The Ottoman Manuscripts and The Projects of Digitizing The Manuscripts in Turkey

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Abstract

Manuscripts are written memories lighting the scientific development of the period in which they were created. They are also works of art having unique examples of calligraphy, miniature, marbling and bookbinding arts. In recent years, various projects have been realized with the purpose of cataloguing and digitizing of manuscripts in some information centers of Turkey. These projects have developed librarianship of manuscripts in an appreciable way. Important steps have been taken in cataloguing, digitizing, preservation and upkeep. However, some problems stemming from services, which were produced in projects, and the structural situation of the manuscript librarianship, have occurred. In the study, listing the characteristics of the classical Ottoman manuscripts, general information on manuscripts projects, which have been realized in Turkey, are given. The study concludes with the suggestions on cataloguing and digitizing projects due to the manuscript projects and the problems that occur.

Keywords: Ottoman Manuscript, Manuscript Librarianship, Digitizing Project for Manuscript, Manuscript Cataloging, Manuscript Illumination

Introduction

Turkey, one of the rare country which has rich cultural heritage from Ottoman Empire and among this inheritance Ottoman manuscripts have great importance and cultural value for his country. Manuscripts are authentic resources that reflect not only scientific accumulation of their periods, but also with ornements give informations about artistic understanding of their times. Because of this, Ottoman manuscripts are common valuable resources that have to be shared all over the world.

In Turkey, these manuscripts were stored in many information centers among which there is lack of communication and coordination and until two decades ago, they were not preserved in adequate conditions and not serviced efficiently. Today, there have been many projects

about manuscripts in order to catalog and make digitalization them by various institutions for two decades. Some of these projects are already completed and others still continue. In order to make this paper more instructive, before discussing these executed projects, some information about Ottoman handwritings is given.

Ottoman Manuscripts and Its Aesthetic Features

Fondness of sultans for books, libraries and reading provided the emergence of an atmosphere leading to developing manuscripts in the palace and its surroundings. Workshops of illumination, miniature and bookbinding were founded in the palace, and outstanding native and foreign artists worked in these workshops. Different workshops were allocated for foreign artists to prevent Turkish art from being affected (Cunbur, 1969:134).

There are many types of bookbinding, which are made in different periods of the Empire, and preserved in libraries and museums until today, such as ivory carved, mosaic ornamented, embossed ornamented and gold veneered. There are also examples of ornamentation with valuable stones such as ruby, emerald, pearl and diamonds. These kinds of manuscripts were usually prepared for the outstanding and rich people of the period (Çığ, 1953:16). It is known that especially the manuscripts presented to the sultans, religious manuscripts and divans were intensely ornamented. The ornamentation elements are more beautiful in the zahriye and serlevha pages of these manuscripts (Türk, 2007). Moreover, using miniature inside the manuscripts and using marbled paper on the cover is widespread.

It is known that the arts applied on the inner sides and on the bindings of the manuscripts consist of various types such as illumination, calligraphy, marbling, miniature, katı'[1], sedefkârlık[2], metal embroidery, writing work, revzen[3], textile and weaving. While manuscript ornamentation was applied only on bookbinding in the early period of the Empire in Ottomans, in later periods it started to be applied on both bookbinding and also on the first and last sections of the work. For this reason, it is necessary to evaluate the manuscript ornamentation in two groups as ornamentation applied on bookbinding and ornamentation applied on sheets of manuscript.

Classical Ottoman manuscript volumes consist of four main parts. These are *the upper and lower covers, the spine of the book, the bookflap (sertab) and the fore-edge flap (mikleb)*. The upper and lower covers contain the pages of book. The spine of the book is the outer cover of the tailband where the sheets are bonded or the deep part of the manuscript. The sertab is the part covering the opened part of the manuscript between the cover and the fore-edge flap. The mikleb is the part, which is placed under the cover when the manuscript is closed, and keeps manuscript completely.

