A RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE BETWEEN RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE:
ELEUTHERAE IN EURIPIDES' ANTIOPE
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A Religious Landscape Between Ritual and Performance: Eleutherae in Euripides’ Antiope

The concept of “religious landscape” is not to be mistaken with the notion of “cultic landscape” (the integration of cultic practices and processes within the constituent components of a landscape), nor with that of “cultic space” (the configuration of a social space through the distribution and hierarchical organization of worship sites). In order to understand its specific nature, it is necessary to incorporate the processes of the symbolic construction of space based on a performance space that has a religious dimension in its own right. The article uses the representation of Eleutherae in Euripides’ Antiope as an example to illustrate the process of creating a landscape that connects Athens to its fringes.

A number of concepts appear to be both close to and distinct from the notion we try to define as “religious landscape,” and the concept of “cultic space” figures among these. It is rather easy to see what makes the two concepts both closely connected to and different from one another. The idea of “space” seems more abstract and constructed, and adds a greater degree of conscious organization than the visual perception associated with the idea of “landscape,” which, on the contrary, seems to be built upon places with their own characteristics. In return, the term “cult” refers to specific practices, gestures, and places, while “religion” also includes various general ways of representing the relationship between mankind and higher powers. But these reflections are based on our own words...
and categories, and therefore are not in and of themselves useful in considering what might be understood by “religious landscape” in the study of ancient societies. To achieve this, it is appropriate to use a different method to explore the various links between religious practices and performances in spaces that the observer must not arbitrarily outline from his own perspective, but must identify according to the way that they were “constructed” by the Ancients themselves. We then can hope that the study of the interactions between practices and performances will allow for a better understanding of the connection between the spatial dimension of religious actions and the religious perception of spatial realities in ancient societies, going beyond the two classic approaches to the relationship between religion and space: one that takes realia as a starting point, analyzing their cultural representations, and one that takes global religious ideas as a starting point, deducing how they are translated into concrete spaces.

From this point of view, the many works on the “performative” value of poetic works—their pragmatic effectiveness at the time of their enunciation in the precise place and at the exact moment for which they were conceived—invite new questions.¹ The articulation between the different temporalities of the stories that these works draw upon and the hic et nunc of their execution forges a two-way relationship between narration and ritual, performance and practice. The rite brings the story up to date and links the moment of execution to a past that the work’s sponsors wished to highlight, while at the same time, the story acquires the ability to inflect the meaning accorded to the ritual, in a constant back-and-forth that lies at the very heart of the process of tradition-building.² This process highlights a defined place of ritual communication, in relation to


which a “landscape of reception” develops, whose nature and scope depend upon the type of cult and the type of sanctuary in which the “performance” took place. Any work, therefore, has the potential to create a “communication space” that can interfere with other spaces created from other poles of ritual communication, whether they are complementary or in competition with one another. The space, then, is not only a physical fact of the experience, but also a dimension of communication and therefore of one’s perception of reality, which may vary depending on the time and location in which this communication takes place. Is it not precisely at the junction between the experience of place and the landscape of ritual communication that one can define the notion of “religious landscape”?

In this paper, I will address this question, taking Athenian dramatic performances, and more specifically an example taken from the works of Euripides, as a starting point. Euripides played a considerable role in the development of an Attic view of space, which was infused with a certain idea of Athens intended primarily for Athenians themselves, but whose impact was considerably magnified due to the subsequent influence of Euripides’ tragedies on broad swaths of ancient culture. The selected example is Euripides’ depiction of the place of Eleutherae in his tragedy *Antiope*. The interest of this choice derives from the fact that the border location of Eleutherae and the existence of sources outside of Euripides make it possible to show the diversity of perspectives on an interstitial, frontier space, the status of which was long uncertain. It also derives from the fact that the supposed history of the cults practiced in Eleutherae is often considered to be related to the establishment of the ritual framework within which dramatic performances took place in Athens: the Dionysia. Perhaps, given this fact, there is some link between the place depicted and the context of the depiction.

