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The symbolism of Hercules in the religious and political propaganda of the Roman Empire as attested by a *terra sigillata* bowl from Górzyca in Słubice County

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The paper considers the symbolic aspects of the figure of Hercules depicted on a *terra sigillata* bowl discovered in Górzyca, Słubice County, in the context of the Roman mythical hero cult. Hercules, a superhuman hero equal to the gods, played a very special role in Roman religion and Imperial ideology. The vessel is an example of exquisite tableware produced in specialized provincial workshops. The relief decoration of such dishes allows us not only to identify particular potters and workshops, but also to propose the dating in terms of absolute chronology. *Terra sigillata* vessels constitute one of the most important categories of Roman imports in the *Barbaricum*, a community of Wielbark culture being one of the recipients.

KEY-WORDS: Hercules, Lezoux, *terra sigillata*, imperial propaganda, Górzyca, Wielbark Culture, *Barbaricum*

BURIAL OF A YOUNG FEMALE ARISTOCRAT

Intense archaeological excavation in recent years in the mid-Oder river region, led to the discovery of numerous archaeological sites representing Wielbark culture. One of these is site 20 in Górzyca in the Lubuskie Province, demonstrating a sound cultural and chronological sequences of occupation and including a cemetery of the said culture (Socha and Sójkowska-Socha 2012; 2014). It is located in an area known as the Lubusz Breakthrough on the Oder, on a wide floodplain terrace just 0.8 km from the river bed. The site was damaged substantially due to intensive modern land transformation in the region.

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The burial ground from the Roman period in Górzyca includes graves of the so-called Lubusz group of the Elbe cultural circle and Wielbark culture, the latter accounting for about 70% of the discovered graves (85 in all). The bi-ritual necropolis of the Wielbark community dates to the B_2 , B_2/C_1 – C_{1a} , C_1 phases of the Roman period (Socha and Sójkowska-Socha 2012: 92, 112–113; 2014: 34–43). Numerous imported goods from Roman workshops, such as bronze brooches (*tutulus* type, disc brooch) and glass and amber beads, were discovered in the graves. One such import was the *terra sigillata* bowl.

The bowl was found in a partly damaged cremation burial (no. 9). Together with several other objects it made up the grave goods of a young woman aged around 22–25 (Socha and Sójkowska-Socha 2012; Wrzesińska 2012; Tyszler 2012a). It appears to have been placed in the pit first, followed by other wares and utensils, including a golden spherical pendant, a coin (*subaerat*?), a Jurassic mollusk *Pholadomya* fossil used as the centerpiece of a pendant, a bronze fibula, numerous glass beads and decorated clay beads, a casket ferrule, a key, bone and metal needles (Socha and Sójkowska-Socha 2012: 97–112, figs 9–17). The condition of the artifacts is characteristic of a cremation burial. The rich equipment indicates that the remains buried here belonged to a young female aristocrat of Wielbark Culture origin. The grave is dated to the B2/C1 phase of the Roman period, which is synchronized in the absolute chronology with the last quarter of the 2nd century AD and the first two decades of the 3rd century AD.

DECORATION AND ATTRIBUTION OF THE TERRA SIGILLATA BOWL (Figs 1-3)

The bowl discovered in the burial of a young female aristocrat in Górzyca was found in 77 pieces and only a few small fragments turned out to be missing following reconstruction. These were either not placed in the burial or were diffused outside the pit and hence impossible to find during the exploration. The condition of the fragments is diverse: some of them are burned and disfigured, others only burned with secondarily discolored slip; one piece presented the original dark red slip without any signs of burning. The vessel is a hemispherical bowl type 37 in Dragendorff's classification (Dragendorff 1895), with rim diameter of approximately 23.8–24.0 cm and height of about 13.5–13.8 cm. The bowl has been published (Socha and Sójkowska-Socha 2012: 93, 97, figs 4, 5, 7, 9) and studied (Tyszler 2012a)¹.

Bowls of this kind were produced in two stages. First a matrix was prepared with the decoration in negative and often stamped by the producer. The second stage

¹ It was exhibited at the 'L'archéologie c'est notre histoire. Les dernières découvertes à Lezoux' in France from April 13 to December 31, 2013; http://www.puydedome.com; http://www.muzeum.kostrzyn. pl; http://archeologia.uni.lodz.pl/blog/porcelana-antyku).



