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INTRODUCTION

If history is what one remembers then the meeting of the Estates General of France in 1614 is history. To the reader with even a casual knowledge of the events of early modern Europe the date 1614 means the last meeting of an Estates General in France until 1789. But other events did occur in 1614. There were the meetings of the Addled Parliament in England, the Riksdag in Sweden and the Estates in Lorraine, Artois and Hesse. Delegates from the Estates of all the Austrian Habsburg lands except the Tyrol met at Linz to plan resistance to the growth of Habsburg central government. The discoverer Pedro Paez found the source of the Blue Nile. Sir Walter Raleigh published his *History of the World*. Rubens completed his 'Deposition from the Cross'. William Harvey was preparing his first lecture on the circulation of the blood. But it is the meeting of the Estates General in France that is remembered by historians when the year 1614 is recalled.

One reason for this memory is that the next meeting of the Estates General, which came a precise and easy-to-remember 175 years later, was so important for the history of Europe. For those interested in French history the traditionally accepted failure of the Estates General in 1614 conveniently marks the beginning of absolutism; especially since the future Cardinal Richelieu made his political debut as a deputy of the First Estate.

On a more sophisticated level 1614 plays a part in the overall pattern of French history. It lies midway between the lowest ebb of the fortunes of the French monarchy during the Hundred Years' War and its destruction during the French Revolution. The strength of the monarchy and France had increased from the end of the Hundred Years' War until the death of Henry II in 1559. Then followed the thirty years of chaos that were the Wars of Religion. The reign of Henry IV marked a revival in the fortunes of France and the monarchy. But his assassination in 1610 ushered in another period of decline that lasted until Cardinal Richelieu began to reorganize France after 1624. 1614, then, marks a secondary low point in the development of absolutism between the fifteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries.

In the work of another group of historians 1614 is used as the terminal point in the history of the Renaissance monarchy. They see the character of the French monarchy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as consultative in that, partly from conviction, partly from weakness, it continually convoked more or less representative assemblies of various types to gain the support of the people. In this view absolutism came to France only after 1614 when the kings became strong enough and ruthless enough to rule without consultation.

As a result of my own research I prefer to look at 1614 in another context.

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After a period of growing royal power France, from the mid sixteenth century through the 1620s, was faced with civil war or the threat of civil war caused by the growth of royal power, political rivalries, religious reform and economic dislocation. During these years after the 1550s when more often than not French rulers were weak, the fortunes of the country were in the hands of a small group of professionally trained and experienced men whose main interest was to serve the crown. These men devised methods, usually not very heroic ones, to deal with continually recurring crises. Their overall aim was to preserve the monarchy until better days. Henry IV's reign and the early years of Richelieu's ascendancy were essentially part of this era. Connecting those two periods was the regency of Marie de Médicis. From 1610 until 1616, when her grip on the government began to weaken, she ruled the country with the aid of three of her late husband's most trusted advisers: Nicholas de Neufville, *seigneur* of Villeroy, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; Pierre Jeannin, Controller General of Finances; and Nicholas Brûlart, *sieur* of Sillery, the Chancellor. These men found themselves, between 1610 and 1616, in the same type of situation as they had been personally involved in since the mid sixteenth century. The same men used the same policies to meet the same conditions. And they had the same success – the monarchy was preserved. Under Henry IV, after 1598, the monarchy had been in a strong position, as it would begin to be again under Richelieu near the end of the 1620s. But to the leaders of government in 1614 the years of Henry IV were exceptional. They were too good to be true. Their job in 1614 was what it had been for most of their professional lives – to hang on until better days.[1]

It is not the purpose of this book to trace the history of France from the Wars of Religion to the Thirty Years' War nor to offer a comprehensive study of the reigns of Henry IV and his widow. Not even a full history of the regency of Marie de Médicis is intended. In view of the present state of scholarship any of these tasks is far too ambitious. The purpose of this book is to study the Estates General of 1614 in the context of the policy of the Regency government to meet a continuing crisis and in itself as an expression of the desires of the groups and individuals who made up France at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

