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## The Reception of Religious Names in Internet Users' Comments

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Recepcja imion zakonnych w wypowiedziach internautów

Among the categories of personal names, there is a group of entities that differ in some respects from others, and one these is religious names. The research on these onyms is part of the analyses conducted within the scope of religious onomastics. I presented the understanding of the term *religious name* in the article *Maria jako imię zakonne*<sup>1</sup>:

I understand the term religious name as an individual personal name given by the religious authorities to a person entering the novitiate (without any agreement with the nominee or after agreement with him/her). The new name was supposed to identify and emphasize spirituality, as well as being a symbol of the beginning of a new life. From the moment of giving a religious name, it represents the person throughout his/her life (except for acts of an administrative and legal nature, in which identification with a “secula” name given during baptism and a surname is obligatory) and constitutes a sign with which the person is identified in a special way (Zmuda, 2015a, p. 138).

Many times during my conversations on the subject of my research on religious names I met with similar common opinions, such as: “ah, these ridiculous names” or “you are studying these strange names of nuns”, this perception of these anthroponyms encouraged me to study the subject of perception and evaluation of religious names by third parties. Therefore, the aim of this article is to look at religious names

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<sup>1</sup> Also based on the publication *Imię zakonne znakiem religijności i tożsamości* (Zmuda, 2015b).

from the point of view of their reception by contemporary users of Polish, and specifically by Internet users. For this purpose, a number of websites were analysed, discovered thanks to Google<sup>2</sup> search engine. For detailed analysis, I have chosen two extensive discussion threads. The first taken from the discussion forum *nasze powołanie* (our vocation)<sup>3</sup>, whose participants are mainly girls and women. From their statements, it can be deduced that some of them have a daily connection with a female order or have considered joining one. A large group, however, shares only occasional experiences, such as religious lessons with a nun carrying a given name, a meeting in a hospital, etc. The second thread was published on forum.gazeta.pl under the title *twisted monastic names* (Pol. *pokręcone imiona zakonne*)<sup>4</sup>. From the comments of the forum participants (hidden under various nicknames), it can be concluded that they constitute a very diverse group in terms of sociology. Opinions that have appeared in this forum are either the results of personal experience of the posters or their reaction to the submitted comments. The remaining websites<sup>5</sup> did not contain such detailed and materially rich information, so they have been treated as a guide, which also applies to the articles on the subject published on the Internet.

While analysing the comments of Internet users, it should be emphasized that they divide religious names into two groups. The first one, usually called *strange*, contains mainly names that are unusual for baptismal nomenclature, and appear in religious names, and the second one, usually called *ordinary*, contains religious names that are also specific for baptismal nomenclature.

## 1.

Names from the first group are referred to as *weird* (Pol. *dziwny* “characterised by something peculiar, attracting attention to itself by this peculiarity; unusual, special, indefinite, incomprehensible”; USJP I, p. 777) or as comparative *weirder* (Pol. *dziwniejszy*):

<sup>2</sup> The subject of the study and the research group contributed to the selection of the description methodology, which is part of the sociolinguistic research trend. I treat the language of Internet users in this article as a kind of sociolect (cf. Grabias, 2003, p. 111n), and in the case of valuation concepts I refer to the findings of Jadwiga Puzynina (1992, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <http://www.naszepowolanie.pun.pl/viewprintable.php?id=109> (access: 02.09.2018); hereinafter referred to as NP.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,12924,23843438,23843438,pokrecone\\_i...](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,12924,23843438,23843438,pokrecone_i...) (access: 02.09.2018); hereinafter referred to as GF.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. <https://www.katolik.pl/forum/read.php?f=1=80388=80381> (access: 02.09.2018); <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/791994.Siostra-niejedno-ma-imie> (access: 02.09.2018); <http://www.rozmawiamy.jezuici.pl/forum/109/n/8284> (access: 02.09.2018).

