

El rei rus d'Andorra: fantasies i fets

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Resums

Català

El rei rus d'Andorra: fantasies i fets.
La història de Boris Skossyreff, que va ser proclamat monarca d'Andorra l'any 1934, ens pot semblar una aventura romàntica. Tanmateix, poc s'ha fet fins ara per distingir entre la ficció i la realitat. L'objectiu d'aquest article és dibuixar una línia clara entre els fets provats i les suposicions. Tot i que no es tracta d'una aproximació a l'estudi biogràfic complet de Boris Skossyreff, l'autor manté l'esperança que aquest article (basat en la recerca arxivística efectuada en països diferents) ajudarà a establir la informació confirmada i a definir els contorns de les àrees pendents d'investigació, que requeriran més recerca en el futur.

Castellano

El rey ruso de Andorra: fantasías y hechos.
La historia de Boris Skossyreff, que fue proclamado monarca de Andorra en el año 1934, nos puede parecer una aventura romántica. Sin embargo, poco se ha hecho hasta ahora para distinguir entre la ficción y la realidad. El objetivo de este artículo es dibujar una línea clara entre los hechos probados y las suposiciones. Aunque no se trata de una aproximación al estudio biográfico completo de Boris Skossyreff, el autor mantiene la esperanza de que este artículo (basado en la investigación archivística efectuada en diferentes países) ayudará a establecer la información confirmada y a definir los contornos de las áreas pendientes de investigación, que requerirán más investigación en el futuro.

Français

Le roi russe d'Andorre: de simples fantaisies et des faits réels.
L'histoire de Boris Skossyreff, qui fut proclamé roi d'Andorre en 1934 peut nous paraître une aventure romantique. Cependant peu a été fait jusqu'à présent pour distinguer entre la fiction et la réalité. L'objectif de cet article est de dessiner une ligne précise entre les faits prouvés et les suppositions. Bien qu'il ne s'agisse pas d'une approche à l'étude biographique complète de Boris Skossyreff, l'auteur nourrit l'espoir que cette approche (basée sur des recherches archivistiques effectuées dans d'autres pays) aidera à établir l'information confirmée ainsi qu'elle nous permettra de mieux cerner les contours des domaines de recherches qui doivent être développés dans l'avenir.

English

The Russian king of Andorra: fantasies and facts.

The story of Boris Skossyreff, who was proclaimed as monarch of Andorra in 1934, sounds like a romantic adventure. However, little has been done so far to distinguish between the fiction and the reality. The purpose of this article is to draw a clear line between the proved facts and assumptions. While this is not an effort of a comprehensive biographical study of life of Boris Skossyreff, the author hopes that the article (based on archival research done in several countries) will help to establish the confirmed information, and to outline the lacunae, which will require more research in the future.

The Russian King of Andorra: Fantasies and Facts

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PREFACE

The story of Boris Skossyreff, who was proclaimed as monarch of Andorra in 1934, sounds like a romantic adventure. However, little has been done so far to distinguish between the fiction and the reality. The purpose of this article is to draw a clear line between the proved facts and assumptions. While this is not an effort of a comprehensive biographical study of life of Boris Skossyreff, the author hopes that the article (based on archival research done in several countries - Andorra, France, Germany, Great Britain, Netherlands, Spain, Russia, USA) will help to establish the confirmed information, and to outline the lacunae, which will require more research in the future.

1. BORIS SKOSSYREFF BEFORE THE ANDORRAN ADVENTURE

Boris Skossyreff's past is surrounded by legends, many of which he initiated himself. They were a part of his "PR campaign", which was, in fact, quite successful. He often spoke about close ties with the Russian and European royals, which was one of reasons of his royalist pretensions. For instance, he mentioned his youth friendship with Prince of Wales. In his press interviews, Boris told he spent his early years in the two of Europe's most elitist educational institutions: Lycee Louis Le Grand in Paris (the oldest and most prestigious boarding school in France, attended by several French presidents), and the Oxford University's Magdalen College. Indeed, study in those institutions could have explained Skossyreff's high-society connections.

