European Journal of Philosophical Research. 2026. 13 (1)
E-ISSN: 2413-7286
Volume-13/Issue-1/2026

Developing the Competencies of Manuscript Archivists in the Information Age

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Received: 01/01/2026; Accepted:30/04/2026; Published: 23/05/2026

Abstract
The contemporary world is witnessing an accelerating technological revolution that has directly and profoundly impacted the methodologies of managing, preserving, and safeguarding documentary heritage within various archival institutions. Within this vast body of historical heritage, ancient manuscripts occupy a uniquely sensitive and critical position, owing to their irreplaceable historical and civilization value, as well as the inherent fragility of their physical mediums.
In this context, transitioning from a traditional, paper-based archival environment to a dynamic digital ecosystem is no longer a luxury or an optional trajectory; rather, it has become an absolute imperative to ensure the long-term survival, sustainability, and global accessibility of this invaluable heritage.
Confronted with this rapidly shifting paradigm, a fundamental and pivotal challenge emerges: the readiness and capacity of the "specialized archivist" to effectively navigate, manage, and interact with these modern technological variables. Consequently, this reality necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation of current professional qualification programs, alongside a precise determination of the essential skills and core competencies required to empower archivists to lead the future of archival institutions with maximum efficiency, competence, and professional authority.

Introduction

Archaeological manuscripts and historical documents serve as the trustworthy repository for the collective memory of nations, and the foundational pillar upon which the cultural and civilizational identity of human societies is constructed. Far from being merely yellowed papers whose edges have been eroded by the relentless passage of time, these documents constitute a living testimony, an intellectual pulse, and a cognitive bridge that inextricably links a nation's past with its present while simultaneously forecasting its future.
Since the dawn of codification, traditional archival practices have played a central and pivotal role in shielding these cultural treasures from loss, degradation, and destruction. To achieve this, traditional archives relied heavily on physical preservation methodologies, manual restoration techniques, and rigorous, systematic paper-based cataloging. However, humanity today is traversing an unprecedented historical and civilizational turning point, characterized

by the absolute dominance of "digitalization" across all facets of human life. This digital shift has confronted archival institutions with profound structural, institutional, and functional challenges, demanding a thorough reassessment of the very essence, core tools, and philosophies of archival work.

The digital transformation we are experiencing today is not a mere passing "technological trend" or a superficial, formal migration from a physical paper medium to an electronic format. Rather, it represents a comprehensive conceptual and epistemological revolution that has catalyzed the emergence of what is now recognized as "smart archiving" and "digital heritage." This new reality has exerted escalating pressures on the specialized manuscript archivist, who suddenly finds themselves compelled to abandon the traditional, serene tranquility of physical archival repositories to plunge into the complex world of algorithms, big data, metadata schemas, and artificial intelligence applications.

The manuscript that was once requested through manual index cards is now retrieved via global digital access platforms from any geographical point on earth. This fundamental shift means that the role of the archivist has evolved dramatically from a mere "guardian of the physical building" to a "facilitator of meaning" and a "data engineer."

Amidst this relentless technological acceleration, a core problematic issue arises regarding how to properly qualify and train this contemporary archivist. The challenge lies in enabling them to harmoniously bridge the gap between the "sanctity of the manuscript" as a physical artifact weathered by the winds of centuries, and the "modernity of digitalization" which relentlessly demands speed, precision, interoperability, and long-term sustainability.

The digital divide that may emerge due to a deficiency in technical skillsets does not merely jeopardize the operational efficiency of the archival institution; it poses a direct threat to the integrity and safety of national memory itself. A single error in the digitization process, or a failure in executing robust digital preservation strategies, could result in the irreversible loss of historical rights or the permanent erasure of civilizational landmarks that can never be recovered. Hence, the issues of "professional qualification," "core competencies," and "technical skillsets" have become the true cornerstone of any national strategic project aiming to construct the "Archive of the Future."

This research comes within the context of analyzing and diagnosing this complex reality. It delves deeply into the formidable challenges imposed by the digital environment on manuscript collections, while simultaneously excavating the integrated package of skills and competencies with which the contemporary archivist must be armed. We are, in fact, in the process of forging a brand new professional identity: the identity of the "Digital Archivist" who possesses the gentle, meticulous hand of a restorer and the vigilant, analytical mind of a programmer.

Through this theoretical and practical approach, we seek to present a forward-looking, visionary perspective one that does not stop at merely describing problems, but extends further to map out ambitious qualification strategies. These strategies will guarantee our archival institutions a well-deserved place under the sun of the digital age, and ensure for our precious manuscripts an immortality that transcends the physical limitations of paper and parchment, remaining an enduring beacon of knowledge that spans across time and space.

Part I: The Multidimensional Challenges Imposed by the Digital Environment on Manuscript Archives

The advent of the digital ecosystem has engineered a radically new, complex, and challenge-ridden reality for archivists specializing in historical manuscripts. This paradigm shift has fundamentally disrupted traditional archival philosophies.

The Threat of Technological Obsolescence: The foremost of these challenges resides in the rapid decay and programmatic expiration of software configurations, storage media, and file formats hosting digital surrogates. This continuous evolution threatens to completely obliterate decades of digitization efforts unless robust, proactive strategies for continuous digital migration are structurally institutionalized.

Cybersecurity and Intellectual Property Sovereignty: Concurrently, critical issues regarding cybersecurity and the enforcement of digital rights management (DRM) have come to the fore. Archival repositories must now shield these globally accessible civilizational treasures from sophisticated cyber-piracy, unauthorized commercial exploitation, and malicious digital tampering or distortion.

Cognitive Overload and Data Deluge: Furthermore, managing the colossal volume of unstructured data harvested from large-scale manuscript digitization projects demands unprecedented agility, speed, and elasticity in informational organization, cataloging, and retrieval capabilities that traditional manual instruments are structurally unequipped to provide. Consequently, this creates a state of escalating cognitive overload and professional pressure on the archival human infrastructure.

1. The Dilemma of Digital Preservation, Technological Obsolescence, and Authenticity Verification

When preserved in their physical, material state (such as papyrus, parchment, or handmade rag paper) under strictly controlled environmental and microclimatic conditions, historical manuscripts represent one of the most durable and sustainable informational mediums known to humanity, capable of surviving for millennia. Conversely, the digital surrogates generated from them are characterized by extreme fragility, ephemeral lifespan, and systemic vulnerability[1].

