

The dreams of Perpetua: An historical application of the continuity hypothesis

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Summary. The continuity hypothesis maintains that a strong link exists between the dreams and waking life of individuals. Often, the contents of our dreams are made up of events and people that are a familiar part of our waking life. Although we know that a certain amount of continuity exists between the dreams and waking experiences of individuals living in the present, to what extent does a similar type of continuity apply to individuals living in the past? This article attempts to explore this question by studying the dream-visions recorded by one individual of the past, namely, Perpetua.

Keywords: Dream content, history, continuity hypothesis

1. Introduction

A major topic of discussion among contemporary dream researchers concerns the extent to which our waking experiences are reflected in our dreams. Very few people would dispute the idea that certain aspects of our waking experiences appear in our dreams. However, most of us would be at a loss if we were asked to explain the exact nature of the relationship between our waking consciousness and our nocturnal dream activity. The attempt to understand the meaning and significance of dreams has been a problem for many people throughout history. According to the common sense view, dreams do not possess any real significance at all but should be regarded as nothing more than ephemeral nocturnal imaginings of an over-active mind; however, in ancient times, there were some who were drawn to the topic of dreams as a result of their general interest in the subject of prophecy and divination. One notable example of this trend is found in the work of Artemidorus who wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams* (White, 1975). Among the adherents of Greco-Roman popular religion and early Christianity, there were many who held the belief that dreams were the stage upon which the divine could reveal itself to humankind. Thus, several examples of “dream epiphanies” can be found in Homer and the *New Testament* (Dodds, 1951; 1970).

As we move forward into the modern era, dreams continue to be a subject of debate and interest. However, in modern times, most of the discussion occurs within the scientific community instead of the religious community. In the writings of Freud and Jung, dreams are understood to have deep psychological significance and are seen to play a central role in the development of psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1955; Jung, 1964). From the standpoint of modern

psychoanalysis, our dreams contain a wealth of wisdom about human existence and un-tapping that wealth is one of the goals of psychotherapy. For Freudians and those influenced by their view, the hidden meaning of our dreams can only be discovered if we probe into the depths of the unconscious. However, in recent times, empirically oriented dream researchers have disputed the notion that the primary way to go about studying dreams is to seek their unconscious meaning.

Currently, there are many researchers who seek to establish the connection between our conscious waking experiences and our dreams (Schredl and Hobson, 2011). Although dreams are still seen as an important subject of inquiry, supporters of the so-called continuity hypothesis are interested in exploring the relationship between an individual’s waking activities and the contents of their dreams as opposed to discovering how our dreams reflect the contents of the unconscious. Proponents of this point-of-view believe that in order to understand the psychological processes involved in dreaming we are required to establish the connection between our dreams and our waking experiences.

We should note that the idea of continuity existing between our dreams and our waking life is a question of degree. In other words, a certain amount of continuity exists in all of our dreams but the real question concerns the extent to which our dreams and our waking life have continuity. Dreams are neither entirely continuous with our waking experience nor entirely removed or “discontinuous” from the activities, events and circumstances of our waking life. Some dreams stand out as qualitatively more continuous with our waking life as than others. Some dreams appear to be less continuous with our waking life. One question regarding the nature of the continuity hypothesis that need to be answered has to do with accounting for the differing degrees of irrational, chaotic imagery which sometimes appears in some of our dreams. If it is true, as the proponents of the continuity suggest, that our waking consciousness provides the main source for the contents of our dreams, then there needs to be an explanation for the presence of certain surrealistic, discontinuous features of our dreams. Perhaps the answer lies in developing a better understanding of the creative mental processes involved producing

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many of the enigmatic, symbolic images which appear regularly in our dreams.

In this article we will be exploring some of these issues surrounding the continuity hypothesis and we will do this by focusing upon the following question; does the continuity hypothesis apply equally to the dream experiences of individuals living outside our current historical era just like it applies to the dreams of individuals living within the contemporary world? It has been fairly well established that continuity is operational in the waking and dream life of individuals living in today's world; however, can we confidently say this proposition is equally true for individuals living in other historical eras?

