Contextualising Alternative Archaeology
Socio-Politics and Approaches

Tera C. Pruitt

Department of Archaeology
University of Cambridge
tcp22@cam.ac.uk

Alternative archaeology has often been dismissed by professional archaeologists as simplistic, ludicrous and not worth the attention of the mainstream discipline. However, alternative claims about the past—such as nationalistic manipulations of history, pseudoscience, religious use of archaeological evidence or simply alternative ways of interpreting the material past—are usually not as one-sided, simplistic or dismissible as many professionals seem to imply. Alternative pursuits are relevant to mainstream archaeology as they challenge the fundamentals of conventional archaeological wisdom. The study of such claims can help professional archaeologists understand, separate and justify reasonable archaeological interpretations from irrational speculations, which may range from the misguided to the intentionally malicious (Fagan 2006). This paper examines the case of the Bosnian Pyramids in order to identify socio-political, theoretical and practical complexities in a case of alternative archaeology and to address mainstream approaches to this project.

Background

In 2005, a businessman and alternative historian named Semir Osmanagić announced his discovery of the world's oldest and largest pyramids, located in the small town of Visoko near Sarajevo in central Bosnia-Herzegovina (fig. 1). Osmanagić's elaborate hypothesis features as many as five Palaeolithic pyramids in the Visočica valley, centred around the Pyramid of the Sun, supposedly the largest and oldest pyramid in the world (fig. 2). The hypothesis further claims that the pyramids are connected by an intricate complex of underground tunnels whose walls are adorned with the world's first writing, which resembles Nordic runes (Osmanagić 2007). Osmanagić also claims to have found a nearby rock quarry site in Gornja Vratnica and a riverbed full of 'mysterious' stone balls near Zenica; both sites are allegedly contemporary and connected to the pyramids in Visoko. Osmanagić now works at these sites alongside his team, operating as the officially registered Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation. The Pyramid Foundation is comprised of 35–80 employed individuals and hundreds of volunteers, and his extended team includes everyone from enthusiastic local shopkeepers to academically accredited Egyptian professors (personal observations 2008).

Fig. 1. Visoko is located 20 miles northwest of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Most mainstream archaeologists have been quick to dismiss Osmanagić's claims (Kampschror 2006, Rose 2006a, 2006b), counter-claiming that the Visočica area is merely a river valley with natural geological hills. The only archaeology in the region dates from scattered Neolithic remains to very significant Mediaeval settlements

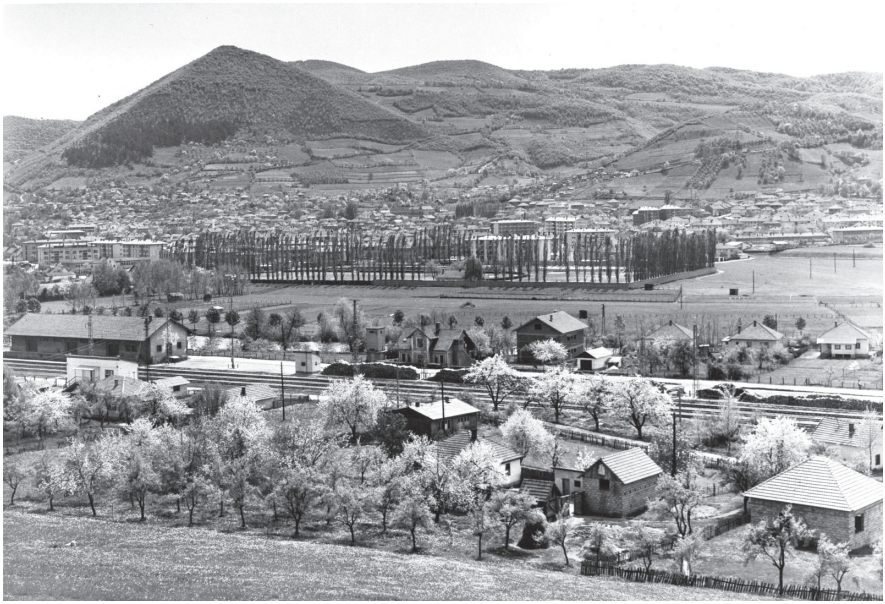

Fig. 2a. This iconic image of Visoko was taken in 1973, and it is widely distributed online, in pyramid brochures for tourism and 'scientific studies', and on tourist postcards and other souvenirs. This is the most stunning, straight-lined side of Visočica Hill (Pyramid of the Sun). Incidentally, this is also the most photographed angle of Visočica Hill (this is a freely distributed image).

