

ADDRESSING INVENTED HERITAGE: THE CASE OF THE BOSNIAN PYRAMIDS

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy

TERA C. PRUITT

Trinity College
Department of Archaeology
University of Cambridge

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PREFACE

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

The work submitted is not substantially the same as any submitted for a degree or other qualification at any other university. No part of this thesis has already been or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

This dissertation, at 14,908 words, does not exceed the 15,000-word limit set by the Archaeological Degree Committee.

Figure 1



(Photo by Tera Pruitt)

ABSTRACT

*Between the idea,
And the reality.
Between the motion,
and the act,
Falls the Shadow.* (Eliot 1969:85)

This dissertation explores a specific case study of pseudoarchaeology—the Bosnian pyramids—in order to address and challenge certain mainstream archaeological assumptions about ‘alternative’ claims to the past. It is organized by two joint arguments.

The first argument asserts that ‘alternative’ claims to the past, like pseudoarchaeology, are complex social processes which originate from intricate social interactions and contexts. This dissertation focuses on a study of the Bosnian pyramids, a case where one man’s irrational alternative vision of the past has become a preferred account of history for many people in Bosnia. This fabrication serves different symbolic, socio-political, and economic purposes on local and worldwide scales, and it is intimately attached to, and working within, larger conditions of politics and performance.

The second argument situates such ‘alternative’ claims within a wider discourse in mainstream archaeology. It argues that archaeologists have not fully engaged with many ‘alternative’ claims to the past, like the pseudoarchaeology of the Bosnian pyramids. Rather than addressing pseudoarchaeology as a product of complex social processes, cases like the Bosnian pyramids have been categorized and simplified; and so archaeologists who have approached the situation have not been addressing all of the relevant issues. This is perhaps why the efforts to stop pseudoarchaeology in Bosnia have failed. This dissertation ultimately argues that ‘alternative’ claims to the past, like pseudoarchaeology, are social phenomena that need to be understood and addressed by the archaeological community.

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I owe special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Neil Brodie, who advised me on this project from its conception to completion. For additional advice, resources, and support I also wish to thank Dr. Marie Louise Sorensen, Dacia Viejo Rose, and other members of the Cambridge Department of Archaeology.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Competing ‘alternative’ archaeological claims have existed since the beginning of archaeology’s professional development (Feder 2002). Many of these claims, however, have been neglected by mainstream archaeology as insignificant side issues, only noteworthy as examples of bad archaeology or laughable enterprises. This neglect has been critically challenged in the last few years.

Archaeologists have begun to see the value, and perhaps necessity, of studying alternative claims to the past. Influences from Marxism to postmodernism, indigenous rights and values, and heritage institutional accountability to public funding have led the field to be aware of pluralistic interpretations about the past and forced archaeologists to recognize the historical contingency of their own profession (Trigger 1989; Skeates 2000; Merriman 2004; Fagan 2005). The study of ‘alternatives’ has most thoroughly developed regarding indigenous values and notions of the sacred (Goldstein & Kintigh 1990; Downer 1997; Wallis 2003). However, many archaeologists feel that other alternative archaeologies—such as nationalistic manipulations of history, imagined reconstructions, or pseudoscience—are also relevant to mainstream archaeology. According to these arguments, alternative claims challenge the very fundamentals of learned archaeological research. The study of alternative claims helps us to understand, separate and justify reasonable archaeological interpretations from irrational speculations, which range from the misguided to the intentionally malicious (Schadla-Hall 2004; Fagan 2006a; Renfrew 2006). Furthermore, it is becoming more apparent that alternative claims are not as one-sided, simplistic, and dismissible as many professionals are prone to think.

This dissertation addresses and challenges this developing professional debate by examining a specific case study of alternative archaeology: the case of the Bosnian “pyramids.” In 2005, a businessman and alternative historian named Semir Osmanagic announced that he had discovered the world’s oldest and largest pyramids in a town called Visoko, located in central Bosnia-Herzegovina. Within a national climate of post-war depression and institutional

instability, and with the support of lax reporting from media that welcomed an exciting story, this pyramid scheme became an overnight success in Bosnia. Through the internet and international television media, the story has also quickly gained worldwide attention.

Most archaeologists dismiss or simply acknowledge the Bosnian pyramid case as cut-and-dry pseudoarchaeology; it fits securely within any diagnosis of fabricated science, leaving no question as to how mainstream archaeological professionals can define and categorize it (Fagan 2006b). But a closer look shows that this type of case study is much larger and more complicated than simple labels like ‘real’ or ‘pseudo’ can characterize. The Bosnian pyramid scheme is a fabrication that serves different symbolic, socio-political, and economic purposes on a dizzying array of scales, from personal to community levels, on local and national arenas, reaching worldwide politics and academic debate. It is intimately attached to, and working within, larger conditions of politics and performance. This case, in essence, is about much larger issues than just archaeology.

This study, when positioned in its contextual framework, illustrates how much larger processes form the conditions in which alternative accounts thrive and how such ‘alternative archaeology’ affects mainstream archaeological discourse. This case represents manifold questions: why is a site of invented heritage so popular in Bosnia while genuine archaeological sites go unnoticed or are intentionally disregarded? Is such invented heritage malicious or harmless? What is the value in studying such invented heritage? What defines an archaeologist and who has the authority to say what is archaeology, what is authentic or invented, and what is not? Could the professional community have acted to prevent or alter the project’s popularity, and is it their job respond in such a situation? In a profession that admits room for a great deal of diversity in the way it explains the past, where do we draw the line between a pluralist vision of the past and an invented re/construction? This dissertation is unable to address all of these questions in its space constraints; however, all of these issues touch, sit alongside, and stimulate the principal line of inquiry addressed in this study: what are the complex contexts and

conditions of the invented heritage at Visoko, and what are the implications of such a case for mainstream archaeological discourse?

This dissertation is organized by two linked arguments: a contextual study with a detailed analysis of two major contributing conditions to the problems at Visoko, and a specific theoretical analysis focusing on implications for professional archaeology. Each chapter develops a context around the case study and situates that context in current archaeological discourse.

Chapter II charts the development and context of the Bosnian pyramid scheme, giving a brief history of Bosnia's geography and social climate and a narrower outline of the pyramid scheme's development. The chapter ends by exploring the term 'pseudoarchaeology' and argues for a more contextual-based approach to pseudoarchaeological problems. Chapters III and IV investigate two factors that conditioned national and international responses to the pyramid scheme: politics and performance. Bruce Trigger writes, "Archaeology is strongly influenced by the position that the countries and regions in which it is practised occupy within the modern world-system" (1984:355). This notion is explored in the third chapter, which explains how a recent war has left Bosnia-Herzegovina in a state of 'tolerant hostility' between Bosniak (Muslim), Croat (Catholic), and Serbian (Orthodox) ethnic groups (Zhelyazkova 2004). It also explores the politics of identity, symbolism, academics, and—perhaps most obviously—the politics of money, which is intimately tied into how the pyramid scheme is represented and supported by citizens and politicians. The fourth chapter focuses on media, performance, and representation. It examines how an encouraging, excited media was critical to the spread and growth of the pyramid scheme. It also highlights the notion of heritage as a symbol, creation and a performance, one that is intimately attached to personal and group identities. Chapter V concludes with an overarching discussion, bringing together the discussion of politics, performance, and pseudoarchaeology, and discusses two methods of 'inventing': performative inventing and participatory inventing. The chapter finally argues that alternative cases should be

studied, not as categories of claims on the past, but rather as products of complex contextual events and phenomena.

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is a product of my research and writing at the University of Cambridge, my attendance to discussion-presentation by Semir Osmanagić at the Bosnian Embassy in London, and two sessions of fieldwork in Bosnia: one trip to Sarajevo as a cultural introduction, and one trip to Sarajevo and Visoko devoted to the pyramid site. This case has resulted in many emotional responses from mostly biased sources. Although I have tried my utmost to view each source objectively, my own personal bias may perhaps be an inevitable thread of this discussion.

Because of the complicated conditions of travel and communication in post-war Bosnia and language barriers I encountered, all of the opinions collected during my fieldwork were gathered from informal interviewing, with only verbal agreement between me and my informants that I may include their opinions in my work. Their statements, expressed in this dissertation primarily in Chapter II and III, should be regarded as opinions and property of their respective owners. Interview and presentation information collected from Semir Osmanagic was done via personal communication over the internet and through public questioning at his Embassy presentation. He gave me full consent to use his statements. While this type of informal interview methodology is sufficient contribution to an MPhil dissertation, I am critical of its delivery and recognize that more extensive and better-planned interview methodology would be necessary for larger or more involved investigations.

As for translation, any research working with a foreign language has many inherent problems. While I have tried to minimize miscommunication by restricting my research primarily to English-speaking contacts and English literature, some translation was inevitable. I used one translator, Amna Hadziabdic, throughout the entire course of research. She

accompanied me throughout my fieldwork, translated my questions back to non-English speakers, and translated quotes from Bosnian literature and media sources. While I have done everything possible to minimize errors in translation, it is always possible that some may have occurred.

CHAPTER II: A CONTEXT

This chapter explores how various individuals and communities have reacted to the alternative archaeology created by Semir Osmanagic. It sets up the context of the pyramid scheme, stating important historical contextual information about Bosnia and outlining the situation in Visoko. It then argues that responses to the project have been emotional and complex, ranging on different orders of scale: individual, local, national, international; from personal levels of meaning to community levels. The term ‘pseudoarchaeology’ is identified and discussed in relation to the pyramid scheme and current academic discourse. The chapter finally argues that simply defining something ‘pseudoarchaeology’ is not a satisfactory response. A case like Visoko provokes many significant questions that have serious implications for mainstream professional archaeology.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CLIMATE

The physical and social setting of this case study is central to its contextual problem. Geographically, Bosnia-Herzegovina is a difficult area in the Balkans. The country is mostly mountainous from the southern Dinaric Alps, which are cut to the east by the Visocica, Bjelasnica and Treskavica mountains. The landscape has dense conifer forest and lush plains in the North and arid and rugged terrain in the West. Hundreds of rivers divide the country terrain, and water is considered one of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s most important resources (Clancy 2004:5-6; Malcom 2002:1).

Historically, this difficult landscape has played a fundamental role in the political and social maturity of the country. Bosnia’s earliest archaeological records show a rich prehistoric record of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers, and the country was one of the last refuges of the Neanderthals. Archaeologists like Preston Miracle say, “Despite the richness of this record, [the region] remains poorly known and understood” (qtd. in Bohannon 2006a). As for later history, Bosnia-Herzegovina “stands between two of the main routes through which waves of invading

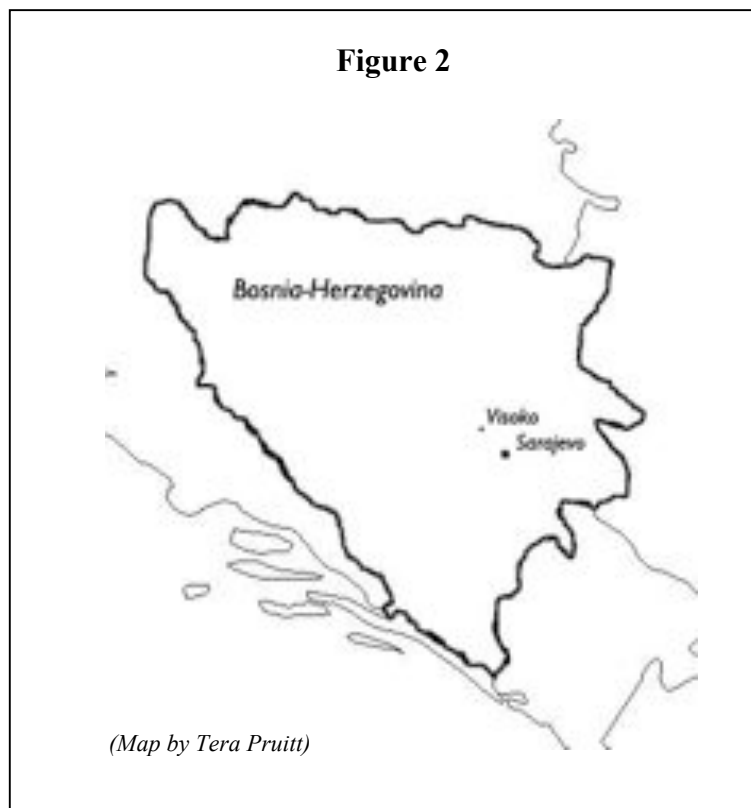
populations entered the western Balkans: the Dalmatian coastal strip, and the lowland thoroughfare which led from Belgrade down through Serbia to Macedonia and Bulgaria” (Malcolm 2002:1). This geography meant that Bosnia had less direct impact than other parts of the Balkans such as Serbia or Croatia during its many historic invasions (Illyrians, Slavs, Romans, Ottomans, Austro-Hungarian) (Ibid.). However, the indirect impact of these invasions has been significant and has left Bosnia very racially mixed.

