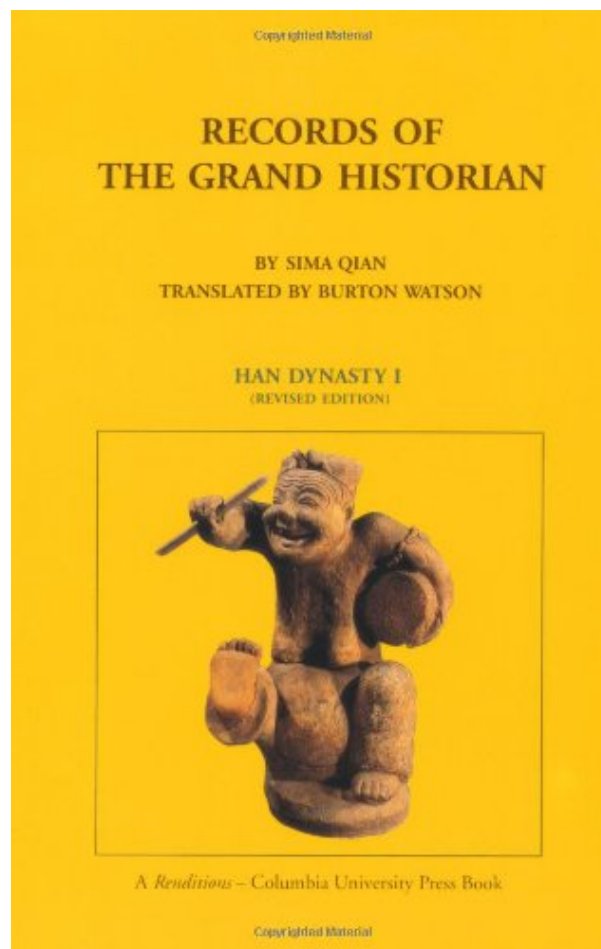


RECORDS OF THE GRAND HISTORIAN: HAN DYNASTY I (VOLUME 1) BY QIAN SIMA



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RECORDS OF THE GRAND HISTORIAN

BY SIMA QIAN
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HAN DYNASTY I
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Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: Chinese

About the Author

Burton Watson is one of the world's best-known translators from the Chinese and Japanese. His translations include *The Lotus Sutra*, *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, *Ryokan: Zen Monk-Poet of Japan*, *Saigyō: Poems of a Mountain Home*, and *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century*, all published by Columbia.

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Sima Qian (145?-90? BCE) was the first major Chinese historian. His Shiji, or Records of the Grand Historian, documents the history of China and its neighboring countries from the ancient past to his own time. These three volumes cover the Qin and Han dynasties.

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8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Not an easy read - but greatly rewarding for those who persevere!

By Maciej

Considering how powerful and influent China was during most of its history and how powerful and influent again it became during those last 35 years or so, it is actually surprising how LITTLE we know about the history of this mighty giant. The general knowledge is especially limited when ancient Chinese history is concerned - but as it turns out it is not exactly for lack of sources. Some important ancient Chinese texts ARE available in English (and sometimes also other western languages) - and none of them is as precious and powerful as the "Shi Ji" or "Records of the Grand Historian".

This is by no means the integrality of "Shi Ji" (not even close). This book contains only a selection of chapters from Sima Qian's Opus Magnum, in a very pleasant and elegant translation by the great Burton Watson, a very renowned translator of ancient Japanese and Chinese texts. Those chapters are however crucially important, because they treat of following people:

- those who between 209 and 202 BC destroyed the Qin regime and then waged a titanic struggle for domination, which ended with the establishment of possibly the most important of all Chinese dynasty - the

Western Han.

- the first four rulers of Western Han: Emperor Gaozu, Empress Lu, Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing
- the most important people such as empresses, vassal kings, chancellors, ministers, generals, concubines, etc. who from 202 until 141 BC all played a part in creating the Western Han mighty state
- last but not least - the most important and powerful rebels...

As I already said it in the title, this is NOT an easy read, at least not immediately - but please believe me, it is WORTH persevering. It is also possible to prepare a little for the lecture - what follows now is relevant ONLY if you have really NOT A CLUE about ancient Chinese history:

- my advice is to first read on internet a little about the First Emperor of Qin Dynasty - but some REAL history stuff, not the esoteric or fantasy nonsense...

- a little look at the map of Ancient China at the very end of Warring Kingdoms period will be also very useful, so you can at least situate the place of action

- then there is also a recommended reading path of this book - ancient Chinese chronicles can seem so peculiar because reading them one chapter after another from the beginning to the end is not always the best way - Burton Watson helped a lot here, repositioning the chapters - this is why this book begins with Shi Ji chapter 48 and continues with chapters 7, 8, 16, 53, 55, 56 and so on. Watson's "reading path" is a very precious thing and my advice is to follow it very strictly, at least at the first reading.

If you really want to read this book, I will repeat it once again - do NOT give up. Persevere and you will be greatly rewarded! This is a rigorously TRUE thing, but honestly, once you get comfortable and start to discover the whole story, it can be much more passionating than "Game of thrones". And - surprise, surprise - albeit this is a 2000 years old historical chronicle, this thing is FUN! Really! Other than tragedies and serious reflexions, Sima Qian, who definitely was a very exceptionnal person, managed to slip into his enormous book TONS of tongue-in-cheek humour, all of it under the nose of imperial censors...

I read this book three times and it was one of most rewarding readings in my whole life! An extremely precious, powerful thing, worth every penny! Recommended to all people interested in history of China or in history in general but also for all amateurs of good books! Enjoy!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Second book of the series

By J. Herbias

Read this after reading about the Qin dynasty. Good book but i wish the maps would better illustrate the boundaries of the various kingdoms.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Watson is one of the great translators of the last and present centuries

By russell e. mcleod

Watson is one of the great translators of the last and present centuries. My only criticism comes when he clips a little from the original Chinese text. Come on Burton, that's just where a desperate grad student, or the instructor, needed help.

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