

1.) Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family

-Balobedu, Sesotho, Bantu

“The Sotho language, or Sesotho, is a Bantu language closely related to Setswana. Sotho is rich in proverbs, idioms, and special forms of address reserved for elders and in-laws.” (Source 2)

1.2 Alternate Names

Pedi, Northern Sotho

1.3 ISO code: 639-3

1.4 Location: South Africa

1.5 Brief History

“The Lobedu are a South Bantu people characterized by the institution of ‘divine kingship.’ They live in a mountainous area of the northeastern Transvaal lowveld. Originally from *Bokhalaga* (S. Rhodesia), they migrated south when the empire of Monomotapa broke up and established themselves as rulers over the sparse Sotho population they found in occupation.” (Source 1)

“Sotho society was traditionally organized in villages ruled by chiefs. The economy was based on the rearing of cattle and the cultivation of grains such as sorghum. In the early nineteenth century, several kingdoms developed as a result of a series of wars that engulfed much of southern Africa. During this period, Sotho people as well as other ethnic groups sought refuge in the mountainous terrain of what is now Lesotho. A local chief named Moshoeshoe (pronounced mow-SHWAY-shway) emerged as a skillful diplomat and military leader who was able to keep his country from falling into the hands of Zulu and, later, white Afrikaner forces. After Moshoeshoe's death in 1870, this independence was weakened, and English authorities from the Cape Colony tried to administer Lesotho as a conquered territory. The people resisted this attempt at control, however, leading to the Gun War of 1880–81 in which the Cape Colony was defeated.” (Source 2)

1.6 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors

“The northern Sotho suffered at the hands of African armies during the wars, but several chiefdoms were able to recover. After 1845, the Pedi also had to contend with an influx of white Afrikaner settlers, some of whom seized Pedi children and forced them to work as slaves. The Pedi were finally conquered by British, Afrikaner, and Swazi forces in 1879. The northern Sotho then lost their independence and fell under the political control of white authorities. Northern Sotho lands were turned into reserves, and Sotho people were forced to relocate to these reserves, causing great hardship. In 1884, Lesotho became a British protectorate. Unlike the Pedi kingdom, therefore, Lesotho was not incorporated into South Africa. Lesotho became an independent country in 1966, completely surrounded by South Africa. South Africa's former

system of apartheid (the governmental policy of racial segregation and discrimination) hindered Lesotho's development. The nation also has had trouble establishing democracy. The first democratic elections after independence were voided by the government of Leabua Jonathan. Jonathan ruled Lesotho from 1970 until he was overthrown in a coup in 1986. In the 1990s, Lesotho began a new period of elective government.” (Source 2)

“The first missionaries to enter the territory in the extreme north of South Africa, later known as the Lebowa Homeland, to the north of Pietersburg (currently known as Polokwane) in 1860, were the Germans, Reverends Alexander Merensky and Heinrich Grutzner. Both belonged to the Berlin Missionary Society. Their brother missionary society, the Hermannsburg Missionary Society, had started work earlier, in 1857, in the southern parts of Transvaal (currently the North-West Province) (Mphahlele, 1978:1). In the course of time Rev Fritz Reuter and Rev Walter Krause, also attached to the Berlin Missionary Society, not only set up a mission station at the village, originally called GaKgapane, but currently known as Medingen. They also established a primary school. This school was officially opened in 1882. It was the very first school in the region and all the other schools that exists in the area today emerged as a result of the primary school at Medingen (Ramokgola & Krause, 1884:23).” (Source 3)

“On 18 April 1834 five BMS (Berlin Missionary Society) missionaries arrived in the Cape. They were Gustav Adolf Kraut, formerly a clerk in a commercial firm; August Ferdinand Lange, a weaver from Rohrbeck; Reinhold Theodor Gregorowski, a teacher from Kaminkerfelde; Johannes Schmidt, a carpenter from Hochirch; and August Gebel, a theologian from Halle (Zoller & Heese, 1984:15)...they proceeded to the Zulu’s and Xhosa’s. In the 1860’s they started working in the former Transvaal amongst the Bapedi, Sotho and Venda speaking tribes. Mission schools were established at Ermelo, Johannesburg, Middelburg and Pretoria. In 1865 the Botshabelo Mission Station was founded while in 1906 Botshabelo Training College was established. Medingen Station was founded in 1881 and in 1882 Medingen Primary School was established.” (Source 3)

