

Gheorghe Băgulescu (1890–1963)

From the War Diary to the Historical Novel or the Offensive of Literature on the Battlefield of History

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THE REPUBLISHING, in 2004, 70 years after its first edition, of Gheorghe Băgulescu's novel *Japanese Soul*, happened on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of Romanian–Japanese diplomatic relations. We believe this can be encapsulated in the old Japan–West flux that had known not only synopes as time went by, but also variations in intensity, and was finally concretized by the deepening of mutual understanding.

After two hundred and fifty years of isolation (*sakoku*), in which Japan had been closed not only to Europeans, but also to diplomatic relations with China, with the Meiji Restoration (“the Era of Enlightened Rule,” 1862–1912) in the second half of the 19th century the Land of the Rising Sun knows the “Western adventure,” when the archipelago opens its doors towards the West, entering an ambivalent 20th century, both violent and peaceful, riddled with various religious, social, economic, political, and military problems.

However, Japanese intellectuals of the time quickly understood that, in order to bring their country at the forefront of the world, a simple “Westernization” was not enough. An understanding, from the inside, by the Japanese themselves, of their own cultural inheritance was needed. As a result, a famous writer of the time, Mori Ogai (1862–1922), was swayed by the “return to Japan” or the “return to being Japanese” current (see Hirakawa 2009, 117) towards the end of his life, and considered it appropriate to give up fiction entirely, believing it to be *uso* (‘lie’) (see Snyder 1994, 353), and focused on historical narrative and biographies. In fact, ever since the end of the 19th century, the archeologist Okakura Tenshin (1863–1913) had already formulated the idea of an Asian unity, based on universality and the will to discover the truth, in which Japan would occupy a privileged position. As there was a tendency to attribute the power of Western nations to technology, Confucian conservatives in Japanese society could feed the illusion of Asian spiritual superiority. For example, to Okakura Tenshin (see Vande Walle 2009, 63), the West was a world dominated by restlessness, obsessed with fighting and wars, with the psychology of individuality, all in the name of freedom and equality, while Western intellectuals seemed to be rather interested in analytical means of researching the resources of life rather than the meaning or the object of life. In total contrast, to the Japanese intellectual Asian civilization seemed to be characterized by stability and harmony, through the power of self-sacrifice and tolerance. But this Asian unity was seen, according to the same interpretation, as centered on Japan, since the archipelago had managed, because of its native genius, to synthesize and adapt in a modern fashion the two great Chinese and Indian civilizations (see *ibid.*, 62), thus appearing superior when compared to the West.

Joining the Japanese, foreigners of the time also let themselves go with this flow of defining Japan, so that the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, on his first visit to Japan, held a conference at Keiō University called “The Spirit of Japan.” On this occasion, he invoked before the Japanese public the reasoning behind the “responsibility” of each country in sending a “cultural and spiritual invitation” to the entire world (see Kawabata 1969, 54). Overcoming cultural relativism, which states that no foreigner will ever be able to truly understand another culture beside their own, Tagore seems to try to surpass the aforementioned anthropological hypothesis, and assumes the mission of showing the Japanese the unseen face of the *greatness* of their own cultural identity: “When Japan is in imminent peril of neglecting to realize where she is great, it is the duty of a foreigner like myself to remind her that she has given rise to a civilization which is perfect in its form, and has evolved a sense of sight which clearly sees truth in beauty and beauty in truth. She has achieved something which is positive and complete. It is easier for a stranger to know what it is in her which is

truly valuable for all mankind,—what is there which only she, of all other races, has produced from her inner life and not from her mere power of adaptability” (Tagore, *apud* Kawabata 1969, 55).

