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Herstellung: Weihert-Druck GmbH, Darmstadt
Printed in Germany
ISBN 3-927120-74-X
Printed on acid-free paper
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The Ugaritic Divine Epithet \textit{ybmt limm} and
the Biblical \textit{‘emim} \textsuperscript{1}

Joshua Fox, Aderet

The phrase \textit{ybmt limm}, used of Anat in Ugaritic epic, has always defied a simple explanation. It is generally vocalized as \textit{labbamatu li’mimnā}, meaning, approximately, ‘Sister-in-Law of the Peoples’; \textsuperscript{2} a construct chain, where \textit{ybmt} refers to a family relationship, and \textit{limm} (\textit{l’m}), is plural ‘peoples’. This interpretation, while based on well-known cognates for the two words, does not fully explain the phrase. This article will propose a different analysis of the second word: instead of \textit{li’imnā} ‘of the peoples’, we will propose \textit{li’-ēmīmā}, ‘to the Terrible Ones (= gods)’. This analysis is suggested by the close syntactic, morphological, and lexical similarity between \textit{ybmt limm} and \textit{ybim liym}, a phrase used of Baal. \textsuperscript{3} Further important evidence for the comparison of \textit{liym} and \textit{limm} comes from the comparative sphere, where the cognate Hebrew \textit{‘ēmīm} is used for a supernatural race. While the reading \textit{li’mīma} cannot be ruled out, there are strong grounds for \textit{li’-ēmīmā}.

1. The meaning of \textit{ybmt(t)}

Although this article will be devoted to the explanation of \textit{liym}, the meaning of \textit{ybmt} and its masculine equivalent \textit{ybim} should be considered as well. These words are generally explained on the basis of Hebrew \textit{yābām}, Syriac \textit{yābmlā}, ‘husband’s brother’, fem. Hebrew \textit{yābmlā}, \textsuperscript{4} Syriac \textit{yābmlā} ‘sister-in-law’.

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\textsuperscript{1} My thanks to Chaim Cohen, Edward Greenstein, Jo Ann Hackett, John Huehnergard, Eugen Pentiuc, Daniel Sivan, Henrietta Wiley, and an anonymous reviewer for their important comments, which contributed significantly to the development of this paper. Responsibility for any faults remains with the author. I acknowledge the support of a Hebrew University Post-Doctoral Fellowship.


\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Yābām} and \textit{yābmlā} are attested in the Bible only with suffixes: \textit{ybimtō} Deut 25:7, 9, \textit{ybimtēk} Ruth 1:15, \textit{yābmlāh} Deut 25:5, and \textit{yābmlī} Deut 25:7. There is also the D verb from \textit{ybhml}, attested in Gen 38:8 and Deut 25:7. The absolute singular of \textit{ybimtō} could,
referring particularly to the participants in a Levirate marriage, in which a
brother, or in some cases another relative, of a man who has died without
progeny marries his widow.

Since it seems that Anat cannot be primarily defined by her status as a
sister-in-law, 3 alternative family-relations, such as ‘progenitress (of heroes)’
have been suggested for ybm. 5 This is supported by the fact that a relative
other than the brother-in-law marries the widow in Biblical accounts of specific
Levirate marriages. The statement of the legal requirements assigns the
responsibility to the yâbâm, who is the ‘âh of the deceased ‘âh is basically
‘brother’, but can refer more generally to other relatives. 7 On the other hand,
the Akkadian use of ya-âba-mi-ša ‘her brother-in-law’ in a legal text 8 supports
the more specific interpretation of *yâbâm as ‘brother-in-law’.

In Ugaritic, ybm, masculine of ybm, occurs twice in the Ugaritic texts, once
in the divine epithet ybm lîlîm (discussed below, p. 6), while ybm occurs ten
times, always in the phrase ybm li îmû. 9 The only use of ybm(t) outside of one
of the epithets is in the Kûta epic, 10 where ybm refers to a relative of one of
Kûta’s daughters. The ybm here may be Kûta himself. Since Kûta is also
described as ab ‘father’, this may be a link between ybm and the ‘progenitor’
semantics suggested for ybm. Alternately, the ybm may be îlu (PN), the brother
of Kûta’s daughter. While the exact relationship cannot be determined, this
passage supports the interpretation of ybm as a family relative.

on the basis of the Biblical attestations forms, be yâbîmet (thus F. Brown, et. al., A Hebrew
basis of extensive Mishnaic attestations, y’bâmâ is to be preferred.