**An Intermediary Space**

Eleutherae—or, rather, “the Eleutherae,” to emphasize the plural form used in nearly all texts—is the name of a place (not even a

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deme) in the Cithaeron mountain range that all sources situate at the border of Attica and Boeotia, in an intermediary location that would translate into fluctuations in the border between the two regions. Thus Pausanias, passing through, explains that Eleutheriae had first been the Boeotian border on the side towards Attica, then that the Eleutherians had gone to the side of Athens and that Cithaeron then became the Attic boundary of Boeotia. Pausanias’ indications show that, when speaking of Eleutheriae, the Periegete is referring to a site on the meridional piedmont of the Cithaeron, the main elements of which are a temple of Dionysus that he notes in the plain and a fortified dwelling (in ruins, in his day) located a bit higher up. This dwelling is generally identified as the so-called Gyphtocastro fortress, at the southern entrance of the pass through which the road from Eleusis to Thebes crossed the mountain range. As we shall see, there is cause to believe that the term may originally have included a larger area, less directly associated with a dwelling. But one must not forget that Pausanias is speaking of borders at a time when that notion had taken a whole new meaning, different from their meaning in the Archaic and Classical eras: the drawing of real boundary lines was a later process, one recorded in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The “border zones” that these lines crossed or that they attributed to one or another city were often, in the Archaic Era and sometimes even in the Classical era, intermediary areas with rather vague statuses and affiliations.

In Pausanias’ description of Eleutheriae, one cannot help but pause over the mention of a temple of Dionysus. The information that Pausanias offers on this topic, supplemented by several pieces of information that he had already listed in the course of his itineraries in Athens proper, is indeed at the root of what might be called a modern “vulgate” linking the founding of the great Dionysia of Athens to the cult of Dionysus in Eleutheriae. According to the Periegete, it was in this temple that an ancient (archaion) xoanon that had been brought to Athens had once been located, while the statue seen in his day was a copy thereof. And yet, in Athens, Pausanias had told of the existence, near the sanctuary of Dionysus Melpomenus in the

4. Pausanias, I, 38, 8.
Cerameicus, of a statue of a certain Pegasus of Eleutheræae who had introduced the cult of the god into Athens. He then mentioned the existence of a temple (and a statue) of Dionysus Eleuthereus in the sanctuary of Dionysus to the south of the Acropolis, adjacent to the theater. Finally, he alluded to the transportation, under some circumstances, of the statue of Dionysus Eleuthereus into a small temple located at the Academy. The role of Pegasus is also mentioned in a scholium to Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*, which identifies the use of *phalloi* in processions in honor of Dionysus to the Athenians’ refusal to worship the god when his statue had been brought to Athens by his “missionary” from Eleutheræae. Cruelly punished by the deity in their most sensitive parts (perhaps in the form of a permanent erection), the Athenians managed to be healed on the condition that they escort the statue of the god, honoring him. None of these notes makes explicit reference to the city Dionysia. But ephoric inscriptions from the second century B.C.E., in which mention is made of *eisagogê apo tês escharas*, the statue’s “entrance from the ritual hearth” by the ephebes on the occasion of the Dionysia, and Philostratus’ confirmation regarding the transportation of the statue of Dionysus to the Academy during the Dionysia, have allowed modern scholars to reconstitute a foundation story on the basis of these scattered pieces of information, an *aition* whose ritual reenactment consists of the solemn introduction of Dionysus into the city and the theater during the great Dionysia.

**Eleutheræae and the Dionysia: Weaknesses of the Historicizing Interpretation**

More still, this story, interpreted through the willingly archaising perspective of the particular reading of Pausanias that was long

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6. Pausanias I, 2, 5; 20, 3; and 29, 2, respectively.
adopted by modern historians, was the object of a strictly historicizing reading that associated the integration of the cult of Dionysus of Eleutherae with the founding or reorganization of the great Dionysia in the second half of the sixth century. It seemed there was no question that the *archaion xoanon* brought to Athens was a true and venerable archaic statue from the Eleutherae sanctuary; the choice of the Academy, understood to represent a stop along the road to Eleutherae (which seems doubtful), as a destination for the statue of the god supposedly recalled the origin of the cult, and the return to Athens allegedly commemorated the effective transfer of the statue of the god at the time of the creation of the city Dionysia. Given that Pausanias further explained that the Eleutherians had united with Athens not out of submission but out of fear of Thebes and in order to share the same *politeia*, it seemed tempting to draw a comparison between their initiative and the rapprochement that occurred between Plataea and Athens in the late sixth century, thanks to which the Plataeans appear to have acquired certain rights from Athens. Consequently, the arrival of the Dionysus of Eleutherae in Athens could be interpreted as an indicator of the incorporation of this border area and its inhabitants into the city, the legend of Pegasus (a figure unknown outside of this context) having been invented to lend a respectable antiquity to this movement.

