

**HORNED, BARBARIAN, HERO: THE VISUAL INVENTION OF THE VIKING  
THROUGH EUROPEAN ART (1824-1851)**

**CHIFRUDO, BÁRBARO, HERÓI: A INVENÇÃO VISUAL DO VIKING PELA  
ARTE EUROPEIA (1824-1851)**

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**Abstract:** The research investigates the beginnings of the visual construction of the Viking figure by Western art, in the period between the 1820s and the 1850s. We used John Harvey's visual methodology and studies of Cultural History. The article analyzes the influence of literary stereotypes, the references of medieval chivalry and the Ossian ideal in the initial formation of images about Vikings. The last part investigates the consolidation of the Viking image as a hero and adventurer, as well as the origin and formation of the most famous visual stereotype about the ancient Nordic: the warrior wearing a horned helmet. We conclude that the first romantic representations about the Nordics played an important role in the consolidation of nationalism for several European countries, which sought to define their geographical borders and social identities.

**Keywords:** Vikings, Romantic art, artistic reception, Medieval Scandinavia.

**Resumo:** A pesquisa investiga os primórdios da construção visual da figura do viking pela arte ocidental, no período entre a década de 1820 até os anos 1850. Utilizamos a metodologia visual de John Harvey e estudos de História Cultural. O artigo analisa a influência dos estereótipos literários, os referenciais da cavalaria medieval e do ideal de Ossian na formação inicial das imagens sobre os vikings. A última parte investiga a consolidação da imagem do Viking como um herói e aventureiro, bem como a origem e formação do estereótipo visual mais famoso sobre os nórdicos antigos: o guerreiro portando um elmo com chifres. Concluimos que as primeiras representações românticas sobre os nórdicos desempenharam um papel importante na consolidação do nacionalismo para vários países europeus, que buscavam delimitar as suas fronteiras geográficas e identidades sociais.

**Palavras-chave:** Vikings, Arte romântica, recepção artística, Escandinávia Medieval.

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## Introduction

“No people had a richer tradition than the Scandinavians. Heroic tradition in the first place, but also religious, mythical, cosmogonic and historical tradition”<sup>2</sup>. Édourad Valjac, *La Grande aventure des Vikings*, 1954.

The term *Viking*<sup>3</sup> evokes the most varied feelings and expressions. These historical characters are present in our daily lives, they are constantly evoked by literature, represented in cinema, comics, television, digital media, operas and visual arts. Despite this immense popularity, there are still no consistent studies on the formation of this rich visual culture.

My main objective in this study is to provide some analytical bases on the first visual representations involving the theme of the Viking in European art, in the period between the years 1824 to 1851.<sup>4</sup> The delimitation of this historical section is due to the production of the first drawings and paintings produced within the modern concept of Viking, developed essentially by Romanticism, still in the 1820s, and ending with the 1850s. The choice of this final limit is due to some criteria, such as the end of the Golden Age of Danish art, the publication of the first image with Vikings wearing horns and the beginning of their major representation as expressions related to nationalism<sup>5</sup>, patriotism and imperialism by European

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<sup>2</sup> “Aucun peuple ne possède plus riche tradition que les Escandinaves. Traditions héroïques em premier lieu, mais aussi traditions religieuses, mythiques, cosmogoniques et historiques”. Apud: Boyer, 2002, p. 109. Translations from French, Swedish, Danish and German into English: my translations unless stated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> “The term which has been synonymous with a raiding or trading Northman during this period is hence *Viking*. This was, however, not the common word used at the time”. Brink, 2012, p. 4-6; “The ubiquity of the term ‘Viking’ masks a wide variety of constructions of Vikingism: the old northmen are variously buccaneering, triumphalist, defiant, confused, disillusioned, unbiddable, disciplined, elaborately pagan, austere pious, relentlessly jolly, or self-destructively sybaritic”, Wawn, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> The best studies on the formation of the modern image about Vikings are: Boyer, 1986 and Wawn, 2002, but both focus on the literary text. The two authors only contemplate French and English literary production (especially during the 19th century), with the other regions and languages in Europe still lacking any type of detailed investigation. For complementary studies, see bibliography in footnote 15. Unfortunately, there are still no detailed studies on the construction of the Old Nordic image from the 16th century until the 19th century and their iconographic studies. The work: Wilson, 1997 is a catalog of an exhibition that took place at the Moesgård museum (Aarhus, Denmark) in 1997 and contains some historical-social indications of Viking-themed paintings and authors.

<sup>5</sup> I also draw on Tim van Gerven's quantitative and systematic research, for which the 1850s were the beginning of the heyday of the historical theme in 19th century Scandinavian visual arts (figure book 7.1: Historical background in the visual arts, 1770-1919). I too place my research delimitation within what Gerven calls the third period of cultivation of Nordic antiquity from a Scandinavian perspective:

art in general, especially by painting battles, navigations and funerals related to the Viking Age.

As the main theoretical support on image, I rely on the studies from Cultural History, especially by Peter Burke. In such an approach, I seek to understand the fundamental social context in which a particular visual culture is created. Thus, the images provide access to contemporary views of a given social world; the images, then, need a series of contexts (cultural, political, material and artistic) in order to be understood.<sup>6</sup> Another fundamental concept to think about both the production of these images and their reception is that of historical stereotypes.<sup>7</sup> As an analysis methodology, I have chosen John Harvey's considerations about visual culture, understanding the tradition and intrinsic characteristics of the artifacts, its materiality and its situation.<sup>8</sup>

As main theoretical support for the theme of artistic reception I follow the idea that the popularity of Nordic themes in visual arts was due to its connection with ideals of national cultures and the political situation of each European country at that time, defined by Knut

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emancipation (ca. 1770–1830), contestation (1830–1870), popularization (1870–1919). Gerven, 2020, p. 152, 319.

<sup>6</sup> “images are neither a reflection of social reality nor a system of signs without relation to social reality, but occupy a variety of positions in between these extremes. They testify to the stereotyped yet gradually changing ways in which individuals or groups view the social world, including the world of their imagination”. Burke, 2001, p. 183. I also use the referential of the of Ernest Gombrich’s *schematta*: these visual stereotypes (*schemas*) act as a familiar filter for themes with little historical information, “a guess conditioned by habit and tradition.” Gombrich, 2000, p. 77. I also adopt as an important theoretical reference the studies on reception of Nordic themes, proposed by Margaret Clunies Ross: “(...) reception studies consider the historical and ideological environments in which cultural goods are received, but the focus is upon the act (or acts) of reception itself and the receiver (or receives) of the work of art”. Clunies Ross, 2018, p. 361-369.

<sup>7</sup> Historical stereotypes are simplifying and distorted representations of the historical past, with a pedagogical and very simple character, which favors their retention and popular dissemination. They are created from pre-existing representations, but their success in diffusion will depend on the process of mediation and reception of the created representation. For the historian, it is very important to try to understand how stereotypes were received in the thinking of individuals and how they were vectors of knowledge. Geslot, 2018, p. 163-176.

<sup>8</sup> Harvey uses three distinct phases in his analysis methodology: first, questions about the objective elements of the artifact; second, comparison of the artifact with other imagery productions or series (including iconographic elements and contexts) and production of investigative questions; third, determining cultural and social contexts. Harvey, 2013, p. 505-507.

Ljøgodt.<sup>9</sup> Another basic reference in my research is that in the representations of Vikings and Norse Myths by Europeans artists during Romanticism, the classicist reference was not always totally predominant, but this was also constituted by resistance, adaptation and use of Nordic motives, as pointed out by Nora Hansson.<sup>10</sup> The main investigative endeavor is to try to ponder on the involvement of nationalism in European artistic production: in particular, the theme of the Vikings - were they related to symbols, themes or motifs linked to ideologies or national sentiments by the Europeans? How were the Vikings portrayed by Western art? Have their representations changed over time?

### **Literary influence and stereotypes**

The general tendency of the iconographic representation of the Old Norse warrior (whether they are constant characters in Icelandic sagas or historical chronicles portraying the beginning of the Middle Ages) from the Renaissance to Pre-Romanticism, was to represent them anachronically following the dress of their own time, almost always in a infantry situation. Exemplary in this sense are the images available in Icelandic manuscripts of the 17th century (fig. 1), which reconstruct the medieval Norse according to a Renaissance reference, both with their warlike equipment (such as swords and shields), as well as clothing. Another possibility adopted is to follow the Neoclassical model representing the Viking in Greco-Roman robes. But in general, always inserting warriors in land-based situations or related to infantry and crowds (fig. 2). Even after the *Nordic Renaissance*<sup>11</sup> in 1756, this trend continued until the middle of the 19th century.

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<sup>9</sup> Ljøgodt, 2012, p. 141-165. On the relationship between Norse mythology and nationalism also see: Thomas Spray, "Northern Antiquities and Nationalism", *eSharp* 23, 2015, 1-17; Kuhn, 2011, p. 209-211; Gerven, 2019, p. 49-72; Ekedahl & Alm, 2004, p. 535-539; Braun, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Hansson, 2019, p. 1-90.

<sup>11</sup> The Nordic Renaissance was a pre-romantic literary movement inspired by Norse myth and eddic poetry. Clunies Ross & Lönnroth, 1999, p. 3. On the influences of the Nordic Renaissance in Scandinavian visual arts, see: Hansson, 2019, p. 15-19.



Fig. 1, Anonymous authorship, *Grettir*, 17th century manuscript AM 426 fol., *pictura codicum*, Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland. Photo in the public domain: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AM426\\_Grettir.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AM426_Grettir.jpg)

Fig. 2, Georg Haas, *Gunnlaugr and Hrafn*, 1774, unknown medium. Published in *Sagan af Gunnlaugi ormstungu ok skalld-Rafni, sive Gunnlaugi vermilingvis & Rafnis poetæ vita*. Edited by Jon Eiriksson (Copenhagen: Ex typographeo Regiæ universitatis apud viduam A.H. & E.C. Godiche, 1775), I.

For example, in the Latin translation of the *The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue* (1775), the three illustrations depicting Old Norse are actually Danish aristocrats from the 18th century themselves wearing *redingotes*,<sup>12</sup> Roman helmets, spears and shields (fig. 2).<sup>13</sup> Even this book containing a nine-page attachment discussing Viking etymology<sup>14</sup>, there is no image of boats or Nordics at sea.

That all changes with the romantic creation of the Viking concept. On the one hand, characteristics more related to the nautical universe were created, and on the other, the departure from representations of its own historical reality, that is, the anachronistic references. Now artists are looking for other elements, be they imaginary and fanciful, and little by little, closer to the recent archaeological research in the Scandinavian area, which also begins in the dawn of the 19th century. Parallel to these aesthetic and form transformations,

<sup>12</sup> I also perceive influences in Georg Haas' illustrations for this book, of male costumes of gentlemanly orders from the 17th century.