However, with the kind help of the archivists from the Oxford University we have established Skossyreff never was a student there. The lyceum in Paris neither confirmed him being a pupil of the Louis Le Grand. Which educational institutions he actually attended remains unknown, though Skossyreff's excellent command of European languages and his gentleman's manners are testified by contemporaries. The Skossyreff surname is not in the list of Russian top aristocratic families, but it is probable he was from a petite noblesse family, as he served during WWI as an officer.

Another fact I wanted to check about Boris Skossyreff was his alleged service to the Netherlands royal court. When in 1930-s Skossyreff was in Catalonia and Andorra, he called himself "Count of Orange", telling this title was granted to him by Queen Wilhelmina of Netherlands for his service to her court. First of all, this title appeared false, because using the name "Orange" (Oranje in Dutch) in a title is a privilege only of the royal family, so it could not be given to any other person. After research at the archive of the Royal House this information was confirmed: according to official records, Skossyreff never served

at the royal court. Thus, another inaccuracy about Boris Skossyreff was revealed.

More than that, the research in Netherlands revealed quite the contrary information. Not only he did not serve to the Dutch Queen, but in 1924 Skossyreff appeared in the list of "prominent foreign revolutionaries" (vooraanstaande buitenlandse revolutionairen), prepared by the Netherlands' Central Intelligence Service (Centrale Inlichtingendienst). Skossyreff was called "international swindler" in that document.

It is true, however, that Skossyreff indeed possessed a Dutch citizenship. Among the most interesting documents found in Holland is his original passport № 85154, issued in 1923 by the Consulate of the Netherlands in Dijon, France. The passport helps to confirm Skossyreff's date and place of birth: January 12, 1896, Wilna (now Vilnius, Lithuania, but previously a part of the Russian Empire). It also shows his alleged title of a baron: "Monsieur le Baron Boris de Skossyreff". Skossyreff's birthplace at the outskirts of Russian Empire proves that his family could be from provincial nobility. However, a baron was quite a rare title in Russia, and probably was false.

The passport has a signature and a photograph of Boris Skossyreff - the earliest one that is known. On the photo we see a good-looking young man, wearing a trendy bow-tie, a checked kepi, and his typical monocle - a feature always present on his later photographs. The passport also mentions Skossyreff's profession as "journalist".

The Dutch passport of Skossyreff is also a source of factology regarding his travels, because of several entry stamps, including those by Spanish and Andorran authorities.

Among other documents found in Holland is Skossyreff's visiting card. It reads "Kapt. B. v. Skossyreff, den Haag". This testifies about his Russian military rank of captain, but hardly can be considered as a documental proof. In the Russian archives I was unable to find any evidence about Skossyreff. This may be due to the fact that significant part of Russian tsarist documentation (before 1917) did not survive during the revolutionary years.

In this regard, the British part of archive investigation was quite fruitful. With the help from the archivists of Foreign and Commonwealth Office of United Kingdom I was able to establish that Skossyreff served at the British army unit attached to the Russian army during World War I. The British document dated 1924 tells about a certificate about Skossyreff's services, issued by Commander Oliver Locker-Lampson, and addressed to Joseph Noulens.

Oliver Locker-Lampson (1880-1954) was a member of British parliament (conservative) for several years, and a trustworthy historical figure. He had close ties with Russia: he was acquainted with Russian tsar Nicholas II, and was even involved in the famous plot against Grigory Rasputin in 1916. During the WWI Commander Locker-Lampson was the head of RNAS Armou-

red Squadron—a British military unit, which was sent to help Russia in the fight against Germany. That was the armed unit to which Boris Skossyreff was attached, probably in the capacity of a military translator.

Thus, Skossyreff's service in the British RNAS armoured unit in Russia in 1918 may be considered proved. As he was actually attached to the British army unit, it may explain the absence of Skossyreff's records in the Russian sources. After his emigration, Skossyreff's life in 1920-s in Europe was not full of prosperity. There exist numerous police reports about cheque fraud and even a newspaper article about a swindle of gold watch, related to Boris Skossyreff. This may be partially the reason why Skossyreff appeared on the Dutch intelligence list as a swindler, but does not explain why he was considered one of "revolutionaries". It is probable that in the 1920-s Skossyreff found himself in a desperate financial situation, as many other émigrés, and was seeking for some kind of employment. That explains why in 1924 he turned to Locker-Lampson for support.

