

Artistic Legacies and the Transpacific Journey of Hispano-Filipino Ivories

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The term “Hispano-Filipino ivories” is used here to refer to ivory sculptures from the Philippines that traveled to the Iberian Peninsula aboard the Manila galleons beginning in the sixteenth century. This essay examines the context of their transoceanic journey: Did they arrive as isolated pieces, or were they part of a larger artistic exchange? The main purpose of this essay is to document some surviving examples of Hispano-Filipino ivory sculptures in Spain.

The Manila Galleon, 1565–1815

The transpacific route between the Philippines and New Spain began on January 1, 1565, when Fray Andrés de Urdaneta sailed from Manila on the galleon *San Pedro* in search of a way to return to Acapulco, Mexico. The ship sailed the internal waters of the Philippine archipelago, heading for the San Bernardino Strait towards the Pacific. The sailors took advantage of the Kuro Shivo Current, until they saw aquatic plants that occasionally created ponds that heralded the proximity of the California coast.¹ Finally, they arrived at the port of Acapulco on October 8, 1565.² Thus the transpacific route linking the Philippine archipelago with New Spain was born (Fig. 1).

Asian merchandise, which was highly valued in the markets of Europe and New Spain, was sent to the port of Acapulco, designated as a key point in the route because it had better conditions for anchorage than other Mexican ports. Once Mexican and Peruvian merchants acquired their supply of Asian products, they distributed them by land to Mexico City and from there to Veracruz, then across the Atlantic to Spain. Spain did not trade directly with the Philippines until the eighteenth century,

