***SHI JI* 6: THE BASIC ANNALS OF THE FIRST EMPEROR OF THE QIN**

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**After the First Emperor became ruler, he united all Six States. He melted down the spears and used the metal to cast bells, putting aside shield and armour. He assumed an exalted title, calling himself emperor, making a show of military might and relying on force. The Second Emperor succeeded to the line, but Ziying surrendered and became a prisoner. Thus I made “The Basic Annals of the First Emperor of the Qin”.**

The First Emperor of the Qin was a son of King Zhuangxiang of Qin. When King Zhuangxiang was a hostage for the state of Qin in Zhao, he happened to see a concubine belonging to Lü Buwei.65 Pleased with her, he took her for himself, and she bore the First Emperor. He was born in Handan in the first month of the forty-eighth year of King Zhaoxiang of Qin (259 BC). At his birth he was given the personal name Zheng; his family name was Zhao.66

When he was thirteen years old, King Zhuangxiang died and Zheng succeeded him as king of Qin. At this time Qin had already annexed the regions of Ba, Shu, and Hanzhong and extended its territory past Wan to Ying, where it set up Nan Province. In the north it had taken possession of the area from Shang Province east, which comprised the provinces of Hedong, Taiyuan, and Shangdang, and east as far as Xingyang,67 wiping out the two Zhou domains and setting up the province of Sanchuan or Three Rivers. Lü Buwei was prime minister and was enfeoffed with 100,000 households and the title of marquis of Wenxin. He had gathered a group of guests and wandering scholars, hoping to unite the world, and Li Si was one of his retainers. Meng Ao, Wang Ji, and Lord Biao commanded the army. As the king was still young and had just ascended the throne, he entrusted affairs of state to his chief ministers.

A revolt had arisen in Jinyang, and in the first year of the new ruler’s reign (246 BC) General Meng Ao attacked and brought it under control. In the second year (245) Lord Biao led the troops in an attack on Juan in Wei, cutting off 30,000 enemy heads. In the third year (244) Meng Ao attacked Hann and captured thirteen walled cities. Wang Ji died. In the tenth month General Meng Ao attacked the Wei cities of Chang and Yougui. There was

a severe famine this year. In the fourth year (243) Chang and Yougui capitulated, and in the third month the army was withdrawn. The Qin prince who had been a hostage in Zhao returned, and the Zhao heir apparent left Qin and returned to his state. In the tenth month, on the day with the cyclical sign gengyin, swarms of locusts appeared from the east and darkened the sky. There was widespread pestilence. Commoners who contributed 1,000 piculs of grain to the government were granted one degree of noble rank.

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In the fifth year (242) General Meng Ao attacked and seized control of the cities of Suanzao, Yan, Xu, Changping, Yongqiu, and Shanyang. In all he captured twenty cities. The province of Dong was set up. In winter there was thunder.

In the sixth year (241) the states of Hann, Wei, Zhao, Wey, and Chu joined in attacking Qin and seizing Shouling. Qin called out its troops, whereupon the forces of the five states withdrew. Qin attacked Wey and advanced on Dong Province. The Wey ruler Jue led his followers and moved to the region of Yewang, where he blocked the mountains in order to protect the area of Wei north of the Yellow River.

In the seventh year (240) a comet appeared in the east and then was seen in the north. In the fifth month it appeared in the west. General Meng Ao died. He had attacked Long, Gu, and Qingdu and was returning with his troops for an attack on Ji. The comet appeared in the west once more. On the sixteenth day of the month Queen Dowager Xia died.

In the eighth year (239) the king’s younger brother Chengjiao, Lord Chang’an, led troops in an attack on Zhao but then revolted. He was killed at Tunliu. The officers of his army were all executed and the people of Tunliu were ordered to be transported to Lintao. When the army commander Bi was killed, the people of Tunliu and Puhao once more revolted. They were killed and their corpses exposed.68 The Yellow River overflowed, strewing fish over the land. People set off east by light carriage or horseback in search of food.

Lao Ai was enfeoffed as marquis of Changxin, being assigned lands east of the mountains and instructed to take up residence there.69 He had a free hand in matters of palaces, dogs and horses, clothing, parks, and hunting areas, and all affairs of state great and small were decided by him. The province of Taiyuan west of the Yellow River was also made part of his domain.

In the ninth year (238) a comet appeared, at times filling the sky. Qin attacked Yuan and Puyang in Wei. In the fourth month the king resided temporarily at Yong, and on the day *jiyou* he received the cap of manhood and put on girdle and sword.

It was discovered that Lao Ai, the marquis of Changxin, was plotting revolt. He had forged the seals of the king and the queen dowager and called out the district troops. Supplementing these with soldiers of the guard, government horsemen, and the chiefs of the Rong and Di tribes and their henchmen, he was preparing to attack the Qinian Palace at Yong and start a revolt. When the king learned of this, he ordered the prime minister, Lord Changping, and Lord Changwen to call out troops and attack Lao Ai. Fighting took place in Xianyang and several hundred heads were cut off. All who cut off enemy heads were honoured with noble ranks, and all the eunuchs who joined in the hostilities were awarded one degree of noble rank. Lao Ai and the others fled in defeat.

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An order was circulated throughout the kingdom offering 1,000,000 cash to anyone who captured Lao Ai alive, and 500,000 cash to anyone who killed him. Lao Ai and his supporters were all seized. Twenty men, including the commandant of the guard, Jie, the prefect of the capital, Si, the lancer of the left, Jie, and the chief of palace counsellors, Qi, were all beheaded and their heads exposed. Lao Ai was torn in two by carriages to serve as a warning and his clan was wiped out. Among his followers, those only slightly involved were assigned to provide “firewood for the spirits”.70 Over 4,000 families were deprived of noble rank and transported to Shu, being resettled in Fangling.

In the fourth month it was so cold that people froze to death. Yang Duanhe attacked Yanshi. A comet appeared in the west, then appeared again in the north, moving south from the Dipper for eighty days.

Tenth year (237): the prime minister Lü Buwei was implicated in the Lao Ai affair and removed from his post. Huan Ji became a commander of the army. Envoys from Qi and Zhao arrived and a banquet was held. Mao Jiao, a man of Qi, spoke to the king of Qin, saying, “Qin these days thinks in terms of the empire as a whole. But word has it that Your Majesty has moved your mother, the queen dowager, to another location. I fear that if the other feudal rulers hear of this, they will take it as a reason to turn against Qin.”71

The king thereupon went to Yong to fetch the queen dowager and bring her back to Xianyang. Later he arranged for her to reside at the Palace of Sweet Springs. A great search was made for aliens and they were ordered expelled from the state. But when Li Si submitted a memorial arguing against the move, the order for the expulsion of aliens was rescinded.72

Li Si took the opportunity to urge the king of Qin to first take over the state of Hann in order to terrify the other states. The king accordingly sent Li Si to negotiate the surrender of Hann. The king of Hann, distressed at this, plotted with Han Fei to weaken Qin’s power.

A man named Wei Liao from Daliang came to Qin and spoke to the king, saying, “Qin’s might is such that the rulers of the other states are like mere heads of a province or a district beside it. My only fear is that the other rulers will form an alliance and join in some unexpected move. That is just how Zhi Bo, King Fuchai, and King Min of Qi met with their downfall. I hope Your Majesty will not be sparing of goods and money but will hand out bribes to their leading ministers so as to disrupt their schemes. By laying out no more than 300,000 in gold, you can completely undo the other feudal rulers!”

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The king of Qin decided to follow this advice. When he received Wei Liao, he treated him as an equal and shared his clothing and food and drink with him. Later Wei Liao remarked, “The king of Qin, with his arched nose and long eyes, puffed-out chest like a hawk and voice of a jackal, is a man of scant mercy who has the heart of a tiger or a wolf. When he is in difficulty he readily humbles himself before others, but when he has gotten his way, then he thinks nothing of eating others alive. I am a mere commoner, yet when he receives me he always acts as though he were my inferior. But if the king of Qin should ever get his way with the world, then the whole world will end up his prisoner. It doesn’t do to stay around a man like that for long!”

He was about to leave, but the king of Qin, learning of his plans, managed to stop him, appointing him a state commandant. In the end he made use of Wei Liao’s schemes, which Li Si put into effect.

Eleventh year (236): Wang Jian, Huan Ji, and Yang Duanhe attacked Ye and seized nine cities. Wang Jian attacked Eyu and Laoyang. Their forces were all combined into one army, which Wang Jian commanded for eighteen days. When the army returned, two out of every ten men in the lower ranks then went into action again. They seized Ye and Anyang, this time with Huan Ji in command.

Twelfth year (235): the marquis of Wenxin, Lü Buwei, committed suicide and was buried in secret. It was decreed that any of his retainers who observed mourning for him, if men of Wei, Hann, or Zhao, were to be banished; and if men of Qin and of the 600 picul rank or above, they were to be deprived of noble rank and transported. All retainers who were men of Qin and of the 500 picul rank or below, whether they mourned or not, were to be transported but not deprived of noble rank. “From now on if there are persons like Lao Ai or Lü Buwei who conduct state affairs in an unprincipled manner, their property shall be confiscated and their family members made government slaves. Take note of this!”73

In autumn the followers of Lao Ai who had been transported to Shu were recalled. At this time there was a great drought throughout the empire

which lasted from the sixth to the eighth month, when rain finally fell.

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Thirteenth year (234): Huan Ji attacked Pingyang in Zhao, killed the Zhao general Hu Zhe, and cut off 100,000 enemy heads. The king journeyed to the area south of the Yellow River. In the first month a comet appeared in the east. In the tenth month Huan Ji attacked Zhao.

Fourteenth year (233): Qin attacked the Zhao army at Pingyang, stormed Yian and captured it, and killed its general. Huan Ji seized control of Pingyang and Wucheng. Han Fei came as an envoy to Qin. The king, heeding the advice of Li Si, detained him. Han Fei died at Yunyang.74 The king of Hann requested that he be allowed to become a subject of the Qin ruler.

Fifteenth year (232): large numbers of troops were called up. One army advanced as far as Ye, another advanced to Taiyuan and seized Langmeng. There was an earthquake.

Sixteenth year (231): in the ninth month troops were dispatched to accept control of the Hann region of Nanyang, with the prefect of the capital Teng as acting magistrate. For the first time men were ordered to register according to their ages. Wei presented territory to Qin; Qin founded the city of Li.

Seventeenth year (230): the prefect of the capital Teng attacked Hann, seized King An of Hann, and took over all of his territory. The region was made into a province with the name Yingchuan. There was an earthquake. Queen Dowager Huayang died. The people suffered from severe famine.

Eighteenth year (229): large numbers of troops were called up to attack Zhao. Wang Jian led the forces from Shang Province in subjugating Jingxing, Yang Duanhe led the forces from north of the Yellow River, and Qiang Hui attacked Zhao. Yang Duanhe surrounded the city of Handan.

Nineteenth year (228): Wang Jian and Qiang Hui seized complete control of all the Zhao territory and at Dongyang captured the king of Zhao. Then they led their troops on in preparation for an attack on the state of Yan, encamping at Zhongshan.

The king of Qin journeyed to Handan, where he put to death all the persons who had been enemies of his mother’s family when he was growing up in Zhao. He then returned to Qin, going back by way of Taiyuan and Shang Province. The queen dowager, the mother of the First Emperor, passed away. Gongzi Jia, a member of the Zhao ruling family, led several hundred members of his clan to the region of Dai, where he set himself up as king of Dai and, joining his troops in alliance with those of Yan to the east, encamped at Shanggu. There was severe famine.

