

Eduqas Latin GCSE

Prescribed text for Component
3A: Latin Literature (Narratives)
Livy,
Hannibal crosses the Alps

N. B. The passages in italics are summaries of events to support understanding of the narrative. They are not part of the prescription.

This is the official examination text for the Eduqas Latin GCSE (2026-2027)

Eduqas 2026-2027 Latin Narratives 3A Prose

Hannibal crosses the Alps.

Livy 21. 1, 4, 22, 28, 32, 35-37

Rome fought three bitter wars with the Carthaginians. The most famous of which is probably the Second Punic War involving Hannibal and his famous crossing of the Alps in 218 BC. (The Carthaginians were descended from Phoenicians, hence, Punic.) The Roman historian Titus Livius (Livy) tells the story around 150 years after the event, when Hannibal's name could still instil fear in Romans, so close did they believe they had come to defeat. After his epic crossing of the Alps with around 37 elephants, only one of which survived, Hannibal inflicted several defeats on the Romans, culminating in the battle at Cannae in 216 BC. During this campaign, it is said that Rome lost one fifth of its entire population of male citizens. There was panic in the city. However, Hannibal did not march on Rome; instead, he spent time trying to gain the support of Italian cities and the march on Rome did not happen until 211 when two heavy rainstorms stopped the fighting. Hannibal later withdrew his forces and after various battles in southern Italy, where the Romans were able to retrieve their superiority, Hannibal was recalled to North Africa in 203. After failed negotiations with the Romans, the Carthaginian forces were defeated by Scipio at the battle of Zama in 202. Hannibal spent some time as a magistrate in Carthage and then went into voluntary exile in Asia Minor sometime after 195. He died around 183, possibly of poison after discovering that the castle where he lived was surrounded by Roman soldiers.

A

I can say at the beginning of this part of my work, what many historians have stated at the beginning of the whole of theirs, that the war I am about to describe was the most memorable of all; that is the war which was waged against the Roman people when Hannibal was leader of the Carthaginians. For neither have any states or peoples who met in battle been stronger in resources nor have they been stronger in manpower or might, and they were not at all inexpert in the arts of war as they had met in the first Punic war, and the varying fortunes of war were so doubtful that those who had been in danger were those who conquered. They even fought with greater hatred than most men, with the Romans being indignant at an unprovoked attack by a beaten enemy and with the Phoenicians (Carthaginians) believing that they were being ruled by an arrogant and avaricious people. To demonstrate this, there is a story that after the campaign in Africa, when Hannibal's father, Hamilcar, was preparing to make a sacrifice, Hannibal, being about nine years old, begged him in his childish way to take him to Spain. Hamilcar led him to the altar and having laid his hand upon the sacred objects, made him swear that when he was old enough, he would be an enemy of the Roman people.

Hamilcar's early death in 220BC before Hannibal was old enough to take command, meant that his son-in-law, Hasdrubal took over and pursued a policy of peaceful, negotiated expansion. However, this did not save him from an early and violent death and Hannibal was the army's choice as successor. Years before, Hannibal, when still quite young was, at Hasdrubal's command, summoned to join the army in Spain.

