The age of the vikings essay

When someone mentions the word ‘ Viking’, the image that comes to mind is usually not pleasant. Often pictured as bloodthirsty barbarians in horned helmets, the Vikings are one of the most unfairly stereotyped ethnic groups. Although a large part of the Viking lifestyle involved invading and pillaging, they also had a rich culture that included unique gods and goddesses and fascinating traditions. Although often overlooked, the Vikings were some of the most amazing and accomplished people ever to walk the earth. The origins of the Vikings lie in the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

Most Vikings were craftsmen and farmers who occasionally raided and pillaged in order to get rich. However, the majority of their time was spent traveling across Europe and colonizing new places. The Vikings most likely acquired their bad reputation from the monks at the few monasteries they raided, who wrote of the attacks as being the “ vengeance of Satan on Christian outposts” (Who). In fact, the monks at these monasteries were known to have invented prayers for the purpose of keeping the Vikings away. One such prayer included the words ‘ Deliver us, O Lord, from the fury of the Norsemen.

They ravage our lands; they kill our women and children’ (Henkin). Nevertheless, the Vikings still made time out of their busy schedules to play games such as backgammon, chess, and drinking (Lemonick). Since it was too cold in Iceland to grow barley to make beer, Icelandic Vikings had to invent other culinary delights to enjoy. The main staple of the Viking diet was probably stew, made from vegetables such as beans, carrots, turnips and the occasional lamb bone. Stew was often eaten with stale bread and buttermilk.

The women made the bread by hand, using millstones to tirelessly grind the grain into flour. For lunch, there was often homemade cottage cheese and leftover stale bread, and occasionally, a piece of wild fruit. Any meat would have to be salted and dried, because there was no other way to keep it without spoiling. On a feast night, Vikings traditionally killed a horse as a sacrifice to their gods, roasted it, and ate it.

The flatware used by the Vikings was most often made out of wood. The dished used were basically the same as those used today: bowls, plates, and spoons, with the exception of the fork which would not be invented for several more years. Instead of glasses, the Vikings used animal horns to drink out of, which were often inscribed with intricate artwork and knotwork (Scott). Of all the Vikings, few are as famous as Leif Eriksson.

Son of Erik the Red, founder of Greenland, Eriksson is credited as being the first European to land on the North American continent. Eriksson was born in Iceland in 970 AD, and spent most of his childhood with a well-educated man named Thyrker whom his father had captured in a raid. Thyrker functioned as Eriksson’s teacher, instructing him on European languages, reading and writing runes, and even how to become a skilled warrior. At the age of twelve, Eriksson’s short-tempered father had a dispute with another man and murdered him.

This resulted in the entire family being banned from Iceland for three years. Erik the Red decided to sail west with his family and subsequently discovered Greenland. Eriksson lived in his father’s settlement, Ericholm, for several years, but eventually he grew restless. Inspired by his father’s

adventures, Eriksson set out in search of a land rumored to be west of Greenland. Eriksson’s travels led him to discover the islands of Labrador, Baffin, and finally the area of North American known as Vinland (Cornish).

Eriksson and his crew settled on a base in Vinland which is now called L’Anse aux Meadows. This area was discovered to be an ancient Viking site as recently as 1960, when it was found by archaeologist Anne Stine and her husband. The community consisted of several buildings including three large halls, workshops, a blacksmith, and some residential buildings. There were also huts for smelting bog ore, a type of iron with which the Vikings made nails to build their ships. Archaeologists believe the area was occupied by Vikings for no more than ten years because of the lack of a cemetery and radiocarbon dates, which suggests that L’Anse aux Meadows was primarily used as a base camp used by the Vikings as a place to stay while exploring the gulf and its surrounding areas (Kuhl).

Although women were technically not allowed to be Vikings, evidence has been found to suggest that there were many notable female Vikings. Of course, new areas could not be populated unless women came along on voyages, too, so they often disguised themselves as men before coming on board. Since the Norse word vikingar was only used to describe men, it is not certain exactly how many women were able to become Vikings without disguising themselves (Jesch). The life of a female Viking depended largely on her social class. Judith Jesch notes that Rigs? ula, an old Icelandic Viking poem, describes Viking omen in great detail: The woman of the slave-class wears ‘ old-fashioned clothes’ and serves bread that is ‘ heavy, thick, packed with bran..

. in the middle of a trencher', with ' broth in a basin'. The woman of the yeoman class wears a cap and a blouse, has a kerchief around her neck and ' brooches at her shoulders', and is busy with her spindle, ' ready for weaving'. The aristocratic woman is just busy preening herself: she wears a blouse of smooth linen, a spreading skirt with a blue bodice, a tall headdress and appropriate jewelry, and has very white skin. She serves silver dishes of pork and poultry on a white linen cloth, washed down with wine (Jesch).

Several graves containing female Vikings have been found that show that they were often buried in their best clothes and with some of their most prized possessions. For example, most women were buried with jewelry such as brooches used to hold up their dresses, and the spindles they used for spinning. This practice was also carried to the New World, where spindles found in graves at L'Anse aux Meadows show that women also made it across the Atlantic. Viking graves also give an insight into the religions observed at any given time. A female grave located on the Isle of Man in the United Kingdom contained the " Pagan Lady of Peel' who was buried with a mix of Christian and Celtic runes, which illustrates the confused period at the beginning of the Vikings' conversion to Christianity. The Vikings' conversion did not begin until the 12th century; before that, the Vikings worshipped a plethora of other interesting deities (Williams).

The Vikings' main god was named Odin, the god of wisdom, war, and death, and also from whom we get the word for ' Wednesday'. Odin had a son, the god Thor, from which ' Thursday' is derived. Thor is most famous for his hammer, Mjolnir, which he used to battle giants. The Vikings believed that Thor rode through thunderclouds in a chariot pulled by goats and created

lightning with his hammer, hence his name which means ‘ thunder’ in Old Norse.

The Vikings’ equivalent of the Christian Heaven was Valhalla, or the ‘ hall of the slain’. Here, the chosen Vikings would entertain themselves by battling against each other, drinking, and feasting. The primary purpose of Valhalla was to gather a large group of skilled warrior who could assist Odin and the other gods as they fought giants and other monsters at Ragnarok, or the end of the world. In order for a Viking to get to Valhalla, a Valkyrie, or ‘ chooser of the slain’ would have to approve of them.

The Valkyries were beautiful female semi-gods whose main purpose was to choose which Vikings would be admitted into Valhalla, and also to serve them drinks and look after them when they actually got there. The ruler of the Valkyries, Freya, was also the Norse goddess of fertility and war, and her name is the word from which ‘ Friday’ is derived (Norse). It is obvious to see that the Vikings had a major influence in shaping the world into what it is today. They traveled to lands no one had ever seen before, invented a spellbinding religion, and built the best ships in Europe. From their amazing deities to their death-defying travels, the Vikings have certainly proved themselves worthy of the history books. Works Cited Cornish, Jim.

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