

Babrius (late 1st century AD) was probably from Italy but wrote in Greek for the son of a King Alexander in or near Syria. His poems comprise the oldest surviving collection of Aesop's fables in Greek.

Romulus Anglicus ("the English Romulus") (manuscript c. 1450) refers to an anonymous medieval author of fables in the Romulus tradition, whose fables may have been known to the author Marie de France (fl. 1160–1215).

The Ant and the Cicada

BABRIUS (late 1st century AD)

translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

An ant who spent the summer heat
In heaping grain inside his den,
In winter dragged it out again
To air it in the wind and sleet.

A starved cicada made his plea,
"Could you give some food to me?
Is there something you could give?
Something, so that I will live?"

The ant said to the one outside,
"What did you do all summer long?"
"Not doing nothing!" he replied;
"I never ceased to sing my song."

The ant just laughed, shut up his wheat,
And said, "If you have played a song
All through the days of summer heat,
This winter, you can dance along."

A more literal translation of Babrius in prose (AFM):

In wintertime, an ant was dragging grain from his den, all he'd heaped up in the heat of the summer, to air it out. A starving cicada begged the ant to give him something from the food, so that he would live. "What were you doing this summer?" said the ant. The cicada said, "Not doing nothing; I continued singing all that time." But the ant laughed, shut in his wheat, and said, "If you played songs all through the heat of summer, then in winter, dance."

The Ant and the Cicada

ROMULUS ANGLICUS (manuscript c. 1450)

translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

A cold cicada, now in need
With winter come, and summer gone,
Came to the ant, began to plead,
"I have no more to live upon.
Please, can you do me some good?"
She begged the ant there as she stood.

The ant asked, "What work have you done,
While, fall and summer, up at dawn,
My family gathered, on the run,
The winter food we live upon?"
"I sang to working folk," she said,
"But got no wages to be fed."

"Anticipate the coming storm.
It would be better," said the ant,
"To work back when the days were warm
Than beg now that the food is scant.
If I were needy on the street,
What could you give to me to eat?"

["Better to gather with the sun,
To do the work while you still may,
So you can share the food you've won,
So you have some to give away.
Better to work until you could
Do the ones in need some good."]

The tale reminds us to pursue
Our work, to seek productive deeds
Instead of laziness, to do
Enough so we can meet our needs.
For if we need another's victual,
We may ask much, and get a little.

A more literal translation of Romulus Anglicus in prose (AFM):

A Cicada, in need in winter time, came to the house of an Ant, asking and begging that she do her some good, and telling her she had nothing at home to live on. The Ant said to her, "So what work did you do in summer and harvest time, when my family and I were hard at work, running and gathering into our storehouses something to live on in winter?"

The Cicada answered, "Back then I sang to those who were working, and I received no wages from them."

Then the Ant said, "It would be better to have worked in summer, looking ahead to the coming storm, than that the severity of winter now compel you to beg at our doors. If, then, I were now in need, what would you be able to offer me when I begged?"

Moral. In this example we are reminded to flee laziness and pursue work, so that we can help ourselves in our own need, because, if we have need of the goods of others, we may ask much, but get little.