The parts, on which the ornamentations are the densest, are covers and mikleb. In the center of the upper and lower covers, there are sunburst design and *salbeks (pendant)* on the edges of sunburst. Salbeks are similar motifs to sunburst and they have a complementary appearance. While şemses had round shapes in the Ottoman Empire as in the Anatolian Seljuks[4] until the 16th century, after that they were usually oval (Çığ, 1953:9). The lines enclosing the outer

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[1]   The type of art which is made with cardboard, wooden or leather carving.
[2]   The technique of inlaying mother-of-pearl on a hard material.
[3]   Ornamentation technique with designs by placing colorful or colorless glass pieces in plaster mold.
[4]   Turkish state which dominated in Anatolia between 1077-1318 before the Ottoman Empire.

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borders of covers are called *zencirek*. The motifs applied in the inner corners of zencireks are called *köşebend (cornerpiece)*.

The Ottoman bookbindings are usually classified into six groups as *leather, çârkûşe, cloth, marbled, murassa and lacquered* according to the type of materials and ornamentation techniques.

The material type, which is preferred most in bookbinding, is leather. Respectively, sheep leather known as meşin, goat leather known as sahtıyan, gazelle leather known as rak and cow leather known as köselen were used mostly (Binark, 1945:7). Çârkûşe bookbinding is the binding type which is covered by velvet, designed and embroidered clothes and enclosed by leather in triangular köşebent shape. Cloth bookbinding is made by covering linen, silk or velvet on cardboards.

The marbling art, whose history dates back to the 16th century, has an important place in the Ottoman Bookbinding art. The edges of marbled binding covers are usually covered with leather in order to prevent them from demolition. In the Ottoman manuscripts, marbling was mostly used in the inner cover as well as book protection pockets and boxes.

It is known murassa bindings in which woods or cardboards are covered with gold and silver plaques. Lake is another type of binding on which lacquer finish that is mix of silver, gold, and pearl powders is added after ornamenting these covers with dyes and crushed gold.
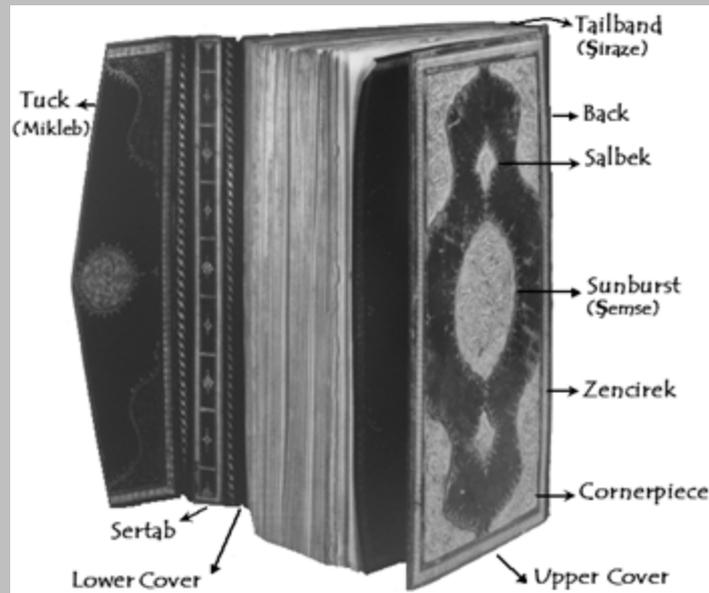
1   Parts of the Ottoman Classical Manuscript Bookbinding

The arts applied on bookbinding in the Ottoman show differences according to various factors like the types and owners of materials and art trends. For example, the books and documents prepared for sultans were generally ornamented with special decorations. In manuscripts, bookbinding ornamentation was the important thing, and side ornamentation of the interior was a secondary consideration. Bookbinding ornamentations differentiate according to the type of the material such as leather, cloth, wood and metal.

In manuscripts, ornamentations applied in inner sides are divided into a few groups. Ornamentations were usually applied on *zahriye pages, serlevha and hatime pages*. In addition to them, *decoration of*

sheet edges and *section roses* showing transition to another theme are other ornamentation elements. Moreover, on some religious works, especially on the Holy Koran, ornamentation elements known as *sure başı (beginning of sura) or fasıl başı (beginning of chapter) and durak (caesura)* are used (Aksu, 1999:132; Bayraktar, 1970:323).