<sup>13</sup> *Sagan af Gunnlaugi*, 1775, p. 164, 192.

<sup>14</sup> The publisher of the book (Jon Eiriksson) discusses the term Viking in Icelandic Sagas, Anglo-Saxon sources and in Olaus Magnus, concluding that he is a pirate, in a military sense (*Sagan af Gunnlaugi*, 1775, 298-306).



artists also continue (or transform) old stereotypes, some present since the Renaissance and others created during Romanticism itself (see table 1).

Table 1, *Main stereotypes related to the Nordics of the Viking Era: Medieval (8th to 15th century AD); Gothicism (16th to 17th centuries); Pre-romanticism (18th century); Romanticism (1780 to 1880), Post-Romanticism (1880 to 1910).*<sup>15</sup>

<b><u>POSITIVE STEREOTYPES</u></b>	<b><u>←ACTION/ ELEMENT→</u></b>	<b><u>NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES</u></b>
Civilizing hero (Gothicism/Romanticism)	<i>Adventure</i>	Barbarian Invader (Romanticism)
Viking as a medieval knight/the North as the origin of chivalry (Pre- Romanticism and Romanticism) Intrepid and fearless heroes (Romanticism) Viking as a melancholy barbarian (Romanticism) Viking as king of the sea/pirate (Romanticism) Viking as a big drinker/Feast/Banquet with horns (Romanticism)	<i>Behavior</i>	Cruel and demonic pagans (Medieval and Romanticism)
Free man (freedom, justice, democracy) (Romanticism) Warriors excited by religion, poetry and love (Romanticism)	<i>Society</i>	Bestial men/barbarism (Romanticism)
<i>Heroic ideals:</i> Enemy skull as cup (Gothicism, Pre- Romanticism and Romanticism) Helmet with wings or side horns (Romanticism and Post-Romanticism) Viking ship with fanciful elements (Romanticism)	<i>Equipment</i>	<i>Barbaric ideals:</i> Enemy skull as cup (Gothicism, Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism) Helmet with wings or side horns (Romanticism and Post- Romanticism) Viking ship with fanciful elements (Romanticism)
Unsurpassed, brave, audacious, indomitable, fearless Warriors (Romanticism)	<i>War</i>	Hallucinated or uncontrolled, fierce and brutal Warriors (Romanticism)
Founding hero of a national past (Romanticism) Unsurpassed, brave, audacious, indomitable, fearless Warriors (Romanticism)	<i>Nationalism</i>	Enemy of the nation (Romanticism)

<sup>15</sup> This table was made taking into account literary sources, historical chronicles, modern translations of medieval sources and visual sources of the most varied and support of analytical bibliography (secondary sources): Wolf; Mueller-Wollmer, 2018; Boyer, 2002, p. 19-116; Boyer, 1986, p. 19-218; Cederlun, 2011, p. 5-35; Frank, 2000, p. 199-208; Langer, 2004, p. 162-169; Langer, 2002, p. 6-9; Lind, 2012, p. 151-170; Lönnroth, 1997, p. 225-249; Mjöberg, 1980, p. 207-238; Roesdahl, 1994, pp. 158-172; Ward, 2001, p. 6-20; Wawn, 2002; Wilson, 1997.

Viking was common to all Northern Europe/Scandinavism and Pan-Germanism (Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism)	<i>National origin</i>	Confusion between Celts, Scandinavians and Germans (Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism)
The Viking as a seducer (Romanticism)	<i>Abduction</i>	The Viking as a barbarian rapist (Romanticism)
Free, powerful, warrior (Romanticism) Inaccessible virgin and keeper of weapons (Romanticism)	<i>Nordic woman</i>	Bestial warrior (Post-Romanticism)
Climate influences positive behaviors (Pre-Romanticism) War is a natural activity of the Nordics (Pre-Romanticism)	<i>Environment</i>	Climate influences negative behaviors (Pre-Romanticism)

But it is through the direct influence of romantic literature that modern visual culture on Vikings has been propagated since 1824 (table 2). This literature was developed in several countries almost consecutively, but essentially influenced by Swedish, French and English writers.

Table 2, *Beginning of the literary reception about Vikings (1775-1841):*

<i>Introduction à l'Histoire de Dannemarc</i> (Northern Antiquities <sup>16</sup> ), Paul-Henry Mallet, 1775 (Denmark)
<i>Les Scandinaves</i> (The Scandinaves), Joseph Cherade-Montbron, 1801 (France)
<i>Vikingen</i> (The Viking), Gustav Geijer, 1811 (Sweden)
<i>The Pirate</i> , Walter Scott, 1821 (England)
<i>Frithjof's saga</i> (The saga of Frithiof), Esaias Tegner, 1825 (Sweden)
<i>Harald, ou les Scandinaves: tragédie en 5 actes</i> (Harald, or the Scandinavians: tragedy in 5 acts), Pierre Victor Lerebours, 1825 (France)
<i>Песнь о вещем Олеге</i> (The Song of Wise Oleg), Alexandre Pushkin, 1822 (Russia)
<i>Et gammelnorskt Herresæde</i> (A Viking's hall <sup>17</sup> ), Henrik Wergeland, 1835 (Norwegian)
<i>The Skeleton in Armor</i> , Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1841 (United States)

<sup>16</sup> Title of the British translation of 1808.

<sup>17</sup> I do not use a literal translation, but it is in the form of the majority of the translations for the English of this poem.

Among all literary works, the most influential is certainly the poem *Vikingen*, by Gustav Geijer.<sup>18</sup> This writer used some elements that already existed, but in a dispersed way and others, in turn, that ended up popularizing: the Viking as king of the sea/Pirate; as a rapist/seducer; as an invincible warrior/fearless hero; as a festive horn drinker - most of these elements are related to behavior. It is with Geijer's poem that the nautical image crystallizes objectively and becomes one of the most constant marks of Viking characteristics: "*Jag sjökonung blev - öfver vattnen drog*" (I became the sea-king and the waters drew me<sup>19</sup>). Here he is a conquering hero, made the absolute lord of war by the sea.<sup>20</sup> The figure of the king of the sea was also popularized in English after the 1820s due to the confusion between the words *sea-king* and *vi-king*.<sup>21</sup> In the novel *The pirate* (1822), Walter Scott follows the literary image created by Geijer, fusing an English term with the Old Norse word: "I am a daughter of the old dames of Norway (...) my lover must be a *Sea-King* (...) is it more wise, think you, to mistake a windmill for a giant, or the commander of a paltry corsair for a Kiempe<sup>22</sup> or a *Vi-king*?"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "(...) le mot Viking lui-même est d'apparition relativement récent: il ne s'impose guère qu'au cours du XIX siècle, peut-être à cause de la diffusion, dans la traduction de Marmier, d'un poème de Geijer: *Vikingen*. Mais auparavant, et même depuis lors, il est courant d'utiliser des termes comme Barbares, Normands, pirates, corsaires, forbans, etc. D'où les confusions." ((...) the word Viking itself is relatively recent: it hardly gained ground until the nineteenth century, perhaps because of the dissemination, in Marmier's translation, of a poem by Geijer: *Vikingen*. But before, and even since then, it is common to use terms like barbarians, Normans, pirates, corsairs, pirates, etc. Hence the confusion). Boyer, *Le mythe viking dans les lettres françaises*, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> *The Viking* by Erik Gustaf Geijer translated into English by Bicher, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> This image was already in formation with the Danish-Norwegian historian Ludvig Platou: "The greatest art of the Scandinavians was to shoot an arrow with great precision, to fell a wild bear, to challenge each other to a duel, to roam around on the seas like Sea-Vikings (sic), and - after all these trials and tribulations - to empty their beer and mead filled drinking horns." Ludvig Stoud Platou, "Besværelse af det æstetiske Prisspørgsmaal om den Nordiske Mythologiens Indførsel", in *Minerva* 64, 1801, 20. English translation by Gerven, 2020, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Wawn, 2002, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> Scott here used another word in Old Norse, *kempa*: champion, warrior. Zoëga, 2004, p. 238, and may have been influenced by earlier uses in modern Scandinavian languages of the term *kämppe*: in tragedy *Brynilda, eller Den olyckelige kärleken*, 1739, by Olof von Dalin; *Optrin af Nordens Kaempeliv*, 1811, by Nicolai Grundtvig; *Sigurd ring*, 1817, by Erik Johan Stagnelius; in the poem *Den siste kämpen*, by Gustaf Geijer, published in the magazine *Iduna*, 1816, p. 36-41.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, 1879, p. 212, emphasis added.



The terminology was also used in the poem *Vikingabalk* (The Viking Code), the 15th song of *Frithiof's saga* (1825) by poet Esaias Tegner: “men sjökonungen sjelf kastar tärningen ej” (But the king of the sea himself does not throw dice).<sup>24</sup>

Adventure at sea has become synonymous with the very spirit of adventure in literature. The Viking is now identified as the navigator and adventurer, who makes nothing move back, approaching another stereotype created by Romanticism (fig. 6): the fearless hero. But not only strength and courage, certainly other aspects will be created by the writers when describing this character: audacious, indomitable, intrepid, brutal and fierce. The Viking of Geijer attacks castles, plunders, obtains spoils, kills.<sup>25</sup> This practically innate ability of the ancient Scandinavian for war and adventure that runs through our poem, in reality, had already been anticipated by the creator of the *Nordic Renaissance*, the Swiss Paul-Henry Mallet: “War becomes, therefore, the only profession that he can exercise with pleasure and honor (...) of the character of the ancient Scandinavians in the nature of the crazy climate in which they lived”.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Scandinavia is the very cause of this warlike capacity, with its aggressive and violent climate. Medieval documentation does not necessarily mention Viking activities as irrational and bloody bandits, but within the conceptions of attacks against authority, political rivals to the Carolingians and Nordic incursions as a result of political expansions.<sup>27</sup> The representation of Scandinavians as bloody savages is a modern construction. In Geijer, shortly

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<sup>24</sup> Emphasis added. The most iconic painting of this representation was with *Les rois o mer or Pirates normands au 9e siècle ravageant les côtes de Normandie*, oil on canvas, Alfred Didier, 1870, currently part of the collection of the Museum of Arts in Rouen, France. The work was influenced by the famous painting *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, 1819, by Théodore Géricault: it is noticed that the vessel is portrayed as a raft, on the water line, almost sinking. As an allegory, Didier exchanges the concept of martyrs in Géricault's painting and transforms the Nordics into heroes of the past, where the glorious leader, standing, extends the ax as a sign of triumph, alongside a female figure (allegory of victory and glory, typical of French painting), which extends one arm upwards.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that in Geijer's poem the character becomes king of the sea soon after turning sixteen and killing a Nordic rival, who accused him of being a weakling. Becoming king of the sea, the waters attract you to games of blood and war

<sup>26</sup> “La Guerre devient donc alors la seule profession qu'il puisse exercer avec plaisir et avec honneur (...) du caractère des anciens Scandinaves dans la nature du climat fous lequel ils vivoient”. Mallet, 1755, p. 251-252.