Obviously, any attempt to answer this question in any kind of rigorous manner poses several difficulties. In the great majority of cases, we do not have access to the personal information and dream reports of people from the past. In certain limited instances where we do have access to a few dream-narratives from the past certain problems exist for the researcher. When dealing with historical dream narratives, we do not have access to the full range of the waking experiences of the authors of these dream reports. Furthermore, we would be hard-pressed to entirely trust in the accuracy and reliability of any dream report, whether from the past or present since dream reporting usually contains a great deal of editing and lapses in memory on the part of the author. Of course, this is true for any dream report, whether it was written centuries ago or only a few days ago. However, in the case of a historical person, we are not in the position to ask questions for further elaboration. Furthermore, dream accounts from the historical past possess other problems; most likely there would be many uncertainties with respect to its authenticity, establishing its proper historical context and the identity of its author. Admittedly, there are several obstacles to such a type of dream-research. In spite of the uncertainties involved, we believe some of these difficulties can be lessened, if not overcome, by identifying a dream report from the past which has enough reliable historical information to conduct such a study. This article concentrates upon one historical instance where such information is available to us. The name of that person was Perpetua, a Christian woman who lived in North Africa in the latter part of the second century A.D. (Musurillo, 1972; Franz, 1948). Perpetua was a Christian martyr who wrote an account of four dream visions occurring to her while she was imprisoned awaiting her execution in Carthage. Besides having a written record of her dreams, we also have a good deal of information about her waking life at the time she recorded her dream visions. As a result, we are in the position to make some connections between her waking life during the time when she awaited execution in Carthage and some of the dream images appearing in her dream diary.

In this article, we will examine Perpetua's dream visions in terms of how they elaborate the principles contained in the continuity hypothesis. Prior psychological studies of Perpetua's dreams have attempted to provide a depth-psychological interpretation of her dreams. For example, Maria-Louise Franz offers a Jungian analysis of Perpetua's dreams (Franz, 1949). Judith Perkins presents a feminist interpretation of the text (Perkins, 1995). We do not wish to continue such lines of research by providing a psychological interpretation of the dream symbols in Perpetua's account. Instead, our main objective is to show that continuity exists between Perpetua's dreams and her waking life.

In order to accomplish our goal, we will need to take several steps. Our first task is to introduce the dreams of Perpetua to the reader and describe the historical facts that we have about her waking life during the time-period her dreams were recorded. We will provide an overview of Perpetua's life and summary of each of Perpetua's dream-visions. Next, we will establish the psychological authenticity of Perpetua's dreams and situate them in their proper religio-historical context, namely, ancient pagan and Judeo-Christian visionary literature. In order to demonstrate the continuity existing between Perpetua's dreams and waking life, it will be necessary to demonstrate that we are in fact dealing with actual dreams rather than literary creations. This point is central to our argument. Thirdly, we will argue that many of the dream images that make up the body of Perpetua's dreams reflect continuity with her waking life. In order to clarify our point that most of Perpetua's dreams reflect continuity with her waking experiences, it will be necessary to make some distinctions in chart form. In our chart we will divide Perpetua's dreams into two major categories. Our classification system is based upon many of the ideas discussed by Malinowski and Horton in their recent article (Malinowski and Horton, 2012). On the one hand, certain dream contents reflecting continuity with Perpetua's waking life will be placed into the "continuity" category. Other dream contents which appear unusual and significantly more disconnected to her waking experiences will be placed into the category of "discontinuity". These discontinuous dreams are characterized by highly symbolic dream imagery which may appear removed or unrelated to Perpetua's waking life. In order to clarify how Perpetua's dreams have continuity with her waking life, we will make another distinction between dream images and scenes on the one hand and dreams figures on the other hand. Lastly, we will show how Perpetua's dreams function as a mean to prepare her for her impending martyrdom.

2. Overview of the Life of Perpetua and a Summary of the Four Dreams of Perpetua

The text entitled *The Passio Perpetua et Felicitatis* is a detailed account of the days just prior to the death of the second century A.D. Christian martyr St. Perpetua. The manuscript was discovered by Lukas Holsten in the seventeenth century among the texts found at Monte Cassino (Franz, 1949, p. 4). Although most scholars believe the account was written by Tertullian, the dream-visions, which form a central portion of the account, are considered by most scholars to be written by Perpetua herself (Franz, 1949, p. 4-5). We should note that the issue of the genuineness of Perpetua's account of her life has been the subject of much debate. As Thomas Heffeman has suggested "the figure of Perpetua qua author attracts an almost knee-jerk apriori skepticism" (Heffeman, 2012). Heffeman concludes on this issue that "we cannot claim with apodictic certainty that either she or Saturus "authored" their respective narratives but the weight of the cumulative historical evidence in the text persuades me that they did..." (Heffeman, 2012, p. 5)

There are a few facts that we know about the life of Perpetua (Franz, 1949). She belonged to the Vibii family and she was twenty-two at the time of her martyrdom. In the text, we can read that her father was desperately opposed to her adamant refusal to recant her Christian faith to the Roman authorities in Carthage. Although he tried to change her mind, in the end, we know his attempts failed. The text

also informs us that she was married although her husband is never discussed in the text. She was the mother of one son who was brought to her while she was incarcerated in prison.

