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Ian Worthington, *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. Pp. xxi, 388. ISBN 978-0-19-992986-3.

Review by Guy Rogers, Wellesley College (grogers@wellesley.edu).

Ian Worthington (Univ. of Missouri) is the author of several respected studies of Alexander the Great and ancient Macedon.¹ In his new book, *By the Spear*, he sets out to prove that Philip II was the architect of the Macedonian empire and his son Alexander its master builder—and destroyer (viii). He also argues that, while Alexander was a great general, Philip was the better ruler for his kingdom (119). The cases for Philip as architect and Alexander as builder are convincing. But the claim that Alexander also destroyed the empire is less persuasive. Moreover, the question whether Philip or Alexander was the better ruler cannot be answered, because they ruled over two different empires.

Worthington makes his case for Philip in chapters 1–6. He first briskly reviews the background story of how the Greek city-states drove the last of the invading Persians from Greece after the battle of Plataea in 479 BCE, setting the stage for the Athenian empire and subsequent conflicts among the city-states of Athens, Sparta, and Thebes, among many others. After Athens's defeat in the Peloponnesian War, Sparta dominated Greece militarily until its defeat by the Thebans at the battles of Leuctra in 371 and Mantinea in 362. Sparta never recovered completely, but the Thebans suffered the loss of their best general, Epaminondas, at Mantinea. The restored Athenian democracy meanwhile had put together a new, anti-Spartan alliance.

While the most powerful Greek city-states were fighting among themselves, in the far north of the Greek mainland King Archelaus gradually consolidated his rule over Upper and Lower Macedon. However, most of his achievements were undone over the next few decades and stability was not restored until Perdiccas III came to the throne in 365. Six years later, Perdiccas, along with four thousand of his soldiers, was killed fighting invading Illyrians. Another hostile neighbor, the Paeonians, and various foreign-supported pretenders to the throne pushed Macedon to the brink of dissolution. The kingdom was saved when its assembly wisely acclaimed Perdiccas's brother, Philip II, as the new king.

Philip rapidly negotiated the withdrawal of the Illyrians (by agreeing to marry their king's daughter), bribed the Paeonians, and put to death one pretender and defeated another, who was supported by the Athenians. These actions bought Philip time to build an army that changed his negotiating position and allowed him to secure his borders. The core of that army was an infantry phalanx brigaded into battalions. These men fought in formations eight to thirty-two ranks deep and were equipped with a sixteen- to eighteen-foot-long pike called a sarissa. Eventually, they received the title *πεζεταίροι* or “foot-companions.” Macedonian and allied cavalry protected the flanks of the infantry battalions. The cavalry comprised squadrons (*ἵλα*) of two hundred or so riders each. In battle, they rode in wedge-shaped formations to attack the flanks of their enemies and open gaps in their lines. Unlike the mounted troops of most Greek city-states, the Macedonian cavalry squadrons fought offensively. Besides these infantry and cavalry units, Philip used detachments of men that specialized in particular types of weapons or combat on specific kinds of terrain. An engineering corps was also created for use in siege warfare. The whole army trained together and learned to live off the land while campaigning.

Philip used his new army to solidify his position and unify the state. He attacked, defeated, and incorporated Paeonia into Macedonia and annihilated the Illyrians, killing seven thousand men. These actions secured the north and northwestern frontiers of a unified Macedon and eliminated the threat of external interference. Philip also made valuable alliances with Larissa in Thessaly to the south and Epirus to the

1. See, e.g., *Alexander the Great: Man and God* (NY: Routledge, 2004), and “Alexander the Great, Nation Building, and the Creation and Maintenance of Empire,” in Victor D. Hanson, ed., *Makers of Ancient Strategy: From the Persian Wars to the Fall of Rome* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 2010) 118–37.

southwest. Both were sealed by marriages, including to Olympias, the niece of the Epirote king Arybbas and future mother of Alexander.