Locker-Lampson responded by issuing his certificate about Skossyreff's services to the allied forces during the war, which might have opened some doors and new perspectives for him. Because of Skossyreff's military background and good command of foreign languages, it is logical to presume that such job perspectives for him could possibly include some special missions in the intelligence sphere. These secret missions are sometimes mentioned in connection to Skossyreff, and vary in quite a fantastic range (from being a British secret agent to German Nazi, or to a Stalin's spy), but this is not confirmed documentarily in any way.

In my opinion, while the special agencies—most probably, the British ones—could have used Skossyreff's services occasionally, it is not plausible that he was a full-size secret agent. Otherwise it's hard to explain Skossyreff's financial hardships and, especially, the swindles such as cheque fraud, which brought him into the hands of police authorities in Europe. On the other hand, the records show that every time Skossyreff got in trouble he managed to get away with relative ease. This could be due to some undercover support from influential individuals or organization, such as intelligence service, but this is only a guess.

It appears that Skossyreff and Locker-Lampson remained in touch throughout 1920-s. It is quite probable they preserved their contact during the 1930-s as well. As Oliver Locker-Lampson indeed was close to the British ruling circles, the royals, and elite, it appears that Skossyreff's later assertions about his high-level British friends were not completely groundless.

In some sources there are referrals to Skossyreff's travel to South America, where he allegedly mastered his Spanish language. In the archival documents of 1932 I found a mention of a trade company organized by Skossyreff. The company was called "Boris de Skossyreff; import—export, representation".

The letterhead mentioned company's address in Santa Marta, Colombia. In my opinion, this document is not enough to prove that Skossyreff in fact travelled to South America. His passport does not bear any South American marks either.

Private life

It is rather important to prove the facts related to Skossyreff's private life, because his female partners played a significant role in his biography. It is generally believed that on March 21, 1931, in France Skossyreff married Frenchwoman Marie-Louise Parat (or Parat de Gassier), though I could not receive a marriage confirmation from the municipalities of Aix-en-Provence or Saint-Cannat.

The marriage did not preclude Skossyreff from extramarital affairs. In the British archive files of 1932 I have found notice about Skossyreff's English girlfriend, Mrs. Phyllis Heard (nee Ewart-Smith), but apparently this affair in Cannes did not last long. Phyllis (or Polly) was not the woman who remained with Skossyreff during the Andorran adventure.

About the same year Skossyreff met another woman— an American divorcée Florence Marmon. Some accounts called her "American millionairess", because of her alleged wealth, and pointed at her private capital as the most probable source of financing for the Skossyreff's project in Andorra. That may be true to some extent. According to the information about Mrs. Marmon, which I found in the American newspapers of the period, she might have possessed substantial financial means. Florence Marmon indeed was the former wife of Howard C. Marmon (1876-1943), owner of Marmon Motor Car Company of Indianapolis, manufacturer of well-known American cars. Though they divorced many years ago—probably around 1914, Howard Marmon was paying a generous allowance to his former wife.

Conclusions:

Below I have summarized the results of research into documentation about the Skossyreff's past.

Confirmed:

- Skossyreff's date and place of birth, nationality;
- Service during WWI in the British armed unit, connections in the British elite;
- Criminal records of fraud;
- Relationship with Florence Marmon, former wife of a U.S.A. car manufacturer.

Denied:

- Education at Oxford University;
- Aristocratic title of count of Orange;
- Services to the Dutch court.

2. THE ANDORRA PROJECT

Let me quote below a brief timeline of Skosyreff's brightest adventure – proclamation as Andorran monarch. The majority of calendar dates and all quotations are taken from a British confidential despatch preserved in the archive of Foreign and Commonwealth Office of UK. This despatch dated July 28, 1934, was addressed to foreign minister John Simon .

May 17, 1934: Skosyreff "presented to the Andorran authorities a reasoned statement of his claim to the throne".

May 22: An order of expulsion of Skosyreff was signed "by Spanish episcopal and French vegueres ". The despatch says Skosyreff left for Torredembarra, but more probably for La Seu d'Urgell.

July 6-7: Skosyreff repeatedly proposed to Consell General de les Valls his program of reforms and modernization for Andorran economy, based on tax-free regime and promotion of tourism and sports. A part of his programme was installation of himself as a monarch, based on alleged approval from Jean d'Orléans, Duke of Guise (who was the only true inheritor of the Counts of Foix, according to Skosyreff's view) (unconfirmed).

