

GOLD AND WOOD: MATERIAL CULTURE AND RITUAL IN PRECOLONIAL AND
CATHOLIC PHILIPPINES

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By

Madison C. Smith

Thesis Committee:

Vina Lanzona, Chairperson

Barbara Watson Andaya

Christine Beaulé

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Abstract

When Ferdinand Magellan landed in what would become the Philippine archipelago, the crew of the circumnavigation voyage was struck by the amount of gold that the indigenous peoples carried. The subsequent interactions between Magellan's crew and the indigenous peoples of the Visayan islands set the stage for over 300 years of Spanish colonialism and Christianization. However, they did not just find gold in the Philippines. The Spanish also encountered a rich culture that included animist elements, and wood was an important material for the indigenous communities of the archipelago.

There have been a plethora of works that have addressed the contexts of indigenous resistance and negotiation in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period, and this work attempts to investigate the presence of this negotiation within the context of material cultures. Through the materials of gold and wood, I argue that the use of material culture shows clear indications of this syncretic process during the Spanish colonial period.

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Introduction

In 1519, Ferdinand Magellan and his crew set sail to find an oceanic path around the Americas to Asia. Authorized by the Spanish Crown in 1518, Magellan's voyage consisted of approximately 270 crew members and five ships.¹ The Spanish were looking for a route between the Americas and Asia, as well as any islands with spices to rival the Portuguese monopoly on the spice trade.² They landed in the island of Cebu in the Visayas area of what would become the Philippine Islands in March of 1521. Antonio Pigafetta, Magellan's chronicler on the voyage, wrote extensively about their encounters with the indigenous people of Cebu. In fact, his writings are one of the richest surviving source materials about the early years of contact between Europe and the Philippines.

Accessorized heavily with gold, the rulers of the Visayan islands made a memorable first impression on Pigafetta:

In the island of that king who came to the ship are mines of gold, which is found by digging from the earth large pieces as large as walnuts and eggs. And all the vessels he uses are likewise [of gold] and are also some parts of his house, which was well fitted in the fashion of the country. And he was the most handsome person whom we saw among those peoples. He had very blk hair to his shoulder, with a silk cloth on his head, and two large gold rings hanging from his ears. He wore a cotton cloth, embroidered with silk, which covered him from his waist to his knees. At his side he had a dagger with a long handle, and all of gold, the sheath of which was of carved wood.³

The nobility of the Visayas possessed a significant amount of gold, but in the precolonial Philippines, gold was not exclusively owned by the elite classes. Instead, people of almost all classes possessed at least a small amount of gold, particularly in the form of jewelry.⁴ Gold was

¹ Downs, Robert B. *In Search of New Horizons: Epic Tales of Travel and Exploration*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1978, 40.

² Downs, *New Horizons*, 40.

³ Pigafetta, Antonio. *Magellan's Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*. Translated by R.A. Skelton. New York: Dover Publications, 1994, 115.

⁴ Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage*, 105, 115.

one of the precious materials that the Spanish were searching for in their explorations of the world. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the abundance of gold across the islands now known as the Philippines caught the attention of Spanish explorers.

Gold was not the only material that the Spanish encountered in the Philippines. Wood, particularly used in the creation of venerative statues, also appears in these early accounts of Spanish and indigenous interactions in the archipelago. Wood was most often used in ritual contexts to create statues of the *anitos* or *diwatas*, most often referring to Philippine ancestral spirits. These statues were the first subjects of Spanish ire.⁵ Pigafetta decried them as idolatrous, frequently referring to them only as “idols” and “of hollow wood without any back parts. They have the arms open, the feet turned up, with legs open, and a large face with four very large teeth like those of wild boars, and they are painted all over.”⁶ Not only were wooden objects important in the indigenous religious environment of the archipelago, but the forest and the natural environment as well. Pigafetta saw the religious importance of wood in a very limited context, where he observed the presence of animist shrines placed in important wooded areas, features of the natural landscape, and in the *balete* tree, a prominent tree for the indigenous religious leaders. As I address in my second chapter, the spiritual relationship that indigenous people in the Philippines had with the surrounding forest was crucial to religious life.

Wood and gold were two materials that were not only abundant in many early Filipino societies, but they were also important mediums in the religious cosmology of Philippine animism. As I argue within this thesis, gold was not only a material of economic importance, but also a spiritually protective material that could provide protection from spirits who caused

⁵ Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage*, 141-146.

⁶ Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage*, 147-148.

disease and death, and it could guard loved ones in the afterlife.⁷ Wood, used in almost every facet of Philippine life, was integral not only as a resource for constructing homes, weapons, and ships, but it was also a way to connect and interact with the spiritual world. Wood was used in carving venerative statues, and certain trees were also spiritually powerful spaces in their own rights.

During the Spanish Colonial period, particularly from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Spanish efforts to Christianize indigenous people and reorganize Philippine society transformed the way that these materials were viewed spiritually and economically. Like most other aspects of life in the Philippines, the Spanish attempted to impose their own cultural values and religious practices onto the indigenous people of the archipelago. However, indigenous communities were able to negotiate a space that preserved and created unique expressions of Philippine religion and culture. This same process can be seen in the material cultures associated with gold and wood. This thesis will explore the process of indigenous negotiation in the Philippine archipelago through the lens of these two important elements of material culture.

It is also integral to mention that the Philippines is a richly diverse archipelago of over seven thousand islands, containing over 100 different indigenous communities scattered across the archipelago, each with their own languages, cultures, and histories.⁸ This great diversity existed before, during, and after the Spanish colonization of the archipelago. Therefore, the analyses that I present in this thesis apply only in specific cases, and not across the entire archipelago. Lowland settled groups like the Tagalogs and Visayans were certainly much more subject to the kinds of cultural changes and colonial pressures from the Spanish that I discuss

⁷ Estrella, Victor. "The Death of Gold in Early Visayan Societies: Ethnohistoric Accounts and Archaeological Evidences." *Hukay*, no. 20 (2016): 30.

⁸ UNDP. "Fast Facts: Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines | United Nations Development Programme." <https://www.undp.org/philippines/publications/fast-facts-indigenous-peoples-philippines>.

than, for example, the Ifugao people in the Cordillera highlands. Like most histories of the Philippines during the early Spanish period, my thesis also focuses on these communities, which were transformed much more dramatically under colonialism.

In addition, the Spanish were unable to fully staff their colony adequately throughout their rule in the Philippines. Because the Spanish colonists numbered only in the low thousands even in the seventeenth century, the administration relied very heavily on indigenous rulers and confraternities to govern their colony.⁹ The number of religious officials in the colony was even less – numbering less than 500 in 1655.¹⁰ Therefore, the Spanish were not able to exercise the same amount of religious and cultural control over their colony in the Philippines as they did in Latin America. There were also many indigenous people groups outside of the lowland urban centers completely resisted Spanish colonization.¹¹

Within the fields of Philippine history, archaeology, and anthropology, there is a growing emphasis on the presence of indigenous negotiation within colonialism. This is an attempt to subvert previous narratives that the Spanish faced no resistance to the process of Christianization among lowland people in the archipelago, or that the Spanish completely erased the indigenous culture present in the Philippines before contact. Scholars such as John Leddy Phelan and Vicente Rafael have shown that the indigenous people in the archipelago were able to negotiate their own place within the colonial apparatus and that the forms that Philippine Catholicism took were expressions of their own agency. In other words, the cultural practices of precolonial societies in the Philippines were not fully replaced or eradicated by the Spanish, and as I discuss in-depth in the body of this thesis, some were incorporated into Philippine Catholicism.

⁹ Phelan, John Leddy. *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959, 11.

¹⁰ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 33.

¹¹ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 11.

My thesis aims to contribute to the small but growing body of literature that discusses the process of indigenous negotiation through material within the Spanish colonial Philippines. The processes of colonization and Christianization attempted to impose an entirely new culture into the Philippine archipelago. In practice, this also meant that indigenous peoples adapted to these changes while also attempting to maintain elements of their culture through a process most often referred to as syncretism. Other historians working on the Spanish Empire, like Rafael in the Philippines and Louise Burkhart in Mexico, have illustrated the ways in which this negotiation happened through language.¹² Both of these scholars argue that the process of conversion, mediated through language, was integral in negotiating the colonial religious environment because the act of translation gave indigenous people the limited freedom and agency to create their own meanings for Spanish Catholic religious concepts and words. In addition, Latin American historians like Shannon Iverson and Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría have discussed the ways in which this negotiation happened through material culture. My thesis attempts to follow this thread in the Philippines to argue specifically that gold and wood were materials where this negotiation took place. Both of these materials were spiritually significant for many precolonial societies, and the practices of ornamentation and worship associated with gold and wood continued throughout the Spanish colonial period into the modern period.

The aim of this thesis is not to encapsulate the entirety of material culture and indigenous negotiation during this time period in Philippine history. For instance, the popular materials of *anting-anting* and the kris daggers will not be analyzed in detail, and Chinese porcelain, while well-studied and abundant in the precolonial Philippines, is also outside the scope of this thesis.

¹² Rafael, Vicente L. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*. Duke University Press, 1993; Burkhart, Louise M. *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989.

Instead, my goal is to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that studies material history in this period and to explore gold and wood's relationship with conversion, colonialism, and contemporary Filipino Catholicism.

Historical Context

When Ferdinand Magellan and his crew arrived in the Philippine islands in 1521, societies in the archipelago were already interconnected with China and the rest of Island Southeast Asia. Typically, societal organization was oriented around communities, called *barangays* in Tagalog, headed by a *datu*, the community leader. According to historian William Henry Scott, the status of the office of *datu* was both an inherited position through blood relation and a political office.¹³ They ruled over anywhere from tens to hundreds of people, and each *barangay* was politically autonomous.¹⁴ Individual *barangays* could operate within loose confederations, headed by a senior *datu*. On a community level, the relationship between the people and the *datu* was often reciprocal. The *datu*'s role was to "govern his people, settle their disputes, protect them from enemies, and lead them in battle... In return for these responsibilities and services, a datu received labor and tribute from his people."¹⁵ These kinship groups were smaller than typical Spanish town structures, and the population density of the archipelago was generally less concentrated as a result.¹⁶

Most people within the archipelago practiced a kind of shamanistic animism, which I refer to as "Philippine animism" throughout this thesis.¹⁷ However, the term "shamanistic

¹³ Scott, William Henry. *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society*. Manila, Philippines: Ateneo University Press, 1994, 128-130.

¹⁴ Scott, *Barangay*, 4-5.

¹⁵ Scott, *Barangay*, 130. However, it is important to note that there were cases of tyrannical *datos*, and this relationship was often much more nuanced than a simple exchange of power for labor.

¹⁶ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 15-18.

¹⁷ Brewer, Carolyn. *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*. Ashgate Publishing, 2004, xvii.

animism” does require some explanation, as it can be deceptively simple. Coined by Carolyn Brewer, the term “shamanistic animism” refers to two separate aspects of Philippine religion within the archipelago. The first term, animism, is a very broad term that basically means that spirits, called *anitos* or *Diwata* in the Philippine context, are incorporated into the material world. These spirits interacted with the physical world “who can be benign, friendly or evil, who dwell in all kinds of places and who must be thanked or placated with prayers and offerings.”¹⁸ Because the spirits occupy the same physical space as people, they are amenable to negotiation. The “shamanistic” part of this phrase is meant to indicate that animist practices in the Philippines necessitated the presence of shamans, referred to as *babaylans*, who possessed the ability to negotiate with the spirits.¹⁹ Shamanistic animism is not just a religion. It was and is a worldview that informed much of daily life for many indigenous communities in the archipelago. Spirits were often incorporated into the daily practices of people, from small-scale ancestor veneration to asking the spirits for permission to mine gold from the ground. In addition, animism was not the only religious belief system that existed in the archipelago. Notably, Islam was already a growing religion in the Philippines and had gained prominence in central Luzon, Mindanao, and Sulu around the late fifteenth century.²⁰

The Spanish first arrived in the archipelago in March of 1521, during Magellan’s famous circumnavigation voyage. Magellan and his men spent a few weeks on the Island of Cebu, speaking to Raja Humabon, the *datu*. While on the island, Magellan convinced the raja and his court to convert to Christianity, where a mass baptism of around 800 people took place on April 14, 1521. Magellan erected a cross on the island as a symbol of the power of Christianity, burned

¹⁸ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xvii.

¹⁹ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xv-xviii.

²⁰ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 17.

the “pagan” *anito* statues he encountered, and famously gifted Raja Humabon’s wife Hara Humamay the *Santo Niño de Cebu*, a wooden statue of the Christ Child. After Magellan was killed in the battle of Mactan on April 27, his crew left for the Maluku Islands. The Spanish returned to the island of Cebu in 1565, when Miguel Lopez de Legaspi established an official Spanish colony in April of the same year.²¹ After their conquest of the island, the Spanish found the *Santo Nino de Cebu* “well-kept inside in one of the local residences that they had ransacked.”²²

Legaspi became the official governor of the Philippines in 1565 after establishing Cebu City and captured the city of Manila in 1571.²³ His rule over the new colony was fairly short-lived, as Legaspi died in 1572, after only seven years of serving as the first governor of the Philippines. The Spanish continued their conquests of the archipelago, and by the end of the sixteenth century, they had firmly established their colony across most of the archipelago, excluding Mindanao, Sulu, and the highland portions of Luzon.²⁴ The Spanish colonial government persisted until 1898, when the Spanish ceded the Philippines to the United States.

Governance in the Philippine colony was largely similar to that in Latin America, especially in the early years. The Spanish initially established the *encomienda* system, which allowed *encomenderos* (often Spanish bureaucrats not associated with the religious orders) to extract native labor.²⁵ This system did not just establish a colonial rule over labor and power,

²¹ Between the circumnavigation and Legaspi, the Spanish explorer Ruy Lopez de Villalobos also landed in the Philippines in 1542 and named the islands after King Philip II of Spain. However, the Legaspi mission was the only one to actually establish a colony in the archipelago. See also “The Spanish Period | Encyclopædia Britannica.”

²² Bautista, “On the Personhood of Sacred Objects: Agency, Materiality, and Popular Devotion in the Roman Catholic Philippines,” 4.

²³ Andaya, Barbara Watson, and Leonard Y. Andaya. *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 139-141.

²⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica. “The Spanish Period.” Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Philippines/The-Spanish-period>.

²⁵ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses*, 95-97.

however. Beginning with the *encomienda* system, lowland Filipinos were also gradually reorganized spatially into towns surrounding the Churches through a system called *reduccion*.

The Philippines was on the fringes of the Spanish Empire, and consistently, colonial administrators were overworked and understaffed. However, the colony's position as the midway point between Mexico and China in the Galleon Trade made it integral to the Spanish Empire's growing economy.²⁶ The Philippine colony was also an important missionizing enterprise. Missionaries from the Augustinian, Dominican, Franciscan, and Jesuit orders were trained in the indigenous languages that allowed them to effectively evangelize in the archipelago. The Christianization process, mostly through the efforts of the Spanish missionaries was largely successful. Catholicism remained popular in the Philippines even after the Spanish left and is still the majority religion in the country.²⁷

Chapter Outline

This thesis argues that gold and wood were used in the colonial period by both the Spanish and indigenous peoples for different religious means. In addition, the indigenous artistry and the spiritual associations with these materials created an avenue for early Filipinos to negotiate their own meanings to Spanish religious artifacts, and to use the artistry techniques that they already knew in the creation of Catholic ritual items.

An important term that I use throughout this thesis is the concept of “dual pageantries.” During the conversion process, the Spanish emphasized the pageantry of religious ceremonies like masses, *fiestas*, and baptism rites in order to entice people to convert to Christianity. In

²⁶ Cushner, Nicholas P. *Spain in the Philippines: From Conquest to Revolution*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1971, 128-129.

²⁷ Official numbers vary, but most estimates put the percentage of Filipino Catholics at around 80%. See also Miller, Jack. “Religion in the Philippines | Asia Society.” Asia Society. <https://asiasociety.org/education/religion-philippines>. and Gregorio, Xave. “Philippines Still Overwhelmingly Catholic | Philstar.Com.” Philstar.com, February 22, 2023. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/02/22/2246855/philippines-still-overwhelmingly-catholic>.

addition to the pageantry of celebration, the Spanish also employed a variety of tactics meant to marginalize and delegitimize the indigenous animist religion, such as destroying “idolatrous” animist venerative figures and burning sacred objects. The destruction of non-Christian objects, which the Spanish saw as pagan, was often done in a very theatrical manner in order to elicit conversion, therefore complementing the pageantry of celebration with the pageantry of destruction. “Idols,” as the Spanish called them, were often burned, but the destruction of indigenous religious objects also included acts like dumping the figures into refuse pits and other means of what the Spanish would consider a complete annihilation of the pagan object.²⁸ This set of dual pageantries rewarded outward religiosity, and they harshly punished any deviation from the behaviors of a “good Catholic.” This strategy was used and adopted in Colonial Latin America, and it was also used in the Philippines.²⁹ In settled communities in the Philippines, for example, public displays of religiosity like praying the rosary daily were praised by the Spanish, while discouraged activities like ritual drinking was addressed at the pulpit, occasionally resulting in the temporary expulsion of community members.³⁰

Through the use of these dual pageantries, the Spanish religious orders attempted to police indigenous behavior, but the wide range of behaviors that the Spanish considered taboo and the lack of Spanish friars also meant that indigenous people were also able to negotiate the spiritual meaning behind these behaviors. At the conclusion of this thesis, I will draw both gold and wood together to further discuss the importance of crosses in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period.

²⁸ Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines*, 97.

²⁹ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 7-8.

³⁰ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 73, 78.

Because much of this thesis is reliant on material culture from individual artifacts, it is important to discuss the impact of private collections and looting on the field of precolonial Philippine material culture. Many of the most important artifacts from the precolonial period were looted from their original archaeological contexts and handed off to either private collectors or museums.³¹ Most of these looted artifacts therefore can only retain a fraction of the information that they could convey under perfect conditions.³² Particularly in regards to gold, this means that much of the valuable information that archaeologists may have been able to glean from these sites is incomplete.

Gold

The first major chapter of this thesis relates to the most precious material, gold. Gold is a ubiquitous luxury throughout history, used extensively as a signifier of wealth. However, gold is also important in a variety of spiritual contexts, and this was the case for both the Spanish colonial government and for most indigenous communities in the Philippines. Gold was also heavily incorporated into the aesthetics of the Catholic Church. In the precolonial Philippines, gold was a protective material that could guard someone against disease and malignant spirits. During the colonial period, the Spanish attempted to remove gold from its animist contexts and place it firmly into economic and material contexts, while simultaneously exploiting it for its spiritual purpose within Christianity. Gold therefore became a site of negotiation where indigenous people continued to see gold as both economically and spiritually significant.

³¹ Villegas, Ramon N. *Kayamanan: The Philippine Jewelry Tradition*. Manila, PH: Central Bank of the Philippines, 1983: 2.

³² Proulx, Blythe Bowman. "Archaeological Site Looting in 'Glocal' Perspective: Nature, Scope, and Frequency." *American Journal of Archaeology*, no. Vol. 117, No. 1 (January 2013): 111–25: 111-112.

Gold was seen in the Early Modern Period in Europe, at least in an official context, as a reflection of the power and glory of God.³³ In the colonial era of the Philippines, the material was also used as a conversion tactic by missionaries. Since much of their early efforts focused on the aesthetic of the church through feast days and mass, the appearance of gold projected an aura of economic and spiritual wealth. As in most Catholic Churches, gold was on high display during the feast days and masses.

Through discussions of certain gold items in ritual and in ornamentation, I make the argument that gold served an important function in the lives of precolonial Tagalogs and Visayas. When the Spanish arrived, gold was already enmeshed into the daily lives of many peoples in the archipelago. Not only was gold a significant economic resource, but it was also a spiritually protective material. Gold was also extremely plentiful in the archipelago, and almost everyone of every class possessed some sort of gold ornamentation. However, during the process of colonialism, Spanish greed and conversion to Catholicism changed the way gold was used in the new Spanish-controlled Philippines. Despite Spanish attempts, gold continued to serve an important ritual function in the archipelago through its use in rosaries, on the altar, and in processional garments during Holy Week celebrations. In addition, the precolonial association between gold and protection still remained throughout the Spanish colonial period.

In modern-day Filipino Catholicism, this is seen most notably in the aesthetics of the churches. While the availability of gold to lower-class Filipinos has largely been restricted due to its prohibitive cost, gold is still heavily featured in religious gatherings and rituals. In the Philippines, and in communities across the diaspora, there is a renewed interest in the remaining pieces of pre-Spanish gold as more people become interested in precolonial histories.

³³ O'Connell, Marvin R. *The Counter Reformation*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1974: 13-15.

Wood

The second major chapter of this thesis is dedicated to wood in ritual. Unlike gold, wood is a less-studied religious item of both Spanish Catholic and indigenous religions in the Philippines that had a significant impact on the material culture of the colonial period. Wood is not only an important building material, but it is also an easily accessible carving tool for art and religious artifacts. Both Spanish Catholics and the early Filipinos used wood for these purposes. In both cultures, wood was an excellent material to carve religious artifacts, not only for its availability but for its religious meaning. Whereas in Spanish Catholicism, wood was used to depict living figures and carried the connotations of life, wood was generally used in Philippine animism in accordance with their spiritual properties. Equally important to the context of wood is the relationship that early Philippine animists had with the forest and how the colonial period changed this relationship.

During the colonial period, the Spanish attempted to completely change the relationship between Filipinos and the forest. They reorganized people into towns in the *reduccion* process, positioned themselves as the spiritual leaders of society to directly contradict the power of indigenous *babaylans*. They also burned both wooden idols and spiritually significant trees. Another important part of this reorganization was centered on Spanish attempts to curtail the spiritual power that the *balete* trees held in Philippine society. The *balete*, a highly sacred tree that occupied a venerated space, was once a home to spirits that the *babaylans* could negotiate with on behalf of the community. Because the trees and the spirits that inhabited them were considered sacred by many animist Philippine communities, only the *babaylans* could enter the space that the tree occupied, and regular people were discouraged from disturbing the tree out of fear that the spirits inside the *balete* would grow sick or even die. Despite the efforts of the

Spanish clergy to remove the superstitions that indigenous communities held surrounding the tree, however, the *balete* still is a source of cultural anxiety, and it is now the home of some creatures of lower mythology, like the *kapre*, a tree giant that is still largely present in modern Philippine folklore, and the *tikbalang*, a horse-like creature that enjoys luring travelers from paths.³⁴

Wood is an extremely popular material in the creation of venerative statues, including the cross, the Virgin Mary, and various saints called *santos*. During the colonial period, the Spanish were largely successful in destroying indigenous “idols” and replacing them with those of *santo* figures. However, the Spanish also had to rely on indigenous carvers to produce more *santos*. These Philippine *santos*, although modeled after European figures, still retain some indigenous carving styles from the colonial period, and some of these figures were carved of the same wood that Philippine animists used to carve their venerative figures.

