

Central European Tropics: Physicians, Naturalists, and Diplomats
in Search of Southeast Asia

Tomáš Petruš, Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences

- *petru@orient.cas.cz*
- a classical conference panel – a single (90 min) session (3-4 presenters)

This panel proposal draws on the session entitled *Revisiting Central European “Classics” on Southeast Asia*, convened at the last EUROSEAS 2021 in Olomouc. However, in this proposed panel, we aim to pay more attention to the lives and accounts of less academic but similarly interesting explorers. Travelers from Bohemia, Moravia, or Hungary to the East Indies and Further India were less numerous than their counterparts from the traditional colonial empires such as Britain or France but no less motivated in their search for “adventure”, knowledge, artifacts, or new animal species. The line-up includes Czech physicians serving in Sumatra and Java under the Dutch Royal Colonial Army, who were not only prolific writers but also keen collectors, whose assemblages of indigenous objects provided foundations for museum collections in Prague and Vienna. The Czech circle also involved naturalists and diplomats, including Jan Havlasa who served as a member of the League of Nations’ Opium Commission, sent to Southeast Asia in 1929 in the interest of the international struggle against this drug, while the Hungarian one boasts a certain Ernő Zboray, who lived in Java for 30 years and created a fantastic collection of Javanese wayang puppets. And there were many more...

These explorers were notable public figures in their times and one may assume their names have slid into oblivion, but the contrary is true: their books are being re-edited in their home countries, their life stories and achievements become topics of students’ thesis, their vast knowledge is still appreciated and their patriotism and adventurous zeal are seen as exemplary.