

# *On the question of ‘architectural copy’ in the Middle Ages*

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## ABSTRACT

The question of copying in medieval architecture only arises with the ability to complete a medieval building in the 19th century, which presupposes knowledge and mastery of the forms of past times. In the Middle Ages, the restoration of a building took place under the sign of its improvement or as a new construction in a more praiseworthy scheme, an adoption of older forms took place under the conditions of *auctoritas*, which led to the use of architectural quotations. Instead of copying, one should therefore speak of architectural appropriation or adoption. It characterizes a participatory relationship to the architectural model, as it builds on its significance and power and transfers it to the copy through formal adoption. A building located elsewhere and built at a different time will not be transferred in real terms, but rather made vivid in certain features through architecture. A building that can be physically experienced becomes an image of itself in reception, whereby the way it is shown is not external to the intention. The architectural quotation is the point of connection to the past and allows the power of authority to become visible. It is thus an essential factor of continuity.

## KEYWORDS

Architectural terms, *Auctoritas*, Copy, Quotation

## 1. *On the understanding of ‘architectural copy’*<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, the concept of ‘architectural copy’ as we know it today did not exist in the Middle Ages. The production of exact copies or deceptively realistic replicas of existing architecture is a concern of modern times, but largely foreign to the Middle Ages. Even if it is attributed to it from today’s perspective,<sup>2</sup> the process of

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<sup>1</sup> The following contribution is based on thoughts the author has developed in various essays and focuses here in context on the question of architectural copying in the Middle Ages. Cf. in particular: Schenkluhn (2014, pp. 187-195); Schenkluhn (2008 and 2012, pp. 65-91); Schenkluhn (2008, pp. 3-12). I would like to thank Karoline Zawistowska for editing the translation.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of the medieval architectural copy was introduced into art historical discourse by Richard Krautheimer; see: Krautheimer (1942, pp. 1-33).

imitation or exact reconstruction on a broad front only began after the abolition of the Ancien Regime by the French Revolution and its impact on the whole of Europe at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> For a large number of churches, monasteries, castles and manor houses, the social and political upheavals meant demolition or conversion. A prominent example of destruction was Cluny III, the largest monastic church in Europe, which served as a stone quarry and only partially survived the vandalism of the time. Restoration in the context of new or continued use required in-depth knowledge of the styles, building forms and construction methods of the past as well as their significance, which accelerated the development of the fields of art history, monument preservation and construction. Numerous large buildings, especially in France and Germany, bear witness to this, e.g. Cologne Cathedral (Fig. 1), which had to be strengthened and completed entirely in the spirit of its builders, but also as a monument to the unfinished German nation.



Fig. 1 Cologne Cathedral, coloured view, around 1900.

The ability to complete the original presupposes the ability to copy the architecture, thus demonstrating that one had a virtuoso

<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that in the 18th century, especially during the development of the landscape park, there were already 'copies' of historical buildings, especially in England, but also in Germany (Wörlitzer Park). References to 'Romanesque' and 'Gothic' can already be observed in the 16th and 17th centuries, but these do not have anything to do with a modern understanding of style (e.g. the glass hall in Heidelberg Castle).

command of the various architectural forms of expression of the preceding periods. The foundations for this, art history and monument preservation, only emerged in modern times. If this is indisputable for the later university subject, monument preservation interventions are already assumed in isolated cases in the Middle Ages (Kurmann, von Winterfeld 1977, pp. 101-159). But this does not stand up to closer scrutiny (Huse 2006, pp. 182-209). Restoration and reconstruction or preservation and adoption of older forms were set in a completely different context, i.e. in a feudal society with a Christian world view that had no historical view of the past in the sense of the 19th century. Thus, a restoration took place as a means of improving a building or constructing it in a more laudable scheme, an adoption of older forms under the conditions of *auctoritas*, which led to the use of architectural quotations. Here, then, one can only speak of achievements similar to monument preservation in terms of the result, but not in terms of the intentions.

