

TADEUSZ ZIELIŃSKI (1859–1944),  
A REAPPRAISAL *SINE IRA ET STUDIO*<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

*The outstanding contribution to classical scholarship made by Tadeusz Zieliński and his unusual Polish, Russian, and German cultural background warrant a new discussion eighty years after his death. This brilliant philologist and pioneer of classical reception inspired great admiration in his time. However, his philosophical beliefs and private life caused public controversies that need reassessing today on the basis of a review of Zieliński's life and career within their historical and cultural context.*

KEYWORDS

*classical scholarship in the Russian Empire,  
Poles at Russian universities in 19th and early 20th c.,  
classical scholarship in post-revolutionary Russia,  
St Petersburg University, University of Leipzig, University of Warsaw*

**Preamble**

**E**ighty years after Tadeusz Zieliński's death, the memory of his, his generation's, and even his students' accomplishments appears — naturally enough — somewhat blurred in his native country and beyond. A couple of recent papers published about him in Poland reflect the need for a reconsideration not only of his academic career and scholarly achievements, but also of his rather unusual private life and beliefs;<sup>2</sup> the latter having generated, during his lifetime and posthumously, a wave of controversy and understandable censure.

This is an attempt to respond to that need by providing an up-to-date profile of Zieliński as seen from the distance of an entire century of significant transformations. Based on a review of the historical and cultural background of Zieliński's lifetime and numerous biographical studies written since the end of WW2, the present paper has benefitted

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my thanks to the anonymous reviewers of this article for their insightful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Śmiechowicz, Olga. „Skrzydlaty homo academicus. Portret Tadeusza Zielińskiego w sto sześćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin,” *Meander* 74 (2019), 123–135 and Nowak, Piotr, „Pierwszy Hellen polski,” *Kronos* 4 (2022), 251–273.

from illuminating new sources and assessments of the great classicist that became available in the 21st century.<sup>3</sup>

Zieliński, an exceptional figure in the history of classical scholarship, left an internationally recognized legacy and capable successors, but was, at the same time — as his autobiography, diary, and letters to friends and family reveal<sup>4</sup> — a man eternally unfulfilled, eager for acceptance, recognition, and understanding, convinced of the resentment, envy, and spite of many. His life and mentality were undoubtedly shaped by this typical coping mechanism, shared by hosts of expats displaced in the 19th and 20th centuries by political events and hostile circumstances, and returning to the country of their origin once the situation changed: a scenario that is also familiar to post-communist Europe. Zieliński, an eminent scholar with a strong sense of Polish identity,<sup>5</sup> was forced by an accident of history to develop and function outside of Poland for three-quarters of his life: born and educated in Tsarist Russia, sent to Germany for an extended period of advanced study, he flourished as an academic teacher and researcher after his return to St Petersburg despite his ethnic background. The October Revolution of 1917 and the restoration of Polish sovereignty in 1918 contributed to his move to Poland, where he was enthusiastically received. An exceptionally active retirement followed the years of his brilliant professorship at the University of Warsaw. That happy period ended when fate, in the guise of WW2, and namely of a Nazi bomb, deprived him in 1939 of a roof over his head, destroyed his library, turned to ashes the manuscript of his most recent work, and took away what was left of his health. The disoriented, half-paralyzed old man, expatriated once again, found refuge in the small Bavarian town of Schondorf, where his son Felix had been a schoolteacher for almost two decades. He spent the last five years of his life in a miserable exile in wartime Germany, without reliable news from Poland or practically any news from his children in Soviet Russia. His age and the enormous respect he enjoyed in pre-war Germany as a scholar were most likely the reasons why his presence in the provincial Schondorf was tolerated by the Nazi authorities, although barely so, as the local gymnasium was forced to withdraw its initial offer of lodging on its premises.

<sup>3</sup> Zieliński's *Autobiography* and *Diary*, publ. in Polish in 2005 and in German in 2012; Lukianchenko's publication of Zieliński's letters to his youngest children in 2005–2011; the chapters of Axer, von Albrecht, and Gavrillov in the Polish, German, and Russian publications marking the 150th anniversary of Zieliński's birth in 2011–2012. See also Geremek 2005; Gindin 2005–2011; Dubielzig 2009; Gillmeister 2011, 2013, 2015; Kucharski 2011; and Olszaniec 2016.

<sup>4</sup> See the previous note, as well as Zieliński 1997.

<sup>5</sup> See Starnawski, 2009–2012, 323–325.

Despite his advancing physical infirmity and the blow caused by the premature death of his daughter, his indomitable willpower allowed him to complete the “child of woe,” the last work of his life, aptly described not as a “treatise in religious studies” but a “*sui generis* testament of ideas formulated by a great intellectual.”<sup>6</sup> He passed away soon after that, a year before Hitler’s defeat.

