



**A Chinese Dehua silver mounted libation cup, 17th century
POA**

????????????? A Chinese Dehua silver mounted libation cup, 17th century, moulded in the form of a rhinoceros horn, one side with a recumbent deer beneath a branch of pine and a crane soaring overhead, the other side with a dragon pursuing a flaming pearl above a beast sitting upright on its haunches; indistinct mark to silver base.

Condition:

Perfect

Notes:

This cup, along with other 'blanc de chine' wares, was made at the Dehua kilns in the South-Eastern coastal province of Fujian, an area renowned for its creamy-white, translucent porcelain. Due to the raw materials available in the local area, Dehua porcelain contains high levels of pure china stone, which results in a very hard and sugary body particularly suited to the production of moulded figures and vessels. This particular style of libation cup is modeled in the form of a so-called 'rhinoceroshorn'. The horn of the rhinoceros is actually made up of layers of keratin and was believed to havemagical properties by Daoists, though any medicinal or magical properties attributed to thissubstance are purely mythical. The theme of longevity is also reflected in the decoration of thevessel; according to Daoist belief, deer are the only animal able to find and consume lingzhi, fungi ofimmortality. As 'deer' in Chinese ('lu') is homophonous with the term for an official's salary, the animalis also a symbol of prosperity and wealth. The pine, evergreen and long-living, is often paired inpaintings and ceramic design with crane, which are in turn associated with Shoulao, the god oflongevity. The immortal crane (xian he) is said to live for thousands of years and to act as messengerbetween the earthly and heavenly realms where the Daoist deities reside. The incorporation ofauspicious natural imagery in general into artistic design was particularly popular during the late Mingand Qing as according to Daoist belief, immortality could only be achieved through living in harmonywith the universal order underpinning all living things. Meanwhile, the Chinese dragon ('long' ? or'loong' ?) has been a prominent mythological creature in Chinese folklore for millennia. While it iscommonly believed that the dragon was originally worshipped as part of animistic ritual in China, themythical beast came to be associated more specifically with control of water, including the sea, riversand associated weather events such as typhoons. The Dragon was also celebrated as a bringer ofgood fortune and a symbol of strength; it was adopted as an Imperial icon from at least the Handynasty onwards. Combined, the shape and decorative elements of this libation cup are highlyauspicious and would have made it an appropriate gift to make a special occasion.

Material and Technique

'Blanc de Chine' Dehua moulded porcelain with silver metal mounts

Origin

Chinese

Period

17th Century

Condition

Excellent

Antique ref: W890