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FAMILY ARCHIVES AND
HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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**THE MEMORY OF THE HOUSE OF LAPA:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE *INDEX GERAL* AND
OF AN INVENTORIED ARCHIVE**

ABSTRACT: This text originated from a research project aimed at offering History undergraduates in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa a first experience of archival work at the documentary description level, focusing on what is known as the *Index Geral (IG)* of the archive of the house of Lapa, an archive inventory dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this paper we intend to examine three different aspects related to the *Index Geral*: the contexts and objectives of the inventory's production; its organization and internal structure; and, finally, an attempt to recover part of the house of Lapa archive, which disappeared in the nineteenth century, from the inventoried version that calcified as the *Index Geral*.

Keywords: Portugal; ancien régime; family archives; inventories; nobility

RESUMO: Este texto nasceu de um projecto pedagógico que visou oferecer aos alunos da Licenciatura em História da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa uma primeira experiência de trabalho arquivístico ao nível da descrição documental, focada no designado *Index Geral (IG)* do arquivo da Casa da Lapa, um inventário de arquivo datado de finais do século XVIII e início do século XIX. Neste texto pretendemos pensar este documento sob três perspectivas distintas: a primeira debruça-se sucintamente sobre os contextos e objectivos de produção do inventário, focando sobretudo as notas que a este respeito foram deixadas pelo seu produtor; a segunda analisa o modo como se organizou e estruturou internamente o *Index Geral*, sublinhando as conclusões preliminares de uma análise geral da descrição arquivística dos cerca de 2.384 documentos registados no *Index* e as características particulares que distinguem este inventário de outros congéneres; e, por fim, a terceira perspectiva avança do *Index Geral* para o arquivo da Casa da Lapa, avaliando a forma como é possível conhecer o arquivo real, entretanto desaparecido, a partir do arquivo inventariado.

Palavras-chave: Portugal; Antigo Regime; arquivos de família; inventários; nobreza

This text results from a research project coordinated by Maria de Lurdes Rosa and Rita Sampaio da Nóvoa aimed at offering History undergraduate students at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa a first experience of archival work and document description. After volunteering to participate in the project, a group of students, over the course of approximately one year, produced the descriptions of all the

entries of the so-called *Index Geral* of the house of Lapa, an inventory created between the end of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, that still remains in possession of descendants of the counts of Lapa¹. With the support of the current owner of the inventory, Luís da Costa de Sousa de Macedo, who not only carried out the digitization of the document but offered important contributions for its understanding, it was possible to make the images available online and to conduct archival descriptions. These resulted in the construction of a database², in two public presentations of the work completed so far³ and, finally, in this article.

Along this brief reflection, which is anchored in already-published works about the *Index Geral* by Luís Henriques and Maria de Lurdes Rosa⁴, and Miguel Metelo de Seixas⁵, we intend to analyze the document from three different perspectives: the first briefly deals with the contexts and objectives of production of the inventory, focusing mainly on the notes that were left on this matter by its producer, Friar José de Almeida e Vasconcelos; the second examines the internal organization and structure of the *Index Geral*; and, finally, the third perspective deals with the house of Lapa archive, which disappeared in the nineteenth century, attempting its recovery from the inventoried version that crystalized as the *Index Geral*.

When considering all three perspectives, the wealth and scientific interest of the *Index Geral* of the house of Lapa archive are remarkable, insofar as they invite in-depth and comparative studies at the intersection of History and Archival Science. Furthermore, we should also highlight the success of a research experience cultivated in the dialogue between professors, students, researchers, and owners of family archives, all of whom contributors to the

¹ The complete title of the *Index Geral* varies across the different volumes. See HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016:120-121.

² The database is available at <http://www.inventarq.fcsh.unl.pt/>.

³ The first presentation took place in the seminar “Arquivos de família & Investigação em História” (October 2017) and the second in an academic session organized by the Instituto Português de Heráldica (December 2017).

⁴ HENRIQUES; ROSA; HEAD, 2015a; HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016; HENRIQUES; ROSA; collab. MACEDO, 2015.

