

RECORDS OF
THE GRAND HISTORIAN:
HAN DYNASTY I

REVISED EDITION

By Sima Qian

Translated by Burton Watson

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SHI JI 9: THE BASIC ANNALS OF EMPRESS LÜ

Emperor Hui passed away at an early age and the Lü family were filled with uneasiness. When they heaped honour and position on Lü Chan and Lü Lu the feudal lords began to plot against them, and when they murdered Liu Ruyi and Liu You, the kings of Zhao, the high ministers were filled with fear and mistrust. In the end disaster fell on the house of Lü. Thus I made “The Basic Annals of Empress Dowager Lü”.

Empress Dowager Lü was the consort of Gaozu from the time when he was still a commoner. She bore him Emperor Hui the Filial and the queen mother, Princess Yuan of Lu. When Gaozu became king of Han he took into his service Lady Qi of Dingtao, whom he loved dearly, and she bore him a son, Liu Ruyi, king of Zhao, posthumously known as Yin, the “Melancholy King”.

Emperor Hui was by nature weak and soft-hearted. Gaozu, convinced that the boy was of a wholly different temperament from himself, wanted to remove him from the position of heir apparent and set up his son by Lady Qi, Ruyi, instead, “for Ruyi is just like me,” he would say. Lady Qi always accompanied Gaozu on his trips east of the Pass, and day and night wept and begged that her son be set up in place of the heir apparent. Empress Lü, being well along in years, invariably stayed behind in the capital, so that she rarely saw the emperor and they became more and more estranged. Ruyi was made king of Zhao and later several times came very near to replacing the future Emperor Hui as heir apparent. But, because of the objections of the high officials and the strategy devised by Zhang Liang, the heir apparent was able to keep his position.

Empress Lü was a woman of very strong will. She aided Gaozu in the conquest of the empire, and many of the great ministers who were executed were the victims of her power. She had two older brothers, both of whom were generals. Her oldest brother, Lü Ze, marquis of Zhoulü, died in the service of the dynasty. His son Lü Tai was enfeoffed as marquis of Li, and his son Lü Chan as marquis of Jiao. Her other brother, Lü Shizhi, was made marquis of Jiancheng.

In the fourth month, the day *jiachen*, of the twelfth year of his reign (1 June 195 BC), Emperor Gaozu passed away in the Palace of Lasting Joy and the heir apparent, Emperor Hui, succeeded to the throne. At this time Gaozu's eight sons occupied the following positions. The oldest, Liu Fei, was king of Qi; he was an elder brother of Emperor Hui by a different mother; all the rest were younger than Emperor Hui. Lady Qi's son Liu Ruyi was king of Zhao and Lady Bo's son Liu Heng was king of Dai. The rest, sons of Gaozu by other ladies of the court, were Liu Hui, king of Liang; Liu You, king of Huaiyang; Liu Chang, king of Huainan; and Liu Jian, king of Yan. Gaozu's younger brother Liu Jiao was king of Chu, and Liu Pi, the son of Gaozu's older brother, was king of Wu. There was one king who was not of the Liu family, Wu Chen, king of Changsha, the son of Wu Ruyi, the lord of Bo, who had achieved merit as a minister of the Han.

Empress Lü bore the greatest hatred for Lady Qi and her son, the king of Zhao. She gave orders for Lady Qi to be imprisoned in the Long Halls¹ and summoned the king of Zhao to court. Three times envoys were sent back and forth, but the prime minister of Zhao, Zhou Chang, the marquis of Jianping, told them, "Emperor Gaozu entrusted the king of Zhao to my care, and he is still very young. Rumours have reached me that the empress dowager hates Lady Qi and wishes to summon her son, the king of Zhao, so that she may do away with both of them. I do not dare send the king! Moreover, he is ill and cannot obey the summons."

Empress Lü was furious and proceeded to send an envoy to summon Zhou Chang himself. When Zhou Chang obeyed her order and arrived in Chang'an, she dispatched someone to summon the king of Zhao once more. The king set out, but before he reached the capital, Emperor Hui, compassionate by nature and aware of his mother's hatred for the king of Zhao, went in person to meet him at the Ba River and accompanied him back to the palace. The emperor looked out for the boy and kept him by his side, eating and sleeping with him, so that, although the empress dowager wished to kill him, she could find no opportunity.

In the first year of Emperor Hui's reign, the twelfth month, the emperor one morning rose at dawn and went out hunting, but the king of Zhao, being very young, could not get up so early. When the empress dowager heard that he was

¹A designation for the women's apartments at the back of the palace.

in the room alone, she sent someone to bear poison and give it to him to drink. By the time Emperor Hui returned, the king of Zhao was already dead. After this Liu You, the king of Huaiyang, was transferred to the position of king of Zhao.

In the summer an edict was issued awarding Lü Dai's father Lü Ze the posthumous title of Lingwu or "Outstanding Warrior Marquis".

