Gk. μοιχός 'adulterer': Re-mixing a Piss-poor Etymology[*]

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This paper challenges the traditional etymology of Greek μοιχός as a τομός-type noun derived from PIE *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- 'to piss' and proposes to trace back the word to PIE *$mei\hat{k}$- 'to mix'. I re-evaluate the Latin and Sanskrit evidence cited in favor of a derivation for μοιχός from *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- and find it inconclusive for the salient details of the semantic development proposed in the earlier literature. Moreover, the lateness of both the Sanskrit and Latin evidence points towards parallel innovations of the meaning 'to ejaculate' from 'to piss'. Instead, the insight that reflexes of *$mei\hat{k}$- frequently denote extramarital intercourse across Indo-European languages and especially Greek, notably in Homeric uses of μίσγω and ἐμίγην in adulterous contexts, provides semantic support for deriving μοιχός from PIE *$mei\hat{k}$-. I formalize the derivation through a *rátha*-type derivational chain (*$mei\hat{k}$- → *$moi\hat{k}$-$éh_2$ → *$moi\hat{k}$-h_2-$ó$-s > μοιχός) and adduce evidence from the Balto-Slavic branch for the intermediate τομή-type abstract. This analysis circumvents the difficulties posed by a lack of incontrovertible Greek evidence for the reconstruction of word-initial Saussure-Hirt effect (*#HRo > *#Ro) in PIE, especially when the resonant has the feature [–nasal]. A full re-evaluation of the evidence is, however, left for future research.

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1 Introduction

Gk. μοιχός (Mimn. +) 'adulterer'[1] had been connected commonly with Gk. ὀμείχω 'piss' already in Wackernagel's time, and, even though Wackernagel (1907:7 n. 2) initially rejected this etymological connection, he later accepted it contra Solmsen (1912–3:467–8).[2] The etymological derivation of μοιχός from the PIE root *h_3meig^h- (> Gk. ὀμείχω/ὀμῑχέω 'piss', Skt. *méhati* 'id.', Lat. *mēiō* 'id.')[3] has since become a mainstay of scholarly works (e.g., Rasmussen 1989:176; Nussbaum 1997:181; *DELG*[2] s.v.).[4] In this paper I will propose that Gk. μοιχός should instead be traced back to the PIE root *$meik̂$- 'mix', whose reflexes frequently refer to extramarital intercourse in Greek, to circumvent the problems of a strained semantic development inherent in an agentive derivation from *h_3meig^h- recently upheld by Höfler 2022–3:23 and Dieu 2023:187–8. Moreover, in light of van Beek's 2011 re-evaluation of the Greek evidence for the word-initial operation of the Saussure-Hirt (henceforth S-H) effect (PIE *$_\omega[HRo > *_\omega[Ro)$, a derivation from *$h_3meig^h$- also faces formal difficulties. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section 2 offers a discussion of the recent arguments pro and contra an agentive derivation of μοιχός from PIE *h_3meig^h- and highlights issues with the semantic proposals. Section 3 offers a re-evaluation of the Latin and Sanskrit evidence for the derivation of μοιχός from *h_3meig^h-, and section 4 develops a new etymology of Gk. μοιχός from the PIE root *$meik̂$- based on Greek-internal evidence. Section 5 offers a formal derivational account, and section 6 concludes by discussing the possible implications of deriving Gk. μοιχός from PIE *$meik̂$- for the reconstruction of the word-initial S-H effect in Greek and PIE generally.

2 Gk. μοιχός and the traditional etymology

The derivation of μοιχός as a τομός-type agent noun from PIE *h_3meig^h- has been widely accepted since Wackernagel's 1916 discussion, with *DELG*[2] (s.v. μοιχός) going so far as to say: "Tout le monde admet que μοιχός est un nom d'agent répondant au présent ὀμείχω « pisser », mais sans prothèse." While the derivation was formally possible in the pre-laryngealistic time of Wackernagel, the lack of a word-initial pre-consonantal laryngeal reflex has since been explained by the word-initial

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1   From μοιχός, we also find μοιχάς 'adulteress' (Aeschin.) as a secondary derivative.

2   "Die von mir […] geäußerten Bedenken fallen wohl mit der Annahme dahin, daß solcher Geschlechtsverkehr, der nicht zu richtiger Frucht von γνήσιοι παῖδες führte, derb als ein Pissen bezeichnet wurde" (Wackernagel 1916:225 n. 1).

3   For a fuller list of possible reflexes, see *LIV*[2] (s.v. *h_3meig^h-).

4   For a somewhat exhaustive list of literature, see Höfler 2022–3:22 n. 1.

operation of the Saussure-Hirt (S-H) effect (e.g., Bonmann 2017:171; Kölligan 2025b).[5] Recently, van Beek (2011:137) has re-evaluated the evidence for this sound change in Greek and argued against the etymological connection of μοιχός with PIE *$h_3meig\hat{g}^h$- based on the legal nature of the term.[6] Similarly, *EDG* (s.v. μοιχός) rejects the etymology on semantic grounds.

