

PRZEMYSŁAW DEC (1969–2018): QUMRANOLOGIST AND CONNAISSEUR OF ANCIENT JUDAISM

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Abstract: Dr Przemysław Dec (1969–2018) was a lecturer at the Department of History of Judaism and Jewish Literature in the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University for more than a decade. He was a passionate Qumran scholar and charismatic teacher. He died prematurely in September 2018. The Jagiellonian University has lost an exceptionally talented Hebrew philologist and lecturer on ancient Judaism.

Dr Przemysław Dec, assistant professor at the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University, died unexpectedly of a heart attack on September 19, 2018. In this brief obituary I would like to present a scholarly profile of Dr Dec.

Promising young seminarian

Przemysław Dec was born in Bydgoszcz on January 25, 1969. After his final exams in secondary school he decided to study the Bible and enrolled first in the Gniezno Archbishopric Seminary, and after a year or so at what was then the Pontifical Theological Faculty in Poznań. As a lay person he studied there from 1989–1997, receiving his M.A. in theology in 1997. In his examination *ex universa theologia* he was asked questions about the New Testament, and dogmatic and moral theology. His answers obtained the best marks. His treatise on “Ger” in the Old Testament was evaluated very highly by the reviewers, Rev. Prof. Bogdan Poniży (of Poznań) and Rev. Professor Tadeusz Hanelt (of Gniezno). Both gave him the highest marks (*optime*: very good). Prof. Hanelt stated in his review, “I very rarely give the highest mark to a thesis. This work deserves

that.” He went on to say that in the three chapters, and on 85 pages of his thesis, Dec “set out to pursue the development of the concept of *ger* in the Old Testament, based on the Hebrew and Greek texts.” The other reviewer observed that Dec was correct in concluding that “[...] at some point the term began to diverge, and in the youngest sources accepted two fully distinct meanings: ‘assimilated non-Israelite, living in Palestine and for the most part subject to the Law’, and ‘new arrival.’” Both reviewers stressed that Dec’s work was a well-organized and mature scholarly study, and that its author had read extensive literature on the subject (listed over ten pages). In effect, both recommended its prompt publication. That, however, did not happen, probably because Dec remained in Poznań to continue his theological studies at the newly created Theological Faculty of the Adam Mickiewicz University, but only for a time. He decided to go to the Pontifical Theological Academy in Kraków, where he defended his licentiate in theology in 2003 and received a Ph.D. in Biblical Sciences in 2004.

Unfortunate story of an exceptional Ph.D. dissertation on the Dead Sea Scrolls

In Kraków Przemysław Dec had the great opportunity of becoming a student of Rev. Prof. Jerzy Chmiel (1935–2016), an outstanding Biblical scholar and editor of the journal entitled *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* [*Biblical and Liturgical Movement*].¹ He also had the chance to listen to the lectures and participate in a seminar of Father Augustyn Jankowski (1916–2005), an eminent New Testament scholar.² From the beginning of his studies in Kraków, Dec demonstrated his interest in late Judaism and early Christianity. He soon demonstrated his knowledge of the ancient languages and his abilities in the ancient Jewish palaeography. It was no surprise that he started writing a Ph.D. dissertation on “Thanksgiving Scrolls from the Dead Sea [Megillot haHodayot] 1QHa [1QHb/4Q427-4Q440].” As I am neither a philologist nor a theologian, let me quote at this point observations made by one of the reviewers of the dissertation on May 16, 2004. Prof. Piotr Muchowski, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań,³ presented Dec’s work thusly: “The subject of the dissertation is a theological and linguistic study of the Thanksgiving Scrolls from Qumran Cave 1. The scope of the dissertation extends to a new critical edition of the Hebrew text, new Polish translation and palaeographic, linguistic, literary and theological analyses of the largest and the earliest discovered manuscript of Hodayot. The basis of this work are, as the author says, the facsimilia published by Eleazar Lipa Sukenik in 1955 and the critical edition of Cave 4 manuscripts authored by Eileen Schuller of 1999. The purpose of the dissertation, in the author’s words,

¹ Cf. Kapera 2016: 1–8.

² Father A. Jankowski was editor of the Millennium Bible, cf. Pietkiewicz 2016: 1–17, here: 7.