The question of copying in the modern sense intensified considerably once more with the terrible destruction of the world wars in the 20th century. They necessitated extensive reconstruction. In the process, reconstructions of certain buildings and districts were also important for the identity and continuity of their inhabitants, for which the former city and townscapes were to be largely restored. While this was desired by local heritage associations and preservationists, it was rejected by modern architects and urban planners as a denial of the consequences of the war. They demanded a completely new beginning, mostly on modified, car-friendly city layouts. Restorations or reconstructions were to be limited to individual monuments, both secular and spiritual, or to streets that once defined the destroyed place.<sup>4</sup>

While the reconstruction of outstanding Christian buildings was approved in principle by all factions, the restoration of buildings of secular power, such as castles, palaces or the city-shaping civic town halls, market squares and old town districts, remained highly controversial in individual cases, such as the successive recovery of the old town of Frankfurt am Main since the end of the war, or the reconstruction of the Berlin Palace that has just taken place (Fig. 2). Blown up in 1950 by the SED, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, as a symbol of Prussian militarism, the building is regarded in many intellectual circles as a soulless copy, an evocation of Prussian glory and a missed opportunity for a new beginning,

<sup>4</sup> Early examples of reconstruction: St. Michael's Church in Hildesheim, the historic principal marketplace of Münster (Westphalia); on this topic compare the anthology by Düwel, Mönninger (eds.) (2011).

and ultimately a blow against modernity. A restoration of the ruins immediately after 1945 would have been celebrated as an achievement in monument preservation, but as a reconstruction after the demolition of the 'Palace of the Republic' on this site, the palace is no more than a tasteless copy and part of a dummy culture (von Buttlar et al. 2011).



Fig. 2 Berlin, Humboldtforum, view from southeast.

But how is it a copy or a dummy? A copy basically presupposes an original in a certain place, which is not the case here.<sup>5</sup> In reality, it is a reconstruction of an old place in a certain way: reconstruction of the former cubature to integrate the architectural environment, approximate reconstruction of certain views, more precise execution of artistically valuable areas such as portals and courtyard facades with fragments partly preserved from the destruction. One could therefore say a reconstruction with spolia, but not a restoration of the countless rooms and staircases with their magnificent furnishings, thus certainly not a copy of Prussian glory. Thus, architectural copying of the 19th century is clearly different from that of the 20th and the present. There, it was the ability to copy styles

<sup>5</sup> The limited pictorial and graphic sources offer no substitute for this, and the question of 'self-citation' is not touched by this.

and style periods and to restore them in detail, often isolating the monument from its surroundings (cf. Fig. 1); here, it was more the evocation of the memory of the past by taking original details into account, which are mistakenly referred to as 'quotations'.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Archetype and after-image in the Middle Ages

Copying in the Middle Ages in the sense of reproducing and duplicating in the field of architecture took place primarily in the production of moulded stones and tiles for pattern repeats of cornices, door and window surrounds or roof coverings. So-called models were used for this purpose, but these reproduction techniques say nothing about an interest in architectural copies.

The reference to an older model was characterised by a certain intention of imitation, which was not aimed at producing an architectural duplicate. It was to adopt certain characteristics in the replica, but at the same time have its own laudable scheme and not be a copy. A distance between the original and the replica had to remain visible. Instead of copy, one should therefore speak of architectural appropriation or adoption and define it in more detail. It characterises a *participatory* relationship to the architectural model, as it ties in with its significance and power and transfers this to the copy through formal adoption. As with relics, one could also speak of a *touching* relationship that brings about participation.

In medieval architecture, imitative appropriation is always about the transfer of older forms into new architectural contexts. This can take place in the sense of an *imitation*, which comes closest to the idea of a copy, in which the old dominates or covers over the new, as in the case of the successor church to the Aachen Palatine Chapel in Ottmarsheim. However, the old can also be present in the new as a *quotation*, whereby it rather contrasts with the new, as in the case of the partial takeover of the Palatine Chapel in Essen Minster. And finally, the old can remain recognisable through new forms, as in the Magdeburg cathedral choir, whose proportions of ground floor and gallery as well as the spolia columns placed against the wall refer to Aachen and thus appear like a *variation* of the old in the new.<sup>7</sup> The recognisable quotations illustrate the appreciation of the model due to their adoption, whereas the variation illuminates the model in a new light.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> More on this below in the last section.

