

## A sheep or a ramp?

כבש?

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In the Book of Kings we read about King Solomon:

ויעש המלך כסא-שן גדול; ויצפהו זהב מופז.  
שש מעלות לכסה וראש-עגל לכסה מאחריו, וידת מזה ומזה, אל-מקום השבת; ושנים אריות  
עמדים אצל הידות.

ושנים עשר אריים, עמדים שם על-שש המעלות-מזה ומזה; לא-נעשה כן לכל-ממלכות.

“Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the finest gold.  
There were six steps to the throne, and the top of the throne was round behind; and there  
were arms on either side by the place of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms.  
And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps; there was  
not the like made in any kingdom” (1 Ki 9:18-20).

However, the Greek translator wrote here: “and the throne had heads of calves in relief behind it.”



In the Book of Chronicles we read: **וישב שלמה על-כסא יהוה למלך, תחת-דויד אביו** - “Then Solomon sat on the throne of YHWH as king instead of David his father” (1 Ch 29:23).

This notion of the Chronicler was apparently based on the reading of verse Ex 17:16 (which seem to be corrupt). However, if the Chronicler, who read about the description of King Solomon’s throne in the Book of Kings, comprehended it in the same manner as the Greek translator of this book, then he must have realized that it amounted to a major transgression. As

in the Book of Kings it is said that the throne was overlaid with gold, it could only mean that the throne was decorated with a “golden calf.”



**The Adoration of the Golden Calf**  
by Nicolas Poussin (1594 - 1665)

The making of a god in the image of a calf in gold by Aaron (Ex 32:1-6) remained a major traumatic event in the memory of the Israelites (e.g. Ps 106:19; Neh 9:18. As a pious person the Chronicler apparently could not bring himself to retell the reader about such abominable detail of Solomon’s throne. Therefore he changed the description of the throne from having a “golden calf” to one with a **כבש בזהב** - “a sheep in gold” which was never described as abomination.

Therefore the Chronicler’s description is as follows:

ויעש המלך כסא-שן גדול; ויצפהו זהב טהור.  
ושש מעלות לכסא וכבש בזהב לכסא מאחזים וידות מזה ומזה, על-מקום השבת; ושנים  
אריות עמדים אצל הידות.  
ושנים עשר אריות, עמדים שם על-שש המעלות-מזה ומזה; לא-נעשה כן לכל-ממלכה.

”Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold.

And there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold which were fastened to the throne, and arms on either side by the place of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms.

And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps; there was not the like made in any kingdom” (2 Ch 9:17-19).

The translation of **כבש בזהב** to the English as: “**with a footstool of gold**” is no more than a speculation and it is not supported by the Greek translation. It appears that the Greek translator of the Book of Chronicles also was not aware of the change here and he wrote simply: “attached with gold.”

Next we read in the Mishnah:

מעשה ברבן גמליאל וזקנים שהיו באין בספינה, ועשה גוי כבש לירד בו, וירדו בו רבן גמליאל וזקנים

(משנה שבת טז ח).

And from this verse of the Mishnah the understanding of **כבש** as a “ramp” found its way to Modern Hebrew.



כבש של ספינה



כבש של מטוס