Two new inscribed Khmer bronzes (K. 1218, K. 1219)

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During the past century, research has considerably refined our knowledge of Khmer temples. While many aspects have been clarified (such as their dates, their founders, their religious affiliations), it is nevertheless regrettable that work has focused on their history, their architectural structure and their decor without looking into the issue of their operation. Even so, the monumental nature of these foundations suggests that they were places of continual and varied activity, similar to their Indian counterparts still in function as places of worship today.

In order to improve our understanding of human activities in the Khmer temples and in particular their ritual operation, an archaeological approach seems to be relevant, but should have a wide frame of reference: it should not only focus on excavations of sanctuaries but should also take into account all the sources that provide information on the production processes providing supplies for their rites.

Epigraphy in particular is a fruitful approach for studying the ritual implements (*yajñopakarana*) that were used in Khmer temples, since ancient Cambodian inscriptions often record the goods of the God (*devadravya*) with varied and detailed inventories. Most of these lists were inscribed at the time of foundation of the monument and set out the properties and supplies for ensuring the temple life. For example, inscription K. 262 tells us that a royal decree ordered the engraving of a *devadravya* register, aimed at the use of the *kulapati*, the superior of the temple, in order to protect the goods under his responsibility (*IC* IV:108).

The study of these lists can be very instructive. They are a mirror on the sanctuary's needs and activities, whether secular or religious, and hint at ritual services requiring special items. These registers are sometimes rather detailed and go beyond the mere mention of the type of object assigned to divine worship, often mentioning also its material, its weight, etc.

Nevertheless, the physical reality of the object is not made accessible by such inscriptions and it is necessary to use other archaeological information to define it. Some of these objects are easily identified on contemporary bas-reliefs, but the best source remains the archaeological record of excavated ritual objects.

Unfortunately, many of these objects are poorly documented. The records of old excavations, lacking in information when they exist at all, only rarely inform us of the origin, the stratigraphic context and hence, the dating of these objects. The smaller items are also among the favoured targets of looters, especially in remote sites in Cambodia.

¹ This study was undertaken in the framework of the *Corpus des inscriptions khmères* (CIK) programme (Gerschheimer 2003-2004:478-482).

Some of these documentary gaps can be filled by studying religious items whose donations are documented by short inscriptions providing some informative details. Without using a fixed formula, these inscriptions often provide the date of the donation, the donor and the donee, and the provenance, although the latter is often difficult to identify geographically.

The fact that these objects are and have always been very easily recyclable and marketable explains the limited number of known examples. Still, a rather significant variety of types has been preserved: conches, bowls, lamps, mirrors, etc. are among the objects I have in mind. While some of these items can easily be linked to a ritual use, the relevance of the engraved texts is not limited to the study of religious practices. The absolute dating provided by these objects can also guide our research into their shapes and the techniques used in their manufacture.

The interest for elucidating regnal chronologies is obvious too. A perfect example is the text on the vase that gave us the most recent date of Jayavarman VII's reign: 1139 *śaka* (AD 1217/1218); in publishing it, Claude Jacques has stressed the importance of these types of objects and the need to closely monitor their trafficking (K. 1234, Jacques 2003).

The two examples presented below were identified in Bangkok and are amongst the numerous looted objects which are inundating the antique markets in Thailand and other parts of the world, side by side with a growing number of forgeries and spurious inscriptions.

An early eleventh century inscribed vase (K. 1218)

The first example, noticed on the internet site of an antique shop, is a large, undecorated bronze basin with outward curving lips and rounded base. It rests on a separate bronze ring stand. The vase has been restored: the metal is very thin particularly at the level of the belly and might have holes in some places. Nonetheless, it is still in a good state of preservation.



Fig. 1: Inscribed bronze basin with bronze stand (K. 1218), overall view (EFEO)

The dimensions of the vase make it most unusual: the vase on its own has a diameter of 66 cm and a height of 36 cm. The diameter of the stand is 36 cm and its height 6.2 cm. The vase weighs around 7.5 kg and the ring stand 1.5 kg. Its capacity is about 60 l. Such information on the weight and capacity of an object, rarely mentioned in the archaeological excavation reports, are pertinent.

The function of such an object and its possible ritual use are difficult to determine: unfortunately, its shape is not characteristic enough to be linked to a peculiar rite.

