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**THE EAST BALTIC NAME FOR ‘SPIDER’**

In his fascinating book *Język litewski w perspektywie porównawczej* prof. Wojciech Smoczyński (2001, 114) derives the East Baltic names for ‘spider’ (Lith. *vóras* m., Latv. *vâris* m.) from the Lithuanian verb *veriù*, *vériaù*, *vérti* (meaning also ‘to thread, to string / nizać, nawlekać’, cf. Lith. *įveriu* ‘fädele den Faden in die Nadel’) and further from the Indo-European root *\*h<sub>2</sub>uer-* ‘binden, anreiben, aufhängen’ (Pokorny 1959, 1150; Rix 1998, 258). Unfortunately, he ignores the phonological difficulties of this derivation, suggesting unconvincingly an innovative Baltic apophony *\*ā ~ \*ē* instead of the expected *\*ō ~ \*ē*. This etymology was suggested many years ago by Leskien (1884, 356; 1891, 179) and accepted by some linguists (e. g. Pokorny 1959, 1150). However, Ernst Fraenkel (1962, 1274) quotes Leskien’s etymology with the comment “vielleicht” and at the same time he treats the Lithuanian term for ‘spider’ as etymologically unclear (“unklar”). Also Trautmann (1923, 351f.) does not associate Lith. *vóras* ‘spider’ with the Lithuanian verb *veriù*.

In my opinion, the traditional etymology is probably wrong. I believe that Lith. *vóras* ‘spider’, containing evidently the primitive vowel *\*ā*, must derive from the Indo-European adjective *\*wāros* ‘knock-kneed, bent, crooked; with legs wide apart’ (see Pokorny 1959, 1108, s.v. **2. *ṷā-***), which is perfectly attested in two Latin adjectives: *vārus* ‘knock-kneed; bent, crooked’ (secondarily ‘opposed, contrary’) and *vāricus* ‘with legs wide apart’ (hence the verb *vārico* ‘to straddle’). This etymology is phonologically perfect and semantically convincing, as spiders are creatures with eight knock-kneed (crooked) legs wide apart.

What is more, the East Baltic terms for ‘spider’ cannot be dissociated from the Ossetic forms: Digoron *xælaur*, Iron *xælwaræg* (m.) ‘spider (spinning the cobweb)’, which contain the Ossetic name for ‘thread’, *xal / xalæ*, as the first member of the compound. The final part of this name (*ur / war-æg*) seems to derive from Iran. *\*wāra-* / *\*wāra-ka-* (= Lith. *vóras* m. ‘spider’ = Lat. *vārus* adj. ‘knock-kneed; bent, crooked’). This explanation seems more acceptable than the etymology suggested by Abaev (1989, 170: “*xæl-waræg* «плетущий нить»”). It should be emphasized that many (but not all) species of spiders spin webs for the capture of insects as food. However, all species of *arachnidae* are characterized by their legs wide apart.

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