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**OBSERVATIONS ON HISTORICAL TERMINOLOGY:
GROTTE AND *HÖHLE* IN GERMAN TEXTS**

POGLED V ZGODOVINO TERMINOLOGIJE: *GROTTE* IN
HÖHLE V NEMŠKIH BESEDILIH

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Abstract

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Brigitta Mader: Observations on historical terminology: *Grotte* and *Höhle* in German texts.

The author treats the historical terminology for caves (*Grotte*, *Höhle*) used by German speaking authors and explorers in the Austro-Hungarian period with special emphasis on the etymology of the terms *Grotte* and *Höhle*, coming to the conclusion that those terms do not indicate a difference either from the speleological point of view or the linguistic one. The contemporary use of *Grotte* and *Höhle* in the Austro-Hungarian period is determined by linguistic conditions and influence of the Italian (bilingual or even trilingual situation) in the classical Karst region.

Key words: karst terminology, *Grotte*, *Höhle*, Kras.

Izvleček

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Brigitta Mader: Pogled v zgodovino terminologije: *Grotte* in *Höhle* v nemških besedilih

Avtor govori o zgodovini terminologije za jame (*Grotte*, *Höhle*), ki so jo uporabljali nemško govoreči pisci in raziskovalci v avstrogrskem času, s posebnim poudarkom na etimologiji izrazov *Grotte* in *Höhle*. Sklene, da ni razlike med njima, ne s speleološkega in ne z jezikoslovnega vidika. Sočasna raba obeh izrazov v omenjenem obdobju je bila odvisna od jezikovnih okoliščin in vpliva italijanščine (dvojezično ali celo trojezično okolje) na klasičnem Krasu.

Ključne besede: kraška terminologija, *Grotte*, *Höhle*, Kras.

In 1912 we find an announcement for the caves of Postojna, mentioned in the German language as *Adelsberger Grotte*. (Fig.1) Having a look at various German written traveller's guides published in the 19th century, the word *Grotte* is very frequent and used not only for cave-names but also as German term indicating a cave. So we have: *Riesengrotte* bei Opcina Triest (Fig.2), *Kleinhäuslergrotte*, *Kronprinz Rudolf-Grotte*, *Grotte von Corngale* and also *Tropfsteingrotte*, *Grottenfest*, *Grotteneingang*, *Grotten des Karsts*, *Grottenwelt* etc. (Fig.3).

But we also find *Grotten und Höhlen von St. Canzian* (*Tominzgrotte*, *Schmidlgrotte*, *Rekahöhle*...) and in the description of the *Adelsberger Grotte* some of the parts of the cave system are denominated *Höhle*. For example: *Poikhöhle* together with *Ferdinandsgrotte*, *Erzherzog Johann Grotte*, *Alte Grotte*, *Löwengreif-Grotte*. And we find also *Höhlen von Luegg*, *Höhlenschloß von Luegg*.

So there is the question: does there exist any difference between *Grotte* and *Höhle*? And if there is a difference, in what does it consist? Are there two different meanings, two different types of caves?

There is obviously a question which was treated already in the 19th century, as we can see in the work of Adolf Schmidl, *Wegweiser in die Adelsberger Grotte und die benachbarten Höhlen des Karst nach neuen Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1850-1852*. published in Vienna in 1853.

Giving in the introduction a general explanation of the Karst and Karstphenomena, Schmidl tries also to define *Grotte* and *Höhle* on the basis of two different characteristics: water and stalactites. In his opinion *Höhlen* are long subterranean water channels. On the contrary *Grotten* are no longer occupied by running water. They are probably channels of former rivers, which have now a deeper course. In the *Grotten* we find only some pools of water. *Höhlen* usually do not have stalactites and if only a few. *Grotten* do have a lot of stalactites (Schmidl 1853).

This is a definition which is not accepted at all by the modern speleologists. In the speleological dictionary published in 1965 in Vienna the denomination *Grotte* for a cave with particularly rich stalactite decorations is considered as "inadmissible". Kyrle proposed to use the term *Grotte* only for artificial caves and considered the historical distinction of *Höhle* and *Grotte* as "senseless" (Trimmel 1965 following Kyrle 1923).

The geological dictionary, published for the first time in 1957 in Stuttgart, gives a less strict interpretation for the term *Grotte*, which might be a natural as well as an artificial cave. *Grotte* is used sometimes as a synonym for *Höhle* and sometimes *Grotte* indicates also a vaulted cave without much depth. *Höhle* is defined by the geological dictionary as a "natural subterranean stone-hollow filled in part or entirely with gas, liquid or solid material" (Murawski 1983).

Following this interpretation is the encyclopedic handbook to the prehistory of Europe (*Enzyklopädisches Handbuch zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte Europas*) citing only the catchword *Höhle*. In this handbook special attention is paid to the karst caves. The formation of sinterforms or stalactites is mentioned as one of the "autoctone components" of Karst-caves (Filip 1966).

Kyrle's definition of *Grotte*, specially in the modern German, as designation for an artificial cave is mainly based on the fact that artificial cave constructions - usually built and used as a romantic element in Mannerism garden architecture - are very often decorated with stalactites (Trimmel 1965).

In *Hübner and Zinken's Curienses und Reales Natur-Kunst-Berg-Gewerck und Handlungslexikon*, published in Leipzig in 1762, we find a similar definition of *Grotte* as a subterranean construction and imitation of natural caves in pleasure gardens to obtain an area with cool air (Waldner 1940/41).

For this reason *Grotte* became also a term indicating an artificial rock cave, which in most cases has also a fountain (Wörterbuch Architektur 1996).

