

HISTORY IN SCRAPS OF FABRIC. ON THE PROVENANCE OF SOME DOZEN FRAGMENTS OF LATE ANTIQUITY TEXTILES AT THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM*

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The Jagiellonian University Museum in Krakow (MUJ) boasts the largest in Poland collection of late Antique textiles from Egypt containing 100 fragments. Some of them were purchased in 1893 by Józef Łepkowski from the known Swiss archaeologist, collector, and dealer Robert Forrer (1866–1947).¹ Others reached the Museum following WW II, and it is some dozen textile fragments from this collections, or strictly speaking the stories unveiled thanks to their provenance study, that I would like to make the subject of the present article. The example of the discussed MUJ's textiles show the relevance of provenance studies of objects. They allow to incorporate single objects in a wider historical context, actually on several levels: beginning with the times when they were created and used, through the circumstances of their discovery, up to the history of subsequent collections whose part they had formed before they reached their present home. A brief paper does not permit do develop these topics, however, they are worthy of being at least signalled, since those apparently inconspicuous textile pieces are important fragments of world heritage dispersed throughout the world and an inseparable component of many intriguing stories.

The group of about a dozen textile fragments (Figs. 1–14) belong to a larger set of 47 late Antique textile products from Egypt placed in a specialized cabinet together with over 200 specimens of textiles from different periods. Until recently the only piece of information on their provenance was a note on MUJ's catalogue cards: 'acquired for the MUJ collection following 1945 (most likely from the Wawel repository)'. This fact was confirmed by the preliminary research conducted in 2016. The information on the transfer of the cabinet with textile samples to the Jagiellonian University Museum was found in the file 'Restitution of the state assets. Return of historic pieces kept at the Wawel to Krakow institutions (museums, scholarly institutions)'. The research into the documentation from the operations of the Wawel repository permitted to confirm that the cabinet had been taken over from the consignment seized in Duszniki Zdrój (Archives of the Wawel Royal Castle, file defined as 'Restitutions of state assets. Post-WW II shipments from the territory of Lower Silesia 21 June–9 December 1945 and shipments from Nuremberg 2 May 1946'). Thanks to the further archival research it turned out that before WW II the cabinet had been property of the Schlesisches Museum für

Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer in Wrocław. Despite the fact that the documents recording the seizure of the shipment do not mention the above Museum, following the comparison of the inventory numbers preserved on the textiles and the numbers in inventory books and catalogue cards of the Kunstgewerbemuseum it can be unquestionably confirmed that prior to WW II the textiles had been the Museum's property. Thanks to this finding it was also possible to take one more step back in the history of the discussed items.

The Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer in Wrocław was one of the most thriving Prussian *Kunstgewerbemuseen*, belonging to the institutions characteristic of the 19th century focused on artistic crafts.² It was only as of 1899 that it started operating under the name of Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer, but its collection included heritage pieces from the Museum Schlesischer Altertümer which had earlier started to consciously collect artistic crafts specimens.³ In the late 19th century, one of the must-haves of this kind of an institution were textiles, as of the 1880s gradually discovered in Egypt's late Antique tombs. Bringing them to light was a real revelation, since they showed attitudes and their decorations popular in the Roman and early Byzantine Empires, previously known only from written and iconographic records, also showing testimony to the weaving techniques in the 19th century considered to have been discovered only in the Middle Ages or later.⁴ The records of the Wrocław Museum allow to trace several purchases of late Antique textiles from Egypt it made. In 1890–1891,

number of textile specimens acquired in this way remains unknown.⁶ Finally, in 1912, it purchased about 20 textiles from Wilhelm Graf,⁷ brother and heir of famous Theodor Graf (1840–1903), who was an entrepreneur and collector, and a key figure for the history of interest in late Antique textiles from Egypt, since he was the first person to have brought such items to Europe, initiating the vogue for collecting them.⁸