Twentieth year (227): Crown Prince Dan of Yan, fearful that the Qin troops would march against his state, in desperation sent Jing Ke to

assassinate the king of Qin. When the king learned of the plot, he had Jing Ke torn limb from limb to serve as a warning. Then he dispatched Wang Jian and Xin Sheng to attack Yan. Yan and Dai called out their forces and fell on the Qin army, but the Qin army defeated Yan west of the Yi River.

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Twenty-first year (226): Wang Pen attacked the Yan capital of Ji. Meanwhile, more and more troops were sent to reinforce Wang Jian’s army, so that eventually he defeated the army of Crown Prince Dan, captured the Yan capital of Ji, and seized the Crown Prince’s head. The king of Yan took control of the region of Liaodong and made himself king of it. Wang Jian asked leave to return to his home on grounds of old age and illness. A revolt broke out in Xinzheng. Lord Changping was transferred to Ying. There was a severe snowstorm, the snow piling up to a depth of two feet five inches.

Twenty-second year (225): Wang Pen attacked Wei, leading water from the Yellow River to flood the Wei capital of Daliang. The walls of Daliang collapsed and the king of Wei asked permission to surrender. All of his territory was seized.

Twenty-third year (224): the king of Qin summoned Wang Jian, requesting him to make a special effort to return to active duty. He sent him to lead troops in an attack on Jing.75 He seized the region from Chen south to Pingyu and took the king of Jing captive. The king of Qin visited Ying and Chen. The Jing general Xiang Yan set up Lord Changping as the new king of Jing and held the region south of the Huai River in revolt against Qin.

Twenty-fourth year (223): Wang Jian and Meng Wu attacked Jing and smashed the Jing army. Lord Changping was killed and Xiang Yan committed suicide.

Twenty-fifth year (222): large numbers of troops were called out and Wang Pen was ordered to attack the Yan region of Liaodong. He captured King Xi of Yan. On his way back he attacked Dai and took prisoner King Jia of Dai. Wang Jian meanwhile finished seizing control of the region of Jing south of the Yangtze River. He forced the capitulation of the Yue ruler and the province of Kuaiji was set up in the region. In the fifth month a great feast was held throughout the whole domain.

Twenty-sixth year (221): King Jian of Qi and his prime minister Hou Sheng dispatched troops to defend the western border of the state and prevent the Qin forces from passing through. Qin ordered General Wang Pen to march south from Yan and attack Qi. He seized King Jian of Qi. With this Qin succeeded in bringing all of the states under its rule.

The king of Qin instructed the chancellor and the imperial secretary, saying, “In the past the king of Hann relinquished his territory and handed

over his royal seals, requesting to become a vassal. Later, however, he went back on his promise and allied himself with Zhao and Wei to defy Qin. Therefore I called out troops to punish him, taking the king prisoner.

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“I believed that things had been set right and hoped I could lay aside my arms. The king of Zhao then sent his prime minister Li Mu to conclude an oath of alliance, and I accordingly sent back the son who had been a hostage here. But the king violated his oath and turned against me at Taiyuan, so I called out troops to exact punishment by seizing the king. Then, because Gongzi Jia of Zhao set himself up as king of Dai, I called up troops to attack and wipe him out.

“The king of Wei at first promised to be submissive to Qin, but later he joined Hann and Zhao in plotting to attack Qin, so the Qin officers and men were sent in punishment, and they destroyed him. The king of Jing offered me the territory from Qingyang westward, but later he broke his promise by attacking my Nan Province. So I called out troops to punish him, seizing the king and taking control of the Jing territory.

“The king of Yan was stupid and unprincipled, and his heir, Crown Prince Dan, secretly sent Jing Ke on a mission of evil, but my troops punished them and wiped out their country. The king of Qi, heeding the schemes of Hou Sheng, broke off relations with Qin, hoping to start a rebellion, but my troops punished him, taking the king prisoner and restoring order to the land of Qi.

“Insignificant person that I am, I have called up troops to punish violence and rebellion. Thanks to the help of the ancestral spirits, these six kings have all acknowledged their guilt and the world is in profound order. Now if some change in title is not carried out, there will be no way to celebrate these achievements and make them known to later generations. Let deliberations be held on an imperial title.”

The chancellor Wang Wan, the imperial secretary Feng Jie, and the commandant of justice Li Si all replied: “In ancient times the Five Emperors possessed domains that were 1,000 *li* square. Beyond were the feudal lords who were submissive and the barbarians who were submissive. Of the feudal lords, some came to pay respects at court and some did not, but the Son of Heaven could not force his will on them.

“But now Your Majesty has raised troops to punish the evil and remiss, brought peace to the world, made the entire area within the seas into provinces and districts, and insured that laws and rulings shall proceed from a single authority. From highest antiquity to the present, such a thing has never occurred before, nor could the Five Emperors equal it. We have respectfully consulted with the court scholars, who tell us that in antiquity there was the Heavenly August, Earthly August, and Greatly August, of

which the Greatly August was the most exalted. Therefore on pain of death we venture to propose this title, namely, that the king shall be known as Greatly August. His commands shall be known as edicts and his orders as decrees, and the Son of Heaven shall refer to himself by the pronoun zhen.”

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The king said, “We will drop the Greatly, keep the August, and adopt the title used by the emperors of high antiquity, calling ourselves Huangdi or August Emperor. Other matters shall be as in the proposal.” Thus he gave his approval to the decree. He honoured his father, King Zhuangxiang, with the posthumous title of Grand Supreme August.

An edict was issued, saying: “We have heard that in high antiquity there were titles but no posthumous names. In middle antiquity there were titles, and posthumous names were assigned after the death of a person on the basis of his actions. This results in the son passing judgment on the father, and subjects passing judgment on their ruler. Such a procedure is highly improper and we will have none of it! From now on, this manner of assigning posthumous names shall be abolished. We ourselves shall be called First Emperor, and successive generations of rulers shall be numbered consecutively, Second, Third, and so on for 1,000 or 10,000 generations, the succession passing down without end.”

The First Emperor believed that the Five Powers succeed each other in unending cycle, and he held that the Zhou dynasty had ruled by the power of fire. Since the Qin had replaced the Zhou, its power should therefore proceed from that which fire cannot overcome; the power of water had now begun its era of dominance.76 He changed the time for the court celebrations marking the beginning of the year, holding them all on the first day of the tenth month, and all clothing, flags, and pennants honoured the colour black. Among numbers, six was the standard, so that tallies and official caps were six inches, carriages were six feet, six feet were taken to make up one pace, and carriages were drawn by six horses. He also changed the name of the Yellow River, calling it “Powerful Water” to indicate that the era of the power of water had begun. Only by being stern and severe, by settling all affairs in the light of the law, by cutting and slashing without mercy or gentleness, he believed, could he comply with the destiny decreed by the Five Powers. Hence he assiduously applied the law and refused to pardon even crimes committed far in the past.

The chancellor Wang Wan and others stated the opinion that, since the feudal rulers had just recently been defeated and the regions of Yan, Qi, and Jing were situated far from the capital, unless kings were set up in such regions it would be impossible to control them. They therefore requested that sons of the ruler be set up, if the emperor would be so kind

as to give his approval.

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The First Emperor referred the proposal to the ministers for deliberation. The ministers all indicated their approval. But the commandant of justice Li Si voiced this opinion: “Kings Wen and Wu of the Zhou dynasty enfeoffed a great many of their sons, younger brothers, and other members of their own surname. Later, however, these men became increasingly estranged and even fell on one another like sworn enemies, and when the feudal rulers attacked each other in this manner, the Zhou Son of Heaven was helpless to restrain them. Now, thanks to the spiritual might of the sovereign, all the area within the seas has been united under a single rule and made into provinces and districts. If the sons of the ruler and the ministers who have won merit are rewarded with generous gifts from the public taxes, that will be quite sufficient. They can be easily controlled, and the world will be without dissension. This is the correct method for insuring peace. To establish feudal rulers would not be expedient.”

The First Emperor said, “It was because of the marquises and kings that the world suffered so long from unending strife and warfare. Now thanks to the aid of the ancestral spirits, the world has at last been pacified. If the feudal states are re-established, this will encourage the use of arms. To hope for peace and tranquillity under such circumstances will be difficult indeed! The view of the commandant of justice is correct.”

Thus the empire was divided into thirty-six provinces, each province provided with a governor, a military commandant, and a superintendent. The common people were renamed “black-headed ones”. There was great feasting. Weapons from all over the empire were confiscated, brought to Xianyang, and melted down to be used in casting bells, bell stands, and twelve men made of metal. These last weighed 1,000 piculs each and were set up in the palace.77 All weights and measures were standardized, the gauge of wheeled vehicles was made uniform, and the writing system was standardized.

The empire extended east to the sea and to Chaoxian (Korea), west to Lintao and Qiangzhong, and south to Beihu. In the north fortresses were established along the Yellow River and then over the Yin Mountains to Liaodong.

Rich and powerful families from all over the empire, 120,000 families, were moved to Xianyang. The various ancestral temples, as well as the Zhangtai Palace and Shanglin Park, were all situated south of the Wei River. And whenever Qin would wipe out one of the feudal states, it would make replicas of its halls and palaces and reconstruct them on the slope north of Xianyang, facing south over the Wei. From Yongmen east to the

Jing and Wei rivers, mansions, elevated walks, and fenced pavilions succeeded one another, all filled with beautiful women and bells and drums that Qin had taken from the feudal rulers.

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Twenty-seventh year (220): the emperor toured Longxi and Beidi, going as far as Chicken Head Mountain and returning by way of Huizhong. He built the Xin Palace south of the Wei River and then renamed it Apex Temple in imitation of the Heavenly Apex.78 A road was opened up from Apex Temple to Mt. Li, where the Front Hall of the Palace of Sweet Springs was built. A walled road was constructed for the emperor running from Xianyang to connect with it. This year officers were advanced one step in rank and fast roads were constructed.79

Twenty-eighth year (219): the emperor visited the provinces and districts of the east and ascended Mt. Yi in Zhuo. He set up a stone marker and, consulting with the Confucian scholars of Lu, had it inscribed with praises of the virtue of the Qin. He also consulted with the scholars on matters pertaining to the Feng and Shan sacrifices and sacrifices to the various mountains and rivers. Afterward he ascended Mt. Tai, set up a stone marker, and performed the Feng sacrifice. On the way down, he encountered violent wind and rain and had to rest under a tree. He accordingly enfeoffed the tree with the title of fifth rank counsellor. He performed the Shan sacrifice at Liangfu and set up a stone marker inscribed with these words:80

The August Emperor mounted the throne, issuing edicts, clarifying laws, which his subjects observe and obey.

In the twenty-sixth year of his rule he first united the world; there were none who did not come to him in submission.

In person he visited the people of distant regions, ascending Mt. Tai, surveying the eastern extremity all around.

The ministers in his retinue, mindful of his deeds, seeking the source of his achievements, reverently praise his merits and virtue.

The way of good government is implemented, the various occupations obtain what is needful, all is gauged by law and pattern.

His great principles are noble and pre-eminent, to be bestowed on future generations, who will receive and honour them without change.

The August Emperor, sage that he is, has brought peace to the world, never neglectful of his rule.

Early rising, late to retire, he takes measures to bring lasting benefit, devoting himself earnestly to instruction and precept.

