

Water, Rivers, and Wells

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Sacred Geography



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The aim of this lecture is to introduce the role of water in its ability to carry, capture and create mythology in a landscape.



Water

Connects all things, living and non-living. It seeks to move and form patterns of swirls and eddies, tides and currents.

In that endless movement of twist and turns it creates places for life.

A 'straighten' river tends to just move water or control water but does not allow for the river to create living places.

The above could be a sacred river but the image below is unlikely.

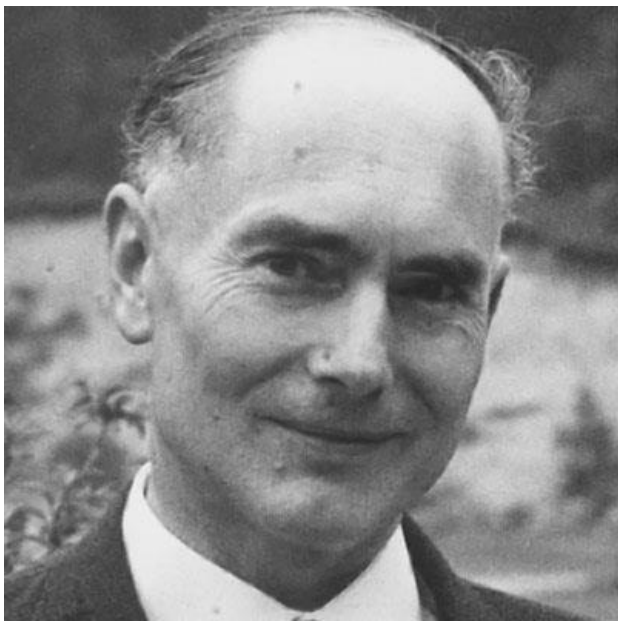




Water

As water encounters wind, landscape shifts, or the gravity of the Moon it is responds producing different flow patterns as it converts energy from one source and moves it to another.

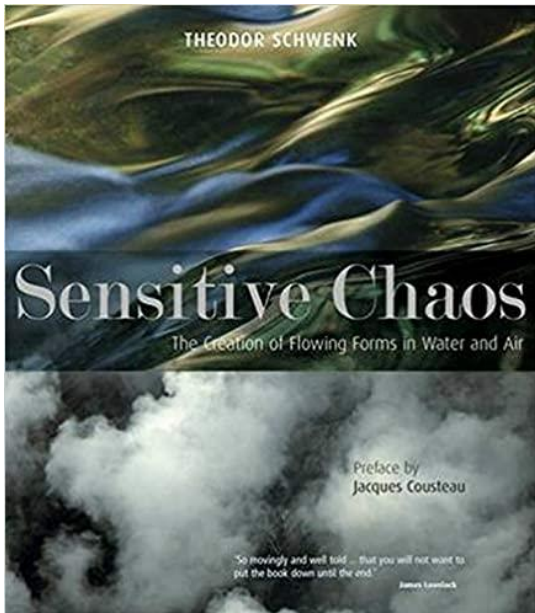




Theodore Schwenk (1910-1986) wrote 'Sensitive Chaos' in 1962 and it has since had over 10 editions.

He founded the **Institute for Flow** and his work is based on tradition of Goethe (1749-1832) and later that of Rudolf Steiner, where nature is considered to be ruled by a single unifying principle which is apparent in all movement and form.

Schwenk argued that '**Water is the cosmic sense organ of the earth**'.¹ He used this idea to claim it is the instruments of a cosmic alphabet, the word of the universe.