Following WW II, twenty textiles from the Wrocław Kunstgewerbemuseum reached the National Museum in Warsaw.⁹ Katarzyna Urbaniak-Walczak identified them as likely coming from the bulk of the last purchase of the Museum, thus from the former Theodor Graf collection, emphasizing, however, that this could not be confirmed with certainty owing to the lack of genuine inventory numbers.¹⁰ As already mentioned, recently it has been found out that even a larger bulk of textiles (47 items) from the Wrocław Museum ended up at the Wawel repository, from where they were transferred to the Jagiellonian University



1. Textile fragments with a parrot motif, ACNO MUJ 1235/1–2, ca 7 cm x 4.5 cm (MUJ 1235/1) and ca 3–6.5 cm x 14 cm (1235/2), tapestry, wool warp threads with wool weft threads and one linen weft thread, Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina



2. Textile fragments with a parrot motif, ACNO MUJ 1235/3, ca 26.5 cm x 10.5 cm, tapestry, wool warp threads with wool weft threads and one linen weft thread, Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina

the Museum bought several dozen textiles from aforementioned Forrer.⁵ In 1897, it exchanged its doublets with Berlin's Königliche Kunstgewerbemuseum, however, the

Museum. The majority of textiles feature genuine certificates attached with original inventory numbers, the fact facilitating their identification as respective acquisitions of



3. Fragments of textiles with a parrot motif, ACNO MUJ 1235/4, ca 28 cm x 8 cm, tapestry, wool warp threads with wool weft threads and one linen weft thread, Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina



4. Textile fragment with a parrot motif at the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin, ACNO 9327, C. Fluck, 'Die Textilien von Carl Schmidt', in *Textilien aus dem Vorbesitz von Theodor Graf, Carl Schmidt und dem Ägyptischen Museum Berlin*, ed. by C. Fluck, P. Linscheid, S. Merz, Wiesbaden 2000, Cat No. 116a, Chart 13



5. Textile fragment with a parrot motif at the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin, ACNO 9328, C. Fluck, 'Die Textilien von Carl Schmidt', in *Textilien aus dem Vorbesitz von Theodor Graf, Carl Schmidt und dem Ägyptischen Museum Berlin*, ed. by C. Fluck, P. Linscheid, S. Merz, Wiesbaden 2000, Cat No. 116b, Chart 13

the Kunstgewerbemuseum. This allowed to confirm that the majority of the textiles (31) came from the purchases in 1890-1891, thus from the Forrer collection.¹¹ There are six textiles on which the certificates have not been preserved.¹² Ten fragments feature numbers showing that they were entered in the Wrocław inventory in 1897,¹³ thus suggesting their provenance from the doublet exchange with the Berlin Kunstgewerbemuseum mentioned in the Museum's records.¹⁴ A preliminary research in Berlin permitted to confirm that on the Berlin part the doublets in question were textiles from the Antinoopolis excavations of the German

Coptologist Carl Schmidt (1868–1938).¹⁵ This takes us to an even earlier chapter in the items' history.

Schmidt won his fame mainly as a discoverer and editor of numerous important gnostic and Manichaean manuscripts. He searched for papyri among other places in ancient Antinoopolis (close to today's El-Shaikh Ebada). The city is associated mainly with the activity of the French Egyptologist Albert Gayet (1856–1916) who, resorting to quite unconventional methods, made his discoveries a great sensation of the Paris of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁶ However, it had been Schmidt who first



6. Textile fragment with a star-shaped insert, ACNO MUJ 1236, ca 38 cm x 32 cm, plain weave (linen) and (flax warp thread with wool weft threads), Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina



7. Silk fabric fragment, ACNO MUJ 1237/5, ca 16 cm x 1.5 cm, weft patterned weave of diagonal binding (so-called samite), Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina



8. Silk fabric fragment, ACNO MUJ 1237/6, ca 12 cm x 16 cm, weft patterned weave of diagonal binding (so-called samite), Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina



9. Fragment of the silk fabric lost in WW II from the old collection of the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin, *Die Gewebe-Sammlung des Königlichen Kunstgewerbe-Museums*, ed. by J. Lessing, O. von Falke, vol. 1, Berlin 1913, Chart Ic.



