

Jade
(Nephrite)

17.31

S.I.1120

Chinese,

W.Chou dynasty, ca. 1027-771 B.C.

Ceremonial implement:

Chisel-shaped object of the type kuei; long slender form with beveled end and conical perforation; dark olive green with tan specklings; satin smooth surface. Box.

18.2 cm		
18.2 in length.	(7-3/16")	Neg. No.
		H382B2
		11171B
04.4 greatest width.	(1-3/4")	least width:
04.4 cm		5.3 cm. (2-1/8")

1. Bought from Lee Van Ching, of Shanghai. For price, see Original Miscellaneous List, p. 250.
2. Original attribution: Before San Tai.
3. Sp. G. is 2.966. Nephrite.
4. (I.M., 1945) Chou dynasty.
5. (H.E.Buckman, 1964) The Envelope File contained no further information, and has now been destroyed.
6. (T.Lawton, 1978) Western Chou.
7. (Julia Murray, 1980) From the exhibition label:
Based on a Neolithic stone tool whose blade is sharpened at the top, early jade chisels were ceremonial rather than

utilitarian. The shape was retained in the jade repertoire in the Shang and Chou periods. The simple, elegant shape of a chisel is subtly embellished by smoothly ground edges, which are shown to advantage by the lustrous polish of the entire surface.

8. (Julia Murray, 1982). Chisel-shaped jades, which are included in the general category of tablets called kuei 圭, first occur in Neolithic sites (see for example the chisel found at Ta-ch'eng-shan, T'ang-shan 唐山市大城山 in Hopei province; reproduced in Ho-pei sheng ch'u-t'u wen-wu hsüan-chi 河北省出土文物选集 Peking, 1980; monochrome plate p. 6, fig. 15). In Neolithic times jade chisels were far outnumbered by chisel-shaped tools made of ordinary stone, which are frequently found in burials. During the Bronze Age, jade replicas of various types of Neolithic stone tools continued to be made and evidently had symbolic or ceremonial functions. However, their shapes tended to become less like those of the original prototype tools (chisels, axes, adzes, knives, hoes, etc.) and more like each other, giving rise to the collective term kuei to designate tablet-like jades in general.

In the Freer collection, the following jades may be considered to derive from the chisel: 35.7, 17.31, 15.87 (with relief masks), 17.57, 17.34 (with slightly recessed tang), and 17.28 (archaistic). Another tablet whose shape is at least in part inspired by that of the chisel is the broad and long 15.69.

Chisel 17.31 is similar in shape and proportions to an example in the Fogg Art Museum; published in Max Loehr, Ancient Chinese Jades, no. 197, as "Western Chou (?)."