3 Anat is understood variously as the sister or consort of Baal, and Baal may be the
brother of Mot or Yamm (although II is described as the father of Mot and Yamm, while
Baal is bn dga ‘son of Dagan’). Baal’s death is a part of the mythological cycle. Thus,
the complex and uncertain family relations allow the possibility of an ingestorship of
Anat as a widowed sister-in-law of Mot or Yamm. This possibility, however, is not well-
supported by the textual evidence, and sheds little light on Anat’s status.

6 C. H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1965) 408.
See also Walls, Baal Cycle, 94-96, 157, concerning the more general interpretation of
ybm.

7 The Biblical passages that depict this custom are Gen 38, Deut 25:5-10, and Ruth 4 et
passim.

8 See W. von Soden, Akkadisches Handwörterbuch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965-81),
1565 (in Nachträge).

9 Some of these passages include reconstruction (following KTU) of part of the phrase
ybm li îmû. If the reconstructed passages are disregarded, the argument of this paper is
not significantly altered. The passages with ybm li îmû are KTU 1.3 I:33, 1.3 III:12 (with
ybm, li îmû, emended to ybm, li îmûm), 1.3 IV:22, 1.4 II:16, 1.10 1:15, 1.10 1:16, 1.10 III:3,
1.17 VI:19, 1.101:16.

10 ybm. šb’; x[xxx]/ ãrz. îlu (KTU 1.16 II:32-33).
2. Ugaritic liʾmu `people'

The common interpretation of liʾmu derives it from liʾmu `people’. This word undoubtedly exists in Ugaritic, and its presence in the lexicon must be accepted even if we do interpret ybstm liʾmu as /yabamatu liʾemima/.

Parallelism and context in Ugaritic myth support the translation `clan(s), people(s)’. Llm (singular or plural) is in parallel with adm `people’, \textsuperscript{11} hmlt `multitude’, \textsuperscript{12} or arš `earth’. \textsuperscript{13} The construct chain with hps [ym] `sea-coast’ \textsuperscript{14} further supports this interpretation. In some cases, \textsuperscript{15} morphological evidence supports the translation `people(s)’: liʾmu and its parallel term arš are both preceded by a preposition l, indicating that the liʾmu in these citations is /liʾemima/ and not /liʾemima/.

The cognates of Ugaritic lim are widespread among the Semitic languages. In Akkadian, limu means `thousand’. This has led to the suggested interpretation of ybstm liʾmu as `Sister-in-Law of the Thousands (of gods)’. \textsuperscript{16} The phrase, however, is found in native Ugaritic context, which renders problematic a translation on the basis of a strictly Akkadian lexeme. The concepts `thousand’ and `clan’ are closely related, \textsuperscript{17} however, so a diachronic semantic transition between the two is not problematic.

Northwest Semitic words in Akkadian cuneiform texts give ample evidence for a second-millennium Northwest Semitic liʾmu `people, clan’. The phrase Šamašt (ʾUTU) liʾmi-ma in the El-Amarna tablets (EA 205:6 and similarly in 195:13) \textsuperscript{18} is structurally close to /yabamatu liʾemima/, as both are construct chains \textsuperscript{19} serving as epithets for a deity. The Northwest Semitic origin of the term is guaranteed by the plural ending -lima rather than the Akkadian -i. Also, the word liʾmu has the meaning `family, clan’ in Northwest Semitic words.

\textsuperscript{11} umhs. lim. hps [ym] tym. adm. sat šps `she smites the people of the seacoast, kills the population of the East’ (KTU 1.3 II:7-8), where adm has cognates in Hebrew (as well as Tigre) in the meaning `person, people’. A similar parallelism — adām and rʾmnim — appears in Isa 43:4 wʾʾetēn ṣadām hattēl(y)kā alʾʾmnim tiḥṣū ṣǎʾēdā. (My thanks to Ch. Cohen for comments on this point.)

