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FUR TRADE SYMBOLS:
A GLIMPSE FROM THE GLADSTONE GRAVES

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ABSTRACT

The relocation of two pre-reservation historic Clackamas Indian graves at Gladstone, Oregon, provided an opportunity to study Clackamas mortuary practices and associated burial assemblages in situ. This paper describes the 17th, 18th, and 19th century items in the burial assemblages, including buttons, beads, and Asian coins. It further discusses their significance in understanding the symbolic use of exotic "wealth" items by the Clackamas during the fur trade period.

INTRODUCTION

The late 18th and early 19th century trade goods of the Lower Columbia River region are relatively well known from trading company inventories and archaeological assemblages. Relatively unknown, however, are the manners of utilization of the trade goods by the Chinookan peoples of the area. The relocation of a Clackamas Chinook burial at Gladstone, Oregon, provided an opportunity to study trade ornaments associated with a pre-1856 burial in situ. This paper will describe this burial (Hogan I) and a previously disturbed nearby burial (Hogan II) with reference to the Clackamas utilization of trade goods as material symbols of a pre-reservation wealth complex.

THE HOGAN I BURIAL

A burial was discovered in an archaeological test pit on private property in the City of Gladstone during the fall of 1979 (Figures 1 and 2.) An archaeological assessment of the city was conducted by Mt. Hood Community College at that time and several test pit sites were selected in areas

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of the city believed to have significant archaeological resources. The burial was probably a part of the cemetery described in May 1835 by John Kirk Townsend when visiting an Indian village at the mouth of the Clackamas River.

We saw here a large Indian cemetery. The bodies had been buried under the ground, and each tomb had a board at its head, upon which was rudely painted some strange uncouth figure. The pans, kettles, clothing, etc. of the deceased were all suspended upon sticks, driven into the ground near the head board. (1978:211)

Hunts Public Survey Map of 1852 clearly shows "Indian Graves" at this locality (Figure 3.) Burials in this cemetery have been disturbed and vandalized from at least 1894 to the present. Due to this history of desecration of Indian graves and the shallow depth of the grave discovered in 1979, it was decided that the remains faced an imminent threat from gardening and vandalism and qualified for removal and reburial according to Oregon State statutes.

The Clackamas cemetery at Gladstone (35C133) is associated ethnographically and archaeologically with the Clackamas village of the Headman Pohpoh (35CL32) described in accounts from 1835 to reservation removal in 1856 (Woodward 1974.) The 19th century Clackamas Chinook practice of shallow ground inhumation with numerous grave items has been recorded for an upriver Clackamas site (35CL3) (Woodward 1974, 1977), however, prior to the discovery in 1979 a complete Clackamas burial had never been systematically studied. The following is a report on this burial.

The remains consisted of very fragmentary and decayed traces of bone between 65 and 75 cm. from the present surface. Only the skull, clavicles, neck vertebrae, humeri, left scapula, and ulna and radius from the left arm remained in good condition. The body had been placed tightly in a box-like container of Western Red Cedar (James Langdon: personal communication.)

