

EMPTY FIELDS



Empty Fields

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SALT Galata

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Empty Fields is the first exhibition to explore the archive of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), and the Protestant mission work in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. The project is made possible through the partnership of SALT, that has been cataloging and digitizing the archive, and the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT), the archive's caretaker. In 2014 SALT sought the assistance of Marianna Hovhannisyan during the process of classifying this multilingual archive, and subsequently commissioned her to curate an exhibition that reflects on the contemporary agency of the available content.

Hovhannisyan's residency at SALT was supported by the Hrant Dink Foundation Turkey-Armenia Fellowship Scheme funded by the European Union (2014-2015). The archive of ABCFM also known as American Board Archives access was made possible through the partnership of SALT and ARIT.

“The universal war put a stop to all scientific work,
except the continuation of arranging,
labeling and cataloguing the specimens...”

Johannes “John” Jacob Manissadjian
1917, Merzifoun
Curator, Museum of Anatolia College

American Board Archives consists of visual and textual materials, which provide impressions of everyday life experiences between American missionaries and the Protestant communities—predominantly Armenians and Greeks from the 1820s-30s and from 1915-1923 in the Ottoman Empire, and later in the Republic of Turkey. As part of ABCFM worldwide operations, the missionary work espoused a philanthropic, educational and religious character. *Empty Fields* begins by considering the archive’s extensive documents from the period when the Empire collapsed and the Republic was formed, whereby certain archival absences bear the traces of *Aghed* [The Catastrophe], 1915. During the categorization of records in 2015, research exposed certain data fields that were left blank, waiting empty, for information, primarily those of the Western Armenian, Armeno-Turkish, Greek and Greco-Turkish languages.

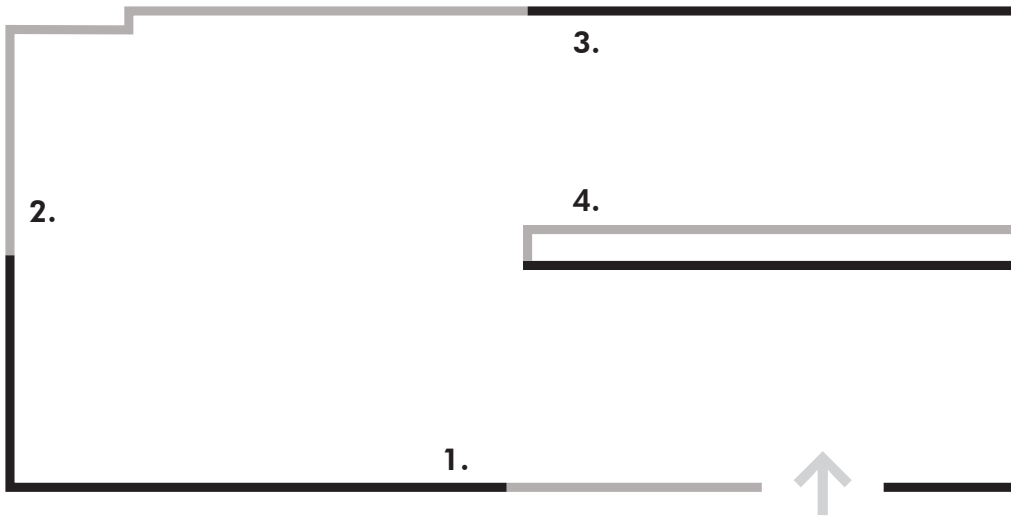
The exhibition takes the archive’s empty fields as its structuring guidelines and suggests that they stand for markers of ontological and epistemological areas of study left blank by the effects of the catastrophe. Supplemented by video interviews with representatives from various communities, *Empty Fields* selects rare archival materials, including photographs, maps and correspondences, as remnants assembled in a curatorial narrative to chart a contemporary museological space. Through this perspective, a reference to a different archive emerges: the catalog of a more than a century-old natural science collection of the Museum of Anatolia College, Merzifon, Turkey. Unique for its time, this museum was developed as a result of the college’s American mission that brought together

a multidisciplinary humanities curriculum with geological fieldwork in the Anatolian landscape, conducted by Armenian and Greek staff, and students living in Merzifon and its vicinity. The collection amassed more than 7,000 artifacts under the curatorship of Prof. Johannes “John” Jacob Manissadjian, an Armenian-German scientist, botanist, as well as a plant collector, whose work included specimen exchanges with international institutions. A survivor of 1915, Prof. Manissadjian ended up in the United States. The college would lose its staff and students, and close in the following years, with the museum collection dispersed without trace.

