

A Proto-Indo-European word for 'spider'? Un-weaving the prehistory of the Greek ἀράχνη and the Latin *arāneus*

Stefan Höfler
(Austrian Academy of Sciences; University of Vienna)

&

Johan Ulrik Nielsen
(University of Copenhagen)

Abstract

The Greek ἀράχνη and the Latin *arāneus* 'spider' have long been considered cognates, yet a convincing etymology is still missing. Based on words for 'spider' in other Indo-European traditions that are predominantly derived from roots and verbs meaning 'weave', 'spin', and the like, we assume that the root at the core of Gk. ἀράχνη and Lat. *arāneus* had similar semantics. Analysing the preform **araksnā* as **h₂f_{h₂(ǵ)sneh₂-}*, we recognize the underlying root **h₂reh₂(ǵ)-* 'weave' not only in ἀράχνη and *arāneus*, but also in the Gk. ῥῆγος 'rug, blanket' and the root noun ῥώξ 'a kind of venomous spider', the continuant of a former agent noun 'weaver'.

Keywords

etymology; laryngeal dissimilation; nominal derivation; Graeco-Latin isogloss

1. Introduction

The¹ etymology of Greek ἀράχνη ‘spider; spider’s web’ (Hp., A., Arist. etc.), ἀράχνης m. ‘spider’ (Hes., Pi. etc.), ἀραχνος m. ‘id.’ (A. *Supp.* 887), ἀράχνιον n. ‘spider’s web’ (*Od.*+), and Latin *arāneus* m. ‘spider’ (Plaut.+), *arānea* f. ‘spider’s web’ (Plaut.+), ‘spider’ (Cat.+)² is still a major mystery within the historical grammar of the two languages. The preform underlying these formations can be phonologically reconstructed as **araksnā*,² with **aksn-* > Gk. -αχν- as in ἄχνη ‘chaff’ (**aksnā*) and **aksN-* > Lat. -āN- as in *exāmen* ‘swarm (of bees)’ (**eksagsmen*).

Within Latin, the expected **arāna* was further extended by **-eġo-* to give *arāneus*, *arānea*. As this suffix usually derives relational adjectives (cf. *aurum* ‘gold’ > *aureus* ‘golden’), one could hypothesize that the adjective *arāneus* ‘of a spider’ (attested in Plin., Col.) was first substantivized as a word for the web of the spider (i.e., *arānea* ‘spider’s web’ Plaut.+). Such a process can be paralleled not only within Latin (cf. *arāneum* n. ‘spider’s web’ Phaed., Plin.) but also in Greek (cf. ἀράχνιον n. ‘spider’s web’ *Od.*+, probably from an adjective **ἀράχνιος* ‘of a spider’). From this, the meaning ‘spider’ (Cat.+)³ could have developed by metonymy. On the other hand, however, Gk. ἀράχνη has both meanings ‘spider’ and ‘spider’s web’ as well and shows that the metonymy can (arguably, at least) develop in the other direction, too. In addition, the masculine *arāneus* that only means ‘spider’ is apparently the older variant (cf. Ernout & Meillet 1959: p. 42 s.v. *arāneus*). In any event, the suffix *-eus*, *-ea* is not uncommon in words denoting various animals (e.g., *ardea* ‘heron’), sometimes small (e.g., *clupea* ‘a kind of very small river-fish’) and/or unwanted ones (e.g., *tinea* ‘larva, grub, maggot’), and in some cases forms with and without *-eus*, *-ea* stand side by side (e.g., *equulus* ‘small horse’ and *equuleus* ‘id.’), at times with a difference in meaning (e.g., *hinnulus* ‘young mule’ and *hinnuleus* ‘young stag or roebuck’) or adding only a slight nuance (e.g., *capra* ‘she-goat’ and *caprea* ‘a kind of wild she-goat’). In line with this, *arāneus*, *arānea* might originally have meant ‘small spider’ or ‘a kind of spider’ and therefore presupposes a form **arāna* < **araksnā*.

Yet any further analysis of the **araksnā* that both Gk. ἀράχνη and Lat. *arāneus* point to is made unsustainable for lack of obvious etymological cognates.³ This is why some scholars have entertained the thought that Lat. *arāneus*, *arānea* is a loan from Greek

1 This paper started out as a joint summer research project and was written as part of the project *Of beasts and men*, which received funding from the *European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program* under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. H2020-MSCA-IF-2018-835954. We thank the two anonymous reviewers for several invaluable comments and suggestions, which have improved this paper considerably. All remaining errors are our own.

2 Thus, e.g., Walde & Hofmann (1938–1954 I: pp. 61–62, s.v. *arāneus*); Frisk (1960–1972 I: pp. 129–130, s.v. ἀράχνη); Boisacq (1916: p. 73, s.v. ἀράχνη); Beekes (2010: pp. 123–124, s.v. ἀράχνη); similarly, Chantraine (1999: p. 103, s.v. ἀράχνη), referring to Benveniste (1935: p. 101); de Vaan (2008: pp. 49–50, s.v. *arāneus*).

3 A discussion (and refutation) of earlier etymological proposals can be found in Walde & Hofmann (1938–1954 I: pp. 61–62 s.v. *arāneus*). A connection with Gk. ἄρκος ‘net’ (A.), ἀρκάνη ‘thread with which the warp is intertwined, when they are setting it up in the loom’ (Hsch. α 7271 Latte) is semantically attractive (see sections §2 and §3), but phonologically only possible if both ἄρκος and ἀρκάνη represent syncopated forms (< **arak**). A more straightforward solution is presented in section §3.

(which is difficult on the phonological level⁴ and still leaves Gk. ἀράχνη unexplained), or that both Latin and Greek borrowed the word from an unknown non-IE Mediterranean language (so, e.g., Ernout & Meillet 1959: p. 42 s.v. *arāneus*; de Vaan 2008: pp. 49–50 s.v. *arāneus*). In support of this scenario, Beekes (2010: pp. 123–124 s.v. ἀράχνη) cites the narrow distribution of the word within the Indo-European languages⁵ and the fact that **araksnā* “looks non-IE”. The latter point, however, might be contested as **araksnā* does not look any less “IE” than a word such as **loṽksnā* (Lat. *lūna* f. ‘moon’, OPruss. *lauxnos* f. pl. ‘stars’, YAv. *raoxšnā-* f. ‘light’, etc.; cf. **leuk-* ‘bright’ in Gk. λευκός ‘white, bright’, etc.), **ulksnā* (Gk. λάχνη f. ‘woolly hair, down’ *Il.*+; cf. **uolko-* ‘hair’ > Av. *varasa-*, OCS *ulasъ*, Russ. *vólos*, etc.), or the already mentioned **aksnā* (Gk. ἄχνη ‘chaff’ *Il.*+; cf. Lat. *acus, -eris* n. ‘husk of grain; chaff’ Cato+). All these words are interpretable as containing a suffix **-snā-* (< **-s(-)neh₂-*). This, of course, invites one to review whether **araksnā* may be identifiable as an inherited word as well and if the underlying root is found in more lexemes of Greek, Latin, or other Indo-European provenance.

As PIE **s* would be expected to device a preceding obstruent at any chronological stage of these languages, the final consonant of the root underlying **arak(snā)* can be **(k)*, **(g)*, or **(g)h*. When it comes to the initial sequence **ara°*, the options are more limited. Latin precludes initial **s-*, **i-*, or **u-*, so the only viable alternatives are **h₁arh₂°*, **h₂erh₂°*, and **(h₂)ṛh₂°* (more on which below in section §3). Since these elements can be teamed up to an incredibly large number of theoretically possible combinations, it seems nearly hopeless to offer a plausible Proto-Indo-European form based on the etymon’s phonological shape alone. It is therefore wise to turn to the semantics of the words for ‘spider’ in other Indo-European languages first and see what kind of roots these are derived from. This will help narrow down the number of possible candidates for the root that underlies **araksnā* ‘spider’.