<sup>27</sup> Coupland, 2014, p. 118-119; Boyer, 1981, p. 92-105.

after the protagonist quenches his thirst with mead, he begins his most controversial action in the entire poem: he raped a maiden in Valland.<sup>28</sup>

The representation of the Viking as abductor is the great stereotype presented in the poem. In the absence of any media sources, it is a totally romantic construction. After the poem of Geijer, in 1817, was initiated in English into an association between rape and pilgrimage, transferred to the Nordic and to the pirates in general - a more attractive image. The Viking is a figure with a specific form of masculinity, engaging in acts of aggression and aggressive domination, culminating in the romance *The Viking: an epic* (1849) by Zavarr (William Bennett), in which romance, rape and seduction take place model for many posterior works.<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the poem, freedom (*Som vinden frie, As the wind free*) also becomes synonymous with social equality, independence and liberation of the man, essential conditions for a national project.<sup>30</sup> For Geijer, the State is an organic unit and the recognition of its people is part of the general achievement of humanity.<sup>31</sup> Going out to sea and transforming the character into a king of the sea can be understood as the search for a new Swedish identity - a nation devastated by the loss of Finland, the war against Russia and Denmark, its political and social isolation from the continent, or a return to the ideal of a nautical empire of which Sweden would have been a part in the past. The rape in Valland, in this case, becomes a situation of Swedish domination and confrontation in relation to continental Europe: in the 1700s the country's political and social situation was marginal. And in the early 1800s, Swedish romantics wanted a turn in the game of nations. Abduction is power, a strong symbolism of male and political domination. And the victim of the rape in the poem is a young woman from the Mediterranean - an allegory for other European nations?

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<sup>28</sup> *Valland* is a generic term for the southern, southeastern and southwestern regions of Scandinavia. In the *Heimskringla* the term is associated with France. Sturluson, *Heimskringla* 2009, p. 79, 86, 169, 251, 436, 682. In the French translation of the *Vikingen* poem by Xavier Marmier, the term appeared as "le pays de Galles", Marmier, 1839, p. 438.

<sup>29</sup> Sigurdson, 2014, p. 249-259.

<sup>30</sup> On the topic of Viking as a free man, consult: Zernack, 2018, p. 255-266; Boyer, 1981, p. 105-112.

<sup>31</sup> Kurunmäki, 2000, p. 16.

The last sentence of the poem reveals other aspects of Geijer's nationalism (*Men den tappres minne - det bliver, But the memory of the brave - still lives*). It reveals that the value of the historical past is important for the present. For this Swedish intellectual, each persons' life not only in its time, but also through its memory. Each generation of people leaves their customs and concepts to the next - and it is through these customs, the tradition, that the people become one, as a nation and personality. Following a model close to Rousseau's, the Viking here is identified with an almost paradisiacal Nordic past - free, dominant, triumphant - moving away and, at times, subduing, the evils of Mediterranean (or classical, or continental Europe) civilization. Thus, it is clear how the literary figure of Geijer's Viking was not only a catalyst for the ancient artistic representations about this character, but also the new version of a patriotic figure in which freedom and nationalism played a fundamental role.

#### **The initial phase: between Ossian and medieval cavalry (1824-1831)**

As I pointed out earlier, the visual representations of the ancient Nordic, from the Renaissance to the 18th century were produced within anachronistic references. It was only from the Romanticism that I have the inclusion of other references of characterization, that mixed influences of the literature (like the Geijer's *Vikingen* poem) with an aesthetic derived from another artistic canon, initiated at the end of the 18th century: the representation of the Nordic peoples, Celtic and Germanic within the framework of the character Ossian. In general, the medieval Nordic themes started to become relevant to the arts as a whole after the crisis of Neoclassicism in the 18th century, motivated especially by the search for national identities. Each country sought the roots for its aesthetic references in its own history, folklore and ancient literature. Rome and Pompeii were not the stimulators of art at this time - major European nations sought inspiration from James Macpherson's *Ossian* poem, supposedly based on oral Scottish traditions, published in 1762. Far from a classical world according to the Roman or Greek molds, intellectuals and artists started to search for the political and cultural glories of their own past inhabitants, especially Celtic, Germanic or Scandinavian warriors, who evoked a barbaric and epic past whose symbolic figure of the bard Ossian could convey the achievements of their old deeds.

Thus, for an artist in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, representing a Norseman or a Celtic was practically the same task. A typical element related to one of the main characters

of the Ossian cycle, Fingal, will be transferred to the Nordics: the pair of side wings located on a helmet. In addition, other reasons will also be applied in the period between the years 1824 to 1831: military equipment (such as shields, weapons and clothing) with Greco-Roman design or medieval knights, motivating the denomination of Ossian phase.



Fig. 3, François Gérard, *Harald I, roy de Norvege*, unknown medium. Published in *Costumes des principaux personnages des Scandinaves: tragedie en 5 actes de M. Victor* (Paris: P. Feillet, 1824), 1.

Fig. 4, François Gérard, *Adeltan, guerrier scanien*, unknown medium. Published in *Costumes des principaux personnages des Scandinaves: tragedie en 5 actes de M. Victor* (Paris: P. Feillet, 1824), 3.

The aesthetics of the character Fingal will first be applied to the Nordics in France, at the premiere of the Harald tragedy, in 1824. The costumes presented had some reasons generally associated with the Nordics, such as the use of axes (fig. 3, fig. 4). The details of the costumes are fanciful and recall Baroque fashion, but the most striking detail is the immense helmet in Harald, a mixture of crown with a large plume in the Roman style (galea crest) and the unmistakable lateral wings, of great size.

But it is in the printed book that I notice the first aesthetic reference directly linked to Geijer's *Vikingen* poem: the relationship of the Vikings to the sea. At the frontispiece a Nordic

ship is positioned at the bottom of a cove (fig. 5). The leader of the group is kneeling in front of a large rock, where there is a skald (carrying a large harp) and a woman, in white clothes. In the human typology existing in the romantic literary reception proposed by Mjöberg,<sup>32</sup> the illustration incorporates the first three: the Viking, the skald, the woman of the sagas, the farmer and the Valkyrie. The Nordic chief wears Roman armor and his helmet has large side wings. The scene was influenced by the aesthetics of Ossian themes, derived from the success of James Macpherson's *Ossian* novel - both by the presence of the long-bearded poet and harp, and by the hero's winged helmet<sup>33</sup>.

The image of the Viking arises from the incorporation of the Celtic tradition by the French, after which it has a more Nordic structure in iconography, especially in clothing - but the winged helmet survives in the figure of the leader. The text of Lerebours' book exalts the Nordic's relationship with the sea: "To make the Scandinavians more intrepid at sea (...) The most powerful and the most formidable were called *Kings of the Sea*"<sup>34</sup>, but also on page 56, it presents an illustration of a vessel (which in reality is a Roman trireme). The more exact ignorance of the material culture of the ancient Norse, at this moment, made the artist search for references in the classical world.

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<sup>32</sup> Mjöberg, 1980, p. 228.

<sup>33</sup> An equipment previously present in the character Fingal, see: *Fingal*, oil on canvas by John Trumbull, 1792; *Fingal*, drawing by Alexis-Francois Girard, early 19th century; *Ossian évoque les fantômes au son de la harpe sur les bords du Lora*, oil on canvas, Pascal Simon Gérard, 1801; *Le songe d'Ossian*, watercolor by Jean-Auguste-Dominique, 1812; *Fingal og lodas Ánd*, drawing by Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein-Stub, early 19th century.

<sup>34</sup> "Pour rendre les Scandinaves plus intrépides sur mer (...) Les plus puissants et les plus redoutables étaient appelés *Rois de Mer*". Lerebours, 1825, p. 163, emphasis added.





Johnni Langer (*Dossier: Norse Myths in the Artistic Reception*)

**Harald,**  
OU  
**Les Scandinaves,**

TRAGÉDIE EN CINQ ACTES,

PAR PIERRE VICTOR,

REPRÉSENTÉE, POUR LA PREMIÈRE FOIS, SUR LE SECOND THÉÂTRE-  
FRANÇAIS, LE 4 FÉVRIER 1824;

PRÉCÉDÉE ET SUIVIE

**D'Observations**

HISTORIQUES, LITTÉRAIRES ET THÉÂTRALES;

ORNÉE DE PLUSIEURS VIGNETTES D'APRÈS DÉVERIA.

« Après le courage, nul sentiment plus que l'amour  
« n'avait d'empire sur le cœur des Scandinaves »  
(Gauls poétiques de M. de Marchangy.)



PARIS.

BARBA, ÉDITEUR, COUR DES FONTAINES, N° 7.  
LES PRINCIPAUX LIBRAIRES DU PALAIS-ROYAL.  
L'AUTEUR, RUE NEUVE-SAINTE-ROCHE, N° 10.

1825.

Fig. 5, Charles Étienne Pierre Motte, *Harald*, unknown medium. Published in Frontispice of book *Harald ou les Scandinaves: tragédie en cinq actes*, drawing by Charles Étienne Pierre Motte. Pierre Victor Lerebours, *Harald ou les Scandinaves: tragédie en cinq actes* (Paris: Barba, Éditeur, 1825).

Another important diffuser of the nautical image of the Nordic adventurer was Tegner's book *Frithiof's Saga*, which soon influenced the creation of paintings, as was the case with Carl Lehman's *Frithiof dreper to troll på havet* (Frithiof slaying two trolls at sea, fig. 6). Almost everything in this painting is fanciful. Nordic vessels were not well known, so Frithiof's boat has four Latin masts and sails and the bow contains a kind of spur. The hero is in full armor -

although medieval knights began to wear only from the 14th century (and its use was extended until the 17th century) - artistic imagery generalized its use for the entire medieval times. Frithiof remains proud and manly at the bow of the vessel, highlighting his role as a hero and warrior in front of a vessel in the middle of the ocean - here the relationship of the Viking as king of the sea is fully configured, which would become one of the most iconic images of this character in the visual arts.<sup>35</sup>



Fig. 6, Carl Peter Lehmann, *Frithiof dreper to troll på havet* (Frithiof slaying two trolls at sea), 1826, oil on canvas, © KODE Art Museums and Composer Homes, Bergen, Norway.

