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**University College Cork, Ireland**  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

# A POEM ON DIARMAID MAC MURCHADHA IN THE BOOK OF LEINSTER

## ABSTRACT

A transcription and edition is presented here of a previously un-noticed fragment of a bardic elegy on Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, from the Book of Leinster.

IN a footnote to his discussion of the term 'Diarmaid na nGall' as applied to Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, king of Leinster (1126–71), Brian Ó Cuív remarked:

It may be assumed from the eulogy of Diarmaid in Gilla na Naem ua Duind's poem beginning *Cúiced Laigen na lecht rí* (LL 4411–22) that he patronised learning and that he would be familiar with well-known Leinster traditions.<sup>1</sup>

The poem referred to is a versified list of the kings of Leinster that concludes (prior to úa Duind's additional signature quatrain) with three quatrains praising Diarmaid as the current king, who extends his supremacy beyond Laighin. This poem by Gilla na Naem (†1160) is part of the contemporary fabric of the Book of Leinster (TCD MS H 2. 18 (1339)), a fabric that, at its most overt, encompasses a number of allusions to Mac Murchadha. This is also the case with the poem immediately preceding that of Gilla na Naem in the Book of Leinster, that beginning *Fianna bátar i nEmain* attributed to the tenth-century poet, Cináed úa Artacáin.<sup>2</sup> Into the Book of Leinster copy of this poem eleven quatrains were interpolated by *Find episcopus Cilli Dara*<sup>3</sup> in order to continue the poem's enumeration of deceased warrior-heroes, and in particular to conclude the poem with a distinctly triumphal Laighin flavour, and a reference to the Battle of Móin Mhór in which *Diarmait*, whom we understand to be living at the time of the composition of this interpolation, is said to have been victorious (see below). These interpolated verses follow the metrical pattern of the original poem in their combination of *deibhidhe scaoilte* and *deibhidhe nguilbreach* metres.<sup>4</sup> The only other known poetic effort by the Bishop is contained in his famous address (confirming his interest in poetry with his request for Mac Lonáin's *duanaire*) to his fellow scribe, Aodh Mac

<sup>1</sup>Ó Cuív (1975: 144).

<sup>2</sup>Book of Leinster, pp. 31a43–32a35; LL ll. 3998–4174.

<sup>3</sup>Quatrains 30–41 of the 43 quatrains contained in the Book of Leinster version; exceptionally qq. 35 and 39 are six-line verses. The Book of Leinster version, with those of Laud 610 and Egerton 1782, is edited in Stokes (1902).

<sup>4</sup>'though they are modelled on the original quatrains, hardly any forms suggestive of Early Middle Irish occur' (Murphy 1952: 154).

Criomhthainn, in the lower margin of p. 288 of the Book of Leinster, a verse in *rannaigheacht bheag* without *aicill* rhyme.<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis on the current king of Leinster in these two contemporary texts (*Cúiced Laigen na lecht rí* and the interpolated section of *Fianna bátar i nEmain*), taken with other references to him in Bishop Find's note on p. 288 and in the Book of Leinster in general, brings into focus the possibility of Mac Murchadha being patron of that book in the sense that we understand patronage to have generally operated in the production of Irish manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> He certainly must have been the recipient of Gilla na Naem's poem, and the fact that the poem presents, to a high degree, a *dán díreach* version of *rannaigheacht mhór* across its 63 quatrains<sup>7</sup> says something of the expectations of this *ughdar Erenn re senchus agus re dan*<sup>8</sup> regarding the poem's reception by Mac Murchadha.

A *seanchas* poem in this strict metre was a relatively new departure, one that was not destined to last, but in the twelfth century we find other *seanchas*-compositions in strict metre that suggest that some *seanchaidhe* were moving in this metrical direction in tandem with the praise-poets of the time.<sup>9</sup> Only in the closing verses referencing Mac Murchadha does Gilla na Naem veer towards praise-poetry — recalling the contemporary *seanchas* praise-poem beginning *Clann Ollaman uaisle Emna* (Byrne 1964) — and *dán díreach* praise-poems were to become the dominant literary art-form from the thirteenth century onwards. Among the candidates for the earliest surviving praise-poem composed in *dán díreach* is that addressed to Ragnall, king of Man (1187–1229),<sup>10</sup> who, like Mac Murchadha, appears to have been a patron of literature.<sup>11</sup> Its editor, Brian Ó Cuív, suggested that the poem to Ragnall may have been composed between 1187 and 1208.

