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# Hannibal and the elephants

Eleanor C. Marsac

*Elephant Research Foundation*

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elephants, *Loxodonta africana cyclotis*]. In crossing the Rhône River (France), several mahouts were thrown off the frightened elephants and drowned. The loss must have caused some staff problems, since the mahouts were highly trained men, not easily replaceable (Cottrell, 1961, p. 46). It is said (de Beer, 1969, p. 190) that Hannibal left the Po Valley (Italy) in the spring of 217 BC and crossed the Apennines and into the valley of the Arno (vicinity of today's Florence, northern Italy, ancient Etruria). "That river was so mightily swollen from the melting of the snow on the Apennines and the spring rains, that the low ground was a marshy swamp, in crossing which the troops suffered great hardships. Livy relates that for four days the army marched through water, unable to find any dry places to bivouac other than piles of baggage or heaps of dead pack-animals. Many died from drowning or of disease, and Hannibal himself caught an infection and lost the sight of one eye" (de Beer, 1969, p. 190). Many elephants died from hunger and fatigue in the mountains, and some of their carcasses were eaten by the troops. In Italy, Hannibal's army inflicted a series of crushing defeats on Roman armies and roved at large for fifteen years up and down the peninsula and into Sicily. In 208-207 BC, Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal Barca, left Spain with 32 elephants and arrived in Italy with about 12 (Lamb, 1958, p. 203). Six were killed by the Romans and the rest were captured (Lamb, 1958, p. 207). In 202 BC, during the battle of Zama in North Africa (about five days journey west of Carthage), Hannibal used 80 elephants against Scipio Africanus, and lost the battle. Twenty years later while in Bithynia (Asia Minor, today's Anatolia, within Turkey), he committed suicide with poison to avoid falling into the hands of the Romans.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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#### **Hannibal and the elephants**

compiled by Eleanor C. Marsac — Elephant Research Foundation

Recent correspondence with interested people in the Elephant Listserver, particularly Diane Guerrero, has resurrected our interest in the history of Hannibal of Carthage. Below is a summary of Hannibal's encounters in crossing the Alps and his battles in Italy and northern Africa, with additional references.

According to Cottrell (1961, p. 46), Hannibal, the young commander of the Carthaginian forces began his famous march against Rome from southern Spain, over the Alps into Italy. He left Cartagena, Spain, in 218 BC with 37 elephants (36 African and 1 Asian), each under its own well-trained mahout. The Asian, "Surus" (meaning Syrian), Hannibal's personal elephant, was the only elephant that survived to reach Italy. According to Lamb (1958, pp. 79-80), the African elephants were no more than 9 feet in height, and more agile than the 11 foot Asian species [appear to be the Forest African