B

missus Hannibal in Hispaniam primo statim adventu omnem exercitum in se convertit; Hamilcarem iuvenem redditum esse sibi veteres milites crediderunt; eundem vigorem in vultu vimque in oculis, habitum oris lineamentaue intuebantur. dein brevi effecit ut pater in se minimum momentum ad favorem conciliandum esset. numquam ingenium idem ad res diversissimas, parendum atque imperandum, habilis fuit. itaque haud facile discerneres utrum imperatori an exercitui carior esset; neque Hasdrubal alium quemquam praeficere malebat ubi quid fortiter ac strenue agendum esset, neque milites alio duce plus confidebant aut audebant. plurimum audaciae ad pericula capessenda, plurimum consilii inter ipsa pericula erat. nullo labore aut corpus fatigari aut animus vinci poterat. caloris ac frigoris patientia par; cibi potionisque desiderio naturali, non voluptate modus finitus; vigiliarum somnique nec die nec nocte discriminata tempora; id quod gerendis rebus superesset quieti datum; ea neque molli strato neque silentio arcessita; multi saepe militari sagulo opertum humi iacentem inter custodias stationesque militum conspexerunt. vestitus nihil inter aequales excellens: arma atque equi conspiciebantur. equitum peditumque idem longe primus erat; princeps in proelium ibat, ultimus conserto proelio excedebat. has tantas viri virtutes ingentia vitia aequabant, inhumana crudelitas, perfidia plus quam Punica, nihil veri, nihil sancti, nullus deorum metus, nullum ius iurandum, nulla religio. cum hac indole virtutum atque vitiorum triennio sub Hasdrubale imperatore meruit, nulla re quae agenda videndaque magno futuro duci esset praetermissa.

From the beginning of his command, Hannibal behaved as though he had orders to make war on Rome. By 218 the Carthaginians controlled the land up to the Ebro river -all except Saguntum, an ally of Rome. Hannibal's siege and brutal sack of the city showed the Romans that he meant business.

C

Hannibal marched his army to the Ebro River and the coast. There, the story goes, in a dream he saw a young man of godlike appearance, who told him he had been sent by Jupiter to guide him to Italy and that he should follow him and never take his eyes off him. At first he was afraid but did not look left or right nor behind as he followed; then with natural human curiosity, since he had been forbidden to look back, he was unable to control his eyes. He saw, behind him, a snake of amazing size, bringing dreadful destruction to trees and bushes, and a storm-cloud with a thunderclap. He asked what the monster was and what it meant and learnt that it showed the destruction of Italy: he was told to proceed onwards and not enquire further but to allow fate to remain in darkness.

Meanwhile Cornelius Scipio had sailed with an army to Massilia (Marseilles) unaware, until he reached there, that Hannibal had begun to cross the river Rhône with his army.

D

I believe various methods were used for transporting the elephants across the river; there are certainly different accounts of how it was done. One account tells us that the elephants were gathered at the riverbank and one of them, the most ferocious, was goaded by his driver to pursue him into the river as he swam off, so that the rest of the herd followed, where the force of the current carried them to the further bank, as each one in terror lost their footing in the deep water. It is more generally agreed that they were carried across on rafts. This would seem to be the safer option and easier to believe. A raft 200 feet long and 50 feet wide was constructed and launched onto the river where it was tethered to the bank by several strong cables to prevent it being carried downstream. It was then covered with earth like a bridge so that the beasts would happily walk on it as on firm ground. Another raft, equally wide, was constructed, but of 100 feet in length, which was suitable for towing across the river, and was attached to the first raft. Some of the elephants, led by the females, were driven onto the raft and it was detached from the larger raft before being dragged across the river by light craft. The operation was repeated. They did not seem to be afraid while they were being driven onto the raft, but they showed fear when the raft was cast off and was carried into mid-stream. Those on the edge backed away, making the others afraid, until their terror itself quietened them as they looked at the water. Some of them panicked and fell into the river, but stabilised by their weight, and having thrown off their riders, they felt their way to shallow waters and made it to shore.

E

Hannibal campestri maxime itinere ad Alpes cum bona pace incolarum ea loca Gallorum pervenit. tum, quamquam fama prius, qua incerta in maius vero ferri solent, praecepta res erat, tamen ex propinquo visa montium altitudo nivesque caelo prope immixtae, tecta informia imposita rupibus, pecora iumentaque torrida frigore, homines intonsi et inculti, animalia inanimaque omnia rigentia gelu, cetera visu quam dictu foediora terrorem renovaverunt. erigentibus in primos agmen clivos apparuerunt imminentes tumulos insidentes montani, qui, si valles occultiores insedissent, coorti ad pugnam repente ingentem fugam stragemque dedissent.

