

Boundary marks on the former Venetian border on the Kraški rob



GEODETIC HIGHLIGHTS

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Introduction

The Kraški rob plateau in Primorska, Slovenia, alongside other natural and historical landmarks, also conceals the remains of the 500-year-old Venetian-Habsburg border, which is considered one of the oldest and most stable political borders in what is now Slovenia. The border was established by peace treaties following the war between the Venetian Republic and the Habsburgs that lasted from 1508 to 1516. At that time, the Habsburgs retained the Goriška and Tolmin regions and most of the interior of what is today Slovenian territory, while the Venetian Republic retained Istria, Friuli and the coastal towns. For the most part, this border remained in place for almost three centuries, right up until the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797.

Although more than 200 years have passed since the fall of the Venetian Republic, the former course of the border between it and the Habsburg Monarchy in this area has remained surprisingly well preserved. The reason why is undoubtedly to be found in the fact that the border was in force at the time of the establishment of the so-called tax municipalities, which were created following the first unified land cadastral survey in our territory in the 18th century. Those familiar with the land cadastre will recall that these tax municipalities were the precursors to the cadastral municipalities. During the subsequent Franciscan land cadastral survey in the first half of the 19th century, which was carried out in this area between 1818 and 1819, the boundaries of the former tax municipalities were generally adopted as the boundaries of the cadastral municipalities. In doing so, great care was taken to mark out the course of the cadastral municipality boundaries in the field. Where boundary marks already existed, these were recorded and adopted as cadastral municipality boundary marks, and thus also as boundary marks of land plots.

Important contemporary evidence of these historical facts is provided by the preserved boundary marks in the field, the vast majority of which still coincide with the course of official cadastral municipality boundaries. Along the former border between the Venetian Republic and the Habsburg Monarchy, one can find interesting boundary marks today: ranging from former Venetian boundary marks dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, to those of cadastral municipalities dating from the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey, and to the boundary marks of common lands or agricultural communities, which were erected here in the second half of the 19th century. The boundary marks on the border between the former Venetian Republic and the Habsburg Monarchy stand out for their design and historical significance. Here, among other things, we find carved limestone plates bearing the coats of arms of the Venetian Republic or the Habsburg Monarchy, which once stood on masonry brick boundary pillars. The role of boundary marks has also been played by characteristic piles of stones, 20 m long, so-called *muše*, as well as natural features such as springs and caves, and other property boundary marks erected by owners or tenants in various historical periods to demarcate their property.

This booklet presents the most interesting boundary marks on and along the former Venetian border on the Kraški rob, each accompanied by fascinating stories. They reveal a less-known chapter in the history of Slovenian Istria and demonstrate how stone boundary marks, some dating back several centuries, still bear witness to former national and administrative borders, as well as to the structure of land ownership and the development of the land cadastre in our region. To conclude this introduction, among the most interesting boundary mark I would like to highlight a former Venetian boundary mark, which stands in a small valley with a spring in Krapnik fallow below the hill Debeli hrib in Podgorski Kras; during the Franciscan land cadastral survey, it became the tripoint of cadastral municipalities, and in 1865 it also served as a boundary mark of agrarian community lands.

