

## PRAISING THE TURK AFTER NICOPOLIS: FRENCH SOURCES

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### Abstract

The Crusade of Nicopolis (1396) fought and led by a great number of Franco-Burgundian noblemen and knights against the Ottoman Turks was a great blow to Christendom and especially to the kingdom of France. The impact of the defeat in France can easily be detected from contemporary writings where, in addition to lamenting the defeat, there was a critical stance towards the crusaders coupled with an apparent awe towards Ottoman soldiers. The presence of similar themes in different genres of writing in the period may suggest an early humanist tendency that enables an objective evaluation of the infidel albeit hand in hand with the commonplace “scourge of God” theme. Moreover, however they should possibly be based on true accounts, the authors’ praise of Turks may have served a completely different agenda given the background of the contemporary decadence among men-at-arms in France, going through a difficult time in terms of its military and politics.

**Keywords:** *Nicopolis, crusade, knightly criticism, Ottoman Turks, humanism*

### Öz

#### **Niğbolu Sonrasında Türke Övgü: Fransız Kaynakları**

Çok sayıda Fransız ve Burgonyalı asilzade ve şövalyenin liderliğinde Osmanlı Türklerine karşı savaşılan Niğbolu Haçlı Seferinin (1396) başarısızlığı, Hıristiyan alemi, özellikle de Fransa krallığı için büyük bir darbe olmuştu. Yenilginin Fransa’daki etkisi, yenilgiye ağıt yakmanın yanı sıra haçlılara karşı eleştirel bir tavırla beraber Türklere karşı belirgin bir hayranlık da sergileyen o dönemde yazılmış eserlerden kolaylıkla anlaşılabilir. Değişik edebi türlerde yazılmış eserlerde benzer temaların olması ve Türkler ile ilgili gözlemlerin gerçekliği Orta Çağ’da alışılmış olan “Tanrı’nın sopası” temasının yanında var olan ve kâfirlerin nesnel değerlendirilmelerini mümkün kılan erken bir hümanist eğilime işaret ediyor olabilir. Ayrıca, her ne kadar bu değerlendirmeler gerçek anlatılara dayanıyor olabilsen de yazarların Türklere olan övgüsü, arka planda askerî ve siyasi açıdan zor zamanlar geçiren Fransa’da şövalyelerin yozlaşmasına dair eleştiriler göz önüne alındığında tamamıyla farklı bir gündeme hizmet etmiş olabilir.

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Niğbolu, Haçlı, şövalyelik eleştirisi, Osmanlı Türkleri, hümanizm*

While the battle of Nicopolis, an Ottoman victory against a joint army of crusaders from western Europe, did not get much attention in the Ottoman sources, it left a deep impact in the western memory, especially in the kingdom of France from where the bulk of the crusaders had come from. The evidence is the contemporary French accounts and literature attesting to the deep resonances of the crusaders' defeat. Interestingly, these writings also contain a certain amount of praise towards the Turk concerning mainly their military qualities. This paper will focus on the impact of the battle in a variety of French works composed in the aftermath of the defeat as well as try to analyse and comment on their laudatory remarks towards the Turks.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 1396 at Nicopolis, the Ottoman Turks defeated a crusading army led by Sigismund, the king of Hungary and Jean, the duke of Nevers, son of Philip the Bold of Burgundy who was the uncle and regent to king Charles VI of France, and *de facto* ruler of the kingdom of France at the time.<sup>1</sup> Although the crusade had earlier been seen as the culmination of the peace efforts between the English and French crowns following a period of intermittent warfare -which would later be known as the Hundred Years' War- at the end of the day, this was not a joint crusade of English and French crowns but rather the peace just provided favourable circumstances for knights on both sides to enlist.<sup>2</sup> While the army comprised a few knights and aristocrats from England and Italy either as mercenaries or as Knights Hospitallers,<sup>3</sup> some Bohemian and Polish knights and a small contingent from Aragon, its bulk apart from Hungarians and Wallachians led by Sigismund, was made of Franco-Burgundian and German contingents.<sup>4</sup>

The duke of Nevers left in the April of 1396 from the Burgundian capital, Dijon, in the company of Franco-Burgundian aristocrats and knights of his own household as well as others, among whom the most prominent names were Jean II le Meingre Bouciquaut, the Marshal of France; his cousins Philip of Artois, the constable of France and Henri de Bar, Count de la Marche, Guillaume de la Trémoille, the Marshal of Burgundy, Jean the Vienne, the admiral of France and Enguerrand de Coucy VII, the son-in-law to Edward III of England.<sup>5</sup> Even if the idea of crusading had lost much of its ardour

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<sup>1</sup> Nicopolis was only the beginning of a series of commitments to crusading on the part of the dukes of Burgundy; even if their only other participation in an expedition against the Turks was in 1444, throughout the fifteenth century the dukes would be ardent propagators of the cause with or without papal initiative. Philip the Good, the son of Jean of Nevers sent relief against the Mamluks a few times during the 1420s and 1440s and once against the Ottomans when they besieged Constantinople in 1444-5. Paviot 2004, p.71.

<sup>2</sup> Housley 2003, p.36. See *Epistre au Roi Richart* as an example of the expectations of crusade tied up to the peace between the two crowns.

<sup>3</sup> Although Atiya declares that contingents of "France, England, Germany and Spain" made up the largest portion of the crusading army, Tipton discusses convincingly that refutes all claims that the English, excepting the contingent of the "English tongue" of Knights Hospitallers, partook in the expedition at all. Atiya 1934; Tipton 1962, p.528-540.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolle 1999, p.35-37.

<sup>5</sup> For the list of participants belonging to the household of the duke of Burgundy, see the ordonnance by the duke issued on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1396. Schnerb informs that the duke's household were given

by the time,<sup>6</sup> the campaign still managed to attract great numbers including prominent knights of the kingdom of France.<sup>7</sup> Yet these, excepting the seasoned knights Coucy and Jean de Vienne, were mostly youth seeking personal renown and glory, simply hungry for a good fight.

