

## **Elephants on board the Manila Galleons: From exotic gifts to Hispanic–Philippine ivory sculptures**

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### **Introduction**

Between 1565 and 1815 the Manila Galleons sea route brought about the beginning of a series of exchanges between the Philippines and Spain.

In this paper we propose a comprehensive study of the relevance of the elephant in the Manila Galleons. Not only the animals themselves, but also the elephant tusks and the tusks carved as religious sculptures: the well-known Hispanic-Philippine ivory sculptures present in collections all around the world.

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As a background to this exchange of elephants in the Philippine area, one of the first documentary references we found is the embassy sent by Francisco Tello de Guzman, governor of the Philippine Islands, to Japan. Despite the diversity of the gifts of this embassy headed by Luis Navarrete Fajardo in 1597, the big attraction was the elephant "Don Pedro" that the governor of Manila had received from Cambodia. We sense that something like this would be reflected in a namban folding screen kept in the Museo de Arte Antiga in Lisbon.

It was usual that elephants from Cambodia were sent as a gift to the governors of the Philippine Islands, as also happened with another one that was sent to Don Alonso Fajardo, governor of the Philippines in the first half of the seventeenth century, and that was donated to the Company of Jesus. This particular one help hauling the construction materials for building their church.

Once aboard the Manila Galleons after the foundation in the eighteenth century of the Royal Company of the Philippines that made the direct route from Manila to Cadiz, we have evidence of the first elephants that arrived in Spain from the Philippines.

In the 1770s, two Asian elephants, one male which landed in Cadiz in 1773 and dissected after his death in late 1777 and another female, coincided in Aranjuez, where was located the Court of King Charles III. The female died in that royal place in early September 1780.

On 24 July 1773 the frigate of the Royal Navy Venus, from Manila, landed on the island of Leon, the current San Fernando, Cádiz, an Asian male elephant five and a half years old, that the governor of the Philippines Don Simon de Anda sent as a gift of Nawab of the Carnatic Indian to His Majesty. The galleon was also carrying scarlet and gold dresses for the elephant and the caretaker, made in Cadiz during the days of acclimatization, and to be used in the presentation of the elephant to King Charles the third. They finally arrived at Aranjuez, on October 27 of that year.

On 17 November 1777, Pedro Franco Dávila, director of the Cabinet of Natural History in Madrid, received the news of the death of the elephant, asking His Majesty to dissect the animal and bring it to Madrid to be put in the Royal Cabinet. And so he did. They put together the skeleton of the animal, while forming a wood frame on which the elephant skin was subsequently settled. Currently this specimen is exposed at the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid.

On 27 July 1778, the *Fragata Astrea* arrived at from the Philippines with a female

elephant, the second pachyderm who gave the Nawab of the Carnatic Indian to His Majesty through the Governor of the Philippines, Simon de Anda, along with other living and stuffed animals.

The king, grateful for both gifts, granted to Simon de Anda to put the elephant on its coat of arms, which we can see in his birthplace, in Subijana de Alava.

The exoticism seized Madrid's Court thanks to the arrival of these animals in the eighteenth century, which became protagonists of poems, plays and artistic performances, like the elephant that appears in this work of Lorenzo Tiepolo, which highlights an elephant in the fan of the lady.

Besides the exchange of elephants in these galleons, there are also references of the tusks of the animals, such as those given as a gift of the King of Siam, Don Fernando Manuel de Bustillo Bustamante y Rueda, governor of the Philippine Islands to Her Majesty in 1719.

Just like carved tusks as sculptures, like those carried in the galleon San Jose in 1665.

### **Hispanic–Philippine ivories sculptures**

These Hispanic–Philippines ivories, as they are known, were main subjects of cultural exchange linked to the creation of the transpacific route of the Manila Galleon, which from 1565 until 1815, transported delicate pieces from Asia to the new-Hispanic and Spanish ports, and vice versa.

So now, I'd like to describe more about these Hispanic–Philippines ivories that arrived from the Philippines to Spain through this transpacific route and currently are in public and private collections around the world.

The Galleon of Manila was excellent for the progress of the evangelization of the territory. Different religious orders sponsored the building of churches that needed liturgical furniture appropriate for their ceremonies. Chinese artists were in charge of providing these goods to the religious.

Soon, the Manila colony was formed with people known as the *sangleys*, who started the production of these pieces of the Philippines area. The governor Gonzalo Ronquillo Peñalosa ordered the construction of the first parian in 1581, to give a base to the *sangleys*. But this was not the only one, up to four of these were rebuilt as a result of fire.

Fray Domingo de Salazar refers to this parian and to their goods in this letter-list. Because of this letter, we know of the production of sculptures made of ivory by the *sangleys*, and it confirmed that the Spanish in the archipelago brought their own models and European goods.

So now, I'd like to explain the aesthetic evolution of these sculptures depending on their chronology.

Starting with the oriental look, this normally appears in the seventeenth century ivories. Highlighting their slanted eyes, flat nose, lined necks and long lobules. We can see this in crucified Christs, specially in dying Christs. And in some Inmaculada Concepción. This is also common in some saints, like these San Miguel and San Juan Bautista from Badajoz. Also in these Virgin and San Jose from México.