This whole structure, attractive but built solely upon later sources, has only recently been put in doubt. The late Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, proposing a new organization of the different rituals making up the city Dionysia, demonstrated the limitations of a historicizing reading of the integration of the Dionysus of Eleutherae.


It is clear that this whole story conforms to the entirely classic pattern of expressions of gratitude toward the god, which, coming from the outside, is always initially rejected and must violently express its power in order for the cult to be accepted. Even in Attica, this pattern gives structure to one telling of the reception of Dionysus by the hero Icarius. None of these stories can be accorded a direct historical value. One might add that, unlike the sanctuary of Icarion that appears to have existed since the sixth century, we have no material evidence of the existence of a cult of Dionysus in Eleutherae in the fifth and sixth centuries; even assuming that the little temple discovered on the plain, at the base of the Gyphocastro fortress, is indeed the temple of Dionysus mentioned by Pausanias, it dates back to the fourth century at the earliest. Archaeology obviously has its limits, and we shall be careful not to rely overmuch on an argument from silence. But we have also gotten past the literal, archaizing reading of Pausanias, and it would be dangerous indeed to deduce from the Periegete’s use of the expression *archaiōn xoanon* that this concerns a truly archaic work, and not simply an archaizing work. There are, therefore, many reasons to dismiss the strictly historicizing reading of the transplantation of the Dionysus of Eleutherae. What remains to be determined are the reasons and the time period of the process that made the Pegasus legend of Eleutherae the etiological narrative of the processions of the great Dionysia and, in so doing, built a ritual relationship between a border area and the sanctuary of Dionysus at the heart of the city.

**Divine Presences Encountered between Attica and Boeotia**

Dionysus, however, is not the only divine figure associated with Eleutherae, and we should broaden our horizons before addressing Euripides’ tragedy. On the other side of the Cithaeron, poets

were giving a very different depiction of this same area. First of all, in the prologue to Hesiod’s *Theogony* in which he mentions the Muses, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, he describes the latter by saying that she “reigns over the hills of Eleuther.”\(^{16}\) Obviously, there is no evidence to support the precise identification of the Eleuther of the *Theogony* as the site described by Pausanias under the name Eleutherae. In fact, the question is of very little interest, for it is likely that the “hills of Eleuther,” of which the mother of the Muses is sovereign, are meant rather broadly to evoke the mountainous region of Cithaeron. Here we must recall the legend of the rivalry between the two brothers Helicon and Cithaeron, which, in the work of Corinna of Tanagra, takes the form of a poetic contest: before the gods and the Muses, the two brothers sing theogonies (as one surmises from the final lines of the song of Cithaeron, which evokes Cronos, Rhea, and the birth of Zeus).\(^{17}\) And so it is Cithaeron who obtains the majority of votes and is proclaimed the victor by Hermes; in his anger, Helicon snatches an enormous rock and throws it into the plain, among the people. The legend may have something to do with an origin story for the two mountains, but above all it shows that both mountains were associated with themes and figures of poetic inspiration. Better still, precedence is given to Cithaeron, making the identification of Mnemosyne’s Eleuther with this mountain range (or a portion thereof) even more believable. Consequently, one might bring this confrontation between the two mountains (which is also a rivalry) closer to the traditions reported by Pausanias, according to which Mt. Helicon, prior to being consecrated to the Muses (daughters of Zeus), had previously been consecrated to the Muses of a prior generation, the daughters of Ouranos, or to three Muses called Melete, Mneme, and Aoidē.\(^{18}\) The two figures recalling the memory dimension of poetic inspiration, Mneme of Mt. Helicon and Mnemosyne of Eleuther, seem to confirm the existence of a competition between the two mountains in the domain of the Muses that Hesiod’s glory and, thanks to him, the Muses of Mt. Helicon eventually obscured.