Bosnia-Herzegovina has often been called “the microcosm of the Balkans” (Ibid.). The current country is divided and identified by ethnic and religious groups of people who associate themselves with different nationalities, notably Bosniak Muslims, Croatian Catholics, and Serbian Orthodox Christians. The same mixed ethnic racial groups, which inhabited Bosnia-Herzegovina more or less peaceably for hundreds of years, developed into national identifications with the countries of Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under Austro-Hungarian rule. These groups were momentarily unified after World War I under the single Balkan state of Yugoslavia. Serbia, however, held ambitions for Yugoslavian dominance when the state began to collapse in 1989. They issued a warning “that republics seeking independence would face border changes on the assumption that anywhere a Serb lived was part of Serbia” (Clancy 2004:44). Slovenia and Croatia succeeded from Yugoslavia in 1990. Bosnia-Herzegovina followed suit, declaring independence on April 6, 1992. On the same day, Serbia declared war on Bosnia, attacking the capital Sarajevo.

The resulting war from 1992-1995 was a violent, international mess. The Serbian army besieged the capital of Sarajevo, killing many civilians. Bosnian Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks were divided, and the country became a three-way ethnic battlefield between Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. Although atrocities were committed on all sides, Bosniak Muslims were the most targeted and victimized ethnic group. The country experienced the largest genocide in Europe since the Holocaust; it is estimated that 150,000 people died, mostly Muslims, and half the country was left homeless or fled the country (Kampschror 2006b:24; Clancy 2004:47). People

who remained in Bosnia during the war grew increasingly frustrated by stalling politics on the international stage. The violence officially ended in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord. The new constitution divides the country into three governed groups, with a separate central Federation government that rotates the head of administration every four years between Bosniak, Serb, and Croat political rule (Clancy 2004).

This historical context plays an important role in understanding how Bosnians have responded to the pyramid scheme. It is within this socio-political environment and under these historically founded conditions that Semir Osmanagic and his Foundation set up their operation at Visoko. And within this context, local and national Bosnians responded to the discovery of the Visoko ‘pyramids,’ attaching meanings to it based on their own socio-historical values.



A VALLEY AND A MAN

Visoko is a sleepy town in central Bosnia, 20 miles northwest of Sarajevo. [Figure 2] During the late middle ages the town thrived as the important political and economic center of the prosperous, provincial Bosnian kingdom. The area exported large quantities of silver and other precious metals, and Bosnian kings built their fortified residences on the hill of Visocica (Malcom 2002:24). When the Ottomans conquered the town in 1463, the town became an oriental-style administrative center. Today the city is a simple, small trade town known for its quality leather craft and its high Bosniak (Muslim) population, 74% in 1991 census and 96% in the post-war census (Wikipedia 2007a). Visoko and its general “region is, in many ways, the heart of the historic Bosnia” (Archaeology.org 2006). Remains of Neolithic, Illyrian, Roman, Medieval, Ottoman sites dot the landscape, and the Visoki royal medieval town and fort sit atop Visocica hill (Ibid). Although the town sports a small museum and tourist trails leading to the remains of the old Visoko fort, few people visited the city until pyramids were ‘discovered’ there. Today, over 200,000 visitors see the pyramids every summer (Traynor 2006; Monaim 2007), and the town is rapidly trying to expand their infrastructure to meet the sudden demand (Silajdzic 2007; Secerovic 2007).

Semir Osmanagić is the man who brought about this change. Osmanagic is originally from Sarajevo and has a Masters in politics and economics. After fleeing the country before the war, he established a successful metal construction business in Houston, Texas that oversees 100 employees. In his free time, Osmanagic claims to have ‘studied’ pyramids around the world for the past 15 years and is the author of several works of fringe archaeology (Foer 2007; Osmanagic 2005c). His book *The World of the Maya* is translated into English and suggests that Maya were descended from aliens from the Pleiades, “inherited knowledge from their ancestors at Atlantis and Lemuria (Mu),” and that “pyramids erected on these energy potent locations enabled the Maya to be closer to the heavens and to other levels of consciousness. (Osmanagic 2005a; Osmanagic 2005b:70). All of Osmanagic’s alternative history works espouse the same genre of

fringe ideas. However, he also claims to be working on an undefended PhD thesis on the Mayan Civilization at the University of Sarajevo, under the adviser Hidajet Repovac (Woodard 2007a; BosnianPyramid.com 2006a; Osmanagic 2007a).

In April 2005, Osmanagic traveled to Visoko on the recommendation of Senad Hodovic, the local museum director, who wanted to promote his books at a book fair. According to Osmanagic's official story, he had an epiphany on that visit: the Visoko valley contained ancient man-made pyramids (Bosnian-Pyramid.net 2006; Kampschror 2006a). Osmanagic renamed the large Visocica hill, 'Pyramid of the Sun,' because it supposedly resembles the Mayan step pyramids in Mexico. Osmanagic also claims that four other pointed hills in the Visocica valley are the 'Pyramid of the Moon,' 'Pyramid of the Bosnian Dragon,' 'Pyramid of Love,' and 'Temple of the Earth.'

All of these pyramids, Osmanagic claims, were built from scratch by an ancient Bosnian supercivilization. The three largest 'pyramids' (Sun, Moon, and Dragon) purportedly form a perfect triangle, and the four sides of the Pyramid of the sun align to the four cardinal points of the Earth's compass. [Figures 3, 4, 5, 21] Osmanagic consistently insists that his Pyramid of the Sun is the oldest and largest pyramid in the world, at 185.5m high and 8,000-12,000 years old (BosnianPyramid.com 2006b). The pyramids are allegedly connected by a series of ancient underground tunnels and chambers. One tunnel reportedly revealed the world's oldest writing on one of its walls, a series of characters that resemble Nordic runes (Osmanagic 2007b; Silajdzic 2007). Osmanagic claims his excavation is about to rewrite world history (Kampschror 2006a).

Once he received local excavation permits through the local museum, Osmanagic began probing the hill in search of 'proof.' Along with the discovery of large boulders, his team found an incomplete human skeleton, which was "packed off and sent to analysis in order to determine how old they were" (Archaeology.org 2006). No one knows the skeleton whereabouts. Academics like Dr. Enver Imamovic, from the National Museum at Sarajevo, believe that Osmanagic may have probed into a medieval necropolis. Despite the lack of supportive

Figure 3



*(Image courtesy of BosnianPyramid.com:
<http://www.bosnianpyramid.com/images/Weekly/BosnianPyramidofSun.jpg>)*

Pyramid of the Sun (Visocica Hill).

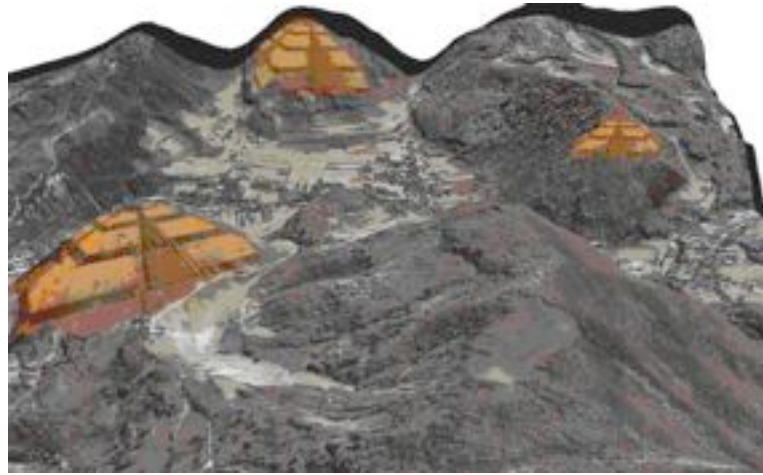
Figure 4



(Photo by Tera Pruitt)

Pyramid of the Moon (Pljesevica Hill)

Figure 5



*(Image courtesy of BosnianPyramid.org:
http://www.bosnianpyramids.org/photos/photo_8.10.jpg)*

Diagram of the three main 'pyramids' by the official website, BosnianPyramid.org.
The pyramid to the left is 'Pyramid of the Sun' (Visocica Hill).
The center pyramid is 'Pyramid of the Moon' (Pljesevica Hill).
The pyramid to the right is 'Pyramid of the Dragon.'

The orange pyramids overlaying the original image are an artist's vision of the pyramids.

archaeological remains or artifacts, Osmanagic published his book in 2006 titled "Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun," which claims that his work proves the existence of pyramids (Osmanagic 2006a).

After a successful media campaign raised public awareness, Osmanagic established the Archaeological Park: Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation. The organization devotes itself to "broadcast news and collect donations" (Foer 2007), consists of approximately 85 full-time employees in summer and 35 in winter (Osmanagic 2007a), and retains Osmanagic as its sole head and organizer (Silajdzic 2007). The exact operation of the Foundation is opaque, with all members directly connecting and going through Osmanagic, "the chief," to get anything done. Every member strictly adheres to his or her job, no questions asked. If a Foundation employee is asked a question they are not responsible for, they refer you to Osmanagic, who holds all of "the papers" (Silajdzic 2007). The Foundation maintains a website (Osmanagic 2007c) that has

published an activity plan outlining future research from 2006 to 2010. Its ultimate goal is to establish Visoko as a major tourist attraction and get the pyramids listed as a UNESCO world heritage site (Wikipedia 2007b).

Osmanagic and his teams of volunteers, sometimes working a hundred at a time, have opened excavation units at several sites in the valley, particularly at the ‘Pyramid of the Sun’ and ‘Pyramid of the Moon.’ [Figures 7-10] The team operates these open-air excavations in the summer and then restricts their work to the tunnels in winter when the weather turns harsh. In winter 2006-2007, Osmanagic started worldwide Embassy tours. Bosnian Embassies in cities like London and New York allowed Osmanagic to give short presentations to the public and the press. Important Embassy officials sometimes attended and gave support (Osmanagic 2007b; Bohannon 2006b). [Figure 6] Along with these presentations, Osmanagic began a twelve-episode documentary tour with a Bosnian television company, which intends “to show that Bosnian pyramids, stone spheres and megalithic walls is not exception but very common on four continents” [sic] (Osmanagic 2007a).

Along with his own amateur archaeology work, Osmanagic claims to have also enlisted “scientific experts” who support his project (Piramidascunca.ba 2007). Although he has been “indulging in a naughty habit [of] announcing project support from foreign archaeological authorities who either weren’t supportive or weren’t authorities” (Foer 2007), Osmanagic does seem to have a couple of supportive professionals with upper-level degrees behind their names. Dr. Aly Abd Alla Barakata, a geologist from the Egyptian Mineral Resource authority, and Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Aly reportedly believe that the hill was “extraordinary, definitely not made by nature” (Associated 2006; PiramidaSunca 2007). The fact that these scholars are from Egypt and have only tenuous knowledge of Bosnian archaeology does not faze supporters.

In June 2007, Bosnian Minister of Culture, Gavriilo Grahovac, briefly withdrew Osmanagic’s requisite excavation permits to halt the dig, due to professional petitioning and protest that the site was pseudoarchaeology. However, the Visoko public staged their own

dramatic protest which blocked the main street in town, and the Federation's Prime Minister quickly gave the permits back (Woodard 2007b). As of now, Osmanagic's project continues to operate and thrive, with almost complete backing of Bosnian public, media, and government support.

Figure 6



*(Image courtesy of Elma Okic/Hungry Eye Images and John Bohannon:
<http://www.johnbohannon.org/NewFiles/bosnia2.pdf>)*

Semir Osmanagic poses for the camera with Tanja Milasinovic, Bosnian ambassador to the U.K. in front a pyramid-shaped cake baked in his honor at the Bosnian Embassy, London.

