

The Iron Age A Ditch and Pottery at Pagans' Hill, Chew Stoke

By

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(O.S. 6 in. to 1 mile, Somerset 12 S.W. N.G.R. ST 557626)

INTRODUCTION

The Iron Age ditch at Pagans' Hill (1 mile north of Chew Stoke Church) was discovered during the excavation of the Roman temple settlement in 1951-2 (Rahtz, 1951). It was not excavated outside the Roman buildings, nor were any associated structures found. Several hundred sherds were found in the ditch, which may be assigned to an early phase of Iron Age A. We would like to thank Peter Ewence for drawing the pottery.

The Ditch lies under the long rooms on the north side of the outer entrance. It is crossed by three Roman wall-trenches, which are cut to its full depth to ensure stability; although it continued to the east, it could not be traced on the temple side of these buildings. The ditch has sloping sides and a flat base (*see Fig. 22B*) and is cut at right angles to the contours (*see Fig. 22A*) on a slightly curving course. It is 7-8 ft. wide at the level of the surrounding natural marl, and varies in depth from 1 ft. to 5 ft. below the turf; it is shallow at the west end, and deepens progressively towards the east.

Stratification.—At the shallow west end, the prehistoric filling was homogeneous, a black-brown greasy soil with charcoal and some small stones. Farther to the south the lower 6 in. were more black and greasy and contained much charcoal (layer 5 in *Fig. 22B*); this merged into a brown black soil with less charcoal (layer 4 in *Fig. 22B*). In the eastern part of the ditch there were many pieces of the local Triassic limestone up to 9 in. across in both layers on the south side of the ditch. Above the dark filling was rammed clay, laid in Roman times to make up the ground. No trace of a buried soil or occupation level could be traced under the Roman levels on either side of the ditch, where the clay make-up merged almost imperceptibly into the natural marl.

Finds.—Several hundred sherds were recovered from all parts of the dark filling, with a concentration at the junction of layers 4 and 5. The pottery types were the same throughout the filling, and the sherds are treated as a homogeneous group, which is described and illustrated below. The

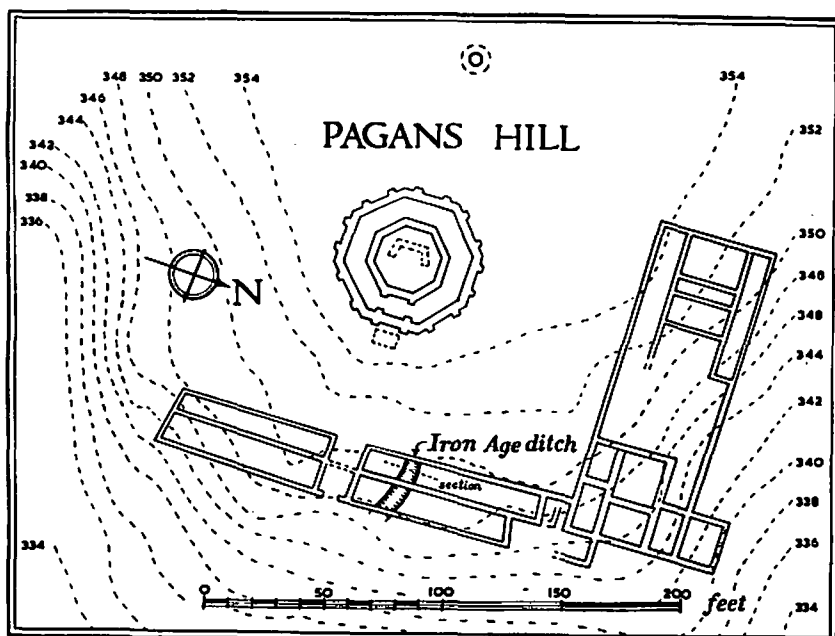


Fig. 22A.

