The Vanquished and the Victor

Date: February 18th
Place: 209 Scheide Caldwell

What To Read

Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian)

1) Chapter 7: “The Basic Annals of Hsiang Yü”
2) Chapter 8: “The Basic Annals of Emperor Kao-tsu”


Online access: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?idn=heb06046.0001.001;cc=acls

How We Will Read

The meeting will start with an introductory statement introducing some of the key terms and essential questions we will be considering during this session and in subsequent meetings. Before we dive into the texts the organizers will introduce the context of each work, and participants will then take turns reading one or two passages followed by a group discussion. Given the length of these two “biographies,” we will not be able to cover every single passage in them, but will focus mainly on the beginning and ending of each biography, as well as any episodes that members think are particularly interesting and relevant to our discussion questions.

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. What types of information, such as lineage, character, education, appearance, crucial moments of one’s life, are given about the protagonists in these biographies?
2. How does the Grand Historian assess these two figures? Do you agree with his assessments based on their biographies?
3. What are the expressions that signal narrative use of time (chronological sequence, flashback, etc.)? Is there anything special about these moments?
4. How are successes and failures, ups and downs, gaining power and losing power accounted for in these biographies?
5. What values or ideologies, especially in terms of the legitimacy of military or political power, are conveyed in these episodes, especially in their dialogues? Are they at odds with each other?