“In 1867 Rev D Wangemann (the Director of the Berlin Lutheran Missionary Society), on his first visit to South Africa, visited the Botshabelo Missionary Station. He was overwhelmed by the way in which the black people at Botshabelo accepted evangelization. His aspiration was that all the indigenous people of South Africa should be evangelized. Consequently he encouraged preaching, the spreading of the Gospel and the establishment of more mission stations in South Africa (Ramokgola & Krause, 1884:33-34).” (Source 3)

“In the course of the nineteenth century a large number of teachers were trained by the missionaries. The Botshabelo Mission Station, for example, produced more than eighty teachers before it moved to Groblersdal in the 1970’s as a consequence of the Group Areas Act (Mofya, 1996). Botshabelo was first renamed Rehlahlilwe (We are lead) and two years later named after Chief Mamokgalake Tshwene by the former Lebowa Premier, Chief CN Phatudi.” (Source 3)

“..., one of the main goals of missionaries was to drastically change the lifestyle of the people they worked with. Specifically, efforts were made to reform black people regarding their health practices, their education and their religion. During Reuter’s time, for example, if one was

be seen drinking beer, attending circumcisions, or celebrating dinaka, one would immediately be expelled from the missionary endeavours. Those who were fond of beer, usually drank it from tea kettles in order for the Reverend not to recognize that they were drinking beer. In effect this implied that the existing African value system had to be exchanged for a Western value system.” (Source 3)

1.7 Ecology (Natural Environment)

“The original territory of the Bolobedu included the land situated between the Little Letaba and Great Letaba rivers in the North and South respectively and the common source of the two rivers in the West and their confluence in the East.” (Source 3)

“The home of most of the northern Sotho is in Lesotho and in South Africa's Free State Province. There are also many Sotho who live in South Africa's major cities. Lesotho is a mountainous country that is completely landlocked within the borders of South Africa. It has an area of about 11,700 square miles (about 30,350 square kilometers). The Free State is a highland plain, called a highveld in South Africa, bordering Lesotho to the West. The eastern section of Lesotho is also a highveld, with plateaus similar to those found in the American Southwest. The Maloti and Drakensberg mountains are in the central and western parts of the country. The Drakensberg Mountains form sharp cliffs that drop off dramatically to South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province. The climate of South Africa is temperate, but the mountains make for cold winters. In winter, snow sometimes falls in the Lesotho highlands.” (Source 2)

1.8 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

“The permanent Balobedu population, determined at 40,000 in 1982, is strongly heterogeneous.” (Source 4)

2.) Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staples

“The economy was based on...the cultivation of grains such as sorghum.” (Source 2)

“Staple foods are corn (maize), eaten in the form of a thick paste, and bread.” (Source 2)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources

“Beef, chicken, and mutton (lamb) are popular meats, while milk is often drunk in soured form.” (Source 2)

2.3 Food storage

- Earthenware pots
- Underground pits for grain
- Animal paddocks, built near the back of the family houses

(Source 1)

2.4 Sexual division of production

“In Sotho tradition, the man is considered the head of the household. Women are defined as farmers and bearers of children. Family duties are also organized into distinct domains based on gender for all Sotho...” (Source 2)

“A wife is expected to feed herself, her children, her husband and her mother in law from her fields. Each time she cooks she sends food to her husband and to his mother. What is left must be returned to her ‘house’ unless the husband himself gives it to the herd-boys or other children as a group.” (Source 1)

“In addition to having her own granaries and cooking utensils, every wife has a right to raise livestock. She may keep chickens; she may acquire goats by the exchange of her produce; she may get pigs by feeding other people’s pigs in exchange for a pigling. She may even acquire cattle if she is a doctor.” (Source 1)

2.5 Land tenure

“The economy of the Lobedu is a subsistence one based mainly on agriculture and stock-raising supplemented by migrant labor in European areas. Land for cultivation is allotted to individuals by the district head. Once allocated, fields are inherited in the male line and cannot be taken away so long as they are in effective use.” (Source 1)

