



## Coming to America

Arab Americans are among the many ethnic groups that make up the United States. They trace their roots to the Arab world, which stretches from North Africa to West Asia. Arab Americans are just as diverse as the Arab world itself. They come from rural and urban areas in 22 different countries, practice different religions, work in a variety of fields, and have a range of educational backgrounds and political affiliations. Despite this diversity, Arab Americans have a shared sense of history, language, and cultural heritage.

Whereas the majority of the people who come from an Arab country identify themselves as Arab



<http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/Coming-to-America.id.18.htm>

Americans, some might identify by their country of origin such as Syrian Americans or Palestinian Americans. Some might identify themselves by their ethnic backgrounds such as Chaldean Americans.

Arabs have been coming to the United States for hundreds of years. Like others, they came seeking better opportunities. The first significant number of immigrants came between 1880 and 1920. This slowed down drastically because of restrictive immigration laws passed after World War I. Since the 1970s, the number of Arab Americans has increased rapidly due to a change in these laws, and because of wars and economic hardships in some Arab countries. It is estimated that by 200 there were about 4.2 million Arab Americans.



“

***I am the descendant of a people that builded Damascus, and Byblos, and Tyre and Sidon you, and with a will***

”

Kahlil Gibran



### ***Beaded Shoes***

Beaded Shoes. When Sara Abdalla left Syria with these shoes in 1923 en route to the United States, her journey would lead her to cross the Atlantic three times before reaching her final destination. Gift of Marie and Ollie Abdalla.

The artifact is a reproduction of the bell worn around the neck of each camel of the Camel Military Corps. Courtesy of the Texas Camel Corps ([www.texascamelcorps.com](http://www.texascamelcorps.com))



# Middle Eastern Cuisine History | Part 2

## Simone Samoeli

### THE MIDDLE-EASTERN CUISINE: THE TRADITION CONTINUES.

The mere smell of cooking can evoke a whole civilization (Fernand Braudel)

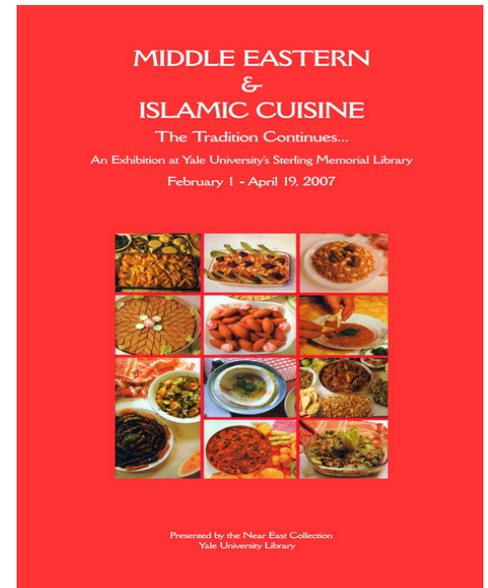
The Middle-Eastern cooking as we know it today largely evolved from the cuisine of the glorious days of the Abbasid Caliphate, and even further back to the ancient Near-Eastern cultures of the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Persians, and Mesopotamians. Of these, the Mesopotamian is the oldest and the first documented world cuisine, of which only three Babylonian cuneiform tablets are extant today (housed at the Babylonian Collection of Yale University and are currently on display at the present exhibition).

When the Arabs conquered the Byzantine and Persian empires in the middle of the seventh century, they assimilated their own simple culinary heritage with that of the local rich traditions and inherited ancient techniques of the regions they ruled. They also adopted so many exotic elements from far and wide, facilitated by active trade, immigrant communities, and foreign domestic helpers of whom the excellent cooks were valuable commodities.

During the golden days of the Abbasid Caliphate when Baghdad was called the navel of the earth, there was a considerable interest among the court and upper classes in the culinary arts and in writing and reading about them. Fine living also necessitated the desire for a healthy living, which gave rise to so many cookbooks, and books on medicine and dietetics. Fortunately, some of these books survived the ravages of time.

