

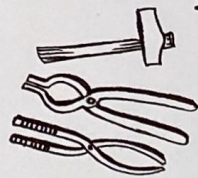
Society

... in 30 seconds



Viking society was divided up into different groups or classes. At the top was the king. The first Viking kings were not grand rulers living in palaces. They often controlled quite small regions. Their power depended on wealth, success in war and keeping order, and support from their followers. Toward the end of the Viking Age, kings became more powerful and ruled over whole countries.

Viking noblemen came next and were called jarls (earls). They were rich and powerful owners of large areas of land, horses, and ships. They were expected to send warriors to support their king in battle.



Most Vikings were called karls, meaning freemen. Some were wealthy and owned land and houses, while others were poor. Karls might work as farmers, skilled craftsmen, blacksmiths, shipbuilders, or merchants. Most of the warriors, seafarers, and settlers were karls.

At the bottom were thralls (slaves), who were forced to work very hard as laborers or servants. They had few rights. Many slaves were captured during sea raids. Only a few were lucky enough to win or buy their freedom.

3-second sum-up

Viking kingdoms were divided into three main classes—nobles (jarls), freemen (karls), and slaves (thralls).

Women's world

Men ruled, but women were respected and had some rights. They needed to be tough and practical. It was the women who ran farms and homes while the men were away fighting. Women controlled the household budget and carried the keys to buildings and stores. Women were skilled spinners and weavers. They played an important part as pioneers settling new lands.

There was a strict order of society (hierarchy), with the king at the top and slaves at the bottom.

The king was expected to be brave. He was also expected to be generous to his followers in return for their loyalty.

Jarls were powerful chieftains who might organize raids or trading expeditions and command many warriors.

Karls were free citizens, with the right to own land and trade. Most karls were farmers.

Thralls were slaves who had to work very hard for their masters.

