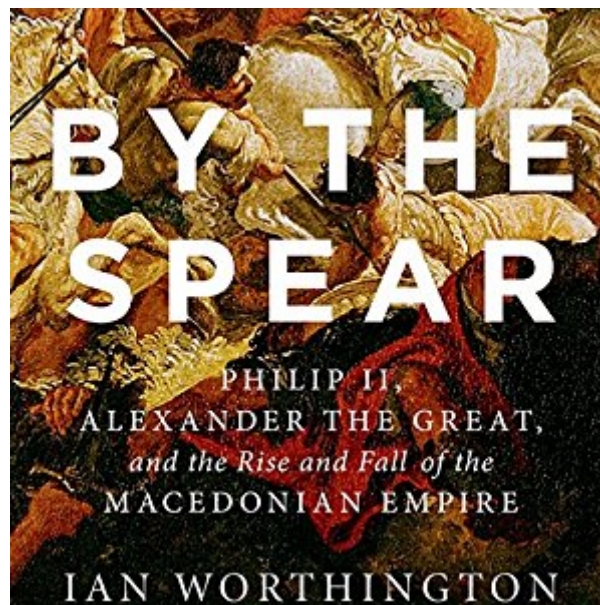


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By The Spear: Philip II, Alexander The Great, And The Rise And Fall Of The Macedonian Empire



Synopsis

Alexander the Great, arguably the most exciting figure from antiquity, waged war as a Homeric hero and lived as one, conquering native peoples and territories on a superhuman scale. From the time he invaded Asia in 334 to his death in 323, he expanded the Macedonian empire from Greece in the west to Asia Minor, the Levant, Egypt, Central Asia and "India" (Pakistan and Kashmir) in the east. Although many other kings and generals forged empires, Alexander produced one that was without parallel, even if it was short-lived. And yet, Alexander could not have achieved what he did without the accomplishments of his father, Philip II (r. 359-336). It was Philip who truly changed the course of Macedonian history, transforming a weak, disunited, and economically backward kingdom into a military powerhouse. A warrior king par excellence, Philip left Alexander with the greatest army in the Greek world, a centralized monarchy, economic prosperity, and a plan to invade Asia. For the first time, *By the Spear* offers an exhilarating military narrative of the reigns of these two larger-than-life figures in one volume. Ian Worthington gives full breadth to the careers of father and son, showing how Philip was the architect of the Macedonian empire, which reached its zenith under Alexander, only to disintegrate upon his death. *By the Spear* also explores the impact of Greek culture in the East, as Macedonian armies became avatars of social and cultural change in lands far removed from the traditional sphere of Greek influence. In addition, the book discusses the problems Alexander faced in dealing with a diverse subject population and the strategies he took to what might be called nation building, all of which shed light on contemporary events in culturally dissimilar regions of the world. The result is a gripping and unparalleled account of the role these kings played in creating a vast empire and the enduring legacy they left behind.

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Customer Reviews

This is a fascinating book, but not an easy read. It details the rise of Philip II and his son Alexander the Great. I would call it more of historical treatise dealing with the rise of the Macedonia empire rather than a biography of either of the architects of this great empire. There is a lot of information relating to the various battles these two men fought as well as their supporters and enemies. At times I struggled with trying to figure out the pronunciation of various names, but that is something of a minor point. Even after struggling through the book I felt that the effort was worth it. The book is not for the faint-of-heart, but for real history buffs it would be worthwhile.

I purchased this after listening to Prof. Worthington's "Great Courses" series on Greek history. It filled in many gaps in the series, and argues (successfully, I believe), that while Alexander was a great general and conquerer, Phillip was by far the better king. Highly recommended.

This was a rather dense book that I thoroughly enjoyed about both Philip's and Alexander's campaigns to subdue and unify Greece and Asia under the rule of Macedonia. I didn't understand the author's need to propose that either Philip or Alexander were the greatest as each man was surely great on his own and for different reasons. If you are looking for a battle summary, this is not the book for you but if you are looking for a book outlining everything Macedonian during the reigns of Philip and Alexander this is a worthy read.

I am huge fan of Ian Worthington, I have most of his books and I even have his lectures from the teaching company. I was not sure about getting this book because I have read his book on Alexander (God and man) and his book on Phillip II. I loved both books but I felt like I would be re-reading a summary of those two books. While some of it is undoubtedly covered in his previous books I was actually quite surprised that Worthington changed some of his prior conclusions, I won't say which. I was just ask glued to this book as I was all his others, I highly recommend it.

An excellent telling of the Macedonian Empire. Gives Philip II credit where due. Could have benefitted from more maps and inclusion on all maps of all places cited in the text.

Good but not commanding account of the Macedonians.