1. Schwenk, Theodore, Sensitive Chaos, UK, Sophia Books 1965. p.80 & 132

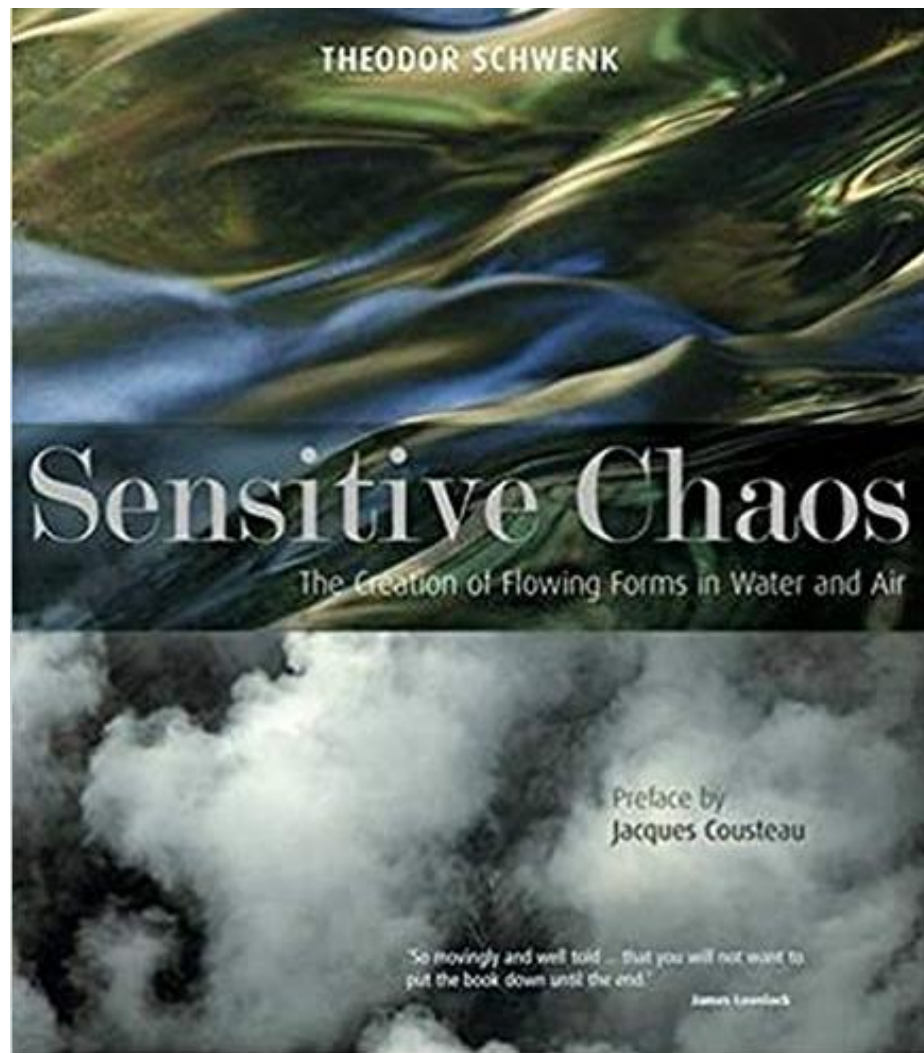




The Spirit of Water – The Rainbow Serpent

Radcliffe-Brown in 1926 found that the Rainbow Serpent was linked or had its home in permeant water holes. These places were thus a **permeant dwelling place of the spirit of water**.

The Rainbow Serpent first known appearance in rock art has been dated to 6000-4000 BP and this in Arnhem Land



is similar to the entity of the Rainbow Serpent – the Spirit of Water, creator of the cosmos and linked to all things.



Schwenk idea of water as a cosmic agent, the sense organ of the cosmos



Rivers

PhotoPhotia



Sacred Rivers

The **River Ganges**, only one of India's sacred rivers, is connected to Lord Shiva and to bathe in the river is to be granted salvation.



The **Jordan River** sacred for both Jews and Christians and the possible place where Christ was baptised by John the Baptist is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Al-Maghtas, Jordan. A World Heritage site since 2015



Sacred Rivers

Whanganue River, NZ

The first river in the world to be granted the same legal rights as humans.

It is sacred to the Maori people and is seen as a living breathing ancestor.

