



Violent & Valiant: Comparing the Portrayals of Vikings in the Medieval, Romantic, and Modern / Postmodern Eras through Analyses of Visual Media

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Abstract

Vikings have been represented in many different ways throughout history. By analyzing visual media about Vikings from different time periods, one can understand how they were portrayed while also learning about the different places and historical contexts in which the representations occur. Vikings have been represented both brutally and idealistically, but those representations have never been consistent. This lack of consistency in representation throughout history can also be applied to other social groups and cultures in general, including in our own time. Understanding the history of representation of one group is important because it helps to illuminate historical motivations for framing groups in different ways, specifically through visual media. Using mixed methods, this study examines how Vikings were portrayed in different visual media across three aesthetic periods: Medieval, Romantic, and Modern/Postmodern. Results show that patterns emerge with respect to how Vikings are portrayed within each time period. After taking into account the many categories from landscapes to style, Vikings were portrayed more brutally in the medieval era, more heroic in the romantic era, and more stereotypical in the modern era, but with much historical context to consider when generalizing about these overall representations. Art characteristics provide the basis of the data, which, when compared, show how the portrayals of Vikings evolved across the time periods. Overall, analysis of the data shows that the Romantic Era created the largest influence on the future time periods by focusing on cultural elements like mythology and beauty, and it was separated from the more brutal and political depictions of Vikings in the Medieval Era. Portrayals of Vikings have had a long and complicated history, and examining these portrayals can educate about the different ways artists can control people's perceptions of different social or cultural groups throughout time.

Keywords

Vikings; Art History; Visual Media; Stereotypes; Content Analysis

Introduction

What specific characteristics do people imagine when they think of Vikings? Although many have analyzed the evolution of the stereotypes of Vikings through literature (Nelson, 2003; Roylance, 2007), few have done so through other media such as visual art, music and film, with no studies comparing these representations through different time periods. Throughout these historical time periods, Vikings were often stereotyped. Scandinavian studies expert, Ellen Kythor (2020), describes how the stereotypes reveal both ideas related to Viking identity, and information about the regions and historical eras that contextualize the varying stereotypes (pp. 213-214). For example, a common stereotype of Vikings used in twenty-first century America represents Vikings as "a muscular man wearing medieval armor, with horns on his helmet" (Wilkins, 2019) which shows the current era's interest in escaping through fantasy in the 21st century. From my own discoveries, several articles including archeology professor, Anders Andren's, "Behind 'Heathendom'" (2005) and G. W. Dasent's *Vikings of the Baltic* (1875) provide insight on the literary and archeological elements depicting Vikings in different historical eras.



The Medieval Era: 500 to 1450 C.E.

In the Medieval Era, an abundance of art and music was based around Christianity. The Vikings lived in the Medieval Era roughly between 800 to 1050 C.E. Allen Mawer, a British philosopher from the early 1900s described in his book, *The Vikings* (1913), how the term “Viking” derives from the Old Norse language word, *vik*, meaning one who haunts a bay, creek, or fjord (p. 1). They had left their homes in Scandinavia in the 900s to assail European countries via ships. The Vikings during this period were portrayed as “Heathen,” a word to negatively describe someone who does not practice Christianity (Frank, 2007). Despite them not practicing Christianity, they had their own many ways of practicing religion. This included their own mythological beliefs surrounding their primary religion of Paganism (von Schnurbein, 2016).

Figure 1 shows an illustration from approximately 1100 C.E. called *Illustrations de la vie de Saint Aubin d'Angers*, which depicts a group of Viking warriors lined up in an organized section upon a ship.



Figure 1. *Illustrations de la vie de Saint Aubin d'Angers* (ca. 1100), Bibliothèque National de France.

They each carry a shield colored green or orange, and handcrafted long spears. They wear heavy layers of chainmail and metal helmets. The ship they stand upon is being carried by a multicolored, seemingly harsh wave adding an effect of intensity. These characteristics depicted in the painting represent how Vikings were not romanticized in works of art in the Medieval Era, but rather feared for their potential to raid European countries (Mawer, 1913, p. 12). A more common work of art, the embroidered Bayeux Tapestry, shown in Figure 2, depicts the Battle of Hastings between the Vikings and people of England (Britannica, 2026).



Figure 2. Bayeux Tapestry (1066), Bayeux Museum.

In the 70 meter tapestry created by the English after the attacks, Vikings are displayed upon horses charging at the people of England. They wear pointy helmets, and carry large shields with their golden swords. They also wear chain mail in this artwork, corresponding to the previously analyzed *Illustrations de la vie de saint Aubin d'Angers*. Deceased and injured villagers, soldiers, and horses are seen scattered across the ground. This signifies the impact the battle had on both the Vikings and English, as many people's lives were taken. The main purpose of this tapestry was to spread the concept to Englishmen that Vikings were not figures to be romanticized or idealized in their culture. These concepts were spread through more propaganda in art.

The Romantic Era: 1800 to 1910 C.E.

In the late 19th century, Vikings were romanticized for many reasons. A composer, Richard Wagner, is known for his operas that incorporate characters who are part of Viking groups. His operas were based upon old Norse folk and Nordic mythology tales which all portray Vikings (von Schnurbein, 2016). Specifically, in the four operas known as *The Ring Cycle*, there was a strong focus on old Norse mythology as it included characters who portrayed old Norse mythological figures like Wotan, Brunnhilde, Valhalla, and Siegmund (Larrington, 2023). Wagner, in fact, was the first artist to portray the Vikings as having horns on their helmets. From this point on, the stereotype continued. They were seen as a symbol of Norse power and to represent their barbaric characterization (Ward, 2001).