2.6 Food taboos

“People sometimes swear by (*ana*) their totem and are supposed to but do not always abstain from eating it.” (Source 1)

4.) Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously

“Most Lobedu who are not Christian have more than one wife.” (Source 1)

“Polygynous marriages (more than one wife) are not uncommon among the elite, but they are rare among commoners.” (Source 2)

4.2 Arrangement of polygynous households

“Control over material resources also plays an important part in the structure of the polygynous domestic group with its economically independent ‘houses’ so characteristic of the Lobedu. As head of the family the husband has full control over all family resources. Yet each wife forms with her children a unit of production and consumption, the independence of which as against

other 'houses' has to be respected even by the husband, whose control becomes limited the moment he marries a second wife." (Source 1)

4.3 Bride purchase/dowry

"In cases where a man has received cattle on the 'security' of a small girl...the creditor also hands over cattle a second time when the girl comes to be married...the Lobedu usually quote the proverb '*mobula ndo oa nywala*'—the opener or establisher of a house pays marriage cattle', i.e., every girl commands a bride-price." (Source 1)

"Marriages are arranged by transfer of bohadi (bride wealth) from the family of the groom to the family of the bride." (Source 2)

4.4 Inheritance patterns

"Each wife has her own fields which it is her duty to cultivate for the needs of her 'house.' On her death her sons have first right to inherit her fields unless their father wants to use them for himself or arrange for their cultivation to provide food for the younger children; but they may not be used for the benefit of any other 'house.'" (Source 1)

"A daughter may be given her deceased mother's field to cultivate while she is still in her parental home, but she cannot inherit it." (Source 1)

"...a married woman may, and often does, get fields from her own people to cultivate. The difference between these fields and those given by her husband's people is that the latter are hers as a right and are inherited by her sons; the former she obtains through the goodwill of her blood-kin and on her death they revert back to them unless the children are still young and the fields are needed to feed them." (Source 1)

4.5 Divorce

"The use of a woman's bride-price by her brother, and the interest which his cattle-linked sister has in maintaining this 'house' in which her son will find a wife, made divorce difficult in the old days. Today, however, partly owing to migrant labour, divorce is more common and girls, especially in the case of arranged marriages with old men or cross-cousins, quite frequently run away to a lover either before or after the marriage knowing that they cannot any longer be forced to return. A return of the bride-price is not always insisted upon...When there are complicated cattle claims a husband, especially he is already old, may find it wiser not to press for a divorce if the wife absconds." (Source 1)

"The rule in Lobedu divorce was, in the old days, that the husband's family should receive back the full bride-price plus all increase, irrespective of where the blame lay, in accordance with the saying '*mosila mobe o boya le noto ea hwe*—even the bad workman (husband) returns with his tools.' The children went with their mother to her people and when she remarried, the new husband had a right to all of them." (Source 1)

“With European administration came the introduction of the Pedi idea that a man has a claim to both the cattle and the children in the case of malicious desertion. Old men in the 1930s called this a white man’s law; today people are claiming it as a Lobedu custom.” (Source 1)

4.6 Preferential category for spouse

“This desire to keep alive the links between brother and sister and to maintain and renew marriage links with women of the lineage from one generation to another is very strong. The marriage of a woman at her father’s sister’s (i.e., mother’s brother’s daughter marriage) is called ‘*ho dsosa moloko*’—to awaken or renew relationship. There are several variations of mother’s brother’s daughter marriage that arise from or are bound up with obligations connected with cattle...If in the case of a cattle-linked brother and sister, the latter has a daughter but no son who could marry her brother’s daughter, she might, rather than break the link with her brother and allow her husband to use the cattle to create new links with strangers, nevertheless, with the agreement and consent of her husband, hand over her daughter’s bride-price to her brother so that he can marry a second wife and establish a ‘house’ from which her daughter may claim a woman later to marry her son and to ‘come and cook for her’.” (Source 1)