His admonitions circulate, his proclamations spread abroad, so that near and far alike are properly ordered, and all bow to the will of the sage.

Eminent and humble are clearly distinguished, men and women are

observant of ritual, cautious and attentive to their duties.

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Inner and outer concerns are carefully demarked, uniformly faultless and pure, to be passed on to future heirs.

His transforming influence is unending, in ages after his decrees will be honoured, handed down forever with gravest caution.

The emperor then proceeded east from Bohai, passed through Huang and Chui, climbed to the top of Mt. Cheng, and ascended Mt. Zhifu, setting up a stone praising the virtue of the Qin. He then went south to ascend Mt. Langya, which delighted him so greatly that he remained there for three months. He ordered 30,000 households of the black-headed people to be moved to Langya Terrace, exempting them from taxation and labour services for a period of twelve years.

Having constructed the Langya Terrace, he set up a stone praising the virtue of the Qin and making clear its accomplishments. It said:

In his twenty-eighth year the August Emperor made a new beginning.

He adjusted the laws and regulations, standards for the ten thousand things.

He clarified human concerns, bringing concord to father and son,

sage, wise, benevolent and righteous, making plain the principle of the Way.

In the east he toured the eastern lands, inspecting their officers and men, and when his tasks were grandly completed, he gazed down on the sea.

The merit of the August Emperor lies in diligently fostering basic concerns,

exalting agriculture, abolishing lesser occupations, so the black-headed people may be rich.

All under heaven are of one mind, single in will.

Weights and measures have a single standard, words are written in a uniform way.

Wherever sun and moon shine, where ships and wheeled vehicles bear cargo,

all fulfil their allotted years, none who do not attain their goal.

To initiate projects in season — such is the August Emperor’s way. He rectifies diverse customs, crossing rivers, traversing the land.

He pities the black-headed people, morning and evening never neglectful.

He erases doubt and establishes laws, so all will know what to shun. Local officials have their respective duties; order is achieved with ease. Decisions are certain to be just, none not clear as a drawing.

The August Emperor in his enlightenment scrutinizes the four quarters.

Exalted, lowly, eminent or humble never overstep their proper course.

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Evil and wrongdoing are not permitted; all practise goodness and integrity.

Exerting utmost strength in matters great and small, none dare to be lax or remiss.

Near and far, in remotest comers, they strive to be strict and thorough.

Upright, honest, fervent and loyal, they are constant in devotion to duties.

The August Emperor’s virtue preserves and brings calm to the four extremes.

Punishing disorder, dispelling harm, he furthers benefit and calls down good fortune.

His frugal undertakings are timely, so that all occupations prosper and multiply.

The black-headed people are at peace, never needing to take up arms.

The six kinships guard one another, ever free from bandits and marauders.

All delight in honouring instructions, complete in their knowledge of the laws.

Within the six directions, the domain of the August Emperor, west to the flowing sands, south all the way to Beihu,

east to the eastern sea, north beyond Daxia,

wherever human tracks may reach, there are none who are not his subjects.

In merit he tops the Five Emperors, his bounty reaching oxen and horses, none untouched by the ruler’s virtue, each at rest in his home.

The king of Qin, having unified all under heaven, adopted the title of August Emperor. Then he toured the eastern lands, going as far as Langya. The ranged marquises, the marquis of Wucheng, Wang Li, and the marquis of Tongwu, Wang Pen; the marquises without fief the marquis of Jiancheng, Zhao Hai, the marquis of Changwu, Cheng, and the marquis of Wuxia, Wang Wuze; the chancellors Wei Zhuang and Wang Wan; the ministers Li Si and Wang Wu; and the fifth rank counsellors Zhao Ying and Yang Jiu, having accompanied the emperor and deliberated together by the sea, spoke thus: “The emperors of ancient times had domains that did not exceed 1,000 *li,* and the feudal lords guarded their own fiefs, sometimes coming to court to pay respects, sometimes not. All attacked one another in violence and disorder, never ceasing their assaults, yet they inscribed bronze and stone with records of their deeds. The Five Emperors and Three Kings of antiquity, though aware that their teachings were not identical and that their laws and regulations were unclear, relied on the authority of the

spirits and gods to deceive the people of distant regions. But because the reality did not accord with their claims, they were unable to continue for long. Even before their lives had come to an end, the feudal lords turned on them in revolt, and their commands ceased to be observed.

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“But now the August Emperor has unified the whole area within the seas, making it into provinces and districts and bringing peace to all under heaven. He has shed light on the ancestral temples, embodying the Way, enacting virtue, and fulfilling his exalted title. His various officials join together to praise the merit and virtue of the August Emperor, inscribing it on metal and stone so that it may be a model and standard.”

After the stone had been set up, a native of Qi named Xu Fu and others submitted a memorial saying that in the midst of the sea were three spirit mountains named Penglai, Fangzhang, and Yingzhou, with immortals living on them. They asked that they be allowed to fast and purify themselves and to go with a group of young boys and girls to search for them.

The emperor thereupon ordered Xu Fu to gather a group of several thousand young boys and girls and set out to sea to search for the immortal men.

The First Emperor returned by way of Pengcheng, where he fasted and purified himself and performed sacrifices, hoping to recover the cauldrons of Zhou from the Si River. He ordered 1,000 persons to dive into the water and search for them, but they could not find them.81

He then proceeded southwest across the Huai River to Mt. Heng and Nan Province. Floating down the river, he reached the shrine at Mt. Xiang. There he encountered strong winds and was almost unable to get across the river. He questioned his academicians, saying, “What sort of deity is the Mistress of the Xiang?”

The academicians replied, “They say she was the daughter of Emperor Yao and the wife of Emperor Shun and that she is buried here.”

The First Emperor, enraged, ordered 3,000 convict labourers to cut down all the trees on Mt. Xiang, leaving it denuded. Then he returned from Nan Province by way of the Wu Pass.

Twenty-ninth year (218): the First Emperor journeyed east, and when he reached Bolangsha in Yangwu he was frightened by bandits. Having searched for them and failed to apprehend them, he ordered the entire empire to carry out a great search for ten days.82

He ascended Mt. Zhifu and had a stone inscribed with these words:

The twenty-ninth year, the season of mid-spring, when the gentle warmth is rising:

The August Emperor journeyed east and in his travels ascended Zhifu, gazing down upon the sea.

The ministers in his retinue, pondering the source of his magnificence, recall with praise the beginning he made.

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The great sage initiated order, establishing laws and regulations, making manifest his rules and standards.

Abroad he instructed the feudal rulers, shedding the light of cultured blessing, enlightening them with the principles of righteousness.

The Six States were recalcitrant, insatiable in greed and perversity, pillaging and slaughtering endlessly.

The August Emperor, pitying the multitude, called out his chastising armies, brandishing his military power.

Through righteous punishment, trustworthy acts, he displayed his might in all quarters, till there were none who failed to submit.

He wiped out the powerful and unruly, rescuing the black-headed people, bringing peace to the four corners of the empire.

Far and wide he dispensed his enlightened laws to bind and regulate all under heaven, to stand as a model unending.

How great, that throughout the whole universe the will of the sage should be heeded and obeyed!

The host of officials praise his merits, begging to inscribe them on stone, to be handed down as an unchanging pattern.

The inscription for the eastern tour read:

In the twenty-ninth year the August Emperor set forth in spring, inspecting and visiting the distant regions.

Advancing to the brink of the sea, he ascended Mt. Zhifu, gazing down at the morning sun.

The vista was vast and beautiful, and the ministers in his retinue all pondered, searching out the source of his supreme enlightenment.

When the sage’s laws were first promulgated, they brought purity and order within the borders and punished the unruly and powerful beyond them.

His warlike might was brandished on wide, shaking the four corners of the land; he took captive the kings of the Six States.

Uniting all under heaven, he put an end to harm and disaster, and then for all time he laid aside his arms.

The bright virtue of the August Emperor aligns and orders the whole universe; he sees and listens without tiring.

He has established his great righteousness, providing all with the implements required, each with his own badge and pennant.

Office holders have the honour due them, each understands his duties, so all proceeds without ill-feeling or doubt.

The black-headed people have undergone transformation, near and far

share a single rule, an achievement far surpassing antiquity.

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Constant occupations have been fixed, heirs hereafter will carry on the tasks, insuring continuance of the sage’s good order.

The host of officials rejoice in his virtue, respectfully praising the sage’s magnificence, and beg to set up this inscription at Zhifu.

On his way back the emperor went to Langya and then from Shangdang returned to the capital.

The thirtieth year (217): passed without incident.

Thirty-first year (216): in the twelfth month the *la* festival was renamed Rejoicing in Peace.83 The black-headed people were rewarded with six piculs of grain and two sheep for each community.

The First Emperor went out incognito in the city of Xianyang, accompanied only by four armed men. Going out at night, he encountered bandits at Lanchi and his life was threatened, but the armed guards attacked and killed the bandits. A thorough search was made in the area within the passes for twenty days.

One picul of grain cost 1,600 cash.

Thirty-second year (215): the First Emperor journeyed to Jieshi, where he commissioned a native of Yan named Scholar Lu to go in search of the immortals Xianmen and Gaoshi. He had an inscription carved on the gate of Jieshi which read:84

He called out his armies to punish the unprincipled, and the workers of evil have been wiped clean.

His arms cut down the violent and contentious, his civil arts restored the guiltless, and the hearts of the multitude are submissive.

Generously he judged merit and worth, his rewards extending to oxen and horses, and his bounty fattened the land.

The August Emperor displayed his might, his virtue brought together the feudal lords, for the first time bestowing unity and peace.

He demolished walls and fortifications, opened up waterways, cut through embankments, and levelled the steep declivities.

When the shape of the land had been fixed, the masses were freed from corvée labour, and all the empire was comforted.

Now men delight in their tasks, women pursue their occupations, each affair ranged in proper order.

His bounty extends to every occupation, all have their allotted work in the fields, none without a place of rest.

The host of officials praise his magnificence, begging leave to inscribe this stone, that his example may be made known to future ages.

At this time the emperor dispatched Han Zhong, Lord Hou, and Master

Shi to search for the immortals and their herbs of everlasting life. The First Emperor, having toured the northern border region, returned to the capital by way of Shang Province.

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Master Lu, a native of Yan, who had been sent out to sea, returned and, claiming that it had come to him from the gods and spirits, submitted a document that said: “Qin will be destroyed by Hu.”85 The First Emperor thereupon ordered General Meng Tian to call out 300,000 troops and lead them north to strike at the Hu barbarians. The general invaded and seized the area south of the bend of the Yellow River.

Thirty-third year (214): a number of men who had absconded in the past, had been adopted into their wife’s family, or were shopkeepers, were sent to invade and seize the Luliang region.86 The provinces of Guilin, Xiang, and Nanhai were created and convicts sent to garrison them. In the northwest the Xiongnu were driven back and the region from Yuzhong east along the Yellow River was joined with Mt. Yin, being divided up into thirty- four districts. Fortifications were built along the river to protect the border.

Meng Tian was also ordered to cross the Yellow River and seize Gaoque, Mt. Tao, and Beijia. Outposts were constructed in order to drive out the Rong people, and convicts were transported to the region to populate the new districts. It was forbidden to offer sacrifices to the Morning Star. A comet appeared in the western sky.

Thirty-fourth year (213): officials in charge of lawsuits who had been unjust in their dealings were transported to the Great Wall to work at its construction, or to the region of Southern Yue.