After the “modernization” which began with the Meiji era, in 1868, replacing the feudal system with that of a nation which recognizes the absolute authority of the emperor, after so many years of... absence, a historical moment came, which demanded not only political reform, but also the positioning of Japan, as a modern capitalist state, within an international context. History followed its course, and the almost forced development of the archipelago also brought about the crisis (cf. Ōe 1995, 41–43) which triggered, in the Showa period (“The Era of Enlightened Peace,” 1926–1989), a rise in Japanese fascism, the invasion of China, and the Pacific War.

Within these political circumstances in which Japanese propaganda becomes more and more violent through statements regarding the superiority of the yellow race, the civilizing role of Japan and its historical mission to save the world (see Bușe and Zamfir 1990, 268), Gheorghe Băgulescu, the former captain of the “Mountain Hunters” regiment from the first line of the Mărăști and Oituz front of the Great War, is sent by the Romanian government to Japan, first as a military, naval and aeronautical attaché (1935–1939), and, a few years later, as minister plenipotentiary (1941–1943).

Gheorghe Băgulescu was born on 11 November 1890, in Brăila County. After graduating high school in Bârlad in 1907, he enrolled in the Military School for Infantry Officers, following all the steps of a military career, from soldier to general. He joined the campaign in Bulgaria in 1913 as a second lieutenant, fought in the First World War as a captain, and on 1 December 1918 he was sent as a representative of the Romanian Army to the National Assembly of Alba Iulia in order to take to Bucharest the official document of the Great Union. His bravery on the battlefield and the wounds suffered in 1916 brought him the honors and recognition he fully deserved.

Thus, in June 1935, he was appointed military attaché in Japan, where he remained until February 1939, when he was called home in order to take the exam that would advance him to the rank of general. He had gloriously ended his first Japanese mission, returning home with many impressive honors. Out of these, it is worth mentioning that in 1939 he received from the Japanese Emperor, at the proposal of the Minister of External Affairs, the Imperial Order of the Sacred Treasure, 3rd Class. He was also named a member of the Chuo Gishikai national Academy in Tokyo, and at that time he was, in fact, the only foreigner to enjoy such appreciation from the highest scientific forum in Japan. Furthermore, upon his return he brought an impressive collection of Japanese and Chinese artefacts, which offered him the opportunity to organize an exhibit of 261 pieces

at the Romanian Athenaeum. He was strongly driven by the wish to create a museum of Eastern art in Herăstrău Park in Bucharest, following the model of the Katsura summer villa of the Japanese emperors. Gheorghe Băgulescu took this opportunity to donate to the Romanian state 726 paintings, bronze, stone, and pre-Christian marble statues, ceramics, chinaware, golden laquerware, early coins of gold, silver, and bronze, 12 large Japanese folding screens, 18 medium-sized folding screens, 2,017 original gravures, all accounting nowadays for most of the Japanese section in the Bucharest Art Museum (see Epure 2002, 160).

General Băgulescu would return to the Far East, this time as minister plenipotentiary in Japan, China, and Manchukuo, two years later, a few months before the attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), which would heavily mark the Pacific military conflict. Japanese officials organized a very warm welcome for the Romanian diplomat, as conveyed by the press of that time. On 4 March 1941, for example, *Tokyo Nichi-Nichi* newspaper printed:

*General Băgulescu, researcher of the legend of the 47 faithful samurai of Ako, has been appointed the new minister of Romania in Japan. Speaking of General Băgulescu, the minister of Romania appointed to Japan, he is the well-known man that we indeed remember immediately: the Military Attaché, good friend of our country and diligent student of the Chushingura. . . . Since His Excellency's arrival, he has realized that before all else he must know the spirit of this country. For this purpose he promptly chose the legend of the 47 faithful samurai of Ako. . . . When he regretfully left Japan in February 1939, after a 4-year stay, the general returned to his mother country. As he was still spellbound by the quintessence of the Japanese spirit, His Excellency published the 2nd part of the work **Japanese Soul (Yamato Damashii)**—vol. 1 and 2—in September 1939, the year when the World War began. In an article that was published at the time by the Romanian press, we were told that the work enjoyed great popularity, being the most fitting read for a Romania which was at war. . . (apud Epure 2002, 157–158)*