Empress Lü later cut off Lady Qi's hands and feet, plucked out her eyes, burned her ears, gave her a potion to drink which made her dumb, and had her thrown into the privy, calling her the "human pig".² After a few days, she sent for Emperor Hui and showed him the "human pig". Staring at her, he asked who the person was, and only then did he realize that it was Lady Qi. Thereupon he wept so bitterly that he grew ill and for over a year could not leave his bed. He sent a messenger to report to his mother, "No human being could have done such a deed as this! Since I am your son, I will never be fit to rule the empire." From this time on Emperor Hui gave himself up each day to drink and no longer took part in affairs of state, so that his illness grew worse.

In the second year of Emperor Hui's reign Liu Jiao, king of Chu, and Liu Fei, king of Qi, came to court. In the tenth month Emperor Hui held a banquet for the king of Qi which the empress dowager attended. Because the king of Qi was his elder brother, Emperor Hui seated him in the place of honour and treated him with the courtesy customary among members of the same family. Empress Lü was furious at this and ordered two goblets to be prepared with poison and placed before the king of Qi. Then she instructed the king to rise and propose a toast. When he did so, however, Emperor Hui also rose and picked up the other goblet, intending to join in the toast. Empress Lü, terrified, rose from her own place and overturned Emperor Hui's goblet. The king of Qi grew suspicious and did not dare to drink any more, but instead feigned drunkenness and left the banquet.

Later, when he learned that the goblet had indeed contained poison, he began to fear that he would not be able to escape from Chang'an. Shi, the internal secretary of Qi, spoke to the king, saying, "The empress dowager has only two children, the emperor and Princess Yuan of Lu. Now Your Majesty possesses over seventy cities, while the princess receives the revenue from only a very

²Early Chinese privies consisted of two parts, an upper room for the user and a pit below in which swine were kept. Apparently Lady Qi was thrown into the lower part, hence the epithet.

few. If you were willing to donate one province to the empress dowager which could be assigned to the princess as her 'bath-town' revenue, then the empress dowager would surely be pleased and you would have nothing more to fear."

The king of Qi accordingly donated the province of Chengyang and honoured the princess with the title of "Queen Mother of Lu". Empress Lü accepted these honours with delight and held a banquet at the Qi state residence. When the drinking and rejoicing were over she sent the king of Qi back to his kingdom.

In the third year work on the walls of Chang'an was begun. By the fourth year half the work was done and in the fifth and sixth years the walls were completed. In the tenth month the various feudal lords journeyed to court to present their congratulations on the beginning of the new year.

In the seventh year, the day *mouyin* of the eighth month (26 Sept. 188 BC), Emperor Hui the Filial passed away.³ Mourning was announced and Empress Dowager Lü lamented, but no tears fell from her eyes.

Zhang Biqiang, the son of Zhang Liang, was a page in the palace and, though he was only fifteen, he said to the prime minister Chen Ping, "The empress dowager had only this one son, Emperor Hui. Yet now that he has passed away, her lamentations are without real grief. Can you solve this riddle, my lord?"

"How would you explain it?" asked Chen Ping.

"Emperor Hui left no grown sons, and so the empress dowager is afraid of you and the others. I would suggest now that you honour Lü Tai, Lü Chan, and Lü Lu with the rank of general and put them in charge of the soldiers in the northern and southern garrisons,⁴ and allow the various members of the Lü family to enter the palace and take part in the government. If this is done, the empress dowager will feel more at ease and you and the other ministers may be fortunate enough to escape disaster."

Chen Ping did as the boy suggested. Empress Lü was pleased and her lamentations took on an air of genuine sorrow. This was the start of the Lü family's rise to power.

A general amnesty was proclaimed to the empire and in the ninth month, on the day *xinchou* (19 Oct. 188 BC), Emperor Hui was interred. The heir apparent succeeded to the throne and became emperor, paying his respects at

³He was twenty-three years old.

⁴Which guarded the capital.

the funerary temple of Emperor Gaozu.⁵

The first year: All orders issued from the empress dowager and she called them "decrees" after the manner of an emperor. She began deliberations with the idea of making kings of the members of her own Lü family, asking Wang Ling, the chancellor of the right, what he thought of such a step. "Emperor Gaozu killed a white horse and made an oath with us that 'if anyone not of the Liu family becomes a king, the empire shall unite in attacking him'." Wang Ling replied, "Now if members of the Lü family were to be made kings, it would be a violation of this agreement!"

Empress Lü was displeased and consulted Chen Ping, the chancellor of the left, and Zhou Bo, the marquis of Jiang. Zhou Bo and the others replied, "When Emperor Gaozu conquered the world he made kings of his sons and younger brothers. Now that the empress dowager is issuing decrees in the manner of an emperor, if she wishes to make kings of her brothers, we cannot see that there is any objection."

The empress dowager was pleased and dismissed the court. When the proceedings were over Wang Ling began to berate Chen Ping and Zhou Bo. "Were you not present when Emperor Gaozu and the rest of us smeared our lips with the blood of the white horse and took the oath?" he said. "Now that Emperor Gaozu has passed away, the empress dowager has made herself ruler and wants to elevate the members of her family to the position of kings. All of you think perhaps that you can ignore your oath and flatter the will of the empress. But how will you dare to face Emperor Gaozu in the world below?"