Fig. 1a–c. Górzyca, site 20, Słubice county. *Terra sigillata* attributed to the Laxtucissa or Laxtucissa-Paternus II workshops in Lezoux. Photo by W. Pohorecki, design by L. Tyszler

involved impressing the clay bowl in the matrix and attaching a wide, smooth (undecorated) rim with a rolled edge as well as a profiled foot to the decorated body. A pre-firing potter's stamp could have been added at this stage. The next steps, which were typical of all *terra sigillata* wares, included applying a slip and firing, both procedures executed by highly specialized potters. The relief decoration and shiny slip in various shades of red indicated high quality. Products of this kind constituted coveted luxury goods.

The relief decoration on the Górzyca bowl was incorporated into a broad register of decoration. A line of ovoli (type Rogers B 206) with a wavy line under it (type Rogers A 23) marks the top of this zone, running around the circumference. The main part of the register is filled with circular medallions within plain double concentric rings, each medallion featuring a figure of Heracles probably stamped with the same die, although the condition of the vessels makes it difficult to verify it. The iconography of this figural representation will be analyzed below. Lines of bead-and-reel ornament (type Rogers A 10) separate the metopes with the medallions from the intervening metopes and divide this field also into two parts horizontally. In the top part are single leaves (type Rogers J 45) and two geese (type Oswald 2301/on the left) within a hanging arc; the lower contains a small medallion with the head of Silenus (type Stanfield, Simpson, fig. 104: 4, here on the left). Smaller trefoil floral ornaments of various sizes (type, Rogers G 102, G 159), lily flowers (type Rogers G 88), rosettes (type Rogers C 123) and decorative column imitations (type Rogers P 37) fill all the available space in keeping with the *horror vacui* principle. There are also, both popular in the Lezoux workshops. The decoration style and the use of certain decorative elements, like the small single circles and larger double circles popular in the Lezoux workshops, suggest the workshops of either Laxtucissa or the duo Laxtucissa-Paternus (style II) active in Lezoux at the time that the bowl was made. The potter Laxtucissa was dated to about AD 145-170 or AD 150-170 (Stanfield and Simpson 1990: 228-229; Rogers 1999: 156) and Paternus style II to around AD 150/160–180/190 (Stanfield and Simpson 1990: 239; Rogers 1999: 190). Bearing in mind the proposed dating, we can assume that our bowl was made around AD 145/150-170/180 or AD 150/160-170/180 (for a complete discussion of decoration and stylistics as well as dating of the vessel, see: Tyszler 2012a: 128–131, tab. 1, fig. 1A–B, 2, 3A–F, 4A–B).

POTTERY WORKSHOPS IN LEZOUX

The best known workshops in central Gaul were active in Lezoux (ancient *Ledosus*) near Clermont-Ferrand (district of Puy-de-Dôme) (Bet and Vertet 1986: 138–144; Tyszler 1999 I: 27–28, note 1; 2012b: 183–184). They belonged to a larger group of ateliers, known from places like Les Martres-de-Veyre, Terre-Franche, Lubié (Bémont and Jacob 1986). Many connections have been demonstrated to exist between these workshops, both in the making of certain products and the creating of new branches. Lezoux was a vast agglomeration, which included a number of workshops, operating in different time periods. More than a hundred pottery kilns were discovered between the 17th and the 19th century (this being the lowest estimate, Bet and Vertet 1986: 141), validating the importance of this pottery center. *Terra sigillata* started being produced in Lezoux in the reign of Tiberius and, following a period of recession, climaxed in the late Flavian period and in the reign of Trajan; it continued at a high level through the reign of Commodus (Bet and Vertet 1986: 139). The Górzyca bowl was made during the heyday of the Lezoux workshops, in the reign of the emperors Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius. The provincial Danube markets declined significantly as a result of the Marcomannic Wars (AD 166/167-180) and the delivery of goods from the terra sigillata pottery workshops ceased at the close of the wars (Tyszler 1999 I: 33-34; 2012b: 188). A major crisis of the central Gaulish workshops during the reign of Septimius Severus is also worth mentioning. It is assumed that production weakened significantly because of the fighting in the Lyon (Latin Lugdunum) area in AD 197, which cut off the workshops from most markets (Stanfield and Simpson 1990: 29). The crisis was augmented by rising competition from pottery centers on the Rhine in Germania and eastern Gaul.