During the years 1610 to 1616 nobles conspired, Huguenots were restless,

[1] Two books that point in a limited way toward a similar conclusion are A. D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsiya v nachale XVII veka 1610–1620* (Leningrad, 1959) and S. Mastellone, *La Reggenza di Maria de' Medici* (Florence, 1962). Neither book, however, considers the economic and diplomatic evidence to be discussed in chapters two and three. Of distinct help from the other direction, through the perspective of the sixteenth century, are N. M. Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State* (London, 1962) and especially Raymond Kierstead, *Pomponne de Bellièvre* (Evanston, 1968).

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royal officials enriched themselves, Rome demanded concessions, Spain threatened France's territory but Marie de Médicis and her advisers held on. If they had openly opposed any one of these forces France would have been torn apart. If they had been less skillful in their policy of vacillation, compromise, promise and feint, France would have fallen apart. This is the context in which the Estates General of 1614 has to be seen. The Estates General was called not to reform France but as part of a complex and hidden but definable policy designed to meet a series of long-term problems that had been worsened by the assassination of Henry IV and by the minority of Louis XIII.[2]

But once an Estates General met it had a life of its own. The meeting in 1614 provided within the bonds of ritualized performance a means of expression for the diverse elements that comprised French society in the early seventeenth century. The debates of the First Estate reveal the dependence of the majority of the clergy on privilege and the drive of a small group for reform. The *cahiers* of the Second Estate express the desire of most of the nobility for the revitalization of feudalism and the realization of a few of the power of capitalism. The Third Estate continually voiced conflicting concern for local privilege and royal power. This most diverse of estates retained a loyalty to old ways, strove for absolutism and uttered many of the same grievances that their descendants would in 1789 – all at the same time.

In spite of the importance of present problems and the grievances of the deputies, tradition and ritual played a distinct role in 1614. Elections, opening and closing ceremonies and the form of the meetings were traditional and followed a pattern. Even the grievances of the deputies tended to remain the same over the years. The deputies in 1614 understood the problems of the past, not those of the future. They understood the France of Francis I and Henry II, not the France of Louis XIV. The nature of the past that influenced the Estates General of 1614 has been discussed for almost two centuries. However, the debate was blurred for a long time by a misunderstanding of the fate of the institution and by the political allegiances of those conducting the inquiry. The Estates General did not die in 1614; it was a potential governmental institution until the personal reign of Louis XIV. After 1661, though, it became identified with a period that the now dominant France wished to forget. Only Fénelon among major writers of the Age of Louis XIV favored the revival of the institution. For men like Colbert and Bossuet the Estates

[2] Recent interpretations of the Estates General of 1614, which differ from the one adopted in this book, include George Rothrock, 'The French Crown and the Estates General of 1614' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1958); Rothrock, 'The French Crown and the Estates General of 1614'. *French Historical Studies*, I (1960), 295–318; Claude Alzon, 'Quelque observations sur les Etats Généraux de 1614', *Journées Internationales Paris, 1957* (Louvain, 1959), pp. 35–42; A. D. Lublinskaya, 'Les Etats Généraux de 1614–1615 en France', *Album Helen Maude Cam* (Louvain, 1960), I, 229–245.

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General was interesting only as a lesson from the past. In the mid eighteenth century the Encyclopedists devoted a few pages to the subject. But it was not until the announcement of a new meeting of the Estates General in 1788 that the interest of Frenchmen was excited once again. In 1788 and 1789 numerous works dealing with all of the Estates General but concentrating particularly on the meeting in 1614 were produced; some of these were published; others remained in manuscript. During the first half of the nineteenth century the Estates General were studied by men eager to support their political position for or against the revolution or the monarchy. Competitions established by the *Academie des Sciences morales et politiques* resulted in several books but it was only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that the Estates General began to be studied by independent scholars not primarily interested in political justification. The lines were soon drawn between legal theorists, most connected with the *Faculté de Droit* of the University of Paris and political historians. This division has been maintained down to the present, though interest has spread beyond France and both social and institutional historians have also entered the discussion.[3]

