

An account of the *Μυρμηκολέων* or Ant-lion

By GEORGE C. DRUCE, F.S.A.

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Introduction to the Digital Edition

This text was prepared for digital publication by David Badke in October, 2003. It was scanned from the original text. Version 2, with corrected Druce biography, was produced in August, 2004.

Author: George Claridge Druce was born in Surrey, England and lived there and at Wimbledon until 1923, when he retired from managing a distillery company and moved to Cranbrook, Kent. He was a member of the Kent Archaeological Society from 1909, as Secretary from 1925 to 1935 and then Vice-President until his death. He was a member of the Royal Archaeological Institute (1903-48, Council member 1921-28) and of the British Archaeological Association, joining in 1920, serving on its Council 1921-38 and then as Vice President (1938-48). He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (F.S.A.) of London in 1912 and served on its Council 1923-6. Druce travelled extensively (by bicycle) with his camera, and built up a unique collection of photographs and glass lantern slides, which in 1947 he presented to the Courtauld Institute in London. Although interested in almost all branches of antiquarian study, he specialized in the study of the bestiary genre, and was widely recognized as an authority on the influence of bestiaries on ecclesiastical sculpture and wood carving. He also studied manuscripts both in England and elsewhere. He contributed articles to various scholarly journals, presented many lectures, and in 1936 produced a translation of *The Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, a Norman-French manuscript which dates from 1210-11. Druce died in 1948.

— *Adapted from an obituary written by Canon Sydney William Wheatley, F.S.A. in The Journal of the British Archaeological Association, 3rd series, 11 (1948), 80.*

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The page numbers shown in this edition (at the bottom of each page) do not match the page numbering of the original printed edition. The original page numbers have been added to allow references to the print edition to be located; the number indicates the start of the print edition page. These page numbers appear imbedded in the text, formatted like this: [350]. The footnote numbering in the printed text started at 1 on each page; since the pagination in this edition does not match that of the printed edition, the footnote numbers do not match. The numbers in this edition start at 1 and continue to 44.

Illustrations: The illustrations in this edition are of unfortunately poor quality, having been scanned from a photocopy of the original article. They have been enhanced to bring out what detail was available, and appear here somewhat larger than in the printed article. They can also be enlarged to some degree when viewed on screen. The three figures that were imbedded in the printed text appear in approximately their original relative positions in this text. The four plates have been moved to the end of this document; clicking on a plate reference in the text will jump to the plate in question. The plates in the printed edition were numbered XXXVIII (38) to XLI (41); here they are numbered 1 to 5 (the two illustrations on plate XXXVIII has been separated into two plate pages), but the original Roman numbering has been retained for reference.

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An account of the *Μυρμηκολέων* or Ant-lion

By G. C. Druce, F.S.A. [Read 10th May 1923]

THE interesting but detestable creature, the subject of these notes, does not seem hitherto to have inspired any enthusiasm in the antiquarian breast, for I have been unable to find any paper relating to it in the journals of archaeological societies. There is, however, a popular account in Princess Mary's Gift-book for 1914, consisting of a translation by the late Teixeira de Mattos of J. H. Fabre's story of the ant-lion and its habits, with a coloured plate, both of which accurately reproduce its pernicious activities.

For popular notions of such creatures in the middle ages we naturally turn to the Bestiaries. These manuscripts give first an account of the common ant and its habits; then of the so-called Ethiopian ant; and lastly of the ant-lion. There is a sermo or moral of an improving nature attached to the common ant, and also to the ant-lion. Although this paper has to do with the ant-lion, it will be necessary to refer to the other ants now and then, particularly to the Ethiopian ant, as there are certain complications which have to be dealt with.

It will be more convenient to take the western version of the story first, that is, as given in the Latin MSS.; this was followed by the French and other European bestiary writers. It is not the earliest form in which it appeared, but it is the form with which we come mostly in contact.

Taking as a basis the text of the Bestiary printed in the Appendix to the *Opera Dogmatica* of Hugo de Sancto Victore,¹ with such small emendations as other manuscripts suggest, the Latin versions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries give the following account:

‘And there is another animal which is called “ant-lion”, because it is either the lion of the ants or at all events equally ant and lion. For it is a little animal and such a foe to ants that it hides itself in the dust and kills the ants as they pass carrying their [348] corn. Accordingly it is called both lion and ant, because as the lion is stronger than other animals, so is this creature stronger than other ants’, or as it is more completely expressed in other manuscripts : ‘It is called both lion and ant, because, while to other animals it is only an ant, to ants themselves it is as it were a lion.’

The texts of the Latin Bestiaries follow very closely the description

¹ ‘De bestiis et aliis rebus,’ Lib. II, cap. 29. Text in Migne's *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, vol. clxxvii, col. 75.

given by Isidore in his *Etymology*² and Rabanus in his *De Universo*,³ who in their turn followed that given by Gregory in his *Moralia* in Job.⁴ The passage in Job in which the ant-lion occurs is in chap. iv, verse 11, but only in the Greek text : *μυρμηκολέων ὥλετο παρὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βοράν*. In the Vulgate it reads as: ‘tigris periit, eo quod non haberet praedam’, and in the Authorised and Revised versions: ‘the old lion perisheth for lack of prey’. Gregory does not seem to be dismayed at this duplication of the animal in question, but boldly duplicates his argument to match, and consequently Job has a very bad time. In Section 39, under the heading : ‘Tigris varia ac rapax hypocritas apte significat’, Gregory employs the tiger, a spotted animal, as a symbol of hypocrites and dissemblers, and in particular of the blessed Job ‘marked with the stamp of changeableness or covered with the spots of dissimulation’. The spots or stripes of such beasts were freely used by early commentators to signify men stained with the spots or vices of hypocrisy, and Gregory tells us that, while every dissembler assumes some virtues in hypocrisy, and secretly gives way to vicious habits, yet concealed vices speedily break out upon the surface. ‘For truly every hypocrite is a tiger, in that while he derives a pure colour from pretence, he is striped, as it were with the intermediate blackness of vicious habits’; and after giving various instances he concludes: ‘And this same tiger seizes the prey, in that he usurps to himself the glory of human praise. For every hypocrite, in counterfeiting the life of righteousness, seizes for himself the praise that belongs to the righteous, that is, carries off what belongs to another. Thus Eliphaz, who knew that blessed Job had walked in ways worthy to be praised in the time of his well-being, concluded from the stroke that came after that he had maintained these in hypocrisy, saying: “The tiger perisheth for lack of prey”, that is, that when stricken by God he had lost the favourable regard of men’.

