RECORDS OF THE GRAND HISTORIAN: HAN DYNASTY II

REVISED EDITION

By Sima Qian
Translated by Burton Watson
battle for eight days, retreating as they fought, until all their weapons and arrows were gone and half the men had been killed. In the course of the fighting they managed to kill or wound over 10,000 of the enemy.

When they reached a point only 100 li or so from Juyan, the Xiongnu cornered them in a narrow valley and cut off their avenue of escape. Li Ling’s food supplies were exhausted and no rescue troops were in sight, while the enemy pressed their attack and called on Li Ling to surrender. “I could never face the emperor and report such a disaster,” Li Ling told his men, and finally surrendered to the Xiongnu. Practically all his soldiers perished in the fight; only some 400 managed to escape and straggle back to Han territory. The Shanyu had already heard of the fame of Li Ling’s family and observed his bravery in battle, and as a result he gave him his own daughter as a wife and treated him with honour. When the emperor received news of this, he executed Li Ling’s mother and his wife and children. From this time on the name of the Li family was disgraced and all the retainers of the family in Longxi were ashamed to be associated with it."

The Grand Historian remarks: One of the old books says, “If he himself is upright, those under him will act without being ordered to; if he himself is not upright, they will not obey even when ordered.” It refers, no doubt, to men like General Li.

I myself have seen General Li — a man so plain and unassuming that you would take him for a peasant, and almost incapable of speaking a word. And yet the day he died all the people of the empire, whether they had known him or not, were moved to the profoundest grief, so deeply did men trust his sincerity of purpose. There is a proverb which says, “Though the peach tree does not speak, the world wears a path beneath it.” It is a small saying, but one which is capable of conveying a great meaning.

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4 This last section in parentheses is most likely not by Sima Qian, but a later addition. It differs from the account of Li Ling’s life in Han shu 54 and deals with events that are later than those described elsewhere in the Shi ji. It may be recalled that Sima Qian was condemned to castration for speaking out in defense of Li Ling to the emperor when the news of Li Ling’s surrender reached the court. Sima Qian’s own account of Li Ling’s battle and surrender is found in his letter to Ren Shaoqing, translated in Su-ma Ch’ien: Grand Historian of China, pp. 57-67.

Analects XIII, 6.
honours those who are young and strong and despises the weak and aged. On the death of his father, a son will marry his stepmother, and when brothers die, the remaining brothers will take the widows for their own wives. They have no polite names but only personal names, and they observe no taboos in the use of personal names.

When the power of the Xia dynasty declined, Gong Liu, the ancestor of the Zhou dynasty, having lost his position as minister of grain, went to live among the Western Rong barbarians, adopting their ways and founding a city at Bin. Some 300 years later the Rong and Di tribes attacked Gong Liu’s descendant, the Great Lord Danfu. Danfu fled to the foot of Mt. Qi and the whole population of Bin followed after him, founding a new city there. This was the beginning of the Zhou state.

A hundred and some years later Chang, the Zhou Earl of the West, attacked the Quanyishi tribe, and ten or twelve years later, his son, King Wu, overthrew Emperor Zhou, the last ruler of the Shang dynasty, and founded a new capital at Luo. He also occupied the regions of Feng and Hao, drove the barbarians north beyond the Jing and Luo rivers, and obliged them to bring tribute to his court at specified times. Their lands were known as "the submissive wastes".

Some 200 years later, when the power of the Zhou dynasty had declined, King Mu attacked the Dog Rong and brought back with him four white wolves and four white deer which he had seized. From this time on, the peoples of the "submissive wastes" no longer journeyed to court. (At this time the Zhou adopted the penal code of Marquis Fu.)

Some 200 years after the time of King Mu, King You of the Zhou, egged on by his beloved concubine Baosi, quarrelled with Marquis Shen. In anger, Marquis Shen joined forces with the Dog Rong and attacked and killed King You at the foot of Mt. Li. Eventually the barbarians seized the region of Jiaozuo from the Zhou, occupied the area between the Jing and Wei rivers, and invaded and plundered the central region of China. Duke Xiang of Qin came to the rescue of the Zhou court, and King You’s successor King Ping abandoned the regions of Feng and Hao and moved his capital east to the city of Luo. (At this time Duke Xiang of Qin attacked the barbarians and advanced as far as Mt. Qi; as a result he was for the first time ranked among the feudal lords of the Zhou dynasty.)

Sixty-five years later (704 BC) the Mountain Barbarians crossed through the state of Yan and attacked Qi. Duke Li of Qi fought with them in the suburbs of his capital. Forty-four years later the Mountain Barbarians attacked Yan, but Yan reported its distress to Duke Huan of Qi, who rode north and attacked the barbarians, driving them off.

Some twenty years later the barbarians rode as far as the capital city of Luo and attacked King Xiang of the Zhou; King Xiang fled to the city of Fan in Zheng. Previously King Xiang had wanted to attack the state of Zheng and had therefore married a daughter of the barbarians and made her his queen; then, with the aid of the barbarian forces, he had made his attack on Zheng. Having accomplished his purpose, however, he cast aside his barbarian queen, much to her resentment. King Xiang’s stepmother, Queen Hui, had a son named Zidai whom she wished to place on the throne, and therefore Queen Hui, her son, and the barbarian queen agreed to cooperate with the barbarian attackers from within the capital by opening the city to them. Thus the barbarians were able to enter, defeat and drive out King Xiang, and set up Zidai as Son of Heaven in his place.

