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## *Revitalisation and Revival of Traditional Musical Instruments in Poland in the Context of Music Contests*

ABSTRACT: This article is devoted to the issue of revitalisation and revival of traditional musical instruments in Poland in the context of music competitions. Research on revival activities in Poland is rare, as is research on the phenomenon of traditional music competitions. Meanwhile, over the last nine decades, traditional music competitions have become the main environment for the public presentation of traditional music and stimulating the revival and revitalisation of individual musical phenomena. In this area, I have been conducting my own participant observations and archival research for over two decades. I understand the revival phenomenon itself and the activities that constitute it after Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (2013). The distinction between the terms revitalisation and revival is based on that made by Ingrid Åkesson (2006) and Ulrich Morgenstern (2019). In the text I discuss the issue of revitalisation of the Podhale bagpipes and the revival of the hurdy-gurdy. I also show that the phenomenon of the revival of musical tradition is accompanied by processes of depreciation of the role, importance or presence of other instruments, such as the accordion or clarinet. I also show the important role of the activism of leading figures among both researchers and lovers of traditional music, as well as musicians and instrument builders.

KEYWORDS: revitalisation, revival, traditional, music, instrument, contest

### Introduction

This article is devoted to the issue of revitalisation and revival of traditional musical instruments in Poland in the context of traditional music competitions. Traditional music competitions in Poland are a form of presenting traditional music which was born in the 1930s, on the occasion of a festival presenting the cultures of individual highlander communities inhabiting the northern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. After World War II, competitions became very popular in various regions, and thanks to the creation of

a festival in Kazimierz Dolny, which had the character of a nationwide final, they were centralised. This makes their character and principles very uniform. At the same time, other forms of presenting traditional music are relatively rare, excluding regions with developed tourism (e.g. Podhale). This means that competitive festivals have a key place in activities aimed at revitalising and reviving musical traditions, including the practice of playing musical instruments. They are therefore one of the main elements of my current research on institutionalised forms of reviving musical traditions in Poland in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Traditional music festivals in Poland have been the subject of my interest since 1996. Since then, I have taken part in most of the festivals existing in Poland, in many of them multiple times, taking part from different perspectives – performer, spectator, juror, and even co-organiser. In addition, I conduct research in archives and libraries regarding the beginnings of traditional music festivals in Poland, the history of individual festivals and the bands participating in them and the activists organising them. The concepts of Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill are of key importance to me, including the statement that: “A music revival comprises an effort to perform and promote music that is valued as old or historical and is usually perceived to be threatened or moribund.” (Bithell, Hill, 2014, p. 3). Following the authors, I also assume that revival issues include six basic topics: activism and the desire for change, the valuation and reinterpretation of history, recontextualisation and transformation, legitimacy and authenticity, transmission and dissemination, and post-revival outgrowths and ramifications. (Bithell, Hill, 2014, pp. 3–5) Therefore, in this text, not only instruments that are the subject of revival or revitalisation will be important for me, but also those that arouse ostracism, ignoring or exclusion. Moreover, not only instruments will play an important role, but also people who can be considered as activists (collectors and researchers of traditional music, regionalists, traditional music lovers, leading personalities, etc.). The motives of activists will be important, but also the consequences of their actions – not the intended and obvious ones, but rather the unintended and questionable ones.

In this article, not only the concept of “revival” but also that of “revitalisation” is of key importance. I adopt the distinction between these terms postulated by Ulrich Morgenstern (Morgenstern, 2019, pp. 11–12). This author adopted the understanding of both terms after Ingrid Åkesson (Åkesson, 2006, p. 7), who described “revitalisation” with the phrase “to give new life and energy to something”, while placing revival close to the phrase “revive something nearly dead”.

Traditional music competitions themselves, due to their leading role in terms of opportunities to present the skills of their performers over the last half-century, together with their communities of performers, jurors and viewers, following Pierre Bourdieu, I treat as a kind of *modus operandi* – a constitutive structure that generates *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2008, pp. 192–193). And *habitus*es are systems of enduring dispositions, that is, the principle that generates and organises the representations and practices.

