

Biography as an Interpretative Model of Cultural Transfers: The Case of Peter Paul Vergerio the Younger and the Habsburg borderlands*

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This article argues for the analytical value of the concept of *cultural biography* in understanding processes of cultural transfer. Biography is treated here as a social construct that reflects an individual's functioning within the public sphere, shaped by stable dispositions and social roles. The notion of *transfer*, in turn, encompasses not only the spread of ideas but also of attitudes, dispositions, and practices, offering a more nuanced framework for describing the formation of cultural communities. The analysis focuses on the life of Pier Paolo Vergerio the Younger (c. 1498–1565), a theologian, publicist, and reformer from Koper in Istria. His biography illustrates the intersection of two cultural models – the humanist and the reformer – and highlights his activity within the cultural borderlands of the Habsburg territories. Vergerio's connections with Slovenian and Croatian reformers occupy a significant place in the broader history of European culture. The article concludes by proposing *cultural biography* as a fruitful category for comparative cultural research.

KEYWORDS: Pier Paolo Vergerio the younger; cultural transfers; cultural biography; borderland; Slovenian Reformation

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Introduction

No culture develops in isolation, as contact and exchange are the primary mechanisms of enrichment and development that lead to the re-configuration of the symbolic field. Contact influences the dynamics of change both within a given culture and within larger symbolic communities – what can be referred to as cultural areas or civilizational spaces – such as, for example, Central Europe, Habsburg Europe, or the Balkans in the historical-cultural sense. The metaphors invoked – *area*, *space*, *community*, as well as the once-important dispute over the categories of *culture* and *civilization* and their scope – reveal, on the one hand, the need for categorization and, on the other hand, uncertainty about the criteria and validity of distinguishing typological wholes (cf. Hannerz, 1996). Yet the question of the mechanisms and essence of the functioning of symbolic and communicative communities – broader than national ones – does not lose its importance. Although the national perspective has a relatively recent history, having imposed its primacy only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it remains a dominant principle for categorizing cultures. A look at the pre-national era, however, allows us to describe mechanisms of symbolic exchange that also characterize the present day but tend to be obscured by the self-referential nature of national discourses and the dominance of national institutions in the cultural field, especially in literature.

Without attempting to resolve the disputes mentioned above, I would like to propose the metaphor of the *space of transfers* as a model that facilitates understanding the formation and relative stability of a space of shared ideas, symbols, and practices. *Transfer* refers to the transmission of certain cultural patterns and modes of interpretation, as well as their integration into local structures of understanding (cf. Ther, 2010). However, transfers do not occur spontaneously: the transfer of ideas, attitudes, or behaviors depends on individuals acting within different environments. The advantage of the notion of *transfer space*, I suggest, lies in its emphasis not only on the dissemination of ideas but also on shared practices in the social and symbolic fields, connected to the actions of specific social actors. In this text, I aim to demonstrate the usefulness of *cultural biography* as a tool for understanding the space of transfers and the formation of a particular type of translocal culture in the humanist

period. I argue that the figure of Pier Paolo Vergerio the Younger (1498–1565) provides a particularly illustrative example of an individual who co-created this space of transfers.

The study of the *space of transfers* can reveal the distinctive nature of borderlands as cultural wholes. I argue that Vergerio's biography helps us understand the unique character of the Habsburg borderlands, which encompassed the hereditary lands of the House of Habsburg in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This region, situated on the periphery of the German Empire, formed a coherent whole despite its transitional position between larger cultural entities: Italy, the German lands, Hungary, and Slavic Croatia. I suggest that this space should be viewed not only as a zone of reception of influences but also as a site where those influences underwent distinctive transformation. Using Vergerio as an example, we can trace the directions and local specificities of these transfers, thereby modeling the area.

Cultural biography as a research category

I propose to look at Peter Paulus Vergeri's biography as a special case of cultural biography. I understand the concept of cultural biography, following Agata Rybińska, as such “a biography that can be written down and interpreted, taking into account the main elements, categories and processes that characterize one or many cultures” (Rybińska, 2020, 19). Vergerio's biography combines multiple localities, takes place in different environments, and uniquely violates expectations of clear-cut categorization. It is certainly impossible to apply a national measure to it, and it is difficult to categorize it in any other unambiguous way. Vergerio functioned within a vast network of connections between various local centres, with exceptional mobility linking centres south, north and east of the Alps. It can be assumed that the cultural biography thus reconstructed becomes a certain semiotic communication, a meaningful whole (Stanford, 2016); however, it must be remembered that it is immersed in the world of real interactions. Real-life actions, however, provide the basis for a certain generalization, for what interests social and cultural scientists is a certain typicality, for the purpose of the biographical

method, as Merill and West emphasize, is to understand social processes, not individual motivations (Merill, West, 2009). It is important to stress that I don't intend to present any new date about Vergerio's biography, but I would like to show how it can help us to understand cultural processes, using the title category.