The adventurer of Lehmann's painting is also an example of the Nordic mixed with the ideal of medieval chivalry, which emerged at the end of the 18th century. In this context of European resumption of medieval literature, artists sought elements to escape the

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<sup>35</sup> The most iconic examples are: *Nordmennene lander på Island år 872*, oil on canvas, Oskar Wergeland, 1877; *Le Siège de Paris para les Normands*, drawing by Alphonse Marie de Neuville, insert in *L'Histoire de France raconté à mès petits-enfants* by François Guizot, 1879; *Les rois o mer ou Piratas normands au 9e siècle ravageant les côtes de Normandie*, oil on canvas, Alfred Didier, 1870; *Une drakkar de pirates scandinaves*, anonymous watercolor inserted in *Le Petit Journal: supplément illustre* n. 1072, 1911; *Kane on the golden sea*, oil on canvas, Frank Frazetta, 1977 - where all the images stand out for the forward position of the expedition leader at the bow of the ship.

Neoclassicism that prevailed in the arts in general, but they also sought to escape the enlightenment rationalism that prevailed at the time. Therefore, the Pre-Romantic period saw the birth of a movement that will ignite European intellectuals. He seeks in the ancient myths, epics and folklore, elements that can provide themes for a contesting art of rationalism (the sublime and melancholy, which will be some of the preferred themes of the later Romanticism) and to strengthen a national identity, which seeks its origins.

In parallel, I have some literary movements that are moving in a direction similar to that referred aesthetic movement, such as the *Sturm und Drang* in Germany. And in 1762 James Macpherson's *Ossian* poem became a fever in Europe, leading each country to look for its own mythical-folk traditions in particular, but taking the Celtic past to an absolute level - many later works will confuse ancient Germans with Celts and Nordic, either in literature or in the visual arts. For example, until the end of the 19th century, Druids will be the aesthetic reference of priests for all these ancient peoples of Europe. The very notion of "North" here needs to be nuanced - it is not just Scandinavia, but the whole of Northern Europe that blends indifferently with a Celtic and Germanic past, both historically and linguistically. The borders are not well demarcated, causing the "confusions" of this period.

In 1755, the so-called Nordic Renaissance began in Denmark, which was very influential in France and in German-speaking countries in general. The Sagas and Eddas are translated, studied and receive new versions, but at the hands of excited young writers. But how to represent the ancient gods and goddesses? How to visually represent the ancient Nordic? At that time, the ancient visual sources (produced during the Viking Age and the medieval period) were not known and the study of the material culture was very precarious. Then, painters and sculptors appealed to their imagination and the resources they had at this time - and medieval chivalry filtered by the literature of this time was an excellent option.

The stereotype of the Norseman as a medieval knight first began in France in 1801: "Everything we call chivalrous spirit we owe to the Scandinavians."<sup>36</sup> In 1825 the Swedish writer Esaias Tegner published his version of Frithiof, where the protagonist hero has several

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<sup>36</sup> "Tout ce que nous appelons esprit chevaleresque, nous le devons aux Scandinaves". Cherade-Montbron, 1801, p. 266.

elements of a medieval knight, as well as the Danish writer Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger (in the character King Helge, 1814) and the Finnish Johan Ludvig Runeberg (in character King Fjalar, 1844).<sup>37</sup> Frithiof's chivalrous model in *Tégner* involves a Nordic masculinity shaped by physical strength and confidence, respect for the father and care for his wife.<sup>38</sup> In 1825, in France, the idea was created that it was in Northern Europe that cavalry would have been born: "Which proves indisputably that chivalry came from the North".<sup>39</sup> Several other French intellectuals also continued to defend this notion.<sup>40</sup>

In this way, the Nordic/Norman becomes not only a hero of Romanticism (see table 1), but also a model of virtue and good behavior in times past. Even for readers of Icelandic sagas, these gentlemanly characteristics seem to dominate the old actions of the Nordics, where the spirit of gallantry would be linked to the values of conduct, fraternity, respect for women and the appreciation for honorable combat. Even the duel (*hólmganga*) is seen from a Middle Ages nostalgia for tournaments. Not even the famous philosopher and poet, Arthur de Gobineau, escaped this trend: "(...) Rollo and his bold band (...) From sailors they were became knights"<sup>41</sup>. This is not a question of faithful interpretations of medieval Nordic texts, of course,

<sup>37</sup> Mjöberg, 1980, p. 229.

<sup>38</sup> Wawn, 2002, p. 136-137.

<sup>39</sup> "Ce qui prouve d'une manière incontestable que la chevalerie est venue du Nord". Lerebours, 1825, p. 176.

<sup>40</sup> "On aime à reconnaître que l'esprit de galanterie des Européens modernes est un héritage des Scandinaves, et que l'odinisme a été le berceau de la chevalerie" (likes to recognize that the spirit of gallantry of modern Europeans is a legacy of the Scandinavians, and that Odinism was the cradle of chivalry). Saint-Geniès, 1824, p. XII; "Il faut savoir que la Scandinavie, d'où sont sortis les Normands, est le véritable berceau de la chevalerie" (You should know that Scandinavia, from where the Normans came out, is the real cradle of chivalry) Hagberg, 1835, p. 240-245, 247; "L'Europe Méridionale et occidentale n'avait pas l'esprit de chevalerie avant l'invasion gothique et germanique" ("Southern and Western Europe did not have the spirit of chivalry before the Gothic and Germanic invasion") Hemsö, 1822, p. 85; "On a pu voir qu'il y avait dans les moeurs scandinaves, toutes rudes et barbares qu'elles étaient, quelque chose de chevaleresque; pour l'exaltation de la bravoure, l'avidité de la gloire, la fraternité des armes, l'amour du beau sexe, le goût de la poésie héroïque, enfin pour toutes les passions fortes, ils étaient chevaliers" ("We could see that there was in Scandinavian customs, rough and barbaric as they were, something chivalrous; for the exaltation of bravery, the greed for glory, the brotherhood of arms, the love of the fair sex, the taste for heroic poetry, finally for all strong passions, they were knights"). Deping, 1826, p. 367.

<sup>41</sup> "(...) Rollon et sa bande hardie (...) De marins qu'ils étaient devinrent chevaliers" Arthur de Gobineau. Manfrédine, 1838 (unfinished poem), in: Ambri, 1965, p. 165.



but of filtering that went against the reception of that moment. And nothing could exemplify better than the visual arts.

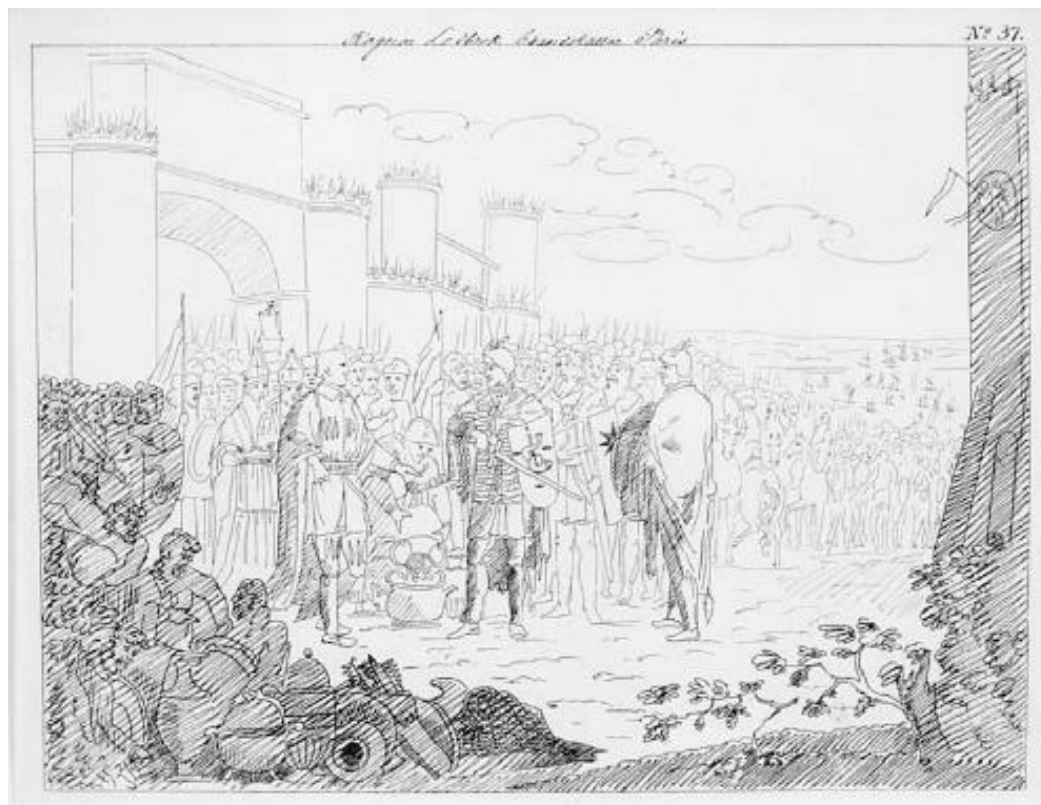


Fig. 7, Anders Hultgren, *Ragnar Lodbrok brandskattar Paris* (Ragnar Lodbrok plundering Paris), etching, 1818, © Nationalmuseum, Inventory No. NMG 840/1890, Photo in the public domain: <http://emp-web-84.zetcom.ch/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=artist&objectId=10474>

The figure 7 represents a drawing by Anders Hultgren (1763-1838), a study for a mural that was destroyed by fire in 1819. It reconstitutes an alleged historical event, the siege of the Nordic leader Ragnar Lodbrok in the city of Paris, in 845 AD. The entire leader and his band were represented as medieval knights: wearing typical swords, shields with coats of arms, horses in the background. Ragnar's own physical position, with his hand gesturing and pointing his sword, reveals a chivalrous attitude. In other words, everything is very distant from the equipment and attitudes of the Viking Age.



