

## THE SWORD IN THE STONE: THE BORDER BETWEEN FANTASY AND REALITY

### LA SPADA NELLA ROCCIA: IL CONFINE TRA FANTASIA E REALTÀ

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**Abstract:** The article examines the topic of stuck swords divided into three groups - legendary, historical artifacts and from archaeological research. The legendary and historical swords are the Sword in the Stone of King Arthur, the Gram sword of Sigurd, the Durendal of Roland, the sword of Galgano Guidotti, and the swords found during archaeological excavations from Salme and Köping. The article attempts to examine their history and symbolic significance. Comparing the legends' stories allows us to examine the swords' similarities and differences, which helps us in their analysis.

**Key words:** The sword in the stone, symbolism, archeology, warrior, legends.

**Astratto:** L'articolo esamina il tema delle spade conficcate divise in tre gruppi: leggendarie, manufatti storici e spade provenienti da ricerche archeologiche. Le spade leggendarie e storiche discusse includono la Spada nella Roccia di Re Artù, la spada Gram di Sigurd, la spada Durendal di Rolando e la spada di Galgano Guidotti, nonché spade rinvenute in scavi archeologici a Salme e Köping. L'articolo si propone di esplorare la loro storia e il loro significato simbolico. Una comparazione tra le loro storie leggendarie ci consente di identificare somiglianze e differenze tra queste spade, facilitando la loro analisi.

**Parole chiave:** La spada nella roccia, simbolismo, archeologia, guerriero, leggende.

### Introduction

Everyone knows about the sword in the stone and the legend of King Arthur, but few realize it is not the only Middle Ages legend featuring symbolic swords. Even fewer are aware that some of these swords have actually been found, still stuck in the ground. The symbolism of the sword in the Middle Ages is profound, deeply connected to rulers and their regalia, the

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aristocracy and knighthood, and even religion and the church. In both pagan and Christian beliefs, the sword symbolizes fairness and justice, supremacy, strength, masculinity, and even serves as a phallic symbol. A sword depicted with the blade at the top is a gesture in memory of those fallen in battle, while a blade at the bottom signifies justice.

The sword appeared as early as the Bronze Age, and since then it has gathered in itself a mystery that no other weapon possesses. From the Late Latin Age (5th - 1st century BC), the heroic period of migrations until the Late Middle Ages, the sword was often praised by bards, skalds, poets, chroniclers and classical historians. The majority of these reports are of a legendary and mythical nature, which does not define them as solid and reliable information, but every legend is formed around some facts. The beliefs of the people in these legends shape the faith, and they form the deeds of the man.

From the earliest times, there have been legends associated with the power of the sword. The legends of Theseus, Arthur, Beowulf and Sigurd present swords of unimaginable power and abilities. Theseus' sword and Arthur's sword bear very similar markings and symbolism. Theseus must find his father's sword, hidden under a huge rock, and only by discovering it can he gain kingship. In the story of *The Sword in the Stone*, Arthur pulls the sword out of the stone. It should be noted that only the real King of England can take it out and sit on the throne. This is just one example of how the sword is defined as a symbol of royal authority. On the other hand, the sword is also a kind of treasure deposited for the one, who is worthy to retrieve it. The deposition of swords and weapons taken from defeated enemies was characteristic of the Celts during the Migration period. They are buried and hidden mostly in swamps, marshes and pools, being protected by curses and in some cases, we know from legends by a guardian. The largest number of such deposits were discovered in Denmark.

Several legendary thrust swords are known from the European Middle Ages and Gram is one of them. The stuck sword carries a strong symbolic meaning, which is important for understanding the culture and history of the peoples of the Middle Ages.

### **Gram**

This is one of the most famous swords in Scandinavian mythology, whose name (Gramr) means Wrath in Old Norse (Orchard, 1997, pp. 59-60). In some places, Gram is known by another name - Balmung or Nothung. Such an example is the *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1200), where the sword bears the name Balmung. The sword also appears in the *Völsunga saga* (c.

13th century), the *Þiðrekssaga* (13th century), and the *Reginismol* of the Old Edda (or *Codex Regius*, c. 1270). The earliest texts of the above sagas date from the 13th century and generally, they tell different stories containing the story of Sigmund and Sigurd and their sword Gram. These poems' stories refer to the early Middle Ages, with the events taking place at the end of the Burgundian kingdom (Kennedy, 1994, pp. 285-303; Shumway, 1909, pp. xi-xl; Bellows, 1923, p. 270).

