

A Critique of Dumsday's Argument from Religious Experience at Zeitoun

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Abstract

This paper is a critique of Travis Dumsday's argument for supernaturalism which is derived from the mass religious corporeal visions reported at Zeitoun (1968–1971). Dumsday makes the deduction by showing the failure of presently available naturalistic explanations and assuming the falsity of unavailable ones to justify a supernatural interpretation of the events. I argue that this inference comes from an argument which is not sound because viable naturalistic explanations remain conceptually and technologically possible. In particular, I propose a chemically and historically plausible “hoaxical” model involving Zinc Sulfide (ZnS)-based photoluminescent compounds suspended within resin structures and illuminated through ultraviolet excitation with a simple mechanical build. Such materials were commercially accessible prior to the Zeitoun events and are capable of producing diffuse, anthropomorphic luminous effects closely corresponding to witness descriptions. This paper demonstrates the viability of this phosphorescent-resin hypothesis and thus challenges Dumsday's rejection of naturalistic explanations. More broadly, the paper highlights the epistemic limitations of arguments that rely on rejecting naturalistic accounts without establishing the impossibility of future or currently unknown explanations.