

Ever hear of pyramids in Bosnia? I got an earful recently, when I spent time in Germany on family matters and, while there, visited Nuremberg friends. Heinz and Gerlinde have regaled me with kooky ideas before; on the other hand, when their daughter (now married and living in Munich) was a teen, they allowed her to spend a summer with my family in California. Their son, also married, resides near his folks.

While I was at his parents', Hilmar stopped by. Soon he and his dad talked excitedly about a week-long visit to Bosnia the two would undertake shortly, to the excavation site of a pyramid they claimed was 26,000 years old. Their only concern was that Bosnia's harrowing flood might make the roads impassable.

"Did you say 26,000 years?" I asked, recalling that even Stonehenge, Europe's most impressive archaic building site, is 10,000 years at most.

"The pyramid is that old," Heinz assured me. "A man from Texas discovered it in 2005 and started excavating. It's quite famous."

"Even the oldest Egyptian and Mesoamerican pyramids aren't nearly that old," I ventured.

You can read about it on the internet," said Hilmar. "The Bosnian pyramid is 220 meters; Giza is only 147 meters high. The Texan wrote a book about it."

"All the ancient pyramids," added his dad, "like Bosnia's Pyramid of the Sun, have many characteristics in common."

"I'll check it out," I said.

It wasn't until I returned to the US that I read up on my friends' contention.

The Texan, a Bosnian-American economist, Semir "Sam" Osmanagic, bills himself as "professor of anthropology" and "author of ten books." His 2005 write-up is mentioned only indirectly in a 2006 National Geographic article that describes him as "a pyramid buff with loony ideas." The article notes that hucksters were quick to cash in on the hype, producing all sorts of pyramid-themed tourist trinkets. For a pricy chunk of cash, Osmanagic's website invites Americans to a "body-mind-spirit journey" and excavation tour.

Elsewhere on the internet I found archeologists who cannot comprehend why the Bosnian government goes along with Osmanagic's claims. A group of leading European archaeologists strongly protested the "continuing support by the Bosnian authorities for the so-called 'pyramid' project being conducted on hills at and near

Visoko.” Osmanagic has perpetrated a “cruel hoax on an unsuspecting public.” Scarce resources should protect the country’s genuine archaeological heritage.

As for his discovery’s supposed antiquity: Between 27,000 and 12,000 years ago the Balkans were locked in the last Glacial Maximum, a period of very cold and dry climate, comments Boston University’s Curtis Runnels, an expert in the prehistory of Greece and the Balkans. The sparse population “consisted of Upper Paleolithic hunters and gatherers who left behind open-air camp sites and traces of occupation . . . simple stone tools, hearths, and the remains of animals and plants that were consumed for food.”

Neanderthals, first discovered in the Neander valley about eight miles east of Düsseldorf, roamed Europe during that time. These forerunners to Cro-Magnon cared for their sick and buried their dead with rudimentary gifts. Their low foreheads, thick eyebrows squat noses, and stocky built, served to protect against the awful cold. They had larger brains than the latecomers.

It seems, Osmanagic unearthed centuries-old stone paths leading to an erstwhile hill-top city and thought he discovered terraces of a pyramid. Since then he has claimed that a cluster of natural hills, located northwest of Sarajevo near the town of Visoko, are the largest ancient pyramids on earth, created by the Nation of Maya, who arrived from the Pleiades star cluster.

This last point explains my friends’ eagerness to believe the tale. In conversation, Hilmar remarked on the “nonsense” of evolution: “Look at chimps in the zoo: they’ve remained that way for millions of years—and here we are, different.” Ah! We are descendants of Maya rather than Great Apes? Once you are convinced that aliens raised huge structures in spite of glacial freezes, of course you’ll discount the Neanderthals.

By the way, my friends are ardent atheists. But disavowing religious thinking hardly means you’re free of ideological turns.

Meanwhile Bosnians are still reeling from the genocidal war of 1992-1995, leveled against them by Slobodan Milosevic. Perplexingly, the international community imposed an arms embargo, making it impossible for the tiny country to defend itself. “Military analysts have conceded that the Bosnian government, had it been allowed to exercise its right to acquire arms and defend its country, could have driven back the Serbs and halted the war in six months,” writes an observer.

Molly Ivins in her August 1996 column, “We are pointing the guns on ourselves,” notes that, while the US sent troops into Bosnia, Haiti, and elsewhere, heavily-subsidized American arms exports ensured that “the forces on the other side had access to U.S. weaponry, training, or military technology. Does the word *self-*

*defeating ring any bells?"*

Perhaps my friends, like Houston-based Osmanagic, in remembrance of Bosnian mass graves, wish to attain something positive for a country just now laid low by devastating floods. Are they helping? There must be better ways.