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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Herb for Speaking to The Dead: The Liturgical and Magical Life of Hyssop in The Latin Middle Ages

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Magical practices have been described as a point of convergence for different pathways in medieval culture. This article examines one such convergence in the ritual use of hyssop in medieval Latin theology, liturgy, and a group of magical texts linked to the understudied Book of Raziel. *In these magical texts, hyssop supposedly helped the living speak to the dead through its use as a tool for sprinkling liquid over a grave. The magical use of hyssop made sense because of its cultural and liturgical significance as a tool for aspersion and as a symbol of cleansing and exorcism. In the medieval Latin world, hyssop possessed a cultural power that individuals could use for a range of purposes. The different uses of hyssop illustrate the widespread entanglement of medieval liturgical and magical ritual, as well as high medieval processes of cross-cultural translation between the Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin worlds. Bygone and flamboyant methods of bringing voices from the past into the present also intersect in theme and function with the ongoing professional work of historians, who pursue their own affective necromancy in their desire for the past.*

I. Introduction: Historical Necromancies and Talking to the Past in Liturgy and Magic

It may be the task of historians to make the dead speak, but their apparent monopoly on conjuring the dead is novel. In the introduction to his study of suicide in the Middle Ages, the medievalist Alexander Murray remarked that, "there was once a discipline, taught in books and assigned to professionals, whose aim was to conjure dead people to life and make them speak." The function of this discipline, necromancy, he suggested, "has long passed to historians, whose method is now the only one

The following abbreviations are used in this article: CCSL: Corpus Christianorum Series Latina; CCCM: Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis; CSEL: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum; PL: Patrologia cursus completus series Latina; LCL: Loeb Classical Library; Roman Pontifical (12th): Le pontifical romain du XIIe siècle, vol. 1 of Le pontifical romain au moyen-âge, ed. Michel Andrieu (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1938); Roman Pontifical (13th): Le pontifical de la curie romaine au XIIIe siècle, vol. 2 of Le pontifical romain au moyen-âge, ed. Michel Andrieu (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1940); Durand, Pontifical: Le pontifical de Guillaume Durand, vol. 3 of Le pontifical romain au moyen-âge, ed. Michel Andrieu (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1940).

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recognised."[1] Before historians' present monopoly on the legitimate conjuring of past voices into present time, other professionals applied the methods of their disciplines to the same end. Among these methods of the past, taught in books and requiring professionals, were a small group of rituals from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries connected to the *Book of Raziel,* a collection of learned medieval magic. These rites claimed hyssop could help make the dead talk if one knew how to use it.

The core action of these obscure rituals involved sprinkling specially prepared water over a grave with a sprig of hyssop. The operator then called the dead person to arise and speak, and sometimes performed other actions to allow conversation later, perhaps in a dream. A modern reader may well be curious about the possible meanings a medieval reader or magical practitioner might have attributed to these ritual actions, especially regarding the choice of hyssop.

The larger theological significations and liturgical uses of hyssop in ecclesiastical rituals enabled its magical use to speak with the dead in these texts. Foremost among them was its use as an aspersorium, or tool for the sprinkling of blessed water. Hyssop could not raise the dead in what might, perhaps, be the more familiar and "scientific" terms explored by Pietro Pomponazzi in the sixteenth century.[2] It does not return the dead to life through its purely natural virtues (even if "occult" or hidden). Instead, hyssop's liturgical prominence gave it power that operators could use for a range of purposes. Together, both the orthodox and unorthodox ritual uses of hyssop illuminate a world of practices and experiences that we have largely forgotten.

What follows is a narrow case study that aims to illuminate much larger cultural dynamics regarding medieval ritual and the experiences of it. It explores the cultural meanings of hyssop in the Latin Middle Ages and its importance in liturgy. Hyssop's liturgical significance was based on its biblical prominence as a means of cleansing and healing. Following these biblical models, hyssop was used liturgically as a tool for aspersion and as a symbol of cleansing and exorcism. The cultural and ritual significance of hyssop helps to explain its use to speak with the dead in the *Book of Raziel.* A consideration of the text's complex background illustrates how hyssop made cultural sense to the Latin editors and translators of the *Book of Raziel,* and that its shadowy Greek sources likely did not share this sensibility. The argument ends with a consideration of how one fifteenth-century magical collection adapted the hyssop ritual from the *Book of Raziel,* combining it with other powerful ritual forms that fit with it culturally and liturgically. Taken together, all these points suggest that hyssop was important in this particular magic because its liturgical and cultural prominence gave it power that could be used for a range of purposes.

One niche method of speaking to the dead illustrates the widespread entanglement of medieval liturgical and magical ritual. Hyssop was an important ritual ingredient in medieval Latin Europe, and, in this role, it was familiar to all levels of the medieval clergy and a vast number of the laity. It was an important part of regular ritual practices, and it was the cultural "capital" of these practices that allowed its use in magical activity. In this sense, magic could be an elaboration upon ubiquitous orthodox ritual, or

[1]Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages, vol. 1, The Violent Against Themselves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.

[2]Despite claims in ancient sources of herbs that restore men to life, Pomponazzi concluded that there were no true resurrections in antiquity. There may have been demonic frauds. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1923–1958), 5: 103–104.

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perhaps more simply a variant understanding of it.[3] This case study also brings to light a moment of cross-cultural translation. The ritual texts that involve hyssop were part of the movement of texts and ideas between the Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin worlds in the high Middle Ages. They came from the same contemporary context of translation and adaptation into Latin as famous scientific works, particularly those of Aristotle, illuminating the dynamics of these processes from a less familiar angle.

What might seem to be outlying esoterica from medieval magical and liturgical traditions offer insights relevant to many areas of modern study. As Ronald Grimes has argued, it is when ritual seems to be at its oddest while also being somehow powerful or significant to others that its study is the most profitable.[4] Specialists have long recognized medieval magic as a "kind of crossroads where different pathways in medieval culture converge."[5] One might find in its sources mixtures of religion and science, popular and learned culture, as well as fiction and reality.

Likewise, the study of liturgical ritual might seem to be an especially arid field concerned with textual minutiae of unclear significance, a branch of scholarship so arcane that its practitioners seem more "like the initiates of an ancient mystery cult" than creators of accessible scholarship.[6] Recent work on liturgical rituals and their sources has demonstrated that this appraisal neither reflects the current reality of liturgical scholarship nor the potential of its sources.[7] In recent decades, the motives that inspire and color our engagements with the liturgical past have shifted in ways that are reflective of larger changes in historical disciplines and ritual studies. These motives have swung from the search for "authentic" traditional rites and confessional polemic to much wider questions regarding how ritual encodes and conveys the values of a society regarding topics such as human relations, authority, diversity, gender, and time, to name only a few.[8] In this shift in motives, tone, and the kinds of questions being asked of the past, scholarship on medieval ritual offers a particularly prominent example of how the motives that inspire historical research influence the shape an imagined past assumes through that research.[9] In conversation with the dead, the spark of life brought by the living questioner is key. For these reasons, a case study of the pathways

[3]For a consideration of the essential ambiguity of "magic," see Claire Fanger, "For Magic: Against Method," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic,* ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), 32–34.

[4]Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

[5]Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Canto Edition, 2000), 1.

[6]For this appraisal of liturgical scholars, see Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 119; cited by Helen Gittos, "Researching the History of Rites," in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy: Essays in Interpretation,* ed. Helen Gittos and Sarah Hamilton (Ashgate, 2016), 14.

[7]For overviews of the current state of inquiry, see the essays collected in Teresa Berger and Bryan D. Spinks, eds., *Liturgy's Imagined Past/s: Methodologies and Materials in the Writing of Liturgical History Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016) and Gittos and Hamilton, eds., *Understanding Medieval Liturgy.*

[8]I have paraphrased Durkhiem's comments on ritual in *Les Formations elementaires de la vie religieuse* and Miri Rubin's wide-ranging analysis of its applicability to current work on medieval liturgical rituals. See "Liturgy's Present: How Historians Are Animating a 'New' History of Liturgy," in *Liturgy's Imagined Past/s,* 23.

[9]For further reflection on this point, see Bryan D. Spinks, "Imagining the Past: Historical Methodologies and Liturgical Study," in *Liturgy's Imagined Past/s,* 7–18.

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that come together in the medieval ritual use of hyssop in the church and in the churchyard offers an opportunity to hear many different past voices.