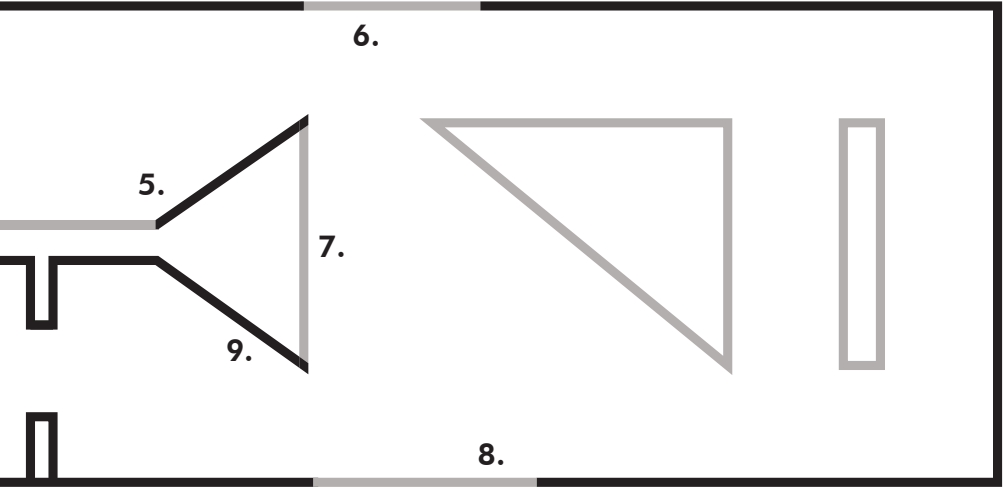
In 2015 a bound, handwritten catalog by Prof. Manissadjian was discovered in the archive, labeling all specimens as well as around eighteen showcases of the museum, often with detailed descriptions. Completed by 1918, Prof. Manissadjian’s act was “the writing of the disaster” in Maurice Blanchot’s terms. This taxonomic museum catalog attests to a cohesive collection of the world and simultaneously foresees the inevitable dispersal of its artifacts. His last curatorial act became his first archival act; its discovery a century later in the American Board Archives gaining a renewed signification. Working with this document, *Empty Fields* traces the routes of dispersal of a number of the original showcases and their contents.

In the exhibition, the museological space and the archival apparatus align through the act of inscription. As such, alongside the display of artifacts, traces of erasure and blankness are showcased as necessary parts of a narrative to be activated. By situating the traces of the dispersed museum within the contexts provided by the archive and the contemporary cultural institution, *Empty Fields* highlights the layered frameworks of museological, geo-politicized space in an attempt to face the irretrievability of a particular period in history, and to open up discussions about contemporary and future conditions of loss and displacement—unpredictable, unknown fields still to be cataloged and acted upon.

The word *Aghed* is used as articulated by Marc Nichanian.



1. The Field is the World
2. From Material to Data-fields
3. The Site of the Field
4. Institutionalizing the Fieldwork
5. Inscribing the Empty Fields:
The Writing of the Disaster
6. A Plant Hunter for the International Field
7. Narrating the Museological Space of Empty Fields
8. Manissadjian: *Plantae Orientales*
9. Postscript to Empty Fields



1.

The Field is the World

The Timeline of the American Mission Work from 1820s-30s to 2010

The ABCFM, with its Protestant outlook, considered the world as its working field of mission. This timeline illustrates how this conception of the field was put into practice during the Ottoman Empire and transformed during the Republic. The timeline comes to an end in 2010, when the mission work ceased its activities in Turkey, at which point ABCFM is reformed as the American Board Archives, with the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT) as its caretaker.

Empty Fields was developed with the understanding that the ABCFM fieldwork in various stations and locations was undertaken through an advanced educational agenda. The impetus was cultural, theological and civic; with initiatives that supported the right to education by building churches, schools, libraries, publishing houses, museums, and even hospitals. Although ABCFM shapes a Protestant Christian worldview, the artifacts presented within this timeline point to a cultural and linguistic diversity of its communities. This timeline is one of many that converge at points along geopolitical crossroads in the Empire and the Republic. After the Great Catastrophe of 1915 and the tumultuous history of Christian minorities in the region, the apparent continuity of the American mission timeline, upon closer observation, witnesses sudden interruptions. These offer references to currently-missing foundational and historical fieldwork of the mission, along with their locations, infrastructures and communities.

The timeline has been produced for the exhibition by researcher, archivist Brian Johnson on behalf of ARIT.

Seedtime and Harvest

The American Board in Turkey

1820-2010

The World as a Field

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), or “American Board,” was a Boston-based Protestant agency founded in 1810 and chartered in 1812, in Massachusetts, USA, to send missionaries abroad, primarily to propagate the Gospel, but also for general altruistic labor, especially in education and health. Its aims were boundless, and of its work the founders declared, the “field is the world.”

In 1820, the ABCFM’s first missionaries arrived in Anatolia, with the directive to discover “what good can be done, and by what means” for all peoples of the region. To this end in the ensuing years, Board missionaries explored Anatolia, as well as the Middle East and Balkans, documenting their activities and recording their discoveries about the land and its inhabitants. This habit of inquiry and the reporting of information to the home office, as well as to the larger American public, would be a hallmark of the ABCFM’s ventures in Turkey for decades to come.

1820

First American Board missionaries arrive in Izmir

1830-1831

Revs. Eli Smith and H.G.O. Dwight journey across Anatolia

1833

The Board sets up a press in Izmir, its regional headquarters

Sowing the Ground

American Board missionaries arrived in Turkey with the idea of introducing Protestant beliefs to all its communities, but finding access to Muslims prohibited, they adapted their approach to indigenous Christians, chiefly Armenians and Greeks. They considered the Eastern Churches astray—burdened with rites and rituals—and they tried to inspire internal reform. Instead, they nurtured a new Protestant community.

After the Ottoman Empire recognized its Protestant subjects as a *millet* in 1847, officially defining their rights and privileges in 1850, the missionaries turned to creating institutions for this community's spiritual and intellectual advancement. They took up residence in areas with Protestant, mainly Armenian, populations and organized churches and rudimentary schools to teach reading and writing. In 1854, they moved their regional headquarters from Izmir to Istanbul, the Empire's capital, which was better suited as an administrative hub for their expanding work in Anatolia.

