



16. Triple Gourd Vase

China, Kangxi period (1662-1722)

H: 102 cm

A monumental triple gourd vase (huluping) decorated in underglaze blue. The two lower bulbs – which are predominantly blue - are decorated in reserve with white stylized dragons, meandering foliage and peony flowers.

The lower section has additional medallions with stylized chrysanthemums in a circle of various leaves. The top section has a more geometric design in blue on a white ground, with multi lobed cartouches filled with lotus flowers and scrolls which are surrounded by floral band latticing. The lower part of the trumpet shaped neck is decorated with plantain leaves, the mouth has a plain double blue line.

The large size of this vase testifies to the remarkable technical achievement of the Jingdezhen potters in the early 18th century. It would have been made in separate parts and then 'looted' together before firing. Such large scale porcelain was no doubt intended for one of the European courts. The most notable collector of large scale porcelain was the Elector of Saxony for his court in Dresden - Augustus the Strong. This collection currently still holds five comparable large vases. Other examples are in the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam) and the Laura Collection (Italy).

This triple gourd vase is particularly special because of the incredible documented provenance. Through labels and documentation, we can trace it back nearly 100 years to the collection of the famous banker and avid art collector John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913). The rich history is underlined by a charred old note we found inside the vase, which was signed by a wealthy New York Gilded Age socialite, Mrs Arthur (Harriet) Curtiss James (1867-1941), who must have frequented the same social circles as Morgan. The discovered note certainly places this vase firmly in the era of J.P. Morgan.

Research found that, like Morgan, Arthur Curtiss James was one of the wealthiest men in the country. His fortune was made from mining and his railroad empire - which included a seventh of the entire railroad network in the United States. He was a quiet, conservative man, focused mainly on his many charitable contributions rather than society - which he seems to have left to his wife Harriet.

Morgan and Curtiss James were contemporaries both living in New York, with mansions on Park Avenue. Curtiss even sold his neighbouring plot to a J.P Morgan partner. They would have certainly known each other socially, as they were both active members and commodore of the New York Yacht Club. They also sat together on various

boards of charitable institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum, Museum of Natural History and the New York Philharmonic. Why and how the note from Mrs Curtiss James ended up in the vases for over 100 years is unclear.

Provenance:

- J.P. Pierpont Morgan Collection no.1464
- Duveen Brothers New York
- Norton Simon Foundation, (1965)
- Parke Bernet Galleries, May 1971, Lot 36
- Private Collection, USA 2017

Exhibitions:

- Special loan exhibition of rare Chinese porcelains in aid of various charities, Duveen Brothers Galleries, New York, 1907, cat. nr.90
- Los Angeles County Museum 1965-1971

Literature:

S. Bushell, Catalogue of the Morgan Collection of Chinese Porcelains, New York 1904, pl.CXLIX