Yiddish Acquisitions: The YIVO Experience

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The acquisition of Yiddish materials consists of two distinct operations: acquisition of older books and periodicals (retrospective acquisitions) and that of current titles.

Retrospective Acquistions — Books

The experience of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research may serve as a model for the collection of older Yiddish materials.

YIVO was founded in Vilna, Poland, in 1925. At that time its name was Yiddish Scientific Institute - YIVO, and one of its major goals was to create as extensive a collection of Yiddish materials as was feasible (Abramowicz, 1980, p. 110, 126 ff.). In the pre-Holocaust, pre-World War II period, the source for such acquisitions was the homeland of Yiddish - Europe. specifically. Central and Western Europe. Pre-1850 materials were very rare even then, and ingenious methods had to be devised to locate them. The Institute used a network of zamlers or collectors living in various localities, ranging from the smallest shtetlekh (villages) to the large cities, who reported on and acquired materials. Zamlers collected publications from private individuals, materials sometimes stored in attics, with their owners not realizing that they possessed something valuable. The zamler method yielded very good results and succeeded in unearthing some really rare treasures. Tsofnas Paneakh, published in 1817 in Berdichev, by Khaykl Hurwitz, was acquired in this manner, as was Mendel Lefin's Mishley, a Yiddish translation of Proverbs (Tarnopol, 1814) a book which made history in the development of the Yiddish literary language (Abramowicz, 1967/68, p. 87-89). YIVO's collections were enhanced as well through contacts with local book dealers and diligent scrutiny of antiquarian book catalogues. The library of the late Yiddish linguist Judah A. Joffe was also acquired in this way. His invaluable collection was purchased by the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

At present, the European antiguarian market rarely features Yiddish titles. The 1984 catalog of E. J. Brill in Leiden, Holland, for example, lists only three Yiddish items among the approximately 2,000 titles it offers for sale. One, Biblia Judaeo-Germanica (London, 1825), is described as a Yiddish text in rabbinic characters. The annotation explains that it is a fresh Yiddish translation "aimed at Jews in Warsaw." The price is 175 Dutch guilders, or approximately \$58.00. Missionary Yiddish Bibles are usually not very rare, and the price is rather high. The other two items are twentieth-century publications. The first, a 1948 Moscow publication of 96 pages, contains two novelettes by Sholem Aleichem, and is priced at 48 guilders. The second, Kultur Geshikhte fun Yidn in Poyln beysn Mitlalter by Dr. I. Szipper (Warsaw, 1926), in two volumes, costs 130 guilders. These prices seem reasonable for items which are both valuable and hard to find. (The address of E. J. Brill and of all other bookdealers mentioned in this paper are given in Appendix A.)

As far as Yiddish books of antiquarian quality are concerned, the lists of the Israeli bookseller J. Robinson are also worth examining. In the section "Out of print and rare Hebraica," of Robinson's July 1983 catalog, 13 out of 57 items were in Yiddish. All were important books in the fields of literary history, education, Judaism, Holocaust, fiction and poetry, published in Moscow, Warsaw and Vilna in the first half of this century. Item no. 128, Hertz Hamburg's *Imre Shefer* (Vienna, 1816) "with translation into Old Yiddish" is really quite rare.

Older books may also be found at S. Rabinowitz's Hebrew Book Store, CYCO (Central Yiddish Culture Organization), and the National Yiddish Book Center (formerly National Yiddish Book Exchange) in Amherst, Mass. Biegeleisen, now located in Brooklyn, N.Y., has entire collections for sale, which may be of interest for institutions considering starting a Yiddish collection. The trouble with all of these, with the exception of the National Yiddish Book Center, is that they do not have any catalogs, so the buyer does not know what they can offer. Nor do the dealers know themselves! One has to visit them and make the selection on the premises. Rabinowitz's Book Store has some sets, probably not complete, of Sholem Aleichem, Frug, and Reisen. He also has the kinds of books which turn up in most discarded private libraries and are least needed, namely translations from other languages into Yiddish published in this country. At Rabinowitz's one can find Yiddish editions of Earl Brouder's The Road to Victory (New York, 1943); Fr. Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra, translated by Dr. Chaim Zhitlovsky in 1919, and collected works of Guy de Maupassant (Forward ed., 1913-1919) in 15 volumes. CYCO has a very considerable stock of older Yiddish books, but it does not have adequate display facilities. CYCO's knowledgeable former manager Yankl Gutkowicz passed away several years ago.

