Philip took over the Macedonian kingdom when it was in a critical state. The Illyrian invasion, the death of Perdiccas III on the battlefield, and the loss of thousands of Macedonians compounded the local problems over Methone, Pydna, and much of the “New Territories” east of the Axios and the lack of control over the cantons to the south-west. Nonetheless within twenty-three years Philip had transformed this broken kingdom and had conquered peoples from Lake Ohrid to Sparta, from the Danube to Thebes. Philip is the greatest royal founder in Greek history. His new model army, his royal style, and vision justify the claim that he is a founder of the Hellenistic age.

My focus is on Philip and his “new Macedon,” a subject which I will address thematically in the second part of this chapter and the next one. His first year, however, is one which modern books, in my view, tend to misdate or underestimate. So I will begin with a closer look at it, believing that it is especially revealing of Philip’s skills.

When Perdiccas III died, Philip was aged twenty-two. Where was he at that time and when did he take over? The main sources are the start of Diodorus 16 (probably using Ephorus) and Justin’s epitome of Trogus who probably drew on Theopompus. The chronology has been penetratingly clarified by Hatzopoulos since 1982. Philip took over early in the Athenian archon-year 360/59, not 359/8 BC. He ruled for twenty-four years (Diodorus), until September–October 336: Justin records twenty-five years, perhaps counting them inclusively, rather than because his ultimate source (Theopompus) followed the Macedonian year (October to October) in reckoning Macedonian reigns in his Philippica. As Hatzopoulos has brilliantly explained, Satyrus’ figure of “twenty-two” refers to Philip’s age at accession, not to a shorter reign-length from which a period of regency had been deducted.1

1 M. B. Hatzopoulos, “The Oleveni Inscription and the Dates of Philip II’s Reign,” in
According to Carystius of Pergamum, while elucidating Speusippus’ Letter of 343/2 BC, Perdiccas had “apportioned” territory for Philip on which he had maintained troops.² This territory might be between the Axios and Echedoros rivers or a part of the former New Territories (Hatzopoulos), which lay east of the Axios, but I wonder if it was specifically Amphipolis and its territory where Perdiccas had sent a garrison in 362/1.³

From this territory, the young Philip faced multiple threats. If we follow the detailed chronology in the scholiast to Aeschines 2.30, the first was Timotheos. Recently arrived in the north, Timotheos had just won over Methone and Pydna (on my chronology), helped, perhaps, by king Perdiccas’ absence against the Illyrians. From there, in or around early August, he moved by sea directly against Amphipolis, but was repulsed by a “large force,” evidently the citizens and the garrison, perhaps on Philip’s orders. Meanwhile, around August 360, Perdiccas was killed far away in his disastrous battle against Bardylis’s Illyrians.

Philip’s next two urgent threats were dynastic: Pausanias (with Thracian backing) and Argaeus (with Athenian backing), who were probably the “old pretenders” of 369/8 and 387–384 BC respectively.⁴ To counter them I accept, though others have not, that Philip made prompt contact with Pausanias’ backer, the king of Thrace, elderly Cotys himself. The later Hellenistic anecdotalist Hegesander of Delphi told a story which presupposed letters from Cotys to Philip: I accept the truth of these dealings, despite the danger that such a late source may have brought two famous kings into unhistorical contact. I am inclined to accept it because of what Athenaeus quotes “concerning Philip” from the “first book of Theopompos’ Philippic histories.” This book covered events in 360/59 BC and the quotation concerns a journey in which somebody came “on the third day” to Onocarsis, a Thracian place which is described as much favoured by King Cotys, whose eventual blasphemy and extreme conduct are described as leading on to his death.⁵

² Caryst. Perg. ap. Athen. 11.506E.
³ M. B. Hatzopoulos, Macedonian Institutions under the Kings, 1, (Athens, 1996), p. 177.