THE MEDALLIONS WITH HERCULES (Figs 4-6)

The figure of Hercules depicted on the Górzyca bowl is depicted sitting on a crossframed folding chair, the Latin *sella curulis* or curule seat. He is well-built, with an athletic chest and muscular arms and legs. The head is small compared to his enormous body and the facial features are barely visible. In his left hand Hercules holds a small, symbolic, studded club, while supporting himself on his right hand resting on the corner of the said seat. The *sella curulis* was restricted in ancient Rome for senior officials, judges, consuls and praetors. Over time it started being used by the Roman emperors in their political propaganda. The interpretation of this stamp in Oswald's catalog (1991, No. 773) contains many mistakes, including a small jug (libation vessel) placed in Hercules right hand, while in fact this hand rests on the corner of the chair (Tyszler 2012a: 131, Fig. 3B–C). The bowl from Górzyca features a full version of the Hercules image.

A club and a lion skin are the most recognizable attributes of Hercules, aside from a quiver and arrows. It is an interesting combination, considering that the hero made the first two himself, whereas the others were gifts of the gods Apollo and Hephaestus as a sign of their support (Berens 2009: 198). The club and the skin derived from the first task that Hercules received from Eurystheus, that is, killing the lion that was



Fig. 2a–c. Górzyca, site 20, Słubice county. Herkules sitting on a curule seat (*sella curulis*) Photo by W. Pohorecki, design by L. Tyszler

ravaging the Nemean Valley northeast of Mycenae. The hero stunned the lion with his handmade club and then strangled the beast with his bare hands. The skin which he took off with his bare hands became his trademark just as the club (Morford and Lenardon 2003: 523). Its symbolism is a very broad concept, with a certain amount of ambiguity assigned to the nature of this kind of weapon: at once an attribute of glory and bravery, and a symbol of brutality, a thunderbolt, penalty and treason. It was made of oak as befitted a hero's club, emphasizing the power and strength of its owner. Oak was used to make the weapons of the solar heroes. In the case of Hercules, it was a symbol of wildness, cruelty, thunder and lightning (Kopaliński 1991: Maczuga <club>).

Potters from the workshops in Lezoux in Central Gaul decorated their vessels willingly with figures of Hercules with the various attributes symbolizing his various works: club and lion skin, lion skin and bow, libation vessels, strangling two snakes, fighting a lion, leading Cerberus, carrying the Erymanthian Boar, picking apples in the garden of the Hesperidia and others (Oswald 1991, nos 746, 748–749, 751, 753, 755–757, 759–760, 768–769, 773–776, 779–785, 789–790, 792–793, 795–796) (Fig. 7). The image of an old, bald man holding three of the hero's most important attributes: club, lion skin and bow (Oswald 1991, No. 746), should be identified as the Celtic god Ogmios-Smertulus. Oswald's catalog does not contain a full list of variant representations of Hercules attributed to Lezoux and this tends to grow every time new manufactories belonging to the Lezoux pottery group are discovered. Included especially are the workshops in Martres-de-Veyre, where figural representations of Hercules on *terra sigillata* vessels were noted frequently in various forms, for example, Oswald numbers 773, 757, 784 and others without counterpart in the catalog (Terrisse 1972, pl. 29: 704; 34: 703, 416, 468, 469, 1080; Romeuf 2001: pl. 67: 5).

THE HERO-GOD IN THE RELIGION AND IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY

Hercules was of particular importance in Roman religion and imperial ideology, as well as in the provincial cult. The Romans took over his cult deriving from the Greek world, where the hero was known as Heracles, and enhanced it. He was the son of Zeus (Jupiter to the Romans) and Alcmene, wife of Amphitryon, king of Thebes. found a guardian and protectress in the goddess Athena (Roman Minerva). As a baby in the cradle he manifested his tremendous strength by strangling the poisonous snakes sent by the goddess Hera (Morford and Lenardon 2003: 519–521; Berens 2009: 195–196). As a grown man he performed twelve extraordinary labors commissioned by the king Eurystheus, making himself famous. These labors were: 1/ slaying the lion ravaging the Nemean Valley, 2/ slaying the hydra spreading terror in the Lernaean swamp, 3/ capturing Artemis's favorite animal the Golden Hind live, 4/ capturing the boar that lived on Mount Erymanthos in Arcadia and was devastating the area, 5/ cleaning



