10. Textile fragment with so-called cross rosette motif, ACNO MUJ 1240/4, ca 6.5 cm x 7 cm, tapestry, linen warp thread with wool weft threads, Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina

‘dug’ into the sands of the Antinoopolis necropolis bringing to light the precious mementoes of its rich past.¹⁷

During the works conducted in early 1896 in the northern necropolis Schmidt uncovered several burials as a result of which mummies and the majority of the tomb furnishing reached the Ägyptisches Museum that very year, while single textile specimens were transferred to

Berlin’s Kunstgewerbemuseum.¹⁸ In the 1920s and 1930s, textiles from both museums were taken to the Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst¹⁹ (currently the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst at the Bode-Museum), where some of them have been kept to this day (except for the mummies and silk textiles which disappeared during WW II),²⁰ while a part, owing to the



11. Textile fragment with so-called cross rosette motif at the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin, ACNO MBK 9329, C. Fluck, 'Die Textilien von Carl Schmidt', in *Textilien aus dem Vorbesitz von Theodor Graf, Carl Schmidt und dem Ägyptischen Museum Berlin*, ed. by C. Fluck, P. Linscheid, S. Merz, Wiesbaden 2000, Cat. No. 123



12. Tablet-woven wool selvedge band fragments, ACNO MUJ 1240/9–10, ca 19.5 cm x 1.7 cm (MUJ 1240/9) and ca 11 cm x 1.8 cm (MUJ 1240/10), Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina

above-mentioned exchange of doublets between Berlin and Wrocław, have been kept at MUJ. Interestingly, the archival records of the Berlin Kunstgewerbemuseum have preserved mentions of the Wrocław doublets, and even photos of some of the Wrocław textiles, although previously they had been considered WW II losses.²¹

The trip into the past of the objects thus ends in Antinoopolis, a city founded in 130 by Emperor Hadrian (117–138) to commemorate the tragic death of his beloved Antinous. In ancient times it was full of sumptuous buildings and monuments typical of Roman metropolises.²² In order to secure excellent development conditions to the city, Hadrian had roads built communicating it with the ports on the Red Sea, which made Antinoopolis a major centre on the trade routes to Persia, India, and further eastward. This contributed to its citizens' wealth, hence the textiles produced there or



13. Tablet-woven selvedge band fragment, ACNO MUJ 1240/11, ca 23 cm x 3.2 cm, wool yarn or vegetable fibre yarn (linen yarn or hemp), Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina



14. Tablet-woven selvedge band fragments, ACNO MUJ 1240/12–13, ca 21.5 cm x 3.8 cm (MUJ 1240/12) and ca 19.7 cm x 1.9 cm (MUJ 1240/13), woven with wool yarn or vegetable fibre yarn (linen yarn or hemp), one of them (MUJ 1240/12) additionally enriched with decorative motifs woven with silk yarn, Jagiellonian University Museum, Photo Janusz Kozina

imported from the Orient are some of the most exquisite specimens of weaving art of late Antiquity.²³ Furthermore, they constitute an exceptional testimony to multicultural character of late Antique Egypt and interpenetration of different trends affecting everyday life of people then. One of the most interesting examples illustrating that phenomenon, and characteristic of Antinoopolis, is e.g., so-called Persian riding costume, for example caftans with ornamental tablet-woven selvedge bands.²⁴ Furthermore, many silk textiles characteristic of Central Asia and showing the impact of Central-Asian silk textiles, so-called samites, come from Antinoopolis.²⁵ It was Schmidt who brought these kinds of heritage pieces to Europe for the first time; following historical vicissitudes, they reached the Jagiellonian University Museum (including both tablet-woven selvedge bands and samites, see Figs. 7–8 and 12–13).