After this the barbarians occupied the area of Luhun, roaming as far east as the state of Wey, ravaging and plundering the lands of central China with fearful cruelty. The empire was deeply troubled, and therefore the poets in the Book of Odes wrote:

We smote the barbarians of the north.
We struck the Xianyun
And drove them to the great plain.
We sent forth our chariots in majestic array
And walled the northern regions.

After King Xiang had been driven from his throne and had lived abroad for four years, he sent an envoy to the state of Jin to explain his plight. Duke Wen of Jin, having just come to power, wanted to make a name for himself as dictator and protector of the royal house, and therefore he raised an army and attacked and drove out the barbarians, executing Zidai and restoring King Xiang to his throne in Luo.

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1 The text says "no family names or polite names", but the word "family names" is probably an error here. Polite names are names which are used in place of personal names to avoid the appearance of over-familiarity.

2 The penal code now comprises a chapter of the Book of Documents, where it is known as the code of Marquis Lü.

3 Sima Qian quotes from three different poems: “Bigong” of the “Temple Odes of Lu” and “Liyue” and “Chuju” of the “Lesser Odes”.
At this time Qin and Jin were the most powerful states in China. Duke Wen of Jin expelled the Di barbarians and drove them into the region west of the Yellow River between the Yin and Luo rivers; there they were known as the Red Di and the White Di. Shortly afterwards, Duke Mu of Qin, having obtained the services of You Yu, succeeded in getting the eight barbarian tribes of the west to submit to his authority.

Thus at this time there lived in the region west of Long the Mianzhu, the Hunrong, and the Dihuan tribes. North of Mt. Qi and Liang the Jing and Qi rivers lived the Yiqu, Dai, Wuzhi, and Quyan tribes. North of Jin were the Forest Barbarians and the Loufan, while north of Yan lived the Eastern Barbarians and Mountain Barbarians. All of them were scattered about in their own little valleys, each with their own chieftains. From time to time they would have gatherings of a hundred or more men, but no one tribe was capable of unifying the others under a single rule.

Some 100 years later Duke Dao of Jin sent Wei Jiang to make peace with the barbarians, so that they came to pay their respects to the court of Jin. A hundred or so years after this, Viscount Xiang of the Zhao family of Jin crossed Mt. Juzhu, defeated the barbarians, and annexed the region of Dai, bringing his state into contact with the Huhe tribes. Shortly afterwards he joined with the viscounts of the Hann and Wei families in wiping out their rival, Zhi Bo, and dividing up the state of Jin among the three of them. Thus the Zhao family held possession of Dai and the lands north of Mt. Juzhu, while the Wei family held the provinces of Hexi (Ortous) and Shang, bordering the lands of the barbarians.

After this the Yiqu tribes began to build walls and fortifications to protect themselves, but the state of Qin gradually ate into their territory and, under King Hui, finally seized twenty-five of their forts. King Hui also attacked the state of Wei, forcing it to cede to him the provinces of Hexi and Shang.

During the reign of King Zhao of Qin the ruler of the Yiqu barbarians had illicit relations with King Zhao's mother, the Queen Dowager Xuan, by whom he had two sons. Later the queen dowager deceived and murdered him at the Palace of Sweet Springs and eventually raised an army and sent it to attack and ravage the lands of the Yiqu. Thus Qin came into possession of Longxi, Beidi, and Shang Provinces, where it built long walls to act as a defence against the barbarians.

At the same time King Wuling of Zhao changed the customs of his people, ordering them to adopt barbarian dress and to practise riding and shooting, and then led them north in a successful attack on the Forest Barbarians and the Loufan. He constructed a defensive wall stretching from Dai along the foot of the Yin Mountains to Gaoque, establishing the three provinces of Yunzhong, Yanmen, and Dai.

A little later a worthy general named Qin Kai appeared in the state of Yan. He had earlier been sent as a hostage to the barbarians and had won their deepest confidence; on returning to his state, he led an attack on the Eastern Barbarians, defeating and driving them over 1,000 li from the border of the state. (The Qin Wuyang who took part with Jing Ke in the attempted assassination of the king of Qin was this man's grandson.) Yan also constructed a long wall from Zaoyang to Xiangping and set up the provinces of Shanggu, Yuyang, Youbei, Liao, and Liao to guard against the attacks of the barbarians.

By this time China, the land of caps and girdles, was divided among seven states, three of which bordered the territory of the Xiongnu. Later, while the Zhao general Li Mu was living, the Xiongnu did not dare to cross the border of Zhao.

Finally Qin overthrew the other six states, and the First Emperor of the Qin dispatched Meng Tian to lead a force of 100,000 men north to attack the barbarians. He seized control of all the lands south of the Yellow River and established border defences along the river, constructing forty-four walled district cities overlooking the river and manning them with convict labourers transported to the border for garrison duty. He also built the Direct Road from Jiuyuan to Yunyang. Thus he utilized the natural mountain barriers to establish the border defences, scooping out the valleys and constructing ramparts and building installations at other points where they were needed. The whole line of defences stretched over 10,000 li from Lintao to Liaodong and even extended across the Yellow River and through Yangshan and Beiijia.

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4 You Yu's ancestors came from the state of Jin; he himself had been born among the barbarians but could speak the language of Jin. The barbarian king sent him to the court of Duke Mu of Qin, who questioned him closely on the customs, lands, and military strength of the barbarians. Duke Mu later succeeded in arousing enmity between the barbarian ruler and You Yu, and the latter finally fled to Qin and became the duke's adviser on barbarian affairs. The fuller account is found in Shi ji 5, "The Basic Annals of Qin", in vol. III.

