

Dear Colleagues and Students,

You are kindly invited to the seminar entitled as “The Battle of Nicopolis (1396) From the Perspective of French Authors” organized by the Department of History.

**Date:** 20 February 2025, Thursday

**Time:** 16.30

**Venue:** A-130 FEASS Seminar Room

**Title:** The Battle of Nicopolis (1396) From the Perspective of French Authors

**Speaker:** Zeynep Kocabıyıköğlü Çeçen, Royal Holloway, University of London

**Abstract:**

The Battle of Nicopolis, fought in 1396 within the present-day borders of Bulgaria, ended with the defeat of the Crusader army, primarily composed of French knights, against Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I. This battle was the first major encounter between Western Europe and the Ottomans, leaving a significant impact on France due to the heavy losses among its noble knights. The battle's aftermath is extensively reflected in various contemporary Western European literary works, providing critical perspectives on both the battle and the Ottomans.

These sources are valuable for historical analysis in two ways: first, they offer insights into early Western European perceptions of the Ottomans before they were considered a major threat; second, they serve as important references for understanding the Battle of Nicopolis, which is relatively underrepresented in Ottoman historiography. This lack of focus in Ottoman sources is attributed to later events, such as the 1402 defeat of Bayezid by Timur and the subsequent interregnum, as well as the shift in Ottoman historiography towards imperial expansion after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

The presentation paper will explore seven French texts, namely works by Philippe de Mézières, Honorat Bovet, Eustache Deschamps, historical chronicles of Jean Froissart and of the Saint-Denis Monastery, an anonymous chivalric chronicle all written in the immediate aftermath of the defeat and the travelogue of Bertrandon de la Broquière written in the mid fifteenth-century. The earlier works depict the battle's impact, criticising the Crusaders' lack of discipline and excessive luxury while also acknowledging the military prowess and organizational skills of the Ottomans. Notably, some texts describe Bayezid I as both a formidable and pragmatic leader, while others emphasize the Ottomans' perceived cruelty. Broquière's work, written in the context of later Burgundian crusading ambitions, while highlighting continued Western interest in understanding Ottoman military strategies, also reinforces the credibility of the earlier accounts through its first-hand observations on Ottoman discipline, warfare tactics, and governance that align with them.

Moreover, all these texts, while illustrating how Western Europe, still unfamiliar with the Ottomans, grappled with the reality of their military capabilities while simultaneously seeking to learn from and counter them in future encounters.

**Bio:**

Zeynep Kocabıyıköğlü Çeçen received her MA and PhD in History from Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey, in 2005 and 2012, respectively. She has taught as a part-time instructor at Bilkent and TED Universities in Ankara and has been affiliated with Royal Holloway, University of London, as an honorary research associate since 2023.

Her research primarily focuses on the reflections of late medieval knighthood and the Crusades in medieval literature, as well as their memory in Turkey from the late nineteenth century onward. More broadly, she is interested in knighthood, warfare, and East-West interactions.

In addition to publishing articles in international journals and conference proceedings, she has co-edited and co-authored Ayşegül Keskin Çolak'a Armağan: Tarih ve Edebiyat Yazıları (2016), a collection of essays on history and literature. She also edited and co-authored Orta Çağ'a Yeni Yaklaşımlar (2019), a volume of essays on the Middle Ages, and translated and edited Berthe Georges-Gaulis'den Mektuplar: Bir Fransız Gazetecinin Türkiye ve Ortadoğu İzlenimleri (2021), a collection of early twentieth-century letters on Turkey and the Middle East.

Her most recent publication is Haçlıların Hezimetini Niğbolu Muharebesi: Fransız Kaynaklarından Türkler'e Bakış (2024), which includes translations of medieval French sources and their analysis. Her forthcoming works include a chapter on the memory of the Crusades in Turkey and an English translation of Philippe de Mézières's Epistre Lamentable (1397), both to be published by Routledge in 2026–27.