

Angelos Tanagras

An Experiment to Test Survival

FOTINI PALLIKARI¹

Introduction

In March 1933, the Librarian and Editor of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), Theodore Besterman (1904–1976)², received a letter from his Greek colleague Dr. Angelos Tanagras (1875–1971), requesting the participation of the SPR in an experiment he was preparing to test the survival of the soul beyond death.³ Tanagras, a medical doctor and Sanitary Inspector of the Royal Navy (1898–1923), was the co-founder and the only president of the Greek Society for Psychical Research (1923–1957), GSPR. Three years later, the SPR granted his request. Tanagras posted the details of the experiment in a sealed envelope addressed to the Hon. Treasurer and Joint Hon. Secretary of the SPR, W.H. Salter (1880–1969)⁴, an acquaintance of his from the 1930 Athens Parapsychology Conference (Salter, 1930). He had included specific instructions for when to open his sealed package after his death.

Yet, the package remained locked up at the SPR for 36 years after the death of Tanagras, and 71 years after its submission, awaiting a signal from Greece. In April 2007, SPR officers opened the envelope containing the survival experiment of Tanagras to deposit its content at the Cambridge University library archives (Tanagras, 1936). This article revisits the survival experiment of Tanagras (Pallikari, 2017f.) to evaluate whether it had achieved its mission.

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2 “Theodore Besterman” (SPR, 2018a).

3 Besterman and Tanagras had met at the 1930 fourth International Parapsychology Congress organized by Tanagras in Athens. Besterman had given two talks (Besterman, 1930a, b) and edited the congress proceedings.

4 “William Henry Salter” (SPR, 2018b).

Experimental Postmortem Challenges

The 20th century saw several other survival tests proposed to investigate whether life continues in some form after death. Their creators were the parapsychologists F. W. H. Myers (1843–1901)⁵, Sir A. Conan Doyle (1859–1930)⁶, Sir Oliver Lodge (1851–1940)⁷, T. E. Wood (1887–1972)⁸, J. G. Pratt (1910–1979)⁹, R. Thouless (1894–1984)¹⁰, I. Stevenson (1918–2007)¹¹ and A. S. Berger (1920–2016)¹². They all shared the common goal to get clear and unambiguous evidence that spirits communicate with mediums. As a first step, the experimenters deposited a secret message inside a sealed package. The aim was to transmit this message posthumously to a medium and thus prove the case of survival.

With such an approach, there was increased concern that a clairvoyant medium could access the message directly through ESP. Coding techniques, therefore, improved the experiments. As a test of the strength of coded messages against ESP interventions, their authors released them during their lifetime. If the mediums could read them only after their passing and not before, it was considered clear evidence of communication with the spirits. Unfortunately, there were instances where such coded messages fell victim to the deciphering aptitude of skilled individuals. The spiritualists then invented better message-coding techniques so hard to crack that their messages remain secret long past their death. To date, the overall evidence reviewed here indicates that there has been no clear and unambiguous proof of the posthumous communication of spirits with the living.

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- 5 Frederic William Henry Myers was a British poet, classicist, and philologist; he was a co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research (Hamilton, 2017).
 - 6 Arthur Conan Doyle was a novelist and creator of the famous sleuth Sherlock Holmes (Wehrstein, 2019).
 - 7 Sir Oliver Joseph Lodge was a physicist and an active investigator of mediums (Braude, 2016). He had participated in the 1930 international parapsychology conference in Athens, organized by A. Tanagras (Pallikari, 2017a).
 - 8 Thomas Eugene Wood was a solicitor from Yorkshire, the UK, and a long-standing SPR member (Bauer, 2017).
 - 9 Joseph Gaither Pratt was an American psychologist specializing in extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, mediumship, and poltergeists.
 - 10 Robert Henry Thouless, psychologist, past president of the SPR, especially interested in survival issues.
 - 11 Ian Pretyman Stevenson was a Canadian-born American psychiatrist known for reincarnation research and near-death studies.
 - 12 Arthur Seymour Berger, lawyer (JD), was director of the International Institute for the Study of Death, president of the Survival Research Foundation.

The spiritualists mentioned had followed a variety of experimental approaches to prove survival. Myers had collaborated with his friend Sir Oliver Lodge entrusting him with his survival test in a sealed envelope (Berger, 1990: 53). Three years after the death of Myers, a woman's claim that she received his message through automatic writing prompted the opening of his sealed envelope in the presence of SPR members. They discovered that the message Myers had left did not match what the medium claimed to have received from him (anonymous, 1905). However, the disclosure of the secret message of Myers inevitably rendered the test useless for further experimentation.

Sir Oliver Lodge deposited a similar secret message in a sealed envelope to test survival. After his death, the SPR members opened the envelope to discover that the mediums who alleged communication with his spirit had not received his message (Thouless, 1972). At that time, Tanagras had already registered his sealed envelope at the SPR.