Along with music and operatic sequences, art also played a major role in the representation of Vikings in the Romantic Era. Many illustrations, paintings, engravings, and statues all depicted the Vikings wearing horned-helmets and carrying an abundance of armor (Langer, 2002). An illustration from 1839 C.E. (unknown artist) depicts a Viking character from the book *The Saga of Frithiof* with an idealized body and face shape, wearing a horned helmet and carrying hand-crafted shields with geometric patterns engraved (Langer, 2002). This creates a certain artistry that adds to the viewer's sense of meaning in the illustration. Another example, shown in Figure 3, is a painting, *Valkyrie*, by Norwegian artist Peter Nicolai.



Figure 3. Valkyrie (1869), National Gallery of Norway.

This painting is an idealized portrait of a female Viking on a horse with a strong sense of power. Her facial features are depicted as ideal for the time, and her weapons are pointed neatly, unlike the depictions of their weapons in the Medieval Era. This can romanticize the feeling of power held by a female through the idealistic features characterised by her strong presence. The audience of this specific art style may feel more interested in the work by its unique romanticization of the Viking, hence the name of this era.

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The Modern / Postmodern Era (1910-present)

Film was introduced as a new form of visual media during this time period, however the portrayal of Vikings through art and music continues. The 1958 film, *The Vikings*, was described as a film depicting Viking life very accurately (Pfeiffer, 2023). This film is a heroic portrayal of two half brothers competing for a princess during the Medieval Era. The attire of the Vikings, as well as the boats and tools used are some of the more accurate portrayals of the Vikings that can be seen during the Modern / Postmodern era. It does not lean in any specific direction towards a positive or negative portrayal. Some films, however, purposefully portray Vikings as either an enemy or a main character/protagonist. The film *The Secret of Kells* (2009), with art by Cartoon Saloon, is an Old Norse-based story displaying the lives of the Irish during the Viking invasions during Medieval Irish history (Buchelt, 2022). Vikings are portrayed as terrifying monsters, with fire around them, and hooded faces, along with prominent horns that are larger than their head. Cartoon Saloon uses art styles used during the medieval times to help portray the Vikings as violent and disruptive to the fairy-tail-like lives of the Irish.

An example of a film that portrays Vikings as kind and bubbly individuals is *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010). The main characters are all Vikings, and the story being told is not a Viking-specific tale. Some



of the Viking characters are harsh, however they are portrayed in a style of animation that can apply to a broader audience. Carolyne Larrington (2023) performed a study examining how the old Norse myths influence current pop culture. She suggests that some of the portrayed masculine Gods and feminine Valkyries from the Medieval Era depict the gender ideals of the present time. This suggests that movies taking place during the time when Norse mythology influenced stylistic choices could even add to current controversial gender stereotypes. This is also true about works of art, books, and music videos. For example, the Thor comic books from the 1960s include the masculine qualities held by Thor, such as rippling muscles and angular jaw lines. Several other works of art portray this stereotypical characteristic as well.

Although several studies examine the stereotypes and representations of Vikings in specific time periods and with specific media, none of them analyze the evolution of these representations through historical time, or a comparison of how they are portrayed within the context of different eras and visual media.

Methods

Selection of the Works

Since this research project compares artworks that portray Vikings across three different time periods, my first task was selecting which artworks to analyze. Artworks have portrayed the Vikings through many different media: The selections I chose from the Medieval Era were artworks that come from tapestries, illuminated manuscripts, and stone carvings; from the Romantic Era, works include paintings, drawings, opera costumes, and book illustrations; and from the Modern / Postmodern Era, I chose film stills, drawings, music videos, and paintings. There are noticeably many more types of media used in art during the Modern / Postmodern Era. I felt it necessary to represent a compilation of each artistic media as to not leave out portrayals that may only be seen in one type of media. For example, Vikings as superheroes became a dominant theme but are only portrayed through comic books and some films, not through paintings and sculpture. In order to represent all newer portrayals of Vikings, one must examine the newer types of media that opinions are portrayed through even though this choice lessens the homogeneity of the samples. Thus, both the content and the media reflect their respective eras. To do this comparison, I first selected and compiled nine works from each of these time periods, deciding on 27 works in total, and then used mixed methods, as outlined below, for the comparison. I found the items of analysis on many different museums' digital collections, including MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as from web searches that used search terms related to real Viking kings, Norse mythology, artists, filmmakers, and composers from different eras.

To find what works of art, music, and film I am analyzing, I first had to gather plenty of context about the battles, leaders, folklore, and old religion surrounding the Viking culture. A video produced by the British Museum (2020), called Vikings Live provides a thorough overview on the most important topics to observe when researching Viking history. The video tours an art exhibition in the British Museum while providing detail on the lives of Vikings. The main figures that I looked for when collecting art were Ubba, the War Commander from the 8th century, Odin, the God of War, and any various battles caused by the Vikings' invasions during the Medieval Era (Niles, 2015). This led me to many connected works of art. For example, the artworks I found from the Romantic Era show a continuous portrayal of Odin, the God of War, while the art from the Medieval Era has been seen to focus more on the portrayal of specific real people and commanders during that era. The Romantic Era also provides a wide selection of Operas portraying Vikings. Continuing into the Modern/Post-Modern Era, there is more variation in the portrayal of Vikings, primarily because there are more past opinions that authors and artists can derive from, as well as a variety of media types and styles.