“Besides marriage with the mother’s mother’s brother’s daughter, other variations of mother’s brother’s daughter marriages are found, such as marriage with the mother’s brother’s son’s daughter (one generation below), with the father’s mother’s brother’s daughter or even with a father’s mother’s brother’s son’s daughter.” (Source 1)

“The same tendency is present in Lobedu polygyny where the sororate is very popular. Most Lobedu who are not Christians have more than one wife. But it will almost always be found that at least one is a sister or younger relative of one of the other wives.” (Source 1)

4.7 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

“...the Lobedu are a patrilineal people in the sense that a man belongs to his father’s lineage, property is inherited in the male line, and marriage is patrilocal.” (Source 1)

4.8 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

“Dating was not part of traditional Sotho life. Marriages were arranged between families, and a girl could be betrothed in childhood. Nowadays, most people pick their mates.” (Source 2)

5.) Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes)

“It (the Balobedu population) is essentially a federation of smaller groups united by their common alliance to the queen. The political power resides in the minority group descended from the original Balobedu with the bush pig as totem. The majority is descended from immigrants of different Northern Sotho and Shangaan tribes. These have largely assimilated with the central minority group culturally, although retaining their original totems. The tribal designation is

Balobedu ba gaModjadji, and the central tribal village is Sehlakong in the district of Balobedu.” (Source 4)

“The form of government is that of a central authority with the queen as the head of state and spatially defined political units which, each under a headman, enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy. A large proportion of these districts in which the country is divided are ruled by the descendants of original sections of the nuclear group; a few have been allocated by alien groups under their own headmen while some are held by royal women, *batanoni* or ‘wives’ of the queen. Many districts now held by commoners originated from *batanoni* but since women do not succeed one another as heads of districts these have been inherited by their sons of husbands given to them by the queen. Royal wives (*batanoni*) are of various kinds. Some are of royal blood, daughters of close relatives of the queen to whom they have been given as a token of homage (*ho loba*). Only these are set up by the queen as rulers over districts...Other royal wives are the daughters of district heads, while a number are daughters of foreign chiefs who come, sometimes with cattle, sometimes with money or a daughter to *loba* the queen for rain. Once a woman from within the tribe has been accepted by the queen as a royal wife, the tie is renewed from generation to generation on the pattern of cross-cousin marriage. Men may offer a daughter to the queen also in return for, or in the expectation of, economic help or political favour...and there is a tendency today for districts to be subdivided into smaller and smaller units to satisfy the political aspirations of ambitious subjects. Royal wives bind to the queen not only her closest relatives but most of the important people in the tribe. Some wives are given away in marriage to her councillors, relatives and district headmen. Some remain with her and have allocated lovers. Children of these latter call the queen ‘father’ and she is responsible for helping them to marry.” (Source 1)

“The Lobedu proper appear originally to have regarded themselves as an aristocracy but today it is only the royal lineage (*ba Mohale*) and a number of important Lobedu heads that are looked up to. Many non-Lobedu lineages have, by virtue of marriage links through royal wives, a higher status and are more closely related to the queen than sections of Lobedu themselves. The society is remarkably egalitarian and there is no concentration of wealth in the hands of the ruling group. Nor would this be easy in a tribe in which the limited resources in property (in cattle) are used primarily for, and are constantly being converted into, marriage alliances.” (Source 1)

5.2 Post-marital residence

“Upon marriage, a woman is expected to leave her family to live with the family of her husband.” (Source 2)

5.3 Territoriality

“Traditionally, then, property is of value to the Lobedu only in so far as it can be consumed or meets an immediate need on the one hand or, on the other, is used for creating and maintaining social relationships.” (Source 1)

5.4 Sex divisions in politics

“...the writer outlines in the second part of the paper interesting Lovedu and Pedi departures from these...structures presented in Tswana, Southern Sotho, and Kgalagadi societies. In this regard, he notes that Lovedu women, unlike their Southern Sotho counterparts, play an important role in family affairs and public administration, often holding positions of office. Indeed, four out of five recent Lovedu rulers were women. Consequently, argues Kuper, linked brother-sister ties are predominant in Lovedu society, as are corresponding relations between agnates and the father’s sister. This relationship, he notes, is reflected in kinship terminology, which tends to underline the ‘relatively greater status of women on Lobedu society.’” (Source 5)