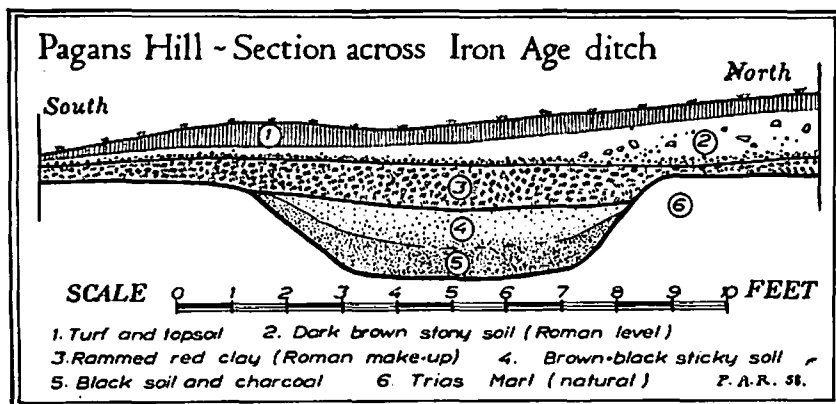


Fig. 22B.

only other finds were a few undistinguished flint flakes, part of a polished bone tool, and some unidentifiable scraps of animal bone.

INTERPRETATION

The purpose of the ditch must remain uncertain on the present evidence, but it was perhaps a sunken way leading up through the brow of the hill

to a site as yet unlocated. Traces of prehistoric occupation were found below the temple (Rahtz, 1951, pp. 121-2), but they cannot safely be related to this ditch; although the scraps of pottery found in the pre-temple soil were similar in fabric to those from the ditch, they are too small and featureless to be positively identified as Iron Age A. Many flints were found in the soil under the temple, but these are almost absent in the ditch. No traces of prehistoric occupation have been found elsewhere on the hill in the areas dug.

No primary silt was observed in the ditch, and it seems likely that the pottery and charcoal in the filling began to accumulate soon after it was dug. The stones in the filling in the east part of the ditch may have been derived from some kind of retaining wall on the south side. The Roman levelling material may have been derived from their own excavations for wall-trenches, etc., or possibly partly from the remains of prehistoric upcast.

THE IRON AGE POTTERY

(Fig. 23, Nos. 1-15; Fig. 24, Nos. 16-36)

The Iron Age pottery from this site is all of "A" type and appears to form a single homogeneous group. The amount of material is not enough to make any form of statistical analysis profitable, but the pottery is described in some detail as there seems little hope of obtaining more in the immediate future. The examination shows that this is probably the earliest group of Iron Age pottery yet found in Somerset. The furrowed, carinated bowls in hæmatite ware represented by the fragments figured (1-3) seem to be of the same type as those from early Iron Age "A" sites in Wiltshire such as All Cannings Cross.

Conversely the cordoned bowls of hæmatite ware with decoration incised after baking, that appear on Wiltshire sites at a slightly later date, are absent from the Pagans' Hill group. Another feature linking the Pagans' Hill pottery to early Wiltshire sites (e.g. *Boscombe Down West*) is the series of bowls in polished grey or black ware (10-17). On these, decoration is confined to horizontal furrowing or varied chevron and simple linear patterns on the shoulder, all executed in incised or impressed linear technique prior to firing. Also considered early is the relative profusion of finger-tip decoration on the jars and cooking pots. The collection does not include any rims so treated, nor are there any applied bands with this kind of plastic ornament, or indeed any trace of this.

The perforated shoulder lugs (18) are common in Wessex Iron Age A groups, including All Cannings Cross. Their combination with finger-tip decoration suggests the possibility of a Late Bronze Age contribution. This combination has been found on a supposedly Late Bronze Age cinerary urn from Dorset; and simple bi-conical urns with finger-tip decoration on the shoulder are known from Mendip barrows (Taylor, 1933, *Pl.* 4, 1, 2). On