While in prison awaiting her death, Perpetua received four dream visions. The text has an introduction written by the redactor detailing the young woman's arrest along with four others. Chapter Three through Chapter eleven consists of Perpetua's first person account of her stay in prison. In this prison diary she narrates the visions that she had while she was incarcerated.

In the first dream vision, Perpetua saw a great brass ladder of tremendous height ascending to heaven. Attached to the ladder there were various iron implements including a variety of weapons such as swords, spears, daggers and spikes. One could easily be injured if one did not watch oneself while trying to climb the ladder. At the bottom of the ladder lay a gigantic dragon that would attack anyone who dared to climb up the ladder. However, by stepping on the head of the dragon, one could avoid injury and safely ascend the ladder. First, Satyrus climbed up the ladder calling back to Perpetua, warning her to beware of the dragon as she ascended to heaven. Once she reached the top of the ladder she found herself in an immense garden and in it she saw a tall white-haired man dressed in shepherd's garb. Upon greeting her he told her to come near. He was sitting down milking sheep and he gave Perpetua a morsel of cheese which he was milking. She received the cheese with folded hands and ate it. Nearby there was a crowd of people dressed in white who called out "Amen" and at that moment Perpetua woke up.

Both the second and third dream involve Dinocrates, Perpetua's deceased younger brother who died at the age of seven from cancer of the face. In the second dream Dinocrates was coming out of a dark hole along with several others. Dinocrates' face was dirty and pale and he was very thirsty. On his face was the cancerous wound that had caused his death. She tells that this was a source of horror and dismay to many at the time of his death. Then, Dinocrates stood next to a basin of water and its rim was too high for him to reach in order to get a drink of water. As she awoke she knew that her brother was in need but she felt confident that she would be able to help him in his need. She continued to pray every day for her brother until she was brought to the amphitheater to fight for her life.

In the third dream, Dinocrates stood at the same spot as he stood in in the second dream except now it was filled with light instead of being dark. Dinocrates was clean and well-clothed. A scar had formed over the wound on his face. He was able to drink water from the basin because the rim had somehow been lowered. At the edge of the basin there was a golden flask filled with water. As Dinocrates drank from it, it miraculously remained full. Dinocrates drank from the flask and it never became empty. Then he began to play and Perpetua awoke since she realized that her brother was delivered from his suffering.

The fourth and last dream occurred on the day before her death. In this vision, Pomponius the deacon knocked violently on the prison gates. He was dressed in a white toga. At the gate, he took Perpetua's hand and together they traveled through some rough country. Finally, they arrived at an amphitheater; an enormous crowd of spectators watched the pair standing at the center of the arena. Next, Pomponius disappears from the scene and Perpetua

was surprised that no wild animals were let into the ring. An Egyptian of horrible appearance came out to fight against her. Suddenly Perpetua becomes a man. Her clothes were stripped off and some young attendants began rubbing her body with oil. The Egyptian lies down on the ground and rolls around in the dust. Next, there appeared a man of tremendous size clad in a beltless purple tunic with two stripes running down the center of his chest. He carried a rod like a gladiator and a green bough on which hung golden apples. Calling for the crowd to be silent, he said that if the Egyptian won the match, then the Egyptian would kill Perpetua with a sword and if she won, then she would receive the green bough. Then he withdrew and the fight began. Each of the two warriors punched the other with their fists and the Egyptian tried to grab her feet but instead she stepped on his face with the sole of her feet and then she was lifted up into the air and she began to trample him "as if I myself no longer touched the ground" (Franz, 1949, p. 14). Then she clasped her hands together and grabbed his head. The Egyptian fell down on his face and Perpetua "trod on his head" (Franz, 1949, p. 14). The crowd erupted with cheers when she was victorious in the fight and she received the bough. The trainer of gladiators gave her a kiss and said "Daughter, peace be with thee". Then, she walked toward the gate of the pardoned and she awoke. At the time she awoke she realized that her fight the next day would not be against beasts, but the devil himself.

The facts of her martyrdom were written by another unknown redactor who states that when Perpetua was led into the arena she sang psalms and was immediately pushed down by a wild cow which tore her dress. Because she was naked she tried to cover herself up and fix her loose hair. She helped a fellow martyr to get up. The crowd was amazed at her efforts and granted for her to be executed by a sword instead of being killed by animals. Appearing to be in a trance, she is led out of the arena and killed by the sword of a gladiator.