Mixed Method



For the analysis, I used a mixed method, including a qualitative thematic analysis and a quantitative content analysis, which were ideal for both qualitatively and quantitatively coming to new understandings about the characteristics present in a variety of artworks that portrayed Vikings. In a qualitative thematic analysis, researchers create thematic categories based on a thorough review of characteristics of the data, and in a quantitative content analysis, researchers count which of the chosen characteristics are present for each data point. In this study, the data is the chosen artworks. I learned about these methods from Langer (2021), Wansink et al. (2016), and Soldati & Illingworth (2020), as discussed below. There are many different characteristics portrayed through art by the artists, and each characteristic can represent different perspectives on the Vikings during the specific era. Different themes can express different emotions, aesthetics, and the artist or culture's impression of the Vikings.

Johnni Langer (2021), a professor with a PhD in Viking Age Archeology and Old Norse Religion, does an analysis of old Norse Religion and how its stereotypes are portrayed among Vikings. Different themes are given for comparison like behavior, society, nationalism, and environment. Next to each theme, there is a description of how the portrayed Norse Religion represents that characteristic or stereotype, either positively or negatively. Another study uses a similar methodology to examine different foods seen throughout paintings in different places. Brian Wansink et al. (2016) are professors at various universities in the United States who do a thematic, then quantitative analysis of the different foods found in art in their study, "Food Art Does Not Reflect Reality: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Meals in Popular Paintings." A third example of this mixed method can be seen in Arianna Soldati and Sam Illingworth's (2020) study on the perception of volcanoes through poetry. The two European researchers found the major categories that emerged from their thematic coding of the poems. Next, using these five categories, they were able to perform an unbiased quantitative analysis with the correct variables. This gave them the data they needed to provide a visual and statistical representation of the portrayals of volcanoes in poetry. This study matches and validates my methodology precisely as it provides a meticulous way to properly analyze visual characteristics of portrayal, which can be difficult to represent given that art can be perceived differently by separate individuals.

For my own project, the thematic analysis involved selecting the primary characteristics from each of the 27 artworks that best depict the notable changes in the portrayal of the Vikings over time. These characteristics form the code book so I can begin the quantitative content analysis, which shows the frequency of each characteristic of art across all three time periods (Medieval, Romantic, Modern / Post-Modern). In the code book, I used a "1" if the artwork displayed the characteristic in question, and a "0" if it did not, as shown in Appendix B. This quantitative analysis of a variety of characteristics will go further than just a "positive" or "negative" portrayal of Vikings in each era. Examining a plethora of characteristics allows the study to more deeply analyze the context and importance of the outcome of each characteristic and how it relates to the overall portrayal of Vikings from that era. The total counts show which characteristics emerge as dominant in each era, with the help of graphs and charts as visualizations of the data from the code book.

After all of the data is compiled, the final comparison of Viking portrayals from the three eras can occur. According to my hypothesis, each time period will have a different portrayal of Vikings through art, music, and film.

Results and Discussion

Selected Works

The art chosen for this analysis consists of paintings, drawings, illuminated manuscripts, tapestries, sculptures, opera scenes/costumes, comic strips, films and music videos all depicting Vikings/Viking culture. Each artwork chosen is listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3 depending on the time period, and a comprehensive list is also in Appendix A.



Table 1. Artworks chosen from the Medieval Era.

Artwork	Media
A depiction of Ivar and Ubba setting forth to avenge their father, Lodbrok (ca. 1430)	Drawing/Illuminated Manuscript
Miscellany on the life of St. Edmund (ca. 1130)	Drawing/Illuminated Manuscript
Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund (ca. 1430)	Drawing/Illuminated Manuscript
Miscellany on the life of St. Edmund MS M.736 fol. 10r (ca. 1130)	Drawing/Illuminated Manuscript
Miscellany on the life of St. Edmund MS M.736 fol. 9v (ca. 1130)	Drawing/Illuminated Manuscript
Viking Domesday stone (ca. 800s)	Sculpture
Illustrations de la vie de saint Aubin d'Angers (ca. 1100)	Drawing/Illuminated Manuscript
Bayeux Tapestry Scene 52 (ca. 1000)	Embroidered Tapestry
A fifteenth-century depiction of the murder of Loðbrók by Björn (ca. 1400s)	Drawing/Illuminated Manuscript

Table 2. Artworks chosen from the Romantic Era.

Artwork	Media
Wagner Costumes/Scenes (late 1800s)	Opera Costumes/Scenes
Wotan takes leave of Brunhild (1892)	Drawing
The Wild Hunt of Odin (1872)	Painting
Mårten Eskil Winge (1866)	Painting
Frithjof Kills Two Ocean Trolls (1826)	Painting
Frithjof's wooing (1907)	Drawing
Sittende Viking I Kystlandskap (1840)	Painting
Nicholas Roerich, Guests from Overseas (1901)	Painting
Valkyrie, by Peter Nicolai Arbo (1869)	Painting

Table 3. Artworks chosen from the Modern / Postmodern Era.