Thus, the expedition, “a military consecration envied by all bachelors”<sup>8</sup>, hence a highly prestigious chivalric adventure, set off with the unwavering confidence of its participants to defeat the “infidel”.<sup>9</sup> This can be called a chivalric expedition not only regarding the motives of its participants but also by the allocation of its combatants: the household of the duke of Burgundy next to its 108 knights and 107 squires comprised only 12 archers and 22 crossbowmen, which is not unlikely to speak for a general pattern for the overall crusading army.<sup>10</sup> The low percent of archers and crossbowmen might reflect the contemporary mind-set that favours hand-to-hand combat on horses as the most chivalric and ideologically appropriate way to defeat the infidels.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that the crusaders initially won a few skirmishes and captured some castles,<sup>12</sup> as their leaders, mostly lacking any knowledge of the Turkish military skills and organization, refused to take advice from their Hungarian and Wallachian allies who had the first-hand

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*gages* by the duke of Burgundy before setting out, and Housley confirms that “high-ranking participants funded their ‘montres’”. Schnerb 1996, p. 60-62; Atiya 1934, p.144-146; Housley 2003, p.36.

<sup>6</sup> See the following among others on the lassitude of western rulers towards taking the cross and the primacy of their regional concerns. Atiya 1938; Housley 1992; Schein 1985; Tyerman 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Although the contemporaries put the number of men in the crusading army to be around 100,000, now it is considered to be about a tenth of that number. Atiya 1934, p.66-99; Housley 1992, p. 76, Rosetti 1936/1937, p.629-28, Setton1976, p.351-53. Still, if we are to bear in mind that the English crossed the English Channel with an army of about 6,000-7,000 men to fight the French in 1415, 10,000 was quite an impressive number for an expedition to such distant lands.

<sup>8</sup> Gaucher 1996, p.96.

<sup>9</sup> There was no clear distinction of the Turks as a specific Muslim people as yet, and neither did the crusade leaders do not pay too much attention to whom they were about to fight as long as it was some infidel. Housley 2003, p.31-34.

<sup>10</sup> These were higher figures than those in any other expedition the Burgundy household has participated in the past twenty years. Schnerb informs that Flanders, Artois and Picardie were present in significant numbers as well. If we were to accept Froissart’s total of 1000 knights and squires for the whole of the Franco-Bourguignon contingent, the share of the duke’s household in it seems quite notable. Schnerb 1996, p.61-65; *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol. 15, p.230.

<sup>11</sup> Nicolle 1999, p.19; Hatto 1940, p. 40-54.

<sup>12</sup> After the crusaders captured Vidin, some 500 men including Count d’Eu, Bouciquaut and Enguerrand de Coucy rushed towards Rachowa in order not to let the honour of victory go to the Hungarians, resulting in their escaping defeat only with the aid of Hungarians. Then there is a mention of a scouting expedition led by de Coucy just before the battle of Nicopolis, allegedly resulting in the defeat of a Turkish force of 6000 with only 1000 men. See *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol.15, 2p.65-267 on scouting; *Le Livre des fais*, p. 94-98 on Rachowa.

experience,<sup>13</sup> they soon fell against the army of Beyazıt, who arrived at Nicopolis straight away,-hence the nickname “thunder”- abandoning his siege of Constantinople.

When the news of the defeat reached home, the whole kingdom of France was obviously shaken for the loss of several of their noble knights and warriors, including the constable, the marshal, and numerous noblemen. Apart from those few who managed to flee the battleground, and those under twenty who were not found fit to die, most of the knights and warriors not worthy of putting to ransom were executed on the orders of the Sultan. Although in several accounts Beyazıt is said to have ended the massacre half-way on the advice of his counsellors, it is believed that around three to five thousand men-at-arms must have already been beheaded. More Christians might have been killed after the battle than during, and those not killed were either kept by the Sultan and his men in slavery or taken to be sold in distant lands.<sup>14</sup> Like the dead, these men were lost to their families for good as almost none ever managed to return.<sup>15</sup> Among those few noblemen and knights who were ransomed<sup>16</sup>, still fewer were able to make it home as many died of illness.<sup>17</sup> As opposed to the fact that the Turkish chronicles treated the battle as nothing

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<sup>13</sup> Lalande 1988, p. 58-65; Nicolle 1999, p.19-21, 33-41; De Vries 1999, 540; Rosetti 1936/1937, p. 633-35. The following contemporary accounts reflect the lack of understanding between the Duke of Nevers and his counsellors on one side and Sigismund and Mircea on the other: *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, vol.2, p.494-503; *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol.15, p.313-315. Bouciquaut’s biographer makes it explicit that he is responding to the accusations of the Monk of St.Denis, but omits the part where the Franco-Bourguignon leaders refuse to hear Sigismund and Mircea. *Le Livre des fais*, p.102-113. Housley 2003, p.37-38.

Bertrand Schnerb conveys that the insistence of the Franco-Burgundian leaders, primarily of Philip d’Artois and Maréchal Bouciquaut, was supported by the ordonnances of Philip the Bold issued in Mars 1396, where it was asserted that the Count of Nevers and his company “should ‘require the avant-garde’” against the Turks. Schnerb 1996, p.67.

<sup>14</sup> It is Froissart who notes the higher casualties after the battle than during, puts the number of the executed at only 300, whereas the Monk of Saint Denis puts it at 3000. Kelly de Vries thinks the number should be closer to the latter, around 5000. While the Monk of Saint Denis explains Beyazıt’s massacre with his revenge for the crusaders’ execution of Turkish prisoners at Rachowa, Johann Schiltberger maintains that Sultan started the massacre after he got upset by the Turkish losses on the battlefield, which De Vries repeats. *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol.15, p.321; *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, vol.2, p.500,519; *Travels of Johann Schiltberger*, p. 4-5; De Vries 2003, p. 164-65.

<sup>15</sup> Johann Schiltberger was a rare example of those prisoners who were able to return home, even though after almost three decades of life in slavery. Barely sixteen years of age at Nicopolis, he managed to return home in 1427. See *Travels of Johann Schiltberger*.

<sup>16</sup> DeVries puts the number of ransomed at 300, though in contemporary accounts it is usually made seem like a dozen or a couple of dozens. Yet given that the incomplete list Schnerb provides for the Franco-Bourguignon survivors who had participated in other crusades before totals to eighteen excluding those whose lives were spared but died in captivity, we can assume it was at least two dozens or more. Although Froissart gives only a dozen names for those put to ransom, he later conveys that 300 more survived by fleeing the battlefield. De Vries, 2003, p.165; Schnerb 1996, p.72-74; *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol.15, p.321-30; *Le Livre des fais*, p.114.

<sup>17</sup> Lalande 1988, p. 67-70; Nicolle 1999, p. 65-73.