But, in 1942, Minister Plenipotentiary Băgulescu published the anti-Nazi, anti-totalitarian work *La nouvelle religion*, where he pleaded for the principles of “harmony” and “creation” as basic principles of the “New Religion.” For this religion, war is not only “the original sin” and “contrary to moral law,” but also “the enemy of universal Law” (apud Scumpieru 2013, 217). As consequence, in the following year, Marshal I. Antonescu decided to end the Japan mission of Gheorghe Băgulescu. The general thus left Tokyo and arrived in China, was kept under house arrest until 1946, when he left for the USA with the help of the US Navy. He finally settled in France (Nice), where he remained until his death in 1963.

Although it seemed that General Băgulescu had made a name for himself, the workings of history would decide differently. Despite being honored as a hero after the First World War, the name of Gheorghe Băgulescu is missing from military history, perhaps because he was declared a war criminal by the regime installed after the Second World War—a sentence that kept him away from his home country for the rest of his life. Likewise, the Japanese Minister of War, General Itagaki Seishiro, declared him *persona non grata* in the archipelago, despite having given Colonel Băgulescu, upon the end of his first mission to Japan, a statuette of Kusunoki Masashige, a famous samurai of the 14th century who became the symbol of the Japanese *bushidō* spirit. This was due to the open condemnation of the “aggression, vanity and conflict between the races” (apud Scumpieru 2013, 220), which Băgulescu confessed in the book *The New Religion*. Furthermore, literary history has not remembered his name either, in spite of the fact that he was a member of the Society of Romanian Writers ever since 1921 and was awarded several prizes for his published works.

Thus forgotten by both military and literary histories after 1944, the name of Gheorghe Băgulescu reappeared in the press only after 1990, in specialized magazines or specialized literature, outlining his portrait as an army officer or diplomat, as a writer and art collector.

As a writer, Gheorghe Băgulescu had his debut with the volume of short stories and novellas *Lines from the Border*. The short story collection *Days of Energy: Stories from the War of Union* (Târgu-Neamț, 1918) followed, prefaced by a letter of Nicolae Iorga. In fact, this book can be read as a battlefront diary that narrates the victories of the Romanian army in the “triangle of death”: “I tried to depict some moments from the times of energy, decisiveness, bravery and sacrifice that the Country has gone through, while describing here and there only a few of the countless deeds of valor accomplished by the sons of the holy land, or impressions born of a state of mind, where the wishes and pain of an entire People seethe” (Băgulescu 1919, 7).

Gheorghe Băgulescu’s literary activity continued with the volume *Sad Days: Short Stories and Novellas from the War of Union* (Bucharest, 1919), which was also accompanied by a letter from Nicolae Iorga. This work turns the written word into an offensive weapon, openly expressing the revolt of the military man regarding the Peace Treaty of Bucharest (Buftea), under conditions that enslaved Romania. In this volume, the novella “The Deserter” is remarkable. It was later published independently, in five additional editions, and it seems to have inspired Liviu Rebreanu to write the short story “Îțic Ștrul Deserter.” During all this time, Gheorghe Băgulescu tried his hand at longer prose, but the novels *The Commander* or *Antiquitas Rediviva* (1926) passed unnoticed.

As inferred by the letter that accompanies the short story volume *Days of Energy*, Nicolae Iorga was betting on the debutant Băgulescu's narrative talent. He notes that the latter wrote "knowledgeably and with spiritual warmth." The historian confesses to be a reader that he was "moved" by such a "noble and proud" book, which he suggestively names "a soldier's Bible." He assures the author that his work will pass the test of time: "And a long time after you are gone, they will be grateful to he who was not satisfied just with doing, but with telling the whole world, on pages that will not die, about the deeds of the sublime and humble soldiers" (Iorga, apud Băgulescu 1919, 2).