The core crisis stems from the compounding velocity of Digital Obsolescence, which affects both physical storage hardware (e.g., solid-state drives, magnetic tapes, local server architectures, and commercial cloud infrastructures) and the underlying software applications required to render and interpret the code. A digital image or high-definition scan of a rare manuscript executed a mere decade ago may become entirely inaccessible or unreadable today. This is typically caused by the deprecation of proprietary file formats, the obsolescence of viewing software,[2] or the evolution of operating systems. To combat this, archival institutions are forced to absorb exorbitant, recurring financial and operational costs to

1- Cook, Terry. (2013). "Evidence, memory, identity, and community: four shifting archival paradigms." Archival Science, 13(2), pp. 95–120.

2- Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn. (2010). Preserving Archives and Manuscripts. 2nd Edition, Society of American Archivists (SAA), Chicago, pp. 115–138.

execute systematic, perpetual Digital Migration protocols, continuously porting raw data from legacy formats into cutting-edge, standardized open-source formats to guarantee uninterrupted long-term legibility.

Furthermore, a philosophical and empirical crisis regarding Authenticity and Trustworthiness manifests within the digital realm. In traditional archives, the physical manuscript stands as the absolute, indisputable, and immutable "primary source" that bears witness to its own provenance through physical evidence. In the digital ecosystem, however, this absolute trust is profoundly compromised[1].

The ease with which high-resolution digital images can be manipulated, altered, or seamlessly fabricated using advanced graphics processing software, generative AI, and digital restoration tools opens a dangerous gateway for the forgery of historical texts, the unauthorized alteration of marginalia (حواشي), and the falsification of ownership seals or colophons (تملاكات) without leaving a conspicuous physical trace[2].

This critical vulnerability mandates that contemporary manuscript archivists deploy sophisticated cryptographic techniques, including:

Digital Fingerprinting (such as SHA-256 cryptographic hashing algorithms), Advanced Watermarking, Digital Time-Stamping (Blockchain-based verification).

These technical measures ensure that the digital surrogate rendered to the global researcher remains an absolute, untampered, and faithful mirror image of the physical historical artifact captured at the exact micro-moment of its initial digitization[3].

2. Technical Standardization, Quality Control, and the Interoperability Bottleneck

A significant obstacle hampering global manuscript digitization initiatives is the chronic lack of standardization across technical parameters. Many projects are executed in institutional isolation, resulting in massive discrepancies in scanning resolutions measured in Dots Per Inch (DPI) or Pixels Per Inch (PPI) and a fragmented choice of file formats (ranging from uncompressed TIFF and JPEG 2000 to compressed, lossy formats like standard JPEG or PDF).

This systemic fragmentation severely restricts Interoperability and cross-institutional data exchange, transforming individual archives into disconnected informational silos that cannot integrate into unified international digital networks or semantic web platforms[4].

Compounding this technical divergence is the issue of Digital Fidelity and Optical Integrity. This concerns the precise, scientific alignment between the physical characteristics of the material manuscript and its digital representative. Any slight miscalibration in the digitization

1 - Thibodeau, Kenneth. (2002). "Overview of Technological Approaches to Digital Preservation and Challenges." In The State of Digital Preservation: An International Perspective, Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), Washington, D.C., pp. 4–16.

2 - Bearman, David. (2007). "Digital Rights Management (DRM) in Museums and Archives: Legal and Technical Impediments." D-Lib Magazine, 13(3/4), pp. 22–34.

3- Marciano, Richard, et al. (2018). "Archival Records and Training in the Age of Big Data." The American Archivist, 81(1), pp. 23–41.

4- Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative (FADGI). (2022). Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Cultural Heritage Materials: Architectural and Image Quality Performance Metrics. Washington, D.C., pp. 14–38.

pipeline such as improper white balance, incorrect color profiling (ICC profiles), poor lux levels, or lens distortion can fundamentally alter the appearance of ink pigments, paper texture, and degradation patterns. Such technical inaccuracies can deeply mislead paleographers and codicologists who rely on these visual cues to determine the geographic provenance, material composition, and exact historical era of the manuscript.

[Traditional OCR] ⟶ (Fails on Arabic Manuscripts due to cursive/ligatures)

[AI-Driven HTR] ⟶ (Requires deep training on multi-layered marginalia&scripts) ⟶ Fully Searchable Text

While Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technologies have achieved near-perfect accuracy rates in converting printed books and typed typography into editable text, historical Arabic manuscripts present a unique, extraordinarily complex technical bottleneck. This complexity is driven by the intrinsic nature of Arabic paleography and calligraphy, which spans multiple fluid and highly stylized scripts (such as Naskh, Ruq'ah, Maghrebi, Diwani, Thuluth, and Kufic). These scripts feature intricate ligatures, overlapping letters, contextual character shapes, and the complete absence of uniform baselines.

Furthermore, historical manuscripts are rarely clean texts; they are heavily layered with multi-directional marginal annotations, corrections, and cross-references written at acute angles, upside down, or in concentric circles around the core text block.

Consequently, the challenge lies in developing, training, and deploying highly specialized Artificial Intelligence models focused on Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR). These advanced neural networks must be capable of structurally analyzing the layout, deciphering archaic scripts, understanding semantic context, and accurately transcribing these complex layouts into fully searchable, editable XML or JSON textual data. This monumental undertaking demands the manual creation of vast "ground truth" datasets requiring thousands of hours of expert human transcription to feed and train machine learning algorithms a process that consumes massive amounts of time, institutional funding, and advanced computational labor.

3. The Information Explosion, Metadata Schemas, and the Crisis of Cultural Data Sovereignty

The large-scale conversion of tens of thousands of physical manuscripts into high-resolution digital assets inevitably generates an overwhelming influx of unstructured Big Data. The overarching crisis here extends far beyond the mere infrastructural challenge of provisioning massive storage architectures (such as Petabyte-scale local storage or high-availability server networks); rather, it centers on the intellectual methodology of organizing and indexing this massive digital output[1].