³ Prof. Piotr Muchowski prepared the first Polish complete translation of the Qumran manuscripts and authored numerous essays on the scrolls, especially on the Copper Scroll. He also published a handbook to the Dead Sea texts. Cf. Kapera 1996: 39–46; idem, “Muchowski’s One Volume Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls”, *The Qumran Chronicle* 9 (2000): 201–209.

was “[...] breaking of the existing scholarly consensus regarding the most important questions around 1QHodayot a, for the main part in the area of textual criticism and palaeography” (cf. Introduction, p. XVII). As the author indicates, the most important achievement of the dissertation is a new reconstruction of the text based exclusively on the preserved fragments and, I quote, “comparison with E. Schuller’s material from Cave 4” (p. XVI), a new Polish translation with critical apparatus, ‘mainly linguistic, much less theological’ (p. XVII) and palaeographical analysis, which is ‘the most important area of study’ (p. XVII).”



Dr Przemysław Dec (1969–2018) © Ada Witenberg

Reporting on the contents of Dec’s dissertation, Prof. Muchowski stated concerning the first chapter, entitled “The Place of Hodayot in the Corpus Qumranicum”, that “This chapter in fact is not a classical presentation of the current state of research, but only an outline of the main scholarly problems connected with the qumranic Hymns.” Chapter two, “Qumran palaeography” “is devoted in general to the script of the Dead Sea manuscripts and in particular to the script of the Hodayot scroll from Cave 1. The author has put in it a precise analysis of characters occurring in the writing of scribe A and scribe C, and advanced theses concerning the dating of the manuscript, mainly confirming earlier conclusions in this regard.” Chapter three, “The linguistic analysis of 1QH_a,” is divided into two parts. “In the first one the author describes the linguistic characteristics of Hodayot in the area of orthography and morphology. In the second [part, Przemysław Dec]

describes particular hymns with regard to their contents, literary structure and language, in the latter case mainly [in connection with] lexical and phraseological aspects. The descriptions are divided into three parts: content stratum, literary stratum, and language stratum.” Chapter four, “The Hodayot Doctrine” is description of the text in its theological aspect. The author concentrates his discussion on several major questions. First, he analyses the titles and descriptions of God and the names used to refer to the enemies of the author of the composition and his community. Second, he discusses the main theological ideas, concerning – as is reflected in the section titles – problems of eschatology, revelation, election, pneumatology, creation and evil. Chapter five, “The Hebrew Text of IQHa” includes the author’s proposed reconstruction of the Hebrew text. The innovation, in comparison with the earlier editions, is a new numbering in columns IV, VIII, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, and XXVI, and a fragmentary reconstruction of column II, absent from previous reconstructions. The footnotes contain variants of the Hebrew text readings in the editions of A. Dupont-Sommer, F. Garcia-Martinez, S. Holm-Nielsen, B. Kittel, J. Licht, M. Mansoor, E. Puech and E.L. Sukenik. Chapter six, “Translation and commentary of IQHa is the author’s translation of the Scroll enriched by critical apparatus, which consists first of all of numerous grammatical and lexicographical descriptions.” The dissertation ended with a brief summary, in which Dec listed “several basic conclusions of his research especially regarding the liturgical nature of the text, the date of the script, and specific linguistic and theological features of the composition.”

Rev. Prof. Stanisław Hałas,⁴ the second reviewer, expressed his admiration for the quality of Dec’s dissertation. He was very satisfied with the second chapter, which in his opinion would be used as “a scholarly compendium for scholars and students of Hebrew palaeography.” He evaluated the third chapter on linguistic analysis as “exact and professional,” and “very inventive, reliable and built on abundant comparative material.” He noticed “perfect knowledge of the Hebrew language,” of “the contents of Qumran texts,” and of “the language and teaching of the Bible.” He observed that Dec’s conclusions were based on “comparative analysis of Hebrew phraseology.” Concerning Dec’s translation of the Hodayot (himself being a translator of some books of the Bible), he recognized it as “faithful” and “in beautiful Polish language.”

Przemysław Dec himself described the results of his Ph.D. research and dissertation, writing (among others) what follows. First of all, “The Hodayot without doubt is a prayer text, perhaps intended for communal liturgy. Some mentions in the Corpus Qumranicum lead us to suppose such an application, even though it is hard to prove that definitively. From its contents it seems that the Hodayot [...] is a testimony of the early stage of Essenism, when the community was just beginning to form. Individualism is in the forefront, though addressing God in the first person is universal in the ancient Jewish texts and may concern anyone who reads or listens to the contents of particular hymns.”

Dec then summarized some palaeographical results of his research. He found “unacceptable [...] the view of those who believe that the Hodayot was a document written still before the death of Herod [the Great], i.e. 4 C.E. The shape of letters and clear signs

⁴ Stanisław Hałas is professor of the Old Testament at the John Paul II University at Kraków.

of development towards later scripts indicate that we have to do here with material to be placed firmly after that date. It is not excluded that 1QHa was written even in the period of rise of Judaeochristianity, i.e. in the second and third decades of the 1st century C.E.”