Artwork	Media
How to Train Your Dragon (2010)	Film
The Secret of Kells (2009)	Film
The Vikings (1958)	Film
Thor Comic Strip (1960s)	Comic Strip
Amon Amarth - We Rule The Waves (2025)	Music Video
Wardruna - Lyfjaberg (Healing-mountain) (2020)	Music Video
The Norseman: Frank Frazetta (1972)	Painting
Lagertha as imagined in a lithography (1913)	Drawing
Irish Gael attack a Viking raiding party (ca. late 1900s)	Drawing

Thematic and Content Analyses

Several characteristics came into focus when examining these diverse media across three different historical time periods. After completing a qualitative thematic analysis, 45 characteristics placed in six different thematic groupings arose as suitable for my content analysis, as shown in Table 4. There are five to 11 different characteristics within each thematic grouping.

Table 4. Thematic groupings and characteristics.

Thematic Grouping	Characteristics
Weapons and Armor (11)	Swords, Axes, Spears, Circular Shields, Heater Shields, Shields with Banners/Devoted Patterns, Bow/Arrows, Chainmail, Armor, Horned/Winged Helmets, Other Helmets
War and Violence (7)	Fighting, Dead Valkyries, Dead Vikings, Dead Non-Vikings, Blood, Horses, Fire
Clothing and Style (9)	Beards, Braids, Face Paint, Men with Long Hair, Bare Feet, Sandals, Clothing from Animal Fur, Women in Gendered Clothing, Muscular Physiques
People/Characters (8)	Vikings, Non-Vikings, Men, Women, Children, Valkyries/Other Mythological Characters, Armies, Portrait of One or Two
Landscape Characteristics (5)	Mountains, Open Oceans, Shore, Big Birds, Villages
Miscellaneous Viking Characteristics (5)	Flags/Banners, Color Themes, Viking Ships, Nordic Art Symbolism, Patterned Grouping in Armies

After gathering all of these characteristics, I was able to perform my quantitative content analysis, the comprehensive results of which are shown in Figure 4 and Appendices A and B.

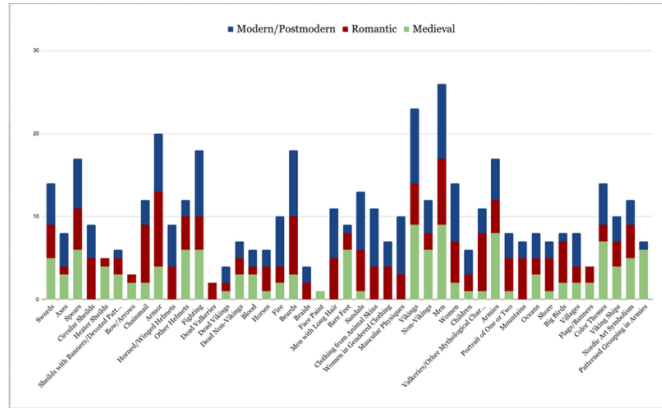
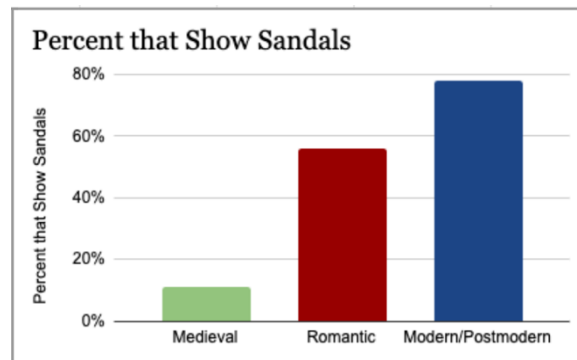


Figure 4 shows different types of variation of portrayal of Vikings in each category. This is the overview of all of my results compiled onto a bar graph. To examine how often each characteristic appears in each era, one would use the x axis to find the category, and analyze the amount of works of art in which the characteristic appears. For example, big birds are seen mostly during the Romantic era (red), partially during the Medieval Era (green), and barely at all during the Modern / Postmodern (blue). The characteristic of face paint barely appears in the Medieval Era, and doesn't appear in any other pieces of media I collected from the following eras.

When examining the results, different patterns emerge. A characteristic may be abundant in the Medieval Era but rare in the Romantic and Modern/Postmodern Eras and its opposing characteristic may be abundant in the Romantic and Modern/Postmodern Eras but rare in the Medieval Era. An interesting example of this scenario is the results provided from the Bare Feet and Sandals characteristics. After observing the Vikings' footwear in every artwork from every era, I discovered that despite the Vikings primarily wearing no footwear in the Medieval artworks, they suddenly were depicted wearing sandals through the other two eras, as shown in Figure 5.



A similar pattern, when a characteristic increases over time, is also seen with clothing made of animal fur as well as horned/winged helmets, as shown in Figures 6 and 7.

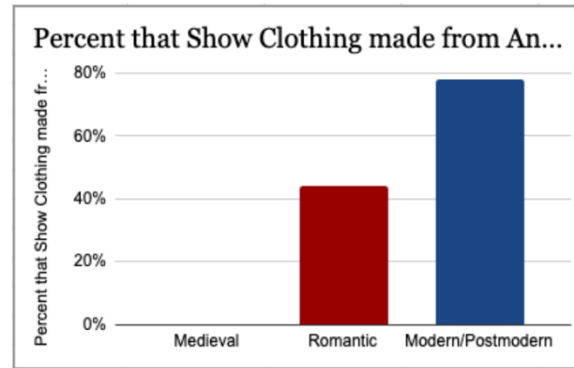


Figure 6. Percent of artworks with animal fur as clothing.

