The Bellosean Sphere:

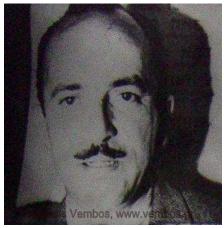
Photographing Spirits - and Venusians as Well

A weird device created by a Greek spiritualist in the 1950s was used in a series of astonishing but controversial experiments. Thanks to this device, photographs—and movies—of otherworldly entities were taken.

By Thanassis Vembos

During the 1950s, the flying saucer phenomenon was becoming increasingly known to Greeks. There was a huge UFO flap in 1954; articles and features in newspapers and magazines on rockets, space travel and the planet Mars, familiarized Greek audience with extraterrestrials and the mysteries of space. At the same time, Spiritualism was on the rise with dozens of groups experimenting and conveying "messages from beyond". Even though Spiritualism was snubbed by the establishment –and Orthodox Church was and is extremely hostile to it- many scientists and high echelons of society participated in the seances.

During the 1950s at a time when space travel was gradually becoming a realistic prospect, extraterrestrials were material, inescapably humanoid creatures from Mars and Venus, dressed in space suits. But at the same time, the immaterial entities from the etheric worlds of the Spiritualists acquired a strange "materiality". These two ends met in the middle, thanks to a strange device designed by a Greek spiritualist.



Alexandros Bellos (*photo left*) was born in 1912 in <u>Agrinio</u>, a small agricultural town in Western Greece. Coming from a wealthy family (his father was the town mayor) he was involved in Spiritualism around 1937. Among other things he realized that mountaintops were rich in folklore and legends about supernatural presences, deities, entities and strange visions. During the Greek-Italian War of 1940-1941, Bellos was serving in the front. One day, his unit was somewhere between <u>Himarra</u> and <u>Tepeleni</u> in Albania, 45 kms from <u>Avlona</u>, at an altitude of 2,800 m. They received warning that Italian alpinists were approaching. Under the moonlight, the soldiers saw shadows and opened fire. But the shadows did not seem to pay any attention. Bellos and the others were dumfounded; later he witnessed again the same phenomenon

in Tepeleni.

After the war Bellos read the classic descriptions of the Everest mountaineers' "invisible companions". He concluded that both his shadows and these invisible companions were immaterial dwellers of etheric worlds, manifesting more easily in high altitudes. There should be a reason why etheric entities were more frequently seen at mountaintops. He wrote:

I wondered why people who live or climb in high altitudes are so blessed and we, the people who live at sea level, experience so much static and mental interference in our spiritualistic communications. Then I dared to reason: if we could bring these altitudes to the experimental laboratory of Metapsychics, we should take better results. Instinctively I remembered the glass bell with the air

pump at our school physics laboratory [with which a vacuum could be created]; curiously this memory had remained indelible in my mind since high school. So I got a glass vacuum bell and started my experiments [...] Joyfully, I observed innumerable forms of etheric people". [1]

On September 21, 1953, Bellos presented his "vacuum bell" to the board of the **Scientific Institute for Metapsychic Research (SIMR)**, a newly founded psychic society with numerous Athenian physicians as members. Bellos' system was a glass bell connected to a vacuum pump. "This mechanical device is put on the experimental table in front of the hypnotized medium and a human chain is formed around it. Previously the air has been removed from the bell and the pressure inside is lowered to that of 8 km altitude. In the seance room there must be a slight infrared light or complete darkness; participants must remain still, mentally calm and silent without being anxiously expectant. After 20-30 minutes, noises and voices are heard from inside the bell, then sparks are seen and finally clouds; the latter are morphing into definite forms than can be photographed". [2]

The enthusiastic spiritualists started experimenting and on February 24, 1954, "the first public experiment regarding the appearance of posthumans [this was the term Bellos and his colleagues used for the deceased] used a glass sphere emptied from atmospheric air". Members of SIMR were present and photographer K. Tellidis took pictures of the shapes that appeared in the sphere. "The participants put the vacuum tube on a marble pillar; inside it there was vacuum equivalent to 100,000 m altitude. Then they made the experimental circle and turned off the lights. Photographs were taken intermittently, either in complete darkness or with flash. Each time the participants were asked to breathe slowly and to meditate silently". The experiment lasted half an hour. Many members claimed that they saw "tree-like explosions, luminous forms and glimpses of shapes transforming" in the glass sphere. One of the pictures was published on the cover of Hyperfos spiritualistic magazine. Supposedly on the left upper quadrant of the sphere "a full form of a man is visible; if turned upside-down, there is a form of a woman smirking". Supposedly the first one was the deceased father of Ifigeneia Hajivassiliou, member of the circle, and the second one the deceased wife of another SIMR member. [3]