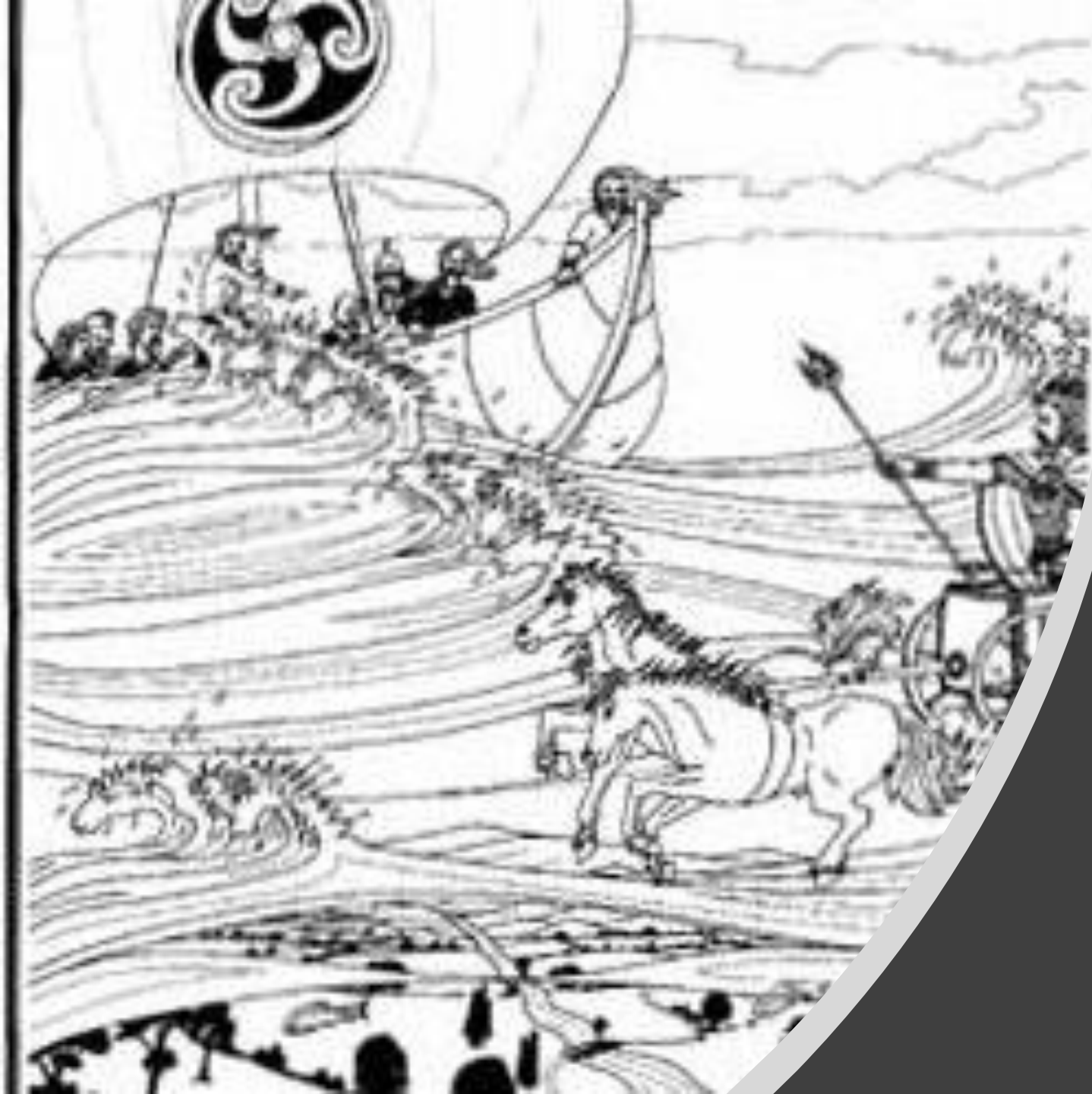




Sacred Rivers



The Nile personified as Hapi, the part female, part male deity which represented the Nile flood



From the
mighty Nile to....

a small Welsh
river...



