I. Text

We Fought South of the Walls  戰城南

We fought south of the walls,
And died north of the ramparts.
Dead in the wilderness and unburied, the crows may eat us.
Tell the crows for us:
“Cry for us strangers away from home!”
We died on the moors, and certainly will not be buried.
How can our rotting flesh run away from you!
The water is deep and clear,
The rushes and reeds are dark.
Valiant steeds have died in battle,
While nags neigh, running around.
Bridges have been made into houses.
How can one go south?
How can bridges go north?

How can the grain be harvested, what shall our lord eat?

We wish to be loyal subjects, yet how can we achieve that!

We long for you, fine vassals.

Fine vassals are truly worth longing for.

You went out in the morning to fight,

And in the evening you did not return.

[Translated by Jui-lung Su]

The poem read in English by Bryan Zeng
The poem read in Mandarin by Zhao Sikun

II. Episode Notes

- Yuefu 樂府, Music Bureau
- Han shu 漢書 (History of the Han Dynasty), written by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92)
- Emperor Wu 武 (Han Wudi 漢武帝 [r. 140-87 BCE]), who expanded the Music Bureau
- Emperor Ai 哀 (Han Aidi 漢哀帝 [r. 7-1 BCE]), who abolished the Music Bureau in 7 BCE
- The “Yue zhi” 樂志 (Monograph on Music) of the Song shu 宋書 (History of the Liu Song Dynasty) by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513) preserves many poems that were thought to be Han yuefu.
- Shen Yue, who preserved the poem, categorized it as one of the eighteen guchui naoge 鼓吹鐃歌 (“Songs for Drum and Pipe and Nao Bell”).
- The Yuefu shiji 樂府詩集 (Collection of Yuefu Poetry) by Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (1041-1099)

III. Textual Source