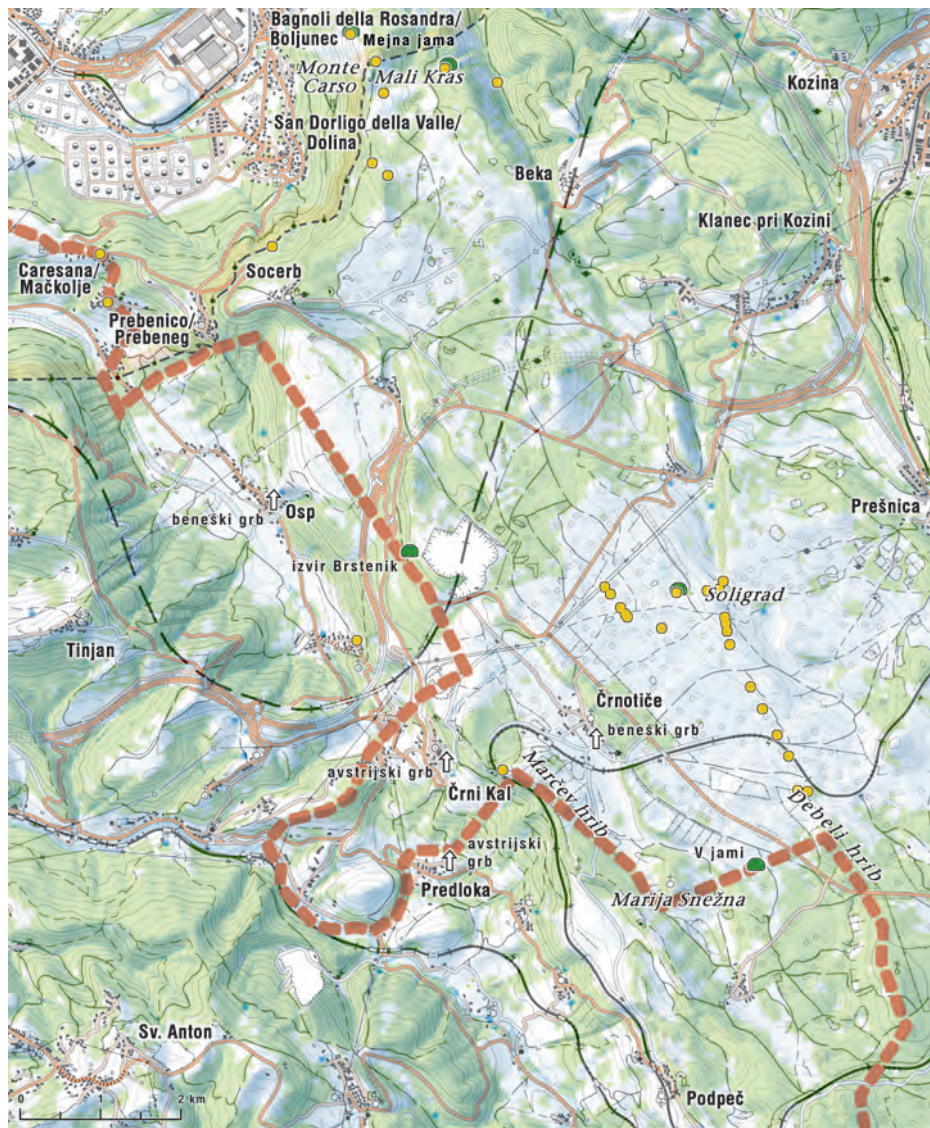
Despite their old age, we surveyors still use all these boundary marks for the management of the land cadastre, and thus we must preserve them in their natural setting, exactly where we found them. In addition to their importance for official land administration, the preservation of these boundary marks is also of exceptional significance from the perspective of cultural heritage, as they are visible witnesses to history for future generations.

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Boundary marks on and along the former Venetian border on the Kraški rob

The Venetian border in Slovenian Istria on the Kraški rob plateau officially disappeared in 1797, with the end of the Venetian Republic. But its course has been preserved in the form of cadastral municipality boundaries to the present day. Along and near it, one can still find everything from elongated piles of stones, known as *muše*, to carved boundary marks of cadastral municipalities dating to the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey, the later boundary marks of agrarian communities that are also known as common lands, as well as natural boundary marks such as springs and caves. Several carved boundary plates measuring 49 cm × 49 cm, bearing the carved Venetian lion or the Austrian coat of arms have also been preserved in the vicinity. Originally these were fixed to two sides of higher brick boundary pillars erected in 1755.

The boundaries of the cadastral municipalities, which are still in force today, thus bear witness to an important historical boundary that has divided the people of Istria for at least 500 years, as the Venetian border – having been transformed into the boundaries of the cadastral municipalities – has remained mainly unchanged from 1523 to the present day.



● boundary stone ↑ coat of arms 1755 ● cave or spring — former Venetian border

The map of boundary marks on and in the vicinity of the former Venetian border that are presented in this booklet.

