What is the hyssop in Coptic texts?
"A Linguistic study Based on The Bible texts"

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Abstract:
The hyssop plant is considered one of the most important plants that have been dyed with religious dye because its main use is found in the Bible.
In the contemporary sense, it is similar to the sacred plants mentioned in Christianity, and the Holy Qur’an, which has been used both religiously and secularly in particular. In addition to the idea of plants being associated with religion, or rather the religious character, when you cover a plant that has a sacred meaning, even in worldly uses.
Not many texts have been exposed to it, but this limited number showed us many uses in addition to knowing a number of special information that showed us its historical and linguistic precedence, which was shown to us by studying the texts and the general characteristics of plant which was considered unique and it has a special place according to what the texts will prove it.

Keywords:
Hyssop, Bible plant, Thyme, Sacred plant, Konica

Reasons for choosing the topic:
The idea of the topic;
- It reveals secret
- Coincides with our current era; that is, it gives insight into something that can be applied nowadays.

The problem of the study:
To uncover;
- An important secret (hyssop plant) of from the secrets that the cover has not yet been lifted.
- Learn more about a practice that is still ongoing.

Scope of the study:
Revolving around;
- Coptic texts that dealt with this plant.
- Ancient Egyptian texts that dealt with this practice.

The study's Goals:
Study must be achieved;
- The research should include all the topics referred to in the linguistic sources.
- Learn about sacred uses of plants in ancient Egypt, and discover its existence nowadays
- Learn about the uncommon uses of some plants in Coptic texts.
**Introduction:**

There are many plants that played an important role in our daily life as alternative medicine or what is known as complementary medicine because they entered into many medical treatments and became an important treatment in addition to their position as a plant in ancient Egyptian society, whether religiously or naturally.

Among these plants is what is known as hyssop, which is mentioned in the Coptic texts, but the question here is whether this plant has a previous reference or did it originate for the first time in the Coptic stage.

Q1: What is hyssop?

**Discussion:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Scientific Name</th>
<th>The Idiomatic Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hyssopus²</td>
<td>David's Potash³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Type</th>
<th>The Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wild Herbs⁴</td>
<td>The Mint's family⁵</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Origin</th>
<th>The Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew lands⁶</td>
<td>Biblical⁷</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is a plant that was mentioned several times in the Old Testament, and scholars could not give a definitive opinion about it, and the traditional opinion is that it is thyme⁸.

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¹Hyssop: a plant used in purification sprinkling rites by the ancient Hebrews. Merriam-Webster's, Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed., 1999, Hyssop

²Hyssopus: from Greek ὑσσῶπος of Semitic origin, a European mint that has highly aromatic and pungent leaves and is sometimes used as a pootherb. See Merriam-Webster's, Collegiate Dictionary, Hyssop

³David's Potash: Potash in Arabic dictionaries is; Acid with which to wash hands and clothes. In a more detailed look at the intermediate dictionary is that; a tree of the sandy family that grows in the sandy ground, he or his ashes are used to wash clothes and hands. As for the dictionary of scholars; It is an Arabized word, and it is a plant from the family of Samakiat, from which soda was extracted, used in the past in washing clothes as a tool for purification and washing. This meaning is also confirmed in the English dictionary, is a potassium carbonate especially as used in agriculture. For previous information see; Merriam-Webster's, Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed., 1999, Davis potach

⁴Wild Herbs: herbs that live in a state of nature and are not ordinary tame and growing or produced without human aid or care. Whose foliage and soft young stems are gathered in rainy seasons for salad, although they are generally bitter See, Zohary, M., Plants of the Bible, “A complete handbook to all the plants with 200 full-color plates taken in the natural habitat”, Jerusalem, 1982, P.95

⁵The mint family: The mint is the tribe to which the hyssop belongs.

⁶Hebrew lands: The original home of hyssop is the countries of the Mediterranean basin, which are the countries that fall under what is technically called the Hebrew lands and literally means the lands of the Levant.

⁷Biblical: of relating to, or being in accord with the bible; the sacred scriptures of Christians comprising the Old Testament and the New Testament.
Botanical description:

- An annual or perennial herb with a height of 50 cm, many branches, aromatic, and its leaves are chameleon-shaped, wrinkled, opposite, non-toothed, and small, resembling scales⁹.
- Hyssop is an aromatic, sweet-smelling plant that has a hot taste at first, and then it gets cold in the mouth, so it irrigates and cools more than water and grows in walls and rocks⁹.

