

# Seven wells

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Keith Briggs [keith.briggs@bt.com](mailto:keith.briggs@bt.com)

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<http://keithbriggs.info>

Bristol Centre for Linguistics UWE 2010-03-10 1330

# Joseph Wright

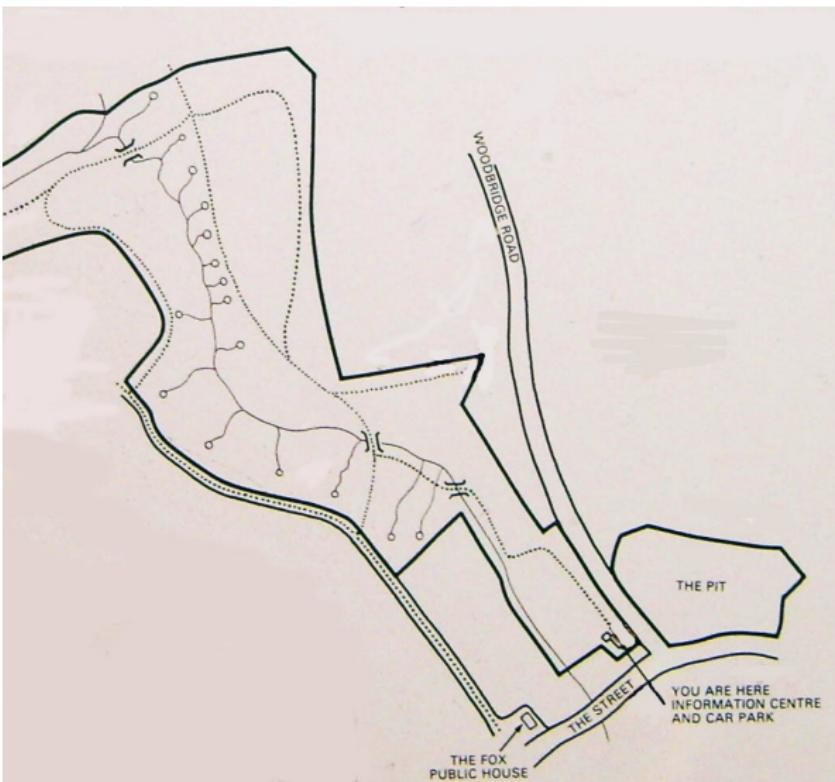
*Everybody who would be a philologist must have done mathematics, or be capable of doing mathematics*

— Joseph Wright (1855–1930), quoted in *The life of Joseph Wright*, page 74, by E. M. Wright (OUP 1932).