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more than a “minor episode” in the expansion of Turks into Europe<sup>18</sup>, we can easily find that French sources saw it as nothing less than a disaster. These sources, whether chronicles that record the memorable events in French history, chivalric biographies celebrating the life and achievements of a knight, or didactic verse or prose aimed at counselling princes on political and military matters, all resonate the shocking impact the defeat had in France, as well as the shame and suffering that ensued.

A very moving poem by the court poet Eustache Deschamps illustrates the atmosphere of mourning in France after the defeat very well. In “Pour les Français morts a Nicopolis”, the poet cries his heart out for those dead on the battlefield while remembering the valiant participants of the crusade and swearing vengeance against the Turks.<sup>19</sup> In another work, a didactic piece written in the wake of the defeat of the crusading army, *Une Epistre Lamentable et Consolatoire*, Philippe de Mézières, one-time councillor to king Charles V, comments that the defeat has wounded Christian honour so severely as it has never been in the past hundred years.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Jean Froissart, the author of the chivalric *Chroniques de France et d'Angleterre* registers the damage of the battle of Nicopolis as so much severe than that; he claims that it was unprecedented since Roncesvalles, the legendary defeat of Charlemagne’s army under Roland, about five hundred years ago.<sup>21</sup> Another contemporary chivalric piece, the epic biography of Marshal Bouciquaut, one of the leaders of the campaign, recounts that the defeat was received by great grief not only by the duke of Burgundy who feared the life of his son, but by the families of all other lords, knights and squires who were lost, and a great mourning began throughout the kingdom of France with masses sung in the chapels of all the lords, “everybody lamenting the noble knights who had fallen there”.<sup>22</sup> The author of the *Chronicle of The Monk of St.Denis*, Michel Pintoin conveys more or less the same feelings as Bouciquaut’s anonymous biographer:

So, it was a general desolation. The great lords were above all distressed; they turned themselves to the most bitter despair... they could not hold back their sobbing and tears... Everywhere there were only moans and wailings. Everyone mourned loudly the death of a relative or a friend. There was not one family in the realm who did not lament some loss at home. Men and women, all wore the clothes of mourning for the death of their friends and family.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kaçar and Dumolyn, 2013, p. 905-34.

<sup>19</sup> Atiya 1934, p.129-30.

<sup>20</sup> *Une Epistre lamentable*, p.124.

<sup>21</sup> *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol.15, p. 316.

<sup>22</sup> *Le Livre des fais*, p.118-20. Later on, the duke of Nevers when he succeeded his father as the duke of Burgundy, had mass sung at the anniversaries of the defeat. Schnerb 1996, p.69.

<sup>23</sup>“Ce fut alors une désolation générale. Les principaux seigneurs furent surtout consternes; ils se livrèrent au plus amer désespoir...qu’ils ne pouvaient retenir leurs sanglots et leurs larmes ... Ce n’était partout que plaintes et lamentations. Chacun pleurait hautement la mort d’un parent ou d’un ami. Il n’y avait point de famille dans la royaume qui n’eût à déplorer quelque perte domestique. Hommes et femmes, tous prirent des habits de deuil pour la mort de leurs proches.” *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, vol. 2, p.523. [All translations from *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys* are mine].

Obviously, chivalric literature like Bouciquaut's biography or Froissart's chronicles, however shaken by the defeat, did not see it as a sign of decline on the part of the leading warriors of the crusade, namely the knights, whose glorification was their major concern. Others, however, did find in it a great deal to worry about the current state of knighthood, which had hitherto been an emblem of military pride for the west. Pintoin describes the defeat as if instigating the fall of knighthood in the eyes of the infidel enemy:

The Christians who had until then advanced like lions, became more fearful than hares; their captains could not even persuade them to draw their sword and to put themselves in order of battle, nor they could force them to look like wanting to defend themselves... Like that, the loud victory of the Christians dispersed like a hollow smoke. Their valour, that was until then so terrific, vanished suddenly, and became the mockery of the infidels and miscreants, of whom beforehand they were the terror."<sup>24</sup>

Honoré Bovet, a Benedictine monk and a doctor of decretals at the University of Avignon<sup>25</sup> conveys the same feeling in his *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, written only two years after the defeat, through a fictitious Saracen<sup>26</sup> coming from Bajazet's court. His Saracen declares that,

For among us, the French  
Are called the most courageous of all Christians,  
The most noble and most mighty,  
Most formidable and valiant in arms.<sup>27</sup>  
But now,  
... even with all the wars you wage,  
You are but little feared by us.<sup>28</sup>

Both authors suggest that with their defeat at Nicopolis, the Christian, or more specifically the French knights' military weaknesses have been exposed and so they were stripped of their prestigious position as military champions. What is more, they have

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<sup>24</sup> "Les Français, qui jusqu'alors s'étaient avancés comme des lions, devinrent plus craintifs que des jievres; leurs capitaines ne purent pas même persuader de tirer lépee et se mettre en ordre de bataille, ni les obliger à faire mine de vouloir se defendre ... Ainsi la gloire éclatante des Chrétiens se dissipa comme une vaine fumée. Leur valeur, jusqu'alors si terrible, s'évanouit tout à coup, et devint la rière des infidels et des mécréants, dont ils étaient auparavant la terreur." *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, vol. 2, p. 510.

<sup>25</sup> Batany 1982, p. 21-22; *L'Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p.4-15.

<sup>26</sup> Using a Saracen mouthpiece was a literary practice not at all uncommon throughout the Middle Ages, and we can still find traces of it even in the eighteenth century. Among well-known examples, numerous Saladin stories circulating in the West between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries can be cited as well as Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*. Jubb 2000, p.103-23; Batany1982, p. 21-30.

<sup>27</sup> "Car les François sont entre nous/ Sur tous Crestiens nommés plus prou, / Plus nobles et les plus puissans, / Plusfiers, en armes plus vaillans." *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p. 82-83, line 315-318. [All translations from *Apparicion* are Hanly's].

<sup>28</sup> "Mais a tout ce que guerrez avez, / Entre nous estes pou doubtés." *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p. 88-89, line 418.

noted that the French lost face against one enemy that they should be victorious against, the infidel Turks, who used to fear them. With the defeat already diminishing spirits in France, to highlight that it was not only the battle which was lost but their glorious renown as noble warriors vis-à-vis the “other”, must have been intended as a slap in the face for all those taking pride in their knighthood. With the memory of the valiant deeds of Godfrey of Bouillon and his fellowmen still fresh in minds thanks to their persistent celebration in chivalric romances, chronicles and biographies, it is highly probable that Bovet’s or Pinton’s remarks had the intended effect of alarming their audience about the consequences of the Nicopolis defeat. It is plausible that the defeat also raised questions about what went wrong with the crusading army. Bouciquaut’s biographer clearly writing in defence of the entire career of the Marshal, makes it explicit earlier on that he is answering to those who want to know why and how the defeat came about.<sup>29</sup>

So, what exactly happened? Having left home with their shining armours and skyrocketing confidence to earn victory against the Turks, whose exact identity and fighting methods were scarcely familiar, why did the crusaders suffer such a disastrous end? Was it the Turks who were invincible or was there something amiss with the crusading army?