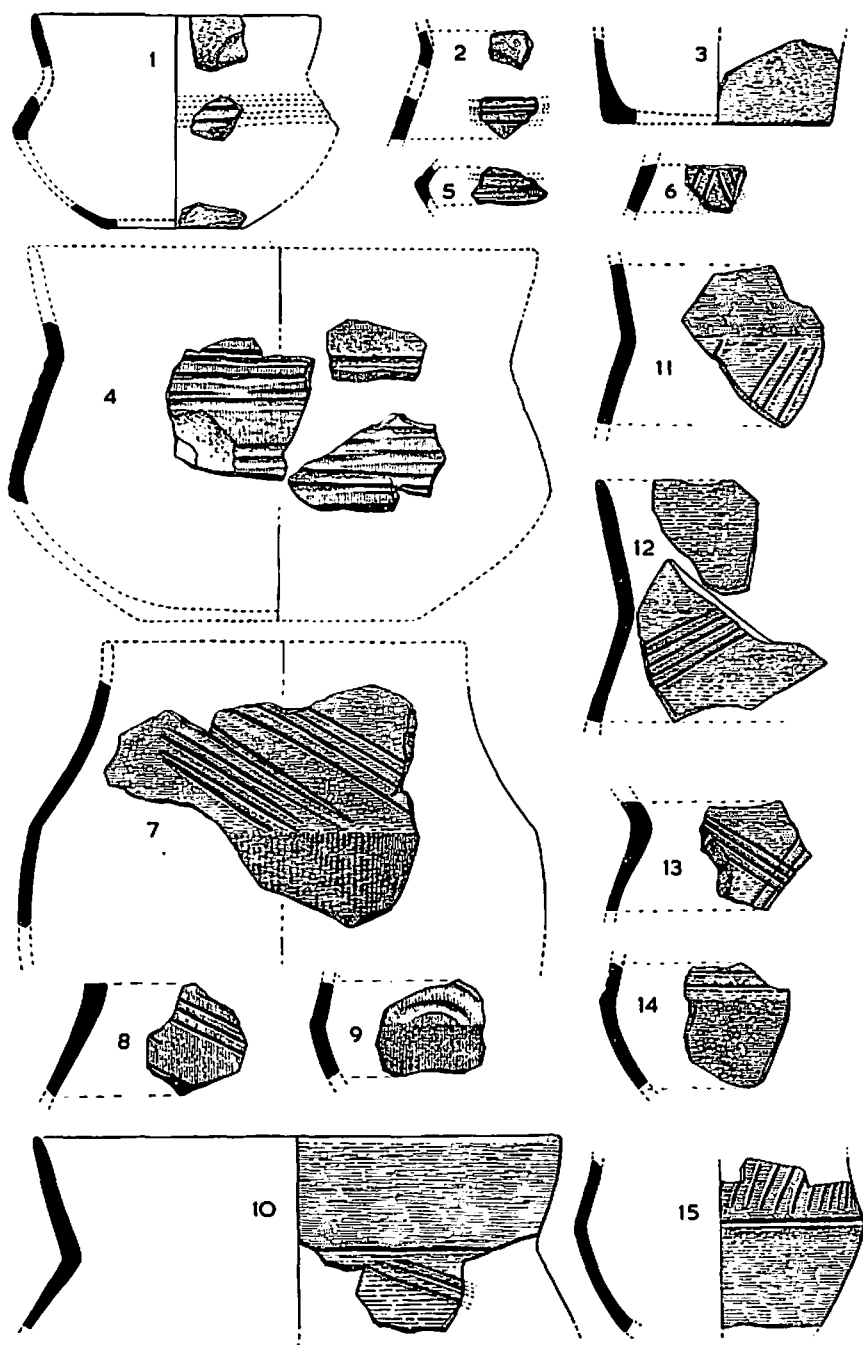


Fig. 23.—Sc. 1. Iron Age "A" pottery from Pagans' Hill.

the other hand, this finger-tip decorated ware may have been brought over by the original Iron Age A settlers.*

Storage jars and cooking pots of shouldered or *situlate* form are not well represented, though this may be accidental. The rather softened profiles of those figured (29-31) seem to be characteristic of early Iron Age A groups in Wessex, in contrast to the very angular shapes of early pottery in Eastern England. The evidence points to the Pagans' Hill pottery belonging to a relatively very early phase of the Iron Age. It seems likely that the furrowed bowls of hæmatite ware were brought to the site by the original settlers from Wiltshire, rather than obtained by trade.

The Iron Age A pottery from North Somerset may be divided into Early, Middle, and Late groups. Pagans' Hill stands at the head of the Early group. Sites in the Chew Valley which may belong to this group include Burlledge Camp, Phase 1†, where the outer rampart may be of later date; Stanton Wick, which is known to have a small ditch and rampart; and Chew Park Farm, an open farmstead site.