There is a legible inscription, 47 cm long, on the shoulder of the vase. It consists of one line in old Khmer. The script is cursive and rather irregular, and while the first part is relatively neat, the second uses shorthand-like scribbles. this is the case, for example, for the two occurrences of *mra* in *kammraten*: the first one is specifically elaborated with the upper left buckle detached whereas the second is rather difficult to identify. In the second part, the 'hair' of the *ka* is reduced to a line similar to a *virāma*. The writer has in fact neglected most of the *virāmas* and uses the simplified form of the na. All this points to quick and not very formal writing.

On the other hand, the engraving is relatively smooth, round and regular. It is most likely that this vase was cast using the lost wax technique and that the inscription was sculpted, not in the bronze as is usually done, but directly into the wax whose plasticity would have facilitated the writing. Naturally, this gives us an opportunity to study the ductus, but above all, it proves that this artefact was not an import and that the vase and the inscription are contemporaneous.

The slight restoration of the vase, at the beginning of the text, has had no effect on its decipherability. It has been registered by the CIK with the number K. 1218.

Text of K. 1218:²

929 śaka jamnvan ka[m]mratena 'aña vrah cau ta vrah kammratena 'aña śivalinga thmo vvaka nana tulā III kātikā 10 6

Translation:

929 *śaka*; offering of Kammraten 'Añ Vrah Cau to Vrah Kammraten 'Añ the Śivalinga of Thmo Vvak, weighing 3 *tulā* and 16 *kātikā*.

 $^{^2}$ This reading, made in collaboration with Gerdi Gerschheimer, is based on photographs taken by François Lagirarde in September 2005 and on a detailed examination by the author in January 2006. The transliteration used for K. 1218 (and K. 1219 below) follows the conventions proposed by Griffiths for K. 1214 (Griffiths 2005:16).



Fig. 2: K. 1218, text (EFEO)

The date 929 *saka* which is AD 1007/1008, falls within the reign of Sūryavarman I. It is the oldest example of a donation of an inscribed item, but takes the same form as later formulations.

An expert in bronzes might be able to take advantage of this absolute dating to study the evolution of casting techniques. To make this type of shape, especially in metal, and on such a scale, is not easy. As this is beyond my field of expertise I will only remark on the shape.

This type of vase is well known in ceramics: a stoneware vase excavated last year at the Bakong is still awaiting detailed ceramological analysis, but is linked to the end of the period of occupation dating to no later than the 11th century (Pottier et al. 2005:18). Furthermore, the archaeological project at the Siem Reap airport has yielded other vases of the same shape in an 11th century context (Bâty et al. 2005; Desbat et al. 2006). Our inscribed object provides certainty as to the existence of this shape around the turn of the 11th century.



Fig. 3: K. 1218, profile

The two names appearing in the inscription are also relevant. Both are already known from others inscriptions.

The name or title of the donor, *vrah cau*, appears in four inscriptions: K. 67 (*IC* VII:26), K. 237 (*IC* VI:293), K. 258 (*IC* IV:175) and K. 293 (*IC* III:193). The commonly accepted meaning of *cau* is 'grandson'. According to Philip Jenner, *vrah cau* 'royal grandson' could therefore designate a grandson of Sūryavarman I and be used as his most prestigious title (Jenner, pers. comm., September 2006).

However, in his study of K. 237, Cœdès translates *vraḥ cau* as 'descendant' with reference to the K.A. Madhyadeśa, who was related to Harṣavarman I, Īśānavarman II and to Sūryavarman I's queen, and who couldn't have been the grandson of three of them. We should note too that in K. 258, these terms are used to complete two names: '*Amten Śrī Yuvarāja Vraḥ Cau* and '*Amten ta Mūla Vraḥ Cau* (*IC* IV:181, A, 1. 75). It is rather strange that such a general term, usually used to qualify a name, is here used alone. Perhaps the interpretation of *cau* should be reviewed.

The place where the Linga of Siva is located, *thmo vvaka*, is found in three other inscriptions.

First in K. 88, where *vraḥ tmo vvak* designates the place where this edict, celebrating the foundation of an *āśrama*, was made (Prah Non, Kompong Cham Province, *IC* VII:30-31, 1. 1).

