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SOME OBSERVATIONS




 The Chinese character of hexagram 20, guān 觀, is most of the time translated as 'contemplation', 'observing' or something similar. There is nothing wrong with that, and even though 觀 has more meanings it is likely that in the Yi 觀 also means 'observe'. But a little scrutiny can add some valuable background information.



Guān 觀 consists of two parts: 萑 and 見. Most etymological dictionaries quote the Shuo Wen 說文 which says that 萑 represents the pronunciation 'guan', and that 見 gives the meaning 'look'. But according to the 甲骨文字典, 萑 is the precursor of 觀 (p. 979 and 408-409). It is more than a phonetic component, it definitely adds meaning to 觀.

萑 is rarely mentioned in Chinese texts, it mostly occurs as a component in other characters (觀, 權, 歡, 灌, 勸, 罐, 顛 etc.). The Shuo Wen 說文 says that 萑 is a "小爵" (漢語大字典 4104.2), an ancient wine vessel with three legs and a loop handle. This seems to be correct, as Karlgren says about 爵: "Cup for libations or feasts; noble, nobility, dignity, rank -- cf. 尊, originally a picture, in the small seal altered so as to contain 鬯 aromatic herbs and 又 hand; now still more deformed; the cup had the form of a bird; 爵 and 雀 'small bird' are etymologically the same word, hence 爵 is sometimes used for 雀" (quoted in [Wenlin](#)). The fact that a 爵 had the shape of a bird, more specifically a heron, is significant here, because 萑 contains the component 隹 'bird'. (But I don't understand why Karlgren says that 爵 and 雀 are etymologically the same word, because according to the 甲骨文字典 their shapes are entirely different. But we will take that for granted.) The 凵 component in the character might represent the two knobs which are used to carry the vessel after the wine has been warmed. That 凵 can represent these knobs can be seen in the character 罍, which is also an ancient type of vessel which has these knobs (see [here](#)).

The 甲骨文字典 says that 萑 and 萑 (not to be confused with 萑) are interchangeable. In oracle bone inscriptions 萑 can be the name of a sacrifice, the name of a place, of a person, or synonym to 觀 'look', or the same as 舊 'old'. Tsung

Tung-Chang adds: "  (variants , ) is identical to 萑 = an owl with feather horns (according to the Shuo Wen HM), (...) 萑 = 鸛 = '[ciconia boyciana](#)'. In oracle bone inscriptions it is used for the homophone verbs 灌 = 'pour wine' and 觀 = 'look at'." (*Der Kult der Shang-dynastie im Spiegel der Orakelinschriften*, p. 65).

The chance that 觀 has something to do with offerings is enlarged by the Judgment of hexagram 20: 盥而不薦. 有孚顛若. "Washing the hands yet not sacrificing. Having captives (of war) looking up, which is in order". This text deals with offerings and sacrifices.

But what is then the meaning of the component 見? If 萑 represents the wine vessel (covered up ⁺⁺ because it is not yet used?) for the libation or the libation itself (灌), then what does 見 add to it? It seems as if it refers to the persons who are not carrying out the sacrifice, but are viewing (見) it. They are observers, and maybe their job was to look for omens which might occur during the service, as a sign of the gods. They 'wash their hands but do not sacrifice'. They only observe.

Hexagram 20 could describe different kinds of looking at the sacrifice, for instance, 童觀 in the first line could denote viewing the sacrifice from within a barren field, or from the top of a mountain which has all the vegetation cut down for a better view (for this meaning of 童 see [漢語大字典](#) 2711.9).