### **The Early Years**

Tadeusz Zieliński, son of Franciszek and Ludwika née Grudzińska, was born on September 14, 1859 on his maternal grandparents’ estate, Skrzypczyńce, Kaniów County, Kiev Governorate of the Russian Empire. He was orphaned by his mother, who contracted tuberculosis and died in the year of the January Uprising (1863) against Russian occupation, having come back to Skrzypczyńce after unsuccessful treatment in Nice. His father, a lawyer, worked in St Petersburg for the Office of State Control. After his wife died, Franciszek left his younger, sickly son with the grandparents and brought Tadeusz to the capital. He assumed his older son’s upbringing and a relatively comprehensive home education until his tenth birthday.

Anna Nikolajewna Kutuzowa, daughter of a Russian Orthodox chaplain at the Russian Embassy in Berlin, was hired to help the family during the illness of Tadeusz’s mother. After Ludwika’s death, Anna travelled to St Petersburg with Franciszek and Tadeusz; continuing to care for the boy, she also taught him French. The younger son, Władysław, joined the household in 1867; Anna, who was by then married to Franciszek, was unable or unwilling to establish friendly relations with him. From Franciszek’s second marriage, two children were soon born, Aleksander and Maria (Mania).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jerzy Axer in his essay, *Tadeusz Zieliński wśród obcych*, published in the 2011–2012 volumes marking the 150th anniversary of his birth in Polish (p. 22), German (p. 21), and Russian (p. 21). Zieliński, in the preface to *Chrześcijaństwo antyczne*, the last volume of *Religie świata antycznego*, writes that the book is a kind of “testament and confession” (Zieliński, 1999, 19). See also Geremek, 2003, 307.

<sup>7</sup> The boy died in early childhood and the girl attended the Smolny Institute (its Alexandrian department was specifically intended for the daughters of higher/rank officers, civil servants, and Russian Orthodox and Protestant clergy). When Anna died, Tadeusz attempted to take care of Maria; after his marriage, she joined his household when she was already an adult. She concealed from her brother a romantic attachment to a Russian colonel in the military police, and eventually travelled with him to Siberia, where they got married. In 1924 Tadeusz wryly commented on this turn of events: “The best that came out of it was that the guy promptly died with the rank of general, which

Tadeusz's father instilled in him a love for Polish poetry, especially for Mickiewicz; it was instrumental in the boy developing strong patriotic and religious feelings. He also taught him Latin, French, and sciences to such a solid extent that Tadeusz passed the entry exams to the evangelical St Anne's gymnasium in St Petersburg in 1869, although the language of instruction at the school was German. To facilitate its study, the boy lodged with Mr Meyer, one of the teachers, whose wife ran a boarding pension. Zieliński mastered the new language within one semester.

Franciszek died in 1873, leaving his family in severe financial straits caused by his extended illness and the loss of his position. Aleksy, his younger brother (a railway engineer), took care of Tadeusz and Władysław with the help of his wife Jewgenia. However, since the couple was hostile to Franciszek's second wife, they forbade the boys any contact with her as well as with their stepsiblings. When construction of the Ural railway forced Aleksy to move to Perm, the boys remained in St Petersburg to continue their studies: Tadeusz stayed at the St Anne's gymnasium, while Władysław, whose primary education was seriously neglected, attended the Institute for Orphans in Gatchina, 45 km south-west of St Petersburg; it was a good school, but with lower academic standards. Tadeusz's ill-fated summer vacation trip to their uncle in Perm in 1875, and his abandonment of any plans to study Engineering, strongly favoured by Aleksy, contributed to a complete breakdown of their relations.

Tadeusz continued to study at St Anne's, developing his philological interests under the direction of an excellent Latin and Greek teacher, Joseph König (1845–1910). He also enjoyed the special support of the school's director, Julius Kirchner (1823–1907), who provided him with financial assistance before the final exams, allowing him to focus on his studies and stop tutoring private pupils, his only source of income since the return from Perm.

### **Studies Abroad**

After Tadeusz successfully passed the exit exams in 1876, König advised him to accept a three-year bursary to study at the Russian Philological Seminary in Leipzig, founded three years earlier by the eminent Latinist Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl (1806–1876), who passed away a few months after Zieliński's arrival. Otto Ribbeck (1827–1898), also a Latinist, was

gave his widow the right to a pension." See *Autobiografia*, 2005, 88–89, 131. About the Smolny Institute, see Kula, 2005, 79–83.

appointed as the new director.<sup>8</sup> Zieliński, well versed in classical languages thanks to König, was also able to attend courses at the University of Leipzig conducted, among others, by Georg Curtius (1828–1885), Ludwig Lange (1825–1885), Johannes Overbeck (1826–1895), and Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920). In 1878, he won a competition organized by Ribbeck, submitting an essay about agons in Attic comedy.<sup>9</sup> In 1879, his final assignment was his Latin dissertation about the last years of the Second Punic War. An additional one-semester Russian bursary allowed Zieliński to defend its revised German version, *Die letzten Jahre des zweiten punischen Krieges. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde*, as a doctorate published in Leipzig with Teubner in 1880. The dissertation about agons in Attic comedy from 1878 earned him another Russian bursary: a so-called professorial stipend, intended for two years of further study abroad, later extended for an additional year. Zieliński welcomed the opportunity enthusiastically and followed the suggested itinerary: Munich (mainly to study art history), Vienna (Latin epigraphy, with Otto Hirschfeld), Venice and Florence (exploring ancient and Renaissance monuments), Rome (at the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut), and Naples (where he wrote *Un gruppo farnesiano ora del Museo di Napoli*).<sup>10</sup>

Zieliński's six-year studies abroad, during which he met many eminent European classicists of the time, ended with a tour of Greece and a stint at the German Archaeological Institute in Athens. He returned to St Petersburg in November 1882, visiting friends in Munich, Leipzig, and Berlin on the way.

