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Dear Prof. Meijers,

You have asked for my advice on Jiri Janac's PhD thesis, *European Coasts of Bohemia. Negotiating the Danube-Oder-Elbe canal in a Troubled Twentieth Century*, which has been nominated for the judicium of "cum laude". I have now read the thesis and my assessment, based on the questions you posed, is the following:

Janac's thesis studies the planning of and negotiations concerning a canal that was never built. But as he convincingly argues, the most interesting question is not why the canal was never built, but how the plans for a canal could be kept alive despite huge political turmoils for more than a century. The answer to this latter question has largely to do with the hydraulic experts involved in the planning, who managed to revive the issue after each major political rupture and legitimize it in the ideological frameworks of the new era. An important reason why they were not able to realize their plans was that they never had time enough – "the story could have been different if the Central Powers had won World War I or the Nazis World War II" (p. 241).

Janac states his purpose and his problems clearly in the introduction chapter. He relates his work to relevant recent scholarship on infrastructure, transnational history and environmental history, and he has chosen a fruitful methodological approach by combining approaches from some of these earlier studies.

Janac's work is innovative in several aspects. It is part of a larger innovative effort initiated by Professor Johan Schot to analyze the hidden integration of Europe by looking at technical experts aiming to build transnational infrastructures. It is innovative in its broad scope, combining infrastructure studies, transnational approach and environmental history. It is also innovative in that it builds on sources that have not been accessible earlier, and it has obviously involved great effort to get hold of them.

The thesis is very clearly written. The language is excellent and the structure of the book is simple and clear with one empirical chapter devoted to each of the four historical periods and an introducing and concluding chapter. The concluding discussion clearly answers the questions posed in the introduction.

My impression is that Janac's own contribution is very significant for the simple reason that his Dutch supervisors are not familiar with the sources and the context, while the Czech supervisor is (I believe) not so familiar with the approach.

I think that the thesis contains an excellent analysis of the problems posed and convincingly shows that a canal that was never built can be an excellent lens shedding new light on European history.

My conclusion is that Janac's thesis is indeed worthy of "cum laude". It is a very fine piece of scholarship and an unusually strong PhD thesis.

Sincerely,

Arne Kaijser