

Some Short Legends on the City of Is

The City of Is

The sailors of Douarnenez were fishing one night in the bay, with their ships at anchor.

Having finished fishing, they wanted to lift the anchor, but none of their combined efforts could bring it back to them. It had hitched on somewhere. To detach it, one of them, a bold diver, swam down alongside the chain.

When he climbed back onto the boat, he said to his comrades:

“Guess what the anchor was stuck on?”

“Well, of course! On some rock.”

“No. On the bars of a window.”

The other fishermen believed that he had gone insane.

“Yes,” he continued, “and the window was the window of a church. It was illuminated. The light that came from it shone lit up the deep sea in the distance. I looked into the stained-glass window. There was a crowd inside the church. A lot of men and women in rich costumes. A priest was standing at the altar. I heard him ask a choir boy to respond to the Mass.”

“That isn’t possible!” exclaimed the fishermen.

“I swear it on my soul!”

He agreed to go tell the story to the rector.

They went, indeed.

The rector said to the sailor who had dove:

“You have seen the cathedral of Is. If you had volunteered to the priest to respond to the Mass, the entire city of Is would have risen out of the sea and France would have a new capital.”

(Told by Prosper Pierre – Douarnenez, 1887.)

The Belltowers of Is

The city of Is stretches from Douarnenez to Pont-Blanc. The Sept-Iles are its ruins. The most beautiful church of the city rose in the place where the reefs of Triagoz are today. That is why people still call them the Trew-gér¹.

In the rocks of Saint-Gildas, when the nights are clear and calm, you can hear a siren singing, and that siren is Ahès, the daughter of its king, Grallon.

Other times, the bells also ring loudly. It is impossible to hear a chime more melodious. It is the chime of the bells of Is.

(Anonymous.)

Its Inhabitants

One of the quarters of the city is named Lexobie. There are a hundred cathedrals in Is, and, in each of them, a bishop performs the rites.

When the city was swallowed by the ocean, each inhabitant kept the attitude that he had and continued to do what he had been doing at the moment of the catastrophe. The old men who were leaving continue leaving. The cloth merchants continue selling the same piece of fabric to the same buyers. And that will continue until the city rises again and its inhabitants are saved.

(Anonymous.)

The Gardens of Ker-Is

The owner of a boat and his servant boy both went out to fish. Halfway from the coast to the Sept-Iles, they dropped the anchor. It was so hot out that, after an hour, the owner of the boat fell asleep.

That was at the moment of the ebb tide.

The sea lowered so much that the ship ended up on dry land.

Great was the boy's surprise to see all around him not seaweed, but a field of little peas. He let the ship's owner sleep, jumped out onto the earth, and began to gather as many green pods as he could. He filled up the boat with them.

When the ship's owner woke up, the sea had risen. He was completely stunned to see the ship filled with pea pods and the boy, who was feasting on them.

"What does all this mean?" he asked while rubbing his eyes, persuaded that he was seeing things.

The child told him everything.

¹ The fisherman of Pont-Blanc are die-hard etymologists. They break up *Trewgér* or *Treogér*, the Breton name for the Triagoz, into *Traou-Ker*, literally *the base of the city*.

The owner of the ship then understood that they had anchored on the outskirts of Ker-Is, the place where the farmers of the great city once cultivated their crops.

(Told by Jeanne-Marie Bénard – Port-Blanc.)

The City of Is (2)

My mother saw the city of Is rise from the water. It consisted of nothing but châteaux and turrets. Their façades were opened up by thousands of windows. The roofs sparkled and were clear, as though they were made of crystal. She distinctly heard the ringing of bells in the churches and the murmur of the crowd in the street.

(Told by Jeanne-Marie Bénard – Port-Blanc.)

The City of Is (3)

At Lomikel (Saint-Michel-en-Grève), on the days of the low tide, when the sea descends very low in the distance, you can see rising over the sand, the “red cross” that topped the highest bell tower of the city of Is.

(Told by Marguerite Philippe – Pluzunet.)

Its Resurrection

When the day of resurrection has come for Ker-Is, the first who sees the cross of the church or who hears the sound of its bells will become king of the city and all of its territory.

(Anonymous.)

The Merchants of Ker-Is

A woman of Pleumeur-Bodou, having descended from the shore to fetch seawater to cook a meal, suddenly saw an enormous portal emerge in front of her.

She went inside and found herself in a splendid city. The streets were lined with stores that were lit up. Their storefronts flaunted magnificent fabrics. Her eyes were shining as she walked along, her mouth open with admiration, in the midst of all this wealth.

The merchants were standing on their doorsteps.

As she passed by them, they cried out to her:

“Buy something from us! Buy something from us!”

And she was astonished, flustered.

In the end, she responded to one of them:

“How do you want me to buy whatever you have? I don’t even have one *liard* in my pocket.”

“Well! That’s a pity,” said the merchant. “By taking even one *sou* of merchandise, you would have saved us all.”

He had hardly spoken those words when the entire city disappeared.

The woman found herself alone again on the shore. She was so moved by her adventure that she fainted. The police officers who make their way around transported her to her home. Fifteen days later, she died.

(Told by Lise Bellec – Port-Blanc.)

The Old Woman of Ker-Is

Two young men from Bugélès went at night to cut the seaweed at Gueltraz, which is severely prohibited, as everyone knows. They were all busy with their work, when an old, very old woman came up to them. She bent under the weight of dead wood.

“Young men,” she said in a pleading voice, “if you would be so kind as to carry this load to my house. It isn’t far, and you will do a great service to a poor woman.”

“Oh well!” replied one of them. “We have better things to do.”

“Not to mention,” added the other, “that you would be capable of denouncing us to the police.”

“Damn you!” the old woman then exclaimed. “If you had replied, ‘yes,’ you would have revived the city of Is.”

And, upon saying these words, she disappeared.

(Told by Françoise Thomas – Penvénan, 1886.)

The Rock that Opens Up Every Seven Years

The mountain of Roc’h-Karlès, between Saint-Michel-en-Grève and Saint-Efflam, serves as the grave of a magnificent city.

Every seven years, on Christmas night, the mountain opens slightly, and, through the crack, you can catch a glimpse of the splendid streets of the dead city.

The city would revive itself if someone were daring enough to adventure into the depths of the mountain at the first sounding of midnight, and agile enough to have gotten out at the moment when the bells sounded the twelfth time.

(*Anonymous.*)

Anatole Le Braz. *La légende de la mort chez les Bretons armoricains* t. II. Paris:
Honoré Champion, 1902.
Translated by Michelle Collins.