

The Provisioning of Charcoal to the Keban and Ergani Mines in the Eighteenth Century

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In the mid-eighteenth century, the extraction, transportation, and combustion of wood for mining substantially reorganized the economy and ecology of the Ottoman East from the Black Sea coast to the Taurus Mountains. In this paper, I will sketch out the wood energy supply networks of this region's mineral extraction industry, which became revitalized in the early 1700s. At this time, the mines of Gümüşhane, Espiye, Keban, and Ergani—where the state organized the mining of silver, gold, copper, and lead—formed a “mining nexus” involving a complex network of local and imperial actors. These mines were wholly dependent on charcoal as the main source of energy to produce the metals that supplied the raw material for the imperial mint and the manufacture of ships and weapons. The provision of charcoal, especially to the Keban and Ergani mines, became increasingly complex when the trees in the nearby mountains were depleted and charcoal had to come from increasingly distant provinces. This top-down organization of charcoal provisioning involved a complex array of investors, tax collectors, laborers, porters, and held together by fiscal arrangements negotiated among mine superintendents, local powerholders (including tax farmers), and the imperial state. Studying the provisioning of charcoal to the Keban and Ergani mines based on muqāṭa‘a and Darbhane-i Amire registers introduces new information on how pre-industrial networks of energy functioned in the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, it elucidates a new conceptualization of the revenue tax farm as an energy-dependent network.