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# **SOCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE IN THE ROMANIAN SPACE**

**(15<sup>TH</sup>-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)**



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**Social and Administrative Elite  
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**Edited by  
Mihai-Bogdan Atanasiu, Cristian Ploscaru**

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*To the memory of Mihai Dim. Sturdza*



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**THOU SHALT NOT REMEMBER.**  
**MEMORY AND OBLIVION AMONG ROMANIAN ARISTOCRATS,**  
**DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME AND AFTER ITS COLLAPSE\***

FILIP-LUCIAN IORGA\*\*

**Memory and oblivion**

The study deals with the relationship between memory and oblivion among Romanian aristocrats, descendants of boyars from Moldavia and Wallachia, during the repressive communist regime and after its collapse, in 1989. One of the fundamental characteristics of any aristocracy is the call to memory, the identification by reference to the ancestors' great deeds, to the antiquity of the genealogical tree, the positions of influence held by family members, the places, and estates to which the family is linked, the memorial traces (manuscripts, correspondence, family portraits and photographs, family objects). The aristocrat is often defined by the quantity and antiquity of the information held about her or his family<sup>1</sup>. The Romanian aristocracy is no exception.

The end of World War II, however, brought to Romania a communist regime whose goal was to destroy the entire class of business owners and landlords ("burghezo-moșierimea"). Thousands of Romanian aristocrats were thrown into

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<sup>1</sup> Éric Mension-Rigau, *Aristocrates et grands bourgeois. Éducation, traditions, valeurs*, Perrin, Paris, 1997, p. 105-200, 486-495, 531-565; idem, *Singulière noblesse. L'héritage nobiliaire dans la France contemporaine*, Fayard, Paris, 2015, p. 29-39, 173-203.



political prisons, and others had to choose exile. The aristocrats who remained in the country and survived the repression of the 1950s were now faced with issues related to their survival and integration in the "new world". These issues became even a bigger problem for the next generation, for the aristocrats born under the communist rule. Thus, an unwritten law of oblivion imposed itself, the effects of which can be analysed throughout the extent of several generations of Romanian aristocrats. In order to survive, aristocrats born in the first decades of the twentieth century tried to hide the details of their origin: they spoke rarely or not at all about governesses, family estates, famous ancestors, and their illustrious deeds, about travels abroad or their political views before communism was installed.

In the next generation, aristocrats born under communism knew very little about their families' past. Parents tried to protect them from any family memories that could hinder or delay their integration into the socialist world. There were, of course, exceptions, and some aristocrats still used memory to differentiate themselves from the "commoners" and to even defy the communist regime. However, in most cases, we can talk about an interruption in the transmission of family memory. The descendants of aristocratic families born towards the end of the communist regime or after 1989 were able to receive from their parents a rather poor memorial heritage. Some of them are trying to recover their memories and recreate their own identity by reconnecting to their grandparents' generation or by researching their own families' pasts. For others, the impediment of the past, "forget in order to survive", has had devastating effects, and family memory, the memory that structures an identity, seems to be forever lost.

A similar phenomenon can be found in the case of Romanian aristocrats who chose exile in the West. Even though they were no longer forced to hide their past and were no longer killed or jailed for it, as was the case under the communist regime, the memorial treasure became less relevant. Their need for integration in the host countries and the difficulties of daily life have encouraged oblivion among the exiles as well. Usually, beginning with the first generation of Romanian aristocrats born in exile, the Romanian language and the Romanian identity became secondary, if not abandoned altogether.

I will analyse the relationship between memory and oblivion among Romanian aristocrats persecuted or uprooted after the establishment of the communist regime, using the unique archive of written, audio, and video testimonies resulting from my research project launched in 2009, "The Memory of the Romanian Elites". The archive contains over 180 testimonials by Romanian aristocrats of various ages, whether from exiled aristocrats or from families still

extant in Romania, and who carry on the memory of more than 300 Romanian aristocratic families.

### Characteristics of the Romanian aristocracy

Before examining the testimonials of today's descendants of the Romanian aristocracy that will give us a better understanding of the relationship between memory and oblivion during the communist repression in Romania, it is necessary to state a few things about the profile of the Romanian aristocracy.

The absence of titles of nobility such as those in Western Europe may be confusing and even encourage claims according to which the Romanian Principalities did not have an aristocracy. Boyar ranks that designated the concrete functions of the boyars surrounding the ruler or those administering the country's regions were not transmitted from father to son. Also, the same boyar could hold successively several different important positions. However, a careful analysis of the genealogies of the officeholders in Moldavia and Wallachia proves that, although a function was not transmitted from father to son, such as the title of marquis, count or baron, there was a certain stratification within the ranks of the boyars, which enabled the members of certain families to occupy similar positions across several generations. Also, holding an office by itself was insufficient in defining the aristocracy in the two Romanian principalities. We will not discuss the ethnic characteristics of the Romanian aristocracy, other than just mention that some authors tried on purely onomastic arguments to allege the predominance of Slavs and Turanians at the start of this social category. What is certain is that even before the establishment of the Romanian medieval states, Wallachia (*Valahia*, *Țara Românească* or *Muntenia*) and Moldavia (*Moldova*), in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there was a Romanian aristocracy based on land ownership<sup>2</sup>, the oldest and most important criteria for defining the local aristocracy (see the mentions of certain *maiores terrae* from Wallachia, in the *Diploma of the Ioannites* from 1247, issued by King Béla IV of Hungary, and of certain *Potentis illarum partium occupatis* from Moldavia, in the letter of Pope John XXII, dated October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1332). In its beginnings, the Romanian aristocracy was not a creation of the kingship. On the contrary, the first rulers, the first "great voivodes" were chosen by "the country's powerful people", by the ancestors of the subsequent boyars<sup>3</sup>. The

<sup>2</sup> Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor. II. De la Mircea cel Bătrân și Alexandru cel Bun până la Mihai Viteazul*, Editura ALL, București, 2010, p. 330.

<sup>3</sup> Neagu Djuvara, *Ce au fost boierii mari în Țara Românească? Saga Grădiștenilor (secolele XVI-XX)*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 19-20.



landowner was an aristocrat, regardless of the size of his estate<sup>4</sup>. Of course, throughout the centuries, the contingences of the aristocracy were significantly modified, many important families in the era of the medieval states' creation were extinguished or declined from a political and economic point of view, others rose, and the grounds of aristocratic identity also evolved. Access to functions and closeness to the ruler gradually became essential criteria for "being a boyar", and as Moldavia and Wallachia came under the control of the Ottoman Empire, wealth became a more important asset for social advancement than courage on the battlefield, which had predominated in the first centuries of the principalities' existence. However, the aristocrats remained always conscious of their social status, their mentality, and their political and economic interests. The continuity of many bloodlines can be certified by estate transfer documents. Also, it is worth mentioning that in Moldavia and Wallachia, female descendance was quite important: using a French formula, we can say that *le ventre anoblit*, meaning nobility is also transmitted through women.

All this time, there were also Romanian boyars who were ennobled by foreign monarchs<sup>5</sup>. Among them were princes of the Holy Roman Empire (the Brâncoveanu and Ghika families), counts of the Holy Roman Empire (the Năsturel, Ceaur, Bălăceanu, Rosetti and Dudescu families), counts of Hungary (the Cantacuzino family), Polish princes (the Movilă family), indigenization in the Polish Kingdom (the Stroici, Ureche, Balica, Barnovschi, Costin, Durac, Petriceicu-Hasdeu, Catargi and Hăbășescu families<sup>6</sup>), nobles of Transylvania (the Buhuș family), Russian princes (the Cantemir, Cantacuzino, Mavrocordat, Moruzi and Ipsilanti families), Italian princes (the Kretzulescu family). There are also dozens of aristocratic families from Moldavia that when Bukovina became part of the Habsburg Empire (1774) and Bessarabia became part of Tsarist Russia (1812), were integrated into the nobilities of those empires, in recognition of their pre-existing nobility. In Bukovina, we have a few families of barons (the Flondor, Hurmuzaki, Stârcea, Calmuțchi, Kapri and Mustață families) and very many families of knights (the Arapu, Arbore, Aritonovici, Aslan, Bejan, Bontăș, Brăescu, Gafencu, Ghenghe, Goian, Gore, Grigorcea, Hulubei, Isopescu-Grecu, Costin, Logotheti, Mălinescu, Morțun, Moțoc, Onciul, Paladi, Pruncul, Rotopan, Stroici, Străjescu, Tăutu, Tiron, Tomozei and Zotta families). Tens of boyar families in Moldavia were recognised

<sup>4</sup> Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor*, p. 330; Keith Hitchins, *România. 1774-1866*, Third Edition, Editura Humanitas, București, 2013, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Filip-Lucian Iorga, *Strămoși pe alee. Călătorie în imaginarul genealogic al boierimii române*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2013, p. 147-163.

<sup>6</sup> Constantin Rezachevici, *Indigenatul polon – o formă însemnată de integrare a nobilimii românești în cea europeană în Evul Mediu*, in *ArhGen*, III (VIII), 1996, Nr. 3-4, p. 205-216.



as being nobles in the Tsarist Empire<sup>7</sup>. However, the aristocratic families in Wallachia and Moldavia that received Western-type nobility titles are the exception, whereas the rule, both for families in the high aristocracy and for the majority of Romanian aristocratic families, was the absence of nobility titles. That is why we must not forget that titled noblemen are a rather particular case in the history of aristocracies, and not the rule. Of course, there are also the hundreds of Romanian families in Maramureș, in Făgăraș, in Banat and in other regions of Transylvania, whose aristocratic status was recognised and who received diplomas, nobility predicates and coats of arms ever since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, from the Hungarian kings. But we will not deal with these families here.

The Romanian aristocracy was born under a Byzantine influence<sup>8</sup>, mediated by the Slavs on the south side of the Danube, from the Bulgarian Tsardom. The term “boyar” itself, which designates the Wallachian or Moldavian aristocrat, is of proto-Bulgarian origin. The Romanian medieval aristocratic elites are of Slavic-Byzantine culture. But the Western influence is strong during the period of the states’ formation and in the following centuries, especially through contact with the kingdoms of Hungary and Poland. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire will emerge as a dominant power and the superior layers of Romanian aristocracy will absorb Oriental customs and habits, a phenomenon which will be accentuated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ottoman Empire imposes at the helm of Moldavia and Wallachia Phanariot Greek princes, from the Phanar neighbourhood in Constantinople. Romanian elites will adopt the Greek language and culture and will increasingly resemble the elites of Constantinople<sup>9</sup>. During this period in particular, but also in the next century, the Romanian aristocracy integrates numerous families of Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Polish and Armenian origin, but also an important contingence of Aromanian families from south of the Danube, who prospered from commerce and banking activities (the Bellu, Hagi-Moscu, Darvari and Meitani families).

In the early 1740s, the Phanariot ruler Constantin Mavrocordat established a new organizational structure for the Romanian boyars, sanctioning the evolution toward the exclusiveness of the function criterion in defining aristocratic identity. From then on, the criterion of estate ownership gave way to the criterion of function.

<sup>7</sup> Gheorghe G. Bezviconi, *Boierimea Moldovei dintre Prut și Nistru*, Editura Tritonic, București, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, Third Edition, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2002, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Neagu Djuvara, *Între Orient și Occident. Țările Române la începutul epocii moderne*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2002, p. 97-138.

Only those who held functions, court positions were considered boyars, therefore aristocrats, which obviously violated the old habit of land ownership as main nobility criterion<sup>10</sup>. Boyars were divided into two layers: the *veliți* (great boyars), with their successors being called *neamuri*, all exempted from taxes, and the second layer boyars, with their successors being called *mazili*, who were only partially exempted from taxes. In 1837, the Organic Regulation organised boyars into 3 classes and 9 ranks: class I had 5 ranks, class II had 2 ranks and class III also had 2 ranks<sup>11</sup>.

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an increasing number of boyars' sons studied in Western Europe, particularly in Paris, from where they returned with revolutionary ideas such as the elimination of the Turkish-Phanariot domination, the unification of the Romanian principalities, the emancipation of the peasantry and the removal of boyars' privileges. An important role was played by the contact of the Romanian elites with westernised Russian officers in the Russian-Austrian-Turkish wars. The Romanian elites began talking and thinking like the French<sup>12</sup>. The specificity of the 1848 revolutionary movements in Wallachia and Moldavia is that in the absence of an articulate bourgeoisie, the main role was played by the lower and middle aristocracy, which now was willing to share the political power with the *veliți*, who had consolidated their position during the Phanariot period. In fact, the battle for power among these layers of the aristocracy will also acquire nationalist connotations: the lower boyars, with less Greek influence, will feel entitled to espouse a Romanian national message that the Phanariot elite could not really identify with (although, in turn, many boyars who had Greek bloodlines will become Romanian nationalists and plead for eliminating the Greeks from important positions). In a weird way, the *veliți* are now fighting for the abolishment of their own privileges, and the Romanian upper class will emerge from the lower layers of that same aristocracy<sup>13</sup>.

The westernised aristocracy will continue to modernize and westernize the country for decades to come. In 1859, it will unite the Moldavian and Wallachian

<sup>10</sup> Keith Hitchins, *Românii*, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Cernovodeanu, Irina Gavrilă, *Arhondologiile Țării Românești de la 1837*, Muzeul Brăilei, Editura Istros, Brăila, 2002, p. 4-6.

<sup>12</sup> Pompiliu Eliade, *De l'influence française sur l'esprit public en Roumanie*, Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1898.

<sup>13</sup> Gheorghe Platon, Alexandru-Florin Platon, *Boierimea din Moldova în secolul al XIX-lea. Context european, evoluție socială și politică*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1995; Alexandru-Florin Platon, *Geneza burgheziei în principatele române (a doua jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea – prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea). Preliminariile unei istorii*, Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", Iași, 2013.



principalities into a single state and in 1866, it will bring to the country's throne the much-awaited foreign prince, Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, meant to quell the internal conflicts between the old ruling Houses and to bring international prestige to the country. Although aristocratic privileges had been abolished in 1858, through article 46 of the Paris Convention, boyar families continued to own the largest part of agricultural lands, as well as remaining the wealthiest and most influential people in the country. The National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party<sup>14</sup>, which alternated power until the First World War, are led by boyar descendants. Even though the National Liberal Party was regarded by many contemporaries and even by certain historians as the "party of the bourgeoisie", its leaders were descendants of boyars<sup>15</sup>. Most ministers and members of Parliament of all political colours, superior officers, and even many of the most important scientists and men of letters at that time pertained to the aristocracy. The First World War is the last great historical event during which boyar descendants occupy most influential positions in Romania; after the expropriation of the great estates, promised by King Ferdinand I to peasant soldiers during the war, old families would lose the economic basis of their influence<sup>16</sup>. However, the aristocracy maintained its influence and active presence in politics, in diplomacy, in the army, in the cultural life, remaining a model for the rest of society, until the instauration of the communist regime and the repression that followed.

In simpler terms, we may identify the following layers of Romanian aristocracy:

- The descendants of the medieval dynasties of Basarab in Wallachia and Mușat in Moldavia<sup>17</sup>. The two Romanian principalities functioned, from their emergence in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and until the instauration of the Phanariot rule in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as hereditary-elective monarchies. Thrones were not automatically transmitted from father to son, the essential criterion for acceding to the throne was to be elected by boyars or have claims to the ruler's throne by being of "lordly bone". The contenders had to belong to the ruling bloodlines mentioned above. When these bloodlines were extinguished in the male lineage, the legitimacy continued being made through "lordly blood", namely through marriages with women who descended

<sup>14</sup> Ion Bulei, *Conservatori și conservatorism în România*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, *Elita liberală românească 1866-1900*, Editura ALL, București, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Filip-Lucian Iorga, *Un cântec de lebedă. Vlăstare boierești în Primul Război Mondial*, Corint Books, București, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Mușatinii*, Editura Columna, Chișinău, 1991.

from medieval dynasties. Although Phanariot lords were imposed by the Ottoman Empire, the blood connection with medieval dynasties continued to be a criterion of legitimacy: most Phanariot families acquired "lordly blood" through marriages with descendants of the Basarab or Mușat dynasties<sup>18</sup>. Even today, there are numerous descendants through women of the two Romanian medieval dynasties.

- The descendants of the ruling families, other than of the two medieval dynasties. In the history of Wallachia and Moldavia, there were "native" ruling houses, originating from the great local boyars or even from *răzeși* (the Craiovescu, Brâncoveanu, Movilă, Dabija, Tomșa, Petriceicu-Hasdeu, Cantemir, Călmașul-Callimaki, Cehan-Racoviță, Sturdza, Bibescu-Știrbey and Cuza families), of foreign origin but naturalised early on, through marriages within the great native boyars (the Cantacuzino, Ghika, Rosetti, and Duca families), and Phanariot (the Mavrocordat, Suțu, Moruzi, Caradja, Ipsilanti, Mavrogheni, and Hangerliu families<sup>19</sup>). Beginning with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of the descendants of these families used mundane titles such as "prince" or "princess".

- The great boyars, the *veliți*, the elite, the leading class, the so called *protipendada*. The group made up a few dozen great families that remain at the helm of Moldavia and Wallachia, throughout several centuries, from the creation of the principalities until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their members occupy the highest ranks, have the largest estates, own the largest number of vassal peasants, are exempt from taxes, decide external alliances, gather and lead armies, often rival with the ruler's power and oppose his authoritarian temptations whenever they have a chance, protect the Christian Orthodox church and generally marry among themselves<sup>20</sup>. A few examples of such families, without repeating names already cited as ruling families (however, we must mention that not all these families had the status of great boyars throughout the existence of the Romanian principalities; some declined faster, some rose later, others came closer to the tight circle of the great boyars through personal merit and matrimonial alliances, etc.): the Albotă-Flondor-Ciudin, Arbore, Argetoianu, Balș, Bașotă, Bădeanu-Mihălcescu-Câdescu, Bălăceanu<sup>21</sup>, Băleanu, Bărbătescu, Beldiman, Bengescu, Berindei, Bogdan, Boldur-Costaki, Boteanu, Brăescu, Brăiloiu, Bucioc, Budișteanu, Buhuș, Butculescu, Buzescu, Catargiu, Câmpineanu, Ceur-Aslan, Ciogolea, Cocorescu, Corbeanu,

<sup>18</sup> Filip-Lucian Iorga, *Strămoși pe alee*, p. 79-92, 277-283.

<sup>19</sup> Mihai Țipău, *Domnii fanarioți în Țările Române, 1711-1821. Mică enciclopedie*, Editura Omonia, București, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Neagu Djuvara, *Ce au fost boierii mari...*, p. 13-63.

<sup>21</sup> Constantin Bălăceanu-Stolnici, *Cele trei săgeți. Destine la confluența cu istoria: Saga Bălăcenilor*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1990.



