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Thaddaeus Zieliński in the Eyes of a Modern Hellenist

Abstract: The paper is an attempt to assess — in an avowedly subjective manner — the significance of the work of Thaddaeus Zieliński, the most eminent Polish classicist, for the present-day studies of ancient Greek literature and culture. Taking into account the immense impact of much of Zieliński's contributions, and their unaging influence over many classical studies topics (Greek comedy, tragedy, Homer), the discussion touches also the more controversial issues related to the works of this great scholar.

Key words: Thaddaeus Zieliński, Greek, tragedy, comedy, anti-Judaism

Thaddaeus Zieliński was born in 1859 to Polish parents in Skrzypczyńce near Uman, in today's Central Ukraine, then part of the Russian Empire. Having graduated from a German secondary school in St Petersburg he left for Germany to study classics at the University of Leipzig, which he concluded with a dissertation on the subject of the Punic Wars.¹ In 1884 he began his tenure as a professor of the St Petersburg University in 1884 (having previously obtained a Russian doctorate for his groundbreaking work in the study of Greek drama, *Die Gliederung der altattischen Komödie*). After the restoration of the Polish state, which followed the conclusion of World War I, he was invited to professorship at the University of Warsaw, where he took the chair of Classical Studies in 1922. In November 1939, after the outbreak of World War II and the beginning of the Nazi occupation, he left Poland to live with his son in Schondorff (Bavaria), where

¹ T. Zieliński: *Die letzten Jahre des Zweiten Punischen Krieges*. Leipzig: Teubner 1880.

he died in 1944 until the very end working on his last study of ancient religions (which he himself considered his *opus magnum*).

This brief biographical sketch has no ambition to rival those much more authoritative and rich in detail to be found elsewhere.² Its sole purpose is to bring out what I consider to be most important in his biography and of considerable bearing on both his scholarly and literary output, resulting in its wide dissemination and significant impact. He was a citizen of the world. He was a *native* speaker of three languages: Russian, German and Polish. Precisely in that order. To be sure, Polish was the mother tongue he took from his home (where he was also taught French). After he moved to St Petersburg, however, it was Russian and then German that became the languages of his spoken and written word, and that until the time of his Warsaw tenure. Small wonder then that after all these years his mother tongue became a little “rusty.” And although he eventually (re-)mastered literary Polish and that to a degree unparalleled by many of his compatriots (his works became canon and as such made their way into the *Great Dictionary of the Polish Language* by Doroszewski, not to mention his nominations to the Literary Nobel Prize), he could never get rid of the melodious Russian accent, while his occasional slips in the spoken language became legendary.

Polish by nationality, German by education and Russian by culture: such was in a nutshell (for all its inevitable generalizations) Zieliński’s enviable cosmopolitanism; and yet, as many of his students have observed, his true homeland was always classical Greece.³ And it is precisely for this reason that, as a Hellenist, whose fields of study — *toutes proportions gardées* — overlap with *some* of Zieliński’s scholarly interests, I was asked to prepare this modest contribution: in order to assess his legacy to the world of ancient Greek studies and its vitality in the 21st century, 65 years after his death. Unfortunately, my limited competence does not permit me to do full justice to his impressive achievements in the field of Latin studies, especially to his works on Ovid, Horace,⁴ and most importantly, Cicero.⁵ As for the latter, suffice to say that it was held in great esteem by the greatest Polish (and one of the greatest in the world) expert on the subject, Kazimierz Kumaniecki, and, according to his testimony, by many others.⁶ For a Hellenist, however, Zieliński is and should be known firstly and foremostly as the author of three

² S. Srebrny: “Tadeusz Zieliński.” *Eos* 1947, nr 42, 2; K. Kumaniecki: “Tadeusz Zieliński.” *Meander* 1959, nr 14, 8—9; M. Plezia: “Tadeusz Stefan Zieliński.” In: I. Biezuńska-Małowist, ed.: *W kregu wielkich humanistów*. Warszawa 1991; cf. also S. Srebrny: “Ze wspomnień ucznia.” *Meander* 1959, nr 14, 8—9; G. Golik-Szarawarska: *Wieczna choreia: poglądy Tadeusza Zielińskiego na dramaty i teatr*. Katowice 1999.

³ S.J. Luria: “Wspomnienia o prof. Tadeuszu Zielińskim i jego metodzie motywów rudymen-tarnych.” *Meander* 1959, nr 14, 8—9, p. 407.

⁴ Cf. O. Nikitinski: “De Thaddaeo Zielinski Horati interprete.” *Philologus* 1995, 139.

⁵ T. Zieliński: *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*. Leipzig: Teubner 1897; Idem: *Das Clausegezetzt in Ciceros Reden. Grundzüge einer oratorischen Rhythmik*, Leipzig: Dietrich 1904.

