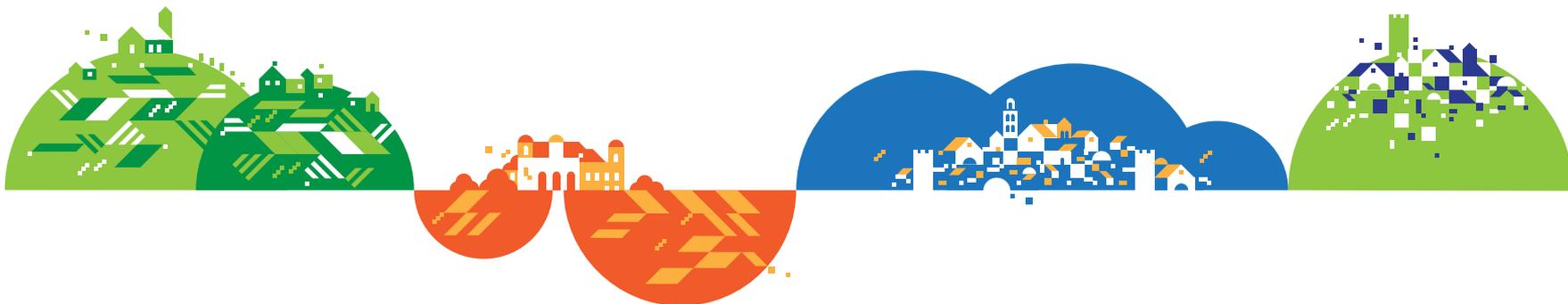




Vina Croatia

A TASTE OF PLACE

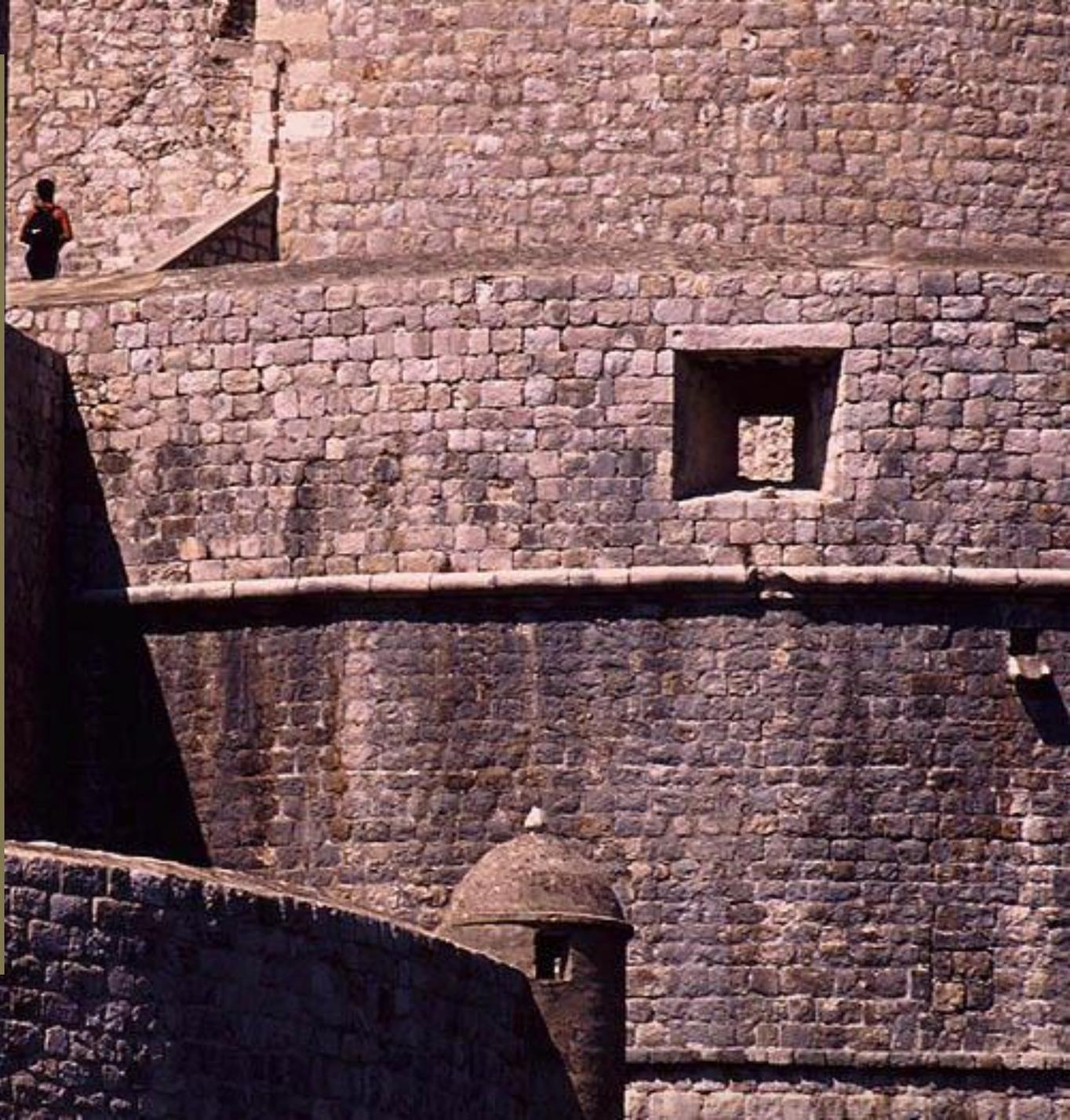
The Story of Vina Mosaica



He introduced himself as the Wine Explorer: wine lover, traveller, occasional artist, sometime wine merchant, inveterate storyteller. He had explored the world's wine atlas from Adelaide to Burgundy, from Chile to the Douro and wherever he travelled, he would sketch his impressions.



Now he was in Dubrovnik, not to walk the walls but to embark on a wine odyssey around Croatia. The word was that it had wealth in the past but wines of the future and he was here to explore, taste, and enjoy. As an Adriatic innocent, he ferried his way up Dalmatia's coast and round its wine islands with few expectations, but here found the roots of Croatian wine.



MOSAICA DALMATIA WORLD HERITAGE WINES



Dalmatia

VINA CROATIA vina mosaica

In Vis he found the first signs of ancient visitors, Greeks bearing vines and laying mosaics: of pebble patterns and amphorae, fish and strange sea creatures.



In Korcula, over perfectly simple grilled langoustines, he discovered Posip – like Semillon, he thought – and the birthplace of another explorer, Marco Polo.



