

Reimagining the Medieval Norse in Nineteenth-Century France

By

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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	ii
<b>Abstract</b> .....	v
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1. Marianne Meets the Vikings:</b>	
<b>Encounters with the Norse Medieval in Nineteenth-Century France</b> .....	22
<i>The Early Phase: From Act of God to Paragon of Man (ca. 1748-1835)</i> .....	26
<i>The Academic Phase: Intensified Scholarly Interest (ca. 1835-1914)</i> .....	35
<i>The Fantastical Phase: Fictive Experimentation (ca. 1876-1914)</i> .....	48
<b>Chapter 2. Seeking the Aryans in Old Norse Literature:</b>	
<b>A Pre-History of Whiteness and the Making of Arthur de Gobineau</b> .....	67
<i>Germanic Origins in the East: Towards a French Aryanism</i> .....	72
<i>In Search of French Whiteness: Making the Franks Aryan</i> .....	83
<i>Gobineau’s Aryanism: A Product of Old Norse Studies</i> .....	101
<b>Chapter 3. Dragon Ships to Empire:</b>	
<b>Writing Vínland through the Lens of Settler Colonialism</b> .....	109
<i>Background: Evolving Attitudes towards Vínland, 1000-1900</i> .....	114
<i>The Question of Transmission: Religion, Language, and Material Culture</i> .....	120
<i>Normans Abroad: At the Intersection of Colonialism, Medievalism, and Regionalism</i> .....	139
<i>The Columbus Debate: Vínland and International Identity Politics</i> .....	147
<i>Strategies of Self-Promotion: Between Relationships and Readerships</i> .....	155
<b>Chapter 4. Painting Norse Raids in Northern France:</b>	
<b>The Problem of Viking Violence</b> .....	166
<i>After Saint-Clair-sur-Epte: Normandy from 911 to 1911</i> .....	170
<i>Pathologizing Viking Violence: Siege Paintings at Versailles</i> .....	179
<i>Assimilating Viking Violence: Paintings of Coastal Raids 1850-1900</i> .....	193
<b>Chapter 5. Waking the Valkyries:</b>	
<b>Gender Transgression in French Mediatization of Old Norse Literature</b> .....	217
<i>Of Shieldmaidens and Suffrage: The Valkyrie as Feminist</i> .....	224
<i>Beautiful and Terrible: Norse Warrior Women’s Dual Corporality</i> .....	241
<i>The Shieldmaiden in Family Life: Dutiful Daughter and Tragic Lover</i> .....	261
<i>The Milk of the Father: Lactating Men and Absent Women</i> .....	277
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	287
<b>Illustration List</b> .....	300
<b>Primary Sources</b> .....	305
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	317

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## Abstract

Between the mid-1700s and the Great War, people in Europe and North America were gripped by a sudden frenzy of enthusiasm for all things Norse. Eminent academics and ordinary readers discovered an insatiable curiosity for medieval Scandinavia, imagined land of dragon-prowed ships and saga heroes. Revivalists composed endless translations, novels, poems, ballads, retellings, and works of history about the medieval Norse. They crafted engravings, paintings, and even scrimshaw carvings mimicking Norse art or depicting Norse events. Universities, academics, and amateur enthusiasts drove a thriving market for these productions, accumulating vast collections that made their way into present-day libraries.

In this dissertation, I put forward two principal contentions: first, the Viking was an object of visible and escalating engagement in scholarship and media in France across the nineteenth century; second, the Viking achieved such cultural purchase because they could be made to address France's many problems. They offered the malleability and imaginative force of the distant past, meaning they could be manipulated to fit a variety of purposes while retaining discursive charisma. I maintain that the Norse gained such traction in nineteenth-century France because they could be refigured to serve in many forms: as secret repositories of ancient knowledge of Aryan migrations, affirming white supremacy; as early trans-Atlantic explorers, affirming the plausibility and inevitability of global settler colonialism; as founders of Normandy, affirming the region's union with the rest of the nation; or as shieldmaidens, affirming the natural and eternal femininity of even the most transgressive women. Over the course of this dissertation, I show how various French actors working in a range of fields – including academia, journalism, art, and theater – remade the Viking to tackle issues of racial hierarchy, colonialism, regionalism, and gender disorder.

## Introduction

*“If the Middle Ages hadn’t existed, people might have had to invent them, just so that we could... have someplace exotic to fly to when modern life got too, well, modern.” – Catherine Brown<sup>1</sup>*

The period historians have dubbed the “Viking Age” spanned roughly from the eighth to eleventh centuries, beginning with the 793 sack of Lindisfarne and ending with the 1066 Norman Conquest of England.<sup>2</sup> During this period, rulers across present-day Sweden, Norway, and Denmark began consolidating authority over greater and greater swaths of territory. As they were dispossessed of their own estates and autonomy, local magnates took to their boats to become raiding “sea kings,” emigrants, or both. These men and their households fought and settled their way across Russia, Byzantium, Germany, France, and the British Isles. They built permanent colonies in places like Normandy, Dublin, the Danelaw, Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroes. With time, the diaspora intermingled with non-Norse populations, adopting Christianity and the Latin alphabet. The syncretic societies these ocean-crossings generated evolved eventually into kingdoms of the High Middle Ages.

Between the mid-1700s and the Great War, people in Europe and North America were gripped by a sudden frenzy of enthusiasm for all things Norse. Eminent academics and ordinary readers discovered an insatiable curiosity for medieval Scandinavia, imagined land of dragon-prowed ships and saga heroes. Revivalists composed endless translations, novels, poems, ballads, retellings, and works of history about the medieval Norse. They crafted engravings, paintings, and even scrimshaw carvings mimicking Norse art or depicting Norse events. Universities, academics, and amateur enthusiasts drove a thriving market for these productions, accumulating vast collections that made their way into present-day libraries.

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\*All translations from French are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Brown, “In the Middle,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 549-550.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the Viking Age, see John Haywood, *Northmen: The Viking Saga, AD 793-1241* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press, 2016).



Fig. 0.1. Gaston Bussière, *Sigurd*, last quarter of the nineteenth century. Chromolithograph, musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille.

This image combines multiple elements of the legend of Sigurd, recorded in *Völsunga Saga*, into a single synchronic frame. In the center, the warrior crosses the wall of fire that surrounds his sleeping love, Brynhild. Echoing medieval rune stones and other carvings, the dragon Fafnir curls around the margin, awaiting his climactic battle with Sigurd. The striking colors, assertive postures, and dramatic choice of narrative moment convey contemporary fascination with the Norse as epic heroes.

One country experienced a Norse resurgence which has been comparatively overlooked by historians: France. Though far greater scholarly attention has been trained on Scandinavia, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, French authors of the day also embraced the Viking with verve. French discussion of the Vikings and Norse began to accelerate in the 1830s and really took off after 1870. This placed it somewhat later in the century than in other places, and truthfully the Viking never achieved the same momentum in Paris that he did in London,



Copenhagen, New York, or Bayreuth. Nevertheless, French interest in the Norse Middle Ages was fruitful, sustained, and vigorous.

Historians have often written the tale of France in the long nineteenth century as a series of exigencies imposed by (or characterizing) modernity, requiring adaptation. First the unprecedented upheavals of the revolutionary decade fueled a new search for stability that ultimately facilitated the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>3</sup> During the Restoration and July Monarchy, republicans struggled to preserve democratic rights. After the Revolution of 1848, anxious elites scrambled to contain working-class activism.<sup>4</sup> Expansive imperial possessions troubled the reach of the nation-state.<sup>5</sup> Loss in the Franco-Prussian War was the founding cataclysm of the Third Republic. Soldiers' perceived failure on the battlefield against Germany ignited fears that Frenchmen were insufficiently manly.<sup>6</sup> Feminist leaders and celebrity

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<sup>3</sup> Bronisław Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution after Robespierre*, trans. Michel Petheram (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994); Martin Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (London: Palgrave, 1994); Isser Woloch, *Napoleon and His Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); Howard Brown, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (University of Virginia Press, 2006); Denise Davidson, *France after Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Andrew Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Jean-Luc Chappey, "The New Elites: Questions about Political, Social, and Cultural Reconstruction after the Terror," in *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Ronen Steinberg, *The Afterlives of the Terror: Facing the Legacies of Mass Violence in Postrevolutionary France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Malcolm Crook, "Back to the Future? Ending the Revolution after Thermidor," *News and Papers from the George Rudé Seminar* 9 (2020): 109-112.

<sup>4</sup> John Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1848–1851* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Roger Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Owen White and J. P. Daughton, eds., *In God's Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Elizabeth A. Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics, and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880–1940* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Michael Dorsch, *French Sculpture Following the Franco-Prussian War, 1870-80* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010); Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870–1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Anne-Marie Sohn, *La Fabrique des garçons. L'Éducation des garçons de 1820 à aujourd'hui* (Paris: Textuel, 2015).

provocateurs challenged the prevailing gendered order.<sup>7</sup> Falling birthrates provoked a ferocious rise in natalism and tactical new attitudes towards immigration.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the government in Paris endeavored to integrate far-flung and diverse provinces into a cohesive whole, culturally and practically.<sup>9</sup> The War of the Two Frances pitted secular republicans against Catholic conservatives in a vicious melee that culminated in the schism of the Dreyfus Affair.<sup>10</sup> Across the Belle Époque, a spate of infamous murders fascinated and panicked the populace, calling public safety and morality into question.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, anarchists perpetrated a wave

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<sup>7</sup> Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Jennifer R. Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Époque: Love as a Lifestyle* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990); Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (University of Chicago Press, 2002); Andrea Mansker, *Sex, Honor and Citizenship in Early Third Republic France* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Carolyn J. Eichner, *Feminism's Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); James Smith Allen, *A Civil Society: The Public Space of Freemason Women in France, 1744-1944* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford University Press, 1976); Mona Ozouf, *L'école, l'église et la République, 1870-1914* (Paris: Editions de Cana, 1982); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); James Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Guiney, M. Martin, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ruth Harris, *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010); Timothy Verhoeven, *Sexual Crime, Religion and Masculinity in Fin-de-Siècle France: The Flamidien Affair* (Palgrave, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin F. Martin, *The Hypocrisy of Justice in the Belle Époque* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Dominique Kalifa, *L'Encre et Le Sang : Récit de Crimes et Société à La Belle Époque* (Paris: Fayard, 1995); Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, *The Crimes of Paris: A True Story of Murder, Theft, and Detection* (Little, Brown and Company, 2009); Douglas Starr, *The Killer of Little Shepherds: A True Crime Story and the Birth of Forensic Science* (Knopf, 2010); Bernard Michal, ed., *Landru : un serial killer à la Belle Époque* (Omnibus, 2012); Steven Levingston, *Little Demon in the City of Light: A True Story of Murder and Mesmerism in Belle Époque Paris* (Doubleday, 2014); Sarah Horowitz, *The Red Widow: The Scandal that Shook Paris and the Woman Behind it All* (Sourcebooks, 2022).

of crime that terrorized Paris.<sup>12</sup> Collectively, the historiography of nineteenth-century France has been structured around this pattern of change/challenge and response.



Fig. 0.2. Jean-François Auburtin, *Chants sur l'eau*, 1912. Painting, 200 x 250 cm, Petit Palais, Paris.

This image captures the three Rhinemaidens of Richard Wagner's operatic Ring Cycle looking out towards a dragon ship sailing past in the distance. Reminiscent of the sirens of Greek mythology, the Rhinemaidens will ultimately lay a curse on the Norse gods, various Germanic royal houses, and anyone else who touches their stolen gold. The cool colors and serene passage of the dragon ship create a sense of tranquility in tension with the doom proclaimed by the Rhinemaidens. The rocks framing the image also recall the Venus Grotto from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. This painting speaks to the profound influence of Wagner on turn-of-the-century receptions of Norse legend.

<sup>12</sup> John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); John Merriman, *Ballad of the Anarchist Bandits: The Crime Spree that Grippled Belle Époque Paris* (New York: Nation Books, 2017).

Meanwhile, a renewed focus on the nineteenth century has recently transformed medieval studies. Scholars of medievalism have demonstrated how the “Middle Ages” were rhetorically established during the Renaissance – and continued to be constantly re-established up through the present – as a useful foil to “the modern.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, the Middle Ages did not constitute a cohesive, pre-existing historical unit until they were written into being retrospectively. As medievalists have shown, the discursive creation of the Middle Ages as they are known today solidified in the nineteenth century, as new academic disciplines and epistemic methodologies congealed.<sup>14</sup> Like they did with “the Orient,” European and American thinkers claimed privileged knowledge over a distant and alien place, one that had no unified reality before they conjured it into being, in order to frame their own world against it.<sup>15</sup>

Medievalists have also underscored the diversity of Middle Ages that existed in the nineteenth century. Not everyone was envisioning – or creating – the same version of the medieval. Depending on the perspective in question, the Middle Ages could be narrow or expansive; good or bad; continuous or discontinuous with the present. Because no one could access the Middle Ages directly, people were free to gloss them as they wished, according to their own emotional or ideological needs. Indeed, the medieval became so popular precisely because it was available to all. There were as many Middle Ages in the nineteenth century as there were politics, classes, genders, religions, and races.

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<sup>13</sup> Élodie Burle-Errecade and Valérie Naudet, eds., *Fantasmagories du Moyen Âge. Entre médiéval et moyen-âges* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2010); David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Richard Utz, *Medievalism: A Manifesto* (Amsterdam: ARC Humanities Press, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> For this comparison, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

I operate at the intersection of these two historiographies: that of modern medievalism, and that of nineteenth-century France. Recent scholarship that unites these two currents has centered especially on reception of Arthuriana, the Carolingian Empire, Gothic architecture, the Crusades, and the Hundred Years' War.<sup>16</sup> Instead, I examine a group that has not traditionally been understood as a major element of French self-conception, nor as a major French preoccupation: the Vikings of the Norse Middle Ages. In this dissertation, I put forward two principal contentions: first, Vikings were an object of visible and escalating engagement in scholarship and media in France across the nineteenth century; second, the Vikings achieved such cultural purchase because they could be made to address France's many problems. They offered the malleability and imaginative force of the distant past, meaning they could be manipulated to fit a variety of purposes while retaining discursive charisma. I maintain that the Norse gained such traction in nineteenth-century France because they could be refigured to serve in many forms: as secret repositories of ancient knowledge of Aryan migrations, affirming white supremacy; as early trans-Atlantic explorers, affirming the plausibility and inevitability of global settler colonialism; as founders of Normandy, affirming the region's union with the rest of the nation; or as shieldmaidens, affirming the natural and eternal femininity of even the most transgressive women. Over the course of this dissertation, I show how various French actors

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<sup>16</sup> Janine R. Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature 1851-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Barbara Keller, *The Middle Ages Reconsidered: Attitudes in France from the Eighteenth Century through the Romantic Movement* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984); Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, *Of Knights and Spires: Gothic Revival in France and Germany* (London: Phaidon, 1999); Harry Redman, *The Roland Legend in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991); Alain Boureau, *Le droit de cuissage : La fabrication d'un mythe, XIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Michael Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995); Charles Ridoux, *Evolution des études médiévales en France de 1860 à 1914* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001); Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003); Zrinka Stahuljak, *Pornographic Archaeology: Medicine, Medievalism, and the Invention of the French Nation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Jennifer Rushworth, *Petrarch and the Literary Culture of Nineteenth-Century France: Translation, Appropriation, Transformation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017); Jan M. Ziolkowski, *The Juggler of Notre Dame and the Medievalizing of Modernity*, 6 vols. (OpenBook, 2018).

working in a range of fields – including academia, journalism, art, and theater – remade the Viking to tackle issues of racial hierarchy, colonialism, regionalism, and gender disorder.

The great twentieth-century study of French attitudes towards the Norse is Régis Boyer's 1986 *Le Mythe viking dans les lettres françaises*.<sup>17</sup> Based on a thesis completed in 1970, Boyer's *Le Mythe viking* deftly surveys evolving French perspectives on the Norse from the Middle Ages to the time of the book's publication. Boyer argues that from the first Viking invasions up through the Renaissance, the inhabitants of France looked on the raiders from the North as the fearful foil of Christendom, an inhuman scourge inflicted by God. Starting with Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu and the Swiss historian Paul-Henri Mallet, however, the Vikings became mighty lovers of liberty who reinvigorated the decadent civilizations of Latin Europe with a bracing infusion of their manly, independent strength. Francophone philosophers pioneered the claim that the wintry climates of the North fostered in-bred traits of freedom, hardiness, and courage at odds with the soft languor perpetuated by the mild Mediterranean. Boyer artfully pulls together travelogues, plays, poems, and works of history to distill the nineteenth-century French portrait of the Viking: a ferocious, egalitarian hero who laughed in the face of death.

Yet, despite the thoroughness of Boyer's catalog of source texts and his incisive summation of the traits nineteenth-century French people read onto the figure of the Viking, he does not connect those traits to the political situation of France at the time. He does not ask how contemporary concerns about national character or international prestige colored his subjects' view of the medieval Norse. Though Boyer tells the reader in extensive detail *what* the nineteenth-century French said about the Vikings, he does not examine *why* they said it or *how* it matters to understanding French society more broadly.

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<sup>17</sup> Régis Boyer, *Le Mythe viking dans les lettres françaises* (Paris: Editions du Porte-Glaive, 1986).

My dissertation aims to resolve these questions. By returning to the texts Boyer cited, as well as many more that he did not, I relocate these documents in trans-Atlantic intellectual circuits and tackle wider issues in French historiography. Why did French writers feel the need to exhume the Norse, with whom they had much less direct connection than with other medieval figures? How did the French Viking craze resemble or diverge from those in other countries? How can studying it help illuminate quintessentially French problems, such as the fear of racial decline; justifications of global imperialism; regional particularity; or anxieties about gender upheaval?



Fig. 0.3. Georges Roux, *De tous les fjords on vit bientôt s'élancer les vaisseaux*, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le Xe jusqu'au XVe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

In this illustration for Neukomm's retelling of the *Vínland sagas*, Roux showcases a flotilla of ferocious dragon ships packed to the bulkheads with heavily-armed Vikings. This image encapsulates one modern stereotype of the Norse: intrepid pirates hungry for violence and maritime adventure.

As I demonstrate throughout my dissertation, a great deal of the Vikings' appeal to nineteenth-century audiences came from their plasticity as a symbol. Christoffer Kølvråa contends that the Viking has become an "empty signifier" in media, devoid of "any distinct meaning, retaining little more than a strong positive valorization."<sup>18</sup> This was equally true in the nineteenth-century North Atlantic world. Substantial temporal distance from the Norse, the relative absence or inaccessibility of reliable primary evidence, and the dearth of previous commentary ensured that people could invent the Viking they wanted to see. This versatility meant that the Vikings could be whomever they were needed to be.

I describe my approach to history as a methodology of the incongruous. I seek out whatever seems superficially odd or out of place for its historical moment. I want to understand how artifacts that appear anomalous actually fit within their context. I find that phenomena – like the nineteenth-century French Viking revival – that initially strike today's researcher as bizarre in fact hint towards widespread cultural patterns. Indeed, on deeper study, these ostensible incongruities derive from (and expose) profoundly essential currents in their societies.

Throughout this dissertation, I juxtapose what Louise D'Arcens refers to as "found" and "made" medievalisms.<sup>19</sup> D'Arcens defines the former as post-medieval cultural products that "emerged through contact with, and interpretation of... material remains of the medieval past."<sup>20</sup> "Found" Norse medievalisms in nineteenth-century France included translations of sagas and Eddas, academic publications on Viking history, and archeological excavations of Norse sites. At the same time, I also tackle "made" medievalisms, or "texts, objects, performances, and practices

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<sup>18</sup> Christoffer Kølvråa, "Embodying 'the Nordic Race': Imaginaries of Viking Heritage in the Online Communications of the Nordic Resistance Movement," *Patterns of Prejudice* 53, no. 3 (2019), 275.

<sup>19</sup> Louise D'Arcens, "Medievalism: Scope and Complexity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 1-13.

<sup>20</sup> D'Arcens, "Medievalism: Scope and Complexity," 2.



that are not only post-medieval in their provenance but imaginative in their impulse.”<sup>21</sup> I examine novels, poetry, theater, and paintings in which French creators elaborated fantastic new visions of the Norse past. As D’Arcens herself acknowledges, the distinction between “found” and “made” medievalisms is necessarily somewhat artificial due to the constant interplay back and forth between them. Indeed, Diedre O’Sullivan has argued that during the nineteenth century “the apparent polarity between a critical and a celebratory discourse [about Vikings was] more apparent than real.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, even in the most academic works of the period, “ideas about Viking identity were never derived from purely detached and scholarly historical endeavour; they were products of creative enterprise, experience and emotion, empathy and aesthetic appreciation.” As a result, I am able to look at erudite tracts written for a purely academic audience alongside artistic and literary pieces designed for a mass consumer base alongside one another and find the same recurring themes. By bringing them both together, I recover the vibrant idiosyncrasy of the Norse imaginary in nineteenth-century France.

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<sup>21</sup> D’Arcens, “Medievalism: Scope and Complexity,” 2.

<sup>22</sup> Deidre O’Sullivan, “The Importance of Being Viking,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Art, Material Culture, Language and Literature of the Early Medieval World*, eds. Eric Cambridge and Jane Hawkes (Oxford: Oxbow, 2017).

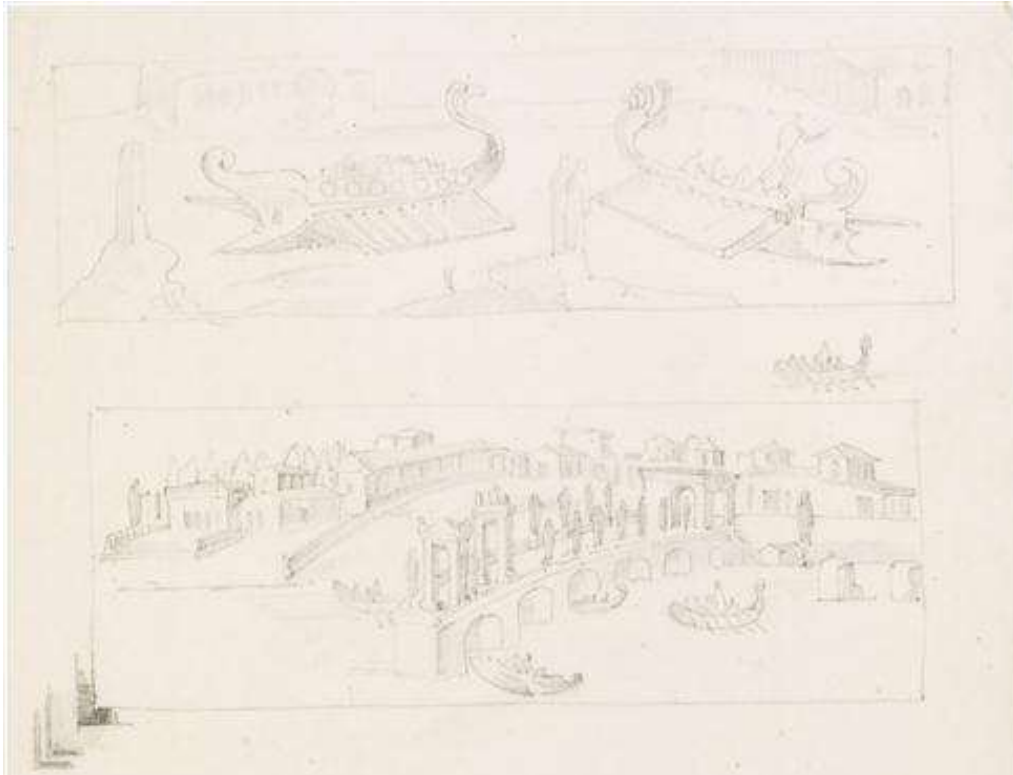


Fig. 0.4. Victor Baltard, Sketch of Drakkars, nineteenth century. Graphite, musée d'Orsay, Paris.

These juxtaposed illustrations portray dragon ships sailing upriver into a developed medieval city, possibly Paris. Whether the Vikings on board aim to raid or trade is uncertain. Baltard communicates the versatility of Norse ships as both ocean-going and riverine vessels, giving them access deep inland for commerce and assault. Their ships were historically crucial to Norse life and became visual short-hands for Vikingness in the nineteenth century.

To be certain, the creators I study were a rather motley crew. It is difficult to generalize about them or offer a representative prosopography, given their diversity. The major actors in this dissertation include Ferdinand d'Eckstein, a Restoration aristocrat of Jewish heritage; Arthur de Gobineau, a Legitimist noble infamous for inspiring Nazi racial policy; Pierre-Eugène Beauvois, a provincial small-town mayor; Paul Belloni Du Chaillu, a mixed-race naturalist from the Île de Bourbon; Henry Vignaud, a Louisiana-born Creole Confederate; and Virginia Zucchi, a prima ballerina at Paris' Eden-Théâtre. My dissertation also features painters, opera singers,

novelists, and archaeologists. The sheer variety of my subjects' origins, professions, and intellectual commitments showcases the scope of the Viking revival in France at the time.

I take as foundational the old aphorism that “all scholarship is autobiography.”<sup>23</sup> My essential assertion is that when nineteenth-century French people talked about Vikings, they were not *just* talking about Vikings. They were also talking about themselves, their world, and the world they hoped to see. I do not mean to imply that they were (necessarily) guilty of faulty historical praxis. Rather, the reflexive return to the present is an inescapable part of historical thinking; the thinker cannot escape their own subject position. I delve deeply into individual paintings, articles, monographs, and translations to unpack the creators' beliefs and goals in creation. By juxtaposing the environment in which the creators were operating with the internal logic of each work, I show why it was made and what it was meant to accomplish. I thereby reveal the importance to historians of an apparently quirky body of artifacts that actually have much to say about power relations in the nineteenth century.

In addition to textual sources including novels, newspapers, poems, theatrical scripts, and academic publications, this dissertation makes substantial use of images. I employ images in two ways. Certain images I analyze in detail and at length, combining close looking, contemporary reception, and cultural context to thoroughly plumb the meaning of the source. I particularly rely on this methodology in Chapters 4 and 5. Other images I use as substantiating evidence, almost in the guise of footnotes. I include them in order to demonstrate the breadth of nineteenth-century French engagement with the Norse, in the same way that I would cite a pertinent primary

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<sup>23</sup> For a useful look at the uses and controversies of this phrase, see Una M. Cadegan, “Not All Autobiography Is Scholarship: Thinking, as a Catholic, about History,” in *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Vocation*, eds. John Fea, Jay Green, and Eric Miller (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010): 39-59. The ways in which my own scholarship is autobiography are considered at the end of this dissertation.

text without necessarily incorporating sustained interpretation. I hope that these two complementary approaches to images together add depth and texture to my study.

I open in Chapter 1, “Marianne Meets the Vikings: Encounters with the Norse Medieval in Nineteenth-Century France,” by laying out where my subjects intersected and engaged with Norse culture. This chapter situates France relative to other countries with more prominent Norse revivals and shows how France needs to be included in the conversation about nineteenth-century Viking mania alongside Scandinavia, Britain, Germany, and the United States. I also chart the emergence and evolution of French people “thinking with Vikings.” How did nineteenth-century French people become familiar with the Norse, and what did they think these figures could offer modern consumers? I identify three key phases in French attitudes towards the Viking: an initial phase of burgeoning interest between 1748 and 1835 following Montesquieu and Mallet’s emphasis on northern barbarians; an academic phase kickstarted by prolific scholar Xavier Marmier in 1835; and a popular phase initiated by Richard Wagner’s operatic Ring Cycle in the 1870s. I show that by the end of the century, the Viking had achieved a notable and even glamorous status in French culture.

In Chapter 2, “Seeking the Aryans in Old Norse Literature: A Pre-History of Whiteness and the Making of Arthur de Gobineau,” I show how some French scholars looked for evidence of Europe’s Aryan lineage in the sagas and Eddas of Iceland. Inspired by the works of Orientalists like William Jones, certain French writers in the mid-century turned to these medieval texts in search of evidence that a superior white tribe migrated out of Asia in ancient days, granting the French and the Scandinavians a common ethnogenesis. By focusing on these writers, I offer a new way of understanding the theories of Arthur de Gobineau, who supported his racial arguments with reference to the sagas and Eddas. I contend that Gobineau’s *Essai sur*

*l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853-1855) must be read within the broader context of French Old Norse studies. I also suggest that some French scholars embraced the Viking because he could be made to serve as an emblem of white supremacy.

I continue with the theme of racial hierarchy in Chapter 3, “Dragon Ships to Empire: Writing Vínland through the Lens of Settler Colonialism.” This chapter traces the implications of French Viking studies for global imperialism. Like many of their international colleagues, French scholars argued for extensive pre-Columbian Norse settlement in the Americas (known in Old Norse as Vínland). I contend that this improbable historical claim accomplished three purposes that served the cause of normalizing French settler colonialism. First, French Vínland scholars maintained that Norse customs had durably imprinted on Indigenous populations, thus affirming the plausibility of the modern civilizing mission. Second, they linked the medieval Norse expeditions to Vínland to early modern Norman expeditions to the “New World.” Such a vindication of early voyages by ethnic “cousins” of the French presented France as genetically destined to colonize foreign lands. Finally, these French scholars laid claim to the glory enjoyed by Spain and Italy as the first “discoverers” of the Americas and shifted it to Norse populations that these writers linked to France, rhetorically improving France’s position within the international competition for empire. I also trace the spread of French ideas about Vínland abroad and how French scholars of Old Norse positioned themselves within trans-Atlantic intellectual communities.

In Chapter 4, I examine “Painting Norse Raids in Northern France: The Problem of Viking Violence.” This chapter looks closely at eight large-scale history paintings that were produced in France between 1834 and 1895 depicting the Norse invasions of Francia. I contend that over the course of the century, artists moved from seeing the Vikings as barbarous,

subhuman enemies to co-founders of the modern French nation. Sublimating the violence committed by the Vikings against the Franks not only helped salvage the Norse as appropriate heroes for French consumption, but also eased the contemporary regional division between Normandy and the rest of France, an especially significant rhetorical move considering the French state's attempt to unify and homogenize the country during this moment.

Chapter 5, "Waking the Valkyries: Gender Transgression in French Mediatization of Old Norse Literature," argues that representations of shieldmaidens and Valkyries in fin-de-siècle literature, performance, and art constituted a response to perceived slippages in normative masculinity and femininity. While many critics and policymakers of the day responded to the "gender damage" of the Franco-Prussian War and the New Woman by reinforcing binaries, certain male writers and artists reimagined the Norse woman warrior as a heroic icon who combined the deadly skill and courage of a soldier with idealized femininity. By emphasizing the shieldmaiden's sexual availability and domestic submissiveness, these Frenchmen assured their audiences that the imperiled gendered order could be salvaged.



Fig. 0.5. Théobald Chartran, *Siegfried*, ca. 1896. Oil on canvas, 280 x 200 cm, Musée des beaux-arts et d'archéologie, Besançon.

Chartran depicts the moment midway through the third of Wagner's Ring operas when the eponymous hero re-forges his ancestral sword, Nothung. Siegfried's villainous foster-father, the dwarf Mime, cowers in the background, fearing his adoptive son's newfound emancipation. Wagner's Siegfried (known in Old Norse as Sigurd Fafnirsbane) incarnated for late nineteenth-century audiences the ideal Norseman: hale, courageous, and autonomous.

If the nineteenth century witnessed such an explosion of Viking mania, what brought that mania to an end in the twentieth century? The answer is two World Wars that discredited anything associated with Germany. Martin Arnold encapsulates it succinctly: "everything associated with the study of Old Norse mythology in Europe came to be regarded with deep suspicion, as did the cradles of high culture in which ideas about racial supremacism had been nurtured. None of this is surprising considering the Aryan hysteria that gripped Germany and led Europe to near ruin."<sup>24</sup> As Régis Boyer puts it, in France "the conditions [of Old Norse

<sup>24</sup> Martin Arnold, *Thor: Myth to Marvel* (London: Continuum, 2011), 136.

scholarship] changed, had to change. The history of the [first] half-century [of the 1900s] taught where the exaltation of the superman could lead.... The events of [that] half-century had tempered the ardor of the fanatics of [biological racist and French Viking scholar Arthur de] Gobineau.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, Germany’s self-proclaimed monopoly on Norse history poisoned the well for other nations.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 0.6. Henri-Michel-Antoine Chapu, *Drakkar, navire scandinave*, nineteenth century. Graphite, musée d’Orsay, Paris.

This charming sketch of a dragon ship reflects the period’s shaky knowledge of the specifics of Norse material culture. Several excavations of medieval ship burials in Scandinavia at the turn of the century would dramatically advance modern familiarity with Norse life and objects.

Nonetheless, today’s right wing continues to idolize the Viking. Scholars have developed a neologism to articulate the enduring conservative fascination with Scandinavia: boréalisme.

<sup>25</sup> “Les conditions ont changé, aurait dû changer. L’Histoire du demi-siècle a enseigné où peut mener l’exaltation de l’*Übermensch*.... Les événements du demi-siècle avaient tempéré les ardeurs des zélés de Gobineau.” Boyer, *Le Mythe viking*, 161, 167.

<sup>26</sup> See also Simon Lebouteiller, “Les droites extrêmes et populistes scandinaves et les Vikings : constructions, formes et usages d’un mythe identitaire contemporain,” *Nordiques* 29 (Spring 2015), 114; Marion Gibson, “Vikings and Victories: Sea-Stories from ‘The Seafarer’ to *Skyfall* and the Future of British Maritime Culture,” *Journal for Maritime Research* 17, no 1 (2015), 6-7; Pierre-Brice Stahl, “French Perspectives,” in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, et. al. (De Gruyter, 2018): 908-912; Anna Rouffia, “« Mythe nordiste » et relations entre la Normandie et la Scandinavie (1880-2015),” *Classe internationale* (June 3, 2021).



The Norwegian historian Kari Aga Myklebost first coined the term in 2010; it has since occupied an important place in Francophone scholarship.<sup>27</sup> A counterpart to Edward Said's orientalism, rotated 90 degrees on its axis, boréalisme names the role of the distant north as a foil for modern Europe's delineation of its own identity. Like orientalism, boréalisme as an interpretive lens brings into focus the extent to which continental Europe's notions of the north are grounded not in reality, but in exoticizing imaginaries. Unlike orientalism, boréalisme stands not for difference, inferiority, and Blackness, but for self, superiority, and whiteness.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the very Arctic landscape itself came to signify racial whiteness in the nineteenth-century imagination, the monochrome fields of snow and ice seeming guarantors of blood purity.<sup>29</sup> The journal *Études germaniques* has dedicated two volumes to spotlighting the influence of boréaliste thinking on French culture.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Lionel Cordier has stridently called out the ongoing place of romantic boréalisme in propagating white supremacy.<sup>31</sup>

However, it would be reductive to imply that the image of the Viking only directed attention northward. Different strands of French Old Norse studies metaphorically faced in different directions, towards different waters and lands. Scholars also oriented their work east towards the Rhine and the forests of Germany; west to Normandy and the coast; across the Channel up to Britain; further yet to Vínland; or even as far away as India. Researchers disagreed

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<sup>27</sup> Kari Aga Myklebost, "Borealisme og kulturnasjonalisme. Bilder av nord i norsk og russisk folkeminnegransking 1830-1920," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Tromsø, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> For recent explorations of these dynamics, see Alban Gautier, Alexis Wilkin, Odile Parsis-Barubé, and Alain Dierkens, "Winter is Medieval. Représentations modernes et contemporaines des Nordes médiévaux," *Deshima. Revue d'histoire globale des Pays du Nord* 15 (2021): 119-178; Bernd Brunner, *Extreme North: A Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2022); Pierre-Brice Stahl, "Boreal Medievalism: The Imaginary of the Viking Age," *Scandinavica* 62, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>29</sup> Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 8-9; Kate Flint, "Under the Ice," in *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* 117-138 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Sylvain Briens, ed., "Le Boréalisme," *Études germaniques* no. 282 (2016); Sylvain Briens, Pierre-Brice Stahl, and Raphaëlle Jamet, eds., "Le Boréalisme 2 : 0," *Études germaniques* no. 290 (2018).

<sup>31</sup> Lionel Cordier, "En finir avec l'illusion boréale : Utopie du Grand Nord et promotion de la blancheur," *Revue du crieur* 3, no. 14 (2019): 50-59.

on *where* Norse history should focus their audiences' attention. Where was the Norse revival anchored? Where was the crux of Norseness – and Frenchness?

I should perhaps clarify the terminology I will employ throughout this dissertation. I distinguish between “the medieval” (*médiéval* in French), or the actual period between Antiquity and early modernity, and “medievalism” (*moyenâgeux*), or the memory of that period constructed retrospectively.<sup>32</sup> I will use “Scandinavia” (*Scandinavie*) to describe the geographic area roughly comprising present-day Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland. The people and culture of that area in the modern period are “Nordic” (*nordique*). By contrast, “Norse” (*normand*) refers to the people and culture of that area in the early Middle Ages, and “Old Norse” (*norrois*) to their language. “Viking” (*viking*) specifically names the sea raiders who came from that society. Though my nineteenth-century subjects were less than perfectly scrupulous about maintaining these terminological distinctions, I shall try to draw them as best I can.

According to Cord Whitaker, “the concept of an idyllic Middle Ages and the emergence of medievalism among scholars and enthusiasts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” arose in response to the perceived strife, disharmony, and corruption of a mobile, industrializing, revolutionary Europe.<sup>33</sup> Retreating to the reassuring comfort of a recovered past where, for all its harrowing dangers, strong men ultimately prevailed and the racial and gendered hierarchy was secure allowed French writers to believe that (like their subjects) they and their countrymen were indomitable champions who would vanquish all adversity. They found psychological relief in transiently occupying a medieval world believed to be free of the modern disarray of accelerating

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<sup>32</sup> On this distinction, see Mark Burde, “Entre médiéval et moyenâgeux... de la marge de manœuvre ?” in *Fantasmagories du Moyen Âge*, 259-261.

<sup>33</sup> Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2019), 193.

social change. When my subjects were writing, reading, painting, sculpting, composing, singing, or dancing about the Vikings, they were reflecting not only on the medieval, but on their present. Norse history shored up flagging French spirits and assured audiences that their heritage guaranteed their inborn destiny as heroes. If they would only turn towards the past, thinking went, they would seize again their medieval greatness.

## Chapter 1. Marianne Meets the Vikings: Encounters with the Norse Medieval in Nineteenth-Century France

“Medievalism may turn to the past but it operates in the present.” – Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein<sup>34</sup>

### Introduction

In the opening pages of Jules Verne’s 1864 *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, Professor Otto Lidenbrock discovers a runic cryptogram tucked inside a manuscript copy of Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*.<sup>35</sup> The *Heimskringla* is a real collection of Old Norse sagas written in thirteenth-century Iceland, and Verne’s fictional cryptogram reveals a forgotten passage to the planet’s interior through the Snæfellsjökull volcano in the west of that country.<sup>36</sup> Lidenbrock and his nephew promptly set off for Iceland, beginning the novel’s titular adventure. Runes and sagas – the language and literature of the medieval Vikings – thus emerge early in the book as privileged pathways to lost truth.

By jumpstarting his tale with timeless secrets hidden among Viking artifacts, Verne drew the attention of a mass readership to Old Norse literature, a burgeoning field in France at the time. Daniel-Henri Pageaux contends that Verne drew directly on the writings of contemporary French medievalists, notably Xavier Marmier (1808-1892) and the contributors to *Revue des deux mondes*.<sup>37</sup> Verne capitalized on (and catalyzed) deepening French fascination with the distant world of dragon-prowed ships and berserk warriors to lend his novel both exoticism and verisimilitude. But how had French readers – including Verne himself – become primed to make sense of Old Norse writings as bearers of special knowledge? Where did French people

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<sup>34</sup> Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein, “Theorizing America’s Medievalisms,” in *The United States of Medievalism*, eds. Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Jules Verne, *Voyage au centre de la terre* (Paris: Bibliothèque d’éducation et de récréation, 1864), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Verne, *Voyage au centre de la terre*, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel-Henri Pageaux, “Voyage aux sources du *Voyage au centre de la terre*,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 54, no. 2 (1980): 202-212.

encounter Norse culture? How did they respond to it? When, how, and by whom were French audiences taught to understand Old Norse texts as relevant to them?

Scholars of the nineteenth-century Viking revival have not generally highlighted France in their narratives.<sup>38</sup> Historians have largely framed Scandinavia, Germany, Britain, and the United States as the epicenters of the phenomenon. Indeed, there are good reasons for this myopia. Early Scandinavian nationalists were the first to restore the Viking to international attention as they argued for the dignity and significance of their marginalized nations.<sup>39</sup> Inspired by the scholarship of the Scandinavians, German-speaking writers took up the Viking as their own. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, advocates of German expansionism leaned on the supposed superiority and Germanness of Norse history to justify asserting dominion throughout Europe; this process achieved its apogee with Heinrich Himmler and the Nazis.<sup>40</sup> Great Britain, however, was not content to leave this Norse legacy to the Continent. British authors strove to resurrect the memory of Viking implantation in the isles to construct a unified national identity around maritime imperialism.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, however, specific

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Mohnike and Pierre-Brice Stahl have specifically called out the lack of recent work on this phenomenon and exhorted renewed study of the topic. See Thomas Mohnike and Pierre-Brice Stahl, "The Reception of Norse Mythology in French. A Brief Introduction to its Multi-Faceted History," *Deshima*, no. 15 (2021): 7-39. Cf. Thor J. Beck, *Northern Antiquities in French Learning and Literature (1755-1855): A Study in Preromantic Ideas*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934-1935); Maurice Gravier, ed., *Rencontres et courants littéraires franco-scandinaves* (Paris: Minard, 1972); Régis Boyer, *Le Mythe Viking dans les lettres françaises* (Paris: Editions du Porte-Glaive, 1986); Thomas Mohnike, *Géographies du Germain : Les études nordiques à l'université de Strasbourg (1840-1945)* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> John L. Greenway, *The Golden Horns: Mythic Imagination and the Nordic Past* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977); Martin Arnold, *Thor: Myth to Marvel* (London: Continuum, 2011), 98-114; Jón Karl Helgason, "Continuity? The Icelandic Sagas in Post-Medieval Times," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (John Wiley & Sons, 2005); Laurence Rogations, "Résurgence de l'art viking à l'époque moderne : l'exemple du mouvement Art nouveau en Scandinavie," *Nordiques* 29 (Spring 2015): 63-71; Sophie Børding, et al., eds., *Mythology and Nation Building: N.F.S. Grundtvig and His European Contemporaries* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2021); Tim van Gerven, ed., *Scandinavism: Overlapping and Competing Identities in the Nordic World, 1770-1919* (Brill, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> Arnold, *Thor: Myth to Marvel*, 115-136; Johann Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans: How the Nazis Usurped Europe's Classical Past*, trans. Richard R. Nybakken (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2000); Joanne Parker, "Ruling the Waves: Saxons, Vikings, and the Sea in the Formation of an Anglo-British Identity in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Sea and Englishness in the*

localities also claimed a privileged or exclusive Viking lineage in order to distinguish themselves from Britain as a whole.<sup>42</sup> As I discuss at length in Chapter 3, the United States adopted the Norse Vínland expeditions as a prop for modern settler colonialism in the Americas. Thus, each of the Viking revivals in Europe and North America had its own signature dynamics, goals, and preoccupations built around the dictates of nationalism.

Certain areas with plausible claims to a Norse past never did develop an equivalent nineteenth-century revival. Recent archeology has substantiated the medieval Norse presence in Wales, western Ireland, the Netherlands, and Estonia, yet none of these places made Viking-ness a part of their modern identity.<sup>43</sup> Despite repeated Viking incursions into Sicily, Italy largely ignored Norse history until after World War II.<sup>44</sup> Imperial Russia actively suppressed memory of Norse involvement in the state's early formation, desiring to present the country instead as eternally and exclusively Slav.<sup>45</sup> These places where the medieval Norse spread but were not

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*Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, ed. Sebastian I. Sobecki 195-206 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011); Robert W. Rix, "Introduction," in *Norse Romanticism: Themes in British Literature, 1760–1830*, ed. Robert W. Rix (Romantic Circles, 2012); Marion Gibson, "Vikings and Victories: Sea-Stories from 'The Seafarer' to *Skyfall* and the Future of British Maritime Culture," *Journal for Maritime Research* 17, no 1 (2015): 1-15; Richard Cole, "British Perspectives," in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, et. al. (De Gruyter, 2018): 891-898.

<sup>42</sup> Julian Meldon D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen: Old Norse Influence on Modern Scottish Literature* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996); David Clark and Carl Phelpstead, eds., *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007); Matthew Townend, *The Vikings and Victorian Lakeland: The Norse Medievalism of W.G. Collingwood and His Contemporaries* (Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2009); Adam Grydehøj, "Ethnicity and the Origins of Local Identity in Shetland, UK—Part I: Picts, Vikings, Fairies, Finns, and Aryans," *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 2 (2013): 39-48; Adam Grydehøj, "Ethnicity and the Origins of Local Identity in Shetland, UK—Part II: Picts, Vikings, Fairies, Finns, and Aryans," *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 2 (2013): 107-114; Margaret Elphinstone, "Some Fictions of Scandinavian Scotland," in *Scotland in Europe*, ed. Tom Hubbard and R. D. S. Jack, 105-117 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); Claire McKeown, "The Sea Kings of the North: Scandinavian Scotland in Nineteenth-Century Literature," *Études écossaises* 19 (2017).

<sup>43</sup> Caitlin Ellis, "Remembering the Vikings: Ancestry, Cultural Memory and Geographical Variation," *History Compass* (2021), 2. See also Clare Downham, "Viking Ethnicities: A Historiographic Overview," *History Compass* 10, no. 1 (2012): 1-12; Jean Renaud, "Un impact viking... jusqu'à nos jours," *Nordiques* 29 (Spring 2015): 11-24.

<sup>44</sup> Fulvio Ferrari, "Old Norse in Italy: From Francesco Saverio Quadrio to *Fóstbræðra saga*," *Études scandinaves au Canada* 26 (2019): 88-108.

<sup>45</sup> Ellis, "Remembering the Vikings," 6.

widely remembered spotlight the contingent and highly constructed nature of “Scandimania” where it did occur.<sup>46</sup>

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the story of the nineteenth-century North Atlantic revival of Norse medievalism cannot be told without France. I show that French people encountered, interacted with, and thought about Norse culture to an increasing extent across the nineteenth century. Because France comparatively lacked in physical Viking relics, the French had to come to know the Vikings through their literature.<sup>47</sup> A great deal of media seemingly removed from actual Old Norse texts ultimately derived from those texts, however indirectly, and thus represented an engagement with them, however obliquely. This phenomenon was not confined to the intellectual capital of Paris; Norse medievalism awoke in provincial hubs such as Rouen, Bordeaux, and Strasbourg.

I contend that Norse medievalism in modern France passed through three principal phases: first, the early phase (ca. 1748-1835), from the Enlightenment through the Restoration, as savants led by Montesquieu and Swiss scholar Paul-Henri Mallet restored the Norse from emblems of ahistorical inhuman chaos to conventional historical actors available for study; second, the academic phase (ca. 1835-1914), which saw intensified interest in the Norse within the emerging structures of the historical profession; third, the fantastical phase (ca. 1876-1914), where non-scholars inspired by Richard Wagner’s Ring Cycle began creating and consuming imaginative media suffused with Norse tropes. As the key roles of Mallet and Wagner hint,

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<sup>46</sup> I borrow this term from Claire McKeown, “‘Scandimania’ and the Victorians: Exoticism or Self-Identification?” *Deshima* 10 (2016): 137-150.

<sup>47</sup> While ample documentary evidence attests to Viking incursions into France beginning from the ninth century, associated archeological finds are thin on (and in) the ground. For a striking example, see the dearth of Viking artifacts in the displays of the Musée de Cluny-Musée National du Moyen Âge. Patrick Périn, “Les objets vikings du musée des antiquités de la Seine-Maritime, à Rouen,” *Cahier des Annales de Normandie*, no. 23 (1990): 161-188; Vincent Carpentier and Cyril Marcigny, “Traces et absence de traces. L’archéologie moderne face au paradoxe de l’implantation des Vikings en Normandie,” *Nordiques* 29 (Spring 2015): 25-43; Jean-Marie Levesque, “Dans les musées de Normandie... où sont passés les Vikings ?” *Nordiques* 29 (Spring 2015).

French engagement with the Norse past was not a closed phenomenon but developed within a broader transnational context.

These three phases were messy and overlapping, often bleeding into each other. The French did not need to wait for Wagner in order to start producing art and fiction about the Vikings. Similarly, the fin-de-siècle turn towards the fantastical did not end serious scholarly engagement with Norse history. These phases also do not map neatly onto wider political or cultural regimes. Changes in work on the Vikings were not anchored to particular historical moments but to broad cultural trends. Indeed, I argue that the forms and themes of Norse medievalism in France evolved over time due to forces internal to Norse medievalist discourse. However, as I shall show in subsequent chapters, as a result of these transformations, the figure of the Viking became rhetorically available for an ever-wider range of external ideological uses.

### **The Early Phase: From Act of God to Paragon of Man (ca. 1748-1835)**

In the centuries that followed the Norse invasions, France remembered the Vikings as an act of God or even a force of nature: an inhuman maelstrom of mindless brutality.<sup>48</sup> In this section, I will show how over the early modern period, the Vikings gradually came to be understood instead as a people like any other, with their own complex civilization and moral worth. However, before turning to modern interpretations of Old Norse documents, it is necessary to first catalog those documents and understand how they came to broad European attention towards the end of the early modern period. In this section, I begin by surveying the formal and content characteristics of various genres of Old Norse literature before tracing their resurrection in the eighteenth century.

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<sup>48</sup> Simon Coupland, "The Rod of God's Wrath or the People of God's Wrath? The Carolingian Theology of the Viking Invasions," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42, no. 4 (October 1991): 535-554.



Old Norse was the medieval forerunner of modern Scandinavian languages. Jules Verne's Professor Lidenbrock praised it as a "magnificent idiom, rich and simple at the same time."<sup>49</sup> The oldest writings produced by the medieval Norse were composed in runes. Runes were not themselves a language, but an alphabet of characters shared by many Germanic languages throughout the first millennium CE.<sup>50</sup> After Christian clerics introduced the Latin alphabet to Scandinavia, Norse writers began to use the new script to record longer and longer texts in their native tongue. Old Norse literature written in Latin characters included skaldic poetry, *þættir* short stories, law codes, histories, and genealogies. More importantly for modern readers' purposes, it also included the Eddas and sagas.

"Eddas" is a collective term that refers to two distinct texts: the Poetic, Elder, or Saemund's Edda; and the Prose, Younger, or Snorri's Edda.<sup>51</sup> The former was compiled in a thirteenth-century manuscript called the Codex Regius but is believed to have originated earlier. As its name suggests, the Poetic Edda collates many verse accounts in varying meters of Norse mythological events, including the creation of the world, the lives of the gods, Ragnarök, and Sigurd the Völsung's destruction of the dragon Fafnir. The Prose Edda represents Snorri Sturluson's attempt to rationalize many of these same stories.<sup>52</sup> Author also of the *Heimskringla* featured so prominently in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, Snorri was an Icelandic Christian who tried to balance his admiration for his pagan forebears with disbelief in their cosmology. He retold in prose, often with his own explanatory gloss, many of the myths that appear in the Poetic

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<sup>49</sup> "Ce magnifique idiome, riche et simple à la fois !" Verne, *Voyage au centre de la terre*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Heather O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 11-12, 146-148.

<sup>51</sup> On the Eddas, see Régis Boyer, *Les Vikings : Histoire, mythe, dictionnaire* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 2008), s.v. "Eddas."

<sup>52</sup> O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla*, 5, 14.

Edda. Taken together, the two Eddas constitute a flawed but irreplaceable window into the worldview of the Vikings.

The sagas represent a distinct corpus of narrative literature composed during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries.<sup>53</sup> They were written (usually anonymously) in Old Norse prose and unite several constituent genres. The most critically acclaimed and frequently studied are the family sagas, also known as the sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*), which follow kin groups of Icelanders between the ninth-century Settlement and the mid-eleventh century. These sagas heavily emphasize feud, honor, and Icelandic identity, and many of the characters and events are historically attested. The family sagas include several subgenres, including the warrior-poet sagas and the outlaw sagas. Notable examples include Egil's Saga, Njal's Saga, and Grettir's Saga. Perhaps the next best-known among today's audiences are the legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), which generally focus on the mythical origins of the royal houses of Scandinavia in the middle of the first millennium. The most famous of these is the Völsunga Saga which inspired Wagner's operatic Ring Cycle. The exploits of less historically distant Norse monarchs were recounted in the kings' sagas (*konungasögur*), such as those compiled in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. Notable bishops and saints, such as St. Jón Ögmundsson, first bishop of Hólar, got their own sagas (*biskupasögur*), intertwined with the hagiographic tradition of the rest of Europe. Continental influences further intruded in the form of the chivalric sagas (*ridðarasögur*), which translated knightly tales like Tristan and Isolde or Marie de France's "Bisclavret."<sup>54</sup> Finally, there were the contemporary sagas (*samtíðarsögur*) describing people

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<sup>53</sup> On the sagas, see Gisli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, trans. Nicholas Jones (Cambridge: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, 2004); Boyer, *Les Vikings : Histoire, mythe, dictionnaire*, s.v. "sagas."

<sup>54</sup> For a late modern look at the medieval translation of lais into Old Norse, see E. Philipot and J. Loth, "Le Lai du Lecheor et Gumbelauc," *Revue celtique* 28 (1907): 327-336.

and events of the era of the sagas' composition in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, including one on the Sturlunga clan of Snorri himself.

After a period of neglect between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, early Scandinavian proto-nationalists were the first to restore Old Norse literature to international attention. They sought to spotlight the world-historic importance of medieval Norse society. Depending on their country, some used Old Norse sources to argue that Scandinavia was not marginal to European affairs, but historically integral to them; other authors focused on achieving national autonomy. As Martin Arnold puts it, “the scholarly interest in Old Norse myths and legends... was partly a case of patriotism and cultural pride, often defensively asserted in the face of those who considered the northern territories to be barbaric and culturally impoverished, and partly a case of continuing political rivalries between the Scandinavian countries.”<sup>55</sup> The literary greatness of Old Norse texts – and the greatness of the Vikings they depicted – was seen as justification for modern nationalism. In other words, the origins of the Old Norse revival were always about the nation – both its essential nature and international standing.

Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755) set the stage for a wider reassessment of the Vikings with his theories of climatic determinism. Besides his more famed arguments about political organization, in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) Montesquieu innovated on ancient notions of the relationship between human environment, health, and character espoused by Hippocrates in *On Airs, Waters, and Places*.<sup>56</sup> Montesquieu asserted that the harsh environment of Scandinavia rendered its people more vigorous, courageous, and independent than southern Europeans, who were made soft by milder climes.

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<sup>55</sup> Martin Arnold, *Thor: Myth to Marvel* (London: Continuum, 2011), 77.

<sup>56</sup> On this theory's influence across time, see Genevieve Miller, “‘Airs, Waters, and Places’ in History,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 17, no. 1 (January 1962): 129-140.

Following the claims of sixth-century writer Jordanes, Montesquieu also identified Scandinavia as the homeland of the barbarian invaders of Rome, driven from their native country by overpopulation. Thor Beck refers to these linked assertions as Montesquieu's *Vagina Gentium*-and-Liberty theory, an intellectual construct that would have a long legacy.<sup>57</sup>

Though Montesquieu did not delve deeply into the history of the medieval Norse specifically, later readers readily transposed his observations about Scandinavians generally and the barbarian invaders of Rome specifically onto the Vikings. Notably, Régis Boyer does not believe Montesquieu understood his climatic determinism normatively.<sup>58</sup> According to Boyer, Montesquieu assumed any body would respond similarly to any weather, and he did not assign moral or biological weight to that response. Nevertheless, the framework sketched out in *De l'esprit des lois* set off a chain reaction of Europeans looking to the Vikings as some kind of supermen and as the originators of modern nations, a trend that would gain momentum in the mid-nineteenth century, see catastrophic results in the twentieth, and endure on the margins into the present day.

This perspective was cemented by a second Francophone writer who would leave a lasting imprint on Old Norse scholarship well beyond the eighteenth century. In 1755, at the behest of the king of Denmark, Swiss historian Paul-Henri Mallet published his *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc, où l'on traite de la religion, des loix, des moeurs & des usages des anciens Danois*.<sup>59</sup> Though Mallet touched on all aspects of Danish history, his translation of sections of the Eddas truly seized his readers' interest. Mallet taught his audience to think of the Norse not just as violent Viking raiders, but as complex individuals belonging to a rich and

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<sup>57</sup> Beck, *Northern Antiquities in French Learning and Literature*, vol. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Boyer, *Le Mythe viking*, 41-76.

<sup>59</sup> Paul-Henri Mallet, *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc, ou l'on traite de la religion, des loix, des moeurs & des usages des anciens Danois* (Copenhagen: Imprimerie des Héritiers de Berling, 1755).

compelling world.<sup>60</sup> He repurposed Montesquieu's climatic theories of human nature to valorize the Norse as independent, egalitarian, enterprising actors. He also popularized the remarkably durable conflation of the medieval Norse with the Celts, a misapprehension initially perpetrated by Huguenot historian Simon Pelloutier (1694-1757) in *Histoire des Celtes, et particulièrement des Gaulois et des Germains, depuis les temps fabuleux, jusqu'à la prise de Rome par les Gaulois* (1741).<sup>61</sup> Thanks to Mallet, the assumption that the Norse were a Celtic people would be picked up by many (though significantly, not all) of the nineteenth-century authors I examine in this dissertation.

Mallet's reach extended well beyond French-speaking lands. *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc* became one of the foundational texts of the European Norse revival. Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore, translated it into English in 1770 as *Northern Antiquities*, earning it an even wider audience and securing Mallet's position as a foremost expert on Old Norse literature for decades to come.<sup>62</sup> Mallet played a key role in spreading the notion that the Vikings had not been vicious subhuman savages, but civilized, courageous protagonists of meaningful interest to modern people. Despite his importance in European reception of Norse culture generally, however, it would be some decades before his impact was fully felt in France.

By the end of the eighteenth century, France was ripe for a Norse revival such as that already under way elsewhere in Europe. Yet, interest in the Vikings ebbed during the revolutionary and Napoleonic decades. According to François Guillet, the revolutionaries recast the Norse in France as foreign invaders and feudal overlords, medieval forerunners of the

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<sup>60</sup> Beck, *Northern Antiquities in French Learning and Literature*, vol. 1.

<sup>61</sup> See Thomas Mohnike, "Géographies du savoir historique. Paul-Henri Mallet entre rêves gothiques, germaniques et celtiques," in *Figures du Nord : Scandinavie, Groenland, Sibérie. Perceptions et représentations des espaces septentrionaux de la fin de Moyen Âge au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Éric Schnakenbourg (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012): 215-226.

<sup>62</sup> O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla*, 110-111; Boyer, *Le Mythe Viking*, 41-76.

aristocratic counter-revolution.<sup>63</sup> While Napoleon Bonaparte adopted a somewhat more favorable view of the Vikings – admiring William the Conqueror as an imperial forerunner, putting the Bayeux Tapestry on display at the musée Napoléon in 1803, and commissioning a Girodet painting for Malmaison of fallen French heroes welcomed to Valhalla – the Norse were largely ignored during the Empire.<sup>64</sup> In August 1806, during the construction of a bridge at Île des Cygnes, workers dredged up from the bottom of the Seine River an 8-meter-long boat hollowed from a single oak log (Figure 1.1). The archeologist Antoine Mongez (1747-1835) examined the find and concluded that it was a Viking boat sunk during the 885 siege of Paris.<sup>65</sup> Yet, this surprising claim does not seem to have elicited much public interest.

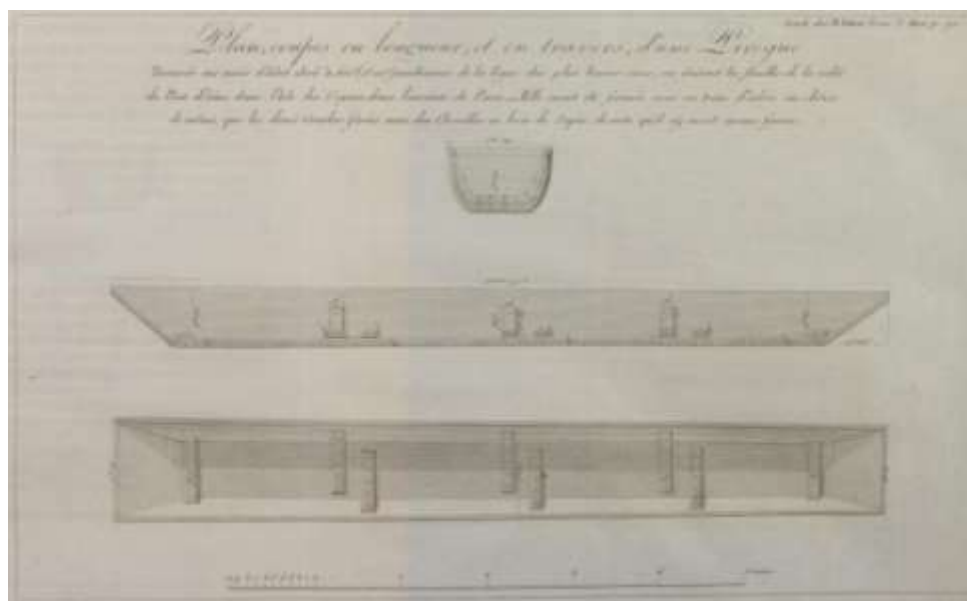


Fig. 1.1. Diagram of supposed Viking ship from Antoine Mongez, “Mémoire sur la manière de naviguer des Normands, et sur un bateau déterré à Paris, près du Champ-de-Mars, en 1806,” *Histoire et mémoires de l’Institut royal de France* 5 (1821): 91-93.

Mongez meticulously catalogued the details of his find, but failed to convince audiences of the ship’s supposed provenance.

<sup>63</sup> François Guillet, “Le Nord mythique dans la Normandie : des Normands aux Vikings de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu’à la Grande Guerre,” *Revue du Nord* 87, no. 360-361 (April-September 2005), 461.

<sup>64</sup> Guillet, “Le Nord mythique dans la Normandie,” 461.

<sup>65</sup> Antoine Mongez, “Mémoire sur la manière de naviguer des Normands, et sur un bateau déterré à Paris, près du Champ-de-Mars, en 1806,” *Histoire et mémoires de l’Institut royal de France* 5 (1821): 91-93.

Perhaps emboldened by the defeat of the anti-Norse revolutionaries, French translators returned to Old Norse texts with a vengeance after the Bourbon Restoration.<sup>66</sup> In 1820, Jens Wolff (ca. 1736-1827) released *Runakefli, le runic rim-stok, ou calendrier runique*; in 1829, Ferdinand, baron d'Eckstein (1790-1861) translated fragments of the *Völuspá* for his periodical *La Catholique*. In 1832 and 1833, Jean-Jacques Ampère (1800-1864) released several versions of the Völsung legend. George Bernard Depping (1784-1853) and Francisque Michel (1809-1887) translated the story of Volund the Smith from *Völundarkviða* in 1833, and two years later Depping provided the introduction to Théodore Licquet's (1787-1832) posthumously published *Histoire de Normandie, depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la conquête de l'Angleterre en 1066*, which also featured the *Völuspá* and portions from the *Hávamál*. Before they could connect with Old Norse literature, French audiences had to be able to read it. These translations reflected and propagated Mallet's essential claim that Norse culture was compelling and edifying for a modern public.

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<sup>66</sup> On translations of the Eddas into French, see Børge Bernhardt, *La Norvège. Livres et articles en langue française, traductions littéraires, bibliographie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970), 159-160; Denis Ballu, *Lettres nordiques : une bibliographie, 1720-2013*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: Kungliga Biblioteket, 2016): 408-409; Pierre-Brice Stahl, "French Editions and Translations of the Poetic Edda: a Bibliography," *Deshima. Revue d'histoire globale des Pays du Nord* 15 (2021): 105-118; Lyonel D. Perabo, "Traduire l'Edda : Les traductions de l'Edda poétique en langue française ; Méthodes, pratiques et limitations," *Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies*, no. 6 (2023): 58-95.



Fig. 1.2. C. Motte, *Harald (aux beaux cheveux) I<sup>er</sup>. Roi de Norvège*, in Pierre Victor, *Harald, ou les Scandinaves* (Paris: Barba, 1825).

The extremely fanciful design of Harald's costume speaks to the absence of solid knowledge about Norse clothing in this period. Like many artists in the first half of the nineteenth century, Lerebours dressed his Norse characters in vaguely Classical garb. The runic engravings around the margins reflect contemporary fascination with the medieval Norse script.

Restoration audiences who did not read the many Eddaic translations suddenly available could instead learn about Norse history at the theater. Though Richard Wagner is usually credited with bringing the medieval Norse to the nineteenth-century stage, Pierre-Simon Lerebours (alias Pierre Victor) dramatized saga content decades earlier in his 1824 play *Harald, ou les Scandinaves*.<sup>67</sup> First performed at the Théâtre Français, *Harald* drew on Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* to depict the titular fair-haired king's legendary unification of Norway under a single crown. Lerebours himself originated the role of the beleaguered monarch (Figure 1.2).<sup>68</sup> He presented the medieval Norse as a precocious society that valued equality and romantic love,

<sup>67</sup> Pierre Victor, *Harald, ou les Scandinaves* (Paris: Barba, 1825); Pierre Victor, *Harald, ou les Scandinaves*, 2 ed. (Paris: Barba, 1826).

<sup>68</sup> For a study of this play, see Sylviane Robardey-Eppstein, "Le Nord, motif du renouveau théâtral au temps du romantisme : *Harald, ou les Scandinaves* et sa préface (1824–1825)," *Revue nordique des études francophones* 3, no. 1 (2020): 112-132.



a “middle point between the moderns and the ancients.”<sup>69</sup> Though he knew little of actual Norse culture, he nonetheless assigned them social and political sophistication. Following Mallet, Lerebours portrayed the Norse not as villains but heroes, independent and high-minded. He would later repackage these arguments in an scholarly tract, *Coup de l’œil sur les antiquités skandinaves* (1841).<sup>70</sup>

The Vikings were not obvious avatars of Europe or the Enlightenment. For centuries, they were branded as cruel, irrational, and barbaric. However, thanks in large part first to Montesquieu spotlighting northern cultures and then to Mallet spotlighting the Norse specifically, the Viking not only became available for modern scholarly investigation, but also came to embody bravery, wisdom, and egalitarianism. Together, Montesquieu and Mallet established an enduring script that would shape the expanding field of publications on Vikings, in French and beyond.

### **The Academic Phase: Intensified Scholarly Interest (ca. 1835-1914)**

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of the modern academic profession, with its university disciplines, positivist aspirations, empirical methodologies, and internal dissemination. As William Keylor and Maurice Olender have shown, two of the fields most prominent within the nascent French academy, history and philology, struggled to reconcile their scientific ambitions with ingrained political biases.<sup>71</sup> As I will demonstrate in this section, Old Norse studies contributed to the solidification of history and philology as fields with defined

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<sup>69</sup> “Ils tiennent le milieu entre les modernes et les anciens.” Victor, *Harald, ou les Scandinaves*, 27.

<sup>70</sup> Pierre-Simon Lerebours, *Coup de l’œil sur les antiquités skandinaves, ou Aperçu général des diverses sortes de monuments archéologiques de la Suède, du Danemark et de la Norvège* (Paris: Challamel, 1841).

<sup>71</sup> William R. Keylor, *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

norms, which fundamentally shaped Old Norse studies in return. The specialty congealed, with dedicated spaces in faculties, conferences, and publications. It also assumed a new veneer of objectivity and exclusive expertise in tension with its ongoing attachment to national, racial, and gendered hierarchies.

In 1835, Xavier Marmier (1808-1893) joined the crew of the French corvette *La Recherche*, unknowingly kicking Old Norse studies in France into high gear. Charged with exploring the North Atlantic, the ship stopped in Iceland and Lapland. These visits ignited a lifelong fascination with Scandinavian society that would later take Marmier to Norway, Finland, Denmark, and even the Faroe Islands. A natural polyglot and autodidact, Marmier quickly picked up Scandinavian languages and began translating Scandinavian texts into English. He penned numerous studies of the North and its medieval culture.<sup>72</sup> Marmier brought the Norse and their writings to a broad audience through his many publications and his popular lectures on foreign literature at the Faculté des Lettres at Rennes (1838-1839). Jacques Dugast, Wendy Mercer, and Maria Walecka-Garbalinska have suggested that Marmier guided his readers to decenter France in their conception of Europe and to value foreign, unfamiliar cultures on their own terms.<sup>73</sup> Though he was a conservative-leaning defender of monarchy and colonialism, Marmier's advocacy of the merit of Old Norse literature was decidedly cosmopolitan.

Marmier also inaugurated an intensification in the translation of Old Norse texts into French. The doyen of Icelandic studies himself published several translations from the Eddas

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<sup>72</sup> A brief selection: Xavier Marmier, *Lettres sur l'Islande* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1837); Xavier Marmier, *Histoire de la littérature en Danemark et en Suède* (Paris: Bonnaire, 1839); Xavier Marmier, *Histoire et littérature islandaises* (Paris: Bonnaire, 1839); Xavier Marmier, *Lettres sur le Nord (Danemark, Suède, Norvège, Laponie et Spitzberg)* (Paris: Delloye, 1840); Xavier Marmier, *Chants populaires du Nord* (Paris: Charpentier, 1842); Xavier Marmier, *Histoire de la Scandinavie* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1854).

<sup>73</sup> Jacques Dugast, "Xavier Marmier (1808-1893)," *Revue de littérature comparée* 74, no. 3 (2000): 307-316; Wendy S. Mercer, *The Life and Travels of Xavier Marmier (1808-1892): Bringing World Literature to France* (British Academy, 2007); Maria Walecka-Garbalinska, "Du décentrement au désenchantement : Xavier Marmier et les origines du comparatisme français," *Orbis Litterarum* 68, no. 1 (2013): 1-16.

between 1837 and 1843. In 1838, Frédéric Guillaume Bergmann (1812-1877), a philologist from Strasbourg, published *Poèmes islandais*, a deep analysis and translation of the *Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, and *Lokasenna* from the Poetic Edda; he published further extracts from that text in 1858 and 1871. Rosalie Du Puget (ca. 1795-1866) made her name writing children's books and translating Scandinavian texts into French, including both the Elder and Younger Eddas in 1838, 1844, and 1846. The prolific medievalist Edélestand du Méril (1801-1871) issued *Histoire de la poésie scandinave* in 1839. The Franco-German historian Maximilien de Ring (1799-1873) produced his own translation of the poem *Rígsþula* from the Elder Edda in 1854. Pierre-Eugène Beauvois (1835-1912) translated several long fragments of the sagas, including parts of *Völsunga Saga*, the *Greenlanders' Saga*, *Erik the Red's Saga*, the *Saga of the Sworn Brothers*, *Vilkina Saga*, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, and *Flóamanna Saga*.<sup>74</sup> Jules Gourdault (1838-?) translated *Njal's Saga* in 1885 as *Gunnar et Nial. Scènes et mœurs de la vieille Islande*, with some added chapters of his own invention; Rodolphe Dareste (1824-1911) translated the same saga again in 1896.<sup>75</sup> Between 1888 and 1893, the Belgian explorer Jules Leclercq translated the *Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue*, *Frithiof's Saga*, the *Saga of Thord Menace*, *Bandamanna Saga*, the *Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi*, and the *Saga of Thorstein, Viking's Son*, all for the *Revue britannique*.<sup>76</sup> The Francophone Luxembourgish Félix Wagner (1868-1959) translated the *Sagas of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue*, *Frithiof*, and *Egil Skallagrimsson*, as well as *Ari the Learned's twelfth-century*

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<sup>74</sup> Eugène Beauvois, *Découvertes des Scandinaves en Amérique, du dixième au treizième siècle : fragments de sagas islandaises, traduits pour la première fois en français* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1859); Eugène Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes aux IIIe et IVe siècles* (Paris: Agence générale de librairie, 1867); Eugène Beauvois, *La vendette dans le nouveau monde au XIe siècle d'après les textes scandinaves* (Louvain: Ch. Peeters, 1882); Eugène Beauvois, "The Voyage of Thorgils and his Adventures on the East Coast of Greenland about the Year 1000," *The National Magazine* 16 (April 1892 – November 1892): 38-58.

<sup>75</sup> Jules Gourdault, *Gunnar et Nial. Scènes et mœurs de la vieille Islande* (Tours: Alfred Marne et fils, 1885); Rodolphe Dareste, *La saga de Njal* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1896).

<sup>76</sup> Jules Leclercq, "La saga de Hrafnkel, prêtre de Thor," *Revue britannique* 64 (1888): 301-321; Jules Leclercq, "La saga des alliés (Bandamanna saga)," *Revue britannique* 64, no. 2 (1888): 325-348; Jules Leclercq, "Histoire de Thord le terrible," *Revue britannique* 64, no. 6 (1888): 381-413; Jules Leclercq, "La saga de Thorstein, fils de Viking," *Revue britannique*, no. 4 (1893): 29-56; Jules Leclercq, "La saga de Fridthjof le Hardi," *Revue britannique* 69 (1893): 49-62; Jules Leclercq, "La saga de Gunnlaug Ormstunga," *Revue britannique*, no. 5 (1893): 243-254.