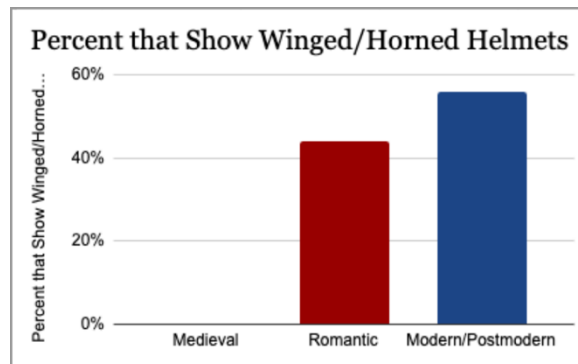


Figure 7. Percent of artworks with winged / horned helmets.

This pattern of increasing frequency occurred mainly because of the influential operas done by Wagner. The most well known example of this is horned / winged helmets which, interestingly, was not the most prominent of this type of variation and ideology amongst these many other characteristics. Once Vikings were seen in a new, romanticized, and idealized way in the theater, many artists took after that same portrayal to enhance the romanticism within their art. Some more of the results that give evidence to this concept are depiction of muscular physiques, fire, beards on Vikings, and male Vikings with long hair.

A different type of pattern I discovered in my content analysis is the dominance of a certain characteristic in just one era. This happens within each era, all with different characteristics. The displaying of Valkyries/other mythological characters appears mostly within the Romantic Era, as shown in Figure 8, with 75% of the works displaying a mythological character. This is due to the idealism and glorification of post-Renaissance heroic legends occurring during the Romantic Era (Stanford University, 2016).

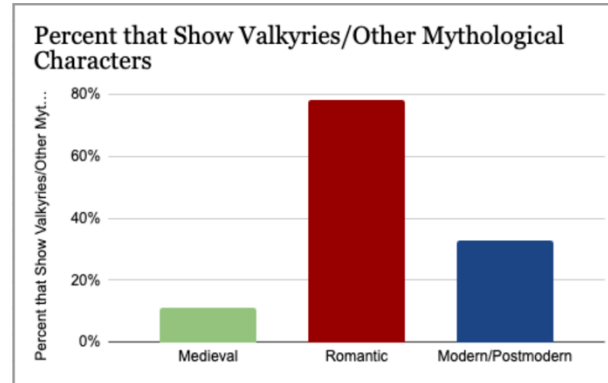


Figure 8. Percent of artworks with valkyries / other mythological characters.

The Greco-Roman mythological rediscoveries of the Renaissance Era, after the Medieval Era, lingered into the Romantic Era but stayed behind as there was a multitude of types of media in the Modern Era so all types of portrayals were broken down into smaller groupings (Bernstock, 1993). This ideology is demonstrated by Valkyries and other mythological characters in my content analysis.

This dominance of a particular characteristic with the Romantic Era can also be observed with the mountains depicted in each work. In the Romantic Era, 63% of works displayed mountains whereas the Medieval Era had 0% mountain display and the Modern/Postmodern Era had 22% mountain display. This proves the romanticism ideology of the Romantic Era portraying nature more sublimely and dramatically in the hopes of providing a sense of intensity and heroism to the observer (Galitz, 2004). Frequent depiction of chainmail, circular shields, large birds, and seashores in the Romantic Era also give evidence to this ideology.

Another pattern that emerged was when characteristics decreased in abundance across the three eras. Examples are shields with banners/flags, bow/arrows, regular helmets, the death of non-vikings, and Nordic art symbolism. These characteristics are common in the Medieval Era, but rarer in the Romantic and Modern / Postmodern Eras. This is due to the characteristics' lack of portrayal within the very influential Wagner's operas and the deep desire to create intense and deep emotions from a piece of art.

This dominance of certain characteristics in the Medieval Era is evident in the depictions of patterned grouping in armies, as shown in Figure 9. Medieval art styles tend to be much more geometric and sharp than later art styles.

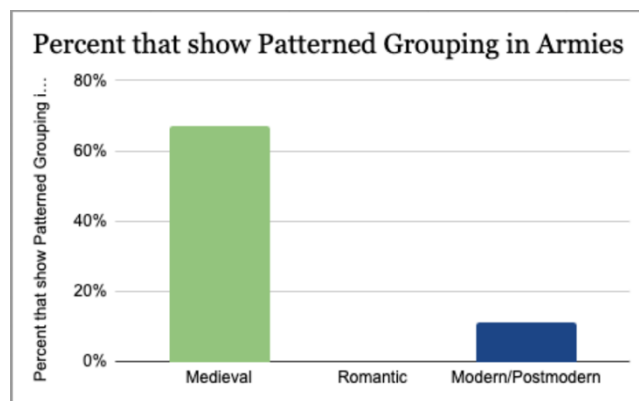


Figure 9. Percent of artworks with patterned groupings of armies.



This is generally the style of all scenes throughout this era. In addition to this, the organization of the subjects within a piece of art tells the audience that the artist has a dramatic intent. This style may also give one a sense of threat and forbidding due to the intense order within the work. Heater shields, the triangular-like shields shown in Figure 1, are also confirmation of a more geometric and orderly approach to the styles in the Medieval Era, along with the thematic color schemes of Vikings' clothes.

This differentiation in shield shape created another interesting comparison across historical eras, as shown in Figures 10 and 11.

