Abstract  The concept of *zhaomu* 昭穆, which may be traced to pre-imperial times and was cited as late as 1908, served to strengthen a claim to exercise imperial authority in two ways. While asserting that patrilinear succession was the regular way in which emperors took their allotted place on the throne, it provided for a breakdown in this system; and it provided the means whereby a newly established dynasty could claim its ancestry in a recognised way to a legitimate source. *Zhaomu* was invoked at moments when adherence to these two principles was difficult or impossible, for example when a brother succeeded his brother as emperor, or an alien dynasty needed to accommodate to Chinese tradition. *Zhaomu* affected the conduct of the rites that an emperor performed in service to his ancestors, the spatial positions of the shrines built for this purpose and, possibly in one case, the positions chosen for an emperor’s tomb.

Speaker Biography  As Lecturer in the History of the Far East at SOAS (1956-63) and in Chinese Studies at Cambridge (1963-90), **Dr. Michael Loewe** has concentrated his research on the history of China’s early empires (221 BCE to 220 CE). Wherever possible he has combined a study of both literary and material sources, in the belief that each type of evidence serves both to supplement that of the other and to modify or correct assumptions and interpretations that rest solely on either one. He has worked and published on recently discovered manuscripts, textual problems, religious and philosophical matters, institutions of government and legal stipulations, and on military and colonial activities. His publications are of four different types; as items of scholarly research, intended for specialists in the Qin and Han dynasties (*Records of Han administration*, 1967; *Ways to Paradise: the Chinese Quest for Immortality*, 1979; *Dong Zhongshu, a ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*, 2011); as reference books (*A biographical dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin dynasties*, 2000); as a summary of research and historical conclusions, for colleagues who work in other periods of history and other cultures (*The Cambridge History of China* volume 1, 1986); and as a first introduction to China’s early empires, for students choosing their subject, or for visitors to museums (*Everyday life in early imperial China* 1968; and *Bing: from farmer’s son to magistrate in Han China*, 2011).