Over the next few years, Philip reduced foreign influence along his coastline and gained control of the Mt. Pangaeum region in western Thrace; his control of the gold mines there vastly increased his revenues. Onomarchus of Phocis inflicted a devastating defeat on Macedon in 353, breaking Philip's string of successes, but the next year Philip marched down into Greece and defeated Onomarchus at the Krokion Plain, near the coast of Magnesia. After this victory, Philip was elected archon of Thessaly and served on its deputation to the Amphictyonic Council, a group of twenty-four city-states that administered the Delphic Oracle. Thus, by the late 350s, Philip had made himself a player in the politics of the Greek city-states.

By 346, Philip managed to end the so-called Third Sacred War (against Phocis for its supposed crimes against Delphian Apollo) on terms that made him a force to be reckoned with from Thrace into central Greece. In 344, Thessaly was formally brought under Macedonian rule. The next year Philip installed Alexander of Epirus, the brother of Olympias, as King of Epirus after expelling Arybbas. The acquisition of Thrace in 342 doubled the size of the kingdom he had inherited in 359. But this also brought Philip into direct conflict with the Athenians, who had interests in the Chersonese. Philip's siege of Byzantium on the Bosphorus directly threatened the Black Sea grain route that supplied Athens. The Athenians sent a relief army, but its general was tricked into leaving ships loaded with grain unprotected; their prompt capture by Philip made war between Macedon and Athens inevitable.

Despite their long-standing enmity to Athens, the Thebans joined the Athenians to fight Philip. On the plain of Chaeronea, near Thebes, Philip's Macedonians defeated an Athenian- and Theban-led army in early August 338, effectively terminating the political autonomy of the Greek city-states. Philip now imposed an oligarchic government upon Thebes and stationed a garrison on the city's citadel. He dissolved the Athenian confederacy and deprived Athens of its settlements in the Chersonese. A Common Peace was declared and the mainland Greek cities were forced into a council with Philip as its hegemon. At its first meeting, Philip announced his plan to invade Asia. His stated purpose was to liberate the Greek cities on the coast of Asia Minor from Persian rule and to punish the Persians for the offenses they committed during their invasions of Greece in the early fifth century.

In summer 337, Philip married a young Macedonian woman named Kleopatra, a niece of his general Attalus. While in their cups at the wedding party, Attalus, Alexander, and Philip brawled over the Macedonian succession and Alexander left Macedon shortly thereafter. He returned a year later, only to fall afoul of his father again by scuttling a marriage Philip was arranging between Alexander's half-brother Philip Arrhidaeus and the daughter of a Persian governor whose province (Caria) lay along Philip's intended route through Asia Minor. In 336, Philip sent an advance force of some ten thousand soldiers across the Hellespont to begin to liberate the Greek cities of Asia Minor.

Philip, then forty-six years old, decided to marry his daughter Kleopatra to Alexander of Epirus, thereby repairing his connection to Epirus, while making Olympias superfluous. During the marriage festivities in autumn 336, a Macedonian soldier named Pausanias, once Philip's lover, assassinated him in the theater at Aegae. Shortly thereafter, Alexander was acclaimed king and subsequently assumed leadership of the Pan-Hellenic alliance Philip had imposed after Chaeronea.

Such is the story Worthington masterfully relates about Philip's shrewd combining of diplomacy and military action to create a Macedonian empire stretching from mainland Greece to the Hellespont. Philip's diplomatic maneuvers included paying bribes and engaging in political marriages. He also employed deceit, as Worthington acknowledges. As a military leader, he was quick, resolute, and personally brave in battle. After surveying the challenges Philip overcame, Worthington concludes that he was a great king who has lived too long in the shadow of Alexander (115-19).