⁶ For which see his paper “Tadeusz Zieliński.” *Meander* 1959, nr 14, 8—9, pp. 391ff.

landmark studies: the aforementioned German *Gliederung*, the Latin *Tragodumenon libri tres*, and the multilingual *Iresione*, a two-volume collection of essays on various topics, most of them previously published in scholarly periodicals.⁷

“Zieliński’s masterly *Tragodumena*,” wrote Zuntz;⁸ “[...] the fundamental reference work not only for the chronology and course of stylistic evolution in Euripides, but also for the philological formulation of the complex rules governing resolution in Euripides” was the assessment by Devine and Stevens in the article⁹ whose title “The Zielinskian Canon” is more meaningful than any compilation of praises and acknowledgments to be found in both Euripidean scholarship and studies devoted to problems of Greek metre.¹⁰ And all that in relation to only one of the three books of *Tragodumena: De trimetri Euripidei evolutione*.

The fundamental idea behind it was quite traditional and simple: the more resolutions, the later the tragedy. This bluntly facile assumption, however, in the hands of Zieliński has been turned into a complex methodological apparatus of not only quantitative, but most importantly qualitative analysis of four distinct Euripidean styles¹¹ and numerous laws governing each of them, which gave him not only a firm foothold in the attempt to establish a relative chronology of the extant Euripidean plays, but also allowed him to successfully undertake the adventurous task of dating fragmentary drama.¹² To be sure, *De trimetri* was not created in an intellectual vacuum. Zieliński himself acknowledged his debt to his predecessors in these studies, most notably C.F. Müller.¹³ It is, however, Zieliński’s work that

⁷ S. Srebrny, Zieliński’s pupil, friend and successor, considers his most important works (*Teatr grecki i polski*. Warszawa 1984, pp. 150—155) to be the Russian commentaries to Euripides (in Russian translation), and the Russian edition of Sophocles’ tragedies, where the introductory essays were eventually translated into a Polish monograph of this poet’s dramaturgy: *Sofokles i jego twórczość tragiczna*. Kraków 1928; the latter, however, may by now seem somewhat outdated, not to mention the fact that it is inaccessible to the Polish- and/or Russianless reader.

⁸ G. Zuntz: *The Political Plays of Euripides*. Oxford 1963 (1955), p. 69.

⁹ A.M. Devine, L.D. Stephens: “Rules for Resolution: The Zielinskian Canon.” *TAPhA* 110 1980, no. 110.

¹⁰ Though Devine and Stephens after a thorough re-examination of the “Zielinskian Canon” conclude that in all “[i]t represents a combination of the extraordinarily insightful with the quite valueless and almost naïve” (“Rules for Resolution...”, p. 79), they acknowledge “the fact that it is to Zieliński above all others, that we owe the basic conception of the overall framework within which resolution can most effectively be studied”; cf. also some very general (and equally moderate) critical remarks of Srebrny (*Teatr...*, p. 155).

¹¹ I.e. *stilus severior, semiseverus, liber and liberrimus*.

¹² *Mihi vero id fuit omnium maxime in mente atque in votis, ut ex trimetri Euripidei configuratione criteria enuclearem, quibus non modo superstitem, sed etiam deperditarum fabularum chronologiam aliquantiens deinire*. (*Tragodumenon...*, p. 134).

¹³ C.F. Müller: *De pedibus solutis in dialogorum senariis Aeschyli, Sophoclis, Euripidis*. Berlin 1966; Zieliński himself modestly concedes that yet another work related to the problem *supervacaneum quispiam judicaverit* (*Tragodumenon...*, p. 133); among others to be mentioned are J. Rumpel (“Die Auflösungen im Trimeter des Euripides.” *Philologus* 1866, no. 24) and H. Zirndorfer (*De chronologia fabularum Euripidearum disputationes*. Marburg 1839), though

for years to come formed the “canon” against which all subsequent works related to tragic metre and Euripidean chronology were to be measured.¹⁴

Indeed, what was lost of Athenian drama is of chief interest to Zieliński in all of his *Tragodumena*, being the common ground linking its three so diverse in their scope “books.” The first, *De locis tragoediae graecae rudimentalibus* provides a brilliant (much ahead of its time) narratological framework for the study of the plots of fragmentary tragedies. The last, *De Iphigeniae et Danaes mythopoeia tragica*, puts this formidable theoretical apparatus to work, as Zieliński traces the tangled ways in which these two myths were handled in both extant and lost dramas of classical Athens. This last book is, of course, but a sample of Zieliński’s studies in the reconstruction of lost tragedies.¹⁵

Turning from Melpomene to Thalia we go back to Zieliński’s early work related to Old Attic Comedy: his aforementioned *Gliederung* and *Die Märchenkomödie in Athen*, the latter subsequently reprinted in the first volume of the *Iresione*. The impact and importance of *Die Gliederung* to the study of the structure of Aristophanic and earlier comic drama is indeed difficult to overstate. The fundamental categories of epirrhematic syzygy or structural elements of the comic agon,¹⁶ still widely used in scholarly literature, are Zieliński’s very own, original contribution to the study of this subject. The *Märchenkomödie*, though lacking the essential scholarly apparatus,¹⁷ proved a brilliantly intuitive stroke in the right direction by connecting Greek comedy with the lore of the folk, one which proved so fruitful

the latter’s findings, according to Zieliński himself, were far from successful (*Tragodumenon...*, pp. 133, 139).