Cover of #11 issue of Hyperfos magazine with the first Bellosean sphere

Bellos considered the experiment especially successful. "A horde of forms inside the vacuum of the glass sphere, striving to give signs of life, proves the great ease with which the spirits of the dead move in the vacuum and the likelihood not only to become visible but to be photographed as well". [4]

Apparently a scientific and attestable method of communicating with the "etheric worlds" and the spirits of the dead had been discovered. Bellos and the other spiritualists were very excited; they considered the idea of constructing a large glass box for better observations, or a special chamber inside which an individual could communicate with the departed. Nevertheless, Bellos indicated that the need for a powerful medium had not been eliminated. And such mediums were hard to find.

The idea was spread. "Many metapsychic societies around Greece inform us that they started experimenting with the 'Bellosean Sphere'. However, from the letters we received we remark that many of them are confused regarding this particular instrument of communication. So SIMR must give detailed information on the design of the sphere —or construct glass spheres suitable for spiritualistic communication and lease them to metapsychic societies or to seriously experimenting spiritualistic circles. But the expenses are over 1 mn Drs. This issue must soon be taken into consideration". [5]

The scientific "wrapping" of the spiritualistic communication using the Bellosean sphere seemed attractive, promising and innovative. The fact that known physicians participated in the experiments added more credit. "During his experiments with a glass sphere, Athens University lecturer Mr Theodoridis discovered a new method of observation; he created a special device called 'spiritoscope' using a special fluorescent glass plate. Three days after the experiment, Theodoridis

realized that forms were imprinted on the glass plate. The more time he left the plate under the rays of a 500W electric lamp coming through the glass sphere, the more forms appeared'. [6]

Furthermore, Bellos designed a special glass sphere with a microphone inside in order to record "etheric voices" –if of course sound waves could be generated in the near vacuum of the device. "As you realize, applications of our invention will be many and various. One must not be surprised if a speaking cinematographic movie of the 'Etheric World' can be made, with leading actors the yesterpeople who passed to the opposite shore of life [...] [7]



A characteristic newspaper report about the Bellosean sphere (Athinaiki 17.9.1955)

Various articles in Athenian newspapers created further publicity. It was reported that a similar "vacuum spirit tube" was used by the British Society of Psychic Research for similar experiments. Supposedly on July 8, 1954, SIMR had received such an informing letter from Demosthenes Vranas, its representative in London. It is uncertain if this was a similar or a completely different device. In the meantime, SIMR had ordered the construction of a large vacuum sphere at the Karsikis' glass factory at Moschato, Athens. On August 11 an experiment was conducted in front of several Athenian newspaper journalists; Kate Constantinidou was the medium. After the experiment, despite the fact that the sphere used was only 7 cm wide (it was the smallest SIMR had in possession) the pictures taken supposedly showed "many organized miniature forms, even the appearance of whole bodies. We frequently saw shapes posing to be photographed; other pictures show unsuspected shapes or even random ones [...] Is this glass vacuum sphere a kind of 'lenses' or 'binocular' through which invisible worlds can be seen and photographed?" [8]

The experiments continued next year -1955- and the newspapers published relative stories, mostly positive. One comment is characteristic: "When a new discovery appears, [Alexander] Dumas once said, stupid people laugh, shallow people deny and only serious ones examine. So let us pay attention to the last phrase and avoid being either the first or the second ones. Furthermore we deal with a person [Bellos] who dedicated nearly all his life to an idea [...] In our materialistic age the study of

human essence has been stopped long ago... Nevertheless, some ideologists, despite the reactions, hopefully continue to examine man, man as a component of Creation". [9]



Greek spiritualists and two Bellosean spheres (mid-1950s). Bellos is marked with a yellow dot