<sup>7</sup> This conception of quotation critically developed in: Bosman (2014, pp. 11-32); Bosman (2016, pp. 43-51).

<sup>8</sup> Formulated along the lines of Tolić (1995, pp. 76-78).

### 3. Types and schemes

There are many architectures as participations in secular and spiritual powers, from the aforementioned successor buildings of the Aachen Palatine Chapel to the ambulatory of St. Denis and the nave of the Brunswick Cathedral; but also church buildings that make use of certain models as shells for significant relics, such as the Elisabeth Church in Marburg, San Francesco in Assisi, San Domenico in Bologna or the Santo in Padua (Schenkluhn 1993, pp. 301-315). Not only specific buildings, but also certain basic forms and typologies, insofar as they already existed in the Middle Ages, play a role in this. Here, the relevance of ground plans for iconography and iconology in the Middle Ages should be pointed out, the thinking of the time in figures or schemes.<sup>9</sup> They appear as early as in the writings of the early Middle Ages, for example in the depiction of churches of the Holy Land in the *Liber de locis sanctis* of Bishop Arkulf of Gaul, written around 670 (Schlosser 1896, pp. 50-59). Here, the Church of St James was built “*quasi in similitudinem crucis*”, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre an “*ecclesia rotundae formulae*” and the Basilica of Constantine a “*quadrangulata fabricatae structura*”. As abstractions from the precise shape of the church, the round, cross-shaped and rectangular figures are signs of a symbolic-theological interpretation. Conversely, it is difficult to prove a deliberate choice of form from this general symbolism. Churches dedicated to the Holy Cross can be cruciform, but do not have to be. Churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary are often round, but not always. Buildings of the Order of the Temple are usually round, as they refer to the church on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, but here too there are numerous exceptions.<sup>10</sup>

Informative for this topic is the Lodge book of Villard de Honnecourt from the second quarter of the 13th century, whose collection of sketches contains an interesting line drawing of the choir and transept of a church (Fig. 3). It is annotated with the words “*Behold a square church, which was intended for a building by the Cistercian Order*” (Hahnloser 1972, pp. 65-67, plate 28b).<sup>11</sup> In fact, this is a characteristic scheme for church buildings of the Order

<sup>9</sup> Julius von Schlosser noted this tendency in his essay on artistic tradition in the late Middle Ages (transl.): “*where new enterprises were underway, there we frequently find, especially in the earlier periods, that particular process of alignment with certain related schema, an alignment either with their form or their content*”; Schlosser (1902, p. 284).

<sup>10</sup> Krautheimer’s reflections on the transfer of the circular form of mausoleums to baptisteries in dependence on a Pauline word from Romans 6:4 have their limit precisely in the exceptions; Krautheimer (1942, pp. 1-33).

<sup>11</sup> The sentence reads in full: “*Vesci une glize desquarie ki fu esgardee a faire en l’ordene d(e) Cistiaus*”.



of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, which, as far as we know today, was actually invented in this form by the Cistercian Order (Schenkluhn 2011, pp. 283-295). Its abstract reproduction proves a knowledge of the significance of this figure, and its general assignment to the Cistercian Order makes it the earliest evidence of thinking in terms of architectural types.

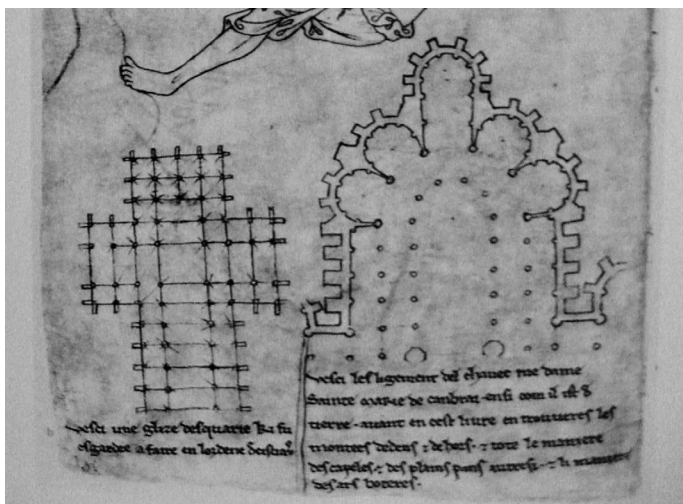


Fig. 3 Villard de Honnecourt, ground plan of a Cistercian church.