While we can contend that the Nicopolis crusaders did actually know little about who they were going to fight and how the Ottoman Turks fought, the French acquaintance with the Turks went back to the Merovingian era. The name “Turk” first appears in the Frankish chronicles of the seventh century, interestingly with the mention of the Turks’ common origins with the Franks.<sup>30</sup> Although Merovingians did not fight their contemporary Turks, namely the Ashina (Gokturk) or Khazar Turks, but possibly shared political allies with them,<sup>31</sup> the Franks on the first crusade fought the Seljukid Turks on their way to the Holy Land in 1097. Even though they were victorious against them, the author of *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, did praise the Turks’ prowess and valour as a good match to those of Franks, possibly for the purpose of asserting that the Franks did not have an easy win, and maybe also because he wanted to invoke the earlier story of the two nations’ common ancestry. We can find the same repeated in several accounts through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries possibly with

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<sup>29</sup> *Le Livre des fais*, p. 88.

<sup>30</sup> It was Frédégaire who first mentioned the Turks in his chronicle, and his story can be found to have been repeated by Aimoin of Fleury in the tenth century. On the issue of the common Trojan ancestry between Franks and Turks, see MacMaster 2014, p.1-12; Hankins 1995, p. 111-207; Bisaha 2004, chap.2, Kobo Edition; Meserve 2008, chap.1, Kindle Edition.

<sup>31</sup> Gokturks were the first Turkic state in history, and Khazars their successors. It is assumed that Gokturks/Khazars were allied with Byzantium, just like the Merovingian state at the time. Meserve maintains that while Khazars were in alliance with Heraclius against the Sassanids during 626-27, they fought the Arabs who replaced the Persians well into the eighth century also to profit Byzantium. On the other hand, Mac Master claims Gokturk-Byzantine alliance, but admits that if so, it must have been a century before Frédégaire, so the knowledge passed on to him through the generations. Meserve, 2008, “Introduction”; MacMaster 2014, p. 5-7; Hankins, 1995, p.139.

*Gesta Francorum* as their common source.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, when a call for crusade against the Turks was made at the end of the fourteenth century, the name “Turk” should have been familiar to French knights and noblemen though they possibly did not distinguish these Turks from the Ottomans or know much about the Ottoman Turks beyond the name. Bovey, who depicts the envoy from Beyazıt’s court as “black as coal”, thus an African, or Pintoin who gives a portrayal of the Sultan angry at the crusaders for “provoking the anger of Jesus-Christ”<sup>33</sup>, quite clearly did not have any notion of what the Turks looked like or believed in, and it is dubious if they cared at all. Moreover, let alone the French, not even those closer to the Turkish threat had a totally accurate knowledge of what was going on with the Ottomans: for example, the most prominent voice of the Republic of Florence, the chancellor Coluccio Salutati, erroneously thought the battle of Kosovo (1389) resulted with an Ottoman defeat.<sup>34</sup> Phillipe de Mézières was an exception to this general ignorance about the Turks: possibly due to his vast experiences of crusading in the Mediterranean such as at Smyrna in 1346 and Adalia in 1361 and his service at the court of the king of Cyprus for more than a decade, he knew quite a lot about the Ottomans and other Turcoman tribes in the region, including details such as how they came into existence and who their leaders were.<sup>35</sup> After a short but detailed account of the history of the Ottoman Turks, Mézières concludes that the success of the Turks in conquering so many kingdoms should be attributed to their valour and the “rule they have kept well in their army”, hence their military discipline.<sup>36</sup>

While the other authors lacked a comparable in-depth knowledge about the identity of the Ottoman Turks, we can still find astonishing details of the Turkish military organization and customs in their accounts. Salutati, lamenting the Nicopolis defeat in a letter to the Margrave of Moravia, gave a quite elaborate portrayal of the Turkish military life:

It is astonishing how the leader cultivates their men in the art of war, ten or twelve-year old boys are seized for military service. Through hunting and labours they inure and harden them, and through running, leaping and this daily training and experience they become vigorous. They eat coarse food and heavy black bread with many kinds of grains mixed into it; whatever delicate foods they eat are acquired by the sweat of hunting. They are so well trained that they live contentedly with only one set of clothing and on bread alone. Remarkably tolerant of cold and heat, they endure rain and snow without complaint.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Gesta Francorum*, p.21. We can find *Gesta Dei per Francos*, Chronicles of William of Tyre, Hugh St. Victor, Rigord, Vincent Beauvais, and others repeating the same account in different versions.

<sup>33</sup> *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p. 69; *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, p.499.

<sup>34</sup> Bisaha 2004, chap.1, n. 64.

<sup>35</sup> *Une Epistre lamentable*, Mézières, *Songe du Vieil Pélerin*, vol 1, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Une Epistre lamentable*, p. 216.

<sup>37</sup> *Mirum in modum principes ipsorum gentes suas ad bella nutriunt; decem vel duodecim annorum pueros ad militiam rapiunt, verationibus et laboribus assuefaciunt atque durant, ad currendum exsiliendumque qutotidiana doctrina et experientia strenuos reddunt. cibis grossissimis paneque solido, nigro, multisque permixto frugibus pascuntur; quod delicatus comedunt sudore*



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Back in France, Bovet echoes Salutati as he puts the following into the mouth of his Saracen:

But we Saracens, on the other hand,  
As my lord of Nevers knows,  
We live otherwise, for certain:  
Clear water and a bit of bread  
Is a big meal for a Saracen,  
So, there's no worry over cellared wines,  
Or what meat is in season;  
If any is found, that is first-rate.  
And when it is time to go to bed,  
He does not worry about disrobing,  
Or trouble himself with looking for straw,  
But only with finding some solid ground.  
Fine cooking matters not to him,  
Neither roasts nor meat pies  
Nor *sauce verte* nor *cameline*  
Nor *blanc mange* with *poudre fine*.  
Such things make a man soft,  
One who cannot endure hunger or cold,  
One who, if he sleeps outdoors,  
Loses his strength and his health.<sup>38</sup>

Bovet's observations about the Turkish soldiers' self-discipline and frugal habits have a striking resemblance to those of Froissart who gives an account of Beyazit showing his noble prisoners around his capital where he holds them captive:

The count of Nevers and all other French lords who were at the court of Beyazit were greatly astonished at the great state he held and [that] he and his men lodged on road as no town could [be big enough] to hold them. [Although] they [should] have spent and supplied so much in beverages as in food in the household of the aforesaid Beyazit, there is no point to think or to consider hardly so much was come and taken because [in]the hot

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ventionis acquirunt; denique taliter instituti sunt, quod unica veste soloque pane contenti vivant. Mirum in modum patientes frigoris et caloris, imbres et nives ... sine querela suscipient. *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, p. 208-9. Here reiterated from Bisaha 2004, chap.2, n.89 [Translation is Bisaha's].