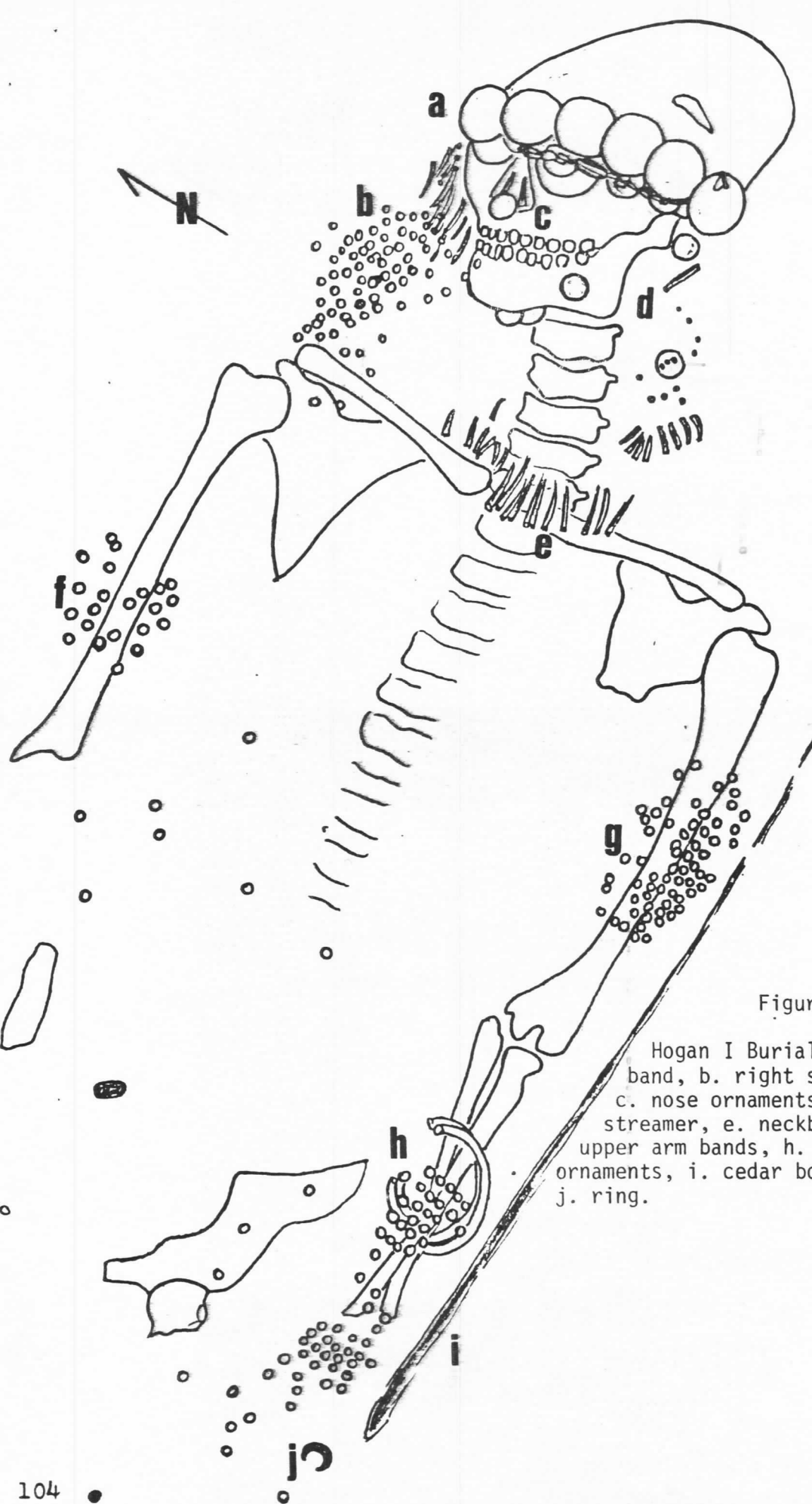


Figure 4

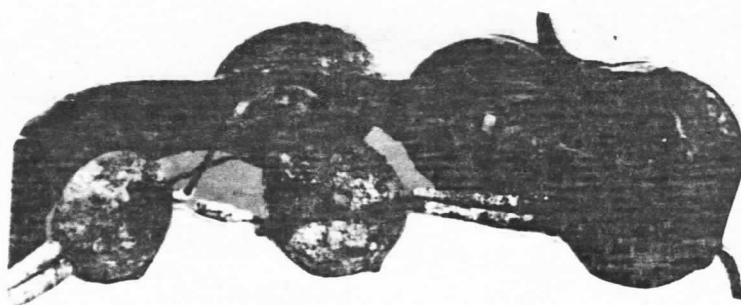
Hogan I Burial: a. head-band, b. right streamer, c. nose ornaments, d. left streamer, e. neckband, f & g. upper arm bands, h. lower arm ornaments, i. cedar box fragments, j. ring.

The body had been interred face up, aligned toward the east with the arms at its sides and the knees drawn up (Figure 4.) Thistle seeds (Cirsium arvense) preserved in the head hair may be evidence that burial occurred in late summer or early fall and indicates a surprisingly early introduction of this European plant in the region.