## The desire for change, activism and the valuation and reinterpretation of history

According to Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill

revivals are almost always motivated by dissatisfaction with some aspect of the present and a desire to effect some sort of cultural change. Revival agents usually have agendas specific to their socio-cultural or political contexts and in this sense may also be regarded as activists. (Bithell, Hill, 2014, pp. 3–4)

It was no different in the case of Poland. This dissatisfaction can be clearly observed already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A lover of folk culture, Kazimierz Brodziński, already in 1829 expressed his disapproval of barrel organs, which he blamed for the lack of interaction between violinists and singers during dances in the inn (Brodziński, 1829, pp. 260–261). In 1858, music publicist Józef Ignacy Kraszewski complained about Jewish tavern bands introducing guitars into their line-up. The sound of this type of bands, according to Kraszewski (Kraszewski, 1858, p. 3), could make anyone feel repulsed by music. However, the best example are the publications of the most outstanding Polish researcher of folk culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Oskar Kolberg<sup>1</sup>. This author simply ignored new sets of instruments in musical groups, which he undoubtedly had to encounter many times. Of the newer instruments in folk music, he only mentioned the “shrieking” or “screaming” clarinet in the context of folk bands consisting – as they put it – of “Jews and buskers, not very talented, hired from farther surroundings or from cities” (Kolberg, 1865, p. 10; Kolberg 1880, p. XII). It is easy to notice here a tendency to belittle the role of the clarinet, manifested by limiting oneself to pejorative definitions of the clarinet’s sound, as well as depreciating its users, who were almost treated as wanderers. Moreover, there was a tendency to focus on the characteristics of the instrument which might disparage it in the eyes of a wider audience – since it is clear that the clarinet sounds noisy only in the upper register of its sound. It seems, however, that such a perception of the clarinet was also influenced by other factors, such as attributing it mainly to urban environments, which, from the perspective of the research paradigms of the time, made the clarinet less interesting, or associating the clarinet with music from German-speaking areas, under the political domination of which large areas of the former Republic of Poland remained. It was therefore an instrument extraneous to the class, as well as to the nation, which at the time was bearing additional hostile connotations.

This perception of the clarinet was also inherited by subsequent generations of researchers associated with musicology institutes established in Poland in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Traditional music researchers of that time, called musical ethnographers, very rarely saved or recorded solo clarinetists, preferring

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<sup>1</sup> Oskar Kolberg (1814–1890) was a unique researcher, not only in Poland, but also in Europe, whose legacy today includes a total of 92 volumes of music collections and ethnographic descriptions, mainly from Poland, but also from Central Europe.

violinists or bagpipers, as representatives of earlier instrumental practice and historically more closely connected with local culture. This resulted from the paradigms of German musicology, under the influence of which Polish musicology (including musical ethnography) was created and developed until the 1970s. In turn, restrictions during recordings were necessary, because in the interwar period Poland was a poor country where it was difficult to find money for wax rollers, and after the war, audio tapes had to be purchased for foreign currencies, which were always in short supply behind the “Iron Curtain”. Thus, clarinetists were usually recorded only together with the whole band, and it often happened that they were excluded from the line-up during recording sessions<sup>2</sup>. This was, among others, the practice of Jadwiga Sobieska, the first lady of Polish musical ethnography in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, who then, a hundred years after the clarinet was adopted in music bands in Poland, considered the clarinet a relatively young instrument and therefore less worthy of attention (Sobieska, Sobieski, 1950, p. 33; Sobieska, 1951, p. 40). It was not until the 1970s that the clarinetists began to be looked at more closely, and clarinets were recognised as instruments belonging also to folk musical practice, as exemplified by the research of Franciszek Kotula (Kotula, 1979, p. 183–192). What is significant is Jadwiga Sobieska’s written statement, written by her three years after the publication of Kotula, which she knew perfectly well, being the author of the afterword to this book. In 1982 Sobieska wrote in her own text for the first time that the clarinet “has earned a full right of citizenship in folk music practice, although it is a factory instrument”, and “its technical possibilities allow for expressing and ornamenting melodies, which suits our folk musicians” (Sobieska, 2006, p. 98).

