

Re: Bear, a Magdalenian test case

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Etymology of bear as the furry one, provider of the best fur, thick, longhaired, soft and warm

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

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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.

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

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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.
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

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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.

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

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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.

Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*. One Porphyrios described a custom of laying a newborn on a bear fur in the third century AD, and the same custom survived until the twentieth century in eastern Slavic regions, where it was the grandmother who laid the newborn on a bear fur. A Vinca figurine from around 4 500 BC shows the divine mother or nurse wearing a bear mask and holding a baby in her arms, while another Vinca figurine from between 4 500 and 4 000 BC shows the divine mother or nurse wearing a bear or bird mask, and, riding high on her back, a bag for the baby. We may then assume that mothers living in the Ice Age carried their babies in the same way, in a bag on their back, in a bag made of fur, and preferably of the thick, longhaired, soft

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and warm fur of a bear.

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