

Preface

The seed of this book was planted long before I ever wrote a single chapter. It began in the hills and valleys around Hirwaun, where I grew up, in a landscape that often feels layered with memory. Just a few miles from my home, high beneath the slopes of Fan Brycheiniog, lies Llyn Fawr. More than a century ago, that mountain lake revealed one of the most remarkable archaeological discoveries ever made in Wales, a discovery that would eventually shape my interest in the ancient beliefs of Cymru.

During the draining of Llyn Fawr in the early twentieth century, workers uncovered a hoard of bronze and iron objects that had been deliberately placed beneath the water more than two thousand years ago. Weapons, tools, ornaments, and ritual objects emerged from the depths, preserved for centuries in the dark waters of the lake. To archaeologists, the discovery provided invaluable evidence for the transition between the Bronze Age and Iron Age in Wales. To me, it raised a series of questions that never entirely disappeared.

Who were the people who placed these objects into the lake? What understanding of the world led them to surrender such valuable possessions beneath the water? What did they believe existed beyond the visible world, and how did they understand their relationship with the landscape around them? Most importantly, how did the mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, and valleys of Cymru appear through their eyes?

Those questions gradually led me towards a deeper exploration of the pre-Christian worldview of Wales. Not simply the myths that survive in medieval manuscripts, nor the archaeological discoveries preserved within museums, but the broader system of ideas that once connected land, memory, ritual, divinity, ancestry, and existence itself into a coherent way of understanding the world. While the surviving evidence is often fragmentary, it offers glimpses of a cosmology in which the landscape was alive with meaning and

where the boundaries between the visible and unseen worlds were often understood very differently from those of today.

This book seeks to explore that worldview. Rather than attempting to reconstruct a single universal Celtic religion, it examines the recurring themes that appear across Welsh mythology, sacred landscapes, archaeology, folklore, poetry, and later traditions. Ancient Cymru was never politically unified, and beliefs undoubtedly varied between communities and regions. Yet certain patterns appear repeatedly: the importance of sacred places, the significance of water, the role of memory and ancestry, the presence of otherworldly realms, and the belief that landscape itself possessed spiritual meaning.

A central idea runs throughout The Cymru Cycles: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. That principle is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the beliefs explored within this book. Mountains became places of encounter with the sacred. Lakes received offerings. Rivers carried both practical and spiritual significance. Ancient monuments connected communities to their ancestors and to deeper layers of memory. The natural world did not merely provide a setting for belief. It formed part of belief itself.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. Absolute certainty is not always possible. Archaeology preserves objects without explaining their meaning. Myths survive through centuries of retelling and adaptation. Medieval texts often preserve older traditions only partially beneath later Christian interpretation. Where gaps exist, interpretation is sometimes necessary. Throughout this book, the aim is to present the explanation that appears most consistent with the available evidence while acknowledging that alternative interpretations may exist.

The spirit of Llyn Fawr runs quietly through these pages. The objects placed into that mountain lake more than two thousand years ago remind us that the past is never truly gone. It survives within the

landscape, within stories carried across generations, within ancient monuments weathered by time, and within the enduring sense that certain places possess meanings deeper than their physical appearance alone might suggest.

In many ways, the worldview explored throughout this book endured in much the same way. It retreated beneath the surface of history, fragmented and reshaped by changing centuries, yet traces remained within folklore, poetry, tradition, sacred landscapes, and cultural memory. The older structures never disappeared entirely. They survived quietly beneath newer layers of understanding, waiting to be recognised once again.

It is my hope that this book helps readers see Cymru not only as a land of history, but also as a land of meaning. A place where mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, and ancient monuments once formed part of a living spiritual landscape, and where echoes of that older way of seeing can still be found for those willing to look.

Nathan Williams
The Cymru Cycles