"When it comes to opposing the ruler and speaking out in court," replied Chen Ping and Zhou Bo, "we are no match for you. But in preserving the altars of the dynasty and assuring the continuance of the Liu family, it is possible that you are no match for us." Wang Ling had no answer to this.

In the eleventh month the empress dowager, anxious to remove Wang Ling from his position, appointed him grand tutor to the emperor and deprived him of his authority as chancellor. Wang Ling eventually left his post on grounds of illness and retired to his home. Chen Ping was moved from the position of chancellor of the left to Wang Ling's former position of chancellor of the right, and Shen Yiji, the marquis of Biyang, was appointed as the new chancellor of the left. Shen Yiji did not use the government offices but conducted his affairs from the palace itself like a palace secretary. Because of the great favour which

⁵The identity of the new emperor is explained below on pp. 272-273.

Shen Yiji enjoyed with the empress dowager, he constantly handled the affairs of government, and the lords and ministers were all obliged to go through him before they could get anything done. As a first step toward making kings of the members of the Lü family the empress dowager awarded Lü Tai's deceased father Lü Ze the posthumous title of Daowu, "The Slain Warrior King".

In the fourth month the empress dowager, with a view to making marquises of the members of her own family, first enfeoffed the palace secretary Feng Wuze, who had been a faithful follower of Gaozu, with the title of marquis of Bocheng.

Princess Yuan of Lu died and was given the posthumous title of "Queen Mother Yuan of Lu". Her son Zhang Yan was made king of Lu. (His father was Zhang Ao, the marquis of Xuanping.) Liu Zhang, the son of Liu Fei, king of Qi, was enfeoffed as marquis of Zhuxu, and Lü Lu's daughter given to him as a wife. Qi Shou, the prime minister of Qi, was made marquis of Pingding, and Yangcheng Yan, the minister of the privy treasury, became marquis of Wu. Following this Lü Zhong was made marquis of Pei and Lü Ping marquis of Fuli. Zhang Mai was made marquis of Nangong.

Still with an eye to making kings of the members of her own family, the empress dowager granted positions to the sons of Emperor Hui by his ladies in waiting.⁶ His son Qiang she made king of Huaiyang, his son Buyi king of Changshan; his son Shan she enfeoffed as marquis of Xiangcheng, his son Chao as marquis of Zhi, and his son Wu as marquis of Huguan. Because the empress dowager let it be known to the high ministers that she would welcome such a move, they requested that Lü Tai, the marquis of Li, be given the title of king of Lü. The empress dowager approved their suggestion.

Lü Shizhi, Marquis Kang of Jiancheng, died. His rightful heir was found guilty of some crime and removed from his position; instead his younger son Lü Lu was made marquis of Huling in order to carry on the line.

In the second year the king of Changshan died. His younger brother Shan, the marquis of Xiangcheng, was made king of Changshan and his name changed to Yi.

In the twelfth month Lü Tai, the king of Lü, died, and was awarded the

⁶We are told later that these were not really sons of Emperor Hui but the children of other men whom the empress dowager attempted to pass off as the emperor's sons. I have therefore given only their personal names and omitted the surname Liu; no surname is given in the original.

posthumous title of Su or "Majestic King". His heir Lü Jia succeeded him as king of Lü. The third year passed without incident.

In the fourth year the empress dowager enfeoffed her younger sister Lü Xu as marchioness of Linguang, Lü Tuo as marquis of Yu, Lü Gengshi as marquis of Zhuiqi, and Lü Fen as marquis of Lücheng. She also enfeoffed five of the prime ministers of the various feudal lords as marquises.

The daughter of Zhang Ao, the marquis of Xuanping, had been made the empress of Emperor Hui. When she failed to give birth to a son, she pretended to be pregnant and, substituting a child born to one of the emperor's ladies in waiting, called it her own. Then she murdered the mother and set the child up as heir apparent. When Emperor Hui passed away it was he who became emperor.

As the emperor grew a little older, he began to hear rumours that his mother had been killed and that he was not the real son of the empress. "What right had the empress to kill my mother and call me her son?" he declared. "I am not old enough now, but when I grow up I will make trouble for her!"

Empress Dowager Lü, hearing of this, became worried and feared that he might start a revolt, so she kept him shut up in the Long Halls and gave it out that the emperor was gravely ill. None of the officials were allowed to see him.

The empress dowager announced: "He who holds possession of the empire and rules the destinies of the multitude must shelter them like the heavens and support them like the earth. The ruler must with a joyous heart bring peace to the people, and the people in gladness serve their ruler, and when this joy and gladness mingle together, then the empire will be well governed. Now the emperor's illness has continued for a long time without abating until his wits have gone astray and he has become demented. He is not fit to carry on the imperial line and perform the sacrifices in the ancestral temples, nor can he be entrusted with the care of the empire. Let him be replaced!"

