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Cherchez la femme: Two Germanic suffixes, one etymology

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Abstract: The origin of the Germanic suffixes forming occupational titles and agent nouns – masculine **-ārijaz* (the ancestor of Modern English *-er*) and its feminine counterpart reflected in Old English as *-estre* and in Modern as *-ster* – is an old problem in Germanic historical morphology. The masculine “agentive” suffix, which occurs in all the subgroups of Germanic, is generally presumed to be of Latin origin, though it occurs mostly with native derivational bases even in the earliest attested Germanic languages; the latter is believed to be native, but has no accepted etymology, and its limited range of occurrence in Germanic remains unexplained. It will be argued that the two suffixes are etymologically connected in a hitherto unsuspected way, that the traditional opinion about the origin of **-ārijaz* should be revised, and that both suffixes have interesting Indo-European cognates outside Germanic.

Keywords: Germanic derivational morphology, etymology, agent nouns, compounds, Proto-Germanic, Verner’s Law

1 Introduction: searching for evidence

A minor Germanic sound law proposed in Gąsiorowski (2012) describes the development of the word-medial sequence **-sr-* in the context of Verner’s Law. It is argued, on the evidence presented there, that the **-sr-* cluster, which did not yet contain an epenthetic **t* at the time, was affected by Verner’s Law and changed into **-zr-*.¹ Subsequently, **z* was lost in this context, and any preceding short vowel underwent compensatory lengthening.² The best examples of the

1 This *t*-epenthesis was omitted from Ringe’s (2006) list of Proto-Germanic consonant changes “by oversight, missed because it had no consequences for PGmc grammar and interacted with no other sound changes” (*Addenda and corrigenda to Volume I*, Ringe and Taylor 2014: 515).

2 One of the reviewers finds the evidence presented in Gąsiorowski (2012) “quite weak” and posits OSw. *sværra* ‘mother-in-law’ as a counterexample (if from **swezrjōn-*, as suggested by the reviewer); another one dismisses it entirely. While I agree that the number of etymologies

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change involve short **e*. The product of the lengthening is **ē*, indistinguishable from the Proto-Germanic reflex of PIE **ē* and tautosyllabic **eh₁*.³

- (1) **ues-r-ó-* > **wezra-* > **wēra-* ‘spring’
**kes-ró-* (from **kes-* ‘comb’) > **xezra-* > **xēra-* ‘hair’
**ġ^h(ð)ies-ráh₂* > **yjezrō* > **yjērō* ‘yesterday’

In the third example, the starting-point is pre-Gmc. **ġ^h(ð)ies-ráh₂*, which can be interpreted as a quasi-collective of **ġ^h(ð)ies-ro-*, a form which also survived in Germanic as **y(j)estra-* ‘yester(day)’.⁴ Although both members of the doublet are attested only with adverbial functions (reflexes of **yjērō* in North Germanic and **y(j)estra-* in Gothic and West Germanic), they are relicts of a nominal paradigm.⁵ This example shows that Verner’s Law can generate alternations like **-estr-* : **-ēr-*, conditioned by pre-Germanic accentual contrasts. Another possible instance of such an alternation is **austra-* : **aura-* ‘east’, cf. **aura-wanðilaz* ‘the morning planet, Venus’,⁶ but since the cluster is preceded by a diphthong in this case, there is no compensatory lengthening (Gašiorowski 2012: 124).

At first blush, there seem to be no examples of Vernerian **-zr-* preceded by **a*. However, candidates might easily be overlooked because of the opacity of the correspondences arising in this context. Let us therefore try to *predict* the

supporting the proposed sound change is low, and some of them might be explained otherwise, I am not aware of any other solution that would make it possible to connect Goth. *gistra-*, Eng. *yester-* etc. with ON *í gær* ~ *í gjár*, derive ON *vár* from the PIE word for ‘spring’ without circularly assuming unmotivated “PIE variants”, or reconstruct a single ancestral form for the ‘gander’ words in Italic, Germanic and Slavic. The argument laid out in Gašiorowski (2012) should be judged on its own merits, but as regards OSw. *sværra* (a form I have not been able to locate, and so cannot tell whether it is distinct from Olc. *sværa*), I see no semantic reason to derive a word meaning ‘mother-in-law’ from one meaning ‘sister’, and no formal reason to separate the former from the Germanic word-family built around the inherited IE kinship terms: **suekuros* ‘father-in-law’, its vřddhied adjectival derivative **suekuros* ‘brother-in-law’, and **suekrúh₂* ‘mother-in-law’. On the other hand, OE *ġe-swīra* ‘cousin’ (*geswīra oððe swustur sunu*, glossing Lat. *cōnsobrīnus* in Wright [Wülcker] 1884: 365) could be adduced as evidence: **kom-suesr-i-h₃ón-* > **swīzr-ijan-* > *swīra*. I decided not to include it, however, because the word is attested only once in this form, and its synonyms recorded in Wright’s collection of glossaries (*ġesweostren*, *ġeswīgra*, *ġesweġra*, *swēor*) show that the Germanic reflexes of **sues(o)r-* and **suekuro-* were confused in the Old English words for ‘cousin’.

3 In traditional parlance, the lengthened vowel merged with the so-called “primary **ē*” or **ē¹*, realised phonetically as a mid-open or near-open front vowel, [e : ~ æ:].

4 For details, cf. Gašiorowski (2012: 126). Cf. Lat. *vesper* ~ *vespera*.

5 The progressive accent shift in thematic collectives is a familiar phenomenon. For the consequences of its interaction with Verner’s Law, cf. Schaffner (2001: 106–113).

6 Literally, ‘east-wanderer’.

hypothetical outcome of the proposed changes to make sure that we know what to expect. Chronology is an important consideration here. It is often argued that the merger of pre-Gmc. **ō* and **ā* resulted at first in an unrounded low vowel – approximately [ɑ:] – which was not raised and rounded to [o:] until Late Proto-Germanic (cf. Ringe 2006: 146, with reference to Streitberg 1896: 48–49).⁷ If this scenario is correct, the conventional representation of the merged vowel as **ō* does not reflect its realisation in Early Proto-Germanic. The strongest evidence for this claim is the treatment of some of the earliest loans exchanged between Latin and Proto-Germanic, in which Latin *ā* is rendered as Germanic “**ō*” (Goth. *Rūmoneis* ‘Romans’ ← Lat. *Rōmānī*) and possibly vice versa (PGmc. **bōk-* ‘beech’ → [*silva ... quæ appellatur*] *Bacenis*, mentioned by Julius Caesar in 53 BC). If the raising was a fairly late development, it is thinkable that **-azr-* became **-ār-* early enough to be affected, and to end up as **-ōr-*.⁸

If, however, the compensatory lengthening took place later than the raising of PGmc. **ō*, the resulting **-ār-* would in all likelihood have been retained. Late Proto-Germanic had already developed a marginal **ā* phoneme from the contraction of **-aja-* after the loss of **j* between identical vowels.⁹ Any long **ā* of other origin would simply have contributed to making the vowel a little less marginal. Furthermore, while the voicing of **s > *z* is part of Verner’s Law, it is difficult to date the more recent loss of the fricative in **-zr-*. Since secure East Germanic examples are missing,¹⁰ the change could even belong to the Proto-Northwest Germanic chronological horizon. In that case, the **ā* produced by compensatory lengthening would presumably have fallen together with NWGmc. **ā < PGmc. *ē*.

7 Here I use the term “Late Proto-Germanic” (LPGmc.) to refer to the *most recent* common ancestor of the historically known Germanic languages, displaying all their common innovations reconstructible on comparative grounds. “Early Proto-Germanic” (EPGmc.) is any earlier stage already affected by Grimm’s and Verner’s Laws. Anything still earlier would fall under the rubric of “pre-Germanic”.