Unlike the battlefield diary of General Alexandru Averescu (*Daily War Notes 1916–1918*), which strictly adheres to the tenets of the genre, recording in detail the tense moments in between bombardments, the preparations for an attack, or the events following the skirmishes on the first lines of the front, Gheorghe Băgulescu's stories move towards the battlefield memoir under the guise of a third person narrative interwoven with the first person voice: "From the earthly hell, other souls ascended to heaven, other trees were broken, another strip of forest was destroyed, the earth shook, but... there was no going further. And the Teutonic hordes fell silent" (Băgulescu 1919, 69).

The memoir was always recognized not only as a genre that was born of man's natural wish to "self-define" or for "retrospective justification," but also as a keeper of the "document confession" value (Bocşan and Leu 2015, 42). Băgulescu's choice of this type of hybrid writing, which apparently conjoins the literary formula of the story with that of the diary, can be easily understood not only from his explicit dedications, but also from the prefaces signed by the author himself, legitimating and giving reason for recording the "lived moment" through the written word: "The pieces that follow are not crafted, they will not have a neat shape and enough spirit of observation to satisfy a critic—an observer from afar; they will appear mundane, even, to a... sedentary man. But I know one thing, and those who were in battle will find this to be true: *they are lived moments*" (Băgulescu 1919, 8).

Gheorghe Băgulescu published a second edition of *Days of Energy* the following year. In the 1919 preface to this new edition he mentioned the joy he felt that the book he wrote during the wars was put into print in a unified Romania. This was the individual ideal that had become the ideal of a nation, for which so many soldiers had sacrificed their lives. He had felt it his duty to speak for them, to open his heart, which was full of hope for the deeds of the future and burdened with bitterness for those of the present: "They who have given their lives have a greater right to this than us, who only sacrificed energy and a part of our blood. They have a right to the first word" (Băgulescu 1919, 203). And perhaps it is precisely because of this wish to give priority to the voices of the

dead that the author hides his own ego behind a third person. The result is an atypical war memoir, different from those generally used by cultural history in order to reconstruct individual or collective fates and mentalities (see Bolovan, Cojocaru, and Tămaş 2015, 17–175).

AT THE peak of his military career, during his first diplomatic mission to Japan (1935–1939), Gheorghe Băgulescu would revisit writing and publish the novel *Japanese Soul* (*Yamato Damashii*). He drafted the plan for the trilogy in 1935, and presented it in the same year, on the occasion of some conferences held at the national Academy Chuo Gishikai in Tokyo. In fact, he would soon become a member, being the first and last foreigner to receive such an honor during those times.

Gheorghe Băgulescu's novel has the *chūshingura*, the theme of the 47 masterless samurai (*rōnin*), at its core. Legend has it that the warriors carefully planned to avenge their master's foul murder for two years, in order to bring the culprit's head to their master's grave, following which they all committed *seppuku*, or ritual suicide. The historical novel tells of events from around the year 1645 until the author's own day and age. This was a page out of Japanese feudal history, for which he carried out research in the archives of prestigious Japanese universities and of various museums in Tokyo and Ako. The text brings before the reader the historical fate of the Asano clan of Ako, followed across a few generations, and concludes with a commentary not only on Japanese (and Chinese) art, but also on the political and economic situation of the Far East. The novel seems to have been written to disseminate knowledge on "the Great Far East," within the trend opened at the beginning of the 20th century by the linguist Basil Chamberlain, the journalist Laskadio Hearn and the poet Rabindranath Tagore. Ultimately, it touches upon the issue of the warrior's code, or *bushidō* (*bushi* = 'warrior,' *dō* = 'path'), the code of samurai honor whose principles spring from the three faiths embraced by the Japanese archipelago across history: Shinto, based on the adoration of nature, Confucianism, which promotes the five moral relations between the government and the follower, master and servant, father and child, man and woman, older brother and younger brother, and Buddhism, which is connected to the fatalism of human existence, while its esoteric sect Zen pushes for meditation and contemplation.

