

The resplendent image of the medieval knight is concentrated in the symbolism of his sword. The straight, two-edged, cross-hilted knightly sword of the European Middle Ages was an object of vital importance, a lethal weapon on the battlefield and a badge of chivalry in that complex social code. Ewart Oakeshott draws on his extensive research and expert eye (and hand, for he has a special sense for the feel of a sword) to develop a typology for and recount the history of the sword, from the knightly successors of the Viking weapon to the emergence of the Renaissance sword - that is, roughly from 1050 to 1550. Within this time-span, two distinct groups of swords successively evolved. Problems of dating are acute, and evidence is adduced from literature and art as well as from archaeology, for a sword (or some parts of a sword) could have been in use several generations after it first saw battle. To deal with such overlap, Ewart Oakeshott develops and refines a detailed typology of swords which takes in entire swords, pommel-forms, cross-guards, and the grip and scabbard. Extensive reference to specific weapons is accompanied on the page by line illustrations and a further 48 pages of photographs illustrate over a hundred splendid weapons or parts of weapons, accompanied by detailed captions.

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