Figure 7



*(Image courtesy of BosnianPyramid.com:
<http://www.bosnianpyramid.com/images/NewsBosnianPyramid/BosnianPyramidOfTheSunRed.JPG>)*

Pyramid of the Sun (Visocica Hill):
Osmanagic's excavation sites are labeled in red.

Figure 8



(Photo by Tera Pruitt)

Excavation site at the Pyramid of the Moon

Figure 9



*(Image courtesy of BosnianPyramid.com:
<http://www.bosnian-pyramid.com/gallery/Excavations/893404g2.jpg>)*

Volunteers of all ages come to excavate pyramids, sometimes by the hundreds.

Figure 10



(Photo by Tera Pruitt)

Mirsad Huseinovic, a 10-year old, gives tours at the Pyramid of the Sun (Visocica Hill). Here, he points out features to tourists.

RESPONSES

Reactions and responses to the project have been emotional and complex. They range on different orders of scale: individual, local, national, and international, on personal levels of meaning and on community scales.

Anthony Harding, president of the European Association of Archaeologists, states: “there are probably three types of [supporters] involved in the pyramids. There are fanatics who want to believe this stuff, there are people who are being misled, and there are people who are leading people along, cynically, for political and financial reasons” (qtd. in Foer 2007). Many individuals, especially Bosnians, certainly seem to be true believers. Sanel Silajdzic, a war veteran and a student finishing his degree in history at the University of Sarajevo, was captivated by Osmanagic’s story. He joined the Foundation in 2006 as a full-time employee and now greets important international guests for the Foundation (Silajdzic 2007). He relishes his job, and on site he will excitedly point out: “The blocks are always of similar size, and you can see that they are cut at 90 degrees. Nature cannot do this, not to a thousand blocks!” (Woodard 2007a; Silajdzic 2007). Although a less fanatic believer might not see everything he sees, Silajdzic is a determined—and defensive—supporter, pouring every moment of his free time and effort into the project (Silajdzic 2007). The exact motivations behind such fanatical belief are unclear, although some good guesses may be made based on the context of a depressed country filled with still-post-war traumatized citizens who may be looking for something positive (Zhelyazkova 2004). Whether the notion of pyramids fills a void for personal achievement, a need for a personal or national symbol, or is simply something exciting to fill a dull day, the site has taken secure hold on individuals like Silajdzic.

As Harding states above, many other people are being misled, hovering somewhere between misdirection and truly espousing a belief in the pyramids. Much of the local population in Visoko is in this state. Locally, the pyramids have been welcomed as something of a miracle because of the economic boost the discovery gives to the town. In other cases, elementary

students like Azra Hadziabdic, an eleven-year old from Sarajevo, are brought to Visoko on class field trips to learn about Bosnian history. When Azra returned from her tour of the pyramids, she made her parents promise to display an artifact from the pyramid (a rock) on their living room table (Hadziabdic 2007). [Figure 11] Teaching children like Azra a glorified national history may be an inspiration for many classrooms, despite the fact that the information about the past is misleading.

Nationally, many Bosnian citizens respond to the pyramid scheme like those in Visoko, applauding the find and aggressively defending it. Other supporters, however, may be what Harding would qualify as ‘cynics who lead people along for political or financial reasons’ or people who simply want the pyramid to exist for what it represents: positive international attention, political clout, and a glorified national history. Most of the national discussion about the pyramids touches on political and financial themes. Tee shirts read “Fuck the country that doesn’t have its own pyramids!” (Foer 2007) and politicians, mainly Muslim, have shown heightened interest in the project and what it might mean—for the economy and as a national or ethnic symbol. Some Bosnians find charade uncomfortable, but still connect the site to a sense of national identity; Hrvoje Batnic, a Sarajevo resident, says, “It makes me ashamed to be Bosnian” (Economist.com 2006). The post-war climate of Bosnia and its national history of ethnic tensions, where different groups always seem to be keeping score against one another, have everything to do with these attitudes. This crucial point is discussed more fully in Chapter III.

Internationally, the pyramids have also had flash overnight fame, thanks to media like internet and television. Television programs broadcast specials about the pyramids (ABC 2006) and international newspapers, both in print and on the web, have also spread the news. The most prevalent source of international debate on the controversy, however, is on online personal blogs, site forums, and web pages. The Pyramid of the Sun Foundation and other groups maintain ‘official’ online news and support. Other websites devoutly oppose the project. Much of the

for-and-against pyramid sentiment is expressed online on a global scale, with emotions running high. A full discussion of the media and its critical impact on the pyramid scheme comprises part of Chapter IV.

From this national and international debate, professional archaeologists have joined the stage. The mainstream archaeology response has come in waves. Initial reaction on the topic was amused interest, following the media's early portrayal of Osmanagic as a serious amateur archaeologist. Dr. Bruce Hitchner at Tufts University initially stated, "My impression is that they may be monumental elite tombs from the pre-Roman period." Zahi Hawass, Head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities in Giza, initially thought, "It is quite possible there are pyramids in Bosnia" (Blogger.ba 2007). The Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) even hosted a blurb about the pyramid excavation on its fieldwork opportunities website, advertising Osmanagic's request for field volunteers (Rose 2006a). This comfortable reaction soon turned to cynicism and scoffing (the AIA advert was quickly withdrawn) as Osmanagic's wild claims and background became fully apparent. Anthony Harding was one of the first to respond: "In most countries of Europe those with wacky theories about 'hidden mysteries' on presumed archaeological sites are free to propound them but not to undertake excavation...it adds insult to injury (Harding 2006). Zahi Hawass retracted his previous speculations and issued a public letter that stated, "Mr. Osmanagic's theories are purely hallucinations on his part, with no scientific backing" (Hawass 2006). This cynicism soon turned to panic when it became apparent that the pyramid frenzy was not subsiding, that it was actually growing. Major publications like *Archaeology Magazine* (Kampschror 2006b; Rose 2006a; Rose 2006b), *Science Magazine* (Bohannon 2006a; Bohannon 2006b) and *British Archaeology* (Harding 2007) published somber, warning articles. Now, most professional mainstream archaeologists recognize the site as pseudoarchaeology. Richard Carlton, archaeologist at the University of Newcastle, despairs: "Support of this raft of nonsense has only increased. I have no idea what to do other than to continue to present reasonably argued opposition" (Bohannon 2006b).

Figure 11



(Photo by Tera Pruitt)

Azra Hadziabdic, aged 11, visited Visoko to learn about the Bosnian pyramids on a school fieldtrip. She brought back a rock (center) from the site and made her parents promise to display it on a table in their living room.

PSEUDOARCHAEOLOGY: A LABEL

Many mainstream archaeologists brand the pyramid scheme ‘pseudoarchaeology,’ a specific type of alternative archaeology. The term ‘alternative archaeology’ refers to a very wide and amorphous range of claims about the past. Issues such as indigenous spiritual and reburial issues, malicious manipulation of history for propaganda purposes, pseudoarchaeological claims about super civilizations, and even some professionally interpreted archaeological reconstructions can all be included under a blanket category of ‘alternative.’ Although more research is needed to understand where the boundaries lie between such a broad spectrum of ‘alternatives’, this dissertation suffices to label the Bosnian pyramid case study as a type of pseudoarchaeology. Colin Renfrew strictly defines ‘pseudoarchaeology’ as “the misrepresentation of the past misusing the material evidence of that past” (2006:xii), separating invented heritage as ‘frauds’ and not part of the same genre. However—despite the fact that the Bosnian pyramid scheme is mostly new invented heritage and does not entirely misuse material evidence ‘of the past’—this dissertation argues that the Bosnian pyramid scheme is, and should be, professionally labeled as ‘pseudoarchaeology,’ following arguments presented by academics such as Fagan (2006b) and Flemming (2006), below.

Mainstream archaeologists frequently define the term ‘pseudoarchaeology’ by explaining what it is not: mainstream archaeology, a hoax, or a myth. Mainstream ‘archaeology’ is defined as a discipline that focuses on the *scientific* “recovery, analysis, and interpretation of the physical remains of past human activity” (Fagan 2006b:24; Bahn & Renfrew 2000). Pseudoarchaeology, unlike archaeology, does not aim at a logical chain of thinking or analysis; it is: “not a set of serious archaeological principles...designed to gain the confidence and support of professional archaeologists. The aim is to propose a set of alternative principles and alleged records of sites that will attract and hold the interest and belief of the general public and the popular media” (Flemming 2006:68). The Bosnian pyramid scheme fits this definition of pseudoarchaeology. It is not a hoax like the Cardiff Giant or the Piltdown Hoax, tricks designed to fool academic and

non-academic audiences alike, nor is it a myth based on ignorance of data, like the so-called myth of the Moundbuilders or the mysteries of Stonehenge (Feder 2002). Semir Osmanagic’s project “invokes the aura of scholarship without being scholarly in fact and blurs the distinction between real scholarship and ‘alternative’ output” (Jordan 2001:288-289), a classic case of pseudoarchaeology.

Following the notion that there is a ‘classic’ type of pseudoarchaeology, academics such as Fagan (2006b), Flemming (2006), and Lefkowitz (2006) have developed something akin to rubrics that map out qualities of pseudoarchaeology. Fagan, for example, “diagnoses” pseudoarchaeology as maintaining the following characteristics:

Table 1

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dogged adherence to outdated theoretical models 2. Disparaging academia 3. Appeal to academic authority 4. Huge claims 5. Selective and/or distorted presentation 6. The “kitchen-sink” mode of argument [multi-disciplinary] 7. Vague definitions 8. Superficiality, sloppiness, and grossness of comparison 9. Obsession with esoterica 10. A farrago of failings [from logical fallacies to inconsistencies]

From such a list, it becomes apparent that Osmanagic’s site *exactly* matches such formal definitions. It also fits less formal definitions like ‘pyramidology’ and ‘pyrimidiocy,’ terms coined in the second half of the twentieth century by scholars like Barbara Mertz (1964) and Martin Gardner (1957). Mertz writes: “Pyramid mystics...Egyptologists sometimes uncharitably refer to this group as ‘Pyramididiots,’ but the school continues to flourish despite scholarly anathemas” (1964). These are classic, defining characteristics of pseudoarchaeology and, not coincidentally, Osmanagic’s Bosnian pyramid project. Mark Rose, with the AIA, says of the pyramids: “this kind of tale is a staple of the pseudoarchaeology or fantastic archaeology genre” (Rose 2006a).

As noted above, previous research on the subject of pseudoarchaeology has been thoughtful enough to explore commonalities between similar cases and to distinguish between ‘genuine’ archaeology and pseudoarchaeology. It has carefully listed and defined alternative ideas about the past, created good arguments for why it disturbs genuine science, and has even taken the next step to declaring them “pernicious processes” that should be combated (Renfrew 2006). Such research has developed as a response to scathing accusations like, “How much does the academic world care about the health of a scientific culture?” (Hale 2006:256). It seems, therefore, that recognizing this need to address pseudoarchaeology is a move forward. However, the direction of research so far is not addressing the right concerns and will be an ultimately futile process, unless a different approach is taken.

Simply defining this type of site as ‘pseudoarchaeology’ does not satisfactorily characterize the complexity and breadth of the situation. Although attention has been turned towards the issue, which is a step in the right direction, cases of pseudoarchaeology are ultimately social processes within larger socio-historical contexts, and they need to be recognized as such. Wiktor Stoczkowski, from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, writes that:

“What is at stake is rather our capacity to grasp the cultural dimension of pseudoscience. In fact, once we have shown that it is inferior to academic science (which is a truism for most of the scientists and their public), we still have done nothing to understand pseudoscience as a social phenomenon” (2007).

This argument—that complex contexts and conditions allow for alternative archaeology to become preferred accounts of history—is key to understanding pseudoarchaeology, and perhaps to ‘combat’ it. The Bosnian pyramid case study illuminates this point. The next two chapters intend to address social contexts and conditions that are inherent in the pyramid scheme.

