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**ARCHITECTURE AND PRIVATE SPACE.
THE MANSION FROM GHIDIGENI**

- Abstract -

Descending from an old family of archons from Chios Isle, Greece, Chrissoveloni family, through its representative, Zannis, arrived in Galați and settled here in 1848, laying down the bases of a cereal meter in the harbour. It was the starting point for the expansion of business in the Romanian space. Shortly after this establishment, the company was setting up agencies in Brăila and Bucharest.

Businesses were successfully continued by Nicolas Z. Chrissoveloni, one of Zannis' sons, who enlarges the family fortune by purchasing wide estates in Romania, Greece and Macedonia, Melnues-Monfort Castle near Paris, etc.

In 1879, he bought from Dimitrie Mavrocordat, a renowned boyar of those days, Ghidigeni and Ciorăști estate, being lured by its forests and soils favourable to cereal crops and vineyards, by its pastures and by the presence of Bârlad River and of a brandy distiller.

Nicolae Chrissoveloni built in Ghidigeni a school, functional to this day, the village church, the mansion and its annexes on the banks of Bârlad. Around 1887, these had already been built.

He turned the brandy distiller into a modern alcohol plant which also comprised yeast and potash plant, mechanic workshops and a garage rail (connected to Tecuci-Bârlad railway).

The mansion, a true palace, and its annexes, built by Nicolae Chrissoveloni, betrayed the influence of the Romantic architecture characteristic of the 19th century. The garden in front of the mansion, full of roses, was arranged in the French fashion, hosting rare species of ornamental bushes brought from abroad.

Two water basins were adorning the mansion entrance, ensuring a fresh atmosphere in hot summer days, and outlining at the same time the residency status of the building.

The bowling track and two tennis courts, out of which one was covered, were probably built after the beginning of the 20th century. It is certain that the covered tennis court was the only one of this kind in Romania for "you cannot play tennis in winter, but at Ghidigeni you can".

Built on two levels, in the style of French academism, the architecture of the palace reminds of the Greek origin of the owner. This building, although with simple volumes of the wall elevation, impressed through the vertical rhythm ensured by the high, prismatic roofs suggesting medieval towers if the alert articulation of the decorative plastics did not partially dissolve their severity.

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Jean Chrissoveloni, one of the three children born from Nicolas Chrissoveloni's marriage with Callirhoe Economo from Trieste, proved himself not only an eccentric, but a pragmatic man as well, managing to develop family business through his friendships with the Romanian highlife.

His eccentricity was obvious not only in the numerous events, but also in his bringing marble from Greece for building a family vault just like the temple of Goddess Nike on the Acropolis.

Jean Chrissoveloni's family and his sister Elena, married to principle Suțu, then to the French diplomat Paul Morand, were extremely hospitable hosts, receiving at Ghidigeni mansion Queen Maria and her daughters, King Ferdinand, Queen Maria's husband and other personalities of the Romanian history, before and during the war: Gafencu, Argetoianu, Negroponte, Balș, Ghica, etc.

During World War I, the mansion was turned into a hospital in which Jean's wife, Sybille and Queen Maria's daughters were working as volunteers. Here, Jean Chrissoveloni set up and managed Queen Maria Society of Ambulances.

After the war, in 1920, Jean Chrissoveloni set up in Bucharest, Chrissoveloni Bank, bringing as social share the alcohol plant from Ghidigeni. He died in 1926, family business being taken over by a wardship made of his wife, Sybille and prince Dimitrie Ghica, because his son, Nicky was not of age yet.

Nicky Chrissoveloni, together with his family, knew all the unfortunate events of the first half of the 20th century: the international crisis, World War II, confiscation of the fortune by the Communists, Communist prison. In 1960, he managed to leave, together with his family, in Greece. He died, far from his native country, in 1971, and was buried on a small island, Glyvada, near Athens.

Ghidigeni mansion, in seemingly perfect symbiosis with its owner, underwent the same hardships as Nicky Chrissoveloni. Burnt down by a fire in 1936-1937, it was rebuilt afterwards without preserving the same superb roof. In 1948 it was nationalised, turned into an agricultural establishment, then into a school for children with special needs. It suffered numerous transformations, both the palace and the annexes, and its state of degradation advanced continuously.

In 2004, Chrissovelonis' heirs, come into the possession of the mansion, trying to stop the degradation phenomenon and to save it from collapse.

The remarkable architecture, as well the personalities that had once passed its threshold, constituted strong arguments for qualifying the mansion and the family vault historical monuments in 1992.

Keywords: Chrissoveloni, biography, Ghidigeni, Galați, Greek family, agriculture, mansion, highlife

ARHITECTURĂ ȘI SPAȚIU PRIVAT. ANSAMBLUL CONACULUI DE LA GHIDIGENI

- Rezumat -

Scoborâtoare dintr-o veche familie de arhonți din insula Chios din Grecia, familia Chrissoveloni, prin reprezentantul său Zannis, a ajuns și s-a stabilit în Galați în anul 1848, când au pus bazele unuo contor de cereale în port. A fost punctul de plecare al expansiunii

afacerilor în spațiul românesc. La puțin timp de la înființare, firma instala agenții la Brăila și București.

Afacerile sunt continuate cu succes de Nicolas Z. Chrissoveloni, unul dintre fiii lui Zannis, care va spori averea familiei prin achiziția unor moșii întinse în România, Grecia și Macedonia, castelul Melnues-Monfort de lângă Paris etc.

În anul 1879, va cumpăra de la Dimitrie Mavrocordat, un boier de seamă din acea perioadă, moșia Ghidigeni și Ciorăștii cu toate trupurile ei, atras fiind de pădurile, de solul propice pentru cultivarea cerealelor și a viței de vie, de pășuni, dar și de existența unei ape curgătoare, râul Bârlad și a unei velnițe de rachiu.

Nicolae Chrissoveloni a construit pe moșia de la Ghidigeni, o școală, funcțională și astăzi, biserica din sat, conacul și anexele sale de pe malul Bârladului. În jurul anului 1887, acestea erau deja construite.