\textsuperscript{12} bʾ. mt. my. lim. bn/ dgn. my. hmlt (KTU 1.5 VI:23-24 =1.6 I:6-7).

\textsuperscript{13} [ ]yṯ. l limu [ ] x ytb. l arš (KTU 1.10 I:8-9, see also 15-16).

\textsuperscript{14} KTU 1.3 II:7-8, 1:7-38.

\textsuperscript{15} KTU 1.10 I:8-9, 15-16.


\textsuperscript{17} Compare 1 Sam 10:19.


\textsuperscript{19} The construct chain with a proper noun in the first position of Šamašt (ʾUTU) liʾmi-ma is problematic, but it must be recalled that `sun’ is a common noun as well as a divine name.
appearing in Akkadian lexical texts. 20

The Northwest Semitic term li'mu is also used at Emar. Attested forms include "le-em, 21 li-im, and "li'-im, 22 in some cases with the Northwest Semitic glottal stop explicitly marked. Some of the contexts show that this means 'peoples, clan' (not the Akkadian 'thousand'), and the word is usually written without the dingir determinative, unlike most DN's. However, the dingir determinative does appear in some cases, indicating that li'mu cannot refer to a deity. 23 This may be the Northwest Semitic form of the Akkadian deity Lim. In Ugaritic, the god Li'mu appears only in the PN yrgh lim. 24 The application of this DN to ybmt limm 'Sister-in-Law of Li()'m' is difficult, however, given the final -m that always appears. One would not expect an enclitic -m to be used without exception.

Hebrew l'om 'nation', plural l'umim, from *lu'umm, is also a cognate of Ugaritic lim. It is impossible to vocalize lim in accordance with the Hebrew — the exact Ugaritic cognate would be /lu'ummul, written /lim — but the other Northwest Semitic sources, as well as the Akkadian, support the vocalization /l'im/.

With a singular li'mu, we would expect /li'amimal /limm for the Ugaritic plural, since an infixed *a is characteristic of Northwest Semitic plurals of *qVil. 25 However, Ugaritic has an optional syncope rule that allows

23 See Seow, "Lim," 76.
25 KTU 102.22. It must be recalled that components of PN's — including names of gods in theophoric PN's — may come from the vocabulary of a dialect other than that of the bearer of the name.
26 In Ugaritic lim /l'im/ and lium /l'imul/ 'people(s), the l-aleph represents a syllable-final glottal stop.
27 Smith, Baal Cycle, 196 vocalizes li'amima, using the Northwest Semitic *a infix, but this does not agree with the orthography limm.
3. Epithets for deities relating them to humanity and other deities

If yhbnm lmn is interpreted as ‘Sister-in-Law of the Peoples’, Anat is described in relation to mortals, whereas if it is interpreted as ‘Sister-in-Law to the Terrible Ones’, she is described in relation to other gods. Both types of epithets occur in Ugarit.

Il’s epithet ab adm is the ‘Father of Mankind’ relates him to mortals. As mentioned above (p. 3), the term adn occurs in parallel with lmn, strengthening the comparison between ab adm and yhbnm lmn. Il is also known as byn bnrw /bnty biwnw ‘Creator of the Creatures’, which also relates him to mortals, although not in terms of a familial relationship.

On the other hand, many divine epithets relate gods to other gods. Mot is bn ilm /binu ‘Il-m’ ‘Son of Il’. He is also known as yd il /yddtu ‘Il ‘Beloved of Il’, while both Mot and Yamm are called mdil ilm /mdidtu ‘Il-m’ ‘Beloved of Il’ (with the same root as yd). Il’s epithet ab snm has been interpreted as ‘father of (DN) Shunam’. Baal’s primary epithet is bn dgn ‘Son of Dagan’, while Ashera is known as qnitt ilm /qntu.


'ilima' 'creator of the gods'. This last epithet shows that gods can be described by their relationship to a group of gods rather than to one specific god.

4. The parallels between *ybm lìm* and *ybm îlm*  
Given that epithets relating gods to other gods are well-attested, the possibility that *ybm lìm* is to be read *yabamatu li-'êmîma* 'Sister-in-Law of the Terrible Ones (gods)' should be considered.

