

RESEARCH

Ivory and religious statues in the Philippines today

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Abstract

From 2009 corrupt officials in the Philippines were reported to have stolen tonnes of African elephant tusks that customs had confiscated in transit from Africa to China. In 2011 a survey found ivory being carved and ivory items sold in Manila (albeit small amounts). In February 2015 a follow-up survey was undertaken. Little had changed in the ivory market and government inspections were not preventing new illegal ivory items from entering the market. The wholesale price of raw ivory had risen slightly from USD 446/kg in 2011 to USD 462/kg in 2015 for average 5-kg (mostly African) tusks. In 2011 there were 20 retail outlets counted with 264 ivory items displayed for sale and in 2015 there were 24 shops with 350 items on display, most of them carved before 1990. Antique outlets displayed most of these items. Figures of Catholic saints predominated, followed by smaller human and animal figurines and jewellery, generally of Chinese or African origin, brought to Manila by members of Filipino diaspora. Prices of pre-1990 ivory items were generally the same as four years earlier. Vendors described how the stolen tusks provided a small flow of ivory for carving new religious figurines. Some new religious statues with ivory, up to 3 m high, were also seen openly on sale to the rich elite in Manila.

Résumé

A partir de 2009, les fonctionnaires corrompus aux Philippines auraient volé des tonnes de défenses d'éléphants d'Afrique que les douanes avaient confisquées en transit provenant d'Afrique vers la Chine. En 2011, un sondage a révélé que l'ivoire était sculpté et les articles en ivoire étaient vendus à Manille (quoiqu'en petites quantités). En février 2015, une étude de suivi a été entreprise. Peu de choses avaient changé dans le marché de l'ivoire et des inspections du gouvernement n'empêchaient pas de nouveaux objets illégaux en ivoire d'entrer au marché. Le prix de vente en gros de l'ivoire brut avait légèrement augmenté, passant de 446 USD/kg en 2011 à 462 USD/kg en 2015 pour des défenses moyennes de 5 kg (principalement africaines). En 2011, on a compté 20 points de vente ayant 264 articles d'ivoire exposés à la vente et en 2015, il y avait 24 magasins ayant 350 objets exposés, la plupart d'entre eux sculptés avant 1990. Les magasins des antiques exposaient la plupart de ces articles. Les figurines de saints catholiques prédominaient, suivis par de petites figurines humaines et animales et les bijoux, généralement d'origine chinoise ou africaine, amenés à Manille par les membres de la diaspora philippine. Les prix des articles d'ivoire faits avant 1990 étaient généralement les mêmes que quatre ans plus tôt. Les vendeurs ont décrit comment les défenses volées fournissaient un petit flux d'ivoire pour la sculpture de nouvelles figurines religieuses. On a vu quelques nouvelles statues religieuses en ivoire, jusqu'à 3 m de haut, ouvertement en vente aux élites riches à Manille.

Introduction

In late 2010/early 2011 a study of Manila's retail ivory sales found that new ivory was still in demand for carving figures of religious saints ('santos') for

worship (Martin et al. 2011). An article in *Vanity Fair*, a *National Geographic* documentary and *National Geographic* articles drew further attention to elephant poaching and ivory demand in Asia, the Philippines

included (Shoumatoff 2011; Christy 2012). At the CITES Conference of the Parties in Bangkok in 2013 the Philippines was placed on the black list of countries needing to improve law enforcement on ivory, as ivory had been 'leaking' from official stocks of confiscated ivory shipments discovered in transit, mainly from East Africa en route to China. What had been happening in the Philippines since the last survey? Had there been a clean up of the illegal ivory trade? Had the price fallen as a result? Was ivory carving continuing? Were vendors phasing out ivory items from the retail outlets?

Methodology

From 1 to 6 February 2015, four years after the last detailed survey (Martin et al. 2011), I conducted a follow-up survey of the ivory items on sale at retail outlets in Manila. I returned to the same areas surveyed before, visiting the same outlets, and new ones that had opened, in order to count, itemize and price the objects displayed for sale. I recorded the country of origin and rough age of the item, i.e. as antique (said to be over 100 years old), old (dating from before the 1990 CITES ban), recent (following the 1990 CITES ban), or new. I collected this information from vendors and from my own observations, looking at the style and appearance of each item. I surveyed shops, hotels and shopping malls in central Manila, mainly in the areas of Ermita, Intermuros and Makati, and I visited China Town. I photographed all the items I could for reference. I matched the raw data from 2011 with items seen in the same outlets during this survey to compare turnover and prices and general trends in demand. I talked to vendors to collect updated information on wholesale prices of raw ivory and to learn about the carvers' activities, and I asked about views on ivory, bearing in mind recent restrictions and negative international pressure.