Traditional, legacy cataloging systems which rely on static, brief descriptive records are utterly obsolete when confronted with the demands of modern digital scholarship. The contemporary researcher no longer settles for searching basic metadata like the title, author, or

1- Marciano, Richard, et al. (2018). "Archival Records and Training in the Age of Big Data." The American Archivist, 81(1), pp. 28–36.

copyist's name. Instead, there is an explicit demand for Full-Text Deep Searching capabilities within the granular content of the manuscript itself, alongside its structural and administrative attributes[1].

To meet these scholarly expectations, archives must implement highly sophisticated, multi-layered Metadata Schemas (such as METS - Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard, MODS - Metadata Object Description Schema, and TEI - Text Encoding Initiative). These frameworks are designed to intricately map and interlink the digitized manuscript with dense webs of theological, historical, codicological, and geospatial data. This requirement places an extraordinary technical and cognitive burden on archivists, who must transform themselves into digital humanists and metadata architects capable of handling complex semantic ontologies and linked open data (LOD) environments[2].

Finally, because managing these massive file sizes requires immense computational power and storage capacity, a growing number of archival institutions have defaulted to hosting their digital repositories on external infrastructure. This often involves relying on global corporate cloud storage giants like Google Cloud Platform (GCP), Amazon Web Services (AWS), or Microsoft Azure.

This systemic reliance introduces a profound geopolitical risk: the loss of Digital Cultural Sovereignty. In an era marked by shifting geopolitical alliances, transnational cyber warfare, economic sanctions, or sudden unilateral changes in corporate service agreements, an archival institution could instantly lose administrative control over, or access to, its digitized national memory. Entrusting the preservation of a nation's core documentary heritage to a commercial "third-party" entity places national cultural security in a highly vulnerable position. This vulnerability underscores the urgent strategic necessity for governments to invest in and construct secure, state-governed National Sovereign Clouds specifically dedicated to safeguarding the digital memory of their collective civilization[3].

4. Legal Conundrums, Cybersecurity Imperatives, and the Codicological-Technical Schism

The moment historical manuscript collections are emancipated from their physical repositories and deployed across global digital networks, they are instantaneously exposed to severe, multifaceted security vulnerabilities and complex legal ambiguities.

The Cyber-Threat Landscape: The primary threat manifests as sophisticated Cyber-Piracy, ransom ware deployments, and distributed denial-of-service (DoS) attacks. These malicious interventions can lead to the catastrophic erasure of relational databases, the corruption of high-resolution image servers, or the ideological and visual distortion of digitized surrogates[4].

1- Burnard, Lou. (2014). What is the Text Encoding Initiative? How to Add Intelligent Markup to Digital Resources. OpenBook Publishers, Cambridge, pp. 45–62.
2- Xie, Iris,&Matusiak, Krystyna K. (2016). Discover Digital Libraries: Theory and Practice of Metadata and Access. Elsevier Academic Press, Amsterdam, pp. 125–148.
3- Michetti, Giovanni. (2018). "In the Cloud we Trust? Archival Sovereignty and Digital Records Preservation." Archival Science, 18(4), pp. 315–332.
4- Garfinkel, Simson L.,&Lipford, Heather Richter. (2014). Structure and Cybersecurity in Digital Repositories. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 88–104

The Intellectual Property Paradox: The second challenge resides within the nebulous realm of Intellectual Property (IP) Rights and digital copyright management. While the original, centuries-old texts reside safely within the public domain, the high-definition "digital surrogate" produced by the archival institution which demands immense institutional labor, manual conservation, and precision imaging creates severe legal friction. Questions arise regarding who holds the commercial exploitation rights, the open-access redistribution mandates, and the authority to grant or deny reuse permissions. This legal vacuum necessitates the formulation of rigorous, modern digital legislations that symmetrically safeguard the proprietary rights of the archival institution while facilitating the scholarly freedom of the global research community[1].

Simultaneously, a profound interdisciplinary disconnect frequently occurs in large-scale digitization initiatives between the Technical Engineer and the Codicological Archivist. The engineer's paradigm is strictly quantitative, focusing on pixel density, color channel balance, file compression efficiency, and server bandwidth. Conversely, the codicologist's paradigm is qualitative and historical, emphasizing the structural anomalies of the paper, the chemical composition of inks, the identification of watermarks, and historical marginalia[2].

The challenge lies in the complete absence of a "Common Epistemological Language." This communication gap often results in a digitally stunning but scientifically barren archive. Because the structural Metadata profiles fail to incorporate the physical, material, and codicological characteristics essential to text editors, paleographers, and philologists, the digital surrogate is reduced to a "Blind/Mute Image"a superficial visual shell stripped of its historical and material depth[3].

5. Financial Sustainability, Structural Deficits, and the Digital Infrastructure Divide

The digital transformation of historical archives must never be conceptualized as a finite, linear project that concludes with the triggering of a camera shutter; rather, it is a perpetual, highly capital-intensive, and operationally demanding lifecycle[4].

The digital environment imposes relentless financial pressures involving:

The continuous cycle of hardware upgrades (e.g., high-end planetary scanners and hyperspectral imaging systems),

The escalating costs of enterprise cloud infrastructure and SaaS database subscriptions,

The retention of specialized technology experts and data engineers who command premium corporate salaries[5].

1- Lipinski, Tomas A. (2018). "The Legalities of Digital Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Copyright and Digital Surrogates." Journal of Intellectual Property Law, 25(2), pp. 215–234.

2- Askhoj, Jan, et al. (2011). "Preserving Records in Secure Environments: Managing Cyber-Threats in Archival Repositories." Archival Science, 11(3), pp. 321–341

3- erras, Melissa. (2011). "Digital Artifacts as Structural Text: The Chasm Between Computer Engineers and Humanities Scholars." Literary and Linguistic Computing, 26(2), pp. 257–270.

4- Lavoie, Brian F. (2008). "The Fifth Black Hole in the Digital Universe: The Economic Sustainability of Digital Preservation." D-Lib Magazine, 14(3/4), pp. 33–49.

5- Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access. (2010). Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information. Washington, D.C., pp. 45–72.

Archival institutions particularly those located within developing nations or economically strained regions suffer from chronic structural budget deficits. When funding for digital maintenance and lifecycle management is neglected, digitization initiatives face a high risk of systemic failure, data corruption, or complete loss the moment the initial seed funding or international grant terminates[1].

