

About the name Kras (Karst) in Slovenia

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Abstract

The term karst derived from the name of the karst plateau called Kras in Slovene, Carso in Italian, and Karst in German. In the antiquity it was called Carsus, Carusadus, Mons Carusad, etc., which came from the root *kar/gar*, *kara/gara*, meaning rock, stone. In the literature there are known numerous examples of names derived the base *kar(r)a/gar(r)a*. Furthermore the word of the regional name Kras in the Slovene language has also a common meaning, that is a rocky, stony, no good or useful (for cultivation or pasture) part of land. In Slovenia it is possible to find many names derived from kras. When we are talking about the term “karst” we are usually considering only the direct link **kar(a)/gar(a)* -> Carusadus -> Kras (Karst, Carso). But beside the regional name there are numerous names, as toponyms, names of geographical and morphological features, of settlements, and of waters derived from this root.

The international term karst derived from the name of the karst plateau in the background of Trieste bay (Adriatic sea), on the Slovene-Italian border, called Kras in Slovene, Carso in Italian and Karst in German language. It covers about 440 km² (40 km long and 13 km wide) and lies at 45° 45' N and 14° E. The altitude is between 200 – 500 m. To the SW it is bounded by Trieste bay, a low lying flysch coast; to the NW lies alluvial Friuli (river Soča – Isonzo) plain; to the NE is low lying alluvial and flysch valley of the Vipava river; to the E and SE there is higher flysch terrain (Brkini hills) crossed by the Reka river, and limestone country continues towards SE, through Istria and along the Adriatic coast. The plateau itself consists of Cretaceous and Tertiary carbonate rocks (KRANJC, 1997).

From the 15th century on, for the travellers coming from the Central Europe (specially from Vienna) towards Trieste, the only possible route passed the country Kras. And between Postojna and Trieste they passed the only “authentic” karst landscape. The traffic intensified specially after 1719 when Trieste got the status of “free port”. The geographers, cartographers, cosmographers, and topographers (Aistingerus, Cluverius, Mercator, Merian, Münster, Ortelius), scientists of the epoch (Agricola, Baucer, Faber, Kircher) and travellers

(Brown), published the descriptions of Kras and its phenomena and thus being the predecessors of modern scientists. Most of the descriptions were published in German language, using German version of the name, which is Karst. At the same time travellers were observing similar phenomena in other limestone countries and compared them with features of the Kras. Knowledge attained so far shows that F. J. HOHENWART (1830) was the first who explicitly wrote in the preface of his guide-book to Postojnska jama cave that Karst stretches from Udine province over the whole of Dalmatia, Dubrovnik, Albania, and a part of Bosnia. In the middle and the second half of the 19th century specially geographers and geologists began to write about Karst and karst phenomena in a larger sense, as for example A. MORLOT (1848) of karst limestone (Karstkalk). Finally at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries term karst became general term as showed by the titles of the then published main works: 1895 - Das Karstphänomen (CVIJIĆ, 1893), Karsthydrographie (GRUND, 1903), Die Seen des Karstes (GAVAZZI, 1904), and Das Karstphänomen ... (PENCK, 1904).

In the antiquity the country, which was in Roman times a part of “Regio X – Venetia et Histria”, was called Carsus, Carusadus, Mons Carusad, Karusad and similar. Predecessors of modern Slovenes who started to settle nowadays territory of Slovenia in the second half of the 6th century, turned *kar* according to the early metathesis in the Slovene language (family of Slavic languages) into *kra* and thus we got the name Kras (RAMOVŠ, 1995). The first written name of Kras is recorded in a document from 1177, in the form of Grast. Italian form Carso and the German Karst are nearer to the original form, while Slovene name Kras changed slightly more.

Most of linguists dealing with this problem agree that the name Carsus, Karst and Kras has the pre-Indo-European or Indo-European root *kar(r)a/gar(r)a*, meaning rock, stone. From the literature there are known numerous examples of the names derived from the pre-Indo-European base *kar(r)a/gar(r)a* in the large regions of Europe. This base was first seriously studied in 1935 by M. G. ALESSIO. The same base covers different forms **kal-*, **gal-*, **kar-*, **gar-*, also **al-*, **ar-* after the fall of the first consonant, and even like in Greek **l-* or **r-*. The same radical can be in the full form **kal-* or in the reduced one **kl-*. To the mentioned eight forms for the same base **kl-*, **gl-*, **kr-*, **gr-* can be added. From this it can be seen what perspectives are given by this system to the field of toponymic research.

Initially **kal-* meant stone, later shelter made of stone, and finally house, fortress or village. There are numerous examples in France: Chelles, Challes, Chalo, Chalou, Caille, Challans, etc. Typical form of karstified French coast are small bays called calanques, calanco in Provençal and calanche in the language of the Corse. The prototype was **kal-anc-us*. Also the name of the karst plateaux in France, Causses, has his origin in **kal-*. **Kar-* appears in composition in the name of the town Carcassone. For us are more interesting La Cra and La Crai in Burgundy, and specially the toponym La Cras in the same region. Well known rocky plane in the delta of Rhone the Crau came from the form **kr-* (ROSTAING, 1974). Not only the toponyms, from the same base derived also the names of other phenomena important for karst: karren from **kar-*, and the French expression for the same, clavier, from **kl-*. While garrigue (typical vegetation association on the karst of the Southern France) came from **gar-*. Base **kr-app-* is known also from Slavic languages, Albanian and “Piemontian”. Slovene expression for **karren** and clavier is **škraplje**. Is it the same base, **kr-app-*? In Croatian language, the word *krš* means karst. The same (*krš-*) is the root in an old Indian language for the verb to plough, to till, the original meaning being to scrape, to scratch (VREČAR, 1984).

