

NIE KAŻDY WEŹMIE PO BEKWÁRKU LUTNIÉY

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It must have been back in 2009 that I had a nice conversation with Eric de Haard about a master's thesis produced by one of my students. Her work is a contrastive analysis of phraseological comparisons in Polish, Spanish and Dutch. Many of these phrases, these sayings, are almost proverbs and during our conversation Eric surprised me with his evidently considerable knowledge on the subject. When the opportunity arose to write this squib in honour of him, I simply had to think of a saying that is very specifically Polish and that, at the same time, reminds me of my very first time in Poland. During that week in Kraków back in 1981 my hosts taught me the saying *Nie bierz po Bekwarku lutni* "do not pick up the lute after Bekwarek [has played]." I was told that it is appropriate in situations when someone has shown their mastery at something and this needs to be acknowledged as a hard act to follow. My informants could not tell me much more at the time, but realised that this Bekwarek must have been a very good lutanist. In my modest contribution to this festschrift, I would like to bring together a few bits of information surrounding this proverb: the way it is rendered in dictionaries, the story of the lute-player and some other matters which are not all available in modern sources and which I think is a rather fitting way to honour Eric de Haard, especially as there is some poetry involved.

Origin of the proverb

None of the most recent major Polish general dictionaries actually mentions our proverb even though some of them have, apart from the expected entry *lutnia* 'lute', an entry for the word *bekwarek* (e.g. Doroszewski, Szymczak). This latter lexeme turns out to refer to the Thrush Nightingale (*Luscinia luscinia*). Szymczak (1972: 136) mentions that this word is derived "od nazwiska" ['from a/the sur-

name’] but does not mention whose. Doroszewski only added the entry *bekwarek* in the supplement to his large dictionary – the word appears to be not very common and so maybe this was an afterthought? – and he suggests the following derivation: “Bekfark, Bekwar(e)k – lutnista i kompozytor pochodzenia węgierskiego (XVI w.) przebywający m. in. na dworze Zygmunta Augusta” [‘Bekfark, Bekwar(e)k – lutanist and composer of Hungarian descent (16th century), who stayed at the court of Sigismund Augustus’] (1969: 41-42). In Polish, then, this most musical of birds was called after a lute-player! But on the way of discovering the origin of our proverb, this fact, however interesting and charming, does not actually help us along much.

We need to turn to what I think is one of the best collections of proverbs in existence, compiled by Krzyżanowski (1969) and his team. In volume one of this dictionary we find our saying under the entry BEKWARK, rendered as follows: *Nie każdy weźmie po Bekwarku lutniej* (1969: 73-74). The form *lutniej* might strike us as surprising: it is the older form of the genitive of soft feminine nouns, such as the word *lutnia* (nowadays the genitive is *lutni*), fossilised as sometimes happens in proverbs. It shows the great age of our phrase, which is also shown by Krzyżanowski’s explanation “Walenty Greff Bakfark (1507-1576) sławny lutnista Zygmunta Augusta zwany w Polsce potocznie Bekwarkiem” [‘Walenty Greff Bakfark (1507-1576) famous lutanist of [Polish king] Sigismund Augustus, in Poland commonly called Bekwark’]. The age of our proverb is made quite concrete by the list of attestations in Polish literary works, dictionaries and collections of proverbs throughout Polish history, such as is provided wherever possible by Krzyżanowski. In an attempt to find out as much as I could from these sources I have tried to consult as many as possible and I shall list my findings in a largely reversed chronological order, ultimately going back a little further than Krzyżanowski.¹

Karłowicz & al. (1912) is the chronologically last general dictionary to contain the phrase and Krzyżanowski (1969: 74) was very clever indeed to have spotted it as it is not listed under the either of the more obvious lemma’s *lutnia* or *bekwark*, but as an example under the word *przymówka* ‘saying, expression’: “O sławnym lutniście Bekfarku jest ona *przymówka*: nie bierz po Bekfarku lutni” [‘about the famous lutanist Bekfark there is this saying: do not pick up the lute after Bekfark