It is in the context of the development of bardic praise-poetry and the emergence of Early Modern Irish, and also in the particular context of the history of the Book of Leinster, that the verses edited here are of interest. They consist of the first seven quatrains, in *séadna* metre,<sup>12</sup> *dán díreach*, of an elegy on Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, which appears to have contained a *caithréim* or list of his martial victories. It is found as a fifteenth-century<sup>13</sup> addition to p. 178 of the Book of Leinster where existing text was cleared from the page, sparing only the top quarter of column *a* (ll. 1–21) — the end of *Cath Ruis na Rí* — of what, judging from the recto of the leaf (p. 177), should have been

<sup>5</sup>LL, xv–xvi.

<sup>6</sup>Ó Macháin (2004: 158–65); Ó Macháin (2018: 233).

<sup>7</sup>Reckoned to be 'about 94%' in Ó Cuív (1968: 289–90).

<sup>8</sup>Bhreathnach (2002: 107–11).

<sup>9</sup>Ó Cuív (1968: 288–9). It is possible that this may have given rise to an element of rivalry between the two learned classes: Ó Macháin (2015: 99).

<sup>10</sup>Ó Cuív (1957); and Ó Cuív (1968: 290).

<sup>11</sup>Rejthón (1984: 29–31, 71–5).

<sup>12</sup>Other twelfth-century poems in this metre are analysed in Ó Cuív (1968: 288–9).

<sup>13</sup>So dated in LL, 779 n. 3.



a 52-line column. In the space thus created three additions were made, occupying 14 lines: (a) a single quatrain in loose *deibhidhe*: 'Asi [...]ltair<sup>14</sup> sin atbeir .uii. nairdrih eronn inber .u. righ nacoige fosgni. righ eronn is urraide'; (b) a metrical text inscribed in hybrid Gaelic and Anglo-Norman script,<sup>15</sup> apparently referencing 'ros *Fergus* Finn' in the body of the text, and beginning *Moche*[. .]indiu/im iacaill con glaiss. /a fhiaccaill fot criss/a chulchi ci taiss; and (c) the seven verses presented here, written (in Gaelic script) across the page, one quatrain per line. The remainder of the page beneath these additions is blank, save for traces of erased text.

As there was still plenty of space left on p. 178 for more of the Mac Murchadha poem to be added, we can only speculate that either the remainder was not to hand or that the scribe lost interest in completing the poem. While this status of space-filling later addition is of interest in itself — paralleling that of the Ó Maoileachlainn elegy in NLI MS G2-3<sup>16</sup> — the historic importance of the existence of this bardic elegy, albeit incomplete, on Mac Murchadha, in a manuscript associated with him, is of greater interest still. Allusions are made in the poem to incidents for which no other record survives today, and there is also the open question as to who among his surviving family was the intended recipient of the poem. Finally, there is the consideration that the poem was composed, one presumes, in or shortly after 1171, thus providing an early date for a bardic praise-poem in *dán díreach*.<sup>17</sup>

## EDITORIAL REMARKS

Because of the importance of the poem and its manuscript source, the transcription and the edition are presented here in parallel. This permits the regularisation of the orthography in the edition to that of Early Modern Irish, the development of the prosodic standards for which was well under way in the second half of the twelfth century, at a time probably contemporary with this poem.<sup>18</sup> This regularisation comprises: the supply of glide-vowels and orthographical lenition; reading *dh* for *gh* (1*b*, 2*d*, 6*a*); *bh* for *mh* (4*a*); *i* for *a* (preposition 'in(to)' 1*d*, 4*d*, 5*c*); *an* (article) for *in* (2*c*, 4*d*, 5*c*); *go* for *gu* (7*a*); final *-d* for *-t* (3*a*) and *-t* for *-d* (6*b*), final *-g* for *-c* (6*d*); pretonic *ro* for

<sup>14</sup>Ó Longáin reads *inpsaltair* (Ó Longáin and Atkinson 1880).

