CHAPTER 7

Historiographical Debate: The Case *Legenda Christiani*

In summarizing the debate concerning the authenticity of the *Legenda Christiani*, I have suggested a number of criteria for evaluating that debate in the light of the general historiographic trends. The debate often reflected the tensions in Czech society as well as politics of that time. I have abstained from a general reflection on the kind of arguments offered by the two sides in the debate and the way in which the two sides engaged in that debate. Both directly mirror more general trends in historiography. As already mentioned in the introduction, a good framework for evaluating the historiographic production of this controversy is composed of three key theoretical dimensions: communication; game and network theory; and the concept of “historiographic field” and capital in its different forms (cultural, social, etc.) introduced by Pierre Bourdieu.¹

The discursive strategies can be described in terminology of the theory of games, which is the first important concept of our thinking about the historiography. Such assumptions may help us better understand the case of the *Legenda Christiani*. After the discovery of the legend and the formulation of a thesis regarding its origin and historical value, a communication situation emerged. Balbín discovered a text and decided to produce an interpretation, thus establishing a number of key questions and possible answers, which defined the framework of discussion for the subsequent generations of

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¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Teorie jednání* (Prague: Karolinum, 1998), e.g. 13–16. On the term “symbolic capital”, see e.g. Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociological theory* 7 (1989): 14–25. Max Weber’s notion of the “charisma” on his work on sociology of religion is close to this concept. The difference between the two ideas is that Bourdieu, unlike Weber, did not considered the forces which support domination and those which oppose it as adverse. This hypothesis transforms the idea of a dialectic relation between a language and a speaker, or bewteen an individual and society, into a rather general language of physics which might subsequently make possible mathematical formalization. On attempts at this formalization by means of game theory and net tehoery, see at least Michael J. Lovaglia et al., “Negotiated Exchanges in Social Networks,” *Social Forces* 74 (1995): 123–155; Henry A. Walker et al., “Network Exchanges Theory: Recent Developments and New Directions,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63 (2000): 324–337. These attempts are typical especially of economics and require a rather complicated mathematical apparatus. A few final passages of this chapter are only a mere glimpse, a sketch of possibilities.
Historiographical debate

scholars. One can imagine this communication situation as a move. Balbín’s opponent Dobner recognized his arguments and called attention to what he regarded as their inconsistency. At the same time, he extended the spectrum of issues associated with the authenticity of the *Legenda Christiani* by adding new counter-arguments and insisting upon the importance of assessing the historical value of the *Legenda Christiani*. In this way, he stressed the complexity of the issue. Dobner’s approach may also be viewed again as a move in the game. At the same time, Dobner’s contribution appears to have increased the distance between Balbín, the reader interested in the *Legenda Christiani*, and the legend itself. As the number of the possible solutions grew, the complexity of the issue (the authenticity of the *Legenda Christiani*) increased accordingly. A scholar’s abilities are measured by the number of issues that he or she can discuss. A change occurs when the number of accepted issues is larger than that of the issues “in the game” at a given moment.

The complexity of the issue consists of end solutions and partial arguments. The concept at stake is therefore never stable, as single solutions exist only within the realm of their application, that is, in the reflections of specific historians in a network of communication. If they are not applied or reproduced any more, the complexity of the concept at stake is reduced accordingly. This is the case of those events which we associate with the weight of a particular authority in the realm of science. This may also explain why the superficial reception of certain concepts could sometimes spread very fast (e.g., the compulsory, politically correct citations from Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, or the fashionable references to the Annales school in more recent time), but still help the association of a group of historians to the work cited.

Historians, as professionals, have a common interest in the past. However, before 1850, the interest in the past was not necessarily connected with professional “training”, but, the rebirth of universities and strengthening of nationalistic discourse helped to give the interest in the past its form and material basis. Thanks to this process, history established itself as an independent discipline with its own rules (“historiographic field”). The participation in historiographic debates started to be limited to those who were familiar with a specific code, a discourse. The definition of historiographical topics was rarely precise, for it emerged in the course of communication – we can imagine the topics of historiographical debates as “symbolic centres” (or as key nodes in historiographical network). In a setting, both topics and their solutions would

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