

COURSE DETAIL

CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Country

Netherlands

Host Institution

Utrecht University

Program(s)

Utrecht University

UCEAP Course Level

Upper Division

UCEAP Subject Area(s)

Slavic Studies History

UCEAP Course Number

119

UCEAP Course Suffix**UCEAP Official Title**

CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

UCEAP Transcript Title

RUSSIAN CULTR HIST

UCEAP Quarter Units

6.00

UCEAP Semester Units

4.00

Course Description

The word 'empire' makes one think of the great European naval empires: Portuguese, Dutch, and English. And yet, the third largest empire in history—surpassed only by the Mongol and British Empires—is Russia. Moreover, Russia has sustained its peak territorial extent much longer than any other empire, having been the largest polity on earth for the last 400 years. How should we understand the Russian empire? And how does it help us get a better grasp on recent political events? Much commentary has tried to describe Russia with the classic categories of Western political thought: autocracy, despotism, dictatorship, nationalism, fascism. Others have followed Winston Churchill in declaring Russia to be incomprehensible: 'a mystery wrapped in an enigma'. This course teaches to think about Russia in a different way, and to recognize it as a complex socio-cultural entity that needs to be understood on its own terms. It shows that the most famous events in Russian history—whether the Revolution of 1917, or the full-scale invasion of Ukraine—can only be properly evaluated within the long-term context of Russian imperial history and identity-formation and teaches students to think of a Russia that faces not only 'the West', but also a vast frontier stretching from the Caucasus mountains to the Korean peninsula. The course also places Russian history in comparative perspective, using tools and methods well-known to scholars of International Relations. The course examines whether Russian autocracy is a unique cultural phenomenon, or whether it bears similarities to other political regimes throughout history. Most importantly, it considers the constant interaction between culture and politics. How did shifting conceptions of gender shape the Russian imperial project? How was the Empire's extraordinary diversity in terms of religious belief, mother tongue, ethnicity or lifestyle studied, interpreted, codified in law, and leveraged for political gains or reinforcing power hierarchies? How has political authority been conceptualized by Russians and their subjects, not just in high politics and formal treatises, but also in art, literature, and other forms of cultural expression? At the end of this course, understand the long-term origins of the Russian Empire, and be able to debate how these origins shape Russian culture and society today.

Language(s) of Instruction

English

Host Institution Course Number

GE2V24004

Host Institution Course Title

CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Host Institution Course Details

<https://osiris-student.uu.nl/onderwijscatalogus/extern/cursus>

Host Institution Campus

Utrecht University

Host Institution Faculty

Faculty of Humanities

Host Institution Degree

Host Institution Department

Course Last Reviewed

2025-2026

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