Van Beek's and *EDG*'s rejection of the etymology has not gone unnoticed, and arguments have been raised to bridge the semantic gap between 'pisser' and 'adulterer' by formulating an intermediate stage in which the PIE root *$h_3meig\hat{g}^h$- could have undergone the trivial semantic change from 'piss' to 'ejaculate' and then the more, I think, implausible change into the sphere of adultery. Janse and Praet (2012:166 n. 2) compare the Dutch expression *naast de pot pissen* '(lit.) piss outside the pot' as evidence for a parallel development in Greek. However, as discussed by van Beek (2011:137 n. 21), the element of adultery is not expressed by *pissen* but by *naast de pot*. On the other hand, Piwowarczyk (2012:124) argues that the semantic development of 'pisser' to 'adulterer' can be clarified by the Latin reflex of PIE *$h_3meig\hat{g}^h$- (> *mēiō*), which can be used *sensu obsceno* with the meaning 'to ejaculate' (thus Ernout-Meillet 718; *DELG*² s.v. μοιχός). He goes on to argue that it is "easily imaginable" that the Greek verb ὀμείχω could also mean 'to ejaculate' and from this meaning one could derive an agent noun μοιχός (lit.) 'the one who ejaculates' > 'adulterer'. Piwowarczyk does not, however, go on to provide any justification for the drastic development from 'the one who ejaculates', which would hypothetically denote someone performing any physical act of ejaculation, inside or outside of marriage, with or without any type of sexual partner, to 'adulterer', which is a legal term for someone who violates the socially and legally defined institution of marriage as discussed in the following paragraph.

Höfler (2022–3) circumvents this issue by pointing to Sanskrit and Latin evidence, where he argues that reflexes of *$h_3meig\hat{g}^h$- can be used for intercourse

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5   For possible examples of the S-H effect in Greek generally, see de Saussure 1905:51122 and Meillet 1908:68–9. Both of them only drew attention to the lack of a word-medial pre-suffixal vowel in some *o-grade nominal derivatives compared to the *e-grade derivatives of the same PIE root (e.g., τόλμᾱ 'courage' vs. τελαμών 'broad strap'). Hirt 1921:185–6, Beekes 1969:238–42, and Rasmussen 1989:175–87, 368–72 have subsequently discussed some plausible word-initial examples of the S-H effect as well.

6   Although I follow van Beek 2011 on the inconclusive nature of the Greek evidence for the word-initial operation of the S-H effect, I do not follow him in positing a sound change *VLHNV > *VLNV to explain the Greek forms showing the word-medial operation of the S-H. While a discussion of the evidence here for the word-medial S-H effect in Greek and PIE more generally would take us too far afield, some preliminary views can be found in Rehan 2025.

without a reproductive intent including homosexual and anal intercourse, that in PIE, the root *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- had already developed a meaning 'to have sex (for fun)' as a "frivole Metapher" ("salacious metaphor") and that the Sanskrit and Latin verbs retain the meaning. On the other hand, a supposed agentive derivative *$h_3moi\hat{g}^h$-ó-s would have undergone further semantic development to 'adulterer'.[7] Similarly, Dieu (2023:187) argues based on a suggestion by Kölligan (2019:165 n. 517) that the label μοιχός 'pisser' must have been used in a disparaging manner for someone who used his semen in vain like urine without seeking to beget (legitimate) children.[8] While the proposals of Höfler 2022–3 and Dieu 2023 make much progress on bridging the semantic gap between the meaning traditionally reconstructed for the PIE root *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- 'to piss' (or, 'to make water' [cf. Nussbaum 1997:181]) and the meaning attested for Gk. μοιχός 'adulterer', they both do nothing to address the problem, already outlined by van Beek (2011:137), namely, that Gk. μοιχός denotes someone "committing a legal or religious offense," making the semantic derivation from the physical act unattractive.[9] Moreover, it must be emphasized that the Latin and Sanskrit passages adduced by Höfler 2022–3 (e.g., Hor. *Sat*. 2.7.51–2, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* 296.1–2) pertain just to physical facts of (anal) intercourse (without reproductive intent), whereas adultery is a social construct. It would be an unusual semantic development for a hypothetical agent noun *$h_3moi\hat{g}^h$-ó-s, if it indeed signified someone (as a salacious metaphor) who has sex for fun without reproductive intent to come to signify someone who commits a religious and/or legal offense by having sex with a married woman. This is especially pertinent to the derivation of Gk. μοιχός from PIE *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- since the Latin and Sanskrit evidence provides no indication whatsoever of any semantic development beyond 'ejaculate' which, as Höfler 2022–3:23 himself admits, could simply be a trivial parallel innovation from the meaning 'to piss'. Equally, if not more, problematic for the reconstruction of a metaphorical meaning 'to have sex (for fun)' for PIE *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- is the lateness of the Sanskrit and Latin evidence adduced to

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7   Naturally, one might raise the simple objection that limiting copulation "um des Vergnügens willen" (Höfler 2022–3:23) to only extramarital contexts might be a stretch.

