

**BELA PČELA  
(2020-2024)**

Marija Mandić

*White Bee* explores a forgotten matriarchal lineage within a patriarchal context, engaging with memory, female identity, and family ties. The work connects a distant past with personal reflections on womanhood and future inheritance, while examining the emotional, cultural, metaphysical, and biological bonds between generations, as I explore my own role within this continuum. In a time when the future feels particularly uncertain, the question of whether I too will one day be “a white bee” for someone becomes both a personal and generational inquiry. It is a reflection on continuity and inheritance, as well as their possible absence, opening a space for deeper contemplation of how, and whether, future generations can exist at all.

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*In my grandmother’s house, I found a family tree drawn by a distant relative back in 1971. Accompanying it was a letter to my great-grandfather, detailing the migration routes our family took from Bosnia and Albania to Montenegro in the 14th and 15th centuries. It also traces the blood ties between generations of men, each prominently listed by name, all leading to the branch of the family I belong to today. In contrast, one mention stood out: the foremother of our family fraternities, whose name remains lost to time, overshadowed by the weight of patriarchy.*

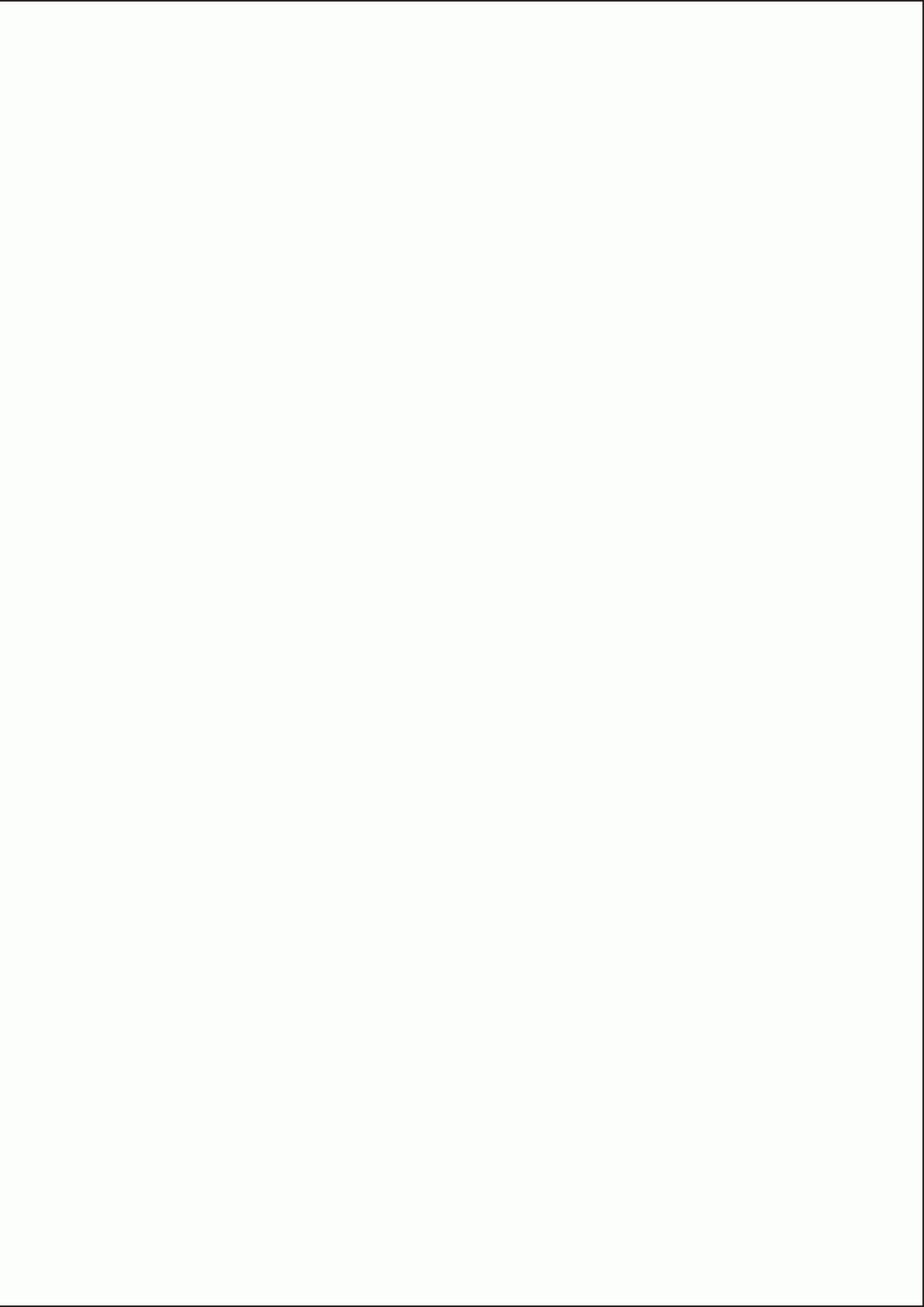
*In Serbian tradition, this archetype of the mother, the earliest known female ancestor, is called *bela pčela* (eng. translation a white bee). Not much is clear about the term, especially since it’s so rare to even find a family tree that acknowledges women. However, this mythical mother is believed to be called the white bee because she appears in the whiteness of the fog of memory and swarms like a bee in our consciousness, trying to wake us up and remind us she is still here.*

*Mine succeeded in that.*

*Her presence brought up questions of history, memory, and the overlooked role of women in a male-centered lineage. Discovering my white bee awakened something within me - it pulled me inward, prompting me to reflect on my own experiences as a woman in the early thirties and grapple with themes of fertility, reproduction, inheritance, and the deep bonds with the women in my life—my mother, aunts, sisters, and especially my grandmothers.*

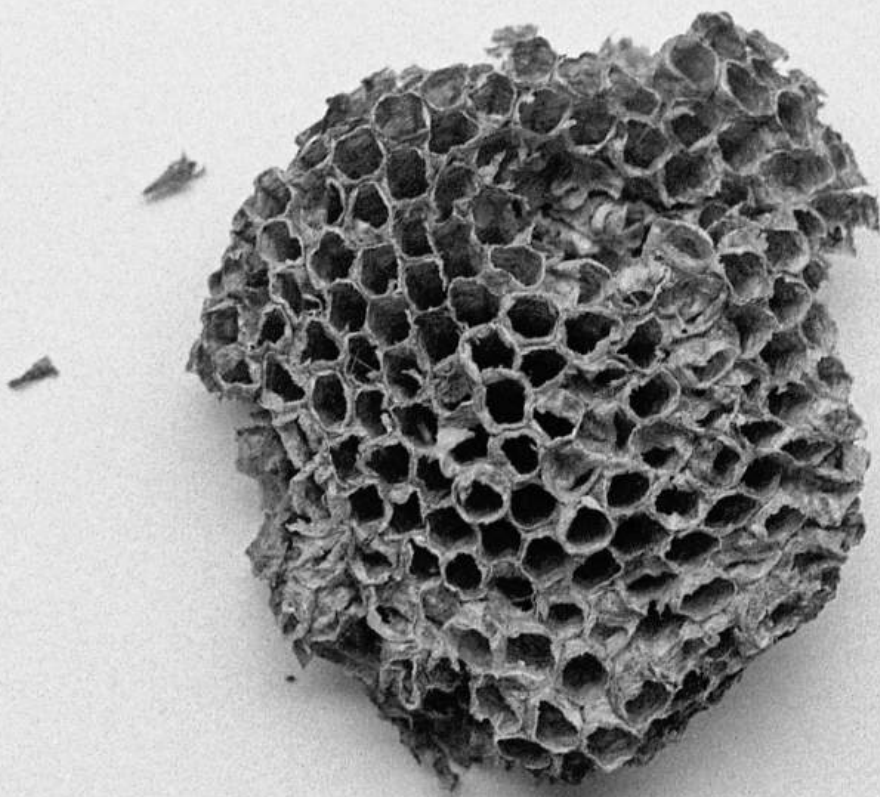
*While my earlier reflections were rooted in the distant past, the spirit of the white bee guided me to the present and gazed toward the future, posing a symbolic question: will I be a white bee to someone?*