*so, which of those weirder names have you heard of?* (NP)<sup>6</sup>

*Owieczka [username – vocative case], Sara doesn't have a weird name :P* (NP)

The strangeness of some names may be temporary and after a certain number of repetitions (after becoming more acquainted with the anthroponym) it may disappear<sup>7</sup>, it may also persist, but with more positive connotations:

*Fidelisa (weird name, but ... I associate it very warmly with :))* (NP)

*Karmela (now I'm used to that name, but when I first heard it, it seemed a little weird to me, though very nice... :)))* (NP)

*...they don't seem weird to me (probably because I've been with Sisters for a while), but they do to people 'from the outside'* (NP)

According to Internet users, the feeling of names being weird may be accompanied by an articulation barrier:

*Gee, some of those names are really weird and unpronounceable :D* (NP)

Some religious names have been described by Internet users as **bizarre** (the adjective Pol. *dziwaczny* in a dictionary with a *lit.* qualifier) “attracting attention with its strangeness, atypical; funny, queer, peculiar” (USJP I, p. 777):

*In religious congregations, it happens that monks/nuns have bizarre names...* (GF)

The word **bizarre** was also used as an explanation of the meaning of the term **twisted** (Pol. *pokrecone* in the use of adjectival *humorous* way, about a person: one who by their behaviour, conduct, appearance differs from the majority; strange, bizarre; USJP III, p. 302, in the analysed statements, this meaning was transferred to the religious name):

*By 'twisted' I mean bizarre – I have never met with a lay person carrying the name Consolata, like many others you see in religious orders* (GF)

Names typical of the religious nomenclature are also called **interesting** (Pol. *ciekawy* “arousing interest, desire to know; intriguing”; USJP I, p. 458) or in comparison **more interesting** (Pol. *ciekawsze*):

*Ewangelista... interesting name* (NP)

*...but there are also interesting names among junior brother/sisters: Amabillis, Zyta;) Loreta...* (NP)

*don't forget about Sister Filipa (=), Sister Ela, Sister Agnessa, Sister Noelia and Sister Sancja, as I think you will agree with me that these names are also interesting* (NP)

<sup>6</sup> I leave all quotations from the Internet in the original spelling, preserving both punctuation and graphic errors, as well as spelling errors that occur. [The remark concerns original, Polish version of the paper] I also keep the graphic elements of the comments.

<sup>7</sup> This is a typical mechanism also in secular nomenclature.

*There are also interesting names such as: Sister Margaret, Sister Pia, Sister Anuncjata (NP)*

*so far, I've remembered so much of the 'more interesting' ones (NP)  
of the more interesting names, there is Sister Samuela, Rafaela... (NP)*

Also, in combination with the term **good one** (Pol. *kwiatki* – a figurative term used in the meaning of “examples of unusual, very original names”). Most likely, the word *kwiatki* to indicate something surprising comes from an idiomatic expression (*ładne kwiatki*<sup>8</sup>):

*(it's just a few of interesting examples of the many 'good ones':D) (NP)*

The analysed material also included the term **mega names**<sup>9</sup> (the word *mega* belongs to the so-called fashionable<sup>10</sup> words, which, appearing as attractive to language users at some point in time, cause the displacement of other contextually and meaningfully stabilized words (cf. Kołodziejek, 2006, p. 220). Here we are dealing with the semantic isolation of the prefix, which was borrowed by the Polish from the English<sup>11</sup> language and served as an intensification of a trait. The meaning in which the Internet user used this word is difficult to unequivocally explicate):

*in the Panewniki cemetery in Katowice, where the sisters are buried, you can see mega names of the type – sister Sekunda – an authentic one... (NP)*

From the words fashionable in colloquial language, which served as terms for religious names of this group, one can also indicate the expression **outlandish** (Pol. *kosmiczny* – the dictionary has the relevant entry with *literary* and *humorous* qualifiers “being on the scale of the outer space, impossible to grasp; great, huge, infinite”; USJP II, p. 262; here in the meaning of “fancy, unusual, uncommon, impossible to grasp”).

*Not every sister has such an outlandish name. They are also normal ones, even after the change (NP)*

One of the female Internet users called unusual names **gems** (Pol. *cudeńka* “something unusual, peculiar”; USJP I, p. 485):

*Recently, I read the names of my deceased sisters in a gallery of sorts, these were real gems (NP)*

<sup>8</sup> *Ładne kwiatki* “an expression meaning dissatisfaction, unpleasant shock, surprise” (WSF, p. 219).

