

# The Legend of the City of Ys

as interpreted by Chris Gonnerman

based in part on [http://www.pvf.dircon.co.uk/BCH-5B\(Legends\).html](http://www.pvf.dircon.co.uk/BCH-5B(Legends).html)  
as well as other legendary sources

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD, Gradlon Mawr (Gradlon the Great), king of Cornouaille in Southern Brittany, had a marvelous capital city built. He called this city Ys. Because it was built below sea level, Ys was protected by great sea-walls. There was a lockgate to the port, and Gradlon alone would decide when it was to open or close for the fishermen.

In his youth, when he was a pagan, Gradlon is said to have fallen deeply in love with a beautiful half-woman/half-fairy. Unfortunately however, he later offended this mysterious creature by converting to Christianity and seeking the counsel of St. Gwenole. The fairy fled from Gradlon across a torrential river, warning him not to follow. The brave Breton, however, plunged headlong into the swirling waters after her. The fairy was forced to save his life, but spurned him nevertheless and hated him all the more for having made her admit that she loved him still.

From their union came a daughter, Dahut, who Gradlon claimed and raised. Dahut was deeply attached to the ancient Celtic gods, and she accused Corentin, the bishop of Quimper, of having made the town a sad and boring place. She dreamed of a city where only riches, freedom and the joy of living would reign. She gave a dragon to the townspeople, which captured all the merchant ships at sea. Thus did Ys become the richest and most powerful city in Brittany.

The King's first fairy-love returned, in later years, to possess the mind of Gradlon's daughter, Dahut, who thence became the most wicked of Breton women. She built a castle over the River Argent in the

Huelgoat Forest, to which a different suitor was invited every night. Each was given a black mask to wear so he could not look upon Dahut's face. Then the revelries began. But the mask was enchanted and at dawn it turned into metal claws, killing the lovers, whose bodies were then thrown from the top of a cliff into the ocean.

One fine day a prince, dressed all in red, arrived in the city. Dahut immediately fell in love with him. Now, it was really the Devil sent by God to punish the wicked town. He told her to steal the key to the lockgates from her father while he was asleep. So she did, and gave it to him. The prince opened the lockgates and the ocean in all its fury rushed into the town, drowning the horrified cries of its inhabitants. The great city had gone to the seabed instantly.

Only the good king Gradlon succeeded in escaping. On his white horse he waded painfully through the waves, weighed down by none other than his daughter. Struck by St. Guérolé, he was forced to abandon his daughter but he managed to reach the shore.

In the rushing waters of the ocean Dahud became a mermaid - Marie-Morgane - and since then she sings with a beautiful voice to attract fishermen, whom she kills. Dahut's soul will be saved only when a mass can be celebrated in the church of the submerged town of Ys.

To this very day, when it is calm, the fishermen of Douarnenez often hear the bells ringing under the sea. They say that one day Ys will be reborn finer than ever, because it was only flooded.

It is a common saying that Paris - "par Ys" -

is called after this mythical submerged city.