[has played]’](1912: 326). Karłowicz & al. (as well as Krzyżanowski) mention the source of this citation: Falibogowski’s *Dyskurs o marnotrawstwie i zbytku [korony polskiéy]* 1626 (orig. 1603). I have not been able to consult this source for further information. It does crop up though, in Darowski, who provides the proverb in a for his time very anachronistic spelling “Nie każdy weźmie po Bekwarku lutniey”. He also informs us that Falibogowski coined the phrase in its altered form “nie bierz po bekwarku lutniey” [‘do not take up the lute after Bakfark [has played]’] as a “przymówka” in his document (1874: 6). Falibogowski is also quoted by Linde in his – more obvious – entry for *lutnia* and we learn from him that he found it on page 4 of *Dyskurs o ...* (1855: 683). Linde also has an entry for *Bekwarek* that is too interesting not to quote: “przewisko sławnego muzyka Polskiego, der Name eines berühmten Polnischen Tonkünstlers. *Prov*[verbium] Nie każdy weźmie po Bekwarku lutnią [sic]” [‘the name of a famous Polish musician ...’] (1854: 71). Linde mentions his source here: “Salomon. Rysińskiego, przypowieści Polskie 1629 4”, which turns out to be the fourth (Kraków) imprinting of *Proverbiorum polonicorum ...* by Solomon Rysiński, a source which unfortunately I have also not been able to consult. However, the 1618 edition of this book, mentioned also by Krzyżanowski, was available and it contains the proverb, sadly without any further information, but in increasingly credible old spelling: “Nie káždy weźmie po Bekwárku lutniey” (Rysiński 1618: f2^r). And so, we find our saying in an early source, already explicitly qualified as a proverb.

Actually, it is not difficult to trace the ultimate origin of the saying, especially not with the help of Krzyżanowski (1969: 73), Kopaliński (1991: 86), to whom I will return later, and Kucalá (1994: 96). It is the last line, the *pointe*, of the following epigram from the collection of *fraszka*’s in three books from 1584 by Jan Kochanowski (1530 – 22 August 1584):²

O Góspodyníéy

PRofszono iednéy wielkiémi próżbami/
 Nie powiem o co/ zgádniecie to fámi.
 A iż státeczna była białagłowá/
 Nie wdawála się z gościem w długie fłowa.
 Ale mu z mężem do láźniéy kazála/
 Aby mu swoię myśl rozumiéc dála.

Wnidą do łąźniéy: á gofpodarz miły
 Chodźi/ by w ráiu/ nie zákrywfzy żyły.
 A flusznie: bo miał bindafz ták doftały/
 Ze by był niewlazł w żadné fámurały.
 Gość pogładáiąc dobrze żyw/ a ono
 Bárzo nie rowno pány podźielono./
 Nie mył fię długo/ i iechał tym chutniéy/
 Nie każdy weźmie po Bekwárku lutniéy.³

(The mistress of the house

A lady was asked once, yeah, pestered no less,
 I won't tell you what for, as I'm sure you will guess.
 Our ma'am was prim though, and did not discuss
 The thing with her guest, thus avoiding a fuss.
 By way of an answer, she ordered her spouse,
 To escort their guest, to the local bathhouse.
 They enter the bathhouse, 'pon which our host,
 Walks round as in Eden, uncovered for the most.
 And justly he does so, for the size of his dart,
 Means no pants'd contain, the whole of his part.
 The guest got an eye full, painf'ly aware,
 That the way things shared out, is really unfair.
 His wash did not last long, he left undelayed:
 Not all pick the lute up, after Bakfark has played.)

This poem is the 55th in the first book (*Księga I*) of *Fraszka's* and it would seem, then, that Kochanowski is the author of the phrase, and that is certainly how the information we gathered from Krzyżanowski might be read.

However, there is a further source, not mentioned by Krzyżanowski, which rather unequivocally confirms Kochanowski's authorship of the phrase that so quickly after its conception became proverbial. It is a rather unlikely contemporary source: the very first grammar book of Polish by Stojęński, which states in the section explaining adverbials (!): "*Po Bákwarku quod eleganter formauit doctiŝ. Kochanouius*" (1568: K6^v = Olesch 1980: 156). It is of course very striking indeed that Stojęński's publication precedes that of Kochanowski by some 16 years, 17 if we take into account that Stojęński dates his foreword to 1567! If the attribution was not so clear we might still have doubted that the phrase really originated from the pen of Kochanowski and was already in use as a proverb when he wrote his

epigram. Stojeński must have taken it from an earlier source than the 1584 edition, perhaps even a publication of which I am not aware.