8   "D'un point de vue sémantique, l'homme adultère (μοιχός) doit avoir été désigné de manière méprisante comme le « pisseur » parce qu'il utilisait sa semence en vain (comme de l'urine, en quelque sorte), sans chercher à engendrer d'enfants, ou, en tout cas, de fils légitimes."

9   There is extensive literature on the extent and nature of the crime committed and the punishments involved for μοιχεία 'adultery', the most severe being the prescription of death for the adulterer in a law variably attributed to Solon and Drakon (for discussion of the evidence and references to literature, see Scafuro 1997:195–201, 216 and Phillips 2019).

support such a development. This lateness has never been mentioned in any etymological discussion of Gk. μοιχός.

3 The Latin and Sanskrit evidence

3.1 The Latin evidence

In Latin, the verb *mēiō* has the primary meaning 'to urinate' (e.g., *qui hic minxerit aut cacarit, habeat deos* […] *iratos* "whoever (ever) pissed or shat here, he made the gods angry." [*CIL* VI.2 13740.5]) and can be used transitively with an inanimate object to signify qualities of urine (*caldum meiere* 'to piss hot urine' [Petron. 67.10]).[10] Martial uses *mēiō* once jokingly of a leaking pot, but the verb is predominantly restricted to human urination (cf. *TLL* s.v., 8:604–5). However, in a few of the Latin passages originally adduced by Wackernagel 1916:225 n. 1 and discussed recently by Höfler 2022–3, the meaning 'to ejaculate' seems relatively certain. One of these passages comes from Horace's *Satires* (2.7.51–2):

(1)   *dimittit neque famosum neque sollicitum ne*
      *ditior aut formae melioris **meiat eodem**.*

      She sends me away neither disgraced nor anxious
      lest a wealthier or more handsome man **ejaculate in the same place**.

In the passage's context of prostitution, *meiat eodem* could surely refer to the ejaculation of semen.[11] Similar usage is attested in Pers. *Sat*. 6.73 (*patriciae inmeiat volvae* "so that he may ejaculate in a patrician vagina") and perhaps elsewhere in satirical poetry (e.g., Catul. 67.29–30, Hor. *Sat*. 1.244), but none of these passages supports the further semantic development from 'to ejaculate' to 'to have sex (for fun)'. These passages refer merely to the physical act of ejaculating semen and do nothing to explain the crucial step from "ejaculator" to "adulterer" that would be needed to connect Greek μοιχός with PIE *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$-. Physical acts such as ejaculation (e.g., Pers. *Sat*. 6.73) or anal intercourse (e.g., Hor. *Sat*. 1.244) are not themselves labels for adultery, which is, as mentioned in the previous section, a social and legal transgression rather than a description of sexual acts.

   Moreover, all of these passages are from either Classical or later Latin and confined to the genre of satirical poetry and likely not independent strands of evidence, which makes it highly probable that the development of the meaning 'to

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10   Translations, unless otherwise explicitly indicated, are my own.
11   The meaning 'ejaculate' in this passage is widely accepted in the literature (cf. Adams 1982:142).

ejaculate' was an inner-Latin development. One might object that it is not unusual for such vocabulary to be attested late in textual traditions, but the absence of such a development in Plautus or other comic artists—who are certainly no strangers to salacious metaphors (in the sexual domain)[12] and might be expected to attest the semantic development if it was inherited as a salacious metaphor from PIE—is problematic. Still, it is worth keeping in mind the oft-cited doctrine that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. As we will see in the next section, the Sanskrit evidence likewise does not support the inheritance hypothesis.

3.2 The Sanskrit evidence

In the earliest Sanskrit literature, namely the Vedas,[13] the reflexes of PIE *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- unambiguously refer to urination (e.g., *átyaṃ ná mihé ví nayanti vājínam* "They [the Maruts] lead (their horse) out to piss like a prize-seeking steed." [*ṚV* 1.64.6c])[14] with the occasional metaphorical extension to 'rain'. This is also the only meaning attested for the Avestan cognate *maēz-*, as well as those in later Iranian languages (for a conspectus, see Cheung 2007:179 s.v. *Hmaiz*) and the later Indic languages (Turner s.vv. *mēha-*[1], *mḗhati*). Moreover, the nominals *méḍhra-* (*AV+*) and *méhana-* (*ṚV+*) derived from *$h_3mei\hat{g}^h$- denote 'urinator, penis' without any sexual connotations, though from 'urinator, penis', one can easily get to 'ejaculator'. At issue for the etymology of Gk. μοιχός is, however, the further semantic development into the metaphorical usage 'to have sex (for fun)' and how it might help explain the semantics of Greek μοιχός. None of the earliest Sanskrit texts attests anything other than a meaning 'to urinate' and the only Sanskrit passages that have been cited in the sexual sense 'to ejaculate' by Höfler 2022–3 are extremely late. These passages come from Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (IV 13.40, II 36.41) and *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (296.1–2), texts that are at least a millennium younger than the Vedas.[15]

The *Arthaśāstra* passage (IV 13.40) discussed by Höfler reads:

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12 For the use of doubles entendres and obscene metaphors in Plautus shared with farce and satire, see Adams 1982:20, 42–7, 126; for extensive discussion of sexual innuendo in Plautus, see Fontaine 2009: 149–200; and for a discussion of obscene metaphors in Terence, see Parker 1998.

