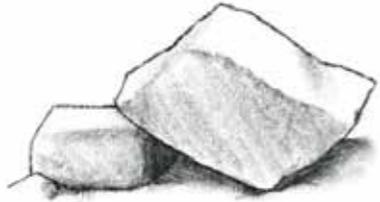




BEAUTY OF STONE POETRY, ISTRIA

Piran cultural landscape,
from the sea to the countryside



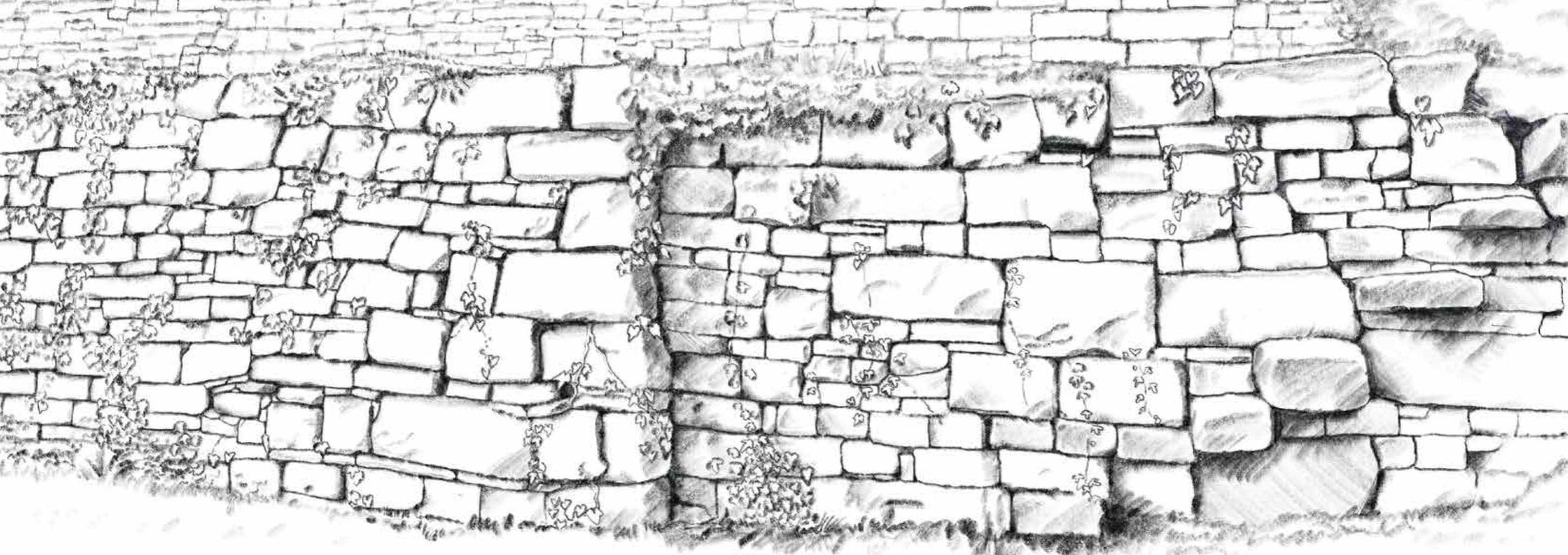
The Beauty of Stone Poetry

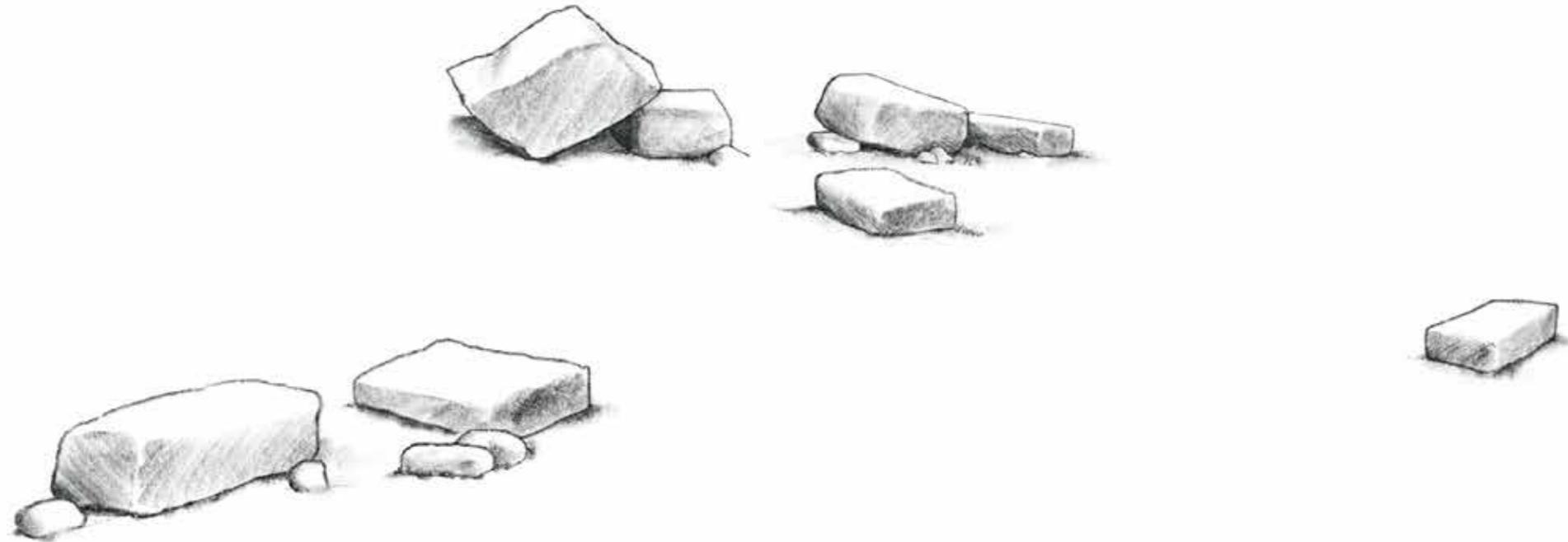
The unique identity and characteristic image of the cultural landscape of Piran are created by the blending of our scenic landscape, and the many stone buildings left for us by our ancestors.

