

## Re: Bear, a Magdalenian test case

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Bear, a Magdalenian test case

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,

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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.

Let us have a look at a bunch of PIE homonyms  
(after Mallory and Adams 2006, page 467):  
\*bher- 'brown' — explained above // \*bher- 'weave,  
twine' — the wool of a sheep that has a longhaired  
fur like a bear // \*bher- 'seethe, bubble; roast' —  
the meat of the skinned animal // \*bher- 'strike  
(through), split, cut' — one has to kill the animal  
in order to get its precious fur and its meat;  
the bear must die so the Ice Age people can  
live; a drawing in the cave Trois Frères shows  
a bear with dotted fur and blood spurting out  
of its mouth, the dots are wounds caused by  
spears, but also visualisations of SAI for life,  
existence, namely the life of the Ice Age people  
depending on fur and meat // \*bher- 'carry' —  
explained above // \*bher- '+- cure with spells  
and/or with herbs' — we might imagine a healing  
ceremony involving spells, herbs, and a warm  
bear fur // \*bhére/o. 'bear (a child)' — explained  
above // \*bherg- 'bark, growl' — sounds made  
by a bear // \*bherg- 'keep, protect' — as a bag  
made of a hide keeps and protects a baby,  
German bergen. Female bears are devoted  
mothers, and a bear fur may thus have had  
a magical meaning for a human mother. On  
the other hand, bear furs may also have been  
used in burial ceremonies – enveloping the  
body in a bear fur could have secured him  
or her a second life in the beyond, hence bury  
and burrow (the burrows in Southern England).  
In fall, a bear goes in quasi hibernation, and  
returns in spring, which may have been regarded  
as kind of a regeneration. In autumn, a bear  
eats up to 150,000 berries, and so English  
berry German Beere may also come from BIR.

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Dutch brombeer 'growling beer' is practically the same as German Brombeere 'black berry', so we may assume three possibilities: 1) bears like black berries very much, or 2) black berry thornbushes were grown around settlements in order to protect them from bears and other wild animals, or 3) alleys through black berry thornbushes were used as bear traps. Pear, Latin *pire* from an unknown source, may refer to the shape of a bear's head, round with a long snout. Beard German *Bart* is obviously a further derivative of *BIR*.

In any case, bear means the furry one, provider of the best fur, longhaired, soft and warm. Two German names or nicknames refer to this meaning, *Zottelbär* 'shaggy bear' and *petz* female *petze*, in fables *Meister Petz*. Grimm, in his *Wörterbuch*, quotes *Hagedorn*: "da sträubet sich der petz" which means: here the petz bristles up and stands on end. *Petz* can only mean pelt, German *Pelz*, and this, I believe, comes from an important word field. *PAD* ---- activity of feet. Comparative form *PAS* ---- everywhere in a plain, here, south and north of me, east and west of me. Lateral association *PIS* ---- water in motion. *Petz petze Pelz pelt* (and Latin *pellis* 'fur') would then come from *PIS* for water in motion. The relation to water is kept in pelt, as verb meaning heavy raining. *Leonardo da Vinci* observed that flowing water resembles hair. The same observation may well have been made in the Ice Age. The bear is the furry one, having a brown fur also the brown one, and being a wild and when attacked furious animal also the wild one. However, the PIE etymologies are secondary or tertiary, and apparently they did not convince *Mallory and Adams*, who leave them out in their PIE bible from 2006. I regard the problem now as solved. My Magdalenian approach reaches deeper than PIE. While PIE relies on sound patterns, Magdalenian relies on semantic patterns or word groups. Both approaches can well complement each other. Let me finish by saying that the verbal morphospace (of the Eurasian languages) keeps more intact and retrievable information on the human past (especially in the last Ice Age) than previously held possible.

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Postscript. BIR means fur, especially the fur on which a newborn was laid. This custom may have survived in the bearing–cloth mentioned by William Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale*, Act 3 Scene 3, a rich cloth (or mantle or gown) in which a child was carried to be christened. Antigonus lays a baby on the ground, next to it a bundle containing (as we learn later on) "a bearing–cloth for a squire's child" and gold, then he is chased away by a bear. May it be that some of the bearing–clothes were made of bear hides? and is the bear chasing Antigonus in revenge for all the bears that had been hunted for their precious fur?

I explain bear as furry one. In Ostyak the bear is called fur–man, in Lapp wooly one. The Norse berserks wore shirts made of bear–skin. Old English beorn, a cognate of bear, means warrior. Also fear and fury and peril and perish might come from bear and testify to the danger of bear hunting. Bare could once have meant skinned, a bear stripped of its fur. As fur covers the living animal, bark covers the trunks and branches of trees. Consider also bark barque German Barke as protection of people against the water on which they swim. Bast was used for clothes in Neolithic times, hence birch German Birke as further derivative of BIR.

Old Indic rksa meaning bear may be a combination of ARC and RAG, suggested by words for bear in several Indic languages. RAG means the first line of the head and back of an animal drawn by a cave painter, strongly evocative of the whole animal (Leroy Gourhan). The curved line of a bear's back, magnified by fear, could have made people see bears in the contours of hills and mountains, and could then account for German Berg 'mountain'. Hypothetical BIR would have been a very productive word.

Albanian pare Sanskrit purva Tocharian B parwe  
Lithuanian pirmas English first may also be  
derivatives of BIR, as Latin pario parens parentes  
— parents are the happy people who can lay  
a newborn on a fur, and in later times wrap it  
in a bearing–cloth and carry it to a church where  
it was christened, first event in the religious life  
of a Christian.

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