It also appears as the *sruk* (village, district) of one of Sūryavarman I's 400 officials in the oath engraved in the eastern entrance of the royal palace of Angkor Thom (K. 292, *IC* III:205-216, D, l. 25).

Finally, an *anrāy* or *vraḥ anrāy thmo vvak* is cited in Banteay Srei (K. 570, *IC* I:144-147, l. 42, 44) as a provider village of the temple.

The diversity of locations makes it difficult to suggest a provenance. Moreover, the different occurrences may not correspond to the same place since a *sruk* seems to be different from an *anr* $\bar{a}y$, a village clearly dependent on a temple (Long Seam 1993:132).

Cœdès considered that this toponym could correspond to the present-day Thma Puok (*IC* I:146). The only village with this name is located today between Banteay Chmar and Sisophon (Gazetteer of Cambodia 1996), but Cœdès noted that it was probably not the same place.

The actual translation of this toponym would be 'the stone of the group' or 'of the corporation' (Aymonier II:334). Saveros Pou glosses the headword *vuk*, *vvak* as 'crumbling, decayed' (Pou 2004:453). But Jenner suggests a root *vok/vvak*, 'to pile up, to group' (Jenner 1982:514), found in the derivation *vnok/vnvak*, which would have lost its verbal sense in modern Khmer (Antelme, pers. comm., October 2006). Thus, Long Seam's translation as 'the piled-up stones', seems quite satisfactory (Long Seam 1993:133).

However, it may be difficult here to specify if this toponym is inspired by a topographical feature or can be explained with reference to the soil nature, as we find rather commonly in Cambodia (Lewitz 1967:413-414), or again if it is linked to a human construction, perhaps religious, such as the foundation of a temple and the erection of a divinity, here a Linga of Siva.

The most interesting data in this short text is the stated weight of 3 $tul\bar{a}$ and 16 $k\bar{a}tik\bar{a}$. It probably referred to the vase itself and not its content. An object of such size may indeed be sufficiently precious to be considered a gift in its own right, and the mention, in other inscriptions, of the weight of the possessions of the God seems to confirm this hypothesis. Moreover, if the offering referred to the contents, it would be strange that these were not mentioned. If that were the case, we have here a first "standard" weight affording us the possibility to refine our understanding of Khmer weights and measures.

We have only little knowledge of this subject in Cambodia for this period. Studies of the steles of Ta Prohm (K. 273, Cœdès 1906:44) and Trapeang Don On (K. 254, *IC* III:180) have enabled us to specify the ratios between the measurements, but they seem difficult to quantify in absolute terms. Of course, knowledge of the Indian systems allows us to propose some values, but knowing how they change in India, in both relative and absolute terms, we need to remain cautious. Cordier himself, who first studied the values, based his work on the scale of Caraka and specified that all the values were twice the same measures in the scale of Suśruta (Cordier 1906:82-85; *addenda* in *BEFEO* XV (2):187).

Thus, apart from the weight of the items and of the quantity of annual supplies listed in the inscriptions, nothing allows us to evaluate them accurately; Long Seam and Saveros Pou avoid giving any values in their dictionaries, for these units of measurement.

Literally 'scale' in Sanskrit, *tula/tulā/tul* is also an Indian unit of weight widely spread in South-East Asia. It is attested in Khmer epigraphy from the Pre-Angkorian period by numerous occurrences. The value specified by Cordier and in *l'Inde Classique* (Renou and Filliozat 1953:758) is around 9.3 kg.

The term $k\bar{a}tik\bar{a}$ in this form occurs here for the first time, but it is probably equivalent to the *katțikā* used in K. 235 (Cœdès et al. 1943:56) or to the *kațți* used from the Pre-Angkorian period to Jayavarman VII's inscriptions.

According to Saveros Pou, it could be a loan word from Austronesian languages, denoting a weight of around 625 g and corresponding to the modern $n\bar{a}l$, a word coming from Pāli (Pou 1984:108-109). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the term *kațți* appears both in the *Tamil Lexicon* as an equivalent of 25 *palams* and in Margaret Cone's *Dictionary of Pāli* as a non-specified measure of weight, a term for which the mentioned author refered to the *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary (DED* 962).