The First Emperor set out wine in his palace in Xianyang, and seventy academicians assembled in his presence to wish him long life. The archery captain Zhou Qingchen stepped forward and spoke these words of praise: “In former times Qin’s territory did not exceed 1,000 *li*. But Your Majesty, through your spiritual power and enlightened sageness, has pacified all within the seas and driven out the Man and Yi barbarians. Wherever the sun and moon shine there is no one who does not come in submission. The domains of the feudal lords have been made into provinces and districts. Each person finds rest and happiness, free from the threat of warfare, such blessings to be handed down for 10,000 generations. Since the highest antiquity there has been nothing to equal Your Majesty’s might and virtue.” The First Emperor was delighted. But another academician, a man of Qi named Chunyu Yue, came forward and said: “I have heard that the kings of the Yin and Zhou dynasties ruled for 1,000 years or more, for they enfeoffed their sons and younger brothers and their meritorious ministers to aid and support them. Now Your Majesty possesses all within the seas,

yet your sons and younger brothers are mere commoners. If a Tian Chang or the six great ministers of Jin should suddenly appear, you would be without support or assistance, and how could you be saved?87 I have never heard of any undertaking that failed to imitate the example of antiquity and yet was able to endure for long! And Zhou Qingchen by flattering you to your face is simply compounding Your Majesty’s error — he is no loyal subject!”

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The First Emperor referred the matter to his ministers for discussion. The chancellor Li Si said: “The Five Emperors did not imitate each other, the Three Dynasties did not carry on each other’s ways, yet each was well governed. It was not that they rejected one another, but that the times changed.

“Now Your Majesty has initiated this great undertaking, establishing merit that will last 10,000 generations. This is not the sort of thing that a stupid Confucianist would understand! Chunyu Yue has spoken of the Three Dynasties, but why should they be worth taking as a model? In other times the feudal rulers vied with one another in inviting wandering scholars to their courts and treating them generously. But now all under heaven has been pacified and laws and ordinances proceed from a single source. The common people in their homes devote their efforts to agriculture and crafts, while gentlemen study the laws and ordinances and practise how to avoid prohibitions.

“But nowadays scholars, instead of looking to the present, study antiquity in order to criticize their own age, misleading and confusing the black- headed people. As chancellor, your servant Li Si must speak out on pain of death. In the past the empire was fragmented and in confusion and no one was able to unite it. Therefore the feudal rulers rose up side by side, all of them declaiming on antiquity in order to disparage the present, parading empty words in order to confuse the facts. Men prided themselves on their private theories and criticized the measures adopted by their superiors.

“Now the August Emperor has unified all under heaven, distinguishing black from white and establishing a single source of authority. Yet these adherents of private theories band together to criticize the laws and directives. Hearing that an order has been handed down, each one proceeds to discuss it in the light of his theories. At court they disapprove in their hearts; outside they debate it in the streets. They hold it a mark of fame to defy the ruler, regard it as lofty to take a dissenting stance, and they lead the lesser officials in fabricating slander. If behaviour such as this is not prohibited, then in upper circles the authority of the ruler will be compromised, and in lower ones cliques will form. Therefore it should be prohibited.

“I therefore request that all records of the historians other than those of the state of Qin be burned. With the exception of the academicians whose duty it is to possess them, if there are persons anywhere in the empire who have in their possession copies of the *Odes*, the *Documents*, or the writings of the hundred schools of philosophy, they shall in all cases deliver them to the governor or his commandant for burning. Anyone who ventures to discuss the *Odes* or *Documents* shall be executed in the marketplace. Anyone who uses antiquity to criticize the present shall be executed along with his family. Any official who observes or knows of violations and fails to report them shall be equally guilty. Anyone who has failed to burn such books within thirty days of the promulgation of this order shall be subjected to tatoo and condemned to ‘wall dawn’ labour.88 The books that are to be exempted are those on medicine, divination, agriculture, and forestry. Anyone wishing to study the laws and ordinances should have a law official for his teacher.”

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An imperial decree granted approval of the proposal.

Thirty-fifth year (212): a road was opened up from Jiuyuan to Yunyang, mountains being cut through and valleys filled up so that the road could run in a straight line.

The First Emperor felt that, in view of the large population of Xianyang, the palace of the former kings of Qin was too small. “I have heard,” he said, “that King Wen of the Zhou had his capital at Feng, and King Wu had his at Hao. The area between Feng and Hao is fit for the capital of an emperor or a king.” He accordingly began construction of a state palace in the Shanglin Park south of the Wei River. First he built a front hall at Epang which measured 500 *bu* from east to west and fifty *zhang* from north to south.89 The upper part could seat 10,000 persons, and in the lower part flag poles five *zhang* high could be erected. It was surrounded by covered walks which then led from the hall directly south to the Southern Mountains. The summit of the Southern Mountains was designated to be the gate of the palace. An elevated walk extended from Epang north across the Wei River to connect the palace with Xianyang, in imitation of the way in which in the heavens a corridor leads from the Heavenly Apex star across the Milky Way to the Royal Chamber star.

The palace at Epang had not been completed at this time. The emperor intended to select some appropriate name for it when it was completed, but meanwhile, since it was being built at a place called Epang, everyone referred to it as the Epang Palace. Over 700,000 persons condemned to castration and convict labourers were called up, part of them being put to work building the Epang Palace and part assigned to Mt. Li.90 Stone was quarried from the northern hills and timber transported from the regions

of Shu and Jing, all being brought to the site.

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In the area within the passes there were a total of 300 palaces, while beyond the passes there were more than 400. The emperor had a stone set up at Qujie on the eastern sea, declaring that it was the eastern gate of Qin. He had 30,000 households transported to the town at Mt. Li, and 50,000 households to Yunyang, exempting them all from taxes and corvée labour for a period of ten years.91

Master Lu said to the First Emperor, “I and the others have searched for zhi fungus, rare herbs, and the immortals, but we can never seem to encounter them. There would appear to be some entity that is blocking us. The magic arts teach that the ruler of men should at times move about in secret so as to avoid evil spirits. If evil spirits are avoided, one can reach the status of True Man. If the whereabouts of the ruler of men are known to his ministers, this hinders his spiritual power. A True Man can enter water without getting wet, enter fire without getting burned, soar over the clouds and air, and endure as long as heaven and earth. But now Your Majesty, though ruling the whole world, has not yet been able to attain calm and quietude. When you are in the palace, do not let others know where you are. Once that is done, I believe that the herbs of immortality can be obtained.”

The emperor said, “I long to become a True Man. From now on I will refer to myself as True Man and will not call myself *zhen*.”

He then had elevated walks and walled roads built to connect all the 270 palaces and scenic towers situated within the 200 *li* environs of Xianyang. He filled the palaces with curtains and hangings, bells and drums, and beautiful women, each assigned to a particular post and forbidden to move about. Anyone revealing where the emperor was visiting at any particular moment was put to death.

The First Emperor visited the palace at Mt. Liang and happened to look down from the mountain and observe the carriages, outriders, and attendants of the chancellor. He was not pleased. One of the eunuchs reported this to the chancellor, who thereafter reduced the number of his carriages and outriders. The First Emperor was furious, saying, “Someone among the eunuchs is leaking word of what I say!” He examined the eunuchs, but none would confess to the crime. He then ordered the arrest of all those who had been in attendance, and had every one put to death. From that time on, no one knew where he was when he was absent from the palace. Whenever he listened to reports or passed on decisions to his officials, it was always done at the palace in Xianyang.

Master Hou and Master Lu plotted together, saying, “The First Emperor is by nature obstinate, cruel, and self-willed. He rose up from among the

feudal rulers to unite the entire empire, and now that he has achieved his ends and fulfilled his desires, he believes that there has never been anyone like him since remote antiquity.

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“He entrusts everything to the law officials, and the law officials alone are allowed into his presence. Although seventy men have been appointed as academicians, they are mere figureheads and are never consulted. The chancellor and the other major officials are all handed decisions that have already been made, and they simply second the emperor’s opinion. The emperor delights in showing his authority by punishing and killing, and everyone throughout the empire dreads punishment and tries merely to maintain his position, none daring to exert true loyalty. The emperor never learns of his mistakes and hence grows daily more arrogant, while his underlings, prostrate with fear, flatter and deceive him in order to curry favour.

“Qin law forbids a person to practise more than one kind of magical art, and if he fails to show results, he is summarily put to death. There are 300 men who practise the art of divining by the stars and exhalations, all of them experts, but they are so terrified of giving offence that they merely flatter the ruler and do not dare speak out and tell him his faults. All the affairs of the empire, great and small, are decided by the emperor. He even has the documents weighed, making certain that each day and night produces a picul’s weight of them. He will not rest until they come up to that weight! When he is as greedy for authority and power as this, we can never hope to search out the herbs of immortality!” They accordingly fled in secret.

When the First Emperor was informed of this, he was enraged. “In the past,” he said, “I confiscated all the books from the empire and got rid of all those that were of no use. I also summoned a great many learned scholars and practitioners of various magic arts, hoping to initiate an era of great peace. The magicians said they wanted to employ their skills to search for rare herbs. But now Han Zhong has disappeared without any report, and Xu Fu and the others, after expending countless tens of thousands of cash, have never been able to obtain the herbs, and daily I hear reports that they are merely scheming for illicit gain. I have shown the utmost generosity in showering Master Lu and the others with honours and gifts, but now they speak slanderously of me so as to exaggerate my lack of virtue. I have also directed people to question the various scholars residing in Xianyang, and it appears that some are spreading dubious stories in order to mislead the black-headed people!”

He then ordered the imperial secretary to subject all the scholars to investigation. The scholars reported on one another in an attempt to

exonerate themselves. Over 460 persons were convicted of violating the prohibitions, and were executed at Xianyang, word of it being publicized throughout the empire so as to act as a warning to later ages.92 In addition, increasing numbers of convicts were transported to the border regions.

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The First Emperor’s eldest son Fusu remonstrated with him, saying, “The empire has just been set at peace and the black-headed people in distant regions have not yet been won over. The scholars all praise Confucius and take him as a model. But in all affairs Your Majesty emphasizes the place of law and employs it as a corrective. I fear this may cause unrest in the empire. I hope you will give this some thought.”

The First Emperor, angered, sent Fusu north to supervise the activities of Meng Tian in Shang Province.

Thirty-sixth year (211): Mars lodged in the mansion of the Heart Star. A meteor fell on Dong Province, turning into a stone when it reached the ground. One of the black-headed people inscribed on the stone: “The First Emperor will die and his land be divided.” When the First Emperor heard of this, he sent the imperial secretary to investigate, but no one would confess to the deed. In the end the emperor had all the persons living in the vicinity of the stone seized and put to death, and had the stone burned and pulverized.

The First Emperor, much disquieted, ordered the academicians to compose a poem on the immortals and on the True Man, which also described the emperor’s travels throughout the empire. It was distributed and musicians were designated to sing the poem to musical accompaniment.

In the autumn an envoy returning from east of the Hangu Pass reported that as he was passing along the Pingshu road in Huaiyin at night a man carrying a jade disc blocked the way, saying, “Give this to the lord of Hao Lake for me.” He also said, “This year the primal dragon will die.”

When the envoy asked the meaning of this, the man suddenly disappeared, but he left the jade disc behind. The envoy accordingly presented the disc along with his report.