13 I am very thankful to Stephanie Jamison for her extensive comments on the Sanskrit evidence.

14 The text used is van Nooten and Holland (1994). Translation is from Jamison and Brereton (2014).

15 Based on McClish (2019:141, 145, 152 n. 62), the earliest possible date for the *Sūtra* text underlying the *Arthaśāstra* is 1st century BCE, while the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* was likely composed in the mid-1st millennium CE (Olivelle 2006:176 n. 24).

(2)   *striyām ayonau gacchataḥ pūrvaḥ* **sāhasadaṇḍaḥ puruṣam adhimehataś ca**

For someone having sex with a woman in a place other than the vagina, **the punishment is the lowest seizure fine, as also for someone ejaculating in a man**. (Trans. Oliville 2013 ad loc., 252)

adhimehatas could straightforwardly refer to ejaculation here, but *adhi √mih* seems to be a specialized idiomatic usage, which finds no parallels in earlier Sanskrit literature and, given the lateness of *Arthaśāstra* and the absence of the provision from earlier Dharma texts, should be conceived of as an inner-Indic creation. The passage cited from *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (296.1–2, cited as "II 293" by Höfler) is even later and merely prescribes a different fine for the same offense (*caturviṃśatiko daṇḍas* "twenty-four is the fine"). Moreover, the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* passage is most probably based on *Arthaśāstra*, which would be just another example of the material in *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* that can be traced back to it (cf. McClish 2019:216). It must also be emphasized that all of these passages assign penalties for physical acts and have nothing to say about adultery.

In addition to the textual evidence for the usage of *√mih* in a sexual sense, the secondary evidence adduced by Höfler to support the putative development has other explanations. In support of the meaning 'ejaculate', Höfler cites *mīḍhvaṃs-* 'gut befruchtend' (*Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* 9.19.5), but *mīḍhvaṃs-* is not a participial formation to a composite root *mī(ḍ/ḷ)h-* built to *mih* 'to urinate'. Rather, the standard interpretation going back to Kuiper (1934: 234) treats *mīḍhváṃs-* as a participial formation to the complex verbal root behind the noun *mīḍhá-* 'pay, reward' (*ṚV+*; cf. OAv. *mīžda-*) < PIE **mis-dʰ(h₁)ó-*[16] 'pay' (cf. *EWA* 358). Moreover, the meaning 'gut befruchtend' is also nowhere attested in the earliest Sanskrit literature, despite the ample attestations of *mīḍhváṃs* in the earliest texts (e.g., *ṚV* 1.27.2, 2.24.1, 9.74.7) where it means 'rewarding, munificent etc.' Consequently, none of the Sanskrit evidence supports the reconstruction of a semantic development 'to have sex (for fun)' for PIE ultimately from 'to piss'.

4 Gk. μοιχός and the reflexes of PIE **meiĝ̑-* 'to mix (of bodies)'

In light of this re-evaluation of the Sanskrit and Latin evidence for a semantic development 'to have sex (for fun)' for PIE **h₃meiĝ̑ʰ-*, Gk. μοιχός would be left without an etymology. Such an etymology can however be sought in PIE **meiĝ̑-* 'to mix' (*LIV²* s.v.), whose reflexes in Greek and other Indo-European languages

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16   A somewhat different interpretation of the second member *-dʰ(h₁)ó-* is offered by Rothstein-Dowden 2022:3 n. 3.

frequently refer to extramarital adulterous sex. Thus, for example, in Latin the *-skέ/ό- present *misceō* can be used with a dative referent to refer to extramarital sex (e.g., Ov. *Met*. 13.866, Apul. *Met*. 9.24.7) and the derived adjective *prō-misc(u)us* to someone engaging in extramarital sex.[17]