No serious historian has ever denied that Philip was one of the greatest rulers in Greek history.² Still, it is useful for a new generation of students and scholars to be reminded of what Philip accomplished and how much Alexander owed his father—as Worthington puts it, “without Philip, no Alexander the Great”

2. Philip's pivotal role in building Macedon's empire was argued for almost forty years ago by J.R. Ellis in *Philip II and Macedonian Imperialism* (1976; rpt. Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1986).

(309). But was Philip in fact a greater ruler than his son? And did Alexander destroy the Macedonian empire?

The facts of what Alexander and his Pan-Hellenic army accomplished are not in dispute. Between 334 and 327, they conquered Persia and its empire, the largest and most successful in the ancient world. As far as we know, Alexander personally decided all matters of strategy, tactics, and logistics throughout the campaigns. He fought at the front in all his major battles against the Persians. His army never lost a battle, despite the Persians' determined resistance all the way from the Hellespont to Central Asia.³

After Alexander had pacified the former provinces of the Persian empire, he was deterred from marching farther east only by the mutiny of his troops at the Hyphasis River in India (present-day Pakistan). After the mutiny, Alexander sailed down the Indus River to the Indian Ocean and made his way back west to Babylon by spring 323. In the days before his death, he was making detailed plans for the conquest first of Arabia and after that the rest of the world. Soon after Alexander died, his officers and friends began a half-century fight for control of his empire, but none proved strong enough to attain unified rule.

Worthington denies none of this in his chapters (7–15) on Alexander and the Asian empire he conquered. Indeed, he acknowledges Alexander's brilliance as a commander who achieved such unimaginable successes in little over a decade. And, to his credit, he does not gainsay parts of this epic story that other historians have wrongly denied: for instance, that Alexander and his army did not conquer Bactria and Sogdiana (the territorial core of modern Afghanistan). Yet, even as he provides the evidence of Alexander's abilities as a battlefield commander, Worthington does not make sufficiently clear the essence of his strategic and tactical genius.

The lack of contemporary narrative sources for Alexander's campaigns makes it hard to discern his leadership signature. Moreover, the fragments of those original sources cited in later historians such as Plutarch or Arrian suggest that Alexander's court historian Callisthenes portrayed him as a latter-day Achilles (to whom Alexander believed he was related through his mother), who fought his enemies in Homeric-style battlefield duels. This literary equation fit Callisthenes's narrative conceit of the war against the Persians—the campaigns of 334 to 327 were a replay of the Trojan War, a struggle of west against east, starring Alexander as Achilles. And indeed, as other sources attest, Alexander did seek out and attack his enemies in single combat (*μονομαχία*) in front of his men.

If Alexander fought like Achilles, he also thought like the master strategist Odysseus. Thus, instead of simply following Darius III and his broken army to the east after the Macedonian victory at Issus (November 333), he turned south and conquered all of the Persian provinces along the eastern Mediterranean littoral, including resource-rich Egypt, to secure his rear before taking up his pursuit of the Persian king. Moreover, in all the major pitched battles of the campaigns, Alexander, like Laertes's son, used tactical tricks and deception. At the beginning of the decisive battle of Gaugamela in 331, for instance, he ordered an attack by mercenary cavalry on his right flank to draw the Persians' Scythian and Bactrian cavalry into a position vulnerable to an assault by Alexander's "Companion" cavalry (*ἑταῖροι*). When that failed, Alexander sent the tough Paeonians into the engagement and broke the enemy formation. Long before Napoleon, Alexander was planning and fighting in branches.

Few kings or generals in history saw as much combat as Alexander, and he had all the wounds to prove it. But the secret of his success was not inconceivable courage, luck, or even the favor of the gods. Although, as Worthington rightly stresses, he owed to Philip the inestimable gift of the Macedonian army, it was Alexander's leadership, willingness to take risks, self-sacrifice, and above all his readiness to *adapt* that yielded such astonishing military triumphs. The Macedonians' sharpest weapon was not the sarissa, but the adaptive mind of Alexander, a mark of his rulership as well.

