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ESSAYS

NOTES ON THE MAJOLICA OF ANTIGUA GUATEMALA

Luis Luján Muñoz

I

INTRODUCTION

We think that it is urgent to have a national and continental perspective on the characteristics and history of glazed ceramics, including, naturally, both colonial and contemporary Majolica. In the case of Guatemala, there is no doubt that pre-Columbian ceramics have overshadowed colonial ceramics, which is why there are many valuable studies published on the former. However, almost nothing exists in Guatemalan bibliography about colonial glazed ceramics.

In John M. Goggin's work, **Majolica in the New World**[1], which the researcher was unable to complete and was posthumously published, there is no study of colonial Majolica

ceramics in the Americas. One of the most important production centers on the continent is therefore ignored, which we consider a regrettable omission.[2] Moreover, we believe the nomenclature used is highly debatable, and there should be consensus among researchers of this type of ceramic to standardize criteria and adopt terminology that is more precise and in line with the historical and cultural reality.

The considerations we will present below are part of a broader study, which is practically completed, titled ***La mayólica en Antigua Guatemala.*** Based on documentary sources, numerous stratigraphic wells, archaeological excavations, studies of collections, and interviews with contemporary potters, we have reached certain conclusions that we will attempt to summarize in this brief paper.[3] Although it may seem redundant given the title, this summary will only address the Majolica of Antigua Guatemala, even though there is another major production center of the same in Guatemala since the colonial period: San Miguel Totonicapán. Consequently, we will disregard glazed ceramics of a more general nature.

1. John Goggin. Spanish Majolica in the New World. New Haven. Department of Anthropology Yale University, 1968.
2. In observations made in South America, the Antilles, Mexico, and Spain, we have noticed that the Majolica of Antigua Guatemala can be compared to the most important ones on this continent. According to the scholars Robert and Florence Lister, with whom we agree, the main production areas in the Americas are: Mexico, Guatemala, the Antilles, Panama, and the Andean region.
3. Apart from the work mentioned above, there is another titled *"Historia de la Mayólica en Guatemala,"* ***Antropología e Historia de Guatemala***, Vol. XXII (January-December, 1970). Guatemala: Instituto de Antropología e Historia, 1973.

II

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF MAYOLICA IN ANTIGUA GUATEMALA

The first concrete reference to mayolica in Guatemala dates back to 1585, when Juan Rodríguez Camacho is referred to as a "master in making white pottery," according to a statement found in a rental contract. By 1605, his wife, María de Zúñiga, is mentioned as a widow.[4]

Shortly after, Lucas Gaytán, a potter from Talavera de la Reina, is noted, along with Gaspar de Encinas, who begins appearing in records in 1607.[5] Juan Rodríguez Camacho is identified as a resident of Oaxaca. These details suggest that the first potters in Guatemala were from Talavera—although Encinas was previously in Puebla—and Oaxaca, respectively.[6]

Stylistically, Guatemalan mayolica is said to have influences from Talavera de la Reina. However, it is important to note that Talavera, in turn, influenced the styles of Puente del Arzobispo, Puebla, and Mexico in New Spain.

The 16th century marks the beginning, as expected, of white glazed pottery in Guatemala, while the 17th century represents its peak. At least 15 individuals were linked to this industry during that period, especially in the mid-century. In the following century, fewer are recorded, barely reaching a dozen; however, architectural and archaeological evidence suggests that this was also a period of significant growth until the earthquakes of 1773 and the subsequent relocation of the capital to Valle de la Ermita. These events led to a dispersal of pottery artisans to Nueva Guatemala and San Miguel Totonicapán, although some remained in Antigua Guatemala due to

4. Archivo General de Centroamérica. Leg. 1433. protocolo de Cristóbal Aceituno. In the Alcabalas tax record of that year, his wife is listed as a widow.
5. For this information, we have relied on the Alcabalas tax records previously referenced.
6. Enrique A. Cervantes, Loza blanca y azulejo de Puebla, México (s.p.i.), 1939, Tomo II, P. 197.

the high cost of building new kilns for producing majolica. After 1780, authorities allowed the continuation of pottery production in Antigua Guatemala.