   In Greek, reflexes of PIE *$mei̯ĝ$- have a similar meaning as κεράω 'to mix' but differ in that κεράω is only used in cases where the mixing of substances leads to a new inseparable whole, whereas the substances/people involved in a mixing designated by reflexes of PIE *$mei̯ĝ$- are separable and do not form a new whole (*LfgrE* s.v. μίσγω). The reflexes of PIE *$mei̯ĝ$- refer mostly to the 'mixing' of animals and humans in the mediopassive, as opposed to the active voice that is mostly reserved for the mixing for liquids (e.g., οἱ μὲν οἶνον ἔμισγον ἐνὶ κρητῆρσι καὶ ὕδωρ "they [the heralds] were mixing wine and water in the krater" [*Od*. 1.110]). In certain cases, the verb straightforwardly denotes social (e.g., *Il*. 3.209, *Od*. 5.378) or martial contact (e.g., *Il*. 5.134, 144, 15.409) but the sexual sense must have developed already in PIE as a euphemism to denote unsanctioned extramarital sex (cf. Lithuanian *kraujó-maiša* 'incest' discussed in the next section), where there is no sense of a marital whole. 'Mixing' in extramarital contexts would have surely entailed the adulteration of a lineage, which must have been viewed negatively in a patriarchal society like that of the Indo-Europeans, in which pure bloodlines would have been important.[18] Consequently, it is imaginable that someone who adulterated the lineage of a man by having intercourse with his (to-be) wife and thus committed a religious and legal offense would be signified with a nominal derivative of PIE *$mei̯ĝ$-. In Greek., such a nominal would have been semantically narrowed to only refer to a person who had extramarital intercourse with an already-married woman. Such a trajectory can be posited based on the evidence of the Greek epics where reflexes of *$mei̯ĝ$- (the *-skέ/ό- present μίσγω and the nasal-

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17 Adams (1982:180–1) offers a succinct discussion of the sexual uses of *misceō* in Latin and raises the possibility that the examples in Latin poetry may be calqued from Greek usages but the idiom had surely extended beyond just those genres on which the Greek usage might have been influential.

18 The extremely negative views on adultery in the Proto-Indo-European society can be gleaned from the severity of punishment prescribed for adulterers in several ancient Indo-European branches. In addition to the Greek laws discussed in n. 9, for example, in the Hittite laws, a husband is free to kill his wife and her lover if they are caught in the act in his house (KBo 6.26 ≈ KUB 29.37). In Roman republican law, the most frequent outcome for adultery was death for the wife (at the hands of the husband) and sometimes also the adulterer (Dixon 2012:40–2). In the Anglo-Saxon laws as well, a father who catches his daughter in an adulterous act is allowed to kill both her and the man caught in adultery (Liebermann 1903–16:514.35).

suffixed present μ(ε)ίγνῡμι)[19] are frequently deployed in instances of extramarital intercourse. Most frequent are the present μίσγω and the aorist ἐμίγην in this meaning.

Our first comparandum concerns Helen and Paris, the proverbial adulterers, who engage in intercourse after Aphrodite has swooped Paris from the battlefield as he is just about to be killed by Menelaos (*Il.* 3.441–6):

(3)   ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε δὴ φιλότητι τραπείομεν εὐνηθέντε·
       οὐ γάρ πώ ποτέ μ᾽ ὧδέ γ᾽ ἔρως φρένας ἀμφεκάλυψεν,
       οὐδ᾽ ὅτε σε πρῶτον Λακεδαίμονος ἐξ ἐρατεινῆς
       ἔπλεον ἁρπάξας ἐν ποντοπόροισι νέεσσι,
       νήσῳ δ᾽ ἐν Κραναῇ **ἐμίγην φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῇ**,
       ὥς σεο νῦν ἔραμαι καί με γλυκὺς ἵμερος αἱρεῖ

       Come now, let us turn to love lying together in bed.
       Never has Erōs veiled my senses in this way,
       not even when I first sailed away from lovely Sparta
       in sea-trading ships after I had abducted you,
       and on the island of Cranae, **I mixed in love's bed**—likewise
       I yearn for you now, and sweet desire takes hold of me.

In the context of this passage, it is readily apparent that ἐμίγην refers to extramarital sex, and while it might be possible to argue that ἐμίγην, and reflexes of PIE *mei̯k̑-generally, only refer to intercourse along with φιλότητι (καὶ εὐνῇ),[20] such locative and adverbial arguments are better understood as clarificatory rather than necessary for the meaning in such contexts.[21] Stefan Höfler (p.c., 12 January 2025) raised the possibility that the reference to ἄκοιτις in 3.447 implies the liaison was not extramarital. However, in light of the events of *Iliad* Book 3—together with the illegitimacy of such a marriage shown by Jamison (1994) in her discussion of bride-

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19   The voiced reflexes of the final palatal, e.g., in μίσγω 'to mix', show analogical transfer of voicing from the stem formations that would have voiced the final palatal, according to *LIV*[2] (s.v. *mei̯k̑-), e.g., in the nu-present μ(ε)ίγνῡμι ≪ *mik̑-nu-. The Iranian formations that seem to go back to a voiced PIE root *mei̯ǵ- like NP *mīhan* 'fresh butter', Oss. I. *misyn* 'buttermilk', Yghn. *mešin* 'id.' are probably unrelated to *mei̯k̑- (Cheung 2007:261).

20   The expression ἐμίγην φιλότητι καὶ (εὐνῇ) with various aspectual forms of μίσγω and some variation in the locatival arguments is assuredly formulaic.

