Imperialism is a strangely uniform phenomenon. The modes of acquiring empire tend to be similar, as do the arguments justifying its acquisition. That is not surprising. Imperial powers have a tendency to look over their shoulders at their predecessors, emulate the achievements of the past, and absorb the traditional philosophies of conquest. Cicero on the just war or Aristotle on natural slavery were texts familiar to the expansionists of the Renaissance and early modern periods. The ancients provided convenient doctrines of racial superiority, which could be buttressed by appeals to the divinity. A typical example of complacent optimism is provided by a certain Daniel Denton, who observed in 1670 ‘that where the English come to settle a Divine Hand makes way for them by removing or cutting off the Indians, whether by wars one with the other or by some raging, mortal disease’. God, then, was on the side of the English, and they could provide time-hallowed justification for their presence in North America. But can the reverse process be

1 On these concepts and their exploitation see in general Clavedescher-Thurlemann 1981; Russell 1975, esp. 4–20; and Pagden 1995, esp. 19–28. In the immediate context of this chapter there is a fascinating collection of material in Hanke 1959: 44–73; the great debate at Valladolid in 1550 between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de Las Casas focused on the twin issues of natural slavery and the just war. The theory was invoked from the early days of conquest by the formal reading of the Requerimiento (see below, n. 76) before battle was joined (Thomas 1993: 71–5; Bosworth 1996a: 159–61), and the doctrine of natural slavery underlies Cortés’ attitude to the Chichimecas (see below, pp. 40–1).

2 Daniel Denton, A Brief Description of New York: Formerly Called New Netherlands (London, 1670), 7, quoted by Pagden 1995: 105. A few years later John Archdale of Southern Carolina was to congratulate the English for shedding little Indian blood in contrast with the Spaniards: ‘the Hand of God was eminently seen in thining the Indians to make room for the English . . . it at other times pleased Almighty God to send unusual sicknesses amongst them, as the Smallpox, to lessen their numbers’ (quoted by Hanke 1959: 100).
justified? Can we, so to speak, call upon the New World to explain or illuminate the empires of the past? There are indeed similarities, notably between the conquests of Alexander the Great and those of the Spaniards in Central America. In both cases the spectacular campaigns of a handful of years changed the political map of the world. Alexander invaded Asia Minor in the spring of 334 BC, and a mere four years later he had overrun the greater part of the Near East, occupied the central capitals of the Persian Empire, and annexed the accumulated treasure of the imperial people he defeated. As a direct result of the campaigns the world from Macedon in the north to Egypt in the south and to Afghanistan in the east came under the control of a Graeco-Roman elite. Similarly between 1519 and 1522 a group of Spaniards under Hernán Cortés extended the rule of the Spanish crown from the east coast of Mexico over almost all Central America. They occupied and destroyed the Aztec capital and exploited its wealth to sustain the pretensions of the Spanish monarchs to domination in Europe. An élite of Spanish settlers moved in, supported by vast encomiendas, and maintained their domination for almost the length of the Hellenistic monarchies.

So far the similarities, if roughly drawn, are clear enough. The same can be said for the sources. For the Spanish conquest there is a rich tradition, predominantly from the conquerors’ perspective. We have the Narrative Letters (Cartas de Relación) in which Cortés himself justified his actions to his master, Charles V.\(^3\) We have several other memoirs from participants, notably the remarkable work by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, written at the ripe old age of 76, some fifty years after the events, and significantly entitled *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*.\(^4\) (A work that so openly professes its truth one automatically suspects

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\(^3\) Translated and edited by Pagden 1986; the parallel with Ptolemy is drawn by Bosworth 1996a: 34–5.

\(^4\) *Historia verdadera de la Nueva España*, written c.1555 and published over 75 years later. The only full English translation is that of Alfred Maudslay (5 vols.: 1908–16); a slightly abbreviated version of the narrative to the fall of Tenochtitlan is also available (Maudslay 1928), as is a more truncated Penguin Classics version (Cohen 1963). One should also mention the largely derivative work of Cortés’ secretary, Francisco López de Gómara (Simpson 1965), and other writings of the early Conquistadors collected in de Fuentes 1993.
of falsehood: think of Lucian.) All this was supplemented by
documentation from the royal investigations into the
conduct of Cortés and his lieutenant, Pedro de Alvarado.⁵
There are also Mexican versions of the conquest, admittedly
written under the supervision of Spanish priests, but which,
however dimly, represent the perspective of the conquered
people.⁶ Nothing comparable exists from the period of Alex-
ander, no testimony direct or indirect from the peoples he
conquered. On the surface there appears a rich vein of con-
temporary memoirs, works of Alexander’s lieutenants and
humbler contemporaries: Ptolemy, Aristobulus, Nearchus,
Onesicritus, and Cleitarchus all wrote significant works, but
all are known solely through derivative authors writing
centuries later, when the objective was literary embellish-
ment, not factual reportage.⁷ We may suspect bias and mis-
information, but it is rare that we have solid evidence. The
historical record of the Spanish conquest can perhaps be
used as an explanatory matrix, showing how historians of
the first generation differ in their record of fact, what they
suppress for their convenience and how they slant the narra-
tive to suit their political interests. Similar motives are at
work, and the subject matter is often startlingly pertinent to
the history of Alexander.

We may begin, as is appropriate, with the leaders of the
conquests, Alexander of Macedon and Cortés of Castile.
Both were complex characters, enigmatic and elusive to
contemporaries and posterity alike, and both quickly
became less the stuff of history than symbols of national
aspiration, to be evoked in an amazing range of contexts.
Anthony Pagden has written of the many personae which
Cortés has assumed in modern writings: ‘the soldier-scholar
of the Renaissance, a bandy-legged syphilitic liar and, most
improbable of all, a humane idealist aiding an oppressed
people against tyranny’.⁸ If one substitutes ‘alcoholic’

⁵ On the Spanish archives see the checklist in Thomas 1993: 784–90.
⁶ Thomas 1993: 774–84, drawing upon the full bibliography by José Alcina
Franch, Códices Mexicanos (Madrid, 1992). There is a useful anthology of material
in Leon-Portilla 1962.
⁷ For brief description of the source tradition of Alexander’s reign see Bosworth
extended accounts of the first-generation historians.
⁸ Pagden 1986: xlv.
for ‘syphilitic’, one has a fair, if incomplete, spectrum of modern views of Alexander, the humanitarian champion of Hellenic culture, the promoter of the brotherhood of mankind, the sinister Machiavellian schemer, the alcohol-drenched debauchee. One creates one’s picture, and the sources, if selectively exploited, will confirm it—provided that one ignores the vast bulk of the evidence. The undeniable similarity comes in the career of conquest. Despite the differences in their ages (Cortés was 35, already older than Alexander at his death, when he set foot in Mexico) and the size of their armies, both had spectacular and largely unbroken successes against much larger forces. Our sources are explicit. For Bernal Díaz ‘the plain name Cortés was as highly respected in Spain and throughout the Indies as the name of Alexander in Macedonia or those of Julius Caesar, Pompey and Scipio among the Romans or Hannibal in Carthage’.\(^9\) Alexander and Cortés alike were endued with an aura of invincibility, and both exploited the concept for self-glorification. The Macedonian king made victory inseparable from his person. The great silver decadrachms which he struck to commemorate his Indian victories depict him holding the thunderbolt of Zeus and receiving a crown from the hands of personified Victory.\(^10\) Even at Athens his erstwhile enemies proposed erecting a statue to him as god invincible; they had an informed opinion of what would appeal to him and framed their motion accordingly.\(^11\) Unfortunately for Cortés the immense proprietary interest of the Catholic Church prevented his claiming godhead, but he made the most of his invincibility. Just before his death he was portrayed with his arms as Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca, and the legend proclaims him \textit{dux invictissimus}.\(^12\)