3. The Dreams of Perpetua in the Context of Ancient Visionary Literature

From the standpoint of ancient Mediterranean religious traditions, the fact that Perpetua was the recipient these four visions and wrote a narrative about them is not particularly a unique event. Dream narratives were a fairly popular form of written communication in the ancient world occurring in both the ancient Judeo-Christian and pagan religious traditions. Because dream accounts were so prolific in antiquity, it has been suggested that dreams and dream reports must have played a major societal role in the ancient world. As Patricia Cox-Miller states dreams served "as one of the modes of the production of meaning, dreams formed a distinctive pattern of imagination which brought visual presence and tangibility to such abstract concepts as time, cosmic history, the soul, and the identity of one's self" (Cox-Miller, 1994, p. 3). In these terms, Perpetua and other ancient dreamers like her created a sense of meaning in their lives through the process of recollecting and recording their dreams. While engaged in this mnemonic process, it is likely that some of these ancient dream narratives became heavily embellished with theological concepts and in certain instances may be nothing more than the product of literary invention. However, this is not the case with Perpetua's dreams. Although it is likely that her dreams may reflect some of the religious ideas

of her waking consciousness and therefore display an element of continuity with her waking life, this does not necessarily mean that her dreams are simply literary fabrications.

There are several instances in ancient literature where dream narratives are based upon actual psychological experiences. Our first example occurs in the first century A. D. and comes from a Greco-Roman doctor named Thessalos of Tralles. Thessalos wrote a letter addressed to Caesar Augustus. In this letter Thessalos describes his vision of Asclepius (Festugiere, 1939). The commentator A. D. Nock is convinced that Thessalos' quest and his visionary experiences described in this letter are essentially authentic (Nock, 1952, p. 110). In this letter, Thessalos tells the story of his travels and search for religious truth. While in Asia Minor we are told that Thessalos failed to consult a certain book written by King Nechepso. After continuing on his journey, Thessalos fell into a state of sadness and he continued into the heart of Egypt. His soul "prophesied continually that he would have dialogue with the gods." (Festugiere, 1939, p. 59). Thessalos writes that he continuously held his hands up in the air calling out to the gods either for a dream vision of some type of divine inspiration which would enable him to go back to Alexandria and his home. Finally he met an old priest who promised to help him receive a religious revelation. Both Thessalos and the priest fasted for three days. The priest gave Thessalos a choice to see either a spirit or a god and Thessalos decided to see the god Asclepius. Upon sitting down inside a special house Thessalos witnessed an epiphany of the god. Thessalos states that no words could describe the beauty of the vision of the god. Asclepius asked him what it was that he desired. Thessalos asked why he had failed to be able to successfully use certain medicinal plants recommended by King Nechepso. Asclepius told him that Nechepso did not mention that the plants had to be gathered at certain times and locations. Asclepius informed the doctor of this data. In commenting on this letter, Nock claims that Thessalos' religious quest most likely was "a real experience." (Nock, p. 110). We can assume that Nock was of the opinion that Thessalos' visions were not purely the product of literary creativeness but actually were psychological experiences.

There are several inscriptions which also provide evidence of visionary experience. One example comes from the temple of Mandulis at the town called Talmis in Nubia (Nock, 1934). Numerous inscriptions were written at the temple at Talmis, telling of personal devotion to the god and the wondrous gifts received from him. One anonymous devotee tells us that "I had a vision and found rest for my soul. For thou didst grant my prayer and show me thyself going through the heavenly vault; then washing thyself in the holy water of immortality thou appeared again." (Nock, 1934, p. 64).

The *Visions of Zosimus* is an alchemical text in which the dream functions as the medium through which the individual confronts the world of the immaterial (Jung, 1967). In reviewing this alchemical text, C.G. Jung concludes that Zosimus' visions "may well have been an actual happening." (Jung, 1967, p. 66). Zosimus of Panopolis lived in the third century A. D. In his first dream Zosimus sees a sacrifice standing on an altar. Zosimus is informed by Ion, the priest of the temple, about his dramatic transformation from the flesh into spirit. Once he witnesses the "mutilated anthroparion" spewing forth from his own flesh, Zosimus is brought back to waking consciousness. In subsequent dream-visions Zosimus has more interaction and speaks to various figures about

the nature of this transformation. In one dream, Zosimus is travelling down a road near the place of punishments; he encounters an old man named Agathodaimon. The old man enters the place of punishments where he is transformed into a pillar of fire, with blood-filled eyes. He tells Zosimus that formerly he was a leaden man and that he submitted himself to unendurable torment.

Undoubtedly, the dream-imagery recorded in this text has to be interpreted in the context of ancient alchemical speculation, yet there are no grounds for supposing that these dream-visions are purely the product of literary invention or that the contents of these documents should be interpreted as the product of religious allegory.

