Characteristics Of The Viking Age Society

The Viking age society that was present in Scandinavia consisted of three classes, those being Karls were the ordinary people and were composed by the vast majority, their occupancies would be farming, smithing, fishing, trading anything comparable. A Karl was free and could increase their social status as Karl and gain greater influence or even become a Jarl. Jarls were the highest of three classes until kings, queens ect. Became present in Scandinavia. But Jarls are very like a king, their position and it's power are inherited by the eldest son of the jarl. Jarls lived in halls and had more refined, privileged life. The power that jarls held depended on their wealth, ships and supporters and those karls, who the jarl had to maintain the security and livelihood of could become the jarl themselves by improving their distinction and wealth. The lowest class were slaves, called þræll they were normally taken from Eastern Europe and Britain when they raided there. If people where unable to pay a debt they became obliged to work to of their debt.

Three social classes existed in Norse society. The Society existed in such a way that an individual could move himself starting with one class then onto the next. And those guilty of crimes such as thievery could become slaves as their punishment.

In the Viking age if marriage did not work, then the wife and husband could divorce. A Spanish-Arabic explorer visited Hedeby (an important Danish Viking Age (8th to the 11th centuries) trading settlement) the explorer "al-Tartushi" visited in the 900s he was surprised to find that women could to divorce their husbands. The sagas involved many divorced women and widows who marry again. The Icelandic sagas describe a large number of divorce rules, which are evidence of a quite advanced legal system. The woman could, for example, demand a divorce if her husband settled in a new country whilst on his travels, but only if the man neglected to go to bed with her for three years. The aim of this was to secure the wife against a life of loneliness. The most typical grounds for divorce were, however, sudden poverty in the man's family or violence on the part of the husband. If a man struck his wife three times she could demand a divorce. We do not know how frequent divorces were in the Viking period, but the rights to divorce and inheritance indicate that women had an independent judicial status. After divorce, babies and small children generally went with their mothers, whilst older children were divided up amongst their parents' families, depending upon their wealth and status.

Hurstwic.org. (2019). Hurstwic: Social Classes in Viking Society. [online] Available at: http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/society/text/social_classes.htm [Accessed 30 Aug. 2019].