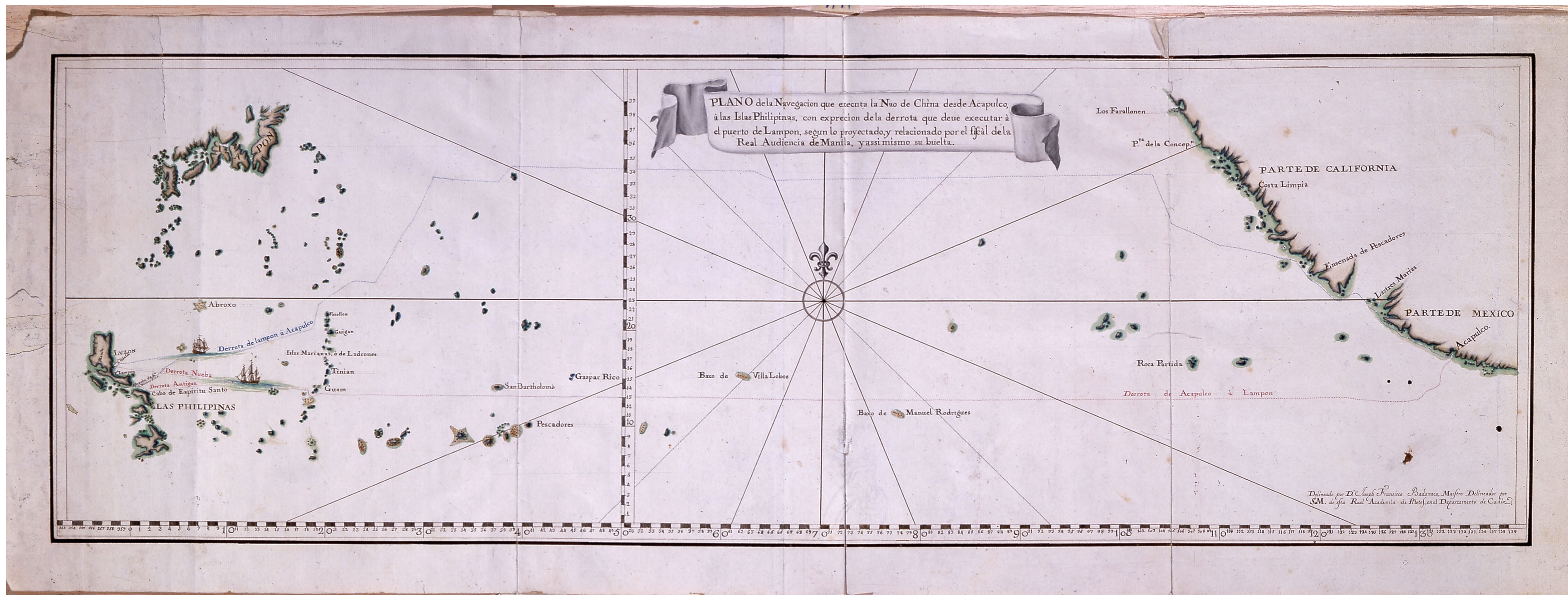


Fig. 1. José Francisco Badacaro, *Plano de la Navegación que executa la Nao de China desde Acapulco a las Islas Philipinas, con expresion de la derrota que deve executar a el puerto de Lampon, según lo proyectado y relacionado por el fiscal de la Real Audiencia de Manila, y assimismo su buelta*, 360 x 1.030 mm, Cádiz, 1750. Museo Naval, Madrid, 58-15.

upon the creation of the Philippine Royal Company. This enterprise was supported by King Charles III, as it fit into his plans for scientific and commercial progress and social prestige, following the models previously created by the Netherlands, England, and France. The company opened the direct Manila-Cádiz route, going around the Cape of Good Hope, thus substantially modifying the Manila galleon route.³

Transoceanic Artistic Encounters

The strategic location of the Philippines in the transpacific trade network had repercussions on the cultural enrichment not only of the archipelago but of all the territories involved in the trade. A network of artistic contact was established,

producing works of art that were intrinsically linked to the transpacific itinerary. Asian goods included mainly Chinese porcelain, silk, and fans; Japanese kimonos, porcelain, and lacquer; natural fabrics from the Philippines, such as those made of abaca (hemp); golden objects; and ivory sculptures.⁴

Not only did the beginning of the Manila galleon route mean economic and cultural stimulation for the islands; it also acted as an excellent channel for the evangelization of the territory, carried out by different religious orders, which had previous experience in the viceroyalty of New Spain. As a consequence of the progressive establishment of Spanish religious orders in the Philippines, parish churches were built. They needed to be furnished with the appropriate liturgical installations for religious celebrations, similar to what was done in Spain. The lavish interiors of Philippine churches have

diminished since the time of their construction due to environmental and historical vicissitudes, but fortunately, documents survive that reflect the magnificence of ecclesiastical legacy, replete with ensembles of gold and silver articles, embroidered silk vestments, ivory sculptures, furniture and sculptures of fine wood, paintings, book stands, and small *namban* chests from Japan, among other things. Evidence of this richness appears in the writings of the archbishop of Manila, Manuel Antonio Roxo del Río y Vieyra, who took note of the jewels and ornaments of the parish of Santa Ana district in Manila, during his visit in 1776:

A habit made of *pequín* with a short cape and surplice, miter and white cape, a kimono, a reredos with two niches, one with an image of N. S. Ana and the other with the image of Our Lady with an ivory face and hands, a tabernacle with an image of the Holy *Ecce homo* with a half-body, a silver ciborium with a cover.⁵

The rapid increase of Asian goods in the Americas made the Spanish impose restrictions on these markets early on, owing to the competition they posed to industries in the metropole, most notably the silk industry in Andalusia. This situation led to the prohibition in 1587 of the trade in Chinese textiles between South America and the Philippines, except in Peru, which was again permitted to import surplus Asian products from New Spain with a special license from the viceroy. But the prohibition was repeated and extended to Panama and Guatemala in 1593 and 1595.⁶ Despite the ban on the export of Philippine merchandise from the viceroyalty of New Spain, a great volume of goods still made its way to Peru at the end of the sixteenth century. In the following years, illicit commerce continued to grow, and in 1612 the viceroy of Peru, the Marquis of Montesclaros, proposed to authorize only one ship per year to sail between Peru and New Spain and to allow textiles from China and Spain to be shipped on the return journey; he collected large amounts of taxes upon exiting Acapulco and upon arrival at Callao. This measure encouraged business with Tierra Firme and not with New Spain. Upon implementation of these prohibitions, several ships were sequestered, and a commercial operation run by a powerful group of Peruvian merchants was exposed. But in Mexico some sectors of the merchant bureaucracy decided to resist the prohibition and granted licenses that maintained the trade in Chinese goods from Callao via Acapulco.