II. Medieval Magic and Speaking to the Dead: A Few Preliminaries

Medieval magic, in general, was not very concerned with speaking to the dead, and the rituals using hyssop examined here are unusual. Why medieval magic generally eschewed contact with the dead is imperfectly understood, but it may have been influenced by a combination of inherited assumptions regarding the impersonation of the dead by demons and a preference for contact with superhuman beings, such as demons and angels.[10] While modern English calls one of the main types of medieval magical practice "necromancy," it had a different meaning than it had borne in the classical world. Medieval authors most often spelled it as *nigromantia,* literally "black divination."[11] It primarily referred to a kind of ceremonial magic that conjured and commanded demonic spirits, not the souls of dead people.[12] It was also often used less technically to translate the Arabic *sihr* (magic) into Latin.[13] It is important to remember, however, that while orthodox theologians could easily see demons in most ceremonial magical rites, the spirits actually called upon in many medieval texts were frequently ambiguous, rendering medieval necromancy into "an ambivalent art of control of spirits," diffused through the middling ranks of educated men.[14] In this air of ambivalence, many magical practices could functionally straddle the line between "full acceptance and full condemnation" within medieval culture, regardless of what the greatest university theologians pronounced.[15] Likewise, many magical texts in practice blurred the theoretical division between magic that drew upon the occult properties of nature and magic that called upon the abilities of spirits. While the rituals employing hyssop to enable actual conversation with the departed are outliers, they do embody many of the fundamental ambivalences scholars of medieval magic have identified.

The practitioners of this kind of magic came from the middle ranks of the educated, a group whose representation in historical studies lags far behind their numbers in the Middle Ages. While still members of an "educated elite," compared to the rest of

[10]The reception of the apparent raising of Samuel by the "Witch of Endor" in the Bible is often cited as the *locus classicus* for many of these possibilities in medieval literature. See Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society,* trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 15–16.

[11]Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance: astrologie, divination et magie dans l'occident médiéval (XIIe-VXe siècle)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006), 89–117.

[12]Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* 152–153; Claire Fanger, "Christian Ritual Magic in the Middle Ages," *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013), 610. See also the definition offered by Frank Klaassen: "Necromancy is a category of ritual magic that concerns itself principally with conjuring demons, though sometimes also angels, terrene spirits such as fairies, and very rarely spirits of the dead" ("Necromancy," in the *Routledge History of Medieval Magic,* 201).

[13]Charles Burnett, "Talismans: Magic as Science? Necromancy among the Seven Liberal Arts," in *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), 2–3. This is especially evident in translations of texts such as *Picatrix.*

[14]Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance,* 523.

[15]Claire Fanger, "For Magic: Against Method," 27. See also Frank Klaassen's finding that the same authors often offered conflicting evaluations of magic (good vs bad, natural vs demonic) in different contexts, concluding there is a "fundamental ambivalence that dominates evaluations of magic in the Latin West." *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013),15.

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society, many of these men were marginal members of their elite class. Often, magicians were clearly churchmen, presumably in minor orders, with knowledge of Latin and the liturgy. Richard Kieckhefer has termed these men inhabitants of a "clerical underworld," who elaborated on the supposed effects of familiar rituals for various purposes.[16] Most importantly, they built upon widely held understandings regarding Christian clerics' ability to command spirits (for example, in exorcism and extra-sacramental blessing) in ways orthodox theology did not condone. As Frank Klaassen argues, this clerical underworld "had ragged edges," incorporating a potentially large range of different types including literate courtiers, grammar teachers, and clerics searching for stable positions. These men described themselves as virtuous Christians and their activities as fundamentally rooted in God's power, despite the sometimes dubious ends they pursued and the forces they wrestled into the service of their wills.[17] The ritual activities these men undertook in their contact with spirits constitute something like the reverse side of the tapestry of orthodox liturgy and ritual.[18]

III. Hyssop in the Bible, Theology, and Liturgy

The use of hyssop to speak with the dead drew on the herb's cultural power in the Latin world, arising from its significance in classical medicine, biblical history, theological commentary, and the liturgical rituals derived from them. Hyssop's ubiquitous ritual use in Latin Europe centered around its employment as a tool for aspersions, or the ritual sprinkling of blessed water. In these contexts, hyssop came to signal protection and purification, bearing a particular power against demons. It also became liturgically associated with places of burial and the inhumation of the dead.

In the Hebrew Bible, hyssop was frequently used to sprinkle liquid to purify and to protect, and later medieval liturgical ritual elaborated on the biblical symbolism of hyssop. While there is some debate regarding the actual plant(s) indicated in the Bible that are translated as hyssop, by the Latin Middle Ages all of the biblical references explored below were taken to refer to modern hyssop, or *hyssopus officinalis.*[19] In Egypt, it was with hyssop that the Israelites sprinkled the transom and posts of their doors with the blood of the lamb so the Lord would pass them over during the plague of the first-born.[20] In Leviticus, someone cured of leprosy would be sprinkled or "asperged" seven times with a mixture of blood and water by a curious tool formed with cedar wood, a red cord, a living sparrow, and hyssop. After the rite, the sparrow would be let loose in a field.[21] Likewise, the same tool and bloody water would be used to asperge a house seven times that had recovered from "the plague of leprosy."[22] In Numbers, hyssop again was used to asperge people and belongings defiled by contact with the dead

[16]Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* 153–156.

[17]Klaasen, "Necromancy," 202–204.

[18]Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites,* 3.

[19]Alexander Fleisher and Zhenia Fleisher, "Identification of Biblical Hyssop and Origin of the Traditional Use of Oregano-group Herbs in the Mediterranean Region," *Economic Botany* 42, no. 2 (1988): 232–241; Alfred C. Andrews, "Hyssop in the Classical Era," *Classical Philology* 56, no. 4 (1961): 230–248. These studies conclude that the plant referred to in the Bible during ancient Israel was almost certainly *Majorana syriaca,* or Syrian marjoram.

[20]Exodus 12:22.

[21]Leviticus 14:3–7.

[22]Leviticus 14:34–53. Note this was a plague affecting the structure itself not its inhabitants.

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on both the third and the seventh days after their defilement.[23] This aspersion used a mixture of water and ashes gathered from the holocaust of a red heifer, cedar wood, red cloth, and hyssop.[24] In the First Book of Kings, "hyssop that comes out of the wall" was one of the topics explained by Solomon in his great wisdom.[25] Before Solomon, David called for hyssop after his sin with Bathsheba in Psalm 50/51. In confessing his sin and requesting to be made clean by God, David sings, "You will sprinkle me with hyssop, and I will be cleansed: you will wash me, and I will be made whiter than snow."[26]

References to hyssop in the New Testament built on those in the Old, emphasizing the exorcism of impurity through God's power. In the Gospel of John, Jesus drank from a "sponge full of vinegar placed around hyssop" on the cross before uttering his last words, "it is consummated," and "giving up the ghost."[27] Paul, in his Letter to the Hebrews, cited the long history of sprinkling blood with hyssop. He explained that the first testament between humanity and God was dedicated with blood. Moses, after reading the Law to the people sprinkled them, the book, the tabernacle, and its vessels with the blood of calves, goats, and water, using scarlet wool and hyssop. He did this because "almost all things, according to the Law, are cleansed with blood: and without shedding of blood there is no remission."[28] Hyssop's use by Moses to sprinkle blood, Paul argued, foreshadowed Jesus' shedding of his own blood to secure remission for all.

The classical world found medicinal virtue in hyssop that somewhat mirrored its biblical prominence. As Alfred C. Andrews argues, for the Greeks and Romans hyssop was primarily a medicinal herb rather than a spice.[29] Unlike biblical hyssop, there is less ambiguity about what actual herb these authors meant. Greek and Roman medicinal engagements with hyssop referred to *hyssopus officinalis,* or modern hyssop.[30] Hippocrates maintained that "Hyssop is warming and expels phlegmatic humours."[31] Pliny the Elder suggested that hyssop be used to treat bruises, liver troubles, pleurisy, pneumonia, serpent bites, bruised eyes, sore throat, chest congestion, cough, asthma, and epilepsy, among other ailments.[32] Similar indications were provided by Celsus and Galen.

It appears that medieval Latin writers associated the medicinal hyssop of classical literature with biblical hyssop to create the web of associations and use the herb enjoyed in the Middle Ages. Christian theologians saw hyssop as a "humble herb." Its humility was purifying, like that exhibited by Christ in taking on humanity and accepting death

[23]Numbers 19:14–19.

[24]Numbers 19:2–6.

[25]1 Kings 4:33.

[26]Ps 50:9. "Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor."

[27]John 19:29–30. "Illi autem spongiam plenam aceto, hyssopo circumponentes, obtulerunt ori ejus. Cum ergo accepisset Jesus acetum, dixit: Consummatum est. Et inclinato capite tradidit spiritum." The image of the sponge around hyssop may have confused some readers because hyssop does not possess branches that could reach Jesus on the cross. Medieval readers resolved the potential strangeness by focusing on the symbolic meaning of hyssop's presence and position at the end of a longer pole. See Augustine, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus,* 119.5. For the literal meaning of the verse, see Bonaventure, "'hyssopo circumponentes,' id est ponentes spongiam circa hyssopum ligatam." *Commentarius in Euangelium sancti Iohannis,* 19.29.47, in *Opera omnia,* ed. PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura (1893), 6:500.

[28]Hebrews 9:18–22.

[29]Andrews, "Hyssop in the Classical Era," 243.

[30]Andrews, "Hyssop in the Classical Era," 242.