The mural was commissioned by king Karl XIV Johan<sup>42</sup> for the Rosendal Palace in Stockholm. It was used to legitimize the royal house and the new king.<sup>43</sup> Karl Johan saw himself as a Scandinavian king causing a blow to the French empire (after the Napoleonic wars), a vision that influenced the creation of various artistic works in his palaces, in addition to the promotion of cultural events related to Norse Mythology.<sup>44</sup>

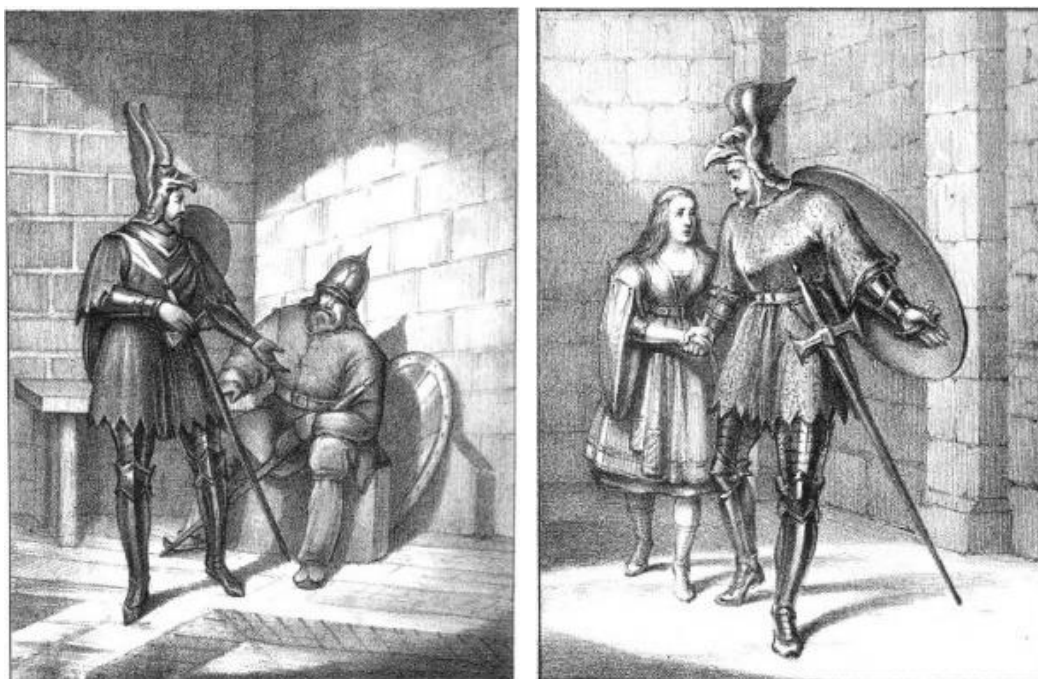


Fig. 8, Johan Holmbergsson, *Frithiof*, unknown medium. Published in *Frithiof saga*, 5th edition, by Esaias Tégner. Stockholm: Tryckt Hos PA Norstedt & Soner, 1831.

Fig. 9, Johan Holmbergsson, *Frithiof*, unknown médium. Published in *Frithiof saga*, 5th edition, by Esaias Tégner (Stockholm: Tryckt Hos PA Norstedt & Soner, 1831).

<sup>42</sup> *Karl XIV Johan* (Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, 1763-1844), king of Sweden and Norway from 5 February 1818 to 8 March 1844. Åstrand, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> "Political power is invisible, it must be personified before being seen, symbolized before being loved (...) Myths are a means of shaping and exercising power (...) power requires communication, in which a certain relationship between governors and subordinates is presented as reasonable and legitimate". Ekedahl & Alm, 2004, p. 537-538.

<sup>44</sup> Karl XIV Johan also personified himself as the god Odin, in a sculpture made by Bengt Erland Fogelberg. Widén, 2013, p. 322-338. Another Scandinavian case of the political use of Norse Mythology and the Vikings was with king Frederik VI of Denmark, between the years 1818 to 1839, on the subject consult: Langer, 2021.

The Scandinavian art continued the tendency to characterize the ancient Nordic as medieval knights. In Johan Holmbergsson's illustrations for Tegner's *Frithiof's saga* we can still perceive these elements (fig. 8, fig. 9): he stands out for his majestic and shiny armor: in the first image, he talks to a warrior and in the second, with a maiden. His winged helmet makes him the leader and only Frithiof carries him as equipment. He imposes himself through gestures and behaviors: honorable, noble, brave. He stands out not only for being an audacious warrior, but for being a man who has a love for ladies and their virtues at court (as well as the courteous knights in the Middle Ages). The complete armor of the Nordic, which did not exist in the Viking Age, will gradually disappear in romantic art, unlike the helmet with wings - this will continue until today, even in other artistic manifestations. It happens to be commonly featured only in leaders, chiefs and kings and not every Nordic warrior.<sup>45</sup>

#### **The Nordic phase: 1827 to 1851**

Already in an 1819 drawing (fig. 10), which was a study for the painting *Christendommens indførelse i Danmark* (Christianity's introduction in Denmark), I located one of the origins of Nordic representation of Vikings in European art. In this image, the danish painter Johan Ludwig Lund (1777-1867) deals with missionary Ansgar's preaching in the Hedeby city in the ninth century<sup>46</sup>, while a small group of six warriors stands on the sidelines of the crowd watching his preaching. Two of them carry wolfskins (they are *Úlfhéðnar*), but one of them carries a *carnyx*, a Celtic wind instrument (which were not used by the Norse). Some move their arms in a position of distrust, while the central leader demonstrates a thoughtful and

<sup>45</sup> From the 1830s onwards, the visual representations of the Vikings in Europe gradually abandoned the reference of the medieval knight, leaving only the winged helmet. Clothing and equipment become increasingly Nordic. But on the other side of the Atlantic, in the United States, this representation will survive until the twentieth century. In 1832 a skeleton was discovered in the next to a supposed armor (Fall River, Massachusetts), inaugurating the Nordic myth in that country. A few years later, in 1841, the writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published the poem "*The Skeleton in Armor*", influenced by the discovery. In this poem, the term *Viking* was mentioned for the first time in the America, but the first images associating this narrative with the idealization of medieval cavalry occurred only in 1856. John Gilbert makes a drawing for the British edition of the poem *The Skeleton in Armor*, by Longfellow (London: George Routledge & Co., 1856), with a knight in full armor and a winged helmet, later reproduced in color by American painter Alice M. A. Baumgartner, *The Skeleton in Armor*, watercolor, 1870-1890, private collection.

<sup>46</sup> Ulrich Schulte-Wülwer, "Lund som landskabsmaler", *Den anden guldalder: Johan Ludvig Lund over alle grænser* (Denmark: Den Hirschsprungeske Samling, 2019), 122.

bowed head, with one hand on his chin. This scene was influenced by classical sources, in which Celts and Germanics are merged with or taken as Scandinavians, but even so, the painter moves towards a medieval expression with reference to the Norse.



Fig. 10, J. L. Lund, *Ansgar prædikende* (Ansgar preaching), 1819. Drawing/pencil, © Statens Museum for Kunst (KKSgb13640), Copenhagen.

Notwithstanding, when Lund painted *Christendommens indførelse i Danmark*<sup>47</sup> (Fig. 12) in 1827, he made several modifications. He eliminates the group of discontented warriors with the preacher, letting only three of them, among whom the leader carries his spear, portrayed in a thoughtful and suspicious position, but now, instead of a smooth helmet, he wears small side wings and a cloak. He contrasts with the anachronistic knight right in front of him, standing on the right side of the missionary Ansgar, while holding a sword, dressed in his full armor and with his hand on his waist. This symbolizes the triumph of Christianity over

<sup>47</sup> It is the only painting in the Christiansborg Palace collection that depicts a historic event and not just a religious practice. Vejlbj, 2019, p. 86.



paganism which was at that moment beginning to succumb. In this case, the leader represents the pagan figure, which then became the Viking image.<sup>48</sup>



Fig. 11, J. L. Lund, *Ansgar prædikende* (Ansgar preaching, detail), 1819. Drawing/pencil, © Statens Museum for Kunst (KKSgb13640), Copenhagen.

<sup>48</sup> Langer, 2021b, p. 6-26. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writers and artists portrayed Germanic chieftain Arminius with a winged helmet, although his men retained flat, undeveloped helmets in the same images. Examples are found in Daniel Casper von Lohenstein's novel *Großmüthiger Feldherr Arminius* (1689), illustrations by Crispin Pas the younger, Christoph Weigel's picture-album *Sculptura historicarum et temporum memoriatrix* (1699). Frank, "The Invention of the Viking Horned Helmet", 204-205. Another possible influence in J. L. Lund may have been the representation of Odin with winged helmet, as in Andreas Ludvig Koop's drawing *Vola der åbenbarer sig for Thor* (1822) or drawings of valkyries with wing helms, made by his friend Hermann Ernest Freund (1822-1828).



Fig. 12, J. L. Lund, *Christendommens indførelse i Danmark* (Christianity's introduction in Denmark), 1827, Oil on canvas, Statsrådssalen, © Christiansborg Slot, Copenhagen.



Fig. 13, J. L. Lund, *Christendommens indførelse i Danmark* (Christianity's introduction in Denmark, detail), 1827, Oil on canvas, Statsrådssalen, © Christiansborg Slot, Copenhagen.



The emergence of Nordic references for the Vikings aesthetics became much more intense with the nationalist involvement on the part of the artists. In this sense, the work of the Swedish painter Hugo Hamilton (1802-1871) is an example. In one of his several drawings, *Odens ankomst till Sverige och förening med Gylfe* (Odin arrives in Sweden and meets King Gylfi), I can observe the transition of these elements (fig. 14). On the one hand, the mythical king Gylfi with Roman-style robes, helm and scepter, with his guard wearing medieval armor and Phrygian caps. On the right side, the god Odin, wearing a long tunic and a staff; at his side, several warriors, in opposition to the band in front of him, carry spears (symbols of the god), smooth helmets and tunics in the Nordic style. A warrior, in particular, leans on a clef and uses a wolf's skin: he is an *Úlfhedinn*, and in the same way as in J. L. Lund, he was directly associated with paganism.



Fig. 14, Hugo Hamilton, *Odens ankomst till Sverige och förening med Gylfe* (Odin arrives in Sweden and meets King Gylfi), 1830, lithography. Published in *Teckningar ur Skandinaviens Äldre Historia* (Stockholm: Gjöthström & Magnusson, 1830).

This drawing was included as an illustration in the book *Teckningar ur Skandinaviens Äldre Historia* (Drawings from Scandinavia's Older History) and is perhaps the first publication to include Vikings as historical characters and not as mere elements of literature. In other images of the same work, I can observe mythical battles (Bråvalla slag), scenes from everyday life (Skandinaviens Äldsta Innebyggare), characters from the Icelandic sagas (Hrólfur Kraki, Hjalmar, Ragnar Lodbrok, Alf, Yngve) and Christianization (Ansgar), all still very dependent on a vision of medieval cavalry applied to the Viking Age. Thus, it is in the confrontation between religions that Hamilton inserts a much more Nordic perception for the ancient warriors, at the same time that they still have a certain primitivism, when compared to the knights (in this context, the Scandinavians already Christianized). Hamilton was a Swedish aristocrat and from 1828 to 1834 he was secretary to the Office of King Karl XIV Johan<sup>49</sup>. His book represents a clear attempt to highlight the past and the ancient achievements of the Scandinavians, being used as legitimizers of the real power of their present. The illustration *Odin arrives in Sweden and meets King Gylfi*, with this, is a representation of the Vikings as ancestors of a mythical period that can be recovered for the glories of modern Sweden.

Following these trends, not only Sweden and Denmark produced the historic glorification of the Viking, but also Norway.