The Afon Cynfael, North Wales

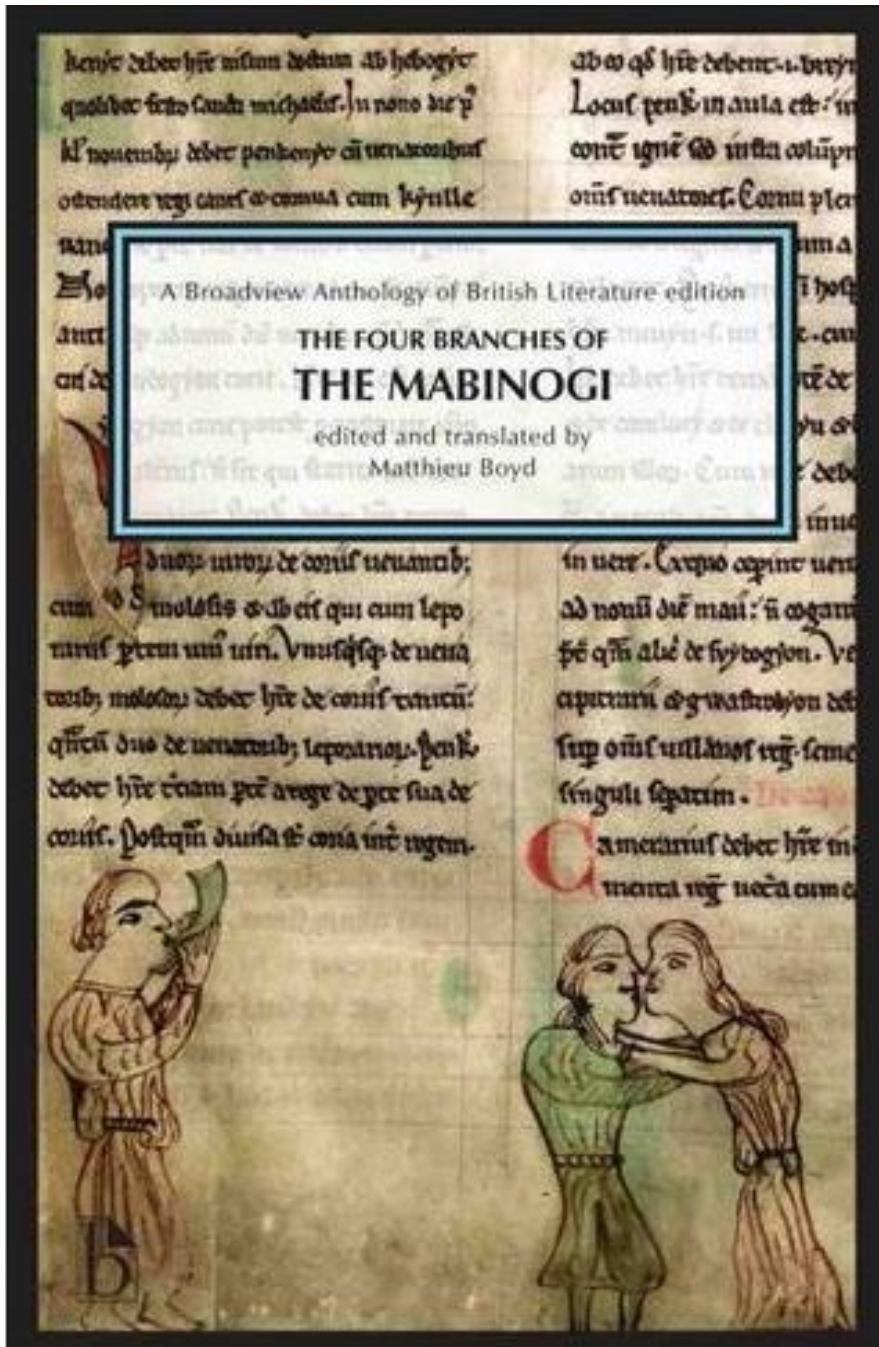


The Afon Cynfael begins in the mountains and cuts a path down to the Ffestiniog Valley where it joins the Afon Dwyryd.



There are four sections known as branches to the Mabinogi:

- ***Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed*** ('Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed')
- ***Branwen ferch Llŷr*** ('Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr')
- ***Manawydan fab Llŷr*** ('Manawydan, Son of Llŷr')
- ***Math fab Mathonwy*** ('Math, Son of Mathonwy')





The Murder of Lleû

With little concern for his safety, Lleû describes the requirements for his mortal death to his wife (Blodeuedd):

‘By making a bath for me on a riverbank, and making a vaulted frame over the tub, and thatching it well and snugly too thereafter, **and bringing a he-goat**’, he said, ‘and setting it beside the tub, and myself placing one foot on the back of the he-goat and the other on the **edge of the tub.**’

In that position he can be killed by a magical spear.

We are told in the story that this takes place on the banks of the Afon Cynfael.

Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion* ,p.60.





Water Falls and Myths



Beaver's heart still remains and is visible as the big rock along the west side of the Palouse River, where it flows into the Snake.

Today it is a sacred place.