The identification of Sigurd and Sigmund with historical figures of the Early Middle Ages is extremely difficult. Among the most supported theories is that Sigurd descended from the Merovingian dynasty. This is due to the several kings of the Merovingian dynasty beginning with the prefix Sigi- and specifically the assassination of King Sigibert I (561-575). He was married to Brunhilda, daughter of the Visigothic king Athanagild and Goiswintha. The image of Sigurd was attached to the person of Sigibert I, a theory being first published in 1613 (Lienert, 2015, p. 30; Gillespie, 1973, pp. 122-123; Fichtner, 2004, p. 327.). Sigibert was killed by his half-brother Chilperic I at the instigation of his wife Galswintha. However, these parallels are not exactly accepted by all scholars (Müller, 2009, pp. 22; Byock, 1990, p. 25.). Such an example is found in the article by Jens Haustein, where it is said that although the story of Sigurd seems to be related to the Merovingians, no convincing facts are found to point us to a specific person or an event (Haustein, 2005, pp. 380-381). Another theory proposes that Sigurd is an amalgam of several historical figures, first proposed by Franz-Joseph Mone in 1830. Modern researchers accept that it is more likely that Sigurd is a hero of legends only (Millet, 2008, pp. 165 - 166.).

Gram originally belonged to Sigurd's father, Siegmund. The sword is described in several sagas. In the *Völsunga Saga* in chapter 23 we read:

„all decked with gold and gleaming bright ... And an indication of his height is that when he belted on the sword Gram-itwas over five feet long-and walked through a field of full grown rye, the scabbard-chape brushed the top of the standing grain. And his size was outdone by his strength. (Finch, 1965, p. 41) “

From the description, it is clear that the sword's hilt was made of or covered with gold. More interesting than the text is the section about the size of seven *pedi*, which is estimated to be approximately 1.5 m. Such a size for a sword is greatly exaggerated for the early medieval

period, and no example of such dimensions has been found for the period to date. The standard length for the period is approx. 90 cm., which is approx. 2/3 the size of Gram. Swords of similar dimensions are not found in the early Middle Ages. The next part of the text says that „ the scabbard-chape brushed the top of the standing grain.“. This indicates that the sword was carried on the back rather than on the waist, which is normal for these sizes. In the "Nibelungenlied" the sword, known here as Balmung, is described in more detail in one place, it says: "...good broad sword, that was so sharp that it never failed when' was wielded 'gainst a helmet; its edge was good. (Shumway, 1909, p. 129)". The description is really short, but it's the only one that gives us any information about the weapon. Returning to the Völsung saga, at the beginning of the saga, chapter 3 we learn more details about the sword's origin, how it got into the tree and how it came into Siegmund's possession. In the hall of Völsung, the king of Hunaland gathered for a feast because of the wedding of the daughter of King Signý to the king of Gautland Siggeir. During the celebration, an unknown man (the god Odin) appeared „he had on a mottled cape, he was bare-footed and had bound his linen breeches round the leg. ... he was very grey, venerable and had but one eye.“ ( Finch, 1965, p. 4.). As he unsheathes the sword, he thrusts it by the hilt into the trunk of the Barnstock apple tree and says (Chapter 3): „The man to pull out this sword from the trunk shall receive it from me as a gift, and he will find out for himself that he never bore in hand a better sword than this.“ ( Finch, 1965, p. 5.). After he left, many tried to pull him out of the tree, but none succeeded except the king's son, Sigmund (Ellis-Davidson, 1964, p. 25).

After the sword was retrieved by Siegmund (Odin's great-, great-grandson according to the Völsung saga) (Bellows, 1923, p. 218), Gram was broken several times and rebuilt. It was forged anew by Regin and Sigmund's son, Sigurd, who, to test it, cut in two the anvil on which he had forged it anew (Bellows, 1923, p. 365.). With the same sword, Sigurd kills the dragon Fafnir in the Nibelungenlied and his stepfather Regin (Fafnir's brother) (Haimerl, 1993, pp. 81-104.). Beowulf also mentions the slaying of the dragon, but there Sigurd goes by the name Sigemund. The moment Sigemund kills the dragon, he drives the sword so hard into it that "the lordly steel stuck fast in the rock" (884-888). Another moment in which the sword confirms its power that it even sticks in the rock (Garmonsway, Simpson, Ellis-Davidson, 1968, p. 25).

Besides the manuscripts related to the saga, there are other written records about Sigurd and the sword Gram. These are about ten stone images or runestones with inscriptions

telling the story of Sigurd. They are from an intermediate/transitional period from the oral legend tradition of the Early Middle Ages to the Classical Middle Ages written tradition of sagas. Two of the stones also depict the sword Gram thrust by Sigurd into the dragon Fafnir. One graphite is located in Ramsund, Eskilstuna Municipality, Södermanland, Sweden and dates to the 11th-century CE.

