



**Chinese 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms' yenyen vase, Kangxi (1662-1722)  
POA**

Chinese 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms' yenyen vase, Kangxi (1662-1722), of 'phoenix-tail' form with a splayed foot and baluster body rising to a long flaring neck with everted rim, decorated in underglaze cobalt blue with a continuous scene taken from the history 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms' (???? sanguo yanyi), with the warrior Lü Bu astride his horse Red Hare, with a halberd in his hand and cantering through a mountainous landscape with boulders, trees and a pagoda roof visible through the clouds, being pursued by a mounted horseman (Zhang Fei) wearing armour and wielding a long spear, and two warriors on foot with spears and a banner; the trumpet neck with a man in audience with court officials on the veranda of a pagoda, the garden with swirling clouds, rockwork and plantain; the wide rim and splayed foot with small cloud scrolls, the base with double circle in underglaze blue.

Dimensions: Height: 46 cm. (just over 18 in.)

Condition: Upper section has restoration of a very high standard

#### Notes:

The scene depicted on the lower section of this vase is most likely the section of the fourteenth-century historical work 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms' detailing the 'Battle of Hulao Pass', an episode during which Lü Bu, who has been sent by Dong Zhuo to break up a coalition formed against him, retreats on his famous horse after a long battle against Zhang Fei. In the story, Zhang Fei is joined by Liu Bei and Guan Yu and the three sworn brothers chase in pursuit of Lü Bu together, but are unable to match the speed of Red Hare. Episodes from the tale were popular subjects within Kangxi ceramic design, though many earlier representations exist in other mediums, including woodblock prints and lacquerware. The scene depicted on this particular vase is also the subject of one of the paintings in the Long Corridor of the Summer Palace, Beijing, though in the painting the three pursuers are all on horseback. In this section of the tale, the narrator quotes 'an old poet' who 'told of this famous fight in these lines':

'The fateful day of Han came in the reigns of Huan and Ling/  
Their glory declined as the sun sinks at the close of day [...]  
Of the warriors of that time Lu Pu [sic] was the boldest./  
His valour and prowess are sung by all within the four seas./  
He clothed his body in silver armour like the scales of a dragon./  
[...] His swift courser bounded over the plain, a mighty wind following./  
His terrible halberd flashed in the sunlight, bright as a placid lake./  
Who dared face him as he rode forth to challenge?/  
The bowels of the confederate lords were torn with fear and their hearts trembled within them./  
Then leaped forward Chang [sic] Fei, the valiant warrior of the north./  
Gripped in his mighty hand the longsnakelike spear./  
His moustache bristled with anger, standing stiff like wire./  
His round eyes glared, lightning flashes darted from them./  
Neither quailed in the fight, but the issue was undecided./  
KuanYun-ch'ang [sic: Guan Yu] stood out in front, his soul vexed within him [...]  
Next Yuan-te [sic: Liu Bei] joined the battle, gripping his twin sword blades;/  
The heavens themselves trembled at the majesty of his wrath./  
These three closely beset Lu Pu [sic] and long drawn out was the battle./  
Always hewed their blows, never faltering a moment./  
The noise of their shouting rose to the sky, and the earth re-echoed it./  
The heat of the battle ranged to the frozen pole star./  
Worn out, feeling his strength fast ebbing Lu Pu [sic] thought to flee./  
He glanced at the hills around and thither would fly for shelter./  
Then, reversing his halberd and lowering its lofty point./  
Hastily he fled, loosing himself from the battle./  
With head low bent, he gave the rein to his courser./  
Turned his face away and fled to Hulaokuan'.

(From 'The Romance of the Three Kingdoms', Lo Guanzhong, trans. C.H. Brewitt-Taylor, Tuttle: Boston, 2002 pp.59-60)

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| <b>Material and Technique</b> | Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration |
| <b>Origin</b>                 | Chinese  |
| <b>Period</b>                 | 17th Century                                     |
| <b>Dimensions</b>             | Height: 46 cm. (just over 18 in.)                |