Of course, one can also cite the opinions of other researchers, which are similar in tone, to support the thesis about the change that has taken place at this point. However, I would consciously like to take a closer look at Jadwiga Sobieska’s statement. Why was it that the Clarinet “has earned a full right of citizenship in folk music practice” after 140 years and not after 110 years? Why was this statement made in the early 1980s and not the 1950s? Had the technical capabilities of C clarinets in Poland changed over the years? No, they hadn’t changed. Had new clarinetists appeared? Probably not, or even marginally, because the 1980s in Poland were the period of the fastest extinction of the oldest generation of musicians and the smallest influx of young musicians<sup>3</sup>. It is therefore certain that the vast majority of clarinetists active in the early 1980s could have met Sobieska in the early 1950s. What’s more – knowing the Polish phonographic collections – it can be concluded that the competence of many of these clarinetists was greater in the early 1950s than in the 1980s. So what had changed? In the meantime,

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<sup>2</sup> Although this topic has not been discussed in scientific publications so far, it can be easily traced by analysing the course of subsequent recording sessions, during which materials from the phonographic collections of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences were recorded (<http://www.ispan.pl/pl/zbiory/zbiory-fonograficzne>). The collection mainly includes recordings from the period after World War II. Earlier recordings were largely destroyed or lost during World War II and today we only have a fraction of the old collections (Jackowski, 2014, pp. 211–224).

<sup>3</sup> The situation will change only in the 1990s.

many elderly violinists and bagpipers who delighted Sobieska with the archaism of their playing style passed away. Therefore, the context of perceiving phenomena changed and caused a change in the valuation of cultural phenomena, as well as forcing a change in the interpretation of the history of instruments in Polish lands.

Worse was the situation of the accordion, stigmatised by music activists since the interwar period as alien to, and even harmful to, Polish musical tradition. The post-war promotion of this instrument by the authorities of the Polish People's Republic in the circles of the amateur art movement was another reason why many music activists decided that traditional music should be protected against the accordion. Fear of the reaction of state factors, initially only accordion soloists and ensembles with this instrument were ignored during the competitions. However, during the relative political thaw of 1985, this instrument was eliminated from participation in the most important Festival of Folk Bands and Singers in Poland in Kazimierz Dolny<sup>4</sup> (Regulations of the 18<sup>th</sup> Festival and subsequent ones; Sar, 2010, pp. 24–25, 26). It should be noted that almost all festivals of traditional music in Poland are linked to the festival in Kazimierz Dolny, if not formally, by holding regional qualifiers, then at least ideologically, imitating its regulations. Thus, bands from those regions where the accordion had been an incumbent instrument for over half a century (e.g. the Łowicz region, in central Poland) were eliminated from such events. As it happens, however, bands from these regions went and still go to the Festival in Kazimierz Dolny in an incomplete line-up. The incomplete sound of the group, or the lack of accordionists who are band leaders, often prevent them from winning the highest trophies, although there are exceptions here as well (e.g. Stanisław Klejnas's band).

### Recontextualisation, transformation, legitimisation and authentication

So prepared field of musical activity became a convenient place for the revitalisation or revival of musical instruments, which was first mentioned in Poland in 1934 by the enthusiast and documenter of traditional music from the Polish Tatra Mountains, Stanisław Mierczyński:

Work on the revival and preservation of native countryside music and songs will be difficult, sometimes requiring studies and research into the musical past of a given area (...). Further work, after collecting and verifying materials on music, songs and rituals of a given area, will consist mainly in forming choral ensembles and folk bands, where it will often be necessary to discard certain instruments that have recently become fashionable, and to reintroduce old instruments that are not in use today, or are dying out, such as the bagpipes in some areas, the lyre in others, etc. (Mierczyński, 1934, p. 28)

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<sup>4</sup> Festival of Folk Bands and Singers in Kazimierz was started in 1966. It has the character of the final of the competition, to which bands, singing groups, soloists, as well as students with masters are qualified through regional competitions taking place almost all over Poland. Relatively high financial prizes enjoy great environmental prestige and are awarded by a jury consisting of ethnomusicologists, folklorists, music editors and animators of traditional culture.