Chūshingura is, in fact, the title of a famous Japanese drama, a play written by Takeda Izumo and his collaborators for the bunraku puppet theatre, with a first showing at Osaka in 1748. With this stage production of a real story which happened in the 18th century, the heroism of the vengeful *rōnin*, in the name of honor as promoted by the samurai code, rapidly entered legend. The theme was soon picked up by both kabuki theatre and literary prose, as well as by cinema-

tography, later on. Thus, the novel by Osaragi Jiro (1897–1973) was published two hundred years after the historical event, in 1927, in a Japan that was increasingly militarized and warlike. *Akō Gishi* (*The Faithful Samurai of Ako*) resumed the theme of loyalty and honor of vassals left masterless. It would be followed, several years later, by Gheorghe Băgulescu's trilogy.

The first volume of the Romanian military attaché's trilogy was published by Kenkyusha Publishing House, Tokyo, in 1936, in French and English. In Romanian, the first volume of *Japanese Soul* was published by the *Universul* newspaper press in Bucharest, between November 1937 and January 1938. The second volume followed in 1939. Each volume bears a title: volume 1, *Shogun, Daimyo, Samurai*; volume 2, part 1: *Injustice, Faith, Revenge*, and part 2: *Two Hundred Years Later*. Volume 1 begins with the words of Marquis Asano to Colonel Băgulescu, at the Sengaku-ji temple (where the graves of the *rōnin* and their master lie) on 13 July 1936: "Dying, and committing their untainted samurai virtues to life in the future, the 47 *rōnin* are the mirror in which their descendants can reflect their conscience, following their good example" (Băgulescu 2004, 5). The 2nd volume, however, opens with an author's preface, accompanied by a collage of reactions from notable people of the time or appreciations issued by the mass-media after the first volume of the trilogy appeared. Out of these, we have selected the words of Admiral Yamamoto, vice-minister of the Navy, from 21 January 1939: "During his stay in Japan, Colonel G. Băgulescu had an extensive activity, studying not only military matters, but also the Japanese history and character, insomuch that he published a splendid work. I can only express my boundless respect" (apud Băgulescu 2004/2: 9).

Recognized by the Japanese intellectual elite as "the first foreigner that has touched our patriotic heart" (Băgulescu 2004/2: 9), Băgulescu was considered to be a genuine "phenomenon" (*ibid.*, 14) by foreigners in the press of the time. Through his trichotomous personality encapsulating the elite military man, the famous writer and the distinguished Orientalist, he had come to be a role model even among the Japanese military. For example, Commander M. Ano confessed, in a personal letter, that he was at the Headquarters of the Japanese army in the north of China, with the mission to chase out the foreigners from Asia, in order to recreate "l'Asie claire" and that, in his soldier's pack, you could always find the first volume of the Romanian military attaché's book. Ending his letter, the Japanese officer expressed the eagerness with which he waited for the following volumes of the trilogy (*ibid.*, 15).

During those times, when the "red peril" and "internal chaos" grew in continental Asia, Japan wanted to show the world its virtues of as a world leader, a "peace-maker" and a "keeper of order" in the Far East (cf. Bușe and Zamfir 1990, 265). It became somewhat natural that the publication, in French, Eng-

lish, and Romanian, of a new novel on the theme of the feudal code of samurai honor, emphasizing and glorifying the qualities of the Japanese soul, this time written by a non-native, was a genuine publishing event. High Japanese authorities—not only men of letters and culture, but also the press and the diplomatic corps in Tokyo—thus felt it their duty to eulogize the published work and to honor the author. As a result, the Romanian minister plenipotentiary received numerous congratulatory letters from military men (such as the Japanese Minister of War, the Japanese admiral or colleagues from other foreign diplomatic corps in Japan), as well as from the rectors of prestigious Japanese universities. As a gesture of supreme appreciation, he was honored by being awarded an imperial order offered by Emperor Hirohito himself (as explained later in the collage that opens the 2nd volume of the trilogy).