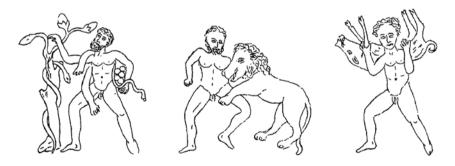


Fig. 3. Stamps with the images of Hercules from the workshop in Lezoux. Types No 748, 749, 755, 756, 746, 785, 769, 760B, 775, 773, 783, 792, 784, 796, 789. After Oswald 1991; design by L. Tyszler

out the Augean stables, 6/ chasing the birds from the area of the Lake Stymphalia inArcadia, 7/ capturing the Cretan Bull, 8/ stealing the Mares of Diomedes, son of Ares and the king of the Thracian tribe of Bistones, 9/ getting the girdle of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, 10/ rounding up the cattle of the monster Geryon, 11/ stealing the apples of the Hesperides, 12/ capturing Cerberus, the dog which guarded the entrance to the underworld (Morford and Lenardon 2003: 523–530; Berens 2009: 199–213).

The Hercules cult was introduced in Rome during the Republic period; it has been confirmed in the year 399 BC. The Ara Maxima altar was erected on the Forum Boarium on the Tiber, resulting in the deified hero's popularity among merchants and traders. Being a guardian of businesses, he was given the title *Custos*. Trade agreements were pledged and vows taken at the Ara Maxima and with time it became a custom to offer a tenth of the profits from such agreements to the god himself (Beard *et al.* 1998: 2, 173–174; Wojciechowski 2005: 33). Most likely around 300 BC, the cult of Hercules as patron of merchants at the Ara Maxima was replaced by a cult associated with the military aspect of the deity (Wojciechowski 2005: 39). Hercules Invictus had his own festival in the Roman calendar on August 12, when sacrifices were made in his honor.

During the Samnite Wars the military aspect of the hero was emphasized more resulting in his receiving another title, *Victor* – victorious, and later also *Invictus* – invincible. Hercules Victor combined two seemingly contradictory aspects: he was a patron of both merchants and warriors (Wojciechowski 2005: 46–47). Over time, Hercules Invictus worshiped as a patron of victory was identified increasingly often with the god of war Mars, a connection emphasized by the fact that he had his own collegium of Salii, which is proved in his sanctuary at Tibur (Marzano 2009: 86, 88).

During the reign of Augustus Hercules already played a certain religious role and with time he became a protective deity of the imperial family. However, he was not the favorite deity of Augustus, as Mark Antony used to mention being connected with the hero in his propaganda (Hekster 2004a: 1). Nevertheless, with the connivance of the emperor, comparisons of Augustus and Hercules were made by the poets of this time (Hekster 2004a: 8).

The mighty son of Zeus was least favored during the Julio-Claudian dynasty. He was treated more favorably by the Flavians, particularly Domitian who wanted to be identified with the god. The apogee of his popularity came during the reign of Trajan and his successors. He became a guardian of the imperial household, and as such received the title of *Hercules domus Augusti*. He was rapidly made a central figure of the emperor's imperial ideology. His special place in Trajan's and Hadrian's religiosity was certainly due to the tradition from their native Italica near ancient Gades (modern Cadiz), where Hercules Gaditanus was worshipped. He was the equivalent of the Punic Melkart. Furthermore, the hero wandering through the world and helping the weaker,

to which Pliny the Younger compared Trajan, or a strong leader, who is the same for his people as a shepherd to his flock, a hero who travels the world alone and takes care of its welfare – this image quickly proved to be worthy of the emperor. Only by a man of extraordinary, heroic strength, like Hercules, could hold a position of such importance and responsibility, defeating tyrants and bringing peace to the world, and like the hero destined to become immortal (Hekster 2005: 1–2; Barry 2011: 21). The importance of the deity was also highlighted by Trajan who chose him for his military-related coinage. An image of Hercules replaced that of the emperor on the obverse of one of the coins, surrounded by the inscription IMP CAES TRAIANI AUG GERM; the reverse showed a boar as the emblem of a legion. Another coin bore the image of the emperor on the obverse and, on the reverse, of Trajan's Column in the form of a club, set on a pedestal draped with lion skins. Yet another shows the statue of Hercules Gaditanus/Victor (Hekster 2005: 2; Barry 2011: 21–22).