⁵ SEIXAS, 2015.

diffusion and promotion of this valuable but somewhat forgotten documentary heritage.

Contexts and purposes of the production of the *Index Geral*

The production of the *Index Geral* of the house of Lapa archive took place in a political, social, and economic context that motivated several noble families to know, organize, and control the archival information they had at their disposal. In addition to the *morgadios* (entails) reforms, there was a climate of political and economic instability that forced noble groups to defend the rights and privileges that were soon to be extinguished by the end of the ancien régime. Archives were the guarantors of these rights and privileges, but the accumulation of large documentary masses over the centuries, coupled with the increasing complexity of managing significant land assets and entails, made access and use of this information increasingly more difficult⁶.

As such, many family archives were reorganized at this time; these efforts were often associated with the production of archival inventories that facilitated the retrieval of information⁷. In this scenario, and while José de Almeida e Vasconcelos Soveral de Carvalho da Maia Soares de Albergaria (c. 1740-1812), first baron of Mossâmedes and first viscount of Lapa, was still alive, the house of Lapa began the first of several archival reorganizations and inventory processes with the *Index Geral*. These lasted until the death of Manuel de Almeida e Vasconcelos (1784-1822), third baron of Mossâmedes, second viscount of Lapa, and first count of Lapa⁸. As Luís Henriques and Maria de Lurdes Rosa have stated, only a thorough analysis of the family history of this period could properly contextualize and explain the specific needs that prompted the first viscount to order the production of the *Index Geral*. However, it is clear

⁶ ROSA, 2012c; ROSA; HEAD, 2015b: 11 and 16.

⁷ HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 112-115.

⁸ HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016.

that it was a time-consuming and expensive investment directed towards the future and survival of the house of Lapa⁹.

As such, the *Index Geral*, completed between 1804 and 1805, is composed of two series or editions: the first — *série armoriada* — is ornamented with coats of arms and contains meticulous calligraphy and binding, being noteworthy for the metal device on the front and back covers of the three known volumes (second, third and fourth volumes), out of four that are thought to have been produced; the second — *série sem armas* — features a simpler binding and less careful calligraphy, and is divided into three volumes, appearing to constitute a complete copy of the first series; the difference in the number of volumes is explained by the pages that were left blank. To each of these sets a *mostrador* (table of contents) was added, arranged in alphabetical order and intended to facilitate the use of the *Index* and to shorten document search times, so as to satisfy the needs or the “curiosity” of the *Index*’s future users¹⁰. According to Luís Henriques and Maria de Lurdes Rosa, the existence of two series or editions is likely due to the need to use the document in different locations, with the ornamented series remaining in the main family household and the copy in another of the family’s homes¹¹.

The task of producing the inventory was entrusted to Friar José de Almeida e Vasconcelos, the illegitimate brother of the first viscount of Lapa. Little is known about Friar José, except that he was a “monk of St. Bernard”, that is, a Cistercian¹². Like the producers of other inventories, the duties he carried out as a friar probably contributed to the acquisition of the technical skills necessary for the construction of the *Index Geral*. Likewise, such duties would have probably also reinforced his awareness of the importance of an organized archive and of quick and efficient information retrieval for the proper functioning of institutions, including his own house¹³.

⁹ HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 94.

¹⁰ Arquivo da Casa dos Condes da Lapa, *Index Geral*, “série armoriada”, vol. 4, fl.1v. The “Arquivo da Casa dos Condes da Lapa” will be henceforth referenced as ACCL and the *Index Geral* as *IG*.

¹¹ HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 97.

¹² HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 95.

¹³ NÓVOA; LEME, 2015.

However, while Friar José's technical profile is comparable to that of other producers of contemporary inventories, what distinguishes him from his peers, and consequently the *Index Geral* itself, is his profound knowledge of the history of his family and its land assets. The fact that the *Index* producer was also a member of the family, with extensive genealogical and patrimonial knowledge, gives the inventory special traits that exceed the mere goal of organizing and describing documents. This much is evident from the opening sentences of the first volume's prologue, in which Friar José classifies the inventory as a "tistemunho autentico" (true testimony) of his love and as the product of a "sencera vontade" (sincere wish) to be useful to the successors of his house¹⁴. The latter is, therefore, the first objective of the *Index Geral's* production, that is, to serve descendants through documents that were to "ensure the survival of the house" (our translations), thus guaranteeing the continuity of the family¹⁵.