1844

"Mission to the Armenians" in Anatolia founded as a distinct enterprise

1854

ABCFM headquarters and press transferred to Istanbul

1856

Armenian mission divided into two branches for better administration

A Bountiful Yield

ABCFM establishments across Anatolia, especially schools and medical facilities, grew rapidly in the mid-nineteenth century. Schools, for instance, founded to teach basic literacy, developed into theological institutes for training Protestant pastors, and many of these later evolved into high schools and colleges with less exclusive, broader goals. Rather than serving specific groups alone, they sought to cultivate general knowledge across communal boundaries, educating students of different beliefs and backgrounds in the sciences and humanities.

As the American Board's undertakings increased, the need for a stronger, better structured administration became imperative. In 1860, the Board divided its work in Anatolia into separate units, the Western, Central, and Eastern Turkey Missions. In 1872, it opened a new executive center in Istanbul. Then, in 1881, it appointed a business professional, William W. Peet, to manage regional operations.

Reports, correspondence, and records from stations in Anatolia, the Boston office, and other places, flowed through Peet's hands. Many of these documents were archived at the Istanbul headquarters, where they survived to the present, bearing witness to this flourishing era of the ABCFM. In 1914, on the eve of World War I, roughly one-third of the Board's work worldwide was concentrated in the Turkey Missions, which included 450 schools, 19 hospitals and dispensaries, and several printing presses.

1860

"Turkey Missions"
established for greater
order and efficiency

1870

New central office building opened in Istanbul

1881

William Peet appointed to supervise administration

1914

Turkey Missions at the forefront of ABCFM's global enterprise

Tilling Anew

Almost all ABCFM institutions in Turkey closed during World War I, and after losing their largest clientele, Anatolia's Christian populations, between 1915 and 1923, only a few reopened, some moving to neighboring lands. In 1924, the Board consolidated its regional work into a single unit, which operated under the laws of the Turkish Republic. Its schools continued to educate students (now primarily Muslim Turks), but adapted their academic programs to government regulations; religion was not taught, and curriculum emphasized secular principles.

In 1930, the ABCFM ran nine schools, three hospitals, and a press in Turkey. Though its work further diminished in subsequent years, Board missionaries welcomed the chance to serve, and they embraced the dictate that had inspired their predecessors in 1820: "what good can be done, and by what means." The motto's universal appeal suited current realities, and the missionaries made it their prime rationale for remaining in Turkey nearly a century more, despite the narrowing of their field.

The ABCFM was dissolved circa 1960, and its operations were inherited by the mission arm of the United Church of Christ (UCC), which kept the name "American Board" for the Turkish enterprise. The heirs decided to divest, and in 1968, Sağlık ve Eğitim Vakfı [The Health and Education Foundation] (SEV), a private, secular, nonprofit Turkish foundation, began to acquire control and ownership of the Board's legacy. SEV assumed full management of the surviving institutions (three schools, a hospital, and a press) in 1998 and full possession in 2011. The UCC closed its office in Istanbul in 2010, bringing the American Board's last official, tangible presence in Turkey to an end.

1918

Most ABCFM institutions in Anatolia empty and closed

1930

ABCFM works at nine locations in Anatolia

1960

ABCFM's ventures pass to UCC's mission wing

1968

SEV begins acquiring remaining American Board institutions in Turkey

2010

UCC closes American Board office in Turkey

Present

Three former American Board schools in Istanbul, Tarsus, and Izmir, one hospital in Gaziantep, and a publishing house in Istanbul still exist in Turkey. Rooted in the past, they continue to operate, but under new direction, with a distinct vision.

The American Board's local archive, over 300,000 (mostly textual) items dating back to the 1830s, is currently owned by the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT). Together with its partner in Turkey, SALT, ARIT is cataloging and digitizing this rich resource, to make it available on the web for public access worldwide.

2.

From Material to Data-fields

Dublin Core Metadata

In 2011 SALT launched a new initiative to digitize their archive holdings, with the intention to establish an online research space. For this purpose, the institution chose the Dublin Core Metadata, a resource description standard, used widely for cataloging archives. It consists of a set of fifteen information fields, resource descriptions to be filled out, such as creator, description, and date. When cataloging began, it became apparent that the number of fields had to be expanded to correspond to the physical archives, the collective time of which includes different world systems (Imperial or Republican, Muslim, Christian or secular) with their respective calendars, geographical coverage and languages. The original set of fifteen fields became forty-five. When the cataloging was applied to the American Board Archives, many of these new fields often ended up highlighting the lack of information, appearing as blanks.

Empty Fields proposes that the multiple blank fields in the American Board Archives do not indicate a lack, but rather actual gaps in historical narratives. In particular, these gaps embody the impressions left by communities who were a part of the American mission past. In the archive, the fields most often left in a state of “waiting-to-be-filled-in” are those of Western Armenian, Armeno-Turkish, Greek and Greco-Turkish languages formerly used in the Ottoman Empire. By recognizing and working with these empty fields, the underlying sense of a curatorial narrative emerges in the exhibition. It points out how archival classification systems not only grind out information, but function as charts to help to explore the unknown depths of archival materials.

Type	
Date	
Contributor	
Publisher	
Description	
Subject	
Creator	Amerikan Bord Heyei (American Board)
Title	

Rights Holder	Rights	Coverage	Relation	Language	Source	Identifier
United Church of Christ (UCC), American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT), SALT Research	Open Access					ABA...

3.

The Site of the Field

American Anatolia College in Merzifon and its Transformations

“Far enough for pampering the students, we intend to *prepare* them for work in the world as the world is.”

Report from the Academic Year, 1912-13

One well-documented case cataloged in the American Board Archives is the Anatolia College, a high school in Merzifon. Along with photos are regular reports, mainly in English, filed by the American missionaries.