The host of officials all bowed their heads and replied, "The empress dowager has taken deep thought for the multitudes of the empire and considered how best to preserve the ancestral temples and sacred altars of the dynasty. With bowed heads we shall obey her edict." The emperor was removed from his position and the empress dowager had him murdered in his place of confinement.

In the fifth month, on the day *bingchen* (15 June 184 BC), Yi, the king of Changshan, was made emperor and his name changed to Hong. (The reason the year is not designated as the first year of a new reign is that the empress dowager

directed the government of the empire.) Chao, the marquis of Zhi, was made king of Changshan. The office of grand commandant was established and Zhou Bo, the marquis of Jiang, appointed to fill it.

In the fifth year, the eighth month, Qiang, the king of Huaiyang, died. His younger brother Wu, the marquis of Huguan, was made king of Huaiyang.

In the sixth year, the tenth month, the empress dowager, announcing that "Lü Jia, the king of Lü, has consistently behaved in an arrogant and imperious fashion", removed him from his position and made his father's younger brother, Lü Chan, the new king of Lü.

In the summer a general amnesty was granted to the empire and Liu Xingju, the son of Liu Fei, the king of Qi, was enfeoffed as marquis of Dongmou.

In the first month of the seventh year the empress dowager summoned Liu You, the king of Zhao, to the capital. Liu You had taken a daughter of the Lü family as his queen, but he had no love for her and favoured a concubine instead. The daughter of the Lü family, consumed with jealousy, left him and began to slander him to the empress dowager. She accused him of sedition and reported that he had said, "What right have the Lü family to become kings? When the empress dowager's days are over, I will certainly attack them!" The empress dowager was furious and for this reason summoned the king of Zhao to the capital. When he arrived, she kept him at the state residence of Zhao and would not see him. She ordered the place surrounded by guards and refused to give him anything to eat. When some of the officials secretly sent him provisions she had them summarily arrested and condemned to punishment. When the king of Zhao was starving he composed this song:

The Lües order all affairs;
 The Liu clan is in peril.
 They have oppressed the nobles,
 And forced upon me this wife:
 A wife who in her jealousy
 Speaks wanton evil of me.
 A slandering woman will undo the state,
 For those in power are blind.
 Though I lack loyal ministers,
 Why should I cast away my kingdom?
 Were I to slay myself in the open fields
 Azure Heaven would speak the justice of my cause,
 Alas, it is too late for regretting;

Better had I made an end at once.
 A king and yet to starve to death —
 Who will pity such as I?
 The Lü clan have overthrown right:
 I charge Heaven with my revenge!

On the day *dingchou* (21 Feb. 181 BC) the king of Zhao died in confinement. He was mourned with the rites of a commoner and interred in the graveyard of the common people of Chang'an. On the day *jichou* (4 March) there was an eclipse of the sun and the day grew dark. The empress dowager was filled with loathing and her heart grew uneasy. Turning to those about her, she said, "This has happened because of me!"

In the second month Liu Hui, the king of Liang, was transferred to the position of king of Zhao, and Lü Chan, the king of Lü, was made king of Liang. Lü Chan did not proceed to his new kingdom, however, but became grand tutor to the emperor. Prince Tai, the marquis of Pingchang, was made king of Lü. The kingdom of Liang was renamed Lü and the former kingdom of Lü called Jichuan.

The daughter of Lü Xu, the empress dowager's younger sister, was married to Liu Ze, the marquis of Yingling, who was a general of the army. Because she had made kings of the members of her family, the empress dowager was afraid that after she passed away Liu Ze might use his troops to do them some harm, and so she made him king of Langya in order to assuage his feelings.

Liu Hui, the king of Liang, was deeply disturbed at being transferred to the position of king of Zhao.⁷ The empress dowager had given him the daughter of Lü Chan to be his queen, and all of her attendants and ministers were members of the Lü family. They exercised authority in a completely arbitrary fashion and secretly spied on the king so that he could do nothing as he wished. The king had a concubine whom he loved dearly, but the queen sent someone to poison her. The king, deeply grieved, composed a song in her memory in four stanzas and ordered his musicians to sing it. In the sixth month he committed suicide. When the empress dowager received the news she declared that he had been guilty of abandoning his duties to his ancestral temples by committing suicide for the sake of a woman, and deprived his heir of the title.

⁷ As well he might be, since the two previous kings of Zhao had both been murdered by the empress dowager.

Zhang Ao, the marquis of Xuanping, died, and his son Zhang Yan became king of Lu. Zhang Ao was given the posthumous title of Yuan, "First King of Lu".

In the autumn the empress dowager sent an envoy to announce to Liu Heng, the king of Dai, that she wished to transfer him to the position of king of Zhao. The king of Dai declined the move, begging to be allowed to remain in Dai to guard the frontier. The grand tutor Lü Chan, Prime Minister Chen Ping, and others asserted that, since Lü Lu, the marquis of Wuxin, held the highest position among those of the rank of marquis, he should be made king of Zhao. The empress dowager consented to this suggestion and awarded Lü Lu's father, Marquis Kang, the posthumous title of Zhao, "Bright King of Zhao".