Historiography and Methodological Influences

While some historical works on the colonial period in the Philippines address the negotiation between the Spanish and the indigenous peoples of the Philippines, the majority typically do not utilize material culture as a mode of analysis in the negotiative Christianization process. Gold and wood were important religious mediums for many indigenous communities in the Philippines prior to Spanish colonialism, and though the colonial process influenced the specific uses of these materials, the precolonial spiritual meanings of these materials continue to be integral to modern-day Philippine Catholicism today. While this is by no means a complete historiography, it outlines the essential background on methodological approaches relevant to

³⁴ Ramos, Maximo D. *Creatures of Philippine Lower Mythology*. University of the Philippines Press, 1971, 25-32

this thesis. Finally, this section will also discuss the presence of material negotiation in Latin America to better expand on this kind of dialogue in the Philippines.

The transition between the indigenous animist religions of the Philippines to Spanish Catholicism is the subject of a large variety of works within Philippine historiography. Earlier works, like those of John Leddy Phelan and C.H. Forbes-Lindsay focus more on the idea that the Spanish completely dominated and transformed the culture of the Philippines to match their own.³⁵ More recent works, like those of Vincente Rafael and Carolyn Brewer, discuss different angles of the Christianization process that involves a more significant focus on indigenous agency.³⁶ However, the general historiography lacks a significant focus on material culture within the dynamics of colonialism. Despite the ubiquitous role of material culture in religious ritual and daily life, it has mostly been discussed tangentially in this discourse.

The historiography for this thesis largely regards works discussing the Christianization process in the Philippines. All of these works within this section are influential to the methodology of this thesis, and I have framed them as such. As a general note, there is a significant historiographical gap between mentions of specific material cultures in the indigenous religions of the precolonial Philippines and the study of Catholic and material culture in the contemporary Philippines. My work builds on existing works and outlines the current trends of indigenous religious negotiation in order to more succinctly illustrate that the Christianization process was not simply a process of the Spanish dominating the religious environment of the Philippines. It was a process in which indigenous people resisted and negotiated the terms of Christianization across the archipelago. With this in mind, I also argue that this kind of

³⁵ Forbes-Lindsay, *The Philippines Under Spanish and American Rules*; Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses*.

³⁶ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*; Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*.

negotiation can be present within material culture as well, for which I have drawn on sources that discuss the process of material negotiation within the Spanish New World. This is more than a simply process where two parties came together equally and equitably, however. The concept of indigenous negotiation in this context refers to the ways in which people resisted and adopted certain Spanish concepts and practices like devotion to the *Santo Niño*, while maintaining some of their own concepts and practices within a framework of Christianity, like using tamborins as ornamentation and protection.

English scholarship on the Spanish Empire thrived in the twentieth century, particularly in the years immediately following the Spanish-American war in 1898. American historians intended to portray the Spanish as completely opposite to themselves. Historians perpetuated the infamous “Black Legend;” that the Spanish were morally corrupt religious zealots who stole from and violently enforced religious conversion on the indigenous peoples in the New World and in the Philippines.³⁷ This narrative significantly focused on the Spanish colonizers, and not the colonized peoples. Forbes-Lindsay’s monograph *The Philippines Under Spanish and American Rules* describes the indigenous peoples of the archipelago as “easily suppressed” and weak opposed to the Spanish Europeans, who “never experienced any serious opposition... until the Tagalog Rebellion of 1896.”³⁸ Forbes-Lindsay’s monograph is an early American source and inherently more critical of Spanish imperialism due to the recent Spanish-American war, and positions his monograph as proof of both Spain’s “black legend” and of the United States’ moral obligation to colonize the former Spanish colony. He consistently describes the colonizing powers far more than the indigenous Filipinos, and though he is very critical of the Spanish,

³⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica. “Black Legend |Encyclopædia Britannica.” Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Legend>.

³⁸ Forbes-Lindsay, *The Philippines Under Spanish and American Rules*, 124 – 125.

Forbes-Lindsay glosses over any indigenous agency regarding conversion efforts and portrays the Christian missionaries in a much more flattering light, choosing to depict them as benevolent protectors of the indigenous peoples from exploitation.³⁹ This narrative is reflected in several other monographs from the time period, especially in American academia where authors frequently implied that the American colonization of the Philippines was necessary to undo the harm that the Spanish inflicted upon the indigenous people.⁴⁰ However, this narrative also conveniently excludes Filipinos from discussions about their own colonization. According to Forbes-Lindsay's work, the Spanish inflicted severe harm upon the indigenous people, but they also Christianized them and "the character of the Filipino has doubtless improved in many respects."⁴¹

The first significant break from this narrative is in John Leddy Phelan's *Hispanization of the Philippines*.⁴² Phelan's monograph contains an early discussion of Spanish rule and conversion in the Philippines as more than just an acceptance of Catholicism and colonialism. Phelan discusses this work as "the meeting of indigenous society with Spanish culture," and he attempts to strike a balance between Spanish and Filipino power – an early portrayal of what would eventually be termed as colonial negotiation. Phelan's work places significant emphasis on the colonization process, and he is fairly careful to portray the colonial system as something not tacitly accepted by Filipinos. Because he is a very early scholar in this historiography regarding a kind of negotiated spiritual Philippines, Phelan still displays a bias in favor of the Spanish – his analysis is still heavily colored by the perspective that the colonization of the

³⁹ Forbes-Lindsay, *The Philippines Under Spanish and American Rules*, 137.

⁴⁰ A very good summary of this issue is found within Cano, Gloria. "Blair and Robertson's 'The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898': Scholarship or Imperialist Propaganda?" *Philippine Studies*, no. Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2006): 3–46.

⁴¹ Forbes-Lindsay, *The Philippines Under Spanish and American Rules*, 90-91.

⁴² Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*.

Philippines was inevitable and that the indigenous peoples in the Philippines needed Spanish intervention. However, as the first source to discuss the ways that indigenous people resisted colonization, Phelan's work is very valuable to this thesis. Phelan makes it clear in his work that at every point that the Spanish tried to enforce control over religious behavior, there were people who hid idols, continued to worship their ancestors, and continued to live outside of the *encomienda* structure.⁴³

Nicholas Cushner's monograph *Spain in the Philippines* also discusses the Christianization process in detail and continues the concept of indigenous resistance that Phelan establishes in his monograph. Although he is thorough in his analysis of the Spanish missionaries, Cushner discusses the process of Christianization with much less nuance than Phelan does regarding indigenous agency. His monograph significantly emphasizes the Spanish involvement in the Philippines and is highly complementary of the Church, but still discusses some Filipino resistance to Christianization. Cushner's monograph provides a significant amount of detail in the missionary strategy for conversion and has more detail regarding the indigenous responses to Catholicism than other sources, namely regarding the indigenous peoples secretly practicing their own indigenous religion while publicly declaring themselves to be Catholic. Although Cushner's monograph is intended to investigate the role of the missionaries, he also analyzes the small moments of resistance to the Christianization process, implying a subversion of the concept of a "complete" evangelization of the Philippines. Instead, these events are examples of early instances of resistance to Catholicization – indigenous peoples in the Philippines did not simply accept Christianity and attempted to keep their own practices alive by

⁴³ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 26, 45.

conducting veneration rituals in secret, reburying their loved ones, and hiding sacred venerated statues from the Spanish.⁴⁴

Vicente Rafael's work *Contracting Colonialism*, like with Phelan and Cushner's works, also signifies a break within this historiography because it emphasizes the importance of the negotiated space happening within the context of conversion, not necessarily outright resistance to Spanish colonial rule.⁴⁵ Through the discussion of translation from Spanish to Tagalog to facilitate conversion in the colonial period, Rafael asserts that though the Spanish tried to enforce a strict hierarchy with the Spanish at the top and the Tagalogs at the bottom, this process was much more variable on the attitudes of Tagalogs themselves. Because the Spanish refused to translate certain words, the Tagalog people were able to reaffirm their own interpretations of these words and allowed the Filipinos to "mitigate the interminable verbal assaults being hurled from the pulpit."⁴⁶ Tagalogs also used the conversion process to directly resist and negotiate with Spanish hierarchies as well as their relationship to the Catholic faith.

This concept of negotiation, though with parties of unequal power, gave indigenous peoples of the Philippine archipelago much more agency than previously addressed in other sources, and it also indicates the importance of these complexities surrounding the contexts of conversion and colonialism. This concept, as I argue throughout this thesis, can also be applied to colonial material culture. Because the Spanish often imposed Christian images onto the people that they encountered, it offered an opportunity for the indigenous people to create and negotiate their own concepts of the meaning of these religious symbols.

⁴⁴ Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines*, 97-98.

⁴⁵ Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*.

⁴⁶ Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 3, 117.

This concept of indigenous negotiation is reinforced in Carolyn Brewer's monograph *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*.⁴⁷ Brewer investigates the Christianization process through a gendered lens and underscores the importance of "the physical and psychological violence that was part and parcel of Spanish colonization."⁴⁸ By viewing the processes of Christianization and colonization through this gendered lens, Brewer also discusses the variety of ways that people in the Philippines resisted Christianization and attempted to keep their precolonial practices. Brewer also spends a significant amount of time discussing the nature of Philippine animism, which she terms "shamanistic animism."⁴⁹ Brewer's analysis of the nature of animist practices in the archipelago makes her work integral to the formation of this thesis. In addition, Brewer's work adds a significant amount of nuance to the discourse of indigenous negotiation – the process of Christianization was often done within expressions of violence towards "idolatry," and came with harsh punishments for indigenous women who attempted to openly oppose it.⁵⁰

The methodologies of Latin American historians and archaeologists are significant influences in how I approached the material in this thesis. One such source is Enrique Rodríguez-Alegira's article "Incumbents and Challengers: indigenous Politics and the Adoption of Spanish Material Culture in Colonial Xaltocan, Mexico." Rodríguez-Alegira's article focuses on the presence of Spanish material culture in colonial Mexico, and who was using these Spanish materials. While Rodríguez-Alegira's focus is specifically on class and the concept of social mobility, his analysis of the *kinds* of materials that the indigenous people gravitated towards is particularly important. In colonial Mexico, where activities like ritual feasting and bodily

⁴⁷ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*.

⁴⁸ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xv.

⁴⁹ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xvii.

⁵⁰ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xxii.

ornamentation was important in expressions of power, the presence of Spanish ceramic vessels and elite requests to don Spanish dress were particularly important to indigenous people.⁵¹ In colonial Mexico, commoners were not allowed to use Spanish styles of dress, so Spanish pottery became more popular.⁵² This discernment of the kinds of Spanish material culture that indigenous people adopted is an excellent example of the ways that indigenous peoples adopted the kind and use of materials that they adopted from the Spanish, and makes the presence of negotiating in material culture clearer. The indigenous people within colonial Mexico were specifically engaging in material cultures that would enhance their own power within the indigenous concepts of what things were important- in this case, ceramics and methods of dress, as opposed to, for example, Spanish architecture. This is a concept that is compatible with the way that I use indigenous negotiation. Although there was no formal process of agreement, indigenous peoples in the Spanish empire were participating actively in certain elements of Spanish material culture while avoiding others, creating a unique expression of both Spanish and indigenous Mexican culture.

Another particularly useful source is W.M. Floris et. al.'s 2019 monograph *Material Encounters and Colonial Transformations in the Early Colonial Americas: Archaeological Case Studies*. This anthropological work focuses on the indigenous peoples' adoption of European goods through early colonial interactions in the New World. While several chapters address the idea of negotiating materiality, Iverson's chapter "Resignification as Fourth Narrative" is particularly compelling. Like Brewer's monograph, Iverson acknowledges the use of violence through the conversion process and positions the state of negotiation as a mixed process between

⁵¹ Rodríguez-Alegría, Enrique. "Incumbents and Challengers: Indigenous Politics and the Adoption of Spanish Material Culture in Colonial Xaltocan, Mexico." *Historical Archaeology*, no. Vol. 44, No. 2 (2010): 53.

⁵² Rodríguez-Alegría, "Incumbents and Challengers: Indigenous Politics and the Adoption of Spanish Material Culture in Colonial Xaltocan, Mexico," 53.

unequal powers through the presence of material ceramic culture in Mexico.⁵³ Iverson's discussions of the colonial process are in harmony with the arguments put forth by Brewer and Rafael, and she is careful to include the nuances of these colonial interactions between the Spanish and indigenous peoples.

As this historiography has discussed, the conversion and colonization processes in the Philippines were negotiated between both indigenous peoples of the archipelago and the Spanish colonists. However, there is a link between materials and negotiated processes that, while presented occasionally in histories regarding the colonial process, has not yet been the subject of significant attention in Philippine histories. I am also using patterns identified in Latin American archaeology regarding the negotiation of material culture to analyze Philippine material culture through the lens of indigenous negotiation.

Conclusion

My main argument therefore is that material culture in the Spanish colonial period of the Philippines can also be understood within the framework of indigenous negotiation with colonialism. Both before and during the colonial process, the gold and wood cultures that already existed in the Philippines encountered the gold and wood cultures of the Spanish/Catholic colonial apparati. During this period, the conversion of indigenous people groups in the Philippines was negotiated through these materials – not only in the form of venerative artifacts like the Santo Nino or the rosary, but also in the construction of golden and wooden objects as well as a unique aesthetic form of Filipino Catholicism. This thesis aims to add to the very rich historiographical dialogues on indigenous negotiation in the Philippines as well as offer a novel

⁵³ Iverson, Shannon Dugan. "Resignification as Fourth Narrative: Power and the Colonial Religious Experience in Tula, Hidalgo." In *Material Encounters and Indigenous Transformations in the Early Colonial Americas: Archaeological Case Studies*, edited by Corinne L. Hofman and Floris W.M. Keehnen: 263–83. Brill, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctvrk2gr.18>: 263.

and different perspective of investigation a different avenue of investigation through an intimate look at material culture in the Spanish Philippines.

Chapter 1: Gold

Introduction

Gold is one of the oldest and most precious metals in the world. From ancient jewelry to modern electronics, gold has a long material history. Many cultures have perceived gold as a symbol of power and wealth, as well as a material that holds spiritual and religious significance. Given its desirability, the demand for gold has sometimes led to corruption, war, colonialism, and the committing of other atrocities. Gold products have also facilitated cultural exchange and trade, however, with gold smiths using the malleable metal to create statues, jewelry, vessels, ornaments, and clothing accessories, amongst other things. Gold artifacts are therefore conspicuous in the archaeological record, attracting scholarly attention because of the important cultural knowledge they provide.

Historically, the lands now known as the Philippines boast numerous gold deposits. These are found dotted across the mountains and tributaries of the over seven thousand islands that make up the archipelago. By the time the Spanish first contacted the Philippines, which was marked by the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in Homonhon Island in 1521, the respective gold cultures of the peoples of Spain and the Philippines were well-established. In a material sense, gold manufacturing styles practiced by peoples of the Philippines and of Spain were distinct from one another. In a cultural sense, both the Spanish and early Filipinos imbued ornamental and devotional gold objects with spiritual significance. This chapter sets out to explore the interaction of these different gold cultures in the Philippine archipelago from the sixteenth to eighteenth century through an understanding of gold as a site of negotiation and indigenous resistance during the Spanish colonial period.

Starting from the sixteenth century, Spanish colonialism and Christianity shaped and pervaded almost all aspects of life in the Philippines. The Spanish attempted to reorganize village structure, religious practices, and economic organization in the archipelago through the process of *reduccion*, where indigenous communities were physically reshuffled into villages to make governance over them easier for the Spanish administration. However, indigenous people found a plethora of ways to resist complete Spanish interventions in their lives. This included strategies like moving away from Spanish-controlled villages and continuing indigenous religious practices in secret. Historians such as Vicente Rafael and Louise Burkhart have also illustrated the power of indigenous resistance through language.

Much of the historical scholarship on gold in the Philippines has focused on its use before Spanish colonialism. Notably, Florina Capistrano-Baker's monograph *Philippine Ancestral Gold* and Ramon Villegas' books *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold* and *Kayamanan: Philippine Jewelry* discuss the prevalence of gold and the artistic methods that smiths used during the precolonial periods. Primarily analyzing gold jewelry artifacts from museums or private collections, Capistrano-Baker and Villegas highlight the importance of recognizing the culture of the archipelago prior to Spanish arrival. Capistrano-Baker in particular discusses the importance of trade with the rest of island Southeast Asia during the precolonial periods. Both authors stress that the Philippines had an established gold culture before colonization. This gold culture was influential not only to the economy of many precolonial Philippine societies, but also to the spiritual associations with gold in much of the archipelago. For example, many artistic traditions in the Philippines draw from the interaction that its societies had with other cultures.⁵⁴ There is also a well-established presence of a syncretic gold culture in the Philippines, as demonstrated by

⁵⁴ Villegas, Ramon N. *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*. Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, 2004: 30-35.

Capistrano-Baker's article "Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewelry" explores the artistry of the *tamborin* necklaces and their "intertwined cultural traditions."⁵⁵ Through this article, Capistrano-Baker also analyses the myriad of cultures that influenced the artistry of the *tamborin*, and how these necklaces became iconic expressions of nationalism.

Despite its richness, the existing literature has not looked at the ways in which gold cultures were contested and negotiated in the Spanish colonial period. This area of research is important, because the Spanish were not wholly successful in their attempts to Europeanize the manufacture and cultural uses of gold in the Philippines. By the nineteenth century, Philippine gold culture reflected a unique artistic and religious environment that was shaped by indigenous peoples' selective rejection and appropriation of Spanish influence. In other words, gold cultures were a site of indigenous agency and innovation. From their adoption of Spanish motifs in *tamborin* necklaces to their continued adherence to the precolonial belief that gold held protective properties, the early Filipinos used their relationship with this precious metal to challenge colonial assertions of dominance.

The Spanish

Many of the current narratives surrounding Spanish obsessions with gold revolve around greed – Spain famously raided the Americas for gold and precious materials, and they found a not an insignificant amount of gold in the Philippines. However, gold was recognized not only as a material for its monetary value. Gold also carried religious associations of immortality and glory, particularly within the aesthetics of the Church. Within the religious milieu of the time, gold was officially used by the church as a way to reflect God's holy power and a representation

⁵⁵ Capistrano-Baker, Florina. "Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery." *Arts of Asia*, no. May-June Issue (2019): 1.

of the everlasting nature of Christianity. Gold was also a symbol of the victory over Judaism and Islam during Spain's Reconquista⁵⁶

Catholic aesthetics lean heavily on gold as a way to visually assert the power and everlasting nature of God - from the altar and the tabernacle to the chalice typically used in mass, gold plays a significant role in modern Catholic ritual and aesthetics, and it occupied a similar religious significance in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries.⁵⁷ Simple greed was certainly a factor explaining why the Spanish became so preoccupied with the presence of gold in the Philippines. Older American historians like Forbes-Lindsay have argued that this preoccupation with gold in Spanish colonies was purely an illustration of the Church's corruption and greed. Early American scholarship on the Spanish Philippines was deliberately antagonistic to Spanish rule, often decrying it as medieval and oppressive in order to assert the superiority and necessity of American colonialism.⁵⁸ However, this narrative only conveys a portion of the truth.⁵⁹ Though the Spanish regarded gold as a material principally through its monetary value, the cultural associations between the Catholic church and gold cannot be underestimated.

The best examples of gold in Spanish religious contexts are in the material's use in reliquaries and architecture. The presence of gold in these contexts all officially served the same purpose: to emphasize the everlasting nature of God and to illustrate the holy power that God

⁵⁶ O'Connell, *The Counter Reformation*, 13-15.

⁵⁷ Lenson, Barry. "How Much Gold Does the Catholic Church Own? – America's Best Gold Refiners." America's Best Gold Refiners. America's Best Gold Refiners, March 27, 2015.
<http://www.goldrefiners.com/blog/2015/3/27/how-much-gold-does-the-catholic-church-own#:~:text=Gold%20constitutes%20only%20a%20portion,by%20universities%20and%20wealthy%20individuals>.

⁵⁸ Cano, Glòria. "Blair and Robertson's 'The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898': Scholarship or Imperialist Propaganda?", 5.

⁵⁹ Forbes-Lindsay, *The Philippines Under Spanish and American Rules*, 137. Early American scholarship on the Spanish Philippines was deliberately antagonistic to Spanish rule, often decrying it as medieval and oppressive in order to assert the superiority and necessity of American colonialism.

provides through the aesthetic adornment of holy spaces and objects, but their presence also alludes to the medieval associations that gold was also a living material and manifestation of God himself.⁶⁰ Following the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent Council of Trent, however, the Church put forth an official reasoning emphasizing that gold was not an actual manifestation of God's characteristics, but rather a *reflection* of them.⁶¹ This idea is much more synchronous with Hans-Gert Bachmann's monograph, *The Lure of Gold: An Artistic and Cultural History*. According to Bachmann, gold in Christianity was "used in churches and iconographic representations to depict... what could not be depicted – the hereafter of Christianity – by symbolizing it with brightness and light, creating a deliberate contrast to threatening, dark powers."⁶²

While gold was a source of greed for the Spanish/Catholic colonial apparati, the religious ubiquity of gold extends further than this simple explanation. The Spanish viewed gold as a desirable object for monetary gain, but it was also a material deeply important to the pageantry and holy power of the Church. After the Council of Trent, gold itself was not a holy material and held no inherently holy power, but the creation of devotional gold objects was a method that the Church used to highlight the sanctity of holy spaces and holy artifacts.⁶³

⁶⁰ Campbell, John. "Building with Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones." *Affirmation and Critique: A Journal of Christian Thought*, no. Vol. 9, No. 1 (April 2007). 58.

⁶¹ O'Connell, *The Counter Reformation*, 13-15.

⁶² Bachmann, Hans-Gert. *The Lure of Gold: An Artistic and Cultural History*. New York, London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2006: 195.

⁶³ There is a long history of the religious use of gold in the late medieval and renaissance periods where in practice, gold may have been still seen as a living material and an embodiment of God himself. However, the influence of the assertions of the Council of Trent is worth further study in the Philippines. For the purposes of this thesis, I have found little evidence that religious officials in the Philippines actively taught that gold was a holy material and a manifestation of God. Therefore, I have reflected the view of the Council of Trent in this thesis and operated on the assumption that the religious officials either preached or didn't contradict the Council's views, though new evidence may question the influence of the Council's findings in the Philippines. For more information on gold as a living material see Campbell, "Building with Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones," 58.