CHAPTER III: POST-WAR POLITICS

This chapter investigates deeply rooted socio-political processes involved at Visoko and examines the ways in which various people and groups are constructing meanings. After setting up the context of places and materialities, ethnic claims and divisions in Bosnia, this chapter specifically addresses four types of politics that create meaning around the site: national identity, ethnic claims, politics of money, and politics of academics. The chapter finally notes that these various claims and meanings ensure that Visoko is not a simple one-directional pseudoarchaeological story.

PLACES AND MATERIALITIES

Laurajane Smith writes that “Heritage is about a sense of *place*. Not simply in constructing a sense of abstract identity, but also helping us position ourselves as a nation, community or individual and our ‘place’ in our cultural social and physical world” (2006:75). Nowhere is this concept more apparent than in Bosnia.

Bosnia is a country and a people obsessed with the culture of materiality and place, where “the physical and social landscape of a region is more than a palimpsest of long-term settlement features; it is an imprint of community action, structure and power on places” (Chapman 1994:120). Therefore, places in Bosnia are more complex than just backdrops and settings; they are intimate features of social life, power, and politics. Heritage plays a key role in this embedded cultural-spatial landscape, where identity “is forged through association with the monuments and artifacts of past ancestors, for there was often strong residential and manufacturing continuity in towns and villages from late medieval to modern times” (Ibid:120). All Bosnian towns have a long history of dynamics between their ethnic-religious populations. Visoko, for example, is considered a primarily Muslim Bosniak town and has a long history of Islamic influences since the medieval invasion of the Turks (Malcom 2002).

Especially in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, nothing goes without an identity of place and ethnicity. Layton and Thomas remark that many people from the former Yugoslavia “had always thought of themselves as Yugoslavs rather than Serbs or Croats. As Yugoslavian unity broke down, however, so many found it increasingly expedient...to secure a national identity” (Layton & Thomas 2001:15). Now within Bosnia, main ethnic groups are each trying to cling to both a sense of national identity and a separate ethnic one, which segments the country into different ethnic material cultures. Every thing, person, and place is tensely divided: Bosniak, Croat, Serb. Every individual, town sector, market, or heritage site has its respective religion: Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox. The Mostar Bridge is considered Bosniak Muslim, for example, the old Bas Carsija market of Sarajevo is Muslim, and the pilgrimage site and city of Medjugorje is Croat Catholic (Wikipedia 2007c).

Because of Bosnia’s focus on material culture, heritage sites such as these and hundreds of others were deliberately shelled by combating ethnic armies during the war. The Orthodox Bishop’s Palace and library in Mostar, the National Library in Sarajevo, and the mosque at Pocitelj were completely destroyed, targeted for their material culture associations (Chapman 1994:122; Barakat et. al. 2001:171). Ideologically, “the deliberate destruction of mosques, churches, museums, civil records, monuments and artefacts in the Balkans suppresses the evidence of a culturally diverse and hybrid past, in favour of a mythical ‘golden age’ of ethnic uniformity” (Layton & Thomas 2001:12), with each ethnic group trying to claim that golden age as their own. In this climate of material identity, of post-war ethnic “tolerant hostility” (Zhelyazkova 2004), Osmanagic’s golden pyramid hills have, inevitably, become deeply entrenched in the politics around them.

POLITICS OF MEANING

I. A NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Bosnian pyramid scheme has been attached to two different angles of identity politics: a holistic nationalism and a specific ethnic claim. The first angle of holistic nationalism is Osmanagic's brave attempt to claim the site "for everyone," of all Bosnian ethnicities, as a site of monumental importance because it transcends ethnic quibbling and—for once—represents Bosnia as a national whole. This claim includes three separate facets: an ethnic unification by proving a single historical origin of all Bosnian ethnic groups, a political unification by showing that all Federation parties support the project, and a symbol of Bosnia's desire for international attention.

Osmanagic insists that his site is a matter of national pride, "something that can unite people instead of dividing them" (qtd. in Foer 2007). His site reportedly unites all ethnicities and people under one history, by representing the origin of a world's supercivilization. Osmanagic maintains that, "Bosnia and the Adriatic pool is the second oldest oasis of life in Europe, with 27.000 years on uninterrupted presence of intelligent man" [sic] (BosnianPyramids.org 2006). He continues, "Bosnia is a source of civilization of Europe and that is a reason enough that Bosnians should be proud of their heritage" (Ibid.). These bold statements suggest that, not only is Bosnia the origin of all the country's ethnic groups, but it is also an origin of Europe. Pyramid-unifying nationalism is even visually identified: the Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation logo is a yellow pyramid icon attached to an inverted top blue triangle and stars of the Bosnian national flag. [Figure 12] Such visual propaganda makes the pyramid literally *part of* the national flag, strongly stating that the pyramids and Bosnian nationalism are one and the same.

Osmanagic also endorses a political unity campaign through national Federation politicians and parties. Although some of his networking is undoubtedly for financial gain (see p.39), Osmanagic also seems to be genuinely promoting a sense of national pride through

political support. In an online interview, Osmanagic says, “We all agree? Well you see, it is possible! Bosnian pyramids have united all levels of government showing political maturity starting with Visoko municipality” (BosnianPyramids.org 2006). High-level political support is not in short supply; important politicians like the President Chairman Sulejman Tihic like the project. The President Chairman publicly announced to Montenegro that they and “all other regional presidents as well as the media [should] come and see the pyramid remains” (HINA 2006). And when Osmanagic’s project faced an uncertain future when its permits were pulled in June 2007, the Federation’s Prime Minister Nedžad Branković overruled and gave support to Osmanagic. The Prime Minister firmly stated, “The government will not act negatively toward this project” (Woodard 2007b). Although the parties are not as unified as Osmanagic likes to promote (see p. 37), he continues to use supportive statements to broadcast how rare and special a treasure his project must be, since it can bond the country.

Of course, political support is driven in large part because the project is receiving international attention. When Bosnia’s Prime Minister Branković publicly endorsed and funded the project, he told reporters, “Why should we disown something that the entire world is interested in?” (Ibid.). Supporters seem absorbed with the prospect of achieving international recognition—or at least appearing to have it.

Osmanagic continues to stress that he has an international advisory committee of experts and worldwide interest (Foer 2007; Piramidascunca.ba 2006). Although most of his academic experts’ names are used without their consent or their views are misconstrued (Foer 2007), Osmanagic certainly receives international attention. At the very least, foreign scholars and tourists have traveled from around the world to see the now-infamous Visoko hills (Harding 2006; Foer 2007; Associated 2006). Dr. Robert Schoch, professor at Boston University, visited the site to witness the hype (Schoch 2007). Dirk Wientges, a German tourist, learned about Visoko online and brought his family over Easter vacation: “We were curious. This is a beautiful country, and I would be happy for it if it would prove this is true. For once one can see Bosnia

being mentioned in media in a positive light” (qtd. in Cerkez-Robinson 2006). On top of simple international attention, an explicit goal of the project is to “install a plaque declaring the site a UNESCO World Heritage Site” (Wikipedia 2007b; HINA 2006). UNESCO officials state that they do not intend to send a mission to Visoko (Woodard 2007a); however, political supporters are unmoved, and the project continues to endorse itself as a way to get ‘little Bosnia’ on the map.

Bruce Trigger writes of nationalistic archaeology: “The primary function...is to bolster the pride and morale of nations or ethnic groups. It is probably strongest amongst peoples who feel politically threatened, insecure or deprived of their collective rights by more powerful nations” (Trigger 1984:360). This description certainly applies to Bosnia, which experienced a great deal of suffering in the recent war, leaving its citizens very insecure and its government politically disjointed: “Fears, hatreds, memories, grief for the dead, nostalgia for the lost native places and homes, shattered dreams, insecurity, disappointment, pessimism are continuing to haunt everybody” (Zhelyazkova 2004:17). The problems in foreign policy during the war also left many Bosnian citizens feeling a great deal of insecurity and resentment toward the U.N. and foreign governments (Hadziabdic 2007). In this context, the pyramid scheme provides a positive symbol of nationalism, and it is hardly surprising that so many members of the public and national politicians support it.

Figure 12



(Image courtesy of Archaeological Park: Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation)



(Image courtesy of Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Bosnia_

Official logo of The Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation (left).
The logo incorporates an inverted Bosnian flag. Compare with Bosnian
national flag (right).

II. ETHNIC CLAIMS: MEDJUGORJE AND ISLAMIC FUNDING

Despite this push for an image of holistic nationality, the Bosnian pyramid scheme is also involved in a second, and very different, angle of identity politics: a specific ethnic claim of the site by national Bosniak Muslims. As one Bosnian scholar notes, “political and economic reunification would mean a lot and is a wonderful prospect, [but] in all likelihood it would remain only an idea, a beautiful dream” (qtd. in Zhelyazkova 2004:10). Many Bosnians feel that, “We don’t have historical monuments that don’t bear religious marks.” (BosanaC 2005). And accordingly, Bosniak Muslims have started a claim that the pyramids belong to them (Foer 2007; Woodard 2007a; Harris 2006). This move is not entirely surprising, considering the post-war population of Visoko is 98% Islamic (Zhelyazkova 2004:11); and many people feel the Bosniaks have been looking for a pilgrimage site to rival the Croat Catholic’s site, Medjugorje (described below). Bosniak claim has manifested both as a response to the Catholic site of Medjugorje, and through rigorous financing by political Islamic groups.

The Bosniak claim to the site is not really connected to the religion of Islam at all, but is rather firmly rooted in the practice and action of support by Muslim groups in Bosnia. The Muslim claim to the site does not come as a relationship between the pyramids and Islamic practice, but instead as a relationship between established Muslim groups who are looking for a place to call their own. The groups seem to be claiming the site, not for a place of worship, but rather as a place to pilgrimage to and boast of, a place that sits like a trophy on the tally board between the Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

Foer writes, “if you want to understand what’s happening in Visoko, you have to visit Medjugorje” (2007). Medjugorje is one of two parallel cases of “alternative” claims in Bosnia Herzegovina (the other is Gabela, discussed on p. 43). Before 1981, Medjugorje was a “podunk town” in the Croat part of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Ibid.). Today Medjugorje is a busy Catholic pilgrimage site, famous for its reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary (Wikipedia 2007c). According to the official story, the Virgin Mary appeared to six teenagers, gave them messages,

and informed them that she will reappear in the future and give them each ten secrets. Mary will reappear to the six villagers until they each receive all of their secrets, then she will give three warnings to the world and will stop appearing (Medjugorje.org 2006). Medjugorje is a controversial site, and the Catholic response has been divided. Despite official Church uncertainty, “some 20 million Catholic pilgrims have come to look at “Apparition Hill”—a stampede that has become a major driver of the regional economy” (Foer 2007). Given all of the Catholic pomp and circumstance in a country where Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Muslims keep score, many people feel that Semir Osmanagic’s pyramids answer Muslim prayers for their own miracle and are a new way for the Bosniaks to compete and compare themselves to the Croats. One NATO officer gave the cold assessment: “Isn’t it obvious? The Muslims are trying to create their own Medjugorje. Why should the Croats get all the tourists?” (qtd. in Foer 2007), and members of the Bosnian public flood online forums, asking, “I was just wondering if we discovered this in Visoko to match the discovery in Medjugorje...” (Prenj 2005). These speculations seem to be supported by the fact that Bosnia’s “senior Muslim cleric, Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric, has urged followers to pray that pyramids would be discovered” (Woodard 2007a).

Muslim support also seems to be emerging the shape of private and public Muslim donors. Osmanagic disputes the notion that Muslim groups claim the site, but the truth is that most of his political and financial backing is now generated from Bosniak politicians and Islamic countries. These ethnic politics in the project are externally generated, leaving Osmanagic out of control of which groups claim the site as their own (Radio-202 2006). Although Osmanagic continues to stress that his site is ‘for everyone,’ he continues to accept all the funding given to him, which in turn discourages other groups from giving funds while encouraging the Muslim claim to the site. Because of its financial backing, the Pyramid Foundation is now closely linked with the Muslim Party for Democratic Action (SDA), as well as foreign Islamic countries (NoPyramid 2006; Harris 2006). Foreign “Muslim nations have shown the most interest, by far”

(Foer 2007), such as the Malaysian government and companies, which donated nearly a third of the entire 2006 project budget (Ibid.). Libya, Iran, Egypt, and Pakistan have also shown interest, while few non-Muslim countries have sent support or emissaries (Ibid.). From such displays, the tone of the site's support has shifted considerably from a site "for everyone" in the favor to the site as a Muslim miracle, one that can compete with its sister Catholic site, Medjugorje.