In the Slovene language the most of the study of this base was carried out by BEZLAJ and published in “Etymological Vocabulary of the Slovene Language” (1976, 1982, 1995). The words like *kal*, *kar* (limestone rock), *karati*, *Karavanke* Mts., *Koroška* (Carinthia), *Kranj*, *Kras*, *skala* (rock), etc. are treated there.

The name *Kras* and its connection to the root meaning rock, is not problematic. As mentioned already, besides the regional name *Kras* the word in the Slovene language has also a common meaning, that is a rocky, stony, no good or useless (for cultivation or pasture) part of the land. In nowadays Slovenia as well as on the whole territory which was settled by the Slavic tribes between the 6th and 8th centuries, it is possible to find a lot of names containing “*kras*”. That is in that part of the Eastern Alps as far as the springs of the rivers *Drava* and *Mura*, where the border with the Bavarians has been stabilised on the main ridges of the Central Alps. These are either names of small regions (plateaux, ridges, etc.), or plots of land, different smaller settlements (villages, hamlets, farms), etc.

Just browsing the main lists of names such as Encyclopaedia of Slovene place names (SAVNIK, 1968; 1971; 1976; 1980), Atlas of Slovenia (1: 50.000), Field terminology (BADJURA, 1953), Terminology of Julian Alps (TUMA, 1929), and

Toponyms of Istria (TITL, 1998; 2000) a lot of names which are linked with *kras* can be found.

Besides *kras* as a general term there are words in Slovene language linked to *kras*, that is to **kar-*, which means rock or rocky, barren land: *krasica*, *krasina*, *krašce*, *kraščina*, *krašica*, and *krašnja* (BADJURA, 1953). These words are often the base for toponyms too.

In the north-western Istria (TITL, 1998) only there are 35 geographical names called *Kras*. In the same region besides the name *Kras* there are also 51 toponyms linked to this word: *Kras* (21 examples), *Krasič* (3), *Krasica*, *Krasnice*, *Krašca*, *Krašče* (4), *Kraščica*, *Kraščič*, *Krašna*, *Kršič*, *Kršin* (5), *Kršini*, *Kraška njiva*, *Laniški kras*, *Nad kršinom*, *Na krasu*, *Na kršini*, *Pod kršinom*, and *Spodnji kras* (TITL, 2000).

The word *kras* is also the base for forming toponyms in the Julian Alps belonging to the Southern Limestone Alps consisting mainly of carbonate rocks (Mesozoic limestones and dolomites) such as *Kras*, *Krase*, *Kras(i)ce*, *Krasje*, *Krasji vrh*, *Na kras*, *Ostri kras*, *Vodenični kras* (TUMA, 1929).

In the whole Slovenia there are 10 names of settlements (villages and hamlets) connected with the word *kras*: *Krasce*, *Krasinec*, *Krasna*, *Krasno*, *Krašči*, *Kraška vas*, *Krašnja*, *Krašnji vrh*, *Krsinji vrh*, and *Kršič* (SAVNIK, 1968; 1971; 1976; 1980). In the Eastern Alps, where there are no more Slovenes, isolated farms can be found, and their names are based on the word *kras* as well: *Kras*, *Krass*, *Krassbach*, *Krasswald*, and *Krastal* (BADJURA, 1953).

Looking the modern Atlas of Slovenia (KOS, 1996), including parts of Southern Carinthia (where Slovenes are living too) and parts of Istria, belonging to the state of Croatia, there are 40 names connected to *kras*. The most numerous are the names of settlements, hamlets and isolated farms (*Kras*, *Krashitz*, *Krasica*, *Krasinec*, *Krasna*, *Krasnica*, *Krasnig*, *Krasnik*, *Krasno*, *Kraßnitz*, *Krast*, *Krastiči*, *Krašce*, *Krašči*, *Kraščiči*, *Kraševce*, *Krašine*, *Kraška vas*, *Kraški Vrh*, *Krašnja*, *Krašnji Vrh*) followed by names of geomorphological features (*Kras*, *Krasca*, *Krasič*, *Krasine*, *Krasje*, *Krasji vrh*), toponyms (*Kras*, *Krasca*, *Kraškašija*), and only in one case of streams (*Kraščevica*).

Very interesting but relatively long lasting task would be the search through the toponyms on the maps of small scales (1:25.000, 1: 10.000 or 1:5.000) existing for the territory of Slovenia.

When we are talking about the term “karst” we are usually considering only the direct link **kar(a)/gar(a)* → Carusadus → Kras (Karst, Carso). But in fact it is only one of the regions, which got the name from stone, regarding its stony character. There are other regions too, bearing the names from the same root. And beside the regional names there are numerous names, as toponyms, names of geographical and morphological features, settlements (from towns to hamlets and isolated farms), and waters. On the Slovenian territory there are tens, maybe hundreds of them. It is proved that such names are covering the territory of the best developed karst in Europe: from Dinaric Mountains through the Alps to the karst of Provence and Southern France. The word for stone is used in many languages in the form very near to the root, such as *ker*, *čer* in the Slovene language, *kar*, *karren* in German, *cairn* in Irish etc.

Is it possible that one of the first known ethnic groups living also on the territory of nowadays karst in Slovenia named Carni, got its name from the “rock” because they lived in Carnia – Rocky country? Although the science of karstology is very young, its name is old, deriving from one of the first known languages in Europe.

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