General shape¹¹: (Plate 1-II, IV)

- Small hairy leaves and when used it is in the form of small bundles due to their small size.
- Its flowers are small, indigo, tending to blue, rarely white or red.
- The flower has two lips with a long tube, and it has a minute end that grows in the form of triple groups at the joints.
- The plant has a pubescent green stem without peel and turns red or purple in the fall season.

Q²: How was a hyssop expressed linguistically?

Discussion:

Here, we need to show how hyssop is expressed through Coptic texts, by knowing the Coptic texts that were exposed to hyssop and then commenting on them linguistically.

Firstly: Coptic Texts

It should be noted that hyssop was mentioned in Coptic linguistic texts about 10 times in the Old Testament¹² and 2 times in the New Testament¹³. For those linguistic texts, see the following table. Table 1: Linguistic sources of hyssop

Mentioned it linguistically by two terms; 3ligt (Thyme); Papyrus Boulaq (N 47.218.48), line 70YMoC :  ink (Thyme, Konica); Wb I, 97.10-11; DrugWb 39ff; Westendorf, Handbuch Medizin, 497; WPL, 85; Germa, Flora, 176.

Papyrus Ebers, 46.10-48.20, (line 47.13); Papyrus Ebers, 36.4-44.12, (line 37.13; 38.14); Papyrus Ebers, 25.11-36.3, (line 33,8; 35.1); Papyrus Ebers, 2,7-25.11, (line 6.12; 21.16; 22.15; 24.17); Pap.Florence PSI inv. I 73 + Pap.Carlsberg 463, (line 4); KPhMBWN (Thyme) El Makari, A., Coptic Arabic dictionary (Bohairic vocabulary), Makari Monastery's press, Egypt, 2008, P.80

Konica: is another expression for the same plant family of thyme and hyssop, meaning that it is equal to them, or perhaps it is also.


¹²According to what is stated in book of kings, it is a plant that grows in the wall. For this information see English translation of 1 K 4:33 because unfortunately the Coptic passage is missing. 1 K 4:33 "also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall" Marvin, S., I&II Kings "A commentary". Westiminer John Knox Press, London, 2007, P.35 this is with regard to the confirmed Coptic text for that information.

As for additional information about the plant; see http://taxonomicon.taxonomy.nl/TaxonTree.aspx?id=5009

¹¹Old Testament: the 1st part of the Christian Bible containing the books of the Jewish canon of scripture. mentioned here in Liv 14: 4,6,49,51; Ps 51:7; Nu 19:6,8; Ex 2:22; 1 K 4:33

Secondly; Linguistically Commenting

If we look at the previous table, we notice that the term hyssop does not have an ancient Egyptian origin, but the initial writing was Greek from νυσσωπος / νυσσωπον which was written in Coptic: 2ГΣΣΩПΟΝ / 2ГΣΣΩПОС because the sound of ν in Greek is replaced in Coptic by the letter 2 as for the rest of the letters of the word do not change at all, they remained the same.

Note:
We note at the end of the Greek original that it ends with either the end ον or ον these are the usual endings in nouns of Greek origin. As stated in the following explanation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>υσσωπος : 2ГΣΣΩПΟΝ</th>
<th>υσσωπος : 2ГΣΣΩПОС</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ον: Nominative Masculine Singular Form</td>
<td>ον: Nominative Neuter Singular Ending Form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problematic here is that the Coptic dictionaries do not mention hyssop, while all reliance is on the Greek mention. Therefore, the grammatical comments on hyssop are very few, and we can only delve into them by studying texts that remain not enough due to their small number.

Discussion:
We must know that the main characteristic of this plant is that it is a sacred plant, or in a more accurate sense, a biblical plant, so most of the uses are found in the sacred sources.

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14 Rizkalla, E., An English-Coptic Psalter and Agpeya, Xulon Publisher, 2020
16 Malaty, T., The Book of Leviticus, studies in the Old Testament, Egypt, 2019
18 Samir, B., Hebrew book: Greek, Coptic, English, Arabic, (Arabic edition), Egypt, 2020
19 Samir, B., Gospel of John: Greek, Coptic, English, Arabic, (Arabic edition), Egypt, 2020
21 LSJ, 1905a
22 Through the texts of the Bible
As for the review of the uses, they are lined up as follows:

- **The Primary use is for Purification purposes as a remedy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Scriptural Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For The Sin Purification</td>
<td>Psalm 51:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For The Liturgical Purification</td>
<td>Numbers 19:6-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For The Epidemic Purification</td>
<td>Leviticus 14:49-51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For The Insects Purification</td>
<td>Leviticus 14:49-52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23 The philosophical aspect of using hyssop to cleanse from sin, from the researcher's point of view, is that hyssop is a very weak plant; there is no place for it to grow in the soil of the earth. Rather, it grows between stone joints in walls. We can see it as a plant that expresses the state of the sinner in general. He is a human being very weak.

