



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHÉ  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



## **INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL**

### **Irish Studies**

### **Course Syllabus**

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# SS116 The Archaeological Heritage of Ireland; From the First Settlers to Medieval Castles

6ECTS/3 Semester Credits

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ireland's archaeological heritage is one of the richest in Western Europe. The development of prehistoric Irish societies can be seen in the megalithic tombs of the Neolithic, the wealth of bronze and gold in the succeeding Bronze Age, and in the great royal sites such as Tara and Navan, of the Celtic Iron Age. From the Early Christian Period, monastic ruins and high crosses survive at sites such as Clonmacnoise, while the finds from Dublin tell us of the Viking raids and settlement. The remains of later earth and timber fortifications and stone castles reveal the story of the Anglo-Norman invasion and subsequent power struggles.

This course charts the evidence for human societies in Ireland over ten millennia from the island's initial colonization by small groups of hunter-gatherers, through to the Medieval period. The archaeology of the entire island of Ireland will be covered with particular emphasis on the archaeology of the Burren, a remarkable upland area just south of Galway where archaeological remains of all periods are well preserved and visible.

University of Galway is ideally positioned amongst some of Ireland's most well-preserved archaeological landscapes and this course includes two field trips to the first to explore the prehistoric archaeology of Cong in Co. Mayo and the second to visit the medieval Franciscan abbey in Claregalway, Co. Galway.

## COURSE OUTLINE

This course charts the evidence for human occupation in Ireland over ten millennia from the island's initial colonization by small groups of hunter-gatherers through to the Medieval period. The course addresses key themes such as 'Megalithic Tombs and the Age of the Ancestors,' 'The Age of Metal,' 'Iron Age Royal Sites,' 'The Arrival of Christianity,' 'The Vikings in Ireland,' etc. The archaeology of the entire island of Ireland will be covered. The course includes two field trips, the first to explore the prehistoric archaeology of Cong in Co. Mayo and the second to visit the medieval Franciscan abbey in Claregalway, Co. Galway.

**Week 1 Archaeology:** Introductory Class.

**Understanding Material Culture.** Lab Seminar – hands-on examination of artefacts, some of the basic building blocks of archaeological interpretations.

**The First Colonists and the First Farmers.** The Mesolithic period, c. 7000 - 4000 BC: hunter-gatherers in a forested landscape. The Neolithic period c. 3800 – 2500/2400 BC: a new way of life, the first farmers.

**Week 2 Megalithic Tombs and the Age of the Ancestors.** Understanding the stone temples of the early farmers.

**The Age of Metal.** The Chalcolithic period c. 2500/2400 – 2000 BC. The introduction of metal to Ireland is accompanied by profound social changes.

**Field Seminar:** The prehistoric archaeology of Cong in Co. Mayo.

**Roughan Hill and its wedge tombs.** Monuments, landscape and identity around 2000 BC. Anthropology and archaeology combine to try and explain this enigmatic group of monuments.

**Week 3 Status and burial in the Early Bronze Age c. 2000 – 1500 BC.** Early indications of individual status including the interesting case of ‘Tara boy.’

**Gold, Power and War.** Chiefdoms in the later Bronze Age, c. 1500 - 600 BC.

Hierarchical chiefdoms emerge with power and wealth concentrated in the hands of a minority elite. Lecture includes the spectacular cliff-edge fort of Dún Aonghasa on the island of Inishmore which students will visit one weekend.

**Field Seminar:** The medieval Franciscan abbey in Claregalway, Co. Galway

**Iron Age Royal Sites.** Ritual, mythology and kingship come together on these long-lived sites.

**Week 4 The Arrival of Christianity.** The introduction of Christianity to Ireland and early monastic sites in Ireland, c. 400 AD - late 12th c. AD.

**Early Medieval Settlement.** The pattern of secular settlement across the landscape, c. 400 AD - late 12th c. AD (ringforts, crannogs, etc.)

**Church, Pilgrimage and Art.** Sites on the Aran Islands (which students visit one weekend) and sites on the Burren reveal aspects of Medieval craftsmanship and devotion.

**The Vikings in Ireland.** The impact of the Vikings on Ireland. Were they just brutal pillagers or is there more to the Viking legacy?

**Castles in Ireland.** The development of castles in Ireland from the Anglo-Norman invasion through late tower houses (which are still standing in Galway’s city centre).

**Course summary.**

## **COURSE TEXTS**

### **Essential Reading**

Jones, C. 2004 *The Burren and the Aran Islands - Exploring the Archaeology*. Cork: The Collins Press (a facsimile copy will be available for a budget price from university copy shop).

Reading Pack – additional essential readings will be provided as PDFs on Blackboard (free).

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR CREDITS**

1. Attendance and participation at all the scheduled lectures **and** field seminars.
2. One essay of 1,500 words minimum on subject assigned by the course tutor.
3. Written examination of the material covered in the scheduled lectures **and** field seminars.

## **COURSE PROFESSOR**

### **Mags Mannion Ph.D. (Director)**

Dr Mags Mannion holds a doctorate in archaeology from the National University of Ireland, Galway where she currently lectures with the School of Geography, Archaeology and Irish Studies. Her research interests include the archaeology, art and artisans of the prehistoric, Early Christian and Viking periods in Ireland. Dr Mannion has presented her research at both national and international conferences and has published a number of papers on her research and published a book *Glass*

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beads from Early Medieval Ireland: Classification, Dating, Social performance. Mags also co-edited the conference proceedings volume from the seventh international conference on Insular art held at NUI Galway, Islands in a Global Context. Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Insular Art, held at the National University of Ireland, Galway, 16-20 July 2014. She regularly participates in Irish heritage events presenting demonstrations and workshops on medieval bead making, body ornament and symbolism and performance.