July 8-10: It is believed that Consell General de les Valls twice ratified the decision to approve Skosyreff's program and to proclaim him as monarch (el príncep) under the name of Boris I of Andorra: on 8th and 10th of July, both times almost unanimously with a single dissenting voice out of 24. On 9th of July the monarchy was proclaimed, the royal Constitution (see Annex for full text) was adopted, and Provisional Government was approved (unconfirmed). The new Andorran flag was adopted.

July 12: Skosyreff issued a proclamation declaring war on the Bishop of Urgell. Apparently this was a reaction to Bishop's anti-Skosyreff position presented in the press.

July 20: Skosyreff was arrested at La Seu d'Urgell by Catalan civil guards and transported to Barcelona. The reason of his arrest "was stated to be the breach of an order of expulsion, which had been pronounced against him on 8th December, 1933". Other sources mention he was arrested in Andorra and taken to Barcelona in accordance with La Ley de Vagos y Maleantes. If he indeed was captured by Catalan civil guards in Andorra (i.e. on foreign territory), it makes his arrest illegitimate!

July 23: Skosyreff was transported to Madrid and "was interviewed at the central police station at Madrid by a number of journalists, to whom he traced the history of the Andorran dynasty, with documentary reference, from the earliest times to its termination with the Duke of Guise. Asked whether he himself descended from the Duke, Skosyreff, however, admitted with some hesitation that he did not, and that, in spite of his historical exposition, his claim to the throne was based not on historic rights, but rather on the "principles of chivalry" and on the need of protecting the Spanish inhabitants of Andorra from

exploitation for the benefit of France". Skosyreff was kept in Modelo prison in Madrid and after some time expelled to Portugal.

The account of events, presented in the above-quoted British intelligence dispatch, had some inaccuracies. However, it is one of the few official documents, which I could find. The overall documentation of the July 1934 events is disappointingly scarce. Naturally, there exist considerable amount of newspaper articles from the European and American press of the period. The articles sometimes provide interesting photographic illustrations, but in terms of factual information they are not especially informative, and in some cases incomplete and contradictory.

As most of sources tell about two sessions of Consell General de les Valls – on July 8 and 10– both of which ratified the proclamation of Boris I as monarch with an overwhelming majority (23:1), I expected to find some documental proof in the in the official book of records of Consell General in the Andorran National Archive. With the help of Andorran colleagues, we examined the original book of records, but have found no mentions of that voting. Neither we found any other mentions about Skosyreff in the official records. In the Andorran archive we could neither find the Skosyreff's Constitution or "royal bulletins" which he was believed to publish. Only clippings from Catalan, French, Spanish newspapers about Skosyreff are available.

I was also hoping to find some documentation in Spain. The Skosyreff arrest and subsequent trial were widely covered in the press, so I believed the original records of the legal proceedings were kept in the Spanish state archives. To my disappointment, in response to my inquiries about access to the documents I received official response from Archivo General del Ministerio del Interior and from Direccion General de la Policia y de la Guardia Civil, stating the archival searches in those archives brought negative results.

Perhaps historic documents or artefacts related to those events of 1934 are still preserved in some libraries, private collections, or homes in Andorra. I believe it would important to make those unique documents known to general public and historians, and possibly assemble them at some point in the form of a historic exposition.

Conclusions:

Confirmed:

- Events in May-July 1934, including Skosyreff's presentations in Andorra;
- Skosyreff's declaration of war upon Bishop of Urgel;
- Arrest of Skosyreff and transfer to Barcelona/Madrid.

Pending:

- Actual decisions of Consell General de les Valls;
- Originals of Constitution and royal bulletins;
- Proceedings of the Skosyreff trial.

3. SKOSSYREFF'S LIFE AFTER ANDORRA

According to the newspaper accounts, on October 31 1934 in Madrid Skossyreff was sentenced to one year. "Although wearing the blue overalls issued to all Spanish prisoners, and with his ever-present monocle in his right eye, Boris de Skossyreff, ... pretender to the throne of Andorra, preserved much of his royal dignity and air of distinction..." (The New York Times). However, because he already spent several months in jail, he was expelled from Spain. As I mentioned above, the official papers with detail of Skossyreff trial were not found in the Spanish archives, and probably were lost during the Civil War. After the trial Skossyreff was sent to Portugal, where he spent several months. Florence Marmon, who acted as a partner and secretary of Skossyreff during the Andorra adventure, returned to USA in November 1934, on board of liner "Exochorda". Apparently, they have never met again.