8 Stifter (2010) persuasively argues against a late date for the raising. He points out that the presence of a Celtic speech community mediating between the Romans and the Germani could satisfactorily account for all the substitutions paraded as evidence. If so, the merged vowel may have been **ō* already in Early Proto-Germanic or even pre-Germanic. At any rate, the case for the contrary can no longer be regarded as watertight.

9 It can be found in the anomalous stems **stai-/stā-* ‘stand’ and **γai-/γā-* ‘go’, and in the conjugational forms of a few factitive verbs belonging to weak class III (Ringe 2006: 180, 194, 258, 264).

10 One possible example is the “Gothic” letter name *uraz* ‘aurochs’ in the *Vienna Codex* (= the Germanic name of the second rune), possibly from **uzrā-* (Gašiorowski 2012: 120). If we exclude it as too insecure, the fate of **-zr-* in East Germanic has to be declared unknown for lack of evidence at this stage.

2 Statement of the problem

2.1 Rounding up the suspects

Depending on different assumptions about the relative chronology of the relevant sound changes, two competing predictions can be tested. I have not been able to identify any putative instances of one of the predicted alternations, **-astr-* : **-ōr-*. The other possibility, however, turns out to be more promising: **-astr-* : **-ār-* does appear in pairs of gendered occupational terms – the type represented by OE *sēamestre* : *sēamere* ‘female : male patcher, tailor’.¹¹ The etymology of the suffix *-estre*, PL *-estran* (< **-astrijōn-*)¹² is considered unknown, and its distribution in Germanic is dialectally restricted. Nevertheless, there is practically unanimous agreement that it is of native origin – perhaps by default, since no convincing source of borrowing has been proposed.¹³ Contrariwise, the received opinion about the masculine suffix *-ere* (pre-OE **-æri* < **-ārija-*) is that it reflects Lat. *-ārius*, borrowed either into Late Proto-Germanic or independently into Gothic and Proto-Northwest Germanic (see e.g. Davis 1992: 106, Gary 2006: 140–142, Ringe and Taylor 2014: 138).¹⁴ Indeed, the formal and functional similarity between the Latin suffix and its Germanic equivalent seems like a good reason to accept the connection. The reconstructed **-ārijaz* is entirely plausible as an early Germanic substitute for *-ārius*, and its further development into Goth. *-areis*, OHG *-āri*, OE *-ere*, etc.¹⁵ presents no major difficulties.¹⁶ It is also clear that *some* Latin nouns in *-ārius* were borrowed into early Germanic languages with a matching form of the suffix, e.g. *monētārius* ‘mint-master’ → OHG *munizāri*, OE *mynetere* ‘money-changer’.

¹¹ Note that since Mod.E *-ster* no longer forms occupational terms marked for gender, *seamstress* has been redundantly characterised with the Latinate femininising suffix *-ess*.

¹² I assume that the initial vowel of the suffix is a reflex of PGmc. **a*, since it does not cause direct or iterative *i*-umlaut in the initial syllable. Its own umlaut, triggered by **-ij-*, prevents the retraction of /æ/ in words such as *bæcestre*; this shows we are dealing with a *jōn*-stem.

¹³ An exhaustive review of numerous hypotheses about its origin can be found in Peterson (2013).

¹⁴ Since Kluge’s (1886: 8) unconvincing attempt to reconstruct a native Germanic **-arja-*/**-ērja-* < PIE **-orjo-*/**-ērjo-* and to connect it with similar suffixes in Latin, Celtic and Slavic, borrowing from Latin has been regarded as practically self-evident.

¹⁵ The “etc.” includes Mod.E *-er*, one of the most productive derivational tools in the language, especially in its capacity as an agent-noun suffix; one could also add common Slavic **-arjb*, uncontroversially regarded as an early borrowing from Germanic.

¹⁶ Except for occasional questions of vowel quantity, on which see Subsection 3.4 below.

2.2 Reopening the case

As Ringe and Taylor (2014: 138) rightly point out, productive affixes are not borrowed by themselves. They are extracted by native learners from borrowed words, and then applied to generate new derivatives in the host language. The question is whether there was a critical mass of Latin loans – preferably pairs like OE *mynet* ‘coin, coinage’ : *mynetere* – to make Germanic-speakers aware of how the Latin derivational process worked and to encourage them to imitate this pattern (“*X-ārius*: a person who habitually does something connected with *X*”). Such pairs are extremely rare in early Germanic texts. In the overwhelming majority of cases **-ārija-* is added to a native base. Straightforwardly imported Latin words in *-ārius* are thin on the ground even in Northwest Germanic, where the ending became virally productive. In the surviving Gothic texts there is no direct evidence of any of them. The list of documented Gothic masculines in *-areis* is brief to begin with:

- (2) *bokareis* ‘scribe’ (OHG *buohhāri*, OE *bōcere*), cf. Goth. *boka* ‘book’
motareis ‘toll-taker’, cf. Goth. *mota* ‘toll, tax’
wullareis ‘fuller’, cf. Goth. *wulla* ‘wool’
dāimonareis ‘one possessed’, cf. NT Gk. *δαίμων* ‘evil spirit’
lāisareis ‘teacher’ (OHG *lērāri*), cf. Goth. *lāisjan* ‘teach’
witodalāisareis ‘teacher of the law’ (see the previous item)
liuþareis ‘singer, bard’ (OHG *liudāri*, OE *lēoþere*), cf. Goth. *liuþon* ‘praise with song’
sokareis ‘investigator’ (OHG *suochāri*), cf. Goth. *sokjan* ‘seek, examine’

Of these, *bokareis*, *motareis* and *wullareis* may conceivably be calques based on attested Latin models such as *librārius*, *telōnārius* (VLat. *tolōnārius*)¹⁷ and *lānārius* (derived, respectively, from *liber* ‘written matter, book’, *telōnium* ~ *tolōneum* ‘custom-house’, and *lāna* ‘wool’). *Dāimonareis*, although based on a foreign word, has no analogue in Latin. The Gothic *-areis* nouns transparently related to native verbs (*lāisareis*, *liuþareis*, *sokareis*) have exact cognates in other Germanic languages, though there are no Latin equivalents in *-ārius*. This militates against independent adoption of the suffix by the East and Northwest subbranches.¹⁸ As said above, conspicuous by their absence from the Gothic

¹⁷ *Tolōnārius* actually appears in West Germanic as OHG *zolanāri*, MHG *zolnære*, OE, OFris. *tolnere*.

¹⁸ The practice of adding **-ārija-* to verbal nouns eventually made it possible for the suffix to acquire a new function: the formation of agent nouns (OE *drincere*, *singere*, *writere*, OIc. *kennari*

corpus are any direct loans from Latin, let alone *pairs* of loans exemplifying the derivational pattern.¹⁹

The suffix **-astrijōn-* has functioned as the feminine counterpart of **-ārija-* in some of the northerly members of the West Germanic dialect network.²⁰ Its Modern Dutch reflex, *-ster*, refers exclusively to women, e.g. *schrijver* : *schrijfster* ‘male : female writer’.²¹ In Middle English, Middle Low German and Modern Frisian, however, nouns ending in this suffix often refer to men. The same is to a certain extent true of Old English. While the weak ending *-estre* could be productively employed – especially in West Saxon – to form feminine counterparts of strong masculines in *-ere*,²² *-estre* words could also optionally refer to males or serve as sex-neutral terms. Jespersen (1962 [1927]) denies any special gender role for *-estre* and proposes the following scenario: the suffix had a “two-sex” interpretation from the very start.²³ The Anglo-Saxon glossary-makers associated the *-tre* part with Latin *-trix*, which prompted them to introduce an artificial gender contrast between *-ere* and *-estre*, in an attempt to reproduce a distinction they knew from Latin. Those *-estre* words which are never applied to men “are chiefly formations created on the spur of the moment by glossarists who wanted a translation of a Latin feminine” (Jespersen (1962 [1927]: 185).