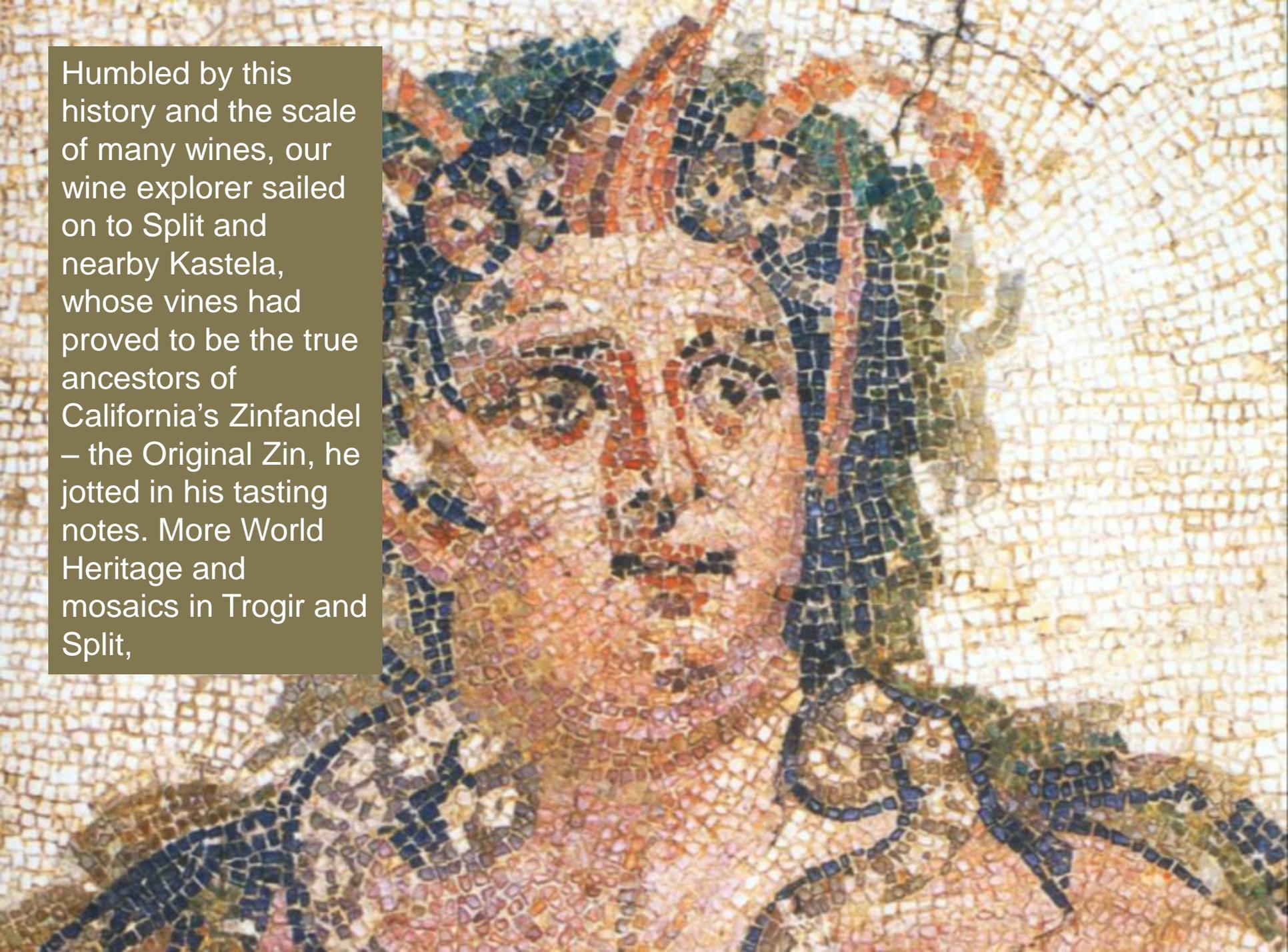
He crossed the water to the Peljesac peninsula opposite, climbed the steep hill of Dingac, donkey ahead, and tasted its profound Plavac Mali wines. How did they do it, on these slopes, with hot sun mirrored in the sea below? (“*The maddest place on earth to make wine*”, Michel Rolland had called it.) Here he saw the challenge for Dalmatia and its vines’ roots, burrowing for sustenance. Here he began to taste the place.



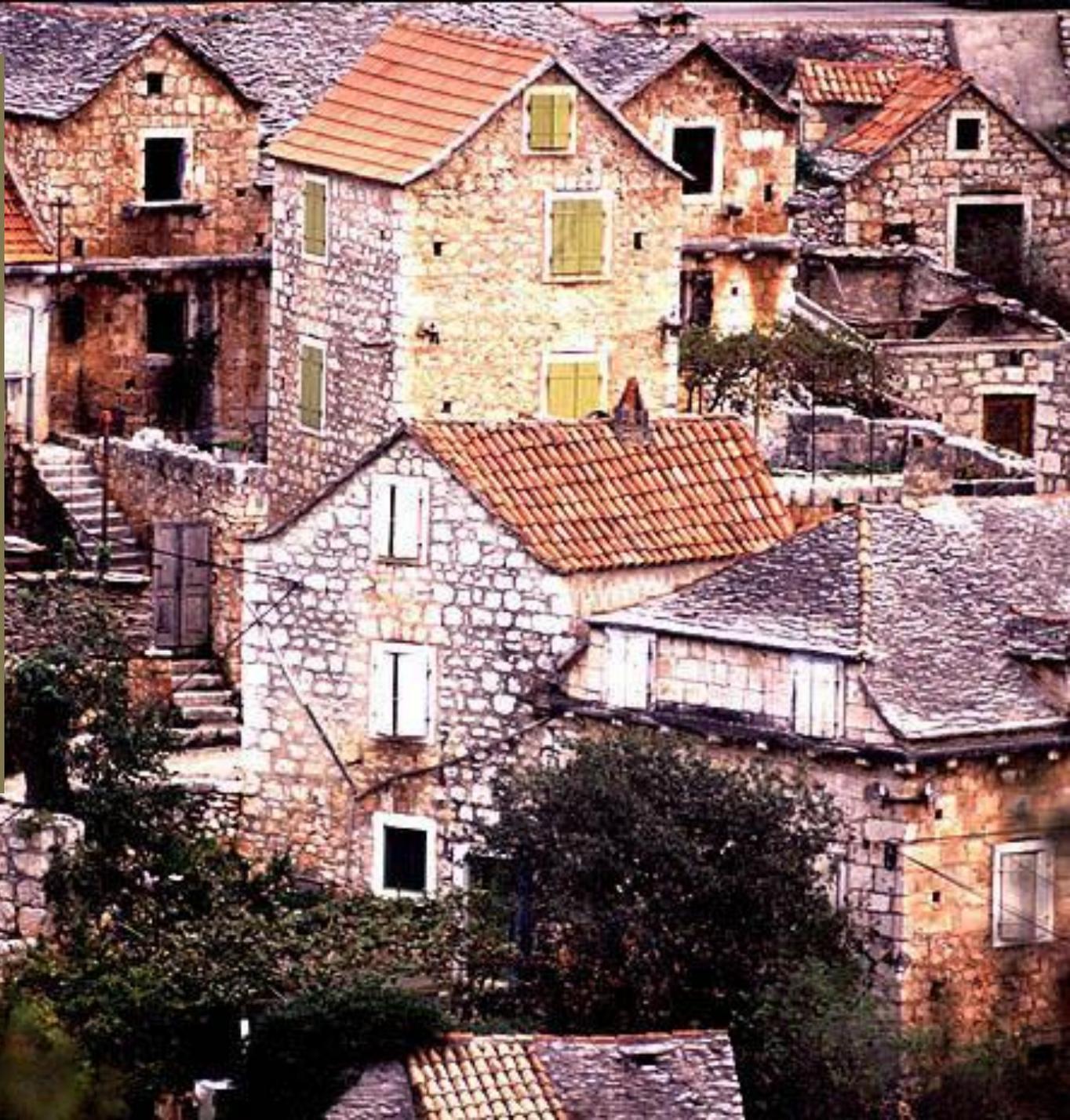
In Hvar he found roots even older, cultural and physical. Outside its old capital of Stari Grad, he walked the vineyard that defined Dalmatia's story. Here, vines have grown for nearly two and a half thousand years, in the oldest continuously worked vineyard of UNESCO World Heritage sites, anywhere in the world. Producing world heritage wines.