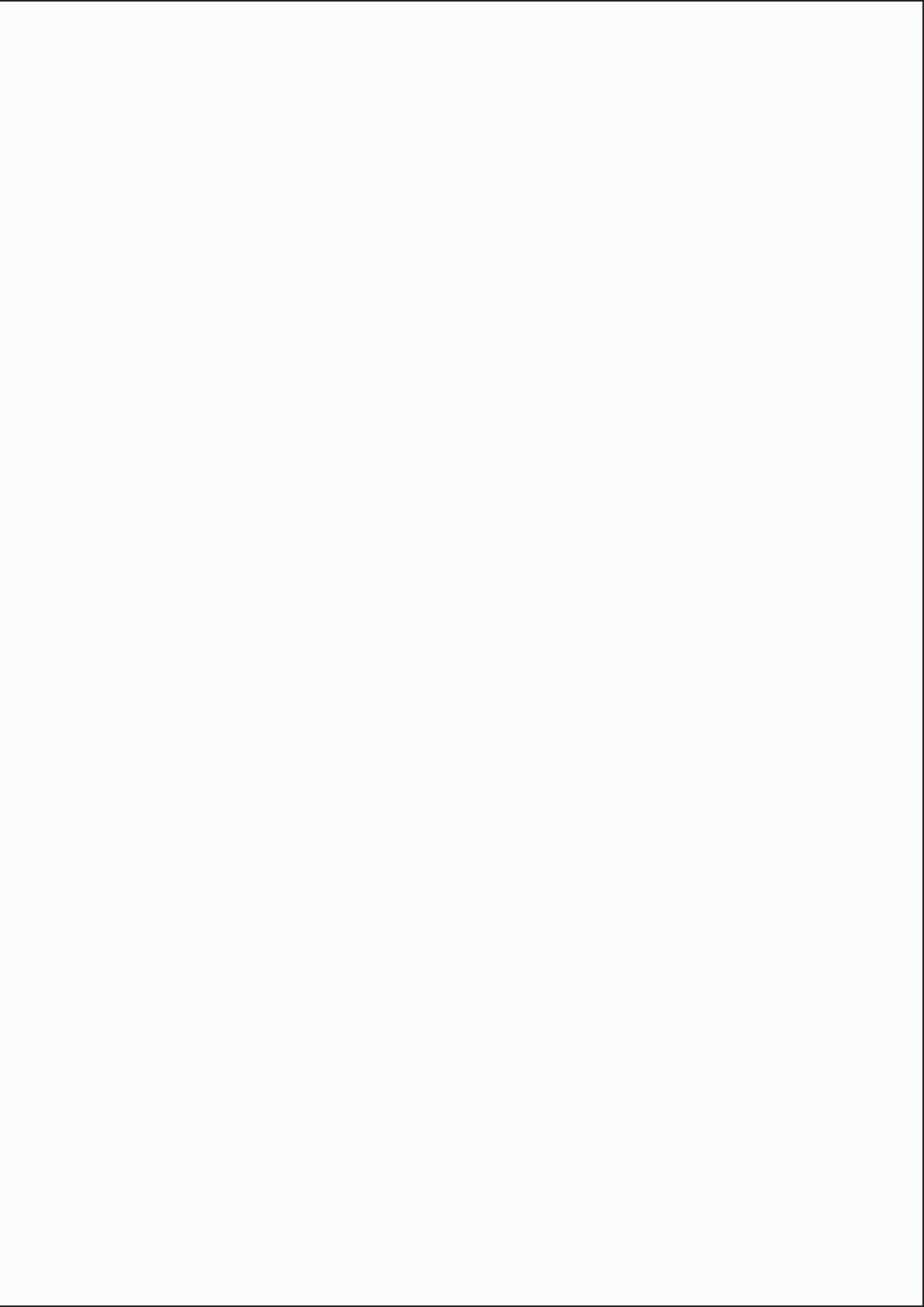




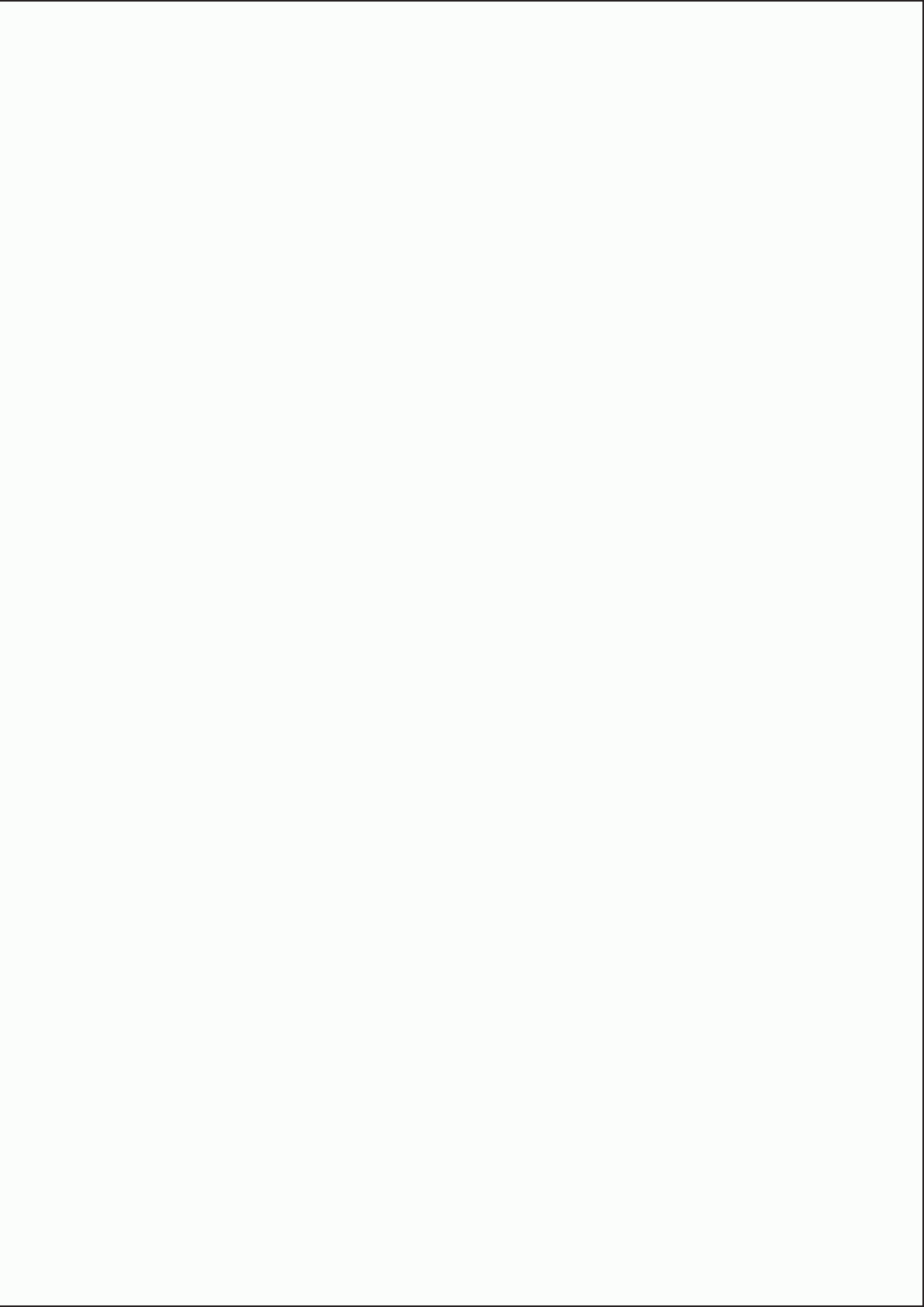


*Foremother*, Year 7000 BC, Lepenski Vir  
(archeological sites of the Mesolithic Iron Gates, located in Serbia)

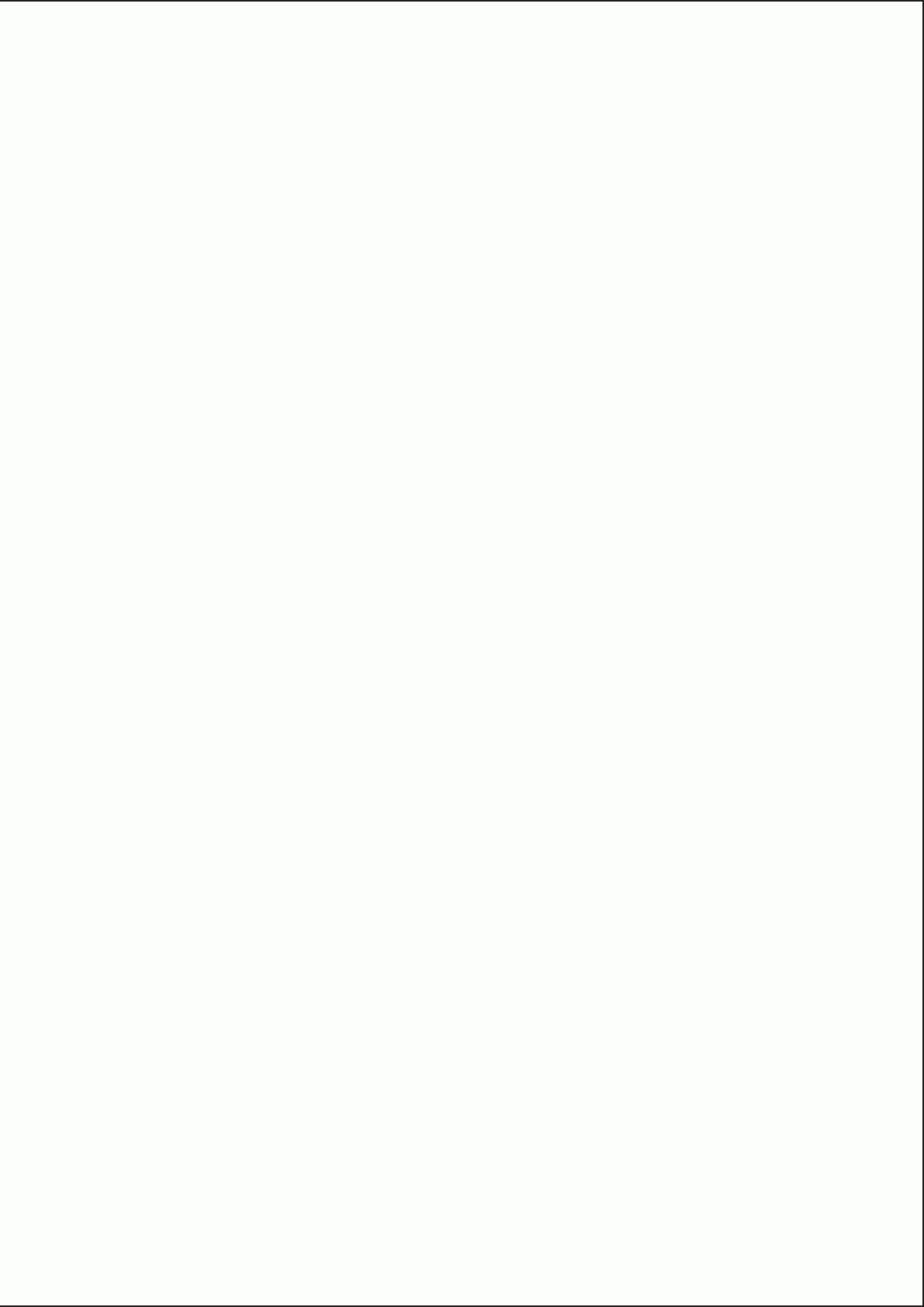














A letter written by a relative Niko addressed to my great-grandfather Đuro in 1971. The letter was sent together with a family tree compiled and explained by Niko. In the letter, he clarifies the entire genealogy - the migration routes from Bosnia and Albania to Ceklin in Montenegro from the late fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth century, the blood ties between the recorded male names, and the final emergence of the family lineage to which I belong. At the end of the letter, Niko wrote about the distant mother of all of our family fraternities, whose name, unfortunately, remained unknown.