This objective was achieved on one hand by the detailed description of about 2,384 documents of the house of Lapa archive; as we shall later see, it was also reached through the physical organization of the documents in at least 40 bundles; last, but not least, it was attained with the transmission of Friar José's knowledge of the history of the house and its assets, which was affixed to long genealogical notes that preceded the document descriptions. The producer of the inventory explains why he included a genealogical component in the *Index Geral* by evoking practical reasons related to the origin of the assets — and, consequently, to the origin of the documents connected to those assets — as well as moral reasons related to ancestral examples, which he believed should be followed¹⁶.

This "obra de famillia" (family work)¹⁷, which, through history and genealogy, communicated to the house's successors a code of moral conduct, is fully expressed through its own materiality, more so than in the content of its

¹⁴ ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fl. 14.

¹⁵ ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fl. 14.

¹⁶ ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fl. 15.

¹⁷ ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fl. 14.

pages¹⁸. By this we mean the coats of arms affixed to the front and back covers of the ornamented series, whose heraldry was constructed using the arms of the families or houses from which the assets originated, always in association with the arms of the main Almeidas e Vasconcelos house¹⁹. Thus, as Miguel Metelo de Seixas has stated, the ornamented series of the *Index Geral* simultaneously faces outward, ostentatiously exhibiting itself to the observer; and inward, visually transmitting the memory of the family and reinforcing its pedagogical component²⁰.

This emphasis on the idea of continuity — which, in essence, makes the *Index Geral* a project invested in the moral and administrative future of the house — is also evident from the fact that the inventory was designed to be completed and corrected as needs dictated. This is visible, first and foremost, in the considerable amount of pages left blank in the three volumes of the ornamented series, an aspect that is specifically mentioned by Friar José²¹. The same is true of the instructions, left in the “advertências” (admonitions) section of the inventory, for adding the descriptions of documents that the producer might have overlooked, and for using the margins for updating any information on a given asset whose current state arose doubts or which lacked more detailed examination at the time of writing²². We know that Friar José’s successors did indeed follow these instructions. In fact, several descriptions of documents and marginal notes were added until at least shortly before the death of Manuel de Almeida e Vasconcelos, since the most recent record described in the inventory dates from 1830. Finally, as Frei José specifically states, the organization of the bundles themselves was designed to allow increases over time²³. We verified that documents have been added to several bundles, namely nrs 38, 39, and 40, the latter consisting exclusively of documents produced after the completion of the inventory.

¹⁸ ROSA; HEAD, 2015b: 16; HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 100.

¹⁹ SEIXAS, 2015: 72-73; HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 100.

²⁰ SEIXAS, 2015: 74-75.

²¹ ACCL, *IG*, “série armoriada”, vol. 4, fl. 1.

²² ACCL, *IG*, “série sem armas”, vol. 1, fl. 20.

²³ ACCL, *IG*, “série armoriada”, vol. 4, fl. 1r/v.

Organization and internal structure of the *Index Geral*

All these topics related to the contexts and objectives of the production of inventories, to their producers, and to the history of the family are essential for understanding how the documents were organized and structured. This importance is evident in the case of the *Index Geral*, notably because its organization and structure were based on the organization and the structure of the house of Lapa itself, transversely reflecting organic, administrative, and juridical characteristics²⁴. Therefore, this type of inventory process could only have been the work of someone with an extensive knowledge of the history of the house besides the assets it comprised, and also of its organic traits and mode of functioning.