III. POLITICS OF MONEY

As sensed above, the politics of money is intimately attached to the project. In depressed post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, money is a sensitive issue. The country is attempting to rebuild itself, despite rising unemployment and a low economy "due to the fact that there are no strong institutions or political stability" (Zhelyazkova 2004:12). Regarding the pyramids, there are two sides of this coin: the first is support for the site's potential social benefits for tourism and jobs; the second is opposition that claims that money would be better spent on post-war restoration efforts, or at least on real archaeology.

Those who argue that the pyramids will bring social benefits have already seen some early results. Much of the hype around the pyramid scheme involves the money it can pump into Visoko and the broader country through tourism. Visoko has already changed dramatically from its dilapidated post-war state. Before the pyramids, the town received around 10,000 visitors a year. Now they report having that many in a day. The project attracted 250,000 tourists to the town in 2006, bringing in a flood of new money and an economic boost (Monaim 2007). Visoko residents welcome this change as something of a miracle. Esref Fatic, owner of a souvenir shop in Visoko, emphatically insists, "something will be found under the hill" and thinks that "any kind of discovery means a lot after so many years of nothing...people will come here and spend money and that would mean our youth has something to do" (Zimonjic 2006). Most of the local population is enjoying the influx of people to their town. The main hotel in Visoko changed its title from "Hotel Hollywood" to "Motel Piramida Sunca" (Motel Pyramid of the Sun) (Bosnian-

pyramid.net 2006). Craft stores now sell tee shirts and pyramid souvenirs, and cafes serve coffee with pyramid-stamped sugar packets and pyramid-shaped pizza (Economist.com 2006). [Figure 14 & 15] Mirsad Huseinovic, a ten-year-old local, now makes more money than his parents by waiting alongside the road and offering tours to visitors. [Figure 10] Mirsad also says he spends much of his free time excavating with ‘Mr. Semir’ and the other volunteers (Huseinovic 2007). Nedžad Secerovic, a Visoko resident, pockets a good bit of money by selling homemade pyramid crafts from his house garage (Secerovic 2007). In his free time, he takes visitors to a new restaurant that was built just to accommodate tourists, which advertises by way of a pyramid made of bricks decorating the lawn. [Figure 13] Secerovic insists that these changes are just the beginning of the town’s development. In summer, when visitor numbers are highest, the town roads cannot handle the traffic, so, says Secerovic, the city has plans to widen the roads and pave the dirt ones that lead up the hill (Ibid.). The hype also extends outside of Visoko. Tourist Agencies in Sarajevo and neighboring areas—even as far as Croatia—have started advertising company-organized pyramid tours (Negra 2007; Maestral 2007).

To add to the fuss, Osmanagic has announced grandiose plans of “research activity” that will be “opening more areas of the Pyramid to tourists.” He claims that his “main research focus from 2008 onwards will be the provision of more tourist facilities” (Wikipedia 2007b; Piramidascunca.ba 2006). He insists that Visoko will eventually have over a million tourists a year. These plans are certainly elaborate and help explain why volunteers like Elma Kovacevic see pyramids as a way into the future: “The pyramids will help us speed the development of the economy, and when we have done that the EU will accept us” (qtd. in Economist.com 2006).

These big plans also explain why there is “outright political posturing” of interested political parties who are interested in the site for its economic potential (Foer 2007). Haris Silajdzic, a Bosniak member of the rotating presidency, says, “these enthusiasts are getting people excited and interested in something positive and are helping the economy of a poor part of the country” (Woodard 2007a). Many of these interested politicians try to use the site as a

campaign strategy, patting Osmanagic on the back and smiling at the camera. [Figure 6 & 16] Like the Muslim ethnic claim of the site, these campaign strategies operate as external factors from Osmanagic’s control and sometimes go slightly over his head. One notable Sarajevo radio presentation in 2006 exemplifies how stunned Osmanagic was to hear how he was used in a campaign:

Table 2

<p>ANCHOR: Have you thought about.. that the whole idea of pyramids in Visoko could be used for preelection purposes?</p> <p>OSMANAGIC: [...] My wish is, in fact, that this project has support of all political establishments, because I think that is in the interest of this country ... and it will not interfere with political.. uhm.. elections [...]</p> <p>ANCHOR: But what if political elections interfere with the Foundation?</p> <p>OSMANAGIC: How?</p> <p>ANCHOR: By Sulejman Tihic coming to kiss you [...] do you think that this kiss will not be worth, I don't know, a thousand votes in Visoko tomorrow? Because you're not popular only in Visoko, but in that region, have you thought about that?</p>
--

Many strategizing politicians seem to realize that Osmanagic’s excavation is pseudoarchaeology, yet they continue to approve the project because of its economic tourism potential. On whether or not the project should be shut down, President Haris Silajdzic said, “Let them dig and we’ll see what they find. Besides, it’s good for business” (Harding 2007). And a spokesman for the foreign Federation representative in charge of Bosnian Affairs, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, supports the project, calling it “the world’s first victimless pyramid scheme” (qtd. in Foer 2007).

But those who oppose the project see plenty of victims. Many people, especially foreigners, say that the social and economic gains are probably only short-term and that the money spent on the project would be better put to use in post-war reconstruction efforts. Ahmed Khattab, Egypt’s ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina, says the pyramids “should not be a top priority. This digging will require millions and millions, and meanwhile artifacts are being damaged in the museums for lack of heat. Bosnia is a poor country, and there have to be different priorities” (qtd. in Woodard 2007a). The actual figures of Osmanagic’s project are

daunting. In 2006 alone, the Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation raised about \$500,000, Osmanagic contributed about \$100,000, and they have had donations such as estate cars and free loans of bulldozers and transportation (Foer 2007; Woodard 2007a; Harding 2007). These figures are staggering in post-War Bosnia, which is still littered with damaged cultural property in need of reconstruction, such as the damaged National Museum in serious need of funding and the National Library still sitting as a burnt-out shell in downtown Sarajevo (Chapman 1994; Barakat et. al. 2001). Many archaeologists, such as Anthony Harding, are horrified at the amount of money going into the project: “it adds insult to injury when rich outsiders can come in and spend large sums pursuing their absurd theories... instead of devoting their cash to the preservation of the endangered genuine sites and monuments in which Bosnia-Herzegovina abounds” (2006).

IV. POLITICS OF ACADEMICS

The politics of nationalism, ethnicity, and money are complex, but perhaps the fiercest politics orbit around academics. Bosnian professionals who oppose the project are called national “traitors.” Foreign academics are “treated to abuse and ridicule” and are told that they should stay out of business they do not understand (Harding 2007:43). Members of the public recognize, “Any criticism over such pseudoscientific approach in Bosnia-Herzegovina is stamped as an unpatriotic act while critics are stigmatized as traitors in public, since the pyramid project has since its beginning been identified with a ‘national interest’” (Stultitia 2007). Project opposers are often explicitly identified and condemned. In one letter, for example, Osmanagic accuses specific professionals of trying to divide the country politically:

The group of anti-pyramid opposers like Blagoje Govedarica, Zilka Kujundzic, Svetozar Pudacic, Mirko Babic, Gavriilo Grahovac, Ivan and Dubravko Lovrenovic, are working hard to debunk the pyramid research project, spreading voices that the project is supported only by ‘Bosniak ambiences’. They are trying to destroy the project by transforming it in a sad story in three pieces about the Bosnian national and religious reality. Those persons intentionally ignore the fact that the Foundation always underlined that this project has nothing to do with single nations, religious beliefs, but that it belongs

to an ancient past about which all should be proud of. Thus, becoming an integrative factor that should unite, not divide [sic] (Osmanagic 2006b).

Academics have responded to such propaganda with anger, contempt, and pleading. Bosnia does not have a single academic archaeology program, and it only has one prehistoric archaeologist, Zilka Kujundzic-Vejzagic, who receives threatening letters for speaking out against the pyramids (Foer 2007). Nevertheless, many academics both in Bosnia and abroad have launched several unsuccessful campaigns to try to stop the program, sending out petitions (Archaeology.org 2006; NoPyramid 2006) and even appearing opposite Osmanagic on television programs. [Figure 17] Academics particularly entreat politicians to stop excavations on Visocica Hill (Pyramid of the Sun), citing the importance of the medieval fort on the summit and giving evidence that Osmanagic has already run into some genuine medieval and Neolithic sites in the surrounding area (Archaeology.org 2006). So far, however, all academic attempts at ‘educating’ the public and combating Osmanagic’s ideas, as well as attempts to retract his permits, have failed.

It is constructive to contrast this post-war state of affairs in Bosnia with a nearly-identical pre-war case of pseudoarchaeology, which started like the pyramid project, yet had a different outcome. In the 1980s, a Mexican hotel-owner named Salinas Price announced that he had found evidence that Homeric Troy was located in the Bosnian town of Gabela, in the Neretva River valley (Stultitia 2007). Back then, Bosnian archaeologists had the authority to stop the pseudoarchaeological dig, making sure that Price could not get excavation permits (Kampschror 2006b:26). The state of affairs is considerably different now in post-war Bosnia, where any maverick can take action on his wild pseudoarchaeological claims. Enver Imamovic, an archaeologist at Sarajevo University and former director of the National Museum of Sarajevo, thinks “our system is to blame, our institutions, which are not doing anything” (Harris 2006). Bruce Hitchner, professor at Tufts, thinks that “the scam is made possible by the lack of effective central authority” and that Osmanagic has “exploited that weakness” (Kampschror 2006b:27).

Figure 13



(Photo by Tera Pruitt)

New businesses, like the one above, were built in Visoko to accommodate the influx of tourists. This restaurant sits near the entrance to one of the pyramid tunnels, outside the main city streets. The business advertises with a large brick pyramid on its front lawn

Figure 14



*(Image courtesy of National Geographic:
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/bigphotos/77289333.html>)*

Pyramid souvenirs are now sold all over Visoko, as well as in many Sarajevo shops.

Figure 15



(Photo by Tera Pruitt)

Tourism is new to Visoko. Makeshift garage souvenir shops, like the one above, are common.

Figure 16



(Image courtesy of John Bohannon: <http://www.johnbohannon.org/NewFiles/bosnia.pdf>)

Semir Osmanagic poses for the camera with Ivice Saric (left), Sarajevo's Minister of Culture in 2006.

EMERGING QUESTIONS

The real questions that emerge from these scenarios are difficult. Who has the right to Bosnia's past? To use Bosnia's past? The project is undoubtedly helping Bosnia's economy. On the other hand, it is undoubtedly disrupting, and perhaps destroying, genuine archaeology in Bosnia. Distressingly, this scenario asks: might an imagined site like the Bosnian pyramids be *worth* more than real archaeology? And who has the right to put a value on it? This site is an economic and social asset to different groups in Bosnia, with different values for different reasons. For many members of the public and politicians, the question isn't whether or not the pyramids are real, but rather if people will come to see it, spend money in the tourist shops, and use it as a cultural and economic artifact. For others the site's very existence questions fundamental ideas about government, control, and academic authority.

Archaeologists who are desperately trying to 'knock sense' into people about the true nature of the site seem to be unmindful of these startling issues. Quoted previously, archaeologist Richard Carlton reflects the despairing attitude of many academics when he says, "I have no idea what to do other than to continue to present reasonably argued opposition" (Bohannon 2006b). Clearly, part of the reason archaeologists don't know how to approach the situation, why their rational arguments are failing, is that they don't fully grasp the entire situation. Telling a 'pyramidiot' that their pyramids don't exist is futile when people are *praying* for the site to be found: Rasim Kilalic, who turned his weekend home into a café, said "Please God, let them find a pyramid," [while] rushing to serve crowded tables" (Sito-Sucic 2006). This behavior is not concerned with arguments about what 'is' or 'is not,' but instead results from complex social processes. Larger, more established conditions (than simple pseudoarchaeology) are in place when people like Rasim feel it necessary to pray for pyramids, when they have a stake in making sure the notion of pyramids survives. Archaeologists need to understand this complexity. They also need to understand how such sites manifest themselves, as discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV: MEDIA AND PERFORMANCE

Debra Spitulnik writes, “Mass media...are at once artifacts, experiences, practices, and processes. They are economically and politically driven, linked to the developments in science and technology, and like most domains of human life, their existence is inextricably bound up with the use of language” (1993:293). This chapter explores how Osmanagic is using politically and economically driven media to create a performance of authority. Through the performance of language, and through media transmission of his material, Osmanagic and his media support are actively creating the pyramids through a media experience. The first section of this chapter outlines the role of media on the pyramid scheme. It sets up a platform of discussion about ‘actualities’ and ‘virtualities,’ concepts that are useful to tease out the dynamics of representation at Visoko. The chapter then details how the site is represented to the public, through narrative and a performance of language and images.