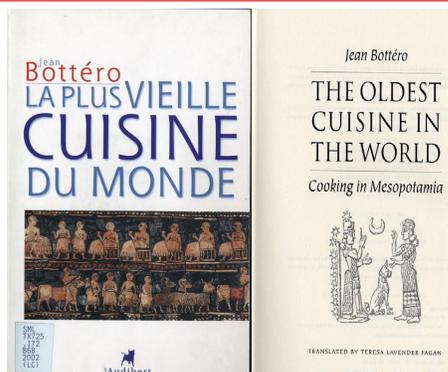
The Omayyad Arabs from Syria expanded to North Africa, and reached the Iberian Peninsula in the early eighth-century and stayed there for eight centuries (711-1492). They conquered the island of Sicily in southern Italy and stayed there for more than two centuries (831-1060). To al-Andalus (Andalusia) and Sicily, the Arabs brought the culinary tradition of the Eastern Islamic world, and with it, so many new crops, such as rice, sugarcane, watermelon, lemon, orange, eggplant, and spinach. Naturally, they also incorporated into their cooking the foodstuffs indigenous to the conquered western regions.

Spaniards and Sicilians absorbed Arabic arts and sciences. In Spanish, there are hundreds of words of Arabic origin related to foods and cookery. Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Western Europe was introduced to the culinary wealth of the Arabs through the Crusades. Christians, fascinated by the wealth of their enemies, often borrowed from them. However, the major contribution of the Arab cuisine to European culture was largely through the conquest and re-con-



quest of Spain and Sicily. Farther East, the Mongols introduced the culinary traditions they learned in Baghdad to their new empire in Northern India. To this day, traces of these traditions can still be detected in the Indian cuisine. The Ottoman Empire dominated the Middle East and Eastern Europe for centuries. The Turkish cuisine was essentially diverse. Its center was the capital, Istanbul, where a refined tradition was created by bringing together elements of regional culinary practices from across the empire, especially the Middle Eastern regions. It was also during this period that many of the New World crops, such as potatoes and tomatoes, were adopted. Through the Ottomans, Europe came to know and love so many of the Middle Eastern delights, such as coffee.

*Plus vieille cuisine du monde [The Oldest Cuisine in the World: Cooking in Mesopotamia] by Jean Bottéro, translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.*



The author attempts to give an idea about the history of food and its preparation in ancient Mesopotamia. His primary sources are the three clay tablets, dating back to the middle of the second millennium (ca. 35 centuries ago), housed at the Yale Babylonian Collection, and which the author calls "The Yale Recipes." The total number of the recipes in the three tables is forty.

**Continue on next page**

Daf' Madarr al-Aghdhiyah [On the Means to Counteract the Harmful Effects of Various Kinds of Food], by Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi (865?-925?).



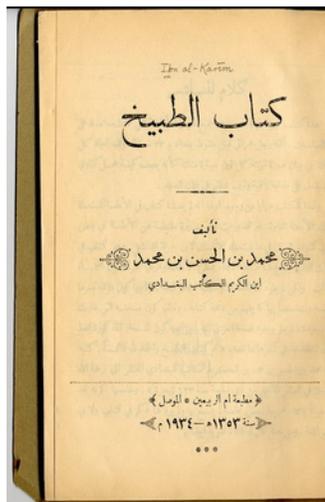
Copied in A.H. 738 (A.D. 1338). Housed at Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Landberg MSS 473). In this manuscript the famous Muslim physician and philosopher al-Razi (Rhazes in Latin) speaks about the various kinds of foods and drinks from a medicinal point of view. He mentions their benefits and how to counteract their harmful effects.

Tadhkirat Uli al-Albab bi-Marifat al-Adab [Manual on human conduct: food, dress, sleep, married life and children, social life, etc.] by Abd al-Rauf al-Munawi al-Haddadi (d. 1621), copied sometime in the 1800's. Housed at Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Landberg MSS 163).

The author of this treatise on human conduct is an Egyptian Shafiite Muslim scholar who lived in Cairo. In the first part of this manuscript he speaks about table manners, banquet hospitality, the different kinds of foods and how to handle and prepare them in order to achieve the best benefit and avoid their harmful effects.