Furthermore, while the philosophical framework of the digital ecosystem is built upon the democratization of knowledge and universal access, it has paradoxically engineered a new, subtle layer of academic exclusion and marginalization. Researchers operating within geographically isolated regions or developing countries with fragile telecommunication infrastructures are structurally prohibited from downloading high-resolution, uncompressed manuscript files (such as TIFFs or raw images), which often exceed several hundred megabytes per volume.

Consequently, a critical operational challenge emerges: How can an archival institution balance the preservation mandate of creating maximum-fidelity master files with the access mandate of providing low-bandwidth, compressed, yet highly legible surrogates tailored for deficient technological environments? Resolving this challenge is vital to prevent digital cultural heritage from degenerating into the exclusive privilege of affluent scholars backed by high-speed fiber-optic networks[2].

6. The Human Subsystem, Cognitive Dissonance, and Active Preservation Lifecycles

When transitioning into a digital workflow, the traditional manuscript archivist frequently experiences profound Technological Shock and cognitive dissonance. This challenge manifests as psychological resistance to structural change, alongside a massive pedagogical chasm that separates classical manuscript sciences (such as philological text editing, paleography, and manual paper chemistry) from the modern requirements of the digital era (such as relational database management, structured query languages, basic programming syntax like Python, and interaction with AI-driven models). If the human infrastructure fails to systematically adapt to these technological milestones, the acquired technology transforms into an unsustainable institutional burden rather than an operational catalyst.

This human crisis is intensified by the fact that digital surrogates demand a paradigm of Active Preservation. While a physical paper or parchment manuscript can be left undisturbed within a climate-controlled vault for decades and still remain perfectly intact and legible to future generations, a digital asset possesses no such passive durability. If servers are left unmonitored, if bit-rot is not cryptographically checked, if hyperlinks are not curated, and if metadata schemas are not systematically migrated to match evolving web standards, the digital archive will vanish into technological oblivion within a few short years[3].

1- Lor, Peter Johan. (2019). International and Comparative Librarianship: Digital Divides and Exclusionary Infrastructures. De Gruyter Saur, Berlin, pp. 412–435.

2- Witten, Ian H., et al. (2010). "Bridging the Digital Divide: Optimizing Low-Bandwidth Digital Libraries for Economically Distressed Environments." Information Technology for Development, 16(1), pp. 55–71.

3- Marciano, Richard, et al. (2018). "Archival Records and Training in the Age of Big Data: Overcoming Professional Cognitive Dissonance." The American Archivist, 81(1), pp. 25–39.

The core challenge requires a profound revolution in institutional administrative culture: migrating from a mindset of "Passive, Static Conservation" to one of "Dynamic, Uninterrupted Active Management." This is a continuous operational commitment that many traditional, bureaucratic archival institutions fail to maintain due to institutional inertia, rigid hierarchies, and a lack of specialized, permanent staff[1].

Part II: The Required Technological and Digital Competency Framework for Contemporary Archivists

In this reshaped reality, it is no longer sufficient or professionally viable for a specialized manuscript archivist to solely possess expertise in classical codicology and traditional, manual restoration techniques. The digital environment has made the acquisition of an advanced, highly technical competency framework an absolute necessity[2].

This modern skillset encompasses an absolute mastery of high-fidelity digital imaging standards and the fluent operation of non-destructive, cold-light planetary scanning systems engineered to protect fragile historical mediums. Furthermore, there is an urgent professional demand for proficiency in training and deploying Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) neural networks.

Finally, contemporary archivists must possess the technical capability to architect, manage, and sustain secure digital repositories, linked bibliographic databases, and semantic web platforms, while rigorously enforcing international digital archival description standards, such as EAD (Encoded Archival Description) and ISAD-G (General International Standard Archival Description)[3].

1. Advanced Digitization Methodologies, Optical Physics, and Scientific Quality Control (Digital Imaging Skills)

The technical competency of a modern archivist must extend far beyond the mechanical execution of a scanner's start command. It requires a deep, scientific understanding of optical physics, the behavior of light spectrums, and their chemical interactions with historical organic pigments, volatile inks (such as iron gall ink), and degraded, brittle paper substrates. The contemporary archivist must possess the analytical skill to determine the exact Optical Resolution (calibrated via PPI/DPI) required for different manuscript typologies, while meticulously manipulating Color Bit Depth (such as 16-bit or 48-bit color channels) to extract and reveal severely faded, faint, or overwritten textual details (as seen in palimpsests)[4].

Furthermore, this specialized competency includes advanced proficiency in industrial digital imaging suites (such as Adobe Photoshop or Capture One Pro). This software proficiency is

1- Cox, Richard J. (2004). No Innocent Deposits: Forming New Archival Human Subsystems for the Digital Era. Libraries Unlimited, Westport, CT, pp. 167–185.

2- Pitti, Daniel V. (2002). "Encoded Archival Description (EAD): An Introduction and Overview." D-Lib Magazine, 8(7), pp. 11–25.

3 - International Council on Archives (ICA). (2011). ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description. 2nd Edition, Ottawa, pp. 14–32.

4- Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative (FADGI). (2022). Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Cultural Heritage Materials: Architectural and Image Quality Performance Metrics. Washington, D.C., pp. 48–65.

deployed not for cosmetic enhancement or subjective beautification, but for objective color calibration, lens distortion rectification, and target-based contrast optimization. This precision processing isolates and illuminates the handwritten text block while preserving the absolute material integrity, historical authenticity, and original chromatic profile of the physical document.

2. Metadata Management and Digital Archival Description Competencies

Within the sophisticated architecture of the digital ecosystem, a historical manuscript divorced from its structured informational DNA commonly known as Metadata is reduced to nothing more than a "blind and mute digital image." Without embedded description profiles, these digital surrogates remain completely invisible, untraceable, and structurally isolated from algorithmic discovery within local or global networks[1].

Consequently, the contemporary manuscript archivist must possess absolute technical fluency in designing, constructing, and deploying multi-layered metadata schemas. This includes mastering the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set (DCMES) for foundational, high-level descriptive categorization, as well as the highly complex Encoded Archival Description (EAD) for deeply granular, hierarchical, and structural archival cataloging[2].

