

Jewish Congregation of Marco Island

OFF-RAMP TORAH

A JUDICIOUS DEPARTURE FROM THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION

November 28, 2026

"Fostering diverse modes of attention to textual details cultivates correlative forms of attention to the world and divine reality"

Michael Fishbane (1943-), *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה׃

TO START: *Parashat-haShavu'a* Stats

Weekly Portion: *vaYishlach* Genesis 32:4-36:43

Sequence in Torah cycle: 8th of 54

Sequence in Genesis: 8th of 11



WHERE WE'RE GOING INSTEAD, and why

Leviticus 11:13-19

For this Shabbat of Thanksgiving weekend, we bypass the thorny question of how it is that Meleagris gallopavo *(the domesticated turkey) came to be the menu staple for this holiday, in favor of exploring the process by means of which it was determined that this New World bird— which was unknown to the Jewish world before the 16th century— is kosher.*

First Voyage of Columbus, 1492

October 12 Guanahani (San Salvador)

October 28 Juana (Cuba)

December 5 Hispaniola (Haiti/Dominican Rep.)



A) Miguel Sague Jr., "Turkeys in the Caribbean," at *The Indigenous Caribbean Network* – October 13, 2022 - We honor turkeys as sacred beings in our spiritual tradition, regarding them in totemic terms as one of the four sacred birds [together with the owl, hummingbird, and red-tailed hawk] associated with the cross-quarter positions that the sun assumes in the sky throughout the four seasons of the year, **even though turkeys are not native to the Caribbean islands**.

Ancient Taino [the indigenous people of Cuba] were descended from mainland people, and had

- more over

brought with them to the Caribbean region [when they migrated there in the 6th to 9th centuries] **the knowledge and appreciation of living creatures that** were native to the mainland regions from which they came, but which **did not exist in their new island homes**.

In addition, the presence of Taino-pattern incised White Deer bones in Taino archeological settings demonstrates that **our island ancestors acquired animals not native to their Caribbean homeland through canoe trade** with South American Natives and with the Mayas of Central America. The Mayas kept the Northern Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), and could have traded them— live or butchered— with the Taino. The word for turkey that has survived in some islands of the Caribbean region is *guanaho*, **a term derived from the Arhuaco tribal language of Venezuela**.

Luis Baez de Torres (יוסף בן לוי *Yosef ben-Leivi*)



- translator to the Governor of Murcia. Competent in Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic (…and Hebrew and Aramaic).

- assigned to Columbus as a diplomat (with a personal agenda).

- fêted four days during November 02 mission in Cuba with accompanying seaman Rodrigo de Jerez (where they witnessed tobacco use).

"cigar" ⇇ Chorti Mayan *sik'ar* "smoke"

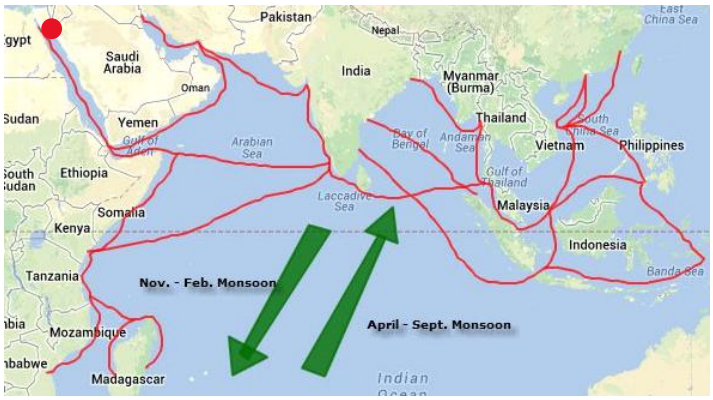
- killed in 1493 among the garrison Columbus left in Haiti.

אַחַת לְשָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים תָּבוֹא אֳנִי תַרְשִׁישׁ

B) I Kings 10:22 - [King Solomon's Indian Ocean trading] fleet would return once every three years,

נֹשְׂאֵת זָהָב וָכֶסֶף שֶׁנְהַבִּים וְקֹפִים וְתֻכִּיִּים

bearing gold and silver; ivory and monkeys; and **peacocks**.