Examples of visionary and dream experiences appear in the Judeo-Christian tradition although these texts should be understood to be primarily literary narratives. In the Old Testament, the Book of Daniel records four dream visions. *Enoch* I, 14:8 states "the vision was shown to me: Behold, in the vision clouds invited me and a mist summoned me, and the course of the stars and the lightnings sped and hastened me, and the winds in the vision caused me to fly and lifted me upward and bore me into heaven." A good example in early Christian literature of visionary writings can be found in the Book of Revelation. Visions also form part of the narrative in *The Shepherd of Hermes*. In this context, we should mention that there are several parallels between *Perpetua's Passion* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Robinson, 2004). For example, just as a terrifying dragon is mentioned in Perpetua's first vision, likewise a "great beast" is described in the fourth vision of the Shepherd of Hermas. Another example of religious visions is found in the *Gospel of Peter* which states "now on the night whereon the Lord's day dawned, as the soldiers were keeping guard two by two in every watch, there came a great sound in the heaven and they saw the heavens opened and two men descend thence, shining with a great light, and drawing near unto the sepulcher." (Rhodes, 1927, p. 92).

In comparison to the single vision described by Thessalos of Tralles, the visions of Perpetua consist of a series of four visions. In terms of format, *Perpetua's Passion* has more in common with the *Visions of Zosimus* than Thessalos' account in that Perpetua and Zosimus present us with more than simply a single dream. Likewise, in terms of theme, both accounts speak of a kind of transformation. In the case of Zosimus, we are presented with various types of alchemical transformations whereas for Perpetua one notable transformation occurs when she is changed into a man. Unlike most of the ancient inscriptional dream accounts which are usually very brief, as in the case of the inscription from the temple of Mandulis previously mentioned, the narratives provided by Perpetua and Zosimus are fairly lengthy and detailed. However, in neither the visions of Zosimus nor Thessalos' narrative are we provided with any personal details about the waking life of the dreamer. However, this is not so in the case of Perpetua. In her case, we are given a good glimpse into the historical circumstances of her life. This creates the opportunity for us to examine her four dream visions against the background of her waking life. This is something very unique and quite unlike any other extant written dream account coming from antiquity. The closest parallel to Perpetua's four dream visions comes from a second century A. D. pagan sophist named Aelius Aristides who is the author of the *Sacred Tales* (Stephens, 2012). Although Aristides wrote lengthy accounts of his dream visions in the

Sacred Tales and we also know something about Aristides' waking existence as a sophist, unfortunately his dreams are neither presented in the context of his waking life nor are the personal details of his life presented in chronological order. As a result, it is difficult if not impossible to establish an exact historical context for Aristides' dream narrative. This is not true for Perpetua and her dreams. In her case, we can place her dreams against the background of her daily life and thus establish a historical context for her dreams in relation to her waking life. Perpetua's dream visions can be understood in light of the events of her waking experience for it was during her two week period of imprisonment prior to her martyrdom that her visions took place and were recorded in a diary format. Such precise background information is not available in the case of other ancient dream accounts.

We should not be surprised by presence of some Christian theological images in Perpetua's dream diary because Perpetua was a fervent Christian. In this sense, her dreams display a certain amount of continuity with her waking life. However, we doubt that she simply consciously embellished her account by incorporating Christian theological concepts into it. The authenticity of her dream narrative is underscored by one simple fact: there are no divine epiphanies mentioned in Perpetua's account. This is quite different from what we find in Aristides' *Sacred Tales* or the account provided by Thesallos of Tralles or other Christian accounts such as the *Shepherd of Hermas*. In fact, there is only a small amount of religious imagery or theological concepts mentioned at all in the *Passion of Perpetua*. This fact underscores that we are most likely dealing with authentic psychological experiences as opposed to something consciously created and embellished with literary and theological concepts. Hence we are most likely not dealing with the product of literary invention. One exception appears in her first dream. There we encounter an old man, symbolizing a heavenly shepherd. This image could be seen to embody a Christian theological concept of "an angel" or God himself. Likewise, the evil Egyptian of the fourth dream could be taken to represent the devil, as Dodds thinks (Dodds, 1970, p.50). It is doubtful that we are dealing with a conscious attempt to embellish the text. Instead, probably Perpetua's waking consciousness was imbued with religious emotions which unconsciously filtered into her dream experiences.

In his classic book *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Dodds states that Perpetua's dreams are genuine and that the material was mostly written by Perpetua herself (Dodds, 1970). More recently in the book entitled *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* William Harris takes a look at various accounts of dreams in ancient literature, especially those which purport to be genuine accounts of dreams, and concludes that most of these narratives, including Perpetua's narrative, are literary concoctions. In the case of Perpetua, Harris states that her dreams are simply too lengthy to be considered as an authentic dream narrative. Apparently, Harris finds it difficult to believe that anyone could possibly remember all the dream details provided in Perpetua's account (Harris, 2009, p. 112). However, those familiar with lucid dreaming know that it is possible to recall a great deal of the contents of one's dreams. In the case of Perpetua, we may in fact be dealing with a lucid dreamer. We know that there were many in ancient times that practiced the art of recalling their dreams and that as one practices the art of dream recall, the more one is able to recall