2. ‘Spider’ in Indo-European

Words for ‘spider’ are attested in every branch of the Indo-European language family, which is not surprising as spiders are found virtually everywhere across Eurasia. However, there is no single reconstructable term for ‘spider’ that is found in two or

4 Clusters of χ plus nasal in Greek borrowings are rendered as *c(h)* plus nasal in pre-Classical Latin and develop an anaptyctic vowel. Compare Gk. δραχμή and Lat. *drachuma* ‘drachm’ (Enn.) or τέχνη and *techina* ‘trick, ruse’ (Plaut.); see Leumann (1977: p. 103). Accordingly, a West Greek /arák^hnā/ should have been borrowed as **arac(h)uma*. And even if we assume that this cluster treatment occurred only after the accented syllable and that /arák^hnā/ was borrowed as **/arák^hnā/* (with Latin-specific recessive accentuation), the outcome of this would probably have been **aragna* (thus Walde & Hofmann 1938–1954 I: p. 61 s.v. *arāneus*; cf. **deknos* > *dignus* ‘fitting’). The only scenario in which a Greek loan would regularly end up as Latin **arāna* is if the input form was **araksnā*, which, however, would have to be borrowed from 2nd millennium Greek.

5 The Avestan word *arəθna-* ‘a dāeueic animal’ occurs in *Yt* 5.90 in a context that implies it to be a dangerous animal like a wasp (*vaβžaka-*) or snake (*aži-*), but this word – despite its superficial resemblance – cannot be equated with **araksnā* ‘spider’ unless one assumes non-regular sound changes (taboo?), and so will be disregarded as a possible Iranian cognate.

more genetically and geographically not closely related branches,⁶ which is quite astonishing.

2.1 Isolated formations and borrowings

A couple of Indo-European languages possess words for ‘spider’ that are without good parallels in other Indo-European languages. Old Irish *damán allaid* ‘spider’ (literally ‘wild calf, fawn’), Modern Irish *damhán alla* ‘id.’, for example, is difficult to explain semantically, though the motivation may be similar in nature to Mod. Ir. *bóin dé* ‘ladybug’ (lit. ‘calf of god’) and other words for insects that are named after larger animals.⁷ The underlying semantic image, though beyond our modern-day comprehension, could possibly also explain Armenian **ernjak* ‘spider’, if derived from *erinj* ‘heifer’ (Ačařyan 1971–1979 II: p. 68b; cf. Martirosyan 2010: p. 270 s.v. **ernjak*) by means of the diminutive suffix *-ak* (as in *cov* ‘sea’ → *cov-ak* ‘lake, pool’; Olsen 1999: pp. 243–244). A comparable case might be *jori* ‘mule’ and *joreak* ‘a kind of small locust’ (cf. Martirosyan 2010: p. 789).⁸

Borrowed terms for ‘spider’ include Albanian *merimangë*, a loanword from Greek (cf. Mod. Gk. *μυρμήγκι* ‘ant’; Orël 1998: p. 257 s.v. *merimangë*), Classical Sanskrit *markaṭa-*, the source of which is unknown (cf. *EWAia* III: pp. 390–391 s.v. *markaṭa-*), and Welsh *cop* (also *copyn*, *pry(f) cop*, *pry(f) copyn*) which is from English *cop* (*GPC* 1967 I: p. 554 s.v. *copyn*¹, *cop*²).

2.2 The spider’s body

A couple of languages derive their ‘spider’ words from expressions denoting round objects, inspired by the spider’s spherical body. Old English *ātorcopppe*, Middle English *attercopppe*, Modern English (obsolete) *attercop*, Old Danish *ederkopppe*, Modern Danish *edderkop*, Old Swedish *ēterkoppa* or *-kopppe* (Bjorvand & Lindeman 2019: pp. 240–241 s.v. *eiter*; Söderwall 1884–1918 I: p. 228 s.v. *eterkopppe* (*-kopppe*)) are all evidently from Proto-Gmc. **aitra-* ‘poison’ and a second member based on **kupp-a-* ‘round thing’ (cf. *loc. cit.*; Falk & Torp 1960 I: p. 180 s.v. *Edder*; Holthausen 1974: p. 57 s.vv. *copp*, *coppe*; Orël 2003: p. 224 s.v. **kuppaz*), which is also found uncompounded in the above-mentioned Middle English *coppe*, Modern English (obsolete) *cop*, and Middle Dutch *coppe* (Van Veen & Van der Sijs 1997: s.v. *kobbe*²).

The naming after its round body has a parallel in Latvian *zirneklis* ‘spider’, derived from *zirnīs* ‘pea’ (Karulis 1992: p. 564 s.v. *zirneklis*), and in Iranian (cf. Sogd. *γōndē*,

6 Accordingly, there is no lemma *Spider* in Mallory & Adams (1997).

7 Compare German *Bock* ‘buck, he-goat’ in words for beetles (e.g., *Alpenbock* ‘Alpine longhorn beetle’) or *Bär* ‘bear’ in words for moths (e.g., *Brauner Bär* ‘great tiger moth’). Alternatively, one might invoke an underlying, now lost mythological motif of an eight-legged cow (compare the eight-legged horse *Sleipnir* in Norse mythology).

8 Or is it a loan from Turkish *örümcek* ‘spider’ (from *örmek* ‘to knit, to weave’)? See Petrosyan (2020).

yōndāk ‘tarantula’, Afgh. Pers. *yundal* ‘id.’, derivatives of an Iranian base **gund-* ‘round, spherical’ as in Av. *gunda-* ‘lump of dough’, MPer. *gund* ‘testicle(s)”; cf. Rossi 2015: p. 359).

2.3 The spider’s legs

Not only the shape of its body but also the appearance or position of its legs seem to have played a role in the spider’s name-giving. Old Church Slavonic *paqkъ* ‘spider’ and its Slavic cognates (such as Czech *pavouk*, Russian *paúk*, Serbo-Croatian *pàuk*, Polish *pająk*) straightforwardly descend from a Proto-Slavic **pàqkъ*, which Derksen (2008: p. 391 s.v. **pàqkъ*) derives from **pa-* ‘like, pseudo-’ and an *o*-grade formation of PIE **h₂enk-* ‘bend’ (cf. Gk. ὄγκος m. ‘barb’, Lat. *uncus* m. ‘hook’), referring to the spider’s hook-like legs (*loc. cit.*; similarly Vasmer 1955: s.v. *naýk*).

A similar thought seems to underlie Lithuanian *vóras*, var. *vorỹs* (and Latvian *vāris*, perhaps a Lithuanianism) which could be cognate with Latin *vārus* ‘bow-legged’, both from PIE **ueh₂ro-* ‘having legs spread out at an angle’ (Witczak 2006: p. 101, accepted by ALEW: p. 1273 s.v. *vóras*; on an alternative account for both PSlav. **pàqkъ* and Lith. *vóras* see below §2.4).

Witczak (2006) offers a very intriguing analysis of Ossetic Digor *xælaur*, Iron *xælwaræg* ‘spider’ as being from *xalæ*, *xal* ‘thread’ (cf. also Abaev 1989 IV: p. 134 s.v. *xal* | *xalæ*) + **ur*, **waræg*, the second member of which Witczak explains as **wāra(-ka)*, formally identical to Lith. *vóras* and Latin *vārus*. As a meaning ‘thread-bowlegged’ makes little sense, it is likely that **ur*, **waræg* at some point meant ‘spider’ by itself, just like Lithuanian *vóras*, and that *xæla*, *xæl* ‘thread’ was added to this (quasi ‘thread-spider’), perhaps under the influence of other Iranian designations featuring words for ‘wool’ (see section §2.4). However, it is not necessary to assume that this **ueh₂ro-* was already a Proto-Indo-European word for ‘spider’: it would not be the only zoonym peculiar to Balto-Slavic and Ossetic, as the isogloss Lith. *balan̄dis* and Osset. Digor *bælæu*, Iron *bælon* (*bæluon*) ‘pigeon’ shows (Weber 1997; further examples in Dini 2014: p. 258). In any event, an alternative etymological interpretation is possible for *xælaur*, *xælwaræg*, namely as derived from a root for ‘weave’.

2.4 ‘Weaving’ and ‘spinning’

By far the most wide-spread etymological motivation for ‘spider’ words lies with the spider’s ability to produce webs that resemble a delicate and skillfully wrought fabric. It is therefore not surprising that many words are derived from roots and verbs for spinning, weaving, and knitting – a pattern that is attested in nearly all branches of Indo-European, formed to a wide variety of roots.