Gold Mining and Material Value

Gold was not nearly as plentiful in Spain as it was in the Philippines, but the northern coastal area of the Iberian Peninsula was the site of a historical gold deposit used largely by the Romans. During the course of their empire, the Romans mined around 1100 metric tons of gold from this site, using it to create coins and personal adornment for the wealthy, called Las Medulas.⁶⁴ The process of extracting gold was a method called hydraulic mining, which was extremely extractive. Miners would drill holes into the gold veins, and when the rock was on the brink of collapse, the gold would then be flushed with a large water reservoir. The organic material was then burned in order to easily separate the gold from the ashes.⁶⁵

The extremely rigorous method of retrieving the gold was hard on the overall environment and unsustainable. By the early Middle Ages, the gold deposits in Northern Spain that the Romans relied so heavily upon had been almost completely exhausted, and gold became scarce across much of Europe.⁶⁶ By the time of the discovery of the “New World” in the 1490s, the practices of mining resembled those used in the 1849 California Gold Rush. Miners panned for gold from river beds and streams, then dug down horizontally to access gold deposits that would have been accumulating over the years.⁶⁷ This method is called placer mining, and it was used in both Spain and Latin America to extract gold from rivers and streams.⁶⁸

Religious Uses of Gold in Spain and the Americas

In the Middle Ages, gold represented a living embodiment of God himself. Because of gold’s resistance to tarnish, ability to reflect warm light, and pre-Christian associations with the

⁶⁴ Bachmann, *The Lure of Gold*, 122.

⁶⁵ Bachmann, *The Lure of Gold*, 122.

⁶⁶ Bachmann, *The Lure of Gold*, 185.

⁶⁷ U.S. National Park Service. “What Is Placer Gold Mining? - Yukon - Charley Rivers National Preserve (U.S. National Park Service),” 2015. <https://www.nps.gov/yuch/learn/historyculture/placer-mining.htm>.

⁶⁸ TePaske, John J. *A New World of Gold and Silver*. Edited by Kendall W. Brown. Boston: BRILL, 2010: 24-26.

divine, the material was often used as a way to illustrate heaven and God in religious art and architecture.⁶⁹ The Protestant Reformation called this belief into question, decrying the practices of the church and the use of gold as idolatry, prompting the Church to establish the Council of Trent to clarify the use of gold.⁷⁰ After the Council of Trent ended in 1563, the official stance of the Catholic Church in Spain was that gold was a secular material intended for human usage. Nevertheless, the Church continued to illustrate God's spiritual power through use of the precious metal in religious spaces, with gold being valued for its aesthetics and perceived as an emblem of glory.

Despite the ruling of the Council of Trent that images were only *reflections* of the divine, the medieval concept of gold as a living material is seen in the use of medieval-style reliquary housing. These reliquaries were housing for the living relics of Jesus, Mary, or various saints within the Catholic pantheon, and were meant to reflect the power of the relic it held. As such, reliquaries were often housed in works made from gold and glass from the medieval period, and this practice continued through the early modern period. The changes created by the Council of Trent due to the Protestant Reformation also extended to these relics, which were no longer living holy relics that contained the powers of the saints. The Church established a method of authenticating relics and reinforced the purpose of the relics. Relics themselves, as Fernandez argues in his chapter, "retain some form of life."⁷¹ Relics were often credited with holy healing power, and churches that held relics were the sites of pilgrimage in the medieval period.⁷² Because of the holy power of these relics, the materials used to house the relics, while no longer

⁶⁹ Behr, Charlotte. "The Symbolic Nature of Gold in Magical and Religious Contexts." The Portable Antiquities Scheme. Accessed June 21, 2023. <https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/papers/charlottebehr>.

⁷⁰ Alba-Koch, Beatriz. *The Ibero-American Baroque*. University of Toronto Press, 2022: 78.

⁷¹ Alba-Koch, *The Ibero-American Baroque*, 78.

⁷² Alba-Koch, *The Ibero-American Baroque*, 78.

officially holy themselves, were used as reflections of the relic's holy power. However, the plentiful use of gold in reliquary housing during the colonial age therefore alludes to the material's medieval meanings.

From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the reliquaries became markedly more elaborate, often employing other materials like jewels and ivory (see fig. 1). Due to the anti-materialist sentiment present during the Protestant Reformation, Catholic defense of the relic cults during the subsequent counter-reformation increased, and the development of new reliquaries and circulation of older reliquaries became much more widespread in Catholic practice.⁷³ Older reliquaries also increased in circulation after the fall of Christian Constantinople in 1453, and new recommendations from the church to place relics inside of reliquary housing increased the number of reliquaries made.⁷⁴ Most of these reliquaries, like figure 1, use gold and/or silver as the base building material, adorned with precious jewels.



Figure 1: Reliquary. Spanish, 16th Century. Photo Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The point of early colonial contact with the Philippines occurred during the early years of the Spanish Golden Age (1492-1659) – an era of extravagant gold culture that emphasized artistic intricacy and Catholic iconography. It was also a period in which Spanish Catholics believed that certain objects such as reliquaries possessed holy powers. Spanish goldsmiths were renowned for their craft, and the association of gold with God's holy power was not only well-established, but the value of gold also continued to be crucial to Catholic conversion efforts and

⁷³ Hsia, R. Po-chia. *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770*. Cambridge University Press, 1998:13-15.

⁷⁴ Alba-Koch, *The Ibero-American Baroque*, 79.

aesthetics during this time period, especially as the riches from Spain's colonial possessions in the Americas began to bring in unprecedented amounts of wealth.⁷⁵ Through most of the medieval period, the Iberian Peninsula was under competing control between the various Muslim sultanates and the Christian kingdoms of Spain, namely Castile and Aragon. The marriage between Isabela and Ferdinand unified the two kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, and the monarchs' victory at Granada brought the Reconquista to an end in 1492. With the end of the Reconquista, a period when Muslims and Jews who lived in Spain were either expelled or forced to convert to Christianity, gold was given a new meaning as a symbol of Christianity's triumph and conquest.

Church architecture in Spain was meant to symbolize the victory of Christianity over Islam and Judaism, especially after the Reconquista concluded with the fall of Granada in 1492.⁷⁶ Gold was heavily featured in church architecture during this period, particularly in the



Figure 2: Close-Up of High Altar in Seville Cathedral, Spain. Photo Courtesy of Dick Ebert, Encircle World Photos.

use of gilded wood as a decorative technique. The Cathedral of Saint Mary of the See, or the Catedral de Sevilla, although much of it has undergone renovations since the establishment of the Spanish empire, is an excellent example of the way the Spanish utilized gold in church architecture (see fig. 2). Here, one can see the intention that gold was supposed to carry. Not only is the material used in the individual niches of this altar, but it also covers

⁷⁵ Perratore, Julia. "Artistic Interaction among Cultures in Medieval Iberia | Essay | The Metropolitan Museum of Art | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, January 1, 1AD. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ccmi/hd_ccmi.htm.

⁷⁶ Maltby, William. *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008: 6.

the entire wall. It gives the altar the visual impression of light and holiness. When used in church architecture, gold not only indicated the glory of Christianity, but it was also meant to depict heaven. Gold was often chosen as a material for portraying holy figures in heaven, “used to lift the figures out of the temporality of earthly existence and turn the painting [or in this case, the altar] into a vision.”⁷⁷ Moreover, the religious use of gold also illustrates the power of the Church. As with many of the cathedrals built during this time period, the Catedral de Sevilla was built on the site of a former mosque – and was not only a physical reminder of the dominance of Christianity, but also a spiritual one.⁷⁸

Spanish religious fervor extended from the Iberian Peninsula and was intimately connected with its colonies.⁷⁹ Thus, gold also became a symbol of Catholic religious dominance in the Americas. As a Catholic monarchy, Spain used its colonies as missionizing enterprises and sites of religious devotion, while simultaneously extracting from their colonies resources for labor and raw materials. As a religious enterprise, the Catholic Church sent various missionaries like the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits to missions to convert and spiritually guide the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Aside from the Spanish religious zeal that was displayed in the missions, the Spanish also harbored a significant economic motivation in their desires for conquest. Much of the gold that adorns Spanish cathedrals is from their colonies in Latin America, taken from mining, grave-robbing, and looting of the Incan and Aztec Empires.⁸⁰ The Spanish took over gold mines originally established by these empires and established new mines

⁷⁷ Bachmann, *The Lure of Gold*, 213-217.

⁷⁸ Quintero, Josephine. “Seville Cathedral.” andalucia.com. Accessed January 19, 2023. <https://www.andalucia.com/cities/seville/cathedral.htm>.

⁷⁹ Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*, 13.

⁸⁰ TePaske, *A New World of Gold and Silver*, 33.

throughout the sixteenth century.⁸¹ In this sense, gold illustrated the power of God, as well as the Spanish Empire, and the Spanish Colonial Project was branded as a Christianizing mission.

Influences in Goldsmithing

Though many of the Catholic Church's practices were dictated by the Vatican during the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, Spain established its own unique gold-working tradition during the early modern period. The beginning of the colonial period in the Philippines coincided with Spain's Golden Age, typified by the establishment and expansion of Catholic artistic culture in the country that drew from elements of the Italian Renaissance. Despite the church emphasizing Christianity's defeat of Islam after 1492, Spanish Christian gold-working in the

⁸¹ Cartwright, Mark. "The Gold of the Conquistadors - World History Encyclopedia." World History Encyclopedia. <https://www.worldhistory.org#organization>, July 25, 2022. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2045/the-gold-of-the-conquistadors/>.

fifteenth century was influenced by the Muslim caliphates that ruled much of Spain through the medieval period.

After “reconquering” Spain from Muslim authority, Muslim gold-working techniques had a significant influence on gold ornamentation and religious objects (see figs. 3 and 4). During the



Figure 3: Elements from a necklace. Spanish, late 15th-16th century. Image Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 4: Bead details from Figure 3. Image Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Reconquista, Muslim goldworking guilds took commissions from Christian patrons, and the influence of Muslim techniques - mostly involving small floriated or geometric details - persisted after the *Reconquista* was completed.⁸² Despite gold starting to represent Christian victory over Islam, the artistic influences from Muslim jewelry continued to emerge after 1492. For example, the filigree beadwork found in figures 3 and 4 uses a significant amount of negative space. This

⁸² The Metropolitan Museum of Art. “Elements from a Necklace | Spanish | The Metropolitan Museum of Art.” <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464044>

style of negative filigree, used in other pieces of jewelry at the time, appears more frequently in later Hispano-Filipino goldwork.

Drawing from Muslim goldworking influences, Spanish goldwork during the Golden Age was characterized by the use of delicate filigree that included the use of precious metals. Regardless of the techniques borrowed from Islamic cultures, however, the Spanish explicitly utilized gold for Catholic practices of worship. Gold was not just used for religious worship, but also as currency, and Spain gained a significant amount of gold from its colonies in Latin America. In addition, through its colonial possessions, Spain extracted a variety of precious materials both to increase their economic wealth and to illustrate the glory of Spanish Catholicism. This continued in their colonization of the Philippines.

Precolonial Luzon and Visayas

As already discussed, most of the indigenous people groups in the precolonial Philippines practiced a form of shamanistic animism. This refers to the religion of the Philippines as an animist belief system (which is typified by the belief that spirits occupy much of the world and can often be negotiated with) that includes and necessitates the presence of shamans in the Philippines, who possess “the ability... to enter into an altered state of conscious in order to heal the sick, communicate with the spirits of the dead and perform other supernatural feats.”⁸³ Shamanistic animism is not just a religion, however. It is a worldview that informed much of daily life for indigenous peoples in the archipelago, which included the way that people in the archipelago interacted with gold. Society during this time period was deeply religious – everyday life constantly involved interacting with a mediated space between the spiritual world of the *anitos* and the material world. Animist practices were imbued in almost every sense of daily life.

⁸³ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xvii-xviii.

Throughout gold's "lifecycle," the material's association with the world of the *anitos* informed its manufacture and use in personal adornment.

Locations, Mining Practices, and Gold's Ubiquity in Precolonial Society

While daily life in the Philippines was not centered on gold, it was an extremely plentiful material across the islands of the archipelago and did play a significant role in precolonial Philippine society and religion. Due to prehistoric volcanic activity that formed the mountainous regions of the Philippines, there are a handful of large historical gold deposits that are scattered across the archipelago. Two of these historical gold deposits were located on the island of Luzon and in the modern-day Visayas region.⁸⁴ In addition, there are also a significant number of gold deposits located in the Mindanao region. Most of the smaller gold deposits in the Philippines diffused from mountainous streams to settle in river basins and streams, and much of the gold used in the archipelago was likely panned from these water sources.⁸⁵ However, there were larger gold deposits in the mountainous regions of the Philippines, particularly on the island of Luzon. These mountainous veins were the typical sites of mining operations.⁸⁶

The amount of gold diffused from the mountains to watery tributaries, streams, and river basins allowed people to have easy access to gold even without the presence of large-scale industrial mining enterprises or hierarchical organization that facilitated access to commoners' labor. The accounts of Spanish explorers and early colonial officials affirm that these deposits were used by the peoples in the archipelago. Magellan's chronicler Pigafetta remarked on the

⁸⁴ Estrella, "The Death of Gold in Early Visayan Societies: Ethnohistoric Accounts and Archaeological Evidence," 22.

⁸⁵ Díaz-Trechuelo, "Eighteenth Century Philippine Economy: Mining," 792-793. See also Estrella, "The Death of Gold in Early Visayan Societies: Ethnohistoric Accounts and Archaeological Evidences," 22-23.

⁸⁶ Estrella, "The Death of Gold in Early Visayan Societies: Ethnohistoric Accounts and Archaeological Evidences," 22-23. See also Capistrano-Baker *et. al*, *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 19 for an in-depth map. While Capistrano-Baker's map is more in-depth on the gold deposits, her map does not include dates or specification of the kinds of mining practiced before the Spanish.

island of Luzon in 1521 “that which is most abundant is gold. They showed me certain valleys, making signs that there was more gold than hairs on the head.”⁸⁷

While gold was mined by some indigenous tribes in the Philippines, mining practices were vastly different from the brutally extractive Spanish mining practices. In the lowland areas, gold was mined using typical panning methods. However, in the mountainous regions of Luzon, small-scale underground mining was conducted.⁸⁸ Placer mining was also used in some areas of the archipelago, but the rate at which the gold was mined and the availability of gold meant that practices were generally more sustainable than mining in Spain.⁸⁹ The gold in these mines was in a sense owned by the *anitos* surrounding it, and certain rituals like periods of abstinence from mining for various reasons (like eating the wrong meat) had to be honored to appease both the *anito* and the gods, but also to ensure that the community’s mine would remain plentiful.⁹⁰ Miners also had to be careful not to take *too much* gold and had to leave some for the *anitos*.⁹¹

Gold mining was a deeply spiritual practice – because the gold belonged to the spirits around them, one had to negotiate with the spirits in order to acquire the gold. This spiritual “ownership” in a sense did not leave gold after it was taken out of the ground in the mines. Instead, the material continued to be associated with spiritual significance in its manufacture and use as a means of personal adornment.

Metallurgy in the precolonial Philippine archipelago was a labor-intensive trade and required a significant amount of labor. Goldsmiths in the Philippines, called *panday-ginto*, were likely full-time artisans who, depending on their skill, either lived in settled cities or traveled

⁸⁷ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 108.

⁸⁸ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 22-23.

⁸⁹ Villegas, *Kayamanan: The Philippine Jewelry Tradition*, 71.

⁹⁰ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 22-23.

⁹¹ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 22-23.

between townships.⁹² The goldsmithing techniques commonly used in the archipelago also required a significant amount of expertise, and methods of gold manufacture that could encourage mass production, like casting, were rarely used.⁹³ Although there has been some doubt regarding the origin of some gold artifacts found in the Philippines, John Guy argues that the availability of gold in the Philippines and the presence of unique goldsmithing techniques that “[display] a level of refinement matched only by the kingdoms of Java” indicates that there was a unique gold culture separate from other Southeast Asian societies at the time, though they certainly influenced and were influenced by the goldsmithing techniques from other parts of the region, particularly Java.⁹⁴

Spanish Accounts of Gold in the Philippines

Whether in the Americas or in Asia, the Spanish were preoccupied with the amount of gold that they found during the early and middle periods of colonization. More than any other material, early colonial sources mention the presence of gold in the Philippine archipelago. Although the Spanish were consciously looking for gold in this period and therefore would have been more inclined to notice it and keep a record, the presence of the material in Spanish accounts are not simply embellishments. Instead, they substantiate the presence of the archipelago’s strong gold culture before colonization. These early colonial records are important as historical sources because they reference an abundant amount of gold found in the archipelago, describe how people used it, and document the meanings of various golden items during this time period. The Spanish accounts describe cultures in the Visayas and Luzon that

⁹² Villegas, Ramon. *Sining Ng Panahong Ginintuan: Art of a Golden Age*. Manila, PH: Metropolitan Museum of Manila, 1999: 25-30.

⁹³ Villegas, *Sining Ng Panahong Ginintuan: Art of a Golden Age*, 27-29.

⁹⁴ Guy, John. “Gold in the Philippines: Form, Meaning, and Metamorphosis.” In *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, by Floriana Capistrano-Baker, 164–88. Singapore: Ayala Foundation, NUS Press, 2011: 174.

utilized gold for adornment, revealing cultures in which gold is an important part of the archipelago's spiritual landscape. There are four accounts that are particularly relevant to this paper: those of Antonio Pigafetta, Antonio de Morga, Francisco Ignacio Alcina, and the Boxer Codex.

Pigafetta was the chronicler on Magellan's circumnavigation voyage from 1519 to 1522, spending most of his time with the explorer on the voyage and accompanied him ashore on several occasions.⁹⁵ During his time on the voyage, Pigafetta's curiosity and willingness to talk with the indigenous people made him an essential figure in subsequent negotiations with the rulers that the Spanish encountered. Pigafetta attempted to record as much as he could about his interactions with indigenous peoples.⁹⁶ His accounts therefore offer a vivid depiction of Visayan society during their voyages. When the Spanish expedition first contacted people on the island of Cebu and other various islands, the entire crew was enamored with the sheer amount of gold that the people of Luzon and the Visayas held and used as personal ornamentation. When the crew of the circumnavigation voyage encountered the *datu* of Butuan and Callaghan Raja Calambu, Pigafetta described him as covered in gold, from (literally) head to toe:⁹⁷

In the island of that king who came to the ship are mines of gold, which is found by digging from the earth large pieces as large as walnuts and eggs. And all the vessels he uses are likewise [of gold], as are also some parts [f.32r] of his house, which was well fitted in the fashion of the country. And he was the most handsome person whom we saw among those peoples. He had very black hair to his shoulders, with a silk cloth on his head, and two large gold rings hanging from his ears. He wore a cotton cloth, embroidered with silk, which covered him from

⁹⁵ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 22-23.

⁹⁶ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 19-21.

⁹⁷ Raja Calambu is referred to as *raja* and not *datu* in this work likely due to trade and cultural relations with the rest of Southeast Asia, which operated within a "mandala" style political configuration. At this point, the language of power was largely Indianized, and many rulers in trade cities used the title of "raja". For more information regarding the duties and cultural obligations of the *datu*, see Scott, *Barangay*, 5-7, 128-130. For more on the mandala configuration and its use in Southeast Asia, see Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830*, 45-53.

his waist to his knees. At his side he had a dagger, with a long handle, and all of gold, the sheath of which was of carved wood.⁹⁸

The footnotes in this particular translation also mention that the Italian manuscript noted that Raja Calambu also had “on each tooth... three spots of gold, so that his teeth seemed to be bound in gold.”⁹⁹ The Raja was incredibly wealthy due to his status as a *datu*, but, it wasn’t just the wealthy that owned and wore gold in the Philippines – on several other occasions, Pigafetta remarks that even the commoners the Spanish encountered either wore small amounts of gold jewelry or carried gold-adorned weapons.¹⁰⁰ Gold was certainly a marker of one’s social status, but the mineral was not limited to those in the upper echelons of Philippine society.

The presence of gold in the archipelago also plays a significant role in the writings of the Boxer Codex. Although the identity of the authors of the codex are unknown, historians like William Henry Scott typically argue “that the compiler was most probably a layman and not a member of a religious order.”¹⁰¹ The Boxer Codex is also the earliest book in the Philippines to depict peoples across Southeast Asia, and the illustrations themselves are accented by the presence of gold leaf in almost every illustration of Philippine peoples.¹⁰² Importantly, the codex describes and depicts in gold-foil illustrations examples of several people groups within the Philippines that wear and own gold in all classes, from commoners to elite royalty.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 115. As a general note, Pigafetta’s writings are often translated from one of three manuscripts, only one of which is in Italian, the other two in French. Skelton’s version of Pigafetta’s journals, which is the source I use most often in this thesis, is a critical translation of both the Italian and French journals. See also Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 22-23.

⁹⁹ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 105.

¹⁰¹ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 13.

¹⁰² Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 13.

¹⁰³ Souza, George Bryan, and Jeffery Scott Turley, eds. *The Boxer Codex*. Translated by Jeffery Scott Turley. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2016: 320-322. For depictions of Visayans and Tagalogs see pages 330-333, 367-371.

Gold is mentioned in the Boxer Codex similarly to the manner in which it is mentioned in Pigafetta, de Morga, and Alcina's writings, but the codex also adds a significant amount of detail to the passing comments of other Spanish administrators, missionaries, and explorers because of the presence of its' gold-foil illustrations. The codex also specifically mentions the presence of a class of artisans who "are expert workers of filigree, they know how to melt and refine gold very well."¹⁰⁴

Another early account of the Philippines and its gold culture is the work of Antonio de Morga in his monograph *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*. Published relatively closely to the Boxer Codex in the late sixteenth century, de Morga's account mostly dealt with the colonial administration and the "achievements" of the Spanish in the area in establishing a colony. De Morga was a lawyer and historian of the new Philippine colony.¹⁰⁵ He wrote his book during the lifetime of some of Legaspi's administrative officials and was able to consult them on their experiences during the earliest period of colonization.¹⁰⁶ As with Pigafetta's writings and the Boxer Codex, de Morga discusses at-length the presence of gold in the archipelago, particularly on the island of Luzon. He describes the abundance of gold in the Philippines as almost unbelievable:

It is sufficient to say that I swear, as a Christian, that there is more gold in this island [of Luzon] alone than there is iron in Biscay. The Moors use this gold and mix it with silver and copper so cunningly, that they might take in the most dexterous and cunning artificers of Spain.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Souza and Turley, *The Boxer Codex*, 349.

¹⁰⁵ Cummins, J. S. "Antonio de Morga and His *Sucesos de Las Islas Filipinas*." *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 560–81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27651727>: 560-561.

¹⁰⁶ Cummins, "Antonio de Morga and His *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*", 560-561.

¹⁰⁷ Morga, Anthony de. *The Philippine Islands, Moluccas, Siam, Cambodia, Japan, and China at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*. Translated by Henry E.J. Stanley. London: Hakluyt Society, 1868: 300. De Morga's discussion of the significant presence of gold as unbelievable in the text also implies that there was some controversy or doubt of the amount of gold in the Philippines at the time of his writing, despite the writings of other Spaniards before him like Pigafetta's journal and the Boxer Codex.