The majority of written records report on new churches and monasteries without referring to a specific basic figure and its symbolic content, usually with the brief statement that they were built according to a better, more beautiful or more laudable scheme. These statements are of great importance for the question of copies of medieval architecture, because the almost stereotypical use of the term ‘scheme’ refers to a horizon of understanding that played a major role in the Middle Ages: rhetoric (Spangenberg 1986, pp. 68-92). Schemata were figures formed according to rules of art, or in other words, they were forms of expression that deviated from everyday language. With the help of these figures, one shaped an apt, ornamental speech.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Quintilianus (1975, p. 257), says: “Figura sit arte aliqua novata forma dicendi”. Translated: “It is to be considered a figure a form of expression that renews expression in conscious art”.

The remarks about the better, more beautiful and more glorious schemes of the churches and monasteries are also set against this background. They indicate that it is not just a matter of simple renovations, but of structural designs that are more fitting than those of the preceding buildings. Schemes mean well-considered changes from the usual or simple appearance and are not template-like formulas at that time. As a version more appropriate to the building, they also build a bridge to the concept of ‘decorum’ of the Roman master builder Vitruvius. In contrast to pure ‘ornamentum’, according to Vitruvius it means “*the faultless appearance of a building formed with taste from recognised parts*”(Vitruv 1987, p. 39), literally: “*compositi cum auctoritate*”, i.e. newly formed with the authority of the established. In this context, Villard de Honnecourt’s scheme of an ‘angular church’ is also a particular figure appropriate to the Cistercian Order (Schenkluhn 1996, pp. 9-22).

#### 4. References to architectural models

Even if the new scheme surpasses the old one in terms of function, beauty and significance, one rarely learns what is special and appropriate about the new one. Therefore, references that give comparisons or a model for the new building are very valuable. Thus, the Bishop of Bremen, Adalbert (1045-1072), built his cathedral “*ad exemplum Beneventanae domus*” (Lehmann-Brockhaus 1938, No. 232) after his predecessor had begun it ‘ad instar’, i.e. in the manner of Cologne Cathedral. As for Prague, we learn that the Bohemian king Vratislav I (†1092) laid the foundation stone for a church “*ad similitudinem ecclesiae Romanae s. Petri*” (Lehmann-Brockhaus 1938, No. 1147) on Vyšehrad, i.e. in resemblance to Old Saint Peter’s in Rome.

*In modum, ad instar, ad similitudinem* and *ad exemplum* are the most frequent phrases referring to models. Here too, however, it is often only possible to surmise in what specific ways they were emulated, since the buildings mentioned either no longer exist or have been extensively rebuilt. When, as in the case of a church founded in Hereford by Bishop Rotbert (1079-1095), the intention to imitate the Palatine Chapel in Aachen is explicitly mentioned, literally: “*scemate Aquensem basilicam pro modo imitatus suo*” (Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955, No. 2047), it is not clear from this message what the common scheme and the intention of the ‘imitatio’ consisted of. This brings us to the question of the relationship between written tradition and visible form.



An example of this relationship is provided by the oldest successor to the Palatine Chapel in Aachen, the small bishop's chapel in Germigny-des-Prés (Fig. 4). A contemporary source states that it was commissioned by "*Theodulfus igitur episcopus [...] basilicam miri operis, instar videlicet eius quae Aquis est constituta, aedificavit in villa quae dicitur Germiniacus.*"<sup>13</sup> But the chapel is a small four-column building with a central dome, indebted to Visigoth or Asturian models. The builder could not have been mistaken about the model, since Theodulf of Orleans, as a permanent guest at Charlemagne's court, knew the Aachen Palatine Chapel very well. But then what does the phrase 'in the manner of Aachen' mean, if the common symbolic schemes such as the general ground and elevation form do not match? Germigny-de-Prés is not a superficial copy, so the level of comparison is different.



Fig. 4 Germigny-de-Prés, interior view.