Lithuanian *vóras* ‘spider’, for example, does not have to go back to **ueh₂ro-* ‘bow-legged’ but can perhaps even more satisfyingly be connected with Lith. *vėrti* ‘to string,

to thread’, Latv. *veīt* ‘to thread, to stitch, to sew’ (see Smoczyński 2007: p. 767 s.v. *vóras*). Other formations belonging to this verb might include Lith. *pavarà* f. ‘rope’, *viřvė*, *virvė* f. ‘rope, cord’ (but see *ALEW*: p. 1453 s.v. on the differing intonation), Latv. *varas* f. pl. ‘borders (of a net)’, and the innovated lengthened grade needed to account for *vóras* ‘spider’ (instead of [†]*vóoras*) appears also in Lith. *vòra*, var. *vóra* f. ‘line, row, caravan’.⁹ The underlying root **uer(h_x)-* ‘sew, stitch, spin (vel sim.)’¹⁰ can also be the source of the second member **wāra(-ka)-* of Ossetic Digor *xəlaur*, Iron *xəlwaræg* ‘spider’. Indeed, under this analysis the compound originally simply meant ‘thread-spinner (vel sim.)’. This hypothetical **wāra(-ka)-* ‘spinner, weaver (vel sim.)’ is not the only trace of the root under question in Indo-Iranian. It might also be attested in a group of Sanskrit words for ‘wasp’ (Classical Sanskrit *varatī-* [*Śusr*], *vareṇa-* [lex.], *varala-* [lex.], etc.; see *EWAia* III: p. 458). The underlying semantic motivation would then be the same as in **(h_x)uob^hseh₂-* ‘wasp’ (Lat. *uespa*, OCS *osa*, Lith. *vapsà*, PGmc. **wapsō-*, etc.) from **(h_x)ueb^h-* ‘weave’ (see §2.4.1), as wasp nests are elaborate structures whose texture resembles woven fabric.

Similarly, the second element **h₂onko-* ‘hook’ in PSlav. **pàǫkǫ* ‘spider’ does not have to refer to hook-like legs but could be compared to Lith. *ánka* f. ‘loop in a rope’ so that the original meaning of **pàǫkǫ* would be something like ‘loop maker’ (see, e.g., Erhart 2000: p. 625).¹¹ While these etymological proposals remain uncertain, albeit quite attractive alternatives to the ones presented above under §2.3, there are several ‘spider’ words in the Indo-European branches that are undoubtedly derived from roots and verbs for spinning, weaving, and the like.

2.4.1 **(h_x)ueb^h-* ‘weave’ (Indo-Iranian, Germanic, Tocharian)

The most prominent root in this regard is **(h_x)ueb^h-* ‘weave’.¹² A simple agent-noun derivative is attested in Tocharian B *yape* ‘spider’ that continues a **temh₁ós*-type¹³ noun **(h_x)ueb^h-o-* ‘weaver’, standing beside TB *wepe* ‘enclosure’ (< **(h_x)uób^h-o-* ‘weaving, web’) and the denominal verb *wāp^a-* ‘weave’.

The root is also found as the second member of the Vedic term for the spider, *úrṇā-vábhi-* (*Br*), *ūrṇā-vábhi* (*MS*), *ūrṇa-vábhi* (*Kath+*) (< **‘wool-weaver’*) (*EWAia* I: pp. 243–244 s.v. *úrṇāvábhi-*), indirectly attested in the Rgveda in the name of a demon *aurṇa-vābhá-m*. (a *vṛddhi* derivative; ‘spider son’ vel sim.). The second member is synchronically an

9 Cf. Smoczyński (2007: p. 741 s.v. *vérti*, p. 767 s.v. *vóras*).

10 Cf. *IEW*: pp. 1150–1151 (“binden, anreihen, aufhängen”, auch zum Wägen, daher ‘schwer; Schnur, Strick’”).

11 We are indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for this and the preceding etymological alternatives to the ones presented in §2.3.

12 The precise shape of the root is contested. See *LIV*²: p. 658 s.v. **ueb^h-* note 1, *LIV*^{2add} s.v. **h₂ueb^hh₁-* note 1, and Peters (1980: pp. 71–72) for a discussion.

13 On this type see Malzahn (2013 with a discussion of Toch. B *yape* on p. 170); Nussbaum (2017 mentioning *yape* on p. 250).

i-stem, but could descend from an original root noun, with °*i*- being the reflex of a potential root-final laryngeal (*LIV*²*add* s.v. **h*₂*uebh*^h*h*₁- note 1).¹⁴

The second element of Old Norse *kǫngur-váfa* f. ‘spider’ is formally close to *-vǫbhi-*, likewise derived from *(*h*_x)*uebh*^h- ‘weave’. The first element is less certain but appears to be related to Finnish *kangas* ‘cloth’ and *kankuri* ‘weaver’, the root of which is possibly borrowed from Germanic (Karsten 1915: p. 95; *SKES* I: pp. 155–156 s.v. *kangas*; de Vries 1962: p. 342 s.v. *kǫngurváfa*; Kluge & Seebold 2002: p. 465 s.v. *Kanker*¹). Old English *gange-wǣfre*, *-wifre*, *gongel-wǣfre*¹⁵ m. ‘spider’ (cf. Bosworth & Toller (1972: p. 361 s.v. *gange-wifre*, p. 485 s.v. *gongel-wæfre*), which Bosworth & Toller gloss as ‘ganging weaver’ seems to be related in some way to the Old Norse compound (*EWD* s.v. *Kanker*; Kluge & Seebold 2002: *loc. cit.*), but must then have been influenced by OE *gangan* ‘to go’ (Magnússon 1989: p. 538 s.v. *kǫngurváfa*, *kǫngurváfa*),¹⁶ whether Middle High German *Kanker*, *Ganker* m. ‘spider (> harvestman)’ is directly related is hard to ascertain (cf. *EWD loc. cit.*; Kluge & Seebold 2002: *loc. cit.*). The root of the first element is a Slavo-Germanic isogloss **geng*^h- which has to do with plaiting or tying bonds, also found in Russ. *guž* ‘tug, cartage’, Bulg. *gǎž* ‘band(age)’, Cz. *houž* ‘plait’ < **gǫžz* (after Derksen 2008: p. 184 s.v. **gǫžz*) (< **gong*^h-*io*-) and ON *kengr* ‘crook, bend’ (*IEW*: p. 380 s.v. *gengh*-; Magnússon 1989: pp. 455, 538 s.vv. *kengur*, *kǫngurváfa*; *EWD* s.v. *Kanker*; Derksen 2008: p. 184 s.v. **gǫžz*).

2.4.2 **h*_{2/3}*eu-* ‘weave’ (Hittite)

The Hittite syntagma *auwawaš ḫanzanaš* (*a-u-wa-wa-aš ḫa-an-za-na-aš*) glosses the Akkadian *qū etl[uti]* ‘spider’s web’, which means that Puhvel (1984: p. 244 s.v. *auwawa-*) is probably correct in interpreting it as ‘spider’s web’ (cf. *ḫanzana-* c. ‘strand, thread, yarn, web’ as per Puhvel 1991: p. 112 s.v. *hanzana-*; ‘web’ as per Kloekhorst 2008: pp. 292–293 s.v. *ḫanzana-*), making *auwawa-* a word for ‘spider’. The word appears to be a reduplicated form, but it has no good etymology.¹⁷ We believe that the underlying root might be **h*_{2/3}*eu-* ‘weave’ as attested in the Vedic root *o* (e.g., *utá-* ‘woven’, *ótum*, *ótave* ‘to weave’ etc.; see *EWAia* I: pp. 275–276) and in Lithuanian *áusti* ‘weave’ (cf. *ALEW*: pp. 74–75 s.v. *áusti*). Phonologically, this is possible if one assumes an *o*-grade formation and accepts

14 This word, as well as *úrā-vat-* ‘wooly’ (RV+) are close to Avestan *varəna-uua-* ‘spider’, which, however, cannot be an exact cognate of either formation (*EWAia* I: pp. 243–244 s.v. *úrāvábhi*).