ROLE OF MEDIA

Media has been the single most important reason that information and support for the pyramid scheme has spread so rapidly. Print news first released and distributed Semir Osmanagic’s story, and television and internet media incensed the debate between supporters and opposition. Interactions that Osmanagic’s team, the general public, politicians, academics, and other groups have had with the media have created a complex web of performance, contribution, theatricality, and distribution.

Print media coverage of the pyramid scheme began in the fall of 2005, when Bosnia’s highest-circulation newspaper, *Dnevni Avaz*, ran a story on Osmanagic’s theories. BBC Monitoring translated the story and ran with it. Several other international news outlets, such as USA Today and National Geographic, followed suit (BBC 2006; Cerkez-Robinson 2005; de Pastino 2006). Mark Rose writes, “The story has swept the media, from the Associated Press and the BBC, from papers and websites in the U.S. to those in India and Australia” (2006a).

Most of these initial reports demonstrated support for the project. Mark Rose, of the Archaeological Institute of America, said, “Every major media outlet that initially covered this story got it wrong. It’s clearly crackpot stuff, but apparently nobody bothered to check the story” (qtd. in Woodard 2007a). Eventually bigger news outlets did start checking the story and released more skeptical reports; however, local newspapers, “don’t have science desks...Bosnian archaeologists dismiss the majority of local journalists as ill-educated. Hence April’s *Avaz* headlines like ‘The pyramid will be visible by the end of the year’” (Kampschror 2006b:27).

Television media was perhaps the most influential in spreading supportive information to a wide audience (Osmanagic 2007a). Woodard reports, “Federation television, the largest Sarajevo-based network, provided extensive coverage, and soon thousands of people were visiting Visoko every day” (2007a). Local media stations also arranged for ‘face-offs’ between Osmanagic and mainstream archaeologists and distributed many supportive campaigns for his site (Osmanagic 2006a). [Figure 17] Foreign television programs, like ABC, advertised excited programs that would “travel to Bosnia to follow this modern day Indiana Jones” (ABC 2006). Osmanagic was also quick to use his new clout with the press, traveling around the world with Bosnian TV—to places like Easter Island, Peru, England, and Jordan—to create a twelve-episode documentary that boosted his site’s profile (Osmanagic 2007a). In the meantime, other private groups released professional documentaries about the Bosnian pyramids (BBR 2007).

Local newspapers relished the attention from foreign press, exaggerating foreign interest: “all local television news shows trumpeted the presence of CNN, AP, Reuters, and the BBC—without mentioning that most outlets covered it as a cute human interest story” (Ibid.). With international media attention fueling the local media, excitement and positive press spread the story like fire. Almost overnight, Osmanagic became the mastermind and poster boy of a national sensation. [Figure 18]

Mark Rose writes “one might have thought that the Ice Age Bosnian pyramid story would collapse like a bad soufflé, but no. Mainstream media has become somewhat more critical of

stories emanating from Visoko, but much of the real work in dissecting the claims has appeared on blogs and message boards, such as The Hall of Ma'at" (2006b). The internet has become the biggest media for those who oppose the pyramid project, undoubtedly because of its interactive and dynamic format. Anti-pyramid websites come in three types: independent websites devoted to anti-pyramid sentiments, blog postings and commentary on personal websites, and forum commentary attached to previously established websites (Irna 2007; Reese 2007; APWR 2007; Feagans 2007). Websites like *In the Hall of Ma'at* operate a general list of articles and forum discussions that dispute alternative history stories for the general public. Katherine Reese, site developer, states "I wanted to help those people who were searching for the truth about history to have an easily accessible "mainstream" counter to these "alternative" claims" (2006:103). Discussions about the Bosnian pyramids have appeared frequently on her site forum, involving heated and emotional debate about the project's pseudoscience. Other sites like the Anti-Pyramid Web Ring (APWR) are blogging sites that release frequent bouts of news, information, and arguments against the pyramid project (APWR 2007). It is primarily through the format of print and television that the project gathered force; and it is mostly through the web that Osmanagic's bad archaeology has been exposed.

Figure 17



(Screenshots courtesy of Centralni Dnevnik and Semir Osmanagic)

These screenshots are from a ‘face-off’ Bosnian news television series called *Face to Face*. Debating television shows like this one are popular in local news media.

Semir Osmanagic is seated opposite Zilka Kujundzic-Vejzagic, an archaeologist from the National Museum in Sarajevo.

Figure 18



(Image courtesy of Gabriele Lukacs:
<http://www.magisch-reisen.at/pyrm.gif>)



(Image courtesy of Beth Kampschorr:
<http://www.archaeology.org/0607/abstracts/bosnia.html>)

Osmanagic courts both the local (left) and foreign (right) Television Press.

ACTUALITIES AND VIRTUALITIES

In “Theorizing Heritage” (1995), Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett retells a story of a travel writer who visited the historic site of Cluny church in France:

Last year 700,000 tourists came to see Cluny and the church that isn't there... A museum dedicated to the church stands a few feet away from the excavation. Inside, I look at an animated, three-dimensional computer re-creation... Back outside, I stare at the void. The computer model is still so fresh in my mind that an image of the enormous edifice seems to appear before me. I'm not alone in this optical illusion: everyone else leaving the museum seems to do the same double take outside. It's as if we're having a mass hallucination of a building that no longer exists (Walsh 1994:15).

Kirschenblatt-Gimblett offers this example as “virtualities in the absence of actualities. It produces hallucinatory effects. On the basis of excavation and historical reconstruction and in collaboration with visitors, the museum openly imagines the site into being—in the very spot where it should be still standing but is no more” (1995:377). This example of Cluny highlights the museum's mediating effect of (re)inventing a virtual site, where “we travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places” (Ibid.).

This example spotlights a major quality of the pyramid scheme: the inventing of a site through the blurring of what Kirschenblatt-Gimblett terms are “actualities” and “virtualities” (1995:375). In the pyramid case, media communication (using language, images, and a combination of performance and participation) acts as a medium in which Semir Osmanagic and others collectively *create* the pyramids. The notion that the ‘virtual’ is opposed to the ‘actual,’ and the idea that the two can become blurred or that the former can replace the latter, is not new in literature. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, argues that there is an underlying and genuine custom in which traditions come to be invented and then exist (1983:2). Scottish kilts, for instance, were artificial traditions that later merged with and ‘became’ Scottish custom (Trevor-Roper 1983), and many nationalistic traditions, such as national holidays and festivals, were mass-invented in state-led generations in Europe between 1870-1914 (Hobsbawm 1983:263). These invented traditions were in a sense ‘virtualities’ that became ‘actualities’ in preexisting custom.

Jean Baudrillard goes further with this notion of the 'virtual' as opposed to the 'actual' in his philosophical work *Simulations*. Baudrillard specifically discusses 'simulacrum,' a Latin word that essentially means "to put on an appearance of." According to Plato and Nietzsche, a simulacrum is an unsatisfactory reproduction of something existing in reality, something like a Roman copy of an original Greek statue (Nietzsche 1990; Plato 2004). However, Baudrillard departs from Plato and Nietzsche, arguing that a simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but rather something virtual that becomes truth or replaces truth in its own right, something that is 'hyperreal' (Baudrillard 1988). The 'hyperreal' characterizes the inability to distinguish between the 'actual' and the 'virtual.' For example, if media radically shapes and filters an event and a viewer's reality becomes enmeshed in both facts and invented/altered information, then his reality is hyperreal.

This discourse of 'simulacrum,' and the 'actual' and the 'virtual,' is a useful lens to view the way pyramids are being constructed at Visoko. Walsh's Cluny "hallucinations" and Semir Osmanagic's pyramids can be seen as cases of 'simulacrum,' where 'virtual' imaginings are created through a mediating factor (the museum mediates in the case of the Cluny church, and various media sources mediate in the case of the Bosnian pyramids). In the case of Cluny and the Bosnian pyramids, viewers experience the 'hyperreal', where imagined understandings of history merge with an 'actual' site in reality. The Bosnian pyramids clearly do not exist as Semir Osmanagic and his followers say they do. The hills are simple geological formations, and no matter how hard Osmanagic may search, he will not produce evidence of a supercivilization. One can distinguish the 'actual' from the 'virtual' at Visoko, just like visitors to the Lascaux Caves in France "could easily be made to understand how they, let alone an art historian, can tell the difference between the real and a fake" (Butler 2002:114). Osmanagic, however, does claim that pyramids do exist at Visoko, and he has more or less devout followers who support his project and claim to see what he sees.

This situation, I argue, is occurring because Osmanagic is successfully creating a simulacrum of the site, a hyperreal history, primarily using mass media outlets as his medium to disseminate his ideas. Osmanagic is presenting a ‘virtual’ (irrational and invented) story through various communication networks, in the same way that the museum at Cluny mediating a ‘virtual’ (rationally argued for) image of the inexistent Cluny church. This process of inventing is described further below.

INVENTING AUTHORITY

In 2006, the television network ABC Houston 13 broadcast a special story about Osmanagic and his pyramids. This show exemplifies how Osmanagic and communication networks are creating the idea, or the simulacrum, of pyramids:

Table 3

<p><i>[Image: logo brand of a pyramid with the words: “Houston’s Indiana Jones”]</i></p> <p>DESK ANCHOR: Travel to Bosnia to follow this modern day Indiana Jones and his search for Bosnia’s great valley of pyramids.</p> <p><i>[Footage of Semir Osmanagic walking at the Pyramid of the Sun, wearing a khaki shirt and trousers and an Indiana-Jones style hat]</i></p> <p>OSMANAGIC: You are enjoying the most beautiful place on the planet.</p> <p>ANCHOR: You don’t know Semir Osmanagic, but to the people of Bosnia, he is a national hero. <i>[Cut to a scene with school children clapping for him]</i>. Congratulated, applauded, and loved wherever he goes. <i>[Cut to scene of more children presenting Osmanagic a pyramid-shaped cake]</i>. This is a land which has been torn by war and civil conflict, but resurrected in a way by one man [...] Indeed, his story, if true, could change the history of the world.</p> <p>OSMANAGIC: <i>[walking at the Pyramid of the Sun]</i> We are going back thousands of years from the ancient times and the Roman and the Greek.</p> <p>ANCHOR: As a history buff, a sort of living Indiana Jones, he travels the world, exploring mysteries [...]</p> <p>OSMANAGIC: All you need to do is disregard the trees, the greenery, the soil, and you will see the object, clearly in your mind. [...]</p> <p>ANCHOR: Semir used satellite, thermal, and topography analysis on tens of thousands of hills in his search for pyramids [...] If a person could look back and just visualize this place as you see it, eight thousand, ten thousand years ago, they would see a massive stone city.</p> <p>OSMANAGIC: What if I told you that this was the most magnificent site</p>
--

This example is useful to see how Osmanagic and his supportive media have performed a ‘virtual’ pyramid site onto the landscape in Visoko. This evocation of a simulacrum occurs in a number of ways. The first is Osmanagic’s specific self-representation: language and images provoking associations with pop-cultural icons: the adventurer, the hero, the hard-working academic, the cool socialite, the modest public servant. The second is Osmanagic’s deliberate narrative establishment of a villain (mainstream archaeologists) that helps to root the pyramid story as a cause ‘for good.’ The third is through Osmanagic’s penchant for logos and branding, which are rooted in modern pop-culture and stereotypes, which actively establish his project. The last way Osmanagic evokes his site is by constructing an *appearance* of methodology and evidence by mimicking genuine scientific documents and the rhythm of scientific language.