A family tree compiled by a distant relative, Niko, in 1971.

In the notes accompanying the tree, Niko wrote about a widow with a son from her first marriage who married a new husband. He accepted her child as his own, along with the one they later had together. This moment is considered the starting point of our family lineage, branching in two directions from this fraternity. Because of this, Niko referred to the widow as the foremother of our family.

It's rare to find a family tree tracing so far back, and even rarer to find one that acknowledges women. Though the name of this foremother (and other women) was omitted, her mention felt like a small victory over the patriarchal pattern. Passing down her story through generations shows how important she was.

When I counted the generations between this foremother and myself, I realized she was my bela pčela. In the Serbian language and tradition, there are distinct names for each generation in the family. Beyond great-grandparents, these terms often cannot be translated into English, except for the last ones: bela pčela (White Bee) and beli orao (White Eagle).

Names for each generation beyond great-grandparents:

Čukunbaba / Čukundeda

Navrbaba / Navrdeda

Kurđela / Kurđel

Askurđela / Askurđel

Kurđupa / Kurđup

Kurlebala / Kurlebalo

Sukurdova / Sukurdov

Surdepača / Surdepač

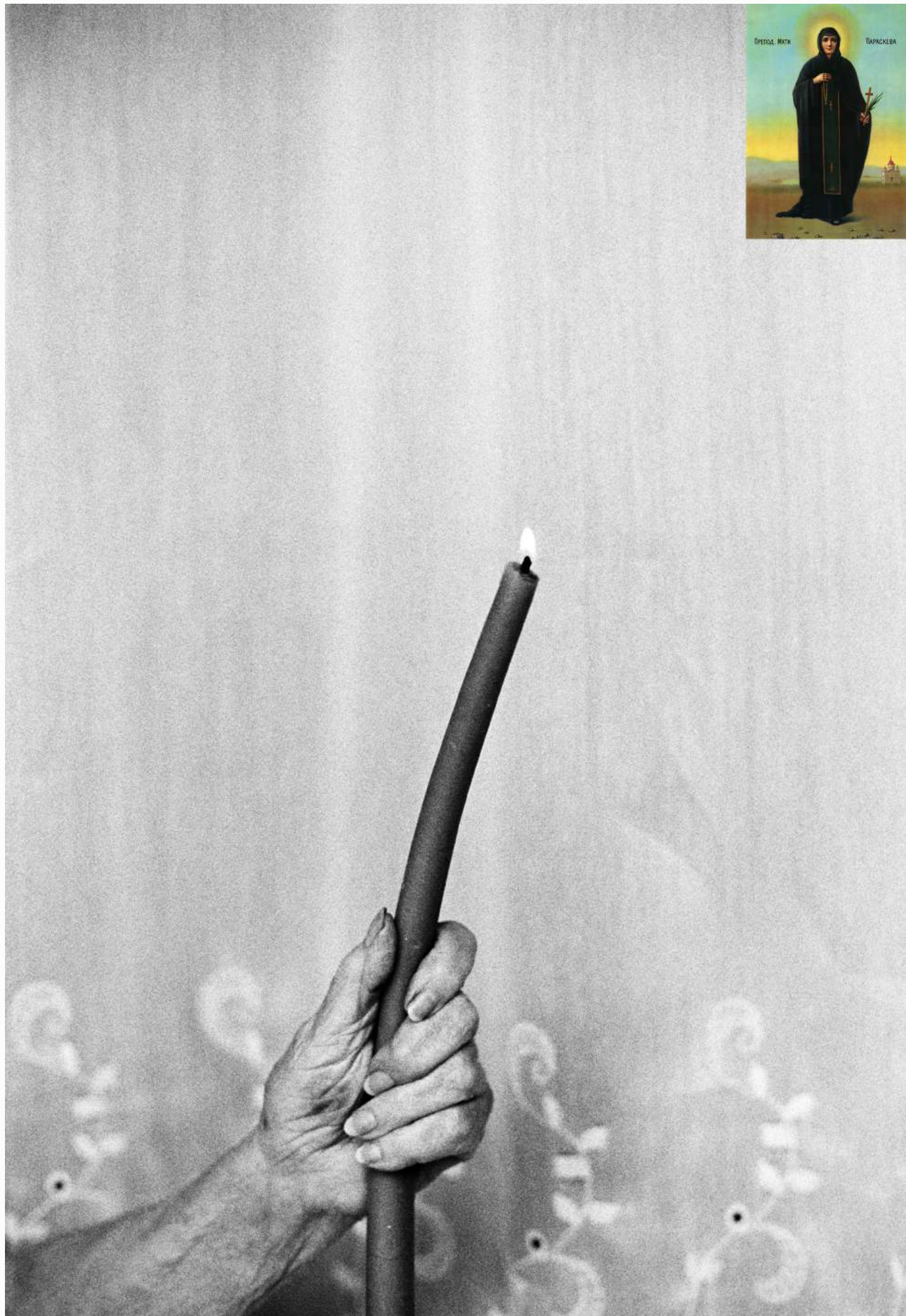
Parđupana / Parđupan

Ožmikura / Ožmikur

Kurajbera / Kurajber

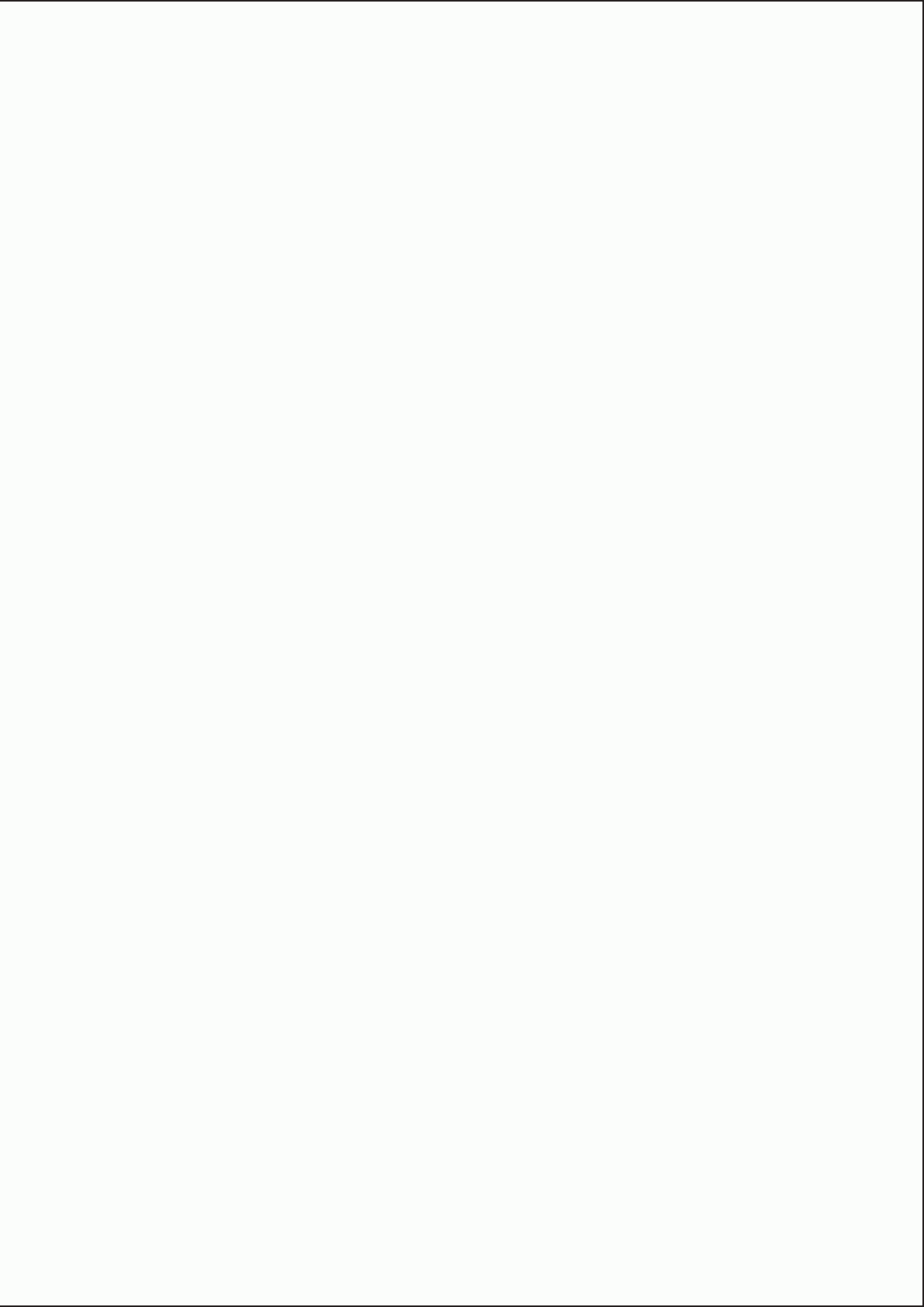
Sajkatava / Sajkatav

Bela pčela / Beli orao



A Serbian Orthodox icon of Saint Paraskeva with a church in the background. My grandmother and her sisters respected Saint Petka, inspired by their mother, who visited the Sveta Petka church in Peć (Kosovo) near their home almost daily. By coincidence, I began my work on Saint Petka's Day, October 27th. Sveta Petka is revered as the protector of women.

