

Jade

39.54

Chinese, ~~8th century B.C., or later~~

~~Middle Chou dynasty, or later~~

~~Early Western Chou, late 11th-10th century B.C.~~

Early Shang, ca. 15th century B.C.

An ornament of reddish nephrite shading to gray-green; somewhat translucent; one surface decorated with low reliefs mostly linear; 4 holes for attachment.

.072 long. (2-13/16")

Neg. Nos.
S6002AA
S618AA

1. Bought from C. T. Loo & Co., New York. For price, see Freer Gallery of Art Purchase List after 1920.

2. (J.E.L., 1940). The rather complicated shape of this jade conveys no idea of its use; but the one decorated surface or front, and the four little vertically perforated bosses on the corners of the plain surface or back, indicate that it was designed for attachment to something as a "one-way" ornament pure and simple. The decorations in the upper and lower zones are essentially alike; they confront each other and are, I think, highly stylized renderings of a face which, if not wholly human, is at least anthropomorphic. The head in the middle zone, however, is human without doubt, although its face is related in a general way, I believe, to

the stylized faces in the zones above and below it, and, indeed, to a considerable number of heads and faces which appear on other jades in our Collection and on several more elsewhere. Thus, the head in the middle zone is to be seen again, in profile, on the smaller end of our large, cleaver-like blade (18.1; a 大圭 ta kuei?), and still again, full face, on one side of a small 圭 kuei (15.87) which, on its other side, is further ornamented with a spread eagle. A similar kuei, published by 黃濬 Huang Chün in his Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi (Vol. I, p. 7), also has a face on one side and a spread eagle on the other; but in this case, the face is so highly stylized that it more nearly resembles the faces above and below the head in the middle zone. Now while the latter, as has been said, is essentially the same type of head as that carved in profile on one end of our large jade blade (18.1), it nevertheless lacks the two bracket-like ornaments which are shown, in linear relief, as projecting from the back of the profile head behind the pendent locks on either side of the face and neck. These ornaments definitely link the profile head, --- and, consequently, the head in the middle zone (39.54) and that on our small kuei (15.87), --- with three jade heads (photographs herewith), numbered respectively 276-1, 276-2 and 276-3, in the Gellatly Collection (National Collection of Fine Arts), and to two others reproduced in Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi, Vol. II, pp. 38 and 39. The three Gellatly pieces are

"two-way" ornaments, that is to say, they are carved on both sides; no. 276-1 measures .077 in height and has one small socket drilled in the middle of its bottom edge; no. 276-2 is .078 high and has one socket in the middle of its top edge and another in the middle of its bottom edge; no. 276-3 measures .035 x .069 and has five equidistant sockets in its top edge, and one socket in the middle of the bottom edge. The sockets, of course, suggest that these objects, though in perfect condition, are not now in themselves complete, and may once have been parts of something, --- though probably not of the same thing. Thus, no. 276-1, with but one socket in its bottom edge, is evidently a terminal ornament, or may simply have been pegged to a supporting base, while nos. 276-2 and 276-3, with sockets in both top and bottom edges, must have had attachments above as well as below. These observations also apply more or less closely to two of the Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi pieces (Vol. II, pp. 38 and 39), except that the latter are "one-way" ornaments with plain backs. All five pieces exhibit full faces which are, perhaps, demoniacal rather than human, but are, nevertheless, related in many ways to the three human faces previously described. Thus, pierced ear-lobes, bulbous noses and an effect of head-dress, more or less pronounced, are common to all eight alike. The profile head (18.1), for example, wears a low crown; the head in the middle zone (39.54) wears a head-band above which the hair projects a little way; while in the case of 276-1 (Gellatly) the hair rises above the band like a plume (cf. also

Salmony, Carved Jade of Ancient China, Pl. XXXII, 4 and 5). Two (18.1 and 39.54) of the eight have closed mouths; but the other six all display formidable teeth and even tusks. The bracket-like ornaments, already noted in the case of the profile head (18.1), appear on five of the others, but in the same plane as the full face. In expression, the faces are all rather sinister; those on either side of 276-3 (Gellatly) are much alike; but those on 276-2 (Gellatly) are, respectively, almost like masks of Comedy and Tragedy, and the same is true of those on 276-1 (Gellatly). There is, indeed, ample evidence to show that the relationship among all these heads is, in many respects, fairly close, --- a fact which has been observed also by Salmony (op. cit. Pls. VIII, XXXI and XXXII); but how closely they are related in time, and what date should be assigned to any or all of them, are matters about which evidence is either confused or lacking. For example, Salmony (op. cit. Pl. VII, 3) attributes our large blade (18.1), --- and, by inference, the profile head (Pl. VIII, 1), --- to the Shang dynasty, whereas our small kuei (15.87), our ornament (39.54), the three Gellatly pieces and the two Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi pieces (Vol. II, pp. 38 and 39) he attributes (Pls. XXXI and XXXII) to the "Early Eastern Chou period" or 771-600 B.C. according to his chronology. To me, however, it seems unlikely that both of these attributions can be correct unless, of course, the large blade (18.1) be regarded as a Shang piece to which the profile head was added later, --- a possibility which, if not