I. SELF-REPRESENTATION: ICONS AND PERSONALITIES

Osmanagic references several specific icons of self-representation. First and foremost, Osmanagic represents himself as an adventurer. Osmanagic builds on one prevalent icon from media and literature: the khaki-wearing adventurer, who knows that “anyone is capable of discovery and the non-professional may participate in the grand adventure” (Ascher 1960:402). Osmanagic fully endorses this image, always wearing rugged khaki and rarely appearing in public without his wide-brimmed Indiana Jones-style fedora. [Figure 19] Osmanagic describes his work with adjectives like dangerous, brave, exotic, and mysterious. His tone is dramatic, targeting notions like ‘secrets,’ ‘mysteries,’ or ‘treasures’ of the past. In the ABC Houston transcript above, for example, claims he is a “living Indiana Jones, he travels the world, exploring mysteries” (2006).

Osmanagic offsets this adventurous image with two contradictory self-representations: that of the hardworking academic and cool socialite. He asserts that his time is dedicated “to the intensive research of certain enigmas of the past” involving cultures such as the Maya, Assay, and pre-Illyric cultures in Bosnia (BosnianPyramids.org 2006). And in the past he has “read 40-

50 books a year” (Ibid). Somewhat paradoxically, Osmanagic has also been initiated into the artsy ‘just plain cool’ side of popular culture. His excavations have been launched with concerts of popular rock groups and pyramid themed art installations, and he has even appeared in a music video (Harris 2006; Dedic 2007).

Figure 19



*(Image courtesy of OKOsokolovo:
[http://www.okosokolovo.com/galerija.php?
akcija=slika&id=535&ton=da](http://www.okosokolovo.com/galerija.php?akcija=slika&id=535&ton=da))*



*(Image courtesy of BBC:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4912040.stm>)*

Semir Osmanagic rarely appears in public without wearing his signature, iconic hat.

Osmanagic also represents himself as a hero-crusader, on a quest for truth, attempting to save a war-torn land. The ABC show above, for example, explicitly calls him a “national hero” who will “resurrect” a war-torn country (2006). The humble public servant image is not far behind. In one interview, Osmanagic recognizes that he is in the spotlight of his project, but says “affirmation of the project on the world wide scene and of course the contact with the media, are all a part of this process. However I will slowly move away from the center of the attention as more people get involved in various activities” (BosnianPyramids.org 2006). His performance of a modest public servant and determined martyr appear in statements such as: “I was aware the in this initial period there would be critics who will publicly or privately, speak out, insult and challenge this vision. That is why I did not want to put anyone else forward, but instead I answered to all provocations with the culture of dialogue and scientific arguments.” (Ibid.)

With these various and often conflicting personalities, it is perhaps surprising that Osmanagic has achieved such a successful media image. But he has, for two reasons: the first is that these images are stereotypes, and they seem to be pulled from a collective understanding of what *is* an archaeologist (from pop-cultural icons like Indiana Jones, to academic notions of public servitude and intensive research). The second reason why these multiple personalities work together to create a whole image for Osmanagic is that he establishes one solitary opposite force: the villain. Osmanagic juxtaposes his various self-images against this antagonist. It is a successful move.

II. NARRATION OF VILLAIN

Garret Fagan writes of pseudoarchaeology, “There is another powerful storytelling feature in this genre, one usually lacking in good archaeological television: a villain. For many pseudoarchaeology shows, the villain is archaeology itself” (Fagan 2003). Vilification “is a kind of symbol-making that groups engage in under certain conditions in order to...build consensus and morale for certain kinds of social actions” (Klapp 1959:71). And Osmanagic has successfully established mainstream archaeologists as the primary villain to his cause. It is through this move of opposition that he has been able to maintain his own narrative.

Like a classic hero, Osmanagic has consistently kept up a performance of ‘good guy’ versus ‘bad guy’ with the academic establishment, saying that “every new idea has oponents in the beginning. The bigger the idea, more aggressive the oponents. But, it does not influence my goals and determination for an inch” [sic] (Osmanagic 2007a). Osmanagic began by subtly insulting mainstream archaeology, exploiting the weakness of a system that has unstable or inexistent institutions and funding. Osmanagic uses the fact that the academic establishment is in tatters from the war to his advantage, by saying that archaeologists are incompetent and have been lax in doing work (BosnianPyramids.org 2006). Osmanagic accuses Bosnian

archaeologists of “longtime carelessness,” and cites foreign scholars as “clueless about the real situation and state of Bosnian Cultural Heritage” (Ibid.).

Despite his own insults, Osmanagic has represented mainstream academics as insulting, fearful groups who conspire to attack his higher truth. On one website, Osmanagic directly politicizes and polarizes his academic opponents: “convinced about their conservative views, [they] promptly attacked the hypothesis and tried to debunk it’s author. Some of them, showed a typical bosnian propensity, by launching labels and insults from behind the scenes” [sic] (Osmanagic 2006b). He also uses forceful language to demean mainstream scientists as afraid, jealous, and small-minded: “Are they afraid about the material evidence that will make collapse their world views?” [sic] (Ibid.); “The trades like geology and archaeology will be the last to accept [the pyramids], because it’s a revolution” (Foer 2007). Like every good crusader and public servant, Osmanagic refers to his opponents in a tone of ‘humble citizen’ versus the ‘corrupt establishment,’ conjuring an image of fighting for truth against all odds.

A prime example of such behavior is in a letter that Osmanagic addresses to “Professors, Museum Councilors, Member of Federal Committees and Journalists.” The letter explicitly entreats academics to help a cause that will improve the country, a cause that intends to give sublime hope and goodness to the world and will stand (and has already stood) the ‘tests of time.’ However, the letter seems to imply that archaeologists are fighting a ‘good’ cause that represents an ‘underdog’ country, fighting to disunite ethnic groups and take sides, and fighting economic growth and development in the country:

The pyramids will survive all of us. In One Hundred Years, nobody will remember our names. But, those collassal stone structures, located in the small, but proud country called Bosnia, will radiate a positive energy out into the world. Please, let me invite you once again to unite the modest Bosnian potentials...In five years, one million of tourists will visit the Bosnian Valley of Pyramids. Our wish is that Bosnia and Herzegowina becomes a lively place where explorers, students, professors, volunteers of lightened faces exchange their international scientific knowledge. Tourism will develop the market, the economy will raise and infrastructures will be built. [sic] (Osmanagic 2006b).

It is important to note that this document is listed on a fanatically supportive public website, which mainly draws advocates who are looking for confirmation about the pyramids (Bosnian-

pyramid.net 2006, poll data). The letter, therefore, is actually not directed at the indicated professionals, but rather toward a supportive general audience. The actual intended reaction, it can be assumed, is to make that general audience see the great benefit of the project and to rally against these dispassionate and antagonistic academics. As propaganda, it does a great deal to reduce the authority of mainstream scientists while simultaneously elevating Osmanagic.

III. LOGOS AND BRANDING

Osmanagic also uses the authority of logos and branding. He does this in several ways, from the promotion of cultural assumptions about foreign academia, to the use of brand names and signage. He uses media, which by nature, “enabled marketers to project brands into national consciousness” (Muniz & O’Guinn 2001:413).

Osmanagic never fails to mention that he has been living and working in Houston, Texas. According to some Bosnians, living and working abroad (and especially in a country like the United States or the United Kingdom) is considered an attractive and authoritative feat in its own right (Hadziabdic 2007). Along with his American label, and as mentioned above, Osmanagic builds his self-image on prevalent pop-cultural icons. His “sort of modern-day Indiana Jones” image is his own personal logo (ABC 2006). Headlines brand him as “Bosnia’s Indiana Jones,” “Houston’s Indiana Jones,” or “Indiana Jones of the Balkans” (Hawton 2006; ABC 2006). This self-branding provides enough drama and assumption to give Osmanagic a look of amateur authority. [Figure 19]

As well as branding himself, Osmanagic also seizes every opportunity to promote other people with official political labels or degrees behind their name. Along with encouraging national political sponsorship (see Chapter III), Osmanagic courts professors or students who give an appearance of authoritative, scientific presence. Dr. Robert Schoch, a controversial academic in his own right from the University of Boston, traveled with Dr. Colette Dowell to the Bosnian Pyramid site to see what the fuss was about. Dowell narrates the event:

Television, news papers and websites... announced our arrival in Bosnia as the “American Superstars,” who would credit the claims of Semir’s pyramids and Bosnia would receive its glory. It was a terrible position for us to be placed in. Semir would make a point of introducing us to investors and politicians and have us all stand around posing together for our pictures. (2007).

Another example of this fondness for scientific labels manifested during his presentation at the Bosnian Embassy in London. Osmanagic opened his lecture by saying that his “excavation team includes an Oxford university archaeologist” (Bohannon 2006b; Osmanagic 2007b). Osmanagic showed a brief video clip of a young man at the Pyramid of the Moon stating that he is “convinced that there’s certainly some kind of large-scale man-made structure” (Cartwright 2006). Peter Mitchell, an Oxford archaeologist, told Science Magazine that the boy in the video was only an undergraduate student and “does not have any expertise and in no way represents the university” (Bohannon 2006b). Nevertheless, Osmanagic continues to promote this video on his website, undoubtedly because of the weight the ‘Oxford’ name carries.

At the most obvious level, Osmanagic’s penchant for logos and brand names appears in the way he trademarks his foundation: a shiny, official-looking logo that directly references the power of government [Figure 12]. He also moved to copyright the names of his pyramids and his Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation (Schoch 2007). In Visoko, official government signs point toward the pyramids, and an array of informal and temporary signage mark the site. [Figure 20] This obsession with logos and branding creates the feeling of establishment and authority, a point that also emerges in the way Osmanagic tries to represent the site as ‘scientific.’

Figure 20



(All photos by Tera Pruitt)

These photos represent various signage and logos in Visoko.

- (A) Official municipal street signs point out the pyramid site. These signs give a sense of weight and authority.
- (B) Locals put up attractive wooden signs like this one. Most have the iconic Bosnia Pyramid of the Sun Foundation logo on them (see Figure 12).
- (C&D) Osmanagic and his Foundation put up signs full of scientific-looking charts. This sign sits near the top of the Pyramid of the Sun (Visocica Hill).
- (E) The pyramid logo is even painted onto the sides of buildings in the streets of Visoko.
- (F) The logo also appears on signs such as this one for a restaurant named “Bosnia.”

IV. SCIENTIFIC REPRESENTATION

Ironically, Osmanagic moves seamlessly performing as a ‘modest people’s adventurer who despises elite academics,’ to the completely contradictory performance of ‘visionary amateur scientist who leads a team of elite experts, carrying out intensive and detailed scientific analyses.’ Osmanagic applauds his own methodologies by carefully manipulating images and language so that his methods *appear* scientific.

One way he does this is by claiming serious project background and research. He claims that his time is dedicated “to the intensive research of certain enigmas of the past” involving cultures such as the Maya, the Assay, and the pre-Illyric cultures in Bosnia (Bosnian Pyramids.org 2006). Even more importantly, he continues to stress that his research is a controlled and extensive scientific experiment. He has released a document called *Scientific Evidence about the Existence of Bosnian Pyramids*, which states:

Discovery of Bosnian Pyramids was not simply an ad-hoc affair, but required combination of classic geo-archaeological methods with modern geophysical and remote sensing technologies.

The Archaeological Park Foundation believes that only a multi-disciplinary approach, with serious scientific argumentation on internationally recognized level will yield a successful realization of the Bosnian Pyramids project.