<sup>9</sup> Separate spelling due to its use in the analysed statement.

<sup>10</sup> On the subject of language fashion, cf. e.g. Kazimierz Ożóg (2001, 2014), Walery Pisarek (1993), Bogdan Walczak (1987). On the subject of *mega* expression cf. e.g. Mirosława Mycawka (2000) or Maciej Malinowski's article *Nagle wszystko zrobiło się mega...*. Downloaded from <https://przelom.pl/14178-nagle-wszystko-zrobilo-sie-mega.html> (access: 12.10.2018).

<sup>11</sup> “Fashion for English has also popularized the prefixes *super-*, *ekstra-*, *mega-*, *hiper-*, which in advertising texts and in everyday speech are used mainly as positive evaluation elements, serving to intensify selected features” (Kołodziejek, 2006, p. 7).



## 2.

The names that form the common basis for the baptism and monastic names are referred to as **ordinary** names (Pol. *zwykle* “according to custom, the average norm, as always, commonplace”; USJP IV, p. 1103):

*But if I had to choose, I would rather have ordinary name* (NP)

This term is sometimes accompanied by other attributives, such as **traditional** (Pol. *tradycyjne* “in line with tradition, customary, contributing nothing new, occurring or following established patterns, templates, models”; USJP IV, p. 98), **simple** (Pol. *proste* “ordinary, normal, natural, obvious”; USJP III, p. 589):

*And I'm in favour of traditional, ordinary, simple names* (NP)

*...but in my order, the simple ones are preferred* (NP)

They are also referred to as **normal** (Pol. *normalne* “consistent with the norm, formula, recipe, as it should be, correct, indistinguishable, most common, average, ordinary”; USJP II, p. 1019) or in comparative form **more normal** (Pol. *normalniejsze*):

*from what you mentioned, a few seem normal to me* (NP)

*And of those sisters I know personally, they all have ‘more normal names’ like Agnieszka, Kasia...* (NP)

*...but one can make a proposal for a normal name* (NP)

*...and when it comes to ‘more normal’ names, I met Sister Krystyna today, quite likable* (GF)

The religious names of the first discussed group (let us call them typical for religious/monastic nomenclature) have a rich material exemplification in the statements of the Internet users. The following names are listed as *strange, original, unusual...*, etc.<sup>12</sup>: *Abeldaba, Agnessa, Akwinata, Alana, Albana, Alkantara, Alma, Alojza, Amabillis, Amadea, Amancja, Amaria, Andrea, Aniceta, Annunciata, Antonetta, Anwarita, Apolonia, Assumpta, Asyzjana, Avila, Beatryks, Benedykta, Bernarda, Bibianna, Bonawentura, Boromea, Caritas, Dafroza, Damaris, Damazja, Dariela, Darina, Dariusza, Dawida, Dobroslawa, Domicjana, Domitylla, Donalda, Elekta, Eleonora, Eligia, Elioza, Ella, Elli, Emanuela, Emiliana, Eustella, Ewangelista, Ewarysta, Ezechiela, Fabiana, Fabiola, Felicyta, Fidelisa, Fides, Filomena, Fulgencja, Gaudencja, Gemma, Goretti, Gracja, Gregoria, Gwidona, Heliadora, Hiacynta, Hilaria, Hortulana, Humilia, Immaculata<sup>13</sup>, Immakulata, Imelda, Inocencja, Jezualda, Joachima, Jonatana, Jordana, Julietta, Kanizja, Kanuta, Karmela, Kasjana,*

<sup>12</sup> Provided in alphabetical order.

<sup>13</sup> It seems that a mistake was made here by an Internet user in the transcript, it should be *Immaculata*.