21   This is clear from plentiful instances in the *Odyssey* (e.g., 1.73, 7.61, 8.268, 11.268, 306–7, 5.430, 18.325, 22.445, and possibly 20.7, 12) and once in the *Iliad* (21.142–3) where the verb μίσγω is used in a sexual context without added qualifications. For another possible example in Nausicaa's speech to a naked Odysseus on the shore (*Od.* 6.282–6) against the backdrop of a Gāndharva marriage, see Jamison 1997.

abduction and Indo-European marriage ritual—I interpret ἄκοιτις here as deeply
ironic, and not a genuine claim that Paris and Helen were married, especially when
they had sex for the first time on the island of Cranae, as nostalgically recounted
by Paris in (3). Similarly, we find the verb ἐμίγησαν used of Ares and Aphrodite
when Demodocus sings in the Phaeacian assembly of their clandestine affair (*Od.*
8.266–70):

(4)   αὐτὰρ ὁ φορμίζων ἀνεβάλλετο καλὸν ἀείδειν
       ἀμφ' Ἄρεος φιλότητος ἐϋστεφάνου τ' Ἀφροδίτης,
       ὡς τὰ πρῶτ' ἐμίγησαν ἐν Ἡφαίστοιο δόμοισι
       λάθρῃ· πολλὰ δὲ δῶκε, λέχος δ' ᾔσχυνε καὶ εὐνὴν

       But then he played the phorminx and struck up a beautiful song
       of the love of Ares and fair-crowned Aphrodite—
       how for the first time they had mixed in the house of Hephaestus secretly;
       and Ares gave her many things, and shamed Hephaestus' marriage-bed.

Here, we note that the actions of Ares and Aphrodite are portrayed as deeply irrev-
erent and shameless, and their clandestine affair fits all the marks of adultery and
the charges levied against a μοιχός (see n. 9). More importantly, the verb ἐμίγησαν
begins an episode capped off by the only attestation of μοιχός in the Homeric epics,
in a compound (*Od.* 8.329–32):

(5)   οὐκ ἀρετᾷ κακὰ ἔργα· κιχάνει τοι βραδὺς ὠκύν,
       ὡς καὶ νῦν Ἥφαιστος ἐὼν βραδὺς εἷλεν Ἄρηα
       ὠκύτατόν περ ἐόντα θεῶν οἳ Ὄλυμπον ἔχουσιν,
       χωλὸς ἐὼν τέχνῃσι· **τὸ καὶ μοιχάγρι' ὀφέλλει**.

       Bad actions do not prosper. The slow catches up with the swift,
       just as even now, Hephaestus, even though he is sluggish, has caught Ares
       even though he is the swiftest among the gods who reign over Olympus;
       even though he is lame, with his skills, (he has caught him).
       And (Ares) owes a fine for adultery.

The mention of μοιχάγρια, derived from μοιχός and ἄγρη 'hunt, chase' (*DELG*[2]
s.v.) with similar formations like ζωάγρια 'ransom paid for a live prisoner',
βοάγρια 'ox spoils', ἀνδράγρια 'spoils of a slain enemy' (all Hom.+), caps off the
episode of Ares and Aphrodite's affair that begins with Demodocus singing. In the
context of Indo-European inherited poetics, this could be a disguised instance of
ring composition, defined by Watkins (1995:34) as "the beginning and the ending
of a discourse […] with the same or equivalent word, phrase, or just sound se-
quence." Here, the action that Ares took part in with Aphrodite (ἐμίγησαν) makes

him liable for a fine (μοιχάγρια) as an adulterer, which can be easily appreciated if μοιχάγρια verbally echoes etymologically related ἐμίγησαν. It is also worth noting, as pointed out by Wackernagel (1907:71), that Homer avoids ὀμείχω altogether. A word like μοιχός, if derived from the PIE root of ὀμείχω and belonging to a hypothetically coarse register, would be out of place in the Homeric epics. On the other hand, if such a word does not belong to a coarse register and was merely a legal term to describe an adulterer, its appearance in the *Odyssey* is not unexpected.[22]

5 Historical morphophonology of Gk. μοιχός

In the previous section we discussed the semantic link between μοιχός and the derivatives of PIE *$mei\hat{k}$-. This section presents evidence on the formal side. I argue that μοιχός represents a *rátha*-type derivative ultimately from *$mei\hat{k}$-.