15 The quality of *æ* is unclear; Bosworth & Toller (1972: p. 361 s.v. *gange-wifre*, p. 485 s.v. *gongel-wæfre*) has *æ*, Holthausen (1974: p. 123) has *ǣ*.

16 The last element *wǣfre* is also not identical in form to ON *-váfa* but seems to have been influenced by *wǣfre* adj. ‘wavering’ and/or *wifer* ‘dart’, with which Holthausen (1974: pp. 379, 394) connects the second element of the compound. The alternative form *wǣfre-gange* supports a folk-etymological reinterpretation of the etymon; its literal meaning is ‘nimble-walker’.

17 The word has been compared to *aku(wa)kuwa-* ‘animal that inhabits an underground lair’, and Puhvel (1984: p. 244 s.v. *auwawa-*) suggests that *auwawa-* is a Luwian variant of native Hittite *aku(wa)kuwa-*. But *aku(wa)kuwa-* does not necessarily mean ‘spider’; it has also been translated as ‘frog’, ‘cicada’ or ‘mole’ (see *ibid.* s.vv. *auwawa-* with lit., *aku(wa)kuwa-* with lit.).

that word-initial **h₂/s₀-* gives Hittite *a-* (see Kloekhorst 2008), or if one reconstructs the root as PIE **h₁ar-*.

2.4.3 **sneh₁-* ‘spin’ (Celtic)

The Breton term *kevnid* ‘spiders’ appears to be from the Proto-Celtic elements **kom-* + **snitV-*, the latter of which is derived from Proto-Celtic **snie/o-* ‘weave, spin’ (OIr. *snuid*, Welsh *nyddu*; cf. *IEW*: p. 973 s.v. *(s)nē-* and *(s)nēi-*, *LIV²*: pp. 571–572 s.v. **sneh₁-* for the root; Schumacher 2004: pp. 598–600 for the verb). The second member of the rare OIr. *etersnuidid* ‘spider’, literally ‘between-spinner’, is formally similar (apparently from **snitiati-*). This makes a “Proto-Insular-Celtic” **snitV-* with a meaning ‘spinner’ or ‘spider’ a real possibility, though it is perhaps more prudent to view the Breton and Irish words as parallel formations.¹⁸

2.4.4 **(s)penh₁-* ‘drag, stretch’ (Germanic)

This root is likely the origin of Proto-Germanic **spinnan-* ‘to spin’ (so *LIV²* s.v. **(s)penh₁-*), which only in Germanic is used to derive words for ‘spider’. Old High German *spinna* and Middle Dutch *spinne* continue a feminine **-ōn-*stem (*EWN* 2009 IV: s.v. *spin*), Old English *spīpra*¹⁹ m., Modern English *spider*, appears to be from **spinþran-* (Holthausen 1974: p. 311 s.v. *spīdra*), and Old Swedish *spinnil*, Modern Swedish *spindel* feature a different agent noun suffix **-il-* (as in Old Swedish *lykil* ‘key’ from *lūka* ‘to lock’). While each of these words exhibits a different suffix, they are parallel formations derived from the same underlying verb and express the semantic concept ‘spinner’.

2.4.5 **ker-* ‘weave’ (Armenian)

Armenian *sard* ‘spider’, an *i*-stem, is likely related to Greek *καίρος* ‘row of thrums (on the loom), to which the threads of the warp are attached’ and thus continues **k₁ti-*, i.e., a *ti*-stem based on the root **k₁er-* ‘tie, bind, attach; weave’. Other cognates include Arm. *sarik* ‘chain, band’ and Gk. *κερία* f. ‘girth of a bedstead, bandage’ (*IEW*: p. 577 s.v. 3. *k₁er-*;

18 No Welsh cognate exists. The usual Welsh word for spider, (*pryf*) *cop*, is borrowed from English (*GPC* 1967 I: p. 554 s.v. *copyn¹*, *cop²*, see section §2.1), and the synonymous *corryn* can refer to any small animal, not just the spider (*ibid.*: p. 555 s.v. *cor*). We are grateful to Anders Jørgensen (Uppsala, Copenhagen) and David Stifter (Maynooth) for their help in illuminating the prehistory of the relevant Celtic formations.

19 The word *spīder-wiht* (cf. Bosworth & Toller 1972: p. 902 s.v. *spīder* and Holthausen 1974: p. 310 s.v. *spīder-wiht*) is the traditional emendation of *spidenwiht*, a *hapax legomenon* in the charm *Against a Dwarf* (Dobbie 1942: pp. 121, 211), but other readings of the relevant half-line are possible, and Grattan & Singer (1952: pp. 162–163) read *inswidan wiht* and emend it to *in[wr]i[ð]en wiht* ‘a creature all swathed’. Dobbie (1942: p. 211) acknowledges that the form may not contain the word for ‘spider’ at all, though he believes it to be a compound.

Frisk 1960–1972 I: p. 756 s.v. *καῖρος*; Beekes 2010: p. 617 s.v. *καῖρος* with ref.; Martirosyan 2010: p. 573 s.v. *sari-k*; skeptical Clackson 1994: pp. 139–140).

2.4.6 *mesg- ‘weave, plait (?)’ (Slavic)

The root *mesg- is attested in Lith. *mėgžti* ‘to knit, tie (a knot)’, Old English *masc* n. ‘mesh’, English *mesh*, German *Masche* f. ‘stitch’, Tocharian A *masäk*, B *meske* ‘joint’ (*IEW*: p. 746 s.v. 2. *mezg-*; Kroonen 2013: p. 356 s.v. *maska-*; *ALEW*: p. 726 s.v. *mėgžti*) and forms the basis of Russian *муззѣѣ* (also *маззѣѣ*) (*mizgír*’, *mazgár*’) ‘tarantula’ from Proto-Slavic **mězgyrь* (Berneker 1913 II: p. 28 s.v. *mazgar’ъ*; Vasmer 1955: p. 133 s.v. *муззѣѣ*; Trubachov 1992: pp. 226–227 s.v. **mězgyrь*). If Tocharian A *masäk*, B *meske* ‘joint’ point to a meaning ‘bend, tie, twist’ rather than ‘knit, plait’, the word may originally have referred to the spider’s bent legs (for this, see above §2.3).

3. A new etymology for ἀράχνη and arāneus

As seen in the previous section, nearly all branches of Indo-European know a word for ‘spider’ that is derived from a root or verb meaning ‘weave’, ‘spin’, ‘knit’ or similar. Only Albanian, Italic, and Greek do not possess such a word. The story of the talented weaver girl *Arachne*, however, who in Ovid’s account of the myth out-weaves the goddess of crafts, Athena, herself, and is then turned into a spider, shows that the ‘spider as a weaver’ concept was familiar to Greek and Roman thought as well. These observations combined pave the way for a new etymological account of Gk. ἀράχνη and Lat. *arāneus*.

3.1 *araksnā ‘web-maker’

We can now surmise that the underlying form **araksnā*, segmentable as **arak-s-nā*, is a derivative of a neuter *s*-stem, in the same way that Gk. *λύχνος* m. ‘lamp’ < **luk-s-no*- is derived from **leuk-os* n. ‘light’ (Ved. *rōkas-*, Av. *raocah-*), or Gk. *ἄχνη* ‘chaff’ < **ak-s-nā*- from **h₂ék-os* (cf. Lat. *acus*, *-eris* n. ‘husk of grain; chaff’). In line with these examples and the above-mentioned Gk. *λάχνη* f. ‘wooly hair, down’ < **ul̥k-s-nā*-, we can suspect that **arak-s-* is the allomorph of a neuter *s*-stem exhibiting a double zero grade in root and suffix. If we assume that the accent was on the first syllable, viz. **áaraksnā*- (whence Gk. ἀράχνη by the law of limitation), the element **áarak-* can be explained as the outcome of **h₂ǵh₂G-*, the zero grade of a root **h₂erh₂G-* or **h₂reh₂G-* (with **G* = **(k)*, **(ǵ)*, or **(ǵ^h)*). The sound development of **h₂ǵh₂C-* to Pre-Gk. **áarac-* is in line with the two most common interpretations of the outcome of **C₁R̥HC* in Ancient Greek, whether one prefers the account proposed by Rix (1992: p. 73) or by Peters (1980: p. 29 and 243, note 194; see also Höfler 2016/2017[2019] for a discussion). In Latin, a sequence *ara-* can also arise from **h₂ǵh₂-* in accordance with the *palma*-rule, i.e., the Latin sound development of **C₁R̥HC*

to *CaR(a)C* as in **p_hh₂meh₂-* ‘broad one’ > **palamā* > Lat. *palma* ‘palm, hand’ (Weiss 2020: p. 119; Höfler 2017).