In the ninth month Liu Jian, the king of Yan, died. He had a son by a concubine, but the empress dowager sent some one to murder the boy and, on the grounds that there was no heir, deprived the family of the kingdom. In the eighth year, the tenth month, she set up Lü Tai's son Lü Dong, the marquis of Dongping, as king of Yan, and enfeoffed Lü Dong's younger brother Lü Zhuang as marquis of Dongping in his place.

During the third month the empress dowager was passing Zhi Road on her way back from a sacrifice when something that looked like a blue dog appeared and bit her under the arm, and then suddenly disappeared. A diviner called in to interpret the happening announced that it was Liu Ruyi, the king of Zhao, who had turned into an evil spirit. The empress dowager soon grew ill of the wound under her arm.

Because Zhang Yan, the king of Lu and the empress dowager's grandson by her daughter, Princess Yuan of Lu, was very young and was an orphan, having lost both his father and mother at an early age, the empress dowager enfeoffed two of his half brothers, sons of Zhang Ao by former concubines, so that they could assist him in his rule, making Zhang Chi the marquis of Xindu and Zhang Shou the marquis of Lechang. She also enfeoffed the palace master of guests, Zhang Qing, as marquis of Jianling and Lü Rong as marquis of Zhuzi. All of the palace eunuchs and their secretaries and assistants she made marquises of the area within the Pass with the revenue from 500 households each.

During the seventh month the empress dowager's illness grew worse. She appointed Lü Lu, the king of Zhao, as supreme commander of the army and ordered him to the northern garrison, and ordered Lü Chan, the king of Lü, to take over the southern garrison. "When Emperor Gaozu conquered the empire,"

she warned them, "he made a compact with his followers that if anyone not of the Liu family became a king, the empire should join together in attacking him. Now the members of the Lü family have become kings and the great ministers are displeased. The emperor is very young and I fear that when I have passed away the ministers will make trouble for you. You must bring your soldiers to guard the palace. Take care and do not accompany the funeral procession. Do not allow yourselves to be coerced by others!"

On the day *xinsi* (18 August 180 BC) the empress dowager passed away. In her testamentary edict she left 1,000 catties of gold to each of the kings who had been advanced from the rank of marquis, as well as grants of gold to the generals, ministers, marquises, and palace officials according to their ranks, and proclaimed a general amnesty to the empire. She appointed Lü Chan, the king of Lü, as prime minister, and the daughter of Lü Lu as empress to the boy ruler. After the burial of the empress dowager, Shen Yiji, the chancellor of the left, was made grand tutor to the emperor.

Liu Zhang, the marquis of Zhuxu and younger brother of Liu Xiang, King Ai of Qi, was a man of great spirit and strength. He and his younger brother Liu Xingju, the marquis of Dongmou, both resided in Chang'an. At this time the various members of the Lü family wielded authority with complete freedom and were hoping to overthrow the government but, because they were afraid of Zhou Po, Guan Ying, and the others who had been followers of Gaozu in the old days, they did not dare to make a decisive move. Liu Zhang's wife, being a daughter of Lü Lu, secretly learned of the plottings of the Lü family. Fearful that she herself might become involved in their downfall, she had her husband, Liu Zhang, send a man to report to his older brother, the king of Qi, asking him to send his troops west to wipe out the Lü family and make himself ruler. Liu Zhang would in that case join with the high officials in aiding his cause from within the capital.

The king of Qi was in favour of dispatching troops, but his prime minister Zhao Ping refused to consent. On the day *bingwu* of the eighth month (12 Sept.) the king of Qi was about to send someone to execute his prime minister when the latter revolted, called out the troops, and made ready to surround the king. The king succeeded in killing the prime minister and eventually dispatched his troops east. By means of deception he seized the troops of the king of Langya and, joining them to his own, led the whole force west. (A fuller description will be found in the chapter on the king of Qi.) The king of Qi then sent the following letter to the various kings and marquises:

When Emperor Gaozu conquered the empire he made kings of his sons and younger brothers. Among these was King Daohui, who was made king of Qi. After King Daohui died Emperor Hui sent Zhang Liang to establish me as king of Qi. When Emperor Hui passed away the empress dowager took over the management of the government. But she was far along in years and, heeding the advice of the members of the Lü family, she arbitrarily deposed the emperor who had been set up and put another on the throne. On top of this she killed three kings of Zhao in succession, wiped out the royal families of Liang, Zhao, and Yan, made kings of the members of the Lü clan, and divided the territory of Qi into four kingdoms. Although the loyal ministers advised her against these moves, she refused in her delusion to heed them. Now the empress dowager has passed away and the emperor, being young in years, is incapable of governing the empire, but must rely solely upon the aid of the officials and lords. The members of the Lü family have therefore proceeded to help themselves to official posts, have massed soldiers to consolidate their power, have terrorized the marquises and loyal officials, and are forging imperial decrees and issuing orders to the empire. Such actions imperil the ancestral temples of the dynasty. I have therefore led forth my troops and shall enter the capital to punish all those who have unrightfully become kings!