Taino (Arawak)
guanaho

Nahuatl (Aztec)
tōtolin

תּוּכִּי הוֹדוּ *tuki hodu*
"the peacock of India"



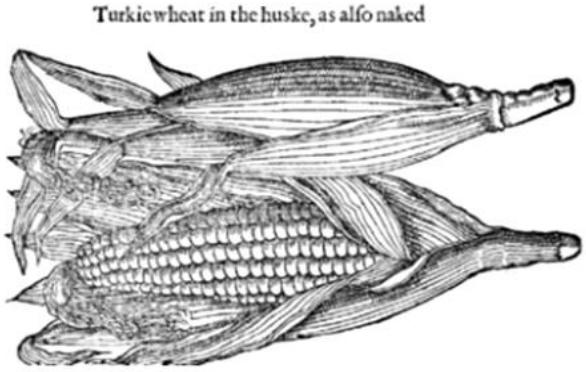
תּוּכִּי *tuki* טָוָס *tavas*

C) Tom Standage (1969-), *An Edible History of Humanity* - As European explorers, colonists, botanists, and traders sought out new plants, learned how to nurture them, and worked out where else in the world they might also thrive, they reshaped the world's ecosystems. The "Columbian Exchange" of food crops between the Old and New worlds, in which wheat [from Mesopotamia]; sugar [from Tahiti by way of the Canary Islands]; rice [from China]; and bana-

- continued

nas [from Southeast Asia] moved west [into the Caribbean and the Americas], and **maize**; potatoes; sweet potatoes; tomatoes; and chocolate moved east (to list just a handful of examples in each direction) was a big part of the story.

By the 1520s[– that is, within a single generation of Columbus's first voyage– maize] had established itself in several parts of Spain and northern Portugal, and it soon afterwards spread around the Mediterranean; into central Europe; and down the West Coast of Africa. **So rapid was the spread** of this most useful new food around the world[– by 1550, it was already a staple crop in China–] **that its origins became obscured almost immediately**. In Europe, it was variously known as Spanish corn, Indian corn, Guinea [= African] corn, and ◄ Turkey wheat, reflecting confusion about its provenance.



17th century engraving of "Turkiewheat,"
Frumenti Indici Spica

Italian	*tacchino*	"the clucker"
German	*truthahn*	"the threatener"
Spanish	***pavo***	**"peacock"**
	gallopavo	"chicken-peacock"
	gallinas ***de la tierra***	"chickens of that land"
French	*dindon*	"of India"
Russian	индю́к *indyuk*	"of India"
Yiddish	אינדיק *indik*	"of India"
Hebrew	תרנגול הודו *tarnegol hodu*	"chicken of India"
Calcutta	तुर्की कुक्कुट *turki kukkutah*	"Turkish chicken"
Turkish	هيندي *hindi*	"of India"





D) Rebecca Rupp (1948-), "The Twisted Linguistics of Turkey" in *National Geographic* (November 25, 2015) -

The chicken-sized guinea fowl *Numida meleagris* hails from sub-Saharan Africa. The Egyptians had been importing them from the Sudan and points south by 2400