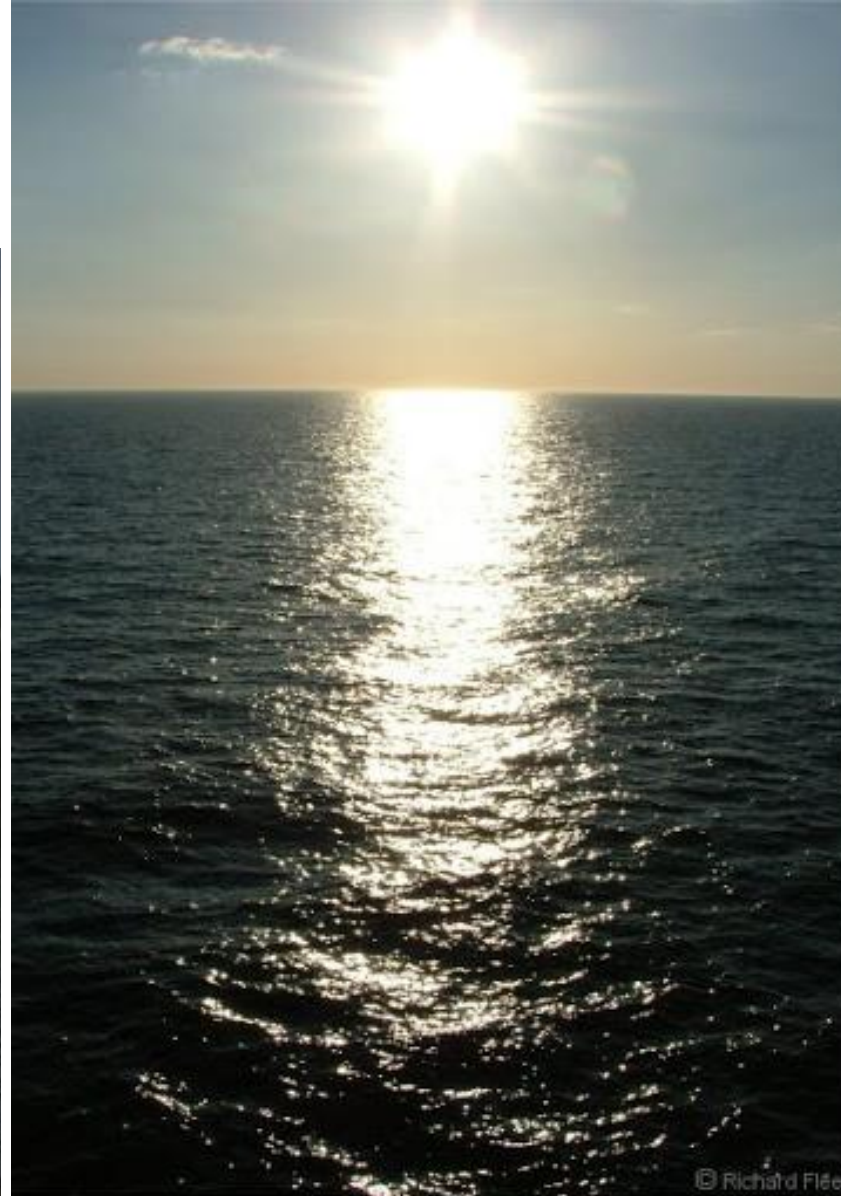


The Iguazu Falls, Argentina

According to the Guaraní Tribe, a young girl would be chosen to be sacrificed every year to please the serpent god of the Iguassu River. Supposedly, as the time of the sacrifice approached, **the Serpent god** saw a young girl playing by the river and fell madly in love with her.

The girl and her lover tried to escape but the land opened up and swallowed them both – they are now separated by the falls.

