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Expert Says Bumps in Bible

James McGloin

At a press conference held in Central Park yesterday afternoon, archaeologist Dr. John Lowery claimed his translation of a recently discovered Dead Sea scroll proved there were bumps in Biblical times. A small group of enthusiasts greeted Lowery with loud cheers when he read his statement, but several Bible scholars in the crowd yelled catcalls at him.

In an interview after the press conference, the scholars denounced Lowery's claim that there are actual creatures who "go bump in the night." The nighttime sounds mentioned in the Dead Sea scroll, they insisted, were meant to be metaphorical and nothing more.

Lowery's scroll tells the story of a young shepherd unable to sleep at night because of thumping sounds coming from the darkness surrounding the campsite. His companions, who only heard the baying of sheep, scolded him for his silliness. Undaunted, the shepherd spent many long nights groping about the edge of the camp until he returned one morning with a sealed vase that gave off a muffled rhythmic sound.

Thinking he must have captured a rodent, his companions drew lots to see which one of them would settle the question. The then-frantic shepherd clutched the vase to his breast and quickly withdrew into the desert. He was never heard from again.

One of the original Dead Sea scrolls, however, tells of a man wandering about the desert and foaming at the mouth. This nameless individual, thought to be possessed by a demon, was stoned to death. His executioners made little of the sealed vase they found crushed in the folds of his tunic, but now Dr. Lowery has said he is certain this man died trying to protect his captured bump.

Current interest in the "bump question" started about ten years ago when bump enthusiasts resurrected an obscure manuscript originally uncovered in southern France in 1917 by a mason repairing a damaged monastery wall. This document, which was sealed in wax and hidden behind some loose bricks, is considered by bump enthusiasts to be a detailed account of bumps in the area. The document is illustrated with colorful ink drawings of egg-shaped creatures with indiscernible features. These creatures, labeled *invisibilis gnomus*, are described as elf-like in temperament and reportedly made hollow thumping sounds at night by hurling themselves against stone walls.

Critics, however, have always considered this manuscript to be the fictitious enterprise of an over-imaginative monk. Those long days and nights in a barren cell with just a meager amount of food and drink can give a man dreams. This notion, incidentally, coincides with the findings of Dr. Lilly, a psychologist who recently completed a series of studies in sensory deprivation. The isolated individual, he discovered, hallucinated easily.

The attacks of critics, however, are not the only problems bump enthusiasts face these days. Internally, they are divided by the Camel-Page controversy. Most enthusiasts acknowledge Dr. Frederick Camel, a professor-at-large of the New World College, as a pioneer in bumpology, but some enthusiasts feel Dr. Page has discredited Camel's thesis. Nonetheless, bump enthusiasts often quote Camel's posthumously-published monograph, *A General Theory of Nocturnal Palpitation*, when critics ask why no one has ever seen a bump. Few, however, are ever satisfied with Dr. Camel's explanation that "centuries of civilized city life have diluted man's ability to see beyond the ordinary."

In his book, written in the 1920's, Dr. Camel strongly argues bumps (shadow sounds) only seem invisible because the human eye depends on the recurrence of patterns for vision. These patterns, he said, are rigorously defined in scope and are maintained by cultural and personal expectations.

To prove his thesis, Professor Camel began experimenting with his son, Peter, on the assumption only the very young are free of cultural patterns. Much of his book tells how he took his son on numerous ex-

peditions into the night. After each excursion he submitted Peter to an examination with flash cards on which basic geometric shapes had been drawn. After many months, Peter began to choose the same sketch over and over.

The professor was eventually able to get an outline portrait of the elusive bump. But before he could finish his detective work, his then-hysterical wife took Peter and went home to live with her mother. Abandoned, the professor devoted his full attention to the writing of his book, but after ten futile years spent looking for a publisher, he was overwhelmed by the forces of loneliness. Six months later, after spending many cold nights trying to capture a bump with a glass vial, Professor Camel caught pneumonia and died.

Just prior to his death, however, Professor Camel had entrusted his manuscript and drawings to his son. And although Peter, always a mischievous child, took delight in mutilating his heritage by drawing mustaches on the sketches of the bumps, Mrs. Camel was a bit wiser. She rescued the manuscript and drawings and saved them because, as she explained to a publisher who later solicited the material, "a man's work often proves to be valuable after his death."