The First Emperor listened in silence and then after a long time said, “These mountain spirits cannot predict anything beyond the events of a single year!” But after he had retired from court, he said, “The primal dragon must mean the leader of men.”93

The emperor ordered the imperial treasury to examine the jade disc. They found that it was one that had been cast into the Yangtze when the emperor crossed the river on a tour in his twenty-eighth year. The First Emperor had divination made by the milfoil stalks and the response

indicated that a journey would be propitious.

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Thirty thousand households were ordered moved to Beihe and Yuzhong and granted one step in noble rank.

Thirty-seventh year (210): in the tenth month, on the day *guichou* (Nov. 1), the First Emperor set out on a trip. The chancellor of the left Li Si accompanied him, while the chancellor of the right Feng Quqi remained in the capital. The emperor’s youngest son Huhai, whom he was very fond of, asked to be allowed to go along, and the emperor gave him permission.

In the eleventh month the emperor reached Yunmeng, where he gazed at Mt. Jiuyi from afar and sacrificed to the sage ruler Yu Shun. Then he sailed down the Yangtze to view Jike, crossed Haizhu, passed Danyang, and arrived at Qiantang, overlooking the Zhe River. Because the waves on the river were so high, he went 120 *li* to the west and crossed the river at a narrower point. He climbed Mt. Kuaiji and sacrificed to the sage ruler Great Yu. Gazing far off at the southern sea, he erected a stone inscribed with praises of the virtue of the Qin. The text read:

The August Emperor in his magnificence pacified and united the universe; his virtue and bounty are long lasting.

In his thirty-seventh year he toured the empire in person, viewing the distant regions all around.

He ascended Mt. Kuaiji, examining customs and folkways, and the black- headed people were circumspect and respectful.

The host of officials praise his merits, tracing the source of his undertakings, thinking back on his lofty enlightenment.

The sage of Qin rules the nation, for the first time defining penalties and names, making clear the old regulations.

For the first time he adjusted the laws and precedents and delineated offices and responsibilities in order to establish constant procedures.

The kings of the Six States, bent only on rebellion, greedy, cruel, and rapacious, led their hosts, certain of their power.

Violent, unruly, they acted wilfully, trusting to strength in their arrogance, again and again fielding their troops.

They exchanged envoys in secret, forming an alliance against us, acting in evil fashion.

Within the state they disguised their plotting, abroad they came to plunder our borders, and in time brought disaster on themselves.

Through the power of righteousness our ruler chastised them, obliterating the lawless and disorderly, wiping out and destroying the brigands.

The virtue of the sage is vast and all-inclusive; throughout the six directions it sheds unbounded blessing.

The August Emperor has united the universe, he lends ear to manifold affairs, near and far are universally cleansed.

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He tends to a multitude of matters, examines and verifies their substance, so that each bears the name it deserves.

He has cognizance of both eminent and lowly, good and bad are ranged before him, nothing remains hidden from sight.

Those who gloss over error in the name of righteousness, women with sons who remarry, unchastely turning against the dead -

Such conduct he bars at home and abroad, prohibits unlicensed behaviour, so that men and women are pure and honest.

If a husband behaves in bestial fashion, killing him will incur no guilt; thus are men made to embrace righteousness.

If a wife runs away and remarries, her sons shall disown their mother; so all will be led to clean and upright conduct.

His great rule purifies the folkways, the whole empire acknowledges its sway; it blankets the world in splendid regulation.

All honour his rules and maxims, harmonious, peaceful, and diligent; there are none who do not heed his command.

The black-headed people are orderly and virtuous, individuals delighting in a common rule, rejoicing in and guarding the great peace.

Posterity will obey his laws, his constant governance knowing no end, like carriages and boats that never overturn.

The officials in his retinue praise his brilliance, begging to inscribe this stone; may its glorious message shine through the ages.

On his way back the emperor passed through Wu, crossed the Yangtze at Jiangcheng, and followed north along the seacoast to Langya.

Xu Fu and the other magicians who had set out to sea in search of the herbs of immortality had passed several years without finding anything, consuming huge sums of money. Fearful of punishment, they deceived the emperor by saying, “The herbs of Penglai can surely be obtained. But always there are large fish that cause difficulty, and therefore we are unable to reach the island. We would like to request that a skilled archer be assigned to accompany us so that if we sight any fish, he can shoot at them with a repeating crossbow.”

The First Emperor dreamed that he was struggling with an ocean god who had the shape of a human being. When he consulted an academician who was an interpreter of dreams, he said, “The water god himself cannot be seen, but he may manifest himself in the form of a large fish or dragon. Now Your Majesty conducts sacrifices with great diligence, and yet this evil god has appeared. It must be driven away so that the good gods can appear.”

The emperor ordered that those who set out to sea should carry along equipment for seizing a gigantic fish. He himself carried a repeating crossbow and watched for a great fish to appear so he could shoot it. He proceeded north from Langya as far as Mt. Rongcheng but saw nothing. When he reached Zhifu, however, he saw several huge fish and shot and killed one of them. He then followed along the shore, turned west, and had gone as far as Pingyuan Ford when he fell ill.

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The First Emperor hated any talk of dying, and none of his officials dared even allude to the matter of death. When his illness grew increasingly grave he wrote a letter under the imperial seal to be sent to his son, Prince Fusu, saying, “When mourning is announced, proceed to Xianyang and carry out the burial.” The letter had already been sealed and deposited with Zhao Gao, chief of the office of imperial carriage, who had charge of official seals, but it had not yet been entrusted to a messenger.

In the seventh month, the day *bingyin*,94 the First Emperor passed away at the Ping Terrace in Shaqiu or Sand Hill. Because the emperor had died outside the capital, the chancellor Li Si feared that the other princes and their supporters in the empire might start an uprising, and therefore he kept the matter secret and did not announce a period of mourning.

The coffin was placed in a carriage that could be opened up for cooling or closed for warmth, with the ruler’s oldest and most trusted eunuchs riding in attendance. At each stopping place, food was delivered to the carriage. The various officials continued as before to submit matters for the emperor’s approval, and at such times the eunuchs would immediately approve them and hand them down from the closed carriage. Only the emperor’s son Huhai, Zhao Gao, and five or six of the trusted eunuchs knew that the emperor had died.

Zhao Gao had in the past instructed Huhai in matters pertaining to writing, criminal investigations, and laws and regulations, and Huhai was very friendly with him. Zhao Gao accordingly joined with Prince Huhai and the chancellor Li Si in plotting in secret, destroying the sealed letter that the emperor had prepared to be sent to Prince Fusu. They then forged a testamentary edict that was supposed to have been received by the chancellor Li Si from the emperor at Shaqiu which designated Huhai as heir apparent. They also prepared a new letter to be sent to Prince Fusu and Meng Tian, accusing them of various crimes and ordering them to commit suicide. (A fuller discussion will be found in The Biography of Li Si.) The party proceeded from Jingxing to Jiuyuan, but as the weather was hot, the body of the emperor in the closed carriage began to smell. An imperial order was issued to the accompanying officials ordering them to load each of their carriages with a picul’s weight of dried fish so as to

disguise the odour. In this way they proceeded by the Straight Road to Xianyang, where the mourning was announced. The heir apparent Huhai ascended the throne and is known as the Second Emperor.

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In the ninth month the First Emperor was interred at Mt. Li. When the emperor first came to the throne he began digging and shaping Mt. Li. Later, when he unified the empire, he had over 700,000 men from all over the empire transported to the spot. They dug down to the third layer of underground springs and poured in bronze to make the outer coffin. Replicas of palaces, scenic towers, and the hundred officials, as well as rare utensils and wonderful objects, were brought to fill up the tomb. Craftsmen were ordered to set up crossbows and arrows, rigged so they would immediately shoot down anyone attempting to break in. Mercury was used to fashion imitations of the hundred rivers, the Yellow River and the Yangtze, and the seas, constructed in such a way that they seemed to flow. Above were representations of all the heavenly bodies, below, the features of the earth. “Man-fish” oil was used for lamps, which were calculated to burn for a long time without going out.95

The Second Emperor said, “Of the women in the harem of the former ruler, it would be unfitting to have those who bore no sons sent elsewhere.” All were accordingly ordered to accompany the dead man, which resulted in the death of many women.

After the interment had been completed, someone pointed out that the artisans and craftsmen who had built the tomb knew what was buried there, and if they should leak word of the treasures, it would be a serious affair. Therefore, after the articles had been placed in the tomb, the inner gate was closed off and the outer gate lowered, so that all the artisans and craftsmen were shut in the tomb and were unable to get out. Trees and bushes were planted to give the appearance of a mountain.

First year of the reign of the Second Emperor (209): the Second Emperor was twenty-one. Zhao Gao as chief of palace attendants was entrusted with the handling of state affairs. The Second Emperor handed down a decree ordering an increase in the sacrifices in the mortuary temple of the First Emperor and the rituals observed in sacrifices to the rivers, mountains, and the various other deities. He instructed the officials to discuss proper ways of paying honour to the temple of the First Emperor.

The officials all bowed their heads and replied: “In ancient times the Son of Heaven had seven mortuary temples, the feudal lords five, and the grandees three. Now the First Emperor has his Apex Temple, which will never be destroyed though 10,000 generations may pass.96 All regions within the four seas send articles of tribute to it, the sacrifices have been

increased, and all the rituals are thoroughly carried out — there is nothing more to add. As for the mortuary temples of the former kings of Qin, some are situated to the west in Yong and some are in Xianyang. The Son of Heaven should consider it his duty to offer libations and sacrifices only in the temple of the First Emperor. The temples of the Qin rulers from Duke Xiang on down should be destroyed, so that only seven temples remain in existence.97 The various officials should make offerings and sacrifices in these according to ritual, and should honour the temple of the First Emperor by calling it the Temple of the Imperial Ancestor. The emperor should also resume the practice of referring to himself by the pronoun *zhen*.”

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The Second Emperor plotted with Zhao Gao, saying, “I, the sovereign (zhen), am still young and have just ascended the throne, and the black- headed people are not yet won over to me. The former emperor made progresses through the provinces and districts in order to display his might and cause all within the seas to be awed and submissive. Now if I do not make a similar progress in a self-assured manner, they will regard me as weak and I will have no way to make them serve me as subjects should!”

In the spring the Second Emperor journeyed to the provinces and districts of the east, with Li Si accompanying him. When he reached Jieshi, he proceeded south along the seacoast to Kuaiji. He added inscriptions to all the stones that the First Emperor had earlier set up, on the side of the stone listing the names of the high officials who had accompanied the former sovereign in order to make manifest his merits and accomplishments and his outstanding virtue. The inscription read:

The emperor said: “These inscriptions on metal and stone were all made by the First Emperor. Now we have succeeded to the title of emperor, but since the inscriptions on metal and stone do not contain the words ‘First Emperor’, there is a danger that after a long time has passed it may appear as though the inscriptions were made not by the First Emperor but by one of his later heirs, and this will not serve to praise his merits and accomplishments and his outstanding virtue.”

We, the chancellors Li Si and Feng Quqi and the imperial secretary De, therefore brave death by requesting that the words of this imperial decree be inscribed on the stones so as to make this fact clear. We brave death by making this request. An imperial decree granted approval of the request.

The emperor went as far as Liaodong and then returned to the capital.

The Second Emperor respected Zhao Gao and heeded his advice in applying the laws and ordinances. He plotted with Zhao Gao in secret, saying, “The chief ministers are unsubmissive, the various officials still

have great power, and the other imperial princes are certain to contest my rule. What can I do?”

