

Have a good funeral

[Neil Oliver]

Viking funerals, at least for the high and mighty, were massive, elaborate affairs with rituals lasting weeks at a time. Of course, the dead had to be placed aboard because it was them who were making the journey and then around them would be heaped all of the things they might need and want in the next life, so sumptuous clothes, jewellery for display, food and drink, and also, and importantly, there was usually an element of sacrifice. And so dogs, maybe hunting dogs and also lap dogs and pets, would be killed and put beside their owners.

In this instance, as many as 15 horses were slaughtered and laid out for use in the next world. And you have to imagine the impact that would have had on the people who were watching.

For one thing, it was a display of wealth beyond their reach, this only happened to the few, and they would see all the valuables going in, then the animals being killed and put alongside.

It would have stayed with those spectators for a lifetime, and they in turn would have passed stories about what they had seen down through the generations so whoever went into the next life aboard this ship would never be forgotten.

Clip from Vikings, Episode One, BBC Two, (2012)