What is undeniable is the decline of this type of ceramics starting in the 19th century, both as a consequence of the aforementioned factors and due to the large-scale industrial production of kaolin pottery and "transferware" made in Europe and the United States. In this century, around 35 years ago, there were still about five pottery workshops, which, due to the impact of World War II and the increased use of pewter and plastic materials, were forced to close. Currently, only one majolica pottery workshop remains, run by the Montiel family, founded at the end of the last century and now spanning four generations of craftsmanship. We believe there is a possible resurgence of Antigua Guatemala's majolica, given the current demand for these types of objects.[7]

Documentary evidence confirms the shipment of white glazed pottery from Puebla to Guatemala, especially during the 17th century, with a noticeable decrease in imports by the 18th century. Additionally, pottery from Jalisco, specifically from Tonalá near Guadalajara, was also imported. However, archaeological excavations have revealed not only ceramics from Puebla and burnished pottery from Tonalá but also Spanish pottery from Talavera de la Reina, Seville, and Catalonia. Furthermore, tiles clearly corresponding to the Sevillian style have also been discovered.[8]

7. I wish to express my gratitude to the members of the Montiel family, especially Don Francisco and his wife, as well as Don Manuel, for their extraordinary patience in answering my questions and addressing my doubts about the majolica of Antigua Guatemala over many years.
8. In the Chapel of Loreto, within the Church of San Francisco in Antigua Guatemala, we have found, in situ, fragments of the same type. However, these correspond to the ones Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán refers to as Genoese, likely because he must have known they were made by Genoese potters, although the style is definitively Sevillian.

III

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAJOLICA OF ANTIGUA GUATEMALA

It is essential to note the remarkable persistence in forms, designs, and colors of white earthenware objects since the colonial period. Among the most common items are plates, mancerinas, platters, large dishes, bowls, beaters, pitchers, pots, jugs, vases, candlesticks, inkwells, salt shakers, incense burners, cups, ornamental fountain spouts, gargoyles, tiles, sculptures, and various types of tombstones. There are also basins, flowerpots, and albarelos, though they are quite rare.

From an aesthetic evolution perspective, the majolica of Antigua Guatemala aligns with the trends of other plastic arts. It exhibits Renaissance features with some Mannerist elements. However, given the time of its flourishing, its peak corresponds fundamentally to the Baroque period, much like what occurs in Guatemala in the so-called "Major Arts" and in goldsmithing and cabinetry among the more distinctive "Minor Arts." Later, during the 19th century, it transitions into Neoclassicism.

The decorative designs are primarily vegetal, animal, and geometric. Human, mythological, or architectural figures are exceedingly rare. Commonly represented animals include deer, jaguars, pumas, various birds, armadillos, fish, and tacuazines (opossums). Emblems such as double-headed eagles and depictions of the sun, moon, or stars also appear. These motifs are usually placed in the central part of plates, with the border adorned with more or less stylized vegetal patterns. Another characteristic decoration involves wavy lines in green, orange, and black on a white background, notable for both the colors and design.

The frequently used colors are green (copper oxide), yellow or orange (antimony oxide), and white (tin and lead oxide), with black lines (iron oxide). Less commonly, brown (also iron oxide) and blue (cobalt oxide) appear. The clay, with a high iron content

(approximately 17%), was sourced from El Tejar, Chimaltenango. [9] It is worth noting that, likely due to supply issues, the white and blue colors are often faint, occasionally revealing the underlying layer.

We have attempted to classify the majolica of Antigua Guatemala based on its colors.[10]

I. Antigua Guatemala Monochrome:

1. White

II. Antigua Guatemala Bichrome:

1. Black lines over white
2. Green over white
3. Blue over white

III. Antigua Guatemala Trichrome:

1. Green and yellow over white
2. Green and black over white
3. Yellow and black over white
4. Blue and black over white

IV. Antigua Guatemala Tetracrome:

1. Yellow, green, and black over white
2. Yellow, brown, and green over white
3. Yellow, brown, and green streaks over white
4. Blue, yellow, and black over white

9. The composition of this clay, taken from a colonial sample, corresponds to: silica 48.70%; iron 16.78%; aluminum 26.24%; calcium 5.40%; and magnesium 2.71%. According to information obtained through the General Directorate of Mining and Hydrocarbons of Guatemala
10. Luis Luján Muñoz, ' 'Historia de la mayólica en Guatemala" en Antropología e Historia de Guatemala. Vol. XXII (enero-diciembre, 1970). Guatemala' Instituto de Antropología e Historia, 1973.

