Rapier hilts archetypes

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Abstract – A.V.B. Norman's typology of hilts currently serves as the standard for the classification of rapiers. However, its flat structure and minutious granularity make it inconvenient for memorization and discussion. This work proposes a restructuration of Norman's extensive typology into fewer archetypes that renders it less cumbersome to use and follows the functional developments of complex hilts.

Keywords – rapier, hilts, typology, norman, archetypes

I. INTRODUCTION

Starting at the late fifteenth century, single-handed swords begin to show a bewildering variety of blades and above all hilts, culminating in what has been called the rapier hilt in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The very definition of the term rapier is a controversial topic, but there is one certainty: the development of increasingly complex hilts coincided with the widespread carry and use of swords in civilian contexts. Putting some order in this diversity is a gigantic endeavour.

The year 1980 saw the publication of two works which tackle the complex task of classifying rapier hilts beyond nineteenth-century curator terminology.

European Weapons and Armour: from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution by E. Oakeshott contains two chapters devoted to the swords of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, focusing on their hilts.[1] Oakeshott outlines a fairly concise typology of swept hilts in six categories (Simple, Basic, Quarter, Half, Three-Quarter, Full) with a few sub-types in each, and separately considers some forms such as cup hilts, basket-hilts, pappenheimers, etc. Although this typology is handy, it suffers from the lack of datation material, which does not allow for a perception of the stages of hilt development. It is also a bit coarse in its description of the hilt structures.

The Rapier and Small-Sword by A.V.B. Norman is a much more precise work.[2] It includes a full typology of hilts and pommels based on a thorough analysis of surviving weapons and pictorial evidence, used to give datation indication for every type.

Norman divides the hilts into outer guards, that face outward when worn normally at the hip and protect the outside of the hand in the common grip, and inner guards, on the other side. Outer guards are ordinarily much more decorated and complex than inner guards. Norman first defines a numerical typology for all the different variants of hilts, with a focus

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[1] Oakeshott, *European Weapons and Armour*.

[2] Norman, *The Rapier and Small-Sword*.

on the outer guards, and then a separate one for the inner guards.

The problem with Norman's typology is that it is very cumbersome to use. There are 113 hilt types, and few people can easily associate from memory a hilt to a numeric type, or the reverse. There is no definite structure in the typology, although it progresses in a very rough chronological fashion and sometimes regroups hilts that have a clear common topology. For a student of martial arts, there is also a lack of functional considerations: many hilt forms actually fulfil the same function with different technical means, and it would be useful to have an idea of the chronological development of functions not obscured by more stylistic considerations. The original book being long out of print certainly does not help either.

This has left the historians of the sword in a rather unfortunate position, with some publications giving Norman types for the hilt, but others omitting them entirely.[3] While many enthusiasts will comfortably discuss medieval swords using Oakeshott's typology, for rapier hilts its previously mentioned shortcomings prevented its adoption, and Norman's is too cumbersome to fill this need.

This article is an attempt to restructure Norman's typology into a few archetypes that would render it less cumbersome to use and make it easier to identify types. Norman's typology was chosen as a basis because it is the most detailed both in terms of different hilt structures and datation information. As such, it is not an attempt to build an entirely new typology, and it will not add information not already present in Norman's.

II. METHODOLOGY

The primary method was to try to group the hilt types in families, evaluating whether the classes made functional or chronological sense. The majority of hilts in Norman's work are formed from the simple cross by the addition of various bars, rings, loop-guards etc. The topology of these additions has been the main consideration for the classification. The designation of all hilts elements is borrowed entirely from Norman. Some structures endured or saw variations even after more protective variants developed; priority has therefore been given to structural elements rather than strict chronology, and some archetypes may regroup hilts from vastly different time periods.

Many hilts come in three variants that differ in the structure on the true edge side: only the front quillon is present, only a knucklebow, or both. These variants have been systematically regrouped, and these groups gave a basis to the classification. The knucklebow is first seen in 1430 in the form of a bent forward quillon, and by the end of the fifteenth century it appears together with the forward quillon.[4] Neither of these forms ever achieved true dominance, and this cannot be correlated with chronological information or stages of hilt

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[3] See, for example, Grotkamp-Schepers et al., *The Sword — Form and Thought* and Picchianti, *Le Spade da lato al Museo Stibbert*, which use it, and Capwell, *The Noble Art of the Sword*, which does not.

[4] See Norman, *The Rapier and Small-Sword*, hilt types 5 and 7.

development. Therefore, I have chosen not to separate the variants in their own archetypes. This is in contrast with Oakeshott's approach of differentiating half, three-quarter, and full hilts by the presence or absence of a knucklebow and forward quillon.[5]

Sometimes links between types are pointed out in Norman's work. These have been conserved as much as possible.

It is obvious that a number of other ways to group Norman's types could be proposed. The one described here is simply a possible solution that gives a manageable number of archetypes and elegantly describes the development of the hilt by grouping the archetypes into broad functional categories.

Each archetype has been given a three-letter shorthand derived from its description. In the descriptions below, an isolated number (e.g. 42) refers to a Norman type within the same archetype. For discussions of the links between archetypes, a composite designation such as Rid-42 has been used. It uses the format <Archetype shorthand>-<Norman type>. The inner guards use a similar system.

Within each archetype's description the grouped Norman types are enumerated. Norman gives a tentative date of apparition for every type, which has been recalled, and the types are sorted in their chronological order. Norman has noted that sometimes the more complex types seem to emerge before the simple; these surprising elements have been conserved and might be due to the fact that we can only operate on the first recorded appearance of a given type, which is conceivably different from when it was first made.