Humbled by this history and the scale of many wines, our wine explorer sailed on to Split and nearby Kastela, whose vines had proved to be the true ancestors of California's Zinfandel – the Original Zin, he jotted in his tasting notes. More World Heritage and mosaics in Trogir and Split,



...and *en route* in Brac his first sight of the classical checkerboard mosaic, much to be seen again. Behind this emblem was the Helleno-Romanic heritage which Croatia had made its own: the roots of ***Mosaica Dalmatia, Vina Croatia***, indeed ***Mosaica Croatia*** itself.



As his boat eased north up the Adriatic coast, past the world heritage vineyards of Primosten, our explorer broached their finest Babic and sketched his impressions: burning bright sun and deep red wine, sturdy donkey and strange sea creatures, linked by crystal blue sea and terracotta landscape.



What began to emerge on his sketchpad, of its own volition, was his own mosaic, a story to keep him warm through winters ahead, like a case of world heritage wine.





Istria & Kvarner

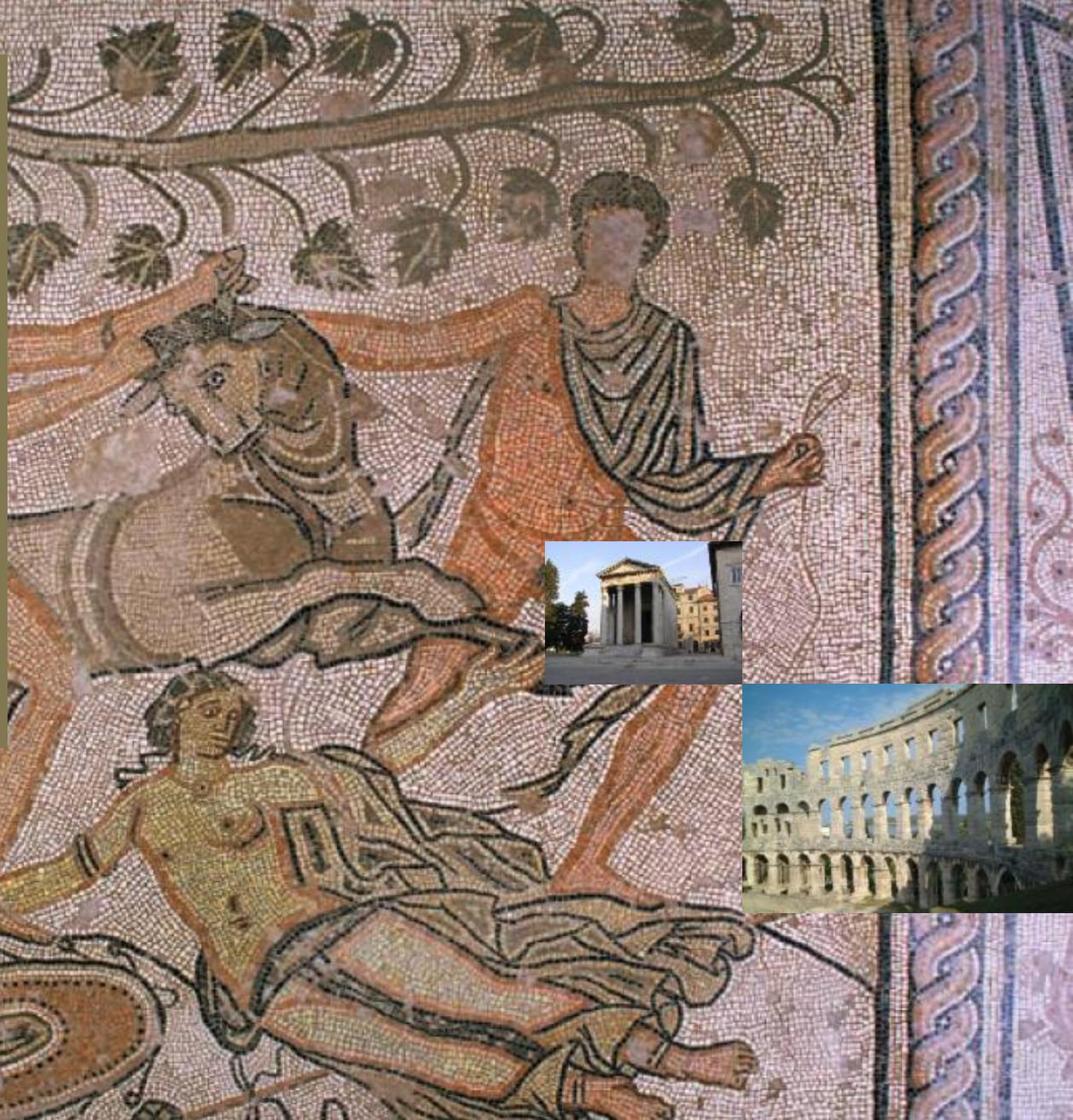
VINA CROATIA *vina mosaica*



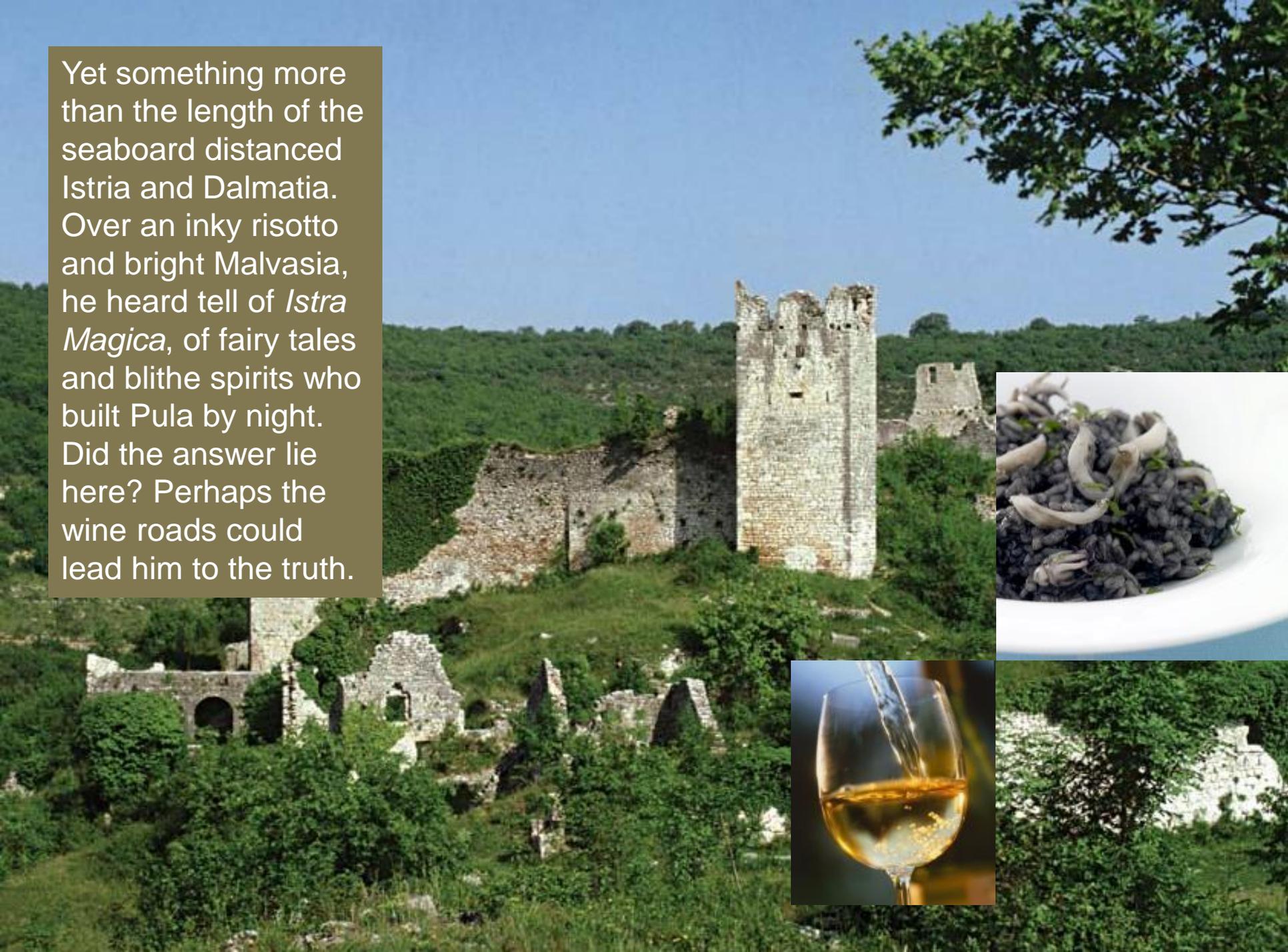
Chapter II

MOSAICA ISTRIA THE RITE OF SPRING

The moment he stepped off the boat he sensed the difference. Cooler temperature, certainly, but something else too. Both regions displayed the rule of Rome and Venice: here in Pula, arena and arch, *campanile* and – yes – mosaics, all bore witness, in the grand style.