\(^9\) Ch. 19: Maudslay 1908–16: i. 72; Cohen 1963: 47.
\(^10\) For discussion and bibliography (to which add Lane Fox 1996; Le Rider 1995–6: 856) see Bosworth 1996: 6–8, 166–9. The epithet \textit{ἀνίκητος} was particularly associated with Alexander’s purported forefather, Heracles (Tyrtaeus F 8. 1 Diehl; Diod. 8. 9. 1; App. BC 2. 76). That helps explain Alexander’s interest in it from his earliest years.
\(^11\) Hyp Dem. col. 32; cf. Din. 1. 94; Athen. 6. 251b; Ael. \textit{VH} 5. 12. On the background see Badian 1981: 54–9, Bosworth 1988b: 288–9; Habicht 1995: 41–6 and the rationalizing interpretation of Cawkwell 1994: 301–6. The hero cult of Hephaestion, which was contemporaneous and apparently mandatory, is now attested on a 4th-cent. relief from Macedonia (Voutiras 1990).
\(^12\) Reproduced in Pagden 1986: 7 and Thomas 1993: 269. Díaz (ch. 212:
His invincibility was truly superlative. The sceptics might point to the *Noche triste*, the night of sorrows (1 July 1520) when Cortés had to fight his way out of the Mexican capital with the loss of at least 500 of his Castilian troops (he admits to no more than 150).\(^{13}\) They might also point to Alexander’s first disastrous attempt to storm the passes into Persia, when his phalanx was smashed by missiles from the hillsides and withdrew demoralized, leaving its dead in the narrows.\(^{14}\) However, both disasters were retrieved, Alexander’s in a matter of days, that of Cortés only by the capture and destruction of Tenochtitlan over a year later. In the long view they could both be considered unconquered, and their military abilities are beyond question.

We can extend and deepen the investigation by the study of two parallel episodes, which to me are remarkably similar. Both Alexander and Cortés were prone to *folies de grandeurs*, and in both cases it led to near disaster and massive suffering. In the autumn of 325 Alexander returned from what is now southern Pakistan. His elephants and some of the heavy infantry and veterans he had sent on an alternative route through Afghanistan and southern Iran, while he took the bulk of the army, at least 30,000 strong, through the bleakly inhospitable Makran. It was an appalling hardship, a march of 750 kilometres over sixty days, plagued by sand drifts, monsoonal floods in the east, and thirst and famine in the west; and the army which limped into the Gedrosian capital of Pura had eaten its baggage animals and was reduced to the last stages of exhaustion.\(^{15}\) The parallel in the career of Cortés is his march through Honduras. It began in October 1525 and took at least six months to cover a distance

\(^{13}\) On Cortés’ figures see Pagden 1986: 139, 479 n. 94. By contrast, Díaz claims that over 860 soldiers were killed or sacrificed in the retreat (ch. 128: Maudslay ii. 255; Cohen 1963: 305); even the eulogistic Gómara admits to the death of 450 Spaniards and 4,000 Indian auxiliaries (Simpson 1965: 221).

\(^{14}\) Diod. 17. 68. 2–3; Curt. 5. 3. 17–23 (cf. 22: *invictus ante eam diem fuerat*); cf. Arr. 3. 18. 3 (less dramatic); Polyæn. 4. 3. 27.

\(^{15}\) See the recent discussion in Bosworth 1996a: 166–85, with the earlier excellent article of Schepens 1989.
comparable to Alexander’s passage of Gedrosia. The hardships were comparable: starvation and exhaustion predominating. Cortés’ forces were often stranded for weeks at a time, while his Indian followers were impressed into engineering works, constructing vast log bridges and causeways at great human cost. Not surprisingly Cortés himself minimizes the hardships. In his detailed Fifth Letter he insinuates that the forces with him were minute (93 horsemen and some 30 foot soldiers) and emphasizes the care with which he provisioned the expedition, sending a small fleet of supply ships to the Tabasco River.\textsuperscript{16} He somewhat weakens the effect by adding that, as his road lay inland, the supplies were of very little use. In his description of the march he does not deny that there were problems with hunger, particularly while building the bridge over the San Pedro Mártir,\textsuperscript{17} but they were promptly relieved once his forces crossed over into Acalan. Hunger began in earnest only when he reached his destination at Nito and had to care for the handful of destitute and starving Spanish settlers whom he found there\textsuperscript{18}—and it was the herd of pigs which Cortés had collected for the journey (or the few survivors) that prevented disaster. He had prepared carefully for the march, acquiring maps from the chiefs of Tabasco and Xicalango,\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Pagden 1986: 342–3. Pagden 514 n. 15 observes that the numbers are wrong, but suggests that the copyist was at fault. But 93 is a remarkably precise figure for a copyist’s error. It is more likely, I think, that Cortés deliberately minimizes the losses and stresses that he had the prudence to take 150 horses, allowing for remounts.

\textsuperscript{17} Pagden 1986: 360: the Spaniards fatigued by having eaten nothing but the roots of trees, but an abundance of food to be found in Acalan. The bridge-building, then wholly delegated to the Indian auxiliaries, caused a large number of deaths.

\textsuperscript{18} Pagden 1986: 387 ‘we had eaten no bread for eight days when we arrived in Tanyha’. For conditions at Nito see 388–90, esp. 390: ‘if it had not been for some few pigs left over from the journey . . . we should all have ended our days there’. Gómara (Simpson 1965: 366) repeats Cortés’ claims, as he does in his description of the bridge-building (351–2); his narrative is scarcely more than a literary elaboration.

\textsuperscript{19} Pagden 1986: 340. Cortés is vague, referring to a map of the whole country, indicating where the Spanish settlement would be found. Gómara (Simpson 1965: 345) dutifully represents the map as covering the whole route from Xicalango to Naco and Nito and extending as far afield as Nicaragua. Cortés himself admits that the map only gave general directions, since the natives travelled by water and did not know which route to take overland.
and it was his initiative which ensured that the route was followed even though the natives professed ignorance of it.

Díaz, however, provides a complete contrast. For all his admiration of Cortés his resentment gives his narrative an acid edge. The march was folly, ruined by Cortés’ obstinacy in ignoring the advice of his lieutenants (including Díaz himself) who advocated a direct route through the Sierras. His detailed account reveals that Cortés took over 250 Spaniards, including most of the settlers in the town of Coatzacoalcos, who were forced against their will to join the expedition—and their absence led directly to a native revolt. Cortés’ preparations are denigrated; his famous map described the lands only as far as Acalan, and within a few days the expedition was lost; the road they laboriously cut went round in a circle and after two days intersected itself (‘when Cortés saw this he was like to burst with rage’). The situation was hardly improved when the two guides he had brought with the expedition disappeared, and it transpired that they had been eaten by the starving Indian auxiliaries, some three thousand of whom followed in his train: Cortés showed his displeasure at the atrocity by having one of the culprits burned alive. In Díaz’ account starvation is an ever-present threat. A few days out from Iztapa the Spaniards were subsisting on herbs and roots, and were busy at heavy construction work. When the great bridge over the San Pedro Mártir was built, there were numerous deaths from hunger, and the situation was only alleviated by a successful

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20 Díaz’ account is unfortunately not contained in the abbreviated translations of Cohen 1963 and Maudslay 1928. It must be consulted in the original or in Maudslay’s earlier full translation.