[31]Hippocrates of Cos, Regimen II, 54, Loeb Classical Library (LCL) 150:333.

[32]Pliny, *Natural History,* 25, LCL 393:260–261; 26.24–25, LCL 393:292–295; 31.45, LCL 418:438–439; 26.11, LCL 393:282–283; 26.15, LCL 393:286–287; 26.17, LCL 393:288–289; 26.19, LCL 393:290–291; 26.70, LCL 393:348–351. See also 25.87, LCL 393:232–233.

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for the salvation of all people. As Augustine explained in his commentary on John 19:29, the vinegar, sponge, and hyssop were symbolic. The Jews, he said, were vinegar, a degenerate form of the wine of the prophets. Their hearts were like a sponge soaking up the wickedness of the world. Hyssop purified both: "But the hyssop around which they placed the sponge full of vinegar, because it is a humble herb and it purges the chest, we suitably take as the humility of Christ: which they enclosed, and they thought themselves to have surpassed."[33] The humble Christ, seemingly enveloped by wicked humanity, made it pure by the shedding of his blood, just as David sang, "You will sprinkle me with hyssop and I will be cleansed."

Isidore in the *Etymologies* highlights what most medieval commentary regarded as hyssop's main attributes. "Hyssop," Isidore writes, "is an herb good for purging the lungs." Because of its medicinal virtue, the ancient Israelites in the Old Testament used bunches of it to sprinkle lamb's blood on "anyone who wanted to be ritually cleansed." His final remark found significant elaboration in later commentary: "It grows on crags, clinging to the rock by its roots."[34] In his commentary on Numbers, Isidore argued that Old Testament rituals involving the sprinkling of blood with hyssop to cleanse defiled things prefigured Christian baptism.[35]

For Christian theologians and exegetes, hyssop symbolized purification and strength; it was both apotropaic and fortifying. When Rabanus Maurus considered Hebrews 9:18–22, it was easy for him to see the blood sprinkled by Moses from hyssop as the blood of Christ; however, Rabanus asked, "Why hyssop?" The answer drew together the herb's historical associations with ritual purification and medicinal virtue: "Because hyssop is a humble herb growing on stones. The humility of Christ is signified by this herb, and the fortitude by which our innermost being is purged. For illnesses of the lungs are accustomed to be purged by this kind of herb."[36]

The association of hyssop with baptism and with exorcism would color its liturgical and its extra-liturgical uses in Christian ritual. The connection between baptism and exorcism was a familiar one, long established in Christian liturgy, that saw the blessings and exorcisms around baptism as ritualized combat against demons.[37] William of Auxerre provides an example of the typical associations enjoyed between aspersions with hyssop and baptism, explaining that the Old Testament sprinkling from hyssop specifically signified the moment of baptism in which the baptized are asked, "Do you reject Satan and all his retinue?" Hyssop signifies faith and the liquid sprinkled signifies the water of baptism. Just as the unclean were made pure by the sprinkling of the waters of cleansing from the Old Testament hyssop, so too are those baptized cleansed through faith.[38]

[33]Augustine, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus,* 119.4. CCSL 36, ed. Willems (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 659–660; John Gibb, trans. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series,* ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1888), 7:433. "hyssopum autem cui circumposuerunt spongiam aceto plenam, quoniam herba est humilis, et pectus purgat, ipsius christi humilitatem congruenter accipimus, quam circumdederunt, et se circumuenisse putauerunt. unde est illud in psalmo: asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor."

[34]Isidore, *Etymologies,* 17.9.39, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 352.

[35]Isidore of Seville, *Mysticorum expositiones sacramentorum seu Quaestiones in uetus Testamentum,* "In Numeros," 15.24–25, PL:349.

[36]Rabanus Maurus, *Enarrationes in epistolas beati Pauli,* 9. PL 112:775B.

[37]Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology and Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), esp. 1–12.

[38]William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea,* 4, tract 5, cap 2, q. 1, ed. J. Ribailler (1985), 80. "Unde ab eo qui baptizatur queritur: 'Credis in Deum? credis in Filium?' etc.. Et hoc pertinet ad fidem. Et postea queritur:

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Importantly, hyssop itself did not have to be present for its associations with purification and exorcism, or the command of spirits, to be utilized, especially through the importance and ubiquity of Psalm 50/51 that mentioned hyssop. This psalm, *miserere mei,* was one of the penitential psalms, recited constantly across Europe. Among many other occasions, it accompanied processes of penance, consecrations, death, and burial. It was also a regular feature in various magical operations.[39] At these and other occasions, aspersions of holy water were frequently accompanied by Psalm 50/51:9 (*Asperges me*) as an antiphon for the singing or recitation of the entirety of the psalm.[40] This practice created an association with the sprinkling of holy water and hyssop regardless of the actual aspersorium used. The image or idea of hyssop signaled purification, exorcism, or the command of spirits by itself. The Mozarabic Liturgy, for example, employed a version of Psalm 50/51:9 as an antiphon in the rite of exorcism for water and salt: "God sprinkles us with hyssop and we will be cleansed: you will wash us and we will be made whiter than snow."[41]

The main recorded liturgical uses for hyssop involved its use as a tool, or *aspersorium,* for sprinkling holy water. As Eric Palazzo has explored, the main occasion in which its use was specified involved the dedication of churches and altars.[42] In his treatise on the dedication of a church, Remy of Auxere drew on hyssop's association with baptism, suggesting that the holy water asperged on an altar during consecration was like a baptism for a building.[43] The Romano-Germanic Pontifical provided a similar justification that drew together many of the cultural associations hyssop possessed, explaining that during consecration an altar was sprinkled with holy water seven times and that the

'Abrenuncias Sathane et omnibus pompis eius?' Et hoc pertinet ad caritatem, que est principium operationum, et in signum huiusmodi aspersorium, quo in veteri lege aspergebantur immundi aqua lustrationis, fiebat de ysopo, 'que est humilis herba purgans tumorem pulmonis'; et significat fidem, que purgat superbiam; aqua lustrationis, que mundabat immundos, significat aquam baptismi, que per fidem quasi per aspersorium mundat baptizatos."

[39]For example, Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft* (1665 edition) contains frequent references to the psalm in operations to make spirits appear, sometimes in a crystal. See 15.22 and 24.

[40]A few examples must suffice for standard procedures, see Dedication of a church: *Le Pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle,* 33.16, ed. Cyrille Vogel, Reinhard Elze, and Michel Andrieu (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1963–1972), 1:84; Durand, Pontifical, 2.4.5, 3:499; Blessing of a cemetery: Roman Pontifical (12th), 52 B, 1:286.

[41]*Liturgica mozarabica secundum regulam S. Isidori,* PL 85:108A. "Antiphona. Sparsit nos Deus hyssopo: et mundabimur: lavabis nos et super nivem dealbabis nos."

[42]Eric Palazzo, "Le végétal et le sacré: l'hysope dans le rite de la dédicace de l'église," in *Ritual, Text and Law: Studies in Medieval Canon Law and Liturgy Presented to Roger E. Reynolds,* ed. Kathleen G. Cushing and Richard F. Gyug (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 41–49. On the medieval dedication of churches, see also Mette Birkedal Bruun and Louis I. Hamilton, "Rites for Dedicating Churches," in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy,* 177–178; Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 212–256; Dominique Iogna-Prat, *La maison dieu*; Méhu, ed., *Mises en scène et mémoires de la consécration de l'église dans l'occident médiéval* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Ruth Horie, *Perceptions of Ecclesia: Church and Soul in Medieval Dedication Sermons* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Brian V. Repsher, *The Rite of Church Dedication in the Early Medieval Era* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998); Lee Bowen, "The Tropology of Mediaeval Dedication Rites," *Speculum* 16.4 (1941): 469–479.

[43]Remigius Antissiodorensis, *Tractatus de dedicatione ecclesiae,* PL 855A. "Aqua ergo cum hyssopo aspergitur cum baptismus Christi passione sanctificatus Ecclesiae tribuitur." See also Ivo of Chartres' comments that aspersion was logistically required for the baptism of a thing too large to be immersed in the usual way: Mette Birkedal Bruun and Louis I. Hamilton, "Rites for Dedicating Churches," in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy,* 196.

