

Great Pike Stories



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THE MEDLAR PRESS
ELLESMERE
2003



XXVII MYTHS AND LEGENDS

THE PIKE is an important mythical fish in Germany and these items, sent by Henning Stilke, who, himself is writing a book (in German) about pike stories from that part of the world, are an example of the place they hold in the angler's imagination.

THE SUNKEN CASTLE

Legend has it that deep beneath the waters of the lake of Stintenburg, in north-east Germany, there lies an old castle. The place is now commonly called *Borgstedenort* - 'place of the castle'. People say the submerged castle is cursed, and fishermen often observe, around midnight, a strange gleam of light coming up from the depths of the lake. This, they say, is the light from the many windows of the sunken castle.

Within the lake, so the legend goes, lives an ancient pike, his head grown over with moss, and in his mouth a key. The key is the key to the castle, and if any fisherman with the name Bulow catches the pike and takes the key, then the castle will rise out of the depths, the fisherman will be able to open the doors and enter all the rooms. Everything that he finds therein will become his.

(Bulow is not an uncommon name in north-west Germany, but it is the name of a big noble family, and perhaps the story implies that the fish can only be caught by a noble man. We can only guess!)

THE CREATION OF THE PIKE

Myths and legends abound about the pike, and this folk tale from the Syrjanen - a tribe of eastern Finland - show just how deeply they have been embedded in some cultures.

The story goes that the Devil created the pike. And he went to God and said, "Today I created the pike."

God responds, "I have also created the pike."

"But how will we tell them apart, yours and mine?" says the Devil.

"That's easy," said God, "Mine have a sign. A cross in their head." [ie, a cruciform bone].

"Mine don't have a cross," said the Devil.

"Let's go to the riverbank and see," responded God.

So, they went to the bank of the river and looked into the water.

The Devil said to God, "You call your pikes, first."
God called his pikes. The pikes came to him.

Then the Devil called his pikes, but not one came to him. "I have lost my pikes," he said. Then he examines all of God's pikes, and sure enough they all have a cross in the head. "Those don't belong to me," he said.

Then they went home.

With thanks to Henning Stilke, who found the story re-told in Volksdichtung der Komi (Syrjanen) by D.R. Fokos-Fuchs, Budapest, 1951.