The roots of Anatolia College start in 1864 as a theological seminary, the aim of which was to train local men to be the pastors of the future. In 1886 it evolved into Anatolia College, a boarding school with Armenian and Greek students from the local provinces during the Ottoman Empire. The faculty was comprised of American missionaries and Armenian and Greek alumni who returned from studies in the West, in order to contribute new insights into knowledge production. One outcome was a multi-disciplinary curriculum that uniquely combined fieldwork in the Anatolian landscape with the fields of studies—theology, social/natural sciences, humanities, and the arts. In tandem with this, institutional frameworks developed: boys’ school, girls’ school, kindergarten, school for the deaf, library-museum, medical clinic, artisanal workshop, and clubs for literature, archeology and music.

Anatolia College’s success continued until the catastrophic events of 1915, at which point all pedagogical work was halted and staff and students were deported, lost or killed. Re-organizing in the aftermath, in 1924 the ABCFM transplanted the school model to Thessaloniki, with an initial composition of Armenian and Greek orphan-refugees and some expelled American professors. After 1915, the properties

in Merzifon were either shut down, occupied, militarized, or sold by ABCFM. In 1924 only their girls' school reopened, with Turkish female students and a secular, national curriculum taught in Turkish. By 1939 what remained in Merzifon of the Anatolia College was closed down.

Abdulhamid [II] Khan, son of Abdülmeçid, the ever victorious.
The Ghazi.

[...] Insofar as the American embassy in Istanbul requested the issuance of my illustrious decree in the matter of the granting of an official license to the American School, formerly established in the village of Merzifon, this matter was discussed in my great council of ministers. This request indicates obedience to the statutes of the regulations regarding education, and so as per the request, for the contents of the license it is deemed fitting that my illustrious decree be issued. Upon this request for permission by means of a written report to my honorable imperial presence, and so long as, in the aforementioned school, nothing occur or be taught contrary to loyalty and servitude and no variety of conditions that go against my grand government emerge—and if such a thing does occur then the provisions of my illustrious decree are to be considered null and void [...].

May 4, 1895

Place of composition: The protected city of Constantinople

4.

Institutionalizing the Fieldwork

Prof. Manissadjian and the Formation of the Anatolia College Library-Museum in Merzifon

By the turn of the 20th century, the Anatolia College embraced a combination of pedagogical perspectives, drawing upon Western as well as local communities, specifically connected with regional fieldwork in the Anatolian landscape. This terrain is shown to be multi-layered thanks to the services of different disciplines, such as geology, geography, archaeology and history. These layers represented the epistemological and ontological spirit of that time, as connoted by the scholarly work of the communities involved, and the specimens from the Jurassic to the contemporary world, collected from the historical land of Anatolia. All these evolved into a unified teaching philosophy with the arrival at the college of the Armenian-German scientist Prof. Manissadjian. Working from 1890 to 1915, Prof. Manissadjian would be the first in the faculty to recognize the pedagogical possibilities of fieldwork developing into a natural science collection. The library and museum were established between 1910 and 1911 as part of a new phase of construction on the Anatolia College campus in Merzifon, already a unique institution for its time and the region. During the existence of the museum, Prof. Manissadjian would be its only curator and he implemented scientific order to its eventual more than 7,000 specimens.

The teaching philosophy undertaken by Prof. Manissadjian, his students and staff of the Anatolia College, proposes a unity with the land that extends until the Great Catastrophe of 1915, at which point emerge several temporalities. While Prof. Manissadjian and his colleagues were inscribing the natural strata of Anatolia (via collecting, identifying and preserving), the Armenian and Greek communities in Anatolia, as well as the college itself and their philosophies, became additional historical layers—ones that are now fragmented, unidentified and made absent. These temporalities are recognized as inseparable overlays, which provide the historical context of *Empty Fields*.

Prof. Johannes “John” Jacob Manissadjian’s Biography

Armenian-German scientist, botanist, mineralogist and plant collector Johannes “John” Jacob Manissadjian (1862, Niksar, Ottoman Empire - 1942, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.) was professor of natural sciences at Anatolia College, Merzifon (1890-1915), and curator of the museum of the same college. He also taught geography at Apostolic Institute of Konia, Ottoman Empire (Konya, Turkey).

Prof. Manissadjian collected and identified for the first time numerous types of specimens including more than 80 new species of plants, butterflies and bees from Asia Minor. Some plants are named in his honor: *Colchicum manissadjianii* / *Merendera manissadjiani* (*Azn.*), *Iris manissadjiani* Freyn, and *Silene Manissadjiana* Freyn; as well as the butterfly *Axiopoena manissadjiani*. He was well known among his contemporary circles of scientists and botanists in Europe and regularly exchanged specimens from Merzifon and the natural science collection of the Museum of Anatolia College with international institutions. He was also the distributor of rare bulbs from Asia Minor for the company Dammann & Co (Naples, Italy) and the Dutch firm C.G. van Tubergen (1895-1914, specifically shipping the bulbs of *Iris gatesii* and *Tulipa sprengeri*). Prof. Manissadjian collected postage stamps and postcards, often collaborating with his brother, Haigasoun B. Manissadjian, who had a printing/publishing house in Basel, Switzerland. His brother Haigasoun was the plant and butterfly hunter for him in Mesopotamia.