Concerning the contrast between natural formation and artificial construction, the German dictionary gives less strict definitions for *Grotte* and *Höhle*: *Grotte* is a rock cave of little depth, but might be also an artificial construction in garden architecture. *Höhle* is a natural hollow in stone or in a tree with a relative small access (Wahrig 1985).

The *Allgemeine Realencyclopädie oder Conversationslexikon für alle Stände* published in Regensburg (1869) mentions *Grotte* as a natural as well as an artificial cave and indicates the mythological signification of *Grotte* as „symbol of the world and of the secret action of nature and their deities“, for example: Pascht, Mithras,

Kalypso, Eileithya-Artemis and the Nymphs, who all found adoration in caves in ancient times. Nympheums - caves specially dedicated to the Nymphs - were in the period of Mannerism rebuilt as elements of garden architecture.

So, for getting a clearer idea about the signification of *Höhle* and *Grotte* it seems necessary to have a look to the etymology of those words.

Höhle is an abstract from the adjectiv “hohl” (hollow) to the Old- and -Middle high German “hol” in the meaning of “hollow, cave, concav, hole, aperture” coming from the Germanic *hula (Kluge 1989). *Grotte* signifies “rock cave” and was taken in the 15th century from the Italian into the German language (Kluge 1989).

The etymology of the



Fig. 1: Historical poster “Adelsberger-Grotte”.

Italian “grotta” goes back to the late latin “crupta, crypta”, a Grecism from architecture-terminology, which indicated “every covered and subterranean locality”. This context has been conserved in the meaning of “grotta” as subterranean room used as pantry or larder of an inn, but the main signification linguistically evidenced already at the beginning of the 14th century is “a natural cave usually in limestone rock formed by water” (Cortelazzo, Zolli 1884).

In modern Italian “Grotta” is still in use. In some alpine idioms “grotta” indicates not only *Höhle* (cave) but also a rocky area and also “Karrenfelder” (Hubschmid 1951). Interesting also is the form “grotto” used in Tuscany, because we find the same word also in historical descriptions of caves in the English language (Shaw 2000).

In modern German *Höhle* is the corresponding term for the Italian “grotta”. *Grotte* is nowadays no more used for caves.

But having a look at historical German texts we note that the term *Grotte* is the more frequent the further back we go. Valvasor for example regularly uses *Grotte* and not only for the “berühmte

Grotte von Adelsberg” but also for other caves, mentioning for example the “Grotten in the 5th part of Carniola in the Učka mountain system in Istria” (1689). Besides of *Grotte* Valvasor also uses the terms *Höle* and *Speluncke*. *Spelunca* we find even earlier in Italian texts (M.Nicolo di Gozze in 1585; Malez 1984). In Italian “spelunca” indicates “a big wide, huge and profound cave” (Cortelazzo 1988); in German it is used in figurative sense of “zwielichtige Gaststätte” “obscure inn” (Kluge 1989). But Valvasor used “Speluncke” not in the German meaning but as synonym for *Höhle*; he also uses *Grotte* as a synonym for *Höhle*.

So, the terminological question about the meaning of *Höhle* and *Grotte* does not seem anymore a speleological problem, but



Fig. 2: Historical poster “Riesengrotte bei Trieste”.

rather a linguistic one. A conclusion which is determined first by the etymology of the Italian word “grotta” as “a natural cave usually in limestone formed by water” and second by the fact, that all linguistic forms and cave-names made with *Grotte* in the German language chiefly concern the classical and Dalmatian Karst regions, which are very influenced by the Italian language. Beyond it are those areas which just in the period of the beginning of intense cave explorations were under the Austro-Hungarian dominion. Specially the Austrian German language has for historical-political reasons a very rich vocabulary with romance origins.

The linguistic interpretation of *Grotte*:*Höhle* as synonyms finds also support in the works of Karl L. Moser, who is - apart from cave names formed with *Grotte* - consequently using only *Höhle*, although he is mainly treating Karst caves in the surroundings of Trieste (Moser 1899). Moser came from Teschen in the Austrian part of Slesia, studied in Vienna and did not grow up in a bi- or even trilingual situation as occurs in the Austrian littoral or in Dalmatia.

The synonym hypothesis is also confirmed by two bilingual persons : Carlo Marchesetti, botanist, prehistorian and director of the Trieste Natural history Museum, and Ludwig Salvator, Austrian Archduke and natural scientist with much cave experience, but mostly known for having invited Edouard Alfred Martel to explore the caves of Mallorca (Mader 1994).

Marchesetti uses *Höhle* when writing in German and *grotta* when writing in Italian. Ludwig Salvator also uses *grotta* in Italian, but in his German descriptions of caves he uses *Höhle* and *Grotte* as synonyms, because he wanted to avoid for stylistic reasons repeating the same word several times (Mader 1994, 1998, 2001; Ludwig Salvator 1897, 1904).



Fig. 3: Historical tourist-guide: *Illustrirter Führer durch Triest und Umgebung*. Hartleben's *Illustrirter Führer* Nr.10, III.Auflage, Wien-Pest-Leipzig 1892, p.82-83.

Parallel to the continuing development of speleology and speleological archeology, also done in other regions and European countries, the term *Höhle* became more and more dominant in the German language and in German written scientific texts. So, for example, Moritz Hoernes uses only *Höhle* in his work *Die Urgeschichte des Menschen* (1896) and in the same way Gundacker Graf Count Wurmbrandt speaks only about *Höhlen* in his chapter about the prehistoric period in Istria in the *Österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild*. (1891).

In conclusion we consider the contemporary use of *Höhle* and *Grotte* in German-written historical texts as a linguistic phenomenon which is a result of specific conditions caused by the historical-political situation and linguistic influence of the Italian, but does not have any signification concerning type or form of caves.

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