¹⁴ Among which mentioned should be: J. Descroix: *Le trimètre iambique des iambographes à la Comédie Nouvelle*. Mâçon 1931; E. Ceadel: “Resolved feet in the trimeters of Euripides and the chronology of the plays.” *CQ* 1941, no. 35; J. Irigoien: *Lois et règles dans le trimètre iambique et le tetramètre trochaeique*. *REG* 1959, no. 72; Devine and Stephens: *Rules...*, and, most importantly, M. Cropp and G. Fick: *Resolutions and Chronology in Euripides. The Fragmentary Tragedies*. London 1985 (*BICS Supplement* no. 43).

¹⁵ These are: “De Alceonis Corinthii fabula Euripidea.” *Mnemosyne* 1922, no. 50; “De Hercule tragico deque Heralidarum tetralogia Aeschylea.” *Eos* 1921—1922, no. 25; “De Euripidis Thebaide posteriore.” *Mnemosyne* 1924, no. 52; “De Sophoclis fabula ignota.” *Eos* 1924, no. 27; “De Aiakis Locrensis fabula Sophoclea.” *Eos* 1925, no. 28; „De Auge Euripidea.” *Eos* 1927, no. 30; „De Andromacha posthomeric.” *Eos* 1928, no. 31; “Flebilis Ino.” *Eos* 1929, no. 32. According to Zieliński himself (“De Andromacha...” p. 33) these were to be included in a later edition of his *Tragodumena* (cf. Srebrny: *Teatr...*, pp. 154ff).

¹⁶ Which are *odē*, *katakeleusmos*, *epirrhēma*, *pnigos* and the corresponding agonal *antodē*, *antikatakeleusmos*, *antepirrhēma* and *antipnigos*, all concluded with a *sphragis*; according to Körte (RE 21.1248, s.v. *Komödie*) this description made “den stärksten Fortschritt, den die Betrachtung der Komposition der alten K.[omödie] in der Neuzeit gemacht hat.” Cf. G.M. Sifakis: “The Structure of Aristophanic Comedy.” *JHS* 1992, no. 12, pp. 123ff.

¹⁷ Cf. the critical remarks of K.J. Reckford in his *Aristophanes’ Old and New Comedy*. The University of North Carolina Press 1987, p. 89 (who nicknames Zieliński “Theodor”); Reckford himself however concedes that Zieliński had the “right instinct.”

in the later works of the Cambridge “Myth and Ritual School,”¹⁸ and is acknowledged as such in more recent studies.¹⁹

Of equal importance to the modern Hellenist is Zieliński’s *Iresione*, a collection of his *kleine Schriften* (many of them not quite deserving the epithet) in a two-volume multilingual (German, English, Italian, Latin and French) book comprising his most important previously published essays and lectures. These fall roughly into two subjects particularly dear to Zieliński: Greek drama (volume I) and ancient religions (volume II). True, some, perhaps even many of these have already become obsolete. Even with the slowly-paced progress of classical studies, an entire century is more than it takes to render defunct any opinion, assumption or orthodoxy. It is all the more telling therefore that some of the essays from the *Iresione*, whose first publication significantly precedes their reappearance in these two volumes, are still considered to be important contributions and that in the fields which are subject to a relatively fast (by the standards of classics) development as *Excuse zu den Trachinierinnen* or *Erysichthon*.

One might only regret that the thematic constraints excluded from the *Iresione* many other valuable essays, as the groundbreaking study of “The Treatment of Simultaneous Events in Ancient Epic,” originally published in 1901 in German,²⁰ and recently republished (in an abbreviated form) in de Jong’s collection of landmark contributions to the Homeric studies.²¹ Its basic premise, is that

when the poet is dealing with two actions which in the normal course of events we would think of as being parallel and which any modern poet would represent as such, and does not wish to pass over either of them, he reports both of them as sequential, not as simultaneous events [emphases from the original].²²

Like his masterful analysis of Euripidean trimeters, this premise too was later on revealingly nicknamed as “Zielinski’s law.” Though subsequently many scholars have debated its validity, it has been quite recently vindicated as defining “a real and significant peculiarity of Homeric narrative.”²³

¹⁸ Ironically though F.M. Cornford in his *Origin of Attic Comedy* (London 1914) does not refer to *Märchenkomödie*, but he draws heavily on Zieliński’s study of the comic *agōn* in the latter’s *Gliederung*.