obvious, is certainly not negligible. But in the case of our small kuei (15.87), such a possibility does not seem to exist: the face on one side and the spread eagle on the other have every appearance of being contemporary with the fashioning of the kuei itself, and presumably the same may be said of the similar kuei reproduced in Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi (Vol. I, p. 7). There remain then, the questions: which of the characteristics of these two pieces affords the surest indication of date? and: within what limits can the date be reasonably set? Assuming that the two kuei are approximately contemporary, it is worth noting that, while the two spread eagles are closely alike in style and execution, the two heads are very different. On our kuei (15.87), the head is fairly naturalistic; but on the kuei reproduced in Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi (Vol. I, p. 7), the head is highly stylized: between them, indeed, these two heads practically span the whole range of representation seen in this entire group of faces, and thus support similar evidence, --- provided singly by our ornament (39.54) and by the front of 276-1 (Gellatly), --- that all these heads, whether naturalistic or stylized, must be regarded as not very far apart in date. In fixing that date, however, neither the heads nor the form of the kuei nor yet the form of the large cleaver-like blade (18.1), separately or in combination, can be regarded as very helpful, since none of them, as far as I am aware, is a near enough relative of any other thing of which the period is really known. In general, I see no sufficient reason for attributing any of them to the Shang dynasty: a Chou date seems to me far more likely to prove

correct, --- and for the heads, a later rather than an earlier. That our large blade (18.1), as such, could have been made in early Chou times or even earlier, I am unable conclusively to deny; but were I to accept so early a date for it, I would also accept as fact the existing possibility that the profile head is a later addition. In the case of the two kuei, however, I have no such latitude, since they and their decorations seem to me clearly inseparable in time. It is, therefore, all the more important to observe how closely the spread eagle on either kuei resembles the one which forms part of the decoration of an elaborately carved jade ring reproduced by Huang Chiin in Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi (Vol. II, p. 4 verso) and also by Ardenne de Tizac in Artibus Asiae (1927, No. II, pp. 138-9). In over-all outline, this ring may be said to belong to the relatively rare type of notched jade rings classified by 吳大澂 Wu Ta-ch'êng as 璿璣 hsüan chi, or "astronomical instruments (chi)" made of "a fine kind of jade (hsüan)". The two examples illustrated by Wu (in his Ku yü t'u k'ao, Vol. I, pp. 50 and 52 recto) differ somewhat as to the number, arrangement and sharpness of their respective notches; but they are alike in their freedom from surface decorations, --- the straight lines drawn on one surface of one of them (op.cit. p. 50 verso) having some practical significance, perhaps, but certainly no decorative intention (cf. also Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi, Vol. II, pp. 1 and 2; and Yüchikusaizō Kogyokufu, Pl. XVIII, 38). About Wu's well documented discussions of these rings, it is enough to say that his recognition of them as astronomical instruments is hardly

more than tentative, while in dating them he merely expresses his belief that although they may not be as early as the Hsia dynasty, they cannot well be later than Chou: evidently, he regards them as ancient or, in his own words, "not remote from antiquity" (op.cit. p. 51 verso), --- "antiquity" being the period of the Three Dynasties (op.cit. p. 52 verso), Hsia, Shang and Chou, 2205-255 B.C.! It seems fair to assume that if these hsüan chi were actually used as instruments of precision, the likelihood is that it was the plain ones rather than the ornate which were originally designed to serve such a purpose, and that the latter, as a symbolic rather than a practicable variety of the same sort of thing, may well be the later in date. To me, at all events, the elaborately carved ring, apart from its eagle, looks far more nearly related in design and execution to the carved jades of late Chou than to anything much earlier, and I can say the same of the delicate spiral design engraved on the crown which adorns the head reproduced in Vol. II, p. 39, of Ku yü t'u lu ch'u chi (see also Salmony, op.cit. Pl. XXXII, 2 and 3). These spirals are, I think, quite comparable with those so plentifully seen in the broad, middle band of decoration on one (39.5) of our large bronze basins, and on the handles of the other (15.107), --- both vessels dating from a period not earlier than the middle of the 5th century B.C. This last observation is, no doubt, the nearest approach to direct evidence that has been adduced; but the major tendency of all available comparisons indicates, I think, a later rather than an earlier

Chou date for our ornament (39.54) and for the allied objects which have been considered in connection with it. A reasonable tentative date, then, for the whole group would seem to be middle Chou (8th century B.C.) or later, --- possibly much later.

3. Sp. G. is 2.896.
4. (W.B.Trousdale, 1964) Chou dynasty. Early Western Chou.
5. (T. Lawton, 1973) The abstract designs in registers at either end of the plaque relate closely to designs found on a stone object unearthed at Liang-ch'eng-chen 兩城鎮, Shantung province in 1963. See: Liu Tun-yüan 劉敦愿, Chi Liang-ch'eng-chen i-chih fa-chüeh te liang chien shih-ch'i 兩城鎮遺址發現的兩件石器, Kaogu, 1972, No. 4, pp. 56-57. In the article the stone artifact is related to the Lung-shan culture, although the ornamentation is extraordinarily sophisticated for such an early date.

6. From Exhibition Label, September 1980, by Julia Murray: Attribution is changed from Early Western Chou, late 11th-10th century B.C. to Early Shang, ca. 15th century, B.C.