5 From this it may be seen that the First Emperor of the Qin, in building the Great Wall, did not have to begin from scratch, as is often implied, but simply repaired and linked up the older walls of these northern states.
At this time the Eastern Barbarians were very powerful and the Yuezhi were likewise flourishing. The *Shanyu* or chieftain of the Xiongnu was named Touman. Touman, unable to hold out against the Qin forces, had withdrawn to the far north, where he lived with his subjects for over ten years. After Meng Tian died and the feudal lords revolted against the Qin, plunging China into a period of strife and turmoil, the convicts which the Qin had sent to the northern border to garrison the area all returned to their homes. The Xiongnu, the pressure against them relaxed, once again began to infiltrate south of the bend of the Yellow River until they had established themselves along the old border of China.

Touman's oldest son, the heir apparent to his position, was named Maodun, but the *Shanyu* also had a younger son by another consort whom he had taken later and was very fond of. He decided that he wanted to get ride of Maodun and set up his younger son as heir instead, and he therefore sent Maodun as hostage to the Yuezhi nation. Then, after Maodun had arrived among the Yuezhi, Touman made a sudden attack on them. The Yuezhi were about to kill Maodun in retaliation, but he managed to steal one of their best horses and escape, eventually making his way back home. His father, struck by his bravery, put him in command of a force of 10,000 cavalry.

Maodun had some arrows made that whistled in flight and used them to drill his troops in shooting from horseback. “Shoot wherever you see my whistling arrow strike!” he ordered, “and anyone who fails to shoot will be cut down!” Then he went out hunting for birds and animals, and if any of his men failed to shoot at what he himself had shot at, he cut them down on the spot. After this, he shot a whistling arrow at one of his best horses. Some of his men hung back and did not dare shoot at the horse, whereupon Maodun at once executed them. A little later he took an arrow and shot at his favourite wife. Again some of his men shrank back in terror and failed to discharge their arrows, and again he executed them on the spot. Finally he went out hunting with his men and shot a whistling arrow at one of his father's finest horse. All his followers promptly discharged their arrows in the same direction, and Maodun knew that at last they could be trusted. Accompanying his father, the *Shanyu* Touman, on a hunting expedition, he shot a whistling arrow at his father and every one of his followers aimed their arrows in the same direction and shot the *Shanyu* dead. Then Maodun executed his stepmother, his younger brother, and all the high officials of the nation who refused to take orders from him, and set himself up as the new *Shanyu*.

At this time the Eastern Barbarians were very powerful and, hearing that Maodun had killed his father and made himself leader, they sent an envoy to ask if they could have Touman's famous horse that could run 1,000 lü in one day. Maodun consulted his ministers, but they all replied, “The thousand-lü horse is one of the treasures of the Xiongnu people. You should not give it away!”

“When a neighbouring country asks for it, why should I begrudge them one horse?” he said, and sent them the thousand-lü horse.

After a while the Eastern Barbarians, supposing that Maodun was afraid of them, sent an envoy to ask for one of Maodun's consorts. Again Maodun questioned his ministers, and they replied in a rage, “The Eastern Barbarians are unreasoning beasts to come and request one of the *Shanyu's* consorts. We beg to attack them!”

But Maodun replied, “If it is for a neighbouring country, why should I begrudge them one woman?” and he sent his favourite consort to the Eastern Barbarians.

With this the ruler of the Eastern Barbarians grew more and more bold and arrogant, invading the lands to the west. Between his territory and that of the Xiongnu was an area of over 1,000 lü of uninhabited land; the two peoples made their homes on either side of this wasteland. The ruler of the Eastern Barbarians sent an envoy to Maodun saying, “The Xiongnu have no way of using this stretch of wasteland which lies between my border and yours. I would like to take possession of it!”

When Maodun consulted his ministers, some of them said, “Since the land is of no use you might as well give it to him,” while others said, “No, you must not give it away!”

Maodun flew into a rage. “Land is the basis of the nation!” he said. “Why should I give it away?” And he executed all the ministers who had advised him to do so.

Then he mounted his horse and set off to attack the Eastern Barbarians, circulating an order throughout his domain that anyone who was slow to follow would be executed. The Eastern Barbarians had up until this time despised Maodun and made no preparations for their defence; when Maodun and his soldiers arrived, they inflicted a crushing defeat, killing the ruler of the Eastern Barbarians, taking prisoner his subjects, and seizing their domestic animals. Then he returned and rode west, attacking and routing the Yuezhi, and annexed

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*6The Gobi Desert.*
the lands of the ruler of Loufan and the ruler of Boyang south of the Yellow River. Thus he recovered possession of all the lands which the Qin general Meng Tian had taken away from the Xiongnu; the border between his territory and that of the Han empire now followed the old line of defences south of the Yellow River, and from there he marched into the Chaoan and Fushi districts and then invaded Yan and Dai.

At this time the Han forces were stalemated in battle with the armies of Xiang Yu, and China was exhausted by warfare. Thus Maodun was able to strengthen his position, massing a force of over 300,000 skilled crossbowmen.

