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Ian Worthington,
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The study of Philip II and Alexander the Great is often separated despite both ancient interests in comparing the two Macedonian kings and the inextricable connection between them in terms of the rapid growth of the Macedonian empire in the fourth century BC. This division is especially significant in books written for general audiences and has left Philip, and Macedonian state building more broadly, off the radar of many readers. *By the Spear*, which specifically serves as a study of both rulers in a single volume, is the latest offering in the “Ancient Warfare and Civilization” series that seeks to provide new narratives of military history accessible to a broad audience. To that end, the book adheres closely to the narrative form and relies primarily on literary sources to help structure that narrative. While the political and military history is likely familiar to most academic readers, it is presented in a lively and accessible manner and should be easily followed by those less familiar with the period more broadly. More interesting for all, however, is the comparative study of the two rulers and Worthington’s emphasis on Philip and his state-building activities in contrast with Alexander’s failure to provide stability for his newly conquered empire.

The reign of Philip II, which comprises the first half of the book, is presented in terms of the rapid speed with which Philip transformed Macedonia from a collapsing backwater upon his accession to the throne in 359 BC into the leading power in the Greek world at his death in 336. Accordingly, the volume opens with the Persian Wars and by framing the rise of Macedonia in the wider context of the drive of the Greek *poleis* for *autonomia* and *eleutheria*. Worthington does an excellent job navigating the complex waters of Philip’s military campaigns as he expanded and secured his power in northern Greece and then seized control as the leading member of the Delphic Amphictyonic League. Throughout these campaigns, Philip consistently emerges as the victor as a result of reforms to the Macedonian state that emphasized new military tactics and equipment, professionalization of the army, and a keen attention to arguably new institutions, such as that of the royal pages, that served to bind the contentious Macedonian aristocracy to the persona of the King. Following the battle of Chaeronea, the creation of the League of Corinth is

described a “brilliant and revolutionary” (p. 100) move that managed to solve the problems created by the various hegemonic powers of the fourth century and their desire for autonomy as a putative stalemate between the rival Greek states enforced by each other and by Macedonian military power above all. Throughout these chapters, Worthington does an effective job of demonstrating how Philip secured stability by binding local institutions, both of the Macedonian state and of the conquered *poleis*, to himself and to the institution of Macedonian kingship.

If Philip’s legacy is to be found in the triumph of the League of Corinth, Worthington argues that the legacy of Alexander is found in his failure to consolidate his kingdom and in the chaos that followed his death in 323 BC. Throughout the second half of the book, Worthington consistently emphasizes Alexander’s tactical and military brilliance with particular note in the three major battles at Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela. In contrast with his conquests on the battlefield, Worthington also stresses Alexander’s failure to manage the strain among his troops after the conquest of Babylon, exemplified by such episodes as the murder of Cleitus the Black and the Opis Mutiny, and follows Arrian in attributing this to Alexander’s increasing orientalism. Importantly, Worthington allows that this tendency towards eastern models of power and kingship may have been part of a wider strategy in governing the multi-cultural empire. Although Macedonians were installed as satraps over conquered territories in the west, Alexander made increasing use of local aristocrats for this role in the east. This strategy, which is extremely well described in Chapter Ten, was built on Achaemenid precedents and was clearly intended to produce stability, but also served to distance Alexander’s Macedonian companions from the operations and rewards of power. Although this connection might have been made slightly more directly in the text, it remains an important suggestion with particular resonance when thinking about the struggle for power and wealth of the Wars of the Successors, argued here to be Alexander’s ultimate legacy.

The most interesting aspect of this work is found in the comparison of the two rulers at the end of the chapters on Philip and in the conclusion. Worthington here leans heavily on an interesting passage of Justin comparing the two figures with a certain preference for Philip as the better king for Macedonia in comparison with Alexander’s role as a conquering military leader. As Worthington argues throughout, there is some evidence that the Macedonian homeland did not wholly embrace Alexander while he was alive. Most significantly, Macedonian mints stopped producing Alexander’s coinage after the Battle of Issus and monuments in honor of Alexander’s campaigns are found only in the east during his lifetime. Under this interpretation, the popularity of Alexander as a conqueror is to be found in the

Greek world only after his death in direct contrast with his contemporary legacy in the east. This is an interesting and important note, though some quibbles might be had, and raises significant issues on who exactly viewed Alexander as “Great,” when, and on what basis. Alexander may well have conquered the world, but the resultant instability did little good for Macedonia in contrast with the stability achieved by Philip. This argument is particularly successful inasmuch as it moves beyond the simple fact of the dissolution of Alexander’s conquests—which, after all, had required him to govern an almost impossibly vast space far greater than the demands placed on Philip—into a larger examination of the values of Kingship thought desirable by surviving sources.

By examining the rise of the Macedonian Empire under both Philip II and Alexander together, Worthington encourages readers to think not just in terms of the biographies of great leaders but also about the ways in which they built, or attempted to build, new political and military structures. More importantly, by putting his vast knowledge of the source material for this period on display, Worthington has also successfully managed to give a broad readership an opportunity to see how history works through the careful reading and analysis of the perspectives and aims of surviving sources. This book deserves a wide audience and, one hopes, will serve well to encourage readers to think carefully about what characteristics are most desirable in a leader and how perceptions of such leaders may change over time.

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