Velnița de rachiu a dezvoltat-o într-o modernă fabrică de spirt care conținea și o fabrică de drojdie și potasă, ateliere mecanice și o linie de garaj (o linie de cale ferată care era legată de drumul de fier Tecuci-Bârlad).

Conacul, un adevărat palat, și anexele sale, construite de Nicolae Chrissoveloni, vădea influența asupra comanditarului a arhitecturii de factură romantică existentă în secolul al XIX-lea. Grădina din fața conacului, plină de trandafiri, a fost amenajată după moda franceză, unde erau plantate specii rare de arbori ornamentali aduși din străinătate.

Două bazine cu apă înfrumusețau intrarea în conac, asigurând o atmosferă răcoroasă în zilele pline de arșiță ale verii, punctând totodată, ținuta rezidențială a imobilului.

Pista de popice și cele două terenuri de tenis, din care unul acoperit, au fost construite probabil după începutul secolului al XX-lea. Cert este că terenul de tenis acoperit era singurul din România în acea perioadă astfel încât „Iarna nu se putea juca tenis, pe când la Ghidigeni puteai să joci.”

Construit pe două nivele, în stilul academismului francez, arhitectura palatului amintește și de originea elenă a proprietarului. Acest edificiu, deși cu o volumetrie simplă a elevației zidurilor, reușea să impresioneze printr-un ritm vertical asigurat de acoperișurile prismate, înalte și mansardate sugerând bastioane medievale dacă articularea alertă a plasticii decorative a fațadelor nu ar dizolva parțial severitatea acestora.

Jean Chrissoveloni, unul din cei trei copii rezultați din căsătoria lui Nicolas Chrissoveloni cu Callirhoe Economo din Trieste, s-a dovedit nu numai un tip excentric, ci și pragmatic, care a reușit să dezvolte afacerile familiei prin întreținerea unor prietenii din high-lifeul României.

Excentritatea lui s-a manifestat nu numai prin numeroasele evenimente, ci și prin aducerea de marmură din Grecia pentru a construi un cavou familiei întocmai ca templul zeiței Nike de pe Acropole.

Familia lui Jean Chrissoveloni și sora sa Elena care a fost căsătorită cu principele Suțu și apoi cu diplomatul francez Paul Morand, au fost gazde extrem de ospitaliere la conacul Ghidigeni pentru regina Maria și fiicele sale, pentru regele Ferdinand, soțul reginei Maria, pentru alte personalități ale istoriei României ante și interbelice: Gafencu, Argetoianu, Negroponte, Balș, Ghica, etc.

În timpul Primului Război Mondial, conacul devenise spital în care soția lui Jean, Sybille și fetele reginei Maria lucrau ca voluntare. Tot aici, Jean Chrissoveloni a finanțat și a fost președintele Societății de Ambulanțe Regina Maria.

După război, în 1920, Jean Chrissoveloni a înființat la București, Banca Chrissoveloni, aducând ca aport social fabrica de spirt de la Ghidigeni. A murit în 1926,

afacerile familiei fiind preluate de o tutelă compusă din soția lui, Sybille și principele Dimitrie Ghica, deoarece fiul său, Nicky, nu era încă major.

Nicky Chrissoveloni împreună cu familia sa, au cunoscut toate evenimentele nefaste ale primei jumătăți de secol XX: criza mondială, cel de al doilea război mondial, confiscarea averii de către comuniști, închisoarea comunistă. În 1960 a reușit să plece , împreună cu familia sa, în Grecia. S-a stins departe de țara natală, în anul 1972 și a fost îngropat pe o insulă mică, Glyvada, în apropiere de Atena.

Conacul de la Ghidigeni aflat parcă într-o simbioză perfectă cu proprietarul său a cunoscut aceleași încercări prin care a trecut Nicky Chrissoveloni. Distrus de un incendiu în 1936-1937, a fost refăcut fără a mai avea acel acoperiș impozant. În 1948 a fost naționalizat , transformat într-o gospodărie agricolă de stat, apoi a devenit cîmin-școală pentru copii cu nevoi speciale. A suferit numeroase transformări constructive, atât la corpul palatului, cât și la anexe, iar starea de degradare a avansat continuu.

În 2004, moștenitorii familiei Chrissoveloni au intrat din nou în proprietatea conacului, astăzi încercând să stopeze fenomenul de degradare și să-l salveze de la colaps.

Arhitectura deosebită, dar și personalitățile care i-au trecut pragul, au constituit argumente puternice pentru clasarea conacului și a cavoului familiei ca monumente istorice în anul 1992.

Cuvinte cheie: Chrissoveloni, biografie, Ghidigeni, Galați, familie greci, agricultură, conac, elită.

To the North of Galați County, at the border with Vaslui County, Ghidigeni locality is closer to Bârlad (Vaslui County) and Tecuci (Galați County) Cities (22 km, 25 km, respectively) than the county capital city - Galați - which is located at 109 km approximately.

In the *Great Geographical Dictionary*, edition of 1899, Lahovary was writing about Ghidigeni that it was a rural locality and village of Tutova County; he was placing Corod on the left border of Bârlad River and to the South, the county capital city.

It had, in those days (1898), “563 inhabitants and 146 houses. There are 850 inhabitants in the entire locality, out of which 149 taxpayers, 270 houses. It has an alcohol plant.

15 people are engaged in trade.

It has a railway station, a rural post office for Corod Pereschiv region, a primary school for boys, a church.”¹

After 1965, at the same time with the new administrative-territorial reorganisation of Romania, Ghidigeni locality had become part of Galați County.

¹ *Marele Dicționar Geografic al României (Great Dictionary of Romania)*, by General Iacob Lahovary, vol. II, Bucharest, 1899, pp. 521-522

At present, the locality has 6,527 inhabitants², 2,049 households and 1,902 dwellings. It comprises eight villages: Ghidigeni, Gefu, Gârbovăț, Tăplău, Tălpigi, Slobozia-Corni, Gura Gârbovățului, Gara Ghidigeni (former Nichișel), on an area of 7,151 ha.