According to Bellos and his colleagues, prospects for the scientific investigation of the etheric world seemed excellent. "After the fission of the atomic nucleus and the verification of the transmutation of mass into energy and vice-versa, materialist credos are deeply shaken. Spiritualism starts to be justified again [...] We do not need darkness, long experiments, strict and depressing conditions, hypnotism and religious mysticism any more to photograph the spirits of the dead". [10]

The first filming of the shapes in the Belosean sphere was achieved on October 26, 1955 during attempts directed by physician-radiologist Ioannis Pavlidis, member of SIMR The film was shown in the "Knossos" hall of the Cretan Society in central Athens (Omirou st), in front of an audience of 300 people. It was reported that a new filming was programmed and that the film would be shown in the same place, on November 10 [11]. Similar shows took place in other halls in central Athens. Bellos described what was shown in the film.

One is astonished to see a grim environment where sad women are sitting around an oblong table like being shackled or meditating; far right, one of them is holding her face with her palms. In the left another one stands up and raises her hands in despair, holding a handkerchief. Things in Hades—from which only the density of atmosphere separates us- do not seem so pleasant. In another place of the sphere, an 18 year old girl is seemingly knitting [...] Silhouettes around them move, appear and vanish mysteriously like being absorbed in the vacuum inside the sphere. Suddenly in the middle of the film an imposing and mysterious priest of the Far East shows up, smiling enigmatically, lifts his left hand and waves. [12]

One wonders if the shapes seen inside the sphere were so clear and well defined as Bellos describes, or the sphere itself was something like an empty canvas, a Rorsach test where one could see what

wanted or expected to see. Unfortunately, I have yet to find one of these highly controversial vintage films.

Later on, Bellos' group broke apart from SIMR and was renamed **SSMR** (Scientific Society for Metapsychic Research). It was reported that, in December 1956, Bellos was experimenting every Saturday at 7:30 pm in the conference hall of the Federation of Craftsmen in central Athens; admittance was free. But some remarked that Bellos had wasted his family fortune on spiritualistic experiments that gave no conclusive evidence [13]. Despite the enthusiasm of Bellos and his group, the experiments were highly contested and their results highly ambiguous. The disappointing picture is revealed in a report written by leading members of SSMR many years later.

Dozens of experiments were held, excellently organized, with the presence of known Athenian photographers, under various lighting conditions etc, but failed to yield anything conclusive or some hard evidence as Bellos expected. The only certainty was that 'something' was happening inside the sphere [...] These [ambiguous results] gave hope to Bellos who never stopped organizing public experiments of spirit photography, eventually hoping to find the suitable physical medium in the audience. The only tangible thing resulted from his attempts was that he was sued by a professor of Athens Polytechnic who accused Bellos of putting dolls behind the sphere, photographing them and presenting them as spirits. [14]

Maybe this legal issue was the final nail in the coffin of Bellos' attempts. In 1958 SSMR rented the sphere from Bellos, who was impoverished by then, to conduct spirit photography and filming experiments –on the condition that Bellos would not be present, since he was still accused for fraud. President of SSMR was the retired lawyer Dimitris Ambelas (1881-1969); vice president was astronomer Dimitrios Ilias, professor at Patras University. At the late 1950s SSMR used Dimitrios Symeonidis (b. 1939) as a medium. His powers were remarkable; he had acquired them when he was 16 year old and hit his head while playing football.