Kitab al-Tabikh [The Book of Cookery] by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Karim al-Katib al-Baghdadi (d. 1240), edited by Dawud al-Jalabi. Al-Musil: Matba'at Umm al-Rabi'ayn, 1934.



Another edition of Kitab al-Tabikh [The Cookbook]. The author, a native of Baghdad, Iraq and an ardent food lover, wrote his book toward the end of the Abbasid Caliphate. In the recipes he mentions, he describes the different foods and dishes used to be prepared by the residents of Baghdad during the era of its opulence. The manuscript of this book is an autograph which the author finished on 20 Dhu al-Hijjah, 623 Hijri (12 December, 1226)

At'imat al-Marda [Manual of diet for the sick] by Muhammad ibn Ali al-Samarqandi (d. 1222). Housed at Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Landberg MSS 608). Copied in A.H. 769 (A.D. 1368).



This treatise is bound at the end of another treatise on medicine by the same author; a prolific physician (originally from Samarqand, Uzbekistan). He was killed in the city of Herat (Afghanistan) during the Mongol invasion of the Islamic Empire. He describes the specific kinds of foods that should be given to the sick suffering from various kinds of illnesses.

Mukhtasar al-Tibyan fi ma Yahillu wa-Yahrumu min al-Hayawan [Dictionary of animals permitted and

forbidden for use as food] by Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn al-Imad al-Aqfahsi al-Shafi'i (1349-1405).



Copied in A.H. 855 (A.D. 1451). Housed at Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Landberg MSS 172). The author of this manuscript is a prolific Egyptian Muslim religious scholar (faqih). In his enumeration of the various animals (mammals, Birds, fish, reptiles, insects, etc.) that are permitted or forbidden to be eaten according to the Shari'ah (Islamic law) he gives many details about the various foods made from the flesh of these animals.

# HISTORY of Arab Americans in the US

The first generation of immigrants from the Middle East began arriving in the late 19th century. They were mostly Christians from the Greater Syria province of the Ottoman Empire, which comprised modern day Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Some came to escape religious persecution in the Ottoman Empire, but most came for economic opportunity, as, like most immigrants, they felt that the United States would offer them the opportunity to build a better life. The typical Arab immigrant of that period was young, male, single and Christian. Most were illiterate and spoke little or no English. Many planned to stay in the United States only until they had saved



enough money to return home with more money and greater status. Many moved to major cities, like New York, Los Angeles, Detroit and Boston, and became peddlers. Among other things, they peddled religious items, embroidery, baked goods and confectioneries, which were often made by their wives. As it became clearer that women and a family were an economic asset, more men returned to the Middle East to marry and come back to the United States with their wives. Over time, Arab immigrants saved money and invested it in small businesses. As their financial conditions and personal lives became more stable, Arab Americans settled in cities and established communities, which included churches, clubs, societies and publications.

While they spoke Arabic, these early immigrants did not identify as Arabs. The Ottoman Empire was the dominant power in the Middle East during the late 19th Century, and nearly all of the immigrants from the Middle East came with passports and identification papers issued by the Ottoman Empire. The terms “Turk” and “Syrian” were used interchangeably, including on Port of Entry records. As a result, the immigration figures from the Middle East for that period are not particularly accurate, as Armenians, Turks and Arabs were all identified as subjects of the Ottoman Empire. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed, most Arab immigrants began to identify with the region in the Ottoman Empire from which they came, usually Syria or Lebanon.

By the 1920's, there were an estimated 250,000 Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians in the United States. Most were engaged in commercial activities, but some worked in the industrial plants of an emergent Detroit, as well as other cities. The community continued to advance economically, with peddlers establishing stores or small manufacturing plants, while importers imported items from the Middle East, ranging from rugs to olives.

During the First World War, immigration from the Middle East dropped, but a second wave of migration began in the 1920s, as relatives of those already living in the United States began to immigrate and, seeing the success of those living in the United States through their remittances back home, new immigrants decid-

ed to join them. The second wave of immigrants was different than the first in that it contained a significant number of Muslims.