In Section 40 Gregory adapts his comments to the ant lion of the Greek version, with the heading : ‘Myrmecoleon eos adumbrat [349] qui timidi in fortiores, audaces in parvos sunt’. ‘For’, he says, ‘the ant-lion is a very little creature, a foe to ants, which hides itself under the dust and kills the ants laden with corn and devours them when killed.’ Now *μυρμηκολέων* is rendered in the Latin tongue either the ants’ lion or more precisely an ant and a lion at once. It is rightly called an ant and a lion, because with reference to winged creatures or any other little

² Book XII, ch. 3. Text in Migne, vol. lxxxii, Col 441.

³ Book VIII, ch. 2. Text in Migne, vol. cxi, col. 228.

⁴ Book V, ch. 20, sec. 40.

animals it is an ant, but in relation to the ants themselves it is a lion. For it devours these like a lion, but by the other sort it is devoured as an ant. When then Eliphaz says : 'The ant-lion perisheth for lack of prey', what does he censure in the blessed Job under the name of ant-lion but his fearfulness on the one hand and his boldness on the other? As if he said to him in plain words 'Thou art not unjustly stricken; because thou hast shown thyself a coward towards those in high places and a bully towards those beneath thee', or in plainer terms: 'Fear made thee crouch towards the crafty; hardihood swelled thee towards the simple; but the "ant-lion" no longer hath prey, because in thy cowardly self-elation, being beaten down with blows, thou art stayed from doing injury to others'.

In Section 43 Gregory applies his moral in a different way. Under the heading: 'Satan et leo recte vocatur et tigris et myrmecoleon,' &c., he designates Satan as a lion for his cruelty (verse 10) and a tiger for the variousness of his cunning, and with much picturesque expression continues: 'This same creature, the ant-lion, which hides in the dust and kills the ants carrying their corn signifies the Apostate Angel, who being cast out of heaven upon the earth, besets the minds of the righteous in the very pathway of their practice, that is, providing for themselves the provender of good works; and whilst he overcomes them by his snares, he as it were kills them by surprise as ants carrying their corn. And like the ant-lion he is strong to encounter those that yield to him, but is weak against such as resist him, for if consent be yielded to his persuasions, like a lion he can never be sustained, but if resistance be offered, like an ant he is ground in the dust'.⁵

It will be seen then that there was a definite symbolic meaning attached to the ant-lion by Gregory, and in more than one direction; but all based on the idea that it was regarded on the one hand as a predatory creature and on the other as a victim of [350] larger creatures than itself. This is however not the whole story, as will be seen when we come to deal with the eastern versions.

Illustrations of the ant-lion are conspicuous by their absence, the only one that I am acquainted with in a Latin manuscript being in MS. Gg-6-5 in the University Library, Cambridge (fig. 1). It is a bestiary of the fifteenth century based on the *De Proprietatibus Rerum* of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and being late, displays some variations from the earlier versions. The text runs thus:

⁵ See translation in Pusey's *Library of the Fathers*, vol. i, p. 270. A summary of the arguments used by Gregory is given by Petrus de Mora in his commentary on the passage in Job. It is included in the Clavis of St. Melito, ch. xlvii, under the heading of 'tiger'. See J. B. Pitra, *Spicilegium Solesmense*, vol. iii, p. 62.



Fig. 1. Ant-lion and ant. MS. Gg-6-5. University Library, Cambridge.

‘The Ant-lion has got its name from “ant” and “lion”, as Isidore says in his 12th Book (of the Etymology) it is both ant and lion. It is a little animal very dangerous to ants, for entering into their granaries by stealth, it consumes the corn of the ants; and so, by abstracting their victuals, is the cause whereby the simple-minded ants come to their death through hunger. But by other animals it is devoured as an ant, nor is it able to protect itself by its own strength. And it is a kind of spider—see under “Spider”. The same is called mirmicaleon, a kind of animal a foe to ants, because it kills and eats them, etc.’ With the exception of the last few words this account follows Bartholomew Anglicus very closely.⁶ If we turn to the reference given about the spider⁷ we find:

‘There is another kind of spider by name “mirmicaleon” or “mirmiceon”, which is also called by the name “formicaleon”. It is like an ant with a white head, and it has a black body, marked with white spots. And the bite of this creature is as [351] painful as that of wasps. And it is called ant-lion because it hunts ants like a lion and sucks out the juices from their bodies, but it is devoured by sparrows and other birds just as an ant.’⁸

The illustration is of a very simple character and shows an ant-lion and ant facing each other, their attitudes being apparently antagonistic. The ant is fairly drawn, but it has eight legs instead of six and very poorly developed antennae. The artist was perhaps at a loss how to portray the ant-lion itself, and seems to have fallen back on the

⁶ Book XVIII, ch. 52.

⁷ Book XVIII, ch. 10.