21 Ch. 204: Maudslay v. 217 (‘I told him many times that we ought to go by the Sierras’). This is one of only two criticisms that Díaz has to lay against Cortés’ leadership.

22 Ch. 175: Maudslay v. 8–9. The numbers seem generally agreed. Even Gómara (Simpson 1965: 346) concedes ‘150 horse and an equal number of foot, in battle trim’.

23 Maudslay v. 12–13. Cortés himself admitted that he had to acquire another map during the journey (Pagden 1986: 365), precisely in Acalan.

24 Maudslay v. 15–16. Cortés mentions the burning, but he treats it as repression of cannibalism, ignoring the prevailing hunger and implying that there was only the single isolated case; nor does he mention that the guides were eaten (cf. Pagden 1986: 351–2).

25 Maudslay v. 13 (‘we were three days building it and had nothing to eat but herbs and some roots . . . which burned our tongues and mouths’).
foraging raid led by Díaz himself. In fact Díaz represents himself as the saviour of the expedition, the only person capable of finding supplies in the native villages near by—he was as indispensable as Xenophon to the Ten Thousand and as shameless in recounting his services. By contrast, Cortés kept his herd of pigs five days to the rear, and his quartermaster spread the rumour that they had been eaten by alligators. He became the butt of the troops’ mounting exasperation. They seized the supplies brought by Díaz, refusing to reserve anything for their leader, and Díaz had to undertake yet another trip to relieve the situation, accompanied this time by Cortés’ lieutenant, Gonzalo de Sandoval (‘he went with me himself to bring his share of the food, and would trust no one else, although he had many soldiers whom he could have sent’). For Díaz the whole affair was a bizarre catalogue of extreme hardship, and even Cortés himself was ‘regretful and discontented’. It contrasts sharply with the bland, minimalist account of the leader of the expedition.

The same variation occurs in our tradition of Alexander’s march through the Makran. There are two main accounts, both resumed in the work of Arrian. First there is a relatively matter-of-fact description of the journey from Oreitis (Las Bela) to Pura (Bampur). The hardships are mentioned but not stressed: the night marches, shortages of water, lack

26 Ch. 176: Maudslay v. 21; cf. 23–4.
27 Ch. 175: Maudslay v. 16.
28 Ch. 176: Maudslay v. 21–3. Cortés naturally says nothing of this embarrassing episode, nor of the fact that his reconnaissance team had failed to investigate the swamps beyond the bridge (so Díaz in Maudslay v. 19). He states that after the crossing he sent ahead ‘some Spaniards’, who returned with 80 Indian bearers laden with supplies (Pagden 1986: 361). It comes as no surprise when Díaz identifies himself as the leader of the foraging party and increases the number of bearers to over one hundred.
29 Ch. 177: Maudslay v. 29. A few pages earlier Díaz had given a bitter picture of deaths by hunger and the desertion by three Spanish soldiers who ‘had taken their chance of a state of war along the road by which we had come, and preferred to die rather than continue the advance’.
30 Arr. 6. 23–27. 1. Here, as in earlier discussions (Bosworth 1988b: 143–6; 1996a: 169–73) I follow the exemplary treatment of the sources by Strasburger 1982–90: i. 451–9. I shall discuss the problems of attribution in the third volume of my Historical Commentary on Arrian. For the present argument it does not matter whether the narrative of horror comes from Nearchus, as I believe, or from Aristobulus. In either case the analogy with Díaz holds good.
of provisions.\(^{31}\) Even so, it is maintained, Alexander was able to acquire a surplus of grain which he sent to the coast to provision the fleet which was to sail along the coast in his wake after the monsoon southerlies abated. One of these convoys was devoured by its escort (and the source underlines the desperate state of hunger),\(^{32}\) but it is implied that the bulk of the consignments reached the coast unscathed. What emerges is a rational scheme to provision the fleet, a scheme which was in part successful. The undoubted hardships were not catastrophic and did not take place in the immediate entourage of Alexander. Once again there is a second version. Nearchus, the actual commander of the Ocean fleet, gave a vivid account of privation:\(^{33}\) deaths through flash floods in the early part of the march, extreme difficulties with the shifting sand dunes, chronic thirst and starvation. As the march continued the draught animals were gradually slaughtered and the army’s baggage was necessarily discarded.\(^{34}\) There was also trouble with the route. Alexander’s guides may not have been eaten, but they were baffled by the configuration of the terrain after a sandstorm and led the army astray.\(^{35}\) Finally, the attempt to provision the fleet was totally ineffectual. If any supplies reached the coast, they did not remain to be consumed by Nearchus’ men. No supply depot is reported between the coast of Oreitis and Hormuz.\(^{36}\) The difference between the two versions is palpable, however much Arrian may have

\(^{31}\) Arr. 6. 23. 1, a very dry and succinct statement of the difficulties: ὅδον χαλεπὴν καὶ ἄπορον τῶν ἐπιτηδεῶν, τῶν τε ἄλλων καὶ ὁδορ πολλαχοῦ τῇ στρατιᾷ οὐκ ὤν· ἄλλα νόκτωρ ἣναγκάζοντο γην πολλὴν πορεύεσθαι.

\(^{32}\) Arr. 6. 23. 4–5.

\(^{33}\) Recounted in a context dominated by Nearchus in Strabo 15. 2. 5–6 (721–2) with the statement of motivation (below, n. 43) anticipated at 15. 1. 5 (686) and ascribed directly to Nearchus. The same material is found, more rhetorically elaborated, in Arr. 6. 24. 1–27. 1, and again Nearchus is mentioned as a source (6. 24. 2).

\(^{34}\) Arr. 6. 25. 1–2: Arrian adds that Alexander pretended ignorance, as he was unable to stop what was happening and unwilling to give it his licence.

\(^{35}\) Strabo 15. 2. 6 (722); Arr. 6. 26. 4–5 (embellished with echoes of the journey through the Sahara to Siwah; cf. Arr. 3. 3. 4).