The relief is dominated by Tecuci Plain, a sub-hilly plain of terraces which belong to the Romanian Plain, the altitude varying between 43 meters in the South and 149 meters (Movila with Salcie point, SE)³. The locality is crossed by Bârlad River which overflows its banks when it rains heavily.

Being located on the lower reach of Bârlad, it includes its terraces and meadow, as well as the terraced foothill of Cosmești din Deal, between Siret and Bârlad.

The ash, oak, poplar and acacia forests, agricultural lands shelter a rich and attractive hunting fund⁴.

The climate is specific to the temperate continental region, with arid summers and cold winters, with strong blizzards.

The lands favourable to agriculture, grazing, vineyards, the forests and the rivers attracted the wealthy boyars who come into the possession of the land.

One of them was Dimitrie Mavrocordat, a distinguished boyar of the latter half of the 19th century, who had his residence in Iași.

On October 25, 1876, Dimitrie Mavrocordat was seeking to lease "Ghidigeni estate and Cioresții with all its annexes"⁵. "Competition" or auction for leasing the estate had to take place on May 1, 1877, in Bârlad town, Talpău Hotel⁶. We do not know whether he succeeded in leasing Ghidigeni estate, however we do know that in 1879, he was selling Ghidigeni-Cioresții estate to Nicolae Chrissoveloni, banker⁷.

² Galați County Council, *The stable population of Galați County on cities, towns, localities and sexes on July 1, 2009*, <http://www.cjgalati.ro>.

³ Sorin Geacu, *Județul Galați, Dicționar de geografie fizică (Galați County, Dictionary of Physical Geography)*, CD PRESS Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p.120.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p.121.

⁵ "Vocea Covurluiului" Newspaper, October 25, 1876, V. A. Urechia Galați Library Documentary Fund.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ In the donation deed, authenticated by Ilfov Court, Notary Section, under no. 3527/1906, by which Callirhoe N. Chrissoveloni, is donating a series of goods to his son, Zanni N. Chrissoveloni, it is specified that Ghidigenii-Cioresții and Cărligii was bought under the document authenticated by Covurlui Court, section I, under no.38/ 1879. The copy of this document was provided to us by Mr. John Chrissoveloni.

The Chrissovelonis come from a family of archons from Chios Isle, its first documentary attestation being still controversial (16th or 18th century)⁸. In 1821, when the Turks were trying to smother the rebellions of the Greek for independence, Zanni Manolis Chrissoveloni, one of the family members, flees from the isle that was to be burnt and arrives in Athens⁹.

Business savvy, as his entire family, Zanni Manolis Chrissoveloni opened in 1830, in Constantinople, Z. M. Chrissoveloni Fils et Cie Company. At the middle of the 19th century, he settled, for a short while in Constanța¹⁰ and then, due to the business relations established between the Romanian countries, especially regarding cereal trade on the Danube, he set up a cereal meter in Galați, under the name of “Chrissoveloni Fils, maison d’exportation et de banquet”. It was the starting point for the expansion of business in the Romanian space. Shortly after this establishment, the company was setting up agencies in Brăila and Bucharest.

In 1881, when Romania was becoming a Kingdom, the company merged with another old export house and bank, A. Kalergi, changing its name in Chrissoveloni Fils et Cie. Businesses were successfully continued by Nicolas Z. Chrissoveloni, one of Zannis’ sons, who changes again the name of the company in “N. Chrissoveloni, banquier”.¹¹

Nicolae Chrissoveloni was a member of the consultative committee for the establishment of a warehouse in Galați¹² and, deeply attached to his adoptive country, he contributed to the subscription of the sums necessary for purchasing weapons for the Romanian army in the War of Independence¹³.

We do not the exact year when he moved to Bucharest, on Lipscani Street¹⁴, what we do know is that in 1883, they owned a property in Galați¹⁵, neighbouring to the East the land on which the National Bank of Romania, Galați Subsidiary, would be built. It is here that were born: Elena (1879-1975) and Zanni

⁸ According to Sybille Manu-Chrissoveloni, born on June 15, 1942, in Bucharest, the filiation of Chrissoveloni family goes down to 15th-16th century (Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Toamna și primăvara unui destin: bancherii Chrissoveloni*, in “Magazin Istoric” (Historical Magazine, no. 9/402, 2000), according to other genealogies, the attestation of the family starts with Zanni Chrissoveloni, in 1740 (http://www.genealogy.si/srd_indeks/C.txt).

⁹ Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Toamna și primăvara unui destin: bancherii Chrissoveloni (The Autumn and Spring of a Destiny: Chrissoveloni Bankers)*, in “Magazin Istoric” (Historical Magazine), no. 9/402, 2000.

¹⁰ National Archives of Romania, *Arhive personale și familiale, Repertoriu arhivistic (Personal and Family Archives, Archive Repertoire)*, Vol.1, Bucharest, 2001, p. 171.

¹¹ Ștefan Petre Kirson, op. cit., p.51.

¹² Galați Documentary Treasury, p.202.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 213.

¹⁴ Donation deed authenticated by Ilfov County, Notary Section, under no. 3527/1906.

¹⁵ Bill of sale entered by sisters Cantacazi and the National Bank of Romania, authenticated by Covurlui Court on October 29, 1883.

(1880-1926), two of the three children of Nicolae and Callirhoe Chrissoveloni, former *Economo din Trieste*¹⁶. The third child was Demeter, who held important positions, for in 1908, N.Z. Chrissoveloni associates his two sons, Jean and Dumitru (the Romanian names of Zanni and Demeter), turning the company into a partnership firm named "N. Chrissoveloni", Bankers, Partnership Firm¹⁷.