It is the part forming the front side of the manuscript's first sheet and it is shown as 1a in the library catalogues. However, this condition may not be true for all manuscripts. Sometimes zahriye can appear even on the inner side of the manuscripts. In zahriye, there is identity some information of the manuscript and manuscript's publisher.


2 El-Câmi'u's-Sahîh's Zahriye

3 Tefsîru İbn-i Abbâs' Serlevha

In manuscripts, ornamentation with wide table especially in rectangular or triangular shape on the page where the text begins is called serlevha. On the serlevha of the Ottoman manuscript, there is usually besmele[5] or the name of the book.

It is the last page where the author writes prayers, the names of calligrapher and illuminator and the date of writing of the manuscript. In some manuscripts, book name and publication date also appear. This information on the hatime page is called ketebe record (Demiriz, 2000). In hatime, the last lines are usually finished in a triangular form.

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[5] According to Islam, the besmele which means "in the name of God, the all Compassionate, the all Merciful" is the sentence which has to be say before starting to do anything.

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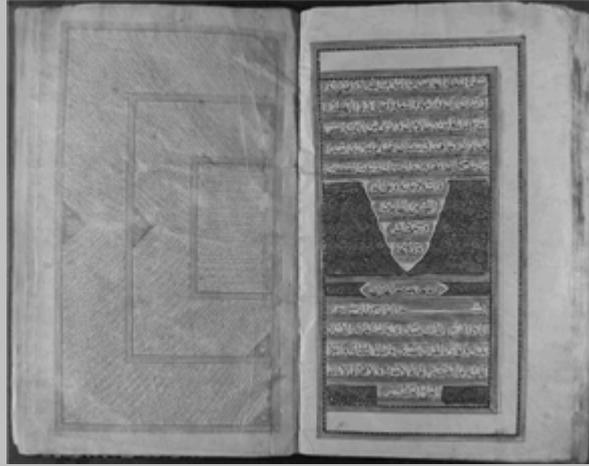
4 Minhâcu's-Sâdıkîn's Hatime

The Projects of Digitizing The Manuscripts in Turkey

In addition to being a treasure of information and therefore worth being researched, the Ottoman manuscripts, most of which are in old Turkish, Arabic and Persian, have also carried the most beautiful examples of traditional handicrafts such as calligraphy, illumination, marbling, bookbinding and miniature to today. The Ottoman manuscripts have been used for centuries and they have carried the great accumulation of the past to today and will carry them to the future. It is a very important responsibility to preserve and put these precious resources into service of the science world. For this reason, these resources need to be digitilized in parallel to the developing technology, in order to be accessed easily and to be preserved from destruction

Since the importance of these manuscripts are realized, various projects on determining, cataloguing, digitizing and putting the manuscripts on the web have been planned, realized and/or accelerated by some institutions in Turkey. The project, which has been carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the attached libraries, is the most comprehensive and the most important one among the projects mentioned. The digitizing project of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is the continuation of some earlier works. The Project of Collected Catalogue of Manuscripts of Turkey (TÜYATOK), which has been carried by the Presidency of National Library since 1978, constitutes the basis of the current project. In 1987, another project was started with the purpose of preparing a manuscript catalogue in the National Library. The number of metadata in these two catalogues with 32 volumes is 25.653. After a while, 25.653 metadata belonging to TÜYATOK catalogue and Manuscript Catalogue of the National Library were combined with nearly 60.000 manuscript index cards. This new catalogue, including 85.653 manuscript metadata, is now available in CD format (Milli, 2008).

These registers were put into the service of the users in a website[6] named Manuscripts of Turkey with the cooperation of the Presidency of the National Library and General Directorate of Libraries and Publications. Today on this web site, there are 198.444 catalogues of the manuscripts which were created in the Ottoman geography and preserved in the libraries of the Ministry of Culture and in some foreign libraries. Moreover, as a result of

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[6] The name of the mentioned website is www.yazmalar.org.