The son of a German mother Katharina Klein and Armenian father Barsam Agha Manissadjian, he graduated from Central Turkey College in Aintab (Gaziantep), class of 1883 in the Arts. After further studies at the University of Berlin, he returned to the Ottoman Empire and in 1890 joined the faculty of Anatolia College in Merzifon. In 1893 he wrote the *Lehrbuch der modernen Osmanischen Sprache* [Textbook of Modern Ottoman Language] as a former lecturer of Turkish at Seminar of Oriental Languages in

Berlin organized by Dr. Eduard Sachau. In 1905-1906 a Masters degree was conferred to him by the Prudential Committee of the American Board.

Prof. Manissadjian survived the Great Catastrophe of 1915. On June 26, 1915 the gendarmes arrested him in Merzifon. Missionary Bertha B. Morley wrote: "First ransom or bribe was paid on June 28. It was to get Prof. Hagopian, Prof. Manissadjian and Simeon Azhderian released, and was £T30." Anatolia College President George E. White reported a higher sum of 275 TL for their release. Later, Maximillian Zimmer, a German farmer in Atabey who had a farm near Amasya got a permit from the Moutasarraf (administrator of the district) to take professors Manissadjian and Daghlian and their families to his farm as they were of German descent. The remaining Armenian college staff and families were deported on August 10. None survived.

In 1917 Prof. Manissadjian decided to return briefly to militarized Merzifon with the intention of documenting the natural science collection of the Museum of Anatolia College. At the end of World War I, he went to Constantinople (Istanbul) and worked in the American College for Girls (Arnavutköy) for a short period. On October 25, 1920 he arrived in New York City with his wife Arousiag (born Daghlian). In the 1920s, he moved permanently to Detroit, Michigan. After his arrival in the U.S., there are no signs as to whether he continued in his field or was in contact with his former international network. Recollections and informal sources suggest he never really recovered from the shock of 1915. *Empty Fields* has discovered only two further productions by him: In 1922 he made a short trip to Germany, preparing a two-page report now kept in the Detroit Public Library. In 1925 under his newly adopted name of J. J. Manis he edited the pamphlet *Proverbs of Turkey*.

Special thanks to Armen T. Marsoobian for his contributions. The biography has been conducted based on the research undertaken for *Empty Fields*, the books of Turhan Baytop, Kees Hoog, Arsen Yarman, and the diaries of Bertha B. Morley.

Manissadjian as Professor of Natural Sciences at Anatolia College

In the 1880s, Dr. Charles C. Tracy, President of Anatolia College, had an informal interest in collecting local fossils. Joining the college in 1890, Prof. Manissadjian expanded this amateur pursuit into a professional field of study. His pedagogical philosophy placed an importance on empirical observation with hands-on, geological fieldwork in the region. Students and members of the Archeological Club attended these collective excursions around Merzifon and gathered geological data in the form of specimens. Brought back to the college, these objects would be studied, identified and ultimately classified by Prof. Manissadjian. As the objects grew in number, the need for a storage facility evolved into the holding of a formal collection. Recognizing the potential in this development, Dr. Tracy fundraised for a building meant both for a library of publications on various topics including natural history and a museum space to house and display the expanding collection under the curatorship of Prof. Manissadjian.

Prof. Manissadjian as Curator of the Museum of Anatolia College

Prof. Manissadjian's curatorial vision and methodology for the new museum of natural science merged his local, regional pedagogical interests with the prevailing humanist impulses of American and German museological tradition. The museum synthesized the project of Enlightenment with that of Progressivism, that is to say, the rationalization of origins, the acts of discovering, naming, and cataloging the world, with the legitimization of scholarly work into modern academic infrastructures, research departments, scientific studies, expeditions, and similar endeavors. Therefore, Prof. Manissadjian introduced a curatorial vision with agency: he was responsible for the acquisition, preservation and display of the collection. For example, acquisitions implied that he researched and traveled to the peripheries of Anatolia, such as the Black Sea region (e.g. Amasya, the mountain of Akdagh [Akdağ], Kastamonu, Trabzon); from the Central Anatolia (e.g. Angora [Ankara], Caesarea [Kayseri], Sivas) to the South-Central region (e.g. Hadjin [Saimbeyli, Adana]; Shar [Şar, Adana] and the mountains of Antakya); from Eastern Anatolia (Azizie [Aziziye, Erzurum], the mountain of Ereğ in Van) to the Southeastern region (Aintab [Gaziantep]) to unearth natural objects.

His museum would foster a scientific discourse, cultivating partnerships in specimen exchanges with scientists and curators, like the Austrian botanist Josef Franz Freyn; Armenian botanist Georges Vincent Aznavour (Constantinople); Prof. Eberhard Fraas (Curator of Natural History Museum, Stuttgart); Prof. L. Wendl (Gymnasium-professor, München); Dr. A. Nenstadt (Biebrich of Rhein); Prof. F. Forster (Bretten, Baden); and Dr. Otto Standiger (Breslau).

“The newly arranged museum, the newly opened reading room and library, the new supply of pure drinking water from a deep well, are individual features of great value and marked progress.”

Source: Anatolia College, “Bulletin of Anatolia College and Anatolia Girls’ School, at Marsovan, Turkey, for the academic year 1914-1915,” American Board Library Pamphlet Collection, Marsovan: Anatolia Press, 1915, p. 10

“The museum was open to the public and drew many visitors, who also admired the campus flower gardens, another creation of Professor ‘Manis.’”

Source: William McGrew, *Educating across Cultures: Anatolia College in Turkey and Greece*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015, pp. 113-14

“The museum, under the wonderfully skilful and scientific hand of Professor Manissadjian attained a collection of more than 7,000 specimens, thoroughly classified and arranged for display. Toward the last the museum was open twice a week to the public, and was often visited by a hundred persons from outside the College of an afternoon. The educative and suggestive value of that orderly array was exceedingly high.”