An illustration is provided for each archetype. This image should be understood as a schematic which includes only the defining feature of the archetype, and not as a representative of the most common types within the archetype. Most of the drawings do not include a knucklebow, for example, because they were not strictly necessary elements, however many hilts would have had one in some form or another.

III. HILT ARCHETYPES

Hilts have been classified as stemming from the classical cross, depending on their complexity, or degree of protection: first guards that are completely flat, then those that have one plane of protection perpendicular to the blade, then those that define a whole sphere of protection around the hand with various arrangements of bars, then those that add a variety of shells to bring further protection to the hand against thrusts, and finally the late forms that distanced themselves from the previous structures.

III.1. Flat hilts

Flat hilts fit entirely in the blade's plane and are the earliest forms. The main innovation

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[5] Oakeshott, *European Weapons and Armour*, p. 137.

going on in this regard is the addition of finger rings, or half-rings in the plane of the blade protecting the front gripping fingers. The first ring appears around 1340, the second one around 1465. These archetypes are not combined with inner guards to form the whole hilt. Oakeshott's Simple and Basic hilt types are all covered in this archetype.

III.1.1. Quillons (Qui)

This is the oldest form and consists only in two quillons forming a crossguard (Fig. 1). The simple cross with long quillons has seen continuous use since the middle of the tenth century at least.[6] During the fifteenth century variants of this archetype appear that show a knucklebow, which will become a common feature on many later hilts.

1: The basic cross (~tenth century)

2: Quillons are curved in a plane perpendicular to the blade's axis (1400)

5: The forward quillon curves to form a knucklebow (1430)

7: A forward quillon and a knuckleguard are present (1490)

105: A late variant of the archetype (1645)

III.1.2. Index ring (Ind)

One of the possible ways to grip a sword that has quillons is to wrap the index over the forward quillon. From pictorial evidence, this was used on cutting swords, perhaps because it increases the control of the blade during cuts or facilitated edge alignment. Oakeshott opines that this allowed for stronger parries. In any case, such a grip exposes the index finger to a weapon sliding down the blade, and there was a need to protect it. The technological way that was chosen was to make a form of half-ring in the plane of the blade sprouting from the forward quillon and curving back towards the blade (Fig. 1). This appeared in 1340 according to Norman, before even knucklebows.

4: A cross plus finger ring (1340)

6: The forward quillon forms a knucklebow (1450)

8: A forward quillon and a knuckleguard are present (1490)

107: A late variant of the archetype (1600)

III.1.3. Arms (Arm)

A further development of flat hilts was to add another finger-ring opposite the first one, forming a symmetrical guard (Fig. 1). It is not perfectly clear what the functional need was for this. One hypothesis is that a symmetrical hilt allows to grip the sword with either hand or either edge forward. However, this development also happened on asymmetrical hilts with a knucklebow. I would say that a more likely hypothesis is that this second ring was

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[6] Oakeshott, *Archaeology of Weapons*, p. 137 under the description for type VIII.

meant to protect the thumb, which is also very exposed, albeit less than the index finger, using a technical means that was already developed.

Together, these two half-rings are called the arms of the hilt. This archetype will be the basis of nearly all rapier hilts in Norman's typology.

15: Cross with arms of the hilt (1465)

17: The forward quillon forms a knucklebow (1475)

19: A forward quillon and a knucklebow are present (1500)

III.2. One plane of protection

While the flat guards give a degree of protection against blades sliding along the blade into the hand, it is quite apparent that many angles are not covered. The next innovation was to add a plane of protection perpendicular to the blade, extending over the outside of the hand. Several methods were used, but all start around 1475.

These archetypes will in turn form the basis of the more complex hilts later. They comprise all of Oakeshott's Quarter hilts.

III.2.1. Projecting pegs (Peg)

One way to establish this plane of protection is to add projecting pegs at the end of the arms of the hilt (Fig. 1). It is probably the simplest way from the point of view of the hilt maker.

16: Derived from Arm-15, with projecting pegs (1475)

18: Same, but the forward quillon arches to form a knucklebow (1475)

20: A forward quillon and a knuckleguard are present (1475)

III.2.2. Arms ring (Rin)

Another way to establish this plane of protection is to add a small side ring at the end of the arms (Fig. 1). This will become the basis of a huge family of hilts; this simple ring held in an advanced position by the arms provides a cone of protection which makes it a very protective feature for its size.

39: Derived from Arm-15, with a side ring on the end of the arms (1475)

40: Same, but the forward quillon arches to form a knucklebow (1475)

41: A forward quillon and a knuckleguard are present (1475)