The Yiddish book resources of Mr. Lansky's National Yiddish Book Center are considerable, and the group publishes a catalog about twice a year. The Center was founded with the endorsement of YIVO and funded by government grants and private donations. Its purpose was to rescue discarded Yiddish book collections and distribute the books at low cost to those who need them. The founders promised that the right of initial selection would be given to large central depositories such as YIVO in order to make it possible for them to fill their gaps. The Center advertises itself as "the world's only comprehensive source of new. used and out-of-print Yiddish books" and informs us that its collections grow at the rate of 1,000 books per week (The Book Peddler, 1984, pp. 4, 12). Besides filling orders, the Center has launched a "Yiddish Library Development Program" whose aim is to establish comprehensive or augmentative Yiddish collections in major universities and research libraries (The Book Peddler, 1984, p. 16). It is to be hoped that the Center will catch up with the rapid growth of its acquisitions and provide the public with more frequent and up-to-date catalogs.

Additional suggestions for Yiddish book hunters may be found in *The New Yiddish Source Finder*, compiled by David Neal Miller and published by YUGNTRUF in 1982. The information in the *Source Finder*, written in the gracious, humorous style of the *Third Jewish Catalog* from which it is excerpted, is, however, at some points already obsolete.

The latest development in the field of retrospective Yiddish acquisitions is the availability of commercially published microforms. A few years ago, the Clearwater Publishing Company issued a very valuable set of Yiddish Classics on Microfiche, edited by Prof. Khone Shmeruk of the Hebrew University and prepared for publication by Pearl Berger, formerly of YIVO and now head librarian at the Main Center of Yeshiva University. Another microform publisher active in the field of Jewish studies is Inter-Documentation Co. (IDC) of Zug, Switzerland. IDC has published a set of 373 older Yiddish titles selected by Professor Khone Shmeruk and distributed in the U.S. by Clearwater in New York (IDC price - 6,700 Swiss Francs). The set listed in IDC's Jewish Studies Catalog, consists of books published in Western Europe and Poland from the 16th through the 18th centuries. The listing is alphabetical by romanized title with short annotations, and includes references to three major catalogs: Steinschneider, Cowley and Prijs, where detailed bibliographic descriptions may be found. An additional group of Yiddish titles is listed in IDC's Jewish Studies Catalog under the heading "Russia." Here 16 items out of the total of 43 are in Yiddish. The selection, which was made by the late Prof. Yehuda Slutski, is quite limited and not, truly representative. It includes several YIVO publications, some Soviet-Yiddish books in the fields of history and bibliography, and memoirs. Much more extensive coverage would be needed to satisfy the needs of scholarship in the field.

Retrospective Acquisitions — Serials

As a result of the efforts of modern scholars, valuable information found in Yiddish periodicals is becoming more accessible and these periodicals are playing an increasingly important role in research and scholarship. Prof. Khone Shmeruk of Jerusalem and his staff have embarked on a project with the goal of indexing the literary material in the most important Yiddish serials, including dailies and weeklies. Dr. Leonard Prager of Haifa University has recently published a bibliography, *Yiddish Literary and Linguistic Periodicals and Miscellanies*, which can be used as a list and partial location guide. (See my review in *Judaica Librarianship* (Abramowicz, 1983).) Dr. Prager has informed me that a second edition of this bibliography is being prepared, since the book is very much in demand.

Despite their importance, however, it is only on very rare occasions that original editions of Yiddish serials may be obtained today. Latin-American sources may on occasion, vield unexpected results. The Yiddish press was very active in Latin America until recently, but only a few North American libraries received these publications regularly. Even being on their mailing lists did not guarantee regular receipt, and gaps resulted from the negligence or unreliability of local post offices. The opportunity to fill the gaps arises, at times, with the aid of editors of recently defunct publications. The YIVO library, for example, was able to obtain back issues of a Yiddish newspaper from Brazil through an exchange agreement. It was most gratifying to find that despite the decline of the Yiddish press in Latin America, there is still a market there for Yiddish books.