The story of Sigurd was quite popular from the end of the 11th to the beginning of the 12th century, as can be seen from the runestones from Scandinavia and from the saga manuscripts we know from the 13th century onwards. Symbolism is very prominent in Norse mythology and is an important aspect of understanding it. The Sword in the Barnstock Apple Tree is just such an example. The sword and the tree have deep symbolic meanings. The sword is a symbol of higher power, masculinity, strength, one of the royal insignia, justice, etc. The tree on the other hand symbolizes kinship and the right of inheritance. The apple tree is associated with the inexhaustible vitality of the joy of life, love and fertility. In Norse mythology, a parallel can be drawn with the world tree Yggdrasil, a gigantic ash tree that connects the underworld, the world of men, and the world of the gods. With his action, Odin poses a challenge, driving the sword into the Barnstock tree, which only Siegmund succeeds in fulfilling. In this case, the stuck sword symbolizes the right of inheritance. In Scandinavia and Germany, there is a tradition where the main pillars of a hall are often engraved, and the seats of important guests and the chief's family are placed there. These pillars hold symbolic meaning as guardians of the family house, believed to bring good luck. This tradition underscores the deep connection between physical structures, familial heritage, and cultural identity in these regions. The Volsung house, built around an apple tree, extends this symbolism further. The tree represents lineage, prosperity, and continuity. In this specific case, the apple tree not only serves as the central structure around which the house is built but also symbolizes the family's lineage and connection to their ancestral roots. The tree's presence in the hall enhances its role as a protective and fortunate symbol for the household, linking the family's present to its storied past (Ellis-Davidson, 1969, pp. 71-72).

If we go back to the beginning of the poem about Völsung, we will see that Sigmund is Odin's grandson, and this explains to some extent why exactly he managed to pull the sword from the tree. On the other hand, through this act, he was also installed as his father's successor by Odin. It is clear from the saga that he is not the eldest of Völsung's children. He has ten sons

and one daughter, his daughter Signy and Sigmund being twins, and drawing the sword marks him as the most worthy of the rest. The plot of the sword being removed from the tree is supposed to have been borrowed from the authors of the Arthurian literary series, transformed as the sword into the stone. This is not unusual, given the popularity of the story of Sigmund and Sigurd during the Middle Ages in northern Europe.

The study of Gram, like other legendary swords, highlights the rich tapestry of medieval lore and the blend of myth and history. The sword's multiple appearances across different sagas underscore its significance in Norse culture. Beyond its physical attributes, Gram is intertwined with themes of heroism, inheritance, and divine intervention. These stories reflect the values and beliefs of the societies that created and told them. They offer a window into the ways people of the Middle Ages understood their world and their place within it.

### **Durendal**

The Durendal is one of the most famous swords of the Early Middle Ages. According to local folklore, he is now buried in a sheer cliff above the Chapel of Mary, Rocamadour, France. Originally owned by Charlemagne, as we learn from the fragments of the 12th century *chanson de geste* *Mainet*, where Charlemagne kills Braimant and takes his sword (Kibler, 1995, pp. 964-965.). This story is better known than some other texts and countries, such as the Franco-Italian *Karleto*. According to another 12th-century poem, before Durendal became Roland's possession, it was owned by the Saracen Aumon son of King Agolant (a fictional character, with no analogous historical figure), according to the *Aspremont* poem. In the poem, Roland takes the horse Morel without permission and defeats Aumon with just one stick. Thus the sword Durendal and the horse *Veillantif* became Roland's possession (Newth, 1989, pp. 146-147.). The Italian prose *Aspremonte* by Andre da Barberino written in the late 14th early 15th century mentions that the young Carlo (Charlemagne) acquired *Durindarda* (Durendal) after killing *Bramante* in Spain.