*Klarisa, Kolbe, Kolumba, Korneliusza, Krescencja, Krucyfiksa, Kryspina, Larisa, Laurencja, Lauretta, Leonisa, Liguria, Liwia, Loreta, Loyola, Macieja, Majella, Maksencja, Margarita, Marietta, Marinoela, Marionilla, Mariusza, Matea, Mateusza, Mechtylda, Miranda, Mircjanna, Miriam, Miriana, Montini, Nadia, Natanaela, Natanela, Nazaria, Nepomucena, Nikodema, Noela, Paschalis, Pelagia, Pia, Piotra, Prospera, Redempta, Rodrycja, Romanilla, Rut, Ryta, Salomea, Salwaticze, Samaria, Samuela, Sancja, Sekunda, Sentencja, Sergia, Stella, Stephanie, Symeona, Symforiana, Symplicja, Symplicyta, Szmaragda, Tabita, Taida, Tarsycja, Tekla, Teobalda, Teodozja, Terencja, Teresilla, Terezja, Tobiasza, Triona, Tropeza, Tymotea, Vianneya, Wianeja, Wenancja, Wenita, Witalisa, Zachariasza, Zelia, Zyta.*

The group includes both female names, which are rare in secular nomenclature, such as *Dobrosława* (a Slavic name in the group of recessive names) or *Fabiola*, as well as onyms created within a particular order. Among the names created as a result of word-forming processes, one can indicate, among others: 1. Those derived (through paradigmatic derivation) from names attributed to men, e.g. *Dariusz, Maciej, Mariusz*, also those that retained foreign spelling, e.g. *Mateo*; 2. Those derived from names of places important for a given order or Church history, e.g. *Karmela, Avila*; 3. Those derived from male nicknames or surnames: e.g. *Nepomucena, Kolbe, Ewangelista, Vianneya*; 4. Those derived from Latin appellatives, e.g. *Caritas, Elekta, Fides*; 5. From symbols, e.g. *Krucyfiksa* or 6. Those derived from Christological titles: *Redempta, Salwaticze*. Names perceived as *strange* have both Polish and foreign spelling, e.g. *Stephane*, names such as *Vianneya* and *Wianeja*, etc. appear next to each other

There were also examples of male names typical for monastic nomenclature; these are male names, which in Poland, in secular nomenclature, are very rare or non-existent:

*Anicet*<sup>14</sup>, *Anioł*<sup>15</sup>, *Emanuel*<sup>16</sup>, *Pacyfik*<sup>17</sup>, *Pankracy*<sup>18</sup>, *Sokrat*<sup>19</sup>, *Tarsycjusz*<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> In *Słownik imion współcześnie w Polsce używanych*, Kazimierz Rymut notes the form *Anicet* (only 32 bearers) (1995, p. 27).

<sup>15</sup> In *Słownik imion współcześnie w Polsce używanych*, Rymut notes the form *Anioł* (only 6 bearers) (1995, p. 28).

<sup>16</sup> In *Słownik imion współcześnie w Polsce używanych*, Rymut notes the form *Emanuel* (2395 bearers) (1995, p. 112).

<sup>17</sup> In *Słownik imion współcześnie w Polsce używanych*, Rymut notes the form *Pacyfik* (only 1 bearer) (1995, p. 314).

<sup>18</sup> In *Słownik imion współcześnie w Polsce używanych*, Rymut notes the form *Pankracy* (only 81 bearers) (1995, p. 315).

<sup>19</sup> Rymut does not record the form of *Sokrat* as used in Poland (1995, p. 365).

<sup>20</sup> In *Słownik imion współcześnie w Polsce używanych*, Rymut notes the form *Tarsycjusz* (only 8 bearers) (1995, p. 381).

Internet users listed the following examples as *ordinary* names: *Agnieszka, Franciszka, Karolina, Katarzyna, Klara, Łucja, Maksymiliana, Marcelina, Maria, Tereska*<sup>21</sup>, *Zofia*.

One of the Internet users provides names, qualifying them as *one of the more ordinary ones*, i.e. she places them somewhere between the first and second group; these names include *Edwina, Krystiana, Oliwia, Samuela, Sancja*.

A dispute over a category was caused by the name *Sara*, as one of the Internet users mentioned it among other names typical for the religious nomenclature, which caused opposition of another person participating in the discussion: *owieczka* [username – vocative case], *Sara doesn't have a weird name* :P (NP).