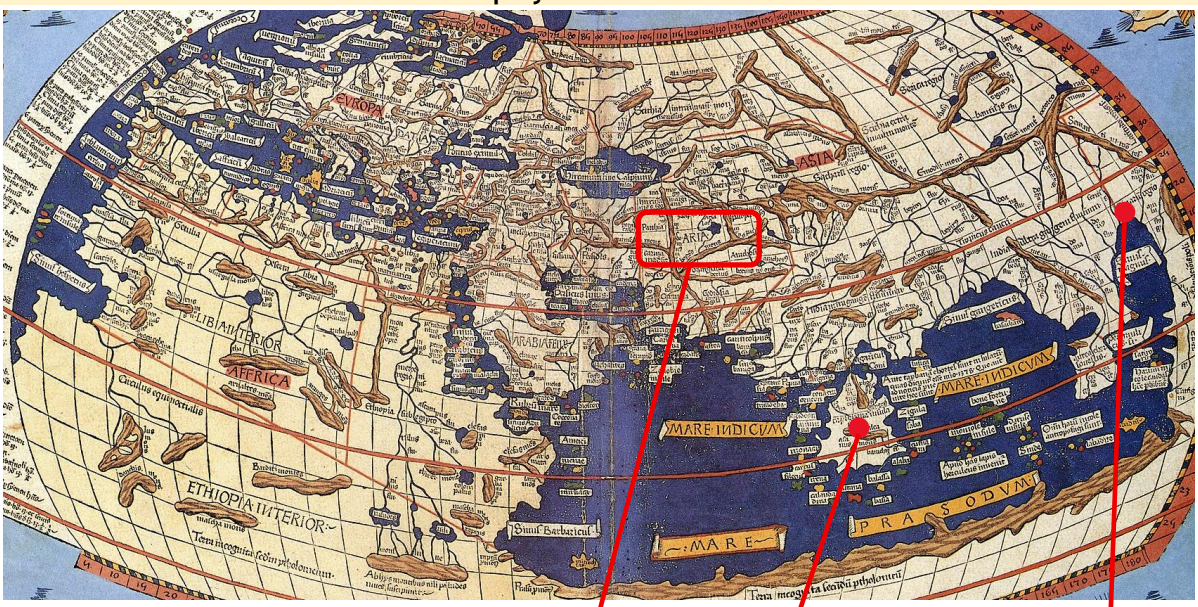
- more over



BCE (Guinea fowl were popular enough in Egypt to appear on pyramid murals ◄), and they were common in Greece by 400 BCE.

Guinea fowl **reached Western Europe in the 14th century, delivered *via* the eastern spice-trade routes** [namely, arriving by way of Turkey]. From their **presumed source of origin**, they were variously known as India chickens, Turkey chickens, Turkey cocks, and Calicut hens— names which were subsequently promiscuously applied to the vaguely look-alike American turkey.

1482 world map by Donnus Nicholas Germanus



"Arya" Sri Lanka (Ceylon) Bangkok

E) Tom Standage, *An Edible History of Humanity* - Building on the calculations of [the 2nd century Egyptian cartographer Claudius Ptolemaeus], who had overestimated the size of Eurasia and underestimated the circumference of the earth, Columbus cherry-picked figures from various authorities **to convince himself that the earth was even smaller— and Eurasia even bigger— thus shrinking the intervening ocean**.

He used an estimate from [the Abassid astronomer Abu al-Farghani, known to Europeans in Latin translation as Alfraganus], for the circumference of the earth; but he failed to appreciate the difference between Muslim miles [4,000 cubits = 1.93 kilometers = 1.2 miles] and Roman miles [1,000 paces = 4,855 imperial feet = 1.48 kilometers = .91 miles], and as such ended up with **a figure that was conveniently 25 percent too small**.

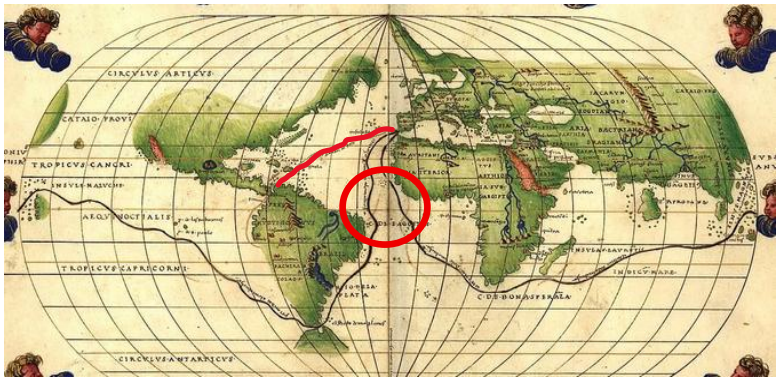
Then he used Marinus of Tyre's unusually large estimate of the size of Eurasia, and added on Marco

Marco Polo,
A Description of the World -

The فرسنگ *farsakh*, comprising about two and a half of our Western miles, was invented by **Persians and Arabs** who, having always been far travelers, **are accustomed to think in expansive terms of measurement.**

- continued

Polo's report of Chipangua (Japan), a large island said to be hundreds of miles off the East Coast of China, which further reduced the width of the ocean he would have to cross. In this way, **Columbus calculated the distance** from the Canary Islands off Africa's west coast to Japan to be slightly over 2,000 miles— **less than one fourth of the true figure**.



by Battista Agnese of Genoa - 1544

Showing voyages of Columbus (1492) and Magellan (1519). By misrepresenting the distance between Brazil and Africa (thereby halving the breadth of the Atlantic Ocean), he highlights the accessibility of The New World.

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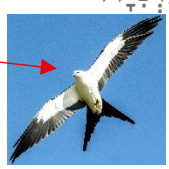
Culinary Ornithology for Jews: A Process of Elimination.