By the 1950s, Arab immigrants had settled in major cities across the United States. From the 1950s on, a new type of Arab immigrant began arriving – literate, qualified and bilingual. Immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s pursued white collar or professional vocations, or sought educational opportunities. This group was about 70 percent Muslim and came from across the Middle East, particularly Egypt, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. In the late 1960s, following Palestinian displacement in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, a large number of Palestinians emigrated to the United States. Given their unique circumstances, they brought with them a greater ethnic pride and political awareness that would ignite the development of an Arab American identity and spark the community's political activism in the 1970s and 1980s. Even for some second- and third-generation Arab Americans, who had few remaining attachments to the Middle East and barely spoke Arabic, the ethnic and political consciousness of the new arrivals helped generate a greater awareness of their Arab heritage.

The greater ethnic and political consciousness of the late 1960s and early 1970s became institutionalized in the 1970s and 1980s with the creation of several Arab American organizations, including the Arab American University Graduates, the National Arab American Association, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Arab American Institute, as well as a number of other local, professional and family organizations. These organizations would consolidate and transmit Arab American identity for future generations, promote an accurate and positive image of Arab Americans and protect the rights of Arab Americans. These functions became increasingly necessary, as events in the Middle East, from the oil embargo to hijackings, combined with well organized media campaigns to link Arab Americans with terrorism, made Arabs and Arab Americans increasingly stereotyped and suspect to many Americans.

These functions grew in importance in the 2000s, following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. In the aftermath of that event, Arab Americans were subjected to hate crimes, racial profiling and

discrimination. In responding to these circumstances, in the 2000s, Arab Americans became a leading voice in the civil rights community of the United States. They have also become a major force in helping to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding that separates many Arabs and Americans. In pursuing these roles as a community and in contributing to the United States in a myriad of other ways as individual citizens, Arab Americans have become a vital and valuable thread in the beautiful tapestry that is America.

*NOTE: Much of the information from this section is drawn from, and can be found in, the Arab American Almanac*



[www.alifinstitute.org/help-us-build-a-bright-future-for-the-arab-american-community/](http://www.alifinstitute.org/help-us-build-a-bright-future-for-the-arab-american-community/)

# World Kid Lit Month: Why So Few Arabic Children's Books have been Translated into English

## SEPTEMBER IS WORLD KID LIT MONTH, CELEBRATING A MONTH OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

Many of them – from One Thousand and One Nights to Tales of Goha – have been enjoyed by young readers. Inea Bushnaq's acclaimed Arab Folktales came out in English in 1986, long before the surge in translations.

But when the boom in translated Arabic literature began in 2002, literature for young people was largely left out. In part, it's because children's literature was undervalued in Arabic. Picture books moralised. Comics were scorned. And authors who were popular with teen readers, such as Ahmed Khaled Tawfik, weren't taken seriously. Literary translation from Arabic focused on books for adults.

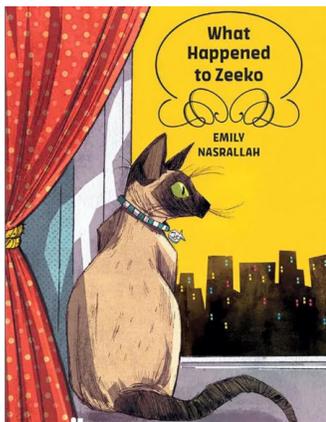


World Kid Lit Month encourages children to read more translated works every September.

## Arabic children's books appeared in other languages, just not English

Some children's literature did make the leap from Arabic in the early 20th century. Fatima Sharafeddine's moving *Fi Madinati Harb* (In My City, There's War) was translated into Catalan, Castilian, Portuguese, Dutch, French and Korean – but not English. Titles by Walid Taher appeared in German and French – but not English.