How the former Venetian border became the boundary between cadastral municipalities

Following the collapse of the Venetian Republic in 1797, the former Venetian border became the boundary between the municipalities of Koper and Socerb (Fünfenberg), as well as that of the individual villages situated along it. When the Franciscan land cadastral survey was carried out in this area in the years 1818 and 1819, the village boundaries became those of the cadastral municipalities, and new carved boundary stones were erected on them. The boundaries of the cadastral municipalities dating from the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey have retained their validity in the land cadastre – or today's property cadastre – right up to the present day. This means that in Slovenian Istria, by the boundaries of the cadastral municipalities, we can trace a 500-year-old boundary, as the Venetian-Austrian border was already mainly established here in the year 1523. At that time, the course of the Venetian border was agreed, but small areas of undivided land along it remained which were used by both sides simultaneously; these were mostly springs and ponds. Despite the agreed Venetian border, both sides largely attempted to circumvent this, primarily to gain immediate benefits from using neighbouring land. As a result, armed confrontations frequently broke out along it. Consequently, the various types of boundary marks used to demarcate the border did not, for the most part, last very long. During these 300 years of the Venetian Republic, everything from natural topographical features – such as hilltops, ravines, springs and trees – to different carved boundary marks, brick pillars and even elongated piles of natural stones, known locally as *muše*, were used as boundary marks here.



Present-day view of the locations: A) the Brstenik pond, E) a break in the dry stone wall on the southern slope below Marija Snežna, and F) Foiba Cernaiana – the entrance to a small abyss west of the sinkhole named V jami.

To date, the course of the Venetian border has been preserved mainly through topographical drawings held in the Italian state archives in Trieste and Venice. The first map of the border we will present here dates from the 17th or 18th century, showing the area between the villages of Mačkolje (Caresana), which is now in Italy, and Črnotiče. It depicts the border as a series of straight lines, running from Mačkolje to the Brstenik pond (location A), and then the border turns downwards beneath the Kraški rob plateau, leaving the village of Črni Kal on the Austrian side, before returning to the Kraški rob and running along its south-eastern flank, bypassing the hill of Gradišče with the Church of Marija Snežna. At point E, known as *Flandia Dolina* on older maps, the border turns at a right angle towards the north-east and ends at point F, known as *Foiba Cernaiana*, which can be translated as “black cave”. Here a small abyss and sinkhole exist, with locals naming both caves. Today the following features can be found at these locations: A) the Brstenik pond just above the remains of the old road beneath the Grucelj quarry, or beneath the former summit of hilltop Gaber which was demolished by a quarry; E) a right-angled break in the dry stone wall on the southern slope of hill Gradišče, also known as Marija Snežna after the church situated there; and F) the entrance to a small abyss on the western side of a larger sinkhole known locally as V jami (Eng. In cave).



Topographical drawing of the Venetian border between Mačkolje and Črnotiče from the 17th or 18th century (source: State Archives in Venice, Dispacci dei rettori, Istria, f. 19, c. 1).



An excerpt of Vincenzo Dini's map showing the border between the Venetian Republic and the Duchy of Carniola in Istria, from the village of Prebeneg to the mountain Kosmačič summit, 18th century (map source: State Archives in Trieste, DFAP, c. 327).



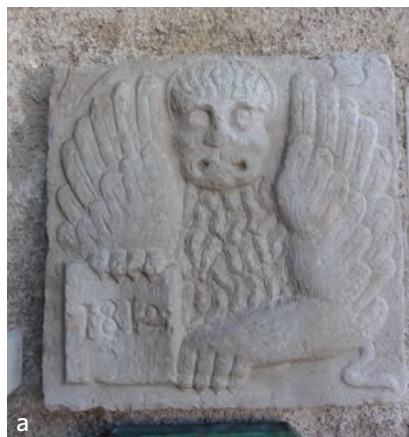
Vincenzo Dini's 18th-century map is much more detailed, and the locations mentioned before are again marked on it. The Brstenik pond is named *Wirstenic* on this map, *Flandia Dolina* keeps the same name, and black cave is named *Tabia nera*. This map also marks, with the designation *Capitelo*, or *Cap.* for short, the locations where brick boundary pillars dating to 1755 once stood. These pillars bore a carved plaque featuring the Venetian lion on the side facing the Venetian Republic and the Austrian coat of arms on the other. Throughout Istria, the stone pillars themselves have not survived, and only individual carved plaques or fragments thereof have been preserved on secondary locations. The nearest surviving preserved Venetian brick pillars – dating from 1791, a few decades younger – can be found in the Venetian Lagoon in the town of Jesolo in Italy.



Jesolo, Italy: a Venetian boundary brick pillar from 1791. The total height is 2.4 m and the cross-section at the base is 80 cm × 80 cm.