Yet something more than the length of the seaboard distanced Istria and Dalmatia. Over an inky risotto and bright Malvasia, he heard tell of *Istra Magica*, of fairy tales and blithe spirits who built Pula by night. Did the answer lie here? Perhaps the wine roads could lead him to the truth.



On the drive north, the red soil and lower vineyards were as different as could be from the bleached slopes of Dalmatia, to be sure, but it was in the basilica at Porec, surrounded by the great Byzantine mosaics, that he sensed the beginnings of a different cultural pathway.



Turning inland towards the green heart of Istria, climbing verdant slopes towards whiter soil, he could understand comparisons with Tuscany but rejected them. This was unspoilt, less peopled, more Umbrian if anything, above all more mystical. As his lunch companion, a poetic young winemaker put it: “there is something in the air”.



They had stopped for a light lunch of *prsut*, cheeses and crunchy Teran – spread over a halved, fallen tree, under the sky – and his new friend explained. Yes their vines were blessed by the meeting of climates, Alpine and Mediterranean, and yes their wines had a natural freshness and vitality denied those further south. But perhaps, he suggested, man played his part. Who was he but “a man from the land”?



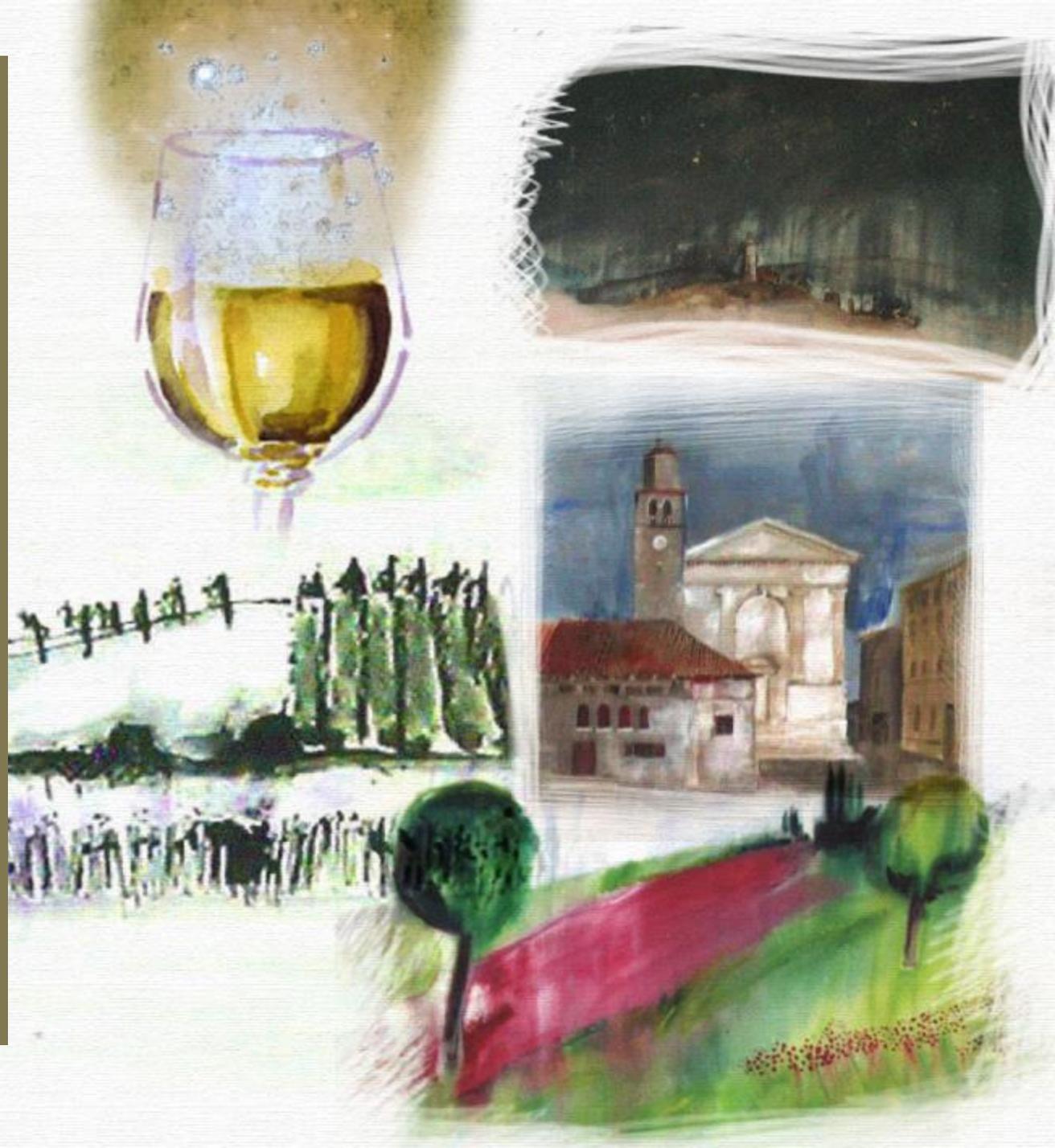
On this land, his grandfather had been born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then his father in Italy, and he in Ex Yugoslavia – each in the same house. “From Austria, we took the seriousness of work and from Italy, the best a man can make it”.



