Seven wells


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Everybody who would be a philologist must have done mathematics, or be capable of doing mathematics

Nine wells

- Nine Wells, Shelford, Cambridgeshire 1575
- Newbourne, Suffolk *Neubrunna* 1086< ON *níu brunnar*
- Enneakrounos?
Newbourne
seven

- OE seofon; seofo, sifu (Northumbrian); syfan (West Saxon), sufon (late West Saxon)
- ME sēven, seven(n)e, ceven(e), seiven, sefne, sev(e), sewen, sef(fe), souve, sen(e), seove(n), zeve(n), sevn, sefene, seofe(n), seofan, seofon(e), seofne, sefenn, seofenn, seffne, seoffne, seovene, soven(e), sove, son(e)
well, spring

➤ OE *wielle, wylle, *wiell, wyll, will strong masc.; *wiella, wylla, willa, wælla, wella weak masc.; wielle, wylle, wille, wælle, welle weak fem.

➤ ME *wel(le), wele, wel(la), weile, wal(le), wil(le), wol(le), wul(le), wæl(le), wealle, wella(n), wille, willan, willom, uel, ulle, vil

➤ ME plural welles, wel(len(e)), wallen, weallen

➤ æt þæs bernes ende æt þæs wæteres sprynge S179 (AD 816)

➤ OE welsprinces (*fontes), gloss to Aldhelm (11th)
England
England
Sawyer 703 – Chelsworth, Suffolk
Early English place-names

- *Seofenwyllas* (Cold Aston, Gloucestershire), in a charter of Æthelbald of 737-740 (11th), Sawyer 99. At SP115188 — Shewhill Coppice and Shewhill Barn

- *(on) syfan wyllan*, Tichborne, Hampshire, in a charter of Athelstan of 938 (12th), Sawyer 444. SU574322 — Seward’s Bridge

- *seuen willes þry*, Kingston in Purbeck, Dorset, in a charter of Eadred of 956 (15th), Sawyer 573

- *þa westran seofon wyllas*, Southstoke, Somerset, a charter of King Edgar of 961 (12th), Sawyer 694

- *seofan wyllan broc*, Showell, Staffordshire, in a charter of Æthelred of 985 (12th), Sawyer 860
Later English place-names — a small sample

- Showell, Oxfordshire *Sevewelle* 1086
- Sewell, Bedfordshire *Sewelle* 1086
- *Seuewelledale* c.1160, Derbyshire
- Seawell, Northants *Sewewell* 12th
- Sowell, Devon *Souewella* 1223
- Sinwell, Gloucestershire *Suuen well’* 1248
- Silverlake, Dorset *Sewelake* 1454
Cornish

- Suffenton, Cornwall *Serfenton* c.1190, *Setfonten* 1284
- < Middle Cornish *seyth+fenten*
- *G. de septem fontibus* 1298
Sanctification

➤ Many Wells Spring, Cranham, Gloucestershire. *Emmanuel Springs* on 1887 OS map
➤ Holywell < *hol-wella*
➤ Bridewell (‘St. Bridget’) < *brid* ‘bird’ or *bryd* ‘surging’?
➤ St. Chad’s Well < *ceald* ‘cold’
Ackroyd — *Thames: sacred river* 2008

- Seven Springs at source; *Setfontaynes* at mouth
- Wrong! *Ralph de Setfountayns, de Septem Fontibus*, lord of Ockendon
Seffent near Aachen

- Zwentibold 896: gift of the place called *Septem Fontes* to the abbess Gisela
- “Charlemagne” *Mox quedam arbor, de qua septem fontes videbantur*
Germanic names — a sample

- Sieborn, Holzhausen *Sibenbrvnnen* 779 (?)
- Siebenbrunn, Hartberg *Sibenbrunn* 1112
- Siebenborn, Maring-Novian *Septem fontibus* 1157
- Simmern, Westerwald *Syfenburne* 1216
- Siba Brünna, Triesenberg, Liechtenstein
- Zevenborren, Sint-Genesius-Rode, Belgium
Luxembourg & France — a sample

Les Sept-Fonts, Carlat, dépt. Cantal: *in loco qui vocatur ad Septem Fontes* 917

Sept-Fons, Diou, Dompierre-sur-Besbre, dépt. Allier. Founded 1132 (Gaulish *devo* ‘god’)

Sept-Fonds, Saint-Fargeau, dépt. Yonne *de Septem Fontibus* 1210


Septfontaines (Simmern, Sieweburen), Luxembourg. *de vii fontibus* 12th; *Siebenborn* 1396

Septfontaines, Blancheville, Haute-Marne *Septem Fontes* 1134

Cerfontaine, Surfontaine, Sirfontaines ??