Source: George E. White, *Charles Chapin Tracy - Missionary, Philanthropist, Educator: First President of Anatolia College, Marsovan, Turkey*, Boston/Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1918, p. 62

By 1915 the entire documented collection held more than 7,000 zoological, paleontological, and mineralogical specimens, including stuffed quadrupeds and birds, skeletons of mammals and fish, fossils, minerals, animals in alcohol, plants, samples of wood, vegetable objects, shells and corals, butterflies and insects. The college library held over 10,000 books. There is no single photo preserved from the museum interior or its collection.

Library-Museum in the 1920s and 1930s

Until research for *Empty Fields* unearthed certain materials, the natural science collection in Merzifon was considered to be lost after the World War I and Greco-Turkish War. In 2015 the exhibition research conducted in the American Board Archives discovered missionary reports from Merzifon from the post-war, and the Republican period between the 1920s and 1930s. These reports contained information as to the ways the missionaries tried to adapt to the new political changes by turning the museum's collection into a social tool to attract the local Muslim Turkish people and build trust with what remained of the mission. Such attempts extended to the use of the science room opposite the museum for 16mm film projections of instructional films such as "Fly Danger," "Forest and Water," "Wheat to Bread," "Care of Trees," "Insects," and for women "Care of Babies."

5.

Inscribing the Empty Fields: The Writing of the Disaster

“The universal war put a stop to all scientific work,
except the continuation of arranging,
labeling and cataloguing the specimens...”

Johannes “John” Jacob Manissadjian
1917, Merzifoun
Curator, Museum of Anatolia College

During the 2015 exhibition research, a bound, handwritten book by Prof. Manissadjian, entitled *Catalogue of the Museum of Anatolia College*, was discovered in the American Board Archives. It meticulously labels, archives and provides the scientific data for all specimens and showcases of the lost museum. His inscription “December 1917, Merzifoun” at the end of the introduction serves as the only evidence for his return to the then-militarized Merzifon after having escaped the Great Catastrophe of 1915.

Completed in 1918, his narrative covers the humble beginning of the collection and its pedagogical meaning, the first showcases, the formation of the library and museum, his travels as a curator in Anatolia and finally the war that “puts a stop to all scientific work.” Prof. Manissidjian’s catalog alphabetically orders and precisely lists showcases, tables, stands and drawers. In page after handwritten page, each object in the showcases is recorded within his system, indexed by number, English and scientific name, area of origin, trade and purchase value or taxidermy cost. Each item contains his remarks on the characteristics (class, genus, species) and the name of the collector, usually a student or staff member.

Prof. Manissidjian’s catalog documents his last view on the museum as it was displayed in Merzifon in 1917. With its obsessive handwritten accounts, among many aspects, it can be argued that his act corresponds to what philosopher Maurice Blanchot coins as

“the writing of the disaster.” That is, while completing the fields of a taxonomy attesting to a cohesive collection of the world, this museum catalog simultaneously foresees the inevitable dispersal of its artifacts. The task of the writing is not only a conscious return to the site of the catastrophe to create the historical inscription, but it is a testimony to the work disrupted by 20th-century history. Thus, this last curatorial act of Prof. Manissadjian would be his first archival act; its discovery a century later in the American Board Archives reveals the nature of the empty fields within.

6.

A Plant Hunter for the International Field

During the Ottoman Empire, the export of plant bulbs to the West was a big industry. This era informs Prof. Manissadjian's fieldwork philosophy on the Anatolian landscape. His work in the museum offered a historical record through inert specimens, and reflected his passion to collect and identify. At the same time, his botanical work studying flowers and gathering bulbs enriched the knowledge of regional biodiversity. Prof. Manissadjian was able to discover rare flowers—irises, snowdrops and tulips, and through his partnership with Dutch company C. G. van Tubergen (1894-1914) ensure their reproduction by cultivating bulbs in botanical gardens or plant nurseries. Later, in the 1980s renowned Turkish botanist and pharmacist Turhan Baytop would recognize Prof. Manissadjian's work and mentioned that he "[...] sent living material to van Tubergen (The Netherlands) and contributed much to the knowledge of Turkish bulbous plants."

Among Prof. Manissadjian's distributed specimens was the rare *Tulipa sprengeri*, first recorded in Amasya in the late 19th century. While now extinct in the wild it thrives in cultivation as an ornamental plant.

Special thanks to Kees Hoog for his contributions

Source: Brian Mathew and Turhan Baytop, *The Bulbous Plants of Turkey*, Batsford Ltd, 1984, p. 12

7.

Narrating the Museological Space of Empty Fields

By overlaying frameworks belonging to both museological and contemporary cultural institutions, *Empty Fields* proposes to envision a space in-between. In this setup, the curatorial narrative materializes the archive's empty fields by reflecting on the natural science collection of the Museum of Anatolia College. It is the fate of that collection which allows us to understand two opposing actions set upon it by the Great Catastrophe of 1915: the dispersal of the whole collection, and Prof. Manissadjian's detailed recording of each object in 1917. The collection's dispersal embodies the post-catastrophe character with a violence of abstraction of its objects by becoming nameless entities. In contrast, Prof. Manissadjian's final curatorial act can be recognized as his resistance to the impending post-catastrophe anonymity of the collection, through his belief in a unity of epistemological and taxonomic orders.