F) Deuteronomy 14:11-8 -

14:11] - You may eat **any pure bird**, — כָּל צִפּוֹר **טְהֹרָה** תֹּאכֵלוּ

14:12a] - but these are the ones of which you may **not** eat: — וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר **לֹא** תֹאכְלוּ מֵהֶם

14:12b] - the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; — אֶת הַנֶּשֶׁר וְאֶת הַפֶּרֶס וְאֵת הָעָזְנִיָּה



14:13] - the kite; every species of falcon; — וְאֶת הַדָּאָה וְאֶת הָאַיָּה לְמִינָהּ

14:14] - any of the various species of raven; — אֵת כָּל עֹרֵב לְמִינוֹ

14:15] - the ostrich; the nighthawk; the sea gull; every species of hawk; — וְאֵת בַּת הַיַּעֲנָה וְאֶת הַתַּחְמָס וְאֶת הַשָּׁחַף וְאֶת הַנֵּץ לְמִינֵהוּ

14:16] - the nightjar; the cormorant; and the great horned owl; — וְאֶת הַכּוס וְאֶת הַשָּׁלָךְ וְאֶת הַיַּנְשׁוּף

14:17] - the barn owl; the pelican; and the bustard; — וְאֶת הַתִּנְשֶׁמֶת וְאֶת הַקָּאָת וְאֵת הָרָחָם

14:18] - the stork; every species of heron; the hoopoe; and the bat. — וְאֶת הַחֲסִידָה הָאֲנָפָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת הַדּוּכִיפַת וְאֶת הָעֲטַלֵּף



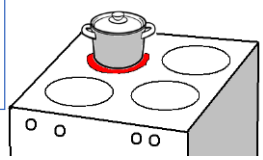
דּוּכִיפַת Eurasian Hoopoe
("Bee-Eater") *Upupa epops*
National Bird of Israel

- more over

החברה להגנת הטבע
Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel
Birds of Israel Checklist

556 identified species - almost 200 of which are either native residents or seasonal nesting species

Passerines (songbirds)	225	Kingfishers	10
Shorebirds	114	Grebes	5
Hawks & Vultures	47	Cuckoo	4
Ducks & Geese	38	Galliformes (quail & grouse)	4
Herons & Storks	23	Swifts	4
Shearwaters & Petrels	20	Loons	3
Pigeons & Doves	14	Nightjars	3
Pelicans & Boobies	12	Parrots (Parakeets)	3
Cranes, Bustards, & Rails	12	Flamingos	2
Owls	11	Woodpeckers	2

	in the Bible	Talmud
Ducks and Geese	I Kings 5:3 meat provisions for King Solomon's palace include **בַּרְבּוּרִים** אֲבוּסִים "fattened ***barburim***" *Anatidae* [webfoot] ducks בַּרְוָז *barvaz* geese אַוָּז *avaz* swans **בַּרְבּוּר** *barbur*	אַוָּז *avaz* goose - a fat bird with regular habits of coming home at night, and honking  on the back burner
Chickens	- - - - - - - - - native of Thailand	תַּרְנְגוֹל *tarnegol* chicken 253x as a food (and as a source of *tum'ah*)
Turkeys	- - - - - - - - -	- - - - - - - - -

G) T[erence] H[anbury] "Ted" White (1906-1964), *The Once And Future King* - It was Christmas night, and the proper things had been done. The whole village had come to dinner in hall. There had been boar's head and venison and pork and beef and mutton and capons— **but no turkey, because this bird had not yet been invented**.



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סימני בהמה וחיה נאמרו מן התורה **וסימני העוף לא נאמרו**

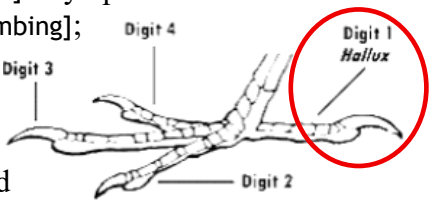
H) Mishnah, Chullin 3:6 - The distinguishing characteristics of those domestic and wild animals [acceptable for food] were stipulated in the Torah[– namely, any ruminant which has split true hooves (Leviticus 11:3), and water creatures with fins and scales ibid. 11:9], while **correspondingly distinguishing characteristics for birds were not stipulated**.

אבל אמרו חכמים **כל עוף הדורס** טמא

However, the Sages [constituting the Sanhedrin of Israel] declared that **any bird that "claws"** is unacceptable.

כל שיש לו אצבע יתרה

[1] [Moreover, they established that] any species which has an extra digit [backward-facing prehensile *hallux*, for grasping and climbing];



וזפק

[2] **and** that has a crop;

וקורקבנו נקלף

[3] **and** that has a peelable gizzard

טהור

is pure [and, as such, acceptable for food].