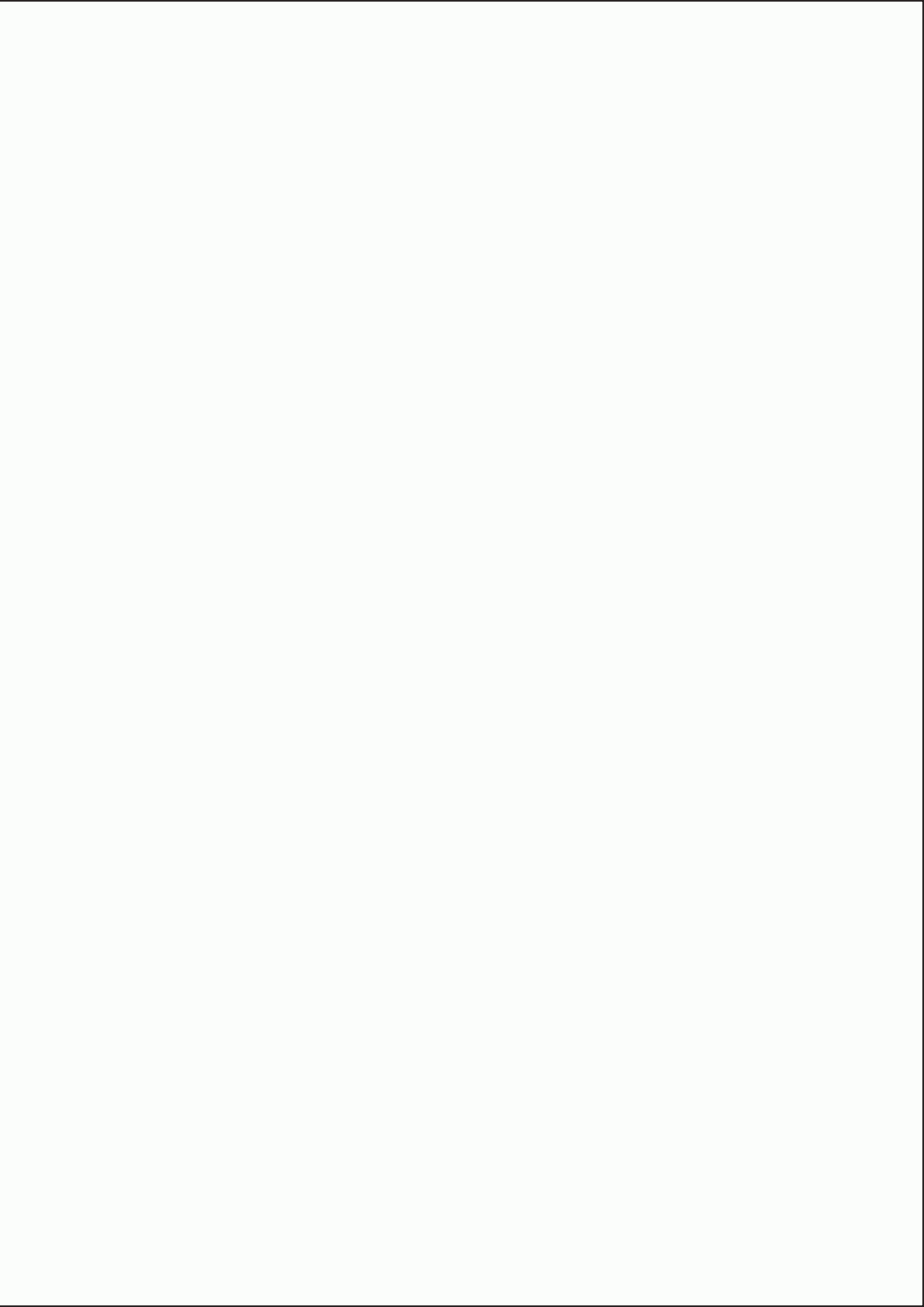




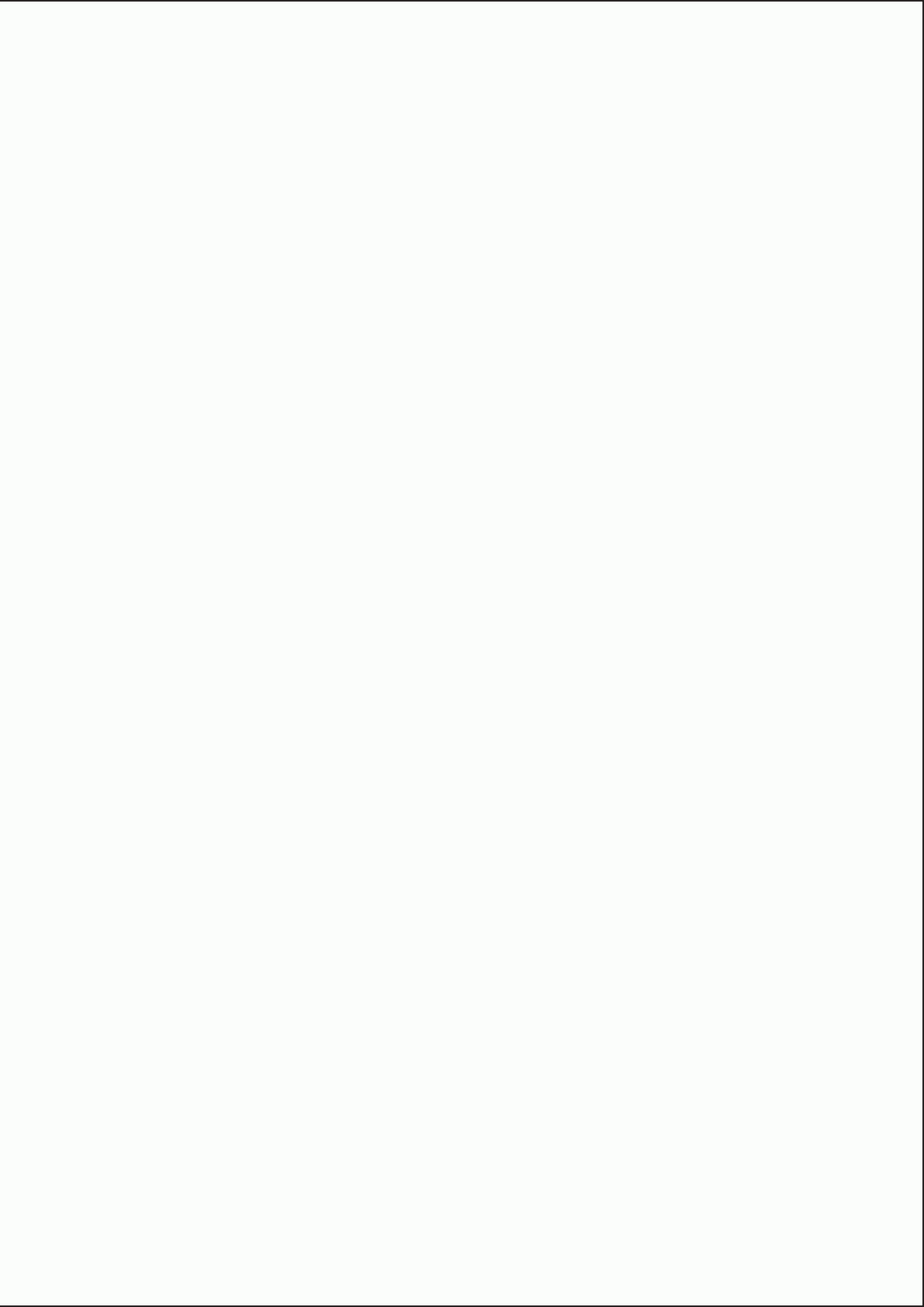


Inspired by Wittgenstein's composite photograph, I tried to flesh out the image of the white bee by overlapping photographs of the women in my family who descended from this female progenitor. The portrait that I finally got is not only her image - it is the faces of all my female ancestors who were, due to the patriarchy, undeservedly left out of the family memory.















My grandfather's sisters with their grandmother in Peć, Kosovo in 1961. From left to right: Milanka, Anka, Gorda (below), Desanka, Branka and Slavka

Прошло је 15 година како нас  
тихо напусти наша многово-  
љена мајка, баба и прабаба



**ГОРДА Т.  
ЂУРАШКОВИЋ**

**рођена ГАЗИВОДА**

Њен мио лик носимо у на-  
шим срцима до краја живо-  
та и нећемо је никад забо-  
равити.

Неизмерно захвални за све  
што је учинила за нас.

Њени:

кћерка МИЛИЦА  
Ђ. ЈОВИЋЕВИЋ,  
унук,  
унуке,  
снаха,  
прауници  
и праунуке.

