

As far as we know the construction of the Krzlaraga Mosque

in the town of Varcar took three years – from 1590 to 1593. Its destruction – only two days. Through incompetence. Some inexperienced *chetniks* positioned the explosives badly, so that the next day others, the specialists, had to come and finish the job. Then the bulldozers, those hard-working heroes, arrived and cleaned up, levelled the ground so well that not a trace remained.

The same thing happened to the other mosque in Varcar, the Hamidaga Husedzinovic. It was much newer and built of weaker material; I suppose that made it easier for them.

They didn't dynamite the Church of the Apostle Saints Philip and Jacob. Rather, they "prepared" it thoroughly by pouring fuel over it, setting it ablaze, and then standing guard around it with their machine-guns at the ready, while they partied and shouted. Only soot-covered walls remain.

Never again will we hear the muezzin from the Varcar mosques, nor the Ave Marias from the Church of the Apostle Saints Philip and Jacob.

When you were about six or seven years old – it was after the

war and your father had been swallowed up in the void of the *missing* twenty million, and your mother was elsewhere burying the dead – you would sleep between your grandfather and grandmother, and on bright summer mornings the bells and the muezzin together would awaken you. “What’s the *hodja* singing?” you’d ask your grandfather who would be yawning widely and making the sign of the cross with his thumb over his wide-open mouth. Half jokingly, he would answer: “The same thing that the bells are tolling, only in his own way; he’s what you might call a bell made of skin and bones.”

Do you remember that fire which took place long ago, and the blessed Don Niko Kaic? At the break of dawn, the neighbours somehow managed to rush down and extinguish the fire. Much later, Don Niko admitted: “Yes, I was awake, I saw the two men starting the fire... and waiting for it to begin burning. I let them leave and then raised the alarm in the neighbourhood. You can be sure that I recognized them, but they’ll have to see about that with God. As for me, I’ll take their names with me into the grave.” And that’s exactly what happened – he didn’t even want to tell the police. Don Niko maintained his integrity during *the other war*. He didn’t join any side, he didn’t run away, he didn’t ruin anybody’s life, and he saved all those whom he could. He saved many people. The local Serbs were particularly grateful to him. Who knows, perhaps even some of those who just burned down the church? Don Niko was lucky to have died long ago.

Varcar’s mosques and churches, as well as the even older graveyards, and the *cesme* – the public fountains, and the lovely *kahve* – the cafés (when they still existed), made it a real town. So did its chroniclers. There were two of them at the same time: Don Niko and Ahmetaga. Each one of them wrote *his own* history of *his own* town, all the while glancing happily over the other’s shoulder. You should have seen their quiet enthusiasm when they exchanged information or sources!

That town has been erased from the face of the earth, along with that history. Now a new history has begun – one with neither church nor mosque, without chroniclers, without annals. Only blunt existence: blunt, drunken, occasionally resonating with bursts of gunfire and explosions.

You have seen the Declaration of Voluntary Change of Residence:

I (first name, father's name, family name) resident of Mrkonjic-Grad, declare on behalf of the members of my immediate family, namely..... that we have decided freely, without any pressure, to change our place of residence. By virtue of this declaration we make known our agreement that the competent authorities of the Municipality of Mrkonjic-Grad dispose of our personal belongings and property. I, personally, sign this declaration, as an expression of own free will and that of my family.

NOTE: This declaration is equivalent to a PERMIT issued by the Municipal Council of Mrkonjic-Grad permitting the above-mentioned persons to leave without hinderance the territory of the Municipality of Mrkonjic-Grad.

Heading, number, date, seal.

Everything legally in order, everything in Cyrillic characters, and at the end:

*SUBMITTED TO: 1) The signatory of the declaration and
2) The Municipal Council of Mrkonjic-Grad.*

You've heard about the horrible end of your school friend Milenko O. They say that he went down the river to Mandas Whirlpool, it was very cold, he cut his veins and spread his arms widely in the cold water. He bled and he died. It was just before the war began. Milenko O. was a Serb. He had always been melancholy, a gentleman, easily upset. Was that Milenko's way of saving himself?

The Krzlaraga Mosque in Varcar would have been four centuries old this year, the old Catholic graveyard on Celija five centuries, the Church of the Apostle Saints Philip and Jacob more than a century, and the Husedzinovic Mosque almost a century...

At a time of such crimes, do the widespread arms of Milenko and the blood flowing from them into the freezing grey water of the Black River offer the only choice open to a human being?

Zagreb, April 1993