

Legends of the Lakes of Wales: Thematic Classification and Analysis

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THESIS RATIONAL AND METHODOLOGY

Years ago, when I was a child in León, a region in the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula, I heard for the first time a legend about a fairy who lived in a nearby lake. The episode would have gone unnoticed if it were not for the fact that the province was full of similar fables about other lakes, wells and fountains. It was certainly surprising to find out that such tales were not exclusive to that region, or even to the neighbouring Asturias and Galicia,¹ but also a conventional phenomenon to all the modern Celtic countries of northern Europe. Curiously, in spite of the geographical and chronological distances that separate the insular Celts, in which I include Brittany, and their Iberian Romance-speaking relatives, motifs, characters and plots were very similar in both worlds. To know why this kind of relationship exists in all those territories became more than simple curiosity, but a goal to work for. Due to their high number of lakes, pools and tarns and the strong vitality of her ancient Celtic culture, Wales and her folklore offer excellent opportunities to the researcher who wants to study this topic in depth.

The primary intention of this study is to gather a representative number of legends related or set in some of the lakes of Wales, to categorize them, and to analyse them. Although there are different ways of classifying legends, i.e., by their structure, theme or period, just to cite some examples, I have decided to do it according to their argument from a historical and mythological point of view.

Despite the fact that classifying legends and tales according to their structure may prove to be very useful in disciplines such as literature, the historical and mythological approach helps to see beyond the forms. Most legends may have a historical foundation, an event or custom of the past that has been decorated and exaggerated with the passing of the centuries. Moreover, many of those Welsh legends arise from a pagan world, with different institutions, social arrangements and beliefs, factors that must also be taken into account. Questions as to what is behind the legend or why it has evolved in a certain way can only be answered using the latter method.

In order to collect the highest possible number of legends, I have used works written mainly in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The reason behind this decision is mainly a practical one. It was during those decades when the revival in Welsh matters became a totally consolidated movement. Proof of it included the creation of the National Eisteddfod, the Cambrian Society and the foundation of Saint David's College in Lampeter in 1822 and the University College of Wales Aberystwyth in 1872. In that time tens of folklorists and enthusiasts such as Rhys, Sikes, Davies, Owen, Trevelyan and others travelled around Wales collecting legends, songs, words, expressions and items, trying to preserve the wounded cultural heritage of one of the oldest nations of Europe. Actually, it can be said that their articles, books and studies are the closest material to a primary source.

Another advantage of those works is their reliability. Before World War I, the communication among the different regions of Wales was relatively limited, favouring their isolation and helping to keep traditions alive. Only a relatively small number of people had travelled to distant regions or even abroad and the peril of contamination by adding spurious motifs to old legends was not as high as it has been during the following decades, when information became widely available.

With an important number of legends collected, my research depended on more modern guides. In order to dissect each legend, Thompson's *Motif-index of folk-literature* proved to be an excellent tool. The next steps, namely the analyses of reasons why those motifs are there, the search of a

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Galicia is always the Iberian region.

possible explanation for them, historical facts related to certain places, as well as possible origins of the legends examined, relied in different manuals of Celtic studies, world folklore, and storytelling. Among others, volumes such as *Celtic Culture Encyclopedia*, edited by J. T. Koch, *Celtic Mythology* by Matson and Roberts and the *Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* by Monaghan have been very important sources in my research. In addition, I have also employed numerous non-Welsh works from the rest of the Celtic countries as well as from the countries of the Iberian Peninsula which boast a Celtic culture and from the Basque country.

As regards to other works on general or world folklore, *Storytelling*, edited by Sherman and A. Green's *Encyclopedia of Folklore* have been used as reference works to reinforce some of the assertions and theories that appear in this paper. Other more specific works, like those by M. Green or J. Campbell have also been necessary in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the subject studied.

Finally, I have made extensive use of Google-Earth. Thanks to this programme, I have been able to see the geography, situation and even photographs of all the sites mentioned. The other online tool that I have used is the *Archif Melville Richards* of the Place-Name Research Centre at the University of Bangor.²

² Available online at <http://www.e-gymraeg.co.uk/enwaulleoedd/amr/>

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to collect as many Welsh lake legends as possible, to produce a thematic classification and to analyse each resultant category and subcategory from a historical point of view. The collection of lake stories is substantially based upon several reliable works edited during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which are also the base for more recent volumes. After an a thorough research, I gathered legends about more than forty lakes. The next step was classifying them into three main categories, namely legends of fairies, legends of catastrophes and legends of magic and ghosts. Finally, the analyses of the tales consisted of identifying relevant folklore motifs, trying to fit them into a historical context within the Celtic world. That process opened the way to propose and revise theories about the appearance of such motives and, to a certain extent, the possible origin of each legend and its influence on later Welsh traditions. In conclusion, the research underlines the importance of lake mythology as a contributor to a better understanding of Welsh culture.

INTRODUCTION

THE CELTS AND THE LAKES

In 1846, Johan Georg Ramsauer discovered seven inhumation burials on the banks of the Austrian Lake Hallstatt, near the village of the same name. Those initial findings were followed by hundreds of other discoveries, namely more than one thousand burials. The civilization that was locally known as 'men in the salt' became the 'Hallstatt culture', the first stage of the Celtic culture³ according to the most accepted theory so far.⁴ Besides being the first widely accepted reference to the Celts and one of the most important sites for the study of their civilization,⁵ Hallstatt is also the first known link between the Celts and lakes.

Nevertheless, the case of Lake Hallstatt in Austria is not an isolated one. The milestone which would mark the expansion of the primitive Celtic tribes received the name of another lakeside settlement, La Tène, a Swiss village situated in an isthmus between Lake Neuchâtel and Lake Biel, not far from a third lake, Murten.⁶ This new phase of the Celtic culture spread all over Europe, creating a long and wide strip under its influence with its corners in Galatia in Asia Minor and the Ukrainian Galicia to the East, and in the Iberian Galaecia and Ireland to the West, with all the territory of modern Wales within its influence. With the course of time, some other lake-dwelling sites were discovered in Switzerland, like those in Lake Zurich and Lake Biemme, which were also thought to be Celtic settlements.⁷

Lake (and river) settlements were actually, a widespread type of habitation in all the European continent and the British Isles for thousands of years until the Middle Ages, when the practice was reduced to certain sites in Ireland and Scotland. The location provided its habitants with clean water and was an abundant source of food.

The primitive modifications of the lake shore consisted of a dry, stable platform of wood which was occupied on a seasonal basis. Afterwards, more elaborate structures were introduced. Firstly, it was the construction of stronger platforms where people built villages of timber huts. From around 1200 BC, it seems that there was an increase of lake settlement in the British Isles. This activity was probably due to the fact that those locations were easily defensible, although a climate change could also have been an influence.⁸

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archaeologists presumed that those platforms were built over the lake. However, in the 1920s, Hans Reinherth published his studies about two settlements in Lake Constance in Switzerland where he proposed a new theory. He argued that the houses must have been built not over the lake, but on the shore, on low piles in zones subjected to seasonal flooding. The latest studies seem to confirm this theory. In fact, it appears that some places were abandoned after floods and resettled again with minor repairs to the houses or even after a

³ R. Karl, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2006), p. 884.

⁴ Although it is not the aim of this paper to discuss it, it must be recalled that there is another theory that proposes an Atlantic origin of the Celts (University of Wales, Ancient Britain and the Atlantic Zone [Online: <http://www.wales.ac.uk/en/CentreforAdvancedWelshCelticStudies/ResearchProjects/CurrentProjects/AncientBritainandtheAtlanticZone/IntroductiontotheProject.aspx>] & <Accessed 26 February 2012>)

⁵ D. Ó hÓgáin, *The Celts. A Chronological History* (Cork: Collins Press 2002), p. 3.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷ U. Ruoff, Lake-dwelling studies in Switzerland since 'Meilen 1854', *Living on the lake in Prehistoric Europe. 150 years of lake-dwelling research*, ed. F. M. enotti (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 9.

⁸ S. Ó Faoláin, *Celtic Culture*, pp. 1083-1084.

reconstruction of the whole village.⁹

However, lakes and water bodies in general were much more than a place to live or to fish. For the Celts, water had a magic component.¹⁰ Actually, its power and attributes were considered supernatural beings who could help or ruin living things. According to M. Green, water was perceived as mysterious. Rain fell from the sky – the place where most gods lived – and fertilized the land; there was also water emanating from underground which was able to cure diseases; rivers move when and where they want to. All these aquatic forces were venerated and given offerings,¹¹ actually thousands of those tributes have been found in different lakes, rivers and wells of the ancient Celtic world.¹² One of those places is Lake Neuchâtel near the Swiss village of La Tène. When the water level fell, more than 3000 votive offerings were found.¹³ A similar case happened on the banks of the river Seine in France. The goddess of that stream was Sequana. Since she was a healing deity, all those who looked for her help, deposited offerings made of silver and bronze in the water.¹⁴ Many of those sacrifices have been discovered in Saint-Germain-Source-Seine near Dijon in France.¹⁵ Even nowadays some of those rituals are still practised in a few regions of the Celtic world. A clear example of this worship of the water-spirits is the Irish custom related to the ancient pagan festival of Beltane, which is celebrated in August. Visitors of holy wells usually follow a ritual and leave offerings as they pray for health and/or healing.¹⁶

In Wales, the most important site related to ancient water worship is probably Llyn Cerrig Bach in Anglesey, where tens of votive objects dating mainly from the first century have been found. It must be recalled that Anglesey was also the last bastion of Druidism in southern Britain.¹⁷ Because of the magnitude of the discovery, it was thought that Llyn Cerrig Bach was a very important sanctuary, probably known all over the British Isles. However, recent finds have dismissed such an hypothesis, supporting the idea that the shrine was in local use.¹⁸ This new point of view highlights the fact of the importance that water worship had in the Celtic world.

Water bodies were also the place where humans received not only healing, but also power. Kings and chiefs had to swear their posts by holy wells and lakes.¹⁹ On the other hand, these very same waters were often chosen to put an end to the life of some people, as prove the human remains found in numerous lakes, rivers and bogs. These finds are often interpreted as human sacrifices,²⁰ since water bodies were also considered the entrance or point of contact between this and the other world.

With this rich historical and religious background, it is no surprise that one of the most important

⁹ U. Ruoff, Lake-dwelling studies in Switzerland since 'Meilen 1854', *Living on the lake in Prehistoric Europe. 150 years of lake-dwelling research*, ed. F. Menotti, pp. 13-15.

¹⁰ Water is an element that represents the source of life and regeneration and obviously, the Celts were not the only people in the world who felt such a mixture of curiosity and veneration for it. However, according to their ancient mythology, legends and even modern practices, their links with water, seem to be stronger than those of the generality of nations. (M. Green, *The Religious Symbolism of Llyn Cerrig Bach & Other Early Sacred Water Sites*, *SOURCE - the Holy Wells Journal*. 1 – New series [Online: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/liskmj/living-spring/sourcearchive/front.htm>] & <Accessed 6 February 2012>)

¹¹ M. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*, 2002 edn. (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

¹² G. Matson & J. Roberts, *Celtic Mythology: A to Z*, 2nd ed. (New York: Chelsea House, 2004), pp. x-xi.

¹³ A. Konstam, *Historical Atlas of the Celtic World* (London: Mercury Books, 2001), p. 62.

¹⁴ G. Matson & J. Roberts, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 98.

¹⁵ M. Lévery, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, pp. 1552-1553.; A. Konstam, *Historical Atlas of the Celtic World*, p. 63.

¹⁶ P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), p. 41.

¹⁷ A. Konstam, *Historical Atlas of the Celtic World*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁸ D. Capek, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1180.

¹⁹ P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. xiv.

²⁰ R. Karl, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1751.

branches of Celtic folklore is the one related to water. This mythology has produced tens of legends that, for a long time, were considered fairy tales for children. However, by studying those stories, we can greatly increase our knowledge of the history and beliefs of the ancient Celts, supplying more evidences about past and current practices and customs.

Luckily, Wales is a country rich in rivers, wells and lakes. Of these three, lakes – extensive, silent, mysterious and, often, remote – possess a very characteristic mythology about visions, fantastic beings, ancient cities, and magic that must studied as a unique branch of Welsh folklore.

CHAPTER ONE

LAKES AS HABITATION OF FAIRIES

Very often, Welsh lakes are related to episodes of encounters with fairies. Although all the legends share some common ingredients, such as humans, fairies and a lake, there is an interesting variety of plots and characters. Firstly, the meetings are sometimes friendly while at other times, humans are placed in jeopardy by fairies. Mortal people's behaviour is also different in each type of legend, although it is often morally reprehensible. Finally, fairies are different too: from beautiful women to old men or animals.

There is a good percentage of lake legends about weddings between a fairy and a man. Most of the registered legends are set in these lakes: Llyn y Fan Fach, Llyn y Dywarchen, Llyn Cwellyn, Llyn Du'r Arddu, Llyn Coch and Llyn Forwyn.

The structure and theme of these stories is quite regular, although depending on the legend chosen, some extra details could be given or some of them could be omitted. The scheme is as follows:

- 1) Man meets beautiful female fairy²¹
- 2) He falls in love with her and asks her to marry him²²
- 3) The man has to pass a test²³
- 4) She agrees to marry him on one condition that is accepted²⁴
- 5) a- The couple lives happily for some years²⁵
b- Sometimes they have children and their descendants still lived by the time when the legend was collected²⁶
- 6) Unwillingly, the mortal man breaks his promise²⁷
- 7) The fairy returns back to the lake²⁸

Among the legends of fairy weddings, the most popular in Wales is that of Llyn y Fan Fach, a small lake in Carmarthenshire not far from the border with Powys. The legend follows the structure mentioned with a strong triadic component.²⁹

The story tells how a man, called Gwyn in some versions, met a fairy for the first time combing her hair with a golden comb.³⁰ Amazed by her beauty, the man offered her some bread, but she rejected it with an enigmatic answer about how the bread was baked. The man returned to the lake a second time with unbaked dough, but the situation repeated. The third day he returned with a third type of

²¹ Motif F420.1.2.1. Water-maidens are of unusual beauty. Unless otherwise indicated, motif quotations are from S. Thompson, *Motif-index of folk-literature: a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jestbooks, and local legends*. Revised and enlarged edition (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1955-1958) [Online] Available: http://www.ualberta.ca/~urban/Projects/English/Motif_Index.htm & <Accessed 7 January 2012>

²² Motif F300. Marriage or liaison with fairy.