<sup>38</sup> Mais nous Sarrazins tout envers, / Com scet monseigneur de Nevers, / Vivons autrement, pour certain: / L'eaue clere et un pou de pain / Est grant disner d'un Sarrazin, / Sy n'a cure de noble vin / Ne de char qui soit de saison; / S'il en trouve, ce soit emprun. / Et quant ce vendra au gesir / Il n'a cure de desvestir, / Ne daignera fuerre querre, / Mais qu'il treuve seüre terre. / De grant cuisine ne lui chault, / Ne de rost, ne pastes chault, / Ne saulse vert ne cameline / Ne blanc mengier de pouldre fine. / Telz choses fonu un homme tendre / Que fain ne froit ne puet atendre, / et s'il gist en lieu descouvert, / Sa vertu et santé pert. *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p. 88-91, line 435-454.

countries they live, all men led a sober life and had little meat, and consumed spices and especially sugar in great quantities, because they are in abundance, as well as goat milk which is the common drink of the Turks and the Saracens. And they have plenty of bread made of millet, young goats and all [kinds of] venison.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, these authors, just like Mézières, certainly appreciate the Turkish military discipline, and interestingly in a similar language which makes one think that they must have had a common source. Salutati's letter to Margrave of Moravia was written in 1397, and so was Mézières's *Epistre*, though we do not know exactly when during the year. Bovet writing in 1398, repeats Salutati's depiction of the Turkish soldiers so closely that one suspects if he might have heard about the letter. Even though the two clergymen served different popes, 1398 was the year when the kingdom of France subtracted obedience from the Avignon Pope, so a period of rapprochement between two sides in the Western Schism. Thus, it is possible that two men corresponded, or at least that Bovet knew about the other's correspondence; anyway, given the influence of Salutati as the master of the formal letter, it is quite possible that Bovet would be inspired. Obviously, neither Salutati nor Bovet, both of whom were men of the Church, nor Froissart who was a court poet/chronicler travelling between England and France, nor even Mézières, although once a wandering knight, now in retirement at the monastery of Celestines, had been at Nicopolis, or visited the Sultan's court afterwards. They might have heard about the crusaders' predicament by the Christmas of 1396 when escapees from the battle arrived in Paris and these were followed shortly by the crusaders' envoy from Beyazit's court with news of the defeat and the fate of the crusaders. In another six months the ambassadors from the French court to the Sultan's would have come back to spice up the stories about the Sultan and his army. We know that Pintoin and Froissart had two survivors of the battle, respectively Gauthier des Roches and Seigneur de Montcavrel as their sources.<sup>40</sup> Although the other authors do not pronounce any names, given that all were influential pens writing in the service of royalty and nobility, it is highly probable that their sources could even be the duke of Nevers himself or his noble companions, who were back on French soil in the spring of 1398 after having spent some time in Rhodes and Venice following their release in the summer of 1397.<sup>41</sup> It is quite reasonable to contend that the authors' descriptions of the Turkish soldiers and army reflect true observations, as more than three decades after Nicopolis, we can find

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<sup>39</sup> Le conte de Nevers et tous les autres seigneurs de France qui en la court et poursieute de l'Amourath-Bacquin estoient, s'esmerveilloient de grant estat qu'il tenoit et faisoit ce moult á esmerveillier, et se logoient, ile et ses gens, aux champs car nulles villes ne les peussent porter. Et ce que on despendoit et fraittioit tant en boire comme en mengier en l'ostel du dit Amourath, il n'est point il á penser, ne á considérer, dont tout ce venoit et estoit pris fors tant que pour les chaudes contrées où ils conversent, toutes gens y sont de sobre vye et se passent légèrement de toutes viandes et usent très-grant foison d'espices et par especial de çucre, car ils en ont habondance, et aussi de lait de chièvres ce sont les communs boires des Turs et des Sarrazins. Et ont assés largement de pain fait de grain de millet, de jeune chevreus et de toutes venoisons. *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol. 16, p.43-44 [All translations from *Oeuvres de Froissart* are mine].

<sup>40</sup> *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, vol.2, p.520; Savage 1939, p.439.

<sup>41</sup> Lalande 1988, p.71-74.

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Bertrandon de la Broquière, first esquire-carver and counsellor to the duke of Burgundy make very similar remarks about the Turkish military customs, which this time were based on personal observations.<sup>42</sup>

While it is safe to assume that these authors were giving true portrayals of Turkish military life, it should also be noted that their depictions were often linked to a contrasting one of the crusaders, or of the French knights' in general. Bovet's Saracen goes on with his observations of the French knights as follows:

You are people, so I have heard,  
Who live like epicures;  
If you do not have white bread,  
Mutton, beef, pork,  
Partridge, young hen, chicken, hare,  
Duck, pheasant, and fat rabbits,  
And if tomorrow there's not more  
Abundance than today,  
You are much troubled;  
And if you do not have a soft, white bed  
For a single night, you are devastated.  
There must be white garments on your back,  
Or it's death for you.  
And if there are no fine wines in the bottle,  
The whole feast goes for nought.<sup>43</sup>

This again is an elaborated version of Salutati's condemning Christian knights being in luxury, inertia, and gluttony as opposed to the Turks.<sup>44</sup> Eustache Deschamps's "Faicte pour ceuls de France quant ils furent en Hongrie", despite the feeling of lamentation it conveys just like his "Pour les Français morts a Nicopolis", happen to voice the same criticisms as Bovet and Salutati make. While the poet avows that he does not "see anything but sadness and tears and weeping and funeral rites morning and night" he also declares that the defeat is a punishment of God for the "poisonous sins" (of the French) which, although not explicit, can be read in between the lines of his description of the Nicopolis crusaders (probably when they set out on the crusade):

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<sup>42</sup> *Le voyage d'outremer*. He was a kind of spy sent by the duke of Burgundy, Philippe the Bold who was John the Fearless's son, to the land of Turks for the purpose of learning about their customs and organization.

