

Why the hyrax¹ cannot be the Biblical *shafan*?



3 hyrax pictures

Regrettably in many books,² *chumashim* and *gemarot*, it is written and/or illustrated with pictures, that the Biblical "*shafan*" mentioned in *Parashot Shemini* and *Ree* is the hyrax (daman or rock badger). In my humble opinion this identification is not possible because of the **8 reasons** explained below.

1. The Torah in Leviticus 11:5 described the *shafan* as "**maaleh gerah**", but we have not found any evidence that the hyrax practices rumination, cecotrophy or even merycism, so the **hyrax is not "maaleh gerah"**.

But anyway, merycism (practiced by the kangaroo) is not equivalent to "*maaleh gerah*", because nutritionally it does not resemble rumination or cecotrophy.

2. The hyrax has **short legs**³ so it is a *sheretz* (short-legged creature) and not a *chaya* (the *shafan* is a *chaya*⁴⁵) and every *sheretz* is already forbidden to be eaten as it is clearly stated in Leviticus 11:41. For the definition of *sheretz* see Rashi *ad loc.*, Rashi on Genesis 1:24, Baba Kama 80a, Rashi, Tosfot *ad loc.*, etc.

3. The hyrax has **hoof-like claws**⁶ and is **plantigrade**⁷, see *Pesikta Zutrata* on *Shemini* 29b where the *shafan*'s foot is described as similar to a cat's foot. A cat's foot is not hoof-like, nor plantigrade, but digitigrade.⁸

4. The Rashbatz⁹ (*Yabin Shemua*, page 11) wrote explicitly that the *shafan* has **long ears**; however the hyrax has short ones.¹⁰

5. The Rashbatz (*Yabin Shemua*, page 11) wrote explicitly that the *shafan* has a **thin skin**; in contrast, the hyrax has a thick one.¹¹

¹ *Procavia capensis*.

² Some of them have been already modified or at least meanwhile the authors have changed their opinions.

³ "Hyrax," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 94

⁴ *Pesikta Zutrata* on *Shemini* 29b

⁵ Because in *Perashat Shemini* the *shafan* appears in the section of the *chayot* and not in the section of the *sheratzim*.

⁶ "Hyrax," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 94

⁷ <http://wfscnet.tamu.edu/tcwc/WFSC401/Lab%203-Mammalian%20Orders.ppt> accessed 16/jul/06

⁸ http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/topics/mammal_anatomy/running_fast.html accessed 16/jul/06

⁹ 1361 - 1444 והר"י שמעון דוראן הנקרא הרשב"ץ ומכונה הרב ר' דוראן היה כמו תלמיד חבר של הריב"ש בר ששת והוא היה חכם גדול ורב מובהק וחבר ס' שו"ת גדול הנקרא תשב"ץ ר"ל תשובת שמעון בר צמח ולא באו בדפוס וגם ס' מגן אבות.

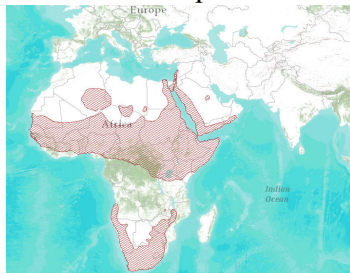
¹⁰ "Hyrax," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994

6. The Rashba (*Chulin* 59a) wrote explicitly that the *shafan* has **many** superior (upper) front-teeth. In contrast, the hyrax has only two.¹²

7. The hyrax' **geographic distribution** is not¹³ the one stated as the *shafan*'s by Rav Jonah Ibn Janach.¹⁴ Rav Ibn Janach ז"ל lived in Cordoba and Saragossa, Spain.¹⁵ He wrote in his *Sefer HaShorashim*:

“And the *shafan*”. It is the “*wabr*”, an animal the size of a cat, which is **found [only] a little in the East, but is abundant among us** [in Spain]. Nevertheless the masses do not know it by that name, but by the name “*conilio*”, a Spanish name [for rabbit]”.¹⁶

As can be seen illustrated in the following map, the hyrax indeed *is* widely found in the [Middle] East and is *not* found in Spain.



الشين والغاء والنون وאת השפן הוא הויר והו
 دويبة على قدر السنور وهي في المشرق قليلة واما عندنا
 فكثيرة معروفة إلا انها لا تعرفها عامتنا بهذا الاسم
 بل بالقنليه وهو اسم اعجمي:

8. The hyrax does not match with **explicit translations** stated by the *Rishonim* as the *shafan*'s identity. The *shafan* is translated as “*conilio*” (i.e. rabbit in a foreign language^{17 18}) by **Rav Jonah Ibn Janach**, **Rambam Perush Hamishnayot** on *Ukatzin* 3:3 (on their original Arabic texts) and **Rav Yosef Ben Nachmias** on *Proverbs* 30:26.

Following is the scanned page of the *Rambam* published by N. Dirinburg, Berlin 1887:

הוא אלפרק. ורי שמעון יקול אן לחום שיתבאר בסוף זה הפרק. ורי שמעון אומר
 אלגמאל ואלאראנב ואלקלניאת ואלזנאזיר שבשר הנמל והארנבת והשפן ב) והחזיר אינו
 לא תחזאנ מחשבה פי אלסואק אלמדינה צריך מחשבה בשוקי העיר לפי שידוע
 לאן מעלומהא ב) אלאל פי אלמדינה ואין שאוכלים אותו בעיר ואין הלכה כרי שמעון.
 הלכה כרי שמעון.
 ב) בערבי אלקלניאת ונראה שציל אלקלניאת.

Conclusion:

For the eight reasons listed above, we consider *B”H* that the hyrax cannot be the Biblical *shafan*.

This information is analyzed in detail in the 2nd edition (2019) of the book “The Enigma of the Biblical *Shafan*” which includes Torah and scientific research suggesting that **the rabbit is the *shafan***.

P.S. According to my humble opinion, important ramifications can be the result of this issue.

Dr. Yitzchak Betech <isaacb@tovnet.com>

T.O.V.

A Hebrew version of this document is available on request.

¹¹ www.shamir.org.il/info/golshim/micha_kagan/shafan.doc accessed 13/mar/11

¹² <http://www.skullsite.co.uk/Hyrax/hyrax.htm> accessed 26/feb/11

¹³ <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/41766/0> accessed on 22/dec/11

¹⁴ *The Book of Hebrew Roots* by Abu’l Walid Marwan Ibn Janah. Oxford, 1875 by Ad. Neubauer. Root שפן

¹⁵ <http://www.torahproductions.com/commentators/164.html> accessed 31/jul/11

¹⁶ Ibn Janah, *op. cit.* (Translation from the original in Arabic).

¹⁷ פירוש רבי יוסף בן נחמיאש על משלי, ביאור מלות לעיני מהמו”ל ר’ משה אריה באמבערגער (דף XX).

¹⁸ <http://open-dictionary.com/Rabbit> accessed 13/jul/06