

## Old Irish *lobur* ‘weak, sick’\*

Old Irish *lobur* ‘weak, sick; leprous’ is cognate with Welsh *llwfr* ‘cowardly, timid, faint-hearted; mean; idle’, Cornish *lover*, Middle Breton *loffr*, Modern Breton *lovr* ‘weak, miserly, leprous’. The common notion linking these words semantically is ‘weak’. Because of the vocalism of the Welsh word, the Proto-Celtic reconstruction *\*lobro-*, proposed in earlier scholarship (VGKS i 116–17, DESHAYES 2003: 477), is excluded: Proto-Celtic (PC) *\*o* appears as *o* in all British-Celtic languages (SCHRIJVER 1995: 26), except for certain nasal contexts and before *\*RC* – neither of which is applicable here –, where it is raised to *u* <w> in Welsh (SCHRIJVER 1995: 27–44, 52–68); PC *\*u*, on the other hand, is retained as *u* <w> in Welsh, but yields *o* in Cornish and Breton (SCHRIJVER 1995: 26–7), precisely the distribution found in this etymon. The *o* of OIr. *lobur* is due to the regular lowering of PC *\*u* > *o* before a non-high back vowel (McCONE 1996: 110). The voiced labial fricative evidenced in the individual languages can continue Proto-Celtic *\*b* or *\*φ*. The former is the reflex of Indo-European *\*b<sup>h</sup>*, *\*g<sup>u</sup>* and the marginal sound *\*b* (McCONE 1996: 42–3; STIFTER 2017: 1189–90), whereas the latter continues word-internal Indo-European *\*p* before a liquid (McCONE 1996: 44; STIFTER 2017: 1190).

The Proto-Celtic reconstruction of OIr. *lobur* etc. is therefore either *\*lubro-* or *\*luφro-*. The form *\*lubro-* could be analysed as an adjective in *\*-ró-* from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*leub<sup>h</sup>-* ‘to be endearing, appealing; to beguile, confound’ (LIV 414), in which case its original meaning would have referred to a confused or enfeebled state of mind. Semantically more appealing is the second alternative, namely that it continues an adjectival formation *\*lupró-* ‘stripped, deprived’ from the PIE root *\*leup-* ‘to peel, strip’ (LIV 420). Greek λυπρός ‘painful, distressing’, a variant of λυπηρός ‘id.’ used in tragic poetry (BEEKES 2010: 828–9), is an exact equation. The semantic connection between the root and the Celtic words is either that being ‘deprived’ of something causes weakness, or that, more directly, a state where one’s skin peels off, is indicative of physical weakness or illness. Despite its outward similarity, *lobur* is not

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cognate with Latin *lepra*, which itself is a borrowing from Greek λέπρα, a formation from the PIE root \*lep- ‘to peel off’ (BEEKES 2010: 848–9; LIV 413). The similarity may have facilitated the use of the native term for diseases with symptoms similar to leprosy; for this folk-etymological equation cf. *lobor quasi lebor, a lepra latine ‘lobor is almost lebor, from lepra in Latin’* (Sanas Cormaic 840) and the gloss *lepra. lubra* (STOKES 1860: 10, no. 268). The same root probably also underlies OIr. *lomm, W llwm* ‘devoid, bare, naked’ < PC \*lu(φ)smo- ‘stripped’ (IEW 690–1).

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