Over 1,000 years had elapsed from the time of Chunwei, the ancestor of the Xiongnu, to that of Maodun, a vast period during which the tribes split up and scattered into various groups, sometimes expanding, sometimes diminishing in size. Thus it is impossible to give any ordered account of the lineage of the Xiongnu rulers. When Maodun came to power, however, the Xiongnu reached their peak of strength and size, subjugating all of the other barbarian tribes of the north and turning south to confront China as a rival nation. As a result of this, it is possible to give an account here of the later Xiongnu rulers and of the offices and titles of the nation.

Under the Shanyu are the Wise Kings of the Left and Right, the left and right Luli kings, left and right generals, left and right commandants, and left and right household administrators, and left and right Gudu marquises. The Xiongnu word for "wise" is "Tuqi", so that the heir of the Shanyu is customarily called the "Tuqi of the Left". Among the other leaders, from the wise kings down to the household administrators, the more important ones command 10,000 horsemen and the lesser ones several thousand, numbering twenty-four leaders in all, though all are known by the title of "Ten Thousand Horsemen". The high ministerial offices are hereditary, being filled from generation to generation by the members of the Huyan and Lan families, and in more recent times by the Xubu family. These three families constitute the aristocracy of the nation. The kings and other leaders of the left live in the eastern sector, the region from Shanggu east to the lands of the Huimo and Chaoxian peoples. The kings and leaders of the right live in the west, the area from Shang Province west to the territories of the Yuezhi and Qiang tribes. The Shanyu has his court in the region north of Dai and Yunzhong. Each group has its own area, within which it moves about from place to place looking for water and pasture. The Left and Right Wise Kings and Luli kings are the most powerful, while the Gudu marquises assist the Shanyu in the administration of the nation. Each of the twenty-four leaders in turn appoints his own "chiefs of a thousand", "chiefs of a hundred", and "chiefs of ten", as well as his subordinate kings, prime ministers, chief commandants, household administrators, juqu officials, and so forth.

In the first month of the year the various leaders come together in a small meeting at the Shanyu's court to perform sacrifices, and in the fifth month a great meeting is held at Longcheng at which sacrifices are conducted to the Xiongnu ancestors, Heaven and Earth, and the gods and spirits. In the autumn, when the horses are fat, another great meeting is held at the Dai Forest when a reckoning is made of the number of persons and animals.

According to Xiongnu law, anyone who in ordinary times draws his sword a foot from the scabbard is condemned to death. Anyone convicted of theft has his property confiscated. Minor offences are punished by flogging, and major ones by death. No one is kept in jail awaiting sentence longer than ten days, and the number of imprisoned men for the whole nation does not exceed a handful. 8

At dawn the Shanyu leaves his camp and makes obeisance to the sun as it rises; and in the evening he makes a similar obeisance to the moon. In seating arrangements the left side or the seat facing north is considered the place of honour. The days wu and ji of the ten-day week are regarded as most auspicious.

In burials the Xiongnu use an inner and an outer coffin, with accessories of gold, silver, clothing, and fur, but they do not construct grave mounds or plant trees on the grave, nor do they use mourning garments. When a ruler dies, the ministers and concubines who were favoured by him and who are obliged to follow him in death often number in the hundreds or even thousands.

Whenever the Xiongnu begin some undertaking, they observe the stars and the moon. They attack when the moon is full and withdraw their troops when it wanes. After a battle those who have cut off the heads of the enemy or taken prisoners are presented with a cup of wine and allowed to keep the spoils they have captured. Any prisoners that are taken are made slaves. Therefore, when they fight, each man strives for his own gain. They are very skilful at using decoy troops to lure their opponents to destruction. When they catch sight of the enemy, they swoop down like a flock of birds, eager for booty, but when they find themselves hard pressed and beaten, they scatter and vanish like the mist.

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7 It is impossible to tell from the name alone what this title means. In later times, when these peoples invaded and conquered northern China, Juqu became a Chinese surname.

8 Sima Qin is inviting a comparison with the situation in China in his own day, when the jails were full to overflowing with men awaiting sentence.
Anyone who succeeds in recovering the body of a comrade who has fallen in battle receives all of the dead man’s property.

Shortly after the period described above, Maodun launched a series of campaigns to the north, conquering the tribes of Hunyu, Qushe, Dingling, Gekun, and Xinli. Thus the nobles and high ministers of the Xiongnu were all won over by Maodun, considering him a truly worthy leader.

At this time Gaozu, the founder of the Han, had just succeeded in winning control of the empire and had transferred Xin, the former king of Hann, to the rulership of Dai, with his capital at Mayi. The Xiongnu surrounded Mayi and attacked the city in great force, whereupon Hann Xin surrendered to them. With Hann Xin on their side, they then proceeded to lead their troops south across Mt. Juzhu and attack Taiyuan, marching as far as the city of Jinyang. Emperor Gaozu led an army in person to attack them, but it was winter and he encountered such cold and heavy snow that two or three out of every ten of his men lost their fingers from frostbite. Maodun feigned a retreat to lure the Han soldiers on to an attack. When they came after him in pursuit, he concealed all of his best troops and left only his weakest and puniest men to be observed by the Han scouts. With this the entire Han force, supplemented by 320,000 infantry, rushed north to pursue him; Gaozu led the way, advancing as far as the city of Pingcheng.