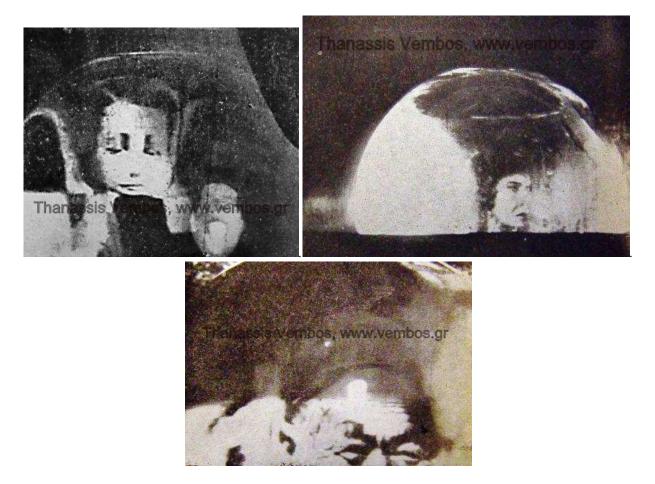
Symeonidis with a Bellosean sphere

On February 3, 1958, SSMR members were filming the sphere in a seance with Symeonidis. It was the first experiment where basic members of Bellos' spiritual circle participated; it was "exceptionally and unexpectedly successful. All medium's 'visions' were depicted on film!" [15]. But by a strange twist of fate, the experimenters were caught unprepared; none of them expected to witness anything more than "the appearance of a couple of hazy faces—like it was until then during Bellos' experiments" [16]. So, detailed proceedings of the experiment were not kept. Nevertheless many human forms were filmed, individuals and groups. The spiritual guide, Yogi Yakhve and his students at a Tibetan monastery were also filmed. Symeonidis was frequently communicating with this particular Tibetan sage—receiving information on the Soviet space program and in, one case, detailed directions for an effective cure for cancer.

A second experiment took place on December 4, 1958. Unfortunately Bellos had passed away five months ago; his widow had donated the vacuum sphere to SSMR. This experiment was also phenomenally successful; many forms were filmed, **among them Alexandros Bellos himself!** [17]



Bellos as appeared in the vacuum sphere (movie still)



Stills from the 1958 film: two female figures in the sphere and "Yogi Yakhve"

At the late 1950s and during the whole 1960s lectures and slide shows were taking place weekly (usually on Wednesdays) at the SSMR headquarters (104 Agathoupoleos st); experiments with the Bellosean sphere continued. President of the Society Dimtrios Ambelas was the soul of this new endeavour. Known astronomer Constantine Hassapis (1914-1972), director of Athens Observatory

and keen science popularizer] was also involved. Now SSMR experiments were not strictly spiritualistic; the investigators were trying to photograph denizens of other planets. **The shapes inside the sphere were not "yesterpeople" any more but "aliens"**. On February 23, 1964, SSMR experimenters managed to photograph life forms of planet Venus.

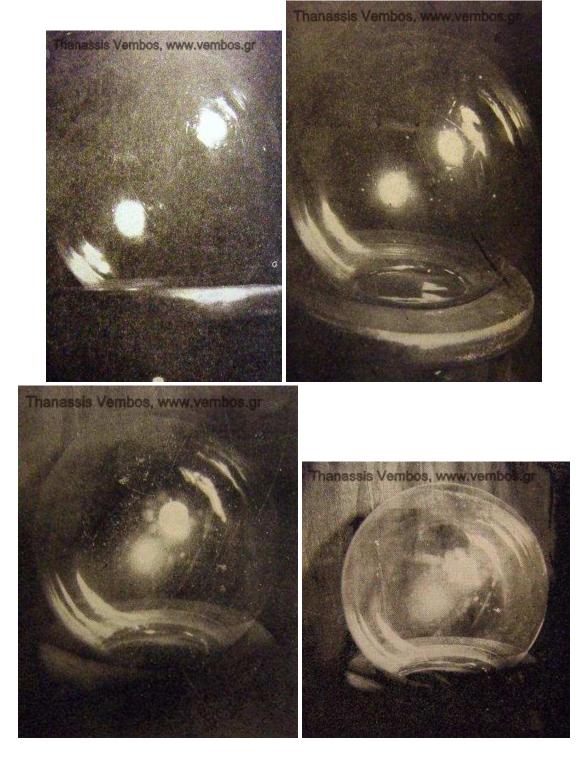
There are lots of clouds; it is hot and humid, it rains, lots of water, deep rivers, much greenery, forests with big trees, serpents like crocodiles with oblong slit eyes, most of them legless; huge beasts, most of them aquatic, wallow in the rivers; there are black vultures with large wings. The indigenous people are not afraid of them. In one place thick smoke is emitted, with unpleasant smell, it is difficult to breath; the typical animal is a white creature like a dog with flat snout (this was thrice photographed in various seances). Men are tall, swarthy with intense features; they do not cut their hair [...] one of them wears a moustache and beard. A pair of serpents was photographed [...] People live in caves, they are naked; they cook in stone utensils a black food like a soup; they smear themselves with that [...] Settlements are sparse [18].