¹⁹ For example, K.S. Rothwell’s recent: *Nature, Culture and the Origin of Attic Comedy* (Cambridge 2007) more than once acknowledges its debt to Zieliński’s *Märchenkomödie* (e.g. fns 55 and 58, p. 259, fn. 68, p. 260). Cf. Sifakis: “The Structure...”, p. 136.

²⁰ “Die Behandlung gleichzeitiger Ereignisse im antiken Epos.” *Philologus* Supplement 1899—1901, no. 8, pp. 407—449.

²¹ I. de Jong, ed.: *Homer. Critical Assessments*. V. I—IV, London 1999; Zieliński’s essay is placed among those dealing with “narrative techniques” in vol. IV, pp. 317—327.

²² T. Zieliński: “The Treatment...”, p. 321, in: I. de Jong: *Homer...*, v. 4.

²³ R. Scodel: “Zielinski’s law reconsidered.” *TAPhA* 2008, no. 138, 108 (cf. 107ff for a brief outline of the debate); to be sure, Scodel does not simply restate Zieliński’s premises, arguing instead for a more limited applicability of his “law.”

Apart from these landmark scholarly works, classical studies — and that not only in Russia and Poland, but also in Germany and the English-speaking countries — owe a great deal to Zieliński's popularizing writings addressed to the common public. In fact, a strict distinction between the “scholarly” and the “popular,” usually firmly upheld by other classicists of his (and not only)²⁴ age was not endorsed by Zieliński, which led many of his colleagues to find faults in his works, considering them “unscientific.”²⁵ Indeed, in one respect these charges were very much true: Zieliński's works did lack the stiffness and tormenting rigidity usually demanded by the standards of “scientific” classics:

A welcome note of enthusiasm and insight pervades the whole subject, and the clear-sighted and original ideas that are strewn throughout the pages must arrest the attention and compel thought. They are for the most part expressed with that characteristically Russian naïveté and use of vigorous and illuminating similes which give the style a flavor of the peculiar charm familiar to the readers of Russian literature.²⁶

Such was the opinion, perhaps nowadays ringing a politically incorrect tune, of the translators of Zieliński's (admittedly popular) *Our Debt to Antiquity*.

For some time now the Polish reader has had the unique opportunity to appreciate Zieliński's colourful prose style coupled with his vast knowledge and a fervent admiration for antiquity in his four-volume cycle entitled collectively *The Ancient World* (*Świat antyczny*), comprising *The Mythical Antiquity*, *The Greek Independence*, *The Roman Republic* and *The Roman Empire*.²⁷ The narrative, as the titles clearly suggest, takes us from the heroes²⁸ of the Greek myth to the last Roman emperors. Should anyone, however, expect a systematic, “scientific” historical lecture here, he will be in for a big surprise. *The Ancient World* is in the first place a true goldmine of fascinating anecdotes unaccompanied by hairsplitting discussions regarding their historicity. Many of them are, in fact, quite fictitious, and because of that usually passed over in silence in the more

²⁴ The most notable exception was Nietzsche, himself a spiritual mentor to Zieliński (cf. Gólik-Szarawarska: *Wieczna choreia...*).

²⁵ Srebrny: *Teatr...*, p. 144, fn. 3; cf. Srebrny: “Tadeusz Zieliński...”, pp. 12ff.

²⁶ T. Zieliński: *Our Debt to Antiquity*. Trans. [from German] by H.A. Strong and H. Stewart, London: Routledge 1909, p. vi.

²⁷ The first three were written in Russian and subsequently translated into Polish (of the Russian version only the first book was actually published); no English (nor German or French) translation is available.

²⁸ And heroes only. Unlike most handbooks of classical mythology not only does it leave out the Roman legends, but also dispenses with the traditional division between heroic myths and those related to gods and cosmogony; the latter are virtually absent from the book, as its ambition, according to Zieliński himself (in his “Afterword” to *Mythical Antiquity*) was to produce a “tragic mythology” (*mitologia tragiczna*); Srebrny (*Teatr...*, p. 141) points out that only this makes the *Mythical Antiquity* unique.

scholarly handbooks or at the best reduced to the core and colourless “fact” behind the captivating story. *The Ancient World*, however, is also a narrative of eulogy, where, in the best traditions of Winckelmann’s school the Greco-Roman antiquity is displayed in the serene light of a lofty ethical and aesthetic ideal, occasionally on the verge between the rosy and the nauseating. The fact that despite this sentimental straightjacket it reads like an engrossing novel is ample testimony to its literary merit.

