

A drop of amber protects a rare amphibian for 100 million years

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It only takes a drop of resin to fall at the right time and in the right place for a small animal to be trapped in this viscous liquid that little by little is solidifying. From there, the ‘survival’ of this fossil is in the hands of luck. But tell the **rare specimen of fossil amphibian** that has been found in a **100 million year old amber stone**.

It is a small animal. With claws, scales and a long tail. Similar to a lizard, yes. But from the amphibian family. “We can imagine them as **small animals, somewhat chubby**, scampering and hiding in the litter and occasionally going out to catch a fly with its tongue,” he explains **Susan Evans**, a paleontologist at University College London and one of the scientists who this Thursday **present their finding in a ‘Science’ article**.

Scientists have named this animal ‘**Yaksha perettii**’, while this would be a **new genus and species for science**. His name, experts explain, refers to the ‘yaksha’; mythical creatures of the Burmese tradition who guarded treasures. And his last name is a tribute to Adolf Peretti, the researcher who discovered his fossil remains.

Two Inch Retractable Tongue Predators

Their discoverers explain that these small amphibians were ‘ambush predators.’ **They captured their prey by shooting their retractable tongue**. The discovery of these animals would also be the first known example of a “tongue of fire”. His tongue, in fact, was like that of a chameleon; known today as one of **the fastest muscles in the animal kingdom**. This movement could reach from 0 to 100 km / h in one hundredth of a second.

These rare amphibians belonged to a different lineage than today’s frogs, salamanders, and caecilians. Experts estimate that the first ‘**Yaksha perettii**’ appeared at least **165 million years** and they became extinct just a few **2 million years** for reasons that, today, remain unknown. “This discovery adds a very interesting piece to the puzzle of

this rare group of animals,” explains study co-author Edward Stanley, director of the Florida Museum of Natural History.

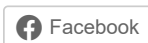
Journey inside a fossil

Its history has been recovered thanks to **study of a set of fossils** 99 million years old found in present-day Burma. At first, the specimen was wrongly classified as an ancient chameleon. The claim created a stir among scientists, so their study came under scrutiny from a **computed tomography**.

This tool allowed to obtain **high resolution images** of amphibian anatomy and even showed areas of soft tissue, such as the tip of the tongue and parts of the muscles of the jaw and eyelids.

“**The extraordinary degree of preservation of this fossil** has provided us with new useful information to deduce the behavior of these small amphibians,” he says. **Arnau Bolet**, ‘Juan de la Cierva’ researcher at the Institut Català de Paleontologia Miquel Crusafont (ICP) and associate professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), one of the experts who has participated in the analyzes performed for the new species described.

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