



## ZMO-Colloquium

Thursday, 2 May 2019, 6 pm

### Married to It:

## The War Years as Seen by the Wife of a Late Ottoman Special Organization Officer

Lecture by **Benjamin C. Fortna** (University of Arizona)

This presentation examines the wartime experiences of Pervin Hanım, the wife of Kuşçubaşı Eşref, an active figure in the Ottoman Special Organization (Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa). Pervin's memoir, found among her husband's private papers, offers an engaging account of the period between her marriage to Eşref on the eve of World War I to 1920 when it ends rather abruptly in the aftermath of Eşref's leaving the service of the Ankara movement which he had served as a regional commander. The work gives a rare perspective on the war years and an even more unusual female eyewitness account of some of the activities of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. Here we learn about Pervin's daily life amid Eşref's preparations for various missions and his comings and goings. To Pervin's chagrin his absences far exceeded his presence at home, and a central theme of the memoir is her feeling of abandonment. Eşref was soon called to a series of assignments ranging from trial flights for primitive Ottoman military aircraft, the mission of the "Five Turks" to Central Asia (from which Eşref turns back when war is declared), reconnaissance missions in the Sinai in preparation for the first Suez Canal offensive, etc. Then comes worse news, Eşref's capture by the British in Arabia, delivered to Pervin in horrible fashion by Çerkes Reşid, the older brother of Çerkes Edhem. Also encountered in the text are figures such as Enver's aide-de-camp İzmitli Mümtaz, Special Organization head Süleyman

Askerî, Yakup Cemil, Mehmed Akif, Mustafa Kemal, Rauf Orbay, etc. All in all, it is a portrait of Pervin's war, quite an atypical experience given the man she married but also similar in some respects to the many Ottoman women who suffered during the years of conflict.

**Benjamin C. Fortna** is Professor and Director of the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies at the University of Arizona and formerly Professor of the History of the Middle East, SOAS, University of London. His research focuses on the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. He received his degrees from Yale, Columbia and the University of Chicago; his publications include *The Circassian: A Life of Eşref Bey, Late Ottoman Insurgent and Special Agent* (Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2016), *Childhood in the Late Ottoman Empire and After*, ed. (Brill, 2016), *Learning to Read in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and *Imperial Classroom: Islam, Education and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

### Venue

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