Fig. 2b. Visočica Hill, renamed Pyramid of the Sun, is claimed to be the largest and oldest man-made pyramid in the world by pyramid supporters. This picture views the south side of Visočica Hill with the town of Visoko in the foreground; the more famous view of the hill is from the north, which has more striking regular lines (photo by Tera Pruitt).

Fig. 3. Semir Osmanagić courts the media at his excavation site at Plješevica Hill, renamed Pyramid of the Moon. Due in large part to the support and interest of local and foreign media, as well as Osmanagić's iconic hat and charisma, the Bosnian Pyramids became an overnight media sensation (photo by Tera Pruitt).

in the area. In their opposition, professional archaeologists primarily note the Pyramid Foundation's lack of solid archaeological evidence and general trend of pre-formulating results. No archaeological remains indicating Palaeolithic activity or monumental architecture have been found at the site; no archaeological tools or any clear signs of settlement from the Palaeolithic era have been identified either (Rose 2006a, 2006b). Osmanagić and his Pyramid Foundation have indulged in the bad habit of pre-formulating their conclusions and results, and then excavating in search of evidence to prove how correct they are. This problematic behaviour is already recognised and acknowledged within their own organisation (Swelim 2008). Contention has also arisen due to Osmanagić's lack of professional training and his background as an alternative author of books like *The World of the Maya* (2005), which presupposes that aliens from the Pleiades star cluster built the Maya pyramids. Despite the quick and very vocal professional dismissal of the alternative claims, the notion

of pyramids has become an overnight public success within Bosnia and a worldwide sensation (fig. 3).

Pseudoarchaeology: A Label

Most mainstream archaeologists brand the pyramid claims as 'pseudoarchaeology', a specific type of alternative archaeology, classically defined as invoking "the aura of scholarship without being scholarly in fact and blurs the distinction between real scholarship and 'alternative' output" (Jordan 2001: 288–289). Although the purpose of this paper is not to discuss which facts may or may not identify the Bosnian pyramid case as an example of pseudoarchaeology, a wealth of literature can be accessed on this particular topic (APWR 2008, Bosnianpyramid.com 2008, Foer 2007, Pruitt 2007, Rose 2006a, Schoch 2007, Woodard 2007).

While this paper agrees that the pyramid hypothesis is factually speculative, it also challenges traditional mainstream approaches to this site and to this kind of alternative academia. Simply defining or branding alternative archaeology sites like the Bosnian pyramids as 'pseudoarchaeology' does not satisfactorily characterise the complexity and breadth of the socio-political and academic situation surrounding such claims. As Stoczkowski (2007) writes:

> 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.

This argument—that complex contexts and conditions allow for alternative archaeology to become preferred accounts of history—is key to furthering our understanding of why and how these accounts arise and thrive. This paper situates the Bosnian pyramids case study in its socio-political context in order to present a more complicated picture of alternative academics at work.

Pyramids in Bosnia: A Study of Place and Politics

> 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 (Smith 2006: 75, emphasis in original).

Bosnia is a country 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). 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 artefacts of past ancestors" (Chapman 1994: 120). Bosnian towns have a long history of dynamic interactions between their ethnic-religious populations; especially now in the country's post-war state, nothing is without an identity of place and ethnicity. Every thing, person and place is tensely divided: Bosniak, Croat or Serb. Every individual, town sector, market or heritage site has its respective religion: Muslim, Catholic or Orthodox. The Mostar Bridge is considered Bosniak Muslim, for example, the Tvrdox Monastery site is Orthodox, the old Bašćaršija market of Sarajevo is Muslim and the pilgrimage site and city of Međjugorje is Croat Catholic. Because of Bosnia's unique identifications with place and material culture, heritage sites were deliberately shelled by combating ethnic groups during the recent Yugoslav Civil War (1991–1995). Ideologically, "the deliberate destruction of mosques, churches, museums, civil records, monuments and artefacts in the Balkans suppresse[d] the evidence of a culturally diverse and hybrid past, in favour of a mythical 'golden age' of ethnic uniformity" (Layton and Thomas 2001: 12), with each ethnic group attempting to claim that 'golden age' as their own. Now, the country sits in a climate of post-war reconstruction, material identity and ethnic "tolerant hostility" (Zhelyazkova 2004).

