University of Gdańsk

Subject card

Subject name and code	Between Magic and Religion: Homo Religiosus or Homo Magicus? Faces of Man from Prehistory to the Present, PG_00179114						
Field of study	History						
Date of commencement of studies	October 2025		Academic year of realisation of subject	2025/2026			
Education level	Bachelor's studies		Subject group				
Mode of study	full-time studies		Mode of delivery	e-learning			
Year of study	1		Language of instruction	Polish Polish			
Semester of study	2		ECTS credits	2.0			
Learning profile	academic		Assessment form	credit			
Conducting unit							
Name and surname of lecturer (lecturers)	Subject supervisor	dr Krzysztof Ulanowski					
	Teachers	dr Krzysztof Ulanowski					
Lesson types	Lesson type	Lecture	Tutorial	Laboratory	Project	Seminar	SUM
	Number of study hours	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	30
	E-learning hours included: 30.0						
	eNauczanie source addresses: Moodle ID: 13430 Pomiędzy magią i religią. 2025/2026 https://mdl.ug.edu.pl/course/view.php?id=13430						
Learning activity and number of study hours	Learning activity	Participation in didactic classes included in study plan	Participation in consultation hours	Self-study	SUM		
	Number of study hours	30	0.0	20.0	50		
Subject objectives	The lecture attempts to reconstruct and analyze the tensions and mutual relations between magic and religion in an anthropological, sociological, and historical context. The starting point is the question of the identity of man as a religious being (homo religiosus) and/or magical being (homo magicus), which leads to reflection on the boundaries, convergences, and functions of these two systems of meaning in different cultures and eras.						

Learning outcomes

Course outcome	Subject outcome	Method of verification
	The student knows the basic concepts related to magic, religion and ritual in various cultural and historical contexts. Has knowledge of the differences and similarities between religious systems and magical practices. Knows the most important theories interpreting magical and religious phenomena in the humanities and social sciences. The student demonstrates openness and respect for diverse belief systems and cultural practices. Understands the role of religion and magic in shaping the identity of individuals and communities. Can conduct dialogue and debate on ideological issues in a substantive and tolerant manner. The student is able to analyze and interpret source texts and contemporary descriptions of religious and magical practices. Is able to indicate the social and cultural functions of magical and religious practices in different eras and societies. Is able to critically evaluate phenomena on the border between magic and religion in an anthropological, sociological and historical context.	[SK2] presentation/project/paper/ report

Subject contents

From prehistoric beliefs, through the religions of ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece, to contemporary syncretic phenomena and new forms of spirituality, the lecture defines the changing forms of expression of sacrality, ritual action and transcendence. The focus of the discussion is on man as a subject and creator of worldviews, in which magic and religion often coexist, compete or interpenetrate.

Prerequisites and co-requisites

Assessment methods and criteria

Subject passing criteria	Passing threshold	Percentage of the final grade
Presence/activity	80.0%	25.0%
Presentation/project	80.0%	75.0%

Recommended reading

Basic literature	Frazer J.*, Złota gałąź Studia z magii i religii, Kraków 2023.* ***Malinowski B.,*** Magia, nauka i religia. Warszawa 1990. *Douglas M., Czystość i zmaza. Analiza pojęć nieczystości i tabu. Warszawa 2007.* *Campbell J., Bohater o tysiącu twarzy, Kraków 2013.*
Supplementary literature	**MOSZYŃSKI K**, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, vol. 2. *Kultura duchowa*, Kraków 1934. Ceklarz K., Janicka-Krzywda U.,. *Góralskie czary. Leksykon magii Podtatrza i Beskidów Zachodnich*. Zakopane 2024. Koprowska-Głowacka A., Czarownice z Pomorza i Prus, Gdynia 2021. **CZERNIK S.**, *Trzy zorze dziewicze. Wśród zamawiań i zaklęć*, Łódź 1968.
eResources addresses	

Example issues/ example questions/ tasks being completed	Can magic be considered a form of religion? Or is it the other way around religion is a legitimized form of magic? How do religious rituals differ from magical practices? Can they always be distinguished? Are magic and religion mutually exclusive or do they coexist within a single culture/religion? What is the difference between belief in miracles and magical practice? What function did magic play in traditional societies and does it still play in modern societies? Why was (and is) magic treated as a threat by institutional religions? Has science completely replaced magic, or does it coexist with it? What role do magic and religion play in constructing individual and collective identity? What mechanisms of religious and cultural exclusion are visible in relation to sorcerers, witches, magicians? How does contemporary popular culture redefine the concepts of religion and magic?
Work placement	Not applicable

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