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<sup>49</sup> Hugo Adolph Hamilton af Hageby, <https://peoplepill.com/people/hugo-hamilton-1/>



Fig. 15, Johannes Flintoe, *Havnen i Skiringssal* (The Harbour in Skiringssal), 1835, oil on canvas, Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, public domain: <https://digitaltmuseum.no/011042444167/havnen-i-skiringssal-maleri>

The painting *Havnen i Skiringssal* (The Harbour in Skiringssal, fig. 15) by the Norwegian Johannes Flintoe (1786-1870) is notable, first of all, for its drama. It reproduces a very common theme in Icelandic sagas, the resolution of a dispute or conflict between characters through an armed struggle in the middle of a circle of stones (*hólmanga*). One of the warriors is armed with a large ax, while the other is preparing to draw his sword. Two hooded men hold other weapons for the pair of fighters, while two others, between trees, glimpse the distant port, with several boats. The scene in general is very realistic and historical, both in the elements of material culture and the representation of nature. But at the same time, he collaborated with the propagation of two images that will be closely associated with the ancient Nordic: the use of an ax and its violence. Flintoe was an expert in painting Scandinavian landscapes. Although the site depicted is a historic Norse port during Viking Age Norway (in the 9th century, also



called Kaupang), here the setting of Icelandic sagas appears as a pan-Scandinavian theme, much more than a regionalist view.



Fig. 16, Knud Baad, *Sittende viking i kystlandskap* (Sitting viking in coastal landscape), 1840, pencil and engraving on paper, Nasjonalmuseet (NG.M.02653VERSO), public domain: <http://samling.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/object/NG.M.02653VERSO>

The Nordics are again represented by Norwegian art with Knut Baad (1808-1879). The drawing *Sittende viking i kystlandskap* (Sitting viking in coastal landscape) 1840, features an aged male figure, with an ax resting on his shoulders and sitting on a rock on the beach (fig. 16). He wears a hood over his head and remains somewhat twisted, looking sadly at the distant sea horizon. Despite being a somewhat unusual reason in European art up to this point, in relation to the Vikings, Baad was influenced by the poem *Den sidste k mpen*<sup>50</sup> (The last Warrior, 1811), by Gustaf Geijer. In this poem, there is the figure of an old warrior who regrets that his companions are already dead and eagerly awaits the moment to be with Odin, being sung at the top of a mountain. The poet was related to the still living glories of his people, he is merely

<sup>50</sup> Swedish original and English translation available at: *Historical & Classical Poetry*, <http://www.odins-gift.com/pclass/thelastwarrior.htm>



the last representative of a culture that was now dying, something dearly appreciated by romantic aesthetics.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 17, Knud Baade, *Fantasibilde fra den norske sagatid* (Scene from the Era of Norwegian Sagas), 1850, oil on canvas, Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, Tromsø, Norway.

Another work by Baade referring to the melancholy figure of the Viking was the painting *Fantasibilde fra den norske sagatid* (Scene from the Era of Norwegian Sagas, 1850), where one can see the shadow of a warrior supported by his spear, on the top of a great mound, also watching the distant sea (fig. 17). According to Ljøgodt<sup>52</sup>, these works by Baade were influenced by Gustaf Geijer and reflect the melancholy atmosphere of an encounter with a hero from the ancient past. I agree. But I also noticed some differences between these two works. In the drawing, the old warrior is sitting, bored, looking at the calm sea. The whole scene is one of

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<sup>51</sup> Literature started the association of melancholy with the ancient Nordic: "(...) Les Scandinaves. La mélancolie était habituelle aux Barbares (The Scandinavians. Melancholy was usual with the barbarians)" Cherade-Montbron, 1801, p. XVIII; "(...) nés avec les deux sentiments les plus capables d'élever et d'attendrir les cœurs, la mélancolie et la fierté (born with the two feelings most capable of uplifting and softening hearts, melancholy and pride)", Lerebours, 1825, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Ljøgodt, 2012, p. 161-162

peace and melancholy. The old man does not hold his axe, as it rests on his shoulders. He doesn't seem to have the strength to do that. On the contrary: in the painting, the sea is rough and the sky has dark clouds. The warrior is standing, holding his spear. His image is one of haughtiness, of virility. Here, Baade evokes the warrior spirit of the sagas, much more than a state of decay. Thus, melancholy is directly associated with heroism, which is ending, but it can be rescued by the present time, going against the nationalist ideal prevailing in Scandinavia of this period.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 18, Frederik Nicolai Jensen, *En Viking bortfører en sydlandsk kvinne* (Viking abducting a southern woman), 1845, oil on canvas, KODE Art Museums and Composer Homes (inv. 379), Bergen, Norway.

<sup>53</sup> Baade has been involved in the production of Norse mythology themes since the 1820s, with some works sponsored by the Swedish king Karl XIV Johan. Ljøgdott, 2015, p. 289.



The heroic figure of the ancient Nordic was also related to virility and predation. And in this case, Norway produced the first iconographic representation of the Viking as an abductor,<sup>54</sup> following Geijer's *Vikingen* poem (1811), with the painting *En Viking bortfører en sydlandsk koinne* (Viking abducting a southern woman), 1845, by Frederik Nicolai Jensen (1818-1870). The scene is picturesque: a Viking tries to hold a fleeing woman, terrified (fig. 18). The Norseman has brown hair, a cape, a helmet, a shield and a fanciful ax; the dark-haired woman is wearing a dress of Renaissance patterns. The site features constructions that refer to the Mediterranean. In addition to reinforcing the ancient Scandinavian as violent and dominant, the painter also contrasts the Northern civilization in opposition to the Neoclassicist values (reigning in art between the 18th and early 19th centuries), one of the tonics of Romanticism.

Another possibility of interpretation is to think of Norway in opposition to other European countries, both in cultural and political terms. In this sense, Jensen's painting must be contextualized within *Nasjonalromantikken* (Norwegian romantic nationalism), in force especially between the years 1840 to 1860. Nature, popular culture and the History of Norway were emphasized within a national identity and nostalgia, since the country had been partially independent from Sweden since 1814. In this context, Vikings were also symbols of freedom for Norwegians, as emphasized in the poem *Et gammelnorskt Herresæde* (A Viking's hall, 1835), by writer Henrik Wergeland, one of the leaders of the cultural and patriotic debate of the time. Also, the first translation of the *Heimskringla* into Norwegian was done by Jacob Aall in 1839. In 1844 one of the most influential romantic poems about Nordic myths was written, *Asgaardsreien*, by Johan Sebastian Welhaven.

The painting *Viking abducting a southern woman* approached a perspective that was not followed by later Norwegian painters between 1850 and 1880, such as Nicolai Arbo and

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<sup>54</sup> The theme of abduction/rape by the ancient Germanic and Nordic was once again present in the paintings *La prisonnière disputée*, 1872, *Invasion*, 1872, *Le Ravisement*, 1889, *The abduction*, 1887, *Pirates normands au IX siècle* (1893-1897), all of the French painter Évariste-Vital Luminais (1821-1896); *After the raid*, 1892 and *Viking women by a fire*, s.d., by British painter Edward Matthew Hale (1842-1942); *Ein Wikingerüberfall*, 1901 and *Vikings looting*, 1911, by German painter Ferdinand Leeke (1859-1923). Then, in the 20th century, this theme will also be constant in women's literature, but as an erotic element. Positively or negatively, the image of the Nordic rapist was a historical and stereotyped fantasy. Sigurdson, 2014, p. 249-267.

August Malmström, who preferred to accompany a tragic and patriotic heroic Viking model, quite different from the manly and violent model created by Gustaf Geijer and who influenced Jensen.

Another Nordic hero model will also appear in the same year as Jensen's painting, but produced with a theme on the other side of the Atlantic. However, unlike Norwegian painting, it met a more famous destination in art history.



Fig. 19, Emanuel Leutze, *Die Landung der Wikinger in Amerika* (Arrival of the Vikings in America)<sup>55</sup>, 1845, oil on canvas, Stiftung Museum Kunstpalat, Dusseldorf, on long-term loan from the Stiftung Sammlung Volmer, Wuppertal.

*Die Landung der Wikinger in Amerika* was produced by the German American painter Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze (1816-1868).<sup>56</sup> It represents the Nordics arriving on the American

<sup>55</sup> The painting would have the original title of: *Die Landung der Normannen in Amerika* (The Landing of the Normans in America), according to Gammon, *Deaccessioning and its Discontents*, 152. But that makes no difference, as the terms Viking, Scandinavian, Norse and Nordic were taken as identical to the intellectual and cultural imagery of Americans of the period. Blanck, 2016, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> The painting may have been produced in Italy or Germany, Barbara S. Groseclose, *Emmanuel Lotze, 1818-1868: Freedom Is the Only King* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), 75.



continent during the Middle Ages, where four women and five men were represented (fig. 19). Women wear loose hair, with veils or braids. The prominent woman (like a princess), raised under her shoulders and two men, has a Victorian brocade dress. Three men have chain mail, while only the leader appears wearing a helmet with side wings, as well as a shield. He raises his hands to the heavens, as if to claim victory for arriving at his destination. One of the crew raises his hands and reaches for a bunch of grapes<sup>57</sup> intertwined with a tree, perhaps an allusion to the land of Vinland, described in the Icelandic sagas and discovered by Leif Eriksson. The vessel is small, obviously unsuitable for navigation on the high sea and within the fantastic references of the period.<sup>58</sup> The figure of the leader was certainly influenced by Frithiof's numerous illustrations and paintings of European art up to that time, converging between a model derived from medieval cavalry and more Nordic references.

The painting in general has elements of the Düsseldorf school, with extravagant and allegorical characterizations, which Leutze absorbed when he studied at this German academy during the 1840s.<sup>59</sup> The painting was commissioned by collector Edward Lawrence Carey<sup>60</sup> and arrived in Philadelphia in 1845, receiving positive reviews, such as the *New York Daily Tribune* in 1846, when it was exhibited at The National Academy of Design.<sup>61</sup> Carey was directly influenced by the prevailing ideas of the Norse in America before Columbus. In 1837 in the book *Antiquitates Americanæ*, the Danish historian Carl Rafn defended the Scandinavian presence in Massachusetts Bay during the Middle Ages,<sup>62</sup> based on Icelandic sagas and some archaeological evidence, such as the Dighton stone (Berkley, with supposed runic inscriptions) and The Newport Tower (Rhode Island), which would have been built by these explorers.<sup>63</sup> And the American historian Asahel Davis, following Rafn's theories, also published a book on the subject, reissued several times between 1838 and 1844.<sup>64</sup> Still in 1844, Professor James

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<sup>57</sup> Wierich, 1998, p. 170.

<sup>58</sup> The artistic representations of medieval Nordic vessels began to be more historic and realistic only after the discovery of Gokstad, Norway, in 1880.

<sup>59</sup> Fluck, 2011, p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> But he never got to see the finished work, as he died in 1845, Groseclose, 1975, p. 75.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Gammon. *Deaccessioning and its Discontents: A Critical History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018), 135.

<sup>62</sup> Rafn, 1837.

