University of Gdańsk

Subject card

Subject name and code	Social practices and rituals in medieval Scandinavia and Iceland, PG_00179399		
Field of study	German Studies, Polish Studies, Romance and Iberian Studies, Applied Linguistics, Logopedics, Scandinavian Studies		
Date of commencement of studies	October 2025	Academic year of realisation of subject	2025/2026
Education level	Master's studies	Subject group	
Mode of study	full-time studies	Mode of delivery	at the university
Year of study	1	Language of instruction	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 hab. Maria Sibińska, prof. UG	
	Teachers	dr Grzegorz Bartusik	

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: 0.0

Additional information:

- Conversational lecture
- Lecture with a multimedia presentation

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	2.0	18.0	50

Subject objectives

The main objective of the course is to deepen students' knowledge of the spiritual and material culture, literature, and religion of medieval Northern Europe, with a particular focus on the daily life and rituals of medieval Scandinavian and Icelandic society. The course also aims to enrich students' reading of medieval Icelandic literature through a contextual approach, highlighting the relationships between Old Norse literature and the social and material reality of medieval Scandinavia and Iceland.

Learning outcomes

Course outcome	Subject outcome	Method of verification
	Knowledge The student: has in-depth knowledge of the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the area of Northern Europe in the Viking Age (K_W11). Skills The student: is able to conduct a critical analysis of literary texts concerning the Viking Age (K_U03). Social competences (attitudes) The student: using knowledge of the historical aspects of multiculturalism in Northern Europe, is ready to promote an attitude of openness towards cultural differences (K_K01).	[SK4] test/exam - oral or written

Subject contents

- *Kvöldvaka* reading, writing, and manuscripts in medieval Scandinavia and Iceland.
- Runestones and runic inscriptions: the mythologization of writing.
- Death and funeral rituals: burial mounds, chamber graves, and ship burials. Accounts from Icelandic sagas, skaldic poetry, and the *Poetic Edda* on death and funerals in the context of archaeological findings.
- The significance of grave goods, ritual gestures, and behaviors in the context of Norse mythology. Cosmology and eschatology in Norse mythology.
- Concepts of the body, soul, and afterlife in Old Norse beliefs. *Draugr* the restless dead and methods to prevent their return (atypical burials, vampire graves, apotropaic rituals).
- Commemorating the dead skaldic mourning poetry (*erfikvæði*). The cult of the dead as a source of Old Norse religion.
- Rituals limiting arbitrary acts of violence: the honor duel (*hólmganga*). The amorality of Old Norse deities, the concept of fate, and divine judgment.
- Blood feud (*hefnd*), customs, and legal regulations related to homicide and murder. The gods Höðr and Loki and the killing of Baldr. Baldr as a "scapegoat" (René Girard). Human sacrifice in Old Norse religion.
- Social exclusion greater and lesser banishment, social stigmas (*níð*, *ergi*), the *níðstang* (pole of shame). Loki and Odin as figures of social norm transgression. Loki as a trickster figure.
- Creating interpersonal bonds: sworn brotherhood (*fóstbræðralag*), foster fatherhood, marriage, and divorce. Family relations among the Old Norse gods (*Æsir* and Vanir).
- Rituals related to childbirth. Infanticide.
- Viking games and pastimes. *Hnefatafl* the strategic board game of medieval Scandinavians.
- The annual rhythm of life in medieval Scandinavia: the calendar and religious festivals of Old Norse religion

Prerequisites and co-requisites

Assessment methods and criteria

Subject passing criteria	Passing threshold	Percentage of the final grade
written or oral test	51.0%	95.0%
active participation	80.0%	5.0%

Recommended reading

Basic literature

Davidson, H. R. E.: Scandinavian Mythology. London-New York 1969.

Lindow, J.: Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs. Oxford 2001.

The Viking World. Ed. S. Brink & N. Price. London - New York 2008.

Turville-Petre, E.O.G.: Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia. London 1964.

	Supplementary literature	Abram, Ch.: Myths of the Pagan North: the Gods of the Norsemen. London 2011. Davidson, H. R. E.: Scandinavian Mythology. London-New York 1969. Gardeła, L.: Bad Death in the Early Middle Ages. Atypical Burials from Poland in a Comparative Perspective / Zła śmierć we wczesnym średniowieczu. Pochówki atypowe z ziem polskich w perspektywie porównawczej. Rzeszów 2017. Gardeła, L.: Worshipping the Dead. Viking Age Cemeteries as Cult Sites? W: Germanische Kultorte. Vergleichende, historische und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Zugange. Red. M. Egeler. Munchen 2016, s. 169-205. Gardeła L.: Dead or alive? "Chamber graves" and their inhabitants in the Old Norse literature and Viking-Age archaeology, W: Scandinavian Culture in Medieval Poland. Red. S. Moździoch et al. Wrocław 2013, s. 373-393. Gardeła, L.: Buried with Honour and Stoned to Death? The Ambivalence of Viking Age Magic in the Light of Archaeology. "Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia" 2009, t. 4, s. 339-375. Lindow, J.: Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs. Oxford 2001. Page, R. I. : Pismo runiczne. Warszawa 1998. Price, N.: Children of Ash and Elm. A History of the Vikings. New York 2022. Price, N.: Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology. "Medieval Archaeology" 2010, t. 54, s. 123-156. Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Trans. A. Faulkes. London 1995. The Complete Sagas of Icelanders. Ed. Vidar Hreinsson. Reykjavik 1997. The Viking World. Ed. S. Brink & N. Price. London - New York 2008. Turville-Petre, E.O.G.: Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia. London 1964.
	eResources addresses	
Example issues/ example questions/ tasks being completed	**Examples of questions for the test:** • What does the kenning *"sun of battle" (*sól gunnar) mean? • List typical grave goods buried with the deceased during funeral rites in medieval Scandinavia. • What apotropaic rituals were performed on the body of a deceased person to prevent their return to the world of the living?	
Work placement	Not applicable	

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