their dreams. Further, Perpetua does not record any miraculous happenings or supernatural events, quite unlike Aristides. This fact underscores the genuineness of her dream account. However, following the account of Perpetua's four visions there is another narrative describing the vision of Satyrus. In *The Vision of Satyrus* we are confronted with an abundance of Christian images and symbols. The narrative begins with Perpetua and a few other martyrs being carried up into heaven by four angels. Once they arrive in heaven they see a beautiful pleasure garden and soon they see a heavenly palace and four more angels who cloth Perpetua and the others in white robes. Once they enter the heavenly palace they hear the cry of voices crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy". Next, Perpetua and the others are welcomed into heaven by a wise old man, who most likely represents God, with a youthful countenance, with twenty-four elders next to him. The presence of such traditional Christian symbols as "angels carrying off the soul, other still greater angels of the Presence, walls of light, voices crying "Holy, Holy, Holy ", elders arranged in a neat row on either side of the throne...is what we expect to find in a literary apocalypse of mediocre originality". For these and other reasons, Dodds rejects the psychological authenticity of the vision of Satyrus (Dodds, 1970, p. 49). In comparison to Satyrus' vision, Perpetua's visions appear far more genuine since they are devoid of such overt theological imagery.

4. Continuity and Discontinuity in Perpetua's Dreams

Now that we have established the psychological authenticity of Perpetua's dreams, we will discuss the continuity hypothesis in relationship to her dreams. In his article entitled "Testing the Continuity Hypothesis" Kelly Bulkeley points out that very often dream content is structured to a large degree by the emotional concerns of the dreamer's waking life (Bulkeley, 2011). Further, Totlis noted that dreams happen automatically to us in our sleep and that often they help us release unresolved frustrations developing from emotional dilemmas occurring the day before (Totlis, 2011). This is very true in the case of Perpetua whose waking life was characterized by great amounts of stress due to her impending martyrdom. In this sense, her dreams contain a great amount of emotional continuity with her waking day-to-day experiences in her prison cell awaiting her execution. As noted by Totlis, usually we are able to handle our emotional dilemmas more successfully in our dreams than in our waking life and this is true in the case of Perpetua. In her dreams she triumphs in her battle against the Egyptian whereas in her waking life she suffers death. Although her dreams do not represent an exact duplication of her waking life in prison, they certainly reflect much of the anxiety that must have pre-occupied her waking consciousness. The presence of imagery in Perpetua's dreams having possible religious overtones does not automatically preclude these images from being considered as continuous with Perpetua's waking life. Perpetua was a very religious person and so it naturally a possibility that her religious emotions unconsciously filtered into her dream life and produced some interesting religious images in her dreams. However, there are other images in her dreams appear much more disconnected and isolated from her normal experiences in the waking state. For this reason we have chosen to group these images into a separate category labeled "discontinuity".

Table 1. Continuity in Perpetua’s Dreams

Dream Scenes/Images	Dream Figures
A vast heavenly garden (Vision 1)	Saturus, a fellow martyr, climbing up a ladder (Vision1)
A water basin filled with water (Vision 2)	Perpetua climbing up the ladder (Vision1)
A dark hole in the ground (Vision 2)	A white-haired man dressed in shepherd’s robe (Vision 1)
A place filled with light (Vision 3)	Sheep (Vision 1)
A difficult journey through the countryside involving much toil and panting (Vision4)	A crowd of people in the heavenly garden (Vision1)
An amphitheater filled with spectators (Vision 4)	Dinocrates, Perpetua’s deceased brother, comes out of a dark place with a cancerous wound on his face and is unable to quench his thirst (Vision 2)
Standing with Pomponius the deacon in the middle of the arena and marveling at the crowd (Vision 4)	Dinocrates, content and happy after quenching his thirst, goes off to play (Vision 3)
An emotion of surprise is experienced because no animals were released into the arena (Vision 4)	Pomponius, the deacon, comes to the prison door and accompanies Perpetua to the amphitheater dressed in a white tunic (Vision 4)
Oil is rubbed into Perpetua’s body by friends and attendants in preparation for her battle with the Egyptian (Vision 4)	A huge crowd in the amphitheater (Vision 4)
In order to prepare for battle, the Egyptian rolling his body in the dirt (Vision 4)	The Egyptian, who engages in a fierce battle with Perpetua. (Vision 4)
A fight in which Perpetua and the Egyptian strike each other with their fists and feet (Vision 4)	
Perpetua wins the battle and receives the bough (Vision 4)	