Some documents are available regarding Skossyreff's stay in Portugal, for instance his letter of February 25 1935, written on stationery of a Lisbon's hotel. This hand-written letter in French, with a photograph attached to it, was addressed to the minister of foreign affairs of Netherlands regarding issue of a new passport. According to the research done by colleagues in Portugal, Skossyreff stayed in the town of Olhão until 1935. The Portuguese colleagues found the Passaporte de Viajante dated October 29 1935, which permitted Skossyreff to leave Portugal in the end of 1935, when he went to his official wife in Saint-Cannat, France. In May 1936 they returned to Portugal and possibly to Spain again, but because of the outbreak of Civil War they came back to France.

According to official information I received from France, on February 9 Skossyreff was arrested, and an order was issued for his expulsion. However, because he did not have proper passport, he was sent to the Rieucros internment camp for foreigners near Mende (Lozère). On April 25 he received an order to leave the French territory within 3 days. On October 7 1939 he was sent to the Vernet concentration camp (in Le Vernet, Ariège) in the French Pyrenees. The concentration camp was used for keeping "undesirable foreigners". In his book of memoirs about the wartime France published in 1960 in Moscow, a Russian doctor professor A.N.Rubakin, who was also prisoner at Vernet, recalls his meeting with Boris Skossyreff at the camp .

Officially confirmed information about Skossyreff terminates at the time of his stay at Vernet. However, in 1950-s and 1960-s there were newspaper publications in Portugal and Germany regarding Skossyreff, which shed some light on his life after the war.

In 1958 Skossyreff's Portuguese friend Dr. Francisco Fernandes Lopes from Olhão published some letters , which he said he received from Skossyreff and his wife Marie-Louise. The letters were from Boppard – a German town in Rhineland, near Koblenz. According to Skossyreff and his wife, in October 1942

Skossyreff was released from the Vernet camp by the Germans, sent to Soviet Union after the war, imprisoned in Siberia, released after several years, and finally returned to West Germany – where he settled with his wife and led a quiet life of a "100% petit rentier". Skossyreff's own interpretations of his biography are often misleading: this particular version of events is not confirmed from official sources, and raises many doubts. For example, if Skossyreff indeed was arrested by Stalin's security service and sent to one of the Soviet camps in Siberia, it seems improbable that he was able to return to West Germany after serving his sentence.

Nevertheless, while we do not have confirmed information about Skossyreff's activities after the war, it seems that until his death in 1989 he lived in Boppard, where Skossyreff's (apparently) grave was found. I have also found people living in Western Europe, who told me they are relatives of Boris Skossyreff, and partly confirmed this version of events, on condition of keeping privacy.

Conclusions:

Confirmed:

- Trial in Madrid; expulsion to Portugal;
- Return to official wife in France;
- Detention in two French concentration camps.

Pending:

- Service for Bundeswehr;
- Detention in Soviet Union.

4. REMARKS ON THE PORTRAIT OF SKOSSYREFF

After spending considerable time researching and proving objective facts about Boris Skossyreff, I wanted to say a few words about his psychological portrait. As always in historic research, the facts of an individual life should be seen in a broader cultural and psychological context, and against the background of large-scale historic events.

Journalists often run to extremes when depicting Boris Skossyreff. He is sometimes represented as a mysterious and charismatic agent à-la James Bond, and his Andorran mission being is a part of some secret international plot. Alternatively, Skossyreff is underestimated as an operetta character in the Andorran adventure. Both approaches are understandable, in the absence of objective information. The truth, as always, lies somewhere in-between.

