement. In other words it can be said that these types of compounds come from a verbal phrase of verb and adverb. The using of nouns instead of gerunds is due to the fact that the gerundial use was unknown in OE and early ME.¹²

Forð-sīþ (Hus43) ‘forth+going’→ ‘departure, death’
*Forð-weg*¹³(Wand81) ‘forth+moving’→ ‘departure,journey’
From-sīþ (Wif33) ‘forth,away + going’→ ‘departure’
Seld-cyme(Wulf14) ‘seldom+coming’→ ‘a rare visit’
Iū-wine(Sea92) ‘formerly+friend’→ ‘a friend of old times’
Up-rodor(Sea105) ‘on high + sky’→ ‘the firmament on high’

The last but one is the example different from the rest in that the second element of the compound word is not a noun of movement, but a static noun ‘friend’. However, this noun can be classified as the same as the rest when we interpret *iūwine* as this: a friend whom one used to visit formerly.

1.4. Prefix + Noun Type

The examples under this heading are those of derivative nouns because first elements of the nouns are not a full part of speech such as a noun, an adjective, etc., but a prefix. Most of the examples here are ones with the prefix *ge-* except a few such as *sin-*, *on-*, etc.

1.4.1. Prefix *ge-* + Noun Type

The first elements of compounds we have so far investigated have shared a full-fledged part which they play in a semantic aspect. This is because such elements are full parts of speech. On the other hand, the prefix *ge-* does not belong to any part of speech, though it is originally a preposition meaning 'with.'¹⁴ Therefore, we cannot treat prefixed nouns, so-called derivatives (also, complex word¹⁵), on the same level with compounds. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* explains the meaning of *ge-* as follows:

- 1) it often gives a collective sense to nouns to which it is prefixed.¹⁶
- 2) it sometimes gives to a neuter verb an active signification
- 3) it often seems void of signification
- 4) it often changes the signification from literal to figurative

The reason why we include 2) here is that most of the derivative nouns in question are formed from verbs. As for 3), R. Lindemann does not own 'the doctrine' that *ge-* is without meaning and states "all too frequently simplex and *ge-*compound have different meanings."¹⁷ He, however, sticks too much to the lexical meaning, contending that *ge-* has following lexical meanings: 'at, on, to, toward, be-, forth, away, up and down' and does not accept that there are some sides of aspect in itself. On the other hand, Niwa admits that the preverb *ge-* has the characters of aspect such as terminative, ingressive and others.¹⁸ Lindemann has contributed much in trying to translate lexically every nuance that preverbal *ge-* has, whereas Niwa excels in including grammatical respects. Both, however, remain in the sphere of *ge-*plus verbs. Our object of research is different in character from theirs since derivative nouns have more than a single, lexical or aspectual, meaning. For example, *ge-dreag*, which has a meaning 'assembly' comes from *ge-* + *dragan* 'draw, go.' Now, *ge-* has some meaning like 'together.' So, **gedragan* means 'go together' or 'be drawn together' and then it transforms into a nominal meaning in the intermediate process 'being drawn together' or 'going together' and then 'what is drawn, assembly'---*gedreag*. Therefore the prefix can have a collective (lexical), effective (aspectual) and figurative (stylistic) meaning in it.

1.4.1.1. Col(lective)

Ge-lác(Wif7) 'COL+struggle'→ 'commotion' also Sea35
Ge-lagu(Sea64) 'COL+water'→ 'a stretch of water'
Ge-wit-loca(Hus15) 'COL+wits+lock'→ 'a container of intelligence, mind'

1.4.1.2. 'With'

Ge-féra(Wand30) 'with+one who goes'→ 'companion'¹⁹

Ge-selda(Wand53) 'with+one who sits on a *seld* "seat" → 'companion'
Ge-siþ(Hus34) 'with+going' → '(company →) companion' also Deo3

1.4.1.3. Ef(fective)

Ge-dreag(Wif45) 'EF+one who *dragan* "draw,go" → 'assembly'
Ge-hola(Wand31) 'EF+one who *helan* "cover" → 'protector'
Ge-met(Sea111) 'EF+measure' → 'moderation'
Ge-sceaft(Wand107) 'EF+creating' → 'destiny'
Ge-steal(Wand110) 'EF+standing' → 'frame'
Ge-weorc(Rui2) 'EF+doing' → 'work' also Wand87

