

The importance of ivory in Philippine culture

Esmond Martin, Chryssee Martin and Lucy Vigne

Abstract

Ivory has been an important part of the culture and fabric of Filipino society for centuries and continues to be significant today. Ivory carvers still make ecclesiastical statues (*santos*), such as sculptures of the Christ Child and saints. Tusks continue to be smuggled into the country from Africa; dealers and craftsmen in Manila purchase them for USD 446 a kg for an average-sized tusk. The carving takes place in several parts of the country. Only some *santos* are seen in the shops in Manila. Filipino families and clergy buy most of them directly from dealers or from the carvers. Thus the number of ivory items seen in the retail outlets does not accurately indicate the true size of the ivory industry.

This survey in Manila in December 2010 and January 2011 found 20 retail outlets offering for sale 264 ivory items. Of these, 97 were locally made, all *santos* (16 carved since 1990), and 133 were foreign made (73 made since 1990), Filipinos having smuggled the recent items into the country, especially from China. There were 34 unidentified items also.

Due to the high price of raw tusks some dealers swindle their customers by knowingly selling new *santos* as antiques, while other disreputable vendors sell bone and resin *santos* pretending that they are ivory. Unlike mainland China and Hong Kong, where many items are carved nowadays from mammoth ivory, there are almost no mammoth items for sale in Manila.

Law enforcement of the ivory trade in the Philippines is generally poor. From 2005 to 2009 large consignments of tusks were sent to the Philippines in transit to other countries in Asia. The Philippines authorities seized several of these consignments, but individual government officers stole some of these tusks to sell to dealers in Manila and elsewhere in the country. Individual Filipinos smuggle smaller numbers of tusks into the Philippines, especially from the Middle East and Asia. Appropriate inspections by government officers of the retail outlets in Manila rarely take place, and more importantly there are inadequate checks of ivory in transit and a lack of security for confiscated stocks.

Key words: Philippines, ivory trade, *santos*

Résumé

L'ivoire est une partie importante de la culture des Philippines depuis des siècles et continue à être important aujourd'hui. Les sculpteurs de l'ivoire fabriquent toujours des divinités religieuses (*santos*), telles que celles de l'Enfant Jésus et des saints. Les défenses continuent à être introduites en contrebande dans le pays en provenance d'Afrique; les marchands et les artisans à Manille les achètent 446 dollars le kilo pour une défense de taille moyenne. La sculpture a lieu dans plusieurs régions du pays. On ne voit que quelques *santos* dans les magasins à Manille. Les familles philippines et le clergé en achètent la plupart directement des marchands ou des sculpteurs. Ainsi, le nombre d'articles en ivoire vus dans les magasins de détail n'indique pas avec précision la taille réelle de l'industrie de l'ivoire.

Dans notre étude à Manille, en décembre 2010 et en janvier 2011, nous avons trouvé 20 points de vente offrant 264 articles en ivoire. Parmi eux, 97 avaient été fabriqués localement, tous des *santos* (16 sculptés depuis 1990), et 133 avaient été sculptés à l'étranger (73 faits depuis 1990), les Philippines ayant fait entrer clandestinement les articles récents dans le pays, surtout de la Chine. Il y avait aussi 34 articles non identifiés.

En raison du prix élevé des défenses non travaillées, certains marchands trompent leurs clients en vendant de nouveaux *santos* comme des antiques, alors que d'autres vendeurs peu scrupuleux vendent des divinités religieuses faites d'os et de résine en prétendant qu'elles sont faites en ivoire. Contrairement à la Chine con-

tinentale et Hong Kong, où de nombreux articles sont de nos jours sculptés à partir de l'ivoire de mammouth, il n'y a presque pas d'articles de mammouth à vendre à Manille.

L'application de la loi du commerce de l'ivoire aux Philippines est généralement médiocre. De 2005 à 2009 de grandes quantités de défenses ont été envoyées aux Philippines en transit vers d'autres pays en Asie. Les autorités philippines ont saisi certains de ces lots, mais des agents du Gouvernement ont volé quelques-unes de ces défenses pour les vendre à des marchands à Manille et ailleurs dans le pays. Les Philippines individuels font entrer clandestinement de petites quantités de défenses aux Philippines, surtout en provenance du Moyen-Orient et d'Asie. Des contrôles appropriés des points de vente à Manille par les agents du Gouvernement se font rarement, et surtout il y a des contrôles inadéquats pour l'ivoire en transit et un manque de sécurité pour les stocks confisqués.