### **The Return to St Petersburg and the Beginning of a University Career**

A one-year bursary granted for writing a Russian MA dissertation ensured a relatively undisturbed work on a new version of the Leipzig essay about agons in Attic comedy. He defended it successfully in late 1883 after passing his MA exam. In January 1884, Zieliński began to teach at the University. In the Fall, he was also tasked with teaching classical languages at the St Anne's gymnasium, now directed by Joseph König, who also offered him accommodation in his apartments at the

<sup>8</sup> For the history of the Russian Philological Seminary in Leipzig, see Schröder, 2014, 91–146. The list of the seminary students includes Zieliński (p. 144).

<sup>9</sup> *De disputationibus quae in comoedia Attica occurrunt*.

<sup>10</sup> Published in *Bullettino degli Annali dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 5 (1882), 99–101.

school. In May of the following year, Zieliński married Elizabeth (Lili) Luise Giebel (1862–1923), a Baltic German, sister of his schoolfriend Karl. Their son Felix (1886–1970) was the firstborn, followed by three daughters, Amata (Ludmila Beneshevich) (1888–1967), Kornelia (Zielińska-Kanokogi) (1889–1970), and Weronika Ludwika (1892–1942).<sup>11</sup>

The first years of his academic career in St Petersburg, particularly the fate of his doctorate on Old Attic comedy, provide an interesting insight into Zieliński's position at the university. Professor Karl Lugebil (1830–1886) refused to accept his dissertation, disappointed by its non-traditional character. Taking advantage of his book published for Ribbeck's jubilee, *Die Gliederung der altattischen Komödie* (1885), Zieliński asked Professor Ferdinand Hörschelmann (1834–1902) at Dorpat University (an institution historically well disposed towards Poles) whether he would accept the publication as a dissertation and grant him a doctoral degree. A favourable assessment from Erwin Rohde (1845–1898), an already recognized authority in the area of Greek literature, convinced Hörschelmann, who allowed Zieliński to defend *cum laude* his doctorate at Dorpat in 1886. International academic acceptance of the new theory about the structure of Greek comedy came only in 1892, after an endorsement by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848–1931) in his *Griechische Literatur des Altertums*, who repeated a similar gesture made by his father-in-law, Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903) in 1880 about *Die letzten Jahre des zweiten punischen Krieges*, Zieliński's doctorate from Leipzig.

However, before this final seal of approval, another German philologist, Friedrich Blass (1843–1907), who did not grasp the meaning of Zieliński's hypothesis and focused only on minor chronological inaccuracies, wrote a critical review of the book. Zieliński took it as an insult and published a harsh response, which prompted Johann August Nauck (1822–1892),<sup>12</sup> an eminent Hellenist from St Petersburg University, well disposed towards Zieliński, to give him some advice: "Your position in scholarship will not depend on what others write about you but on what you write yourself."<sup>13</sup> A few years later, still before von

<sup>11</sup> Lili did not speak Polish and the language spoken at home was German. Out of the four siblings, only Weronika became perfectly fluent in Polish, after moving to Poland in the early 1920s.

<sup>12</sup> Zieliński's high opinion of Nauck is well attested in the biography he wrote after his passing: „August Nauck. Ein Bild seines Lebens und seiner Werke,” *Jahresbericht über die Fortschritte der classischen Alterthumswissenschaft* 77 (1893), 1–65.

<sup>13</sup> *Autobiografia*, 2005, 122.

Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's commendation, Blass' criticism was redressed by Georg Kaibel (1849–1901), a classicist from Göttingen, who praised Zieliński's book and recognized its main conclusions about Attic comedy as valid.

The years 1885–1886, along with *Die Gliederung...* in the German (Leipzig), Russian, and German (Dorpat) versions, resulted in two more publications about Greek comedy: *Die Märchenkomödie in Athen* and *Quaestiones comicae (De partitione comica epirrhematum, De comoediae Palaeatticae reliquiis, De comoediae Doricae personis, De Menaechmorum paramythio, De Acca Larentia)*. In 1887, Zieliński was appointed associate professor, which forced him to abandon teaching at St Anne's Gymnasium. It also allowed him to move from his modest lodgings in Tsarskoye Selo to a larger apartment in St Petersburg and embark on his long-delayed honeymoon to Austria, northern Italy, and Germany.