The origins of the French Estates General have long been a subject for debate. Whether one goes back to the *Concilium Trium Galliarum* or the *Placitum Generale* of Pre-Capetian France or chooses to emphasize either the feudal duties of aid and counsel or the Roman Law theories of *Plena Potestas* and *Quod omnes tanget*; whether one finds a new departure in 1302 or chooses to say that the Estates General did not take its completed form until 1484, the fact remains that by the late fifteenth century the French kings had permitted the development of an institution that allowed the representatives

[3] For Colbert see B. N. Mélanges de Colbert 83 fols. 74r–106r; for Bossuet, B. N. Collection Clairambault 364; for Fénelon, Françoise Gallouedec-Genuys, 'Fénelon et les Etats', *Album Helen Maude Cam*, I, 277–290. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751–1765), VI, 20b–27a, XIV, 143a–143b, 146b, XVI, 918a, XVII, 880b. An example of the range of interest of the scholars of 1788–1789 in what happened in 1614 can be seen from *Catalogue Raisonné des ouvrages qui parurent en 1614 et 1615 à l'occasion des Etats* (n.p., 1789). An example of unpublished material can be found in B. N. Collection Moreau 307. For the use of the Estates General as a buttress for differing political opinions see Henrion de Pansey, *Des Assemblées Nationales en France depuis l'établissement de la monarchie jusqu'en 1614* (Paris, 1829) and Augustin Thierry, ed., *Recueil des monuments inédits de l'histoire du tiers état* (Paris, 1856), III. For a further indication of the interest of both Thierry and François Guizot see *Extrait du Journal de l'instruction publique*, no. 2 (January 5, 1850). The competition established by the Academie in 1840 is described by Joseph Meyniel, *Le Président Savaron, ses théories, ses ouvrages* (Paris, 1906), pp. 32–33. At least three books published between 1843 and 1845 resulted from this competition. Auguste Boullée, *Histoire complète des Etats généraux et autres assemblées représentatives de la France depuis 1302 jusqu'en 1626*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1845); E. J. B. Rathery, *Histoire des Etats généraux de France* (Paris, 1845); Antoine C. Thibaudeau, *Histoire des Etats-généraux et des institutions représentatives en France depuis l'origine de la monarchie jusqu'à 1789*, 2 vols (Paris, 1843).

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of certain groups to present their complaints to the king in return for their support of royal policy or the collection of new taxes. It is also apparent that by the late fifteenth century the French kings were worried that the Estates General might establish a claim to redress of grievances before the granting of the monarchy's wishes as was beginning to happen elsewhere in Europe. As a result the French monarchy began to substitute for it the meetings of regional or restricted assemblies to maintain occasional contact with important segments of society and to gain support for crucial decisions. A full Estates General was not called again until 1560.[4]

The next three meetings of the Estates General in 1560, 1576 and 1588 were all called in response to the chaos of the Wars of Religion. In the confusion of civil war the Estates General might have had an opportunity to develop its power if the three Estates could have agreed on a common program. They could not, and French opinion, spurred on by the actions of the illegally convoked Estates General of 1593, turned against the Estates General and in favor of the policies of the new King Henry IV. This description of what happened in the second half of the sixteenth century is incomplete. It does seem to fit the facts if the meetings are studied from the point of view of legal theory or through local records. However it ignores the royal government without which any of the Estates General could not have existed. The assemblies of the late sixteenth century need more study, but based on what is known of the men who advised the successive Valois kings and who were still in office in 1614 it can be argued that for them the calling of the Estates General was a calculated risk in the face of desperate conditions. They sought to win for the royal government both popular support and time to solve the problems connected with the Wars of Religion. These men knew that the deputies would be divided and counted on this fact. The policy worked until 1614. The unity of the three estates in that year may have contributed to the decision never to call them together again.