1.4.1.4. It(erative)

Ge-wealc(Sea6) 'IT + to "roll" *wealcan* → 'motion' also Sea46
Ge-hygd(Sea116) 'IT + to "think" *hycgan* → 'thought'
Ge-mynd(Hus31) 'IT + to "remember" **mynan* → 'mind, memory'
Ge-þoht(Wif12) 'IT + to "think" *þencan* → 'thought' also Sea34

1.4.2. Other Prefixes + Noun Type

*Cyne-riče*²⁰(Deo26) 'kingly+dominion' → 'kingdom'
In-dryhto(Sea89) fr. adj. *in-dryhten* 'most²¹ noble' → 'nobleness'
On-sýn(Sea91) 'on, at+seeing' → '(something with which one looks at a thing), face'
Sin-sorg(Wif45) 'ever+care' → 'continual care'

1.5. Noun + Nominal Suffix Type

An-haga(Wand1) 'one+n. suf. indicating one who encloses oneself' (?) → 'recluse' also Wand40
Burg-waru(Wand86) 'city+n. suf. indicating inhabitants of a place' → 'citizens'
Glîw-stafas(Wand52) 'glee+n.suf. used to form masc. abstract n.²² → 'joy'
Mete-lîst(Wand15) 'food + n. suf. formed from adj. *leás* 'without' → 'want of food'

2. Kenning

Kenning is 'one of the periphrastic expressions used instead of the simple name of a thing, characteristic of Old Teutonic, and esp. Old Norse, poetry.'²³ S. Ichikawa defines in a narrow sense kenning as follows: compounds such as Old Icelandic *dalfiskr* or phrases composed of some words which mean completely different persons or things and take on the character of some mystery.²⁴ A.

G. Brodeur clarifies kenning further by distinguishing it from *kend heiti*: when a base word of the compound word is equivalent to the object referred to, the compound word is called *kend heiti*, while if it is not; namely, it bears a strong characteristic of metaphor, it is kenning.²⁵

2.1. *Kend heiti*

Kenning narrowed in definition, it is presumed that the following compounds are placed under the heading of *kend heiti*.

Eard-stapa(Wand6) 'land+stepper'→ 'wanderer'
Eorð-scræf(Wif28,36) 'earth+cave'→ 'grave'
Eorð-wela(Sea67) 'earth+wealth'→ 'fertility'
Flæsc-homa(Sea94) 'flesh+covering'→ 'carcase'
Leod-fruma(Wif8) 'people+founder'→ 'king'
Máþrum-gyfa(Wand92) 'treasure+giver'→ 'king'

None of the compounds above are to be categorized as kenning, because the second elements of them can be judged as the 'object referred to.' Thus, a 'stepper' is someone who steps out or about somewhere; a 'wanderer' can be easily deduced. *Scræf* 'cave' includes a 'grave.' 'Wealth' includes 'fertility.'

2.2.1. Kenning for Sea

Through the analyses given so far do we classify kenning into three types: kenning for sea, for building and for abstract ideas or feelings. This section deals with kenning for sea.

Brim-lád(Sea30) 'surf, sea+way'→ 'sea'
Flot-weg(Hus43) 'water, sea+way'→ 'sea'
Flód-weg(Sea52) 'tide+way'→ 'sea'
Hwæl-weg(Sea63) 'whale+way'→ 'sea'
Lagu-lád(Wand3) 'sea+course'→ 'sea'
Mere-lád(Hus28) 'sea+course'→ 'sea'

The number of kennings for sea is larger than that of the other two. This is because four elegiac poems of the seven except for *Deor*, *Wulf* and *Eadwacer* and *the Ruin* are in contents concerned with the sea.

2.2.2. Kenning for Building Structure

Eorþ-gráp(Rui6) 'earth+grasp, clutch'→ 'grave'
Eorð-sele(Wif29) 'earth+hall, house, dwelling'→ 'cave'
Scúr-beorg(Rui5) 'storm+protection'→ 'roof'

There is something dreary about these kennings themselves. Furthermore, the degree of their lyricism increases the more with the actual context in the presence, especially so when their alliteration and rhythm taken heed to.

