

## NOTION OF KARST IN THE ITINERARIES OF BENEDIKT KURİPEČIČ AND EVLIYA ÇELEBI (16<sup>TH</sup> AND 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

### *Abstract*

*To introduce the problem the author gives a brief overview of the first descriptions of the Dinaric karst and geopolitical reasons of difficult access for western travellers to the Balkans. Two diaries are presented. The first one of B. Kuripečič, member of the imperial mission to the Turkish sultan in 1530 and published in 1531. The second one is of the great Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi (1611 - 1682), but was not published until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kuripečič's book is the first description of the Balkan by a western author and Evliya's is the first extensive description of the Turkish Balkans by an author from the East. While Kuripečič just mentions few karst springs, Evliya describes surface and water phenomena, and caves. Kuripečič does not comment the springs, while Evliya discusses the karst from the point of view of a traveller and soldier.*

**Key words:** *history of karstology, Balkans, Dinaric karst, Kuripečič B., Evliya Ç.*

### **Early descriptions of Dinaric karst**

Before the Napoleon's Illyrian provinces (the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) the most part of Dinaric karst was difficult and dangerous to access, at least looking from the Western point of view. Starting from the NW, a great part of the Adriatic Sea coast belonged to the Venetian Republic, to the Dubrovnik's (Ragusa) Republic and to the Turkish Empire. Just a small part of the coast under the Kras plateau (territory of Trieste) and in the corner of the Kvarner Bay, round Opatija, belonged to Austria and to the Duchy of Carniola. The relations between Austria and Venice were often not very friendly, just to remember Austro-Venetian wars. Relations between Venice and Dubrovnik with the Ottoman Empire were formally good, but a lot of smaller disagreements ended in local conflicts. Such a situation can be well seen in Evliya Çelebi's diary: he often joined a band attacking or plundering Venetian's or Dubrovnik's towns and their territories or was sent there as a bearer of a flag of truce. Therefore it is clear that the voyager from the West wishing to travel across the Dinaric karst had a very small possibility to do so. The exception was Carniola, where the road from Vienna to Trieste crossed the Dinaric karst.

The oldest descriptions of Dinaric karst write about the karst in Carniola, the plateau Kras included. The first printed work on Cerknjško jezero (Lake of Cerknica) was a poem by G. Leonberger from 1537. Not long after the description of the same seasonal karst lake is included into G. Wernher's (1551) work on "Marvellous waters of Hungary". J. W. VALVASOR (1687; 1689) describes Cerknjško jezero first in 1687 and in more in details in 1689. In his "Glory of the Duchy of Carniola" (1689) he describes some other parts of Dinaric karst too, out of actual Slovenia. These are parts of Istria including the Adriatic coast around today's Opatija (Abatia) and a part of Military Belt (Croatia today) with the town of Senj in the karst at the foot of the Velebit Mountain. Much later (1774) it was A. Fortis who travelled to Dalmatia by order of the Venetian Senate and describes the karst phenomena in Dalmatia also. When living in Carniola, B. Hacquet (1785) made long travels and he visited nowadays Croatia and Bosnia too. He gives us the first descriptions or at least mentions of their karst phenomena, including Plitvička jezera (the lakes of Plitvice). It is Hacquet who probably the first uses the name of Dinara Mt. to designate a greater region - Dinara Alps as he calls them.

So I decided to focus on two travellers who were the first mentioning karst phenomena of the Balkans, one from the west and the other from the east. The first is Benedikt Kuripečič from Carniola and the second is Evliya Çelebi from Istanbul. The travel diary of B. Kuripečič is the first such one, describing the travel through the Balkans. The diary of Evliya Çelebi is similarly the first detailed description of Balkan lands by a Turkish author.

### The travel of B. Kuripečič

Benedikt Kuripečič or Kuripešič, his name is known only in the Latin version, *Benedicten Curipeschitz*, was born at Gornji Grad (NE from Ljubljana) in 1490. It is documented that in 1525 he was a notary public at Ljubljana. In 1530 he was assigned as the interpreter to the diplomatic mission sent by Erzherzog (Archduke) Ferdinand von Österreich to the Sultan Süleyman II. the Magnificent (Sultan since 1520, under him the Ottoman Empire reached the greatest extent). Those were the years of great successes of Sultan's armies (the Battle of Mohacz 1526, the siege of Vienna in 1529) (KRONIKA 1997) and therefore the Austrian court was sending diplomatic missions to the High Porta quite often, to achieve at least the armistice if not a peace (MATKOVIĆ 1881). One of such missions was the one in which B. Kuripečič took part.

