

Bear, a Magdalenian test case

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- *From:* Franz Gnaedinger <frgn@xxxxxxxxxxx>
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Bear, a Magdalenian test case (1 of 3)

English bear German Bär Dutch beer is explained via two alternative PIE etymologies, namely as the brown one, from *bher- 'brown', and as the wild one, from *ghwer. Neither etymology convinces me. How many brown and wild animals are there? Relying on my Magdalenian dictionary I propose BIR meaning fur (ancient Greek byrsa), especially the fur wherupon a newborn was laid, as origin of a plethora of words. When a fur keeps a newborn warm, a bag made of a hide can also be used to carry a baby around: bear a child. Via analogy this verb is also used for a pregnant woman bearing a child in her womb. Between the two ways of bearing a child, inside and outside of the body, occurs the event called birth, giving birth, and the child is born, a newborn. Most furs are brown, hence BIR is also the origin of PIE *bher- 'brown'. The bear provides the best fur, longhaired, soft and warm, hence bear Bär beer (while the actual name of the cave bear was ARC, referring to the animal's extraordinary strength, surviving in Greek arktos and Latin ursus). Judging by its name also the boar, Latin aper German Eber, provided a fairly good fur. Also the hare, whose name might be a further derivative of BIR, as hair German Haar.

(to be continued)

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