Their image influences us, invoking feelings of respect, beauty, and harmony. The space and harmony give a defined purpose to the place.

While the structures are strong, stable, and simple, their expression gives the powerful relationship between man and nature. This gives us an in-depth view of people's relationship with nature, which is an ethical one of respect, and honesty.

Stone architecture is a unique work of art, regardless of its size. It elevates our spirits and blends well with the aesthetic values of the space it occupies. Just as poetry engages us at a personal level, so does this beautiful stone architecture, connecting us and educating us.





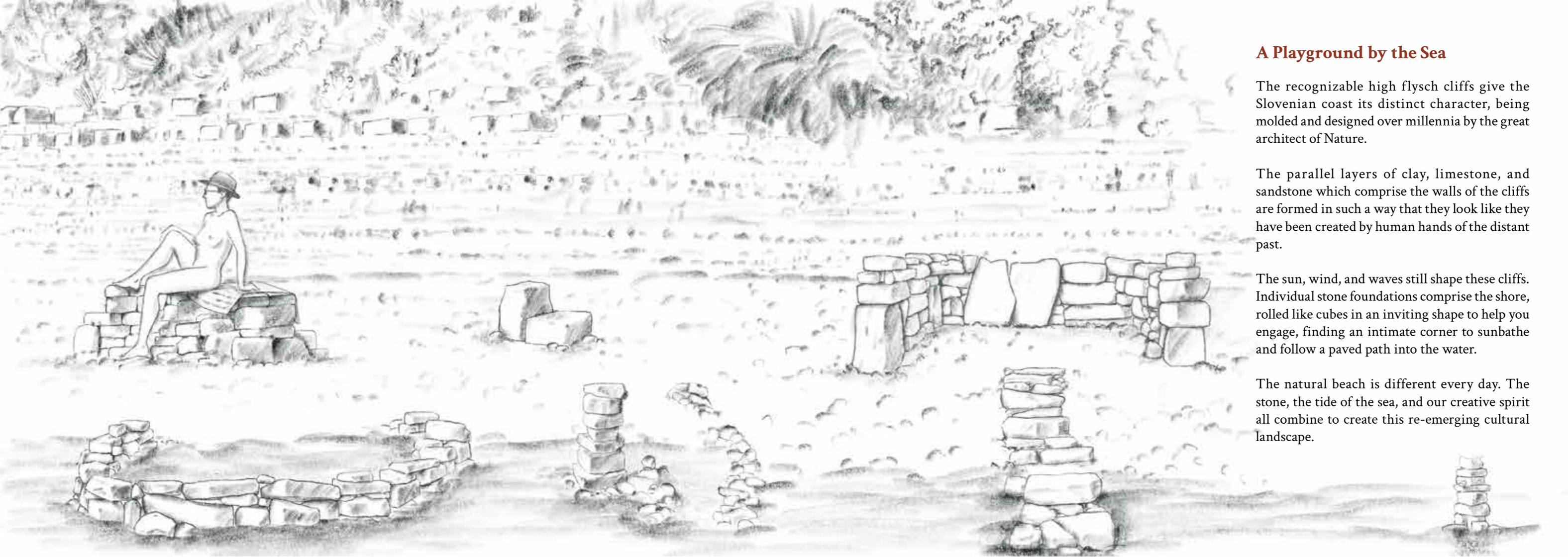
Stone, My Friend

My feet hurt,
I laid you down and paved my way.
I wanted to be alone,
so I built a wall and hid behind it.
Stone, my friend.

Fertile soil was carried away,
so I used you to support it.
Whipped by the wind,
I found shelter under your arch.
Stone, my friend.

When the water drenches, you frame it,
when a wave comes, you tame it,
when the water is needed, you hold it,
when I have to cross it, you bridge it.
Stone, my friend.

My home stands safe on your foundations.
My green garden grows
and blossoms in your embrace.
I admire you in the streets, on shores
and in the squares.
In your countless colours, sizes and shapes.
Stone, my friend.