Perhaps inevitably, Osmanagić's golden pyramid hills have become deeply entrenched in the post-war politics around them. Most national

media discussion about the pyramids touches upon political and financial themes. The pyramid project has been attached to two different angles of identity politics: a holistic nationalism and a specific ethnic claim. The holistic nationalism relates to the Pyramid Foundation's brave attempt to claim the site 'for everyone', for all Bosnian ethnicities, as a site of monumental importance. In this hopeful and patriotic view, which is coincidentally the most advertised stance of the official Pyramid Foundation, the site is said to transcend ethnic quibbling and—for once—represent the Bosnian nation as a whole. Trigger (1984: 360) writes that:

> …the primary function [of nationalistic archaeology] 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.

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). In this context, the pyramid project with its unifying premise provides a positive symbol around which Bosnian nationalism, an ideology of all-inclusive peacefulness and of all ethno-religious backgrounds, can be constructed.

Despite this push for an image of holistic nationality, the Bosnian pyramid project also appears to be involved in a very different, controversial ethnic claim to the site by Bosniak Muslims. As one Bosnian scholar notes, post-war "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" (Zhelyazkova 2004: 10). Many average Bosnians feel that "We don't have historical monuments that don't bear religious marks" (BosanaC 2005). And accordingly, it seems that Bosniak Muslims may have quietly staked a claim that the pyramids belong to them (Foer 2007, Harris 2006, Woodard 2007). Despite the fact that many members

of the official Pyramid Foundation balk at the idea that Muslims have laid a non-religious claim to the site, this move is not entirely surprising, considering the post-war population of Visoko is 98 percent Islamic (Zhelyazkova 2004: 11) and many people feel the Bosniaks have been looking for a pilgrimage site to rival the Croat Catholic's site of Međjugorje for resources, tourism and attention (Foer 2007, Prenj 2005, Woodard 2007). Such a rivalry does not revolve around the site's religious associations, but it is rather an ethnic rivalry for space, place and touristic resources (i.e. the pyramids are not claimed to be Islamic, *per se*, but are instead symbolic of the power of Bosniak belief in Bosnia-Herzegovina). One NATO officer gave the cold assessment: "Isn't it obvious? The Muslims are trying to create their own Međjugorje. Why should the Croats get all the tourists?" (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 Međjugorje…" (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 2007).

The Politics of Money

Much of the enthusiasm about the pyramid project involves the money it can bring to Visoko and the entire country through tourism. Visoko has already changed dramatically from its dilapidated post-war condition. Before pyramids were announced, the town received around 10,000 visitors a year. Now authorities report that they have that many visitors in a single day. The pyramid sites attracted 250,000 tourists to the town in 2006, bringing in a flood of new money and an economic boost (Foer 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" (Zimonjić 2006). Most of the local population is enjoying the influx of visitors to their town. The main hotel in Visoko changed its name from 'Hotel Hollywood' to 'Motel Piramida Sunca' (Pyramid of the Sun Motel)