The skull has the characteristics of a male about 30 years old and exhibits very substantial frontal-occipital deformation; a trait associated with Chinookan concepts of beauty and social rank. The post cranial remains are very small for a male and show the effects of polio or similar pathology (Mark Feldsman: personal communication.) The probable sequence of mortuary events was preserved on the skull where the oxidation of copper alloy ornaments protected examples of fabric and intact ornament groups around the head (Figure 5a and b.) The upper face was first covered with bright red hematite ocher, over this was placed a complex ornament band of buttons and Chinese coins, with dentalium beads, glass beads, and button streamers at the sides of the face. A dentalia tusk was inserted up each nostril of the nose which also probably had a perforated septum through which was strung a button and two clamshell disc beads. Two clavicles of a small mammal, probably marmot or squirrel, were discovered on each side of the skull in the ear area. A fine hand-loomed, 1/1 plain cotton cloth (Figure 6a) was then placed over the face and the body wrapped in at least two heavy, brushed sheep wool blankets. One was a brown and black diagonal 2/2 plain twilled weave (Figure 6b and c); another was a brown 1/1 plain weave (Figure 6d.) Two brass arm bands were found on the left wrist and bracelet-like strings of blue glass beads had been placed on both upper arms and on the left wrist, and a silver ring was on a finger of the left hand. The specimens that could be confidently attributed to