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18. Pausanias, IX, 29, 2. The first tradition allegedly derives from Mimnermus.
At this point, it would be tempting to contrast an Athenian view of Eleutherae, favoring the Dionysus honored on the southern slope of Mt. Cithaeron, with a Boeotian view favoring the Muses, Mnemosyne, and other figures associated with poetry, on the side facing Mt. Helicon. But Euripides’ tragedy shows that we cannot stick to such crude divisions. Indeed, Antiope clearly draws an association between Eleutherae and a god whose name has already been surreptitiously mentioned in this matter, through the mention of Mnemosyne and Corinna’s poem: Hermes, who, as noted in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, was one of those associated with the mother of the Muses. Hermes is unquestionably the god who dominates Euripides’ Antiope. The narrative framework of the play is based on a well-known legend, which obviously presents a certain number of variants: Antiope, granddaughter of Hyrieus, eponym of a small city in Boeotia, and daughter of Nycteus in Euripides’ account, is loved by Zeus and conceives by him; she flees and is either carried off or received as a guest by Epopeus of Sicyon. In order to avenge his deceased brother Nycteus, Lycus, who has become regent of Thebes, comes to retrieve Antiope and brings her back to Thebes. Along the way (in the Cithaeron, according to Euripides), Antiope gives birth to twins, Amphion and Zethus, whom she abandons and who are taken in and raised by a shepherd. Long imprisoned by Lycus’ wife Dirce, Antiope succeeds in escaping and seeking refuge in Eleutherae with her sons, who have grown into young men. The tragedy dramatizes the arrival of Antiope and the way that Amphion and Zethus, finally informed of their true origin, protect their mother from the queen Dirce when she appears unexpectedly, then put Dirce to death by tying her to an angry bull. When the king, Lycus, arrives in turn in pursuit of Antiope, the twins prepare to execute him but are stopped by the appearance of Hermes, who, in the name of Zeus, saves the king’s life but forces him to cede sovereignty to Amphion and Zethus.

19. Homeric Hymn to Hermes, 1. 430: “For the son of Maia was of her [Mnemosyne’s] following” (hé gar λαχέ Μαιαδὸς ὦιον).

Euripides and the Construction of Religious Landscape

Although the play is known only through fragments, completed by some fragments of the version that the poet Pacuvius added in Latin, by Hyginus’ summary in his Fables, and by other indirect sources, the elements at our disposal suffice to show that Euripides truly developed a “landscape” that owes less to already-existing realities of worship than to the efficacy of its religious components within dramatic logic. And these components make plenty of room for Hermes. This is the case first of all due to the very location of the action. Unlike the “plains of Oinoe” where the master of the shepherd who opens the prologue lives (Oinoe is the closest deme), “the Eleutherae” are a harsh, rocky land (the word petra comes up several times, and Pacuvius’ tragedy even speaks of a horrible place, loca horrida), inhabited by herdsmen (boucoloi, pastores in Pacuvius). Those are the characteristics of the unpredictable spaces where the aid of Hermes is needed to guide the paths of guardians of their flocks or of travelers hesitating over the road to take. Thus it is not impossible that Hermes is the god (whose name has not been preserved) invoked by that herdsman in the play’s prologue. Due to the resonance of the legend of Pegasus and the Dionysus of Eleutherae, editors of Euripides frequently indicate that the prayer is addressed to Dionysus; but nothing proves this, and the hymn that Amphion sings in the second part of the prologue makes explicit reference to Hermes, saved from the fury of Apollo thanks to the exchange of the lyre in return for cattle (fr. 5). Indeed, Amphion is wholly on Hermes’ side: he, like Apollo, received the gift of the lyre from Hermes, and dedicates himself entirely to song and poetry, for which his brother Zethus reproaches him. The play is known for the confrontation between two ways of life, as embodied by the twins: one, Zethus, thought of as the perfect citizen, active, hardworking, and involved in city affairs; the other, Amphion, living in seclusion and cultivating “divine inspiration and love of song” (fr. 6). Nevertheless it is Amphion who, as the action plays out, seems to be in charge. According to Hyginus’ summary, Zethus initially refuses...
to receive Antiope; the preserved fragments then make Amphion the main interlocutor of the various protagonists. Finally, it is Hermes who appears for the dénouement of the play and who, in the name of Zeus, confers sovereignty over Thebes to the twins; but it is in concert with Zeus that he gives Amphion the special power to move blocks of stone and trees with the sound of his lyre in order to build the ramparts of Thebes. 23  