When news of this reached the Han court the prime minister Lü Chan and the others dispatched Guan Ying, the marquis of Yingyin, to lead troops to attack the king of Qi. After Guan Ying reached Xingyang, he began to consider what to do. "The Lü family have seized control of the troops in the area within the Pass and are imperiling the Liu clan, intending to make themselves rulers," he said to himself. "Now if I defeat the forces of Qi and return to court to report my victory, this will only increase the power of the Lü clan." He therefore halted and made camp at Xingyang, sending envoys to the king of Qi and the other nobles asking them to join with him in peaceful alliance and wait and, if the Lü clan should attempt to overthrow the government, to unite in wiping them out. When the king of Qi received word of this he led his troops back to the western border of his kingdom to await further developments in accordance with the agreement.

Lü Lu and Lü Chan wanted to start an open revolt against the dynasty in the area within the Pass, but they were afraid of men like Zhou Po and Liu Zhang in the capital and of the troops of Qi and Chu beyond the Pass. They were also

fearful that Guan Ying might turn against them, and so they wanted to wait until Guan Ying's troops had joined in battle with those of the king of Qi before beginning a revolt. Thus they hesitated and made no decisive move.

At this time Tai, the king of Jichuan; Wu, the king of Huaiyang; and Chao, the king of Changshan, who were supposed to be younger brothers of the boy emperor, and King Yuan of Lu, the grandson of Empress Dowager Lü by her daughter, were all very young and had not proceeded to their respective kingdoms but lived in the capital. Lü Lu, the king of Zhao, and Lü Chan, the king of Liang, were in charge of the troops and resided in the southern and northern garrisons respectively. All were members of the Lü party. Under such circumstances none of the lords or officials of the court could make a move without fear of them, and Zhou Bo, the marquis of Jiang, though officially the grand commandant, was unable to enter the garrisons and take command of the troops.

Li Shang, the marquis of Quzhou, was at this time old and infirm, and his son Li Ji was on good terms with Lü Lu. Zhou Bo accordingly plotted with the prime minister Chen Ping and together they sent someone to threaten Li Shang and force him to send his son Li Ji to talk with Lü Lu. Li Ji was to deceive Lü Lu by saying to him, "After Emperor Gaozu and Empress Lü together conquered the world, nine kings of the Liu family were set up and three of the Lü family. All of this was done after deliberation with the high officials, the decisions were announced to the various feudal lords, and they in turn expressed their approval. Now the empress dowager has passed away and the emperor is still very young. And yet although you wear at your girdle the seals of the king of Zhao, you have not hastened to your new kingdom to guard it as a feudal lord should, but have become supreme commander and remain here in charge of the troops. This has aroused the suspicions of the great ministers and nobles. Would it not be better to return your general's seals and transfer your troops to the grand commandant Zhou Bo? If you can persuade Lü Chan, the king of Lü, to relinquish his seals of prime minister as well and if both of you take an oath with the high officials that you will proceed to your kingdoms, then the armies of Qi will surely disband, the officials will rest easy again, and you may rule your vast kingdom with a tranquil mind. In this way you will assure the safety of your heirs for countless generations to come!"

Lü Lu trusted Li Ji and approved his suggestion. He was about to return his general's seals and transfer his troops to the grand commandant but, when he sent men to inform Lü Chan and the elders of the Lü clan, some of them were

in favour of the move and some were opposed, so that he hesitated over what to do and could come to no decision. Lü Lu, however, continued to trust Li Ji as before.

One time he was out hunting with Li Ji when he stopped to visit his aunt, Lü Xu, the younger sister of the empress dowager. Lü Xu was furious with him. "You are a general and you go and throw away your army!" she cried. "Now the Lües will not be safe anywhere!" Then she dragged out all her jewels and precious vessels and threw them on the ground outside the hall. "I won't keep them around for somebody else to enjoy!" she declared.

At dawn on the day *gengshen* of the ninth month (26 Sept. 180 BC)⁸ Cao Zhuo, the marquis of Pingyang, who was performing the duties of imperial secretary, went to see the prime minister Lü Chan to settle some government business. The palace attendant Jia Shou had at the time just returned from a mission to the king of Qi and was berating Lü Chan. "Though you are a king, you would not go to your kingdom earlier. Now, even if you wanted to, do you think you could?" Then he reported in detail to Lü Chan how Guan Ying had joined with the forces of Qi and Chu and was planning to overthrow the Lü family, urging him to flee to the palace for protection at once. Cao Zhuo overheard all that was said and rushed off to report it to Chen Ping and Zhou Bo.

Zhou Bo wished to enter the northern garrison, but he was not able to do so until Ji Tong, the marquis of Xiangping, who was in charge of the imperial credentials, sent someone to bear the credentials and, under pretended orders from the emperor, had Zhou Bo admitted to the garrison. Zhou Bo in the meantime ordered Li Ji and the director of guests Liu Jie to report to Lü Lu: "The emperor has put the grand commandant Zhou Bo in charge of the northern garrison and wishes you to proceed to your kingdom. You must surrender your general's seals and take your leave at once. If you do not, disaster will befall you!"