It is beyond question that by the end of the sixteenth century the French Estates General can best be described by its failures. The deputies had failed

[4] The most valuable sources for tracing the development of the Estates General are Jacques Cadart, *Le régime electoral des Etats généraux de 1789 et ses origines* (Paris, 1952); Jean-Paul Charnay, 'Naissance et développement de la vérification des pouvoirs dans les anciennes assemblées françaises', *Revue historique du droit français et étranger*, ser. 4, XL, no. 4 (1962), 556–589; XLI, no. 1 (1963), 20–56; G. Griffiths, *Representative Government in Western Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1968); Ferdinand Lot and Robert Fawtier, *Histoire des institutions françaises au moyen âge*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1957–1958); Emile Lousse, *La société de l'Ancien Régime* (Louvain, 1943); J. Russell Major, *Representative Institutions in Renaissance France, 1421–1559* (Madison, 1960); Antonio Marongiu, *Medieval Parliaments: a Comparative Study*, trans. S. J. Woolf (London, 1968); François Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du droit français des origines à la révolution*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1951); Georges Picot, *Histoire des Etats généraux considérés au point de leur influence sur le gouvernement de la France de 1355 à 1614*, 5 vols., 2nd ed. (Paris, 1888).

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to obtain the right to meet regularly, to consent to taxation, or even the uncontested right to verify their own elections. Above all they had not gained the right to redress of grievances before supply. Rather they had to fight continually to get some vague answer to their grievances before dismissal by the king.

Some perspective on the situation of the Estates General of 1614 can be gained from a comparison with the other representative and parliamentary bodies in early seventeenth century Europe. To the northwest the English parliament was in the process of establishing its control over taxation and becoming a permanent fixture in the English constitution. The troubles of the monarchy, the Reformation, the size of the country, the method of representation, and the lack of competition from an institution like the *Parlement* in France were fashioning a different role for Parliament.

In the Spanish Netherlands the Estates served as a means for tax collection with power of gaining redress though it did not meet between 1600 and 1632. In the United Provinces the States General was the government. In the Duchy of Lorraine all important affairs were submitted to the Estates General for consideration. In Sweden the *Riksdag* was well on its way to becoming part of the normal machinery of the state as a result of the conscious effort of Gustavus Adolphus.

In much of the Holy Roman Empire the Estates of the individual principalities still had a definite role to play. These Estates had developed out of feudalism, the rulers' need for money, and succession crises in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In so far as these problems continued, so did the role of the Estates, though the Thirty Years' War, and later wars and the influence of Louis XIV would significantly modify the situation. The *Diet* of the Holy Roman Empire was collapsing as the concept of the union of the *Kaiser* and the *Reich* lost its practical validity. The Estates of the Habsburg lands were losing their struggle with the newly vigorous central government for control of local affairs. To the East the Polish *Sejm* used its power to prevent government though it rarely used its power to further government.

Bit by bit during the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries the parliaments of Italy ceased to exist and by the opening of the eighteenth century of the three that remained only that of Sicily had any real power. Nevertheless as long as they did exist, and there were eight at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they met fairly frequently and played a role in financial affairs. In Spain the *Cortes* of Castile had been brought under control by Philip II though it continued to meet fairly frequently. In Aragon the *Cortes* still had financial power.

In all of this diversity two kinds of representative bodies can be distinguished, those few which had managed to win a place in government and those which through atrophy or the growing power of the rulers were dis-

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appearing after a period of relative power. At first glance it would seem that the French Estates General fits neatly into the second category. This is not so. It may share a common origin with the Estates and Diets that were disappearing, but the French kings had prevented their Estates General from ever gaining significant power over any aspect of government and had prevented any regularity of meetings and thus the possibility of ever achieving a permanent place in French life. The valid comparison is between the French provincial estates and the second group of European representative bodies. The disappearance of the French Estates General came not from the changing socio-economic life of France or from a new political theory, but as the logical result of a constant policy of the French monarchs. This policy was determined at least as early as 1484 and after that date the Estates General existed only when a group of administrators chose to use it as an instrument to handle specific problems and to preserve the monarchy between 1560 and 1614. When these adminstrators died shortly after 1614 their instrument died with them.