Costin, Cretzianu, Donici, Dudescu, Fălcoianu, Filipescu, Florescu, Gane, Glogoveanu, Golescu, Grădişteanu-Bărcănescu, Grecianu, Hâncu, Izvoranu, Jora, Kretzulescu, Leurdeanu, Manu, Miclescu-Prăjescu, Năsturel-Herescu, Negri, Nottara, Obedeanu, Olănescu, Otetelişanu, Pallady, Pârâianu, Pârşcoveanu, Poenaru, Ralet, Rudeanu, Slătineanu, Stârcea, Stroici, Şendrea, Tăutu, Ureche, Văcărescu, Vârnav and Vlădoianu families. When it comes to their social position and local influence, we may associate these families with Hungarian and Polish magnates and, even further, proportionally, with British lords, the *Grandes de España* or the *Pairs de France*.

- The middle and lower boyars. These are the hundreds of families with smaller estates and inferior functions. They are too numerous for us to list here, but it is worth mentioning that the Brătianu family, the true political dynasty of modern Romania, which yielded prime-ministers, ministers, and presidents of the National Liberal Party, came from this layer of aristocracy. The ranks of this layer were much thickened during the native rulings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rulers such as Grigore IV Ghica, Ioniţă Sandu Sturdza, or Mihail Sturdza selling countless boyar diplomas to "new people". The cup-bearer Costandin Sion (1795-1862), a memorialist keen on genealogies, regarded these "commoners risen to boyars" as a genuine "corruption of the country's nobility"<sup>22</sup>. For example, in Wallachia, records show this rapid increase from 1829 when 1309 individuals were recorded as belonging to the boyar ranks, to 3167 in 1858<sup>23</sup>. But only a few of these newcomers managed to be recognised by the old families and were able to integrate themselves into the aristocracy of the principalities for more than one generation.

- The *mazili*. These were the descendants of boyars who had not succeeded in obtaining functions anymore and who generally lived on their estates in the rural area. Even though their material condition was much more modest than that of the great boyars, the *mazili* kept privileges of social distinction, often being descendants of illustrious families, recognised in the history of the country, and much more respected than the "new people" who purchased their boyar titles.

- The *moşneni* and *răzeşi*. They were by no means the "free peasants", as a series of historians in the Romantic era, sociologists and communist propagandists defined them. The *moşneni* in Wallachia and the *răzeşi* in Moldavia

<sup>22</sup> Paharnicul Costandin Sion, *Arhondologia Moldovei. Amintiri şi note contimporane. Boierii moldoveni*, text elected and established, glossary, and index by Rodica Rotaru, preface by Mircea Angheliescu, postface, notes, and commentaries by Ştefan S. Gorovei, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1973; Filip-Lucian Iorga, *Strămoşi pe alese*, p. 95-102; Alexandru Perietzianu-Buzău, *Consideraţii asupra valorii genealogice a Arhondologiei Moldovei de C. Sion*, in *ArhGen*, IV, 1992, 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Cernovodeanu, Irina Gavrilă, *Arhondologiile...*, p. 4.



pertained to the aristocracy, they were free men and joint owners of estates inherited from a common ancestor<sup>24</sup>. Genealogic research shows that, oftentimes, the *moșneni* and *răzeși* are descendants of great boyars from medieval times when the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia were established, descendants of the medieval *knyaz*, of the military aristocracy. Although many of the thousands of bloodlines in this category had become rather poor, caused by the divisions of the original estates over generations, and were sometimes forced to work their land with their own hands, their social status, different from that of peasants, was maintained until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We could compare the *moșneni* and the *răzeși* with the “nobiliary proletariat” from Poland and Hungary or the Spanish *hidalgo*. A significant part of modern Romania’s upper class and intellectuals come from this social stratum. One could compare, while preserving nuances and proportions, the middle and lower boyars, the *mazili*, *moșneni* and *răzeși* with that *landed gentry* in England.

- Notable (prominent) families. The great upper class that came into being at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, oftentimes related through marriages with boyar families, fact that was later used by the communists to label this group in a discriminatory and pejorative way as the “bourgeois-landlords” class. Apart from the great upper class, many other families of professionals, high ranking civil servants, superior officers, and intellectuals would join this group of notable families that adopt the cultural model of the aristocracy and oftentimes even become related to it.

### The characters

In order to understand the phenomenon we are dealing with, we will rely on written, audio, and video testimonies obtained over almost two decades between 2000-2018, mainly within the “Memory of the Romanian Elites” project, based on the questionnaire I drew up<sup>25</sup>, from twenty-four representative descendants of the Romanian aristocracy. With these testimonials, I sought to illustrate as many layers and nuances, as varied experiences and perspectives as possible: they are women and men, descendants of rulers, great boyars, middle or small boyars, *moșneni* and

<sup>24</sup> Constantin Giurescu, *Despre boieri și despre rumâni*, volume edited by Dinu C. Giurescu, Editura Compania, București, 2008; Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor*, p. 332; Dinică Ciobotea, *Istoria moșnenilor*, Vol. 1, Part I (1829-1912), EUC, Editura Universitaria, Craiova, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Filip-Lucian Iorga, *The Memory of the Romanian Elites*, in “Analele Universității din Craiova”, *Istorie*, XIX, nr. 2(26), 2014, p. 157-172.

*răzeși*, great bourgeois and notables from Moldavia and Wallachia (some of them also representing regions such as Oltenia, Bessarabia, and Bukovina); they are descendants of families with autochthonous or foreign roots, including Phanariot ones; descendants of families of both liberal or conservative political persuasions; people who lived in Romania during the communist regime, including former political prisoners, and others who chose exile living abroad; people who practice various jobs and have diverse preoccupations. The interlocutors' birthyears range from 1909 to 1954, and most of them lived in all three eras covered here: before World War II, during the communist regime, and after its collapse at the end of 1989. I chose to list the "characters" of our story alphabetically with the biographic details needed to decrypt the testimonials.

**Gheorghe Boldur-Lătescu**, born in 1929, is the son of cavalry colonel Ion Boldur-Lătescu and of Marina Stroici, thus a descendant of the boyar families Boldur-Lătescu (Costaki) and Stroici, a direct descendant of hetman Iordache Costaki Boldur-Lătescu. The Costaki bloodline, often evoked by the chronicler Ion Neculce in the *Chronicle of Moldavia (Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei)*, under the name of "Gavrilițești", was one of the wealthiest and most influential boyar families in Moldavia during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The family yielded personalities such as: Lupu Costaki, *caimacam* of Moldavia in 1711, Metropolitan Veniamin Costaki (1768-1846; metropolitan of Moldavia, *caimacam*, church founder and great scholar), Manolache Costaki Epureanu (1823-1884; twice Prime-Minister of Romania, several times minister, president of the Constituent Assembly in 1866, parliamentarian, a founding member of the National Liberal Party) or Elena Costaki Epureanu, married Bibescu (1855-1902; pianist, friend of Queen Elisabeth of Romania and host of famous musical and literary gatherings in Paris, frequented by great personalities of the time, such as Marcel Proust, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Camille Saint-Saëns, Claude Debussy, Charles Gounod, Jules Massenet, Anatole France, etc.). The mother of diplomat Grigore Gafencu was a Costaki both on her father's and her mother's side. Gheorghe Boldur-Lătescu is an engineer, a Ph.D. in economics, a writer, a university professor at the Economic Cybernetics Faculty within the Economic Studies Academy in Bucharest, a creator of the Romanian operational research school, a specialist in decision theory. He graduated from the Civil and Industrial Constructions Faculty in Bucharest, worked on several project sites and began his scientific research activity at the Construction Research and Construction Economics Institute (INCERC). He published 17 books in the field and more than 150 articles. He is a member of the New York Academy of Sciences. Between 1949 and 1951 he was a political prisoner, being arrested for attempting to



join the anti-communist resistance in the mountains. He was subjected to "re-education" through torture in Pitești prison and the Danube-Black Sea Channel, even coming face to face with the ferocious torturer Eugen Țurcanu, but without ever giving in. After 1989, he was an active member of the Civic Alliance, also being one of its founders. Author of the paper *Genocidul comunist în România* (*The Communist Genocide in Romania*), in 4 volumes, and hundreds of articles on political, social, and cultural topics.

**Irina Bossy-Ghica Boulín**, born in 1954, a descendant of various ruling and boyar families, is the direct descendant of the writer, economist, diplomat and politician Ion Ghica (1816-1897), *bey* of Samos, three times Prime-Minister of Romania, Minister of Foreign Affairs and president of the Romanian Academy, author of the famous *Letters to Vasile Alecsandri*, but also of Prince Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino (1832-1913), nicknamed "The Nabob", the wealthiest Romanian of his era, also a Prime-Minister of Romania, twice. Her grandfather, General Bossy, descendant of a boyar family, was an adjutant of King Michael I of Romania. She studied English and art history in Sorbonne, graduated from Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Paris, worked as a reporter for the BBC and the Reuters press agency and later, she entered French diplomacy. Presently, she is in charge of restoring Ion Ghica's manor in Ghergani and revitalizing the Cantacuzino domain in Florești.

**Prince Mihai Basarab-Brâncoveanu**, born in 1948, is the descendant of the ancient Romanian family Craiovescu-Brâncoveanu, which yielded Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu (1654-1714), ruler of Wallachia during 1688-1714 and Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, martyred in Constantinople, by the order of the Sultan, together with his four sons. The martyr ruler has numerous female descendants<sup>26</sup>, but Prince Mihai Brâncoveanu and his brother, Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, a historian, university professor and former advisor to exiled King Michael I of Romania, also continue their family's illustrious tradition. Prince Mihai Brâncoveanu is also a descendant of the great ruling and boyar families of Cantacuzino, Băleanu, Ghika, Văcărescu and a direct descendant of the rulers of Wallachia, Barbu Știrbey and Gheorghe Bibescu, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is also closely related to the writers Anne de Noailles and Martha Bibescu. His mother, Princess Marina Știrbei, had, during the Second World War, the initiative to create the White Squadron, a sanitary military aviation unit made up

<sup>26</sup> Dan Berindei, *Urmașii lui Constantin Brâncoveanu și locul lor în societatea românească. Genealogie și istorie*, in *Constantin Brâncoveanu*, (ed.) Florin Constantiniu, Paul Cernovodeanu, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1989.

exclusively of women. His father, Prince Constantin Basarab-Brâncoveanu, was a political prisoner during the communist repression in Romania<sup>27</sup>. The family managed to take refuge in England, and Prince Mihai Brâncoveanu studied and settled in Paris, becoming one of the most valuable mathematicians of his generation, a university professor, a researcher, and an author of papers in the field. He is also passionate about music and wrote for quite some time music related articles for *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

**Barbu Brezianu** (1909-2008) was the descendant of a boyar family in Wallachia, related to the poet Alexandru Macedonski, the historian Grigore Tocilescu, and the Sămeșescu, Ullescu, Bozianu, Mareș, Hina, Mummuianu and Lehliu families<sup>28</sup>. The great-grandfather of Barbu Brezianu, Istrate Sămeșescu, was Minister of War (1861). Barbu Brezianu's grandfather on his mother's side, Eftimie Ullescu (1840-1883), fought in Romania's Independence War against the Ottoman Empire (1877-1878) and took part in the conquest of the Smârdan redoubt<sup>29</sup>, and his family took pride in a sword that he allegedly received from the defeated Ottoman commander, Osman Pasha. Barbu Brezianu was a magistrate in the inter-war period, a poet and prose writer (the volumes *Nod ars*, *Zăvor fermecat*, *Jaf în dragoste*), a friend of great personalities, such as George Enescu, Eugen Ionesco, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica, Nicolae Steinhardt and Arșavir Aterian. He fought in World War II, he was a political prisoner during the communist regime, and after he got out of jail, he specialised in art history and became the most important Romanian expert in the sculptures of Constantin Brâncuși (the volume *Brâncuși in Romania*). Presently, the "Barbu Brezianu" Brâncuși Studies Center operates within the "G. Oprescu" Art History Institute of the Romanian Academy.

**Gabriela Romana Dămăceanu** was born in Rome, Italy, in 1938, as the daughter of Georgeta Mirela Stroescu and general and diplomat Dumitru Dămăceanu (1896-1978), who fought in both World Wars, was a Romanian military attaché in Italy (1936-1938), a royal adjutant and a studies director at the School of the Great Voivode Mihai – Palatine Class, sub-secretary of state on several occasions. From his position as chief of staff of the Military Headquarters of

<sup>27</sup> Audio interview with Prince Mihai Basarab-Brâncoveanu, Paris, 31 May 2010 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>28</sup> Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, *Genealogii*, Editura Albatros, București, 1999, p. 158-162; idem, *În jurul genealogiei lui Barbu Brezianu (I)*, in "Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei", Artă plastică, new series, Tome 4 (48), 2014, p. 143-152.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, *În jurul genealogiei lui Barbu Brezianu (II)*, in "Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei", Artă plastică, new series, Tome 5 (49), 2015, p. 151-165.



Bucharest, Dumitru Dămăceanu played a crucial role in supporting King Michael I of Romania, during the act of 23 August 1944, by which Romania left the alliance with Nazi Germany and joined the Allies. Subsequently, he was part of the Romanian Committee that signed the Truce Convention between Romania and the Allies, in Moscow, and he was a member of the Romanian delegation that took part in the Peace Conference in Paris (1946-1947) and a signatory of the Peace Treaties in Paris. He was a political prisoner during the communist regime. Gabriela Dămăceanu studied at the "Caragiale" High School in Bucharest and graduated from the English Language and Literature section of the Philology Department of the University of Bucharest. She worked as a librarian, was a university professor at the Academy for Economic Studies and worked as a translator and documentarist in the Romanian Government. After 1989, she worked in the International Relations Department within the Ministry of Culture<sup>30</sup>.

**Ion Filitti** (1935-2020) was the son of Manole Filitti, the re-founder of the Romanian Jockey Club after 1989, and the grandson of the historian Ioan C. Filitti (1879-1945), descendants of a boyar family with roots in Epirus, which gave Wallachia Dositei Filitti, metropolitan of *Ungrovlahia*, and Constandie Filitti, bishop of Buzău<sup>31</sup>. Ion Filitti was a descendant, on a female lineage, of the native dynasties of the Basarab and Mușat, of rulers Mircea the Elder (1355-1418), Vlad the Impaler and Stephen the Great, of the Craiovescu bloodline, of the Cantacuzino, Kretzulescu, Văcărescu, Slătineanu, Băjescu, Facca and Razu boyar families<sup>32</sup>. He was also a direct descendant of rulers Gheorghe Ghika, Grigore I Ghika, and Nicolae Mavrocordat. Although the communist regime blocked several of his attempts to enrol in college, because of his "unhealthy social origin" and he had to work as an unqualified labourer, Ion Filitti eventually managed to obtain a construction engineering diploma. In 1979, he left communist Romania and settled, together with his family, in Germany, where he worked as an engineer. In the latest years, he has written several travel books and was an active member of the Romanian Jockey Club.

**Constantin Flondor** was born in 1936, in Cernăuți (at the time, the city belonged to Romania, nowadays it is part of Ukraine), as the descendant of one of

<sup>30</sup> Audio interview with Gabriela Dămăceanu, București, 26 March 2015 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>31</sup> Audio interview with Ion Filitti, București, 7 March 2010 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author); Ioan C. Filitti, *Jurnal*, Vol. I. 1913-1919, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> *The Genealogical Tree of the Filitti family*, novel manuscript in Romanian, no author, no date. Archive of Ion Filitti.



the oldest and most important boyar bloodlines in Moldavia, the Albotă-Flondor-Ciudin family. Members of the Flondor family received Austrian and Russian nobility titles. One of them, Iancu Knight of Flondor (1865-1924) played a decisive role in 1918, when Bukovina became part of Romania, as a main unionist leader and then the president of the Romanian National Council in Bukovina and a minister secretary of state responsible for the administration of Bukovina<sup>33</sup>. Constantin Flondor is the son of Dumitru Flondor, a representative of the Bessarabian branch of the family, and of Claudia-Roma Ivasiuc, the niece of painter Nicolae Ivasiuc (1865-1937). In 1940 and 1944 he lived through the two refuges of the Romanians from North Bukovina, that were caused by Soviet invasions<sup>34</sup>. Constantin Flondor, one of the most important Romanian contemporary painters, studied arts in Timișoara and Bucharest, taught at the Imitative Arts High School in Timișoara and played an important role in modernizing the artistic education in Romania. After 1989, he also taught at the Art Faculty of the West University in Timișoara, whose dean was from 1996 to 1999. He was a founding member of the art groups "111", "Sigma" and "Prologue". He held exhibitions in the country and abroad, having an essential role in the fight for the survival of an innovating and ideologically unattached art, during the communist dictatorship. He is an active member of the "Sever Zotta" Romanian Genealogy and Heraldry Institute in Iași.

**Yvonne Florescu**, born in 1926, is the descendant of one of the oldest boyar families in Wallachia, which gave Romanian history civil servants, politicians, scholars, men of arms and diplomats. The Florescu family was related to the native Basarab dynasty as well as numerous old boyar families. Bonifaciu Florescu was the "bastard" son of the famous 1848 revolutionary and famous historian Nicolae Bălcescu and Luxița Florescu, and Ioan Emanoil Florescu was an accomplished officer who became Prime Minister of Romania. Yvonne Florescu is the daughter of the diplomat Radu Florescu and Vera Soepkez, the daughter of a banker born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. She is also the sister of the historian Radu R. Florescu. She grew up in Bucharest, where she started her studies and continued them in Berlin, Washington D.C., and London, while accompanying her father in his various diplomatic missions. She left Romania, together with her family, during World War II, studied at Oxford, taught history, geography, and arts

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<sup>33</sup> Audio interview with Constantin Flondor. București, 26 September 2014 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>34</sup> Sergiu Flondor, *Dulce-amar. Povestea unui refugiat din Cernăuți*, Corint Books, București, 2017.

for a while, after which she decided to enter a convent under the name of Sister John the Baptist, joining a Catholic monastery near Munich.

**Princess Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino Deniau**, born in 1930, is the daughter of Prince Matei Ghica-Cantacuzino and Ioana Perticari. She is the direct descendant of writer Ion Ghica (1816-1897), three times Prime-Minister of Romania, minister of Foreign Affairs and president of the Romanian Academy, and of doctor Carol Davila (1828-1884), founder of the sanitary system and medical education in Romania. Her grandmother, Elena Davila Perticari, was a lady-in-waiting to Queen Marie of Romania<sup>35</sup>. The Perticari family built Romania's first rural hospital on real estate it owned in Izvoru, which it donated to the local community in the 1930s. Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino left Romania in 1947, together with her mother and the latter's second husband, Prince Constantin Suțu<sup>36</sup>. She lived in Canada and subsequently settled in Paris, where she got married and had five children. After 1989, she reclaimed her possessions with the ruined manor from Izvoru, where she is trying for several years now to set up an ecological agricultural farm there.