<sup>43</sup> Vous estes gens, car apris l'ay, / Qui vivés diilicieusement; / Se vous n'avez pain de froment, / Char de mouton, beuf et pourcel, / Perdriz, poucins, chappons, chevrel, / Canars, faysans et connins gras, / Et que demain ne faillist pas / Habondance plus qu'aujourd'uy, / Vous etes venus a l'ennuy; / Et se vo lit mol blanc n'avez / Pour une nuyt, estes foulés. / Chemis blanche sur le corps, / Ou autrement vous etes mors. / Et se bons vins n'avez en teste / Pour non riens est toute la feste. *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p. 88-89, line 420-34.

<sup>44</sup> "Nos autem Christiani traditi luxui et inertia, luxui et gule intendimus." *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, p.209.

Alas! Where are the high instruments,  
The sheets of gold, the robes of silk,  
The great war horses, long ornate robes,  
Jousters whom I used to see,  
Women whom I see dance  
From the night until the light of day?  
Where does vanity reside?  
God has put an end to it;<sup>45</sup>

Unlike Deschamps, Mézières openly accuses the crusaders of “covetousness and luxury” that reign among them along with other vices hindering the rule, discipline, obedience, and justice in their army.<sup>46</sup> He further ridicules them with contempt for being dressed as if “at the wedding of a friend in Paris or London” and leading “a delightful life that could be compared to the grand dinner of the riche in the Bible”.<sup>47</sup> In the chronicle of the Monk of St. Denis too, we can find depictions of the crusader camp that agree with this critique: Pontois mentions “splendid feasts,” “sought-after wines and dishes,” “tents decorated with paintings,” “embroidered clothes,” “guilty pleasures” experienced with prostitutes and games of dice, all carried out “regardless of military discipline and at the risk of compromising the success of the expedition.”<sup>48</sup> Even Froissart, who is always in praise of the crusaders, slips a picture of them which is in agreement with the other authors’ censures: He recounts that when the crusaders learned about the approach of Turkish army they were at dinner heated with “wine in their heads,” and they turned over the tables to get ready. This lightheaded and celebratory mood is perhaps similar to those of chivalric romances and epics that Froissart emulates but surely in contradiction with an disciplined army formation.<sup>49</sup> He again underlines the love of luxury of the Nicopolis knights, however unconsciously, as he observes that Beyazit’s prisoners began to lose their health for they could not live on the coarse Turkish meals and in the absence of their usual gourmet meals and servants.<sup>50</sup> The critical Pontois confirms the incompatibility of the crusaders’ extravagant ways with a military life by using Beyazit as a mouthpiece: He

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<sup>45</sup> “Las! ou sont les haulx instrumens, / Les draps d’or, les robes de soye, / Les grands destriers, les parremens, / Les jousteurs que veoir souloie, Les dames que dancier veoie / Dés la nuit jusques au cler jour? / Las! ou est d’orgueil le sejour? / Dieu l’a mis en partie a fin”. Atiya 1934, p.131. [Translation is mine]

<sup>46</sup> *Une Epistre Lamentable*, p.121.

<sup>47</sup> *Une Epistre Lamentable*, p. 224. Whereas Mézières continuously refers to the crusaders as “the army of the king of Hungary”, his criticism is clearly for the knights of France whom he reproached before in his *Songe du Vieil Pèlerin*. See *Songe du Vieux Pèlerin*.

<sup>48</sup> *Chroniques du Religieux de St. Denis*, vol. 2, p. 496-8.

<sup>49</sup> *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol 15, p. 312. With his later account of Beyazit and his men celebrating their victory on the wines, meat, and other goods they have found at the crusaders’ camp, Froissart once again underlines that the crusaders eat and drank well during the siege. *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol 15, 321.

<sup>50</sup> *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol 15, p.340.

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recites that when the “prudent” Sultan sees the abominations at the camp, he deems the crusaders worthy of defeat for “provoking the anger of Jesus Christ”!<sup>51</sup>

Now this, a medieval commonplace to explain military defeats, especially those against the infidel, is at the core of Pintoin’s criticism for the Nicopolis crusaders: their defeat is inflicted on them by God because of their moral depravations which are contrary to God’s ideal of a knight, and the infidels, the Turks in this instance, are an instrument of His wrath (*flagellum Dei*). He goes:

You are the only one, oh God, who is capable of everything, and there is no one who can resist your will. You have chastised your people, by making Beyazit the instrument of your vengeance, and you have let him exterminate the Christians.<sup>52</sup>

Ever since the Church took up the task of correcting the knights, the clergy rebuked the knights for their sinful ways while at the same time exhorting them towards the ideal the Church had set up for them. Yet, even the crusaders who took the cross to fight for the “eternal reward” had a hard time living up to these ideals.<sup>53</sup> While their atrocities towards their fellow Christians during the First Crusade could be largely ignored, by the second half of the twelfth century their sins such as pride, greed, luxury and lust came to be seen more and more as the reason of their failures against the infidels and the gradual loss of the lands of the Latin Kingdom.<sup>54</sup> By the time of Nicopolis, crusader criticism had been formulized so that sinful knights be punished through God’s scourge on earth, the Saracens. Turning this on its head, it meant that if it was not for their sins, Christians, the loved ones of God, would overcome the infidels. When put like this, it was not so much improving the military skills or organization of their armies but adhering to Christian morals that would guarantee victory to the crusaders.

The Battle of Nicopolis was fought at a time while the idea of taking the cross to fight the infidels with the surety of divine will on one’s side was still enticing, humanist views had begun to flourish. A couple of decades earlier Petrarch had diagnosed the decadence of French knights to be related not with their sinful behaviour but with their straying away from the Roman model of military discipline.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, even if the authors writing in the aftermath of the Nicopolis defeat do not ignore the divine

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<sup>51</sup> *Chroniques du Religieux de St. Denis*, vol.2, p.498.

<sup>52</sup> “Tue s le seul, ô Seigneur, qui peux touti et il n’est personne qui puisse resister à ta volonté. Tu as appesanti ta main sur ton peuple, en prenant Bajazet pour instrument de ta vengeance, et tu lui as permis d’exterminer les Chrétiens”. *Chroniques du Religieux de St. Denis*, vol.2, 511.