Probably also belonging to this early group is a bowl in fine grey ware, like that of Pagans' Hill (10-17), from Gough's Old Cave, Cheddar (now the Society's museum). Some of the Iron Age A pottery from Hayes Wood, Freshford, east of Bath (Stone and Wicks, 1936), is also said to resemble that from Pagans' Hill.

The most important site of the Middle group is Solsbury Hill Camp, near Bath (Adams and Falconer, 1935; Dowden, 1957). The pottery here is clearly derived from that of All Cannings Cross, though from types current in the later stages of the occupation of the Wiltshire site. It seems probable that these types, which are well represented at *Swallowcliffe Down* (Clay, 1925), and which include elaborately decorated, cordoned, hæmatite-coated bowls, and a series of flat-rimmed storage jars of more angular shape, as well as features such as pedestal bases, were introduced to Wessex by a fresh group of settlers.

I am of the opinion that the occupation of Solsbury Hill may have begun about the time when that of All Cannings Cross was drawing towards its close. The pottery from Solsbury Hill is also important in that it may well be the source from which the "linear decorated" ware of Bredon Hill (Hencken, 1938) is derived, though this derivation may not be direct.

The hæmatite ware bowl from Barrow 2, King's Weston Hill, Bristol (Tratman, 1926), probably belongs to an early phase of the Middle group. The Iron Age A pottery from the Brean Down Sand Cliff site presents some unusual features which might ally it to some of the Midland Iron Age A

* For an alternative view, not necessarily applicable here, see Wheeler, 1953, 10.

† This amends my note on the pottery in *Proc.*, 1957, 40.