Here, on these hills, where climates and cultures swirled in the breeze, they toasted this Istrian mosaic – with his finest Malvasia. Pale lemon-yellow, it quenched the thirst better than Sauvignon Blanc, with more personality than Pinot Grigio. Now, with a bouquet of wild flowers, he could taste the place.



Sadly it was time to go. With magical hill towns behind him, he stopped before Mount Ucka, turned off the road and sketched awhile, up amongst the clouds; a *campanile* against blue sea, the great fish of Porec, the goat munching grass below him, and a glass of stardust on high. Again, a mosaic emerged on his sketchpad, but this time, beyond the icons and behind the wines there was something more, something in the Istrian air. He could hear the Rite of Spring.



Chapter III

Mosaica slavonia and the Croatian danube. Pure gold.



Slavonia &
Croatian Danube
VINA CROATIA *vina mosaica*



On reaching Zagreb, our explorer walked the town to view for himself the mosaic-tiled roof of St Mark's Church, an Austro-Hungarian rendition of this classical form. How perfectly Croatian, he thought, a multi-cultural mosaic: the meeting of Croatia, Dalmatia, and his next destination, Slavonia.



His train took him to its cultural and commercial centre at Osijek, en route to the Danube.

He had not realised Croatia bordered the Danube, for like many west Europeans he knew little of “Inner Croatia”, but now he discovered its importance.



Warhafftige Contrafactur/etlicher Städt/Schlösser

ken in Crabaten/welche der Erbfeind ganze

His journey took him east through the Pannonian Plain, Sava to the south, Drava to the north, each flowing inexorably into the Danube. Just as the Pannonian Sea had done 600,000 years ago, leaving behind the rich loess soil that could feed the whole of Europe and grow the wines he had come to taste.



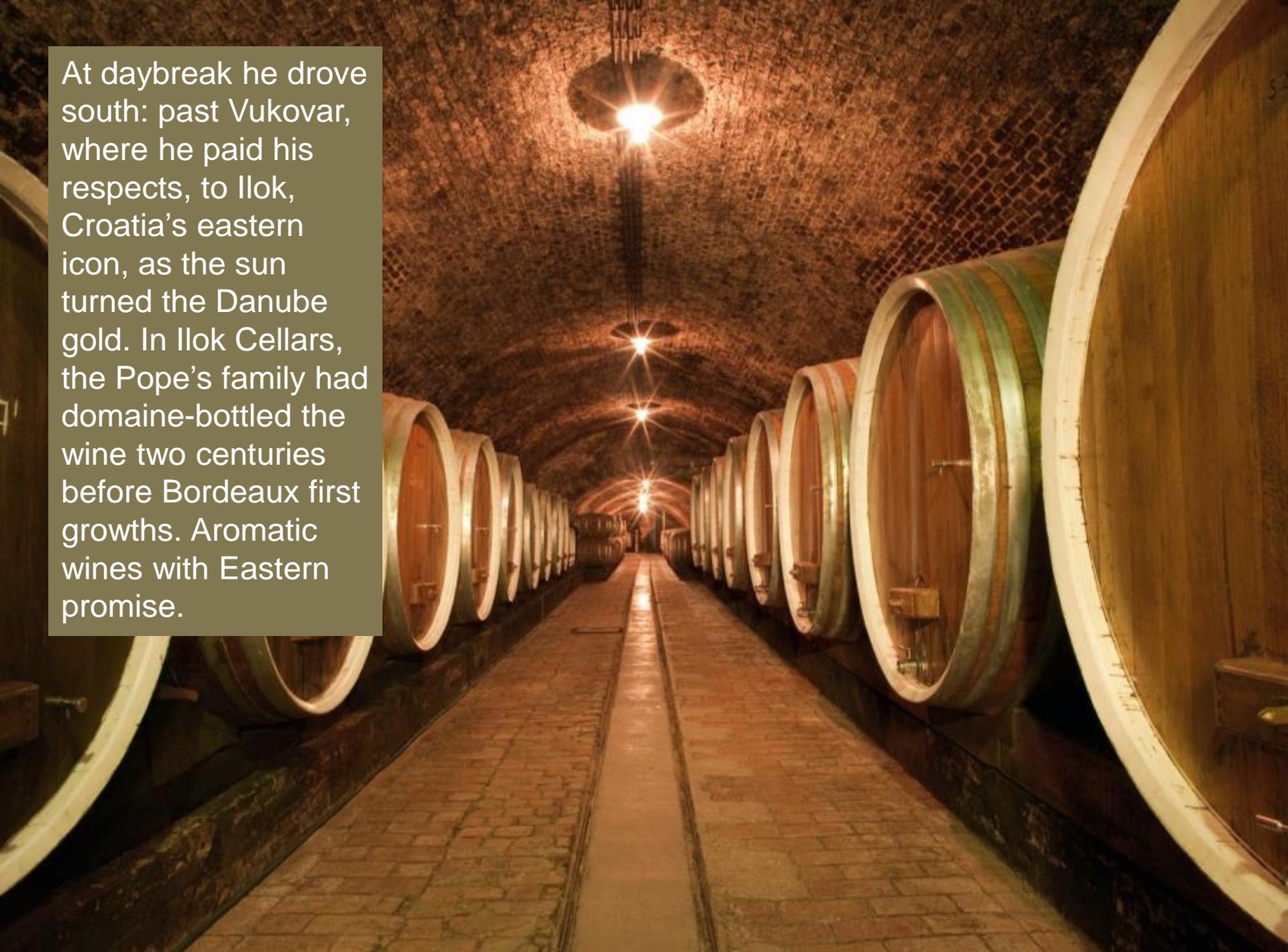
den weichen die groene Lyser
lands / allgemeyner Christenheit des
wert sey / von dem er die Consten so et
lich jährluch widerbrant / Stülck und
selber blüch alle Menschen wol bebeyn
in bester er aber daruff / daß wir nit allein
in noch wol so großem wir zuehens mit veyren Sünden ver
stet / Oben der h. Wei durch böchen vund Wunder
löcher / so / och wider die Wele dermassen mit Sünden also
in allerley / Warnung vund Verwöhnung im Wund
er vnd gering / et. wir solches die tägliche erfahrung gindig
Da wir ons aber von gangen bergen zu Christo bekehrt
den lau / einer Züchtung noch gindig sey / denn er je und ab
wehmet mit jenen Tücheln bergstaiden / wie wir alle