Dec points out that “the Hebrew language of 1QHodayot indicate[d] strong dependence on other documents credited to the Essenes [1QS, 1QM, CD, 1QpHab, etc.]” There is obviously a visible difference between Qumran Hebrew and the Hebrew of the *Biblia Hebraica*.

Concerning the doctrine of the Hodayot, it “shows a large degree of exclusivity in understanding God and the relations which bind his elect with Him. As 1QHa testifies, some allusions to Old Testament texts are treated figuratively, and their content is referred analogically to the fates of the Essene organization. Some essential prerogatives of Israel in messianic time, especially those of the prophetic books, are attributed to the people whom the Hymns call ‘sons of truth.’ The dualism appearing in most of the motifs of the Hodayot divides the surrounding reality more explicitly than does the Old Testament, i.e. into the good and the evil ones, the elected and the impious. Such tension is probably a result of the eschatological consciousness of the author and also of the whole community.”

At the very end, Dec underlines that the Hebrew text of 1QHodayot a he edited “ha[d] a number of variants different from the version accepted hitherto.”

Dec’s dissertation should have been published at that time. Yet that did not happen. The reason was simple. Both Dec and the writer of this obituary were well aware of the existence of an unavailable Ph.D. dissertation on the Hodayot defended in 1963 by Hartmut Stegemann, who used then-unpublished manuscripts from Cave 4.⁵ Dec’s attempts to obtain a copy of the dissertation had been fruitless. The owners refused, still accepting the rule that the rights of the official publishers of the scrolls must be maintained. H. Stegemann very fortunately published an article in 2000 recapitulating briefly the story of the reconstruction of Hodayot and providing a new numbering of columns and lines and a catalogue of fragments not attached previously.⁶ Despite its brevity, the article enabled Dec to “reconstruct the text in a version which was larger and more accurate than earlier editions of the text,” using small fragments of 4QH already available in print.⁷ Unfortunately, the results of his work presented in his dissertation remained unpublished for many years. Other obligations kept him from pursuing his interest in Hodayot, and it was only a publication of Eileen Schuller and Carol Newsom in 2009⁸ that made him to return to the text anew; Schuller and Newsom published a full Hebrew version based on Stegemann’s dissertation.

After many editorial complications, Dec’s philological Hodayot monograph appeared in print in May 2017⁹, to the great satisfaction of the author himself and his superiors at the Institute of Jewish Studies, who had been observing Dec’s deep

⁵ H. Stegemann, *Rekonstruktion der Hodayot. Ursprüngliche Gestalt Und kritisch bearbeiteter Text der Hymnenrolle aus Höhle I von Qumran*, (Diss. Phil.), Heidelberg 1963.

⁶ Stegemann 2000: 272–284.

⁷ Dec 2017b: 3.

⁸ Cf. Stegemann 2009.

⁹ Dec 2017.

involvement in the subject for years. Dec's monograph contained mostly the Hebrew text already found in his dissertation; compared with that earlier version, it was, as he put it, "largely corrected and extended," with the numbering of lines slightly changed in some columns. Because of the "enormous work" done first of all by Eileen Schuller in the DJD publication of the Hodayot, all of his footnotes were extended to quote "her versions of the text" and all the differences were noted. Dec also made "drawings of each column and of each fragment," putting them "in proper sequence, keeping the scale and numbering of lines." A new, originally unplanned addition to the Hodayot was a Hebrew-Polish dictionary.¹⁰ It is larger and more detailed than the dictionary published in the study edition by E. Schuller and C. Newsom in 2012.¹¹

Only five reviews of Dec's 2017 monograph have appeared so far. The language barrier remains a serious obstacle. Even so, Dec's publication has been welcomed in reviews by Dariusz Długosz, Edward Lipiński, Antoni Tronina, and David M. Stec, and John F. Elwolde has written a review article about it. However, more reviews are to be expected.

