



Frauds, myths and mysteries: Feder on "Bosnian pyramids"

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Extracts from Kenneth L. Feder's book, "Frauds, myths and mysteries - Science and Pseudoscience in Archeology", sixth edition, pages 276-278.

Pyramids in Bosnia?

The charismatic archaeologist, expedition leader, project director, fund-raiser, and author, Semir Osmanagic (in his day job, he's a metalwork contractor in Houston, Texas), has labeled the features the "Pyramid of the Sun," the "Pyramid of the Moon," the "Pyramid of the Dragon," the "Pyramid of Love," and the "Temple of Earth" (Bohannon 2006; Kampschror 2006). These pyramids and temples are not exactly where you might expect them to be. They're not located in Egypt or Mesoamerica, for instance. They are, instead, in Bosnia, a small eastern European republic, until recently wracked by warfare and genocide, where an uncertain peace is still maintained by United Nations troops. The largest feature, the Pyramid of the Sun, is raised to a stupendous 360 meters—nearly 1,200 feet, or two-and-a-half times the height of Khufu's pyramid, presumed by conservative archaeologists to be the tallest pyramid in the ancient world (Figure 9.17). You will remember that Khufu's pyramid was built about 4,570 years ago, the culmination of nearly 100 years of pyramid construction. Well, it's a real youngster compared to its Bosnian counterparts, which Osmanagic asserts are 12,500 years old, predating the cream of Egyptian construction by nearly 8,000 years.



Figure 9.17

Located in Bosnia, about 30 kilometers (19 miles) from Sarajevo, these hills have spawned an entire alternative archaeology industry. Some of the features have been interpreted as being, not naturally configured, but enormous, artificial pyramids, more than two-and-a-half times the size of the largest Egyptian pyramid and more than twice as ancient. No actual archaeological or geological evidence has yet been presented that supports this remarkable interpretation.

Osmanagic has been nothing if not a good salesman concerning the Bosnian pyramids. Local geologists have long been aware of the hills overlooking the town of Visoko, about 30 kilometers (a little less than 19 miles) north of Sarajevo, the city that hosted the 1984 Winter Olympics. The so-called pyramids are, in fact, natural landscape features, angular eminences that appear pyramidal only from certain angles. The angular appearance of segments of the hills is the product of well-known geological processes and resulting features, described by Bosnian geologist Stjepan Coric as “fractured chunks of sediment called breccia, the remains of a 7-million-year-old lakebed that was thrust up by natural forces” (as cited in Bohannon 2006).

Though Osmanagic has been conducting excavations on the hills for about four years, it is telling that not a single tool dating to the ostensible construction of the ostensible pyramids has been found—no sleds, no mallets, no copper chisels, no measuring devices, none of the kinds of stuff found in ancient Egypt, for example, and already mentioned in this chapter. Neither have carbon samples been forthcoming that might be used to date the period of supposed pyramid construction.

There are two broader points to be made here about the Bosnian pyramids and the excitement they have generated specifically in Bosnia. First, it is important to point out that to prove that the Bosnian pyramids are not natural geological features but, instead, the product of human labor, there must be substantial archaeological evidence in the region for the infrastructure necessary for their construction. Pyramids don't build themselves. As pointed out in the FAQs in this chapter, Egyptologists have found the remnants of the dormitories in which pyramid builders were housed, the bakeries in which their bread was baked, food remains from their meals, and even the cemeteries in which they were buried. We should expect no less in Bosnia. It is not terribly surprising that Osmanagic, who asserts that the technology used to build the pyramids of the Maya was derived from ancient Atlantis and Lemuria, isn't aware of standard archaeological reasoning (Bohannon 2006).

The second point consists of a reminder of the discussion in the first chapter in this book about the motives for an archaeological hoax, along with the discussion in Chapter 3 of the rules for a successful one. Osmanagic's claim of a super-ancient, super-civilization in ancient Bosnia is restoring pride among a people who can use some good news for a change. Along with creating a bit of a tourist industry with the Sun Pyramid Motel, pyramid T-shirts, pyramid slippers, and pyramid brandy (Kampschorr 2006), “To believe in the pyramids has become synonymous with patriotism” (as stated by Zilka Kujundzic-Veizagic, the Bosnian National Museum's expert on prehistoric archaeology, as quoted in Bohannon 2006:1718). Apparently, local archaeologists who have questioned the reality of the pyramids have been threatened, and a local official has proposed that these skeptics be prevented from conducting any archaeological research and even have their academic degrees revoked (Bohannon 2006)! “Give the people what they want” was one of the rules I enumerated for a successful archaeological hoax in Chapter 3. I fear that Osmanagic is doing precisely this.

FEDER Kenneth L., "Frauds, myths and mysteries - Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology", 6th edition, McGraw-Hill 2007