**Princess Manuela Ghika-Oroveanu**, born in 1948, is the daughter of Prince Leon Ghika (from the Ghika-Brigadier branch), a naval officer, and of Marcela Pandelescu. She is the direct descendant of rulers Gheorghe Ghika and Grigore I Ghika and a descendant, on a female lineage, of the Mavrogheni, Bogdan, Balș, Filipescu, Rizo-Rangabé and Evpraghioti families. Through the Mavrocordat and Hrisoscoleo families, she is a descendant of the medieval Mușat dynasty and of Stephen the Great (1433-1504), the ruler of Moldavia. In 1971, she left communist Romania and settled in Paris, where she married stage director Ion Oroveanu, also a descendant of a Romanian boyar family from the Oltenia region. In recent years, she has been involved in retrieving the family memory and defending the moral values of her ancestors.

**Dumitru Gh. Lecca**, born in 1936, is a descendant of the Moldavian Lecca boyars (a family that General Dimitrie Lecca, Minister of War in 1866 and 1879-1880, among others, was part of) and of the Belloianu family, the grandson of the army corps general Gheorghe Athanasescu, the adjutant of Queen Marie of Romania<sup>37</sup>. He was a professional athlete, and the coach of Romania's national basketball teams of which Romania has three: juniors, young adults, and seniors

<sup>35</sup> Audio interview with Princess Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino Deniau, Paris, 16 June 2015 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>36</sup> Ioana Perticari, *Souvenirs*, novel text written in English, 1950. Archive of Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino Deniau.

<sup>37</sup> Dumitru Lecca, *Cronica unei mari familii băcăuane: boierii Lecca*, Editura Magic Print, Onești, 2012.



(1992-2002). At an early age, in 1952, he was a political prisoner during the communist regime<sup>38</sup>. After 1989, he reclaimed and renovated the family's manor in Radomirești, published several books dedicated to his family's past, is present in the cultural life of Bacău, is a respected member of the National Liberal Party and a member of the Romanian Jockey Club Committee.

**Alexandru Maftei**, born in 1941, in Bucharest, is the representative of a family that belonged to the intellectual elite of inter-war Romania, with old roots in Transylvania and Moldavia. His father, Constantin Maftei, was a career officer in the Cavalry and Romania's military attaché in Zagreb, during World War II. His aunt, Maria (Maricel) Șova (1913-2007), was a talented pianist and an appreciated teacher. After 23 August 1944, sensing the communist danger, Alexandru Maftei's parents left Zagreb and chose the free world, eventually settling in Paris. Alexandru and his brother, aged 3, namely 5, were left with the rest of the family in Romania to deal with the persecutions of the communist regime. It took 20 years for the family to be reunited<sup>39</sup>. Alexandru Maftei studied mathematics in Paris and became a professor in one of the most prestigious high schools in the capital of France. In parallel, he was and has remained a passionate, refined, and expert music lover.

**Alexandru Makarovitsch** was born in 1937, in Bucharest, as the descendant of several old boyar families of Moldavia and Wallachia, such as the Makarovitsch, Hasdeu, Sculy-Logotheti, Izvoranu, Leurdeanu and Esarcu families. He is the direct great-grandson of General Gheorghe Makarovitsch (1843-1930), a hero of the Independence War of 1877-1878, as commander of the Bucharest firefighting department, principal of the Military Sons' School in Iași (which later on was named after him) and commander of Bucharest garrison. Alexandru Makarovitsch studied in Bucharest, graduated from the Constructions Institute and became an engineer, while never losing his lifelong passion for painting and graphics. In 1968, he left communist Romania and settled in France, where he worked for Compagnie Bull, in systems management and marketing. Between 1974 and 2009 he was an associate professor at the Applied Mathematics Institute of the Université Catholique de l'Ouest. He was awarded the *Palme Académiques* Order

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<sup>38</sup> Audio interview with Dumitru Gh. Lecca, București, 25 June 2010 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>39</sup> Audio interview with Alexandru Maftei, Paris, 1 February 2012 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

in 2007<sup>40</sup>. His paintings were presented in general (Gentilly, Paris, Stockholm, New York) and personal exhibitions (Perpignan, Paris, Bucharest).

**Radu Alexandru Negrescu-Suțu**, born in 1950, is the son of officer Aurel-Mihai Negrescu and of Princess Georgeta Suțu, the heir of a Phanariot family that gave three rulers to the Romanian Principalities. Through his mother, he is the direct descendant of Alexandru Suțu (ruler of Moldavia in 1801-1802 and of Wallachia in 1806 and 1818-1821). He is also a descendant of the Callimaki (a direct descendant of ruler Alexandru Callimaki), Rosetti, Mavrocordat, Mavrogheni, Manu, Miclescu and Cazaban families. His grandfather, Rudolf Suțu, was a writer, a journalist and a passionate chronicler of Iași at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>41</sup>. In 1977, Radu Negrescu-Suțu signed Paul Goma's appeal as well as an additional appeal that he co-authored, demanding of the communist authorities to respect fundamental human rights. He was arrested, together with the other signatories of the appeal of the "Canal 1977" Group and was sentenced to one year of hard labour at the Danube-Black Sea Canal. He was beaten and tortured and, after entering a hunger strike, Amnesty International and Jimmy Carter, the US president at the time, intervened to get him released. After being banished from Romania, France granted him political asylum<sup>42</sup>. As a visual artist, he exhibited religious paintings in Austria, France, and Germany, and took a turn toward surrealism. Eventually, he dedicated himself to journalism and literature, publishing numerous volumes: *Zece Amintiri*, *Și-alte patru triste cânturi* (poetry); *Dialogul Teologilor*, *Eseuri*, *Poarta Luminii*, *Concertul de Händel*, *Cleopatra*, *Besada*, *Meredith* (trilogy), *La Bocca della verità* (essays and short stories). More recently, he delved into the history and genealogy of his maternal family, publishing *Livre d'or de la Famille Soutzo* and *Stirpea Drăculeștilor. Pseudocronică a Familiei Suțu* (Editura Corint, 2017).

**Irina Ioana (Ina) Rîșcuția** (1935-2020) was the great-granddaughter of Prince Constantin Ghika-Deleni (1846-1910), deputy and vice-president of the Senate, the granddaughter of Princess Alexandrina (Adina) Ghika-Deleni and of lawyer Nicolae Gr. Polizu-Micșunești, the head of the Bar in Iași, a friend of Iuliu

<sup>40</sup> Audio interview with Alexandru Makarovitsch, Paris, 7 February 2012 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>41</sup> Alexandre Negrescu-Soutzo, *Livre d'or de la famille Soutzo*, Chez l'Auteur, Paris, 2005; Radu Negrescu-Suțu, Written answer to the questionnaire *The Memory of the Romanian elites*, novel texts edited in Romanian, 2010 (in possession of the author); idem, *Stirpea Drăculeștilor. Pseudocronică a Familiei Suțu*, Corint Books, București, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Audio interview with Radu Negrescu-Suțu, Paris, 8 June 2015 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).



Maniu, who died in a communist prison. Her father, Gheorghe Polizu-Micșunești, was an attorney, dealt in automobiles, became a political prisoner when the communists took over and was executed in Jilava prison. Her father's brother, Nicolae Polizu-Micșunești, became a successful fighter in Romania's air force in World War II. Like so many Romanians, he fought on the Eastern front where he fell in battle. Ina Rîșcuția was a descendant of rulers Gheorghe Ghika, Grigore I Ghika, Barbu Știrbey and a female lineage successor of the Cantacuzino, Balș, Bălăceanu and Berindei families. Ina Rîșcuția was expelled from high school for political reasons, but somehow succeeded to graduate despite of it. Eventually she ended up conducting anthropology research, together with her husband, Cantemir Rîșcuția. After 1989, she dedicated herself to reclaiming, restoring and introducing to the cultural and tourist circuit the Polizu manor in Maxut, Iași county, which was built by her great-grandfather Constantin Ghika-Deleni.

**Dan Romalo**, born in 1923, is the descendant of a Greek origin boyar family. His first known ancestor, the high steward Iordache Grigoriade Romalo, arrived in Iași at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and married Maria Rosetti-Solescu. His heirs were ministers, magistrates, and parliamentarians who allied themselves with great ruling and boyar families, such as the Cantacuzino, Suțu, Sturdza, Negri, Ralet, Jurgea-Negrilești, and Lambrino families. Grigore Romalo (1820-1849) took part in the 1848 Revolution in Moldavia, he was deported to Constantinople where he died of tuberculosis. Vasile Alecsandri dedicated a poem to him. The Romalo family yielded the actor Edouard de Max, famous in France at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Princess Maruca Cantacuzino, the wife of the composer George Enescu<sup>43</sup>. The grandfather of Dan Romalo, MD Eduard Romalo (1859-1930), was a physician at the Royal Court, during the reigns of Kings Carol I and Ferdinand I. He married Alexandrina Bălăceanu, the descendant of one of the most illustrious boyar families in Wallachia. Thus, Dan Romalo is also the direct great-grandson of Ioan (Iancu) Bălăceanu (1828-1914), Minister of Foreign Affairs, plenipotentiary minister of Romania in Rome, Paris, Constantinople, and London. After the removal of Romania's leader, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iancu Bălăceanu played a key role in the search for a foreign prince for the Romanian throne that resulted in the selection of Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. Dan Romalo's father, Grigore Romalo (1890-1928), studied in Paris and Zürich, was friends with the future King Carol II, being part of the legendary "Birjărie" (the group of close friends of the future king) and fought as a volunteer in World War I, on the

<sup>43</sup> Nadejda Romalo, *La famille Romalo*, novel text written in French. Archive of Dan Romalo.



Transylvanian and Moldavian fronts. After standing out in the battle of Mărăști, in August 1917, he was appointed adjutant to General Văitoianu, and after the conclusion of the separate peace between Romania and the Central Powers, in the spring of 1918, he took the Berthelot train and continued fighting as a volunteer in the French army. He was married to Nadejda Grueff, the descendant of a Bulgarian family. He died young, succumbing to tuberculosis that he contracted during the war. In 1916-1917, Grigore Romalo kept a war diary, that until recently was kept under wraps: Grigore Romalo, *Carnete de război. 1916-1917*, Editura Corint, București, 2017. Dan Romalo studied at the Polytechnic University and worked as an engineer. His passion for history and literature resulted in several books including one with an explanation for the content of the mysterious and controversial lead plates in Sinaia, an alleged chronicle of the Getae<sup>44</sup>.

**Petre Rosetti-Bălănescu**, known better under the simplified name of Petre Rosetti or Pierre Rosetti (1927-2018), son of attorney Ion Rosetti-Bălănescu and of Elena Miclescu. The Rosetti (Ruset, Roset) ruling and boyar family, of Greek origin, is one of the most important and influential bloodlines in the history of Romania, which gave the country rulers (Antonie Ruset, ruler of Moldavia between 1675-1678 and Manole Giani-Ruset, ruler of Wallachia between 1770-1771 and of Moldavia in 1788), high ranking servants to rulers (such as the direct ancestor of Petre Rosetti, Constantin Rosetti "The Cup-bearer"), politicians, scholars<sup>45</sup>. Through women, Petre Rosetti is the descendant of rulers Mircea the Elder and Vlad the Impaler, of the Cantacuzino, Sturdza, Catargiu, Bărcănescu, Grecianu-Cornescu, Negruzzi and Miclescu families. Petre Rosetti's great-grandfather, Neculai Rosetti-Bălănescu, was a Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1863-1865, during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza. The brother of Petre Rosetti's father, Alexandru Rosetti (1895-1990), was a member of the Romanian Academy as well as one of the most important Romanian linguists and philologists. His grandfather on his mother's side, Nicolae Miclescu, fought in World War I, at Mărășești, and took part in one of the decisive battles at Râzoare, that lasted from August 6<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> 1917. Petre Rosetti was admitted to the Mining and Metallurgy Department of the Polytechnical School in Bucharest. After the communist takeover, he began having problems at the university and decided, together with two of his friends, to swim

<sup>44</sup> Audio interviews with Dan Romalo, București, 30 October 2013; București, 15 January 2014; București, 27 November 2014 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>45</sup> General Radu R. Rosetti, *Familia Rosetti, I. Coborătorii moldoveni ai lui Lascaris Rousaitos*, Monitorul Oficial și Imprimeriile Statului, București, 1938.

across the Danube to flee the country. After many adventures, that included Yugoslavian and Bulgarian concentration camps and prisons, he eventually managed to reach the free world. In Paris, he studied at the Ecole Supérieure des Mines and became an appreciated engineer. He married Odile Mallet, the descendant of an old dynasty of ennobled French Protestant bankers<sup>46</sup>.

**Bogdan Petru Skeletti** was born in 1953, as the son of Despina Skeletti-Budişteanu (see below) and Vlad Skeletti. A direct descendant of Nicolae Mavrocordat (1680-1730), the ruler of Moldavia and Wallachia, who could trace his genealogy to the medieval Muşat voivodes of Moldavia. His grandfather, officer and composer Emil Sc. Skeletti, was the adjutant of King Ferdinand I of Romania and a close friend of the Queen Mother Helen. After finishing high school in Bucharest, Bogdan Skeletti left communist Romania in 1972, and settled with his family, as exiles, in Germany. He attended law, Roman philology and political sciences at the "Goethe" University in Frankfurt and obtained his BA in Letters at the Paris IV Sorbonne University. He currently works in public relations.

**Despina Skeletti-Budişteanu** was born in Bucharest, in 1930, as the daughter of journalist and writer Radu Budişteanu, Minister of Culture and Arts in the Gigurtu government (1940). She is a descendant of several old Romanian boyar families, the Budişteanu, Grecianu, Frumuşanu, Otetelişanu, Gane and Tuduri families, as well as the Italian Vignali family. She suffered, together with her family, the persecutions of the communist regime. Before moving to the West for good, in 1972, she worked for 10 years as Ana Aslan's personal secretary, at the Geriatrics Institute in Bucharest. In Germany, she worked for 20 years at the "Max Planck" Institute for the History of the European Law<sup>47</sup>. She was married to the diplomat Vlad Skeletti, also a descendant of various boyar families (his mother had been born as Mavrocordat, and one of his grandmothers as Flondor). She published several memoirs in Romania: *Descendenţi condamnaţi, Boierii mei şi Europa, Sertarele cu secrete. Din istoria familiilor boiereşti Budişteanu şi Skeletti, Exilat în libertate*.

**Ion C. Sturdza**, born in 1939, is the descendant of several ruling and boyar families in Romania, such as the Sturdza, Cantemir, Ştirbey, Rosetti, Câmpineanu, Bellu, Cantacuzino-Paşcanu, Ghika-Comăneşti, Mavrocordat, Văcărescu, Bogdan,

<sup>46</sup> Audio interviews with Petre Rosetti-Bălănescu, Paris, 17 February 2012; Paris, 25 June 2012; Paris, 29 May 2015 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>47</sup> Despina Skeletti-Budişteanu, *Sertarele cu secrete. Din istoria familiilor boiereşti Budişteanu şi Skeletti*, Corint Books, Bucureşti, 2017.



Cândescu, Ceaur, Jora and Negri families. His great-great-grandfather, on a direct male lineage, was Vasile Sturdza, member of the threefold *caimacam* (regency) of Moldavia (1858-1859) and Prime Minister of Moldavia (1859), supporter of the Union of the Principalities, president of the High Court of Cassation. Another great-great-grandfather of Ion C. Sturdza is the ruler Barbu Știrbey of Wallachia. And another one is Ion Câmpineanu (1798-1863), one of the leaders of the 1848 revolutionary movement in Wallachia, founder of the national movement. Ion C. Sturdza is also a direct descendant of the rulers Constantin Cantemir, Antioh Cantemir, Gheorghe Ghika, Grigore I Ghika and Grigore V Ghyka. He is the great-grandson of the diplomat, historian and memorialist Radu Rosetti and grandson of the historian Radu R. Rosetti, member of the Romanian Academy, who died in prison during the communist repression<sup>48</sup>. Ion C. Sturdza studied railway mechanics in college and began his career at Regionala Brașov, the Târgu-Mureș roundhouse, after which he returned to Bucharest and worked in the Railway Laboratory that morphed into Railway Research Institute. He never gave up his passion for history that led him to unearth documents and episodes from the world of his forefathers.

**Prince Mihai Dim. Sturdza** (1934-2020) was the descendant of one of the oldest and most illustrious ruling and boyar families in Moldavia that included two rulers of Moldavia, Ioniță Sandu Sturdza (who ruled between 1822 and 1828) and Mihail Sturdza (who ruled between 1834 and 1849), a Romanian Prime Minister, D. A. Sturdza (who was also the president of the Romanian Academy and the president of the National Liberal Party), high ranking civil servants, scholars, ministers, military men, artists<sup>49</sup>. He was also a descendant of the Manu boyar family, with members like General Gheorghe Manu, a hero of the Independence War, Prime-Minister of Romania, War and Finance Minister, mayor of Bucharest. Mihai Dim. Sturdza was the great-great-grandson, on a direct male lineage, of the ruler Mihail Sturdza. In 1952, the communists arrested him, sentenced him without trial to three years behind bars along with other young men from historical Romanian families, for “missing to denounce and a hostile attitude towards the regime of popular democracy”. Mihai Dim. Sturdza’s grandmother and mother also spent time in communist jails. Passionate about genealogy, he wanted to enrol in the Department of History, but the field was controlled by the communist ideology, and he ended up attending the Italian Section of the Philology Department of the University of

<sup>48</sup> Audio interview with Ion C. Sturdza, București, 15 December 2014 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>49</sup> Cristian Popișteanu, Dorin Matei, *Sturdzeștii: din cronică unei familii istorice*, fundația culturală *Magazin Istoric*, București, 1995.

Bucharest instead. He worked as an unqualified labourer, a schoolmaster, then as a translator for a research institute in Bucharest. In his spare time, he continued his modern history research. In 1964, he went into exile and settled in Paris. Between 1968 and 1985, he worked at the Cultural Foreign Exchanges Department of the French Foreign Affairs Minister, also being the official Romanian language interpreter for the presidents of France, Charles de Gaulle, and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Between 1986 and 1995 he was a political editor for the Romanian Department of the Research Institute of the Free Europe radio station in Munich. He published numerous articles in the cultural and scientific press in the country and abroad and became one of the most respected Romanian genealogists, a genuine authority in the field, through the publication of the vast *Dictionnaire Historique et généalogique des grandes familles de Grèce, d'Albanie et de Constantinople* (Paris, 1983 and 1999; a volume awarded by the International Heraldry and Genealogy Academy) and *Familiile boierești din Moldova și Țara Românească. Enciclopedie istorică, genealogică și biografică* (Editurile Simetria and Corint, București, 2004-present). Other books published by Mihai Dim. Sturdza are *Românii între frica de Rusia și dragostea de Franța, Rușii, masonii, Mareșalul și alte răspântii ale istoriografiei românești* (Editura Roza vânturilor, București, 2006) and *Aristocrați români în lumea lui Proust. Anton Bibescu, Martha Bibescu, Anna de Noailles, Elena Bibescu* (Editura Humanitas, București, 2016). He was married to Isabelle Frotier de Bagneux, a descendant of the Polignac family and a third-degree cousin of Prince Albert II of Monaco.