Dr. Dariusz Długosz writes that the new monograph presents "d'une maniere claire et complete l'état actuel de la recherche sur Hodayot." And he adds that it is "une oeuvre bien précieuse dans le developpement de la qumranologie en Pologne."¹² Prof. Lipiński acknowledges Dec's monograph as "le résultat d'une nouvelle élaboration du texte hébreu, basée sur tous les fragments connus et sur les recherches menées depuis une douzaine d'années."¹³ He welcomes the new Polish translation and presentation of the progress in the research on Hodayot. Prof. Tronina finds it necessary to "underline the pioneering character of Przemysław Dec's book. [...] With this publication the author joins the small group of Polish scholars dealing with the problems of Essene literature." Tronina "highly recommend[s] [the book] to the Polish philologists and Biblical scholars. Qumran scholars elsewhere, if they find help with the Polish, can read it with profit too, finding many new philological corrections and suggestions concerning the ancient text."¹⁴ Dr. David M. Stec states in his review that Dec "gives details of his reconstruction of columns, illustrating them graphically with a hand-drawn outline of pieces of leather placed in position to make up each column. The centrepiece of the book is the edition of the Hebrew text." He also notes Dec's "generally conservative approach" with regard "to reconstruction of missing portions of the text, except where 4QHod manuscripts can be used for this purpose." In Stec's opinion "the footnotes to the Hebrew text make up a very useful critical apparatus, enabling the reader to see at a glance what different readings have been given by other scholars."¹⁵

Prof. John F. Elwolde has already presented the book to readers of "The Qumran Chronicle" in an extensive review article. There is no need to repeat his remarks here. However, I should like to quote a few lines of his text: "Dec's work [...] represents [...]"

¹⁰ Dec prepared it at the instigation of the present writer, who had in mind Polish students of Hebrew, who needed help in the study of Qumran manuscripts in the original.

¹¹ Schuller, Newsom 2012.

¹² Cf. Długosz 2016: 214–215.

¹³ Cf. Lipiński 2017: 227–228, here: 228.

¹⁴ Cf. Tronina 2017: 95–97, here: 97.

¹⁵ Stec 2018 [SOT Book List 2018].

a partially preserved, fragmentary, linguistic corpus, which can be investigated at phonological, morphophonemic, lexical, and morphosyntactic levels, and such investigations would appear to be among Dec's primary interest in view of the character of many of his footnotes, the section he dedicates to linguistic matters [...], and sporadic overt indications of the work's intended use, e.g. to reach young specialists in the field of Hebrew language and Hebrew literature." And he adds, "the present work could serve as the basis of a set of linguistic (or perhaps also exegetical) comments on the 'extant' text of 1QH_a. In that context the Hebrew text and its translation [...] would simply function as a source for these comments. Such a work would doubtless be welcomed by those with a particular interest in the Hebrew language of the Scrolls and/or in the biblical background to terms and concepts employed in the Hodayot."¹⁶

As a few reviewers have recommended publication of Dec's monograph on Hodayot in the English language, the authorities of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University have decided to finance such a translation. It is expected that the Scroll of Thanksgiving Psalms will appear in a year or so.

Smaller contributions on the Hodayot

Still before the DJD publication of 1QH by Prof. Eileen Schuller, Dec produced a paper on material and textual reconstruction of column 8 with fragment 12 of 1QH_a.¹⁷ Prof. C.T. Begg, abstracting it, stressed that Dec presented there "his own reconstruction of the manuscript's col. 8 with a variety of new readings, plus a translation of this. His discussion also features a treatment of the question of the proper placement of the much damaged "Fragm. 12" within the column; in his reconstruction, this constitutes lines 12–20 of the column."¹⁸

During the last few years Dec also investigated some linguistic aspects of the Hodayot. In 2009 he wrote on its phonology. He considered peculiar pronunciations of certain words and the existence of certain phonetic alternations. He listed examples of elision (weakening) of the alef and ayin guttural sounds, the elision of the nun and mem nasal consonants, the geminated (lengthened) waw (*dageš hazaq*), the voicing sonorization of א _ ן, the waw as ševa and the realisation of Proto-Semitic short "e" (or "u"/"y"), mil'ra mil'el in the diphthongs -ui (וִי), and imperfectum verbs with a waw after the second consonant. In his opinion the quoted examples could "point to various factors which exerted an influence upon such linguistic alternations. In some cases it could have been Mishnaic Hebrew, in other cases – Aramaic or even Samaritan Hebrew."¹⁹

Always interested in the language of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Dec returned to 1QH_a and studied the pronouns in the book. He analyzed the personal pronouns, one

¹⁶ Elwolde 2017: 151–161, here: 161.

¹⁷ Dec 2009b: 25–32.

¹⁸ Begg 2011: 145, item no. 531.