Camel's book, which eventually became a cult classic, was severely criticized twenty years later by Thomas Beacon Page, an investigator of paranocturnal phenomena. In an article published in *Parabolic Perspectives*, Dr. Page maintained the drawings which Peter Camel identified as the mysterious bumps were psychological frauds. An infant, Dr. Page insisted, could not have possibly identified something so elusive as a "shadow sound." And, Dr. Page asserted, the "basic geometric forms" Professor Camel showed to his son were illogical, since no living creature, whether visible or not, is shaped like a square or a triangle.

Dr. Page also criticized Professor Camel's objectivity, which he said was almost certainly skewed by feelings of paternal pride. After all, he said, what is more likely to generate such feelings than a father and son camping in the country. He asked the reader to imagine them on a hillside under a full moon. Young Peter, Page said, would have been in awe of his father. He could have been easily persuaded to believe there were thumping sounds coming from the darkness surrounding them. And it would have been an easy task, Page argued, for the Professor to persuade his son to pick the oval-shaped flash card again and again until it became unreasonably significant.

It was, in fact, the egg-shaped drawings in Camel's book that prompted Page to accuse the professor of plagiarism. Dr. Page conducted an extensive investigation into Camel's past, and claimed the

professor, as a private in the US army, had been stationed in southern France for many months during World War I. Thus, Page deduced, the drawings which Peter Camel identified as bumps had their origin in the mind of an imaginative monk.

The scientific community applauded Dr. Page for his revealing essay on the nature of bump research, but they refused to publish Page's subsequent manuscript detailing his own research into the bump phenomenon. His rejection by the world of science, however, was followed almost immediately by publication in the *New York World*.

Dr. Page was front page news. "Exclusive-photos-of-things-that-go-bump-in-the-night" a headline read. Beneath the headline was a smudgy photo of a darkened landscape with tiny blips of light which the caption claimed were actual bumps.

Page explained his findings in an article that began on the second page of the tabloid. He claimed not only were bumps real, but ordinary people could actually see "things that go bump in the night" by using special lenses made from polarized glass. This, he said, is no different than using a microscope to see otherwise invisible microbes living in a drop of water.

Dr. Page went on to say he was also able to photograph bumps by using polarized lenses. He said he attached his special lenses to a camera and took a series of photos on infrared film at a site known for its mysterious nighttime sounds. At the end of the article, Page confidently described the "wafer-shaped blips of energy" in his photos as actual "things that go bump in the night."

The publication of Dr. Page's photos brought an immediate response from a fanatic group of people living near San Francisco. One letter claimed bumps (referred to as "spook lights") were thought to be good luck if seen in pairs. And several families indicated domesticated bumps make nice companions for children.

After extensive interviews with residents of the area, Dr. Page wrote an article for the *National Voice* in which he explained the "spook light" phenomenon. People living in earthquake zones, Page said, are able to see bumps because they have a heightened awareness of their environment. This awareness, he said, is generated by the acute anxiety they feel because of their fear the earth will open up at any time to swallow them whole.

"In order to live with this reality," Page wrote, "people living near fault zones force themselves to believe either a quake will not occur, or if one does happen, they will not be affected. The resulting synaptic disequilibrium skews lifelong cultural patterns, allowing individuals to see what is invisible to others." He also noted the bumps'

eerie glow is just a local variation due to the foggy climate.

Critics were aghast. Dr. Page, they said, was no more credible than the tabloid newspapers that published his theories. Meanwhile, his supporters in San Francisco denounced him because he had criticized them in the *National Voice* article. Alone and ignored, he withdrew from public life.

The current controversy over the existence of bumps has been intensified by the publication of the Lowery Dead Sea scroll. Public opinion on the existence of bumps has polarized, leaving little middle ground. Believers in the phenomenon have tried to strengthen their position by asking the Paranocturnal Phenomena Institute and the press to investigate research files left by Dr. Page when he passed away earlier this year. To date, the only official mention of Dr. page's accomplishments appeared in *Newsweek* after he died.

His obituary read:

DIED: Thomas Beacon Page, 67, former member of the Paranocturnal Phenomena Institute; of injuries sustained when he fell into a crevice while hiking near the San Andreas fault; in Berkeley, CA. Once a leading investigator of paranocturnal phenomena, Dr. Page was banned from the pages of scientific journals after being published in several tabloid newspapers. Dr. Page was best known for his belief in "things that go bump in the night." He will also be remembered for his enormous collection of Mason jars.