The Japan of the '30s and '40s had gained increased international influence. The last years of the Taisho era (1912–1926) would strengthen the trend towards the rise of Japan in the Asia-Pacific area and in the world (see Epure 2002, 134). In order to make its presence known in the world, Japan took advantage of the internal strife in China, and so took the first step towards the doctrine regarding “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (see Vlad 1998, 69). This was proclaimed in 1938 by General Hachiro Arita, the minister of foreign affairs, who was trying to create a basis for cooperation among the states in the area, with Japan as a privileged partner and protective power. Although the Japanese general was a supporter of expansion through peaceful means (see Bușe and Zamfir 1990, 311), Japanese expansion in China, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific would actually entail military operations and the invasion of territories. As a result, only a few years later and under the direct influence of the world political context, the political attitude of Japan would shape itself into two directions that manifested themselves in parallel: on the one hand, the initiation of simultaneous talks with Germany, the USSR, and the USA, and on the other hand, actual preparations for a war which seemed imminent (see Bușe and Zamfir 1990, 276). But the Japanese military propaganda relating to expansionist external politics, which emphasized the special mission and the responsibility of Japan in the context of world politics, was like an echo across time of the idea of Asian unity in which Japan would occupy a privileged position. This latter idea, formulated by Okakura Tenshin (1826–1916) at the end of the 19th century, would soon be recognizable inside the country. In consequence, *Gunbatsu*, or the military caste, unnoticeably gained more and more power in the life of the state, and military men came to monopolize all key positions in the government.

At the time of its apparition, when Japan's prestige and power in the Far East were on the rise, when the internal national-chauvinist, militarist and fascist pro-

paganda in favor of Greater Japan (*Dai Nihon*) was in full swing, the novel *Japanese Soul* seemed to be fated for success with the public. The narrative text signed by Gheorghe Băgulescu brought to contemporaneity the legend of the 47 *rōnin*, thus suggesting to the world that understanding the spirit of the Japanese people (*yamato damashii*) can be achieved by a recourse to its history. Its events tap into traits such as a sense of justice, of faith and mercy, of resisting the wickedness and adversities of fate, of Confucian loyalty to one's superior, etc. and welcomed the spirit of the age, although, after Japan's surrender in the Second World War, the legend would be reduced to insignificance by the American occupation.

In the Romania of the time as well, due to the exoticism of the theme and the ingredients that seasoned the subject with contemporary relevance, the publication of the historical novel *Japanese Soul* met the expectations of readers that were far removed geographically and culturally from the theme of *chūshingura* offered by the novel, which brought it a warm welcome from the interwar public.

Should one reread nowadays this “gospel of the samurai of Ako,” as the author subtitled his historical trilogy, independently from the political context in which it was created, one may objectively admit that, although the nucleus of the book is a legend that has made it around the world along the years—a fact that would have ensured its success through the very generosity of its theme—the text's construction and narrative strategy as well as the authenticity of its character occasionally lead the discourse to a dead end. Rather preoccupied by the thesis aspect of this legend, which exhibits virtues and personalities, the author forgets about narrative demands, and the characters enter a cone of unnatural idealization, their heroism being rather told than lived. In fact, the narrative technique is very similar to that of the author's early story collections. If *Days of Energy* can ultimately be considered a battlefield diary of the First World War, where Gheorghe Băgulescu wishes to “honor” with the medal of... eternity the valor of the Romanian soldiers fallen in the line of duty with the hopes of unifying their people, the novel *Japanese Soul* can be read as a “documentary” on servants who stay faithful to their master's ideals. In the end, it is about the same loyalty to a master or an idea, which is in fact demonstrated by General Băgulescu himself throughout his entire military and diplomatic career, as he was always faithful to the ideal of a united Romania and its supreme commander, the king. Professionally a military man, Gheorghe Băgulescu prioritizes in his Japanese historical novel the conflict between heroes and traitors, in order to emphasize the virtue of the former. His wish is to discover, by means of the *chūshingura* legend, similarities between the Romanian and Japanese spirits, and so he sacrifices the natural thread of the story on this altar. Yet, this attempt to bring two spiritualities closer, veiled throughout the book, is openly confessed