*Íslendingabók*.<sup>77</sup> Many authors – including Rosalie Du Puget, H. Desprez, Louis-Antoine Léouzon Le Duc, Louis Boutillier, L. G. Ténint, and Henri Gautier – issued their own translations of the Swedish poet Esaias Tegnér’s (1782-1846) epic verse paraphrase of Frithiof’s Saga.<sup>78</sup> Together, these men – and lone woman – laid the groundwork for French people to read Old Norse sources.<sup>79</sup>

Higher education as it exists today, with its defined fields enshrined in departments, congealed institutionally in France in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Following Marmier’s brief tenure at Rennes, scholars of Old Norse began to secure a place in the French academy. A key early scholar of Old Norse poetry, Jean-Jacques Ampère taught at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France.<sup>81</sup> Frédéric Gustave Eichhoff (1799-1875) served as professor of foreign literature at the Faculté des Lettres at Lyon as well as librarian to Louis Philippe I’s queen Marie-Amélie and Inspector General of public instruction of the Academy of Paris.<sup>82</sup> Paul Gaffarel (1843-1920), an expert on the Vínland voyages, held the post of professor of History first at Dijon then Aix-Marseille.<sup>83</sup> August Geffroy (1820-1895) taught at the lycées of Dijon, Clermont-Ferrand, and Louis-le-Grand as well as the universities of Bordeaux and Paris.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Félix Wagner, *Le livre des Islandais du prêtre Ari le savant* (Brussels: Office de publicité, 1898); Félix Wagner, *La saga de Gunnlaug-langue-de-serpent* (Paris: A. Siffer, 1899); Félix Wagner, *La saga de Frithjof-le-Fort* (Louvain: C. Peeters, 1904); Félix Wagner, *La saga du scalde Egil Skallagrímsson* (Brussels: J. Lebesgue, 1925).

<sup>78</sup> Ballu, *Lettres nordiques en traduction française*, 205.

<sup>79</sup> See also André Crépin, “Old English Studies in France,” *Old English Newsletter* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 28-30; Gilduin Davy, “Le fantasme islandais ou les racines scandinaves du droit français au XIXe siècle,” *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 98, no. 4 (October-December 2020): 521-545.

<sup>80</sup> See Terry Nichols Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); George Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France, 1863-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Walter Rüegg, ed., *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004).

<sup>81</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), s.v. “Ampère, Jean-Jacques.”

<sup>82</sup> Martine François, Amélie Le Pendevan, and Blandine Husser, “Frédéric Gustave Eichhoff,” *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques. École nationale des chartes* (December 6, 2010), <https://cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=103519>

<sup>83</sup> Martine François, “Paul-Louis-Jacques Gaffarel,” *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques. École nationale des chartes* (March 18, 2021), <https://cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=108640>

<sup>84</sup> Martine François and Alexandre Wauthier, “Mathieu Auguste Geffroy,” *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques. École nationale des chartes* (February 2, 2007), <http://www.cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=800>

Frédéric-Guillaume Bergmann transformed the University of Strasbourg into a nexus for Old Norse studies, though of course it was absorbed by the German Empire after the 1871 Treaty of Versailles.<sup>85</sup> While building a new Francophone historical literature around the Vikings, these men also helped build the modern university system.

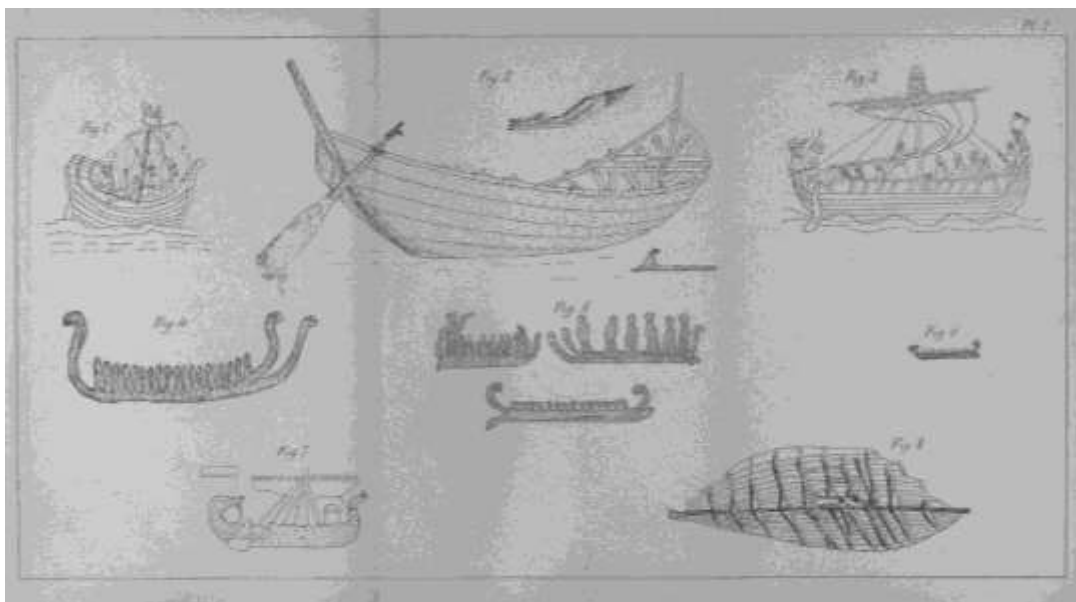


Fig. 1.3. Plate 1 from Alfred Ravet, *La marine des Vikings* (Rouen: J. Lecerf, 1886).

Ravet drew directly on the most up-to-date discoveries coming out of Scandinavian archeological digs to inform his own research on Viking maritime practice. His work reflects the transnational exchange vital to Norse studies in this period.

Many of the scholars involved in this academically-orientated stage of the French revival of Old Norse personally spent time in Scandinavia. Frequently, their time in the European North inspired their interest in the culture of the Vikings. Xavier Marmier's formative journeys around the North Atlantic are well known. Rosalie Du Puget was raised in Sweden by French parents.<sup>86</sup> Though born in Aisne, Charles Delglobe (1844-1916) passed most of his adult life in Norway.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Mohnike, *Géographies du Germain*.

<sup>86</sup> Martine François, "Rosalie du Puget," *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques. École nationale des chartes* (November 13, 2008), <https://cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=100686>

<sup>87</sup> Anden Udgave, *Salmonsens konversationsleksikon*, vol. 5 (Copenhagen: S J. H. Schultz Forlagsboghandel, 1916), s.v. "Delglobe, Charles Antoine."

Louis Léouzon le Duc (1815-1889) spent time in Finland as the tutor to a family of Swedish aristocrats.<sup>88</sup> Alfred Ravet (1855-?) studied at the Handels Gymnasium in Christiania (Oslo).<sup>89</sup> Jean-Jacques Ampère and Auguste Geffroy both toured Scandinavia at various points.<sup>90</sup>

The mid-nineteenth century further witnessed an explosion of foreign writings on the Norse – especially by modern Scandinavians – now available in French. Prior to the Revolution, one of the very few studies of Old Norse literature translated into French was Gabriel-Axel Lindblom’s 1781 translation of *Lettres sur l’Islande* by Uno von Troil, bishop of Linköping and eventual archbishop of Uppsala.<sup>91</sup> After Marmier’s voyages, however, things changed. Erik Gustaf Geijer’s history of Sweden, including the legendary and Viking periods, appeared in Jean Frédéric de Lundblad’s French translation in 1839, 1840, 1844, and 1845.<sup>92</sup> In 1844, Paul Guillot translated Henry Wheaton’s study of ancient and medieval Scandinavian history as *Histoire des peuples du Nord depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à la conquête de l’Angleterre par Guillaume de Normandie*.<sup>93</sup> M. Chopin translated Esaias Tégner’s poem about the Norse transition to Christianity as *La première communion* in 1839.<sup>94</sup> Though principally a student of Finnish rather than Norse literature, Louis Léouzon Le Duc (1815-1889) translated Karl August Nicander’s play on the same topic as *Le glaive runique, ou La lutte du paganisme scandinave contre le christianisme* from Swedish in 1846.<sup>95</sup> Both Chopin and Léouzon Le Duc provided scholarly commentaries framing the historical context of these more literary works. Between

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<sup>88</sup> “Léouzon le Duc, grand voyageur et littérateur,” *Le Bien Public* (August 22, 2016).

<sup>89</sup> Alfred Ravet, *Les vikings dans l’Amérique du nord* (Rouen: Imprimerie Léon Gy, 1911), 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), s.v. “Ampère, Jean-Jacques,” “Geffroy, Matthieu Auguste.”

<sup>91</sup> Uno von Troil, *Lettres sur l’Islande*, trans. Gabriel-Axel Lindblom (Paris: Imprimerie de Monsieur, 1781).

<sup>92</sup> Ballu, *Lettres nordiques en traduction française*, 166.

<sup>93</sup> Henry Wheaton, *Histoire des peuples du Nord depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à la conquête de l’Angleterre par Guillaume de Normandie*, trans. Paul Guillot (Paris: 1844).

<sup>94</sup> Esaias Tégner, *La première communion*, trans. J. M. Chopin (Paris: Schneider & Langrand, 1839).

<sup>95</sup> Karl August Nicander, *Le glaive runique, ou La lutte du paganisme scandinave contre le christianisme*, trans. Louis Léouzon Le Duc (Paris: Sagnier et Bray, 1846).

1870 and 1899, Eugène Beauvois translated 39 articles by leading Scandinavian scholars such as Jens Jacob Asmussen Worsaae and Conrad Engelhardt for the *Mémoires de la Société royale des Antiquaires du Nord*.<sup>96</sup> He also published a translation of Carl Ferdinand Allen's *Histoire du Danemark depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours* (1878).<sup>97</sup> In 1886, Jules Leclerq, better known for his translations of the sagas, brought to French *Mythologie scandinave : Légendes des Eddas* by University of Wisconsin professor Rasmus B. Anderson.<sup>98</sup> By opening up modern Scandinavian analyses to a lay French audience that generally could not read these texts in their original language, translators expanded French knowledge of the Norse medieval.

Norse scholars in France also stood at the intersection of two important institutions in nineteenth-century scholarship: private collections and public libraries.<sup>99</sup> Alexandre Dezos de la Roquette (1784-1868) capitalized on his position as French consul to Denmark and Norway to accumulate an extensive selection of 1,500 printed and manuscript texts on Scandinavia, with particular attention to the medieval period.<sup>100</sup> In 1868, he bequeathed his collection to the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, forming the nucleus of what is today the library's Bibliothèque nordique, the largest assemblage of Nordic studies sources in Europe outside of Scandinavia.<sup>101</sup> Though Xavier Marmier was at one time an administrator of the Sainte-

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<sup>96</sup> Hervé Mouillebouche, "Les archives d'un précurseur des études nordiques : Eugène Beauvois," in *Châteaux et palais de la Bourgogne médiévale : recueil d'articles* (Chagny: CECAB, 2019), 486-487.

<sup>97</sup> Carl Ferdinand Allen, *Histoire du Danemark depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*, trans. Eugène Beauvois, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: A. F. Høst et fils, 1878).

<sup>98</sup> Rasmus B. Anderson, *Mythologie scandinave : Légendes des Eddas*, trans. Jules Leclerq (Paris: E. Leroux 1886).

<sup>99</sup> John F. Camp, "Libraries and the Organization of Universities in France, 1789-1881," *The Library Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (April 1981): 170-191; Valerie Mendelson, "(Re)Collecting Stories: The Private Libraries of Fin-de-Siècle Paris," *The International Journal of the Book* 4 (2007): 39-48; Tom Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-Revolutionary Paris c.1790-1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Christian Sorce, "Considerations on the History of Public Libraries in France and USA," *Italian Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* 8, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>100</sup> Collection Dezos de La Roquette, Ms. 3586-3641, BSG.

<sup>101</sup> Jean Mongin, "Rapport sur les collections Scandinaves de la bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève," *Bulletin administratif de l'instruction publique* 16, no. 315 (1873): 663-676; Eugène Capt, *Catalogue du Fonds scandinave de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève* (Chalon-sur-Saône: Emile Bertrand, 1908); Yves Peyré, *La bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève à travers les siècles* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

Geneviève, he left his personal library of almost 6,000 volumes to his hometown of Pontarlier (Doubs), including 429 volumes on Scandinavia.<sup>102</sup> The Academician Jean-Jacques Ampère accumulated a personal library of 700 printed texts, mostly on Scandinavian and Germanic history and literature.<sup>103</sup> He left this trove to the Bibliothèque Mazarine. Archeologist Louis Le Pontois (1838-1919) also collected extensively in medieval Scandinavian studies, as did Parisian folklorist Henri Gaidoz (1842-1932), first director of Celtic Studies at the Sorbonne.<sup>104</sup> These elite French collectors compiled vast personal troves of primary and secondary sources on the Norse which eventually made their way into public libraries.

For nineteenth-century French scholars, the Viking incarnated the ideals of 1789 without the awkward associations of social upheaval or political violence. As Régis Boyer has shown, French researchers at this time framed the Norse as living according to the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.<sup>105</sup> The Viking was a medieval hero but not a feudal lord.<sup>106</sup> As a symbol, he was generally accessible, even cautiously democratic; more men could believe they would have been born Vikings than would have been born aristocrats. Moreover, unlike the medieval Europeans supposedly enmeshed in complicated, constricting bonds of vassalage relationships, the Viking was imagined as independent, autarchic. For nineteenth-century writers, the Viking's was not a society of serfs and seigneurs, but one of freeholding landowners whose loyalty to their chieftains lasted only as long as they consented to give it. This ferocious personal freedom made the Norse the ideal idols of the post-revolutionary French.

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<sup>102</sup> José Lambert, "Figures et documents oubliés : Xavier Marmier et sa bibliothèque," *Revue de littérature comparée* 49, no. 3 (July 1, 1975) : 478-480.

<sup>103</sup> "Special Collections. Jean-Jacques Ampère," *Bibliothèque Mazarine*, <https://www.bibliotheque-mazarine.fr/en/collections/special-collections/jean-jacques-ampere-2>, accessed June 2, 2023.

<sup>104</sup> Collection Le Pontois, Ms. 3703-3738, BSG; Kate Lauber, "Henri Gaidoz Collection, 1580-1968," *Archives Online at Indiana University* <https://archives.iu.edu/html/VAB7342.html>, accessed May 25, 2023.

<sup>105</sup> Boyer, *Le Mythe viking*, 41-160.

<sup>106</sup> I use the term "feudal" advisedly, with the acknowledgement that historians today agree that feudalism does not describe an actual social system that obtained in the Middle Ages. Rather, I use "feudal" to express nineteenth-century beliefs about the economic and interpersonal structures of medieval Europe.



How did nineteenth-century French people understand the appropriate meaning, uses, and interpretation of Old Norse literature? The historical specificity of their approaches to these texts is thrown into sharp relief by comparison with subsequent developments. Scholars today chiefly debate two closely related questions: how the sagas came to be and why. Or, put otherwise, who composed the sagas and to what end? Since the close of the Second World War, researchers have particularly focused on unraveling the process which led to the sagas being written down. Did the sagas emerge incrementally, through a gradual accretion that lasted centuries, or were they dreamt up by isolated geniuses? The answer to that hotly contested question promises to help resolve the equally contentious problem of the sagas' political instrumentality. Whoever wrote the sagas, what did they mean to accomplish by them? What ideological and imaginative uses did these texts serve? These intersecting dilemmas of authorial identity and intent represent the beating heart of today's saga scholarship.<sup>107</sup> By contrast, nineteenth-century commentators did not conceive that Old Norse texts could be intentionally manipulative polemical tools. They judged these texts according to two axes of merit: literary and historical. On the one hand, nineteenth-century researchers located Old Norse sources somewhere along the spectrum from primitive to sophisticated; on the other hand, from irreparably corrupted to transparently truthful. These two scales did not always intersect at the point a reader today might expect. Various nineteenth-century scholars saw Old Norse literature as primitive and truthful, sophisticated and truthful, sophisticated and corrupted, or primitive and corrupted.

The divided reception of Old Norse literature highlights the contradictory impact of empiricism as historical method in the nineteenth century. While it encouraged some researchers

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<sup>107</sup> For excellent overviews of modern approaches to reading the sagas, see Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964); Heather O'Donoghue, *The Genesis of a Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Jesse Byock, "The Sagas and the Twenty-First Century," in *In Honor of Franz Bäumli*, eds. Ursula Schaefer and Edda Spielman (Dresden: 2001); Axel Kristinsson, "Lords and Literature: The Icelandic Sagas as Political and Social Instruments," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 28 (2003): 1-17.

to be leery of their sources' claims, it encouraged others to accept them without question. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the French scholars that I examine in this dissertation by and large approached Old Norse literature as unproblematic historical truth. They mounted an absolute defense of the evidentiary value of these texts. Apart from the occasional supernatural flourish, they understood the content of the sagas and Eddas as a perfectly transparent window into the medieval past. Though they sometimes struggled with the problem of how to rationalize the fantastical elements endemic to these sources, French scholars of Old Norse generally defaulted to proposing less mysterious explanations for seemingly wondrous events and characters: Greenland trolls became Inuit hunters, powerful gods became ancient chieftains, the mythical Nine Realms of the cosmos became the geography of medieval Scandinavia. This positivist attitude, resolutely hostile to any possibility of genuine efficacious magic, got these French scholars over a number of interpretive humps. They argued that the intrusion of the supernatural did not make these tales any less credible. They assumed the otherworldly and uncanny factors had been added to make the stories more engaging or morally edifying for their medieval audiences. Indeed, they even viewed the presence of the supernatural in these narratives as an imprimatur of their historical authenticity. Such components, alien to modern disenchanted sensibilities, proved these stories truly came from the distant era they claimed. This narrowly confined skepticism speaks to the eclectic *mélange* of rationalism and credulity that often characterized nineteenth-century medievalists' work. On the one hand, they dismissed the sagas' supernatural excesses, as unipeds and the walking dead, as merely artifacts of a less enlightened age. On the other hand, they readily accepted that Odin, Frey, and Heimdall were once real live people. Living in a disillusioned time, they sought to re-enchant the world through recourse to a mythic past.

Nineteenth-century medievalists did not only rely on texts to support their claims; this period also witnessed the rise of modern archaeological practice.<sup>108</sup> Like Britain and Scandinavia, France also enjoyed local discoveries of Viking artifacts, though these were few and far between. In 1852, three pits exhumed in Calvados revealed 315 skeletons equipped with wooden shields; the Norman archeologist Léon Coutil (1856-1943) suspected they could be Vikings.<sup>109</sup> During the nineteenth century, building works along the Seine River between Lillebonne and Mantes dredged up a number of iron swords and axes left behind by Norse invaders.<sup>110</sup> Some of these rare Viking remnants ended up in the Musée d'antiquités de Rouen. Visitors could encounter an exhibit of “Scandinavian weapons and polished stone tools” in the museum’s Salle de la Mosaïque, as well as a Norse helmet, a bronze bracelet, and a pair of women’s turtle brooches in a display cabinet dedicated to “medieval Scandinavian and Norman antiquities” in the Galerie Cochet.<sup>111</sup> Though they generally had to write them into existence, the French did have a few of their own Vikings to dig up.

Only one authenticated Norse ship has ever been unearthed in France. In June 1906, archeologists Paul Du Chatellier (1833-1911) and Louis Le Pontois excavated a small hill called le Cruguel, standing on the coast of the Île de Groix off the shore of Brittany.<sup>112</sup> They expected to find primitive Neolithic vaults, which were their usual fare and area of particular expertise, but instead they were shocked to uncover the burned remnants of a Viking ship burial. Part of the

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<sup>108</sup> Andrew L. Christenson, ed., *Tracing Archaeology's Past: The Historiography of Archaeology* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); Bruce Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); William H. Stiebing Jr., *Uncovering the Past: A History of Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>109</sup> Léon Coutil, *Armes et parures scandinaves trouvées à Rouen, Oissel (Seine-Inférieure) et Pitres (Eure)* (Rouen: Imprimerie Léon Gy, 1913), 3.

<sup>110</sup> Léon de Vesly, “Armes découvertes dans les dragages de la Seine,” *Bulletin archéologiques du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* (1915): 161-166; Patrick Périn, “Les objets vikings du musée des antiquités de la Seine-Maritime, à Rouen,” *Cahier des Annales de Normandie*, no. 23 (1990): 161-188.

<sup>111</sup> Jean-Benoît-Désiré Cochet, *Catalogue du musée d'antiquités de Rouen* (Rouen: E. Benderitter, 1875), 59-61, 143.

<sup>112</sup> Paul Du Chatellier and Louis Le Pontois, *La sépulture scandinave à barque de l'île de Groix* (Quimper: Imprimerie Cotonnec, 1908).

site had been washed away by the ocean over the intervening centuries, but they eventually recovered the charred remains of human, dog, and bird bones; luxury grave goods, including pots, weapons, jewelry, and game pieces; and of course the ship itself. Based on comparisons to other Viking Age dig sites abroad, the archeologists concluded that their ship had arrived in Brittany sometime in the tenth century from western Norway before becoming the last resting place of an elite warrior.<sup>113</sup> Du Chatellier later transferred these artifacts to the musée de Kernuz, which he ran out of his family chateau, though today they reside at the musée d'Archéologie nationale in Saint-Germain-en-Laye.<sup>114</sup>

The Île de Groix discovery inspired considerable interest. The dig itself was interrupted by the exuberant enthusiasm of the local fishing population. By the second day, “the excavation was surrounded by at least eighty men, women and children, an assuredly kindly public, but cumbersome, restless, talkative, questioning, and possessed of a sometimes worrying curiosity.”<sup>115</sup> These zealous bystanders kept hassling the archeologists and trying to hold the artifacts, until after three days additional digging had to be postponed until August, when the fishing boats would be out at sea. Du Chatellier and Le Pontois eventually published their findings first in the *Bulletin de la Société archéologique du Finistère*, then as a stand-alone pamphlet.<sup>116</sup> Miss C. M. E. Pochin later translated their summary into English for the British journal *Saga-Book*, and the news was also published in Scandinavian papers such as the

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<sup>113</sup> Liliane Tarrou, “La sépulture à bateau viking de l’île de Groix (Morbihan),” *Les Dossiers d’archéologie* no. 277 (2002): 72-79; Loïc Langouët, “La sépulture viking à barque de l’île de Groix,” *Bulletin de l’A.M.A.R.A.I.*, no. 19 (2006): 87-108.

<sup>114</sup> J. M. Abgrall, “M. Paul Du Chatellier,” *Bulletin de la société archéologique du Finistère* 38 (Quimper: Imprimerie Cotonnec, 1911): 167-187; Yves Coativy, ed., *Paul Du Chatellier : collectionneur finistérien (1833-1911)*. *Archives de Kernuz Sous-série 100 J 1249 à 1252* (Brest: Université de Bretagne Occidentale, 2006).

<sup>115</sup> “L’excavation avait été entourée d’au moins quatre-vingts hommes, femmes et enfants, public assurément bienveillant, mais encombrant, remuant, loquace, questionneur et d’une curiosité parfois inquiétant.” Du Chatellier and Le Pontois, *La sépulture scandinave à barque de l’île de Groix*, 4.

<sup>116</sup> Paul Du Chatellier and Louis Le Pontois, “La sépulture scandinave à barque de l’île de Groix,” *Bulletin de la société archéologique du Finistère* 35 (Quimper: Imprimerie Cotonnec, 1908): 137-232.

Norwegian *Verdens gang*.<sup>117</sup> Du Chatellier and Le Pontois' discovery further attracted the attention of fellow experts. The celebrated Scandinavian archeologists Oscar Montelius (1843-1921), Knut Stjerna (1874-1909), Haakon Shetelig (1877-1955), and Gabriel Gustafson (1853-1915) all examined the Kernuz relics and volunteered their insights.



Fig. 1.4. Photograph of crowd at the excavation site, from Paul Du Chatellier and Louis Le Pontois, “La sépulture scandinave à barque de l’île de Groix,” *Bulletin de la société archéologique du Finistère* 35 (Quimper: Imprimerie Cotonnec, 1908): 137-232.

This snapshot captures the many people attracted by the excavation at the Île de Groix. Though it is unclear who exactly this people might be – Dig workers? Local onlookers? – the image conveys the scope of people directly impacted by enthusiasm for the find.

Gustafson offered the strongest endorsement of the site’s historical significance. Along with Shetelig, Gustafson led the 1904-1905 Norwegian excavation of the Oseberg ship, one of the most complete Viking sites ever unearthed. At the behest of the Norwegian government, Gustafson travelled from Christiania to Brittany to visit Du Chatellier and Le Pontois at Kernuz. Having scrutinized the artifacts recovered from the Île de Groix, Gustafson concluded that the burial was not that of an itinerant raider, but of a high-status Norse colonist durably settled in

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<sup>117</sup> Paul Du Chatellier and Louis Le Pontois, “A Ship Burial in Brittany,” *Saga-Book* 6, trans. C. M. E. Pochin (1908-1909): 123-162; Gabriel Gustafson, “Sur les traces des Vikings,” *Bulletin de la société archéologique du Finistère* 35 (Quimper: Imprimerie Cotonnec, 1908), 271.

Brittany.<sup>118</sup> The excavation thus afforded proof of a permanent Norse community established in France outside Normandy.

Following Paul-Henri Mallet, the Vikings were vindicated as people; following Xavier Marmier, they were vindicated as key historical subjects. The publications surveyed in this section were predominantly inward facing – scholars wrote for other scholars, producing translations and original studies. These publications also all arose from direct, unmediated interactions with remnants of the Norse Middle Ages, be they sagas or ship burials. The modern authors in question closely interrogated medieval textual and physical artifacts in the hope of better understanding the past and communicating that understanding to readers. Though their methods may not adhere to present-day standards of academic rigor, they demonstrate a clear concern with empirical inquiry, challenging received notions, and pushing the boundaries of established knowledge. In this way, the Old Norse scholars examined here helped lay the groundwork for medievalist research today.

### **The Fantastical Phase: Fictive Experimentation (ca. 1876-1914)**

The scholarly work examined in the previous sections of this chapter had a wider, albeit indirect, impact on French life than might be assumed at first glance. Though the immediate audience for such texts was somewhat circumscribed, they inspired popular media that reached a very broad public. “Found” medievalisms touched off “made” medievalisms, including novels, poems, plays, ballets, operas, and paintings, that delighted French customers with fantastical

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<sup>118</sup> Gustafson, “Sur les traces des Vikings,” 277.

visions of the Norse Middle Ages.<sup>119</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, I tackle the entertaining fictions that emerged from the discoveries of Old Norse studies.



Fig 1.5. Arthur Rackham, Drawing of the Norns with the body of Fafnir before Yggdrasil, from Richard Wagner, *Siegfried & Le Crépuscule des dieux*, trans. Alfred Ernst (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1911?).

Perhaps the most famous Victorian images of Norse women come from Arthur Rackham's illustrations accompanying Margaret Armour's 1910-1911 English translation of Richard Wagner's operatic Ring Cycle. These images later spread abroad with other translations. Rackham's iterations of Wagner's supernatural women – Rhinemaidens, goddesses, Norns, and Valkyries – are seductively powerful. Here, the three Norns – analogues to the Greek Fates – dismember the body of the slain dragon Fafnir and spin his matter into the thread of destiny.

The primary catalyst for these fictions was Richard Wagner's four-part operatic Ring Cycle, based on the stories of the Eddas, the *Vilkina Saga*, and the *Völsunga Saga*, as well as the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*. To be sure, French people were producing imaginative art

<sup>119</sup> On the distinction between “found” and “made” medievalisms, see my introduction. The terms come from Louise D’Arcens, “Medievalism: Scope and Complexity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D’Arcens (Cambridge University Press, 2016): 1-13.

and literature about the Norse long before the Ring Cycle ever premiered (see Chapters 4 and 5 for examples). However, Wagner's operas touched off a new surge of French Scandimania and established the model of what the Norse would look like in French media. In this section, I begin by charting French reception of Wagner's oeuvre, then move on to direct French innovations on the Ring Cycle, and end by examining more divergent works that capitalized on general enthusiasm for all things Norse. My aim here is not to document Wagner's influence on French society writ large; other scholars have already done so admirably.<sup>120</sup> I intend only to show the role of the Ring Cycle in spreading fascination with Norse medievalism across a wider range of French media.



Fig. 1.6. François-Alexandre-Alfred Gérardin (illustrator), Tony Beltrand (engraver), and Eugène Dété (engraver), *Le théâtre illustré, Siegfried, drame lyrique de Richard Wagner, représenté à La Monnaie de Bruxelles, 1891*. Engraving, 37 x 53 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Contemporary fascination with the Ring Cycle produced many sketches of its sets and staging for French newspapers.

<sup>120</sup> Martine Kahane and Nicole Wild, *Wagner et la France* (Paris: Herscher, 1983); Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).



Though the Ring Cycle first debuted in its entirety at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus in August 1876, it was relatively late in arriving in France.<sup>121</sup> The Palais Garnier initially staged a two-piano concert version of *Das Rheingold* on May 6, 1893, starring René Fournets at Wotan, Jeanne Marcy as Freia, and Albert Vauget as Loge. The cast sang a French version of the libretto translated from German by Alfred Ernest, rendering the Eddaic plot more accessible to Parisians.<sup>122</sup> The full operatic premiere did not take place until March 19, 1902 in Nice. It was later performed in Lyon on April 1, 1903, and on November 17, 1909, the Garnier finally mounted a full-cast production, still with Ernest's French libretto. The Garnier took up the Ring Cycle's second installment much more readily, staging the French premiere of *Die Walküre* on May 12, 1893, with a translated libretto by Victor Wilder.<sup>123</sup> Francisque Delmas sang the role of Wotan, and Lucienne Bréval the role of Brünnhilde. The Tetraology's second half was not sung in France until Rouen's Théâtre des Arts staged *Siegfried* on February 17, 1900 and Paris' Théâtre du Château d'Eau staged *Götterdämmerung* on May 17, 1902. For those who could not attend the theater to listen to the Ring Cycle directly, newspaper coverage described the spectacle in enthralling detail. In 1900 famed music critic Alfred Bruneau claimed that "the first performance of *The Valkyrie* at the Opéra in 1893 decided the triumph of the lyric drama in France and foreshadowed large parts of the future [of music] on our soil."<sup>124</sup> Moreover, although the Ring Cycle did not appear on the French stage until 1893, it made itself felt in France decades earlier, as descriptions of its triumphant Norse enthusiasm reverberated in France from foreign sources.

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<sup>121</sup> For details on the staging of Wagner's work in France, see Kahane and Wild, *Wagner et la France*.

<sup>122</sup> Richard Wagner, *L'Or du Rhin*, trans. Alfred Ernst (Paris: Schott, 1897).

<sup>123</sup> Richard Wagner, *La Walkyrie*, trans. Victor Wilder (Paris: Schott, 1895).

<sup>124</sup> "En 1893, la première représentation de la *Valkyrie* à l'Opéra déterminait le triomphe du drame lyrique chez nous et permettait de tracer sur notre sol les larges chemins de l'avenir." Alfred Bruneau, *Musiques d'hier et de demain* (Paris: Charpentier, 1900), i.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 1.7. Édouard Zier, *Théâtre illustré, Siegfried, trois actes de Richard Wagner, version française d'Alfred Ernst, représentés à l'Opéra, 1902*. Engraving, 37 x 53 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Here Zier juxtaposes the three crucial moments of Wagner's *Siegfried* (left to right): when Siegfried/Sigurd re-forges the blade Nothung; when he awakens Brynhild from her magical slumber; and when he confronts the terrifying dragon Fafnir. At the top left corner, Odin – in his guise as the Wanderer – oversees events, and at the top right, Siegfried/Sigurd listens to the sound of bird speech after he gains powers from consuming Fafnir's blood.

Richard Wagner divided French audiences.<sup>125</sup> Some music-lovers feared his many innovations threatened the grand French operatic tradition. Others praised him as a progressive genius pushing the frontiers of aesthetic possibility. Still others warned he was not an artistic menace, but a political one – the cultural vanguard of German aggression. In his 1902 *Bibliographie wagnérienne française*, Wagner devotee Henri Silège claimed that outside of

<sup>125</sup> Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle*.

Germany, the study of the Demiurge of Bayreuth was best developed in France.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, French Wagnerians devoted a whole periodical, the *Revue wagnerienne* (1885-1888), to the interpretation and advancement of his music.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, *revanchiste* crowds disrupted performances of Wagner's *Lohengrin* in Paris in 1887 and 1891.<sup>128</sup> Yet, despite (or perhaps because of) these controversies, Wagner was so dominant in nineteenth-century European high culture, it was difficult to escape his influence.

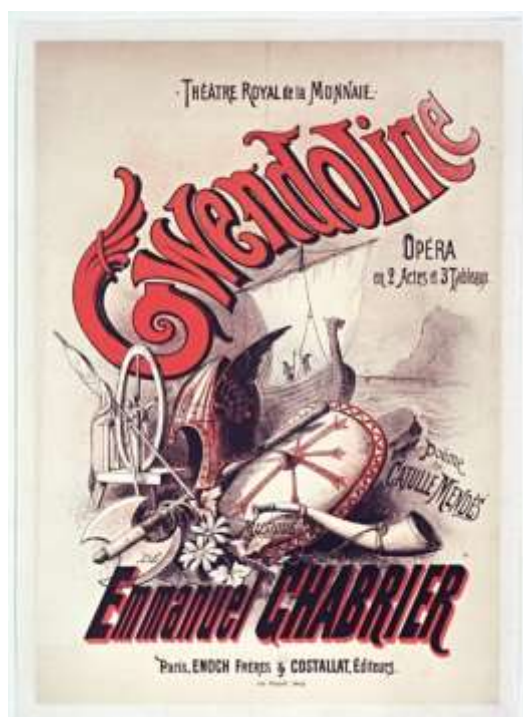


Fig. 1.8. Barbizet, *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie. Gwendoline : opéra en 2 actes et 3 tableaux, poème de Catulle Mendès, musique de Emmanuel Chabrier*, 1886. Engraving, 60 x 43 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

This poster for *Gwendoline* brings together many of the stereotypical attributes of nineteenth-century Vikings: drakkar; war horn; winged helmet; double-bladed axe.

<sup>126</sup> Henri Silège, *Bibliographie wagnérienne française* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1902).

<sup>127</sup> Rachel Sloan, "The Condition of Music: Wagnerism and Printmaking in France and Britain," *Art History* 32, no. 3 (June 2009): 545-577; Kelly J. Maynard, "Strange Bedfellows at the *Revue Wagnerienne*: Wagnerism at the Fin de Siècle," *French Historical Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2015): 633-659; Adeline Anastasia Heck, "Under the Spell of Wagner: The *Revue Wagnerienne* and Literary Experimentation in the Belle Époque (1878-1893)," Ph.D. diss (Princeton University, 2020).

<sup>128</sup> Kahane and Wild, *Wagner et la France*, 65-68. Cf. Katherine Ellis, "How to Make Wagner Normal: *Lohengrin*'s 'tour de France' of 1891-92," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 25, no. 2 (July 2013): 121-137.

The Ring Cycle inspired several Norse imitations on the French stage. These included the Italian ballet *Sieba* and Ernest Reyer's opera *Sigurd*, which I study at greater length in Chapter 5. Symbolist poet Francis Vielé-Griffin (1864-1937) also wrote the script for a play in verse entitled *Swanhilde* (1893), which imagined the sequel to the events of the Ring Cycle, though it does not seem this was ever actually performed.<sup>129</sup> For now I take as an illustrative example *Gwendoline*, an opera composed by Wagner devotee Emmanuel Chabrier with libretto by Catulle Mendès.<sup>130</sup> First staged in April 1886 at Brussel's Théâtre de la Monnaie before moving to Karlsruhe's Théâtre Grand-Ducal in May 1889, Munich's Théâtre Royal in November 1890, Lyon's Grand-Théâtre in April 1893, and finally Paris' Académie nationale de la musique in December 1893, *Gwendoline* recounts the tragedy that ensues when a Danish raiding party attacks a small Saxon village in England. The titular heroine, daughter of local headman Armel, halts the violence by agreeing to marry the Viking captain Harald. In a typically operatic twist, Harald and Gwendoline fall immediately in love. The night of their wedding, the Saxons seize the opportunity to burn the Vikings' ships and massacre them. Distraught and each unwilling to live without the other, Harald and Gwendoline die together in the hope of reuniting in Valhalla.

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<sup>129</sup> Francis Vielé-Griffin, *Swanhilde, poème dramatique* (Paris: 1893).

<sup>130</sup> Emmanuel Chabrier (composer) and Catulle Mendès (librettist), *Gwendoline* (Paris: E. Dentu, 18??).



Fig. 1.9. Paul Destez, *Théâtre national de l'Opéra. Gwendoline. Opéra en trois actes, poème de M. Catulle Mendès, musique de M. Emmanuelle Chabrier*, 1893. Engraving, 24 x 20 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Depicting the pivotal scene where a woman's sweetness bewitches a fearsome Viking, Paul Destez's illustration underscores the contrast between the Gwendoline's relatably modern domesticity and Harald's rugged, uncivilized barbarism.

French painting at the turn of the century drew frequently on the Ring Cycle for subject matter. In Chapter 5 I analyze the many visual representations of Valkyries. Symbolist artists also drew inspiration from Siegfried's encounters with the Rhinemaidens, as in Henri Fantin-Latour's 1876 *Les filles du Rhin, ou L'or du Rhin*, Gaston Bussièrè's 1906 *Les filles du Rhin* (Figure 1.10), and Jean-François Auburtin's 1912 *Chants sur l'eau*. The hero himself dominated in Bussièrè's *Sigurd* (last quarter of the nineteenth century) and Théobald Chartran's *Siegfried*



(ca. 1896). The Allfather, leader of the Gods, appeared in Henri Bellery-Desfontaines' *Wotan* (1897), Bussière's *L'Adieu à Wotan* (1895), and Fantin-Latour's many engravings of Odin summoning the earth goddess Erde.



Fig. 1.10. Gaston Bussière, *Les filles du Rhin*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.5 cm, musée des Ursulines, Mâcon.

Wagner's Rhinemaidens – Woglinde, Wellgunde and Flosshilde – cavort seductively before Sigurd. Their soft, sensual femininity emphasizes by contrast the hard, assertive masculinity associated with Norse warriors in the nineteenth century.

Wagner's Norse medievalism also shaped late nineteenth-century French literature. The motif of the Viking chief facing death with heroic aplomb particularly caught the imagination of poets, as seen in Charles Vasselin's "L'Héritage du viking (ou roi-pirate scandinave)" (1877) and Edmond Haraucourt's (1846-1941) "La mort du viking," which won the Académie française's

poetry prize in 1891.<sup>131</sup> In his narrative poem *La légende ailée de Wieland le forgeron* (1900), Francis Vielé-Griffin retold the myth of Volund the Smith, which was preserved in the Poetic Edda and Vilkina Saga and formed the basis for an unfinished opera by Wagner entitled *Wieland der Schmied*.<sup>132</sup> Other fiction – in prose and verse – narrating the Norse past is considered at greater length later in this dissertation, including Félix Cellarier’s *Paris délivré* (1870), Aristide Frémine’s *La Légende de Normandie* (1886), Paul Belloni Du Chaillu’s *Ivar the Viking* (1889), Léon Cahun’s *Le rois de mer* (1890), Edmond Neukomm’s *Les dompteurs de la mer* (1895), and Louis Fouché’s “Légende saxonne” (1899).



Fig. 1.11. *Le nom de Bjarn sortit des premiers*, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le Xe jusqu’au XVe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

This illustration captures a moment from the Old Norse sagas supposedly underscoring Norse egalitarianism and disdain for death. Trapped aboard their sinking ship, a Viking crew draws lots for the limited spaces in their life boat. Though the captain, Bjarni, wins a spot in the boat, he gives it up when another man accuses him of cowardice.

<sup>131</sup> Charles Vasselín, “L’Héritage du viking (ou roi-pirate scandinave),” *Revue des poètes et des auteurs dramatiques*, no. 24 (December 15, 1877): 338-341; “Edmond Haraucourt,” *Académie française* <https://www.academie-francaise.fr/node/16205> accessed July 2, 2023.

<sup>132</sup> Francis Vielé-Griffin, *La légende ailée de Wieland le forgeron* (Paris: Société de Mercure de France, 1900).

French writers also began translating Norse-inflected fiction from abroad. Among their 1874 collection of French versions of Hans Christian Andersen's tales for children, Ernest Gregoire and Louis Moland included the short story "The Marsh King," about a young girl named Helga who is adopted by Vikings.<sup>133</sup> Emile Montégut translated from English George Webbe Dasent's novel *The Vikings of the Baltic* and wrote a separate article on its saga origins.<sup>134</sup> Xavier Marmier and David Soldi produced an 1881 French edition of selected plays by celebrated Danish dramaturge Adam Oehlenschläger, including his dramatization of the life of *Hakon Jarl*.<sup>135</sup> In their 1904 compilation of early plays by Henrik Ibsen, the vicomte de Colleville and F. de Zepelin incorporated a French version of his 1850 drama about the life of Norwegian king Olaf Trygvasson, *Kjæmpehøjen*.<sup>136</sup> These translations introduced French audiences to a broader range of Norse-inspired literature.

By the late 1800s, French readers could also learn about the physical imprints of Norse culture elsewhere. Travel narratives related trips to Bavarian king Ludwig II's fairytale castles of Neuschwanstein and Hohenschwangau, praising the elaborate wall paintings of scenes from *Vilkina Saga* and *Völsunga Saga*.<sup>137</sup> Ludwig II was famously a close friend and frequent host of Wagner, sharing the composer's interest in Old Norse literature. Newspapers described Anne Whitney's statue of Leif the Lucky, erected in Boston in 1887 to celebrate the Norse landing in

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<sup>133</sup> Hans Christian Andersen, "La fille du roi de la valse," in *Le Camarade de voyage*, trans. Ernest Gregoire and Louis Moland (Paris: Garnier, 1874): 47-124.

<sup>134</sup> George Webbe Dasent, *Les Vikings de la Baltique : épisode de l'histoire du Nord au Xe siècle*, trans. Emile Montégut, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1877); Émile Montégut, "Derniers vikings et premiers rois du Nord," *Revue des deux mondes* 17, no. 2 (September 15, 1876): 342-386.

<sup>135</sup> Adam Oehlenschläger, "Hakon Jarl," in *Théâtre choisi de Oehlenschläger*, trans. Xavier Marmier and David Soldi (Paris: Didier et Cie., 1881): 3-104.

<sup>136</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Ölaf Liljekrans ; Le tumulus : drames historiques en vers et en prose*, trans. vicomte de Colleville and F. de Zepelin (Paris: Nilsson, 1904).

<sup>137</sup> Louis Rivière, *Entre l'Inn et le lac de Constance (Tyrol, Haute-Bavière et Souabe)* (Paris: Ancienne maison Quantin, 1891); Joseph Galtier, "Les châteaux de Louis II," *Revue illustrée* (September 1, 1901): 25-29.



Vínland.<sup>138</sup> They also reported eagerly on the arrival of a replica Viking ship in Chicago to honor the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition.<sup>139</sup> These were all very literally “made” medievalisms: material recreations of more-or-less imagined elements from the Middle Ages that impressed viewers through their weighty physicality. Their effect was likely attenuated by textual translation, but they nonetheless provoked the imaginations of readers.



Fig. 1.12. Arc de Triomphe de la rue Jeanne d'Arc from Olaf E. Ray, *Gange Rolf, or Rollo of Normandy* (Chicago: Gus G. Martin, 1912).

A gigantic drakkar sails over the streets of Rouen to celebrate the millennium anniversary of the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte.

Popular engagement with Viking history reached its apogee when, on November 19, 1909, at the urging of journalist Georges Dubosc and Academician Lucien Valin, the municipal council of Rouen determined to host a grand celebration honoring the 1000-year anniversary of

<sup>138</sup> Harald Hansen, “Le voyage d’un livre,” *Le Figaro* (March 4, 1893); Jehan Soudan de Pierrefitte, “Les gars normands,” *Les gars normands* (July 1, 1907); “Ethnographie,” *L’Avenir d’Arcachon* (October 10, 1909).

<sup>139</sup> Le Passant, “Les on-dit,” *Le Rappel* (September 19, 1892); Henry de Varigny, “Promenades à travers l’Exposition de Chicago,” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (October 17, 1893).

the 911 Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, in which King Charles the Simple granted Normandy to Rollo.<sup>140</sup> The millennium celebration's Historical Congress took place June 3-10, 1911 in Rouen. Louis Liard, vice-rector of the University of Paris, presided. Participants travelled to Rouen from across the North Atlantic world, including the United States and Scandinavia. The Congress tackled five interrelated topics: "ancient and modern Norman literature; Norman archeology and fine arts; Norman history and geography; history of Norman law; [and] natural and medical sciences."<sup>141</sup> For those who did not attend in person, the speeches were printed in a two-volume record of the Congress, and many were additionally published in stand-alone extracts.

The history of the Vikings occupied a substantial place in the program.<sup>142</sup> Presenters especially emphasized the early Norse settlement in Normandy ("Invasion des Normands dans la vallée de la Seine," by Léon Coutil; "La civilisation des Normands avant l'émigration" by Oscar Montélius; and two lectures on "L'Origine de Rollon" by Professors Prentout and Walberg of the Universities of Caen and Lund, respectively); the enduring impact of Old Norse in modern language ("Ce qui demure des Vikings, la langue maritime" by Charles de la Roncière, conservator at the Bibliothèque nationale; "Etude sur l'origine scandinave de quelques noms de localités en Normandie" by F. Acher of the Société havraise d'Etudes diverses; "Les Noms de lieu d'origine non romane et la Colonisation germanique et scandinave en Normandie" by Charles Joret of the Institut); and the remnants of Norse material culture in France ("La Broderie de l'église de Hollandet, en Norvège, et son rapport avec la Tapisserie de Bayeux" by Dr.

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<sup>140</sup> Anna Rouffia, "« Mythe nordiste » et relations entre la Normandie et la Scandinavie (1880-2015)," *Classe internationale* (June 3, 2021).

<sup>141</sup> "La principale de ces solennités, le Congrès du Millénaire Normand, qui tint ses assises à Rouen, du 6 au 10 juin, sous la présidence d'honneur de M. Liard, vice-recteur de l'Université de Paris... Des communications, destinées à former un recueil du plus haut intérêt, se classèrent dans les cinq subdivisions d'un cadre fort bien tracé : Littérature normande ancienne et moderne ; — Archéologie normande et beaux-arts ; — Histoire et géographie de la Normandie ; — Histoire du droit normand ; — Sciences naturelles et sciences médicales." *La Société historique du Vexin et le millénaire normand* (Pontoise: Bureaux de la Société historique, 1911), 3-4.

<sup>142</sup> *Congrès du Millénaire de la Normandie (911-1911). Compte rendu des travaux*, 2 vols. (Rouen: Imprimerie de L. Gy, 1914).

Frédéric B. Wallem; “Parures et Armes scandinaves trouvées à Rouen, à Oissel et à Pitres” by Léon Coutil). However, lectures also underscored the broader scope of Norse exploration (“Essai on the Phases of maritime life, in France and England, directly traceable to the Vikings” by Olaf E. Ray of the U.S. organization Sons of Norway; “Les Vikings dans l’Amérique du Nord,” by Alfred Ravet; “Une Base navale des Vikings normands en Tunisie” by René Bougourd; “The Kensington runestone” by Hjalmar R. Holand of the University of Wisconsin). Collectively, these speakers framed the Vikings as pivotal to the history of France and the Atlantic world broadly.



Fig. 1.13. Group portrait of Congress attendees from *Congrès du Millénaire de la Normandie (911-1911)*. *Compte rendu des travaux*, vol. 2 (Rouen: Imprimerie de L. Gy, 1914).

Scholars and notables from across the North Atlantic gathered in Rouen to honor the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte and to reflect on the legacy of the Norse invasions.

For a more popular audience, the millennium festivities closed on June 11 with a grand parade through Rouen. One thousand residents dressed in Norse garb, led by a horseman impersonating Rollo, accompanied fifteen floats on a triumphal march to the center of town from the city's port, where a replica Viking ship that had sailed all the way from Norway was docked. An estimated 40,000 spectators from across northern France observed the proceedings.<sup>143</sup>



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 1.14. Agence Rol, *Rollo roi des Normands*, 1911. Photograph, 13 x 18 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Embodied engagement with Norse history through costumed re-enacting has a long history. I will return to this theme in the dissertation's conclusion.

<sup>143</sup> For details on the parade, see Jean-Pierre Chaline, "Rouen 911 : le millénaire de la Normandie," in *Dragons et drakkars. Le Mythe viking de la Scandinavie à la Normandie XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Jean-Marie Levesque (Caen: Imprimerie Normandie Information Impression, 1996): 71-82; William Blanc, "Le Millénaire normand, fantôme de Vikings français," *RetroNews* (March 5, 2019); Anna Rouffia, "« Mythe nordiste » et relations entre la Normandie et la Scandinavie (1880-2015)," *Classe internationale* (June 3, 2021).

Though Wagner may have ignited a new era of Scandimania in Germany, French people did not need to traverse the Rhine in search of the Norse medieval. It was thriving at home, in Paris, Rouen, and beyond. From poetry to posters, sculptures to the stage, by turn of the century France was alive with resurrected Vikings. True to their peripatetic nature, they could not be contained within the pages of academic scholarship. Indeed, the nineteenth century saw the Viking spread irrepressibly across the wide landscape of French media. Though Old Norse studies in France emerged from a relatively small group of amateur and professional historians and philologists, their ideas were then picked up and popularized by artists, novelists, and composers who took Norse history as a rich jumping off point for works of imagination.

## Conclusion

Norse culture durably imprinted French public life in the nineteenth century. It had nodes not only in the capital, but Burgundy, Brittany, Bordeaux, and (especially) Normandy. It evolved over time, expanding from a fringe academic subject, to an object of fervent scholarly urgency, to an inspiration for diverse and commercially successful mass media. The medieval revival in France certainly exceeded the Viking – consider Victor Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) or the Exposition Universelle’s medieval villages (1900) – but the Viking nonetheless occupied a notable position within this landscape of stained-glass windows and hunting tapestries.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Janine R. Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature 1851-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Barbara Keller, *The Middle Ages Reconsidered: Attitudes in France from the Eighteenth Century through the Romantic Movement* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984); Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, *Of Knights and Spires: Gothic Revival in France and Germany* (London: Phaidon, 1999); Harry Redman, *The Roland Legend in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991); Alain Boureau, *Le droit de cuissage : La fabrication d'un mythe, XIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Michael Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995); Charles Ridoux, *Evolution des études médiévales en France de 1860 à 1914* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001); Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Zrinka Stahuljak, *Pornographic Archaeology: Medicine, Medievalism, and the Invention of the French Nation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Jennifer Rushworth, *Petrarch and the*

Norse medievalisms in France targeted various audiences through various media. Academic treatises envisioned an educated, expert readership of fellow scholars. Translations, travelogues, novels, and poems assumed a literate but more popular audience seeking entertainment. Stage performances and museum exhibits offered middle-class visitors experiential contact with Norse material. Even rural laborers set eyes and hands on Viking artifacts dragged from the waters of northwestern France after a millennium of neglect. Across divisions of class, geography, gender, age, and profession, French publics produced and consumed Norse medievalisms written, viewed, heard, touched, and embodied.



Fig. 1.15. François Clasquin, *Le Dieu Thor, la plus barbare d'entre les barbares divinités de la Vieille Germanie*, 1915. Engraving, 39.9 x 29.6 cm, musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille.

Thor here is no longer a heroic avatar of masculinity and courage, but a grotesque barbarian opposed to modern civilization.

The Norman millennial celebration of the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte was both the zenith and the last hurrah of French interest in Norse culture. Afterwards, national engagement



with the Viking past declined precipitously. Many of the leading exponents who had popularized Old Norse studies in France died just around the turn of the century.<sup>145</sup> Without them to stoke it, the field lost its fire. The musical avant-garde moved beyond Wagner. Then, the Great War stole the blush off the Norse rose, as the French increasingly associated the medieval Viking with the modern Hun.<sup>146</sup> German efforts to claim Norse history as their privileged national patrimony ultimately succeeded, forcing the Entente powers to back away from Norse symbolism. Wagner's music was forbidden in concert halls.<sup>147</sup> Art such as François Clasquin's *Le Dieu Thor, la plus barbare d'entre les barbares divinités de la Vieille Germanie* (Figure 1.15) and Gustave Alaux and Raoul Tonnelier's *Les Normands repoussés devant Paris* (Figure 1.16) show how the Viking became more useful after July 1914 as a metaphor for Prussian villainy.



Fig. 1.16. Gustave Alaux and Raoul Tonnelier, *Les Normands repoussés devant Paris*, 1915. Wood and paper, musée de l'Armée, Paris.

This striking image shows the Parisians holding off a Viking assault in the 880s. The stark lines, monochromatic sepia tones, and silhouetted crowds render the assault in a very modern idiom.

Alaux and Tonnelier implicitly compare the medieval Franks' defense of their city against eastern invaders to contemporary Frenchmen's defense of the nation against Germany.

<sup>145</sup> Gustave Bascle de Lagrèze in 1891; Xavier Marmier in 1892; Alfred Maury in 1892; Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle in 1894; Auguste Geffroy in 1895; Paul Du Chaillu in 1903; Edmond Neukomm in 1903; Henri Fantin-Latour in 1904; Gabriel Gravier in 1905; Jules Lair in 1907; Paul Du Chatellier in 1911; and Eugène Beauvois in 1912.

<sup>146</sup> Boyer, *Le Mythe viking*, 161, 167; Pierre-Brice Stahl, "French Perspectives," in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, et. al. 908-912 (De Gruyter, 2018).

<sup>147</sup> Kahane and Wild, *Wagner et la France*, 68.

This chapter has established that French people in the nineteenth century enjoyed a rich variety of relationships with Norse medievalisms. Those medievalisms afforded entertainment and education both. But what ideological work did they perform? How did creators mobilize Old Norse sources to respond to the dilemmas facing modern France? In the chapters that follow, I zoom in from this bird's-eye overview of French engagement with Norse culture to focus in on how and where Vikings were deployed once they were available for external rhetorical functions.



## Chapter 2. Seeking the Aryans in Old Norse Literature: A Pre-History of Whiteness and the Making of Arthur de Gobineau

*“To be white is to be Nordic; to be Nordic is to be white. These are associations centuries in the making.” – Catrin Lundström and Benjamin R. Teitelbaum*<sup>148</sup>

### Introduction

In the late eighteenth century, English philologist Sir William “Oriental” Jones (1746-1794) promulgated a theory that, although he could not possibly have predicted it, would have catastrophic consequences for humanity. Founder of the Asiatick Society of Bengal, Jones contended that Europe’s languages and pagan religions had their ancient genesis in India.<sup>149</sup> This surprising assertion not only inspired a new generation of scholars to take up the study of Sanskrit in the hope of uncovering Europe’s deepest origins, but also ignited “Aryanism,” the belief that a superior white race had migrated out of India at the dawn of history and conquered Europe, mixing with the lesser peoples already living there and establishing the continent’s enduring institutions and culture.<sup>150</sup> The advent of biological racism lent this prejudice a pseudo-empirical gloss supported by new craniometric theories.<sup>151</sup> Generations of influential race scientists placed the Aryans, also sometimes termed Nordic, Teutonic, or Indo-European, at the top of the hierarchy of whiteness and held them to be the majority population in Scandinavia,

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<sup>148</sup> Catrin Lundström and Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, “Nordic Whiteness: An Introduction,” *Scandinavian Studies* 89, no. 2 (Summer 2017), 151.

<sup>149</sup> John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7-8.

<sup>150</sup> On the spread of this idea, see Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*, trans. Sonia Wichmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Felix Wiedemann, “The Aryans: Ideology and Historiographical Narrative Types in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Brill’s Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos N. Demetriou (Brill: Leiden, 2017): 31-59.

<sup>151</sup> A. James Gregor, “Nordicism Revisited,” *Phylon* 22, no. 4 (1961): 351-360; Jennifer Michael Hecht, “Vacher de Lapouge and the Rise of Nazi Science,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 2 (April 2000): 285-304; Richard McMahon, *The Races of Europe: Construction of National Identities in the Social Sciences, 1839-1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Britain, and Germany. The destructive ideology of Aryanism would ultimately feed the rise of the Nazis and their murderous program.

Recent scholars have highlighted the pernicious historical importance of Joseph Arthur, comte de Gobineau (1816-1882): diplomat, politician, novelist, poet, aristocrat, and Legitimist known to some as “the intellectual founder of racism.”<sup>152</sup> Gobineau believed his family traced its roots in France back to the Viking conqueror Ottar Jarl, better known to history as Ohthere of Hålogaland.<sup>153</sup> He also inaugurated a particularly virulent strain of Aryanism that would motivate the Third Reich. Gobineau profoundly influenced Hans Günther, the professor who made his career erecting the ideological scaffolding for the Nazis.<sup>154</sup> Günther called Gobineau “the first to formulate and call into being... the Nordic ideal.”<sup>155</sup> Gobineau’s conclusions suffused Günther’s work, from his division of the races to his prescriptions for national rejuvenation.

Since World War II transformed Gobineau’s racial philosophy into a problem of global geopolitical significance, scholars have tried to pinpoint its origins. Specifically, they have tried to unify his extraordinarily diverse body of work into cohesive whole motivated by a single secret, shared *idée fixe*. Various writers have traced Gobineau’s brand of Aryanism back to his

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<sup>152</sup> Edmund Wright, *A Dictionary of World History*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), s.v. “Gobineau, Joseph Arthur, comte de.”

<sup>153</sup> Ernest Seillière, “L’Histoire d’Ottar-Jarl, pirate norvégien, et de sa descendance,” in *Le Comte de Gobineau et l’aryanisme historique* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1903): 375-413; Léon Deffoux, “En marge d’ « Ottar Jarl » : Le Comte de Gobineau à Trye-le-Château,” in *Trois aspects de Gobineau* (Tours: Imprimerie Arrault et Cie, 1929): 1-36. Ohthere of Hålogaland is described in the Old English edition of Paulus Orosius’ *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, available in modern translation as Paulus Orosius, *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius*, trans. Malcolm R. Godden (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>154</sup> For Günther’s biography and role in shaping Nazi ideology, see Alan E. Steinweis, *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>155</sup> Hans Friedrich Karl Günther, *The Racial Elements of European History*, trans. G. C. Wheeler (London: Methuen & Co., 1927), 252. For more on Günther’s admiration for Gobineau, see Günther, *The Racial Elements of European History*, 254-259.

aristocratic elitism;<sup>156</sup> his Legitimist royalism;<sup>157</sup> his alienated pessimism;<sup>158</sup> his anxieties about his own parentage;<sup>159</sup> his fear of the nineteenth century's accelerating rate of social change;<sup>160</sup> or even his childhood in Brittany.<sup>161</sup> An annual journal dedicated to *Études Gobiniennes* even appeared under the direction of Jean Gaulmier with Paris' Éditions Klincksieck between 1966 and 1978.<sup>162</sup> I do not aim here to offer a comprehensive investigation into Gobineau's writings or worldview. Rather, I show the central importance of the field of Old Norse studies to Gobineau's understanding of the Aryans' implantation in Europe. I argue that Gobineau's vision of Aryan history – as well as how and where to find it – emerged in dialogue with discourses established by other French scholars of Old Norse.

This chapter seeks to relocate Gobineau within the intellectual lineage he inhabited: the nascent, relatively obscure world of Old Norse studies in nineteenth-century France. I contend that understanding Gobineau's calamitously persuasive ideas requires tracing the evolution of Aryanist thought in studies of the sagas and Eddas, particularly those written by Ferdinand Eckstein, Jean-Jacques Ampère, Édélstand Du Méril, Maximilien de Ring, and Pierre-Eugène

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<sup>156</sup> Arnold H. Rowbotham, "Gobineau and the Aryan Terror," *The Sewanee Review* 47, no. 2 (April-June 1939):152-165; Janine Buenzod, *La formation de la pensée de Gobineau* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1967); James W. Ceaser, "America as a Racial Symbol: The 'New History' of Arthur de Gobineau," in *Reconstructing America: The Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 87-105; Robert J. Delahunty, "Tocqueville and Gobineau," *Law and Religion Forum* (September 12, 2013); Paul Lawrence Rose, "Renan versus Gobineau: Semitism and Antisemitism, Ancient Races and Modern Liberal Nations," *History of European Ideas* 39, no. 4 (2012): 528-540.

<sup>157</sup> Steven Kale, "Gobineau, Racism, and Legitimism: A Royalist Heretic in Nineteenth-Century France," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 1 (2010): 33–61.

<sup>158</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Race-Thinking Before Racism," *The Review of Politics* 6, no. 1 (January 1944): 36-73; Paul A. Fortier, "Gobineau and German Racism," *Comparative Literature* 19, no. 4 (Autumn 1967): 341-350; Michael D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1970); Pierre-Louis Rey, *L'univers romanesque de Gobineau* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981); Nicholas Martin, "Breeding Greeks: Nietzsche, Gobineau, and Classical Theories of Race," in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2004): 40-53.

<sup>159</sup> Jean Gaulmier, *Spectre de Gobineau* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965).

<sup>160</sup> Melvin Richter, "The Study of Man: A Debate on Race," *Commentary* (February 1958); Jean Boissel, *Gobineau biographie* (Paris: Berg International, 1993); John Nale, "Arthur de Gobineau on Blood and Race," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 2, no. 1 (2014): 106-124.

<sup>161</sup> Jean Gaulmier, "Arthur de Gobineau et la Bretagne," *Annales de Bretagne et pays de l'Ouest* 78, no. 3 (1971): 537-548.

<sup>162</sup> Jean Gaulmier, ed., *Études Gobiniennes*, 9 vols. (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1966-1978).

Beauvois. Gobineau did not write in a vacuum. His notions of racial hierarchy, blood purity, and human movement developed within a wider environment of French engagement with Old Norse texts.

In the *Heimskringla*, a thirteenth-century compilation of Old Norse king's sagas, Christian Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) contended that the Odinic mythology of his ancestors allegorized the actual history of a proto-Germanic royal family called the Aesir.<sup>163</sup> Six hundred years later, scholars would adopt Sturluson's claims in order to justify reading Old Norse sources, specifically the Eddas' record of pagan theology, as a cryptic retelling of ancient people's migration westward out of Asia. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how certain nineteenth-century French scholars used new disciplinary tools to argue that pagan legends recorded in Old Norse texts secretly preserved the prehistory of the supposed Aryan tribe.

This strained logic only held together because nineteenth-century authors in general projected the Viking backwards in time and equated him with the "barbarian" invader of Rome. Though these figures existed centuries apart, scholars conflated the two populations of supposedly wild northern warriors who defeated "civilized" southern communities. Writers easily and uncritically transposed religious, racial, and cultural traits across a gap of nearly a millennium. They saw no meaningful difference between the peoples described in Tacitus' *Germania* (first century CE) and Ahmad ibn Fadlan's travelogue (tenth century CE). Despite first landing on the shores of France in 799, the Vikings thus received credit for the fall of the western Roman Empire four hundred years before. This easy slippage is perfectly encapsulated by the baffling subtitle to Paul Du Chaillu's 1893 novel *Ivar the Viking*: "A romantic history

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<sup>163</sup> Heather O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 26-27.

based upon authentic facts of the third and fourth centuries.”<sup>164</sup> Consequently, these scholars believed that the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writings of the Christianized Norse preserved untainted the culture of pagan Germanic tribes from Europe’s Migration Period (*Völkerwanderung*) ca. 300 CE.<sup>165</sup>

The actors I survey in this chapter shared not only a research agenda; they shared a common social position. They were well-travelled, male, metropolitan, well-to-do scholars who, while not all formally educated as historians, published prolifically in respected journals and belonged to academic societies. Whether gentlemen amateurs or comfortably ensconced in university chairs, they wielded the power of their masculinity, wealth, whiteness, and academic credentials to validate their interpretations of Old Norse texts. A surprising number were also devoted royalists with pretensions to nobility themselves. While I have not been able to locate any evidence that the main actors I survey here explicitly cited or corresponded with one another, and none of the publications I examine appeared in Gobineau’s personal library purchased by the Bibliothèque de Strasbourg in 1903, nonetheless their social and intellectual proximity ensures they must have been familiar with one another’s work.<sup>166</sup> I will now turn to a close analysis of these authors and their enduring role in molding medieval history into a handmaiden of white supremacy.

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<sup>164</sup> Paul Belloni Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893).

<sup>165</sup> On nineteenth-century approaches to the *Völkerwanderung*, see Felix Wiedemann, “Migration and Narration: How European Historians in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries Told the History of Human Mass Migrations or *Völkerwanderungen*,” *History and Theory* 59, no. 1 (March 2020): 42-60.

<sup>166</sup> Lily Greiner, “Fragments de la bibliothèque d’Arthur de Gobineau à Strasbourg,” *Études Gobiniennes* 1 (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1966): 139-158.

## Germanic Origins in the East: Towards a French Aryanism

The Vikings certainly did not begin as a European emblem of whiteness. Indeed, during the Middle Ages their enemies sometimes conflated them with Saracens.<sup>167</sup> Yet, as Jon Røyne Kyllingstad states, by the nineteenth century, “Scandinavia held a key position in the worldview of the advocates of the supremacy of the Nordic race. Scandinavia was the core area of the race.”<sup>168</sup> Erika Jackson argues that even today “Nordic whiteness remains as the ultimate position of unquestioned racial hegemony and privilege.”<sup>169</sup> Such associations were projected backwards onto the Vikings. Gilles Teulié has shown that in Victorian Britain, “Norse warriors became part of the agenda of race ideologists who wished to underpin their vision of the superiority of (Northern) Europeans over the rest of the world.”<sup>170</sup> In this section I will show how a small group of nineteenth-century French Orientalists first helped to make the Scandinavians unassailably, paradigmatically white by rooting Aryanism in Old Norse texts.

A century before the Third Reich, William Jones’ thesis was first popularized in France by the aristocratic journalist Ferdinand Eckstein (1790-1861).<sup>171</sup> In a deeply ironic and tragic twist, Eckstein was of Jewish heritage. According to Arthur McCalla, “Eckstein's father came from a family of German-speaking Jews residing in a region near Hamburg that in the late eighteenth century belonged to Denmark. Eckstein, however, was raised a Protestant because his

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<sup>167</sup> Richard Cole, “British Perspectives,” in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, et. al. (De Gruyter, 2018): 891-898; Eduardo Ramos, “Imagined Invasions: Muslim Vikings in *Brut* and Middle English Romances,” *Speculum* 99, no. 2 (April 2024): 432-457.

<sup>168</sup> Jon Røyne Kyllingstad, “Norwegian Physical Anthropology and the Idea of a Nordic Master Race,” *Current Anthropology* 53, supplement 5 (April 2012), S46.

<sup>169</sup> Erika Jackson, “The Contemporary Importance of Nordic Whiteness,” in *Scandinavians in Chicago: The Origins of White Privilege in Modern America* (University of Illinois 2019), 180.

<sup>170</sup> Gilles Teulié, “Henry Rider Haggard’s Nordicism? When Black Vikings Fight alongside White Zulus in South Africa,” *E-rea* 18, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>171</sup> For Eckstein’s biography, see George Ripley and Charles A. Dana, eds., *The New American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge*, vol. 6 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861), 743; C. A. E. Jensen, “The Romanticism of Ferdinand d’Eckstein,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 39, no. 2 (April 1965): 226-242; Arthur McCalla, “Paganism in Restoration France: Eckstein's Traditionalist Orientalism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76, no. 4 (October 2015): 563-585.

father, a successful merchant, had converted to Lutheranism as a condition of his marriage.”<sup>172</sup>

Though Eckstein was born in Copenhagen, he pursued his studies in Göttingen and Heidelberg.<sup>173</sup> During a trip to Rome 1807-1809, the young Eckstein fell under the influence of noted Orientalist Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829). Schlegel was definitely responsible for Eckstein’s turn to Aryanism and likely his fervent conversion to Roman Catholicism.<sup>174</sup> Eckstein served as an officer in Coalition-aligned Holland during the waning days of Napoleon’s regime before entering the Bourbon administration as Marseille’s *commissaire général de police* in 1817 and then as an attaché to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 1830. In gratitude for his contributions to the state and his close alliance with the Restoration’s reactionary ultra-royalists, the Bourbons named him a baron.<sup>175</sup>

Eckstein published his two-hundred-page manifesto on Old Norse sources as “De la poésie épique du moyen âge” in 1829 in his right-wing periodical *La Catholique*.<sup>176</sup> Also presented orally at a session of the conservative Société des Bonnes-Etudes, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge” aimed to use Old Norse texts to reveal the world of France’s ancestors. Eckstein wrote, “It is back toward that naïve epoch that I wish to bring you, in reconstructing before you the world in which our fathers lived. I will make pass before your eyes the Franks of the Conquest.”<sup>177</sup> He trusted that the Eddas and sagas formed a perfectly transparent window into the culture, values, and mores not only of the medieval society that recorded them, but also of the

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<sup>172</sup> McCalla, “Paganism in Restoration France,” 564.

<sup>173</sup> Ripley and Dana, eds., *The New American Cyclopaedia*, vol. 6, 743.

<sup>174</sup> McCalla, “Paganism in Restoration France,” 565.

<sup>175</sup> For the history of the role of Catholic converts from Judaism in Legitimist politics, see Maurice Samuels, *The Betrayal of the Duchess: The Scandal That Unmade the Bourbon Monarchy and Made France Modern* (Basic Books, 2020).

<sup>176</sup> Ferdinand Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” *Le Catholique*, vol. 16(Paris: Imprimerie de H. Fournier, 1829): 683-907.

<sup>177</sup> “C’est vers cette époque de naïveté que je désire vous ramener, en reconstruisant devant vous le monde dans lequel vécut nos pères. Je ferai passer sous vos yeux les Francs de la conquête.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 684.

earlier tribes that he framed as the direct antecedent of modern Europe. Like his mentor Schlegel, Eckstein believed he could illuminate “the cradle of peoples” by using literary remnants to trace their history back to ancient days.<sup>178</sup>

Eckstein’s “De la poésie épique du moyen âge” began from the premise that the Middle Ages were not a period of metaphorical darkness where human arts and intellects slept outside the rare oases of monasteries – creative expression was still happening.<sup>179</sup> Eckstein particularly celebrated the Eddas and sagas of medieval Iceland as evidence of literary greatness. He lauded these works as “a common property for all the nations of Europe.”<sup>180</sup> In “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” Ferdinand Eckstein argued that Old Norse literature was historically useful (and artistically worthy) precisely because it was ingenuous. He asserted that the differences between medieval and modern literature indexed the differences between the respective cultures that produced them. He suggested that his own contemporary society was too self-aware and conflicted to faithfully transcribe itself in literature.<sup>181</sup> He lamented the atomization of modern life, which produced writers who “are themselves the manifestation neither of a century nor of a nation; each belongs more or less to himself, an individual within the mass of the people.”<sup>182</sup> He contrasted this “poetry of the *bel esprit*, vulgarly called literature,” with the medieval epics, “a poetry of actions and emotions drawn from the breast of nature: poetry that characterizes the

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<sup>178</sup> “Le berceau des peuples.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 688-689.

<sup>179</sup> Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 683, 689.

<sup>180</sup> “Cette poésie épique du moyen âge, qui forme pour toutes les nations de l’Europe... comme une propriété commune.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 688-689.

<sup>181</sup> “Il est impossible de refléter avec conscience et moins possible encore de refléter avec naïveté le tableau d’une existence aussi divisée que celle des temps modernes... Notre symbole c’est la diversité, et la diversité ne saurait se faire homme.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 685.

<sup>182</sup> “Aucun des écrivains que nous venons de nommer n’est à lui seul la manifestation d’un siècle ni d’une nation ; chacun s’appartient plus ou moins lui-même, est un individu dans la masse du peuple.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 686.



mores of a people in its cradle.”<sup>183</sup> Eckstein believed that unlike the deracinated, self-conscious modern writer, who could speak only of himself and for himself, the medieval writer inhabited a world where “individuality was less pronounced, isolation was less huge, naïveté more profound.... Poets, the organs of the era, were themselves part of this unity, themselves belonged to this national childhood, sang and breathed the sentiments of their contemporaries.”<sup>184</sup> Eckstein insisted that these medieval authors were perfect fractal microcosms of their milieu: “The poet [of the time] is neither an artist nor a poet properly speaking. He is a citizen or a knight. The citizen is the people, he is the tribe in its entirety. The knight is chivalry incarnated.”<sup>185</sup> According to Eckstein, this representativeness not only underscored the inferiority of modern literature by comparison, but also rendered premodern literature – specifically the medieval epics – a reliable source of information on the past.