They alienated the property in Galați, because on the date of the donation made by Nicolae Chrissoveloni's wife to her son, Zannis, in 1906, it no longer appears among the real estates of the family¹⁸. However, Chrissoveloni family did not leave entirely the town on the Danube border where they had started their business and ascension, also owning a nailery which Zanni Chrissoveloni brought in as share capital upon the establishment of Chrissoveloni Bank in 1920¹⁹.

At the same time with the fame of the company led by Nicolae Chrissoveloni, family fortune increases as well, as it they purchase wide estates in Romania, Greece and Macedonia, Ghidigeni mansion, Melnues-Monfort Castle near Paris, etc.

Let us go back to Ghidigeni estate which Nicolae Chrissoveloni brought in 1879 from Dimitrie Mavrocordat. Near the Greek communities of Galați and Brăila, near the Danube harbours, the inspiration to buy Ghidigeni estate will prove of great importance during World War I when the royal family, the Parliament and the Government of Romania move their headquarters to Moldova.

Nicolae Chrissoveloni built in Ghidigeni a school²⁰, functional to this day, the village church, the mansion and its annexes on the banks of Bârlad. Around 1887, these had already been built.

He turned the brandy distiller into a modern alcohol plant which also comprised a yeast and potash plant, mechanic workshops and a garage rail²¹ (connected to Tecuci-Bârlad railway).

The aerial photograph, dating to the year 1930 approximately shows that the mansion, a true palace, and its annexes, built by Nicolae Chrissoveloni, betrayed the influence of the Romantic architecture characteristic of the 19th

¹⁶ Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Pe aripile amintirilor (On the Wings of Memories)*, Publishing House of the Historical Magazine Cultural Foundation, Bucharest, 2005, p.72.

¹⁷ Memorandum of association of Chrissoveloni Bank, Romanian Public Limited Company, authenticated by Ilfov County, Notary Section, under no. 10582 of April 30, 1920.

¹⁸ According to the Donation deed authenticated by Ilfov County, Notary Section, under no. 3527/1906.

¹⁹ Memorandum of association of Chrissoveloni Bank, Romanian Public Limited Company, authenticated by Ilfov County, Notary Section, under no. 10582 of April 30, 1920.

²⁰ Petru Condrea, *Dicționar geografic al județului Tutova (Geographic Dictionary of Tutova County)*, Socecu&Teclu Graphic Establishment, Bucharest, 1887, p.42.

²¹ According to the Memorandum of association of Chrissoveloni Bank, Romanian Public Limited Company, authenticated by Ilfov County, Notary Section, under no. 10582 of April 30, 1920.

century (Photo 1). The garden in front of the mansion, full of roses, was arranged in the French fashion, being cared for by a gardener specialised in floral arrangements. It hosted rare species of ornamental bushes brought from abroad.

Two water basins were adorning the mansion entrance, ensuring a fresh atmosphere in hot summer days, and outlining at the same time the residency status of the building (Photo 2). “One meter, one meter and a half deep (...) You would freshen up during the summer, instead of taking a shower, you got into that shallow water, swam a little, and felt invigorated (...)” was saying Maria Georgeta Caterina Chrissoveloni²², Nicky Chrissoveloni’s wife, Zanne N. Chrissoveloni’s son.

The bowling track and two tennis courts, out of which one was covered, were probably built after the beginning of the 20th century. It is certain that the covered tennis court was the only one of this kind in Romania²³ for “you cannot play tennis in winter, but at Ghidigeni you can”²⁴. The building in which the tennis court was located had been built precisely for this purpose. It was tall, long, with two registers. On the lower register, there was a series of half-circle windows, and on the upper register, a series of large, tall, arched windows ensured the proper lighting to the tennis players (Photo 3).

Built on two levels, in the style of French academism, the architecture of the palace reminds of the Greek origin of the owner. This building, although with simple volumes of the wall elevation, impressed through the vertical rhythm ensured by the high, prismatic roofs suggesting medieval towers if the alert articulation of the decorative plastics did not partially dissolve their severity (Photo 4).

The edifice, initially consisting of a single building, made of stone, brick, and wood and covered with slate, has, at its origins, a rectangular planimetry, developed on two levels. The ground floor housed the parlours and the living rooms, and the upper floor, the bedrooms.

The balanced plane of the building opens up generous spaces to the lights of the surrounding garden. The Southern façade, looking onto the two water basins of the garden, is guided in a pyramidal composition which accelerates, towards the centre, the feeling of verticality.

The idea of verticality is obvious in all of the details: empty-full alternation, height of the window opening, of doors, both arched on the ground floor, then, upstairs, straight window openings with ornamented framings, and the straight attic windows which, although small, offered an oversized image due to the size of the arched eyelets, bigger than the windows. Over the attic windows, there were ox-eye clerestories.

²² Ștefan Petre Kirson, op. cit., p.54.

²³ *Ibidem.*

²⁴ *Ibidem.*

The Eastern side of the palace had in those days a terrace covered with glass, intercalated between Doric columns. This terrace looked onto the garden and part of the village (Photo 5). On this side also, there was another way of access into the building, achieved through an octagonal construction with decorative elements.

In 1906, Jean N. Chrissoveloni, received Ghidigeni and Ciorăștii, under the donation deed made by his mother, Callirhoe Chrissoveloni, next to other goods and estates, with the obligation to pay to his sister, Elena²⁵, the sum of two millions lei, “which my husband gave as dowry upon her marriage with Captain Dim. C. Soutzu”²⁶.

Jean Chrissoveloni (1880-1926), banker in training and structure, set up Chrissoveloni Bank, Joint-Stock Company, in 1920, being its President until 1926 when he dies from an incurable disease. Intelligent, cultivated and educated in the finest schools of Paris, Jean Chrissoveloni was an eccentric banker, with clear artistic affinities. He was one of the “wealthy boys” of Galați, women-lovers²⁷, town gallants, as “play boys” were called in those days²⁸.