Before the infantry had had a chance to arrive, however, Maodun swooped down with 400,000 of his best cavalry, surrounded Gaozu on White Peak, and held him there for seven days. The Han forces within the encirclement had no way of receiving aid or provisions from their comrades outside, since the Xiongnu cavalry surrounded them on all sides, with white horses on the west side, greenish horses on the east, black horses on the north, and red ones on the south.9

Gaozu sent an envoy in secret to Maodun’s consort, presenting her with generous gifts, whereupon she spoke to Maodun, saying, “Why should the rulers of these two nations make such trouble for each other? Even if you gained possession of the Han lands, you could never occupy them, and the ruler of the Han may have his guardian deities as well as you. I beg you to consider the matter well!”

Maodun had previously arranged for the troops of Wang Huang and Zhao Li, two of Hann Xin’s generals, to meet with him, but though the appointed time had come, they failed to appear and he began to suspect that they were plotting with the Han forces. He therefore decided to listen to his consort’s advice and withdrew his forces from one corner of the encirclement. Gaozu ordered his men to load their crossbows with arrows and hold them in readiness pointed toward the outside. These preparations completed, they marched straight out of the encirclement and finally joined up with the rest of the army.

Maodun eventually withdrew his men and went away, and Gaozu likewise retreated and abandoned the campaign, dispatching Liu Jing to conclude a peace treaty with the Xiongnu instead.

After this Hann Xin became a general for the Xiongnu, and Zhao Li and Wang Huang repeatedly violated the peace treaty by invading and plundering Dai and Yunzhong. Shortly afterwards, Chen Xi revolted and joined with Hann Xin in a plot to attack Dai. Gaozu dispatched Fan Kuai to go and attack them; he recovered possession of the provinces and districts of Dai, Yanmen, and Yunzhong, but did not venture beyond the frontier.

At this time a number of Han generals had gone over to the side of the Xiongnu, and for this reason Maodun was constantly plundering the region of Dai and causing the Han great worry. Gaozu therefore dispatched Liu Jing to present a princess of the imperial family to the Shanyu to be his consort. The Han agreed to send a gift of specified quantities of silk floss and cloth, grain, and other food stuffs each year, and the two nations were to live in peace and brotherhood. After this Maodun raided the frontier less often than before. Later Lu Wan, the king of Yan, revolted and led his party of several thousand followers across the border to surrender to the Xiongnu; they roamed back and forth in the region from Shanggu to the east, causing considerable disturbance.

After Emperor Gaozu passed away, Emperor Hui and Empress Lü in turn ruled the country. At this time the Han had just come to power and the Xiongnu, impressed by its strength, were behaving with great arrogance. Maodun even sent an insulting letter to Empress Lü.10 She wanted to launch a campaign against him, but her generals reminded her that “even Emperor Gaozu, with all his wisdom and bravery, encountered great difficulty at Pingcheng”, and she was...

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9 These four colours are symbolic of the four directions in Chinese belief and, if the narrative is correct, in Xiongnu belief as well.

10 In his letter Maodun suggested that, since both he and Empress Lü were old and lonely, they might get together and console each other.
finally persuaded to give up the idea and resume friendly relations with the Xiongnu.

When Emperor Wen came to the throne he renewed the peace treaty with the Xiongnu. In the fifth month of the third year of his reign (177 BC), however, the Xiongnu Wise King of the Right invaded the region south of the Yellow River, plundering the loyal barbarians of Shang Province who had been appointed by the Han to guard the frontier, and murdering and carrying off a number of the inhabitants. Emperor Wen ordered the chancellor Guan Ying to lead a force of 85,000 carriages and cavalry to Gaonu, where they attacked the Wise King of the Right. The latter fled beyond the frontier. The emperor in person visited Taiyuan, at which time the king of Jibei revolted. When the emperor returned to the capital he disbanded the army which Guan Ying had used in the attack on the barbarians.

The following year the Shanyu sent a letter to the Han court which read:

The great Shanyu whom Heaven has set up respectfully inquires of the emperor’s health. Formerly the emperor broached the question of a peace alliance, and I was most happy to comply with the intentions expressed in his letter. Certain of the Han border officials, however, imposed upon and insulted the Wise King of the Right, and as a result he heeded the counsel of Houyi, Luhou, Nanzhi, and others of his generals and, without asking my permission, engaged in a skirmish with the Han officials, thus violating the pact between the rulers of our two nations and rupturing the bonds of brotherhood that joined us. The emperor has twice sent letters complaining of this situation and I have in turn dispatched an envoy with my answer, but my envoy has not been allowed to return, nor has any envoy come from the Han. As a result, the Han has broken off peaceful relations and our two neighbouring countries are no longer bound in alliance.

Because of the violation of the pact committed by the petty officials, and the subsequent events, I have punished the Wise King of the Right by sending him west to search out the Yuezhi people and attack them. Through the aid of Heaven, the excellence of his fighting men, and the strength of his horses, he has succeeded in wiping out the Yuezhi, slaughtering or forcing to submission every member of the tribe. In addition he has conquered the Loulan, Wusun, and Hujie tribes, as well as the twenty-six states nearby, so that all of them have become a part of the Xiongnu nation. All the people who live by
drawing the bow are now united into one family and the entire region of the north is at peace.

Thus I wish now to lay down my weapons, rest my soldiers, and turn my horses to pasture; to forget the recent affair and restore our old pact, that the peoples of the border may have peace such as they enjoyed in former times, that the young may grow to manhood, the old live out their lives in security, and generation after generation enjoy peace and comfort.

However, I do not as yet know the intentions of the emperor. Therefore I have dispatched my palace attendant Xihuqian to bear this letter. At the same time I beg to present one camel, two riding horses, and eight carriage horses. If the emperor does not wish the Xiongnu to approach his frontier, then he should order the officials and people along the border to withdraw a good distance back from the frontier. When my envoy has arrived and delivered this, I trust that he will be sent back to me.