הַדּוֹרֵס - **הָאוֹחֵז בְּצִפָּרְנָיו** וּמַגְבִּיהַּ מִן הַקַּרְקַע מַה שֶּׁהוּא אוֹכֵל

I) Obadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro (1455-1520), *Commentary on the Mishnah* - "[Any bird] that 'claws'" - namely, **that seizes** what it eats off the ground **with its talons**.

וְיֵשׁ שֶׁפֵּרְשׁוּ שֶׁאֵינוֹ מַמְתִּין לַבַּעַל חַי עַד שֶׁיָּמוּת אֶלָּא אוֹכְלוֹ מֵחַיִּים

(Although there are those who expound it as meaning that it does not await the death of an animal, but rather eats it while it is still alive).

J) Philip Blackman (1881-1968), *Mishnayoth* - Similarly, we regard **any bird that seizes its prey in mid-air** as unclean. Traditionally, the only *kasheir* birds are the fowl [chicken], duck, goose, **turkey**, and pigeon.

סימני עוף טהור לא נתפרש מן התורה אלא מנה מינים טמאים בלבד

K) Yosef Karo (1488-1575), *Shulchan Aruch* Yoreh Dei'ah 82:1-3 - The distinguishing characteristics of a pure bird are not articulated in the Torah, which instead merely itemizes those which are unacceptable.

ושאר מיני העוף מותרים כל מי שהוא בקי באותם מינים ובשמותיהם הרי **זה אוכל כל עוף שאינו מהם ואינו צריך בדיקה**

Thus all other kinds of birds are permissible as food. Anyone with an understanding of those [forbidden] species and their names, is welcome to eat any bird that is not one of them— **and does not need to examine** [to determine that it possesses all three distinguishing characteristics of a pure bird outlined in the Mishnah].

ועוף טהור נאכל במסורה והוא שיהיה דבר פשוט **באותו מקום** שזה עוף טהור ונאמן צייד לומר עוף זה התיר לי רבי הצייד והוא שיוחזק אותו צייד שהוא בקי במינים הטמאים האמורים בתורה ובשמותיהם

A pure bird is eaten according to *m'sorah* [tradition]— namely that it is established and known **in that place** that this particular local species is a pure bird. Thus a bird-trapper is

- more over

to be relied upon when he says: "My hunting teacher permitted me this species of bird," since that master hunter is understood to be knowledgeable about the non-kosher species itemized in the Torah, and all of their names.

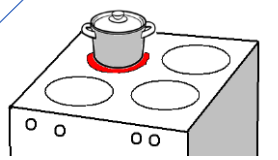
מי שאינו מכירם ואינו יודע שמותיהם בודק בסימנים ואם ידוע שאינו דורס יש שלשה סימני טהרה אצבע יתירה וזפק וקורקבנו נקלף ביד

Anyone who does not know them, and who does not know their names, should examine for [the distinguishing characteristics outlined in Mishnah Chullin 3:6 (our "Text H" above)]. For if it is known not to be a bird of prey, there are three signs of its being pure: an extra digit; a crop; and a gizzard peelable by hand.

ואע"פ שיש לו ג' סימנים אלו אין לאכלו לפי שאנו חוששין שמא הוא דורס **אלא א"כ יש להם מסורת שמסרו להם אבותיהם** שהוא טהור

Yet even though it has these three signs, it should not be eaten (inasmuch as we still entertain suspicions lest it prove to be a bird of prey), **unless they have a *m'sorah* transmitted to them by their forebears** that this is a pure species.

יש אומרים שכל עוף שחרטומו רחב וכף רגלו רחבה כשל אווז בידוע שאינו דורס ומותר באכילה



There are those who say that all birds that have a wide beak and a webbed foot, like that of a goose— once it has been determined [by observing its behavior] that it is not a bird of prey— is permitted as food,

אם יש לו שלשה סימנים בגופו

if it has the three signs on its body.

הגה - ויש אומרים שאין לסמוך אפילו על זה

NOTE ON THIS [by Moses Isserles of Cracow, (1530-1572)]: Yet there are other authorities [predominantly Nathan ben-Y'chiEil of Rome (1035-1110) in his '*Aruch haShaleim*] who say that one may not rely even on [the existence of the three distinguishing characteristics],

ו**אין לאכול שום עוף אלא במסורת** שקבלו בו שהוא טהור

and that **one does not eat any bird without a *m'sorah*** that it has been accepted as pure.