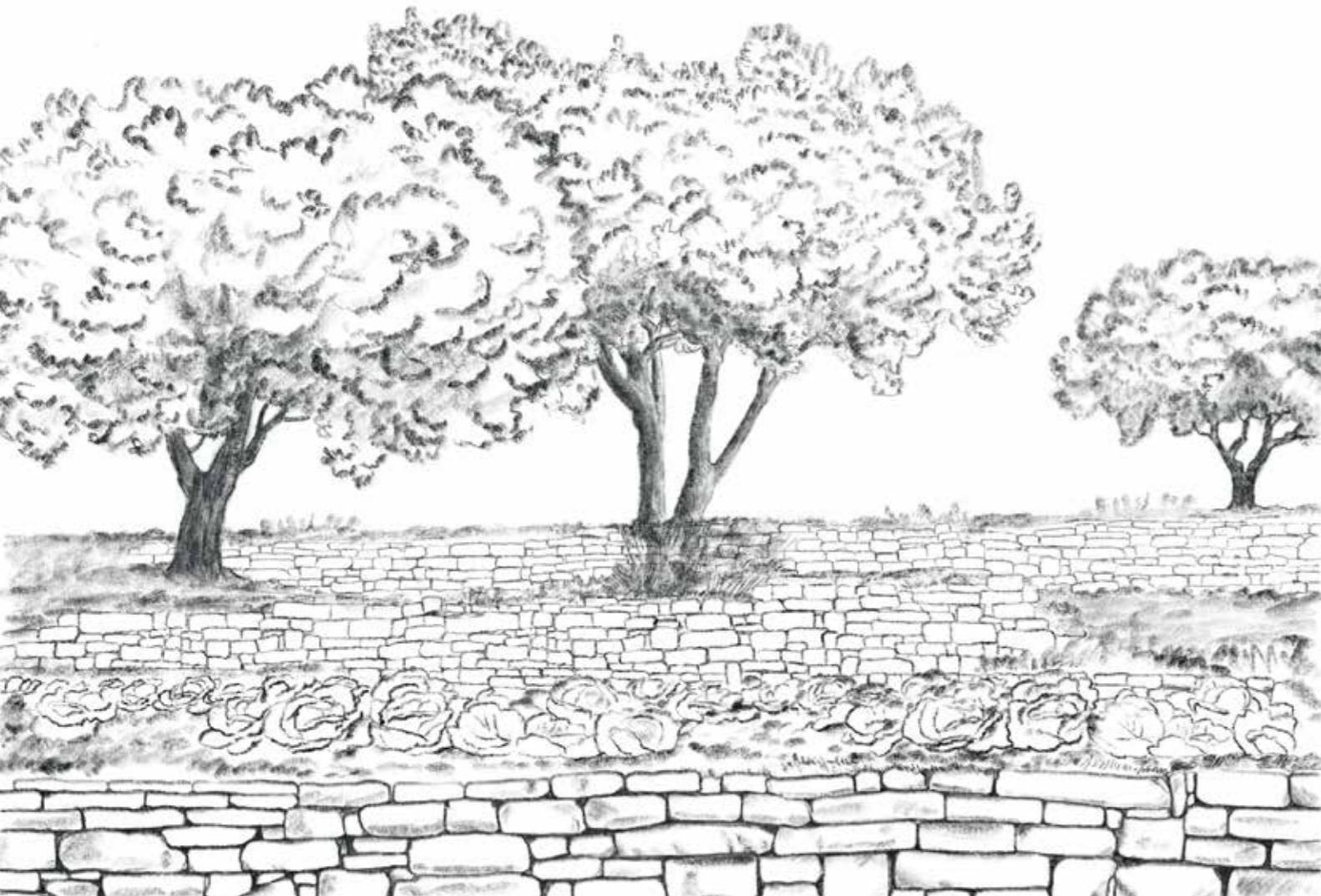
A Playground by the Sea

The recognizable high flysch cliffs give the Slovenian coast its distinct character, being molded and designed over millennia by the great architect of Nature.

The parallel layers of clay, limestone, and sandstone which comprise the walls of the cliffs are formed in such a way that they look like they have been created by human hands of the distant past.

The sun, wind, and waves still shape these cliffs. Individual stone foundations comprise the shore, rolled like cubes in an inviting shape to help you engage, finding an intimate corner to sunbathe and follow a paved path into the water.

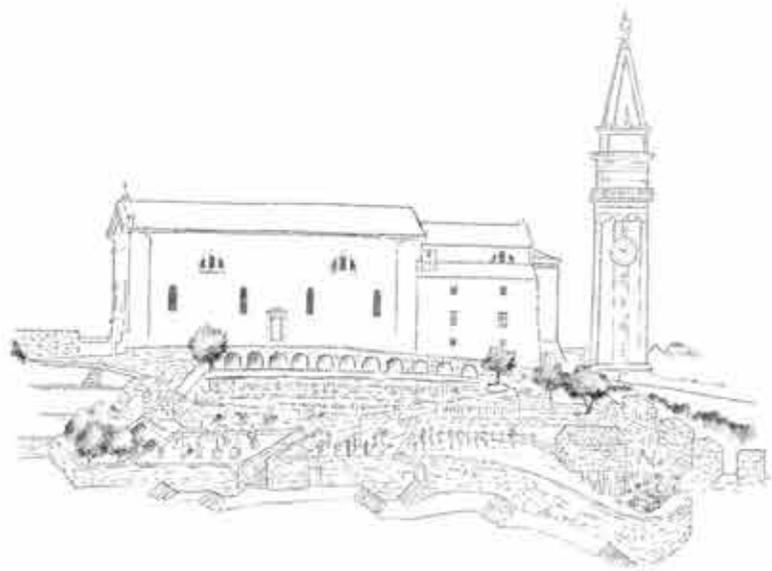
The natural beach is different every day. The stone, the tide of the sea, and our creative spirit all combine to create this re-emerging cultural landscape.



The Guardians of the Earth

The Slovenian cultural landscape, part of Istria, is mostly terraced, with the valley plains comprising the rest of this landscape. The slopes of the landscape are recognizably shaped into magnificent terraces, supported more often than not by dry stone walls, which are known by locals as scarps.