The sword Durendal is often mentioned in the *Song of Roland*. In the poem, Roland receives the sword from Charlemagne, who in turn receives it from an Angel sent by God. The sword is very well described in the poem:

CLXXII

„ Rollant hath struck the sardonix terrace;



The steel cries out, but broken is no ways.  
 So when he sees he never can it break  
 Within himself begins he to complain:  
 "Ah! Durendal, white art thou, clear of stain!  
 Beneath the sun reflecting back his rays!  
 In Moriane was Charles, in the vale,  
 When from heaven God by His angel bade  
 Him give thee to a count and captain;  
 Girt thee on me that noble King and great. ... (Moncrief, 2005, pp. 121-122)"

It continues further:

CLXXIII  
 „ Rollant his stroke on a dark stone repeats,  
 And more of it breaks off than I can speak.  
 The sword cries out, yet breaks not in the least,  
 Back from the blow into the air it leaps.  
 Destroy it can he not; which when he sees,  
 Within himself he makes a plaint most sweet.  
 "Ah! Durendal, most holy, fair indeed!  
 Relics enough thy golden hilt conceals:  
 Saint Peter's Tooth, the Blood of Saint Basile,  
 Some of the Hairs of my Lord, Saint Denise,  
 Some of the Robe, was worn by Saint Mary.  
 It is not right that pagans should thee seize,  
 For Christian men your use shall ever be. (Moncrief, 2005, pp. 123) "

Although we don't get information about how the bear ended up stuck in a rock above the town of Rocamadour, the poem gives us a lot of additional information about its origins and qualities. According to the poem, God sends an Angel to give the sword to Charlemagne, who must choose who to give it to. This part is very reminiscent of a scene from the poem *Helgakvíða* from the *Codex Regius* manuscript. In the poem, a valkyrie offers a sword to the hero Helgi, which is described as the best of all:

„8. I know swords lying            In Sigarsholm  
 Four less            Than fifty ;  
 One is                            The best of them all.  
 The banner of war-knittings            Covered with gold.  
 9. For him who gets it            A ring is in the guard,  
 Courage in the middle,            Terror in the point,  
 A blood-dyed serpent            Lies along the edge,  
 The serpent throws its tail            On the valhost.  
 (Du Chaillu, 1889, p. 84; Bellows, 1923, p 277.)"

Here we observe heredity from the pagan period, something not unusual for the Middle Ages. The same goes for the description of the sword. It is extremely strong and sharp with an impressive appearance. It is no longer decorated with pagan symbols and inscriptions but

houses Christian relics and relics of various saints. This gives the weapon supernatural abilities - cutting through rocks and riders along with their horses.

Most of the literature of the Carolingian cycles makes it clear that the sword was made by Wayland the Smith, who is often cited as the creator of many of the fine swords of the Early Middle Ages.

Local folklore claims that Durendal can still be found today, embedded in a sheer cliff above the Chapel of St. Virgin Mary in the town of Rocamadour, France. It is not known exactly when the sword fell on the sheer rock, but it is certain that it does not match the swords used in the time of Charlemagne. According to a legend from Rocamadour, Louis de Veyrières claimed that the real Durendal was deposited in the Chapel of Our Lady under the Rock, but was stolen by Henry son of King Henry II (1133-1189) in 1183 (De Veyrières, 1892, pp. 139 - 143.) and replaced by a replica . This is also confirmed by a quick analysis of the hilt of the sword embedded in the rock, which can definitely be placed in the period 1100 - 1300. The theft of the sword by Henry, called the Young King, was probably a quest for legitimacy as a king, as besides dying that year, he is at war with his father.

Regardless of whether it is the original sword, Durandal also carries profound symbolic meaning. From the "Song of Roland," it becomes evident that the focus has shifted from the old gods and religions to Christianity. In the poem, Durandal is depicted not merely as a weapon but also as a reliquary containing holy relics. This dual nature underscores its significance and provides insight into why the sword was kept in the chapel of the Virgin.

The decision to place Durandal in its current location, high on the rock and chained, reflects the local population's desire to prevent its theft. This placement serves as a powerful symbol, affirming that the true Durandal sword is indeed there. The sword's elevated position and the measures taken to secure it highlight its revered status and the importance of preserving such a potent symbol of faith and heritage.

In summary, the story of Durandal illustrates the evolution of symbolic weapons from pagan to Christian contexts, demonstrating how these artifacts transcend their original functions to become enduring symbols of cultural and religious identity.



### **The sword in the stone**

One of the most mystical elements of the legend of King Arthur is the sword in the stone. The earliest legends of Arthur and the sword come from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*. I should note here that most of the sources written about the Early Middle Ages and after the Roman period are scarce, not because of their small quantity, but because they are mostly legendary or religious in nature, and in them supernatural events are mixed with history. The case of Geoffrey and his story is no exception, although we know that he drew information from older books written in the Celtic language given to him by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford (Loomis, 1994, p. 59.). The events surrounding the legend of King Arthur refer to the very beginning of the Early Middle Ages, or specifically the beginning of the 6th century, when the British population fought against the Anglo-Saxon invasion.