⁸ The two editions consulted are Cologne (? 1470) and Nuremberg, 1483.

alternative description that it was a kind of spider, the form of which he knew well. Its body is plump, but the legs unsatisfactory.

The French versions follow the Latin closely. In the rhyming Bestiary of Philip de Thaun, c. 1121, the account occupies seven lines with heading in Latin, but the actual description occupies only five lines:

Heading : Est formicaleon invisum⁹ animal formicis.

‘There is another beast—which of ants is chief
It is the ant-lion—that is its name.
Among ants it is the lion—and so it gets its name.
It is a little beast—it hides in the dust.
In the path the ant goes—it does it deadly harm.
But of this matter—I shall discourse no more.
For I must begin another—of which I want to treat.’¹⁰

In the popular rhyming version of Guillaume le Clerc of the thirteenth century, the text occupies twelve lines:

‘There is still another ant,
Not of those which I have told you,
Which has the name ant-lion.
Of the ants this is the lion,
It is the smallest of all,
The boldest and wisest.
Other ants it hates bitterly;
In the dust quite deftly
It hides; so clever it is.
When the others come laden,
It jumps out of the dust upon them,
It attacks and kills them.’¹¹

[352] There is no moral attached to the ant-lion in either of these two versions, nor do I know of any illustrations. In the Picardy prose Bestiary of the beginning of the fourteenth century¹² the ant-lion is not mentioned, nor is there any reference to it in the Italian Bestiaries cited by Max Goldstaub and R. Wendreiner.¹³

⁹ *invisum* = *infestum*; in MS. 249 Merton Coll. the reading is *minimum*.

¹⁰ MS. Nero A v (B.M.); see also translation of this manuscript in Thos. Wright’s *Popular Treatises on Science*, 1846. Compare MS. 249 Merton Coll.; there are variations in the text, but the sense is the same.

¹¹ MS. Vespasian A vii (B.M.); MSS. in Bibl. Nat. Paris, transcribed by Cahier in *Mélanges d’Archéologie*, vol. ii, p. 195; MS. Egerton 613 (B.M.), text in Dr. Reinsch’s *Le Bestiaire*; Leipzig, 1890; the differences in the texts are not important.

¹² MS. 3516, Arsenal Library, Paris.

¹³ *Ein toscovenezianischer Bestiarius*, 1892.

Turning now to the eastern versions, we find the story of the ant-lion in the Greek, Arabian, Syrian, Armenian, and Aethiopian texts, but it is on quite different lines. The Greek texts which we possess are not any earlier than the Latin texts of the west, but they do undoubtedly reflect the form in which the story appeared when the original Physiologus was compiled, although we do not know exactly when that was. The inclusion of the ‘myrmecoleon’ or ant-lion in the original Bestiary was certainly due to its presence in the passage in Job, that is to the LXX.¹⁴ For the Greek texts we may refer first to that printed by J. B. Pitra in *Spicilegium Solesmense*, vol. iii, p. 354, as the text of the *Physiologus veterum gnosticorum*.

Heading: About the Ant-lion.

‘Eliphaz the Themanite says: “The ant-lion perisheth for lack of prey”. The Naturalist speaks thus about the ant-lion, that its father eats flesh and its mother herbs. If then they shall have produced the ant-lion they produce it possessed of two natures. It has the fore parts of a lion and the hind parts of an ant; so that it cannot eat flesh because of the nature of its mother (or herbs, because of the nature of its father), and therefore it perishes for lack of food.’

‘Thus every man who is double-minded is unstable in all his ways. It is not meet to travel two roads or to speak with two minds in thy prayer; it is not well that in one breath thou shouldest say “yea” and not “yea”; but let thy “yea” be “yea” and thy “nay” “nay”’.¹⁵

The Greek Bestiary at Smyrna, transcribed by Josef Strzygowski,¹⁶ contains a similar description and moral, and has the advantage of being illustrated; but unfortunately the author has not reproduced the miniature of the ant lion, only that of the Sermo. His description however indicates that there are three pairs of ant-lions shown, composed in front as lions and running off as ants behind. They are lying opposite to each other with gold wings symmetrically arranged, and are coloured red above, brown in the middle, and blue underneath.

[353] The illustration of the Sermo shows in the upper part the holy Athanasius as bishop, with nimbus, standing before a temple and addressing three men. In the lower part on the left is a man who carries a purse in his left hand and turns towards the right with his right hand raised. A devil (damaged) leads him to two women clad in long robes worked in gold and wearing arm rings; they have fan-shaped head-dresses, white with a red pattern and horizontal gold band. Both turn to the left to the

¹⁴ LXX is the Septuagint (“70”) version of the Bible –digital editor.

¹⁵ Matt. v. 37 ; Jas. v. 12 ; 2 Cor. i. 17-19.

¹⁶ *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus*, Leipzig, 1899.

man, and the foremost appears to display pieces of gold in her open hand.

The scene relates to the injunction that men should not go two ways or be double-tongued in their prayer. The one way is provided through the agency of the saints who speak to believers; the other way through the leadership of the devil to women of ill fame.

The Syrian text is given by O. G. Tychsen¹⁷ and agrees with the Greek texts, but he does not give the moral. He compares the descriptions given in the so-called commentary of Eustathius on the Hexameron¹⁸ and the pseudo-Jerome, and adds:

‘All the commentators translate the word “lajisch” in the Hebrew text properly as “lion”, but the LXX as “ant-lion” and Jerome as “tiger”. The ant-lion is really a small animal which destroys ants by forming a mound of sand like a funnel and hiding in it; and when the ants cross over it it overwhelms them with sand and devours them.’

In addition to the above the text of a manuscript at Leiden is given by Professor J. P. N. Land.¹⁹ The heading runs: ‘About the ant-lion, which has a double form’. The description corresponds with the Greek version, but the moral is differently expressed:

‘Likewise everyman for whom supplication to God has been made, who works the works of Satan, is without the God to whom prayer has been made for him; and so at the same time that he abandons the works of Satan he lacks the life and health which belong to God.’

