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Supervisor's review of the PhD thesis of Marie Drábková

At the time Marie joined our lab, dicyemids, Marie's phd topic, were a brand-new line of research started in collaboration with Václav Hypša and Jan Zrzavý. New topics mean new challenges often mercilessly thrown at a student. It was not different with the dicyemids, or mesozoans in the wider context. Not only they represent a truly enigmatic group of animals, evading any attempts to be analysed phylogenetically, they are also difficult to isolate in an uncontaminated culture (for "omic" sequencing purposes) or as individuals for a population genetic analysis.

Even though Maruška did her undergraduate studies in a different field, of soil ecology and biochemistry, she managed to deal with all the challenges posed by the new topic. She successfully participated in field collecting, with a majority of the analysed samples obtained by herself, and she prepared DNA and RNA for high-throughput sequencing. She then mastered bioinformatic and phylogenetic analysis of the data, meticulously decontaminated phylogenomic datasets produced by previous studies to include her data and analyse them. She also succeeded with single-individual genotyping of dicyemids for a population genetic analysis.

Maruška also proved to be a successful mentor. She supervised three bachelor students. All of them defended their theses and continued into the master's programme. Finally, since Maruška became a mother of twins (a life-time supervisor), she managed to juggle between her family commitments and preparing the thesis and finishing her manuscripts, even after a few of our foreign collaborators backed out a bit.

I am very much looking forward for Maruška to present her main findings today and of course I recommend her thesis for a defence.

Jan Štefka

České Budějovice, June 8, 2022.

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