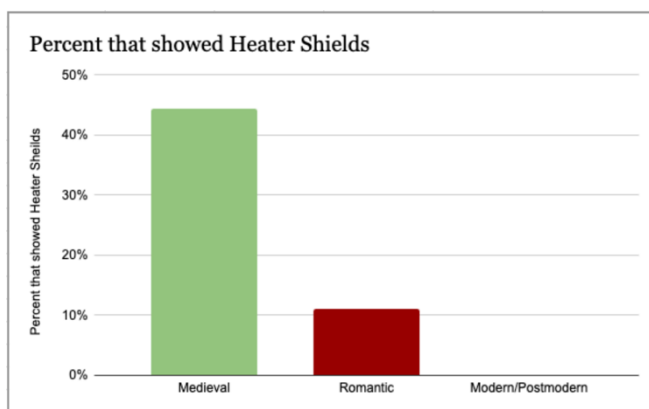


Figure 10. Percent of artworks with heater shields.

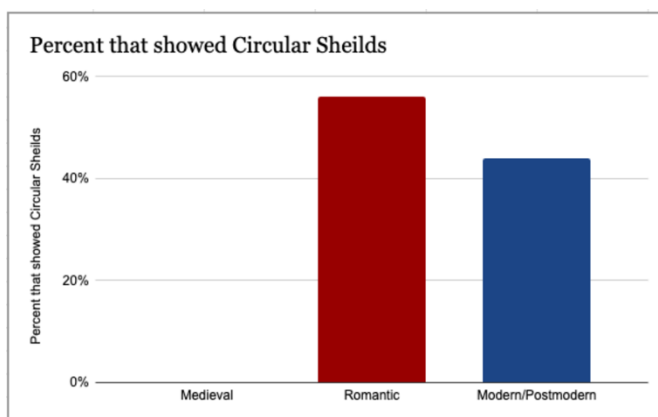


Figure 11. Percent of artworks with circular shields.

Heater shields, which are the shields whose shape is defined by a point at the bottom, are confirmation of a more brutalist portrayal of Vikings during the Medieval Era. A contrasting style seen through comparison is the more circular shields (Figures 3 and 12) that developed during the Romantic Era and lingered into the Modern / Postmodern Era. The circular shields presented a more toned, natural, and graceful style of Vikings in art. The portrayal of the circular shields was another aspect of Romantic Era portrayal that originated from Wagner's Operas. The costumes included Valkyries carrying round shields with pointed spears at the center. This trait came from one of Wagner's intentions to portray Vikings more powerfully and valiantly than they have been in prior eras.

One important point to note is the absence of characteristics in certain time periods. A primary example can be seen through the data displaying shield shape depiction. Circular shields, for example, are not depicted in the Medieval Era, which could be a result of many different factors. After taking into consideration the context and the background of each characteristic's representation, one might make the assumption that circular shields were not yet invented or just not commonly used. However,



depictions in art do not always represent reality. Later, the heater-shaped shields' depiction is absent from the Modern / Postmodern Era. This fallout of a once popular characteristic being replaced with an emerging and opposing one can be an explanation for many of the absences of attributes that can be seen in all of the data. Another example of this concept can be seen with the Clothing from Animal Skins characteristic. The Medieval Era has an absence of this characteristic. Again, a similar point can be made that this may just be a way they are portrayed, but not how they really were since archeologists have found animal skins and fur in Viking graves (Kirkinen et al, 2020).



Figure 12. Costume design for Waltraut, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1889).

Figure 12 shows a Valkyrie costume design for one of the four operas in Wagner's Ring Cycle. This kind of circular shield hadn't been seen previously, which was found in my data that did not find any circular shields in the Medieval Era. Shield shape, then, is one example of how the Romantic Era strays from realistic portrayals of Vikings and leads into more idealistic portrayals, which influenced many of the portrayals of Vikings in the Modern / Postmodern Era.

The Modern Era resulted in diverse portrayals of Vikings. Due to the overwhelming amount of media types, there were many different ways in which Vikings were portrayed. Overall, they were alternately portrayed as harmful, frolicsome, and heroic. This era also shows an exaggeration of certain male gendered characteristics such as beards and muscular physiques, as shown in Figures 13 and 14.

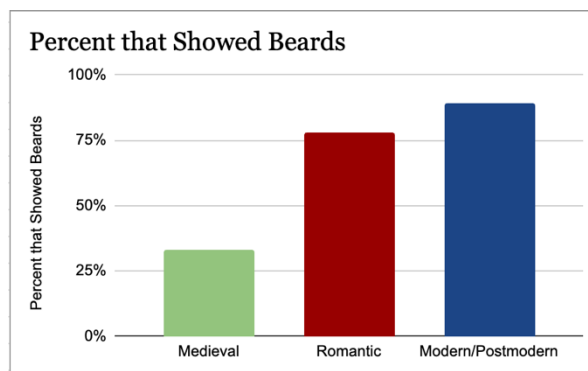


Figure 13. Percent of artworks with beards.

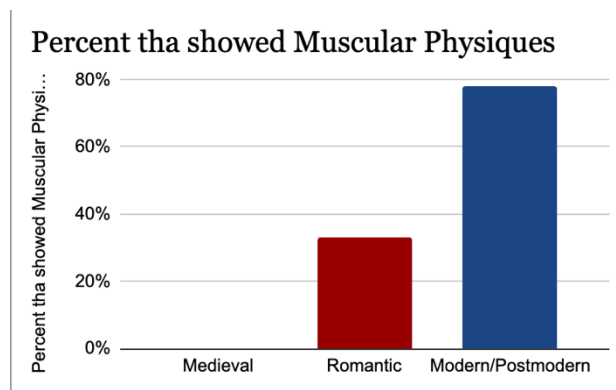


Figure 14. Percent of artworks with muscular physiques.