ten Anmachte mit erpörung / Es sey auch blüchig spiren / Denn veyrer
Vermafft nach / ist es freylich wol vündlich / ein so großes Meer / mit ei
nem solchen Namen blüchlich als neulich / fünf hundert vund fünf hundert
Christen / Dagegen veyrer trawer Tücheln / wie jr bestoch verkommen
werde / wuerehen vnd püchlich er / wo nit Gottes als des ewigen Sieges
sten / selbe Arm vnd rechte hand / solches gethan vnd erzeigt best 06.
Die Jüngst angeseyne Irwendische Victoria so vnter Kriegsvold
durch Gottes Beystand / den 21. Junij / wider den Bassaren Besitz / von
Essey / erpalten / wüdt auß Esseyg / Anam / vund andern mehr / den
confirmiert / hantebot weiter vermude / gröbere Bassare geist auch
vündkommen / wie dann sein Käper des andern Tags vülich gefunden
sant / daß alles Mahoma Berge von Constantz Re / 4. dem andern
e. Begegn / wie gleichfalls vil Agon / Spahien / Land / mit / Veycher
theils auß der Wehltun gelübet / theils /

den weichen die groene Lyser
lands / allgemeyner Christenheit des
wert sey / von dem er die Consten so et
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wehmet mit jenen Tücheln bergstaiden / wie wir alle

At daybreak he drove south: past Vukovar, where he paid his respects, to Ilok, Croatia's eastern icon, as the sun turned the Danube gold. In Ilok Cellars, the Pope's family had domaine-bottled the wine two centuries before Bordeaux first growths. Aromatic wines with Eastern promise.



By day he passed forests of Slavonian oak, the source of finest barrels, and crossed rich farmland: to lunch on *kulen* sausage and fruit-driven Merlot in the nature reserve of Kopacki Rit, silently watched by a white-tailed eagle, the first he had ever seen.



Nearby, from the hill of Goldberg, Grasevina in hand, he looked down on the legacy of Eugene, conqueror of Turks and Prince of the Croatian Danube: on irrigation that has borne fruit for three centuries.

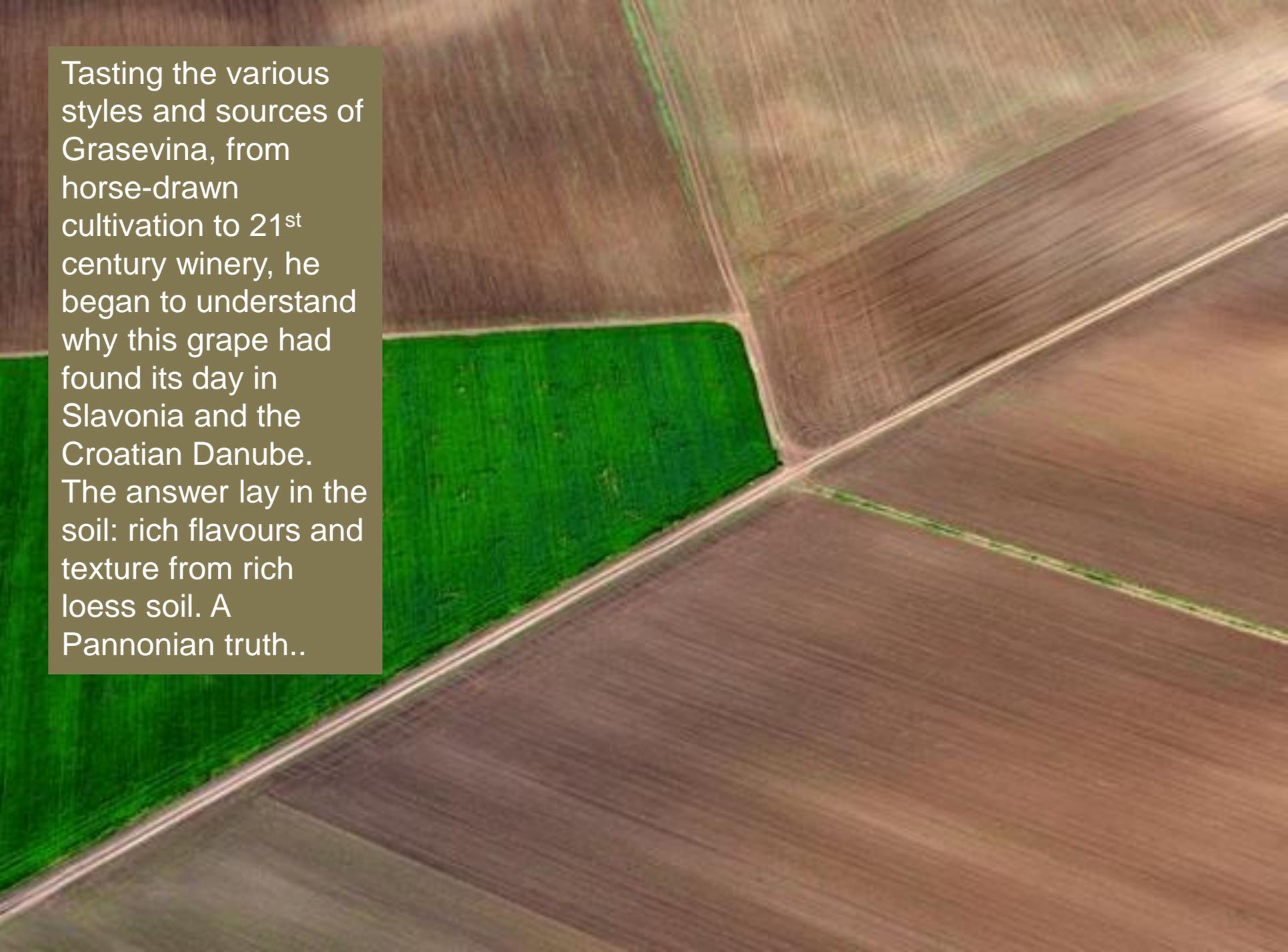


But much earlier, Romans had marched here behind their eagle, under these same great skies, to make wine in the Danube basin, long before the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As our explorer reached Kutjevo, sunset bathed their “*Vallis Aurea*” – Golden Valley – and he could see why its winemakers claimed this as the home of golden Grasevina.



Here was the oldest cellar in Croatia, with its own mosaic history of owners and influences: from Cistercians to Jesuits, Romans, Hungarians and even Turks.



An aerial photograph showing a patchwork of agricultural fields. A prominent feature is a bright green field, likely a vineyard, situated in the lower-left quadrant. The surrounding fields are various shades of brown and tan, indicating different crops or stages of cultivation. The fields are separated by thin, light-colored lines, possibly roads or irrigation channels. The overall scene depicts a rural, agricultural landscape.