A legendary lute-player

In an effort to find out more about our lute-player, I looked him up in Kopalíński and found a short biography – which I shall leave here as I use another source for my biographical section below – as well as some information about “Bekwark i dzwon ‘Zygmunt’” [‘Bekwark and the bell “Sigismund”’] (1991: 86). The “Królewski Dzwon Zygmunt” [‘the Royal Sigismund Bell’] weighs in at 13 tonnes and is the largest bell in Poland. It was cast for King Sigismund I (born 1467, reign 1506-1548) in 1520 by Hans Behem of Nuremberg from looted gun barrels. It hangs in the tower of the Cathedral on Wawel hill in Kraków, where it was put on 13 July 1521, when it was also rung for the first time. The most important ceremonial bell of Poland, it is rung on important festive occasions and holidays and is considered a national symbol of Poland. The story goes that our Bekwark threw a string of his lute into the bronze for this bell as it was molten in the crucible so as to improve the sound of the bell. It is not unlikely that for this reason Jan Matejko (1838-1893) depicted him on his painting *Zawieszenie dzwonu Zygmunta* [‘The Hanging of the bell Sigismund’] in 1874. Kopalíński mentions in his entry that this must be an anachronism as Bekwark cannot have been older than 13 years of age at the time and came to Poland only much later. Nowadays, as it has become apparent that Bekwark was in fact probably not even born yet in 1520, Kopalíński’s remark holds true even more. On which note, let’s turn to some more concrete facts about Bekwark’s life.

Bakfark Bálint *alias* Walenty Bekwar(e)k *alias* Valentin(i) Greff Bacfark ...

The first version of the name in the title is the Hungarian name of our main protagonist. I do not think it ever came down to us in that way in any historical source but it is used in important Hungarian publications by Gombosi (1935) and by Homolya & Benkő (1976) in the edition of Bakfark’s *Opera omnia*. The variation in his name – the sources contain several more than I listed in the title of this section – might be taken as an illustration of the elusiveness of our hero and a

good indication for this is also the entry for his name in the Grove Music Online by Király: “His biography, formerly founded on inadequate documentation and misconstruction of available facts, has been badly distorted; more recently discovered evidence and reinterpretation of received data allow a far more accurate story to be given.” I shall therefore base my following biographical outline on Kiraly and reach for other sources only to add some matters that might be of literary interest.

Király’s article seems quite complete and I refer anybody who wishes to know more of the available details to it. Although his epitaph in the San Lorenzo of Padua points to a birthdate of around 1507, it may be deduced from other documents that Bálint was born in Brassó (also: Kronstadt or Braşov) in Transylvania (nowadays part of Romania) somewhere between 1526 and 1530. He was a member of the Saxon (German) colony there. His father and some other members of his family were lutanists. His musical talents led him to the court of Hungarian king, János I Szapolyai (1526 – 1540) already when he was very young and he received a good education there. At some time after the demise of János, Bálint looked for employment at the Polish court of king Zygmunt II August and may have been aided by the Polish widow of the Hungarian king, Izabela Jagiellonka (aka Izabela Jagiełło and in Hungary as Jagelló Izabella or Izabella királyné ‘Queen Isabella’), the sister of Zygmunt II August. Bekwarek succeeded and is mentioned in the documents of the Polish court as *fistulator* ‘musician’ from the 15th of June 1549 onwards. Apparently, he was much loved. On 7 September 1550 he married in Kraków with Katarzyna Narbuttówna, a widow from Wilno (nowadays: *Vilnius* capital of Lithuania). Bekwarek must have travelled extensively in the kings retinue and also on his own and we encounter him at courts from Lithuania to Italy, always making sure he gets acquainted with important people, such as Albrecht of Brandenburg, the duke of Prussia and the Fugger family, but also with Philipp Melanchthon. He played at the French court and published his first collection of works (four excellent but technically very demanding fantasia’s (freely composed pieces) and several intabulations (arrangements for the lute) of Italian and French/Flemish vocal pieces) in Lyon with the famous publisher Jacques Moderne in 1553. The title page (Bakfark 1553: a *iii*) of this book sports the only likeness of Bacfark that I encountered from the time of the lutanist himself.