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digitizing projects, whole texts of 73.794 manuscripts can be seen on this website (Türkiye, 2008).

The Library of Faculty of Letters, Ankara University is the library having the fourth largest manuscripts collection after the National Library, İstanbul University Library and Süleymaniye Library. There are nearly 35.000 manuscripts in 15.039 volumes in the library. A project called "Cataloging and Digitizing the Manuscripts" has been carried out since 1998. The purpose of the project is to prepare the catalogue and the digital images of the important ones and put them into the service on the web (Ankara, 2006:II). The process of preparing the catalogues, which was the first step of the project, was completed and the works on digitizing and putting them on the web are continuing. In addition to this some manuscripts of which the process was completed have been serviced on the web.

Another university having a manuscript project running is Atatürk University. There are nearly 2.300 manuscripts in the Precious Collection of Seyfettin Özege at the Central Library. Cataloguing and digitizing haven't been completed there since the important part of the Collection of Seyfettin Özege is in Arabic and there is no expert in the library. With the digitizing project, which has started in 2006, the digital copies of works have been prepared. However, the studies have been proceeding quite slow due to the lack of qualified personnel. For this reason, cataloguing of works hasn't begun yet; only the studies on preparing the digital copies can be done.

Except the projects done in the libraries of the universities which are the libraries of the connected to the Ministry of Culture, there are also projects, which has been done with the support of some foundations to digitize the manuscripts in the governmental libraries. For example, a project on digitizing nearly 55.000 precious works in Istanbul University was started with the support of Teknosa (an electronic retail chain, www.teknosa.com) in 2007. The continuing project called "Works Resisting the Time" is planned to be completed in 2010 (İstanbul, 2008).

Another example is the project of digitizing Ali Emiri Collection in the Public Library. The project of digitizing 6.998 manuscripts most of which in Arabic, has been supported since 2005 by Foundation of Suna İnan Kıraç (Tanrısever, 2008; Millet, 2008).

Similar Project has been carried on Süleymaniye Library in İstanbul. İbn-i Sina Collection of Süleymaniye Library is accepted as a common documentary inheritance in World Memory Program by UNESCO in 2003. İbn-i Sina Collection consisting of some works dated back to the 11th century in different sciences such as philosophy, logic, medicine and astronomy, is a precious collection worth of being researched and scrutinized because of unique miniature, calligraphy, illumination and bookbinding characteristics of its works (Memory, 2008). Digitizing of 73.000 manuscripts including İbn-i Sina Collection was started with the support of Evyap Company, but the Project hasn't been completed yet (Güneş, 2007).

The total number of manuscripts preserved only in the libraries in Turkey is 300.000. This number is estimated as about 600.000 with the manuscripts preserved in archives, museums, mosques, foundations and by the persons. With the projects, only half of these works were bibliographically controlled and put on the web. In some information centers, there are still some manuscripts which are put into service with card and book catalogues. There is no library other than the libraries of Ministry Of Culture and Tourism, which completed digitizing studies and put the manuscripts on the web yet.

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An appreciable progress can be seen in Turkish manuscript librarianship especially in the last ten years. Half of the total manuscript catalogues preserved in different information centers can be accessed on the web. The full texts of 73.794 works can be also reached on the web. When the projects in progress are completed, it will be possible for the researchers to reach the catalogue records and images of manuscripts on the web.

The Problems Observed in the Digitizing Projects

Considering all the studies which have been carried out untill today, it is seen that important part of the activities on cataloguing and digitizing of the Ottoman manuscripts and documents were carried out independently. This situation caused some problems in digitizing projects of manuscripts in Turkey. It is possible to divide them into two groups as administrative and technical problems.

One of the administrative problems is that each public institution makes and run independent projects from each other. For example, it is known that although both of them are connected to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, The National Library and The Süleymaniye Library started two different projects. Unfortunately there are similar problems in the universities and other institutions. In addition to this problem, expert personnel and budget deficiencies are the other administrative problems. Moreover, lack of a national standard which can be benefited in cataloguing and digitizing of manuscripts is another administrative problem.