Jean Chrissoveloni proved his affinity for the British Empire, for he “was nursing the interests of England” in Romania²⁹. He married Sybille Youell³⁰, an English woman who, due to her origin, tied a close friendship with Princess Maria of Romania. Princess Maria was the godmother of Nicolae Chrissoveloni, Nicky, the only son of Jean and Sybille Chrissoveloni Youell, born in 1909. What we should notice is the tradition through which the first boy received the grandfather’s name.

After receiving Ghidigeni estate, Jean Chrissoveloni built, annexed to the palace, a new building with ground floor and one floor, developed S-N, in relation to the palace. There was an annex which stood out through its gallery of columns with round arches, on the Eastern façade, ensuring access to the beautiful panorama of the family forest and Bârlad River, on which stood the palace hydroelectric power plant.

²⁵ Elena Chrissoveloni (1879-1975), married to Prince Dimitrie C. Suțu and divorced in 1923, married again, in 1927, the French writer and diplomat Paul Morand.

²⁶ According to the Donation deed authenticated by Ilfov County, Notary Section, under no. 3527/1906.

²⁷ Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Pe aripile amintirilor (On the Wings of Memories)*, Publishing House of the Historical Magazine Cultural Foundation, Bucharest, 2005, p.69.

²⁸ Crișan V. Mușeteanu, *Lumea copilăriei mele (World of My Childhood)*, Alma Publishing House, Galați, 2001, p.88.

²⁹ Gh. Jurgea-Negrilești, *Troica amintirilor sub patru regi (Troika of Memories under Four Kings)*, 2nd edition, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p.131.

³⁰ Sybille Youell was the second of the four daughters of Edward P. Youell, ship and company owner in Brăila and Galați (According to Henry Poole, *An unexpected survival*, 2004 - article sent by the author to John Chrissoveloni).

In this annex, situated behind the house, there were the offices of the estate and alcohol plant management³¹.

His eccentricity was also obvious in his building a family vault in Ghidigeni just like the temple of Goddess Nike on the Acropolis³² (Photo 6). It was built in the forest, on the other side of Bârlad. "When you saw this well outlined and harmoniously built temple, with its Greek columns, you thought it was a piece of the Acropolis"³³.

The railway ensured the access of the family friends to the mansion. Therefore, everything had to be very well organised. The Romanian Railways were informed of the number of people going to Ghidigeni so that the train would stop two minutes in Nichișel (the current Ghidigeni station). From here, the guests were taken over by a track car of the alcohol plant, with seats (Photo 7), by which they arrived either to the mansion park and went on foot to the palace, or at the alcohol plant where carriages were waiting for them³⁴.

Queen Maria would often find refuge at Ghidigeni estate, together with the princesses³⁵, enjoying the pleasant accommodation offered by Elena Chrissoveloni, Jean's sister.

Grigore Gafencu was, next to Dimitrie Ghica, Balș, Negropontes and other personalities, a habitual friend of Chrissoveloni family.

They would play tennis, bowling, they would swim, ride and take walks. Hunting at Ghidigeni was minutely organised by Jean Chrissoveloni. Pheasants were bred in farms and let loose in the forest one week before the hunt³⁶.

In the days of World War I, during his refuge in Moldova, King Ferdinand would often go to Ghidigeni, to Chrissoveloni's mansion, where, according to Argetoianu, "the king indulged in lecherous parties with the three Bastache sisters who, under the cover of charity sisters, exploited their temper". People made "love" like there was no tomorrow, "men and ladies tangling at night in rooms and in beds". For these manifestations, C. Argetoianu found an explanation: "When all moral laws are reversed, when people chase to kill one another, when epidemics, misery and all sorts of privations exasperate the nerves and waken the vices, when

³¹ Ștefan Petre Kirson, op.cit., p.115.

³² According to the testimony of Sybille Manu-Chrissoveloni, the eldest daughter of Georgeta and Niculae Chrissoveloni, the temple seems to have been brought piece by piece from Greece in order to become the family vault (Stelian Țurlea, *Fă-ți patul și dormi (Make Your Bed and Go to Sleep)*, PRO Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p.23.).

³³ Ștefan Petre Kirson, op.cit., p.115.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p.66.

³⁵ Pamfil Șeicaru, *Istoria partidelor național, țărănesc și național țărănesc (History of the National, Peasants' and National Peasants' Parties)*, vol. II, EVF, Bucharest, 2000, p.123.

³⁶ Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Pe aripile amintirilor (On the Wings of Memories)*, Publishing House of the Historical Magazine Cultural Foundation, Bucharest, 2005, p.50.

sex promiscuity, imposed by the circumstances, overthrows the material barriers raised by the comfort of peaceful civilisations, when life and tomorrow seem mere ephemeral illusions - it is only natural that moral criteria become altered”³⁷.

In the same period, Jean Chrissoveloni allowed his mansion be turned into a hospital where Queen Maria was an almost permanent presence. Still here, Jean Chrissoveloni set up and managed Queen Maria Society of Ambulances³⁸ (Photo 8).

A relevant episode for the fate of the war took place in Ghidigeni mansion. We reproduce several passages from Victor Antonescu’s journal: “Fearing that my presence in Iași would be discovered, Mr. de St. Aulaire asked banker Ion³⁹ Chrissoveloni, whose pro-allied feelings were authentic, to harbour at Ghidigeni a certain person whose name could not be made known, neither to him, nor to his family and employees. The name of the mysterious guest was to be communicated to him by Mr. St. Aulaire himself, once the secrecy was no longer required. At 11 at night, I left the house of the Minister of France in a car, accompanied by the French lieutenant, du Sartel.

During my stay at Ghidigeni, the King dismissed Marghiloman government and replaced it with a government presided by General Coandă (October 24 / November 6, 1918), the army being mobilised as discreetly as possible until it was possible to publicly decree it (October 28 / November 10, 1918)⁴⁰.

Victor Antonescu, appointed again envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary in Paris, left immediately to take up his position. His return was eulogized by the press of Paris. It was justly qualified, as “L’Excelsion” of December 11, 1918 was titling - *A heroic mission*⁴¹.