Thouless had designed several survival tests applying coding techniques. His approach was to consider particular design problems made by others before him. One problem was the risk of getting to the content of a message through telepathy and clairvoyance. He first produced two encrypted survival messages (Thouless, 1948) using two different techniques, the so-called Playfair cipher (Simmons, 2013) and a book cipher.¹³ After death, he noted, the material brain in which memories are stored is no longer present. He planned, therefore, to posthumously communicate just the lighter and easier to recall short key that deciphers his encrypted passage. Therefore, if a communication attempt was unsuccessful, a new trial was still possible keeping his encrypted message safe.

An anonymous cryptanalyst deciphered the first passage of Thouless shortly after its announcement. Thouless replaced it with a third encrypted passage using the double Playfair cipher, which introduced two English keywords to the code instead of one (Thouless, 1949). Powerful computers recovered these two keys in 1995, deciphering the third and last secret message of Thouless before mediums could claim success (Gillogly & Harnisch, 1996). Considering such development, an SPR member commented: "When Thouless devised the test in the late 1940s he could hardly have foreseen the future power of computers." (Pool, 1995: without page) The remaining second and most difficult to crack encrypted message from Thouless was decrypted in 2019 (Bean, 2020 a, b), again using computers that searched for keywords in the Project Gutenberg online library.

Thouless had urged others to organize more ciphered survival tests, a call that had encouraged SPR member T.E. Wood to follow suit. Wood created his test according to the Vigenère letter square that Thouless had previously adopted (Wood, 1949). He took his coding key from

13 A book cipher is a coded key, often from some aspect of a readily available book.

a book written in a language other than English. As a result, his secret message contained words in more than one language, making Wood's encrypted message quite severe to crack by either computer or ESP. It has remained unsolved so far. The survival experiments of Thouless and Wood are outlined in the book by Klaus Schmech *Nicht zu knacken* (Schmech, 2012).¹⁴ The author has also added in it his encrypted survival test.

To overcome the difficulties encountered in ciphered postmortem survival tests, Ian Stevenson (Stevenson, 1968) and J.G. Pratt (cf. Berger, 1990: 56) separately developed the *combination-lock* test approach. Their code key consisted of a six-word phrase or six-letter word. A formula converted the code key letters to numbers, which were used to set the combination lock. The idea was that after death their spirits would deliver their keys to respective mediums in each case. The recipient of the key would convert it into numbers according to the familiar formula. If the converted key opened the lock, it was confirmation that the experimenter had posthumously communicated with the living.

The combination locks were expensive and operated by a delicate mechanism whose setting required absolute precision. Their complex alignment required skilled fingers and good memory. There was also the risk that an inaccurate key could also break them. Stevenson and Pratt have not yet communicated their coded keys posthumously. Berger attributed these failures to the fact that both experimenters were not good communicators as spirits (Berger, 1990: 59).

Arthur Berger took up the procedure of the text-coding survival test with his By-the-Numbers test. His approach required a simple dictionary from which he randomly selected one word as his key. Berger numbered consecutively each letter of this keyword and its definition provided in the dictionary. Thus he had created a table in which each letter of the alphabet corresponded to a number. With the help of this table, he converted his secret text into a sequence of incomprehensible numbers (Berger, 1990: 56). He deposited the coded message with researchers, together with the name and edition of the dictionary he had used. Berger had only to convey the simple keyword to other researchers to proceed with the experiment after his death.

Berger believed that his meaningful message, decoded with a posthumously communicated key, would provide experimental proof of life after death. When he created his survival test, he had not anticipated the future deciphering capability of computers. After the successful deciphering of the third survival test of Thouless in 1995, Berger stated, "the era of séances and clairvoyants seems to be over" (Pool, 1995: without page). In the same interview, he also announced that he would develop a more robust encryption system that randomly mixes words and numbers.

14 <https://scienceblogs.de/klausis-krypto-kolumne/2016/04/22/tote-verraten-keine-geheimwoerter-oder-vielleicht-doch/>. See also the book by Craig Bauer (Bauer, 2017).

The End of a Noble Ideologue

Two influences had mainly shaped the decision of Tanagras to attempt his survival test. The first was his theory of psychobolia, which maintained that living matter emanates a powerful bio-radiation responsible for psychical phenomena (Pallikari, 2020a). If this psychic radiation could affect animate and inanimate matter as in telekinesis, would such an ability continue beyond death? Tanagras, therefore, designed his survival test involving telekinesis.

