

Sword in the Stone

St. Galgano's Sword

Illustration

There actually is at least one "sword in a stone". It can be seen in the ruins of a Cistercian abbey about 30 km (20 miles) southwest of Siena in beautiful Tuscany. In a nearby chapel is one of the strangest relics ever: the **sword of Saint Galgano**, seemingly thrust into the bedrock up to the hilt. How did it end up there? Well there is your typical Christian story about miracles:

"What still can be seen in-situ is the sword of **St. Galgano**, born in **1148**, and one of those punk, no-good young knights constantly looking for trouble and worldly pleasures. He had tough luck because he encountered the [Archangel Michael](#) who made him regret his evil ways and become a hermit. Living without sin he died early (it's boring) but not before he had stuck his sword in a stone where it still resides."

Björn Hellqvist tells the story in a way that can't be beaten, so here is [the link](#).

Of course, having one more *faked* relic or tourist attraction in Italy would not be all that remarkable. It is claimed, however, that the Galgano sword is *genuine*.

If the sword in the stone is indeed about 850 years old *and* was in the stone already in the 12th century, then it could have been the role model for "the sword in the stone" of the King Arthur saga.

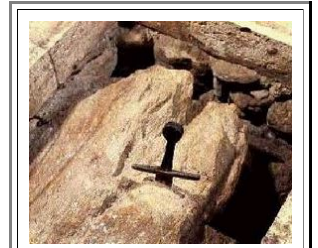
The [King Arthur](#) "sword in the stone" topic appeared for the first time in *Robert de Boron's* "Merlin", one of the many books of the King Arthur saga cluster. Robert was a French poet of the late 12th and early 13th century so this could fit. In this book, however, the sword is actually stuck in an **anvil** on top of a stone.

The claim is that: "according to a recent analysis of Luigi Garlaschelli, University of Pavia, it is a 12th century sword. The "stone", according to ground-penetrating radar analysis, is actually hollow— there is a cavity measuring 2 meters by 1 meter below it which might be a burial recess, possibly containing the saint's long-lost body".

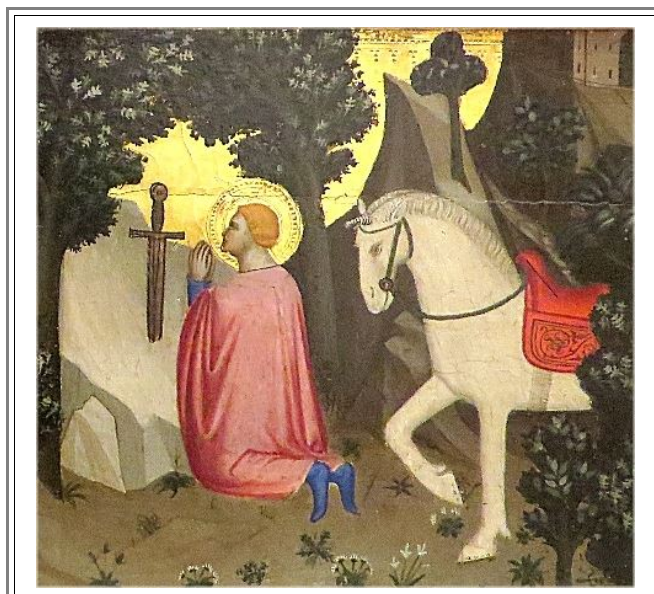
Luigi Garlaschelli is a serious scientist and a "sceptic", hunting down false claims of supernatural things or other BS. If he says the sword is real, it must be taken seriously. Note that neither he nor anybody else claims that the sword was put into the stone by a miracle.

Unfortunately, there are many notes in the Net recounting the Galgano / Garaschelli story - but the original article is hard to get. So let's first praise the librarians of my University, who can find anything and get a copy of it - provided it exists. It does exist. I have it, and Luigi Garaschelli does make a convincing (but not airtight) case for a 12th century sword. So maybe Galgano, or whoever buried him, did stick a sword in that stone around 1180 or so, and maybe the "sword in the stone myth" in the 12th century might have come from that particular sword in the stone.

Or maybe not. There is no way of telling - yet. We will have to wait for more discoveries that might help. Anyway - here is St. Galgano:



St. Galgano's sword
in the stone



St. Galgano
Lower part of large altar painting from Matteo di
Pacino, ca. 1365.
Galleria dell'Accademia

Source: Photographed in Florence, April, 2018

Roland's Durendal

Just for completeness, there is another sword in the stone. In this case its reputed to be [Roland's Durendal](#)

- According to some of the many legends, when he couldn't destroy Durendal before his rapidly approaching end, he flung it away mightily, and Durendal got stuck in the rocks of Rocamadour. There you can see it if you find that somewhat hidden little town.
- Nobody has ever claimed that it is the real thing. It's just a quaint little (and possibly old) joke and thus of no real interest.



**Roland's alleged
Durendal "in the
stone".**

All things considered, there aren't all that many swords in stones around. Neither in reality nor in mythology. Even if we widen the topic to just "stuck swords", allowing the sword to be stuck in stones, anvils, trees or whatever, there isn't much around.

- Besides King Arthur's sword in the sword / anvil, we have Sigmund's sword in the tree, originally part of [Northern mythology](#) but well recounted in Wagner's "[Ring des Nibelungen](#)". That's it. I could find nothing else.
- There are some speculations (by Littleton and Malcor) if a custom of the Alans, one of the many folks criss-crossing Europe during the [migration period](#), influenced the story tellers around the fifth century AD. The ancient Alans, practicing a religion associated with their war god, used to embed a sword in the ground as part of some ritual, presumably removing it later again. The Alan ritual in turn might have been taken over from a Scythian ritual. Sounds a bit like the "burying the hatchet" of the native Americans.