After the war, there came Brătianu’s expropriation. Jean Chrissoveloni, from the ten thousand arable hectares of Ghidigeni was left with five hundred!⁴²

³⁷ Ion Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947) (The History of Romanians under the Four Kings)*, Tipo Moldova Publishing House, Iași, 2010, p.58.

³⁸ Maria Cantacuzino-Enescu, *Umbre și lumini. Amintirile unei prințese moldave (Shadows and Lights. The Memories of a Moldavian Princess)*, Aristarc Publishing House, Bacău, 2006.

³⁹ The Greek names Zanni, Demeter, Nicolas gradually turned into Jean or Ion, Dimitrie or Dumitru, Nicolae.

⁴⁰ The original journal is kept in the Historical Archive of the National Library, *Saint-Georges* Fund, package C/4. V. Antonescu.

⁴¹ After two days, Colonel Rosetti handed to Antonescu, apart from the said letter, other three letters, addressed to Queen Maria, to Ion I.C. Brătianu and to Barbu Știrbei, urging them to join the battle decisively... when it is rung up, but not before". (General Radu Rosetti, *Marturisiri (Confessions) (1914-1919)*, Bucharest, Modelism Publishing House, 1997, p. 268.).

⁴² Gh. Jurgea-Negrilești, op.cit., p.124.

Jean Chrissoveloni died in 1926 and was buried in the marble vault he had built, next to his father, Nicolae, who had passed away in 1913, and his cousin, Stryge Chrissoveloni.

His son, Nicky was only 17 years old and therefore, until his coming of age, a wardship was established for the management of the fortune, comprised of his mother, Sybille Chrissoveloni and a friend of the family, Prince Dimitrie Ghica⁴³.

After his coming of age, Nicky Chrissoveloni would manage the entire fortune of his family, including the Bank of Bucharest. He had become a charming man, an excellent dancer, a man with an impeccable education and a fairness one would only see at the English gentlemen.

In 1940, he was the honorary consul of Finland, representing the Finish Consulate in Romania⁴⁴.

In 1941, he married Georgette Lakeman-Economu, born in 1912, the daughter of Georges Lakeman-Economu and Elena Colibășeanu, Mazar Pașa's granddaughter, on her father's side⁴⁵. They had four children: Sybille (1942), John (1943), Elena (1946) and Irina (1951).

Nicky Chrissoveloni, together with his family, knew all the unfortunate events of the first half of the XXth century: the international crisis, World War II, confiscation of the fortune by the Communists, Communist prison. In 1960, he managed to leave, together with his family, in Greece. He died, far from his native country, in 1971, and was buried on a small island, Glyfada, near Athens.

Ghidigeni mansion, in seemingly perfect symbiosis with its owner, underwent the same hardships as Nicky Chrissoveloni.

Nicky Chrissoveloni managed to protect family reputation, succeeding, after the crisis of 1929-1933, with desperate financial efforts which involved his own fortune, to save Chrissoveloni Bank from bankruptcy, bank whose fame had gone beyond the Romanian borders. In 1935, he succeeded in stabilising the position of the bank on the market, however, in 1936 a fire which occurred at Ghidigeni, due, it seems, to some welding works undertaken at the mansion roof, damaged its roof entirely.

The episode of the fire is retold by Nicky Chrissoveloni's wife, Mrs Georgeta N. Chrissoveloni: "When the mansion caught fire, most of the furniture

⁴³ Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Toamna și primăvara unui destin: bancherii Chrissoveloni (The Autumn and Spring of a Destiny: Chrissoveloni Bankers)*, in "Magazin Istoric" (Historical Magazine), no.9/402, 2000, p.51.

⁴⁴ Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Pe aripile amintirilor (On the Wings of Memories)*, Publishing House of the Historical Magazine Cultural Foundation, Bucharest, 2005, p.89.

⁴⁵ Mazar Pașa, on his real name, Stephen Bartlett Lakeman (1823 – July 1897), British officer, he fought in the Crimean War (1853 – 1856), under the guidance of the Ottoman officers. He receives the rank of Pasha for his remarkable deeds.

burnt. I must say that the villagers acted remarkably for they took out and saved the things inside the mansion (...)”⁴⁶. The damage to the goods inside the house was minor. The dishware, the silverware, everything was saved by the villagers. “Only an ash-tray and six tennis balls were missing”⁴⁷.

The roof could not be rebuilt at its monumental sizes because all the liquidities were used for saving Chrissoveloni Bank, however, Nicky Chrissoveloni, helped by one of his close friends, architect Balș, managed to build a smaller roof without affecting too much the elegance of the architectural style of the mansion, rebuilding the façades as well (Photo 9).

Owing to the photographs provided by Nicky Chrissoveloni’s children, we can enter the palace, recreating the elegant air of the time when its threshold was passed by Queen Maria and King Ferdinand, their Royal Highnesses, Gafencu, Ghica, Paul Morand, Argetoianu, Negropontes and many other distinguished personalities of Romania in the first half of the XXth century.

The rooms had marble floors, parquet and the marble fireplaces, the furniture, the huge candelabra showed the high social appurtenance and commissioner’s the taste for luxury (Photo 10, 11, 12, 13). The hallway clerestory was made of wrought iron and was adorned with vegetal patterns. In the hallway, there were pillars decorated with a floral band. They continued into a broken arch which framed the illuminator on the ceiling. We do not know whether the fireplaces had a functional or a purely decorative role, however, the mansion had underfloor heating, in those days being the only one in the South of Moldova with such a heating system. The access to the rooms was ensured either by arched voids, or by straight voids, the tall doors bearing geometrical patterns on the wooden panels. The ceilings differed from room to room. In some rooms, the ceiling was compartmentalized and surrounded by an ovae and tonguelets moulding, specific to the Erechtheion of Athens, or adorned with purely decorative moulding which limits and frames the assembly, in other rooms, the ceiling was simple.

The wooden furniture was tastefully displayed in each room and the parquet was covered by hand-woven carpets.