¹⁹ Dec 2016a: 56. This article was abstracted by Chr. R. Matthews in: *New Testament Abstracts* 61 (2017): 457, item no. 1382.

negative prefix, different suffixed pronouns, and verbs with suffixed personal pronouns. He concluded that “the occurrence of an additional ה- in the form of an affix in the majority of the pronouns [...] suggests that in the Hodayot we are dealing more likely with the principle of analogy in terms of morphology than with the confirmation of prolonged pronunciation in the last phase of articulation.” He noticed “the application of long Qumran variants along with the traditional ones.” In his opinion, “similarly as in the case of the majority of other QH-related phenomena [...] we are dealing with a liberal approach of the scribes to the linguistic standards. This remark applies to the same extent to the personal pronouns and objective pronouns.”²⁰

Beginning with some minor contributions on the language of the Hodayot, Dec later turned to the study of deeper phenomena of the Hebrew language from the Hebrew Bible to the Mishnah, including the Dead Sea Scrolls. He started with a study on the periphrastic tense היה with a participle. He presented the syntax of the periphrastic construction היה + participle during the period. In his opinion “present participles are identical to present tense forms in Hebrew. The use of this construction is characteristic of late Ancient Hebrew, including the Mishnah.” He observed that “in the Hebrew Bible the construction היה + participle occurs relatively rarely. It is attested slightly more frequently in the Judaean Desert texts. However, in the Mishnah it is an already well-established grammatical form.”²¹ Knowing about Dec’s plan to publish a monograph on the development of the verb from the Biblical period, then the scrolls and Mishnah to the Mediaeval period, we can only regret that this work had to be so unexpectedly discontinued.

Publications of Przemysław Dec on palaeography

His first publications were connected with the current problems of the time. His article “On the most recent archaeological and historical research on Masada” reported the discussion concerning human bones found on Masada, inclining to the view of the Israeli anthropologist, J. Zias. The bones found in two places are almost certainly not the bones of the defenders of the fortress.²² Next Dec undertook an independent analysis of the inscription on the ossuary of James, (the) brother of Jesus. He used as his comparative material some inscriptions and texts from the Dead Sea area (Qumran and Wadi Murabba‘at). He established that the inscription had been made by one person. It was cut by somebody who was well acquainted with the technique of writing on soft materials (parchment, papyrus). He dated the text on the ossuary to 70–100 A.D. He rejected R. Altman’s supposition that the second part of the inscription was added in the third century A.D.²³

In his next publication Dec occupied himself with an analysis of two painted Hebrew or Hebrew-Aramaean inscriptions on pots (Kh.Q. 2416 and 2417), illustrated

²⁰ Dec 2016c: 153–154.

²¹ Dec 2017a: 124.

²² Dec 1999: 251–258.

²³ Dec 2003b: 103–118; Altman 2003: 89–101. Cf. also Niesiołowski-Spano 2004.

in a pamphlet on Qumran locus 130 by Robert Donceel, but not described in full or read.²⁴ Dec had also in his hands the official publication of both pots and inscriptions by André Lemaire of 2003.²⁵

Concerning Kh.Q. 2416, Prof. Lemaire proposed the reading of *Gurap M 26* as a proper name and *M* as an abbreviation (of the *mina* or the *obol*). The neutron analysis of the pot suggested Transjordanian origin. Dec was inclined to connect the word *GRP*, written by the ceramic technique of graffiti, to the noun *gerofit* meaning container, *pot* (for liquid or loose materials). He interpreted the *M* as Hebrew *mdh* (measure) but did not exclude Aramaic *mina*. The way of writing 26 is in line with Arabic numeration. Dec dated the object to the period 100 B.C.-50 A.D., while Lemaire dated it to the beginning of Period II at Khirbet Qumran. Lemaire proposed 13 kg as the metric equivalent, Dec as 14 kg.²⁶

Concerning Kh.Q. 2417, Prof. Lemaire proposed the reading... *Zimrilu M 30*, taking into consideration the proper names *YZMR*, *ZMRW*, well known from the onomastics of Aramean Idumea, pre-Islamic Arabia and even the Bible (for example Nb 25,14). The number 30 is clear. Dec agreed with him, quoting additional Biblical, Targumic and Talmudic comparisons to the name. He established that 30 M means nearly 16 kilograms. Prof. Lemaire suggested the Idumean – Nabataean areas as the place of origin of the pot and did not suggest a date; Dec proposed the period 100-40 B.C. on palaeographic grounds.²⁷

Although published in Polish, this article by Dec caught the attention of some scholars. It was even noted in “Old Testament Abstracts.”²⁸ Dec’s article was critically evaluated by Prof. Edward Lipiński, professor emeritus of Leuven University, an eminent Biblical and onomastic scholar. He accepted the dating of both pots to 100-40 B.C., but refused to accept *M* as an abbreviation of *mina*. The contents of the jar should be described differently, in his opinion. *M* “represents a huge amount of money if “26” and “30” were indications of the price.” He analysed the photograph of Kh.Q. 2417 and read the text as *’šl zrmw*. In his view the script was not Nabataean, but he agreed that the names *Grp*, *’šl* and *Zmrw* seemed to be Nabataean.²⁹ As we can see, Dec’s article aroused the interest of one of the most eminent internationally recognized experts in the field of ancient Near Eastern onomastics and epigraphy.