Dionysus is not absent from the play, but nothing links the mentions of him to the Dionysus of Eleutherae from the Pegasus legend, except the fact that commentators have often read Euripides in light of Pausanias and retroactively interpreted the text of the tragedy in accordance with the legend. We have already seen this in the case of the identity of the god invoked in the prologue. Likewise, because Pausanias (I, 38, 9) mentions a grotto in Eleutherae that could be the location where Antiope abandoned her children, the twins’ dwelling is depicted onstage as a grotto; however, the terms used to describe it (for example, stéga, which brings to mind a building with a roof, in line 54 of fragment 42), hardly support this interpretation. Yet once we stop using the Pegasus legend that interferes with our reading of Euripides, another figure of Dionysus appears. The god is, in fact, present in two ways. He generally haunts the untamed, mountainous land that serves as the tragedy’s setting, and it is to that type of presence that Dirce attaches herself when she bursts onto the stage at the head of a chorus of violent maenads roaming the solitude of Mt. Cithaeron. But the god is also on stage, although hidden. Indeed, fragment 39 explains that, inside the shepherds’ dwelling, there is a stylon covered with ivy, dedicated to Dionysus. The stylon in question is undoubtedly less a column than a simple post like those on which one could hang the mask of the god. But it is meaningful that this post is simply alluded to in the text, and not visible onstage; significant also that it plays no protective role for the characters dedicated to the cult of the god, such as Dirce. This is a marked contrast from tragedies such as The Heraclidae or The

23. The wording of line 96, fragment 42, highlights Hermes’ active role in this decision: “Zeus, and I with him, grant you this honor” (Zeus tênde timèn sun d’ego didômi soi). One might add to this that Aristophanes brought in the etymology that Euripides gave to the name of Amphiôn, thus called because he was born at the junction of two roads (fr. 3), which reinforces the “Hermaic” nature of the character in the play.
Suppliants, in which the altar of a deity emblematic of the place—the Zeus of the Tetrapolis of Marathon in the former case, Demeter at Eleusis in the latter—plays a central role in the action, on stage, as a guarantee of refuge and a medium of supplication. Nothing of the kind takes place with the Dionysus of Eleutherae. This “invisible and inactive presence” of the god does not fail to raise a series of questions, regarding both the manner of representing the god in general and, more specifically, the place of Dionysus Eleuthereus in the great Dionysia of Euripides’ day.24

**The Double Connection of Dionysus and Hermes**

Even so, this is not so much a matter of making a choice, through Euripides’ tragedy, between a “Hermaic” view and a “Dionysian” view of Eleutherae, as it is of understanding how the poet combines the two deities in order to develop his depiction of a very distinctive space that is at once proper and foreign, Athenian and Boeotian, past and present. Hermes clearly makes Eleutherae as the connecting point between two identities, two worlds that find in it an intermediary or transitional space in which to join together. The heroes and the legend are Boeotian and are among the tales of the dynasties of Thebes, but the chorus of shepherds is certainly Athenian, and it is in relation to the Attic deme of Oinoe that the scene is set in the prologue.25 Thanks to Hermes, a land portrayed as being part of Attica becomes the setting for a legend directed toward Boeotia, giving Euripides a new opportunity to extol his view of Athens as a welcoming, hospitable land where heroes, traditions, and cults

24. Because of this, I am not entirely convinced by the arguments presented by Agatha Pitombo Bacelar, “Pégase d’Éleuthères,” 154–160, in favor of dating the establishment of the etiological legend of the Dionysus of Eleutherae to the fifth century.