If one looks at the church, which has been thoroughly renovated today, one can sense the former expenditure on stucco and mosaic decoration of this building in the remains of the furnishings. In

<sup>13</sup> Schlosser (1892, No. 682). Translated: "*Bishop Theodulf [...] has built a church of amazing manufacture in the place called Germanicus precisely in the manner of the one built in Aachen*".

this sense, Germigny-de-Prés probably does not refer to the architectural form of its model, but presumably to the extraordinary execution of the imperial model, which was done in the manner of the Aachen Palatine Chapel. Germigny-des-Prés is therefore an important example of the imitation of an effort that neither imitates nor quotes its model architecturally, but rivals it in artistry, also corresponding to the rank of its builder.

### *5. Tradition and innovation*

Imitation can therefore be a matter of references to architecture but also to furnishings, which can only be clarified through a detailed analysis of the buildings that relate to each other. In fact, it is never a question of an exact adoption, i.e. not a copy, but of a recognisable tradition of a predefined form; its virtuoso transformation in a new context, as it were. The adaptation, the visualisation of the 'absent', must be visible and recognisable, also with regard to the intended historical context. In this respect, syntheses occur between new and old forms, between innovation and reception, as already explained above in the consideration of archetype and after-image.

A perfect synthesis is offered by the cathedral of Reims (Fig. 5), in which important innovations of Gothic times were introduced, such as the variability of the yoke depths, the transfer of the hierarchy of the wall services to the triforium division and finally the logical application of the logic of the vault-wall service system to the window area, which led to the invention of the tracery window (Helten 2006). As an innovation in the cathedral of Reims, it is connected with a traditional ambulatory concept, whose basic form as well as some elevation features such as the plinth system and the connection between the triforium and the upper arcade zone are clearly influenced by its predecessor, the monastery church of St. Remi in Reims, and its archiepiscopal rival, the cathedral of Sens (Kunst, Schenkluhn 1994; Schenkluhn 2013, pp. 16-34). Receptive and innovative forms do not collide harshly in Reims, but rather merge into a unified design, which in its high quality and inventiveness stands for a new stage in the development of the Gothic style.

Such examples can also be found in the Lodge book of Villard de Honnecourt, where a church is named in plan as a form found or invented in 'disputation' by Villard and a certain Peter of Corbie (Fig. 6) (Hahnloser 1972, pp. 69-72, plate 29a). It is an unusual design, showing a choir with a double ambulatory and alternating apse chapel with round and rectangular chapel spaces. The inner



Fig. 5 Reims, cathedral, choir.

choir closes in a 7/14 shape, rare but not unusual for the Cistercian order. But on closer inspection it becomes clear that the figure was obtained from a combination of known plans, such as the choir of the Cistercian church of Vaucelles depicted in the Lodge book itself and certain features of the choir plan of Chartres Cathedral.

The product of invention or the ‘trouver’, as it is called in the Old French text,<sup>14</sup> is therefore based on known models which, imaginatively combined, are brought into a new form.