Eorð grāp hafað / waldendwyrhtan (Rui6-7) 'The earth's grasp holds the master builders'
 Eald is ðæs eorð sele, eal ic eom oflongad (Wif29) 'Old is this cave-dwelling, I am fully seized with longing'

2.2.3. Kenning for Abstract Ideas or Feelings

Bealo-sīp(Sea28) 'bale+going'→ 'misfortune'
Breōst-cofa(Wand18) 'breast+chamber'→ 'mind, heart'
Breōst-hord(Sea55) 'breast+hoard'→ 'mind, heart'
Ecg-hete(Sea70) 'sword+hate'→ 'war'
Ferð-loca(Wand13) 'breast+enclosure'→ 'thought'
Gewit-loca(Hus15) 'understanding+enclosure'→ 'mind'
Wræc-sīp(Wif5,38) 'wrack+going'→ 'punishment'

In all our seven elegies are nine examples of phrasal kenning recognized, whereas we have recognized 18 compound kennings. So, compound kennings prove to be, as far as our OE poetry is concerned, exactly twice as many as phrasal kennings. A glance shows that they are all the phrasal constructions with the, singular or plural, genitive forms, though it is possible to use other constructions, say, ones with participle forms or with function words such as prepositions. One of the reasons why the poets refrained from using those phrasal kennings with the exception of some number is that those forms are liable to be too long to be answerable to prosodic restrictions.

For this reason the compound kenning is of greater use, with the result that the ease with which compound kennings are used tends to make them hackneyed.

3. Conclusion

We have morphologically classified the nouns compound and derivative into five types. We have further classified these types in accordance with lexicology, syntax and aspect. The way of expressing different nuances through use of compounds was most welcome among OE poets. The demands of alliterative verse in OE where nouns rather than verbs take the stress may well be responsible for a great number of compound nouns²⁶.

As for kennings, what we have learned is that compound kennings are used twice as much as phrasal ones, which means that compound kennings were easier to resort to on the grounds that the latter make prosodic verse difficult.

Notes

1. A.C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957), p.73.
2. It means line 88 in the Wanderer. Other abbreviations: Sea; the Seafarer, Wif; the Wife's Lamentation, Wul; Wulf and Eadwacer, Hus; the Husband's Message, Deo; Deor, and Rui; the Ruin.
3. See 'gid' in J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1898; rep. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).
4. See *OED*.
5. As to the heading name of this, see 10 of "of" in A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's*

- Dictionary of Current English* (1948; rep. Oxford: Kaitakusha, 1980), p.580.
- 6 . It has variants *ferh̄-loc* and *fyrh̄-loc*.
 - 7 . I. Shimose, "Diction and Imagery for the Sea in Old English Poetry," *The Journal of Kumamoto Women's University*, vol.41,1. p.16.
 - 8 . See 1.1.6.
 - 9 . *An* can be a noun.
 - 10 . D. Collins, "Kenning in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," *Essays and Studies*, New Series, 12:1-7, 1959, p.2.
 - 11 . See "middenerd" in *OED*.
 - 12 . See "-ing" in *OED*.
 - 13 . *Weg* is a noun form from a verb *wegan* to 'move.'
 - 14 . J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller, p.363.
 - 15 . S. Ichikawa et al, "Derivatives," *The Kenkyusha Dictionary of English Philology*, (1940; rpt. Tokyo, 1974), p. 290a.
 - 16 . *OED* confirms this statement but does not refer to other three. See "i-."
 - 17 . R. Lindemann, *Old English Preverbal Ge-: Its Meaning*, (1970; Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia), pp. 2-3.
 - 18 . 丹羽義信 『Preverb ge-の意味構造』 *Ivy* 7, 1967, pp. 2-3 and p. 6.
 - 19 . Simplex *fera* 'companion' should be regarded as an apherasis of *gefera*.
 - 20 . See "cyne-" in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.
 - 21 . See "in-" in *OED*.
 - 22 . J. Wright and E.M. Wright, *Old English Grammar*, (1925; rpt. London, 1972), p.318.
 - 23 . See "kenning" in *OED*.
 - 24 . Ichikawa, p. 546b.
 - 25 . T. Matsunami, "Old English Poetry," *Poetry I; The History of English and American Literature*, (1977; Tokyo: Taishukan), p. 73. The term "kennd heiti" means 'compound or circumlocutory names' in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, p.336. Also see S.B. Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature*, (1947; N.Y.: N.Y. Univ.Press), pp. 73-4.
 - 26 . D.C. Collins, p. 2.

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