This core competency inherently demands a robust, practical command of Extensible Markup Language (XML) and schema serialization protocols. This proficiency guarantees that the rich codicological, historical, and intellectual attributes of each unique manuscript are rendered perfectly machine-readable. Such data formatting ensures complete indexation by global search engine crawlers, transnational information retrieval systems, and semantic web infrastructures[3]

3. Mastery of Automated Text Recognition Technologies (HTR&OCR)

The rapid maturation of Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) neural networks represents the most profound paradigm shift and technological revolution in the long history of manuscript archives. While standard Optical Character Recognition (OCR) systems succeeded in processing uniform, machine-printed typography, they failed when confronted with the continuous, cursive, and calligraphic nature of historical Arabic scripts.

Therefore, the modern archivist must evolve into a "Machine Learning Trainer." They must acquire the specialized skill to interact with advanced HTR platforms (such as Transkribus or eScriptorium). This process involves manually transcribing text to construct massive, highly accurate "Ground Truth" datasets. These datasets train neural network models to decipher complex paleographic writing styles (Naskh, Thuluth, Maghrebi, Kufic), irregular line spacing, and multi-directional marginalia.

1- Haynes, David. (2018). Metadata for Information Management and Retrieval: An Introduction. 2nd Edition, Facet Publishing, London, pp. 89–104.

2- Cover, Robin. (2014). "XML and Archival Metadata: Mechanisms for Semantic Interoperability." Journal of Digital Humanities, 5(2), pp. 74–91.

3- Gilliland, Anne J. (2016). "Setting the Foundational Framework: Introduction to Metadata." In: Introduction to Metadata, 3rd Edition, Getty Publications, pp. 10–14.

This cutting-edge competency requires a rare fusion of meticulous, classical philological scholarship and an understanding of computational algorithms. Cultivating this skill is the only viable pathway to achieving optimal character accuracy rates, ultimately facilitating Full-Text Deep Searching across millions of digitized historical pages[1]

(Explains the precise methodology of utilizing human curated datasets to train HTR algorithms to read cursive historical scripts).

4. Advanced Long-Term Digital Preservation Lifecycles

Because modern digital storage mediums possess an alarmingly volatile and ephemeral lifespan compared to the centuries-long survival of physical rag paper or parchment, the contemporary archivist must be armed with advanced technical skills in Digital Longevity and Preservation Lifecycles.

This operational competency transcends passive storage; it requires an active implementation of Digital Migration protocols systematically and perpetually porting bitstreams from decaying, legacy file formats into cutting-edge, standardized open-source formats (such as converting raw files to uncompressed TIFF or JPEG 2000). Additionally, the archivist must master the technical mechanics of Hardware and Software Emulation. This process creates virtual environments capable of running obsolete operating systems and legacy software architectures, ensuring that historical digital data remains rendered exactly as it was originally captured.

Furthermore, the archivist must be fully proficient in cryptographic data integrity verification through the systematic execution of Checksums (such as MD5 or SHA-256 algorithms). These mathematical calculations act as digital signatures, run periodically to verify that files have not suffered from bit-rot, unauthorized alterations, or data corruption during storage or cross-network transmissions[2]

5. Management of Open-Access Digital Repositories and Interactive Platforms

The operational identity of the modern archivist has evolved from a physical vault custodian into a sophisticated Digital Content Architect and repository manager. Today's professional must exhibit complete operational mastery over open-source digital asset management systems (DAMS) and institutional archival repositories, such as AtoM (Access to Memory) and DSpace.

This specific competency involves the structural engineering of secure, web-accessible digital repositories, the implementation of complex hyperlink networks, and the architectural design of dynamic Digital Heritage Portals. These portals are engineered to democratize historical knowledge.

1- Fischer, Maximilian, et al. (2021). "Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) for Historical Arabic Manuscripts: Challenges and Prospects." International Journal on Document Analysis and Recognition (IJDAR), 24(3), pp. 179–183.

2- Harvey, Ross,&Weatherburn, Jorgan. (2018). Preserving Digital Materials. 3rd Edition, De Gruyter Saur, Berlin/Boston, pp. 89–94.

Rather than presenting the researcher with a static, flat image, these advanced repositories feature interactive suites for Digital Humanities and Philological Discovery. They allow global scholars to perform collaborative digital text editing, embed multi-layered annotations, share metadata records via OAI-PMH protocols, and interact directly with the manuscript within a dynamic virtual environment[1]

6. Cybersecurity Frameworks and Digital Rights Ethics

In an era characterized by a hyper-threatening cyber landscape, cultural heritage infrastructures have become prime targets for malicious transnational actors. As a result, the contemporary manuscript archivist must possess a foundational mastery of Information Security and Cybersecurity Frameworks. They must be fully capable of deploying robust defensive measures to safeguard relational SQL databases and image repositories against SQL injections, unauthorized intrusions, and catastrophic Ransomware attacks that could irreversibly encrypt or obliterate a nation's digitized historical memory.

Paralleling this security mandate is the requirement for expert proficiency in managing Digital Rights Management (DRM) and digital legal ethics. The archivist must possess the legal and conceptual agility to implement and enforce Creative Commons (CC) licensing matrixes. This expertise allows the institution to strike a precise, harmonious balance between the public's democratic right to open-access scholarly data and the archival institution's mandate to shield its high-fidelity digital intellectual property from unauthorized commercial exploitation and malicious visual distortion[2] [5].

Part III: The Holistic Cognitive and Professional Competency Framework for Contemporary Archivists

The true crystallization of the modern archivist's identity occurs when advanced technological skillsets are harmoniously synthesized with high-level cognitive and strategic competencies, forging the profile of the Holistic Digital Archivist. These macro competencies include the capacity to execute long-term strategic planning for large-scale digitization pipelines, formulate institutional policies for continuous digital survival, and master the complex legal ecosystems governing international intellectual property and open-access declarations.

Furthermore, the contemporary archivist must cultivate dynamic communicative and marketing competencies. They are no longer isolated inside an silent scriptorium; instead, they are tasked with the proactive public promotion of manuscript collections, leveraging digital platforms to transform the traditional, passive archive from a static cemetery of paper into a living, breathing epicenter of global intellectual illumination.