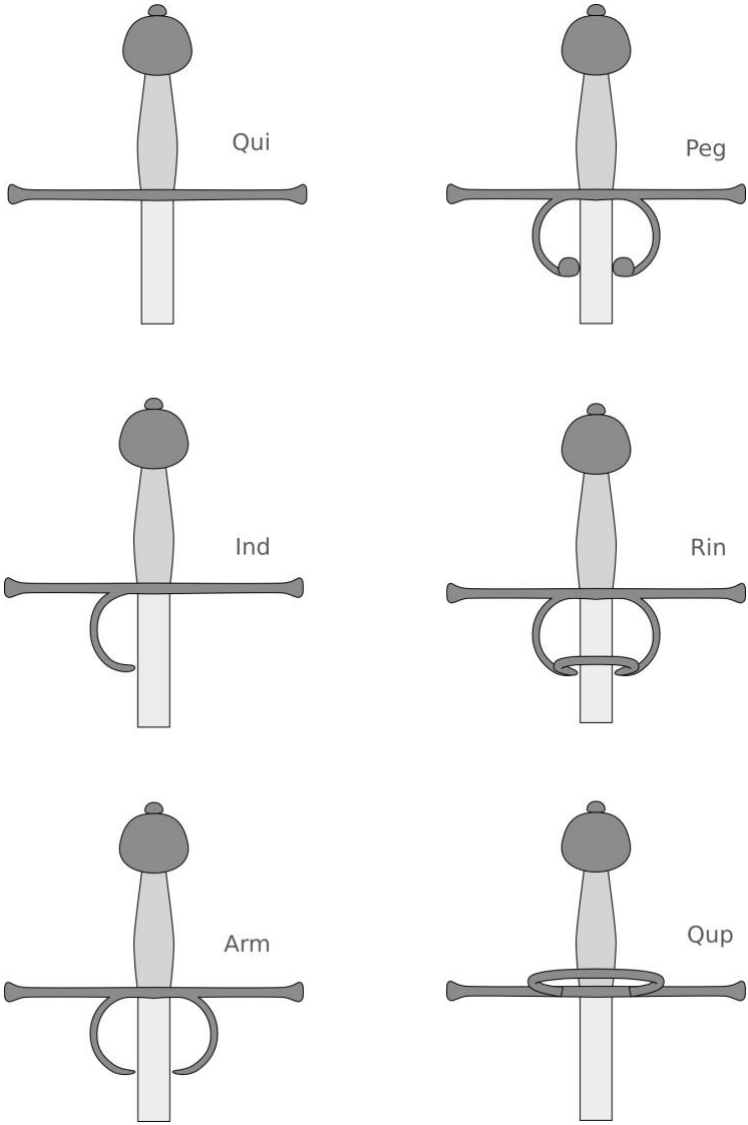

Fig. 1 *The first six outer guard archetypes. Flat hilts (left column) and one plane of protection (right column). By author.*

III.2.3. Quillon plane (Qup)

Arms of the hilt are not necessary to establish a perpendicular plane of protection. Another very successful way, found on many swords of a variety of types, is to attach a projection on the quillons instead (Fig. 1). Norman found evidence of this as early as 1475.

9: Earliest example, a lug protruding from the quillons. This is found in particular on German messers; the lug is named the nagel (1475)

10: A simple cross with a side ring on the quillons (1510)

13: Same, with the forward quillon arched to form a knucklebow (1515)

14: A forward quillon and a knuckleguard are present (1515)

3: Arguably, a hilt form implementing the same idea as 10. The quillons are both curved in the plane perpendicular to the axis of the blade, until they reach the other quillon (1520)

11: A variant of 10, only the junction with the cross is different (1520)

21: The protection is formed by a plate, but arms are nonetheless present (1585)

108, 109, 110: Late variants of 13 (1600, 1610, 1770)

106: Late variant of 10 (1635)

III.3. Sphere of protection

The forward plane of protection provides fair coverage against sliding blades but leaves many openings that a cut could reach. The next innovation was to add a variety of guards to build a sphere of protection in front of the hand. Archetypes Peg and Rin both went through this development sometimes during the 1520s.

Some of the earliest variants were formed by bending one or both quillons around the hand, as is done in Qup-3. Two different structures can be tentatively isolated, although with time hilts appeared with elements from either:

- One extends from the rear quillon until it joins the root of the forward quillon, forming a ring *perpendicular* to the axis of the blade
- The other develops from the forward quillon to the end of the rear arm, and from the rear quillon to the knucklebow, forming two *diagonal* or spiralling guards

Norman isolates type 42 as an example of the second structure, but has some instances of the first as variants, for example under Rin-41, Rin-40, Peg-18. Type 36 also has an opened variant, therefore might have derived from Peg-20 with the same process.

Types related to perpendicular structures seem to appear and expand marginally earlier.

The next evolution in the sphere of protection was a branch that never touches the quillons: a long diagonal loop joining the rear arm to the knucklebow. It is hard to be sure of the

development path leading there, but the structure of these hilts is rather similar to the ones sporting the diagonal elements, and they have therefore been grouped together. The first examples of these long loop guards appear around 1550 and were in all likelihood the source of a final archetype derived from Rin that appeared in the 1560s and met much success.

These archetypes group some of Oakeshott's Three-Quarter and Full hilts.

III.3.1. Pegs and perpendicular (Pep)

In this archetype derived from archetype Peg, the pegs are ordinarily more developed, curved towards the pommel, and completed by a perpendicular structure stemming from the rear quillon (Fig. 2). On some types both of the pegs remain, on others the one on the forward arm merges or is replaced with a looping guard.

36: Derived from Peg-18, with a quillon ring and a loop from the rear quillon to the forward arm, which replaces the peg on the forward arm (1520)

37: Same as 36, with an additional loop-guard from the quillon ring to the knucklebow (1520)

22: Based on Peg-16, with a quillon ring (1520)

38: Same structure as 37, but the loops and rings are cut, which might indicate a different method of construction. Norman identifies this as the prototype for the Schiavona hilts which are not part of the typology (1550)

23: Same as 22, with a knucklebow (1560)

24: Same as 23, with a loop between the ring and the knucklebow (1580)

III.3.2. Arms ring and perpendicular (Rip)

An archetype derived from Rin, in which a perpendicular structure on the quillons extends the protection provided by the arm ring (Fig. 2). It could be seen as a merge of Rin and Qup.