\(^{36}\) Arr. Ind. 23. 6 (Oreitis). Ind. 26 describes the transit of the coast south of Alexander’s route through the Makran, and it is clear that the fleet had to dig its own wells and subsist on dates and meat supplied by natives. By that stage most of the supply of grain had been exhausted (Ind. 26. 9). The only depot of provisions which Alexander supplied is recorded west of Persis on the Persian Gulf (Ind. 38. 9).
intensified the lurid details of Nearchus for rhetorical effect, and it is exactly the contrast we find in the reports of Cortés' march to Honduras. One account, which in all probability derives from Ptolemy, placed the emphasis on Alexander’s leadership. He coped with impossible conditions with a degree of success, and he treated the one lapse of discipline with compassionate understanding. That account does not derive from Alexander himself, but it was written by one of his Bodyguards, one of the elite marshals of his court, who would have been involved in the planning of the expedition and shared any opprobrium for the hardships of the march. He would not have made a feature of the human misery and casualties it incurred. On the other hand, Nearchus had the same perspective as Díaz. He was making the most of a situation which he had not created. He could stress the miseries of the march which made it impossible for any provision to be made for him. It was almost a miracle that the land forces escaped with such comparatively small losses to the fighting forces. By contrast he was instrumental in saving the fleet—just as Díaz claims he delivered Cortés and his men from starvation. Despite the lack of provisions, the hostile coast, an incompetent head steersman, he brought the fleet to Hormuz practically untouched. It was his stratagem that extorted food from the natives on the Gedrosian coast, his initiative that coped with the threat from a school of whales, his foresight which saved the fleet from disaster when Onesicritus proposed extending the voyage west to the Arabian peninsula. The hardship and near catastrophe suffered by the land forces served to highlight Nearchus’ achievement. At the least he had vindicated his proud boast to Alexander that he would bring ships and men safe to Persis—and on his own account he had surpassed Alexander himself.

The similarities extend beyond the sources to the motivation of the two expeditions. All writers are somewhat baffled by the reasons for Cortés’ march to Honduras. On the surface it is transparent enough. Cortés was infuriated by

\[37 \text{Ind. 27. 7–28. 9; cf. Bosworth} \ 1996b: \ 184–5; \text{Ind. 30. 1–7; Strabo 15. 2. 12 (725) (Onesicritus, FGrH 134 F 31 also mentioned the whales, as do Diod.} \ 17. 106. \ 6 \text{and Curt. 10. 1. 12); Ind. 32. 6–13; Anab. 7. 20. 9–10.\]
the defection of one of his captains. Cristóbal de Olid, whom
he had dispatched to establish a settlement in Honduras, had
gone over to his mortal enemy, Diego Velázquez, the gover-
nor of Cuba. That was a violation of Cortés’ authority as
governor of New Spain, authority which had been only
recently conferred (Cortés received the news in September
1523, only four months before Olid’s betrayal). It is not sur-
prising that Cortés reacted with fury, and imprudently
threatened to cross to Cuba and arrest Velázquez, and it is
only natural that he sent a punitive force, a flotilla of five
ships with a complement of conquistadors under his rela-
tive, Francisco de Las Casas. It is understandable, as Díaz
states, that he had suspicions that Las Casas would fail and
decided upon a second expedition led by himself. What is
not explained is why he went overland and took the route he
did. Díaz maintains that he might have gone far more easily
by way of the uplands, from Coatzacoalcos to Chiapa, from
Chiapa to Guatemala, and from Guatemala to Olid’s base at
Naco. Instead Cortés insisted on the coastal route, although
he knew that there were substantial rivers to cross as well as
unforgiving marshy terrain and heavy jungle. Even Díaz
gives no explanation for the march, and the only hint we
have is Cortés’ remark to his emperor that ‘I had been for a
long time idle and attempted no new thing in Your
Majesty’s service’. He would not rest indefinitely on his
laurels after the capture of Tenochtitlan, but would carry
out an epic march through the most difficult of terrain to
 crush a rebel against his authority. The route was chosen
precisely because it was the most difficult and challenging.

38 For a lucid account of the complex political intrigues see the introductory
the aforementioned Diego Velázquez and arrest him and send him to Your
Majesty; for by cutting out the root of all these evils, which he is, all the branches
will wither . . .’.
40 Ch. 174: Maudslay v. 1–2. Díaz adds that Cortés was excited by reports that
the land was rich in gold mines. All the more reason for him to take the most direct
route. Gómara (Simpson 1965: 338) has an interesting story of the royal officers in
Mexico attempting to dissuade Cortés from the journey because of the danger of
insurrection during his absence. ‘Besides, they told him, the journey was long,
difficult, and profitless.’ It is strongly reminiscent of Alexander’s briefing on the
perils of the Makran.
In the event it nearly killed him. He and his men arrived at the Honduran coast in the last stages of exhaustion, in no condition to crush any rebel, and he was lucky that Olid had already been captured and beheaded—through a combination of good luck and incompetence.\(^{42}\)

Alexander’s motivation is on record. According to Nearchus, Alexander went into the Makran in full knowledge of the difficulties of the terrain because he wished to eclipse the achievements of Semiramis, the legendary conqueror-queen of Babylon, and Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire.\(^{43}\) Both had allegedly come to grief in the Makran, escaping with a handful of survivors. By contrast, Alexander intended to bring his own army through intact. Like Cortés he had political reasons for concern. There were reports of insubordination among the governors of the western satrapies of his empire, and he took the first steps to quash the unrest before he embarked on the desert march. When he arrived in Carmania, he was met by the generals from Media who had completed a 1,700-kilometre march the length of Iran\(^{44}\) and had obviously been summoned while he was still in India, as, it seems, was Apollodorus, the military commandant in Babylonia.\(^{45}\) Alexander conducted a full investigation, and had the Median generals executed for insubordination and misgovernment. Apollodorus remained under suspicion.\(^{46}\) The king had every reason to return and restore order among his errant subordinates, but, like Cortés, he chose the route which was most challenging and he did so to prove his pre-eminence as a leader of armies. He would bring his forces intact through the desert which had beaten Cyrus. In that he was partially


\(^{43}\) Strabo 15. 1. 5 (686): \(\phi\gamma\alpha\iota N\varepsilon\varphi\chi\alpha\varsigma \kappa\tau\mu\lambda\); cf. 15. 2. 5 (722). Arr. 6. 24. 1 confirms, stating that Nearchus alone alleged that Alexander made the journey in full knowledge of its difficulties. The parallels for the construction (\(\tau\omega\rho\omega \mu\varepsilon\) used resumptively), particularly 7. 14. 7 and Ind. 10. 8–9, show that the whole preceding clause is to be understood, including the negative; Nearchus did not, as has been often argued, state that Alexander acted in ignorance of the route. I argue this more fully in my forthcoming commentary.

\(^{44}\) Arr. 6. 27. 3–4; Curt. 10. 1. 1–9. See below, n. 47.

\(^{45}\) Arr. 7. 18. 1 = Aristobulus, \(FGrH\) 139 F 54; Plut. Alex. 73. 3–5; cf. Bosworth 1996a: 23–4.

\(^{46}\) Arr. 7. 18. 4–5; Plut. Alex. 73. 4.
successful. The casualties he sustained were largely suffered by the camp followers, the women and children in the army’s train, and, though his troops arrived in Pura in an exhausted and demoralized state, they were soon rehabilitated and their military efficiency was unimpaired.

Alexander was also free to clean up the pockets of insubordination. At first he was cautious and calculating. While his men were still weak he treated the satrap of Carmania, Astaspes, with affable courtesy, only later catching him off guard and executing him (so sparking a local revolt). 47 That contrasted with the savagery with which he greeted Abulites, the satrap of Susa, berating him at their first meeting and personally spearing his son with a sarisa. 48 Then his troops were fully recovered, and the satrap was helpless. But the desert march had been a great miscalculation. It inflicted prodigious hardship, more, we are told, than the sum total of the other tribulations which the Macedonians endured in Asia. 49 It must have increased the resentment at Alexander’s unceasing pursuit of glory, and his emulation of the heroic figures of the past was no more than extravagant bravado.