Many books have been written about King Arthur covering every aspect of the story. Here attention will be paid to his swords. We get basic information about them from several places. One of the main sources is the poem *Merlin* by the knight-poet Robert de Boron. The poem is a reworking of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work on Merlin. The poem is part of a trilogy dedicated to the Holy Grail, written at the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century (Conlee, 1998, p. 15.). Another source is the *Prose Lancelot* written at the beginning of the 13th century. Specifically, we get information about the sword from the chapter *The Estoire de Merlin*, which is in two parts and recounts Merlin and Arthur's early adventures. From the middle of the 13th century, a prose copy of *Lancelot* appeared, revised and with new additions, called by scholars the *Post-Vulgate Cycle*. Last but not least, the collection *Le Morte d'Arthur*, compiled in the 1570s by Thomas Malory, (c. 1415-1471) and a collection of French and English Arthurian romances, some retold by Malory and others completely invented by him, such as *The Story of Sir Galahad*.

A different view of the appearance of the *Sword in the Stone* in literature is presented by Prof. Luigi Garlaschelli. He conjectures that this part of the story appears under the influence of the prevalent narrative of the miraculous sinking of the sword of St. Galgano of Tuscany into the stone, which will be made clear hereafter (see: Garlaschelli, 2006.). Of course the two stories are not very identical. In the Arthurian legend, he pulls the sword from the stone, and in some later legends there is also an anvil on the stone, and Galgano takes it away. The symbolism is also different, the sword in the stone symbolizes the right to rule over

England, it is a royal regalia, while the sword of Galgano symbolizes humility and holiness. The similarities are limited to being set in stone.

The sword in the stone appears in a number of the Arthurian novels, but the question of whether it is Excalibur or another sword is rather complicated. In Robert de Boron's *Merlin*, Arthur claims the throne after removing the sword from an anvil standing on a stone in the churchyard on Christmas Eve (Bryant, 2001, p. 107.), establishing him as the rightful king, the true heir of Uther Pendragon. Thomas Malory in *History of Sir Galahad* it says, "He that took this sword out of the stone and the anvil is a rightful kinsman king" It also says that the sword out of the stone is not Excalibur. He receives it only after breaking his first sword in the battle against King Pellinore, from the Lady of the Lake. The challenge of pulling the sword from the stone occurs again in the Prose *Merlin of the Lancelot* and the Holy Grail cycle and the Arthurian legends associated with Galahad.

The sword in the stone is strongly associated with the Christian faith, although historically King Arthur probably lived in the 5th-6th century. First of all, it should be noted that Arthur managed to draw the sword on Christmas Eve. Christmas holidays were used for a number of rituals in the medieval world such as baptisms and coronations - Charlemagne, William I, Stephen and the Scottish, etc. The moment when Arthur pulls the sword from the stone is symbolically linked to the Christian traditions of the medieval world.

The stone and the anvil also have their symbolic meaning. In an article by Caleb Howells, a parallel is drawn with the Stone of Scone. On this stone were crowned the Scottish kings until the 13th century, and later the English and British kings. Howells suggests that the legend of the sword in the stone comes from a coronation ritual that was used by medieval authors to create the plot of the sword in the stone. Another famous example that Howells mentions is the London Stone. He is famous for Jack Cade's rebellion of 1450 and his entry into London, where he goes to the London Stone, strikes it with his sword and declares himself the new master of the city (Howells, 2024). Although Howells provides some interesting parallels, they fail to provide a clear explanation as to why the sword was driven into a specific stone.

From the first two parts about Gram and Durandal, many interesting analogies can be drawn from those legends. Comparing the two stories of King Arthur and his father Uther Pendragon with that of Sigurd and his father Siegmund reveals several overlapping storylines. In both stories, we find a stuck sword that can only be pulled out by a single person, Arthur

and Sigurd grow up as orphans, the sword in the stone and Gram shatter in battle, Arthur and Sigurd slay a dragon, etc. It is possible that some of the authors of the Arthurian literature were inspired by the story of Sigurd and Siegmund, and vice versa.