5.5 Village and house organization

“Lobedu homesteads vary in size and composition from a typical minimum of a married man with his mother, wife, and children to a group of half-brothers, their mothers, wives, children and grandchildren, still living together after the death of the father. Very often other relatives, such as a widowed sister and her children, a maternal relative or an affine of the head are to be found living in the homestead. But these are the least stable elements and tend to move away in a short time. Though small units continuously hive off, and there is a good deal of change in the small homesteads of more recent immigrants or where a migrant labourer husband has never returned, the Lobedu homestead is on the whole, especially in the case of the chief son and his descendants, a remarkably stable unit. Over a period of thirty years most of the larger homesteads known to me have remained in the same place or been rebuilt a few hundred yards from the old site after the death of their head.” (Source 1)

5.6 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses)

“Family life for many rural Sotho has been disrupted for generations by migrant labor. Today, many Sotho men continue to live in all-male housing units provided by the gold-mining companies that employ them. With the end of apartheid, some of the families previously separated by the old labor laws now live together in urban areas.” (Source 2)

5.7 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc

“The Sotho have clans, many of which bear animal names, such as the *Koena* (crocodile). These clans stress descent through the father's side, but there is flexibility in defining clan membership. A feature of Sotho kinship was that a person was allowed to marry a cousin (*ngwana wa rangoane*) who was a member of the same clan.” (Source 2)

6.) Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine)

The most powerful religious leaders in Balobedu society are their rain queens, who are believed to have powers over the weather and other natural phenomena.

“The Balobedu of Modjadji...are renowned for their female rulers, the mystical rain queens. It is traditionally accepted that the Balobedu queen has the powers of rainmaking and is still regarded

as the most famous rainmaker on the subcontinent. Fear of her powers has always restrained both internal opposition and any attack from outside. Even the mighty Shaka, king of the amaZulu, treated her with great respect and paid her tribute. The rain queen Modjadji still is the focal point and strength of the Kingdom.” (Source 4)

“The rain-making powers of their queen, enhanced by the mystery and secrecy of her ritual seclusion, attracted many accretions from diverse tribal groups from surrounding areas who sought peace and security...For enemies feared to attack the Lobedu queen lest they be visited by drought and locusts.” (Source 1)

“ Traditionally the rain queen was expected, in her old age, to pass on her secrets to her successor and then to commit ritual suicide. Missionaries to break this tradition prevailed upon Modjadji III, who came in power in 1896, and she died of old age in February 1959, aged eighty-six. Although some of the traditional customs have become obsolete, the sacred drums may still be heard on special occasions, and when the Balobodu appear before their queen, they still do so barefooted and in a kneeling position. To her people Modjadji is still a mystical ruler whose powers and health are vital to the nation. As in bygone years, she is still held in high esteem as rain queen of the Balobedu tribe.” (Source 4)

“The list of wild animals believed to have medicinal and curative properties is long...the pangolin is considered to be a particularly potent medicine by the Lobedu tribe in north-eastern Transvaal.” (Source 6)

“In a concluding section entitled ‘Witchcraft and Sorcery,’ the authors distinguish between ‘day witches’ (sorcerers), and night witches. The (day) sorcerer utilizes ‘natural, known powers of medicine for anti-social ends,’ while the (night) witch utilizes evil powers beyond ordinary understanding.” (Source 5)

6.2 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal)

“There are elaborate rites of initiation into adulthood for boys and girls in Sotho tradition. For boys, initiation involves a lengthy stay in a lodge in a secluded area away from the village. The lodge may be very large and house dozens of initiates (*bashemane*). During seclusion, the boys are circumcised, but they are also taught appropriate male conduct in marriage, special initiation traditions, code words and signs, and praise songs. In Lesotho, the end of initiation is marked by a community festival during which the new initiates (*makolwane*) sing the praises they have composed. In traditional belief, a man who has not been initiated is not considered a full adult.” (Source 2)