The Armenian version is given by J. B. Pitra²⁰ and a French translation by Cahier²¹ made by an Armenian. The manuscripts do not appear to be earlier than the fourteenth century. The moral runs: ‘But as for thee, my brother, do not proceed by two [354] roads; one cannot serve at one time God and Mammon or have two ways of thinking or of speech.’

The Ethiopian version is given by F. Hommel,²² with heading ‘About the Ant-lion, which is a kind of ant’. The description and sermo are on the same lines as the foregoing.

The description of the ant-lion in the eastern versions cannot be attributed with any safety to Eustathius, and no doubt had its origin in the early Greek Bestiary. The compiler would be quite capable of making it up from the material provided by classical writers. It was not until Gregory’s time, as far as we may judge, that the cleavage took

¹⁷ *Physiologus Syrus*, ch. xii, Rostoch, 1795.

¹⁸ See translation by Leo Matins, Leiden, 1629. Allatius attributes this commentary to Eustathius upon very slender evidence.

¹⁹ Cod. Lugd. Bat. 66, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. iv, p. 31.

²⁰ *Spicilegium Solesmense*, vol. iii, p. 385.

²¹ *Nouveaux Mélanges d’Archéologie*, vol. i, p. 130.

²² *Die Aethiopische Uebersetzung des Physiologus*, Leipzig, 1877.

place between the eastern and western interpretations, for while eastern imagination and love of the picturesque nursed the idea that the ant-lion was composed of ant and lion. Gregory and the more sober western commentators adopted the view that the ant-lion was no more than a large ant which preyed on smaller ants. This passed into Isidore's etymology, which set the seal upon it for the future, for Isidore is quoted as an authority more than any one else in the Bestiaries.

We will now follow up the eastern story and see what foundation there was for the adoption of the idea that there was a creature composed partly of ant and partly of lion. It is of great importance, as throwing light upon the apparently incomprehensible course followed by the LXX in adopting the *μυρμηκολέων* in Job iv, verse 11.

There is evidence derived from classical writers that there was a four-footed animal of some kind which was called *μύρμηξ* or ant. It has a picturesque story, which passed through various hands and eventually found a place in the Bestiary alongside the other story of the ant-lion of the west. The animal in question is there called the Ethiopian ant, but in classical writers usually passes under the name of Indian ant. The earliest source of information that we have is Herodotus (fifth century B.C.). According to him²³ the scene is laid in a northern district of India, where there is a desert in which ants abound in size somewhat less than dogs but larger than foxes. They burrow under ground and heap up the sand which contains gold. The Indians go to the desert to collect this sand, each man provided with three camels harnessed together side by side, that is on either side a male, and in the middle a female on which he rides. The female must only just have been parted from her recently-born young. The Indians being thus equipped set out at such a time that they will arrive at the hottest hour of the day, for during [355] the greatest heat the ants hide underground. They bring with them sacks which they fill with the sand and then return as fast as they can. For the ants detect them by the smell and pursue them, so that if the Indians do not get a good start while the ants are assembling, not a man could be saved. The male camels in time slacken their pace, but the females mindful of their young hasten on; and in this way the Indians return safely with the gold.

This story passed through various hands, including those of Nearchus (fourth century B.C.) and Megasthenes (third century B.C.), and their versions are given to us by Strabo (first century B.C.).²⁴ Nearchus is quoted as having seen the skins of ants which dig up gold,

²³ Book III, 102-5.

²⁴ Book XV, ch. 1, 44.

as large as the skins of leopards. Megasthenes, who gives more details, reports that in a mountainous district towards the East where the Derdae, a populous nation of the Indians, lived, there was a plateau of about 3,000 stadia in circumference, below which were mines containing gold, which the ants, in size not less than foxes, dig up. They are exceedingly swift. In winter they dig holes and pile up the earth in heaps at the mouths. The neighbouring people go by stealth with beasts of burden to obtain it, for if it is done openly the ants fight furiously, pursuing those that run away, and if they catch them they kill them together with their beasts. But to prevent discovery the gold-hunters distribute in various parts the flesh of wild beasts, and when the ants are dispersed they take the gold-dust, and dispose of it in its rude state at any price to merchants.

Pliny²⁵ does not add much, but mentions the horns of an Indian ant suspended in the temple of Hercules at Erythrae as being regarded as quite miraculous for their size. He evidently borrowed from Megasthenes, as the narrative corresponds in many particulars, and describes the animal as having the colour of a cat and being as large as an Egyptian wolf. The beasts of burden employed by the hunters are camels. Aelian²⁶ says that the Indian ants which guard the gold never cross the river Campilinus; and elsewhere²⁷ when speaking of the young of wild animals groups together wolves, tigers, ants, and panthers. Arrian²⁸ simply repeats Nearchus and Megasthenes. The grammarian Agatharchides (second century B.C.) in his description of the lions of Arabia actually mentions ant lions by their Greek name (*mirmecoleones*) and says that in appearance most of them differ in no way from the other lions;²⁹ and Strabo when describing the coasts adjacent to the Arabian Gulf says that the country abounds [356] with elephants and lions called ants, the skins of which are of a golden colour, but they are more bare than the lions of Arabia.³⁰ Aelian³¹ speaks of the same ants as being native to Babylonia. Apparently it was due to Solinus (A. D. 80) that the abode of these so-called ants was changed to Ethiopia, for in his chapter on that country and its marvels³² he describes them as being there and resembling a large dog in shape

²⁵ Book XI, 37 (31).

²⁶ Book III, ch. 4.