All in all, by this time he had gathered fame, love (in public life that is, for according to some accounts his marriage was not a happy one) and wealth, and he was also ennobled by János Zsigmond from the Hungarian royal family. To top it all he was given an endearing Polish nickname: *Węgrzynek* 'little Hungarian'. In 1665 he publishes his second collection of pieces for the lute, in Kraków, and dedicates it to the Polish king Zygmunt II August. It contains three fantasia's and intabulations of vocal works by Clemens non Papa, Gombert, Arcadelt and Josquin des Prez and he signs it "Valentini Greffi Bakfarcii" (Bakfark 1565: a *iii*). The additional name Greff probably represents esteemed in-laws from Transylvania, but I shall leave that matter for what it is. This publication is interesting for people with a literary interest as it contains some poetry related to Bakfarc, and his coat of arms, which latter is depicted on folio *aiiiv* and I copy it here with the explanation of the motto.

INSIGNIA VALENTINI
 BAKFARCI PANNONII, ARTIS MUSI-
 CÆ PERITISSIMI.



SYMBOLVM EIVSDEM.

*Cuncta uirtuti statione cedunt,
 Quæ capit terræ spaciosus orbis,
 Sola palmam sirt, hominesq; cælum
 Tollit in altum.*

It is a not altogether untypical for books printed in the 16th century to have poems and other texts by sometimes famous people in praise of the author etc. The Cracow lute book by Bekfarc has such a text on the coat of arms of Bakfarc (folio a *iii^v*) by a certain Andreas Tricesius, who must be Andrzej Trzeciecki ‘the Younger’ (1525/1530-1584), a known poet (in Polish and Latin) who, amongst other things, also wrote *Threnodia in funere [...] Joannis Cochranovii* in 1585 on the death of Jan Kochanowski. He was a familiar figure at the court of king Sigismund II August and became secretary of king Henry III “Valois” and must also have known our lutanist (cf. Kotarski). His text (in a diplomatic rendition such as with al the poetic

texts in this paper) on the arms of Bakfarc in Latin is as follows:

DE INSIGNIBVS EIVSDEM,
 CARMEN *ANDREÆ TRICESII*
EQVITIS POLONI.
 HÆc Aquila excellam designat ut ardva mentem
 BAKFARCI, cuius nobile Stemma regit :
 Sic etiam Capreis sua sunt mysteria nigris,
 Desuper auratum quas Diadema tegit.
 Sunt illæ siquidem, gelido quas traxit ab Hæmo
 Calliopes cantu filius ille Chelis.
 Ast huic successeit BAKFARCUS, & inde vocari
 Orpheus Pannoniæ diuitis ille potest,
 Attrahit hic etiam quia cantu fæxa ferasque
 Et ponto natum, fluminibusque genus.
 Has infigne feras, & pisces contulit illi
 Regnatur magnæ nobilis Vngariæ.
 Ille lupi natus Trancini è sanguine cuius
 Ornatum gemmis hic Diadema uides.
 Adijcit Aureoli quoque pomi insigne : quòd illo
 Nomine Pannoniæ ditia Regna uocant
 Nofcitur hinc vates qua fit de gente profectus
 At palma excellens indicat ingenium:
 Muficus ingenio quia nulli hic cedit, ut arbor
 Ponderibus nullis cedere palma solet.
 Illa uirens femper, præfigni laude uirentem
 In fera famam posteritate notat.
 Viuitur ingenio siquidem post funera : mortis
 Iuris in ingenium nil habet atra manus.

There is a further poem (on folio a *iii^v*) which Gombosi (1935: 96) also attributes to Trzeciecki.

AD EVNDEM.
 BAKFARCE Ifmarius quem non superauerit Orpheus,
 Matre licet genitus Mufa fit, arte lyræ.
 Ille nec Amphion Thebarum conditor, aut qui
 Delphini tergo per mare uectus erat.
 Si mea uota dij uellent præstare secundi,
 Quæ sæpè ardenti pectore fundit amor,

Immortale tuum caput effret, & æthera primùm
 Tunc peteres mundi machina quando ruet.
 Sed quia fatorum lex est immota, nec ulli
 Parcere uel fummo mors uiolenta folet,
 Viue diu, & Pylj superato Nestoris annos,
 Detque tuæ uitæ mollia fata Deus.

