

# H-Net Reviews

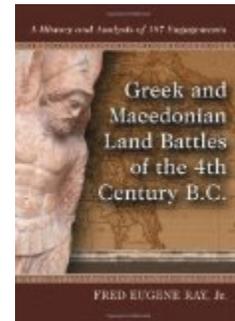
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Fred Eugene Ray Jr. *Greek and Macedonian Land Battles of the 4th Century B.C.: A History and Analysis of 187 Engagements*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2012. 244 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6973-4.

Reviewed by Nathan D. Wells (Quincy College)

Published on H-War (April, 2013)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



The fourth century BC was a seminal period in military history, especially with regard to the Western way of war. From the period of Spartan dominance in the wake of the Peloponnesian War to the initial wars waged by Alexander the Great's successors, the fourth century saw multiple variations of the Doric phalanx on battlefields, in the Greek heartland, in the Mediterranean, and on its border with India. These formations were initially used by rival city-states, then crafters of empires. Such a pivotal period deserves a thorough analysis, and Fred Eugene Ray Jr., a retired geologist and oil industry executive, has gamely accepted the challenge.

This is not the first time that Ray has explored the subject of warfare in the classical Greek world. In his *Land Battles in 5th Century B.C. Greece: A History and Analysis of 173 Engagements* (2008), Ray covered the century preceding the current volume's subject. Ray's knowledge of geology and topography are evident in both books.

While *Greek and Macedonian Land Battles of the 4th Century B.C.* provides an analysis of engagements and military developments, it also examines what led to those developments. Indeed, this may be the strongest asset of Ray's volume. When the fourth century began, Sparta was the dominant land power in Greece, as it had been in the previous century. Sparta had emerged victorious in the Peloponnesian War, and the Greek world looked to be in for a long-term Lacedaemonian hegemony. Yet, by mid-century, the fulcrum had shifted first to the up-and-coming Thebans and then to the even more up-and-coming Macedonians. This was a fascinating and critical period, and Philip II's time as a hostage in Thebes

during the glory years of that polis has rightly so often been remarked on. Ray recounts all of this, with Philip, his son Alexander III (the Great), and the Theban strategists Pelopidas and Epaminondas who inspired them each getting their due. Ray also draws attention to a lesser-known Athenian general, Iphicrates. While most historians look to Thebes, and especially to Epaminondas as the inspiration for Philip's reforms of the Doric phalanx, Ray believes that Iphicrates was perhaps more deserving of credit, especially with regard to tactical deployment of the oblique assault. Learning strategy from Epaminondas and tactics from Iphicrates would prove to be a deadly education, ironically so for their native poleis. Ray also does an excellent job in discussing the Persian kardakes, which was a stopgap attempt to deal with the phalanxes, both mercenary and Macedonian.

This is a fine book overall, but I have three major criticisms. The first is that the volume is strictly chronological. Given the nature of warfare in the fourth century with hoplite armies, often mercenary based, fighting simultaneous wars throughout the Mediterranean and Near East, the same characters appear and reappear often. Focusing on regions might have made the narrative less confusing. The second criticism relates to citation. As noted above, this volume is a companion to a work on the fifth century BC. In his review of *Land Battles in 5th Century B.C. Greece*, A. A. Nofi comments that "the chief flaw of Ray's book is that he fails to provide proper footnotes, using instead in-text 'documentation' which is often too brief to permit easy checking of references, not to mention disrupts the narrative flow." [1] Ray follows the same pattern in this volume and it is similarly distracting. His sources are also primarily drawn from period