

BOOK REVIEW

By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire. By IAN WORTHINGTON. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xxi + 388. Hardcover, \$34.95. ISBN 978-0-19-992986-3.

Ian Worthington is an acknowledged expert at Philip II and Alexander the Great. He has authored a number of more specialized studies in the field, but also two biographies, aiming, too, at a more general reader.¹ In both books he has consistently argued that Alexander's conquests could not be possible without the reign of Philip, and that many of Alexander's decisions may be explained by his willingness to surpass his father. Now, Worthington is offering another book combining together scholarly reliability and a desire to reach a wide non-specialized audience. The scholarly ambitions of the book are clear from its detailed endnotes, in a selective, but at the same time representative bibliography, and in an appendix on sources. The latter aim is reflected by the presentation of sources in translation only, as well as by the addition of numerous purely decorative illustrations.

One can imagine that the comparisons between the father and the son echoing from his two earlier books prompted Worthington to present his study of the reigns of the two greatest Argead kings.² Unlike the two earlier books, this one was not conceived as a comparative biography of Philip and Alexander, but rather as "a study of the rise and fall of their Macedonian Empire" (vii). Worthington has previously done a lot towards a historical appraisal of Philip, and here starts from the introduction by stressing the father's importance for son's achievement.

¹ *Alexander the Great: Man and God.* (London: 2003); and *Philip II of Macedonia.* (New Haven / London: 2008).

² Of course, no author dealing with the Macedonian history in the era of expansion can escape comparisons between Philip and Alexander – ancient sources invite us to enter the discussion concerning their greatness and achievement. One should note that recently even specialized academic books tend to adapt the biographical approach and openly deal with the father and the son collectively; a good illustration may be a collection of conference papers by leading Philip and Alexander scholars aiming at comparing Philip and Alexander: E. Carney, D. Ogden (ed.), *Philip II and Alexander the Great: Father and Son, Lives and Afterlives.* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Still, proportions of the book remain in favor of Alexander (roughly two thirds of the narrative focus on him).

The general comparison of historical contributions by Philip and Alexander seems, however, more balanced than in previous books by Worthington, which were sometimes criticized for a tendency to diminish Alexander's success and his merits to the Macedonians. Indeed, Worthington names Alexander the master builder and the destroyer of the Macedonian Empire at the same time. It is easy to agree with the first part of his opinion. One should also accept that (Philip was at least as important as his son for the success of Macedonia). Yet it is difficult to accept a view that Alexander was the destroyer of the Macedonian empire. At least, the ancient historians (including Alexander's contemporaries) would have hardly said that the Macedonian Empire had not survived him.

The Macedonians remained the ruling elite of the world after Alexander, and it is often stressed in Classical authors that the Macedonian dynasties ruled the world till the Roman conquest. Indeed, criticism of Alexander in ancient sources seems to be restricted to moral issues. Also his failure to produce a legitimate heir was rightly understood as a factor that facilitated the clashes among his generals known as the wars of the Successors. Yet, the ancient critics of Alexander concentrated on changes in his character (including drinking habits, orientalism, immodesty) and on his attitude to the Macedonian traditions that devastated unity of the king and his nation. I believe that the remarks of ancient historians stressing on Alexander's appetite for conquest collected by Worthington (306–307) implied a degree of admiration for so great a conqueror.

Although this book is aimed towards a general readership, more ambitious readers should not be disappointed. They may benefit from well-balanced references to ancient sources and cleverly chosen modern literature. The endnotes are mostly precise and helpful.³

³ Once, however, the reviewer encountered an endnote that had been converted from an earlier format of reference to Classical texts (page 355, note 12). There, in the list of the Macedonians implicated in the conspiracy of Dimnus the present book sends to Curtius Rufus 6.2.37, whereas the proper address in Curtius Rufus 6.11.37. One can easily imagine, how 6.11.37 of aged paper notes had been wrongly deciphered as 6.ii.37, and then mistaken for 6.2.37. By the way, in the same note "By the spear" seems to imply that Demetrius' participation the Dimnus conspiracy is not attested in Curtius 6.7.15, whereas *Demetrius, corporis custos* is actually the first conspirer named in the list. Clearly, Demetrius in a way slipped from the notes used by the author for this problem. Such lapses suggest that the author, while writing this book, based on his enormous knowledge of sources, and consulted his notes of long ago, but rarely felt forced to check once again correctness of his notes or recollections in the Classical texts, even in smaller details. Of course, having encoun-

Generally, the book is a good read, nicely edited, and may well serve as a compendium on Philip and Alexander for the general public. With *By the Spear* Worthington makes an important contribution to the ongoing debate concerning our times' assessment of Alexander and his conquest in Asia.

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tered one mistake the reviewer had to survey many other references in this book, from the same angle, looking for other possible slips. The result of this survey (not a complete check note by note, but rather a random selection of notes) is highly positive for the book.