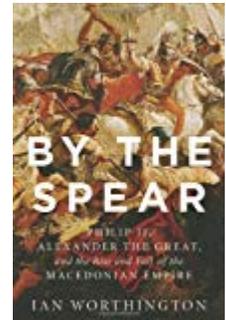


**Ian Worthington.** *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. xxi + 388 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-992986-3.



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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

*By the Spear* is a narrative history of how the Macedonian Empire was first forged by King Philip II (382-336 BC) and expanded from Greece all the way to India by his son Alexander III (356-323 BC), but then fell apart when the latter king died during the summer in Babylon. Richly illustrated with detailed maps, descriptions of the battles, and images of the period's artwork, the volume offers an engaging historical account of the two reigns, necessarily selective and anecdotal, with a constant emphasis on the achievements of both kings in terms of legacy, especially in comparison to each other. Professor Ian Worthington argues that "this book is the first to consider the achievements of Philip and Alexander within one set of covers to show how they together formed one of the most important epochs of Greek history. It is not a biography but, rather, a study of the rise and fall of their Macedonian Empire" (p. vii). This may be a surprise to students of Alexander, as there have been many comparative books on Philip, Alexander, and the Macedonian Empire since the late nineteenth century if not before.[1]

Worthington comes to the conclusion that there is a great difference in the achievements of the two kings, although his criteria for assessment are unclear (of which more below). Besides the character portraits of the two kings presented by Worthington, the book is an accessible retelling of a turbulent period of ancient history.

Worthington devotes six chapters to Philip and the conquest of Greece and nine chapters to Alexander and the conquest of Persia. The main narrative is supplemented by informative paraphernalia: there is a concise timeline of the principal events; an overview of the historical characters associated with Philip and Alexander; and endnotes to the material discussed in the book. In the preface, the author does not mention for whom his book is intended, but the bibliography reveals that the author primarily addresses an Anglophone audience with basic knowledge of Greek and Macedonian history: there are four items in German (publication no later than 1982); two in Italian (one is a collection of Greek inscriptions); two in Russian (both by Ivan Ladynin); and

ten in French (primarily the well-known works of Pierre Briant). The remaining items are in English and well distributed between studies of Philip and Alexander. A basic discussion of the ancient sources is found in an appendix at the back of the book.

The book is about the wars and the politics involved in the shaping the new Macedonian world. Almost all the chapter headlines include words such as war, fall, rise, legacy, and politics. Worthington treats his principal research interests--the Athenian orators Aeschines and Demosthenes in ancient Macedon and in Greek rhetoric and history--in great detail in the first few chapters of the book. When we turn east with Alexander, however, Worthington is extremely reliant on the work a limited number of scholars (Ladynin for Egypt; Briant for Achaemenid Persia), and writes without the same eye for detail in the case of the Persian material. For instance, there is no treatment of the important Babylonian astronomical diaries or chronicles that allow us to date Alexander's death in his appendix on the sources (available in English translation). Conversely, there are apparent flaws in his discussions of the Greek material. He seems to consider the *Royal Diaries* attributed to Alexander's secretary Eumenes of Cardia historical, a Greek document that ostensibly reports the events leading up to Alexander's death (p. 312). This is problematic without qualification, given the fact that there are multiple scholarly views on its authenticity. Indeed, his treatment of sources for Philip and Alexander is generally problematic: there is, for example, no serious discussion of the fragmentary historians, which is startling considering the fact that Worthington is the principal editor of the new Brill series of Jacoby's *Fragments of the Greek Historians* (mentioned at least twice, pp. xiv and 316). Moreover, he accepts many sources at face value. He cites the speech Alexander made to quell the mutiny at Opis (324 BC) in two instances (p. 106; pp. 278-279) without drawing attention to the fact that the speech as quoted was put into the mouth of

Alexander by his Roman historian Arrian, who wrote half a millennium later. Again, the dating of the sources is sometimes erroneous. For instance, on p. 303, Worthington asserts in a passing remark that the first reference to Alexander as "the Great" is in the *first-century BC Mostellaria* by the Roman comedian Plautus, but this author died in 184 BC. A more systematic and balanced (less Graeco-centric) review of the sources would have been helpful to the innocent reader.

Such a reader must also be aware that Worthington makes some factual and methodical blunders. In a pivotal section on what the Macedonians thought about Alexander in 323 BC, he argues that no monuments were set up to Alexander in Greece or Macedon while the king was away campaigning. From the lack of evidence, Worthington deduces that the people left in Greece or Macedon did not admire Alexander as much as those abroad. But this is to sidestep hard evidence for objects we know Alexander sent back home (p. 150: the 300 suits of Persian armor dedicated to Athena; pp. 201-202: the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton) or erected in Macedon, such as the statues of Alexander and the soldiers who fell in the battle of Granicus, dedicated in a temple at Diium.[2] Again, there are many inconsistencies in the portrait of Alexander Worthington is trying to paint. Alexander is, at the same time, a master builder of empire, but also a destroyer. Worthington presents both representations in the preface in which he also attributes the spread of Greek culture and language in the east to Alexander. In the conclusion, however, he only offers the destroyer (p. 309) and not the others. Furthermore, drawing upon a questionable case study by the Pentagon (pp. 200-201), he makes rather curious comparisons between the experiences of Alexander's troops then and the war experiences of American soldiers now (pp. 283-288). This may be partially prompted by the aim of the book series *Warfare and Civilization* (p. viii), but the modern war experiences are only alluded to twice and feel rather out of place. A typo in the

capital name of the Republic of Macedonia (“Skpoje” instead of “Skopje,” p. 14) suggests that modern material is best left out.

Any would-be reader deserves to know that the conceptual framework of the book is extremely shallow. The comparison of Philip and Alexander is already a *topos* attested in two ancient Alexander historians: Diodorus Siculus’s *Library of History* (strangely referred to as *Universal History* without the “Library”) and Justin’s epitome of the Augustan Pompeius Trogus’s *Philippic History* (pp. 117-119, 308-309). Worthington has already explored the *topos* elsewhere without noticing that Alexander Meeus has established that in the Hellenistic age there was “no trace of any absolute preference for either Philip or Alexander,”[3] on the part of the successor dynasties in their attempts to claim royal legitimacy. If the Hellenistic kings did not compare and contrast Alexander and Philip, but made parallel use of their two legacies, it would seem that Worthington has merely expanded a discussion that originates in the Roman period, not in the period of Philip and Alexander. Indeed, if a 2,000-year-old platitude developed in Rome’s rhetorical schools is contended to offer an appropriate methodological basis for the modern investigation of Philip and Alexander, then we need a much more thorough justification of the contention than Worthington supplies in the passing remarks at pp. 308-309. Without a more modern methodology and approach, it is hard to see how this book is going to help university students answer the most basic essay questions.

#### Notes

[1]. David G. Hogarth, *Philip and Alexander of Macedon* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897). For a more recent book aimed at a general and academic audience, see Johannes Engels, *Philipp II und Alexander der Grosse*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006).

[2]. Aristobulus (*Brill’s New Jacoby* no. 139, fragment 5) from Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*

16.15-17; Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 1.11.3-4; Pliny, *Natural History* 34.64; Arrian, *Alexander’s Anabasis* 1.16.4-5; Justin, *Epitome* 11.6.12-13.

[3]. Alexander Meeus, “Alexander’s Image in the Age of the Successors,” in *Alexander the Great: A New History*, ed. Waldemar Heckel and Lawrence A. Tritle (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 250.

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