Introduction and methodology

From 2005 to 2009 several large consignments of illicit tusks were sent from Africa to the Philippines where they were seized by customs officers. The question was whether the Philippines was an end market for ivory carving or only an entrepot for raw ivory en route to other countries in eastern Asia. In 1982 we (Martin and Martin) visited the Philippines and heard there were active ivory carvers, but we were unsure if they were continuing their work after the 1990 CITES ivory ban. Therefore, from 24 December 2010 to 3 January 2011 we carried out an ivory study in and around Manila. We visited the retail outlets to count the ivory items on display for sale, the types of items, their age, where they were made, their prices and the nationalities of the customers. We interviewed traders selling raw ivory to carvers to find out the origin and prices of the tusks. We learned from traders and vendors about ivory carving and about sales of items today and in the recent past. We also interviewed an ivory carver to find out the details of his profession. A

prominent ivory historian and author living in Manila, Ramon Villegas, informed us about the history of ivory in the Philippines and the importance of ivory religious statues to the cultural identity of Filipinos.

The legal position of the ivory trade in the Philippines

The Philippines joined CITES in 1981. In 1990 CITES prohibited all commercial international trade in new, raw and worked ivory items amongst the Parties. The most recent Philippine legislation dealing with the internal trade in wildlife products is Republic Act No. 9147 'An Act providing for the conservation and protection of Wildlife Resources and their habitat...' This Act, published in 2004, stipulates that wholesalers and retailers of wildlife items must register their objects with the government. Persons convicted of illegally dealing in wildlife items receive a minimum of six years and one day to twelve years in prison and/or a fine of Philippine peso (PHP) 100,000 (USD 2,272 in late December 2010) to PHP 1,000,000.



© Chrysee Martin

Figure 1. A sword handle from the region of Mindanao, about 50 years old, was priced at USD 1,222 in a Manila antique shop.

In practice most craftsmen and vendors of ivory items in the Manila area do not possess the proper government registration. They would be very unlikely to receive such registration, as most of the new ivory items are crafted from recently smuggled tusks. The owners would usually have difficulties in proving the age of older pieces. Furthermore, the probability of being convicted in a court of law is so slim that most vendors obviously do not bother to obtain registration.

The government claims that officials, including those from the National Bureau of Investigation, carry out wildlife inspections of the shops in Manila every three months to ensure wildlife items are legal. The shopkeepers apparently seem to know in advance, however, when the authorities are about to conduct a raid and consequently hide their ivory items (Antonio

Manila, Regional Technical Developer, Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, Manila, pers. comm., November 2011). Furthermore, the majority of newly carved ivory items are crafted in small workshops in private homes in rural areas and sold directly to customers, thus avoiding retail outlets, making it very difficult for authorities to find these items. Thus hardly any salespersons in Manila or the rural areas are arrested for dealing in ivory.

The government rightly asserts that very few ivory items have proper documents; therefore, almost all the ivory objects offered for sale in the Manila area—old and new—are illegal (Manila, pers. comm., November 2011).

The history of the ivory trade in the Philippines

Scholars do not know precisely when the international ivory trade started in the Philippines, but ships plying the South China Sea from the 10th century carried ivory and probably sold some to Filipino traders. An internal ivory trade has existed for centuries, certainly before the Spanish period (1565–1898), with ivory from elephants in the Sulu Islands in southern Philippines. Craftsmen made items such as ivory jewellery, handles for weapons, *santos* and even erotic accessories (Jose & Villegas, 2004).

When the Spanish established settlements in Cebu in 1565 and Manila in 1571 they began to build churches, which required *santos*. From the end of the 16th century to the early 17th century more than 30 Chinese junks put to harbour in Manila every year carrying luxury goods, including elephant tusks. In addition, a few ships came from what is now Thailand and Cambodia bringing in ivory. Some of the Chinese traders settled in the port towns and were known as *sangleys* ('traders' in Chinese). Many originated from the Fujian province; some were skilled in carving, producing religious ivory carvings for the Roman Catholic Spanish. They employed apprentice Filipinos who later branched out on their own becoming the majority of the carvers (Ramon Villegas, pers. comm., December 2010). In 1593 the Governor in Manila commissioned a *sangleys* to carve 'Our Lady of the Rosary with the Child Jesus' which can be seen today in Manila's Santo Domingo Church. Church leaders gave *sangleys* Spanish lithographs to execute in ivory and wood. The elite Spanish in the Philip-



© Esmond Martin

Figure 2. An 18th-century 18-cm tall Madonna and Child, full ivory, was selling for USD 2,727 in Manila.

piners also brought in artists from Europe to teach the *sangleys* and Filipino carvers how to make Christian statues using ivory and wood. From the 17th century onwards Filipinos converted to Roman Catholicism and constructed churches and chapels throughout the country. This caused the demand for ivory religious figures to expand considerably in the 17th and 18th centuries (Gatbonton, 1983; St Aubyn, 1987; Florendo, 2001; Jose & Villegas, 2004).