46: Derived from Rin-41, with a quillon ring (1525)

44: Same as 46, but without the forward quillon (1530)

49: Same as 46, with a diagonal loop between the two rings (1530)

50: Same as 49, with a loop between the quillon ring and the knucklebow (1530)

43: A cross, arms, quillon ring, and arms ring (1540)

47: Same as 46, with a loop between the quillon ring and the knucklebow (1550)

51: Same as 50, with a short bar rising from the end of the rear arm (1570)

48: Same as 50, but the diagonal is in the reverse direction (1585)

45: A variant of 44, with only a three-quarter knucklebow (1590)

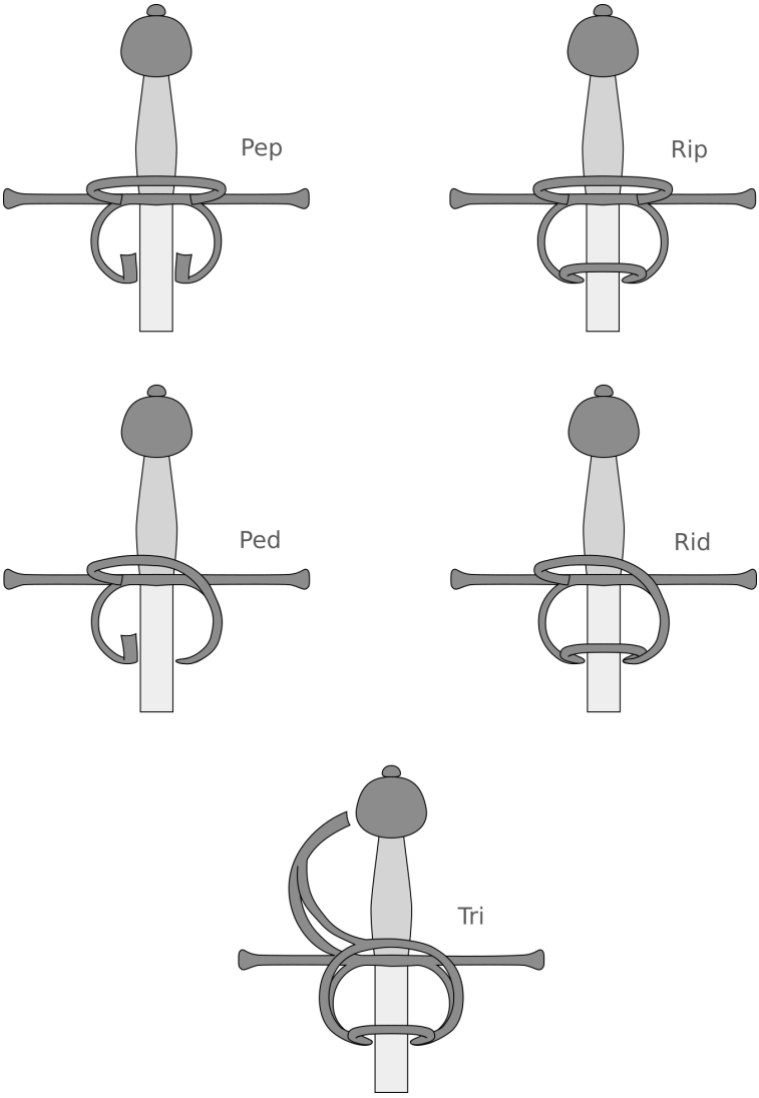

Fig. 2 *The five next outer guard archetypes, offering a sphere of protection. Left to right and top to bottom in the order of the text. By author.*

III.3.3. Peg and diagonal (Ped)

A relatively successful archetype derived from Peg, in which a diagonal structure joins the root of the forward quillon to the end of the rear arm (Fig. 2). Norman notes that fairly flat diagonal rings seem to appear earlier, which might indicate that these types do not originate in a process akin to Qup-3. The flat diagonal ring may well have come instead from the peg on the rear arm being extended, bent, and merged into the forward quillon. It is hard to be sure, and these forms are functionally mostly the same, so it made sense to group them all here.

28: Derived from Peg-16, without a peg on the rear arm, a diagonal joins the end of the rear arm to the root of the forward quillon (1530)

29: Same, with the forward quillon arched to form a knucklebow (1530)

30: A forward quillon and a knuckleguard are present (1530)

32: Same as 30, with an additional loop-guard from the rear quillon to the knucklebow (1540)

33: A more complex form based on 32 (1550)

34: A more complex form based on 32 (1550)

26: Based on Peg-16, with both pegs remaining and a very curved diagonal (1560)

35: The loop goes from the end of the rear arm to the middle of the knucklebow (1590)

25: Same as 26, but the forward quillon is bent into a knucklebow (1600)

27: Same as 25, but the diagonal turns into a loop that joins the knucklebow instead of the forward quillon (1600)

31: Same as 28, but the hilt is reinforced by a quillon ring and a small arm ring. Sorted here because the branching structure emerges from the forward arm, but shares elements of archetype Pep (1600)

III.3.4. Arms ring and diagonal (Rid)

Archetype Rin was also completed by a variety of diagonal guards, but for an unknown reason this seems to have taken more time than for archetype Peg (Fig. 2). A possible explanation is that it was more difficult from a maker perspective to merge at least 3 branches at the end of the rear arm: the arm, the arms ring, and a diagonal guard. However, after its apparition this archetype saw many evolutions.