²⁷ Book VII, ch. 47.

²⁸ *Indika*, ch. 15.

²⁹ See Müller's *Geographi Graeci Minores*, vol. i, p. 158.

³⁰ Book XVI, chs. 4 and 15.

³¹ Book XVII, ch. 42.

³² *Polyhistor*, ch. xxxiii.

and with the feet of a lion. Dion Chrysostom³³ (A.D. 50-117) says that the heaps which the ants throw up consist of gold the purest and brightest in all the world. They are in regular order like hillocks of gold-dust, 'whereby all the plain is made effulgent. It is difficult therefore to look towards the sun, and many who have attempted to do this have thereby lost their eyesight'. Those who go to plunder the heaps cross the intervening desert on wagons, to which they have yoked their swiftest horses. The ants on discovering them pursue and fight them until they conquer or die, for of all animals they are the most courageous. It appears that they understand the worth of gold and will sacrifice their lives rather than part with it.³⁴

These ants are mentioned in Alexander's Romance. In the course of his wanderings he arrives at a desert, in which are 'ants' which carry off horses and men, and which were chased away by his soldiers by the employment of fire. Particulars of these and other monstrous creatures which he meets with are recorded in his letters to his mother Olympias and Aristotle, under the general title of 'Marvels of India'.³⁵ The story appears in a kindred treatise entitled 'De rebus in oriente mirabilibus', of which there are two Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in the British Museum, viz. Cotton Tiberius B v and Cotton Vitellius A xv, both illustrated. They date from the latter part of the tenth century. In the Tiberius MS. the text is duplicated, being in both Latin and Anglo-Saxon, and there are two illustrations of these ants. The text says that they are as big as dogs, are red and black, and have feet like locusts. The gold-seekers bring both male and female camels and load the gold upon the females. These then hasten back to their young foals, but the males left behind are discovered by the ants and devoured. And while they are busy with them the females get back across the river with the men, for 'they are so swift that you might think they were flying'.

The artist has carefully followed his text. In the first illustration [357] (Plate 1 (XXXVIII, 1)), within a pink border, we see the desert with mountains partly blue and partly flesh-coloured. In the upper part are two red dog-like animals, viz. the ants, grubbing up nuggets of gold with their snouts, the nuggets being visible beneath their feet. In the lower part two more 'ants' are doing the same, the head and fore legs of one being down the hole. Above the sky-line is brilliant green. In the second (Plate 2 (XXXVIII, 2)), within an olive green border, a river runs diagonally from top to bottom, coloured blue. On the left is the

³³ Oratio 35.

³⁴ For translations and notes, see J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian*.

³⁵ See Julius Zacker, *Pseudocallisthenes*, p. 135.

desert, flesh-coloured, on which the male camel which has been left behind stands attacked by three similar red 'ants', which fly at its neck, belly, and hind-leg. Meanwhile the gold-seeker is returning across the river on the female which is bridled. The saddle is visible behind and a bag of gold hangs at the rider's knee. On the right bank the foal stands patiently (or impatiently) awaiting its mother's return. The camels are orange-red, the foal flesh-tinted. Above the sky-line is a rich red.

In the Vitellius MS., which has been damaged by fire, all events are combined in one picture (Plate 3 (XXXIX)). On the left at the top is a hole in the ground with about twenty lumps of gold lying about. On either side of the hole is a rough animal more or less like a dog with a lump of gold in its teeth. These are the 'ants' guarding the gold. On the right is the male camel tethered to a tree (damaged). Three 'ants' are attacking it, flying at its belly, back, and flank. Across the middle of the picture is a winding river, and below this a conventional tree or plant with flower, growing out of a red pot set in a three-legged iron ring. On the right of this and tethered to it by a rope round its neck is the foal, and on the left stands a man clad in a tunic and with him the female camel raised upon a mound or sand-hill. On its back is a square howdah-like structure in which are visible nine lumps of gold gained from the ants. It is probably a box or case on which the rider sits, as the camel is bridled. The camels are badly drawn, and there is much blue, yellow, and pink colouring.³⁶

This story passed into the Bestiary and took its place alongside that of the ant-lion of the west, but in a still more attractive form. Using the Latin version again in the appendix to Hugo, it runs as follows:

'And they say that there are in Ethiopia ants as big as a dog, which dig up the sand which contains gold with their feet; and they keep guard over it that no one rob them, and if any come to rob them, they pursue them with fatal results. But those who [358] mean to steal the gold bring mares with their young foals and starve them for three days; they then tie up the foals on the banks of the river which runs between them and the ants, and having put pack-saddles on their backs drive the mares across the stream. And they graze in the fields on the further side. But when the ants see the pack-saddles and receptacles³⁷ upon their backs they collect the golden sand and put it in them, believing that they are hiding it there. And when the day is drawing to its close and the mares have got a good bellyful and are laden with gold, they hear their little foals hinnying through hunger, and so they hurry back to them (across the stream) with

³⁶ See T. O. Cockayne's *Narratiunculae Anglice Conscripae*, 1861, p. 63, for texts.

³⁷ *Scrinia et clitellas*.

much gold.’³⁸

There does not seem to be any *sermo* attached to this story in the Latin bestiaries, nor are there any illustrations, which is much to be deplored. It is probable that the ecclesiastical commentators and bestiary writers concentrated on the story of the common ant as affording better material on which to base a moral, especially as they were able to use Solomon’s admonition to the sluggard as a starting-point; and so they neglected the Ethiopian ant and the artists followed suit.

The French bestiaries follow the Latin, and as usual Isidore is the authority. In Philip de Thaun’s rhyming version of the twelfth century the story is told in twenty-one lines with heading in Latin. In the manuscript at the British Museum, the latter is badly mutilated:

‘Est quedam maneries formicarum primum in mundum [359] canum,’ whereas in the Merton College manuscript the heading is:

‘Et est quedam maneries formicarum in Ethiopia in modum canum’, which is much more correct.