The Spanish galleon trade (1565 to 1815) connecting the Philippines with Mexico and Spain further boosted the production of religious sculptures in the Philippines for export to Mexico and South American cities for their new cathedrals and churches, and for the wealthy. Manila was central to the galleon trade and thus could obtain the largest tusks from Africa and India to make into sizeable religious statues. Macau was a secondary market for the galleon trade, having a much smaller population, so traders there received smaller tusks for their religious ivory carvings. Many of the carvings of *santos* found later in the western world have Chinese faces suggesting they were carved in China, but in fact they were sculpted in the Philippines by *sangleys* or by Filipinos who produced Catholic statues with both western and eastern features. The specific style of ivory carving produced by the artisans in the Philippines is now widely accepted by art historians to be among the finest in the former Spanish territories (Florendo, 2001; Gatbonton, 1983).

Craftsmen in the Philippines made other ivory items for local consumption and for export via Spanish galleon, such as inlaid chests, miniature portraits, travelling desks, snuff boxes and billiard balls. With the end of the galleon trade, the ivory carvers concentrated on the local market, especially for private individuals who were becoming wealthier, as opposed to the churches, which were by then well stocked with *santos*.

In 1869 the first formal ivory carving training school was set up by the *Sociedad de Artes y Oficios* in Manila, with later ones in the 1880s, including a government institute. Despite these training establishments the quality of ivory carving declined in the latter 19th century. Gatbonton (1983) wrote: 'The 19th century saw the beginning of an irreversible trend towards decadence that the over-elaboration of religious imagery generated. The more the artisan aimed at realism, the more distant from art his craft

became. The *ninos* [images of the Christ Child] of the 19th century became veritable dolls, with saccharine smiles and a bland prettiness.' Meanwhile the fashion for new *santos* was declining as they were considered out of date (Jose & Villegas, 2004). Then, as a result of the Spanish-American war in the Philippines, many churches were burnt resulting in the destruction and looting of religious objects from 1899 to 1902 (Jose & Villegas, 2004).

World War II again resulted in the massive destruction of parts of the Philippines, especially in Manila. After the war, priority was given to reconstruction of the country, and the new elite was not particularly interested in religious sculptures as they wanted to follow a more modern, western lifestyle. Filipinos who still wanted ivory *santos* for their home altars bought old ones at low prices from formerly wealthy families who were facing hard times due to the war. Religious leaders in need of money for church repairs sold antique ivory *santos* to shops that catered to visiting foreign collectors. The churches replaced them with modern copies in wood and ivory using old ivory billiard balls and ivory bracelets at a time when raw ivory was not being imported due to poverty after the war years (Jose & Villegas, 2004).

After the war, one ivory carver/shopkeeper, Maximo Vicente, was especially responsible for resurrecting high quality ivory *santos* carving, according to vendors. He had been active before the war and afterwards persevered with high standards of workmanship. His Manila workshop employed 20 to 30 artisans, many of whom came from the Bicol region in south-east Luzon (the main island of the Philippines). After he died in the 1980s, some of these ivory carvers set up their own businesses in carving and decorating ivory *santos*.

Ivory from Africa was still legally obtainable through the 1970s and 1980s, which were active decades for the making and selling of ivory *santos*, as well as some other items such as inlay work for furniture and boxes. Civic leaders wanted to recreate their Spanish heritage, especially in the old parts of the cities that had been devastated during the war. Thus, many new *santos* were carved for churches and recently restored houses. The small *santos* were often made completely from ivory, while only the head and hands of the larger ones were carved out of ivory due to the expense of the raw material. Meanwhile the antique shops in Manila continued to display and sell

antique ivory *santos* with strong sales to American dealers, especially from California.