**Tudor Verona** was born in 1939, as the son of painter Paul Verona and Carmen Sauciuc-Săveanu. He is a descendant of a noble family with old roots on the Dalmatian Coast, that was ruled by the Venetians. One great-grandmother, Amalia de Lukovics, bore the title of countess. The brother of Tudor Verona's grandfather, Arthur Verona, was one of the most important Romanian painters. Tudor Verona is also a descendant of the old Kazimir bloodline, Moldavian boyars with distant Polish origins. The family was very fond of the Herța county, where its estate was located. His maternal grandfather, Theofil Sauciuc-Săveanu, was a historian, archaeologist, parliamentarian and minister of Bukovina in the inter-war period and became a political prisoner during the communist years. Tudor Verona's mother was also imprisoned during the communist regime, only because her father had been a dignitary in the "bourgeois regime". Tudor Verona graduated from the Constructions Institute, he worked on various building sites, after which he took a job at the Chamber of Commerce. For more than three decades, he organised the international



fairs at the Central Pavilion in Bucharest. After 1989, he concentrated on retrieving the memory of his ancestors and edited several books dedicated to them.

**Irina Vlăducă-Marghiloman** is the daughter of architect Mihail Butculescu-Marghiloman and the descendant of the Butculescu, Marghiloman, Pherekyde, Arion, Cârlova, Otetelișanu and Isvoranu families. Her great-grandmother, Elena Marghiloman-Pherekyde, was the sister of the conservative politician and Prime Minister Alexandru Marghiloman<sup>50</sup>, lady-in-waiting to Queen Elisabeth of Romania and known for her philanthropic activity. Her grandmother, Irina Pherekyde-Butculescu, founded the Animal Protection Society, she was a lady-in-waiting to Queen Marie of Romania and was part of numerous philanthropic societies. Irina Vlăducă-Marghiloman graduated from the "Nicolae Tonitza" imitative arts school in Bucharest and, after leaving Romania in 1970, she studied design in Germany. She is married to architect Gheorghe Vlăducă, together with whom she founded a design and architecture company in Frankfurt. After 1989, she dedicated herself to retrieving and restoring the family's homes. At the same time, she is advocating increased awareness of the historic role of her great-uncle, Alexandru Marghiloman, played during World War I and the Great Union. She is an honored citizen of the Buzău municipality, and in 2018 she founded the "Alexandru Marghiloman" Association, dedicated to curing children of cancer, supporting meritorious law students and the raising of purebred horses.

**Simona M. Vrăbiescu-Kleckner**, born in 1927, is the descendant of an old boyar bloodline in Oltenia, the Vrăbiescu family, related to other great families, such as the Vorvoreanu family. She is the daughter of George Vrăbiescu, one of the most highly regarded attorneys in inter-war Romania. Simona Vrăbiescu graduated from the Law Department of the University of Bucharest, but because of her "unhealthy social origin" could never practice law during communism<sup>51</sup>. In 1965, she emigrated to the United States, where she studied library science and built herself an international career in the field of legal library science. She holds a 1969 Master's Degrees in informatics from Columbia University and a 1973 one in public international law from New York University. Among her many jobs it is worth mentioning that of head of the UN Legal Library (1975-1986) and of director of the Library of the US Federal International Commerce Court (1987-1996). After 1989, in her pursuit to free Romania from remnants of communism and to help

<sup>50</sup> Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice*, 3 volumes, Editura Scripta, Editura Machiavelli, București, 1993-1995.

<sup>51</sup> Simona M. Vrăbiescu Kleckner, *Pe urmele mele în două lumi: România – SUA. Romanul unei vieți – cronică unei epoci*. First Volume, Curtea Veche, București, 2013.

democratizing it, in the years 1999-2000, she became the personal advisor to the Romanian President Emil Constantinescu. She wrote several autobiographical books: *O mărturie provocată – 1995-2000* (Editura Themis Cart, București, 2004), *Din Exil – Lobby în SUA pentru România, 1990-1998* (Editura Ziua, București, 2006), *Pe urmele mele în două lumi: România – SUA. Romanul unei vieți, cronica unei epoci* (2 volumes, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2013-2014). In 2008, she received from King Michael I of Romania the *King Michael for Loyalty Medal*.

### Conduits of memory

As I mentioned at the beginning, the Romanian aristocracy was not much different from many other European aristocracies, regarding the cult for the family memory. Personal identity was also built on stories, models, inherited objects. Ancient genealogies, which can be documented or were merely founded on family tradition, exemplary characters in the past, estates and manors, family portraits, documents and old objects, they all become conduits to family memory and turn into essential elements of the aristocratic identity, as shown so eloquently by Éric Mension-Rigau, in his studies dedicated to the French aristocracy<sup>52</sup>.

Despina Skeletti-Budișteanu wrote a lot about her ancestors, about their suffering during communism and she is trying to pass on to her successors the vision about her own family, which she inherited, in turn, from her parents and grandparents. The main elements are the antiquity of the family and its autochthonism:

*The Budișteanu family originates in Wallachia. Its cradle is in a small locality near Curtea de Argeș, namely Budeasa. That is where the family's cula [fortified manor] is. The Budișteanu family is one of the oldest Romanian families, which had already been living on the lands of Argeș when Wallachia was founded by Basarab I<sup>53</sup>.*

Families that originated abroad have their own charm, as long as that origination happened a long time ago:

*The Makarovitsch family, as far as I know, is a very old family, which appeared in Moldavia close to the year 1500, when the first ancestor that we know of was taken prisoner in a frontier battle between the Moldavians and the Poles;*

<sup>52</sup> Éric Mension-Rigau, *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Despina Skeletti-Budișteanu, Written answer to the questionnaire *The Memory of the Romanian elites*, novel texts edited in Romanian, 2012 (in possession of the author).



*that happened back in Stephen the Great's times. He stayed here, got married and then, they slowly became high ranking servants to the rulers of Moldavia*<sup>54</sup>.

An important bond between generations and an accessible and efficient vehicle for a family's memory is made up of the first names characteristic to a certain family that repeat themselves, sometimes obsessively, making a genealogist's job quite difficult. But the first name also ensures continuity and brings the achievements of the evoked ancestor into the present:

*The name Mihai has stayed in the family, I bear it, my grandfather was Mihai and my grandfather's grandfather was the ruler Mihai Sturdza. That is why my name is also Mihai, but I was careful to distinguish myself from other Mihais in the family who are contemporary with me, even today there are 2-3 in the family, so I adopted the name Mihai Dimitrie, because my father's name was Dimitrie. In fact, my official name, in the county records, is Mihai*<sup>55</sup>.

The testimonials of the descendants of the Romanian aristocracy who were born before communism, who adopted from their forefathers memories about their own families always highlight a few elements, such as family antiquity, heroic and exemplary figures, the sacrifice for the country and the common good. But oftentimes we also have the identification through the memory of the traumas caused by the communist regime:

*The Sturdza family, that originated in Romania, is quite old. Of course, over time, Greek and other blood got mixed in... It originated before 1600, but in any case, its continuity is well documented starting with the 1600s. (...) My grandfathers were Constantin Sturdza, magistrate and then attorney, and Radu R. Rosetti, officer, colonel during World War I, regiment commander, wounded in a battle auxiliary to the main battle of Mărășești, namely the battle at Răzoare. Wounded in the leg, he was left with one leg shorter by about 4 centimetres. He was also a military attaché in London, right after WW I. (...) Grandpa Rosetti also worked for the Red Cross (...), he was the director of the Military Museum and, as a military historian, he also became a member of the Romanian Academy and the director of the Academy's Library. (...) After 1948, he was arrested a second time and, even though nothing could be proven against him, he was sentenced to two years in prison. Grandpa died in prison*<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Video interview with Alexandru Makarovitsch, București, 28 August 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/alexandru-makarovitsch-video/>).

<sup>55</sup> Video interview with Prince Mihai Dim. Sturdza, București, 10 April 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/mihai-dimitrie-sturdza/>).

<sup>56</sup> Video interview with Ion C. Sturdza, București, September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ion-c-sturdza-video/>).

The ties that old families had with certain villages, towns or regions are illustrated by the case of painter Constantin Flondor, who was born in Cernăuți and lived on a street that bore the very name of his family's most illustrious representative:

*Now, if I am to talk about the Flondor family, it is a glorious, well-known, hyper-known genealogical tree. The first notions about this tree date back to around 1400, a certain Albotă. (...) After two-three hundred years, it splits into two other families, Ciudin and Flondor (...) Let us not forget the most important of them all, the emblematic (...), Iancu Flondor, who made the union between Bukovina and the Romanian Kingdom possible by way of congress, the great congress held at the Metropolitan Church in Cernăuți, where he was elected president and a majority signed on. (...) I would like to mention that my emergence into the world took place in 1936, when my mother and my father lived on an important street in Cernăuți, which bore the name of Iancu Flondor<sup>57</sup>.*

Family tradition, the memorial heritage and the will to pass it all on is also manifested in the choice of professions or engagement in a particular vocation:

*Later, I happened to end up an artist as well. How I got here is, to go back to the talents that come from your genealogical tree, from God, but God through this tree, I believe I inherited it from my father. But what do you know, my mother painted as well, she took a few painting classes in Cernăuți (Czernowitz). But my mother's uncle, therefore my grandfather's brother, a painter named Ivasiuc, one of the most important in Cernăuți, has a memorial house in Cernăuți. He went to the academy in Munich and Vienna, he studied painting, and we had a large reproduction in our house, about one meter by 30 cm, with a historical composition painted by this painter called Nicolae Ivasiuc. A scene in the history of Ukraine, Bogdan Hmelnițchi's entrance into Kiev (...). I had this painting in front of my eyes, I liked that painting a lot and, at some point, I was already around 11-12 years old, I got it into my head to make a copy of it. Being so big, an excellent colour reproduction, I began drawing it in pencil and I recreated it. (...) My mother knew this Ivasiuc fellow personally, she had gone to his workshop, probably when he made this historical composition, because the workshop was like a theatre, filled with costumes, old swords, therefore it was a complete documentation of this historical scene that he was striving to accomplish. And my mother dressed like a*

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<sup>57</sup> Video interview with Constantin Flondor, București, 10 May 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/constantin-flondor-video/>).



14-year-old girl. (...) Around that same time, Ivasiuc made a portrait of her which, to my great joy, is in our possession now. (...) Ivasiuc was executed by the KGB<sup>58</sup>.

The descendants of families with a long tradition of public service did not have a very wide range of jobs to choose from:

*Grandpa Florescu had told my father: "You either become a diplomat or an officer". The family tradition was particularly military. (...) My father had been in the army in World War I and he did not want to have anything else to do with the military, so he chose the diplomacy*<sup>59</sup>.

An aristocrat's country estate, among other things, is usually essential for his or her identification. Even more so if it was a large estate and the landlord's relations with the locals were close and cordial:

*The family's estate in Herța, which is now in Ukraine, was immense. In 1900, Ecaterina Kazimir and Henri Verona, my grandma and grandpa, received from the mayor of Herța a yellow coin in exchange for their signature that freed Herța and its inhabitants. This prompted historian Nicolae Iorga, one of my grandfather's friends, to state that their act might have removed one of the last remnants of feudalism in Romania*<sup>60</sup>.

But aristocrats did not live only at their country estates. Descendants often refer to the institutions that members of their families founded, to buildings that they built in cities, thus contributing to progress in society. The Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest is one such building that symbolizes Romanian culture:

*What I was told and what I knew was that great-uncle Esarcu was a journalist and politician, who was committed to get the Athenaeum built. And since there were no funds, he started a drive for donations: "Give one leu for the Athenaeum". So, it seems that the Athenaeum was built, at least partially, as a result of this drive to donate one leu for the Athenaeum. I learned about this from back home and when later I lived (...) on Franklin street, my mother and my mother's brother pointed out to me that I was not a neutral bystander to this Athenaeum*<sup>61</sup>.

Outstanding characters in a family's past serve as proof for certain exceptional traits in a family's fabric, which also justify its social status, as well as

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> Video interview with Yvonne Florescu, București, 1 October 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/yvonne-florescu-video/>).

<sup>60</sup> Video interview with Tudor Verona, București, 27 November 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/tudor-verona-video/>).

<sup>61</sup> Video interview with Alexandru Makarovitsch, București, 28 August 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/alexandru-makarovitsch-video/>).

becoming a role model for future generations. Their influence increases if their biographies offer examples of courage, of sacrifice for the country, of struggle for the greater good and, many times, a tragic ending, as was the case of the 1848 revolutionary Grigore Romalo:

*His destiny was tragic. He was a militant and supporter of the revolution (...) eventually he was banished, he was caught by the establishment's police and sent under guard together with another revolutionary and he ended up in Galați or Brăila, where he was supposed to be handed over to the Turks. And he was, but it seems that he travelled in bad weather, and caught a cold or fell ill, and his tuberculosis started; he finally died in exile in Constantinople<sup>62</sup>.*

Grigore III Ghika (1724-1777), ruler of Moldavia (1764-1767 and 1774-1777) and Wallachia (1768-1769) protested vehemently, together with the Moldavian boyars, when the Habsburgs took over from the Ottomans the region of Moldavia that became known as Bukovina. Because of his opposition, Grigore Ghika was decapitated by the Sultan, becoming a hero for his family and for many Romanians. Another hero of the Ghika family, also the victim of an unfair and unequal fight, is Monsignor Vladimir Ghika (1873-1954), recently beatified by the Roman-Catholic Church, who died as a martyr in a communist prison:

*Grigore Ghika was decapitated for his country. His country counted more for him than his own life, which is truly extraordinary. And the Monsignor, not to mention the Monsignor, who sacrificed his life as well for his country and who was so dreadfully tortured. He not only gave up everything, but he practically did not eat in order to give everything to the others. He really had a saintly look about him, a remarkable warmth<sup>63</sup>.*

Aristocratic families leave written traces and are careful to preserve them and transmit them from generation to generation. There is a habit of redacting diaries or memoirs and oftentimes, these written traces are connected to extraordinary events, such as travels to faraway places or wars. This is the case of the war journal kept by another Grigore Romalo during World War I (notice the earlier mentioned repetition of first names):

*The notebooks talk about his campaign – as a volunteer, he enrolled and participated in the entire 1916-1917 campaign, basically on the front line. (...) The*

<sup>62</sup> Video interview with Dan Romalo, București, 14 February 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dan-romalo/>).

<sup>63</sup> Video interview with Princess Manuela Ghika-Oroveanu, București, 20 November 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/manuela-ghika-oroveanu-video/>).



*part that I believe is the most beautiful, which is truly a piece of meritorious literature, with a great deal of charm and impressive power, is the description of the retreat toward Moldavia. (...) Step by step, in terribly bad weather, all through the night, through the Prahova Valley, passing Câmpina, where he says he believed he saw daylight, not caused by the light of dawn, but because the oil field, with all its wells, had been set ablaze*<sup>64</sup>.

Of course, considering the political function of the boyars, we also have individuals who occupied important positions and impacted the history of the country. Their descendants reverently invoke their courage, their intelligence and especially the contribution they made to the evolution of the Romanian nation:

*General Dimitrie Lecca (1832-1888) became a War Minister after graduating from a French military school considered as one of the most important military institutions at the time. Helped by his accomplishments in battle he advanced through the Romanian ranks without a hitch. He was commemorated for his achievements in battle in the written and unwritten history of Romanians as the hero from Nazâr Mahala. As Minister of War, he also had great achievements. We have treaties written by him, as well as rules instituted by the Ministry of Defence. (...) As head of the House of Representatives, he earned his place in history by expediting the founding of the Romanian Kingdom. His memorable speech in the House of Representatives was key in getting the required measure passed*<sup>65</sup>.

The discourse of familial memory among descendants of the old boyars creates the link between the heroic deeds of the past and the character of the more recent representatives, who were also willing to sacrifice themselves for the country:

*My entire family, from 1501 onward, they were all pitars, seneschals, they held high offices. Iulian Vrăbiescu was the prefect of Dolj county and the mayor of Craiova. My father and his brother studied law in Paris, at Sorbonne. But because they lived in a family of patriots and lovers of their country and its people during war, they interrupted their studies at Sorbonne when they saw that Romania was entering World War I, came back and enrolled in the army*<sup>66</sup>.

This family continuity manifests itself also in the attitude towards the country's alliances. Gheorghe Boldur-Lătescu wasn't too passionate about his

<sup>64</sup> Video interview with Dan Romalo, București, 14 February 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dan-romalo/>).

<sup>65</sup> Video interview with Dumitru Gh. Lecca, Radomirești, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dumitru-lecca/>).

<sup>66</sup> Video interview with Simona M. Vrăbiescu-Kleckner, București, 24 September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/simona-vrabiescu-kleckner/>).

family's history in his childhood, but as a student passing through the harsh political prisons of the communist regime, he recognised his own aversion toward the Soviet Union similar to the political instinct of an ancestor from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who played a role in thwarting the plans of Emperor Peter the Great of Russia:

*My father was a man who respected his ancestors and raised me in this spirit from early on. I remember that one of the first poems he made me learn by heart was the ballad "Iordache al Lupului" by Alecsandri, in which the main hero is an ancestor of mine, who is fighting with Grigore Ghika, the ruler who was a bit afraid that Iordache might take his throne, and he runs to Bugeac, to the Tatars. (...) What is certain is that I was exposed to the family tradition, but as to awareness, that came much later. Strangely, in the beginning, I had a slight feeling of rejection for this legacy, believing that it was better for a man to go through life by relying on his own powers. However, as I got older, things changed; it is probably a natural phenomenon. I began living this connection with my ancestors affectively. I took interest in it, I found out interesting things and I was glad to learn that there were others who had dealt with my kind of problems. (...) The Boldur were drawn to greatness and produced a few very interesting characters, starting with that Lupu Costaki, who had an important contribution in changing the country's history, when he participated in the Ottoman war against Peter the Great of Russia and Dimitrie Cantemir of Moldavia. I do not know if Lupu had what may be called a political consciousness. Probably not. But he did have the right intuition that an alliance with the Russians would end up in getting us under their tutelage and completely losing our autonomy. He felt that Peter's desire for expansion was more dangerous than the permissive system of the Turkish rule<sup>67</sup>.*

The idealization of ancestors and their projection into behavioural patterns does not eliminate the critical attitude toward one's own family. Especially those of today's aristocrats who are passionate about history and do research the past lucidly assume and discover less honourable aspects of their family saga:

*Of course, references to ancestors came up quite often. The ancestor who had been a ruler of the principalities was excessively revered in the family, like a saint, and so was Lady Eufrosina, the ruler's wife, born Callimaki, who was called "Agia", meaning "the saint". References to the cultural dignity and talent of our ancestors returned all the time, but they were all assimilated through emotions, ancestors being pure and righteous, good, fair and merciful, generous, honest and brave, beautiful and wise, none of them having the smallest flaw! It's the same in*

<sup>67</sup> Audio interview with Gheorghe Boldur-Lătescu, București, 18 June 2014 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).



any family. *De mortuis nihil nisi bene!* But the historical reality is different. Certain rulers left a beautiful memory in their first reign, only to be abominable in the next ones, for various reasons. It's true that Alecu Suțu instituted excessive fiscal rules during his reign, on the other hand, my great-great-great-grandfather had reached the diplomatic achievement of being in good relations with all the neighbouring empires, whom he had asked for protection<sup>68</sup>.