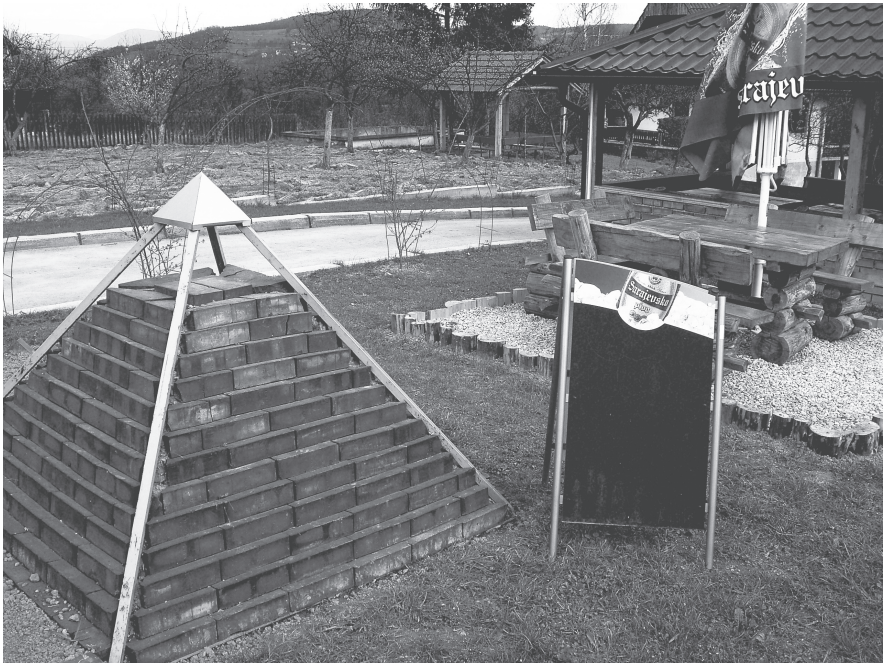

Fig. 4. New businesses, like the one above, were built in Visoko to accommodate the influx of tourists. This restaurant is near the entrance to one of the pyramid tunnels, outside the main city streets. The business advertises with a large brick pyramid on its front lawn (photo by Tera Pruitt).

and advertises rooms with a view of the pyramids. Craft stores now sell t-shirts and pyramid souvenirs, and cafes serve coffee with pyramid-stamped sugar packets and pyramid-shaped pizza (Economist.com 2006). Nedzad Secerović, a Visoko resident, earns money by selling homemade pyramid crafts from his house garage. In his free time, Secerović takes visitors to a new restaurant that was built just to accommodate tourists, which advertises itself by way of a pyramid made of bricks decorating its lawn (fig. 4). Secerović 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, says Secerović, so the city has plans to widen the roads and pave the dirt ones that lead up the hill (Secerović, personal communication 2007). The pyramid tourism also extends outside of Visoko: tourist agencies in Sarajevo and in neighbouring towns as far away as Croatia have started advertising company-organised pyramid tours.

To add to the hype, Osmanagić has announced grandiose plans for "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" (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, saying "the pyramids will help us speed the development of the economy, and when we have done that the EU will accept us" (Economist.com 2006). Such sentiments are especially important in the region, as many people in countries like Bosnia and Croatia are enthusiastic about the idea of joining the European Union, especially since their ex-'brothers', the Slovenes, have become EU members.

These big plans may also explain why there is "outright political posturing" of political parties who are interested in the pyramid site for 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 2007). Many interested politicians use the site as a campaign strategy for election and can be seen patting Osmanagić on the back and smiling at the camera. Like the Muslim ethnic claim of the site, these campaign strategies are external factors, operating outside the Pyramid Foundation's control and perhaps going over their heads. One notable Sarajevo radio presentation in 2006 exemplifies how stunned Osmanagić was to hear how he was used in a political campaign:

> **ANCHOR**: Have you thought about…that the whole idea of pyramids in Visoko could be used for preelection purposes?
> **OSMANAGIĆ**: […] 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 […]
> **ANCHOR**: But what if political elections interfere with the Foundation?

OSMANAGIĆ: How?
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?
OSMANAGIĆ: No. [sic]
(Radio-202 2006)

Many strategising politicians seem to realise that the Pyramid Foundation's excavation is controversial and potentially damaging to cultural heritage in the region, yet they continue to approve the project because of its tourism potential. On whether or not the project should be shut down, President Silajdzic infamously said, "Let them dig and we'll see what they find. Besides, it's good for business" (Harding 2007). 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" (Foer 2007).

However, for those who oppose the project, it is now a truism that there are plenty of victims. Many people, especially foreigners and professional academics, believe that the social and economic gains are 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 artefacts are being damaged in the museums for lack of heat. Bosnia is a poor country, and there have to be different priorities" (Woodard 2007). The actual financial figures of Osmanagić's project are daunting. In 2006 alone, the Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation raised about $500,000, Osmanagić contributed about $100,000, and they have had donations such as estate cars and free loans of bulldozers and transportation (Foer 2007, Harding 2007, Woodard 2007). These numbers are staggering in post-war Bosnia, which is still littered with damaged cultural sites in need of repair or attention, such as the recovering National Museum which is in serious need of funding and the National Library which still sits as a burnt-out shell in downtown Sarajevo (Chapman 1994). Many archaeologists are

horrified at the amount of money going into the project. Harding (2006) has heatedly said that it is offensive "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".

