

Llyn Cerrig Bach: Celtic Water Rituals

1. Introduction

- Background
 - Celtic culture → Iron Age Britain & Europe
 - Importance of ritual practice
 - Water sites as liminal/sacred spaces
- Location
 - Anglesey, Wales
 - Discovery by Sir Cyril Fox (1940s)
- Purpose
 - How archaeology reveals ritual behaviour
 - Relationship between material culture and belief
- Thesis Statement
 - Strong physical evidence of intentional ritual deposition linked to warfare, status, and religion.

2. Archaeological Context

- Site Overview
 - Bog/lake environment
 - Exceptional preservation
 - Over 170 objects discovered
- Methodology
 - Excavation history
 - Recording + classification
- Comparative Sites
 - La Tène (Switzerland)
 - Thames River deposits
 - Danish bog sites (Tollund Man, Illerup Ådal)

3. Categories of Artifacts (Evidence)

- 3.1 Weapons (Primary Evidence)
 - Types
 - Swords
 - Spears
 - Shields
 - Characteristics
 - Many deliberately bent, broken, decommissioned
 - Symbolic destruction
 - Interpretation
 - Votive offering after battle
 - Symbolic release of power
 - Sources
 - Macdonald (2007)
 - Bradley (2017)
- 3.2 Status Objects
 - Types
 - Chariot fittings
 - Horse gear
 - Bronze trumpets
 - Interpretation
 - High-status offerings
 - Displays of prestige, wealth
 - Rulers or elites associated with the rituals
 - Sources
 - Garrow & Gosden (2012)
- 3.3 Human-Related Items
 - Examples
 - Chain fragments
 - Possible slave restraints
 - Interpretation
 - Ritual deposition of captives
 - Human sacrifice? (debated)
 - Sources
 - Green (1997)

8. Key Sources

- Bradley (2017) – ritual landscapes & offerings
- Macdonald (2007) – weapon analysis
- Garrow & Gosden (2012) – Celtic art & elite objects
- Aldhouse-Green (2005) – religion & shamanism
- Green (1997) – human ritual victims
- Classical authors (Strabo, Poseidonius)

7. Conclusion

- Llyn Cerrig Bach = one of the richest ritual deposition sites
- Evidence strongly supports water-related ritual practice
- Combines warfare, religion, social identity
- Archaeology reveals more accurate insights than biased classical authors
- Site essential for wider Celtic studies

6. Scholarly Debate

- 6.1 Ritual vs. Non-Ritual Explanations
 - Ritual deposition (dominant theory)
 - Accidental loss? → Weak argument
 - Warfare dump? → Evidence contradicts (objects intentionally broken)
- 6.2 The Role of Druids
 - Aldhouse-Green: Druids as ritual specialists
 - Their involvement likely but speculative
- 6.3 Meaning of Broken Weapons
 - Ritual decommissioning
 - Symbolic “killing” of objects

5. Comparison with Classical Sources

- 5.1 Strabo
 - Describes Celts sacrificing in lakes
 - BUT biased by Roman stereotypes
- 5.2 Poseidonius
 - Mentions warrior culture, ritual practices
 - Limited accuracy
- 5.3 Value of Comparison
 - Classical texts = external observation
 - Archaeology = material, objective evidence
 - Show convergence & contradictions

4. Ritual Interpretation

- 4.1 Thanksgiving Rituals
 - Offered after military victory
 - Desire to honour the gods
 - Evidence: weapons destroyed prior to offering
- 4.2 Appeasement Rituals
 - Appeasing supernatural forces
 - Water as “gateway” to Otherworld
 - Sources: Aldhouse-Green & Aldhouse-Green (2005)
- 4.3 Social Display / Status
 - Deposits as public acts of elite identity
 - Wealth destruction as power demonstration
- 4.4 Religious Symbolism of Water
 - Water as liminal, sacred, powerful
 - Boundary between natural and supernatural
 - Supported by comparative European sites