Tasting the various styles and sources of Grasevina, from horse-drawn cultivation to 21st century winery, he began to understand why this grape had found its day in Slavonia and the Croatian Danube. The answer lay in the soil: rich flavours and texture from rich loess soil. A Pannonian truth..

So unlike other wine-producing regions, here Grasevina became an important speciality, with an indigenous name and indigenous character: “wine of grace”, he jotted on his notepad. For those who enjoyed the texture of Chardonnay, here was a genuine alternative of regional character. Wine for sultry summer evenings on the Danube. You could taste the place.



Before leaving his hosts at Kutjevo, replete with their warm hospitality, he sketched his impressions once more: an eagle, a cross, and an oak, each linking Slavonia and the Croatian Danube, each – like their Grasevina – bathed in gold. Pure gold.



Chapter IV

The Croatian Uplands: Hillside Wines



Croatian Uplands

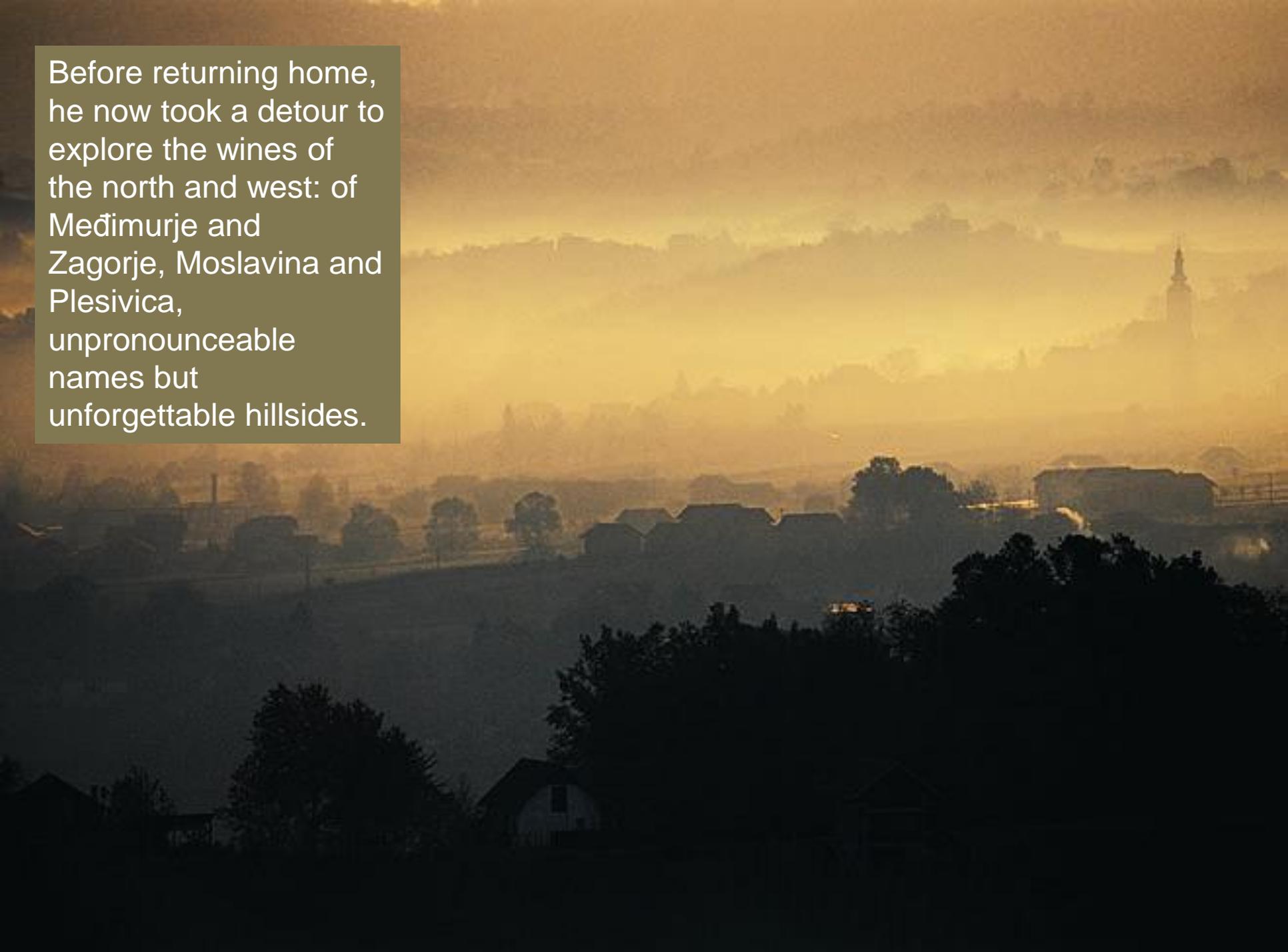
VINA CROATIA *vina mosaica*



Prije povratka kući,
zastao je kako bi
istražio i vina na
sjeveru i zapadu:
Međimurje, Zagorje,
Moslavina i Plešivica,
neizgovorivih imena
ali nezaboravnih
brežuljkastih padina.



Before returning home, he now took a detour to explore the wines of the north and west: of Međimurje and Zagorje, Moslavina and Plesivica, unpronounceable names but unforgettable hillsides.



Each had its own character but each had more in common: invariably small and family winemakers, working around their own tiny live-in cellars (*klet*); forests of old oak and singular yew; simple, modest churches and proud baroque castles, both reminders of their Imperial past; cool climates and sunny dispositions; and, above all, hillside wines.



The grape varieties might change – Pinots, Rieslings, Sauvignons – but most of them produced wines of crisp, refreshing, hillside character. Local opinion-leaders were even proposing a common name for their distinctive *cuvées* of fresh white wines: *Breg*, meaning Hillside.