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I

MAY 14, 1610

In the middle of the afternoon of Wednesday May 14, 1610 Henry IV sought relief from the round of official functions that had started the preceding day with the coronation of his wife Marie de Médicis and which gave no sign of ending until Sunday. He and a group of friends set out for a coach ride through the streets of Paris. But the Right Bank was crowded and their progress was slow. At about four o'clock as Henry's driver was trying to extricate himself from the heavy traffic in the rue de la Ferronnerie a figure leapt out of the crowd wielding a dagger. Henry IV was assassinated by a madman. François Ravaillac had earned his footnote in history, and France had lost its fifth king in fifty years, the third to die suddenly and violently in that time, and the second to be assassinated within twenty years.

The coach returned to the Louvre at top speed, but the occupants knew that it was already too late. They had seen far too much death to be mistaken. They also knew that Henry IV's death came at a crucial point in the history of France. The king who had ended the Wars of Religion and had restored unity and prosperity to his country had been killed on the eve of his departure for a military campaign that would have enabled France to resume the battle against Habsburg domination that it had been forced to abandon in 1559.

One of the men who had been in the coach was the Duke of Epernon, colonel general of the infantry. He immediately stationed troops in the streets to prevent the possibility of trouble as the news of the attack spread. The people of Paris who heard the rumors and saw the troops were no more prepared for Henry IV's death than their fathers or grandfathers had been when Henry II had been killed in a tournament in their city in 1559. For those with a penchant for historical parallels there were too many similarities to be found between 1559 and 1610. Henry's son Louis XIII was only eight years old and was said to be as sickly as the young Francis II had been. Once again the Queen Mother was not only a foreigner but a Medici. Once again there was the possibility of widespread civil disturbance.

Three of Henry's advisers were aware that the similarities were misleading. These three, *les Barbons*, the Greybeards, all nearly seventy, had been around in 1559 and had been active in government ever since. Nicholas Brûlart, *sieur* of Sillery, the Chancellor, Nicholas de Neufville, *seigneur* of Villeroy, Secretary of State and virtual Minister of Foreign Affairs, and

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Pierre Jeannin, diplomat and jurist, immediately allied themselves with Marie de Médicis. They persuaded her to obtain the *Parlement*'s immediate confirmation of her appointment as Regent. Marie had been proclaimed temporary Regent during Henry's absence only the day before, but the *Parlement*'s official approval was needed to strengthen her position now that Henry was dead. Within three hours of the assassination this had been accomplished.

Villeroy, Sillery and Jeannin knew that Henry had left behind him a royal government that worked and that had the sincere allegiance of the majority of the people. Moreover, through the efforts of their younger colleague the Duke of Sully, this government had saved enough money to buy the loyalty of the minority that was certain to cause trouble.[1]

In 1610 France was not divided into two implacably hostile religious groups as it had been when Henry III was assassinated in 1589. The Huguenots were assured of a place in French society, and the Catholics had accepted this, if with bad grace. The nobles were not organized into three armed camps as they had been in 1559. There was only one man, the First Prince of the Blood, Henri de Bourbon, Prince of Condé, who had both the position and the inclination to threaten Marie's position as Regent and he was out of the country. Most important the people of France were in no mood to support another civil war. The thirty-five years that had followed the death of Henry II were still too real to be romantic.

Marie de Médicis had her supporters and was officially declared Regent before anyone could recover from the shock of Henry's death. By the time that Condé had returned to court in July the government had organized itself