By the time of the international ivory ban in 1990 there was a shortage of old religious *santos* for sale in the Philippines. Thieves had exploited this scarcity by stealing ivory *santos* from many churches and selling them to dealers in the Philippines (Jose & Villegas, 2004). Dealers tried to increase the supply of religious images for their shops in the Philippines by buying back old ones from abroad, such as from the USA, South America, Spain and Portugal. Some dealers went out of business in the 1990s and the early 2000s due to the lack of ivory *santos*.

The status of ivory in Filipino culture today

Santos made out of ivory are still in great demand in the Philippines because the colour white remains especially significant in the country. Even before the Spanish era, Filipinos preferred white materials, such as shells, limestone, bones and ivory. White represents spiritual goodness, purity, virtue and power. In Catholicism, white dresses are worn by girls taking their first holy communion and for their weddings. Additionally, Filipinos believe that elephants represent power, wisdom and longevity (Jose & Villegas, 2004).

Most of the high quality *santos* are either all ivory or with faces, hands and feet of ivory. Painters usually colour their hair, facial features and clothes, as in the past. Filipino people revere these religious *santos* in their homes, churches and at public processions. These statues are an integral and important part of the culture of the Philippines and are the best known works of art in the country. They are also collected all over the world by art lovers. As in the past, the most popular *santos* are the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Virgin and Child, the Baby Jesus/Christ Child called *Nino*, Christ on the Cross, and many different saints, mainly from the religious orders in the country. The *Nino* was the most common religious image historically and is still frequently seen today. A few other items are crafted from ivory, especially for inlay work, but this is insignificant compared to the carvings of *santos*.



© Chrysee Martin

Figure 3. Old ivory religious statues are often for sale in antique shops in Manila.

Results of survey work on the ivory markets in Manila

Sources of raw ivory

Africa is the major source for new tusks for the craftsmen in the Philippines, a country of 94 million people. This is all illegal ivory, smuggled out of different African regions. The Philippines are used as a transit point for some of the large ivory consignments moving en route to eastern Asia, usually destined for markets in China, perhaps Thailand, and other places (CITES, 2007a). There is not the demand for such huge quantities of tusks for the local Filipino market. Some of these large transit consignments have been seized at the country's ports. For example, in 2005

and 2006 the Philippine government made three large seizures of tusks from Africa. In 2006, 3.7 tonnes of the confiscated ivory subsequently ‘disappeared’, in other words was stolen, from the Customs department; according to shop owners we interviewed it was sold to ivory dealers and carvers in the Philippines. Subsequently the government recovered some of the tusks and several officials were prosecuted (CITES, 2007b; Milliken et al., 2009). In 2009 TRAFFIC reported that there had been two more large-scale in-transit seizures of tusks in the Philippines in that year that weighed 4,861 kg—a particularly sizeable amount (Milliken et al., 2009; CITES, 2011). Moreover, in March 2010 the Environment Secretary for the Philippines announced that 793 kg of tusks, part of the 209 seizures made by Customs and subsequently turned over to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), had gone missing. The Director of DENR admitted that there had been ‘news going around that one of our personnel had just bought two cars and now had a beautiful house’. According to the Environment Secretary, he was bringing administrative charges against a Park Superintendent in connection with the loss of the tusks (Papa, 2010). Some of these tusks ended up in the hands of dealers and craftsmen in the Philippines, which resulted in the police raiding some of the artisans’ workshops and confiscating some of the newly carved *santos* (Villegas, pers. comm., November 2011).

Small quantities of African tusks have been coming directly into the Philippines, according to shop owners in Manila. For example, according to an antique dealer, around 2005 a Filipino diplomat based in North Africa purchased tusks that originated in Sudan and sent them by air to the Philippines. Muslim Filipinos, many from the southern island of Mindanao, who make the Hajj to Saudi Arabia, purchase ivory items there that originate in Africa. They also purchase tusks (one shopkeeper said some came via Somalia), bringing them back to the Philippines. They openly offer this ivory to dealers and carvers in the greater Manila area. Some 5–10 dealers in this area regularly buy tusks in this way. There are approximately 8–9 million Filipino expatriates living world-wide (1 million in Saudi Arabia alone) and when they return

home, some of them carry African raw ivory as well as worked ivory carved especially in China and Africa. Thailand was mentioned as a minor source of ivory. People sell to dealers, for example, ivory figures and netsukes from China. These can be seen in certain Manila antique and gift shops. Some Filipino sailors bring back African busts and occasionally tusks to sell as well and also some ivory items from China. Within the country, another source of ivory for the craftsmen is broken religious statues stolen from churches (Jose & Villegas, 2004). The main source of larger amounts of ivory being sold to craftsmen and shop owners has probably been government employees with access to Customs warehouses.