The 1530 mission was a numerous, some members started from Vienna and the last ones joined the mission a little before the Turkish border. They started from Vienna on the July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1530 and reached Istanbul on the October 17<sup>th</sup> the same year. On the February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1531 they were back at Ljubljana. The normal route from Austria to Istanbul was along the Sava river, through Slavonija (northern Croatia), to Belgrade and then south following the Morava river and south-east through Bulgaria to Istanbul. Because of the military activities in the southern Hungary, this mission had to take unusual route through the central part of the Balkan peninsula and thus crossed the karst lands, while other missions following the northern route practically did not touch the karst.

B. Kuripečič writes the diary during the travel, day by day. In the same year when he returned from the travel he publishes it in the form of a book, written in German language, *Itinerarium Wegrayß Kön. May. potschafft/gen Constantino-pel/zudem Türckischen keiser Soleyman. Anno XXX* (CURIPESCHITZ 1997). The book contains 63 pages and is written, besides preface, in the form of a diary. Usually the daily route is described quite briefly, with short descriptions of places. In general he takes an interest in people and their customs more than in landscape.

Regarding the karst he mentions karst features only twice: the springs of the Krka river



Fig. 1: Cover of Kuripečič's *Itinerarium 1530* (CURIPESCHITZ, B., 1997).

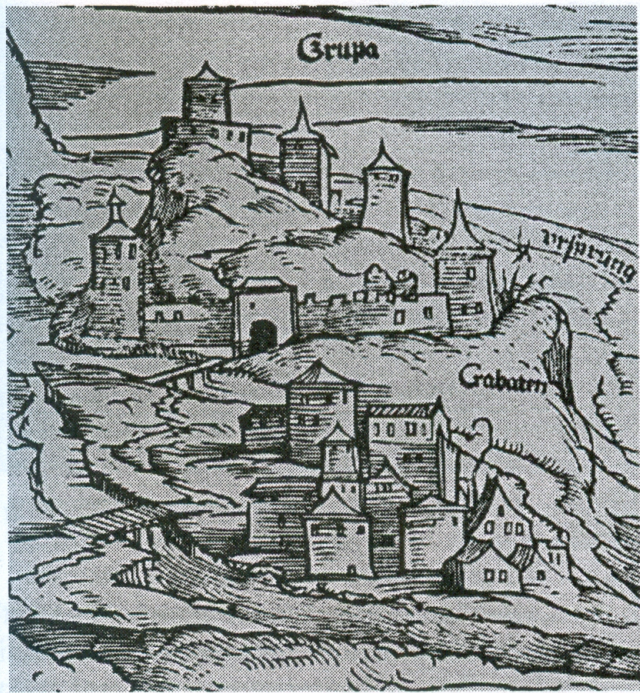


Fig. 2: The castle of Krupa and the spring of the Krupa river (Ursprung) (CURIPESCHITZ, B., 1997).

(south-eastern Slovenia), he describes as “two holes where the water comes out from the underground”, and the karst spring of the Sana river in the central part of Bosnia. One of the woodcuts illustrating the book represents the town and the castle of Krupa and in the foot of the hill the karst spring of the Krupa river can be seen. Kropa (Slovene) and Krupa (Croatian and Serbian) are very common names of karst springs in Dinaric karst.

B. Kuripečić is the first who published a description of his travel through the central Balkans. He crossed many karst terrains but there are only three karst springs figuring in his book. But regarding the early date of his book - 1530, this is something. In any case in his book is if not the first at least one of the first mentions of the karst spring of the Krka river. In any case the landscape does not play an important role in his book.

### Travels of Evliya Çelebi

His real name was Evliyā ibn Derviş Mehmed Zillī. He was born at İstanbul on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1611 (10<sup>th</sup> of Muharem 1020) and died around the year 1682. His family was well situated and he could study and achieved the title of “Çelebi”. Çelebi means “sir, lord” and was later replaced by the expression of “efendi”. Both words have the same meaning. Evliya Çelebi’s main and the only occupation were travels. Sometimes he travelled on his own account but mostly he was in a company of lords, in diplomatic missions, as a messenger of high rank administrators and often took part in the military campaigns or raids, for example the campaign in Transylvania and Hungary in 1663. He often travelled through the Turkish Balkans and as negotiator to Venetian towns on the Dalmatian coast, Dubrovnik (Ragusa) included. When negotiations have been unsuccessful he joined the raids on the Venetian territory too. So he passed many times the Balkans in longitudinal sense (south-east – north-west) and in many places he crossed it from north-east towards south-west that is from the interior towards the Adriatic sea. The last mentioned routes led him always across the Dinaric karst.