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Zhao Gao replied, “I have long wanted to speak of this, but had not ventured to do so. The chief ministers of the former emperor are all men of eminent families that have been famous throughout the empire for ages, families that have piled up merit and passed these offices along from generation to generation for many years. I, on the other hand, come originally from a humble background, but Your Majesty has been kind enough to raise me up and assign me to a high position where I can supervise the affairs of the palace. The chief ministers are disgruntled at this. In outward appearance they may seem compliant enough, but at heart they do not truly submit.

“Now Your Majesty has just been on a tour, but you did not make use of the opportunity to examine the governors and military commandants of the provinces and districts and punish those who are guilty of some crime. By doing so you can strike terror into the empire as a whole, and at the same time do away with those who disapprove of your actions. This is not the time to seek your model in the arts of peace but to decide all through brute power. I beg Your Majesty to follow along with the times and not be in doubt. There is no need to consult with the host of officials. The enlightened ruler raises up those people who would otherwise be overlooked. The humble he makes eminent, the poor he enriches, the distant he draws close to him. Then those both high and low can be won over and the nation will be secure.”

“Excellent!” said the Second Emperor, and he proceeded to impose punishments on the chief ministers and the imperial princes, accusing them of crimes and errors and arresting even petty officials close to the ruler or the three categories of palace attendants, so that no one was certain of his position.

Six of the imperial princes were put to death at Du. Only Prince Jianglü and his two brothers, who were held prisoner in the palace while their crimes were being investigated, were left alive. The Second Emperor sent a messenger to them, saying, “You have failed to act as proper subjects, and for this crime you deserve death. The officials have been instructed to carry out the law!”

Jianglü said, “In matters of court ritual I have never ventured to disobey the director of the guests, in taking my place in the hall of state I have never ventured to overstep my position, in accepting and responding to commands I have never ventured to use improper language. How have I failed to act as a proper subject? I wish to be informed of my crime before I die!”

The messenger replied, “I am not authorized to discuss such matters with you. I receive my instructions and carry them out!”

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Jianglü looked up to heaven and cried out to it in a loud voice three times, saying, “This is Heaven’s doing! I have committed no crime!” The three brothers all wept bitterly as they drew their swords and took their own lives.

The members of the imperial family shook with terror. Those officials who remonstrated were all accused of slander. The high officers merely clung to their posts and endeavoured to ingratiate themselves, while the black-headed people trembled with fear.

In the fourth month the Second Emperor, having returned to Xianyang from his tour, announced: “The former emperor regarded the court at Xianyang as too small, and therefore began building a palace at Epang. Before the halls could be completed, however, the ruler passed away. Construction there was halted and workmen assigned to supply dirt for the mound at Mt. Li. The project at Mt. Li has been carried to completion, and if we do not now finish construction of the palace at Epang, it will appear as though the former emperor was mistaken in his undertakings.”

Work was accordingly resumed on the Epang Palace, while on the foreign front efforts were continued to subdue the barbarians on the four borders, all as the First Emperor had originally planned. Fifty thousand crossbowmen were called up from all over the empire and assigned to garrison and protect Xianyang, where they were to give instruction in archery. It was estimated that they and their dogs, horses, and other animals would require large amounts of food and that food supplies would be insufficient. An order was circulated to the provinces and districts instructing them to send supplies of beans, millet, grass, and fodder to the capital. All persons transporting the supplies were ordered to bring their own rations with them. Within a radius of 300 *li* of Xianyang, farmers were forbidden to consume their own grain. Thus the laws and regulations became increasingly severe.

In the seventh month Chen She and others of his band of garrison troops revolted in the old territory of Jing, calling themselves “Magnifiers of Chu”. Chen She set himself up as king of Chu, with his residence in Chen, and sent out his generals to seize control of the lands east of the mountains. The young men of the provinces and districts, having suffered under the Qin officials, all murdered the governors and commandants or the magistrates and aides of their respective provinces and districts and declared themselves a part of Chen She’s revolt. Countless numbers of them, having appointed themselves marquises or kings, joined forces and turned their eyes west, declaring their intention to attack the Qin.

When a master of guests who had been sent east on official business returned from the area, he reported the rebellion to the Second Emperor. The Second Emperor, enraged, had him turned over to the law officials for punishment. Thereafter, when envoys arrived and the emperor questioned them, they would reply, “Just a bunch of bandits. The governors and commandants of the provinces are now in the process of pursuing and capturing them. They’ll have them all in no time — there is no need to worry!” Then the emperor would be pleased.

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Meanwhile Wu Chen set himself up as king of Zhao, Wei Jiu became king of Wei, Tian Dan became king of Qi, the governor of Pei started his uprising in Pei, and Xiang Liang raised an army in the province of Kuaiji.

Second year (208), winter: Zhou Zhang, a military leader who had been dispatched by Chen She, pushed west as far as Xi with a force of several hundred thousand soldiers. The Second Emperor, greatly alarmed, consulted with his officials, saying, “What’s to be done?”

Zhang Han, the privy treasurer, said, “The bandits are already close by in great numbers and force. There is no time to call up forces from the nearby districts. There are many convict labourers at Mt. Li. I would like to ask that they be pardoned and given arms so they can be used for an attack.”

The Second Emperor thereupon issued a general amnesty to the empire and ordered Zhang Han to lead the attack. Zhang Han struck at and defeated Zhou Zhang’s army and sent it fleeing, and eventually killed Zhou Zhang at Caoyang. The Second Emperor sent Sima Xin and Dong Yi, chief officials in the office of the chancellor, to assist Zhang Han in his attacks on the bandits. They killed Chen She at Chengfu, defeated Xiang Liang’s forces at Dingtao, and wiped out Wei Jiu at Linji. By this time all the outstanding bandit leaders in the region of Chu were dead, and so Zhang Han led his forces north across the Yellow River to attack Zhao Xie, the king of Zhao, and his followers at Julu.

Zhao Gao advised the Second Emperor, saying, “The former emperor ruled the world for a long period of time and therefore his officials did not dare act wrongfully or speak nonsense. But now Your Majesty is young in years and you have just come to the throne. Why discuss matters with the high ministers when making decisions? If you should make an error in judgment, you would look bad in the eyes of the officials. The Son of Heaven refers to himself by a special pronoun, zhen, because his own voice is never heard.”98

Accordingly the Second Emperor remained within the inner recesses of the palace and decided affairs in consultation with Zhao Gao. Thereafter the high ministers seldom had an opportunity to see him at court.

The bandits and brigands continued to grow in numbers, and troops were endlessly called up from the area within the passes and sent east to attack them. The chancellor of the right Feng Quqi, the chancellor of the left Li Si, and General Feng Jie came forward to remonstrate with the emperor, saying, “East of the pass, bands of brigands rise up in one place after another, and though the Qin has dispatched troops to attack and punish them, and though great numbers have been killed, still there is no end to them. Bandits are so numerous solely because of the burdens of garrison duty, the transportation of supplies, and other types of construction and corvée labour, and because taxes are so heavy. We request that construction work on the Epang Palace be suspended and that garrison and transport duty for the four frontiers be reduced.”

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The Second Emperor said, “I have heard from Master Han that emperors Yao and Shun did not plane the speckled beams of their palaces or trim the thatch of their roofs; they ate their rice from earthen pots and sipped soup from earthen jars. Even the lot of a gatekeeper could not have been as cramped as theirs. Emperor Yu chiselled through Dragon Gate and opened up Daxia, fixing the courses of the rivers and allowing the water to flow to the sea. In person he took up plough and spade, labouring till there was no more hair on his shins. Even the toil of a slave taken prisoner in the wars could not have been more arduous than his.99

“The reason people think it an honour to hold possession of the empire is that one may indulge his desires and carry out his wishes to the full. If the ruler takes care to clarify the laws, then those under him will not dare to act wrongly and all within the four seas will be well governed. But if rulers like Shun and Yu, though honoured with possession of the empire, must impose hardship and labour on themselves so as to set an example for their people, then what good are laws?

“I am honoured with the title of lord of ten thousand chariots, but I do not enjoy the reality. Now I want to be provided with 1,000 chariots, to be attended by 10,000, so that I can live up to my name and title!

“The former emperor rose up from among the feudal lords to unite the empire. After the empire had been set at rest, he drove back the four barbarian tribes in order to bring peace to the border regions, and he built halls and palaces as a symbol of his success. You, my lords, must have seen how his great accomplishments have been carried on.

“Now, during the two years when I have been on the throne, bands of robbers have risen in one place after another, and you have not been able to suppress them. Moreover, you want to put a halt to the former emperor’s enterprises. On a higher level you are failing to repay the debt you owe the former emperor, and on a secondary one you are not exerting

your utmost loyalty and strength for my sake! Why then should you remain in your posts?”

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He had Feng Quqi, Li Si, and Feng Jie handed over to the law officials, who subjected them to examination to see if they were guilty of other crimes as well. Feng Quqi and Feng Jie said, “Generals and ministers must not endure such disgrace!” and they committed suicide. Li Si was put in prison and sentenced to the five penalties.

Third Year (207): Zhang Han and the other Qin generals led troops and surrounded the city of Julu. Xiang Yu, the supreme general of the Chu forces, went to the rescue of Julu.

In the winter Zhao Gao became chancellor and, concluding the investigation of charges against Li Si, had him executed.

In the summer Zhang Han fought with the Chu troops and several times suffered defeat. When the Second Emperor dispatched envoys to berate him, he grew fearful and sent the chief official Sima Xin to the capital to ask for further instructions. But Zhao Gao refused to see him or to believe his account of events. Alarmed, Sima Xin fled from the capital. Zhao Gao sent men to overtake and arrest him, but they were too late.

When Sima Xin reappeared before Zhang Han, he said, “Zhao Gao handles all affairs in the palace. You will be put to death, General, whether you are successful in battle or not!”

Xiang Yu pressed his attacks on the Qin army and took the Qin general Wang Li prisoner. Zhang Han and the others then surrendered with their troops to the leaders of the states.

Eighth month, the day *jihai* (Sept. 27): Zhao Gao was contemplating treason but was afraid the other officials would not heed his commands, so he decided to test them first. He brought a deer and presented it to the Second Emperor but called it a horse. The Second Emperor laughed and said, “Is the chancellor perhaps mistaken, calling a deer a horse?”

Then the emperor questioned those around him. Some remained silent, while some, hoping to ingratiate themselves with Zhao Gao, said it was a horse, and others said it was a deer. Zhao Gao secretly arranged for all those who said it was a deer to be brought before the law. Thereafter the officials were all terrified of Zhao Gao.

Earlier, Zhao Gao had several times advised the emperor that the bandits east of the pass were incapable of causing serious trouble. But after Xiang Yu captured the Qin general Wang Li at Julu and began advancing, the armies of Zhang Han and the others suffered repeated defeat and they had sent letters to the capital requesting reinforcements. The former states of Yan, Zhao, Qi, Chu, Hann, and Wei had all set up kings to head them, and in the area east of the Hangu Pass almost everyone had

revolted against the Qin officials and gone over to the side of the leaders of the states, who were all leading their troops toward the west. The governor of Pei, heading a force of 30,000 or 40,000 men, had already wiped out the defenders of the Wu Pass and sent a man to communicate in secret with Zhao Gao.

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Zhao Gao, fearful that the Second Emperor would be angered at these events and that he himself would be subjected to punishment, pleaded illness and did not appear at court.