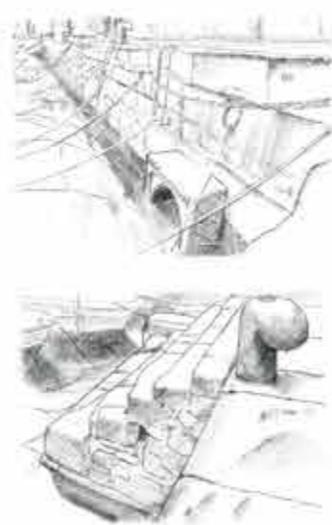
A varied array of bustling crops, like vines and olives, create a green belt. Some terraces had become reforested a few decades ago, while others have overgrown on their own. The slopes of the terrace, known by the locals as crowns, can be overcome by grass or rock. In some areas, the base would be comprised of rock, while the top is comprised of grass. Due to the weight of the stone blocks in the drywall, the terraces are very stable. These self-supporting structures protect the ground from water and wind erosion. These retaining walls naturally follow the strata, which can span hundreds of meters. On the steepest slopes they can reach 5 meters in height. During downpours they allow excess water to flow away and help retaining moisture during droughts, creating better conditions for diversity in flora and fauna.



The Stone Embrace of Gardens

While walking in Piran, you can often find yourself intertwined within stone walls, streets, and staircases. Nature breaks through here and there, with flowers breaking through, implying a different space beyond the wall, an intimate space that wants to remain hidden. These spaces can be private gardens, olive groves, orchards, fields, lawns, or a churchyard. Usually, the entrance consists of wooden doors, rarely by the stone entryway and exceptionally by a stone entryway with symbolic flowers carved into the sandstone above them. Each stone wall is its own, like humans, they are unique in height and width, some are slender and long, others are wide and low, and still, others are tall and short. Different colors and textures dress their surface, concealing one side while proudly showing off the other. Some of the walls are topped by a two-cap sandstone cap. Others are covered by a flat limestone beret and some walls are not topped at all, being left to the elements.

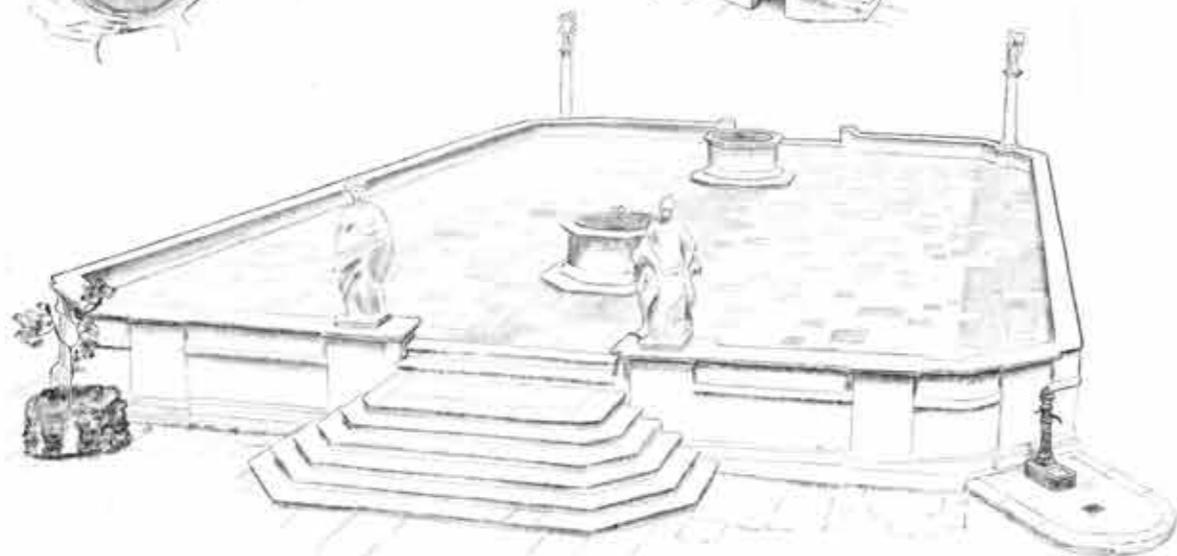
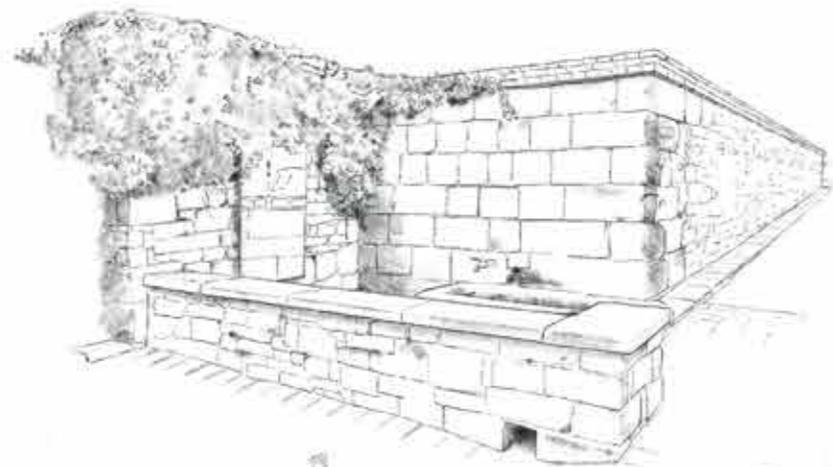
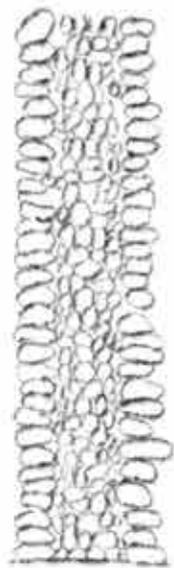
The walls give different perspectives as you gaze over the landscape of Piran. Dark cypresses which rise in the sky behind these walls mark the cemetery, the last home of the ancestors who lived in this region, shaped and nurtured by them to create this landmark.