V. Antigua Guatemala Pentacrome:

1. Yellow, green, brown, and black over white
2. Yellow, green, blue, and black over white

It is possible that during the colonial period, as well as in the present, two types of ceramics existed: fine and coarse. The former, which is the majolica, has a white background with a higher content of tin oxide, while the latter is dark green, with a high content of lead oxide.

To conclude this section, we must say that, undoubtedly due to the influence of the Spanish, the shapes and decoration are very defined. However, it is also visible how important local wildlife animals such as jaguars, pumas, deer, armadillos, and others are in this type of pottery. It is not surprising, then, that both the glazing technique itself and the use of the wheel and kiln for achieving high temperatures are European, while indigenous forms of pottery, such as the "Olinautla arqueológico" type, coexist, without the use of a kiln or glaze, especially in that tradition.[11]

IV

THE HUMAN ELEMENT REGARDING THE MAJOLICA OF ANTIGUA GUATEMALA

Given the socioeconomic characteristics of the people who make the white pottery in Antigua, we know very little about them. They occasionally appeared in documents, more as actors or performing trivial acts. In the Parish Archives, they are included in the "Libros de Gente Ordinaria," as they were Spaniards of humble origin or mestizos of low economic status.

11. Robert Whuchope. "Protohistoric pottery Of the Guatemala Highlands" in Monographs and papers in Maya Archaeology. Cambridge, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Hrvard University. 1970.

Their artistic activity was carried out within the family, meaning they lived and worked in the same place. We can even infer that it is highly probable that there were dynasties of potters, such as the Reyes family in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the Montiel family at the end of the 19th century and into the present. Apprentices and journeymen frequently became part of the family unit. On the other hand, in Antigua Guatemala, there was no guild of potters, which has deprived us of further documentation. [12] Moreover, anonymity prevailed entirely, as we do not know of any signed pieces, and only a few are dated. It is also important to note that the "baroque" pictorial style is practically nonexistent in colonial Guatemalan art, which has further hindered our ability to gain insight. All of the above defines the scope of research, as we mentioned at the beginning, relying more on archaeological excavation, the collection of pieces that we are certain are colonial, and the information gathered from contemporary potters rather than written documents.

It is worth dedicating a few words to the production technique of Antigua's majolica, as it has preserved much of its purity to this day, making us imagine a medieval pottery workshop, and certainly one from the colonial era. The clay is prepared using mills with human traction and is patiently beaten with the feet. The foot-operated wheel is skillfully managed by the masters to produce the required pieces. Then, the pieces are placed in the oven for the first **firing** to leave them in **rough form**. Afterward, they are cleaned of impurities, glazed, and then placed back in the oven for the second **firing**, making them ready for use.

Since the clay came from Chimaltenango, the area where most of the pottery workshops were located was San Sebastián, precisely near the road that goes from Jocotenango to El Tejar, in Chimaltenango, a situation that still exists today. So, these pottery workshops were located in the northwestern sector of the city, which

12. Based on historical documentation, it is estimated that during the period of greatest flourishing of Antigua Guatemala's majolica, between six and ten workshops must have been operating at the same time, which in a way made the existence of a potters' guild unnecessary.

is not unusual, as in other populations, both European and American, industries that produce smoke were often located in leeward areas. In this particular example of Antigua, however, the location was chosen for the convenience of accessing the raw material.[13]

Regarding who used this type of glazed pottery, we can affirm that it was used by the majority of the urban population, including the indigenous people, for whom it became a kind of luxury tableware. We have found fragments of white pottery with initials in almost all excavations carried out in the convents, and according to Fuentes and Guzmán in the ***Recordación Florida*** (ca. 1690),[14] the Dominicans had their own pottery.