The Politics of Academics and Agency

The politics of nationalism, ethnicity and money are complex, but perhaps the fiercest politics orbit around academics. The mainstream archaeology response to the project has come in waves. Initial reaction on the topic was amused interest, following the media's early portrayal of Osmanagić as a serious amateur archaeologist (Rose 2006a). This comfortable reaction soon turned to cynicism and scoffing as Osmanagić's wild claims and background became fully apparent. Harding (2006) was one of the first to respond, saying "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". Zahi Hawass (2006) issued a public letter stating, "Mr. Osmanagić's theories are purely hallucinations on his part, with no scientific backing". Such 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 2006, Rose 2006a, 2006b), *Science Magazine* (Bohannon 2006a, 2006b), *British Archaeology* (Harding 2007) and *Discover Magazine* (Bohannon 2008) published sombre, warning articles. Currently, most professional mainstream archaeologists identify the site as pseudoarchaeology, many calling it a 'dangerous' situation (e.g. Harding 2008), with no foreseeable 'solution' to the 'problem' in sight.

Bosnia does not have a single university archaeology programme, and its established prehistoric archaeologist, Zilka Kujundžić-Vejzagić, receives threatening letters for speaking out against the pyramids (Foer 2007). Bosnian professionals like Zilka Kujundžić-Vejzagić who openly oppose the project claim they have been called national "traitors": and it is true that project opponents who are professional archaeologists are

often explicitly identified and condemned by name (Osmanagić 2006). Some members of the public feel that:

> [A]ny 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 from the beginning been identified with a 'national interest' (Stultitia 2007).

Foreign academics claim they are "treated to abuse and ridicule" and are told that they should stay out of business they do not understand (Harding 2007: 43).

Professional academics respond to such accusations with anger, contempt and pleading. Many academics both in Bosnia and abroad have launched unsuccessful campaigns to try to stop the programme, sending out petitions and even appearing opposite Osmanagić on television. Academics have particularly entreated politicians to stop excavations on Visočica Hill (Pyramid of the Sun), citing the historic importance of the Mediaeval fort on the summit and giving evidence that Osmanagić has already run into and destroyed some genuine Mediaeval and Neolithic sites in the surrounding area (Archaeology.org 2006). So far most academic attempts at 'educating' the public and combating Osmanagić'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 very similar pre-war case of alternative archaeology, which began much like the pyramid project, yet had a different outcome. In the 1980s a Mexican hotel-owner named Salinas Price announced evidence that Homeric Troy was located at the Bosnian town of Gabela in the Neretva River valley (Stultitia 2007). Pre-war Bosnian archaeologists stopped Price using their institutional authority, convincing the State to deny his excavation permits (Kampschror 2006: 26). Now, in post-war Bosnia, the state of affairs is considerably different. Dr Enver Imamović, an archaeologist at Sarajevo University and former director of the National Museum of Sarajevo, recognises the lack of political and institutional authority of archaeology in the country today, claiming the "system is to blame,

our institutions, which are not doing anything" (Harris 2006). Dr Bruce Hitchner, Tufts University, believes that "the scam is made possible by the lack of effective central authority" and that Osmanagić has "exploited that weakness" (Kampschror 2006: 27).

On the other side of the fence, pyramid supporters and alternative amateurs claim, rather fairly, that they too are treated to abuse. Pyramid supporters are called names ranging from the abusive "quackery" (Harding 2008) and "senility" (Swelim 2008), to informal and juvenile, but professionally used expressions like 'pyramidology' and 'pyramidiocy', semi-academic terms coined in the mid-twentieth century by scholars like Barbara Mertz (1964) and Martin Gardner (1957). Volunteers, pouring their sweat and tears into this project with almost-religious devotion, have had their hopes trampled on by seemingly distant, cold, militaristic academics. Many supporters voice that they do not understand how academics have the right to condemn a site so vociferously when they have not bothered to see the sites for themselves (Swelim 2008). Members of the public who listen to supportive media often claim that Osmanagić and the Pyramid Foundation sound like they are arguing for rational, scientific archaeological ideas and evidence, and that arguments made by professional archaeologists and opponents are not always clear or simple, or they sound mocking and pompous.