From Durandal's account, we learn that the original sword was stolen from the chapel of St. Virgin in the town of Rocamadour, France by Henry in 1183. As it turned out, he was the son of Henry II, who was famous for his search for King Arthur's tomb and Excalibur. Gerald of Wales wrote about this in *Liber de Principis Instructione* and *Speculum Ecclesiae*, which describe the search and discovery of Arthur's tomb. According to the text, the tomb was discovered at Glastonbury, a place that existed in Arthur's time called the Isle of Avalon. Gerald tells us that in Old English it means - the island of the apple trees, because "truly this place abounds in apples." In even more ancient times, in British, it was called *Inis Gutrin*, which in latin *Insula Vitrea* means Island of Glass. The monks discovered the grave between two stone pyramids, at approx. 2 meters underground, as many of Henry II's sources assumed it would be there. Inside the tomb was a large stone cross, on which Gerald informs us was carved an inscription that read: "Here lies buried the famous King Arthur with Guinevere his second wife, in the Isle of Avalon." He also reported that a sword was found in the grave. Which he claims is Excalibur. The text mentions that the bones were of a taller person and reburied in a place not mentioned in the text (Sutton, 2001). This is all the information Gerald of Wales mentions about the discovery and burial of Arthur. The information we get is not confirmed by other written sources, but it is still interesting to note that King Henry II was interested in the story of King Arthur and collected information about him. For now, this part of the story of Arthur and the sword in the stone will remain a mystery.

### **The sword of St. Galgano**

Galgano Guidotti was the son of a minor nobleman, born in 1148 and died in 1181 at the age of Christ (33). The main information about the saint comes from the acts of the canonization process first published by Sigismondo Tizio in the 16th century in the second volume of *Historiae Senenses*. Hagiography about the saint began to be written as early as the 13th century. *Vita Sancti Galgani de Senis*, 14th century *Vita beati Galgani*, 14th century *Legenda sancti Galgani confessoris*, etc.

He is a knight of ill repute, seeking trouble and worldly pleasures. He decides to become a hermit after the Archangel Michael appears to him and shows him the right path. After announcing that he will become a hermit to his family, he sets off and on the way, the horse throws Galgano. Suddenly, as if by an invisible force, he was lifted from the ground and brought to the Monte Siepi hill. A voice told him to look towards the hill and Galgano saw a round temple with Jesus and Mary surrounded by his disciples. The voice again spoke to him to climb the hill, and as Galgano walked up the temple faded until it disappeared. When he ascended, the voice urged him to give up his previous way of life. Galgano remarked that it was easier said than done, just as it was easier to say that he could cut a rock with his sword. To prove it, he drew his sword and stuck it into the rocky ground. The sword sunk into the rock up to the hilt. Galgano understood the message and settled on this hill as a hermit (Moiraghi, 2003, pp. 193 – 205.).

The sword is of type XI, 1, G according to Oakeshott's typology and fully corresponds to the time when Galgano lived (Chodyński, 2014, p. 28.). Until recently, it was speculated that the sword was a modern forgery, but a 2001 study by Prof. Luigi Garlaschelli<sup>2</sup>, a renowned Italian chemist who exposed a number of "miracles", proved that the sword was real (Garlaschelli, 2006). Investigations are carried out with PV 9800 X-ray fluorescence spectrometer (Chodyński, 2014, p. 26.)<sup>3</sup>, Thermoluminescent method (TL - method) and ground radar scanning, which confirm that the sword is from the 12th - 13th century period. The radar scan reveals that the blade of the sword pierces the rock, and beneath it is a cavity measuring 2 by 1 meter. It is believed that the body of St. Galgano was buried in this cavity, for which there is no information as to where it is. There are two mummified hands from the saint's period in the chapel, and the head of Saint Galgano is preserved as a relic in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Siena (Chodyński, 2014, pp. 21 – 30; Hellqvist).

As with Durendal, so here the Christian religion is intertwined with the legends of Galgano's sword. Although here the sword has no supernatural abilities we see that it is part of such an event. Galgano's disbelief leads to the moment when the sword pierces the rock and changes everything. The stuck sword symbolizes the power of God and that nothing is impossible for Him, the humbleness and the holiness. This sign shows that no matter how

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<sup>2</sup> Sincere thanks to Prof. Garlaschelli for the materials he sent me from his research.

<sup>3</sup> Spectrometer data show Cu c. 80.4 ppm, Ni c. 70.5 ppm, Pb c. 39.2 ppm, Cd c. 0.104 ppm. Compared to other swords from the region from the 12th century, they show the same metal composition.

fallen a person is, physically and spiritually, he can change as long as he has the will and faith to do so.

### **Salme**

Two very interesting finds from Northern Europe - **Salme** in 2012 and **Köping** in 2022 - have been discovered by archaeological research, swords ritually driven into the ground. Research on the second shipwreck at Salme took place between 2010 and 2012 in three stages. The open burial has been dated to the pre-Viking era (ca. 650-750 AD). During the archaeological research, approx. 40 swords, 14 umbos for shields, arrows, knives, checkers, dice, and gifts for the buried 32 dead were discovered (Peets, Allmäe, Maldre, Saage, Tomek, Lõugas, 2013, pp. 1 - 18.). Three interesting artefacts were also discovered from the surveys. Two of the finds were discovered from the burial itself - one was a checkerboard and the other a riveted sword ring. The third find was found northwest of the ship - a sword stuck in the ground.