The poem which follows is attributed to Bakfarc (“der Herausgeber”) by Gombosi (1935: 96), and so belongs to the collection of poetic works related to our lutanist:

AD SODALES MVSICOS.
 SI prima hæc uobis nostræ fœtura placebit
 Artis Apolloneæ dedita turba lyræ,
 Plura breui dabimus maiori condita cura,
 Castalio haud dubiè grata futura choro.
 Quid latuiffe iuuat ? LACHICI sub nomine REGIS
 Proferat è tenebris nostra camœna caput.⁴

Almost as soon as his book had appeared though, Bekfarc took employment with emperor Maximilian II. This, or perhaps something else – we simply don’t know – might have earned him the wrath of the Polish king and it could well be that the lutanist’s house was plundered in an act of revenge. Bakfarc remarried with Austrian Julia Taxear. He was accused of treason but quickly released and then went to Padua in December 1569. He left his family there, when he was employed by János Zsigmond Szapolyai of Transylvania. After the latter’s death, Valentin took up residence in Padua with his family. The plague of 1576 wiped out many of Padua’s citizens, amongst whom Bakfarc – he died on 22 August 1576 – and his family. He was buried in the San Lorenzo on 23 August. Gombosi (1935: 87) mentions that that church was demolished in 1810 but he manages to give the reconstruction (“Autopsie”) of his epitaph from another source:

D. O. M. A.
 Nobili Viro Valentino Greuio alias Bakfarc e Transilvania Saxonum
 Germanorum Colonia oriundo, quem fidibus novo plane et inuisitato artificio
 canentem audiens ætas nostra, ut alterum Orphea admirata obstipuit.

Amphion Orpheus, et Arion psallere docti
 Credentur merito te genuisse Greui

Aut illos positus docili testudine quondam
Effinxit genii via Minerva tui.
Quid rear in te uno plus quam genialis Arion
Orpheus Amphion, nempe videndus erat.

Obiit Anno Domini MDLXXVI. Idibus Augusti.
Vixit Annos LXIX. Natio Germanica unanime et
Testamenti executores *posuerunt*.
(Gombosi 1935: 87)

With his epitaph ends my somewhat literary survey of Bakfark's life. There is more though.

A few more snippets

A surprising amount of biographies and biographical notes on the life of our Hungarian friend are listed by Király. One is lacking though: *Bekwarek, lutnia i polityka* by Dr. Adolf Chybiński (1918). Doctor Chybiński is, as are we now, mostly interested in Walenty Bekwarek's Polish connection. From his account I would like to add a few interesting details. Chybiński actually connects Bekwarek up with the proverb (but not with the *fraszka*, which I presume was a little too lewd for the readers of the very respectable *Przegląd Muzyczny* at the beginning of the 20th century), although the wording of his version slightly deviates from those we have seen so far: "Nikt po Bekwarku nie obejmie lutni" (1918: 1). The differences *nikt* 'no one' rather than *nie każdy* 'not everyone', and *obejmie* 'grasp' rather than *weźmie* 'take [up]' are not deviant enough to urge me to provide a second translation although I cannot help but get the impression that the proverb had gained somewhat in assertiveness. Chybiński also mentions that Poles often think Bekwarek is Polish – and as we have seen above this seems to hold true at least for Linde – in spite of his nickname *Węgrzynek*.

The most interesting snippet of information we get from Chybiński (1918: 2), I think, is however, that Jan Kochanowski wrote a *fraszka* entirely about our little Hungarian. It is the 63rd in his second book and it could not be more explicit about the qualities of our hero. It runs thus:

O Bekwárku

BY lutnia mówić vmiála/
Ták by nam wgłos powiedziála:
Wzyscy infzy w dudy graycie
Mnie Bekwárkowi niechaycie.

(About Bakfark

Were it so, that the lute could speak,
She would tell us loud and clear:
All of you, go blow some pipes,
And leave me to Bakfark, you hear.)