Microfilms are probably the only dependable source of older Yiddish serials. Relatively little progress, however, has been made in this area. Of the 170 periodical titles listed by G. Kressel in the Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals section of the IDC catalog, only five are in Yiddish. Of these, two are contemporary Yiddish dailies from Israel: Kol Hoom (Communist) and Letste Nayes (general); one is a shortrun Yiddish daily from Warsaw: (Di Tat (Revisionist); and two are old-Yiddish titles from Amsterdam: Dinstagische and Fravtogische Koerant, the first Yiddish newspapers which were published in the second half of the 17th Century. The situation has improved lately as several major libraries have published lists of their serial holdings on microfilm. These are: Jewish Newspapers and Periodicals on Microfilm, available at the American Jewish Periodical Center (Cincinnati, 1984), Guide to Judaica Serials in Microform in the Harvard College Library (Cambridge, MA, 1981), and the latest in this area and the only one whose stated purpose is selling the material-The Jewish National and University Library List of Periodicals on Microfilm, no. 1 (Jerusalem, 1984). All of these lists contain considerable numbers of Yiddish periodicals.

Current Acquisitions — Books

As far as current Yiddish books are concerned, the situation is again not very satisfactory. CYCO still remains the central address for book suppliers in search of markets. Because of its cramped quarters. however, and the lack of adequate personnel, it orders only small supplies and its stocks quickly become exhausted. CYCO's selection of new titles is limited. Catalog Nos. 5 and 6 (No. 6, dated 1983. was distributed in May 1984) carried 35 and 37 items respectively, with imprint dates ranging from 1951 to 1982. In these catalogs, Yiddish authors and titles are transcribed in Roman characters (in a manner which arouses doubt as to the competence of the transcriber). The format of the entries is uneven as well. Some titles are translated and have short, descriptive annotations, while others are merely transcribed. The Education Department of the Workmen's Circle sells Yiddish textbooks and some recent fiction.

A listing of Yiddish books may also be found in the monthly catalog of the Israeli dealer, "Pinat Hasefer," arranged according to subject categories. The relevant sections here are Sefarim bevidish and Sifrey kehilot. The list for December 1982 contains 20 entries in the first category, giving author, title, publisher and price. The listings are in two alphabets: the original and transcription in Roman characters. The transcription is often puzzling, as it uses a non-standard pronunciation, but the presence of the original script is a great advantage. Most of the imprints carry the same date as the catalog, indicating that the list is up-todate. Most of the titles were published in Israel, although books from Melbourne (Australia), Buenos Aires and New York are included as well. Prices are moderate. A very important section of the Pinat Hasefer catalog is the one entitled (Yizkor Books) - Sifrey Kehilot. These books are very hard to obtain - Yiddish book suppliers hardly have any. In most cases, the publishers donate the books to a selected group of libraries, and the remaining copies are reserved for the members of the sponsoring societies. The monthly catalog of Pinat Hasefer under discussion carried 10 memorial volumes, published between 1956 and 1977. This should be considered a good offering of older titles in this category, which are usually very difficult to obtain. The price range is much higher than for the average Yiddish book, ranging from \$10.00 to \$42.00, with the average price about \$30.00. Whether Pinat Hasefer's memorial volumes are unique copies or not is unclear, but it is likely that these books are in the antiquarian category, with only a single copy available, especially for the older imprints.

Another elusive category of current Yiddish books is the output of Hasidic circles in New York City, especially the Lubavitch and Satmar branches. They issue fiction, mostly based on Jewish traditional and historical lore; legends; moralistic and didactic parables; and textbooks for girls, on all levels of elementary and high school instruction. For a description of this literature see the informative article by Z. Baker (1977). These materials are not listed in any bibliographies and can be gotten only at the source or through selected dealers. Biegeleisen, of New York, claims that he receives all of these publications and sends them to a few libraries which have placed a standing order with him.