A large number of gaming pieces were found on board the ship, approx. 300 (Hall, 2016, pp. 439-455; Peets, Allmäe, Maldre, Saage, Tomek, Lõugas, 2013, p. 5.). They are hemispherical and made of whalebone or walrus tusk, some of the figures representing the king being larger and having a metal nail driven into the top. One in particular makes an impression on the rest, not because of the method or material of manufacture, but because of the place where it was found. During the explorations, a gaming piece was discovered in Skeleton XIV's mouth, with several more scattered around his head. The pool in the skeleton's mouth represents the figure of the king. It is thought to have been placed there ritually identifying the deceased, as the leader of a war band or as a captive king.

During the explorations, a ring-sword cast together with the pomelo of the sword was also discovered. They are made of gilded bronze, the pomelo not being whole. In the late period of use of ring-swords, they had already lost their original purpose of the second half of the 5th and 6th centuries, as a symbol of a loyal relationship between the ruler/ring-giver and the warrior. In the first half of the 8th century, they became the decoration of the swords of the rich military commanders and leaders (Vasilev, 2014, pp. 36.). The presence of a late-type riveted ring indicates that such a warlord was buried at Salme, and the symbolic placement of the king's figurine in the mouth of Skeleton XIV suggests that it was most likely him.

The impaled sword was found a few meters northwest of the ship. Its context has been disturbed by past excavation and it is uncertain whether this is its original position, although its blade is deeply embedded. One cannot help but consider the possibility that the sword was driven into the ground. Its proximity to the ship and the fact that it was underground until it was discovered suggests that it was driven into the ground before the ship was embanked and the mound formed. It is extremely rare to find a sword stuck in the ground in the springs, and in these cases, there is talk of a swearing ritual. In our cases, however, it is most likely part of a funeral or memorial ritual.

### **Köping**

During archaeological excavations at the Viby/Norrtuna cemetery outside Köping, archaeologists discovered two impaled swords. The necropolis consisted of about 100 burials, two of which were burial mounds. They date from the Late Iron Age, 600 – 1000 AD. The swords were found in two of the three new graves made around 800 AD and made of stone, on one of the mounds. According to the researchers, the three graves are 200-300 years newer than the mound. The swords were found embedded in the middle of the two graves. Necropolis researcher Anton Seiler notes that they were driven shallowly into the ground and that when the studies began, their handles protruded low from the ground (Pihl, 2022).

Extremely interesting and unusual burials. The place where the three deceased are buried is not accidental, most likely the burial mound belongs to one of their relatives. The placing of the swords in the middle of the two graves is also unusual. The way the swords were discovered also confirms the assumption that when the dead were buried, the swords were displayed above the ground. Why they were placed that way is hard to say. It may be a symbol of belonging to the military class or part of some ritual, about which we can only guess.

### **Instead of a conclusion**

The swordsmen gesture is an action that demonstrates that something is being stated, through some kind of ritual. From the presented examples of stuck swords, it is clear that this statement can be different and meaningful. Rituals are mainly related to swearing. It is either a declaration or a summons to a witness, but most often it is both, with the sword appearing as both a witness and a punisher. From the sources, we have very little information about rituals

related to swords. There is a single record of a ritual with a sword driven into the ground, upon which the newly arrived Saxons in Transylvania swore an oath. We also have some accounts of oaths on swords and more often mention of weapons in general. We find such an example in Ammianus Marcellinus, where he tells about the German tribe Quadi, in his *History*, the following: XVII, 12, 21 „Then, drawing their swords, which they venerate as gods, they swore that they would remain loyal. (Rolfe, 1935, p. 381.)“ In the Old Edda, the poem *Völundarkviða*, also mentions an oath of allegiance involving a sword:

„35. First shalt thou all | the oaths now swear,  
By the rail of ship, | and the rim of shield,  
By the shoulder of steed, | and the edge of sword,(Bellows, 1923. p. 266.)“

The weapon is one of the first cutting tools that man makes, not only for hunting but also protection. It is an object that accompanies a person throughout his life until he dies in the grave. For a warrior, it is his most valuable possession, often personified and turned into an object of worship. This is especially true when the weapon has been passed down through the generations or has been involved in important historical events or important battles.

The sword in the stone of King Arthur and the sword of Sigurd and Siegmund carry a similar symbolic meaning. This is also due to the many similarities in the storylines of the stories, the main point being the drawing of the sword, which represents the right of succession to the throne. The one who draws the sword is the only heir to the throne, marking royal status and right of inheritance.