Glitter Paths



Moon (left), Sun, Venus (right)

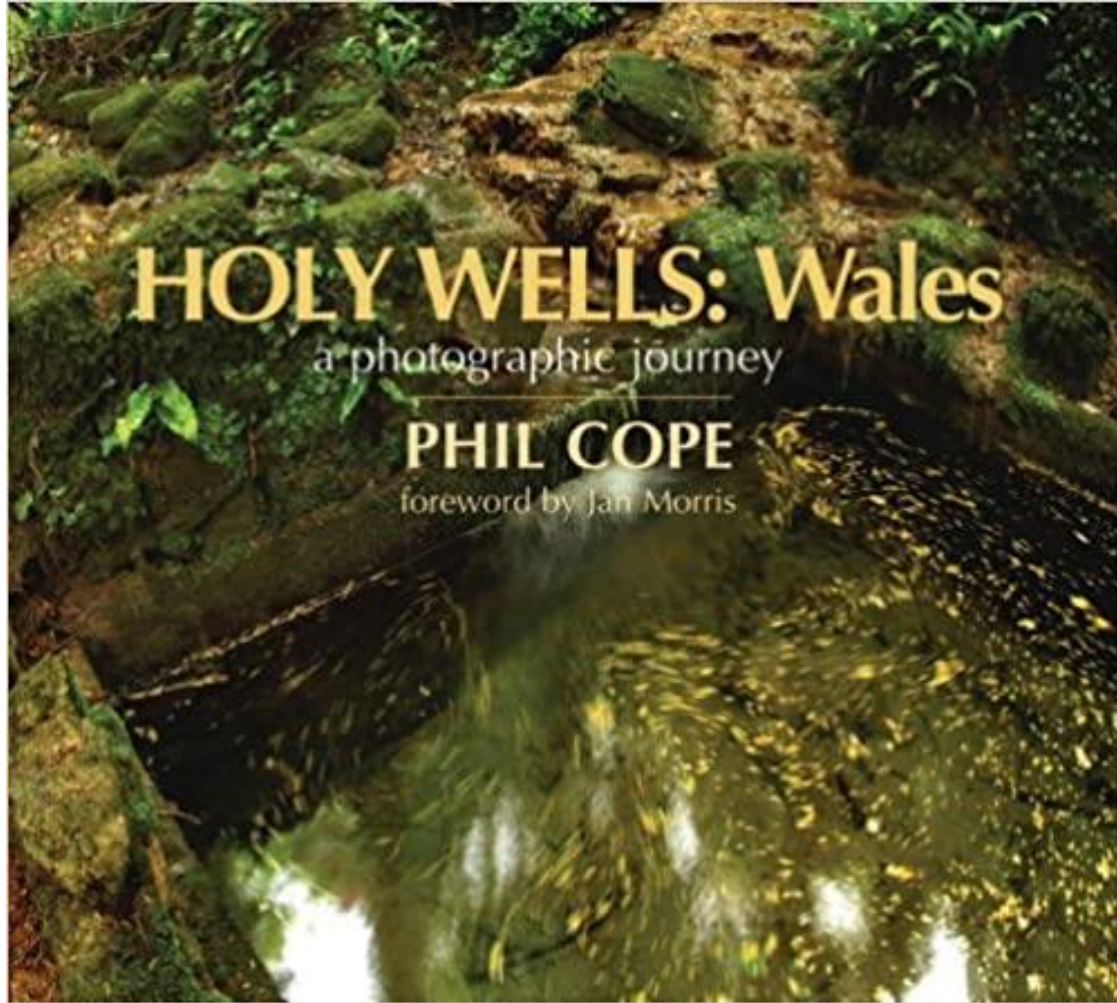


Always draw a straight path from
you directly to the heavenly body



Sacred Wells





In 1954 there were over 1000 holy wells listed in Wales. In 2008 Phil Cope photographed over 200 of these wells and wrote up 44 of them in his work.

Cope (p.11) points out that the attributes of a holy well are diverse but most:

- Never freeze or run dry.
- Ebb and flow.
- Make strange noises.
- Most will be able to predict the future.
- Grant wishes.
- Offer cures.
- Some turn objects into stone while others can turn to milk or blood.

They are also gateways to the otherworld.

Sacred Wells

‘we are face to face... with living forms of the oldest, lowest, most primitive religion... one which would seem to have been once universal, and which, couching close to the earth, lets other creeds blow over it without effacing it, and outlives one and all of them.’

Charles Squire – Celtic Myth and Legends quoted in Cope p.9.



St Brannoc's Holy Well – Braunton, Devon

Cope, Phil, *Holey Wells: Wales, a photographic journey*. Bridgeend, UK Seren, 2008.



Chalice Well – Glastonbury



St Clether's,
Cornwall

Rag Wells -

<https://insearchofholywellsandhealingsprings.com/>



Reading and References

<https://insearchofholywellsandhealingsprings.com/>

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