In view of the formations discussed in section §2.4, it seems justified to assume that this root **h₂erh₂G-* or **h₂reh₂G-* had a meaning ‘weave’ and formed a neuter *s*-stem ‘weaving; woven thing’, from which **h₂h₂G-s-neh₂-* > **áraksnā-* ‘weaver, web-maker (vel sim.)’ was derived, **h₂h₂G-s-neh₂-* ultimately being a substantivization with accent retraction of a denominal **-no*-adjective **h₂h₂G-s-nó-*. And indeed, not only the root but even the neuter *s*-stem might be directly attested in Greek.

3.2 Gk. ῥῆγος n. ‘rug, blanket’ (Hom.)

The hypothetical *s*-stem **h₂reh₂G-os* might be the ancestor of Gk. ῥῆγος n. ‘rug, blanket’ (only in Hom.), quasi ‘woven thing’ (compare ὕφος n. ‘web, net’ from **(h_s)uebh-* ‘to weave’). Traditionally,²⁰ ῥῆγος has been connected to ῥέζω ‘dye’ (Epich., Phot., *EM*), itself apparently from the PIE root **(s)re(ǵ)-* ‘to dye’ (cf. *LIV*: p. 587 s.v. **(s)re(ǵ)-*), to which one also ascribes Ved. *rajyate* ‘is dyed, reddens’ (*AV*). The strongest argument against this etymology is that one needs to reconstruct ῥῆγος as a lengthened grade *s*-stem **(s)re(ǵ)-os*.²¹ Such a lengthened grade, however, is quite unexpected in this noun class and only shows up secondarily when there is a corresponding verbal stem that exhibits a lengthened grade, from which it could analogically be introduced in the *s*-stem.²² This is not the case for ῥῆγος and its alleged verbal counterpart ῥέζω.²³

Moreover, the equation Ved. *rajyate* ~ Gk. ῥέζω is compromised by the lack of **s-* in Vedic and/or the lack of a prothetic vowel in Greek. The assumption of an *s mobile* would be a valid remedy, yet *s mobile* is otherwise virtually unheard of before **r*.²⁴ Since the verb and its apparent derivatives (such as ῥέγματα n. pl. ‘dyed things’ Ibyc., ῥογυέας ‘dyer’ inscr. Sparta, etc.) are rare and largely confined to Ionic and Doric context, it is not unlikely (as argued by Meissner 2006: p. 79) that ῥέζω ‘dye’ is merely a specialized meaning of ῥέζω ‘make, perform’ that belongs to an entirely different root **uerǵ-*.²⁵ The connection between a meaning ‘dye’ and the *s*-stem ῥῆγος n. ‘rug, blanket’ would, thus,

20 Cf. Frisk (1960–1972 II: pp. 647–648 s.v. ῥέζω 2); Chantraine (1999: p. 969 s.v. 2 ῥέζω); Stüber (2002: pp. 150–151).

21 There is a short-vowel hapax ῥέγος in Anacreon (*fr.* 102 Page = 447 Campbell), but it means ‘dye’ (ἀλιπόρφυρον ῥέγος ‘sea-purple dye’) and is evidently based on or derived from ῥέζω ‘dye’ and therefore unconnected to ῥῆγος ‘rug, blanket’.

22 Cf. Höfler (2014). The lengthened grade in γῆρας n. ‘old age’, for example, is secondarily taken over from the aorist ἐγήρα (see Stüber 2002: pp. 83–84; Meissner 2006: p. 82); the original short-vowel form γέρας n. is still attested in the specialized meaning ‘gift of honor’ and through the derivative γεραῖός ‘old’.

23 The aorist ῥῆξαι = βάψαι ‘dye’ (see note 26) may be an invention by Eustathius.

24 Cf. Barber (2013: p. 356 with note 93); Weiss (2020: p. 42 note 38). Of course, this statement is dependent on the question whether PIE had *r*-initial roots or not (on which see below).

25 Compare Flemestad (2020: pp. 86–87) for typological parallels. Meissner himself (2006: pp. 79–80) prefers a loan origin for ῥῆγος and points to Arabic *ruq* ‘a piece of cloth’.

only be folk-etymological; it is not found outside of lexicographical works²⁶ anyway.²⁷ In addition, the root vowel of ῥήγος need not continue **ē* but can equally well continue an old **ā* (< **eh₂*).²⁸

There is thus no a priori reason to doubt the interpretation of ῥήγος n. ‘rug, blanket’ as going back to **h₂réh₂g-os*.²⁹ But of course, one wonders why the word does not show a prothetic vowel: the regular continuant of **h₂réh₂g-os* ought to be Gk. **ἄρηγος*, with ἄ- being the expected reflex of a preconsonantal **h₂*- in absolute *anlaut* (compare Gk. ἀλέξω and Ved. *rákṣati* from **h₂leks-* ‘ward off, protect’, or Gk. ἀτυζόμενος ‘terrified’, Ved. *tujyáte* ‘flees’, Hitt. *ḫatukzi* ‘is fearsome’ from **h₂teu^hḡ-* ‘terrorize’). We see two possible ways out of this problem.

For one thing, one could assume a kind of dissimilation that led to the loss of the initial laryngeal at some stage between PIE and Proto-Greek, viz. **h₂réh₂g-os* > **réh₂g-os* > ῥήγος. There are other words that lack a prothetic vowel for which a similar explanation has been proposed: ³⁰ compare, for example, Gk. λήγος n. ‘wool’ < **h₂l^hh₁m-* (cf. Hitt. *ḫulana-* c.),³¹ Gk. νήττα, Ion. νήσσα f. ‘duck’ < **h₂n(e)h₂tih₂-* (cf. Ved. *āti-*, Lat. *anas*, *-tis*, Lith. *antis*), or Gk. ράινω ‘I besprinkle’ < **h₂urⁿ-n(e)-h₁-* (cf. Hitt. *ḫurnēzzi* ‘besprinkles’). Yet this explanation is somewhat arbitrary as it fails to account for why the laryngeal was lost by dissimilation in **réh₂g-os* > ῥήγος but seemingly not in **h₂ṛéh₂g^sneh₂-* > ἀράχνη, and likewise not in a verb such as Gk. ἀρήγω ‘aid, succor’ < **h₂reh₁g-* with a sound sequence very similar to the alleged **h₂réh₂g-os* > ῥήγος. In addition, the loss of **h₂*- in the mentioned examples seems to be linked to a following syllabic sonorant (cf. Peters 1980: p. 26 note 18), which does not really work for ῥήγος.

26 The *s*-stem is explained as τὸ βαπτὸν στρώμα ‘dyed bed-spread’ by the grammarian Orion of Thebes (5th c. CE), as τὸ πορφυροῦν περιβόλαιον ‘purple bed cover’ in the *Etymologicum Magnum*, and as παλλία βαπτὰ, ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων. βεβαμμένα ἱμάτια ‘dyed garments, clothes (with the Romans)’ by Hesychius (p 235 Latte-Hansen). An aorist ῥήξαι = βάψαι ‘dye’ is mentioned by Eustathius, and an agent noun ῥηγυεύς ‘dyer’ is attested in Hesychius (p 234 Latte-Hansen) and in *scholia*, while ῥογεύς is found in Hesychius (p 384 Latte-Hansen) and in a Spartan inscription, which makes it the *lectio difficilior*.