42: A prototype of the archetype, this is a type Rin-41 where the quillons are bent to curve around the hand. The quillons do not join either the rear arm or the knucklebow (1520)

74: The structure is the same as 42, but it is closed, merging into both the end of the rear arm and the knucklebow (1545)

52: Derived from Rin-40, with a loop from the end of the rear arm to the knucklebow (1550)

53: Same as 52, with a forward quillon (1550)

69: Derived from Rin-39, with a diagonal from the end of the rear arm to the root of the forward quillon (1560)

56: A variant of 74 where both loops join the knucklebow (1580)

72: Same as 69, with a knucklebow (1580)

75: Same as 74, but both branches emerge from the end of the rear arm (1585)

76: Same as 74, with many loops and the arms ring turning into a shell. This could be seen as a transition into archetype Rio (1590)

70: A variant of 69, where the diagonal turns into a spiral attached to the middle of the arms ring (1600)

III.3.5. Tangent rings (Tri)

The last derivative of archetype Rin was probably derived from Rid-52 and Rid-53. The diagonal loop guard of these types gives a very good coverage, but is also a bit weak in its middle. A way to reinforce it is to add another guard emerging from the loop-guard and joining the end of the forward arm (Fig. 2). This effectively forms a bigger arms ring, inclined towards the pommel, tangent to the first, which is how it stayed shaped. Building up from that, more rings were eventually added. This archetype builds effective protection around the hand, yet remains unobtrusive around the quillons and therefore allows for comfortable and flexible gripping. This probably explains its success: very many surviving hilts of these types can be found.

58: Derived from Rin-41, with another bigger arms ring inclined towards the pommel, joined to the knucklebow by a loop-guard (1560)

57: Same as 58, without the forward quillon (1585)

59: There is a spiral covering the inside of the biggest arm ring (1600)

60: Same as 58, with a loop joining the root of the rear quillon to the knucklebow (1600)

61: A third arms ring is inserted between the others (1600)

63: Same as 58, with more projections rising from the arms ring (1615)

III.4. Opaque hilts

Hilts composed of bars and rings provide good coverage against cuts but remain open to thrusts. As fencing styles emphasizing the thrust spread and developed, guard positions with the arm extended forward and the tip in line became more common, and this exposes the hand much more to both accidental and intentional thrusts. From this plausibly stemmed the idea of integrating shells and plates into or over the bars, eventually taking up more and more space between them.

The earliest examples are grouped in the previous section; they only have a plate filling the forward side ring. This is a variation that occurs on all the archetypes that have a forward

ring: Rin, Rip, Rid, and Tri, starting in the 1590s. The guards in this fourth archetype have at least a bigger plate which covers a larger volume and makes enough difference in function and structure to warrant the creation of further types. This development occurs in the 1610s.

The types have been grouped under two archetypes: those clearly derived from archetype Tri with evidence of the loop guard supported by an arms ring (archetype Tro below), and the others (archetype Rio). It is difficult to ascertain the exact development path, as examples of both appear at roughly the same date. Likely as not, some of types in Rio are actually simplifications from Tro, however the first types to appear belong to Rio.

Again, these archetypes group some of Oakeshott's Three Quarter and Full hilts.

III.4.1. Opaque arms ring (Rio)

In this archetype derived from Rin, the ring is inclined towards the pommel and filled or even replaced with a plate (Fig. 3). It can be combined with a variety of additional guards.

78: Derived from Rin-39, with the arm ring larger, inclined to the pommel, and filled with a plate (1610)

71: A variant from Rid-69, with a larger inclined ring filled with a plate (1610)

54: Derived from Rid-53, with a larger ring filled with a plate (1620)

81: Maybe derived from 78, with a different way to attach the plate, or perhaps streamlined from Tro-67, with neither knucklebow nor first arm ring (1620)

55: Same as 54, but with struts joining the ring and the loop-guard (1625)

79: Same as 78, but additional branches support the arms ring, stemming from the arms at an angle (1630)

80: Same as 78, but a quillon ring supports the arms ring (1630)

73: A variant from Rid-72, with the arms ring filled with a plate and one or more additional side-rings in the space between the plate and the diagonal loop. Classed in this archetype rather than Rid because the numerous additional bars and struts create an opaque structure, as in Tro-68 (1630)

III.4.2. Opaque tangent rings (Tro)

In this archetype derived from Tri, the first or second arm ring is enlarged, inclined towards the pommel and filled with a plate (Fig. 3). It is hard to know the chronology of the development, as there is no clear order of the types, all appearing within a 5-year span, according to Norman.

The determining criteria for inclusion in this archetype is the presence of a ring linked by a loop-guard to the knucklebow.

65: The arms ring is filled with a plate and extended until it joins the second ring by a strut (1620)

66: Same as 65, but with two C-shaped supports (1620)

67: Derived from Tri-61, the second arms ring is filled with a plate and connected to the third with a strut (1620)

84: Could be derived from 66 or 67, with the first ring merging with the second. Could also be derived from Rio-54, with the loop merging with the ring. The defining feature of a ring linked to the knucklebow led to its inclusion here (1620)

62: Derived from Tri-61, with a shell almost parallel to the second ring (1625)

64: Derived from Tri-58, the first arms ring is filled with a plate and extended and inclined and the second arms ring is linked to the quillons by struts (1625)

68: Derived from Tri-58, the first arms ring is filled with a plate, and many additional arms ring (four or more) form a skeleton which is mostly opaque, hence the inclusion in this archetype (1625)