We have then two episodes of personal self-indulgence, both potentially disastrous. For Cortés the march to Honduras came when he was at the height of his glory, governor of the whole of New Spain and owner of vast estates which allegedly brought an income of 200 million pesos. His authority lapsed during his long absence, when rumours of his death were rife, and, although he was able to re-establish himself temporarily on his return, he was suspended from his governorship, subjected to an official investigation, and returned to Spain in 1528. For Alexander the consequences were less harmful. He was able to restore his authority by systematic execution of his subordinates, and he neutralized the resentment of the army by mass demobilization of his veterans. Perhaps the most damaging

47 According to Curtius (9. 10. 21, 29–30), Astaspes was suspected of having plotted rebellion while Alexander was in India, and he was duly executed. For the rebellion which his death instigated see Arr. Ind. 36. 8–9.
48 Plut. Alex. 68. 7; Arr. 7. 4. 1; cf. Badian 1961: 17, 21, and, more recently, Lane Fox 1996: 105–8.
49 Arr. 6. 24. 1; Ind. 26. 1; all sources to some extent stress the hardships; for Strabo (15. 2. 5 (721–2)) ‘Alexander was in great distress throughout the whole journey’. 

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aspect of the affair was its demonstration of the lengths to which he would go to rival the great exploits of history and mythology. If he had traversed Gedrosia in order to outdo Semiramis and Cyrus, would he not follow Heracles to the Straits of Gibraltar? The limits of his ambition were boundless, as were the sacrifices he demanded to reach them, and it was only a matter of time before disaster struck. He had no overlord to impose curbs on his ambition. He could not be demoted or recalled. He could, however, be killed if he presented too much of a threat to those around him, and the Gedrosian episode was a stark illustration of the magnitude of the dangers he voluntarily embraced.

We can extend the narrative similarities beyond the personae of the conquerors. In more general ways the sources echo each other and reveal comparable values, comparable modes of thought. One of the most striking phenomena is what can only be termed a sanitization of the military carnage. Both Cortés and Alexander led forces which were technically superior to anything they encountered. The firearms, crossbows, plate armour, and Toledo steel of the conquistadors were set against the obsidian clubs and quilted cotton armour of their Indian adversaries, while Alexander found nothing to match the six-metre long sarisa of his Macedonian phalanx or the discipline of mass engagement which he and his father had inculcated. Singly and collectively they outstripped their adversaries in all branches of military technology. Not surprisingly we read of epic combats in which the invaders were outnumbered many times and still won without significant losses. In his description of the first battle against the Tlaxcalans (later his most loyal allies) in September 1519 Cortés claims to have fought all day with half a dozen guns, five or six harquebuses, forty crossbowmen, and thirteen horsemen against a host of Indians which he modestly estimates as 100,000 strong, and did so without damage ‘except from exhaustion and hunger’. Díaz describes the same engagement with more reticence: there were only 3,000

50 Pagden 1986: 59–60. The following day allegedly saw a renewed engagement with ‘more than 149,000 men’ (an amusingly precise figure), and the Spaniards were again unscathed.
Tlaxcalans, and they inflicted severe wounds with their obsidian ‘broadswords’. Four Spaniards were hurt, one fatally, while the Indians left seventeen dead.\(^{51}\) The epic scale of Cortés’ narrative has been much reduced, but Díaz is still impressive in describing the lethal effects of the obsidian weapons which, he claims, literally decapitated one of the Spanish horses.\(^{52}\) The enemy is represented as formidable, and the achievement of the conquerors is maximized. The same thinking almost certainly underlies the commemorative coinage of Alexander, which displayed the archers, elephants, and war chariots of his Indian adversaries, showing all with eyes to see the fearsome qualities of the troops which had defeated them.

What is not stressed is the effect of the fighting upon the conquered. Our sources for Cortés and Alexander alike write of huge casualties, but there is no attempt to spell out what those casualties implied. For that we need to turn to the records of the Indian informants whose testimony was compiled by Fray Bernadino de Sahagún in 1555. The most vivid description concerns the mysterious episode in 1520 when Cortés’ lieutenant, Pedro de Alvarado, violated the national festival held by his permission in the capital, and massacred the largely defenceless celebrants. The results were gruesome, luridly illustrated in picture and prose:

They attacked all the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out. Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to pieces. They struck others in the shoulders and their arms were torn from their bodies. They wounded some in the thigh and some in the calf. They slashed others in the abdomen and their entrails all spilled to the ground. Some attempted to run away, but their entrails dragged as they ran . . .\(^{53}\)

\(^{51}\) Díaz, ch. 62: Maudslay i. 229; Cohen 1963: 143. The following day’s battle was fought against two armies 6,000 strong, with the loss of 15 wounded, one of whom died.

\(^{52}\) Díaz, ch. 63: Maudslay i. 231; Cohen 1963: 145–6. Gómara (Simpson 1965: 99) described the decapitation of two horses at a slightly earlier juncture; Díaz may be deliberately setting the record straight, and takes pains to identify the rider, Pedro de Moron, who died of his wounds after the battle.

\(^{53}\) Conveniently translated in Leon-Portilla 1962: 74–6. There are gruesome
There could not be a more telling description of the effect of finely honed Toledo steel upon human flesh, and it is not surprising that the Spanish sources do not dwell on the details of the carnage. The battles would lose their heroic aura, and the conquistadors would appear more like abattoir workers. For Alexander’s campaigns there is nothing to compare with the Indian testimony. Nobody describes what it was like to be spitted by a sarisa with its ferocious leaf-shaped blade fifty centimetres long (although the Alexander mosaic gives a visual representation). As a result one becomes immune to the casualty figures. Alexander’s men may have killed countless thousands, but one gets the impression that nobody was really hurt, just as in some Disney cartoon. However, there must have been scenes of slaughter which made Alvorado’s massacre at Tenochtitlan look tame. Consider the final scene at the Granicus, when the 20,000 Greek mercenaries were left stranded on the battlefield to be surrounded by Alexander’s victorious army, the phalanx pressing their front, the cavalry harrying the sides and rear. The king disregarded their appeal for quarter, and a massacre ensued. Whether or not 90 per cent were cut down, as Arrian and Plutarch imply, there is no doubt that many thousands fell, and the circumstances would not have been pretty. Given the large circular shields of the Greeks and their massed formation, the wounds inflicted by the sarisae would have been predominantly in the face and throat—otherwise in the groin. There was a similar scene at the end of the battle of the Hydaspes, when the Indian battle line was entrapped by the phalanx and a cordon of illustrations in Codex Duran and the Codex Florentino, containing Sahagún’s Historia General. Cortés himself was away from the scene of the massacre, but even so he considered it prudent to omit it from his Second Narrative Letter, stating only that the Indians were in revolt. Gómara (Simpson 1965: 208) has no hesitation in blaming Alvarado, who acted ‘cruelly and pitilessly’; Díaz (ch. 124; Maudslay ii. 124; Cohen 1963: 283) adds that he attacked ‘for no reason at all’. Even so none of the Spanish authorities attempts to depict the horror of the scene; ‘he killed and wounded many’ is all that Díaz says.