The first two lines run:

Uncor Ysodorus de altre furmi dit plus
En Ethiopie en sunt ki del gran deceu sunt.³⁹

The incidents correspond with the Latin version, but instead of a pack-saddle there is mentioned *un petit decolez* on the backs of the mares. This word is not in Godefroi. In the Merton College manuscript it reads as *berchelet*, which appears in Godefroi as *berselet*, a diminutive of *berceau*, a cradle; and it is rendered by Thos. Wright as ‘a little basket’.

In Guillaume’s rhyming version of the thirteenth century the story occupies forty-eight lines. The resemblance of the ants to dogs is fully

³⁸ In MS. Gg-6-5, the fifteenth-century Bestiary at Cambridge, the animals employed are camels. The story also appears in Sir John Maundevile’s Travels. The scene is laid in Ceylon and the ants are called ‘pismyres’. ‘In the yle is a great hyll of golde that pismyres kepe, & they do fine golde from the other that is not fine golde and the pismyres are as great as houndes, so that no man dare come there for drede of pismyres that should assayle them so that men may not worke in that gold nor get thereof but by subtiltie, and therefore whan it is righte hote the pismyres hide them in the earth from undern to none of the daye, and than men of the cuntry take cameles and dormedaries & other beastes & go thether and charge them with gold and go away fast or the pismyres come out of the earth. And other times whan it is not so hot and the pismyres hide them not, they take mares that have foles, & they lay upon these mares two long vessels as it were two smale barels and the mouth upwards and drive them thether and holde their foles at home, and whan the pismyres se these vessels they springe therein, for they have of kinde to leve no hole nor pyt open, and anone they fyl these vessels with golde, and whan men think that the vessels be full, they take the foles and bringe them as nere as they dare, and then they whine, and the mares heare them, and anon they come to their foles, and so they take the gold, for these pismyres will suffer beastes for to go among them but no men.’ The Voiage and trauaile of Syr John Maundevile, Knight, London, 1568.

³⁹ MS. Nero A v, ‘del gran deceu’ = ‘de la grandeur de chien’.

expressed:

De chiens ont tote la faiture E sont ben de for estature.

The receptacles on the pack-saddles are called *escrins*, and are:

Alsi luisanz com est or fins,

which presumably is part of the deception, as it is before they are filled.
The mares return laden

Del bon or precios e cher.

for the enrichment of their masters, but on the other hand

Les foriniz en sont dolanz,

in other words ‘are very sick’. There is no moral.⁴⁰



Fig. 2. Legend of Ethiopian Ant. MS. 14969 Français. Bibl. Nat. Paris.

Manuscripts of Guillaume are invaluable as they have illustrations of the story, though only to a limited extent. Perhaps the best is to be found in MS. 14969 Français, Bibl. Nat., Paris, (fig. 2). The miniature is divided into three parts. On the left is an ant-heap with about a dozen ants upon it. On the right is standing corn with many ants passing to and fro between it and an ant-heap, and climbing up the stalks; these two relate to the story of the common ant. In the middle is illustrated the story of the Ethiopian ant. A mare coloured blue is feeding. Between its [360] legs is a heap of sand crowded with ants which are running up and down busily filling the pockets or other receptacles attached to the pack-saddle with gold-dust. The ants are not uniformly drawn; three at least are like little terriers with curly tails. The artist has

⁴⁰ MSS. Egerton 613, Vespasian A vii, and other manuscripts have been consulted.

heaped up the sand conveniently to enable the ants to climb up to the pack-saddle. The lower part of the miniature is occupied by the river which rises at the left margin and flows along to the right, a pretty little artistic arrangement. Outside the panel on the left a man clad in a yellow tunic stands with a foal beside him also blue. He carries a large axe and beckons. In MS. 1444 Français (Bibl. Nat., Paris) one of the four illustrations shows the Ethiopian ants as a pair of big yellow dogs standing upon a purple-pink hill facing each other. There are no other details. In MS. Roy 2 B vii (B.M.) there are two illustrations of ants. One of them shows about fifteen very badly-drawn ants on an ant-hill, which is flanked by trees. These are the common ants. The other (fig. 3) shows three ants, drawn as large dogs, upon a hill. They are barking at two armed men who are attacking them. These are the Ethiopian ants. The artists of the French bestiaries seem to have been attracted here and there by this story, which certainly lends itself to picturesque treatment, but the details are meagre.



Fig. 3. Legend of Ethiopian Ant. MS. Roy. 2 B vii.

As to the identity of this so-called Indian ant we are wholly in the dark. Apparently there was a four-footed animal of some kind which had a resemblance to a lion and which burrowed in the ground like an ant, and so may have acquired the name of 'ant-lion'. It is difficult to believe that it can have had any resemblance to an ant. Very few people seem to have seen it, [361] and in course of time popular imagination invested it with the two-fold nature of ant and lion; and so arose the story that, its father being a lion, it could not eat herbs, and its mother being an ant it could not eat flesh, and consequently it died of starvation. This creature must be the original of the *μυρμηκολέων* of the LXX; but in view of the agreement by all commentators that the

Hebrew word *lajisch* denotes a lion or old lion, it is reasonable to ask why the LXX did not so translate it, and why Jerome and the Vulgate render it a tiger. Putting aside the possibility that the LXX had a different Hebrew text to work on which contained some other word than *lajisch*, the probability is that the LXX purposely employed the ant-lion because they thought it suited the context so well. They would be aware of any current story that the lion-like *μύρμηξ* of the classical writers like Herodotus or Megasthenes could not eat flesh like its father or herbs like its mother, and so died of hunger, or in their own words ‘for lack of prey’, and preferred to make use of it. It may be argued that ‘lion’ suited the context quite well enough. Granted, then the only thing we can do is to credit the LXX with thinking that they knew better than we, and be satisfied that they used the fabled ‘ant-lion’ in preference to the ‘lion’ because of the striking defects of its digestion.

