

Russian Empires Old and New

How does the New Russia reflect the Old Russia?

Purpose: Russia is much in the news today, in ways that mirror old imperial Russia before communism. We will explore this connection.

Moderator:	Gordon Wyse
Co-moderator:	Larry Ambs
Date and Time:	Tuesday morning, 9:30-11:30 10 weeks, starting September 25
Format:	Seminar
Location:	UMass Transit Center, Amherst

Description: Churchill famously called Russia “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Russia is again an international challenge, and as enigmatic as ever. This seminar will examine the continuity between the Old Russia and the New Russia.

How did Russia become a major empire? How do the Russian empires of the Tsars relate to the Russia of today? Our thesis is that the Old Russian empires provide a lens through which to see modern Russia. Put another way, modern Russia, Putin’s Russia, attempts to recreate the authority and hegemony of the Old Russian empires. Common aspects include autocracy, expansionism, religion, and the weakness of legal constraints.

We plan to concentrate on imperial Russia and contemporary Russia, paying less attention to the Soviet era in between. Seminar topics will include emperors and political and social issues from Tsarist Russia, and foreign and domestic policies and major figures in contemporary Russia.

Role of participants: Participants will each give a 30-minute presentation and lead a discussion following it.

Resources: We recommend a couple of books (but don’t require them). Current favorites are: *Russian History: A Very Short Introduction*, Hosking, G., 2012; and *Who Lost Russia?*, Conradi, P., 2017. (There are many sources; we will provide a list of recent alternatives.)

About the Moderators: Gordon has led seminars in science and history, and taken seminars on many topics. Larry has led many seminars and taken many more, on historical and other topics. Gordon previously moderated a seminar entitled “Russia: the Last 100 Years”; Larry moderated a seminar (with Bob Romer) on “The Vikings,” which included their role in early Russian history.

Maximum number of participants: 18

Auditors accepted: yes, up to 2

Course # 18FRU