<sup>53</sup> To name a few, we can cite John of Salisbury, Etienne de Fougères, Pierre de Blois, Alain de Lille and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. *Policraticus*, book 6, part 1-10; “De laude novae militiae ad milites temple”, p. 1253-61; Keen 2005, p. 4; Flori 1986, p.332-33; Flori 2006, p. 41-56. Pope Urban II declared the desirable award for knights as the “eternal reward” and not the pay or plunder the contemporary knights fight for. Rodriguez 2015, p.54-56.

<sup>54</sup> Siberry 1985, p. 72-108; De Vries 1999, p. 91-93; For examples of crusader criticisms in the twelfth century chronicles see, *Historia Anglorum*, p.752-53; *Chronica Majora*, vol. 2, p.180-83, 328; *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, p.54.

<sup>55</sup> The significance of Petrarch’s visit to Avignon in 1361 as flickering the light of Humanism and his criticisms of French warriors in his letters to French clergymen were discussed in Gundersheimer 1969, p.13; Canon-Willard 1973, p.189-90.

providence scheme altogether, they also draw attention to the human element in the defeat.

Mézières was a good example of this attitude: he was a zealous advocate of crusading but did not leave all to divine providence, asserting that the infidels could only be defeated by a military order, that is his Order of the Passion which stood for military discipline along with Christian ethics.<sup>56</sup> His view of the Turks in *Epistre Lamentable* reflects how he combines a traditional crusader outlook with a humanist one. Whereas he debases them by adjectives such as “evil, true enemies of faith, fierce, and cruel people” and so on, he cannot but give them credit for their “valour in arms and rule they have kept well in their army” by which they have conquered those kingdoms and empires.<sup>57</sup> Likewise Froissart, in total contradiction to his conventional outlook on Beyazıt as the cruel and vile infidel, nevertheless also recognizes the Sultan as “a valiant man of great enterprise [who] knew all there is to know on the deeds of war as much as he proved himself well in that business.”<sup>58</sup> So, whereas the view of the Turks as infidels who need to be defeated is still there, they are also given credit for their excellence in arms. On the other hand, they recognize that sinful behaviour on the part of the crusaders not only earns God’s wrath but also undermines military performance. In Mézières view, Nicopolis crusaders’ sins of vanity, greed, gluttony, luxury and lust reigned in the army at the expense of “rule, discipline, obedience, and justice” thus bringing about the defeat.<sup>59</sup> Pintoin is of the same opinion, asserting that the crusaders “immersed themselves with ardour in pleasures with disregard of military discipline and at the risk of compromising the success of the expedition.”<sup>60</sup> By the same token, according to Mézières, the Turkish army “well-guarded by the discipline of knightly behaviour,” can only be defeated by a Christian army that is also ruled by military discipline.<sup>61</sup>

Bovet, although does not use the phrase “military discipline” per se, makes it clear that the reason why the crusaders were defeated at Nicopolis was their digression from a disciplined soldier’s life. However, differently from Mézières and Pintoin, he chooses to tone down his criticisms to arrive at a compromise: he proposes that a new crusade army should be recruited from among poor peasants and labourers who will be inherently disciplined unlike the luxury loving aristocratic knights who cannot stand the hardships of the expedition.<sup>62</sup> Something he already suggested in his *Arbre des batailles* about a decade earlier<sup>63</sup>, this is a compromise that would guarantee a future victory against the

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<sup>56</sup> *Nova religio milicie Passionis Jhesu Christi*. Mézières wrote at least two redactions of the rules of the order after 1367, one in 1384 and the other 1396. Magee 1998, p.372-79.

<sup>57</sup> *Une Epistre lamentable*, p.216.

<sup>58</sup> “ung moult vaillant homme et de grant emprinse et sçavait, en fait de guerre, tout ce qu’on y pouvoit sçavoir, ainsi qu’il monstra bien en cestuy affaire.” *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol.15, p.471.

<sup>59</sup> *Une Epistre lamentable*, p.121.

<sup>60</sup> “Ils se plongeaiant avec ardeur dans des plaisirs coupables, au mépris de ladiscipline militaire et au risque de compromettre le succès de l’expédition”. *Chroniques du Religieux de St. Denis*, vol.2, p. 498-99.

<sup>61</sup> *Une Epistre lamentable*, p.184.

<sup>62</sup> *Apparicion, Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p.96-97, line 565-590.

<sup>63</sup> *Tree of Battles*, p. 211-12.

Turks without disrupting neither the accustomed habits of the noble knights nor their lives which, in the author's opinion—that probably reflects his readers'—, were more precious than those of the poor. Thus Bovet backs up from his critical mockery of the crusaders possibly because he did not want to offend his noble patrons any further.<sup>64</sup> This is as if acceding that the French knighthood cannot be disciplined, and in a way proposing a quite modern army structure, though Bovet is not exactly talking about professional soldiers here. In contrast, Mézières is adamant in addressing his contemporary armies' lack of military discipline in *Epistre Lamentable* and elsewhere; he has harsh criticisms for the vices of his contemporary knights and offers remedies in *Vieil Pélerin*, *Epistre Roi Richart* and other works<sup>65</sup> as well and puts down the rules of his new disciplined order of knights in *Nova religio milicie Passionis Jhesu Christi*<sup>66</sup> in three different redactions over the years. The rules of this order, as aforementioned advocating both military discipline and a good Christian life, possibly drew on his extensive military experience and observations of both Christian and infidel armies.

Yet, both Mézières and Bovet agree that military discipline is the key to victory in battle and it can only be reinstated by looking back to the Roman model that stands for its epitome. In *Epistre Lamentable* and in *Vieil Pelerin*, Mézières recommends Roman authors to be read, specifically Vegetius's *De la chose chevalereuse* on military matters.<sup>67</sup> Likewise Bovet, not only in *Apparicion* but also in *Arbre des Batailles* repeatedly mentions the Romans, namely Vegetius and Valerius Maximus to be consulted on military advice.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, given that these authors also think highly of Turkish military discipline, it would not be farfetched to assume that they suggest a likening of the Ottoman military conduct to the Romans, which Coluccio Salutati actually did

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<sup>64</sup> Although Bovet clearly aligned himself with Charles VI and his brother Louis of Orléans at a time when it was the king's uncle Philip of Burgundy who was dominating the political scene as he held the reins of the mad king, he also seems to be constantly seeking favours with Philip by presenting him a copy of his *Arbre des Batailles* and then dedicating *Apparicion* to him. Bovet's attempts at ingratiating himself with the duke seem curious enough, as he not only criticised the duke in his *Somnium super material scismatis* (1394) but also mocked his son and his fellow crusaders in *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p. 5-8.