Each room was furnished according to its destination, in line with the specificity of the epoch and the owner’s taste. In the entry hall, where the large fireplace was located, the low or high back armchairs and couches, covered in leather or fabric, were lined next to the wall. In front of the fireplace, on a hand-woven carpet, there was a solid wooden table⁴⁸. Lighting was ensured in the hall by shell-shaped wall fittings. On the fireplace, there were various brass objects, of

⁴⁶ Ștefan Petre Kirson, op.cit., p.66.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ From our talks with Mr. John Chrissoveloni, it appears that this table is in Greece today, in the house of one of his sisters.

Greek specificity. A child bust placed in a corner and an ornamental plan embellished the room. In one of the ground floor parlours, strongly lit by the tall arched windows, the same warm atmosphere welcomes us, while hand-woven carpets, wooden chairs with curved backs, armchairs and couches with generous cushions, covered in cloth, invite people to rest. Flower vases on tables or chests and ornamental plants gladdened the eye and offered moments of comfort.

The terrace, covered in glass, was the place where the owners and his guests could talk peacefully at a cup of coffee or tea or at a game of cards, comfortably seated on willow chairs, admiring the garden landscape, irrespective of the weather.

We can easily imagine the conversations carried at a cup of tea, in rooms which the visitor felt honoured to see, to assist at a theatrical representation or film projection, as the mansion also housed an entertainment room.

After the instauration of the Communist regime in Romania, in March 1945, Ghidigeni mansion, alcohol plant and forest of are nationalised. The agricultural establishment will function in the mansion, then a school for children with special needs.

Chrissoveloni family vault did not remain untouched. Built by Jean Chrissoveloni with marble brought piece by piece from Greece, faithful copy of temple of goddess Athena Nike on the Acropolis⁴⁹, it was profaned and the coffins containing the relic of Nicolae Chrissoveloni, the one who bought Ghidigeni estate, Stryge Chrissoveloni, his nephew and Jean Chrissoveloni, the one who built the vault, were taken out and thrown away⁵⁰.

The distinction and taste conferred to the entire mansion jangled with the interventions performed by its various beneficiaries after 1948.

The performance of several, entirely uninspired works, brought substantial changes to mansion volumetry and rooms. The underfloor heating was removed, the voids for heat emanation were covered, the terrace was divided and the gaps between the Doric columns were built up, the doors between certain rooms were also built up, other access voids were made, etc. The lack of care for the garden turned it, from a French garden, into a simple orchard invaded by bushes and weeds. The famous covered tennis court was also changed and turned into the dining hall of the school.

⁴⁹ Radu Negrea, Ștefan Petre Kirson, *Banca Chrissoveloni, Societate Anonimă Română, București 1920-1948: documente: actul constitutiv, statutul, procese-verbale ale consiliului de administrație, bilanțuri generale anuale și semestriale (Chrissoveloni Bank, Romanian Public Limited Company, Bucharest 1920-1948: documents. Memorandum of Association, Articles, Minutes of the Managing Board, Yearly and Semestrial Balance Sheets)*, Vol. I, Collection *Civilizația bancară românească (Romanian Banking Civilisation)*, Publishing House of the Historical Magazine Cultural Foundation, 2001, pp. 398-399.

⁵⁰ Ștefan Petre Kirson, *op.cit.*, p.114.

The remarkable architecture, as well the personalities that had once passed its threshold, constituted strong arguments for qualifying the mansion and the family vault historical monuments in 1992.

The mansion and its annexes, architectural and historical monuments each of them, were included in the List of Historical Monuments with the code GL-II-a-B-03082, and the vault with the code GL-II-m-B-03083.

In 1994, upon the initiative and with the funding of the American Foundation "Feed the Children", a project was ordered for the repair and functional arrangement of the Northern house. The project was carried out by the company S.C. PionProiect S.R.L. of Bucharest, after having received approval no. 39 of March 16, 1994 from the National Committee of Historical Monuments.

After 1989, Nicky Chrissoveloni's son, John comes back to Romania and resumes business traditions, also coming into the possession of a part of the properties confiscated by the Communists. In 2004, Chrissovelonis' heirs received Ghidigeni mansion and the forest⁵¹.

Today the mansion is close to collapse. The rooms, with fallen ceilings due to water infiltration, with dismantled masonry on wide areas due to the same infiltrations, require a thorough intervention, especially at the level of the roof, the drain slope must be enlarged and the cover replaced. Chrissovelonis' heirs have already started the project for the recovery of the roof, having received approval no. 2 of the Local Committee of Historical Monuments.

⁵¹ Decision 89 of 2004 of Galați County Council.

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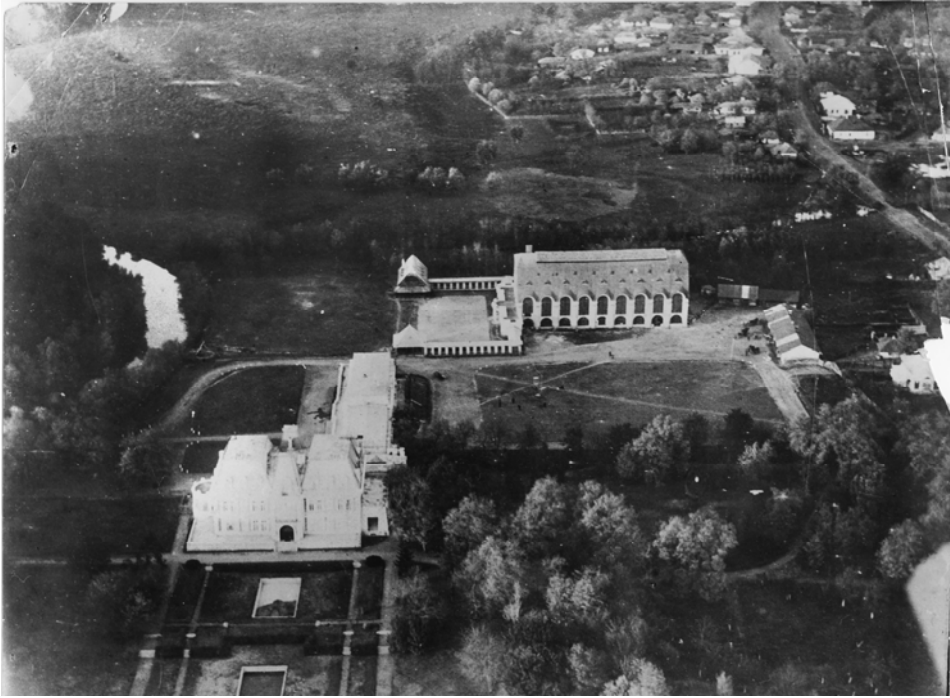