Another influence was the suicide incident regarding an old acquaintance of his, “a noble ideologue”. Tanagras narrated the related story in his autobiography (Tanagras, 2016: 339). The man was a Greek from Alexandria of Egypt, frequently visiting Tanagras in Athens to discuss paranormal phenomena. One day, Tanagras received a letter from him announcing that he was about to commit suicide at a specific place in Alexandria due to financial difficulties. He intended to appear to him as a spirit and produce several visual and audio phenomena. The Alexandrian newspapers in Athens confirmed the dreadful event that had occurred on the scheduled day. Tanagras was bedridden on that day, unable to recall any unusual visual and audio occurrences around him. He interpreted their absence as “truly overwhelming proof that the living cannot communicate with the dead” (ibid.).

Tanagras had noticed a flaw in the experimental design of his friend’s test. Such a flaw, he thought, could invalidate any evidence supporting survival. As a subscriber to the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (Tanagras, 2016: 335), he had noticed the same flaw in the survival experiments developed by leading members of the SPR, Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Stek & Schwartz, 2011). The problem that he saw was that a potent clairvoyant could get the written details of the survival test through ESP before their spirit could communicate it posthumously. There was no such risk, he believed, if the survival evidence instead required telekinetic feats to be accomplished posthumously:

Some eminent noble scholars, such as Sir Oliver Lodge and the author Conan Doyle, had also left in their wills the request to investigate if they had posthumously produced certain phenomena. Again, however, no phenomena were observed after their death. Their



Fig. 1: Angelos Tanagras 1936, in his uniform with decorations. The first medal awarded to him around 1898 for his participation in the 1897 “unfortunate” war with Turkey, the silver cross of the savior, is pinned on the left right under the cross.

(Source: Parapsychology Foundation library)

method was equally vulnerable because revealing the content of their will when they died exposed them to any powerful psychic who could discover their secret through living Roentgen rays. (Tanaras, 2016: 340)

To overcome the apparent flaw, Tanaras designed six survival tests involving telekinesis. He described each one of them in code using a conversion table of his invention. He then put the coding table and each description of the coded telekinetic actions in separate envelopes and sent the whole lot to the British Society for Psychical Research at 31 Tavistock Square, London, UK.¹⁵ Years later, when he wrote his autobiography, he admitted that he had already forgotten the code key. His narrative further indicates that he could also not remember the number of feats he intended to achieve posthumously.

Preparing the Survival Test

Tanaras conducted his communication with the SPR in French and wrote on the official GSPR letter paper. First, he sent a letter to the Hon. Secretary of the SPR requesting permission to deposit a sealed envelope containing details of his intended survival test (fig. 2):¹⁶

Athens, March 1st, 1933

Dear Mr. Bestermann

I have the pleasure to enclose a sealed envelope, which I ask you to give to the Council of the S. P. R. on my behalf, with the request that they accept to open it on the day of my death.

I wish to contribute towards the solution to the big problem when my time comes.

I tried very carefully to organize the experiments I propose to accomplish if communication between the dead and the living was possible.

All the best,
Thank you
Dr. A. Tanaras

For unknown reasons, the SPR granted the permission three years later by a letter from Hon. Secretary W. H. Salter (fig. 3), which Tanaras must have received around February 8, 1936. He next proceeded to complete the coding of the significant sections for each description of the postmortem feat.

¹⁵ It was the address of the SPR office in the 1930s.

¹⁶ SPR MS 80/8/26 (Tanaras, 1936; translated by F. P.).