The area where Antigua Guatemala's majolica was used can be defined within the so-called *Corregimiento del Valle de Guatemala*, which depended on the town hall of the city of Santiago of the same name, corresponding to the current departments of Sacatepéquez, Chimaltenango, and Guatemala. In addition, we have found it in Lake Atitlán region in abundance and, to a lesser extent, in the northern and western parts of the country. Moreover, we have seen tiles from Antigua Guatemala in the cathedral of León, Nicaragua, built in the second half of the 18th century, and we believe we can affirm that the tiles in Comayagua and the Church of Los Dolores in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, are influenced by Guatemalan techniques, though made locally.[15]

According to the above, pre-Hispanic ceramic traditions were used by indigenous people for daily purposes and were intended for the *ladinos* (mestizos) in urban areas for specific uses. In contrast, the white pottery imported from Puebla, Spain, or China must have been a luxury for the inhabitants of major urban centers, especially the city of Santiago de Guatemala itself.

13. The observation that the majolica workshops should be situated downwind of the population is attributed to Dr. José M. Cruxent.
14. Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán, Recordación Florida. Tomo l. Guatemala, Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, 1932.
15. On the facade of the Church Nuestra Señora de los Dolores in Tegucigalpa, the only known examples of decorative sculpture used in architecture are found. These can be dated to the late 18th century or the early years of the 19th century.

Finally, we can mention other contemporary centers producing glazed pottery in general, whose connection with the colonial majolica of Antigua Guatemala is highly likely: Huehuetenango, Chiantla, and Totonicapán in western Guatemala; Jalapa in the east, and the current capital, which, starting in 1793, developed its pottery following the Antigua style.

V

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is important to have a more complete perspective of the issues surrounding majolica and glazed pottery on this continent, especially in the regions where Spanish colonization occurred. We believe that an appropriate evaluation of the nomenclature used by John M. Goggin is necessary, both to standardize it and to give it a more logical content in accordance with the historical and cultural reality of Hispano-America.
2. The production of majolica in Guatemala began around 1585, becoming one of the most important centers of production on the continent, comparable to Mexico, Peru, the Antilles, and Panama. The most likely influences on the majolica of Antigua Guatemala are those of Talavera de la Reina and Seville in Spain, and Puebla in New Spain, although each of these centers maintained its own characteristics.
3. The traditional colors in the ceramics of Antigua Guatemala are what we call Antigua Guatemala tetracrome: 1) yellow, green, and black on white. Stylistically, there is a significant persistence in the shapes and colors of the designs from the 16th to the 20th century, with reminiscences of the Renaissance, passing through Mannerism and Baroque, and eventually reaching Neoclassicism.
4. The majolica of Antigua Guatemala is fundamentally of Spanish origin, both in technique and design, although it incorporates elements of local fauna and probably some pre-Hispanic forms. The decorative designs are mainly of a

vegetal, animal, and geometric nature, with very few human or mythological figures, although emblems such as the double-headed eagle and representations of the sun, moon, or stars do appear. Glazed ceramics, and therefore majolica, coexist with the pre-Columbian pottery tradition, especially the so-called archaeological type. Guatemalan glazed pottery in general, and the majolica from San Miguel Totonicapán and Nueva Guatemala in particular, have a clear *Antigüeña* lineage.

5. Colonial majolica was produced by Spaniards or mestizos of low social status, primarily for the use of the urban population and as luxury dishware for indigenous people.
6. The study of majolica requires the use of historical and ethnological techniques to yield more positive results.