A striking parallel to the phrase *ybm îlm* strengthens the reading of *lìm* as a prepositional phrase. *Ybm îlm* is apparently an epithet for Baal. It occurs immediately following a passage concerning Baal, particularly in the context of his relation with Anat. Anat is mentioned throughout KTU 1.6.1, and, if the reconstruction is correct, is even mentioned in the line preceding *ybm îlm*. The word *gîzîh* 'her hero', immediately preceding *ybm îlm*, also suggests Baal. 39 As Baal is in some ways the male counterpart of Anat, it is fitting that they should be called by similar epithets, and it is therefore likely that the *ybm îlm* is Baal.

Alternately, the *ybm îlm* may be II, since immediately after the phrase *ybm îlm*, Anat sets out to find the god II. II's role as the father of the gods may support 'progenitor' as the meaning of *ybm*, following the interpretation of *ybm* as 'progenitress'. 40 Still, the context makes it more likely that the epithet refers to Baal.

The epithets *yabamatu li-'ilima* and *yabamatu li-'êmîma* — if *ybm lìm* is to be so interpreted — have very similar syntax, morphology, and even phonetics.

On the syntactic level, both are nouns with modifying prepositional phrases. 41 This is admittedly rarer in epithets and in descriptions of family relations than a construct chain — the usual interpretation of *ybm lìm* — but the use of the prepositional phrase in *ybm îlm* shows that it is possible. 42

On the morphological level, there is also a close similarity between the two epithets. Most of the morphemes are the same: *ybm* and *ybm* are morphologi-

38 *tîgni rbt [ ] atrî ymt tîgyn. anyl îlm* (KTU 1.4 III.25-26).
39 It may be noted that *gîzîh* 'hero' also occurs in the context of the only other attestation of *ybm* (KTU 1.16 II.32), where it is an attribute of *îlu* (PN).
40 See note 5.
41 My thanks to H. Wiley for alerting me to the possibility of syntactic parallelism, which is essential to the argument of this article.
42 The Hebrew idiom *hîyâh f* 'ôb f* (Isa 22:21, Jer 31:9, Job 29:16) means 'to become' a father to' in the sense of 'in the role of a father'. See also, in the Akitawada inscription *pîn bîl lamûm l'îbb wîm* 'Ba'al made me a father and a mother to the Damuans' (H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966] text 26 A 1.3. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point). We may also note ordinary expressions of familial relationships such as *watêlîl hâgûr f* 'âbrâm bên 'then Hagar bore a son for Abra'm' (Gen 16:15).
cally identical except for the gender marker, the same preposition is used for both imm and ilm, and both imm and ilm have the same plural marker. The main morphological difference, then, is between the nominal bases im and il, and the plausibility of /'ēmul/ in the semantic field of /'iṣul/ will be demonstrated below. 

We may note that /'ēmīma/ and /'ilīma/ are very similar phonetically, although this similarity is not in itself proof of this vocalization. The stems of both these words are phonetically biconsonantal; they differ only in their stem-vowel (ē versus i, both front high vowels), and in their second consonant (m versus l, both sonorants). This may be the result of poetic word-play designed to highlight the relationship between Anat and Baal.

5. The root √ 'ym ‘terrific’ and epistles for deities

For yabamu li-ʾilīma and yabamatu li-ʾēmīma to be fully parallel, ‘ēmul must be in the semantic field of /'iṣul/ ‘god’. The root of the word /'ēmul/, √ 'ym, is known from Northwest Semitic cognates, including Biblical Hebrew 'ayōm ‘terrible’ and 'ēmā ‘terror, dread’, and words in this semantic field are used extensively in Ugaritic for describing deities.