‘teacher, master’, *scrifari* ‘painter, writer’, *sofari* ‘sleeper’, etc.). There is no Latin model for this pattern, so productive in Northwest Germanic.

19 As pointed out by one of the reviewers, we also have Goth. *waggareis** (or neuter *waggari**) ‘pillow, cushion’, attested as DAT. SG *waggaria*, which cannot be analysed as an agent noun or an occupational title, but which seems to contain Lat. *-ārium*, a common suffix forming (among others) nomina loci. Although we are dealing with an isolated Gothic example, it has cognates elsewhere in Germanic (OE *wangere*, OHG *wangâri*), while loanwords such as OHG *kellari*, OIc. *kjallari* ‘cellar, storeroom’ ← Lat. *cellārium* show that some nouns with this suffix must have been borrowed at an early date (note the “hard” velar). It is therefore only fair to note that the absence of direct loans from Latin in the Gothic corpus does not absolutely rule out the possibility that the Gothic suffix *-areis* is borrowed.

20 It is absent from High German (all historical periods), but also from the Old Saxon text corpus; sporadically found in Old Frisian; highly productive in Old English and Middle Low German; still fully productive in Modern Dutch. In Modern English the suffix has managed to acquire new functions quite different from those it had in Old English.

21 It can also be productively added to nouns already containing a masculine agentive suffix other than *-er*, e.g. *bedelaar*: *bedelaarster* ‘male: female beggar’.

22 Or even feminine terms without a matching masculine in *-ere*, cf. *lārestre* ‘female teacher’ (the masculine counterpart is *lārēow*) or *myltestre* ‘prostitute, harlot’. In several cases some other masculine agent suffix, especially *-end*, is paired with *-estre*, e.g. *forspennend* ‘panderer’: *forspennystre* ‘procuress’.

23 It would follow that its exclusively female-marking use in Dutch represents a late, secondary specialisation.

Jespersen also suspects the existence of an alternative strong masculine ending (*-astrija-) whose Old English reflex fell together with that of the weak feminine in the nominative singular. However, there seems to be no evidence of unambiguously non-feminine case-forms like GEN.SG *-estres or NOM.PL *-estras. The strong-declension GEN.PL -estra is occasionally attested: *pleġestra* ‘wrestlers’ glossing Lat. *luctatorum* (masculine); *bæcestra* ~ *bæcistra* (regularly in the phrase *bæcestra ealdor* ‘chief baker’ = Lat. *magister pistorum*).²⁴ Still, it would be difficult to argue that meaning trumps grammatical gender here, since GEN.PL -ena has the same form for all weak nouns irrespective of their gender. By the same token, GEN.PL -a is simply strong, not specifically masculine.

Jespersen’s argument is thought-provoking, but based largely on unverifiable “suspicions” about the intentions of Old English writers. It does not explain why – if the contrast was so artificial – it remained to some extent alive and productive throughout Middle English,²⁵ why -estre formally belonged to the weak feminine declension, or why -ster has been selected to mark natural feminine gender in Dutch. As for the etymology of -estre/-ster, Jespersen remains agnostic: “Nothing is known of the origin of the ending, and it does not have any connexion with any feminine ending in any of the related languages” (Jespersen (Jespersen 1962 [1927]: 188)).²⁶

²⁴ On the other hand, the genitive plural of *myltestre* ‘prostitute’ is invariably *myltestrena*.

²⁵ New -estre words referring only to women continued to be coined in the southern dialects. In Early Modern English, however, the -er- -ster system collapsed and either the one or the other variant became fixed in general use irrespective of the gender of the referent. Today, -er remains fully productive in the formation of deverbal agent nouns, while -ster has been delegated to minor derivational duties and is clearly denominal (*gangster*, *prankster*, *hipster*, etc.; see the entry for “-ster, suffix” in the *OED* 2015).

²⁶ To complicate matters further, there are several varieties of Germanic *nomina instrumenti*, *loci*, *actionis* and related formations involving the suffix *-str(a)- or just *-st(a)- (Peterson 2013: 1–12). They seem to be of diverse origin. Their relationship to the -estre suffix has been much discussed without definite conclusions. Some individual feminines in -str- may not be of the same origin as the bulk of the group; a good example is the OE compound *cild-festre* ‘nurse’, whose second member (*-fōstrijōn-) is clearly derived from the neuter *fōstra- ‘feeding, nourishment’ (OE *fōstor*). Although it is traditionally regarded as a combination of *fōð- (as in *food*) with the Germanic reflex of the PIE tool suffix *-tro-, there are good formal reasons to consider it a direct reflex of PIE *páh₂s-tro-m. Whichever etymology one prefers, the -str- combination is not a real suffix in this word. In my opinion, deriving other instances of the occupational suffix *-astrijōn- from action nouns in *-str- (Krahe [Meid] 1969: 185) is a case of *obscurum per obscurius*, and explaining the *-str- part as a variant of the tool suffix *-bra- with a preceding “extension” *-s- (Casaretto 2004: 550–552) is downright arbitrary.

2.3 Formulating the hypothesis

Let us turn back to the possible relationship between **-astrijōn-* and **-ārija-*. Stripped of stem-final declension markers (**-ō + n-* and **-a-*) together with the accompanying **(i)j-* element,²⁷ the two suffixes can be aligned neatly if we consider the effects of Verner's Law and changes dependent on its operation (*t*-epenthesis in the **sr* cluster, loss of **z* in its Vernerian allomorph, and the concomitant compensatory lengthening):

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----------------|---|---------------|
| (3) | Pre-Germanic: | <i>*-ásr-</i> | : | <i>*-asr-</i> |
| | Early Proto-Germanic: | <i>*-asr-</i> | : | <i>*-azr-</i> |
| | Late Proto-Germanic: | <i>*-astr-</i> | : | <i>*-ār-</i> |

As we play back the historical sequence of changes, the suffixes coalesce into one and the same shape. In other words, I am proposing that Germanic **-astrij-* and **-ārij-* have a common ancestor. The difference between their ancestral forms was originally trivial: one of them carried an accent, while the other did not.

3 Analysis and discussion

3.1 Dissecting the suffix

Even without the final extension, **-asr-* looks morphologically complex; let us therefore resolve it into component parts. The ancestral form of a typical Old English occupational term like *sēamestre* can be reconstructed as **saumastrijōn-*, based on the *a*-stem masculine **saumaz* 'seam' < **s(i)ou-m-o-*, itself a thematic relative of **šiuht₁-mén-* 'thread, sinew'.²⁸ Therefore, the most obvious possibility is that the initial **a* of **-asr-* simply reflects the *o*-grade thematic vowel of the stem to which the suffix was added.²⁹ Since weak feminines in Germanic are secondary

²⁷ Note that both suffixes share it – the significance of this fact will be discussed in the next section.

²⁸ The laryngeal was lost in the 'seam' word in accordance with the Saussure–Hirt effect; the simplification of the zero-grade **-mn-* to **-m-* (or **-n-*) in thematic derivatives of **-men-* stems is regular.