(Spain: Siete Aguas. Italy: Settefontane, Settefonti, Siètfontànès etc.)
Sept-Fons
Heptapegon (Tabgha) on the Sea of Galilee

- (Hepta Phretata, Arabia reported by Strabo, before 24 CE)
- Petrus Diaconus (Liber de locis sanctis 1137, quoting Etheria 381-384): *Ibidem uero super mare est campus erbosus, habens fenum satis et arbores palmarum multas et iusta eas septem fontes, qui singuli infinitam aquam emittunt*
- Theodosius (early 6th): *De Magdale usque ad septem fontes, ubi domnus Christus baptizauit apostolos, milia II, ubi et saturavit populum de quinque panibus et duobus piscibus*
Heptapegon
Aldhelm (c.640–709)

★ Liber de Septenario: *septem epistolarum rivulis*

★ XIV. FONS

*Per cava telluris clam serpo celerrimus antra*

*Flexos venarum girans anfractibus orbes;*

*Cum caream vita sensu quoque funditus expers,*

*Quis numerus capiat vel quis laterculus æquet,*

*Vita viventum generem quot milia partu?*

*His neque per cælum rutilantis sidera speræ*

*Fluctivagi ponti nec compensantur harenæ.*
Superstition

- Jacob of Edessa (c.640-708): “seven well worship” amongst Christian Syrians
- al-Qazwini (d.1276): seven wells at Tiberias
- Punjab: the water of seven wells is poured into the gutter of a house to guard against bad luck thought to threaten a child of one sex born after three births of the opposite sex
- India: “if there is no rain on April 27th, water taken from seven springs is [...] mixed with cowdung and red earth”
- Syria: “a sick child . . . to drink from seven wells”

*Fons Baraliuen* was “perhaps a well in a field now called Croft Hir, near Nant farm house. This well is resorted to for wishing and said to have seven springs. — J. A. Bradney”
FOLKLORE OF WELLS

BEING A STUDY OF

WATER-WORSHIP

IN EAST AND WEST

BY

R. P. MASANI, M.A.

BOMBAY:

D. B. TARaporevala Sons & Co.

1918
Solicitor’s letter: “Our client is a staunch Hindu of old idea and he requires the use of water from seven wells for religious ceremonies. For this purpose he uses the two wells in question and has to go to neighbouring properties to make up the full number of seven wells.”

There are seven sacred ponds at Nirmal in the Thana district.

In Northern India hydrophobia is believed to be cured if the patient looks down seven wells in succession.

The water of seven tanks, or at least of one pond, in which lotuses grow, is said to check the virulence of measles and smallpox.

In many parts of India the water of seven wells is collected on the night of the Dewali, or feast of lamps, and barren women bathe in it as a means of procuring children.
Scriptural cleansing

➤ 2 Kings 5:9–10: So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots, and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean.”

➤ Fifth Ezra (130-300 CE):

\[ \text{parabo tibi arbores duodecim aliis et aliis fructibus et septem fontes fluentes lac et mel} \]

French recension replaces \textit{septem} by \textit{totidem}

➤ Book of Zechariah: “seven streams” > “seven eyes”
Suppression of well-worship

Non licet compensus in domibus propriis nec pervigilius in festivititates sanctorum facere nec inter sentius aut ad arbores sacrivos vel ad fontes vota dissolvere, nisi, quicumque votum habuerit, in ecclesia vigilet et matricole ipsum votum aut, pauperibus reddat nec sculptilia aut pede aut hominem ligneo fieri penitus praesumat. […] it is forbidden to make vows in groves, at sacred trees or at springs . . .]

(Third council of Auxerre, c.573–603. MGH Leges, Concilia aevi Merovingici p.179)
The garden of virtue

Herrad of Landsberg, *Hortus deliciarum* (1180): *Septē fontes sapientae fluunt de philosophia quae dicuntur liberales artes*

Lorens, *Somme le roi* (1279): *la fontaine de grace . . . ceste fontaine se devise on VII ruisiez ce sont les VII dons du saint esprit qui arousent touz iardins. Les VII peticions sont ausic come VII tres beles puceles qui ne cessent de puisier des VII ruissiaux les caves vives pour a rouse ces VII arbres qui portent le fruit de vie par durable.*

seven trees fed by seven streams

Book of Vices and Virtues (14th): *Þis welle is departed in seuene stremes, þat ben þe seuen þiftes of þe Holy Gost, þat wateren al þe garden*

Mechthild (born c.1210) of Helfta, *Liber specialis gratiae*: *... a garden or hills of virtues with seven levels, a virtue-fountain on each*
Seven liberal arts
Verses 2.12.3 and 2.12.12 mention “seven streams” four times; e.g. yó hatváhim áriṇāt saptá síndhūn yó gá udájad apadhávalásya ‘He who having slain the serpent set flowing the seven streams, he who drove out the cows from Vala’s hiding place’

In verse 7.36.6 the Sárasvati river is described as saptáthī síndhūmātī ‘seventh, mother of streams’