Semantically, adjectives (including substantivized adjectives) in the semantic range of ‘terrific, awesome, mighty, great’, are used in Ugaritic as epistles for the gods. In one passage from the Baal Cycle, 46 'ul-ny ‘mighty one’ (of the same root as ul ‘army’, cognate to the root of Hebrew 'ēl ‘strength’), is in parallel to ‘zm-ny ‘terrific one’ (cognate to Hebrew 'āšām ‘mighty’ and Arabic ‘azīm ‘great’). Other terms used are adr 47 /'adur/ ‘mighty’ (cognate to Hebrew 'addir), 'rē 48 (cognate to Hebrew 'ārīṣ ‘awe-inspiring, terror-striking’), and ṭb 49 ‘great, chief’ (with wide-spread Semitic cognates, often

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43 Seeow, “Lim,” 978, recognizes the possibility of semantic parallelism between ybm ilm and ybm limm: he uses this to compare ybm ilm “the ybm of the gods” with ybm limm “the ybm of the thousand (gods)” (where limm is interpreted on the basis of Akkadian linm ‘thousand’). He does not recognize a syntactic parallelism however, and analyzes ybm limm as a construct chain rather than a noun with modifying prepositional phrase.

44 The cuneiform evidence shows that the reduced diphthong *ay and triphthong *ayi were ē and not i (Huehnergard, Ugaritic Vocabulary, 257-59, 275-76).

45 The biconsonantal im /'ēmul/, like ib /'ēbu/ ‘enemy’ from the root /'y'b, shows monophthongization, with the resulting ē vowel evident in the i-aleph. If the morphology of Hebrew /'yēb/ is a guide, /'ēbol/ is from /'yīb/, but there can be no certainty that the noun patterns are the same in the two languages. In fact, a phonologically regular reconstruction would suggest that ‘ēmul and ‘ēbu are both *gātl nouns.

46 1 ars. ypl. ulny. w l. 'pr. 'znnm (KTU 1.2 IV:5).

47 E.g., jdm. adr. h[ y jdm. 'rē t'r[hm ] (KTU 1.12 II:29-30).

48 See previous note.

49 E.g., ṭb att yi (KTU 1.6 I:44), ‘the great one, Ashera of the Sea’ (or ‘walker on the sea’).
used for deities).

Not only are near-synonyms of ‘terrible’ used for deities in Ugarit, but a word from the cognate root of יָמִים is used for the Israelite deity in the Hebrew Bible: יָמִים inscribes ‘טּוּרָש’ terror’ (e.g. Exod 15:16). 50 Pâhad yîshâq 51 is an epithet for Yîwh, and the roots הַפָּד and יָר are often associated with fear of God. It is, therefore, reasonable for a Ugaritic substantivized adjective from the root יָמִים to be used in parallel to ilm ‘the gods’. 52

6. Biblical ēmîm

Further support for the use of Ugaritic ēmîma is in the precise Biblical Hebrew cognate, ēmîm. 53 The ēmîm are described in Gen 14:5 together with the zûzîm and the r’pâ’îm, peoples with semi-mythological status in the Hebrew Bible.

wayyakkî ’et r’pâ’îm b’s’ešrît qarnâyim w’et hazzûzîm b’hâm w’et hâ-ēmîm b’s’éwê qiryûtayîm.

‘Then they struck the Rephaim in Ashterot Qarnayim and the Zuzim at Ham and the Emim at Shaveh Qiryatayim.’

Moreover, Deut 2:10-11 explicitly equates the ēmîm with the r’pâ’îm and ‘nâqîm:

hâ’ēmîm lepâ’îm yâš’bî bâh ‘am gâdol w’rab wârâm kâ’nâqîm. r’pâ’îm yehâš’bî ’ap hêm kâ’nâqîm w’hammî’êbîm yiqrê’û lâhem ēmîm.

‘The Emim had dwelt there beforehand, a great and mighty and high nation, like the Anaqim. The Rephaim too are considered Anaqim, and the Moabites call them Emim.’