[1] Maximilien de Bethune, Duke of Sully (1560–1641) joined the court of Henry of Navarre in 1571, rising in power from 1596 onwards. He resigned his post of Superintendent of finances in early 1611 though he kept a number of his lucrative offices. Nicolas de Neufville, *seigneur* of Villeroy (1543?–1617), served as a secretary of state under Charles IX, Henry III, Henry IV and Louis XIII; from 1610 to 1617 he controlled foreign affairs. Pierre Jeannin (1540–1622), formerly a member of the *Parlement* of Dijon and a supporter of the Duke of Mayenne from 1578, became one of the principal councilors of Henry IV and controller general of finances under Louis XIII. He like Sillery served as a diplomat on a number of occasions. Nicolas Brûlart, *sieur* of Sillery (1544–1624) who, like Villeroy, was descended from Parisian municipal officials who had entered royal service, began his career in the *Parlement* of Paris, remained loyal to the crown throughout the Wars of Religion, became chancellor in 1607, was disgraced in 1616, regained first place in the Council but not the Seals in 1617, regained the Seals in 1623. Villeroy's royal service began the earliest, in 1559. Several books that show these men in action are Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State*, Kierstead, *Bellièvre*, David Buisseret, *Sully and the Growth of Centralized Government in France 1598–1610* (London, 1968); J. Nouaillac, *Villeroy, Sécretaire d'état et ministre de Charles IX, Henri III et Henri IV* (Paris, 1909); Edmund H. Dickerman, 'The King's Men: the Ministers of Henry III and Henry IV, 1574–1610' (unpublished dissertation, Brown University, 1965). Edmund H. Dickerman, *Bellièvre and Villeroy: Power in France under Henry III and Henry IV* (Providence, R. I., 1971).

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and had taken effective measures to solidify its position. It had saved face by fulfilling Henry's commitment to send an army to the Rhine to join English, Dutch, and German troops in the capture of Cleves-Jülich. It had sought to appease the nobles through increased pensions and gifts and the people through the revocation of edicts that empowered obnoxious royal officials to check on back taxes. And it had lowered the price of salt.[2]

All this had been very difficult to accomplish in the face of the personal rivalries, struggle for influence, general chaos and confusion that characterized the months after Henry's death. Sully was one of the first victims of the situation. His hesitation in coming to court after the assassination and his haughty manner and bad temper when he arrived marked him for removal from the government, especially since he opposed the cautious policies adopted by the three advisers whose experience in government so far outdated his and who remembered all too well the days before Henry IV. Sully could not forget either the boldness of Henry's last days or his favor with that monarch. Those around him had never particularly liked him and were not loath to begin to push him aside.[3]

Sully's retirement in early 1611 did not bring an end to the internal problems of the new government. The struggle for influence continued throughout the Regency period. Alliances and counter alliances followed each other. Villeroy became the dominant member of the government. He was supported by Sillery and Jeannin even though Sillery's office as Chancellor should have made him paramount. As Concino Concini, the husband of Marie's closest friend, began to gain personal influence over her and as the great nobles continually switched sides in the background, Sillery detached himself from

[2] B.N. MS fr. n.a. 23369, pp. 178–179 (Antoine de Loménie to the Marquis of La Force, July 24, 1610). *Lettres patentes du roi . . . portant révocation de plusiers édicts et commissions extraordinaires* . . . (Paris, 1610), pp. 3–24. See also *Mercure François*, I, 132a–132b, 504b–510a. The French of the early seventeenth century did not have a word to describe the king and his close advisers working as a group because they were not regarded as a single entity. Rather the king ruled with the advice, if he wished to listen, of certain men whom he had chosen. No office, not even that of Chancellor which was theoretically a lifetime position at the head of the bureaucracy, carried any guarantee of access to the king's ear. During the years 1610–1615 Marie de Médicis chose to listen to three men, and for the sake of convenience when referring to Marie and one or more of these men acting in concert the words Regency, Regency government or government will be used. These words, especially when used interchangeably, are far less loaded than words such as administration or ministry, both of which are completely foreign to the early seventeenth century. Since the three men shared no common titles, when they are referred to as a group separate from Marie they will be called advisers rather than the anachronistic 'ministers'.

[3] Abel Desjardins, *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane pendant le XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1886), V, 638 (Matteo Botti to Grand Duke of Tuscany, June 19, 1610). B.N. MS fr. n.a. 23369, p. 174 (Loménie to La Force, July 8, 1610).

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