<sup>15</sup>Differing in some points from the hybrid script that contributed the *Í Mhórdha* poems on p. 53 (for which see O'Sullivan 1968).

<sup>16</sup>Ó Macháin (2015: 100).

<sup>17</sup>This and other matters relating to the Book of Leinster were presented in summary at a public lecture in Trinity College Dublin, April 2018, as part of the 'Beyond the Book of Kells' series. I thank Dr Gordon Ó Riain, Prof. Seán Ó Coileáin and the anonymous peer-reviewer for helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

<sup>18</sup>In his edition of a poem to Cathal Croibhdhearg, dated c. 1191, Brian Ó Cuív remarked on a linguistic and orthographic situation comparable to the present text: 'In general the language of the poem is in conformity with classical Early Modern Irish usage, but there are a few features which seem more representative of late Middle Irish ... A normalized text might be presented in either an Early Modern or a Middle Irish form' (Ó Cuív 1983: 160).

*ra* (4*b*);<sup>19</sup> simple preposition *re* for *ra* (4*b*). Editorial conventions such as capitalisation of proper nouns, hyphenation after pretonic elements in adverbs and compound verbs, and insertion of length marks, have been adhered to, as has the arrangement of the verses (each written in a continuous line in the manuscript, as stated above) into quatrains with editorial punctuation. Less cosmetic interventions have taken place in supplying grammatical lenition (1*cd*, 2*b*, 4*ad*, 5*abc*, 6*b*, 7*d*) and eclipsis (1*d*, 3*c*, 4*bc*, 5*bc*, 7*a*); so also with emendations in 6*b* (supply of *t* omitted through haplography) and in 6*d* where the accusative singular form *ríoghain* is a grammatical and metrical requirement, and where the following form *u* represents *uí* (see note).

## EDITION

1. Easbach dith diarmata *dur*gean  
na dhiaigh fhasas anba dhulc  
adiu do dainib ní dechaid  
fiú an coimhfhir creachaig acurp

2. IS amlaid airighim easbaidh  
fhir chualann do chosain cliaigh  
in bith uile mair bud fholam  
can duine ar doman na dhiaigh

3. Tuireamat gach gort rogabsom  
is gach giall teann tuc amuigh  
biaidh fos i fuiriudh ar flatha  
turem cach catha do cuir

4. Ac tig munnda ar maitimh muman,  
ramoid ra curaid cnuic roir.  
ferirdi blad ar flatha a fomain  
car in catha a monaid móir

5. Do bris ar thigernan taltean  
tuir tuirgen ar dol adiu  
a tres re huib briuin in bragha.  
bes ní ciuin do rala riu

6. Bagach do aith milid mastean  
mnai cherbaill ma do cuaid cuaird  
tuc tres no da tres na digail  
ruc fodes righan u ruairc

1. Easbach díoth Diarmada Duirghean,  
'na dhiaidh fhásas anba dh'ulc;  
a-diú do dhaoineibh ní dheachaidh  
fiú an chaoimhfhir chreachaigh i gcurp.

2. Is amhlaidh airighim easbaidh  
fhir Chualann do chosain Chliaigh:  
an bioth uile mar budh fholamh,  
gan duine ar domhan 'na dhiaidh.

3. Tuiréamhad gach gort ro ghabhsomh,  
is gach giall teann tug a-muigh;  
biaidh fós i bhfuiriudh ar bhflatha  
tuireamh gach catha do chuir.

4. Ag Tigh Mhunna ar maithibh Mumhan  
ro mhoidh re curaidh gCnuic Róir;  
feirirdi blad ar bhflatha a Fómhain  
car an chatha i Mónaidh Mhóir.

5. Do bhris ar Thighearnán Tailtean  
tuir Thuirghean ar ndol a-diú,  
i dtreas re hUíbh Briúin an Bhragha:  
bheas ní ciúin do-rala riú.

6. Bádhach do aith mílidh Maistean  
mnaoi Í Chearbhaill má do-chuaidh cuairt;  
tug treas nó dá threas 'na díoghail,  
rug fo-dheas ríoghain Uí Ruairc.

<sup>19</sup>On the understanding that the manuscript form does not indicate the presence of an infixed pronoun.