ous” from waking experience. A hidden symbolic connection may exist between these images and her waking life but that connection may be difficult to pin down. One example of a “discontinuous “image is the image of the old man “milking cheese from a sheep” appearing in Vision #1. Another example would be Perpetua’s brother Dinocrates being miraculously cured from a facial wound (Vision#3). These dream images qualify as very discontinuous with her actual waking experience since they contradict the laws of nature although they may have a vague metaphorical reference to Perpetua’s emotional life in her waking state. We must keep in mind that we are speaking in terms of degrees of discontinuity in comparison to other dream images. In this sense, it may be difficult to make any absolute distinction in respect to classifying a particular dream image as either “continuous “or “discontinuous”. It is important to remember that we are dealing with dreams and as a result there will always be a certain amount of ambiguity. In general, we can say that the appearance of surrealistic dream imagery such as “wounds which miraculously heal” or the superhuman ability to fly often occur in the context of as

those “rare but intensely memorable dreams with unusual “bizarre aspects” (Bulkeley, 2011, p. 48). Dreams containing bizarre imagery “reflect existential or religious concerns in a person’s waking life” (Bulkeley, 2011, p. 48).

Our present concern is to develop a system for classifying Perpetua’s dreams taking into account some of the fundamental ideas of the continuity hypothesis. On the one hand, there are certain dream contents which clearly exhibit continuity with Perpetua’s waking consciousness and there are other dream contents which reflect more disconnectedness or discontinuity with normal day-to-day sensory experience occurring while awake. This distinction will form the basis of our classification system (Malinowski and Horton, 2011). Our first step involves classifying Perpetua’s dream contents into one of these two categories, either “continuity” or “discontinuity”. Once Perpetua’s dream contents have been separated into these two categories, we will make another distinction. On the one hand, the dream contents belonging to each category will each be divided into two sub-categories; the first sub-category will be called “dream scenes and images” and the second sub-category will be labeled

Table 2. Discontinuity in Perpetua’s dreams.

Dream Scenes/Images	Dream Figures
A great brass ladder ascending to heaven, decorated with knives, hooks and daggers (VSION 1)	A gigantic dragon (Vision 1)
A morsel of cheese being milked from sheep (Vision 1)	Dinocrates, appears in a well-lit place and his cancerous wound has miraculously healed and formed a scar (Vision 3)
A golden flask that mysteriously re-fills itself when Dinocrates drinks from it (Vision 3)	A man of miraculous size who towers over the amphitheater. It is he who declares the terms of the battle between Perpetua and the Egyptian (Vision 4)
	Perpetua is miraculously transformed into a man (Vision 4)
	Perpetua is lifted into the air to enable her to trample the Egyptian, as if she no longer touches the ground (Vision 4)

“dream figures”. For descriptive purposes, we make this distinction between “dream scenes” and “dream figures”. Once we have presented our chart, we will discuss some of the problems associated with dividing her dreams into these categories (see Tables 1 and 2).

When reflecting upon the dreams of Perpetua, we can see, in certain instances, we are dealing with the scenes and figures which possess continuity with her waking life. In some instances, we may find images and ideas in her dreams which have reference to her theological imagination as opposed to her direct sensory experience of the world. For example, the ladder ascending up into heaven could be classified as an example of continuity since a ladder is an everyday ordinary household item and this is undoubtedly an example of a dream image which has a corresponding object in her waking experience. Moreover, the image of the “heavenly ladder” has a Biblical reference in the Book of Genesis and could very well have been familiar to Perpetua. In this sense, the image of the “ladder” reflects continuity with her waking consciousness in a symbolic sense. The image of the “brass ladder ascending to heaven” may have some spiritual reference to her waking life. Likewise, the garden described in vision one could be classified in the category of continuity since it could be interpreted as a religious image of heaven reflecting a component of Perpetua’s religious imagination. This religious image surely was familiar to Perpetua in her waking mind possibly by means of conversations with others or reading and therefore it was something which most likely experienced by Perpetua in her waking consciousness. Most definitely, some of her religious beliefs and experiences could be reflected in her dreams. Clearly, the “heavenly ladder” is an image that transcends the normal range of our rational waking experiences and yet it still could reflect a certain amount of continuity with Perpetua’s waking emotional and spiritual life. A similar argument could be made about other dream images such as the dream image of the white-haired man in the heavenly garden who may simply be interpreted as an image of a man or, on the other hand, some kind of spiritual entity such as an angel. Since dreams often times speak in a metaphorical and symbolic language, sometimes the concept of continuity may appear in a disguised form (Malinowski and Horton, 2011).