One of the most interesting documents about Asian merchandise on the Manila galleon is the study of the property of Fray Francisco de la Cuesta, which analyzes the property of an ecclesiastical office. He was archbishop of Manila from 1719 to 1721. Later he took possession of the bishopric of Michoacán, on April 18, 1724, and died forty-two days after taking office at the age of sixty-three. He left his property at his final destination, the Cathedral of Morelia, formerly Valladolid in Michoacán. The pieces that are described in detail below are only a sample of the richness of the inventory:

A dozen golden plates from China worth six pesos, an ivory figure of the Christ (*Santo Cristo*), two *tibores* worth twelve pesos, a small dish (*cazuela*) from China [and] Japan one-third of a *vara*⁷ deep worth six pesos, two ordinary Chinese jars worth one peso, one japanned screen (*viomvo*)⁸ worth 200 pesos, eight pieces

of narrow ribbon made of silk (*pequin*) forty-eight *varas* long worth two pesos [and] thirty pesos, two ivory canes worth eleven pesos, two canes with tortoise-shell inlay worth one peso [and] two pesos, twelve ordinary kimonos at four pesos four reales [and] fifty-four pesos, three cups embellished with Chinese metal at two pesos [and] six pesos, fourteen red and black varnished (*maque*) saucers (*manserinas*) at two reales three pesos and four reales, a silk (*pequin*) hanging worth thirty-one pesos, tortoise-shell fan from Japan worth two pesos, seventy-six buttons from China at six reales, a dozen small Japanese plates at three pesos and six reales, a dozen Japanese cups ten of which with covers, everything at eleven pesos.⁹

Together with these goods, the inventory describes the valuables of the Cathedral of Morelia, Michoacán, from 1787 in which the property of other ecclesiastical offices appears in the section *Expolios de los Sres. Obispos*. There are some references to pieces of Asian origin, such as “A red silk hanging with Chinese embroidery of various tones for a Bourbon bed, which belonged to Sr. Tagle and consists of six curtains, canopy, bed coverlette and baseboard.”¹⁰

This flow of Oriental objects and the taste for Asian goods in the viceroyalty of New Spain resulted in the emergence of a series of Mexican works directly influenced by the aforementioned products from Asia.¹¹ These consisted of furniture including chests of drawers, chairs, desks, and screens; the latter being one of the objects most in demand among the bourgeoisie of New Spain.¹² The *biombos*, or screens, made in New Spain included pieces made with pearl inlay, a technique familiar to Indigenous artisans, which were then combined with motifs inspired by the Japanese *namban* artwork (Fig. 2).¹³ Another example of the influence of foreign designs can be seen in the ceramics produced in the city of Puebla, which borrowed shapes and motifs seen

Fig. 2. Unknown artist, folding screen, Mexico, seventeenth century. Museo de América, Madrid. Photograph by Joaquín Otero Úbeda.





on blue and white Chinese porcelain (Fig. 3). The lacquer of Michoacán, Chiapas, and Guerrero in Mexico also adopted Chinese techniques and motifs.¹⁴ Chinese lacquerware was so well received that the artists who made *maque* (a Mexican pre-Hispanic lacquer technique) began to introduce new forms and ornamental designs in their creation. These novelties were applied to the existing variety of *jícaras* (lacquered gourd cups) and *bateas* (shallow dishes), as well as to different furniture items, such as folding screens and writing desks.

Not to be forgotten is the adaptation of Asian fans to the taste of the women of New Spain and Europe, especially *mil caras* (thousand faces), called such because of the superimposed layers of fine ivory to make the faces of persons that adorn the upper part of the fan; also, minute work was done on the ivory ribs, although at times mother-of-pearl or tortoise shell was used instead (Fig. 4). The taste for Chinese fans can be corroborated through an order to those assigned to buy special Chinese fans for the queen of Castilla in 1748:

The King commands that whenever there is an opportunity to buy special fans from China, whether at the arrival of the Galleon from the Philippines, where a person in Acapulco may make the purchase in time, or if some exquisite ones may be found even without waiting for that event, you may charge to the Royal Treasury the cost of eight to ten dozen sets and send them well-wrapped...¹⁵



Fig. 4. Unknown artist, *mil caras* fan, China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Instituto Municipal del Museos de Reus, Reus, Spain. Photograph by Francesc X. Fernández/IMMR.