²³ Motif H310. Suitor tests.

²⁴ Motif F420.6.1.5. Water-maidens make conditions for lovers.

²⁵ Motifs F420.6.1. Marriage or liaison of mortals and water-spirits and F302.2. Man marries fairy and takes her to his home.

²⁶ Motif F420.6.1.6. Offspring of marriage between mortal and water-spirit.

²⁷ Motif C31.8. Taboo: striking supernatural wife.

²⁸ Motif F302.6. Fairy mistress leaves man when he breaks taboo.

²⁹ For a detailed analysis of motifs of this legend and its repercussions in modern culture see: C. Ulmer-Leahey, 'The Lady of the Lake'. A motif analysis of the legend 'The Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach' and a comparison with twentieth century works', (unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Wales Bangor, 1994)

³⁰ Motif F827.5. Golden comb.

bread, half-baked bread, similar to fairies' bread,³¹ and that time she accepted it.

The man stared at her noticing everything in detail, including her sandals, and finally asked her to marry him. Nelferch the fairy accepted but only on one condition: if the man should strike her three times, she would have to leave him and return to the lake. When Gwyn protested about it, a loving husband would never beat his wife, the fairy disappeared in the lake.

With that, Gwyn felt so desperate that wanted to commit suicide. He climbed up to a cliff and when he was about to jump into the lake an old man and two girls approached him. The old man told Gwyn that he would give his daughter to Gwyn in marriage if he could tell which one of them was Nelferch. Although the test was difficult, since both women were virtually the same, Gwyn noticed the peculiar shoe-tie that he had seen in Nelferch's sandals and chose her. The old man then offered his daughter as well as fairy cattle with the same condition, if he should strike Nelferch three times without due cause, then she would leave him forever.

Another version³² states that the man saw three different fairies in the lake and, although he tried several times, he was never able to catch any of them. Time after time the fairies repeated a riddle concerning the kind of bread that he was eating. But one day a piece of moist bread came floating ashore. The man ate it and next day was able to talk to the maidens. Then he proposed marriage to one of them. She accepted as far as he could distinguish her from her sisters. The rest of the story follows the general structure as follows:

Gwyn and Nelferch lived happily together and had three sons. However the first time during a wedding celebration, the second, during the christening of a baby and a third time at a funeral, Gwyn unintentionally strikes Nelferch. The fairy, following the law of her people, had to leave her family.³³ Gwyn and his three children felt miserable and go to the lake looking for Nelferch. Finally, she emerged from the waters and declared that her mission on earth was to relieve the pain and misery of mankind. For that, she took her three children to a place called Pant y Meddygon, where she taught them the art of healing. After their mother's instruction, they became the most famous physicians in Wales, the Physicians of Myddfai.³⁴

There is still another tradition related to Llyn y Fan Fach³⁵ that tells how every first day of August Nelferch appeared on the surface of the lake combing her hair.³⁶

Right in the opposite part of Wales, in Gwynedd, there is another legend about the union of a lake fairy and a mortal man. The lake in particular is not clear, since there are legends about Llyn Cwellyn and Llyn y Dywarchen that are basically the same story.

Although the structure and theme are in general the same as those of Llyn y Fan Fach, there are some differences, especially in the beginning. The legends of Llyn Cwellyn and Llyn y Dywarchen start by telling how the man met the fairy for the first time. It was not in the lake, but dancing with her family³⁷ or just in an unspecified place while working.³⁸

³¹ Motif F243.1. Fairies' bread.

³² J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales* (Aberystwyth: Welsh Gazette, 1911), pp. 100 -101.

³³ In some versions Nelferch leaves with all her fairy cattle.

³⁴ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book* (Forgotten Books AG:1908, 2007), pp. 5-11.

³⁵ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, pp. 92, 308-309.

³⁶ Motif F420.5.3.1. Water-spirits sit on beach combing their long hair.

³⁷ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 58.

³⁸ E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore: A collection of the Folk-tales and Legends of North Wales* (Oswestry and Wrexham: Woodwall, Minshal & Co., 1896), p. 12.

Although there are some variants of the tale, all of them coincide in explaining how the man was so in love with the fairy that he kidnapped her bringing her to his home. There he locked the door with iron, so that the fairy family could not get in, since they hated iron. In another version it is a little fat old man, possibly the fairy's father, the one who unsuccessfully begs the young man to give the girl back.³⁹

Once in the house, the man asked the fairy to marry him,⁴⁰ but he rejected him several times. Finally she agreed that if he could guess her name, she would serve him as his servant. The man tried with several names, but none of them was the correct one. Luckily one day he heard some fairies mention the name Penelope, as their sister who had been caught by a mortal man. After arriving home, the fairy admitted that Penelope was her name, and that she would serve him, as promised.

Nevertheless, the man did not want a servant, but a wife because he loved her. After many proposals, Penelope accepted to get married on one condition: iron could not touch her skin. If it happened, she would return to the lake where she had come from. The couple lived happily for years and had three or four children. However one day, unintentionally, the man touched her with iron and she disappears into the lake.

At this point some versions and locations of the lake vary. One of the tales states that the fairy loved her family and that she regularly emerged from the water to be with them. In fact she created a sod – *dywarchen*, in Welsh – and to spend time with her family until all of them died. That sod gave its name to the lake, Llyn y Dywarchen. Nevertheless, nothing is said about the descendants of the three or four children⁴¹ but they would probably be the ancestors of one or more Welsh fairy families.

The rest of the legends do not mention any other contact between the fairy and her family, except that one night after her disappearance her voice was heard by the window telling her husband to take care for the children. However, it tells that her descendants were the Fellings, a family who owed its name to a corruption of their mother name, Penelope. The tales also differ in the location of the lake, which is said to be Llyn Cwellyn.⁴²

Another story within this category is the legend of Llyn Du'r Arddu. It is said that a man used to meet a fairy in the lake. After some time he asked her to marry him. When her parents emerged from the water, they agreed on one condition: iron could never touch her daughter's skin. As usual, the couple lived together until the day when, by accident, iron made contact with the fairy and she went back into the lake with all her fortune.⁴³

A similar condition is also repeated in two more relates. In the legend of Llyn Coch a man captures a fairy who wanted to eat one of his apples. At hearing her screaming her father emerged from the waters and agreed to give her in marriage on condition that he should not strike her with clay. The happy marriage ended years later when, precisely planting an apple tree, some clay touched the fairy, who returned to the lake.⁴⁴

The final legend of this group is that of Llyn y Forwyn near Ferndale. A fairy called Nelferch, like

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

⁴⁰ Motif F302.4.4. Man binds fairy and forces her to marry him.

⁴¹ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 58-60.

⁴² E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 12-14; & J. Rhÿs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 44-46.

⁴³ J. Rhÿs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 31-32.

⁴⁴ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 156-158.

the one in Llyn y Fan Fach, is asked to marry a mortal man. The first time she refused him, but afterwards she accepted to marry and to bring all her wealth on condition that he should not argue with her, because at the third dispute she would return to the lake. This marriage also came to an end and the fairy returned into the lake. Another version of the story tells that the wife was not a fairy, but a young woman from Penrhys. She had left her husband after a dispute and afterwards, while taking the cattle to the water, she sank into the lake and was never found again.⁴⁵

The existence of families or clans in Wales, like the Fellingings or the physicians of Myddfai who traced their origins back to a union between a man and a fairy are numerous in Celtic traditions. In the Celtic-cultured Iberian regions of Asturias and León some families were said to be descendants of *xanes*⁴⁶ and in Galicia, *mouros*⁴⁷ were considered ancient ancestors of modern people.⁴⁸ In fact, it is not unusual to find this kind of divine, mythological or fantastic origins in families all over the world. Just to cite a few examples: the Egyptian Pharaohs or the Kings of the Akans of Ghana were said to be children of the gods,⁴⁹ and the Kings of Hungary claimed to be descendants of King Attila of the Huns.⁵⁰ The idea behind this custom is no other than the search of legitimacy and importance. Without that godly or fantastic ancestor, each family would have the same rights for ruling or having a profession, but godly blood instead, gave rights and privileges. For instance, nobody in Egypt doubted the power and superiority of the sun, consequently, the sun's children had to be superior and therefore, they were legitimate to rule the whole country. In Wales there could be many physicians, but only *one* clan knew the *correct* cure and treatment for all the diseases, the physicians of Myddfai. Their reference, the reason for their importance was the origin of their knowledge and of their blood, a wise fairy. The same way, the Fellingings were once a highly respected family in Anglesey and they owed that respect to their fairy origin.⁵¹

The other peculiar motif in these legends are the conditions that the fairies (or their families) impose on mortal men in order to accept them as husbands. As seen, there were three different similar restrictions: the fairy could not be struck (in general), and more particularly, they could not be stricken with clay (in one legend) or with iron. The latest is also the most common. In fact, the aversion that fairies show towards iron⁵² is also repeated in some other cultures. For example, the Arabic *djinn* and the Persian *pari*⁵³ could not endure the proximity of iron.⁵⁴ In the nineteenth century, MacRitchie attributed this use of iron to repel fairies as a memory of pre-Iron Age peoples.⁵⁵ As for the other two restrictions, not to be wounded in general or not to be wounded with clay, could be variants of the same idea. While striking a fairy is something condemned in many stories,⁵⁶ just like it was improper to hit any person without a reason, there are not many parallels with being touched by clay as a taboo, which could be interpreted as a local corruption of the common taboo related to iron.

⁴⁵ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 23-25.

⁴⁶ Castillo de Lucas, Los ejemplos asturianos en la mitología de aguas, *Boletín RIDEA*. 27: (1956), 94-108. p. 98.

⁴⁷ The *xanes* (sing. *xana*) are the water fairies in the Astur tradition in the NW of the Iberian Peninsula, while the Galician *mouras* (sing. *moura*) are underground and water spirits.

⁴⁸ F. Alonso Romero, Las Mouras Constructoras de Megalitos, *Anuario Brigantino*. 21: (1998), 11-28. pp. 12-13.

⁴⁹ R. Graves, *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (New York: Crescent Books, 1987), p. 5.

⁵⁰ *Gesta Hugarorum*, translated by Carles Fernandez, (Budapest: MEK, 2008), p 9. [Online: <http://mek.oszk.hu/05800/05885>] & <Accessed 11 February 2012>

⁵¹ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 47.

⁵² Motifs C531. Taboo: touching with iron and F384.3. Iron powerful against fairies.

⁵³ The *djinn* (genies) and the *pari* are mythological ancient races created thousands of years before the humans. They were supposed to have lived in the mountains of Persia. (*Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*, ed. J. Sherman, p. 117.)

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 117, 361.

⁵⁵ A. Minard, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 729.

⁵⁶ Motif C31.8. Taboo: striking supernatural wife.

Some of the Celtic legends establish a bond between certain lakes and the entrance to Fairyland.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, there is no documented and definite proof of this belief among the ancient Celts, since the inscriptional evidence is fragmentary and clearly insufficient. However, there are some archaeological finds that could support the theory of a belief in an underwater (and underground) Otherworld.⁵⁸ Among these discoveries there would be the numerous offerings recovered from certain water bodies like Llyn Cerrig Bach, in Anglesey⁵⁹ or Llyn Fawr, in Glamorgan.⁶⁰

In these tales, Fairyland is described as a place similar to this world but more beautiful and changeless,⁶¹ full of gentle, good-mannered and beautiful people – the male and female fairies. They are also hospitable and provide amusement and food for their guests. In the Celtic traditions, contrarily to what happens in some other cultures, humans can freely enter into Fairyland, although there are many cases when people entered into it by error or were kidnapped.⁶² Moreover, not everything is positive in that country and mortals could find some problems because of both, the natural rules of the Otherworld and the laws established by its inhabitants, the fairies.

One of those problems is the different way of telling time in Fairyland as compared to the mortals' land.⁶³ Two examples of that are the legends of Llyn Cwellyn and Llyn Cynwch.

Both stories start with a man going to meet his bride in another farm or town. One of them fell in Llyn Cynwch. He could not swim and sank. When he arrived at the bottom a little fat man meets him and introduced some people who lived in a wonderful country under the water. After one or two hours, he decides that it is time to meet his bride and asked to be allowed to leave the party. When the man arrived at his bride's home she felt scared and surprised. Those two hours in Fairyland had been one month in the mortals' land.⁶⁴

The other man did not fall into a lake, but as he was passing by Llyn Cwellyn he met some fairies dancing. As he approached, they started to chat and to have fun. After a short time the man decided to go on his way, but when he arrived at his bride's home he saw that everything had changed: his parents had died and his bride had married another man. Actually he had been absent for more than seven years.⁶⁵

Hartland mentioned that tales of this kind are common all over Wales. And another curious detail was that the only way to recover somebody that had been trapped by the fairies was to touch him⁶⁶ with a piece of iron,⁶⁷ which connects this metal to the previously described traditions.

As it happens with fairy marriages, fairies had also their conditions for people to visit to them, and these conditions had to be strictly respected.⁶⁸ Any breaking of those rules had consequences as shows the legend of Llyn Cwm Llŵch. According to this tale, every first of May a door was magically opened in a rock nearby. Behind that door there was a passage leading to a magic island

⁵⁷ Motif F156. Door to otherworld.

⁵⁸ J. Carey, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1404.

⁵⁹ D. Capek, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1180.

⁶⁰ T. Muhsil, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1181.

⁶¹ Motif F162.1.1. Everblooming garden in Otherworld.

⁶² P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. xii.

⁶³ Motif F377. Supernatural lapse of time in fairyland.

⁶⁴ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 105-107.

⁶⁵ E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁶ Normally it is always a man.

⁶⁷ E. S. Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London: Walter Scott, 1891), p. 163.

⁶⁸ Motif C46. Taboo: offending fairy.

in the middle of the lake, which was invisible for those who were on the lake shore. The fairies received all people and entertained them with music and delicious fruits. However, there was a condition: nobody could carry away any of the things belonging to that place, since the island was sacred.