In the quoted text, the dividing line runs between the old, which is desirable, and the new, which the author suggests should be excluded. Historical instruments and songs are valued, especially those with archaic features, while new and fashionable ones are rejected. This view results directly from the original interests of the fathers of Polish ethnomusicology, Adolf Chybiński and Łucjan Kamieński, who were also fascinated by early music. In contemporary folk music practice – in accordance with the paradigm of German musicology from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – they saw an opportunity to trace similar phenomena known from historical sources. They were therefore interested in the protection of archaic phenomena and the reconstruction of phenomena that had already disappeared. However, they perceived new phenomena as a threat to instruments, songs and performance practices similar to those recorded in historical sources. That is why Chybiński was fascinated by primitive, elongated highlander fiddles called ‘złóbcoki’, old-fashioned basolias, bagpipes, pipes, as well as musical performances abounding in ornaments reminding us of those known from the 18<sup>th</sup> century treatises (Chybiński, 1923, 1924, 1927). Therefore, Kamieński studied archaic ritual songs and two-voice chants with parallel voices (Kamieński, 1933, 1935). The views proclaimed by these musicologists have acquired the character of dogma for subsequent generations of folk music researchers such as Stanisław Mierczyński, Marian Sobieski and Jadwiga Sobieska<sup>5</sup>. The activities of the younger generation of folk music researchers, in addition to documentary research on songs, instrumental music and the instruments themselves, will also include activities aimed at preserving or restoring old instruments for modern use. But were the instruments that were brought back into use always exactly the same as their historical models?

Let us look at the two instruments mentioned by Mierczyński – the Podhale bagpipes, and the hurdy-gurdy. After World War II bagpipes fell out of use in Podhale, although still in the eighties they were occasionally presented to tourists as a curiosity by an elder, Józef Galica-Baca from Olcza (1908–1989). However, bagpipe playing was revitalised after 1971 by young Tomasz Skupień (1955–2005), who considered it crucial to bring the bagpipes back to musical practice by introducing a number of material innovations which would give performers more technical possibilities, enrich the timbre and strengthen the sound. The reeds were a particular problem, because the local materials, due to the short vegetation of the plants, did not provide the desired sound parameters. Skupień solved the problem by, among other things, importing materials of plant origin which originally do not occur in Poland, but do occur in Bulgaria. The desired prefabricated elements were sent to the constructor by a Bulgarian piper, a friend he met during one of the traditional music festivals<sup>6</sup>. The materials used, as well as the detailed construction solutions inside the instrument, resulted in a significant change in the sound of the instrument, of which the instrument builder was aware. Despite this, in the opinion of folklore researchers who sat on the jury of music compe-

<sup>5</sup> One can also mention Julian Pulikowski, Adolf Dygacz and others.

<sup>6</sup> Information obtained during the author's interview with Tomasz Skupień, conducted on June 3, 1996 at the instrument builder's house in Zakopane.

titions, Skupień's instruments were considered a faithful copy of old Podhale instruments<sup>7</sup>. This was due to Skupień's great care to preserve the external form of the instrument, consistent with the external form of old instruments. He was aware of the fact that the ethno-organological discourse in Poland at that time focused on visually perceived technical and morphological features and the use of natural materials (Sobieska, Sobieski, 1973). Skupień wanted to meet these criteria, because music competitions in the years 1949–1989 were, in the case of archaic instruments, the only opportunity to present his musical skills. However, he considered the interior of the instrument, on which the character of the sound depended most, as an open space for his own experiments. And his strategy turned out to be effective – he managed to make the modifications he wanted without losing his reputation as a designer and musician faithful to tradition. He also won many awards. However, as a consequence of Skupień's actions, the instrument obtained, despite the efforts of traditional music researchers, was not exactly the same instrument that was intended to be revitalised.