By means of a clever trick, Hannibal captured the high passes held by the local tribesmen. After a skirmish, he was able to continue his journey, only to encounter another tribe, which he just managed to defeat to allow his army to proceed.

F

nono die in iugum Alpium pervenerunt per invia pleraque et errores, qui acciderunt aut propter ducentium fraudem aut, ubi fides iis non esset, valles intrabant temereque iter faciebant. biduum in iugo castra posuerunt fessisque labore ac pugnando quies data militibus; iumentaque aliquot, quae prolapsa in rupibus erant, sequendo vestigia agminis in castra pervenerunt. fessis taedio tot malorum nivis etiam casus, ingentem terrorem adiecit. per omnia nive oppleta cum signis prima luce motis segniter agmen incederet pigritiaque et desperatio in omnium vultu emineret, praegressus signa Hannibal in promunturio quodam, unde longe ac late prospectus erat, consistere iussis militibus Italiam ostentat subiectosque Alpinis montibus Circumpadanos campos, moeniaque eos tum transcendere non Italiae modo sed etiam urbis Romanae; cetera plana, proclivia fore; uno aut summum altero proelio arcem et caput Italiae in manu ac potestate habituros. procedere inde agmen coepit iam nihil ne hostibus quidem praeter parva furta per occasionem temptantibus. ceterum iter multo difficilius fuit quam in ascensu fuerat ut pleraque Alpium ab Italia sicut breviora ita arrectiora sunt; omnis enim ferme via praeceps, angusta, lubrica erat, ut neque sustinere se ab lapsu possent nec qui paulum titubavissent haerere adflicti vestigio suo, alique super alios et iumenta in homines occiderent.

G

Then they came to a much narrower cliff, so nearly perpendicular that a lightly armed soldier feeling his way with his hands and holding onto bushes and stumps which stuck out, could scarcely have got himself down it. The ground was naturally steep before, but a recent landslide had snatched it away to a drop of nearly 1,000 feet. There the cavalry halted as though they had come to the end of the road, and it was reported to Hannibal that the cliff was impassable. He set off to look at the place himself. After inspection, there was no doubt that the column would have to march around it over trackless and untrodden routes even if it was a long detour; but that way too was difficult, for above the old, unmelted snow was a new layer of moderate depth and soft; the infantry in the front found the going easy, but when it had been trampled down by so many men and beasts, they began to advance through the bare and liquid slush of melting snow underneath. It was a dreadful struggle on a road slippery with ice, not affording a foothold and on a downward slope making their feet slide from under them more quickly; when a man tried to help himself stand up by hands or by knees, he tumbled down again, nor were there stumps or roots by which a man could pull himself up by foot or hand; and so, they rolled about on what was nothing but smooth ice and melting snow. The pack animals sometimes cut through the deep snow as they went and fell more heavily, kicking up their hooves in their struggles to rise, and they would break through it, so that as often as not they were held as in a trap, in hard, deep-frozen snow.

H

tandem nequiquam iumentis atque hominibus fatigatis castra in iugo posita, aegerrime ad id ipsum loco purgato; tantum nivis fodiendum atque egerendum fuit. inde ad rupem muniendam per quam unam viam facere poterat milites ducti, cum caedendum esset saxum, arboribus circa immanibus deiectis detruncatisque struem ingentem lignorum faciunt eamque, cum et vis venti apta faciendo igne coorta esset, succendunt ardentiaque saxa infuso aceto putrefaciunt. ita torridam incendio rupem ferro pandunt molliuntque anfractibus modicis clivos ut non iumenta solum sed elephantum etiam deduci possent. quadriduum circa rupem consumptum, iumentis prope fame absumptis; nuda enim fere cacumina sunt et, si quid est pabuli, obruunt nives. inferiora valles et apricos quosdam colles habent rivosque prope silvas et iam humano cultu digniora loca. ibi iumenta in pabulum missa et quies muniendo fessis hominibus data. triduo inde ad planum descenderunt et iam locis mollioribus et incolarum ingeniis.