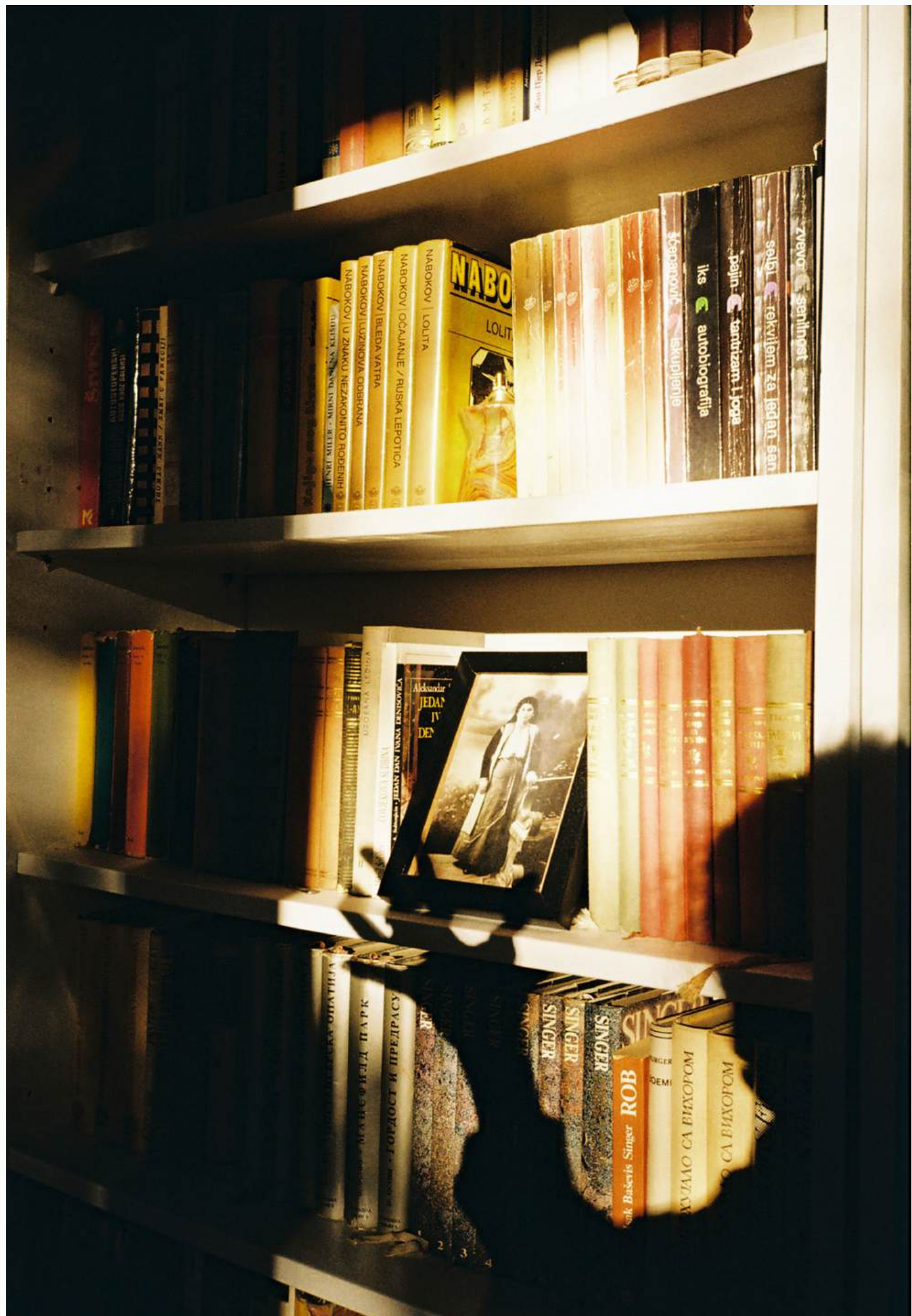
My great-great-grandmother's Gorda T. Đurašković (born Gazivoda) death certificate, 1978.

It reads:

*It has been 15 years since our beloved mother, grandmother and great-grandmother quietly left us. We carry her dear image in our hearts for the rest of our lives and we will never forget her. Immensely grateful for everything she did for us her.*

Hers:

*daughter MILICA Đ. Jovičević,  
grandson,  
grandchildren,  
daughter-in-law,  
great-grandchildren*



Жан-Пьер Дю...

ЛЮБОВЬ И СМЕРТЬ / NEW EDITION  
АВТОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ КОПИЯ

NAVOKOV | LOLITA  
NAVOKOV | ОСАЖЕНІЕ / РУСКА ЛЕРОТИСА  
NAVOKOV | ВЛЕДА ВАТРА  
NAVOKOV | ПУЗИНОГА ОДВРАГА  
NAVOKOV | У ЗНАКУ НЕЗАКОНОТО РОДЕНИН  
NAVOKOV | МУЖЕВИ И ЖЕНЕ

Štefanović | Iskupljenje  
Iks | autobiografija  
pajin- | tanizam i poza  
seloli | rekviem za jedan san  
Zvevo | senhrest

ЛЮБОВЬ И СМЕРТЬ / NEW EDITION  
АВТОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ КОПИЯ

NAVOKOV | ВЛЕДА ВАТРА  
NAVOKOV | ПУЗИНОГА ОДВРАГА  
NAVOKOV | У ЗНАКУ НЕЗАКОНОТО РОДЕНИН  
NAVOKOV | МУЖЕВИ И ЖЕНЕ  
Aleksandar JEDAN IV DEN



NAVOKOV | ВЛЕДА ВАТРА  
NAVOKOV | ПУЗИНОГА ОДВРАГА  
NAVOKOV | У ЗНАКУ НЕЗАКОНОТО РОДЕНИН  
NAVOKOV | МУЖЕВИ И ЖЕНЕ

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NAVOKOV | У ЗНАКУ НЕЗАКОНОТО РОДЕНИН  
NAVOKOV | МУЖЕВИ И ЖЕНЕ  
SINGER  
SINGER  
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SINGER  
Singer ROB  
SINGER  
SINGER  
SINGER

Photograph of my great-grandmother Gorda on my mother's and grandmother's bookshelf



ТУЖНИМ СРЦЕМ ЈАВЉАМО РОДИНИ И ПРИЈАТ  
ДАНА 02.01.2023. ГОДИНЕ ПРЕМИЉА У 82-ОЈ ГОДИНИ  
**ЉУБИЦА ТЕШАНСКА**  
САХРАНА ЋЕ СЕ ОБАВИТИ НА ГРАДСКОЈ ГРОБЉИ ГРЊАКОВИ  
ПОВОРКА КРЕПЕ ИЛИРЧЕ СТУКЕ КЛОСТИ У 13:30 ЧАСО  
ОЖАЛОШЋЕНИ:  
СИН: ПУЧАД  
Сестра: Весна, Миле, Добрица  
Васка и Ђурђу  
И ОСТАЛА ОЖАЛОШЋЕНА РОДИНА И П

ТУЖНИМ СРЦЕМ ЈАВЉАМО РОДИНИ И ПРИЈАТ  
ДАНА 24.07.2022. ГОДИНЕ  
**БОЈИЋ МИЛЕВА**  
СМРНОСНОСТ  
Смртна је се обавила на мртвом гробљу у Друштвеном  
у ПУТЕШКАМ, дана 24.07.2022. године у 13:00 часова.  
Осталога ожалосиога су суздржали Рајсана Присајко, Ђуричић,  
ВЕЛИЧЕВИЋИ, син Ненад, сини: Асими и Кина, унука: Анастасија,  
и остала родбина, сестра, кума и пријатељи.

My grandmother's sisters' death certificates, who died just a couple of months distance



Family's Saint Patron Day lunch - Saint Stefan, January 9th.

My grandmother is mourning her two sisters, who both died within a few months of each other.



My grandmother's palm / My palm

My great-aunt, with who I grew up and looked upon as my grandmother, was born in 1929, although some documents suggest 1931. This kind of confusion was common for her generation, as exact birth dates were often imprecise. Birthdays were frequently rounded to the nearest saints' day, making it easier to remember when someone was born. As it happens, she and her four sisters were all born on major Orthodox celebration days.