He was writing the diary, some parts contemporarily during the travels and some parts much later when he was old and more settled. Therefore some parts of the diary are actual and exact, while the others show inaccuracy, even mistakes. From the diary it is seen that he likes to exaggerate and was fond of *licentia poetica*.

Evliya Çelebi’s manuscript diary *Sijāhatnāme* (Travel Diary) in 10 volumes was found at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Pertev-Pasha library. The existence of his diary was mentioned for the first time in print in 1896. Later a complete diary was published. In Bosnia the part related to the Balkans was translated to Serbo-Croatian language and published in few editions (EVLİJA 1957).

Evliya Çelebi was not especially interested in landscape or in its physiognomy. The most of-

ten the landscape and its physical properties are mentioned as the obstacles to travel, like steep slopes, high mountains, narrow and rocky gorges, wild and deep rivers. Karst surface offers many of such difficulties. In general, karst land is according to Evliya Çelebi:

- rocky, stony land (*sengistan*),
- there are big rocky depressions (*uvala*),
- there is shortage of cereals and wheat,
- there are permanent crisis and famine,
- therefore the people from inner parts migrate towards the coast (to Ravni Kotari in the background of Zadar, for example).

For my paper I used Serbo-Croatian translation and therefore I do not know the original

Turkish words Evliya Çelebi used such as are in the Serbo-Croatian for the *uvala* or *krš* (= karst). In any case it can be said that the *uvala* is meant just for the depression, not necessary the karstic one. But where Evliya Çelebi reported of thousands of smaller and bigger depressions and *uvalas* in karst mountains, for example in Bileća Mountains (Herzegovina) we can be sure that he is talking about real karst depressions, dolinas and *uvalas*.

Evliya Çelebi often looks the terrain from the military point of view. For the karst (that is rocky) surface he often mentions how it is difficult to pass, both for cavalry and infantrymen. The soldiers have to enlarge and to improve the paths over the karst mountains, especially for the transport of canons, which they have to use against the strong walls of Venetian coastal towns. On one of such occasions he reports that the soldiers had been ordered to use the vinegar to crack and dissolve the limestone to be able to make a passage for the canons. By our knowledge the result was doubtful but this is the proof that Evliya Çelebi knew the reaction between the acid and the limestone.

Evliya Çelebi mentions not only a general description of karst surface but also a lot of karst features by their proper names. So he is enumerating many of *poljes*: Duvanjsko, Gatačko, Kupreško, Livanjsko, Nevesinjsko, and Popovo *polje*. Evliya Çelebi mentions Dinara Mountain too, the mountain that gives the name to the whole geological system

(Dinarids), to the whole chain of mountains (Dinara Mountains), and to the karst of Balkans - Dinaric Karst. Less than 100 years after Evliya, Baltazar Hacquet travelled through the North-Western Bosnia in 1781 and 1783 and maybe as the first one from the West called that part of the Balkans Dinaric Alps (Dinarischen Alpen) (HACQUET 1785).

On the karst surface water is rare and therefore precious, especially during hot summer days. In Evliya Çelebi's Diary the reader can find all kinds of karst water phenomena, karst springs, sinking rivers, ponors (swallow holes) and lakes - flooding on the *poljes*. By the names are mentioned the springs of the rivers Cetina, Bistrica at Livno, Breznica at Plevlja and springs on Gatačko *polje* and at Piroto. He did not miss the karst spring of Buna in Herzegovina, one of the largest karst springs of Dinaric karst. On the Popovo *polje* there are, according to Evliya Çelebi, thousands of seasonal resurgence holes that act also as ponors, these are *estavelles*. Of the sin-

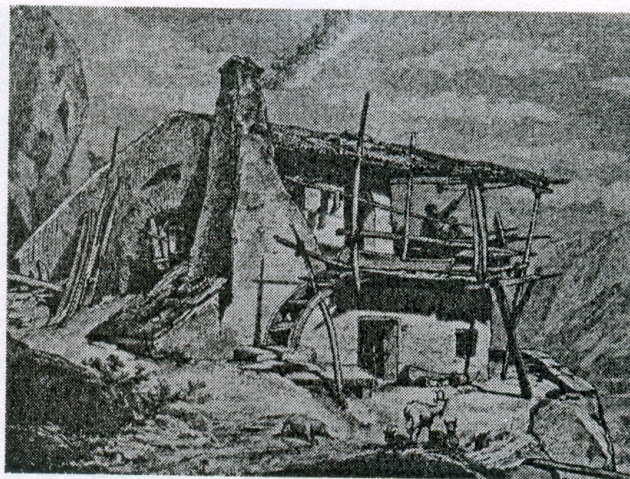


Fig. 3: "Dry mill" on the karst by F. Zvěřina (ANON. 1930).