²⁹ Another analysis that could be considered is **-mos-r-*, with a suffix beginning with **-r-* added to a complex *s*-stem (similar to **moi-nos/*-nes-* > Lat. *mūnus, -neris*). *S*-stems are sometimes combined with the heteroclitc ending **-r/*-en-*, which may then be extended with **-o-* or

formations, derived by adding a nasal extension to a pre-existing “plain” feminine in $*-ah_2$ or $*-ih_2/*-iah_2$ without changing its meaning, $*-strijōn$ presupposes an earlier $*-sri-$ + $*-ah_2$ or $*-sr-ih_2/*-sr-īah_2$ (with the ablauting “motion suffix” $*-ih_2$, as in Ved. *devī* ‘goddess’).³⁰ The proper segmentation of the hypothetical pre-Germanic form seems to be $*s(i)oumo-sri(-a)h_2$ (later extended with $*-n-$). Since the first part is a bare thematic stem, not modified in any way, the whole resembles a compound rather than a suffixation. We could expect its second member be interpretable as a *word*, not a *suffix*, at some ancestral stage.

A rather obvious candidate for the second member is $*s(ē)r-ih_2-$, reconstructed by Kim (2005; 2009) as a variant of an archaic Indo-European word for ‘woman, female’, redundantly extended with the suffix $*-ih_2$.³¹ Kim identifies its reflexes in Indo-Iranian (Ved. *strī-*, YAv. *strī*, Oss. Digor *silæ*, Iron syl, Khot. *strīyā-*) and Tocharian (B *ṣarya*), all with meanings such as ‘female, woman, lady’.³² The older variant without the *devī-* suffix was outcompeted by the synonymous word $*g^wenh_2-$ very early in the history of Indo-European. Its most familiar fossil relict is the femininising suffix $*-s(o)r-$, no longer productive in any surviving branch of Indo-European but lingering on in the ‘sister’ word

³⁰ *-i-*. But in examples of this type – of which at least $*témh_2-s-ro-$ ‘dark’ and $*k̑h_2-s-ró-(h_3)on-$ ‘hornet’ have Germanic reflexes (distorted by dissimilatory changes in the latter case, cf. Nussbaum 1986: 248–260) – the vocalism of the $*-e/os-$ suffix is normally “zeroed out”, and at any rate does not take the *o*-grade.

³¹ $*-sri-h_3(o)n-$ with the Hoffmann suffix is also formally possible, but there is no semantic reason to posit it here.

³² Kim (2009: 114) reconstructs $*h_1ós-r/*h_1és-r-$, an acrostatic *r*-stem, hence $*(h_1)sér-ih_2/*(h_1)s_r-īéh_2-$. However, even if an initial $*h_1$ was originally present in the free-standing word, no phonetic effect of its presence is felt in compounds; for example, there is no laryngeal lengthening in $*t(r)i-sr-es$ ‘3 (f.)’. The simpler reconstruction defended by Harðarson (2014, see footnote 32 below) is definitely preferable. The etymology, functions and morphological behaviour of the *devī-* suffix are discussed at length in Kim (2014).

³³ Harðarson (2014) works with an acrostatic root noun $*sor-/*ser-$ ‘woman’ which lost its autonomy in post-Proto-Indo-European times and became co-opted as a feminine suffix. Although Harðarson (p. 49) follows Pinault (2013: 241–243) in judging Kim’s etymology of Vedic *strī-* as doubtful on formal grounds (such as the questionable assumption of irregular *t*-epenthesis), he himself identifies relics of $*sor-$ as a free-standing word in Iranian. He reconstructs an *i*-stem adjectival derivative $*sēri-/*seri-$ ‘womanly’, subsequently substantivised and extended to yield $*sēri-s-o-$, fem. $*sēri-s-ih_2$ > YAv. *hāirišī-* ‘woman’ (for details, cf. Harðarson 2014: 35–37). Another Iranian word containing $*sor-$ is YAv. *āṇhairī* ‘woman’, reflecting $*(h_1)e/oh_1-ser-ih_2$, the feminine form of $*(h_1)e/oh_1-ser-o-$ ‘belonging to the wife/woman’. Harðarson (pp. 38–42) equates the first element with the instrumental singular of the demonstrative pronoun $*(h_1)e-$, used adverbially, and proposes an etymological relationship between the Iranian word and Hieroglyphic Luwian *ašra/i-** ‘woman’.

(**syé-sōr*), and the Celtic and Indo-Iranian feminine forms of the numerals '3' (**t(r)i-sr-es*) and '4' (**k^wéte-sr-es*). In Hittite the suffix *-(š)šara-* formed a few nouns denoting female humans or deities (Hoffner and Melchert 2008: 59). It is remarkable that it behaved like the second member of a compound, attaching itself to a fully formed noun stem. For example, the feminine counterpart of Hitt. *išḫa-* 'lord' was *išḫa-ššara-* 'lady, mistress'. The Anatolian examples are well known and often quoted. It is, however, worth pointing out that Skt. *strī* can be used in a very similar way: *nāgara-strī* 'townswoman', *divya-strī* 'female divinity, an Apsaras'; it can also form names of female animals (*śākhāmṛga-strī* 'she-monkey').

The idea that Germanic **-strijōn-* contains PIE **s(e)r-* + *-ih₂* is not new. It was laid out by Sihler (1977) along similar lines. Sihler regards the suffix as the PIE "feminine element" **-sor-* extended with the *devī*-suffix on the analogy of other types of feminines, such as active participles in **-ŋt-ih₂*. The resulting combination **-sr-ih₂* was eventually converted into a weak stem together with other personal nouns of the *ī*-declension. Sihler's proposal has received surprisingly little attention, possibly because he was not able to offer a convincing explanation of the absence of this supposedly ancient suffix from Gothic, High German and North Germanic. I shall try to vindicate Sihler's etymology with some modifications which, I hope, make for a stronger case.³³

In Indo-European words that contain the femininity marker **-s(o)r-* it is the lexical base rather than the suffix (originally the second member of a determinative compound) that carries the accent. It is reasonable to assume that the same was the case when the second member was **-s(é)r-ih₂* (reduced to unaccented **-sr-ih₂* > **-srī* in composition). Let us imagine that it was added to an *o*-stem accented on the thematic vowel (symbolised here as **X-ó-*). The expected result is **X-ó-srī* (unaffected by Verner's Law), yielding Late Proto-Germanic **X-astrī*, eventually adorned with the weak-noun suffix **-(ō)n* in West Germanic. After a root-accented first member (**X-o-*), the predicted outcome is **X-o-srī* > **X-azrī* (Verner's Law) > **X-ārī* (compensatory lengthening). It resembles the masculine suffix **-ārijaz*, though it cannot be directly ancestral to it. We shall have to address three questions:

³³ The existence of a free-standing PIE **ser-ih₂* 'woman' is not a necessary assumption here, so my analysis does not depend on the acceptability of Kim's etymology of Ved. *strī-* etc. To be sure, it should not be discarded lightly until a more convincing hypothesis is offered. As noted above, I agree with Harðarson (2014) that the most plausible reconstruction of the recessive 'woman' word is **sor-/ser-*. If **ser-ih₂* existed on its own, it may originally have been a feminine-motion variant of adjectival **ser-o-* 'female, womanly', substantivised with the meaning '(a) female' in compounds referring to stereotypically female occupations.

1. What happened to the Vernerian allomorph **X-ārī*?
2. Why was the non-Vernerian allomorph **X-astī* (+ weak ending) generalised?
3. How exactly did **X-ārijaz* originate, and why is it masculine?