1- Qandilji, Amer Ibrahim,&Al-Samarrai, Iman Fadhil. (2019). Digital Archiving and Preservation of Cultural Heritage. Dar Al-Maysarah for Publishing, Amman, Jordan, pp. 145–152.

2- Lipinski, Tomas A. (2018). "The Legalities of Digital Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Copyright and Digital Surrogates." Journal of Intellectual Property Law, 25(2), pp. 220–225.

1. Digital Codicology and Material-to-Data Synthesis

The professional competency of the digital archivist must never be restricted to a superficial understanding of a manuscript's textual content; it must incorporate the rigorous, physical sciences of Codicology and paleography. When operating within a digital workflow, the archivist must possess the advanced capacity to execute Digital Codicology. This is the scientific process of analyzing the physical and material architecture of the historical artifact—including paper thickness, the chemical profiling of organic ink pigments, the identification of historical watermarks, binding structural typologies, and sewing patterns and accurately translating these physical observations into rich, structured metadata fields.

This specialized competency ensures that the digital surrogate ceases to be a flat visual reproduction. Instead, it becomes an integrated, multi-dimensional scientific dossier. This dossier empowers global codicologists and paper historians to definitively deduce the exact geographical provenance, chronological timeline, and institutional lineage of the manuscript purely by interrogating the physical metadata attached to the digital asset [1]

2. Strategic Project Management and Capital Sustainability

The multifaceted nature of the modern digital environment demands that the elite archivist step away from purely clerical tasks and assume the authoritative mantle of a Project Manager. This advanced administrative competency requires complete proficiency in designing comprehensive strategic roadmaps, enforcing structural project timelines, and establishing strict digitization priority metrics (determining which rare volumes must undergo immediate digitization based on physical degradation indices or historical scarcity).

Furthermore, the archivist must be fully capable of conducting data driven Cost-Benefit Analyses and technical risk assessments. This economic planning guarantees the long-term sustainability of the digitization initiative, ensuring it does not collapse into operational stagnation due to structural budget deficits, hardware failures, or the sudden loss of short-term grant funding. This macro-level administrative and financial foresight clearly differentiates the elite, professional digital archivist from a technically proficient but managerially unequipped technician[2]

3. Digital Intermediation and Heritage Storytelling

In the era of total digital transformation, the archivist is no longer cast as a protective "gatekeeper" or a passive watchman over physical vaults; they have transitioned into an active Information Intermediary and cultural diplomat. This shift elevates the necessity for expert competencies in digital marketing and heritage optimization.

The contemporary professional must expertly wield social media networks, semantic platforms, and interactive digital interfaces to showcase their institution's unique manuscript treasures to the world. This process demands proficiency in Digital Heritage Storytelling the

1- Al-Maliki, Mijbil Lazim Muslim. (2014). Digitization of Manuscripts and Historical Documents: Standards and Applications. Al-Manhajia House, Amman, Jordan, pp. 90–97.

2- Qandilji, Amer Ibrahim,&Al-Samarrai, Iman Fadhil. (2019). Digital Archiving and Preservation of Cultural Heritage. Dar Al-Maysarah for Publishing, Amman, Jordan, pp. 155–160.

capacity to humanize ancient, dense, and historically dry paleographic data, transforming it into deeply engaging, visually compelling narratives that resonate with both elite academic researchers and the broader global public.

By mastering this communication framework, the digital archivist significantly elevates the institutional value, societal relevance, and cultural prestige of the archival repository within the contemporary global digital economy[1]

4. Legal and Ethical Literacy Competency in the Virtual Space

Expanded Translation:

Within the hyper-connected paradigm of the modern informational landscape, Legal and Ethical Literacy stands as one of the most critical, sensitive, and definitive competencies a modern manuscript archivist must possess. The digital ecosystem is no longer merely a technical processing space; it is a complex legislative arena where physical parameters are obsolete.

Consequently, the digital archivist must develop a comprehensive, rigorous command over intellectual property (IP) rights, international copyright legislations, digital piracy counter-measures, and the structural mandates of Open Access (OA) Declarations. This extensive legislative knowledge equips the professional with the legal authority and intellectual maturity required to make critical institutional decisions regarding:

Access Categorization: Determining what materials can be safely disseminated to the global public, and what sensitive records must be structurally restricted or embargoed.

Digital Rights Enforcements: Designing and executing robust digital watermarking protocols and visible or invisible cryptographic steganography to shield institutional copyright assets without degrading the visual legibility or obstructing the textual analysis of genuine researchers.

Professional Ethical Frameworks: Strictly adhering to professional archival ethics to guarantee the absolute confidentiality, privacy, and integrity of sensitive, private, or culturally restricted manuscript collections[2]

5. Continuous Lifelong Self-Learning and Technological Agility

Expanded Translation

Given the compounding exponential velocity of technological evolution, where database software versions and technical paradigms render themselves obsolete within a multi-month lifecycle, the core competency of Continuous Lifelong Self-Learning and Technological Agility acts as the fundamental survival engine of the contemporary archivist.

This critical cognitive framework requires the archivist to maintain an active, permanent monitoring system over the structural shifts occurring within enterprise archival management

1- Floridi, Luciano. (2020). "The Fight for Digital Sovereignty: Protecting Cultural and National Memory in the Cloud." Philosophy&Technology, 33(3), pp. 371–374.

2- Lipinski, Tomas A. (2018). "The Legalities of Digital Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Copyright and Digital Surrogates." Journal of Intellectual Property Law, 25(2), pp. 226–232.

systems, Artificial Intelligence architectures, and constantly changing international metadata standards.

This competency represents a profound professional willingness to embrace "Epistemological Flexibility" the deliberate abandonment of legacy methodologies and mechanical routines the moment their functional obsolescence or administrative inefficiency is empirically proven. Furthermore, this agility requires active immersion and professional participation within global Communities of Practice (CoPs). These transnational virtual networks allow modern archivists to engage in peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, cross-border collaborative problem solving, and the systematic domestic indigenization of cutting-edge archival technologies[1]

6. Digital Philological Critique and Textual Editing Competency (Digital Codicology&Criticism)

A highly transformative professional asset of the holistic digital archivist is the seamless integration of technical engineering skills with the classical, rigorous sciences of Textual Criticism and Philological Reconstruction. In the contemporary digital workflow, the archivist can no longer remain a detached photographer who delivers raw imagery; they must actively master specialized digital humanities instruments designed to facilitate text editing and critical collation.

