

# MARTOR



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Title: "The nobleman in an apartment block"

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How to cite this article: Nicolescu, Costion. 2007. "The nobleman in an apartment block". *Martor* 12: 45-46.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-12-2007/>

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## The nobleman in an apartment block

Costion Nicolescu

*Whether I am a nobleman or of noble origin? What I can say is that I had nobles in my family, so to say, in ancestry.* An answer that speaks volumes about Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu, more precisely about his qualities: moderation, modesty, nobility, spiritual nobility too...

Chance has it (if there is such a thing) that I've known Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu for about 25 years, without knowing him very well. (His eldest grand daughter and my daughter are „bosom“ friends ever since they went to the kindergarten!) The aura enveloping him and making him somewhat stand out against his will was that of grand son of writer Duiliu Zamfirescu, an acknowledged classic of Romanian literature, about whom we learned something at school. (In principle, we had to read *Tănase Scatiu* and *Life in the Countryside*, which were subject to comments with communist ideological touches in the textbooks of the time.) Actually, after Duiliu Zamfirescu, it became a family tradition that all his grand children and great grand children should receive the second Christian name of Duiliu or Duilia. As a sort of flourish, Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu himself bears this name.

From outside, Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu appears as an affable, distinguished, open-minded, friendly, discreet man with a gentlemanly conduct. In a word, what we call a Gentleman! The modesty of aristocratic origin apparent in his wife characterizes him too. His politeness is exquisite and he also has a refined humor, sometimes with a touch of irony without malice and at times with a playful radiance in his eyes.

Born in 1922, a class mate and close friend of the great king Mihai between 1936 and 1939, a young graduate of the Polytechnic Institute in

1946, Mr. Lascar Zamfirescu further led the more or less common life of his fellow men during the communist regime. Just like nearly all people of his condition, his family found themselves deprived of all they had and had gathered along several generations. He was an engineer who practiced his profession with vocation, pleasure and with enough successes (proof thereof are his numerous valuable inventor patents). Since I've known him, the one who had formerly spent his holidays in mansions and had lived in embassy buildings for years, has lived in an ordinary block apartment in Iancului Avenue. For a long time, there were six of them in four rooms: he and his wife, his daughter and his son-in-law and his two grand daughters. Since the instatement of communism had split his life into two highly different positions, in terms of the social condition.

Now I got in touch with Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu because in one way or another, through various kinds of extraction and alliances, branches of both families historically linked to the Herești estate are grafted among names of great noble families on his family tree: Năsturel-Herescu and Stolojan. His wife descends from the Năsturel family and his sister was married to Vlad Stolojan.

I wanted to find out from him something about what it was like to be a nobleman, whether to be of noble origin made you nourish a certain feeling and how this feeling was expressed, about the atmosphere in the noble families in the inter-war period which he had known directly, about some significant incidents in the history of those noble families. He told me a lot about the intricate relationships between the noble

families in the ancestry of his family. The way they inter-relate and how many „historical“ names got together in Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu’s family make up a really impressive picture. He depicts it in detail, because despite his age, he has a fantastic memory, though sometimes, he complains about it, not without a certain coquetry („Sir, there is a lot to talk about. Forgive me, I’m a bit soft-witted, that is the bad thing. But when you are 85, you’re forgiven.“; „Oh, Lord! I need a head as big as a pumpkin to keep everything in mind.“). I put together all that he told me with good will and the gift of the gab for nearly two hours, trying to pinpoint in a logical and coherent succession a few significant elements of the lives of certain noble families (followed over almost two centuries) conducive to today’s family of Lascăr Zamfirescu.

While I was talking to Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu, he kept an eye with a great tenderness on his wife, in want and helpless, partly understandable given her age of 97. Meanwhile, she passed away, resting with God and naturally joining her

ancestors in the Rosetti-Bălănescu family in the vault at the Bellu cemetery, close to the tombs of Caragiale and Eminescu. Mr. Zamfirescu pondered for a short while, keeping unaltered the persistent perfume of their old and stormy love story, consolidated then for a lifetime.

To come back to the initial question: *is Mr. Lascăr Zamfirescu a nobleman?* Definitely, he is and one can see that most clearly in the excitement (sometimes tears welling in his eyes) with which he speaks about the places, which formerly belonged *de jure* to his family and where he spent his childhood and youth. And it is not their material value that moves him but the spirit of those places and of those times, their spiritual and historical content, which has been lost to a great extent now. It is an old and definitive connection, as old as wine with bouquet, colour and strength. Since we have to regard nobility more than being a mere material condition with all it involves. Real nobility was also a certain state of mind, rich in meanings and emotions, nicely related to true peasantry in this country.