The Religions of the Ancient World, yet another multi-volume study of Zieliński,²⁹ his last work, and reportedly his *opus magnum* takes us from the cults of the Greek city-states to the ascendancy of Christianity. If *The Ancient World* with its unpretentious flouting of historical criticism and its novelistic form stood firmly on the side of the “popular” as opposed to the “scholarly,” *The Religions* are a clear-cut example of Zieliński’s notorious tendency to blur the distinction between these two. Its impact on the “serious” side of classics can be measured not only by the fact that its first volume has been translated into French and English,³⁰ but most importantly that it is still referred to in modern,³¹ indeed sometimes quite recent studies,³² and was subject to scholarly scrutiny in various academic periodicals. It is, however, precisely the authors of these reviews, who, while not infrequently sympathetic to the book’s literary merits and the author’s ardent admiration of Greek antiquity, pointed to its “unscholarly” character. And this time their criticism seems to be justified far beyond the usual complaints about the “un-classical” style of Zieliński’s prose. Like many of his other works, this too has not been written without *studium*; quite unfortunately though, this time also not without *ira*.

“[I]t is not historical in temper” — we read in Shorey’s otherwise sympathetic review; “A book which cautious students may approach with suspicion, distrusting

²⁹ Comprising six parts altogether: 1. *Religia starożytnej Grecji* (‘The Religion of Ancient Greece’; trans. from Russian into Polish by S. Srebrny; 1st ed. 1921; 2nd ed. Warszawa—Kraków 1937; 3rd ed. Wrocław 1991 (together with 2nd); 4th ed. 2001, Toruń); 2. *Religia hellenizmu* (‘The Religion of Hellenism’; trans. from Russian into Polish by G. Pianko; 1st ed. Warszawa—Kraków 1925; 2nd ed. Wrocław 1991 (together with 1st); 3rd ed. Toruń 2001); 3. *Hellenizm i judaizm* (‘Hellenism and Judaism’; 1st ed., vv. i—ii, Warszawa—Kraków 1927; 2nd ed. Toruń 2000); *Religia rzeszypolitej rzymskiej* (‘The Religion of Roman Republic’; 1st ed., vv. i—ii, Warszawa—Kraków 1933—1934; 2nd ed. 2000, Toruń); *Religia cesarstwa rzymskiego* (‘The Religion of Roman Empire’; 1st ed. Toruń 1999); *Chrześcijaństwo antyczne* (‘Ancient Christianity’; 1st ed. Touń 1999).

³⁰ T. Zieliński: *La Religion de la Grèce antique*. Trans. by A. Fichelle, Paris 1926; *The Religion of Ancient Greece. An Outline*. Trans. by G. Rapall Noyes. Oxford 1926.

³¹ For example M.P. Nilsson: *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*. München, 1955 (2nd ed.), v. 1, p. 66; W. Burkert. *Greek Religion*. Trans. by J. Raffan. Cambridge, MA, 1985, p. 343 (bibliographic mention only).

³² For example M. Sewall-Rutter (*Guilt by Descent. Moral Inheritance and Decision Making in Greek Tragedy*. Oxford 2007, pp. 142ff) in his discussion of the relationship between Zeus and Moira (Fate).

its charm and vitality” wrote Linforth in his laudatory article;³³ McCartney, less inclined to the discourse of praise, speaks *en passant* of “[...] a religious interpretation of Greek religion,”³⁴ which, for all its absurdity, is unfortunately the work’s briefest and yet most succinct *résumé*. Yet its harshest critic, whose adverse judgments unfortunately can hardly be refuted, came from the province of German *Religionsgeschichte*: Kurt Latte — then yet to become a renown student of Roman religion. Complaining of Zieliński’s “Einseitigkeit,” of his selective choice of evidence and its “dogmatische Auslegung, die völlig ungriechisch ist,” he ruthlessly pinpoints its factual mistakes and methodological blemishes to which he adds an equally critical appraisal of its formal, stylistic merits

eine weichliche, stellenweise süssliche Stimmung, deren Lieblingsworte joli, charmant, caessant sind, verfälscht durchweg die herbe Grösse der antiken Religiosität.³⁵

It is not my intention, however, to rehearse the objections made by specialists in the field, nor to present, armed with the enormous apparatus of recent scholarship, yet another review of Zieliński’s work. For all its faults and beyond its “weichliche” and “süssliche Stimmung”, *The Religions* still have something to offer.