Apart from this quite clear division of religious names by Internet users, which is signalled by the use of appropriate attributives, forum posters often refer also to the aesthetic criterion. They express their likes and dislikes, most frequently using the expression, ***I like*** (Pol. *podoba mi się*, often with additional attributives such as *very much, the most*). The names of groups 1 and 2 are often indicated in such cases:

*And I like Adalberta the most* (NP)

*And here are the names I like (...) Fides (signifying faith), Nadia, Amnis (signifying stream), Via (signifying road)* (NP)

*Personally I also like the name Konstancja, Rita, Marietta, Nadzieja, Fides, Stella, Maristella, Felicyta, Imelda, Maria and many other names* :) (NP)

*I like the names Rita, Maria and Maria Magdalena very much* <33 (NP)

*And I've recently liked Pia* (NP)

*I like the name Gabriela veeery much* (NP)

The same meaning can be found in the description of our preferences, using the term ***prefer something*** (Pol. *woleć coś*).

*...I prefer ordinary ones like Teresa, Marcelina, Karolina* (NP)

Internet users also indicate their preferences by choosing a name they would like to bear; then they use a construction of the following type: ***I would like my name to be*** (Pol. *chciał(a)bym mieć na imię*):

*And I'd like my name to be Kolma or Bonita or Rut* (NP)

The aesthetic criterion is also referred to by the adjective ***beautiful*** (Pol. *piękny*), used to describe religious names:

*My sisters from the group received beautiful names (and predicates) of Sister Teresa Benedykta – this name is pronounced entirely using these two, or Sister Nadia, Sister Aleta. In general, my sisters have many beautiful names that are often not found in other congregations* (NP)

<sup>21</sup> The diminutive form *Tereska* is certainly given by the Internet user and not heard by him/her in the communication between the nuns.



*They are beautiful and already taken among my sisters; young sisters, may I add (NP)*

*Very beautiful name, just like the saint patroness (NP)*

Occasionally there was the adjective *cute* (Pol. *śliczny*) and also *pretty* (Pol. *ładny*):

*And you've heard of the name Anuncjata, cute, isn't it (NP)*

*Nice thread, some names are pretty (GF)*

Once, the adjective *great* (Pol. *świetny*) was used:

*...I like those: Klara, Franciszka, Maksymiliana. They're great :D (NP)*

As is commonly known, the aesthetic criterion is also currently the dominating criterion used by parents when choosing a forename after the birth of a child.

In one of the entries, the phenomenon of religious fashion for names, understood by the Internet user as a tendency to choose/use given names in religious orders, has been indicated:

*I know more than half of those names in real life, so I can see they're in the religious fashion (NP)*

Internet users also drew attention to the fact that some religious/monastic names generate problems with articulation, recording or remembering:

*I recently met Sister Majella ;) At first I couldn't read it aloud, but later I managed to do it somehow :D (NP)*

*When I was at 'Come and See' in Łagiewniki, I couldn't remember the name Symplicja :P (NP)*

*Nepomucenna ;] one of the Immaculates, the order at which at the very beginning it was impossible to choose a name – there were only names out of God's Will. And after her oath, another sister comes up to her and asks: 'So what's your name?' And she responds: 'errrrr I don't know.' She couldn't even repeat her name (NP)*

*Gee, some of those names are really weird and unpronounceable :D (NP)*

*I know Sister Immakulata. With the last one, there was a funny story: my then little son called her sister Makulatura [Eng. wastepaper]. He was very ashamed because he couldn't remember her name. Fortunately, the sister had a great sense of humour and so it was very amusing to her (GF)*

A special group among the names given and commented on by Internet users are those that are the result of the creation (semantic and verbal) by the Internet users themselves, or other persons, including clergy, and have been heard in other places by the forum users. These names belong to the category of a linguistic joke:

*I was once offered the name of Salcesona by a priest, or in combination with the predicate Lina of the main bell... once again with one sister on a walk we invented... e.g. Flakonia of the side altars, Pulcheria of the larger body shapes... (NP)*

*As for those names which you mentioned at the beginning, I heard Sister Chochla of the Sunday broth, Sister Konewka of the monastery garden, Sister Wróbelka of the morning rising... (NP)*

*There may also be Sister Herkulesa of the Divine Power (supposedly authentic), Sister Asfalta of the Path of God, Sister Szafa from eternal robes (NP)*