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 7. Ri gu fresabra fer maisten<br>mac murchada maighe sead.<br>ma nertsum nochá nar labra<br>rotechtsum clar banba acht beag | 7. Rí go bhfreasabhra fear Maistean<br>Mac Murchadha Maighe Sead;<br>'ma neartsumh nochá nár labhra:<br>ro theachtsumh clár Banbha acht beag. |
|---|---|

## TRANSLATION

1. A grievous loss is the death of Diarmaid of Duirghean, it is in his wake that great evil grows; no-one like the fair plundering man has been born here [since].
2. This is how I perceive the loss of the man of Cuala who gained Cliú: as if the whole world were desolate, no-one at all succeeding him.
3. I will enumerate every territory that he conquered, and every substantial hostage whom he brought in; in our prince's court will still occur the enumeration of every battle he gave.
4. At Teach Munna the hero of Cnoc Róir overcame the nobles of Mumha; the fame of our prince from Fómhain was enhanced by the prosecution of the battle in Móin Mhór.
5. The pillar of Duirghean, having gone hence, defeated Tighearnán of Tailte in a battle against the Uí Bhriúin of the Brugh: it is certain that he did not meet with them quietly.
6. Fondly did the warrior of Maiste compensate the wife of Ó Cearbhail when he visited; southwards he brought Ó Ruairc's queen: he fought one or two battles in requital for her.
7. 'King with Opposition' of the men of Maiste was Mac Murchadha of Magh Sead; there is no shame in speaking of his power: he possessed the plain of Banbha except for a small part.

## NOTES

1a *Easb[h]ach* is cited as a *canamhuin* form (as opposed to *easb[h]adhach*) in IGT ii, l. 1978: see Carney (1945: l. 278 n.). The question of *-b-/-bh-* may be merely one of orthography in the present instance, but despite the prohibition of the form *easbaidh* in IGT ii, 149, forms with unlenited *-b-* are attested in the poetry (e.g. *DDána* 113.4; Carney (1945: l. 1291); Mac Airt (1944: l. 3968), and so the manuscript reading is retained here, and in 2a.

*Diarmada Duirghean* This echoes combinations of the name *Diarmaid* and *duirgean* from at least three other poems: that on the sword of Cearbhall (Meyer 1899: 10.8b: *Diarmait dúrgen* 'Diarmait the hardy-born'); on Car-mun in the *dindsheanchas* (*MD* iii, 8.96: *Diarmait dron-mas durgen* 'Diarmait Durgen'); and on the kings of Cashel (Ó Donnchadha [1940]: 411.78: *dar éis*

*Diarmata duirgen*). These and other examples are tentatively construed in *DIL* (s.v. *dúr*, 453.41–6) as representing a compound of *dúr* and *gein*; the examples cited, however, show *deibhidhe* end-rhymes (*re*) *hed* : *dúrgen* (Cearbhall) and *cned* : *durgen* (*MD* and *Leabhar Muimhneach*); the peer-reviewer suggests a compound of *dúr* and *gen* 'sword'. It is in light of q. 5b below, where an apparent variant occurs in the expression 'tuir tuirgen', that I suggest that the word may represent an unidentified place-name — distinct from the Leinster placename, *Bealach Duirghean* — though I cannot explain the form.

1cd *ní dheachaidh* ... *i gcurp* 'has not been incarnated'. The peer-reviewer suggests the opposite interpretation (taking MS *a* as the simple preposition 'out of'): 'no-one like the fair plundering man has died here'.

2b *fir Chualann* may have been a tribal/territorial name (Carney 1943: l. 1044) but is to be taken here as in *rí Cualann* (*DDána* 84.5) or indeed *a fhir Chualann* (*Magauran* l. 2493), save that in the present instance the context gives expression to Mac Murchadha's sphere of influence covering Leinster (*Cuala* in south Dublin and north Wicklow) and Munster (*Cliú* centered on east Limerick).

3a *Tuiréamhad* The only other example to hand of an *ē*-future of *tuirmhidh* (< *do-rími*) is in *Magauran* l. 2503: *buaidh do throd ní thuiréamhom*.