The problem rests elsewhere, and is only foreshadowed in the first volume, with which a wider scholarly public has been acquainted. And it lies not so much in Zieliński’s fervent admiration of Graeco-Roman antiquity, which so frequently got the better of his enviable critical acumen here, as in sentiments of quite the opposite value, shaping his appreciation of what in his discussion came to be a comparative paradigm to the religions of the Greeks and Romans: Judaism. A negative paradigm, to be sure. One, furthermore, which requires no philological hairsplitting or close reading between the lines to be established as such. For the study’s anti-Judaism is professed and celebrated throughout, and there is little wonder why. One of its fundamental premises, displayed as such among the so-called “axioms” at the beginning of each volume,³⁶ was that the true “Old Testament” to Christianity (Zieliński himself was a fervent believer) is the religion of Greece and Rome.³⁷ To be sure, he did acknowledge the fact that the culture and

³³ I.M. Linforth [Review of the English translation]: *The Journal of Religion*, 1927, no. 7.5/6; Linforth however was (along with M. Roztovtzeff and G.C. Fiske) one of those to whose efforts this translation owes its existence (cf. *The Religion...*, p. v).

³⁴ E.S. McCartney: [Review of the English translation]. *CJ* 1928, no. 24.4, p. 307; on the very same page he asks rhetorically “Is it not possible to make a pious study of Greek religion without sacrificing scholarly caution and precaution?”

³⁵ K. Latte: [Review of the French translation]. *Gnomon* 1926, no. 2.11, pp. 650—653.

³⁶ Six sentimental truisms, testimony to Latte’s “weichliche und süssliche,” the bulk of them taken out as quotations from the text of the *Religions*.

³⁷ Being a Catholic of the pre-Vaticanum church Zieliński mistrusted both Judaism and Protestantism, considering the latter to be an attempt at re-Judaisation of Christianity (*The Religion...*,

beliefs of the ancient Jews also did have some influence upon the (then) fledgling religion, as in the “poison introduced by Judaism into Christianity,” “the fatal gift of intolerance,” which ultimately “proved to be a two-edged sword” when “the Christians turned it against their own masters.”³⁸

These sentiments, already stamped upon the translated and widely read *Religion of Ancient Greece*, have not escaped critical attention.³⁹ Unfortunately they are yet intensified in the subsequent volumes of *The Religions*. The third, *Hellenism and Judaism*, as the title itself explains, offers a systematic comparison between the two, with quite predictable results. Bristling with quotations and references (yet another testimony to Zieliński’s masterful knowledge of source material) it takes the reader on a dubious intellectual tour, where he is to learn of the ineptitude of Jewish scientific speculation, as opposed to the brilliant thought of the Greeks;⁴⁰ of their ridiculous religious customs: circumcision,⁴¹ the Sabbath⁴² and the doctrine of purity,⁴³ as opposed to the serene beauty of Hellenic rituals⁴⁴; of

p. 222); an interesting anecdote was recorded by Luria (“Wspomnienia...”, pp. 417ff): during a lecture on ancient Greek religion Zieliński asked his audience: “[...] would the Mother of God listen to the prayer of an innocent Greek girl addressed to Demeter? Would she accept it?” to this he firmly assented: “But of course she would, since the prayer was honest and came from her heart.” When some of the students exchanged ironic smiles, Zieliński fell into anger and almost yelled: “My lectures are only for Christian believers, Catholic and Orthodox. I advise both Protestants and Jews to stay out; their religion is not living faith but cold calculation!” („Wykładam tylko dla wierzących chrześcijan — dla prawosławnych i katolików. Nie radzę uczęszczać na te wykłady protestantom i Żydom — ich przekonania religijne opierają się nie na żywej wierze, ale na zimnym rozumie!”).

³⁸ T. Zieliński: *The Religion...*, pp. 16, 216.

³⁹ “[I]t is an indirect method of calling attention to some of the weaknesses of Judaism, against which the author seems to have some prejudice,” E.S. McCartney: [Review of *The Religion...*]. *CJ* 1928, no. 23.4, p. 307; “A certain amount of space is devoted, rather needlessly, to expressions of mildly anti-Jewish feeling,” H.J.R.: [Review of *La Religion*]. *JHS* 1926, no. 46.2; cf. Rose’s review of *Iresione* vol. 2 (devoted to the study of ancient religions): “A certain dislike of Jews and Judaism may here and there be detected,” *CR* 1938, no. 52.2.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 87—92.

⁴¹ “Jehovah chose as a symbol of his covenant a bodily part which even the savages are ashamed to show, of which decent people in a civilized world prefer not to speak at all, and the less decent when mentioning it do it only for the purpose of dirty humour. Let us be honest: with this sign of his covenant Jehovah made a laughing stock of his people among other nations” (“Jehowa wybrał dla symbolizacji swego przymierza taką część ciała człowieka, którą nawet dzikusy wstydzą się pokazywać, o której ludzie przyzwoici w świecie kulturalnym woła nie mówić wcale, a mniej przyzwoici, jeżeli i mówią, to dla wywołania sprośnego śmiechu. Nie, bądźmy szczerzy: tym znakiem swego przymierza Jehowa ośmieszył swój lud wśród wszystkich narodów na świecie.” *Hellenizm i judaizm*, p. 112); a Greek on the other hand manifested his devotion by... garlands and hair-offerings (*ibidem*, p. 111).

