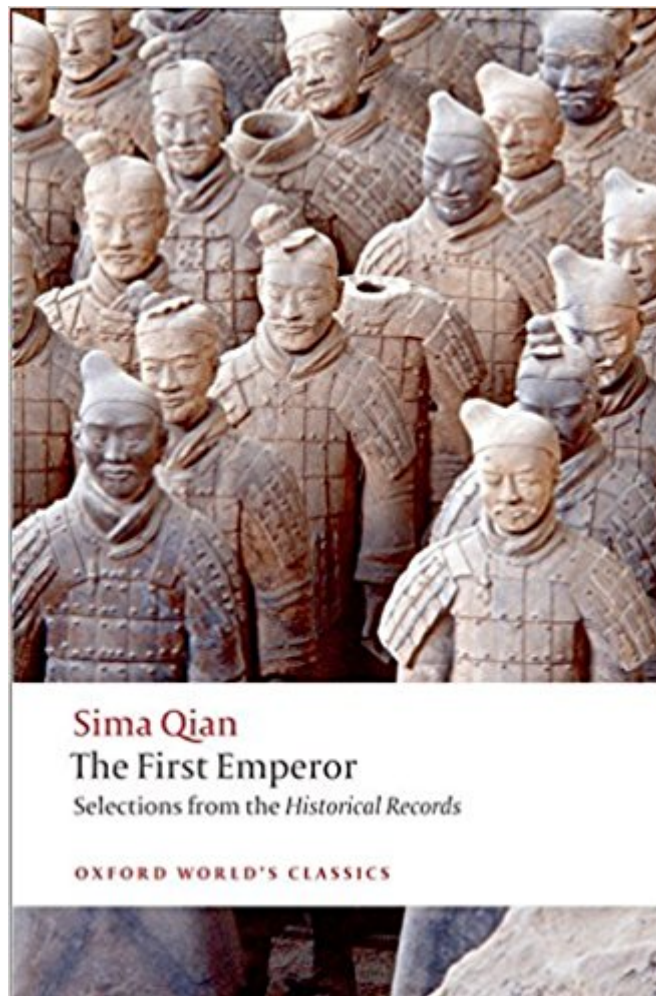




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# The First Emperor: Selections From The Historical Records (Oxford World's Classics)



## Synopsis

"The following year Qin unified all under Heaven and the title of August Emperor was immediately adopted."The short-lived Qin dynasty unified China in 221 BC and created an imperial legacy that lasted until 1911. The extraordinary story of the First Emperor, founder of the dynasty, is told in the Historical Records of Sima Qian, the Grand Historiographer and the most famous Chinese historian. He describes the Emperor's birth and the assassination attempt on his life, as well as the political and often brutal events that led to the founding of the dynasty and its aftermath. Sima Qian recounts the building of the Great Wall, the "burning of the books", and the construction of the First Emperor's magnificent tomb, a tomb now world famous since the discovery of the terracotta warriors in 1974. Sima Qian's love of anecdote ensures that his history is never dull, and Raymond Dawson's fluent translation captures his lively and vivid style. About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Its vast scope can guide you to places they never reach - such as third-century BC China, with imperial historian Sima Qian, \* Boyd Tonkin, The Independent \* ...vivid, near contemporary account... \* CH, The Independent \*

The late Raymond Dawson was Emeritus Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford and author of a number of publications on China, including *Confucius (Past Master, 1982)* and the OWC edition of *Confucius' Analects*.

Surprisingly entertaining.

Great history of the Qin foundation of the system that slowly evolved into modern China. But as with Roman histories of the same period (Tacitus for example) one does get a bit bogged down with the vast array of the people and what they did. Pity the "X-Ray" button doesn't function for historical books; would be really helpful for these ancient historians.

This is an intelligent and cohesive selection of eight chapters from the "Historical Records" which comprise 130 chapters. This English version tells the story of the "First Emperor" of Qin who unified China after several hundred years of strife among feudal lords. Once one gets used to the spelling and pronunciation of the names, the narratives make gripping reading. This book is considered both as literature and history to the Chinese scholars and educated readers. It is obvious that it is not written in the way modern history books are done. Some narratives are not unlike the annals by Tacitus. When one starts the book, one should read both the preface and the introduction carefully. In addition, I have found the letter from the author to his friend Ren An very illuminating to the situation and frame of mind of the Grand historiographer when he penned his weighty volumes. Attached is a site for an abridged version of it: [...]

For those readers who don't want an epic historical treatise clogging up their bookshelf, there are several good reasons to get this selection of highlights instead. First, there is a preface by K. E. Brashier pointing out Sima Qian's incredible depth of personality (which you should be able to get from the text anyway, but whatever). Second, it provides a rather overlooked alternative translation. Third, it is a good selection of chapters for what it is; you will get to read several of the major biographies. Of course you will finish this except wanting to know the rest of the story. What happened after the Han overthrew the Qin? How good was the First Emperor of Han at throwing homecoming parties? Is the human pig proof that there is no God? How much money will Emperor Wu pay fake prophets and psychics before he realizes he's a dope? When a legislator flees a conspiracy against his life but gets ensnared by his own laws, does the Chinese language need to

invent a word for "irony"? To hear these stories and more, you will end up buying all three volumes of Burton Watson's translation. That's just the way this is going to work out, so you should really skip directly to the Watson and save your money.

Fascinating story. I learned a lot about China's past and their first Emperor. I recommend this book if you love history, military strategies.

I read it because I wanted to read Sima Qian's record. Thank you Messrs. Brashier and Dawson.

Where in history a person's voluminous writings have survived (albeit often much modified by copyists and translators), amid a relative dearth of contemporaneous literature, historians have perforce relied excessively on such writings as primary sources, commonly stretching credulity to and beyond the breaking point. In fact, self-perpetuating academic cults arise, focused on such people and their writings, spawning an inordinately vast pedantic literature; here, for example, may be mentioned Herodotus, with whom Sima Qian is not infrequently compared. Although Herodotus far surpasses Sima Qian (ghosts notwithstanding) in his fantastic inventiveness, we must look askance at the latter's pretense to incredibly intimate knowledge of the thinking, motives, and certain deeds of people who preceded him, especially, but not limited to, those pulled up from the depths of prehistory. When purported historiography has been filtered through political and cultural orthodoxies, and when its first motive is moralizing, as authorities agree with regard to Sima Qian, it is legend, fable, or parable, and when it is contrived, it is, by today's standards, fraud. This, of course, is a gray-scale phenomenon, and no history of any age, written by anyone, can be absolutely objective, comprehensive, or insightful. Unfortunately, the writings of Sima Qian, apart from some valuable cross-substantiated dynastic chronicles, not infrequently fall at the paler end of this gray-scale continuum, which is unsurprising for any texts of such remote age and pre-modern cultural context.

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