

45.

Archaic Jade Sword Guard

玉劍格

Length: 4.4 cm. (1 3/4 in.)

Width: 2.6 cm. (1 in.)

Depth: 2.0 cm. (3/4 in.)

Eastern Zhou dynasty

6th-5th century B.C.

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Of oval section, the guard is pierced through with an aperture of elongated shape conforming to that of the guard. The accouterment is carved on its flat top and bottom surfaces with 'C' and comma forms in raised rounded relief, the edges of the stone bordered by a narrow band marked with six crenellations. The long sides are carved with similar décor in raised vertical panels. Each rounded end is carved with a *taotie* mask, characterized by large slanted eyes beneath incised brows flanked by curled ears and incurved horns, its nose vaguely indicated below. The semi-translucent stone is a mottled-buff color polished on the raised relief areas and exhibiting some calcification on one side.

The jade guard here would have been paired with a jade pommel, as in the example excavated from a 6th-5th century B.C. tomb in Jiangsu province (figs. 1-3). The primary difference between the excavated and present jade guard rests in the manner of producing the design on the top and bottom surfaces. The excavated guard was incised in fine-line intaglio to create a pattern of elongated triangles in contrast to the carved raised-relief comma design decorating the sides of the present guard, this method of décor used throughout on the present guard. A similar carving technique was used to produce the comma motifs on a jade ring handle excavated from an early Warring States period tomb in Shandong province, supporting the date ascribed to the present piece (fig. 4).

A variation in design, however, dominates the short curved ends of the Kaikodo jade where distinctive *taotie* masks are carved. Both the abstract and representational designs are related to the art of bronze

craftsmen during the late Zhou period. It has been suggested that such elaborate sword paraphernalia is characteristic of production in the south and southeast, the provenance of the excavated example and likely of the present as well.¹

It has also been noted that combining metal and jade in the production of weapons and their fittings might have resulted from "a desire to combine the material strength of a weapon with the powers of jade, and thereby to enhance the force and protection afforded by the weapon."² This presumes that the weapons were produced for use rather than ritual or display, yet today we can hardly imagine such elaborately fitted weapons subject to the stress of battle.

1. Jessica Rawson, *Chinese Jades: from the Neolithic to the Qing*, London, 1995, p. 293.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

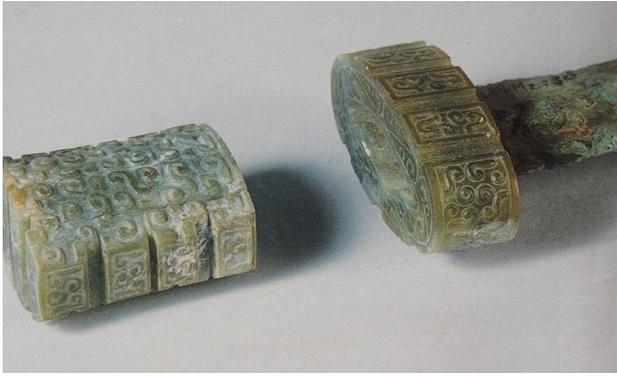


Fig. 1: Jade sword guard, Eastern Zhou dynasty, late Spring and Autumn period, 6th-5th century B.C., excavated from a tomb at Liuhe, Chengqiao, Jiangsu province, Nanjing Museum, after *Zhongguo yuqi quanji*, vol. 3 (*Chunqiao-Zhanguo*), Shijiazhuang, 1993, pl. 91 (right), p. 55.



Fig. 2: The jade guard in fig. 1 as discovered, attached to a bronze blade, after *Kaogu*, 1974:2, pl. V: 2.

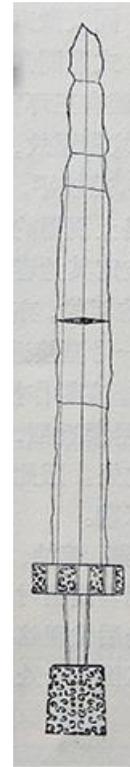


Fig. 3: Drawing of sword with jade fittings in fig. 2, after *Kaogu*, 1974:2, fig. 5:5.



Fig. 4: Jade ring handle for a sword, Eastern Zhou dynasty, early Warring States period, 5th century B.C., excavated from a tomb in Zibo, Shandong province, after *Kaogu*, 2016:2, fig. 43, p. 43.