27 It must be left open for now if the evidence of Ved. *rajyate* ‘is dyed, reddens’ and ῥέζω ‘dye’ is enough to warrant the reconstruction of an *s* mobile root **(s)re^hḡ-* ‘dye’. For arguments against the Indo-Iranian side of the equation but in favor of a Greek-only root **reg-* ‘dye’ (cf. ῥογεύς in the previous note) see Barber (2013: pp. 356–357).

28 If so, the gloss χρυσοραγέες· χρυσοβαφέες (Hsch. χ 800 Hansen-Cunningham; i.e., χρυσοῤαγέες?) would be more easily understood as containing an *s*-stem second member **h₂réh₂g-és-* than under the traditional account with **syg-és-*, where both the zero grade and the lack of gemination of -p- at the morpheme boundary (cf. εὔ-πρηής ‘fair-flowing’ < **srey^h-és-*) are noteworthy. Of course, the glossing χρυσοβαφέες ‘dyed in gold’ would then have to be interpreted as secondary and based on the same folk etymology that led to the forms in footnote 26. In view of the lack of golden dyes, however, a meaning ‘gold-brocaded’ (vel sim.) makes more sense for χρυσο-ῤαγέες; compare with similar meanings χρυσο-στήμων ‘woven with gold’ (Lyd.), χρυσό-παστος ‘gold-spangled’ (A.).

29 From now on, we will reconstruct the root and its derivatives with a **g* for the sake of simplicity, even though **ḡ* remains a possibility.

30 See Peters (1980: pp. 23–26 note 18); Hinge (2007: pp. 156–161) for a collection and discussion of potential examples.

31 On the reconstruction of the word-internal laryngeal as **h₁* see Peters (1987).

The alternative is to set up the root as **reh₂g-*, i.e., without an initial laryngeal. The *s*-stem ῥήγος would then continue a full-grade form **reh₂g-os* regularly,³² provided that *r*-initial roots and words were present in PIE and that they show up without a prothetic *ê-* in Greek. Both premises, to be sure, are not uncontroversial and there is no space here to go through decades of scholarship on this matter. The bottom line, however, is that there is no conclusive piece of evidence that would tip the scales in one or the other direction. For every Greek word that starts with *êp-*, one can in principle reconstruct **h₁r-* (see also note 1 in *LIV*²: p. 502 s.v. *?(h₁)reid-*); we know of no case where **h₁r-* for *êp-* is excluded.³³ On the other hand, if a Greek word starts with a *ῥ-*, it is usually believed to go back to either **sr-* (cf. ῥέος n. ‘stream’ < **sréuos*; cf. Ved. *śrávas-*) or **ur-* (cf. ῥήτρᾱ ‘agreement’ < **urētrā*; cf. Elean *ῥάτρᾱ*). But it cannot be ruled out that **r-* would have led to *ῥ-* as well,³⁴ depending on the minor implication (necessary as well, in any case, for the dissimilation account outlined above) that the word-initial **r-* received a rough breathing analogically, or simply that all word-initial rhotics became voiceless.³⁵ This is independently suggested by old loan or substrate words with initial *r*’s such as ῥόα f. ‘pomegranate tree’ (*Od.*+) that consistently have *ῥ-* and (notably) no prothetic vowel (cf. Schwyzler 1959: p. 310). Either way, a secondary origin of a spiritus asper is not a unique thing in Greek: it also affected word-initial **u-* across the board (cf. ὕδωρ n. ‘water’ < **uidōr*, etc.).

If we accept that ῥήγος can be traced back to **reh₂gos*, the problem lies with ἀράχνη and its vocalic anlaut that seems to continue a laryngeal (as if **h₂ῥh₂gsneh₂-*). However, it is all but guaranteed that **ῥh₂gsneh₂-* would also regularly have given Gk. ἀράχνη,³⁶ with *ᾱ-* not being a laryngeal reflex but rather the outcome of **ə*, i.e., the prop vowel that developed when syllabic **r̥* and **l̥* became vocalized and which generally comes out as Gk. *α* (cf. ταρφύς ‘thick, close’ < **d^hῥb^hús*).³⁷ It would be surprising if word-initial **r̥* and **l̥* did not behave accordingly.³⁸

If ἀράχνη therefore does not require the reconstruction of an initial laryngeal, one could even find a common ground between the two approaches and, again, depart from a more canonical root structure **h₂reh₂g-* and assume a dissimilation. While in two of the cases listed above (the ones involving differently colored laryngeals), the following syllabic sonorant might indeed have been the conditioning factor for the loss of the

32 Tremblay (1996: pp. 59–60) also sets up a laryngeal-less preform for ῥήγος, though of the acrostatic type with a lengthened grade **rēg-s*.

33 But see Schaffner (2016/2017[2018]: p. 103 note 4).

34 A potential example could be the root **re(ǵ)-* ‘dye’ (thus without *s mobile*), see above.

35 Phonetically, only the sound change **sr- > *hr- > ῥ-* [r̥] makes sense, while **ur- > ῥ-* [r̥] is not immediately comprehensible.

36 We do not know if – but deem it plausible that – both **h₂ῥh₂gsneh₂-* and **ῥh₂gsneh₂-* would have led to Lat. **arāna*.

37 The Aeolic, Mycenaean, and Arcado-Cypriote reflex seems to be *o*, see Rix (1992: p. 65) and van Beek (2022: pp. 129–137) with a discussion of the evidence, but with a different account for Mycenaean.

38 Van Beek (2022: p. 17) lists one possible (but uncertain) example for initial **r̥*, namely **ῥsen-* ‘male’ in Gk. ἄρσην, Thess. ὄρσεν, Arcad. ορεν (see the discussion in van Beek 2022: pp. 392–394), though a pre-form **ur̥sen-* is probably just as good (see Peters 1993; García Ramón 2018: pp. 40–43).

word-initial laryngeal (Gk. λῆνος n. ‘wool’ < $*h_2ulh_1n_2-$, Gk. ράινω ‘I besprinkle’ < $*h_2uln(e)h_1-$), at least Gk. νῆττα, Ion. νῆσσα f. ‘duck’ < $*h_2n(e)h_2tih_2-$ could also be due to an (inner-Greek?) dissimilation of the first of two consecutive $*h_2$ ’s, irrespective of whether a syllabic sonorant followed or not. As far as the ‘duck’ word is concerned, the remaining languages point to an *i*-stem $*h_2énh_2ti-$, $*h_2nh_2tíi-$ (Ved. *ātí*, Lat. *anas*, *-tis*, Belarus. *uc*, Russ. *uti-ca*, OE *ænid*, nom. pl. ON *andir*, OHG *anite*) or a *t*-stem (nom. pl. ON *endr* < $*and-iz$ and nom. sg. $*anud(z)$ > OHG *anut*, ON *qnd*; ambiguous Lith. *ántis*, OPruss. *antis*), which makes the Greek *ih_2*-stem stand out. It is therefore not unthinkable that νῆττα continues a *vrd̥dhi* derivative with *schwebeablaut*, viz. $*h_2néh_2tih_2-$. Indeed, such a reconstruction is even preferable since a pre-form $*h_2nh_2tih_2-$ should come out in Greek as if from $*h_2nh_2tih_2-$ (> $*ἄνασσα$; cf. χάλαζα ‘hail’ < $*g^h_1h_2dih_2-$ from $*g^helh_2d-$ as in PSlav. $*žēld_6$ ‘sleet’). Based on $*h_2néh_2tih_2-$ > νῆττα and $*h_2réh_2g-os$ > ῥήγος one could hypothesize that in an environment $*\#h_2RVh_2C_2-$, word-initial $*h_2-$ was lost by dissimilation. Under this formulation, the verb Gk. ἀρήγω ‘aid, succor’ < $*h_2reh_1g-$ does not pose a problem for the account that we propose for $*h_2réh_2g-os$ > ῥήγος. For $*araksnā$, both $*h_2nh_2gsh_2-$ and purportedly dissimilated $*h_2nh_2gsh_2-$ > $*nh_2gsh_2-$ are thinkable.