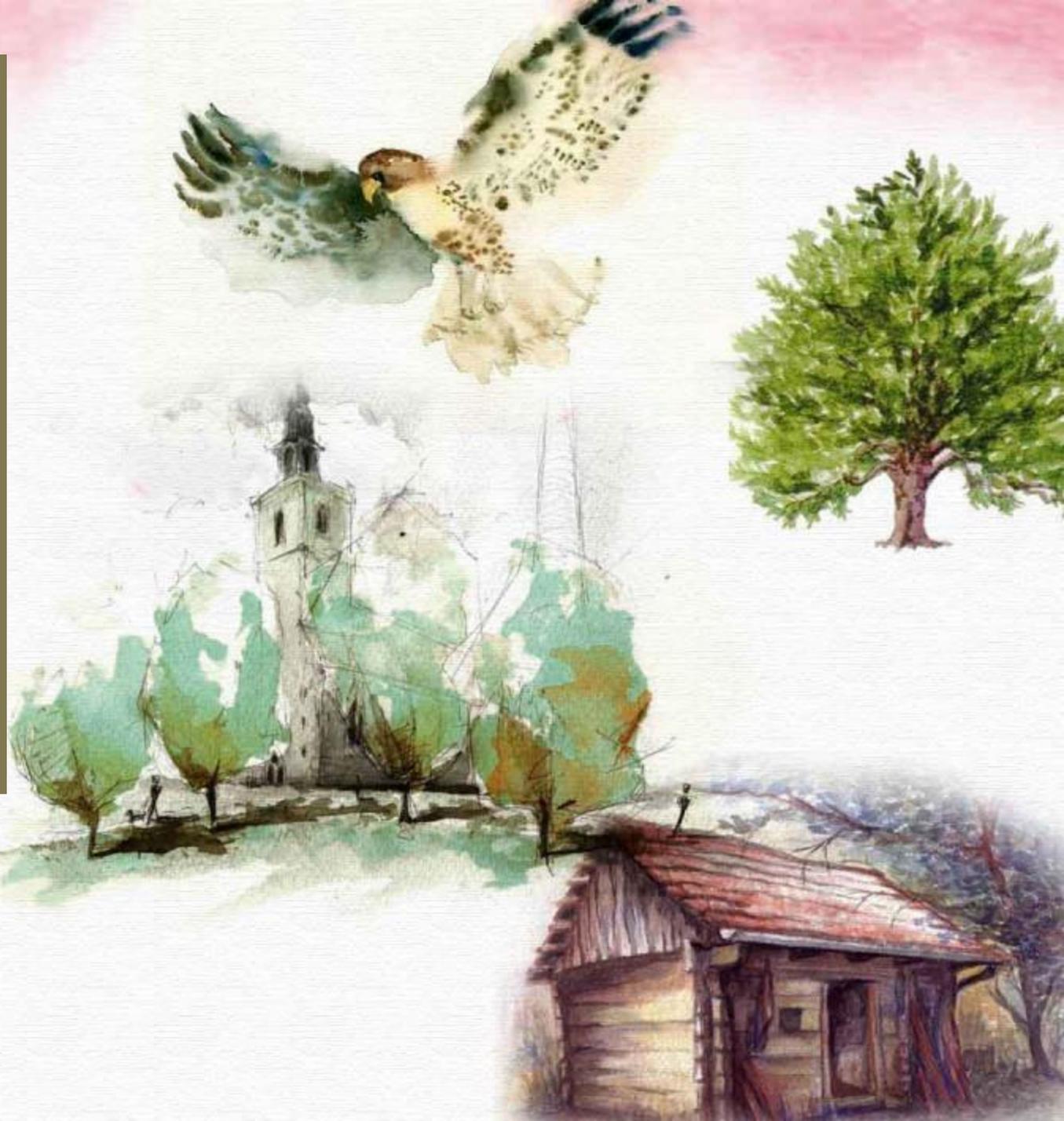
• But whether these were *Zagorje Breg* or *Plesivica Breg*, based on this man's Sauvignon Blanc or that man's Riesling, they invariably tasted like *Vina Bregi*, hillside wines. From what would become known as *Bregovita Hrvatska*, the Croatian Uplands.



In one day he had walked a mosaic of hills, from Pannonian east to borders west, and now he sat on a hilltop that could have been in deepest Beaujolais – but with a glass of natural wine that was distinctly Croatia



For the last time on this journey, his sketchpad opened and his hand moved with ease, remembering a hawk here, a yew tree there, the constant church and typical klet, and for some reason the sky was red – had he sensed that, here in inner Croatia, he had found the home of Croatian red?



•A place where generations of family winemakers were creating a new tradition, a new mosaic, on these Croatian Uplands. The name reminded him of Churchill, in the dark days of war, sounding hope for the future, famously speaking of “broad sunlit uplands” ahead. Here he could feel a bright sunlit future for Vina Croatia – its wines, its lands, and its peoples, its very own cultural mosaic. For once more he could taste the place. .



Chapter V

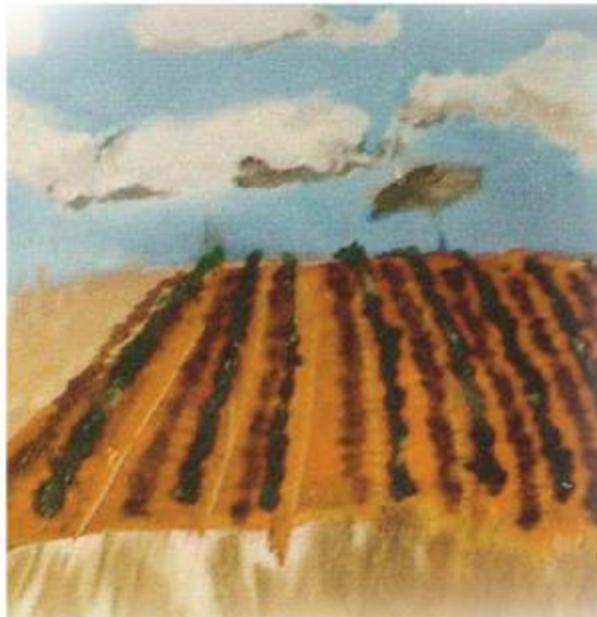
VINA CROATIA, VINA MOSAICA



Now our Wine Explorer would return home with his sketchbook full of memories and his palate changed for good.



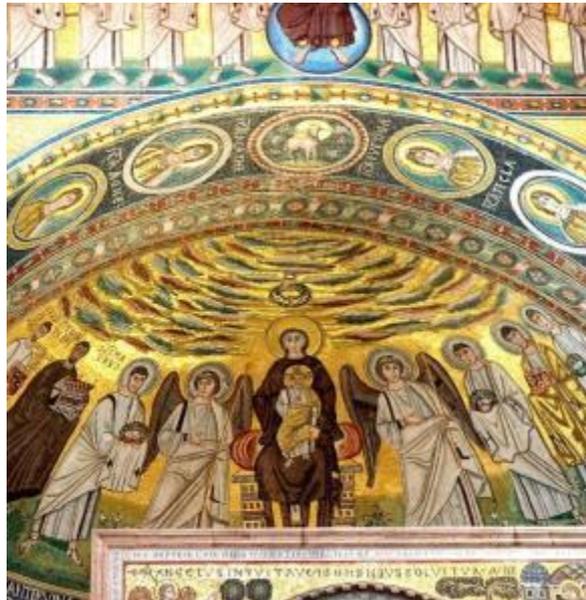
He would welcome Spring with a glass of Malvasia and dream of Istria. Laze a sultry summer evening with golden Grasevina and thoughts of the Croatian Danube. Grace a winter feast with a bottle of Plavac Mali, filled with its world heritage and the warmth of Dalmatian sun. And imagine a future glass of Vina Bregi in the bright sunlit Croatian Uplands.



• It seemed that Croatian wines embodied history beyond the New World yet synthesised cultures unlike any Old World country. This was the future and wine lovers everywhere should explore it. Ahead he could see wine tours and travel guides and wine maps and web-guides.



In fact he would help create them. He would send his impressions to Decanter and sketches to his new friends across Croatia's wine lands. Perhaps they could use them in the story of Vina Croatia and redraw the world wine map.....with Vina Mosaica.





VINA CROATIA
vina mosaica





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