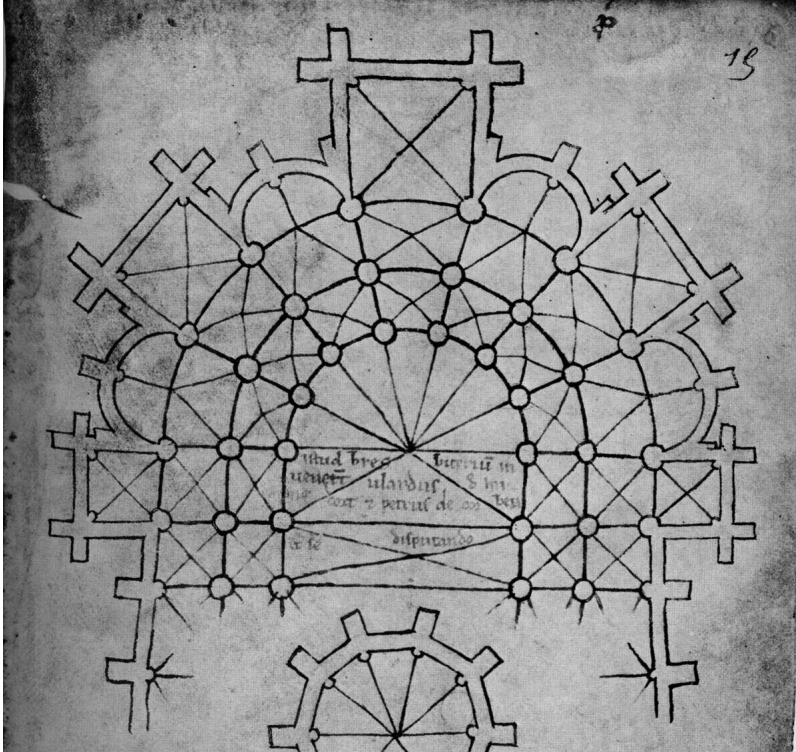


Fig. 6 Villard de Honnecourt, ground plan of a church.

The example from the Lodge book shows that it is about specific buildings, the architectural quotation aiming at a concreteness that is determined in the design process, i.e. in the specific way of adoption, how the pre-shaped form is transformed into the new context and vice versa. Only this can lead to an actual grasp of its historical significance. One can also say that the question is: what

<sup>14</sup> A second comment in Old French at the end of the page reads: “Deseure est une glize a double charole k(e) Vilars de Hnecort trova (et) Pieres de Corbie”, Hahnloser (1972, p. 72). Translated: “Above it is a church with double ambulatory found (designed) by Villard of Honnecourt and Peter of Corbie”.

is received and how? The how cannot be foreseen in the analysis. For this reason alone, 'architectural quotation' cannot be equated with the term 'architectural copy', since the latter turns the model into a pattern and thus brings the problem of the accuracy of the adoption to the fore.

## 6. Outlook

When describing the connections between a church building and a specific model, one finds a variety of expressions in the medieval sources, but the word *copia* is not mentioned. Richard Krautheimer, who introduced the concept of 'architectural copy' into the discourse on art history, cannot name any source that uses *copy* in connection with architecture (Krautheimer 1942, pp. 1-33). A 'similitudo', to produce a likeness, does not mean a strict or necessarily architectural imitation either; it can also be an unusual decoration. Faithful copies of the original were not sought in the Middle Ages, even if one was by no means incapable of exact copying or exact adoption of form. The relationship between them was that of likeness to model, after-image to archetype, but not copy to original. Today's concept of copy lacks the moment of the undivided participation of the copy in the original image, which was so essential in the Middle Ages, and which was able to establish the context in a way that encompassed both form and content.

Thus, in the Middle Ages, the architectural quotation plays a more important role than the architectural copy. A building located elsewhere and built at a different time was not transferred in real terms, but rather made vivid in certain features through architecture. A building that can be physically experienced tends to become an image of itself in reception, whereby the way it is shown is not external or subsequent to the intention. The architectural quotation is the point of connection to the past and allows the power of authority to become visible. It is thus an essential factor of continuity (Schenkluhn 2008, pp. 11-12).

In today's world, 'quoting' is often seen only as a feature of postmodern architecture and the practice of reconstruction, which is heavily criticised in discussions about the late reconstruction of buildings destroyed in the war or afterwards. There is a certain irony, then, in the fact that the discovery of the significance of architectural quotation for the Middle Ages occurred at the very moment when, in postmodernism, the adoption of traditional building forms, first and foremost the column, was understood as 'quoting'



(Schenkluhn 2008, p. 3). The citation as a scientific category and analytical tool is contrasted in the modern building industry with the use of the arbitrary citation. Architectural quotation has, however, proven itself in art history, also as a methodical further development to the notion of 'architectural copy', which once denoted the change from the history of style to the history of meaning (Nille 2013, pp. 84-88; Nille 2016).

Meanwhile there have also been attempts to apply the architectural quotation to other epochs in the history of architecture or to transfer it, methodically modified, to other art forms (Brandl, Ranft, Waschbüsch 2014). Certainly, it is only one way to understand medieval architecture in its time and society, and the quotation approach is integrated into other models of architectural analysis (Nille 2013, Schenkluhn 2014, pp. 192-193), a building block to explore above all the causes of form adoption due to certain local traditions (Bosman 2004, Horn 2015, Bosman 2016), secular or clerical claims to power, the expression of builders and architects, and more.

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