μοιχός can be traced back to a thematic derivative of a τομή-type *-$éh_2$-abstract with bounded deletion of the pre-accented vowel,[23] a derivation type commonly known as the *rátha*-type (*$rotéh_2$- 'wheel' > Lat. *rota* 'id.' → *$rot-h_2-ó$- 'that which has wheels' → *$rót-h_2-o$- 'chariot' > Ved. *rátha*- 'id.', Av. *raθa*- 'id.'). Rau (2004:163–6) introduces some other possible examples of such derivatives (e.g., *$\hat{k}op-éh_2$ 'striking; beating' [> Gk. κοπή 'id.'] → *$\hat{k}oph_2-ó$- 'striking, beating' > Ved. *śaphá*- 'hoof', Av. *safa*- 'id.'), and Melchert (2014:205–6) has subsequently discussed some potential Anatolian reflexes.[24] I argue that Gk. μοιχός can ultimately reflect a *rátha*-type derivative:

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22 The social evaluation of a μοιχός in the *Odyssey* and in the Indo-European society (cf. n. 18) may also shed light on a different etymology for OE *(ġe)māh* 'unbridled, shameless'. The word has been connected frequently with μοιχός (see Höfler 2022–3:23 for references); Orel (2003:s.v. *maiʒaz*) and Bammesberger (1990:237) reconstruct it as PGmc. *maiga-*, with Bammesberger explicitly tracing it back to IE *moigh-o-* [= *$h_3moi\hat{g}^h-ó$-], an etymology recently upheld by Höfler. The Homeric material could provide a straightforward link between 'adulterer' and 'shameless, unbridled' if the 'adulterer' commits a shameful sexual act and in doing so is himself shameless, but this etymological connection of OE *(ġe)māh* with PIE *$mei\hat{k}$- is suggested here only as a possibility requiring further evaluation of the Old English textual material.

23 On bounded deletion, the deletion of only the vowel in the stem-final suffix of the base in further derivation, in PIE secondary derivatives, see Yates 2024. This idea was suggested to me by John Clayton (p.c.).

24 Some recently proposed examples of the *rátha*-type derivation include *wes-* 'to buy' → *$wos-éh_2$- 'buying, purchase' → *$wos-h_2-ó$- 'the thing characterized by purchase' > HLuw. *wašḫa*- 'purchase, price, fee' (Zhang 2022); *$h_3nog^{(w)h}-éh_2$ > Lith. *nagà* 'foot', PSl. *nogà* 'id.' → *$h_3nog^{(w)h}-h_2-ó-s$ > Ved. *nakhá*- 'nail, claw, talon' (Barnes 2024) is, however, more uncertain.

(6)   PIE *$meik̑$- → *$moik̑$-$éh_2$- 'unsanctioned sex'
       → *$moik̑$-h_2-$ó$-[25] 'characterized by unsanctioned sex'
         > 'adulterer' > Gk. μοιχός.

A readily apparent problem for such an analysis is that Greek does not attest a τομή-type abstract derived from *$meik̑$-. However, there is some evidence for such an *-eh_2-abstract in Balto-Slavic that can be set up as the intermediate stage for a *rátha*-type derivative.

As second member of a compound, we find a Lithuanian *o-grade *-eh_2-abstract -*maiša* attested in *kraujó-maiša* 'incest' < PIE *$krou(h_2)$-i-$éh_2$-$moik̑$-eh_2- 'blood mixing' (*LED*, s.v. *maišýti*; s.v. *kraũjas*). The semantics of Lithuanian *kraujó-maiša* 'incest' also support the hypothesis that *$meik̑$- could designate extramarital unsanctioned intercourse already in PIE, and the unsanctioned intercourse underwent further semantic narrowing to denote adulterous intercourse in Greek but incestual intercourse in Balto-Slavic. In Lithuanian, the compound *kraujó-maisa* exists alongside Lith. *príe-maiša* 'Beimischung' and OCS *(pri-)měsa* 'mixture'—both reflecting an *o-grade (*LEW*, s.v. *miẽšti*). It is in theory possible that -*maiša*- is a relatively new deverbal creation in the internal history of the Balto-Slavic languages, which attest a verbal stem *$maiš$-$ī$- < PIE *$moik̑$-$éye$- (cf. OPruss. *maysotan* 'gemenget' and Lith. *maišýti*).[26] *LED* (s.v. *maišýti*) derives -*maiša* from the iterative-causative stem, however I contend here that we are dealing with the inverse.[27] From a PBSl. *$maiš$-$ā́$ 'mixture' as reflected in Lith. *kraujó-maiša*, Russ. *(pri)-meša* we can derive a PBSl. denominative formation in *o-grade *$maiš$-$ī$-$tí$-,[28] whence PSl. *$měsiti$ (> Russ. *mesít*—1sg.pres. *mešú*, 3sg.pres. *méšit*, SCr. *m(ij)eśiti* [*EDS*, s.v. *měsìti*]). East Baltic then generalized the infinitive stem in *-$ī́$- with presents in *-$ā́$- (whence *maišýti*), and West Baltic generalized the

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25   The status of aspiration caused by *h_2 (*$T > T^h$ / __ *h_2) is controversial in Greek (cf. Elbourne 2001, de Decker 2011), but there are some examples that are otherwise hard to explain (e.g., σχάω 'to cleave' ~ Skt. *(-)chyati* 'id.' < *$sk̑eh_2$/$sk̑h_2$-ye/o-, ψέφας 'darkness' < *k^wsep-h_2-s [Nikolaev 2010 [2011]:64–5, see especially n. 33; for other possible examples, see Vine 2002 [2006] and especially p. 290 n. 4]). While a fuller evaluation of the evidence remains a topic for future research, we might tentatively posit that the sound change did apply in Greek but the unaspirated consonant was sometimes restored by intraparadigmatic analogy. There would, however, be no context in which an unaspirated stop could have been restored for an isolated μοιχός < *$moik̑$-h_2-$ó$- by intraparadigmatic analogy.