Complete carved plaques bearing a coat of arms, which were once mounted on Venetian boundary brick pillars in Slovenian Istria, can now be found at the following locations:

- the Venetian lion set into the wall to the left of the entrance portal at Črnotiče 29, which, in addition to the year 1755 – visible on the upper edge of the slab – also bears the year 1812, which was added to it later;
- a Venetian lion divided into two parts, each of which is separately built into the wall at Osp 43, and these were previously used as bricks in the wall of an older building;
- the Austrian coat of arms set into the inner side of the cemetery wall of the Church of Janez Krstnik in the village Predloka, which was discovered in 1892 during the restoration of the church floor;
- the Austrian coat of arms on the house at Črni Kal 51; and
- two Venetian lions in the Koper Regional Museum.



Plates with Venetian lion and the date 1755: a) on the entrance portal at Črnotiče 29, with the additional date 1812, and b) a two-part plaque set into the wall at Osp 43.



Two plates with Venetian lion from Koper Regional Museum.



Plates with Austrian coats of arms and the date 1755 (MDCCLV): a) on a house at Črni Kal 51 and b) on the inner side of the church wall of Janez Krstnik in Predloka.

A former Venetian boundary stone in Krapnik below Debeli hrib

In the Podgorški Kras, just under 500 m north-west of the gentle hilltop of Debeli hrib (505 m) or 500 m east of the hilltop of Bombelj (471 m), lies the Krapnik fallow. On its southern edge, there is a small valley with a small spring. It is situated about 80 m south of the railway tracks. Here stands a natural rock, about 1 m high and of a brownish colour, with a cross-section of 70 cm × 55 cm at ground level. Carved into it is a square bearing the year 1865. On the same side – that is, the side facing roughly south – there are also weak remnants of fan-shaped lines, which most likely present the remains of the wing of the Venetian lion. This is further suggested by a crumbling circular structure with faint transverse lines on the opposite side, which most likely once represented the Austrian coat of arms¹. Before us stands an old Venetian boundary stone, which, at the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey in 1819, became the tripoint boundary point of the cadastral municipalities of Črnotiče, Podgorje and Prešnica. In 1865, it also became a boundary mark of agrarian community lands. Today it additionally serves as a boundary mark between the municipalities of Koper and Hrpelje-Kozina. On the Franciscan land cadastre maps, this tripoint of cadastral municipalities is named *Rjavo Čamen u Štirni* or *Štirnica*. The first name means “brown stone in a waterwell” in the local dialect, and can immediately be linked to the colour of this boundary stone and the spring located here. The boundary mark is not, however, situated on the summit of Debeli hrib, where the Venetian border once ran and where, according to Vincenzo Dini’s map, a brick boundary pillar stood in the mid-18th century. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that the Venetian border once ran 500 m further north-west. The fact that the fan-shaped lines – or the remnants of the Venetian coat of arms – points in the direction towards the former Venetian Republic, while the remains of the Austrian coat of arms points towards the former Austria, also suggests that the boundary mark was probably not moved.



An extract from the land cadastral map of the cadastral municipality of Podgorje from 1819.

¹ Compare this with the Venetian lion and the Austrian coat of arms, carved into natural rocks near the village of Golobi above Livek as presented in the booklet *Boundary Marks of the Former Estates of the Northern Primorska Region*.



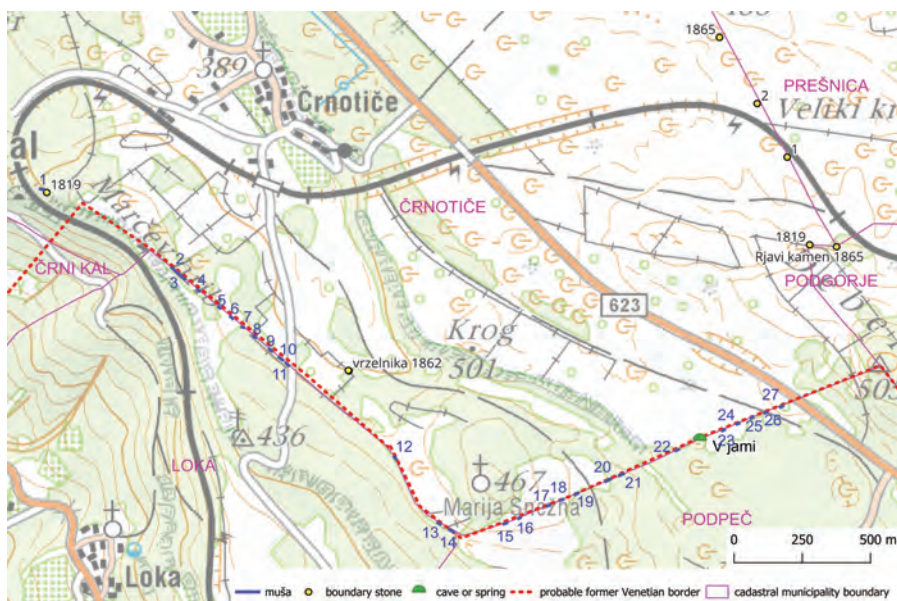
Krapnik under Debeli hrib: the tripoint of the cadastral municipalities, the agrarian community and the former Venetian boundary mark, viewed from both sides.