in the Preface to the 2nd volume of the novel, where the author shows that he bears in his heart the wish to write a trilogy called *Romanian Soul*, to record “the wonderful deeds of valor and sacrifice” (Băgulescu 2004/2: 28) of Romanian history.

In fact, during his Japanese missions, somehow Gheorghe Băgulescu had already done his “research” for this project, as he had taken numerous actions to present Romania, a country known little or not at all in that part of the world. He thus wrote, alongside articles presenting his home country for various Japanese cultural magazines, the monograph *Romania*, published in Tokyo in 1942. Across 118 pages, he presented the history, art and culture of Romania, accompanied by representative illustrations. Since it was written in Japanese, as the author intended, the book had great impact (cf. Scumpieru 2013, 216), although it is true that the Soviet and Hungarian governments protested immediately, asking the Japanese government to stop its circulation. Minister Plenipotentiary Gheorghe Băgulescu also held numerous conferences on Romania or on Romanian folklore. He also translated folk ballads and poems by Eminescu into Japanese, he organized exhibitions of Romanian folk art, as if to illustrate his faith that “the art of any nation, which is usually national in its roots, becomes universal through its effects” (Băgulescu 2004/2: 41). And, not lastly, he visited schools, offering Japanese professors teaching materials on his home country; he also screened documentaries on Romania. He was fully convinced that Japan would one day become an ally that would influence or even practically aid the historic destiny of his country: “Taking into consideration that the vote of Japan will weigh heavily in the new world order, the money spent on propaganda is not wasted, and its fruit will be reaped shortly not only in the political field as a restoration of borders, but also economically, culturally and artistically” (Băgulescu, apud Epure 2002, 183).

Aware that the times he lived did not involve clashes of armed forces as much as ideologies that would grant the world a new beginning, the military and diplomatic career of General Gheorghe Băgulescu is tightly interwoven with the history of the Romanian people: his participation in the First World War continued with the diplomatic battle to make his country known in geographically remote places. Conversely, the same general led the battle through which he attempted to bring the Far East closer to Europe, for a better mutual awareness and understanding. However, in achieving this goal, he used not only the path of diplomacy, but also the art of writing, both to make his opinion known, and to thus be a part of the fate of the world: “And still, if I am to die, History will remain. . .” (Băgulescu 1919, 224).



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Abstract

Gheorghe Băgulescu (1890–1963): From the War Diary to the Historical Novel or the Offensive of Literature on the Battlefield of History

Actively combatting the saying “When weapons speak, the muses are silent,” General Gheorghe Băgulescu was adamant in recording the events of history he lived or read, by using the art of literature. As he was aware that the times he lived did not involve the clash of armed forces as much as ideologies that would change the face of the world, the military and diplomatic career of General Băgulescu is tightly interwoven with the history of the Romanian people. His participation in the First World War, immortalized in stories that can be read as a battlefield diary, continued with the diplomatic battle of making his country known, as a military, naval and aeronautical attaché in Japan (1935–1939), as minister plenipotentiary in Japan, China and Manchukuo (1941–1943), and in other, more geographically remote places. Conversely, the same military man and diplomat published the trilogy *Japanese Soul* (1937) in French, English and Romanian, and attempted to bring the Far East closer to Europe, with the purpose of better mutual understanding and awareness.

Keywords

battlefront diary, historical novel, *bushidō* (samurai code), Romania, Japan