*ro ghabhsomh* (cf. *ro theachtsumh* 7d) See McKenna's remarks on the disappearance of this enclitic in poetry after the thirteenth century (McKenna 1944: 190), and the comments on this in Ó Riain (2016: 16 n. 83).

3c *bhfuiuidh* 'apparently a structure or enclosure of some kind' (*DIL* s.v. *fuiriud*).

4a As the circumstances referred to are unclear, either of two places named Teach Munna (Taghmon in present-day counties Westmeath and Wexford) could be intended. The Wexford location seems more likely, and there is a record of an incursion into Í Cheinnsealaigh by Ó Briain and his allies being repulsed by Mac Murchadha in 1134 (Ó hInnse 1947: 22); hence the emendation *maitimh* > *maithibh* here. (Note that Ó Longáin (Ó Longáin and Atkinson 1880) reads *mundu* and *maithimh* in this line.)

4b Cnoc Róir is perhaps The Rower in south county Kilkenny, on the border with county Wexford, though linked to the form *rómhar* in *Onom*.

4c *Fómhain* Another unspecified Leinster location, the quantity of the first syllable being established here by the rhyme with *Mónaidh*, but elsewhere presenting as a short vowel, rhyming with *find-choraib* (*MD* iii, 74.101–2).

4d Móin Mhór refers to the uplands immediately to the north of Cork city, rising eventually to the Nagles Mountains between Mallow and Fermoy; Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin speaks of Templemichael, east of Carraig na bhFear, as being located *san Móin Móir* (Ó Conchúir 1982: 37). References to the battle of Móin Mhór (A.D. 1151) occur elsewhere in the Book of Leinster: in



Bishop Find's additions to the poem *Fianna bátar i nEmain* (LL, ll. 4163–6) — generally taken as establishing a *terminus a quo* for the manuscript — and in the annalistic notes in the tract on the Christian rulers of Ireland (*do fhlaithesaib agus amseraib Herend iar creitim*, LL, ll. 3192–5). The event has been treated comprehensively in Kelleher (1988).

5a Tighearnán Ó Ruairc, king of Bréifne (†1172), one of Diarmaid's chief antagonists. The victory in question may have been that of 1152, when Mac Murchadha combined with Toirdhealbhach Ó Conchubhair to defeat Ó Ruairc, in the aftermath of which the latter's wife Dearbhfhorgaill was taken to Leinster by Diarmaid, an incident alluded to in q. 6.

5b *Tuirghean* The manuscript clearly reads initial *t*-, perhaps under the influence of *tuir*, and so is either a slip or a variant of *Duirghean* in q. 1a.

5c *hUíbh Briúin an Bhragha* Ua Ruairc was of the Uí Bhriúin Bhréifne; *an Bhragha* is an epithet referring to Brugh (gen. *Brogha/Bragha*) na Bóinne and complementing the reference to Tailte in line a.

5d *bheas* See DIL s.v. 2 bés; 'the word seems to be OIr. *bés* "perhaps" with shortened vowel' (Watson 1940: 179).

6 The dalliance — as I interpret the text — with Ó Cearbhaill's wife is otherwise unrecorded; nor is it clear whether it is Ó Cearbhaill Éile (Mac Murchadha's distant neighbour) or the more powerful and prominent Ó Cearbhaill, Rí Airghiall, who is intended. The latter, Donnchadh Ó Cearbhaill, was half-brother to Tighearnán Ó Ruairc (ATig. s.a. 1155), whose wife is referred to in the second half-quatrain. Seán Ó Coileáin makes the ingenious suggestion that these lines contain no innuendo, but rather that Mac Murchadha's purported service to Ó Cearbhaill's wife may have consisted of the restoration to her of her husband following his imprisonment by Ó Ruairc in 1155, though no source refers to Mac Murchadha's involvement in that episode.

The incident involving Ó Ruairc's wife was a celebrated one — and indeed became the subject of bardic apologue (Ó Cuív 1975: 136–7) — involving the abduction by Diarmaid in 1152 of Dearbhfhorgaill, daughter of Ó Maoileachlainn of Meath and wife of Tighearnán Ó Ruairc (of q. 5); she returned to Ó Ruairc the following year. For a summary of the story see Martin (1975: 17–18). The annals specify that it was in revenge for this (*do dighail mna hUí Ruairc fair*, ATig.) that Ó Ruairc and Ó Maoileachlainn, with the Dublin Norse, attacked and banished Mac Murchadha in 1166; and that Mac Murchadha was forced to pay compensation of 100 ounces of gold to Ó Ruairc *i llóg a mna* (ATig.), having been defeated on his return in 1167. These incidents may be the 'treas nó dá threas' referred to here.