In conclusion, it can be seen that provenance studies have allowed to place some dozen fragments of textiles from the MUJ collection within a broader context. When presenting these historic pieces, the following should be brought up: the issues connected with the place and time of their creation (Roman and Byzantine Egypt, but also Persia or more broadly Central Asia) and also the place of their discovery (Antinoopolis), history of 19th-century archaeology, specificity of museums of artistic crafts, in particular of Prussian *Kunstgewerbemuseen*, relocation of cultural goods as a result of wars, including the question of repositories, and so-called substitute restitution, and finally the history of the Jagiellonian University Museum and the importance of weaving artefacts in its collection.

Abstract: The importance of provenance research for placing objects of originally unknown origins within a wider historical context is discussed. The issue is tackled on the example of a less known group of historic objects at the Jagiellonian University Museum: several dozens fragments of textiles from Egypt dating from Late Antiquity.

Keywords: provenance, late Antique textiles Antinoopolis, Carl Schmidt, Jagiellonian University Museum.

Endnotes

- * I would like to express my gratitude to Cäcilia Fluck of the Berlin Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Joanna Sławińska and Magdalena Naruszewicz, both of MUJ, and Robert Heś of the National Museum in Wrocław for their priceless assistance in me reaching various pieces of information related to the textiles discussed in the present paper.
- ¹ See A. Głowa, J. Sławińska, 'The Collection of Late Antique Textiles from Egypt Acquired in 1893 by the Archaeological Cabinet of the Jagiellonian University in the Context of the Early Interest in "Coptic" Weaving', in: *Collecting Antiquities. From the Middle Ages to the End of Nineteenth Century*, ed. by A. Kubala, Kraków–Wrocław 2021, pp. 287-309.
- ² More on the idea of the *Kunstgewerbemuseen* see. B. Mundt, *Die deutschen Kunstgewerbemuseen im 19. Jahrhundert*, München 1974.
- ³ P. Łukaszewicz, 'Śląskie Muzeum Przemysłu Artystycznego i Starożytności / Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer', in: *Muzea sztuki w dawnym Wrocławiu / Kunstmuseen im alten Breslau*, ed. by P. Łukaszewicz, Wrocław 1998, pp. 98.
- ⁴ For example tapestries and multiple-yarn patterned textiles. See J. von Karabacek, *Die Theodor Graf'schen Funde in Aegypten. (Der Papyrusfund von El-Fajûm. Die textilen Gräberfunde)*, Wien 1883, pp. 30-35.
- ⁵ 'Schlesiens Vorzeit in Bild und Schrift. Zeitschrift des Vereins für das Museum Schlesischer Altertümer' (Breslau) 1891, vol. V.5, 66, gives information on the total number of 'Coptic' textiles standing at 63 ('63 Nummer koptischer Gewebe') purchased in 1890. In the partially preserved inventory from 1890 there are 24 entries (nos. 302–325, however, some numbers contain 2-3 textiles; in total, the group contained 27 pieces). Furthermore, 22 catalogue cards featuring numbers from 530:90 to 552:90 and one with number 57:91 have been preserved. Meanwhile, Robert Forrer's notebook preserved at the Archaeological Museum in Strasbourg, contains five sales records marked 'Mus. Breslau' and 'Breslau'; of them three transactions took place in 1890 and two in 1891; according to these data, the Wrocław Museum purchased in total 55 textiles from Forrer. MUJ has about 30 of them in its collection.
- ⁶ 'Eine Auswahl von frühmittelalterlichen Stoffen aus ägyptischen Gräbern und ein italienischer Samstoff des 16. Jahrhunderts mit Granatapfelmuster in Weiss (?) und Rot (eingetauscht gegen dubletten vom Kgl. Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin'. *Schlesiens Vorzeit in Bild und Schrift: Zeitschrift des Vereins für das Museum Schlesischer Altertümer*, 7 (1899), p. 262.