In one of those May visits, one person put a fairy flower in his pocket and took it to the land of the humans. When the fairies realised what had happened they felt very angry and the door was never opened again.⁶⁹

Robberies from Fairyland are common in mythologies and traditions from all over the world. In fact, in some cultures fire was the product of one of those thefts. In many of those stories, robbery entails severe punishment,⁷⁰ however, in the case of Llyn Cwm Llŵch the sanction is the end of the relationship between fairies and humans, which could be considered the mildest punishment for such an offence.⁷¹

Fairies, as previously discussed, had a parallel world with the same or more facilities than existed in the human realm. Among those resources, there were fairy cattle. These animals show no real difference from the mortal animals except in their quality.

The fairy animals appear in legends sometimes as gifts from the fairies, sometimes as captured by people.⁷² Among those legends where cattle are presented as gifts are those of fairy weddings. For example, Nelferch of Llyn y Forwyn accepted to be given in marriage on two conditions, one of them was to carry with her all her animals.⁷³ Almost exactly the same conditions are repeated in the legend of Llyn Du'r Arddu.⁷⁴ Finally, in the version of Llyn y Fan Fach given by Thomas,⁷⁵ Nelferch's father gives Gwyn, his son-in-law, hundreds of animals, including cows, sheep, goats, swine and horses as a dowry.

There are some other tales about fairy cattle that were not presented as a gift. Some examples of this kind of folklore is found in the legends of Llyn Barfog. All of them begin either with a farmer who captures a fairy cow which had appeared from the lake⁷⁶ or with a fairy cow that was in love with the cattle of a mortal farmer's herd.⁷⁷

At this point, the stories basically follow the same pattern: the farmer becomes very rich because of the high quality of the milk of the fairy cow. It also increased the number of animals in his herd, all of them, strong and producers of good milk. However, the farmer's happiness did not last long. The legends go on to say that, because of his greed, the farmer wanted to slaughter the fairy cow before it got too old for giving milk so he fattened it as much as he could. The day of the slaughter many neighbours of the village came to see the event. When the butcher was ready to do his work, a figure of a woman emerged from the waters of Llyn Barfog and shouted:

Dere di felen Einion,

⁶⁹ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 51-53.

⁷⁰ Motif C91. Taboo: stealing from spirits.

⁷¹ E. S. Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales*, p. 136.

⁷² Motif B180. Magic quadrupeds.

⁷³ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 23-25.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

⁷⁵ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 8.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 78-79; E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, p. 209.

⁷⁷ W. Sikes, *British Goblins: Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions* (London: Sampson Low, 1880), pp. 36-37.

*Cyrn Cyfeiliorn-braith y Llyn,
A'r foci Dodin,
Codwch, dewch adre.*⁷⁸

The cow heard her legitimate owner and returned into the lake with all her progeny, leaving the farmer poor and despised by all his neighbours.

Owen gives a similar legend about fairy cattle and how they should be treated.⁷⁹ The story mentions that long ago a cow – the Freckled Cow – appeared in Denbighshire. It gave excellent milk no matter how many people milked her. Nevertheless, somebody did not behave properly and wanted to dry the cow. After being tortured for hours, the cow ran away and disappeared under the waters of a nearby lake.⁸⁰ The Freckled Cow was also the mother of the oxen⁸¹ that dragged a demon from the church of Cerrigydrudion to Llyn-dau-ychain.⁸² Still another legend mentions how the Freckled Cow disappeared in the water of a lake with her two sons, for that the lake received the name Llyn-dau-ychain.⁸³

There is still another reference to fairy animals appearing from lakes in Davies *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*. Although there is not much information about the legend itself, Davies registered that there was a belief in Ceredigion that wild cattle use to come out from Llyn Eiddwen, and ran when disturbed.⁸⁴

The background of all these stories of fairy animals reflects the point of view that Celts, and the Welsh in particular, had towards their animals. In fact, domestic animals played a very important role in Celtic life. Although their ultimate purpose was to feed humans, they were highly respected. One example is the farmer of Llyn Barfog. When he wanted to kill the fairy cow, he was humiliated by the fairy of the lake, abandoned by the cow and despised by his human neighbours.

The Celts also associated some animals with the Otherworld. The legends of the fairy animals are a clear example of this belief. In fact these tales imply that some animals have much more than a vague relation with Fairyland, since some of them are fairies themselves.⁸⁵

Finally, another interesting point is what these legends tell of the origin of breeds and/or races. Having a fairy ancestor would have increased the value of that race, just as having a fairy ancestor increased the honour of a human family.⁸⁶

As previously seen, most of the times lake fairies were considered positive beings. They gave generous dowries to the men who married fairies,⁸⁷ and sometimes offered gifts to some other

⁷⁸ Sikes gives the following translation for the order of the fairy: 'Come yellow Anvil, stray horns,/Speckled one of the lake,/And of the hornless Dodlin,/Arise, come home.' (*ibid.*, p. 37.) The order is common to all the consulted legends with just some variations that do not affect the meaning of the message.

⁷⁹ E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 130-131.

⁸⁰ Although the name of the lake is not given in the original legend, it was probably Llyn-dau-ychain – now part of the Alwen reservoir –, since it is close to the village and is also mentioned in another legend connected with the Freckled Cow and the region. (*ibid.*, p. 131.)

⁸¹ The two oxen receive the *Ban ychain Banawg*, which could be translated as 'two long-horned cattle'

⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 131.

⁸⁴ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 309.

⁸⁵ M. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*, p. 164.

⁸⁶ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 52.

⁸⁷ Motif F343.9. Fairy gives man horses, cattle, etc.

humans.⁸⁸ One case is the fairy of Llyn Rhos-ddu in Anglesey. The legend tells that a fairy brought a loaf of bread to a woman every day.⁸⁹ As usual there was a condition for keeping on doing so: the fairy told the woman not to look after her when she left the house. One day, the woman's curiosity was too strong and observed what the fairy did outside the house. The latter went away towards Llyn Rhos-ddu, disappeared in its waters and never returned.⁹⁰

There is a huge variety of fairies in the Celtic countries and their behaviour is as different as their habitats, purpose and shape.⁹¹ For this reason, there are a few tales where they are described as enemies or simply as those who make fun of humans.⁹² One of those legends is set in Llyn-dau-ychain. Tradition says that one night a harper called Siôn returned home after having played in a party till late. He was surprised to see a big and luxurious palace on the banks of Llyn-dau-ychain, since he knew the area and had never seen that palace. When he came closer, he was invited to enter by a servant. The servant led the harper to a room full of guests who greeted him by name, although Siôn had never seen any of them, and asked him to play. After the first time, one of the guests came to Siôn offering some money that had been collected from all the guests. After this the harper kept on playing until one by one all the guests disappeared and he was left alone. Since he was very tired, he decided to sleep there. He slept until noon, and when he woke up he saw that the palace had vanished and the money he had collected had been transformed into withered leaves.⁹³

Sometimes the existence of lake fairies was used to scare children. In Cwm Brwynog, a location in the county of Gwynedd, children were warned against going far from home when the mist was thick. There was the danger of crossing a fairy circle and being taken away to their land in Llyn Dwythwch.⁹⁴

Fairies were much more than the little winged beings that modern tales and films describe. Welsh lake mythology speaks of male and female fairies who have taken human shape and size. Probably the most distinctive physical feature of the female fairies is their astonishing beauty which very often seduces mortal men. Fairies have families who live in bigger communities under the water. The relation between fairies and mortals varies from tale to tale. At times, it is so close that a man marries a female fairy, but at other times humans and fairies are virtually enemies. Most of the stories relating to lake fairies could be viewed not only as an echo of the pre-Christian beliefs of the Cymry, but also as a reflection of how life was lived in rural Wales.

⁸⁸ Motif F340. Gifts from fairies.

⁸⁹ Motif F343.19. Fairies give mortals fairy bread.

⁹⁰ E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, p. 71.

⁹¹ A. Minard, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 728.

⁹² Motif F360. Malevolent or destructive fairies.

⁹³ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 150.

⁹⁴ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 33.

CHAPTER TWO

SUNKEN CITIES AND FLOODS

Legends about sunken cities, kingdoms or lands are common in all the Celtic countries. Some of the most famous are Kêr-Ys – City of Ys – in Brittany, or the Arthurian country of Lyonesse, said to be drowned in front of the Cornish coast, the Isles of Scilly being evidence of its past existence.⁹⁵ The first reference to a drowned city in Welsh tradition is found in the poem *Boddi Maes Gwyddneu*, which appears in the Black Book of Carmarthen, dating from the thirteenth century.⁹⁶ Although many of these tales are located in the sea, including the three previously mentioned, there is also a considerable number of them about lakes that hide sunken lands.

In Wales, this kind of catastrophic legends share a common ending – the flood – but different plots, natures of the floods and consequences. In fact, we cannot talk about one category, but about several categories within the same type of legends, such as the destruction of a city as punishment, prophetic destructions related to lakes and floods, understood as the inundation of a field with the creation of a lake.⁹⁷

The first subtype of stories to be analysed is the destruction of a city as punishment. All through the counties of Wales there are a minimum of ten documented legends about an ancient city or town lying at the bottom of a lake. Curiously, although there are probably more lakes in north Wales, mainly in Gwynedd, the overwhelming majority of the legends within this category belong to lakes in south Wales.⁹⁸

The most complete stories about sunken cities in lakes are those of Llyn Tegid, Llyn Cynffyg, Llyn Syfaddan, also called Llan-gors, Llyn Crymlyn or Cors Crymlyn,⁹⁹ near Swansea, Maes Llyn near Tregaron and Llyncllys Lake in the parish of Llanyblodwel.¹⁰⁰

Each legend about a lost city could be generally divided into four main parts that could be identified as:

- 1) antecedents, often a problem or sinful situation that will lead to a catastrophic ending
- 2) a warning, which is not taken into consideration by the sinner¹⁰¹
- 3) the fulfilment of the sentence¹⁰²
- 4) the consequences for both, the protagonists of the story and the modern inhabitants of the region

⁹⁵ *Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*, ed. J. Sherman, p. 293.

⁹⁶ A. Minard, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 754.

⁹⁷ Many of the legends of sunken cities and lost lands are also analysed in the following works: F. J. North, *Sunken Cities* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1957) and M. Senior, *Llys Helig and the myth of lost lands* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2002)

⁹⁸ See map 2, page 36.

⁹⁹ Cors Crymlyn used to be called Llyn Crymlyn until it was dried. Sikes called it *Crumlyn Lake*.

¹⁰⁰ Llanyblodwel is part of the county of Shropshire in England. However, it has been included in this study because the region was a part of the Kingdom of Powys and even today Welsh culture and language are still alive in many towns and villages. Some examples of this survival are the church services in Welsh, some eisteddfods like the one in Minsterley, Welsh language courses like those offered by Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology, or Welsh businesses such as Siop Cwlwm in Oswestry.

¹⁰¹ Motif J652. Inattention to warnings.

¹⁰² Motif F944.1. City sinks in sea or lake as punishment.

A typical specimen of a legend about a drowned city is the story of Llyn Syfaddan in south Powys, which could be well used to illustrate this structure.

The antecedents and initial problem are set with the explanation that the place that today is Llyn Syfaddan was once a beautiful land belonging to a great lady. A young man from Brecon loved her, but he was poor and could not marry her. However one day, he went to a lonely place where he murdered a rich merchant to rob him.¹⁰³ When he told the lady what he had done and showed to her all the gold, she accepted him.

The next part relates the warning that the young couple received because of the murder. The story goes on to say that the lady told her bridegroom to go to the place where the corpse was in order to ask whether the crime would be avenged. The answer that the young man found was that vengeance would come but during the ninth generation. Thinking that they would be dead by that time, the young couple forgot about it.

The next episode, the fulfilment of the prophecy is illustrated by the account of how many years later, the murderous couple was very old and decided to make a great feast for all their family members. When they were eating and having fun, the earth opened and swallowed them up. The story ends numbering the consequences of this vengeance: death for all the family members of the murderers and the creation of Llyn Syfaddan, as a current testimony of the danger of misconduct.¹⁰⁴

As with Llyn Syfaddan, all legends, without exception, open the story by describing a situation that is regarded as a negative one. For example, the legend of Llyn Cynffyg shows many similarities with Llyn Syfaddan and describes the circumstances of a young man who is in love with the daughter of a lord. Unfortunately the young man is poor and for this reason his love is impossible to requite. In both legends the young man, who might be seen with sympathy at the outset, kills a rich man¹⁰⁵ to steal his money and in this way, being accepted by his lady.

Other legends delineate other sinful scenes, like Llyn Llynclys, where Benlli, the cruel Prince of Powys was tired of his wife and falls in love with another woman,¹⁰⁶ or the abuses of the prince who lived in the valley that is now covered by Llyn Tegid.¹⁰⁷ A second legend related to Llyn Syfaddan as well as the legend of Maes Llyn describe the wickedness of the inhabitants of a town.¹⁰⁸ Another story, that of Cors Crymlyn, talks about the lack of respect that the inhabitants of Swansea¹⁰⁹ showed towards St Patrick during one visit he paid to his friend, St David.¹¹⁰

Once the sin is identified, the next part of the legends within this category is the announcement of the sentence for the godless behaviour described in the introduction. This sentence often corresponds to the offence of the wrongdoer, that is to say, a biblical eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth: one death deserved another death. Once again, Syfaddan and Cynffyg become virtually the same story when a voice¹¹¹ is heard during the celebration of the wedding of the murderer proclaiming vengeance: "Vengeance will come." The murderer plucked up courage to ask when. "In

¹⁰³ Motif K890.1. Poor man deceives rich man, plays tricks on him, causes his death.

¹⁰⁴ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 185 and J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 73-74.

¹⁰⁵ In the legend of Llyn Cynffyg, the deceased is not really a rich man, but a tax collector. However, this fact does not change the finality of the murder, which was to kill an innocent man to obtain the money he had in that moment.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales* (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1973), pp. 10, 11-12.

¹⁰⁹ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 326.

¹¹⁰ W. Sikes, *British Goblins*, pp. 35-36.