king rivers there are extra mentioned only two: Čehotina and Trebišnjica sinking at Popovo polje. In Evliya Çelebi's time Trebišnjica was called Slana, which means "salt river". The flooding of Popovo polje is described mainly because of fishing when the polje starts to dry. The description is not so detailed and picturesque as is Valvasor's of the "curious fishing" in the ponors of Cerknjiško jezero (Polje of Cerknica) but in general a lot of similarities can be seen.

Dinaric karst is rich in karst caves. Evliya Çelebi writes of them in the hinterland of the town of Šibenik, of the towns Jajce and Užice, and of Ravna gora mountains. At Jajce he re-

ports about numerous houses with a cave in the back wall through which the inhabitants have access to their gardens on the other side of the rocky ridge. Two spring caves are mentioned by the names that are the cave at Livno where the river Bistrica takes its source, and the spring of the river Breznica. But here again the main interest of caves is shown from the military point of view. At different occasions Evliya Çelebi reported about "hajduks" hiding or even living in caves. Hajduks were a sort of guerrilla against Turks, heroes or robbers, depending from which side somebody looks upon them. They attacked Turkish territories and Turks. Evliya Çelebi describes barricades put on the road and sudden attack of hajduks, appearing from the caves and after the Turks got the help of other troops, they vanished in the caves again.

Much more than at present, military strategy "plunder and burn the land" was practically "everyday" use in Turkish period. Evliya Çelebi often mentioned such activities. In the cases of the attacks against Venetian towns along the Adriatic coast, when the Turks could not take the towns, both the regular army and the raiders systematically burnt the fields and cut down the trees in orchards in the vicinity of the town. When talking of the bareness of the coastal part of Dinaric karst, mostly shepherds and Venetians are taken into the consideration (HORVAT 1957). But in Evliya Çelebi's diary it is often mentioned that the soldiers were ordered to burn the forests along the roads. Thus the open terrain along the road reduced the chances of ambushes and there were no material for making barricades.

## Conclusions

When talking about the history of Dinaric karst authors usually do not mention either Benedikt Kuripečič or Evliya Çelebi. But they are both the first regarding the description of this karst. B. Kuripečič publishes the first diary of his travel across the Balkans as a traveller from the West, while Evliya Çelebi is the first from the East who describes the Balkans in details. As the great part of the Western Balkans is karst, they had to note it. Kuripečič just mentions few phenomena. Evliya mentions karst, its phenomena and characteristics more frequently, but mostly from the point of view of a soldier or a long distance traveller. No one of the both note the karst as a special kind of terrain.



Fig. 4.: Battle between cuirassiers of Carniola and Pasha of Bosnia's troops in 1566 (VALVASOR 1689).

## A KARSZT FOGALMA BENEDIKT KURIFEČIČ ÉS EVLIJA ČELEBI (XVI. és XVII. SZ.) ÚTLEÍRÁSAIBAN

A probléma illusztrálására a szerző részletes áttekintést ad a Dinári-karszt első leírásáról, a geopolitikai okok miatt nehezen megközelíthető Balkánra készülő nyugati utazók számára. Két napló került bemutatásra. Az első B. Kuripečič-től, aki a török szultán 1530. évi hódító hadjárata keretében járt ott, és 1531-ben publikálta azt. A másik a nagy török utazó Evlija Čelebitől (1611–1682), ez azonban a 20. századig nem került megjelentetésre. Kuripečič könyve az első nyugati szerzőtől származó leírás a Balkánról, míg Evlijá-é az első olyan részletes leírása a török Balkánnak, amely keleti szerzőtől származik. Míg Kuripečič csak említést tesz néhány karsztforrásról, addig Evlija le is írja a felszínt, a hidrológiai jelenségeket és barlangokat. Kuripečič nem fűz magyarázatot a forrásokhoz, Evlija azonban egy utazó és katona szemszögéből magyarázatokat is ad a karszthoz.

Kulcsszavak: karsztológia történet, Balkán, Dinári-karszt, Kuripečič B, Evlija Č.

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*Andrej Krajnc  
Karst research Institute ZRC SAZU,  
Titov trg 2, SI - 6230 Postojna, Slovenia  
kranjc@zrc-sazu.si*