54 Arr. 1. 16. 2; Plut. Alex. 16. 13–12. Plutarch alone mentions the mercenaries’ attempt to surrender and reports substantial Macedonian casualties. Arrian has the mercenaries rooted to the ground with astonishment at the routing of their cavalry, and says nothing about Macedonian losses (later at 1. 16. 4 he implies that there were only 30 infantry casualties), but he does not minimize the horror of the slaughter: ‘no one escaped unless he escaped notice among the corpses’.
Macedonian cavalry, and the horror of the slaughter was intensified by maddened elephants caught within their own disorganized mass of infantry and trampling indiscriminately everything in their path. Few commanders have been more expert than Alexander in creating the conditions for mass slaughter, and his troops developed a terrible efficiency in killing. The conquest came at a high price in blood and agony. Vast areas in the west may have fallen to him without serious resistance, but from the great rebellion in Sogdiana in the summer of 329 to his invasion of the Makran in October 325 there was almost continuous fighting, scores of towns destroyed and whole populations, civilian and military alike, massacred.

The human cost is something best ignored by those who inflict it. Conquerors are in a position to control the record and take the high moral ground. If they attack, it is because they have been provoked and threatened, and the people they subjugate have a tendency to submit themselves voluntarily to their yoke. If they then change their mind, it is an act of rebellion; reprisals and condign punishment are justified. All these are common phenomena, too familiar to require illustration. What is, however, notable in the record of the Spaniards in the Americas and the Graeco-Macedonians in the far east is an atmosphere of wonder, a stress upon the marvels of the new territories. In part it is sheer curiosity, sometimes tinged with a modicum of nostalgic admiration, but there is also a demonstrable tendency to depict the conquered as alien. However wonderful they may be, they are different from us and can therefore be treated differently. For the Spaniards in Mexico it was a simple matter. The natives were not Christian; their deities were portrayed in alarming and revolting imagery, and, worst of all, they practised human sacrifice, eating the remains of the victims after their palpitating hearts had been torn out and offered to the sun. The suppression of such practices was easy enough to justify, and Cortés’ narrative letters are full of the complacent sermons he allegedly


\[56\] For the early European attitudes to the Americas see the wonderful compilation of material in Greenblatt 1991.
delivered, denouncing the twin evils of human sacrifice and sodomy. These were easy targets; the vice of the natives justified wholesale iconoclasm, massacre, and the burning alive of recalcitrants.\textsuperscript{57} But in other ways the Spaniards have strongly traditional reactions to more familiar situations. They have the same prejudice in favour of agriculture and against nomadic populations that had prevailed since antiquity. In the Alexander authors we find the traditional admiration of the Saka nomads of the north-east as exemplars of the virtues of poverty,\textsuperscript{58} but there is also the traditional exasperation against the depredations of the nomadic peoples of the Zagros. The marauding Cossaeans, who lived between Media and Babylonia, had a bad reputation for brigandage and received presents from the Great King to ensure safe passage when he moved court from Ecbatana to Babylon.\textsuperscript{59} That alone justified Alexander’s unprovoked attack late in 324. The Cossaeans were terrified into temporary submission and were subjected to a colonizing policy in which the new settlers would transform them from nomads into ‘ploughmen and labourers on the land’, as Nearchus coyly puts it.\textsuperscript{60} In other words they ceased to be free herdsmen and became serfs labouring to support an alien military population. Cortés displays exactly the same attitude when he promises Charles V that he will subjugate the nomad Chichimeca peoples of the north. They are said to be very barbarous and less intelligent than the rest of the natives. He has therefore sent a small expedition to pacify them and settle if they show some aptitude. If not, they will be reduced to slavery. ‘By making slaves of this barbarous people, who are almost savages, Your Majesty will be served

\textsuperscript{57} In the debate at Valladolid Sepúlveda was to harp upon the practices of human sacrifice, cannibalism, and idolatry as proof of Indian inferiority and justification of the Spanish conquest: ‘How can we doubt that these people, so uncivilized, so barbaric, so contaminated with so many sins and obscenities . . . have been justly conquered by such an excellent, pious, and most just king . . . and by such a humane nation which is excellent in every kind of virtue?’ (Hanke 1959: 46–7).

\textsuperscript{58} Arr. 4. 1. 1; Curt. 7. 6. 11; on this episode see Bosworth 1995: 13–15; 1996a: 151–2.

\textsuperscript{59} So Nearchus, FGrH 133 F 1(g) = Strabo 11. 13. 6 (524); Arr. Ind. 40. 6–8.

\textsuperscript{60} Arr. Ind. 40. 8. On the campaign see Arr. 7. 15. 1–3; Diod. 17. 111. 4–6 (confirming the establishment of cities); Plut. Alex. 72. 4; Polyaen. 4. 3. 21, and on the Cossaeans in general see Briant 1982b: 64–81.
and the Spaniards will benefit greatly, as they will work in the gold mines, and perhaps by living among us some of them may even be saved.'\textsuperscript{61} The Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery shines out here. The Chichimecas were too uncivilized to be anything but slaves and could therefore be enslaved and transported without any qualms. It is pleasant to record that in actuality they retained their independence for over a century, and improved their nomadic way of life by stealing Spanish horses and firearms.\textsuperscript{62}

Traditional prejudice was matched by traditional curiosity. It is amusing to find Cortés invoking time-hallowed interest in Amazons, which had been stimulated by the recent publication of the romance of Amadis. That vastly popular work dealt with the exploits of the warrior queen Calafia, who held sway in the rugged but gold-rich island of California, ‘on the right side of the Indies’. Diego Velázquez had originally commissioned Cortés to search for Amazons, and some years later Cortés was able to report to Charles V that there was a distant island off the Pacific coast which was inhabited by women, without a single man. Mating took place only at certain seasons, when sexual partners were allowed on the island, and only the female offspring were retained.\textsuperscript{63} A kinsman, Francisco Cortés, was given a modest force of horse, crossbowmen, and artillery and sent to investigate this intriguing story; but the Amazons remained as stubbornly elusive as the pot of gold at the rainbow’s end. Alexander received very similar information when he was approached by Pharasmanes, the ambitious ruler of Chorasmia, just south of the Aral Sea. Pharasmanes allegedly claimed to be a neighbour of the Amazons and their homeland near Colchis, and volunteered to lead Alexander on an expedition against them.\textsuperscript{64} The political aims are transparent in both cases: Pharasmanes wished to harness the curiosity

\textsuperscript{61} Pagden 1986: 446, 526 n. 118.

\textsuperscript{62} It has been estimated that in the period between 1564 and 1574 more Spaniards died at the hands of the Chichimecas than had fallen in the original Mexican conquest (Powell 1944: 580 n. 1). Alexander’s plans to ‘civilise’ the Cossaeans were equally abortive. Less than a decade later they were able to embarrass Antigonus when he traversed their territory (Diod. 19. 19. 2–8; cf. Billows 1990: 92–3).

\textsuperscript{63} Pagden 1986: 298–300, 502 n. 21; Leonard 1944.