Muše

According to local accounts in Slovenian Istria, elongated piles of stones named *muše* were also used as boundary marks on the former Venetian border. Each is around 20 m long and they were originally about 1 m high, but damage and deterioration over the years means that today they are between 2 and 3 m wide. To the untrained eye, they are easily mistaken for the remains of dry stone walls, which are very common in this area. Some *muše* can actually be found within dry stone walls, where they can be recognised by the fact that here the dry stone wall becomes reinforced and rises in height. Again, this kind of structure stretches for approximately 20 m in length.

The *muše* are said to have derived their name either from the local dialect word for a donkey or from the caravans of donkey drivers who once transported goods up the Črni Kal slope, which were known as *mussolati*.

The *muše* are thought to have been preserved at least along the former Venetian border between Osp and Socerb, on the boundaries of the cadastral municipalities of Podgorje and Podpeč, and on the slopes of mountain Kojnik. On the next page, we present the *muše* surveyed in the field along the southern and western boundaries of the cadastral municipality of Črnotiče, between the hilltop of Marčev hrib (425 m), the southern slope of Marija Snežna (467 m) and the hilltop of Debeli hrib (505 m). On the map and picture on the next page, where we presented the most typical examples, the *muše* are marked with same numbers.



Map of field-verified elongated piles of stones named *muše* at the boundaries of the cadastral municipality of Črnotiče.



Muše at the boundary between the cadastral municipalities of Črnotiče, Loka and Podpeč.

Other preserved boundary marks on the Kraški rob plateau

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Venetian Republic, the entire area situated on both sides of the former Venetian border, following a brief interim period of French rule, came under Austrian jurisdiction in 1813. Consequently, it was subject to the same procedures of land cadastre surveying and the organisation of common lands as elsewhere in present-day Slovenia. Common lands in this region have been traditionally referred to as *srenje* or *jusi*. Following the process of denationalisation that occurred a few decades ago, after Slovenia's independence, a number of these areas were re-established and named "agrarian communities". The boundary marks found along the boundaries of cadastral municipalities and the boundaries of former common lands are similar, and differ only by the year that is inscribed on them. The boundary marks of cadastral municipalities in the vicinity of the Kraški rob plateau bear the years 1818 or 1819, while those of the common lands are mostly marked with a later date, as the majority were first established in the decades after the land reforms that began in 1848.

Cadastral municipality boundary marks from the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey

Cadastral municipality boundary marks from the period of the Franciscan land cadastral survey in the vicinity of the former Venetian border bear the name of the village inscribed on each side, with the year 1818 or 1819 below it. Occasionally, the word COMUNE, GEMEINDE or DORF is also inscribed above the name of the village. All inscriptions are carved using a template for the letters and numbers. Boundary marks can be carved from limestone or sandstone.

Let us start on the northern side of the former Venetian border, just below the Kraški rob plateau, in the village of Mačkolje under Socerb, which is now located in Italy. Here, we can easily travel by car and find two boundary marks of cadastral municipalities dating to the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey. The first is a three-sided tripoint marker of the cadastral municipalities of Mačkolje, Prebeneg and Dolina, dating to 1819, located at the northern end of the village on the edge of a four-way road junction. It is made of limestone, is 104 cm high and measures 43 cm × 40 cm × 52 cm in cross-section.



Boundary stones in Mačkolje, Italy: a) tripoint of the cadastral municipalities of Mačkolje, Prebeneg and Dolina at a crossroads; b) the boundary point of cadastral municipalities of Mačkolje and Prebeneg set into a stone wall.