# Nine wells

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

# Newbourne



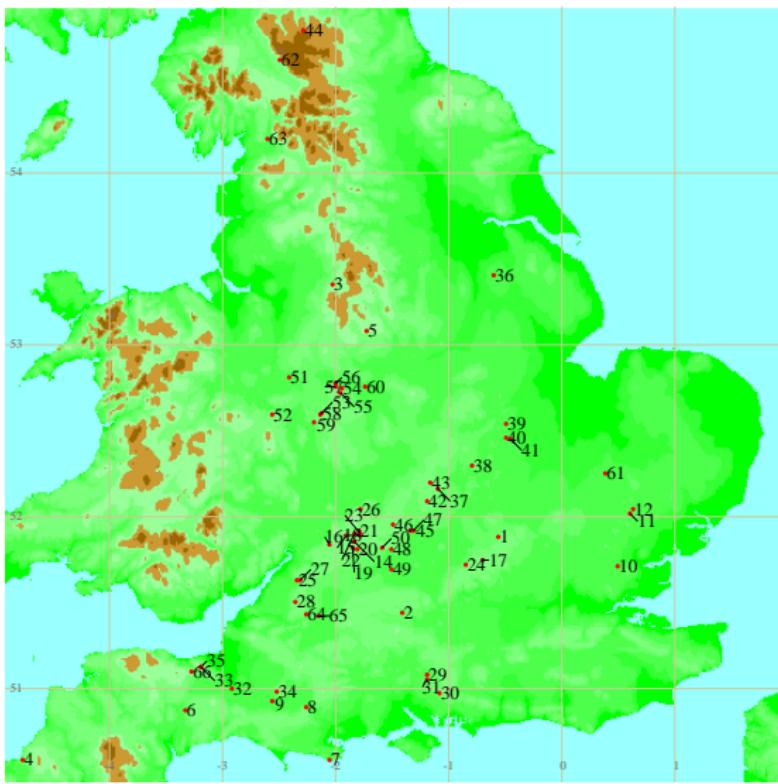
# seven

- ▶ 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)*

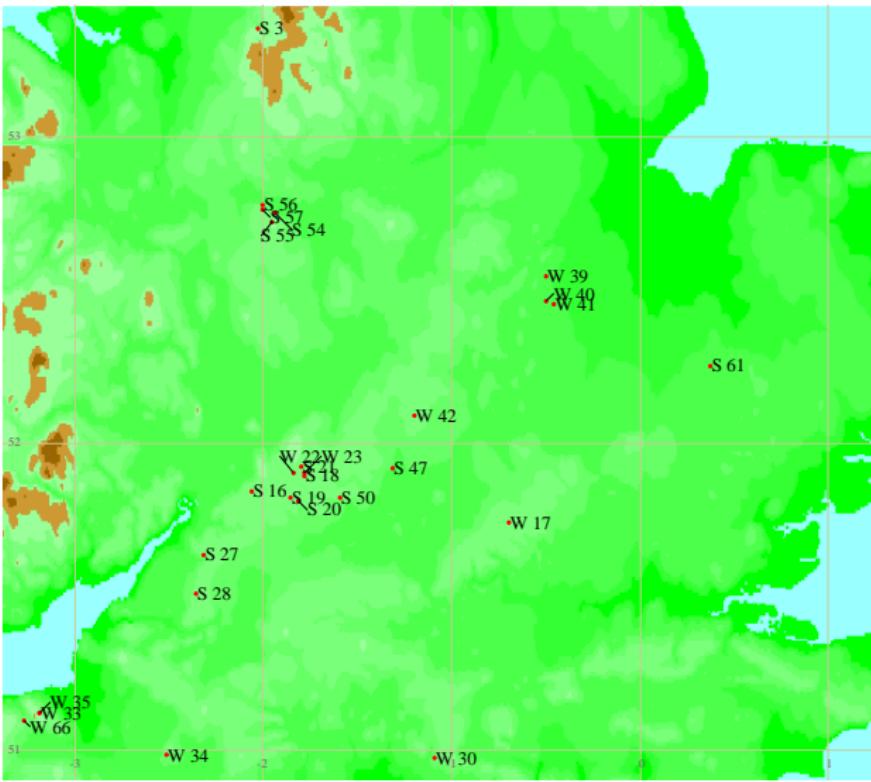
# well, spring

- 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), wle, 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 – Chelworth, Suffolk

**P**Alius totius coisci fabjace condonit supjina infimiaque mijo ineffabilique opidme collocans hominibz tancundm  
 quodijpojuni plasmatum machia dico adiui similitudinibz in pslitum piamine cunctaqe in infimis creauit uno phando  
 causa decepto ueroaque pncipibz pavidisiac locundato amenitate cum sua comite luculentissime confertur Quipdo  
 lej demonico instictus opijamme sibi ac postepus in hio ejumposo dictus exculo monitem pmejuie perpetuam  
 Quam obfus ego EADGAR totius hittanniae gubernatori repecto uni in treplone cuiusabulum ejus a stipulacione ppcet  
 et fefled quondam cellijne particulam vir uidelicet mansas libeualitep matrum qubuo possessionibz illo mloco ubi  
 aqunucolis uulgaris. CLOLES PYRÆ pnciatum est cum omnibus adeutibz ceppam pte pncipibz pnciatas uidelicet campis  
 pascue silvis. et oso eue uita ceppum hejedi cui uoluerit depelinquat. Sit autem pnciatu pnci omni thijene sequitur  
 neq; libeupum ratus decepis pata uidelicet expeditione pontis incisue pncipulatione. Siquis ut plo hanc miam donationibz  
 maluio quam constiutus epans pppue uoluerit. sit ipse sequentus a consocio sed diuilex. ne non et a communione omnium  
 fidelium miseri pnciatu hic ante obtu sui pnci pncipuerit quos coniua mjuum deliquid decipiat. His metis jnpho e gnatupi.  
**D**icitur nam saluus genitio et copleps pypde. Qd capro. plaus. opijin bujumis hic cynd et manan meate forme suam plaus pale hypise. pata beamus bujumis hic  
 cynd epe omnianian meate. Toma pnciatu hanc plaus higof hic cynd transente forme spuopis. Hanc cynd enjor bujumis hescce et uale remane pncipuopis plaus  
 pncipuopis hanc cynd et pncipuopis. Tad plo. forme pncipuopis plaus higof hescce pncipuopis hanc cynd et pncipuopis. Tad pncipuopis hanc enjor  
 hanc pncipuopis plaus meancellan. Hanc cynd et pncipuopis. Tad pncipuopis. meancella uocat et gedre forme pncipuopis. Tad pncipuopis hanc cynd epe mon capro.  
 Anno dominicae incarnationis dcc cclxi. equita est herc capta his teſebus conſumentibus quecumque nomena notantur.