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> Hyssop with which this water is sprinkled is a humble herb which is said to penetrate the hardness of stones with its roots, and it heals inner ailments of the chest. Also, uncleanliness was removed by its aspersion in the Law, signifying the humility of Christ, which breaks the hardness of our stubbornness and knows how to cure our passions and inner uncleanliness. Therefore, the water is sprinkled with hyssop when baptism, sanctified by the humility of Christ, is given to a church.[44]

After the altar, the rest of the church and all its walls were sprinkled, presumably with the same hyssop.[45]

Hyssop's necessity in the blessing or consecration of churches was frequently repeated. Honorius of Autun, Hugh of St. Victor, and Sicard of Cremona called for hyssop in the consecration of churches and altars.[46] In both the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Roman pontificals, hyssop is one of the five essential ingredients for the blessing of a church that must be prepared ahead of time.[47] William Durand, whose thirteenth-century pontifical became the standard for the late medieval Church, requires a slightly different listing of essentials but still places "an aspersorium made of hyssop" among them.[48] The thirteenth-century Roman Pontifical provided the option of circling and asperging the altar three or seven times with hyssop, while singing Ps. 50/51:9 as an antiphon.[49] The pontifical also specified that the doors were to be sprinkled with hyssop as well. The number of aspersions (three or seven) enjoyed associations with the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit, the seven wounds of Christ, the seven virtues, and the seven journeys of Christ, prefigured by the seven aspersions mentioned in the Old Testament, along with the triple emersions of baptism. William Durand highlighted many of these associations, requiring the exterior walls and the entire interior of a church to be sprinkled with an aspersorium of hyssop three times, signifying the triple immersion of baptism.[50] The altar was sprinkled seven times.[51] After these rites of consecration, the halleluiah should be sung, "because with the phantasies of the demons excluded, God will be praised there."[52]

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[44]*Le Pontifical romano-germanique,* 35.26, 1:104. "Ysopus autem cum quo eadem aqua spargitur herba est humilis, quae radicibus suis saxorum dicitur penetrare duritiam et interioribus pectoris medetur incommodis, cuius etiam aspersione inmunditiae delabantur in lege, significans humilitatem Christi, quae duritiam nostrae obstinationis confringit passionesque atque inmunditias interiores curare novit. Aqua ergo cum ysopo aspergitur, sum baptismus Christi humilitate sanctificatus aecclesiae traditur."

[45]*Le Pontifical romano-germanique,* 35.28, 1:105. See also 35.29–32.

[46]Honorius, *Gemma animae,* 1.160, "De altari et cruce," PL 172:593–594; *Sacramentarium, seu de causis et significatu mystico rituum divini in ecclesia officii liber,* 101, PL 172:801–806; Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis Christiane fidei,* 2.5.2, ed. Rainer Berndt (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 2008), 370–371; Sicard of Cremona, *Mitralis de officiis,* 1.6, CCCM 228, ed. Gábor Sarbak (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 28.

[47]Roman Pontifical (12th), L.1, 1:176; Roman Pontifical (13th), 23.1, 2:421–422. The five were: hyssop, a vase filled with water, wine, salt, and ashes. These items are combined to create the so-called Gregorian Water, and hyssop is the tool for sprinkling it.

[48]Durand, Pontifical, 2.3.3, 3:479.

[49]Roman Pontifical (13th), 2:430.

[50]Guillelmus Duranti/ William Durand, *Rationale diuinorum officiorum,* CCCM 140B, ed. Davril, Thibodeau, and Guyot (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000): three times around the exterior, 1.6.6 (67); three times around the interior and exterior as in baptism, 1.6.11 and 1.6.12 (68–69).

[51]Durand, *Rationale,* 1.7.4, 84–85.

[52]Durand, *Rationale,* 1.7.6, 85. "Post completam uero ecclesie uel altaris consecrationem cantatur alleluya quoniam exclusa demonum fantasia Deus ibi laudabitur."

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Durand explained that these aspersions were done with an aspersorium made of hyssop because it was a humble herb, signifying Christ's humility. In his humility, Christ bled seven times, cleansing the world. Hyssop grows from stones, penetrating the hardness of the rock with its roots just as humility breaks open a hardened heart. Likewise, hyssop treats swelling as humility does pride. Its deep roots allow it to return to life after it appears to have been ripped away. In these ways, hyssop can signify the entire multitude of the faithful, especially those "rooted and grounded in the faith of Christ who are not able to be uprooted and separated from his love." Among the multitude, however, it is most especially associated with the professional religious who use it liturgically: bishops and priests.[53] In fact, the rituals that called for it beyond the consecrations of churches and altars tended to emphasize the presence and the persons of senior prelates.

Hyssop played the role of an aspersorium in rituals beyond consecrations, and some of these rites involved the dead. Hyssop was used to sprinkle holy water during the visits of important prelates to churches, particularly during the visitations of bishops to subject parishes, and in the processional reception of prelates or legates.[54] In Durand's Pontifical, an episcopal visitation heavily involved the dead, featuring the aspersion with hyssop of not only people but also "the entire cemetery," the absolution of the dead, and the recitation by the bishop of the psalm *Miserere mei* before the confirmation of children.[55] In these examples, authors specify that the *aspersorium* should be hyssop; however, it is obvious that hyssop could be used for any aspersions in general, even when it is not specifically required by prescriptive texts. Such flexibility is most important regarding places of burial and burial itself.

Places of burial were sacred places, fortresses against demons, established and maintained by aspersions associated with hyssop. Burial involved the aspersion of both the corpse and the grave, and hyssop was a possible tool for it. Even if another tool was used, the ubiquity of Psalm 50/51:9 ensured hyssop remained in mind. Sicard of Cremona, Jean Beleth, and William Durand refer to this aspersion, suggesting that it inhibited the ability of demons to interfere with and inhabit corpses.[56] They do not, however, specify the tool that should be used. What written texts do not provide, other kinds of sources suggest. Archaeological evidence testifies to the presence of hyssop at medieval gravesites.[57] In these contexts, hyssop was a tool for aspersions – not a fragrant herb buried with corpses.[58] Christopher Daniell cites a glass roundel from

[53]Durand, *Rationale,* 1.7.20, 89. "Vnde et si per eam tota fidelium multitudo intelligi possit, precipue tamen illi per ysopum figurantur qui in Christi fide radicati et fundati ab eius amore euelli et separari non possunt. Per quos quid melius quam episcopos et presbyteros intelligere possumus qui, quanto maiorem in ecclesia optinent dignitatem, tanto firmius Christi fidei inherere debent? Per hos siquidem spargitur aqua, per hos et ab hiis baptizantur Christi fideles, hiis datum est perficere baptismatis sacramenta."

[54]Durand, Pontifical, 3.13.3, 3:627.

[55]Durand, Pontifical: Hyssop used, 3.12.13, 3:625–626; absolution, 3.12.4; final steps and Psalm 50, 3.12.18–21, 3:626.

[56]Sicard of Cremona, *Mitralis de officiis,* 9.50, 672; Jean Beleth, *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis,* 161, Q, CCCM 41 A, ed. H. Douteil (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 318. "Deinde ponitur in spelunca, et aqua benedicta ponitur ibi et prune cum thure: aqua benedicta, ne ad corpus demones accedant, qui multum timent aquam benedictam. Solent namque deseuire dyaboli sepius in corporibus mortuorum, ut quod non potuerunt in uita, faciant saltem post mortem." Repeated by Durand, *Rationale,* 99.

[57]Roberta Gilchrist and Barney Sloane, *Requiem: The Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain* (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2005), 180.

[58]Philipe Charlier and Patrice Georges, "Techniques de preparation du corps et d'embaumement à la fin du Moyen Âge," in *Inhumations de prestige ou prestige de l'inhumation? Expressions du pouvoir dans*

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Leicester Cathedral created around 1500 that depicts the aspersion with hyssop of a body wrapped in its shroud at the grave.[59]

The consecration of cemetery ground involved significant aspergations of holy water, and many of them were accompanied by the antiphon *Asperges me.*[60] Again, the ubiquity of references to hyssop in this antiphon associated it with the ritual sprinkling of holy water, regardless of the actual tool used. One can see the lingering power of the association between aspersion and hyssop in a seventeenth-century treatise on magic that refers to a magician's aspersorium as a "hyssop," even though hyssop was just one of many herbs used in its construction.[61] Spirits that spoke from consecrated ground were less likely to be demons, and late medieval sermon collections, such has John Mirk's *Festial,* associated church consecration and the aspersion of corpses with the appearance of loquacious human spirits.[62] Of course, the grave of an individual was also a potential site for ongoing liturgical commemorative activities (with hyssop or not) associated with votive masses. Such ritual activity was ubiquitous and familiar to everyone, constituting a major source of employment and income for the clergy of local parishes.[63]

In summary, hyssop's ubiquitous ritual use and cultural significance associated it with purification and exorcism. As a tool of exorcism, hyssop played a role in the command of spirits. The same context connected it to the banishment of demons. In these aspects, hyssop was also a tool to protect and benefit the Christian dead. All these associations might have suggested its potential utility in attempts to speak with the dead and in resolving any ambiguity between human and demonic spirits.

IV. Using Hyssop to Speak with the Dead in the Latin *Liber Razielis*

The seven-part Latin *Liber Razielis,* or the *Book of Raziel,* provides a rare example of a medieval magical text that gave specific instructions for contacting the dead. It survives today in two mostly complete copies.[64] Its seven books, or "*tractati,*" are each devoted to a different element of magical practice.[65] These seven books draw their material from

l'au-delà (IVe–XVe siècle) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 427. Regarding post medieval findings, see Susan Drury, "Funeral Plants and Flowers in England: Some Examples," *Folklore* 105 (1994): 102, and Beatrix A. Wherry, "Miscellaneous Notes from Monmouthshire" *Folklore* 16, no. 1 (1905): 66.