During his stay at the Albright Institute in Jerusalem Przemysław Dec wrote a paper on scroll palaeography. The text appeared in “The Qumran Chronicle” in 2008.³⁰ After a brief survey of the history of Qumran palaeography, he analysed nine phases of the script (175 B.C. to 100 A.D.). Then he considered “the implications of this proposal for understanding the origins of the Qumran texts and the identity of their copyist.”³¹ Dec expressed his criticism of the current state of palaeography, presenting it in six

²⁴ Donceel 2005: 32–33, pls. XXIII–XXV.

²⁵ Lemaire 2002: 363–364.

²⁶ Dec 2007: 170–173.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 173–175.

²⁸ Cf. Iwański 2011: 145, item no. 532.

²⁹ Lipiński 2008: 74–75.

³⁰ Dec 2008a: 89–106.

³¹ Mason 2010: 129, item no. 511.

points: 1. “Palaeography as a method of dating scrolls is insufficient. The dating is still based on the Roland de Vaux archaeological conception. [...] 2. As far as the dating of the oldest scrolls is concerned, scholars assumed that the scrolls were [...] copied by the Essenes.” Some of [Norman] Golb’s conceptions can still be taken into consideration. 3. Dec did not agree that there was a scriptorium at Qumran. In his opinion “the scrolls came from elsewhere and only some of them were written by the Essenes. 4. For him “it is necessary to find out why some of the exegetical and calendar texts are the youngest”, and to explain “why the liturgical and legislative texts are the oldest”, especially as “some of them had come into being before the settlement of Qumran.” 5. He raised the question “which Jewish circles could have had such a large number of well-trained scribes?” He did not accept that they were only the Essenes. 6. The epigraphic texts according to him come from the period 100 B.C. to 25 A.D. Latin texts appeared later, after 73 A.D. The Aramaic texts written on pottery testify to existence of commercial contacts and the highly developed organization of the settlement. Some of the ostraca show signs of Nabatean influence and it is impossible to answer whether they were written by the Essenes. Professor Eibert Tigchelaar of the University of Leuven in some way took up the problems stated by Przemysław Dec in 2008. During the second Qumran colloquium at the Catholic University in Lublin, Prof. Tigchelaar spoke on “Seventy Years of palaeography and Dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls.” When the paper appears, the readers will see how similar his opinions were to those of Przemysław Dec. Among other things Prof. Tigchelaar analyzed “how scholars connected palaeography to historical hypotheses, for example with respect to the origin of the community of the Qumran settlement.”³²

Publication of the first Hebrew-Polish scholarly dictionary

It is regrettable that Dr Dec did not continue his palaeographical research after such promising original contributions to the field. Instead, he turned to the philology of Biblical languages. He welcomed the first handy Hebrew-Polish and Aramean-Polish dictionary, published by Piotr Briks. He stressed its value as a practical tool for many exegetes and students of religious and theological faculties, and expressed his hope that the dictionary would be a stimulus for further similar enterprises in future.³³ He probably did not expect to be invited himself to edit the Polish translation of one of the largest internationally acknowledged Hebrew dictionaries. The Warsaw Vocatio Publishers asked him for a translation of some Hebrew letters from the “Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament” by Ludwig Köhler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, printed by Brill in five volumes during 1994–2001. It was ‘The New Koehler Baumgartner in English’ edition by M.E.J. Richardson. Soon it turned out that the publishers were unable to finish the editorial work without a very good Hebrew scholar. Dec agreed to take care of the edition and not only supplemented the letters Kaf, Sin,

³² Cf. Kapera 2017a: 182; Tigchelaar 2017: 4.

³³ Dec 2000: 291–292.

and Šin, representing one-fifth of the whole dictionary, but revised the translations of all the letters prepared by fifteen contributors. In fact he spent some five years on the scholarly edition of the dictionary. In the end it appeared in Polish in two huge volumes in 2008.³⁴ It has found its way onto the desks of all Polish biblical scholars and still remains in print.