At this point it is necessary to emphasize two more important features related to the concept of cultural biography. The emphasis on the cultural dimension means trying to reconstruct not so much the individual choices and their motivations – here, moreover, there are not enough sources available for the fate of Vergerio the younger and this individual dimension is left to the literary imagination (Tomizza, 1984). At stake is the interpretation of biography in the socio-cultural field, in the perspective of the conditions inherent precisely in this field understood, according to Bourdieu's theory, as a space of dynamic relations between actors (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Unlike Bourdieu, my goal is not to reconstruct the relations of domination and struggle for capital, although this has an important dimension in interpreting Vergerio's actions. The task of the analyses I present in this article is to describe the formation of a space of cultural transfers that allows us to speak of a relatively stable cultural community of humanist Europe, with its specific variety in the Habsburg hereditary lands. Common to Bourdieu is the notion that the key element in the space of transfers are actors such as Vergerio. When reconstructing this type, it is important to keep in mind the narrative power over the material under study; careful control over the researcher's own analysis and imposition of his or her gaze is crucial (Całek, 2016).

Centres and cultural paradigms

An important stage in my research was to identify the centres and cultural paradigms that played a key role in shaping Vergerio's cultural and social dispositions.¹ These are therefore places that influenced the

¹ Literature on various aspects of Vergerio's life and work is abundant, especially since he influenced the cultural destinies of several areas, Swiss, Slovenian, Prussian (Polish), to varying degrees. However, a comprehensive biography of the

formation of Vergerio's *habitus*, i.e. his system of dispositions towards possible life choices related to functioning in the social sphere. A more detailed study would need to take into account the places he stayed, his reading and his circle of acquaintances. In this text, I highlight only the most important of these; what matters more to me is the cultural and social specificity of a given place that influenced the formation of a *habitus* of a young intellectual trying to build a career in the public sphere.

Vergerio the younger was born in Capodistria (today's Koper), which at that time belonged to the Republic of Venice. Koper is an important biographical location for two reasons. Firstly, it belonged to Venice, which predetermined the educational path of the young Vergerio, as it led to Padua, which belonged to the Serenissima and had a monopoly on university education' he obtained there a doctorate in law and canon law. As Anne Jacobson Schutte points out, this was a period when Venice was establishing its image as a state with the most perfect form of government, as well as a moment of 'euphoric optimism' after victorious wars and at the height of its economic and political power (Schutte, 1977, 37; Robey & Law, 1975; cf. Wojtkowska-Maksymik, 2023). Secondly, Vergerio's place of birth connected him to the Slavic world. Vergerio returned to Koper many times, and in 1536 he obtained the bishopric of Capodistria, which stabilised his position in the church hierarchy (although he expected better remuneration in recognition of his services to the papacy and was not ordained until 1541). He spent the years 1541–1546 in Koper, attempting to implement some elements of the Reformation (Cavazza, 2017). Living on the Italian-Slavic border created the conditions for him to undertake a task that he took on at a certain point in his life, namely to establish cooperation with the Slovenian Protestant movement; this issue will be discussed later.

Due to the specific nature of Venice's oligarchic caste system, which limited career opportunities (see King, 2019), Vergerio decided to seek

Istrian reformer is still lacking. The primary reference texts for me were the invaluable work of Anne Jacobson Schutte (1977) and the concise but cross-sectional text of Slaven Bertoša (2011). I would like to stress here that I didn't intend to rewrite Vergerio's biography, but propose a tool to understand the cultural transfers in the humanist Europe, and a specificity of the Habsburg borderland.

a career in Rome, which was another important point in his biography. The publications in Latin, which he did in the Venice period, was a kind of act of joining the community of humanists, an entry into the world of educated people with the hope of a future career (cf. Pierno, 2018, 97–98). Similarly, his association with the group centred around Pietro Bembo allowed the young Vergerio to enter a network of contacts that was the beginning of a possible career (Schutte, 1977, 34), and the contacts he made in Rome thanks to his brother, and later during his career in the Roman Curia, allowed him to enter the circle of the political elite of the Apennine Peninsula (Cavazza, 2020).

