

Cicāda salamandraque
The salamander and cicada
A medieval song

Cicāda salamandraque
hūc domitum iērunť.
Cum galeā lōricāque
sē praestō parāvērunt.
Musca vēxillum portābat
ut mīles ēgregius.
Scarabaeus būcināvit
tōtīs vīribus.

The salamander and cicada
went out here to fight.
With helmet and with habergeon
they were all ready dight.
The fly he bore the banner there
as a doughty knight.
The scarab beetle trumpeted;
he blew with all his might.

The original medieval lyrics in Latin and Middle English were as follows (no macrons in the Latin):

Salamandraque cicada domitatum perereterunt,
Galiaque cum lorica presto se parauerunt;
Musca vexillum portabat vt miles egregius,
Scarabius buccinauit totis suis viribus.

The krycket & þe greshope wentyn here to fyȝht,
With helme and haburyone all redy dyȝht;
The flee bare þe baner as a duȝty knyȝth,
The cherubud trumpyt with all hys myȝth.

Source: *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*. Edited by Rossell Hope Robbins. 2nd edition. Oxford, 1964, page 104.

Edited and translated by AFM.

The opening of the original Middle English lyrics translate to “The cricket and the grasshopper,” but we have substituted “The salamander and cicada,” to correspond to the Latin lyrics. Also, the Middle English word “flee” should mean “flea” but the Latin lyrics say “musca” (“fly”) so we have used “fly.”

The Latin word “perereterunt” might be an unknown medieval Latin word, or perhaps an error for praeteriērunt (“they passed by”) or for “pererrāvērunt” (“they wandered through”), but we have emended it to “hūc ... iērunť” (“went here”) which is the equivalent of the Middle English lyrics, “wentyn here.” We have similarly emended the Latin word “domitatum” (“tame”) to the Latin word “domitum” (“conquer”) as a better equivalent for the Middle English “fyȝht” (“fight”).

We have also emended the text where the Latin enclitic “-que” (“and”) is used, so that it is added to the second word, as in classical usage (e.g., “Senātus populusque” for “Senate and people”). So we emended “salamandraque cicāda” to “cicāda salamandraque” and “galiāque cum lōricā” to “cum galeā lōricāque.”

We have standardized the Latin spelling and added macrons.

To simplify the meter (rhythm) for singing, we also changed the Latin word order, and omitted “suīs” (“his”) in the final line.

As you can see above, the Middle English letter yogh (ȝ) could be used where we would use a y, g, or gh.

A few of the old-fashioned English words may require explanation:

habergeon: coat of mail armor or scale armor (the Latin equivalent, *lorica*, means breastplate)

dight: equipped (the Latin equivalent, *paraverunt*, means prepared)

doughty: excellent, honorable, brave (the Latin equivalent, *egregius*, means excellent, distinguished, honorable)

Both the Latin and the English texts can be sung to the folk tune *The Jolly Miller*.