Hercules Gaditanus was present even more strongly in Hadrian's ideology. While Trajan had promoted the image of a warrior hero conquering the world, his successor portrayed him more as a traveler. Hercules was connected with Gades, the hometown of the emperor's mother, by two legends referring to the labors he performed. One version of the myths located the garden of the Hesperides in the westernmost part of Europe and it was also there that the hero was supposed to round up Geryon's cattle. Moreover, returning with the cattle, he stopped in Italy, where he fought Cacus. The Ara Maxima was set up as a result of these adventures, thus making a direct connection between the deity and the Eternal City. Hadrian issued special coins associated with the hero, among others a series of aurei with Hercules Gaditanus and Oceanus on the reverse. A sanctuary of Hercules Victor was also built in the residence of the emperor in Tibur (modern Tivoli) (Hekster 2005: 3; Barry 2011: 22–23).

The figure of Hercules continued to be used in imperial ideology, but the most favored variant from the reign of Antoninus Pius was Hercules Victor/Invictus (Hekster 2005: 3). One of the tenets of Antoninus Pius's religious policy was to return to tradition; the emperor wished to recreate the Republican religious spirit as well as reinforce and spread the rituals and worship of the true Roman gods throughout the empire. Between AD 147 and 149 the celebrations of the 900th anniversary of the founding of Rome took place, celebrated among others by the issue of coins and medallions designed to draw attention to the religious history of the empire. Hercules and his labors were also recalled in those days. A medallion released between AD 140 and 143 depicted Hercules defeating Cacus on the reverse; another one, issued after AD 145, showed Hercules feasting after a sacrifice. On coins he was represented in the garden of the Hesperides (AD 140–143), fighting the centaurs (AD 148) and recognizing his son Telephus (AD 145–147) (Bryant 1895: 141–143; Rowan 2014: 111–113). Antoninus Pius legitimized Hercules as a fully Roman deity and this reflected the manner of his government. Hercules was presented no longer as a great traveler but rather as quiet guardian residing in Rome. Like the emperor he had no need to travel around the empire, since he was informed of everything through a well-developed information system (Hekster 2005: 3–4). In the time of Commodus, however, the emperor proclaimed himself the 'new Hercules' and claimed to be the reincarnation of the god on earth in order to substantiate his divine right to rule and used all means of propaganda to emphasize this. Coins were issued with a representation of the emperor together with Hercules or as the god himself. Statues of the kind were made and the emperor frequently dressed in public as Hercules. He even fought as a gladiator in order to demonstrate to his people the resemblance to the hero who protected the world from chaos and danger. Many ceremonies were held during this emperor's reign to commemorate the achievements of the deified hero (Hekster 2005: 4–9).

HERCULES, THE ANCESTOR OF THE GAULS

Over time the cult of Hercules was introduced in the provinces, Gaul included, where it was connected with local deities. Hercules was given local titles: Andossus, Ilunnus, Deusonienis, Magusanus and Saxanus. He was also identified with the Celtic Ogmios/Smertulus. Both were associated with regeneration and symbolized the connection between the world of the living and the underworld. Both overcame death and become demigods. Ogmios was a god from whom all life derived and Hercules was supposed to be the ancestor of all the Gauls (Hekster 2004b: 672; Koch 2006: 905–906, 1393). Diodorus Siculus wrote of Hercules stopping in Alesia on one of his journeys to the north and fathering there Galates, from whom the Gauls originated. His role therefore was special, bonding the province to the Roman Empire. Moreover, because of his unique relation to animals, Hercules took an important place in a pastoral society (Koch 2006: 906; d'Encarnação 2008: 34–35).