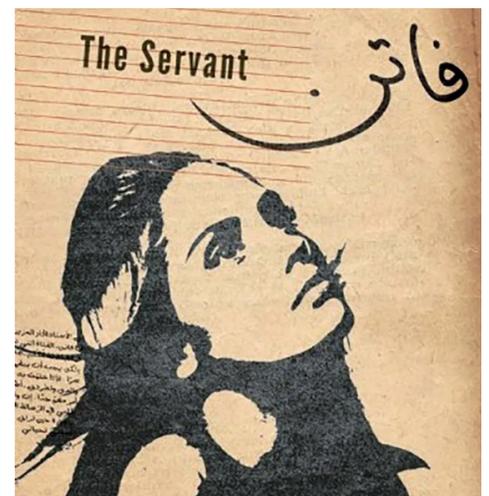
There were a few books translated into English earlier this century. Emily Nasrallah's award-winning *Yawmiyat Hirr* (A Cat's Diary, 1997) was translated by Denys Johnson-Davies as *What Happened to Zeeko* 2001. But like most other English translations of Arabic literature for young people, it was published in Egypt and didn't travel much beyond Cairo.



Emily Nasrallah's award-winning *'Yawmiyat Hirr'* ('A Cat's Diary', 1997) was translated by Denys Johnson-Davies as *'What Happened to Zeeko'* in 2001. Courtesy Naufal

In 2006, Mohieddine Ellabbad's *The Illustrator's Notebook* was translated by Sarah Quinn, and it came out in a bilingual edition from Canada's Greenwood Books. Seven years later, Greenwood Books took a chance on Sharafeddine's *Faten*, translated by the author as *The Servant*.

This trendsetting book was one of the first of a new wave of Young Adult novels and the surprise winner of a Beirut Book Fair prize in 2010. Emirati writer Maitha Al Khayat's *My Own Special Way*, illustrated by Maya Fidawi, also appeared in 2010. This vibrant picture book was translated by Sharafeddine and "re-told" by Vivian French. In 2013, it became the first Arabic children's book to be shortlisted for a major prize in English translation.



Fatima Sharafeddine Fate's *'The Servant'* is one of only a few translated Arabic children's books. Greenwood Books

Continue on next page

## Why 2019 could be the year of Arabic children's literature

Sharafeddine's prolific and sensitive writing and Fidawi's joyous illustrations helped spark the new interest in Arabic children's books. Sharafeddine now has more than a dozen books in English translation, from the Mimi picture books to her co-authored middle grade novel Ghady & Rawan to her YA novel *The Servant*. Fidawi, meanwhile, is the illustrator behind many popular picture books translated into English, Spanish, Turkish and French.

Co-founder Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp is on a mission to promote children's translated literature. Courtesy of Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp

Co-founder Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp is on a mission to promote children's translated literature. Courtesy Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp

Now, the boom in translated Arabic children's literature seems to have begun. After years when there were perhaps one or two Arabic children's books published in translation, if any, at least six are expected in 2019.

These books are from a diverse array of accomplished authors and illustrators: Gulnar Hajo, Abir Ali, Taghreed Najjar, Sharafeddine, Samar Mahfouz Barraaj, Ahlam Bsharat, Fidawi and Hassan Manasra.

## What is World Kid Lit Month?

Translations have always been a part of children's literature. Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales are an example. Pippi Longstocking, Asterix and *The Little Prince* are among the world's most popular children's fiction characters. But most translated titles have come from a few countries in western Europe.