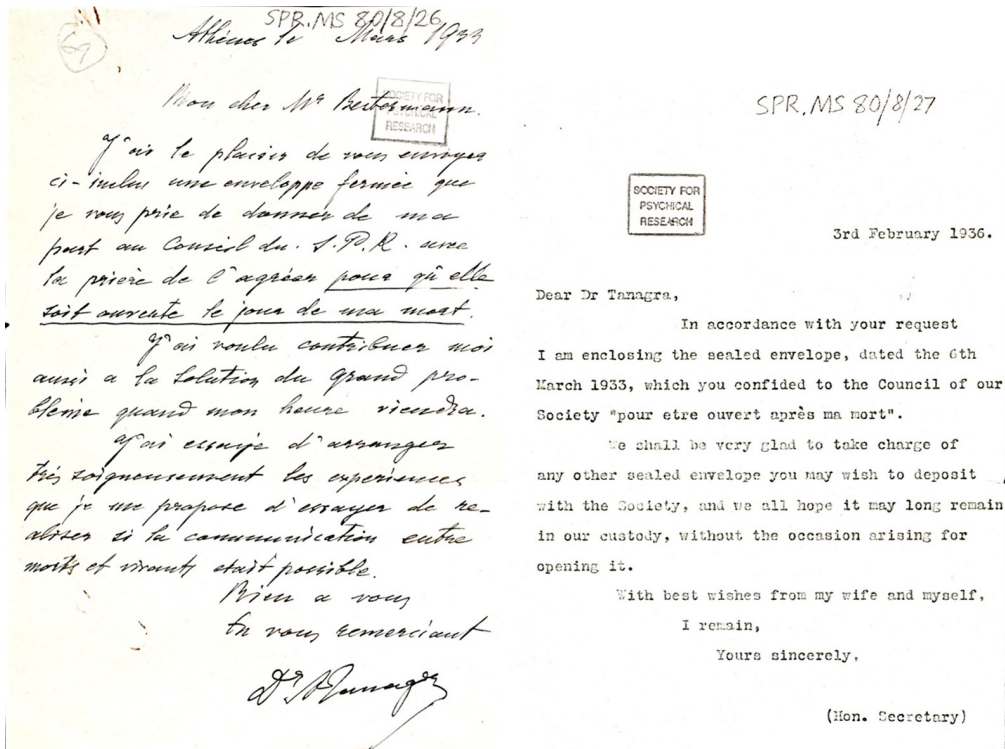


Fig. 2: The first letter Tanagras sent to Theodore Besterman on March 1, 1933, requesting the collaboration of the SPR in his postmortem experiment.

Fig. 3: Salter's letter to Tanagras accepting Tanagras' proposal to collaborate in his postmortem test. (Source: Tanagras, A. (1936). SPR archives, Library of Cambridge University, UK. SPR.MS 80/8/26-38.)

Tanagras wrote his deciphering code in two double columns, where the letters of the Latin alphabet corresponded to random integers (fig. 4). The first double column had 13 rows listing characters from A to M; the second had 12 rows with characters from N to Z. The W was absent in his encryption table because French words rarely contain it. He placed his coding table in a small gray envelope, requesting its opening after 4 p. m. on the 50th day after his death. He put the description of each postmortem feat in a separate small envelope sealed with red wax and embossed with the Greek word "ΕΘΕΛΕΙΝ" (be willing), surrounded by laurel.

There was a five-page introductory letter to the SPR where he explained his reasons for undertaking such a task. In the letter, he vaguely referred to the telekinetic medium of the GSPR, Cleio (Pallikari, 2009 & 2020c), and his theory of psychobolia. He reiterated his belief in

the mercilessness exhibited by the *ultimate divine soul*. Tanagras believed that the “divine soul” was indifferent to who survived or not as long as life on earth could continue. He admitted having already reconciled with the prospect of death. Most likely, he had reached this stoic state after two painful losses in his life. One of them was the death of his young girlfriend in 1903 (Pallikari, 2017c). The other sad occasion referred to the loss of his mother in 1919 (Pallikari, 2017d). Here is his introductory letter to the SPR (translated by F.P.):

Athens 12 February 1936

To the honourable Board of Directors of the English S. P. R.

Gentlemen,

In my desire to serve my fellow men and to contribute through the probable solution of the problem of survival to an improvement of the concepts on which the current societies are based, I have thought of trying this experiment which, if it succeeds, will be, I think, the irrefutable proof of the immortality of the conscious and mnemonic self.

Conscious telekinetic phenomena by a suitable medium, as I had the privilege to experience, have firmly convinced me of the existence of an agent in the living human body, inaccessible to our senses, which can manifest and act consciously until the moment of death. I wanted to investigate whether the said agent continues to have the same properties after death.

I am aware of the difficulties involved in such an experiment. If I had written to you that in case of my survival on such and such a day after my death I would cause certain telekinetic phenomena at a known place, there would be the suspicion that a clairvoyant medium could have guessed the contents of my letter and telepathically triggered the said phenomenon, either himself/herself or through others. However, one has first to rule out any suspicion of clairvoyant activity.

For this purpose, I have written a list of phenomena that I try to realize in case of survival, using a coded alphabet designed for this purpose, which you will find in a sealed envelope with this letter.

You can open the first envelope and the envelope containing the key at 4 p.m. on the fiftieth day after my death, which Athens will tell you, and check the manifestation of the first phenomenon.

I have selected phenomena to occur in known locations that are not ambiguous and where an accident could not pass unnoticed. If the phenomena do occur, one will exclude clairvoyance by a living medium.

If they take place, one could perhaps argue that it was just a haunting provoked by me, based on monoideism¹⁷ related to this experiment and the psychometric impregnation of this letter, acting in a way automatically.

17 Monoideism is a state of prolonged absorption in a single idea, as in trance or hypnosis.

In fact, given the extreme importance of the question, any objection is only natural. For this reason, I have chosen phenomena that require a clear and detailed memory to occur in places very distant from the probable location of my death (Athens), knowing that hauntings usually occur near the site of death.

It should also be considered that I have not demonstrated any mediumistic properties during my life. I was an inefficient “agent” in telepathy experiments.

How can we assume that if the phenomena occur, they have not automatically resulted from the monoideism connected with the tests that have permeated this letter?

In any case, this attempt is the best I have to offer to my fellow men.