3.3 Gk. ἀράσσω ‘strike, beat’ (II.+) and ῥάσσω ‘beat, smash, thrust, stamp’ (II.+)

Whether one prefers to depart from $*h_2reh_2g-$ and assumes a dissimilation of the first laryngeal, or from an *r*-initial root $*reh_2g-$ and acknowledges that $*r-$ is continued by Gk. ῥ- – either way there is an inner-Greek parallel for the proposed distribution. Following Bechtel (1914: p. 293), it is more likely than not that the verbs ἀράσσω ‘strike, beat’ (II.+) and ῥάσσω, Att. ῥάπτω, Ion. ῥήσσω ‘beat, smash, thrust, stamp’ (II.+) are etymologically related.³⁹ They form part of a small set of verb doublets that go back to roots of a shape $*(C)Reh_2G-$ and exhibit a similar variation: compare τaráσσω ‘stir, agitate, shake; trouble’ (II.+) and θράσσω ‘trouble, disquiet’ (Pi., Hp., Att.) from $*d^hreh_2g^h-$ (cf. τράχυς ‘jagged, rough’; Lith. *d̥irginti* ‘to stir up, irritate’, etc.), or παλάσσω ‘smack; bespatter sth. with a liquid; soil’ (II.+) and πλήσσω ‘beat, strike’ (II.+) from $*pleh_2g-$ ‘strike’ (cf. Gk. πλιγγή f. ‘blow, stroke’, Lat. *plāga* f. ‘stroke; wound’, etc.).⁴⁰ These can be interpreted as the continuants of $*d^hnh_2g-ie/o-$, $*plnh_2g-ie/o-$, and unaccented $*d^hnh_2g-ie/o-$, $*plnh_2g-ie/o-$ or full-grade $*d^hreh_2g-ie/o-$, $*pleh_2g-ie/o-$, respectively, which encourages an analysis of ἀράσσω and ῥάσσω as going back to $*(s/ul/h_2)nh_2g^h-ie/o-$ and $*(s/ul/h_2)nh_2g^h-ie/o-$ or $*(s/ul/h_2)reh_2g^h-ie/o-$. Within Greek, the likely cognates Att. ῥάχια, Ion. ῥηχίη f. ‘breakers of the sea’ seem to confirm such a root structure. Comparable material outside Greek is found in the Slavic word family around OCS *raziti*, Russian *разить* (*razít’*) ‘strike, hit, smite’, Czech *ráz* ‘thrust,

39 Also compare the gloss προσαρασσομένον: προσρησσομένον (Hsch. π 3679 Latte-Hansen). Skeptical (for phonological reasons) Frisk (1960–1972 I: p. 129 s.v. ἀράσσω, II: p. 644 s.v. ῥάσσω); Beekes (2010: p. 1276 s.v. ῥάσσω); Chantraine (1999: p. 102 s.v. ἀράσσω, pp. 967–968 s.v. ῥάσσω).

40 On these, see most recently van Beek (2021) with an in-depth discussion and references.

impact’, etc. The Slavic evidence precludes $*sreh_2\hat{g}^h$ but would be in line with $*ureh_2\hat{g}^h$ ⁴¹ and $*(h_2)reh_2\hat{g}^h$ ‘strike’. For Greek, however, a u -initial root (cf. Frisk 1960–1972 II: p. 644 s.v. ῥάσσω; Beekes 2010: p. 1276 s.v. ῥάσσω) is made implausible by the lack of any trace of a digamma in ἀράσσω,⁴² while the consistent absence of a spiritus asper even in Attic (e.g., ἀπ-αράξητε in Thucydides 7.63) speaks decisively against $*sreh_2\hat{g}^h$ -. Invoking the dissimilation rule $*\#h_2RVh_2C- > *\#RVh_2C-$ from above, one could start from $*h_2reh_2\hat{g}^h$ - ‘strike’ and reconstruct ἀράσσω as $*h_2\acute{r}h_2\hat{g}^h\acute{i}e/o-$ and ῥάσσω, ῥάττω as $*h_2reh_2\hat{g}^h\acute{i}e/o-$. This would make $*h_2reh_2\hat{g}^h\acute{i}e/o-$ > ῥάσσω, ῥάττω the third example for this proposed sound law, aside from $*h_2n\acute{e}h_2t\acute{i}h_2-$ > νῆττα and $*h_2r\acute{e}h_2g-os$ > ῥήγος.

3.4 Gk. ῥῶξ, ῥωγός m. ‘a kind of venomous spider’ (Nic.)

And once we accept that word pairs exhibiting a variation $*r\acute{a}C- \sim *araC-$ (ῥήγος and ἀράχνη, ῥάσσω and ἀράσσω) can be etymologically related, it becomes plausible that the root $*(h_2)reh_2g-$ ‘weave’ has another avatar in Greek, namely the root noun ῥᾶξ, ῥᾶγός or ῥῶξ, ῥωγός, a marginally attested word for a venomous kind of spider that has not yet (to our knowledge) been connected to ἀράχνη. The dictionaries generally identify this word with the homophonous ῥᾶξ, ῥᾶγός f. ‘grape’ (S., Pl., Arist., etc.),⁴³ seeing the origin of the arachnid meaning in a metaphorical usage (cf. *LSJ*: p. 1565 s.v. ῥᾶξ 3. “so called from its shape”; Overduin 2015: p. 445).⁴⁴ And indeed, some ancient authors, such as Aelian (2nd–3rd c. CE), provide the same explanation.⁴⁵

(1) Πένος φαλαγγίου φασιν εἶναι, καλοῦσι δὲ ῥάγα τὸ φαλάγγιον, εἶτε ὅτι μέλαν ἐστὶ καὶ τῶ ὄντι προσέοικε σταφυλῆς ῥαγὶ καὶ πῶς ὁρᾶται καὶ περιφερές, εἶτε δι’ αἰτίαν ἑτέραν. γίνεται δὲ ἐν τῇ Λιβύῃ, καὶ ἔχει πόδας μικροῦς· στόμα δὲ εἴληχεν ἐν μέσῃ τῇ γαστρὶ, καὶ ἔστιν ἀποκτεῖναι τάχιστον. (Ael. NA 3.36)

‘There is a kind of Spider which they call [ῥᾶξ,] either because it is dark and does in fact resemble a grape in a bunch – it has a somewhat spherical appearance – or for some other reason. It occurs in Libya and has short legs; it has a mouth in the middle of its belly, and can kill in a twinkling.’ (transl. Scholfield 1971–1972)

41 Cf. *IEW*: p. 1181 s.v. 2. $ur\acute{a}\hat{g}h-$: $ur\acute{a}\hat{g}h-$.

42 Compare the verse-final formula ... σὺν δ’/τ’ ὅστέ’ ἀραξε/ἀράξω/ἀράχθη# ‘smashed/will smash his bones/his bones smashed’ (2× *Il.*, 2× *Od.*).

43 Cf. Frisk (1960–1972 II: p. 642 s.v. ῥᾶξ); Chantraine (1999: p. 966 s.v. ῥᾶξ); Beekes (2010: pp. 1274–1275 s.v. ῥᾶξ).

44 Cf. Latvian *zīrnēklis* ‘spider’ (: *zīrnis* ‘pea’) in section §2.2, which provides a close parallel.

45 Similarly in the *Theriaca* scholia (cf. Crugnola 1971: p. 262 *ad loc.*). A diminutive ῥαγίον referring to some sort of spider is used by Philumenus (in or before 4th c. CE), which the author etymologizes as ‘grape’ (Philum. *Ven.* 15.1), and by Aëtius of Amida (5th–6th c. CE).

It is interesting to note, however, that the first attestation of the word in the meaning ‘venomous spider’ is in the shape ῥώξ in Nicander’s *Theriaca*, a hexametrical poem written in the 2nd c. BCE, i.e., several centuries before the first use of ῥάξ in the same meaning.