Interesting to note in de Morga's work is the discussion of Philippine goldsmithing and the alloys that indigenous people used. Though the Spanish administration attempted to regulate the quality and artistic traditions of goldwork later in the colonial period, they were initially fascinated with the goldworks they came across in the early stages of colonization.

In addition to the travel documents of Pigafetta, de Morga, and the Boxer Codex, the work of Alcina also mentions gold as an abundant resource with talented goldsmiths. Alcina was a Jesuit missionary and historian active in Luzon and the Visayas in the seventeenth century who further confirmed that this class of gold artisans in the archipelago were extremely talented, particularly in the construction of *kamagis*, Visayan-made golden cords made entirely of interlocking beads, as well as those made from a Visayan alloy called "Tunga," which was gold mixed with red copper, and "it was valued as highly as gold, not for its richness but for medical properties."¹⁰⁸ However, this artisan class seemingly only existed in metropolitan areas, and goldsmiths outside of the larger settled cities often were part-time subsistence farmers.¹⁰⁹

The clear abundance of gold in the Philippine archipelago is also supported by the discovery of golden grave goods found by both the Spanish colonial personnel and modern-day archaeologists. Leading up to the early days of the Spanish occupation, gold had an extensive presence in the Philippine archipelago during the precolonial period. Even without the Spanish fascination with gold in their travel documents and colonial accounts, the presence of these burial goods confirms that the Visayans and Tagalogs had an indisputable gold culture at the

¹⁰⁸ Alcina, Francisco Ignacio, and Juan Bautista Muñoz. *The Muñoz Text of Alcina's History of the Bisayan Islands (1668), Part I*. Translated by Paul S. Lietz. Chicago: Philippines Studies Program, University of Chicago, 1962: 29. The term *camagi* is also spelled as *kamagi* in modern sources, but it is spelled with the "c" in this version of Alcina's writings. In other discussions of the *kamagi*, I will use the spelling with the "k" to reflect the popular spelling. Alcina also mentions that the religious practitioners of Philippine animism adorned themselves with gold during rituals, but this passage also bears a significant resemblance to the witches' sabbath (as a gathering of magic practitioners under the cover of night, a "ritual" that rose to prominence with the *Malleus Maleficarum*). For more information see Alcina and Muñoz, *The Muñoz Text of Alcina's History of the Bisayan Islands (1668), Part I*, 216.

¹⁰⁹ Villegas, *Kayamanan: The Philippine Jewelry Tradition*, 113.

point of Spanish contact – they had a developed style of manufacture, an established class of artisans to shape and sell the gold, and they had such an abundance of gold that it was accessible to almost every class of people across the archipelago.

Grave Goods and Golden Adornments: Precolonial Artistry

Various kinds of golden adornment have been found in Philippine burials that date as far back as 500 BCE, which archaeologists term the “Metal Age.”¹¹⁰ Although the interference of the Spanish in the earliest years of the colonial period certainly lessened the amount of gold archaeologists have found, smaller gold pieces like beads and fastenings for the end of large strings (likely used in clothing) have been found in archaeological sites across the archipelago, and these smaller gold pieces made up the bulk of gold found in graves throughout the twentieth century.¹¹¹ In addition, the discovery of much larger gold pieces such as the famous Butuan and Cebu gold masks and other elaborate works of Philippine goldsmithing were excavated in graves untouched by the Spanish throughout the twentieth century. These unearthed the presence of a much more elaborate gold culture in the Philippines than previously suggested by the archaeological record.¹¹²

Jewelry in the Philippine archipelago was not only abundant in graves, but the pieces discovered also display a unique set of goldsmithing techniques and iconography. While a significant amount of goldwork from the Mindanao area bears a significant influence from Hindu-Buddhist tradition that indicates extensive contact and influence from other parts of Southeast Asia, this is not the case for the entire archipelago. There are less examples of Hindu-

¹¹⁰ Dizon, Eusebo. “36. The Prehistory of the Philippines.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia, 1st Edition*, by C.F.W. Higham and Nam C Kim, 819–38. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022: 820.

¹¹¹ Fox, Robert, and Miguel A. Bernad. “The Calatagan Excavations: Two 15th Century Burial Sites in Batangas, Philippines.” *Philippine Studies* 7, no. 3 (1959): 20-21, 38-40.

¹¹² Guy, “Gold in the Philippines: Form, Meaning, and Metamorphosis,” 174.

Buddhist influence in the Luzon and Visayas areas, for example.¹¹³ However, this is not to say that these areas were devoid of artistic influences from the rest of Southeast Asia, or that the



Figure 5: Finger ring in the shape of a bird. Attributed to Cuyo, Palawan province Ca. 10th–13th century. Gold. Ayala Museum, 64.1237. Photography by Neal Oshima, Image courtesy of Ayala Museum.



Figure 6: Ear ornament. Eastern Visayas or Northeastern Mindanao. Ca. 10th–13th century. Gold. Diam. 1 5/8 in. (4.2 cm). Ayala Museum, 73.4192. Photography by Neal Oshima, Image courtesy of Ayala Museum

Southern Philippines exclusively used gold working techniques from outside sources. In general, most gold artifacts with Hindu-Buddhist influences found are attributed to the Southern Philippines (and sometimes in the Visayas), while this influence is largely absent in Northern examples of goldwork.

In addition to the influences of Hindu-Buddhist art in the Philippines, Islam also influenced the archipelago's gold culture. As Anne Richter argues in her monograph, the presence of Islamic forms of goldworking mostly appears in the south, where bracelets and

¹¹³ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 30-35.

jewelry “were decorated with arabesques and curling vegetal motifs,” popular in Muslim goldworking in other parts of Island Southeast Asia.¹¹⁴

Pre-colonial goldwork in the Philippines included elements from flora and fauna. Gold items of personal adornment commonly included depictions of birds the sun, and geometric patterns that Capistrano-Baker has attributed to Hindu- Buddhist influences from other spaces in Southeast Asia (see figs. 5 and 6).¹¹⁵ There is also a presence of a variety of flora in Philippine jewelry, particularly in earrings.¹¹⁶ In the Southern Visayas / Northern Mindanao areas, the



Figure 7: Ear ornaments with twelve floriated spangles (*kayong kayong*). Attributed to Bohol, Central Visayas. Ca. 10th–13th century. Gold. Ayala Museum, 71.4042ab. Photography by Neal Oshima, Image courtesy of Ayala Museum.

presence of *Patan-aw* or *kayong-kayong* earrings (see fig.7) display some of examples of this imagery in their “multiple round, rhomboidal, and foliate (leaflike) spangles.”¹¹⁷

Manufacture of gold jewelry was markedly different from traditional European styles, but it was similar to the gold aesthetics of other parts of Southeast Asia at the time. For example, the presence of U-shaped ear ornaments referred to as *uod*, are similar to ear ornaments featured in the kingdom of Champa in Southern Vietnam.¹¹⁸ Undoubtedly, societies in the archipelago were actively exchanging gold with other Southeast Asian cultures during this time, and that the methods of manufacture were also influenced by other societies. However, the gold beadwork

¹¹⁴ Ritcher, Anne. *Jewelry of Southeast Asia*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000: 249.

¹¹⁵ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 30-35

¹¹⁶ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 62-68.

¹¹⁷ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 100-101.

¹¹⁸ Capistrano-Baker *et al.*, *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 92-93.

present in the Philippines is a significant testament to the independence of the archipelago's gold culture. These small gold beads, often forming larger parts of necklaces, as well as cord weights



Figure 8: Cord weights. Butuan, Agusan del Norte province. Ca. 10th–13th century. Gold. Ayala Museum, 77.4895ab. Photography by Neal Oshima, Image courtesy of Ayala Museum



Figure 9: Oton Death Mask, late 14th to early 15th century, Iloilo, Panay Island, Visayas. Photo Courtesy of National Museum of the Philippines.

meant to adorn clothing, were intricately manufactured using a variety of methods with different names for the beads, which Capistrano-Baker argues “suggest an established tradition.”¹¹⁹ These items are also tiny, displaying the artistry that goldsmiths would have had to possess in order to achieve the detail found on the beads and weights (see fig. 8).

Death Masks, *Kamagis*, and Protective Properties of Gold

One of the most compelling types of gold artifacts that differs from adornment used in life is the gold funerary mask. Similar funerary masks have been found in other Southeast Asian polities as well (particularly in southern Vietnam and Indonesia, sites that would have had extensive trade contact with the Philippines at this time), and the masks themselves varied in shape and style across the islands.¹²⁰ In Mindoro and Cebu, the funerary masks discovered in the Philippines are often one connected piece to cover the eyes, hammered with abstract decorations.

¹¹⁹ Capistrano-Baker *et al.*, *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 102.

¹²⁰ Capistrano-Baker *et al.*, *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 40.

Visayan death masks often also display a prominent nose piece, like seen in the famous Oton death mask (see fig. 9). These gold pieces were crafted of thin gold, which “would be most unsuitable for ornament in daily use,” further indicating that these funerary masks were made specifically as a death practice and would not have been used at any other time.¹²¹

While gold was a very popular item for adornment and aesthetics, the presence of these death masks found in the graves of important people in the Visayas and upper Mindanao areas as grave goods also indicates that there was a definite social and spiritual value to gold at the time of Spanish contact. As discussed by Villegas, burying the deceased family members with gold pieces at this time was a way to ensure that their loved ones would be well-received by their ancestors. Given the ability that gold pieces like the *kamagi* necklaces had to protect the wearer from illness, the placement of gold in the grave may have also been a method to protect the deceased family member from harm in the afterlife, or to prevent the body from being possessed by evil spirits.¹²²

Gold grave goods other than death masks, like the plethora of jewelry recovered in the archipelago, also probably protected the deceased person from suffering while in the afterlife by ensuring that they would be taken care of and accepted by their ancestors and other spirits. While there are examples of cutwork diadems used by the living in the Boxer Codex, there are instances where golden diadems interred with the deceased that weren’t used during their lifetime.¹²³ As Estrella, Capistrano-Baker and Villegas argue, golden ornamentation was placed

¹²¹ Capistrano-Baker et al., *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 44. This specific example pertains to not only the eye covers that she addresses here (which may have been shaped at the funerary site judging by the gold shavings found at the gravesite). These funerary masks may have been placed on the deceased at the last moment before finally burying them, potentially for protection, but Capistrano-Baker argues that it is more likely “to enhance one’s prestige in the afterlife.”

¹²² Ladrido, R.C. “Oton Death Mask: Celebrating the Afterlife - VERA Files.” VERA Files, November 8, 2022. <https://verafiles.org/articles/oton-death-mask-celebrating-the-afterlife>.

¹²³ Capistrano-Baker et al., *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 44.

in graves with the deceased to ensure a peaceful and accommodating transition to the afterlife. Without it, the deceased was shunned by the other dead.¹²⁴

In the precolonial period, gold ornamentation was also intensely personal to the individual: Capistrano-Baker points out that the deceased would have been buried with the jewelry that they wore in life (likely their favorite pieces), and the funerary masks were not the only death-specific gold items that deceased family members would have had in the spirit world with them.¹²⁵ In some graves, the deceased also bore a cutwork diadem also made of gold.

While the presence of the grave goods in the Philippines indicates that gold was already used in a spiritual manner, gold's spiritual properties did not begin or end with death. Instead, gold was likely also used as a protective material. Alcina's Munoz text further confirms this significance with the properties of kamagi necklaces made by Visayans in the seventeenth century:

It is valued as highly as gold, not for its richness but for medicinal properties because by it [they are protected] from/ airs which cause spasms and from infections. For this reason the rings and bracelets which even the Spaniards, both men and women, wear today as preventatives against these illnesses, are so highly valued¹²⁶

Alcina is referring here to the alloy called Tunga, which as stated earlier in this chapter, is a mix of gold and a bright red copper to make an alloy. While Alcina describes tunga as antibacterial and disease-repellent, this use of the *kamagi* necklaces is interesting considering the “lifecycle” of gold. This is very typical of Philippine animism, where practitioners believed that

¹²⁴ Estrella, “The Death of Gold in Early Visayan Societies: Ethnohistoric Accounts and Archaeological Evidence,” 30, Capistrano-Baker et al., *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 40.

¹²⁵ Capistrano-Baker et al., *Philippine Ancestral Gold*, 40.

¹²⁶ Alcina and Muñoz, *The Muñoz Text of Alcina's History of the Bisayan Islands (1668), Part 1*, 149-150.

disease was caused by either malignant or unhappy spirits.¹²⁷ By using the *kamagis* as a way to ward off disease, Visayans were warding off the evil spirits that caused the disease.

The idea that gold was considered protective by the precolonial peoples of the Philippines is often mentioned in discussions of gold and in academic sources. For example, Villegas explains that gold was a material of protection. In addition, the concept that gold as a *material* is protective is not unusual for specific styles and items used in jewelry or ritual due to their association with protection – in contemporary paganism and Wicca, the crystal black tourmaline is utilized in ritual to aid in protection, and it is also worn by practitioners in order to carry protection with them.

Gold's ubiquity in ornamentation, the number of gold burial goods in precolonial graves, and the negotiated nature of animism present in the archipelago indicate that the use of these kamagi to ward off sickness potentially wasn't simply a unique use of gold-alloy necklaces as physical protection from disease. Gold carried a sense of spiritual protection for the peoples in the Philippine archipelago. Therefore, the presence of gold as adornment also indicates that precolonial peoples of the archipelago used gold jewelry as a means of protection.¹²⁸ Gold was a spiritual substance just as much as it was a *physical* substance, and this can be traced throughout gold's "lifecycle." At the mine and in the rivers, gold was collected in accordance with local customs, and it was often treated as property of the supernatural. Gold jewelry retained its' spiritual significance, as in the example of the *kamagi*, by taking on a protective role for the individual who wore it. This role as protection continued through the individual's death, where it ensured that the individual received a good reception and treatment in the afterlife.

¹²⁷ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xvii.

¹²⁸ Villegas, *Ginto: History Wrought in Gold*, 97.

The Colonial Era

In the Spanish colonial period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, gold was used in pageantry as a conversion tactic by missionaries. Certain Spanish Catholic gold traditions like church architecture and ritual items were well-received by the peoples of Luzon and the Visayas. However, the practice of using gold in religious processions and the general pageantry of the church did not fully remove the animist associations of gold with protection. These associations became localized into Filipino Catholicism, and although the animist associations between gold and the *anitos* were suppressed by the church, the precolonial spiritual associations between gold and protection continued in at least some capacity.

It is also important to note that the colonization of the Philippines and Spanish fascination with gold was also an economic venture, particularly for non-clergy members in the new Spanish colony. While the Spanish did not set up a significant mining venture in the Philippines throughout most of its colonial administration, they certainly robbed graves and acquired gold through economic transactions.

Grave Robbing: Changes in the Economic Uses of Gold

Before beginning large projects to extract, create, and expand gold mines in the Philippines, the first part of the Spanish colonial project was marked by the robbing of graves. By 1565, Legaspi's government had such a problem with Spanish soldiers "opening" and removing gold from Philippine graves and not paying their required tax on the goods that Legaspi issued a missive requiring that removal of grave goods could only be done in the presence of an official:

In the island of Cubu of the Western Islands, belonging to his majesty, on the sixteenth of May, one thousand five hundred and sixty-five, the most illustrious Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, his majesty's governor and captain-general of the people and fleet of the discovery of the Western Islands, appeared before me,

Fernando Riquel, government notary of the said islands, and declared: that, inasmuch as he had been informed that many Spanish soldiers and sailors have opened many graves and burial-places of the native Indians in this island, wherein a quantity of gold and other jewels has been found; and inasmuch as those opening these graves and finding the said gold have not made a report thereof to his excellency nor to his majesty's officials, in order that his majesty may receive and take his royal fifths and rights; therefore he ordered, and did order, that proclamation should be made, in due form of law, that all who have opened any graves whence they have abstracted gold, jewels, and other valuables, and those who have in their possession gold and jewels of these islands, however they may have been obtained, shall appear and make full declaration regarding such things before his majesty's officials, in order that what is, in this regard, fitting to his majesty's service and the good security of his royal estate, may be provided—under penalty that whoever shall act contrary to this order shall, besides losing all the gold and other valuables thus obtained and abstracted, be proceeded against in due form of law.¹²⁹

Though it is typical of historical narratives that the Spanish simply greedily took gold from wherever they could find it, this declaration is notable because of the implied value the colonial and Spanish governments lost when its own soldiers and other colonists dug up Philippine graves. It is reasonable to assume that the amount of gold in Philippine graves around this time must have been significant enough for the colonial administration to care this much about the amount of taxes that they were “losing” when the soldiers did not give up one-fifth of the income from these robbed graves. Logically, either the Spanish were finding a significant number of graves in the Philippines that contained gold, or the Spanish were finding a small number of individual graves with a lot of gold.

The practice of “opening” Philippine graves was not the only method of acquiring gold in the archipelago. The Spanish also implemented the *encomienda* system in the Philippines during the first century of colonial rule, where the Spanish Crown granted colonists an incentive to occupy land in the colony and demand tribute and forced labor from the native inhabitants that promised them wealth and power. The *encomenderos* imposed strict tariffs and “compelled their

¹²⁹ Blair and Robinson, *The Philippine Islands (1493-1898)*, Volume II.

wards to pay tribute in a scarce commodity, which goods the encomenderos then resold at a handsome profit.”¹³⁰ It is likely that families had to give up gold pieces during this early portion of the colonial period in order to pay the tariffs in addition to cloth, porcelain, rice, and other valuable goods.¹³¹ In his monograph, Alcina mentions a growing class of goldsmiths in the seventeenth century, but “there is much less quantity [of gold] now than when the Spaniards had just arrived in the islands.”¹³² However, gold was still plentiful in the archipelago, and continued to be a significant source of ornamentation for wealthy families.

Despite the amount of gold that the Spanish remarked upon and recovered in graves, the material was not used extensively as a source of revenue in the colony. Most Spanish wealth came through the Galleon trade, where Manila became a valuable port of exchange and midpoint between the silver mines in Potosi and Southern China. These galleon ships carried silver from Mexico to Manila and brought back luxury trade goods from China such as porcelain, tea, and gunpowder towards Mexico and onward to the markets of Europe.¹³³ The Philippine colony was not financially successful in its own right and was in fact a significant drain on the Spanish government.¹³⁴

The Spanish were also never able to fully exploit the mines found in the highland regions of Luzon due to indigenous resistance throughout the colonial period.¹³⁵ Many gold ore veins remained in indigenous hands until the twentieth century. Because of the archipelago’s relative distance from the rest of the empire, indigenous resistance where gold mines were located, and the riches that came from the mines in New Spain and the mercantile goods of China, the

¹³⁰ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 95.

¹³¹ Phelan, 102.

¹³² Alcina and Muñoz, *The Muñoz Text of Alcina’s History of the Bisayan Islands (1668), Part 1*, 127.

¹³³ Encyclopædia Britannica. “Manila Galleon | Encyclopædia Britannica.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed June 21, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Manila-galleon>.

¹³⁴ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 94.

¹³⁵ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 105-106.

Philippines did not experience the same environmental degradation of gold mines and the surrounding environment that the Americas experienced in the same period. In addition, gold continued to be used extensively in religious ritual, especially during the process of conversion.

Gold's use in Colonial Religion

Much of the Spanish Catholic Church's early conversion efforts focused on the pageantry of feast days and masses, both to illustrate the power of the Church and to reorganize Filipinos into more concentrated and manageable communities for the benefit of the Spanish administration.¹³⁶ A significant part of this implementation of pageantry was in the use of colorful and dramatic visuals and rituals during these important events. Gold was an essential aesthetic of early conversion efforts by the Spanish, especially displayed in Church architecture and processional crosses, and as used in the tools of Catholic ritual.¹³⁷

In the earlier years of Spanish colonization, churches were made of wood and "light, locally available materials."¹³⁸ As such, during much of this period, the altar and tabernacle in Philippine churches did not utilize the same gilded wood seen in Spain at the time. Instead, most of the gold used in Christian worship was in ritual items like the chalice, used to hold communion, or the host, the symbolic body of Christ, and the santos, images or statues of saints, which utilized gold and silver in the clothing adornments.¹³⁹ Gold was utilized in Church architecture more frequently as the colonial period progressed and early churches transitioned

¹³⁶ Phelan, *Hispanization of the Philippines*, 45-50.

¹³⁷ Cushner, *Spain the Philippines*, 91.

¹³⁸ Jose, Regalado T. *Simbahan: Church Art in the Colonial Philippines 1565-1898*. Metro Manila: Ayala Foundation, 1992: 31.

¹³⁹ The santos and statues will be better discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis regarding wood. However, the important thing to note about their use here is the availability of gold vs. the permanence of church structures. For much of the early colonial period, gold was used primarily in movable objects, not in permanent fixtures until much later. While Jose does not discuss this in-depth in his monograph, it makes logical sense that the *santos* would have also been included in these movable religious objects that featured a significant amount of gold, particularly when considering the golden adornments that modern *santos* wear.

from wooden structures to stone.¹⁴⁰ This is an important distinction – as the Spanish reoriented Philippine society to surround the church, they also included gold in architecture, a new way to utilize gold in the archipelago, and a way not to just establish a spiritual association with the churches. It also established the dominance of the church during the colonial period.

One of the principal achievements in the colonial period was the reorganization of Philippine society to resemble Spanish organization more closely. A large component of this reorganization was the establishment of churches in the centers of towns. Located in central plazas, Jose argues that these churches were made of stone in order to reflect the permanence of Christianity. The gold used in colonial churches resembled the way it was used in Spain: as an illustration of God's glory, and as a visual reminder of the dominance of Christianity. However, gold also still carried with it the precolonial associations with protection and spiritual power. In using gold in the Philippines, the Catholic Church also positioned itself as a protective power.

Gold and pageantry were also utilized heavily in Catholic feast days and holidays, especially during Holy Week, where they continued to serve as a reflection of God's glory and everlasting nature.¹⁴¹ These festivals and feast days were occasions where the community surrounded the church, and where missionaries could further evangelize to the people. The festivities prompted people to travel to the center, some even making temporary houses to stay in the city for the duration of the celebration.¹⁴²

Gold was also subject to the dual pageantries of display and destruction in the colonial period. The destruction of "idols" by Spanish priests was common practice as a way to police

¹⁴⁰ Jose, *Simbahan*, 34-35.

¹⁴¹ Several sources discuss the use of pageantry in the conversion process – Phelan discusses the process itself as a "colorful ritual" where the feast days and Holy Week were large events where people would travel to be around the church and participate in the ritual. Cushner, similarly, discusses the significant use of visuals in the conversion process, and that they were heavily used in lessons. See also Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 47 and Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines*, 90.