### **Professorship at the University of St Petersburg**

Three years later, Zieliński was named full professor as the successor of the recently deceased Lugebil. In his *Autobiography* (1924), Zieliński deplores the infighting and intrigues in the academic community caused in part by the problems with academic autonomy and in part by the hostility towards people of different ethnic origins and religions. Harmonious collaboration with Bestuzhev Courses, a higher education institution for women that had been open since 1878 and was directed by the famous historian Konstantin Bestuzhev-Ryumin (1829–1897), and the position of full professor that Zieliński obtained there, contributed to a significant improvement of the material situation of his growing young family (by 1892, four children were already born).

Putting a considerable effort into improving his command of Russian, Zieliński developed his own lecturing style, which, in combination with well-selected topics, attracted large crowds of students. His growing interest in Cicero was reflected in lectures he gave about the orator and in a Russian translation of half of the extant speeches.<sup>14</sup> In 1895, on the occasion of Cicero's two-thousandth birth anniversary, Zieliński lectured on Cicero's reception in European culture at the Historical Society. A year later, the written version of the lecture was published in the prestigious

<sup>14</sup> Disappointed by the less than enthusiastic reception of the translation, Zieliński did not attempt to translate the remaining speeches (*Autobiografia*, 2005, 135) and included his translation with a commentary in a two-volume edition of Cicero translated by V.A. Aleksejev published in St Petersburg in 1901.

journal *Вестник Европы*; a revised and augmented German translation was issued by Teubner in 1897, entitled *Cicero im Walden der Jahrhunderte*. This innovative work rapidly became his best-known and widely recognized publication and, before WW2, already counted three revised editions (1908, 1912, and 1929). After WW2, there were many German reprints of the book; however, attempts to publish translations into Italian, English, and Polish (by Julian Krzyżanowski, 1892–1976) apparently failed because of prohibitively costly conditions imposed by Teubner.<sup>15</sup> An essay about the treatment of simultaneous events in the ancient epic poetry published in German under the title „Die Behandlung gleichzeitiger Ereignisse im antiken Epos” in *Philologus Suppl.-Band 8.3* (1901), 405–449, became another important scholarly success.

In 1903, Zieliński published a crucial, repeatedly translated into other languages and reprinted book about the importance of Antiquity and classical education for European culture, *Świat antyczny a my* [The Ancient World and Us], a set of eight lectures which appeared first in Russian in St Petersburg.<sup>16</sup> Continuing his research into Cicero, Zieliński wrote three important studies about rhythm in Ciceronian prose, published in 1904–1906.<sup>17</sup> Their conclusions were taken up by Albert Clark, an eminent British textual critic, in his edition of Cicero’s speeches produced by the Clarendon Press in Oxford.

In 1905, Nikolay Rayev (1856–1919) resigned from his post as director of the Bestuzhev Courses and founded History-Literature and Law Courses for Women at the Alexandrian section of the Smolny Institute, which soon became known as the Rayev Courses. Zieliński agreed to teach there, especially since his two elder daughters, Amata and Kornelia, attended the school. Having taught with well-documented success at Bestuzhev-Ryumin Higher Education Courses for Women since 1890 and at the Rayev Courses since their foundation in 1905, Zieliński remains one of the recognized pioneers and champions of university education for women.

<sup>15</sup> It would be very interesting to recover Krzyżanowski’s Polish translation, “modernize” it, and publish at some point in the near future.

<sup>16</sup> In 1905, the Russian version was reprinted; in 1905, the German version was published and reprinted in 1909, 1911, 1913, 1921; French and English translation appeared in 1909; Italian in 1910, Polish in 1922, Romanian in 1923, Serbian in 1929.

<sup>17</sup> „Das Clauselgesetz in Ciceros Reden. Grundzüge einer oratorischen Rhythmik,” *Philologus Suppl.-Band 9.4* (1904), 598–844; „Das Ausleben des Clauselgesetzes in der römischen Kunstprosa,” *Philologus Suppl.-Band 10.3* (1906), 429–466; and „Textkritik und Rhythmusgesetze in Ciceros Reden,” *Philologus* 65 n.F. 19 (1906), 604–629.



In 1906–1908, he assumed the function of dean of the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of St Petersburg, in spite of the chicaneries of anti-Polish professors who attempted to prevent the election of an ethnic Pole. Zieliński successfully faced the political turmoil, which disrupted the normal course of the teaching process during this period. In 1909 his best student, the ancient historian Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeff (1870–1952), organized the 25th anniversary of Zieliński's work at the St Petersburg University, crowned by a doctorate *honoris causa* granted to him by Moscow University.