On the other hand, the hurdy gurdy was, in the realities of the interwar, multi-ethnic Republic of Poland, an instrument characteristic for the lands of contemporary Ukraine, and that is where it was most often played. However, it rarely happened that musicians playing the hurdy-gurdy travelled to areas inhabited by Poles, especially large cities and summer resorts. After World War II, within the new borders of relatively nationally homogeneous Poland, the hurdy-gurdy was present in exceptional cases, mainly in families displaced from Ukrainian Volhynia or Podolia. However, this instrument was recreated in 1967 by Stanisław Wyżykowski from Haczów (south-eastern Poland, close to the border with Ukraine). In Haczów, no one played this instrument before. However, the inhabitants remembered the instruments of wandering lyre singers who visited village residents from the Boyko ethnic minority before the war (The Boykos from this village were displaced after 1945). And it was just such a hurdy-gurdy that Wyżykowski built and brought back into musical practice.

Over time, interest in the hurdy-gurdy among musicians, researchers and traditional music lovers has increased (Bednarska-Kopeć, 1981, Przerembski, 1993, 1996, Dahlig, 2009, Rokosz, 2021), and instruments were produced not only by Wyżykowski, but also by his student, Stanisław Nogaj. The two instrument builders did not stop at reconstructing a hurdy-gurdy whose form was similar to the Ukrainian hurdy-gurdy from the early 1930s. Historical patterns from outside Central Europe were also used, including such a spectacular pattern as the famous lyre from the Portico of Glory of St. James Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. Nowadays, Stanisław Nogaj offers a number of very sophisticated hurdy-gurdies with a wide range of performance options<sup>8</sup>. However, it is difficult to consider these instruments as a direct continuation of hurdy-gurdies from nearby regions of Ukraine. The revival of the hurdy-gurdy is therefore a very specific case. This

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<sup>7</sup>Information obtained during the author's interview with Aleksandra Szurmiak-Bogucka, an ethnomusicologist who is a permanent jury member of many traditional music competitions in southern Poland. The interview was conducted in Krakow, May 9, 1996.

<sup>8</sup><https://lirakorbowa.com/home-eng/>, accessed 28 August 2023.

is the revival of an instrument in an area where it was not regularly played by a community that was neither the user nor the recipient of this instrument (after all, the Boykos were displaced from Haczów and the surrounding area). Moreover, over the past half-century, hurdy-gurdy manufacturers have completely moved away from the pattern that became the excuse to revive the instrument. Taking into account all aspects of the process that took place, one can ask whether it was a revival or rather an invention of tradition (Hobsbawm, 1983, pp. 1–14). However, in scientific discourse in Poland, the contemporary presence of the hurdy-gurdy during stage presentations of traditional folk music (including competitions) is not controversial.

### Competition festivals as *modus operandi* of activists and performers

As indicated in the above examples, the sound innovations of the bagpipes, which did not affect the external form of the instrument, or the adoption and significant modification of the hurdy-gurdy, which was only marginally present in the past, did not raise any controversy in Poland among researchers, jurors and lovers of traditional music. However, the acceptance of the clarinet took a century and a half, and the accordion has not been accepted until now. So what determines this attitude? Available information suggests that there was an ever-present dialectic conflict between what is considered as relatively old and what is perceived as relatively new. As I pointed out at the beginning of this text, already among 19<sup>th</sup>-century collectors of traditional music, we notice a tendency to ignore and downplay the role of or criticise instruments that were relatively new in traditional music. The activity of historically oriented musicologists in the field of traditional music in the first eight decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century confirmed this way of distinguishing two groups of instruments and their value. Interestingly, however, despite the adoption of music anthropology paradigms in Polish ethnomusicology in the 1980s, the previously adopted methods of valuing various musical instruments are still present in the practice of traditional music competitions. So what made this happen? Tracing the history of the entry and presence of traditional music on the stage in Poland seems to indicate that a kind of ‘institutionalisation’ of music competitions themselves played an important role.

