DOC1: Hagar the Horrible

Hägar the Horrible, created by American cartoonist Dik Browne, appeared in 1973. It has since been translated in 12 languages and published in about 1,900 newspapers, in 56 countries. This loose interpretation of Viking age life is a caricature of modern day life in the United States.

DOC2: The Vikings: It wasn't all pillaging

For centuries, they have been stereotyped as marauding barbarians arriving in their helmeted hordes to pillage their way across Britain But a conference, entitled "Between the Islands", draws on new archeological evidence, historical studies and analysis of the language and literature of the period, and shows that between the 9th and 13th centuries, the Vikings became an integral part of the fabric of social and political life that changed Britain and Ireland.

Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, who is co-organising the conference, said it was not a simple case of the Vikings coming and conquering. There was a "cross-fertilisation" of practices, including Anglo-Saxon communities adopting Norse names. "It was two-way interaction," she said. "Those who settled had to become different, and adapt to the society around them and learn to communicate with each other." [...] "Of course, there was plundering and pillaging, but those who started to build camps and started to settle began interacting in a very different way," she said.

On a cultural level, Celtic folklore began to influence Viking literature. An analysis of Old Norse literary works that shows some of their tales may have been borrowed from Gaelic storytelling, thus the myths of Scandinavia, Ireland and Britain became inexorably intertwined.

Arifa Akbar, www.theindependent.co.uk (2009)

DOC3: Viking Britain: A History

I was once the project curator for the exhibition ‘Vikings: Life and Legend’ at the British Museum. The Vikings, it seems to say, are a cheerful, bloody diversion for the kids on a wet bank-holiday afternoon, not a proper historical phenomenon. Vikings are big men with swords, crushing skulls left, right and centre: the barbarian archetype writ large and red. It occurred to me at the time that nobody would treat Roman history in this way. The Romans, it is instinctively felt, are refined, have gravitas. They benefit from a cultural snobbery with extraordinarily deep roots. Roman Britain, in particular, is widely presented in a solidly respectable way. It is a period that can serve as an acceptable backstory to who we are and where we come from, a people ‘just like us', who went to parties and wrote letters and had jobs. Romanitas - Romanness - means 'civilization'.

Few think of the age of the Vikings in those terms. Like other romantic curios they have been fetishized and infantilized, set apart from wider history alongside pirates, gladiators, knights-in-armour and, I suppose, dinosaurs. Between the conventional beginning of the Viking Age in the late eighth century and its close in the eleventh, Scandinavian people and culture were involved with Britain to a degree that left a permanent impression on these islands. They came to trade and plunder and, ultimately, to settle, to colonize and to rule. It is also, however, the story of how the people of the British Isles came to reorient themselves in a new and interconnected world, where new technologies for travel and communication brought ideas and customs, fostered the development of towns and trade, forged new identities and gave birth to England and Scotland as unified nations for the first time. Representations of the Viking Age in art, music and literature have had a profound impact on the western imagination. A ‘Viking Britain' came alive to the likes of William Morris and J. R. R. Tolkien. Sometimes it appears overtly, through the pages of comic books, the iconography of football teams or the covers of heavy-metal albums. But it also runs in deeper channels of thought and language, the serpentine ships that travel the dark rivers of the subconscious mind.

Thomas Williams, Viking Britain: A History (2018)