¹⁴² Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 47.

behavior, but also to ensure a “true” conversion to Christianity.¹⁴³ In addition to the parish priests, the Inquisition also ensured correct behavior by prosecuting people for religious crimes like blasphemy. The Inquisition targeted animist practices within the Philippines, particularly in the Zambales province, where the organization catalogs lists of suspected *babaylans* and the materials used in these religious rituals.¹⁴⁴ The destruction of these idols was a way to more accurately ensure “correct behavior” in the society at the time, and instances of priests waiting outside a known “pagan” worship locale and destroying idols in front of the people worshipping them were plentiful.¹⁴⁵ While this very theatrical destruction of pagan idols typically involved the wooden *anito* statues that will be discussed later in this thesis, golden religious items of personal adornment would be most likely suspected by missionaries.

Gold was used in the churches of the Philippines in a similar manner to how it was used in Spanish churches. Gold was prominently featured in the altars as a way to illustrate heaven and the glory of God. However, gold still carried with it the precolonial associations with protection, and this association with the protective properties of gold helped in the evangelizing mission of the Spanish Church. By using the same conceptions of gold as a spiritually powerful material in the Philippines, the Church further enforced its own spiritual and material power.

Gold Artistry in the Colonial Period

While the Spanish colonial period irreversibly changed the economic value of gold in the colonial period, the spiritual association with gold as a protective material remained a significant feature of its use in the Philippines, particularly in regard to indigenous gold artistry. Indigenous communities in the Visayas region and the island of Luzon still maintained portions of their gold

¹⁴³ Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines*, 97-98.

¹⁴⁴ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, 146-150.

¹⁴⁵ Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines*, 97-98.

culture and their methods of making gold artifacts in the face of colonialism well into the eighteenth century. Gold continued to be integral to religion in the Philippines throughout the colonial period, and it continues to be an important part of Filipino Catholicism well into the modern day.

Goldsmiths in the Philippines had a variety of methods to create intricate works of gold ornamentation, and these works had a style of manufacture different from Spanish goldworking methods. During the colonial period, the presence of Chinese artisans also introduced new methods of gold artistry such as gilding, or applying gold to another surface, and soldering, or fusing two metal pieces together.¹⁴⁶ Gold was also used as a method of protection in Philippine animism – particularly in the manufacture of *kamagi* necklaces.



Figure 10: Panika Barter Rings, 10th-13th Century. Image Courtesy of Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

¹⁴⁶ Villegas, *Kayamanan: The Philippine Jewelry Tradition*, 115.

Gold was used in trading, and people in the archipelago typically used large “barter rings” as currency until the introduction of coinage throughout the Spanish Empire (see fig. 10). These rings were often not adorned in the same manner as jewelry, but people were able to appraise their value by weight.

Despite Spanish attempts to regulate Filipino gold manufacture particularly in the eighteenth century, precolonial methods of gold manufacture and the precolonial artistic tradition remained the primary methods used to manufacture gold in the Philippines until the nineteenth century. This presence is evident in the manufacturing methods of necklaces like the iconic tamborin.

Tamborins



Figure 11: "Rosary or Necklace." Philippines, 17th-19th Century. Photo courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 12: Details of "Rosary or Necklace." Philippines, 17th-19th Century. Photo Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Alcina’s earlier assertion that the artistry of the precolonial period was lost is not entirely consistent with surviving goldwork from the Spanish colonial Philippines. The presence of a kind of venerative necklace called the tamborin is a direct representation of this Philippine

negotiation of materials through Catholicism. The tamborin, though it does not always depict the cross or other quintessential Christian objects, is a kind of venerative necklace that gained popularity in the eighteenth-century Philippines (see figs. 11 and 12).¹⁴⁷ While these necklaces can also incorporate the use of copper, silver, or coral, the tamborin is principally made of gold, and contains a significant amount of filigree artwork in the main pendant of the necklace, called the *relicario*.¹⁴⁸

These tamborins, much like *anting-anting*, could have been a way for Filipinos to maintain their protective jewelry, but it was often also used as a way to ensure an inheritance for one's children.¹⁴⁹ The beads of the tamborin were easily divided up among children, and the religious iconography featured on many tamborins would have kept the necklaces safe from the disapproval of the priests.¹⁵⁰

Gold was also a common material used for rosaries in the Philippines, and Alcina's writings also mention the presence of gold as a popular material for this purpose, even in the early colonial period. Paired with the previously discussed significance of gold in the precolonial Philippines as a sort of spiritual protection, it is likely (but still a speculative theory) that gold was used in these rosaries not as a reflection of wealth and God's glory but also as a way to ensure that gold's protective properties would continue to be used in a religious context. Not

¹⁴⁷ The term tamborin (they have also spelled as tamburin, tamborines, or tamburines) can also refer to the beading on these necklaces. However, I am following Capistrano-Baker's classification of this as the kind of necklace, and I will be using the spelling in this sentence to refer to them, with the exception of contemporary versions of the necklace, which will use the "tambourine" spelling to reflect what is used in the online discussions of it, and how they are listed on shopping websites. In addition, the term "tamborin" is not attributed to the necklaces from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collections – as they are labelled with the term "necklace" or "necklace or rosary" instead. I have kept the MET labels on these pieces the same in order to ensure that others can find these listings. As Capistrano-Baker argues in her article "Faith and Filigree," this is a miscategorization of many of the pieces currently housed at the MET.

¹⁴⁸ Capistrano-Baker, "Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery," 2.

¹⁴⁹ Capistrano-Baker, "Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery," 8.

¹⁵⁰ Capistrano-Baker, "Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery," 8.

only were these necklaces a method of retaining gold's protective power in a colonial context, the craftsmanship of these tamborins, particularly in the beadwork around the amulet, are very visually similar to precolonial beadwork discussed earlier in this thesis.¹⁵¹

Spanish goldwork (especially in the sense of reliquaries and venerative objects) had



Figure 13: Pendant reliquary with depiction of the Annunciation, Spanish, 17th century. Photo Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art.

elements of framing in jewelry around the eighteenth century as well. As seen in figure 13, these framing elements also could include precious gems, which look very similar to the tamborin. The similarities between the tamborin jewelry and Spanish jewelry are striking.

Eighteenth-century tamborins almost never featured fauna in the symbology of the jewelry, unlike the examples seen in earlier Philippine goldwork (seen in the precolonial gold artistry section), with the exception of the butterfly motif seen in figure 11, right above the *relicario*.

Instead, colonial era tamborins contain a significant amount of flora (flowers, vines, etc.), as seen in the framing around the pendant in the tamborin.¹⁵² There is also the addition of

a second smaller pendant on top of the larger bottom pendant, often in the shape of a butterfly, and a “window” to hold the venerative image, reminiscent of the Spanish reliquary.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Capistrano-Baker, “Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery,” 8.

¹⁵² It is also important to note that the butterfly or winged shape of the beading that attaches the pendant is also often in the shape of “a bow, garland, or wings.” Capistrano-Baker, “Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery,” 2.

¹⁵³ Although it is plausible that there could be a connection between the butterfly and spiritual meaning in both Spain and the Philippines, my research has not shown any conclusive connection or association between the two.

The whole tamborin, with the exception of the face holding the image, is made of gold. The use of Spanish motifs of the butterfly and the use of filigree around the borders of the tamborin are compelling evidence that artisans are obviously seeing and learning from the other



Figure 14: Brooch. 18th century, Spain. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

art style of the Spanish here, but they are adapting it to their own conceptions of gold, aesthetics, and religion.¹⁵⁴ Capistrano-Baker's research has connected the tamborin to clan heirlooms, for example, and Villegas has briefly discussed the use of tamborins as a presence of precolonial religion and meaning.¹⁵⁵ The tamborin beads themselves, as well as the style of necklace, are not seen in other Spanish jewelry around this time. Instead, "fully Spanish" jewelry utilized a flattened style of pendant with almost interlocking parts instead of extensive beadwork seen in the

tamborin necklaces around this time, which are more indicative of styles seen in precolonial beadwork. However, the use of filigree is much more in-line with European styles, like seen in figure 14.

One can see a physical form of indigenous negotiation when looking at them. The goldwork in these tamborins also took a significant amount of influence from Spanish goldwork and artistry. Tamborins were also a method of avoiding the application of sumptuary laws in the Philippines. The Spanish implementation of sumptuary laws, regulations on clothing and jewelry that prohibited the use of nonreligious ornamentation across the Spanish empire (including

¹⁵⁴ Capistrano-Baker, Florina. "Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery."

¹⁵⁵ Capistrano-Baker. "Faith and Filigree: 19th Century Hispano-Filipino Gold Jewellery," 9.

within the Spanish colonies), also meant that there was an increase in devotional jewelry across the empire.¹⁵⁶ Because these tamborins were technically religious items, the prohibitions on nonreligious ornamentation did not apply.

While gold may not have been as actively perceived as protective in Catholic minds among Spanish and indigenous peoples towards the end of the colonial period, the spiritual associations with gold and protection never fully disappeared. Although missionaries tried to govern the behavior of Filipinos through the process of conversion, this association between gold and protection was easily bypassed because Catholic use of gold in church and on venerative objects, as well as religious rituals, allowed this correlation between gold and protection to survive through the Christianization process. Even in gold artistry in relation to personal adornment, the use of precolonial goldworking techniques seen in the tamborins shows that gold itself and its uses were part of a negotiated colonial space.

Conclusion and Contemporary Significance of Gold

By the end of the Spanish colonial period, the spiritual associations with gold were rooted in Catholicism, and almost entirely lost their association with nature spirits in the heavily colonized cities and lowland regions of the Philippines. Despite the changes that occurred in lowland, settled areas of the archipelago, a significant number of indigenous communities in the mountainous regions maintained their cultural beliefs regarding the spiritual properties of gold, as well as their indigenous mining practices.

With the introduction of American colonialism, the religious importance of gold was almost completely ignored by the new colonial government in favor of its monetary value.

¹⁵⁶ Wunder, Amanda. "Spanish Fashion and Sumptuary Legislation from the Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Century." Chapter. In *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective, C.1200–1800*, edited by Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack, 243–72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. doi:10.1017/9781108567541.010: 243.

During this period, the first commercial mine was created in the Philippines, using modern extractive techniques to remove the precious metal from the earth.¹⁵⁷

Gold no longer holds the same kind of spiritual capital in the Philippines as it once did – partially due to the differences between Spanish and Filipino conceptions of spiritual power, but also due to the fact that gold is not as widely available in the archipelago anymore. Because of its worth, it is also prohibitively expensive. Instead of maintaining the religious or spiritual aspects of the material in the modern day, gold now holds a much more significant amount of economic capital, and golden artifacts found in archaeological excavations are highly sought after by private collectors.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in precolonial gold and tamborin jewelry, particularly within diasporic communities. Companies like Kaya Mana have begun selling modernized tambourine jewelry to preserve traditional Filipino artistry; the plethora of churches across the Philippines continue to utilize gold in their practices and church fixtures, as well as in their festivals; and the Philippine Central Bank (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas) holds a variety of precolonial gold artifacts in its collection. In Oton, the site of where the first death mask was found, community members hold a yearly *Katagman* festival in honor of the mask.¹⁵⁸

While gold's association with protection is largely associated with the past in contemporary contexts, it is still an extremely important part of Filipino-Catholic aesthetic traditions, and evidence of a long tradition of gold working that retains elements of indigenous negotiation during colonialism.

¹⁵⁷ Corporate Watch. "The Matrix of the Philippine Mining Industry." Corporate Watch, November 10, 2010. <https://corporatewatch.org/the-matrix-of-the-philippine-mining-industry/>.

¹⁵⁸ Ladrido, "Oton Death Mask: Celebrating the Afterlife - VERA Files."

Chapter 2: Wood

Introduction

Used in building ships, structures, and functional items, wood is an integral part of society. As it is a widely available material over the world, it is also one of the most widely available materials with which to make devotional art. It is easily carveable, and the properties of certain woods have been associated with protection in the past. In addition, the spiritual relationship that humans have with the forest or lack thereof, and by extension of wood, is an important part of a society's spiritual cosmology.

The value of wood and the forest is true in both the Philippine archipelago and in Spain, where wood was used to make devotional statues and held a position as a spiritually significant material. While both the Philippines and Spain utilized wood for devotional objects, the wood type, art styles, and even practices surrounding these items shifted significantly during the colonial period. In addition, an important aspect of spiritual practices surrounding wood is intimately connected with a society's relationship with the forest around them.

The Spanish colonial period fundamentally shifted the relationship between many indigenous communities in the Philippines and the forest by reorienting society around the church. The Christianization process, exercised through the use of dual pageantry, effectively replaced the veneration of *anito* statues, Philippine devotional statues, with those of the *santos*, often wooden statues of Catholic Saints. The practice of venerating Spanish *santos* and the Spanish use of wood in devotional items worked well with the practices of keeping venerative *anito* statues already present in Philippine animism, and the reverence of certain trees in the Philippines remained consistent throughout the colonial period, continuing until the modern day.

Despite the ubiquity of wood in societies, there is little historiography regarding its use in the Philippines, and fewer sources that analyze wood as a religious material. Scholars such as Greg Bankoff and Cheek Fadriquela study the historical use of the forests in the Philippines, providing valuable insights into how people utilized wood in the archipelago's diverse forests and how these forests were used by the indigenous people.¹⁵⁹ Fadriquela's two-volume work catalogues the names of different woods that are mentioned in European sources during the early Spanish colonial period. As such, Fadriquela also illustrates that certain types of wood were utilized for a variety of economic and spiritual uses, and how some of these practices of wood use endured as the colonial period progressed. Bankoff's works chiefly discuss the human impact on Philippine forests from an economic perspective – from using the forest resources for boats and weapons, people in the precolonial Philippines have been utilizing the resources of the forest for centuries.¹⁶⁰ However, wood was not only an economic resource. Wood, and the forested environments of the archipelago, was also an important facet of indigenous animist religions in the Philippines.

In addition to the works of Bankoff and Fadriquela, Clodoveo Nacorda's monograph *Handumanan* details a collection of *santo* statues and their characteristics. Nacorda's book is extremely detailed in categorizing and analyzing the *santo* statues in the colonial period, particularly regarding how these *santos* were made. Nacorda details the way that many of these *santos* would have been used in religious ritual and the various art styles from the colonial period. Despite the availability of various catalogues of forest management and wooden statues, however, no major sources have discussed the religious relationship between the society and the

¹⁵⁹ Bankoff, Greg, "'Deep Forestry': Shapers of the Philippine Forests." *Environmental History*, 2013, 523–56. and Fadriquela, Cheek Sangalang. *Lexicon of Wood Terms From 16th to 19th Century Sources*. Manila, PH: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Bankoff, "'Deep Forestry': Shapers of the Philippine Forests.", 535-536.

forest, nor have any sources traced the use of wooden images as a material of negotiation in the process of Christianization.

This chapter will also explore the use of urban and forested spaces and how they changed during the process of Spanish colonialism. I will be drawing significantly from Regalado T. Jose's monograph *Simbahan* to do so, as his book not only discusses the processes of building churches within the Philippines but also how the Spanish used the church structures to impose their own conceptions of how society should be organized onto Philippine society. The Spanish wished to reorganize indigenous people "within hearing distance of the bell," and churches were built intentionally to "command respect and be seen from all sides."¹⁶¹ This was not the case in settled areas like Pampanga, however, which did not require a relocation plan.¹⁶² While Jose does not address the spiritual dynamics between the forest and the colonial church structure in his monograph, his argument that the Spanish used the physical structure of the church as a way to reinforce coloniality and Christianity is important to the broader context of this chapter. In building towns and churches that did not resemble traditional Philippine societal structures and enforcing to the best of their abilities the system of *reduccion*, the Spanish also removed many indigenous communities from daily interactions with the natural environment. When restructuring lowland Philippine society, this physical redistribution of people also changed the ways in which some of these societies interacted with the forested environment.

As in the previous chapter on gold, the narrative of religious negotiation is key in this chapter. As Shannon Iverson argues in her chapter, the religious conversion process between the Spanish and the indigenous peoples that they colonized was "a complex but unequal

¹⁶¹ Jose, *Simbahan*, 16, 51.

¹⁶² Newson, Linda A. *Conquest and Pestilence in the Early Spanish Philippines*. University of Hawaii Press, 2009: 172-173.

exchange.”¹⁶³ While indigenous communities within the Spanish Empire were faced with a situation where they were marginalized and systematically disadvantaged, they still found ways to resist Spanish attempts to remake indigenous cultures in their own image and influence the new colonial culture. While Iverson’s chapter refers to Hidalgo, Mexico, this process is seen in the Philippines as well, and Vicente Rafael utilizes his concept of negotiation in a similar manner. By discussing the process of linguistic negotiation between the Spanish priests and the indigenous Filipinos, Rafael analyzes this same dynamic of an unequal yet present cultural exchange. Like Iverson, Rafael’s focus on negotiation is integral to my argument that although the Spanish attempted to overwrite the animist influences in Philippine culture, there are elements of Philippine animism within the material culture of Philippine Catholicism: particularly, the space surrounding the balete tree is still spiritually revered, and the practices of worshipping *santos* both inside the home and in churches are very similar to the practices of revering *anitos*.

Many precolonial societies in the early Philippine archipelago were closely integrated with the forest. Not only were these societies dispersed in a way that necessitated daily interaction with the forest, but certain trees were integral to the cosmology of Philippine animism. The great diversity in the forests of the archipelago also meant that many of these trees had medicinal uses. During the colonial period, the *encomienda* system and the emphasis of the church as the center of society also fundamentally reframed the relationship between peoples in low-lying areas of the Philippines and the forest – instead of Filipinos continuing spiritual relationships with the forested areas around them, the shift to enforce the Church as *the* center of

¹⁶³ Iverson, “Resignification as Fourth Narrative: Power, and the Colonial Religious Experience in Tula, Hidalgo”, 263.

Philippine society meant that people within the boundaries of Spanish-controlled villages no longer interacted with the forest in the same manner.

In 15th century Spain, the use of polychromatic wooden statues in the processional parades during Holy Week was a significant part of the venerative process. These statues were often depictions of Jesus or Mary, but they were meant to emulate the series of events that lead to Jesus's crucifixion, ending with a celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.¹⁶⁴ The processions were large and elaborate in Spain, and during Spain's colonization of the New World and the Philippines, the pageantry of these parades was effective in converting indigenous peoples to Spanish Catholicism. This pageantry of celebration and devotion was coupled with the pageantry of destruction, particularly with the burning of idols. Referring back to the concept of "dual pageantries" that the Spanish utilized in their colonial holdings that I have discussed in previously, the importance of this concept is discussed further in the exploration around wood.

As with gold, the Spanish use of wood in religious ritual inherently reframed the space in which religious rituals were experienced in the Philippines. Spanish society physically oriented itself around town centers, where the Church was physically and symbolically located in the central plaza. This reflected their relationship with the forest both physically and spiritually. When the Spanish reoriented Philippine society to reflect Spanish towns, they also fundamentally changed the context in which Filipinos engaged with religious ritual and the natural environment. In Philippine animism, the indigenous peoples of the archipelago often interacted with nature in a spiritual manner, negotiating with nature spirits and asking permission to extract resources. This was especially true in the forested areas, where wood was not only a significant economic resource but also a spiritual one. However, the progression of society in the

¹⁶⁴ Conde, Mavic. "The Purpose of Holy Week Processions." Rappler, March 26, 2018. <https://www.rappler.com/life-and-style/arts-culture/198984-holy-week-philippines-processions-purpose/>.

Iberian Peninsula, with the development of settled towns and an established Church, meant that Spanish society became spiritually separated from the forested environment over time. Because much of Spanish society was fully settled, the forest was more a zone of economic development for towns, particularly in the Northern portions of Spain, where the immediately surrounding forested areas were used for economic activities like logging and animal husbandry. Culturally, the forest further from the towns became sources of anxiety, reflected through the popular belief that the forest was full of thieves and murderers. Although this is a feature of many settled societies, Spain's reshuffling of lowland peoples into towns through the *encomienda* system and the removal of the prestige of *babaylans* also spread a similar fear of the forest into the colonial period.

In addition to a spiritual separation from the forest, the Spanish colonial period also saw a change with wooden devotional statues. The material evidence we have of wooden figures is much less plentiful than that of gold, mostly because of the Philippine climate and wood's relatively short life in the archaeological record. In order to accommodate this difference, many figures that I have included in this chapter are from the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, as the *santos* from the period make up the bulk of museum collections.

Spanish Society During the Early Modern Period

In Spain, there was a distinct spiritual and spatial separation between society and the forest, particularly from the late medieval period. For most of early history, the wooded areas of Northern Spain were natural resources and were used by towns next to them as such – as herding places, hunting grounds, and raw materials for carpentry. As the Early Modern period progressed and developed, the Spanish developed a system of conservation toward their oak forests to preserve the longevity of the galleon trade due to the extreme increase in demand.

The Spanish cultural understanding of the forest reflected this spatial separation. The forests, especially those far away from the towns, were considered to be places rife with robbers and murderers, and the folklore of the time reflects this idea that the forest is “outside” of normal societal boundaries.¹⁶⁵ In addition, because Early Modern Christian theology placed a significant emphasis on anthropocentrism and Spanish towns oriented themselves inward towards the churches, the forest became more akin to a liminal place outside of society, not a space within the boundaries of society. This depiction of the forest as a place outside of Christianity reflected the way that Spanish society organized itself in centralized towns surrounding the churches.¹⁶⁶

Wood as Resource in Spanish Society

The spatial layout of most Spanish villages during the early modern period was fundamentally different from most societies in the Philippine archipelago. The forest was treated as separate from the Spanish village, almost as a border, not integrated within it. As such, the forest was used as a resource for development. This is not the same case with individual trees, however. Wood, meaning the material harvested from the trees, was used in religious processions because it was seen as close to life and could accurately portray holy figures. Instead of having a spiritual relationship between Spanish society and the forest, the woodlands were spaces for economic development, where oak trees could be used to build ships in the North, and Spanish communities located within the forest extracted wood for charcoal and local timber needs.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Wing, JT. “Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century.” *Environmental History*, no. Vol. 17, No. 1 (January 2012):123.

¹⁶⁶ Wing, “Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century,” 123. See also Porteous, Alexander. *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology*. Courier Corporation, 2012: 21.

¹⁶⁷ Wing, “Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century,” 120-123.

However, during the Early Modern Period, the Spanish became threatened with wood shortages and began to export their shipbuilding capabilities across their empire, opting to begin a policy of forest conservation in the motherland. Although the Spanish adopted this policy relatively early in the history of their empire, the methods used in the conservation of Spanish forests did not get adapted to their colonies until much later.¹⁶⁸ The forests were not recognized as sacred places, but they were valuable for their economic importance to the empire.