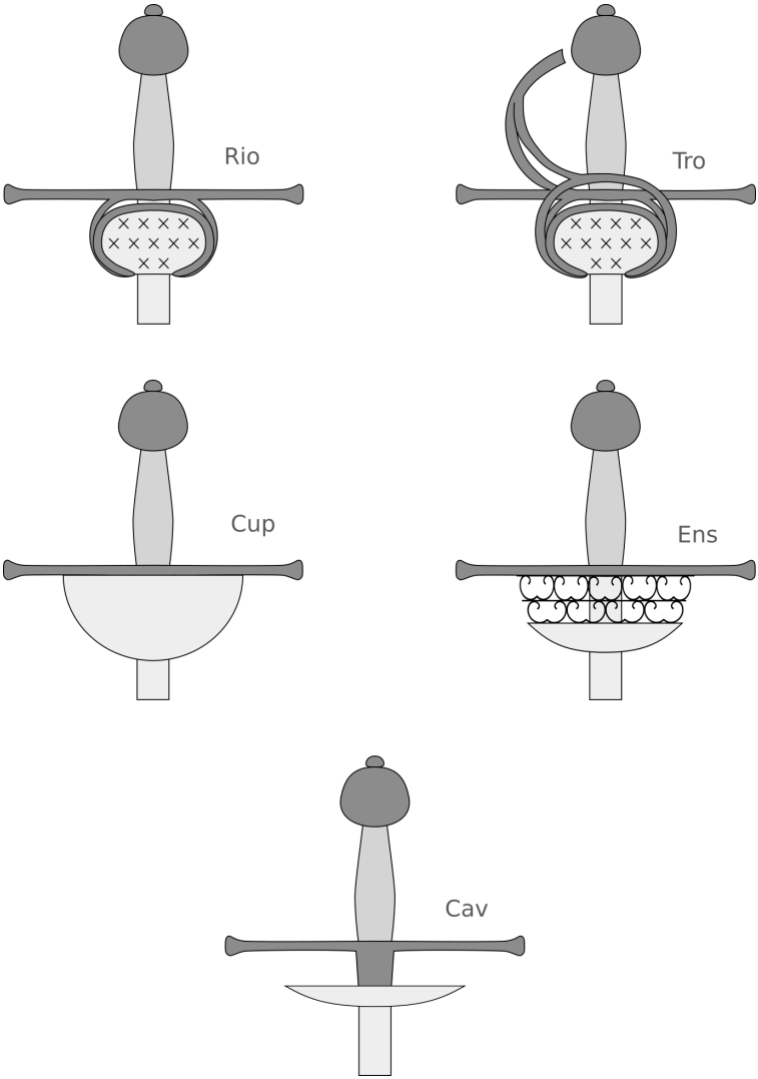

Fig. 3 *The last five outer guard archetypes. Opaque hilts (top two) and late variants, left to right and top to bottom in the order of the text. By author.*

III.5. Late hilts

In the late 1620s new forms of hilts emerged, apparently as a result of redesigns from scratch aiming for the same protective function as the opaque hilts. Some, primarily in lands under Spanish influence, were using cups as the primary defensive structure instead of the previous bars. In England, original forms of hilts were developed, dispensing with arms of the hilt. A variety of hilts relying on a saucer guard were developed, eventually transitioning to smallswords. The common point of all these is that while they achieve three-dimensional protection around the hand, they completely abandon the relatively independent inner and outer guards and instead are built as a whole. Although some of the previous archetypes were also sometimes symmetrical (particularly the opaque hilts), it is still apparent that they were all structurally separated into outer and inner components.

III.5.1. Cup hilts (Cup)

Cup hilts combine archetype Arm with a cup enclosing the arms of the hilt, with some variation of design (Fig. 3). Norman was dissatisfied with his typology of them and had trouble pinpointing their development. In particular, his claim of cup hilts being developed as early as 1630 is contradicted by Oakeshott, and widespread use does not seem to occur before 1650.

Subtypes 82 and 83 are put in this archetype because the shells are the main protective parts, dispensing with rings almost entirely, and they have a symmetrical structure on the inner side. They could be sorted under archetype Rio instead. The most famous subtype is the Spanish taza cup-hilt, number 100. The others are variations of build methods and cup construction.

83 (1625); 100, 103 (1630); 101, 102 (1650); 82 (1660); 104 (1675).

III.5.2. English saucers (Ens)

The English began to build hilts based on a shallow cup in front of the quillons, which Norman calls a saucer. In these hilt forms, the arms of the hilt are not present, and the saucer is supported by series of rings linked by struts eventually reaching the quillons (Fig. 3). The various subtypes are stylistic variations on this idea.

85, 86 (1625); 91 (1630); 87, 88, 89, 90 (1635)

III.5.3. Cavalier hilts (Cav)

Saucers were also used outside of England, in a different construction method: extending the quillon block along the ricasso to fix the saucer at the shoulders of the blade (Fig. 3). Sometimes arms of the hilt are still present and link the saucer to the quillons. This is the construction method that would eventually become ubiquitous with the smallswords (type 112).

92, 94, 97, 98 (1630); 93 (1635); 96, 99, 111, 112 (1640); 95 (1650); 113 (1720).