26   For the accentual properties of denominative and iterative-causative verbs in Balto-Slavic, see Jasanoff 2017:206–17.

27   This idea was suggested to me by Ronald Kim (p.c., 10 December 2023).

28   After Villanueva Svensson 2019:203, I operate with PBSl. underlying unaccented (*-eye- > *-$ī$-) denominative and iterative-causative suffixes.

infinitive stem in *-*ā́*- whence *maysotan*. It is also possible, as John Clayton (p.c.) has suggested to me, that the causative stem *maiš-ī̄-* and the *-eh$_2$-abstract *maiš-ā́* were both inherited since BSl. nominal derivates from iterative-causative stems must have developed from an original set of roots with both *R(o)-*éh$_2$*- denominatives and *R(o)-*éye*- causatives.

In addition, the compound *kraujó-maiša* looks archaic on several counts. There exists an exact match for Lith. -*kraujó*- in OPr. *crauyo* < *krou̯(h$_2$)-i̯-éh$_2$-*, which looks archaic since the later productive forms of this word are mostly masculine. It might also be noted that the Old Prussian forms cited above have been glossed by *PKEŽ* (II 263–4) as feminine, meaning that they provide a perfect cognate to *kraujó*- < *krou̯(h$_2$)-i̯-éh$_2$-* in the Lith. 2M determinative compound *kraujó-maiša* 'incest' (< *krou̯(h$_2$)-i̯-éh$_2$-moi̯k̂-eh$_2$-*), whose morphological formation otherwise remains obscure. There are also a couple of general patterns in Balto-Slavic compounding that point towards the antiquity of *kraujómaiša*. In most cases for inner Balto-Slavic two-member determinative compounds, "the second part of the determinative compounds ends in Lith. -*is/-ė*" (Larsson 2002:209), and the ending in -*a* (seldom -*as*) is not the productive type. According to Larsson 2002:211, these nouns most probably continue the inherited category of deverbative abstracts in *-*eh$_2$*. The compositional form *kraujó*- is, moreover, unproductive in Lithuanian, only making four compounds inclusive of *kraujó-maiša* in comparison with the more productive compositional forms *krauja*- or *krau*- (cf. *kraujasiurbỹs* alongside *kraŭsurba*, *kraŭsurbys* 'bloodsucker, vampire'; *LED* s.v. *kraŭjas*). In light of this, we can reconstruct a τομή-type abstract as the 2M of Lith. *kraujó-maisa*, *príe-maiša* 'Beimischung', and OCS *(pri-)měsa* 'Mischung'. This would allow us to posit the following derivational network:

(7)   PIE *mei̯k̂- → *moi̯k̂-éh$_2$ 'unsanctioned sex' (> PBSl. *(-)maiša*)
         → *moi̯k-h$_2$-ó- 'characterized by unsanctioned sex'
            > 'adulterer' > Gk. μοιχός

6 Conclusions

In the previous sections, I have argued that the derivation of μοιχός from PIE *h$_3$mei̯ĝ^h- remains problematic semantically and should not be used as evidence for the word-initial operation of the S-H effect. Already in Homeric epics and hymns, μ(ε)ίγνῡμι has connotations of shameless adultery in an extramarital context, which support an etymological connection with *mei̯k̂- and allow us to reconstruct the use of the verb as a euphemistic expression for extramarital intercourse for PIE, and a hypothetical nominal derived from such a root underwent further

semantic development to 'adulterer' in Greek. I have formalized the derivation through a *rátha*-type derivational chain *$mei\hat{k}$- → *$moi\hat{k}$-$éh_2$- → *$moi\hat{k}$-h_2-$ó$-s > Gk. μοιχός (with elliptical substantivization). Along with the counterexample of ὄνυξ < *$h_3nóg^{(w)h}$- ~ *$h_3nég^{(w)h}$- (van Beek 2011:142; for the etymology, see Schindler 1972),[29] we should tentatively restrict the operation of the word-initial S-H effect to resonants having the feature [–nasal]. Whether the S-H effect simply should not be reconstructed in word-initial position for PIE remains a topic of future research.

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29 I tentatively reject the etymology of νοθός 'bastard, fool' proposed by Kölligan (2025a) < *$h_1nód^ho$- (← *h_1ned^h-) and derive it following Hackstein 2016 from *not^hh_2o- 'nobody'. A fuller treatment of the evidence is left for future work.

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