The Wet Dry Wall

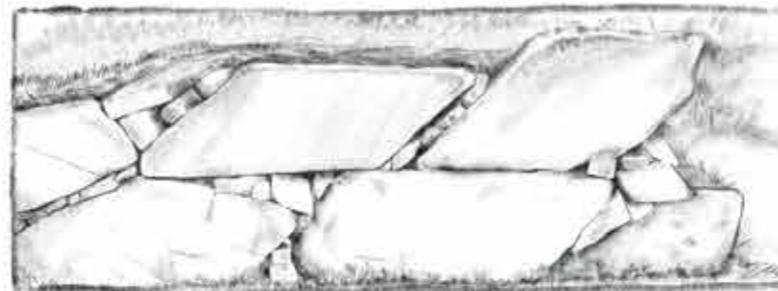
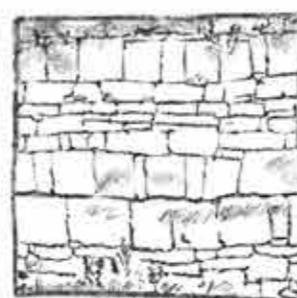
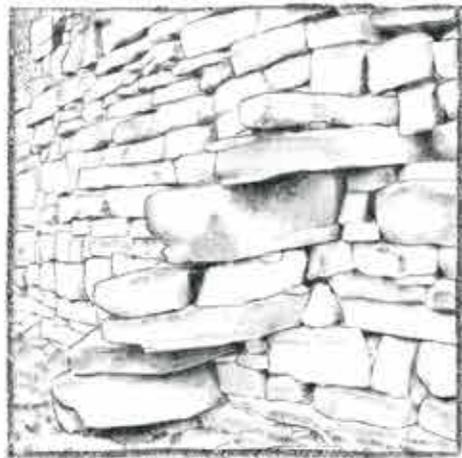
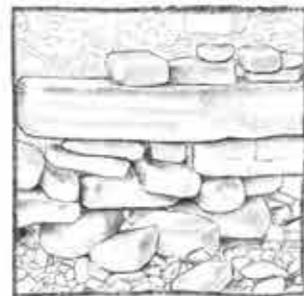
It is quite ironic, but drywall works very well in water. Soline is the most characteristic water cultural landscape, which breaths daily with the tides. Earth and stone walls traditionally separate fields through long straight lines. Together with water, they create a mosaic image of mirrors, these mirrors reflect the sun, clouds, and sky. When high, the water naturally seeps through the permeable layers of stacked sandstone and limestone into the ground, and when the water falls, it leaks out of it in opposite direction. The drywalls allow for the breathing of the salt fields, are calm, and are better adapted to the needs of the salt workers.

Dry ravines in the area also create these water barriers. These turn into heavy rushes of water during intense rains. Partly permeable barriers retain the destructive force of water. They also delay the water, allowing it to flow through the landscape. The semi-permeable stone is great for strengthening ditches for drainage along roads, between fields, and along the back walls of houses. The clash of stone and water are also found on Piran's embankments, piers, and stairs leading to the sea. The port is equipped with a variety of metal elements, such as bollards, ladders, rope rings, chains, and mooring numbers.



Water in a Stone Cradle

Water is a precious commodity within this living space, by its nature inconstant. Due to the impermeable base of marl and sandstone, water drains quickly on the surface during downpours, and in dry periods it is difficult to keep, as it will quickly evaporate. Where there are cracks in the ground between the rock layers, the water will sink, and then it will come back to the surface as a spring or a well. These places are unique and precious, often protected by stone self-supporting arches. Stone structures were usually built next to the springs, where women did their laundry. Within medieval Piran, to retain water, a raised platform was built. This was built in the former central square, under which there is a cistern. Rainwater flowed into it through the joints between the pavers and through gutters installed from nearby roofs. Today this area is known as Prvomajski trg. In the countryside, artificial water catchments, so-called "puč" or "kal" and ponds were built for the needs of people and livestock. Where the water could not be stopped and rushed through the landscape during downpours, arched bridges were built. The most valuable commodity in this region is certainly the well. Almost every house had it, for without water there is no life. Until recently, taps in the streets and squares, which Istrians call "špine", were the only source of drinking water for many.

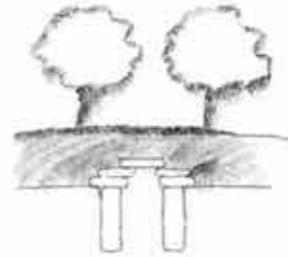


Unique Patterns

Drywall is an ancient art of stacking stones into various structures without the help of a binder. Like how poets will carefully pick their words to evoke emotions, so do the masters who construct the drywalls carefully select specific stones of differing assortments and arranging them.

Every wall, every step, opening or stone barrier and every line in the wall is a unique work of art, in which each stone has its specific place within the whole. It is therefore not surprising that the art of building dry stone walls in 2018 was inscribed on the UNESCO list of the untouchable cultural heritage of mankind.

The special feature of drywalls in Istria is that despite the diversity of textures, they have a distinctly linear structure. Stairs for the passage between terraces are always part of the structure of the wall, regardless of whether they run along with it, or are built into it.