24 Scarlet: It is dyed red like the color of blood, so it is a symbol of it.

25 Number 7 in Bible: from the first page of the bible it is clear that the number seven stands for the completed and perfect, when god rested on the 7th day, the week was established. It is no coincidence that the first sentence in the bible contains seven words, that the second sentence contains 2×7 words and that the first paragraph contains 3×7 words. For more details see; Larsen, I., Number symbolism in the Bible, 2002, P.1
**For The Insects Purification**

*The priest shall command to take for the one who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop* Liv 14:4

*“As for the live bird, he shall take it with the cedar wood, the scarlet, and the hyssop, and dip them with the living bird in the blood of the bird slaughtered on the living water”* Liv 14:6

- **The secondary use is for Medical prescriptions**

*Take the hyssop bouquet and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the upper lintel and the two pillars with the blood that is in the basin* Ex 12:22

*"For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people"* Heb 9:19

*"A jar full of sour wine stood there; so, putting a sponge soaked in the wine on a hyssop stick, they held it up to his mouth"* Jo 19:29

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**Q4: Are there other terms for hyssop?**

**Discussion:**
The answer to this question requires careful research, not only with regard to hyssop but also with regard to the thyme plant, which is the original as mentioned in the previous pages. If we look at the linguistic aspect, which is the part concerned with the study, we will find that there
are alternative terms found to express the thyme plant in the linguistic stage before the Coptic and in the Coptic stage.

**Important Note:**
Here we have to ask ourselves an important question: What are the reasons that made thyme the ancient origin of hyssop?
The answer includes relying on the opinions of scholars regarding the characteristics of thyme that are equal to hyssop in addition to similar shape (See, Plates III; V)

**The evidences**
- Thyme leaves contain the antiseptic substance THYMOL\(^{26}\), which is the same feature that is found mainly in hyssop.
- The uses of the thyme plant are the same as the uses of hyssop, and that we can see through the texts\(^ {27}\).
- The shape of the thyme plant is the shape of the hyssop\(^{28}\).
- Linguistic terms expressing thyme, if we look at it, we find the same linguistic composition of Coptic hyssop. Where we find similarity in letters, and that we can display in the linguistic similarity platform\(^ {29}\).

**Commenting on the previous table**\(^ {30}\):
The comment we have to add here is that the linguistic synonyms of thyme, whether through the similarity of letters, or even their similar shape, through the uses those were found in the aforementioned texts, will lead us to the same result, which is:
- Similar Uses between thyme and hyssop.
- Similar Synonyms between thyme and hyssop.

**Conclusion:**
1- Hyssop is a plant with a sacred hue, this information was confirmed by studying the texts, because in most cases his mention was religious first-class, possesses powerful spiritual cleansing.
2- Hyssop is a medicinal plant equal to some medicines in terms of its effectiveness in treating pain, as it was an important component of alternative medicine.
3- Hyssop is thyme with a different method of linguistic expression, but this was shown by matching letters, uses, general qualities, active substance and general shape.
4- Looking at the verbal similarity between hyssop in modern languages, Za’tar in Arabic, and Ezuf in Hebrew, we find that they are identical words that express the same thing.

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\(^{26}\) THYMOL: a crystalline phenol \(\text{C}_{10}\text{H}_{14}\text{O}\) of aromatic odor and antiseptic properties found especially in thyme oil or made synthetically and used chiefly as a fungicide and preservative.

For the THYMOL in thyme and its use in alternative medicine see; Manka, L., Herbal medicine in ancient Egypt, Madbouly library, Cairo, 1993, P.336

\(^{27}\) Compare the ancient Egyptian texts mentioned in footnote No.8 to the Coptic texts (research's topic) you will find similarities.