¹¹¹ Motif M348. Murderer warned by God's voice that murder will be avenged.

the lifetime of thy grandsons, great-grandsons, ascensors, and their children,”¹¹² or as written in Llyn Cynffyg: “One asked (after having heard the warning), “When?” “In the ninth generation.”¹¹³ The wicked prince of Bala receives the same sentence twice, the first time as he was walking in his garden, he heard a voice claiming “vengeance will come!”, the second one was in a party, when a bird¹¹⁴ proclaims the same message.¹¹⁵

St Patrick also decreed a sentence over the disrespectful people of Swansea. Although his words are not registered in the available versions of the legend, Sikes¹¹⁶ writes the sentence: 'Of course such an insult could not go unpunished.'¹¹⁷

Finally, the registered legend of Maes Llyn reads that the inhabitants of Tregaron had been warned many times¹¹⁸ that in the case of keeping their sinful way of life, the city would be destroyed with fire and flood.¹¹⁹

Along with the verdict, some legends register the reaction of the guilty characters which is always disrespectful: the Prince of Bala 'laughed the warning to scorn', the murderers of Syfaddan and Cynffyg just didn't care much about it: “No reason for us to fear,” said the married pair; “we shall be under the mould long before.”¹²⁰ In some other tales the reaction to the sentence is not written, but is evident from the way the story evolves. For instance, it is obvious that the people of Swansea did not listen to St Patrick, or that those of Tregaron kept on with their improper conduct. This behaviour is the final factor that will boost the severity and consequences of the original sentence. What had to be the death of the murder, will end with the death of all his family, what had to be just a warning or rebuke by a holy man, became the annihilation of the town.

The last step, common to all legends is the accomplishment of the vengeance, the destroying of the city under the water. In one of the tales of Syfaddan, all the family members of the assassin finally die,¹²¹ and in Bala, there is only one survivor¹²² who sees the fulfilment of the prophecy.¹²³ In the second legend of Syfaddan, the ambassador of the King survives along with a local baby in his cradle.¹²⁴ In Maes Llyn, the final fulfilment of the sentence arrives with a fire that kills a percentage of the inhabitants, while the others perish in the flood that follow the fire; nobody survives.¹²⁵ The case of Llyn Crymlyn is slightly different since all the inhabitants of the city survived the flood, but not in human shape: men were transformed into fish¹²⁶ and women into Gwraegdd Annwn,¹²⁷ the fairies that live under the water.¹²⁸ Sikes points to the fact that this legend of Cors Crymlyn is common to some other lakes like Llyn Barfog, although, unfortunately, he does not give any further

¹¹² W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 185.

¹¹³ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 403.

¹¹⁴ Motif B143.1. Bird gives warning.

¹¹⁵ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 81.

¹¹⁶ W. Sikes, *British Goblins*, p. 35.

¹¹⁷ Motifs Q221.1.1. Discourtesy to messengers of the Gods punished and Q227. Punishment for opposition to holy person.

¹¹⁸ Motif J652.4. Warnings against certain peoples.

¹¹⁹ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, p. 12.

¹²⁰ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 2, p. 403.

¹²¹ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 185.

¹²² Motif Z356. Unique survivor.

¹²³ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 2, p. 403; W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 82.

¹²⁴ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, p. 11.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Motifs D683.4. Transformation by saint, D661. Transformation as punishment and D692. City's inhabitants transformed into fish.

¹²⁷ Motif F251.13. Fairies are Welsh women cursed by St Patrick for rebuking him because he left Wales for Ireland.

¹²⁸ W. Sikes, *British Goblins*, p. 35.

details of those legends.¹²⁹ Another twin legend is that of Llyn Gwyn, which will be discussed later in relation to the transformations into fish, fairies and ghosts.¹³⁰

Once the vengeance has been inflicted, there were generally no more consequences. The lakes will act forever as a living warning to avoid the wrong doing that led to such a terrible event and the sunken cities are often discerned under the waters by the inhabitants of the regions.¹³¹ In Bala, however, it was said that 'some old boatmen can on quiet moonlight nights in harvest see towers in ruins at the bottom of its waters, and also hear at times a feeble voice saying, *Dial a ddaw, dial a ddaw*, 'Vengeance will come'; and another voice inquiring. *Pa bryd y daw*, 'When will it come?' Then the first voice answers, *Yn y drydedd genhedlaeth*, 'In the third generation.'¹³²

The legend of Llynclys is, probably, the narrative that is most different from the other tales within this group. Although the beginning is similar to the other legends – describing an immoral situation – and the end is the destruction of the city because of some complications connected with the initial problem, the plot is totally peculiar and unrelated to the plot of the other legends.

The elaborated story begins by exposing the sinful situation that provokes the rest of the story. Benlli, Prince of Powys, was getting tired of his wife and after coming across a mysterious maiden in the Green Forest, falls in love with her.¹³³ On the third day Benlli asked her to become his wife and she accepted with three conditions: to put his wife away, to allow her to go away one night a week and to never ask her about that night. If he accepted the mysterious lady would marry him and her beauty would never fade away.

Benlli's first wife disappears¹³⁴ and finally Benlli married the lady of the Green Forest and this episode opens the next part of the story. Although he had promised not to ask his new wife about her absences every week, he began to feel a strong curiosity. After nine years Benlli's curiosity became deep sorrow.¹³⁵ One day he invited, among others, a man called Wylan to a party and seeing that Benlli did not enjoy neither the splendid food nor the songs, he asked the prince about the reason of his grief. Benlli explained all the details and Wylan promised him to restore his peace with two conditions: Benlli had to resign the Maid of the Green Forest to Wylan and moreover had to pay a tithe annually to the White Minster.

Benlli consented and Wylan went to the forest before midnight. There he saw the Lady of the Green Forest hurrying in royal clothes so he pronounced a magic spell for the Lady to remain forever with him with the same shape she was at that very same moment.

After pronouncing those irreversible words, Wylan discovered that the beautiful young woman had become a grim ogress¹³⁶ and that way would be with him forever. Then the Lady of the Green Forest told him how thirty years earlier she had been Benlli's first wife until he got tired of her. Afterwards, thanks to magic, she had received her beauty and youth again,¹³⁷ on condition of going back to the cave in the forest one night in every seven.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 36.

¹³⁰ See page 30

¹³¹ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 326; J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 307.

¹³² J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 2, p. 408.

¹³³ Motif K2246. Treacherous prince.

¹³⁴ Motif D2188.2. Person vanishes.

¹³⁵ Motif F1041.21.3. Refusal to eat from excessive grief.

¹³⁶ Motif D47.3. Transformation: princess to ogress.

¹³⁷ Motif D662. Transformation to cure inconstant husband.

Finally the legend tells how Benlli's palace, along with all the town, was swallowed by water, forming Llyn Llyncllys.¹³⁸ Of course, there was the belief that it was possible to see the remains of the city under the waters. Another curious detail is the epilogue about Wylan, as the person alluded by the place names¹³⁹ Croeswylan and Trewylan in Oswestry.¹⁴⁰

According to the described structure, each legend could be regarded as a moralising story. The plot could have probably evolved from a real fact: the destruction of a village, farm or house after a flood. Davies¹⁴¹ proposed an origin dating from the time of lake dwellers in Europe. In fact, villages of this kind were common throughout the continent, since their location provided abundant resources of plants and animals. In the British Isles there is evidence of lake settlement since the Mesolithic Age. Later on, during the late Bronze Age,¹⁴² there was an increase in this kind of habitation, producing more sophisticated towns like Glastonbury during the Insular Iron Age.¹⁴³ Lake settlements remained in some parts of Scotland and Ireland until the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁴

At first, these villages were fragile, just wooden platforms which were occupied on a seasonal basis. Later, those platforms served as a foundation for building small huts and villages. Such precarious constructions could easily be annihilated during a storm and sunk into the lake, leaving terrible memories within the survivors and other inhabitants of the region.¹⁴⁵ Most probably, those witnesses would have looked for a cause why the misfortune had happened. That cause had to be something more than mere chance or a natural disaster, since not all the region had been destroyed. There had to be a reason and with the reason, a guilty. Theories could have been accepted as facts and the passing of time would have added new details and exaggerations.¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately not all legends have survived to our day with all details intact. In some tales the existence of a sunken city in a certain lake is the only reliable detail. Within this group is the legend of Llyn Pencarreg in Carmarthenshire, a quadrangular lake of about 400 metres from east to west and 200 metres from north to south. It is also reported to have been the original site of the village of Pencarreg, but after a terrible flood it was swallowed up by the waters.¹⁴⁷ Although there is no other reliable information about the original legend, the lake was said to be bottomless.¹⁴⁸

In Carmarthenshire, two lakes enjoyed the same notoriety: Llyn Talylychau Uchaf and Llyn Talylychau Isaf, beside Talley Abbey. They were supposed to be the tomb of an ancient city. Unfortunately Davies does not give further information about this legend, nor if the old settlement was in one, the other or in both lakes.¹⁴⁹

The fourth lake which has an unregistered but reliable version of a legend of a sunken city is Llyn Cororion.¹⁵⁰ There is not much information about the lost city of the lake except that it became

¹³⁸ Motif F944.1. City sinks in sea or lake as punishment.

¹³⁹ Motif A1617. Origin of place-name.

¹⁴⁰ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 135-137.

¹⁴¹ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 308.

¹⁴² c. 1200 BC

¹⁴³ Glastonbury was a round house settlement occupied by approximately 200 people from 250 BC until 100 BC. Each house had its mound of clay, outdoor working area. The whole village was surrounded by a timber palisade. (S. Ó Faoláin, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1084.)

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 1084.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 1083.

¹⁴⁶ I. Hutton *et al.*, *Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*, ed. J. Sherman, p. xix.

¹⁴⁷ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 307.

¹⁴⁸ Motif F713.2. Bottomless lakes (pools, etc.)

¹⁴⁹ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 308.

¹⁵⁰ Corwrion, according to Rhÿs' spelling.

submerged and that some of its buildings were still visible in some parts of the pool, although it too was supposed to be bottomless.¹⁵¹

Another group of catastrophic legends could be called 'legends about floods'. In this group there are four stories, one in Llyn Glasfryn and Ffynnon Grasi, which are in Gwynedd, another in Llyn Tegid, and the other two in Llyn Llech Owain in Carmarthenshire. Although these tales are different, there are several points that connect or gather them in a single category.

Firstly, all of them explain the origin of a lake, which did not exist when the first details are given.¹⁵² Actually, in all three spots there were said to be fields where there were small wells that had to be covered in order to avoid a disaster.

Ffynnon Grasi, a spring in the Llŷn Peninsula, had a guardian, a human woman called Grasi. Her mission was to cover the well every night. However, one evening she forgot to protect the well and water flowed until it formed Llyn Glasfryn.¹⁵³

One of the legends about Llyn Tegid relates how there was a city in the middle of the land that now occupies the lake, just in front of modern Llangywer. That city was built around a well called Ffynnon Gywer¹⁵⁴ which had to be covered every night so that witches, fairies and the devil might not disturb the water.¹⁵⁵ However, one night the keeper forgot to put the lid on the well,¹⁵⁶ the waters burst out and the next morning it had become a large lake, three miles long and one mile wide.¹⁵⁷

Contrarily to the cases of Llyn Tegid and Ffynnon Grasi, Llyn Lech Owain had no guardian, but it was known by the locals that it had to be covered. In one of the legends, a farmer used to send a boy to get water for his horse. The boy one day forgot to replace the stone that covered the well and for one day water flowed forming the lake that is visible today. Another legend about the same place explains that Owain Lawgoch, and his men went to the well to get some water. Again, they forgot to cover it and the water burst out to produce the lake.

The consequences of all three actions, apart from the appearance of a new pool or lake, are different in all three legends. In Ffynnon Grasi, the fairies punished Grasi because her negligence allowed the water to destroy a fairy circle. She was transformed into a swan, which is often associated with metamorphosed women and to the Otherworld,¹⁵⁸ for six score years. Afterwards, she recovered her appearance and is said to wander about on certain nights near the lake.¹⁵⁹

Apart from the evident destruction of old Llangywer, which was supposed to be still visible under the water, there is no other mention of consequences in the Llyn Tegid legend nor any special reason for the destruction of the town.¹⁶⁰

There is no mention of any story the legend of the boy who forgot to cover the well of Llyn Llech Owain, but there is one postscript to the legend of Owain Lawgoch. According to the story, he and

¹⁵¹ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 57.

¹⁵² Motif A920.1.0.1 Origin of a particular lake.

¹⁵³ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 161.

¹⁵⁴ According to the version given by Trevelyan, it was a walled-in spring.

¹⁵⁵ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ In other versions it was the devil the one who opened the well at night. (*ibid.*, p. 14.)

¹⁵⁷ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 376-377.

¹⁵⁸ M. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*, p. 174.

¹⁵⁹ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 161.

¹⁶⁰ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 376-377.

his soldiers were afraid of the flood and ran to a cave for protection. They fell asleep and remain there, inside the cave, until their rest is broken by the sound of trumpets and the clang of arms. Then they will go out to conquer.¹⁶¹

Apparently once again, the overflowing of these wells was something beyond natural phenomena, and it had to be explained somehow. In many cultures, perhaps in all of them, water has been regarded as a source of life. However, this element is also unpredictable and is able to destroy anything by flooding or drowning animals or people. As Green recalled, it would be easy to link the flowing of water from the underground with the activity of gods, goddesses or other divine beings.¹⁶² Actually, that emanation could be perceived as a consequence of the internal powers of the Otherworld.¹⁶³ In fact, wells were among the holy places of the ancient Celts. Wells were honoured for their connection with the goddess of sovereignty, for their links to the Otherworld, and were often used as the place where new kings had to swear fidelity.¹⁶⁴ Many of those pagan holy wells, where later consecrated by the Celtic Christian churches and named after saints.¹⁶⁵

Minard has pointed out the fact, that some of those good sources of water might become destructive if they were improperly cared for.¹⁶⁶ However, in a land where there are magic (positive) lakes along with haunted (negative) lakes, it would also be logical to find holy (positive) wells and haunted (negative) wells. The negative wells could be fountains that had not been consecrated, and for that reason, preserved a strong pagan activity, whether literal, with rituals, or symbolic or spiritual, fairy/demonic activity. That would be a good motive to cover them by night, avoiding interference from the wicked, pagan beings into the new Christian world.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, it does not mean that the haunted wells were a Christian invention. In fact, there are legends about haunted wells provoking floods in many parts of the world, including non-Christian countries, like India.¹⁶⁸ In the case of Wales and the other Celtic countries, the demonisation of wells would rather be regarded as an actualization of beliefs, just like the pagan holy wells became Christian holy wells.

