ARCHITECTURE AND PRIVATE SPACE.  
THE MANSION FROM GHIDIGENI

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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 Cioraști 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.
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 Suţu, 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, Balş, 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.