An additional special group of Yiddish books is the small number published in the Soviet Union. Not all of these reach the usual book dealers. The YIVO Library has a standing order with the firm of Victor Kamkin, who seems to be the sole representative of the Soviet book trade in the U.S. This book dealer does not have Yiddish-reading personnel, and orders Yiddish books through the Soviet national bibliography Novye Knigi. Some of the Yiddish titles published in the USSR are missed, however, and may be detected through either Sovetish Heymland or Yiddish journals published in Israel. Titles listed two or three years after their publication can no longer be obtained through the Soviet book agency. In some instances, Israeli dealers are able to supply these titles.

Current Acquisitions — Serials

As for current serials, newspapers which are published in Israel, New York, and several other major cities may be obtained directly from the publishers. Papers from the Soviet Union and Poland, Birobidzhaner Shtern and Folks Sztyme respectively, must be ordered through governmentoperated subscription agencies. The major older, established journals in this country and Israel can be obtained through CYCO. Problems arise, however, with the acquisition of new titles and journals published for special groups. A new journal, Yidish-Velt, published by the World Council for Yiddish (based in Israel), promises to provide information about developments in the field of Yiddish, as does the page In der Velt fun Yidish, edited by J. Hamer, which appears from time to time in the New York Forward (formerly a daily, now a weekly).

A new tool for locating Jewish periodicals which recently appeared in Israel is *The Directory of World Jewish Press and Publications* (Jerusalem, March 1984). Bilingualism or trilingualism is characteristic of many current Yiddish periodicals.

Among the services the Directory offers are computer printouts of titles by a "variety of characteristics." As an example, the publisher suggests a list of "all Yiddish publications which accept advertising and have a circulation of 10,000 or more." In other words, the service could identify periodicals by language, and could thus provide a list of Yiddish language serial publications. The coverage of the Yiddish press is, however, very spotty in this new Directory. A cursory check revealed that it does not include the major Israeli Yiddish newspaper Letste Naves, the important guarterly Di Goldene Keyt, nor the Soviet Yiddish monthly Sovetish Heymland, let alone a host of minor titles. World-wide dispersal of the Yiddish press and lack of bibliographic control make complete coverage of this medium very difficult. Yet, the effort is very worthwhile, as it could reveal, better than any other gauge, the extent of Yiddish readership, and the role and functions of Yiddish in the post-Holocaust world.

Appendix B contains a listing of current Yiddish serials, based on receipts at the YIVO library in 1984. The minimal bibliographic data provided serves to point out certain significant characteristics of the contemporary Yiddish press - very few titles come from Eastern Europe, while many appear in Israel. There are few daily newspapers (most have become weeklies) and few children's periodicals. The date of initial publication serves to highlight the fact that "old timers" continue to exist; some date from the past century. It is also notable that many new periodicals have emerged in the seventies and eighties. Bilingualism or trilingualism is characteristic of many current Yiddish periodicals (e.g., nos. 22, 41, 47, 49, 55, and 56) which is indicative of an effort to establish a link with the younger generation, which is less familiar with Yiddish than the older one.

It is hoped that this checklist will be useful to Judaica acquisitions librarians. Additions and corrections to the list by readers are encouraged. The compilation would serve a broader purpose if it stimulated interest in the study of the current Yiddish press as an indicator of the actual use of the language in our time, or if it served as the basis of a comparative study with the Yiddish press of the pre-Holocaust period.

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 אַבראַמאָװיטש, דינה.
 אַבראַמאָװיטש, דינה.
 אַפרוּװ צו שאַפֿן אַ נאַציאַנאַלן ביבליאָגראַפֿישן צענטער פֿאַר ייִדיש: די די ביבליאַגראַפֿישע צענ־ טראַלע און די ביבליאָ־ טראַפֿישע יאָרביכער פֿון גראַפֿישע יאָרביכער פֿון גראַפֿישע יאָרביכער פֿון גראַפֿישע יאָרביכער פֿון גראַנד 46 (1980), זז' 201-נאַנד 46 (1980), זז' 102-גוזי

 בעקער, זכריה. "רעליגיעזע יוגנט־ליטעראַטור", אויפֿן שוועל נומ' 230 (אַקט.– דעצ. 1977), זז' 12-12.