In this line, the legend of Ffynnon Gywer clearly exposes the real cause of the flood: fairies, witches and the devil himself coming to disturb the water. Obviously the well was not under the protection of any Christian saint. There was no saint to avoid the overflowing of Ffynnon Grasi and Llyn Llech Owain neither. Evidently, fairies, demons or any other supernatural pagan being were behind those actions, fighting a losing battle from their last realms, the underground.

There is still another curious category of legends about sunken cities in lakes. These are the tales about a future destruction of a city by flood. Llyn Tegid is again the scene of another legend. As previously explained, according to the tradition, there was a city in the middle of Llyn Tegid that was submerged because of the wickedness of her prince. However it seemed that the curse was not completely fulfilled, since there was the belief that the lake would still grow longer towards the

¹⁶¹ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 308.

¹⁶² M. Green, The Religious Symbolism of Llyn Cerrig Bach and Other Early Sacred Water Sites, *SOURCE - the Holy Wells Journal*. 1 – New series [online]

¹⁶³ An interesting example of this idea is Abzu or Apsu in Sumerian mythology. It was believed to be a divine creature and an underground ocean from which water sprang forth lakes, rivers, wells, and seas. (I. Spar, *Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*, ed. J. Sherman, p. 6.)

¹⁶⁴ P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. xiv.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 470.

¹⁶⁶ V. Simmons, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1624.

¹⁶⁷ It is evident that pagan rituals continued to be celebrated at wells and springs during the Christianization of the Celtic countries. For example, the councils of Arles (443-450), Tours (567) and Toledo (681 and 683) denounced ancient forms of worship in ruined sanctuaries. Until 1410 British Archbishops were still calling for the elimination of ritual at those sites. (P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. 322.)

¹⁶⁸ R. P. Masani, *Folklore of Wells* (Bombay: Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1918), p. 89.

north. Rhŷs reported that in the nineteenth century, everybody in the region knew a couple of verses explaining the prophecy:

*Y Bala aeth, a'r Bala aiff,
A Llanfor aiff yn llyn.*¹⁶⁹

Those two sentences imply that the old town of Bala lies under the water, but that the new one will not last long, since even Llanfor¹⁷⁰ will be submerged.¹⁷¹

A similar legend links Llyn Eiddwen in central Ceredigion, to the city of Carmarthen. According to the legend, the following prophecy was spoken:

*Caer Fyrddin, cei oer fore;
Daeear a'th Iwnc, dŵr i'th le.*¹⁷²

The legend implies that when Llyn Eiddwen dries up, Carmarthen will sink.¹⁷³

In the legend of Llyn Du in the old county of Montgomeryshire, in modern Powys, the small lake of about 300 metres from east to west and about 200 metres from north to south is supposed to suddenly 'spread itself, and one fine market day to engulf the whole place'.¹⁷⁴

In Welsh folklore, cities are never destroyed under water without any purpose, but because of the actions of their inhabitants. In the case of these three prophecies, there is no specified reason for the future ruination, as the original legend has been forgotten. Nevertheless, the stories that relate other destructions in lakes can offer some ideas why the threat is there.

The prophecy against Llanfor links it with the lost town of Bala, so Llanfor is likely to fall for one of the reasons that made Bala fall, namely the wickedness of its prince or people, or the fairy activity in the zone. This last one is possible because Ffynnon Gywer was never closed again after the inundation of the valley that created Llyn Tegid.

The other two prophecies, those of Carmarthen and its connection to Llyn Eiddwen and the legend of Llyn Du, seem to have no link with any other known legend, so different theories may arise about the object of the threat. On the first hand, it could be assumed that it is no other than punishing the bad, godless or impious inhabitants of the pointed town or area, like those of Tregaron.¹⁷⁵ However, some other possibilities must be also considered. For example, the prophecy may refer to a penalty for certain wrongdoing perpetrated by the inhabitants of the locality towards the fairies. In the case of Llyn Eiddwen, Carmarthen is threatened if the lake dries up, probably because any work of the inhabitants of the town to cause that effect in the lake. Llyn Eiddwen may be one of the entrances to Fairyland, and the lack of water would leave the mystic country defenceless. The fairies would consider the action an attack that must be responded to by destroying

¹⁶⁹ According to Rhŷs the verses could be adapted as: "Bala old the lake has had, and Bala new; the lake will have, and Llanfor too." (J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 378.)

¹⁷⁰ Llanfor is a village that lies about 1.65 Km. to the north-east from Llyn Tegid side.

¹⁷¹ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 377-378.

¹⁷² Rhŷs adapted the verses as: "Carmarthen, a cold morn awaits thee; Earth gaps, and water in thy place will be." (*ibid.*, p. 378.)

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 378; J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, pp. 268, 309.

¹⁷⁴ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 378.

¹⁷⁵ Motif A920.1.8. Lake bursts forth to drown impious people.

their enemies.¹⁷⁶ The next option could be a monster in the lake. The monster of Llyn y Fan Fach threatened with destroying Brecon if its peace were disturbed¹⁷⁷ or the famous legend of the *afanc* or beaver of Llyn Llion reads that the monster caused floods in the region.¹⁷⁸ Finally, the legend of Llyn Cwm Llwh gives evidence of another danger why a township could be destroyed by a lake. A humanized or rather monsterized extensive Llyn Syfaddan came to the help of Llyn Cwm Llwh threatening Brecon with annihilation when the inhabitants of the region wanted to dry up the small lake.¹⁷⁹

An additional problem found in the legend of Llyn Eiddwen is the distance between the lake and the threatened settlement. Llyn Eiddwen in Ceredigion lies more than fifty kilometres north of Carmarthen. At first sight, it would have been more logical to threaten another place closer to the lake, for example Aberystwyth or Tregaron.¹⁸⁰ The legend, however, could be explained as a reflection of ancient ethnicities and enmities. The old county of Dyfed, which includes Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, has traditionally been a land which accommodated a blend of races and instability. Through history, north and south Dyfed have been inhabited by different peoples which could have led to a traditional rivalry. The first attested differences were those of the Celts, newly arrived from the Continent, and the original inhabitants of the region.¹⁸¹ Later the southern lands (Pembrokeshire and south Carmarthenshire) were the home of the Demetæ, while the northern part (Ceredigion and north Carmarthenshire) seems to have been inhabited by different tribes of Cymry.¹⁸² There is also evidence of different Celts in Ceredigion since several Ogam inscriptions found in the south of the county reveal the existence of Godelic-speaking settlers in the area, while the north would be Brythonic-speaking.¹⁸³ Another fact which proves the existence of conflicts between both regions during the early Middle Ages is the conquest of Cantref Mawr in modern Pembrokeshire by the rulers of Ceredigion in the eighth century.¹⁸⁴

Centuries of turbulent history and antagonism between north and south must necessarily have left a mark on local consciousness and folklore, even when the conflict was at an end. Llyn Eiddwen lies in north Ceredigion, the Cymry and Brythonic region, but Carmarthen and its surrounding area is in the Demetæ and Goidelic region. The prophecy spoken by Merlin, may have developed from a real warning: if the south attacks the north, the north will respond.

Most lost lands legends relating to the lakes of Wales could be based on real facts, such as the destruction of lake-dwellers' villages or ancient enmities. Moreover, the passage of time has added many other elements to that remote memory, such as characters and plot, often with a moral. The latter relates to the reason for the destruction of the settlement, and that reason is usually the wicked behaviour of its inhabitants. Behind the story there was a warning to avoid such immoral behaviour in order to avoid suffering a similar tragedy.

¹⁷⁶ The legend of Ffynnon Grasi tells how fairies punished Grasi when, because of her negligence, one of their circles was destroyed by water. (W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 161.)

¹⁷⁷ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 309.

¹⁷⁸ E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 133, 151-152; W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 193-194.

¹⁷⁹ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁸⁰ The town of Aberystwyth is located only 14 kilometres from Llyn Eiddwen, while the distance between Tregaron and the lake is about 10 kilometres.

¹⁸¹ E. Anwyl, 'The Early Settlers of Cardigan', *Archæologia Cambrensis*, Vol. 6: (1906), 93-120. pp. 100-101. [Online: <http://www.archive.org>] & <Accessed 2 March 2012>

¹⁸² Wade-Evans, A. W., 'Is "Forth Kerddin" in Moylgrove?', *Archæologia Cambrensis*, Vol. 4: (1904), 33-48. p. 39. [Online: <http://www.archive.org>] & <Accessed 7 March 2012>

¹⁸³ E. Anwyl, 'The Early Settlers of Cardigan', pp. 96-97.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

CHAPTER THREE

HAUNTED LAKES AND MAGIC LAKES

There is a number of legends about haunted or cursed lakes distributed all through the country. The nature and consequences of the curse are often very different from one lake to the other. In fact there is no real common plot to join all those stories and it could be said that the feature that binds this category together is the vision of the lake as a place of contact with death, murder and the Unknown, something very different from the fairies that were thought to exist in many spots of Wales.

One of the lakes where murder is a protagonist of the story is Llyn Idwal in Gwynedd. According to the local legend, Prince Idwal Foel son of Owain Gwynedd was killed¹⁸⁵ on the banks of the lake by his foster father,¹⁸⁶ Dunawt.¹⁸⁷

The legend of Llyn-Nad-y-Forwyn¹⁸⁸ is also the story of a murder with further consequences. A man was going to marry a young girl, but in secret he loved another woman. In order to get rid of his bride, he went to an unfrequented place and pushed the girl into a lake, where she drowned.¹⁸⁹ The effects of that treacherous murder were still visible, since according to the version registered by Owen, it was said that the spirit of the girl appeared as a ball of fire along the river Colwyn.¹⁹⁰ Another reported that she used to be seen dressed in silk walking alone by the river or even coming out from the waters of the lake. Her screams¹⁹¹ were also heard in the zone and for that reason the lake received its name.¹⁹²

Llyn Morwynion in Gwynedd is the scene of two legends that can be included within this category since both of them describe a tragic ending. One of them, called *The Men of Ardudwy*, tells how a long time ago there were no maidens to marry in Ardudwy. Although in the Vale of Clwyd there was an abundance of women, the men of Ardudwy were not allowed to go there because of the enmity between both regions.

In this situation, some of the men of Ardudwy went to the Vale, stole some maidens¹⁹³ for themselves and carried them to the mountains. When the men of the Vale of Clwyd came to know about it, they chased the captors with a big army. One time after another, the men of Ardudwy resisted the army of the Vale of Clwyd as the maidens waited on a precipice near a lake. In every battle some of the men of Ardudwy were killed until the final confrontation, in which the last four men were also killed. When the maidens, who loved them in spite of having been abducted, saw such a terrible outcome, they fell down from the cliff¹⁹⁴ and died in the lake giving it name.¹⁹⁵

The second legend is registered in *Math son of Mathonwy*, one of the branches of the Mabinogi. It tells how when Lleu was visiting Math son of Mathowy, Gronw Pebyr fell in love with Lleu's wife,

¹⁸⁵ Motif Z292. Z292. Death of hero.

¹⁸⁶ Motif S36. S36. Cruel foster father.

¹⁸⁷ J. E. Thomas, *Welsh Inland Lakes, The Cambrian*, 22 (Cincinnati: D. I. Jones, 1897), 169-173. p. 171.

¹⁸⁸ The name of the lake could be translated as the Lake of the Cry of the Maiden.

¹⁸⁹ Motif S62.2. Man has bride drowned so that he may marry another.

¹⁹⁰ Motifs E231.3. Ghost light hovers over hiding place of body of murdered person and E332.1. Ghost appears at road and stream.

¹⁹¹ Motif E402.1.1.3. Ghost cries and screams.

¹⁹² E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, p. 209.

¹⁹³ Motif R10.1.1. Maiden abducted by soldiers.

¹⁹⁴ Motif A968.2. Cliff from lovers' leap.

¹⁹⁵ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 188-190.

Blodeuwedd. For that reason Gronw and Blodeuwedd conspired to kill Lleu.

After being hurt by Gronw, Lleu ran away to his uncle, who rescued and cured him. Once safe again, he and his brother Gwydion came back to Mur-y-Castell to avenge themselves on Blodeuwedd and Gronw. When Blodeuwedd heard about it, she took her maidservants and ran away to the mountains but afraid of Gwydion, they walked with their faces looking backwards, so they fell into a lake. All the maidens drowned except Blodeuwedd, who was captured by Gwydion and turned into an owl. According to that legend, the lake received its name in remembrance of the servants who died there helping Blodeuwedd.¹⁹⁶

Another person who, according to the local legend, died in a lake was Cynan, the son of Rhys ap Tewdwr.¹⁹⁷ Cynan ran away after the defeat of his father on Hirwaen Wrgan and when he arrived to the lake, accidentally drowned in its waters. In fact, Cors or Llyn Crymlyn was also known as Pwll Cynan.¹⁹⁸

Llyn Gwernan in Gwynedd is another lake related to an unnatural death.¹⁹⁹ It was said that one day the farmers of Llanegryn came from a fair in Dolgellau and saw an Englishman running naked²⁰⁰ in green weeds around the lake shouting: "The hour is come but the man is not, the hour is come but the man is not." Some days later the man was found dead floating on the lake. Apparently his madness had been caused by sitting on Idris's chair²⁰¹ – Cader Idris – for one night. According to the legend, anyone who sat on that chair would either be mad, be a poet, or a corpse, and the Englishman wanted to test if that was true or just a myth.²⁰²

Apart from the previously analysed legend of Llyn-Nad-y-Forwyn, there are a few legends of ghosts and other spirits that live or appear in certain lakes in Wales. One of them is Grasi, who lives near (or inside) Llyn Glasfryn in Gwynedd. According to the legend,²⁰³ she was transformed into a swan²⁰⁴ and after recovering her human shape she appears about two hours after midnight, on certain nights in the year as ghostly creature²⁰⁵ in the shape of a beautiful tall lady, dressed in white silk,²⁰⁶ wandering up and down²⁰⁷ the high ground of Cae'r Lath, weeping and wailing.²⁰⁸

There is another legend about a lake or whirlpool—depending on the quantity of water of the River Taff—set in Cardiff. It was said that there was a beautiful lady that used to go to the lake and lure the young men who were there. When they swam towards her they were sucked²⁰⁹ and their bodies were never found. The lady was believed to be the devil in disguise. The lake was also supposed to arrive to the gates of Hell, where Satan waited for those who were deceived by the lady.²¹⁰

A particularly interesting lake is Llyn Dulyn. It has been described by Jonah Jones as 'hidden behind

¹⁹⁶ *Pedeir Keinc Y Mabinogion*, translated by I. Williams, (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1930), pp. 90-92.

