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

3 Semester Credits/6 ECTS Credits

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

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 but there will be a 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. The course includes two trips to the Burren to visit both prehistoric and historic-period sites, some of which have been the focus of course director, Carleton Jones’s own research.

COURSE OUTLINE:

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 Burren in prehistory. Students will visit some very interesting and ‘off-the-beaten-track’ sites where Dr. Jones has excavated.

**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.** Chieftdoms in the later Bronze Age, c. 1500 - 600 BC; Hierarchical chieftdoms 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 Burren in the historic period. Students will visit the Early Medieval cliff-fort of Cahercommaun and the Medieval Corcomroe Abbey.

**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?

Week 5

**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:


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

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT BOOKS:


REQUIREMENTS FOR CREDITS:

1. Attendance and participation at all the scheduled lectures, field seminars and tours.

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, field seminars and tours.

COURSE PROFESSOR:

Carleton Jones, M.A., Ph.D. (Director)

Carleton Jones received his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge and his research has focused on the prehistoric archaeology of Ireland. For several seasons Dr. Jones directed a survey and excavation project that concentrated on the prehistoric landscape of the Burren in Co. Clare which is now continuing in collaboration with current and past postgraduate students. This work has received support from the Heritage Council, the Royal Irish Academy, and the Irish Research Council. Dr. Jones has published numerous papers on his research and two books: ‘The Burren and the Aran Islands – Exploring the Archaeology’ and ‘Temples of Stone: Exploring the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland’.