### **Accusations of Impropriety and Questionable Morality**

In May 1910, the so-called Zieliński's Circle, ca. 40 people strong (composed of students from the university, Bestuzhev and Rayev Courses), embarked on a four-week-long excursion to Greece. Upon their return an unpleasant and humiliating period began for Zieliński: stories were being spread about his allegedly numerous affairs, which antagonized the community and allowed his adversaries to take advantage of the situation. His habit of holding seminars at home was openly criticized; students were discouraged from attending his lectures and participating in the "circle." These hostilities continued for a long time, i.e., until the Spring of 1913, when they petered out without achieving their goal, which was the public disgrace of the scholar. The gossip campaign failed despite two unrelated suicides among his students: of a young girl in unrequited love with her professor, and of Subbotina, a member of the "circle," brought to despair by her doctors' interdiction of intellectual effort.

Even if Zieliński — as seems likely — was not responsible for the tragic deaths of the two girls and had no improper relations with his female students, his several well-documented extramarital affairs with former students were detrimental to his reputation and provided fertile ground for gossip and accusations, a godsend for his adversaries. However, the university did not officially investigate the rumours, applied no preventive measures, and let the campaign against Zieliński take its course; without institutional support, it eventually lost momentum.

Zieliński describes this lengthy episode *sub rosa* in chapter XIX of *Autobiografia* (166–176), suggesting to his children, to whom this private biography was addressed, that his behaviour — however it might have been judged — was sanctioned by their mother, deceased in 1923. He also cryptically alludes there to the morally controversial position (171–172) he presented in his essay on Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, a play he called the "tragedy of fidelity" (*Вестник Европы* 47.11 (1912), 135–182).

The research conducted by Oleg Lukianchenko, Zieliński's grandson, has shown that he had three important extramarital affairs. The first one began several years after Weronika, the last child of Lili Zielińska, was born. In 1898, a former student and later a collaborator of Zieliński, Vera Petukhova, had a son with him, Adrian (adopted by her aunt, Jewgenia Piotrowska), followed two years later by a younger sister, Irina (deceased in an accident around 1927, when Zieliński was already in Poland). Twelve-year-old Adrian and ten-year-old Irina participated in the "circle's" excursion to Greece in 1910.

In November 1911, Ludmila Zawalishina, an alumna of the Bestuzhev Courses, had a son with Zieliński, Valentine. However, she soon completely broke off with her lover, preventing him from any contact with the child. Zieliński's two youngest daughters were born in 1913 (Tamara) and 1915 (Ariadna); their mother, Sofia Chervinska, attended Bestuzhev Courses and participated in the excursion to Greece in 1910. She was also a friend of Karin Borman, a Baltic German, the future wife of Felix Zieliński. The correspondence among Zieliński's children, initiated by Professor Lidia Winniczuk in 1958, reveals that he did not conceal from his four legitimate children the existence of the five extramarital ones and that there was some contact between the siblings.<sup>18</sup> Based on his mother's memoirs, Lukianchenko concluded that his grandfather's plans to bring Sofia Chervinska with their daughters to Poland were shattered by Sofia's unexpected decision to enter a convent and remain with her children in Połock.<sup>19</sup>

### **Publications in Russian**

Just before WW1, Zieliński began publishing a three-volume Russian translation of Sophocles' plays with excellent introductions and an innovative reconstruction of the lost plays. The publication was completed in 1915. In 1928 Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza issued a monograph with introductions to the plays translated into Polish, entitled *Sofokles i jego twórczość tragiczna* [Sophocles and His Tragedies] in the series *Biblioteka Narodowa*, continued by Ossolineum since 1933.

Two small volumes, *Historia kultury antycznej* [History of Ancient Culture], appeared in Russian in 1914 and again in 1915, *Religia starożytnej Grecji* [Religion of Ancient Greece] in 1917 also in Russian.

<sup>18</sup> See Lukianchenko in the volume for the 150th anniversary of his birth, 2011, 55–191. From the included letters, it is obvious that Amata, who got married in 1909, did not know Ariadna personally; they began to correspond in 1960, put in touch by Feliks.

<sup>19</sup> Lukianchenko, 2011, 71.

The same year, Zieliński started to write fairly frequent opinion pieces in newspapers, mainly highlighting the importance of classical culture and education. A selection of these articles was published by Hanna Geremek in 1999. He also wrote in Russian *The Attic Tales*, a collection of mythological stories for young readers that were later (1921–1922) published in several separate booklets by the Brothers Shabashnikov. Jakub Mortkowicz issued Polish translations of the myths between 1922 and 1936.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Russian Revolution and the New Career in Poland**

The October Revolution took away Zieliński's St Petersburg pension and his considerable savings. This financial blow, combined with difficult spells of serious food shortages, contributed to his decision to accept in 1918 the position of professor at the University of Warsaw. Using the pretext of a mission abroad, he planned to leave Russia with his wife and daughter Weronika. The influence of Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933), with whom he had become acquainted before the revolution, facilitated the departure. However, he had to leave his daughter in Russia as a hostage. The trip to Germany, France, Italy, and North Africa on which Zieliński embarked with his wife ended in Warsaw. His daughter's presence in St Petersburg forced him to return to Russia, and he was not allowed to leave until the signing of the Riga Treaty in 1921 ended the Polish–Soviet war. This time, he allegedly left to participate in the jubilee of the University of Padua; in fact, he travelled only to Warsaw, where he was received with all honours and offered an apartment at the University; he began to teach there and became one of the most popular professors.