Lü Lu was convinced that Li Ji would not deceive him, and so he took off his general's seals and handed them over to the director of guests, thus transferring his soldiers to Zhou Bo. Zhou Bo went to take command of the troops and, as he entered the gate of the garrison, circulated an order to the army saying, "Those who are for the Lü family bare their right arms, those for the Liu family bare their left arms!" Throughout the garrison the men all bared their left arms,

⁸The text erroneously reads "eighth month".

showing that they were loyal to the Liu family. Thus Zhou Bo eventually gained admission to the northern garrison and became its commander, General Lü having surrendered his seals as supreme commander and relinquished his post. But there was still the southern garrison.

Chen Ping summoned Liu Zhang and sent him to assist Zhou Bo,⁹ who ordered him to guard the gate of the garrison. He also sent Cao Zhuo to tell the colonel of the palace guards not to let the prime minister Lü Chan through the gate of the imperial apartments. Lü Chan, completely unaware that Lü Lu had already surrendered command of the northern garrison, entered the Eternal Palace, intending to start a revolt, but when he found he could not gain admittance to the imperial apartments, he paced back and forth indecisively. Cao Zhuo in the meantime galloped back to report what had happened to Zhou Bo.¹⁰

Zhou Bo was still afraid that he would not be strong enough to overpower all of the Lü family, and so he did not dare to issue a public order for their execution. Instead he dispatched Liu Zhang again, with instructions to enter the palace with all speed and guard the emperor. When Liu Zhang asked for a body of troops he gave him a force of over 1,000 men to accompany him.

By the time Liu Zhang and his men entered the gate of the Eternal Palace and spotted Lü Chan in the courtyard it was already late afternoon. He fell upon Lü Chan, who fled, while a great wind rose from heaven and threw Lü Chan's attendants into such confusion that none of them dared to fight in his defence. Liu Zhang pursued Lü Chan and killed him in the privy of the palace attendants' office.

After Liu Zhang had killed Lü Chan, the emperor sent his master of guests bearing the imperial credentials to thank him for his trouble. Liu Zhang tried to seize the credentials but, since the man refused to give them up, he brought him along in the same carriage and, using the credentials to gain admittance, raced to the Palace of Lasting Joy and beheaded the colonel of the guard of the palace, Lü Gengshi. Then he galloped back to the northern garrison to report to Zhou Bo.

Zhou Bo rose from his seat, bowed, and congratulated Liu Zhang on his work. "The only one we had to worry about was Lü Chan," he said. "Now that

⁹The sentence which precedes this in the original is an interpolation which does not appear to belong here and has accordingly been omitted in translation.

¹⁰In the original the words "afraid they would not win" have been erroneously interpolated from the sentence below.

he has been killed, the empire is safe.” Then he divided his men into groups and sent them out to arrest the men and women of the Lü family and, without distinction of age or youth, to behead them all. On the following day, *xinyu* (27 Sept.), he arrested and beheaded Lü Lu and had the empress dowager’s sister, Lü Xu, beaten to death. He also dispatched men to execute Lü Dong, the king of Yan, and remove Zhang Yan, the king of Lu, from his position. On the day *renxu* (28 Sept.) he appointed the emperor’s grand tutor, Shen Yiji, to the position of chancellor of the left, and on the day *mouchen* (4 Oct.) moved the king of Jichuan to the position of king of Liang and set up Liu Sui, the son of Liu You, King You of Zhao, as the new king of Zhao. He also dispatched Liu Zhang to go and report the overthrow of the Lü family to the king of Qi and order him to disband his army. Guan Ying’s army was also disbanded at Xingyang and returned to the capital.

The high officials plotted together in secret, saying, “The young emperor and the kings of Liang, Huaiyang, and Changshan are not true sons of Emperor Hui. As part of her plans Empress Lü took the children of other men, murdered their mothers, and had them brought up in the women’s quarters, pretending that they were the children of Emperor Hui. Then she had him recognize them as his sons and set them up as heir apparent or as kings in order to strengthen the power of the Lü family. Now that the Lü clan has been annihilated, if we leave them in their positions, then when they grow up and begin to take a part in government affairs we ourselves will suffer! It would be better to look over the other kings and pick out the one who is wisest to set up as the new ruler.”

Someone pointed out that Liu Fei, King Daohui of Qi, was the oldest son of Emperor Gaozu, and that his legitimate heir had succeeded him as king of Qi, so that from the point of view of genealogy the king of Qi was the oldest grandson of Emperor Gaozu in the legitimate line of descent and therefore the proper successor to the throne. But the high officials all objected. “It was the Lü family who, as maternal relatives of the ruler, made all the trouble and almost brought disaster to the ancestral temples of the dynasty and ruin to the worthy officials,” they said. “Now the king of Qi’s mother belongs to the same family as Si Jun, and Si Jun is an evil man. If we set up the king of Qi, we will have the Lü family all over again.” Others suggested setting up the king of Huainan, but it was objected that he was too young and that his mother’s family likewise had a bad reputation. Finally they said, “Liu Heng, the king of Dai, is the oldest of Gaozu’s sons who are still living and a kind and generous man, and his mother’s family, the Bo clan, are respectable and upright people. As the eldest

in line he is the obvious successor, and his reputation for kindness and filial obedience, which is known throughout the empire, will be of great advantage.”

