



Armenian and Greek orphans along with the Dildilians on the S.S. Belgravia departing Samsun. Mariam Dildilian on the ladder near the life preserver in the background of the photo, November 1922.

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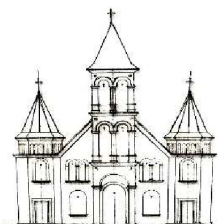
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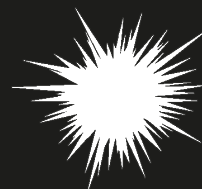
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The Photographic Odyssey of the Dildilian Family: From Anatolia to the West

Museum of Byzantine Culture

Curated by:  
Armen Marsoobian, Ioannis Motsianos

The exhibition is part of the Thessaloniki PhotoBiennale2023 programme, coproduced by MOMus-Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, the Museum of Byzantine Culture and the Anatolia College, with the collaboration of the Anatolia College Libraries & Archives.



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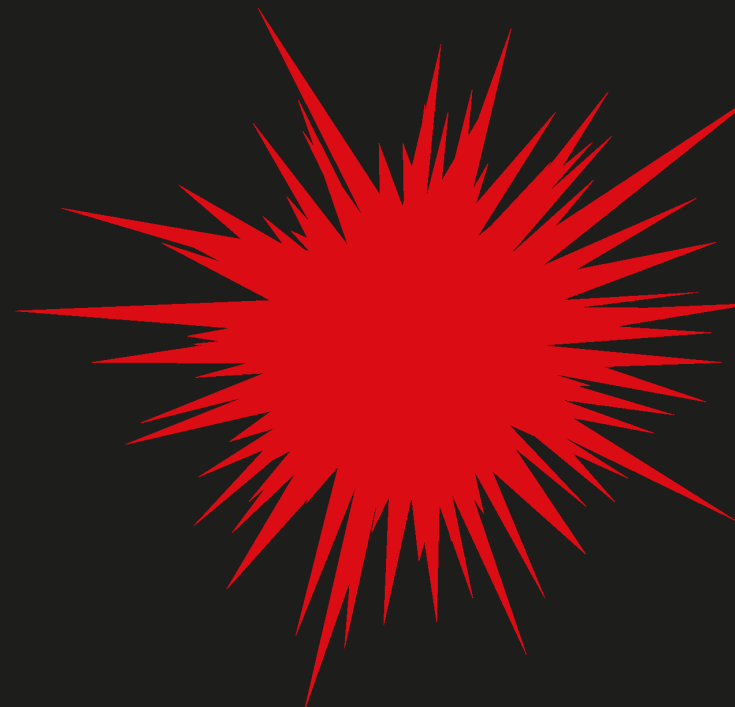
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The Photographic Odyssey of the Dildilian Family: From Anatolia to the West

11 October 2023 – 11 February 2024

Museum of Byzantine Culture,  
Thessaloniki

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Dildilian family in Kokkinia, Greece, c. 1926. Tsolag and Mariam with their three surviving children, Humayag, Ara, and Alice.

### The Photographic Odyssey of the Dildilian Family: From Anatolia to the West

An exhibition drawing upon the Dildilian family archive, consisting of thousands of photographs, glass negatives, drawings, artwork, documents, letters, and family heirlooms. The exhibition texts are based upon written memoirs and oral interviews produced by multiple generations of the Dildilian family.

This exhibition captures the odyssey of an Armenian family, the Dildilians, many of whose members originally worked as photographers in Ottoman Turkey. They lived, worked, and raised their families in the Anatolian cities of Sebastia (Sivas), Marsovan (Merzifon), Samsun and the surrounding communities. This story begins in the 1870s, tracing the lives of the Dildilians through the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and beyond.

The story is a painful one, encompassing the violent eradication of Armenians from their 3,000-year-old homeland. Yet the photographic narrative also testifies to the cultural, educational, and commercial achievements of this proud nation. Armenians were among the first photographers in the Middle East. Their talents soon gave them a dominant role in the profession. Armenian photographers soon would flourish in the diaspora, with the Dildilians continuing their profession in Greece and the United States.

Many of the photographs gathered for this exhibition were taken by Tsolag and Aram Dildilian over the course of 34 years in the cities, towns, and countryside of central Anatolia and the Pontic Black Sea Coast. Other members of the family joined the studio as it expanded across the region. The next generation, particularly his children Humayag and Alice, continued the family legacy of photography in Greece and the United States well into the early 1980s – a nearly 100-year photographic legacy.

The texts of the exhibition are written by Armen T. Marsoobian, the grandson of Tsolag Dildilian. They are based upon the written and oral memoirs of two generations of storytellers who first began recording their memories in the 1920s. Both Tsolag and his brother Aram left behind extensive written accounts.

A full account of the Dildilian family odyssey can be found in Marsoobian's published books, *Fragments of a Lost Homeland: Remembering Armenia* (I. B. Tauris, 2015) and *Reimagining a Lost Armenian Home: The Dildilian Photography Collection* (I. B. Tauris, 2017). Besides Turkey, exhibitions have taken place in London, Yerevan, Watertown (Massachusetts), Chicago, and Greater Los Angeles in Glendale.

Dedicated to my ancestors and all those descendants of genocide survivors who, lacking the photos I am privileged to possess, can only imagine what their ancestors' lives were like in their historic homeland.



Three of the first five orphans rescued by Aram Dildilian with Armenian priest in Samsun. Photo taken in front of Armenian Apostolic Church that served as an orphanage, early 1919.