Publications on the Bible

A research team working on Hebrew manuscripts in the Polish collections was created at the Jagiellonian University in 2007. Przemysław Dec located a codex in the Czartoryski collection in Cracow described in Latin as a *Hebraicae Bibliæ Fragmentum*. It turned out that it was a biblical text starting with Genesis 23,8 and ending with Exodus 14,28 containing “alternating single sentences in Hebrew and Aramaic.” From preliminary analysis it was obvious that the codex came from Italy (or France) and had been bought by the Czartoryski family in the 19th century. Dec examined its historical, palaeographical and linguistic aspects. The Aramaic text was in some respects “very similar to Targum Onkelos and in others it was very similar to Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.” It was an unknown version of Targum Onkelos. Dec investigated the morphological and grammatical differences between the official version of the Targum Onkelos and the text preserved in the Cracow codex. As established from the frontispiece, the codex was part of the collection of the famous Francesco Petrarca, who – according to Venetian sources – owned two hundred significant works in various languages. The codex is “regarded as unique mainly because of the rare bilingual text and the specificity of the Aramaic text.”³⁵

Przemysław Dec, like very many Biblical scholars, was intrigued by the original text about the creation of the world and he analyzed it from a theological point of view. Taking into consideration that the literary character of the text and its presence in the Book of Genesis had been rarely analysed, he took the subject up again. In an article on the language and style of Gn 1,1–2,4 he tried to show that “[the] contents of Gn 1,1–2,3 do not imitate Mesopotamian mythologies about the creation of the world and include very few mythological reminiscences; the style and language of Gn 1,1–2,3 indicate a far-reaching editorial synchronization with the other texts of the Hebrew Bible; on the structural level Gn 1,1–2,3 is strongly linked to the legal tradition about the Sabbath and the chronology of the Jewish week.”³⁶ He found that the text “shared a common vocabulary with Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–14. Furthermore, the analysis of lexemes and phraseological collocations indicates that the structure of the text is based on Jewish weekly time calculations as observed in the Persian period.”³⁷

³⁴ Dec 2008b: LXXXI, 1–840 and XXXVII, 1–903. See Wstęp redaktora naukowego wydania polskiego [Introduction of the Scholarly Editor of the Polish Translation], vol. 1: XI–XIII.

³⁵ Dec 2016b: 67.

³⁶ Dec 2013: 61–62.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 74.

Minor contributions to the history of Jews in antiquity

The subject of lectures which Przemysław Dec had been delivering to his students at the Institute of Jewish Studies also drew him to the history of ancient Jewry. That is demonstrated by some extensive reviews of works by Rainer Kessler³⁸ and Izabela Eph'al-Jaruzelska.³⁹ However, what he became keenly interested in were the documents from Hermopolis and Elephantine in Egypt. These texts had never been studied or translated by Polish scholars. Therefore, in the middle of the present decade he undertook a larger project to publish a complete translation of nearly two hundred Aramaic papyri from both sites. Unfortunately, before his death he was able to publish only a selection of them in an article entitled "Hermopolis family letters and the Elephantine papyri. Translation and commentary." After a brief presentation of the discoveries of letters from Hermopolis and some general remarks on the Jewish habitation in Egypt, Dec analyzed the Aramaic language of the texts A.2.1 to A.2.7 and offered their translation into Polish. It is evident from the letters that "[t]he settlers of Hermopolis and Elephantine were then writing to their families and relatives asking for more clothes, wine bottles, and household items to be sent to their outposts."⁴⁰ One valuable part of the study is the presentation of the pattern of the letters, their language, style and onomastics.

New Testament contributions

Przemysław Dec was good not only in Hebrew but also in New Testament Greek. In 2009 he published an article on Matthew 16,19: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on the earth shall be considered loosed in heaven" (Jerusalem Bible). Dec pointed out that the problem of primacy of St. Peter had been researched many times in the history of exegesis and biblical philology, but theological analyses had overlooked important linguistic phenomena. To analyse the logion from the philological side he retranslated the Greek text into Mishnaic Hebrew. The verse about binding and loosing is for him "a Rabbinic formula, under some conditions simply a calque, used by the author, or editor of the text." That view is supported by morphosyntactic combinations in Matthew's Greek text typical of the Mishnaic Hebrew. It is also worth adding that Dec noted in the margin that verse 19b should be disconnected from verses 18–19.⁴¹

Another of Dec's articles on a New Testament subject is connected with the very well-known parable of the Good Shepherd (Gospel of John 10, 1–21).⁴² He turned to three somewhat obscure terms in the Greek text of J 10,1–3 and 10,16. He re-read

³⁸ Dec 2009c: 285–289.