These problems caused many difficulties in almost every project. For example, there are not physical description elements of manuscripts in important part of catalogue records. Except the catalogues prepared by Ankara University Library, the National Library and General Directorate of Publications, there is no data about artistic characteristics of manuscripts in the catalogues in Turkey. For this reason, it is impossible for a researcher, who is researching on the artistic characteristics of manuscripts, to reach a consistent result.

Giving place to ornamentation elements details in catalogues gives opportunity to that work to be preserved with its all elements safely. For example, some manuscripts are ornamented with many miniatures and the miniatures are made by miniature artisan named nakkaş except not by the writers or the copiers of manuscripts. There are some examples where the miniatures are more valuable than the work due to their theme and the designer painter who made them. For this reason, all characteristics of the miniatures should also be recorded in the catalogue in order to preserve the work as a whole and prevent the pages with miniatures from losing. The pages ornamented with calligraphy, marbling and illumination should also be recorded. In The Catalogue of Manuscripts of Turkey Database, there is no information about the artistic characteristics of important part of the works. For example, the unique ornamentations on ten papers of the resource called *"er-Risâletü'l-Nevrûziye"*[7] in Istanbul Public Library, do not take part in catalogue records. Although there are good ornamented enclosing lines on its zahriye and serlevha and various human and animal miniatures on 21 papers of the work, called *"Ikdül-Cüman Tercümesi"*[8] in Süleymaniye Library, these are not included in the catalogue records. Similarly, brown leather bookbinding with gold gilded şemse and salbek on red ground and gold gilded serlevha of *"Risâlat en-Niâbat"*, which is recorded in Konya

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[7] The catalogue number of the work written by İbn Sînâ, Ebu Ali Hüseyin b. Hasan b. Ali (370-428 H.) is 34 Fe 1213/5.

[8] Place number of the work written by Bedreddin Mahmud b. Ahmed b. Musa el-Hanedî el-Ayni is 34 Sü-Lala 318.

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Karatay Yusufağa Library, are not recorded in the catalogue. Unfortunately there are similar problems in many parts of the manuscript catalogues.

The second important problem observed in manuscript projects, is lack of terminological unity. This problem, which is mostly seen in the names of the works and writers in catalogues, can also be seen in physical description fields. There are also differences between the names of the works and the writers even in the manuscript catalogues of the libraries connected to the same ministry. For example, *"Abd el Kâdir el-Geylanî"* in the Catalogue of Manuscripts of Turkey Database is seen as both *"Abdülkadir Geylani"* and also as *"Şeyh Abdülkadir Geylani"* in Kütahya Vahidpaşa Province Public Library. In addition, the name of a manuscript belonging to Birgivi is written in two different types as *"Vesilet al Ahmediyye ve al Zeriat al Sermediyye fi Şerh-I Tarikat al Muhammediyye"* and *"Vesilet ül Ahmediyye ve al Zeriat fi Şerh Tarikat al Muhammediyye"*. Also in the collected catalogue Birgivi[9] is recorded in eleven different types and el-Konevi[10] is recorded in seven different types (Türkiye, 2008).

While the information about watermark is recorded in some catalogues, they are not written in most of them. In many parts of the catalogues, there are also data about the dimensions and the numbers of lines. All these inconsistencies and deficiencies indicate that, the manuscript projects should be carried in a central structure. In addition to this, the projects should follow a national standard policy and this standart should be applied to all public institutions.

Conclusion

Ottoman manuscripts are valuable resources reflecting scientific, cultural and artistic characteristics of the period and the geography the Empire dominated. They are unique works on which bookbinding, illumination, marbling, miniature and calligraphy arts can be seen together on a single work. These works are not only a value of Turkish people but also a common value of the world and they are the resources that should be shared. For this reason, manuscripts should be put into service in a way that researchers can reach the detailed information on the web in the shortest time.

In Turkey, several projects have been carried on cataloguing and digitizing of manuscripts especially for the last ten years. Cataloguing and digitizing processes of some of them are completed and put into service. As mentioned before, the cataloguing process of nearly half of the manuscripts preserved in different information centers in Turkey was completed and the majority of the images was put on the web and this provides the works being reached by all the science world. Despite this, any study on the manuscripts preserved by various institutions, foundations and persons has not started yet.