⁴² With its strict rules (*ibidem*, pp. 128ff) and the legalistic approach to their circumvention (pp. 135ff), as opposed to the colourful festivals of the Greeks and their deep regard for work.

⁴³ With its casuistic treatment of food purity, as opposed to Greek rational medicine (*ibidem*, pp. 140ff).

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 108—143.

its immoral eschatological dualism, as opposed to the inclusive ideas of the Greek mystery cults,⁴⁵ and finally of Israel's extermination of the Kanaanites,⁴⁶ as well as their historical responsibility for both ancient and modern anti-Semitism.⁴⁷ Yet the most idiosyncratic theories are to be found in the concluding volume of the study, Zieliński's "child of misery," "Ancient Christianity":⁴⁸

Having planted into Christianity the seeds of intolerance towards infidels, the Jews became its victims themselves. There is a clear and terrible lesson in this, for because of that they have lost the right to complain: *patere legem quam ipse tulisti* [suffer the law which you have laid down yourself] — harsh words indeed, but quite right.⁴⁹

Arguments like this, following upon absurd digressions on the ethnic identity of Christ (not quite Jewish, of course⁵⁰) seemed all the more shocking given the historical circumstances in which Zieliński's last volume was completed. One year after the publication of "Ancient Christianity" a distinguished Polish classicist, Zygmunt Kubiak wrote:

I cannot but wonder, if Zieliński did or did not know about what was going on in Germany and in occupied Europe the years 1940—1943, i.e. precisely when he himself was expressing such deep contempt of Judaism, of which Hitler decided to rid the world.⁵¹

Kubiak may well have gone too far in his criticism. The fate of the European Jews was not common knowledge throughout World War II, and there is no reason

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 151—165.

⁴⁶ Zieliński himself is well aware of the pitfalls to which this particular argument draws him: "I take no pleasure in dwelling on this subject. It is a commonplace in anti-Semitic brochures..." ("Niechętnie poruszam ten temat. Figuruje on stale w broszurkach antysemitów"); yet in spite of this, he devotes to it two pages (66ff).

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 277—285.

⁴⁸ M. Plezia: "'Dziecię niedoli'. Ostatnie dzieło Tadeusza Zielińskiego." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 1983, nr 15.

⁴⁹ "Żydzi, zaszczerpiwszy chrześcijaństwu nietolerancję względem innowierców, sami stali się jej ofiarami. Tkwi w tym jasna, wielka, straszna nauka, gdyż przez to stracili prawo skargi: *patere legem quam ipse tulisti* — to surowe, ale słuszne słowo." *Chrześcijaństwo Antyczne*, p. 343; por. *Hellenizm i judaizm*, p. 68

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 307ff.

⁵¹ "Nie mogę nie zastanowić się, czy Zieliński nie wiedział, czy wiedział o tym, co się działo w Niemczech i w podbitej Europie właśnie w latach 1940—1943, gdy on wyrażał tak głęboką wzdgarę wobec judaizmu, od którego Hitler postanowił świat uwolnić," Z. Kubiak: "Tadeusz Zieliński wobec dwóch rewolucji, bolszewickiej i hitlerowskiej." *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2000, nr 10; a reply to Kubiak's criticism was given in the same weekly (2000, 33) by J. Gordziałkowski ("Antyjudaizm Tadeusza Zielińskiego"), who nonetheless stresses that Zieliński's anti-Judaism "is undeniable" ("zarzut antyjudaizmu nie podlega wątpliwości").

to suppose that the old and sick Zieliński had any particular insight into this. Furthermore, the *Ancient Christianity* written by him in the 1940s is in fact a reworked version of what has almost been completed before the outbreak of the war and perished in a fire in 1939. To be sure, pre-war Poland was a place where Jews enjoyed neither respect, nor, in fact, tolerance; a place where the public life was not infrequently disrupted by paroxysms of anti-Semitism fuelled by the Catholic Church.⁵² Zieliński must have been aware of that (see below). And though it certainly does not work to his credit, it does bring out an important issue in our appraisal of his morally questionable attitudes expressed on the pages of his *Religions*.