Indeed, it is easy to depict Skossyreff as an adventurer and liar. However, we should place his activities in the context of fierce historical situation of WWI, Russian revolution of 1917, and emigration. Skossyreff lost everything in the revolution and emigrated. He did not even have a passport. A young man in his early twenties found himself away from his family and home country, cut off from his environment, with no financial means. His military service was pro-

bably the only work experience he had, so his options for finding a job in Western Europe were very limited. The only advantage, which Skossyreff possessed, was good command of foreign languages. Combined with a military training, it suggested that the intelligence service was almost the only choice. At the same time there were hundreds of thousands of other Russians who fled from the revolution, many of whom had a similar background as Skossyreff, who were also seeking employment at the same market.

At the same time, Skossyreff was a good-mannered and good-looking young officer from a noble family. He wanted to remain with "high society", to which he belonged in Russia, but this was problematic for him in Europe. Nevertheless, Skossyreff was obviously attractive to women and even charismatic. We know about his affairs with rich upper-class women. It is also possible to imagine that in these relationships Skossyreff was feeling he was not equal, and suffered from a deeply rooted inferiority complex. From a psychological viewpoint, it explains Skossyreff's lies about himself. Obviously he mixed fantasies with facts, and probably at some point even started to believe in his own words about royal connections all over Europe.

Skossyreff's pretension to lead a life of a high-society person, with no real material means, could only result in his financial dependence on his female partners, or lead to his occasional criminal deeds such as cheque fraud. As we know Skossyreff tried to find proper employment through his British friend and Member of Parliament Oliver Locker-Lampson. If he was employed by special agency, his missions were probably infrequent, and his financial position was never stable. This instability probably was the reason of his marriage: as we know, his wife was well-off and considerably older than Skossyreff.

Many other men would have led a quiet unpretentious life in such a situation. However, Skossyreff was obviously a type who could not reconcile himself to his fate. He seeks a possibility to regain his position in the world. Dissatisfaction of his dependent position probably resulted in active search for new possibilities, and eventually led to his Andorran plan.

Skossyreff resides in French Riviera, and knows well Monaco. When he learns about Andorra, he develops his plan to transform it into a flourishing tax heaven like Monaco. He studies the history of Andorra and learns about the controversial situation with the French co-prince's rights in Andorra, the royalists in France (Jean III, Duke of Guise), and seizes the opportunity, which he finds. It may be seen very adventurous from a modern standpoint, but we should remember the historical context: political changes were happening all over Europe from Russia to Catalonia, and nothing seemed impossible – even the most risky political plan could succeed.

Another psychological aspect, which should be noted, is Skossyreff's origin of former tsarist officer. He probably suffered from brutal execution of the Russian royal family (by the way, in 1931 followed the departure of king Alfonso XIII from Spain). Thousands of Russian officers were ready to fight for restoration of the Romanovs in Russia, but in the 1930-s it was already hopeless. While monarchy in Russia was impossible, a new "Russian" dynasty in the middle of Europe could be seen as an attractive alternative for many Russians. Those Russians could contribute both finances and knowledge into its development.

Finally, Skossyreff managed to realize his plan. Though Skossyreff's reign was very brief, it appears to be legitimate – as his rule was overthrown by the intervention of an external (Spanish) force. Skossyreff's declaration of war upon the Bishop of Urgel in response to Bishop's "insulting" words needs further research based on documents. However, that was obviously quite an unpragmatic and even romantic gesture of Skossyreff - not a gesture of a dishonest swindler.

Often the Skossyreff episode is ignored in the history of Andorra. Probably there were political and psychological reasons for that. It is important, however, that we must not have taboos. The Skossyreff's monarchy was not an incident, which passed without any trace. For example, it has left the first Andorra's Constitution, which granted equal liberal rights to the people. The ideas of Andorra's development, based on tax-free economy and promotion of tourism, were also foreseen by Skossyreff many years before they were actually implemented. After all, Consell General is known to have voted and approved Skossyreff's plan twice – almost unanimously. I believe Boris Skossyreff was sincere in his attempts to introduce improvements in Andorra, and in his affection towards Andorran people.

There may be different approaches to this person, and different evaluations. My own research is only a small piece of historical information, which can be collected, but my aim is to initiate a bigger work. The different opinions about Skossyreff should always be founded on facts, and people must have access to documents. In my recent interviews in Andorran press I proposed the idea of accumulation of Skossyreff's documentation and artefacts under the roof of an exhibition or museum. His story is so unique that it will raise much interest among people in Andorra and its visitors. Hopefully, an objective account of Skossyreff episode will follow in the future.

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