Stanisław Mierczyński, in the text I quoted at the beginning, pointed out that the return to the “old” traditions requires the support of state authorities, schools, churches, social organisations and folk theatres. Mierczyński’s position corresponded not only to social realities, but also to the socio-cultural policy of multinational Poland at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s. The state authorities saw various movements aimed at preserving the cultural distinctiveness of individual regions of the country as an opportunity to weaken the tendency of rapidly growing national separatism. So all kinds of social organisations that worked to maintain regional identities and protect local traditions could count on support from government agencies, state and local government administration, education



and even the army. All kinds of festivals immediately became the favourite form of activity. Of special importance was the “Mountain Festival” held in 1935–1939, whose presentations were planned, assessed and evaluated. In the first year, mainly artists were invited to the jury – painters and writers – with limited participation of specialists in the field of folk culture research. However, widespread criticism of the verdict resulted in the establishment of a permanent Homeland Commission, composed of ethnographers, regionalists, musicologists (Adolf Chybiński, Kazimierz Dobrowolski, Julian Pulikowski, Stanisław Mierczyński), painters, writers and choreologists, who not only assessed the presentations, but also selected the invited bands, advised the bands during the preparation of programmes, and even provided small subsidies for the purchase of costumes from the funds entrusted to them (Kurzeja-Świątek, 2013, pp. 134–157). The commission attached great importance to embedding the programmes of individual bands exclusively in their own local tradition, paying particular attention to disappearing rituals, songs and instruments, as well as avoiding stylisation. And indeed, after only two years, the tendency to borrow bands’ repertoire from the programmes of other groups stopped, attempts at stylisation were abandoned, and many bands prided themselves on reproducing rarely used customs, costumes, dances, songs and instruments (e.g. bagpipes) on stage (Kurzeja-Świątek, 2013, pp. 144–149). The effects of the work of the teams and the Homeland Commission were widely reported in the regional and national press. And this probably influenced the adoption of the competition model of the festival with the participation of experts as the most appropriate for efforts to revitalise and revive traditions in Poland.

After World War II, competition-style festivals with the participation of experts in the field of traditional culture research became very common throughout Poland. The solutions used during the pre-war “Mountain Festival” were also copied everywhere, including the privileged treatment of old instruments. The continuation was ensured by historically oriented ethnomusicologists involved in the festivals, including Jadwiga Sobieska, Marian Sobieski et. al. In 1966, the Festival of Folk Bands and Singers was established in Kazimierz Dolny, which in the following years was associated with various regional festivals, thus becoming the finale of many smaller events. Thus, the regulations of the festival in Kazimierz Dolny and the conclusions formulated in subsequent protocols of its jury became binding. This resulted in a very broad – although not complete – unification of the treatment of traditional music festivals in Poland. Revolutionary changes in such a linked festival environment are difficult, if at all possible. Small changes to the regulations do not have major consequences for the established network of festivals. In this way, due to inertia, the festival formula developed in the second half of the 1930s by researchers and lovers of Carpathian cultures remains the most common in Poland.

The activities of the jury committees had and still have an important impact on the transformation of traditions in an area that was not noticed in the short period of the “Mountain Festival” before the war, but which we see in the longer term of festivals that have been held for several decades. Appreciation by the jury, including the awards themselves, are a very important factor in mobilising

performers. Therefore, award-winning performers are not only imitated, but even copied in detailed solutions. Rewarding certain instruments is an excuse for performers to use them, while the long-term omission of other instruments was the reason for abandoning performance practice on them. The same applies to band line-ups. Therefore, the diversity of instruments and band line-ups disappeared, and their line-ups began to constitute a kind of regional canon. The same applies to the presented repertoire. In this way, a kind of “book” vision of the traditions of individual regions was created, as Tomasz Rokosz describes this phenomenon (Rokosz, 2009, p. 67).

Considering what has been discussed above, with reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, one can venture to say that traditional music competitions are a kind of *modus operandi*, a constitutive structure that generates *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2008, pp. 192–193). In the context of competition festivals, *habitus* concern both jurors and competition participants and refer to all aspects of the revitalisation and revival of traditional music: valuation and reinterpretation of history, recontextualisation, transformation, legitimisation and authentication, as well transmission and dissemination. Actions aimed at revitalisation and revival also have their consequences, which are not a simple return to the past. The comments and questions made in this text in the context of discussing the cases of four instruments in Poland are a small contribution to the discussion on the unplanned consequences that are the result of all, even the noblest, actions.

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