I firmly hope that if the experiment succeeds, it will have consequences for the future evolution of humankind. My time in this world would then not have been in vain. May others imitate my example with their contributions to promote the advancement of mankind, which seems to be a will and a law in the grandiose framework of general evolution.

Finally, if this experiment does not succeed, it cannot definitively settle the question of survival. This experiment concerns only the possibility of communication with the dead.

I have been reconciled with death for some years now. I even believe that if this ending, this liberating outcome, did not exist, we would have begged for it on our knees as a savior.

Besides, the unshakeable logic of the immortal teachings of Socrates never ceases to support the faltering doubt.

What if there is something else! Modern Physics teaches us that we are imperishable parts of incredible creative energy in electronic form. Suppose we return to our immortal source after death, even though a rational observation of life shows us that this energy has nothing in common with what we call justice, mercy, or compassion. What if we regain a kind of superconsciousness, in which the very memories of our ephemeral life on earth become superfluous, and the human desire to preserve them a ridiculous ambition?

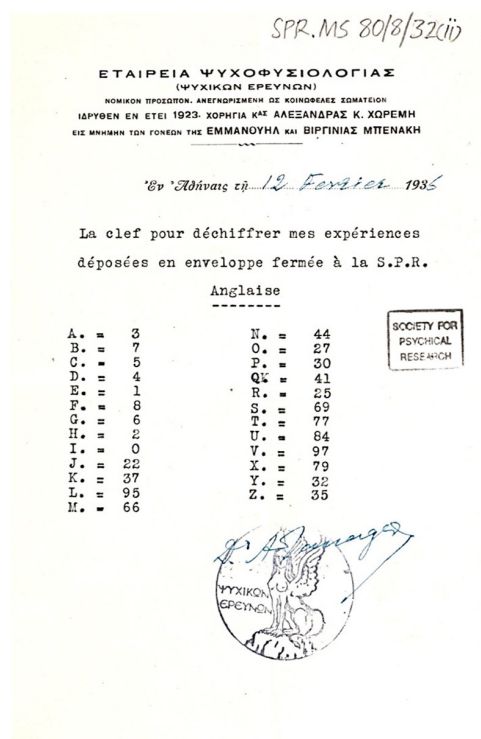


Fig. 4: The code key created by Tanagras for deciphering his secret postmortem task messages. The translation of the French text above the table reads: “The key to decipher my experiments which I deposited by the English SPR inside a sealed envelope” (SPR MS 80/8/32ii)

Finally, before passing the barrier to Nirvana or a better life, I deposit the documents of this experiment in the archives of the English S.P.R., proud to be its honorary member because of the higher goal it pursues with such perseverance and scientific impartiality.

And the followers of spiritualism ensure that souls often regain consciousness long after their death, I will try, if possible, to carry out the phenomena described in the enclosed envelopes within a period of five (5) years, which I consider sufficient.

- 1) Fifty days after my death.
- 2) Three months after my death.
- 3) Six months after my death.
- 4) One year after my death.
- 5) Two years after my death.
- 6) Five years after my death.

I thank you for the inconvenience I am subjecting you to, accept my best wishes.

Dr. A. Tanagras

Sanitary Inspector of the Royal Navy

President of the Hellenic P.R. Society

Aristotelous Str. No 67.

Three red wax seals secured the manila envelope¹⁸ containing Tanagras' tests, his coding table, and his introductory letter, sent by registered mail to the home address of Mr. Salter, the SPR Hon. Secretary at The Crown House, Newport Essex, arriving February 17, 1936. For his part, Salter forwarded it to the SPR Council, with a letter¹⁹ noting the damage to one wax seal on the envelope.

The Six Survival Tests of Tanagras

Tanagras had arranged his six feats to appear in different locations and dates, two of them in Greece, while the four others were to take place in Rome, Paris, Berlin, and Constantinople. On the envelopes containing the descriptions of the feats, the calligraphic handwriting of Tanagras indicated the exact date and time when they should be opened after his death, always four hours after the supposed manifestation of the act. This precautionary four-hour lapse ensured that no human intervention was possible to either prevent or fraudulently perform the act itself. Yet,

18 With dimensions 15 cm x 23 cm; SPR MS 80/4/30, (Tanagras, 1936).

19 SPR MS 80/4/29, (Tanagras, 1936).

Tanagras had not specified whether these were local times or Greek times. After all, it was an unimportant detail if all phenomena had occurred at the scheduled date and location.

The coded sentences that described each act consisted of numbers instead of letters separated by a hyphen (-) to form a word, while a slash (/) separated words to form a sentence. The process of coding proved to be quite challenging for Tanagras. Fatigue affected his concentration after preparing for the first two tests, so errors marked the other four.

First test

The location where the spirit of Tanagras would perform the first feat was in the Archeological Museum of Athens near his home. The target was the glass window protecting the exhibits of the Minoan era²⁰, in which he planned to make a hole. He explained in his letter

The first test that I will try to carry out in case of survival

and continued with the coded description of task #1:

On the fiftieth day after my death²¹, I am going to break the window containing the Minoan of Crete in the Athens museum. Exactly at noon. Dr A Tanagras.