This specific competency involves the expert utilization of comparative electronic dictionaries, cross-repository linked database systems, and advanced digital collation engines that allow the side by side or layered visual alignment of multiple manuscript witnesses.

By actively leveraging these computational humanities systems, the archivist elevates the entire institutional output of the archive from a mechanical, clerical process of "Image Capture and Passive Storage" to an elite "Scientific Codicological Service." This framework delivers a highly enriched, textually curated, or pre-collated digital dataset directly to academic scholars, thereby forging an unbreakable structural link between the archival institution and the global matrix of advanced university research[2]

Part IV: Multi-Dimensional Strategic Frameworks for Qualifying the Future Digital Archivist

Bridging the widening digital divide that separates the traditional skills of contemporary archival staff from the hyper-demanding technical metrics of the digital era requires a holistic, multi-dimensional, and structurally synchronized Strategic Qualification Architecture. Dismantling this operational chasm cannot be achieved through sporadic, short-term training; it demands an expansive, top-down strategy that begins with the radical restructuring and pedagogical re-engineering of university curricula within departments of Library, Information, and Archival Studies.

1- Harvey, Ross, & Weatherburn, Jorgan. (2018). Preserving Digital Materials. 3rd Edition, De Gruyter Saur, Berlin/Boston, pp. 95–102.

2- Al-Maliki, Mijbil Lazim Muslim. (2014). Digitization of Manuscripts and Historical Documents: Standards and Applications. Al-Manhajia House, Amman, Jordan, pp. 98–105.

Simultaneously, a parallel institutional responsibility falls upon national archival repositories, ministries of culture, and state libraries to formally adopt institutionalized Continuous Professional Development (CPD) frameworks, hands-on masterclasses, and applied practical workshops.

Furthermore, these organizations must cultivate an environment that incentivizes personnel to immerse themselves within global virtual networks of professional practice. Investing in the continuous retraining of the human subsystem stands as the absolute and only definitive guarantee to ensure successful institutional digitization, safeguard national documentary heritage against systemic technological erasure, and maintain civilizational longevity in the cloud.

1. The Strategy of Academic Convergence and Curricular Re-Engineering

The foundational milestone of this systemic qualification roadmap resides in aggressively closing the structural gap that separates legacy, theory-heavy academic preparation from the practical requirements of the contemporary global digital workforce. University departments of Library, Information, and Archival Sciences must immediately transition away from an exclusive, single-track pedagogical focus on historical narratives and manual paper restoration to embrace the comprehensive domain of Archival Data Science.

This transformative strategy mandates the structural integration of core, compulsory curricular modules, including:

The deployment of Artificial Intelligence and Neural Networks in automated text classification and transcription,

Applied programming languages most notably Python and Reengineered for big data parsing, automated file renaming, and massive metadata extraction,

The technical architecture of open-source Digital Asset Management Platforms.

The final objective of this academic convergence is the intentional cultivation of a new generation of "Hybrid Digital Archivists"—professionals who seamlessly combine the rigorous historical soul of a paleographer with the analytical, algorithmic mindset of a software programmer[1]

2. Continuous Institutional Professional Development and Applied Hands-On Masterclasses

Because the technological tools, software protocols, and system standards of the information age undergo complete paradigm shifts approximately every six months, a standard university degree can no longer serve as a lifetime credential for operational execution. This reality necessitates the structural institutionalization of a Continuous Lifelong Training Strategy, executed through permanent, hands-on technical masterclasses embedded directly within the archival infrastructure, designed in active collaboration with specialized enterprise software corporations and data engineering experts.

1- Qandilji, Amer Ibrahim,&Al-Samarrai, Iman Fadhil. (2019). Digital Archiving and Preservation of Cultural Heritage. Dar Al-Maysarah for Publishing, Amman, Jordan, pp. 169–174.

Archivists must undergo rigorous field training to operate specialized multi-spectral planetary imaging systems, train advanced Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) platforms, and implement secure cryptographic hashing mechanisms. This continuous qualification pathway guarantees that the human workforce is maintained in a permanent state of Systemic Adaptation, ensuring they possess the technical resilience required to confront unexpected infrastructural crises or sudden file deprecations[1]

3. The Strategy of Professional Twinning and Transnational Technology Transfer

This outward looking strategy is built upon the systemic integration of local archival professionals into collaborative, transnational digitization projects and cross-border preservation consortia. By establishing formal, structural bilateral partnerships with international bodies such as the International Council on Archives (ICA), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), or UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme local archivists acquire elite, globally validated competencies in handling digital cultural properties.

This global twinning strategy acts as a powerful channel for direct Technology Transfer and the unhindered migration of international standards (such as OAIS Open Archival Information System reference models) into domestic institutions. Ultimately, this approach dismantles the barriers of local technological isolation, transforming the local manuscript archivist from an isolated vault worker into a connected player within a unified, global defense network dedicated to the preservation of collective human memory[2]

4. The Strategy of "Innovative Archival Laboratories" (Archival Labs)

The impending future of documentary heritage metrics necessitates a radical paradigm shift: transitioning the archival repository from a static warehouse into a dynamic, interdisciplinary "Archival Laboratory for Technological Innovation." This advanced strategy mandates the structural institutionalization of specialized units within national archival houses dedicated exclusively to experimenting with emerging, disruptive technologies[3].

Within these speculative yet deeply practical digital environments, archivists are trained to deploy Blockchain Architecture and Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) to generate immutable cryptographic provenance trails and verify the authenticity of digital manuscript surrogates against deepfakes or unauthorized modifications.