Given that the Modern Era contains several types of media that strayed from the previous media seen in the Romantic and Medieval Eras, such as music videos, live-action films, cartoons, and comic books, it was very difficult to choose a sample that captured the most valuable representation of how Vikings were portrayed during this time period. A mixture of all of these media ended up being included in the Modern / Postmodern Era sample of works. This also offered the variation of intended audience in the sample, from children seeking light-hearted content, to adults hoping for a realistic to moderate portrayal of history, also seeking education. Despite this difference in audience, the sample of works I chose provides results that capture a combination of all portrayals of Vikings. The results show that many of the Modern / Postmodern content percentages are about halfway in between of the other two eras, sometimes functioning as an average between the two other eras. A specific example of this is the appearance of Vikings dressed in armor. Forty-four percent of Medieval works show Vikings in armor, 100% of Romantic works show Vikings in armor, and 78% of Modern / Postmodern works show Vikings wearing armor. Seeing as 78% is very close to the mean between the 100% in the Romantic Era and the 44% in the Medieval Era, the idea that the Modern / Postmodern Era can show a variation and combination of the previously seen portrayals of Vikings is distinctly proven.

Each pattern that emerged in my analysis has a historical explanation. The primary explanatory factors responsible for the variations in portrayals of characteristics have a strong correlation within each category giving structure to my results. After taking into account the many categories from landscapes to style, Vikings were portrayed more brutally in the medieval era, more heroic in the romantic era, and more stereotypical in the modern era, but with much historical context to consider when generalizing about these overall representations.

Limitations

One of the limitations that appeared in the process of performing the quantitative content analysis was having to decide whether or not a given characteristic appears without the help of other individuals' opinions. I sometimes had to choose "0" or "1" in ambiguous situations. For example, the characteristic of men with long hair was one of the more vague qualities to analyze. Whether or not a hair length is categorized as long or short would have been easier to decide with the perception of another individual to provide variation that would be combined into an ultimate choice. Having two or more co-authors would have helped in unclear situations like this one.

Seeing as there are many more artifacts available to examine from the Modern / Postmodern Era, and only nine works are collected from each era, a smaller ratio of media is being taken out of the selection. Although it is valid to have a persistent number of works being analyzed from each era, the change in amount of media available to be analyzed also changes the extent to which the era is represented. A smaller percentage of artworks are being selected from the era's artistic offerings. Additionally, the nine chosen works from the Medieval and Romantic Era have much less variation in



media due to the minimal materials, in comparison to the Modern / Postmodern era, that were used for art. The exponential growth of art forms in the 20th and 21st century provided much more media to be analyzed, so the Modern / Postmodern sample has much more fluctuation in the types of media considered. This also creates a difference in the amount by which each era's portrayals of Vikings through art is being represented.

The works selected offer a very wide differentiation of regional background and perspectives. Although this increases variation in culture, standards of what's considered aggressive, and extent of exaggerated portrayal, it also makes it difficult to provide even more context on each artwork. Without proper examination of the intentions in each region's development of artistic expression and perspectives, there is potential for misrepresentation of local intentions.

Another limitation that appeared was during the selection of pieces of media prior to the thematic analysis. It was a difficult process to put together a single sample of works that fully represented the portrayal of Vikings during that specific era. A potential solution to this problem could be to increase the sample size to 30 or more pieces of media per era and gather one to two works that represented a multitude of that type of work seen within a sample.

Conclusion

Before performing this analysis, I hypothesized that the Medieval Era would have a negative portrayal of Vikings, the Romantic Era would have a positive portrayal of Vikings, and the Modern / Postmodern Era would have a mixture of both positive and negative portrayals. After performing this analysis, I have found that this hypothesis was a very vague description of my final results. The results I collected examine the details of each portrayal to allow for a greater level of complex understanding for this topic. For example, the Romantic Era does not simply portray Vikings positively, but it focuses on the influence of Viking mythology and Valkyries, which do ultimately create an idealized portrayal of Vikings, but doesn't equate to simply being "positive." Future studies may want to examine more artwork and could look at specific samples or these portrayals. It may be a useful addition to the body of knowledge surrounding the topic of portrayals of Vikings to examine how they were depicted in a specific region, such as only in French art or only in Irish art, or through other historical eras like the Renaissance, which my research showed had very few Viking portrayals. It may also be interesting to do a deeper analysis on the comparison of how they are portrayed through literature across time, seeing as language provides a different lens than other art forms.

In this study, a significant amount of data was collected that creates a credible comparison of portrayals of Vikings through art, music, and film throughout the Romantic, Medieval, and Modern / Postmodern Eras. The characteristics of the art provided for an analysis of the portrayals of Vikings in each era. Not only did the data collected quantitatively provide for the individual analyses in each era, but it allowed for the comparison of each era's representation of Vikings throughout time. These comparisons show how the portrayals of Vikings evolved across the time periods. Overall, analysis of the data shows that the Romantic Era created the largest influence on the future time periods by focusing on cultural elements like mythology and beauty, and it was separated from the more brutal and political depictions of Vikings in the Medieval Era. Portrayals of Vikings have had a long and complicated history and examining these portrayals can educate about the different ways artists can control people's perceptions of different social or cultural groups throughout time.

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Appendix A.