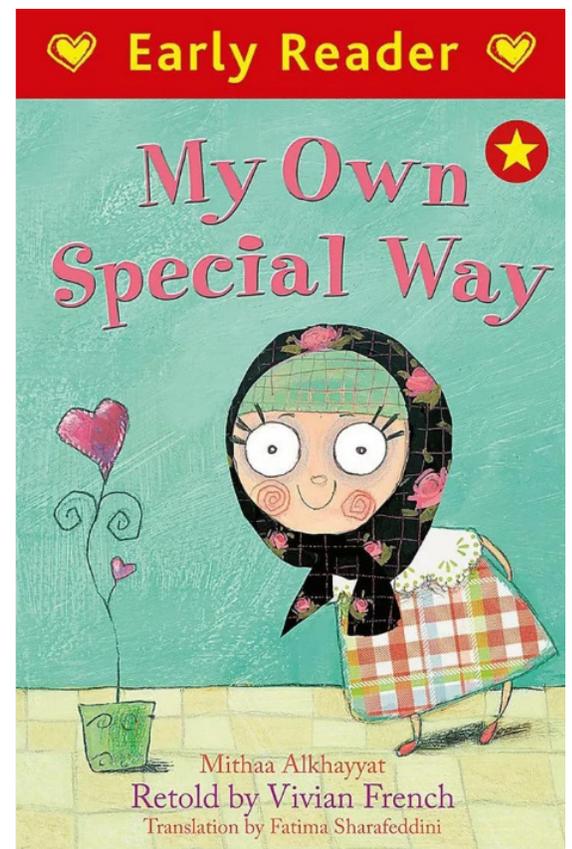
In the past few years, publishers have turned with new interest to diverse children's literature in translation. In 2016, book activists launched World Kid Literature Month to celebrate and promote literature for young readers in translation – particularly from beyond Europe.

"I think the attitude of publishers towards children's literature in translation is changing," says Arabic translator Sawad Hussain. "Having said that, the 'big five' publishers need to do more to include translated kid lit on their lists and also make themselves more open to receiving submissions."

Hussain says she's excited to see Arabic children's literature in translation. "But even more heartening is Arab authors who usually write for adults are taking kid lit seriously and citing it as part of their oeuvre. Also, there have been more workshops in the Arab world for writing kid lit, which is always great to hear."

World Kid Lit Month co-founder Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp translates works from Arabic, Russian, and German. Courtesy the author One hitch in the relationship between Arabic and English children's literatures is that they have different publishing conventions. Picture books in English are a standard 32 pages, and most publishers look to stay under 600 words. Arabic picture books, on the other hand, often run more than a thousand words and have no standard number of pages. Young Adult conventions are also different.

Two books recognised by the Etisalat Prize in Arabic – Sonia



Emirati writer Maitha al-Khayat penned '*My Own Special Way*', illustrated by Maya Fidawi, was translated by Vivian French. Courtesy Hachette Children's

Nimr's Wondrous Journeys in Amazing Lands and Ahlam Bsharat's *Trees for Absentees* – are forthcoming as adult titles, because they don't fit the mould of YA in English.



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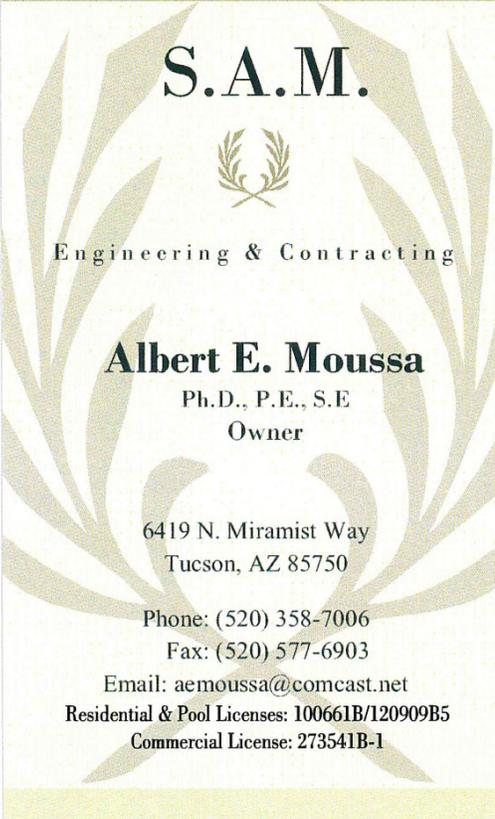
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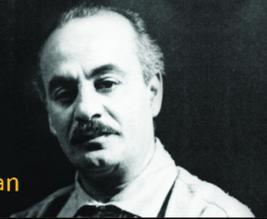
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“

You should be proud of being an American, but you should also be proud that your fathers and mothers came from a land upon which God laid His gracious hand and raised His messengers.

”

Kahlil Gibran



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