6a MS *Bagach* might also be taken as 'warlike'; *do aith* (: *sgaith* in *Magauran* l. 4200) is the perfect 3 sg. form of *aithidh* (< *ad-fen*).

6b *má do-chuaidh cuairt* This appears to be practically a temporal use of the conjunction *má*; Professor Ó Coileáin suggests emending to *mar*. For the verb phrase, compare *Dá ndeachaidh cuairt go Cruachain* (Carney 1952: 157.6) and *an chuairt-se do-chuamar* (DDána 67.49), in contrast to more common expressions involving use of the preposition *ar*, or verbs such as *do-bheir*, *gaibhidh* and *cuiridh*.

6b and d Emendations in these lines have been mentioned in the editorial remarks above. The restored genitive singular forms *t* and *uí* reflect the variation common in bardic poetry (cf. McManus 2013: 121). In line d the manuscript form *ū* (for genitive singular *uí*) is of interest because (as pointed out by the readers) three examples of it are noted by Liam Breatnach in *SnaG* 246, all from the Book of Leinster. Further examples from the same manuscript are *fichi bládna iar mbás hū Chuind* and *co bás hū Néill Noígfallaig* (Smith 2007: 202.38, 206.50, with note p. 242). That this form was not confined to the Book of Leinster is shown by examples from the Book of Ballymote (RIA MS 23 P 12), e.g. *meic hu chuind*, fol. 76va16 (cf. *meic hui chuind*, Book of Lecan (RIA 23 P 2), fol. 91r8) and *Carn hu neid*, fol. 200vb28.

The ornamentation known as *breacadh* is present in the second half-quatrain: *treas : treas : dheas*.

7a The expression *rí go bhfreasabhra* might seem less than complimentary here, but in the twelfth century it would have been a term of high praise; see some legal references in Simms (1998: 32–4). Diarmaid's great-grandfather, Diarmaid mac Maol na mBó, was considered to have been the first *Rí Éireann go bhfreasabhra*. The aspirational element in the compliment consists of the fact that, even given the shifting allegiances of the time, Diarmaid Mac Murchadha hardly met the traditional definition (alluded to in l. d here) of such an office. Being from the Southern Half, this would have entailed him being Rí Leithe Mogha, and also controlling Teamhair, and, in addition, controlling another *cóigeadh* from the Northern Half: see LL ll. 3158–63; in the seventeenth century this definition was refined as follows by Fear Feasa Ó Maoil Chonaire: *Follus go ngoirthí i mBanbha / mar so rí co bhfreasabhra: / leath Éirionn aige ó do bheith / 's cúigeadh don dara háirdleith* (Mhág Craith 1967: 39.102). In the wake of Móin Mhór, Mac Murchadha was referred to as 'ardríg Leithi Moga' by Bishop Find in his famous epistle on p. 288 of the Book of Leinster, perhaps reflecting opinion at that point in time; and as *rí Lethi Moga uile ... agus Midi* by a later scribe in the tract on *Ríg Lagen* in the same manuscript (LL ll. 5501–2).

7b *Maighe Sead* Unidentified.

7d *acht beag* Four examples of this expression are cited in DIL s.v. *bec* 47.38–42.



## ABBREVIATIONS

- ATig. Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'The Annals of Tigernach', *RC* 16 (1895), 374–419; 17 (1896), 6–33, 116–263, 337–420; 18 (1897), 9–59, 150–303.
- DDána Láimhbheartach Mac Cionnaith (ed.), *Dioghlúim Dána* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1938).
- Magauran Lambert McKenna (ed.), *The Book of Magauran: Leabhar Méig Shamhradháin* (Dublin, 1947).
- Onom. Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum Locorum et Tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae: An Index, with Identifications, to the Gaelic Names of Places and Tribes* (Dublin 1910).

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