Whatever its origin, a *kati* is still used today in Malaysia (Diffloth, pers. comm., June 2006), and this Malay/Javanese term corresponds to the English catty (Jenner 1981:12). According to Wilkinson, it used to correspond to "a pound *avoirdupois*, but weighing about one-third more", that is to say around 605 g. He also specified that a *kati* comprises 16 *tahil* or *tael* (Wilkinson 1903:156, 491).

It is possible that other ratios were used in Cambodia. In a text written at the beginning of the 20th century, a $n\bar{a}l$ is described as the twentieth part of a *tael* which is also the twentieth part of a *tulā* (Antelme 2004:27). Nevertheless, whatever the value and the ratios admitted, a *tulā* would thus be no less than 9 and no more than 15 kg.

Yet, if we consider that this measurement referred to the weight of the vase, these estimates are much higher than the 9 kg that it weighs with its stand. Cordier indicated

that in the case of liquids, there was a correspondence with the measure of capacity of the same name. Unfortunately, while Michel Antelme has noticed that some names were equally used for weight and capacity, this is not true in the case of the $tul\bar{a}$ as 20 $n\bar{a}l$ correspond either to a capacity of one tau or to a weight of one $tul\bar{a}$ (Antelme 2004:23). Should we then consider that 3 $tul\bar{a}$ and 16 $k\bar{a}tik\bar{a}$ represent the capacity of the vase, that is to say 60 l. with a $tul\bar{a}$ of around 15 l.?

While this hypothesis may seem more in line with previously proposed estimates, it is difficult to verify, as it is impossible to know which "standard" material was used for the corresponding weights and volumes, and even if there was one. Moreover, the term *nan/nana* never refers to a measure of volume in Khmer epigraphy, and we would need to wait for further texts and ideally a similar inscription to confirm this hypothesis, or to re-estimate the value of these units downward. This inscription nevertheless provides a first interesting step in this research.

A dated bronze vase of Tribhuvanādityavarman's reign (K. 1219)

The second object is very different. It is also a vase in bronze, found this time in a private collection in Bangkok, but its shape and its decoration are rather unusual for bronze objects excavated in Cambodia.



Fig. 4: Inscribed bronze vase with bronze tripod (K. 1219), overall view (EFEO)

The vase has the shape of a truncated cone divided into three parts: a metal cylinder forming a base, the body itself and an upper strip. It has two ring handles. Its height is 14.8 cm, its maximum diameter being 24 cm and minimum diameter 16.4 cm.

It rests on a bronze tripod, 24.5 cm in height. The diameter of the supporting circle is 26 cm. In contrast to the vase, which is quite sober, the stand is elaborately ornamented.

The upper parts of the feet, in particular, present a vegetal decor: foliage forming a triangular mask which seems to evoke a Chinese pattern, but we should remain cautious on issues of imports or even influence. The lower part consists of ring mouldings of different diameters, widening at the bottom to form the foot. The two items seem to fit together quite well. Apart from some corrosion marks, both objects are in good condition.



Fig. 5: Bronze tripod, detail (EFEO)

The purpose of this vase is difficult to determine. We cannot say much more than that it is reminiscent of a small "brazier". This, in turn, might suggest a connection with fire ritual. Indeed, despite the importance of this form of worship in Cambodia, as suggested by the numerous mentions in the inscriptions, no archaeological structure related to the installation of fire hearths has been revealed. Thanks to bas-reliefs, we know that the hearths aimed at ritual usage could be mobile.



Fig. 6: Banteay Chmar, eastern bas-reliefs, north side, detail (D. Soutif)

One representation on the northeast part of the bas-relief of Banteay Chmar resembles this vase in size and shape. In this example the small vase rests on the head of an elephant. Could this be an object to be transported in procession? This is an isolated example and is not yet well understood, as the major part of the lower register of the relief is not visible. The hypothesis thus remains rather weak.

The inscription, one line in old Khmer, is engraved over most of the upper part of the vase and gives us a different impression from that of K. 1218: although regular, the writing is jerky and, all in all, makes a clumsy impression. This bad calligraphy is probably due to a different mode of inscribing: it seems that here the engraving was done once the vase was finished, directly into the bronze, the lack of plasticity of the material triggering a less flexible, more hesitating engraving. If a foreign origin of this vase were to be established, it would make sense that the engraving was executed subsequent to the casting.