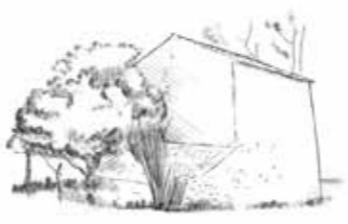
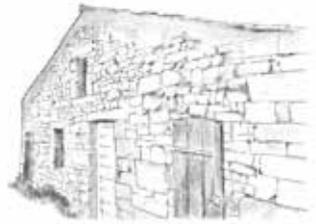
In the Shelter of Stone

Walking through the Istrian countryside today it will be surprising to find that almost all the slopes, even if overgrown with forest today, are shaped into terraces supported by stone walls.

While walking among them, you may find a hidden niche within the wall. You can step inside and witness a nice stone shelf, a window opening, with even a semi-circular roof above you. These modest stone shelters provided a safe haven from rain, wind, and sun for the people who once cultivated their fields called “njive” – where olive and fruit trees, vines, and vegetables were grown.

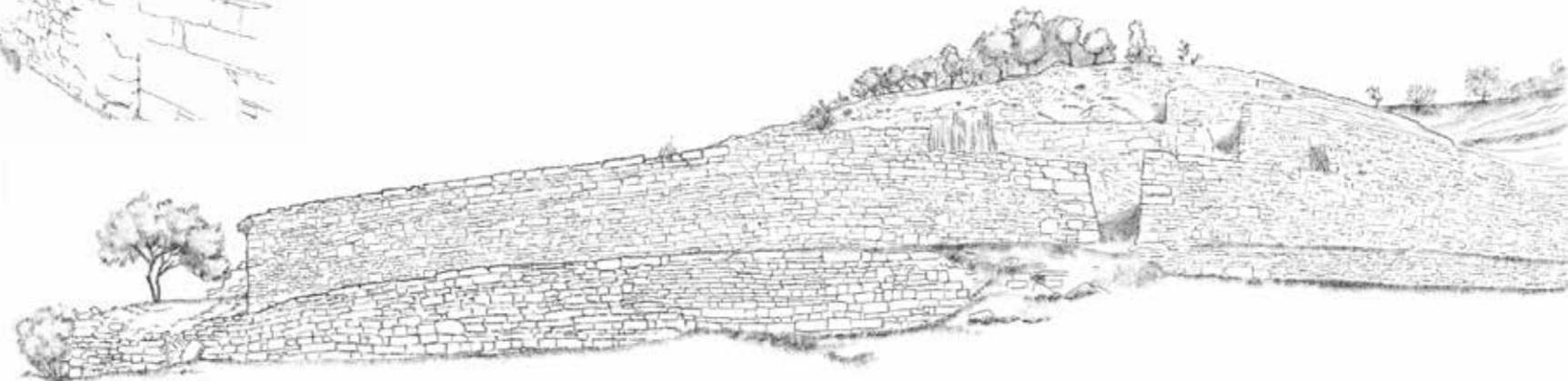
When plantation distances were far from each other, these small niches accommodated for people to spend the night and continue their tasks the next morning.





From the hut to the palace

You can find stone buildings both in the city and in the countryside. They are like crystal structures, grown from the earth, which give a characteristic and recognizable stamp to the landscape. The buildings are mostly built in warm, earthy sandstone colors. In the areas near Izola or the Savudrija peninsula, where limestone appears in the parent rock, the walls are mixed. There are also several details to be found, consisting of white stone. A stone building can be a modest home or an intimate homestead. They can be used as train stations, huge salt warehouses or hotels. They can stand on their own as a majestic and prestigiously elegant palace, or they can squeeze in with others at the top of a hill or at the end of a cape. Everywhere the building adapts to natural conditions and the users' needs. Simple saltworker's houses were the temporary residence of families who worked in the salt fields during the summer. Individual village houses are close to fields and olive groves. They can have their facades facing southwest or south to capture as much sun as possible and protect themselves from the north wind, called "burja". Prestigious palaces, villas, and hotels occupy places with the most beautiful views. Some buildings proudly display their stone essence on the outside, while others prefer to hide it under colorful façade plaster.