from elsewhere find refuge and take on new life or a new meaning. Dionysus, for his part, is there in the forms supposed to represent the crudest, wildest aspects of his cult—the simple post, the crazy rush of the maenads through the mountains—and thus pushes the space of Eleutherae into the background of the mountains and the terrifying spaces where a woman, Dirce, can be put to death in such a savage manner as being torn apart by a bull; here, we are rather close to the world of the Bacchantes. Thus the god would seem to arouse a sense of remoteness. Nevertheless, being depicted at the heart of his main Athenian feast and his main urban sanctuary, this Dionysus of Eleutherae also forges a connection of complicity between the theatrical performance and the context of the dramatic action. The presence of Dionysus in Antiope has the effect of projecting the spectator, conscious of his participation in a celebration in honor of the god, into a time and place where this god is also present and celebrated, even if the forms of that celebration bring to mind the distance between the story and the present experience of the rite. Thus the god kindles both unity and difference between the two levels of the experience.

We see that the question of the etiological relationship between the evocation of Eleutherae and the celebration of the Dionysia, whether one considers said relationship possible or doubtful, in fact conceals more interesting questions regarding the symbolic construction of a space by depicting it as being linked to a ritual context. The relationship established between the depiction and the space in question is even contrary to etiological reasoning: it is no longer the supposed origin that is projected toward the present of the depiction, but the process of the depiction that becomes the driving force behind a symbolic investment of places thus integrated within a comprehensive cultural construction. Rather than thinking that it is the existence of a cult, or even a simple legend, of Dionysus in Eleutherae that explains the god’s presence in Euripides’ tragedy, one might consider that depicting Eleutherae as a Dionysian space was a way to connect the place to the Athenians’ lived religious experience during the Dionysia, and thus a way to integrate Eleutherae into a religious landscape conceived and performed in Athens. In a way, it is by means of the “Dionysian otherness” common to both ritual and narrative that the play integrates Eleutherae into the landscape in which the ties between Athens and its outskirts
are forged. Rather than a genealogy between a real or invented origin and the context of the performance, the tragedy establishes a vis-à-vis between two spaces marked by the presence of Dionysus. This accounts for all the difference between the xoanon mentioned by Pausanias and the stylon in Euripides’ tragedy. There is no doubt that the former is, from the Periegete’s point of view, a sign of the cult’s roots in a founding archaism, a step in an evolution that leads toward more refined, more urban forms of the rite. The latter must not be seen in the same progressive perspective. More accurately, it represents the religious proximity (the shared Dionysian context) between the ritual and the narrative, all while maintaining a cultural distance between what happens at the heart of the city and what is supposed to take place at its mountainous fringes.

Dionysus thus draws Athens and the remote area of Eleutherae within a single religious landscape, but this landscape is not necessarily cultic, since one can do without the relationship between one supposedly original sanctuary and another. Hermes, for his part, lends this same space its intermediary, transitional, between-two-worlds quality. This is why the two deities are inseparable, and their combined presence necessary, in order to give the space its full meaning. This necessity was well understood in Antiquity: it is not irrelevant that Hermes’ lyre and syrinx figure, along with Dionysian ivy, in the most monumental work depicting the killing of Dirce by Amphion and Zethus, the famous “Farnese Bull” at the Museum of Naples.26 Focusing solely on the Dionysian dimension, as is favored by the etiological point of view, distorts our understanding of the “religious landscape” drawn by Euripides.

Thus the concept of “religious landscape,” such as it emerges from these considerations, does not exactly cover the notions of “cultic landscape” (the integration of cultic practices and processes within the constituent components of a landscape), nor of “cultic space” (the configuration of a social space through the distribution and hierarchical organization of worship sites), but rather integrates them in a network of symbolic constructions of space based on a specific performance space. The religious nature of this performance space,

26. The lyre (which is the “true” lyre of Hermes, made with a tortoise shell) is placed at the feet of Amphion, the syrinx (Hermes’ gift to the shepherds) lower on the rock that forms the base, and the ivy is carried over the shoulder of a young shepherd.
whether it be a theater or any other kind of poetic production associated with a ritual, influences the way in which form and coherence are given to these symbolic constructions. The religious landscape is therefore essentially multiple within a single society, and an understanding of its dynamics is essential in order to bring the analysis of religious conceptions and practices beyond the overly rigid and monolithic categories to which we sometimes confine them.

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