וכן נוהגין **ואין לשנות**

Such is our customary practice [among Ashkenazim], and **it should not be changed**.

The Three Signs Permit the Bird	Established *M'sorah* is Required
Jacob ben Meir (1100-1171)	**RaSHI** (1040-1105)
Nachmanides (1194-1270)	Asher ben Jehiel (1250-1327)
Shlomo ibn Aderet (1235-1310)	Yosef Karo (1488-1575)
Yom Tov ben Abraham (1260-1320)	Moses Isserles (1530-1572)
Vidal de Tolosa (*c.* 1380)	
Moshe ben-Yosef di Trani (1505-1585)	

L) Natan Slifkin (1975-), "Turkey- the Traditionless Bird," in *Rationalist Judaism* – November 25, 2021 - It seems that the initial acceptance of the turkey occurred before [the stringent view of Moses Isserles in the middle of the 16th century] was promulgated and accepted. The scenario could well have unfolded as follows:

First, turkey was being eaten by Jews in eastern lands [of the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Persia],

- continued

who were the first to receive [this New World novelty food being imported eastward by] the Turkish merchants. They may have eaten it because **they followed the majority view of the earlier Medieval sages**: that as long as it displays the kosher signs, and is not predatory, it may be eaten.

Subsequently, Jews in western Europe became aware that eastern Jews were eating it. **They may have assumed this meant that** [in that region] **there was an ancient tradition of eating** [this "local" bird of India]. Or they may have simply been relying upon the majority view of the earlier Medieval sages [regarding any unfamiliar non-raptor that is possessed of all three characteristic features of a kosher bird].

Fascinatingly, concerns about the kosher status of the turkey were only first raised in the 19th century, long after the turkey had already gained universal acceptance as a kosher bird. Yosef Sha'ul Nathanson argued that the long-established consumption of turkey by observant Jews demonstrated that **Isserles's stringent requirement of a *m'sorah* is not to be followed**. Rather, he asserted, we follow the majority view of the earlier sages, from the Mishnah onward: so long as a [non-raptor] possesses the three signs of being a kosher bird, it may be eaten.

About 11,000 known bird species.
All classified since 18th century.
5 to 10 new species each year.

It must be appreciated that when the turkey question was raised in the 19th century, declaring the turkey to be non-kosher would have denigrated as sinners many pious Jews around the world, who had been eating it for generations. There is very strong rabbinic opposition to such a thing— first, due to the Talmud's statement that God does not allow the righteous to unwittingly sin, and second, due to the principled position of not casting aspersions on earlier generations. Thus, there was strong motivation to find a justification for the common practice.

Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin [1816-1893] explicitly uses such a meta-halachic justification, stating that, **since turkey has gained widespread acceptance, no objections should be raised to its consumption** in the absence of overwhelming evidence that it is actually a non-kosher bird. Accordingly, we unreservedly follow the consensus of the earlier sages, so that **any bird that has the three signs (such as turkey) can be eaten even without a *mesorah***.

Still others would take an intermediate approach. Although they would usually take Isserles's stringency into account, if there are other significant arguments to permit the bird, they would allow the mistaken basis for the stringency to combine with those arguments for leniency, to result in the bird being permitted. In the case of turkey, **the fact that it has been eaten for generations would contribute to this**.



The Main Course Arrives
Le Livre des Conquêtes et Faits d'Alexandre - c. 1450

As you might guess, there are significant ramifications from all the above discussion for the *kashrut* of other birds. A notable example is peacock— but while the above discussion certainly provides reason in favor of it being acceptable, there are actually **far more powerful halachic justifications for permitting peacock** than there are for permitting turkey!

- more over

M) Sheldon Harnick (1924-2023), "If I Were a Rich Man," from *Fiddler on the Roof* -

I'd fill my yard with chicks **and turkeys** and geese and ducks
For the town to see and hear,
Squawking just as noisily as they can.



And each loud *screech* and *quack* and *cluck* and *caw*
Would land like a trumpet on their ear,
As if to say: "Here lives a wealthy man!"



Der Shoychet **(The Kosher Slaughterer)**
by Issachar Ber Ryback, 1917

Kosher Organic	*kosherorganic.com*	turkey duck turducken
Geshem Premium Foods	*geshemkf.com*	goose duck quail (24-pack)
Exotic Meat Market	*exoticmeatmarkets.com*	pheasant **peacock** (kosher slaughtering– special order)