Dina Abramowicz is Head Librarian of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City, where she has been actively acquiring current and older Yiddish materials for many years. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Association of Jewish Libraries Convention held in Atlanta in June 1984. Appendix B: Current Yiddish Serials (continued)

- 23. *Di Goldene Keyt* P.O. Box 303 Tel Aviv, Israel
- 24. Der Weg El Camino Calz. de Tacubaya 75 Mexico, D.F., Mexico
- 25. Der Veg 61 Mazah Street Tel Aviv, Israel
- 26. Der Wecker 45 East 33 Street New York, N.Y. 10016
- 27. Heshbon 8339 West Third Street Los Angeles, Calif. 90048
- 28. News of the YIVO 1048 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10028
- 29. Yugntruf Youth for Yiddish 3328 Bainbridge Avenue Bronx, N.Y. 10467
- 30. YIVO-Bleter 1048 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10028
- Yiddish Welt
 9 Mendele Street
 Tel Aviv 63431, Israel
- 32. Yiddish of Greater Washington P.O. Box 6283 Washington, D.C. 20015
- 33. Yidishe Tsaytung Harakevet 52 Tel Aviv, Israel
- 34. Yidishe Kultur 1123 Broadway Room 305 New York, N.Y. 10010
- Jiddisch-Kultur i Skandinavien Stockholms Judiska Center Nybrogatan 19 11439 Stockholm, Sweden
- Yidishe Shprakh YIVO 1048 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10028
- 37. Yerusholaimer Almanakh = Jerusalem Almanach c/o Cypora Shragai
 63 Mazah Street
 65789 Tel Aviv, Israel
- 38. *Yisroel Shtime* P.O. Box 1777 Tel Aviv, Israel
- Lebns Fragn
 48 Kalisher Street
 Tel Aviv, Israel

- 40. Letste Nayes Harakevet 52 Tel Aviv, Israel
- 41. *Morning Freiheit* 22 West 21 Street New York, N.Y. 10010
- 42. *Melbourne Chronicle* 7 Selwyn Street Elsterwick 3185 Melbourne, Australia
- National Committee on Yiddish, Canadian Jewish Congress Bulletin 1590 Docteur Penfield Montreal, Que. H3W 1C5, Canada
- 44. La Presse Nouvelle 14 Rue de Paradis Paris 10, France
- 45. Sovietish Heimland The Soviet Heimland 10100 Moscow, Center Kirov 17 USSR
- 46. Folk un Zion World Zionist Organization Information Department Beit Hakerem, Sderot Herzl 81 P.O. Box 92, Jerusalem, Israel Editorial office: Kaplan St. 17 Tel Aviv 61070, Israel
- 47. Folks-Sztyme RSW "Prasa-Ksiazka-Ruch" ul. Towarowa 28 00-958 Warszawa, Poland
- 48. *Folksblat;* Monthly Mendele St. 9 Tel Aviv, Israel
- 49. Forward 45 East 33 Street New York, N.Y. 10016
- 50. *Revista Foroys* Amsterdam 252 - 8 Mexico 11, D.F. Mexico
- 51. *Problemen* 203 Ben Yehuda Tel Aviv 63502, Israel
- 52. Freie Schtime = Voz Libre Jean Jaures 746 (1215) Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 53. Di Presse = La Prensa Israelita Castelli 330 1032 Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 54. The Zukunft 25 East 21 Street New York, N.Y. 10010

- 55. *Revista Cultului Mozaic* Bucuresti Str. Popa Rusu nr. 24 Romania
- 56. Boro Park Voice 4616 13th Avenue Brooklyn, N.Y. 11219
- 57. Vida y Cultura c/o IWO Pasteur 633 Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Kultur un Lebn Culture and Life
 45 East 33 Street
 New York, N.Y. 10016
- 59. The Jewish Eagle 4180 De Courtrai Suite 218 Montreal, Que HeS 1C3, Canada
- Voice of Radom United Radomer Relief for U.S. & Canada c/o Charles Borenstein 144 - 44 72 Street Flushing, N.Y. 11367
- 61. La Voz Israelita de Mexico Pedro Moreno 129 Aptd. Postal 110 Mexico, D.F., Mexico
- Shmuessen mit Kinder un Yugent Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch 770 Eastern Parkway Brooklyn, N.Y. 11213
- 63. Der Shmaiser (The Spanker) David Botwinik, ed.
 5775 Wentworth Côte St. Luc Montreal, Que. H4W 2S3, Canada
- 64. Schraiber-Tribune Tribuna de Escritores Lerma 164 1414 Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 65. The Torah World 182 Division Street Brooklyn, N.Y. 11211

A note on Romanization: The Roman alphabet title information is based primarily on bibliographic data found in the serials translations of the Yiddish title or transcription. Where no Roman alphabet information was found in the work, systematic transcription of the title according to the YIVO system was provided.