© Chrysee Martin

Figure 4. A 1920s 40-cm figure of the Madonna and Child (before being clothed) with head and hands of ivory was selling in Manila for USD 2,727.

Wholesale prices of raw ivory in Manila

Shopkeepers who deal in ivory told us that they buy tusks at different prices depending on weight. In 2010 those less than 5 kg were on average USD 272/kg, while those weighing 5–10 kg cost USD 409/kg, 10–20 kg tusks were USD 625/kg and the average price for all sizes was USD 446 a kg using the exchange rate of PHP 44 to USD 1 at the time of the survey. This compares with the 2009 price on average (for all sizes) of USD 320, according to the shopkeepers (Stiles et al., 2011).

Ivory carvers and workshops in the Philippines

Ivory artisans are scattered throughout the Philippines. A few carve with chisels only, while the majority also employ electric drills as well. After an item is carved, it is sanded and then often embellished with paint, especially the *santos*, which are the most commonly made items. Vendors said a few dagger makers use ivory to craft handles for the traditional south-east Asian sword/knife, called a *kris*, on Mindanao Island.



© Esmond Martin

Figure 5. A 19th-century figure of St John (without clothes) with ivory head and hands, 35-cm high, was priced at USD 3,636 in Manila.

According to Villegas and another prominent shop owner in Manila, there are perhaps 10 to 20 ivory artisans still active in the Bicol region. Most work out of their homes and they speak their own language, Bicolano.

Often all the adults in the family carve or finish wood and ivory carvings; sometimes women smooth the items with sandpaper. Today these craftsmen mostly make ivory *santos* to sell in Manila's shops, but do not work full-time on ivory, but only when they get the raw material. In addition there are craftsmen who only do restoration work.

About a two-hour drive north of Manila is the heavily populated Province of Pampanga. The Kapampangan people have a tradition of boat building and carving *santos* for churches. There were many more ivory carvers in this region in the 1960s than today due to the impetus given by a European dealer who hired them to carve religious images to be sold in Italy and Germany. In 2010 there were perhaps 20 part-time ivory carvers working privately from their homes. They also make wooden *santos* and furniture when there is no ivory available (Villegas, pers. comm., December 2010).

For Greater Manila, the number of ivory artisans, according to shop owners and craftsmen is not clear, as most work from their homes, but estimates ranged from 12 to 50 according to vendors. What is certain is that nearly all of them work only part-time in ivory, mostly carving religious images. While some of these craftsmen sell their leftover ivory chips and powder to shopkeepers, others buy ivory chips from the shopkeepers for PHP 6,000 (USD 136) to PHP 10,000 (USD 227) per kg to inlay billiard cues and furniture, or for repair work. As elsewhere, when they do not have ivory they use wood for carving *santos* and to make furniture, usually from a *narra* tree (*Pterocarpus indicus*) from the rosewood family. Sometimes they use *molave* wood (*Vitex parviflora*), obtained from old house posts; this was the more common wood for *santos* used before the 19th century.

We interviewed an ivory carver who was visiting a shop in Manila where he sometimes sells his new ivory religious images. His name was Michelangelo, aged 18 years, and he lives in his family's house and carves in the family workshop, a three-hour bus ride south-east of Manila in the Bicol region. He started working with his father, a painter, at 9 years of age. He completed his primary and secondary education and in 2010 was attending his first year in college. Michelangelo makes *santos*—both full ivory and those with just ivory heads and hands. Priests, shopkeepers and collectors give him ivory to make into items for them. He uses chisels and electric drills to carve his

ivory items, while his mother sandpapers the objects and his father and brothers do the final painting. He is paid between PHP 300 (USD 6.82) to PHP 500 (USD 11.36) per cm for an item. Sometimes he is given a deposit for his work. He takes about four to five days to make a 10-cm head of a *santo*, earning about PHP 4,000 (USD 91). He works six days a week and claimed to earn PHP 20,000 (USD 455) to PHP 30,000 (USD 682) a month carving ivory, wood and stone, which is higher than the minimum earnings of about USD 230 a month in Manila.

According to several prominent antique shop owners and art historians, the quality of new ivory carvings is not as good as those produced from the 1960s to the 1980s because the artisans do not spend enough time in the finishing process. Some people told us that they even had to return their purchased *santos* back to the carvers in order to improve the workmanship. Some shopkeepers sell cruder religious statues to members of the new middle class and expatriate Filipino labourers who do not mind having poorer quality items.