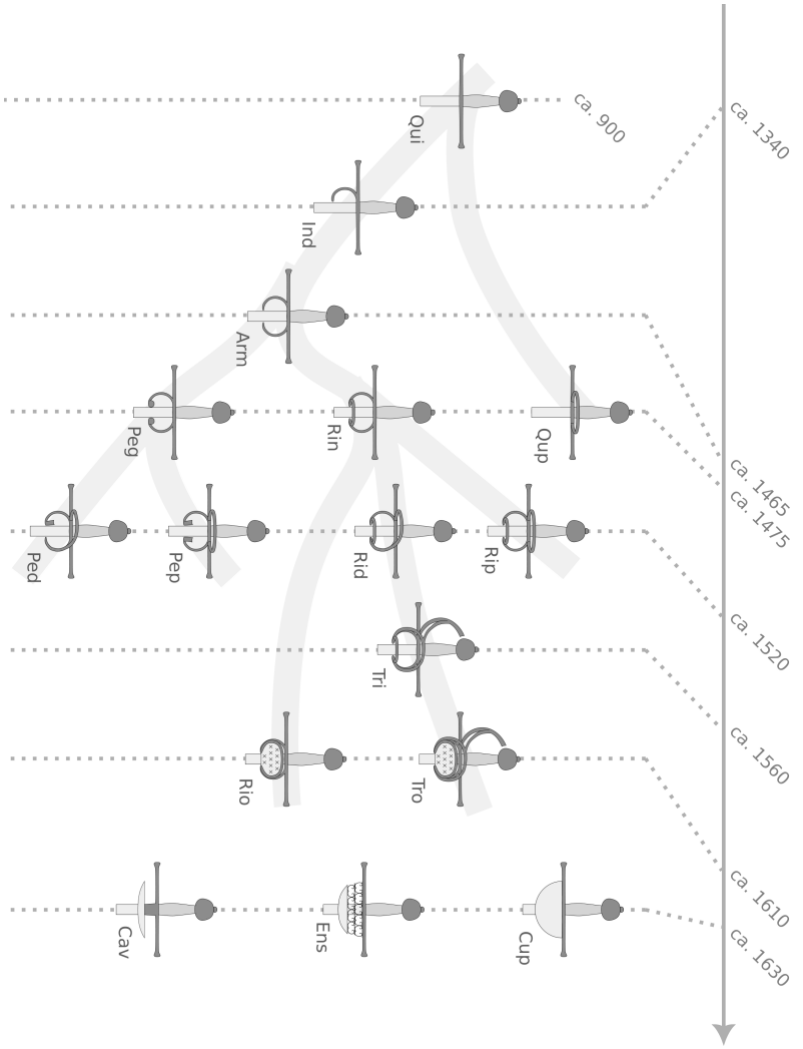

Fig. 4 *A view summarizing the sixteen outer guard archetypes, their date of apparition, and their development relationship. The time scale on the right of the graphic is accurate, but of course the dates are still approximate; the time scale is only meant to give an idea of how fast or slow some developments were. The early apparition of the simple cross has not been put on the time scale due to how far it is from the others. Most outer guard archetypes persisted through time despite the apparition of more complex types. The 'genealogy tree' only shows the development relationships but does not imply replacement. By author.*

IV. INNER GUARD ARCHETYPES

Norman's typology of inner guards does not have the wealth nor the precision of the typology of hilts. Two facts explain this.

First, inner guards are always less complex in structure than outer guards, so it is quite natural that one would need fewer types to be distinguished.

Second, much of Norman's datation work is based on depictions in portraits or artwork more generally. Inner guards are rarely clearly seen there, so that there were much fewer data points.

This makes it such that it was not possible to isolate as clear stages of development of inner guards as has been shown above for the hilts. The information about their dating is too sparse. Even the addition of plates and shells cannot be used to fully separate archetypes, as Norman sometimes includes them as variants of the more open types. It stands to reason that the addition of shells was thought of simultaneously for the inner and outer side, anyway.

In the following, archetypes are mainly defined in terms of overall complexity and basic topology.

IV.1. Simple guards

These are archetypes that use very few elements, achieving minimal hand protection, but greater comfort for the wearer.

IV.1.1. Forward obstacle (Fob)

This archetype uses a simple obstacle on the end of the arms of the hilt (Fig. 5).

1: A simple peg on one of the arms (~1480)

2, 3, 4: Variations on the idea of a small ring attached to the arms, always inclined to the tip (starting ~1520)

5: A ring inclined to the pommel, larger than in the previous types (~1600)

IV.1.2. One transverse (Tra)

This archetype uses one transverse guard (Fig. 5). As it forms a diagonal obstacle above the hand, it is inherently more protective than the isolated forward obstacle and eventually formed the basis of the most complex archetypes.

6: One transverse from the forward arm to the forward quillon (~1530)

7: One transverse from the forward arm to the rear quillon, completed with an arm ring inclined to the tip (~1530)

8: Same, but with the ring inclined to the pommel (~1600)

16, 17: The transverse joins the forward arm to the rear quillon (starting at 1530, mostly on hilts of Germanic types)

IV.2. Combined transverses

The transverse guards were manifestly recognized as the most efficient solution for hand protection and least obtrusive wear. Several were soon combined in three basic structures. This development seems to have happened in the middle of the sixteenth century.

IV.2.1. Fan of transverses from quillon (Faq)

A fan of transverse bars goes from the root of the forward quillon to the end of the arms (Fig. 5). In later forms, a shell replaced the bars, keeping the global form.

9: Two transverses join the forward quillon (~1540)

11: Three transverses join the forward quillon (~1560)

12: Based on 11, with a thumb ring (~1570)

28: Based on 12, with a loop guard to the knucklebow (~1570)

13, 38: Based on 11, with a plate (~1590)

10: Same as 9, with an arm ring inclined to pommel (~1610)

14, 15: Variants which replace the transverses with a shell filling the same space (~1620)

IV.2.2. Cross (Cro)

Two transverse bars cross or otherwise meet over the blade, joining the end of the arms to the roots of both quillons (Fig. 5).

18: Two transverses cross over the ricasso (~1550)

20: Same as 18, with a thumb ring (~1550)

22: One of the transverses joins the rear quillon going to its tip (~1560)

23: One of the transverses joins the rear arm instead of the root of the rear quillon (~1560)

25: The two transverses join tangentially over the ricasso (~1560)

21: One of the transverses becomes a thumb ring instead of joining the rear quillon (~1570)

19: The crossed transverses join tangentially the arms on either side (~1600)

24: The transverses are tangent to one another, as in 25, and one joins the rear arm tangentially, as in 23 (~1600)

26: Like 24, but the other transverse joins the knucklebow (~1600)

27: A more complex variant of 26 (~1600)

39: Arguably, should be just a symmetrical inner guard corresponding to an archetype Rio, with the addition of a thumb ring. Included here because the overall shape of the cover relates it to this inner guard archetype (~1620)

IV.2.3. Fan of transverses from knucklebow (Fak)

A fan of transverse bars goes from the knucklebow to the end of the arms (Fig. 5). It provides a wider protection than archetype Faq and was widely adopted on hilt types sporting a knucklebow. In principle it is similar to the loop-guard from the rear arm's end to the knucklebow that occurs in outer guards.