Hispano-Filipino Ivories: Artisans and Influences

The evangelization of Philippine territory by Spanish friars of different religious orders resulted in the establishment of parishes that needed liturgical furniture appropriate for religious ceremonies. Chinese artists were in charge of providing these pieces. Thus, Hernando Riquel, a scribe for the Spanish government in the Philippines, wrote that the merchandise that the first Chinese ships brought was adapted to the taste of these religious missionaries.¹⁶ To satisfy the needs of the religious, Chinese artists started to make pieces to the European taste, inspired by models that the Spanish brought but with Oriental inflections by the artists. The artists came from Fujian, a province on the coast of the southern Chinese Sea, specifically from the city of Zhangzhou; its proximity to the island of Luzon was made evident by previous contact even before the arrival of the Spanish.¹⁷ However, the commercial exchanges increased due to the Spanish presence in the archipelago from the sixteenth century onwards, and the city of Zhangzhou became a model producer of ivory images for the Spanish market, continuing this monopoly until the nineteenth century. The first signs of this production of images in Fujian appeared in the prologue of Gao Lian's *Zun sheng ba jian*, mentioning the human shape that these artists gave to ivory and its quality.¹⁸ Also, in the geographic dictionaries published in Zhangzhou, specifically in 1628, there is mention that although the ivory could not have been found in this area, exported ivory was used to make these sculptures, which were extremely beautiful and realistic, as well as other objects of ivory such as glass, toothpicks, and belt buckles.¹⁹

There were two main reasons for the establishment of these artists in Luzon. On the one hand, they were good traders and saw the presence of the Spanish as a business opportunity; and on the other hand, Luzon was the only province in which the traders were allowed to travel from overseas to destinations during the Ming dynasty, mainly from 1570. It should be remembered that the commercial impact of Fujian extended not only to the Zhangzhou ports but also to the Quanzhou, Fuzhou, and Xiamen (Amoy) ports.²⁰ Soon a Manila colony was formed with people known as the *sangleys*, who started the production of these pieces in the Philippine territory. This term “sangleys” is interpreted from the Chinese expression “those that came to trade” or from the *shanglai* term that means “trade” in the Minnanhua dialect in Fujian. It could also have been derived from the Chinese expression *changlei*, that is, “those that come frequently.”²¹ With the intention that all of them would have permanent lodging and were not wandering around the town, the governor, Gonzalo Ronquillo Peñalosa, ordered the construction of an *alcaiceria* or Parian in 1581.²² This area was located inside the city, and the Oriental houses, workshops, and shops were kept within it and controlled by a Spanish mayor. Fray Domingo de Salazar refers to this *alcaiceria* and the Chinese people from the Parian in Manila:

In this Parian are to be found workmen of trades and handicrafts of a nation, and many of them in each occupation. They make much prettier articles than are made in España, and sometimes so cheap that I am ashamed to mention it... The handicrafts pursued by Spaniards have all died out, because people buy their clothes and shoes from the Sangleys, who are very good craftsmen

in the Spanish fashion, and make everything at a very low cost. Although the silversmiths do not know how to enamel (for enamel is not used in China), in other respects they produce marvelous work in gold and silver. They are so skillful and clever that, as soon as there are any objects made by a Spanish workman, they reproduce it with exactness. What arouses my wonder most is, that when I arrived no Sangley knew how to paint anything; but now they have so perfected themselves in this art that they have produced marvelous work with both the brush and the chisel, and I think that nothing more perfect could be produced than some of their marble statues of the Child Jesus which I have seen. This opinion is affirmed by all who have seen them. The churches are beginning to be furnished with the images which the Sangleys make, and which we greatly lacked before; and considering the ability displayed by these people in reproducing the images which come from España, I believe that soon we shall not even miss those made in Flanders.²³

This letter indicates that the sangleys produced sculptures made of ivory and confirmed that the Spanish brought their own models and European goods; thus, they started to create figures in Zhangzhou copying Gothic images that were found in Europe at the time.²⁴ The Jesuit Pedro Chirino wrote in 1604 about the work of Father Antonio Sedeño, the premiere vice provincial of the Jesuits in the Philippines, who had encouraged the work of Chinese artists in the decoration of the churches in the Philippines:

He [Father Sedeño] found Chinese painters and brought them home to paint images, not just for our churches, but also for other churches of Manila and beyond; and he encouraged the *encomenderos* and friars to decorate their churches with these images... In this way he adorned with these images all the churches, almost all of which were of the mother of the lord.²⁵