In 2015 the exhibition research discovered both Prof. Manissadjian's catalog and labels. These serve as coordinates for deciphering his inscription of the collection as a whole entity. His personal handwriting in black ink, which records each object, continues on matching labels framed by ornamental plant motifs. Displayed together today, such elaborate documentation, made at that moment of the disaster, suggests that the collection's meaning for Prof. Manissadjian had to do with more than just objects.

In "Narrating the Museological Space of Empty Fields" the remains of the past are seen through the lens of the associations they evoke. There is no aim to restore past connections to the collection's dispersed objects, or what could be salvaged in 2015. What is showcased is the erasure and blankness implicit in the collection's history that invites the viewer to stare at empty fields. Yet, it is at this point, in the public cultural institution, that the subject of the catastrophe returns as a contemporary discourse which revolves around what is seen and what is not said.

Discovering the Leftovers of the Collection in Tarsus American College (TAC)

In 1939, after the closure of the Merzifon school, the Anatolia College museum collection and showcases were transported to the remaining American College in Tarsus, Mersin. Once there, this pedagogical collection lacked an institutional framework to hold it together as a cohesive museum. Only a selection of the showcases and specimens were used, displayed and dispersed in spaces around the college. By the 1960s, not having been even properly inventoried, the collection became neglected and its unrecognizable status left it bereft of meaning and provenance. In 2015, during a research trip to Tarsus for the exhibition, the curator followed up on recollections from the school's alumni. Due to specific labels created by Prof. Manissadjian for each object, it was possible to identify that the forgotten objects had originally belonged to the collection of the Museum of Anatolia College. Currently, all that is left of the collection and the museum showcases now belongs to Sağlık ve Eğitim Vakfı [The Health and Education Foundation] (SEV) in Turkey.

Special thanks to Nihat Taner for his support to the research in Tarsus, as well as to Dr. Feza Günergun, Dr. Şeref Etker and Ateş Aykut.

Merzifon Station Annual Report, 1938-1939
by Everett C. Blake
June 22, 1939

“Recently considerable time has been spent in packing and shipping 66 crates and boxes containing most of the college museum. These four tons of museum objects and exhibition cases occupying a box-car [...] have just been delivered to Tarsus College and are now being set up there. We feel that in preserving to one of its institutions this immensely valuable collection of animals, fossils, minerals, and plants, the mission is preserving one of its finest treasures. [...] Two show-cases containing the largest stuffed animals of our museum are being given to the local Orta School. These animals would be very difficult and expensive to transport elsewhere and will be highly appreciated if left in Merzifon.”

Report of Tarsus College for the Annual Meeting for 1939
June 24, 1939

“Mr. Blake stopped off at Tarsus on his way to Annual Meeting, bringing with him the butterfly collection from Merzifon, and at just about the same time [...] our load of other museum pieces also arrived. Before the Tarsus delegates had left for Istanbul the process of setting things up had begun. As Bobby Woolworth remarked, ‘Even the empty cabinets are interesting:’ we all anticipate enjoying the museum ourselves, as also sharing it with the people of the city.”

TAC'LIYILLAR [TAC YEARS]

(1940-1947 Tarsus American College Memories and the Story of the School's Establishment)

“In glass displays lined up on the left and right sides were some plant samples, dried and taxidermied specimens of insect and animal species, a few objects unearthed in archaeological excavations, coins, various samples of stones and minerals; in other words, it was like a kind of private museum. These special objects had been brought from the American school in Merzifon, which had been closed down. Among the plant samples, the dried tobacco leaves in various sizes were the samples that we found most interesting. –Tobacco is not grown in Çukurova, so it is alien to us.– That section of the glass display was a center of attraction for those who had developed a fondness for smoking at a young age; I never forget how many friends stood and admired those tobacco leaves; and of course, the jokes sprinkled in between.”

An email correspondence between two alumni of TAC (July 25, 2009)

Subject: The Attic of the Old Administrative Building of TAC

From: Ateş Aykut

To: Nihat Taner

My dear brother Nihat,

After reading the Tarsus İdman Yurdu text, and while thinking about your interest in history, I suddenly remembered this: There used to be a diagonal staircase on the side of Study Hall that overlooked the offices that led up to the attic of the old administrative building, where the dining hall and the bell [tower] were. At the end of this staircase there was the room of Mrs. Leman, who once used to be the “dining hall matron.” The entrance to the attic was next to her room.

I remember seeing hundreds of stone and fossil samples in drawers there. Back then, it had never crossed my mind to investigate what those objects were, lying there unclaimed and covered in dust. [...]

I think these dusty objects formed an important collection [of] fauna. [...]

Yours affectionately,
Ateş Aykut

Subject: RE: The Attic of the Old Administrative Building of TAC
From: Nihat Taner
To: Ateş Aykut

Hello my dear brother Ateş,

[...] I know that attic, too. Not only fossil samples, there were also taxidermy samples, and snakes and similar animals preserved in alcohol in glass containers as well.

We spoke about this once with Mr. Meyer. I may be mistaken but I seem to remember that they were brought from Merzifon, when the missionary school there was closed. I can ask him anyway. Mr. Meyer said that the collection had later been sent to Istanbul for some reason.

Yours sincerely,
Nihat

Nihat Taner wrote in 2009:

Hello my dear brother Ateş,

Two weeks ago we were in Virginia with my wife [...]. So I took the opportunity to call Mr. Meyer and Mr. Robeson. It turns out

I remember correctly. When Merzifon College closed, some of the materials there were brought to Tarsus [...] An important scientist in Merzifon (Mr. Meyer referred to him as “professor”) used to work on fossils, send samples abroad, and bring samples from abroad. These materials somehow came to TAC [...]. At one point, an inventory of these materials was drawn up. Mr. Meyer couldn’t quite remember that, but in the message he sent me later he provided this information, “The fellow I had been working with on the museum stuff above the Study Hall around 1957-58 was Ertan Söylemez, I believe a graduate of 1958.”