These organizational and structural choices resulted in the construction of the inventory based on the set of houses, families, lines, and entails that preceded the house of Lapa, which was understood as a sum of different parts. The divisions are as follows, in the order in which they are presented by the producer: Mossâmedes, Sernancelhe (surname of Soveral), Vieiro, Ladário, Tojal, São Pedro do Sul, Viseu, Alvarenga, Ferronha, Sernancelhe (house of Conceição), Quinta da Cavalaria, and the *albergaria* and *morgado* of São Paulo do Cris. Within each of these divisions there are geographical subdivisions listing the various locations where assets could be found, and, within each of those, additional typological sections. It is important to note, as Luís Henriques and Maria de Lurdes Rosa remind us, that this geographical referencing should not be read anachronistically since it is not “technical (and, therefore, more modern)”, but rather is bound by the “administrative and legal nature of the assets and their origin”²⁵.

As such, we can summarize the overall structure of the *Index Geral* as follows²⁶: coat of arms (in the ornamented series); foreword; admonitions; explanations and genealogies of the different houses/families/lines/entails,

²⁴ HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 100.

²⁵ HENRIQUES, ROSA, 2016: 100.

²⁶ For a detailed description of the structure of each volume see HENRIQUES; ROSA, 2016: 122-32, Table II.

sometimes followed by descriptions of some documents (thoroughly in the first volume and more sparingly in the remaining volumes); geographical sections pertaining to each house/family/line/entail; typological sections pertaining to each geographical section.

At the finer level of document description found within each typological section, it was not possible to identify any organizational criteria, either chronological or thematic. However, the quality and detail of the description of the documents must be mentioned. It is complete with the date of production (day/month/year), reference (bundle and document numbers) and, in many cases, the records where the documents could be found, for example, chancellery books or notaries' notes (for the latter, the name of the notary is given, as well as his place of work).

These elements are sometimes accompanied by Friar José's notes on the content of the documents, which clearly demonstrate his expertise on the administrative, legal, and patrimonial matters related to his house, as well as on the archive itself. References to other documents described in the inventory are common, as well as notes that specify whether a record was kept for memorial purposes, to clarify doubts, out of simple curiosity, or even for "segurança e susego" (safety and peace of mind)²⁷. Additionally, Friar José also left several indications about the need to examine certain documents, a task which, according to him, should be carried out by "quem tiver tempo para isso sem arguir a quem o não tem para mais" (someone who affords the time and won't reproach who does not)²⁸.

From the *Index Geral* to the house of Lapa archive

The inventoried archive shown to us by Friar José in the *Index Geral* is probably very different from the physical archive, although it is difficult to accurately establish the extent of the difference, especially since the house of

²⁷ ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fl. 310v/311.

²⁸ ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fl. 310v.

Lapa archive disappeared almost completely in the late nineteenth century²⁹. In fact, as several authors have underlined, inventories cannot be regarded as faithful, complete, and impartial mirrors of the archives they describe. Rather, they should be understood as selections of sets of information available in the archives that, depending on the different contexts and needs, were considered a priority in terms of control, recovery, or conservation, to the detriment of other³⁰.

The first difference between the two archives — inventoried and physical — lies in the sequence of bundles and documents, given that the order in which the 40 bundles and their documents are presented in the inventory does not match the order in which they were physically organized, as the producer of the inventory himself acknowledges³¹. This means that the criteria that oversaw the physical organization of the bundles were not the same as those used in the inventory's virtual organization, although this was apparently not Friar José's initial plan.

In fact, it is likely that the original objective of the producer was to physically rearrange the archive and then inventory it, a task that he seems to have begun. However, the intervention of a "third hand" led to the documents becoming disorganized, returning them to the "initial chaos", and it was not possible to reconstruct the previous order³². This unforeseen setback may help to explain the difficulty in accurately determining the criteria underlying the physical organization of the documents in bundles, a topic which requires further study. A preliminary analysis suggests, however, that a combination of typological, thematic, and geographical criteria was used, although with regards to the latter the geographical distribution does not correspond to the one established in the *Index Geral*.

The second difference between the inventoried archive and the physical archive is the quantity of documents. By looking at the number range attributed to bundles and documents mentioned in the *Index Geral* we find that

²⁹ Henriques; ROSA, 2016: 90.