“Initiation for girls (*bale*) also involves seclusion, but the ritual huts of the *bale* are generally located near the village. *Bale* wear masks and goat-skin skirts, and they smear their bodies with a chalky white substance. They sometimes may be seen as a group near the homes of relatives, singing, dancing, and making requests for presents. Among some clans, the girls are subjected to tests of pain and endurance. After the period of seclusion the initiates, now called *litswejane*, wear cowhide skirts and anoint themselves with red ocher. Initiation for girls does not involve any surgical operation.” (Source 2)

“Women give birth with the assistance of female birth attendants. Traditionally, relatives and friends soaked the father with water when his firstborn child was a girl. If the firstborn was a boy, the father was beaten with a stick. This ritual suggested that while the life of males is occupied by warfare, that of females is occupied by domestic duties such as fetching water. For two or three months after the birth, the child was kept secluded with the mother in a specially marked hut. The seclusion could be temporarily broken when the baby was brought outside to be introduced to the first rain.” (Source 2)

“When someone dies, the whole community takes part in the burial. Speeches are made at the graveside by friends and relatives, and the adult men take turns shoveling soil into the grave. Afterward, all those in attendance go as a group to wash their hands. There may also be a funeral feast.” (Source 2)

6.3 Other Rituals

“Interpreting aspects of the structure of Lovedu society, social anthropologists Krige and Krige claim that natural order among Sotho-speakers in the north-eastern Transvaal region of South Africa is premised upon the assumption that ‘cosmic forces’ are controllable events. Hence, they identify four methods whereby the Lovedu control natural phenomena: First, *vunaga*, is the skilled use of impersonal power believed to be inherently concentrated in persons and objects. The authors claim that *vunaga* is a ‘medico-magical’ practice performed by an expert doctor (*ngaka*) and applied in the interests of health and well-being. Second, suggests the authors, *dithugula* is deployed to indirectly influence the ancestors; the ancestors may cause harm and sickness to descendants who neglect them and are therefore propitiated to ensure good crops, fertility, good fortune, and success. Here, the use of objects once in the possession of, or in close contact with ancestors (beads, animals, or clothing), are employed. Third, the divine queen may be approached to secure the regularity of seasonal change; her death, by contrast, might mark the onset of drought, famine, or the breakdown of social order. Fourth, and finally, cosmic forces can be controlled or manipulated to promote abundance and rain by using a ‘sacred drum’ during the designated *digoma* (drum) ritual.” (Source 5)

“...evil is symbolically represented by ‘heat’ or ‘burning’ (*leswa*). Indeed, heat is perceived to denote a disturbance caused by negative events such as abortions and miscarriages. ‘Cooling’ medicines, such as the burying of dead fetuses in wet soil, by contrast, are considered effective mechanisms for realigning social imbalance.” (Source 5)

6.4 Myths (Creation)

“According to one Sotho tradition, the first human being emerged from a sea of reeds at a place called Ntswanatsatsi. However, little is known or said about the events of this person's life.” (Source 2)

6.5 Cultural material (art, music, games)

“Sotho traditional music places a strong emphasis on group singing, chanting, and hand clapping as an accompaniment to dance. Instruments used included drums, rattles, whistles, and handmade

stringed instruments. One instrument, the lesiba, is made from a pole, a string, and a feather. When it is blown, the feather acts as a reed, producing a deep, resonant sound.” (Source 2)

“Generations of mine labor have led to a distinct migrant-worker subculture in Lesotho. This subculture developed its own song and dance traditions. Some types of mine dances have synchronized high-kicking steps. One song tradition, difela, has lyrics relating the travels, loves, and viewpoints of the migrant workers. Other popular music in Sotho includes dance tunes played by small groups on drums, accordions, and guitars.” (Source 2)

6.6 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

“The tribe is made up of a large number of different totemic groups, Lion, Elephant, Crocodile, Wild Pig, none of which, not even the royal Lobedu totem, is confined to the Lobedu tribe.” (Source 1)

“The supreme being that the Sotho believe in is most commonly referred to as Modimo. Modimo is approached through the spirits of one's ancestors, the balimo, who are honored at ritual feasts. The ancestral spirits can bring sickness and misfortune to those who forget them or treat them disrespectfully. The Sotho traditionally believed that the evils of our world were the result of the malevolent actions of sorcerers and witches.” (Source 2)

Sources

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