- ⁷ The *Jahrbuch des Schlesischen Museums für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* (6 (1912), p. 232) provides information on that year's purchase: *Sammlung von spätantiken und koptischen Textilfunden aus Akhmim und dem Fayum, 4 – 7 Jahrh. n. Chr., erworben aus den Sammlung Wilhelm Graf in Rodaun bei Wien*. The purchase is confirmed in the 1912 inventory book. See also K. Urbaniak-Walczak, 'Koptische Stoffe aus der Sammlung des Nationalmuseums in Warschau. Geschichte der Sammlung', in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit, 1. Materielle Kultur, Kunst und religiöses Leben. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster 20.-26. Juli 1996*, ed. by S. Emmel, M. Krause, Wiesbaden 1999, pp. 403-405.
- ⁸ In 1882, Theodor Graf dispatched to Vienna a substantial collection of textiles (over 2,000 specimens), made available to the general public that very year at the Vienna Museum of Art and Industry ('K.K. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie, today's MAK – Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst). Pioneer, next to the London South Kensington Museum (currently Victoria and Albert Museum), the Vienna Museum both amassed a collection and conducted research focusing on artistic crafts; the Museum subsequently purchased 269 textiles from Graf, which have been on display there till today. The Graf collection also provided exhibits to other museums in Europe and America. See S. Merz, 'Die Textilien von Theodor Graf', in *Textilien aus Ägypten. Teil 1. Textilien aus dem Vorbesitz von Theodor Graf, Carl Schmidt und dem Ägyptischen Museum Berlin*, ed. by C. Fluck, P. Linscheid, S. Merz, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 127, endnote 35.
- ⁹ K. Urbaniak-Walczak, op. cit., p. 403.
- ¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 405; K. Urbaniak-Walczak, I. Pannenko, *Tkaniny późnoantyczne z Egiptu ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Wybrana grupa tkanin*, Warszawa 2003, Cat. Nos.: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15, 16, 22, 23, 30.
- ¹¹ MUJ ACNOs: 1234/1 (KGM 535:90); 1234/2 (KGM 578:90); 1234/3 (KGM 304:90); 1234/4 (KGM 541:90); 1234/5 (KGM 536:90); 1234/6 (KGM 537:90); 1237/1 (KGM 549:90); 1237/2 (KGM 596:91); 1237/3 (KGM 551:90); 1237/4 (KGM 550:90); 1238/1 (KGM 540:90); 1238/2 (KGM 311:90); 1238/3 (KGM 320:90); 1238/4 (KGM 579: 90); 1238/5 (KGM 544:90); 1238/6 (KGM 305:90); 1238/7 (KGM 577:90); 1238/8 (KGM 319:90); 1239/1 (KGM 542:90); 1239/2 (KGM 57:91); 1239/3 (KGM 325:90); 1239/4 (KGM 318a:90); 1239/5 (KGM 318b:90); 1239/6 (KGM 539:90); 1239/7 (KGM 322:90); 1239/8 (KGM 543:90); 1239/9 (KGM 552:90); 1240/1 (KGM 324:90); 1240/2 (KGM 312:90); 1240/7 (KGM 530:90); 1240/8 (KGM 531:90).
- ¹² MUJ ACNOs: 1235/1; 1235/2; 1235/4; 1240/3; 1240/5; 1240/6.
- ¹³ ACNOs: 1240/9 (KGM 94a:97); 1240/10 (KGM 94b:97); 1240/11 (KGM 94c:97); 1240/12 (KGM 94d:97); 1240/13 (KGM 94e:97); 1240/4 (KGM 95:97); 1237/5 (KGM 101:97); 1237/6 (KGM 102:97); 1236 (KGM 92:97); 1235/1-4 (KGM 91:97).
- ¹⁴ See endnote 18.
- ¹⁵ This is confirmed by the analogies with the MUJ fragments which can be found in the textiles currently preserved at the Bode-Museum in Berlin. See A. Głowa, 'Eingetauscht gegen Dubletten vom Kgl. Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin' – textiles from the Carl Schmidt's collection now in the Jagiellonian University Museum in Kraków', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 60 (2018/2019 (2020)), pp. 23-32.
- ¹⁶ In order to 'animate' this forgotten world, Gayet employed a medium to discover the identity of the deceased; he also arranged mummies and tomb findings in order to tell vivid stories around them; moreover, he staged performances with models wearing costumes mimicking those found in Antinoé, etc. See N.A. Hoskins, *The Coptic Tapestry Albums and the Archaeologist of Antinoé, Albert Gayet*, Seattle-London 2004, pp. 13-14; F. Calament, *La révélation d'Antinoé par Albert Gayet. Histoire, archéologie, muséographie*, vols. 1–2, Le Caire 2005, pp. 179-185.