The Iberian Peninsula is typically categorized as part of the Mediterranean, and the southern portions of Spain very much resemble the typical Mediterranean climate- mountainous areas that are ideal for growing olive oil. Particularly in the northern parts of the country, there are a significant number of wood forests that populate the regions of Navarre, Basque, Cantabria, Asturias, Galicia, and Catalonia, and the forests of these provinces were used extensively for logging starting in the thirteenth century.¹⁶⁹ Oak was an important wood in the Spanish Empire because it was known for its durability. Oak was also used extensively in shipbuilding, particularly of Galleon ships during the early years of the Spanish Empire.

Although logging of oak wood began in the thirteenth century, Spain saw a significant decrease in usable oak wood on the Northern coast, the site of 90% of its galleon manufacture, due to the increased need for oak to use in the galleon ships during the Early Modern Period.¹⁷⁰ The exploitation of the oak forests became exacerbated to the point that the monarchy reached a significant wood shortage during the sixteenth century. This meant that economically, the Spanish had to shift the economic relationship to the forested areas around them. As John T. Wing's article argues, because of these shortages, Spain had already begun to implement a policy

¹⁶⁸ Wing, "Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century.", 126.

¹⁶⁹ Wing, "Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century,"126.

¹⁷⁰ Wing, "Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century,"120.

of forest conservation in the homeland by the sixteenth century. Because about 90 percent of Spanish vessels for the galleon trade were made in Spain, it severely depleted the number of usable oak trees. In response, the Spanish government slowly implemented national institutions to oversee the local use of oak forests, a departure from the previous system of allowing the local towns and villages to determine the appropriate amount of forest use.¹⁷¹ However, there is a clear designation in Spanish society that the forests and the oak tree are usually only used in an economic context – not a spiritual one, and this attitude extended to the way that Spain treated the forests in its colonial possessions. Although this kind of economic relationship between Spanish society and the forest changed on the peninsula, this did not extend to Spain’s colonial holdings until much later, and the spiritual relationship between Spanish society and the forest remained relatively the same. In addition, the Spanish were much more invested in conserving their own forests, partially due to the growing sentiment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the resources of the New World and the Philippines were “inferior” to those located in the Old World.¹⁷² Therefore, it was more important to preserve the forests of the Old World for future generations.

Despite the fact that forests were spatially and economically separated from Spanish society and were used more like a resource to be exploited, this was not necessarily the case with the wood of individual trees. Wood, separated from its context in the forest, was used for religious carvings not only for its availability, but also for its proximity to life. The wood of individual trees that were used to carve processional statues were chosen for specific features or

¹⁷¹ Wing, “Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century,” 120-121.

¹⁷² Scott, Heidi V. “Paradise in the New World: An Iberian Vision of Tropicality.” *Cultural Geographies* 17, no. 1 (2010): 77–101. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44251314>: 83.

spiritual associations. However, despite the importance of using wood in particularly religious contexts, this did not translate to a respect for the environment that grew the trees.

Saints, Wood, and the Importance of a “Living” Material

Unlike gold, wood is an easily accessible and cheap way to create religious images for the general public, and wooden Christian artifacts served this purpose from the earliest expressions of Christianity. Wooden carvings of religious significance, especially those of Christ, saints, and the wood of the cross were used extensively in Christian rituals and worship from the late medieval and early modern periods. The widespread use of wood in creating devotional statues is due partially to the widespread availability of the material. Wood was often preferred to portray human religious figures because wood was seen as closer to the human body, and therefore more “personal” than media like stone or ivory. While there is some evidence of correlation between the types of wood used in these carvings and pre-Christian spiritual associations with wood, the crucial aspect of these wooden carvings was their widespread use in Holy Week processions that started in the Medieval period.¹⁷³ In addition, while there was a trend to include more expensive materials for devotional icons as the Spanish empire progressively became wealthier from its colonial possessions, wood continued to be the preferred material for the processional icons carried during the Holy Week festivities.¹⁷⁴

The Holy Week processions that are recognizable to Spanish Catholics today are typically traced back to penitentiary walks during the Black Plague, but the Sevillian version of these processions that happened specifically during Holy Week originated in 1521

¹⁷³ Neilson, Christina. “Carving Life: The Meaning of Wood in Renaissance Sculpture.” In *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c. 1250-1750*, edited by Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, and Pamela Smith, 223–39. Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2015: 227-231.

¹⁷⁴ Webster, Susan Verdi. *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain: Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998: 104.

“commemorating the Passion known as the *Via Crucis*.”¹⁷⁵ During the Holy Week celebrations, confraternities reenact moments from the Passion of the Christ, “by staging elaborate public processions” while carrying life-sized polychrome wooden sculptures of Jesus and Mary.¹⁷⁶ These processions were incredibly popular in the late medieval and early modern periods, and “virtually the entire city participated in the event” (see fig. 15).¹⁷⁷

These processional statues, almost always made of polychromed wood, were crucial to the processions as they were intended to invoke as much pageantry as possible. Spanish guilds involved in making the statues and the confraternities that commissioned them wanted these statues to be as lifelike as possible; some of these processional statues include moving parts in order to facilitate this desire. In addition, the Spanish preferred wood over more expensive materials because the wood was considered a living material.¹⁷⁸ As Christina Nielson argues in her chapter, certain types of



Figure 15: MAS MATEO JESUS NAZARENO DEL GRAN PODER (PROCESSION DE LA SEMAINE SAINTE), Gustave Dolst. From *L'Espagne*, 1874. This is a nineteenth-century depiction of the procession, but Dolst's focus on the polychrome depiction of Jesus is a good example of the opulence of the Holy Week processions.

¹⁷⁵ Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain*, 144.

¹⁷⁶ Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain*, 4-5.

¹⁷⁷ Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain*, 85.

¹⁷⁸ Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain*, 104, See also Nielson, “Carving Life: The Meaning of Wood in Renaissance Sculpture.”

wood, like willow, pearwood, and walnut also held spiritual connotations.¹⁷⁹ Using wood was also extremely important to expressions of Catholicism. Although the practice of using wood for religious sculpture continued in Spain through the early modern period, in other parts of Catholic Europe more expensive materials like marble gained popularity and eventually surpassed the manufacture of wooden polychrome sculpture.¹⁸⁰

Although wood was considered a kind of living material and appropriate for venerative icons like processional statues and *santos*, the wood used for sculpture was still separated from being fully spiritually integrated with the forested environment that it came from. The wooden statues of the Mary, Jesus, and the saints were used because of a tree's proximity to life, but the forest and living trees still operated outside of the societal structure. Christian theology operated on an anthropocentric worldview, often referred to as the doctrine of *imago dei*, where humanity is meant to have "God-given dominion over creation," and the resources placed on Earth were meant for people to utilize as they saw fit.¹⁸¹ This also meant that as opposed to seeing the environment as part of an exchange, humans were placed in a different category with nature. This idea that humanity and the natural environment are spiritually separated is reflected in European folklore and Bible stories.

Generally, forests in European folklore are depicted as either enchanted places of revelry and magic, or they are dark, intimidating places to be wary of. In literature like medieval romances, stories tended to lean heavily towards the image of the enchanted forest, while folktales typically portrayed the forests as a place of terror.¹⁸² In both instances, the forest is

¹⁷⁹ Neilson, "Carving Life: The Meaning of Wood in Renaissance Sculpture," 227-231.

¹⁸⁰ The National Gallery, London. "The Making of a Spanish Polychrome Sculpture." The National Gallery, London. The National Gallery, London, May 2009. <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/the-making-of-a-spanish-polychrome-sculpture>.

¹⁸¹ Grasse, Alexis. "The Impact of Anthropocentrism on Christian Environmentalism." *Dialogue & Nexus*, no. Vol. 3 (2016): 3.

¹⁸² Porteous, Alexander. *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology*. Courier Corporation, 2012: 21.

portrayed in Christian societies as a space that is separate from society, not integrated within it. Spanish folktales reinforce this idea that the forest is a space that exists outside of Spanish society. It is a well-known trope in Spanish folklore that the forest is a gathering place for robbers and thieves.¹⁸³ James Taggart's monograph illustrates this in his discussion of "maiden and thief" folktales. In them, the maiden is threatened by violence by from thieves, often used as allegories for sexually predatory men, who live in the forest.¹⁸⁴ In other tales, the maiden is taken by a suitor to the forest, who then reveals himself to be a thief and a cannibal.¹⁸⁵ While Taggart looks at these folktales through a gendered lens and how the tales help young women through transitions to adulthood, it is interesting to look at these folktales through a locational lens. In these stories, the dichotomy between the society and the forest is clear: the maiden lives in the home in town, and the thief lives in the forest. Both the thief and the forest are positioned as "other" than the society and dangerous.

Wood, particularly polychromed wood, served an important function in the Holy Week processions in Spain, and the pageantry of these parades was used during the colonial period to evangelize across the Spanish colonies. The Spanish recognized the ability of wood to hold spiritual properties, it was not connected to the forest that the wood originated. The Spanish did not see the forest as spiritually integrated with a society, and the responsibility of maintaining the environment was only so that future generations could continue to have physical economic resources provided by the forest. In contrast to the Spanish views on wood and the forest, a majority of indigenous people of the Philippine archipelago, particularly in the highland areas,

¹⁸³ Wing, "Keeping Spain Afloat: State Forestry and Imperial Defense in the Sixteenth Century.", 123.

¹⁸⁴ Taggart, James M. *Enchanted Maidens: Gender Relations in Spanish Folktales of Courtship and Marriage*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990: 63. The "maiden-and-thief" stories are not the only ones that include the forest as a space outside of society. Other folktales use the forests as a location for penance, or even as an intermediary space in a longer journey. However, the impact is the same: the forest is not spatially or socially integrated into the society.

¹⁸⁵ Taggart, *Enchanted Maidens*, 70-71.

did spiritually integrate themselves with the forest, and wood was not only a resource but a powerful material that could accommodate spirits.

Precolonial Philippines

Before the arrival of the Spanish, much of the Philippine archipelago was densely forested, with a diverse ecosystem of trees and foliage. Certain kinds of trees, like the famous *balete*, were sites of spiritual significance and ritual, and there were several kinds of wood that contained medicinal benefits. While a lot of wood was used for building materials for homes and ships, wood was also significant for ritual objects like statues of the *anito*, or ancestral spirits, and certain kinds of wood were heavily used in medicinal contexts. As such, the relationship of many indigenous peoples to the forest was heavily influenced by their animistic practices and worldview – the forest was an extension of the spiritual space, and it was physically, economically, and spiritually integrated into the daily lives of the people. This was especially true in lowland areas that were not heavily settled before the Spanish arrived.

The Philippine Forests

While there are no studies that have a solid estimate of the percent of forest cover in the archipelago before colonization, present-day estimates put the forest cover at around 24.1%, and this was certainly much higher before the arrival of the Spanish.¹⁸⁶ However, no exhaustive study of the forest cover in the Philippines was completed by either the Spanish or American colonial forces was completed until deforestation had taken most of the forests present in the Visayas and the Manila area. By the eighteenth century when the Spanish began to take an interest in preserving Philippine forest cover, the archipelago had already lost an estimated amount of 50%

¹⁸⁶ World Bank Open Data | Data. “Forest Area (% of Land Area) - Philippines.” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.FRST.ZS?locations=PH>.

of its forests.¹⁸⁷ However, even after the initial period of deforestation, the surveys of the archipelago revealed that the forests of the Philippines were massive and incredibly diverse, containing different kinds of trees depending on their elevation and location across the islands.

Bankoff addresses six kinds of forest found in the archipelago: the dipterocarpaceae, extensive forests with large, evergreen trees; molave forests, categorized by open forest cover, where “dominant trees are less abundant and set further apart, [the dominant trees] are short-boled and irregular in form”; mangrove forests, set in the river mouths and “along the shoreline”; beach forests; pine forests, mostly located in plateaus in Northern and Central Luzon; and mossy forests, located in high-altitude mountainous regions.¹⁸⁸ While these forests had often vastly different woods, three kinds of trees, in particular, are critical for an understanding of the precolonial spiritual environment: the *balete*, used as a gathering place for *babaylans* and served as an integral ritual function, the *ipil* wood, which was used often in carving *anito* statues, and the *narra* wood, another highly useable hardwood that was used principally for carving *anito* statues.

While these trees are particularly important in the practice of Philippine animism, this is for almost entirely different reasons. For example, the *balete*, the *ipil* wood, and the *narra* wood do not share outward characteristics: the *narra* wood (*Pterocarpus indicus*) is a very durable hardwood, and it is typically used today in making furniture. It is termite-resistant, easy-to-carve, and retains a strong fragrance that lasts long after the wood is carved.¹⁸⁹ The *Narra* tree’s wood was also used in the precolonial Philippines to cure kidney problems, and it is currently known

¹⁸⁷ Bankoff, Greg. “The Science of Nature and the Nature of Science in the Spanish and American Philippines at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.” In *Cultivating the Colonies: Colonial States and Their Environmental Legacies*, by Christina Folke Ax, 78–108. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011: 100.

¹⁸⁸ Bankoff, Greg. “‘Deep Forestry’: Shapers of the Philippine Forests.” *Environmental History*, 2013, 18.

¹⁸⁹ The Wood Database. “Narra: The Wood Database.” <https://www.wood-database.com/narra/>.

as the national tree of the Philippines.¹⁹⁰ Growing often in the molave forests of the archipelago, the *narra* tree is easily identified by its compound leaves, yellow and orange flowers, and massive size.¹⁹¹

Ipil wood (*intsia bijuga*), as well, is a durable hardwood that was sometimes used for carving *anito* statues. It grows in the beachy forests of the archipelago and is also termite resistant.¹⁹² Both the *ipil* wood and the *narra* wood belong to the same family; however, the *ipil* wood is typified by smooth, greyish bark and their large size (see fig. 16).¹⁹³ Ipil is often used in the carving of venerative ancestral statues of the Ifugao, called *bulul*.¹⁹⁴



Figure 16: Leaves of the Ipil tree. Image courtesy of Flickr.

In contrast, the wood of the *balete* tree is soft, not used in carvings, or particularly medicinal.¹⁹⁵ The *balete* is characterized by its sprawling aerial roots, which are used to cover a

¹⁹⁰ Fadriquela, *Lexicon of Wood Terms From 16th to 19th Century Sources*, 124. Fadriquela

¹⁹¹ Encyclopædia Britannica. “Narra.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed March 25, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/plant/narra>.

¹⁹² Fadriquela, *Lexicon of Wood Terms From 16th to 19th Century Sources*, 82-83.

¹⁹³ Cainta Plant Nursery. “Ipil.” <https://www.facebook.com/WordPresscom>, September 10, 2013. <https://caintaplantnursery.com/our-products/philippine-indigenous-plants/ipil/>.

¹⁹⁴ The Aswang Project. “The National Museum of the Philippines (Anthropology Building) Has Shared Some of Their Bulul Collection.” Facebook. Accessed June 21, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/AswangProject/posts/the-national-museum-of-the-philippines-anthropology-building-has-shared-some-of-/3470922572974573/>.

¹⁹⁵ The *balete* or *baliti* is the Tagalog word for this tree, but it also went by other names in the Visayas, notably *nonoc* or *dalaquit*. See also Alcina, Francisco Ignacio. *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands: Evangelization and Culture at the Contact Period*. Translated by Cantius J. Kobak and Lucio Gutiérrez. Vol. 1. Manila, PH: University of Santo Thomas Publishing House, 2002:473, 487.

host tree, until the host tree rots away from lack of sunlight. *Balete* trees often contain an empty cavity in the main trunk because of this.¹⁹⁶ These large aerial roots and iconic trunk created a prominent feature in the Philippine forest landscape, particularly as these trees can reach up to 30 meters or 100 feet in height, but can spread their canopy much wider.¹⁹⁷ While the term *balete* often broadly refers to several



Figure 17: Balete Tree in Negros Occidental, Philippines. Image Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

species of ficus that fall under the English common name of strangling fig, the most common and iconic kind of species associated with the *balete* is the *ficus benghalensis*, which is often referred to as the *ficus indica* in earlier documents.¹⁹⁸ These trees are not used for carving venerative icons or for any economic goods, but their areal roots provide significant shade cover, and the hollowed centers were used as natural holy spaces by many indigenous groups in the Philippines (see fig. 17).¹⁹⁹

While these three species are significant to this thesis because of their roles in religious practices, they were certainly not the only tree species that were significant to Philippine animism. The sheer amount of forest cover in the archipelago, the lack of large cities, and the

¹⁹⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica. "Strangler Fig: Encyclopædia Britannica." Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/plant/strangler-fig-tree>.

¹⁹⁷ "Strangler Fig: Encyclopædia Britannica."

¹⁹⁸ Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands.*, 477.

¹⁹⁹ Jose, *Simbahan*, 13.

organization of Philippine society meant that the indigenous people in the Philippines were constantly interacting with the forest in their daily lives. This extended to their understanding of the spiritual world – many animist shrines were built and placed in notable places in the Philippine landscape, like cliffsides facing the seas, the mouths of tributaries, or important caves.²⁰⁰

Trees were also used extensively as economic resources. Wood was used to make boats, weapons, homes, as well as religious venerative figures. Wood was integral in making instruments for war, as illustrated in Bankoff's article. The construction of molave vessels was extensive, and wood was a primary building material for weapons. However, there was still a reverence for the wood, and like with gold, certain rituals had to be performed in order to harvest it.²⁰¹

Space and Worship in Precolonial Philippines

While there were small shrines and places of worship in the precolonial Philippines, most of these places were sites of private worship and shrines dedicated to the *anitos* – however, these spaces were never intended to hold large groups of people on a regular basis. The exception to this was the *mag-anitos* festival, which was held in the *datu*'s home with a couple of temporary additions added to it. During the festival, the house became a *Simbahan* – a Tagalog word for worship space whose meaning has been replaced with “church.”²⁰² During the festival, Jose summarizes in his monograph *Simabahan* “The large house of the chief [datu] was the center of activities, and so had to be expanded to accommodate the assembled people. On each side of the house a shed, called a *sibi*, was constructed. The house was then divided into three

²⁰⁰ Jose, *Simbahan*, 13.

²⁰¹ Phelan, *Hispanization of the Philippines*, 80.

²⁰² Jose, *Simbahan*, 13.

compartments, ‘after the layout of ships.’”²⁰³

With the exception of the *mag-anitos* festival or large royal rituals, these shrines were not made to be permanent, and instead were made to blend into the natural landscape – often made of bamboo or wood, they could be moved or rebuilt easily. The use of space in this context was in relation to nature – Philippine society before the colonial period was scattered and people had to interact with the natural environment daily. As such, the forest was integrated into religion and society. In addition, the space for worship was not usually intended to be grand– Philippine animism certainly had large rituals that accommodated big groups of people, but more common animist practices were held on a family or community level to venerate ancestors, while the *babaylan* negotiated with local nature spirits.²⁰⁴ Many of these negotiations were focused on curing illnesses caused by neglected or malignant spirits, a process that the *babaylan* was integral in facilitating.

The *Balete* and the *Babaylan*

An incredibly important part of Philippine animism was the idea of integration with the natural world, and no part of the natural landscape typifies this better than the *balete* tree. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the *balete* is a massive strangling fig tree, which has a significant canopy and can often have a hollow center. In modern times, the *balete* is associated with creatures like the *kapre* and the *tikbalang*, but in the precolonial period, the tree was home to nature spirits that were amicable to the *babaylan*, who could provide protection and heal illnesses. The spirits that resided in the *balete*, though they could only be approached by a *babaylan*, could heal those who were sick, but the power of the spirits also meant that the *balete* itself was a site of great reverence.

²⁰³ Jose, *Simbahan*, 13.

²⁰⁴ Jose, *Simbahan*, 13.

The *balete* was considered highly sacred by most Philippine animists before the colonial period – it was forbidden to cut down the tree because *anitos* resided inside them, and angering the spirits could make one or an entire community suffer, grow sick, and even die.²⁰⁵ Alcina wrote in his 1668 *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands* that:

They are accustomed to say in ancient times and they believed that in those *nonoc* [Visayan for *balete*] trees there lived their gods whom they called *Diwata*. Hence, such gods deserved such dwellings! The more powerful one took for himself the largest and that with the most extensive branches. So all the area that they occupied was, in their regard, a sacred place. This was the reason why they did not dare to be under them for fear of angering the deity which lived in them.

To approach the trunk of the tree was a great risk, to strike it was dangerous, to cut it meant death.”²⁰⁶

The *balete* was a sacred tree and inhabited a sacred space, but it was also believed to be dangerous to laypeople who did not regularly negotiate with the spirits. The *babaylans* were trained and spiritually powerful enough to interact with these spirits, whereas common people were not. In order to negotiate with the *Diwata* in the *balete*, the *babaylans* would burn a mixture of “wild hog bristles,” and hen feathers. In cases of sickness, the *babaylan* would break off a piece of the root and keep it in her house for ten days, then discard the root. This practice was meant to remove the sickness, and perfectly illustrates the worldview of Philippine animism.²⁰⁷ The presence of illness was often indicative of spirit dissatisfaction, and through the actions of the *babaylan*, they could be pacified or convinced to remove the sickness from the afflicted person. In Alcina’s account, the cause of the reported illness is unknown, and it is unclear

²⁰⁵ Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 479.

²⁰⁶ Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 481. It is also important to note here that Alcina is writing around 140 years after the initial contact with Magellan’s mission to the islands, but this lines up very well with the kinds of veneration that Pigafetta observed during his visit to the archipelago. See also Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*.

²⁰⁷ Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 483.

whether this process was used for only a specific illness or for a large variety of afflictions.

However, this passage makes it clear that the spirits that resided inside the *balete*, as well as the *balete* itself, possessed a spiritual power over other illness-causing spirits. It is important to note that the presence of the *babaylan* is necessary for this exchange between people and spirits to take place. Without them, the *balete* continues to be a relatively dangerous place, and the spirits inside the tree can easily turn hostile. In almost all accounts of the *balete*, it is apparent that ordinary people could not extensively participate in curative rituals.

The veneration of the *balete* tree in particular is markedly different from the venerative practices of the *anito* statues. As opposed to the presence of a casual veneration, the spirits that reside in the *balete* could only work with the *babaylans*. The practices of talking to these spirits also differed from the venerative practices of the *anito*. In the context of Philippine animism, the spirits that reside in the *balete* are closely associated with the whims of nature and cannot be handled by ordinary people. Because they are forces of nature and not ancestral spirits, the spirits in the *balete* subsequently must be handled by capable professionals.