30: A fan of three transverses joins the knucklebow (1570)

31: Same as 30, with an additional transverse (1580)

32: Same as 30, with a plate between two transverses (1590)

33: Same as 30, with plates between all transverses (1590)

35, 36: Four transverses — two variants (1600, 1610)

29: Forward ring inclined to the pommels, with two transverses joining the knucklebow (1610)

34: Like 32, with a different shape of plate (1610)

37: A variation of type 36 (1610)

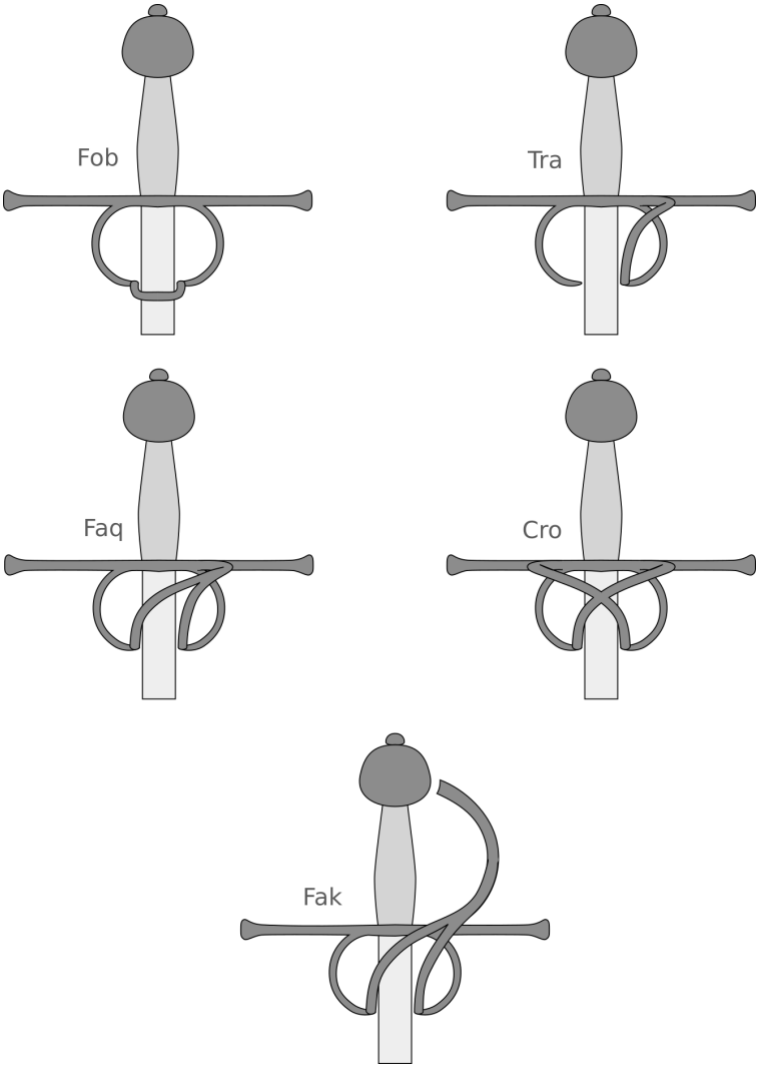

Fig. 5 *Inner guard archetypes, left to right and top to bottom in the order of the text. By author.*

V. PERSPECTIVES

Norman's typology and the archetypes defined in this article give a good view of the development of the structure of the hilt for the subclasses stemming from what Oakeshott termed the Basic Hilt: two quillons, finger rings. There are, however, blind spots which are merely grazed by Norman:

- There are hilt types which rather evolved from the cross with one finger ring. They seem to be mainly seen in Germanic lands, and there are only two Norman types pertinent to these: 12 and 77. They are also interestingly close to the complex hilts that can be found on hand-and-a-half swords in the same general geographic area. It is likely that these hilts had their own history of development, perhaps borrowing ideas from elsewhere. It would make sense to have a more precise typology of these.
- Military basket-hilts are entirely neglected by Norman, which makes sense as his focus was on civilian swords. However, it would be pertinent to pinpoint how, or even if, their development used or influenced those of civilian hilts. Norman does point one such link, from Pep-38 to the Schiavona hilt, but are there others?

Norman separates inner and outer structures of the hilts, in a way that suggests that these would be largely independent. It would be pertinent to study the correlation between the outer and inner structures and see whether there are dominant combinations. It seems likely that hilt makers viewed the hilts as a whole, and certainly some of the bars continue from one side to the other, which influences the choices of inner and outer guards.

The next frontier in rapier typologies is the blades. They are a lot harder to use for datation, which is why both Norman and Oakeshott have focused on the hilts. However the blades are the primary functional elements, and there was obviously innovation going on with them as well, if only in terms of length. Rapiers are at the same time some of the longest single-handed blades and favour extremely rapid and precise actions, which must have posed a lot of challenges to makers, who undoubtedly identified technical solutions which we must be able to classify. There have been some suggestions which deserve further developments.[7]

Another good topic for study would be the interplay between fencing styles and hilt and blade variations. Hilts can be developed to protect from common sword actions in a given style, and conversely more protective hilts can open the way to new tactics. Correlating hilt development and fencing treatises could provide insights into both.

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[7] See Parry, "Evolution of rapier blades", for one of the most recent.

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