I. Key for Analyzed Artworks

MEDIEVAL:

1. [British Library Harley 2278](#) (ca. 1430s)
2. [Miscellany on the life of St. Edmund](#) (ca. 1130)
3. [Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund](#) (ca. 1430s)
4. [Miscellany on the life of St. Edmund MS M.736 fol. 10r](#) (ca. 1130)
5. [Miscellany on the life of St. Edmund MS M.736 fol. 9v](#) (ca. 1130)
6. [Viking Domesday stone](#) (ca. 800s)
7. [Illustrations de la vie de saint Aubin d'Angers](#) (ca. 1100)
8. [Bayeux Tapestry Scene 52](#) (ca. 1000)
9. [British Library MS Yates Thompson 47, folio 34r](#) (1400s)

ROMANTIC:

10. [Wagner Costumes/Scenes](#) (late 1800s)
11. [Wotan takes leave of Brunhild](#) (1892)
12. [The Wild Hunt of Odin](#) (1872)
13. [Mårten Eskil Winge](#) (1866)
14. [Frithjof Kills Two Ocean Trolls](#) (1826)
15. [Frithjof's wooing](#) (1907)
16. [Sittende Viking I Kystlandskap](#) (1840)
17. [Nicholas Roerich, Guests from Overseas](#) (1901)
18. [Valkyrie, by Peter Nicolai Arbo](#) (1869)

MODERN / POSTMODERN:

19. [How to Train Your Dragon](#) (2010)
20. [The Secret of Kells](#) (2009)
21. [The Vikings](#) (1958)
22. [Thor Comic Strip](#) (1960s)
23. [Amon Amarth - We Rule The Waves](#) (2025)
24. [Wardruna - Lyfjaberg \(Healing-mountain\)](#) (2020)
25. [The Norseman: Frank Frazetta](#) (1972)
26. [Lagertha as imagined in a lithography](#) (1913)
27. [Irish Gael attack a Viking raiding party by Angus McBride](#) (ca. late 1900s)

II. Key for Color Codes of Themes

Weapons and Armor
War and Violence
Clothing and Style
People/Characters
Landscape Characteristics
Miscellaneous Viking Characteristics

Appendix B.

I. Complete Code Book for Artworks Chosen from the Medieval Era



Work #: (See Appendix A-I)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Swords	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	5
Axes	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Spears	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	6
Circular Shields	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Heater Shields	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
Shields with Banners/Devoted Patterns	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Bow/Arrows	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Chainmail	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Armor	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	4
Horned/Winged Helmets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Helmets	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	6
Fighting	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	6
Dead Valkyries	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dead Vikings	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Dead Non-Vikings	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
Blood	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
Horses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Fire	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Beards	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Braids	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Face Paint	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Men with Long Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bare Feet	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
Sandals	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Clothing from Animal Skins	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women in Gendered Clothing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Muscular Physiques	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vikings	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Non-Vikings	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6
Men	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Women	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Children	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Valkyries/Other Mythological Characters	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Armies	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	8
Portrait of One or Two	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Mountains	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oceans	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3



Shore	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Big Birds	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Villages	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Flags/Banners	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Color Themes	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	7
Viking Ships	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	4
Nordic Art Symbolism	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	5
Patterned Grouping in Armies	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6

II. Complete Code Book for Artworks Chosen from the Romantic Era

Work #: (See Appendix A-I)	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Swords	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
Axes	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Spears	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	5
Circular Shields	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	5
Heater Shields	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Shields with Banners/Devoted Patterns	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Bow/Arrows	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chainmail	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	7
Armor	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Horned/Winged Helmets	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Other Helmets	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
Fighting	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	4
Dead Valkyries	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Dead Vikings	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Dead Non-Vikings	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Blood	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Horses	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Fire	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Beards	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	7
Braids	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Face Paint	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Men with Long Hair	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	5
Bare Feet	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Sandals	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	5
Clothing from Animal Skins	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	4
Women in Gendered Clothing	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4



Muscular Physiques	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
Vikings	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	5
Non-Vikings	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Men	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	8
Women	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	5
Children	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Valkyries/Other Mythological Characters	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	7
Armies	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
Portrait of One or Two	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	4
Mountains	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	5
Oceans	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Shore	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	4
Big Birds	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	5
Villages	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Flags/Banners	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Color Themes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Viking Ships	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Nordic Art Symbolism	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	4
Patterned Grouping in Armies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

III. Complete Code Book for Artworks Chosen from the Modern / Postmodern Era

Work #: (See Appendix A-I)	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	Total
Swords	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	5
Axes	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	4
Spears	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	6
Circular Shields	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	4
Heater Shields	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shields with Banners/Devoted Patterns	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Bow/Arrows	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chainmail	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Armor	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	7
Horned/Winged Helmets	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	5
Other Helmets	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Fighting	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
Dead Valkyries	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dead Vikings	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2



Dead Non-Vikings	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Blood	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Horses	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Fire	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	6
Beards	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	8
Braids	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Face Paint	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Men with Long Hair	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	6
Bare Feet	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Sandals	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	7
Clothing from Animal Skins	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	7
Women in Gendered Clothing	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Muscular Physiques	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	7
Vikings	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Non-Vikings	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
Men	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Women	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
Children	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Valkyries/Other Mythological Characters	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Armies	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Portrait of One or Two	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
Mountains	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Oceans	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Shore	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Big Birds	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Villages	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
Flags/Banners	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Color Themes	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
Viking Ships	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Nordic Art Symbolism	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Patterned Grouping in Armies	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1