[59]Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (London: Routledge, 1997), 45.

[60]Roman Pontifical (12th), 52 B, 1:286.

[61]BN MS Lat. 15127, pp. 78–80, esp. 80. "Aspergendo cum dicto ysopo siue spergulo. . ."

[62]John Mirk, "De dedicacione ecclesie" and "In die sepulture alicuius Mortui," in *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk),* ed. Theodor Erbe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1905), 1:277–281 and 294–297. See analysis by Stephen Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters: Demons and the Restless Dead in Medieval England, c. 1050–1450* (London: Routledge, 2020), 130–149.

[63]See, for example, the commemorative options recorded in the obituary of Banize (fifteenth-century): Jean-Loup Lemaitre, "Obituaires, calendriers, et liturgie paroissiale," in *L'église et la mémoire des morts dans la France médiévale*, ed. Lemaitre (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 139.

[64]These are Rome, Vatican Library, MS Reg. lat. 1300 (hereafter, Vat. Reg. lat. 1300) and Halle, Universitäts- und Landesbiblipthek Sachsen-Anhalt, 14. B. 36, ff. r5–130v. The Rome MS is late fourteenth- to mid-fifteenth-century, and the Halle MS is sixteenth-century.

[65]The original version had multiple other works appended after the main seven tractati, which are only now preserved in the Halle MS. For more information on these appendices, see Sophie Page, "Uplifting Souls: The *Liber de essentia spirituum* and the *Liber Razielis,*" in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012): 107, n. 17; Sophie Page, "Magic and the Pursuit of Wisdom: The 'Familiar'

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different sources. Its composition was a complex process that is imperfectly understood and the subject of some scholarly disagreement.[66] Its preface claims that it was produced in medieval Spain as part of the major corpus of magical texts translated under the commission of Alphonso X of Castile (r. 1252–1284), who was interested in Arabic image magic and Jewish angelology.[67] In the Jewish and Arabic traditions, Raziel was an angel said to have revealed secrets to Adam, and various texts and esoteric secrets were attributed to it.

The book claims to be a translation of a single Jewish work, but in truth it derives from a complicated pool of texts that cannot be clearly dated.[68] As Damaris Gehr has argued, there is good reason to believe its attribution to Alphonso is fictive and that the text took shape between the middle and the last quarter of the fourteenth century.[69] It combines material from different languages and cultures, particularly Greek (perhaps sometimes via Arabic) and Hebrew, into a new work that claims a single Hebrew origin. The work, as it exists today, is the result of the choices made by its Latin editors.[70] While parts of the *Liber Razielis* represent a very rare demonstrable importation of Hebrew magic into medieval Latin Europe, the section involving hyssop and the dead appears to originate from originally Greek hermetic literature.[71]

The ritual that allows conversation with the dead using hyssop comes from the second book.[72] This book, the "Book of the Wing" (*Liber Alae*),[73] deals with what Page identifies as "natural magic" and is divided into four "wings" dealing with different substances: the virtues of 24 types of stones, 24 herbs, 24 animals, and the 22 letters of the

Spirit in the *Liber Theysolius," La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* 36, no. 1 (2007): 41–70.

[66]In my approach to the text, I am particularly indebted to Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der astrologischen Literatur der Juden* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) and Sophie Page, "Uplifting Souls," 79–112. To these, one should also add Alejandro García Avilés, "Alfonso X y el Liber Razielis: Imagenes de la magia astral judía en el scriptorium alfonsí," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 74, no. 1 (1997): 21–39; Alfonso d'Agostino, *Astromagia: MS Reg. lat. 1283a* (Naples: Liguori, 1992), 39–45; and F. Secret, "Sur quelques traductions du Sefer Razi'el," *Revue des études juives* 128 (1969): 223–245.

[67]Vat. Reg. lat. 1300, 2r–2v. Among other works, Alphonso's translation program produced the Latin *Picatrix,* a work that would exert considerable influence in the later Middle Ages. For Alfonso's translation program, see Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance,* 187–198.

[68]It claims to be a collection of revelations to Adam compiled by Solomon. Its true origins are extremely complex, and specific source texts and lines of transmission often cannot be identified—only inferred. It is likely the final editor(s) worked from earlier translations into Latin. See discussion below.

[69]Damaris Gehr, "La fittizia associazione del Liber Razielis in sette libri ad Alfonso X il Saggio e una nuova determinazione delle fasi redazionali del trattato, della loro datazione e dell'identità dei compilatori coinvolti," *Viator* 43 (2012): 181–210.

[70]Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica,* 263. The preface names two editors/translators: Glarifacon and Johannes Clericus. On these shadowy figures, see Gehr, "La fittizia associazione," 185–190.

[71]On the issues surrounding medieval Jewish magic and its influence on Latin Europe (and Latin Europe's influence on it), see Katelyn Mesler, "The Latin encounter with Hebrew Magic," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic,* 85–98; for the *Liber Razielis,* see 87–88.

[72]There is another ritual for speaking to the dead in the *Liber Sameyn* (the sixth book of the *Liber Razielis*): Vat. Reg. lat. 1300, 107r–107v. Rather than hyssop, it uses a jar of oil and honey, a staff/wand, and the assistance of two angels: Ascymor and its servant "Thozynarudya." See Sophie Page, "Speaking with Spirits in Medieval Magic Texts," in *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100–1700,* ed. Joad Raymond (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 132–133.

[73]Vat. Reg. lat. 1300, 21v. "Et diximus istum tractatum librum ale propter hoc quod aues et pisces sine alis non possunt moueri." In the preface, it is named "ala" (3r).

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Hebrew alphabet. While the subject may appear to suggest a discussion of the occult powers of nature, as Julien Véronèse and Jean-Patrice Boudet have observed, the content of these passages intertwines natural and ritual elements.[74]

The method of contacting the dead outlined in the "Book of the Wing" comes from its "Second Wing" on herbs. The *Liber Razielis* explains that its thirteenth herb allows discourse with the dead. This herb is called "holy" (*sancta*) or the "herb of the prophets." It should be carried with veneration in holy places such as churches where it defends against evil things. With this herb in the past, "prophets made the dead speak, whether they had been dead for a long or a short time."[75] Interestingly, this herb enables the dead but constrains demons. A demon cannot be in the same place as this herb, unless the one who carries it invokes it for a specific purpose. If put in a place where there are demons, "it restricts and binds them so they cannot move."[76]

The *Liber Razielis* explains how one can use the herb to speak with the dead, and, in this elaboration, it does name a specific herb: hyssop. The rest of the entry is devoted to an explanation of how it can call up the dead for conversation. It reports that in the *Book of Hermes* Solomon says that someone who wants to have fellowship with the dead should take water collected on the fourth hour of the night and suffumigate it with costus, musk, and juice/sap (*cum costo musco et suc*).[77] He should then take this water "to the grave of a dead person with whose spirit he wants to have fellowship," throw it upon the tomb "with the herb called hyssop," and say four times, "rise, rise and come and speak with me." If you do this for three nights, on the third night the dead person "will come to you and will speak with you regarding whatever you want."[78]

Some of the later abridgements and translations of the *Liber Razielis* continued to reproduce this ritual and its employment of hyssop. It occurs, for example, in two English translations from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that attribute the work to Solomon.[79] The text of this ritual is generally very close to the Alfonsine Latin with one main exception. In both, the Alfonsine reference to potential demon

[74]Julien Véronèse and Jean-Patrice Boudet, "Lier et délier : de Dieu à la sorcière," in *La légitimité implicite,* ed. Jean-Philippe Genet (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2015), § 35, https://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/6581?lang=en (accessed August 11, 2022).

[75]Vat. Reg. lat. 1300, 27v. "Et cum ista faciebant prophete loqiri mortuos siue fuisset magnum tempus quod fuissent mortui siue modicum."

[76]Vat. Reg. lat. 1300, 27v–28r. "Et scias quod nullus demon in loco ubi est ista herba si ille qui eam portat non inuocat ipsum quod det sibi potestatem super causam quam uoluerit facere Et scias quod si ponatur in loco ubi sunt demones inclusi cogit et ligat eos quod non possent mouere."

[77]These are aromatics, see Anya H. King, "About Musk and Its Terminology," in *Scent from the Garden of Paradise: Musk and the Medieval Islamic World* (Brill, 2017), 11–36. I have taken "suc" as *succo.*

[78]Reg. lat. 1300, 28r. "Et dixit Salomon inueni in Libro Hermus quod si aliquis accipit aquam que fiunt colecta in quarta hora noctio et uadit supra tumulum alicuius mortui hominis cum cuius spiritu uult habere societatem et proiciat de ista aqua super tumulum cum herba ista que dicitur ysopo et sit prius aqua subfumigata cum costo musco et suc et dicit ei quatuor vicibus surge surge et veni et loqere me cum / Et ista facies per tres noctes in tercia nocte ueniet ad te et loquatur tibi de quocumque uolens."