a



b

Figure 5

A. Skull of Hogan I Burial with intact headband; B. View of interior of headband showing method of construction.

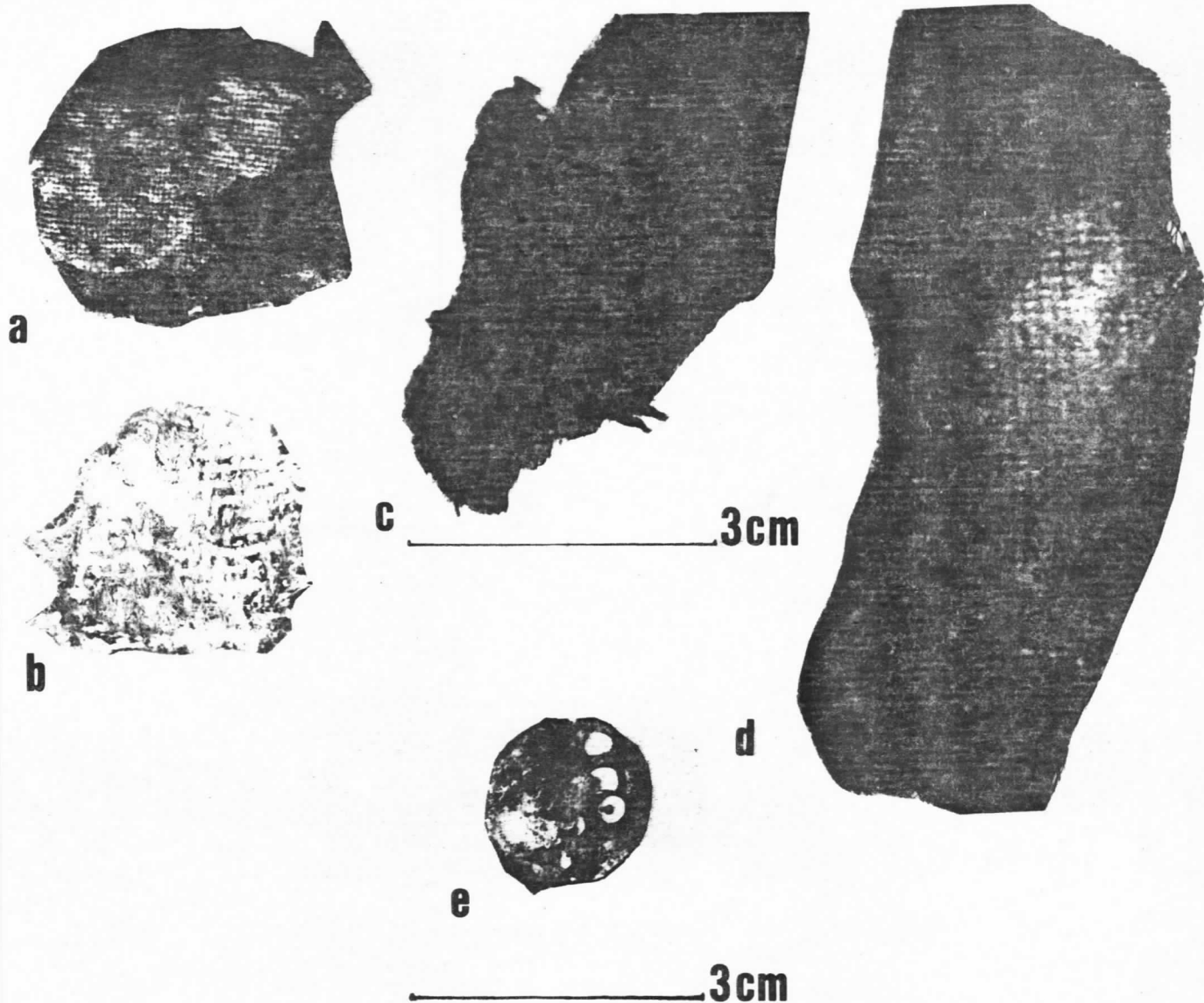


Figure 6

A-D. Fabric remains from Hogan I Burial; E. Phoenix button tied through eye to fabric with attached white and red glass beads.

in situ ornament groups will be described in detail in this report.

The 40 cm. of soil immediately above the skeleton was removed from the site and sorted with water flotation for total recovery of artifacts in the gravefill. This procedure recovered a clam disc bead, over 50 glass beads of several types, an unidentified melted metal object, glass bottle shards, and carbonized seed and wood fragments. Many of the beads exhibit evidence of exposure to an intense but brief fire and several fire broken rocks occurred at 30-40 cm. below the present surface. (Perhaps resulting from the destruction of offerings of the deceased's possessions on the grave.)

THE ORNAMENTS

The Headband. The top section consists of nine large yellow metal disc coat buttons attached through the eyes to a perforated 270 mm. long, 24 mm. wide leather band. There are two perforated large yellow metal disc coat buttons knotted with leather thongs through their perforations to each end of the band. The nine central buttons are held onto the band by a two yarn z twist nettle strand which is tied at the ends to the leather band (Figure 5a and b.)

The lower section consists of five 18th century brass or bronze Chinese coins alternating with paired dentalium sections and held together by an inter-woven two yarn z twist nettle strand attached at the ends to the upper band with leather knots (Figure 7.)

The 11 coat buttons represent varieties of the footless shank, copper-alloy punched disc manufactured in Europe and North America during the last 40 years of the 18th century (Olson 1963, Ross 1976.) All except one are unmarked as to maker. The buttons from the headband comprise the following varieties:

1. Brass appearance, flat face, soldered copper eye, punched floral

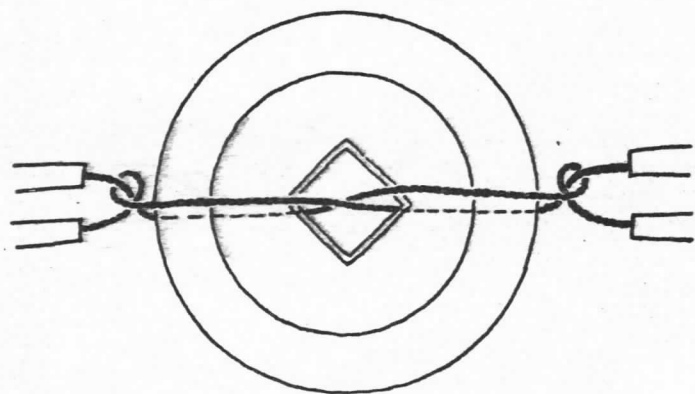


Figure 7

Method of stringing Chinese coins with dentalium beads on headband.

beads attached to the fabric (Figure 6e.) Sections of a three yarn, braided nettle strand remained in some beads. The following Phoenix button types are represented: (Strong 1975) Type 1, style 1, numbers 4, 6, 8, 26; Type 2, style 2, number 1.