The Vernerian variant must have existed under the scenario proposed here. To return to the example discussed in the first paragraph of this section, **s(i)oumos* is a *τόρμος*-type masculine,³⁴ and should accordingly be reconstructed with accent on the root, i.e. **sīōumos*. The pre-Germanic compound **sōumo-srī* ‘seam-woman’ would have become **saumazrī* > **saumānī*; therefore, the attested form with *-str-* is unexpected. On the other hand, the deverbal thematic neuter **b^hgóm (vel sim.)*³⁵ ‘baking’ would have yielded pre-Gmc. **b^hægó-srī* ‘bread-making-woman’ > PGmc. **bakastī* (+ **-ōn-*) > OE *bæcestre* ‘baker’. Here we encounter the curious phenomenon emphasised by Jespersen (1962 [1927]): although formally feminine, *bæcestre* is actually used more often of men; it translates Latin *pistor* and, conversely, is glossed as ‘*pistor*’ rather than ‘*pistrix*’. Of its 14 occurrences in the *DOE*, only one refers specifically to women.³⁶ Its grammatically masculine counterpart, *bæcere*, is attested only twice, both times in the same source (Ælfric’s *Colloquy* 20, 185), translating *pistor*. *Wæscestre* ‘lauderer’ (no corresponding masculine **wæscere*) is used twice of men and twice of women. On the other hand, the word for ‘fisherman’, a predominantly male occupation, is invariably *fiscere* (68 occurrences in the *DOE*); we never find **fiscestre* used of men (or of women, for that matter). But *cennestre* ‘genetrix, giver of birth’ (27 occurrences) refers exclusively to women³⁷ and has no *-ere* variant. Some pairs, e.g. *rædere* ‘male reader, lector’ : *rædestre* ‘female reader, lectrix’, are neatly segregated according to the sex of their referents in glossaries as well as texts. In sum, Old English exhibits a system in flux, with two suffixes competing for similar functions and only partly specialised as markers of natural gender.

³⁴ Cf. Rasmussen (1999 [1986]).

³⁵ Some such form underlies OE *bæc-hūs*, *bæc-ern* ‘bakery’, *ġe-bæc* ‘baked goods, (the process of) baking’. A connection with Phrygian *bekos* ‘bread’, made famous by Herodotus’s anecdote about King Psammetichus’s linguistic experiment (*Histories* II: 2), is possible only if a consonant shift similar to Grimm’s Law can be demonstrated for Phrygian.

³⁶ Note, however, that most of those occurrences appear in Old English translations of *Genesis* 40 and refer to an alien social institution (the Pharaoh’s chief baker), not to the realities of Anglo-Saxon England. It is thinkable that the translators used a native feminine word for ‘chief baker’ (ignoring the mismatch of formal and natural gender) because its masculine counterpart did not have a sufficiently dignified ring to it (see the next section for details).

³⁷ Mostly to the Virgin Mary, but once also to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

3.2 Reconstructing what happened

The contention defended here is that the *-estre* words were originally compounds in which the second element functioned like *-wife* in *housewife*, *alewife* or *fishwife*. In other words, they referred to women engaged in certain occupations. If *-estre* and *-ere* go back to the same source – compounds containing an old lexical element meaning ‘woman’ – how did *-ere* become masculine? Let us note, first, that **-ārija-* is a thematic suffix. If, as argued above, it derives from **-sr-ih₂-*,³⁸ thematisation must have taken place before pre-Germanic *i*-feminines were transferred to the weak declension. *Pace* Jespersen (Jespersen 1962 [1927]: 187), there is no solid evidence of a thematic variant of OE *-estre*. It seems that only the Vernerian variant of the suffix consistently shows a thematic extension. If the theme vowel was added to the suffix before Verner’s Law (that is, in pre-Germanic times), a natural explanation suggests itself. The PIE suffix **-o-* was normally accented in exocentric derivatives of athematic nouns (basically substantivised adjectives): **wód-ŕ/*wéd-n-* ‘water’ → **udr-ó-* ‘aquatic (animal) → otter’. Similarly in compounds, cf. Ved. *dvīpā-* ‘island’ < **dūi-h₂p-ó-*, literally ‘(piece of land) with water flowing on either side’. When added to **-o-sr-ih₂-*, it would have formed the complex suffix **-o-sr-ih₂-ó-* > **-azrija-* > **-ārija-*, with Verner’s Law applying regardless of the original accentuation of the **-sr-ih₂-* compound.³⁹

Note that a very similar process was employed in Proto-Germanic to form masculine occupational names directly from nouns characteristically associated with the job in question. A thematic noun could give rise to a masculine derivative in **-ija(n)-*, eg. **fiska-* ‘fish’ → **fiskijan-* ‘fisherman’ > Goth. *fiskja* (not found in Northwest Germanic). Such agent nouns in **-ija-* were for the most part transferred to the weak declension.⁴⁰ Whatever the ultimate origin of Indo-European **-ijo-* (**-i-o-* or **-ih₂-o-*),⁴¹ one of its functions was to build thematic derivatives of stems that were already thematic (descriptively, **i*

³⁸ Or **-srī-*, after the loss of the laryngeal.

³⁹ Two of the reviewers object that the substantivisation of a derivative in **-ó-* would probably have involved accent retraction. This, however, is not what we see in actual nouns of this type, which generally retain the final accent, as in the examples given above; retraction is sporadic at best. Anyway, retraction would have blocked the operation of Verner’s Law only if the accent had been shifted precisely to the vowel immediately preceding the **-sr-* cluster. Initial accentuation would still have triggered Verner’s Law.

⁴⁰ But not without exception, cf. Goth. *hāirdeis* ‘herdsman’, *lekeis* ‘physician’, *asneis* ‘farm-worker’, *faúramableis* ‘ruler, chief’, OE *hierde*, *læce*, *esne*, OHG *hirdi*, *lāhhi*, ON *hirðir*, *lækir*, etc.

⁴¹ Cf. Meyer-Brügger (2002: 286–288).

replaced the original thematic vowel); **-iio-* is thus equivalent to the **-ó-* suffix used with athematic stems.

Why should masculine occupational nouns have been built on the basis of their feminine counterparts? It is more usual, at least in the Indo-European languages, for feminines to be derived from stems carrying either no explicit gender marking (though they may be interpreted as masculine by default) or unequivocally masculine. Exceptions are rare, though they do exist. For example, ME *widwer*, MHG *witewære*, MDu. *wedewâre* (Mod.Du. *weduwnaar*) ‘widower’ represent parallel attempts to recharacterise the word with reflexes of **-ārija-* as a makeshift masculinising suffix at a time when the old contrast between weak feminines and masculines, as in OE *wid(e)we*, *wuduwe* ‘widow’: *wid(e)wa* ‘widower’, had been lost.

My proposition is that the process began with the names of some female-dominated (“socially female”) occupations. The common Indo-European deverbal agent nouns in **-tér-* ~ **-tor-/tr-* (femininised, if need be, with the **-ih₂/iáh₂-* motion suffix) dropped out of use in the linguistic lineage of Germanic. Their functions were partly taken over by various inherited formations, such as substantivised active participles in **-nt-*, *n-*stems, and derivatives in **-iio-*, but speakers of pre-Germanic continued to experiment with new ways of enriching their vocabulary of occupational terms. Compounds designating women’s jobs could be coined by combining a noun symbolically referring to the activity in question with **-sr-ih₂*, analogously to more recent compounds like OIc. *spákona* ‘prophetess’, Eng. *chambermaid*, Du. *wasvrouw* ‘laundry woman’, etc. When **sor-/ser-* became extinct as an independent word, it was demoted to a derivational suffix in the compounds that had it as their second member (losing its semantic value in the process). As the characteristic word-final **-ih₂ > *-ī* was unambiguously feminine, ex-compounds ending in **-sr-ih₂* formally retained their grammatical gender, but the focal aspect of their meaning was now the social role, not the sex, of the referent. Still, in a language with a well-developed gender system a conflict between grammatical and natural gender may be perceived as undesirable, and derivational processes get their chance to generate remedial solutions.⁴²

⁴² For example, *midwife* is defined even nowadays as “A woman (or, rarely, a man) who assists women in childbirth” (OED 2015, updated in March 2002). While Modern English does not possess a specialised masculinising suffix, *midwifer* (possibly inspired by *widower* or back-formed from *midwifery*) was proposed in the 1820s for a “male midwife” or an “accoucheur”, but did not become a standard term; and the curious dvandva compound *manmidwife* used to be employed in the same meaning for a few hundred years (cf. the relevant OED entries). Note that Latin had the feminine agentive form *obstētrix* but no **obstētor*; the adjective *obstētricius* was derived from the former.

