

Naomi Hanson

The lives of female pirates remain shrouded in fictionalized accounts that delegitimize their historic deeds. This is in part due to the lack of sources and lack of attention given to both the fields of women's history and Atlantic history. Taking these women out of fiction legitimizes their role in history, this is especially true in the case of Granuaile O'Malley, a pirate from the 1530s. Her legend has been manipulated many times and so she has come to represent ideals that are in opposition to what she actually stood for. My research focuses on creating a historically accurate depiction of Granuaile, and to separate from the image of the nationalist, feminine, Irish heroine that Granuaile was painted to be in the twentieth century. Granuaile, better known as Grace O'Malley, was the Pirate Queen of the West Irish coast. At her peak she controlled the trading economies of western Ireland, commanded a fleet of galleys, a fighting force of at least 200 men, and was a thorn in the side of the imperial English. In her career she truly embodies the characteristics of a pirate, using blackmail, violence, and fear in order to exert control. In retrospect, she has often been romanticized as a champion for women's right and a warrior for Irish freedom and nationality. The purpose of this research is to have a truer understanding of Granuaile and her motives; to separate the reality from the romanticized. By taking a close analysis at her life, I came to understand that Granuaile is a product of her environment and her motives for piracy and rebellion are survival rather than a nationalist ideology. This research utilizes sources from two different eras: sixteenth century documents, such as the *Salisbury Manuscripts* and *Lambert Place Library Manuscripts*, as well as modern secondary sources. This research was done over the summer as part of the Summer Scholars program in the Humanities and Sciences, and the research was done on my own. At the end of my research I had a 33 page paper detailing the life of Granuaile, and distinguishing between the reality of her career and the romanticized version of her. This work is one step in a larger vision, I hope to continue this research and do other case studies of female pirates. My final vision is to use all of these detailed biographies to do a comparative study of female piracy across different regions and times. In a larger picture this research is important to providing an understanding of gender in piracy. Even within just the life of Granuaile, we can see gender play a role in her career. Female pirates are anomalous but are important for understanding what values hold more weight than gender within the pirate community. This look at Granuaile brings an understanding of piracy and politics in sixteenth century Ireland, as well as a look at how both nations dealt with women and widows. Most importantly this research is a look at the life of a woman, a woman who was independent economically and politically, and also the dominant partner in her marriages and in her life. This research focuses on an anomalous woman and tries to understand how she fits into existing systems of violence, economics, politics, and gender.

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