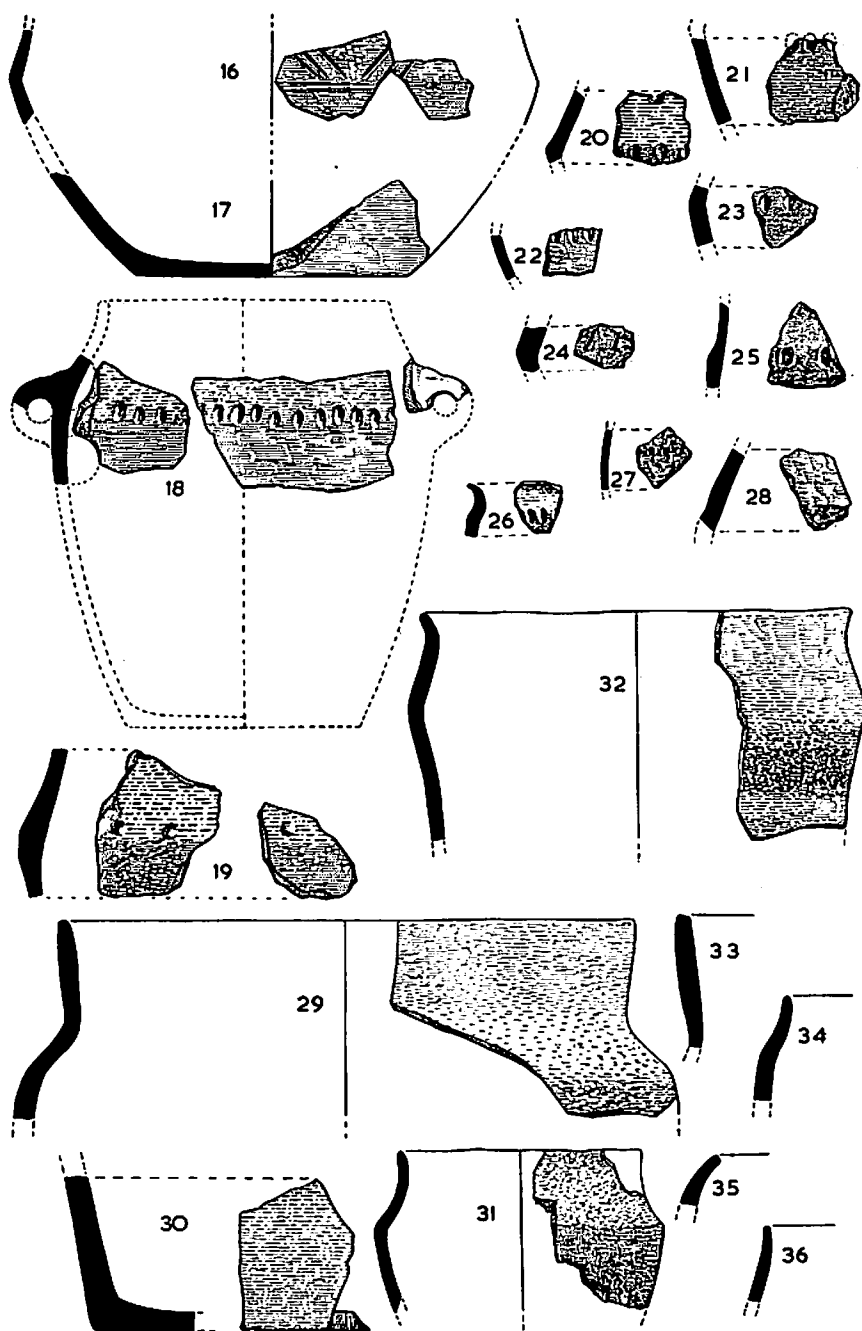


Fig. 24.—Sc. 1. Iron Age pottery "A" from Pagans' Hill.

material, but its general similarities to developed Wiltshire material suggest that it also probably belongs to the Middle group.

The late group is characterized by degeneration. Hæmatite ware and its derivatives practically disappear, decoration is rare, and the pottery forms become devoid of distinctive character. Sites which have yielded pottery assignable to this group include the hill fort on King's Weston Down (Rahtz, 1957), Burlledge Camp, Chew Park Farm, and the earthwork at Camerton (Horne, 1938).

This summary is not meant to be complete nor definitive; there are a number of other sites in the North Somerset area that have produced Iron Age pottery which I have not mentioned here. The need for an account may be judged from the fact that a comprehensive paper published only six years ago did not even mention any sites in this area.*

There is no evidence of the date of the Pagans' Hill site other than that provided by the pottery. Current archæological opinion, as reflected in publications, would probably assign this pottery to the fourth century B.C. The best exposition of the arguments on which this dating is based is to be found in works by Wheeler (1943, p. 192) and by Kenyon (1952). The Pagans' Hill pottery does not provide any new evidence bearing on this dating.

A. HÆMATITE WARES

There are 9 small sherds of fine, bright red-surfaced ware with a pale grey core.

1. A furrowed bowl, probably represented by two rim, two shoulder and two base sherds. (Cf. *All Cannings Cross*, Pl. 28, 1.)
2. Two scraps from the shoulder of a furrowed bowl, of reddish-brown hæmatite ware.

There are 28 sherds of coarse hæmatite ware. The thickness of this ware varies between about $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ in. The inner surface is sometimes brown or black instead of red. None of the pieces is decorated. Three base fragments are present suggesting pots with basal diameters of 6, 5, and 3 in. These look to be from fairly straight-sided jars, but the fragments are too small for certainty.

3. A fourth base fragment, the inner surface is badly abraded.

B. FABRICS DERIVED FROM HÆMATITE WARES

There are a dozen sherds of brown-faced ware with a fine brown, or reddish-brown core, probably from 2 coarse furrowed bowls.

4. Shoulder of a furrowed bowl. The large sherds do not fit but are probably from the same pot. (Cf. *Boscombe Down West*, Fig. 7, 15.)
5. Fragment from the shoulder of a smaller furrowed bowl. The furrow is deeply grooved and the carination sharp.
6. Sherd with faint grooved decoration.

C. BURNISHED FABRICS WITH PALE BROWN OUTSIDE

This fabric, though not particularly common at Pagans' Hill, is an important one in later Iron Age A groups in North Somerset. The paste is commonly dark grey or black, well levigated, the inside surfaces are usually black.

7. Shoulder of large bowl. The grooved decoration has been incised when the pot was in a "green hard" state but before firing. (Cf. *All Cannings Cross*, Pl. 41, 3.)
8. A sherd of a similar vessel. This retains the base of an upright or slightly everted neck.
9. Possibly also from a similar bowl. The curved lines may be accidental.

* For a distribution map showing most sites, see Tratman (1955), Fig. 20, 159.

D. DARK-FACED BURNISHED WARE

The paste of this ware is normally dark grey or black; the texture is fine but flecked with small pale grey grits apparently due to the use of fossiliferous clay. The surfaces carry a varying amount of burnish and are dark grey, dark brown or reddish-brown. Most of the decoration has been applied when the pots were still fairly soft, but in at least one case (*Fig. 23, 12*) incision in a green hard state has been employed.