(2) Ἔργα δέ τοι σίνταο περιφράζοιο φάλαγγος
 σήματά τ’ ἐν βρυχομοῖσιν· ἐπεὶ ῥ’ ὁ μὲν αἰθαλόεις ῥώξ
 κέκληται πισσῆεν, ἐπασσύτεροις ποσὶν ἔρπων·
 γαστέρι δ’ ἐν μεσάτῃ ὀλοοῖς ἔσκληκεν ὁδοῦσι. (Nic. *Th.* 715–718)
 ‘Consider now the operations of the dangerous spider and the
 symptoms that attend its bite. The one which is the colour of
 pitchy smoke is named [ῥώξ]; it moves its feet in succession,
 and in the centre of its stomach it has hard and deadly teeth.’ (transl. Gow & Scholfield 1953)

Note that, unlike Aelian, Nicander does not in any way allude to the shape of the spider or mention that it resembles a grape, even though this author normally does not miss a chance to explain the underlying meaning of the names of the venomous creatures he catalogues. Compare his description of the spider right after our ῥώξ: Ἄστέριον δέ φιν ἄλλο πιφάσκειο, τεῦ τ’ ἐπὶ νώτῳ / λεγνῶται στίλβουσι διαυγέες ἐν χροῖ ῥάβδοι· ‘Learn of one different from these – the STARLET [cf. ἀστέριος ‘starred’], on whose back striped bands gleam radiant on the skin.’ (Nic. *Th.* 725–726). In addition, Nicander uses the word as a masculine (noted by Schindler 1972a: p. 95, but not addressed elsewhere), whereas the ‘grape’ word ῥάξ is always feminine. For these reasons we suspect that the two words were separate lexemes originally, namely ῥάξ, ῥᾶγός f. ‘grape’ (without a good etymology)⁴⁶ and ῥώξ, ῥωγός m. ‘spider’. Note that the derivatives based on the ‘grape’ meaning are all derived from the base ῥᾶγ- and not ῥωγ- (ῥαγο-ειδής ‘resembling a grape’ [medic.], ῥαγ-ιον n. ‘little grape’ [EM], ῥαγ-ικός ‘of grapes’, ῥαγ-ώδης ‘resembling grapes’ [Thphr.], ῥαγ-ίζω ‘gather grapes’ [Theoc.]).

Only secondarily did folk etymology conflate these two words, the result of which being that ῥάξ came to be used for ‘spider’ (first attestation in Aelian, 2nd–3rd c. CE) and ῥώξ, in turn, for ‘grape’ (first attestation⁴⁷ in the *Septuagint* where it is also once treated as a masculine). It is not surprising that a ‘gloss hunter’ such as Nicander (“θηρευτῆς γλωσσῶν” Papadopoulou 2009: p. 117; Overduin 2015: p. 69) would preserve a rare word in its correct form. Hesychius’s glossary points in the same direction: the lemma ῥώξ is explained as κόκκος· ἢ εἶδος [σ]φαλαγγίου ‘a seed; or a kind of venomous spider’ (ρ 572 Latte-Hansen), while ῥάξ only says ἡ τῆς σταφυλῆς ‘that of a bunch of grapes’ without mentioning the arachnid meaning, but with the additional comment ἦν ἡμεῖς

46 One traditionally assumes a Mediterranean origin and compares Lat. *racēmus* ‘stalk of a cluster of grapes; bunch of grapes’ (cf. Frisk 1960–1972 II: p. 642 s.v. ῥάξ; Chantraine 1999: p. 966 s.v. ῥάξ; Furnée 1972: p. 126; Schrijver 1991: p. 306; Beekes 2010: pp. 1274–1275 s.v. ῥάξ); on the other hand, Schrijver (1991: p. 177) compares *frāgum* ‘strawberry’ (< *srag-?), which is closer phonetically.

47 The ῥώξ ‘grape’ that Herodian (Herodian. ii.744.22 Lentz = Choerob. *can.* i.296.5 Hilgard) attributes (without context) to the 7th century poet Archilochos (Archil. *fr.* 281 Gerber) is an outlier and difficult to assess without the primary source.

ῥάγα καλοῦμεν ‘which we call ῥάξ’ (p. 116 Latte-Hansen). This indicates that ῥάξ ‘grape’ (the only form attested in Attic) had already been given up in favor of ῥώξ by the time Hesychius wrote his glossary (ca. 5th/6th c. CE). Compare Modern Greek ῥάγα f. ‘grape’. Note that an explanation along these lines accounts for the variation in vowel quality in ῥάξ: ῥώξ that is otherwise difficult to justify (cf. Chantraine 1999: p. 966: “Le vocalisme de ῥώξ reste inexplicable.”).

Formally, ῥώξ can be analyzed as an *o/e*-ablauting root noun with agentive semantics, of the kind we see in **b^hór-* m. ‘thief’ (Gk. φῶρ, Lat. *fūr*) or **klóþ-* m. ‘thief’ (Gk. κλώψ; see Schindler 1972b: p. 36). We could set up a **(h₂)róh₂g-s*, gen. sg. **(h₂)réh₂g-s* >> **(h₂)reh₂g-ós* ‘weaver’, with loss of the initial laryngeal either by the dissimilation rule from above **#h₂RVh₂C-* > **#RVh₂C-* or by the ‘Saussure effect’. A **(h₂)róh₂g-s* ‘weaver’ would not only be a fitting word for a spider in line with the formations discussed in section §2.4; it would also confirm the etymological proposal outlined here for Gk. ἀράχνη, Lat. *arāneus* ‘spider’ < **araksnā* ‘web maker’ and Gk. ῥῆγος ‘rug, blanket’, respectively.⁴⁸

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we looked at the words for ‘spider’ that are attested in the different branches of the Indo-European family. It is striking that according to the communis opinio there is no single reconstructable item for this animal for PIE. An etymological survey showed that most traditions derive their words for ‘spider’ from roots or verbs that mean ‘weave’, ‘spin’, and the like. This led us to a re-evaluation of the obscure lexemes Gk. ἀράχνη, Lat. *arāneus* ‘spider’, starting from the premise that the underlying etymon **araksnā* is also derived from a root meaning ‘weave’. Based on partly commonly accepted, partly newly proposed sound developments, **araksnā* was interpreted as **(h₂)řh₂g-s-neh₂-*, i.e., a derivative of a neuter *s*-stem **(h₂)réh₂g-os* ‘weaving, woven thing’ that is attested in Gk. ῥῆγος ‘rug, blanket’. In addition, the root **(h₂)reh₂g-* ‘weave’ might be seen as the source of the root noun **(h₂)róh₂g-s* ‘weaver’, attested in Greek as ῥώξ ‘a kind of venomous spider’. While facing some challenges on the phonological level, our account has the advantage of providing a new and semantically appealing etymology for not only Gk. ἀράχνη and Lat. *arāneus* ‘spider’ < ‘weaver, web-maker’, but also Gk. ῥῆγος ‘rug, blanket’ and ῥώξ ‘a kind of venomous spider’ < ‘weaver’, all of which had hitherto been un- or ill-explained. Whether or not **(h₂)řh₂g-s-neh₂-* was the PIE word for spider or merely constitutes another one in a series of Graeco-Latin isoglosses (cf. **b^huǵéh₂* ‘flight’ > Gk. φυγή, Lat. *fuga*; **s₂ǵōřaks* m. ‘shrew’ > Gk. ῥραξ, -ακος, Lat. *sōrex*, -*icis*), must be left open for now. What can be said with a certain degree of confidence, however, is that the Proto-Indo-Europeans presumably called the spider a ‘weaver’ in some way or other.

48 Unfortunately, there is no evidence for the root **(h₂)reh₂g-* ‘weave’ outside Greek and Latin. However, it is not unthinkable that **řesg-* ‘plait, weave’ (LIV²: p. 507) as in Lit. *řezgù*, *řėgzti* ‘plait, weave’, Lat. *restis* ‘rope, cord’ (**řezgtis*), Ved. *řájjū-* f. ‘rope’ is underlyingly **(h₂)řesg-* and eventually a conflation of **(h₂)reh₂g-* ‘weave’ and **mesg-* ‘knit, plait’ (see §2.4.6).

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Dr. Stefan Höfler / hoefler.ling@gmail.com

Austrian Academy of Sciences
Doktor-Ignaz-Seipel-Platz 2, 1010 Wien, Austria

Department of Linguistics
University of Vienna, Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies
Sensengasse 3a, 1090 Wien, Austria

Johan Ulrik Nielsen, B.A. / johan.u.nielsen@hum.ku.dk

Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics
University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Humanities
Emil Holms Kanal 2, 2300 Copenhagen, Denmark



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