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REBULA - great grape variety from a small area / a hundred faces of Rebula

Rebula is a white grape variety which is used to make top quality wines, sparkling, still fresh wine, aged, orange or sweet wines alike. In every form it always gives excellent results and great pleasure. Vineyards where this excellent variety is grown are located in a very small area, stretching over about 50 km in diameter on the border between Slovenia and Italy. In hilly parts on both sides of the border, grown on a poor soil where well-known international varieties would never grow without substantial human assistance, the indigenous Rebula thrives with all its qualities.

Although recognised by wine experts all over the world, owing particularly to orange wines, which have been quite popular over the last decade, it still needs to be introduced to and popularised in the wider circle of wine connoisseurs.

Its origin and place where it was first grown are still unclear. It has been established that the white variety Rebula (Slovenia), Ribolla Gialla (Italia) and Robola (Greece) are related. The first two are identical and only bear different names, whereas the Greek Robola is a relative sharing one of the parents with the other two.

Rebula is registered with the OIV (L'organisation Internationale de la Vigne et du Vin) Register of vine varieties, and it can therefore be grown by everyone who has it registered in their rulebooks on wine-growing region. That is why in recent years, due to Rebula's abundant yields, resistance and natural acidity, our western neighbours have been growing it in new vineyards in the plain and on the rich soil that is inadequate and does not allow this variety to show all its qualities, which is why the reputation of this variety's respectable name may be severely damaged.

I started my research by reading reference books and journals dealing with the topic in question. I have conducted interviews with renowned wine experts, who have provided me with further guidance. An extensive research of archive material has yielded results in the form of centuries-old records mentioning the Rebula. Interviews with the most famous winemakers in Goriška

Brda (SLO) and Collio (IT), and tastings of various varieties have presented a hundred faces of this excellent white variety and its many possibilities in the best way possible.

The Rebula likes sloping hillsides, terraced, sunbathed, airy vineyards on a poor soil. The best grapes come from soft, eocene flysch soil — fine marlstone, sandstone and limestone that give Rebula its characteristics. Flysch is also known in Goriška Brda as 'opoka'. The skin thickness allows the grapes to remain longer on the vine. Fresh wine obtained from Rebula grape is hay-yellow with green shades and retains carbon dioxide bubbles, which give sparkle, freshness and pleasure when tasted. Fragrance is reminiscent of white florals, acacia, white peach, apple, and grapefruit. In the mouth it is lively and with higher acids, pleasant fruitiness, and prolonged, slightly bitter almond aftertaste. Owing to its natural acidity, rich body, floral-fruity aromas and flavours, it is suitable for the production of a rich spectrum of wines.

The paper goes on to describe the typical wine samples — from the lively sparkling wine obtained by Charmat method in Klet Brda winery, the fresh wine with floral and fruity aromas from the Belica winery, the fullness and minerality of the special wine from Movia winery, the natural Rebula allowed to age for 7 years in amphorae by the legendary winemaker Gravner, to the sweet and very rich wine of Marjan Simčič, obtained by drying 5 tons of grapes for a quantity of 225 litres.

According to archival records discovered so far, the Rebula variety was highly treasured for its excellence and often used as both a means of payment and valuable commodity for sale, which is evidenced by the 13th and 14th century contracts originating from the Strunjan and Piran regions of the Slovenian part of Istria.

It is surprising that this fantastic variety is not given even more attention and recognition. It is humble, grows abundantly on poor soil, does not require irrigation or fertilisation, and it is not overly susceptible to any threats befalling the vines.

When researching the origin and finding proof of autochthonousness in the varieties with identical DNA structure and different names, the oldest historically preserved record is, as a rule, considered the proof of the grape variety origin. It is possible that Rebula is an autochthonous Slovenian variety and I hope that further research will confirm the conviction of the Italian scientist S. Imazio, who believes that Rebula is a variety originating in Collio and Goriška Brda.