10. Large bowl of well-burnished ware.
11. Part of a similar bowl. The decoration consists of very shallow-fluted lines.
12. Shoulder of similar bowl. This appears to be slip-covered both inside and out. The outside is grey-brown, the inside reddish-brown. The rim sherd does not fit but may well belong to the same pot.
13. Fragments of a similar bowl in fine grey-black ware.
14. Part of furrowed bowl in fine black ware. The collection includes part of another example of this type, which may be related to All Cannings Cross bowl types. (*Cf. All Cannings Cross, Pl. 28, 6, 16.*)
15. Bowl in grey ware, broken off at the junction between wall and base.
16. Shoulder of bowl in smooth grey ware.

The collection includes several other fragments of similar bowls bearing incised or impressed chevrons, as well as the intersecting chevrons of 13, and the horizontal furrowings of 14.

17. Part of base. This probably comes from one of the large bowls described above.

There are also parts of at least 5 other bases belonging to this fabric group; their diameters are 6 in. (2), $5\frac{1}{2}$ in., 3 in., and $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. All the bases are flat and there is no trace of pedestals, foot-rings or omphaloi.

COARSE WARES

E. WITH FINGER-TIP NAIL-MARKED DECORATION

There are 14 sherds with this type of decoration, representing 12 separate vessels. Only in one case (*Fig. 24, 26*) is a rim preserved, but most of the vessels seem to have been shouldered or bi-conical jars. The fabric employed varies but generally has a light brown outer surface, the inner half of the wall being black.

18. Shoulder of bi-conical jar in black ware, the outer surface fired to a pale smoky brown. There is a row of finger-tip impressions bearing nail marks on the shoulder. The 2 sherds do not fit but are part of the same vessel. Hollows on the fractured edge of one sherd show that a perforated lug was formerly "tenoned" into the wall of the pot at this point. The broken lug illustrated is probably from this pot but does not fit the hollows left. (*Cf. All Cannings Cross, Pl. 38, 6 (shape); 4 and 5 (lugs).*)

19. Two sherds from shouldered jar in black ware, the outer surface slip-covered and fired to a reddish-brown above the shoulder and a smoky-grey below. (*Cf. All Cannings Cross, Pl. 29, 5-7.*)

20. Sherd from shouldered jar or bowl, in coarse black ware. One fracture runs through an old "repair hole".

21. Sherd with finger-nail marks, in black ware with slipped outer surface fired to a pale-brown colour.

22. Finger-nail decorated sherd of dark-grey ware, the outer surface fired to light buff-brown and burnished.

- 23-5. Three coarse ware sherds with finger-tip/nail impressions.

26. Rim sherd from a small jar or bowl with everted rim. Beneath the rim is a low raised band with a row of finger-tip impressions.

- 27, 28. Two sherds of coarse ware with circular stamped impressions.

F. MISCELLANEOUS COARSE WARES

29. Rim and shoulder of large jar or bowl in grey ware with buff-brown surfaces.

This vessel and those figured below belong to a group of coarse ware with outer surface characteristically buffish or reddish in colour, that is clearly strongly influenced by the use of haematite coating for finer pottery. It is probable that the bone-coloured wares very common in later groups also spring from the same source. At Pagans' Hill, perhaps three-fifths of the coarse pottery belongs to the buff or red-surfaced haematite derivative group. This character led to the identification of this early phase among the Iron Age sites recently investigated in the Chew Valley.

30. Base and lower wall sherds from a large jar in red-faced ware of the type discussed above. The diameter of the base is 9 in.
 31. Shouldered jar of coarse black ware; the outside is fired brown below the rim, black below the shoulder. The surfaces of this pot bear chaff or grass impressions.
 32. Shouldered jar of black ware with brown outside.
 33. Rim of straight-sided jar in black ware. Diameter about 7 in.
 34. Rim of shouldered bowl or jar in soapy black ware.
 35. In-turned rim of black ware.
 36. Rim sherd of buff-brown ware.
- Among the coarse ware not illustrated are a dozen or more rounded rim sherds, but flat-topped rims seem to be entirely missing.

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