¹⁹⁷ Prince of Deheubarth from 1078 until his death in 1093.

¹⁹⁸ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 2, p. 404.

¹⁹⁹ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 144-145 .

²⁰⁰ Motif Z181.1. Nudity as sign of madness.

²⁰¹ Motif D1151.2. Magic chair.

²⁰² Motif H1376.8. Quest for wisdom.

²⁰³ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 161.

²⁰⁴ Similar to motif D161.1. Transformation: man to swan.

²⁰⁵ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 369.

²⁰⁶ Motif E422.4.3. Ghost in white.

²⁰⁷ Similar to motif E332.1. Ghost appears at road and stream.

²⁰⁸ Motif E402.1.1.3. Ghost cries and screams.

²⁰⁹ Motif K958. Murder by drowning.

²¹⁰ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, pp. 9 -10.

a shoulder and surely the most dramatic rock-basin anywhere.' Although the lake is not very extensive – just about 13 hectares – it has an amazing depth of between 30 and 60 metres.²¹¹ These features have produced a dark and interesting mythology with the lake as the main protagonist.

Among the beliefs around this lake, there is one that was shared by the shepherds of the region. They said that when a dove appeared near the lake, it meant that a beautiful but wicked woman had descended to Hell.²¹² Another legend connected with this place says that anyone who dared to watch beside the lake on certain nights, would see those who were to die within the next twelve months.²¹³ Of those, the ones that had had bad lives would be taken by the spirits into the black waters, while good people would be led to the lake where they would vanish into spirit forms dressed in white. It was also believed that a famous witch from the region had been dragged into the waters of Llyn Dulyn.²¹⁴

Among the legends related to Llyn-dau-ychain – the Lake of the Two Oxen –, there is at least one about a wicked spirit living near the lake. The spirit was causing trouble near the church of Cerrigydrudion. Apparently, the situation became unbearable and the people sought the help of a famous conjurer or wise-man who told them that only certain oxen could get rid of that spirit. After choosing two oxen – offspring of a fairy cow –, the neighbours brought them to the church. Not without difficulties, they seized the spirit and secured it to a sledge to which the oxen were yoked. Although the spirit was very heavy, the oxen dragged it into the lake, releasing the region from the bad influence of the spirit.. In fact, the legend says that it is still possible to see both, the racks of the sledge and the marks of the hoofs²¹⁵ from the church to the lake. The death of both oxen gave the present name to the lake.²¹⁶

In some legends the devil uses lakes for his wicked purposes. One of those tales says how a man called Hari came back home from playing cards. On Maesgwyn Bridge he saw a hoop of fire and in the beginning he thought of turning back, but since he had a Bible in his pocket he walked on thinking that nothing bad could happen.²¹⁷ However, as he was passing the fire, the devil grabbed Hari in the air²¹⁸ and threw into a lake where he drowned. The lake was then called Llyn Hari.²¹⁹

The devil himself is also related to Llyn y Fan Fach. Many years ago a man promised the devil to help him, according to the legend. The devil brought him to a place where there was a big stone and told him to take the box and throw it into Llyn y Fan Fach. On the way, nobody seemed to see the man, as if he were invisible. When he arrived by the lake and threw the chest into the water, there was a storm with thunder and lightning. The man was snatched into the air²²⁰ in a kind of trance and when he became conscious again, he was on the banks of the river Tywy, not far from his home.²²¹

The existence of demons, the devil and some other negative spirits could have different origins. On the one hand, a historical deed or maybe a corpse in the remote past cannot be dismissed. That deed would have given the necessary material to develop or simply to exaggerate a story in which

²¹¹ J. Jones, *The Lakes of North Wales* (Tal-y-bont: Y Lolfa, 2002), p. 100.

²¹² Similar to motif E732.2. Soul in form of crow.

²¹³ Motif D1825.6. Magic power to "see" who will die during coming year.

²¹⁴ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, pp. 12-13.

²¹⁵ Motif A903. Topographical features caused by animals.

²¹⁶ E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 132-133.

²¹⁷ Motif D1392.1. Amulet saves one from death.

²¹⁸ Motif G303.9.5.6. Man temporarily abducted by devil.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

²²⁰ Motif G303.9.5.4. Devil carries man through air as swift as wind (thought).

²²¹ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, pp. 149-150.

different spirits appear. Those stories could have had their origin not only after the Christianisation, but also before, since ghosts were also present in Celtic mythology.²²² Obviously the hard geography of some remote lakes would also help to develop such a dark folklore, as it happens in Llyn Dulyn.

However it could also be possible that some of the ghosts and spirits were, in fact, ancient fairies of gods downgraded by the Celtic Christianity. This way, the entrances to Fairyland would have been changed into entrances to Hell, and fairies would have been transformed into ghosts, being deprived of any form of divinity. As Christian ideas and doctrines advanced in the Celtic countries, many fairies and gods almost lost²²³ or completely lost their pagan nature, becoming saints like St Bridge²²⁴ or spirits.²²⁵ One documented example of this Church strategy is found in the words of Martinus Bracaraensis. In his work *De correctione rusticorum* he warned Celts and Sueves of sixth century Galicia against the fairies of forests, fountains and rivers, arguing that they were in fact wicked spirits and demons that had been cast away from heaven.²²⁶ Actually, everything was allowed to combat the fairy faith in the Celtic lands. Two centuries later, for example, the Galician fairies (*mouras*) were identified by the Church with the Muslim Berbers, the enemies of Christendom who invaded Iberia in the eighth century.²²⁷

There are some lakes that are described as a sort of source of negative energy.²²⁸ Curiously, the legends of such places are sometimes set in a distant, past, but sometimes the effects of that magic had an effect on daily life.

One example of this kind of tale is Llyn Idwal which, according to the local tradition, was a haunt of demons and the consequences of the wicked spirits actions were clearly perceptible, since it was said that no birds could fly over its waters.²²⁹ The same story also circulated in Ceredigion, where it was said that any bird which tried to fly over Llyn Moel Llyn would fall into it dead. There is still another legend that tells that when an attempt to drain Llyn Moel Llyn was made, there was terrific thunder and lightning²³⁰ which made people to give up in their work.²³¹

The magic self defence of a lake is also narrated in at least three Welsh legends, two about Llyn Cwm Llwh in Powys and the other about Llyn Tegid. Llyn Cwm Llwh was supposed to be inhabited by fairies, but the legend is set years after their disappearance. The inhabitants of the region wanted to drain the lake to discover the fairy treasures. However, the work had to be stopped when a terrible storm discharged all its power over the place. When the sound of thunder died away

²²² Gwynn ap Nudd led a pack of supernatural creatures, and ghosts (G. Matson & J. Roberts, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 62) and the pre-Christian Irish hero Cúchulainn was tricked into battling with ghosts (G. Matson & J. Roberts, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 37.)

²²³ One example of a creature that can be interpreted as a pagan fairy or as a 'Christian' ghost is the Irish-Scottish co-walker. (P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. 102.)

²²⁴ C. Traffon & C. Marc, 'The Search for Bride's Well', *SOURCE - the Holy Wells Journal*. 3 – New series [Online: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/liskmj/living-spring/sourcearchive/front.htm>] & <Accessed 6 February 2012>

²²⁵ P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. 168.

²²⁶ M. Terneiro, '¿Qué son os mouros? A nosa mitoloxía popular e as súas orixes atlánticas', *Historia de Santa María Maior do Val*, ed. A. Pena (Narón, 2003), 39-61. p. 55

²²⁷ To promote and reinforce this idea, the Church played with a wrong etymology. The Galician word *mouro* is an homophone. The first meaning describes a kind of underground or water fairy. The origin of the word may be in the Celtic *mrvos – 'dead', also related to the Welsh *marw*. The other meaning, the one used by the Church is Muslim, from the Latin, *maurus* – black, origin of the name of some countries like Mauritania. (F. Alonso Romero, *Las Mouras Constructoras de Megalitos, Anuario Brigantino*. 21: (1998), 11-28, pp. 12-13.)

²²⁸ Motif M477. Curse on lake.

²²⁹ J. E. Thomas, *Welsh Inland Lakes, The Cambrian*, 22, p. 171.

²³⁰ Motif Q552.14. Storm as punishment. It is also repeated in the legend of Llyn Cwm Llwh.

²³¹ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 307.

a huge figure – actually a personification of the lake itself – appeared in the middle of the water saying to the workmen:

"If you disturb my peace,
Be warned that I will drown
The valley of the Usk,
Beginning with Brecon town."

Finally he added the mysterious words: "Remember the token of the cat," and then disappeared. After discussing the matter, the inhabitants of the region concluded that there was a magical connection between Llyn Syfaddan and Llyn Cwm Llŵch.²³² This case is similar to the tale of the monster of Llyn y Fan Fach that will be discussed later.²³³

The second legend of Llyn Cwm Llŵch tells how when people tried to dig a channel in order to let the water go, a figure of a man in a red coat, sitting in an armchair, appeared on the surface of the water and threatened them. The warning most probably included the destruction of the town.²³⁴

Another lake that tried to preserve its integrity by means of magic is Llyn Tegid. For centuries it was supposed to be bottomless or at least of uncertain depth. It is said that one day two men went in a boat to the part that was supposed to be the deepest. Their aim was to measure where the bottom was. Suddenly they heard a mysterious voice threatening them if they tried to measure the lake. The voice was actually Llyn Tegid's voice.²³⁵

Cors Crymlyn and Llyn Lliwan are two lakes that, according to the tradition, had some malign power. It was believed that when the wind blew across the lake, if anyone stood with his/her face towards the body of water, they would have difficulties not to be sucked into it.²³⁶

The reason for this belief is not really mystical. As Rhŷs explained, it is just a combination of natural phenomena and fantasy. The spray produced by the wind was considered to be part of the lake, as if it had an arm to catch inexperienced people who were not aware of the course.²³⁷

Cors Crymlyn was also the scene of another curse. According to the legend, the sun never shone upon the lake waters. The same superstition was applied to Llyn Gwyn, a lake in Powys, since the local tradition said that the light of the sun touched the lake just for one week every year. The legends of both lakes share many other details.²³⁸ In fact, it can be said that the plots are basically the same. During one visit of St Patrick to Wales, he stopped to rest near one town – Swansea in the Cors Crymlyn legend,²³⁹ one unidentified town in Llyn Gwyn. The inhabitants of the town were defiant and critical towards the saint and he transformed the men into fish and the women into fairies,²⁴⁰ while in Llyn Gwyn it was said that there was but one woman who was transformed into a white lady.²⁴¹

²³² W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 51-53.

²³³ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 309.

²³⁴ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 21.

²³⁵ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, p. 14.

²³⁶ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 2, p. 407.

²³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 405-407.

²³⁸ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, p. 10.

²³⁹ W. Sikes, *British Goblins*, pp. 35-36.

²⁴⁰ Motifs D683.4. Transformation by saint, D661. Transformation as punishment and D692. City's inhabitants transformed into fish.

²⁴¹ Similar to motif E653.1. Reincarnation: man as water spirit.

One curious point, common to both legends, is the different result of the transformation according to the sex of the persons changed. It is evident that there are male and female fish and many legends often talk about male and female fairies, that is to say, fairies were not restricted to the feminine sex.²⁴² However, this is not the only case in Welsh mythology in which transformations have different results according to the sex of the person transformed. One clear example of it is the story of Gwion, when he was transformed into a salmon but Morfran became an otter.²⁴³ Nevertheless, it is also true that in Gwion's story, the different animals had different purposes and that those differentiated metamorphoses were not the result of the sex of the different characters. Therefore, several hypotheses may arise about this subject. Since the transformation was induced by a saint as a punishment for improper behaviour, the difference between sexes could be a punishment in itself, cutting forever all bonds between men and women. Another possibility is that the legend could have been adapted to older local traditions about feminine spirits or goddesses where there would be no place for male fairies.²⁴⁴

Another interesting detail is the ending for women in each legend, fairies or a white lady. The existence of lake-fairies or ghosts in lakes would not cause any surprise to anyone who is familiar with Welsh folklore. The question that must be answered is why the same legend ends differently according to the lake where it is set. The answer could be interpreted thinking of Llyn Gwyn as a more Christianised version of the original tale. Although the term, white lady, can be applied for both, a female fairy or the ghost of a woman,²⁴⁵ the description of the white lady of Llyn Gwyn clearly describes the ghost of a woman.²⁴⁶ The white lady of Llyn Gwyn could have been an ancient fairy or goddess that the new religion transformed into a ghost. Of course, following the same theory, St Patrick could have originally been a god, a druid or a wizard.²⁴⁷

The opposite to the cursed lakes of the previous category would be the magic lakes; lakes that help to fulfil a positive action. Although there are probably more, the most famous magic lake in Wales is Llyn Syfaddan.

The legend says that one day Gruffudd ap Rhys returned home from the King's Court accompanied by some other noblemen. Passing by Llyn Syfaddan one of the noblemen told him that it was said that if the legitimate ruler of Wales came to that lake and ordered the birds to sing, they would obey him.

Gruffudd then, told the noblemen to ask for the sign for themselves first. They did but there was no answer from the birds. Finally Gruffudd himself prostrated on the ground and asked a sign from God and from Christ. In that very same moment all the birds started to beat their wings on the lake

²⁴² One of the best examples is Arawn, King of the Underworld, who according to the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, changed places with Pwyll for one year. (C. Bernard, *Celtic Mythology* (Berkeley Heights:Enslow, 2003), p. 4). Moreover the legends of Llyn y Fan Fach, Llyn Cwellyn or Llyn y Dywarchen, just to name three, mention the existence of male fairies. Outside Wales, the Irish legend of the Tuatha Dé and the Milesians implies a transformation of a whole nation – the Tuatha Dé – into fairies (P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. 168.)