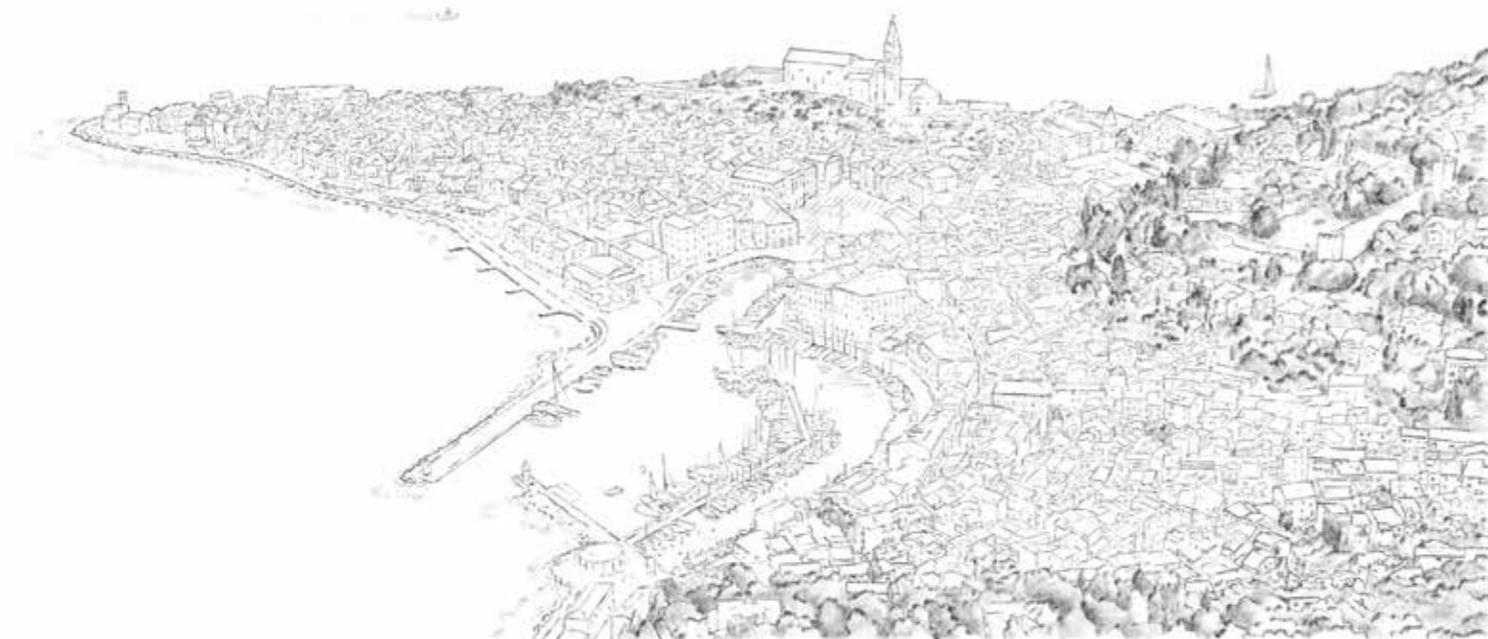
The Countryside in Stone

Two types of settlements emerge from the Istrian countryside. What attracts your view at first are the clustered villages in which houses are huddled together around the village church, with the bell tower arising on the peak of the hill.

Not as noticeable are the settlements without a distinct village core, scattered amongst the hills.

Often on top of the hills, linearly along the ridge, or on narrow exposed piers above the valleys. Due to the interconnectedness of firewalls, stone houses, retaining walls, portals, and scarps, it seems they are a single complex stone structure.

In the case of villages that are in lower-lying areas, individual houses are placed linearly, in groups or standing independently in the space depending on the natural conditions.



The city of Stone

Piran's houses, palaces, streets and squares, church bell towers and walls, and even embankments and piers are built of stone bricks, because the people of Piran were using natural material that was at their fingertips.

As grains of sand were formed into stone under the pressure of their own weight in the distant past, so were individual stone bricks transformed into cities under the hands of skilled medieval stonemasons. The labyrinth of narrow streets and arched passages of the city still offers shelter from the elements today.

Piran got its name from the beautiful reddish sandstone, which glows especially warm and vivid when the sun shines on it. This is enhanced as there is a lot of sun in Piran, from sunrise to sunset.

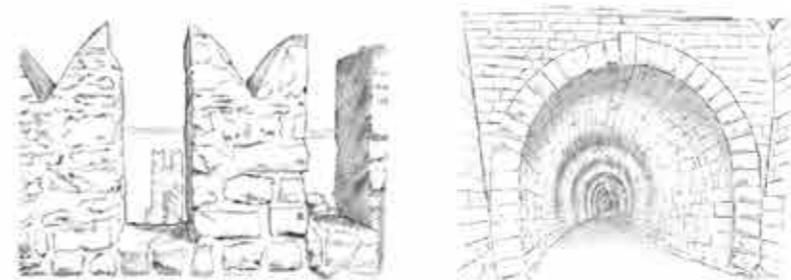


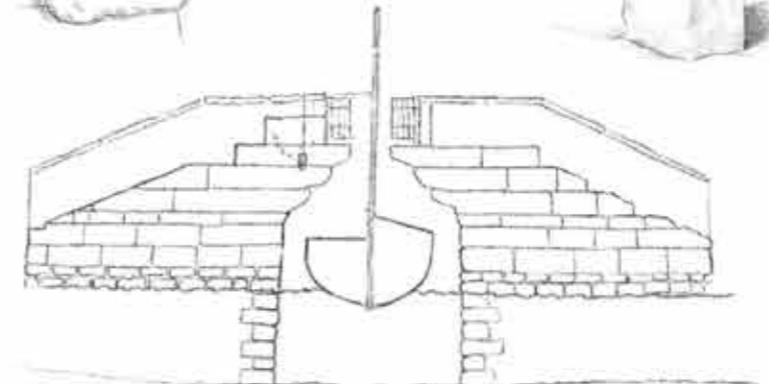
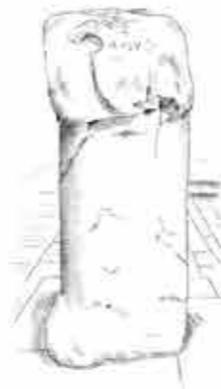
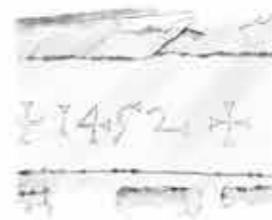
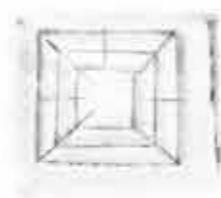
Magnificent constructions

Only when you gaze upon Piran from afar, from the sea, do you notice a wreath of massive stone walls with mighty jagged towers, which recently protected the city from predators from the mainland.