The next one, from the same year and made of sandstone, is built into a stone wall by the road a short distance to the south of the Church of St Jernej the Apostle.

Next, we will move on to our second thoroughly surveyed area, which is located near the village of Črnotiče. We will walk there. At Krapnik, 100 m west of the old Venetian boundary mark, which still serves as a tripoint of cadastral municipalities, another limestone boundary mark with the year 1819 inscribed in it has also been preserved in a dry stone wall. The inscriptions GEMEINDE PODGORJE and GEMEINDE CERNOTICI tell us that it represents a boundary mark of the cadastral municipalities Podgorje and Črnotiče. It is 92 cm high, has a cross-section of 25 cm × 42 cm, and its top has a round shape.



At Krapnik: limestone boundary mark of cadastral municipalities Črnotiče and Podgorje with inscriptions on both sides set in a dry stone wall.

In the village of Gabrovica near Črni Kal, at the edge of a multi-purpose area adjacent to the Partisan Printing House, which can be reached by car, an additional cadastral municipality boundary mark from the Franciscan land cadastre can be seen. Unfortunately, it is displaced, and therefore currently holds no geodetic significance. However, it is important to note that it still has significant cultural heritage meaning.



Village Gabrovica: the displaced boundary mark of cadastral municipalities, viewed from both sides.

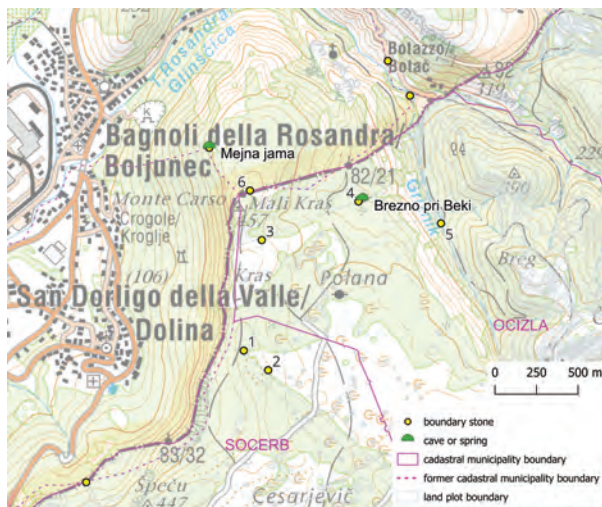
Agrarian community boundary marks

In order to determine whether a boundary stone is an agrarian community boundary stone, we must first check the date carved into it. However, many agrarian community boundary stones lack any inscriptions, which makes it more difficult to determine their exact function. Even the inscribed years of 1818 or 1819 do not definitively confirm whether the marker is solely a cadastral municipality boundary stone or if it also represents an agrarian community boundary stone. We can assist our analysis by consulting the land cadastre, where we check whether the boundary stone is situated just on a land plot boundary or also on the cadastral municipality boundary. If it is only on a land plot boundary, then it is highly likely that it marks the boundary of a former agrarian community.

Let us first mention boundary stones from the former Beka agrarian community located on the northern part of Kraški rob. On the plateau between Socerb and Mali Kras (457 m), which can only be explored on foot, six boundary stones of the Beka agrarian community, dating to 1819 and 1865, have been preserved. Four are on the plateau between the Cesarjevič and Polana fields, one is below the summit of Mali Kras, and one is in the gorge of the Grižnik stream. The two uprooted boundary stones, which we have marked on the map with the numbers 1 and 2, bear the year 1865 and separated the former agrarian communities of villages Beka and Socerb. Boundary stones 3, 4, 5 and 6 bear the date 1819 and separated the Beka and Boljunec agrarian communities. We can tell that these are indeed agrarian community boundary markers by the fact that today they are situated only on the boundaries of land plots.

The easiest to find is the one below the summit of Mali Kras (no. 6 on the map). It is located near the current ITA-SLO 82/32 national border boundary mark, and you should head approximately 10 m to the Italian side to find it.

All the boundary stones of the Beka agrarian community are around 70 cm high and made from sandstone, which makes them very easy to recognise in the limestone surroundings. They have inscriptions on both sides.



Map of the boundary stones of agrarian communities beneath the hilltop of Mali Kras.