²⁴³ G. Matson & J. Roberts, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 107.

²⁴⁴ MacCulloch recalls the fact that ancient Celtic goddess Brigit had a female priesthood and that men were probably excluded from her cult. (J. Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), pp. 431,432.)

²⁴⁵ P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. 472.

²⁴⁶ The white lady of Llyn Gwyn is described as a woman often seen accompanied by flashes of light, which connects with motif E530.1.1. Ghost light follows ghost. (M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, p. 10.)

²⁴⁷ It could be a similar case as that of goddess Bride and St Brigig (C. Straffon & C. Marc , The Search for Bride's Well , *SOURCE - the Holy Wells Journal*. 3 – New series)

and to sing loudly, proclaiming Gruffudd as the natural prince of Wales.²⁴⁸

The legend of Gruffudd ap Rhys and Llyn Syfaddan could be linked to the ancient ritual of inauguration. Although there are not many details about this ancient ceremony, it seems that it was held in the most sacred places of the region, often a source of water.²⁴⁹ In the Celtic tradition, the king was not an absolute monarch, but a chosen person who often received the confirmation of his kingship from the Otherworld.²⁵⁰ From that moment, he enjoyed a special relationship with those magical forces determining the fate of his people.²⁵¹ Although the legend adds a Christian component to the story, the structure of the 'ceremony' does not change substantially what the pagan rulers might have done: in a holy place – in this case a magic lake – some candidates to be the supreme ruler of the country ask the Otherworld about their legitimacy for that position. The answer comes from water (and animals) declaring who is the chosen one. The tale, therefore, is a reflection of an ancient ceremony of inauguration. In fact, the name of Gruffudd ap Rhys along with the Christian references are most probably later insertions to an old story applied to a former pagan king or maybe to many of them.

According to tradition, there are several Welsh lakes that are or have been the habitation of different kinds of monsters. These are Llyn Tegid, Llyn y Gader, Llyn Barfog, Llyn Syfaddan and Llyn Eiddwen.

Probably the most important story about a lake monster is the *afanc*²⁵² of Llyn Llion. Nowadays there is no lake in Wales called Llyn Llion, and consequently, there are many different proposed locations for this place,²⁵³ however most scholars tend to identify it with Llyn Tegid.²⁵⁴

The story reads that time ago the *Cymry*²⁵⁵ lived in an unknown country called Deffrobani. After arriving in Britain, a monster terrorized them breaking the banks of Llyn Llion and flooding their lands.²⁵⁶ A hero called Hu Gadarn with his oxen,²⁵⁷ or in some other legends, King Arthur with his horse,²⁵⁸ caught the monster²⁵⁹ and brought it to another lake in which the *afanc* is still supposed to be living. Among the lakes proposed to be inhabited by the monster, are Llyn Ffynnon Las²⁶⁰ in Gwynedd, Llyn Llydaw²⁶¹ in Gwynedd, and Llyn yr Wyth-Eidion in Anglesey.²⁶²

Another place where the *afanc* was thought to live is Llyn Syfaddan. The oldest reference linking this location to the monster is a short poem by Lewis Glyn Cothi, written in the fifteenth century, which Rhys reproduces in his work *Celtic Folklore*²⁶³ as follows:

²⁴⁸ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, pp. 309-310.

²⁴⁹ P. Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, p. 258.

²⁵⁰ J. Carey, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1696.

²⁵¹ J. T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1061.

²⁵² Also spelled *avanc* or *addanc*.

²⁵³ J. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 142.

²⁵⁴ A. Minard, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 19; J. MacKillop, Bala Lake, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford:Oxford University press, 2004) [Online: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O70-BalaLake.html>] & <Accessed 6 February 2012>

²⁵⁵ The Brythons.

²⁵⁶ Motif F713.3. Lake monster turning over causes lake to overflow surrounding mountains.

²⁵⁷ E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, pp. 133, 151-152; W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, pp. 193-194.

²⁵⁸ J. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 142.

²⁵⁹ Motif G308.1. Fight with sea (lake) monster.

²⁶⁰ W. J. Thomas, *The Welsh Fairy Book*, p. 194.

²⁶¹ J. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 134.

²⁶² *ibid.*, p. 429.

²⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

Yr afanc er ei ovyn
 Wŷv yn llech ar vin y llyn;
 O dòn Llyn Syfaddon vo
 Ni thynwyd ban aeth yno:
 Ni'm tyn mèn nag ychain gwaith,
 Ođiyma heđyw ymaith.²⁶⁴

The legend basically repeats the same elements that legends set in Llyn Llion/Llyn Tegid, namely the existence of an *afanc* and the idea of having it removed from a lake by a hero using oxen. However, some details of this version of the *afanc* legend help to develop at least two theories.

Firstly, that the identification of Llyn Llion with Llyn Tegid could be a convention of modern folklorists and that the mythical lake was never intended to be a specific location.²⁶⁵ In fact, Llyn Llion has traditionally been identified with several lakes, pools and rivers all over Wales.²⁶⁶ Actually, one of the lakes where the *afanc* is supposed to be living is Llyn Barfog. In his first volume of *Celtic Folklore*, Rhŷs suggested that the original name of the lake could have been Llyn y Barfog – the lake of the bearded one²⁶⁷ – as probably referred to the habitation of a hairy monster like the one of Llyn y Fan.²⁶⁸ It must be also recalled that the word Welsh *afanc*, which is derived from the Brythonic word for river – *afon* or *avon* – is often applied to the beaver, a hairy animal which constructs dams and may flood extensive lands, as says the legends.²⁶⁹

The second point that may attract the scholar's attention is the absence of a name for the hero of Llyn Syfaddan. To be true, it would be unintelligible that a bard erased the name of the brave man who risked his life to save the nation, as it happens in the epic poem by Lewis Glyn Cothi. The omission of the name could be explained as a reflection of the anonymous original hero.²⁷⁰ The names of Hu Gadarn or King Arthur would be later additions to the legend, just like the name of some real lakes.

This way, the legend of the *afanc* that lived in Llyn Llion by the time of the arrival of the Brythons to Wales, which was removed from the lake by Hu Gadarn, King Arthur or Peredur²⁷¹ because it terrorized the nation and destroyed the crops with floods, could be reduced to a plane: “Many years ago a man took away a big *afanc* (beaver?) from a lake/river because it was causing floods in the lands of the people of the village.” The time and the imagination of people added the rest of details.

Llyn-y-Gader, south-west of Snowdon is the home-lake of another monster. This time the legend is not set in a distant and uncertain past, but during the eighteenth century. Locals told the story of a

²⁶⁴ Rhŷs also provided a translation as follows: The afanc am I, who, sought for, bides/ In hiding on the edge of the lake/ Out of the waters of Syfaddan Mere/ Was he not drawn, once he got there./ So with me: nor wain nor oxen went to toil/ Me to-day will draw from here forth.

²⁶⁵ One curious example of this kind of imaginary places could be a place called *Óperencia*, in the Hungarian folklore. It was supposed to be a fantastic far away land. In fact the word is ultimately derived from the German “Ober Enss” – over (the River) Enss – but must not be identified with any Austrian region. (*Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon*, ed G. Ortutay (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977-82) [Online] Available: <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115> & <Accessed 7 January 2012>)

²⁶⁶ J. Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, p. 142.

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 142, footnote.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 142, footnote.

²⁶⁹ A. Minard, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 19.

²⁷⁰ If this would be the case, it would not be an exception in Welsh medieval narrative. Another noteworthy case would be the poem of *Preiddiau Annwfn*, where the name of the heroes is also omitted. (J. T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 1456.)

²⁷¹ A. Minard, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 19.

young man who swam the lake. Although he was not aware of it, his friends on the shore saw a long snakelike²⁷² object going towards him. Before he reached the shore the monster caught the man and dragged him to a deep hole in the lake.²⁷³

A monstrous snake²⁷⁴ was also supposed to live in the previously mentioned lake or whirlpool of the river Taff. People said that the serpent dragged swimmers to the depths. The legend goes on that when their bodies were not found it was because the monster had swallowed them. On the other hand, if the body came to the surface, it was because the person was very good, since the monster did not touch the corpses of righteous people.²⁷⁵

In Ceredigion there is a small lake called Llyn Farch, near Llyn Eiddwen. Although there is not much information about it, Davies registered the legend claiming the existence of a “wonderful animal” living in the lake that had been shot by a farmer.²⁷⁶

As previously mentioned, there is also a legend of a monster in Llyn y Fan Fach. According to the version given by Davies, after the disappearance of the Lady of the Lake – mother of the physicians of Myddfai –, her husband and his friends tried to drain the lake in order to find the Lady. The legend goes on explaining that, when the men were working on the bank, a huge monster emerged from the waters threatening that if they kept on disturbing its peace, it would drown the town of Brecon. Obviously, with this commination in mind, the men gave up their work.²⁷⁷

Although the existence of these monsters could be based on mythological facts, it is also very possible that the source of the legend was based on an historical incident. Actually, it is not difficult to find snakes and other water animals living in the lakes and rivers of Wales. However, another possibility could be the animalisation of whirlpools and lakes. The danger of certain areas or lakes could have been attributed to non-existent animals, creating a legend.²⁷⁸

Although the idea of haunted places where paranormal activities are detected, surviving dinosaurs from the Ice Age, and other theories relating to the legends discussed in this chapter could look attractive to some, the reality that these stories hides seems to be much more in keeping with this world than to other dimensions. Legends concerning animals which inhabit certain areas were exaggerated and coloured until they became terrific monsters. The same applies to magic and haunted lakes. An ancient centre of worship, a story of a killing in or near a certain lake, or even ancient Celtic rituals, produced legends of ghosts, demons and magic lakes. Some may see this argument as a further attack by the scientific mainstream which conspires to suffocate the evidence of other realities. However, the truth is different. Research into what is veritably behind those legends can be even more attractive, challenging and mysterious than any unfounded explanation of extraterrestrial, monstrous or spiritual beings controlling certain lakes.

²⁷² Motif B91.5.2. Lake-serpent (monster)

²⁷³ M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, p. 14.

²⁷⁴ Motif B91.5.2. Lake-serpent (monster)

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁷⁶ J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, p. 309.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 309.

²⁷⁸ W. Tarzia, *Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*, ed. J. Sherman, 322-325. p. 322.

CONCLUSIONS

The theory followed in this paper is that most legends reflect ancient political orders, religious systems and customs, and historical events. It may seem that there are exceptions to this rule, but those oddities would also be included within the mainstream of Welsh folklore producing, not real exceptions, but variants of the same stories and traditions.

Among these special cases is the legend of the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach. A similar tales is found in other lakes in different parts of Wales, namely the tales of Llyn y Dywarchen and Llyn Cwellyn, the twin legends of lost lands in Llyn Syfaddan and Llyn Cynffyg, the courses over Llyn Gwyn and Cors Crymlyn by St Patrick, or the variant legends of the *afanc* of Llyn Llion, and these have been analysed in this research. The repetition of these tales in different lakes could be due to two main reasons, firstly the migration of the original legend from one lake to the other, probably by travellers or refugees from the original location, and secondly the convergence and subsequent melting of the original legend with a local legend about the new lake.

The original legends are a mixture of reality and fantasy created by the passage of time, religious and cultural ideas, and by exaggerations. In most cases it cannot be determined when or where the original myths were created. For example, there are tens of legends concerning lost lands and the possibility of an origin based on actual and common catastrophes of destruction of lake or river settlements has been suggested. Whether those legends were created in Wales or were brought into the country by the Celts who arrived from the Continent and adapted them to local lakes is impossible to prove. However, the existence of similar legends bearing the same motifs in other Celtic and non-Celtic civilizations and lands, could point to a non-Insular origin, that being that the Welsh legends are a version of ancient memories adapted to a new environment.²⁷⁹

Celtic Christianity plays a significant role in the modification of old legends, creating new interpretations of them. There existed legends of fantastic supernatural beings which were transformed with the arrival of Christianity to Wales, for example a local fairy or divinity may have become a Catholic saint, or even a ghost. There also exist examples of Christian legends and customs which are reflections of old pagan rituals. A notable one is the confirmation of kingship by God and Christ in Llyn Syfaddan, a clear alteration of the confirmation of kingship by the Otherworld powers through water in Celtic mythology.

Following this reasoning, folklorists such as MacRitchie²⁸⁰ tried to explain fairy legends as memories of pre-Celtic settlers of Britain. Those primitive inhabitants of the British Isles would have been short and dark-haired, in contrast with the taller and fair Celts.²⁸¹ In spite of the prestige that this theory enjoyed during the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, it would hardly explain why the motifs are repeated in other Celtic countries with different backgrounds from that of Scotland.²⁸² Moreover, the fairies' appearance is not always as MacRitchie and his followers expected.²⁸³ It is possible that the stories have a Continental origin, at

²⁷⁹ An example of non-insular Celtic mythology of lost lands is Carucedo, a lake in the northwestern Iberian region of Bierzo in León. (E. Gil y Carrasco, *El Lago de Carucedo* (León: Miñón, 1899))

²⁸⁰ An article on the same line but referred to Welsh folklore appeared in the magazine *Welsh Outlook* in 1921. O. T. Jones, 'The Origin of the Welsh Legends', *Welsh Outlook*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Jan. 1921), 309-312. [Online: <http://cylchgronaucymru.llgc.org.uk>] & <Accessed 28 February 2012>

²⁸¹ D. MacRitchie, *Fians, Fairies and Picts*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893), p. 44. [Online: <http://www.guthenberg.org>] & <Accessed 10 March 2012>

²⁸² The same kind of lake-fairy legends are also present in many other places besides the Celtic countries. A curious case is the Basque Country. (Barandiarán, J. M., 'Huellas y Recuerdos Visibles de las Lamias', *Eusko-Folklore*, 17: (1966) 125-128.)