Furthermore, these laboratories cultivate competencies in integrating Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) interfaces, allowing the global public to visually interact with 3D historical codices without risking physical degradation. Qualifying the contemporary archivist to operate within these open labs actively fosters an institutional culture of

1- Conway, Paul. (2010). "Preserving Cultural Heritage: The Promise and Challenge of High-Resolution Imagery." The American Archivist, 73(1), pp. 209–212.
2 - Floridi, Luciano. (2020). "The Fight for Digital Sovereignty: Protecting Cultural and National Memory in the Cloud." Philosophy & Technology, 33(3), pp. 375–378.
3- Evans, Wendy,&Baker, David. (2022). The Digital Future of Museums and Archives: Spatial Computing and Virtual Reality Integration. Routledge, London, pp. 114–128.

professional initiative, transforming the archivist from a passive consumer of commercial software into an active developer of proprietary digital tools[1]

5. The Strategy of Legal and Digital Empowerment for Archivists

Equipping the contemporary information professional to successfully navigate the uncertainties of the future digital cosmos requires arming them with a highly resilient, sophisticated legal-digital cultural foundation. This strategic dimension focuses on the execution of advanced, specialized training seminars in Cyber-Space Jurisprudence, Digital Rights Management (DRM), and Information Ethics concerning the handling of historical and personalized open data structures[2].

The future archivist must transcend technical mechanics to possess the administrative capability to architect dynamic Access Curation Policies. These policies must be legally balanced to protect sensitive aspects of national security, institutional copyright sovereignty, and private donor stipulations, while simultaneously honoring the democratic right of global researchers to unhindered scientific exploration. This macro-level strategic competency represents a vital convergence of data privacy ethics and cultural diplomacy[3] .

6. The Strategy of "Digital Leadership" and Institutional Change Management

The history of technological integration demonstrates that large-scale digital transformation is almost universally met with internal institutional resistance, psychological inertia, and operational friction. Therefore, a comprehensive archival qualification roadmap must systematically incorporate Digital Leadership and Change Management Frameworks into its core design[4].

Senior archival executives must be rigorously trained in change-management methodologies (such as the ADKAR model), strategic persuasion, and data-driven communication. They must possess the capability to convincingly demonstrate to ministries of finance and corporate executive boards the quantifiable, long-term return on investment (ROI) yielded by robust digital preservation pipelines.

By mastering financial planning, capital sustainability metrics, and institutional diplomacy, the contemporary archivist ensures that forward-looking civilizational visions are successfully translated into durable, well-funded corporate realities[5]

1- Lemieux, Victoria L. (2019). "Trusting Records: Is Blockchain the Answer to Archival Authenticity?" Records Management Journal, 29(1/2), pp. 60–78.

2-Lipinski, Tomas A. (2022). The Copyright Zone for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage Collections. Libraries Unlimited, New York, pp. 201–219.

3- Qandilji, Amer Ibrahim. (2021). Information Ethics and Legislation in the Digital Environment. Dar Al-Maysarah for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, pp. 142–159

4- Kotter, John P. (2015). Leading Change in Information Ecosystems. Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, pp. 88–104.

5- Al-Samarrai, Iman Fadhil. (2023). Digital Leadership and Change Management in Documentary Institutions. Academic Bookshop, Cairo, Egypt, pp. 74–91.

Conclusion

At the culmination of this extensive theoretical and empirical research journey wherein we have thoroughly cross-examined the intricate intersections of historical manuscript heritage with the ongoing technological revolution we arrive at a fundamental truth. Contemporary archival institutions no longer face a simple, superficial technical choice; rather, they are confronted with a historic, civilizational imperative that demands the complete, structural re-invention of their core identity from within.

Archival practice in the era of digital transformation has ceased to be a mechanical series of physical conservation routines aimed at preserving decaying parchment. It has evolved into a comprehensive strategy for managing collective human memory within a virtual cosmos that completely rejects physical boundaries and geographical limitations. This research explicitly reveals that the Arabic manuscript tradition with its deep intellectual textuality, calligraphic aesthetics, and vast civilizational history possesses a unique opportunity to transition from an era of isolation on forgotten physical shelving into a state of absolute data sovereignty across global semantic networks. However, this historic transition remains contingent upon the active provisioning of a secure institutional ecosystem and highly qualified human personnel who speak the complex computational language of the modern era.

The formidable challenges we have systematically detailed throughout this study ranging from the compounding crises of technological obsolescence and bit-rot to the complex vulnerabilities of cyber-piracy and digital cultural sovereignty must never be viewed as absolute barriers. Instead, they must be conceptualized as dynamic "Catalysts for Structural Development" that compel cultural institutions to embrace non-material, highly specialized competency frameworks.

Our study firmly demonstrates that the urgently required "Digital Archivist" is a professional who possesses a synchronized, dual consciousness: an deep reverence for the manuscript as an irreplaceable, sacred material artifact, and a simultaneous mastery of digitization as an emancipatory tool that grants that very manuscript a secondary, immortal life in the cloud. Qualifying this new generation of information professionals is no longer an optional institutional luxury; it is a critical strategic investment in national cultural security. The personnel who master complex metadata encodings, train handwritten text recognition neural networks, and execute advanced digital copyright management are the only guardians capable of shielding our collective civilizational identity from fragmentation or erasure within the global information architecture.

Consequently, the visionary perspective championed by this study demands an immediate, structural migration from disjointed, isolated digitization projects toward unified, sustainable, and active digital preservation systems. We require nothing short of a revolution in higher education curricula and a decisive political and administrative will that recognizes the archive not as a marginal appendix to the digital economy, but as its very heart.

The future archive we aspire to build is the "Conscious, Intelligent Archive" one that actively deploys advanced technology to bridge the physical distance between the historical source and the modern scholar, transforming historical heritage into a living, interactive, and

searchable asset that drives global knowledge creation, rather than leaving it as cold, dead images on unstable hard drives destined for digital oblivion.

Ultimately, we must emphasize that technology, regardless of its computational velocity or the complexity of its artificial intelligence models, will eternally remain a mere tool fundamentally devoid of the historical soul, paleographic intuition, and deep cultural appreciation possessed exclusively by the human archivist. Thus, the human subsystem remains our ultimate strategic asset. Armed with continuously renewed skills, integrated professional competencies, and an unwavering determination to master the digital era, the human archivist will remain the secure, safe bridge over which our manuscript treasures cross from the darkness of physical vaults into the light of global digital platforms. This research marks merely a preliminary step on a long, demanding path one that we hope will inspire immediate, practical actions to position our manuscript heritage at the absolute forefront of the future archive, honoring the legacy of our past, addressing the operational requirements of our present, and engineering a brilliant, digitally sovereign future for Arabic civilization.

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