

Where Alcoholic Drinks Got Their Names | Otherwords
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Hf6r5FczHM>
Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/alcoholicdrinks.pdf>

There are no shortage of wacky names for alcoholic beverages, from fuzzy navels, to sex on the beaches, or sexes on the beach, to the NSFW AMF.

I'm not sure if any of these actually taste good or if they're just fun to yell in a crowded bar.

The origins of some are obvious, while others are more contentious.

Two bars in Juarez, Mexico and one tequila distributor in California are among those claiming to be the mastermind behind the world-famous Margarita, which was either named after a woman or a flower, depending on who you believe.

Boy, if we can't even agree on the etymology of an 80 year old word, how are we going to find ones that are 5,000 years old?

Fortunately, or unfortunately, humans have been enjoying alcoholic beverages since the dawn of civilization, so there's plenty of linguistic evidence in many languages to point us to the truth.

As the Romans said, *in vino veritas*.

Speaking of *vino*, in 2017, a group of archaeologists discovered the earliest known winery in the world.

In an ancient village east of the Black Sea, in what is now Georgia, stone age people were growing grapes and fermenting the juice 8,000 years ago.

This is not far geographically or chronologically from the speakers of Proto-Indo-European, a hypothetical language that linguists believe to be the ancestor of hundreds of modern day languages, from English, to Spanish, to German, Greek, Russian, Hindi, Persian, Norwegian, the list goes on and on.

Though this discovery is archaeological evidence that the Proto-Indo-Europeans drank wine, historical linguists already knew this to be the case.

How? Because many of these languages still have similar words for the beverage, *vino*, *wijn*, *Wein*, *oinos*, *gini*. Words that share a common ancestor like this are known as cognates.

Linguists have even been able to reverse engineer these cognates to reconstruct what the ancestor word might have sounded like: *uoin*.

Though most people think of wine as the oldest alcoholic beverage, there's actually something older.

Slightly before the Black Sea Winery was in production, Neolithic peoples in the Yellow River Valley were making an alcoholic drink out of fermented rice, fruit, and honey.

Honey may be the first ingredient that humans ever fermented into alcohol, because unlike grapes, rice, or wheat, you don't need agriculture to harvest it, as depicted by some ancient cave paintings.

The resulting beverage today called mead has a long list of cognates that show we've been stealing from the bees for a very long time.

The Proto-Indo-European ancestor of all these cognates, *medu*, may have been adapted from the Proto-Semitic *matak*.

From there, other non Indo-European speakers likely borrowed the term as well.

Hence, the Finnish *mesi*, Proto-Chinese *mit*, and Japanese *mitsu*.

That's a pretty prolific word considering you don't see mead around much these days, unless you're one of those people who brings it to parties.

Moving to the beer aisle, a craft microbrew aficionado might be able to tell you the exact differences between ales and lagers, but the origins of those words are more like *hefeweizen* than a *pilsner*, in that it's cloudy and opaque. Bad beer joke.

Ale is probably a Scandinavian term for a malt-based beverage.

The meaning of **MALT** is grain (such as barley) softened by steeping in water, allowed to germinate, and used especially in brewing and distilling.

Malted milk or malt powder or **malted milk** powder, is a powder made from a mixture of **malted** barley, wheat flour, and evaporated whole **milk** powder. The powder is used to add its distinctive flavor to beverages and other foods, but it is also used in baking to help dough cook properly. (I'm thinking chocolate malt milkshake.)

The word *alu* appears on ancient runic inscriptions across Scandinavia, often alongside references to leeks, suggesting that ale was thought to have medicinal properties.

Some think the word is related to the Latin *alum*, meaning bitter, which would make it a cognate with aluminum, or maybe it's connected to the Germanic verb *alan*, which meant to grow or swell, perhaps a reference to the fermentation process.

This would make it cognates with old.

Beer comes from the Old English *beor*, which some have suggested is related to the word *barley*.

This seems unlikely though, since *beor* was originally a sweet, fruit-based drink.

It wasn't until later that it became a synonym for ale.

The more accepted source is a borrowing of the Latin *bibere*, which meant to drink, also where we get beverage and imbibe.

Lager is short for the German *lagerbier*, which meant a beer that was laid down or stored for a long time.

It comes from the P-I-E root *legh*, which also gives us the word *law* because you can lay down the law.

Today, the term laid down is still used to describe the long storage of alcoholic drinks.

I've got a few bottles of the old Winyard left. It was laid down by my father.

I know you're not supposed to follow beer with liquor, but let's move on to the hard stuff.

The earliest archaeological evidence suggests that Muslim chemists were distilling wine into a concentrated liquor in the eighth or ninth century.

Alcohol actually has an Arabic origin, *al-kohl*, a purified gray powder used for cosmetic purposes.

The practice spread to Europe where the distillation process was seen as extracting the very spirit of wine, which was believed to have life-giving properties.

Hence, the Latin name, *aqua vitae*, water of life.

This term migrated to several other languages like *eau de vie* in French, *akvavit* in Scandinavian, *okowita* in Polish, and *uisce beatha* in Gaelic, which was eventually shortened to whiskey.

Some linguists believe the term also influenced the Russian vodka, which literally means little water.

As the distillation process spread across the world, the resulting liquors were typically named either after their main ingredient, as in gin and rye, or their place of origin, like bourbon and scotch.

The agave plant of Mexico is used to make three different kinds of alcoholic drinks; tequila, which is named after the town of origin, mezcal, which is named after the plant from the Nahuatl mexcalli, and pulque, a sour, milky beverage made from agave sap.

Pulque is the oldest of the three, originally called octli by the Meso-Americans who invented it thousands of years ago.

The Spanish name was probably a corruption of a Nahuatl term, poliuhqui octli, which means spoiled octli.

Once you start mixing liquors with other beverages, the result is widely known as a cocktail, although no one is certain why.

One theory refers to a 19th century New Orleans socialite who served mixed drinks in egg cups, known in French as coquetiers.

Another suggests it's named after a horse's tail that has been cut short, as was the fashion with horses of mixed pedigree.

Now that everyone has the drink they ordered, it's time to raise our glasses for a toast.

Wait, why is it called a toast?

It can't really have anything to do with twice cooked bread, can it?

Actually, yes. There was an archaic tradition of adding a small piece of charred bread into your wine to add flavor and soup acidity.

Since this was typically done on festive occasions, you can imagine it to be the perfect moment to say something special before everyone takes their first sip.

So whatever you're poison, or no poison at all, salud, prost, zdarovya, serefe, kanpai and cheers.