

History of the Ottomans: The Turks and Their Empire

Tuesday, October 13 to December 1, 2026 - 10am to noon

On Zoom

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Presenter: Dr. Olivier Courteaux

Course Overview:

Nomadic peoples from the steppes of Mongolia, the first Turks were fearless (and the most feared) warriors who ended up dominating the Middle East. Migrating to the West, they built, under the Ottomans, one of the most powerful political entities in History. This unique empire, which spread over three continents, lasted some six hundred years.

Following the First World War, defeated and humiliated, the old empire collapsed and made way to a modern nation-state: Turkey. Since its birth in 1923, Turkey has become a regional superpower, oscillating between its alliance with the West (NATO), Central Asia, Russia, and neighboring Arab states. Its current president, Erdogan, who won re-election in 2023, can no longer rely on healthy economic growth. To maintain himself in power, as the ongoing Ukrainian conflict tells us, he never hesitates to play one side against the other.

October 13: Why did the Turks seize Constantinople?

- When the Turks looked outwards to Europe, from Soliman the Magnificent to Ataturk.

October 20: The Ottoman Empire

- A unique, multi-ethnic and multilingual empire from the Balkans to the shores of North Africa.

October 27: The “Sick Man of Europe: The Decline of the Ottoman Empire

- The decline of the Ottoman Empire.

November 3: 1912-1922: A Ten-Year War

- From defeat to renewed pride – the birth of Turkey as a modern nation state.

November 10: Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk)

- Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk): the father of a nation.

November 17: From Mustapha Kemal to Recep Erdogan

- The art of re-writing history.

November 24: Turkey as a Regional Superpower

- A precarious balance between the West, Russia and Asia.

December 1: Turkey's Game in the Middle East

- What is Erdogan up to?

Biography:

An accomplished lecturer, historian and author, Dr. Courteaux received his PhD in History from the University of Paris-Sorbonne and was a faculty member at Royal Military College and at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson). He is a frequent lecturer for several later life learning programs in Toronto including those at Glendon College, TMU and Learning Unlimited Etobicoke.

He is the author of "Canada Between Vichy and Free France, 1940-1945 (2013) and "Quatre Journee qui Ebranlerent le Quebec" on Charles de Gaulle's famous 1967 'Vive le Quebec Libre' (2017). He is currently working on his latest book, "Suez, 1869, the Last Triumph of the Empress Eugenie".

Committee Contact and Chair: Deb Forsyth-Petrov