In November 1923, he suffered a personal loss: his wife, Lilli, passed away. In his *Autobiography* (197–198),<sup>21</sup> dictated in German to Weronika in 1924, in Schondorf, he admitted that the unexpected death of his wife made him realize and feel his own advancing age. Still, his university career in Warsaw flourished, and his students and colleagues liked and admired him despite his difficulties in easily expressing his thoughts, lecturing, and writing in Polish. Making his scholarly achievements published in Russian accessible to Polish readers and continuing

<sup>20</sup> See Tadeusz Zieliński, *Queen of the Wind Maidens*, 2013, 5 and *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Antiquity. A Catalogue* published in 2013 by Katarzyna Marciniak and her team, available in the Open Access database *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* created in 2015–2022 under a European Research Council grant.

<sup>21</sup> *Mein Lebenslauf* published for the first time in Polish translation together with his Polish *Diary 1939–1944* by Hanna Geremek and Piotr Mitzner in 2005.

the great synthesis he launched in St Petersburg — *Religie świata starożytnego* [Religions of the Ancient World] became his focus. Stefan Srebrny translates from Russian volume 1 (*Religia Grecji* [Religion of Greece]), and Gabriela Pianko tackles volume 2 (*Religia Hellenizmu* [Religion of Hellenism]); both volumes appear in 1925. Zieliński published in Polish *Hellenism a Judaism* [Hellenism vs. Judaism] in 1927 and both parts of *Religia rzeszypospolitej rzymskiej* [Religion of the Roman Republic] in 1933–1934. Today's Polish scholars struggle with the assessment of the 1927 volume, torn between admiration for Zieliński's erudition and disgust for his far-fetched accusations against Judaism, only marginally offset by his repeated condemnations of antisemitism.<sup>22</sup> Zieliński's treatment of Judaism was also noted and criticized in reviews of the English<sup>23</sup> and French<sup>24</sup> translations of *The Religion of Greece*.<sup>25</sup> I will return to this issue at the end of this paper when discussing the final volume of the series, *The Ancient Christianity*.

In 1935 Zieliński officially retired, but continued teaching and researching, publishing many studies in Polish and on themes related to Polish literature. Despite occasional controversies, he became a widely recognized and admired scholarly, literary, and intellectual authority.

## World War II

Four years later, the quasi-complete manuscript of volume 5, *Religia imperium rzymskiego* [Religion of the Roman Empire], was turned to ashes in the fire of Zieliński's apartment during the bombing of the University of Warsaw. As already mentioned, the homeless professor became practically paralyzed and disoriented by the events. Several weeks later, when his mental health improved, he travelled in the company of his seriously ill daughter to the familiar little town of Schondorf am Ammersee, where his son Felix had been living and working after escaping revolutionary St Petersburg in 1920 and where Zieliński had been spending his summer vacations since the early 1920s. Felix taught Natural Sciences at the Landeserziehungsheim Schondorf

<sup>22</sup> See Andrzej Gillmeister's two interesting papers that present the pre-WW2 polemic generated by *Hellenism vs. Judaism* (Gillmeister, 2011, 275–288 and 2013, 63–80).

<sup>23</sup> Publ. under the title: *The Religion of Ancient Greece, An Outline*. George Rapall Noyes (transl. with the author's co-operation). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926; reprinted in 1970 and 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Publ. in Paris with Les Belles Lettres, 1926, transl. by Alfred Fichelle.

<sup>25</sup> See Kucharski's (2011, 106–107) illuminating presentation of these criticisms.

(abbreviated as Landsheim), a local foundation consisting of a gymnasium and a boarding school.<sup>26</sup> The director, Ernst Reisinger (1884–1952), who participated in Hindenburg's failed election campaign against Hitler in 1932, and several other liberally minded teachers welcomed the scholar and later enthusiastically attended over a dozen of his lectures and participated in intellectual debates (on Horace and Dante) during his final years in Schondorf.

Zieliński initially planned to remain in Schondorf for a short time until he could travel to Rome and live at the nursing home of Santo Stanislao dei Polacchi. In the early months of 1940, it became clear that these plans had to be abandoned; he was reduced to a somewhat surreal existence focused on a single goal — reconstructing the burned manuscript and writing the last volume of the great synthesis. He had to rely mainly on his vast erudition and memory as his already minimal access to books shrank during the war to almost nil, after the closure of the libraries in Munich and Leipzig. His existence in Schondorf, including relations with the local community, his poor living quarters, the desperate shortage of books, and isolation, has been researched and presented in detail by Hanna Geremek in her introduction to the 2005 edition of the *Diary 1939–1944*.<sup>27</sup>

Increasingly incapacitated and weak in his two final years after Weronika's death, Zieliński faded away shortly after completing the manuscript of *Chrześcijaństwo antyczne* [*Ancient Christianity*], conscious of having reached his goal, but unaware of, or indifferent to, the text's scholarly shortcomings. This lonely end, no less tragic than the fate of many victims of WW2, does not alter the fact that Zieliński's life included many glorious moments of professional accomplishment. He was a member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, the British Academy, the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, and many other academies and scholarly societies; he was granted doctorates *honoris causa* by more than a dozen universities, including Moscow University, Jagiellonian University, Oxford University, and the University of Athens. He was twice decorated with the order of *Polonia Restituta* and with the Cross of the Grand Commander of the Greek Order of the Phoenix. He has earned a place of choice in the memory of generations of classicists, not only and not mainly in Poland.