Vergerio came from a noble but impoverished family; for him and his brothers, the main career path was church service. An ambitious man, he sought a career and used his knowledge in the service of the Roman Curia. During his years of service to the papacy, there was a period of heated disputes in Western Christianity, triggered by the actions of Martin Luther, and it was in the 1530s and 1540s that the disputes and debates reached their climax, as did the accompanying political processes. For Vergerio, service in the Roman Curia meant the beginning of both a theological and diplomatic career; moreover, the difficulty in separating these two spheres is symptomatic of the era. Furthermore, not only education and excellence in Latin, but also taking an active part in the public life and a drive for a career were another signs of the humanist Renaissance *habitus* (cf. Blažević, 2017). During the pontificates of Clement VII and Paul III, the question of reforming the Church, restoring the unity of the Christian world and Rome's dominance over the political world became a pressing task. As part of his diplomatic service, he embarked on a journey that remained centred on Rome until he was accused of heresy. According to Anne Jacobson Schutte, Vergerio put considerable organisational and polemical effort into the preparations for the ecumenical council (Schutte, 80–104). His exclusion from the deliberations caused him great disappointment and a loss of faith in his previous relations with the papacy.

During this period, the clergyman from Koper carried out various missions involving trips to German countries and Austria. As early as 1533, he was appointed apostolic nuncio to the court of the Roman (German) King Ferdinand I Habsburg in Vienna. After two years, he returned

to Italy and was assigned to work on preparations for the ecumenical council in Mantua, which, however, met with resistance from the German clergy (Bertoša, 2011, 155–157). His second term as nuncio lasted from 1535 to 1536 and was filled with travels through German countries, including Munich, Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, and Prague, which was then the centre of religious unrest in Bohemia. Vergerio met with leading representatives of the Reformation, including Martin Luther himself (Cavazza, 2020, 16–17). Mobility was associated with the function of a clergyman, but it was also a sign of belonging to a group of educated elites connected by networks of dependencies. Mobility accompanied the desire for a career in politics, which was inextricably linked to the fields of theology, propaganda and culture. It can be assumed that Vergerio's activities were also accompanied by personal passion and perhaps a sense of mission – according to Schutte, Vergerio put a lot of energy into convening the general council and considered being denied the right to participate in the deliberations a great personal failure (Schutte, 1977, 80–91; Bertoša, 2011, 159).

By engaging in both intellectual and political life during the Roman period, Vergerio was part of a certain cultural paradigm. I base this concept on the theoretical premisses of Victor Turner, who described a pattern of behaviour appropriate to a given function, attitude and the values associated with them (Turner 2005); the paradigm can also be considered a kind of scenario for behaviour in the public arena, linked to one's role and projected gain. Vergerio's missions were related to public activity, for which a certain pattern developed during the Italian humanism period, and later adopted throughout Europe, was necessary to him. It assumed erudition and competence in Latin, as well as knowledge of theology and philosophy and the ability to act in the public forum. Moreover, humanists were eager to engage in political life. During this period, Vergerio successfully carried out the tasks assigned to him by his *habitus* as a humanist-politician. This combination of knowledge, philosophy and politics created a specific lifestyle, universalised among humanists and characteristic of them (cf. Sellars 2020). His particular mobility can be considered a specific feature, although not unique in Europe at that time as being a feature of the paradigm of humanist-politician. Thanks to this, he created a network of acquaintances that he was able to use later on.

After his forced emigration from the Apennine Peninsula in 1549, Vergerio stayed in Grisons in the first years after his second trial and conviction for heresy.² Grisons is, of course, closest to the Italian area and gave the theologian hope of gaining influence among Italians, however, he did not manage to return to the Apennine Peninsula, and the influence of the Reformation in Italy remained minimal; the term 'Italian reformer', often used in reference to him, therefore refers more to his origins and period of formation than to the influence of his political and theological activities. Instead, his influence on the religious movement in the South Slavic countries, especially in the Slovenian area, was greater. The episode in Grisons is significant in that a sedentary life in a small community did not correspond to the scenarios pursued by Vergerio (on his stay in Grisons, cf. Cavazza, 1991). It did not fit into either the existing paradigm of the humanist-politician or the later paradigm of the humanist-reformer; his stay in Grisons can therefore be considered a turning point, when Vergerio gave up his desire to influence Italian affairs directly and matured to undertake a mission in transalpine Europe.