His fame reached far beyond Poland and in fact also beyond his lifetime. Not only the proverb we have been looking at is testimony of that, because, when in 1607 the French poet César de Nostradame writes his 17 page ‘Vers funèbres’ for the master lutanist Charles du Verdier, he cannot leave out our hero. Haraszti (1929: 171) first noted this passage and he explains that Du Verdier will, in the other world, enjoy eternal springtime with the “concert” of the best lutanists ever. These latter – and there are quite a few – are then listed one by one. On page 13 we find the following passage:

[...]
Tu verras Edinton *et* ces fonneurs antiques,
Dont encor l’vniuers honore les cantiques,
Francisque de Milan, *et* Bagfar Polonois,
Qui font mille concerts enuironés de Roys.
[...]

In this passage there are three lute-players: Charles Edinthon, lutanist of the French king Henry II, Francesco da Milano, who lived almost a century before and who was known as “Il Divino” and our Bakfark, erroneously, but perhaps traditionally, called a Pole.

As far as I am aware all poetic texts related to Bakfark have now been brought together.⁵ Summing up, it may have become apparent that the sheer fame of this obviously brilliant musician inspired the equally if not more famous Jan Kochanowski to perpetuate the lutanist’s name in poetry already during the latter’s lifetime or thereabouts, which then became proverbial.

This is where my contribution must end and I say once more to Eric de Haard:
Nie każdy weźmie po Bekwarku lutniej.

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Notes

1 Three sources mentioned by Krzyżanowski (1969: 73-74) I have not consulted: the manuscript by Niezabitowski from 1886 (it was not available near me), the *Księga przysłów* [...] by Samuel Adelberg from 1889-1894 (which was anyway the basis for Krzyżanowski (1969)) and the slightly later collection by Stanisław Brzozowski, *Przysłowie polskie* from 1896).

2 The word *fraszka* is an interesting one in its own right. In Poland it seems to be synonymous with *epigramat* 'epigram' even though not all *fraszka*'s seem to fall into the definition of *epigram*, but that is a discussion I shall leave to others. In Polish it also has the more general meaning of a 'trifle'. It seems to have its origin in Italian *frasca* 'broken off branch with leaves' which also has the metaphorical meaning of 'trifle'. It has cognates in other Slavic languages and is related to German *Fratze* and Dutch *frats* with much the same meaning (Bańkowski 2000: 386).

3 Here are a few notes on the older Polish in this text: *ślátieczna* 'proper'; *białagłowa* 'woman'; *chodźi by w ráiu* 'walks as in Paradise' = 'naked'; *żyły* is the genitive case form of *żyła* 'vein', here used for 'penis'; *bindafz* I have not found in any etymological dictionary and Kucala (1994: vol. I, 111) only mentions its use in the meaning 'penis' in this very poem but I rather think it may go back to German *Bindaxt* 'type of ax' such as we find mentioned for *Bindas* in Linde (1854: 110); *fámurawy* (< lat. *femoralia*) 'pants, drawers'; *chutniéy* (nowadays: *chętniej*) 'willingly'.

4 In the Cracow lute book there is a further very small poem under the coat of arms of king Sigismund II August (Bakfark 1565: a^r), which, judging from the initials that accompany it, is rightly attributed to Andrzej Trzeciński as well by Gombosi (1935: 93). I give it here in full even though there is no direct bearing on Bakfark other than that it is in his book.

Armiger aduerfos Jouis ifte ut proterit hostes,
 Subiectos placido sic regit imperio.
 A.T.

5 In Gombosi (1935: 88) there is a suggestion that further poetry about Bakfark might have been written by Górniczki [sic] (could be: Łukasz Ogończyk Górnicki (1527-1603)). Darowski (1874: 6) mentions Melcher Pudłowski as an author of poetry on the lute-player. I have not been able to trace any such works.

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Bakfark. 1565: VALENTINI GREFFI BAKFARCI PANNONII, HARMONIARVM MUSICARVM IN VSMV TESTVDINIS FACTARVM, TOMVS PRIMVS ... CRACOVLAÉ, Impensis Authoris LAZARUS ANDREÆ excudit. Anno a virgineo partu, M·D·LVX· Menfe Octobri. Reprint: Király, Peter (ed.). *Valentini Bakfark: Das Lautenbuch von Krakau 1565*. N.p. [Lübeck]: TREE-Edition, Albert Reyerman.

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