The Second Emperor dreamt that a white tiger sank its teeth in the outside left horse in his team of four and killed it. Troubled in mind by the dream and uncertain of its meaning, he questioned an expert in the interpretation of dreams. The diviner replied, “The Jing River is exercising a malevolent influence.” The Second Emperor conducted a fast at the Wangyi Palace, intending to sacrifice to the Jing River by drowning four white horses in it. At the same time he sent an envoy to Zhao Gao to berate him over the bandit uprisings.

Zhao Gao, terrified, began plotting in secret with his son-in-law Yan Yue, the magistrate of Xianyang, and his younger brother Zhao Cheng, saying, “The emperor refused to listen to admonition, and now that the situation is grave he wants to shift the blame to our family. I want to remove the emperor and set up Prince Ziying in his place. Ziying is kindhearted and modest and the people will all listen to what he says.”

Zhao Gao arranged for the chief of palace attendants to assist him from within the palace by spreading false reports that a large number of bandits had appeared and ordering Yan Yue to call out troops to expel them. Zhao Gao took Yan Yue’s mother into custody and held her in his own quarters as a hostage.100 Then he dispatched Yan Yue with a force of over 1,000 men to go to the gate of the Wangyi Palace. Yan Yue arrested and bound the commander of the guard and the archery captain, saying, “When the bandits broke in here, why didn’t you stop them!”

The commander of the guard replied, “I have surrounded the buildings with my men and taken every precaution. How could bandits possibly have entered the palace!”

Yan Yue proceeded to cut down the commander of the guard and lead his band of officials straight into the palace, shooting arrows as he went. The palace attendants and eunuchs were overcome with astonishment, some fleeing, others putting up a fight. Those who resisted were summarily killed, the dead numbering thirty or forty persons.

Yan Yue and the chief of palace attendants entered the hall together and shot arrows at the curtains surrounding the emperor’s throne. The Second Emperor angrily called for his attendants, but they were all too confused

and terrified to resist. Only one eunuch remained by the emperor’s side, not daring to desert him.

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The emperor, escaping into an inner apartment, said, “Why didn’t you warn me earlier, before things came to this!”

The eunuch replied, “I didn’t dare speak out, and that’s why I’m still alive. Anyone who had dared to speak out would have been put to death long ago — he wouldn’t be around now!”

Yan Yue came forward and at once began berating the Second Emperor, saying, “You are arrogant and wilful and you punish and kill people without reason! The whole empire has turned against you. You had better settle things for yourself!”

“May I see the chancellor?” said the Second Emperor. “Impossible!” said Yan Yue.

“I would like to be made king over just one province,” said the Second Emperor, but this request was denied. “I would like to become a marquis of 10,000 households,” he said, but this was denied.

“I would like to become one of the black-headed people along with my wife and children and to be treated like the other princes.”

Yan Yue said, “I have my orders from the chancellor to punish you on behalf of the empire. Whatever you may propose, I would never dare grant it.” Then he summoned his soldiers to come forward. The Second Emperor committed suicide.

Yan Yue returned and reported to Zhao Gao. Zhao Gao then summoned all the major officials and princes of the ruling family and informed them of how he had punished the Second Emperor. “The state of Qin was formerly ruled by a king,” he said. “The First Emperor made himself sovereign of the empire, and therefore called himself emperor. Now, however, the Six States have declared their independence once more and Qin’s territory is steadily diminishing. It would not do to go on using the empty title of emperor. We should use the title of king as before.”

Then he set up Ziying, the son of one of the Second Emperor’s older brothers, as king of Qin.101

The Second Emperor was buried at the Yichun Garden at Du’nan with the rites appropriate to one of the black-headed people. Then Ziying was ordered to fast and present himself at the ancestral temple to receive the jade seal of office.

After fasting for five days, Ziying plotted with his two sons, saying, “The chancellor Zhao Gao killed the Second Emperor at the Wangyi Palace, but because he is afraid that the other officials will punish him, he pretends to be acting righteously by setting me up as ruler. I have heard that Zhao Gao is secretly in league with the men of Chu and intends to wipe out the Qin

ruling family and make himself king of the region within the passes. Now he has instructed me to fast and appear in the ancestral temple, so he must intend to kill me in the temple. If I say I am ill and fail to go, the chancellor will surely come here, and when he does so, we can kill him!”

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Zhao Gao several times sent messengers to Ziying requesting him to proceed to the temple, but Ziying failed to go. As expected, Zhao Gao then came in person, saying, “The service of the ancestral temple is a grave affair. Why doesn’t Your Majesty proceed?”

Ziying stabbed and killed Zhao Gao in the palace where he was fasting, and put to death Zhao Gao’s three sets of relatives to serve as a warning to the people of Xianyang.

Ziying had been king of Qin for forty-six days when the governor of Pei, the military leader from Chu, defeated the Qin armies, entered the Wu Pass, and advanced as far as Bashang. He sent men to bargain with Ziying and persuade him to surrender. Ziying accordingly tied a rope around his neck, came in a plain carriage drawn by white horses, handed over the seals and credentials of the Son of Heaven, and surrendered by the side of Zhi Rod.102

The governor of Pei then entered Xianyang, sealed up the palaces and storehouses, and returned to encamp at Bashang. A month or so later, the forces of the other states arrived, with Xiang Yu as their leader. He killed Ziying and the other princes of the Qin ruling family and their relatives, and then went on to massacre the inhabitants of Xianyang, burn the palaces, take prisoner the men and women that staffed them, and confiscate their goods and treasures, which were divided up among the various leaders.

After the Qin dynasty had been overthrown, the area was divided into three parts, with three rulers known respectively as the king of Yong, the king of Sai, and the king of Di; they were referred to as the Three Qin. Xiang Yu made himself “Dictator King of Western Chu”, issuing commands to the empire and dividing it up among the various kings and marquises. Thus the Qin was finally wiped out. Five years later, peace was restored to the empire by the Han.

The Grand Historian remarks: Qin’s ancestor Boyi won distinction in the time of emperors Yao and Shun and was presented with territory and a surname. Later, when the Xia and Yin dynasties were in power, the family was dispersed and remained in obscurity, but when the power of the Zhou dynasty waned, the Qin rose to prominence, building its capital in the western borderland. From the time of Duke Mu on, it gradually ate away at the domains of the other feudal rulers until the process was finally completed by the First Emperor.

The First Emperor believed that his merits exceeded those of the Five Emperors of antiquity, and that his lands were broader than those of the Three Dynasties, and was ashamed to be ranked with them. Master Jia has written an excellent discussion of the matter:103

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Qin annexed the lands of the other feudal rulers and created over thirty provinces, putting in order the fords and passes, relying on the steep places and barrier points, and stationing armed men to guard the region. And yet Chen She and his several hundred garrison soldiers, scattered and disordered as they were, lifted up their arms and gave a loud cry. They used no bows or spears as their weapons, but mere plough handles and bare sticks, eating their way from house to house and rampaging over the empire. The men of Qin were unable to guard their narrow defiles or block the passes and bridges, their long spears would not slash, their strong crossbows would not shoot. The armies of Chu entered deep into the heartland, battling at Hongmen and never once encountering any barriers or fortifications to impede them. Thus the area east of the mountains was plunged into great confusion, the leaders of the states rose up on all sides, and brave men and heroes one after the other came to the fore.

Qin ordered Zhang Han to lead his troops east and restore order. But Zhang Han used the three armies under his command to secure land holdings abroad and plot against his own sovereign. From this one can see how untrustworthy the Qin officials were.

When Ziying came to the throne, he failed to awaken to reality. If Ziying had possessed even mediocre ability as a ruler, if he had been able to recruit even middling assistants, then despite the turmoil east of the mountains, Qin would have been able to retain control of its territory and the sacrifices in its ancestral temples need never have been cut off.

The old territory of Qin is well protected by mountains and girdled by the Yellow River, a state fenced in on four sides. From the time of Duke Mu to that of the First Emperor, Qin had over twenty rulers, and at all times they were leaders among the feudal lords. Surely this was not because generation after generation they were worthy men, but because of the strategic position they occupied. Once before, the empire had joined together in heart and pooled its strength to attack Qin.104 At that time worthy and sagacious rulers abounded, skilled generals headed the armies, and wise ministers cooperated in laying plans. But they were frustrated by the steep slopes and narrow defiles and were unable to advance. To entice them inside and draw them into battle, Qin purposely opened the passes, and the invading troops, though a million strong, were forced to flee in defeat and were utterly crushed. Surely this was not because they were lacking in bravery or wisdom, but because the shape of the land was

against them and the circumstances were not to their advantage.

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Qin had little towns but it linked them together with big walls. It guarded its defiles and frontiers with armies, heightened its fortifications rather then engaging in battle, closed its passes, relied on its barriers, shouldered its spears and stood guard. The leaders of the rebellion rose up from among the common people and joined forces for their own profit — they did not act in the manner of natural-born kings. They were not linked by bonds of kinship, nor were their subjects as yet deeply attached to them. In name their goal was to overthrow Qin, but in reality they were out for profit. If they had observed that Qin’s barriers would be difficult to penetrate, they would surely have withdrawn their armies, remained in the safety of their own lands, rested their people, and waited for Qin’s power to decline.

One who succours the weak and aids the weary, as the ruler of a great kingdom is commanded to do, need never worry that he will not gain his way with the lands within the seas. But when one is honoured with the position of Son of Heaven, possesses all the riches of the empire, and yet ends up as a captive, it must be because he has failed to remedy his errors. The First Emperor trusted his own judgment, never consulting others, and hence his errors went uncorrected. The Second Emperor carried on in the same manner, never reforming, compounding his misfortune through violence and cruelty. Ziying stood alone and friendless, weak and imperilled, with no one to aid him. All three rulers were deluded, and to the

end failed to awaken — is it not fitting that they perished?

At that time the world was not without men of deep insight and an understanding of change. The reason they did not dare exert their loyalty and correct the errors of the ruler was that Qin’s customs forbade the mentioning of inauspicious matters. Before their words of loyal advice were even out of their mouths, they would have been condemned to execution. This insured that the men of the empire would incline their ears to listen, stand in an attitude of solemn attention, but clamp their mouths shut and never speak out. Therefore when the three rulers strayed from the Way, the loyal ministers did not dare remonstrate, and the men of wisdom did not dare offer counsel. The empire was already in rebellion, but the ruler was never informed of the villainy — how pitiful!

The kings of former times knew the harm brought to the nation by suppression and concealment. Therefore they appointed high ministers and palace officials to put the laws in order and establish penalties, and the empire was well governed. While they themselves were still powerful, they were able to outlaw violence and punish the unruly, and the empire submitted to them. And later, when they became weak, the Five Hegemons carried out punitive expeditions and forced the other feudal rulers to

comply. Hence, though they were stripped of territory, they could guard their inner realm, the surrounding states supported them, and they were able to preserve their altars of the soil and grains.105

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In the case of Qin, however, while it was in a flourishing state, its manifold laws and stem punishments caused the empire to tremble. But when its power declined, then the people eyed it with hatred and the whole area within the seas rose up in revolt.