Anito Statues and the Role of Wooden Carved Figures

Wooden venerative statues of the *anitos* were incredibly important to rituals in Philippine animism. Typically carved from *narra* or *ipil* wood, the *anito* statues were important artifacts within many expressions of Philippine animism.²⁰⁸ Unlike the large venerative practices involving the *balete*, *anito* statues were much more common, and did not need rituals as intricate as those involving the *babaylans*. *Anito* statues were most often found in the homes of people across the archipelago, required very little space in the home for them, and would have probably

²⁰⁸ These were called *tao-tao*, *larawan*, or *bata-bata* in Visayan. I have kept the names of these statues to the Tagalog terms for the sake of brevity, but it is important to note that the term *anito* in Visayan referred to the *act* of sacrifice, and not necessarily the statues themselves. See Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society*, 83-85.

been more involved in more routine venerative rituals. While many were made of wood, these statues were also made of gold, ivory, stone, and clay.²⁰⁹ They commonly represented ancestor veneration in the home and would have been given places of honor as well as offerings of rice in exchange for their spiritual protection. However, unlike the spirits associated with the *balete*, for minor rituals members of the household would have negotiated with spirits attached to the *anito* statues in the home.

Spanish accounts of the practices associated with the *anito* statues are few and far between, especially in the early parts of the colonial process. Many indigenous people after the initial conversions to Christianity kept their venerative practices and *anito* statues secret from the priests, and the more mundane nature of *anito* veneration using these statues meant that the Spanish rarely if ever witnessed these rituals. However, the accounts that do exist offer some insights into how these *anito* statues looked and offer limited ideas of how the statues were venerated by various people groups in the archipelago.

The first Spanish account of the *anito* statues is from Pigafetta, who describes them as “idols” “of hollow wood without any back parts. They have the arms open, the feet turned up, with legs open, and a large face with four very large teeth like those of wild boars, and they are painted all over.”²¹⁰ The “idols” that Pigafetta discusses are probably a reference to *anito* statues, which were used in the home to aid in protecting the occupants from ill fortunes such as disease and drought. While Pigafetta does not write about the process of veneration for these statues, potentially due to the mission’s status as honored guests during their stay in Cebu, it is important to note that they did exemplify a form of sacredness.

²⁰⁹Jose, Regalado Trota. *Images of Faith: Religious Ivory Carvings from the Philippines*. Pasadena: Pacific Asia Museum, 1990, 15. See also Castañeda, Dominador. *Art in the Philippines*. Manila, PH: Diliman: Office of Research Coordination, University of the Philippines, 1964, 40.

²¹⁰ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 147-148.

Pigafetta further writes that Raja Humabon, the ruler of Cebu, promised to burn all idols in the island, and that a convert magically healed from an illness by Magellan burned an idol that had been in his house.²¹¹ This convert also claimed that he would burn every “idol” on the island, even if they were “in the chamber of the king himself.”²¹² Other Spanish commentators like Antonio de Morga mention that the wooden idols are common in every house, “without any fixed rite or ceremony.”²¹³ While there may have been no apparent method of worship to the Spanish, the place of the *anito* statues were undoubtedly important to the people of the Philippine archipelago, even during the beginning of the colonial period. The venerative statues would have been used in more domestic rituals, and likely did not require a *babaylan*. Instead, these statues would have been akin to home guardians and more closely associated with ancestor spirits rather than nature spirits.²¹⁴

The style of carving for the *anito* figures was also important because of their spiritual significance. As seen in Pigafetta’s commentary, the bodily proportions in *anito* figures were exaggerated. The faces were also stylistically distorted and had “large bulging eyes and mouths

²¹¹ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 147-148. In Pigafetta’s chronicle, he does not see many mundane examples of ancestor veneration or negotiation with the spirits on behalf of the sick. However, he does mention that the shrines placed outside often have meat offerings in them, likely pig.

²¹² Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage*, 147-148

²¹³ de Morga, *History of the Philippine Islands*, 331.

²¹⁴ Scott, *Barangay*, 184-186.

extending ear-to-ear.”²¹⁵ Pigafetta describes the faces of the *anito* statues as almost animalistic – a phrasing that suggests that the people that the Spanish encountered were perceived as primitive. However, as Dominador Castañeda argues, the facial and proportional distortion is more likely designed to be protective, similar to protective sculpture seen in other animist cultures in Southeast Asia.²¹⁶ The *anito* figures placed in the home would have been protective figures to guard the family from malevolent spirits, and as such they would have been “the first recourse in the case of sickness or trouble.”²¹⁷ Their aesthetic as almost gruesome would have aided the *anito* statues in protecting the members of the household.



Figure 18: Bulul (Seated Male and Female Rice Deity), 19th century. Honolulu Museum of Art. Image Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Although the Spanish burned and destroyed most of the precolonial *anito* statues, the style of carving that Pigafetta and Castañeda describe most closely resemble the modern Ifugao *bulul* statues (see fig. 18). Because of the shelf-life of wood, we do not have a large selection of the precolonial examples of *anito* statues. However, these nineteenth-century examples of Ifugao *bulul* statues do not have the exaggerated

²¹⁵ Castaneda, *Art in the Philippines*, 40.

²¹⁶ Castaneda, *Art in the Philippines*, 40

²¹⁷ Scott, *Barangay*, 86.

facial features, but the *bulul* do have a similar body language to the *anito* statues described by Pigafetta. In addition, the venerative practices of the Ifugao are likely the closest to what the historical venerative practices of *anito* statues would have been. Within the Ifugao culture, the *bulul* statues are carved from *narra* wood and used largely in rice-growing and cultivation rituals. They are offered rice and meat, and occupy a special place in the home, often in a high place.²¹⁸ *Bulul* statues are also paired together, as seen in figure 18, as one male and one female with distinctive sex characteristics, meant to represent “the principles of conjoint and reciprocal male and female energies.”²¹⁹ However, there are certainly differences between the *bulul* statues of the Ifugao and the *anito* statues that the Spanish encountered, particularly in the presence of paint in the Cebuano statues that are not seen in the Ifugao statues. In addition, the more modern examples of *bulul* statues also do not have the same kind of exaggerated facial proportions that Pigafetta and Castaneda describe. While the art style of these *bulul* statues is certainly different from the idols that the early Spanish encountered, especially in more modern examples, they do have some similarities to the Spanish descriptions of the *anito* statues.

In many precolonial Philippine cultures, the forests were intimately connected with the societal structure. Wood was not only a functional material from which to carve venerative statues. Wooden statues were used to facilitate the relationship between families and nature. Not only was wood a resource for economic use, but it was also medicinally and spiritually significant. People also generally interacted with the forest as a spatial extension of the society.

However, wood in its living form also contained spiritual and sometimes medicinal properties that required the expertise of the *babaylan* to negotiate with the natural world. This

²¹⁸ Aguilar Jr., Filomeno. “Rice and Magic: A Cultural History from the Precolonial World to the Present.” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, no. Vol. 61, No. 3 (September 2013): 302.

²¹⁹ Aguilar Jr., “Rice and Magic: A Cultural History from the Precolonial World to the Present.”, 302.

integration between society and the forest was also facilitated by the lack of settled cities, where people were settled further apart and integrated into the natural environment. In addition, the *babaylan* was essential to the functioning of Philippine society when it came to interactions with the natural world. During the colonial period, the Spanish attempted not only to separate the people from the forest, but they also positioned themselves as almost direct replacements for the *babaylan*. During the colonial process, however, expressions of Philippine animism allowed people to continue certain venerative processes with wooden *santos*, and the continued hesitance regarding the *balete* illustrates that the Spanish priests did not perfectly replace the role of the *babaylan* in Philippine society.

The Colonial Period

The Spanish colonial government fundamentally changed the relationship between people and the forest in the Philippines through a variety of methods. The establishment of a forestry industry to take advantage of the archipelago's significant forest cover and variety of useful trees for lumber created a system of deforestation in the Philippines that continues to this day. The Christianization process also transformed the way that people interacted with the forested areas around them. Not only were people resettled into communities or villages surrounding a church, but they were also systematically disconnected from the animistic practices that allowed them to negotiate with nature spirits. The destruction of these forests for various lumber needs further enforced this disconnect.²²⁰ By keeping interactions between society and the forest purely economic and transactional, the Spanish regime reinforced a spatial and spiritual separation between people and the forest. Wood, once a material that was used in almost every aspect of life for many in the Philippines, became a tool of colonization.

²²⁰ Bankoff, "“Deep Forestry”: Shapers of the Philippine Forests.”24.

This severance between the people and the forest does not mean that Filipinos simply forgot about these forest spirits, or that the use of wood in religious ritual simply disappeared. Instead, the presence of specific spirits of the *balete* and the gradual replacement of *bulul* statues with *santo* statues is an excellent example of the negotiative and syncretic processes that were as present during the periods of colonization and Christianization.

The *Bulul* and the *Santo*: Wooden Icons as Negotiation

As I discussed previously, the use of the *narra* wood to carve *bulul* statues for ancestor veneration served important roles in Philippine animism, and the importance of venerative human figures transferred quite easily to the Spanish *santos*. During Magellan's voyage and the subsequent mass conversion of over 800 people on the island of Cebu, Hara Mumamay, the wife of Raja Humabon, took a particular interest in Magellan's *Santo Niño*.²²¹ Magellan gifted the *Santo* to her, and during Legaspi's expedition, the Spanish found it anointed with oil, an indication that its veneration was similar to worshipping precolonial *anitos*.²²²

While the *Santo* is a particularly important artifact within the discourse of religious negotiation, it is also one of the most famous artifacts from the Christianization process because it was used by the Spanish as justification for further colonization during Legaspi's mission.²²³ The presence of the *Santo Niño* during its rediscovery in 1571 in particular signified to the Spanish that the indigenous people in the archipelago could be converted.²²⁴ In this sense, the *Santo Niño* and similar venerative *santos* worked as both direct tools of colonization and as tools of negotiation for indigenous peoples. However, the Spanish tradition of using polychrome wood

²²¹ Bautista, Julius J. "An Archipelago Twice 'Discovered': The Santo Niño in the Discourse of Discovery." *Asian Studies Review*, no. Vol. 29, Issue 2 (2005): 192-193, and Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage*, 144.

²²² Bautista, "The Santo Nino in the Discourse of Discovery," 192-193.

²²³ Bautista, "The Santo Nino in the Discourse of Discovery," 196-198.

²²⁴ Bautista, "The Santo Nino in the Discourse of Discovery," 60-62.

icons in Holy Week celebrations and parades also played a significant role in the continuous conversion process during colonization.

The indigenous peoples of the Philippine archipelago did not simply replace the icon of the *anito* with the icon of the *santo*. The process of replacement was marked by the dramatic destruction of “idols” by priests, most assuredly the *anito* statues along with their offerings. Cushner’s monograph *Spain in the Philippines* details priests waiting in the trees for “converted” Filipinos to bring offerings and venerative statues to important places, typically caves where people were buried, then destroying the “idols” and offerings in front of the people who had left the offerings in order to prompt them to ask forgiveness for committing blasphemy.²²⁵ The often violent destruction of these idols is common in early conversion accounts, and as Brewer argues, “legitimated by the Old Testament historical narrative.”²²⁶ Non-Christian images were considered “blasphemous,” and according to the Old Testament, had to be destroyed, often by fire.²²⁷ Sometimes, however, indigenous images were used in colonial churches as an illustration of the power of the church. This practice was used in colonial Mexico, where the Spanish utilized the stone images of Toltec kings to create baptismal fonts, a way to continually establish the superiority of Christianity over indigenous conceptions of power.²²⁸ Furthermore, as Cushner and Burkhart argue, this destruction did not always result in a fully Christian populace. People learned how to practice their religion in secret or to use *santos* as replacements for animist images.

²²⁵ Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines Revolution*, 97-99.

²²⁶ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines*, 155.

²²⁷ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, 155.

²²⁸ Wren, Linnea, Travis Nygard, and Kaylee Spencer. “Establishing and Translating Maya Spaces at Tonina and Ocosingo: How Indigenous Portraits Were Moved, Mutilated, and Made Christian in New Spain.” In *Memory Traces: Analyzing Sacred Space at Five Mesoamerican Sites*, edited by Cynthia Kristan-Graham and Laura M. Amrhein, 169–202. University Press of Colorado, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt173zmtt.10>: 176-177.

This pageantry of violently destroying or appropriating “idols” connected with indigenous conceptions of power is contrasted with the pageantry of feast days, parades, and mass. As in their Latin American colonies, the Spanish established *confraternities* that carried the tradition of the *passion* parades.²²⁹ These *confraternities* carried out similar processions to those displayed in Spain and Latin America during Holy Week and during *fiestas*, including the use of polychrome sculpture in the processions. The parades were meant to draw people into the city’s center during religious festivals and to showcase the benefits of Christianity to the populace. However, the use of wooden *santo* images in these processions, particularly the *Santo Nino* figurines, also solidified the use of wooden figures for veneration in everyday life. The *santo* figures were an easy replacement for the *anito* figures. These *santos*, sometimes replicas of the *Santo Niño de Cebu*, and sometimes different saints, were also made by local artisans, using traditional carving methods. In addition, the methods used to create these *santos* followed traditional techniques done in the Philippines before colonization.

Early *santo* figures from the Philippines carved by local Filipino and Chinese artisans are more similar to the precolonial *anito* *statutes* than to the saint figures brought in from Spain or Mexico. Chinese diasporic subjects were often the principal makers of these images, but just like with gold, they also incorporated carving techniques from indigenous Filipinos during the colonial period.²³⁰ Because Chinese people were often the subject of expulsions and restrictions, even massacres, by the Spanish, however, a significant number of indigenous Filipino carpenters were trained and performed this important work.²³¹ As Castaneda argues in his monograph, the style of carving gradually shifted to better resemble the realistic style of polychromed statues

²²⁹ Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden Age Spain*, 4-5.

²³⁰ Gatbonton, Esperanza Bunag. *A Heritage of Saints*. Editorial Associates, LTD, 1979, 146-147.

²³¹ Gatbonton, *A Heritage of Saints*, 165-167.

seen in Spain and Mexico. Through this imitation of other figures, the style of carving shifted from the indigenous form of carving to a semi-realism, followed by a flourishing of realism where “the hair and the garments were no longer stylized, though the proportions were incorrect.”²³² Castañeda’s monograph further argues that the proportions of saint statues in the seventeenth century depict this kind of transition from indigenous carving styles to mimicking those seen from European and Mexican *santos*.

While Castaneda argues that the reason for the distorted proportions of Philippine *santos* was simply a form of poor imitation of the statues from Spain and Mexico, it may have also been a way to maintain indigenous carving practices used previously for the *anito* statues. Clodoveo Nacorda argues that local carvers “continued their artistic sensitivity but were at the same time replicating Western models although still giving their local flavor to their works.”²³³ In addition, though the Spanish closely supervised church building, the carving of the *santos* was not as highly scrutinized. Often, the carving was left to “the *maestro de obra* (the master carpenter) who was generally a local Filipino.”²³⁴

Although the historical record is largely silent on the intentions of local carvers, there is a precedent set by scholars like Rafael and Iverson that Filipino carvers may have been participating in an active form of negotiation. By keeping some traditional carving



Figure 19: Statue of Virgin Mary. Philippines, 19th Century or Earlier. Photo Courtesy of the Field Museum, Chicago, acc.236724.

²³² Castañeda, *Art in the Philippines*, 40-41.

²³³ Nacorda, Clodoveo G. *Handumanan: The Rosita Rodrigues-Arcenas Collection of Visayan Santos*. Cebu City, PH: University of San Carlos Press, 2016, 14.

²³⁴ Lopez, Mellie Leandicho. *A Handbook of Philippine Folklore*. UP Press, 2006, 350.

methods and styles regarding the santos, they also imply that the *santos* occupied a similar religious designation as the *anito* statues, particularly during the earliest parts of the colonial period. Although, as seen in Figure 19, the art style came eventually to closely resemble European and Mexican *santos* in proportion, these *santos* also have a distinctive art style taken from Chinese, animist Filipino, and Spanish influences. A statue of the Virgin Mary, seen in Figure 19, dated to around the nineteenth century, is an excellent example of this. Her face is rounded and less chiseled than the typical European examples, but her proportions are much closer to those same European styles. Mary's mix of facial and bodily proportions in this statue are signs that she is seen not as a Spanish imposition on Christianity, but that she has been adopted into the indigenous cosmology. This is also seen in Mexico, where veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a dark-skinned Mary, grew up around the town of Tepeyac and became a national symbol.²³⁵

The *santos* shown here are not a complete representation of the *santo* culture in the Philippines, however. There is also a significant number of statues of other saints like *San Roque* that became popular in the Philippines for his ability to drive away disease.²³⁶ In addition, the practices of veneration for these saints in the home remained strikingly similar to those conducted during the precolonial period, including the offerings of food and rice wine.²³⁷

Space, the Church, and the Forest

During the colonial period, the Spanish reorganized Philippine society to better resemble the *haciendas* seen in Latin America and the Spanish mainland. Where precolonial society in the archipelago was more scattered across islands and not particularly centralized around a person or

²³⁵ Taylor, William B. "The Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain: An Inquiry into the Social History of Marian Devotion." *American Ethnologist*, no. Vol. 14, No. 1, Frontiers of Christian Evangelism (February 1987): 9–33.

²³⁶ Gathbonton, *A Heritage of Saints*, 110–111.

²³⁷ Gathbonton, *A Heritage of Saints*, 44–45.

area, the colonial government “compelled the natives to form larger communities or *reducciones*” during the first century of colonization.²³⁸ This resettling practice allowed for the priests to evangelize better and more efficiently, but the dual use of pageantry in the colonial period was also used to attract people to the city centers, specifically around the churches. These church structures served as landmarks for people to gather around, but they also subtly enforced the separation between people and the forest.

The Spanish heavily invested in building large stone churches that still serve as the centers for Filipino towns and cities. In forcibly relocating people to surround the church and colonial administration, the Spanish also fundamentally changed the way that indigenous peoples interacted with the forest. Not only were wooden artifacts of veneration subject to the colonial processes of “dual pageantries”, but the relationship to the forest was highly affected by Spanish colonialism. While many of the Spanish processes of colonialism are often seen as imposing Spanish structures onto the colonized people, it is important to note that there are elements of specifically Filipino artistic traditions within stone carvings on Philippine churches. As Mellie Lopez argues, the churches, though Spanish in layout, are “a fusion of Asian and Western architecture, a synthesis of art motifs, European baroque, primitive and folk art.”²³⁹

The use of stone for churches, too, further alienated people from the forest. Although the first churches in the Philippines were made of wood, the Spanish spent significant time erecting churches of stone specifically because it illustrated the permanence of Christianity and Spanish rule in the archipelago.²⁴⁰ As Jose argues in his monograph *Simbahan*, the use of stone in the

²³⁸ Jose, *Simbahan*, 51.

²³⁹ Lopez, *A Handbook of Philippine Folklore*, 323.

²⁴⁰ This was also a practical move – although the wooden churches were constructed of molave wood once the Spanish were able to permanently place themselves in society, the wooden churches were also easily flammable. See Jose, *Simbahan*, 34.

churches was an intentional move. Not only were these churches iconic landmarks in the city and therefore easy to orient colonial wooden structures and homes around, using stone specifically gave these churches more permanence in the landscape. Instead of the small, wooden, temporary structures that existed during festivals and holidays, the Catholic Church was imposing and permanent. The stone, pulled mostly from local quarries, was also very different from the timber of the heavily forested landscape. It required a significant amount of manpower to build these stone churches, and though the Spanish did undergo a process of adapting their architectural standards to accommodate their designs for earthquakes, the stone churches still maintained a distinctly colonial appearance – following European styles as opposed to Philippine styles of architecture “as [the Spanish] remembered them back in Spain and America.”²⁴¹ The preference for stone over wood allowed the Spanish, even without sermons or specific acts of violence, to enforce a separation between the forest and society even when Philippine animism was effectively endangered within the Spanish-controlled parts of the archipelago.

The use of stone in churches was not the only way in which the Spanish cemented the separation from the forest, however. Another significant part of cementing the importance of city centers around the church was the use of pageantry. While the pageantry of destruction is illustrated in the destruction of *anito* statues, the Spanish also heavily utilized the pageantry of the *fiesta* and the performance of sacraments as an effective tool for continued conversion during the colonial period. The *fiesta*, celebrations used to gather people who lived near the rice fields and away from the city center, as John Leddy Phelan addresses in his monograph, “provided a splendid opportunity to indoctrinate the Filipinos by the performance of religious rituals.”²⁴² This was an intentional move to solidify the importance of these centers during the colonial period.

²⁴¹ Jose, *Simbahan*, 34, see also 30-36.

²⁴² Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 73.

The most important of the *fiestas* is the Holy Week processions, which are still performed today. Pageantry is intimately connected with these parades. As Fenella Cannell depicts in her monograph, the Holy Week processions include people traveling from other *barangays*, some carrying penitentiary crosses, to the church or a holy shrine in order to participate.²⁴³ People read the *passion*, an account of the “sufferings of Christ” that lead to his Crucifixion and his eventual Resurrection, throughout different points during these celebrations. The whole community participates in the events and processions, which draw pilgrims from other *barangays* to the town.²⁴⁴ As Cannell discusses, these have taken on a life of their own from the original processions and *passions* brought by the Spanish, but it results from Catholicism’s evangelization through the use of powerful pageantry.²⁴⁵ Although the practices are certainly different, the chanting of prayers and the community participation in the processions are also seen in the early years of the Spanish colonial period.²⁴⁶ However, this does not mean that the people within the lowland areas simply accepted Christianity passively. There were a plethora of stories of indigenous peoples resisting Christian monotheistic doctrine by placing Christ among their other venerative statues, to practicing animism in secret, to reburying their dead in accordance with their cultural practices.²⁴⁷

The Spanish colonial period shifted the way that space and the forest was viewed in the Philippine archipelago. While they were unsuccessful in fully reorganizing indigenous peoples spatially, religious power was firmly centered on the church and separated from the forested environment well before the end of the colonial period.

²⁴³ Cannell, Fenella. *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, 176. In Cannell’s description of the Holy Week Processions, the Good Friday Procession starts at the Hinulid Shrine in Bicol, which is about a ten-minute walk away from the Church.

²⁴⁴ Cannell, *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines*, 169-181.

²⁴⁵ Cannell, *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines*, 167-168.

²⁴⁶ Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, 72-73.

²⁴⁷ Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines*, 192-196.

The Balete and the Babaylans

The relationship between the people in the Philippines and the forest was fundamentally changed by Spanish colonialism. Not only was this done by shifting the central space of Philippine society and replacing *anito* statues with *santo* statues, but the Spanish also marginalized the *balete* tree and its role in society. The *balete* tree experienced a shift not entirely dictated by the Spanish colonial apparatus, particularly in relation to the *babaylans* and the *baletes*. The trees kept much of their spiritual power, but the loss of status for the *babaylans* meant that there were no specialists to interact with the spirits who resided within the tree. By the end of the colonial period, the *balete* was no longer associated with the healing capacity of Philippine animism, nor of the *babaylans*.