Next, on the European influences, frequently from the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth century. The impact of the arrival of sculptures from Flandes in the sixteenth century,

made by the Malinas workshops, as the Santo Niño de Cebu. These gave typical elements to Hispanic–Philippines ivories, such as small size, clear forehead and small eyes.

The absorption of the Christian iconography was exported from Spain with the missionary and the European engraving. But we cannot forget the relevance of the Andalusian sculptural school in the Hispanic–Philippines ivories, mainly focused on Juan Martínez Montañés. We can find images of Niño Jesús bendiciendo similar to the reference image of him, conserved in the Seville Cathedral. The quantity of sculptures of this type, is maybe because one copy comes back to Ternate, in the Philippines, from Acapulco in seventeenth century.

So, turning to the saints. San Miguel is one of the most represented as he is the symbol of the triumph of the Catholic Church against heresy. With San Miguel there is also San Sebastian, San Juan Bautista and the saints related to different religious orders, like San Francisco de Asis, and some female representations such as Santa Rosa de Lima or the Virgen de Guadalupe.

Next, let's look at some of the legacies from the Philippines during the eighteenth century.

First, we can outline the figure of Manuel Silvestre Pérez del Camino, originally from the Riojan village of Castañares de Rioja, who had an extensive career as a state worker in the Viceroyalty of New Spain<sup>1</sup>.

He made a donation to build a chapel in his home village in the eighteenth century, to consolidate his family prestige. Now, this chapel has a small altarpiece, presided by a painting with the Virgen de Guadalupe, signed by Miguel Cabrera. However, the most interesting ornaments in this chapel for our study are ivory sculptures.

Of all of them, the Virgen del Rosario, San Miguel and San José and the Virgin of the Holy Family set were sold by the parish priest. So, now in the Diocesan Museum in Calahorra, they have the sculptures of San Juan Bautista, San Fernando and the Niño Jesus of the Holy Family. All of them are with oriental features even though they are from the eighteenth century. We ignore if they came from the Philippines or were made by sangleys in Mexico.

Another interesting legacy is the Francisco de Samaniego y Tuesta<sup>2</sup>.

There's not much information available but we can see he was born in 1568, in Caicedo de Yuso, Álava, and died in 1670 in Manila. So, there was a delay in the repatriation of properties from the Philippines to Spain, given that the reference date for this was 1783.

The content of this decree not only allows us to analyse the pieces that Francisco de Samaniego donated to his native village, ivory crucifix, a silver sacred receptacle and a silver cross that currently is missing.

With respect to the crucifix, in the decree were mentioned its measures and description, and that its location in a chapel near to the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asuncion that is now in ruins.

Its features have a European influence that can be particularly appreciated in the eyes and nose. But the most interesting part of this sculpture is the inscription that has been kept on the right foot, unusual in the Hispano-Philippines ivories, given that these models are normally anonymous. The set is completed with a filigree sacred receptacle.

Finally, I want to show my most recent research. I'm working to analyze the composition of ivory and polychrome in some of these sculptures, like this Inmaculada Concepción.

Documented in the eighteenth century and donated by D. Juan de Osorio Crespo, from Mexico to Íllora in Granada, where he was born. Unfortunately it was destroyed in the Spanish Civil War but this has given us more facilities for the chemical analysis <sup>3</sup>.

We are currently working on a book about Hispanic-Philippine ivory sculptures in Spain and comparison with others from around the world, where we want to respond to the doubts that now exist around them, the origin of the material, the process of preparing and studying workshops and artisans.

## NOTES

1. Ruiz Gutiérrez, Ana. "The Oriental Passion to Honor the Dead". *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities* (Philippines), nVol. 3, nº1. 2013. págs. 123-136.
2. Ruiz Gutiérrez, Ana. "La Ruta Comercial del Galeón de Manila: el legado artístico de Francisco de Samaniego". *Revista Goya*. nº 318. Fundación Lázaro Galdiano. mayo-junio 2007. Autora: Ana Ruiz Gutiérrez. págs.159-167. ISSN: 0017-2715.
3. Rozalen, M., Ruiz Gutierrez, A., "A study of the origin and gilding technique of a Hispano-Philippine ivory from the XVIIth Century. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2015.08.034>.

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<sup>1</sup> RUIZ GUTIÉRREZ, Ana. "The Oriental Passion to Honor the Dead". *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities* (Philippines), nVol. 3, nº1. 2013. págs. 123-136.

<sup>2</sup> RUIZ GUTIÉRREZ, Ana. "La Ruta Comercial del Galeón de Manila: el legado artístico de Francisco de Samaniego". *Revista Goya*. nº 318. Fundación Lázaro Galdiano. mayo-junio 2007. Autora: Ana Ruiz Gutiérrez. págs.159-167. ISSN: 0017-2715.

<sup>3</sup> Rozalen, M., Ruiz Gutierrez, A., "A study of the origin and gilding technique of a Hispano-Philippine ivory from the XVIIth Century. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2015.08.034>.