Eckstein delineated medieval epics into four main categories.<sup>186</sup> The category with the oldest roots comprised epic adaptations of Classical myth. Eckstein argued that these transformed Greco-Roman tales were ironically the shortest-lived, as they never achieved traction among the masses. Only slightly less ephemeral, in Eckstein’s mind, were the Arthurian epics of the Grail legend and the Round Table. He claimed that these legends largely died out in the fourteenth century along with the knightly chivalry that animated them, though they retained some momentum among ordinary people. By contrast, he maintained that the third category, the Charlemagne epics, broadly survived in everyday life well beyond the Middle Ages, especially

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<sup>183</sup> “C’est de poésie que je viens vous entretenir, non pas de cette poésie du bel esprit, qu’on appelle vulgairement littérature, mais d’une poésie d’actions et d’émotions puisées au sein de la nature : poésie qui caractérise les mœurs d’un peuple à son berceau.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 683.

<sup>184</sup> “Il n’en est pas ainsi dans ces temps reculés, berceau des sociétés modernes. L’individualité y est moins prononcée, l’isolement est moins grand, la naïveté plus profonde.... Les poètes, organes de l’époque, font eux-mêmes partie de cette unité, appartiennent eux-mêmes à cette enfance nationale, chantent et soupirent les sentiments de leurs contemporains.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 686.

<sup>185</sup> “Le poète n’est ni artiste ni même poète proprement dit : il est citoyen ou chevalier, le citoyen est peuple, il est la tribu tout entière, le chevalier est la chevalerie en personne.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 686.

<sup>186</sup> Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 695-727.

in southern Europe. However, he believed that the most significant and most enduring of his four categories were the Germanic epics, which he insisted still echoed through modern Scandinavian culture and were the only medieval epics that could be considered truly national. He further divided this category into two sub-groupings.<sup>187</sup> First was the Gothic or Eastern Cycle, centered on the rivalry of Theodoric the Great and his usurping uncle Ermanaric (known respectively as Thidrek and Jörmunrek in Old Norse). Second was the Frankish or Western Cycle, centered on the exploits of Sigurd Fafnirsbane. Eckstein asserted that both of these cycles had once been widespread throughout Europe but were now best preserved in the writings of the Icelanders, notably the Poetic Edda and the sagas. By closely reading these documents, he believed he could extract the early history of Aryan settlement in Europe.

Across a sustained comparative reading of the several iterations of the legend of Sigurd Fafnirsbane, Ferdinand Eckstein contended that the Western Cycle of medieval Germanic literature allegorized the actual, historical expropriation of a subjugated artisan population by a martial population. He began by a minute examination of the various depictions of Sigurd's slaying of the dragon Fafnir and the hero's subsequent downfall recorded in Eddaic poems, *Vilkina Saga*, and *Völsunga Saga*.<sup>188</sup> He supplemented these Old Norse texts with the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Eckenlied*, which recounted the same events in Middle High German. He repeatedly emphasized the common origin of these many versions of the Sigurd story: "the intimate kinship of a mass of poetic entities, dismembered from a single fundamental idea, can be found in the smallest particularities of this poem."<sup>189</sup> According to Eckstein, this lost origin point was a real historical event. He argued that the metal-working dwarves of the Sigurd legend,

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<sup>187</sup> Eckstein, "De la poésie épique du moyen âge," 728.

<sup>188</sup> Eckstein, "De la poésie épique du moyen âge," 783-904.

<sup>189</sup> "L'intime parenté d'une foule d'êtres poétiques, démembrés d'une seule idée fondamentale, se retrouve jusque dans les moindres particularités de ce poème." Eckstein, "De la poésie épique du moyen âge," 860.

who sometimes transform into treasure-hoarding dragons, represented a people skilled in mining and metallurgy but weak in arms.<sup>190</sup> Sigurd, who bests the dwarves and dragon and seizes their booty, represented a horse-riding people skilled in arms but unaccustomed to settled industry. Eckstein believed that, when “mounted on his battle steed, the hero [Sigurd] enslaves the blacksmith, commands the dwarf, kills the dragon, and steals the object of his desire,” the sagas and Eddas were retelling in disguised form a true history of racial conquest.<sup>191</sup>

The conquerors in question were, of course, the Aryans. Eckstein expanded on this argument in an article published in 1831 in the prominent *Revue des deux mondes* entitled “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement considérées sous le point de vue d’une philosophie de l’histoire.”<sup>192</sup> According to Eckstein, the Aryans originated in the Hindu-Kush region of modern Afghanistan.<sup>193</sup> The story of how their lust for riches led them to war, corrupted them, and divided their families “passed through several centuries, several peoples, several great events, before reemerging in the Gothic poems and the Sicambrian [Germanic] epic, retained in the Scandinavian Völsunga Saga.”<sup>194</sup>

So what were Eckstein’s Aryans like? Their confidence in their own racial superiority and military might was their defining characteristic. It drove them to spread and dominate. They also shared a taste for nationalism and imperialism and, at least among themselves, were liberated, equal, and fraternal. In short, they were the perfect nineteenth-century Frenchmen. Eckstein described the “noble Aryan nations [as] horse-riding people with chivalric mores” who

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<sup>190</sup> Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 750, 858.

<sup>191</sup> “Monté sur son cheval de bataille, héros asservit le forgeron, commande au nain, tue le dragon, enlève l’objet de sa convoitise.” Eckstein, “De la poésie épique du moyen âge,” 750.

<sup>192</sup> Ferdinand Eckstein, “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement considérées sous le point de vue d’une philosophie de l’histoire,” *Revue des deux mondes* 3 (1831): 15-46.

<sup>193</sup> Eckstein, “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement,” 34-35.

<sup>194</sup> “Elle a passé par bien des siècles, par bien des peuples, par bien des événements, avant de reflourir dans les poèmes gothiques et l’épopée sicambre, renfermée dans la Volsunga-Saga Scandinave.” Eckstein, “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement,” 34-35.

subscribed to what he called heroic paganism.<sup>195</sup> Heroic paganism, in Eckstein's mind, supplanted a universalist tradition that prioritized harmony with a particularist ethos that led the Aryans to prioritize their "race" above all others. He believed that the Aryans and their conflictual attitude towards interpersonal relations "advanced the affairs of humankind, destroyed the tribal spirit... engendered a public and national character appropriate to conquerors who maintained their conquests by a constant appeal to the patriotism of their members, military hierarchy, and fraternal equality that reigned in their ranks, in short the political unity of a powerful empire."<sup>196</sup> Moreover, their value system, which elevated individual greatness in battle above all else, "inflamed in man the spirit of independence, it returned him to free action."<sup>197</sup> Put otherwise, Eckstein believed that the Aryans' "heroic religion, in exalting racial pride, transcended the bonds of family and created a public cult that is no long the domestic cult, but a religion of the State, with... its appeal to the shared fatherland. This belief supposes a population of men who are men *par excellence*, whose greatness is founded on the exclusion of other men in whom they do not recognize their fellows."<sup>198</sup> Through the Aryans, Eckstein melded the values of racial supremacy with the values of modern nationalism.

Jean-Jacques Ampère (1800-1864) shared Eckstein's belief that Old Norse literature encoded an ancient Germanic migration out of Asia. Significantly, Ampère brought this thesis

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<sup>195</sup> "Nobles nations ariennes, peuples cavaliers aux mœurs chevaleresques." Eckstein, "Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement," 28.

<sup>196</sup> "Ce phénomène si beau de l'héroïsme dans le monde antique... a avancé les affaires du genre humain, anéanti l'esprit de tribu... engendré un caractère public et national, propre aux conquérans, qui se maintenaient dans leurs conquêtes par un appel constant au patriotisme de leurs membres, à la hiérarchie d'ordre militaire, et à l'égalité fraternelle qui régnaient dans leurs rangs, enfin à l'unité politique d'un puissant empire." Eckstein, "Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement," 35-36.

<sup>197</sup> "Il a enflammé dans l'homme l'esprit d'indépendance, il l'a ramené à l'action libre." Eckstein, "Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement," 35-36.

<sup>198</sup> "La religion héroïque, en exaltant l'orgueil des races, franchit déjà les bornes de la famille, et se crée un culte public, qui n'est plus le culte domestique, mais une religion de l'État, avec son dieu national, sa justice politique émanée de ce dieu, et son appel à la patrie commune. Cette croyance suppose un peuple d'hommes qui soient des hommes par excellence, et dont la grandeur est fondée sur l'exclusion des autres hommes, dans lesquels ils ne reconnaissent pas leurs semblables." Eckstein, "Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement," 42.

out of the pages of learned publications and into the classroom.<sup>199</sup> A philologist and *homme de lettres*, Jean-Jacques discovered a fascination with Old Norse texts during a tour of Scandinavia. In 1830, he published *De l'Histoire de la poésie*, one of the earliest comprehensive studies in French of what Eckstein termed the Western and Eastern Cycles of the Germanic epics. Ampère lectured on Old Norse sources at the Athenaeum in Marseilles, later teaching at the Sorbonne and eventually becoming a professor of French literature at the Collège de France. One of his lectures, the opening class of a course on foreign literature, was published in 1832 as *Discours sur l'ancienne littérature scandinave*.<sup>200</sup> The transcript of this lecture reveals Ampère's role in spreading the fundamentals of Aryanism by way of Old Norse studies.



Fig. 2.1. Portrait of Jean-Jacques Ampère, nineteenth century. Photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Jean-Jacques was the son of the far more famous André-Marie Ampère, pioneer of the science of electromagnetism for whom the unit of electric current is named.

<sup>199</sup> For Jean-Jacques Ampère's biography, see *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), s.v. "Ampère, Jean-Jacques."

<sup>200</sup> Jean-Jacques Ampère, *Discours sur l'ancienne littérature scandinave* (Paris: Paul Renouard, 1832).

Ampère believed that in ancient times, Germanic peoples moved out of northern India and Persia, traveling west into the Caucasus, then to the Black Sea, before finally settling along the shores of the Baltic and the Gulf of Bothnia.<sup>201</sup> He claimed they came in two waves: first the Goths, who colonized southern Sweden and Denmark, then the Aesir, who set up further to the north.<sup>202</sup> Following Snorri Sturluson, Ampère maintained that the Aesir were not gods but a real tribe led by a chieftain named Odin who then passed into memory as divinities. Ampère argued that although the Goths and the Aesir were of a single ethnicity and culture, the Aesir politically and religiously subordinated the Goths. Ampère maintained that even up to the present, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were still dominated by these two branches of “the Germanic race.”<sup>203</sup> He expected that the revelation of their Asian origins would shock his audience.<sup>204</sup> Nevertheless, he insisted on “the essential relationship between the Germanic nations and Persia and India.”<sup>205</sup>

Ampère trusted in the narrative content of Old Norse texts to substantiate this assertion. He argued that their mythology allegorized actual events related to the Aesir’s migration, which could be untangled with careful exegesis. He maintained that the medieval literature of Iceland “tied the North to the East.”<sup>206</sup> Ampère particularly underscored the historical truth of the stories of the Poetic Edda; he worried that Snorri’s later Christian interpolations compromised the relative value of the Prose Edda for accessing authentic early Germanic culture.<sup>207</sup> Ampère could

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<sup>201</sup> Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 10.

<sup>202</sup> Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 9.

<sup>203</sup> “Du race germanique.” Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 8.

<sup>204</sup> Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 10.

<sup>205</sup> “Les rapports essentiels des nations germaniques... avec la Perse et l’Inde.” Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 6-7.

<sup>206</sup> “Elle rattachait le nord à l’orient.” Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 6-7.

<sup>207</sup> Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 16-17.

not contain his enthusiasm for “this extraordinary literature.... In returning to its sources, one is drawn to the depths of the East and to the heart of the most distant Antiquity.”<sup>208</sup>

Ampère also turned to philology to demonstrate his claims of an Asian origin for the Germanic peoples.<sup>209</sup> He promised over the duration of the course to prove that Old Norse was related first to Latin and Greek and then to the languages of Persia and India.<sup>210</sup> He mounted a fierce defense of philology as method, anticipating critique: “thanks to recent work undertaken in Germany and the north, followed successfully in France, the etymological science, to which extravagant forays had attached a sort of ridicule, has become an altogether philosophical and positive science.”<sup>211</sup> Ampère emphasized the purely objective, reliable operation of philology by comparing it to biology, writing that “the history of languages could be called an anatomy, or rather a comparative physiology, for language is like a living being.... We will study that organism in order to define some of its laws.”<sup>212</sup> Ampère drew on the growing legitimacy of the natural sciences as a mode of knowledge-making in order to defend philology as a means of learning about the world. He also asserted that philology promised answers that no other approach could deliver: “A precious and sometimes unique light, it illuminates that which history too often leaves in shadow, the descent and cradle of peoples.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> “Cette littérature extraordinaire.... En remontant à ses sources, on est conduit au fond de l’orient et au sein de l’antiquité la plus reculée.” Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 6-7.

<sup>209</sup> On the development of philology as methodology, see James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Paul Michael Kurtz, “The Philological Apparatus: Science, Text, and Nation in the Nineteenth Century,” *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 4 (Summer 2021): 747-776.

<sup>210</sup> Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 13-14.

<sup>211</sup> “Grâce à des travaux récents entrepris en Allemagne et dans le nord, et qui se poursuivent en France avec succès, la science étymologique à laquelle des tentatives extravagantes avaient attaché une sorte de ridicule, est devenue une science philosophique et positive tout ensemble.” Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 13.

<sup>212</sup> “L’histoire des langues peut s’appeler une anatomie ou plutôt une physiologie comparée, car une langue est comme un être vivant.... Nous aurons à étudier cet organisme, à constater quelques-unes de ses lois.” Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 13.

<sup>213</sup> “Flambeau précieux et quelque-fois unique, elle éclaire ce que l’histoire laisse trop souvent dans l’ombre, la filiation et le berceau des peuples.” Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave*, 13.

The Norman literary critic Édéstand Du Méril (1801-1871) espoused an equal faith in the soundness and explanatory power of philology. He offered indirect support for the Aryan hypothesis in *Essai sur l'origine des runes* (1844), where he argued that the Norse runic alphabet descended from an ancient Asian ideographic language.<sup>214</sup> Du Méril began his *Essai* by asserting that all writing systems began around pictographs that visually approximated the things they signified. He maintained that so-called backwards civilizations, like China or Mesoamerica, retained pictographic language, while more advanced civilizations turned increasingly towards abstracted writing systems based around phonics, leading eventually to the creation of a syllabic alphabet.<sup>215</sup> Du Méril framed runes as the culmination of that evolution and believed he could trace their development backwards to discover the ur-language that birthed them.<sup>216</sup> He divided runes into two closely related alphabets: the older, Scandinavian alphabet (today called the Younger Futhark) and the later, Anglo-Saxon one (today called the Anglo-Frisian Futhorc).<sup>217</sup> He maintained that they showed no signs of Christian influence and thus must have been exceptionally old; he dated their origins to the fifth century CE at the earliest.<sup>218</sup> Drawing on supposed similarities between the Scandinavian runic alphabet and the ancient Phoenician alphabet, he concluded that “significant connections clearly indicate that runes had an Eastern origin.”<sup>219</sup> He insisted that both writing systems only had sixteen characters, and that Hermes and Odin were actually the same figure, slightly distorted by their descent through the Phoenician and Germanic traditions respectively. As both gods were credited with bringing written language to humanity, Du Méril thought they both allegorized a single older, Eastern figure who brought

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<sup>214</sup> Edéstand Du Méril, *Essai sur l'origine des runes* (Paris: A. Franck, 1844).

<sup>215</sup> Du Méril, *Essai sur l'origine des runes*, 1-4.

<sup>216</sup> Du Méril, *Essai sur l'origine des runes*, 5.

<sup>217</sup> Du Méril, *Essai sur l'origine des runes*, 14-19.

<sup>218</sup> Du Méril, *Essai sur l'origine des runes*, 13-14.

<sup>219</sup> “Des rapports significatifs indiquent clairement que les runes avaient une origine orientale.” Du Méril, *Essai sur l'origine des runes*, 22.



writing west from Asia.<sup>220</sup> To explain why Scandinavian runes and Phoenician writing could be so different if they both originated from a single Asian pictographic system, Du Ménil pointed to sustained isolation, widespread illiteracy, the absence of a centralized body imposing uniformity, the desire to create secret forms of writing legible only to a select few correspondents, and the constraints of writing on different surfaces with different implements.<sup>221</sup> By arguing that the written language of the Norse could be traced through the depths of time back to Asia, Du Ménil provided ostensible evidence in favor of Aryanism.

The publications surveyed in this section had two key impacts: to bring the Aryan hypothesis to France and to ground that hypothesis in supposed evidence pulled from Old Norse texts. In the next section, I will show how other writers built on these premises to attempt to build a new ethnic linkage between modern-day France and Scandinavia.

### **In Search of French Whiteness: Making the Franks Aryan**

I assert that two French scholars' anxieties about their nation's status within the gradated landscape of whiteness fundamentally shaped medieval studies, and Old Norse studies specifically, at the moment of its inception as an academic field. I argue that two key writers – Maximilien de Ring and Eugène Beauvois – used the ostensible “proof” of Aryanism afforded by Old Norse texts in order to disassociate their nation from the allegedly dissolute, weak populations of southern Europe and regroup them with the brawny, enterprising populations of the North. This redrawing of Europe's racial borders soothed national anxieties that the French came from inferior stock and buttressed French claims to (a not unproblematic) whiteness.

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<sup>220</sup> Du Ménil, *Essai sur l'origine des runes*, 23-27.

<sup>221</sup> Du Ménil, *Essai sur l'origine des runes*, 38-40.

Beginning with Montesquieu and his climatic theory of human character (see Chapter 1), European race thinkers had frequently associated the temperate environment of southern Europe with sloth and dissipation, the opposite of the rugged enterprise bred in the chilly North.<sup>222</sup> Protestants additionally linked this almost Oriental lethargy and decadence to Catholicism. By assigning the French and Norse a shared imaginary ethnogenesis in late Antiquity, Ring and Beauvois distanced their countrymen from the supposedly lazy Latins of southern Europe and grouped them in with the supposedly virile northern Europeans.<sup>223</sup> According to Ring and Beauvois, reading sagas and Eddas revealed the forgotten history of France's distant national antecedents – antecedents they shared with modern Scandinavians. This project was particularly urgent because the French claim to untarnished whiteness was in jeopardy. By bringing the French into the Scandinavian ethnic orbit, these scholars aimed to secure their country's whiteness beyond doubt.

The risk of racial contagion from southern Europe helps explain these authors' decision to invent a new Norse history for France instead of drawing on its more established Hellenistic heritage. For centuries, but especially since the neo-classical revival of the Enlightenment, France had framed itself as the privileged inheritor of Greco-Roman culture, whether in the form of antique aesthetics or republican values. Old Norse researchers shunned this sophisticated

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<sup>222</sup> Gabriel Tortella, "Patterns of Economic Retardation and Recovery in South-Western Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *The Economic History Review* 47, no. 1 (February 1994): 1-21; "Forum—Europe's Southern Question: The Other Within," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26, no. 4, (2004): 311-337; Michael Broers, "The Myth of the Lazy Native," in *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796–1814: Cultural Imperialism in a European Context?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 217-244; Ruth MacKay, "*Lazy, Improvident People*": *Myth and Reality in the Writing of Spanish History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Roberto M. Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Emanuel Rota, "The Worker and the Southerner: The Invention of Laziness and the Representation of Southern Europe in the Age of the Industrious Revolutions," *Cultural Critique* 82 (Fall 2012): 128-150; Guido Franzinetti, "Southern Europe," in *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History*, eds. Diana Mishkova and Balázs Trencsényi (New York: Berghahan, 2019): 100-121.

<sup>223</sup> Note that instead of distancing themselves from the "Latin race," some nineteenth-century French people tried to argue for the value and superiority of that race. See Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Creole: Portraits of France's Foreign Relations During the Long Nineteenth Century* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 373-377; Raymond Jonas, "Rescuing the Latin Race," in *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande: The Rise and Fall of the Second Mexican Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2024): 11-25.

Classical lineage in favor of a rugged Viking past more commonly associated with modern Scandinavia in order to safely delineate France from contemporary Italy and Greece. This rewriting of the racial map of Europe assuaged national fears that the French were made of lesser stock than their geopolitical rivals and propped up French claims to whiteness.

I am intentionally excluding Norman writers from this section, as they had their own regionally distinctive preoccupations and approaches. While the writers discussed here sought France's connection to Scandinavia in the Migration Period of Antiquity, Norman researchers – examined in Chapter 4 – rooted France's Norse-ness in the ninth-century Viking invasions of the country's northern and western shores.

Many French people in the nineteenth century still understood their national origins according to the schema laid out by Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722) in the early eighteenth century. The aristocratic Boulainvilliers asserted that the Old Regime's Second Estate directly descended from the Frankish conquerors of the Celtic Gauls, themselves ancestors of the subordinated Third Estate.<sup>224</sup> This supposed genealogy buttressed nobles' claim to authority at a moment when it was deeply threatened by monarchical centralization, the Military Revolution, and emerging capitalism.<sup>225</sup> It also superimposed race on class, differentiating the Estates through ethnic background as well as social position. In his transformative 1789 pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?*, the abbé Sieyès turned this notion on its head. He maintained that the Gauls – and therefore their modern-day heirs, the commoners – were the true people of France, while the Frankish nobles were merely parasitic interlopers. This narrative of France's dual origins,

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<sup>224</sup> Harold A. Ellis, "Genealogy, History, and Aristocratic Reaction in Early Eighteenth-Century France: The Case of Henri de Boulainvilliers," *The Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 2 (June 1986): 414-451.

<sup>225</sup> See Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. William Doyle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Jay Smith, *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France, 1600-1789* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Chad Denton, *Decadence, Radicalism, and the Early Modern French Nobility: The Enlightened and the Depraved* (Lexington Books: 2016).

Germanic and Celtic, was generally adopted throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>226</sup> Indeed, Sieyès' valorization of the Gauls helped inspire a wave of "Celtomania."<sup>227</sup> However, as I will show, Old Norse scholars sought to rebrand the Germanic Franks as Asian Aryans through recourse to medieval documents.

The colorful Franco-German archeologist Maximilien de Ring (1799-1873) took up the Aryan hypothesis in order to advocate for the ethnic unity of the French, Germans, and Scandinavians.<sup>228</sup> Ring was born in French-controlled Bonn to an Alsatian colonel of Swedish heritage. After marrying the Baroness d'Ulm d'Erbach, he moved to Bischeim in Alsace, where he resided until his death. Ring published prolifically on German pre-modern history and belonged to several learned societies in France, including the Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques and the Société pour la conservation des monuments historiques d'Alsace. He was an active contributor to the *Revue d'Alsace* and the *Messanger des sciences historiques de Gand*. His intersecting French, German, Swedish, and aristocratic identities fundamentally shaped his posture towards Europe's distant past.

In his concise 1854 volume *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga et sur les trois classes de la société germanique*, Ring translated and glossed the *Rígsþula*, a section of the Poetic Edda.<sup>229</sup> In

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<sup>226</sup> Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 20-21.

<sup>227</sup> Michael Dietler, "Our Ancestors the Gauls: Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe," *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (September 1994): 584-605; Claude-Gilbert Dubois, "« Nos ancêtres les Gaulois » : un élément de construction identitaire devenu stéréotype," in *Stéréotypes culturels et constructions identitaires*, ed. Florent Kohler (Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2007): 101-114; Alexis Léonard, "« Nos ancêtres les Gaulois » : la celtomanie en France," in *Fantasmagories du Moyen Âge : Entre médiéval et moyen-âgeux*, eds. Élodie Burle-Errecade and Valérie Naudet (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2010): 183-190.

<sup>228</sup> For Ring's biography, see Louis Vivien de Saint-Martin, "Nécrologie," in *L'Année géographique*, vol. 12 (Paris: Librairie Hachette et. Cie, 1873), 483-484; Édouard Sitzmann, ed., *Dictionnaire de biographie des hommes célèbres de l'Alsace : depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours* (Rixheim: Imprimerie F. Sutter & Cie, 1909-1910), s.v. "Ring (de), Bernard-Jacques-Joseph-Maximilien-Ferdinand"; Martine François, "Ring, Maximilien de," *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, École nationale des chartes* (March 29, 2010) [cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=102946](http://cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=102946)

<sup>229</sup> Maximilien de Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga et sur les trois classes de la société germanique* (Paris: B. Duprat, 1854).

these verses, the god Rig (identified with Heimdall) visits in turn three human couples and impregnates the wives, named Great-Grandmother, Grandmother, and Mother. Through them, Rig becomes the progenitor of the three Norse social strata: thrall (serf), karl (freeman), and jarl (aristocrat). Working from Peter Andreas Munch's 1847 edition of the Edda, Ring printed the original Old Norse text of the *Rígsþula* opposite a French translation on facing pages, along with an extended introduction and interpretation.<sup>230</sup>

Like Eckstein and Ampère, Ring endeavored to read between the lines of an Old Norse document to recover the forgotten history of the ancient Germanic tribes that settled modern Scandinavia. He embraced the nascent hypothesis that in the distant past a population “from the high plateaus of Asia” travelled west and “first settled in the Caucuses” before “separating into two great societies, of which one, by the North, went to the coasts of Norway and Helsingborg.”<sup>231</sup> The other, southern branch moved into Germany.<sup>232</sup> Among this southern branch, Ring included the Franks, Salians and Ribuarrians, who had been celebrated since early modern times as the originators of the French nation.<sup>233</sup> They swept into Gaul and established themselves as masters of the land.<sup>234</sup> Ring asserted that the Scandinavians, on the one hand, and the French and Germans, on the other, had originally shared a single culture carried out of Asia, but this was preserved longer in northern Europe where contact with Celts and Christians was

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<sup>230</sup> P. A. Munch, *Den ældre Edda. Samling af norrøne oldkvad, indeholdende Nordens ældste Gudeog Helte-sagn* (Christiania: 1847), 62-66.

<sup>231</sup> “Partis, en effet, d’un centre commun, des hauts plateaux de l’Asie, sur la trace des Aries, des Ibères, des Celtes Kimriques et Galles, et des autres peuples qui les précédèrent dans leur migration ; assis d’abord sur le Caucase, comme nous l’indiquent leurs mythes, et ensuite, au nord de cette chaîne de montagnes, dans les vastes plaines où apparut ensuite le nom des Roxolans, ils se séparèrent en deux grandes Sociétés, dont l’une, par le Septentrion, vint se fixer sur les côtes de la Norvège et sur celles de l’Helsingjabotn.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 3-4.

<sup>232</sup> “L’autre, pénétrant à travers les plaines boisées jusque dans le cœur de l’Europe, se partagea, selon l’antique tradition du Sud, l’immense territoire qui s’étend depuis l’Eyrstrasalt ou la Baltique jusqu’au cours du Danube. Ce sont les tribus appartenant à cette dernière grande famille qui peuplèrent la Germanie proprement dite.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 3-4.

<sup>233</sup> Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 81, 109-110.

<sup>234</sup> Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 64, 100-101.

more limited.<sup>235</sup> Consequently, Ring believed that the Poetic Edda, compiled in thirteenth-century Iceland, offered a reliable window into the world of fifth-century France and Germany.<sup>236</sup>

According to Ring's interpretation of the *Rígsþula*, the Celt was the indigenous inhabitant of Europe, dark-complexioned and living in brutish squalor. When the progenitors of the Germanic tribes migrated out of Asia, they brought the karl, the clean-living and enterprising yeoman. From this population, and superior to it, emerged the jarl, the pinnacle of social evolution: "In the *Rígsþula*, the jarl is begotten last by the god Rig. In giving him Mother for mother, the poet evidently wanted to symbolize the most recent caste, that which extended his aristocratic power over the other two castes of karl and thrall, or free farmer and serf."<sup>237</sup>

Ring used the imagined past he traced in the *Rígsþula* not only to bring together the various nations that made up his personal identity, but also to legitimate a steep class hierarchy that justified his aristocratic privilege. Placing the *Rígsþula* at the core of European history naturalized stark nineteenth-century social divisions by rooting them in the deep past. Ring described the three classes fathered by the Norse god Rig as destined by birth to their stations. The thrall was "ugly, broken by work, dark, as if of a foreign origin," a miserable peon barely within the bounds of society.<sup>238</sup> The karl was a hearty and industrious "free peasant, proprietor of the land he cultivates, strong and tall, born from a mother cleanly put together."<sup>239</sup> Finally, the jarl was "handsome, vigorous, but arrogant, of a shape that announced noble origins... generous

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<sup>235</sup> Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 2.

<sup>236</sup> Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 4-5.

<sup>237</sup> "Le Jarl, dans la Rigsmal-Saga, fut enfanté le dernier par le dieu Rig. En lui donnant Moder pour mère, le poète a évidemment voulu symboliser la caste la plus récente, celle qui étendit son pouvoir aristocratique sur les deux autres castes du Karl et du Træl, ou du cultivateur libre et du serf." Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 74.

<sup>238</sup> "Le Træl ou serf, laid, courbé par le travail, au teint noir, comme s'il était d'origine étrangère, pauvrement vêtu et vivant sous une misérable hutte." Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 51-52.

<sup>239</sup> "Le Karl ou paysan libre, propriétaire de la terre qu'il cultive, fort et bien pris dans sa taille, né d'une mère proprement mise, et qui déjà est entourée de quelque chose de plus que des simples ustensiles du ménage." Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 51-52.

to prodigality, and prefers the sword to the plow.”<sup>240</sup> Ring asserted that these “castes of the ancient German constitution” obtained until the Revolution’s “bloody political upheavals at the end of the eighteenth century,” which the aristocratic Ring of course abhorred.<sup>241</sup>

Ring merged this just-so story of social hierarchy with Henri de Boulainvilliers’ eighteenth-century explanation of French national origins. Ring returned implicitly to Boulainvilliers’ valorization of the Franks compared to the Gauls. He stated that, following the Frankish conquest of Gaul, “the primitive inhabitants... were included in the distribution of land made to the great families, and according to the Germanic constitution... were treated simply as vassals, mainmortables, or serfs. This is what the poet [of *Rígsþula*] seems to have wanted to symbolize when he made Rig enter the cottage of Great-Grandmother and, disguised, father the lowliest class of Germanic society.”<sup>242</sup> In other words, Ring believed the *Rígsþula* allegorized the subjugation of Celtic peoples like the Gauls by Germanic peoples like the Franks: “among the Germans, the slave was always taken from a vanquished people; and it seems that next to the blond hair of the jarl, one must see a foreigner in the thrall, swarthy and dark-skinned.”<sup>243</sup> Ring thereby reversed Sieyès’ designation of the Frank as foreigner and the Gaul as native. The Gauls were always and forever foreigners, even in their own land, because as Celts they did not belong to the superior Germanic ruling class. Ring even carved out an explanation for the dual nature of the Gallic Third Estate, split between rural laborers and urban dwellers: “In Gaul, there were

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<sup>240</sup> “Le Jarl enfin, beau, vigoureux, mais arrogant, aux formes qui annoncent la noblesse d’origine, et qui, entouré du luxe et du superflu, est généreux jusqu’à la prodigalité, et préfère à la charrue les armes.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigismaal-saga*, 51-52.

<sup>241</sup> “De castes que l’ancienne constitution germanique avait provoqué.” “Les secousses politiques et sanglantes de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigismaal-saga*, 120.

<sup>242</sup> “Les habitants primitifs... furent compris dans la distribution du sol faite aux grandes familles, et selon la constitution germanique... furent traités en simples vassaux, en mainmortables ou en serfs. C’est ce que semble avoir voulu symboliser le poète, lorsqu’il fait entrer Rig dans la chaumière habitée par la bisaïeule, et que, sous une forme voilée, il fait naître de son commerce avec elle la classe la plus infime de la société germanique.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigismaal-saga*, 64.

<sup>243</sup> “L’esclave, chez le Germain, était toujours pris chez le peuple vaincu ; et il semble qu’à côté de la chevelure blonde du Jarl, on doive voir un étranger dans le *Træl*, au teint noir et basané.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigismaal-saga*, 55.

cities. These places, surrounded by walls, became the refuge of those who had formed the most elevated class of the country. They were able to live there independently for some time, but the conquerors, who disdained these walled fortifications, made them pay dearly for this independence. It was in these cities that the bourgeoisie formed, a class unknown to the German.”<sup>244</sup> Ring portrayed the French bourgeoisie, ostensibly responsible for the Revolution of 1789, as a lesser Celtic creation that could never exist among the Germanic rural aristocracy.

Ring read the *Rígsþula* through the lens of nineteenth-century theories of unilinear evolution. Before Charles Darwin suggested that species changed over time in response to the pressures of natural selection, anthropologists theorized the unilinear evolution of human societies. According to this framework, though different societies would progress at different speeds, they would all move through the same benchmarks of supposed development and improvement, from less to more complex or sophisticated.<sup>245</sup> Following this interpretive pattern, Ring wrote that “one is led to believe that in making the thrall born of Great-Grandmother, the karl of Grandmother, and the jarl of Mother, [the poet] had in view to symbolize the diverse superpositions of society.”<sup>246</sup> In other words, the Edda represented in metaphor the successive implantation of different populations in a single territory and the associated development of ever greater degrees of social hierarchy: “the race of the thrall, who, as we have remarked, was distinguished by his foreign physiognomy, would have therefore been the oldest, and would have

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<sup>244</sup> “Dans la Gaule, existaient des villes, ces lieux, ceints de murailles, devinrent le refuge de ceux qui avaient formé la classe la plus élevée du pays. Ils purent pendant quelque temps y vivre indépendants, quoique les conquérants, qui méprisaient ces enceintes murées, leur firent payer cher cette indépendance. Ce fut dans ces villes que se forma la bourgeoisie, classe inconnue du Germain.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 100-101.

<sup>245</sup> Alan Barnard, “Changing Perspectives on Evolution,” in *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 28-47.

<sup>246</sup> “En suivant le vieux récit du poète, on est porté à croire qu’en faisant naître le Træl de la bisaieule, le Karl de l’aïeule et le Jarl de la mère, il avait eu en vue de symboliser les diverses superpositions de la Société.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmal-saga*, 54.



been subjugated by that of the karl, on which in turn [the race] of the jarl, the youngest, would have imposed his power.”<sup>247</sup>

The Anglo-French historian Gustave Masson, writing for the British periodical *Notes and Queries*, received Ring’s *Essais* enthusiastically.<sup>248</sup> Masson opined that “the commentary he [Ring] has added to his reprint of the Rigsmaal-Saga seems to us particularly valuable, as illustrating the political condition of the Teutonic race towards the beginning of the medieval period.”<sup>249</sup> Masson agreed with Ring that the *Rígsþula* afforded modern readers an honest sketch of social conditions during Europe’s Migration Period, noting that “M. de Ring proves very clearly that it [the *Rígsþula*] embraces in a true, though necessarily concise manner, the leading facts which historians and original documents have preserved respecting the constitutions of Teutonic society.”<sup>250</sup> Masson called “M. de Ring’s *Essais sur la Rigsmaal-Saga*... a work of much interest to those who are engaged in researches on the early history of the Teutonic races.”<sup>251</sup>

However, the most enthusiastic advocate of the cultural proximity between the French and the Norse was undoubtedly Pierre-Eugène Beauvois (1835-1912).<sup>252</sup> Comprising more than 80 articles, 4 books, and 45 translations, Eugène Beauvois’ scholarship collectively built on a

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<sup>247</sup> “La race du *Træl*, qui, comme nous l’avons fait remarquer, se distinguait par sa physionomie étrangère, aurait donc été la plus ancienne, et aurait été subjuguée par celle du *Karl*, à laquelle à son tour celle du *Jarl*, qui est la plus jeune, aurait imposé son pouvoir.” Ring, *Essais sur la Rigsmaal-saga*, 54.

<sup>248</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 37 (Smith, Elder & Co, 1885-1900), s.v. “Masson, George Joseph Gustave.”

<sup>249</sup> Gustave Masson, “Monthly Feuilleton on French Books,” *Notes and Queries: A Medium of Inter-Communication for Literary Men, Artists, Antiquaries, Genealogists, Etc.* (September 1, 1860), 179.

<sup>250</sup> Masson, “Monthly Feuilleton on French Books,” 179.

<sup>251</sup> Masson, “Monthly Feuilleton on French Books,” 179.

<sup>252</sup> For Beauvois’ biography, see Bernard Bouley, “Un Bourguignon en Kabylie : Eugène Beauvois,” *Mémoires / Société d’archéologie de Beaune* 74 (1993): 84-90; Kristjan Ahronson, *Into the Ocean: Vikings, Irish, and Environmental Change in Iceland and the North* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 8-37; Hervé Mouillebouche, “Les archives d’un précurseur des études nordiques : Eugène Beauvois,” in *Châteaux et palais de la Bourgogne médiévale : recueil d’articles*, 482-487 (Chagny: CECAB, 2019); “Décès d’Eugène Beauvois, érudit,” *Académie des sciences, arts et belles lettres de Dijon* <https://www.academie-sabl-dijon.org/celebration/deces-deugene-beauvois-erudit/>, accessed 9 December 2021.

single premise: the French were, at their core, a Scandinavian people. While later in his career he launched off from this foundational assumption to make the arguments about American colonization which I will scrutinize in Chapter 3, his early publications before the Franco-Prussian War focused on proving France's Norse connections. Beauvois relied on a credulous reading of the medieval Icelandic sagas to assert that the two groups had only diverged relatively late in Antiquity when part of the Burgundian tribe left the North to move into Gaul. Based on this shared ethnic past, Beauvois claimed the saga heroes for French national culture.



Fig. 2.2. François Emile Graffe, Portrait of Eugène Beauvois for the Société de géographie de Paris, 1882. Photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Pierre-Eugène Beauvois was born in 1835 in the small village of Corberon in Burgundy to a well-to-do family with a long history of public service. After completing his education at the local primary school and the pensionnat Gautret in the neighboring town of Nuits-Saint-Georges, he travelled to the regional capital of Dijon for lycée. He earned his law degree in Paris in 1856, and his family hoped he would pursue a career as a notary. However, he was enthralled by the history of the ancient world, and instead he embarked on a career as a historian, linguist, and anthropologist, while still finding time to serve as mayor of Corberon between 1861 and 1875.

In complete contrast to Maximilien de Ring and Arthur de Gobineau, Beauvois aligned himself with Paul Henri Mallet (see Chapter 1) and drew a direct line from the ancient Celts to the medieval Norse. He also believed their origins lay slightly further west, in Anatolia rather than India. In his 1868 tract *Origine de Burgondes*, Beauvois argued that the Franks, Burgundians, Normans, and Bretons arose from the same migratory Celtic tribe that in ancient times had also settled modern-day Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.<sup>253</sup> He located all of these nations' ethnic origins in the Cimmerians of Crimea and the Eneti of Asia Minor.<sup>254</sup> The Eneti are a possibly apocryphal group known only from scattered ancient sources. According to Livy, they lived in Trojan country, and Homer claimed they fought alongside the Trojans against the Greeks. Strabo reported that they had disappeared by his day.<sup>255</sup> Beauvois posited an explanation for this disappearance. He claimed that after being defeated in battle by King Halyatte of Lydia, the Cimmerians and Eneti fled together into Thrace. As they continued north along the Carpathian Mountains, other tribes joined them, notably the Ambrones, Sidones, Scirii, and Gothines.<sup>256</sup> These amalgamated Celts progressed along their northward trajectory and began to settle en route. The Gothines established footholds in Finland, the Danish islands, and Götaland in southern Sweden; the Sidones in northern Sweden; the Scirii in southern Norway; and the Eneti in northern Norway. Other Eneti kept travelling west, eventually putting down roots in Armorica, modern-day Brittany.<sup>257</sup> Some "Eneto-Cimmerians" settled in Schleswig, at

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<sup>253</sup> Eugène Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes* (Dijon: Lamarche, 1869).

<sup>254</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 3.

<sup>255</sup> My sincere thanks to Joseph Holwell for his assistance in unraveling the Classical references here. Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 2, trans. Samuel Butler (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1898); Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, Book 12, Chapter 3, ed. H. L. Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1924); Jinyu Liu, "The Era of Patavium Again," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (2007): 281-289.

<sup>256</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 4.

<sup>257</sup> "La bande des Hénètes occidentaux qui avait franchi l'Elbe suivit le littoral de la mer du Nord, puis celui de la Manche, jusqu'à ce que l'Océan Atlantique mît un terme à ses longues pérégrinations : elle s'arrêta dans la péninsule Armoricaïne, sur les bords de la Vilaine. Vanes, cité des Vénètes de la Gaule, s'appelle en breton Wenet

the mouth of the Elbe.<sup>258</sup> Two centuries later, they ventured further into what would become Belgium; Beauvois attributed this journey to a desire to reconnect with their cousins, the Eneti of Gaul.<sup>259</sup> Some of these migrants continued all the way into southern Gaul, making their homes in the Cévennes Mountains. Like Snorri Sturluson, Beauvois claimed that this tribe's "intellectual superiority meant they were regarded as gods rather than mortals" and Odinic paganism arose from worship of an actual Celtic chief variously called Gwydion, Godan, Vodan, or Odin, and his followers the Ases (Asgardians).<sup>260</sup> Beauvois adamantly affirmed that the Eneto-Cimmerians gave rise to the "principal peoples who supplanted the masters of the ancient world and founded the modern nations" of France and Scandinavia.<sup>261</sup> Beauvois' superior eastern whites who birthed the Norse were therefore Celtic, rather than conquerors of the Celts.

Beauvois dedicated especial attention in *Origine de Burgondes* to the settlement of Norway. He drew on the Eddas, the *Flateyjarbok*, and the folkloric investigations of Jacob Grimm to assert that the Celts who conquered Norway were also the forebears of the Burgundians, who gave their name to Beauvois' home region in eastern France.<sup>262</sup> According to Beauvois, the rulers of Norway came out of the Gothines of Finland.<sup>263</sup> Two brothers, Nor and Gor, led the invasion, their exploits preserved in the *Fundinn Noregr* and the *Hversu Noregr bygdist*.<sup>264</sup> These Gothines settled around the parish of Borgund and took on the name

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ou Gwenet ; Belle Isle, située en face de la côte qu'ils occupaient, portait autrefois le nom de Vindilis (île des Vendiles)." Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 5-6.

<sup>258</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 5, 7.

<sup>259</sup> "Ils voulaient sans doute se rapprocher des Hénètes... de la Gaule." Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 7.

<sup>260</sup> "Leur supériorité intellectuelle les fit regarder comme des dieux plutôt que comme des mortels." Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 9-10.

<sup>261</sup> "Des principaux peuples qui ont supplanté les maîtres de l'ancien monde et fondé les nations modernes." Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 11.

<sup>262</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 14-18.

<sup>263</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 5, 21, 34.

<sup>264</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 15-18.

Burgundians.<sup>265</sup> Beauvois maintained that this dynasty also gave rise to the Franks and, by way of Gor's descendant Earl Rognvald of Møre, Duke Rollo and his Normans.<sup>266</sup> He insisted that “as the princes of the Franks and Burgundians originated in Norway... *the two peoples came from the same source.*”<sup>267</sup>

Beauvois particularly sought to claim Eckstein's Western Cycle of medieval epics for France. He maintained that what he called “the Franco-Burgundian legend” furnished “proof of the Scandinavian origins of the Franks and the Burgundians.”<sup>268</sup> He insisted that this legend “sheds an unexpected light on the origin and primitive history of our ancestors the Franks and the Burgundians” and “reconciles [their] traditions of a Trojan origin with their memory of a Scandinavian origin.”<sup>269</sup> He even believed it explained the genesis of such emblems of essential Frenchness as Salic law and the fleur-de-lys.<sup>270</sup> In 1867, he dedicated an entire book, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes aux IIIe et IVe siècles*, to translating the three main sources of the Western Cycle – Völsunga Saga, Vilkina Saga, and the Nibelungenlied – into French and demonstrating their genuine historicity. Through what might easily be considered a tendentious reading, he sought to prove that the Western Cycle absolutely verified the shared heritage of the French and the Scandinavians.

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<sup>265</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 27-28. See also Laurent Ripart, “Les Burgondes et l'érudition régionale de langue française (années 1830-années 1920),” *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyen Âge* (École française de Rome, 2007): 305-321.

<sup>266</sup> Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 5, 18, 38.

<sup>267</sup> Italics my own. “Or, comme les princes des Francs et des Burgondes étaient originaires de la Norvège, nous ne sommes pas surpris de trouver dans le Hanovre et les Pays Bas, par où les premiers ont passé, des bractéates, sortes de médailles, ornées de runes anciennes, et, en Bourgogne, l'alphabet runique ancien gravé sur une boucle de ceinturon que M. H. Baudot a recueillie à Charnay. Que cette boucle provienne d'un guerrier franc ou burgonde, ce qu'il est difficile de savoir, peu nous importe ici, puisque les deux peuples avaient puisé à la même source.” Beauvois, *Origine des Burgondes*, 38.

<sup>268</sup> “La preuve de l'origine scandinave des Francs et des Burgondes.” Eugène Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes aux IIIe et IVe siècles* (Paris: Agence générale de librairie, 1867), vii.

<sup>269</sup> “Répand une lumière inattendue sur l'origine et l'histoire primitive de nos ancêtres les Francs et les Burgondes.” “Il met d'accord les traditions des Francs et des Burgondes sur leur origine troyenne avec leurs réminiscences d'une origine scandinave.” Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes*, vi-vii.

<sup>270</sup> Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes*, vii.

For Beauvois, Sigurd Fafnirsbane, the hero of the Western Cycle, served as a crucial hinge in that shared heritage. Sigurd's storied exploits were key to Beauvois' lionization of France's supposed Norse past. He concluded the introduction to his *Histoire légendaire* by exhorting his fellow countrymen to preserve a national cult of the famed dragon-slayer:

Let us raise the statue of Sigurd next to that of Vercingetorix. It is good to show that the Franks were worthy of uniting with the Gauls to give birth to the most vigorous nation that ever existed. [The Gauls] produced a worthy adversary for the greatest Roman captain [Caesar]; [the Franks] produced a hero admired throughout the Germanic world. Honor therefore the Volsungs, the founders of our nation! Glory above all to Sigurd, that icon of loyalty, heroism, and magnanimity, whose name shall be immortal!<sup>271</sup>

Beauvois valorized Sigurd as a blueprint for a rejuvenated French manhood. Sigurd was a godlike dragon-slayer remembered across the centuries for his strength and courage. Such an illustrious forebear virtually guaranteed French martial prowess and virility. Beauvois also saw Sigurd and his dynasty, the Volsungs, as forefathers of the French nation on par with the iconic Vercingetorix. Indeed, he valorized saga studies as a great patriotic enterprise of excavating France's lost history.

In 1868, Beauvois followed up *Origine des Burgondes* and *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes* with "Une pénalité des lois Gombettes et les lumières qu'elle jette sur l'origine des Burgondes" in *Mémoires de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Chalon-sur-Saône*.<sup>272</sup> This article aimed, in the words of reviewer Rudolphe Reuss, to "demonstrate that the Burgundians are a Scandinavian nation."<sup>273</sup> Beauvois began by identifying a provision in the *Lex*

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<sup>271</sup> "Relevons la statue de Sigurd pour faire pendant à celle de Vercingetorix. Il est bon de montrer que les Francs étaient dignes de s'unir aux Gaulois pour donner naissance à la nation la plus vigoureuse qui ait jamais existé ; si les uns ont produit un digne adversaire de plus grand capitaine romain, les autres ont produit un héros qui a fait l'admiration du monde germanique. Honneur donc aux Voelsungs, les fondateurs de notre nation ! Gloire surtout à Sigurd, ce type de loyauté, d'héroïsme et de magnanimité, dont le nom doit être immortel !" Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes*, viii.

<sup>272</sup> Eugene Beauvois, "Une pénalité des lois Gombettes et les lumières qu'elle jette sur l'origine des Burgondes," *Mémoires de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Chalon-sur-Saône* (1868): 75-85.

<sup>273</sup> "M. Beauvois, le savant collaborateur de cette Revue, n'essaye pas pour la première fois de démontrer que les Burgondes sont une nation Scandinave ; on a déjà rendu compte ici de son volumineux ouvrage sur *l'Histoire*

Burgundionum, the law code of the medieval Burgundians supposedly promulgated by King Gundobad (452-516), which required wives found guilty of infidelity to be drowned in a marsh.<sup>274</sup> While Beauvois humbly admitted that no archeological evidence of this gruesome punishment had ever been unearthed in Burgundy proper, he went on to enumerate nine watery grave sites in Jutland, the Danish islands, and East Frisia containing the corpses of women interred in bogs, which he took as proof of the application of the Lex Burgundionum against adulteresses in these regions.<sup>275</sup> He also turned to saga evidence. He noted that Æsa, the unfaithful wife of Hjoerleif the Polygamous, king of Haurdaland and Rogaland, is sentenced to drown in a swamp in the Saga of Half and his Heroes.<sup>276</sup> Beauvois also translated a passage from the Poetic Edda in which a servant woman is drowned in a bog after she falsely accuses her mistress of infidelity.<sup>277</sup> Certain sagas additionally describe Gunnhild, “Mother of Kings” and widow of Erik Bloodaxe, being drowned by the king of Denmark, though in a surprisingly lucid moment of skepticism Beauvois rejected the truth of this event on the basis that “the best Icelandic and Norwegian sagas, as well as the Danish chroniclers, abstain from mentioning this tragic death; moreover it is not at all believable that a prudent and cunning queen like Gunnhild would fall into such a rude trap.”<sup>278</sup> Beauvois argued that the Burgundians “brought [the penalty in question] from the country that was their cradle” in Norway.<sup>279</sup> He concluded his article by

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*légendaire des Franks et des Burgondes* (v. Rev. Crit. 1868, t. I, art. 7). Il aborde ici cette question favorite d'un autre côté et s'efforce de prouver cette thèse par de nouveaux arguments.” Rodolphe Reuss, Review of “Une pénalité des lois Gombette et les lumières qu'elle jette sur l'origine des Burgondes” by Eugène Beauvois, *Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature* 4, no. 1 (Paris: Librairie A. Franck, 1869), 290.

<sup>274</sup> Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombettes,” 75.

<sup>275</sup> Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombettes,” 76-79.

<sup>276</sup> Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombettes,” 81-82.

<sup>277</sup> Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombettes,” 84-85.

<sup>278</sup> “Les meilleures sagas islandaises et norvégiennes, ainsi que tous les chroniqueurs danois, s’abstiennent de mentionner cette mort tragique ; de plus il n’est aucunement vraisemblable qu’une reine prudente et rusée, comme l’était Gunnhilde, soit tombée dans le piège grossier que lui aurait tendu l’ennemi déclaré de sa famille, et qu’elle soit allée l’épouser à l’âge de plus de soixante-dix ans.” Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombettes,” 77.

<sup>279</sup> “On nous objectera peut-être que Burgondes n’ont jamais occupé le Jutland, ni l’archipel des Beltes, ni la Frise Hanovrienne, que leur influence ne s’est jamais étendue jusqu’en ces contrées, et que par conséquent leur loi n’a pu

forcefully affirming that this combination of archaeological and literary sources “confirms us in our reasoned conviction that the Burgundians originated in Scandinavia, as they themselves still knew in the sixth century.”<sup>280</sup>

Not everyone was convinced by Beauvois’ claim of a Scandinavian background for the French. His argument in “Une pénalité des lois Gombette” proved particularly divisive.<sup>281</sup> On the one hand, Eugène Trutat and Émile Cartailhac avowed themselves totally persuaded by “these irrefutable facts and positive texts.”<sup>282</sup> However, Rudolphe Reuss of the *Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature* could not have been more scathing in his critique of “Une pénalité des lois Gombette.” A Protestant Alsatian historian educated in Germany, Reuss was presumably unsympathetic to Beauvois’ anti-German program. He succinctly summarized Beauvois’ argument:

The *Lex Burgundionum* held that if a woman becomes unfaithful to her husband, she shall be drowned in mud, ‘necetur in luto.’ The bodies of women have recently been found in the swamps and bogs of Denmark, Schleswig, East Frisia, etc.... They are, says M. B., adulterous wives buried and drowned according to Burgundian law; therefore the Burgundians inhabited these countries; therefore they are originally Scandinavian.<sup>283</sup>

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y être appliquée. Nous le concédons volontiers, mais la pénalité en question n’a pas été inventée par les Burgondes ; ils l’ont apportée du pays qui fut leur berceau et qui renferme encore trois localités du nom de Borgund.” Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombettes,” 80.

<sup>280</sup> “Nous confirmer dans notre conviction raisonnée que les Burgondes étaient originaires de la Scandinavie, comme ils le savaient encore au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle.” Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombettes,” 85.

<sup>281</sup> Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombette,” 75-85.

<sup>282</sup> “Ces faits irréfragables et ces textes positifs... confirme l’auteur dans sa conviction raisonnée que les Burgondes étaient originaires de la Scandinavie, comme ils le savaient encore au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle (*Hist. Légend.*, p. 474), et qu’ils venaient des deux versants du plateau de Fillafjall en Norvège.” Eugène Trutat and Émile Cartailhac, Review of “Une pénalité des lois Gombette et les lumières qu’elle jette sur l’origine des Burgondes” by Eugène Beauvois, *Matériaux pour l’histoire positive et philosophique de l’homme* 5 (Paris: Ch. Reinwald, 1869), 91.

<sup>283</sup> “La *Lex Burgundionum* porte que si une femme devient infidèle à son mari, elle sera noyée dans la boue, « necetur in luto. » Or dans les derniers temps on a retrouvé dans les marais et les tourbières du Danemark, du Schleswig, de l’Ostfrise, etc., des corps de femme plus ou moins bien conservés, fixés en terre de manière à écarter la possibilité d’une mort accidentelle ou naturelle; ce sont, dit M. B., des femmes adultères enterrées et noyées selon les lois burgondes ; donc les Burgondes ont habité ces contrées; donc ils sont d’origine Scandinave.” Rodolphe Reuss, Review of “Une pénalité des lois Gombette et les lumières qu’elle jette sur l’origine des Burgondes” by Eugène Beauvois, *Revue critique d’histoire et de littérature* 4, no. 1 (Paris: Librairie A. Franck, 1869), 290.



Reuss dismissed this line of reasoning on the basis that all sorts of peoples in all sorts of times and places had executed criminals by drowning; the coincidence of preserved female corpses was no proof of cultural transference.<sup>284</sup> Moreover, Reuss attacked Beauvois' credulous reading of the sagas: "We do not wish to deny absolutely the very weak historical component that may be found in such legends, but in truth nothing authorizes a scrupulous writer to employ such documents with the assurance that M. Beauvois places in them.... In the name of science, such an abuse of mythic legends as the basis of a historic tradition cannot be protested enough."<sup>285</sup>

Reuss even went after Beauvois' genealogy of place-names. In response to Beauvois' argument that the Burgundians derived their demonym from *Burgond* in Scandinavia, Reuss facetiously inquired if "the nine *Villefranches* in our country had the same founders, or if the six *Strasbourgs* situated in France, eastern Prussia, Carinthia, Transylvania, Brandenburg, and the United States had some connection between them?"<sup>286</sup> Though he acknowledged Beauvois' "ingenious wisdom" and "great love of science," he affirmed that "the conclusions of M. Beauvois seem to me totally contrary to historical reality, and I do not believe his theories will obtain the support of many scholars."<sup>287</sup>

Karl Bartsch adopted an comparably skeptical posture towards Beauvois' claims in his review of *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes* for the *Revue critique d'histoire et de*

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<sup>284</sup> Reuss, Review of "Une pénalité des lois Gombette," 290-291.

<sup>285</sup> "Nous ne voulons pas nier absolument la très-faible part historique qui peut se trouver dans de pareilles légendes, mais rien en vérité n'autorise un écrivain scrupuleux à employer de pareils documents avec l'assurance qu'y met M. Beauvois.... On ne peut assez protester au nom de la science même contre un pareil abus des légendes mythiques comme base de la tradition historique." Reuss, Review of "Une pénalité des lois Gombette," 291.

<sup>286</sup> "Les neuf *Villefranche* disséminés dans notre pays ont eu les mêmes fondateurs, ou que les six *Strasbourg* situés en France, dans la Prusse orientale, en Carinthie, en Transylvanie, en Brandebourg et aux États-Unis ont jamais eu quelque liaison entre eux ?" Reuss, Review of "Une pénalité des lois Gombette," 292.

<sup>287</sup> "Je l'avoue, les conclusions de M. Beauvois me paraissent absolument contraires à la réalité historique, et je ne crois pas que ses théories obtiennent l'adhésion de nombreux savants. Il est regrettable de voir tant de sagacité ingénieuse et un si grand amour de la science faire ainsi fausse route, et c'est précisément pour cela que je me suis permis d'attaquer aussi nettement la manière de voir de M. Beauvois. Les travailleurs sérieux sont trop rares en France pour qu'on puisse laisser ainsi l'un d'eux s'égarer en chemin, sans faire un effort sincère pour lui prouver qu'il poursuit ce que l'on croit être un sentier perdu." Reuss, Review of "Une pénalité des lois Gombette," 292.

*littérature* in 1868.<sup>288</sup> Bartsch was a highly respected German historian and philologist who edited a new publication of the *Nibelungenlied* and also studied ancient and medieval France. While praising Beauvois' depth of scholarship, Bartsch took unrelenting aim at his methods and the conclusions to which they led they led him. Bartsch categorically rejected Beauvois' foundational assumption that the sagas and other medieval sources offered an uncorrupted look into the historical past they depicted. Bartsch insisted that such sources were rife with mythology and the adulteration of subsequent centuries. As a result, he denied the scholarly validity of Beauvois' preferred methodology: seeking out homologies between minute details in medieval literature and outside sources in order to assume connections between them. Bartsch maintained that such details were too easily misread or indeed might not be original to the sagas at all. He concluded by affirming that Beauvois' method "is in our eyes more than suspect; it rests on a completely erroneous conception of the historical value of the legends... It is above all dangerous to seek to account for every detail: one risks attributing an excessive value to elements that are far from being original" to the text.<sup>289</sup> He noted that despite "the praise that the care, conscientiousness, and erudition of the author merit, one can only regret to see such effort and science employed to support a thesis that... developed in a single direction and exaggerated as it is, can only lead to unacceptable conclusions."<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Karl Bartsch, Review of Eugène Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes aux IIIe et IVe siècles*, in *Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature* no. 1 (January 4, 1868): 18-23.

<sup>289</sup> "Les exemples que nous avons donnés suffisent à faire comprendre au lecteur la méthode de M. B. Elle est à nos yeux plus que suspecte ; elle repose sur une conception tout à fait erronée de la valeur historique des légendes... Il est surtout dangereux de vouloir rendre compte de tous les détails : on risque trop d'attribuer à des traits qui sont loin d'être primitifs une valeur excessive." Bartsch, Review of Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes*, 22.

<sup>290</sup> "Nous tenons à rappeler les éloges que méritent le soin, la conscience et l'érudition de l'auteur. On ne peut que regretter de voir tant de travail et de science employés à soutenir une thèse qui... développée dans un seul sens et exagérée comme elle l'est, ne pouvait conduire qu'à des conclusions inacceptables." Bartsch, Review of Beauvois, *Histoire légendaire des Francs et des Burgondes*, 23.

Though Ring and Beauvois differed considerably in their perspectives – especially regarding Germany – they joined together in assigning Aryan heritage to modern France, thus endowing it with unimpeachable credentials of whiteness. They deployed the medieval past to chart boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that drew the French towards the Scandinavians and away from other, “lesser” races. The Middle Ages these two writers constructed required a transhistorical global hierarchy that positioned French elites near the top, alongside the blonde, blue-eyed Nordics. This hierarchy acted as a powerful psychological balm at a moment when France’s political situation within Europe was alarmingly precarious. The line drawn between Old Norse literature and modern white supremacy thus passes through French national anxieties at the mid-nineteenth century.

### **Gobineau’s Aryanism: A Product of Old Norse Studies**

In his signature *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853-1855), Gobineau advanced the destructive hypothesis that civilizational decay, a topic of obsessive concern, did not result, as commonly suspected, from “fanaticism, luxury, bad mores... irreligion... the relative merit of governments... environment... [or] Christianity.”<sup>291</sup> These factors were all irrelevant or secondary. Instead, Gobineau alleged, social degeneration originated from the intermingling of “the three great races” – black, yellow, and white – and the many sub-races they encompassed.<sup>292</sup> Gobineau believed that, of all of these, “the Aryan is superior to other men, principally in the measure of his intelligence and energy; and it is by these two faculties that when he manages to vanquish his passions and material needs, he is equally given to achieve an

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<sup>291</sup> “Le fanatisme, le luxe, les mauvaises mœurs... l'irreligion... Le mérite relatif des gouvernements... Des lieux... Le christianisme.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 1, 491.

<sup>292</sup> “Des trois grandes races” Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 1, 492.

infinitely higher morality.”<sup>293</sup> He insisted that the history of Aryan migration, differentiation, and miscegenation “formed the essential part of history... [and] explained a multitude of enigmas heretofore insoluble.”<sup>294</sup> Across the final two volumes of *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1855), Gobineau delved into the Norse mythology recorded in the Eddas in order to trace what he believed to be the Aryans’ ancient migration out of the real-life city of Asgard (which he located in central Russia) into Scandinavia, then Germany, and finally France. Like Snorri Sturluson, he went to great lengths to assure readers that Norse mythology was not naïve invention, but the adulterated transmission of real history.

According to Gobineau, the Aryans originated in India and established themselves in Persia before migrating in waves westward into Europe. The first of these waves were the Illyrians and Thracians.<sup>295</sup> They were followed by the Getae, a portion of whom settled in Scandinavia and interbred with the local populations until they were thoroughly “degraded.”<sup>296</sup> Gobineau believed these fallen Getae nonetheless preserved their impressive Aryan physiques and thus became in later centuries the inspiration for the Jotun, or frost giant antagonists of the Eddas. However, Gobineau was most interested in the last supposed wave of Aryans, the Sarmatians, whom he claimed moved out of Asia around 1000 BCE and were consequently “the purest” of the Aryan groups in Europe.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> “L’Aryan est donc supérieur aux autres hommes, principalement dans la mesure de son intelligence et de son énergie ; et c’est par ces deux facultés que lorsqu’il parvient à vaincre ses passions et ses besoins matériels, il lui est également donné d’arriver à une moralité infiniment plus haute.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 36.

<sup>294</sup> “J’insiste d’autant plus fortement sur les faits de ce genre, qu’ils forment la partie essentielle de l’histoire, qu’ils expliquent une multitude d’énigmes, jusqu’ici insolubles.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 37.

<sup>295</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 3, 396.

<sup>296</sup> “Les plus dégradés de tous les Gètes.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 3, 398.

<sup>297</sup> “Les derniers venus des Ariens, au X<sup>e</sup> siècle avant notre ère, et conséquemment les plus purs.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 3, 416.

Gobineau alleged that the Roxolani, a Sarmatian subgroup, inspired the mythology recorded in the Eddas. In his telling, during the eighth century BCE, competition from surrounding populations forced the Roxolani north-west into central Russia. There, on the eastern bank of the Don River, they founded the empire of Gardarike described in the Eddas.<sup>298</sup> Their capital, says Gobineau, was “Asgard, the city of the Ases or the Aryans,” located near the rising of the Volga and decorated in the style of their Indian homeland.<sup>299</sup> In the sixth century CE, “despite the courage and energy of its founders,” Asgard fell, and the Roxolani again took to the road in their chariots.<sup>300</sup> Gobineau believed that Snorri Sturluson’s Ynglinga Saga, which traces the history of the royal houses of Sweden and Norway back to their original descent from Odin, allegorized the Aryans’ initial flight west from Asgard and Gardarike in Russia.<sup>301</sup> A millennium after abandoning Asgard, their descendants would honor their forebears as divinities and remember their stronghold as the realm of the gods.<sup>302</sup>

Gobineau maintained that, after the loss of Asgard, the Roxolani settled Scandinavia and divided into two branches.<sup>303</sup> The first branch put down roots in Pomerania and southern Sweden, becoming the original Aryan mariners. The second branch built their new homes in Norway. Gobineau insisted that when the Greek explorer Pytheas of Massalia visited in the fourth century BCE, these two “Scandinavian nations” had only just established themselves.<sup>304</sup> Gobineau dutifully transcribed the Norse beliefs on creation, Valhalla, and Ragnarök from the

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<sup>298</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 3, 421-422.

<sup>299</sup> “Asgard, la ville des Ases ou des Ariens.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 3, 421.

<sup>300</sup> “Il fut renversé vers le IV<sup>e</sup>, malgré le courage et l'énergie de ses fondateurs, et ceux-ci, forcés encore une fois de céder à la fortune qui les conduisait à travers tant de catastrophes à l'empire de l'univers, remirent leurs familles et leurs biens dans leurs chariots.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 3, 423.

<sup>301</sup> Arthur de Gobineau, *Histoire d'Ottar Jarl, pirate norvégien, conquérant du pays de Bray en Normandie et de sa descendance* (Paris: Didier, 1879), 3-4.

<sup>302</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 40-41.

<sup>303</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 1-33; Gobineau, *Histoire d'Ottar Jarl*, 3-4.

<sup>304</sup> “Nations scandinaves.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 3.

Eddas into his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*.<sup>305</sup> He argued that the cosmic geography described there simply recorded the historical placement of Scandinavia.<sup>306</sup> The realm of primordial ice (Niflheim) represented the Arctic; the realm of primordial fire (Muspelheim) represented the distant tropics. To the east was Jotunheim, land of frost giants, whom Gobineau took for the “mixed Getae” who had settled along the Baltic. To the west was Svartalfheim, land of the “black dwarves,” whom Gobineau took for Celts – unlike some of his contemporaries (including Beauvois), Gobineau decidedly did not succumb to Paul Henri Mallet’s error of confounding the Norse and the Celts (see Chapter 1). In Gobineau’s telling, the Jotuns/Getae and dwarves/Celts were of course all threats subdued by the superior Aryans.

According to Gobineau, the eternally energetic Roxolani did not remain confined to the Scandinavian peninsulas, but spread throughout Europe. In the first and second centuries BCE, Scandinavian Aryans moved into modern-day France, explaining why Julius Caesar found Gaul so difficult to conquer.<sup>307</sup> France – and the rest of continental Europe – then received another fresh infusion of Aryan blood during the Migration Period in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. Although Aryan Germanic tribes had long been assimilating to Rome as auxiliaries and even citizens, “it was not to them that was promised the glory of regenerating the world and constituting the new society... They were already too affected by the Celtic and Slavic mixtures to accomplish a task that demanded such youth and originality of the [racial] instincts.... They had let themselves be won over by Roman corruption.”<sup>308</sup> Instead, that “glory” of regeneration would be reserved for Scandinavia. Gobineau alleged that “to find the true source of the decisive

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<sup>305</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 38-48.

<sup>306</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 46-48.

<sup>307</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 6-7, 11.

<sup>308</sup> “Ce n'était pas à eux qu'était promise la gloire de régénérer le monde et de constituer la société nouvelle. Tout énergiques qu'ils étaient, comparativement aux hommes de la république, ils étaient déjà trop affectés par les mélanges celtiques et slaves pour accomplir une tâche qui exigeait tant de jeunesse et d'originalité dans les instincts.... Ils s'étaient laissé gagner par la corruption romaine.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 18.

invasions that created the germ of modern society, one must go to the Baltic coast and the Scandinavian peninsula. Behold the country that the most ancient chroniclers justly named, and with ardent enthusiasm, the source of peoples, the matrix of nations,” the *vagina gentium*.<sup>309</sup>

Among the tribes to emerge from this womb were the Franks, ruled by the royal Merovingians. Gobineau maintained that the Merovingians were originally Norwegian and led their followers out of the Baltic region into Gaul.<sup>310</sup> Despite an acknowledged lack of evidence, he emphatically insisted that the Merovingians traced their lineage back to Asgard: “none of the divine genealogies that we possess today mention them or permit us to connect them to Odin. Nonetheless, this was an essential circumstance among the Germanic nations to establish royal right.... Seeing the uncontested preeminence of the Merovingians among the Franks and the glory of that nation, their divine origin, their Odinic descent cannot be doubted.”<sup>311</sup> Gobineau assumed the family trees linking the Merovingians to the gods of Asgard must simply have been lost to time.

Unlike Ring and Beauvois, Gobineau did not use the Aryans’ supposed migration into France to sustain France’s ethnic worthiness. At first, he claimed, the Aryan had “so faithfully conserved the instincts and primitive notions of the culture belonging to his race,” that he carried them fundamentally unchanged from “the Caspian and even the Euphrates” all the way to “the waters of the Sund [between Denmark and Sweden], and later those of the Somme, the Meuse,

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<sup>309</sup> “Pour trouver le foyer véritable des invasions décisives qui créèrent le germe de la société moderne, il faut se transporter sur la côte baltique et dans la péninsule scandinave. Voilà cette contrée que les plus anciens chroniqueurs nomment justement, et avec un ardent enthousiasme, la source des peuples, la matrice des nations.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 18.

<sup>310</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 25-27.

<sup>311</sup> “Aucune des généalogies divines que l'on possède aujourd'hui ne les mentionne, et ne permet de les rattacher à Odin, circonstance essentielle cependant, au gré des nations germaniques, pour fonder les droits à la royauté.... il n'y a pas à douter, en voyant la prééminence incontestée des Mérovinges parmi les Franks, et la gloire de cette nation, que l'origine divine, la descendance odinique, autrement dit, la condition de pureté ariane ne faisait pas défaut à cette famille de rois, et que c'est uniquement par l'effet destructeur des temps que ses titres ne sont pas venus jusqu'à nous.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 25-27.

and the Marne.”<sup>312</sup> Ultimately, however, the Aryan colonists in Gaul were insufficiently numerous and thus ended up intermarrying with local Celts, sinking into a lesser morass of “mixed whites.” Gobineau referred to such populations as “blancs métis,” playing on contemporary fears of race-mingling in colonial spaces.<sup>313</sup> For Gobineau, the Aryans’ history in France was thus not a celebratory story of triumph, but a disastrous story of loss.

Of the writers surveyed in this chapter, Gobineau was the most infamous, but also the most pessimistic. He was far less confident than Ring or Beauvois that the modern peoples of the world could be successfully and cleanly sorted into the high and the low, the pure and the impure. In his mind, the mixing and therefore degradation of races, notably the Aryan race, had already gone too far. First and foremost, Gobineau believed in the absolute conservation of racial traits over generations. This was the lodestar of his philosophy. Miscegenation was an abomination to him because it diluted desirable (Aryan) racial traits into undesirable (non-Aryan) populations. Unlike the other authors surveyed in this chapter, Gobineau ultimately saw the Migration Period as a tragedy, because although it accomplished the temporary regeneration of continental Europe, the purity of Roxolani blood was sullied forever through mixing with the degenerate populations of the Roman Empire.<sup>314</sup> European hierarchy could therefore now only be imperfectly established, as all nations had been touched by lesser peoples.

Gobineau believed the Eddas preserved a deep memory of early Aryan culture and political organization that continued to shape European society. He repeatedly emphasized that the material conserved in the Eddas was extremely old, “constitut[ing] one of the most important

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<sup>312</sup> “Il avait si fidèlement conservé les instincts et les notions primitives de la culture propre à sa race, que l'on vit se mirer dans les eaux du Sund, et plus tard dans celles de la Somme, de la Meuse et de la Marne, des monuments construits d'après les mêmes données et pour les mêmes mœurs que ceux dont la Caspienne et même l'Euphrate avaient reflété les magnificences.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 77.

<sup>313</sup> For the definitive study of such fears, see Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>314</sup> Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 30-31.



sources that can be consulted for Germanic history of the most ancient periods.”<sup>315</sup> He was not disturbed by its superficially fantastical content: “the mythic form of the story in no way impedes [us] from perceiving the historical nucleus.”<sup>316</sup> He clung to the belief that Old Norse sources held the key to explaining the deep past that in turn explained the European present. In this respect, he followed a script that had been laid down for him decades before by fellow French readers of the Eddas.

## Conclusion

While researchers today hotly contest the extent to which sagas and Eddas put to vellum in the Christian twelfth and thirteenth centuries can reliably represent the first millennium pagan culture they purport to depict, the authors examined in this chapter had no such reservations. They confidently elaborated a new prehistory for Europe based on Icelandic texts written tens of generations later. The authors addressed here practiced a nascent and eclectic methodology.<sup>317</sup> They lined up distantly-known historical events and episodes from Old Norse literature, then argued the latter described – and illuminated – the former. By deconstructing the Eddas and sagas, they believed they could recover the supposed migration of the Aryan tribes out of Asia into Europe, as well as their characteristics, values, and relative concentrations after settlement.

Today, Aryanism is rightly remembered for its role in fueling the cataclysmic rise of National Socialism in Germany. To the extent that France plays a part in that story, scholars usually point to the works of Arthur de Gobineau. Yet, despite the vicious anti-Semitism of

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<sup>315</sup> “Constituent une des sources les plus importantes que l'on puisse consulter pour l'histoire germanique des plus anciennes époques.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4, 27.

<sup>316</sup> “La forme mythique du récit n'empêche en aucune façon d'apercevoir le noyau historique.” Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 3, 422.