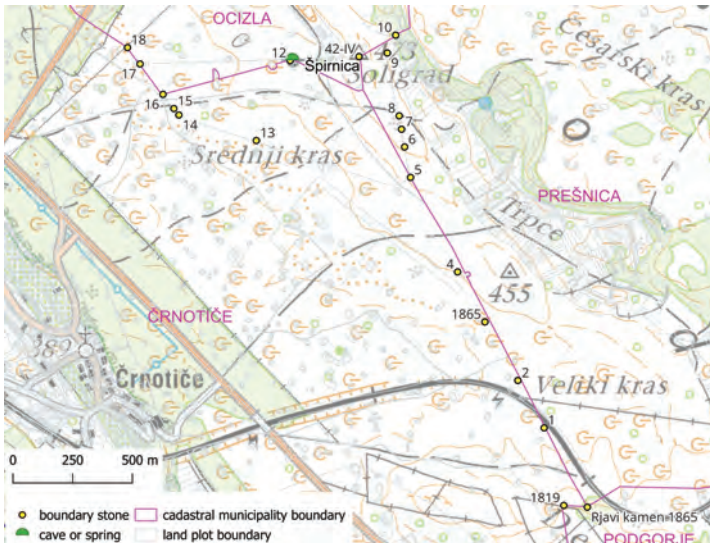


Beneath Mali Kras: the sandstone boundary stones of the Beka agrarian community.

Agrarian community boundary stones can also be found around the village of Črnotiče. The first, with the year of 1819 inscribed on it, is on the Kraški rob plateau on the western slope of Marčev hrib (425 m). Its location is already marked on the map with *muše*. It is situated just below the mountain path leading from the railway line to the summit of Marčev hrib. The fact that it stands on a land plot boundary confirms that this is indeed an agrarian community boundary mark. The limestone boundary stone is 53 cm high, has a cross-section of 38 cm × 12 cm and the inscriptions GEMEINDE CERNOTICH and DORF CERNICAL.



On the north-western slope of Marčev hrib: the agrarian community boundary stone from 1819 viewed from both sides.



Map of boundary stones of agrarian communities above the village of Črnotiče.

Between the hilltops of Debeli hrib and Soligrad (473 m), in the Veliki and Srednji Kras areas, partly on the boundary between the cadastral municipalities of Črnotiče and Prešnica, and partly only on the boundary between individual land plots, there are still a large number of agrarian community boundary marks made out of sandstone and limestone without inscriptions, and two bearing the year 1865. One is the aforementioned Venetian boundary stone from Krapnik, while the other is a natural limestone rock with a carved cross at the top and the year 1865. Those which are placed on the cadastral municipality boundaries have a dual purpose: being both agrarian community as well as cadastral municipality boundary marks. Judging by the two sandstone boundary stones that have been uprooted, these have an average cross-section of between 23 cm × 25 cm and 37 cm × 34 cm; 50 cm to 75 cm is above the ground, while a further 20 to 30 cm remains buried. On some boundary stones there are carved, smoothed square panels on which one would expect to find inscriptions, but none are preserved. In the figure on the next page, this square panel is clearly visible on boundary stones 15 and 18.



Veliki kras: natural rock with the year 1865 carved into it and a cross on top.



The hilltop of Soligrad: on the left, an Italian interwar concrete trigonometric pillar with a square cross-section today representing trigonometric point 42-IV-18; on the right, a sandstone boundary stone that has been pulled out from the ground.

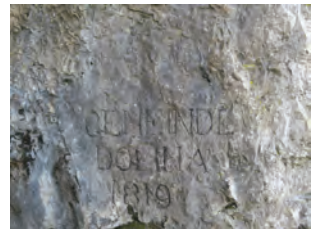


Agrarian community boundary stones without inscriptions around the summit of Soligrad.

Caves as boundary marks

On the Kraški rob plateau, in addition to the Venetian spring of Brstenik and a smaller abyss on the western edge of the sinkhole V jami – which was once called Črna jama, or “black cave” – there are at least two other caves that have retained the role of being boundary caves of cadastral municipalities to the present day.

The first, with the very telling name of Mejna jama in Slovenian, which can be translated to “border cave” in English, or its Italian name *Grotte delle Antiche Iscrizioni*, which can be translated to “cave of old inscriptions”, is situated on the western side of the hilltop of Mali Kras above the village of Boljunec following the mountain path from Mali Kras towards Boljunec. Today it lies in Italy. Mejna jama is a horizontal cave with the names of two cadastral municipalities and the year 1819 – referring to the Franciscan land cadastre – carved into each side of the entrance. Just above the top of the entrance an additional cross is carved, marking the boundary point itself. This cave marked the corner of the cadastral municipalities of Dolina and Boljunec.