In these projects, some administrative and technical problems have occurred. The main reason for these problems is, not to develop a national policy for managing these resources Turkey wide. Moreover, since different institutions preserve the manuscripts, the applications for upkeeping, preserving and putting them into service are all different. While in some institutions the cataloguing and the digitizing processes were completed, in some institutions

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[9] "Muhammed b. Pir Ali el Birgivi", "Birgivi, Mehmed b. Pir Ali" (this name should have been written as Mehmed b. Pir Ali but lack of comma changed family tree completely), "İmam Birgivi Mehmed", "Mehmed b. Pir Ali Birgivi", "Birgivi Mehmed Efendi", "Mehmed al Birgivi", "Birgivi Muhammed b. Pir Ali, 981", "el-Birgivi, Muhyiddin Muhammed b. Pir Ali el-Hanefi,981", "Mehmed Efendi b. Pir Ali Birgivi" ve "Birgivi, Muhammad".

[10] "Ali es-Sadri el-Konevi", "Ali es-Sadri Konevi", "Ali Sadi el-Konevi,1216/1801", "Ali Sadri el-Konevi", "Ali Sadri Konevi", "Ali Sadri Konevi" and "el-Konevi, Ali es-Sadri".

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even the sufficient preservation conditions cannot be formed. Some institutions have to receive support for funding from various foundations because of the budget problems. Similarly, some of the projects are carried by the personel in the institutions themselves, where as the institutions, which do not have enough resources and qualified personnel, try to overcome this difficulty with part-time personnel. Decentralized management, lack of a national policy and lack of the common guide lines, in which the standard principles and applications are designed, are the basis reasons for all the administrative and the mentioned bibliographical recording problems.

In the light of these developments in Turkey, the suggestions which should be taken into consideration in manuscript librarianship and in digitizing projects are as follows;

• The manuscripts are important resources giving richness to the information centers in which they are. The manuscripts should be put into service in a qualified way and preserved under the appropriate conditions. For this reason, developing a national policy for these works, each one being a historical memory and a work of art, is a obligation. The mentioned policy should follow a national strategy that should be applied in cataloguing, preserving, upkeeping and digitizing the manuscripts preserved in various information centers Turkey wide. The national policy should put forward the rules that make the manuscripts be collected in central libraries and be kept following the same procedures. Collecting the resources in one center, will ensure a qualified cataloguing, a safe preservation, a proper digitizing and a good restoration following the original characteristics.

• Each manuscript is a historical artifact having valuable information on its theme. In addition to this, they are important works of art on most of which original examples of calligraphy, illumination, miniature, marbling and bookbinding arts are applied. The catalogues should have information about every kind of artistic characteristics of the manuscripts. Similarly, the watermark information should be written in the catalogue records. The watermark is an important qualifying element exposing the feature of the paper and determining the period to which the manuscript, which does not have the date records, belongs. For this reason, descriptive element having every kind of physical characteristics of the manuscript should be written in the manuscript catalogues.

• In order to put scientific and artistic values of manuscripts, it is necessary to have needed information that one can make any scientific and artistic evaluation about the resources on the catalogues. For this reason, the librarians and the information management professionals need to have knowledge and skills in evaluating, cataloguing, digitizing, preserving and caring the manuscripts. Consequently, the education programs in the librarianship and in the information science schools, should be revised in this direction. The education programs should include at least courses on repairing and restoring little damages on the manuscripts.

• A national authority file and a dictionary of manuscripts terms should be created in order to ensure descriptive elements stay in a specific standard in catalogue records. These are mostly needed for removing different descriptions used for the names of writers and works. Different descriptions are also used for physical terms. For example, a bookbinding cover, which is described as "katı art" (carving art) in a catalogue, is described with the term "carving" in another catalogue. Similarly, lacquered bookbinding cover can be seen as varnished cover in another catalogue. The file and the dictionary should be commonly used in every information center and should continue to develop with the feedbacks.

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