A possible recipe for masculinising a pre-Germanic feminine was to move it to the *o*-declension.⁴³ The thematic vowel **-o-*, in its capacity as a derivational suffix, prototypically formed adjectives expressing various shades of appurtenance. These could in turn be substantivised, as noted above. The original meaning of a thematic noun derived in this way would have been exocentric, e.g. if **b^hagósri* meant ‘bread-making woman’, its thematic derivative **b^hagosriō-* (loosely speaking, a “possessive” adjective) could describe any person or thing that helped her to perform her job; and when substantivised as a masculine noun, **b^hagosriōs* could refer to a male attendant or servant involved in bread-making – in other words, a “baker’s boy”, not the chief baker herself.⁴⁴ As the common Germanic sound changes had run their course, **b^hagósri* (+ **-ōn-*) and **b^hagosriōs* became, respectively, **bakastri* (> **-ijōn-*) and **bakārijaz* (OE *bæcestre* : *bæcere*), the former older and more official than the latter. Gradually, considerations of inherent social respect sank into oblivion,⁴⁵ and the words became more or less synonymous. Only the difference between the natural gender of their referents would sometimes influence the speakers’ preference for the one or the other in a given context.⁴⁶

Since some of the **-sr-ih₂* compounds must have been accented on the root of the first member (rather than its theme vowel), we should expect a different pattern of pairing as well, with feminine **-ārī*⁴⁷ vs. masculine **-ārija-*. Such **-ārī* feminines seem to have died out in those Germanic languages which preserve the non-Vernerian variant **-astrī* (> **-astrijōn-*). As the etymological connections between **-astrī*, **-ārī* and **-ārija-* grew opaque, their gender tended towards complete polarisation, and since **-astrī* was exclusively feminine, the masculine **-ārija-* nouns absorbed and assimilated any lingering instances of feminine **-ārī* (almost or completely homophonous with them at that stage). Eventually,

43 By that time there were no feminine *o*-stems in the language; those like PIE **snusó-* ‘daughter-in-law’ had already joined the *ah₂*-declension.

44 Although by the end of the Old English period baking was increasingly a male occupation (cf. *Ælfric’s Colloquy* and the use of *bæcere* therein), note the etymology of OE *hlæfdige* ‘lady’ (literally: ‘bread-kneader’, cf. the naughty etymological pun exploited in Riddle 45, *Exeter Book*), and PGmc. **ðaiyijōn-* (f.) ‘kneader, bread-maker’ (OE *dæge*, glossing Lat. “*pistris*” = *pistris*, ON *deigja* ‘female servant’).

45 Though arguably not yet in Old English, see footnote 36 above.

46 Cf. the strikingly parallel situation in Kurdish as described by Haig and Öpengin (2015: 265): Similarly, the word *nanpêj* ‘baker’ traditionally referred to a female person in a household who produced bread, but has now been extended to become a general term for people involved in bread-making as an occupation (usually males). When used in this latter sense, the noun may be inflected with masculine forms.

47 Hence **-ārijōn-* or **-ārīn-* in later Germanic dialects.

the descendants of **-astrī* and **-ārija-* began to form *de novo* derivatives, such as **saumastrijōn-* ‘seamstress’ (for the hypothetical lost **saumārī*) to match masculine **saumārijaz*, or **fiskārijaz*, without a feminine source form, replacing inherited **fiskija(n)-* in Northwest Germanic.

It is possible that a mirror image of this process, namely the generalisation of feminine agentive nouns in **-ārī* at the expense of those in **-astrī*, took place in the ancestor of Old High German. There, masculine nouns in *-ārī* often have feminine counterparts in *-āra*⁴⁸ or *-ārin*, e.g. *folgārī* ‘(male) attendant’ : *folgāra* ~ *folgārin* ‘handmaid’.⁴⁹ While such feminines may represent secondary extensions of **-ārija-* (truncated to **-ār-*) with the femininising suffixes **-jōn-* or **-in-ī/***-in-jō*, it must be noted that at least **-ār(i)jōn-* > *-āra* could just as well be the outcome of the typical “dialectal” treatment of inherited *ī*-stems (including those with the suffix **-ārī/*-ārijō-*).⁵⁰ Early competition between the Vernerian and non-Vernerian allomorphs of the same feminine suffix (in the absence of any functional difference between them) may be the reason why different languages have preserved at most one of them at the expense of the other, whereas reflexes of the uniformly Vernerian masculine **-ārija-* have survived everywhere in Germanic.⁵¹

As pointed out to me by one of the reviewers, in some of the older Germanic languages the “inhabitant” suffix **-warja-* (found already in ancient tribal names like *Ampsivarii*, *Baiuvarii*, *Vidivarii*) lost its initial semivowel and developed into *-ari* ~ *-eri* > *-er(e)*, which fell together with the reflex of **-ārija-*.⁵² Such

⁴⁸ Also spelt *-aria*, *-arra*.

⁴⁹ Cf. Kozianka (2010: 8–9). Similarly in Old Saxon: *hîmakirin* ‘procuress’, cognate to OHG *hîmachāri* ‘(male) matchmaker’: *hîmachāra* ‘bridesmaid’.

⁵⁰ Radically restructured outcomes like **-ārinī* or **-ārinjō* (as if with an infix **-in-*) also seem possible, given the messy evolution of some *ī*-stems in Germanic. For example, **burpī* ‘burden’ became **burpīn-* in the ancestors of Gothic (*baurþei*) and Old High German (*burđi*), **burpījō* in North Germanic (ON *byrðr*), and **burpīnjō* in Ingvaenonic (OE *byrþenn-*). Of course in Modern German the “motion suffix” *-in* synchronically derives nouns denoting females from their masculine counterparts, including those in *-er*, like *Bäcker* ‘baker’: *Bäckerin*; this, however, does not necessarily reflect the diachronic order in which such forms arose.

⁵¹ One of the reviewers finds this scenario unlikely, pointing out the absence of relict forms with the non-Vernerian variant **-str-* in Old High German. To this I can only reply that the complete elimination of one of two competing allomorphs is not unheard of. In this case, the competition would have begun already in Proto-Germanic, many hundred years before the earliest attestation of Old High German. The analysis adopted here enables us at least to speak of the partial survival of the feminine type (the Vernerian allomorph). Anyone who agrees that the *-estre* type is an inherited formation has to account for its disappearance outside North Sea Germanic. The alternative is to continue regarding its origin as an eternal mystery.

⁵² See section 3.4 for a discussion of vowel quantity in the reflexes of **-ārija-*.

a merger is clearly seen in continental West Germanic, cf. OHG *burgari* ‘resident of a fortified town, burgher’. Since **-warja-* was masculine, it may have had a reinforcing influence on the masculine semantics of occupational *-āri*. It should be kept in mind, however, that **-warja-* itself has a complicated history, and that the conflation did not occur everywhere in the same way; note OE *burhwaru* ~ *-ware* ~ *-waran* ~ *-waras* ‘city-dwellers, citizens’.⁵³ It cannot be denied, however, that the functions of both suffixes overlapped to some extent, facilitating the conflation, cf. ON *skipveri*, synonymous with *skipari* ‘sailor’ (OE *scīpere*).