Jerome’s translation of ‘tiger’ is difficult to understand. Apparently he was not satisfied with the translation of the LXX, perhaps on account of uncertainty regarding the identity of the ant-lion, or through ignorance of the allusion. In these circumstances we should expect him to have used simply ‘lion’, and the fact that he did not do so rather raises the question of the original [362] texts that the LXX and he employed. Into this phase of the matter I am not competent to go.

There was considerable speculation afterwards about the nature of the ‘ant-lion’. Albertus Magnus (thirteenth century) in his treatise, *De parvis animalibus sanguinem non habentibus*,⁴¹ after describing the ant-lion as an insect, and its habits from personal observation, adds: ‘If we can have any belief in those things which are written in the letter of Alexander about the marvels of India, then there are in India ants as big as dogs and foxes, having four legs and hooked claws; and they guard the mountains of gold and destroy men who come to get it. But this has not been sufficiently tested by experience.’ Bochart, at a much later date, in his chapter on the ant-lion,⁴² says that many people are anxious to know what animal is intended by the LXX as the *μυρμηκολέων*, and devotes a long chapter to a survey of the information obtainable from classical and later sources. He doubts whether the Arabian and Babylonian ant-lions mentioned by Agatharchides, Strabo, and Elian are the same animals as the Indian ants which dig up the gold; and thinks Solinus has no justification for placing them in Aethiopia. He considers that the opinions expressed are only founded on report, and reserves judgement ‘until somebody describes this animal more exactly

⁴¹ *De Animalibus*, Book XXVI, Tract. I, ch. 20.

⁴² *Hieroicoicon*, Book VI, ch. 4.

after having actually seen it’.

We must now turn once more to the west, for the final stage of our inquiry. The story developed there on different lines as we have seen, with the result that we have the name ‘ant-lion’ applied to two totally different creatures. While the east conceived the ant-lion as a composite animal and blessed it as such, Gregory and those who followed him adopted the view that the ant-lion was simply ‘the lion among the ants’, that is, a large ant which preyed upon the smaller. Vincent de Beauvais (1190- 1264) tells us⁴³ that the ant-lion, so-called because it is the lion of the ants, is a worm of the family of the ants, but much larger. So long as it is small and weak, it assumes a weak and peaceful air. But when it has grown strong it disdains its former associates and joins up with a crowd of bigger ants. And so increasing in daring, it conceals itself and lies in wait for the ants which are working for their own common good; so it is that this creature which in summer time has laid up no store of provisions for itself, snatches in winter from the others the fruit of their labours and destroys them. The description which Gregory gives of its [363] habits is extraordinarily accurate, and we may be tempted to think that in his day the name was applied to a particular species of large ants, but this would be difficult to verify.

The ant-lion is found in numbers in the tropics and also in the neighbourhood of the Mediterranean. In its larval form it measures from $\frac{3}{8}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in length, and is a repulsive creature with a flattened oval body and enormous head and jaws. The specimen illustrated (Plate 4 (XL)) is the *Palpares libelluloides* of Linnaeus, and is a native of Southern Europe (Mediterranean). It is a large kind, $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long, and develops into a beautiful lace-winged fly something like a dragon-fly. The male measures about $4\frac{1}{8}$ in. across the wings, the female about 5 in.⁴⁴ There were some ant-lions on view in the Caird Insect House at the Zoological Gardens in 1914, but they were so buried in the sand that I could not see them; and on a further visit I was told that they had died. There are, however, plenty of specimens in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington; and I here take the opportunity of expressing my thanks to Mr. G. J. Arrow for the valuable help he gave me in selecting specimens and for facilities for photographing them.

The ant-lion in nature is a wicked creature, and its method of capturing its prey diabolical. In a sandy spot frequented by ants it

⁴³ *Speculum Doctrinale*, Book XVI, ch. 117.

⁴⁴ A good illustration of an adult fly may be seen in *The Living Animals of the World*, vol. ii, p. 700.

hollows out a funnel-like depression by moving backwards round and round, using its head as a shovel. It then buries itself in the sand at the bottom with only its pincer-like horns projecting. An ant comes along over the top and slips part of the way down on the loose sand. It tries to recover itself and climb up again, but the old devil at the bottom flings up a shower of sand with its flat head on to the ant and knocks it down again. This is repeated until the poor thing falls to the bottom exhausted and is devoured. The scene is illustrated in a fanciful way in Princess Mary's Gift-book, but more fully in an illustration in Roësel's *Insecten-Belustigung*, a monthly magazine devoted to insect studies in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ In this work we have a detailed description and five full-page illustrations, the first of which is reproduced here (Plate 5 (XLI)). It shows in a series the operations of the ant-lion, first in forming its pit and then in catching its prey, as has been indicated.

In these notes I have endeavoured to give the life history of the ant-lion in its legendary form. Not being a naturalist or acquainted with India I can make no suggestion as to the identity of the ant-lion which is said to be like a dog. All the attempts [364] which have been made are so vague that they are not of much value. But despite this difficulty I think there is a fair case in favour of the employment by the LXX of the dog-like *μυρμηκολέων* in Job, as explained by its legend.

In the case of the ant-lion of the west we are on safer ground, and if Gregory were here on earth he should I think be congratulated on the excellent definition of the creature which he has given in his *Moralia* in Job.

⁴⁵ Vol. iii, p. 101.