³⁰ GUYOTJEANNIN, 2010: 40; HEAD, 2007: 320; ROSA, 2012c: 580-581.

³¹ ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fl. 14.

³² ACCL, *IG*, "série sem armas", vol. 1, fls. 14v/15.

at least 92 documents in the house of Lapa archive were not described in the inventory. Table 1 illustrates this discrepancy, indicating for each bundle the range of production dates of documents (year of production); the distribution of the documents in the volumes of the *Index Geral* in which they are described; the documents' number range (which is reset in each bundle); the total amount of documents described in the inventory (which may exceed the number range, given that in some cases the same number was assigned to more than one document); the total amount of missing documents in the inventory (which includes documents that were numbered but not described in the *Index Geral*); and the total amount of documents that would have existed in the archive (estimated from the number range and assuming that each missing number corresponds to one document):

Table 1 – Characterization of the bundles described in the *Index Geral*

Bundle	Vol. distribution	Date range (year)	Doc. number range	Total docs described	Total missing docs	Total docs
1	1/2	1392-1803	1-56	58	2	60
2	1/3/4	1431-1821	1-73	30	44	74
3	1	1526-1778	1-21	27	0	27
4	1/2/4	1533-1761	1-27	25	3	28
5	1/4	1483-1706	1-40	40	0	40
6	1	1565-1779	1-43	38	5	43
7	1	1589-1738	1-17	16	1	17
8	1/2	1447-1830	1-23	24	2	26
9	2	1514-1792	1-9	9	0	9
10	2/4	1331-1829	1-57	60	1	61
11	2	1477-1815	1-24	24	0	24
12	2/3/4	1522-1806	1-77	80	0	80
13	1/2	1524-1759	1-39	38	1	39
14	1	1578-1792	1-82	108	2	110
15	1/3	1446-1785	1-86	85	1	86
16	1	1656-1775	1-12	9	3	12
17	1	1625-1765	1-17	17	0	17
18	2	1458-1804	1-48	51	0	51
19	2/4	1565-1829	1-33	35	1	36

Bundle	Vol. distribution	Date range (year)	Doc. number range	Total docs described	Total missing docs	Total docs
20	2	1580-1798	1-29	29	0	29
21	1	1523-1781	1-75	80	0	80
22	1/2	1612-1829	1-58	49	11	60
23	1	1529-1738	1-135	135	6	141
24	1	1507-1772	1-88	91	0	91
25	1	1504-1797	1-127	131	2	133
26	1/2/4	1481-1825	1-125	127	1	128
27	1/2/4	1533-1802	1-96	97	1	98
28	2/3/4	1481-1830	1-92	99	1	100
29	2/3/4	1531-1826	1-97	98	0	98
30	3	1540-1803	1-46	46	0	46
31	2/3/4	1489-1826	1-106	109	1	110
32	3	1487-1827	1-52	55	0	55
33	3	1400-1800	1-96	96	1	97
34	3	1525-1798	1-98	100	0	100
35	3	1539-1791	1-45	45	0	45
36	4	1569-1788	1-53	55	0	55
37	4	1655-1830	1-63	64	2	66
38	4	1693-1827	1-24	24	0	24
39	4	1741-1829	1-22	61	0	61
40	4	1790-1824	1-17	19	0	19
TOTAL	-	-	-	2,384	92	2,476

The total number of missing documents may vary slightly due to possible errors in the database construction but it is likely that the volume of documentation in the archive at the beginning of the inventory process exceeded that number. As several authors have pointed out, the physical reorganization of archives that was conducted during the inventory process almost always included a selection of documents³³. This appraisal effort determined the relevance of the inventories' document descriptions, and included or excluded records depending on a plethora of criteria. Also under scrutiny was the jus-

³³ MORSEL, 2015; NÓVOA; LEME, 2015; ROSA; HEAD, 2015a.

tification for the continued preservation of some documents, often resulting in the destruction of records which, for various reasons, no longer met the criteria that warranted their archival preservation³⁴. Friar José specifically refers to this process of appraisal, mentioning the existence of documents that he considered “useless”, which were “perhaps as many [...] as those that are described”³⁵. It is possible that some of these documents were not numbered (remaining in the archive unnumbered or eventually being destroyed), thus joining those that were, in turn, numbered but not described in the *Index Geral*.

