

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



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AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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Notes: Sources included *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*; the Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://www.etymonline.com/>; and *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. There's mention in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Old English word butere* and the Old High German *butera* before the German *butter* came to be. Also, the Online Etymology Dictionary says *boutyron* might have been borrowed from the Scythian language. Etymology is the study of the development of words. Entomology, meanwhile, is the study of, yep, insects. Yak link: http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Bos_grunniens.html.

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Q. Dear Twig: Why do they call it butter?

A. It has to do with **cows**, it seems. Here's the story in a rich, creamery nutshell:

A long time ago, the Greek words *bous*, meaning "ox" or "cow," and *tyron*, meaning "cheese," were made into a word together: *boutyron* — "**cow-cheese.**" After awhile, *boutyron* became *butyrum* in Latin. After another while, *butyrum* became *butter* in German, the word we use today in English (and German).

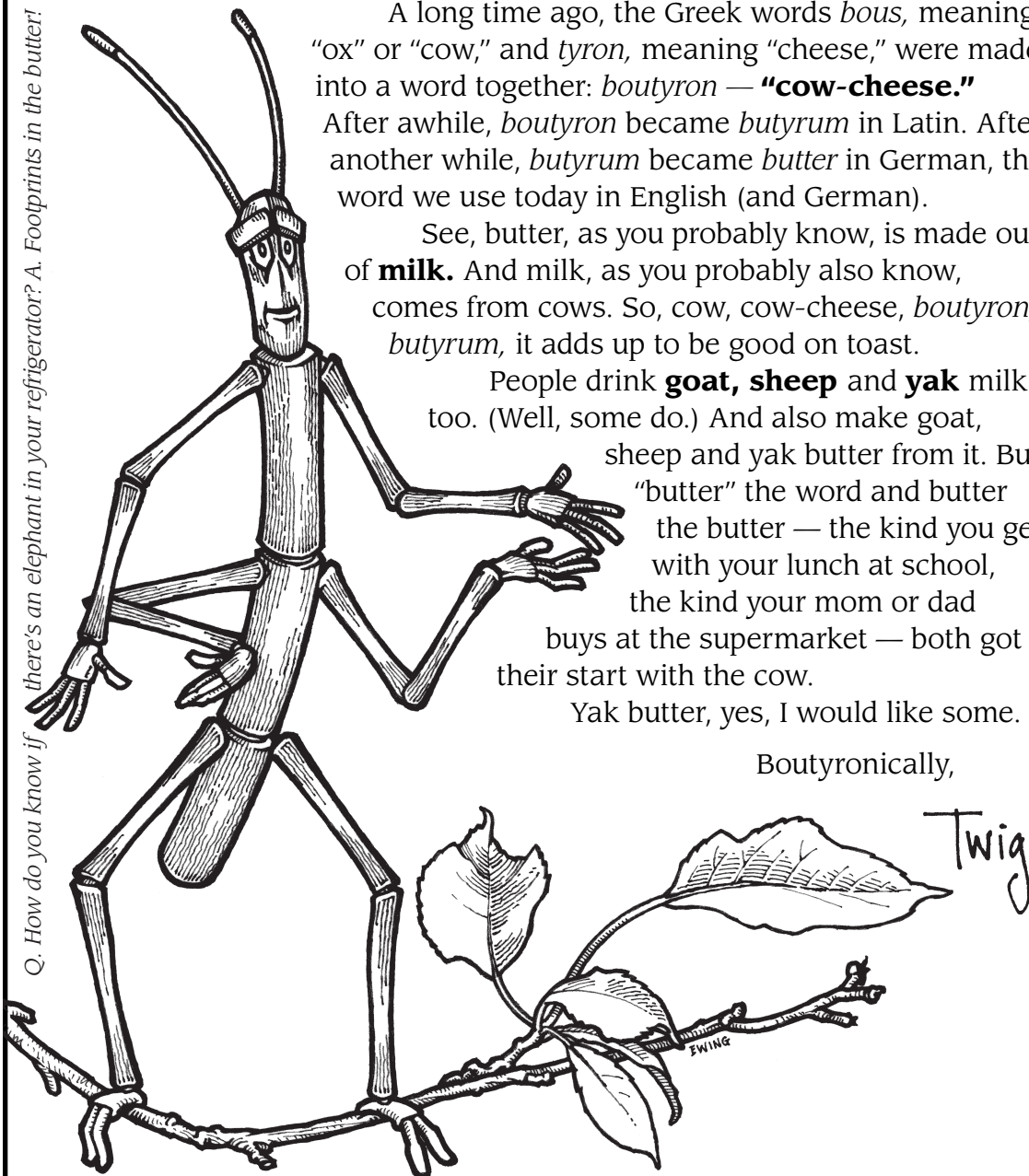
See, butter, as you probably know, is made out of **milk**. And milk, as you probably also know, comes from cows. So, cow, cow-cheese, *boutyron*, *butyrum*, it adds up to be good on toast.

People drink **goat, sheep and yak** milk, too. (Well, some do.) And also make goat, sheep and yak butter from it. But "butter" the word and butter the butter — the kind you get with your lunch at school, the kind your mom or dad buys at the supermarket — both got their start with the cow.

Yak butter, yes, I would like some.

Boutyronically,

Q. How do you know if there's an elephant in your refrigerator? A. Footprints in the butter!



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