With regard to the period after 1549, when Vergerio had to leave the Apennine Peninsula and go into exile, it is difficult to identify a single centre, as the theologian and diplomat led a nomadic lifestyle. However, it should be noted that his travels focused around the most important centres of Protestant Europe: Württemberg and the court of Duke Christopher, Königsberg and Tübingen. Later, he remained in the service of Emperor Maximilian II, and Vienna was the centre of his activities in the 1550s, when he was in close contact with Slovenian reformers. He then stayed in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, establishing contacts with Jan Łaski and Prince Albrecht in Königsberg. His travels to

² Vergerio was first accused in 1544 of having too close ties with Protestants during his missions, even though he gave no evidence of deviating from Roman orthodoxy. He was cleared of the charges, but was nevertheless removed from participation in the council. A second accusation was made four years later. Vergerio chose emigration over a trial in front of the Inquisition tribunal in Venice, and it was only after emigrating that he began to actively participate in the Protestant movement. The accusations were probably the result of intrigues against him within the Curia (cf. Schutte, 1977).

Prussia were an important step in spreading the Protestant movement in Lithuania, as evidenced by Vergerio's contacts with Prince Radziwiłł (Pociūtė, 2017). He spent the last years of his life in Protestant cities in central Germany, eventually settling in Tübingen. During this period, Vergerio's biography fits into the paradigm of a humanist-reformer who also engages in political action. The humanist from Koper used his previously established network of contacts and capitalised on his position as an erudite, theologian, skilled orator and publicist. This paradigm is characterised by transcending political boundaries, not to mention ethnic ones. In the world of educated elites, who shared a common background despite their different religious affiliations, Vergerio's *habitus* gave him advantages that he skilfully exploited.

Borderland experience

Koper was located on the border between the Italian-speaking and Slovenian-speaking areas. Speaking today's language, the Republic of Venice was a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state; at the height of its economic development, in the 15th and 16th centuries, it was a place that attracted career-hungry people from different parts of Europe and from Venetian estates, there were communities of Germans (or rather, people from German countries), Greeks, French, etc. in the lagoon city (Čoralić, 2003). According to Lovorka Čoralić, the peak of the migration of Slavs from the eastern Adriatic coast in Venice was at the end of the 15th and the first half of the 16th century (Čoralić, 1993, 39).³ In Venice itself, Slavs made up a significant percentage of permanent residents and a significant percentage of visitors – merchants, sailors, scholars, officials. The experience of multiplicity characterized the entire region under the authority of Serenissima (Ivetic, 2021, 265–266). I will call it the

3 I do not want to discuss in the article the relationship between Dalmatia and Venice and its place in the Venetian empire throughout history, as this is a complex topic. My remarks refer to the 15th and 16th centuries; the great change in the attitude of Venetians toward Dalmatian subjects occurs in the 18th century, see Wolff, 1997.

experience of the borderland, characteristic of the zone of Italian-Slavic contact precisely in the Slovenian Primorska and Dalmatia.

The borderland as a specific cultural and social entity presupposes the co-presence and contact of elements of neighbouring cultural zones and their dynamic, dialectical relationship. What is important for the specificity of the borderland is the remoteness from the cultural centres of the areas that are in contact; in other words, borderland areas do not fit into the norm of a given culture and require a special methodological approach (cf. Reill, 2021, 1–13). In the 16th century, this issue was drawn differently than in the era of nationalisms, in the 19th and 20th centuries. There was not yet an established Italian cultural norm, even though we are accustomed to thinking of the period of humanism as the era of Italy's absolute dominance in culture. The symbolic sphere had not yet undergone homogenization leading to the establishment of a cultural norm or political centralization, however the Tuscan dialect had gained prestige and was propagated as an idiom of the educated and a possible basis for the cultural unity of Italy.⁴ The polycentricity of the Italian area also meant that institutions did not develop that could be centres for creating the norm, in other words, the standard of Italian culture. On the other hand, through the improvement of the literary language of expression and the awareness of the importance of Italy in the European culture of that era, a consciousness of Italian identity was formed, which, however, was the property of the sphere of educated elites. Precisely, the “culture” could become a tool of unity despite the political and administrative fragmentation. The Italian experience was certainly important for the humanist-reformer, namely the awareness of the existence of a community (of language, today we would say: of culture) above political divisions. In the activities of reformers, language – the vehicle of God's word – would also become a tool for unification. Communication of the Word of God was crucial for the Reformation movement, that explains the place of translations and