One of the oldest ivory images that has been documented is the sculpture of *Our Goodness of the Rosary* made for a Dominican chapel in the convent of Santo Domingo. Due to its construction on marshy land and seismic movements, the chapel collapsed two years after its construction in 1590, and only the ivory sculpture survived. After this event, Aduarte wrote:

the roof covering it [the chapel] was cut into the shape of a wing serving as a coat and shade of our Lady; an event that gave rise to so much devotion among the people that later, when the church was renovated, and the convent had another Image with an ivory face made for that altar, many devotees requested the old image.²⁶

The new sculpture was made in 1593 by a Chinese artist, under the supervision of Captain Hernando de los Rios, and it is the oldest known in the Philippines. Again, Aduarte describes it in his work: "Our Lady is five *tercias* [one-third of a vara] tall, with ivory face, hands and Child, and is sovereignly beautiful."²⁷ The governor, Luis

Perez Dasmariñas, gave it to the Dominican order with the name of *La Naval* after the victories that were obtained against the Dutch because of its help.²⁸

The creation of these ivory sculptures by the sangleys endowed these pieces with a special Oriental look, usually because their eyes were slanted and had thick top eyelids, noses flattened at both lateral ends, small wrinkles on the necks, lengthened lobules on the ears, and feet that were plumper; rounded and voluptuous clouds in the base appeared mainly on the pieces in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Such a characteristic anatomy comes from Buddhist art that the Chinese originally derived from India, seen in the example of the Buddha from Mathura in the Guimet Museum in Paris.²⁹ For example, there is a clear intention to adapt the Buddhist iconography to the Christian style in the transformation of Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion in Buddhist art to the Catholic image of the Virgin Mary and Child.³⁰ The Guanyin from China is precisely the one that the sangleys took as a reference to make sculptures of the Virgin, although from its iconographic diversity, they chose its representation from *Songzi*, as a fertility symbol accompanied by her son. In the ivory sculptures from Zhangzhou that inspired the Hispano-Filipino sculptures, these representations appear sometimes with the baby and at other times with different attributes such as a roll, a scepter, and the rosary.

Furthermore, the trade of Indian-Portuguese ivories from the Portuguese colonies, Macao and Goa mainly, also reached the Philippines along with the Hispano-Filipino ivories, creating new iconographic models such as the Child Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In relation to the European influences on the Hispano-Filipino ivories, another key factor in the assimilation of the occidental iconographies in the Philippines is the arrival of sculptures from Flanders in the sixteenth century, provided by the Malinas school. One example, the *Santo Niño de Cebu*, was transported by Ferdinand Magellan to the Philippines.³¹ The characteristic elements of the sculptures from these workshops are its small size, clear forehead, and small eyes.³²

The Christian iconography seen in these sculptures was exported from Spain by missionaries through European engravings. These engraved works were generally Flemish, although they interpreted Italian work; thus Christoffel Plantin was widely accepted by sculptors as a model to follow.³³ However, the Andalusian sculptural school also impacted the Hispano-Filipino ivories, mainly focused around Juan Martínez Montañés, whose work was taken to New Spain and then to the Philippines, where images can be found of the Child Jesus



Fig. 5. Unknown artist, sculpture of San Juan Bautista, Philippines, eighteenth century. Castañares de Rioja, Spain.

surprisingly similar to his work. There is a reference image of this style that survives in the tabernacle in the cathedral in Seville.³⁴

Originally created for the adornment of the early Catholic churches in the Philippines, these ivory sculptures were soon exported to Mexico and Spain through the Manila galleon route. A selection of the most distinctive examples from the eighteenth century is discussed in the following section.

Artistic Heritage of the Transpacific Connections

Eighteenth-century examples of Hispano-Filipino ivories in overseas locations came mostly from prominent Philippine residents who wanted to provide extraordinary gifts to their places of birth. Artworks sent overseas by colonial residents include devotional donations, such as those commemorating anniversaries or deaths. Other gifts were social donations, whose aim was to strengthen familial wealth and to support the residents of one's place of origin. These included foundations established to help students, schoolteachers, hospitals, and other similar causes. Some gifts were a combination of both religious and social donations. The structure of these donations was similar to that practiced by colonial residents in the Americas who sent large quantities of money and artworks to Castilla.³⁵ Some of the donations that have been documented sprang from the donor's devotion and facilitated the foundation of chaplaincies and the transport of artworks as thanksgiving for success achieved during one's stay in the Philippines. In relation to the establishment of a chaplaincy, Manuel Silvestre Pérez del Camino, originally from the Riojan village of Castañares de Rioja, made a donation to build a chapel in his home village in the eighteenth century to expiate his sins and to consolidate the prestige of his