The envoy bearing the letter arrived in the region of Xinwang during the sixth month. When it was delivered to the emperor, he began deliberations with his ministers as to whether it was better to attack or make peace. The high officials all stated, “Since the Shanyu has just conquered the Yuezhi and is riding on a wave of victory, he cannot be attacked. Moreover, even if we were to seize the Xiongnu lands, they are all swamps and saline wastes, not fit for habitation. It would be far better to make peace.”

The emperor agreed with their opinion and in the sixth year of the former part of his reign (174 BC) he sent an envoy to the Xiongnu with a letter which read as follows:

The emperor respectfully inquires about the health of the great Shanyu. Your palace attendant Xihuqian has brought us a letter which states: “The Wise King of the Right, without asking my permission, heeded the counsel of Houyi, Luhou, Nanzhi, and others of his generals, violating the pact between the rulers of our two nations and rupturing the bonds of brotherhood that joined us, and as a result the Han has broken off peaceful relations with me, and our two neighbouring countries are no longer bound in alliance. Because of the violation of the pact committed by the petty officials, I have punished the Wise King of the Right by sending him west to attack the Yuezhi. Having
completed the conquest of the region, I wish to lay down my weapons, rest my soldiers, and turn my horses to pasture; to forget the recent affair and restore our old pact so that the peoples of the border may have peace, the young may grow to manhood, the old live out their lives in security, and generation after generation enjoy peace and comfort.”

We heartily approve these words. This indeed is the way the sage rulers of antiquity would have spoken.

The Han has made a pact of brotherhood with the Xiongnu, and for this reason we have sent generous gifts to you. Any violations of the pact or ruptures of the bonds of brotherhood have been the work of the Xiongnu. However, as there has been an amnesty since the affair of the Wise King of the Right occurred,14 you need not punish him too severely. If your intentions are really those expressed in your letter, and if you will make them clearly known to your various officials so that they will henceforth act in good faith and commit no more violations of the pact, then we are prepared to honour the terms of your letter.

Your envoy tells us that you have led your troops in person to attack the other barbarian nations and have won merit, suffering great hardship on the field of battle. We therefore send you from our own wardrobe an embroidered robe lined with patterned damask, an embroidered and lined underrobe, and a brocaded coat, one each; one comb; one sash with gold ornaments; one gold-ornamented leather belt; ten rolls of embroidery; thirty rolls of brocade; and forty rolls each of heavy red silk and light green silk, which shall be delivered to you by our palace counsellor Yi and master of guests Jian.

Shortly after this, Maodun died and his son Jizhu was set up with the title of Old Shanyu. When Jizhu became Shanyu, Emperor Wen sent a princess of the imperial family to be his consort, dispatching a eunuch from Yan named Zhonghang Yue to accompany her as her tutor. Zhonghang Yue did not wish to undertake the mission, but the Han officials forced him to do so. “My going will bring nothing but trouble to the Han!” he warned them.

After Zhonghang Yue reached his destination, he went over to the side of the Shanyu, who treated him with the greatest favour.

The Xiongnu had always had a liking for Han silks and food stuffs, but Zhonghang Yue told them, “All the multitudes of the Xiongnu nation would not amount to one province in the Han empire. The strength of the Xiongnu lies in the very fact that their food and clothing are different from those of the Chinese, and they are therefore not dependent upon the Han for anything. Now the Shanyu has this fondness for Chinese things and is trying to change the Xiongnu customs. Thus, although the Han sends no more than a fifth of its goods here, it will in the end succeed in winning over the whole Xiongnu nation. From now on, when you get any of the Han silks, put them on and try riding around on your horses through the brush and brambles! In no time your robes and leggings will be torn to shreds and everyone will be able to see that silks are no match for the utility and excellence of felt or leather garments. Likewise, when you get any of the Han foodstuffs, throw them away so that the people can see that they are not as practical or as tasty as milk and kumiss!”

He also taught the Shanyu’s aides how to make an itemized accounting of the number of persons and domestic animals in the country.

The Han letters addressed to the Shanyu were always written on wooden tablets one foot and one inch in length and began, “The emperor respectfully inquires about the health of the great Shanyu of the Xiongnu. We send you the following articles, etc., etc.” Zhonghang Yue, however, instructed the Shanyu to use in replying to the Han a tablet measuring one foot two inches, decorated with broad stamps and great long seals, and worded in the following extravagant manner: “The great Shanyu of the Xiongnu, born of Heaven and Earth and ordained by the sun and moon, respectfully inquires about the health of the Han emperor. We send you the following articles, etc., etc.”

When one of the Han envoys to the Xiongnu remarked scornfully that Xiongnu custom showed no respect for the aged, Zhonghang Yue began to berate him. “According to Han custom,” he said, “when the young men are called into military service and sent off with the army to garrison the frontier, do not their old parents at home voluntarily give up their warm clothing and tasty food so that there will be enough to provide for the troops?”

“Yes, they do,” admitted the Han envoy.

“The Xiongnu make it clear that warfare is their business. And since the
old and the weak are not capable of fighting, the best food and drink are naturally allotted to the young men in the prime of life. So the young men are willing to fight for the defence of the nation, and both fathers and sons are able to live out their lives in security. How can you say that the Xiongnu despise the aged?"