|                |       |          |             |                 |     |                  |   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------|-----------------|-----|------------------|---|
| + fgo adagian  | ne    | antholom | concessi    | + fgo alhelold  | abb | + fgo alfgan     | m |
| + fgo dunstan  | apchi | eps      | cognobona   | + fgo alfhene   | dux | + fgo alffine    | m |
| + fgo osceol   | apchi | eps      | confimani   | + fgo alpheash  | dux | + fgo brytferend | m |
| + fgo osulf    |       | eps      | consolidari | + fgo alfelstan | dux | + fgo pulphelm   | m |
| + fgo brynhelm |       | eps      | consensi    | + fgo alhelold  | dux | + fgo alffine    | m |

## Early English place-names

- ▶ *Seofenwyllas* (Cold Aston, Gloucestershire), in a charter of Æthelbald of 737x740 (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 bry*, 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
- ▶ *Seuwellledale* c.1160, Derbyshire
- ▶ Seawell, Northants *Sewewell* 12th
- ▶ Sowell, Devon *Souewella* 1223
- ▶ Sinwell, Gloucestershire *Suuen well'* 1248
- ▶ Silverlake, Dorset *Sewelake* 1454

# Cornish

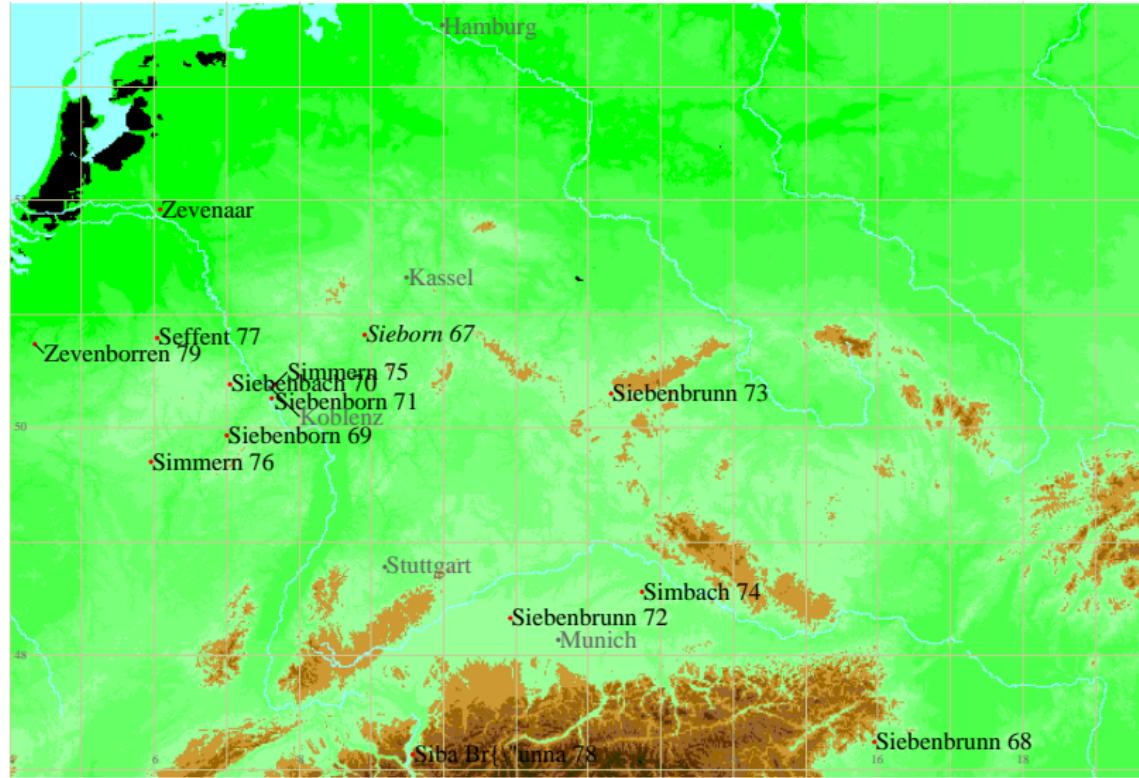
- ▶ Suffenton, Cornwall *Serfenton* c.1190, *Setfonten* 1284
- ▶ < Middle Cornish **seyth+fenten**
- ▶ *G. de septem fontibus* 1298