Sometimes, the omnipresence of ancestors may become overwhelming, especially in one's childhood. But it is this continuous reminder that keeps the family's legend alive and assures its perpetuity. Princess Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino remembers the insistence with which her family claimed the descendance of her direct ancestor, the famous doctor Carol Davila, from composer Franz Liszt:

*I must say that when I was very little, I was a bit annoyed by doctor Carol Davila, because in every room, in my grandmother's drawing-room, everywhere, all over my grandmother's house, there were mortuary masks of Davila, of Liszt and of Davila's son, writer Alexandru Davila. All this, to prove that Davila looked exactly like Liszt. Who was very likely his father... Carol Davila was the illegitimate son of a French countess who hadn't had the courage to acknowledge him and had given him a made-up name, "Davila", a name that hadn't existed before<sup>69</sup>.*

Knowing the family's past and the biographic details of outstanding ancestors imposes a sense of duty to prevent oblivion and emulate the model. If memory builds the identity of a family and consolidates its social status, it also comes with a large sense of responsibility:

*With the name Bossy-Ghica, I feel somewhat responsible for everything that belonged to Ion Ghica, and which was passed on to me, because my father was the only male descendant who was adopted by his grandfather, Nicolae Ghica. Ghica had inherited the manor in Ghergani, which he transferred to my father on condition that he would add Ghica to his name of Bossy, in order to perpetuate this very prestigious name. (...) I feel very close to Ion Ghica, not only for being a historical personality with a coat of arms and of the family that had produced 10 rulers for Romania, in Wallachia and Moldavia, but also for the fact that he left a mark on his time, he was a tireless fighter for the prosperity of the Romanian people, for the Union of the Principalities, for promoting the fame of our people and of Romania in the West. When in 1835, he went to study in Paris, he realised*

<sup>68</sup> Radu Negrescu-Suțu, Written answer to the questionnaire *The Memory of the Romanian elites*, novel texts edited in Romanian, 2010 (in possession of the author).

<sup>69</sup> Video interview with Princess Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino Deniau, Izvoru, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (in possession of the author).

*that no one knew his people and the two Romanian principalities whose separate existence he never accepted and for which he fought so much to unite*<sup>70</sup>.

Finally, family memory also retains those details that confirm the aristocratic status of the family, details that become even more important when foreigners evaluate the Romanian boyar families' claims to aristocracy. Petre Rosetti remembers that his French teacher, hired by his family from France, would attempt to protect his sensitivities typical of a child born in an aristocratic family, when they talked about the French Revolution, a historical event that European aristocrats weren't very fond of:

*Mademoiselle Jarry came over three times a week. (...) Among other things, she taught us not only the language, but also the history of France. And at some point, we reached the takeover of the Bastille and the beginning of the Revolution. And that's when she told me, in French of course, "this is not for you!" And she skipped 30 pages. So, she reached the Restoration, when a Bourbon returned to power*<sup>71</sup>.

### **The withering of memory-bearing objects**

Some of the privileged vehicles of family memory are family heirlooms, portraits, archives. But they are also some of the most threatened. In its attempt to annihilate the aristocracy, the communist regime tried from early on to use all means to eliminate all material traces that old families could cling to and which could have continued to represent a significant symbolic capital. The confiscations and destructions of the material patrimony of historical Romanian families were massive in the 1950s and remain irretrievable in most cases.

Obviously, the "popular democracy" regime could not allow aristocrats to keep weapons in their homes, even if they had only historical value and could not be used in any armed upheaval against the regime:

*My maternal grandfather was an army officer: Major Eftimie Ullescu, who conquered the Smârdan redoubt during the war of 1877-1878. My mother kept the sword that Osman-Paşa had surrendered to my grandfather. The sword had a silver enhanced ivory handle; it was seductive, an exquisite object. It is a shame that, when*

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<sup>70</sup> Video interview with Irina Bossy-Ghica Boulín, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/irina-bossy-ghica/>).

<sup>71</sup> Video interview with Petre Rosetti-Bălănescu, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/petre-rosetti-video/>).



*the communists came to power, they confiscated it from us, and I have no idea what happened to it. It was proof that my grandfather fought victoriously in the '77 war*<sup>72</sup>.

*On each side of the stairway, there were panoplies with old weapons. They were decorated with precious stones, wonderful rifles, but they were centuries old, they did not work anymore... And when the communists came to search our house, they told my father: "You didn't declare this?" You had to declare all your weapons, but functioning weapons. (...) They took everything. They said "No, no, you can't keep this, you have to turn it in". It was not just social malice, but also enormous stupidity*<sup>73</sup>.

But not only aristocrats' old rusty swords and clogged rifles were regarded as a threat by the communists. Family documents were also seen as possible weapons. The past that was not in accordance with the all-encompassing ideology had to disappear. The written memory of families was considered subversive:

*What was painful for us was that, in the class hatred at the time, paper was considered quite important or something particular to the "upper class". Here, in Radomirești, in front of the manor, they gathered everything that was made of paper. On the one hand, books, many of them valuable, that were certainly a great loss, but the hardest loss were all the documents that belonged to General Lecca. Documents regarding the important functions he held in Romania; documents, I am sure, of great importance for the history of Romania, not only for our family's history. As president of the House of Representatives, as Minister of War, as vice-president of the National Liberal Party, imagine how many important documents there had to be here, of which we could not save any. Upstairs, on one of the manor's walls, there remained a lone decoration from King Carol I, received by my great-grandfather. (...) Apart from that, nothing, decorations, decrees, addresses, diplomatic correspondence, military correspondence, absolutely nothing. There are not any in the archives in Bacău, or anywhere else. From my point of view, it was a crime. (...) They burned them. They took them out here, in front of the house, they started a fire and threw everything made of paper into the fire and all of it turned*

<sup>72</sup> Audio interview with Barbu Brezianu, București, 1 April 2000 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author). Fragments of the testimony of Barbu Brezianu appeared in the author's article *Viața ca o coloană spre infinit. Interviu cu Barbu Brezianu*, in "Vlăstarul", 5<sup>th</sup> series, IV, 2000, Nr. 3-4, p. 42-52 (part I) and Nr. 7-8, p. 33-45 (part II).

<sup>73</sup> Video interview with Petre Rosetti-Bălănescu, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/petre-rosetti-video/>).

*into a pile of ashes, as the villagers remembered; when we returned in 1990, they told us what had happened*<sup>74</sup>.

Some families were forced by circumstances to destroy or put a dent themselves in the memorial patrimony represented by objects. Documents that could be compromising and which threatened the life or freedom of members of their family were destroyed. Decade after decade and especially in the tragical decade of the 1950s, when many aristocrats were killed or politically detained and when it was almost impossible for them to find a job, many families survived from one month to the next by selling pieces of furniture, jewels, silverware, carpets or precious vessels on flea markets, to the newly affluent people of the communist regime:

*Not only did not my family keep any property titles, but they actually burned them when the Bolsheviks entered the country, and the family took refuge in Bucharest. Over time, many objects and documents that had belonged to the rulers in the family, were either sold or donated to museums. I remember that constantly something went missing from the house, a piece of furniture, a painting, a jewel, which were surely sold in the flea market for pennies. (...) Of course there were all kinds of furniture ordered from Vienna, paintings, tea sets made of Sèvres or Limoges porcelain, ordered from France, all decorated with the family's emblem or the owner's monogram, as was the custom back in those days for well to do families with a glorious past. I got to see some of them, but not for long, because for many years, we lived off selling these objects. But they were not many, about as much as they could fit into a wagon or two; all the other things that remained in the house in Iași when we fled went missing*<sup>75</sup>.

Family portraits, family trees, objects of all kinds, from urban dwellings and country estates, are all lost in this genuine collective shipwreck, taking the memory of ancestors with them:

*I was born right after his demise [of an ancestor], so for me, he is an image. And his portrait, en pied, was on Roma Street, in my family's home, but that painting "vanished", so to speak, during the communist era, nobody knows where it is. I have tried to find out where it might be, but I couldn't. (...) At some point, there was a family tree made by Ionel Makarovitsch, or Traian. One of the two put together an enormous family tree, I still remember it today. It stayed with the youngest of the general's sons, whose name was Adrian, but he too died and*

<sup>74</sup> Video interview with Dumitru Gh. Lecca, Radomirești, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dumitru-lecca/>).

<sup>75</sup> Radu Negrescu-Suțu, Written answer to the questionnaire *The Memory of the Romanian elites*, novel texts edited in Romanian, 2010 (in possession of the author).



*nobody knows exactly what happened to the tree... (...) When the estates were confiscated, my grandmother was at her manor in Pufești. They took hold of them and put them into forced domicile in Vaslui. And her sister, whose name was Titica Varlam, (...) she was in the countryside too and she had a beautiful manor in Budești, where her husband, who had been a judge in Congo, had brought a splendid collection of objects from Africa. (...) They came and destroyed everything. Nothing was left of it<sup>76</sup>.*

However, especially in the case of young generations, born under communism, there is also a phenomenon of rejecting the old objects. Their elders told them few things or nothing at all about their families' history, and young people no longer had the opportunity to emotionally connect with objects and learn about their families from the stories that the objects bear. What this young generation remembered was not so much the valuable objects, but the various restraints imposed on the household:

*In my childhood, we had style furniture, I was never allowed to sit on those chairs however I wanted to or just lounge in them. I could break the Louis... That is why I hated style furniture for years. There was a family portrait, which we, unfortunately, had to sell, in order to make ends meet. A painting depicting one of the Budișteanu magistrates from the 19th century. Dressed in black, in a magistrate's cloak and with a scroll in his hand. He towered in our home and if there was a diffuse light, I was so frightened of him... The portrait was found at some point, by a friend of a friend, in a consignment shop<sup>77</sup>.*

### **To forget in order to survive**

The destruction and squandering of memorial objects fit into a much wider communist strategy of placing the *damnatio memoriae* spectre on the descendants of the Romanian aristocracy. The names of boyars disappeared from history books and public places. That is what happened to the father of Princess Manuela Ghika-Oroveanu, Prince Leon Ghika, as well as her husband, scenographer Ion Oroveanu:

*When my father took the high school admission exam, he came out second. And after that, he won a prize in each grade. This was at the "Negruzzi" High School in Iași. He appeared on the honour board; the heads of class were put there*

<sup>76</sup> Video interview with Alexandru Makarovitsch, București, 28 August 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/alexandru-makarovitsch-video/>).

<sup>77</sup> Audio interview with Bogdan Petru Skeletti, București, 28 May 2013 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

every year, but the communists took him off when they came to power. (...) Actress Marina Vlady wrote a book, her memoir, in which she says that the most beautiful setting she ever filmed on was the one made by my husband in the movie "Steaua fără nume" ("Mona, l'étoile sans nom") from 1966. (...) He worked so hard before leaving Romania. (...) When he left, of course, every trace of him in the country was completely erased. Because, unfortunately, that is what happened to everyone who left Romania. They were never heard of again<sup>78</sup>.

The mere display of a "bourgeois-landlord" family name could block the bearers' access to the hospital or the university, that is why descendants of aristocratic families were sometimes forced to hide their own names:

*When she was expelled from her home, my grandmother had a jaundice or stomach seizure and had to be taken to a hospital. She was taken to the Colțea Hospital in Bucharest, the director of which, at the time, was professor Hortolomei, a very well-known doctor. (...) The problem with my grandmother was that, if she had used her real name, Olga Sturdza, she would have been denied access by the hospital's management, which was made up of communist party members. Professor Hortolomei, who was from Iași and knew my grandmother very well, registered her under a different name, a false name<sup>79</sup>.*

But names could not always be changed:

*I went to the University's History Department; at the time, visits were organised for students and candidates. And when I went there, candidates were being welcomed by a celebrity of that time, historian Andrei Oțetea, who was also from Iași. As he was showing us around, all the auditoriums and seminar halls, I got close to him, so that no one could hear me, and asked him: "Professor, my name is Sturdza, do you think I could apply for the History Department?" He looked at me smilingly and said: "No way." These were ideological departments. And I would not have stood a chance. I would have been rejected immediately<sup>80</sup>.*

Sometimes, descendants of notables, children of political prisoners, who had gone through the traumatic experience of prison, could slip through by changing a letter, not of their name, but of their place of birth:

*The year is 1947, a difficult year, we remember how difficult it was for King Michael, who was forced to abdicate on the 30th of December '47 and along with*

<sup>78</sup> Video interview with Princess Manuela Ghika-Oroveanu, București, 20 November 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/manuela-ghika-oroveanu-video/>).

<sup>79</sup> Video interview with Prince Mihai Dim. Sturdza, București, 10 April 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/mihai-dimitrie-sturdza/>).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.



him, my father's career ended as well. No pension, no pay, no rank, demoted, so he eventually ended up working for "Plafar". He nursed lavender for "Plafar", what could he do... After that, times were really hard. I was growing up. (...) But it passed. So, I got admitted to high school. (...) And this is where the hardest days of our lives began. They started to come at 5-6 in the morning, rang the doorbell, they came in teams of two or three at a time and began rummaging everywhere, took whatever they wanted, so these were what you would call searches. They demanded documents, letters, decorations. (...) Until one day... my father was at "Plafar" from where they had sent him to Moldavia to check out some medicinal plant crops, so he was not in Bucharest. Several individuals in civilian clothes came to ask about my father. They assumed he had fled. So, they took us. My mother and me. They blindfolded us and took us somewhere. They separated me from my mother, and I did not know anything else after that. I was 14. (...) I do not know exactly who whispered to me that they found my father where he was, in Moldavia. Of course, they arrested him on the spot, took him somewhere, I don't know where. After a few days, a militia woman brought me home, and didn't leave our house for weeks. She basically kept me under surveillance. Who was coming, whether the phone was ringing, whether someone asked about my parents. (...) You might be wondering how I survived during all this time. Well, by way of mercy. The mercy of an old cook who used to be employed by us. She lived outside of Bucharest, I took at least 2 trams to get there, I had a lunchbox with me, and she would fill it with food. (...) We had a certain purity, naivety, faith, we believed in life, even with all the difficulties that I described, we also lied... I was very keen on sports. My whole class went to "Tânărul Dinamovist". Everyone filled out the form. But how could I write that I was born in Rome, Italy? So, I added an "N" and wrote down "Roman" (a city in Romania's Moldavia region) as my birthplace and I got admitted, so I could play basketball and everything else<sup>81</sup>.

Desperate, because she was not allowed to take her baccalaureate exam, Ina Rîșcuția (born Polizu-Micșunești) tried, unsuccessfully, to convince authorities that she wanted to distance herself from her own family. For the moment, oblivion was only simulated:

"Polizu, what are you doing here?" "Madam, I came to see where the English exam will take place tomorrow." (...) "Go home, girl, you have no business in this high school." I kept asking why and how come? I had no idea. Had I done something wrong or... Nothing. (...) She said, "there's no place for you among the

<sup>81</sup> Video interview with Gabriela Dămăceanu, București, July 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/gabriela-damaceanu-video/>).

*children of the working class." I said, "Madam, on the contrary, if I stay within my family, I will learn all kinds of things against the working class"... (...) She thought I was mocking her, which I was, a bit. And, of course, I couldn't reason with her<sup>82</sup>.*

Although parents tried to use examples of conduit from the family's history, young people who had to adapt to life in communism regarded these efforts with increased scepticism:

*I knew we were part of this family because my father was trying to make me more proper, more believing. So, he would say: "Boy, you come from a family of priests and you must be more attracted to these things". But of course, on the other hand, during communism, coming from a family of priests and being a practicing Orthodox wasn't something to brag about. So, there was considerable doubt, which I continued to have until I left the country<sup>83</sup>.*

Contact with family memory and awareness of belonging to a "different" environment from the rest of society in communism was accompanied by the family's warnings about being discreet. Nobody talked about the family's history outside the home, and details that might have created problems had to be "forgotten":

*It took a while for me to be aware of the name Iancu Flondor, because my childhood wasn't preoccupied with these greats in the family and the family tree. In the second refuge during the war, when I left Bukovina for good and ended up in Oltenia, at Podari, that's when I heard of Iancu Flondor, but as fugitives, I was made aware that he represented a danger (...) because it could mean being deported to Siberia. Not to mention the fact that we too bore the name of Flondor, which for the Russians meant an enemy of the people. I read a newspaper written by the communists at the time (...), where they wrote about "Iancu Flondor, an enemy of the people". And then, frightened as I was as an 8-9-year-old child, my mother and my father told me that we were Flondors from the Bessarabian branch and we didn't really have many estates, which was partially true<sup>84</sup>.*

But the name resurfaces later like a stigma with the life of painter Constantin Flondor, and the family's identity and memory must be sidelined:

*As a student, I was talking about something with a colleague of mine and mentioned "yes, Flondor, the landlord", or something similar... The following day,*

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<sup>82</sup> Video interview with Irina Ioana (Ina) Rîșcuția, Maxut, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ina-riscutia-video/>).

<sup>83</sup> Video interview with Ion Filitti, București, 10 September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ion-filitti-video/>).

<sup>84</sup> Video interview with Constantin Flondor, București, 10 May 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/constantin-flondor-video/>).



*when my colleague sees me walking down the corridor, he yells: "Baron Flondor! Baron Flondor!" I didn't know where to hide. And I kept saying: "shut up, man, come on!" (...) Later on, when I was in my final year at the institute, I was stopped in the hallway by Catul Bogdan, the painter and professor (...) He stops me and asks: "Do you have something in your family... some unpleasant business in the family?" I think he also asked me something about boyars and heirs. I said "no, I'm from Bessarabia, no relation with the Flondors in Bukovina"*<sup>85</sup>.