[79]These are BL Sloane MS 3846, ff. 127–155 (16th century) and Sloane 3826, ff. 1–57 (17th century). A transcription of both MSS is available through a masters thesis: Sanne de Laat, "Liber Salomonis: A Parallel Edition with Introduction and Appendices," (MA thesis, Radboud Universiteit Numegen, 2018), ritual text at 52 and 53. The oldest of the two has an interesting colophon, dated November 2, 1564, that claims the text was copied by William Parry at the request of John Gyne of Llandlos from a publicly available manuscript at Oxford. See de Laat, "Liber Salomonis," 3. Below the colophon is an archival number to the supposed original: A. 116. It cannot be traced.

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summoning by the operator is not present and is instead replaced with an elaboration on the power of the herb.[80] Both also continue to specify hyssop.

The divided nature of the entry for the thirteenth herb is curious and raises suspicions regarding the potential difficulties the text's translators may have faced with unfamiliar terms and concepts. The limited modern commentary on it has tended to focus on possibilities for the herb called "sancta" while neglecting the hyssop mentioned shortly thereafter. In some scholarly work on this book and on its many later abridgements and translations, especially into English, the herb called "sancta," or the "herb of the prophets," is identified with vettonica or betony.[81] Likewise, one might explore other texts that elaborated on the virtues or powers of natural things, such as the *Book of Hermes on the 15 Stars, Stones, Herbs, and Their Images*.[82] This Hermetic work, sometimes attributed to Enoch, is a Latin translation of an Arabic abridgement of an originally Greek work.[83] It is found in codices containing variants of the *Liber Razielis*.[84] In it, the second star, Pleiades, corresponds to crystal and fennel. Of these, it is crystal that possesses the power "to gather demons and the spirits of the dead and to call winds and to know hidden secrets."[85] The powers ascribed to herbs and

[80]Seven-Part: "Et scias quod nullus demon in loco ubi est ista herba si ille qui eam portat non inuocat ipsum quod det sibi potestatem super causam quam uoluerit facere." Sloane MS 3846: "In places where is any evill he hath not might if he that beareth it clepeth him not. And it giveth to him might upon thing which he would."

[81]This gloss is offered by Joseph H. Peterson in his online edition of Sloane MS 3846: http://www.esotericarchives.com/raziel/raziel.htm#book7 (accessed August 11, 2022). The suggestion is made by Charles du Fresne, (Glossarium ad scriptores mediae infimae Latinitatis (Frankfurt, 1710), 490), who attributes the name to the Libellus de herba uettonica of Pseudo-Antonius Musa and the Herbarium of Pesudo-Apuleius. I have been unable to locate these attributions in the modern edition of these texts. Betony did have reported uses in warding off nocturnal terrors or awful dreams: Wilfrid Bonser, "Magical Practices against Elves," *Folklore* 37, no. 4 (1926): 360. The description is also similar to that of the Martagon Lily in a work originally appended to the *Liber Razielis*—the *Liber Theysolius:* Page, "Magic and the Pursuit of Wisdom," 68; Halle 14. B. 36, f. 151r. The Martagon entry does not mention the dead. This work does include an operation to acquire a familiar spirit that involves a dead person, which is beyond the scope of this article. One might also consider the classical *sagmina,* which were connected in Justinian's *Digest* to the adjective "sanctus"; see *Digesta seu Pandectae Iustiniani Augusti,* 1.8.8. See, Fritz Schulz, *History of Roman Legal Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 172–173. The *sagmina* were herbs gathered from the Capitoline Hill in Rome, and they were often identified with verbena, or any kind of plant gathered from a sacred place. See "SAG'MINA," *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities,* ed. William Smith (John Murray: London, 1875), 1002.

[82]On this text and its manuscripts, see Lynn Thorndike, "Traditional Medieval Tracts concerning engraved astrological Images," 221–227, in *Mélanges Auguste Pelzer: Études d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale de la Scolastique médiévale offertes à Monseigneur Auguste Pelzer* (Louvain: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1947). For another similar collection (with no direct overlap on speaking to the dead), see Isabelle Draelants, *Le Liber de virtutibus herbarum, lapidum et animalium (Liber aggregationis): Un texte à succès attribué à Albert le Grand* (Florence: SISMEL, 2007); for some potential connections with the *Liber Razielis,* see 96–98.

[83]I have used the edition by Louis Delatte, ed. "Hermes Trismegistus: de quindecim stellis, quindecim lapidibus quindecim herbis et quindecim imaginibus," *Textes latins et vieux français relatifs aux Cyranides* (Liège: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1942): 237–275. I would like to thank David Litwa for providing a copy of this text. On the text and its diffusion, see also Thorndike, 1:340, n. 1.

[84]For example, BL Sloane MS 3847.

[85]Delatte, "De quindecim stellis," 259. "Secundus lapis dicitur cristallus. . . Virtus namque eius est aggregare daemones et spiritus mortuorum et vocare ventos et screta abscondita scire." In many recensions the exact powers of the stone and herb were written closely together and could easily become conflated. See BN lat. 13014, fol 174vB, a fourteenth-century MS that I have consulted. See also the transcription of Bodleian

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stones in the *Liber Razielis,* however, are different. In it, crystal has no such power.[86] The stone that allows the living to speak with the dead, as well as invoke and speak with demons, is an unnamed powerful stone similar in color to beryl.[87] While this Hermetic work sheds little light on the thirteenth herb of the *Liber Razielis,* another Hermetic work associated with it provides a few tantalizing leads.

A better sense of the sort of content the *Liber Razielis*' editor(s) may have reshaped into their entry for the thirteenth herb can be found through an examination of the *Cyranides* and its translations and adaptations. The *Cyranides* was a Hermetic text translated from Greek into Latin.[88] As Reimund Leicht has observed, materials linked to the Latin translation of the first book of the *Cyranides* appear to correspond loosely in theme and contents to this part of the *Liber Razielis.*[89] They are not a direct source but rather point toward a genre of linked Hermetic texts, which resembled some of the contents of the *Cyranides* and shared the number twenty-four (the letters in the Greek alphabet) as their organizing theme.[90] Leicht cautiously hypothesizes that this part of the *Liber Razielis* (the *Liber alae*) might be a partial survival of an otherwise lost hermetic text, linked to the *Cyranides,* called "Wings," mentioned in a magical papyrus fragment.[91] The section on stones found in another work linked to the *Cyranides,* the Old French *Le Livre des Secrez de Nature,* offers a very close parallel to the "First Wing" of the *Liber Razielis*.[92] This text also claims to have been translated "from Greek into Latin" through King Alphonso's patronage.[93] For herbs, the correspondences are more difficult and obscure.

While most entries of the herbs listed in *Cyranides I* do not correspond with those in the *Liber Razielis,* the thirteenth offers a very suggestive set of virtues that do. Most importantly, the Latin *Cyranides* informs the reader that the herb takes its name, *Nekya,* from conversation with the dead.[94] In Greek, *Nekya*, *Nekyia,* or *Nekuia* at its most literal, refers to the questioning of ghosts, used to describe Odysseus' descent

MS e Museo 52, ff 44–47 in Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Particularly in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 246.

[86]For crystal, the 12th stone in the *Liber Razielis,* see Reg.lat. 1300, 23v.

[87]For the 18th stone that allows speech with the dead, see Reg. lat. 1300, 24v. In both Reg.lat. 1300 and Halle 14 B 36 (14v), this herb has no name. In the Halle MS, the scribe has left an empty space for the missing name. In the Sloane English translations, it is named Catel. See also Crisolitus/Chrysolite (10th stone) that draws together demons and winds, defends places against "evil spirits and dead men," and makes demons obedient (Reg. lat. 1300, 23v).

[88]I have used Louis Delatte, *Textes Latins et vieux Français relatifs aux Cyranides*.

[89]Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 264, n. 157.

[90]Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica,* 265. Leicht points out that The Book of the Wing(s) uses twenty-four to organize its subsections, until it lists the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, where it is forced to remodel for twenty-two. He regards this change as evidence that the compiler of the *Liber Razielis* was interested in producing a veneer supporting a supposed Hebrew origin for originally Greek material.

[91]Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica,* 265–266. The fragment is PGM XIII/16.

[92]Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica,* 265. *Le livre des secrez de nature,* in *Textes Latins et vieux français relatifs aux Cyranides,* ed. Delatte, 309–315. The correspondence is exact for the first nine stones and then displays some variation and rearrangement. The stone in the *Liber Razielis* (the unnamed 18th stone), which allows conversation with the dead, is not present.

[93]Delatte (ed.), *Le livre des secrez de nature,* 297. This Latin translation is not known to have survived. Gehr suggests that this work may even have been consulted by the editor(s) of the *Liber Razielis:* "La fittizia associazione," 193.

[94]*Cyranides I*, "Elementum XIII," 66–68. The thirteenth entry corresponds to the letter N.