\textsuperscript{64} Arr. 4. 15. 4–7; Bosworth 1995: 104–7.
of the Macedonians into the expansion of his own kingdom, while Cortés wished for an unlimited brief for exploration and conquest—as far as the Moluccas and Cathay, if it could be managed.\(^{65}\) The Amazons were the prime drawcard, the ultimate appeal to prurient male curiosity, but in both cases the motivation of the informants was blatantly obvious and the reports were disregarded. However, there was much that was completely new, that could not be accommodated to traditional beliefs and prejudices. In the literature of the Spanish conquest the most moving expression of wonder is Bernal Díaz’ panegyric over the marvels of Tenochtitlan. The city on the water with its great pyramids was almost the stuff of fairy-tales, ‘like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis . . . It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before.’ Díaz proceeds to a rapturous description of the palaces of stone and cedar wood, the fragrant orchards and rose gardens, the birds of all breeds and varieties. But then he ends on a chilling note: ‘But today all that I then saw is overthrown and destroyed; nothing is left standing.’\(^{66}\) The marvels did not protect the Mexican from the holocaust, and in some ways they were responsible for it. However wonderful and exotic the environment of Tenochtitlan, it was proof of the otherness of its inhabitants. They were different from the Spaniards, and the norms of western civilization did not apply to them.

Some of the same type of thinking can be found in the Alexander historians, particularly in their description of India, which they saw as a land of marvels, with curiosities known from past literature and an apparently inexhaustible supply of novelties. Perhaps the closest analogy to Díaz’ outpouring is the description which Onesicritus gave of the realm of Musicanus, an Indian prince who held sway on the middle Indus, in the vicinity of the modern town of Alor. Musicanus was slow to submit to Alexander, but once he did so, admitting his error (‘the most potent method with


\(^{66}\) Díaz, ch. 87: Maudslay ii. 37–8; Cohen 1963: 214–15. There are some pertinent remarks in Greenblatt 1991: 132–4, who argues that it was the very act of destruction which gave the Spaniards possession of their empire; it transferred them from the imaginary to reality.
Alexander for anyone to obtain what he might desire’), he was confirmed as ruler with a supervisory garrison of Macedonians. Alexander, so Arrian states, wondered at the city and its hinterland. What he found to marvel at is not explicitly on record. However, Onesicritus, the head steersman of his fleet, gave a rhapsodic description of the land, which abounded with all the necessities of life. Its inhabitants lived a frugal and healthy life, attaining an age of 130 years. They abjured the use of gold and silver, considered excessive practice in military science iniquitous and had no procedures of civil law. Above all there was no slavery; young men carried out menial domestic tasks, and the rural population had almost the serf status of the Laconian helots but was content with its lot. Without a doubt Onesicritus is idealizing, and he may have the self-sufficiency advocated by his master, Diogenes the Cynic, at the back of his mind. However, he is explaining and interpreting Indian phenomena, like the social position of the śūdras, who were serf-like but free members of the society—the concept of caste no Greek appears to have fully appreciated. His explanation is cast in polar opposites: everything that the invaders cherished, banquets, precious metals, chattel slaves, litigation, and military expertise, were disdained by the people of Musicanus. Onesicritus praised their institutions highly, but he could not make it plainer that they were the antithesis of everything Hellenic. They may have been successful, virtuous, and admirable but they were also alien. Accordingly their institutions no more saved them from disaster than did the beauties of Tenochtitlan. Once Alexander had left to deal with the stubborn resistance in the mountains to the west, Musicanus rebelled, encouraged by his Brahman advisers. We need not explore his motives here. What matters is the consequences. Alexander sent the satrap of Cortés and Alexander

67 Arr. 6. 15. 5–7; Curt. 9. 8. 8–10; Diod. 17. 102. 5.
68 καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἑθείμανεν Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ τὴν χώραν.
70 The text is difficult and perhaps defective. On reading and interpretation see Bosworth 1996a: 85–6.
71 The similarities almost prove the rule; the comparisons Onesicritus made were with the least typical of Greek states, Sparta and Crete.
Sind, Peithon, son of Agenor, to deal with the rebels. The cities of Muscanus were destroyed or turned into garrison centres, and their inhabitants were enslaved en masse. Muscanus and his Brahman advisers were crucified as an example to the rest—a terrible and perhaps deliberate flouting of Indian custom which exempted Brahmans from any sort of capital punishment. We have the paradox of a realm admired for its peculiar institutions, but ruthlessly destroyed once it proved recalcitrant. Those very institutions were a proof of the otherness of the conquered, and the otherness was some justification for the savagery with which they were treated.

The conquered, however, could not not be portrayed as totally alien. They had to understand their conquerors and converse with them in a meaningful way. Above all they had to offer submission and understand what submission meant. Whether Greek or Roman, Spaniard or English, a conqueror could not simply annex land by unprovoked violence. There had to be some act of recognition, some voluntary acceptance of the authority of the invaders. That is clearly illustrated in another fragment of Onesicritus, his famous account of his meeting with the Brahman sages outside Taxila. This is an elaborate and complicated passage in which Onesicritus retails Brahman doctrine in a significantly Greek dress. It is hardly reportage of a specific exchange but a literary re-enactment, and an anthology of Indian doctrine which Onesicritus had assimilated in his years of interaction with the court sage, Calanus. For our purposes what is significant is Onesicritus’ report of the doctrine of the senior Brahman, Dandamis. For Dandamis Alexander shows the interest in ‘philosophy’ which is the mark of a true king, and he retains it even in his military calling. He can therefore inculcate the virtues of temperance in his subjects. Dandamis in fact welcomes Alexander, and he adds that he

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72 Arr. 6. 17. 1–2; Curt. 9. 8. 16. The revolt is discussed by Bosworth 1998: 198–200.
had encouraged the local prince, Taxiles, to receive him.\textsuperscript{74} Taxiles had indeed invited Alexander into India long before Alexander was in a position to invade, and had sent a delegation to the western frontiers to welcome him into the Indian lands.\textsuperscript{75} His submission is reinforced by the senior Brahman of northern India, who is represented hailing Alexander almost as an ideal king. Taxiles, it would seem, recognized the suzerainty of Alexander, based on his conquest of the Persian Empire, to which his princedom had once belonged, and Dandamis conferred moral legitimacy. However alien these Indians may have been, they recognized their natural sovereign and accepted his authority in unambiguous terms—or so Alexander’s historians implied.