Photo 1



Photo 2

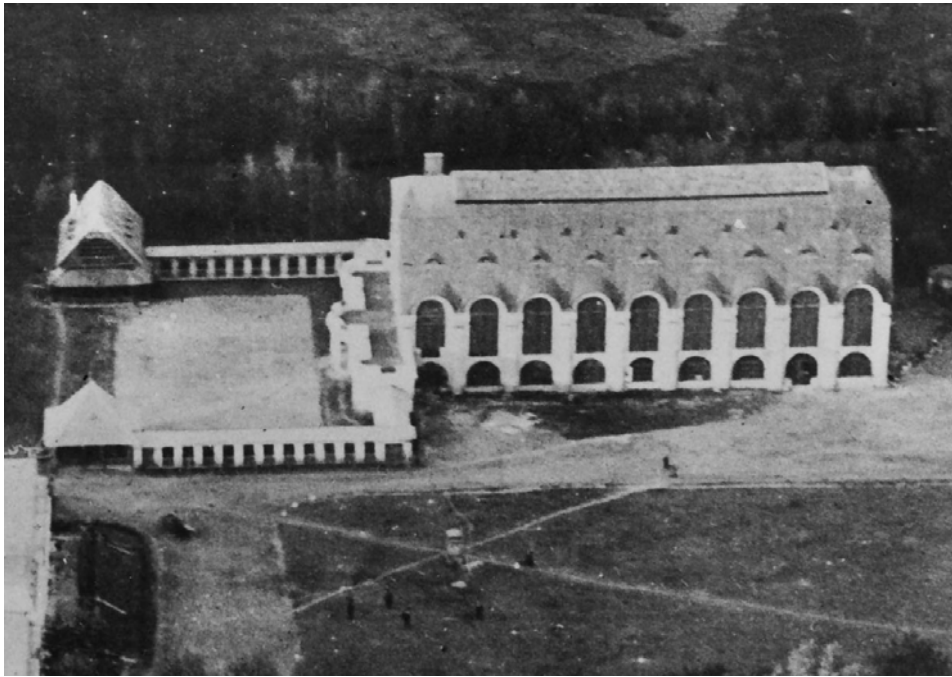


Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5

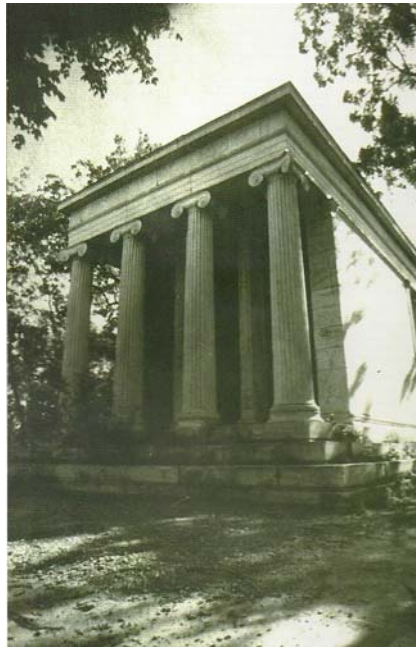


Photo 6



Photo 7

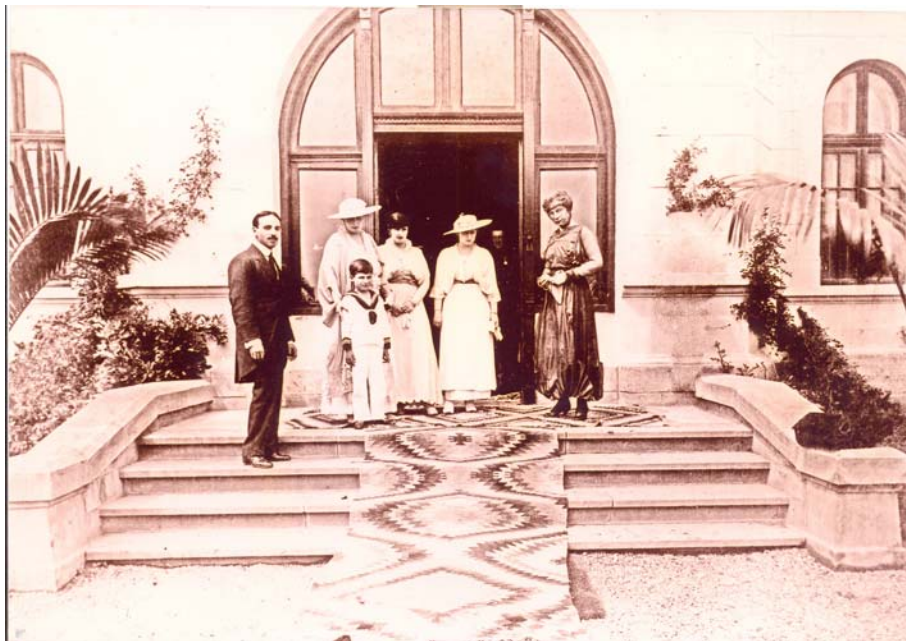


Photo 8

The Hospital from Ghidigeni, 1916

From the left to the right

**Jean Chrissoveloni, Queen Maria with Nicky Chrissoveloni (7 years old)
whose godmother she was, 2 ladies-in-waiting and Sybille Chrissoveloni**



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo 13