³⁹ Dec 2011b: 199–201.

⁴⁰ Dec 2015–2016: 103.

⁴¹ Dec 2009a: 141–158.

⁴² Dec 2011a: 251–262. The article is a summary of Dec's licentiate thesis prepared in 2003 at the then Pontifical Theological Academy in Kraków.

a few key Greek lexemes, resorting to the retranslation into Hebrew and Aramaic and also using terms from the Dead Sea Scrolls for comparison. He proposed a new interpretation of the parable. He assumed that “part of the terminology is not related to pastoral reality in Palestine in the 1st century C.E., but is strongly linked to the Jerusalem Temple.” And after analysing the use of the lexemes Θύρα (as רעו), θυρωρός (as רעו) and ἀλλήλη (as רעו) Dec became convinced that “the author of J 10–1–21 intended to present the non-Jewish disciples of Jesus as those who should be included in the liturgy of the Temple together with Jews. The key fragments to understand this motif/ thought connected with the Jerusalem Temple are verses from J 10,1–3 and J 10,16.”⁴³

University activities

Dr Przemysław Dec was a lecturer at the Department of History of Judaism and Jewish Literatures in the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University for more than a decade. During that time he additionally fulfilled various serious administrative duties, one of which was the coordination of cooperation with the University of Judea and Samaria in Israel in 2006–2017. Exchange visits with students to the Ariel University were a regular feature of his summer holidays. His perfect knowledge of modern Hebrew was very helpful in this cooperation. He also greatly contributed to the organization and success of the all-Poland independent scholarly forum on Ancient Israel/Palestine, which more recently became the Symposium on the Ancient Near East and its Legacy.⁴⁴ He not only co-organized and participated in the yearly meetings as a representative of the Jagiellonian university and reported on them,⁴⁵ but also, as co-editor of the annual “*Studia Biblica et Orientalia*,”⁴⁶ he evaluated and prepared for publication numerous papers delivered. He died while preparing for the 13th forum in Wrocław. And it should not be forgotten that he worked for a few years on a committee organizing the congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies, which met in Poland (Cracow) for the first time in July 2018. He presided over some colloquia and panels.

Dr Dec’s funeral service in the Podgórze church was attended by a large congregation of his colleagues and, especially, his students. For them he was a passionate scholar and charismatic teacher. They knew him also as an enthusiastic guitarist, a connoisseur of football and great lover of pets. I have had the pleasure of delivering several papers on Qumran for his students and I was able to observe how great was the authority he enjoyed among them, and how friendly he was towards them. Having had several years’ experience of teaching religion in secondary school before coming to Kraków, he easily established a close cooperative relationship with the new young students in his institute.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 262.

⁴⁴ Kapera 2017b: 237–240.

⁴⁵ Dec 2014: 143–145.

⁴⁶ Dec was on the editorial board since the beginning of the annual in 2009. He co-edited vols 1–8 (up to 2016).

It is not saying too much when I write that his students really loved him.⁴⁷ His lectures were copiously illustrated and easily understandable. He was able to provide an enormous number of examples when necessary and to explain very complicated problems to his listeners. The Jagiellonian University has lost an exceptionally talented lecturer and scholar, and a protector of the young students abroad. As one of his colleagues writes to me, Przemysław Dec was “a splendid personality, a friend, and a good man.”

I knew Dr Dec since the beginning of this century. Rev. Prof. Jerzy Chmiel, supervisor of his Ph.D. dissertation at the then Pontifical Theological Faculty in Kraków, drew my attention to him. Our common interest in qumranology and ancient Judaism brought us closer together. Dr Dec’s friendly and faithful cooperation with me continued till the last days of his life. He helped me recently for example, by correcting the Hebrew in the monograph of Rev. Aleksy Klawek (1890–1969) on the name of Jesus. He also realized the importance of this hitherto unpublished text and offered some remarks on it.⁴⁸ He was a very trustworthy colleague as well as an unforgettable friend. I deeply regret that he passed away so early, and before completing his several important projects. *Sit tibi terra levis*. May you rest in peace on heavenly pastures under the protection of the Good Shepherd, in whom you trusted so deeply!

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⁴⁷ After Dec’s death one of his matured students wrote to me the following way: as his student she entered into relationship “From lecturer to a friend. We were friendly. Our [...] fields of interest covered each over for the main part. [...] I followed his track. [...] [Now] I feel a bit lost, such a lost child at the dividing of ways. A lone child, as Przemek was my sign-post on the path of my [scholarly] development.”

⁴⁸ They will appear in Klawek 2019 (in press).

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