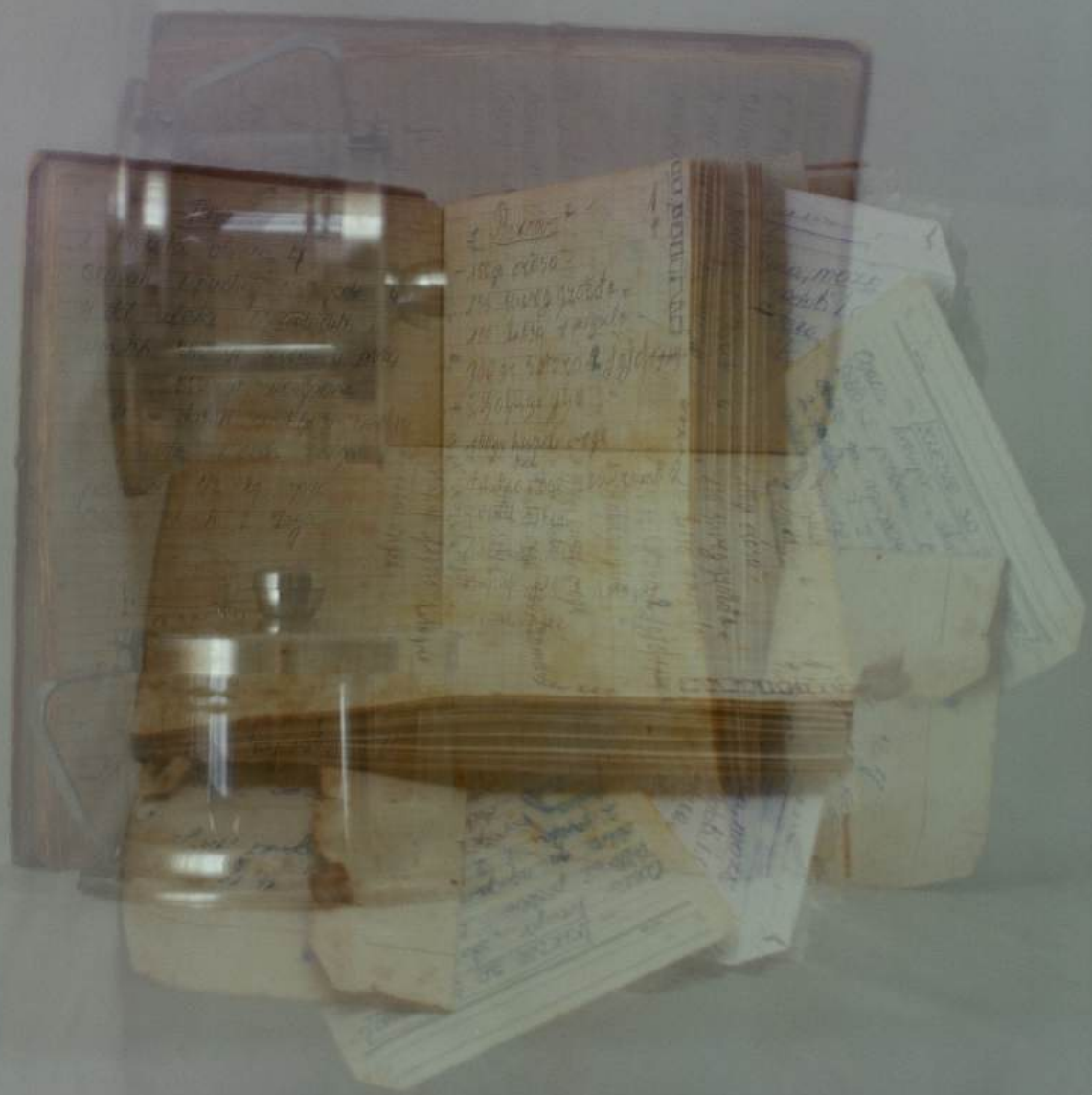
Yet, this coincidence didn't stop them, especially Anka, the only one still alive, from finding it unusual and mysterious. Even now, she sees something strangely significant in it. If someone had read her palm when she was young, would her life have turned out the way it has? Would a prediction have shaped her choices, or would it simply have reflected the life she was destined to lead?



The four objects - hydrangea, recipe book, bed linen and tablecloths, and lead - represent the symbolic heritage passed down to me from my grandmothers. Together, they form the focus of four photographs titled *MIRAZ*, which translates to dowry in English.

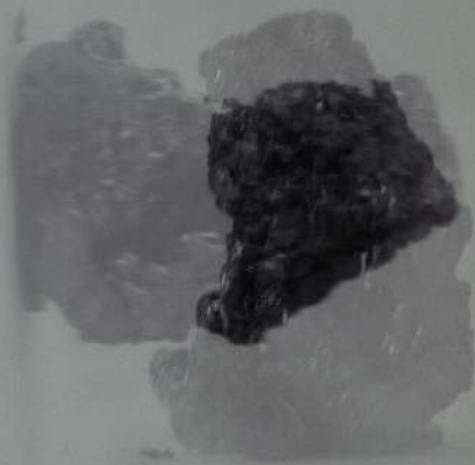
### Hydrangea

Hydrangeas are the flowers I remember most from my childhood, always present in my grandmothers' gardens. Their love for flowers and plants, passed on to my mother, and the care and time they devoted to them, amazed me. Even then, I thought about how one day I would plant my own garden filled with all the flowers they cherished in their homes.



## Recipe book

In Balkan culture, food holds a special place. The women in my family spent much of their time preparing meals for the rest of us. Each of my grandmothers had a few signature dishes that, as they aged, became less flavorful until they eventually stopped cooking altogether. Beyond the vivid memories of their food, the only tangible trace left was in their recipe books, which I've gathered to continue where they left off.



### Esoteric Tradition

As a child, I remember watching my grandmother perform izlivanje strave (eng. fear casting) done with lead, on my brother to help him overcome his nightmares. The technique worked, and from then on, I found nothing unusual about such 'treatments.' Stories of esotericism, witchcraft, superstition, and intuition were common among the women in my family. Naturally, I adopted these ideas, and they sparked a lifelong interest that continues to shape my perspective.



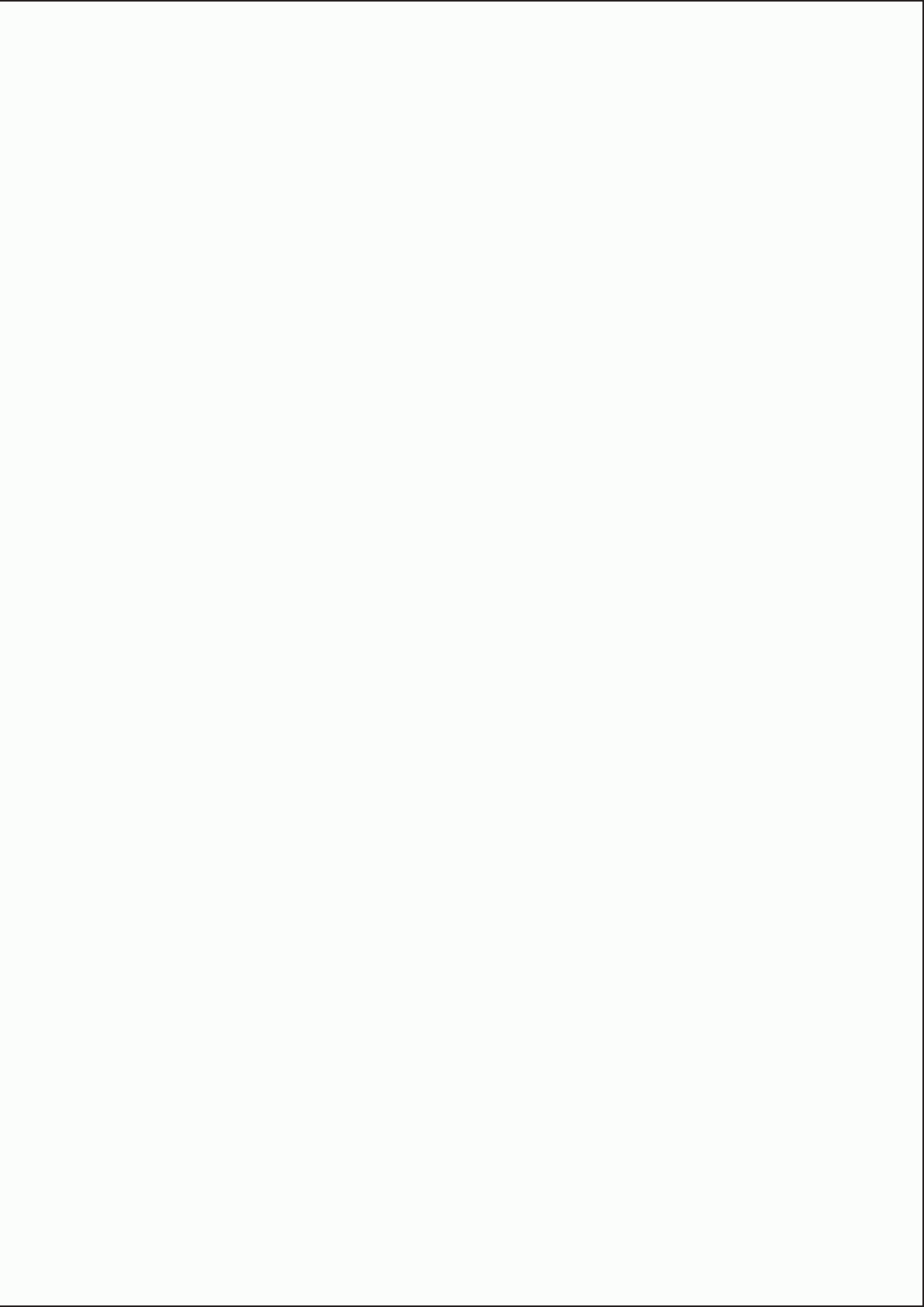
### Bed linen and tablecloths

In our family, as in many others from this region, women were highly skilled and creative in crafting different types of linen. Handcrafted linen was often the centerpiece of a dowry, passed from mothers to daughters before marriage. Since childhood, and later throughout my life as I moved from one apartment to another, I've always carried the bed linen my grandmothers gifted me- it gives me a profound sense of home.