*Or maybe Sister Gleba from the Promised Land (I invented it myself) (NP)*

*Or maybe this: Sister Asfalta of the ways of Christ, Sister Flakonia of the side altars, Sister Marsja of the extraterrestrial contacts. It's a joke, just to be clear (NP)*

*Back to the topic, the last time I called that sister on the phone, she introduced herself. Sister Skleroza of eternal oblivion. And here she's right, because she always forgets something :) (NP)*

*There's also Sister Furiata of God's wrath and Sister Flakonia of bouquets (GF)*

There were also jokes based on the creation and meaning of religious names:

*A nun enters a pharmacy and looks carefully at the shelves... The saleswoman asks how she might be of help, and the sister says that she is looking for new names... :D imagine, for example, Sister Nospa, Peralgina?... :D (NP)*

It is also worth mentioning that Internet users refer to funny associations about the names of Fr. Jan Twardowski, engraved in his work:

*I remembered that in a poem by Fr. Twardowski it goes like this: 'Sister Konsolata because she bites [Pol. kąsa] and flies [Pol. lata]' (GF).*

## CONCLUSION

Internet users' comments on religious names are focused on the onyms typical of religious nomenclature, which in their opinion are *strange, bizarre, original, twisted, interesting, freakish* or *fancy*. In order to adequately define their perception of the religious name, the commenters also use attributives with negation, such as *extraordinary, non-traditional, unusual, unrepeatable*, as well as fashionable and used in a figurative sense: *good one, mega, outlandish, gems*, or express their attitude through a graphic record of the word: *vaaaaaaaried*.

The valuation contained in these attributives is not unambiguous, because, while words like *strange, bizarre, freakish* may have rather negative connotations, quite the opposite is true for terms like: *interesting* or *gem*, whereas other forms connote very subjective content, depending on the context and the person constructing the statement (e.g. *fancy, unusual, non-traditional, vaaaaaaaried*).

These names, typical of religious nomenclature, are in opposition to *ordinary, traditional, simple and normal* names. The very number of attributives used to denote one or the other group of names indicates which one attracts the attention

of Internet users – this is typical of religious nomenclature. It is also confirmed by the anecdotes, created by funny names cited for the sake of discussion or jokes.

*Translated into English by Marek Robak-Sobolewski*

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- GF – [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,12924,23843438,23843438,pokrecone\\_imiona\\_zakonne.html](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,12924,23843438,23843438,pokrecone_imiona_zakonne.html)  
(access: 02.09.2018)
- lit. – literary
- NP – <http://www.naszepowolanie.pun.pl/viewprintable.php?id=109> (access: 02.09.2018)
- Pol. – Polish
- USJP I–IV – Dubisz, Stanisław (ed.). (2008). *Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego PWN*. Vol. 1–4. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN
- WSF – Kłosińska, Anna, Sobol, Elżbieta, Stankiewicz, Anna (eds.). (2005). *Wielki słownik frazeologiczny PWN z przysłowiami*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN

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## ABSTRACT

This article is part of the study of Polish religious names. The purpose is to analyse the reception of religious names by Internet users (the subject of the description was made by their comments on various Internet forums). The analysis of the methods of describing and evaluating religious names, unusual for baptismal nomenclature and names marked as *ordinary* Internet users, was carried out. The article uses both onomastic (especially religious onomastics) and sociolinguistic works.

**Keywords:** names, religious names, religious onomastics

## ABSTRAKT

Niniejszy artykuł wpisuje się w nurt badań nad polskim imiennictwem zakonnym. Celem analiz uczyniono recepcję imion zakonnych przez środowisko internautów (przedmiotem opisu były wypowiedzi internautów umieszczone na różnych forach internetowych). Dokonano analizy sposobów opisu i wartościowania imion zakonnych, nietypowych dla nazewnictwa chrześcijańskiego oraz imion zwanych przez internautów *zwykłymi*. W artykule wykorzystano zarówno prace onomastyczne (zwłaszcza z onomastyki religijnej), jak i socjolingwistyczne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** imiona, imiona zakonne, onomastyka religijna

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