Sometimes, the need to ensure the physical survival of the family, by being discreet about one's past, may meet certain pedagogical commandments inherited straight from the aristocratical ethics:

*Once, I was celebrating my birthday, I was nine or ten years old. In Bucharest, on Paris Street, in the attic. I had a few classmates as guests. (...) And my father heard through the window that I was telling my colleagues I was of noble descent and my great-grandmother was a countess. He opened the door and called me outside. He stayed low key. He never hit me. He looked at me: "Tudorel, I have something to ask you". "Yes, dad!" It was my birthday. "Boy, why don't you do something with your life and then you can go ahead and tell everyone that you're whatever you want to tell them. But until you do, don't say anything else!" That lesson served me well in two ways, first, he was right: if you don't accomplish anything on your own, it doesn't matter if you say you're a count. And secondly, if you mention something like that during communism... you better remember that mum's the word and keep your mouth shut"*<sup>86</sup>.

When it comes to descendants born after the communist takeover, their separation from their own families' history was dramatic. In order to protect them from repression and help them integrate into the "new world", as well as spare them the negative psychological impact that comparisons between the former glory and prosperity and their new status under the "popular democracy" regime brought with them, parents, grandparents and all other elderly relatives avoided talking about the past in front of children. Many of these descendants started to discover their family's past only after 1989, by doing their own research:

*Alexandru Marghiloman is my great-uncle. His sister, married Pherekyde, is my great-grandmother. Of course, unfortunately, I didn't meet him, I didn't know much about him. I was born Butculescu-Marghiloman, a name that was 'verboden' during communism, it was not well regarded, that is why I was kept out of it, I*

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>86</sup> Video interview with Tudor Verona, București, 27 November 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/tudor-verona-video/>).

wasn't told anything or almost anything. I knew there was an uncle, I knew it just vaguely, but nothing else. (...) I was kept out of all that by my parents, so that I wouldn't get into trouble. I left Romania in 1970 and returned in 2007. Still fearful, because I didn't know how my name was regarded, and I slowly discovered the Marghiloman family, the Butculescu family, and ever since I have been gathering information. (...) When I discovered what I discovered by coming here, I wondered why I hadn't been told anything. First, I think I was angry, then I was sad, and finally I understood. And I understood – I don't want to exaggerate – the immense wealth that my father was born into. (...) What could they tell a child who lived with her parents, for 18 years, in a single room? What could they tell me? "See? We owned so much", "See who we used to be?" What good could it do to me? It couldn't have done me any good<sup>87</sup>.

Without revealing too many details of their past, families, nevertheless, were able to instill in their children a series of moral values and respect for their ancestors. A subtle balance between oblivion and memory was born:

*The manor was confiscated in 1949. I didn't know the manor, I didn't know of any property my family used to own. (...) I'd heard stories from my father, who, before his death, wrote a beautiful document about his childhood in Ghergani that he always described as heaven. (...) My grandmother lived to be 101 years old and I was her only granddaughter from a son. So, you can imagine how close we were and I lived almost my entire life by her side. (...) But I didn't really hear my grandmother talk about those places, because she didn't want to return to those now sad memories. And anytime I asked her about all the lost properties, she told me 'Tempi passati'. We didn't talk about it. (...) On the other hand, I had in her an extraordinary model of courage, nobility, and dignity, which stayed with me for the rest of my life. (...) I learned one thing from her throughout that time: we must be proud of our name. This name does not give us any rights, just obligations<sup>88</sup>.*

The memories of the "landed beasts'" children are haunted by stories of material deprivations, but also by the difficult contact with the world "outside" the family. For the descendants of the old Romanian elites, there was always an "we", represented by the family and close ones, and a "them" that designated the people outside one's family, a world filled with traps and dangers. Aristocrats' children

<sup>87</sup> Video interview with Irina Vlăducă-Marghiloman, București, 24 May 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/irina-vladuca-marghiloman-video/>).

<sup>88</sup> Video interview with Irina Bossy-Ghica Boulin, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/irina-bossy-ghica/>).



learned early on to hide from “them” the little information of their family’s past that they got, filtered as it was, from their older members of the family. This duality contributed to the aristocratic descendants’ alienation from the country that persecuted them, excluded them and forced them to hide who they were:

*In the first years, a child doesn’t reason the way an adult does. He has other reference points, less profound than an adult’s reference points. Nevertheless, a child notices that other people have good living conditions, while he is starving. (...) The poor child doesn’t ask too many questions, because his basic concern is the pleasure of playing with everything he can get his hands on. (...) That’s just the way things are, fate is unjust to us. So, these are my childhood memories, when we were literally starving at home. (...) My father had been let go from the army in 1947. As an “enemy of the people”, he could no longer get a job that paid enough to provide for his family. My mother as well, as she had an even “unhealthier” past: being born Princess Suțu, she suffered the same persecutions. (...) Ever since I was little, I got it really, really well into my head that I had to leave my country. To go into exile. Exile was better than home, where I was forcefully silenced. (...) I had a classmate in school, a little boy who kept bringing his father’s communist decorations and bragging about them. “Look what my father has, look, he has the Medal of Labour!” Well, that was it for me, I said, my Dad has medals as well! “Ehhh, what does your Dad have?” “He has!” I knew my father kept decorations in a trunk in the attic but had no idea what kind of a decoration they were, so I took one to show it to my classmate: “Look, my father has a decoration as well!” It was the German Iron Cross, that my father had received during World War II, the time when Romania was allied with Germany. (...) My father was summoned to the Securitate and he beat the hell out of me when he returned. Had I forgotten what I’d been taught, that I couldn’t share anything that happened at home with the outside world. But I was a child and children are usually talkative. Anytime they discussed politics or related stuff, I was sent to play in another room<sup>89</sup>.*

Even when the family tries to transmit a semblance of the aristocratic memory and identity, a child born under communism can only associate this memory and this identity with material shortages, with the persecutions of his loved ones and with his own experienced status, a marginalised or even “excluded” person from society. To use the very fitting expression used by Despina Skeletti-Budișteanu to title one of her books about “condemned descendants”:

<sup>89</sup> Video interview with Radu Negrescu-Suțu, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/alexandru-sutu-video/>).

*When it came to education, my mother focused on religion and our being part of the boyars, which a child is not very aware of, due to both his age and his poor living conditions. We were boyars, but starving! (...) Of course I received a very "Phanariot" education ever since I was little, growing up in an environment that permanently evoked the family's past, even too much so, but a child doesn't have the same values as adults do. Growing up, I became a teenager and that's when I found other passions that came with my age, but the family continued to talk about the same things, which I only half-listened to, but still I heard them and some stayed with me... The situation was identical in many boyar families that lived from evoking the family's glorious past, and also educating their children in this spirit. (...) But my parents were labelled as "bandits", "class enemies" and other absurdities, and as such, as a consequence, they couldn't find work, so belonging to the boyar ranks had to be kept secret. A child understands that when he is asked, in school, what his parents do for a living, it's better to avoid an exact answer. (...) What a child feels is particularly important, because it can haunt him for the rest of his life, especially when faced with difficult circumstances. Because of the communist terror, I permanently felt that I belonged to a clan of outcasts, of pariahs, and that I had to constantly hide my true self, my thoughts and feelings. In the communist schools, as we had no other educational choice, I was intoxicated with the communist propaganda that was present in all school subjects. In contrast, I was told exactly the opposite at home, and of course I tended to believe my parents, my blood relatives, not the Party. This refusal went to the extreme sometimes, so that even when we were taught something true in school, I was convinced that, in reality, it had to be exactly the other way around!<sup>90</sup>.*

In the absence of detailed stories about the family's past, what descendants born under communism are left with is a vague feeling of the differences in their own education compared to "the others". But, in general, the tendency of these descendants is not to preserve the difference, but to try to mingle with their colleagues and friends of the same age, regardless of their social provenance, even with children of the communist nomenklatura:

*I didn't know details about the family, but I was somewhat kept away, I grew up in other traditions than my classmates. (...) I was attending the "Dr. Petru Groza" High School (which is now the "Tudor Vianu" National Informatics College), together with children of ministers, of the communist nomenklatura. I got along well with them, I went with them to the villas they owned in the mountainside*

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<sup>90</sup> Radu Negrescu-Suțu, Written answer to the questionnaire *The Memory of the Romanian elites*, novel texts edited in Romanian, 2010 (in possession of the author).



*or the seaside, we organised parties, we had no idea about politics. My first crush was a communist hot shot's daughter. (...) But I was told in school that I would stand no chance in Romania. The school's principal told it to my face. (...) No one told me anything about my family at home, but they raised me in a way that made me be different. I learned what "you could do" and "what you couldn't do". I must admit that I remember best what was banned. But I didn't know anything else about the family. When my grandfather, Radu Budişteanu, came home from prison, it was terrible. I didn't know him. I was locked in my room, so that I can't see him, and I found out through sounds that something was going on in the house. In the following days, I was slowly told who he was and what had happened, but without many details. (...) I had to go to Germany, then to Paris, where I met a lady from the Cantacuzino family, married Sturdza, whom I was also related to, so that later on, I would discover, on Calea Victoriei in Bucharest, the palace of her grandfather, the famous Prince Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino, "The Nabob". Before I left, I didn't know anything<sup>91</sup>.*

Under certain circumstances, the family's past could feel like a burden, a ballast, that could cause rebellion. The seeds of the conflict between family memory and one's own survival begin to appear. An aristocrat's descendant often wants to break away from the country and the burden of the family memory, in order to lead a normal life:

*My grandfather's wife, Emily Chapman, was English, a person to whom I owe a lot, she was extremely nice to me. For example, in 1949, when she was leaving Romania, as a British citizen, she asked my father whether she could take me with her to spare me from the terrible things everybody was expecting. But my father refused by arguing that a Romanian boyar has to stay in Romania otherwise who would take care of the graves... Well, as you well know, at the end we took care of the graves but only God knows how we lived through it all, with six of us living in one room. (...) As time went on, we ended up sharing a bathroom with more than thirteen others. It was horrible. But we were living the "bright future", didn't we? Everything was well. And I kept cursing and yelling at my dad: "Why didn't you let me leave?"<sup>92</sup>.*

But the persecutions that descendants were subjected to have an unexpected effect. Even without the full knowledge of their family's history, young people

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<sup>91</sup> Audio interview with Bogdan Petru Skeletti, Bucureşti, 28 May 2013 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

<sup>92</sup> Video interview with Ion Filitti, Bucureşti, 10 September 2018. From the *Poveşti cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ion-filitti-video/>).

formed new solidarities as they experienced the all-around sufferings including their own. At the modest “tea parties” from the 1950s-1960s, sufferings and poverty had replaced the privileged bond that the parents and grandparents of the aristocrat offspring had experienced:

*It actually turned out a good thing. First of all, we didn't have any money for pubs, secondly, our relations couldn't be controlled by our parents, so they organised these dance soirees, these tea parties for us. Where we had, I don't know, three lousy sandwiches, but we had fun dancing and the joy and pleasure of dancing, of flirting. They were great flirts, platonic of course. (...) We all came from the same category. "Don't tell me! Did they arrest your dad as well?", "Don't tell me! Haven't they arrested your dad yet? Well, how come?"*<sup>93</sup>.

### **The “autobiography” – a genealogical imaginary turned upside down**

Although pretending to remove genealogy from the selection and promotion process and getting rid of the “upper class/landowner exploiters” who “had sucked the people’s blood”, the communists did nothing more than turning the genealogical imaginary upside down. Whereas, for aristocrats, the ancestors’ memory had meant symbolic capital, a reservoir of legitimacy and social prestige, it would turn now into guilt and ballast. The much-cultivated *pedigree* would turn into “unhealthy social origin”. The hunt for “the class enemy” had begun, and the model was of course the Soviet one. This enemy of the new order was not only an annoying residue of a world that had to be demolished, but its very biological fibre was corrupted, due to depravation, luxury, and endogamy. The aristocrat and his memories acquired a monstrous character. In order to be admitted to college or get a job in communist Romania, you had to fill out an “autobiography” that looked nothing like today’s resumé but contained many questions about family and ancestors. The autobiography required by the communists was, in fact, a record of one’s genealogy, based on which the regime could now decide the fate of an individual.

An *Autobiography Guide*<sup>94</sup> of the time, meant for employment, presents in detail the chapters that the answers of the interviewed persons had to include: name, surname, domicile, nationality, place of employment; information regarding studies, known foreign languages, political affiliation before the instauration of the “popular

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>94</sup> *Autobiography Guide*, text written in Romanian, no author, no date – Archive of Filip-Lucian Iorga.



democracy", material condition (the assets they used to own), affiliation or non-affiliation with the Romanian Labour Party; professional activity; whether they fought in World War II, on what front, whether they were injured or decorated; whether they had been convicted; details about their parents (personal details, occupations, material condition, travels abroad, political activity, domicile); details about siblings (the same as in the case of parents); details about the spouse (personal information, occupation, material condition, political affiliation, arrests, travels abroad; whether they had been married before and if so, all the details of the former wives/husbands); details about children (domicile, occupation, material condition, political activity, marital status and, as the case may be, details about their husband/wife); details about the spouse's parents; details about the spouse's siblings; details about other relatives that were tried or were convicted; details about relatives abroad. The guide is extremely detailed, covers several pages and starts by urging you: "We recommend that you provide the requested data with much responsibility, keeping in mind that the autobiography constitutes an official document in each individual's file". Thus, a family's past turns into a stigma. The repeated redacting of the autobiography represented a trauma for most representatives of the old Romanian elites and this discrimination based on family memory blocked many of their attempted studies and careers.

Alexandru Maftai's parents were in the West and, even though the ones left in Romania had declared that they had no information about them, this "stain" in the teenager's autobiography did not escape the eyes of the *Securitate*, the communist Romanian secret police:

*Returning home would have meant prison time for my father, at best, because he had been sent as a diplomat by the King. (...) Upon returning, for the mere fact of having been sent by the King, he would have been at least imprisoned, if not executed. So, they had left. (...) I was denied admittance to the University. The first time I took the admission exam, I was told: "Rejected, because you failed the math test". In fact, in the paper, there was a crossed-out 10. And the Securitate had placed its grade: 4. (...) In order to enrol in an exam, you had to fill out a 4-5 pages long form about who your great-grandfather was, who was one or that one, and if your last great-grandfather was a chiabur [a wealthy peasant, the equivalent of the kulak in the USSR] 200 ago, you couldn't get into University. (...) Therefore, I enrolled in a technical school so that I could at least have a profession. (...) I became a labourer. An electrician<sup>95</sup>.*

<sup>95</sup> Video interview with Alexandru Maftai, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/alexandru-maftai/>).

However, there were also fortunate circumstances, in which filing out an autobiography could be avoided, and descendants could escape the burden of their own families. Sports was such a loophole:

*I got into sports by accident, because I ended up on the "motherland's building sites". My colleagues started a basketball team, which I happened to join. And this basketball team benefitted from a communist policy that encouraged sports: in general, all members of a sports team were employed by one of the government owned companies, however, you didn't have to show up for work but only for the daily practice with your team (...) Thanks to this fictional employment by a state company [during communism all companies were owned by the state] as a sportsman they didn't ask you for your autobiography. They didn't ask questions. Your file didn't count, which for me was a salvation<sup>96</sup>.*

The family memory could also be adapted, avoided, transformed. Many of the people who filled out autobiographies were convinced that the *Securitate* was not really all-knowing and that it was better if it didn't find out certain details. Thus, they entered a tricky memory game in order to protect their relatives and increase their chances of getting a job. Such narratives that survived the repressive system are a testimony to how important it was to "forget" certain things or pretend to forget them, in order to trick the system, at least partially. Mircea Stănescu (1923-2000) came from an old family of *moșneni* from the Ialomița county, in south-east Romania, the Bărbulescu-Stănescu family, *moșneni* who owned land in the estates of Poiana and Pisculeasca and were related to the Poenaru-Bordea boyar family<sup>97</sup>. His father was a moderately wealthy civil servant, the family's only fortune being a house in Bucharest. Mircea Stănescu was a career officer in the anti-aircraft artillery army, who advanced to become a regiment commander, who fought in World War II, on the front against Nazi Germany and was a Knight of the Order of the Romanian Crown. In 1958, he was excluded from the "popular" army and only after several years did he manage to study engineering. A brother of his, Nicolae

<sup>96</sup> Video interview with Dumitru Gh. Lecca, Radomirești, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dumitru-lecca/>).

<sup>97</sup> *Arbre généalogique de la famille Poenaru et Poenaru-Bordea (originaire de Roumanie, dép. de Ialomița)*, novel genealogy, edited in French, established by Gheorghe and Andrei Poenaru-Bordea, together with their niece, Catherine Imbert-Lauxerois, with the collaboration of Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, based on the documents of Alexandru V. Perietzianu-Buzău. Corrected, addended and updated based on researches performed by Mihai-Alin Pavel. The copy in the National Museum of Agriculture in Slobozia, edited by Mihai-Alin Pavel, 31 January 2012 (Archive of the National Museum of Agriculture in Slobozia); Filip-Lucian Iorga, Andreea Panait, *Moșnenii Bărăganului. Istoria crucilor din piatră de la Poiana, județul Ialomița*, Corint Books, București, 2020.



Stănescu, was a political prisoner for 5 years. In his 1973 *Autobiography*, Mircea Stănescu injects a few adjustments into the family memory. Thus, when it comes to the political activities, he emphasizes his aversion for the Iron Guard, the fascist movement in Romania during 1927-1941, a genuine aversion, shared by his entire family. He also mentions the social-democrat sympathies of his brother, engineer Vasile Stănescu. But he skips the fact that he himself had been a sympathizer and a voter of the National Liberal Party, just like his father. The vulnerable point in his autobiography is, of course, his brother, the former political prisoner. So, Mircea Stănescu insists that he does not know what caused his brother's arrest, although the family knew very well that Nicolae Stănescu, an employee of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Romanian Government, had been active, before and during World War II, in the Romanian royal counter-espionage. When he reaches his father's brothers, he omits even more often information or details to deceive the *Securitate's* vigilant eye. These brothers, *moșneni* from Poiana, had been well off with social positions that might have become a burden in the autobiography. About Constantin (Costache) Bărbulescu, who had owned the Romanian Patriarchy's tailor shop and as such had become close to the Romanian Patriarchs Miron Cristea and Nicodim Munteanu, Mircea Stănescu writes that he was a "tailor without means"<sup>98</sup>. About Dumitru (Dumitrache) Bărbulescu, he writes that he was a "foundry worker" and that he had a house in Galați; in reality, Dumitrache Bărbulescu had been a prosperous industrialist in inter-war Galați, the owner of the "Demetre Bărbulescu" Metallurgical Plants and the Bells Foundry, and a national liberal political leader in his county. About Ștefan Bărbulescu, Mircea Stănescu only writes that he was a "mechanic by trade", although Ștefan Bărbulescu had been the owner of a mechanical workshop in Bucharest and a member of the conservative National Peasants' Party. Details about the family cover also the relatives of Mircea Stănescu's wife, Alexandrina. About one of his father-in-law's brothers, a wealthy shop owner in Ploiești, whose assets had been confiscated and who was sent to a mandatory domicile, Stănescu writes that he used to be a "farm laborer"<sup>99</sup>. These kinds of omissions or "sugar-coating" of a family's past became the rule for all those who were even in the slightest connected with the "class enemies".