A group of four Phoenix buttons was recovered from a disturbed Clackamas grave at the Mostul site (Woodward 1977) and 11 are found in the Clackamas Historical Society's collection attributed to the Gladstone Cemetery (Woodward 1974.) The five Phoenix buttons from the Hogan I Burial are particularly significant in that their native use as ornaments rather than fasteners is clearly shown. Strong (1975) suggests that these buttons were brought to the Columbia River region by the American trader Nathaniel Wyeth in 1832 or 1834. At Fort Vancouver, 11 buttons were recovered in an 1834-1853 context, however, Ross (1976:606) states that the Hudson's Bay Company probably did not import them from their Great Britian manufacturers. Strong (1967:219) reports a cache of 200 associated with 12 dated Northwest tokens found in a burned trader's structure on the Cowlitz River. A source of this cache should be the Northwest Company who had the tokens minted in 1820, the same year King Christophe of Haiti (for whom the buttons were intended) was deposed. The Hudson's Bay Company acquired the Northwest Company in 1821 and the stock of buttons could have been moved to Fort Vancouver after its establishment in 1825.

The beads consist of: 30 opaque white, plain, single-layer, short, hot-tumbled beads, Fort Vancouver Variety 1003 (Ross 709:1976), 5 transparent dark red, faceted, single-layer, short, hot-tumbled beads, Fort Vancouver Variety 1058 (Ross 734:1976), and 5 transparent dark red, plain, single-layer, short, hot-tumbled beads, Fort Vancouver Variety 1027 (Ross 703:1976.)

The Nose Ornaments. A Phoenix button, Strong (1975) Type 1, style 1,

number 5, and 2 finely made clam disc beads 25.0 mm. in diameter were recovered immediately below the nose area suggesting suspension from a perforated septum. Fragments of two dentalium tusks were located vertically within the nose in positions indicating placement in each nostril after death.

The Neck Band. Thirty-six vertically aligned dentalium tusks 20.0-25.0 mm. in length were recovered around the neck area. Very decomposed traces of an unidentified woven material was associated with the dentalia.

The Upper Arm Bands. There were 270 blue glass beads (Fort Vancouver Variety 2004 and 2005) located on the left humerus, apparently strung in loops. Forty-one glass beads of this variety remained near the right humerus. However, a rodent disturbance affected this area.

The Lower Arm Ornaments. On the left ulna and radius were two C-shaped round brass trade bracelets with diameters of 61.0 mm. Figure 9b.) Below these were located 252 blue glass beads (Fort Vancouver Variety 2004 and 2005) which had been strung around the wrist.

The Ring. Fragments of a silver trade ring with a diameter of approximately 19.0 mm. were located in the area of the left hand. The specimen was 4.5 mm. wide and 1.3 mm. thick.

THE HOGAN II BURIAL

A grave approximately three meters west of the Hogan I burial was partially disturbed by gardening in the late 1960's. The skull of a female about 35 years of age exhibiting moderate Chinookan deformation was removed (Mark Feldsman: personal communication.) Three artifacts were recovered; a translucent blue, plain, single-layer, short, hot-tumbled glass bead (Fort Vancouver Variety 1063), a cast copper-alloy kettle handle modified for use as a pendant (Figure 11), and a 17th century Japanese coin (Figure 10.) A fragment of a coarsely woven diagonal 2/1 plain twilled wool fabric

countries (Coole 1965:51; Jacobs and Vermeule 1972:84), so there is a possibility that the Kanei-type coin could have been acquired from the same source as the Yung Cheng and Ch'ien Lung coins in the Hogan I burial. Historic Japanese immigration to Oregon began after 1860 (Yasui 1975:227), and hence there is little likelihood that the coin in the Hogan II Burial was obtained from late historic sources.

CONCLUSION

The burials described in this paper provide new data on the native utilization of 18th and 19th century Columbia River trade items. The Clackamas-Chinook burial complex illustrates the symbolic importance attributed to limited and "exotic" artifacts acquired by the Clackamas during the trade era. Ethnographic accounts link head deformation and the display of material goods to the individual's rank in Chinookan society. The Gladstone burials described in this paper confirm the importance of wealth display in life and in death. Prestige goods of metal, glass, shell, and textiles closely accompanied the deceased in the grave; other important items were displayed above the grave or ritually destroyed on it. The Asian coins, dentalium tusks, Phoenix buttons, and unusually large 18th century buttons were not equally accessible to all members of Clackamas-Chinook society; their ownership and display symbolized wealth in the local status structure.

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