<sup>317</sup> Patrick Geary and Éric Michaud have written elegantly about the role of novel nineteenth-century historical methodologies in the search for national ethnogenesis in ancient and medieval Europe. Geary, *The Myth of Nations*; Éric Michaud, *The Barbarian Invasions: A Genealogy of the History of Art*, trans. Nicholas Huckle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019).

Gobineau and his Nazi heirs, they owed their understanding of Aryanism to a man of Jewish heritage. Ferdinand Eckstein popularized for French readers the notion that their national history – the history of the Germanic tribes of the *Völkerwanderung* – could be found in Old Norse texts. It is a horrible irony that a writer of Jewish descent laid the groundwork for the research of Gobineau, who in turn inspired the intellectuals of the Third Reich.

### Chapter 3. Dragon Ships to Empire: Writing Vínland through the Lens of Settler Colonialism

*“The keen Victorian interest in Vikings went further than mere entertainment. It was in fact a mirror image of their own imperial achievements.” – Gilles Teulié<sup>318</sup>*

#### Introduction

In 1961, archeologist Anne Ingstad (1918-1997) and her husband Helge (1899-2001) resolved a centuries-old historical mystery when they unearthed an eleventh-century Norse settlement at L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland.<sup>319</sup> With the excavation of this site, the Ingstads answered a question that had enflamed historians since the 1600s: had Viking sailors reached continental North America? The debate had begun when a pair of early modern Icelandic scholars proposed that “Vínland,” an overseas Norse settlement described in medieval sources, was to be found in the Dawnland.<sup>320</sup> However, the issue took on a novel urgency in the nineteenth century as whites in Europe, Canada, and the United States turned to the past for models of imperial greatness. With only the vaguest of textual evidence, historians, novelists, poets, and artists declared proudly that Viking heroes had not just discovered, but durably colonized the Americas.<sup>321</sup>

Certain French writers provided unexpected but vocal support for the theory of a widespread Norse presence in the territory that would become Canada, the United States, and even Mexico. The topic consumed an intimate community of *Américanistes* who presented their

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\* Portions of this chapter have previously been published as “Dragon Ships to the Dawnland: Eugène Beauvois and the Vinland Viking Expeditions in the Nineteenth-Century Settler Imagination,” *Mainsheet* 1 (2024): 66-82.

<sup>318</sup> Gilles Teulié, “Henry Rider Haggard’s Nordicism? When Black Vikings Fight alongside White Zulus in South Africa,” *E-rea* 18, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>319</sup> See Birgitta Linderoth Wallace, “The Viking Settlement at L’Anse aux Meadows,” in *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga, Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, ed. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000): 208-216.

<sup>320</sup> Following the example of Annette Kolodny and in accordance with the principle of using the language of historical actors themselves, I will here call the medieval northeast of the American landmass either “Vínland,” as did the Norse, or “the Dawnland,” as did the Wabanaki ancestors who inhabited it.

<sup>321</sup> On the role of nationalism and colonialism in the birth of medieval studies as a field broadly, see Carol Symes, “The Middle Ages between Nationalism and Colonialism,” *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 37-46.

research in outlets like the *Revue des deux mondes*, the *Revue orientale et américaine*, the Congrès international des américanistes, and the Société des américanistes. Though it consisted only of a handful of enthusiastic gentlemen amateurs and university professors, this community was well-connected, exchanging books, letters, and citations among themselves and with far-flung colleagues across the Atlantic.

But why did these *French* scholars care about Vínland? At first glance, they would seem to have no skin in that historical game. The ideological stakes of this supposed Norse settlement were far clearer in Scandinavia and the United States, which accordingly enjoyed more intense excitement around the subject. Yet, the question of pre-Columbian European exploration in the Americas dominated nineteenth-century French publications about the Norse Middle Ages.

I argue that French scholars of Norse history focused disproportionately on Vínland – ultimately a rather marginal element of actual Norse society – because they understood it as a forerunner of modern imperialism. The project of settler colonialism, especially in Africa, suffused French attitudes towards the world past and present. These writers' fascination with Vínland reveals that ordinary French people internalized imperial messaging. In turn, their description of the Norse involvement in Vínland normalized and naturalized empire. They deployed conquest and colonialism as the default, even inevitable frame for making sense of the global movement of peoples. They could not see Vínland as a short-lived lumber outpost on the fringe of Norse expansion, as historians do today. The imperial context in which these nineteenth-century scholars lived ensured that they saw Vínland as a key element of Norse history and an exalted forerunner of modern imperial dynamics.

In recent decades, historians of imperialism have responded to a key problem: how did nineteenth-century states rally their domestic populations around the distant project of

colonization? This question moves beyond asking how the imperial powers of the era rhetorically justified their domination of foreign locales and instead asks how they marshalled active collaboration and outright zeal for this dominance among their own citizens in the metropole. This dilemma has inspired a rich literature on imperial fantasy, as contemporary scholars have plumbed the imaginative and affective universes built up around colonial possessions by advertising, religion, and propaganda.<sup>322</sup> I show that in France, this fantasy fundamentally shaped medievalists' interpretation of the Norse, as a small but dedicated cohort of scholars came to see the Vínland Viking as an avatar of their own colonial ambitions.

In this chapter, I will survey the converging, overlapping, and competing visions that certain French *Américanistes* articulated about Vínland in the nineteenth century. First, I will trace the evolution of the notion that Norse sailors made landfall somewhere in the Dawnland from the medieval sagas up to modern publications. Second, I will examine how assumptions about religious and cultural transmission between colonizer and colonized inflected French depictions of Vínland. Then, I will show how Gabriel Gravier and his disciples framed the Viking journeys to Vínland as a source of Norman regional honor and by extension French national pride. I will next draw these lines of research together by charting the cross-pollination and international reach of Viking-focused *Américanistes*. Finally, I will outline how international competition between rival imperial powers helped fuel French writers' enthusiasm for Leif Eriksson and hostility towards Christopher Columbus as potential "discoverers" of the Americas.

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<sup>322</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Dana S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Matthew G. Stanard, *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Jennifer Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Susan A. Brewer, "Selling Empire: American Propaganda and War in the Philippines," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11, no. 40 (October 1, 2013).

These idiosyncratic strategies for legitimating French colonialism clue in today's scholars to the importance of looking beyond the metropole/colony binary to begin analyzing how competing imperial projects were mutually reinforcing. Charlotte Ann Legg has asserted that "racial discourse was constructed not only between settler colonies and imperial centers.... Discourses of whiteness were also constructed across empires, through instances of Europeans' engagement in each other's imperial domain."<sup>323</sup> As Tom Sancton has observed, French thinkers in the nineteenth century often looked across the Atlantic to the United States as both foil and inspiration for assessing their own political situation.<sup>324</sup> French medievalists articulated a vision for global French empire through reference to other colonial powers. They particularly borrowed from the imperial lexicon of the United States. Indeed, very little that the French argued was truly unique. Tales of *Vínland* were extremely popular in nineteenth-century North America. What makes these French authors distinctive in their national context, as they intervened in a very Anglo-Saxon historiography. While white Americans usurped Indigenous identity in order to secure their theft of Native land, French thinkers drew on this narrative trope to prop up aspirations elsewhere, in Africa. They took white settler discourses common in other empires and imported them into a new national framework – France – where they assumed a novel and powerful significance.

Though this dissertation centers France in its title, it is inescapably an Atlantic story. Telling it requires locating France relative to other hotbeds of Old Norse studies – Scandinavia, Germany, Britain, and North America – but also relative to the very Atlantic itself. The ocean was a key attribute of the Viking identity in the nineteenth century. For the French, it signified

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<sup>323</sup> Charlotte Ann Legg, "Resettling Europe: Paul Robin, His Tribe, and Inter-Imperial Constructions of Whiteness in the 1890s and Early 1900s," *French History and Civilization* 10 (2020), 73, 81.

<sup>324</sup> Tom Sancton, *Sweet Land of Liberty: America in the Mind of the French Left, 1848-1871* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021).

above all the Viking's independence, but it also incarnated (and enacted) his cosmopolitan interconnectedness. Though various countries explicitly tried to yoke the Viking to their nation-building projects, as a historical and symbolic figure he very flamboyantly crossed boundaries via the medium of the sea, sailing promiscuously from port to port. A national identity constructed through the Viking was defined by water, not land. That water functioned not as a hard border or limitation, but as a matrix of linkages that birthed the nation through its network to other shores. This matrix, and its implications for the literal fluidity of identity-making, is articulated by Kamau Brathwaite's notion of "tidalectics:" a creative dynamic of push and pull, give and take in never-ending motion that does not statically resolve.<sup>325</sup> The Atlantic joined the countries of Europe and their settler-colonial projects in the Americas and Africa. In prioritizing the ocean, Viking historians saw culture and sovereignty emerge relationally. Relationally is not to say peacefully. As in the medieval north, dynamics between nineteenth-century places and peoples were often violent and coercive – but they were always interconnected. This lens fundamentally colored Old Norse scholars' understanding of geographies of race, empire, and region. This spatially imbricated vision required thinking the nation alongside and in comparison to other places.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> For an exploration of the scholarly implications of tidalectics, see Stefanie Hessler, *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science* (MIT Press, 2018); Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Tatiana Flores, "Submerged Bodies: The Tidalectics of Representability and the Sea in Caribbean Art," *Environmental Humanities* 12, 1 (May 2020): 132–166; Chinedu Nwadike, "Tidalectics: Excavating History in Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*," *The International Academic Forum Journal of Arts & Humanities* 7, 1 (Summer 2020); Emilio Amideo, *Queer Tidalectics: Linguistic and Sexual Fluidity in Contemporary Black Diasporic Literature* (Northwestern University Press, 2021).

<sup>326</sup> On the ways in which Viking maritime and riverine movement challenges simplistic national-identitarian histories, see Michael Pye, *The Edge of the World: How the North Sea Made Us Who We Are* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 2014); Robert Rouse, "Dynamic Fluidity and Wet Ontology: Current Work on the Archipelagic North Sea," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 7, no. 4 (2016): 572–580.

### **Background: Evolving Attitudes towards Vínland, 1000-1900**

The chief textual evidence for medieval Norse voyages to the Dawnland comes from the so-called Vínland sagas, a pair of thirteenth-century Icelandic prose documents written in Old Norse.<sup>327</sup> The Saga of Erik the Red and the Greenlanders' Saga both belong to the genre of family sagas, which detail the struggles of historical Icelanders and their kin from roughly the ninth through the eleventh centuries. The two Vínland sagas recount the travails of the extended clan founded by the murderous Erik Thorvaldsson, who is exiled first from Norway and then Iceland. With nowhere left to run, Erik recruits a large party to found the first Norse farms in the hostile environment of Greenland. Erik's son Leif the Lucky later sails west from Greenland and makes landfall ca. 1000 at three locations, which he dubs Helluland (Land of Rocks), Markland (Land of Trees), and Vínland (Land of Vines). His discovery inaugurates a series of missions headed variously by his brother Thorvald Eriksson, who is killed by a native of Vínland; his sister Freydís Eriksdottir; and Thorfinn Karlsefni and his wife Gudrid the Far-Travelled, Leif's sister-in-law through his late brother Thorstein Eriksson. Vínland is depicted as a fecund paradise peopled by the violent Skraelings, with whom the Vikings quickly come to blows. Though there are notable differences between them, both the Saga of Erik the Red and the Greenlanders' Saga follow this overall plot.<sup>328</sup>

Other Old Norse sources offer tantalizing hints of Vínland. According to the *Landnámabók*, or Icelandic Book of Settlements, written down in the early second millennium, Ari Marson was blown off course and “drifted over the ocean to Whitemensland, which some call Ireland the Great, and lies west away in the ocean a nigh to Vineland the Good.”<sup>329</sup> Further

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<sup>327</sup> *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*, trans. Magnus Magnusson and Herman Pálsson (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

<sup>328</sup> Gisli Sigurðsson, “An Introduction to the Vínland Sagas,” in *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, 218-224.

<sup>329</sup> *The Book of the Settlement of Iceland*, trans. Thomas Ellwood (Kendal: T. Wilson, 1898), 81.



evidence of Vínland may potentially be found in Eyrbyggja Saga.<sup>330</sup> In the course of this thirteenth-century text, Bjorn Breidvikingakappi is coerced into leaving Iceland, and his ship disappears. Thirty years later, another vessel captained by Gudleif Gudlaugsson gets shipwrecked in a mysterious land far to the west. Gudleif and his crew there encounter a foreign people who take them captive. Bjorn then appears; he has become a preeminent leader in the region. The locals all honor and defer to him, and he saves Gudleif and his men from death or slavery. However, Bjorn warns Gudleif not to tell anyone else that he is still alive, fearing other Icelanders might risk their lives trying to find him across the ocean. Despite his promise, upon his return to Iceland Gudleif relates the amazing story of his miraculous escape and Bjorn's survival.

It was not immediately evident to readers that Vínland was located in the Americas. Various medieval and early modern commentators assumed Vínland referred to someplace in Finland, Greenland, or even Africa.<sup>331</sup> In the seventeenth century, the Icelandic scholars Arngrim Jonsson (1568-1648) and Thormod Torfæus (1636-1719) introduced modern readers to the notion that Vínland was to be found in North America. This thesis only achieved popular recognition, however, with the publication of Danish scholar Carl Christian Rafn's (1795-1864) *Antiquitates Americanæ* (1837).<sup>332</sup> Rafn kickstarted serious international interest in Norse history generally and in Vínland specifically. Rafn identified Helluland with Newfoundland and Labrador; Markland with Nova Scotia; and Vínland with Cape Cod. In 1887, the Norwegian Gustav Storm (1845-1903) mounted a major challenge to Rafn, arguing that Vínland was much

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<sup>330</sup> *Eyrbyggja Saga*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (London: Penguin Books, 1989).

<sup>331</sup> Henry Vignaud, "Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique : un nouveau faux document," *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 7, no. 1/2 (1910), 92-94.

<sup>332</sup> On Rafn and his influence, see Gisli Sigurðsson, "The Saga Map of Vínland," in *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, trans. Nicholas Jones (Cambridge, MA: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, 2004); Gisli Sigurðsson, "The Quest for Vínland in Saga Scholarship," in *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, 232-237.

further north, in Nova Scotia. In 1911, famed Norwegian explorer, scientist, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) asserted Vínland had actually been the Canary Islands off Africa. Nonetheless, Storm and Nansen were debating according to a script Rafn had set. From the nineteenth century on, Vínland studies would revolve chiefly around attempting to map specific saga locations onto present-day geography. The exact scope of Norse exploration in North America still remains a mystery to today's researchers. To date, the only verified archeological site of Norse settlement in Canada or the United States is the encampment at L'Anse aux Meadows.

Much nineteenth-century scholarship of the Viking presence in Vínland was produced in the United States, and its purpose was to police boundaries of American national belonging. Geraldine Barnes asserts that a nation's mood towards Vínland indexed its mood towards empire; U.S. scholars saw the Vínland experiment as a success and the heroic birth of a white state in the Americas, reflecting their optimism regarding their own Manifest Destiny.<sup>333</sup> The Viking was also made to stand in for stereotypically American values: liberty, self-sufficiency, and empire. In her touchstone book *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vínland, the Peoples of the Dawnland, and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery*, Annette Kolodny identifies two key reasons Anglo-Americans specifically championed the memory of Leif Eriksson, supposedly the earliest Norseman to reach the North American continent in 1000 CE.<sup>334</sup> First, they celebrated the Norse voyages to Vínland in order to negate Indigenous land rights. The ostensible longevity of white settlement in the Americas helped overwrite millennia of Indigenous presence, thus assuaging the Anglo-Americans' anxieties about the very recent

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<sup>333</sup> Geraldine Barnes, "Nostalgia, Medievalism and the Vínland Voyages," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 2 (2011): 141–154.

<sup>334</sup> Annette Kolodny, *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vínland, the Peoples of the Dawnland, and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

vintage of their stake to the territory and manufacturing the timeless racial claim to a given space demanded by Romantic nationalism. Douglas Hunter, Edward Watts, Christopher Crocker, Gordon Campell, Andrew McGillvray, and Martyn Whittock have delved further into this point.<sup>335</sup> Second, alarmed by growing numbers of Catholic arrivals from southern Europe, Anglo-Americans elevated Leif Eriksson as a rival and alternative to Christopher Columbus as the so-called discoverer of America. Deflating Columbus' accomplishment served to counteract Spanish and Italian immigrants' claim to a place in America's past and future. On the other hand, Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, Jørn Brøndal, David M. Krueger, and Dag Blanck have shown that Scandinavian immigrants further propagated the story of the Vínland landings in order to position themselves as fully, integrally, and originally part of the white American community.<sup>336</sup> Jes Wienberg concludes that nineteenth-century Americans embraced the Viking revival as a medieval analog of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis.<sup>337</sup> Just as the Vikings headed west, their manly conquests distilling a culture of rugged individualism, so to would modern citizens of the United States.

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<sup>335</sup> Douglas Hunter, *The Place of Stone: Dighton Rock and the Erasure of America's Indigenous Past* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Edward Watts, *Colonizing the Past: Mythmaking and Pre-Columbian Whites in Nineteenth-Century American Writing* (University of Virginia Press, 2020); Christopher Crocker, "What We Talk about When We Talk about Vínland: History, Whiteness, Indigenous Erasure, and the Early Norse Presence in Newfoundland," *Canadian Journal of History* 55, no. 1 (2020): 91-122; Gordon Campbell, *Norse America: The Story of a Founding Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Andrew McGillvray, "Manitoba's Viking Aesthetic: Two Cultural Artifacts in Gimli and the Connection to a Distant Past," *Prairie History* 6 (Fall 2021): 41-47; Martyn Whittock, *American Vikings: How the Norse Sailed Into the Lands and Imaginations of America* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2023).

<sup>336</sup> Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, "Leifr Eiríksson versus Christopher Columbus: The Use of Leifr Eiríksson in American Political and Cultural Discourse," in *Approaches to Vínland: A Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North-Atlantic Region and Exploration of America*, eds. Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Sigurður Nordal Institute, 2001): 220-226; Jørn Brøndal, "'The Fairest among the So-Called White Races': Portrayals of Scandinavian Americans in the Filiopietistic and Nativist Literature of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 5-36; David M. Krueger, *Myths of the Rune Stone: Viking Martyrs and the Birthplace of America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Dag Blanck, "The Transnational Viking: The Role of the Viking in Sweden, the United States, and Swedish America," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016). Cf. Alice C. M. Kwok, "In Search of the Viking Midwest," *The Middle West Review* vol. 11, no. 1 (Fall 2024) *Forthcoming*.

<sup>337</sup> Jes Wienberg, "Vikings and the Western Frontier," in *Small Things, Wide Horizons: Studies in Honor of Birgitta Hårdh*, eds. Lars Larsson, Fredrik Ekengren, Bertil Helgesson, and Bengt Söderberg (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2015): 289-294.

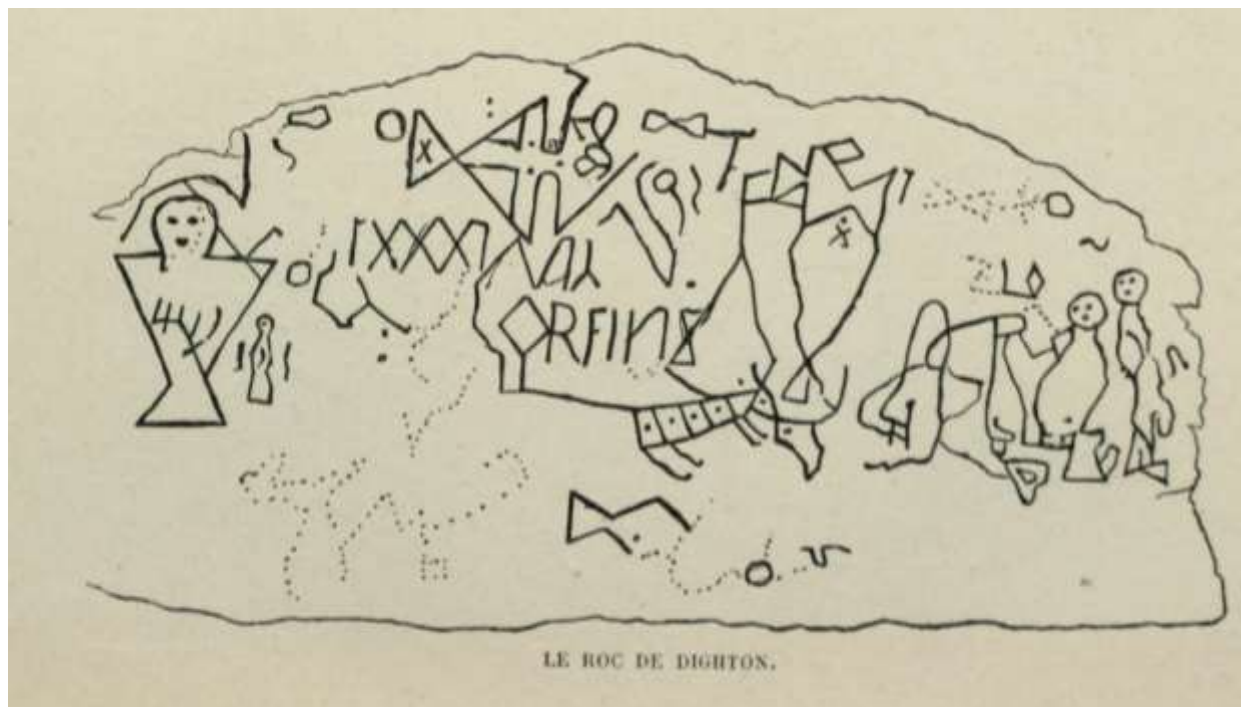


Fig. 3.1. Drawing of Dighton Rock, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le X<sup>e</sup> jusqu'au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

In case of exceptionally motivated thinking, Viking enthusiasts in the nineteenth century interpreted this Indigenous carving as a portrayal of Thorfinn Karlsefni, his wife Gudrid, and their son Snorri.

The turn-of-the-century United States was rife with fanciful – and often outright fraudulent – evidence of Viking settlement. In Massachusetts, the mysterious petroglyphs on Dighton Rock (Figure 3.1) were celebrated as an eleventh-century mural depicting Thorfinn Karlsefni's Vínland landing.<sup>338</sup> Famed for inventing shelf-stable baking powder, Harvard professor Eben Norton Horsford (1818-1893) dedicated the latter part of his life to proving that Boston was in fact the site of the (mythical) Norse city of Norumbega.<sup>339</sup> After his death, his

<sup>338</sup> Hunter, *The Place of Stone*.

<sup>339</sup> Richard R. John, "Eben Norton Horsford, the Northmen, and the Founding of Massachusetts," in *Essays on Cambridge History: Proceedings, 1980-1985*, vol. 45 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Historical Society, 1998): 116-144; Janet A. Headly, "Anne Whitney's *Leif Eriksson*: A Brahmin Response to Christopher Columbus," *American Art* (Summer 2003): 41-59; Brian Regal, "Cornelia Horsford and the Adventures of Leif Erikson: Viking Settlements in the Bay State," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 36-59; Gloria Polizzotti Greis, "Vikings on the Charles: Leif Eriksson, Eben Horsford, and the Quest for Norumbega," *Historical*

daughter Cornelia Horsford (1861-1944) continued his research. Horsford's friend and intellectual ally, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), composed the poem "The Skeleton in Armor" (1841), which presumed that the human remains unearthed in Fall River, MA in 1832 belonged to a Viking settler of Vínland.<sup>340</sup> The combined efforts of Horsford and Longfellow drove a boom in Viking-related tourism to Massachusetts. Residents of Newport, Rhode Island believed a ruined seventeenth-century mill was their very own "Viking Tower."<sup>341</sup> Further south, the author Frank Cowan (1844-1905), writing in the persona of the invented archeologist Thomas C. Raffinon, falsely claimed to have unearthed the 1051 tomb of a Norse woman along the shores of the Potomac River.<sup>342</sup> In Minnesota, Swedish immigrant Olof Öhman excavated (or planted) the Kensington Runestone on his property in 1898.<sup>343</sup> In 1911, Hans O. Hansen similarly discovered a so-called Viking sword on his property in Ulen, MN.<sup>344</sup> The state of Oklahoma has fully five runestones attributed to Viking carvers, notably the Heavener Runestone, which experts argue is likely a late nineteenth-century creation by Scandinavian-American railway workers.<sup>345</sup> As recently as 2021, Raymond Clemens, curator of early books

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*Journal of Massachusetts* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 2-27; L. Mara Dodge, "The Viking Saga Continued: Leif Erikson, Anne Whitney, Boston, and the Nation," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 128-151.

<sup>340</sup> Erik Ingvar Thurin, *The American Discovery of the Norse: An Episode in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1999); Patricia Jane Roylance, "Northmen and Native Americans: The Politics of Landscape in the Age of Longfellow," *The New England Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (September 2007): 435-458.

<sup>341</sup> F. H. Shelton, "More Light on the Old Mill at Newport," *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society*, no. 21 (January 1917): 1-23.

<sup>342</sup> Scott Tribble, "Last of the Vikings: Frank Cowan, Pennsylvania's Other Great Hoaxer and a Man who Changed History," *Western Pennsylvania History* (Fall 2007): 48-57.

<sup>343</sup> Krueger, *Myths of the Rune Stone*; "Kensingtonstenens gåta – The riddle of the Kensington runestone," *Historiska Nyheter* (Stockholm: Statens historiska museum, 2003); Larry Zimmerman, "Unusual or 'Extreme' Beliefs about the Past, Community Identity, and Dealing with the Fringe," in *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendent Communities*, eds. Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson 55-86 (AltaMira Press 2008).

<sup>344</sup> Marcus B. Cederström, "'Everyone Can Come and Remember': History and Heritage at the Ulen Museum," *Scandinavian Studies* 90, no. 3 (2018): 376-402.

<sup>345</sup> Lyle L. Tompson, "An Archaeologist Looks at the Oklahoma Runestones," *The Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers* 29 (2011): 5-43; Josh Wallace, "Oklahoma runestone is impressive but not from Vikings, Swedish scholar says," *The Oklahoman* (May 4, 2015).

and manuscripts at Yale's Beinecke Library, officially declared the library's famous Vínland map to be not a fifteenth-century original but a 1920s forgery.<sup>346</sup> Collectively, these willful misinterpretations and outright hoaxes testify to the fierce desire to establish a white (Scandinavian) history for the continent.

### **The Question of Transmission: Religion, Language, and Material Culture**

French scholars of Vínland were principally concerned with the Norse, but they also reserved an interest for the population on the other side of the colonial encounter: the group named in the sagas as the Skraelings. Who were these Skraelings? Researchers today propose that they probably encompassed several different peoples conflated by the Norse, including the Beothuk, Dorset, Innu, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, and Thule.<sup>347</sup> However, the exact identity of the Skraelings was hotly debated in the nineteenth century; various (white) writers suggested they were Inuit, Algonquin, or even Iroquois.<sup>348</sup> Despite these disagreements, French scholars of Vínland who discussed the Skraelings were united in denigrating Indigenous culture as merely the watered-down residue of transplanted European culture. By asserting that central components of Indigenous cultures such as language and religion derived from medieval European models, they usurped Native positionalities and affirmed the rightness of the colonial project.

French imperial thinkers in the nineteenth century were concerned with the question of cultural transmission, or the exchange of religious, linguistic, and material practices between colonizer and colonized. Specifically, they framed the transfusion of (supposedly superior) European attributes to (supposedly inferior) non-white societies as a justification for conquest.

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<sup>346</sup> Mike Cummings, "Analysis unlocks secret of the Vínland Map — it's a fake," *YaleNews* (September 1, 2021).

<sup>347</sup> Daniel Odess, Stephen Loring, and William W. Fitzhugh, "Skraeling: First Peoples of Helluland, Markland, and Vínland," in *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, 193-205.

<sup>348</sup> On this debate, see John Campbell, "Culdee Colonies in the North and West," *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 30, no. 117 (July 1881), 467-477.

Religion especially played a pivotal role in in French colonialism. Spreading the Gospel provided an important ideological motive (and moral fig leaf) for imperialism; missionaries did much of imperialism's practical work.<sup>349</sup> The scholars I examine in this section (one of whom was a priest himself) believed the Norse spread Christianity to Indigenous Americans. More broadly, nineteenth-century advocates of empire maintained that France had a universal mission to civilize the globe.<sup>350</sup> This argument only held up if such "civilizing" was possible. By asserting that the Skraelings readily absorbed Norse language and behavior, scholars of *Vínland* assured readers it was. Thus, by claiming to find remnants of medieval Norse culture in modern Indigenous culture, these writers simultaneously created evidence of *Vínland*'s location in the Americas and a precedent legitimating France's own colonization of non-white peoples.

Among the first French writers to tackle the problem of *Vínland* in significant detail was Charles-Etienne Brasseur (1814-1874). Born in the small town of Bourbourg, outside Dunkirk, he was ordained as a Catholic priest in Rome while on his Grand Tour of continental Europe.<sup>351</sup> He first travelled to the Americas in 1845, when he went to serve as a professor of ecclesiastical history at a seminary in Quebec. During this time, he also visited New England and began cultivating relationships among the academic elite there. He returned to Rome in 1846, before fleeing to Mexico after the Revolution of 1848. André-Nicolas Levasseur, his travelling companion and French plenipotentiary to Mexico, named Brasseur chaplain to the French

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<sup>349</sup> See J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Owen White and J. P. Daughton, eds., *In God's Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Elizabeth A. Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics, and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880-1940* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>350</sup> See Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>351</sup> For Brasseur's autobiography, see Charles-Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique-centrale, durant les siècles antérieurs à Christophe Colomb*, vol. 1 (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1857), iii.

legation there, giving Brasseur the opportunity to explore the country and learn Nahuatl. During this time, Brasseur began his serious study of Mesoamerican history. He returned to Europe in 1851, but in 1854 took passage for the Americas for a third time, first touring New England – where he befriended Henry Schoolcraft, a noted ethnographer of North American Indigenous tribes – before sailing to Nicaragua. Brasseur admired modern Central America as an idealized union of European and Indigenous civilizations, an ideal that would recur in his imaginings of the pre-Columbian past. Between 1857 and 1859, Brasseur distilled his travels and readings in Central America into the four volume *Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique-centrale, durant les siècles antérieurs à Christophe Colomb*.<sup>352</sup>



Fig. 3.2. Nicolas Claude Persus, Portrait of Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, 1874. Photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

This portrait was taken at the end of Brasseur's life, capturing him in his clerical robes.

<sup>352</sup> Charles-Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique-centrale, durant les siècles antérieurs à Christophe Colomb*, 4 vols. (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1857-1859).



In this work, Brasseur argued that the Toltec people were secretly Norse. The Toltec were a Mesoamerican civilization renowned for their artistic achievements who achieved their apex around the year 1000; the Aztec looked back on them as their cultural forebears.<sup>353</sup> Brasseur maintained that the Vikings had landed in several waves not in future Canada or New England, as Rafn claimed, but in what would become the American South, around Virginia and Florida.<sup>354</sup> They then travelled south, adopting the name Toltec and passing elements of their language and religion on to the Nahua. Brasseur defended this surprising thesis with three main points. First, he claimed that the word “Toltec” came from the ancient term for Scandinavia, the mist-shrouded *ultima Thule*, which also gave its name to the Toltec settlement of Tula in the Americas. Second, he drew on early modern transcriptions of Nahua legends to suggest that the Nahua believed their own culture to have originated across the Atlantic in a land of shadow. Third, Brasseur highlighted similarities between Norse spirituality and the worship of Quetzalcoatl. He believed first Odinic paganism, then Christianity infused the mythology of a white-skinned, blonde-haired god.<sup>355</sup> According to Brasseur, though the Norse in Central America eventually died out, their traditions lingered on in the region for centuries.

For Brasseur, a Viking presence in America was ideologically necessary as the only way to explain Nahua practices and artifacts that resonated with himself. If such practices and artifacts were autochthonous, the timeless superiority of European culture would be thrown into doubt. Conversely, if the Nahua had truly integrated Norse culture into their own, then the civilizing mission was plausible. The Toltec-Vikings thus represented convenient predecessors for the sort of soft imperialism Brasseur himself performed.

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<sup>353</sup> Nigel Davies, *The Toltec Heritage: From the Fall of Tula to the Rise of Tenochtitlán* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

<sup>354</sup> Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique-centrale*, vol. 1, 1-31.

<sup>355</sup> Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique-centrale*, vol. 1, 62-97.

Charles Schoebel (1813-1888) lambasted Brasseur's conclusions in his review "Etude sur l'antiquité américaine" for the *Revue orientale et américaine*.<sup>356</sup> A professor of German language and literature, Schoebel mobilized his expertise as an ethnographer and linguist to argue that pre-Columbian contact between the Toltec and Europe was impossible. On the one hand, he contended that there was "no manner of relationship" between the Toltec language and any Indo-European or Semitic language.<sup>357</sup> Even more damning, in his mind, was the Mesoamerican practice of ritual anthropophagy. Schoebel found it inconceivable that any society influenced by European religion, pagan or Christian, could have maintained such a tradition.<sup>358</sup> He lingered at length in his article over gruesome descriptions of cannibalism. He even insisted that Mesoamerican art should not appear in European museums, as its brutality and ugliness would corrupt European morality and aesthetics.<sup>359</sup>

Schoebel's discomfort with Brasseur's book revealed the potential dangers of cross-cultural contact. Schoebel felt the need to deny the violence of European civilization so acutely that he was unwilling to believe medieval Scandinavians had any interaction with what he perceived as a barbarous society. His fear that pre-Columbian Mesoamerican culture could contaminate even modern Europeans militated against displays of their art. Once Schoebel opened up the possibility of bilateral cultural transfer, a Scandinavian presence in medieval America became psychologically untenable. European superiority equally required absolute protection from outside adulteration. By extension, Schoebel's anxieties raised questions about

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<sup>356</sup> Charles Schoebel, "Etude sur l'antiquité américaine," *Revue orientale et américaine*, vol. 7 (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1862): 174-192.

<sup>357</sup> "La structure organique des langues toltèques n'a, ce semble, aucune espèce de rapport avec celle d'un idiome quelconque des familles indo-européennes et sémitiques ; les Toltèques ne sont donc pas de la race de ces peuples." Schoebel, "Etude sur l'antiquité américaine," 181.

<sup>358</sup> Schoebel, "Etude sur l'antiquité américaine," 185.

<sup>359</sup> Schoebel, "Etude sur l'antiquité américaine," 191-192.

the viability of the civilizing mission. If European minds were not safe from Indigenous art, he implicitly asked, how would they fare when plunged into Indigenous society?

This unspoken problem was addressed in the work of Pierre-Eugène Beauvois (1835-1912). During the 1860s, Beauvois' scholarship focused on the culture and mythology of the medieval Norse, particularly on trying to prove that they shared a common ethnogenesis with the French dating back to late antiquity (see Chapter 2). After 1870, he concentrated on attempting to demonstrate extensive pre-Columbian settlement in both North and South America by European groups including the Vikings, the Welsh followers of Madoc opp Gwynedd, and the Irish monastic order of St. Columba. Though Brasseur was quicker to the punch, Beauvois was undoubtedly the standard-bearer of the Vinland thesis in France. He shared Brasseur's essential belief as to the long and impactful presence of the Norse in medieval America, though he differed as to the geographic and evidentiary details. Significantly, he attempted to resolve the perceived ideological danger of non-white peoples influencing European culture.

Eugène Beauvois did not merely defend settler colonialism in the abstract. In 1871, Beauvois found himself across the Mediterranean in Algeria. As a captain-major in the Third Battalion of *mobilisés* from the arrondissement of Beaune, Beauvois took up arms to suppress the Mokrani Rebellion. Initially led by the *bachaga* El-Hadj Mohammed ben el-Hadj Ahmed el-Mokrani, the biggest anti-colonial revolt in Algerian history prior to 1954 began as a reaction against French encroachment on the land holdings of the Algerian elite.<sup>360</sup> It rapidly transformed into a popular uprising of over 200,000 insurgents before being brutally crushed by the French, who seized the excuse to further dispossess the Algerians of their territory. During the late spring of 1871, Beauvois himself fought in several battles. The following year, he recounted his service

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<sup>360</sup> X. Yacono, "Kabylie : L'insurrection de 1871," in *Encyclopédie berbère*, ed. Salem Chaker, vol. 26 (Edisud, 2004), 4022-4026.

in the epistolary memoir *En colonne dans la Grande Kabylie*.<sup>361</sup> Throughout the text, he advocated unrelentingly for expanded French settlement in Algeria and for the urgency of the civilizing mission. This book reveals the formative impact of his time in Algeria on Beauvois' politics, as well as his intellectual and material support for the French imperial project in Africa.

Beauvois also had his eye on other colonies for France. In 1861 he reviewed V. A. Barbié du Bocage's *Madagascar, Possession française depuis 1642* for the *Revue orientale et américaine*.<sup>362</sup> Tellingly, he began the article not by lauding Barbié's scholarship, but his politics: "A patriotic idea presided over the composition of this work. The author is among those who think rightly that the government should encourage emigration for the French colonies, and he departs from there to show the opportunity to retake possession of Madagascar."<sup>363</sup> Beauvois proved far more interested in Barbié's support for colonial adventurism than in his examination of life on the ground in Madagascar, which Beauvois glossed over briefly: "the description of the provinces and detailed history of the French establishments in Madagascar fills nearly half the volume. The author then exposes the most appropriate means to deliver the island from the tyranny of the Hovas and substitute our protection; finally, in a last chapter, he shows the possibility of colonizing Madagascar, which would be, after Algeria, our most beautiful overseas possession."<sup>364</sup> Barbié's enthusiasm for imperial expansion made him a scholar after Beauvois'

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<sup>361</sup> Eugène Beauvois, *En colonne dans la Grande Kabylie: Souvenirs de l'insurrection de 1871, avec une relation du siège de Fort-National* (Paris: Challamel, 1872). For a secondary analysis of Beauvois' time in Algeria, see Bernard Bouley, "Un Bourguignon en Kabylie : Eugène Beauvois," *Mémoires / Société d'archéologie de Beaune* 74 (1993): 84-90.

<sup>362</sup> Eugène Beauvois, Review of *Madagascar, Possession française depuis 1642* by V. A. Barbié du Bocage, *Revue orientale et américaine* 5 (October 1860 – March 1861): 82-83.

<sup>363</sup> "Une idée patriotique a présidé à la composition de cet ouvrage. L'auteur est de ceux qui pensent avec raison que le gouvernement doit encourager l'émigration pour les colonies françaises, et il part de là pour montrer l'opportunité de reprendre possession de Madagascar." Beauvois, Review of *Madagascar, Possession française depuis 1642* by V. A. Barbié du Bocage, 82.

<sup>364</sup> "La description des provinces et l'histoire détaillée des établissements français de Madagascar remplissent près de la moitié du volume. L'auteur expose ensuite les moyens les plus propres à délivrer l'île de la tyrannie des Hovas, et à lui substituer notre protection ; enfin, dans un dernier chapitre, il montre la possibilité de coloniser Madagascar,

own heart, and Beauvois was eager to promote his message. By emphasizing potential French “protection” of Madagascar from native “tyranny,” Beauvois leaned into the notion of imperialism as the white man’s burden.

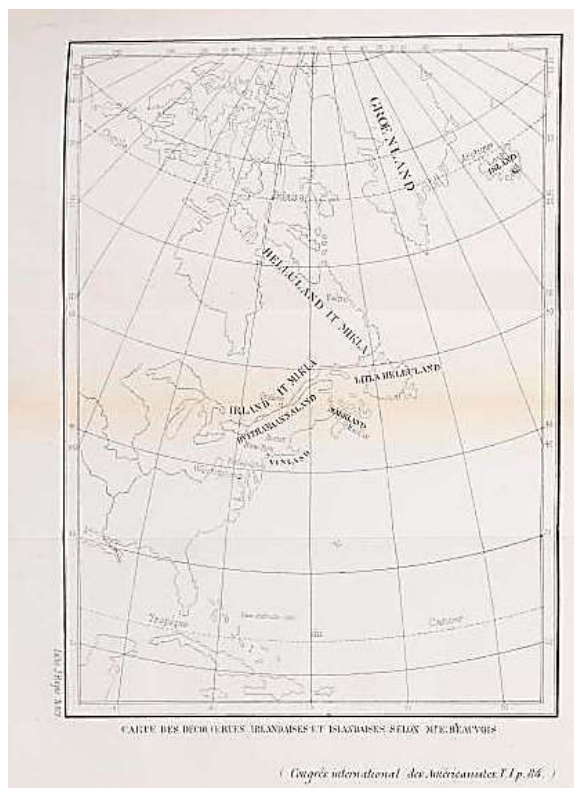


Fig. 3.3. *Carte des découvertes irlandaises et islandaises selon M. E. Beauvois*, in Eugène Beauvois, “La découverte du Nouveau Monde par les Irlandais et les premiers traces du christianisme en Amérique avant l’an 1000,” *Congrès international des américanistes. Comptes-rendu de la première session*, vol 1 (Nancy: G. Crépin-LeBlond, 1875), 84.

For Beauvois, the story of French imperialism actually began with the Scandinavian colonization of North America, and the story of the Scandinavian colonization of North America actually began with Ireland. Beauvois believed that medieval Gaelic legends of a lush green paradise in the west, a “Great Ireland” across the sea, preserved a real historical memory of Celtic voyages to the Americas in antiquity. These corrupted recollections propelled Icelandic explorers to later seek out the vaguely-remembered western territory, resulting in the discovery of Greenland and Vinland. In Beauvois’ words, the tradition of Great Ireland, also known as “Hvitramannaland” or “White Man’s Land,” “explains the mysterious attraction that the West, with its imaginary marvels,” exerted on the medieval imagination.

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qui serait après l’Algérie notre plus belle possession d’outre-mer.” Beauvois, Review of *Madagascar, Possession française depuis 1642* by V. A. Barbié du Bocage, 83.

Beauvois did not simply believe the Norse visited the Americas. He was convinced they had settled there and raised a massive city: Norumbega. The legend of Norumbega began in 1529, when Girolamo de Verrazzano included an inlet labeled “oranbega” on his map of the North American coastline.<sup>365</sup> Over the next two decades, French navigators brought back stories of “Norombègue,” a rich and well-peopled region near Penobscot Bay. In 1548, Giacomo Gastaldi marked a large “Tierra de Nurumberg” on his map of the *Tierra Nueva*. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, English sailors desperately searched for this mythical land of plenty, but never found it. Norumbega then largely disappeared from the white imagination until the late nineteenth century, when Eben Norton Horsford devoted the later part of his life to proving two unlikely propositions: first, that Norumbega had been located outside of Boston, and second, that it had been a pre-Columbian Viking settlement.<sup>366</sup> Horsford was convinced that Norumbega was a thriving center of Norse civilization, home of the first American Althing and endowed with a sophisticated military, political, economic, and physical infrastructure. He dedicated his time and fortune to drawing public attention to Massachusetts’ supposed Viking past.

While Beauvois placed Norumbega further north than did Horsford, in the region of Acadia, he too depicted it as one of the grandest and most sophisticated urban centers of the medieval globe. According to Beauvois, Norumbega’s architecture was majestic, its people multilingual, its faith pious. He described it as “a great city, furnished with towers and ornamented with bell towers, where the inhabitants were tall and beautiful, good and tractable,

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<sup>365</sup> Kirsten A. Seaver, “Nourmbega and *Harmonia Mundi* in Sixteenth-Century Cartography,” *Imago Mundi* 50 (1998), 34-58; Peter T. Bradley, “Norumbega,” *The Oxford Companion to World Exploration*, ed. David Buisseret (Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>366</sup> Robin Fleming, “Picturesque History and the Medieval in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (October 1995), 1080-1082.

dressed in rich furs and equipped with cotton thread.”<sup>367</sup> Beauvois affirmed that “in the sixteenth and even seventeenth centuries, in [the region that had been] Norumbega, there were not only antique crosses and remembrances of Christianity, attesting to the passage of Catholic missionaries... but also the remains of a former language which was Old Norse.”<sup>368</sup> Beauvois translated into French the Old Norse records of *Vínland* discussed at the beginning of this chapter and glossed them.<sup>369</sup> In addition, he mined early French sailors’ memoirs for references that could possibly be construed as evidence of a prior Norse presence in the area. As the title of his tract on Norumbega indicated, he sought a “pre-Columbian colony in the New World, with proof of its Scandinavian origin provided by the language, institutions, and beliefs of the Indigenous Acadians.”<sup>370</sup> Like the medieval and early modern people he analyzed, Beauvois fantasized about a flourishing white civilization embedded deep within a wilderness of non-white barbarians.

Like Horsford, Beauvois believed that the name Norumbega was given to the region by the “former masters of the country... who were Scandinavians.”<sup>371</sup> He argued that the first part

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<sup>367</sup> “Une grande ville, munie de tours et ornée de clochers, où les habitants étaient grands et beaux, bons et traitables, vêtus de riches fourrures et pourvus de fil de coton.” Eugène Beauvois, *La Norambègue. Découverte d'une quatrième colonie précolombienne dans le Nouveau Monde, avec des preuves de son origine scandinave fournies par la langue, les institutions et les croyances des indigènes de l'Acadie (Nouvelle-Ecosse, Nouveau-Brunswick et Etat du Maine)* (Brussels: F. Hayez, 1880), 5.

<sup>368</sup> “On retrouva en effet, dans la Norambègue, au XVI<sup>e</sup> et même au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, non-seulement des croix antiques et des réminiscences du Christianisme qui attestaient le passage de missionnaires catholiques (vestiges qui d'ailleurs, avouons-le, ne prouvaient rien de certain quant aux Scandinaves, car on pouvait tout aussi bien les attribuer aux *papas* irlandais), mais aussi des restes d'une ancienne langue qui était le vieux norrain, des traces d'organisation et d'institutions politiques appelées de noms norraïns, le refrain d'une chanson norraïne et tout un conte relatif à un monstre épouvantable, le Gougou, qui a sa place dans la mythologie scandinave.” Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 5.

<sup>369</sup> Eugène Beauvois, *Découvertes des Scandinaves en Amérique, du dixième au treizième siècle : fragments de sagas islandaises, traduits pour la première fois en français* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1859).

<sup>370</sup> Beauvois, *La Norambègue. Découverte d'une quatrième colonie précolombienne dans le Nouveau Monde, avec des preuves de son origine scandinave fournies par la langue, les institutions et les croyances des indigènes de l'Acadie*.

<sup>371</sup> “Ce n'est pas chez les tribus algiques qu'il faut chercher la signification du nom de Norambègue; car il n'était pas en usage chez elles et il ne l'a jamais été depuis. Il faut donc remonter à leurs prédécesseurs, aux anciens maîtres du pays, aux Marklandais, qui étaient des Scandinaves.” Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 28-29.

of the word came from the Old Norse *Nordhan*, *norraen*, or *norroen*, meaning “northern.”<sup>372</sup> The second part he variously identified with *bygdh*, meaning “country;” *buga*, meaning “cove;” *vik*, meaning “port;” or *vága*, meaning “bay.”<sup>373</sup> To justify the latter two possibilities, Beauvois claimed that the Indigenous peoples of the area could not pronounce “v” and changed the sound to “b.” Thus, he asserted that the Norse originally named their settlement either “*Nordhanvik* (Country to the North of the Bays) or *Nordhanbygd* (country to the North), as opposed the *Territory to the South*, in Old Norse *Sudhriké*.”<sup>374</sup> Over time, these terms were bastardized as Norumbega and Souriquois, an early modern French designation for the Mi’kmaq peoples which fell out of use over the centuries.<sup>375</sup>

Beauvois found further traces of Old Norse in the Indigenous languages of the region. He cited the account of Marc Lescarbot, an early seventeenth-century French explorer of Acadia skeptical of the existence of Norumbega. In his ethnological study of the Mi’kmaq, Lescarbot recorded “three archaic words of a refrain... ‘Epigico ïaton edico.’”<sup>376</sup> Beauvois asserted that “these three mysterious words that so intrigued the curious and wise observer [Lescarbot], are simply Old Norse, more or less disfigured either by Souriquois pronunciation or by Lescarbot’s transcription. They correspond to the Icelandic words *oefiligu gátum etingu* (we have had a great

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<sup>372</sup> “La première partie de Norambègue correspond, soit à l’islandais *Nordhan*, adverbe signifiant : *du Nord, au Nord* et pouvant aussi se traduire par *septentrional*... soit à l’islandais *norraen* ou *norroen*, adjectif signifiant *septentrional*.” Italics original. Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 29-30.

<sup>373</sup> Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 30-31.

<sup>374</sup> “*Nordhanvik* (Pays au Nord des baies) ou *Nordhanbygd* (contrée du Nord), par opposition au *Territoire du Sud*, en vieux norrois *Sudhriké*, nom composé de *sudhr* (au Sud) qui s’écrit *su* (2) et se prononce *sou* dans les dialectes norvégiens du Telemarken et du Nummedal et de *riké*, (territoire, province). De ce nom de pays prononcé *Souriké*, Lescarbot et le P. Biard ont formé le nom ethnique *Souriquois*.” Italics original. Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 32.

<sup>375</sup> Souriquois is today being revived as an identity by white settlers of French origin in eastern Canada trying to invent a fictitious Indigenous lineage for themselves. Bernard G. Hoffman, “The Souriquois, Etechemin, and Kwëdëch--A Lost Chapter in American Ethnography,” *Ethnohistory* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1955): 65-87; Andrea Eidinger, “L’Association des Acadiens-Métis Souriquois,” *Raceshifting* (May 29, 2019), accessed February 2, 2022, <https://www.raceshifting.com/lassociation-des-acadiens-metis-souriquois/>

<sup>376</sup> “Trois mots archaïques d’un refrain... : « Epigico ïaton edico (2). »” Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 20.



celebration).<sup>377</sup> Beauvois compared this phrase against samples of medieval Icelandic verse to argue that it actually represented a fragment of Norse poetic end-rhyme, known as Runhenda.<sup>378</sup> He maintained that this proof was especially valuable given Lescarbot did not believe in Norumbega's existence, so he could not have invented the phrase to prove a point.<sup>379</sup> Beauvois additionally referred to Pierre Biard's *Relation de la Nouvelle-France* (1616), derived from Jesuit expeditions, for evidence that the early modern Mi'kmaq called confederated tribes *ricmanen* and courage *meskir cameramon*.<sup>380</sup> Beauvois postulated that *ricmanen* derived from the Old Norse word *rikmenni*, meaning "chieftains," and *meskir cameramon* derived from the Old Norse *mestr hammrammadhr*, meaning "endowed with the heart of a berserk." He further drew on Champlain's report of a Mi'kmaq legend explaining the thunderous noise produced by water and wind flowing in and out of sea caves.<sup>381</sup> The Gougou was a monstrous woman who inhabited the caves and made the terrible sounds that frightened locals. She abducted humans in a great sack and carried them back to her lair to eat them. Beauvois connected the Gougou to the Gýgjar: man-eating, cavern-dwelling female giants of Norse myth. In light of these linkages, he insisted that "it is impossible to attribute an accidental origin to the Norse words employed by

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<sup>377</sup> "Ces trois mots mystérieux qui intriguaient si fort le curieux et sagace observateur, sont tout simplement de l'ancien norrain, plus ou moins défiguré soit par la prononciation des Souriquois, soit plutôt par la transcription de Lescarbot. Ils correspondent aux mots islandais : *oefiligu gátum etingu* (nous avons fait un copieux festin)." Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 21.

<sup>378</sup> Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 25. On Runhenda, see Joseph Calasanz Poestion, *L'assonance dans la poésie norrainne*, 2 ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Sumptibus Editoris Actorum Comparationis Litteratum Universarum, 188?); Judy Quinn, "Contemporary Poetics: Theorizing Traditional Versification in the Sturlung Age," in *Samtíðarsögur / The Contemporary Sagas*, ed. Sverrir Tómasson (Reykjavik: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1994): 659-673; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007), 141; R. D. Fulk, "Poetic Language, Form and Metre," in *The Cambridge History of Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, eds. Heather O'Donoghue and Eleanor Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024): 50-71.

<sup>379</sup> "Ont-elles d'autant plus de valeur qu'elles ne peuvent avoir été inventées pour les besoins de la cause, étant en contradiction avec la thèse soutenue par leur auteur." Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 20.

<sup>380</sup> Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 34-35.

<sup>381</sup> Beauvois, *La Norambègue*, 36-40.

the Acadians themselves.... These names attest that [Acadia] had been occupied in a permanent and prolonged fashion by the Scandinavians” who built Norumbega.<sup>382</sup>

Beauvois frequently sought to demonstrate pre-Columbian contact between Europe and America by drawing homologies between Christianity and Indigenous religions. Specifically, he referenced the memoirs of early French settlers in Canada to show that native populations venerated the symbol of the Cross before modern missionaries ever brought the Gospel.<sup>383</sup>

Beauvois drew on the writings of Jean-Baptiste de Lacroix Chevrères de Saint-Vallier, Bishop of Quebec in the late seventeenth century, and Father Chrétien Le Clercq of the Récollets branch of the Franciscans, who went on mission in 1675 to the Ile Percée off the coast of Gaspesia.

Beauvois insisted that these missionaries were deeply suspicious of a cult of the Cross in the Dawnland: they were not predisposed to believe it, did not want to believe it, and initially vehemently rejected it. However, according to Beauvois, those like Saint-Vallier and Le Clercq who encountered native cross-worship directly were so overwhelmed by the evidence, they had no choice but to recognize it for what it was: a vestige of pre-Columbian Christianity.<sup>384</sup> They called these tribes the “Porte-Croix” or “Cruciantaux.”<sup>385</sup>

Beauvois also offered a creative reinterpretation of the exploration narrative of Jacques Cartier. During his survey of the Canadian coastline, Cartier erected a giant cross, and in response the Indigenous residents of the area made crosses with their fingers and gestured to the surrounding land.<sup>386</sup> Cartier took this to mean that they wanted him to remove the cross because

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<sup>382</sup> “Il est impossible d'attribuer une origine accidentelle à des mots norraïns employés par les Acadiens eux-mêmes pour désigner les divisions géographiques de leur pays et le caractère fédéral de leurs institutions politiques. Ces noms attestent que le Markland a été occupé d'une manière permanente et prolongée par des Scandinaves.” Beauvois, *La Norumbègue*, 37.

<sup>383</sup> Eugène Beauvois, *Les derniers vestiges du christianisme prêché du 10e au 14e siècle dans le Markland et la Grande Irlande : les porte-croix de la Gaspésie et de l'Acadie* (Paris: Imprimerie Moquet, 1877).

<sup>384</sup> Beauvois, *Les derniers vestiges du christianisme*, 1-2.

<sup>385</sup> Beauvois, *Les derniers vestiges du christianisme*, 3-4, 11.

<sup>386</sup> Beauvois, *Les derniers vestiges du christianisme*, 17-18.

the land was theirs, but Beauvois believed they meant to indicate that there were similar crosses in the nearby country. In support of this analysis, Beauvois evoked accounts from the Champlain voyage that many crosses were found upon initial French arrival in Canada. Beauvois assumed that the Canadian First Nations adopted Christianity so eagerly from French missionaries in the early modern period because it accorded with extant traditions passed down from their ancestors, who had previously received the Gospel from the Norse.<sup>387</sup> In Beauvois' opinion, the First Nations were already prepared for Catholic teachings by the vestigial cult of the Cross they had preserved from extended contact with Norse settlers. However, Beauvois also left open the possibility that the Norse had brought Odin-worship to the Americas as well. Drawing on the archeological studies of Jens Jacob Asmussen Worsaae, who argued that excavated Bronze and Iron Age caches of Norse relics represented ritual sacrifices to the gods, Beauvois noted that these "innumerable deposits of arms and instruments or objects in amber [are] attested not only in the Scandinavian countries, but also in America."<sup>388</sup>

Academic knowledge of actual pre-Columbian Mi'kmaq tradition is elusive.<sup>389</sup> First, many aspects of Mi'kmaq life, including shamanism, bone ceremonials and hunting rituals, did not survive the genocidal onslaught of white settler colonialism. Second, Mi'kmaq society, like all Indigenous societies, is dynamic, constantly changing in response to external circumstances and internal creativity. Third, certain closed practices are not available for study by outsiders.

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<sup>387</sup> Beauvois, *Les derniers vestiges du christianisme*, 22-23.

<sup>388</sup> "Des innombrables dépôts d'armes et d'instruments ou d'objets d'ambre, constatés non seulement dans les pays scandinaves, mais encore en Amérique." Eugène Beauvois, *Bulletin critique de la mythologie scandinave* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1881), 4.

<sup>389</sup> For academic studies of Mi'kmaq culture, see Jennifer Reid, *Myth, Symbol, and Colonial Encounter: British and Mi'kmaq in Acadia, 1700-1867* (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1995); Anne-Christine Hornborg, *Mi'kmaq Landscapes: From Animism to Sacred Ecology* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008); Graham Harvey, "The Return of Mi'kmaq to Living Tradition," in *Handbook of Rituals in Contemporary Studies of Religion*, eds. Ive Brissman, Paul Linjamaa, and Tao Thykier Makeeff (Leiden: Brill, 2024): 64-76; Michael Jackson, "Cosmologies of the Earth and Ether: Spirituality and Sociality among the Mi'kmaq, Warlpiri and Māori," in *Handbook of Rituals in Contemporary Studies of Religion*, 77-94.

Nonetheless, researchers have attempted serious studies of pre-Contact Mi'kmaq animism and community. Beauvois did not engage with these questions. He was not interested in the Mi'kmaq in themselves, on their own terms, as a vibrant and independent people. He saw them only as a sort of malleable clay on which Norse culture had been imprinted, preserving it for future scholars and proving that Indigenous peoples would readily absorb the supposedly superior culture of Europe.



GRANDE-IRLANDE ET CONTRÉES ADJACENTES  
AVEC INDICATION DES JOURS DE NAVIGATION ENTRE CES DIVERS PAYS

Fig. 3.4. *Grande-Irlande et contrées adjacentes avec indication des jours de navigation entre ces divers pays*, from Eugène Beauvois, “La Grande-Irlande ou Pays des Blancs précolombiens du Nouveau-Monde,” *Journal de la société des américanistes* 1, no. 3 (1904), 191.

Beauvois emphasized the historical importance of the Gall-Gaidel, a “mixed, semi-Christian population born of the union of the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland with the Norwegians and Danish. [The Gall-Gaidel] played a great role in the North Atlantic islands of the ninth

century.”<sup>390</sup> Beauvois believed that this mingling of peoples, inaugurated when the Vikings conquered the British Isles, produced a uniquely favored breed of men: “The Gall-Gaidel, born of the union of the Scandinavians and the Celts, united the aptitudes of both races; from the one, they received the spirit of initiative and the talents of organization; from the other, literary taste and a more advanced civilization.”<sup>391</sup> Beauvois highlighted the predominant role of the Gall-Gaidel in colonizing Iceland. He believed this explained the emergence of the saga genre in Iceland, which he hailed as one of the great narrative forms of human art. He also argued that the families issued from the Gall-Gaidel provided a disproportionate number of Atlantic explorers, including the illustrious Thorfinn Karlsefni, whose son Snorri was the first European born in Vinland.<sup>392</sup>

Beauvois attracted a certain amount of criticism from foreign readers.<sup>393</sup> In his July 1881 article “Culdee Colonies in the North and West” for *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, John Campbell offered a survey of Beauvois’ Americanist research.<sup>394</sup> Campbell generally praised Beauvois’ scholarship, but did not accept all of the Frenchman’s notions. Campbell believed that Eyrbyggja Saga’s portrayal of horses in the mysterious land to the west undermined its credibility.<sup>395</sup> More significantly, he remained unconvinced by the parallels Beauvois drew between Christianity and Indigenous American religions. Campbell argued that, far from proving cultural transmission, the Mi’kmaq traditions that Beauvois interpreted as Christian residue had in fact arisen independently in a wide variety of historical and geographic contexts.<sup>396</sup>

Notably, even when denying the role of medieval sailors in shaping Indigenous American traditions, Beauvois nonetheless presumed those traditions must have derived from Europe. For example, he clashed with Fridtjof Nansen, Ebbe Hertzberg and Yngvar Nielsen, who asserted

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<sup>390</sup> Beauvois, “La Grande-Irlande ou Pays des Blancs précolombiens du Nouveau-Monde,” *Journal de la société des américanistes* 1, no. 2 (1904), 189.

<sup>391</sup> Beauvois, “La Grande-Irlande ou Pays des Blancs précolombiens du Nouveau-Monde,” 228.

<sup>392</sup> Eugène Beauvois, “La Découverte du Groenland par les Scandinaves au Xe siècle,” 273-288.

<sup>393</sup> See for example Justin Winsor, “Pre-Columbian Explorations,” in *Narrative and Critical History of America*, ed. Justin Winsor, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1889); William T. Tillinghast, “The Geographical Knowledge of the Ancients Considered in Relation to the Discovery of America,” in *Narrative and Critical History of America*, ed. Justin Winsor, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1889).

<sup>394</sup> Campbell, “Culdee Colonies in the North and West,” 455-477.

<sup>395</sup> Campbell, “Culdee Colonies in the North and West,” 463.

<sup>396</sup> Campbell, “Culdee Colonies in the North and West,” 472-473.

that the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin learned lacrosse from the Canadian First Nations, who had learned it in turn from shipwrecked Vikings.<sup>397</sup> Hertzberg and Nielsen's hypothesis relied upon the similarity between lacrosse and the medieval Norse game *knattleik*. Beauvois found it more plausible that Normans descended from Rollo's Viking army taught a version of *knattleik* to the Algonquin during the early modern French colonization of Canada.

Beauvois imagined all trans-Atlantic exchange as unidirectional. For him, Indigenous Americans had no durable culture of their own and merely soaked up European religious, political, and linguistic influences. This belittling attitude implicitly propped up the nineteenth-century French empire's civilizing mission by assuming colonized peoples could be easily assimilated to European culture. Beauvois went even further in arguing that Indigenous culture was not a true copy of Europe's, but a degenerate version evacuated of its real value. He cited the writings of Le Clercq to suggest that the Mi'kmaq of the early modern period had fallen over the centuries from the more devout morality and spiritual practice of their converted medieval forebears thanks to "the negligence and libertinage of their ancestors."<sup>398</sup> This argument helped justify European conquest and genocide.

French *Vínland* writers turned an Orientalizing gaze westward, playing up the exotic excitement of non-white cultures while also asserting a privileged understanding of those cultures. Yet, while Orientalist texts typically relegated the societies under examination to a comfortably lesser status, *Vínland* opened up an unstable tension between Europe and America. The notion that the Vikings imparted their customs to Indigenous populations naturalized European superiority, but it also brought the disparate groups into dangerous proximity. As often

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<sup>397</sup> Eugène Beauvois, Review of *Nordmaend og Skraelinger i Vinland* by Yngvar Nielsen, *Journal de la société des américanistes*, no. 2 (1905): 319-320; Fridtjof Nansen, *In Northern Mists: Arctic Exploration in Early Times*, trans. Arthur G. Chater, vol. 2 (London: Ballantyne and Company, 1911), 40.

<sup>398</sup> "La négligence et le libertinage de leurs ancêtres." Beauvois, *Les derniers vestiges du christianisme*, 4.

as Beauvois or Brasseur insisted that the Native tribes had fallen from the white, Christian example over the centuries, their thesis nonetheless raised the awkward question of just how different the peoples on the opposite sides of the Atlantic truly were. If the Norse were an exalted civilization and they passed their ways on to the Indigenous Americans, would that not make the Indigenous Americans similarly exalted? This Orientalist strategy to simultaneously subordinate non-white peoples and claim knowledge and ownership over their cultures ironically risked collapsing the all-important distinction between races. Eliding this relationship required sustained and willful blindness.

The anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus (1830-1905) challenged Vínland scholarship from an alternative angle.<sup>399</sup> Rather than questioning whether it was true or significant, he asked if it was good. In *Nouvelle géographie universelle : la terre et les hommes*, Reclus generally dismissed all pre-Columbian European voyages to the Americas as mythic hearsay.<sup>400</sup> He mocked suggestions by other scholars that the Phoenicians, Welsh, or Irish had sailed there in pre-modern times. In spite of this habit of skepticism, however, he did believe that the Norse had indeed landed in North America. Ever the contrarian, he lampooned other researchers' efforts to map saga locations onto present-day geography. He insisted that Helluland was not Newfoundland, but Labrador; Markland was not Nova Scotia, but Newfoundland, Vínland was not Rhode Island, but New Brunswick.<sup>401</sup> Reclus scooted the entire saga landscape northwards compared to other writers, preferring to remain cautious about the scope of Viking exploration.

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<sup>399</sup> For Reclus' biography see Federico Ferretti, "Comment Élisée Reclus est devenu athée. Un nouveau document biographique," *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography* (2010); Federico Ferretti, "The Correspondence between Élisée Reclus and Pëtr Kropotkin as a Source for the History of Geography," *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2012): 216-222; Federico Ferretti, "'They have the right to throw us out': Élisée Reclus' *New Universal Geography*," *Antipode* 45, no. 5 (2013): 1337-1355; Simon Springer, "Anarchism! What Geography Still Ought To Be," *Antipode* 44, no. 5 (2012): 1605-1624; Simon Springer, "Anarchism and Geography: A Brief Genealogy of Anarchist Geographies," *Geography Compass* 7, no. 1 (2013): 46-60.

<sup>400</sup> Élisée Reclus, *Nouvelle géographie universelle : la terre et les hommes*, vol. 15 (Paris: Hachette, 1890), 9-13.

<sup>401</sup> Reclus, *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, vol. 15, 12.

On his map of *Découvertes des normands dans le nouveau monde* (Figure 3.5), he also added question marks next to the labels for Markland and Vínland, signaling a certain tentativeness about his attributions.

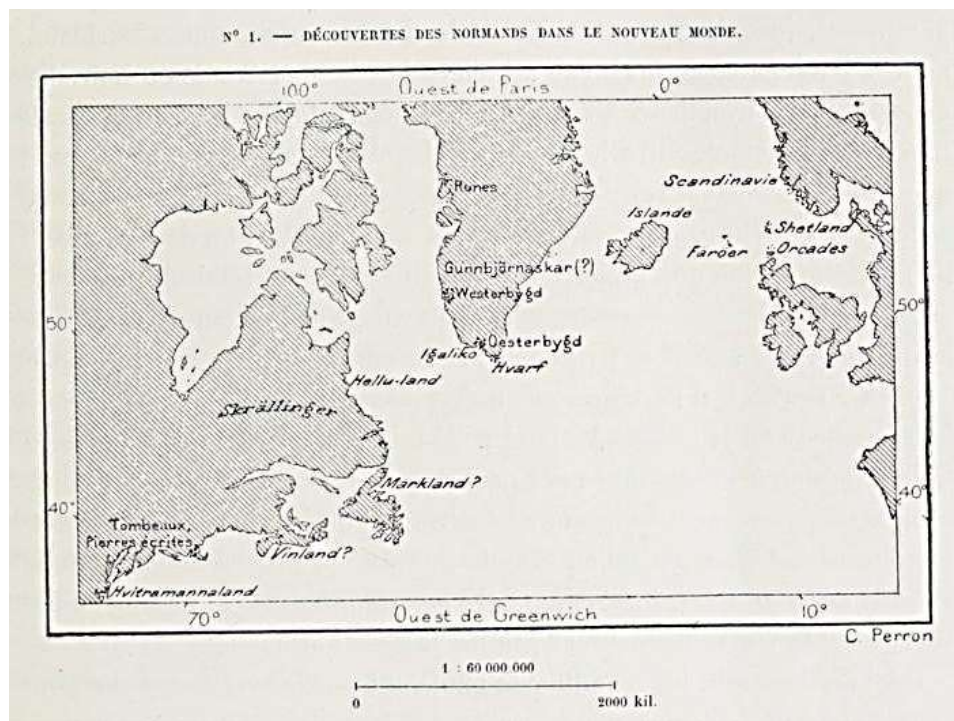


Fig. 3.5. *Découvertes des normands dans le nouveau monde*, in Élisée Reclus, *Nouvelle géographie universelle : la terre et les hommes*, vol. 15 (Paris: Hachette, 1890), 11.

Despite his critiques of imperial violence and efforts to take the histories of non-white peoples on their own terms, Reclus still literally centered France in his geography: his map measures longitudinal distance in degrees from Paris.

Reclus viewed the Norse act of colonization unfavorably, as a violent precursor to genocide in direct continuity with subsequent European imperial violence. He wrote that “like the invaders of all the nations of Europe who succeeded them, the Norman pirates massacred the Indigenous for the sole pleasure of spilling blood: the work of extermination began from the



arrival of the whites.”<sup>402</sup> Reclus’ anarchist commitments fundamentally colored his interpretation of Viking exploits in the Dawnland. Like other nineteenth-century commentators, he understood the Vínland voyages as inaugurating a long tradition of European imperial adventure. While other writers celebrated that tradition, however, Reclus condemned it. He believed Norse conflict with the Skraelings presaged white eradication of other Native peoples and cultures in the modern period. In Reclus’ mind, the Norse established a script for colonial encounter, one of gratuitous brutality and expropriation, that would shape European policies abroad up through his own day.

The promise of cultural transmission from white to non-white societies constituted a powerful justification and motivator for everyday Europeans to support overseas colonialism in the nineteenth century. Bringing the Gospel to far-flung corners of the world engaged metropolitan citizens affectively and materially in the work of empire. By representing Norse Vínland as a Catholic project, writers like Brasseur and Beauvois depicted imperialism as a morally upright – even imperative – undertaking. More generally, supposed evidence of the Nahua or Mi’kmaq adopting Norse language, beliefs, and behaviors suggested that the modern civilizing mission could succeed in imprinting European culture on foreign peoples.

### **Normans Abroad: At the Intersection of Colonialism, Medievalism, and Regionalism**

If the authors examined in the previous section placed the Norse in a timeline of Catholic missionizing that stretched up to the present, the authors I consider in this next section located them in an equally long lineage of Norman French maritime adventure. As I will show at greater length in Chapter 4, during the nineteenth century the Viking came to embody Normandy and its

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<sup>402</sup> “Comme les envahisseurs de toutes les nations d'Europe qui leur succédèrent, les pirates normands massacèrent des indigènes pour le seul plaisir de répandre le sang : l'œuvre d'extermination commença dès l'arrivée des blancs.” Reclus, *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, vol. 15, 12-13.

complicated relationship to the rest of the nation. I turn now to Norman writers – scholars and one novelist – who claimed the Vínland settlers as predecessors (by way of Rollo) of the early modern Normans who sailed to the Americas. These writers embraced the Vínland Norse as distant ancestors in order to position the Normans transhistorically as brave, enterprising leaders of global exploration and imperialism.



Fig. 3.6. Alexandre Quinet, Portrait of Gabriel Gravier, ca. 1870-1889. Photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Quinet here colludes in Gravier’s self-fashioning as a gentleman scholar.

The argument for Vínland as an essentially Norman colony was spearheaded by Gabriel Gravier (1828-1905), an intellectual associate and correspondent of Beauvois.<sup>403</sup> Though not

<sup>403</sup> For Gravier’s biography, see Gabriel Marcel, “Gabriel Gravier,” *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 2 (1905): 137-138; Martine François, “Gabriel Gravier,” *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques. École nationale des chartes* (April 17, 2012) <https://cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=109343>

originally from Normandy, he settled in Rouen and became fiercely proud of his adopted region. Though not originally trained as a historian, he took up research eagerly and became a member of the Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, the Société de l'Histoire de France, the Société de l'Histoire de Normandie, and the Société Rouennaise de Bibliophiles. In 1874, he published his masterwork: *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au dixième siècle*.<sup>404</sup> His discussion of the Viking journeys to Vínland closely mirrored Rafn's. However, his original contribution was to locate those journeys in a longer timeline of trans-Atlantic exploration by Norman sailors. Under this heading, Gravier included both the Norse of medieval Greenland and the Frenchmen of early modern Dieppe. Gravier indiscriminately lumped together people from disparate times and places under the collective title of *Normands*. He defended this approach in his later volume *Les anciens normands chez eux et en France* (1898), which traced the Viking exodus from Scandinavia and settlement in northwestern France under Rollo.<sup>405</sup> By connecting the Scandinavian Norse to modern Normans by way of Rollo's army, Gravier claimed the Vínland settlers as Norman regional heroes. He also asserted that family memories of Vínland, passed down over the generations in Norse-descended clans in Normandy, motivated early modern Normans led by Jean Cousin to sail west to Brazil in 1488, four years before Columbus arrived in Hispaniola.<sup>406</sup> Gravier explicitly linked so-called "Norman" explorers from the Middle Ages up through the seventeenth century in order to establish a storied lineage for his home.

In *Les scandinaves dans l'Amérique du nord au dixième siècle*, the Dieppois scholar Michel Hardy (1840-1893) offered a glowing review of Gravier's *Découverte de l'Amérique par*

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<sup>404</sup> Gabriel Gravier, *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au dixième siècle* (Rouen: Espérance Cagniard, 1874).

<sup>405</sup> Gabriel Gravier, *Les anciens Normands chez eux et en France* (Rouen: Espérance Cagniard, 1898).