Appendix B: Current Yiddish Serials (continued)

- 1. אויפֿן שװעל 1941־ ניו־יאַרק: ליגע פאר יידיש
- 2. אויפסני*יי* נאָװעמבער 1971 קאָפּענהאגען: יידישע סאַצי־ אליסטן "בונד" אין דענמארק
 - אונדזער אי*יי*גן װאָרט. סעפּ. 1964 ניו־יאַרק
 - 4. אונדזער געראנק 1947 מעלבורן אויסטראליע
 - אונזער װאָרט .5 דו944 פאריז
 - .6 אונזער װעג: צענטראל־ אַרגאן פון מיזרחי הפּועל המיזרחי אין אייראָפּע 1946 פאריז
 - אונזער צייט.7. פעבר. 1941-ניו־יאַרק
 - אונזער שטימע. 1935-פאריז: בונדישע אָרגא־ ניזאציע אין פראנקרייך
 - 9. דער איד: רעליגיעזער. װאָכנבלאט 1953 ניו־יאַרק
 - 10. די אידישע היים תּשרי־טבת תשי"ט־ ניו־יאָרק: חב"ד פרויען
 - 11. דאָס אידישע װאָרט 1953-ניו־יאַרק: אגודת ישראל
 - 12. דאָס אידישע ליכט. תש"ו־ ירושלים־ברוקלין, נ.י.

13. דאָס אידישע פאָלק
1968
1968
לאָנדאָן: י.א. ליסקי
14. אידישער קעמפער
14. אידישער קעמפער
15. אינפאָרמאציע בולעטין
15. אלגעמײנער זשורנאל
16. אלגעמײנער זשורנאל

- פעבר. 1972⁻ ניו־יאֲרק
- 17. דער אָנה**ײּב** דעצ. 1982⁻ מיאמי ביטש, פלאָ.: אשר שטשוטשינסקי
- 18. אָרדן־נײעס. אַפּריל 1980־ טאַראַנטאַ : פאראײניקטער יידישער פאַלקס־אָרדן אין קאנאדע
 - 19. באר שבע שטימע 1977 באר שבע: מדישע קולטור־ געזעלשאפט
 - 19א. בוקאַרעשטער שריפטן 1978 -בוקאַרעשט: קריטעריאָן.
- 20. בײּ זיך: העפטן פאר קולטור. ליטעראַטור און געזעלשאפט־ לעכע פּראָבלעמען 1972 תל־אביב: קאַמיטעט פאר יידישער קולטור אין ישראל.
- 21. ביראָבידזשאנער שטערן נאָװעמבער 1930־ ביראָבידזשאן: געגנטלעכער קאַמיטעט פון דער קאָמוניס־ טישער פארטיי פון סאָװעטנ־ פארבאנד
- 22. בריקן: צוויישפראכיקע צייט־ שריפט פאר העברעישער און יידישער ליטעראטור סעפ. 1983־ תל־אביב: וועלטראט פאר יידיש און יידישער קולטור

23. די גאַלדענע קייט: פערטל־ יאַרשריפט פאר ליטעראטור און געזעלשאפטלעכע פראָבלעמען װינטער . 1949־ תל־אביב

> 24. דער וועג 1929-מעקסיקע

- 25. דער וועג: וואָכנשריפט. 1965[–] תל־אביב
- 26. דער װעקער 1921־ ניו־יאַרק: יידישער סאַציאַ־ ליסטישער פארבאנד
- 27. חשבון יאנואר 1946[–] לאָס אנגעלעס: לאָס אנגעלעסער יידישער קולטור קלוב
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