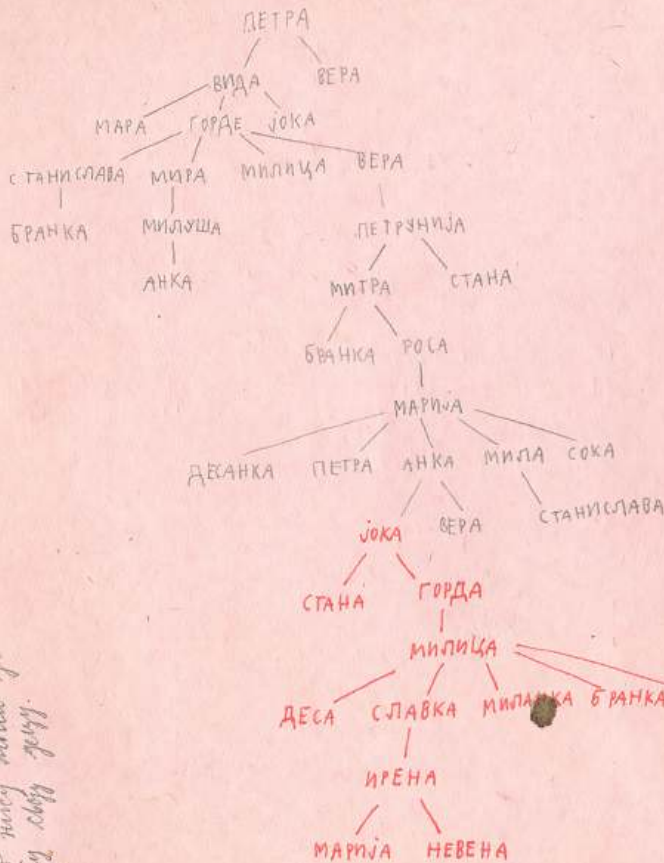


My mother and me in her belly in our former family cottage, 1990





МАРИЈА  
јул 2021



У овом делу су објављени  
имена свих њених  
деца и њихових жена  
и њихових деце.  
У овом делу су објављени  
имена свих њених  
деца и њихових жена  
и њихових деце.



### Matrilinear family tree, 2021

I once heard that a person truly dies when their name is spoken for the last time, when no one is left to remember them or share their story. In the beginning, there was the word, or rather, everything begins with a story and ends with a story.

When I learned about the distant mother of all family fraternities, mentioned in the letter about the family tree, it became important to me to give a name to her - a nameless mother lost to time, and to other mothers whose names have also been forgotten. I created a (semi) fictitious matrilineal family tree, filled with imagined names of my foremothers, as well as those who still live on, if only in the memories of those who remember them.

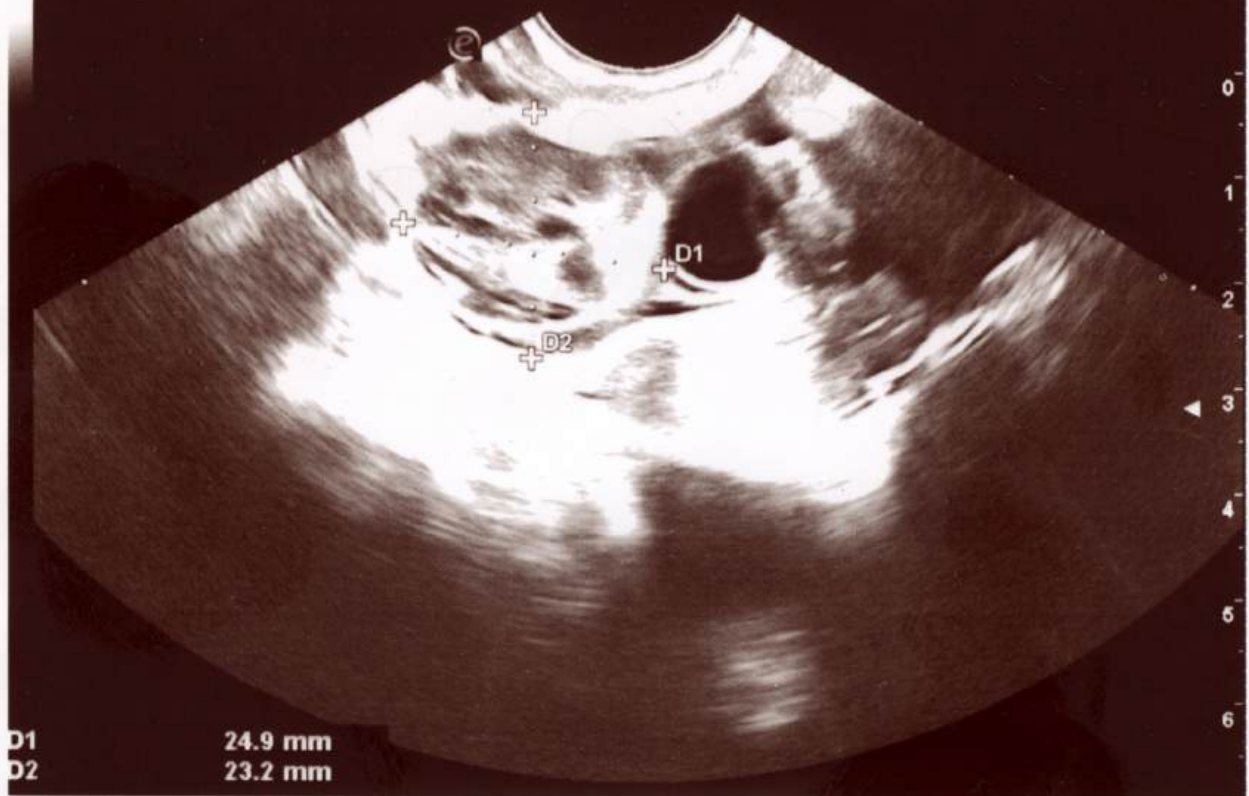
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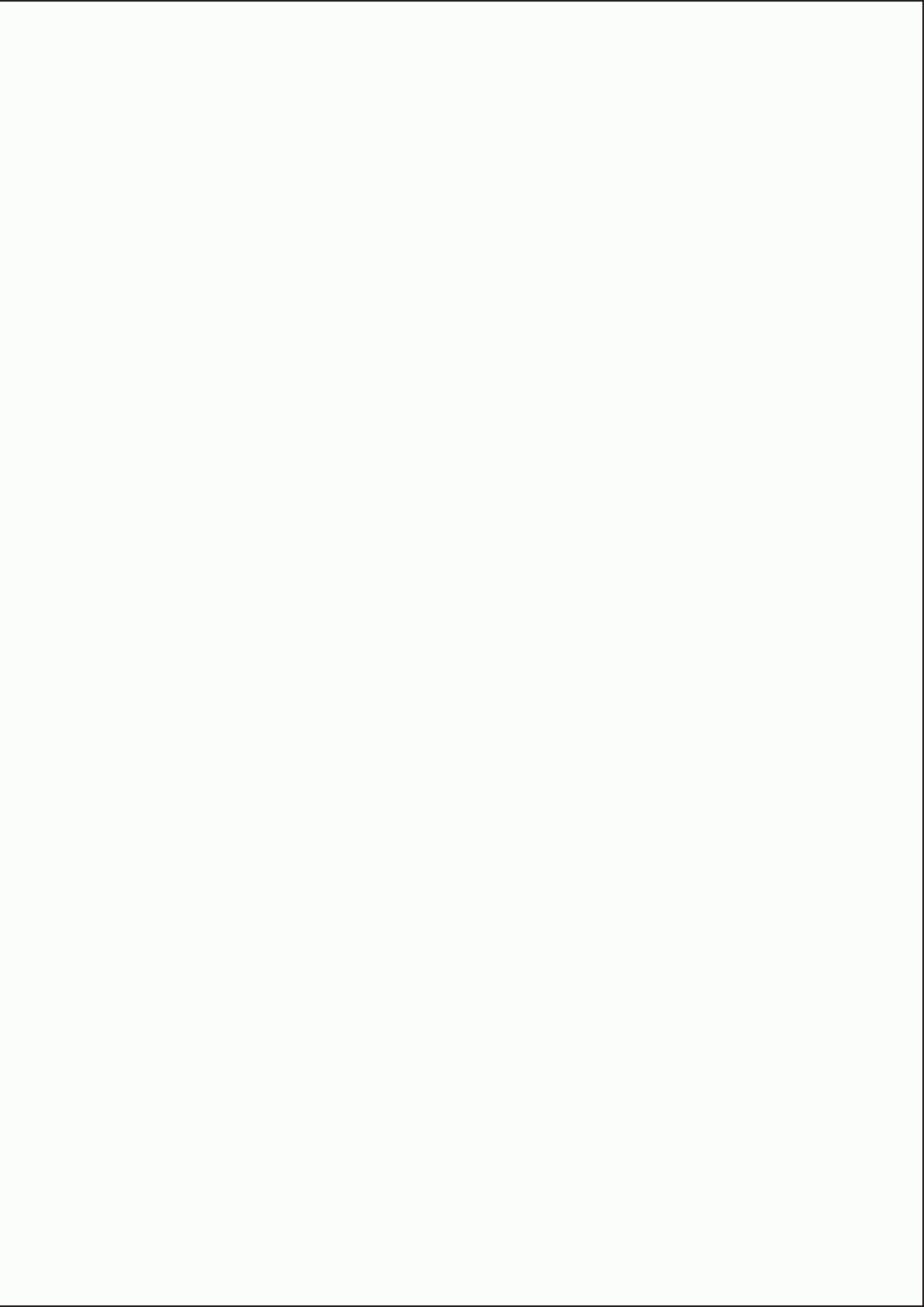
3 Res-H G 50 %  
TEI D 68 mm X/M C1/2  
PRC 11/2/3/0 PRS 4

25/Sep/2024 18:24:5

P 100% MI 1.1  
TIS 0.3  
TIB 0.3

OB-Fetal  
EC1123 OB2





23:02



< 18

Tetke Sestre i Batica >

tetkica, Alisa, majka



temp:

21:56



Alisa 65

Jeste! ❤️ 21:59



2



majka

Bravo ! 22:01



↳ Alisa 65  
Jeste! ❤️



22:01

Only you can see this summary



Here's what you missed:

- Alisa 65 is struggling with managing her child's high fever and is trying different medications to lower it, including combining multiple types in smaller doses.
- Alisa 65 is concerned about her child's high fever and mentions using a diazepam suppository as a precaution for potential seizures due to the temperatures.
- Other mothers offer advice on using cold compresses, wrapping the child in a damp sheet, and avoiding getting the child wet when he is sick as it causes his temperature to spike.



