

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is a supplemental episode.

Before I go on, I should warn you that this episode contains spoilers. So if you don't know how the story turns out and you don't like spoilers, then you should listen to episodes 25 and 26 before you listen to this one. Go on. I'll be here when you come back.

Alright, so in episode 26, we witnessed the end of Lü Bu. He's the first really significant player in our narrative to die. Dong Zhuo was an important figure, to be sure, but he hung around for just a few episodes. Lu Bu, on the other hand, was introduced back in episode 4 and just now left the narrative. Given his importance, I think it only right that we give him a proper send-off by taking a look at the real Lu Bu vs. the fictional one portrayed in the novel. This is something I want to do for other major players as well once they exit stage left from the narrative.

Before we start, I should note that much of the historical information in this episode, and future supplemental episodes on other key figures, are sourced to two texts: *The Book of the Later Han*, and *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. The Book of the Later Han covers the history of the Eastern Han Dynasty from the year 6 A.D. to 189 A.D. The book was compiled during the fifth century, so a good 300 years after the events it covers. The compilation draws on a number of earlier sources, most of which have not survived to us intact.

Records of the Three Kingdoms covers a period of about 100 years, from 184 to 280, so it spans the end of the Eastern Han and the entire Three Kingdoms period. It was written by an official living in the final years of the Three Kingdoms period, so it is almost contemporaneous with many of the

events it covers, and even though it contains errors and biases, it is generally considered a more accurate chronicle than the later accounts of this period.

Ok, so, Lu Bu. We don't know when he was born, but we do have a date for his death: February 7 in the year 199. For the most part, the major events of his career as portrayed in the novel match up with what the historical accounts tell us. However, there are some key differences in the details.

First, while he was a trusted officer of Ding Yuan's, there is no record of him being Ding Yuan's adopted son. So this was probably an embellishment added to accentuate his treacherous personality by establishing a pattern of patricide. He did, however, become Dong Zhuo's adopted son, and Dong Zhuo DID convince him to kill Ding Yuan.

As in the novel, Lu Bu's prowess as a warrior was renowned, as evidenced by him being dubbed the Flying General. He DID take part in the war against the coalition forces that rose up to oppose Dong Zhuo, but he did not get along with one of his lieutenants named Hu (2) Zhen (3), and that contributed to his defeat at the hands of Sun Jian (1), which then prompted Dong Zhuo to move the capital west.

Now, as for the most famous part of Lu Bu's story from the novel -- his love affair with Diao Chan and his subsequent betrayal of Dong Zhuo -- according to the historical record, Lu Bu DID turn against Dong Zhuo and WAS part of the conspiracy that killed him, and there WAS a woman involved, but truth was not nearly as dramatic as fiction in this case.

Apparently there were two main reasons Lu Bu turned on Dong Zhuo. First, Dong Zhuo had a terrible temper and would often take it out on Lu Bu. One time, Dong Zhuo got so ticked off over some trifle of a thing that he hurled a short halberd at Lu Bu, which made Lu Bu detest him. But by all accounts, this did not happen in Dong Zhuo's garden and was not because he caught Lu Bu with Diao Chan.

The other reason for Lu Bu's betrayal was the woman I mentioned. So Lu Bu apparently was canoodling with one of Dong Zhuo's servant girls, but there is no mention of anyone named Diao Chan in the historical records, much less any mention of Wang Yun (3) offering a woman first to Lu Bu and then to Dong Zhuo to stir up trouble between them. In reality, Dong Zhuo was not even aware of Lu Bu's affair with his servant girl, but Lu Bu was mortified at the prospect of him finding out, and that in part drove him to join the conspiracy to kill Dong Zhuo.

So what of Diao Chan? Interestingly, in Chinese, Diao means the tail of a mink, while Chan refers to a piece of jewelry in the shape of a cicada made from either jade or gold. These two items were parts of a popular style of headdress for generals and officials during the Qin dynasty, the Han dynasty, the Three Kingdoms period, and the historical eras immediately following them. And apparently the term was kind of a popular alias among courtesans and singing girls. So the name could just be a literary embellishment, part of a fictional love triangle concocted for the purpose of better storytelling.