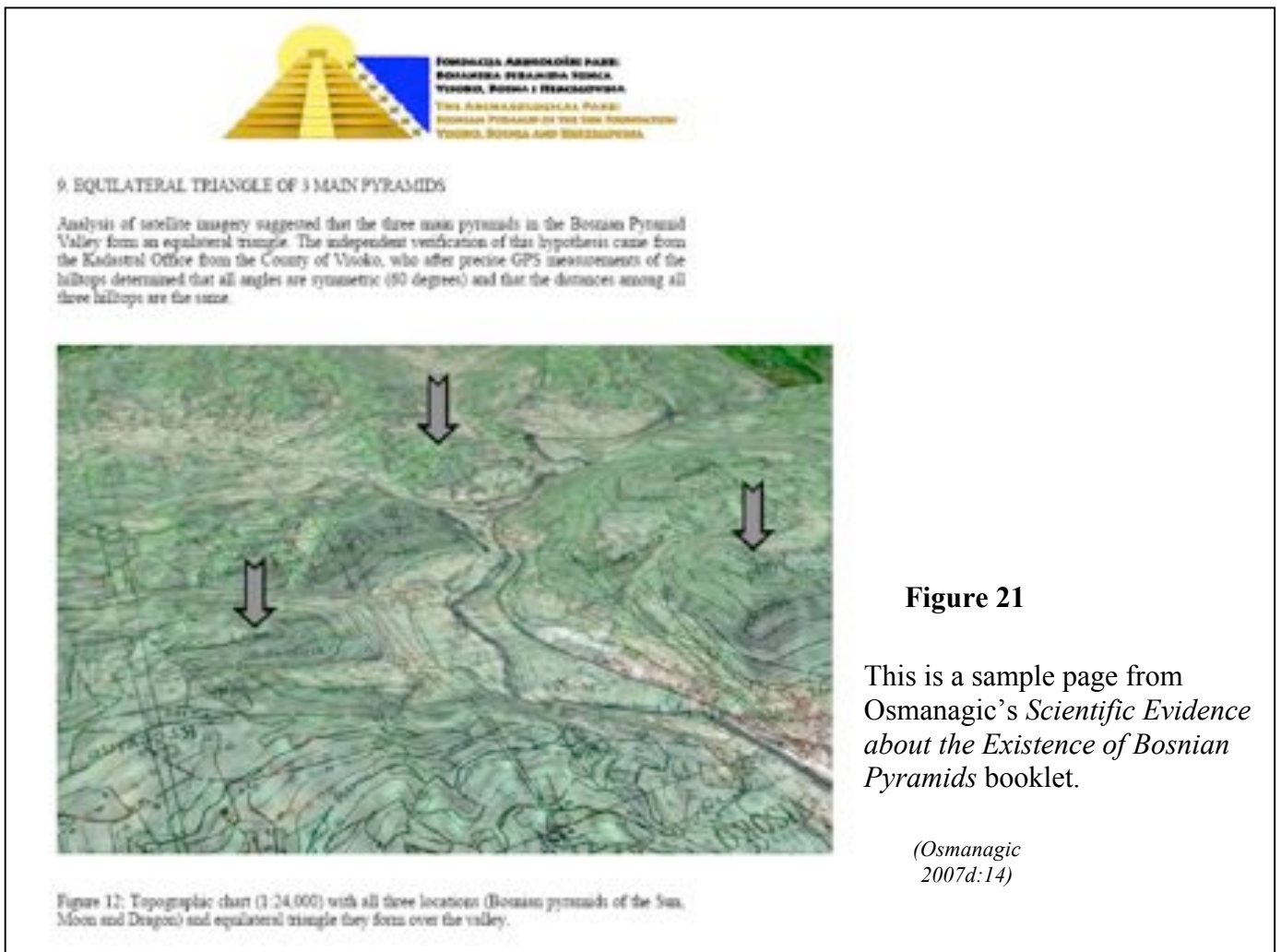
The team, therefore, includes not only archaeologists, but also geologists (mineralogists/petrologists, hydrologists and sedimentologists), geophysicists, paleontologists, speleologists, anthropologists, mining engineers as well as anthropologists. Each one of these experts brings a new element of problem understanding and integrate their qualifications and

Table 4

His language intentionally connects his project to mainstream scientific work and methodologies. None of his statements, however, (including his long list of team experts) are ever documented or supported with any real evidence. His so-called scientific document gives short paragraph entries with intricate titles such as “Apparent thermal inertia measurements” or “Geodetic topographic contour analyses.” His data, however, are nothing but simple statements which say

that “geospatial anomalies” exist (Osmanagic 2007d:2) or only reveal vague generalizations, such as “the sides of Visocica/Bosnian Pyramid of Sun are exactly aligned with the cardinal sides of the world (north-south, east-west), which is one of the characteristics often noted with the existing pyramids” (Ibid.:3). These ‘data’ entries each have a corresponding image, which at first glance appears to be technical and evidentiary; however, the images and their accompanying legends are meaningless. [Figure 21]

Such a document shows that *what* Osmanagic says is less important than *how* he says them. His boastful, elaborate documents mimic language patterns of genuine scientific documents, creating a tone of authority. His tone, coupled with colorful, technical images give his work a feeling of weight and worth, *creating* authority. His website and logos are formatted to appear formal, official, yet inviting and inclusive for a wider public. He is, through mimicry, performing authority.



CHAPTER V: ADDRESSING INVENTED HERITAGE

Holtorf and Schadla-Hall write, “it has become a truism that every generation has the past it desires or deserves” (Holtorf & Schadla-Hall 1999:230). This statement also proves true in a narrower sense with the pyramid case, where a single nation is inventing the past it desires and feels it deserves. Through his faux-excavations and scientific-appearing documents, Osmanagic is inventing and constructing the perfect image and physicality of an archaeological park. Osmanagic is evoking a simulacrum, a ‘virtual’ site that is replacing a ‘genuine’ site in the public imagination, through his performative language and the crafting of specific narrative images. And through the participation of an eager, avid public on the other end of the media projection, the invented pyramids are actively sustained in a greater public understanding. In other words, through their participation, the public contributes to the construction and continuation of the pyramid pseudoarchaeology at Visoko. This section examines this important process of inventing, as it stems from two distinct and intertwined practices: performative inventing and participatory inventing. The chapter ultimately brings together socio-political context and the notion of invented heritage, and it addresses the mainstream discourse of pseudoarchaeology.

PERFORMATIVE INVENTING

The first process of inventing in the Bosnian pyramid case is what I would call ‘performative inventing’—mostly described in Chapter IV. It is the process by which Osmanagic is inventing a site through performing (what is assumed and appears to be) the role of amateur archaeologist. Also part of performative inventing is Osmanagic’s and his supporters’ use of performative language—the process of saying things that makes things happen—or in the case of the pyramids, makes things exist that were nonexistent before.

In the book, *How to Do Things With Words*, J.L. Austin distinguishes between ‘statements,’ which are utterances that simply describe something, and ‘performative language,’

which are neither true nor false statements, but rather utterances which perform certain kinds of action. When you utter performative language, and the circumstances are appropriate, the language does not describe something, but rather *does* something (for instance, saying “I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*” in the appropriate circumstances will perform the action as it is said) (1962). Although Austin was certainly discussing more narrow and specific utterances and circumstances, the general idea can be applied to the performances occurring at Visoko. By repeatedly saying that there are pyramids, and describing an inexistent site as existent in what appears to be authoritative circumstances, Osmanagic is *creating* pyramids. By saying on ABC television, for example, that “If a person could look back and just visualize this place as you see it, eight thousand, ten thousand years ago, they would see a massive stone city” (2006), he is uttering performative language. He is not describing the faux city, because it does not exist. It is through the narration of this city, and through the appropriate circumstances that give him authority (namely authoritative media), that the city *is being invented*.

This performative behavior, performative language, and mimicry of scientific documents are quite literally inventing a heritage site. This point is perhaps best driven home in regards to the physical site excavation. When visitors approach the Pyramid of the Moon, they find large-scale excavations of monumental steps leading up the mountain. [Figure 22] Visitors like Joshua Foer exclaim, “Suddenly it dawns on me—and I’m shocked that it has taken me so long to figure this out—that Osmanagic is *carving* pyramids out of these pyramid-shaped hills” (2007, emphasis added). Osmanagic is chipping away at the mountainside until it physically resembles pyramid steps. This behavior is performative: Osmanagic is playing the part, constructing (quite literally) the right image, and thus inventing heritage.

Figure 22



(Image courtesy of Le Site D'Irna: http://irna.lautre.net/IMG/jpg/bpmoon_15.jpg)

Steps are carved into the side of the Pljesevica Hill, creating The Pyramid of the Moon.

PARTICIPATORY INVENTING

The second process of inventing is what I would term ‘participatory inventing.’ As Chapter III illuminates, the pyramid scheme is deeply ingrained in national and ethnic Bosnian history. Claims to the site attach to different values and different meanings from a variety of interest groups. Eric Hobsbawm writes:

‘Invented traditions’ have significant social and political functions, and would neither come into existence nor establish themselves if they could not acquire them...the most successful examples of manipulation are those which exploit practices which clearly meet a felt—not necessarily a clearly understood—need among particular bodies of people. (1983:307)

Such a *need* for pyramids clearly exhibits itself at Visoko. Unlike the unsuccessful pseudoarchaeology site of Gabela, where another pseudoarchaeologist claimed to have found Troy, Osmanagic’s pyramid site satisfies specific socio-political needs. It offers a world-class monument that outstands and outsizes every other major national monument in the world, right there in “little Bosnia.” It offers Muslim populations their own pilgrimage and tourist site. It offers politicians a diversion from unstable government problems and offers a campaign strategy. It gives a war-struck town a thriving economic boost. In short, it fulfils serious social needs.

Osmanagic is able to invent his heritage only through the continued participation from a supportive audience that allows his ideas to gain momentum and security. Osmanagic presents his simulacrum, his ‘virtual’ story that overlays the ‘actual’ truth—but it is only through the full acceptance and participation in this vision that the site comes to fruition. In the past, the impact of media on the spread of information and public consumption was thought to occur in a linear progression: message production, transmission, and reception (Spitulnik 1993:295), with one entity creating and transmitting a message that another entity passively received. This notion has been challenged in the past decade, and media has been “examined not so much as definers of “reality,” but as dynamic sites of struggle over representation, and complex spaces in which subjectivities are constructed and identities are contested” (Ibid.:296). These notions about dynamic message construction and participation have also arisen in museum literature. In his

discussion of museum exhibitions, Baxandall states that there are three active agents involved in exhibitions: the maker of the artifact, the exhibitor, and the viewer (1991:36-37). It is through the participation of all of these levels of involvement that a museum exhibition has meaning. Similarly, three dynamic agents are at work in the pyramid project: Osmanagic (the producer/maker), the media (transmitter/exhibitor), and the viewers/audience.

The participatory role of the media and, especially, the public is what has helped to invent the project and keep it alive. This active, participatory inventing is exemplified in one quote: “If they don’t find the pyramid, we’re going to make it during the night. But we’re not even thinking about that. There *are* pyramids and there *will be* pyramids” (Foer 2007). This is exactly what the participating public, media, and Osmanagic are doing: they are *constructing* pyramids through their participation.

CONCLUSION

Two things are happening within professional archaeology in the Bosnian pyramid case: (1) archaeologists are not engaging with the public, and (2) they are not engaging with pseudoarchaeology. Mainstream archaeologists have clearly not engaged the public enough in ‘genuine’ archaeological work. The public seems generally aware of its history and somewhat appreciative of it, but also seem ignorant of why claims like Semir Osmanagic’s may be ridiculous. Of course, the recent war has destabilized institutions in the country, leaving the Bosnian archaeological establishment struggling to rebuild without funding; so interaction with the public has not been entirely avoided due to lack of concern or interest. However, this lack of engagement with the public has clearly had an impact on the ‘pyramid’ situation in Bosnia.

Archaeologists have also not engaged with pseudoarchaeology. This case study sends a striking message to mainstream archaeologists. Invented heritage, such as pseudoarchaeology, is an extremely complex subject matter whose complicated nature has been misunderstood, if not neglected. This study shows a dissonance between the simple mainstream pronouncement “this

is pseudoscience” and the complex story that emerges from a more in-depth examination. Pseudoarchaeology is a product of complex social processes, and therefore should be studied. By whom? Sociologists? Anthropologists? Archaeologists? But beyond these questions is the fact that, by ignoring its complexities, archaeologists who are trying to approach the situation in Bosnia are not addressing the most relevant issues. Their arguments have been (somewhat condescendingly) directed at educating an ignorant public; however, the public in Bosnia is not exactly ignorant—they want and need these pyramids, and they have a stake in keeping the notion alive. If archaeologists wish to discourage or ‘combat’ invented heritage like pseudoarchaeology (and whether or not they should opens entirely a different set of questions), then they need to be much more aware of what they are addressing. The burden to provide the public a sense of credibility in archaeology as a social science rests on mainstream archaeologists. If they wish to address a case like Visoko, then understanding the social processes which create pseudoarchaeologies is the first step in a productive direction.

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