A note at the bottom alerted the reader to look at the back, where it read: “if possible, the hole will be round”.

Second test

Inside the sealed envelope, the letter reads:²²

The second test that I will try to carry out in case of survival. Three months after the day of my death, just at noon, I will try to...

followed by the coded message

... break the cross of St. Peter church in Rome.

and signed

Dr. A. Tanagras

20 SPR MS 80/8/33 (ii), (Tanagras, 1936).

21 Tanagras had added here by mistake the phrase “and on the same date” which makes sense only for the phenomena to appear one year and later. He repeated the same mistake in the descriptions of the other two phenomena supposed to occur within one year after his death.

22 SPR MS 80/8/34 (ii), (Tanagras, 1936).

The heavy white cross attached to the golden sphere at the top of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica has been overlooking St. Peter's square in the Vatican City for over three centuries (Tadié, 2020). No damage to it has been reported.

Third test

The partially encrypted message revealed that the new location for the telekinetic act performed by the spirit of Tanagras would be in Paris:

Third test that I will try to carry out in case of survival. Six months after the day of my death at noon, I will try to break the showcase containing the crown of the kings of France at the Louvre in Paris. Exactly at noon. Dr. A Tanagras

An additional note below the message directed the reader to look at the back of the paper, where he specified, "the hole would be triangular".

Fatigue had probably already taken its toll and led him to make two mistakes. He had coded the French word "rois" (kings), with the numerical sequence 25-27-0-65, although the last number 65 was not present in his coding table. The required number for the letter S was 69. He had also misspelled the word Louvre, using for the letter O the number 0 instead of the correct 27.

Fourth test

In his fourth assignment, the spirit of Tanagras was to appear in Berlin in a place so high that only birds could reach it:

The 4th experiment that I will try to carry out in case of survival. One year after my death and on the same date, I will try to

and the message followed in code

overturn the cross of the Berlin Dome,

The message continued in his handwriting:

precisely at noon. Dr. A Tanagras²³

He made an error coding the word Berlin right at the end of his coded message. He put 41 for the letter N instead of 44. According to his coding table, 41 represents the letter Q.

Eight years later and twenty-seven years before Tanagras' death, the Berlin Dome collapsed

23 SPR MS 80/8/36 (ii), (Tanagras, 1936).

along with its cross during a World War II air raid. Reconstruction began in 1975²⁴, four years after Tanagras' passing. In 1981, the Dome received its new cross.

Fifth test

For his fifth survival test, the spirit of Tanagras was to appear again in Greece to break the glass case displaying the findings in the tomb of Mycenae in northeastern Peloponnese. However, Tanagras failed to specify that the Mycenae findings were then at the Athens National Museum. Thus, an essential detail was missing for researchers who could have followed up on his proof of survival.

His description, partly coded to conceal location and target, reads:²⁵

The 5th experiment that I will try to carry out after my death in case of communication between the dead and the living: Two years after the day of my death and on the same date, I will try to break the showcase containing the findings from the tomb of Mycenae, known as Agamemnon, by making two holes, exactly at noon. Dr. A Tanagras

He coded the word “Mycènes” by numbers: 66-32-5-1-44-1-65. Yet, the last number 65 was nonexistent in his coding table. The correct number for the letter S was 69, an error he had repeated already in the description of his third test.

The German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann²⁶ and the Greek Archeological Society, which held the excavation permit (Harrington, 1999), had excavated at Mycenae in 1876. The Mycenaean tomb findings were in the National Archeological Museum of Athens long before Tanagras prepared his survival test. Their presence in Athens must have made it into the news. Tanagras most likely knew the details from his colleague Alexandros Philadelphus²⁷ (Tanagras, 2016: 345). Philadelphus had published their description in a 1935 museum document (NAMA, 2020). The so-called *Golden Mask of Agamemnon* was among the exhibits, which is why Tanagras had used it to identify them. Tanagras must have assumed that everyone knew where to see the Mycenae findings.²⁸

24 See, <https://digitalcosmonaut.com/2020/kuppelkreuz-berliner-dom/>

25 SPR MS 80/8/37 (ii), (Tanagras, 1936).

26 German businessman-turned-archaeologist. He carried out excavations also in Turkey at the location of Troy described by Homer.

27 Alexandros Philadelphus (1865–1955), archaeologist, painter, anthropologist, historian, and journalist of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, co-founder and treasurer of the GSPR. (http://el.metapedia.org/wiki/Αλέξανδρος_Φιλαδέλφους).