The number of missing documents in most bundles is very low (between one and six documents), the most outstanding exception being bundle nr 2, with 44 documents missing. As with the other bundles, it is difficult to accurately determine the typology and content of these missing documents since, as we have seen, the criteria overlooking the documents’ physical organization into bundles are unclear. However, we are able to arrive at some conclusions about bundle nr 2, which included documentation for Mossâmedes and Lisbon. The 30 documents described in the *Index Geral* as belonging to this bundle are distributed throughout the first, third, and fourth volumes, and their number range is between one and 73, skipping the numbers 8, 22-27, 29, 30, 32-43, 45-65, 67, and 68. The documentation contained in this bundle was produced between 1431 and 1821, and no obvious global chronological order could be found. Most of the records described in the inventory refer to royal letters, letters of the Inquisition, and papal documents, but dowries, wills, and sentences were also added. Finally, a part of the documents in this bundle was organized in the inventory as being connected to the Almeida family, namely the descendants of Gonçalo Pires de Almeida; therefore, a genealogical organization criterion may have been partially followed.

Despite these differences between the inventoried and the physical archives, the *Index Geral* allows us to infer some of the components that would have characterized part of the house of Lapa archive in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As regards the size, to the 2,384

³⁴ ESCH, 2002.

³⁵ ACCL, *IG*, “série sem armas”, vol. 1, fl. 4v.

documents described in the inventory would have been added, as we have seen, at least another 92. This documentary amplitude is explained mainly by the amount and size of the houses which, by marriage or succession, merged into the house of Lapa, bringing with them several significant entails and their corresponding documents.

The chronological boundary for documentary production is between 1392 and 1830, with a breakdown of 1 document dating from the fourteenth century, 36 from the fifteenth century, 447 from the sixteenth century, 887 from the seventeenth century, 718 from the eighteenth century, 89 from the nineteenth century, and 206 with no date. The range of production dates and their chronological distribution are in line with what has been found in other ancien régime Portuguese family archives, that is, a very small number of preserved documents from the fourteenth century followed by a minor increase in volume during the fifteenth century and by exponential growth between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. As far as the nineteenth century is concerned, the small number of recorded documents can be explained by the fact that the *Index Geral* only describes documentation produced up to 1830.

The house of Lapa archive is also in tune with surviving family archives with regard to the most significant documentary typologies — roughly half of the documentation is related to land (47%), including 725 purchase deeds, 285 *prazos* and 111 *escrituras de empraçamento*. In second place we find legal documentation (10%), albeit at a considerable distance from the first, with 236 sentences. Using Esch's terminology, these two types of documentary production were the ones with the "highest probability"³⁶ of being preserved in noble family archives given their owners' land-based economy, the extensive use of *morgadios*, and the litigant nature of the need to defend and claim rights and privileges³⁷.

³⁶ ESCH, 2002.

³⁷ VON KAENEL, 2003: 36-38; ÚRIEN, 2000: 16-18.

Conclusions

Although fragmented, this glimpse of what would have been the archive of the house of Lapa illustrates one of the advantages of the study of family archive inventories: the recovery of a version of an archive that no longer exists. Those advantages are even greater if we look beyond the content and reflect on the form, the materiality, the contexts and objectives of production, the organization criteria and internal structures, the technical expertise of the producers, the history of the family. That is why the process of studying inventories and of reconstituting inventoried archives benefits greatly from an approach that combines History and Archival Science in the analysis of a socially constructed archival trace.

By following this methodology, this paper, paired with the database of archival descriptions of the *Index Geral's* entries, will hopefully contribute to the development of further studies dedicated to exploring the full richness and potential of the *Index Geral* and of the remaining traces of the archive of the house of Lapa. Likewise, it will expectantly showcase the rewards of a cooperative project that can bring together professors, students, researchers, and private owners of family archives for the study, diffusion, and protection of a shared archival heritage.

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