Plate 1 (XXXVIII, 1)



Fig 1. Legend of the Indian Ant. (1). MS. Cott. Tiberius B v

Plate 2 (XXXVIII, 2)



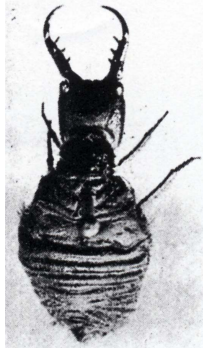
Fig 2. Legend of the Indian Ant. (2). MS. Cott. Tiberius B v

Plate 3 (XXXIX)

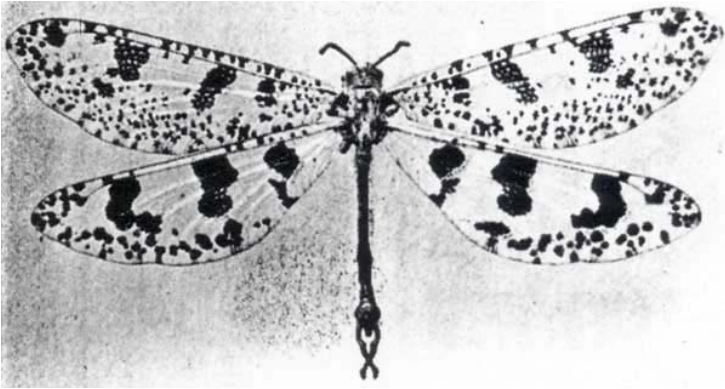


Legend of the Indian Ant. MS. Cott. Vitellius A xv

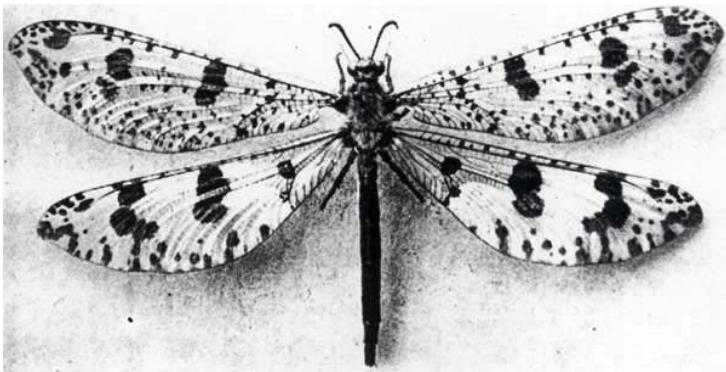
Plate 4 (XL)



Ant-lion. *Palpares libelluloides* (magnified)

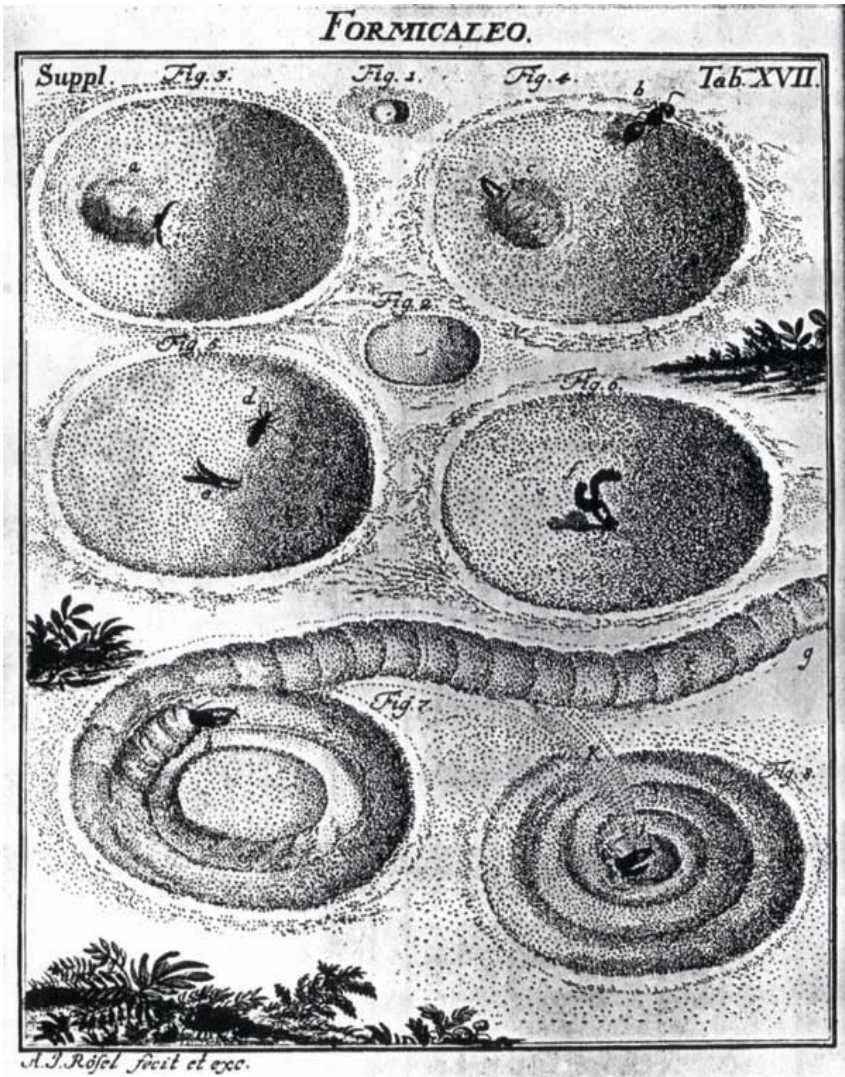


Ant-lion. Male fly



Ant-lion. Female fly

Plate 5 (XLI)



Ant-lion: its habits. From Roësel's *Insecten-Belustigung*.