The image of Venus as a Mesozoic Eon Earth, with dinosaurs roaming, hot, humid and full of swamps was popular before WW2. Alas, the Venus-as-jungle image died ingloriously after the findings of American and Soviet space probes in the early 1960s; the planet was a blazing hell, with surface temperatures sufficient to melt lead and atmospheric pressure equal to that of a 1km deep ocean. Nevertheless it is interesting that the Soviet science fiction movie Planet of Storms (Planeta Bur) by Pavel Klusanchev was shot in 1962; a group of Soviet cosmonauts roam around the surface of a Venus quite like the visions of SSMR's mediums. They also encounter and fight many dangerous creatures. This film must have been showed in Greek cinemas of the time [19].



Stills from Planeta Bur (1962). In the steaming swamps of Venus, a serpentoid biped lurks and attacks a cosmonaut, the crew fights a monstrous plant (curiously resembling the early Soviet lunar and planetary landing probes!) and an alien pterodactyl.

In January 1967 the **Greek Center for Metaphysical Research (GCMR)** was founded with civil engineer and spiritualist Constantine Antonakeas as its president [20]. GCMR, in collaboration with SSMR and one of its branches, the **Scientific Society for Indirect Interplanetary Exploration (SSHE)**, was photographing aliens in the vacuum sphere on a regular basis. Many of these photos appeared in psychic magazines of the time and in Ambelas' and Antonakeas' books; one needs a lot of imagination to discern the creatures and artifacts that the spiritualists of SSMR and SSHE claimed to see in them. At least some of Bellos' pictures and films were clearly depicting human forms. Expectedly, the newspapers ignored them altogether. In the rare times that they did not, they were publishing tongue-in-cheek reports. The zeitgeist of the era was incompatible with Spiritualism; space race had started and was going full throttle. Men were orbiting the Earth and walking in space, making headlines. Both superpowers were striving to reach the Moon before the end of the 1960s. Old fashioned spirits in outdated glass spheres were plain anachronisms.



One needs a lot of imagination to discern the Venusian creatures and artifacts in the glass sphere, supposedly depicted in these photos shot in mid and late 1960s.

In late 1968, in one of the rare newspaper references, one journalist participated incognito in a SSIIE seance and tried to sabotage it by making fake questions to the medium about a supposedly deceased person (who was alive and well). The medium conveyed the answers of the 'deceased' and the journalist wrote a mocking article [21]. Ambelas answered with a letter, retorting that false answers are expected when asking false questions [22].

In Christmas 1968 Apollo 8 with a crew of three made the incredible feat of flying around the Moon and returning safely back to Earth. It had literally gone where no man had gone before. Humans had escaped Earth orbit and hovered over the unseen far side of the Moon. The unprecedented success meant that the first manned lunar landing was imminent. In this apotheosis of space technology, immaterial spirits and glass balls seemed even more outdated and laughable. After a lecture by Ambelas in SSIIE on January 29, 1969, a journalist wrote ironically. "There is another way to conquest space, apart from spaceships, a way purely 'spiritual'. Recently this method flourishes in Greece and important research is being done in the field—as these researchers claim. Moreover, they present the results of such research. What results? Well, it is not so easy to explain. Nevertheless, these people claim that their pictures show people of Venus, wild beasts, hair, bracelets, and other mind-boggling things... Of course nothing can be seen in these pictures. But Mr Ambelas and his colleagues do not pay much attention to that. They are satisfied that only they can see them..." [23].



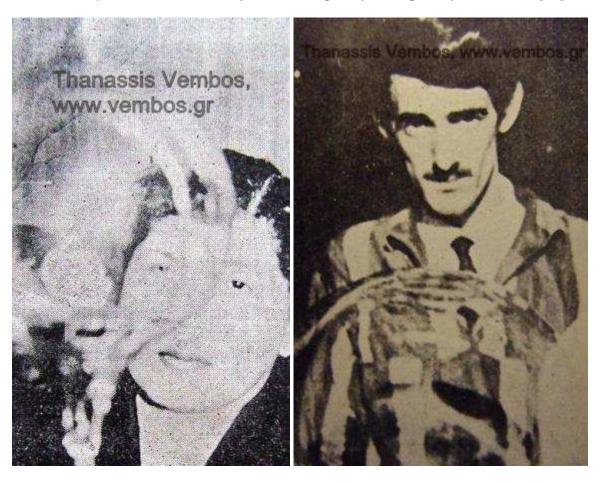
A tongue-in-cheek report on the "Venusian photos" (Acropolis, 6.4.1969)

