

## **Peasant (Im)Mobility and Unregistered Landed Estates in Niğde (1740-1790)**

*Anıl Aşkın*

This paper tackles the question of peasant (im)mobility in the province of Karaman in the eighteenth century, roughly between the 1740s and 1790s. I contextualize Karaman in the eighteenth century as an Ottoman countryside where capital appeared, as Marx wrote in *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, “side by side with the old modes of production.” Building on my study of court cases and orders in the *Book of Orders of Karaman*, I investigate official complaints and appeals made predominantly by timar-holding cavalries, with comparatively fewer instances involving other landholding classes. The focus in these documents is on forcibly returning peasants who fled bondage (*celâ-yı vatan*). By mapping these conflicts, I illustrate that free peasants often ended up in nearby cities, landed estates, exclusively military (*askeri*) ones, and other towns and villages engaged in commercial grain cultivation and saltpeter, lead, and silver mining. The lack of specific reasons behind peasant flight in these complaints suggest that bondage could be regularly avoided by peasant cultivators. On the other hand, Ottoman state documents suggest that major violent events, such as attacks by unemployed mercenaries (*levendât*) and major investments in mining, caused waves of depopulation and displacement. In this paper, I focus on saltpeter contractors in and around the city of Niğde who allegedly allied with mercenaries to pluck peasants off from their villages and drive them to their own domains of rule. As the local rivals of the contractors reported, these episodes of violence ended up with forming unregistered or unofficial landed estates around Niğde. I conclude that what is often perceived as disorder in state documents was the emergent order of capital.