I then spoke to Mr. Robeson. He, too, said that, when he came to Tarsus in 1953, these fossil samples were in the Stickler basement, and that the floor above Study Hall was the preparation class dormitory. He then added that the next year (1954-55?), when the construction of Friendship Hall was completed, the dormitory was moved here, and the fossils were taken to the room above Study Hall. [...]

Back to Mr. Meyer: “One day someone (he doesn’t remember the name) from Robert College came and asked for these fossils on a ‘permanent loan.’ The administration approved the request and the fossils were gone” he said. [...]

Yours sincerely,
Nihat

Library-Museum Building in Merzifon Today

The Merzifon building, which held the library and museum, later served for several decades as the headquarters for the military's motorized infantry regiment. It was restored in 1990 to become what is now the administrative center for Merzifon Vocational School of Amasya University. Today, the original building is standing but is missing the top, third floor, which had accommodated the natural sciences collection in the past. According to unofficial sources, this may have been due to a fire in the 1940s. A roof structure now covers the building's second floor.

Museum of Anatolia College, Merzifoun

From left to right

1.

Case A

Quadrupeds

2.

Case B

Quadrupeds & Birds

3.

Case C

Birds

4.

Case D

Diverse Animal and Vegetable Objects

5.

Case E

Skeletons

6.

Case F

Table: Shells & Corals

7.

Case F

Stand: Animals in Alcohol

Drawers: Minerals

8.

Case F

Closet: Plants from Germany

9.

Case G

Eggs, Insects, Minerals

10.

Case H

Butterflies & Other Insects

11.

Case J

Samples of Wood

12.

Case K

Herbarium

13.

Case L

German Fossils

14.

Case M

Perfect (Fossils) from Foreign Countries

15.

Case N

Stones and perfect (Fossils) from Turkey

16.

Case O

Fossil Fish

17.

Case P & Case Q

Perfect (Fossils) from Turkey

8.

Manissadjian: Plantae Orientales

Prof. Manissadjian collected numerous specimens from historically Asia Minor with many identified for the first time: more than 80 new plants, butterflies and bees. Some plants are named in his honor: *Colchicum manissadjianii* / *Merendera manissadjiani* (Azn.), *Iris manissadjiani* Freyn, and *Silene Manissadjiana* Freyn; as well as the butterfly *Axiopoena manissadjiani*. This fact of naming is a rare accolade even now and a testament to his endeavor in the field.

During his tenure in Merzifon, Prof. Manissadjian cultivated the scientific exchange of plants, preserved as specimens, which were acquired as examples of the genus “Plantae Orientales.” Traces of this history can be found in collections today, including herbaria in Ankara, Amsterdam, Berlin, Baden, Istanbul, Geneva, London, Paris, and Vienna. The Herbarium of Ankara University, Faculty of Science offers a postscript to the narrative process in which empty fields become the core of this project. The institution holds 130 plants of Prof. Manissadjian, including the rare *Silene manissadjiani* Freyn, one of many named in his honor. These specimens were respectfully preserved, yet kept in a drawer for unattributed sources, in the “anonymous historical” section. This is due to the fact that connections to both Prof. Manissadjian’s biography and the Anatolia College, as his institutional framework, were absented. In 2015, these connections were reestablished during the research visit of *Empty Fields* to Ankara.

The suggestion of an Anatolian landscape is presented in the museological space by bringing together the many plants categorized under “Manissadjian: Plantae Orientales.” It is a scientific tableau of precise specimens, which paradoxically also stands for the non-empirical perspectives within a landscape that can only be projected through the residual signs of its politics of loss and displacement.

Postscript to Empty Fields

Ara T. Dildilian (1907, Merzifon - 1986, Boston, USA) attended Anatolia College before the Great Catastrophe of 1915. He managed to flee to Thessaloniki, finding final refuge in the USA. There Dildilian would become a chemist, as well an avid collector of rare rocks and minerals from all over the world. In a 1968 interview conducted in New York with the survivors of the catastrophe, Dildilian would state that as a child, he acquired his interest and inspiration in minerals from his neighbor, curator of the natural science collection of the Museum of Anatolia College in Merzifon, Prof. Manissadjian. In 1986, according to his final wishes, Dildilian's family donated his entire collection to the Geological Museum in then Soviet Armenia. In 2012-2013 the Geological Museum of Armenia incorporated his collection into its permanent exhibition.

The text is based on the references provided by the Geological Museum of Armenia in Yerevan and the exhibition *Bearing Witness to the Lost History of an Armenian Family Through the Lens of the Dildilian Brothers (1872-1923)* by Armen T. Marsoobian at DEPO, Istanbul, 2013.

Interview with Ara T. Dildilian
1968

“Really it was a good college, community atmosphere - concerts, lectures, the museum. I know I was a small child, but our neighbor Dr. Manissadjian was quite a scientist. He was the curator of the museum. Perhaps I acquired my interest in minerals, and rocks, and antiques, you name it, from him. I used to spend most of my time in the museum with his fossil collections and plant collections.”

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Institutions

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Cover Image

Liliaceae, Amasya, date unknown

Allium kharpuntense Freyn. et Sint.

Manissadjian: *Plantae Orientales*, No. 5886, Determ. by J. Freyn

Courtesy Ankara Üniversitesi Fen Fakültesi Herbariumu (ANK)

Istanbul, 2016