<sup>26</sup> Today Landheim Ammersee is a foundation running several private schools, one of which is named Ernst-Reisinger-Gymnasium. See <https://www.landheim-ammersee.de/en/schools-education/ernst-reisinger-school>, last accessed 12.11.24.

<sup>27</sup> Geremek, 2005, 201–248. A translation of Geremek's introduction was published in the German edition of Zieliński's *Autobiography* and *Diary 1939–1944* in 2012, 169–191.

## Zieliński's Legacy

After WW2, Zieliński's former Polish students and their students paid tribute to him and his scholarly legacy<sup>28</sup> despite the apparent hostility of communist authorities, well aware of his unquestionably negative attitude towards a regime he knew from personal experience in revolutionary Russia. His youngest daughters, who remained in the Soviet Union, Tamara and Ariadna, were constantly persecuted by Soviet authorities for this family connection along with their mother, Sofia Pietrovna Chervinska.<sup>29</sup> Zieliński corresponded with them and tried to provide financial support with meager results. Fate spared him the knowledge of the tragedy of his son-in-law, Vladimir Beneshevich, the eminent Byzantinist, who was executed in 1937, along with his twin sons, Dmitrij and Georgij. He was also unaware of the tragedy of his son, Adrian Piotrowski, an innovative communist dramaturg and translator of the ancient theatre, who was condemned to death and shot in 1938.<sup>30</sup> Tamara and Ariadna learned about their father's death only in 1958 from his Polish student, Lidia Winniczuk, who received a letter that Ariadna sent to the University of Warsaw. Professor Winniczuk assisted Ariadna, her mother, and her sister in starting correspondence with Zieliński's elder children in Germany, Russia, and Japan; that exchange among siblings flourished for many years. The extant letters constitute a source for the scholar's biography, along with his letters to children and students, additionally supported by the two "memoirs" (mentioned in the previous section).<sup>31</sup>

In 1959, for the one-hundredth anniversary of Zieliński's birth, Professor Kazimierz Kumaniecki (1905–1977), the foremost Polish classicist of his generation, ensured the publication of a special issue of *Meander* (14, 8–9), entirely devoted to Zieliński and his scholarly achievements. It included papers by Polish classicists, Kumaniecki himself and Stefan Srebrny (1890–1962), two Russian scholars, Salomon Luria (1891–1964)

<sup>28</sup> During the first few years after WW2, a series of articles about Zieliński honouring his lifetime achievements were published mainly by Polish classicists: in 1946 by Aleksander Turyn (in the US), Witold Klinger (in Poland and in Czechoslovakia), and Ludwik Piotrowicz, in 1947 by Stefan Srebrny, and in 1949 by Stanisław Pigoń. Three such articles appeared in Germany, Ernst Reisinger's in 1945, Albert Rehm's in the 1944–1948 issue of the *Jahrbuch der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, and in 1949, Heinrich Däumling published a posthumous tribute in *Gnomon*, also in Munich.

<sup>29</sup> Lukianchenko, 2005–2011, 7; see also Lukianchenko, 2011, 70–71.

<sup>30</sup> Lukianchenko, 2011, 60–62.

<sup>31</sup> Published by Hanna Geremek and Piotr Mitzner, in the OBTA series *Ludzie i Teksty* [People and Texts] in 2005, and in German and in part in Russian in 2012.

and Jakob Borowski (1896–1994), as well as two Polish writers, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (1894–1980) and Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa (1905–1968), the daughter of Jakub Mortkowicz (1876–1931), the pre-WW2 Polish publisher of Zieliński's books.

In the early 1980s, two substantial papers about Zieliński appeared, focussing on his youth and the last work completed just before his death. Both were written by Professor Marian Plezia, who, after many failed attempts, managed, once Communism collapsed, to re-issue in Ossolineum in 1991 the first two volumes of *Religie świata antycznego* [*Religions of the Ancient World*] with his own introduction, which was written in 1985. However, he remained unsuccessful in publishing volumes 5 and 6, which remained in typescript for eight more years. Jerzy Axer, the *spiritus movens* behind the post-Communist revival of interest in Zieliński's legacy, recalls the classical community's reluctance to publish the raw text of the last volumes, motivated by the fear of misconstruing their nature.<sup>32</sup>