As the eye descends lower towards the sea, the view stops at the majestic arched garlands that support the church building with walls and protect it from being undermined by sea waves.

When you walk to the other side, where the Piran houses lean on the slope that descends towards the sea, you notice two stone piers that securely embrace the mandrake-like hands and protect the ships and boats anchored in it.



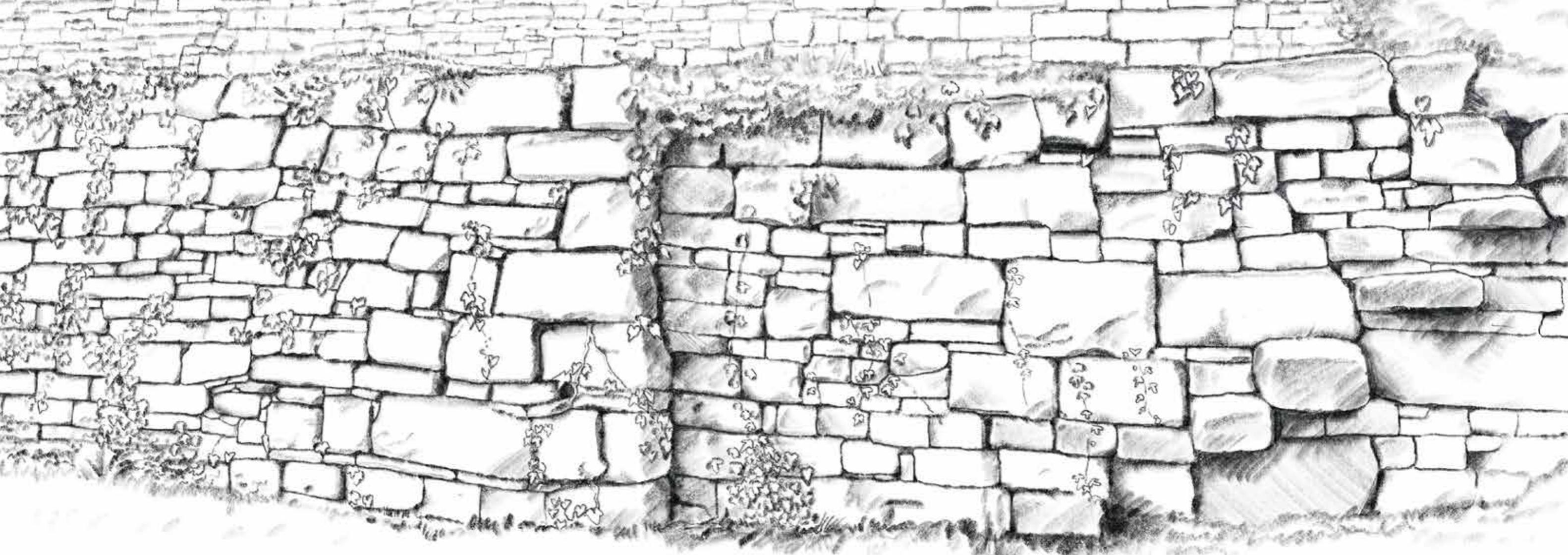


Stone Secrets

An abundance of archeological findings on land and at sea prove the presence of Romans on the peninsula. In village Lukan, you can view archeological remains of a country house surrounded by large stone walls. Within the Fizine area, between present-day Bernardin and the Monfort salt warehouse, underwater archaeological research has confirmed the existence of a Roman-era fish farm with piers.

You may not have known that the original Piran mandrac was where Tartini Square is located today. The entrance to it was then closed by a drawbridge, unique on a global scale. It had two separate stone parts, which were connected by a lifting wooden platform so that ships with masts could also sail into the mandrake.

Under Sv. Jurij's church is a secretive archeological cave. Within it's silence, you can listen to the whisper of the stones of the oldest walls in Piran, which guard the secrets of the former priests. And what is the biggest secret of the stone? Hold it in your hands to get warm. Listen to them. Do you also think a heart beats silently in them? That a house, wall, or city built of stone revived by human hands has a soul. The landscape, formed from such a stone, radiates a spirit that unobtrusively calms the visitor, restores their meaning, and fills them with timeless beauty.



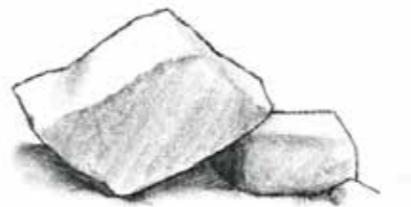
CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

719(497.4Piran)

KAČIČ, Romana

Lepota kamnite poezije, Istra: kulturna krajina
Piranskega od mesta do podeželja / [besedilo Romana
Kačič, Barbara Škarja; poezija Barbara Škarja; ilustracije
Sara Mušič Žetko]. - Portorož: Turistično združenje, 2023

ISBN 978-961-94982-8-6
COBISS.SI-ID 86046979



THE BEAUTY OF STONE POETRY, ISTRIA; The cultural landscape of Piransko, from the sea to the countryside

Original title: Lepota kamnite poezije, Istra;
Kulturna krajina Piranskega od morja do podeželja
Text: Romana Kačič, Barbara Škarja
Poetry: Barbara Škarja
Illustrations: Sara Mušič Žetko
Design: Romana Kačič, Sara Mušič Žetko
Translation: Evan Bailey, Barbara Škarja
Producer: ABAKKUM Zavod za krajino, kulturo
in umetnost, Piran
Published by: Turistično združenje Portorož
Printed by: xxx.xxx
Copies: 000
Piran - Pirano, 2023