<sup>406</sup> Gabriel Gravier, "Les Normands sur la route des Indes: discours de réception à l'Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Rouen lu le 30 avril 1880," in *Précis analytique des travaux de l'Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Rouen pendant l'année 1879-1880* (Rouen: Imprimerie de H. Boissel, 1880): 164-213.

*les Normands au dixième siècle.*<sup>407</sup> He praised it as a great landmark of patriotic scholarship spreading forgotten but essential knowledge. While he conceded that Gravier did not supply much in the way of original discoveries, Hardy celebrated him for bringing a topic that had previously been the preserve of a scholarly few to a broad Francophone audience. Hardy proudly trumpeted that “it is a whole revolution that Monsieur Gravier has undertaken to effect in the ideas received up to our day concerning the discovery of America. His work cannot fail to bring him universal sympathy, for he serves truth, the supreme object of our aspirations, as well as the so unsung glory of our beloved homeland.”<sup>408</sup>



Fig. 3.7. Map of Vínland, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le X<sup>e</sup> jusqu'au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

Across the nineteenth century, Carl Christian Rafn occupied a preeminent place in Norse studies generally and in the hunt for Vínland specifically. Neukomm here reproduces Rafn's geographic conclusions.

<sup>407</sup> Michel Hardy, *Les scandinaves dans l'Amérique du nord au dixième siècle* (Dieppe: Emile Delevoeye, 1874).

<sup>408</sup> “C’est tout une révolution que M. Gravier a entrepris d’opérer dans les idées reçues jusqu’à nos jours concernant la découverte de l’Amérique. Son œuvre ne peut manquer de lui attirer d’universelles sympathies ; car s’il sert la vérité, but suprême de nos aspirations, il sert aussi la gloire tant méconnue de notre chère patrie.” Hardy, *Les scandinaves dans l'Amérique du nord au dixième siècle*, 7.

Edmond Neukomm (1840-1903) further popularized Gravier's thesis in the novel *Les dompteurs de la mer*.<sup>409</sup> Born in Rouen, Neukomm met Gravier during a visit home and quickly became a friend and disciple of the older historian.<sup>410</sup> Neukomm absorbed Gravier's enthusiasm for the Norse and his conviction that their Vínland voyages represented precursors to the expeditions of their early modern Norman cousins. When Gravier lamented to his protégé that, outside of academic circles, readers remained regrettably ignorant of the Viking landings in North America, Neukomm willingly took up the torch. He put his experience as a journalist to good use in distilling Gravier's dense scholarly prose into a gripping adventure story accessible to a wide audience. The effort succeeded. *Les dompeturs de la mer* was first serialized as "Les précurseurs de Christoph Colomb" in the colonial pulp magazine *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer* between November 1892 and March 1893.<sup>411</sup> It was then published in 1895 as "La découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands en l'an mil" in the *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, edited by Jules Hetzel alongside that famed enthusiast of the Norse Middle Ages, Jules Verne.<sup>412</sup> *Les dompeturs de la mer* finally appeared for the first time as a standalone volume (with the addition of a preface) that same year, going through three editions in the next half-decade. The editors Estes and Lauriat even released an English translation in Boston in 1896.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le X<sup>e</sup> jusqu'au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

<sup>410</sup> Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 5-10.

<sup>411</sup> Edmond Neukomm, "Les précurseurs de Christoph Colomb," *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, no. 803-819 (November 27, 1892-March 19, 1893).

<sup>412</sup> Edmond Neukomm, "La découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands en l'an mil," in *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, eds. Jules Verne and Jules Hetzel, vol. 2 (Paris: Bibliothèque d'éducation et de récréation, 1895): 10-363.

<sup>413</sup> Edmond Neukomm, *The Rulers of the Sea: The Norsemen in America from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1896).



Fig. 3.8. L. Benett, *Le jour même, on était en vue de la terre*, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le X<sup>e</sup> jusqu'au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

Benett portrays the waters of North America rich with whales. Whale-hunting was an important component of the Norse economy, and nineteenth-century whalers adopted Viking imagery for themselves.

*Les dompteurs de la mer* united in one continuous narrative frame the two titular populations Neukomm and Gravier understood as “conquerors of the sea”: the medieval Norse and the early modern Normans. The book’s first two parts novelized the *Vínland* sagas – fancifully, and occasionally counterfactually. Parts Three and Four related Norman expeditions to South America in the late 1400s. Neukomm named the fifteenth-century adventurers who populated the second half of his book as the “worthy children of the sea-kings” who populated the first half.<sup>414</sup> He drew a direct line, genetic and causal, between the Viking explorers of *Vínland* and the Norman explorers of the Americas.

<sup>414</sup> Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 6.



Fig. 3.9. Georges Roux, *Le site apparaissait plein de séductions*, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le X<sup>e</sup> jusqu'au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

Roux incongruously juxtaposes stereotypical Vikings with an almost tropical rainforest, emphasizing the lush bounty of Vínland and its exotic foreignness.

Not everyone was so enamored of Gravier as Neukomm was. In a gleefully backhanded obituary for the *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, Gabriel Marcel called Gravier “nothing but a popularizer” animated by petty provincial pride.<sup>415</sup> Nonetheless, Marcel did grudgingly admit that Gravier “had rendered a great service to colonial history, in spreading the taste for these studies and giving a well-merited posthumous popularity to all these pioneers of civilization, these modest, little-known heroes.”<sup>416</sup> Even though Marcel personally belittled Gravier, he acknowledged the value of expanding French awareness of Vínland.

<sup>415</sup> “Gravier n'est donc qu'un vulgarisateur.” Marcel, “Gabriel Gravier,” 138.

<sup>416</sup> “Ses publications, il faut le reconnaître, ont rendu un grand service à l'histoire coloniale, en répandant le goût de ces études et en donnant une popularité posthume bien méritée à tous ces pionniers de la civilisation, à ces modestes héros peu ou mal connus.” Marcel, “Gabriel Gravier,” 138.

In 1911, the city of Rouen celebrated the 1,000-year anniversary of the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, in which King Charles the Simple granted Normandy to Rollo the Viking. At the Historical Congress of Rouen convened to honor the occasion, scholars tackled questions relating to the Norse influence on medieval and modern Normandy. Among them was “Did the Northmen establish colonies in North America in the ninth and the tenth centuries?”<sup>417</sup> Though superficially not connected to Norman history, the Historical Congress clearly felt that the problem of Vinland reflected on Normandy’s reputation.

In his contribution to the Congress, Rouennais scholar Alfred Ravet (1855-19??) celebrated *Les vikings dans l’Amérique du nord*.<sup>418</sup> A former student of the Handels gymnasium in Christiania (Oslo) and author of a highly technical tract on Norse ship construction, Ravet pointed to the sagas, the Kensington Runestone, and Cornelia Horsford’s excavation of supposed Norse ruins in Massachusetts as incontrovertible evidence that “the Vikings first tread the soil of America as conquerors.”<sup>419</sup> He trusted that before long a dragon-ship like that found in Tune, Norway would be unearthed in the United States.<sup>420</sup>

Also as part of the millennial festivities, Rouennais author Paul Toutain (1848-1925), writing under the pseudonym Jean Revel, began his article “Le Millénaire de la Normandie” by vaunting the accomplishments of the Vinland explorers “Bjarni, Erik the Red, Leif, Thorfinn, Thorstein, all those sea-kings who lived on the waves and prided themselves on never sleeping beneath a roof.”<sup>421</sup> Toutain lauded their courage and skill, crediting them with “found[ing], on transatlantic coasts, an empire not political, but commercial and maritime... The new colony

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<sup>417</sup> Olaf E. Ray, *Gange Rolf, or Rollo of Normandy* (Chicago: Gus G. Martin, 1912), 13.

<sup>418</sup> Alfred Ravet, *Les vikings dans l’Amérique du nord* (Rouen: Imprimerie Léon Gy, 1911).

<sup>419</sup> “C’est un fait vraiment historique et sans conteste que ce sont bien les Vikings qui ont foulé les premiers, en conquérants, le sol de l’Amérique.” Ravet, *Les vikings dans l’Amérique du nord*, 7.

<sup>420</sup> Ravet, *Les vikings dans l’Amérique du nord*, 7.

<sup>421</sup> “Bjarn, Erik le Rouge, Leif, Thorfinn, Thorstein, tous ces rois de mer qui demeuraient sur les vagues et se vantaient de ne jamais dormir sous un toit.” Jean Revel, “Le Millénaire de la Normandie,” *Revue des français* 6, no. 5 (May 25, 1911), 23.



and the mother country had, one by the other, an era of prosperity.”<sup>422</sup> Toutain never mentioned Gravier by name in his article (though he did cite Brasseur de Bourbourg), but he joined Gravier in tying the Vinland expeditions directly to Jean Cousin’s landing in Brazil.<sup>423</sup> Toutain followed Gravier in seeing the Vinland Vikings as tangible proof of Normandy’s historical greatness, an essential part of the region’s great millennium celebration.

When the authors I have examined here spoke of *les normands*, they envisioned at once helmeted raiders with axes leaping over the gunwales of a drakkar onto an unknown shore *and* their fellow countrymen alive in their own day. This intellectual shell game – swapping in a modern Frenchman for a medieval Viking – raised the status of Normans within the metropole, a topic I will return to in the next chapter. It also normalized French participation in global colonialism, as something they had been doing since the days of the sagas themselves.

### **The Columbus Debate: Vinland and International Identity Politics**

A final point helps explain why the writers examined in this chapter clung so tenaciously to the theory of expansive Norse colonization in the Americas: they were desperate to best Columbus. Beating the Italian servant of Spain to the discovery of the Americas would safely detach the French from the supposedly “inferior” nations of southern Europe and rank them instead with modern global superpowers like Germany and Britain. As discussed in Chapter 2, nineteenth-century racial thinking positioned the peoples of the Mediterranean lower in the biological hierarchy than the peoples of the European north. By trumpeting the Vikings’ victory over Columbus, French scholars amplified this hierarchy and located France near its top. In this

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<sup>422</sup> “Par « ces pirates », fut fondé, aux rives transatlantiques, un empire non point politique, mais commercial et maritime. . . . La colonie nouvelle et la mère patrie eurent, l’une par l’autre, une ère de prospérité.” Revel, “Le Millénaire de la Normandie,” 24.

<sup>423</sup> Revel, “Le Millénaire de la Normandie,” 24-25.

respect, their motivations were very similar to “the attempts made by [American] Anglo-Protestants, who claimed to be descendants of the Norse invaders of England and who were driven by anti-Catholic sentiments, to [use histories of Viking settlement in Vinland to] unseat Columbus as the nation’s founding father,” as studied by Christopher Crocker.<sup>424</sup>

French *Américanistes* were remarkably explicit about their desire to deflate Columbus’ accomplishments. Eugène Beauvois opened his 1859 article *Découvertes des Scandinaves en Amérique* by baldly proclaiming that “more than five centuries before the memorable voyage of Christopher Columbus, an Icelander who was travelling to Greenland was blown by a tempest towards the shores of America.”<sup>425</sup> He repeatedly insisted that even Columbus’ peers among Renaissance Italian scientists knew that contemporary explorations of the Americas were not true “discoveries,” but merely “rediscoveries.”<sup>426</sup> Michel Hardy summed up his *Les scandinaves dans l’Amérique du nord au dixième siècle* by concluding that “the discovery of America does not date only from 1492, and the honor should not go to Christopher Columbus. As we have seen, five centuries before him, Scandinavian pirates had reached the coasts of Greenland and promptly spread throughout North America.”<sup>427</sup> On multiple occasions, Edmond Neukomm

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<sup>424</sup> Crocker, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Vinland,” 97.

<sup>425</sup> “Plus de cinq siècles avant le mémorable voyage de Christophe Colomb, un Islandais, qui se rendait au Groenland, fut poussé par une tempête près des côtes de l’Amérique.” Beauvois, *Découvertes des Scandinaves en Amérique*, 5.

<sup>426</sup> “Au commencement de l’ère moderne, tandis que les explorations des Portugais, des Espagnols et des Italiens étaient qualifiées de *découvertes*, en latin, en allemand, en espagnol, en français, en anglais, en portugais, les cosmographes et éditeurs italiens, dont les compatriotes avaient pourtant plus fait que les navigateurs des autres nations, parlaient plus modestement de *pays retrouvés*.” Italics original. Eugène Beauvois, *Le monastère de Saint-Thomas et ses serres chaudes au pied du glacier de l’île de Jan-Mayen* (Louvain: Imprimerie Polleunis et Ceuterick, 1905), 5; “S’ils ne sont plus invraisemblables, on ne doit plus les regarder comme fabuleux, ni traiter d’impostures, ou même de simples erreurs, les récits d’anciens navigateurs concernant des îles et des contrées, que les modernes croyaient avoir découvertes, mais qu’ils ont simplement *retrouvées*, comme le disaient avec tant de justesse les cosmographes et les éditeurs italiens du temps de la Renaissance.” Italics original. Beauvois, *Le monastère de Saint-Thomas*, 42.

<sup>427</sup> “La découverte de l’Amérique ne date pas seulement de 1492, et l’honneur d’en doit pas revenir à Christophe Colomb. Nous venons de voir que, cinq siècles avant lui, des pirates norvégiens [sic] avaient abordé aux côtes de Groënland et s’étaient promptement répandus dans toute l’Amérique du Nord.” Hardy, *Les scandinaves dans l’Amérique du nord au dixième siècle*, 6.

stepped out of the narrative flow of his novel *Les dompteurs de la mer* to declare that “America was discovered by the Normans in the year 1000, that is to say 492 years before the expedition of Christopher Columbus.”<sup>428</sup> J. Félix lamented that for centuries Columbus’ “glory absorbed the memory [of the Vikings] in an oblivion” even though Gravier had “demonstrated their presence in America nearly 500 years before the arrival of Columbus.”<sup>429</sup> In his treatise on the material construction of Viking ships, Norman author Alfred Ravet’s sole allusion to Vínland was to celebrate that “finally, thus it is proved, that [the Norse] discovered the New World well before Columbus!”<sup>430</sup> Auguste Geffroy, at the time a professor of history at the famous Lycée Louis-le-Grand, noted derisively that “Christopher Columbus rediscovered [America] a second time.”<sup>431</sup> Paul Gaffarel titled his magnum opus *Study of the Relations Between America and the Old Continent before Columbus*.<sup>432</sup> In his study of global trade and navigation, *Histoire du commerce du monde depuis les temps les plus reculés*, Octave Noël began his section on Columbus by surveying the accomplishments of the Norse in reaching continental North America.<sup>433</sup> Jean-Jacques Ampère assigned the Vínland sagas in his course on foreign literature because they described “the discovery of Greenland or that of America, four centuries before Columbus.”<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> “L’Amérique a été découverte par les Normands en l’an mille, soit 492 ans avant l’expédition de Christophe Colomb. Et, de plus, elle a été colonisée et exploitée par eux, pendant plus de quatre siècles.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 58.

<sup>429</sup> “Poussés par leur instinct voyageur, ceux-ci s’évertuèrent sur les mers lointaines, et vous nous montrez ces hardis précurseurs de Christophe Colomb, dont la gloire a absorbé leur souvenir dans un oubli auquel vous avez su les soustraire, bravant les courants, les tempêtes, les glaces, trouvant un nouveau monde dès le X<sup>e</sup> siècle.... Vous aviez démontré leur présence en Amérique, près de 500 ans avant l’arrivée de Colomb.” J. Félix, “Réponse au discours de réception de M. Gravier,” in *Précis analytique des travaux de l’Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Rouen pendant l’année 1879-1880* (Rouen: Imprimerie de H. Boissel, 1880), 225-226.

<sup>430</sup> “Enfin, ainsi qu’il est prouvé, ils découvrent le Nouveau-Monde bien avant Colomb !” Alfred Ravet, *La marine des Vikings ; ou, Pirates scandinaves* (Rouen: J. Lecerf, 1886), 7.

<sup>431</sup> “Christophe Colomb la retrouvât une seconde fois.” Auguste Geffroy, *Histoire des états scandinaves (Suède, Norvège, Danemark)* (Paris: Hachette 1851), 82

<sup>432</sup> Paul Gaffarel, *Étude sur les rapports de l’Amérique et de l’ancien continent avant Christophe Colomb* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1869).

<sup>433</sup> Octave Noël, *Histoire du commerce du monde depuis les temps les plus reculés* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1894), 31-32.

<sup>434</sup> “La découverte du Groënland ou celle de l’Amérique, quatre siècles avant Colomb.” Jean-Jacques Ampère, *Discours sur l’ancienne littérature scandinave* (Paris: Paul Renouard, 1832).

By insisting that the Norse had landed in America before the Spanish and their Italian representative, these authors reemphasized France's distance from – and superiority over – southern Europe.

The stakes of the Vínland debate for Columbus' French legacy are thrown into particularly stark relief by Henry Vignaud's 1910 article "Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique" for the *Journal de la Société des américanistes*.<sup>435</sup> Vignaud understood the threat that Norse landings in North America posed to Columbus' standing, and consequently sought to disprove them.<sup>436</sup> Vignaud himself specialized in biographical studies of Columbus.<sup>437</sup> In "Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique," he fiercely defended the primacy of Columbus and his claim to be the first European in the Americas.

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<sup>435</sup> Vignaud, "Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique," 85-116.

<sup>436</sup> For Vignaud's biography, see "Banquet to Henry Vignaud. Americans in Paris Honor Diplomat who has Served 27 Years," *New York Times* (May 9, 1909); "Henry Vignaud," *New York Times* (September 20, 1922); Edward A. Parsons, "Henry Vignaud: A Personal Sketch," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1922): 63-75; "Henry Vignaud," *Revue archéologique* 17 (January-June 1923): 169; Henri Cordier, "Henry Vignaud," *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 15 (1923): 1-17; Max I. Baym, "Henry Adams and Henry Vignaud," *The New England Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (September 1944): 442-449; Henry Adams and C. Waller Barrett, "The Making of a History: Letters of Henry Adams to Henry Vignaud and Charles Scribner, 1879-1913," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 71 (October 1953-May 1957): 204-271; Charles E. Nowell, "Henry Vignaud – Louisiana Historian," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1955): 1-25; *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 10 (New York: Scribner's, 1995), s.v. "Vignaud, Henry."

<sup>437</sup> Henry Vignaud, *Histoire critique de la grande entreprise de Christophe Colomb*, 2 vols. (Paris: H. Welter, 1911); Henry Vignaud, "Americ Vespuce, ses voyages et ses découvertes devant la critique," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris* 8 (1911): 23-54; Henry Vignaud, *Les thèses nouvelles sur l'origine de Christophe Colomb, Espagnol! Juif! Corse!* (E. Leroux, 1913); Henry Vignaud, *Le vrai Christophe Colomb et la légende* (Paris: Auguste Picard, 1921); Henry Vignaud, *Comment l'Amérique fut réellement découverte en 1492* (Cahors: A. Coueslant, 1922).



Fig. 3.10. Agence Rol, Portrait of Henry Vignaud, 1909. Photograph, 13 x 18 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Born Jean-Héliodore Vignaud to a white creole family of French heritage in New Orleans, Louisiana on November 27, 1830, Vignaud began his career writing for local Francophone newspapers before fighting for the Confederates in the Civil War. Though he was captured by Union forces during the fall of New Orleans in 1862, he escaped and fled to Paris, where he spent the rest of his life as a diplomat, first serving as secretary of the Confederate Diplomatic Commission to Paris, then Chancellor of the Romanian Diplomatic Agency, and finally secretary to the American legation. During his time in Paris, Vignaud began a career as an *Américaniste*, eventually becoming president of the *Société des Américanistes* and corresponding with such eminent scholars in the United States as George Bancroft and Justin Winsor.

Vignaud maintained that the Vikings had never visited the modern-day territory of the United States. He asserted that while the sagas did prove that the Norse travelled to someplace they called *Vínland*, the vague textual evidence and non-existent archeological evidence made it impossible for historians to know where *Vínland* was actually located. He claimed that the sailing timelines and astrological data reported by the sagas could not line up with the northeastern seaboard.<sup>438</sup> He categorically rejected Dighton Rock, the Kensington Runestone, the

<sup>438</sup> Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 99-100.

Fall River skeleton, and the Newport Tower as Norse artifacts.<sup>439</sup> He also contended that modern Indigenous Americans bore no trace of Norse influence, nor indeed any resemblance to the Skraelings described in the sagas.<sup>440</sup> In Vignaud's mind, Vínland might be any number of places, but it definitely was not New England.

Vignaud was unrelenting towards those of his colleagues who assumed Vínland could be found in the United States. He accused Beauvois of being “a little too enthusiastic” and lacking both “the critical spirit” and “that skepticism without which there is no historical criticism.”<sup>441</sup> He was even harsher towards Gravier, whose *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au dixième siècle* he labelled “interesting, but superficial. The author tells a story agreeably, but he is credulous, and in critical matters it is not credulity that saves. One must not look in his work for any discussion of controversial points or the value of sources.”<sup>442</sup> He called out Brasseur, Beauvois, Gaffarel, and Gravier by name for having “accepted without reserve Rafn's thesis; it does not even seem that any of them saw that they could raise objections other than those relative to several details without importance.”<sup>443</sup> In Vignaud's opinion, his rivals were slapdash scholars who failed to adequately vet, or even question, their sources.

So why was Vignaud so relentlessly against any suggestion that the Vikings settled further west than Greenland? The solution is that he was building his entire scholarly career on Columbus, and he grasped the danger that the Vikings posed to his protagonist's legacy: “given

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<sup>439</sup> Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 103-107.

<sup>440</sup> Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 102, 114.

<sup>441</sup> “L'auteur, très compétent en cette matière, mais peut-être un peu trop enthousiaste, a commenté, expliqué et interprété ces textes dans nombre de monographies très erudites, auxquelles il ne manque qu'un peu plus d'esprit critique.” Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 97; “Il manque un peu de ce scepticisme sans lequel il n'y a pas de critique historique.” Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 87.

<sup>442</sup> “Ouvrage intéressant, mais superficiel. L'auteur raconte agréablement, mais il a la foi, et en matière de critique ce n'est pas la foi qui sauve. Il ne faut chercher dans son ouvrage aucune discussion des points controversés et de la valeur des sources.” Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 97.

<sup>443</sup> “On peut dire que tous ces auteurs et bien d'autres, ont accepté sans réserve la thèse de Rafn ; il ne semble même pas qu'aucun d'eux ait vu qu'elle pouvait soulever d'autres objections que celles relatives à quelques détails sans importance.” Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 97

these sorts of controversies always lack any sense of proportion, one is not content with seeing the ancient Scandinavians the first discoverers of the New World, one poses Columbus as an unscrupulous rival of Leif, whose place he usurped in the recognition of posterity.”<sup>444</sup> Vignaud recognized the rivalry researchers built up between the Vikings and Columbus was a partisan conflict with implications beyond the dryly historical. Despite his superficial gesture towards wishing to de-escalate that conflict, Vignaud was not afraid to throw fat on the fire. In his words, wherever *Vínland* might have been, “the Scandinavians’ discovery... had in effect no influence on the history of civilization and holds no place in the chain of events by which we have gradually arrived at a knowledge of the globe. It could have not happened and we would be equally advanced. It is therefore absurd to pose Leif or Karlsefni as a rival or precursor to Columbus.”<sup>445</sup> Vignaud rhetorically spit in the face of all of the researchers since Rafn who sought to anchor modern imperial glory in Viking achievement. In his eyes, *Vínland* was less than fake; it was irrelevant.

Vignaud’s conclusion was seconded by Charles de la Roncière, conservator in the manuscripts department of the Bibliothèque nationale and expert on Norse maritime history. Roncière endorsed Vignaud’s dismissal of the flimsy archeological evidence that placed *Vínland* in the United States. Indeed, he called Vignaud “one of the scholars best versed in the discovery

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<sup>444</sup> “Comme la mesure est ce qui manque toujours dans ces sortes de controverses, on ne se contenta pas de voir dans les anciens Scandinaves les premiers découvreurs du Nouveau Monde, on posa Colomb en rival peu scrupuleux de Leif, dont il aurait usurpé la place dans la reconnaissance de la postérité.” Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 95.

<sup>445</sup> “Faut-il donc contester aux Scandinaves l’honneur d’avoir touché au continent américain avant Colomb ?... La découverte des Scandinaves, quelles que soient les conditions dans lesquelles elle a pu se faire, n’eut, en effet, aucune influence sur l’histoire de la civilisation et ne tient aucune place dans la suite des événements par lesquels nous sommes graduellement arrivés à la connaissance du globe. Elle n’aurait point eu lieu que nous serions tout aussi avancés. Il est donc absurde de poser Leif ou Karlsefni en rival ou en précurseur de Colomb. Le découvreur de l’Amérique est celui qui mit les deux mondes en communication.” Vignaud, “Les expéditions des scandinaves en Amérique devant la critique,” 115.

of the New World” and “rallied to the prudent reserve of H. Vignaud” in arguing that historians could not honestly assign a discrete location to Vínland.<sup>446</sup>

The British journal *Saga-Book*, founded in 1892 to revivify the Norse legacy in the Anglophone world, did not take this challenge lying down. The journal published a review of the English translation of Vignaud’s book *The Letter and Chart of Toscanelli on the Route to the Indies by Way of the West* specifically to criticize his exclusion of the Vikings from the history of trans-Atlantic sailing: “It is an extraordinary thing that in this volume of 360 odd pages we have been unable to discover the faintest allusion to the fact that the Norsemen had discovered the continent of America some 500 years before Columbus sailed on his adventurous voyage, and that possibly some knowledge of their discoveries may have reached him.”<sup>447</sup> Vignaud and the partisans of the Norse understood that they were engaged in an intellectual battle for the origins of the United States.

For French scholars in the nineteenth century, Vínland was never just Vínland. It was Algeria and Madagascar, Mexico and Brazil, as well as Great Ireland and Norumbega. The Norse settlement in America stood in for all the imperial ventures these writers coveted or rejected. By borrowing a founding myth of white settler colonialism from the United States, they deliberated French imperial identity in the here and now.

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<sup>446</sup> “Un des savants les plus versés dans la question de la découverte du Nouveau Monde.” “je me rallie à la prudente réserve de H. VIGNAUD.” Charles de la Roncière, “L’énigme du Vineland,” *Annales de géographie* 22, no. 123 (1913), 267, 270.

<sup>447</sup> A. F. M., Review of *The Letter and Chart of Toscanelli on the Route to the Indies by Way of the West, Sent in 1474 to the Portuguese Fernam Martins, and Later on to Christopher Columbus* by Henry Vignaud, *Saga-Book* 3 (January 1901 – December 1903), 289.



### Strategies of Self-Promotion: Between Relationships and Readerships

Stories of Vínland were not confined to the dusty pages of academic tracts. Spectators seeking a more entertaining connection with the Vikings could attend a *théâtre d'ombres*. In 1897, the Boîte à musique at 75 boulevard de Clichy in Paris commissioned Georges Redon to design an advertisement for their “shadow plays.” The resulting poster depicted an enthralled audience watching a screen where a Viking ship sailed towards the American coast, a caricatural Indigenous warrior on horseback in the foreground (Figure 3.11).



Fig. 3.11. Georges Redon, *Théâtre d'Ombres. La Boîte à musique, 75 Boulevard de Clichy*, 1897. Lithograph, 87.4 cm x 119.8 cm, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

This advertisement assumes not only popular awareness of the Viking presence in North America but also the commercial viability of content relating to Vínland.

How did French people come to know and care about the Vínland expeditions? This section will zoom out from a close exegesis of the French Vínland oeuvre to ask how authors negotiated the reception of that oeuvre. We will look at the steps they took to secure their status and how the academic and broader communities responded to their claims. What strategies did scholars employ to promote their theses on the international stage, and how effective were those

strategies? This section will attempt to demonstrate that French scholars of Vínland proactively cultivated personal relationships at the local, regional, national, and Atlantic scales in order to expand their intellectual footprint. Through a careful, sustained program of building intimate and distant connections with both academic professionals and enthusiastic amateurs, these writers successfully spread a distinctive notion of the Viking settlement in Vínland that was especially well received among Anglophone audiences equally eager to extend the white lineage of the Americas. French medievalists did not write in a vacuum. Not only were they deeply influenced by political developments across the Atlantic world, they also wrote for an audience. As this section will show, they imagined that audience extremely broadly.<sup>448</sup>

Though French scholars of Vínland presented at numerous scholarly meetings, their attendance at the biannual sessions of the International Congress of Americanists beginning in 1875 are particularly well documented and proved especially crucial to their foreign reputation. At the Congress' inaugural meeting in Nancy, France, Beauvois, Gaffarel, and Gravier all lectured on their research into pre-Columbian North America.<sup>449</sup> All three presented as well at the second meeting in Luxembourg in 1877.<sup>450</sup> Over "1,026 persons registered" for the Congress that year, including sitting president Rutherford B. Hayes at the head of the United States delegation.<sup>451</sup> At Brussels in 1879, Beauvois and Gravier both gave papers.<sup>452</sup> Gaffarel returned for the 1881 session in Madrid, but the man of the hour was indubitably Beauvois. He there gave

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<sup>448</sup> For insight on the methodology of this section, see Andrew M. Stauffer, *Book Traces: Nineteenth-Century Readers and the Future of the Library* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

<sup>449</sup> Thomas Wilson, "Report on the Congress of Americanists," in *Report of the Commissioner-General for the United States to the International Universal Exposition, Paris, 1900*, vol. 6 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 21-22; "International Congress of Americanists," in *The American Naturalist: An Illustrated Magazine of Natural History*, eds. Edward D. Cope and J. S. Kingsley, vol. 27 (Philadelphia: Edwards and Docker Company, 1893), 300-301.

<sup>450</sup> Wilson, "Report on the Congress of Americanists," 24; "International Congress of Americanists," *The American Naturalist*, 302.

<sup>451</sup> Wilson, "Report on the Congress of Americanists," 23.

<sup>452</sup> Wilson, "Report on the Congress of Americanists," 25; "International Congress of Americanists," *The American Naturalist*, 303.

two speeches on “La grande terre de l’Ouest dans les documents celtiques du moyen-âge” and “The kjøkkenmeddings of Dinamarca.”<sup>453</sup> That year Botella Federico also nominated Beauvois to the honor of vice-president of the Congress; “the proposal was accepted unanimously and with great applause.”<sup>454</sup> Moreover, at an evening reception following the conference, Beauvois found himself “discuss[ing] art and literature” with the organization’s honorary protector, the King of Spain himself, Don Alfonso XII.<sup>455</sup> Unlike most of Beauvois’ work, which was generally engaged by French, American, or Scandinavian contemporaries, his participation in the fourth International Congress of Americanists was reported in Hispanophone sources.<sup>456</sup> Presenting in Madrid to a Spanish audience successfully spread his ideas to a new readership and a new national historiography. In 1881, Beauvois also successfully advocated for holding the fifth meeting of the International Congress of Americanists in Copenhagen, presumably with the dual goals of highlighting Scandinavia’s historical impact on the Americas and creating a professional opportunity to interact face-to-face with Danish scholars.<sup>457</sup> At the Copenhagen meeting two years later, he presented “The precolumbian relations between the Gauls and the Mexicans.”<sup>458</sup> Beauvois does not appear to have spoken at the 1888 conference in Berlin, but Gaffarel and Gravier both did.<sup>459</sup> At the 1890 conference in Paris, “the question of the first discovery of

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<sup>453</sup> Wilson, “Report on the Congress of Americanists,” 27-28; *Congres internacional de Americanistas : Actas de la cuarta reunión, Madrid 1881*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Imprenta de Fortanet, 1882), 45; “Cuarto Congreso de Americanistas,” *Boletín de la Sociedad Geográfica de Madrid* 11 (1881), 454-455.

<sup>454</sup> “En lengua francesa apoyó el Sr. Botella D Federico moción semejante en favor del nombramiento de vicepresidentes efectivos de algunos de los socios extranjeros que han prestado valiosa cooperación al certámen americanista, proponiendo... M. E. Beauvois, eminente americanista francés.... La propuesta fué aceptada también por unanimidad y con grandes aplausos.” *Congres internacional de Americanistas*, vol. 1, 22. See also “Cuarto Congreso de Americanistas,” 435. Thanks to Ellen Coulter Main for all translations from Spanish.

<sup>455</sup> “Cuarto Congreso de Americanistas,” 455.

<sup>456</sup> Cesáreo Fernández Duro, *Colón y la historia póstuma : examen de la que escribió el conde de Roselly de Lorgues, leído ante la Real academia de la historia, en junta extraordinaria celebrada el día 10 de mayo* (Madrid: Imprenta y fundición de T. Tello, 1885), 71-72; “Cuarto Congreso de Americanistas,” 430-467; *Congres internacional de Americanistas*, vols. 1 and 2.

<sup>457</sup> *Congres internacional de Americanistas*, vol. 1, 309.

<sup>458</sup> Wilson, “Report on the Congress of Americanists,” 29.

<sup>459</sup> Wilson, “Report on the Congress of Americanists,” 30-31.

America (relating to Scandinavian Vineland) begot a discussion” – which apparently grew quite heated – involving not only Beauvois and Gaffarel, but also M. Saint-Bris, M. Bosari, Sn. Don Pedro, Mr. Hyde-Clarke, and Mrs. Mary A. Shipley.<sup>460</sup>

By assiduously attending the International Congress of Americanists, these French scholars rubbed shoulders with such trans-Atlantic luminaries of the historical profession as Daniel Garrison Brinton (1837-1899), an expert in Indigenous American religions and the first man to hold a professorship of anthropology in the United States; and Justin Winsor (1831-1897), early president of both the American Library Association and the American Historical Association. They also swapped ideas with others who shared their commitment to the Vínland thesis.

French writers gifted their books to other intellectuals in order to solidify interpersonal networks while disseminating their ideas about Vínland. I will take Eugène Beauvois as a case study. Beauvois delivered fully eleven of his short pamphlets on American colonization to the Société de géographie in 1903 and six to the International Congress of Americanists in 1881.<sup>461</sup> To further his second career as a local politician, on July 24, 1888, he offered a copy of *Les premiers chrétiens dans les îles nordatlantiques* (1888) to prominent wine-maker and honorary president of the Beaune chamber of commerce Pierre Ponnelle.<sup>462</sup> He also inscribed a copy of his 1899 *Echos des croyances chrétiennes chez les Mexicains du moyen-âge et chez d'autres peuples voisins* to Gabriel Gravier with “friendly regards.”<sup>463</sup> These gestures were sometimes

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<sup>460</sup> Wilson, “Report on the Congress of Americanists,” 32-33.

<sup>461</sup> “Ouvrages reçus par la Société de géographie,” *La Géographie. Bulletin de la Société de géographie* 7 (1903), 414; “Cuarto Congreso de Americanistas,” 440.

<sup>462</sup> Eugène Beauvois, *Les premiers chrétiens dans les îles nordatlantiques* (Louvain: Imprimerie Lever frères et soeur, 1888), University of Alabama Library.

<sup>463</sup> Eugène Beauvois, *La jeunesse du maréchal de Chamilly : notice sur Noël Bouton et sa famille de 1636 à 1667* (Beaune: Imprimerie Arthur Batault, 1885) University of California Southern Regional Library Facility; Eugène Beauvois, *Echos des croyances chrétiennes chez les Mexicains du moyen-âge et chez d'autres peuples voisins*

reciprocated. In 1880, Reverend Benjamin Franklin de Costa of New York sent Beauvois a copy of *The New York Herald* featuring his own most recent research. In 1899, Eben Norton Horsford signed a copy of his own study on *The Discovery of the Ancient City of Norumbega* (1890) to Beauvois “with the best regards.”<sup>464</sup>

French scholars of Vínland extended their reach and name recognition across the Atlantic world by joining learned societies. Again taking Beauvois as an illustrative example, at the most local level he was a titular member of the Société d’histoire, d’archéologie et de littérature de l’arrondissement de Beaune, where he regularly attended meetings and presented his most recent findings.<sup>465</sup> He rubbed elbows there with the local notables who composed the rest of the society’s roster: clergy, doctors, lawyers, landowners, aristocrats, and government officials. Building relationships with these men was imperative for Beauvois’ second career as a municipal political figure and mayor of Corberon, but it also ensured that they imbibed his unique notions of medieval history. Regionally, he was a correspondent of the Société d’histoire et d’archéologie de Chalon-sur-Saône, the Société des Sciences historiques et naturelles de Semur, the Société philomathique Vosgienne, and the Commission des Antiquités du département de la Côte-d’Or.<sup>466</sup> At the national scale, he was a member of the Société française d’archéologie, the Société de géographie de Paris, and the Société Asiatique de Paris; deputy secretary of the Société d’Ethnographie de Paris; and a corresponding associate of the Société nationale des

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(Louvain: Ictas, 1899), <https://www.ebay.com/itm/1884-1902-EUGENE-BEAUVOIS-inscribed-13-WORKS-on-PRE-COLUMBIAN-CONTACT-w-MEXICO-/192605962078>

<sup>464</sup> Eben Norton Horsford, *The Discovery of the Ancient City of Norumbega: A Communication to the President and Council of the American Geographical Society at their Special Session in Watertown* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1890), <https://www.ellipsisrarebooks.com/product/norumbega-viking-america>

<sup>465</sup> *Société d’histoire, d’archéologie et de littérature de l’arrondissement de Beaune. Mémoires année 1883* (Beaune: Imprimerie Arthur Batault, 1883), 6, 20, 22-23, 28, 30-32.

<sup>466</sup> Eugène Beauvois, “Une pénalité des lois Gombette et les lumières qu’elle jette sur l’origine des Burgondes,” *Mémoires de la Société d’histoire et d’archéologie de Chalon-sur-Saône* 5, no. 3 (1872), 75; Eugène Beauvois, *Origines et fondation du plus ancien évêché du nouveau monde : le diocèse de Gardhs en Groenland, 986-1126* (Paris: E. Dufossé, 1878), 3.

antiquaires de France.<sup>467</sup> Internationally, he was a member of the Danish Société Royale des Antiquaires du Nord, the Swedish Société des Antiquités Suédoises, an honorary member of the Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura (Finno-Ugrian Society), and a corresponding member of the Celtic Society of Montreal.<sup>468</sup> He was further granted the chivalric honors of the Norwegian Order of Saint Olav and the Danish Order of the Dannebrog.<sup>469</sup>

These organizations were extremely varied not only in location and prestige, but also population and purpose. Some, like the Société Royale des Antiquaires du Nord, were the preserve of credentialed experts pushing the boundaries of knowledge and methodology in their scientific disciplines. Others, like the Celtic Society of Montreal or the Société d'histoire, d'archéologie et de littérature de l'arrondissement de Beaune, were essentially heritage associations for local amateurs and enthusiasts to socialize and celebrate their shared ancestry. Beauvois bridged these worlds, blurring their porous frontiers, in order to spread his ideas to multiple publics and diversify his social capital. He astutely intuited that his narrative of Norse history held appeal for both of these groups and leveraged that appeal into a reputation potent at multiple scales.

Records of nineteenth-century library holdings in Europe and North America highlight the effective spread of French writings on Vínland. In 1868, Alexandre Dezos de la Roquette (1784-1868), a French consul to Denmark and Norway, bequeathed his personal collection to the

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<sup>467</sup> *Congrès archéologique de France. LVe session. Séances générales tenues à Dax et à Bayonne en 1888 par la Société française d'archéologie pour la conservation et la description des monuments* (Caen: H. Delesques, 1889); *Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1899), 19; François Emile Graffe, Portrait of Eugène Beauvois for the Société de géographie de Paris, 1882, photograph, BnF; *Revue orientale et américaine* 9 (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1864), 53, 302; Bernard Bouley, "Un Bourguignon en Kabylie : Eugène Beauvois," *Mémoires / Société d'archéologie de Beaune* 74 (1993), 84.

<sup>468</sup> *Mémoires de la Société Royale des Antiquaires du Nord. Nouvelle série 1866-1871*. (Copenhagen: Thiele, s.d.); Iwona Piechnik, "Ujfalvy's Place in the Development of Finno-Ugrian Language Studies in the Second Half of the 19th Century in France," in *Essays in the History of Languages and Linguistics: Dedicated to Marek Stachowski on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, ed. M. Németh, B. Podolak, M. Urban (Kraków, 2017), 487, 488, 500; *Constitution and By-Laws of the Celtic Society of Montreal, Inaugural Address of the President, List of Members, Etc.* (Montreal: W. Drysdale and Co., 1883), 38-39, 44.

<sup>469</sup> Beauvois, *Origines et fondation du plus ancien évêché du nouveau monde*, 3.

Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, forming the nucleus of what is today the library's Bibliothèque nordique.<sup>470</sup> In 1908, the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève held works by Paul Belloni Du Chaillu Beauvois, and Gravier arguing for the location of Vínland in continental North America.<sup>471</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the Library of the Peabody Institute of the City of Baltimore, today part of Johns Hopkins University, held works on Vínland by Du Chaillu, Brasseur de Bourbourg, Paul Gaffarel, and Gravier.<sup>472</sup> In 1905, Cornell University Library acquired the personal collection of Icelandic texts of the late Professor Willard Fiske, including Vínland titles by Du Chaillu, Beauvois, Gaffarel, Gravier, and Neukomm.<sup>473</sup> Nearby in New England, Daniel Garrison Brinton possessed several Vínland texts by Beauvois; his library is now housed at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>474</sup> In 1892, the Quebecois government purchased the private collection of the late Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauveau (1820-1890), first prime minister of Quebec, to add to the Bibliothèque de la Législature; the Fonds Chauveau contained at least three of Beauvois' Vínland publications.<sup>475</sup> Half of the original Fonds has since been lost, so it is possible Chauveau owned more of Beauvois' writings during his life. French advocates of the Vínland settlement also featured prominently in bibliographies about early America printed in the United States.<sup>476</sup> Today, scholars can use these bibliographies to track

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<sup>470</sup> "Nos collections," *Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève* <https://www.bsg.univ-paris3.fr/iguana/www.main.cls?surl=presentation>, accessed November 2, 2021.

<sup>471</sup> Eugène Capet, *Catalogue du Fonds Scandinave de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève* (Chalon-sur-Saône: Emile Bertrand, 1908).

<sup>472</sup> *Catalogue of the Library of the Peabody Institute of the City of Baltimore*, 5 vols. (Baltimore: Isaac Friedenwald, 1883-1892); *Second Catalogue of the Library of the Peabody Institute of the City of Baltimore Including the Additions Made Since 1882*, 8 vols. (Baltimore: Deutsch Lithographing and Printing Co., 1896).

<sup>473</sup> Halldór Hermannsson, ed., *Catalogue of the Icelandic Collection Bequeathed by Willard Fiske* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1915).

<sup>474</sup> John M. Weeks, *The Library of Daniel Garrison Brinton* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2002), 1-6, 64-65.

<sup>475</sup> Clément LeBel, Claire Jacques, and Martin Pelletier, *Inventaire du Fonds Chauveau de la Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale* (Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale de Québec, January 2017), 1-2, 32, 110.

<sup>476</sup> Joseph Sabin, *Bibliotheca Americana: A Dictionary of Books Relating to America, from Its Discovery to the Present Time*, vol. 1 (New York: Joseph Sabin, 1868); Paul Barron Watson, *The Bibliography of the Pre-Columbian Discoveries of America* (Boston: 1881); James Constantine Pilling, *Proof-sheets of a Bibliography of the Languages*

what American researchers at the time were reading, and the answer is that they were reading (among others) the French.

French scholars of Vínland kept up a lively correspondence with fellow academics, even those in foreign nations; sent out gratis copies of their books; attended conferences; and built reciprocal bonds of obligation through citation. These efforts helped embed their names and ideas in an Atlantic-wide discourse about Vínland. Though geographically distant from any of the locations directly implicated in the actual Vínland legend, French authors inserted themselves into its legacy.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that a small subset of French *Américanistes* set out to unearth a hidden history of extensive American settlement by the medieval Norse. By recovering a supposed Viking history of state-building in the western hemisphere, these researchers legitimized imperialism, giving it a long and colorful precedent. For these scholars, the past and present of European colonization abroad were inextricably intertwined. To mount a defense of French imperialism, such writers looked outward, not just to history but to other contemporary nations and their empires. They positioned France within a transoceanic web of sailing routes and resource exploitation, couching medieval America as an antecedent for modern expeditions. This violent chauvinism did not emerge in a cultural bubble, but in conversation with competing colonial projects the world over.

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*of the North American Indians* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885); Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *America Not Discovered by Columbus: An Historical Sketch of the Discovery of America by the Norsemen in the Tenth Century*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1901); Joseph Fischer, *The Discoveries of the Norsemen in America, with Special Relation to Their Early Cartographical Representation*, trans. Basil H. Soulsby (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1903); Halldór Hermannsson, *Bibliography of the Icelandic Sagas and Minor Tales* (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1908); Halldór Hermannsson, *The Northmen in America (982-c. 1500): A Contribution to the Bibliography of the Subject* (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1909); G. N. Swan, "Leif Erikson. Amerikas 'Rätte Upptäckare,'" *Year-Book of the Swedish Historical Society of America* 6 (1916-1917).



At the same time, these historians appropriated Indigenous identities for white settlers.<sup>477</sup> By insisting that Mi'kmaq and Nahua traditions were actually European imports, they unseated the Native peoples of America from their own stories and slid white colonists into their place. This insidious sleight of hand dismissed Indigenous personhood while also pushing European imperial aspirations further into the past as well as the future.

The writings examined in this chapter directly inspired Jacques de Mahieu a century later. A Vichyite who served in the Waffen-SS Charlemagne Division of Frenchmen who volunteered to fight for the Third Reich in the Second World War, Mahieu fled to Argentina in 1946 where he became an intimate friend and ally of strongman Juan Perón.<sup>478</sup> Mahieu maintained his ties with fugitive Nazis and was himself an anti-Semite, “national secretary of the influential Higher School of Perónist leadership... [and] headed a Peronist party branch.”<sup>479</sup> Mahieu also became an esoteric anthropologist who directed the Instituto de Ciencia del Hombre in Buenos Aires. Like Brasseur, Beauvois, Gaffarel, and Gravier, he used the myth of pre-Columbian Norse settlement in Latin America to promote white supremacy. He repackaged their research – variously with and without attribution – in *Le Grand Voyage du Dieu-Soleil* (1971), *L'Agonie du Dieu-Soleil* (1974), *Drakkars sur l'Amazone* (1977), and *L'Imposture de Christophe Colomb*

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<sup>477</sup> On white settlers in the United States appropriating Indigenous identities, see Stephen Williams, *Fantastic Archeology: The Wild Side of North American Prehistory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Ward Churchill, *Indians Are Us? Culture and Genocide in Native North America* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994); S. Elizabeth Bird, ed., *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); De Villo Sloan, *The Crimsoned Hills of Onondaga: Romantic Antiquarians and the Euro-American Invention of Native American Prehistory* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008); Jason Colavito, *The Mound Builder Myth: Fake History and the Hunt for a “Lost White Race”* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020).

<sup>478</sup> Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina* (Granta Books, 2015).

<sup>479</sup> Goñi, *The Real Odessa*. See also Stéphane François, “L’imaginaire viking et les extrêmes droites française et belge contemporaines,” *Nordiques* 37 (Spring 2019), 126-128; Ezequiel Boetti, “El enigma de Jacques de Mahieu,” *Página/12* (March 3, 2019); Sebastian Rotella, “His Love of Nazism Lives On,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 17, 2000); Mark Falcoff, “Peron’s Nazi Ties,” *American Enterprise Institute* (November 9, 1998); Victoria Allison, “White Evil: Peronist Argentina in the US Popular Imagination Since 1955,” *American Studies International* 42, no. 1 (2004): 4–48.

(1979).<sup>480</sup> Mahieu’s attraction to such thinking concretely demonstrates the harmonies between nineteenth-century Vínland arguments and Nazi racial science.

White nationalists in the twenty-first century have also embraced Vínland to assert white historical dominance in the Americas specifically and timeless white power generally.<sup>481</sup> The Anti-Defamation League lists the Vínlanders Social Club as “one of the larger racist skinhead groups in the United States.”<sup>482</sup> Similarly, the Southern Poverty Law Center identifies the Wolves of Vínland as a neo-Völkish hate group.<sup>483</sup> Neo-Nazis now fly the so-called Vínland flag – a green, black, and white version of the Nordic cross first developed by the goth metal band Type O Negative in the 1990s. In a 2017 blog post for *The Public Medievalist*, Paul B. Sturtevant frames contemporary references to Vínland as part of what he calls “Schrödinger’s medievalism... a piece of medieval culture found in the wild that you know has been appropriated as a symbol by right-wing nationalists or racists. But, that piece of culture also has a broader, potentially benign, meaning. You can’t tell which is it until you get more information—and sometimes doing so is impossible.”<sup>484</sup> White nationalists thus capitalize on the undeniable historicity of Vínland to cloak their hateful ideology with legitimacy.

Authors such as Brasseur, Beauvois, Gaffarel, and Gravier believed there was an intimate, indelible connection between medieval and modern colonialism. They claimed the Vikings and their American adventures for various causes: Catholic missionizing; Norman

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<sup>480</sup> Jacques de Mahieu, *Le Grand Voyage du Dieu-Soleil* (Imprimerie de Montligeon, 1971); *L’Agonie du Dieu-Soleil* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1974); *Drakkars sur l’Amazone* (Copernicus, 1977); *L’Imposture de Christophe Colomb* (Copernicus, 1979); *Les Templiers en Amérique* (J’ai lu, 1999).

<sup>481</sup> See Verena Höfig, “Vínland and White Nationalism,” in *From Iceland to the Americas: Vínland and Historical Imagination*, eds. Tim William Machan and Jón Karl Helgason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020): 77-98.

<sup>482</sup> “Vínlanders Social Club,” *Anti-Defamation League* (accessed November 17, 2022) <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/vinlanders-social-club>

<sup>483</sup> “Neo-Völkish,” *Southern Poverty Law Center* (accessed August 24, 2023) <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/neo-volkisch>

<sup>484</sup> Paul B. Sturtevant, “Schrödinger’s Medievalisms,” *The Public Medievalist* (December 28, 2017).

stature; besting Columbus. Yet, these men all saw the Norse of Vínland as an evocative symbol to coalesce an imperial identity in the present. If the Norse had been destined for global dominance, then their French heirs were too.

## Chapter 4. Painting Norse Raids in Northern France: The Problem of Viking Violence

*“For nine centuries, practically without exception or nuance, the Viking was this being ‘predatory and cruel.’” – Régis Boyer<sup>485</sup>*

### Introduction

Vikings first attacked Charlemagne’s Francia in 799, pillaging an island off the shores of Aquitaine.<sup>486</sup> Though some of their ships sank and many of the invaders fell to local defenders, the Norse were hardly discouraged. Over the next century, Viking attacks became a cruelly regular feature of life in the coastal regions of the Frankish Empire. Drakkars plundered villages along the Channel, Atlantic, and Mediterranean coastlines, even sailing up the Dordogne, Loire, and Seine Rivers to reach targets further inland.<sup>487</sup> The Vikings sacked Paris in 845 and 856 before laying siege to it for nearly a year in 885-886.<sup>488</sup> Northwestern France, however, was hardest hit. Places like Rouen, Nantes, Noirmoutier, and Jumièges particularly suffered.<sup>489</sup> Charlemagne’s great-great-grandson Charles III “the Simple” attempted to end the violence in 911 by offering the territory that would become Normandy to Rollo the Viking (sometimes identified with the sagas’ Hrolf the Walker), charging him with converting to Christianity and repelling the incursions of his fellow Norsemen.<sup>490</sup> This agreement, enshrined in the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, signaled the beginning of the end of Viking assaults on West Francia. It also durably changed the culture of Normandy, as masses of Norse settlers put down roots in Rollo’s lands and built communities that would maintain their distinctiveness for centuries.

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<sup>485</sup> “Pour neuf siècles, pratiquement sans exception ni nuances, le Viking sera cet être « prédateur et cruel ».” Régis Boyer, *Le Mythe Viking dans les lettres françaises* (Paris: Editions du Porte-Glaive, 1986).

<sup>486</sup> John Haywood, *Northmen: The Viking Saga, AD 793-1241* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 78.

<sup>487</sup> Haywood, *Northmen*, 86-87.

<sup>488</sup> Haywood, *Northmen*, 94-100.

<sup>489</sup> Haywood, *Northmen*, 86-87.

<sup>490</sup> Haywood, *Northmen*, 100-108.

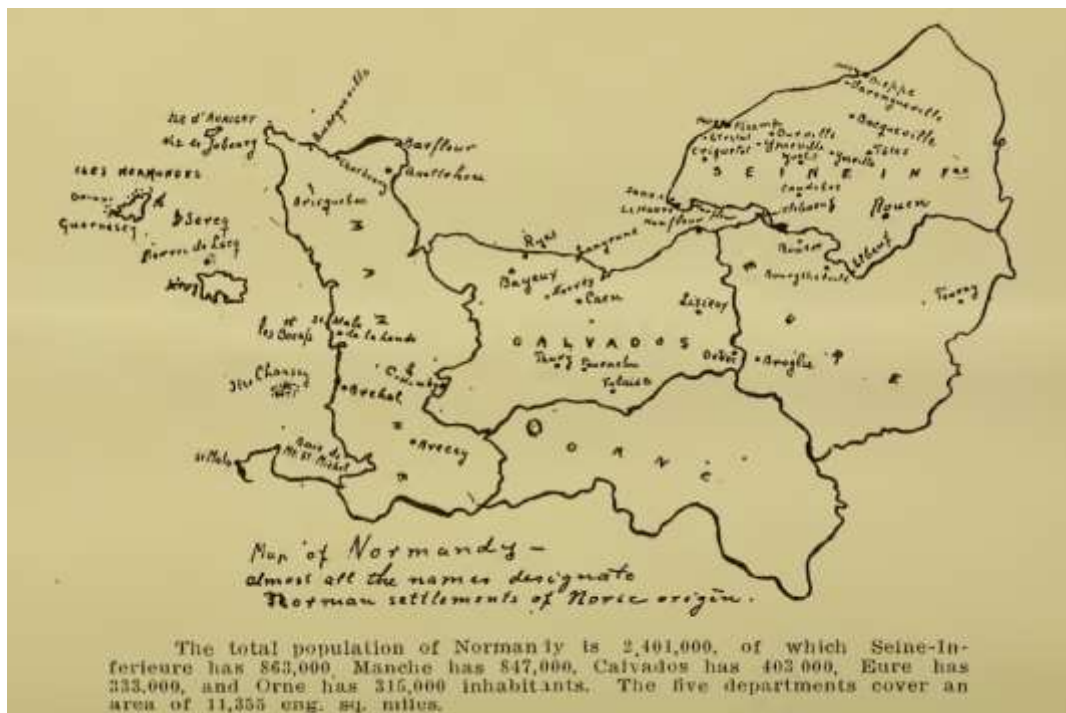


Fig. 4.1. Map of Normandy with Old Norse place names from Olaf E. Ray, *Gange Rolf, or Rollo of Normandy* (Chicago: Gus G. Martin, 1912).

Ray presented his research on Rollo and the Norse settlement in Normandy at the 1911 Historical Congress convened at Rouen. He included this map to highlight the enduring impact of Old Norse language on the French landscape.

This mingled legacy of bloodshed and regional division introduced problems when nineteenth-century publics began to valorize the medieval Norse. How could the same Vikings who ravaged Francia become the idols of France a millennium later? How should the nation reconcile this painful history with the reality that many modern Normans proudly claimed descent from the Norse intruders? As the Vikings came to occupy an increasingly visible position in French media, the difficulties they posed for national memory only multiplied.

This chapter explores history painting as a case study for changing postures towards the Norse invaders. I show how nineteenth-century French artists rationalized the very real history of Viking violence in northern France in order to rehabilitate these figures and counterintuitively transform them from the enemies into the heroes of France. Painters such as Romulus Antoine

Hennon-Dubois, Henri Georges Charrier, and Evariste-Vital Luminais sublimated awareness of the brutality committed by the Norse against the inhabitants of Francia in service of a greater cause of contemporary French unity. Forgetting Viking violence was about (selectively, purposefully, and instrumentally) forgetting regional divisions, a particularly urgent project in light of the centralization efforts at work throughout the period. Ironically, though the Vikings were originally responsible for cleaving off Normandy as an independent duchy with a divergent local culture, in the nineteenth century they became the mascots for assimilating the separate regions of northern France into the national body politic.<sup>491</sup> The painters I examine here reclaimed the Viking – once an emblem of discord and disorder – as a symbol of a harmonious and stronger France.



Fig. 4.2. Jules Gagniet (illustrator) and Gabriel Lacoste (engraver), *Siège de Paris par les Normands en 885*, nineteenth century. Engraving, 13.7 x 19.4 cm, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

This illustration emphasizes the scale of the Norse assault on Paris and its tactical specificities, rather than highlighting any of the particular individuals involved on either side.

<sup>491</sup> François Guillet, “Le Nord mythique dans la Normandie : des Normands aux Vikings de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu’à la Grande Guerre,” *Revue du Nord* 87, no. 360-361 (April-September 2005): 459-471; Anna Rouffia, “« Mythe nordiste » et relations entre la Normandie et la Scandinavie (1880-2015),” *Classe internationale* (June 3, 2021).

In his landmark study *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856), Alexis de Tocqueville proposed that French history should be understood as an incremental process of gradual centralization that transcended the supposed disjuncture between the Old Regime and the Revolution of 1789.<sup>492</sup> Eugen Weber continued this story into the nineteenth century with his masterpiece *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), charting the difficult and uneven incorporation of a diverse rural peasantry into a cohesive national body during the early Third Republic.<sup>493</sup> Following Weber's contested but nonetheless paradigm-setting intervention, scholars have traced the many paths France took towards cultural, political, and economic unification in this period: universal education, linguistic homogenization, mass media, infrastructure development, military service, and more.<sup>494</sup> Normandy occupies a notable place in this literature.<sup>495</sup> I aim here to present France's Norse history as another node that crystalized dilemmas of national integration.

I contend that the topic of the Viking invasions of Francia (as opposed to other subjects of Norse medievalism) was so likely to be tackled in visual media because it posed a problem for national historical memory.<sup>496</sup> Artists felt the need to grapple with it in a public venue and address a wide audience. An entire visual conversation emerged in France in the 1800s around this fraught dilemma: what place did the Vikings hold in the French past? In this chapter, I will examine the eight large-scale nineteenth-century French oil paintings I have located portraying

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<sup>492</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (Paris: Michel-Lévy frères, 1856).

<sup>493</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>494</sup> Mona Ozouf, *L'école, l'Eglise et la République, 1870-1914* (Paris: Editions de Cane, 1982); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); James Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Guiney, M. Martin. *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>495</sup> Roger Jouet, *Et la Normandie devint française* (Paris: Mazarine, 1983); François Guillet, *Naissance de la Normandie. Genèse et épanouissement d'une image régionale en France, 1750-1850* (Caen: Annales de Normandie, 2000).

<sup>496</sup> On Viking imagery as a tool of nationalism in Europe writ large, see Johnni Langer, "Horned, Barbarian, Hero: The Visual Invention of the Viking through European Art (1824-1851)," *Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies*, no. 4 (2021): 131-180.

the Viking incursions onto French soil. First, I will look at four paintings from 1834-1840 depicting attacks on Frankish urban centers during the Norse campaigns of the 880s. Then, I will turn to four different paintings from the second half of the nineteenth century imagining generic raids on the coastline. These two temporal groupings will demonstrate evolving French attitudes towards the Vikings and their slow absorption into the national mythos. Artists transitioned the Viking from a dangerous foreign threat to a constituent element of the *patrie*. Throughout this chapter, I ask, what did these paintings mean to their creators and viewers? Why did they make sense to nineteenth-century French people? Why did they appeal, or even feel necessary, in this historical context?

### **After Saint-Clair-sur-Epte: Normandy from 911 to 1911**

Understanding the Vikings' prestige in nineteenth-century Normandy requires understanding the region's unique position in the broader national context. Though barely 100 kilometers separated Paris and Rouen, many factors distanced Normandy from hegemonic French culture, including endemic poverty, a distinctive local patois, and long-standing biases. I do not aim in this section to provide a comprehensive local history of Normandy. Rather, I seek to sketch the fluctuating affinity of Normans for Scandinavia, England, and the Hexagon in the millennium following Rollo's settlement. Though historically Normandy's Norse-ness had contributed to its cultural distance from the rest of France, by the dawn of the twentieth century intellectuals had successfully mobilized Viking memory to refigure Normandy as a singular but integral component of France.

Normandy's legal and administrative relationship to the government located in Paris changed repeatedly in the 1,000 years after Rollo and Charles III came to an agreement. The



medieval period witnessed especially frequent upheavals on this front.<sup>497</sup> Though the 911 Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte only granted Rollo the lands around Rouen, after Charles lost the throne of West Francia in 922, Rollo seized the opportunity to claim Caen and Bayeux as well. His heirs continued to add to this territory, consolidating the basic dimensions of modern Normandy. Rollo's great-grandson Richard II "the Good" was the first of his line to go by the title Duke of Normandy and the last to maintain meaningful cultural or practical ties with the broader Norse Atlantic world. After Rollo's great-great-great-grandson William the Conqueror triumphed over Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the dukes of Normandy (notably excepting William's son Robert Curthose and the leaders under the Anarchy) simultaneously ruled as kings of England.<sup>498</sup> Their dual roles as sovereigns of England and vassals of the French monarch made Normandy a site of ongoing conflict. The dukes often exercised their lordship in absentia, preferring to govern from across the Channel. This neglect helped facilitate the growth of an autonomous Norman identity, dubbed "the Norman nationality."<sup>499</sup> Such multilateral tensions continued until Philip II "Augustus" of France reasserted royal possession of Normandy in 1204.<sup>500</sup> From then on, lordship over Normandy would be personally held by the king of France or his immediate relative until the region was fully assimilated in 1469.<sup>501</sup> The English kings did not formally renounce their claim to the dukedom of Normandy until the 1259 Treaty of Paris, but in reality French control of Normandy was already a *fait accompli*.

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<sup>497</sup> David Bates, *Normandy before 1066* (London: Longman, 1982); Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); David Crouch, *The Normans: The History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002); Katherine Cross, *Heirs of the Vikings: History and Identity in Normandy and England, c.950–c.1015* (Boydell & Brewer, 2018).

<sup>498</sup> Pierre Buoet and Véronique Gazeau, *La Normandie et l'Angleterre au Moyen Âge* (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2003).

<sup>499</sup> "La nationalité normande." See for example Émile Léonard, *Histoire de la Normandie*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963).

<sup>500</sup> Anne-Marie Flambard Hélicher and Véronique Gazeau, eds., *1204. La Normandie entre Plantagenêts et Capétiens* (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2007).

<sup>501</sup> Louis XVI briefly revived the dukedom in 1785 and granted it to his second son, the future Louis XVII. Léonard, *Histoire de la Normandie*, 106.

However, unification with France did not mean homogenization. In response to local unrest, in 1315 Louis X “the Quarrelsome” promulgated the *Charte aux Normands*, which – among other concessions – guaranteed that the Rouennais Exchequer, not the Paris Parlement, would decide Norman affairs.<sup>502</sup> The *Charte* epitomized for Normans (in the fourteenth century and after) their independence and corporate identity; it would be repeatedly reconfirmed over the centuries. The Hundred Years’ War devastated the area, strategically located between England and the rest of France, and local aristocrats regularly switched sides in pursuit of political advantage.<sup>503</sup> The Protestant Reformation also revived links between Huguenots in Normandy and their coreligionists across the Channel.<sup>504</sup> In the early modern period, the province’s administrative cohesion suffered first from the appointment of three separate intendants based out of Rouen, Caen, and Alençon, respectively, then from the Revolution’s delineation of five different Norman departments in 1790.<sup>505</sup>

Normandy’s difficulties accelerated in the nineteenth century.<sup>506</sup> As a center of textile production, it was deeply impacted by the Industrial Revolution and the attendant advent of mass poverty.<sup>507</sup> Tocqueville himself wrote decrying the “pauperism in Normandy” and speculating on how to solve it.<sup>508</sup> Laborers seeking better opportunities left for Paris and elsewhere,

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<sup>502</sup> Léonard, *Histoire de la Normandie*, 72.

<sup>503</sup> Léonard, *Histoire de la Normandie*, 73-82.

<sup>504</sup> Léonard, *Histoire de la Normandie*, 87-106.

<sup>505</sup> Léonard, *Histoire de la Normandie*, 97, 108.

<sup>506</sup> As late as 1990, the journal *Études normandes* devoted an entire issue to the ongoing problem of “poverty, precarity, and unemployment.” “Pauvreté, précarité, chômage,” *Études Normandes* 39, no. 3 (1990).

<sup>507</sup> Yannick Marec, *Pauvreté et protection sociales aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Des expériences rouennaises aux politiques nationales* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006); Antony Kitts, « Bons » et « mauvais » *pauvres. Représentations et prise en charge de la pauvreté en Normandie au XIXe siècle* (Rouen: Bibliothèque des universités normandes, 2022).

<sup>508</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, “Letter on Pauperism in Normandy,” in *Memoirs on Pauperism and Other Writings: Poverty, Public Welfare, and Inequality*, ed. Christine Henderson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021): 47-50.

depopulating the area.<sup>509</sup> By the time of the Norse revival, economic, political, and cultural factors combined to marginalize Normandy within the national community.

Normans' cultural memory of the Vikings shifted almost as frequently as did Normandy's official relationship with Paris. Though the learned churchmen who served the later dukes of Normandy and English Norman kings framed their patrons in poems and chronicles as valiant Norse warriors perfected by their conversion to Christianity, in reality the material and social links between Normandy and Scandinavia broke by the early eleventh century.<sup>510</sup>

According to François Guillet, post-medieval Normans began identifying with the Vikings in the late 1700s, as local societies of learned savants excavated the medieval history of the region.<sup>511</sup>

However, the revolutionaries discredited this attitude around the turn of the century, presenting the Norse in France as foreign enemies and aristocratic oppressors analogous to modern counter-revolutionaries. One notable figure did keep the faith: Simon-Barthélemy-Joseph Noël de la Morinière (1765-1822).<sup>512</sup> Though employed as Inspector General of Fisheries, Noël de la Morinière found time to publish extensively on Norse culture. A native of Dieppe, he insisted that modern French readers ought to engage with Old Norse literature because the Norse were the forebears of modern Normans.<sup>513</sup> Though a stalwart defender of the historical and patriotic merit of Old Norse sources, Noël de la Morinière failed to inspire a significant following among his contemporaries. He remained a lone voice in the wilderness for the importance of the Vikings to France.

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<sup>509</sup> Léonard, *Histoire de la Normandie*, 115-119.

<sup>510</sup> Guy Nondier, "Mirages et mythes norois," *Études Normandes* 35, no. 3 (1986): 105-122.

<sup>511</sup> Guillet, "Le Nord mythique dans la Normandie," 461.

<sup>512</sup> Eric Wauters, *Noël de la Morinière (1765-1822). Culture, sensibilité et sociabilité entre l'Ancien Régime et la Restauration* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001).

<sup>513</sup> See for example Simon-Barthélemy-Joseph Noël de la Morinière, *Examen comparatif du pouvoir des parques scandinaves et grecques sur Odin et Jupiter* (Rouen: Imprimerie des Arts, 1799), 28.

The Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres kicked off a new enthusiasm for the Viking presence in Francia with its 1820 challenge: “What were the causes of the numerous emigrations of the peoples known under the general name of *Normans* in the Middle Ages, and... their incursions and their establishment throughout ancient Gaul?”<sup>514</sup> The Münster-born historian Georges Bernard Depping (1784-1853) won the prize for his entry, *Histoire des expéditions maritimes des Normands et de leur établissement en France au X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, which enjoyed several re-editions.<sup>515</sup> The competition also prompted the Legitimist historian Jean-Baptiste Capéfigue (1801-1872) to publish *Essai sur les invasions maritimes des Normands dans les Gaules*. These works delved not only into medieval Scandinavian culture, society, and politics, but specifically into the Norse settlement in northwestern Francia.

The 1820 Académie competition opened the metaphorical floodgates of regional research into the Viking presence in Normandy.<sup>516</sup> Specifically, domestic ethnographers looked to the

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<sup>514</sup> “Examiner, d’après les monumens historiques, et principalement d’après les monumens du nord, quelles ont été les causes des nombreuses émigrations des peuples connus sous le nom général de *Normands* dans le moyen âge, et tracer l’histoire abrégée de leurs incursions et de leurs établissemens dans toute l’étendue de l’ancienne Gaule.” Jean-Baptiste Capéfigue, *Essai sur les invasions maritimes des Normands dans les Gaules* (Paris: 1825), vii.

<sup>515</sup> Georges Bernard Depping, *Histoire des expéditions maritimes des Normands et de leur établissement en France au X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1826).

<sup>516</sup> The next century would see the publication of: Théodore Licquet, “Dissertation sur une clause du traité de Saint-Clair-sur-Epte : Le mariage de Rollon avec Giselle, fille de Charles-le-Simple,” *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie* (1827-1828): 258-272; Achille Déville, “Dissertation sur l’étendue du territoire concédé à Rollon, par le traité de Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, en 911,” *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie* (1831-1833): 47-69; De Gerville, “Recherches sur le Hague-dike et les premiers établissemens militaires de Normands sur nos côtes,” *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie* (1831-1833): 193-245; Théodore Licquet, *Histoire de Normandie*, 2 vols. (Rouen: Edouard Frère, 1835); Achille Deville, “Dissertation sur la mort de Rollon,” *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie* (1840-1841): 308-314; Charles Barthélemy, *Histoire de la Normandie ancienne et moderne* (Tours: Ad Mame et Cie, 1857); Charles Barthélemy, *Histoire de la Normandie ancienne et moderne*, 2 ed. (Tours: Ad Mame et Cie, 1858); Charles Barthélemy, *Histoire de la Normandie ancienne et moderne*, new ed. (Tours: Ad Mame et Cie, 1862); Edouard Le Héricher, *Normandie scandinave* (Avranches: Imprimerie Henri Tribouillard, 1861); Edouard Le Héricher, “Les scandinaves en Normandie, ou influence littéraire, philologique et morale des scandinaves en Normandie,” *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie* (1875): 34-164; Gustave Bascle de Lagrèze, *Les normands dans les deux mondes* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1890); Gabriel Gravier, *Les anciens Normands chez eux et en France* (Rouen: Imprimerie E. Cagniard, 1898); Emmanuel Thubert, “Politique du Nord de l’Europe au moyen âge. Les Northmen en France,” *Revue d’histoire diplomatique* 20 (1906): 511-536; Ferdinand Lot, “La grande invasion normande de 856-862,” *Bibliothèque de l’école de chartes* 69 (1908): 5-62; Henri Prentout, *Essai sur les origines et la fondation du duché de Normandie* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1911); Jean Revel, *Histoire des Normands* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1918-19).

Norman peasant as a time capsule perfectly preserving the lost cultural heritage of the Norse.<sup>517</sup> Indeed, the supposed Scandinavian-ness of the Norman peasant became an assumed fact. This posture reified the trope of the exotic rural provincial. Moreover, it helped naturalize the poverty and disenfranchisement of the Norman peasantry as simply part of their timeless identity, recasting a social problem as picturesque charm.

In the second half of the century, elite Normans began claiming Viking heritage for themselves, instead of merely ascribing it to the peasants they observed. Norman notables joined organizations like the *Souvenir normand*, founded in 1896, which sought to create an international Paix Normande based on the shared Norse heritage of countries like France, Britain, Denmark, and Russia.<sup>518</sup> Gradually, the Norman intelligentsia no longer associated Norse-ness with linguistic, political, and economic backwardness, but with moral, literary, and military greatness.<sup>519</sup> Amateur genealogists eagerly sought Viking conquerors in their family trees.<sup>520</sup> Fiction celebrated the Norse settlement in and integration with France.<sup>521</sup>

As the century wore on, Norman enthusiasm for the Vikings took on a eugenic dimension. As discussed in Chapter 2, nineteenth-century race thinkers in France and abroad came to believe the Norse were the last pure strain of Aryans. Viking revivalists embraced this notion in order to claim for the Normans both ethnic superiority and an important role in the historical destiny of France. For example, in his 1880 essay “La vieille civilisation scandinave,”

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<sup>517</sup> Guillet, “Le Nord mythique dans la Normandie,” 459-466.

<sup>518</sup> Jehan Soudan de Pierrefitte, “La Reine Alexandra, la Tsarina Marie. Souveraines Normandes,” *Revue illustrée* (December 20, 1907): 273-280; Brian Golding, “Remembering the Battle of Hastings: Memorialization, Le Souvenir normand, and the Entente Cordiale,” *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXIX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2016*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (Boydell and Brewer, 2017): 65-79.

<sup>519</sup> Jean-Jacques Bertaux, “Vikings et drakkars dans la littérature régionaliste normande 1850-1950,” in *Dragons et drakkars. Le Mythe viking de la Scandinavie à la Normandie XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Jean-Marie Levesque (Caen: Imprimerie Normandie Information Impression, 1996): 57-70.

<sup>520</sup> See notably Arthur de Gobineau, *Histoire d’Ottar Jarl, pirate norvégien, conquérant du pays de Bray, en Normandie et de sa descendance* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1879).