It seems, however, that the deities linked to their Roman equivalents in the 2nd and the 3rd century AD were no longer recognizable as the gods worshipped by the pre-Roman inhabitants of Gaul in the 2nd and rst century BC. Too little is known of pre-Roman Celtic religion for the evolution of Celtic beliefs under Roman influence to be clearly understood. Local religion had evolved long before the time of Augustus and continued to do so long after his death. Gods with Celtic theonyms, including Hercules with the Celtic titles and identified with pre-Roman deities, could have been a part of change that was intended to integrate to local community. One must keep in mind that only a handful, the druid priests, had knowledge of the gods in Celtic society. It is quite possible that Hercules was intended as a means of bringing the spiritual world closer to the people. Hercules also played a very important role in the integration of local traditions with those of the Roman religion. There was a wide-spread cult of local ancestor-heroes who acted intercessors between humans and gods

in Celtic religion until the 1st century AD. The Roman god became a kind of replacement. In Roman times, we can observe a continuation of this tradition in the form of temples erected on burials of this kind (d'Encarnação 2008: 13–20).

Epigraphic sources are very useful for studies of the Hercules cult in Gaul. The following were found in the various administrative units of Gaul respectively:

Gallia Narbonensis: 17 monuments and 16 inscriptions associated with the Hercules cult, three of which overlapped the categories, giving in effect 30 sites associated with the deity; four persons were identified as dedicating such inscriptions;

Gallia Aquitania: 22 monuments and eight inscriptions, two of which overlapped, giving 28 sites associated with the deity and five dedicating persons;

Gallia Belgica: 158 monuments and 32 inscriptions, 11 of which overlapping, which gives 179 sites associated with the deity and 20 dedicating persons;

Gallia Lugdunensis: 39 monuments and 1 inscription; none of them overlapping, hence 40 sites associated with the deity (Hekster 2004b: 670; Wojciechowski 2005: 182).

Inscriptions in honor of the deity can be found throughout the province, but mostly in the northeastern region. This area was associated with Hercules Magusanus who gained the greatest popularity among soldiers and was introduced into the Roman pantheon thanks to the army. The epigraphic evidence is not the only grounds for estimating the popularity of the Hercules cult, ergo it does not mean that his worship was less common in other parts of Gaul (Wojciechowski 2005: 181–183; d'Encarnação 2008: 16). It should be underlined that Hercules was very successful in Gaul and many local gods and deities were identified with this hero. In military areas, he was worshiped as a protector of soldiers, one who guaranteed victory.

CONCLUSIONS

To recapitulate, the representation of Hercules on the *terra sigillata* bowl, discovered in Górzyca, attributed to the Laxtucissa or Laxtucissa-Paternus II workshops in Lezoux, can certainly be considered as a form of implementing Roman propaganda and ideological motifs. The hero cult, popular in the Republican period, was given new meaning in the religious policies of the empire. Hercules, son of Jupiter, offered new opportunities for identifying the emperor with the hero-god. It was not until the time of Trajan, however, that a substantial change occurred, turning the demi-god into a model of a good emperor and man, both winning and bringing peace. The reign of this emperor coincides with a period of prosperity of the workshops in Lezoux, observed in the relatively frequent use of different representations of Hercules by the potters in their decoration of *terra sigillata* vessels, which is the main topic of the present article (Tyszler 2012a: 133). Hercules maintained his significant position in the religious policies of the Empire during the reign of Antoninus Pius, which is when the bowl from Górzyca was made, between about AD 145/150 or 150/160 and about AD 170/180. Keeping in mind the production process, one can assume that it is one of many copies of the same bowl molded in one or more matrices, distributed together with bowls from other workshops, via the trading guilds within the limits of the empire. Roman soldiers stationing on the Limes were a major customer for *terra sigillata* products. The luxurious tableware was used by the middle-class soldiers and it fulfilled perfectly the function of spreading imperial propaganda. Relatively few bowls from the Lezoux workshops passed beyond the Limes, reaching *Barbaricum*, including Polish lands (Tyszler 1999; 2012a). It is certainly not that obvious that the Hercules symbolism or the figure of the hero itself for that matter was understood outside of the Roman Empire, in this case by the elites of the Wielbark culture in the Górzyca area on the middle Oder.

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Abbreviations: Drag. = Dragendorff H. 1895 Oswald = Oswald 1991 Rogers = Rogers G.B. 1974 Stanfield, Simpson = Stanfield J.A., Simpson G. 1958, 1990

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