Another newspaper wrote: "Kudos to the photographers of the Society for Metapsychic Research who, without a spaceship, managed to take pictures of the residents of Venus! However, we fear that their feat is shaded by the fact that there were always... priestesses of Venus upon this Earth!" [24]

In March 1969, the Apollo 9 mission was launched, testing successfully the lunar module in Earth orbit. In mid-May Apollo 10 made a full dress rehearsal of the landing with the lunar module descending to only 15 km from the surface of the Moon. In early April in a feature on the seances in SSIIE and the photos of "aliens" in the glass sphere, a journalist concluded. "We will not tire our readers with more of this; probably they believe nothing of all these, but maybe some of them feel proud that Greece has reached the planets, even via mediums, long before the Americans and the Russians!!! Nonetheless in this Greek... Cape Canaveral at Michail Voda st., members of SSMR and SSIIR continue their weekly seances. And thanks to the glass sphere they fill their lives with trips to the ends of the Earth, the planets, the past, the present, talking with souls, with living beings, existent and nonexistent people and worlds..." [25]

Nobody took spiritualists and their alien contacts seriously. In a SSMR seance, medium Irene Panopoulou communicated with a Martian; the story appeared in a daily newspaper on the Arts and

Sights page (!). "Mars [...] is a very beautiful planet, with much greenery. Men are extremely tall and women extremely short. Everybody wears immaterial clothes. The contacted Martian [...] was wearing an iron, cube-like helmet. The people of Mars are sister souls, benevolent spirits who have fulfilled their earthly destination. Their objective is the peaceful conquest of the Moon". [26]



Left: Medium Panopoulou in front of a Bellosean Sphere. Right: Christos Barbas, another medium heavily involved in the late 1960s spirit/alien photography.

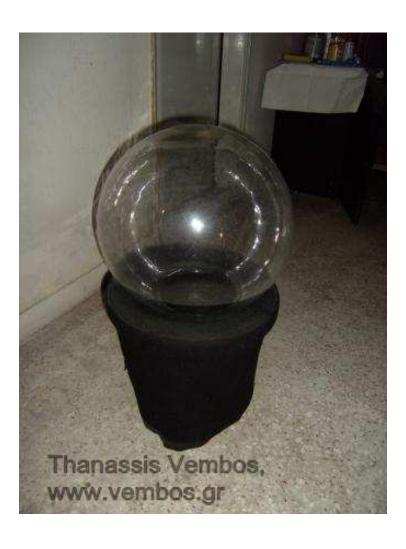
There is one interesting case, one of the last samples of UFO/spirits connection. In mid-March 1969, when Apollo 9 was flying around Earth, members of Antonakeas' Greek Center for Metaphysical Research claimed that they managed to photograph the spirit of the deceased Italian architect Vicenzo Caivano, hovering over the church of Agia Aikaterini (St Catherine) in the city of Piraeus where his Greek wife was buried. The spirit had the form of a coffin –the photo shows a rectangular luminous 'something' that could be called "UFO" as well. Caivano had died in 1967. The photograph was taken in infrared; the spirit was asked to project on the film whatever image it wanted. "It seems", Antonakeas said, "that when the spirit arrived, conditions were suitable so the result was something novel: its coffin hovering above the temple". [27]



The report on the "flying coffin" and the ambivalent photo (Acropolis, 16.3.1969)

The story of the Italian architect is of interest since it combines Spiritualism and espionage. His Greek wife had died in Istanbul before WW2. Caivano had asked permission from the mayor of Piraeus to build a chapel as a tribute to her. But the law forbade foreigners to possess real estate in this particular area (Castella region). After many attempts, the license was finally given to Caivano who built a church with an underground vault. A bronze coffin containing the embalmed body was put in the vault; through a glass window her face was visible. Caivano was staying for 2-3 hours every day in the vault, mourning his wife. She had become his obsession; during lunch no servant was allowed to be present; he ate having his wife's dish in the opposite side of the table and conversed with her. During the Greek-Italian war (1940-41), British intelligence in Greece traced strange cryptographic signals originating from Castella region, in Piraeus. Apparently some secret radio was transmitting. The source of the signals was the church. When Caivano went in Istanbul for business the police searched the church; in the vault they discovered the secret transmitter under her wife's head! The Italian architect was a secret agent [28].

