



**University of Hradec Králové
Philosophical Faculty
Dept. of Philosophy and Social Sciences**

Review of Supervisor

Name	Brian Vernon McClellan				
Title	The Geographical Influence on the Development of Early Slavic Culture and Society				
Study degree program	International Area Studies				
Supervisor	Martin Palecek, Ph.D.				
Reviewer	Jiri Hutecka, Ph.D.				
External Consultant	NA				
Year of Defense	2019				
Length of the Thesis: 50 pages					
Pictures	yes - no	Index	yes - no	Other	NA

Sources:

7 books, 11 other sources

Evaluation of the main argument

The aim of Mr. McClellan's thesis is to prove a hypothesis about the geographical determination of the West Slavic ethnic group development influenced by Jared Diamond's work. The Second chapter (after Introduction) focuses on the methodology. The Third chapter defines Slavic ethnic groups and identifies them (rather controversially) with Lusitanian culture. The Fourth chapter focuses on the migration of Slavic people. The Fifth chapter describes different Slavic groups (East, West, and South Slavs). The Sixth chapter specifies environmental influence, and causal relation between geography and cultural development of Slavic groups.

Mr. McClellan concludes that geographical and environmental influence was deterministic and rather decisive. According to him, environmental conditions even led Slavs to abandon their traditional tribal religion in favor of Christianity and change Moravia from proto-state stage into an empire. It also led Bohemians to protect their "culture", and Bulgarian Slavs to lose theirs.



Evaluation of content

<i>Appropriate usage of scientific sources</i>	Yes	With reservation	No
<i>Usage of scientific terminology</i>	Yes	With reservation	No
<i>Adequate methodology</i>	Yes	With reservation	No
<i>Fulfilment of the declared goals of the thesis</i>	Yes	With reservation	No

Evaluation of the formal standards of the thesis

<i>Style of language</i>	Excellent	Good	Poor
<i>Citation practice</i>	Excellent	Good	Poor

The key objections against the main argument

Mr. McClellan's thesis is heavily dependent on Jared Diamond's methodology used in his book *Guns, germs and steel* (1997). This fact alone makes it disputable. Despite rather controversial methodology Diamond succeeded in bringing the environmental issue back into the debate of cultural evolution. Nevertheless, Diamond's work is limited due to the isolated ethnic groups he analyzed. Therefore, any direct application of his method on the development of the so-called Slavic people is deeply problematic. Of course, there is no dispute that environment has its impact on local development and construction of social conditions. Nevertheless, what is not really clear is how far this impact goes and why it should be considered more important than historical, habitual or religious causation.

The second problem is connected to the limited sources that Mr. McClellan used. His lack of ability to read German or Czech left him dependent on the limited amount of more or less outdated English sources.

The third problem is deeply connected with the second. Based on the outdated ideas, Mr. McClellan uses a cluster of categories and theories that have been proven disputable. For example, the idea of "Slavic democracy" is based on the German philosopher Herder's speculations that became handy for nationalistic argumentation in 19th century. The idea itself is more connected with political ambitions rather than based on any kind of ethnographic evidence. Similar problem is also connected with the author's definition of Slavic ethnic groups, assuming, without any evidence, the idea of Lusatian culture as proto-Slavic, and ignoring possible Slavic-Germanic character of several excavated settlements (for instance Březno u Loun), etc.



The key objections against the formal standards used in the thesis

No page reference in citations.

Question for the discussion

- 1) Can you specify your understanding of an ethnicity? What defines an ethnicity? Is language crucial for ethnic groups?
- 2) Why do you believe that environmental conditions are a stronger determinant for the development of ethnic groups rather than historical or habitual conditions?

Despite my reservations and critical comments, I recommend the submitted thesis with the tentative grade of pass.

Hradec Kralove, January 29, 2019

Martin Palecek