<sup>65</sup> See for example, *Une Epistre Lamentable*, p.105-21; *Songe du Vieux pèlerin*, p.442-467; *Letter to King Richard II*, p. 52, 58. Ioarga narrates that in *Contemplacio hore mortis* and *Oratio Tragedica* written around the same period as *Vieil pèlerin*, Mézières turns the mirror onto himself and offers self-criticism for fighting criminal wars in his youth. Ioarga 1896, p.65.

<sup>66</sup> *Nova religio milicie Passionis Jhesu Christi pro acquisitione sancte civitatis Jherusalem et Terre sancta*, found in ms. 1943, Bibliothèque Mazarin, Paris and *De la Chevalerie de la passion de Jhesu Christ* found in ms. 2251, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris. Here reiterated from Atiya 1934, p.136-38.

<sup>67</sup> *Une Epistre Lamentable*, p. 131. He talks in greater length about the Roman examples of military success by virtue of their discipline in his *Songe du Vieil Pelerin*. See for example, *Songe du Vieux Pelerin*, p. 445-67. *Epitoma rei militaris*, also referred to as *De re militari* by Publius Flavius Vegetius Renuatus in the late fourth century.

<sup>68</sup> *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p. 90-91, line 455-485, 564-568.

articulate.<sup>69</sup> Although not openly acknowledging the traces of the Roman customs, life and institutions in those of the Turks like *Salutati* does, Bovet talks about the discipline of the Romans just after he praises that of the Turks which makes it impossible not to link the two. He goes,

This is what Valerius says of Cato,  
A wise knight, great and good:  
He never turned up his nose at poor bread,  
Nor refused any drink;  
Nor was it important for him, in satisfying hunger,  
To eat meat pies or cakes;  
For his lodgings he sought no shelter,  
For his clothes, no trunk nor chest;  
As long as he was protected from the cold,  
He didn't care about the colour of the cloth.<sup>70</sup>

As much as those authors writing in the wake of Nicopolis lament the disaster, alarm their readers about the Turks, propose solutions for defeating them, or offer comparisons of the Turks with Romans, their main concern clearly was not the Turks. Understandably so because, despite alleged threats from Beyazıt that he will take Rome, the geographical distance was still far enough not to put the Turks on the list of immediate enemies of France.<sup>71</sup> Mézières must be conscious of this fact while rebuking those who do not take the Turkish menace seriously and say “madly that the Turks are not yet on the bridge of Charenton”.<sup>72</sup> Still, despite being maybe a tad more alarmed against the threat the Turks pose to Christian Europe due to his experience with them in the Mediterranean, even Mézières is more concerned with the state of men-at-arms in France than anything else. His *Epistre Lamentable* is a cry for the state of arms in France and yet another opportunity for him to promote his Order of the Passion, just like his *Vieil Pèlerin* was a criticism of men-at-arms among other echelons of the society in France. Likewise, Bovet who tackles the question of the rules of warfare in *Arbre des batailles*, and the decadence of society and institutions in France in *Apparicion*, brings up the defeat at Nicopolis not for its own sake but as an illustration of the weakness and ills of French knighthood. His depiction of the Turkish warriors' disciplined life with its reflections on the French knights totally fits the bill. Yet, given its repetitions in several other sources, including

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<sup>69</sup> “Credite michi: genus hoc hominum, quorum cum mores, vitam et instituta percipio, fortissimorum Romanorum ritum consuetudinesque recordor ...” *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, vol.3, p. 209. Here reiterated from Bisaha 2004, chap.2, n.96.

<sup>70</sup> Ce dit Valere de Cathon, / Chevalier sage, grant et bon: / Oncques mauvaiz pain ne blasma, / Ne bevrage ne refusa; / Ne lui chaoit de perdre fain / De mengier paste ou levain; / Pour son logis ne queroit salle, / Pour ses robes bahu ne malle; / Mais Qu'il se peust garder du froit, / Couleur de drap ne regardoit. *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, p.90-93, line 473-482.

<sup>71</sup> On Beyazıt's alleged threat, see *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol.15, p.216-17.

<sup>72</sup> *Une Epistre Lamentable*, p. 219. Charenton is a town just on the periphery of modern Paris, probably here indicating in the midst of France.



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that of Bertrandon de la Broquière several decades later, the odds are Bovet's depictions were not incongruent with the reality either.

Bovet and Mézières, like Pintoin and Deschamps, were critics of their own times, and the state of men-at-arms in their contemporary France was of utmost importance to them. Although ostensibly Nicopolis defeat must have been quite shattering, possibly their immediate concern as enemy was not the Turks, but the English. Despite a tentative truce that was established in 1395, the war between the kingdoms of England and France — that would later be named the Hundred Years' War — had been going on intermittently for six decades; and the French, despite a few relatively recent victories, seemed to be suffering intensely from it, not only because it was fought mainly on French land but also because the English seemed to better organize and deploy their armies. The well-known but not said aloud fact, that the king of France, Charles VI was mad and thus unable to rule his kingdom, did not help either. The military dead end was fed with a series of courtly intrigues to hold the reins of the mad king, and the result was internal turmoil and instability over and over. Nicopolis crusade, which seemed as a blessing at first for instigating the peace between the two crowns and a giving them a common enemy, unfortunately ended up in disaster, especially for the French, losing them both their men and their dignity in arms. While the peace treaty made with the English was still effective, the possibility of it being broken, and the resuming of the war with a knighthood having serious problems about discipline must have distressed every responsible intellectual of the period and prompted to look for remedies to the military situation.<sup>73</sup>

All in all, while the French authors' admiring commentaries about the Turkish men-at-arms should not go unnoticed or devalued, they should be nevertheless read with an eye on the contemporary military and political predicaments of the French, as well as for the signs of a slightly less providential attitude towards warfare, attesting to the presence of humanist tendencies in France at the time.

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<sup>73</sup> While the problem was repetitively tackled in the fifteenth century by figures such as Christine de Pisan, Alain Chartier and Jean Gerson, it was finally officially addressed by the reforms of Charles VII. Keen 1996, p.12; Allmand 1998, p.51-55.

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