Having thus agreed among themselves, they secretly sent a messenger to summon the king of Dai. The king sent back word declining the offer but, when they sent a request once more, he started on his way with his attendants in six relay carriages. On the last day of the ninth month, the day *jiyu* (14 Nov. 180 BC), he reached Chang’an and proceeded to the state residence of Dai to spend the night. The high officials all went to visit him there and, bearing the imperial seals, presented them to the king and honoured him as the new Son of Heaven. The king of Dai declined several times but, at the urgent request of the various officials, he finally acceded to their wishes.

Liu Xingju, the marquis of Dongmou, said to the king, “I played no part in the overthrow of the Lü clan, but I beg to be allowed to prepare the palace for your coming.”¹¹ Then he and the master of carriage, Lord Teng, the marquis of Ruyin, entered the palace and appeared before the young emperor. “You are not of the Liu family,” they announced, “and so you have no right to the throne.” Then they waved to the spear bearers who were ranged on either side of the emperor to lay down their weapons and depart. Several of them were unwilling to give up their arms until the chief eunuch Zhang Ze explained to them what had happened, after which they too abandoned their weapons. Lord Teng summoned a carriage and, placing the young emperor in it, drove out of the palace. “Where are you taking me?” asked the boy. “You are going to leave the palace and stay in one of the lodges,” replied Lord Teng, and took him to the apartments of the privy treasury. After this he prepared the imperial carriage of state and went to the state residence of Dai to meet the king of Dai. “The palace has been duly prepared,” he reported.

At sundown the king of Dai entered the Eternal Palace. Ten palace attendants bearing spears were guarding the main gate of the palace. “The Son of Heaven is in residence,” they said. “What business have you that you wish to enter?”

The king of Dai spoke to Zhou Bo, who went and explained to them what had happened, after which they laid down their weapons and left. So the king of Dai finally entered and took over the business of government. That night the authorities were dispatched in groups to do away with the kings of Liang,

¹¹ Literally “to clean the palace”, where the boy emperor Hong was still theoretically enthroned.

Huaiyang, and Changshan, and the young emperor at their various residences.

The king of Dai became Son of Heaven and passed away after twenty-three years on the throne. He was given the posthumous title of "Supreme Emperor Wen the Filial".

The Grand Historian remarks: In the reign of Emperor Hui and Empress Lü, the common people succeeded in putting behind them the sufferings of the age of the Warring States and ruler and subject alike sought rest in surcease of action.¹² Therefore Emperor Hui sat with folded hands and unruffled garments and Empress Lü, though a woman ruling in the manner of an emperor, conducted the business of government without ever leaving her private chambers, and the world was at peace. Punishments were seldom meted out and evil-doers grew rare, while the people applied themselves to the tasks of farming, and food and clothing became abundant.

¹²The political ideal of "non-action" or *laissez-faire* in which the government exercises a minimum of control. Sima Qian is implying a contrast with the vast government projects and strict regimentation of the people which characterized the Qin dynasty.

SHI JI 10: THE BASIC ANNALS OF EMPEROR WEN THE FILIAL

After the Han had risen to power and the line of succession became unclear, the king of Dai was brought to the capital to ascend the imperial throne, and the whole world gave him its allegiance. He abolished the mutilating punishments and opened up the barriers and bridges; his goodness and charity spread far and wide, and he came to be called the Great Patriarch. Thus I made "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wen the Filial".

Emperor Wen the Filial was the fourth of Gaozu's eight sons. In the eleventh year of Gaozu's reign, after the army of Chen Xi had been defeated and peace had been restored to the region of Dai, he was set up as king of Dai with his capital at Zhongdu. His mother was Empress Dowager Bo.

Seventeen years after he became king of Dai, Empress Lü passed away in the seventh month of the eighth year of her reign. In the ninth month, because Lü Chan and the other members of the Lü clan were threatening to endanger the position of the Liu family by starting a revolt, the great ministers joined in overthrowing them and laid plans to summon the king of Dai to take the throne. (An account of the affair will be found in the chapter on Empress Lü.)

The chancellor Chen Ping, the grand commandant Zhou Bo, and the others sent an envoy to fetch the king of Dai. The king consulted Zhang Wu, his chief of palace attendants, and others of his court, and in the course of the debate they expressed their opinion as follows: "The great ministers of Han were all originally generals in the time of Emperor Gaozu. They are experienced in warfare and given to plots and deceits. There is more behind their proposal than simply this. In the past they have been restrained only by their awe of Emperor Gaozu and Empress Lü, but now they have succeeded in wiping out the Lü clan and have newly tasted blood in the capital. They say that they have come to fetch Your Majesty, but in truth they cannot be trusted. We beg you not to go, but to put them off with an excuse of illness and wait to see how the situation develops."