Despite the serious corrosion of the last syllables, most of the text can be read.³ The inscription has been registered under the number K. 1219.

Text of K. 1219:

1089 śaka vrah jamnvan· vrah pāda kamratena 'añ· śrītribhuvanādityavarmma[d]eva ta [ka]mratena ja[g]ata chpara ransi 0^4

Translation:

1089 *śaka*; holy offering of His Majesty Kamratena 'Añ Śrī Tribhuvanādityavarmadeva to the Kamraten Jagat (of) Chpar Ransi.

³ This reading is based on photographs provided by the owner and on direct examination of the item by the author (January 2006).

⁴ The punctuation is a spiral.



Fig. 7: K. 1219, text (EFEO)

Some additional information can be elicited from this text. Firstly, we know of very few inscriptions linked to the reign of Tribhuvanādityavarman (AD 1165-1177). One example is of two trays, but while the king is mentioned on one inscription, where the date has disappeared, the second, dated 1088 *śaka*, does not mention him (K. 418, Cœdès 1929:305). Although those two items are probably contemporaneous, the dates for Tribhuvanādityavarman are only known through later inscriptions, especially through the study of the Prasat Crung inscriptions in Cœdès' survey of the Mahīdharapura dynasty (Cœdès 1929:289-330).

Another inscribed item that has been attributed to this reign is a vase made of electrum, kept at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (K. 1217). The text has not yet been published, but, according to Long Seam, it mentions this ruler's name (Bunker 2004:272-273). However, a new transcription of the text indicates a date later than Tribhuvanādityavarman's death, so we must conclude that it does not refer to the same person.

It seems, therefore, that we have here the first dated inscription mentioning Tribhuvanādityavarman.

The toponym used to designate the divinity, *chpara ransi*, is also of considerable importance. Several instances in different spellings are known (*chpar ransi/chpār ransi/chpā ransi/chpā ransi/chpā ransī*).

Aymonier first noticed that this toponym, whose literal meaning is 'garden of bamboo', was probably a Khmer equivalent to the Veluvana of Buddhist texts. From this, he deduced that *kamraten jagat chpar ransi* designates the Buddha (K. 169; Aymonier I:452).⁵

⁵ This inscription, K. 169, discovered by Aymonier near the Prasat Chikreng (Siem Reap Province), but which has since dissapeared, was dated by him to the 10-11th century.

This interpretation was followed by Cœdès in his study of K. 879 (Prasat Snen, Battambang, 962 *śaka; IC* V:235-237) in which mention is made of the erection of a Kamraten Jagat Chpā Ransi in Lanl... (the toponym is unfortunately incomplete).

Nevertheless, we notice a number of inscriptions in which the mention of a *kamraten jagat chpar ransi*, without any other geographical precision, seems sufficient to specify the sanctuary where a donation was made.⁶ Thus, it was not just a periphrasis to designate the Buddha or a Buddhist divinity, but corresponded to a topographic reality.

This is confirmed by the use of the toponym alone in K. 178, where a boundary stone is said to be near a field providing rice to *chpār ransi* (Prasat Phhom Mrech, Kompong Thom Province, 916 *śaka*, *IC* VI:192-194).⁷

Saveros Pou, in her analysis of Khmer toponyms, distinguishes two types of designation: the systematic and the spontaneous, the latter comprising three categories (Lewitz 1967:396-404).

She considers that *chpar ransi* belongs to her first category of spontaneous designations, in which the names of places are linked to geographical or vegetal details. But this seems here more a way to evoke the presence of a Buddhist foundation. It therefore belongs more to her third category corresponding to "an historical detail, an event, an ancient worship or an institution".

In these two cases, this toponym could refer to different places. But we may also consider it as a systematic designation testifying of "a membership, an eulogy, a consecration, a beneficial wish", as Mahendraparvata, İśānapura, etc., and in which Veļuvana/Chpār Ransi/Vaṃśārāma would have its place as a reference to the famous hermitage of the Buddha. This way of naming places, requiring a certain cultural background knowledge, seems to have been mostly used for important and famous places, and usually only once.

It is difficult to say if this toponym designated a unique place, because occurrences have been found in various areas, ranging from Battambang to Chikreng, but a few clues can be found.