In Old Norse, the elimination of inherited feminine agentive suffixes was complete; their role was taken over mostly by compounds with *-kona* ‘woman’.⁵⁴ In Modern Icelandic, *-kona* (or, alternatively, *kven-* as the first member of compounds) can still be used in female occupational titles. For example, although the grammatically masculine noun *leikari* ‘actor, player’ can nowadays refer to either sex, the feminine compound *leikkona* ‘actress’ remains in common use (cf. Grönberg 2002: 173). In the mainland Scandinavian languages, on the other hand, the femininising suffixes *-inne/-inna* and *-ske/-ska*, borrowed from Low German during the transition from Old Norse to the Early Modern Scandinavian languages, can be combined with the descendants of ON *-ari*, and play a role similar to that of German *-in*, as in Nor. *sangerinne* ‘female singer’, *lærerinne* ‘female teacher’, *syerske* ‘seamstress’, Dan. *sangerinde*, *lærerinde*, *syerske*, Sw. *sångerska*, *lärarinna*, *sömmerska*. These, however, are contact-induced innovations, not inherited structures.

Finally, it has to be admitted that nothing is known about the fate of the feminine suffixes derived from **-sr-ih₂* in East Germanic. Their non-attestation there is scarcely odd, given the limited documentation of Gothic (socially female

⁵³ The suffix developed from an agent noun meaning ‘defender, protector’ (Harðarson 2004: 546–547). Though the variant **-warja-* must be old (Latinised *-variī* matches ON *-veri*, PL. *-veriar*), Old English employed other derivatives of the same verb (**war-i-/*war-ja-* > OE *werian* ‘hinder, keep off, defend, protect’). These include the feminine collective *-waru* (formally singular), the weak stem *-wara*, PL. *-waran*, and the *i*-stem plurale tantum *-ware* (note the absence of palatal umlaut, suggesting a late analogical formation after *liode* ‘people’, *ylde* ‘men’, and ethnic names like *Engle* ‘Anglians’, *Mierce* ‘Mercians’). Although the ordinary strong masculine plural *-waras* also occasionally occurs, Old English has no reflexes of **-warja-*. The modern type represented by *Londoner*, *northerner* or *foreigner* is attested in Late Middle English, but is difficult to decide whether there is any historical continuity e.g. between OE *Lundenwaru* ~ *-ware* ~ *-waran* and ME *Londoner(e)*. We may be dealing with an entirely new Middle English formation which employed a suffix abstracted from loanwords such as *burg(h)er* ‘burgher’ (cf. *burgh* ‘town’) or *straunger(e)* ‘foreigner, alien’ (cf. *straunge* ‘foreign’). Whatever its etymology, this new *-er* is synchronically analysed as a special use of the basic agentive suffix in Modern English (see “*-er*, suffix,” in the OED 2015).

⁵⁴ Re-enacting the same scenario that once led to the rise of the **-sr-ih₂* type.

occupational titles simply do not happen to occur in the surviving texts). Nevertheless, the presence of several nouns in *-areis* (none of them a direct loan from Latin) shows that at least the masculine suffix was already firmly entrenched in Wulfila's Gothic. The shape of the suffix is the same as in Northwest Germanic, which allows us to draw one important chronological conclusion: the simplification of the **-zr-* cluster (and the accompanying vowel-lengthening) is a common Late Proto-Germanic change, not a dialectically restricted development. It also follows that we should reconstruct the pronunciation of Gothic *a* in *-areis* as a long vowel: EPGmc. **-azrijaz* > LPGmc. **-ārijaz* > Goth. [a:ri:s].⁵⁵

3.3 Investigating the involvement of the Romans

There can be little doubt that Latin *-ārius* had a certain impact on the evolution of the Germanic occupational terms. During the early stage of contacts between the Romans and Germanic-speaking peoples, bilingual speakers on the Germanic side must have observed that Latin had a noun-forming suffix strikingly similar, both in form and in function, to one they had in their own language. They could not know the similarity was purely coincidental.⁵⁶ Both suffixes were denominal and formed names of regular occupations. To be sure, since the Germanic suffix was often added to deverbal nouns, the outcome was increasingly perceived to be associated with a particular verb stem (which was not the case in Latin), but there was so much common ground that the suffixes could be regarded as “the same” in terms of popular etymology. Apart from possibly stimulating the creation of a number of calques, this “sameness” undoubtedly facilitated the import of a number of Latin loans, such as *molīnārius* ‘miller’,⁵⁷ sometimes together their derivational base – in this case the Late Latin word *molīna* ‘mill’, of adjectival origin.⁵⁸ Note that *molīna* (used as a noun) and *molīnārius* are attested fairly late in post-Classical Latin (4th and 6th c. AD, respectively, according to the *OED* 2015) – too late to serve as a model pair from which the speakers of Gothic, Proto-West Germanic, or any still earlier

⁵⁵ Apart from /a:/ in loanwords and perhaps as an inherited marginal phoneme distinct from “primary” **ē* [æ:] (> Goth. *ē*), Gothic also had a “new” *ā* that arose through denasalisation in the sequence **[aŋx]* > **[ã:x]* > *āh*, as in *brāhta* ‘brought’.

⁵⁶ Latin *-ārius* goes back to Proto-Italic **-āsījō-*, which in turn seems to represent an **(i)jō-* derivative of pre-Italic adjectival **-ah₂-so-*.

⁵⁷ Early WGMc. **mulinārija-* > OE *mylnere*, OHG *mulināri*.

⁵⁸ OE *mylen*, OHG *mulin*, beside Germanic reflexes of the Classical ‘mill’ word *mola* (presumably an earlier borrowing).

language could extract a derivational rule to imitate. Rather than that, these particular loans were integrated into a pre-existing pattern.

Lowe (1972: 214) claims that **-ǣrja-* (sic, in two different variants, with a long and a short vowel) was borrowed from Latin into the Germanic languages geographically closest to the Roman Empire (such as Gothic and Old High German), and then diffused north into Ingvaemonic and Scandinavian. He argues for its foreign origin and diffusion route by making two observations. First, the Gothic examples are all “learned formations” (like *bokareis*). Secondly, the suffix is rare in the archaic epic registers of the languages of the north: there are only five examples of its use in the *Heliand*,⁵⁹ one in *Beowulf* (*scēawere* ‘spy’),⁶⁰ and one in the *Edda* (*tjúgari* ‘robber’). Neither argument is compelling. As for the first, there is nothing particularly “learned” about meanings like ‘toll-taker’, ‘fuller’ or ‘teacher’. They could perhaps be described more accurately as “technical”, but since we are dealing with occupational titles, what else could they be? As for their rarity in archaic epic poetry, almost all the tokens Lowe refers to are derived from native Germanic roots (as are the Gothic *-āreis* words). The only one of Latin origin is OSax. *munitēri*. Again, meanings like ‘fisherman’, ‘gardener’, ‘spy’ or ‘robber’ can hardly be described as sophisticated or exotic. The authors of the *Heliand*, *Beowulf* and the *Edda* may have avoided them precisely because of their mundane, technical character. Bakers of either sex, tailors and toll-takers do not play prominent roles in heroic tales. Note that although OE *-estre* is generally regarded as a native Germanic suffix (and would scan well in several types of verse because of its heavy penult), no feminine in *-estre* occurs anywhere in *Beowulf*.

To sum up, it is obvious, on the one hand, that a number of borrowings from Latin were analysed as containing the same suffix **-ārija-* which could also be attached to Germanic derivational bases.⁶¹ On the other hand, there is no compelling evidence that such borrowings were the *source* of the suffix in Germanic. Since Latin *-ārius* had no feminine counterpart, loanwords of this type exerted a bias in favour of masculine **-ārija-* as a popular occupational and agentive suffix. By providing names for higher-status jobs, they also added connotations of social prestige to the use of the suffix, eventually helping the

⁵⁹ Not listed in Lowe. Here are the Old Saxon words in question: *dōpēri* ‘baptist’, *dreogēri* ‘deceiver’, *fiskari* ‘fisherman’, *gardari* ‘gardener’, *munitēri* ‘money-changer’.