There is a striking counterpoint in the accounts of the Spanish conquest, which show the native chiefs accepting a state of vassalage to the Spanish crown, even though they can have had no inkling what the Spanish crown was or what the state of vassalage implied. Nevertheless their statements of submission were translated into Spanish and solemnly engrossed in legal form by a Spanish notary.\textsuperscript{76} The most famous submission is that of Montezuma himself in November 1519, when he first received Cortés into Tenochtitlan. What he actually said we shall never know. What all sources represent him delivering is explicit recognition of the Spaniards as his legitimate overlords. Even the Indian accounts of the meeting have Cortés’ coming predicted by previous Aztec rulers; they were merely representatives, and Montezuma surrenders his stewardship: ‘Rest now, and take possession of your royal houses. Welcome to your lands, my lords.’\textsuperscript{77} This acknowledgement was a moral necessity, and Sahagún, the Spanish editor,

\textsuperscript{74} Strabo 15. 1. 65 (716): καὶ δὴ καὶ Ταξίλη νῦν συμβουλεύσειε δέχεσθαι τῶν Ἀλέξανδρον.
\textsuperscript{75} Arr. 4. 22. 6; 5. 3. 5–6; Diod. 17. 86. 4; Curt. 8. 12. 5; Metz Epit. 49. On the problems of the tradition see Bosworth 1995: 2. 146–7, 220–1.
\textsuperscript{76} For a typical instance see Bosworth 1996a: 159–60. The legalities observed by the Spaniards could verge on the bizarre, as with the famous ‘Requirement’, which was supposed to be read to Indians before any combat and presented the Spanish claims to empire (Gibson 1968: 58–60; Thomas 1993: 71–5).
\textsuperscript{77} Leon-Portilla 1962: 64. On the Indian tradition see Thomas 1993: 283. There is an interesting essay (Hornung 1966: 30–47) which argues that the Mexican chronicles described the events of the conquest as a playing out of myth, almost in terms of ritual performance.
cannot have allowed any variant to stand in the record. The Spaniards are even more explicit, most of all Cortés, who put in Montezuma’s mouth what is almost a classical foundation myth, reminiscent of the return of the Heraclidae. His people, he says, were brought into the Valley of Mexico by an overlord, who was in due course rejected by the Aztecs and disappeared into the east. Since Cortés and his men come from the rising sun and claim to be the servants of a great lord, they are clearly the descendants of the Aztec foundation hero and the Aztecs are their vassals. Consequently ‘all that we own is for you to dispose of as you choose’.\(^78\) A very comfortable doctrine for the Spaniards, expressed in terms that are totally unambiguous to them. And it is not surprising that other sources record Montezuma making much the same statement. Bernal Díaz mentions the prophecies of Montezuma’s ancestors that some day rulers would come from the rising sun, and Francisco de Aguilar claimed that the emperor’s submission was recorded by a notary.\(^79\) All this is very suspicious. It will not do to argue (as Hugh Thomas has recently done) that the unanimity of the reports confirms that Montezuma did perform some act of submission, and that writers who wished to reduce the stature of Cortés would have had no hesitation in exposing a fiction. Perhaps not; but this fiction was the master lie which legitimized the Spanish conquest. Montezuma declared the invaders to be the proper rulers of Mexico and surrendered all his possessions to them. Such a fiction could not be exposed without undermining the position of the authors, the beneficiaries of the conquest. On the contrary, their interest was to strengthen and embellish it, and that they seem to have done. As a result Montezuma not only understands his guests, but acknowledges their lordship in terms that sound almost biblical (‘See that I am flesh and blood like you and all other men, and I am mortal and substantial’).\(^80\) However alien his culture, however repulsive and outlandish his religion, when it comes to the

\(^78\) Pagden 1986: 85–6, 467–9 n. 42. Cortés’ version is not surprisingly repeated by his secretary Gómara (Simpson 1954: 141–2).

\(^79\) Díaz, ch. 90: Maudslay ii. 57–8; Cohen 1963: 222–3; Aguilar, in de Fuentes 1993: 147.

important issue Montezuma expresses himself with perfect clarity, accepting vassal status explicitly and categorically.

So far I have concentrated on the similarities of ideology and action. I shall end with an important difference. What is notorious in the career of Alexander is his willingness to collaborate with and use the conquered Persian aristocracy. There is nothing comparable in the annals of the Spanish conquest. Cortés may have used the local Indian peoples like the Tlaxcalans, and confirmed their chiefs as vassals of Spain, but he used them as auxiliaries to destroy the Mexican empire. The Mexica themselves were ruthlessly crushed: Montezuma’s successor, Cuahtémoc, may have been named ruler of Tenochtitlan by the victorious Cortés, but he was put to torture to reveal his reserves of treasure, was dragged in Cortés’ train to Honduras, and ended up hanging on a tree in Acalán, convicted of complicity in a mythical conspiracy. On the other hand, Alexander treated the Persian royal family with extreme deference; the brother of the deceased king became a Companion,81 Persian nobles governed some of the more important satrapies, and at least seven younger sons of the nobility were admitted into the prestigious Macedonian Royal squadron.82 Alexander himself took on some items of Persian court regalia and absorbed some of the traditional features of Persian court life; Peucestas, his satrap of Persia, actually assumed full Persian dress and learned Persian.83 There is nothing remotely similar in the Spanish conquest. The explanation is simple but informative. For the Spaniards their new subjects were vassals of their own European emperor and submitted themselves to his supreme authority. Alexander, however, was taking over an empire and replacing the Great King. He was leading a war of revenge against Persia and simultaneously claiming to be the rightful occupant of the Persian throne.84 There was no inherent contradiction. For Alexander’s guest friend, Demaratus of Corinth, the greatest punish-

81 Plut. Alex. 43. 7; Curt. 6. 2. 11; cf. Bosworth 1980b: 6, 12–13.
82 Arr. 7. 6. 4–5. If 7. 29. 4 is taken literally, there were also admissions of Persian nobles into the infantry guard (agema).
84 See the discussion of Michael Flower, below, pp. 107–15, 123–5.
ment for the Persians was to see him seated on the throne of the Achaemenids. These claims to empire originated early. Our sources depict him representing himself as the proper king of Asia immediately after the battle of Issus in late 333, and he had the mythological justification in that Perses, the supposed eponymous hero of the Persians, was the son of Perseus, Alexander’s own remote ancestor. Herodotus had represented Xerxes appealing to the genealogy and respecting the Greek city of Argos as his kin. For Alexander it was a tailor-made foundation myth, akin to the legend which the Spanish sources put in the mouth of Montezuma. This time it was an invader from the west coming to claim the monarchy which was his prerogative. But Alexander did not come to destroy, rather to make the Persian Empire his own. He accepted enough of the customs of the conquered to identify himself with the Persian monarchy, and took princesses from the Persian aristocracy as his wives. He was simultaneously King of Macedon and King of Kings.

The differing perspective made little difference in practice. The behaviour of Alexander to his subjects was not dissimilar from that of the Spaniards. Where there was opposition and what he saw as rebellion, he acted with total ruthlessness, as Musicanus and countless other magnates in Central Asia and India found to their cost. Although he had no god-sent visitation of smallpox to devastate the conquered populations, there were whole areas where the conquest came close to depopulation, thanks to the tactics of terror which he used. What for instance would have been the sequel in the oases of the Zeravshan valley (around Bukhara) after Alexander systematically ravaged the agricultural land as far the surrounding salt desert? And the campaign against the Malli was deliberately planned to inflict the greatest possible number of casualties. After the slaughter Arrian describes the embassy of submission ‘from those of

85 Plut. Alex. 37. 7, 56. 1; Ages. 15. 4; Mor. 329d.
86 Arr. 2. 14. 8–9; Curt. 4. 1. 14. See the observations of Ernst Fredricksmeyer, below, pp. 139–44.
87 Hdt. 7. 150. 2.; cf. 6. 43; 7. 61. 3; Hellanicus, FGrH 4 F 59–60.
88 Arr. 4. 6. 5–6.
the Malli who survived’;\textsuperscript{89} there is a clear implication that the majority had perished—and the grossly overused label of genocide may not here be inappropriate. For large areas of Asia the advent of Alexander meant carnage and starvation, and the effects were ultimately as devastating as that of the Spaniards in Mexico. The conquerors created a desert and called it empire.