<sup>521</sup> Félix Cellarier, *Paris délivré : poème*, 2 vols. (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1870); Aristide Frémine, *La Légende de Normandie* (Paris: Alphones Lemerre, 1886); Léon Cahun, *Le rois de mer* (Paris: Imprimerie F. Imrert, 1890).

scholar Alfred Maury used the language of transfusion and vaccination to argue that the Norse settlers in Normandy improved French racial stock. He maintained that “an infusion of such barbarous blood... inoculated the Gallo-Franks of the banks of the Seine and the Vire with this germ of intellectual and material progress.”<sup>522</sup> As a result, “having settled on the shore of the English Channel, the Franco-Norse... walked rapidly along the path of civilization.... The Norse of Neustria promptly placed themselves at the head of the society they had entered, and French genius soon produced in this province some of its greatest fruits.”<sup>523</sup> Following in the footsteps of Montesquieu two centuries before, Maury presented the medieval Scandinavians as an intrepid, independent people whose hearty genes reinvigorated the declining populations of Mediterranean Europe. Over thirty years later, in 1911, the Rouennais author Paul Toutain borrowed this serological lexicon. Writing under the pseudonym Jean Revel, Toutain argued that “the Nordic ferment, that they [the French] once attempted to expel like a virus, is now perceived to have the qualities of a vaccine. They seek to reabsorb it into the French essence, which will be entirely vivified by it. Thus our genial and generous [Norman] race infuses its blood into the national body.”<sup>524</sup> Not an unholy plague set by God to scourge Francia, the Viking of Toutain’s imaginings was instead a bracing inoculation.

This view of the Viking as a symbolic unifier of region and nation fundamentally structured the 1911 celebration of the 1,000-year anniversary of the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-

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<sup>522</sup> “Une infusion d’un sang aussi barbare... inoculé aux Gallo-Franks des bords de la Seine et de la Vire ce germe de progrès intellectuel et matériel.” Alfred Maury, “La vieille civilisation scandinave : Récens travaux des archéologues du nord sur les invasions des normands,” *Revue des deux mondes* 41, no. 2 (September 15, 1880), 247-248.

<sup>523</sup> “Devenus habitans du littoral de la Manche, les Franco-Normands... marchèrent rapidement dans les voies de la civilisation.... Les Normands de la Neustrie se placèrent promptement à la tête de la société dans laquelle ils étaient entrés, et le génie français porta bientôt dans cette province quelques uns de ses meilleurs fruits.” Maury, “La vieille civilisation scandinave,” 247-248.

<sup>524</sup> “Le ferment nordique, que jadis on s’efforça d’expulser comme un virus, maintenant on lui aperçoit des qualités de vaccin. On le veut résorbé dans la substance française qui en sera toute vivifiée. C’est ainsi que notre géniale et généreuse race infuse son sang dans la chair nationale.” Jean Revel, “Le Millénaire de la Normandie,” *Revue des français* 6, no. 5 (May 25, 1911), 31.

Epte. The celebration, organized by the municipal council of Rouen, aimed “to commemorate the great deeds of the Normans and to trace the role and the glory their race can claim in the national patrimony.”<sup>525</sup> From its instigation, the organizers intended this event not only to popularize awareness of Norse history in northwestern France, but to link regional and national identity. The festivities began on Sunday, May 28, 1911 in the town of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte itself. Five hundred forty delegates from government and historical societies in Normandy, Paris, and Scandinavia met to share a meal, give speeches, and unveil a plaque marking the place where the treaty signing supposedly occurred. A special train chartered from Paris delivered the attendees promptly at noon to the station of Bordeaux-Saint-Clair in the neighboring town of Château-sur-Epte, which was specially decorated with garlands, bunting, banners, and pennants. The celebrants formed a procession from the train station to the bridge linking Château-sur-Epte to Saint-Clair-sur-Epte. After an exuberant lunch marked by many ebullient toasts, at 3:00pm the party emerged to inaugurate the plaque on the riverbank. Notable guests included Victor Edouard Milliard, senator; Louis Passy, longtime member of the Chamber of Deputies and prolific historian of Rollo’s conquest; Charles Ernest Gérard Aubourg de Boury, erstwhile marquis and member of the Chamber of Deputies; Maurice Guesnier, yet another member of the Chamber of Deputies; Ernest Mallet, historian and mayor of Pontoise; and George Marie Besnier, Eure’s departmental archivist. The *Journal de Rouen* reported that 1,500 people attended the concert, dinner, and fireworks that closed the day.<sup>526</sup>

This convivial occasion not only bolstered Norman regional pride in an illustrious Viking past, but also helped to heal rifts in the French community. The Treaty of 911 had divided the

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<sup>525</sup> “Commémorer les hauts faits des Normands et retracer la part d’activité et de gloire à laquelle leur race peut prétendre dans le patrimoine national.” *La Société historique du Vexin et le millénaire normand* (Pontoise: Bureaux de la Société historique, 1911), 3.

<sup>526</sup> All details on the celebration taken from *La Société historique du Vexin et le millénaire normand*.

Vexin region in two, between the Normand Vexin ruled by Rollo and the French Vexin ruled by Charles. Saint-Clair-sur-Epte was on the border between the sundered territories. By locating the millennium celebration's first major event there, the organizers symbolically reunited the two Vexins. Much of the conversation also centered the project of reconciling Norman regional and French national identity. In his speech, the adjunct mayor of Rouen proclaimed that "if we [Normans] are profoundly attached to our country, if France is for us the object of a true cult and the most ardent patriotism, we conserve in the bottom of our hearts a profound affection for our little fatherland, Normandy."<sup>527</sup> The official report of the May 28 gathering opened by asserting that the 911 Treaty actually "conquered" the "conquerors" by setting up the conditions for the Vikings' inevitable assimilation into a French "national hegemony," returning "a province torn from the fatherland by war" back to France, an event the authors believed "could only leave glorious, friendly, and comforting memories."<sup>528</sup> The Saint-Clair-sur-Epte celebration also addressed more recent wounds in the French body politic. The event brought together rivals from diametric sides of the era's contentious ideological divide. Among the leading attendees at the gathering were Victor Edouard Millard, an anti-Boulangiste republican, who was defeated in the election of 1877 by another attendee, Louis Passy, a right-wing Boulangist, monarchist, and former Orléanist. Maurice Guesnier, a progressive republican, even made a toast to Passy, his political opposite. Shared enthusiasm for the Viking past helped mediate the heated factional conflict within turn-of-the-century France.

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<sup>527</sup> "Si nous sommes profondément attachés à notre pays, si la France est pour nous l'objet d'un véritable culte et du patriotisme le plus ardent, nous conservons au fond du cœur une affection profonde à notre petite patrie normande." *La Société historique du Vexin et le millénaire normand*, 7.

<sup>528</sup> "Conquérât... les conquérants." "L'hégémonie nationale." "Une province arrachée par la guerre à la patrie et redevenue par la paix membre de la France," an event the authors believe "ne pouvait laisser que des souvenirs glorieux, amicaux et réconfortants." *La Société historique du Vexin et le millénaire normand*, 3.



The millennium celebration continued in a new venue a conversation that had been ongoing for most of a century. How had the Viking invasions changed the French national fabric? And how could the damage of that conflictual past be healed in the present? The delegates who gathered at Saint-Clair-sur-Epte in 1911 offered one solution to those questions. Norse heritage became a touchpoint that helped define Norman regional identity as distinct from but also essentially contributing to France as a whole. The paintings I examine in the rest of this chapter thus constituted one dimension of a robust conversation on the place of the Viking Normans in French history.

### **Pathologizing Viking Violence: Siege Paintings at Versailles**

In 1833, the recently crowned King of the French, Louis Philippe I, conceived a new plan for the disused palace of Versailles. He determined to transform the ultimate symbol of Bourbon absolutism into a historical museum celebrating the collective accomplishments of the French nation over the many centuries.<sup>529</sup> This project was particularly imperative considering the uncertain status of the new Orléanist regime. In his own lifetime, Louis Philippe I had seen France pass through an absolutist monarchy, constitutional monarchy, republic, Bonapartist empire, and Bourbon Restoration. He himself had come to power at the expense of his cousin Charles X through the July Revolution of 1830, and (though he did not yet know it) he would lose the throne less than two decades later during the Revolutions of 1848. Considering the exceptionally volatile nature of French politics at the time, establishing unity and consensus was chief among Louis Philippe I's priorities. He aimed to accomplish this goal in part by

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<sup>529</sup> Eudore Soulié, *Notice du Musée impérial de Versailles*, 2 ed., 3 vols. (Paris: Charles de Mourgues Frères, 1859-1861).

repurposing a divisive emblem of royal extravagance into a patriotic homage to a diverse lineage of heroes.<sup>530</sup> The history museum debuted in 1837 to great fanfare.<sup>531</sup>

The focal point of the new Versailles was the Gallery of Battles (*Galerie des Batailles*), situated on the first floor of the south wing (*Aile du Midi*). This gallery and the many monumental paintings commissioned for it related a triumphant narrative of French martial greatness that spanned centuries. The theme of France's transhistorical dominance on the battlefield also suffused the rest of the museum, which focused heavily on representing military men and military scenes. Though most of the museum's holdings portrayed more recent engagements, three paintings destined for Versailles depicted the Vikings' campaigns across northern France in the 880s: Jean Victor Schnetz's *Le comte Eudes défend Paris contre les Normands* (Figure 4.3), Henri Lehmann's *Mort de Robert-le-Fort* (Figure 4.4), and Joseph Dassy's *Bataille de Saucourt-en-Vimeu* (Figure 4.5), all three completed for the museum's 1837 opening. In this section, I will analyze these canvases alongside a fourth inspired by the same topic: Romulus Antoine Hennon-Dubois' 1840 *Siège de Paris par les Normands (Scandinaves), l'an 885* (Figure 4.7). Collectively, these four images express a shared national stance towards the Norse who invaded Francia in the ninth century, characterizing them as barbarous enemies who threatened the gallant Franks with inhuman violence. Nonetheless, hints of a softening attitude towards the Norse can be briefly glimpsed in these pictures.

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<sup>530</sup> Robert Fohr and Pascal Torrès, "Louis-Philippe inaugure la galerie des Batailles," *Histoire par l'image* (May 2005).

<sup>531</sup> For more on Louis-Philippe and French medievalism, see Thomas Smith, "The Charters of the Fifth Crusade Revisited," in *Settlement and Crusade in the Thirteenth Century: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Latin East*, ed. Judith Bronstein, Gil Fishhof, and Vardit Shotten-Hallel (London: Routledge, 2021): 197–208.



Fig. 4.3. Jean Victor Schnetz, *Le comte Eudes défend Paris contre des Normands*, 1834-1837. Oil on canvas, 465 x 542 cm, musée du Louvre, Paris.

By far the most widely remembered of the paintings surveyed in this chapter, Schnetz's canvas overawes through its size and harried composition.

The three paintings of the Norse campaigns of the 880s that hung at Versailles conformed to a consistent visual idiom common to war paintings at this time.<sup>532</sup> They all centered a heroic Frankish nobleman engulfed in a heaving mob of ahistorically garbed, bestial Vikings. In terms of form, the three canvases featured only two planes: a close foreground of writhing bodies and a distant background of imperiled landscape. The architecture of the images, like their meaning, had very little middle ground. The main thrust of these pictures was conventionally anti-Viking. In 1837, at least, telling the story of the siege of Frankish towns from a French perspective meant

<sup>532</sup> On the characteristics of war paintings in this era, see Theodore K. Rabb, *The Artist and the Warrior: Military History Through the Eyes of the Masters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Katie Hornstein, *Picturing War in France, 1792-1856* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

celebrating Frankish knights, not the Viking invaders. Enshrined in the royal museum at Versailles, they come as close as possible to an official French position on the Vikings.



Fig. 4.4. Henri Lehmann, *Mort de Robert-le-Fort*, 1837. Oil on canvas, 68 x 105 cm, châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles.

Born in the contested region of Schleswig, Lehmann (1814-1882) initially trained under his father Leo before studying with Ingres in Paris.<sup>533</sup> He established himself as a celebrated painter of historical and Biblical scenes, eventually joining the Legion of Honor and the Institute.

The surfaces of all three paintings are principally consumed by a chaotic crowd of deindividualized bodies. Confronted with a tangled array of human forms, the viewer is initially hard-pressed to tell who is who or which side is which. Indeed, the journal *L'Artiste* complained in 1837 that “everything is confused in the work of M. Lehmann; it is impossible to distinguish anything but a pyramid of soldiers.”<sup>534</sup> Of Schentz’s canvas, the same periodical said, “In the battle and melee there is confusion without interest; there are neither dramas nor episodes that fix

<sup>533</sup> For Lehmann’s biography, see John Denison Champlin, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Painters and Paintings*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 51-52.

<sup>534</sup> “Tout est confondu dans l’ouvrage de M. Lehmann ; il est impossible d’y rien distinguer autre chose qu’un pyramidal de soldats qui s’agitent à l’entrée d’une porte de ville.” “Musée historique de Versailles,” *L’Artiste* (1837), 339.

the attention.”<sup>535</sup> The combatants are depersonalized, nearly disintegrated; they lose any specific identity to become merely flesh, parts. Instead of featuring standard male Academic nude vignettes, the canvases grind up the human body in the maelstrom of war. Bare limbs become dissociated, almost dismembered from their torsos by the very fact of their bareness. These martial bodies are not celebrated, but taken apart. Indeed, many are casually trampled or crushed in the fray. Intermingled with this maze of bodies are weapons. Swords, knives, spears, arrows, bows, and axes stick out awkwardly in all directions. These images offer a real palpable sense of the horrors of war. They provoke a sense of revulsion, not awe or admiration. They communicate the horrors of Viking violence, as well as the horrors of Norse society. The lack of visual hierarchy within the crowd gestures towards the perceived barbarism of Norse life. Scholars of the day argued that Norse culture was uniquely egalitarian and lacking in formal structure.<sup>536</sup> The visual anarchy of the scene condemns the supposed political anarchy of the Vikings themselves.



Fig. 4.5. Joseph Dassy, *Bataille de Saucourt-en-Vimeu*, 1837. Oil on canvas, 70 x 107 cm, châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles.

Though Dassy (1791-1865) painted a number of historical and Biblical subjects, he was most successful as a portraitist. He went on to be curator at the musée de Marseille.

<sup>535</sup> “Là où est la lutte et la mêlée il y a de la confusion sans intérêt ; il n’y a ni drames ni épisodes qui fixent l’attention.” “Salon de 1837,” *L’Artiste* (1837), 114.

<sup>536</sup> Boyer, *Le Mythe Viking dans les lettres françaises*, 105-113.

Each of the three canvases provides a counterpoint to the undifferentiated horde in the form of a singular Frankish warrior who emerges from the pandemonium to claim the status of savior. In the case of Joseph Dassy's *Bataille de Saucourt-en-Vimeu*, that warrior is Louis III, King of West Francia (r. 879-882). Dassy portrays Louis III's July 881 victory over the Viking Garamond and his forces outside of Abbeville.<sup>537</sup> This canvas hung in Room 2 of the ground floor of the north wing of Versailles, among other paintings of French history from before the Revolution of 1789. Dassy's Louis III commands both his army and the scene. Held aloft on a rearing white charger, clad in brilliant golden armor, his spear high above the fray, Louis III nearly jumps out of the picture plane at the viewer. Jean Victor Schnetz's *Count Odo (French: Eudes)*, future King of West Francia (r. 888-889), similarly draws the eye. He recalls Catholic iconography of St. George slaying the dragon or St. Michael vanquishing the Devil, positioning the Norse by implication as demonic. Like Louis III, his white steed and golden armor almost glow against the background of grey smoke. Though it is difficult to focus on anyone else tangled in the melee, the crowd parts to reveal him: distinct, separate, literally above everyone else. As he sallies forth from the distant tower to break the 885-886 siege of Paris, the line of mounted knights following him directs the weight and momentum of the scene towards him. Odo's father, Robert the Strong, plays the same role in Henri Lehmann's *Mort de Robert-le-Fort*, which hung immediately next to Dassy's *Bataille de Saucourt-en-Vimeu*.<sup>538</sup> Robert's luminescent body forms the apex of a triangle of warriors, marking the point where the two clashing sides meet. Everyone faces him, the lines of weapons all lead to him. Unlike Dassy and Schnetz's canvases, this image portrays a Frankish defeat. On July 2, 886, Robert died and his army was routed during an assault on the church of Brisserte outside Angers, where a Viking

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<sup>537</sup> Soulié, *Notice du Musée impérial de Versailles*, 2 ed., vol. 1, 10.

<sup>538</sup> Soulié, *Notice du Musée impérial de Versailles*, 2 ed., vol. 1, 10.



force led by Hastein was holed up.<sup>539</sup> Lehmann's Robert takes on the Christomimetic attributes of a martyr, sacrificing himself for a holy cause.



Fig. 4.6. After Jean Victor Schnetz, *Le comte Eudes défend Paris contres des Normands* (1834-1837) in Charles Barthélemy, *Histoire de la Normandie ancienne et moderne*, 2 ed. (Tours: Ad Mame et Cie, 1858).

This reproduction of Schnetz's painting for a history book enlarges the bishop Jocelyn and brings him forward until he looms over Eudes, seemingly inspiring him onwards in his fight.

The three paintings in question also conflated the Vikings with the barbarian enemies of ancient Rome. Assessing *Le comte Eudes défend Paris contres des Normands*, historian Alexandre Sumpf dismisses “the armament [as] lacking detail, the costumes [as] rather fantastic.... The battle could just as easily oppose soldiers and simple brigands.”<sup>540</sup> As Knut Ljøgodt has shown, European artists in the early nineteenth century knew almost nothing about

<sup>539</sup> This event is described for viewers in Soulié, *Notice du Musée impérial de Versailles*, 2 ed., vol. 1, 10. See also Victor Boreau, *Histoire générale des temps du moyen âge*, 5 ed. (Paris: L. F. Hivert, 1856), 176; Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, new ed., vol. 4 (Paris: A. Lacroix, 1876).

<sup>540</sup> “L’armement est peu détaillé, les costumes assez fantaisistes.... La bataille pourrait tout aussi bien opposer des soldats et de simples brigands.” Alexandre Sumpf, “Les invasions barbares,” *Histoire par l’image* (December 2019).

Norse material culture. Consequently, they defaulted to dressing their Viking subjects according to Classical idioms.<sup>541</sup> Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 2, even the leading scholars of the period breezily conflated the medieval Norse with ancient Germanic tribes. Schnetz, Lehmann, and Dassy evince little concern for the real lived world of Norse people; they are concerned with the Norse not in themselves, but as a villainous foil for the Franks. As a result, they wrap their Viking subjects in barbarian furs or Antique tunics.

Schnetz explicitly equates the ninth-century Norse with the fourth-century Germanics. In the left foreground of his canvas, a Viking hides behind a crumbling pillar bearing the inscription “LUTET.” Schnetz implies this pillar is a ruined remnant from the Roman settlement of Lutetia, which would become Paris. Schentz thereby figures the Middle Ages as a postlapsarian era of darkness and discord that has fallen from the great Roman model of accomplishment. He also locates the Vikings in a lineage of northern barbarians destroying southern civilization dating back to the Germanics of the *Völkerwanderung*. He frames the Viking assaults on Paris as parallels to the barbarian overthrow of the Roman Empire. He presents both as subhuman hordes tearing down a great bastion of progress.

Nonetheless, Schnetz betrays hints of affinity for his antagonists. The old warrior in the left foreground recreates the posture of the *Dying Gaul*, an ancient Roman recreation of a Greek statue of a defeated but dignified enemy. Again, lacking original Norse referents, Schnetz resorts to Classical inspirations. More specifically, however, while painting a Viking in the attitude of the *Dying Gaul* certainly positions him as a barbarian enemy of civilization, it also ennobles him, as does the clear affection between the elderly, injured warrior and the younger man protecting him. Schnetz introduces another ancient allusion in his portrayal of the standing Viking in the

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<sup>541</sup> Knut Ljøgodt, “‘Northern Gods in Marble’: The Romantic Rediscovery of Norse Mythology,” *Romantik* 1, no. 1 (2012): 141-165. On nineteenth-century ideas about Romans and barbarians in art, see Éric Michaud, *The Barbarian Invasions: A Genealogy of the History of Art*, trans. Nicholas Huckle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019).



foreground immediately right of center. Like the Biblical David facing Goliath, this youthful warrior prepares to take on a bigger, stronger, better prepared foe with merely a sling. Like David, he is young and (at least from the back) attractive. He even wears a fleece, alluding to David's occupation as a shepherd. In the far right of the image, another Viking bows his head and does homage to his chieftain, Sigefroy.<sup>542</sup> Both men are muscular and handsome. This vignette is also surprisingly touching, ascribing to the Viking enemy chivalrous values usually reserved for Christian knights: loyalty, honor, fealty, and courageous resignation.

Schnetz's was by far the most prominent of the Versailles Viking canvases.<sup>543</sup> Exhibited at the Salon of 1837, it hung permanently in the Gallery of Battles, heart of the new museum.<sup>544</sup> Though indubitably a pro-Frank image, it suggests the possibility of Viking sympathies. These sympathies came to fuller maturity in Romulus Antoine Hennon-Dubois's *Siège de Paris par les Normands (Scandinaves), l'an 885* (Figure 7), which riffed on the schema laid out in the three Versailles Viking paintings. Exhibited at the Musée Royale in 1841, the canvas took its subject from Louis-Antoine-François de Marchangy's (1782-1826) 1813 *La Gaule poétique, ou l'Histoire de France considérée dans ses rapports avec la poésie, l'éloquence et les beaux-arts*, which was quoted directly in the exhibit catalogue:

About to cross the threshold of the church [of the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés], [the Normans] stop suddenly. One of their prophetesses, agitated by an unknown trouble, pushes aside the brambles covering a tomb where she recognizes with surprise a runic inscription. She approaches, and her hair standing on end with horror, she reads these words to the stupefied horde: "Ragnar [Lodbrok], chief of the Scandinavians, having dared to penetrate into the temple of the Lord, there was struck by an invisible hand and fell dead in the middle of his warriors." At these devastating words, the warriors paled and precipitously fled this place marked by divine vengeance.<sup>545</sup>

<sup>542</sup> The Viking chieftain is identified as such in Soulié, *Notice du Musée impérial de Versailles*, 2 ed., vol. 2, 352.

<sup>543</sup> On Schnetz himself, see Laurence Chesneau-Dupin, ed., *Jean-Victor Schnetz, 1787-1870 : couleurs d'Italie* (Flers: Musée du Château de Flers, 2000).

<sup>544</sup> Soulié, *Notice du Musée impérial de Versailles*, 2 ed., vol. 2, 352.

<sup>545</sup> "Prêts à franchir le seuil de l'église, ils s'arrêtent tout-à-coup ; une de leurs prophétesses se sent agitée par un trouble inconnu, elle écarte les ronces qui couvraient un tombeau où elle reconnaît avec surprise une inscription runique ; elle approche, et les cheveux hérissés d'horreur, elle lit ces mots à la horde stupéfaite : « Ragenaire, chef

Born in Oise in northern France, Hennon-Dubois may have been particularly sensitive to the problem of the Norse presence.<sup>546</sup> *Siège de Paris par les Normands (Scandinaves), l'an 885* shares many attributes with the Versailles paintings: a mass of Viking warriors assaulting an urban Frankish stronghold; a flattened, busy foreground and distant background; historically dubious costuming; a single, glowing protagonist elevated at the crux of the image. Nevertheless, it adopts a decidedly divergent posture towards the problem of the Vikings in Francia.



Fig. 4.7. Romulus Antoine Hennon-Dubois, *Siège de Paris par les Normands (Scandinaves), l'an 885*, 1840. Oil on canvas, 88 x 118 cm, musée du Monastère Royal de Brou, Bourg-en-Bresse.

Though the most obscure of the paintings in this section, I argue Hennon-Dubois' canvas is most narratively innovative.

Hennon-Dubois subverted the narrative of Frankish victory established by the Versailles paintings. The Frankish forces are not even present in the scene; they do not drive the Vikings

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des Scandinaves, ayant osé pénétrer dans le temple du Seigneur, y fut flagellé par une main invisible, et tomba mort au milieu de ses guerriers. » A ces paroles foudroyantes, les guerriers pâlissent et s'éloignent précipitamment de ces lieux marqués par la vengeance divine." *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants exposés au Musée Royal le 15 mars 1841* (Paris: Vinchon, 1841), 124.

<sup>546</sup> Émile Bellier de la Chavignèrie, *Dictionnaire générale des artistes de l'école française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Veuve Jules Renouard, 1868), 756.

off through dominance in battle. Instead, the Norse are arrested by the carved warning on the floor. Intriguingly, the viewer cannot decipher what is written there – they must rely on the catalogue description or their own knowledge of Marchangy’s text. The entire canvas revolves around something the public cannot see. Even as the Norse all point towards and look at the plaque on the ground, they also lean away (or even flee) from it. The painting turns on an axis the viewer cannot directly grasp. Indeed, the canvas captures a non-event. God intervenes to repel the Vikings, but only indirectly. The viewer does not witness a miracle, merely a terse record of a miracle from years before. This is a painting about something that does not happen: no battle between the Vikings and Franks for Saint-Germain-des-Prés, no lightning descending from the sky to smite the heathen Norse. The image captures them at a moment of indecision, creating a sense of anti-climax.



Fig. 4.8. P. Kauffmann, Illustration of Ragnar Lodbrok, in Leo Claretie, *Paris depuis ses origines jusqu'à l'an 3000* (Paris: 1886).

The Viking chieftain Reginherus, who led the 845 assault on Paris, is often identified with the legendary Ragnar Lodbrok. While some accounts have Ragnar dying suddenly after breaking into the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, more often he is reported to have been murdered by King Ælla of Northumbria, inspiring his sons to lead the Great Heathen Army against England in revenge. This illustration from a book of history reveals contemporary French impressions of Ragnar.

The heroic position usually occupied by the Frankish leader is instead filled here by the Norse prophetess, or “völva.” The architecture of the scene mimics the three Versailles paintings. Like Count Odo, Robert the Strong, or Louis III, the völva anchors the composition. Her gown and flesh glow luminously against her dark surroundings. The warriors clustered around and the line of ruined wall frame her; she is the apex of their visual triangle. Hennon-Dubois implicitly compares her with the Frankish protagonists of Schnetz, Lehmann, and Dassy.

French scholars of the day emphasized the importance of the völva in Norse society. The *Völuspá*, or “Prophecy of the Seeress,” was among the earliest and most frequently translated of the Eddaic poems.<sup>547</sup> Frédéric Guillaume Bergmann of the University of Strasbourg explained the prevalence of female practitioners of magic in Norse culture by arguing that “as women, due to their more delicate organization, their education, and their habitual occupations, naturally have a more impressionable mind than men, prophecy and divination entered particularly into their attributes in antiquity.”<sup>548</sup> Arthur de Gobineau maintained that women were particularly attached to Odinic religion because it “attribute[ed] to them a wise and penetrating, even divinatory mind... the science of sorcery, magic recipes... [and] all the mysteries of runes.”<sup>549</sup> In his novel 1890 *Les rois de mer*, Léon Cahun said of the “great Vala (witch)... her knowledge was

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<sup>547</sup> On translations of the Eddas into French, see Denis Ballu, *Lettres nordiques : une bibliographie, 1720-2013*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: Kungliga Biblioteket, 2016): 408-409; Pierre-Brice Stahl, “French Editions and Translations of the Poetic Edda: a Bibliography,” *Deshima. Revue d’histoire globale des Pays du Nord* 15 (2021): 105-118; Lyonel D. Perabo, “Traduire l’Edda : Les traductions de l’Edda poétique en langue française ; Méthodes, pratiques et limitations,” *Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies*, no. 6 (2023): 58-95.

<sup>548</sup> “Comme les femmes, par suite de leur organisation plus délicate, par leur éducation et leurs occupations habituelles, ont naturellement l’esprit plus impressionnable que les hommes, la prophétie et la divination entraient, dans l’antiquité, plus particulièrement dans leurs attributions.” Frédéric Guillaume Bergmann, *De l’influence exercée par les Slaves sur les Scandinaves dans l’antiquité* (Colmar: Camille Decker, 1867), 10.

<sup>549</sup> “Leur attribuant un esprit sagace et pénétrant jusqu’à la divination... la science des sortilèges et des recettes magiques... tous les mystères des runes.” Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4 (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1855), 86-87.

prodigious, and there was nothing she did not know of the past, present, and future.”<sup>550</sup> Paul Belloni Du Chaillu devoted an entire chapter to völvas in his two-volume study *The Viking Age* (1889).<sup>551</sup>



Fig. 4.9. Jacques-Louis David, *Les Sabines*, 1799. Oil on canvas, 385 x 522 cm, musée du Louvre, Paris.

In David’s painting, Hersilia launches herself between Titus Tatius (her father) and Romulus (her husband) to stop the war between the Sabines (her family of origin) and the Romans (her family by marriage).

I contend that Hennon-Dubois visually cites Jacques-Louis David’s 1799 *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (French: *Les Sabines*, Figure 4.9), conflating the Norse völvá with David’s heroine Hersilia in order to predict a future unification of Vikings and Franks. Stefan Germer argues that David intended Hersilia as a model of political reconciliation for the French public after the divisions of the Terror.<sup>552</sup> I suggest the völvá performs the same function in resolving the legacy of violence between the Norse and Franks. Instead of jumping in front of a band of warriors, arms outstretched, to interrupt an ongoing battle, the völvá does the same to

<sup>550</sup> “Grande Vala (Sorcière)... sa science était prodigieuse, et elle n’ignorait rien du passé, du présent et de l’avenir.” Léon Cahun, *Le rois de mer* (Paris: Imprimerie F. Imrert, 1890), 18.

<sup>551</sup> Paul Belloni Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age: The Early History, Manners, and Customs of the Ancestors of the English-Speaking Nations*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1889), 394-402.

<sup>552</sup> Stefan Germer, “In Search of a Beholder: On the Relation between Art, Audiences, and Social Spheres in Post-Thermidor France,” *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (March 1992): 19-36.

prevent a battle from occurring. Both Hersilia and the völvu represent visually soft, feminine intrusions into hard, masculine spaces of warfare. While the men in Hennon-Dubois' painting wear imagined approximations of Iron Age costume – shining armor, winged helms, heavy boots – the völvu's clothing is anachronistically Hellenistic. Her loosely draped chiton is nothing like the long-sleeved, fitted woolen gowns of actual Norse women and is moreover utterly unsuited to the harsh Scandinavian climate.<sup>553</sup> It is however nearly identical to Hersilia's garb. The laurel garland on her head, which echoes the foliage encircling the runic plaque, further alludes to her role as an agent of peace. Hennon-Dubois also references Classical motifs in his rendering of the damage to Saint-Germain-de-Prés, drawing on the many visual studies of Italian ruins popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like David's Hersilia, Hennon-Dubois' völvu halts the violence between two rival peoples who will eventually become a single people.

Oddly for a pagan sorceress, the völvu also serves as a mouthpiece of the Christian God. By warning her comrades of God's wrath against any who would profane the abbey, she saves both them and the holy place. She unexpectedly conforms to nineteenth-century French expectations of women as inherently pacific and pious. Her openness to receive God's message anticipates the Christian conversion of the Norse in France. This conversion, accomplished by Rollo and the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, will of course also end the major phase of Viking attacks and weave the Norse into the French body politic.

Hennon-Dubois hardly celebrates the violence perpetrated by the Vikings in Francia. He presents it as contrary to the will of God and a problem to be arrested. Nonetheless, he promises that a better future is on the horizon. Some Norse – notably women – are amenable to God's word and wish to step back from violence. Like David's Sabines, they efficaciously exhort their

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<sup>553</sup> Lilli Fransen, Anna Norgard, and Else Ostergard, *Medieval Garments Reconstructed: Norse Clothing Patterns* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010).

men to peace. Someday, the fighting between Norse and Franks will end when the Norse accept Christianity and form a single intermarried people with the Franks.

The visual pattern honed and endorsed by the historical museum housed at Versailles presented the Vikings as enemies of France. However, that pattern offered space for a more humane interpretation of the Norse. Schnetz gestured towards it; Hennon-Dubois fully embraced it. In the second half of the nineteenth century, French painters of Vikings would follow Hennon-Dubois' lead and focus on the unification of Norse and Franks into the modern French. As in *Siège de Paris par les Normands (Scandinaves), l'an 885*, medieval women would play a key visual role in that unification.

### **Assimilating Viking Violence: Paintings of Coastal Raids 1850-1900**

As the 1800s wore on and French fascination with the Vikings waxed (see Chapter 1), visual portrayals of the Norse in Francia changed accordingly. Gone were 1837's animalistic hordes assaulting French cities. During the second half of the 1800s, painters elaborated a new artistic idiom for representing Viking incursions. They displaced their settings from geographically and temporally particular urban locales to generalized maritime scenes along anonymous Frankish shorelines. This shift relocated the Viking invasions from Paris and other central points to less populated coastal regions where the Norse could be recast not as a national disaster, but as local forefathers. Moreover, between 1850 and 1900 French painters declined to depict actual battles, but focused instead on moments adjacent to non-specific raids. This evolution away from concrete representations of precise violence attenuated the problems attendant on elevating the Vikings as historical heroes.

By the late nineteenth century, the influence of the Salons was waning, due in large part to the institutional challenge posed by the Impressionists. Nevertheless, revisionist art historians have demonstrated that the Salons continued to attract visitors and propel the evolution of French aesthetics.<sup>554</sup> These canvases appeared before an engaged and democratic public primed to seek historical illumination in art. Though not endowed with the same government imprimatur as the works displayed at Versailles, the paintings examined in this section benefited from a prestigious environment to impress upon viewers the importance of the Vikings to France.



Fig. 4.10. Anonymous French artist, *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares*, ca. 1850. Oil on canvas, 122 x 151 cm, Château-musée, Nemours.

This painting by an unknown creator reflects mid-century concerns with male work.

An anonymous ca. 1850 painting now hanging in the château-musée of Nemours, entitled *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* (Figure 4.10), took an unexpected approach to

<sup>554</sup> Neil McWilliam, "Limited Revisions: Academic Art History Confronts Academic Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 12, no. 2 (1989): 71-86; Patricia Mainardi, "The Double Exhibition in Nineteenth-Century France," *Art Journal* 48 no. 1 (1989), 23-28; Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 4 (1991): 599-622; Stephen Bann, "Questions of Genre in Early Nineteenth-Century French Painting," *New Literary History* 34, no. 3 (2003): 501-11.



humanizing the Vikings who ravaged northern France: portraying them not as villains, but victims. Though hardly enormous, at 1.22 m x. 1.51 m the canvas makes an impression. *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* depicts the landing of a Norse armada on the shores of northern France; the myriad of sails and dark silhouettes stretching into the distance indicate this is a true invasion force.<sup>555</sup> According to Alexandre Sumpf, “the high cliffs of white chalk that bar the horizon situate this landing scene in Normandy.”<sup>556</sup> I suggest that more specifically the image represents the beaches of Étretat, a seaside resort town supposedly founded by Norse settlers. The Norse connection was still remembered in the modern period; in his 1909 Arsène Lupin novel *L'Aiguille creuse*, Maurice Leblanc made Étretat the site of Rollo’s secret treasure horde.

*Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* does not conform to earlier French conventions for depicting Norse invaders. Most notably, it is not a heroic war scene, but a frozen moment of menial suffering. No battle is taking place here, only arduous physical labor, exhaustion, and death. Men heave in the ships, lugging the bodies of their dead, or even collapse fatigued on the shoreline. They do not project bellicosity, just overwork. They appear beaten down by the effort and loss of the voyage from Scandinavia. The canvas does not present an army of eager young warriors hungry for glory, but men of varying ages – including the very old – who may well have been forced into sailing to Francia. The artist does not distinguish between freemen and thralls. Unlike in the Viking paintings featured at Versailles, the accoutrements of war occupy a secondary position in this scene. Someone has discarded a shield and helmet next to a rock in the left foreground in the midst of the more pressing task of landing the fleet. The deck of one ship is littered with abandoned junk, including some arms and armor. Most of the

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<sup>555</sup> Nineteenth-century historians estimated that hundreds of Norse ships regularly participated in single battles. Alfred Ravet, *La marine des Vikings, ou Pirates scandinaves* (Rouen: J. Lecerf, 1886): 15-24.

<sup>556</sup> “Les hautes falaises de craie blanche qui barrent l’horizon situent cette scène de débarquement en Normandie.” Sumpf, “Les invasions barbares.”

men are naked. Though some still wear helms or chainmail, these seem more an encumbrance than an aid. An axe is embedded in a log in the center foreground, but it is being used for the dangerous and urgent business of securing a ship rather than for war. Without enemies to fight, the Norse have no opportunity to display their martial prowess. The Vikings do not seem in control of the situation. To the contrary, they seem overwhelmed and overmatched by the ocean.

The unknown creator of *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* lingered attentively over his rendering of the laboring male body. Of the dozens of individuals depicted in this scene (in greater or lesser detail), none appear to be women. However, the viewer sees a wide range of men: young and old, clothed and naked, alive and dead. The painter showcases his command of the Academic male nude through deft renditions of muscular backs, thighs, buttocks, chests, and arms. Straining limbs and tendons glisten in the indeterminate light, almost glowing. The way the figures in the foreground brace their legs against sand and rock for purchase is particularly dramatic. Indeed, Sumpf notes that the canvas “recalls the towpath along a canal more than a campaigning army.”<sup>557</sup> The labor these men perform with their muscles is the ostensible justification for displaying them. Yet, such labor does not feel heroic, but rather menial. It is slowly breaking the men, not elevating them. Their suffering expresses itself in bowed heads, slumped shoulders, and bent backs. Nonetheless, their faces are uniformly stoic, set, and focused, their pain communicated only through posture.

Moreover, the chaotic composition of the scene flattens visual and social hierarchies. This image does not have a single protagonist or even group of protagonists. The representation of this vast crowd of invaders does not prioritize any one individual. The painter does not direct the viewer where to look. Rife with so much detail it cannot be easily processed, the canvas

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<sup>557</sup> “Une posture qui rappelle plus le halage le long des canaux qu’une armée en campagne.” Sumpf, “Les invasions barbares.”

offers no clear architecture guiding the eye. These masses of undifferentiated bodies displace historical focus from the single names of so-called great men like Rollo, Hastein, or Ragnar Lodbrok onto the everyman Viking. The painting's visual anarchy translates into a rowdy egalitarianism that nineteenth-century historians widely attributed to Norse society.<sup>558</sup>

The only vignette within the painting that conforms to the usual Viking trope is the depiction of the drakkar crew in the left midground. Armed men in helmets and capes stand stalwartly in the prow of the ship, facing defiantly towards the coast. However, these men seem separated from the rest of the image. They are almost play-acting as standard Viking warriors while ignoring the distinctly unheroic scramble around them. The artist implicitly contrasts the chieftain, pointing imperiously but uselessly at the shore, with the taut bodies of the three rowers actually doing the efficacious work of propelling the ship. By portraying the chieftain and his retainers as one small, incongruous, almost comedic element of a much vaster image, the artist suggests they are stereotypical *but not representative* of Norse warriors. The true Viking experience, he contends, is that of the exhausted men struggling merely to gain the safety of the shore.

*Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* further bucks expectations by including a Viking of color. A rare nineteenth-century acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of the Norse world, which extended from Moorish Spain in the west to the Black Sea in the east, the dark-skinned man in the far left foreground sports an earring and turban. Though Sumpf speculates that the man could be a slave captured on raids far afield, the painting provides no definitive evidence to support this analysis. Norse society was notably diverse, and Viking crews may have

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<sup>558</sup> Boyer, *Le Mythe Viking*, 105-113.

included individuals of many races.<sup>559</sup> The turbaned man on the left is performing the same tasks as all his fellows. True, he might be a thrall, but so might any of the men in the scene, apart from the chieftain and his guard. The painter treats him with the same grim dignity as the other Vikings. The muscles lining his arms, neck, ribs, and legs are rendered with the same careful gravitas. This surprising respect reads as an expression of solidarity with working men internationally, positioning ordinary men of all races as mutual victims of their leaders' selfishness, warmongering, and disregard for the common man. Such a statement of cross-racial brotherhood may suggest that the artist meant to critique the abuse of colonial subjects in Algeria. The painting's clear skepticism towards war further supports this potential interpretation, as does the artistic lineage in which it consciously inscribes itself.



Fig. 4.11. Théodore Géricault, *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, 1818-1819. Oil on canvas, 491 x 716 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

A poignant critique of Bourbon failures of governance, *The Raft of the Medusa* portrays the shipwrecked passengers of a doomed French expedition to Senegal.

<sup>559</sup> Caitlin Ellis, "Remembering the Vikings: Ancestry, Cultural Memory and Geographical Variation," *History Compass* (2021): 1-15.

The dark-skinned man at the head of a desperate melee of half-clad survivors and corpses, barely held afloat on turbulent seas by splintering vessels, clearly calls back to an inescapable touchstone in nineteenth-century French art: *The Raft of the Medusa* (French: *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, 1818-1819) by Théodore Géricault (Figure 4.13).<sup>560</sup> By visually citing Géricault's masterpiece, *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* implicitly joins in its politics. It writes the Vikings into a long history, ending with the *Medusa*, of innocent seamen drawn to destruction by the folly of aristocratic commanders aloof from their suffering. It shares Géricault's sympathy for common sailors and disdain for the powerful leaders who waste those sailors' lives. Importantly, it also inserts the Vikings into an extensive French maritime lineage dating up to the artist's present.

*Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* flips the expected script by portraying the Vikings as victims instead of the Frankish locals. It bypasses the problem of their violence by showing them in need of relief. Normandy becomes the site not of their predations, but their salvation. The *armée* of the painting's title is a refugee flotilla before it is an invasion force. *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* wants the viewer to pity the Vikings. They become the worthy forebears of a different kind of Frenchman: the oppressed but noble worker.

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<sup>560</sup> For an analysis of this painting, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Cannibalism: Senegal, Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, 1819," in *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002): 165-235.



Fig. 4.12. Alfred Didier, *Les rois de mer, ou pirates normands au IXe siècle, ravageant les côtes de Normandie*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 189.5 x 300 cm, Musée des beaux-arts, Rouen.

Of all the paintings examined in this chapter, Didier's portrayal of heroic maritime exploration perhaps most closely conforms to today's notion of Vikings. It also recalls Carl Peter Lehmann's *Frithjof Slaying Two Trolls at Sea* (1826).

Alfred Didier (1840-1892) adopted many of the same conventions in his painting *Les rois de mer, ou pirates normands au IXe siècle, ravageant les côtes de Normandie* (Figure 4.14).

Displayed at the Palais des Champs-Élysées in 1870 and the Exposition universelle in Vienna in 1873, *Les rois de mer* also features a Viking fleet afloat on dangerous seas pulling towards the distant, chalky cliffs of Normandy.<sup>561</sup> *Les rois de mer* shares with *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* a keen attention to the physical beauty of the laboring male body: see the bare-chested man in the left foreground straining against an oar, or the man in the right middle ground holding the rudder against the swift current. Didier's debt to *The Raft of the Medusa* is even more

<sup>561</sup> *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des Artistes Vivants exposés au Palais des Champs-Élysées le 1 mai 1870* (Paris: Imprimerie Charles de Mourgues frères, 1870), 110; *Exposition universelle de Vienne 1873, France: Œuvres d'art et manufactures nationales* (Paris: Hôtel de Cluny, 1873), 105.

explicit. The color palette, the swamped vessel filling the picture plane, the pyramid of bodies against the backdrop of the filled sail – they all hearken back to Géricault’s canvas.

However, key differences set *Les rois de mer* apart from both *Le débarquement de l’armée des barbares* and *The Raft of the Medusa*. Didier’s painting lacks the levelling impulse evident in the two earlier works. Though more ships are distantly visible in the background, Didier centers one in particular. The chieftain of this armada is not an elusive Waldo-like figure from a seek-and-find puzzle, but the clear protagonist of the scene. He stands at the forefront of the image, gesturing forward imperiously with his axe towards the destined shore. The men around him kneel or fade into the background. Of all the men in the painting, he faces the viewer most directly. He sports the luxury befitting his status: a splendid winged helmet, a long chainmail tunic, and a thick fur cape. He is visually supported by the woman on his left, whose white flesh and tunic pop against the stormy darkness of the scene. Her raised hand forms the apex of the image’s triangular composition, drawing the eye down to the chieftain himself.

Who is this mysterious lady? Clean, anachronistically dressed, and the only woman in the scene, she does not seem to be a member of the crew. I propose that she is an allegory of Scandinavia, an amalgam of Denmark’s Mor Danmark, Norway’s Mor Norge, Sweden’s Svea, and Iceland’s Lady of the Mountain.<sup>562</sup> She shepherds the Vikings towards Normandy and their future. She stands behind the chieftain to signify where they have come from, but she also upholds him as he points forward to where they are going. She gestures up towards Odin’s raven war banner, underscoring the crew’s Norse and pagan heritage, but also towards the sky, indicating this emigration is heaven’s design.

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<sup>562</sup> See Ursula E. Koch, “Female Allegories of the Nation,” *Encyclopédie d’histoire numérique de l’Europe*, trans. Arby Gharibian (June 22, 2020).

With this painting, Didier suggests that the Norse arrival in France was predestined. A small circle of sky opens in the swirling tempest just above the lead ship, implying the crew has finally reached the end of their struggle, the respite after the storm. The heavens themselves indicate Normandy is the Vikings' final destination and safe harbor. Unlike the beleaguered barbarian army of the previous painting, these sea kings are arriving not as refugees, but gallant adventurers proudly brandishing weapons of war. Reading the triumphant gestures of the chieftain and the female allegory, this landing appears intentional and victorious, not haphazard and desperate. These Vikings are here to conquer and (in nineteenth-century terms) bring a manly infusion of vigor to France. However, Didier still avoids any direct depiction of violence. Actual brutality is left off the canvas, in the future, to the viewer's imagination. Didier downplays the material harm this raiding party will inevitably inflict on the Franks and Gauls in order to focus on their masculine vitality and fated integration with the French community.



Fig. 4.13. Henri Georges Charrier, *Les Normands revenant du pillage*, 1880-1881. Oil on canvas, 139 x 228 cm, Musée de Normandie, Caen.

High Medieval anarchonism and conventions of landscape painting merge in Charrier's canvas to create a surprisingly romantic representation of Viking raids.



In *Les Normands revenant du pillage* (Figure 4.15), Henri Georges Charrier (1859-1950) jumped ahead in time to depict the aftermath of a Viking raid such as that being prepared in *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares* or *Les rois de mer*. Exhibited at the Palais des Champs-Élysées in 1889, Charrier's *Les Normands revenant du pillage* shows a band of Norsemen laden with booty leading captives down to their drakkars, away from a burning settlement.<sup>563</sup> Among other symbols of their victory, the Vikings bear away a golden reliquary, a woman in blue with her hands bound behind her, and a cleric's head on a spear.<sup>564</sup> Like Didier and the anonymous creator of *Le débarquement de l'armée des barbares*, Charrier also eschewed direct representation of Viking violence, choosing instead to hint backwards at violence that has already occurred.

This canvas is riven by a tension between the superficial tranquility of the scene and the brutality that immediately preceded it. In the single moment frozen here in oil paint, no one is fighting. The Vikings and their captives trudge down the cliff path, supervised from on high by two seemingly untroubled horsemen. The erect bearing of the woman in blue conveys proud resignation, while the warriors head casually back to their ships. The Norseman in the right foreground even pauses to readjust his leg wraps. Apart from the priest's severed head, which is easily lost in the visual jumble of the cortege, the only direct evidence of violence is the smoke rising from the buildings in the distance. Caught in the same coastal breeze as the Vikings' white pennant, the smoke could easily be mistaken for a cloud, if not for the painting's other clues.

Indeed, minus the people, ships, and background settlement, this image would be simply a local seascape in the style late nineteenth-century artists so adored. In the second half of the 1800s, French artists – particularly those influenced by the burgeoning Impressionist movement

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<sup>563</sup> *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants exposés au Palais des Champs-Élysées le 1 mai 1889* (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1889), 43.

<sup>564</sup> *Des Vikings et des Normands : Imaginaires et représentations* (Caen: Musée de Normandie, 2003), 32.

– rediscovered the northern coast, especially the shorelines of Normandy.<sup>565</sup> *Les Normands revenant du pillage* shares many of the hallmarks of this new visual genre: a rocky beach, striking blue water, imposing cliffs, an unsettled sky. Charrier renders this setting with loving attentiveness, granting every surface brilliance and character. Charrier’s decision to operate within this visual idiom implies the scene takes place along France’s northern shores. As the painting’s display tag at the Musée de Normandie notes, “The beach of sand, gravel, and pebbles... gives a trampled and ‘stony’ effect.... The shingle beach of this little cove [is] typical of the coast of Normandy.”<sup>566</sup>

Though *Les Normands revenant du pillage* portrays the aftermath of terrible violence, it does not feel that way. The vast swaths of negative space create a sense of peace. The landscape dominates the Vikings, rather than the reverse. It plays a more important role in the image than any of the human characters. It overwhelms the narrative of disaster and imposes an atmosphere of serenity. Charrier thereby gestures towards the timeless endurance of the French landscape itself. Regardless who or what passes through it, he suggests, the physical space of France – with all of its grandeur and dignity – will continue unchanged.

The resonance between the environment and the principal female captive underscores this message. Garbed in the teal blue of the sky and the bay’s still waters, she retains her beauty and poise in spite of the violence directed against her. Like the landscape to which she is assimilated, she remains calmly unmoved, though threatened with the implied future possibility of sexual assault. She fulfills the role of Marianne, carrying France within herself. Like the nation,

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<sup>565</sup> Robert Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867-1886* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Carole McNamara, ed., *The Lens of Impressionism: Photography and Painting along the Normandy Coast, 1850-1874* (Manchester: Hudson Hills Press, 2010).

<sup>566</sup> “La plage de sable, de graviers et de galets, dont la touche vibrante donne un effet piétiné et « caillouteux »... La grève de cette petite anse typique du paysage côtier de Normandie.” *Des Vikings et des Normands : Imaginaires et représentations*, 32.

Charrier insinuates, this trouble will not bow, much less break her. She holds on to her beauty and her pride, evident in the erect bearing of her shoulders and chin.<sup>567</sup>

Through the self-possession of the Frankish heroine and the undisturbed harmony of the land itself, Charrier telegraphs the Vikings' ultimate irrelevance. This too, he suggests, will pass. The Norse pirates are just another colorful incident in the implacable trajectory of the French nation, a much grander trajectory than one small period of adversity. Moreover, in his rendering of the Vikings' ships and gear, Charrier relies on the Bayeux Tapestry rather than on archeological finds, conflating ninth-century Norse pirates with the eleventh-century armies of William the Conqueror.<sup>568</sup> He thereby visually anticipates the Vikings' eventual integration into the French body politic. Altogether, he frames the horrors of this raid as a mere tragic blip in the onward march of French history, which will ultimately subsume and rectify all conflict.

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<sup>567</sup> On representations of France as woman in art, see Marianne Ryan, ed., *La France: Images of Woman and Ideas of Nation, 1789-1989* (South Bank Centre, 1989).

<sup>568</sup> *Des Vikings et des Normands : Imaginaires et représentations*, 32.



Fig. 4.14. Evariste-Vital Luminais, *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 189 x 144 cm, musée Anne de Beaujeu, Moulins.

One of several images Luminais produced of early medieval Frankish women suffering sexualized violence.

The Nantes artist and officer in the Legion of Honor Évariste-Vital Luminais (1821-1896) similarly foreshadowed the unification of Viking and Frank in his painting *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Figure 4.16), exhibited at the 1894 Salon des Champs-Élysées.<sup>569</sup> Depicting Norse raiders carrying off captured women to their boats, *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* would also appear the following year at the Exposition of the Union Artistique de Toulouse.<sup>570</sup> Charles Yriarte of *Le Figaro* praised the picture as “robust and well felt,” Olivier Merson of *Le Monde illustré* as “full of picturesque and dramatic interest,” while J. Clattery of *Le Franco-Américain* proclaimed that “movement, design color, everything becomes dramatic” in Luminais’ painting.<sup>571</sup> I argue that this painting is riven by unresolved doubt about the nature of the Academic nude, sexual violence, and France’s history with the Vikings. While historian Alexandre Sumpf contends that “Luminais’s choice runs counter to the mythification by his Norman contemporaries of a line of descent from the Vikings... [which] he crudely exposes as the result of a series of rapes,” I maintain that in fact Luminais explores the ambiguities of his chosen form – the nude – to channel the ambiguities of his chosen subject – sexual violence – to in turn visualize the ambiguities of his real concern – the Norse legacy in modern France.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> François-Guillaume Dumas, ed., *Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture. Salon de 1894* (Paris: Librairie d’art, 1894), 56.

<sup>570</sup> *Union Artistique de Toulouse 11<sup>ème</sup> année : Exposition de 1895* (Toulouse: Imprimerie J. Fournier, 1895), 56. On the trope of Viking abductions in nineteenth-century European imagery, see Langer, “Horned, Barbarian, Hero: The Visual Invention of the Viking.”

<sup>571</sup> “Deux œuvres de Luminais – toutes les deux robustes et bien senties. – *Les Pirates Normands*, scène de rapt, une captive portée à bord d’un navire.” Charles Yriarte, “Le Salon des Champs-Élysées,” *Le Figaro* (April 30, 1894), 1. “Le peintre a rendu avec sa largeur de facture habituelle, et un tel sentiment de la réalité qu’on dirait une scène vue, ce sujet bien dans ses cordes, plein d’intérêt pittoresque et dramatique.” Olivier Merson, “Le Salon des Champs-Élysées,” *Le Monde illustré*, no. 1943 (June 23, 1894): 399. “M. Luminais, le peintre gaulois, nous représente l’enlèvement d’une femme par des pirates normands ; puis, dans un autre tableau la Fin de Brunehaut. Quel tempérament d’artiste ce M. Luminais ! Mouvement, dessin, couleur, tout devient dramatique avec son pinceau.” J. Clattery, “Beaux-Arts. Exposition de Peinture et de Sculpture de 1894,” *Le Franco-Américain*, no. 31 (April 1-15, 1894), 2.

<sup>572</sup> “Luminais va aussi à l’encontre de la mythification par ses contemporains normands d’un lien de filiation avec les Vikings, ou alors il l’expose avec crudité comme le résultat d’une série de viols.” Sumpf, “Les invasions barbares.”

*Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* capped off a series of paintings by Luminais on the same subject. The problem of Norse brutality consumed him for decades. At the Salon of 1849, he exhibited *Siège de Paris par les Normands, pillleurs de mer*. At an auction of Luminais' work in 1898, in addition to *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, the Galerie Georges Petit listed for sale *Débarquement des Normands* (25 x 37 cm), *Les Barques des Normands* (49 x 80 cm – likely the same painting displayed at the 1896 Salon de la Société des Amis des Arts de Bordeaux), and *L'Enlèvement* (60 x 50 cm).<sup>573</sup> This last particularly resembled *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. According to the auction catalogue's description of *L'Enlèvement*, "on his shoulders, a Norse warrior carries his prey and passes a ford. The young woman bends her torso and hides her face with two raised arms."<sup>574</sup> Several associated preparatory sketches and studies accompanied these works on the block. Luminais could not get away from the question of Viking violence – particularly Viking sexual violence – and its role in shaping France. Is this coerced union something to hate or welcome? The painter could not resolve his own feelings about the long durée imprint of the Vikings in France.

Though the scene's location is never made explicit, I believe the viewer is meant to understand *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* as taking place on the northern shores of France, near the artist's home in Brittany.<sup>575</sup> Alexandre Sumpf has connected the canvas to "the rise of painting that voluntarily took on the national past and interrogated the origin of non-Christian peoples who, in a certain manner, made France."<sup>576</sup> During the ninth and tenth centuries, Brittany

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<sup>573</sup> *Catalogue de tableaux, études peintes, aquarelles, dessins par feu Évariste Luminais*, 6-8.

<sup>574</sup> "L'Enlèvement. Sur ses épaules, le guerrier normand emporte sa proie et passe un gué. La jeune femme courbe le torse et se cache le visage de ses deux bras relevés." *Catalogue de tableaux, études peintes, aquarelles, dessins par feu Évariste Luminais*, 6.

<sup>575</sup> On Luminais' biography, see *Évariste Vital Luminais. Peintre des Gaules, 1821-1896* (Avignon: Imprimerie Laffont, 2002).

<sup>576</sup> "L'essor d'une peinture qui prend volontiers pour sujet le passé national et interroge l'origine des peuples non chrétiens qui ont, d'une certaine manière, fait la France." Sumpf, "Les invasions barbares."

suffered repeated Viking attacks.<sup>577</sup> Luminais predominantly painted images of the ancient and medieval Gauls, and secondarily the Franks. Significantly, Luminais' many paintings of Gauls and Franks differed considerably from his portrayal of the Norse. His numerous depictions of the former two groups offered comparatively straightforward messaging: they were depicted as stoic, brave, and heroic, if occasionally tragic. Moreover, his preference for the two tribes shows that he placed them, not the Norse, at the heart of his nation's genealogy. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the women are either Gauls or Franks captured from the French coast. The editor of a catalogue of Luminais' works sold at auction in May 1898 shared this assumption, describing *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* as "one of the large canvases that Luminais consecrated to his reconstitution of the barbarian life of Gaul. It was the era when the Normans, Scandinavian pillagers, sailed up rivers or followed the coasts, devastating, stealing, raping, killing, sowing fear everywhere."<sup>578</sup> Sumpf also asserts that Luminais likely painted the landscape from life along the English Channel.<sup>579</sup>

On the one hand, Luminais seizes the opportunity in *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* to engage in a virtuoso demonstration of his technical skill at a celebrated Salon form. He flaunts his expert grasp of the Academic nude in his attentive rendering of the woman in the foreground, showing off his minute tracing of the shadows at her inner elbows, the varied shades of her flesh, and the delicate bones of her left hand. Jean Tribaldy, writing for *La Dépêche de Brest*, gently ribbed Luminais for his attachment to the nude. Though acknowledging him as "an artist of incontestable value," Tribaldy joked that "Luminais loves *académies*, and rare are his canvases

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<sup>577</sup> Neil Price, *The Vikings in Brittany* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1989); Jean-Christophe Cassard, *Le siècle des Vikings en Bretagne* (Editions Gisserot, 1996); Tudi Kernalegenn, "Quand la Bretagne était Viking," *ArMen*, no. 196 (September-October 2013): 12-19.

<sup>578</sup> "Une des larges toiles que Luminais a consacrées à sa reconstitution de la vie barbare de la Gaule. C'était l'époque où les Normands, pillards scandinaves, remontaient les fleuves ou suivaient les côtes, dévastant, volant, violant, assassinant, semant partout l'effroi." *Catalogue de tableaux, études peintes, aquarelles, dessins par feu Évariste Luminais* (Paris: Imprimerie Georges Petit, 1898), 5.

<sup>579</sup> Sumpf, "Les invasions barbares."

that do not make us look at a vigorous nude study. This year, the fat Academic morsel is found in *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle*.... The foreground is occupied by a group of several men and a completely naked woman. It is a pretext to describe vigorous men and beautiful women.”<sup>580</sup> Sumpf suggests that Luminais was inspired by the motif of Zeus’s abduction of Europa, a frequent subject for the nude.<sup>581</sup>

At the same time, anything further from a conventional Academic nude is difficult to imagine. The woman is half-clad, not in an artistically draped robe or mantle in the Greco-Roman fashion, but in the torn remnants of a gown that tangle awkwardly beneath her. She is even wearing shoes – not delicate Antique sandals, but hardy leather boots or turn-shoes, unheard of in the tradition of the Academic nude. However, her ability to convincingly embody the Academic nude principally breaks down because of her pose. She does not stand regally upright or recline languorously, the two established choices for the form. She is cumbrously held between two men at a bizarre angle that must leave all the blood rushing to her brain. The red-headed Viking grasps her ankles solidly, but the helmeted Viking struggles to hold her up. He carries the weight of most of her body under one arm, balancing her slightly on his left hip. He leans far to the right to compensate for her weight, letting his shield splash in the water. Far from glamorous, her situation is intentionally clunky.

The Academic nude was experiencing a moment of transition in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>582</sup> Celebrated painters like Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) and William-

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<sup>580</sup> “M. Luminais est, comme M. Charles Le Roux, un artiste d’une incontestable valeur. Mais il n’affiche pas les mêmes goûts. M. Luminais a l’amour des académies et celles de ses toiles sont rares qui ne nous font pas voir une vigoureuse étude de nu. Cette année, le gros morceau académique se trouve dans les *Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle*.... Le premier plan est occupé par un groupe formé de plusieurs hommes et d’une femme toute nue. C’est un prétexte à une description d’hommes vigoureux et de belles femmes.” Jean Tribaldy, “La Bretagne au Salon,” *La Dépêche de Brest*, no. 2645 (May 7, 1894), 1.

<sup>581</sup> Sumpf, “Les invasions barbares.”

<sup>582</sup> Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture, 1870-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).



Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905) continued to win great success through their masterful renderings of shapely women missing clothes. However, more iconoclastic artists – notably Impressionists, like Édouard Manet (1832-1883) with his *Olympia* (1863) – began to break down, even parody this traditional genre.<sup>583</sup> This broader context of flux allowed Luminais to play with the boundaries of the nude and explore its potential meanings.

Luminais' conflicted attitude towards the Academic nude articulates his conflicted attitude towards the sexual violence on display in the painting. The Vikings are carrying the women off to their boat, likely to be delivered either to a slave market or a Scandinavian farm, where they will live as thralls. The central woman is only partially dressed; her blue over-gown and white shift have both been torn open to the waist, telegraphing backwards in time to the initial struggle between her and her captors when she was first seized. The damage to her clothing suggests she has already been the victim of sexual assault by her abductors.

Luminais toggles between condemning and reveling in the depicted violence. As scholar Caroline Olsson notes, “throughout *Pirates normands* and its adroit mingling of violence and eroticism, Luminais reveals his fantasy of the Viking: he reduces the character to the abduction of women, to aggressive and libidinal drives.”<sup>584</sup> Luminais paints the central woman as clearly uncomfortable, frightened, and struggling. The jumbled lines of limbs and garments convey chaos and discord. Yet, Luminais encourages the viewer to thrill in the woman's beauty and vulnerability. The luminous skin of her torso glows incandescently against the moody darkness of waves and sky, drawing the eye immediately to the center of the canvas. The viewer luxuriates

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<sup>583</sup> T. J. Clark, “Olympia's Choice,” in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984): 79-146.

<sup>584</sup> “À travers *Les Pirates normands* et son savant mélange de violence et d'érotisme, Luminais donne à voir son fantasme du Viking : il réduit le personnage au rapt de femmes, à ses pulsions libidinales et agressives.” Olsson, “Le Mythe du Viking entre réalité et fantasme,” in *Fantasmagories du Moyen Âge. Entre médiéval et moyen-âgeux*, eds. Élodie Burle-Errecade and Valérie Naudet (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2010), 191.

in her perfectly sculpted breasts, the soft dimples of her clavicle, and the smooth whiteness of her faintly etched ribcage.

As scholars have shown, French writers have a long legacy of normalizing, indeed romanticizing, non-consensual relations.<sup>585</sup> Such writers justified rape and other forms of sexual assault as a distinctly “French” mode of seduction that actually appealed to French women, who simply played hard-to-get in an elaborate two-step of enticement and pursuit. This dangerous myth of women’s feigned resistance and enthusiastic submission to shows of sexual force by men would have colored the public’s understanding of Luminais’ canvas.

*Pirates normands au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* would also have triggered anxieties about white slavery rampant in Europe and North America at the time. According to sensationalist press stories of the day, white women were being forcibly trafficked into coerced prostitution.<sup>586</sup> These fantastical stories fueled activist campaigns, racial animus, and widespread panic. Such stories conveniently exonerated Europeans from the sins of colonialism by figuring them as the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of slavery. However, even as they terrified, these stories also titillated readers. Luminais’ canvas plays on the same dynamic of incompletely sublimated desire. The viewer gasps in horror while secretly relishing the frisson of sensual danger.

French historians at the time argued that Vikings had a special predilection for French women. In a June 30, 1911 speech at Pontoise before the Assemblée générale de la Société

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<sup>585</sup> Often in demonstrating this legacy, researchers themselves have engaged in such normalization. See Philippe Raynaud, “Les femmes et la civilité : aristocratie et passions révolutionnaires,” *Le Débat*, no. 57 (November–December 1989); Mona Ozouf, *Les mots des femmes : essai sur la singularité française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995); Claude Habib, *Galanterie française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). Cf. Joan Wallach Scott, “French Seduction Theory,” in *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 117-140.

<sup>586</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Cecily Devereux, “‘The Maiden Tribute’ and the Rise of the White Slave in the Nineteenth Century: The Making of an Imperial Construct,” *Victorian Review* 26, no. 2 (2000): 1-23; Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le mythe de la traite des blanches. Enquête sur la fabrication d'un fléau* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009); Elisa Camiscioli, *Selling French Sex: Prostitution, Trafficking, and Global Migrations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

historique du Vexin, written to honor the millennium of the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, Joseph Depoin described so-called Danish Marriages, or “les unions à la danoise,” which is to say forced concubinage. Depoin observed that “arriving in the northwestern French provinces, the Scandinavians brought a particular custom, that of taking foreign women as temporary companions.”<sup>587</sup> He framed Rollo the Viking’s Danish Marriage to Poppa of Bayeux as a positive metaphor for the unification of the Norse and French peoples. Scholar J. Félix went even further. In an April 30, 1880 address to the Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Rouen, he proclaimed that the Vikings “pursued in their excursions the conquest of the women of Neustria. The character of these timid beauties moreover contributed to provoking the brutal passion of these audacious conquerors by a double contrast with the temperament of their rivals and their ravishers.”<sup>588</sup> Félix believed that the demure passivity of Neustrian women was perfectly calibrated to “arouse those tender and relaxed sentiments that are the essence and honor of the conjugal union whose endurance they ensure, and which have their source, not in an equality refuted by nature, but in the virile protection accorded to native weakness and voluntary submission. The calm life, domestic cares, and the peace of the hearth soon kept the Scandinavians in Neustria.”<sup>589</sup> This notion of Frankish women as uniquely soft, pliable, and desirable, evident in both Luminais and Charrier’s canvases, also reassured the French public

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<sup>587</sup> “En s’installant dans les provinces françaises du Nord-Ouest, les Scandinaves y apportèrent un usage particulier, celui de prendre pour compagnes temporaires des femmes généralement étrangères.” Joseph Depoin, “Les compagnes de Rollon,” in *La Société historique du Vexin et le millénaire normand* (Pontoise: Bureaux de la Société historique, 1911), 17.

<sup>588</sup> “Ces intrépides guerriers poursuivaient aussi dans leurs excursions la conquête des femmes de la Neustrie. Le caractère de ces timides beautés contribuait d’ailleurs, par un double contraste avec le tempérament de leurs rivaux et de leurs ravisseurs, provoquer la passion brutale de ces vainqueurs audacieux.” J. Félix, “Réponse au discours de réception de M. Gravier,” in *Précis analytique des travaux de l’Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Rouen pendant l’année 1879-1880* (Rouen: Imprimerie de H. Boissel, 1880), 223-225.

<sup>589</sup> “Susciter ces sentiments tendres et reposés qui sont l’essence et l’honneur de l’union conjugale dont ils assurent la durée, et qui ont leur source, non dans une égalité démentie par la nature, mais dans la protection virile accordée à la faiblesse native et à la soumission volontaire. La vie calme, les soins domestiques, la paix du foyer, retiennent bientôt en Neustrie les Scandinaves.” Félix, “Réponse au discours de réception de M. Gravier,” 223-225.

that their women were normatively – even paradigmatically – feminine at a moment when the gendered order seemed in doubt (see Chapter 5).

I contend that Luminais understood his painting as a synecdoche of the overall Norse implantation in Francia. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, thinkers such as Alfred Maury and Paul Toutain particularly emphasized the eugenic benefits of interbreeding between the Vikings and the Franks. They argued that this synergistic mixing of blood made France into the productive, artistic, civilized nation it would become. Charrier posed the same question in *Les Normands revenant du pillage*: what were the long-term impacts of the sexual mixing of Viking invaders and French women, embodied by the woman in blue? Charrier answered that France remained the same, ever unchanging. Luminais, however, leaves the question disturbingly open.

Luminais' ambivalence about the sexual violence portrayed in this image conveys his ambivalence about the Vikings' historic relationship with France. Throughout his career, Luminais plumbed the origins of the French nation. L. Roger-Milès said of him, "he was filled with a fever to recall the terrible hours that chimed around the cradle of our national integrity, and what Augustin Thierry had done with a pen so eloquent, so French, he undertook to do with his brush, equally eloquent, equally French."<sup>590</sup> The artist himself was born in the Breton city of Nantes, in a region that had endured sustained harassment by Norse raiders, and for twenty-five years he had devoted himself to painting Breton subjects.<sup>591</sup> Luminais betrays a distinct uncertainty about this repackaging of the Viking as an emblem of regional pride and national unity. Does he identify with the Vikings as courageous, masculine warriors? Or does he detest

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<sup>590</sup> "Il s'était surpris plein de fièvre au rappel des heures terribles qui tintèrent autour du berceau de notre intégrité nationale, et ce que Augustin Thierry avait fait d'une plume si éloquente, si française, il entreprit de le faire avec son pinceau, éloquent aussi, bien français aussi." L. Roger-Milès, *Catalogue de tableaux, études peintes, aquarelles, dessins par feu Évariste Luminais*, viii.

<sup>591</sup> Dominique Dussol, "Entre le genre et l'histoire, Évariste Luminais et la critique de son temps," in *Évariste Vital Luminais. Peintre des Gaules, 1821-1896*, 19-21.

them as bellicose, uncouth barbarians preying on his people? He partially dodges the question by not representing the Vikings' faces. He thereby avoids definitively settling their characters. He is not forced to render them either as demonic avatars of brutality or as heroic avatars of valor. Art historian Dominique Dussol has argued that Luminais' paintings are politically ambiguous by design.<sup>592</sup> Certainly, Luminais never definitively answers whether the Norse integration with France was for the best. However, he cannot deny the subversive allure of melding with the violent outsiders.

## **Conclusion**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, French painters represented the Norse as savage enemies of the illustrious Franks, themselves the forerunners of the modern French nation. After 1850, however, such lines blurred. Artists portrayed the Norse in Francia more sympathetically, as victims, comrades, or even ancestors. By visually integrating the Vikings into France's genealogy, these painters also soothed contemporary fissures in the nation's regional divisions. Gradually attenuating the violence of the Norse incursions – portraying it as marginal, necessary, or even attractive – the artists surveyed in this chapter transmuted medieval and modern Normans from a divisive problem to be solved into emblems of unified national strength. Like their long-distant descendants, the Vikings of northern France became integrated into the country's future through intentional acts both of welcome and suppression.

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<sup>592</sup> Dussol, "Entre le genre et l'histoire," 17-27.

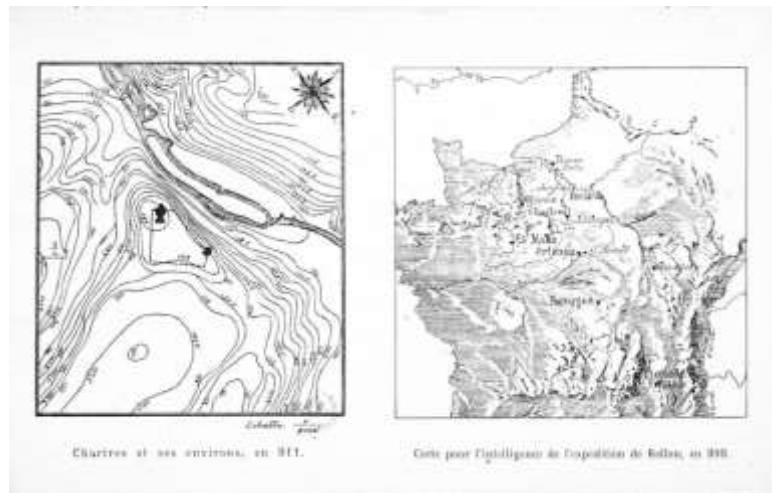


Fig. 4.15. Maps relating to Rollo's siege of Chartres, from Jules Lair, *Le siège de Chartres par les Normands (911)* (Caen: Imprimerie Henri Delesques, 1902).

The details of Rollo's campaign and eventual settlement in France was a subject of sustained academic investigation at the turn of the century.

Though this chapter has centered the eight large-scale nineteenth-century oil paintings I was able to identify depicting the Viking invasions of Francia, those invasions also inspired more quotidian imagery, including maps, engravings, and book illustrations (see for example Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.15). These everyday representations, usually printed in black and white on thin paper, acquainted modern French viewers with the Norse attacks from a different perspective. I have chosen to foreground the history paintings because of the gravitas they imposed on the subject. As Patricia Mainardi has demonstrated, "history painting continued to be regarded as the most elevated category of painting throughout most of the nineteenth century."<sup>593</sup> Critics viewed history painting as the foremost expression not only of French art, but of French cultural superiority writ large.<sup>594</sup> By rendering the Viking invasions within this privileged idiom, the artists surveyed in this chapter wrote the Norse not only into French history, but French identity.