From the story of King Arthur and his swords (The Sword in the Stone and Excalibur), it is known that he was a Christian and his country was too. Despite this fact, Arthurian literature shows many traces of the pagan period - wizards, the Lady of the Lake, dragons, Excalibur and his supernatural abilities, which are not associated with Christianity. However, an interweaving of paganism and Christianity is seen with the search for the Grail, chivalric ideology, etc.

Despite the assumption of a connection between the Sword in the Stone and the sword of St. Galgano, the similarity ends only with the fact that both swords are stuck in stone. Galgano's sword symbolizes humility, holiness and the power of God.

Roland's sword Durendal carries a different meaning, as it turns out the sword stuck in the rock is not the original, but a replica. In practice, we are not looking at one sword here, but two - Durendal and the sword over the chapel of the Virgin. A true Durendal is no ordinary

sword. It first appears supernaturally, brought by the Archangel Michael to Charlemagne, who gives it to Roland. The sword possessed supernatural abilities in its strength and power, with which it could cut down a man along with his horse. Moreover, he was not only a weapon of death and a scourge for infidels, but also a reliquary. This makes the sword most valuable of all to a Christian warrior fighting against infidels. Durendal is the best example to show us the association of religion with swords and warfare. The sword symbolizes the unbreakable faith and strength that a warrior must possess.

Durendal's replica stuck in the rock above the Chapel of the Virgin in the town of Rocamadour, France can be seen as a memorial meant to commemorate the theft of the original sword by Henry in 1183. The sword is of great importance in understanding the medieval warrior. He is not only his weapon but also a companion, a witness to his exploits and oaths, a priceless treasure with magical powers.

When we look Durandal, Galgano's sword, Excalibur, and Gram, they share common themes of divine favor and righteousness but embody unique aspects of their respective cultural contexts.

Durandal signifies invincibility and Christian relics, showcasing the transition from old religions to Christianity. In the "Song of Roland," Durandal is depicted not just as a weapon but also as a reliquary containing holy relics, emphasizing its role in Christian faith. This blending of martial prowess with sacred relics symbolizes the merging of warrior ethos with spiritual devotion, reflecting the shifting cultural and religious landscapes of the time.

Galgano's sword, known as the Sword in the Stone of St. Galgano, embodies personal transformation, humility, and divine power. The act of thrusting the sword into the stone by St. Galgano represents a profound renunciation of violence and a commitment to spiritual life. This symbolizes a transition from a warrior's life to one of faith and humility, highlighting a key cultural shift where personal transformation and divine humility became paramount virtues.

Excalibur, from Arthurian legend, represents the legitimacy of kingship and divine approval. Its removal from the stone signifies King Arthur's rightful ascension to the throne, symbolizing justice, nobility, and the unity of the kingdom under a righteous ruler. Excalibur's mystical origins and connection to the Lady of the Lake add layers of mythical and religious



symbolism, combining pagan and Christian elements. This underscores the importance of divine right and moral integrity in leadership.

Gram, the sword of Sigurd in Scandinavian mythology, symbolizes heroism, strength, and the divine right of succession. The sword's journey from Odin to Sigmund, and then to Sigurd, underscores its role as a symbol of divine favor and heroic destiny. Gram's legendary status in the sagas highlights the Norse belief in divine intervention and the qualities required for leadership and conquest.

These swords are more than mere weapons; they are potent symbols that convey deeper cultural and spiritual meanings. Durandal's combination of invincibility and sacred relics reflects the integration of martial and spiritual values during the Christianization of Europe. Galgano's sword symbolizes a moral and spiritual awakening, emphasizing personal transformation over martial prowess. Excalibur, with its dual pagan and Christian roots, underscores the legitimacy and divine approval of righteous rule. Gram embodies the Norse ideals of heroism and divine right, signifying the essential qualities of a leader.

Through their myths and legends, these swords illustrate how physical objects can transcend their practical purposes to become enduring symbols of cultural identity, moral values, and spiritual beliefs. They reveal the interplay between power, faith, and identity in their respective societies, and how these elements are interwoven in historical narratives.

The study of swords in general is of great importance for the understanding of the history, culture, and art of the peoples of the Middle Ages. Beyond their practical use, swords are woven deeply into the fabric of medieval life, serving as symbols of power, honor, and divine judgment. They illustrate the complex interplay between personal valor, political legitimacy, and religious faith. Examining the small but significant topic of stuck swords can provide profound insights into the broader cultural and historical contexts of the time.

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