"But among the Xiongnu," the envoy continued, "fathers and sons sleep together in the same tent. And when a father dies, he sons marry their own stepmothers, and when brothers die, their remaining brothers marry their widows! These people know nothing of the elegance of hats and girdles, nor of the rituals of the court!"

"According to Xiongnu custom," replied Zhonghang Yue, "the people eat the flesh of their domestic animals, drink their milk, and wear their hides, while the animals graze from place to place, searching for pasture and water. Therefore, in wartime the men practise riding and shooting, while in times of peace they enjoy themselves and have nothing to do. Their laws are simple and easy to carry out; the relation between ruler and subject is relaxed and intimate, so that the governing of the whole nation is no more complicated than the governing of one person. The reason that sons marry their stepmothers and brothers marry their widowed sisters-in-law is simply that they hate to see the clan die out. Therefore, although the Xiongnu encounter times of turmoil, the ruling families always manage to stand firm. In China, on the other hand, though a man would never dream of marrying his stepmother or his brother's widow, yet the members of the same family drift so far apart that they end up murdering each other! This is precisely why so many changes of dynasty have come about in China! Moreover, among the Chinese, as etiquette and the sense of duty decay, enmity arises between the rulers and the ruled, while the excessive building of houses and dwellings exhausts the strength and resources of the nation. Men try to get their food and clothing by farming and raising silkworms and to insure their safety by building walls and fortifications. Therefore, although danger threatens, the Chinese people are given no training in aggressive warfare, while in times of stability they must still wear themselves out trying to make a living. Pooh! You people in your mud huts — you talk too much! Enough of this blubbering and mouthing! Just because you wear hats, what does that make you?"

After this, whenever the Han envoys would try to launch into any sermons or orations, Zhonghang Yue would cut them off at once. "Not so much talk from the Han envoys! Just make sure that the silks and grainstuffs you bring to the Xiongnu are of the right measure and quality, that's all. What's the need for talking? If the goods you deliver are up to measure and of good quality, all right. But if there is any deficiency or the quality is no good, then when the autumn harvest comes we will take our horses and trample all over your crops!"

Day and night he instructed the Shanyu on how to maneuver into a more advantageous position.

In the fourteenth year of Emperor Wen's reign (166 BC) the Shanyu led a force of 140,000 horsemen through the Chaona and Xiao passes, killing Sun Ang, the chief commandant of Beidi Province, and carrying off large numbers of people and animals. Eventually he rode as far as Pengyang, sent a surprise force to break into and burn the Huizhong Palace, and dispatched scouts as far as the Palace of Sweet Springs in Yong.12

Emperor Wen appointed the palace military commander Zhou She and the chief of palace attendants Zhang Wu as generals and put them in command of a force of 1,000 chariots and 100,000 horsemen to garrison the vicinity of Chang'an and guard the capital from the barbarian invaders. He also appointed Lu Qing, the marquis of Chang, as general of Shang Province; Wei Su, the marquis of Ning, as general of Beidi; Zhou Zao, the marquis of Longlu, as general of Longxi; Zhang Xiangru, the marquis of Dongyang, as general in chief; and Dong Chi, the marquis of Cheng, as general of the vanguard, and sent them with a large force of chariots and cavalry to attack the barbarians. The Shanyu remained within the borders of the empire for a little over a month and then withdrew. The Han forces pursued him beyond the frontier but returned without having been able to kill any of the enemy.

The Xiongnu grew more arrogant day by day, crossing the border every year, killing many of the inhabitants, and stealing their animals. Yunzhong and Liaodong suffered most severely, while in Dai Province alone over 10,000 persons were killed. The Han court, greatly distressed, sent an envoy with a letter to the Xiongnu, and the Shanyu in turn dispatched one of his household administrators to apologize and request a renewal of the peace alliance.

In the second year of the latter part of his reign (162 BC) Emperor Wen sent an envoy to the Xiongnu with a letter that read:

The emperor respectfully inquires about the health of the great Shanyu. Your envoys, the household administrator and juqu Diao

12Bringing them within sight of the capital.
Qunan and the palace attendant Han Liao, have delivered to us two horses, which we have respectfully accepted.

According to the decree of the former emperor, the land north of the Great Wall, where men wield the bow and arrow, was to receive its commands from the Shanyu, while that within the wall, whose inhabitants dwell in houses and wear hats and girdles, was to be ruled by us; thus might the countless inhabitants of these lands gain their food and clothing by agriculture, weaving, or hunting; father and son live side by side; ruler and minister enjoy mutual security; and all forsake violence and rebellion. Now we have heard that certain evil and deluded men, succumbing greedily to the lure of gain, have turned their backs upon righteousness and violated the peace alliance, forgetting the fate of the countless inhabitants and disrupting the concord which existed between the rulers of our two states.

This, however, is an affair of the past. In your letter, you say that “since our two countries have been joined again in peace and the two rulers are once more in concord,” you desire “to rest your soldiers and turn your horses to pasture, in order that generation after generation may know prosperity and joy and we may make a new beginning in peace and harmony.” We heartily approve these words. The sage, it is said, renews himself daily, reforming and making a new beginning in order that the old people may have rest and the young grow to manhood, that each may preserve his own life and fulfill the years which Heaven has granted him. So long as we and the Shanyu join in walking this road, following the will of Heaven and pitying the people, bestowing the blessing of peace on generation after generation without end, there will be no one in the whole world who will not benefit.