<sup>63</sup> The tower received its own study, with several texts and illustrations, in the book: *Supplement to the Antiquitates Americanæ*. Rafn, 1841.

<sup>64</sup> Davis, 1839.

Russell Lowell made connections between the Nordics and the Puritans of New England, as being fundamental to a definition of the United States.<sup>65</sup>

But certainly, the biggest influence on Leutze's painting was the poem *The skeleton in armor*, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, published in 1841.<sup>66</sup> The basic plot of this poem is the coming of an adventurer from Norway ("I was a Viking old!"<sup>67</sup>) to the Massachusetts region, running away with a princess. Here, he erects a building (identified as Newport Tower<sup>68</sup>), dedicated to his wife's memory. One of the most prominent elements in the poem, which Leutze preserves in his painting, is the irreverence and humor of the Nordics ("then the champion laughed; Laugh as he hailed us"<sup>69</sup>), a feature absent from European literature and painting and which will become one of the main marks of the reinterpretation of the ancient Nordic for American art and media.<sup>70</sup>

Leutze's painting will thus influence the United States' later artistic reception of the Vikings much more than other European works of the same theme.<sup>71</sup> It helped to spread the idea of a myth of Anglo-Saxon racial and moral superiority, of which the Norse were part of the supposed ancestors of the New England region, and which in Leutze's works as a whole, represent a predestination of superior races of the North that triumph in history.<sup>72</sup> At the same

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<sup>65</sup> Blanck, 2016, p. 6-7.

<sup>66</sup> The poem was first published in Lewis Gaylord Clark's *The Knickerbocker* and was based on the 1832 discovery of a skeleton in the Fall River, Massachusetts, which was destroyed by fire in 1843.

<sup>67</sup> Longfellow, 1877, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Longfellow followed the Nordic interpretation of the Newport tower according to Carl Rafn's theories, as we can see in his text: Introduction, *The Skeleton in Armor*, 1877, 5-6. For a detailed overview of literary reception of the Nordic themes in the United States (and its influence on immigration policy and gender issues), see: Kolodny, 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Longfellow, 1877, p. 49.

<sup>70</sup> This can be seen in a cartoon by Frederick Burr Opper, representing drunken and humorous Vikings in front of Newport Tower, *Bill Nye's Comic History of the United States* (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1894), p. 97; and in several Hollywood film productions: *The Viking* (1928), *Prince Valiant* (1954) *Vikings* (1858) and *The 13th Warrior* (1999).

<sup>71</sup> Like the paintings *Leiv Eirikson oppdager Amerika* (Leiv Eirikson discovering America), oil on canvas, 1893, by Christian Krohg (Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design); *Nordmennene lander på Island år 872* (The Norwegians Land in Iceland Year 872), oil on canvas, 1877, by Oscar Wergeland. In both, the heroic and intrepid character prevails over the unknown, in a very different way from that proposed by Leutze.

<sup>72</sup> Wierich, 1998, p. 170-171.

time that it was inserted in the period when Scandinavian immigrants received a new, positive and more special assimilation by American society in the 19th century.<sup>73</sup>

And it was also in the work of German artists that the most famous stereotype related to Vikings in the visual arts emerged: the horned helmet.



Fig. 20, Gustav Richter, *Tyr der Gott der Schlacht und die Fahrt nach Walhalla*, 1850, Neues Museum, Berlin, *Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*, Photo: Uwe Gaasch, 2000. Photo in the public domain: <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/3PCLB4H7YG46BT3BUN3E5Q3OBX4SYVSG>

### The visual invention of the horned helmet

It is a consensus among researchers that it was after Richard Wagner's operas (1870s, with costume designer created by Carl Emil Doepler) that the stereotype of the Vikings wearing horns was popularized,<sup>74</sup> but its iconographic origins are still obscure.<sup>75</sup> My investigation concluded that this image came from a modern reinterpretation of 18th century German artists during the early 1850s.

<sup>73</sup> Blanck, 2016, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Djupdræt, 2016, p. 186-188; 2013, p. 14-15; Frank, 2000, p. 199; Langer, 2002, p. 06-09; Langer, 2004, p. 162-169; Ward, 2001, p. 15. In a recent publication, an art historian reinforced the idea that the horned helmet of the Vikings was invented with German operas in the 1870s: "The man wearing a wolfskin and a horned helmet, which had only recently been invented as Viking headgear by the designer of the 1876 Bayreuth Wagner festival, suggests that these figures fully embrace the animal world". Marshall, 2017, p. 9-10.

<sup>75</sup> The Danish painter Lorenz Frølich (1820-1908) made a drawing about the Nordic hero Frithiof in the 1840s, wearing a horned helmet, but the work was never published: Djupdræt, 2016, p. 189-190.

The first case appeared in a frieze painting for the Neue Museum in Berlin, executed in 1850 by Gustav Carl Ludwig Richter (1823-1884), using the stereochrome technique.<sup>76</sup> The painting features the god Tyr wielding his sword towards dead warriors being taken to Valhalla (fig. 20). He is one-handed, following the description of the Eddas, wears a red cape and also has a large beard of the same color - an approach that the painter made to the god Thor, described in the sources as being red-haired. Here Tyr wears a coat of mail over a tunic, as well as a shield over the one-armed arm. On his head, a helmet with bovine horns. He is not a Viking himself, but he is the god of war for the ancient Germans (Tiwaz) and Scandinavians of the Viking Age (Tyr)<sup>77</sup>, embodying the prototype of the Northern European warrior.



Fig. 21, Tyr, Gustav Richter, *Tyr der Gott der Schlacht und die Fahrt nach Walhalla*, 1850, Neues Museum, Berlin, *Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*, Photo: Uwe Gaasch, 2000. Photo in the public domain: <http://www.germanicmythology.com/works/HeidenreichArt.html>

<sup>76</sup> Timme, 2018, p. 537.

<sup>77</sup> Simek, 2007, p. 337.



Richter must have used old illustrations of ancient Germanic warriors, produced by artists since the 18th century. The winged helmet, more common in European art at the beginning of the 19th century, in addition to recurring in works under the influence of the Ossian cycle, was also common in the representation of the ancient Germans. Leaders like Arminius were represented in several drawings and paintings with large wings.<sup>78</sup> Priests, heroes and chiefs of the Germanic peoples received both characterizations of winged and horned helmets<sup>79</sup>, that were transferred to the ancient Nordic.

The painting is part of a large series of frizzes on Nordic Mythology, executed by several painters for *Nordischen Saals* (Nordic Hall) at the Neue Museum in Berlin, opened in 1855. He was part of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's monarchical project as a synthesis of a world history and religion, where the Nordic myths would be considered as fundamental pieces of the Germanic past.<sup>80</sup> The analysis carried out so far, concluded that several scenes present in the friezes (especially details related to Odin) were interpreted within a Christian and monotheistic framework and as phenomena of nature in the perspective of the brothers Grimm.<sup>81</sup> In my perspective, the frieze of Tyr does not refer to these two influences, which were implanted as state religion in most nationalisms of the time, but to a revaluation of the war culture, remodeled to the intentions of the 1850s. In the same frieze of Tyr, but on the left side, there is a painting of two valkyries, naked and wearing helmets with wings. Valkyries symbolize

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<sup>78</sup> An example is the ancient Germanic peoples present in the painting *Heřman po bitvě v Teutoburském lese* (Arminius after the Battle at the Teutoburg Forest), by Joseph Bergler der Jüngere, 1809. They carry spears, have a naked bust and wear animal furs, while Arminius has a more sophisticated and colorful outfit. The figure of the ancient warrior is idealized within a barbaric past, but still capable of being linked with a glorious ancestry. Another example is *Hermann als Sieger*, oil on canvas (Leipzig, Museum der Bildenden Künste), 1839, by Wilhelm Lindenschmit.

<sup>79</sup> In drawings of Crispin de Pas (1630) until Christoph Weigel (1699), Frank, 2000, p. 205-206.

<sup>80</sup> Heinecke, 2011, p. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Wemhoff, 2017, p. 938-941; Timme, 2018, p. 537.

death, battle and victory,<sup>82</sup> following the standards in force in Romantic art.<sup>83</sup> In this sense, both they and Tyr embody the spirit of war and their equipment has a positive meaning for the barbarism of the past, now understood as emblematic for the new German patriotism.

With similar interpretations and in parallel, France also produced images about the Viking warrior at the same time, but inserted in a publication.



Lodbrok.

Fig. 22, Henry Emy, *Ragnar Lodbrok*, unknow médium. Published in *Bescherelle Ainé, La mythologie illustrée: mythologie pittoresque de tous les temps, de tous les lieux et de tous les peuples* (Paris: Chez MM. Marescq et Cie et chez Gustave Havard, 1851), p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, 2019, p. 129. The Valkyries began their trajectory in the visual arts as symbols of warmongering in nationalism in an illustration for the opera *Balders Død* (Copenhagen, 1778), made by Daniel Nikolas Chodowiecki. William Blake performed a series of watercolors on Valkyries for the poem *Fatal Sister*, by Thomas Gray (between 1797 and 1798). In 1813 the work *Cäcilia Tschudi as a Valkyrie* by Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Caresfeld was the first oil painting with this theme. However, the first artistic work of great aesthetic influence was *Valkyrior ridande till strid* (1818-1820), oil painting by Johan Gustav Sandberg, *Nationalmuseum*, public domain: <http://emp-web-84.zetcom.ch/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=23915&viewType=detailView>

<sup>83</sup> "(...) that will bring 'unity, justice and freedom' to the Germans (...) an absolutely positive heroine, leading the Germans to victory in a battle for a just cause", Hermand, 2000, p. 10. The figure of the valkyrie will also be used in the personification of nation, in paintings and sculptures representing *Germania* in the second half of the 19th century: *Germania*, oil on canvas, Christian Köhler, 1849; *Germania auf der Wacht am Rhein*, oil on canvas, Lorenz Clasen, 1860; *Die Wacht am Rhein*, oil on canvas, Hermann Wislicenus, 1873.

Executed by illustrator Henry Emy (1820-1874), the drawing was included in a compilation on Mythology in general, specifically dealing with Ragnar Lodbrok - one of the most famous Vikings, but of a semi-historical character. Their narratives mixed historical (perhaps from several Nordic leaders over time) and mythical elements. The illustration does not use material contained in chronicles (such as the *Gesta Danorum*) but from a literary source with a legendary character (*Ragnarssona þáttr*, The Tale of Ragnar's sons).<sup>84</sup> In it, to free Princess Thora, Ragnar fights a large dragon snake that imprisoned her. In his image (fig. 22), Emy uses mixed elements: the hero's dragon, shield and spear are typically medieval, while his animal skins and horned helmet refer to the artistic imagery of ancient Germanics - an influence similar to that followed by Gustav Richter in your Tyr frieze. This is confirmed by the existence of another illustration in the book, in eight pages prior to Ragnar's image (fig. 23). It is the representation of the ogres, who, for the author of the book, would be the ancient Huns, Hungarians and other peoples, who, when plaguing Europe with their bestial and terrorist attacks, became the beings described in folk tales.<sup>85</sup> In the illustration, four men walk with their animal skins dragged on the ground, with grotesque shields and clubs, and one of them bears a horned helmet - the symbol of human bestiality, of the transition between the animal world and men.