⁴ An interesting record of the process of propagating a cultural norm through a standard (that's a modern term, of course) literary language is an article by F. Pierno, in which he compares the presence of the local Italian Venetian and Tuscan idioms in Vergerio's writings (Pierno, 2018).

pre-standardization of the language in reformers' activity (cf. Jambrek, 2015). It was the main reason of Vergerio's involvement in the process of translation of the Holy Bible and other important texts into Slavic; as Primož Trubar claimed in one of his letters from 1557, "Vergerio, after the God, was the most important factor for the beginning of translating" (Jembrih, 2007, 24). We can assume that the most important reason for Vergerio to engage in translating books into Slavonic was precisely his desire to spread the word of God among the faithful, and at the same time the ideals of the Reformation. He was undoubtedly aided by the experience he gained not only during his travels and debates in Protestant countries, but also during his brief stay in Grisons; all these experiences confirmed the importance of communication in the vernacular.

The fragmentation of the area was also clear in the Slavic case, where it would be even more difficult to speak of the formation of any form of cultural standard. There were no basically permanent centres for the formation of a narrative centred on the specific identity of the Slavic population of today's Slovenian or Croatian area, and there were neither institutions nor active patrons interested in supporting cultural production in the spirit of a Slavic supra-regional community. Neither political distinctiveness nor even nominal Roman traditions as in the case of, for example, Roman Gaul or Illyria⁵ spoke for Slovenian distinctiveness.

Vergerio was a frontiersman, a citizen of the Republic of Venice, which was characterized by diversity. The Italian example and the experience of Reformation made it clear to him that the language could be an useful tool to create the community of communication. He was familiar with the Slovenian language, and as a learned man he was versed in the Slavic writing tradition of the Glagolitic, the use of which was still

5 It is worth recalling that, according to researchers of national cultures and policies, homogenization was a key step in defining the national community in the 19th and 20th centuries. I understand this process as the creation of a norm of national culture, a certain standard that must apply to all members of a given ethnonational group. Polycentricity and multiplicity of political and regional loyalties were characteristic for the Italian and Slovenian areas during the period in question. This does not deny the existence of universalist identifications among elites, for example, humanist, Christian or Slavic. Cf. Angyal, 1961; Brogi Berkoff, 1988; Gellner, 1991.

alive at the time in nearby Istria, as well as in the Senj region and the Adriatic islands.⁶ His first language was, of course, Italian in its local dialectal variety, namely the Venetian dialect commonly used in Venetian estates on the eastern side of the Adriatic; it should be added here that Italian remained Vergerio's main language of correspondence and intimate language. Still, he remained a man of the universal culture of the Latin language, and for this reason, it can be said, Latinness allowed him to function "at home" in the entire area in which he moved – it was this that guaranteed the unity of the cultural world of the European elite from Rome to Königsberg, despite the deepening confessional divisions.⁷

What was important to me, however, from the perspective of cultural biography inscribed in geographic space, was the very openness of the borderland described above: openness not only to linguistic multiplicity, but also to diverse cultural experience. As I will try to show further, this undoubtedly influenced the activities he undertook in connection with his stay in Vienna and Tübingen. As it seems, he was free from the tendency to value cultural areas or various *nationes*, although a kind of identity pride was then beginning to be a feature of humanistic learned historiography (cf. Brogi Berkoff, 1988). I believe that this attitude of Vergerio's was related firstly to the purpose of his activity – at first to preserve the unity of Christianity and later to support Reformation theology, and secondly to his experience of the borderland and his knowledge of both cultural areas, Italian and Slavic.⁸

6 The Protestant printing house, which operated in Urach and was financed mainly by Baron Ungnad with whom Vergerio cooperated, printed books in the Latin alphabet, Glagolitic script and Cyrillic script (Damjanović 2007, 17).