<sup>98</sup> Mircea Stănescu, *Autobiography*, novel manuscript in Romanian, dated 10.04.1973, 12 pages – Archive of Filip-Lucian Iorga, p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

This is what happened in the case of Prince Mihai Dim. Sturdza, when he enrolled in the Italian Section of the Foreign Languages Department of the University of Bucharest:

*Of course, you had to mention your family's wealth in the autobiography. Due to my father's death in 1938, the wealth had remained in my grandfather's name. There was no column on the form that required me to state the wealth of my grandfather. So, what I stated was perfectly accurate and true; my parents' wealth: zero. My mother had no wealth. So, I was admitted<sup>100</sup>.*

### Memory as rebelliousness

We have concentrated on the aristocrats' need to "forget" in order to survive. However, it doesn't mean that there haven't been numerous examples of anti-Communist opposition through memory. We have the famous autobiography in which the scenographer and painter George Baron of Løvendal, descendant of a Russian aristocratic family with Danish roots, uses self-deprecating statements to ridicule the notion of "class struggle". In the respective autobiography, he explained the fact that his title was not a threat to the new order, because he became a baron by declension, as the successor of dukes and kings. But there were also other kinds of such reactions that combined the preservation of family memory and its affirmation to oppose the communist regime:

*I attended the "Cantemir" High School. I wasn't an excellent student. (...) And there was this thing, a stupid reaction by a child. No one had taught me at home to shut the hell up about our family's estate. One day, they asked us to write on a piece of paper what it was like to live on an estate and I gathered all the pigs in Romania, all the horses in Romania, all the hectares in Romania. And this piece of paper haunted me until I left Romania. Professor Zagăr, God bless his soul, the math teacher, would come to class. And the first question, after greeting us, which made everyone laugh, went like this: "Do you want to see a landlord's son? Filitti, go to the blackboard!" Of course, to be honest, my reaction wasn't very nice, because I couldn't care less about Mr. Zagăr's logarithms. I was in a continuous battle. (...) So I changed high schools a couple of times. (...) At "Spiru Haret", the teacher asked me who invented the steam machine. And I said: "Watt!" And she said: "You get a 1, go back to your place! The right answer is: Polzunov!" And the following day, she made me come in front of the classroom again. "Filitti," she*

<sup>100</sup> Video interview with Prince Mihai Dim. Sturdza, București, 10 April 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/mihai-dimitrie-sturdza/>).



said, "who invented the steam machine?" I said: „Watt!" "Go back to your place!" And she gave me another 1. These were very pleasant scenes, and very convincing for me. With my father in jail, twice. (...) And that's when I tried to take the exam to be admitted to the School of Cinematography and Theater, in order to become a projectionist. Wilfried Ott, who used to be a projectionist back then, a very fine gentleman, confirmed that I got excellent grades. And then, on the third day, I found out that I didn't get admitted. "How could I not get admitted, sir, with the grades I have..." "Well", he said, "you didn't mention that you used to have an estate!" "Well, nobody asked me!" Someone had called the school and asked if a certain Filitti had taken the exam. "Yes". "And how did he do?" "Well, he got good grades". "And did he tell you that he used to have an estate?" And then, I didn't have good grades, I didn't have anything anymore. I tried to get into the French Department in Cluj. (...) Since I spoke French fluently, I got very good grades again. And that damned estate came up again... And that's how I ended up as an unskilled worker in the Sports Hall in Constanța<sup>101</sup>.

### Conclusions. What can be recovered and what not

More than 30 years after the fall of the communist regime in Romania, we can attempt to evaluate how much of the family memory of the Romanian aristocracy is lost and what can still be recovered. After 1989, many descendants published their memoirs, as well as books dedicated to certain families, genealogy studies, people were finally able to talk freely about the suffering that these families endured during the communist dictatorship. In the last few decades, several aristocrats, such as the writer Alexandru Paleologu or the historian Neagu Djuvara, gained important positions in Romanian politics and its cultural life. A century after a first attempt by Octav George Lecca, Prince Mihai Dim. Sturdza endeavored a huge project of publishing the first synthesis of the Romanian boyars. Until his recent death he published five massive volumes of *Familiile boierești din Moldova și Țara Românească. Enciclopedie istorică, genealogică și biografică*. They cover the boyar families from A to E. The academic community hopes to pick up from here by using the material gathered and systematised by the historian-prince to continue his work. Many of the descendants of historical Romanian families gathered at the "Sever Zotta" Genealogy and Heraldry Institute in Iași, animated by the historian and genealogist Ștefan S. Gorovei, whose goal is to increase the

<sup>101</sup> Video interview with Ion Filitti, București, 10 September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ion-filitti-video/>).

interest for genealogical research and the history of the Romanian aristocracy. Another institution with an aristocratic tradition, founded in 1875, suppressed during communism, which resumed activities after 1989 is the Romanian Jockey Club, which plans to build a hippodrome in Bucharest (the old hippodrome that the club used to own was demolished during communism) and to promote the purebred English horse in Romania. Even today, the majority of the approximately 120 members of the Jockey Club are descendants of the Romanian aristocracy. Other channels for promoting the Romanian aristocracy are: the "Istorie cu blazon" book series of Editura Corint in Bucharest and the "Povești cu blazon" website that contains dozens of video testimonials from the descendants of noble and notable Romanian families, both projects initiated by the author of this study. For the successors of the aristocracy, it was a difficult battle to recover the properties which had been abusively confiscated from them during the communist regime. Many of them gave up when faced with the hostility of authorities and the networks of corruption, and many of those who eventually reclaimed their estates and manors found them in such disastrous states that all they could do was sell them at bargain prices. For many of the descendants of the Romanian aristocracy, the restorations turned into a second confiscation. There are, however, fortunate cases as well, of manors that have been restored and are now inhabited by descendants of the Romanian aristocracy or turned into guesthouses for tourists. Many descendants are now so far away from the memory of their families that their reaction to meeting their own lost identity is similar to that of young Prince Mihai Brâncoveanu when he encountered his father, who had just been freed from prison:

*My father was first arrested in 1948 when I was 2-3 months old, sentenced to 3 years in prison, and after 3 years it was decided, without a new trial: he served 3, let him serve 3 more! (...) I only met him in person when I was 6 years old. (...) One morning, when I was around 6, my mother woke me up and told me: "Look, I have a big surprise for you, your dad is back!" And I apparently told her "Well, that's an old story, I don't believe it anymore". But what do you know, this time it was true. My father had arrived in the middle of the night. (...) I told him, distantly and formally: "Good morning, sir!" To me, he was a stranger<sup>102</sup>.*

Certain memories and memory places are lost forever, and family dramas sometimes resemble the end of the world:

*I grew up in Hangu, Neamț county, at the bottom of the Ceahlău Mountain. That is where my father died, at the age of 29, when I was barely 4 years old, in an*

<sup>102</sup> Video interview with Prince Mihai Basarab-Brâncoveanu, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (in possession of the author).



*accident on Bistrița river. He was taking part in a sports competition, in a very unsuited boat for a big river like Bistrița, which had very rapid and tumultuous waters. The boat capsized, he slammed against some rocks and they found him 3 or 4 days later. (...) Our manor ended up underwater, when the Bicaz dam was built, a dam that I helped to build as a political prisoner*<sup>103</sup>.

And yet, certain objects survived the shipwreck, sometimes in ways worthy of a police thriller, and are today testimony to the family's past, playing the role they always did, that of cementing the bond between ancestors and descendants. Especially when it comes to family portraits:

*In Moldavia, we had a valuable and beautiful library, which also ended up in Bucharest, brought by a truck driver from Iași, a very nice man, but who transported books as if they were cabbage. He unloaded the truck in our yard, and we took them and placed them in categories. That library was partially hidden in our attic on Făurari Street, an attic that miraculously escaped the Securitate's searches. We had stacks of books, some of which we sold as that was what we were living off during communism. People sold whatever was left of their forks, their silver spoons, their books. (...) The family portraits that I still have, old portraits from the 19th century, were all hidden, rolled up, at acquaintances in Iași, who kept them hidden in a barn, in very bad conditions. (...) A relative of my relatives was the ambassador of Greece in Romania. He knew that we were living in Bucharest, at such and such address, but he let my mother know that he was being followed and it wouldn't be wise for him to come to our house. Daredevil that I am I went to get those 5 or 6 rolled-up paintings from Iași. And I went to see him. They knew that I was leaving the country and I asked if I could entrust them with the paintings. We agreed on the following plan: on a certain day, Mrs. Arghiropol, the ambassador's wife, would wait for the tram at Colțea station, until my mother arrived with some rolled up things. Everybody was cramped together there. There were these huge crowds... people rode on the stairs the trams and buses (...) it was a life and death battle to get a place on the tram. So, in this station, there were lots of people stepping on each other, crushing each other. And there, my mother and the lady ambassador, without greeting each other, without talking, pushed into each other, pretending to try to catch the tram, and that's how the paintings ended up in the lady ambassador's hands. The paintings made it safely to Greece. (...) That was the story of the paintings, my family heirlooms, which I still have and which I'm very*

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<sup>103</sup> Video interview with Prince Mihai Dim. Sturdza, București, 10 April 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/mihai-dimitrie-sturdza/>).

*proud of and which I'll pass on to my sons and grandson, who, I'm told, is very interested in history*<sup>104</sup>.

Some objects were saved miraculously, offering privileged access to a vanished world, access that can only be offered by a family's memory, as well as material evidence:

*Grandpa Pandulescu, a doctor, saw his patients in the afternoons at home. And he had certain hobbies. (...) he painted superbly, he had a passion for photography and developed his own pictures. (...) After we left the country, the house was a mess, in any case, all the photographs inside were thrown into the trash. But a neighbour was able to save some glass plates. (...) That's how I saw my mother when she was one year old, the house as it looked before my mother was born and everything that followed at every age*<sup>105</sup>.

Even there where almost everything disappeared, where material evidence is quasi-inexistent, the ancestors' memories still linger, and the descendant can learn at least some of his own story that was taken away from him:

*I had the opportunity of going to Hlina, to see where the manor house is. Well, we used to have a manor, but now, there's only a mound of dirt there, that's all. There used to be a cellar somewhere, some locals took me to it, since everyone knew about Flondor, and they told me: "Look at this cellar, this is your cellar". Then, a fountain: "It's your fountain". There was a forest and they said it was called the Flondors' Forest. (...) After that I went to the cemetery and this is very important, because there were some stone crosses there, a lot of them overturned, and you couldn't read anything on them, but one was left standing, and on it stood written, in Cyrillic letters of course, "Dimitrie Vasilievici Flondor", with the year of birth and the year of death*<sup>106</sup>.

But even graves were not saved from the fury to erase memories, which was part of an effort by the regime to instil indifference toward monuments and historical personalities:

*There is a very big problem concerning the Marghiloman family tomb at the Bellu Cemetery. It was taken over. It's a monstrous disgrace that something like*

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>105</sup> Video interview with Princess Manuela Ghika-Oroveanu, București, 20 November 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/manuela-ghika-oroveanu-video/>).

<sup>106</sup> Video interview with Constantin Flondor, București, 10 May 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/constantin-flondor-video/>).



*this was approved. (...) At the top, the inscription "The Marghiloman family" disappeared and it was replaced by "The Gică family"*<sup>107</sup>.

Nor did the Leordeni mansion have better luck either. All that is left for the owner's descendants is to bemoan the disappearance of such a beautiful building of historic significance. And the final destruction didn't happen during communism, but, unfortunately, like in so many other cases, after 1989:

*It was a fortress. The house had a very strange configuration, it looked like a cross with equal arms, with these admirable tall rooms, with high-arched windows, in the old style. (...) Now, there's nothing left anymore, I believe there are some new buildings. After the revolution in 1989, somebody urged me... yes, that it deserves to be a patrimonial monument and I should go there. (...) The people from Leordeni learned that the former landlord came by to see it (...) And the second time I visited, there was a wall or something similar. All that was left was an entire wall. (...) They had taken brick by brick (...) I felt sorry as it was something worth preserving*<sup>108</sup>.

This talk by the descendants of Romanian boyars about the destruction of their belongings goes beyond their own or their families' interests and becomes part of the larger losses that these irrational destructions have caused to the local communities as well as the entire country:

*We were against communism, completely, without any hesitation. I mean, there wasn't one second when we said "hey, they did well!" Because, you see, the thing was, they came and took everything. There was equipment there, at Redea, stables with electrical light, running water, there was equipment for making cheese, as they also had sheep there. Of course, they were primitive, but still! OK. In 1993, something had changed in Romania, so I rented a car and took my dad there, to see what was left of Alexeni, which had been confiscated in 1949. When we got there, it was impossible to figure things out, to know what's where. We asked around, we looked around. Anyway. And then it dawned on me that as a child there was a railway station nearby. In my child's memory, I realized that opposite the manor, there was a railway station, about two kilometres away, from which I heard the trains coming and going, whistling. This made me realize where I am. And now there was a field there, corn had been sown, the cornstalks were tall, and we were*

<sup>107</sup> Video interview with Irina Vlăducă-Marghiloman, București, 24 May 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/irina-vladuca-marghiloman-video/>).

<sup>108</sup> Video interview with Dan Romalo, București, 14 February 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dan-romalo/>).

*just walking back and forth, kicking things, and hit a foundation. That was all that was left of Alexeni. And I sat there thinking: it's very good that you got me out of there. But what did you do with them? You destroyed them! And that's terrible! Use them, man, use them for your children, give them something to do! Rebuild those stables, do something! Everything was destroyed! The mark of Communism!*<sup>109</sup>.

When the descendants talk about the destruction of their estates it always gives you an end-of-the-world feeling. Their country estates were those that tied them closest to the local communities, the country as a whole and the past of their families. Their disappearance uproots them, but usually, something does remain. A memory, a name at least:

*Every summer, without question, we went to Genune for two months and there, we went hunting, we had hunting dogs, we went fishing, we went down to the fields when it was time for ploughing. (...) And we also had a vineyard with this Riesling wine which has remained my favourite of all the wines that can be found on the market. Because I got used to that wine. (...) But the communists came, we had to leave and we never came back. In 1962, when I married Rudi Kleckner and we had a motorcycle, I went there to see what was happening. The house was still there, but turned into a granary. (...) Later on, I went to visit the manor again. There was nothing left. Everything had been taken, brick by brick. When I went there, everything was green and cows were grazing, no one would have suspected that there had been a human settlement there. Only the road remained. The road is called: "La Vrăbiești"*<sup>110</sup>.

When the family property is not completely destroyed, its mutilation and acquired ugliness resembles disappearance for the family's successor:

*I remember that at Fotin, at my grandparents' (...) there was a house designed by an architect, in the Romanian style, it was very beautiful. (...) I went to see it recently and the house I found was painted pink and only half of it was still standing*<sup>111</sup>.

Some houses are luckier, they survived and have endured to the present day, continuing to carry on the memory of the families that built and lived in them, even when they are not any longer owned by the aristocratic families:

<sup>109</sup> Video interview with Ion Filitti, București, 10 September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ion-filitti-video/>).

<sup>110</sup> Video interview with Simona M. Vrăbiescu-Kleckner, București, 24 September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/simona-vrabiescu-kleckner/>).

<sup>111</sup> Video interview with Alexandru Makarovitsch, București, 28 August 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/alexandru-makarovitsch-video/>).



*I had never seen Budești, so I went there to see the manor, a few years ago, after it was sold. (...) The mother-in-law of the gentleman who had bought it came and told us that her husband was raised on the Budești estate and that he remembered my father and the entire family and how happy they all were there<sup>112</sup>.*

One of the fundamental characteristics of aristocrats from every place and every era is the desire to return to their places of birth, to retrieve the family's memory places, to resume a memory thread that was brutally interrupted and to ensure the transfer to one's own descendants. Even though almost nothing is left of the ancient manor at Izvoru, Princess Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino remains attached to the places where she feels at home and keeps fighting to revive the family's place in society:

*When we finally reclaimed the Izvoru manor (...) it wasn't a house anymore. 40 meters away from it, there were pieces of the staircase, only three walls were left standing, everything was gone. They had torn it down; I don't know who had the idea of tearing down that house. (...) I'm kind of ashamed to tell my grandchildren that I don't have a home in my own country. I fought for 25 years to be given back a house and they returned it to me in pieces. (...) It took many years to get it back. And when I finally got it, it wasn't a house anymore, there were only ruins. There were only ghouls without windows, without doors, without furniture, without stairs, without anything. (...) I feel cut in half. One half of me rejoices and the other half weeps. It weeps for everything. For the ugliness I find in places that used to be wonderful. I am glad when things resurrect in some manner or another. (...) Because it's a shame to allow the destruction of something that existed and was beautiful, and honourable, with an honourable life, with people who used to live here. And who didn't bring shame upon this country before. Why should this place bring shame to us now? Why? (...) It's very difficult to do something. Especially when you are fighting against windmills. (...) For those who deserve it. As I have no idea who is worth it, the place is worth it! People who are worth it aren't marked with a cross on their forehead, I don't know who they are, and the ones who aren't worth it aren't marked either, so let God decide. But this place is mine and I want it to live. That's it. (...) I want to die in peace, knowing that no one will bother my children and they are in charge of their own home. And that they are doing*

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<sup>112</sup> Video interview with Princess Manuela Ghika-Oroveanu, București, 20 November 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/manuela-ghika-oroveanu-video/>).

*something useful for everyone and for themselves. In this place that has been theirs for three centuries. Period*<sup>113</sup>.

Another direct descendant of Ion Ghica is fighting to restore and revitalize the manor of her illustrious ancestor, even going against the advice of her father, who had suffered in communist Romania. Proof that family memory can survive traumas:

*I cannot leave ruins in the wake of a family that built Romania. Ion Ghica was one of the precursors of the modern Romanian state. And we cannot let such a name and such a family go up in smoke, especially since his tomb is there, in Ghergani. (...) A lot of people told me I shouldn't... even my father, who was very upset about what had happened in the family and in Romania. He always held me back and said: "stop meddling in Romania's business, let them be, don't ask for the return of Ghergani, leave it to the Academy". It belonged to the Romanian Academy, but it was in ruins when I found it. (...) I couldn't, I'm sorry I didn't listen to my father, but I couldn't. I just couldn't leave it that way. (...)* <sup>114</sup>.