Hence, because the Zhou dynasty set up the five noble ranks and ruled according to the Way, it was able to endure for over 1,000 years without break. But the Qin was in error from first to last, and therefore it did not continue for long. From this we can see that the course of action leading to safety, and that leading to peril, are far apart indeed. The homely proverb says, “Former affairs, not forgot, teach those who come after.” That is why, when the gentleman is given charge of a state, he observes how things were done in ancient times, tests them in terms of the present day, sees how they tally with human concerns, examines into the cause of flourishing and decay, perceives what is fitting in the light of circumstances, initiates actions in the proper order, and changes with the times. As a result, his days as ruler are long and many, and his altars of the soil and grain rest secure.106

Duke Xiao of Qin, relying upon the strength of Mt. Yao and the Hangu Pass and basing himself in the area of Yongzhou, with his ministers held fast to his land and eyed the house of Zhou, for he cherished a desire to roll up the empire like a mat, to bind into one the whole world, to bag all the land within the four seas; he had it in his heart to swallow up everything in the eight directions. At this time he was aided by Lord Shang, who at home set up laws for him, encouraged agriculture and weaving, and built up the instruments of war, and abroad contracted military alliances and attacked the other feudal lords. Thus the men of Qin were able with ease to acquire territory east of the upper reaches of the Yellow River.

After the death of Duke Xiao, kings Huiwen and Wu carried on the undertakings of their predecessor and, following the plans he had laid, seized Hanzhong in the south and Ba and Shu in the west, and acquired rich land in the east and provinces of strategic value. The other feudal lords in alarm came together in council to devise some plan to weaken Qin, sparing nothing in gifts of precious objects and rich lands to induce men from all over the empire to come and join with them in a “vertical alliance”, and pool their strength. At this time there was Lord Mengchang in Qi, Lord Pingyuan in Zhao, Lord Chunshen in Chu, and Lord Xinling in Wei. These four lords were all men of intelligence and loyalty, generous and kind to others, who honoured worthy men and took good care of their followers.

They rejected the Horizontal Alliance and instead formed the Vertical Alliance, which united all the forces of the states of Hann, Wei, Yan, Chu, Qi, Zhao, Song, Wey, and Zhongshan. At this time among the distinguished men of the Six States were men like Ning Yue, Xu Shang, Su Qin, and Du He, who laid the plans; Qi Ming, Zhou Zui, Chen Zhen, Zhao Hua, Lou Huan, Di Jing, Su Li, Yue Yi, and their followers who carried out these plans; and Wu Qi, Sun Bin, Dai Tuo, Er Liang, Wang Liao, Tian Ji, Lian Po, and Zhao She, who commanded the troops. With a force of 1,000,000 soldiers drawn from an area ten times that of Qin, they beat upon the Pass and pressed forward toward Qin. But the men of Qin opened the Pass to entice the enemy in, and the armies of the Nine States fled and did not dare advance. Qin, without expending a single arrow or losing a single arrowhead, threatened the feudal rulers of the entire empire.

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With this the Vertical Alliance collapsed, its treaties came to naught, and the various states hastened to present Qin with parts of their territory as bribes for peace. With its superior strength Qin pressed the crumbling forces of its rivals, pursued those who had fled in defeat, and overwhelmed and slaughtered the army of 1,000,000 until their shields floated upon a river of blood. Following up the advantages of its victory, Qin gained mastery over the empire and divided up its mountains and rivers. The powerful states begged to submit to its sovereignty and the weaker ones paid homage at its court.

Then followed kings Xiaowen and Zhuangxiang, whose reigns were short and uneventful. After this came the First Emperor who, carrying on the glorious spirit of his six predecessors, cracked his long whip and drove the universe before him, swallowed up the eastern and western Zhou, and overthrew the feudal lords. He ascended the throne of honour and ruled the six directions, scourging the world with his lash, and his might shook the four seas. In the south he seized the land of the hundred tribes of Yue and made of it Guilin and Xiang provinces, and the lords of the hundred Yue bowed their heads, hung halters from their necks, and pleaded for their lives with the lowest officials of Qin. Then he sent Meng Tian north to build the Great Wall and defend the borders, driving back the Xiongnu over 700 *li,* so that the barbarians no longer ventured to come south to pasture their horses and their men dared not take up their bows to vent their hatred.

Thereupon he discarded the ways of the former kings and burned the books of the hundred schools of philosophy in order to make the black- headed people ignorant. He destroyed the walls of the great cities, put to death the powerful leaders, and collected all the arms of the empire, which he had brought to his capital at Xianyang, where the spears and arrowheads were melted down and cast to make twelve human statues. All

this he did in order to weaken the black-headed people. After this he ascended and fortified Mt. Hua, set up fords along the Yellow River, and strengthened the heights and precipices overlooking the fathomless valleys, in order to secure his position. He garrisoned the strategic points with skilled generals and strong crossbowmen and stationed trusted ministers and well-trained soldiers to guard the land with arms and question all who passed back and forth. When he had thus pacified the empire, the First Emperor believed in his heart that, with the strength of his capital within the passes and his walls of metal extending 1,000 miles, he had established a rule that would be enjoyed by his sons and grandsons for 10,000 generations.

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For a while after the death of the First Emperor the memory of his might continued to awe the common people. Yet Chen She, born in a humble hut with tiny windows and a wattle door, a day labourer in the fields and a garrison conscript, whose abilities could not match even the average, who had neither the worth of Confucius and Mo Di nor the wealth of Tao Zhu or Yi Dun, stepped from the ranks of the common soldiers, rose up from the paths of the fields, and led a band of some hundred poor, weary soldiers in revolt against Qin. They cut down trees to make their weapons and raised their flags on garden poles, and the whole world gathered like a cloud, answered like an echo to a sound, brought them provisions, and followed after them as shadows follow a form. In the end the leaders east of the mountains rose up together and destroyed the house of Qin.

The empire of Qin at this time was by no means small or feeble. Its base in Yongzhou, its stronghold within Mt. Yao and the Pass, were the same as before. The position of Chen She could not compare in dignity with the lords of Qi, Chu, Yan, Zhao, Wei, Song, Wey, and Zhongshan. The weapons which he improvised from hoe handles and tree branches could not match the sharpness of spears and battle pikes; his little band of garrison conscripts was nothing beside the armies of the Nine States. In deep plotting and far-reaching stratagems, in methods of warfare, he was far inferior to the men of earlier times. And yet Chen She succeeded in his undertaking where they had failed, though in ability, size, power, and strength his forces could in no way compare to those of the states east of the mountains that had formerly opposed Qin. Qin, beginning with an insignificant amount of territory, reached the power of a great kingdom and for 100 years made the ancient eight provinces pay homage at its court. Yet, after it had become master of the six directions and established its palaces within the passes, a single commoner opposed it and its seven ancestral temples toppled, its ruler died by the hands of men, and it became the laughing stock of the world. Why? Because it failed to rule

with humanity and righteousness, and did not realize that the power to attack, and the power to retain what one has thereby won, are not the same.

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The Qin ruler, having annexed the lands of all the other feudal lords, faced south and called himself an emperor, proprietor of all within the four seas, and the gentlemen of the empire docilely bowed before the wind of his influence. Why was this?

I would reply that the world in recent times had for a long time been without a true king. The royal house of Zhou had sunk into insignificance, the Five Hegemons had passed from the scene, and there was no one whose commands were obeyed throughout the empire. Hence the feudal rulers in governing relied on strength alone, the powerful impinging on the weak, the many lording it over the few. Weapons were never set aside and the people grew exhausted and impoverished.

Then Qin faced south to call itself ruler of the empire, which meant that the world now had a Son of Heaven to head it. The masses hoped that they would be granted the peace and security to live out their lives, and there was not one of them who did not set aside selfish thoughts and look up to the sovereign in reverence. This was the moment for demonstrating authority and proving one’s merit as a ruler, laying the foundation for lasting peace in the empire.

But the First Emperor was greedy and short-sighted, confident in his own wisdom, never trusting his meritorious officials, never getting to know his people. He cast aside the kingly Way and relied on private procedures, outlawing books and writings, making the laws and penalties much harsher, putting deceit and force foremost and humanity and righteousness last, leading the whole world in violence and cruelty. In annexing the lands of others, one may place priority on deceit and force, but insuring peace and stability in the lands one has annexed calls for a respect for authority. Hence I say that seizing, and guarding what you have seized, do not depend upon the same techniques.

Qin put an end to the Warring States period and made itself ruler of the empire, but it did not change its ways or reform its system of government, which shows that the means employed to seize an empire differ from those needed to guard it. Qin tried to guard it alone and singlehanded, and therefore its downfall was merely a matter of time.

If the First Emperor had reflected upon the practices of antiquity and noted the accounts of the Yin and Zhou dynasties in formulating the institutions for his government, then although wilful and dissolute rulers might appear in later times, there would have been no danger that the ruling house would be imperilled or overthrown. The founders of the Three

Dynasties, when they ruled the empire, were renowned for their good names, and the regimes they initiated endured for a long time.

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When the Second Emperor came to the throne, there was no one in the empire who did not look toward his government with anxious hopes. One who is cold will welcome even a skimpy coat of serge, one who is starving will relish the coarsest dregs. The hungry hopes of the empire offer aid to a new sovereign, for a weary people are easy to govern when treated with benevolence.

If the Second Emperor had acted in the manner of even a mediocre ruler, if he had employed loyal and worthy men and had joined with his officials in single-mindedly caring for the nation’s ills, correcting the errors of the former emperor while still in mourning garments; if he had divided the land and apportioned it to the people, enfeoffing the heirs of meritorious ministers, or had set up states with rulers over them so the empire would be ordered by ritual; if he had emptied the prisons, pardoned those condemned to execution, abolished slavery and other forms of humiliating punishment, allowing each person to return to his native village; if he had opened the granaries and disbursed funds to succour the orphaned and lonely and those in dire poverty; if he had lightened taxes and corvée labour to relieve the distress of the common people, simplified the laws and reduced penalties for the sake of posterity; if he had allowed the people of the empire to make a new beginning, each tending to his own well-being through the practice of integrity and good conduct, fulfilling the longings of the 10,000 people and presiding over the empire with authority and virtue, then the empire would have flocked to him. Then within the four seas all would have been perfectly content, each enjoying and finding security in his own station, fearful only that some change might occur.

Then even if wily and unscrupulous persons should appear, so long as there was no turning against the sovereign, then unprincipled officials would have no way to gloss over their schemes and the threat of violence and rebellious action would come to an end.

The Second Emperor, however, did not adopt such policies, but made the situation even graver by his departures from the Way, destroying ancestral temples and people and resuming work on the Epang Palace. He multiplied the laws and made punishments even sterner, his law officers becoming even harsher and more thorough in their investigations. His rewards and penalties were unjust, his taxes and levies knew no bounds. The empire was assigned so many tasks that the officials could not supervise them all; the people sank into poverty and destitution and the ruler offered them no pity or help. Thereafter villainy and deceit rose on every side and superiors and inferiors turned against one another. Those accused of crimes were so

numerous that condemned men were within sight of each other on the roads, and the whole empire groaned. From lords and high ministers on down to the mass of commoners, all feared for their safety, all tasted in person the realities of hardship, none felt secure in his position. Therefore they were easily roused to action. As a result, though Chen She had none of the worth of a King Tang or King Wu, though he possessed no noble title of duke or marquis to rely on, he had only to raise his arm in defiance in Daze and the whole world responded to his call, because the people felt threatened.

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The former kings perceived the changes that occur in the course of events and understood the secret of survival or downfall. Therefore their way of shepherding the people was simply to assure them of security. Then although treasonous subjects might appear in the empire, there would be no one to respond to them or aid them. So it is said, a people who feel secure may be led into righteous ways, but a people who feel threatened easily turn to evil. To be honoured as a Son of Heaven, to possess the riches of the empire, and yet be unable to escape execution comes from failure to correct misdirection. Such was the Second Emperor’s error.107