7 By necessity, I am using here a rhetorical shorthand for the unity of Latin Europe; in my perspective, it is crucial to see the Latin cultural area as a communicating area in which elites from different centres and backgrounds participated. The condition for communication was not only knowledge of the language, but also the sphere of imagery, references, rhetorical tropes, conditioning effective communication and reproduction of cultural patterns. On communication, see Żyłko 2008, pp. 98–180.

8 It should be remembered that the Reformation activists took as their goal the reform of the Church, while the development of local languages and their standardization became a means, not an end. This was the case, for example, with the most active Slovenian activist Primož Trubar, cf. Grmič 1986.

Federico Zuliani noted that Vergerio began publishing polemical writings, tracts and religious proclamations in Italian during his period of exile in Grisons; moreover, it was then that Vergerio was born a publicist who gained notoriety precisely because of his polemical writings (Zuliani, 2013, 76). On the one hand, this was probably the influence of the Reformation's guiding principle, that is, to reach the faithful with the Word of God and truly Christianize the faithful on the right path to salvation. On the other hand, as Zuliani emphasized, Vergerio found himself in an environment of Lombard-Swiss political borderlands, as well as Italian, German and Rhaeto-Romance linguistic ones. In addition, since the late 1520s, the valleys of the Grisons had been in favour of the Reformation. These factors made Vergerio realize the need to address the faithful in the vernacular rather than the scholarly language; it was Italian that was to be the effective vehicle for the true faith. The impact of the Reformation and the experience of the frontier must have formed a new style of communication; it also formed a new figure for Vergerio as an intermediary in cultural flows not only in the area of elite communication, but also between the various linguistic areas and local centres within the Reformed Christian community.

Habsburg frontier

Before the restrictive reign of Ferdinand II and the recatholization of his Austrian possessions, the Habsburg area, including the so-called Inner Austria, which included lands inhabited by Slovenians (Gorizia, Carniola, Styria, Carinthia), was susceptible to the influence of the Reformation. The Habsburg frontier, remaining within the borders of the German Empire, was an interesting area of contact between the German cultural area, the Slavic-speaking area and, in the south, the Italian-speaking area. On the one hand, cultural and social processes in the Slovenian area were strongly connected with what was happening in the German countries, with the southeastern limit of the extent of German-speaking settlement running through Carinthia and Styria. On the other hand, the Italian influence in the southern Habsburg countries (in Gorizia, Trieste, but also in Carinthia and Istria) was considerable. Although the Slavs

were nowhere a dominant group and did not have an elite interested in creating a high culture in the Slovenian language, the Slovenians were definitely considered an offshoot of the great Slavic nation and were linked especially to the rest of the southern Slavs because of their linguistic proximity. Through this route, knowledge of Slavic liturgy, then alive in the Croatian-Dalmatian area and in Istria, reached the Slovenian area. Urban centres such as Koper, Ljubljana and Klagenfurt became important sites of intellectual transfers.

In the exile, Vergerio maintained contacts with Maximilian Habsburg serving as a Habsburg envoy (Esswein 2016, 117–121). In 1555, he met Primož Trubar personally and became involved in the Reformation movement among the Slovenes, and ultimately further southern Slavs (cf. Cavazza, 2020, 28–31). The former bishop of Koper himself did not settle in the Slovenian area, but he had direct contact with Slavic reformers in Vienna, Tübingen and Wittenberg, not forgetting that these two centres were supra-local centres of the Reformation in Central Europe. Vergerio supported the concept of translating the Bible into Slavonic; although he himself did not participate in the translation work and, as Primož Trubar maliciously claimed, did not translate a word, his organizational zeal was important for the emergence of the Bible for the southern Slavs (Cavazza, 2020, 30). By this time, the Istrian reformer was already a well-known figure as a politician first involved in dialogue with Protestants, a papal nuncio at the Viennese court, a protagonist in a trial for heresy and finally an anti-papal publicist. Arguably, it was easier for him to find agreement with donors, such as duke Christopher and the Church of Württemberg, Maximilian or Baron Ugnad, with whom he maintained good relations despite his conflict with Trubar (Betroša, 2011, 161). Benjamin Esswein even argues that without Vergerio, it would be difficult to speak of Trubar's translation achievements (Esswein, 2016, 104).