A fortunate example is that of the Polizu manor, which Ina Rîșcuția managed to restore and turn into a luxury hotel that evokes the former atmosphere of Romanian aristocratic residences. But this accomplishment was possible only with her grandmother's wish to pass on her estate so that the connection between the family and its country residence wouldn't be lost:

*My grandmother, Alexandrina (Adina) Ghika-Deleni, was a princess. (...) She was forced to live in the house of some workers in Bucharest, who were angry that they had lost access to one of their guest rooms. And she got a pension only later on, that was due to my grandfather. She played the piano. That was her joy. I'll never forget it, she was already well over 90 years old, she always came by on Christmas, on Easter, I had a piano from my other grandmother (...) and she came on Christmas, I placed a chair with a pillow for her and when she started playing Chopin's waltzes, although she was so small and hunched, all of a sudden, she swayed from side to side, happy, and everybody was happy. My grandmother, who never complained, came with her tote bag filled with papers. I still have it. And she told me: "Here, Ina, don't lose this! They can take everything from you, but they can't take this!" I thought it had something to do with the soul or who knows what.*

<sup>113</sup> Video interview with Princess Irina Ghica-Cantacuzino Deniau, Izvoru, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (in possession of the author).

<sup>114</sup> Video interview with Irina Bossy-Ghica Boulín, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/irina-bossy-ghica/>).



*And, low and behold, these were titles of ownership. To the manor, to the forest, to everything*<sup>115</sup>.

Certain families, not many, manage to renovate their recovered manors and keep them as vacation homes. The satisfaction of one's revenge against history is doubled by the awareness that the saved places represent a local and national treasure:

*I slept here, in Radomirești, for one night. To me, it was extraordinary. As the saying goes, at the moment of death, each person revisits its entire life, I believe that on that night, I revisited my entire childhood, all my memories. All that I lived through. All the characters. My father, my father's brothers, the children in the village. I believe that on that night, I relived everything that tied me to that place. (...) Each visit here makes me relive memories that are, of course, dear to me, the memory of people who are no longer with us today and who come to mind every time I get the opportunity to come here, a feeling of a fulfilled debt to all my ancestors, who basically built these places and who – I can say without modesty – are important for our family, but also more than only for our family. They represent history*<sup>116</sup>.

Apart from the places that can be recovered and restored, for descendants, it is essential to get back the memories of their ancestors. Both for themselves and for those around them, for the communities that their ancestors' names are tied to:

*In Buzău, a lot was done for Alexandru Marghiloman. I noticed some people didn't know, others got it wrong. The children were taught, the local mayor there went to every school and held history classes. Because they should be proud of it. It's a city that produced a man who brought Bessarabia back to Romania. I hope he will be appreciated and they will be proud of this as well*<sup>117</sup>.

Faced with the disappearance of so many manors, so many documents and family heirlooms, so many memories, the descendants of the Romanian aristocracy try not to forget the behavioural model of their forefathers and the moral values they believed in. This is an even stronger capital than the material one, and today's descendants are aware of its value. The sense of duty, respect toward the past and tradition, knowing the past of one's own family, the attempt to rise to the level of one's ancestors, the power to forgive those who have harmed you, the obligation to serve the others, the obligation to be modest, respect for education, the will to

<sup>115</sup> Video interview with Irina Ioana (Ina) Rîșcuția, Maxut, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ina-riscutia-video/>).

<sup>116</sup> Video interview with Dumitru Gh. Lecca, Radomirești, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dumitru-lecca/>).

<sup>117</sup> Video interview with Irina Vlăducă-Marghiloman, București, 24 May 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/irina-vladuca-marghiloman-video/>).

remain connected to Romania, all these are part of a memorial arsenal that today's descendants received from the people before them, through education and the power of example. Family memory is always at the centre of this system of values:

*Our parents always led us to understand that to descend from such ancestors carries with it a sense of responsibility. Of course, during communism we ran into difficulties because of it, when we were considered "enemies of the people", with an "unhealthy social origin". Our parents didn't hold any grudges, they were very detached from it, they never complained about losing what they used to have. (...) Much of their philosophy was to accept things and stay detached. In fact, they never became nostalgic for the past<sup>118</sup>.*

*To what extent is being part of an illustrious genealogical tree a duty, a merit, a reason for pride? And here, I would immediately emphasize that pride shouldn't be part of it. (...) First and foremost it is a duty, we are born, and become part of a tree... that bears fruit; we are nothing more than the fruit and it is this amalgam, this alchemy. (...) They are like talents, God gives us the talents and he organizes this miracle, this alchemy that I was talking about, and the rest is what we do with these gifts that we receive from a genealogical tree<sup>119</sup>.*

*I believe that everyone had to preserve their tradition and respect themselves. But without bringing these things up all the time, living like a normal person<sup>120</sup>.*

*Now, we shouldn't spend all the time lamenting about what used to be, but it's good to remember that these things existed and we should try to act so that things will not happen as they did during communism. (...) I can now say that I am a Romanian who is not living in Romania, who is a descendant of a family of people who sent their children off to school a long time ago. (...) This is the secret, I believe. And now, of course, as a former teacher, I can only encourage people and say: "sir, if you have any money, spend it on education, not anything else". (...) This is a family who lived in Romania for 500 years. So, I don't see why, all of a sudden, I should forget all about that<sup>121</sup>.*

<sup>118</sup> Video interview with Prince Mihai Basarab-Brâncoveanu, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (in possession of the author).

<sup>119</sup> Video interview with Constantin Flondor, București, 10 May 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/constantin-flondor-video/>).

<sup>120</sup> Video interview with Ion C. Sturdza, București, September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ion-c-sturdza-video/>).

<sup>121</sup> Video interview with Alexandru Makarovitsch, București, 28 August 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/alexandru-makarovitsch-video/>).



However, respect for one's ancestors and the need to resume a tradition does not mean to lose our critical spirit. Many aristocratic descendants lucidly judge the past of their own families and do not keep quiet about what they believe to be their ancestors' errors and shortcomings. The same critical judgment is present when it comes to the current profile and role of aristocratic descendants in society:

*If we were to judge the role of the Romanian boyars by the state of the peasants, one might say it wasn't a great one, because, take for example Hungary, where the civilizing role of the nobility was much deeper. The Hungarian village was much better off than the Wallachian or Moldavian one. But we cannot blame this entire situation on the inefficiency of the boyars' civilizing role. There was a bunch of factors, beginning with the long Ottoman domination, which left the boyars slightly behind the Western nobility. (...) However, there was a very strong solidarity between boyars, răzeși, and peasants, at least during the reigns of the great voivodes. At the end, let's not forget about the 1848 generation of boyars who fought against their own interests; or the fact, maybe unique in history, that after the end of World War I, a Parliament made up mostly of the great landlords voted for expropriations in favour of the peasants. That's not a minor fact. As to the current descendants... The boyars' bloodline is obviously decimated: a lot of them went abroad, others died in communist prisons. Those who have stayed in Romania are generally poor and only a few are aware of them being part of a social group and a set of values that command a certain attitude. To what extent do these descendants belong to a real elite, I believe this has to be analysed on a case-to-case basis. Anyway, we must keep in mind that nobility is more a matter of responsibilities than of privileges. At least that's how I see it<sup>122</sup>.*

In statements, individual ancestors are always reiterated, especially the parents and the grandparents. Referring to them, to the dear ones in the family, ensures not only the continuity of a genealogical tree, but also the certainty of the survival of certain moral values and the motivation to preserve the family memory. Dumitru Lecca honours his father by doing everything possible to prevent oblivion from settling on his ancestors' deeds:

*My role model for my entire lifetime was my father, I remember the things he told me: (...) "Son, never forget that the most important thing in life is being able to look anyone in the eye and not be ashamed". That's what I have left from my dad. (...) When I came to Bacău in 1991-1992, I saw that the communist slogan to erase the Lecca family from the history book was 90% accomplished: no one*

<sup>122</sup> Audio interview with Gheorghe Boldur-Lătescu, București, 18 June 2014 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

*talked about the family in any of the cultural get-togethers, we had disappeared. And the fact that I succeeded, with the help of decent people in Bacău, to revive the memory of the Lecca family, with all its merits, that I managed to restore the manor that the General had turned into the family's main residence (...) this gave me tremendous satisfaction, but most of all it is a tribute to my father*<sup>123</sup>.

Beyond the material losses, what matters most are all the people and role models whose memory is carried on by today's descendants. The revenge for the sufferings of one's parents and grandparents becomes the stubbornness in not giving up on the country that so often gave up on them:

*My father, who was a brilliant student at the University, was proposed twice by his professors to become a teaching assistant but was never given a chance because his name was Bossy-Ghica. (...) Maybe I didn't suffer as much as he did, as I left Romania at the age of 19. (...) But Romania remains my country, our country. Even if we left, it doesn't mean that we don't love Romania any longer. Maybe Romania didn't love us, but we love Romania. My grandmother always talked to me about the people. Not the places, and by no means about objects. She didn't consider them important. She said that what was important was the richness of my soul, the richness of her education that she tried to pass on to me, the manners, values, foreign languages. We must behave like people of our status, but without arrogance, we must be as modest as possible*<sup>124</sup>.

But if a family's memory is kept alive by a permanent remembrance of one's ancestors, it would lose its purpose if the family's memories and identity would not be carried on by descendants. Take for instance the families settled abroad of which some do not even speak Romanian anymore. And yet, family memory, kept alive through stories and fragile material remains, seems capable of substituting for the loss of the ancestors' language, of the manors and treasured objects, of documents. Children of these families also feel, as their parents and grandparents had once felt, that they are part of a special story:

*If only we could transmit what our folks taught us. To be punctual, to be serious, to keep your word, not to try to deceive people and perform your duties properly. It would be something! I am not in any kind of competition with anyone. I didn't lose the contest, in fact, I won it. I emigrated to Germany and was able to get my son out as well, Constantin Filitti, and he turned out just fine. (...) Nothing*

<sup>123</sup> Video interview with Dumitru Gh. Lecca, Radomirești, May 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/dumitru-lecca/>).

<sup>124</sup> Video interview with Irina Bossy-Ghica Boulín, Paris, March 2017. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/irina-bossy-ghica/>).



*less than a doctor in stochastics, with studies in Switzerland and now living in London. But he cares about the family's vault in Bellu cemetery, he told his girls who Constandie Filitti was. And the little ones said: "Oh, dad, but we are famous! We are famous!" That's our role. What role can we have? We can be people who contribute certainties to society*<sup>125</sup>.

*My children are extraordinarily interested in the family history, more than I was. Growing up in that environment, I wasn't too much interested in anything. They like to rediscover their roots from afar. They are very proud and they tell everyone that they are half Romanian. But their mother is German and unfortunately, they didn't learn Romanian. But now they want to try that as well*<sup>126</sup>.

For a Romanian aristocrat who fought openly against the communist regime and chose exile, there seem to be two ways to treasure the inherited memory. First, based on childhood memories, he recomposed in Paris an environment that evokes the history of his family and the Romanian identity. He surrounded himself with portraits and photographs of his ancestors, with evocative objects, and he tries to honour his forefathers. Then, he realizes that stories become useless if they can't be told to anybody, if there is no one to convince, to impress, to educate. Therefore, he does not ignore the importance of the existence of a biological continuity to historical families:

*In my childhood home, there was a small collection of family portraits, more precisely in the house of my aunt, my mother's sister, but they were all sold, lost, stolen or donated to museums in Iași, so I had to rebuild the collection in the Parisian exile, an arduous exercise, but with patience, many things can be done. (...) I wasn't exceedingly passionate about documents, portraits, and family photographs in my childhood, but they were so familiar to me that even today I can remember with amazing precision. The house I grew up in was a kind of family museum, the importance of which a child cannot really comprehend, but the familial message had been transmitted and well received, so that today, my house in Paris is a faithful reproduction of the atmosphere in my childhood, with the same kind of furniture, paintings, objects, which I will pass on to my son, who, for now, is just as passionate about the passing on of family memory as I was at his age, meaning not very much. (...) Family photographs are also very important, as through them, those alive today learn to recognize themselves, discovering the*

<sup>125</sup> Video interview with Ion Filitti, București, 10 September 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/ion-filitti-video/>).

<sup>126</sup> Audio interview with Bogdan Petru Skeletti, București, 28 May 2013 – Archive of *The Memory of the Romanian Elites* project (in possession of the author).

*lineage's predominant traits. I've managed to amass a collection of around two thousand photographs, which I've used to illustrate my book about the family's history, and which have an enormous sentimental value. But in our country, the boyars didn't really live like the nobles in the West, with castles and galleries of portraits that were transmitted across centuries, from generation to generation. In Romania, these things started much later and the boyars were never so well structured. Not to mention that the Phanariot Greeks had no more motherland and therefore an uncertain future. Under these circumstances, few objects were passed on to descendants. Back in those days, heads fell easily, families left in exile, from which they sometimes never returned, so photographs and portraits were fairly rare. (...) Now, respect for family tradition and memory are very important, their transmission becoming an obligation, which, in turn, implies the obligation of having descendants. In communism, the noble families that were the main target of the regime's persecutions, had a much lower birth-rate than before, one child or two, compared to six, seven or even eight children earlier<sup>127</sup>.*

An aristocrat who has lived almost his entire life under communism sees the role of his generation and of the social category he is part of as primarily a memorial one. If the political and economic influence of the aristocrats has disappeared to a great extent, the memory is the area in which they feel sovereign and necessary. They have family stories, moral values, cultural models to transmit, they have to confess the horrors of the 20th century. Memory as a weapon against totalitarianism and dehumanization:

*To not forget, to publish books, to recount, to say what happened. It is the only weapon that the elderly and the people who lived through these dramas still have<sup>128</sup>.*

This is the reason why I have chosen life stories as a method to illustrate the discussion about the relationship between memory and oblivion among Romanian aristocrats who lived through the communist repression. We have heard their voices; we have tried to understand which were the mechanisms for transmitting family memory before the instauration of the totalitarian regime. We have accompanied them in their battle for survival, during which family memory often times became a burden, while at the same time remaining a saving refuge. We have

<sup>127</sup> Radu Negrescu-Suțu, Written answer to the questionnaire *The Memory of the Romanian elites*, novel texts edited in Romanian, 2010 (in possession of the author).

<sup>128</sup> Video interview with Tudor Verona, București, 27 November 2018. From the *Povești cu blazon* series (<https://www.povesticublazon.ro/tudor-verona-video/>).



seen homes, objects, and documents disappear forever and making the recompositing of the ancestors' faces more and more difficult. But we also have been witnessing the recovery of fragments, in today's descendants' attempt to bring places, memories, and attitudes back to life. It is difficult to evaluate now how much of the memorial treasure has been lost forever and how much of it will be carried on by those descendants who have pledged not to forget. We will probably have to wait for the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the people we listened to here to mature, in order to better understand the impact that a few decades of programmatic persecutions have had on the memory of an aristocracy that knew how to transmit, for centuries, from generation to generation, its memories, values, and lifestyle. And which defined itself by an abundance of memories<sup>129</sup>.

<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, in order to write this paper, I have also used general information from works such as the following: Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 2007; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, Vintage Books, New York, 1999; Ion Mihai Cantacuzino, *O mie de ani în Balcani. O cronică a Cantacuzinilor în vâltoarea secolelor*, Editura Albatros București, 1996; Demetrii Cantemirii, Principis Moldaviae, *Descriptio antiqui et hodierni status Moldaviae* / Cantemir, Dimitrie, Principele Moldovei, *Descrierea stării de odinioară și de astăzi a Moldovei*, Institutul Cultural Român, București, 2006-2007; Jacques Coenen-Huther, *Sociologia elitelor*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2007; Nicolae Docan, Octav George Lecca (1881-1969), in *ArhGen*, IV(IX), 1997, 3-4; Gh. Ghibănescu, *Un izvod genealogic al răzășilor din Silișteni, înrudiți cu Cantemireștii*, in *ArhGen*, II, April-June 1913; Filip-Lucian Iorga, in dialogue with Alexandru Paleologu, *Breviar pentru păstrarea clipelor*, Third Edition, revised, Editura Humanitas, București, 2012; idem, in dialogue with Neagu Djuvara, *Trecutul este viu*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2014; Jean-Pierre Labatut, *Les noblesses européennes de la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1978; Didier Lancien, Monique de Saint Martin (sous la direction de), *Anciennes et nouvelles aristocraties de 1880 à nos jours*, Éditions Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, 2007; Octav-George Lecca, *Familiiile boierești române (istorie și genealogie după izvoare autentice)*, Libra, Muzeul Literaturii Române, București, 2000; idem, *Genealogia a 100 de case din Țara Românească și Moldova*, București, 1911; Ștefan Lemny, *Cantemireștii. Aventura europeană a unei familii princiare din secolul al XVIII-lea*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2010; Siðurour Gylfi Magnússon, Szijártó István M., *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* [ebook], Routledge, New York, 2013; Roland Mousnier, *Les hiérarchies sociales de 1450 à nos jours*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1969; Eugen D. Neculau, *Sate pe Jijia de Sus*, 3 volumes, Institutul Român de Genealogie și Heraldică "Sever Zotta", Iași, 2003-2005; Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, *Genealogia românească. Istoric și bibliografie*, Muzeul Brăilei, Editura Istros, Brăila, 2000; Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History. A Practical Guide*, Second edition, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003; Zoltán Rostás, *Secolul coanei Lizica. Convorbiri din anii 1985-1986 cu Elisabeta Odobescu-Goga*, Jurnalul din perioada 1916-1918, Editura Paideia, București, 2004; Barbara W. Sommer, Mary Kay Quinlan, *The Oral History Manual*, Second Edition, Altamira Press, Plymouth, 2009;

**Abstract:** The study deals with the relationship between family memory and oblivion among Romanian aristocrats, descendants of boyars from Moldavia and Wallachia, during the repressive communist regime and after its collapse, in 1989. During communism, thousands of Romanian aristocrats were thrown into political prisons, and others had to choose exile. Most of their manors, private archives and family objects were confiscated or destroyed. An unwritten law of oblivion imposed itself, it affected family memory and its effects can be analysed throughout the extent of several generations of Romanian aristocrats. The descendants of aristocratic families born towards the end of the communist regime or after 1989 were able to receive from their parents a rather poor memorial heritage. Some of them are trying now to recover their family memories and their aristocratic identity.

**Keywords:** ancestors; aristocracy; autobiography; class enemy; communist repression; discrimination; Eastern Europe; estates; exile; family archives; family history; family memory; family objects; family portraits; genealogy; history of the elites; manors; memoirs; memory studies; Moldavia; oblivion; oral history; political prisoner; private archives; prominent families; Romanian aristocracy; Romanian upper class; Romanian boyars; Romanian principalities; social distinction; testimonials; The Memory of the Romanian Elites; Wallachia.

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*Familiile boierești din Moldova și Țara Românească. Enciclopedie istorică, genealogică și biografică*, vol. I, II, III, V, VI, editor and co-author Mihai Dim. Sturdza, Editura Simetria, Editura Corint, București, 2004-2018; Mihai Dim. Sturdza, *Grandes familles de Grèce, d'Albanie et de Constantinople. Dictionnaire historique et généalogique*, 2<sup>e</sup> édition revue et augmentée, Chez l'auteur, Paris, 1999; *Marea Arhondologie a boierilor Moldovei (1835-1856)*, (established by) Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", Iași, 1997.