28 A new museum exists at Mycenae since 2003, with exhibits of many other Mycenaean tomb findings (Odysseus, 2012).

Sixth test

The final appearance of the spirit of Tanagras was in Constantinople, right at the top of Hagia Sophia (fig. 5). The message of Tanagras inside the sixth sealed envelope reads:

6th and last experiment that I will try to perform after my death if communication between the dead and the living is possible. Five (5) years after the day of my death, I will try exactly at noon to ...

followed by the coded message

...overturn the crescent at the dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

The coded part of this message contains an error. In the French phrase “renverser le croissant à la coupole de st. Sophie à Constantinople”, the words “à la” were number-coded as 41/95-3 instead of the correct 3/95-3. The number 41 had again appeared in the wrong place, as in his fourth experiment, where it represented the letter N, although according to his table it corresponds to the letter Q. His sixth letter ended with his final thoughts and words of farewell:

If this last experiment also does not succeed, communication between the dead and the living seems impossible. Either there is a higher reason that puts an insurmountable barrier between the two, or the human being who regains superconsciousness no longer needs the earthly memory, which would be the worst of all punishments... Damnation itself!

In thanking the S. P. R. for the trouble I have given it, I wholeheartedly wish my fellow men of the past the peace, the forgiveness, the higher thought that alone elevate man and make him contemplate with serenity his unknown fate. I also send a heartfelt greeting to those I have known and loved, if they are still alive...

Dr. A. Tanagras

The crescent moon on the dome of Hagia Sophia has been in place since the 16th century. No known damage was reported.²⁹

Two months after Tanagras posted his final survival package to the SPR, he traveled to Vienna to deliver a lecture on the famous telekinesis of Cleio (Pallikari, 2018). He returned to Athens to continue his activities at the GSPR, his discourses on paranormal phenomena, and his travels throughout Greece to investigate spontaneous paranormal cases. He reintroduced fire walking in Greece (Pallikari, 2017b), got into a dispute with Professor J. B. Rhine over his theory of psychobolia (Pallikari, 2017e), and participated in long-distance telepathy experiments with many parapsychological centers in Europe (Pallikari, 2020b&c).

29 In Müller-Wiener, 1977.

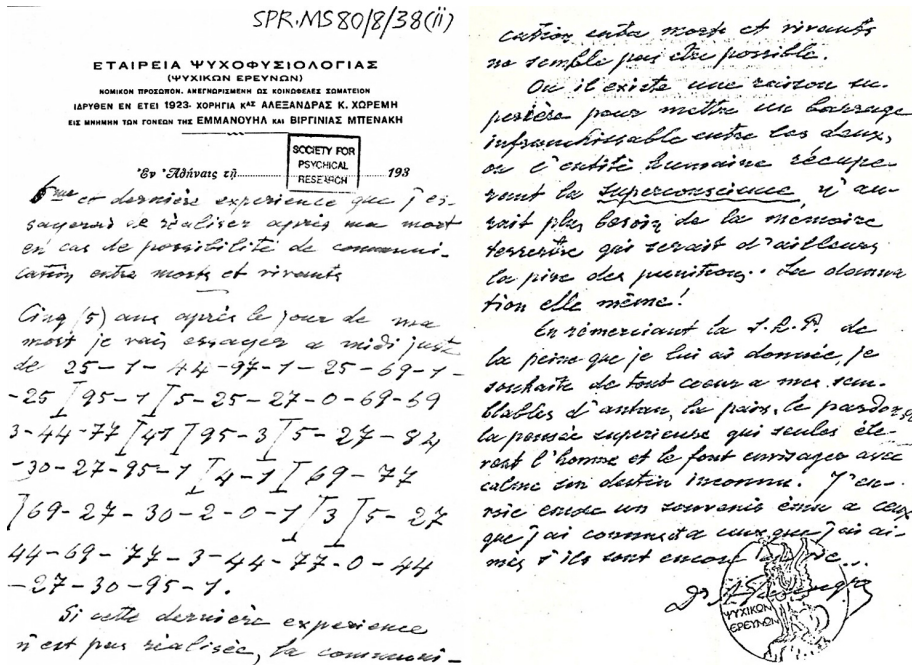


Fig. 5: The letter describing the sixth and final postmortem task of Tanagras, to overturn the crescent at the dome of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (SPR MS 80/8/38 ii)

With time, the GSPR and its activities ceased to exist, while Tanagras became frail and practically blind (Herbert, 1972). Allegedly, he moved into a home for the elderly, where he died soon after, on February 2 1971. Salter was dead by then. Those who knew about the sealed package of Tanagras in the SPR had probably forgotten its existence. It may be that no one from Greece informed them about the passing of Tanagras or that his uninvited spirit had not visited any of the ongoing spiritualistic gatherings to notify the participants of his new state of existence.