In 1997, the Centre for Studies on the Ancient Tradition (OBTA) at the University of Warsaw, under Jerzy Axer's direction, inaugurated a series of publications related to Tadeusz Zieliński, entitled *People and Texts. Listy do Stefana Srebrnego* [Letters to Stefan Srebrny] in 1997, *Kultura i rewolucja. Publicystyka z lat 1917–1922* [Culture and Revolution. Opinion Journalism from 1917–1922] in 1999, and *Autobiografia. Dziennik 1939–1944* [*Autobiography. Diary 1939–1944*] in 2005.<sup>33</sup>

The two last volumes of *The Religions* were issued in 1999 as an act of civic service by Professor Andrzej Piskozub and his team<sup>34</sup> at the Adam Marszałek publishing house in Toruń but without a commentary and proper scholarly discussion. This “child of woe” is described, with reason, as “a strange structure, full of nooks and crannies, magnificent ideas and uncanny whimsies.”<sup>35</sup> It still awaits a treatment worthy of the great classicist who, in his difficult final years, faced mortality and what he saw, in his deep religious belief, as the approaching day of judgment by producing a highly emotional synthesis of ancient religions that was in certain respects offensive and lacked scholarly impartiality.

In its imperfectly edited form, the last volume of *The Religions, Ancient Christianity*, offers, without any commentary, passages replete

<sup>32</sup> Axer, in the 2011 anniversary publication, 22. This fear was well justified, as demonstrated by the reaction to the volumes finally published in 1999 by Zygmunt Kubiak (1929–2004), a Professor at the University of Warsaw (Kubiak, 2000, 12).

<sup>33</sup> See the bibliography provided at the end of this paper.

<sup>34</sup> See Zaborowski, 2007, 62–63.

<sup>35</sup> Axer, in the volume for the 150th anniversary of his birth, 2011, 22.

with far-fetched ideas about the role of Judaism and shocking accusations against it, which are all the more outrageous if one considers that they were expressed during WW2. It remained in line with the long-criticized hypothesis expressed in his 1927 *Hellenism vs. Judaism* that Christianity's true *Old Testament* was Greek and Roman religion, rather than Judaism. Zieliński's unquestionable anti-Judaism was insightfully discussed in 2011 by Jan Kucharski, who provided the sort of commentary that was woefully lacking in the poorly edited 1999 text:

For however unattractive (a conscious euphemism) such specimens of Zieliński's prose may — or at least should — seem to the modern reader (...), it must be kept in mind they have originated in a very particular *cultural* context. (...) For *The Religions* is a product of a social and intellectual *milieu* where anti-Semitism was (regrettably) still more a matter of opinion than of morality. (Kucharski, 2011, 109.)

To end on a more encouraging note, it might be worth recalling that during the controversy on *Hellenism vs. Judaism*, written from the Jewish community's point of view in 1927–1929, despite the harsh critical tone adopted by the authors, none of them accused Zieliński of antisemitism.<sup>36</sup> When ten years later, in 1939, the Polish Philological Association (PTF)'s Warsaw Chapter infamously voted to approve a member's motion preventing Jews from joining the organization (the so-called *numerus nullus*), Zieliński, who was the head of the Chapter at the time, renounced his membership and his function, stating that he could not belong to an organization that discriminated against his best colleagues, and left the meeting. As a result of Zieliński's withdrawal, the board invalidated the first vote because of a legal flaw: the motion to change the statute of the Association should have been part of the official agenda, rather than being placed under "any other business." Another meeting was called to vote on the motion, which was rejected. Zieliński agreed to rejoin the association.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Gillmeister, 2011, 74.

<sup>37</sup> See Biezuńska, 1999, 217–210; Kucharski, 2011, 110, who refers to Pianko, 1960, 61 and Gordziałkowski, 2000, 15.



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<sup>38</sup> An Italian translation of a paper published in *Meander* 14 (1959) entirely devoted to Tadeusz Zieliński.

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Three publications (Polish, German, and Russian), unusual in concept and execution, issued for Tadeusz Zieliński's 150th birth anniversary, are listed below chronologically. They include chapters by Jerzy Axer, Aleksandr Gavrilov, and Michael von Albrecht.

*Tadeusz Zieliński (1859–1944). W 150 rocznicę urodzin*. Olechowska, Elżbieta (ed.). Warszawa: IBI AL UW, KNoKA PAN, 2011. It also includes Oleg Lukianchenko's (Zieliński's grandson) and his mother's, Ariadna Chervinska (Zielińska), *Tadeusz Zieliński. Nieznane karty biografii* as well as *Listy ojca do najmłodszej córki Ariadny* and *Listy Feliksa i Amaty do Ariadny*.

Zieliński, Thaddäus, *Mein Lebenslauf – Erstausgabe deutschen Originals – und Tagebuch 1939–1944*. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Jerzy Axer, Alexander Gavrilov und Michael von Albrecht; unter Mitwirkung von Hanna Geremek, Piotr Mitzner, Elżbieta Olechowska und Anatolij Ruban, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012.

„Фаддей Францевич Зелинский (1859–1944),” *Древний мир и мы* 4 (2012), 12–220.