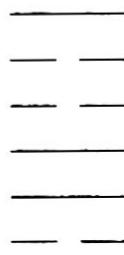


*gu/mildew 18*



*Supreme offering.*

*Favourable for fording a big river,  
three days before a jia day and three days after a jia day.*

Base (6): Mildew for a deceased male ancestor.

*He has a son:*

*thus, for a dead father, NO MISFORTUNE.  
DANGEROUS; but ultimately AUSPICIOUS.*

(9) 2: Mildew for a deceased female ancestor.

*No augury possible.*

(9) 3: Mildew for a deceased male ancestor.

*Some trouble; NO GREAT MISFORTUNE.*

(6) 4: Mildew for the bathed forefather.

*Distress in going to see.*

(6) 5: Mildew for a deceased male ancestor.

*Use a yu incantation.*

Top (9): Serving neither king nor lord.

*High reward for service.  
(DISASTROUS)*

### (18) mildew

The translation is based on Waley's perceptions. In some respects Schuessler's are more compelling. See the notes on the tag, base line and Line 4.

(Tag) Some writers take the tag to mean sickness, even 'pestilence', though pestilence in the sense of 'epidemic' seems inappropriate here. Waley prefers 'maggots', implying maggots found in the offerings made to the ancestors. Bodde suggested that the word meant 'decay', of which mildew is an early sign. Something of the range of meanings which accrued to this word can be seen in the two Zuo Commentary anecdotes on pages 180 and 191. Here it is understood to mean mildew appearing either on the wooden tablets that represented the ancestors in the clan temple, or on the sacrificial food set before them. Such mildew would be regarded as ominous.

(Hexagram statement) The quotation of this hexagram in the Zuo Commentary (Duke Xi year 15, see page 179) has the word *he* (as in Huanghe, the Yellow River) instead of *dachuan* 'big river'.

*Jia* refers to the denary counting system used for counting and numbering days. (See Table 1.) *Jia* is the first of the ten stem characters. Sacrifices to a given ancestor were made on his stem day. Partly for this reason, oracles referring to stem days are a recurrent feature of tortoiseshell and oracle bone inscriptions. Compare 57:5.

(Base) Waley (A132) first explained the meaning of *gan*, here translated as 'deceased' in oracles base, 2, 3 and 5. The character as now written means 'trunk (of a tree or body)'; but the short form means 'stem' (see Diagram 11) and was used in the denary series that served, among other things, as numbers for the days of the ten-day week (see Table 1). In Shang times a dead ancestor's name was tabu (unless the ancestor was from a very remote period), and one of the stems was used as an identifier.

The details of this sacrificial system are not completely understood, though K-C Chang discusses them in *Shang civilization* pp 165–88. Shang sovereigns were given two-syllable names. The first syllable was a generic such as *zu* 'ancestor', *da* 'great one' or *wu* 'warrior'; and the second was one of the ten stems. The penultimate Shang king was known posthumously as Diyi (see 11:5 and 54:5), *di* meaning 'ruler' and *yi* meaning 'stem 2'. His son, however, referred to him as Fuyi, 'my father of stem 2'. *Ganfu* 'stem father', used here in Lines Base, 3 and 5, means 'forefather of such-and-such stem'.

It is not clear how the stem character for each king was chosen.

Waley thought, as others did when he wrote in 1933, that the stem character indicated the day of the week on which the ancestor was born, but it is now thought that stems were allotted according to a ritual system reflecting the stem days of sacrificial routines.

Axel Schuessler suggests a different understanding of *gan* (D188). He takes it as a verb meaning ‘to straighten out like a post’. He further suggests that *gu* is a loan character for *gu* (Z1602) meaning ‘to handle, carry out’ or ‘affairs’ (D204; see Diagram 12) – partly because the character used for it in the Mawangdui manuscript is yet another loan, *ge* ‘individual’ or ‘one object’ with the bamboo radical. He has not found *gan* or its partner *zhi* ‘branch’ (see page 20) used as calendrical terms elsewhere in Early Zhou writings. This leads him to translate the first oracle as ‘straightening out the way his father handles affairs’, with similar alterations in lines 2, 3 and 5. See also the note to Line 4 below.

(3) Women ancestors seem to be as important as male ancestors.

(4) Kunst (R275) takes the second character in this oracle, *yu* ‘abundant’ or ‘indulgent’, as a loan character for *yu* ‘to bathe’ (see Diagram 13), bringing the oracle into harmony with the rest of the ‘mildew’ quintet by connecting it with ancestor worship and a day of the ten-day week.

A myth declared that there were originally ten suns, identified with ten ravens living in the branches of a 100-mile-high mulberry tree (Fusang) that grew in the Warm Water Valley (Tanggu or Wenyuangu) in the East. On each day of the ten-day week one of these suns rose in order to cross the sky, having first been bathed in the warm water pool by their mother, Xihe.

There may be a legacy from Shang in this oracle. Shang had a typical north-east Asian myth telling that the royal family was descended from a mysterious avian progenitor: Dijun, the raven father of the ten suns, and therefore of the one sun that eventually survived. The name of Wang Hai (see page 29 and Translation Note 56:top) was often written with a drawing of a bird above it. The oracle may refer to this high ancestor. Or it may refer to the bathed sun of a particular day (probably the day when divination took place), meaning the ancestor whose cult was connected with a day bearing the same denary title. See also Granet *Dances et légendes* 435ff.

More information on Shang and the sun myth can be found in Sarah Allan ‘Sons of the sun: myth and totemism in early China’ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44 (London 1981) pp 290–326. The same article is reprinted in *The shape of the turtle* (1991 see Note II.1), as is also Sarah Allan’s paper ‘Art and meaning’ in Roderick Whitfield ed. *The problem of meaning in early Chinese ritual bronzes* (1993) pages 9–32. See also Anne Birrell *Chinese mythology* (1993) page 234.

Schuessler's translation of this oracle is 'be indulgent with the way your father handles affairs.'

(5) *Yu* means laudatory speech.

(Top) The Mawangdui manuscript adds the prognostic DISASTROUS.