First, the inscription K. 254 is quite informative (Trapeang Dong On, Siem Reap Province, 1051 *śaka*, *IC* III:180-192, st. XXX and l. 29). The Khmer texts, on sides B and D, are rather accurate translations of the Sanskrit text and identify Vamśārāma with Chpār Ransi (*IC* III:180). The same identification is possible from the Khmer and Sanskrit parts of K. 237 (Prasat Prah Khset, Siem Reap Province, 989 *śaka*, *IC* VI:293-295 l. 15; Barth 1895:173-177 st. III). Unfortunately, the place corresponding to this Sanskrit name is again difficult to locate.

We should also observe, with Cœdès (IC III:97), that this toponym is often associated with another one: *lingapura*. Out of eleven occurrences, five are joined with

⁶ I mention as examples K. 276, l. 21 and K. 277, l. 19, 10th century *śaka*, Prasat Keo, Siem Reap Province (*IC* IV:152-160).

⁷ *chpār ransi* is also notably used as a toponym in the Sanskrit part of K. 1158 (Sab Bak, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, 988 *śaka*, l. 9; Chirapat Prapandvidya 1990:12).

this second toponym.⁸ Even though Cœdès notes that *liṅgapura* may designate different places, an important one being Koh Ker, we can assume that the texts which mention Chpār Ransi in one context with Liṅgapura each reffered to the same two places. Among them, it is worth noting that K. 254 is one of the two texts mentioning Vamśārāma in the Sanskrit part.

Finally, we must cite K. 682 from Prasat Thom in Koh Ker, which quotes the gift of a *sruk śivanivāsa* from the *pramān chpar ransi* (Cœdès 1931:15, 1. 8). According to Long Seam, the term *prāman*, translated with 'territories, region', corresponds to the most important territorial division, of which twenty are known in the corpus (Long Seam 1993:129-131). Unfortunately, even this gloss is difficult to confirm for the moment.

While it is impossible to claim that this toponym corresponds to a unique place, it seems that one of the places called Chpar Ransi was a quite important place in ancient Cambodia. It is therefore all the more regrettable that it cannot be localized with certainty.

Concerning this new occurrence, we can only regret for the issue of localisation that the vase was taken out of its stratigraphic context. The only noticeable indication is that it was obviously given in an area directly under the influence of Tribhuvanādityavarman, a usurper in a time of serious political unrest, who was eventually defeated by the Chams in AD 1177. We can also notice that this date, corresponding to AD 1167/1168, makes ours the most recent occurrence of this Kamraten Jagat.

To conclude, these two objects bearing inscriptions provide significant data still to be exploited and raise several questions. Despite the lack of information due to the circumstances in which these bronze objects were discovered (probably linked to lootings facilitated today by the use of demining devices), some information has been saved. This will be useful as much for detailed studies like those of the religious function of objects, as for broader issues, for example the topographic distribution of sites or the refining of (typo)chronologies.

Abstract:

Epigraphy, by providing lists of the assets of the gods, gives us indications of the daily functioning of Khmer temples. Nevertheless, it is necessary to use archaeological sources for information about their appearance.

Sadly, many items that have been discovered have no stratigraphical context because of incomplete recording or because they come from lootings.

These gaps in documentation can be partly overcome by the presence of inscriptions: short texts giving indications of the date, donor, donee, etc. They constitute valuable data for refining chronologies, and providing date ranges for typologies of shapes or manufacturing techniques.

⁸ K. 158 (Tuol Prasat, Kompong Thom Province, 925 *śaka*, *IC* II:97-114), K. 254, K. 249 (Prasat Trau, Siem Reap Province, 1031 *śaka*, *IC* III 97-99, 1. 17), K. 276 and K. 277 (see n. 6).

Two such items identified in Bangkok, at an antique shop and in a private collection are presented here. These two examples illustrate how the loss of archaeological context can be partially compensated for by an engraved text.

The first one is the oldest example of this usage and gives rise to a new approach to studying measurement units used in ancient Cambodia.

The second one offers one of the few examples of dated inscriptions mentioning Tribhuvanādityavarman and a new occurrence of a deity well-known from the epigraphical record: *Kamraten Jagat Chpar Ransi*.

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