- ¹⁷ C. Fluck, 'Die Textilien von Carl Schmidt', in *Textilien aus Ägypten...*, p. 175, endnote 5. Schmidt and Gayet were followed in Antinoopolis excavations by John de Monins Johnson of Oxford in 1914 (see E. O'Connell, 'John de Monins Johnson's 1913/14 Egypt Exploration Fund expedition to Antinopolis (Antinoë)', in *Antinopolis*, ed. by R. Pintaudi, vol. 2, Firenze 2014, pp. 415-466), as well as by the Italian expeditions of the Istituto Papirologico G. Vitelli in Florence and from Rome's La Sapienza, who have continued their works there with some interruptions since the early 20th century up to this day. See F. Calament, 'Les fouilles d'Antinoë d'hier à aujourd'hui: une mise en perspectives', in: *Antinoë. Momies, textiles, céramiques et autres antiques*, ed. by Y. Lintz, M. Coudert, Paris 2013, pp. 25-29.
- ¹⁸ C. Fluck, *Die Textilien von Carl Schmidt...*, p. 175; eadem, 'Findspot known: treasures from excavation sites in Egypt in the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin', *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan*, 21 (2014), p. 5.
- ¹⁹ In 1926, textiles from the Kunstgewerbemuseum were transferred to the Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst, followed in 1934-1935 by mummies and the remaining late Antique objects from the Ägyptisches Museum. See, *Die Textilien von Carl Schmidt...*, p. 175.
- ²⁰ Ibidem. Schmidt also purchased items in the antiquarian market, where he bought textiles from other sites (Akhmim, Sohag, Esna). See ibidem, pp. 175-176. Textiles purchased by Schmidt, apart from Berlin, also reached Mainz. See P. Lienschied, *Die frühbyzantinischen Textilien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums*, Heidelberg 2015, pp. 9-10. However, in the present paper the focus has been kept on his own Antinoopolis excavations, since the MJJ textiles come from there.
- ²¹ Photo No. 1448 in MSB photo gallery. See C. Fluck, *Die Textilien von Carl Schmidt...*, p. 183.
- ²² For general information on the city together with further bibliography see e.g., M.T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire*, Princeton 2000, pp. 190-197.
- ²³ See F. Calament, M. Durand, *Antinoë, à la vie, à la mode. Visions d'élégance dans les solitudes. Catalogue de l'exposition au musée des Tissus de Lyon (1er octobre 2013 – 28 février 2014)*, Paris 2013.
- ²⁴ C. Fluck, G. Vogelsang-Eastwood, 'Introduction', in *Riding Costume in Egypt. Origin and Appearance*, ed. by Cäcilia Fluck, Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2004, p. 2. Such costumes are rarely found at other archaeological sites.
- ²⁵ See R. Pfister, 'La rôle de l'Iran dans les Textiles d'Antinoë', *Ars Islamica*, 13/14 (1948), 46-74; A. Geijer, 'A Silk from Antinoe and the Sasanian Textile Art. A propos a Recent Discovery', *Orientalia Suecana*, 12 (1963), 3-36; M. Martiniani-Reber, 'Témoignages textiles des relations entre Égypte et Proche-Orient (VIIe-IXe siècles)', *Antiquité Tardive*, 12 (2004), 113-119.

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