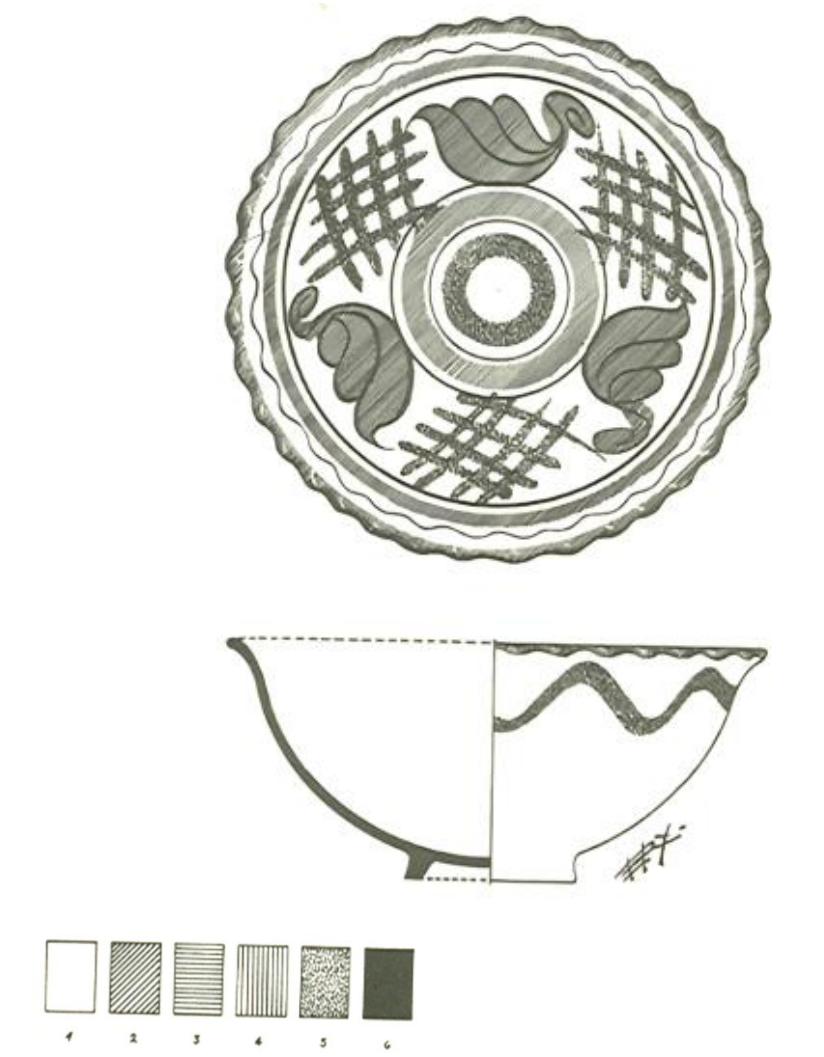

Figure 1. Bowl (15.5 cm diameter), probably 19th century. Drawings by Antonio O. García.

Color guide

1. White
2. Orange
3. Yellow
4. Blue
5. Green
6. Black

Figure 2. Vase with double-headed eagle decoration (27.5 cm tall), 18th century. Drawing by Antonio O. García.

Color guide

1. White
2. Orange
3. Yellow
4. Blue
5. Green
6. Black

Figure 3. "*Mancerina*" or plate for holding a *jícara* (20 cm diameter), 18th century. Drawing by J. Antonio Oliveros