After the death of Darius (July 330), as Alexander set out for Bactria to hunt down his murderers and eliminate all resistance to his rule, he began to adopt various Persian customs and practices. He installed Asian-born ushers in his court and ordered the most distinguished Persians to act as his guards. He himself

3. Maria Brosius, "Alexander and the Persians," in Joseph Roisman, ed., *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great* (Boston: Brill, 2003) 169–93.

wore the Persian diadem, white robe, and distinctive sash. He gave purple-bordered cloaks to his companions and outfitted their horses in Persian harness.

Three years later, after quashing revolts or resistance to his rule in Bactria and Sogdiana, Alexander replaced a number of insubordinate and incompetent governors. He also incorporated native-born Asians into his cavalry and gave orders for thirty thousand native youths to be taught Greek and trained to use Macedonian weapons for eventual service in a new phalanx. In spring 327, he married Roxane, the daughter of a Bactrian noble. That same year, he attempted to introduce the Persian custom of *proskynesis* or prostration into his court. In 324, when Alexander emerged from the Gedrosian Desert (in southern Pakistan) on his way back to Persia, he executed governors and officers who had fomented rebellion or abused provincials. Among the slain was one of Alexander's closest generals, a man who had raped a virgin. In March 324, Alexander married two daughters of the last Persian kings and arranged for marriages of ninety-one of his Macedonian and Greek friends and companions to Persian and Median noblewomen.

During mid-summer 324, Alexander quelled a second mutiny of Macedonian troops⁴ by threatening to replace them with local levies. At a banquet of reconciliation at Opis on the Tigris River, Alexander prayed for harmony and fellowship of rule between Persians and Macedonians. In the days before the planned invasion of Arabia in late spring 323, just before he died, Alexander began to enroll Persians into the brigades of the Macedonian battalions.

Both on the battlefield and as ruler of the largest empire in the ancient world to that time, Alexander adjusted his strategy and tactics to changing circumstances. He adopted Persian customs to ease his acceptance by the peoples of Asia as their legitimate king. If governors revolted or mistreated the governed they were executed or replaced. Moreover, unlike any other Greek or Macedonian king before him, Alexander was committed to integrating Asians, not only into his imperial service, but also into the army itself. The discontent of Macedonians with such policies is proof of Alexander's determination to meet the challenges of ruling a huge, multicultural empire.

Alexander's prayer for harmony and fellowship of rule between the Macedonians and the Persians was never realized. Since he died less than a year later, we will never know whether it could have been fulfilled. Alexander cannot be criticized (as he is by Worthington) for failing to choose an heir before he died or for the fragmentation of his empire after his death. How could he have known he would not live to his thirty-third birthday and how can he be held responsible for the actions of his successors? Not Alexander but those successors (the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Antigonids) destroyed the empire as they fought in vain to replace him.⁵

Moreover the governance challenges Alexander faced were on a different scale from those confronted by Philip, who ruled an essentially Greek realm extending also into territories of peoples like the Thracians, who had long been in contact with Greeks and their culture. Alexander's two-million-square-mile empire was larger than the Persian empire had ever been. Its polyglot peoples had their own distinctive cultures rarely, if ever, influenced by sustained contact with Greeks.⁶ In addition, Philip died at around age forty-six. What kind of ruler might Alexander have been, had he lived another thirteen years? So the jury is out and no conclusive verdict can ever be rendered on the question of whether Philip or Alexander was the better ruler.

In his well crafted, thought-provoking, and instructive book, Ian Worthington has shown that Philip II of Macedon does not deserve to live only in the shadow of his more famous son. But Philip himself, who was in a position to know, was right about his son: Macedonia was too small for Alexander.⁷

4. Caused by his decision to send home thousand of veterans no longer fit for service.

5. Guy Rogers, *Alexander: The Ambiguity of Greatness* (NY: Random House, 2004) 291.

6. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 507-10.

7. Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 6.5.