Evaluating the Survival Experiment of Tanagras

It is worth examining the value of Tanagras' survival experiment in the general context of his personal beliefs and other such survival experiments. As a physician in the Greek Royal Navy, Tanagras had attended a few spiritual séances in Athens (Tanagras, 2016: 43). His observations at these gatherings helped him formulate the opinion as early as the 1920s that it was impossible for the living to communicate with spirits. He developed the impression that the oper-

ating medium was telepathically extracting information from family members present at the séance and pretending to have received it from the spirits. Mediums misled people, Tanagras argued, because of the lack of a supporting scientific explanation for paranormal phenomena. He wanted his survival test to provide reliable and unambiguous evidence on the relevant issue of survival. The lack of a scientific description of psi phenomena had strongly motivated him to establish the Greek Society of Psychical Research, encouraged to such a decision by many academics of the University of Athens.

The standard methods parapsychologists used to investigate a case of survival were ESP and mediumship. Tanagras' survival experiment, on the other hand, used only telekinesis. His inspiration for this deviation was the telekinetic activity of the GSPR collaborator Cleio. He saw her telekinesis as confirmation of his theory of psychobolia, his contribution to the lack of theoretical description of paranormal phenomena. Since Tanagras himself had no psychic ability, he may have secretly longed to gain posthumous access to this superpower.

His theory of psychobolia postulated that consciousness survives separation from the body after death in an ethereal form of existence. However, he supposed, that after death, when the time comes for the soul to merge with the *divine consciousness*, it enters such a state of bliss that it no longer has any interest in a discourse with the living. Worth mentioning that Tanagras has had a negative experience with the postmortem attempt of his acquaintance from Alexandria. He may have wished in vain that his beloved deceased could somehow contact him. It justifies why he stated in his concluding remarks that a possible failure of his survival experiment only proves the impossibility of communication with spirits, either by ESP or, in his case, by telekinesis. For him, the souls of the deceased maintained no interest in communicating with the earthly residents.

Was the phenomenon of telekinesis suitable as a vehicle to provide evidence for survival? Tanagras had already offered the answer to this question in his introductory letter in the year 1936. To him, telekinesis was as appropriate as any other paranormal phenomenon and yet safer. His enthusiasm for telekinesis may have waned with time, however. For reasons unknown, he had given up discussing Cleio's telekinetic activity after 1948, falsely declaring her dead in his autobiography (Pallikari, 2020c) while she was still participating in his long-distance telepathy experiments. One wonders if, twelve years after he submitted his survival package, he still maintained his belief in telekinesis as an appropriate tool to gather survival evidence to the SPR.

The interpretation of the results of his survival experiment depends on the belief framework of the evaluator. Options based on spiritualist hypotheses would be: (1) The soul persists but no longer finds it appealing to be involved in earthly activities; (2) the ethereal body retains no memory of a previous life; both of these are consistent with Tanagras' views; (3) The ethereal body, regardless of its intentions, cannot manifest itself in the physical world. The interpretation

of the negative experimental result by those who do not believe in life after death is understandably obvious.

Tanagras did not publicize the existence of his survival experiment, apparently as a precautionary measure to safeguard it. The resulting delay in its recognition hindered the proper evaluation of the results. Of the six telekinetic acts that he described in his experiment, three were indoors, while the other three were located outdoors high above the ground. Could any of these telekinetic feats have taken place? The records of famous outdoor locations are easier to track, and yet no such confirmatory reports exist. It may be safer to conclude that the three acts were not successful. The evaluation problem is more difficult for the indoor targets. Were there mysteriously appearing holes in the glass cabinets of exhibits in the Louvre and Athens archaeological museums that made international headlines between 1971 and 1975? Nonesuch events existed, to the best of our knowledge, indicating that none of the six telekinetic activities proposed by Tanagras took place.

Tanagras' survival experiment tested a non-falsifiable hypothesis. It would have been falsifiable if failure to observe any of the announced events had proved with certainty that consciousness does not survive death. Yet, Tanagras had warned about this and provided an explanation for such an impasse: Failure to perform the six telekinetic acts will not test survival, but only prove that spirits do not communicate with the living. An additional issue with this and other survival tests is that according to common logic, one cannot prove a negative, namely to prove that there is no survival beyond death, or the inability to communicate with the spirits assuming their survival. Still, some philosophers dare to question this view (Law, 2011).

One should also bear in mind that reports exist of ordinary people claiming to have personal contact with the deceased (Haraldsson, 2012). In addition, there are studies of children who retain memories of a previous life (Stevenson, 1980), so-called cases-of-reincarnation-type (CORT). They all support the alternative view that consciousness survives death.

The "survival confirming" testimonies and the corresponding experimental evidence that refutes it leave a small space for sending a coded message to the beyond, in the coding style of Tanagras that the other deceased spiritualists should also understand: 97-27-84-69/3-97-1-35/4-1-22-3/4-1-5-27-84-97-1-25-77/95-3/97-1-25-0-77-1.

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