

# Comparing two records of a significant event in history



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March 27, 2009 Hannibal Crossing the Alps: A Comparison Polybius of Megalopolis (c. 200-c. 118) is the of a world history that details the rise of Rome. He personally crossed the Alps to see how Hannibal invaded Italy. 1 Book 3 of his world history addresses Hannibal and his crossing of the Alps in sections 50-55. While the book does not detail where he obtained his information, it can be assumed that most of it was general knowledge and from his personal observations of the area.

The account was written not long after Hannibal crossed the Alps it is more of a detailed re-telling of the events than a historic accounting. As such, Polybius is very aware of the time and place at which the events took place. Polybius journeyed to the site not long after the actual crossing of the Alps, and is more trustworthy than a modern day historian.

The account is a prose form of chronology in that it just tells the story, like a story. It is not interspersed with facts- it is represented as all fact - which is typical of early histories. They did not have many other writers to reference, and the reader most likely wouldn't have been able to access the other books regardless.

The only major discrepancy between Polybius' accounting and that of Livy is that Polybius mentioned they could see Italy from the pass and Livy stated they could not see Italy until they had started the descent.

Titus Livy (59 BCE- 17 CE) is the author of the authorized version of the history of the Roman republic. His writings do betray that he knew little of military matters which would affect the believability of his account of the military operations of Hannibal. 2 Again, there is no attempt to evaluate the sources of evidence and it is quite likely that he may have even used

Polybius' writings as a possible reference.

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As he lived 100 years or so after Hannibal crossed the Alps, this accounting is more subject to inaccuracies due to the passage of time. This could explain the discrepancy as to if Hannibal and his army could see Italy from the passage or not until the descent. This could also be due to Livy's lack of military knowledge.

This accounting is also a prose form of chronology, as it is just retelling the known facts about Hannibal's crossing. There is little expanding upon the facts, or additional information presented. Livy does make time for dramatic details such as " the dreadful vision was now before their eyes".<sup>3</sup> There are little interpretations of the historical data, it is just presented in a story form. These accounts are essentially the same. The minor difference such as; when they could see Italy, as well as the writing style are the only two noticeable differences. There are no discrepancies as to how Hannibal is presented or the facts of the march. Viewing these two accounts taught me about the story of Hannibal, his amazing ability to move an army against impossible odds. They both showed his military genius and leadership qualities. The comparison of the two works did not lead to further revelations, but did lead to interesting ideas about the writing styles of the two authors. I found I greatly preferred reading Livy's retelling, as it was more dramatic and interesting whereas Polybius' style was more of a dry recounting of facts. I would have preferred Polybius to expound more on his firsthand knowledge of the area and terrain. Both authors were not focused specifically on this event in their writing, both readings were excerpts of much longer books and collections. This explains the brevity of the accountings. I would have preferred to add another reading more in detail on the subject to explain more detail of the event.

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