Message...



A Viber family group called Aunts, Sisters, and Batika includes my mother, her sister, their two daughters (me and my sister), and my brother, though he remains completely inactive in the group. This Viber group is the place where the four of us talk daily to keep up with each other's lives since we don't see each other very often.



Me as a baby with my grandmothers Desa (my mother's mother), Kosa (my father's mother), and Anka (my mother's aunt and adoptive mother), 1990. Since my mother was raised by her aunt, I grew up with Anka as well and always felt she was my true grandmother. That's how I ended up with three grandmothers instead of two.



My grandmother's sister's wedding day, Bosnia, 1959. The women on the left side are my great-grandmother Gospava, my grandmother Kosanka, and two of her sisters Mileva and Ljubica (who died months apart in 2022/23).



Self portrait in a wedding dress

ПРАМЕН КОС



MAMA ME JE PRVI PUT OŠIŠALA NA

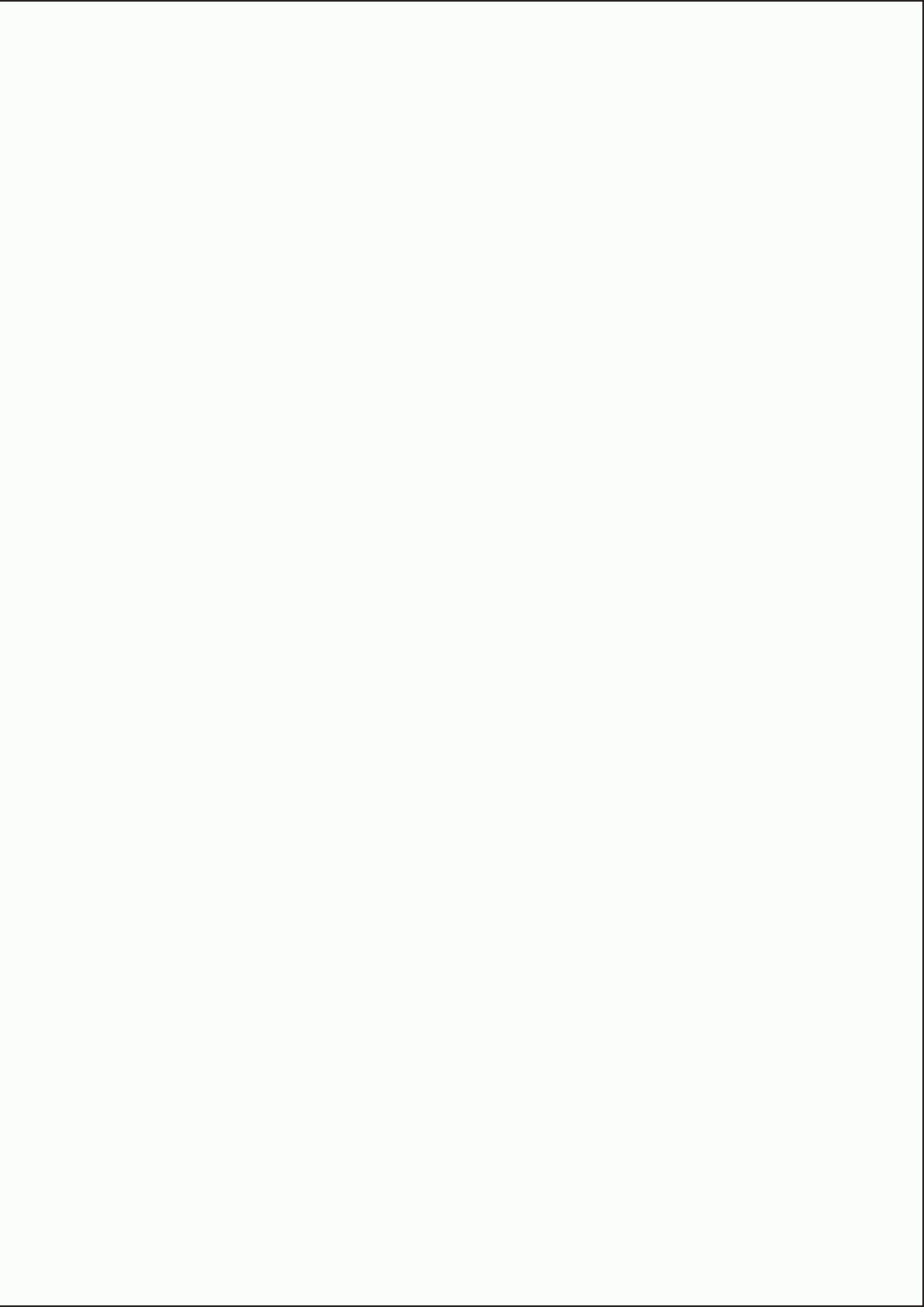
SV. NIKOLU 19.12.'91.

My baby hair in the envelope in a baby notebook my mother wrote. The text below reads: *My mom cut my hair for the first time on Saint Nicholas Day 19.12.1991.*

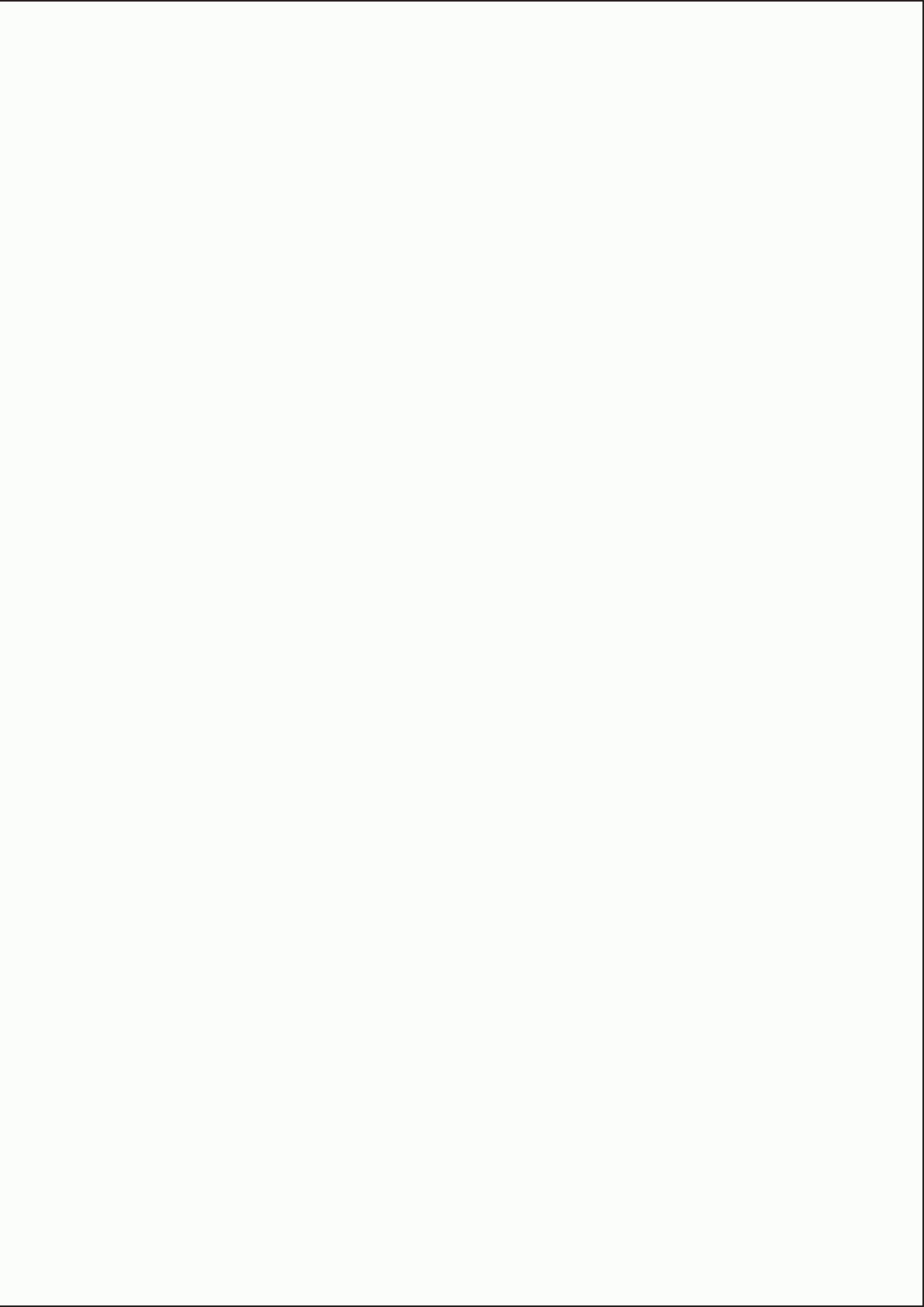














Exhibition view:  
White Bee  
Fotografic Gallery, Prague Czech Republic  
05.06. - 26.07.2025.  
ph credits: Marie Hyleneova