# 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

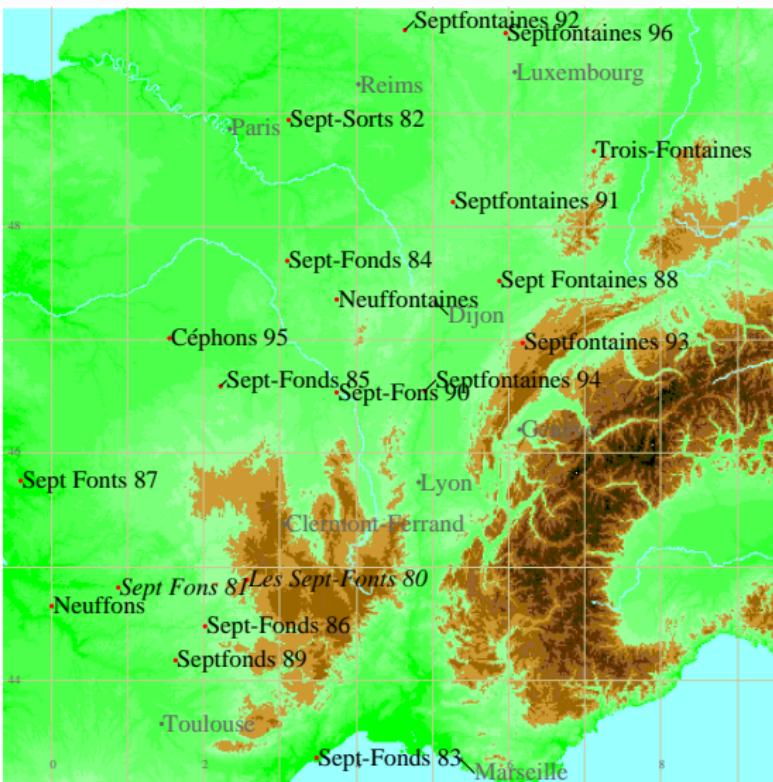


# Seffent near Aachen

- ▶ 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-Noviand *Septem fontibus* 1157
- ▶ Simmern, Westerwald *Syfenburne* 1216
- ▶ Siba Brünna, Triesenberg, Liechtenstein
- ▶ Zevenborren, Sint-Genesius-Rode, Belgium