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into the underworld.[95] This herb is also named "flomus," which Latin authors identified as mullein.[96] Medieval texts referring to mullein as flomus frequently regarded it as a Hellenism, and there is some indication that the word caused problems for Latin readers.[97] Its properties closely parallel those attributed to the thirteenth herb of the *Liber Razielis*. Its name refers to its use as a tool in necromancy: "Its leaves used as wicks burn well in lamps. For this they use [the leaves] in *nekikes manties,* that is necromancy, which those who do this sort of thing perform in a shell (*concha*). Hence, the herb is called *nekya* because *nekys* means dead."[98] While the original Greek referred to a basin or a bowl, the Latin used *concha,* a word that, to a Latin reader, could conjure the image of a basin containing holy water.[99] This small choice may have had significant consequences in later reception and adaptations by suggesting liquid used in aspergation. Other corresponding traits appear in the same entry, attached to the corresponding stone, the *nemesitis lapis,* or the "stone of Nemesis." It was a stone taken from the altar of the goddess Nemesis in Athens that could be used to reveal a demoniac and free them of their demon. It could also protect against demonic dreams, the terror of children, and "nocturnal encounters."[100] In an atmosphere of frequent adaption and rearrangement, it seems possible that some of these elements could have been attached to the herb rather than the stone in derivative works.

Whatever the truth may be behind the material that influenced the thirteenth herb of the seven-part *Liber Razielis,* its final form drew upon cultural and ritual associations that were intelligible to Latin Europe, and these revolved around hyssop, an herb with which the *Cyranides* was unconcerned. Unlike an herb, such as Mullein, suited to ancient modes of divination, hyssop was, in contrast, a good cultural and ritual fit for Latin Europe.

V. Liturgy, Magic, and Hyssop in a Fifteenth-Century Handbook of Necromancy

The theological and liturgical associations of hyssop shed light on the form taken by the *Liber Razielis* hyssop ritual for speaking to the dead in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D. 252, a fifteenth-century necromantic manuscript compilation. The form it takes in this manuscript reveals a great deal about the liturgical and ritual associations medieval clerics found in the intersection of hyssop and the dead. Most significantly, its form in Rawlinson D. 252 reflects adaptation with other ritual forms that "fit"

[95]For the Greek and Roman practice of necromancy in general, see Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). There is some overlap in concept between *nekuia* and *katabasis,* or bodily descent into the netherworld.

[96]*Cyranides I*, 66. "Nekya herba est flomus." For the identification with mullein, see Francis Bacon, *Natural History. Century VI,* in *The Works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Verula, Viscount of St. Alban and High Chancellor of England* (London: A. Millar, 1753), 1:208.

[97]See for example the "Aberdeen Bestiary," 15r. https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f15r, accessed August 11, 2022. Readers may have had difficulty understanding what herb flomus meant, and the apparatus of Delatte's edition of the Latin *Cyranides* testifies to one scribe adding "vel fluvii" in a faulty elaboration.

[98]*Cyranides I,* 66–67. "Nekya herba est flomus: huius herbae species sunt VII. Dicit ergo quod folia quae ascendant super terram brachium unum, huius folia comburunt in lucernis pro licinio; quia hoc habent in nekikes manties, id est in nigromantiis quae fiunt in concha, qui faciunt huiusmodi, quare et herba nekya dicitur."

[99]Its Greek context clearly refers to divination through a reflective surface, often with a child medium, but there is evidence in magical papyri that ghosts could appear in the flame of the lamp as well. See Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy,* 194.

[100]*Cyranides I*, 168.

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with it in the world of its compiler. The modern Rawlinson D. 252 consists of two roughly contemporary personal notebooks in two different hands, called by Frank Klaassen Rawlinson A and B.[101] They reflect the interests and knowledge of their compilers, practitioners of frequently demonic ceremonial magic. The manuscript is one of the oldest practical handbooks of necromancy that have survived in archive collections to the present day, such as the influential "Munich Handbook" of necromancy published by Richard Kieckhefer.[102]

Rawlinson B contains a section on "raising the dead" that is unusual in the context of other medieval texts devoted to the summoning of angels and demons through ceremonial magic.[103] Its ritual that uses hyssop to speak with the dead has a specific purpose: gathering information regarding a theft.[104] It instructs the operator to go to the grave of a recently dead person on the tenth day of the moon. The operator should then call the dead person by name, commanding them in Middle English, "make redy in apparence unto me." He then should conjure the spirit "Asacel," who is "the guardian (*custos*) of the bodies of the dead," to secure permission from God to allow the soul of the dead person to appear "on this night in my dreams in such a way that without tricks or deceit he will tell me so I can have perfect knowledge of this theft."[105] A spirit named Asacel, Assasel, Asasell, Azaell or some other close variant, with dominion over the dead or their bodies, is a familiar figure in a number of late medieval and early modern magical rituals.[106] The text then indicates that the operator should refer to a written list of matters to be addressed that he apparently has with him. The first stage of the rite concludes with the operator declaring, "I bind you so that you will omit nothing in any way from this" (*ut hoc nullatenus omittas*) through the highest name Tetragrammaton[107] and AGLA,[108] all the names of God, all the punishments of hell, and "through him who will come to judge

[101]Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic*, 134; on the manuscript's significance, see 124–125. On this manuscript, see also Jean-Patrice Boudet, "Deviner dans la lumière. Note sur les conjurations pyromantiques dans un manuscrit anglais du xve siècle," in *Religion et mentalités au Moyen Âge,* ed. Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet, Amaury Chauou, Daniel Pichot, et al. (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003), 523–530.

[102]This equivalent work is totally uninterested in conversation with the dead, containing only one similar operation to make a dead person seem alive or vice versa. See Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites,* 221–224.

[103]Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 252 (hereafter Oxford, Rawlinson D. 252), 66v–67v. The section has impressed several scholars of medieval magic. See Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic,* 119; Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites,* 61.

[104]Oxford, Rawlinson D. 252, 66r–67v. The discovery of thieves and the finding of stolen goods is a general preoccupation of the collection; see Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic,* 238, n. 72.

[105]The Rawlinson text is 65v–66r: "Ego coniuro te spiritum . Asacel . qui es custos corporum mortuorum per patrem et filum et spiritum sactum ut licenciam impetres a summo creatori nostro deo viuo et vero qui sedit super tronum et agno ut anima istius . Johannis . anima nominando defuncti ut appareas ista nocte michi in sompnis ita ut sine fallacia uel fraude dicat michi quod possum habere perfectam noticiam de isto furto."

[106]For example, see BL Sloane 3853, 102v–104v and BL Additional 36674, 47v. Different scholars identify this angel with Azael or Azazel. Both were familiar figures in Herbrew angelology. See Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen Angels* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 63–64; M. Moïse Schwab, "Vocabulaire de l'angélologie d'après les manuscrits hébreux de la Bibliothèque Nationale," in *Mémoires présentés par divers savants étrangers à l'Académie* 10, no. 2 (1897), 321. See also the similar functions of the angels Ascymor and Thozynarudya in the *Liber Sameyn.*

[107]This is the most common name of God found in magical texts. See Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites,* 138.

[108]AGLA is a common magical abbreviation for the Hebrew "Ata gibor leolam Adonai" or "Thou art mighty for ever, O Lord." It is often found in magical texts as a name of God. Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites,* 139.

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the living and the dead and the world through fire. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The next stage requires hyssop. The instructions say to take hyssop water gathered by night and put it on the grave for three nights. "Let him sprinkle on the grave from that water with a hyssop branch with costus and musk" (*costo musco*). Afterwards, "he should say, get up – by saying the name – and come and speak with me on the third night in a beautiful form and you will give me true responses to my questions through this name: Tetragrammaton and AGLA. Amen. Fiat, fiat."[109] The rite concludes with instructions in Middle English. The operator should take earth from around the dead man's head and tie it up in cloth along with a written list of the stolen things. The operator should sleep with this bag under his right ear and within ten nights he will achieve his goal. Finally, the rite concludes with the instruction to have a Mass sung for the soul and afterward say the *De profundis*.

This ritual seems to provide a highly variable set of potential time frames in which the dead person can provide information regarding the theft and its details. As Frank Klaassen has suggested, it is an interesting example of the way medieval magical practices often sought to provoke revelatory dreams.[110] The operator, in his initial conjuration of Asacel, first calls for an appearance "this night to me in my dreams," then later, after three nights of hyssop, for the dead man to come "speak with me on the third night," and finally for a certain revelation after sleeping with the grave soil for ten nights beneath his ear. A reader gains the impression that success at any stage would be possible and welcome. More significantly, however, considering the ritual in the *Liber Razielis,* the variable times given in the Rawlinson manuscript—to say nothing of the changes in verb persons and from Latin to English—may also represent "seams" marking the compilation of ritual actions and elements from different sources. The *Liber Razielis* hyssop ritual was just one of them.[111] As put together in the Rawlinson manuscript, these elements made sense together for speaking to the dead, and they did so because of the larger liturgical and ritual associations the elements possessed.