Although it is impossible to say how much new raw ivory is carved on average each year in the Philippines, as it is illegal, one major shopkeeper/dealer believed that perhaps 400 kg of large tusks weighing on average 20 kg each might have been consumed per year recently, but he could not estimate the figure for small tusks.

Retail outlets and prices of worked ivory in Manila

We conducted an extensive search for retail outlets selling ivory items in Manila and found 20 shops, but no ivory specialty shops or street stalls (see Table 1). We counted on display for sale during our survey only 264 ivory items (141 made before 1990, 89 made after 1990 and 34 unidentifiable). There were, however, significantly more new items, especially *santos*, commissioned by priests and other Filipinos that never go to retail shops.

Twelve of the 20 ivory shops were in the Ermita area, where the less wealthy tourists traditionally stay in rather seedy hotels. Like other shops in this area, the outlets with ivory were small and dingy. Ten were antique shops, one was a hotel shop, and the other a gift shop. We saw virtually no rare or expensive ivory items. This section of central Manila is run-down and retains an unsavoury atmosphere. The buildings,

including the antique shops, are mostly post-World War II and are generally unkempt, as is the whole area. The foreign exchange bureaus in the area sometimes offer unrealistic rates, cheating the tourists. Touts roam the streets for business, which are taken over at night by prostitutes. Many premises have armed guards protecting them. The remaining eight outlets selling worked ivory were scattered in the city. In total in Manila, there were 16 art and antique shops, two hotel shops and two gift shops selling worked ivory.

Of the total 264 ivory items, we calculated—based on what the vendors said and from their appearance—89 had been recently crafted (i.e. after 1990). Among the recent items, 69 were Chinese objects (27 human and 13 animal figures/figurines, 10 netsukes, 9 charms and 10 miscellaneous objects); there were also 4 African items (2 rings, one human figure and bust) and 16 Filipino items (*santos*) (Tables 2 and 3).

Of the 264 items seen, 97 were Filipino-made *santos* (Table 2). The remaining items were mostly foreign-made. Of these, 107 were Chinese (34 human figures/figurines, 21 animal figures/figurines, 13 charms, 10 netsukes and 29 miscellaneous items). There were 15 old Indian items (paintings on ivory plaques), 6 African items (2 rings, a human figure, a bust, a pendant and a bangle), 4 old Japanese items (2 bachi, a human figurine and a charm), and an old Thai item (a knife with an ivory handle). There were 34 items that were not clearly identified (Table 3).

The most expensive objects were the large (over 20 cm) antique well-carved *santos* (Table 4). The highest asking price was for a 28-cm 19th century St Joseph with Christ Child for USD 10,227. The lowest priced objects were Indian ivory paintings that measured 15 x 7 cm probably from the mid-1980s for USD 85 each and the recently crafted Chinese charms for USD 92 each.

The main customers for the religious objects, both old and recently made, were mostly Filipinos, both residents and those expatriates wishing to have an object that reminded them of home. Most of the older *santos* are purchased by wealthy old Filipino families. Some new wealthy Filipinos now can afford antique *santos* but prefer to purchase new ones because they believe that the antiques possess evil spirits or negativity. If they already own such antiques, they sometimes attempt to eliminate the evil spirits by putting them into the bright sun or washing them or even getting them blessed in a church (Villegas,

pers. comm., December 2010). Tourists, especially from the USA, Europe and Japan, usually buy less expensive ivory items, such as objects from China.

As well as ivory items, one shop sells ivory powder by the bag and had 10 kg in store. He said he sells the powder to a Japanese landscape designer who regularly comes to Manila to collect and take it back with him to Japan; the shop owner presumed he uses it to fertilize his plants.

Ivory substitutes and forgeries

Filipinos, occasionally offer mammoth ivory items and tusks that they have purchased in Hong Kong to shop owners and carvers in Manila. They only offer a small number of these tusks as there is little demand for them, selling them for PHP 6,000 (USD 136) to PHP 15,000 (USD 341). Filipino ivory carvers say mammoth ivory is of poorer quality than elephant ivory, with a drier texture and less of a shine. They also find it more difficult to carve because it is harder and tends to crack. We only found one mammoth ivory item, a 1.25-cm thick bangle in an art and antique shop, probably made in China. Typical of mammoth ivory, it was not entirely white with a brown tinge on the inner side. We were told the price was USD 136.