lineage.³⁶ Currently, this chapel has a small altarpiece dominated by a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe, signed by Miguel Cabrera. However, the most remarkable features in this chapel are the four alcoves where four out of six Hispano-Filipino sculptures were located that Perez del Camino sent from the Philippines and are currently preserved in the diocesan museum in Calahorra.³⁷ Given the size of the recesses, one might surmise that they were originally occupied by the following sculptures (all of them are 41 centimeters in height): San Juan Bautista (Fig. 5), San Miguel, Fernando III, the saint, and San José and the Baby Jesus (these last two are in one group).³⁸

Another interesting legacy is that of Francisco de Samaniego y

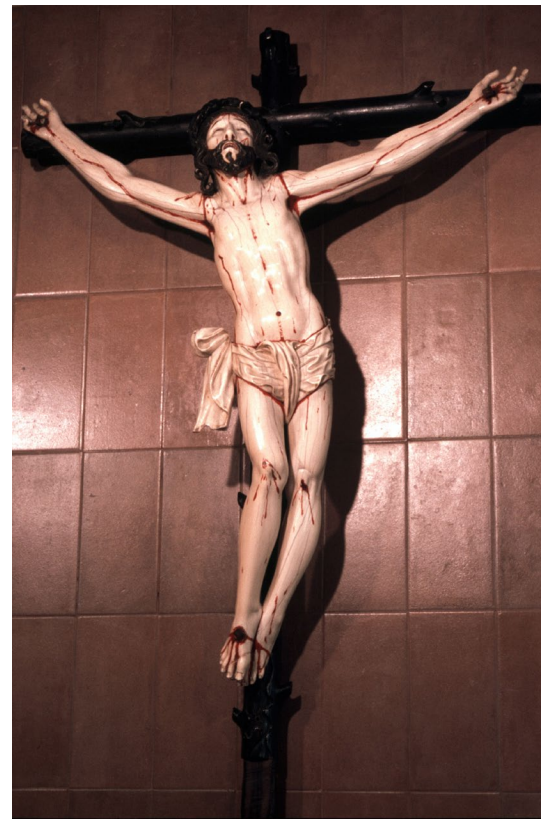


Fig. 6. Unknown artist, crucifix, Philippines, eighteenth century. Caicedo de Yuso, Álava, Spain.

Tuesta. There is not much information available, but it is known that he was born in 1568 in Caicedo de Yuso, Álava, and died in 1670 in Manila. There must have been a delay in the repatriation of properties from the Philippines to Castilla given that the reference date for this decree was 1783. Not only does the content of this decree describe the pieces that Francisco de Samaniego donated to his native village (an ivory crucifix, a silver monstrance, and a silver cross that currently is missing); it also reveals that the legacy arrived in the galleon *Asunción*, as well as its valuation. With respect to the crucifix, the decree records its dimensions and features, noting that it was once located in a chapel near the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, which was then in ruins.³⁹ The European influence on the crucifix is particularly evident in the eyes and nose of the human figure. But the most interesting part of this sculpture is the mark of the artisan, unfortunately illegible, on the right foot, which is unusual in Hispano-Filipino ivories, which are normally anonymous. The set is completed with a sacred receptacle in filigree (Figs. 6 and 7).

Any discussion of donated ivory sculptures is incomplete without mention of the figure of Santa Rosa of Lima in the convent of Agustinas Recoletas in Pamplona, Spain. This artwork was donated by one of the most influential patrons of the viceroyalty of New Spain, Don Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, who was born in Fitero, Navarra, in 1600.⁴⁰ The recently beatified bishop of Puebla de los Angeles and Osma possessed a collection of ivories that have been conserved in Spain and Mexico, including one that still has the polychrome painting intact. According to documents in the archive of the convent, it passed to Doña Teresa de Irurre, who donated it in 1731 to the religious group.⁴¹ Although there is still much to learn about the carving techniques that might be useful in determining chronology, the stylistic correspondencies of these Hispano-Filipino ivories in collections in Spain, Mexico, and the Philippines are evidence of the formal and iconographic transculturation that the sculptural models underwent as they circulated in the Manila galleon route.⁴²



Fig. 7. Unknown artist, sacred receptacle, Philippines, eighteenth century. Caicedo de Yuso, Álava, Spain.