

H-Net Reviews

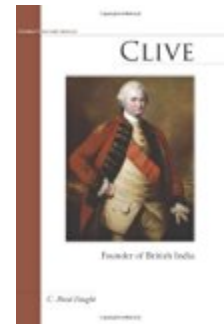
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

C. Brad Faught. *Clive: Founder of British India*. Military Profiles Series. Dulles: Potomac Books, 2013. 140 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-61234-168-2.

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Published on H-War (January, 2014)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



An examination of the records of any large library will demonstrate that a substantial number of works have been devoted to Robert Clive. The New York Public Library, whose holdings may be taken as a decent example, boasts some twenty-two biographies, as well as a handful of works that partially pertain to the 1st Baron Clive. This should come as no surprise, as Clive's rise from a somewhat unprepossessing first son of a solid upper-middle-class English family to military leadership and the unofficial title of "Founder of British India" is something of a biographer's dream. In addition, his actions in India set the stage and became the model for the achievements of those who came after him, ensuring a sometimes dubious but nonetheless powerful historical legacy.

C. Brad Faught's new book, *Clive: Founder of British India*, the latest in Potomac's Military Profiles' series, is thus in good company. Faught is clearly conscious of the works on Clive that have come before his, pointing out that his is "the first in almost a generation [Robert Harvey's *Clive: The Life and Death of a British Emperor* was published in 1998] and one of the few that concentrates on him mainly as a military leader" (p. xi). This military focus is welcome, and makes a great deal of sense when approaching the life of a figure who once noted that "peace is the most valuable of all blessings, but it must be made sword in hand in this Country [India], if we mean to preserve our present possessions" (p. 66). It is a shame, therefore, that the military focus is often unclear and at times convoluted.

Faught does an admirable job of demonstrating the chaotic and unplanned nature of eighteenth-century imperial warfare on the subcontinent, as well as the limited size of engagements, especially when referring to reliable

troops. This is crucial, as these particular characteristics allowed Clive to first move from clerk to soldier, and then rise up the ranks of the East India Trading Company's armed forces so quickly. Indeed, it is through Clive's rise that Faught demonstrates the improvised character of Britain's (or, to be pedantic, the company's) empire in India. Unfortunately, some of that chaos has leaked into the military writing contained within this volume. The strategic map and battlefields of eighteenth-century India were unquestionably convoluted, but it would have been gratifying to see some effort to simplify them. Instead, troops appear with little explanation and depart with less; the strategic and tactical reasons for maneuvering cry out for more explanation; and the battles are given short shrift (Plassey is dealt with in four pages). The length (about one hundred pages) and style of this volume and the Potomac series overall hints at a general target audience, but average readers may find themselves confused as to just what is going on and why, while any reader familiar with Clive's campaigns or the history of India in this period will be thirsting for more detail.

It is strange, considering where Faught places his work in the historiography of Lord Clive, that the same cannot be said of the sections dealing with political matters. It is here that the narrative not only picks up pace but also moves along smoothly, providing an informative and interesting account of Clive's political actions and the wider setting. Of particular note are the brief sections dealing with Clive's friendship and support of Warren Hastings, a name that will be familiar to all students of a slightly later period of British India, as well as the jealousy and acrimony created by Clive's vast wealth and continuing jagir. It is also in these sections that Clive comes to life, not as an imperial paragon but rather as an

arrogant and flawed human being, capable of hypocrisy and holding grudges, but also of great generosity and loyalty. These sections will grip and inform the general reader, and those of a more academic bent will enjoy the livelier prose, even if it contains nothing spectacularly new.

The book is well researched, drawing most of its insights from primary source materials, especially letters, but lacks, by its very nature, a strong thesis. It is a shame, therefore, that the book is somewhat stranded between a general audience, who may be confused by portions of it, and an academic one, who will find very little new

material or groundbreaking analysis. It is the book's length, more than anything, which is to blame, with large portions of the military sections feeling rushed. Faight's work most closely resembles Elizabeth Longford's *Wellington* (2006), a 144-page abridgement of her two-volume biography of the Iron Duke (*Wellington: The Years of the Sword* [1969] and *Wellington: Pillar of State* [1972]). While it is doubtful that Faight's original draft was ten times longer than the final product, as was the case with Longford's, one cannot help but feel that there is an excellent treatise on Clive's life located within *Clive: Founder of British India*. It only needs fifty to one hundred more pages to emerge.

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Citation: Luke A. Reynolds. Review of Faight, C. Brad, *Clive: Founder of British India*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. January, 2014.

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