Our two great nations, the Han and the Xiongnu, stand side by side. Since the Xiongnu dwell in the north, where the land is cold and the killing frosts come early, we have decreed that our officials shall send to the Shanyu each year a fixed quantity of millet, leaven, gold, silk cloth, thread, floss, and other articles.

Now the world enjoys profound peace and the people are at rest. We and the Shanyu must be as parents to them. When we consider past affairs, we realize that it is only because of petty matters and trilling reasons that the plans of our ministers have failed. No such matters are worthy to disrupt the harmony that exists between brothers.

We have heard it said that Heaven shows no partiality in sheltering mankind, and Earth no bias in bearing it up. Let us, then, with the Shanyu, cast aside these trifling matters of the past and walk the great road together, wiping out former evils and planning for the distant future, in order that the peoples of our two states may be joined together like the sons of a single family. Then, from the countless multitudes of the people down to the very fish and turtles, the birds which fly above, all creatures that walk or breathe or move, there will be none that fail to find peace and profit and relief from peril.

To allow men to come and go without hindrance is the way of Heaven. Let us both forget past affairs. We have pardoned those of our subjects who fled to the Xiongnu or were taken prisoner. Let the Shanyu likewise ask no further concerning Zhang Ni and the other Xiongnu leaders who surrendered to us.

We have heard that the rulers of ancient times made their promises clearly known and that, once they had given their consent, they did not go back on their words. The Shanyu should consider this well, so that all the world may enjoy profound peace. Once the peace alliance has been concluded, the Han shall not be the first to violate it! Let the Shanyu ponder these words!

When the Shanyu expressed his willingness to abide by the peace agreement, Emperor Wen issued an edict to the imperial secretary which read:

The great Shanyu of the Xiongnu has sent us a letter signifying that the peace alliance has been concluded. No action need be taken concerning those who have fled from one state to the other, since they are not sufficiently numerous to affect the population or size of our territories. The Xiongnu shall not enter within our borders, nor shall the Han forces venture beyond the frontier. Anyone who violates this agreement shall be executed. It is to the advantage of both nations that they should live in lasting friendship without further aggression. We have given our consent to this alliance, and now we wish to publish it abroad to the world so that all may clearly understand it.

Four years later the Old Shanyu Jizhu died and was succeeded by his son Junchen. After Junchen assumed the title of Shanyu, Emperor Wen once more renewed the former peace alliance. Zhonghang Yue continued to act as adviser to the new Shanyu.
The Grand Historian remarks: When Confucius wrote the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he was very open in treating the reigns of Yin and Huan, the early dukes of Lu; but when he came to the later period of Dukes Ding and Ai, his writing was much more covert. Because in the latter case he was writing about his own times, he did not express his judgments frankly, but used subtle and guarded language.

The trouble with the ordinary run of men these days who discuss Xiongnu affairs is that they seek only for some temporary advantage, resorting to any kind of flattery in order to have their own views accepted, without considering what the effect may be on all parties concerned. At the same time the generals and military leaders, relying upon the vastness and might of China, grow increasingly bold, and the ruler follows their advice in making his decisions. Thus no profound achievement is ever reached.

Emperor Yao in ancient times, as wise as he was, was not completely successful as a ruler; the nine provinces of China had to wait until the reign of Emperor Yu before they knew real peace. If one would establish a truly worthy dynasty such as those of old, therefore, nothing is more important than selecting the right generals and ministers! Nothing is more important than selecting the right generals and ministers!

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17 Sima Qian's purpose in making these seemingly irrelevant remarks about Confucius and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is of course to warn the reader that he too is obliged to use "guarded language" in his discussion of the Xiongnu problem.

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**SHI JI 111: THE BIOGRAPHIES OF GENERAL WEI QING AND THE SWIFT CAVALRY GENERAL HUO QUBING**

They patrolled the winding frontier, broadened our lands south of the bend of the Yellow River, defeated the enemy at Qilian, opened up contact with the western states, and overpowered the northern barbarians. Thus I made "The Biographies of General Wei Qing and the Swift Cavalry General Huo Qubing".

The general in chief Wei Qing was a native of Pingyang. His father, Zheng Ji, was a clerk in the household of the marquis of Pingyang, where he had illicit relations with Dame Wei, a concubine of the marquis. From this union Wei Qing was born. Before this Dame Wei had already given birth to a boy, Wei Changzi, and a girl, Wei Zifu. The latter, because she was employed in the household of the princess of Pingyang, the wife of the marquis of Pingyang and older sister of Emperor Wu, later managed to obtain favour with the emperor. For this reason Wei Qing also adopted the family name Wei and the polite name Zhongqing, and his brother Zhangzi changed his name to Changjun. The oldest daughter of their mother was named Wei Ru, her second daughter Wei Shaer, and her third daughter Wei Zifu. Later she had another son named Buguang. All her children adopted the surname Wei. ¹ Wei Qing became a servant in the household of the marquis of Pingyang.

When he was young Wei Qing went to live with his father, but his father set him to herding sheep and all his half-brothers, sons of his father's legitimate wife, treated him like a slave and refused to recognize him as a brother.

Once, while Wei Qing was a servant, he had occasion to visit the prison at the Palace of Sweet Springs. There one of the convicts in chains examined his

¹ The narrative is remarkably confused. Was Zheng Ji the father of all Dame Wei's children, and was Wei her own family name? Or did she have a husband named Wei? Apparently Sima Qian was not certain of the facts when he wrote the passage.