²⁸³ Sometimes the Welsh fairies are also described as blonde and tall people (J. Rhÿs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 2, pp. 667-

least for their structure, plots and characters, which were later adapted to local scenes and needs. Another curious point of view, especially in popular culture, describes fairies as being a remnant of pre-Christian communities, who lived hidden in order to avoid death by the new Christian ruling classes.²⁸⁴

These theories are not currently held in academia, but it is possible that some mythological beings were based on real people, for example the fairy of Llyn y Forwyn, who seemed to have been a woman who had had an argument with her husband.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it is impossible to give a scientific explanation of the origin of fairies as a group. Each story has to be examined and, as far as possible, fitted into a particular background and historical scene in order to formulate theories concerning the origin of the specific creatures of each particular legend.

In conclusion, the study of Welsh legends, not as a reflection of certain spiritual states, human desires, or any other pure psychological reason, but as memories of historical facts, can continue to provide many glimpses of what Welsh people believed and how they lived in the past. Those glimpses, along with scientific evidence such as archaeological finds and linguistic data, will help us to form a fuller sense of the past which produced the current nation of Wales.

CARLES ENRIC FERNANDEZ

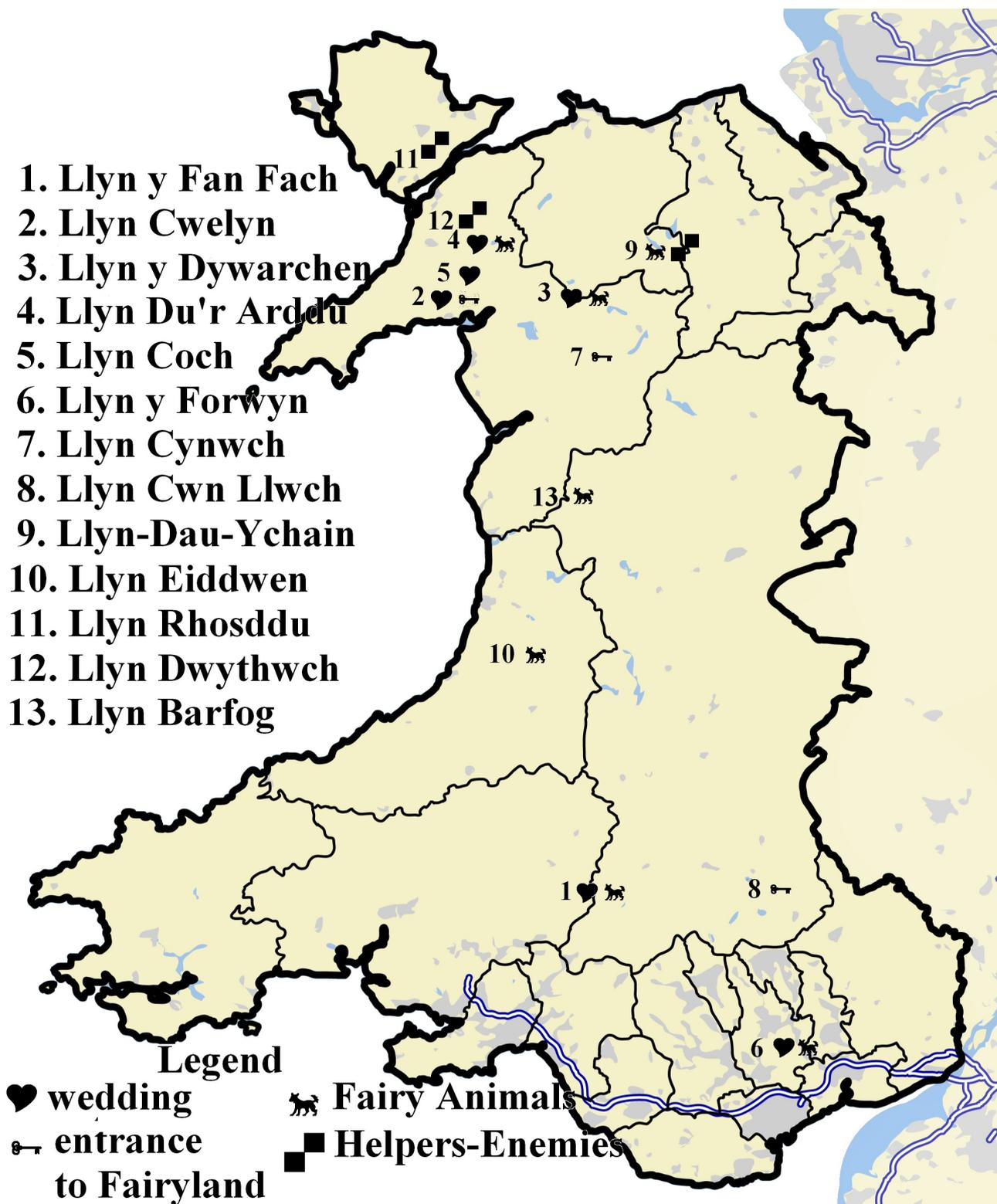
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668) Moreover, in the Iberian Peninsula, the Celtic legends describe fairies as tall and blonde people. (J. A. Balboa de Paz, 'Mitología Berciana', *Bierzo Mágico*, ed. E. García López, (León: Diario de León, 1996) [Online: <http://www.saber.es>] & <Accessed 29 September 2011>)

²⁸⁴ A. Minard, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. J. T. Koch, p. 728.

²⁸⁵ J. Rhÿs, *Celtic Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 23-25.



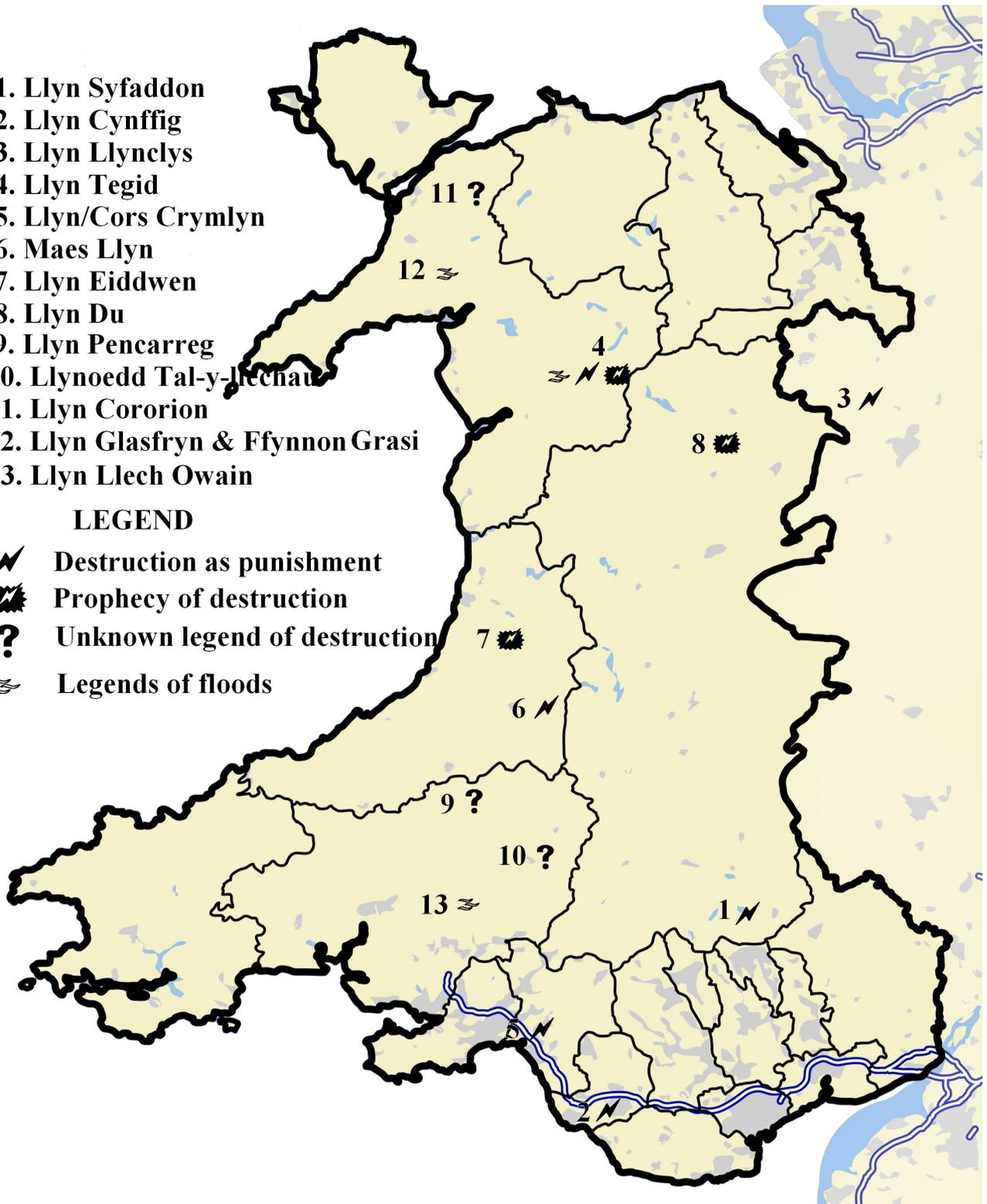
Map 1. Lakes and fairies.

²⁸⁶ All the maps are based on: Jhamez84, Map of Wales, Creative Commons License [online]. Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wales_outline_map_with_UK.png & <Accessed 7 January 2012>

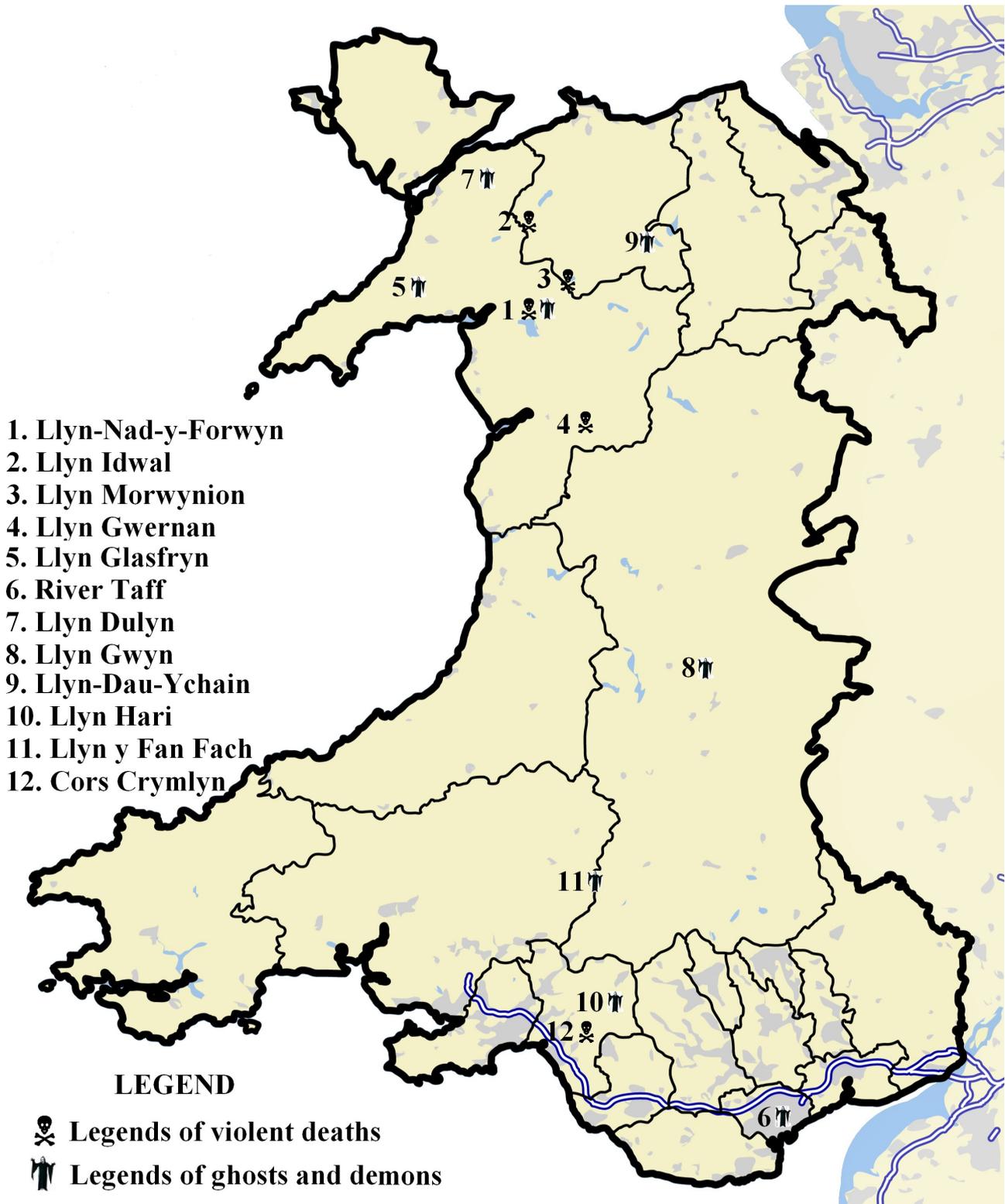
1. Llyn Syfaddon
2. Llyn Cynffig
3. Llyn Llyncllys
4. Llyn Tegid
5. Llyn/Cors Crymlyn
6. Maes Llyn
7. Llyn Eiddwen
8. Llyn Du
9. Llyn Pencarreg
10. Llynoedd Tal-y-llechau
11. Llyn Cororion
12. Llyn Glasfryn & Ffynnon Grasi
13. Llyn Llech Owain

LEGEND

-  Destruction as punishment
-  Prophecy of destruction
-  Unknown legend of destruction
-  Legends of floods



Map 2: Legends of catastrophes in lakes.



Map 3: Legends of deaths and ghosts in lakes

1. Llyn Idwal
2. Llyn Moel Llyn
3. Llyn Cwm Llwh
4. Llyn Tegid
5. Llyn/Cors Crymlyn
6. Llyn Lliwan
7. Llyn Syfaddon
8. Llyn Ffynnon Las
9. Llyn Llydaw
10. Llyn Barfog
11. Llyn y Fan Fach
12. Llyn-y-Gader
13. River Taff
14. Llyn Farch
15. Llyn yr Wyth-Eidion

- LEGEND**
-  Monsters
 -  Positive magic
 -  Negative magic



Map 4: Monsters and magic

APPENDIX TWO

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