Color guide

1. White
2. Orange
3. Yellow
4. Blue
5. Green
6. Black

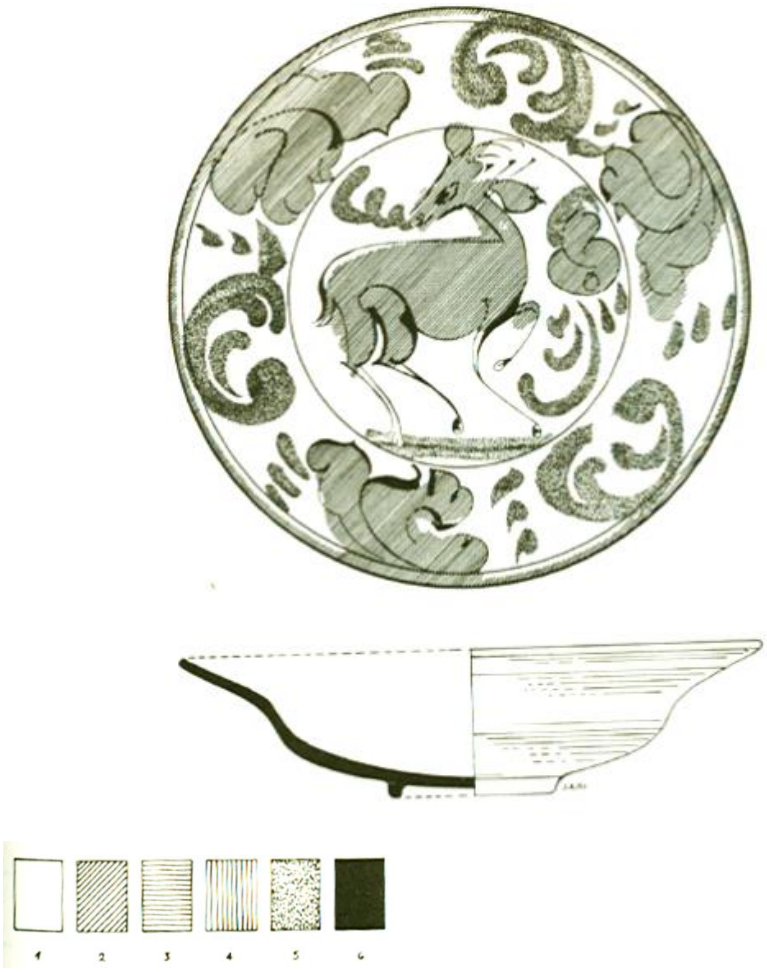

Figure 4. Plate with central decoration of a deer and vegetal motifs (23 cm diameter), 18th century. Drawing by J. Antonio Oliveros.

Color guide

1. White
2. Orange
3. Yellow
4. Blue
5. Green
6. Black

Figure 5. Don Francisco Montiel working on the pottery wheel. (Photograph by Antonio Prado).

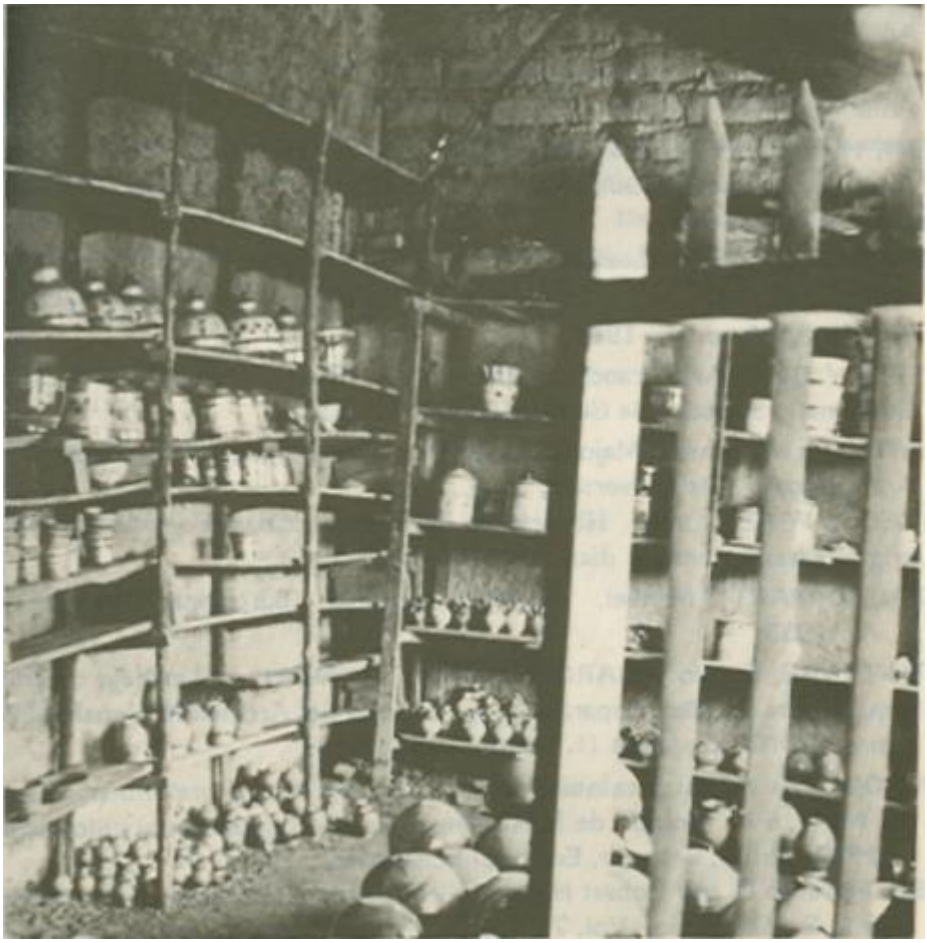

Figure 6. Majolica of Antigua Guatemala. Montiel's storage room. (Photograph by Antonio Prado).

VI

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