After Dong Zhuo's death, Lu Bu was indeed sent fleeing from the capital by Dong Zhuo's former lieutenants, Li Jue and Guo Si. In fact, it is said that he fled with Dong Zhuo's head in tow. I guess he wanted a souvenir or a conversation starter. After he escaped, like in the novel, he first was turned away by Yuan Shu and then wore out his welcome with Yuan Shao. In fact, there's a bit of historical drama with Yuan Shao here.

When the relationship between the two began to turn sour, Lu Bu got the feeling that Yuan Shao was planning to kill him, so instead of sticking around, he asked Yuan Shao for permission to return to Luoyang, the former capital. Yuan Shao agreed, but he also sent a squad of armed soldiers to accompany Lu Bu for, umm, protection, yeah that's it. Well, Lu Bu was naturally suspicious of this, so that night, he had someone sit in his tent and play the zither, an ancient string instrument, to give the

appearance that he was there, but Lu Bu himself skipped out. Sure enough, in the middle of the night, the soldiers made their move. They stabbed his bed repeatedly, only to be surprised when they found out he had given them the slip.

When Yuan Shao heard about the failed assassination, he sent another force to go chase after Lu Bu and kill him for real this time. But the soldiers he sent were all afraid of Lu Bu, so even when they caught up, they kept their distance, and he managed to get away. Lu Bu eventually ended up with Zhang (1) Yang (2), the governor of Henei (2,4) Prefecture, but on his way there, he also came across Zhang Miao (3), the governor of Chenliu (2,2) Prefecture, and the two hit it off, which is how Lu Bu came to be at the head of Zhang Miao's (3) invasion of Cao Cao's territory later on.

From there, the rest of Lu Bu's career pretty much unfolded like it was described in the novel. He DID fight and lose to Cao Cao, which forced him to seek refuge with Liu Bei in Xu Province. He DID take Xu Province from Liu Bei, and he DID take Liu Bei back and station him at Xiaopei (3,4).

One thing that I was surprised to find in the actual historical records was the episode where Lu Bu stopped a war between Yuan Shu and Liu Bei by hitting his halberd with an arrow, because that just sounded like the perfect dramatic flair a novelist would pen. But it was real, apparently, so, good for him.

But the real-life Lu Bu was also sold out by his advisers Chen Deng (1) and Chen Gui (4), just like in the novel. And in the end, when Cao Cao had Lu Bu trapped in Xiapi (4,1), three of his officers -- Hou (2) Cheng (2), Song (4) Xian (4), and Wei (4) Xu (4), DID turn on him, though things ended slightly differently than in the novel. Instead of capturing Lu Bu and handing him over to Cao Cao, they actually captured his adviser Chen Gong (1) and handed him over. As for Lu Bu, when he saw that

defeat was inevitable, he ordered his guards to kill him and bring his head to Cao Cao, but they could not bear to do it. So instead, he surrendered to Cao Cao in February 199.

When he was brought in front of Cao Cao, Lu Bu did indeed try to talk Cao Cao into sparing his life, but Liu Bei did remind Cao Cao of what happened to Lu Bu's former masters, which prompted Lu Bu to make his remark about Big Ears being dishonorable. After his execution, Lu Bu's head, along with the heads of Chen Gong and his general Gao (1) Shun (4), were taken to Xuchang as evidence of Cao Cao's service to the court, and then they were buried.

Lu Bu's final resting place is supposedly now [a small overgrown mound](#) in a wheat field in a small village in Xiuwu (1,3) County in Henan (2,2) Province ([map](#)). It is in an area with a number of burial mounds, and it is now part of the county's Office for the Preservation of Cultural Artifacts. Of course, according to visitors' accounts that I've found online, there are no monuments or signs of any kind that verify this actually is Lu Bu's grave, and I can't find a source for where that claim originated beyond just the fact the people in the area say it is. So take it with a grain of salt.

Alright, that closes the book on Lu Bu, the historical figure and the literary character. I hope you enjoyed it, and I will see you next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.