Many Bosnians are also surprised and angered when they hear that they, the Bosnian 'public', are often seen by foreigners as a lump-sum mass of people, who at the worst end of the spectrum are represented as being stupid or in shell-shock, being led like a flock of braying sheep by a wily Osmanagić (Hadziabdić, personal communication 2007). The 'Bosnian public' usually appears on the fringe of the debates about pyramids and 'pyramid belief', frequently represented as passive or without their own agency, or with no real opinion of their own—obviously a gross oversimplification. The Pyramid Foundation, pyramid supporters and opponents, and most importantly the Bosnian public are all groups comprised of very active people and personalities, with their own sensibilities and choice, and their own agency and impact. Sentiments like humour or light affection for the pyramids, often appearing in public art instalments, seem overlooked or overshadowed by arguments about whether the slopes

of the hills align in 45-degree angles. The award-winning film *Tolerantia* (Ramadan 2008), which premiered at the Sarajevo Film Festival in 2008, is an animated short film about two ice age cavemen who build incredible monumental pyramids, but who destroy their creations and themselves because of disagreements over their respective religions—a poignant metaphor of the region's ethnic hostility. The prehistoric pyramids in *Tolerantia* are cartoon-like, and the dark humour which accompanies them is characteristic of Bosnian humour in general (fig. 5). Such displays of public reception, inspiration and response show the intimate ties between 'pyramid belief' and Bosnian identity, as well as grey-area nuances in how the public receives and responds to contested archaeology.

Conclusion: Agency, Participation and Approaches

The questions that emerge from these scenarios are difficult. Who has the right to Bosnia's past? To use Bosnia's past? On the one hand the Pyramid project is undoubtedly helping Bosnia's economy. On the other hand, the project may be disrupting, and perhaps destroying, genuine archaeology in Bosnia. This scenario forces us to confront the possibility that a contested site like the Bosnian pyramids might be *worth* more than real archaeology. 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 is not 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 artefact. For others, the site's very existence questions and challenges 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 often seem to be unmindful of these issues. Archaeologist Richard Carlton reflects the despairing attitude of many academics when he says, "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: 1862). Part of the reason archaeologists don't know how to approach the situation, or why their rational arguments are failing, may be that they are not fully engaging with the situation. Abusively calling someone a 'quack' or 'pyramidiot' and

Fig. 5. Stills from the animated short *Tolerantia* by Ivan Ramadan, which premiered at the Sarajevo Film Festival in 2008. The film tells the story of two ice age cavemen who build, and then destroy, monumental ice age pyramids. This accomplished production draws inspiration from Osmanagić's vision of the past, and it also highlights intimate ties between pyramids and Bosnian identity (reproduced with the permission of Ivan Ramadan).

saying that their pyramids do not exist is a futile exercise 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). A local Visoko resident said to an international reporter, "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, emphasis in original). This behaviour is not the product of arguments about what 'is' or 'is not', but rather results from complex social and economic processes. Larger, more established socio-political conditions are in place when people feel it necessary to pray for pyramids or wish to build them in the night, when they have a stake in making sure the notion of pyramids survives.

Professional academics who wish to approach this situation need to engage with the whole of such a case, the bigger complexities of alternative academics and socio-politics at work. Most mainstream arguments have been directed at critically repeating over and over again who is being silly and what evidence is missing from the record; their arguments have been 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. Eric Hobsbawm (1983: 307) 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.

Such a need for pyramids is clearly seen at Visoko. Unlike the unsuccessful pseudoarchaeology site of Gabela, Osmanagić'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', a country still trying to solidify itself on the global political stage. It offers Muslim populations their own pilgrimage and tourist site. It offers politicians a diversion from unstable government problems and provides a successful campaign strategy. It gives a war-ravaged town a thriving and much-needed economic boost. In short, it fulfils serious social and economic needs. Mainstream professionals who wish to address this kind of alternative archaeology need to

fully engage with the socio-politics that create and sustain it, otherwise, they may as well joust windmills.

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