Why someone would want to contact the dead to uncover the details of a theft the ritual does not explain, and any answer must remain provisional. At first glance, the entire situation is curious, considering the involvement of the superhuman Asacel, who presumably should be capable of uncovering thieves itself. Opinions regarding what knowledge a spirit, human or otherwise, might possess varied widely. While it might make sense, as it had for Augustine, that a human soul would only know those things it had personally experienced or had been told, other authorities argued that the dead acquired perfect knowledge of terrestrial events immediately after their

[109]Oxford, Rawlinson D. 252, 67v. "Postea accipias Aqua[m] ysopi qui fuerit accepta in nocte et vadit super foueam tribus noctibus et proiciat de illa aqua cum ramusculo ysopi super foveam cum costo musco et postea dicat sic . Surge tu talis nominando . N . Et veni loquere mecum in tertia nocte in pulcherima forma et quod dabis michi vera responsa de quesitis meis per hoc nomen . tetragrammaton et Agla Amen . fiat . fiat."

[110]Frank Klaassen, "Magical Dream Provocation in the Later Middle Ages," *Esoterica* (2006), 118.

[111]For example, another ritual (mostly in English) that allows contact with the dead through sleeping with grave soil under the ear, along with conjurations of Asasell/Assasell/Azaell appears in BL Sloane 3853, ff. 102v–104v, esp. 102v and 104v. See also BL Sloane 3318, 71v. The assumption appears to be that the dead person whispers from the soil (taken from around their head) into the ear of the sleeping operator.

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departure from their bodies.[112] Such knowledge would be like that enjoyed by angelic and demonic spirits. Human souls might also be more approachable or act as mediators with other spirits. Likewise, many contexts could constrain what a spirit knew or was allowed to say. For example, another ritual in Rawlinson B, calling upon the power of Satan to catch a thief, explains that the ritual must be completed within three days of the theft. If the thief has in the meantime confessed his crime or donated with a pious motivation, this magic cannot reveal him.[113] In fact, the very uncertainty of any spirit's knowledge might have incentivized obtaining the ability to summon diverse kinds.

As Anne Mathieu, who has studied this section of the manuscript, has found, the ritual possesses multiple "intertexts," combining elements from different traditions and contexts. It utilizes conjurations and evocations (such as the divine names Tetragrammaton and AGLA) commonly found in magical texts, liturgical elements associated with burial and commemoration of the dead, as well as non-liturgical written formulas of command. She notes the formula "ut hoc nullatenus omittas" is regularly found in royal letters.[114] The binding "though him who will come to judge the living and the dead" is a common ingredient of prayer and exorcism as well as a prominent component of the Office of the Dead.[115] The *De profundis* also offers a clear connection to widespread medieval practices of commemoration for the dead. It concluded the Office of the Dead and accompanied Christian funerals.[116] Mathieu also notes that the aspersion of a grave with holy water from a bunch of hyssop was part of a burial ceremony.[117] In addition to the connections Mathieu has so perceptively identified, the Rawlinson manuscript also draws on further rituals that accompanied the aspersion of holy water with hyssop in many liturgical contexts, as well as the widely understood significations of the herb.

The ritual for consecrating cemeteries recorded in Durand's Pontifical combines aspersions and verbal formulae that provide a particularly significant intertext for the ritual in the Rawlinson manuscript.[118] The rite began with a prayer to "the all-powerful, eternal God, you who are the guardian (*custos*) of the souls and bodies of your faithful."[119] It is easy to see a parallel to the Rawlinson invocation of the spirit Asacel,

[112]For Augustine, see *De cura pro mortuis gerenda,* 16–19, CSEL 41, ed. J. Zycha (1900), 647–653. For an example of wider ability, see the claim made by the ghost of Beaucaire "that a spirit [of a dead human] has all things under his glance," especially "shameful deeds," in Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia,* 3.103, trans. ed. S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 766, 767.

[113]Rawlinson D. 252, 104r. On this ritual and its use of a lamina in the context of general magical figures, see Sophie Page, "Medieval Magical Figures: Between Image and Text," *Routledge History of Medieval Magic,* 438. There are many other examples of similar logic. See Caesarius of Hiesterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum,* 3.2; 3.3; 3.5, ed. Joseph Strange (Coloniae: Sumptibus J. M. Heberle, 1851), 112–115; and the ghostly commentary regarding spirits' ability to reveal confessed sins in Jean Gobi, *Dialogue avec un fantôme,* trans. Marie-Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1994), 96.

[114]Anne Mathieu, "Formules conjuratoires dans un rituel de nécromancie du XVe siècle," in *La formule au Moyen Age II. Actes du colloque international de Nancy et Metz, 7-9 juin 2012,* ed. Isabelle Draelants and Christelle Balouzat-Loubet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 466.

[115]Mathieu, "Formules conjuratoires," 464. See also Florence Chave-Mahir, "Medieval Exorcism: Liturgical and Hagiographical Sources," in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy,* 172.

[116]Mathieu, "Formules conjuratoires," 462.

[117]Mathieu, "Formules conjuratoires," 461. As explained above, hyssop may simply have been associated with the aspersion of corpses even if it was not used as a tool for this specific activity.

[118]Derek A. Rivard, *Blessing the World: Ritual and Lay Piety in Medieval Religion* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009): for consecration of cemeteries, see 89–112; for reconciliation of defiled cemeteries, see 112–131.

[119]Durand, Pontifical, 2.5.5, 3:505.

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who is "the guardian (*custos*) of the bodies of the dead." This prayer is soon followed by the sprinkling of holy water along with the antiphon *Asperges me.*[120] The aspersion of holy water, prayers, psalms, and antiphons continue in a circuit around the entire cemetery. In a final collect, God is asked to assign an angel as a guardian for the cemetery.[121] Again, while hardly an orthodox interpretation, it is not difficult to interpret Asacel as this kind of angel.

VI. Conclusion

Hyssop held a cultural and liturgical power that could be employed by individuals to diverse ends. The seven-part *Liber Razielis,* likely compiled soon after the mid-fourteenth century, used it as a tool for communication with the dead. Behind this appearance is an imperfectly known and complicated translation and reception history. This history involves negotiations between many languages and cultures (even if only in the realm of fiction), including Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and possibly Arabic. From this mystery brew of Hermetic, Astrological, and other esoteric texts, a particular ritual for speaking to the dead took shape that drew on the power of widely understood liturgical rituals involving hyssop. In the *Liber Razielis,* the significance of hyssop "native" to Latin Europe encountered literatures concerned with "magic" and "natural philosophy" entering Europe from the outside. These "magical" and "scientific" literatures were interested in the natural virtues or powers of herbs, stones, animals, stars, letters, and special words. The hyssop ritual's later reception and transformation in Rawlinson B, a fifteenth-century handbook of necromancy, provides a particularly compelling example of the syncretism between, and entanglement of, magic and liturgy as common ritual forms in Latin culture. The hyssop ritual is one case of this much more widely found dynamic of importation, reception, and entanglement that makes the history of magic a particularly interesting and compelling window on medieval cultures.

In this case study, I have attempted partially to revive and explore an obscure attempt to raise the dead again to an echo of life. The employment of the cultural power of hyssop to speak with the dead in a small group of texts intersects in theme and function with the ongoing professional work of historians, as well as the less professionalized efforts of amateur historical enthusiasts.[122] Both groups, in general terms, seek, "to conjure dead people to life and make them speak." Historians and amateurs often undertake their work because of what has been termed a "desire for the past."[123] This is a desire to encounter the past, or some image of it, to connect with it and hear its voice in the present.[124] In our current sociopolitical moment, these encounters are of great importance, forming an often under-acknowledged cornerstone

[120] Durand, Pontifical, 2.5.7, 3:506.

[121] Durand, Pontifical, 2.5.24, 3:510. "Deus cuius miseratione anime fidelium requiescunt, huic cimiterio, quesumus, domine, angelum tuum sanctum deputa custodem et quorum quarumque corpora in te hic sepelientur animas eorum ad omnibus absolue vinculis delictorum, ut in te semper cum sanctis tuis sine fine letentur. Per dominum."

[122] For a compelling case for the connection between the two (with important distinctions I have elided), see Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

[123] Nicholas Watson, "Desire for the Past" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 21 (1999): 59–97.

[124] For another reflection on an often-unvoiced desire to speak with the dead as a motive in historical literary studies, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1.

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in our polemical struggles regarding identity and belonging.[125] In these wars regarding modern culture, the dead are often mobilized and even drafted, and their voices (ventriloquized or not) are major participants. In the rallying of the dead, as Robert Pogue Harrison remarks, "The living do not have a constitutive need to speak as much as hear themselves spoken to."[126] It is in the history of ways to act on the desire for the past—to give it a voice so that it may speak to us—that the hyssop ritual has its place.

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[125]Hans Ruin, *Being with the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 81–82.

[126]Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 151.

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