For history lovers

I had been waiting for this book for a long time because I expected it to be on the Macedonian Empire. It is partly about this, although it is mostly a narrative of Philip II and Alexander III's reigns, and a somewhat vain comparison between the brilliant "Founding Father" and his talented but flawed "All-Conquering Son" after whose death the Empire fell apart. Needless to say, the author's conclusion is that the father was "better" than the "son", inasmuch that he was a great king, and not only a destructive conqueror. The main issue I had was that although the statement may be valid, the case supposed to back it up was simply poor and largely unconvincing. I had many problems with this book. First, there is little in it that it is really original. While this is not necessarily an issue in itself, it becomes one when the case becomes over-simplified and key elements are omitted. For instance, the author relies heavily on Hammond's (remarkable) works on Philipp and the Macedonian State. Unfortunately, he omits key elements when drawing on this work, such as how Philip built up an army of professional soldiers through the creation of military colonies, and how he set up many of these in strategic locations and in particular on the new borders of his greatly expanded kingdom. More generally, the author minimises Philip's role as a strategist and a consummate diplomat, and does not show to what extent his expansion was carefully designed, calculated and executed. Also, while the book does include a section on Philip's "new model army", there is very little on his economic reforms although the latter were part and parcel of the former. The picture that is drawn of Alexander is an extreme version of the "modern school", which started to emerge with Badian in the late 1950s and where the "Conqueror's" deeds were increasingly balanced by his human flaws and limitations. So this book tends to be about "Alexander the Monster" as opposed to the more traditional "Alexander the Hero", with a strong emphasis on his desperate need to "outdo daddy" in his achievements, and a tendency to belittle these, at times. The point here is that I found the author's borrowed interpretations almost systematically biased against Alexander, regardless of whether the point made is a good one. This was somewhat of a pity because the case becomes that much less convincing. Even worse in my view was the existence of oversimplifications and exaggerations that, at times, can even become mistakes. Alexander's supposed last words, when asked on his deathbed to who he would leave his Empire were NOT "to the best", contrary to what the author claims, but "to the strongest", which given the Macedonian warrior ethos is unsurprising and more in line with the "Spear-won land". The fact that the author could make such a mistake is surprising, to put it mildly. Another point which would have

deserved a more in-depth treatment is that of the "Macedonian State" and the Macedonian war machine (to paraphrase a recent book title) that his father created. This would have led to a discussion of the meaning of the term "Macedonian" which, although indeed a Greek term, did not necessarily at the time have the ethnic meaning that the author seems to believe and which it would have some decades later. As other authors have shown, the populations that Philip integrated within his kingdom (as opposed to the vassal states which acknowledged his supremacy and owed him tribute and men for his campaigns) were of rather mixed ethnic backgrounds. Other simplifications and exaggerations include statements such as Xerxes having "turned tail" and "fled back to Persia" after Salamis leaving Mardonius behind "to rally the demoralised Persian troops". This seems very questionable. Such statements are not demonstrated and the rather hard time that the Persians gave the Greeks at Plataea certainly shows that there is little evidence to back them up with. Other "glitches" seem to also partly be the result of poor editing. There are numerous repetitions. There are also a few inconsistencies such as between the narrative of Black Kleitos' murder by Alexander during a drunken brawl and the otherwise useful "cast of principal characters" at the end of the book where you discover that Alexander "killed him in cold blood". The book does contain numerous interesting elements, although many of these would have deserved to be discussed further. One is whether it really was clear, at the time, that the author seems to imply with the benefit of hindsight, that Alexander's Empire was failing (or even starting to disintegrate) even before his death. The fact that some satraps were rebelling does not suffice to make such a case, if only because rebellions of satraps were endemic under the Persian Empire. A related point is the statement that Alexander managed to alienate just about everyone, that is not only his Macedonians, but also the "natives" (essentially the nobles and religious elites). Again, whether Alexander's efforts at integration were successful or not is a very interesting topic, but it is a bit of a moot one. The author seems to claim that Alexander did not even attempt such integration and was careless about the feelings of the "native" elites just as much as he was about those of the Greeks or the Macedonians (which, at the time at least were NOT the same). Another interesting point that deserved a better and more thorough treatment was the behaviour of Alexander's army, whether, over time, they got more bloodthirsty (with their multiple massacres in India in particular) and how this can be explained. Here again, while the explanations are interesting, they are also tentative or even speculative at times. As can be gathered by this review, I was rather disappointed by this book because, in my view, it does not really deliver the promised goods and I would probably not recommend it as a starting point. Even the preface's claim that "this book is the first to consider the achievements of Philip and Alexander within one set of covers" happens to be not quite correct. A quick look at the bibliography

will show you that a book with a similar scope has been published in 2012, albeit in German. Three stars, after some hÃ© citations: I almost rated it two stars because it is not "okay", to use 's terminology, although it is not exactly "bad" either. Those wanting to read something better could try Hammond's "The Macedonian State", his biography of Philip and one of the numerous good biographies on his son. My favorite happens to be "Alexander of Macedon" by Peter Green, but there are quite a few other good ones, often with somewhat different slants...

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