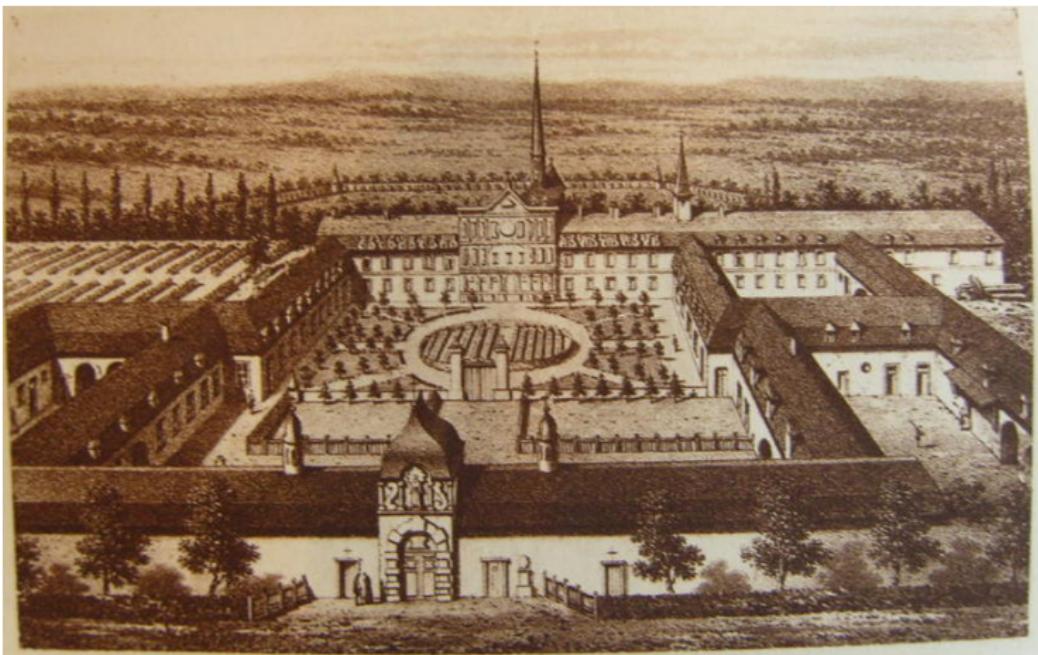


## Luxembourg & France — a sample

- ▶ 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
- ▶ Céphons, dépt. Indre. *Septfonz* 1250. Near Levroux
- ▶ Septfontaines (Simmern, Sieweburen), Luxembourg. *de vii fontibus* 12th; *Siebenborn* 1396
- ▶ Septfontaines, Blancheville, Haute-Marne *Septem Fontes* 1134
- ▶ Cerfontaine, Surfantine, Sirfontaines ??

(Spain: Siete Aguas. Italy: Settefontane, Settefonti, Siètfontànes etc.)

# Sept-Fons



# Heptapegon (Tabgha) on the Sea of Galilee

- (Hepta Phreata, 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 dominus 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

# Masani

- 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):

*parabo tibi arbores duodecim aliis et aliis fructibus et septem fontes fluentes lac et mel*

French recension replaces *septem* by *totidem*

- Book of Zechariah: “seven streams” > “seven eyes”

## Suppression of well-worship

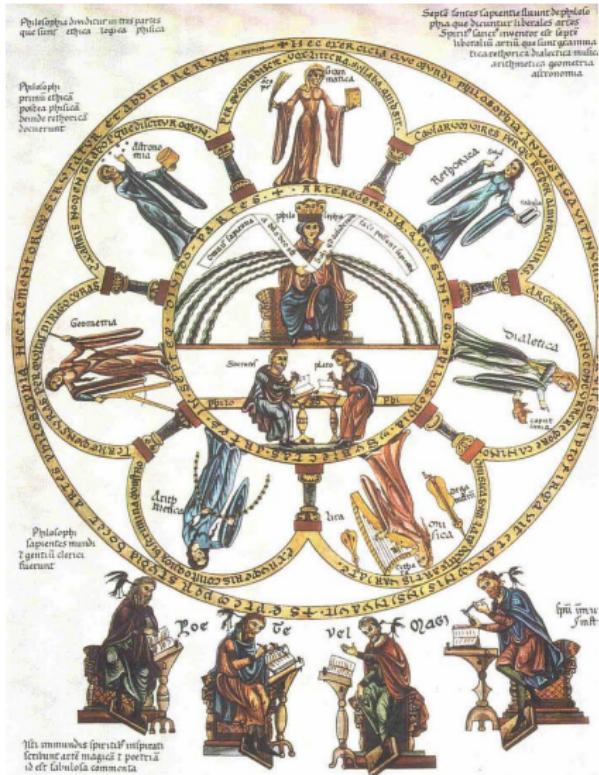
*Non licet compensus in domibus propriis nec pervaigilius in festivitates sanctorum facere nec inter sentius aut ad arbores sacrivos vel ad fontes vota dissolvere, nisi, quicumque votum habuerit, in ecclesia vigilet et matricole ipsum votum aut, pauperibus reddat nec sculptilia aut pede aut hominem ligneo 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 sapientæ fluunt de philosophia quae dicuntur liberales artes*
- ▶ Lorens, *Somme le roi* (1279): *la fontaine de grace . . . ceste fontaine se devise on VII ruiselz 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 ruissiaus 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): *Pis welle is departed in seuene stremes, þat ben þe seuen ȝiftes 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



## Sanskrit — Rigveda

- ▶ Verses 2.12.3 and 2.12.12 mention “seven streams” four times; e.g. *yó hatvāḥim árināt saptá síndhūn yó gā udājad apadhā valásya* ‘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 *Sárasvatī* river is described as *saptáthī síndhūmātā* ‘seventh, mother of streams’