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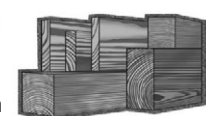
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## A TRUE WORLD TRAVELER: THINGS YOU MAY OR MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT THE TURKEY-- THE BIRD, NOT THE COUNTRY

A lot of people probably don't know that the bird at the center of our traditional Thanksgiving feast originated in Central America and southern Mexico. The Aztecs called the bird huehlotl (which I cannot pronounce) and it was originally domesticated from a now extinct wild species native to that area of the world.

The scientific name for what we in America call the "turkey" is Meleagris gallopavo gallopavo (from the Greek word Meleagrid meaning Guinea fowl, and the Latin words gallo and pavo meaning chicken and peacock), which is not to be confused with their close cousins Meleagris gallopavo sylvestrus, the wild Turkeys we see in our local farmer's fields. How this bird native to Columbus's New World came to be named after an ancient Old World eastern Mediterranean country (Turkey) is a matter of considerable controversy.

One theory says that the original Spanish conquistadors who conquered and then decimated the native Aztecs thought that the bird looked a lot like the Guinea fowl--which was a bird native to Africa--whose nickname was the "Turkey bird." And the reason the African Guinea fowl was called the Turkey bird was that in the early 1500s the bird was being traded and sold in southern Europe and the Middle East by the Ottoman Turks, who at the time, controlled the sea and overland trade routes to the continent of Africa. When the conquistadors brought their new Guinea fowl-looking bird back with them from Central American, the designation Turkey bird stuck.

Eventually this new Turkey bird spread all over Europe and Asia where it was successfully domesticated into the various different breeds that exist today. When the English settlers arrived in the 1600s in what is now our American northeast, they noticed a wild bird that looked a lot like the "Turkey bird" they had back on their farms in England. And even though the wild bird was no direct relation to the original Central American (maybe distant cousins) species, the name turkey again stuck.

A third possibility for the word turkey (and one that I kind of like) was from a December 13, 1992, New York Times article that claimed the New World fowl's name was actually given to it by Christopher Columbus's interpreter. The explorer's interpreter, a Mr. Luis de Torres, was a Jewish convert to Catholicism. When he first saw the bird it reminded him of the peacock, a bird then common throughout Europe and Asia. And the ancient Hebrew word for peacock at that time was tuki.

And so, what do the people of the country of Turkey call the bird that we in America at Thanksgiving call the turkey? The call it the "Hindi" which translates into the "Indian" bird. And what do the people of India call the bird? They refer to it as the "tarki."  
 Happy Thanksgiving!

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