Although the ēmîm, r’pâ’îm, 54 zûzîm, and ‘nâqîm 55 are sometimes portrayed as human tribes, they are also accorded supernatural status. Thus, the

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50 It is no more than coincidence that the adjective ‘tâyôn ‘terrible’ is not used to describe Yîwh, as it is only attested twice in the Bible.
51 Parallel to ‘tôhî ’abrahâm (Gen 31:42, 53)
52 Whether ēmîma refers to all the gods or to a specific sub-group is not clear.
53 Spelled ‘mym twice and ‘ymym once.
54 The Ugaritic term rpm th or rpm ârs, cognate to Hebrew r’pâ’îm, constitutes another link between the Ugaritic and the Hebrew terminology. For status of rpm and rpm ârs as minor divine beings, see J. C. de Moor, ‘Râpl’ama – Rephaim,” ZAW 88 (1976) 323-45; J. N. Ford, “The ‘Living Rephaim’ of Ugarit: Quick or Defunct?”, UF 24 (1992) 90-92. De Moor, (ibid., 339 n. 100), suggests the possibility that the term ēmîm originated as an epithet for the spirits of the dead, the “terrifying ones.”
55 Another semi-mythological race is the n’pîlim. The ēmîm, r’pâ’îm, ‘nâqîm, and zûzîm (or zæmûmûmûmû) are often mentioned together in various combinations, compared, or even equated. (See the above-mentioned passages and Num 13:33.)
ancient Israelite mythology embedded in the Biblical text shows a connection to the Ugaritic use of *imm* for divine creatures.

7. The root √ṣ’yım in Ugaritic

If /’ému/ is a Ugaritic word, we may look for it in contexts other than ybm’l *imm*. There are a few possible attestations of *imm* without preceding ybm*. In one passage, 56 *imm* immediately follows *ll* (singular /ll-‘illi/). 57 The text is broken, but if textual proximity can suggest semantic and syntactic similarity, then /ll-‘ímmalu/ is the natural parallel for /ll-‘illi/. Both are prepositional phrases, as in the divine epithets.

It would be more significant, however, to find *imm* without the preposition l-, or even to find other words from the root √ṣ’yım. The word *im* does occur once, in an epistle, 59 but the context indicates that this should be interpreted as a variant of *hm* ‘if’, and not a derivative of √ṣ’yım.

Thus, the only strong evidence for Ugaritic /’ému/ is in the phrase ybm’l *imm*. The absence of /’ému/ elsewhere cannot exclude this interpretation of *imm*, however, since an argument from silence can have limited validity in the small Ugaritic corpus.

Particularly in an epithet for a deity, one may expect a specialized, often archaic, vocabulary. 60 Compare to this the Hebrew epithets *ze sínây* 61 and ‘éš sadday 62 for the Israelite deity.

8. Conclusion

Given the limited attestation of these words and the difficulty of interpreting some of the texts, the commonly accepted interpretation of *imm* cannot be

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56 KTU 1.27:8. This broken text mentions ‘nt and b’l (KTU 1.27:2-4). The word *imm* in this text cannot be part of a ybm’l *imm* phrase, as it immediately follows *ll*.
57 In KTU 1.13:19-20, *imm* is followed by ‘m. *il* and, since ‘m can have a directional meaning in Ugaritic, a parallel may be sought between *imm* and ‘m *il*. The context, however, does not seem to support such a parallel.
58 Antonymic parallelism is possible as well as synonymic parallelism. ‘God’ could be parallel to ‘people’ as an antonym (‘heaven and earth’); likewise, ‘Terrible Ones (gods)’ could be parallel to areg ‘earth’ and hault ‘multitudes’ mentioned above (p. 3). However, the use of the preposition l- in some of these passages, as well as contextual clues, allows us to distinguish *ll-‘ímmalu* from *ll-‘ímmalu*. The possibility that prepositions are dropped in a poetic ellipsis, or that adverbial -a fulfills the parallel role to the preposition, must be considered, but this seems unlikely in the above-mentioned passages.
59 KTU 2.15:8.
60 We may also mention, as a Ugaritic example of a divine epithet with archaic language, ab sīn, the epithet for II, but only if it is to be interpreted ‘father of years’. In that case, sīn is a frozen plural for ‘year’ (Cross, Canaanite Myth, 16). See note 36 above.
61 Jud 5:5, Ps 68:9.
62 E.g., Ps 68:15.
excluded. However, the close similarity between ybmt lìm and ybm lifm, as well as the evidence of Israelite myth, suggest that we may read ybmt lìm as yahamatu li-'emūna ‘Sister-in-Law to the Terrible Ones,’ in the sense of ‘to the gods.’