In most cases, it is fairly clear-cut whether a particular image exhibits continuity or discontinuity since we have a good idea about Perpetua’s waking experiences and the historical context of her life. In many of the dream scenes and images exhibiting continuity with Perpetua’s waking life there are many typical features of dreaming such as talking or movement. In Perpetua’s dreams, she has several conversations with various familiar figures such as her brother Dinocrates, the fellow martyr Satyrus, the deacon Pomponius or the tall white-haired man. Likewise, many scenes involve action and movement from one location to another such when Perpetua ascends the brass ladder to the heavenly garden or when Pomponius and her travel through the countryside to the amphitheater. Movement is usually over-represented in dreams in comparison to sedentary activities such as reading or writing (Schredl, 2012). Novel events as opposed to ordinary situations tend to be more prevalent in dream life as exemplified in Perpetua’s the fight with the Egyptian.

The main insight that we can glean from classifying her dreams into our the categories of continuity and discontinuity

is that majority of Perpetua’s dreams recorded in the *Passion of Perpetua*, even many of the religious images appearing in her dreams, are continuous with her waking life. There are a few dream contents that clearly fall into the category of “discontinuity” in the sense that they stand apart from the more mundane and ordinary dream imagery appearing in the narrative. The majority of these unusual, discontinuous dream images involve the theme of spiritual transformation. In the first vision, Perpetua is involved in an ascent. During her ascent, Perpetua climbs up the giant brass ladder. This ascent could be interpreted as a transformative journey in which Perpetua leaves the material world and enters into another spiritual world. Another instance of this motif of transformation is personified in the image of “milking a morsel of cheese from the sheep”. Somehow, what should be milk has magically transformed itself into cheese. In another instance, in the third vision, Dinocrates’ cancerous wound has miraculously healed and it has become a scar. Dinocrates enjoys drinking from a golden flask which magically re-fills itself. Likewise, in Perpetua’s fourth vision, she is inexplicably changed into a man. We are not sure about the exact meaning of each of these mysterious transformations occurring in her dreams but we are sure that these images stand apart from the other images of Perpetua’s dreams which directly reflect continuity with her waking activities. Clearly, each of these discontinuous images represents the underlying repetitive theme of “change” or “transformation”.

When we understand Perpetua’s dream visions against the background of her life as a young Christian woman and mother, incarcerated in a Roman prison and about to be martyred, it is not difficult to understand why that on the eve of her own martyrdom she should dream about her deceased brother. Nor is it surprising that the contents of the fourth vision centers on a battle with the Egyptian in the arena since it is there where she is about to be taken in her waking life. Nor is it a mental stretch for us to understand why in her first vision she would ascend a brass ladder to heaven. Dreams such as these illustrate the principle that dreams function as a way to prepare the individual for major events of the future. In Perpetua’s case, it is her martyrdom for which she prepares. Perpetua’s dreams reflect the idea that dreams are a “pre-play” as opposed to a “re-play” of the events of our waking life (Malinowski and Horton, 2011).

5. Conclusions

In this article we have raised a question about whether or not the continuity hypothesis applies outside the confines of our modern era. We have made the case that in one instance in the past, that is, in the case of the four dream-visions of the second century Christian woman named Perpetua, we can clearly see the principle of continuity between her dreams and her waking life. Rather than viewing her dreams from a depth-psychological perspective, we have sought to discover how her dreams articulate themes, issues and concerns of her waking life. Her dreams were recorded just a few days before her anticipated martyrdom. Undoubtedly, her conscious mind was filled with reflections about death and the meaning of her faith. Her dreams revolve around the themes of spiritual transformation, journeying up a ladder to heaven, seeing her deceased brother at one point in despair and later healed and engaging in a victorious battle with an Egyptian. We have noted that dream-visions such as hers were not completely uncommon in both pagan and Judeo-Christian circles in ancient times and there are no grounds

for denying the authenticity of many of these accounts, especially Perpetua's narrative. By examining Perpetua's dreams in conjunction with other dream accounts from antiquity, we have discovered that her account differs from the other dream accounts since she does not have any mention of divine epiphanies. This fact alone underscores the strong likelihood that we are dealing with actual dream experiences. This is different from what is presented in Aristides' *Sacred Tales* or Zosimus' narrative. Another unique characteristic about Perpetua's dream narrative in comparison to other ancient dream narratives is that her dreams reflect many of her concerns present in her waking life. The continuity between her waking consciousness and her dream account corroborates the idea that her dream narrative is psychologically authentic. Finally, we classified Perpetua's dreams into two categories, namely dreams reflecting continuity with her waking life and dreams reflecting discontinuity with her waking life. The majority of the images and figures in her dreams belong to the "continuity category" which should not surprise the supporters of the continuity hypothesis. Fewer dream images and figures can be classified into the category labeled as "discontinuity". Most of the discontinuous dream images relate to Perpetua's spiritual concerns and her impending martyrdom.

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