

## 29 kan/pit



*Sacrificing captives: bind them.  
Offering.  
Travel brings rewards.*

Base (6): Pit within a pit.  
*Falling into it.*

DISASTROUS.

(9) 2: O pit so deep,  
with sides so steep . . .

*Seeking small gain.*

(6) 3: Thudding hard, the bottom hit.  
*Steep and deep is the pit.  
Going down into it.*

*Do not use this.*

(6) 4: Flask for wine, food bowl – a pair.  
*Choose them made in earthenware,  
put them through the window there.*

Ultimately NO HARM.

(9) 5: Pit not filled.  
*Earth's gods are stilled.*

NO MISFORTUNE.

Top (6): With triple braid and black cord bound.  
*Stowed away in thorny ground,  
for several years not to be found.*

DISASTROUS.

(29) **pit**

One of the most consistently inauspicious hexagrams.

(Tag) The single-character tag, *kan*, is generally used; but the 1st and 3rd Wings use a two-character tag: *xikan*, which is simply the first oracle of the hexagram, 'double pit' or 'pit within a pit'. Elsewhere in the Ten Wings the single-character tag is used. On the Han stone tablets the single-character appears in the form of a loan *kan* 'discontented', while the Mawangdui manuscript has, as so often, an elaborate substitute *xigan*.

*Kan*, the received tag character, has become the name of the trigram reduplicated to form the hexagram.

Waley (A135) saw Hexagram 29 as referring to religious rites, such as Shang and Zhou sacrifices to the moon, performed in a pit or hollow, and described in the 'Jiyi' section of *Liji*. Wen Yiduo saw the pit as a dungeon for prisoners, which certainly makes an intelligible reading. (W36)

The pit could even be a grave, originally referring to sacrifices of the living for the dead at royal funerals. Kunst sees it as a pitfall or trap.

The translation 'bind them' follows Gao Heng's reading. He takes *xin* 'heart' as a mistake for *zhi* 'them' (see Diagram 14), meaning that the tied captives will be used as sacrificial victims (G242). Kunst takes the received text at face value and says 'Let the hearts be what we offer . . .' See also 42:5 and note.

(Base) Double pits were used for royal graves. For prisons too, they would be more effective than single pits.

(2) The translation serves the rhyme. The text says, literally: 'Pit has sheer sides.'

(3) The oracle has a single rhyme-character and a reduplicated word, *kan-kan*, which is perhaps purely onomatopoeic, 'thudding'. More literally the oracle reads: 'Coming *kan-kan*; steep and deep; into the pit.'

(4) Things made of clay or earthenware appear also in 8:base and 30:3. In 8:base the same word occurs in relation to captives who are likely to be sacrificial victims.

Gao Heng (G243) relates the oracle to Ode 15, in which a dutiful bride sets offerings of boiled water-plants outside the window of the ancestral shrine.

(5) 'Stilled'; literally, 'placated'. The translation follows Kunst. Gao Heng gives, in the Huangs' version: 'The pit you cannot fill, even by levelling a hill.'

(Top) There may be some omen quality about the triple braid and the black cord. Omens in plying strands are known in other parts of the world.

Wen Yiduo sees thorns as a metaphor for imprisonment (W36). Gao Heng also takes this oracle as referring to imprisonment (G242).

The final verb 'be found' literally means 'to receive'. What is received depends on the understanding of the rest of the oracle. It may be a blessing, or it may be release from prison. The prognostic envisages a sorry plight of some duration.