As ivory is expensive, Filipino craftsmen have resorted to other whitish materials to make *santos*. In the 1990s cow and buffalo bone were used, while more recently artisans have been using a resin, especially in Cebu (Florendo, 2001). Some Manila shopkeepers said that fish bones were crafted into small *santos*. We saw a few of these, but as fish bones are porous they were probably made from other materials. Some vendors tried to sell these ivory substitutes as ivory, either as they did not know, or because they were trying to deceive their customers to make more money.

There is an active trade in fake or forged antique ivory religious statues that are actually carved out of new ivory and made to look old. Some shop owners in Manila sell these, pretending they are antiques, but experts can tell the difference as the fakes are not so well carved and the style can be different. They also tend to be less expensive, sometimes half the price of similar real antiques. In the past, forgeries were exported in large number by an infamous European dealer in the 1960s—who employed carvers in Pampanga and later in Bicol when he needed more carvers—selling *santos* in Europe pretending that they were 17th and 18th

century Baroque artworks; eventually he was exposed (Villegas, pers. comm., December 2010).

Vendors' views on the future of the ivory trade in the Philippines

The managers and owners of shops selling ivory in Manila expected their ivory business to remain stable or decline slightly in the near future. This would probably be the case also for the more plentiful ivory items commissioned directly to the carvers by the priests and other Filipinos. Most vendors think that the price of ivory tusks will increase and that only the most successful artists will be employed to carve them. However, vendors anticipated that these artists will no doubt be pressured to rush the carving for a faster turnover and sales to cover their costs. They said that the increasing price of tusks and subsequent probable decline in popularity for new ivory items, due in part to the media campaign against the illegal killing of elephants, will decrease demand. The number of shops selling ivory has been declining since the 1980s, and vendors believe this trend is likely to continue. On the other hand, some vendors thought there could be an easing of the international CITES trade ban on tusks allowing traders to obtain tusks from African elephants that die of natural causes; they hoped this might result in the decrease in the price of tusks.

Conclusion

The Philippines probably has at least 50 part-time ivory carvers, still practising when ivory is available, scattered throughout the country. This is an average number for countries with ivory carving in south-east Asia, higher than Cambodia, Laos, Macau and Vietnam, and lower than Thailand and Myanmar. The number of outlets selling ivory and the number of items counted for retail sale was low, however, which is misleading regarding the size of the Filipino ivory market. The reason is that many newly-carved ivory *santos* never get into the shops because Filipino families and church dignitaries commission them directly from artisans or dealers.

Unlike other south-east Asian countries, the majority of ivory items, including the commissioned ones, are bought by Filipinos as nearly all are religious statues that continue to play an important part in their culture; few foreigners are interested in them. Ivory

has been an important part of the Philippine culture and identity, especially in the Roman Catholic religion, for hundreds of years. Ivory is strongly rooted in the way of life of many Filipinos and therefore it is most likely that some carving and trade in small amounts of ivory will continue.

There has been concern amongst some wildlife conservationists that the Philippines was becoming a major consumer of tusks for domestic sales due to the large consignments of raw ivory seized recently by the Filipino authorities. These tusks were travelling in transit to other countries in East Asia. Some of these tusks have been stolen in recent years from those stocks seized in transit by customs officials and later sold to Filipino ivory dealers and carvers. Many other large shipments are no doubt not detected and carry on to their final destination countries.

Lack of effective law enforcement in the Philippines is a major problem. Ivory traders are using the Philippines as an entrepot to move large quantities of tusks from Africa to destinations in other parts of Asia. This smuggling appears to be relatively easy to carry out due to the lack of law enforcement at the ports, according to shop owners selling ivory.

Some vendors also admitted that government officials sometimes come to their shops to sell tusks. Additionally, sometimes Filipino expatriates, sailors and traders, especially from the southern part of the country, illegally import smaller amounts of tusks and a few ivory items from Africa and the Middle East into the Philippines, and they also sometimes bring back a few newly crafted ivory items from East Asia, mostly made in China, for retail sale. We counted only 89 recently-made ivory items (69 being Chinese) carved after 1990 out of a total of 264 items in our survey in 20 retail outlets in Manila. This is not significant enough for officials to warrant putting their scarce resources into regular shop inspections for new illegal items, although an up-dated official inspection is important to warn vendors against buying and selling ivory. What is urgently needed is a crackdown at the Bureau of Customs, which is responsible for seizing and securing illegal ivory consignments. Also, law enforcement officials must appeal to Church authorities and their congregations not to commission new ivory religious items carved from illegal imports of tusks. These are the highest priority law enforcement efforts required.