In the wake of the lunar landings, UFOs become exclusively alien crafts—the spiritual connection was lost. Spiritualism went underground—again. SSMR ceased operations in 1971. Antonakeas' GCMR continued to exist but its time had pass. Metapsychic Society also continued to exist and publish its magazine *O Kosmos tis Psychis (The World of Soul)* but Spiritualism was outdated. The films of the spectral forms in the Bellosean spheres were lost—after more than three years of research I could not obtain any of them. However, in 2011 I located one of the spheres in the basement of the Metapsychic Society; it was locked in a cupboard and only one older member remembered its existence when I mentioned it. The Society still exists but as a faint shadow of its former self, not doing experiments any more. Its magazine ceased to be published many years ago. Only the glass sphere (and possibly others, forgotten in other basements or lockers) and some photos remain, relics of the golden age of Greek experimental Spiritualism and its strange alien connection.





Left: One surviving Bellosean Sphere in the Athens Metapsychic Society. Right: The ground floor of this building (149 Michail Voda st) in a now degraded Athens neighbourhood, was the headquarters of Scientific Society for Indirect Interplanetary Exploration (SSIIE) until 1971. (Photos by T. Vembos, 2011)

Notes

- (1) Alexandros Bellos, "Spirit Moves inside the Vacuum", Vradyni newspaper, 31.7.1954
- (2) Hyperfos magazine, #9, November 1953
- (3) "Posthumans Were Photographed in the Glass Crooks Sphere", *Hyperfos* magazine, #11, March 1954, p. 173.
- (4) ibid, p. 175
- (5) ibid, p. 173. This sum was equivalent to a fairly good monthly salary back then. Today it may not seem a lot of money, but spiritualistic groups were chronically short of money.
- (6) Alexandros Bellos, "Etheric Forms inside the Glass Sphere –The Importance of the Vacuum", *Vradyni* newspaper, 15.7.1954
- (7) Ibid
- (8) Alexandros Bellos, "Yester-People Dwell in the 'Vacuum'", Macedonia newspaper, 8.9.1954
- (9) G.M. Kats[aris], "Spirits of the Dead Inside a Sphere", Athinaiki newspaper, 2.7.1955
- (10) Alexandros Bellos, "Spirits of the Dead Dwell in the Vacuum!", Athinaiki newspaper, 1.8.1955
- (11) Alexandros Bellos, "Ghosts in the Vacuum of the Glass Sphere", *Athinaiki* newspaper, 2.11.1955 (12) Ibid.
- (13) "The Vacuum Sphere and Other Curiosities", Kathimerini newspaper, 19.12.1956

- (14) Maria Dafnomili-Costovasili, Sophia Mavrokefalou, Alexandros Fyssas, "Photographs of Invisible Ectoplasmic Forms", unpublished typed report, dated 20.2.1980
- (15) Ibid
- (16) Ibid
- (17) Ibid.
- (18) Dimitrios Ambelas, *Psychics*, pp 264-265
- (19) In 1965 Curtis Harrington added several scenes shot in the US with American actors and created and released the dubbed result under name *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*. Since all credits were removed, soviet actors were "renamed" with non-Russian names or left completely uncredited. In 1968 Peter Bogdanovich (under the name Derek Thomas) added several different new scenes with attractive women and released the film as *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women*.
- (20) Constantine Antonakeas was son of Nikolaos, author, politician and also spiritualist (1896-1966).
- (21) "Flying Saucers Come from Mars", To Vima newspaper, 28.11.1968
- (22) To Vima newspaper, 17.12.1968
- (23) "Infinity Touching Zero", *To Vima* newspaper, 30.1.1969
- (24) "Metapsychic Issues", Acropolis newspaper, 31.1.1969
- (25) Dimitris Limberopoulos, "Athenian Mediums Communicate with... Martians and Creatures of Venus", *Acropolis* newspaper, 6.4.1969
- (26) Dimitris Constantaras, "Medium Talks with 'Man' from Mars", *Eleftheros Kosmos* newspaper, 3.4.1969
- (27) "We Photographed... a Flying Coffin at Piraeus", Acropolis newspaper, 16.3.1969
- (28) Macedonia newspaper, 28.10.1969

Read my other articles on paranormal in Greece here