Although the *balete* was a potent source of spiritual significance to the Filipinos, it was also not immune to the whims of dual pageantries that were connected to the conversion process. The tree was a target of missionary violence, and similarly to the *santos*, also became a useful tool to portray the spiritual significance of the Church later in the colonial period. This persecution of the symbol of the *balete* is reflected in Alcina's *History of the Bisayan Islands*: although many people refused to cut down the *balete* tree, Alcina recounts a story of him tricking young children into bringing him branches, with which he made a fire and burnt the *balete* down.²⁴⁸ This was an intentional act to destroy with fire the reminders of "pagan" religions, like with the burning of *anito* statues. The Inquisition, active in the Philippines until 1821, also ensured correct behavior by prosecuting those who still adhered to precolonial practices.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 479-481. Alcina does not use the term 'trickery,' but this seemed to have been his intention. Alcina specifically says "I pretended ignorance and ordered the boys and girls to bring... a bundle of wood each, for the purpose for the use of the kitchen. They gathered a good quantity without knowing the purpose. If they would have known, certainly they would not have brought it."

²⁴⁹ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations*, xxi.

The space that the *balete* occupied also became a much more fearsome place than it had been previously. Although the *balete* was already a sacred space and had to be respected, the presence of an established class of *babaylans* meant that the tree was a venerated space, and any problems with the spirits who resided within the tree could be mitigated with their help. However, the Spanish attempts to weaken the status of the *babaylans* also meant that the power that they once occupied diminished, especially in the early colonial period, therefore forming a power vacuum that the priests and missionaries could not quite fill. Even though the priests positioned themselves as the spiritual leaders of the communities they governed, they were unable to properly negotiate with the spirits or fully convince the indigenous peoples that the *balete* tree was effectively harmless.²⁵⁰ Instead, the *balete* became a formerly- sacred place with no one to negotiate with the spirits that resided in it, and in the process became a place that carried a significant amount of cultural anxiety in the colonial period. Instead, the *balete* became haunted by the *kapre* and *tikbalang*, creatures known as tricksters, and became a gathering place for *brujas* and *aswang*, or witches and vampires.²⁵¹ The spiritual context of the *balete* shifted, but the apprehension towards approaching the tree remained until the modern day.

One of the earliest examples of this shift from viewing the *balete* as sacred to being a place of explicit fear is seen in Alcina. During his time in the Visayas in the late seventeenth century, relatively early in the colonial period, Alcina described in his *historia* that the converted

²⁵⁰ Alcina refers to the younger generations of Visayans as losing their fear for the *balete*, and that the Spanish were working to destigmatize the spiritual association with the *balete*. However, the fact that the fear of the *balete* in the modern day is an obvious failure of these attempts to eliminate the apprehension of the *balete*. See also Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 483 and Fe, Susan Go. "MOTHERS, MAIDS AND THE CREATURES OF THE NIGHT: THE PERSISTENCE OF PHILIPPINE FOLK RELIGION." *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, no. Vol. 7, No. 3 (1979): 186–203.

²⁵¹ The term *aswang* is generally an umbrella term for a malignant creature in the Philippines. Details regarding their abilities, origin, and mannerism vary depending on the area. See also Ramos, *The Creatures of Philippine Lower Mythology*, 23-27, 122, 176.

Christian populations in the Visayas already regarded the baletes with a significant amount of fear, which were (reportedly) gathering places for “sorcerers:”

They also told us that sorcerers gathered at these trees at night. This was on dark nights when there was no moon, or until it came up... these creatures held their infamous and even abominable meetings with the devil either among or on top of these branches which supported many, since these are dense and thick, or among the roots, in the openings that they fashion, as we have said. He appeared either in the aforementioned shape [of the *palihi*], or at times in that of a he-goat, or of a very large snake which they call *sava*,... They had meetings with women selecting them at their pleasure and it was held to be a distinction... Now, these women, therefore, if they were not so already, from that moment on became priestesses.²⁵²

There are several interesting features of this passage, particularly in how it relates to the ways that the tree is viewed by both Alcina and the indigenous people to whom he is talking. First, Alcina uses the term “*brujo*” in the original Spanish, translated by Kobak and Gutierrez as “sorcerer,” but could also be translated to “(male) witch.” In addition, he uses only the masculine version of the noun, not the feminine. These “*brujos*” do not follow the same European standards for witchcraft, with the exception of the inclusion of the devil and of the witches’ gatherings, a common trope that the Spanish employ when discussing “pagan” religions.²⁵³ The “*brujos*” that Alcina describes do not shapeshift or participate in the witches’ gatherings as subservient to the devil. In typical European descriptions of witchcraft, a common trope is the participation in the witches’ sabbath, where male witches also have intercourse with the devil.²⁵⁴ While these *brujos* do seem to have a specific time for gathering during the new moon, the sorcerers do not gather in

²⁵² Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 483.

²⁵³ Brewer’s monograph discusses this in depth, particularly in regard to the trouble that the Spanish had to translate Tagalog and Visayan nouns like *babaylan* to reflect gender. See Brewer, *Catholicism, Shamanism, and Gender Relations*, 84-96.

²⁵⁴ Levack, Brian P. *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford University Press, 2013, 45-47.

the same way – instead of some kind of fire or a dance invoking Satan, the “sorcerers” gather in the branches of the *balete*, resembling instead the *kapre*.²⁵⁵

Another compelling aspect of this passage is the role of the *babaylans* in this interaction. Although these women would easily fit into the European category of “witch” or “bruja” during this period, Alcina mentions the *babaylans* but does not use the term “bruja.” Instead, they are given the Spanish term “sacerdotista,” meaning “priestess.”²⁵⁶ In describing the *babaylans*, Alcina argues that the healing practices that they conducted were an act of deceit and he is very careful to explain the practices of the *babaylans* as a dialogue between the priestess and the spirit inside the *balete*.²⁵⁷ In doing so, Alcina specifically does not ascribe any sort of power to the *babaylans*, choosing instead to portray them as normal, human women who deceive the indigenous people, but he does not give them any of the powers associated with European witches from the same time period. Alcina’s careful wording of the *babaylan* lack of power likely intentional, and it correlates well with Brewer’s argument that the Spanish actively denigrated the power of the *babaylan* because they were primarily women, while empowering the men around them.²⁵⁸ However, this careful wording does not continue in later periods. The role of the *babaylans*, as Brewer illustrates, soon became equated to those of witches.²⁵⁹ While Alcina views the *balete* as a specifically evil place in the new colony, he also recognizes the

²⁵⁵ Ramos, *The Creatures of Philippine Lower Mythology*, 23-27. There are also a significant number of stories regarding the *kapre*. See also Avendaño, Christine O. “Malacañang’s ‘Haunted’ Balete Declared a Heritage Tree | Inquirer News.” INQUIRER.net, May 30, 2011. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/10573/>.

²⁵⁶ Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 482-483. The term in modern Spanish would be “sacerdota,” but Alcina’s spelling is slightly different and therefore reflected here.

²⁵⁷ Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands*, 482-483.

²⁵⁸ Brewer addresses Alcina’s work several times in her monograph, but it is important to note that her analysis of Alcina relates specifically to his uses of the term *asog*, the third gender space that some *babaylans* occupied. In addition, Brewer’s monograph rightly addresses that Alcina’s descriptions of precolonial religion are often contradictory to each other. However, she does not address Alcina’s use of European witch conventions in his work, which I think is integral to the understanding of how the Spanish figured their place in their colonial holdings particularly in the early period of colonialism.

²⁵⁹ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines*, 89-91.

tree's spiritual power within Philippine society, ascribing the trees' powers as the devil's illusions that influence the indigenous Visayans.

The Replacement of the Religious Orders

In addition to utilizing physical reminders of the power of Christianity with both the imposing structures of the Church and the presence of *fiestas*, the missionaries utilized the focus on sickness and healing in Philippine animism to further proselytize and encourage conversion to Christianity – implying in the process that they had more power to understand and heal sickness than the *babaylans*.²⁶⁰ Though the performance of the sacraments was far from the processions and feats that accompanied the *fiestas*, they played a similar role in the use of performance to both negate the role of the *babaylans* and to ensure that people adhered to the practices of Christianity.²⁶¹

Spanish friars, during their early attempts to convert indigenous peoples, often argued that the process of baptism would heal the sick, an ability that directly competed with the healing practices of the *babaylans*. In addition, the Spanish priests established native *confraternities* in order to enforce Christian influence over the sick in the absence of Spanish priests, who often found themselves understaffed.²⁶² These indigenous *confraternities* also organized the Holy Week celebrations and processions, very like their Spanish and Latin American counterparts.²⁶³

The sacraments and religious rituals meant to impart divine grace to participants, such as marriage, baptism, and last rites, were integral to Catholic identity both in Spain and in the colonies. Priests also employed the dual pageantries in conducting these sacraments. In order to ensure community adherence to the sacraments, priests used a variety of methods, shaming

²⁶⁰ Jose, *Simbahan*, 193-198.

²⁶¹ Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 89-90.

²⁶² Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 186-188.

²⁶³ Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 186-188.

parishioners and destroying any “idols” they found in order to ensure conformity to Christian morality.²⁶⁴ The Spanish also encouraged praying the rosary and attending *fiestas* including the Holy Week processions, which served to illustrate the celebration of Christianity.

Religious officials faced significant shortages of personnel during the colonial period, and they often empowered *confraternities*, groups of men associated with promoting Christian piety, to perform some of these sacraments in order to make up for this lack of Spanish personnel.²⁶⁵ *Confraternities* were already popular in Spain, and they were solely responsible for organizing the Holy Week processions in the Iberian Peninsula.²⁶⁶ In the Philippines, the *confraternities* worked closely with the Spanish clergy, often delivering sacraments like last rites when the priests were unable to attend to them.²⁶⁷ This allowed Christian ritual to retain some of the decentralization of Philippine society, but it also empowered people within the *confraternities* to perform spiritual duties that were originally held by the *babaylans*, who were still spiritually tied to the forested natural environment. Even in places where the spatial reorganization of Philippine society was impractical, spiritual power to heal and perform more everyday rituals were firmly seated into the church. The forest was no longer a place that could be negotiated with in the same manner. The *confraternities* and the priests did not manage to assume the same kind of responsibility or power over the forest that the *babaylans* once did.

Conclusion and Contemporary Significance

The Spanish colonial period fundamentally changed the way that people in the Philippines interacted with and viewed wood as manifested in infrastructure, spiritual figures and

²⁶⁴ Phelan, *Hispanization of the Philippines*, 81

²⁶⁵ Webster, Susan. “Sacred Altars, Sacred Streets: The Sculpture of Penitential Confraternities in Early Modern Seville.” *Journal of Ritual Studies*, no. Vol. 6, No. 1, Special Issue: Art in Ritual Context (1992): 159–77. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44398531>, 163.

²⁶⁶ Webster, “Sacred Altars, Sacred Streets: The Sculpture of Penitential Confraternities in Early Modern Seville,” 163.

²⁶⁷ Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*, 116-117.

sacred trees, as well as the role of the *babaylans* who utilized the wood's power. The Spanish colonial government attempted to reorganize Philippine society to surround the church into a more traditionally European town structure. They replaced wooden churches with stone in order to enforce a sense of permanence and while they successfully separated religiosity from the forest, the spiritual power that the forest held remained. However, the forest was never completely separated from Philippine society, nor did the Spanish successfully erase the significance that living trees have in Philippine culture.

In the lowland areas of the Philippines, the cultural relationship of the forest to indigenous society is markedly different from the practices observed by the Spanish at the beginning of the colonial period. During the colonial period, the process of Christianization reoriented space away from human integration with the natural landscape to a more colonial, "Catholic" organization. This transition between religions also oriented people away from the wilderness – the Spanish cities were oriented around the stone church as opposed to easily-transported *nipa* homes and temporary worship spaces, people were physically rearranged into stricter units resembling the *reducciones*, and the *babaylans*' roles were intentionally erased from prestigious positions in society, and were replaced by the clergy. The conversion processes also changed the dynamics of many Filipino societies.. The shift in physical space, orienting society away from nature and towards the church, and the shift in religious authority, also rearranged the spiritual landscape, meaning that the people were no longer familiar with forest spirits as they were in the precolonial period. Instead, familiarity was replaced with fear and apprehension toward natural spaces, especially with the widespread loss of a class of *babaylans*.

The most obvious example of this fundamental shift in the way that forests and trees are viewed could be manifest in the wariness which some Filipinos show toward the *balete* tree and

the creatures that reside within them. The creatures that live in the *balete* are not particularly known for negotiating with humans other than those that they favor, and they act more as guardians of the trees rather than spirits that possess power over other supernatural entities like their precolonial counterparts. The process of Christianization has also largely eliminated the skilled practitioners (the *babaylans*) who could negotiate with the *anito* on a person's behalf, and while saint veneration is still common in the Philippines in modern times, the *tikbalangs* and *kapres* do not generally fall under a saint's purview.²⁶⁸ The precolonial apprehension of approaching these trees remained through the Spanish and American colonial periods and continues to the present.

During the Spanish colonial period, some of the forests of the archipelago were depleted, but around 70% of the original cover remained.²⁶⁹ During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Spanish began cutting away more land to make room for agricultural development, and subsequently tried to use some of the conservation practices that they had been utilizing in Spain for centuries.²⁷⁰ However, after the United States bought the Philippines from Spain after the Spanish-American War, American officials saw the forest as a resource to replace and subsidize the lumber industry on the US mainland.²⁷¹ Deforestation of the Philippine forests began in earnest during the American colonial period and was exacerbated by the Japanese occupation in the 1940s and the regime of Ferdinand Marcos Senior.²⁷² Now, the entire archipelago's forest cover accounts for 24.1% of land across the islands.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ Fe, "Mothers, Maids and The Creatures of The Night: The Persistence of Philippine Folk Religion," 187- 190.

²⁶⁹ Bankoff, "Deep Forestry: Shaping the Longue Durée of the Forest in the Philippines," 27.

²⁷⁰ Bankoff, "Deep Forestry: Shaping the Longue Durée of the Forest in the Philippines," 28-29.

²⁷¹ Bankoff, "Deep Forestry: Shaping the Longue Durée of the Forest in the Philippines," 29-30.

²⁷² Bankoff, "Deep Forestry: Shaping the Longue Durée of the Forest in the Philippines," 29-30.

²⁷³ "Forest Area (% of Land Area) – Philippines | World Bank Data."

The exploitation of the forests of the Philippines continued this trend of spiritually separating the forest from society that the Spanish started, but the continued existence of folklore surrounding the forest and the *balete* trees are undoubtedly the result of the continued process of syncretic negotiation regarding the spiritual significance of wood. In contemporary contexts, the *balete* is the home of creatures like the *tikbalang* and the *kapre*, and the folklore surrounding these creatures resembles the spirits with whom the *babaylans* were once responsible for mediating.²⁷⁴ Now, the tree elicits a hesitancy among many Filipinos, and it is a common practice to say “*Tabi tabi po*” (excuse me) when passing underneath or nearby a *balete*. While there is now a distinct separation between the forest and society in the Philippines, to some degree the practice of using wood for venerative objects has still remained. The practice of venerating wooden *santos*, particularly the *Santo Niño de Cebu*, has become a specifically Filipino expression of Catholicism, and the figure is celebrated annually every third Sunday in January by vibrant parades and a large procession centered on Cebu.

Wood in the Philippines has a large and complex history, not just with the presence of wooden figures in the archipelago, but also in the relationship that Filipinos have to the forest. While the processes of Christianization and colonization have drastically changed the way that people in the Philippines interact with space, the presence of spirits in the *balete* and the practices of veneration for *santos* do indicate that some of the precolonial practices of veneration have remained in the archipelago.

²⁷⁴ Fe, “Mothers, maids and the creatures of the night: the persistence of Philippine folk religion.,” 187- 190.

Conclusion: Processional Crosses

While I have discussed the material histories of gold and wood separately, it was not uncommon for devotional objects to combine the two materials. For instance, Chapter 1 discussed how the Spanish decorated their churches with gilded wood. Of particular religious and cultural importance are crucifixes and processional crosses, which were used in processions during Holy Week (see Chapter 2). Because they were often made of both gold and wood and served an important ritual function, I have intentionally left my discussion of the processional crosses and crucifixes to the very end. The icon of the crucifix is integral to expressions of both Spanish and indigenous forms of Catholicism, and the processional crosses are emblematic of the blending of gold and wood, along with everything those two materials symbolized in the Catholic cultures of early colonial Philippines.

As I have analyzed in Chapter 1, gold had a spiritual significance both in the precolonial Philippines and in Early Modern Spain. The material was prominent in the aesthetics of the Catholic Church because it was deemed an appropriate material to represent holy figures, heavenly realms, and the glory of God. Given its association with wealth and prestige, gold was also used to display the power and success of the Church itself, particularly after the Reformation and the Council of Trent. In the animist contexts of indigenous Philippine cultures, gold offered protection against illness and malignant spirits, and it was part of people's everyday lives, regardless of their place in the social hierarchy. When the Spanish attempted to enforce their own ideas about the religious and economic uses of gold across the Philippines, the precolonial associations with protection and the artistic techniques used to shape gold for personal adornment were often mixed with Spanish goldworking methods. In addition, though gold was no longer economically accessible to many people as the colonial period progressed, the Catholic

Church's use of gold also displayed its material and spiritual power. The Spanish extracted gold from its Latin American colonies and used it to adorn their churches and mint currency. Gold was a physical reminder of power, but it was also a spiritual embodiment of glory. While the Spanish Colonial Period produced a major shift in the way gold was used and perceived in the Philippines, indigenous peoples retained a significant amount of their own epistemological beliefs about gold. In this context, gold can be used to view the processes of indigenous agency and negotiation in the colonial period.

Chapter 2 explored the religious functions of wood as a tool, resource, and spiritual object. In Philippine animism, wood was not only a product for human consumption, but often an extension of the societal relationship with the forest. The Spanish transformed wood culture in the Philippines through a variety of methods. For example, the Spanish literally destroyed wooden idols in intentional spectacles, burnt sacred trees such as the *balete* trees, and relocated indigenous people away from the forests, aiming to reorganize Philippine society to surround the Church. During the early colonial period, early Filipinos adopted Catholic venerative practices, leading to the dominance of *santo* figures in early colonial religious wooden iconography. However, these *santos* were not simply adopted from the Spanish without any changes, and many of these wooden *santos* bear resemblances to indigenous artistry and significance. *Santos* in the Spanish Colonial Period were predominantly carved by native artisans and reflected some traditional elements of Philippine woodworking techniques.

Gold and wood are two completely different materials, but they were often used together in religious ritual, particularly in Spanish Catholicism. Crosses, because they often used both gold and wood in their construction, are a perfect encapsulation of this. Symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ, the icon of the cross is one of the most influential symbols of the Christian faith. In

Europe, crucifixes were used in personal adornment as they were believed to have protective properties, which is not unlike how the indigenous people of the Philippines viewed gold. During the early colonial period, Spanish friars also gave them to indigenous peoples to replace their own protective amulets.²⁷⁵

Crosses were also important religious artifacts, and they were incorporated into the Spanish strategy of dual pageantry. For instance, Magellan's famous mass baptism also came with the building of the famous cross on Cebu, which was followed by the burning of animist venerative objects. In a broader Christian context, the cross was a way to invoke the suffering of Christ and quickly became a symbol of Christianity. Crosses were also used extensively in home altars in the Philippines, where they were "hung on the wall or placed on top of the family altar for acts of devotion."²⁷⁶ Processional crosses in particular highlighted the Holy Week processions, and as the first and most prominent indication of the celebrations, were integral to these parades.²⁷⁷ As I have previously discussed in-depth in this thesis, the pageantry of the Holy Week processions was key to the Spanish clergy members' aims of evangelization and subsequent observance of Catholic morality and behavior.

Processional crosses were not only of religious importance because of their shape and symbolic significance, but also because of their materials of manufacture. While the inclusion of the highly sought after precious material of gold represented the divinity of Jesus and the power of the Church, wood possessed its own biblical connotations as the material from which Jesus' own crucifix was made. On the one hand, gold used on the cross served to glorify Jesus and indicate his heavenly status. On the other hand, wood gave an impression of authenticity, serving

²⁷⁵ Castro, Sandra B. *Art of the Cross: A Philippine Tradition*. Ayala Museum, 2002, 13.

²⁷⁶ Castro, *Art of the Cross: A Philippine Tradition*, 13.

²⁷⁷ Castro, *Art of the Cross: A Philippine Tradition*, 22.

as a reminder of Jesus' humility. Because wood was also perceived as a somewhat living material, it was also a reminder of Jesus' fully human status.²⁷⁸ Within this context, the literal layering of gold on wood was a fitting method to convey these multiple layers of meaning. Gold and wood cultures coexisted in the Philippines during the early colonial period, and the Spanish attempted to control both. Moreover, the precolonial notions of gold and wood also made the processional cross an intensely powerful and protective artifact.

The histories of gold and wood overlap in the context of indigenous negotiation during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines. Although gold and wood were distinct materials that the Spanish tried to conquer for economic and material gain, the goods produced by Philippine goldsmithing and woodworking often represented animist religious rituals that the Spanish sought to eradicate. While there is evidence of cohesion in the Philippines' gold culture in the Spanish colonial period, the Spaniards' aggressive attacks on wooden icons and the reorganization of Philippine societies brought about a more drastic shift in the lowland Filipino relationship with wood. Both materials were also useful tools in the colonization and Christianization projects, with their pre-existing popularity among animists partly explaining the appeal of Catholic iconography among indigenous peoples.

Building on recent historiographic interest in material cultures and indigenous agency, I have offered a new perspective on the interplay of religion, material culture, environmental history, and colonialism in the Philippine archipelago during the Spanish colonial period. I have attempted to utilize an interdisciplinary approach, including the fields of art history, archaeology, and anthropology in this thesis to better discuss the presence and power of indigenous

²⁷⁸ Neilson, "Carving Life: The Meaning of Wood in Renaissance Sculpture."

negotiation. As opposed to focusing on just one culture, my intention has been to explore the interactions between Spanish and indigenous Philippine communities by tracing the kinds of dialogue and negotiations that took place across cultural and religious borders. My geographical scope has been broad, but it mostly focused on the low-lying areas of the Philippine archipelago, particularly that of Luzon and the Visayas. In addition, I have only scratched the surface of this material world of early Catholic influence in the Philippines.

The presence of indigenous negotiation in the material culture in the colonial Philippines is a topic that deserves further historical inquiry. indigenous people were able to resist colonization and often negotiated their own spiritual meanings of materials during this period. I hope that this research will inspire further studies on material cultures, indigenous agency, and colonization in the Philippines, especially in relation to other materials like *anting-anting*, *kris* daggers, and porcelain, which fell outside of my scope. Through the material use and culture of gold and wood at least, the power and agency of indigenous Filipinos during the Spanish colonial period is clear and undeniable.

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