⁶⁰ To be precise, the *Beowulf* word is a compound: *lēas-scēaweras* ‘false spies’.

⁶¹ The process could involve misanalysis: OE *cāsere* and ON *keisari* ‘emperor’ were secondarily attracted into the class of occupational terms thanks to superficial similarity (Lat. *Caesar* > Late PGmc. **kaisara-*). The same kind of morphological confusion led to the borrowing of Germanic (Gothic?) **kaisara-* as PSL. **česarjъ*.

descendants of **-ārija-* to gain advantage over several other suffixes competing for similar functions.⁶²

3.4 The short and the long: tying up some loose ends

Lowe (1972: 214) suggests that the suffix **-ārija-* (**-ārja-* in his notation) had a variant with a short vowel, **-arja-*.⁶³ Old High German demonstrates the presence of a long vowel in the suffix, supported both by Notker's orthography (the spelling *-āri*) and by metrical data, but we also have ample evidence of a short variant, especially in the Franconian varieties. Since only short *a* was affected by *i*-umlaut in Old High German and Old Saxon, the spelling *-ari* points to etymological length in both languages, while *-eri* (or *-iri*) indicates an umlauted short vowel. The variation *-āri* ~ *-eri* in Old High German is continued as MHG *-ære* ~ *-ere*. Both variants, however, often appear in the same word, sometimes in one and the same text: OHG *buohhāri* ~ *buocheri* 'scribe', *wahtāri* ~ *wahteri* 'watchman', *skāchāri* ~ *schāheri* 'robber'; MHG *vischære* ~ *vischer* 'fisherman', etc. While some words are found regularly with *ā*, others with *e*, and still others allow free variation, this distribution is entirely consistent with traces left by a sound change in progress gradually diffusing through the lexicon. In this case, we are dealing with the shortening of an unstressed long vowel in non-final syllables. Although it is natural for such shortenings to spread more readily among frequently used words and in weak metrical environments, they typically affect word after word in an unpredictable order and take some time to sweep through the population.

In Old English, Old Frisian and Old Norse the vowel is short, but never undergoes syncope regardless of the metrical and segmental environment. This resistance suggests a relatively recent shortening of the reflexes of Proto-NWGmc. **ā*, that is, **ā̃ > *æ > e* in English and Frisian, and **ā > a* in Old Norse. In Dutch, the vowel of the suffix is a reduced *e* [ə], but after a base ending in an unstressed vowel plus a coronal liquid or nasal, Dutch *aa* [a:] appears instead –

⁶² The fact (emphasised by one of the reviewers) that the replacement of unambiguously inherited occupational suffixes like **-ija(n)-* by **-ārija-* belongs to the history of the individual Germanic languages does not *per se* favour borrowing as the source of the latter suffix. Competition between morphological elements may well begin in the parent language and continue in the daughter languages.

⁶³ Thus also in the *OED* 2015 entry for “-er, suffix₁”. Unfortunately, the entry has not been revised since 1891 and the etymological information it contains is badly outdated.

e.g. *oefenaar* ‘trainer’, *treiteraar* ‘bully’, *vogelaar* ‘bird watcher’ etc. Some words have a full long vowel after a coronal sonorant even when the preceding syllable is stressed – e.g. *dienaar* ‘servant’, *leraar* ‘teacher’, *winnaar* ‘winner’. This idiosyncratic behaviour shows that we are not dealing with a phonologically conditioned *lengthening* but rather with a failure to *shorten* an originally long vowel in a specific phonological environment where [ə] was prohibited for phonotactic reasons.⁶⁴ In a similar context where, however, [ə] was only mildly disfavoured, the shortening was not effectively blocked, but it nevertheless failed to be carried through completely, leaving behind a trail of lexical exceptions.

The Gothic spelling of *a* does not reveal its quantity, but some conclusions can be drawn from the treatment of suspected East Germanic loans in Slavic. A number of Germanic nouns in **-ārija-*, borrowed into Slavic at a time when short **a* would have been substituted by Proto-Slavic **o*,⁶⁵ exhibit **-arjъ*, which reflects a long vowel in the donor language.⁶⁶ The source of borrowing is difficult to pinpoint in individual cases. Some of the loans may have been taken from East Germanic; in the majority of cases the probable source is early Old High German. In either case, there are no instances of Slavic **-orjъ*. We find **a* also in the oldest layer of Slavic words containing **-arjъ* added to a native base (such as **rybarjъ* ‘fisherman’, parallel to **fiskārijaz*).

The cumulative evidence favours the view that the suffix originally contained a long **ā*. The inconsistent shortening found in Old High German (and reflected in the quality of Old Saxon *-ari* vs. *-ēri*, and MHG *-ære* vs. *-ere*) is in all likelihood due to the semi-random operation of a natural phonetic process and does not justify postulating separate origin for the short and long variants.

4 Summary and conclusion: the feminine within

The hypothesis presented above contains a twofold paradox. One of the most successful morphemes in the history of English is traced to a definitely unsuc-

⁶⁴ Avoidance of an [əRər] sequence. Cf. Booij (1999: 73–74) for a phonological discussion of the *-er/-aar* allomorphy.

⁶⁵ Cf. Goth. *weinagards* ‘vineyard’ → PSl. **vinogordъ*, PGmc. **(ȳa-)nazi/ja-* (Goth. *ganasjan*) ‘save’ → PSl. **gonoziti* (note the Vernerian **z*, preserved in Slavic, but analogically replaced with **s* in Wulfila’s dialect).

⁶⁶ Cf. **lēkarjъ* ‘physician, healer’, **lixvarjъ* ‘money-lender’, **mōlinarjъ* ‘miller’, **mytarjъ* ‘toll-taker’.

cessful archaic root, displaced by a rival synonym already in Proto-Indo-European. Until now, its only known cognate in Germanic has been the final part of the word *sister*. We have been able to reformulate Sihler's (1977) conjecture in the light of this reconstruction. The second paradox is that this *feminine* element underlies the Germanic *masculine* suffix ancestral to English *-er*. Feminine occupational terms produced masculine derivatives which became their near-synonyms and eventually marginalised their parent formation. From the etymological point of view, the older feminine suffix was outcompeted by its own extended variant, with the feminine element concealed within and obscured beyond recognition by Proto-Germanic sound changes.

Needless to say, such paradoxes are only apparent. Morphological units, like other linguistic substance, are often recycled for a new purpose, which may have little to do with their past functions as recovered by etymological analyses. Such leap-like functional shifts are known as “exaptations” – a term popularised in linguistics by Lass (1990), who borrowed it from evolutionary biology.⁶⁷ While the construction of new grammar by tinkering with old material is a familiar motif in historical linguistics, exaptation is particularly unexpected and at the same time more difficult to detect and reconstruct if the material tinkered with at a given time had previously been on its way to become linguistic junk – the functionless and obsolescent residue of dead historical processes. Some morphemes seem to have a charmed life: in the face of extinction (for example, when replaced by a luckier competitor), they unexpectedly become co-opted for a novel function, making themselves indispensable to language users in a new way. This enables them to survive and thrive long after they have died out in their original state. It is claimed here that both the final *-ster* of *spinster* and the final *-r* of *baker* are vestigial reflexes of an otherwise rare Indo-European archaism and should be added to the inventory of its cherished relics.

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⁶⁷ It was coined and defined by Gould & Vrba (1982: 6): “We suggest that such characters, evolved for other usages (or for no function at all), and later ‘coopted’ for their current role, be called *exaptations*”. For a broad recent overview of opinions on the usefulness of the concept of exaptation in linguistics, on the insights it offers and on controversial issues surrounding it, see especially the collected volume edited by Norde and Van De Velde (2016).

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