\(^{28}\) It is shown in the Plates (See Plates I-1V)

\(^{29}\) We can review that platform by comparing the vocabulary of thyme and hyssop as follows:

\[\text{(Thyme)} = \text{2YCCQPTOC-2YCCQPTON} \quad \text{(Hyssop)} \quad \text{Konica} = \text{KPMABON} \quad \text{(Thyme)}\]

\(^{30}\) This comment is from the point of view of the researcher and the evidences to it; the texts and the shape which are explained in detail. For further information about Hyssop in General and Hyssop in Bible, See; Soheilikhah, Z, and others,. Qualitative and Quantitative analysis of diosmin content of Hyssop (Hyssopus officinalis) in response to salinity stress, Helion, Vol 7, Issue 10, 2021; Worcester, J., Correspondences of the Bible, Part II, Boston, 1888, P.154-156; Baldensperger, L, Crowfoot, G, From Cedar to Hyssop: A Study in the folklore of plants in Palestine, Sheldon press, California University, New york, 1932
Hyssop Plates:

Plate I

Source: Zohary, M., Plants of the Bible, P.96 (Hyssop Plant)

Plate II-III

Source: P.II Hyssop Plant Zohary, M., Plants of the Bible, 96; P.III Thyme Plant Soni, N., To study the herbalism of thyme leaves, 253

Plate IV-V

Source: P.IV Hyssop Plant Musselman, L., A Dictionary of Bible plants, 74; P.V Thyme Plant Soni, N., To study the herbalism of thyme leaves, 253
Abbreviations of dictionaries:

**DrugWb:** Hildegard, Y., and Grapow, H., Dictionary of Egyptian drug names, outline of the medicine of the ancient Egyptians VI, Berlin 1959

**Germer.Flora:** Germa, R., Flora des Pharaonic Egypt, SDAIK 14, Mainz am Rhein 1985

**LSJ:** Liddle, H., Scott, R., A Greek-English dictionary, Oxford, 1901

**Wb:** Erman, A., Grapow, W., Worterbuch der ägyptische Sprache, 7 Band, Berlin, 1926-1931

**Westendorf.Handbook Medicine:** Westendorf, W., Handbook of Ancient Egyptian Medicine, 1st-2nd cent. Vol., Handbuch der Orientalistik, Dept. 1: The Near and Middle East 36/1-2, Leiden (etc.) 1999

**WPL:** Wilson, P., Ptolemaic lexicon: a lexicographical study of the texts in the temple of Edfu, Peeters, 2000

Abbreviations of Bible:

**1 K:** Kings

**Ex:** Exodus

**Heb:** Hebrew
Samir, B., Hebrew book: Greek, Coptic, English, Arabic, (Arabic edition), Egypt, 2020

**Jo:** John
Samir, B., Gospel of John: Greek, Coptic, English, Arabic, (Arabic edition), Egypt, 2020

**Liv:** Leviticus
Malaty, T., The Book of Leviticus, studies in the Old Testament, Egypt, 2019

**Nu:** Numbers

**Ps:** Psalter
Rizkalla, E., An English-Coptic Psalter and Agpeya, Xulon Publisher, 2020

Abbreviations of Egyptology Sources:

**Pap.Boulaqe:** Sauneron, S., Un traité égyptien d'ophiologie, IFAO XI, Le Caire, 1989

**Pap.Ebres:** Grapow, H., Grundriss der Medizin der alten Ägypter V. The medical texts autographed in hieroglyphic circumscription, Berlin, 1958


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6. Germer, R., Flora des pharaonic Egypt, SDAIK 14, Mainz am Rhein 1985
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(19) Sauneron, S., Un traité égyptien d'ophiologie, IFAO XI, Le Caire 1989

(20) Soheilikhah, Z, and others., Qualitative and Quantitative analysis of diosmin content of Hyssop (Hyssopus officinalis) in response to salinity stress, Heliyon, Vol 7, Issue 10, 2021

(21) Soni, N., To study the herbalism of thyme leaves, JPIR, Vol 2, issue 3, 2012

(22) Westendorf, W., Handbook of Ancient Egyptian Medicine, 1st-2nd cent. Vol., Handbüch der Orientalistik, Dept. 1: The Near and Middle East 36/1-2, Leiden (etc.) 1999

(23) Worcester, J., Correspondendences of the Bible, Part II, Boston, 1888


(25) Zohary, M., Plants of the Bible, “A complete handbook to all the plants with 200 full-color plates taken in the natural habitat”, Jerusalem, 1982

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