Mejna jama below Mali Kras.

Above the village of Črnotiče, beneath the gently sloping hilltop of Soligrad, lies the Špirnica abyss. On its southern side, a sandstone boundary stone with the dual function of being an agrarian community and cadastral municipality boundary mark has been preserved. The entrance to the abyss itself marks the corner of the boundary between the cadastral municipalities of Ocizla and Črnotiče, dating back at least to the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey, as the name of this cave is already written on land cadastral maps from that period.



Špirnica Cave below the summit of Soligrad.

Boundary marks as heritage

Although the Venetian border no longer existed from 1797 onwards, its delineation of the area on the Kraški rob plateau has been preserved via the cadastral municipality boundaries until the present day. As the Venetian border was definitively established here as early as 1523, we can say that today's cadastral municipality boundaries bear witness to five centuries of the division of this part of Slovenia. Along or near this border, we find everything from elongated piles of stones, known as *muše*, to carved boundary stones of cadastral municipalities bearing inscriptions from the time of the Franciscan land cadastral survey or later agrarian community boundary marks, as well as natural boundary points such as springs and caves.

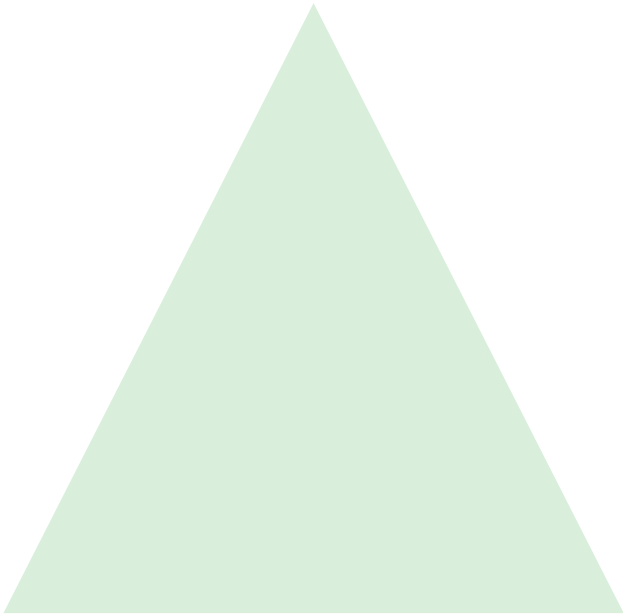
All the boundary marks presented in this booklet, as well as others which can still be found in nature, constitute a significant example of the technical heritage of our predecessors. These boundary marks continue to bear witness to the locations of boundary points established 200 or more years ago. The contemporary land cadastre is based on the Franciscan land cadastral survey, which was carried out in this area during the years 1818 and 1819. Consequently, these boundary marks still represent valid boundary points. Therefore, it is essential that we preserve them in situ where we have found them, so that future generations of geodesists may continue to use them for surveying purposes. The Venetian boundary mark from Krapnik still has a valid boundary function. It is also one of the few surviving Venetian boundary marks on our soil, which over time became a boundary mark of cadastral municipalities and later also agrarian communities, thereby retaining its original function. Owing to its uniqueness, we have submitted a proposal for its inclusion in the Slovenian Register of Cultural Heritage to the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia.

May this booklet serve as a modest contribution to our understanding of our lesser-known local geodetic history, which is largely hidden not far from the existing mountain trails.

More details on the boundary stones mentioned in this booklet are available in the following papers:

Triglav Čekada, M., Bratož-Ježek, B. (2025). ***The remains of the former Venetian border hidden in the cadastral municipality boundaries on the Kraški rob plateau around Črnotiče.*** Geodetski vestnik, vol. 69, no. 4, pp. 459–501. https://www.geodetski-vestnik.com/arhiv/69/4/459_Triglav_Cekada_Bratoz.pdf

Triglav Čekada, M., Bratož-Ježek, B. (2024). ***Boundary cave and other land cadastral boundary marks around Socerb castle and the Rosandra valley.*** Geodetski vestnik, vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 11–39. https://www.geodetski-vestnik.com/arhiv/68/1/11_Triglav_Cekada_in_Bratoz_Jez



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