

Jade

16.118
S.I.797

Chinese

~~Period uncertain~~ ~~Western Chou~~
Neolithic, ca. 2000 B.C.

Squared, hollow cylinder of the type tsung; narrow projecting collar at both ends; rich cream and tans; decoration: incised and in low relief, stylized masks and double bands of fine lines on corners. (Collar chipped.)

Height: .045 (1-25/32")
Width: .073 (2-7/8")
Diameter of hole: 5.7 cm (2 1/4")

Neg.No.
669A
364B10

1. Bought from Lee Van Ching, in New York. For price, see Original Miscellaneous List, p. 173.
2. Original attribution: Han. See further, S.I. 797, Appendix VII.
3. (J.E.Lodge, 1929) Han, or earlier.
4. (A.G.Wenley, 1946) Period uncertain.
5. (T.^{aw}Lawton, 1978) Attribution changed from "Period uncertain" to "Western Chou". Cf. 17.384, another tsung with similar monster masks. Both 16.118 and 17.384 are related to a group of Western Chou jade objects with this type of monster mask design in relief, such as the plaque 16.511.

6. (Julia Murray, 1980) Attribution is changed from Western Chou to Neolithic, ca. 2000 B.C. From the exhibition label: A comparable tsung of the Liang-chu culture was excavated at Ts'ao-hsieh-shan, Wu-hsien in Kiangsu province. The surface of the tsung is highly polished.

7. (Julia Murray, 1982) The tsung found at Ts'ao-hsieh-shan is reproduced in Wen-wu tzu-liao ts'ung-k'an 文物資料叢刊 no. 3: pl. 3/1. Although the mask motif straddling each of the corners is very similar in type to that on FGA tsung 16.118 its execution on the excavated piece appears somewhat cruder and less detailed. An angular plaque with a similar design of large oval eyes came from another site belonging to the late phase of the Liang-chu culture of the east coast Neolithic period (see K'ao-ku 1981 no. 3: p. 197, fig. 7), helping to confirm the motif as belonging to the Liang-chu cultural context. However, in his article "Jade of the Liang-chu Culture" 良渚文化の玉器若干をめぐって (Museum no. 360: Mar., 1981): 22-33, in Japanese), Hayashi Minao expresses some doubt that the Freer tsung 16.118 is as early as other pieces bearing the mask motif. He feels that the highly sophisticated workmanship evident in the Freer tsung was not attained even during the Warring States period (480-221 B.C.), implying ever so obliquely that the tsung might be archaistic (see p. 26).

The mask motif seen in all these examples seems to be the basis for the more abstract band-and-incised line (and sometimes circle) decor found on many tsung, both small and large. Understanding this abstract pattern as the simplification of a face-mask provides a clue for answering the question of which end of the tsung is top and which is bottom. On tsung wider at one end than the other, the pattern is always correctly oriented when the piece rests on its smaller end; however, it is unstable and likely

to topple over when so positioned. It is possible that the design was intended to be seen from above, and if so, then the tsung would rest on its wider end. Until the function of the tsung is clarified, no definitive conclusions may be reached.

8. (From an exhibition label: Studies in Connoisseurship: 1923-1983 - September, 1983). Exhibited with: 16.499, 16.511, 17,378AB, 16.628, 17.382.

A few jades related to these plaques and beads by shape or by decoration have recently come to light in the excavation of sites associated with a late phase of the Liang-chu 良渚 culture, which flourished during the late Neolithic period in east coastal China. They include an angular plaque, of a different shape than the Freer pieces (16.628 & 17.382), bearing an arrangement of large oval eyes executed in low relief; such large eyes in further elaboration are seen on a plaque in the Freer collection (16.511). Other jades with comparable decor include a few tsung with demonic-mask motifs (16.118 and 16.499), sometimes in multiple registers. The mask motif may be ancestral to the ubiquitous t'ao-ieh 饕餮 found on Shang dynasty bronze vessels. The beads (17.378A&B) probably were originally part of an elaborate necklace.