<sup>593</sup> Mainardi, "The Double Exhibition in Nineteenth-Century France," 23. See also Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix, "National Art and French Art: History, Art, and Politics During the Early Third Republic," *Studies in the History of Art* 68 (2005): 36-53.

<sup>594</sup> Mainardi, "The Double Exhibition in Nineteenth-Century France," 24.

## Chapter 5. Waking the Valkyries: Gender Transgression in French Mediatization of Old Norse Literature

*“It is a mixing of body codes that marks the valkyrie and the shield-maidens as neither male nor female, but a mixture of the two.” – Kathleen M. Self<sup>595</sup>*

### Introduction

Composed of four parts (*Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*), Richard Wagner’s operatic Ring Cycle traces the misfortunes of Brynhild (German: *Brünhilde*), doomed daughter of Odin (German: *Wotan*) and captain of his Valkyries. Wagner’s Brynhild defies Odin’s command by intervening in human affairs to help a mortal man. In punishment, Odin withdraws her divinity, curses her to eternal sleep, and encloses her in walls of fire. The hero Sigurd Fafnirsbane (German: *Siegfried*) ultimately saves Brynhild from her prison and the two fall in love, at least until a magic potion induces Sigurd to leave her for a Burgundian princess. The proud Brynhild defends her honor by engineering Sigurd’s killing, igniting an explosive feud that consumes the Burgundian house. Wagner drew the character of Brynhild from the Old Norse *Völsunga Saga*, *Vilkina Saga*, and *Eddas*, as well as the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, whose plots were in turn likely inspired by the sixth-century Austrasian queen of the same name.<sup>596</sup>

Wagner’s Ring Cycle catalyzed a surge of French interest in Norse warrior women. Though it first appeared in French theaters beginning in 1893, its influence was felt decades earlier, as reports of its content filtered into France from abroad. The effects of Wagner’s Valkyrie were felt in France even by those who never attended a single performance of the Ring.

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<sup>595</sup> Kathleen M. Self, “The Valkyrie’s Gender: Old Norse Shield-Maidens and Valkyries as a Third Gender,” *Feminist Formations* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 145.

<sup>596</sup> Shelley Puhak, *The Dark Queens: The Bloody Rivalry that Forged the Medieval World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022).

The Tetralogy kicked off a renewed academic interest in its medieval source material.<sup>597</sup> Apart from her many appearances in newspapers, books, and art directly drawing on Wagner, Brynhild also birthed a long legacy of Valkyries and shieldmaidens inspired by her triumph. After Wagner, popular representations of Norse history *required* a gorgeous warrior woman. Indeed, notable musicologist Étienne Destranges articulated the general French response when he wrote that “the great, the admirable figure of Brynhild, the goddess who... elevates herself to human divinity, dominates the Tetralogy. She is one of the most magnificent of Wagner’s conceptions.”<sup>598</sup>

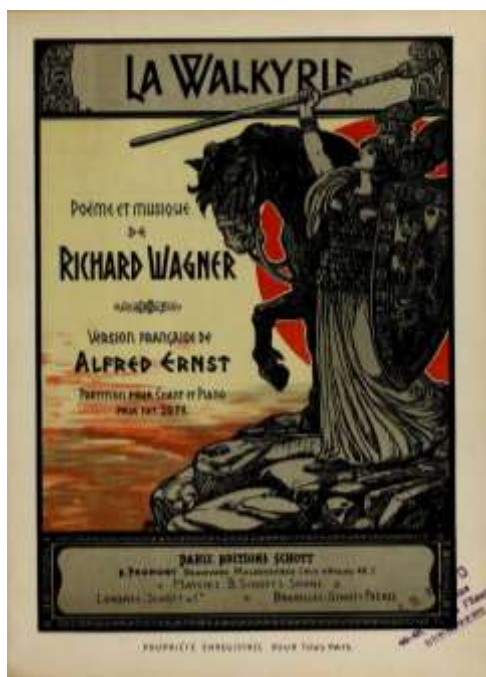


Fig. 5.1. Title Page from Richard Wagner, *La Walkyrie*, trans. Alfred Ernst (Paris: Éditions Schott, 1899).

Visual depictions of the Valkyrie spread throughout Europe thanks to Wagner’s opera.

<sup>597</sup> Victor Jacquemont du Donjon, “Les Rois frères,” *La Nouvelle Revue* (January 15, 1897); Henri Lichtenberger, *Le Poème et la légende des Nibelungen* (Paris: Hachette, 1891); Émile de Laveleye, *Sigurd et les Eddas* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1900).

<sup>598</sup> “Cette grande, cette admirable figure de Brünnhilde, la déesse qui, selon la juste expression d’un critique, s’élève de la divinité à l’humanité, domine toute la Tetralogie. Elle est l’une des plus magnifiques conceptions de Wagner.” Étienne Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l’œuvre de Richard Wagner* (Nantes: F. Salières, 1899), 109.



My purpose in this chapter is not to chronicle the full impact of Wagner’s music on French culture; that impact has already been ably charted by other scholars.<sup>599</sup> My objective here is only to detail French fascination with the shieldmaiden – a fascination that began with Wagner’s fallen Valkyrie, Brynhild. In the last decades of the 1800s, certain French scholars, novelists, and artists embraced the Norse shieldmaiden as an unlikely heroine. Why did the shieldmaiden take root as a trope in fin-de-siècle France? What made her distinctive in the cultural landscape of the moment?



Fig. 5.2. A. de Broca, *Brünnhilde*, in Étienne Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l’œuvre de Richard Wagner* (Nantes: F. Salières, 1899).

Broca’s Brynhild wears the fanciful winged helmet that came to signify Vikingness at this time. Odin’s ravens soar to the side.

<sup>599</sup> Martine Kahane et Nicole Wild, *Wagner et la France* (Paris: Herscher, 1983); Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Rachel Sloan, “The Condition of Music: Wagnerism and Printmaking in France and Britain,” *Art History* 32, no. 3 (June 2009): 545-577; Kelly J. Maynard, “Strange Bedfellows at the *Revue Wagnérienne*: Wagnerism at the Fin de Siècle,” *French Historical Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2015): 633-659; Adeline Anastasia Heck, “Under the Spell of Wagner: The *Revue Wagnérienne* and Literary Experimentation in the Belle Epoque (1878-1893),” Ph.D. diss (Princeton University, 2020).

The shieldmaiden (Old Norse: *skjaldmær*, French: *vierge de bouclier*) is a figure who appears in medieval Norse sagas, poems, and histories, a (typically unmarried) woman of high status who takes up arms and armor to defend her and her family's honor. Her divine counterpart, the Valkyrie (Old Norse: *valkyrja*), was a servant of Odin who summoned mortals who died nobly in combat to the eternal rewards of Valhalla. Historians today hotly debate the extent to which the Norse shieldmaiden was an actual social phenomenon versus a pure literary construction.<sup>600</sup> In the nineteenth century, however, her lived existence in the past was taken as unquestioned truth.



Fig. 5.3. Anne de Chardonnet, *Walkyrie endormie*, 1892. Wax, musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon.

One of the rare nineteenth-century depictions of a shieldmaiden created by a French woman, *Walkyrie endormie* shows Brynhild either falling into or waking from her magical sleep.

<sup>600</sup> On this debate, see Leszek Gardela, “Amazons of the North? Armed Females in Viking Archaeology and Medieval Literature,” in *Hvannadalir – Beiträge zur europäischen Altertumskunde und mediävistischen Literaturwissenschaft*, eds. Aleissa Bauer and Alexandra Pesch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019): 391-428; Judith Jesch, “Women, War, and Words: A Verbal Archeology of Shield-Maidens,” *Viking: Norsk Arkeologisk Årbok* 84, no. 1 (November 2021): 127-142.

Contemporary scholars have long attended to the dramatic conflict around gender roles in fin-de-siècle France. Specifically, they have mapped the profound anxieties surrounding women's supposed failure to conform to gendered expectations. Elisa Camiscioli, Margaret Cook Andersen, Joshua Cole, and Nimisha Barton have traced the intense public and official panic around falling birthrates driven by fears that future generations of the French army would be too depopulated to hold off the fecund Germans.<sup>601</sup> As Mary Louise Roberts has shown, commentators in press and government blamed this drop in fertility on French women and their supposed rejection of maternity.<sup>602</sup> These commentators warned that the siren seductions of wages, urban entertainments, new-fangled fashions, and print media were luring women away from hearth and home. The modern city was eroding gender norms, family life, and national biopower.<sup>603</sup> French society was haunted by the specters of supposed bad women: the anarchic *pétroleuse*, the insubordinate New Woman, the promiscuous working girl, the shrewish feminist.

At the same time, Frenchmen at the fin de siècle collectively suffered from what Roberts terms “gender damage”: a self-perceived inability to live up to gendered expectations, including in this case protecting and controlling women.<sup>604</sup> Frenchmen were believed to be failing according to two rubrics – as warriors and as patriarchs. The French military's failures on the

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<sup>601</sup> Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Margaret Cook Andersen, *Regeneration Through Empire: French Pronatalists and Colonial Settlement in the Third Republic* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Nimisha Barton, *Reproductive Citizens: Gender, Immigration, and the State in Modern France, 1880-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2020.

<sup>602</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>603</sup> See also Gay Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Karen Offen, *Debating the Woman Question in the French Third Republic, 1870–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>604</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, “Beyond ‘Crisis’ in Understanding Gender Transformation,” *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (August 2016): 358-366.

field in 1870 and 1871 kneecapped public faith in the manliness of the country's men.<sup>605</sup> After the 1871 Treaty of Versailles, the male body could no longer convincingly incarnate unproblematic, unifying heroism. Simultaneously, men were apparently losing their holds over their daughters, sisters, and wives, who increasingly demanded social and political freedoms.<sup>606</sup> Cumulatively, the French men shaping policy and public opinion were convinced that the gender relations that underpinned national life were fraying at the seams.

The historians discussed above have correctly underlined that these leaders, including writers, scientists, and government officials, responded to the perceived crisis by doubling down on bifurcated gender roles. However, the popularity of the shieldmaiden represents a parallel and contrasting development. Certain male authors and artists found irresistibly attractive the vision of a past heroic figure who effortlessly united the greatest virtues of both gendered positionalities. They looked to the shieldmaiden to reconcile disruptions in the gendered order. She represented nothing less than a beguiling dream of synthesis between feminine and masculine, past and future.

Recent scholarship on gender-bending in nineteenth-century France has adopted two main approaches. Some authors have excavated the biographies of a few exceptional individuals. Celebrities across the 1800s such as Rosa Bonheur, George Sand, Gisèle d'Estoc, Rachilde, Jane Dieulafoy, Marc de Montifaud, and Sarah Bernhardt lived and worked in defiance of

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<sup>605</sup> Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Michael Dorsch, *French Sculpture Following the Franco-Prussian War, 1870-80* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>606</sup> Charles Sowerwine, "The Sexual Contract(s) of the Third Republic," *French History and Civilization* 1 (2005): 245-253; Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Anne-Marie Sohn, *La Fabrique des garçons. L'Éducation des garçons de 1820 à aujourd'hui* (Paris: Textuel, 2015).

expectations for their assigned gender at birth.<sup>607</sup> Other historians have focused on the scientific medicalization of gender nonconformity, which developed in tandem with the birth of the Foucauldian clinic.<sup>608</sup> I consider here not the personal experiences of actual transgressive figures, but instead the transgressive figure's place in fantasy. In other words, I explore the gender-bending woman not as subject, but object – specifically the object of male yearning.

In this chapter, I first examine representations of the shieldmaiden that portrayed women simultaneously enjoying political equality and conventional feminine roles, diffusing the fear that women's suffrage and full integration into republican citizenship would render them unfeminine. Next, I trace the assertion that shieldmaiden's martial accomplishments did not make her any less attractive and sexually available to men. Then, I look at the shieldmaiden's submission to male dominance and maintenance of patriarchal family structures. Finally, I end with a brief coda exploring a rare case of male gender transgression from Eugène Beauvois' translation of *Flóamanna Saga*. That this chapter focuses principally on popular media highlights the extent to which the shieldmaiden was a product of longing and imagination. She did not flourish in the more serious academic tracts. She was an elusive and alluring chimera who thrived on fantasy.

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<sup>607</sup> Dore Ashton, *Rosa Bonheur: A Life and a Legend* (New York: A Studio Book/The Viking Press, 1981); Melanie Hawthorne, *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship: From Decadence to Modernism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Diana Holmes, *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender and the Woman Writer* (New York: Berg, 2001); Elizabeth Harlan, *George Sand* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Patricia A. Tillburg, *Colette's Republic: Work, Gender, and Popular Culture in France, 1870-1914* (Beghahn Books, 2009); Melanie Hawthorne, *Finding the Woman Who Didn't Exist: The Curious Life of Gisèle d'Estoc* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Martine Reid, *George Sand*, trans. Gretchen van Slyke (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018); Rachel Mesch, *Before Trans: Three Gender Stories from Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford University Press, 2020); Catherine Hewitt, *Art is a Tyrant: The Unconventional Life of Rosa Bonheur* (Icon Books, 2020).

<sup>608</sup> Herculine Barbin, *Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, ed. Michel Foucault (Vintage, 1980); Alice Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Anne E. Linton, *Unmaking Sex: The Gender Outlaws of Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

## Of Shieldmaidens and Suffrage: The Valkyrie as Feminist

Women's equality was a hot-button issue in France at the end of the nineteenth century. Feminists demanded access to voting, property, divorce, education, civic groups, public space, and even dueling.<sup>609</sup> In response, their opponents branded them as ugly, unlovable harpies neglecting their feminine responsibilities. This conflict helps explain the shieldmaiden's unique appeal. She represented political rights and even leadership for women, while remaining a good daughter, sister, lover, wife, and mother. As portrayed in turn-of-the-century French media, the shieldmaiden reassured audiences that the terrifying feminist of popular imagination was not actually so terrifying. Despite occupying the medieval past, she incarnated a future where women were enfranchised and yet still desirably feminine, thus soothing anxieties about changing gender roles.

It was accepted as fact in nineteenth-century French intellectual circles that Norse gender relations were uncommonly equitable.<sup>610</sup> In *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) wrote that Norse paganism "surrounded [women] with that respect and armed them with that authority that southern paganisms so disdainfully refused them.... Far from believing them unworthy to judge in elevated matters, they were trusted with the most intellectual cares."<sup>611</sup> He noted that Norse mores granted women primacy in magic and medicine, and men valued their counsel in political matters. Paul Belloni Du Chaillu (1835-1903) opened

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<sup>609</sup> Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Jennifer R. Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Epoque: Love as a Lifestyle* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990); Andrea Mansker, *Sex, Honor and Citizenship in Early Third Republic France* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Carolyn J. Eichner, *Feminism's Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); James Smith Allen, *A Civil Society: The Public Space of Freemason Women in France, 1744-1944* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022).

<sup>610</sup> For a recent history of women's status in Norse society, see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

<sup>611</sup> "Leur attribuant un esprit sagace et pénétrant jusqu'à la divination, les avaient entourées de ces respects et armées de cette autorité que leur refusaient si dédaigneusement les paganismes du Sud sous l'empire de l'ancien culte. Bien loin qu'on les crût indignes de juger des choses élevées, on leur confiait les soins les plus intellectuels." Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, vol. 4 (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1855), 86-87.

the second volume of his study *The Viking Age: The Early History, Manners, and Customs of the Ancestors of the English-Speaking Nations* by observing that “it is particularly striking, in reading the Sagas and the ancient laws which corroborate them, to see the high position women occupied in earlier and later pagan times. If we are to judge of the civilisation of a people in their daily life by the position women held with regard to men, we must conclude that in this respect the earlier Norse tribes could compare favourably with the most ancient civilised nations.”<sup>612</sup> Du Chaillu particularly underlined Norse practices around marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property ownership, which he praised as precociously enlightened.<sup>613</sup> Drawing on examples from the sagas, he demonstrated Norse women’s central involvement in every aspect of life, from farming, to manufacturing, to political decision-making.<sup>614</sup> He emphasized that woman was “the companion and not the inferior” of man in Norse society.<sup>615</sup>

For French commentators, Norse warrior women epitomized this supposed equality. Among the first French translators of Old Norse literature, Ferdinand Eckstein (1790-1861) saw the Valkyrie as the essential incarnation of Norse values. An ultra-Catholic Legitimist journalist and Orientalist, Eckstein believed that the oldest form of Eurasian religion was what he termed patriarchal paganism, a naturalistic cosmology that valorized harmony and organized society around the family.<sup>616</sup> Eckstein maintained that patriarchal paganism was gradually supplanted in ancient times by heroic paganism, a martial religion that exalted the triumph of the superior individual in battle. The deity who quintessentially personified this bellicose ethos was a virginal

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<sup>612</sup> Paul Belloni Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age: The Early History, Manners, and Customs of the Ancestors of the English-Speaking Nations*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1889), 1.

<sup>613</sup> Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, vol. 2, 1-29.

<sup>614</sup> Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, vol. 2, 362-368.

<sup>615</sup> Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, vol. 2, 1.

<sup>616</sup> Ferdinand Eckstein, “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement considérées sous le point de vue d’une philosophie de l’histoire,” *Revue des deux mondes* 3 (1831), 28.

warrior woman.<sup>617</sup> This figure achieved her apogee with “the celestial Valkyries that Odin sent to heroes dying on the battlefield.”<sup>618</sup> Eckstein affirmed that, inspired by the Valkyries’ example and authorized by their culture’s pugnacity, actual Norse women took up arms with enthusiastic public consent: “The Scandinavian warrior families prided themselves on their Skioldmôer, [or] shieldmaidens, terrestrial forms of the Valkyries.”<sup>619</sup> Similarly, in an address given on April 30, 1880 to the Académie de sciences, belles-lettres, et arts de Rouen, J. Félix had this to share about the Viking women of medieval Scandinavia: “Michelet said that ‘in a heroic marriage, the woman can only aspire to equality in becoming a man, a hero.’ If one believes the historic legends, the rude companions of these terrible *sea-kings* [were] loyal to that ideal.... Doubtless such exploits excited the enthusiasm of savage peoples who saw them accomplished.”<sup>620</sup> Félix went on to list examples of shieldmaidens from the sagas to sustain his characterization of these female furies as undaunted champions who could stand toe-to-toe with their husbands on the battlefield. In the same vein, Alfred Ravet (1855-19??) asserted that Norse women “differed little from [male warriors] because they fought at their sides.”<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> Eckstein, “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement,” 28.

<sup>618</sup> “Des Valkyriur célestes, qu’Othinn envoyait aux héros qui succombaient sur le champ de bataille.” Eckstein, “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement,” 28.

<sup>619</sup> “Les familles guerrières des Scandinaves s’enorgueillissaient de leurs Skioldmôer, filles du bouclier, formes terrestres des Valkyriur.” Eckstein, “Du genre humain aux grandes époques de son développement,” 28.

<sup>620</sup> “« Dans le mariage héroïque, a dit Michelet, la femme ne peut aspirer à l’égalité qu’en devenant un homme, un héros, » et si l’on en croit les légendes historiques, les rudes compagnes de ces terribles *rois de mer*, fidèles à cet idéal.... De pareils exploits excitaient sans doute l’enthousiasme des peuples sauvages qui les voyaient s’accomplir.” Italics original. J. Félix, “Réponse au discours de réception de M. Gravier,” in *Précis analytique des travaux de l’Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Rouen pendant l’année 1879-1880* (Rouen: Imprimerie de H. Boissel, 1880), 223-225.

<sup>621</sup> “Les femmes recevaient quelquefois le même cérémonial d’inhumation que les guerriers ; d’ailleurs, nous avons vu qu’elles différaient peu de ces derniers puisqu’elles combattaient à leurs côtés.” Alfred Ravet, *La marine des Vikings, ou Pirates scandinaves* (Rouen: J. Lecerc, 1886), 49.





Fig. 5.4. Gil Baer, *Plus de pneus crevés ! par l'emploi de la Fucosine*, 1897. Color lithograph, 152 x 104 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Advertising is a particularly rich source for the visual culture of the turn of the century.

During the Belle Époque, the bicycle became a metonym for the New Woman, that educated, professional daughter of the middle class.<sup>622</sup> The bicycle allowed the New Woman to traverse the city, on her way to a job or even a political meeting. It offered her unprecedented mobility and an excuse to don bifurcated trousers. Advertisements capitalized on the bicycle's appeal to women pursuing freedom. Companies positioned their product as joyful and emancipatory for women consumers. They also played with the erotic frisson male viewers might enjoy watching a woman transgress traditional boundaries. For example, a poster for Fucosine patch solutions from 1897 showed a leisurely female cyclist in a dapper suit sailing

<sup>622</sup> Deborah L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 63-74.

comfortably past a sweaty gentleman crouched beside his broken machine (Figure 5.4). Unlike the heroine, he has failed to think ahead and invest in Fucosine to prevent flat tires. This image tapped into the *querelle des sexes*, pitting man against woman and showing woman coming out ahead – thanks to her fully operational bicycle. Even more striking, an 1890 Papillon advertisement depicted a bride fleeing her wedding by *vélo*, her abandoned groom shouting ineffectually in the distance (Figure 5.5). This image sold the bicycle as an escape from patriarchy’s foundational institution: marriage. The runaway fiancée indicates the bicycle’s rhetorical and practical connection to women’s empowerment.



Fig. 5.5. A. Bonnard, *Papillon. Société française pour la construction de cycles*, 1890. Color lithograph, 119 x 78 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

This bride shows off a shapely calf as she leaps onto her bicycle to pedal her way to freedom.

Some bicycle companies elected to compound this symbolism with another emblem of women's liberation: the Valkyrie. An 1898 poster for Acatène bicycles depicted the Germanic seeress Velleda, a legendary leader of the Bructeri resistance to the Roman Empire in the first century CE (Figure 5.6).<sup>623</sup> Appropriately for a woman who opposed servitude under the Romans, her namesake bicycle is chainless. In the background, a raptor holds the severed chains – of the bicycle or the Bructeri? – in its claws and beak, the devise *vae catenis* (woe to chains) illuminated behind it. This image participates in the frequent confusion between the ancient Germanic tribes and the medieval Norse. Velleda is dressed just as Brynhild appeared on the stage during contemporary productions of Wagner's Ring Cycle. She has Brynhild's two trademark braids flowing over her shoulders, and Brynhild's trademark rondels protecting her bust. She raises her right hand as if in the midst of an aria. She wears arm-rings in the Norse style, and a circlet much like the one Rose Caron wore when she performed as the Valkyrie in Ernest Reyer's opera *Sigurd*. Velleda also has the rich red locks nineteenth-century people associated with the Vikings. This advertisement plays on several registers of chainless-ness: the chainless-ness of the Acatène, of the Bructeri, of the shieldmaiden, and of the modern woman cyclist.

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<sup>623</sup> A French poet described her as the powerful druidess “Velléda, fille des Bructères, célèbre prophétesse de la Germanie, laquelle lutta héroïquement avec Civilis contre les aigles de la ville conquérante.” Sébastien Rhéal, *Les divines féeries de l'Orient et du Nord*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Fournier, 1843), 152.



Fig. 5.6. Lucien Baylac, *Velleda Acatène*, 17, rue St. Maur, Paris, 1898. Color lithograph, 160 x 120 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Baylac's poster merges medieval subject matter with art nouveau aesthetics.

The evocatively named Liberator Cycles and Automobiles also deployed the Valkyrie to sell its product to ambitious young women. A company poster from 1899 (Figure 5.7) portrays another shieldmaiden, her red hair waving freely in the breeze beneath a stereotypical but ahistorical winged helmet. She clutches an equally ahistorical claymore in one hand and a bicycle in the other. These two tools are presented as symmetric, equally necessary to the Valkyrie's independence and power. She stands proudly, her shoulders thrown back and chin lifted in determination. She wears armor, but also bears her pert breasts, underscoring her nubility. She is a locus of desirable femininity both for men tempted by her sexual allure and for women drawn to her unapologetic freedom. By yoking the Valkyrie to the bicycle, these advertisements amplified both as icons of women's emancipation.



Fig. 5.7. Jean de Paléologue, *Liberator. Cycles et automobiles*, 1899. Lithograph, 140 x 100 cm, musée de l’Affiche et de la Publicité, Paris.

Jean de Paléologue’s shieldmaiden anticipates twentieth- and twenty-first-century depictions of “boob armor” in films, video games, and book covers with medieval or fantasy settings.

Edmond Neukomm similarly positioned the shieldmaiden as an emblem of women’s equality in his novel *Les dompteurs de la mer*. Inspired by the academic publications of Neukomm’s mentor Gabriel Gravier, *Les dompteurs de la mer* novelized the events of the so-called Vínland sagas: the Old Norse Saga of Erik the Red and Greenlanders’ Saga.<sup>624</sup> Like his two medieval sources, Neukomm’s novel describes the eleventh-century Viking expeditions to Vínland, or continental North America.<sup>625</sup> Neukomm’s tale first ran 1892-1893 as “Les précurseurs de Christoph Colomb” in the *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*

<sup>624</sup> Gabriel Gravier, *Découverte de l’Amérique par les Normands au X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Cie, 1874).

<sup>625</sup> Neukomm may have read the two Vínland sagas in a French translation by Eugène Beauvois. Eugène Beauvois, *Découvertes des Scandinaves en Amérique, du dixième au treizième siècle : fragments de sagas islandaises, traduits pour la première fois en français* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1859).

and then as “La découverte de l’Amérique par les Normands en l’an mil” in the *Magasin d’éducation et de récréation*.<sup>626</sup> *Les dompeturs de la mer* was published as a standalone volume (with a new preface) in 1895, enjoying three editions over five years. An English translation appeared with Boston editors Estes and Lauriat in 1896.<sup>627</sup> Like the other creators examined in this chapter, Neukomm emphasized that the beautiful shieldmaidens were lovers, wives, daughters, and mothers as well as warriors. Distinctively, however, he also portrayed them as political leaders who exercised authority over other Norse people, including men. They not only led battles and broke hearts but governed their followers on land and sea – sometimes badly, but more often well.

The antagonist of the first half of Neukomm’s text is Freydis Eiríksdóttir. Though attested in both of the Vínland sagas, Freydis comes across quite differently in the two medieval sources. In Erik the Red’s Saga, she confronts the Skraelings (Indigenous Americans) attacking the Viking camp. She beats her naked breast with her sword before charging the Skraelings, scattering them and deciding the battle in the Vikings’ favor. In the Greenlanders’ Saga, however, she turns her violence on her fellow Norse. After tricking her husband and followers into attacking a rival Norse faction, Freydis executes the women of the conquered party, personally massacring five unarmed prisoners with an axe. Neukomm combines these two depictions of Freydis, courageous and craven, to create an intriguingly complex figure.

On the one hand, Neukomm’s Freydis is an unparalleled warrior of the utmost skill and bravery. Her father Erik the Red says that her “indomitable nature proclaims her race and

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<sup>626</sup> Edmond Neukomm, “Les précurseurs de Christoph Colomb,” *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, no. 803-819 (November 27, 1892-March 19, 1893); Edmond Neukomm, “La découverte de l’Amérique par les Normands en l’an mil,” in *Magasin d’éducation et de récréation*, eds. Jules Verne and Jules Hetzel, vol. 2 (Paris: Bibliothèque d’éducation et de récréation, 1895): 10-363.

<sup>627</sup> Edmond Neukomm, *The Rulers of the Sea: The Norsemen in America from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1896).



worth.”<sup>628</sup> Similarly, her brother Leif the Lucky calls her “the Queen of Vínland. Her manners are a little brusque, rather fantastical, but the blood of Erik runs in her veins. She is brave as a shieldmaiden, and her heart is open to the noblest sentiments.”<sup>629</sup> Before a battle, Freydis appears at the head of her retinue, and “her ardent eye and quivering lips overcame all hearts. She was beautiful thus, with a murderous beauty, her thick hair floating on the wind, her waist cinched in a mail coat beneath a dark blue cape fastened at the shoulder. In her hand she held an axe, and her sword hanging at her side shone.”<sup>630</sup> In the fight with the Skraelings, “suddenly, a woman [Freydis] appears, her breast bare, her hair in the wind, her eye on fire.... She finds a companion killed by a hit from a rock. She takes his sword and, alone, without calculating the danger, she throws herself in front of the Skraelings.... She falls on the queen of the Skraelings, and with her sword, cuts off the woman’s head with a single blow.”<sup>631</sup> By contrast, after Freydis defeats the Skraelings, “Thorvar, Freydis’ husband, was found hidden up a tree,” trying to escape the melee.<sup>632</sup> In diametrical opposition to her cowardly spouse, Freydis demonstrates physical skill and strong leadership.

Despite her valor in battle and ability to lead men, Neukomm’s Freydis is also untrustworthy, conniving, and underhanded – “the goddess of crime.”<sup>633</sup> Upon learning that her

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<sup>628</sup> “L’indomptable nature proclame la race et la valeur.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 19.

<sup>629</sup> “La reine du Vinland. Elle est de manières un peu brusques, assez fantasques ; mais le sang d’Erik coule dans ses veines. Elle est brave comme une Vierge-au-bouclier, et son cœur est accessible aux plus nobles sentiments.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 150.

<sup>630</sup> “Son œil ardent, et ses lèvres frémissantes eurent raison de tous les cœurs. Elle était belle ainsi, d’une beauté meurtrière, ses cheveux épais flottant au vent, sa taille serrée dans une cote de mailles, que faisait ressortir d’une chlamyde d’un bleu sombre, agrafée sur l’épaule. A la main elle tenait une hachette, et son épée, qui pendait à son côté, reluisait.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 161-162.

<sup>631</sup> “Soudain, une femme apparaît, la poitrine nue, la chevelure au vent, l’œil en feu.... Elle trouve un compagnon tué d’un coup de pierre.... Elle fond sur la reine des Skrellings, et, de son épée, lui fend la tête, d’un seul coup.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 131-132.

<sup>632</sup> “Thorvar, le mari de Freydis, qu’on retrouva caché au haut d’un arbre.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 133.

<sup>633</sup> “La déesse du crime.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 164.

brother Leif has dubbed her Queen of Vínland, she claims the region as her sovereign domain.<sup>634</sup> She begins taxing her subjects at a rate of 10% and evicts a group of visiting Norwegians from the settlement. Eventually, tired of Freydis' high-handed governance, the Norwegians, led by brothers Finn and Helgi, elect to return to Europe. Unfortunately for them, Freydis covets their goods and will not let them leave America without a fight. She attempts various trickeries to ignite a feud between the two groups, eventually lying to her husband that the Norwegians have sexually assaulted her. Being a lazy coward, Thorvar is inclined to overlook this insult until Freydis threatens to divorce him should he not avenge her. Unwilling to face this greatest humiliation to his manhood, Thorvar rallies his men and they murder most of the Norwegians as they sleep. Unlike in the medieval source texts, Freydis personally kills Helgi and Finn. Then, seeing that her men have not killed the Norwegian women, she cuts the women to pieces in a blind rage. This demonstration of bloodlust so disturbs even her hardened Viking followers that they nearly desert her, until she promises to exact terrible vengeance against anyone who speaks of the massacre. Nonetheless, her brother Leif quickly learns the truth and exiles Freydis, leaving her to wander the wilderness alone.

Though indisputably fascinated by the transgressive Freydis, Neukomm gave pride of place in his novel to Gudrid the Far-Traveller, widow of Freydis' late brother Thorstein Eriksson. While Neukomm's Freydis is an amalgam concocted from the Old Norse sources, his Gudrid owes almost her entire identity his own imagination. In the Vínland sagas, Gudrid is a pious Christian housewife who remarries the adventurous merchant Thorfinn Karlsefni after Thorstein's death in a plague. She joins Thorfinn on a voyage to Vínland, where their son Snorri is born. Though resolute, loyal, and capable, the sagas' Gudrid – in contrast to Freydis – never

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<sup>634</sup> Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 148-166.



hefts a weapon. Neukomm, however, chose to rewrite her as the foremost of Norse shieldmaidens, demonstrating the inescapable magnetism the trope exerted on him.



Fig. 5.8. George Roux, *Je t'attendais !... Partons !*, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le Xe jusqu'au XVe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

Gudrid here reveals to Thorfinn Karlsefni that she has been awaiting a husband of his caliber and urges him to depart with her for Vínland at once.

Neukomm imagines for Gudrid a storied career as a champion on the high seas. Before her marriage to Thorstein, Neukomm's Gudrid was a great pirate queen. Neukomm provides extensive accounts of her physical courage and longing for adventure.<sup>635</sup> He calls her "Gudrid the Victorious... for she had reigned over the sea, and the enemies killed by her hand numbered

<sup>635</sup> Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 89-99.

in the legions.”<sup>636</sup> She has “muscles of iron” and an implacable thirst for revenge.<sup>637</sup> In this telling, she becomes the motive force in convincing Thorstein to sail for Vínland in order to repay his brother’s death at the hands of the Skraelings. As in the *Greenlanders’ Saga*, Thorstein briefly returns from beyond the grave to deliver Gudrid a ghostly message. However, Neukomm invents an entirely new and far more bellicose prediction for Thorstein to convey. Thorstein’s shade tells Gudrid, “you were not made for the peaceful life of the hearth. Dangers and combats have an irresistible attraction for you.... You will participate in bloody battles. Often death will appear to you in the future, but she will not brush you with her wing. Your sanctified soul will shine, living, over the earth.”<sup>638</sup> Indeed, Gudrid travels to North America with her next husband, Thorfinn (Figure 5.8), where she “reigned as sovereign mistress, and Thorfinn’s companions regarded her as the true leader of the mission.”<sup>639</sup>

Neukomm’s Gudrid operates as a foil to her villainous sister-in-law. Though equally fearsome on the battlefield, Gudrid has a feminine softness Freydis lacks. The narrator relates that “remarkable for her beauty, the dignity of her person, her ability, her prudence... Gudrid promptly became the soul, the jewel, the fine pearl of the court at Brattehilde. Her grace attracted homages and devotion.”<sup>640</sup> Unlike the pagan Freydis, Gudrid is a devout Christian. Neukomm even goes so far as to claim that she personally convinces the Holy See to establish a bishop in

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<sup>636</sup> “Gudride-la-Victorieuse... car elle avait régné sur la mer, et les ennemis tués de sa main se comptaient par legions.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 89-90.

<sup>637</sup> “Ses muscles d’acier.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 108.

<sup>638</sup> “Tu n’es point faite à la vie paisible du foyer. Les dangers et les combats ont pour toi des attraits irrésistibles... Tu assisteras à de sanglantes batailles. Souvent la mort t’apparaîtra, prochaine ; mais elle ne t’effleurera pas de son aile ; et ton âme, sanctifiée, rayonnera, vivante, sur la terre.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 98.

<sup>639</sup> “Régnaît en souveraine maîtresse et que les compagnons de Thorfinn regardaient comme le véritable chef de la mission.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 107.

<sup>640</sup> “Remarquable par sa beauté, la dignité de sa personne, son habileté, sa prudence et — comme nous l’apprend la *Saga* — « sa facilité dans l’art de converser avec les étrangers », Gudride était promptement devenue l’âme, le joyau, la perle fine de la cour de Brattehilde. Sa grâce attirait à elle hommages et dévouement.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 89-90.

North America to missionize the Indigenous population.<sup>641</sup> Gudrid further unites maternal care with battlefield prowess. During a battle with the Skraelings, she “with one hand, clasped her newborn son [Snorri] to her breast and, with the other, brandished a sword.”<sup>642</sup> Gudrid seamlessly integrates motherhood, piety, and sociability with efficacious violence.



Fig. 5.9. George Roux, *Gudride se laissait aller à des rêveries sans fins*, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le Xe jusqu'au XVe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).

Gudrid sits listlessly at yet another Greenland feast, dreaming of the battles described by the skalds.

<sup>641</sup> Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 220.

<sup>642</sup> “Leurs chefs, ayant à leur tête Gudride, qui, d'un bras, serre son nouveau né sur sa poitrine, et, de l'autre, brandit une épée.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 130.

Neukomm further evoked the shieldmaidens of Saxo Grammaticus' twelfth-century history *Gesta Danorum*. Neukomm used Leif's court skald Anlaf as an excuse to introduce the events of the *Gesta Danorum* into *Les dompteurs de la mer*: "There was not a banquet, not a party... where the skald did not exalt the heroic action of women-pirates. He sang of the *shieldmaidens*, so named because, in the melee, they loosed their little azure-colored shields."<sup>643</sup> Among the women warriors Anlaf eulogizes are Veborg and Visna, whom Saxo describes fighting bravely at Battle of Brevala. Anlaf also sings about the *Gesta Danorum*'s Alfhild, a beautiful princess whose father locks her away in the woods, guarded by two monsters. As related by both Saxo and Anlaf, a young Viking named Alf kills the monsters to win her hand, but Alfhild, "jealous of her liberty, fled to the sea."<sup>644</sup> Disguised as a man, she becomes a great Viking captain, commanding a whole fleet. Eventually, the forces of Alf and Alfhild meet in combat off the coast of Finland. Alfhild loses her helmet in the fighting, and Alf immediately recognizes her. He disarms her, and – like Wagner's more famous shieldmaiden Brynhild – she agrees to marry the man who bested her in battle. This story was popularized among nineteenth-century audiences by Charles Ellms in *The Pirates Own Book* (1837). Alfhild and her portrait in Ellms' collection immediately became favored subjects in scrimshaw art carved by New England sailors into whale bone.<sup>645</sup> Neukomm presents Saxo's shieldmaidens as inspirations and role models for Gudrid (Figure 5.9). Listening to Anlaf's performances while wasting away at Leif's court in Greenland, "her thoughts went back to her past exploits, to battles where, like these famous maidens, she brandished axe and sword. How times had changed! The calm, the ennui,

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<sup>643</sup> "Il n'était pas un banquet, une fête — car la cour de Brattehilde avait promptement repris ses habitudes joyeuses—où le Skald n'exaltât les actions héroïques des femmes-pirates. Il chantait les *Vierges au Bouclier*, ainsi nommées parce que, dans la mêlée, se détachaient leurs petits boucliers couleur d'azur." Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 90.

<sup>644</sup> "Jalouse de sa liberté, se réfugia sur mer." Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 91.

<sup>645</sup> Mary Malloy, "The Sailor's Fantasy: Images of Women in the Songs of American Whalemens," *The Log of Mystic Seaport* 49, no. 2 (Autumn 1997), 40.

the disgust of an easy life had taken the place of the exaltation, the fever, the beneficial delirium of glorious days.”<sup>646</sup>

The last (and in terms of historicity, least) of Neukomm’s shieldmaidens is Syasi the Blonde. Syasi’s origins are far stranger and more convoluted than her literary sisters Freydis and Gudrid. While the latter two women appear prominently in authentic medieval texts – Erik the Red’s Saga and the Greenlanders’ Saga – Syasi was an invention of the nineteenth century. On July 8, 1867, at the commission of the newspaper’s editor, Pennsylvanian writer Frank Cowan published an article in the *Evening Union* under the identity of made-up archeologist Thomas C. Raffinon (an homage to the Danish antiquarian Carl Christian Rafn).<sup>647</sup> As Raffinon, Cowan claimed to have discovered the 1051 grave of a Norse woman named Syasi the Blonde along the banks of Potomac River. The runic inscription supposedly found marking her burial described her as a young immigrant from Iceland. Cowan/Raffinon proclaimed that this find validated the text of the Old Norse Skalholt Saga, which described Syasi’s journey to Vínland with her family. Of course, Skalholt Saga – like Syasi’s tomb – never actually existed. Though the *Evening Union* reported that the manuscript had been unearthed in Iceland in 1863 by a Mr. Phillip Marsh and translated into English by a Mr. Thomas Murray, the manuscript (like Marsh and Murray themselves) were fabrications of Cowan. Syasi was nonetheless briefly the belle of the academic ball. Before Cowan eventually revealed his deceit, Old Norse scholars throughout the Atlantic world hailed “Raffinon’s” revelation as an unheralded breakthrough in the search for Vínland.

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<sup>646</sup> “Sa pensée se reportait vers ses anciens exploits, vers les combats, où, pareille à ces vierges fameuses, elle brandissait la hache et l’épée. Que les temps étaient changés ! Le calme, l’ennui, le dégoût d’une vie trop facile, avaient pris la place de l’exaltation, de la fièvre, du délire bienfaisant des jours glorieux.” Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 93.

<sup>647</sup> See Scott Tribble, “Last of the Vikings: Frank Cowan, Pennsylvania’s Other Great Hoaxer and a Man who Changed History,” *Western Pennsylvania History* (Fall 2007): 48-57.

Notably, Neukomm's mentor Gabriel Gravier took Raffinon's writings as gospel truth, prompting Neukomm to incorporate Syasi into his novel.

Though Cowan/Raffinon certainly did not depict her as such, in Neukomm's retelling, Syasi is a shieldmaiden in her own right. During their tenure as the Norse leaders in Vínland, Syasi's husband Hervador prefers to focus on agriculture, "leaving the political scepter to his wife."<sup>648</sup> Syasi governs fairly and well, ultimately falling in a heroic last stand against the Skraelings. The author depicts her "buckling her helmet, putting her shield on her arm, and taking her war-axe in hand. When she appeared before her assembled people and companions, a cry of enthusiasm and admiration rose from every chest. The good queen, who had presided over the sweet work of peace, transformed suddenly into a bellicose goddess. Her eyes spit lightning, and her hand convulsively gripped the weapon she burned to redden with blood."<sup>649</sup> For Neukomm, Syasi's death effectively ends the heyday of Norse colonization in Vínland.

Like his contemporaries, Neukomm assigned the Norse shieldmaidens feminine beauty and family values. They were enmeshed in kinship relationships as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters; they were also sexually desirable. However, Neukomm also endowed his shieldmaidens with political authority. His Vínland women were leaders who exercised power in dangerous frontier environments during times of peace as well as war. They spearheaded charges against the Skraelings and governed the future of their colonies. In every respect they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with – and often exceeded – the men of their society.

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<sup>648</sup> "Laisant le sceptre politique à sa femme." Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 190.

<sup>649</sup> "Syasi, se rappelant les prodiges de Freydize devant Thorfins-Budir, ceignait son casque, mettait à son bras son bouclier, et prenait en main sa hache de combat. Quand elle parut devant ses compagnons et son peuple assemblés, un cri d'enthousiasme et d'admiration sortit de toutes les poitrines. La bonne reine, qui avait présidé aux doux travaux de la paix, se transformait soudainement en déesse belliqueuse. Ses yeux jetaient des éclairs, et sa main serrait convulsivement l'arme qu'elle brûlait de rougir d'un sang détesté." Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer*, 193.

French audiences were very sensitive to the delicate balance of gender conformity and transgression embodied by the shieldmaiden. She was not only a key trope, a sort of shorthand for Viking-ness; she also incarnated an elusive ideal of womanhood. As a liberated political actor who shared equality with men, she fulfilled the dreams of the Belle Epoque feminist. At the same time, she was the attractive lover and devoted family member men craved. She gained traction as a symbol precisely because she comforted men who feared the forward progress of feminism would mark an end to femininity.

### **Beautiful and Terrible: Norse Warrior Women's Dual Corporality**

French artists, authors, and theatrical directors united feminine and masculine forms of corporality in the shieldmaiden. They feminized her by foregrounding the vulnerability and desirability of her body; they masculinized her by bedecking that body in the accoutrements of war. French media pitted shieldmaidens against enemies in great set piece battles, giving them plenty of opportunity to flaunt their bravery and skill on the field. It also showed the same attention to the attractions of their hair, eyes, and figure. Indeed, most depictions suggested their prowess in war even heightened their personal charms. Thus, by combining the conventional traits of men and women, French shieldmaidens surpassed both. The shieldmaiden embodied a messy, inchoate, even subliminal desire by men for women who remained normatively feminine while simultaneously filling in for the martial failures of men. The shieldmaiden thereby solved a key problem of the fin de siècle: how would France survive the failure of her men on the battlefield? The Franco-Prussian War had discredited Frenchmen as soldiers. The shieldmaiden soothed this anxiety, promising women could step into the gap while remaining sexually available to men.



Fig. 5.10. A. de Broca, *Les Valkyries*, in Étienne Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner* (Nantes: F. Salières, 1899).

Broca's depiction of the Valkyries echoes the paintings of Norse mythology by Norwegian Peter Nicolai Arbo (1831-1892).

Music critic Etienne Destranges obsessed over the juxtaposition of martial accomplishments and feminine beauty in Wagner's *Valkyries* (Figure 5.10). He described the appearance of Odin's nine daughters on stage "coiffed with a white-winged helmet, cuirassed in a coat of silver mail, carried through the stormy clouds on fantastic winged horses, from whose



saddle are suspended the still warm cadavers of warriors struck down in battle.”<sup>650</sup> Destranges portrayed Wagner’s Valkyries as absolutely fearless: “They go, joyously, through battles, appearing to those designated by Destiny. In the midst of carnage, they remain indifferent to the sighs of the dying, to the pleas of the wounded. Their soul, which has never known fear, is inaccessible to human weaknesses. They are as happy in tempests as in combat.”<sup>651</sup> Yet, in addition to being brave, Wagner’s Valkyries were also attractive and maidenly. Destranges wrote that “the nine sisters are beautiful, tall, courageous. Never would a god dare damage their virginity.”<sup>652</sup> Destranges declared that “of all the Valkyries, Brynhild is the most radiantly beautiful.... [She has] a face of the purest oval where shine two eyes full of sparkle, shadowed by long lashes; her nose, with trembling nostrils, is perfectly shaped; when she smiles, her red lips reveal the dazzling ivory of her teeth; her neck and arms are white as marble.”<sup>653</sup> Indeed, her martial valor only heightened her sexual appeal for French viewers. In Destranges’ words, “her beauty is made of pride and grace; everything in her breathes of nobility and charm. Her long golden hair descends in silken curls from her helmet.... The harmonious shape of her virginal breast is further affirmed by the suppleness of the silver scales of her cuirass.”<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> “Ces êtres coiffés d'un casque aux blanches ailes, cuirassés d'une cote de mailles d'argent, qu'emportent, à travers les nuées orageuses, de fantastiques chevaux ailés, à l'arçon desquels sont suspendus les cadavres, encore chauds, de guerriers frappés dans la bataille.” Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 113.

<sup>651</sup> “Elles vont, joyeuses, à travers les batailles, apparaissant à ceux désignés par le Destin. Au milieu du carnage, elles restent insensibles aux soupirs des mourants, aux plaintes des blessés. Leur âme, qui n'a jamais connu la Peur, est inaccessible aux faiblesses humaines. Elles se plaisent aux tempêtes aussi bien qu'aux combats.” Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 114-115.

<sup>652</sup> “Les neuf sœurs sont belles, grandes, courageuses. Jamais un Dieu n'a osé porter atteinte à leur virginité.” Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 114.

<sup>653</sup> “De toutes les Walkyries, Brünnhilde est la plus radieusement belle.... Un visage de l'ovale le plus pur où brillent deux yeux pleins d'éclat, ombragés de longs cils ; son nez, aux narines frémissantes, est d'un dessin parfait ; sa bouche purpurine découvre, quand elle sourit, l'éblouissant ivoire des dents ; son cou et ses bras sont d'une blancheur marmoréenne.” Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 103-104.

<sup>654</sup> “Sa beauté est faite de fierté et de grâce ; en elle, tout respire la noblesse et le charme. Ses longs cheveux dorés descendent du casque en boucles soyeuses.... L'harmonieux dessin de sa poitrine virginale est encore affirmé par la souplesse des écailles d'argent de sa cuirasse.” Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 10-104.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 5.11. Adrien Marie, *Parigi, Eden-Théâtre, Sieba, ballo di Luigi Manzotti, musica dei maestri Marengo et Venanzi : una scena dell'Inferno*, 1883. Engraving, 30 x 30 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Marie represents the moment when Loki attempts to ensorcel the vulnerable Sieba.

Long before the first notes of the *Walkürenritt* ever echoed across a French stage, the Ring Cycle stamped itself on the world of French theater. The Valkyrie first alighted on the Parisian boards on November 23, 1883 in the titular role of choreographer Luigi Manzotti's ballet *Sieba, o La spada di Wodan*, a clear homage to Wagner's Ring Cycle (Figures 5.11, 5.12).<sup>655</sup> Originally performed at the Regio Theater in Turin in 1878, *Sieba* staged the Eddaic conflict between Odin and the giant Surtur, prophesied to play a key role in the gods' downfall at Ragnarök. Odin dispatches Sieba to deliver a magical sword to Harold, king of Thule (a

<sup>655</sup> Luigi Manzotti, *Sieba* (Paris: Imprimerie Mouillot, 1883).

legendary realm in Scandinavia) so that he may defeat invading armies from Asia. Surtur, on the orders of the trickster god Loki, intervenes to cause Sieba to fall in love with Harold. She thereby sacrifices her immortality and Odin loses a member of his divine retinue. Unlike Brynhild, however, Sieba earns a happy ending. She saves Harold from a pirate attack and becomes his queen.

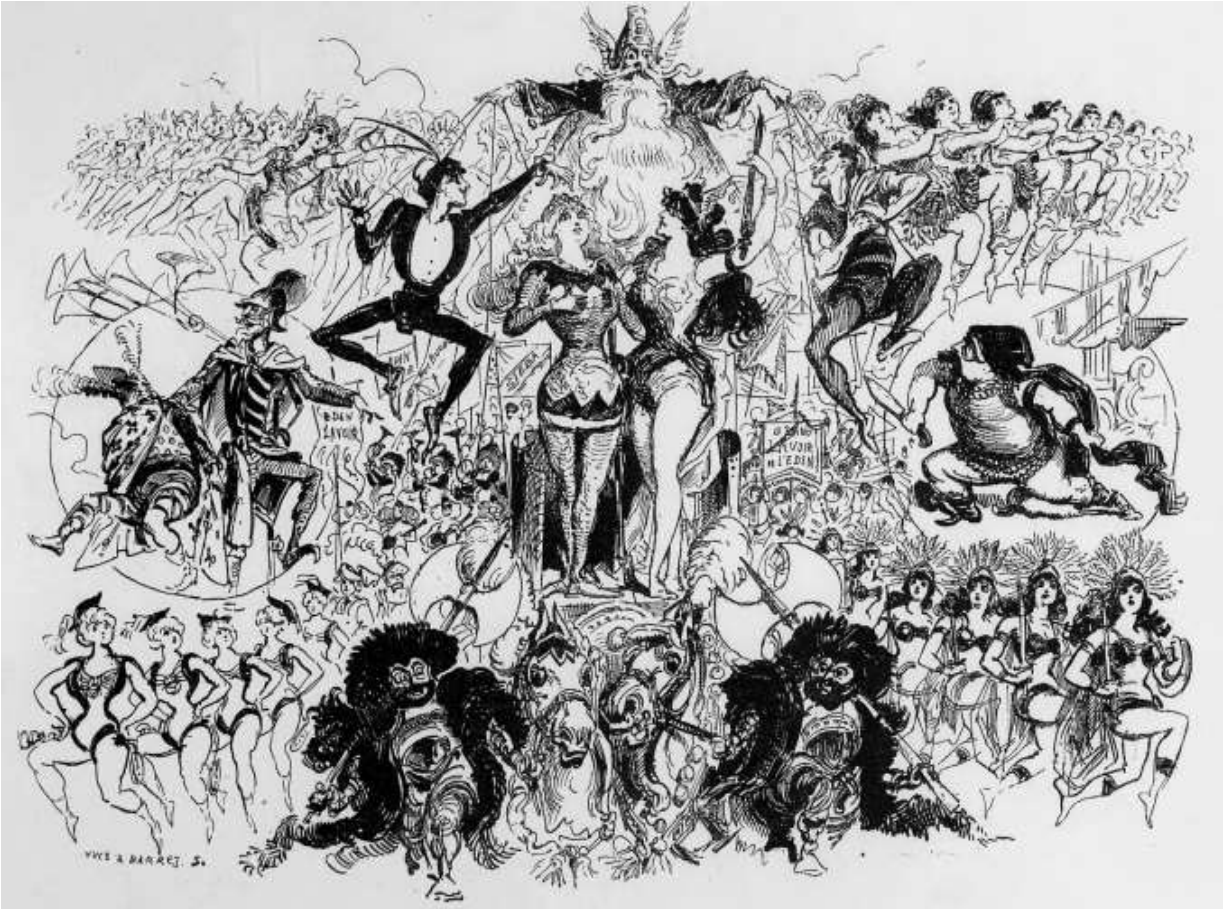


Fig. 5.12. *A l'Éden – Sieba*, in *La vie parisienne* (December 22, 1883), 722.

This newspaper illustration depicts Odin as a puppeteer pulling the strings on the other characters of the ballet, reflecting a Norse attitude towards mortals' fate as outside their control.

French viewers who watched the show at Paris' Eden-Théâtre particularly adored Virginia Zucchi, the prima ballerina who danced the title role. Gustave Claudin of *Le Théâtre*

*illustré* called her “the new star of dance” and claimed that all of Paris “sang her praises.”<sup>656</sup>

Emile Desbeaux writing for *La Petite presse* claimed that “Mlle Zucchi is without peer... a true and great artist.”<sup>657</sup> In the *Courrier de l’art*, Louis Gallet proclaimed that “Mlle Zucchi dances

and impersonates the role of the Valkyrie with a true superiority; it is one of the laborious creations of dramatic choreography; the success of the dancer and actress was very great.”<sup>658</sup> H.

Moreno of *Le Ménestrel* affirmed that while “indeed all the performers acquitted themselves admirably at their task... among them, Mlle Zuchi – Sieba – merits citation not only as a dancer,

but also as an actress. She had moments of pantomime so expressive, so dramatic, that she

received merited ovations.”<sup>659</sup> Critical and popular consensus held that Virginia Zucchi’s turn as

Sieba was a triumph.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>656</sup> Gustave Claudin, “La Zucchi,” *Le Théâtre illustré* (1883) NYPL b12147701.

<sup>657</sup> “Il faut mettre hors de pair Mlle Zucchi, une danseuse et surtout une mime d’une intelligence remarquable. La Zucchi, qui les Italiens appellent « la tragédienne de la danse », est une véritable et une grande artiste.” Emile Desbeaux, “Théâtres,” *La Petite presse* (November 25, 1883).

<sup>658</sup> “Mlle Zucchi danse et mime le rôle de la Walkyrie avec une véritable supériorité ; c’est une des créations les plus laborieuses qui soient en matière de chorégraphie dramatique ; le succès de la danseuse et de la comédienne a été très grand.” Louis Gallet, “Art musical,” *Courrier de l’art* (November 29, 1883), 575.

<sup>659</sup> “Tous les interprètes s’acquittent d’ailleurs admirablement de leur tâche. Entre tous, Mlle Zucchi-Sieba mérite d’être citée non seulement comme danseuse, mais aussi comme actrice ; elle a eu des moments de pantomime si expressive, si dramatique, qu’on lui a fait des ovations méritées.” H. Moreno, “Semaine théâtrale,” *Le Ménestrel* (November 25, 1883), 413.

<sup>660</sup> Other discussions of the ballet in the French press include Jules Prével, “Courrier des théâtres,” *Figaro* (November 22, 1883): 3; Olivier Merson, “Nos gravures,” *Le Monde illustré* (December 1, 1883): 342-343; Kamoushka, “A l’Éden – Sieba,” *La vie parisienne* (December 22, 1883): 722-724.



Fig. 5.13. Samuel Marie Clédat de Lavigerie, *Sieba*, ballet de Luigi Manzotti et Romualdo Marenco : *dessins de costumes*, 1883. Watercolor, 19 x 10 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Clédat de Lavigerie produced several watercolors of the costumes for *Sieba*, which featured dancers in outfits of varying historical accuracy.

The Valkyries of Manzotti's ballet blended feminine charm and combatant spirit.

Describing their arrival on stage, reviewer Frimousse claimed in *Le Gaulois* that the Valkyries “enter like lightning: steel helmets with white chenille as the plume. This chenille falls back and mixes with the dancers’ blonde hair. White mantles starred with silver. Shining shield on the arm and lance in hand.”<sup>661</sup> Like Destranges, Bussière, and Du Chaillu, Frimousse presented the Norse

<sup>661</sup> “Elles entrent comme la foudre : Casques d’acier découpé avec chenille blanche sur le cimier. Cette chenille retombe par derrière et se confond avec les cheveux blonds des danseuses. Manteaux blancs étoilés d’argent.

women's alluring beauty and martial accoutrements as two sides of the same coin, even as mutually constitutive. Watercolor sketches (Figure 5.13) show that the ballet's costumes carefully balanced these two factors. The Valkyries bore armor, helmets, and bucklers. The illustrations show them standing proudly, chin uplifted with authoritative panache. At the same time, their legs and arms are enticingly bare. Metal rondels draw attention to their breasts. In photographs of prima ballerina Virginia Zucchi in costume (Figure 5.14), her armored corset was cinched tight to flaunt her narrow waist.



Fig. 5.14. *Virginia Zucchi, dans Sieba, à l'Éden-Théâtre, 1883*, in Martine Kahane et Nicole Wild, *Wagner et la France* (Paris: Herscher, 1983), 82.

Zucchi repose in attitudes appropriate for a woman pining away from love, not an aggressive warrior.

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Bouclier étincelant au bras et lance à la main." Frimousse, "La soirée parisienne," *Le Gaulois* (November 23, 1883), 3.



The Ring Cycle was also preceded on the Parisian stage by a home-grown operatic adaptation of the same Old Norse material: *Sigurd*, composed by Ernest Reyer with a libretto by Camille du Locle and Alfred Blau.<sup>662</sup> Like Wagner, the team of Reyer, du Locle, and Blau tackled the tragic relationship between Brynhild and Sigurd related in the sagas and Eddas.<sup>663</sup> The lead female role was sung by Rose Caron, who posed for the camera as Brynhild (Figure 5.15) not in the attitude of a vicious swordswoman or austere goddess, but in the attitude of a woman in love: her hands clasped wistfully by her cheek, her eyes soft and distant. Benque's photograph of Caron centered her beauty and grace, not her martial and divine ferocity.



Fig. 5.15. Benque (photographer) and Dochy (engraver), *Mme. Rose Caron, rôle de Brunhilde, dans « Sigurd », opéra de M. Reyer, in Le Monde illustré, no. 1751 (October 18, 1890).*

*Sigurd* was first performed at Brussels' Théâtre de la Monnaie on January 7, 1884 under the direction of MM. Stoumon and Calabrési. It debuted in France at Paris' Académie nationale de musique on June 12, 1885 under the direction of MM. E. Ritt and P. Gailhard.

<sup>662</sup> Ernest Reyer (composer) and Camille du Locle and Alfred Blau (librettists), *Sigurd* (Paris: Heugel et Cie, ???).

<sup>663</sup> For a history of the performances and reception of *Sigurd*, see Virginie Adam, "Sigurd : Débats autour d'un mythe nordique," *Deshima*, no. 15 (2021): 41-69.

Wagner's Tetralogy inspired many imitations not only in French theaters, but in French salons as well.<sup>664</sup> Brynhild starred in paintings, engravings, and advertisements. However, chief among the fin-de-siècle French painters of Valkyries was Symbolist Gaston Bussière.<sup>665</sup> Born on April 24, 1862 in the town of Cuissery (Saône-et-Loire), Bussière earned fame as a painter of grand history scenes. He died at the height of his career following an automobile accident on October 29, 1928. Georges Lecomte of the Académie française praised his work as demonstrating “taste, conscience and an indisputable aptitude for the expressive representation of forms... well-ordered and harmonious in color.”<sup>666</sup> Though Bussière tackled subjects from Classical mythology, the New Testament, Arthurian legend, the Hundred Years' War, and Shakespearean tragedies, he returned over and over again to the figure of Brynhild. He painted her in various settings and guises, but always with close attention to her mingled femininity and martial force.

In one of his many depictions of Brynhild, in this case unfinished, Bussière rendered her familiarly feminine by painting her in the mode of an Academic nude (Figure 5.16). He contrasted the cool tones of the stormy, purplish sky with the warm colors of her hair and flesh. This Brynhild is not a muscular athlete. Her body is soft but slight. Bussière insistently sexualizes her. She has pronounced red lips. Shadows emphasize the round contours of her breasts. Her nipples are picked out in pink. Her luscious waves of hair – evoking the stereotype of the red-headed Viking – are feminine and ornamental. The apparent softness of that hair complements the apparent softness of her flesh. Bussière conveys the suppleness of both in thick,

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<sup>664</sup> On Valkyries in European art generally, see Susan Filoche-Rommé, “Fatal Spinsters: Thread Work in 19th-Century Artistic Depictions of Norse Mythological Women,” *Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies*, no. 4 (2021): 13-51.

<sup>665</sup> For a biography, see Émile Bussière, *La vie et l'œuvre de Gaston Bussière* (Paris: Librairie des amateurs, 1932).

<sup>666</sup> “Du goût, de la conscience et une indiscutable aptitude à la représentation expressive des formes... bien ordonnées et harmonieuses de couleur.” Georges Lecomte, quoted in Bussière, *La vie et l'œuvre de Gaston Bussière*, 7.



indulgent strokes of paint. The incomplete emptiness at the bottom of the painting gives the impression that Brynhild is emerging fresh from the primordial ether. Like Botticelli's nascent Venus, she arises rosy and soft from a froth of white. Her nakedness underscores the suggestion that this is a moment of birth, hence also of vulnerability and innocence.



Fig. 5.16. Gaston Bussière, *Brunehilde*, last quarter of the nineteenth century. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm, musée des Ursulines, Mâcon.

Despite her machinating the death of the hero Sigurd in vengeance for his sexual betrayal, thus kicking off a multigenerational bloodbath of subsequent feuds and revenge killings, Bussière did not represent Brynhild as harpy or shrew. Instead, he portrayed her as equally vicious and vulnerable, dangerous and desirable.

Brynhild's incongruous helmet only emphasizes her nakedness by contrast. It appears entirely out of place, given she bears no arms or other armor. It also seems fairly useless in a battle; it looks like it barely stays on her head. While disconcertingly reflective, it also feels unfinished, like an odd afterthought, especially compared with the elaborate helmets Brynhild wears in other Bussière images. Though this bizarre, pot-like helmet ostensibly gestures towards her role as a Valkyrie, it fails to communicate the impression she is an accomplished, imposing warrior. To the contrary, she looks like a young girl playing dress-up in whatever she found lying around.

Yet, at the same time, this Brynhild's pose is assertively martial. The chief visual axis of the image is the line that leads upwards from her left arm, across her shoulders, then from the highlights of her right bicep onto her forearm and her underdeveloped hand. This steep diagonal elongates her body, making her taller, commanding. Is she hailing the public beyond the picture plane? Summoning them? Marshalling them to battle? Her intense, forthright stare arrests the viewer's attention. Her vivid blue eyes, which nearly leap off the canvas, echo the hints of sky at the top of the image, recalling the myth that Valkyries descend from the heavens to summon worthy warriors to Valhalla. While this Brynhild's body is inoffensively and temptingly exposed, her authoritative posture and gaze hints that she is an assured and competent fighter.



Fig. 5.17. Gaston Bussière, *La Révélation, Brünnhilde découvrant Sieglinde et Siegmund*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 236 x 304 cm, Musée Thomas Henry, Cherbourg-en-Contentin.

This canvas captures the moment at which Brynhild, charged by Odin with ensuring the downfall of the fugitive Völsung siblings, breaks her vow and determines to save them instead.

Bussière offered a different angle on Brynhild in *La Révélation, Brünnhilde découvrant Sieglinde et Siegmund* (Figure 5.17). The canvas earned Bussière a silver medal at the 1894 Salon des Artistes français as well as the Prix Baschkirtseff; it was later displayed at the Exposition universelle of 1900.<sup>667</sup> Here, Brynhild fully appears in all of her martial glory. Standing at the head of a cavalcade of sister Valkyries faintly visible behind the trees, Brynhild boldly faces the Völsungs (and the public). She draws her sword as her hair blooms behind her

<sup>667</sup> Bussière, *La vie et l'œuvre de Gaston Bussière*, 91; *Catalogue officiel illustré de l'exposition décennale. Exposition universelle de 1900* (Paris: Imprimerie Lemerme et Cie, 1900), 103, 245.



like a cape. She occupies the dominant position in the image. An imposing, assured warrior, she towers over the supine Sieglinde and the kneeling Siegmund. Though equally beautiful, Brynhild contrasts sharply with the soft, vulnerable Sieglinde. She also projects authority and competence that Siegmund lacks as he recoils from her, terrified and uncertain. This Brynhild has cast off any weakness, coming fully into her own as a warrior.



Fig. 5.18. Gaston Bussière, *Brunnhild*, ca. 1900. Chromolithograph, 40.5 x 30.6 cm, Musée des Ursulines, Mâcon.

The background of Bussière's image anticipates propagandistic images of decimated French towns produced during the Great War.

Bussière transposed Brynhild from *La Révélation* into a chromolithograph (Figure 5.18) that, by cutting out the Völsung siblings, focused attention exclusively on her as an emblem of martial valor. She moves literally to the forefront of the image. The audience can appreciate the ornate detail of her armor and the fierce determination of her expression. She stands stalwart amid a ravaged landscape of flame and desolation. Here is a hardened and accomplished warrior in her true habitat.

Paul Belloni Du Chaillu similarly explored the tension between the shieldmaiden's beauty and fighting prowess in his novel *Ivar the Viking* (1893). Du Chaillu was born on the Ile de Bourbon, a French imperial possession, to a white father and a Black mother.<sup>668</sup> He studied in Paris before immigrating to the United States, where he passed as white. Thus, though French, he wrote in English and published with U.S. presses for an intended American audience. He first pursued a successful career as a naturalist, leading expeditions to western Africa where he collected biological specimens for transport back to New England. He became famous as one of the first Euro-Americans to describe the behavior of the gorilla. However, in late middle age he pivoted to a new subject of research: the Vikings.

Du Chaillu's fascination with the Norse warrior woman is especially in evidence in the climactic Chapter 19, "The Slaying of Starkad," when the titular hero Ivar goes to war against Starkad to avenge the killing of his own father Hjorvard.<sup>669</sup> In this pivotal encounter, each side summons great armies with masses of named champions, resulting in a vast multi-day battle that forms the high point of the book. The chapter is also an homage to the shieldmaiden; the three named female warriors – Visma, Heid, and Vejborg – completely steal the show. They receive

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<sup>668</sup> For Du Chaillu's biography, see Henry H. Bucher Jr., "Canonization by Repetition: Paul Du Chaillu in Historiography," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 66, no. 242-243 (1979): 15-32; Stuart McCook, "'It May Be Truth, but It Is Not Evidence': Paul Du Chaillu and the Legitimation of Evidence in the Field Sciences," *Osiris* 11 (1996): 177-197.

<sup>669</sup> Paul Belloni Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 182-196.

more description, attention, and individuation than any male warrior in either army. Du Chaillu transparently lifted these three women from Saxo Grammaticus' twelfth-century history *Gesta Danorum*. A client of Absalom, Archbishop of Lund, Saxo wrote to celebrate the glorious past of his homeland, Denmark; the *Gesta Danorum* remains one of our best sources on Norse society. It relates in detail the historical Battle of Brevalla, at which Saxo claims three shieldmaidens (conveniently named Visma, Heid, and Vejborg) fought.

Du Chaillu's shieldmaidens are leading warriors who play a chief role in the battle and are acknowledged for their abilities by their male peers. Heid and Visma lead the points of Starkad's wedge formations.<sup>670</sup> Visma herself lands the first blow of the fight. On the opposite side of the field, Vejborg and her one hundred berserkers hold the peak of Ivar's wedge.<sup>671</sup> Du Chaillu affords his shieldmaidens a principal and acclaimed role in perpetrating violence and maintaining honor. They are not just in the fight; they are leading the charge.

Du Chaillu repeatedly emphasizes the skill of the shieldmaidens in traditionally masculine pursuits. He lingers over a description of Visma, Starkad's personal standard-bearer: "Her sword was of the best and sharpest. She had accustomed herself from her childhood so well to the use of shield and sword and chain-armor, that she was one of the foremost in horsemanship and in the handling of weapons, and the champions who could successfully compete with her were very few. She always rode a magnificent white charger."<sup>672</sup> Similarly, the author praises the fighting prowess of Ivar's female retainer Vejborg, who acquits herself most

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<sup>670</sup> Before the battle begins, Starkad's advisor Bruni "arranged the host of Starkad. On the apex of the wedge, or array, he put the shield-maiden Heid with her standard. With her were one hundred champions who were all berserks. They formed the shield-burg; among these were the scalds Eivind and Amund. On one of the other points of the wedge he put Visma with her standard and powerful following." Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 186-187.

<sup>671</sup> "Herlief was considered the wisest in the host of Ivar, and Ivar bade him arrange his host in battle order, and to assign to each man the standard under which he was to fight. At the apex of the wedge he placed the shield maiden Vejborg with one hundred berserks, who guarded her standard and formed the shield-burg, and among these were the most valiant men of the land." Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 186-187.

<sup>672</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 184.

nobly in the battle and ultimately gives her life to save her leader.<sup>673</sup> Yet, without a doubt the greatest of the novel's shieldmaidens is Heid, who commands Starkad's shield wall. She is specified to be the greatest opponent the story's protagonist has ever faced:

The shield-maiden Heid, seeing the appalling death of men in the array of Starkad, rushed towards Ivar. Many men engaged in single combat stopped by common accord to see the conflict. Her fiery steed, white with froth, seemed to enjoy the fray.... Her eyes seemed to send out flashes of fire; lightning seemed to spring from her sword as it struck that of Ivar. Never in his life had Ivar been so hard pressed, but finally the pressure of other combatants separated them.<sup>674</sup>

Heid then earns the most poetic, poignant death in a novel with altogether too many deaths:

“When Heid the shield-maiden saw so many valiant men fall, she rushed forward, and however valiant and skillful a man was in the handling of his sword, he was almost sure to meet his death while fighting against her. Ivar entreated his men to take her alive, but she would not be taken, and fell fighting furiously.”<sup>675</sup> She is the only fallen warrior in the battle who gets a death poem composed for her, and by no less a skald than Ivar himself.

At the same time, Du Chaillu does not hesitate to laud the shieldmaidens' conventional beauty. Visma appears as “a superb woman of twenty-five summers, with long, fair hair floating from under her golden helmet, reaching far below her waist, and resting on the back of her horse.”<sup>676</sup> Heid similarly is “twenty-eight years old, above medium height, full chested, her limbs of splendid proportions. Her hair was of the color of ripened wheat, and glossy, and, like Visma's, fell far below her waist. She rode a superb black steed, and when under helmet and

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<sup>673</sup> “Vejborg, when apprised of the great danger that menaced Ivar, made a terrible onset on Starkad's host. First she attacked the champion Barri, dealing him blow after blow, and so quickly that he could only protect himself with his shield, and this only for a time, for one of her lightning strokes soon cleft his shield, and giving him a wound that disabled him, she left him. Then Styr the Strong met her. They attacked each other with great fierceness, but the throng of warriors was so great that they were separated against their will. Finally, after slaying Toki and several other champions whose hard fate placed them in her path, and after exhibiting the greatest valor, she fell herself under the sword of the champion Hjalti.” Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 189-190.

<sup>674</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 190-191.

<sup>675</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 191-192.

<sup>676</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 184.

chain-armor, and with shield and sword, was the perfect ideal of a shield maiden.”<sup>677</sup> In the same vein, Vejborg is “the personification of a fury; she was extremely beautiful, had an exquisite figure, light blue eyes, flaxen hair. Her eyes when under the excitement of battle seemed to throw fire, and she looked superb under helmet and chain armor.”<sup>678</sup> Du Chaillu fixates on the women’s eyes, hair, and figures. He suggests that not only are these women gorgeous, but that their looks are part of their identity as shieldmaidens, rather than being in conflict with that identity.

Du Chaillu also lifted another shieldmaiden directly out of Norse legend to star in his novel: Hervor, the heroine of the thirteenth-century Saga of Hervor and Heidrek. He lightly amended her origins to partially disguise his borrowing. Saga Hervor is the daughter of Angantyr, one of twelve berserker brothers; novel Hervor is the daughter of Ivar’s rival Starkad. Du Chaillu describes her as an accomplished warrior: “She constantly practised riding on horseback, shooting with bows, the handling of swords and shields, and all kinds of athletic games. When she had grown up she became a shield-maiden, and loved to be under helmet and chain armor – far better than being occupied in sewing or embroidering.”<sup>679</sup> As an adult, Du Chaillu’s Hervor disguises herself as a man, joins a Viking crew, and assumes captaincy of the ship upon the death of the previous skipper. Yet, she never abandons her quest to avenge her father’s death. At this point, Du Chaillu reverts fully to the plot of the Saga of Hervor and Heidrek. Hervor seeks out her father’s grave on a deserted island and commands him to rise from his tomb to surrender to her the ancestral blade Tyrting.<sup>680</sup> While in the saga, Angantyr does waken and grant his daughter her inheritance, Du Chaillu opts for a more mundane outcome:

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<sup>677</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 184.

<sup>678</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 185.

<sup>679</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 193-194.