For however unattractive (a conscious euphemism), such specimens of Zieliński's prose may — or at least should — seem to the modern reader (and these are just some examples), it must be kept in mind they have originated in a very particular *cultural* context. This is best illustrated by yet a passage from *Hellenism and Judaism*, where Zieliński takes the opportunity to make a programmatic statement:

I cannot hope to avoid the preposterous question of whether the author of this study is a philo-Semite or an anti-Semite. And yet I will do my best to ensure that this unnecessary curiosity receives no satisfying answer.⁵³

In an age when even anti-Semites are at pains to dispel any suspicions of anti-Semitism such blatant flouting of this norm of public discourse is bound to shock. This is, however, where the most important difference between the context in which the study was created and that in which it has been recently republished comes to light. For *The Religions* are a product of a social and intellectual *milieu* where anti-Semitism was (regrettably) still more a matter of opinion than of morality.

And yet in spite of all this, to accuse Zieliński of racial prejudices against Jews would certainly be wrong (though, admittedly, distinguishing anti-Judaism from anti-Semitism in our times may well appear to nothing more than specious hairsplitting).⁵⁴ He did attempt to distance himself from such attitudes on the pages of his *Religions*, most notably in what directly follows on his terrible *patere legem*:

And thus anti-Semitism came to existence. The notion being just as inept and wicked, as the thing itself. It came to existence, not for the first time, of

⁵² For which cf. R. Modras: *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933—1939*. London 1994.

⁵³ “[N]ie mam żadnej nadziei, żeby mi się udało uniknąć niedorzecznego zapytania: czy autor tej rozprawy jest filosemitą, czy antysemitą? Otóż postaram się przynajmniej, żeby ta niepotrzebna ciekawość żadnej zadowolającej odpowiedzi nie otrzymała.” *Hellenizm i judaizm*, p. 36; elsewhere Zieliński considers the notions of anti-Semitism itself as “absurd” (ibidem, p. 278).

⁵⁴ Zieliński's answer to this that the subject of his study is ancient Judaism (e.g. *Hellenizm i judaizm*, p. 11) is hardly persuasive, given the license he gives himself to dubious historiosophic excursions.

course, but with an amplified force in the Middle Ages [...]. As for nowadays, I would have a lot to say about what is presently going on with regard to this matter. But we all know it well enough.⁵⁵

The mildness of Zieliński's tempered allusions contrasts starkly with the inexplicable atrocity of what was alluded to. Perhaps too starkly. His deeds, however, provide better testimony to his stance than his euphemisms and circumlocutions. As the tides of anti-Semitism swept through the pre-war Poland and Europe, finding their way also to universities and campuses, it was no one else but Zieliński himself who put his enormous authority on the line in opposing a heinous motion of his "colleagues" to exclude students of Jewish origin from membership in the Polish Philological Society (the infamous Aryan paragraph). The motion was cancelled.⁵⁶

In concluding these lengthy remarks on *some* of the brilliant accomplishments of this truly magnificent figure, as well as on some of his judgments and assumptions, which to the modern reader seem (or should seem) at the very least questionable, a word of apology seems in order. It is not for the sake of journalistic sensation-seeking, that these questions were raised. Nor is it yet another event in the recent crop of so-called studies whose sole purpose is to denigrate the memory of a great man by studiously picking out some less than flattering, obscure facts and statements from his past. For to experience Zieliński's undeniable anti-Judaism one needs not delve into the world of academic anecdote and hearsay, nor does it require a laborious struggle with unpublished manuscripts stowed away in library archives. On the contrary, it is "right there," readily available, in his recently (re-)published *Religions*,⁵⁷ which for many a reader may well be the first encounter with Zieliński's work. And not infrequently the last.⁵⁸ His most valuable contributions to classical studies, on the other hand, those which should be on the bookshelf of every serious student of ancient Greek literature, are nowadays virtually inaccessible.

⁵⁵ "Powstał antysemityzm. Termin tak samo niecny i głupi, jak i sama rzecz. Powstał, nie po raz pierwszy, dajmy na to, ale ze spotęgowaną siłą w ciągu średniowiecza [...]. Obecnie miałbym wiele do powiedzenia o tym, co się dzieje w zasięgu tej sprawy. Ale i tak wiemy o tym wszyscy." *Chrześcijaństwo Antyczne*, pp. 543ff; cf. his remarks in *Hellenizm i judaizm*, p. 69; and his condemnation of anti-Semitism on p. 281.

⁵⁶ Cf. G. Pianko: "Tadeusz Zieliński w Warszawie." *Meander* 1960, nr 15, p. 61; Gordziałkowski: "Antyjudajizm..."

⁵⁷ The last two parts, "The Religion of Roman Empire" and "Ancient Christianity" were published for the first time in 1999 (see fn. 29).

⁵⁸ The emotional assertion of Kubiak (see fn. 44): "Never again will I read Zieliński" ("Ja Tadeusza Zielińskiego czytać już nie będę"), though exaggerated, is good testimony to the sentiments of a sensitive modern reader of the *Religions*.