Conclusion

It is clearly possible to divide Vergerio's biography into a cis-Alpine period and a trans-Alpine period; however, this stereotypical division

of humanist Europe's civilization falls out to be nuanced by the specific experience of the borderlands, for which Vergerio will be the perfect example. In the first "cis-Alpine" period, his route leads through three centres: Koper, Padua and Rome. This is the usual itinerary of a man who acquires an education and aspires to a career in the fields available at the time, that is, primarily in diplomacy and/or science. Particularly in the case of a career at the papal or royal court, the recognition of other humanists became a test of competence, and, of course, also contributed to enhancing the prestige of the principal. As Farbaky notes with regard to Hungarian humanists who succeeded in a career in ecclesiastical structures, the key was "extensive knowledge and often personal Italian experience of the new style reviving the antique arts" (Farbaky, 2009, 273). Access to the field of politics was therefore limited and required appropriate certification or competence, but was open to non-aristocrats. Erudition and relevant acquaintances made it possible to launch a career of a humanist-politician, during the 'Roma-centred' period of Vergerio's life, transformed thereafter into the paradigm of a humanist-reformer, basing on the social and cultural capital from the previous period.

I believe that a third special area should be added to the stereotypical division into cis-Alpine and trans-Alpine Europe, namely the Habsburg borderland and Dalmatia. This was a special zone of contact and interpenetration between the influences of the three linguistic areas of German, Italian and Slavic, as well as various cultural centres whose influences intersected precisely in the Slovenian area. Significantly, these centres – I have in mind the most important ones like Venice, Padua, Rome, Tübingen, Vienna – were outside this zone. On the one hand, it can be considered that the area was a zone for receiving influences, a periphery to the central nodes of networks, a border zone for the reception of such phenomena as humanism, the Renaissance, the Reformation. On the other hand, the borderland produces its own specificity, being an area of contact, mediation, as well as the formation of specific variants of phenomena present in the centres. Vergerio's involvement in translating religious writings into Slovenian and Croatian stemmed from both the religious zeal of the convert and the experience of the borderland; the experience of the borderland marked Vergerio in his

youth in Koper, as well as later during his brief tenure as bishop in his hometown. Italian and above all Reformation experience showed him importance of the language in the communication process; although it is not possible to see in him any predecessor of the Slavic (or any other national) unity. We should put forward the idea of an efficient communication, as in the Italian or German case; the emerging community of communication would be its result.

The cultural biography of the reformer from Koper combined two paradigms: that of the educated humanist and that of the reformer. In the first stage, the “Italian” stage, his actions in the public sphere were part of the humanist *habitus*, while in his aspirations there was a clear desire for a career, an accession to the highest layer of European *literati*. In this he would differ in his choices from, for example, Marko Marulić, who, despite his erudition and esteemed output on the subject of new spirituality, did not seek a career and chose a stationary life in Split (Rapacka, 2001). In the second stage, the “trans-Alpine”, Vergerio’s destiny combines the patterns developed in the first stage with the Reformation imperative of evangelization. However, Vergerio, unlike, for example, Trubar, was not content with working at the grassroots, propagating the word of God among the faithful. The field of his activity, like earlier, became the highest circles of the political and religious hierarchy and the idea of mission, clearly manifested in two ventures, namely the evangelization of the Prussian–Lithuanian borderlands and, above all, of Slovenia. In the “trans-Alpine” biography, these two models overlap, which was certainly due to Vergerio’s individual dispositions. Being a member of educated elites, he became also a vector of the cultural transfers, going from Italian and German Protestant milieus to the Slovenian (and partly Croatian) speaking area.

Biography taken as a construct can help in understanding cultural processes; it can be especially important in analysing cultural transfers.⁹

⁹ Following Clifford Geertz, I consider cultural biography both as a construct – our attempt to understand the world, but also as “social action in a social world,” a certain cultural structure. Thus, the dual dimension of cultural biography as a structure of understanding as well as practice and action in the world, which I signaled at the beginning, is solidified. Cf. Geertz, 2005, 25.

After all, in the migration of ideas or patterns of practice, models of behaviour and attitudes, the participation of individuals is essential. Vergerio's biography was part of the patterns prevalent in 16th-century Europe, and the associated dispositions to act supported the propagation of ideas, but also practices, organizing the activist's worldview. I think this is also a good starting point for verifying the thesis of the Habsburg frontier as a special space of transfers. The comparative possibilities outlined at the end of the article draw interesting comparative studies.

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