

Me and Ion Stroescu

Alin Ludu DUMBRAVA*^a

*Corresponding author

*Str. C.A. Rosetti nr. 43, Bucharest, sector 2, Romania

alinlududumbrava@clicknet.ro

DOI: 10.13111/2066-8201.2011.3.52

On the 14th of June 2009, on a Sunday evening I was heading home through the C.A. Rosetti with J. L. Calderon crossroad in downtown Bucharest. Near some recycle containers I saw two young men carrying some books. When I looked closer, I managed to take the see a huge pile of dossiers, sketches, etc in good shape, tied up with rope, but thrown in disarray on the pavement. Intrigued, I started reading. Sketches and mathematical equations which I could not understand, a biography, piles of materials and medicine books.

I must have stood before those three containers, red, blue and green, reading and running over the pages from midnight to past three in the morning. It was a hot Sunday night; occasionally, a cab would pass by. I found out that it was the personal archive of a certain Ion Stroescu.

But who was Ion Stroescu? I carried the archive in my cellar, about 20 kilograms, went home and coming back several times. Then I selected a few important documents and I took them upstairs with me. I read them until about seven in the morning after previously searching on Google any useful information on this person whose precious belongings had been trashed away.

I find out that Stroescu was a scientist, inventor, aerodynamics specialist and the man who created alongside Elie Carafoli the first aerodynamics laboratory and the first Romanian wind tunnel, which he then recreated in Paris. And I find personal belongings, photographs, even the beginning of a sketched autobiography. I start to figure it out. I find it a shame to let such a treasure go to waste. What to do? I can't make out the equations, the aerodynamics and the physics.

Wind energy propellers that might have changed the fate of Romania. Medical books, probably belonging to his son or grandson, who knows who might have thrown them away?

I cleaned the dust on top of them and I managed to discover financial demands, desperate letters from Paris, postcards sent to the family, orders signed by the king, acts of his son proving that Stroescu was not an enemy of the people and a late academic reward of a retired Stroescu.

The most awkward aspect is that the Aviation Museum in Baneasa claimed that it possessed the personal archive of Stroescu. Consequently, what had I found? His secret archive? His personal one?

During the following days I discussed with some producers and production houses telling them that I wanted to dig further, to investigate this story like a Sherlock Holmes; to

^a Film critic/ screenwriter

find Stroescu's followers and hand them the autobiography written with great talent and details of their grandfather.

But were they in the country? With the help of a friend I found someone at the aeronautics museum who seemed interested in the matter; a contact, a researcher who knew more on this. But I thought that everything had to be archived, documented, scanned, photographed.

And I wanted to take someone with a camera to make some investigations. To go to the ancient address, to a physics specialist (in aerodynamic equations) and to verify if they were correct, if this man about who the aerodynamics history does not tell us much, was or was not a hero and a pioneer whose efforts were put in the dustbin and to see if we could rediscover an important part of the past by chance.

It's an investigation that could lead me in the worst case at the door of any relatives who would find out about this man of the twentieth century who struggled to do important things under three regimes that stood against him, which would have had another destiny in another country and whose wing energy program was dropped. (after 1990, because they work on it in the last years of Ceausescu).

Or maybe I'm wrong and he was only a *Don Quixote*, the idealistic knight who loses reality and is mixing the real world and fiction, chasing chimeras, but then why even the communists sent him after the war to work in France where he had no money and at one point even a good suit of clothes? But being patriotic and a family man he returned home.

Who is Ion Stroescu? We may learn together starting in an unusual adventure. We only need a team with a video camera to reveal forgotten truths about mystified times.

*This was my initial presentation from 2009, when I applied to several sessions of projects to make a documentary, but without concrete results. Finally, my friend Bogdan wanted to help me to make an independent film and I kept a log book that I present here briefly and schematically:

In December 2010, before Christmas, after many preambles, I met Ada Maria Ichim, my former colleague, who makes a documentary about her grandfather, a pilot, and her contact, Sorin Turturica, a researcher at the Museum of Aviation.

Then we met *on January 11, 2011* and went in the basement where we began to "explore" the archive. We moved the archive to Bogdan Lazar's company in February to be able to study it in better conditions. Sorin made us acquainted with Professor Ion Buiu from the Museum of the "POLITEHNICA" University of Bucharest, an engineer specializing in aviation history and mechanics.

We opened all the boxes and carefully examined all the documents in the archive, while the camera filmed this procedure. This way we confirmed we had indeed found the true archive of Ion Stroescu, containing really valuable items, unique, and even his original work "New perspectives in airplane aerodynamics", published by the author in a single, hand-written edition, that brought him the Adamachi Royal Foundation Prize, and an OSIM journal from the 1990's about his patents and research.

Mr. Buiu was to track down Ion Stroescu's relatives but unfortunately he did not succeed.

Mr. Buiu introduced me to Mr. Dan Pantazopol, the former director of INCAS –The National Institute for Aerospace Research “Elie Carafoli”.

He said he would provide a room in order to research the material. We agreed to take the archive there after Easter and –good thing we’d talked more specifically before we brought it- we cleared the confusion that we (namely me and Bogdan) wanted to study the documents ourselves.

After that, we established a day to take the archive from Golem, Bogdan’s company, to INCAS.

Monday, the 9th of May, 2011. Bad weather and rain. We loaded the documents into the car and we’re off to Iuliu Maniu Avenue, near the “Pacii” metro station. We almost missed the institute that is not easily seen from the street. Mr. Pantazopol was expecting us, extremely punctual, accommodating and curious about the materials.

We entered a room of the old INCAS building, the original construction, next to Stroescu’s still operational wind tunnel, where tests were conducted on an airfoil for a foreign company. I felt like in Mircea Eliade’s stories, in a mysterious, interwar lab where magic things were happened.

We ran through the material and found autobiographical elements, his book and the 1959 conference when Stroescu was made a member of the Romanian Academy. We left them all there and finally, after a series of talks during the summer, Mr. Pantazopol told me INCAS would host a commemorative conference.

And so, on the 15th of September at the INCAS headquarters I participated in what was called **“Ion Stroescu - Commemorative Session”**.

I was asked to say a few words and, stressed by my speech, shortly titled „Happening” (Hazard), I ended up casually and briefly reporting this oddisey. Ada, whom I informed that she’d be wellcomed if she chose to come, arrived and met a family friend here, Tudor Jitianu, who was Stroescu’s step grand-grandson. Hearing about how we found the documents, he realized they were from his mother’s house, where a major cleanup was made 2 years ago.

Tudor left before I spoke, and I was to contact him. Finally at the end of October I met him and together we visited the house on Thomas Masaryk street where the documents were stored in the attic. The mistery was solved, it seems those medical books were a false lead, as they were thrown in the same time at the containers by someone else, unrelated.

Now we must fiind Stroescu’s grandson, or his daughter, to inform them of all this, and tell them where they can fiind the archives of their forbearer.

Now, if we can still make a documentary on Ion Stroescu, I don’t know yet. The mistery of the documents is solved, nothing as mysterious as previously thought, but at least part of his reputation was reinstated and his personality was brought into context where it should be, at the Institute for Aerodynamics, and more people will know about him now.

The key question is what if it would have rained that June night? But some things are not ours to decide, but destiny’s. And one more thing :those who sort old and forgotten things, should look them over once more before they throw them away, because who knows what they might discover.