Table 1. Types of retail outlets and number of ivory items surveyed in Manila in December 2010 and January 2011

Type	No.	No. of items	Av. no. of items/outlet
Antique shop	16	190	12
Gift shop	2	65	32
Hotel shop	2	9	5
TOTAL	20	264	13

Table 2. Types of ivory items for retail sale in Manila in December 2010 and January 2011

Type	No.	% of total
Santo	97	37
Human figures/figurine	39	15
Animal figure/figurine	23	9
Painting	15	6
Netsuke	11	4
Charm	10	4
Bangle	5	2
Unidentified	34	13
Misc.	30	11
TOTAL	264	100

Table 3. Origin and age of ivory items surveyed in Manila in December 2010 and January 2011

Item	No. old (pre-1990)	No. recent (post-1990)	Total	Origin
<i>Santo</i>	81	16	97	Philippines
Human figurine	7	27	34	China
Animal figurine	8	13	21	China
Charm	4	9	13	China
Netsuke	0	10	10	China
Necklace	7	3	10	China
Magic ball	0	4	4	China
Cigarette holder	0	3	3	China
Misc.	12	0	12	China
Jewellery	2	2	4	Africa
Human figure	0	2	2	Africa
Miniature painting	15	0	15	India
Bachi	2	0	2	Japan
Human figurine	1	0	1	Japan
Charm	1	0	1	Japan
Knife	1	0	1	Thailand
Unidentified	-	-	34	Unknown
TOTAL	141	89	264	

Table 4. Retail prices for recently-made ivory items seen in Manila in December 2010 and January 2011

Item	Size in cm	Where made	Range in USD	Av. USD price
JEWELLERY				
Necklace, beads	50	China	-	102
FIGURINES				
Animal	5	China	86-227	188
Human	5	China	102-455	243
<i>Santo</i> head	5	Philippines	341-795	568
<i>Santo</i> head and two hands	5 (head)	Philippines	454-1,023	738
<i>Santo</i>	11-20	Philippines	568-7,000	1,852
Bust	15-20	Africa	-	1,818
MISC.				
Charm	5	China	45-152	92
Cigarette holder	10	China	-	123
Netsuke	5	China	68-238	102
Name seal	6	China	-	45

NB: USD 1= PHP 44

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank The Aspinall Foundation and Elephant Family for funding fieldwork in the Philippines. We are also grateful to Nigel Hunter, Dan Stiles and Ramon Villegas for their helpful comments on the manuscript.

References

- CITES (2007a). CoP 14 Doc. 53.2 *Monitoring of Illegal Trade in Ivory and other Elephant Specimens*. Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, The Hague (Netherlands), 3-15 June 2007. Geneva: CITES Secretariat.
- CITES (2007b). CoP 14 Doc. 53.1 *Trade in Elephant Specimens*. Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, The Hague (Netherlands), 3-15 June 2007. Geneva: CITES Secretariat.
- CITES (2011). SC 61 Doc. 44.2 Annex 1. *Status of Elephant Populations, Levels of Illegal Killing and the Trade in Ivory: A Report to the Standing Committee of CITES*. Sixty-first meeting of the Standing Committee, Geneva, 15-19 August 2011, Geneva: CITES Secretariat.
- Florendo, A. (2001). *Santo Nino. The Holy Child Devotion in the Philippines*. Congregacion del Santisimo Nombre del Nino Jesus, Manila.
- Gatbonton, E. (1983). *Philippine Religious Carvings in Ivory*. Ministry of Human Settlements, Intramuros Administration, Manila.
- Jose, R. and Villegas, R. (2004). *Power + Faith + Image. Philippine Art in Ivory from the 16th to the 19th century*. Makati City, Philippines: Ayala Foundation.
- Milliken, T., Burn R. and Sangalakula, L. (2009). *The Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) and the Illicit Trade in Ivory: a report to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES*. Report to the CITES CoP 15 Doc. 44.1 Annex.
- Papa, A. (2010). Seized elephant tusk stolen (Philippines/Tanzania). *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 3 March.
- St Aubyn, F. (ed). (1987). *Ivory: an International History and Illustrated Survey*. Harry Abrams, New York.
- Stiles, D., Martin, E. and Vigne L. (2011). 'Exaggerated Ivory Prices can be harmful to Elephants'. *Swara* 34(4):18-22.