<sup>680</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 194-195.



Starkad remains dead, so Hervor breaks into his tomb and steals Tyrfing. She then leads an army of vengeance against Ivar but is killed in the battle. Despite her heroic exploits, Du Chaillu's Hervor remains attractively feminine. The author describes her not only as “tall and strong,” but also as “of fair complexion; her long, silky hair was of the color of red gold, and the people said that it was like the hair of Sif, the wife of the god Thor.”<sup>681</sup> Like the three women who fight for Ivar and Starkad in their climactic clash, Hervor seamlessly combines erotic desirability and battlefield skill.



Fig. 5.19. Emmanuel Frémiet, *Statue de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1874. Place des Pyramides, Paris.

Frémiet's statue was one of several public monuments to Joan of Arc erected after the Franco-Prussian War.

<sup>681</sup> Du Chaillu, *Ivar the Viking*, 193-194.

The shieldmaiden also evoked a visual lexicon of national heroines, to wit Joan of Arc and Marianne. The picture of a medieval woman in armor brandishing a sword would immediately recall a prime referent for contemporary French viewers: Joan of Arc. The Maid of Orleans led French forces against English invaders during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), and according to some hagiographers she saved the French nation. French Catholics' 1869 appeal to the Vatican for Joan's formal canonization coincided closely with the country's 1870-1871 defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. These twinned events inspired an explosion of Joan imagery (see for example Figure 5.19).<sup>682</sup> Joan came to stand in for an unsubdued France ready to bounce back from wartime misfortunes. The shieldmaiden readily recalled Joan: a chaste maiden, her hair streaming from beneath her helm like a banner, stoically facing battle for a righteous cause. Like Joan, the shieldmaiden's dual nature as woman and warrior promised a better, sounder future for France.

The shieldmaiden further evoked Marianne, the female allegory of the French republic. Though she first emerged during the Revolution out of longstanding iconographic traditions, Marianne achieved renewed prominence during the Second and Third Republics.<sup>683</sup> Her attributes often included the Phrygian cap, the pike, and the bared breast. The shieldmaiden translated these attributes into a medieval context, featuring at different times helmet, sword, and nudity. By associating with both Marianne and Joan, the shieldmaiden appealed to a secular, republican audience as well as a Catholic, conservative one. She transcended the divide of the

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<sup>682</sup> Dennis Sexsmith, "The Radicalization of Joan of Arc Before and After the French Revolution," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 17, no. 2 (1990): 125-130; Elizabeth Foxwell, "Saint, Soldier, Spirit, Savior: The Images of Joan of Arc," *Minerva* 12, no. 3 (September 1994); Nadia Margolis, "The 'Joan Phenomenon' and the French Right," in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood (New York: Garland, 1996): 265-288; Caroline Igra, "Measuring the Temper of Her Time: Joan of Arc in the 1870s and 1880s," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 68, no. 2 (1999): 117-125; Nora M. Heimann and Laura Coyle, *Joan of Arc: Her Image in France and America* (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 2006).

<sup>683</sup> On the history of Marianne, see Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

so-called Two Frances and was available to both groups as a possible icon of national uplift. She appeared thereby not only as an alluring mix of lover and warrior, but also somehow as indelibly French. The shieldmaiden, along with her sisters Joan and Marianne, became an emblem of a France that was triumphantly free, militarily undaunted, and culturally intact.<sup>684</sup>

### **The Shieldmaiden in Family Life: Dutiful Daughter and Tragic Lover**

For French creators and commentators, the shieldmaiden's femininity did not reside only in her (alluring) physical body. It also resided in her relationships with men. In this section, I show that French writers and artists at the fin de siècle assumed that whatever her personal powers and initial independence, the shieldmaiden would always ultimately defer to a man. This deference took two forms: first, in her enacting of her father's true, if ostensibly denied, wishes; second, in her sacrifice of her autonomy for the romantic love of a human man. She was thereby remade as a symbol of the patriarchy triumphant. If even the shieldmaiden inevitably submitted to the authority of father or husband, then the masculine role of household head was safe.

Well before Wagner's Ring Cycle first premiered in full at Bayreuth in 1876, Charles Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894) tackled the shieldmaiden's relationship with her father in the 1862 poem "L'Épée d'Angantyr," part of his landmark collection *Poèmes barbares*.<sup>685</sup> Like Du Chaillu three decades later, Leconte de Lisle paraphrased the Saga of Hervor and Heidrek. In both the original saga and Leconte de Lisle's verse adaptation, Hervor, daughter of Angantyr, is a fierce shieldmaiden who dreams of avenging her father's killing. She sails to the haunted island

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<sup>684</sup> On representations of France as woman in art, see Marianne Ryan, ed., *La France: Images of Woman and Ideas of Nation, 1789-1989* (South Bank Centre, 1989).

<sup>685</sup> For analysis of *Poèmes barbares*, see Alison Fairlie, *Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947); Valentina Sirangelo, "The Fate of the Gods in the Poetry of Charles Leconte de Lisle and Lucian Blaga," *The Annals of the University of Bucharest* (2019): 99-116; Francesco Sangriso, "The Gods in Exile: The Twilight of Myth in the Poetry of Charles Leconte de Lisle," *Deshima* 15 (2021): 71-104.

where her father is interred, despite warnings that specters stalk the cliffs after dark. Undeterred, she lands on the island at night and summons forth the ghost of her father with a poem, requesting that he rise from his burial mound and hand over the family's magical sword, Tyrfing.<sup>686</sup>

Translating Hervor's confrontation with her father's ghost from stark saga prose into mellifluous verse, "L'Épée d'Angantyr" plays with nineteenth-century expectations around gender roles. Leconte de Lisle centers his reimagining of the saga around Hervor's desire for her father to recognize her Viking identity, symbolized by the family sword she seeks to recover from his grave. Initially, the poem seems to conform to a conventional gender binary. Angantyr resists his daughter's entreaties, comparing her efforts to become a warrior with her efforts to raise him from the dead, both equally unnatural and impossible. He exhorts her, "My child, my child, let us remain what we are: // The needle is heavy enough for your hand.... // O woman, leave! The blade is meant for men."<sup>687</sup> He suggests that just as he should confine himself to Valhalla, rather than returning to the world of the living to converse with Hervor, she should confine herself to womanly pursuits, rather than taking up arms.

However, the poem then takes an unanticipated turn. Angantyr fails to dissuade Hervor; she insists that she must have his sword to retaliate against his killers. The author then reveals that Angantyr has merely been testing his daughter. Praising her for holding steadfastly to family and honor, the shade of the departed warrior announces, "My child, my child, all is well, your soul is strong. // The daughter of heroes ought to speak thus.... // Take the immortal sword, o my

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<sup>686</sup> For an analysis of Hervor's role in the original saga, see Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, "Hervör, Hervard, Hervik: The Metamorphosis of a Shieldmaiden," in *Ballads of the North, Medieval to Modern: Essays Inspired by Larry Syndergaard*, eds. Sandra Ballif Straubhaar and Richard Firth Green (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019): 55-70.

<sup>687</sup> "Mon enfant, mon enfant, restons ce que nous sommes : // La quenouille est assez pesante pour ta main.... // O femme, hors d'ici ! Le fer convient aux hommes." Charles Leconte de Lisle, "L'Épée d'Angantyr," in *Poèmes barbares* (1862).

blood, and carry it! // Run, avenge us, and die bravely.”<sup>688</sup> The poem ends as Hervor takes the sword from her father’s tomb and leaves to seek her enemies. Leconte de Lisle’s Hervor thus wins acknowledgement for her choice to adopt the manly pursuit of war and live as a shieldmaiden.<sup>689</sup> Significantly, she also seeks – and wins – her father’s approval before all else. First and foremost she desires his esteem and to act on his behalf. The poet, speaking through Angantyr, admires her not only, or even mostly, as a great warrior, but as a dutiful daughter.



Fig. 5.20. Charles Bianchini, *Brünnhilde. Mlle Bréval*, 1893. Watercolor, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Bianchini’s Brynhild is assuringly feminine, with a nipped waist, flowing hair, and soft textures, even while holding a shield and spear.

<sup>688</sup> “Mon enfant, mon enfant, c’est bien, ton âme est forte. // La fille des héros devait parler ainsi... // Prends l’Épée immortelle, ô mon sang, et l’emporte ! // Cours, venge-nous, et meurs en brave.” Leconte de Lisle, “L’Épée d’Angantyr.”

<sup>689</sup> On other nineteenth-century adaptations of Hervor’s story, see Hannah Burrows, “Reawakening Angantýr: English Translations of an Old Norse Poem from the Eighteenth Century to the Twenty-First,” in *Translating Early Medieval Poetry: Transformation, Reception, Interpretation*, eds. Tom Birkett and Kirsty March-Lyons (D.S. Brewer, 2017): 148-164.

Wagner's Brynhild is similarly filial. Despite her betrayal of Odin's orders, French critics of the Ring Cycle nonetheless understood her as the ideal daughter, in part because she does what her father actually wishes her to do. Though Odin officially forbids her from protecting the incestuous Völsung siblings, Siegmund and Sieglinde, from Sieglinde's jealous husband Hunding, Brynhild knows he secretly hopes that she will save them. Alfred Bruneau called her "the preferred child, the sole heiress to the heart, the thought, the will of the father."<sup>690</sup> Étienne Destranges wrote that "of his nine daughters, Odin prefers Brynhild. He truly adores her; he cannot do without her; he always designates her to accompany him in his rides across the blue spaces of the sky."<sup>691</sup> In exchange for this paternal devotion, "the virgin warrior wraps him in an ardent filial affection. Accomplishing his divine orders seems to her the sweetest of obligations. A loving and submissive daughter, she is chosen by the god to be his messenger and interpreter."<sup>692</sup> Indeed, Brynhild so conforms herself to her father's wishes, Destranges portrayed her as an extension of Odin's very being: "She is the Elect of his heart, the daughter of his desire, his own Wish.... The closest communion exists between father and child. Brynhild is the reflection of Odin's best soul."<sup>693</sup> Though ostensibly a rebel against patriarchal authority, the Brynhild of French imagination was in fact totally subsumed to her father.

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<sup>690</sup> "L'enfant préférée, héritière unique du cœur, de la pensée, de la volonté du père." Alfred Bruneau, "Préface," in Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, xiii.

<sup>691</sup> "De ses neuf filles, c'est Brünnhilde que Wotan préfère. Il a pour elle une adoration véritable ; il ne peut se passer d'elle ; c'est toujours elle qu'il désigne pour l'accompagner dans ses chevauchées à travers les espaces azurés du ciel." Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 104.

<sup>692</sup> "La vierge guerrière l'entoure d'une ardente affection filiale. Accomplir ses ordres divins lui semble le plus doux des devoirs. Fille aimante et soumise, elle est choisie par le dieu pour être sa messagère et son interprète." Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 104.

<sup>693</sup> "Elle est l'Elue de son cœur, la fille de son Désir, son propre Vouloir .... La communion la plus étroite existe entre le père et l'enfant. Brünnhilde est le reflet du meilleur de l'âme de Wotan." Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 104.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 5.21. A. de Parys, *La Walkyrie*, drame lyrique de Richard Wagner, représenté à l'Opéra le 12 mai : 3e acte, Wotan, M. Delmas ; Brunnhilde, Mlle Bréval, 1893. Engraving, 22 cm x 32 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Newspapers eagerly printed illustrations of stagings of the Ring Cycle.

Gaston Bussière's depiction of Brynhild in his 1895 *L'Adieu à Wotan* (Figure 5.22) further affirms Odin's patriarchal authority and Brynhild's acceptance of it. Displayed at the 1895 Salon des artistes françaises and later at the Salle des fêtes in Mâcon, this canvas captures the moment when Odin bids farewell to his favorite daughter before consigning her to endless slumber atop a mountain, surrounded by a wall of flames, as punishment for disobeying his order to let the Völsung siblings lose their battle with Hunding.<sup>694</sup> In spite of Odin's command, Brynhild saved the Völsungs, and now she humbly submits to his judgment. Odin stands nearly a head taller than his daughter, bending down proprietarily over her. She demurely accepts both his kiss and his discipline. The rosy light limning the leaping lines of the cliffs foreshadows the fire that will soon enclose Brynhild and cut her off from the outside world. These vertical lines also point towards the heavens, Odin and Brynhild's home, underscoring by contrast that she will soon be stripped of her divinity and condemned to the ground on which she stands. She will be cloistered away from society under the aegis of paternal control, as the ideology of domesticity required. The bleak remoteness of the mountain environment, reminiscent of John Ruskin's studies of rock, implies this is the very spot where Odin will imprison his daughter.

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<sup>694</sup> Bussière, *La vie et l'œuvre de Gaston Bussière*, 93. This painting was also used to illustrate Edward S. Ellis and Charles F. Horne, *The Story of the Greatest Nations*, vol. 3 (New York: Francis R. Niglutsch, 1913), 504.





Fig. 5.22. Gaston Bussière, *L'Adieu à Wotan*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 300 cm x 180 cm, musée des Ursulines, Mâcon.

Though in line with other nineteenth-century depictions of Brynhild, Bussière's canvas departs from conventional portrayals of Odin.

However, Bussière's portrayal of the relationship between Brynhild and the Allfather is not that straightforward. Firstly, they swap the expected accoutrements of their genders. No longer naked, Brynhild dons the silver armor and crested helmet she will adopt in other Bussière paintings. Odin, by contrast, is sumptuously decked out in jewels and richly embroidered cloth. His robe falls in heavy, unctuous waves, indicating its value. The two figures are also assimilated to each other. They both sport bare arms and flowing waves of red hair. His golden ornaments echo the gold decoration on her helmet. The design of his crown also rhymes with the design of

the belt around her waist. They press so close together that their skirts intermingle; it is difficult to tell where one body ends and another begins.

Finally, any analysis of *L'Adieu à Wotan* must deal with the unsettling intimacy of the protagonists' kiss, which is altogether too passionate even for a parent and child bidding eternal farewell. Odin and Brynhild gaze into each other's eyes with hazily lowered lids. His right hand tangles in her hair while his left grips her shoulder. His robe sweeps around her, seemingly embracing her as well. Their attitude edges uncomfortably close to the incest at the heart of the Ring Cycle and *Völsunga Saga*, to wit the taboo love between the *Völsung* siblings. Bussière introduces a frisson of the forbidden by playing with and around acceptable boundaries of familial love. He pursued this theme further in *La Révélation, Brünnhilde découvrant Sieglinde et Siegmund*.



Fig. 5.23. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Finale de la Valkire*, 1879. Lithograph, Boston Public Library, Boston.

Fantin-Latour produced innumerable black-and-white illustrations of scenes from the Ring Cycle. Here, Odin curses Brynhild to her magical sleep and swathes her in protective fire.

What of Brynhild's mother Erda, "the mysterious and prophetic goddess asleep in the entrails of the earth?"<sup>695</sup> Where did she fit into the story, in the French imagination? Unsurprisingly, commentators afforded her a much smaller role than Odin in Brynhild's biography, as in the opera itself. Destranges openly acknowledged that he did not know what to make of "the Eternal Sleeper."<sup>696</sup> He argued that, unlike Wagner's other women characters, Erda did not map neatly onto contemporary understandings of femininity; she did not incarnate an existing archetype. While the chthonic seeress who first foretold Ragnarök certainly made for an appropriately illustrious parent for the Valkyries, Erda was otherwise sidelined in Brynhild's narrative. French critics of Wagner did not prioritize the homosocial bond between Brynhild and her mother, but the heterosocial bond between Brynhild and her father as more interesting and important, reinforcing the notion that women – even Valkyries – existed primarily in relationship to men.

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<sup>695</sup> "La déesse mystérieuse et prophétique dormant dans les entrailles de la terre." Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 92.

<sup>696</sup> "L'Éternelle Dormeuse." Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 91.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 5.24. Édouard Zier (illustrator) and Auguste Tilly (engraver), *Théâtre de l'Opéra, La Valkyrie, drame lyrique en trois actes, poème et musique de Richard Wagner, version française de Victor Wilder : la chevauchée des Valkyries*, 1893. Engraving, 22 x 32 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

The cavalcade of (obedient) Valkyries roars past as Odin condemns his favorite daughter to endless sleep.

Like the case of Joan of Arc, the shieldmaiden's virginity partially authorizes her gender transgression. With the decided exception of Edmond Neukomm's anomalously progressive women figures, who continue to lead and fight after marriage and even motherhood, French shieldmaidens and Valkyries give up their martial independence after sex. Even creators who prized the idea of the Norse warrior woman could not imagine her continuing her battlefield exploits once she had a lover. Only a woman who is not yet fully woman, went the thinking of the time, could exercise such exceptional liberty and power. Once a woman had given herself to

a man sexually, continued the logic, she must devote herself fully to him and conform to conventionally feminine duty.



Fig. 5.25. Henri Bellery-Desfontaines, *Wotan*, 1897. Lithograph, 71 x 96 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

This vibrant portrait of the Allfather hides the Valkyries in the background, as a sort of support or afterthought in relation to Odin.

Indeed, Wagner's Brynhild ultimately subsumes herself not to Odin but a different man: her treacherous lover, Sigurd. Relating the climax of *Siegfried*, third in the Tetralogy, Destranges wrote that "the goddess has not completely disappeared. Nonetheless, the virgin ends by ceding to Sigurd's ardor, to the man whom... she freely takes as a spouse. Now Brynhild is no more than a woman, a woman who will love and suffer."<sup>697</sup> Similarly, Alfred Bruneau celebrated

<sup>697</sup> "La déesse n'est pas entièrement disparue. Cependant la vierge finit par céder à l'ardeur de Siegfried, de l'homme qu'elle... prend librement pour époux. Brünnhilde, maintenant, n'est plus qu'une femme, une femme qui va aimer et souffrir." Destranges, *Les Femmes dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner*, 107.



Brynhild for simultaneously incarnating the “divine redemptrice and human wife.”<sup>698</sup> While Bruneau and Destranges both praised Brynhild for sacrificing her celestial independence for romance, their characterization of her transformation troubles conventional gender dichotomies. They suggest that the opposite of “woman” is not “man,” but “deity.” The contrasting available position to normative femininity is martial and god-like transcendence, not normative masculinity. This reading of Brynhild’s arc upsets received notions about fixed gender binaries while still lauding romantic love as woman’s highest calling.



Fig. 5.26. Odilon Redon, *Brünnhilde (crépuscule des dieux)*, 1894. Lithograph, 38 x 29.2 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

This Brynhild is uncontroversially feminine, with curling tresses, a rounded bosom, and pensive expression.

<sup>698</sup> “Rédemptrice divine et humaine épouse.” Alfred Bruneau, *Musiques d’hier et de demain* (Paris: Charpentier, 1900), 14.

In his poem “Légende saxonne” (1899), later republished as “La Mort de Sigurd : Légende saxonne” (1902), Jean Louis Fouché reduces Brynhild’s entire story down to her self-sacrifice for Sigurd.<sup>699</sup> He begins the poem with Sigurd “traversing with a sure step the barrier of flame” that Odin has used to surround Brynhild.<sup>700</sup> Loyal to his friend Gunnar, who seeks Brynhild as a wife, and to Gunnar’s sister Gudrun, whom Sigurd loves, Fouché’s Sigurd rejects Brynhild’s affection and delivers her to her destined husband. However, Brynhild is so consumed with desire for Sigurd, who saved her from her prison, that she engineers his death. The details of this scheme are conveniently omitted from the poem; Fouché declines to portray Brynhild actually taking the active steps to manipulate her husband Gunnar and seek vengeance on Sigurd for denying her. Instead, Fouché jumps ahead to Gudrun, “Sigurd’s widow, how[ing] afar her grief,” and Brynhild stabbing herself to death before being burned alongside Sigurd on a mighty pyre.<sup>701</sup> Fouché’s poem is not concerned with Brynhild’s earlier exploits as a Valkyrie, only her (literal and figurative) self-immolation to Sigurd. The author bypasses her life as a (relatively) independent warrior to focus exclusively on her self-abnegation for a man.

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<sup>699</sup> Louis Fouché, “Légende saxonne,” *La Vie quotidienne* (August 19, 1899): 270; Jean Louis Fouché, “La Mort de Sigurd : Légende saxonne,” in *Les cadences du rêve* (Paris: Librairie de la Plume, 1902): 41-43.

<sup>700</sup> “Traversant d’un pas sûr la barrière de flamme.” Fouché, “Légende saxonne,” 270.

<sup>701</sup> “La veuve de Sigurd gémit au loin son deuil.” Fouché, “Légende saxonne,” 270.

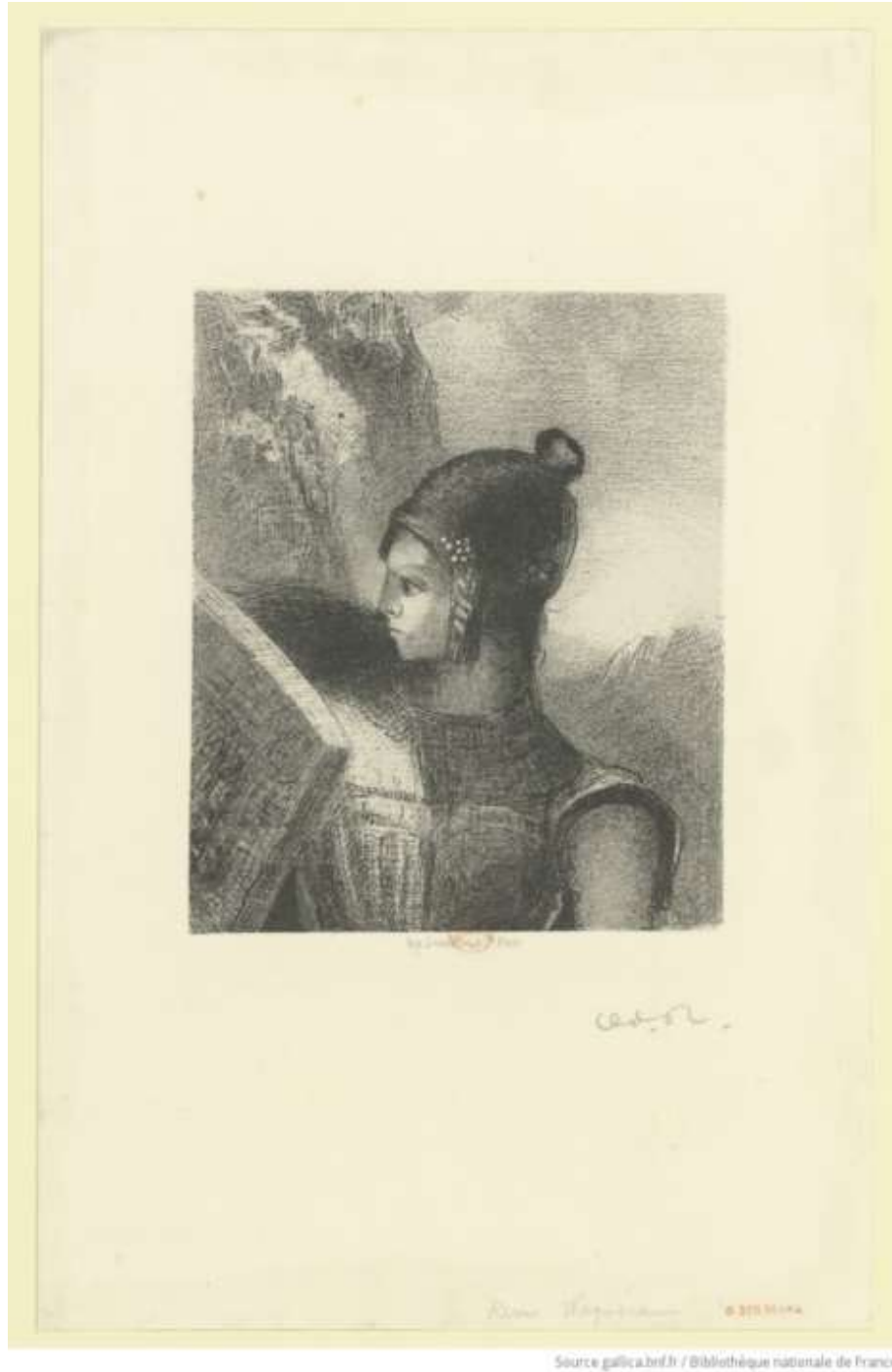


Fig. 5.27. Odilon Redon, *Brünnhilde*, 1886. Lithograph, 24.4 x 15.6 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Redon courts possible objection here by sketching a fully androgynous Brynhild. Her armor totally obscures her sex, and she appears entirely engrossed in battle.



Leconte de Lisle condensed Brynhild's biography even further, covering only her mourning for Sigurd in "La Mort de Sigurd" (1862). He opens the poem with Brynhild and Gudrun watching over Sigurd's corpse and ends twenty-one stanzas later with Brynhild's suicide. Indeed, he identifies her only as a queen, never as a shieldmaiden, Valkyrie, or goddess. He shrinks her entire narrative down to her ill-fated brushes with romance. At the same time, he contains the threat posed to the patriarchal order by a woman murdering her lover. Like Fouché, he rejects the premise, present in other interpretations of the Old Norse source material, that Brynhild destroys Sigurd to restore her honor. Leconte de Lisle and Fouché portray Brynhild not as a warrior seeking revenge after being wronged in a feud, but as a lovesick woman who cannot bear to see her dear one in the arms of another. By simplifying Brynhild's motivations to sexual jealousy, these two poets reaffirm the primacy of men and romance as the central features of even a shieldmaiden's psychology.

Paul Belloni Du Chaillu also portrayed romantic love and its attendant sacrifices as the Valkyrie's noble and inevitable fate. In his scholarly tract *The Viking Age*, Du Chaillu dedicated most of a chapter to the Valkyries.<sup>702</sup> He singled them out as one of the most distinctive, significant, and beautiful parts of Norse religion: "The belief in Valkyrias appears to have been of very great antiquity, and is one of the most striking, poetical, and grand features of the Asa faith.... They are mentioned as riding through the air, over the sea, and amid the lightning, helmet-clad, with bloody brynjas [byrnies], and glittering spears."<sup>703</sup> Du Chaillu translated his research on the Valkyries into a chapter-long aside in *Ivar the Viking* that appropriates the story of Helgi Hjörvarðsson from the Poetic Edda, also associated with Helgi Hundingsbane from

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<sup>702</sup> Du Chaillu, "The Nornir and the Valkyrias," in *The Viking Age*, vol. 1, 385-393.

<sup>703</sup> Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, vol. 1, 387-389.

Völsunga Saga.<sup>704</sup> Midway through the novel, Du Chaillu abruptly abandons the narrative thread of Ivar's quest to avenge his father's killing and instead turns to the life of Ivar's late first cousin, Helgi Halfdansson. Helgi sails away to distant lands to find fame and fortune, winning many battles and accumulating much land. He is also regularly visited by a Valkyrie named Bodvild, daughter of the hersir Hogni. Hogni pledges Bodvild in marriage to a widower named Hodbrod, but she rejects the match and promises to marry only Helgi. Helgi goes to war with Hogni and Hodbrod, and all three die. Bodvild herself then succumbs to grief. This narrative arc is incongruously Victorian for a Valkyrie. Du Chaillu constrains an Eddaic plot to the norms of the nineteenth century in order to render Bodvild both a fierce warrior and a tragic romantic heroine.

In the 1886 opera *Gwendoline*, Emmanuel Chabrier and Catulle Mendès made explicit an innovation Wagner had pioneered: the modern Valkyrie, unlike her Old Norse counterpart, *must* sacrifice herself for love.<sup>705</sup> That sacrifice, even more than her battlefield vigor or care for the dead, is her defining characteristic. In *Gwendoline*, the Viking captain Harald recalls his encounter with a Valkyrie on the field of battle: "On a white horse, in the nude, appeared to me // The Valkyrie in a golden helmet. // Seeing her ruddy beauty // Shine in the sun, my heart trembled, // And I long dreamed of a woman equal // To the maiden of Valhalla!"<sup>706</sup> Chabrier and Mendès were deeply influenced by Wagner, and though they never brought the Valkyrie directly on stage, Harald frames her as the pinnacle of femininity, simultaneously gorgeous and terrifying. As she dies alongside her husband and his troops, Harald's new wife Gwendoline promises that in the afterlife she will become one of the maidens of Valhalla: "On a white horse,

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<sup>704</sup> Du Chaillu, "Helgi and the Valkyrias," in *Ivar the Viking*, 158-166.

<sup>705</sup> Emmanuel Chabrier (composer) and Catulle Mendès (librettist), *Gwendoline* (Paris: E. Dentu, 18??)

<sup>706</sup> "Sur un blanc cheval m'apparut dans la nue // La Walkyrie au casque d'or. // En voyant sa beauté vermeille // Luire dans le soleil, tout mon cœur se troubla, // Et j'ai rêvé longtemps une femme pareille // A la vierge du Walhalla !" Chabrier and Mendès, *Gwendoline*, 14.

in the nude, // I will be the Valkyrie in a golden helmet!”<sup>707</sup> By giving up her life for her true love, Gwendoline – who has heretofore explicitly shunned martial pursuits as unwomanly – fulfills the stereotypical role of the Valkyrie. As I have shown, French authors and audiences particularly gravitated to this iteration of the shieldmaiden, who reaffirmed gendered expectations by choosing submission and self-abnegation over power.

### **The Milk of the Father: Lactating Men and Absent Women**

Thus far, this chapter has exclusively considered examples of female gender transgression. However, one rare but intriguing example of male gender transgression in Norse medievalism bears examination. In 1892, the prolific Burgundian scholar Eugène Beauvois found a model for a reinvigorated masculinity in Sigurd Fafnirsbane’s far less famous descendant, Thorgils Scar-leg’s Stepson. In the early fourteenth-century text *Flóamanna Saga*, Thorgils sails throughout the North Atlantic world, dueling marauders, laying ghosts, saving maidens, and tangling with kings.<sup>708</sup> Beauvois was the first to translate the little-read *Flóamanna Saga* into a non-Scandinavian tongue.<sup>709</sup> Though in some ways *Flóamanna Saga* was an obvious choice for Beauvois to translate – its extended Greenland sojourn catered perfectly to his fascination with the Norse expeditions to North America – one element of its plot was decidedly unusual: it prominently featured Thorgils lactating.

Beauvois consistently framed Thorgils Scar-leg’s Stepson as an unproblematic hero.

Describing Thorgils’ early life in the preface to his translation, Beauvois lauded “the energy that

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<sup>707</sup> “Sur un fier cheval blanc je serai dans la nue // La Walkyrie au casque d’or !” Chabrier and Mendès, *Gwendoline*, 41.

<sup>708</sup> “The Saga of the People of Floi (*Flóamanna saga*),” trans. Paul Acker, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, vol. 1, 271-304 (Reykjavík : Leifur Eiríksson Pub., 1997). This is the first and only full English translation of *Flóamanna saga*, meaning that for over a century Beauvois’ article was the best way for Anglophones to access the story.

<sup>709</sup> Eugène Beauvois, “The Voyage of Thorgils and his Adventures on the East Coast of Greenland about the Year 1000,” *The National Magazine* 16 (April 1892 – November 1892): 38-58.

he gave proof of during his infancy and youth, and how he was prepared to surmount the difficulties which he was destined to encounter.”<sup>710</sup> Beauvois was surprisingly accepting of Thorgils’ checkered childhood, which featured killing a cart horse and taking money from slaves, though he wisely omitted those incidents from his translation.<sup>711</sup> He attested endless enthusiasm for Thorgils’ manly exploits, presenting him as a model of enterprising bravery.

More unusually, Beauvois also recoded Thorgils’ quintessentially feminine activities as masculine. In the second half of *Flóamanna Saga*, Thorgils and his family emigrate with several other households from Iceland to Greenland at the urging of Thorgils’ friend Erik the Red. However, they are shipwrecked on the uninhabited eastern shore of the island and find themselves stranded for months. Just as a change in the weather is about to make escape from this desolate shore possible, vengeful thralls murder Thorgils’ wife Thorey and steal his ship and supplies. Thorey and Thorgils’ newborn son Thorfinn is discovered “sucking the corpse” of his murdered mother.<sup>712</sup> As Beauvois repeated in his translation, “Thorgils watched by the babe through the night, although he saw no possibility of saving its life; this prospect distressed him so greatly that he determined upon an experiment; he pierced his breast, out of which flowed blood at first, then a blue liquid, which became white like milk. He made the babe draw this and fed it thus.”<sup>713</sup> In a footnote, Beauvois underscored and defended this unlikely incident in his own words: “There exist a number of analogous accounts.... It is especially in America that instances of lactation have been found, even in our days.”<sup>714</sup> Beauvois did not discount, discredit, or minimize this strange textual moment; indeed, he drew attention to and legitimated it.

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<sup>710</sup> Beauvois, “The Voyage of Thorgils,” 46.

<sup>711</sup> “The Saga of the People of Floi (*Flóamanna saga*),” 278-279.

<sup>712</sup> Beauvois, “The Voyage of Thorgils,” 51.

<sup>713</sup> Beauvois, “The Voyage of Thorgils,” 51-52.

<sup>714</sup> Beauvois, “The Voyage of Thorgils,” 52.

This is not a one-off occurrence in the saga. Thorgils continues to suckle his motherless son on a mixture of his own milk and blood for many seasons until the bedraggled party of survivors finally stumbles upon a village. According to Beauvois' translation, after they find shelter with a Greenlander named Hrolf, "little Thorfinn was given over to the care of the women; when milk was given to him he remarked that it had not the same color as that of his father." Later the survivors arrive at Erik the Red's settlement, and "a nurse was obtained for Thorfinn, but he would not drink milk until it was made dark."<sup>715</sup> Beauvois' rendition underscores Thorfinn's attachment to his father's milk, laced with heroic blood spilled through violence.

In the context of Flóamanna Saga, Thorgils and his party face a dire struggle to survive following an all-destructive calamity that has displaced them and set them adrift in the world without resources, much like the French perceived themselves after the Franco-Prussian War. The imagery of a warrior father feeding his son on his own blood would have been powerfully resonant at this moment in French history. It implied the heroic sacrifice of French fathers spilling their blood on the battlefield to protect their sons from the Germans. It also suggested the passing on of blood from father to son as a symbol of the unadulterated transmission of race and martial valor. French fathers, it promised, could raise warrior sons.

Breastfeeding occupied a particularly potent symbolic position in late nineteenth-century France. As natalists blamed falling birthrates and disturbingly high infant mortality on French women's supposed disinterest in motherhood, breastfeeding one's own child became viewed as a moral and even civic act.<sup>716</sup> Employing wetnurses to feed babies was increasingly condemned as

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<sup>715</sup> Beauvois, "The Voyage of Thorgils," 54-55.

<sup>716</sup> George D. Sussman, *Selling Mother's Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France, 1715-1914* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Paul L. Toubas, "Dr. Pierre Budin: Promoter of Breastfeeding in 19th Century France," *Breastfeeding Medicine* (March 2007): 45-49; Marie-France Morel, "Images de nourrices dans la France

selfish and dangerous. Wetnurses themselves were viewed with suspicion. By showing Thorgils breastfeeding, Beauvois tapped into a form of virtuous contribution to the family and the state usually only available to women.

Beauvois consciously edited his translation. He omitted all the standard saga content of thwarting monarchs, besting berserks, slaying the undead, and feuding with neighbors from his abridged edition. Instead, he focused exclusively on Thorgils' immigration to Greenland in the second half of the saga. Indeed, he ends his telling of the saga immediately after Thorfinn rejects the wet nurse's milk, noting that "the emigrants have reached a happy haven. We need not follow them further," even though the events of the original saga continue for years beyond that point.<sup>717</sup> On the one hand, this contraction of the story reflects Beauvois' all-consuming fascination with Viking exploration in North America, discussed in Chapter 3. However, there are plenty of other Old Norse texts with Greenland interludes that Beauvois did not translate; he could easily have picked one of them.<sup>718</sup> Yet, he picked this one, which is mostly notable in the overall saga corpus for its depiction of male lactation. Beauvois' concentration of his translation around the Greenland incident also throws into stark relief the elements of the story he chose to retain. He threw out over half the text; he did not need to keep anything he did not want for the sake of fidelity to the original. So it is particularly telling that he preserved the scenes of male breastfeeding. He could easily have papered over them as too complicated, irrelevant, or disturbing, but he kept them. This choice shows they must have meant something significant to him. Indeed, by shortening the saga he actually amplified their importance in the text.

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des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles," *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 6 (2010): 803-817; Gal Ventura, *Maternal Breast-Feeding and Its Substitutes in Nineteenth-Century French Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Lisa Algazi Marcus, *Mother's Milk and Male Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022).

<sup>717</sup> Beauvois, "The Voyage of Thorgils," 55.

<sup>718</sup> Jonathan Grove, "The Place of Greenland in Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative," *Journal of the North Atlantic* (2009): 30-51.

Moreover, Beauvois scrapped the parts of the original saga that suggested breastfeeding might be emasculating, rather than a spectacular feat of heroism. After Thorgils and his ragged party of survivors finally arrive in Erik the Red's settlement, one of Erik's servants, Hall, boasts that his own master "is a great and famous chieftain, but this man Thorgils has been living in misery and hardship, and it's not clear to me whether he is a man or a woman."<sup>719</sup> This allegation brings simmering tensions between Thorgils and Erik to a boil, forcing Thorgils to leave the settlement and ultimately return to Iceland. Beauvois skips over the entire conflict between Thorgils and Erik because Erik is one of the most famous figures of saga literature who plays a key role in the colonization of North America. Thus Beauvois cannot allow him and Thorgils to be at odds without compromising Thorgils' character. More importantly, though, Beauvois needs to assiduously avoid any suggestion that Thorgils' gender transgressions are emasculating. Beauvois can allow Thorgils to be feminine, but his masculinity can not be called into question.

This concern resurfaces later in the text when, on the voyage home from Greenland, Thorfinn washes overboard and, though the crew recovers him, he dies. Out of his senses with grief, Thorgils "said he would no longer blame women for loving the children they had suckled at the breast more than anybody else."<sup>720</sup> Beauvois omitted this line as well, perhaps because it explicitly brought Thorgils and his breastfeeding into dangerous proximity to women. Beauvois also fails to mention that after being hauled back aboard ship, "the boy spit up blood and died."<sup>721</sup> The fact that Thorfinn dies vomiting blood, whereas he previously lived by consuming blood, introduces the potential implication that his body was not able to properly absorb the nourishment from his father's breast, an implication Beauvois would absolutely not want to raise. He was also understandably hesitant to depict the lovingly raised male child, the shining

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<sup>719</sup> "The Saga of the People of Floi (Flóamanna saga)," 295.

<sup>720</sup> "The Saga of the People of Floi (Flóamanna saga)," 299.

<sup>721</sup> "The Saga of the People of Floi (Flóamanna saga)," 298.

hope of his father's line, tragically perishing. This incident would only have exacerbated the fears of a French readership panicked about their own country's plummeting rates of reproduction. Beauvois needed Thorgils' assumption of a traditionally feminine task to be counter-intuitively masculinizing. He portrayed his protagonist's feeding of Thorfinn as a fulfillment of patriarchal responsibility and transcendent fortitude. Yet, the risk that the act of breastfeeding might emasculate Thorgils haunted the original saga. To resolve this threat, Beauvois simply suppressed any such intimation.

Flóamanna Saga featured another counterpoint to the breastfeeding plot in the form of a second bizarre case of men consuming other men's bodily fluids in order to survive. Tellingly, Beauvois *did* keep this scene in his translation. As Thorgils' meager crew attempts to sail around Greenland on a makeshift boat, they find themselves stranded with no clean water. Desperate with thirst:

One of the five companions then said that sailors on the point of dying of thirst would mix their urine with the sea water; they asked Thorgils' permission to drink such mixture. He declared that there was nothing to oppose it, and that he wished neither to forbid nor to command it; but when they were about to drink he took a vessel and uttered some words of exorcism; "Wicked beast who retardest our voyage, it shall not be said that thou shalt make us drink our own water!" In the same instant a diver flew out of the boat towards the north, uttering a cry. Continuing to row further on they saw a running stream, out of which they slaked their thirst.<sup>722</sup>

Like Thorfinn's death, this rather opaque narrative moment inverts Thorgil's act of fatherly breastfeeding. Here, men also endeavor to nourish one another with their somatic emissions, but this is a case of bad or failed nourishment. Despite the sailors' optimism, humans cannot live on urine as they can on milk; it will only dehydrate them faster. Thorgils grasps this unfortunate reality; thus he declines to sanction or participate in drinking. At the last minute he intervenes and invokes the Christian God, driving off the diver bird and saving the crew from

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<sup>722</sup> Beauvois, "The Voyage of Thorgils," 53.



consuming the urine and ultimately dying of thirst. The efficacy of this prayer suggests the crew is becalmed by a vengeful Thor, who torments his namesake Thorgils throughout the saga to punish him for his conversion from paganism and who is originally responsible for stranding the emigrants in Greenland. The diver bird can be interpreted as the demonic Thor being repelled by Thorgils' pious words, freeing the boat. God intercedes to save Thorgils' men from ingesting grotesque bodily liquids that will still doom them to die. By including this odd incident in his translation, Beauvois highlighted through contrast Thorgils' exceptional act in successfully nursing Thorfinn from his bodily fluids. The saga and Beauvois distinguish between this paternal feeding from the breast and comradely feeding (indirectly) from the penis, the latter invoking specters of homosexuality, a grievous stain on a man's honor and manliness in both the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thorgils not only demurs from drinking the urine, but actively prevents it. By implicitly differentiating Thorgils' lactation from his crew's micturition, Beauvois and the saga both insisted on Thorgils' emblematic masculinity.

Beauvois highlighted some of the stranger saga plot points that one might have expected to discomfit nineteenth-century sensibilities. By foregrounding, rather than discreetly eliding, paternal lactation, Beauvois posited that men could take on the female responsibility for propagating the race without compromising their own manliness. Feminist theorists posit that women in patriarchal societies can more easily assume masculine traits than men can assume feminine traits, as women's desire for masculinity indirectly buttresses patriarchy but men's desire for femininity saps patriarchy. This background may explain why the Third Republic had so many representations of shieldmaidens, but only one of Thorgils Scar-leg's Stepson.

## Conclusion

Today, the shieldmaiden is one of the most iconic figures of Norse society. She dominates the big and small screens across Europe and North America.<sup>723</sup> More academically, the discovery that the tenth-century skeleton buried with all the accoutrements of an honored warrior in Birka, Sweden is female generated an international sensation in both the scholarly and general press.<sup>724</sup> From the halls of the Ivory Tower to the ordinary home living room, feminists have embraced Norse history as a mirror where they can see empowered, assertive women reflected back at them.

In this chapter, I have attempted to balance paranoid and reparative readings of my sources.<sup>725</sup> In a 2001 article for *Critical Inquiry*, Joan Scott coined the term “fantasy echo” to describe the process by which people (specifically, female feminist historians) actualize their unconscious desire to see themselves in the past by retroactively constructing a naturalized transhistorical category (specifically, women, and more specifically, feminist women activists).<sup>726</sup> I argue that, in the present day, the mediatized shieldmaiden functions for the feminist audience as a fantasy echo, that is to say as a “retrospective identification... established

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<sup>723</sup> See Frida Gustavsson’s Freydís Eiríksdóttir in *Vikings: Valhalla* (Canada/Ireland, 2022-2023); Emily Cox’s Brida in *The Last Kingdom* (United Kingdom, 2015-2023); Krista Kosonen’s Alfhildr Enginnsdóttir in *Beforeigners* (Norway, 2019-2021); Silje Torp’s Frøya in *Norsemen* (Norway, 2016-2020); Kathryn Winnick’s Lagertha in *Vikings* (Canada/Ireland, 2013-2020); Natassia Malthe’s Brynna in *Vikingdom* (Malaysia, 2013); and Miranda Otto’s Eowyn in *Lord of the Rings* (New Zealand/United States, 2002-2003). Recent video game shieldmaidens include Sigrún from the *God of War* franchise (United States, 2018-2022); Eivor Varinsdóttir from *Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla* (Canada/France, 2020); and Folka from *The Banner Saga* franchise (United States, 2014-2018).

<sup>724</sup> Bruce Bower, “Skeleton ignites debate over whether women were Viking warriors,” *Science News* (September 13, 2017); Amy Ellis Nutt, “Wonder Woman lived: Viking warrior skeleton identified as female, 128 years after its discovery,” *The Washington Post* (September 14, 2017); James Rogers, “Researchers confirm Viking warrior found in grave was actually a woman,” *New York Post* (February 22, 2019); Emilie Steinmark, “Archeology’s sexual revolution,” *The Observer* (January 16, 2022).

<sup>725</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 123-151.

<sup>726</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 284-304.

by the finding of resemblances between actors present and past.”<sup>727</sup> I count myself within that audience. I experience an emotive reaction not only to the actual medieval shieldmaiden of Norse sources but also to these nineteenth-century reimaginings of her.<sup>728</sup> I *want* to see a powerful, confident female role model in Neukomm’s Syasi or Destranges’ Brynhild.<sup>729</sup>

Nonetheless, I acknowledge that I am not the original intended target of these works, nor is mine the original intended response. The shieldmaiden functioned as a very different form of fantasy for men in fin-de-siècle France – tellingly, perhaps, the term “fantasy echo” derives from a student’s misunderstanding of the words “fin de siècle.” For authors such as Paul Du Chailly or painters such as Gaston Bussière, the shieldmaiden represented the dream not of an accomplished, liberated woman recognized and accepted by her society, but of a seamlessly integrated gendered being undamaged by the trials of modernity. She was both a beautiful, alluring object of heterosexual male lust and at the same time an undaunted warrior who supplied the martial prowess French soldiers lacked.

Scholars of the Third Republic have rightly emphasized French men’s recommitment to gender essentialism. Many male journalists, researchers, and policymakers feared French women were becoming the gravediggers of the nation as their perceived retreat from appropriately feminine activities – marriage, homemaking, and (especially) childbearing – would doom the organic polity. However, this academic focus on the very real campaign to force women back into the home and birthing bed – the better to trounce the Germans in the next war – has obscured a parallel development. Alongside this hard-nosed effort to re-feminize French women

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<sup>727</sup> Scott, “Fantasy Echo,” 287.

<sup>728</sup> On the power of fantasy in history, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).

<sup>729</sup> For an example of reparative readings of popular medievalisms, specifically reparative readings of Orientalist medievalisms by a scholar of Indian descent, see Tirumular (Drew) Narayanan, “‘Why is He Indian?’: Missed Opportunities for Discussing Race in David Lowery’s *The Green Knight* (2021),” *Arthuriana* 33, no. 3 (2023): 36-59.

and re-cloister them in domestic space, some French men dreamed of a hybrid, transcendent woman capable of solving every national dilemma. Reassuringly gorgeous and sexually alluring, the Norse shieldmaiden they envisioned in literature and art also dominated on the battlefield in a way French troops did not. At a moment experienced as one of failure, fracture, and fragmentation, the shieldmaiden incarnated an erotic promise of wholeness.

## Conclusion

*“The Middle Ages are not going away anytime soon.” – Amy Kaufman and Paul Sturtevant<sup>730</sup>*

In the introduction to this dissertation, I proposed to answer two questions: why did nineteenth-century French people spend a surprising amount of time talking about Vikings, and how does that fact matter to understanding French society? Over the last five chapters, I have shown that French academics, journalists, novelists, artists, and composers grappled with Norse history in order to work through specifically French issues of the day: anxieties about whiteness, global imperialism, regional distinctiveness, and gender damage. To confront these trials of modernity, the men and women who populate my dissertation turned to the Middle Ages. The medieval past anchored – and promised to illuminate – their present. While at first blush French engagement with the Vikings in the long nineteenth century might seem marginal, incongruous, or even exotic, I argue that it gets directly at the heart of major historiographic dilemmas.

I do not believe that this dissertation exhausts everything there is to say about the memory of the Vikings in France – far from it. In the future, I intend to examine how the Vikings, who preferentially attacked the wealthy but poorly protected bastions of the Church, become protagonists of a predominantly Catholic France a thousand years later. France was unique among countries touched by the Norse revival for being predominantly Catholic. Set against a robust strain of anti-clericalism born of the Enlightenment and Revolution, this created an extremely distinctive spiritual landscape for the reanalysis of the Viking past. This chapter asks how French writers challenged the dominant trans-Atlantic interpretation of Norse medieval religiosity and its modern significance. Whereas nineteenth-century Germans, Scandinavians, Britons, and Americans celebrated the Norse as anti-popish or even crypto-Protestant, devout

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<sup>730</sup> Amy Kaufman and Paul Sturtevant, *The Devil’s Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the Medieval Past* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

Frenchmen celebrated the Norse conversion from paganism around the first millennium as a truly Catholic conversion. Simultaneously, some French writers tried to reconcile Odinism and Christianity, surprisingly presenting them not as opposed but overlapping in order to render the polytheistic Norse appropriate heroes for the Catholic French. Vikings thus emerged as unlikely symbols of a “usable past” for Catholics who rejected rising French secularism.

In future research, I also plan to explore the substantial efforts throughout the nineteenth century by patriotic French savants to promote formal and informal cooperation with other countries they saw as part of the Norse world. I call this phenomenon “Viking diplomacy.” By leaning on a shared sense of historical, ethnic, and cultural Viking-ness, these scholars tried to build common ground with colleagues – and politicians – in Scandinavia, the British isles, and North America. Notably, Germany was left out of, and indeed targeted by, this proposed *Pax Nordmannia*. I hope that delving into Viking diplomacy will help elucidate international ties in the lead-up to the Great War.

Finally, I hope to undertake a case study of twenty-first century French attitudes towards Norse history through a close reading of the video game *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*, published in 2020 by the French corporation Ubisoft. Scholars today frequently interpret medieval Norse society through the lens of the “game of honor”: a high-stakes competition for reputation in which individuals are constantly at risk of losing standing in their communities based on perceived bravery, wisdom, wealth, and influence. Set in a meticulously historical recreation of the medieval North Atlantic, *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* attempts to replicate the experience of the game of honor by placing the player in the position of a Viking chieftain. The player can seek to gain honor by raiding foreign strongholds for loot; expanding their land holdings; pursuing revenge against rivals; and even participating in the flyting, a ritualized exchange of insults.

However, even as *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* endeavors to immerse the player in turbulent Norse culture and the violent game of honor, fundamental elements characteristic of the video game medium undercut this goal. Crucially, the uncertainty and danger at the core of the game of honor is lost. The video game player can always restart and try again for a better outcome. I examine the tension at the heart of *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* between reviving the conditions of Norse life in the precarious game of honor and video games structures which prioritize player agency. I hope thereby to illuminate the careful path contemporary French memory-workers navigate between historicity of content and limitations of form.

I began this project by looking for Vikings in France. Ultimately, I ended by finding France in Vikings. In other words, I set out initially planning to hunt down as many cases as possible of nineteenth-century French people talking, writing, singing, painting, drawing, and even dancing about Vikings. I discovered a richer source base than I could have ever dreamed. Yet, as I learned, for nineteenth-century French people, speaking about Vikings was really a way of speaking about France, specifically about its place in the modern world. They elevated the Norse as an idealized foil to their contemporary problems of race, imperialism, regionalism, and gender. The stereotypes they established still mold our impression of the Vikings today.

Across the nineteenth century, Scandinavians celebrated the Vikings as figures of world-historical importance in order to counter their own marginalization in modern Europe. Britons used imagined Norse history to negotiate internal regional divisions and exalt British naval supremacy and maritime empire. Germans turned to the Vikings to supply a common past that could transcend centuries of fragmented governance. Finally, white residents of North America highlighted the Vínland expeditions to legitimate settler colonialism and gatekeep immigration.

These Protestant-dominated societies also saw Viking enthusiasts elevated Odinic paganism in order to attack institutionalized religion, especially the Catholic Church.

Though far greater scholarly attention has been trained on Scandinavia, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, French authors of the day also embraced the Viking with verve. French discussion of the Vikings and Norse began to accelerate in the 1830s and really took off after 1870. This placed it somewhat later in the century than in other places, and truthfully the Viking never achieved the same momentum in Paris that he did in London, Copenhagen, New York, or Bayreuth. Nevertheless, French interest in the Norse Middle Ages was fruitful, sustained, and vigorous. Yet, the history I trace in this dissertation matters because the tropes and emphases pioneered by the French in the nineteenth century still shape how the Vikings are viewed today. Though motivated by temporally and geographically specific insecurities, they helped set the script for ongoing academic and popular notions of the Norse.

French work on the medieval Norse was anything but insular. French creators read, cited, reviewed, and translated people from throughout the North Atlantic world. In turn, the French sold their own work abroad, presented at international conferences, and appeared in foreign bibliographies. Enthusiasts elsewhere bought French work, quoted it, footnoted it, responded to it, oftentimes praised it, and sometimes critiqued it. French creators corresponded frequently with their colleagues across borders, the various countries extensively cross-pollinating. Nineteenth-century French work about the Norse was thus part of a transoceanic intellectual phenomenon while still maintaining its national distinctiveness.

After the World Wars, the shadow of the Third Reich undermined the national search for Norse origins. Nonetheless, medieval Scandinavia remained a favored symbolic repertoire



among racist radicals in France and elsewhere.<sup>731</sup> From 1949 to 1958, the Norman neofascist Jean Mabire edited the journal *Viking*; Georges Bernage revived the project as *Heimdall* in 1971.<sup>732</sup> The works I study here helped remake the Viking into an emblem of white supremacy.

On July 16, 2013, French police arrested the neo-Nazi black metal musician Kristian “Varg” Vikernes and his wife Marie Cachet on suspicion of planning a terrorist massacre.<sup>733</sup> Authorities alleged that the couple, who lived in Corrèze, were inspired by spree killer Anders Behring Breivik, a Viking-obsessed Norwegian fascist who murdered 77 people in Oslo and Utøya in 2011. French authorities released Vikernes and Cachet after 48 hours due to lack of evidence, but the following year a Paris court convicted Vikernes of “inciting racial hatred” against Jews on his blog, earning him a six-month suspended sentence and a fine of €8,000.<sup>734</sup> In 2011, he vocally supported the election of Marine Le Pen and the Front national.<sup>735</sup>

Vikernes is an avowed enthusiast of the medieval Vikings. Norse mythology and imagery saturate his music. Like many other *völkische* hardliners, he openly practices Odinic paganism. In 2016, he even published a French translation of his pseudo-academic book *Magic and Religion in Ancient Scandinavia*.<sup>736</sup> As a Norwegian skinhead operating in France and the author of politically-charged Viking media, Vikernes incarnates two important but understudied currents

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<sup>731</sup> Jan Alexander van Nahl, “Half-Remembering and Half-Forgetting? On Turning the Past of Old Norse Studies into a Future of Old Norse Studies,” *Humanities* 9, 97 (2020).

<sup>732</sup> Benoît Marpeau, “Le rêve nordique de Jean Mabire,” *Annales de Normandie* 43, no. 3 (1993): 215-241; Benoît Marpeau, “Le Nordisme en Normandie après 1945 : idéologie politique et mythe viking,” in *Dragons et drakkars. Le Mythe viking de la Scandinavie à la Normandie XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Jean-Marie Levesque (Caen: Imprimerie Normandie Information Impression, 1996): 115-122.

<sup>733</sup> “Neo-Nazi metal musician planned ‘large’ terror attack, officials say,” *Los Angeles Times* (July 16, 2013) <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2013-jul-16-la-fg-wn-neo-nazi-musician-terrorist-attack-20130716-story.html>; “‘Neo-Nazi’ musician Vikernes in French terror arrest,” *BBC News* (July 16, 2013) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23327165>.

<sup>734</sup> Sean Michaels, “Kristian ‘Varg’ Vikernes guilty of inciting racial hatred, French court rules,” *The Guardian* (July 9, 2014) <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jul/09/kristian-varg-vikernes-guilty-inciting-racial-hatred>.

<sup>735</sup> Vikernes previously served twenty-one years in Norwegian prison for stabbing to death bandmate Oystein “Euronymous” Aarseth of the group Mayhem and setting fire to four churches. Stéphane François, “L’imaginaire viking et les extrêmes droites française et belge contemporaines,” *Nordiques* 37 (Spring 2019), 125-126.

<sup>736</sup> Kristian Varg Vikernes, *Magie et religion en Scandinavie antique* (Paris: Rubicon, 2016).

in modern far-right culture: the junction between Scandinavia and France, and the embrace of Norse history.

Today, the Charlottesville protestors, January 6 insurrectionists, Nordic Resistance Movement, and occultist Armanen-Orden, among many others, follow in Heinrich Himmler's footsteps by assuming the Viking mantle to glamorize their hateful ideology and advocate racial hierarchy.<sup>737</sup> How did Vikings become preferred emblems of the alt-right? How did conservative reactionaries develop such a unique strain of medievalism?

By dissecting Norse scholarship and media by French creators between the Bourbon Restoration and World War I, I hope I have shown how medieval history, and above all Viking history, became available as a favored resort of white supremacists today. From its inception in the nineteenth century, Old Norse studies operated as a handmaiden of nationalism, Aryanism, imperialism, and patriarchy. The field was shaped by the particular concerns of elite French men in the nineteenth century – concerns about racial hierarchy, geopolitical security, and feminist awakening. They built a version of medieval history and the Viking figure to respond to those fears. We still live with that history – and those Vikings – even now.

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<sup>737</sup> For recent scholarship on Viking imagery in the global alt-right, see Jörn Staecker, "Thor's Hammer - Symbol of Christianization and Political Delusion," *Lund Archaeological Review* 5 (1999): 89-104; Carl Olof Cederlund, "The Modern Myth of the Viking," *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 6 (2011): 5-35; Simon Leboutteiller, "Les droites extrêmes et populistes scandinaves et les Vikings : constructions, formes et usages d'un mythe identitaire contemporain," *Nordiques* 29 (Spring 2015): 111-123; Karl Spracklen, "'To Holmgard. . . and Beyond': Folk Metal Fantasies and Hegemonic White Masculinities," *Metal Music Studies* 1, no. 3 (September 2015): 354-377; Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival: Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism* (Boston: Brill, 2016); Judy Quinn and Maria Adele Cipolla, eds., *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature: The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016); Simon Halink, ed., *Northern Myths, Modern Identities: The Nationalisation of Northern Mythologies Since 1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Christoffer Kølvrå, "Embodying 'the Nordic Race': Imaginaries of Viking Heritage in the Online Communications of the Nordic Resistance Movement," *Patterns of Prejudice* 53, no. 3 (2019): 270-284; Natalie Van Deusen, "Why Teaching About the Viking Age is Relevant and Even Crucial," *Canadian Historical Association* (November 25, 2019); Nicolas Meylan and Lukas Rösli, eds., *Old Norse Myths as Political Ideologies: Critical Studies in the Appropriation of Medieval Narratives* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020); Eirnin Jefford Franks, "Nordic Giants: Using Left-Wing Post-Rock to Deepen Our Understandings of White Supremacist Interpretations of Vikings," in *International Medievalisms: From Nationalism to Activism*, ed. Mary Boyle (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2023): 173-88.

The example of Franco-Swedish journalist Jan Guillou (1944-present) encapsulates how the association of Norse culture with white supremacy effectively poisoned the well of Norse history for post-war generations of anti-racist leftists in France. A socialist and ardent opponent of both Islamophobia and ongoing Western imperialism abroad, Guillou penned a phenomenally popular series of novels about the fictional Swedish Knight Templar Arn Magnusson and his participation in the Crusades.<sup>738</sup> Though the plot takes place over a hundred years after the close of the Viking Age, Sandra Ballif Straubhaar argues that Guillou writes explicitly in reaction to right-wing assumptions about European society's debt to the Vikings.<sup>739</sup> Instead, she suggests, Guillou invents a multicultural origin story for Europe, in which the continent is fundamentally influenced (and improved) by the Islamic Middle East. Straubhaar maintains that Guillou rejects the perceived brutality of Norse society and instead roots European modernity in the values of anti-racism, gender equality, separation of church and state, and social egalitarianism that he sees transmitted from the Muslim world. According to Straubhaar, Guillou aims specifically to refute the neopagan skinheads who perceive some sort of right-wing inflected Viking society as the cradle of European culture.

In 2019, the journal *postmedieval* published a landmark issue on “The Ghosts of the Nineteenth Century and the Future of Medieval Studies.” Editors Cord J. Whitaker and Matthew Gabriele exhorted readers to work “towards a medieval studies exorcised” of those ghosts by first identifying and then unmaking the ongoing influence of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy

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<sup>738</sup> Jan Guillou, *Vägen till Jerusalem* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1998); Jan Guillou, *Tempelriddaren* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1999); Jan Guillou, *Riket vid vägens slut* (Stockholm: Pirat, 2000); Jan Guillou, *Arvet efter Arn* (Stockholm: Pirat, 2001). Translated into French as Jan Guillou, *Le chemin de Jérusalem* (Marseille: Agone, 2007); Jan Guillou, *Le chevalier du Temple* (Marseille: Agone, 2007); Jan Guillou, *Le royaume au bout du chemin* (Marseille: Agone, 2008); Jan Guillou, *L'héritage d'Arn le templier* (Marseille: Agone, 2011).

<sup>739</sup> Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, “A Birth Certificate for Sweden, Packaged for Postmoderns: Jan Guillou's Templar Trilogy,” in *The Year's Work in Medievalism*, eds. Jesse G. Swan and Richard Utz, vol. 17 (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002): 64-75.

in medieval studies.<sup>740</sup> I hope that this dissertation has contributed to that work. By tracing the ways and reasons through which medieval – and especially Norse – history come to be a privileged bulwark of inequality in the nineteenth century, I wish to play some small role in dismantling that bulwark in the present.

In the aftermath of the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally and the January 6 insurrection, medievalists have taken to both popular and academic outlets to debunk the violent misappropriation of the Middle Ages by reactionary extremists.<sup>741</sup> Yet, as Christopher M. Herde demonstrates, these refutations have largely confined themselves to spotlighting extremists’ factual inaccuracies.<sup>742</sup> Accustomed to empirical dispute, well-meaning scholars seek to discredit the alt-right’s portrayal of the Middle Ages by contesting the historicity of their claims instead of directly engaging the genuine problem posed by the alt-right: a heinous ideology of violence and hate. As Herde shows, this approach not only misses the real point of what makes the alt-right abhorrent, it also risks alienating innocent laypeople who desire a casual or initial foray into the Middle Ages. By elevating perfect historical exactitude as a necessary prerequisite to any engagement with medieval content, scholars aiming to refute extremists – who are not arguing in good faith anyhow – may inadvertently push away potential future students or simply ordinary folks trying to relate to the rich tapestry of human experience by way of the medieval.

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<sup>740</sup> Cord J. Whitaker and Matthew Gabriele, “Mountain Haints: Towards a Medieval Studies Exorcized,” *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 10, no. 2 (2019): 129-136.

<sup>741</sup> To cite only a few examples: Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017); Daniel Wollenberg, *Medieval Imagery in Today’s Politics* (Amsterdam: ARC Humanities Press, 2018); Andrew Albin, Mary C. Erler, Thomas O’Donnell, Nicholas L. Paul, and Nina Rowe, eds., *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019); Noëlle Phillips, *Craft Beer Culture and Modern Medievalism: Brewing Dissent* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2019); Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Kłosowska, and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, eds., *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures* (Santa Barbara: Punctum Books, 2020); Kaufman and Sturtevant, *The Devil’s Historians*; Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein, eds., *The United States of Medievalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021); Jonathan Hsy, *Antiracist Medievalisms: From ‘Yellow Peril’ to Black Lives Matter* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2021); Louise D’Arcens, *World Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern Textual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>742</sup> Christopher M. Herde, “Open the Gates: A Case for Moving Beyond Accuracy,” *Different Visions* (Forthcoming 2025).

Catherine Brown offers a valuable antidote to this line of thinking, modeling a stance that promotes intellectual rigor while also honoring the affective link between the modern individual and the medieval artifact.<sup>743</sup> She begins by acknowledging that the so-called Middle Ages were invented in the so-called modern period as a rhetorical Other against which to define the modern self. She then proposes an alternative means of relating to the medieval, specifically via its texts. She advocates a form of empathetic reading that embraces the relationship between the present reader and the past text. She suggests reading medieval texts in the way medieval people read texts, which is to say according to a metaphor of eating, whereby the text is broken down, consumed, and integrated into the reader, becoming materially part of them. Brown believes that framing modern subject and medieval object as coeval and interconnected rather than hierarchically divided will open up possibilities for a more complex interplay between reader and text than empirically-bounded medieval studies have traditionally permitted. Put otherwise, she calls for the reader to occupy a “middle” space, alongside the text, suspended between the past and the present.

I share Brown’s conviction that attending to the emotive tie between scholar and subject opens up new pathways to understanding. I first encountered the Icelandic sagas in my second year of graduate school. I signed up as a reader-grader for an undergraduate topics course on the Vikings only intending to make a few extra dollars. Instead, I fell in love with a literature that was at once deeply alien and totally enthralling.<sup>744</sup> I went looking for a hinge to connect my background in nineteenth-century French politics to my newfound fascination with the stories of *Brennu-Njál*, *Egil Skallagrímsson*, and *Grettir the Strong*. I found Eugène Beauvois. Reading

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<sup>743</sup> Catherine Brown, “In the Middle,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 547-574.

<sup>744</sup> As a child, I attended kindergarten at Leif Erikson Elementary School in the Mira Mesa neighborhood of San Diego, CA. I do not think this explains my affinity for Old Norse literature, but one never can know for certain.

Beauvois' publications, I was immediately repulsed by his deployment of the Norse past in the service of white supremacy. At the same time, I understood his passion for the sagas. I too could feel their magic pull.

The magnetic attraction of these texts in some ways defies the explanatory toolkit of the historian. The reader's bone-deep resonance with words written by unknown authors centuries dead is perhaps more properly a problem for the literary critic or the philosopher. Yet, this study has been an attempt to historicize exactly that. What distinguished Beauvois' affective relationship with the sagas 150 years ago from mine today? How much of the sagas' enduring power can be attributed to some mysterious human alchemy, and how much to insidiously persistent notions of race, gender, and nation?

Today, those seeking evidence of their own Norse roots are usually not denizens of the Ivory Tower, but ordinary citizens, and they rely not on medieval Icelandic manuscripts, but on commercial DNA testing. Researchers such as Marc Scully, Turi King, Steven D. Brown, Daniel Strand, and Anna Källén have shown that a robust international customer base buys these genetic tests in order to substantiate family narratives of Viking-ness through means perceived as objective, scientific, and irrefutable.<sup>745</sup> Purchasers believe DNA evidence of Scandinavian heritage endows them with "Viking" virtues like courage, independence, and enterprise. Yet, it is precisely this assumption that medieval Norse culture properly "belongs" to contemporary white people that fuels white supremacy. Savvy white nationalists capitalize on the essential human longing to see one's self in the past. As modern individuals look to Scandinavia in the Middle

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<sup>745</sup> Marc Scully, Turi King, and Steven D. Brown, "Remediating Viking Origins: Genetic Code as Archival Memory of the Remote Past," *Sociology* 47, no. 5 (2013): 921-938; Marc Scully, Steven D. Brown, and Turi King, "Becoming a Viking: DNA Testing, Genetic Ancestry and Placeholder Identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 2 (2016): 162-180; Marc Scully, "Constructing Masculinity through Genetic Legacies: Family Histories, Y-Chromosomes, and 'Viking Identities,'" *Genealogy* 2, no. 8 (2018); Daniel Strand and Anna Källén, "I am a Viking! DNA, Popular Culture and the Construction of Geneticized Identity," *New Genetics and Society* 40, no. 4 (2021): 520-540. Cf. Kerstin P. Hofman, "With vikingr into the Identity Trap: When Historiographical Actors get a Life of their Own," *Medieval Worlds*, no. 4 (2016): 91-122.

Ages to build their own ego-narratives of origin, history, and identity, white supremacists argue that Norse historical greatness guarantees eternal white greatness.

However, there are plenty of people pushing back against the alt-right version of the Viking. Many of those seeking to reappropriate the Norse for progressive causes are not formally-trained scholars, but practitioners. In an ethnography of present-day Scandinavian rune carvers, Bodil Petersson argues that the artisans who embrace this medieval medium adopt a Viking identity is explicitly anti-racist and anti-fascist.<sup>746</sup> Instead, they seek a personal, green, localized, slow craftsmanship that rejects capitalist logics. Nadège Bénard-Goutouly has similarly suggested that Viking metal music is environmentalist, universalist, pacifist, and anti-capitalist.<sup>747</sup> Many heathen groups reviving Norse paganism are explicitly inclusive.<sup>748</sup> Many reenacting groups have strong policies guaranteeing protection from harassment; the Society for Creative Anarchism bills its focus as “the Middle Ages the way they should have been.” The Swedish group Vikingar Mot Rasism (Vikings Against Racism) even appears in costume to protest for racial and gender equality.<sup>749</sup> As I discussed in Chapter 5, the shieldmaiden has today become a symbol of women’s empowerment. Collectively, these experiential medievalists outside academia are on the forefront of reclaiming the Viking from the alt-right.

In August 2023, I visited the Parc Historique Ornavik outside of Caen in Normandy. Self-described as an “open, living, animated book,” Ornavik is the brainchild of Christian Sébire.<sup>750</sup> Sébire was inspired by a trip to the château de Guédelon in Burgundy, a living history site where

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<sup>746</sup> Bodil Petersson, “Travels to Identity: Viking Rune Carvers Today,” *Lund Archaeological Review* 15 (2009): 71–86.

<sup>747</sup> Nadège Bénard-Goutouly, “La figure du Viking dans la musique métal,” *Nordiques* 29 (Spring 2015): 87-100.

<sup>748</sup> Sigal Samuel, “What To Do When Racists Try To Hijack Your Religion,” *The Atlantic* (November 2, 2017); Barbara Jane Davy, “Inclusive Heathens Practice Ancestor Veneration, But Not Pride in Ancestry,” *Nova Religio* 26, no. 3 (2023): 30–51.

<sup>749</sup> Catherine Edwards, “We can’t let racists re-define Viking culture,” *The Local* (October 6, 2017) <https://www.thelocal.se/20171006/we-cant-let-racists-re-define-viking-culture-far-right-runes-swedish>.

<sup>750</sup> “Le Parc Historique Ornavik est un livre ouvert, vivant, animé.” “A l’origine du projet,” *Ornavik : des Vikings aux Normands*, accessed February 22, 2024 <https://www.ornavik.fr/origine-du-projet>

since 1997 expert artisans have been reconstructing a thirteenth-century fortress using local materials and authentic methods. Eager to apply the principles of experimental archeology to medieval Normandy, Sébire created Ornavik.<sup>751</sup> Spread across 10 wooded hectares alongside the Orne canal in the Domaine de Beauregard, which also contains an adventure ropes course, paintball field, and bicycle rental, Ornavik is composed of two main sections.<sup>752</sup> In the first, volunteers and employees recreate the roles of Frankish peasants under the Carolingians. At the time of my visit, their village consisted of a two farms and a half-built church. Ornavik's second and more robust section comprises a Viking encampment such as might have been seen along the shores of Normandy in the ninth century. When I visited, re-enactors took on the roles of blacksmith, weaver, merchant, carpenter, and arms-master – I was disappointed to learn they did not have a skald on staff. The Vikings' physical infrastructure includes a forge, several A-frame tents, a sacred grove, various thatched farmhouses, and a dragon ship imported from Scandinavia. In the future, the Ornavik leadership hopes to add a longhouse and a hill fort to their facilities. Set apart from the two zones reserved for experimental archeology, there is an open-air crêperie whimsically named “Rollo's Table,” an exhibit detailing the history of the Norse in Normandy, and a surprisingly comprehensive bookstore specializing in Norse history – though the damp Norman air has curled most of the covers. The visitors – mostly families with children – came not just from local towns or even just from France, but from all over western Europe. That being said, the docents were somewhat surprised to encounter “fellow Vikings from California.”

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<sup>751</sup> “L' Association,” *Ornavik : des Vikings aux Normands*, accessed February 22, 2024 <https://www.ornavik.fr/association>

<sup>752</sup> For a map of the park, see “Le plan d'Ornavik,” *Ornavik : des Vikings aux Normands*, accessed February 22, 2024 <https://www.ornavik.fr/plan-interactif-2>



Ornavik's viability as a tourist attraction concretely demonstrates the ongoing attraction Vikings exert on the French – and on people in general. What the Vikings mean to us today is different from what they meant in the nineteenth century, but that meaning is just as magnetic, even urgent. We are still drawn to the Vikings, though for new reasons specific to our own historical context – and perhaps also for reasons rooted in something beyond historical comprehension.

### Illustration List

- Fig. 0.1. Gaston Bussière, *Sigurd*, last quarter of the nineteenth century. Chromolithograph, musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille.
- Fig. 0.2. Jean-François Auburtin, *Chants sur l'eau*, 1912. Painting, 200 x 250 cm, Petit Palais, Paris.
- Fig. 0.3. Georges Roux, *De tous les fjords on vit bientôt s'élancer les vaisseaux*, in Edmond Neukomm, *Les dompteurs de la mer. Les normands en Amérique depuis le Xe jusqu'au XVe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque des succès scolaires, 1895).
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