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<sup>84</sup> Haywood, 2000, p. 152-153.

<sup>85</sup> Ainé, 1851, p. 81.



Ogres.

Fig. 23, Henry Emy, *Ogres*, unknown médium. Published in Bescherelle Ainé, *La mythologie illustrée: mythologie pittoresque de tous les temps, de tous les lieux et de tous les peuples* (Paris: Chez MM. Marescq et Cie et chez Gustave Havard, 1851), p. 81.

Thus, Bescherelle Ainé's book inaugurated the two models of horned helmets to be incorporated by the Vikings, both coming from the ancient images of the ancient Germanics: on the one hand, the *heroic warrior*, who performs memorable acts, intrepid journeys and worthy deeds for the nation that seeks its past; on the other hand, in a totally inverse way, the *bestial beings* that invaded the nation's ancient space (see table 2, equipment). The first model will be popular with Germans,<sup>86</sup> British,<sup>87</sup> Italians<sup>88</sup> and Americans,<sup>89</sup> while the second

<sup>86</sup> *Die Wikinger Bestattung*, oil on canvas, Fritz Roeber, no date (possibly executed after 1880); several drawings by Hermann Göll, inserted in *Illustrierte Geschichte der Mythologie* (1889).

<sup>87</sup> *The funeral of a Viking*, oil on canvas, Frank Dicksee, 1893 (Manchester Art Gallery); *A Viking Chief*, Carl Haag, illustration from *The Church of England: A History for the People*, 1910.

<sup>88</sup> *Viking burial; Duel at the time of the Vikings*, Fortunino Matania, drawings, no date.

<sup>89</sup> *Cheapest Newport season*, Frederick Burr Opper, cartoon drawing, *Bill Nye's Comic History of the United States* (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1894), 97; *The First Cargo*, oil on canvas, Newell Convers Wyeth, *Scribner's Magazine*, 1910; *Kane on the golden sea*, oil on canvas, Frank Frazetta, 1977.



occurred in France,<sup>90</sup> Nordic<sup>91</sup> and Russian<sup>92</sup> artists will not follow these two models, the horns being largely absent from Scandinavian<sup>93</sup> and Slavic art on the Vikings during the 19th century.<sup>94</sup>



Fig. 24, Jules-Descartes Férat and unrecognized author<sup>95</sup>, *Lodbrog*, drawing, published in Victor Duruy, *Histoire Populaire de la France* (Paris: Charles Lahure, 1862), p. 129.

<sup>90</sup> *Une drakkar de pirates scandinaves*, illustration anonyme, *Le Petit Journal: supplement illustre* n. 1072, 1911.

<sup>91</sup> *Proposal messenger from Harald Haarfagre to Gyda*, oil on canvas, Nils Bergslien, 1860; *Dronning Thyra som voldbygger udført*, watercolor, Lorenz Frølich, 1855; *The Battle of Bråvalla*, oil on canvas, August Malmström, 1862.

<sup>92</sup> Dozens of drawings (lithographs) about Oleg of Novgorod, Fyodor Antonovich, 1830s. (National Library, St. Petersburg); *The Pagans killed the first Christians of Kievan Rus*, oil on canvas, Vasilij Ivanovic Surikov, 1884; *Funeral of a Rus' nobleman*, oil on canvas, Henryk Siemiradzki, 1884.

<sup>93</sup> This generally applies to paintings, but in the drawings of Scandinavian artists the horned helmet occurs - as in a drawing by Lorenz Frølich (1877), see: Djupdræt, 2016, p. 190.

<sup>94</sup> This perhaps explains why Scandinavian film productions during the 20th century (since its inception) do not represent Vikings wearing horned helmets, unlike American movies - with wide use since the silent film *The Viking* (1928) and so uninterrupted to this day, as in *Pathfinder: The Legend of the Ghost Warrior* (2007).

<sup>95</sup> On the Jules-Descartes Férat signature side, there is also the signature that we were unable to identify: L. Lazrini (?), not included in the list of the countless illustrators in this book, available at: *Histoire populaire de la France/sous la dir. de Ch. Lahure, Bibliothèque publique d'information*, 2021.

Another French artist would perpetuate this model by applying it to the character Ragnar Lodbrog a few years later. In 1862, in a manual for the popularization of French history, an illustration by Jules-Descartes Férat about a Nordic hero was inserted in the scene of the pit with snakes, where he stands and holding his helmet - with horns very similar to the image of Henry Emy (Fig. 24). At the top, watching the rock bottom, are the Saxons who captured this hero in England. One of the Saxon warriors also wears a helmet, but with bull horns. In general, we can see that Scandinavian art from the 1840s to 1880s portrayed Ragnar Lodbrog without any animal appendage on his helmet,<sup>96</sup> which leads us to believe that it was French art that popularized the most famous stereotype related to the Vikings, well before the German operas of the 1870s.

### **Conclusion: Nationalism and visual invention of the Vikings**

The 19th century was a period of intense changes, where nationalism occupied an important space as an ideological and social framework. The visual arts played a great role in the construction of national identities and themes, essential for countries that sought self-assertion, delimitation of borders and identities within a world that was increasingly globalized. In this context, several artistic works related to the Norse appeared, which visually "invented" the Vikings, within what Eric Hobsbawm proposed as a set of practices of symbolic nature, inculcating values and behavior and implying an artificial relationship with the historical past.<sup>97</sup> Nordic history has been reframed and was thus replaced by a series of images or stereotypes that were inspired by the myths, legends or individual fantasies of the artists.<sup>98</sup>

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[https://catalogue.bpi.fr/fr/cinema/document/noticepermalink:/NGLCMbnf\\_gallica\\_12148\\_bpt6k9116608k?searchToken=74974a72804d985213d4f6fe6865f1c43d030729](https://catalogue.bpi.fr/fr/cinema/document/noticepermalink:/NGLCMbnf_gallica_12148_bpt6k9116608k?searchToken=74974a72804d985213d4f6fe6865f1c43d030729)

<sup>96</sup> *Regnar Lodbrog og Kraka*, Otto Edvard Lehmann, 1849, oil on canvas; *Regner Lodbrogs frieri*, Lorenz Frølich, 1851, woodcut; *Ragnar Lodbrog möter Kraka*, Martin Eskil Winge, 1867, oil on canvas; *Regnar Lodbrog befrier Thora Borgarhjort*, Hans Nikolaj Hansen, 1875, woodcut; *Rayner Lothbroc*, August Malmström, 1880, drawing.

<sup>97</sup> Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1-14.

<sup>98</sup> It is not a matter of simply opposing a supposed "true history" of the Viking Age and the Middle Ages in opposition to a "false history" promoted by the reception of modern times, but rather of perceiving the resignifications as modified versions, especially those made by the visual arts: "(...) the art seems to mirror the oral tradition where each 're-telling' is its own version of the same story" (Karen Bek-Pedersen, Aarhus University, email - March 15, 2020). In studies of reception of Nordic themes, all versions of the cultural responses of groups and individuals have the same interest and value (Clunies Ross, 2018, p. 362). Stereotypes also rest on a part of reality and are a way of understanding expressions

Icelandic sagas and Norse Mythology contributed to arouse Europeans, in general, an interest in the ancient history and archaeology of each country. The Vikings were a reflection of this historic time, providing a benchmark of a magnificent past to countries that have undergone humiliation, were oppressed or needed to create a sense of patriotic pride.

The artistic works integrated the content of Mythology and History of the ancient Nordic in a present time - of the artist and of the society in which the works were generated - and also providing references for the future times and goals of the nation:

*Mythology and History have not been used in the past, the time that has passed is not dead, but it is a living source of insights into current living conditions and most importantly, a source to be brought to the coming in the time to come (...) Like an Atlas must [the artist] lifts the nation over his shoulders. Giving him a national conscience, images to be collected, mirrored and enhanced.<sup>99</sup>*

But at the same time, visual stereotypes have also been modified, transformed and adapted by each artist in each region and context, creating different meanings.<sup>100</sup> While in many countries the ancient Norse were interpreted as heroes of their mythical-historical past, others understood them as invaders or enemies (see table 1). The insertion of several works of art with this theme, in public spaces, from the 1830s onwards, was a demonstration of the extreme importance that the Nordic motives obtained within European nationalisms, but they still await more detailed analysis, as well as extensive studies comparing each case.<sup>101</sup>

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of identity. Stereotypes are regulatory instruments between national and social groups and are never innocent or gratuitous. One of the main probing questions about stereotypes for historians is trying to understand how the stereotype acquired an official value and how it was received as true for its contemporaries. Thus, it is less important to judge the distance between reality and stereotypes than to study the construction for which it was received as a truth. Geslot, 2018, pp. 163-176; Edrom, 2018, pp. 93-102.

<sup>99</sup> "Mytologi og historie er ikke brugt op som fortid; den tid, der er gået, er ikke død, men en levende kilde til indsigt i de aktuelle livsvilkår og, hvad der er vigtigere endnu, en kilde der skal føres livgivende ind i den kommende tid [...] Som en Atlas må [kunstneren] løfte nationen på sine skuldre. Række den en national bevidsthed, billeder at samles om, spejles i og styrkes ved". Nykjær, 2019, p. 90.

<sup>100</sup> Gombrich, 2000, p. 55-65.

<sup>101</sup> Research has begun to emerge that points to the differences in the artistic reception of the Viking theme in the each Scandinavian country, as is the case of Norway - which quantitatively produced more works on the Viking Age than Denmark and Sweden (Figure book 10.2 - Historical Periods in Historicist Art in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, 1770-1919), Gerven, 2019, p. 204.

Another way that could still be investigated was the great influence of visual stereotypes on the Nordics created during the 19th century in various artistic and media works from 1910 onwards (literature, visual arts, comics, cinema, television, games and the Internet).

Vikings, as well as other historical and literary themes, more than being interpreted within the framework of the past, often reflected ideologies and themes of the time and society in which the artists were inserted.<sup>102</sup> They are what historian Carlo Ginzburg once defined about interpretations of the sources of history, they are deformed mirrors of the past.<sup>103</sup> And the visual arts are also part of this distorted past, which is constantly renewed and helps to understand our own time and imagination.

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<sup>102</sup> "The form of representation cannot be divorced from its purpose and the requirements of the society in which the given visual language gains currency", Gombrich, 2000, p. 87.

<sup>103</sup> Ginzburg, 1999, p. 36.



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