History and background on the Philippines' ivory trade

Fossils of more than one species of elephant have been found in the Philippines; about 500,000 years ago the early hominine inhabitants of the islands hunted them for food. From the 10th to 13th centuries, ivory was brought by boats to the islands of the Philippines and used for jewellery and for images to worship. In 1492 Spain discovered the New World and from the Philippines aimed to rule the Far East. The Philippines

became a link between the East and West. Unlike in Asia where elephants in the Brahmanic and Buddhist cultures were revered and respected, and had been domesticated for 5,000 years, in Africa they were seen as a nuisance and the trade in their tusks grew as European explorers opened up the continent. Ivory symbolized to them power and man's dominion over nature, epitomized by the elephant, the largest land mammal surviving since the Ice Age. Chinese traders came to the Philippines in the early 1600s with 30 junks a year carrying ivory, silk and spices. The Chinese traders, named Sangleys, came especially from Fujian Province in southeast China, an area famous for carving, and some settled in the Philippines. Spanish friars asked them to carve religious ivory images for Manila's churches (see colour pages iv). The 250-year Galleon Trade turned Manila into a flourishing city in the 17th century, and these religious statues and figures, today known as Filipino-Spanish ivories, were exported, especially to Mexico and Spain (St Aubyn 1987; Jose and Villegas 2004).

In Manila the Spanish built Baroque-style houses. Rich families shared a family chapel with a big altar for their figures of ivory santos. Smaller houses had a niche for their santos at the end of the corridor leading to the bedrooms. The families would pray to these with their children at sunset. Parents with their children would pray to St Joseph, Mary and the Christ Child and, also, on their feast days, to saints who had family members' names.

These practices continue today (Ramon Villegas, art historian and art dealer, pers. comm., February 2015), and santos remain an important part of Filipino culture. In early 2015 I counted 54 antique santos on display in the St Augustin Museum (some had been replaced with fake ivory, but in 2013 the family of Don Luis Mar Araneta donated 17 early ivory carvings with Chinese features made by Sangleys, along with later pieces with European features carved by Filipinos after the 18th century). There were also 27 antique ivory santos on display at the Museum of St Tomas University, being of cultural interest.

Legislation on ivory

The Philippines has been a Party to CITES since 1981, and thus is expected to comply with the CITES ban on the international ivory trade of 1990 (voted in 1989). The country's domestic law stipulates that wholesalers and retailers of wildlife items must register with the government any items acquired and, if caught dealing

in them illegally (ivory included), are liable to a penalty of 6–12 years in prison and/or a fine of about USD 2000–20,000. In reality dealers do not register their ivory, as officials cannot tell whether the ivory is new or old. Official inspections (apparently carried out every three months in Manila) do not trouble the vendors as ivory is rarely examined.

In 2013 the government decided it had to show it was intent on cracking down on the ivory trade, so it announced that it would crush its remaining stockpile of five tonnes of tusks (worth USD 2,250,000, based on the wholesale ivory price in Manila at the time of about USD 450/kg). This was “to bring the Philippines’ message across the globe that the country is serious and will not tolerate illegal wildlife trade, denouncing the continuous killing of elephants for illicit ivory trade”, according to Mundita Lim, director of the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) (Christy 2013; Vigne and Martin 2014).

Results of the survey

There had been a tightening of the Philippine ivory trade in response to growing international pressure against it around 2013, some vendors explained. They had to be careful about selling their ivory santos and changed the labels on the items, giving the carving date as an earlier decade, such as ‘1970s’, to avoid trouble from inspectors seeing items carved close to the 1990 CITES ban. However, vendors said the atmosphere was now more relaxed again. There was some scathing talk about the ivory crush in Manila in 2013. Among vendors, this was largely considered lip service by officials to appease the international media. One vendor remarked that actually for certain officials it was “an excuse to keep some of the ivory for themselves”. Some said these officials just have the tusks in their houses for decoration, as they don’t need to sell them, keeping the tusks for when they may need some money. An eye witness at the ivory crush said the event ended up a fiasco with an excavator and a steam roller trying to crush the tusks that had been laid flat on the ground, but they were flying around all over the place, nearly hitting the crowd. In the end they pushed the semi-broken tusks into the back of Manila’s famous colourful shared taxis called jeepnies to be taken away somewhere out of sight to be incinerated instead. Who knows where they all ended up (Alex Hofford, WildAid, Hong Kong, pers. comm., January and August 2015). This ivory

designated for destruction amounted to less than half of the earlier officially held stocks, which had been recently depleted by theft (Christy 2013).

Sources and wholesale prices of ivory

Historically, Africa and India were considered the main sources of ivory for the Philippines, but Siam (Thailand) and Cambodia also supplied ivory for carving Christian religious figures - in the Philippines – (and for export) in the past (Jose and Villegas 2004). Today the main source is Africa. Ivory comes into Manila illegally from consignments heading for China. In 2005 the Philippines customs agency seized 7.7 tonnes and in 2006 Taiwan seized 6.1 tonnes of ivory en route for the Philippines (Christy 2012). There was a scandal in 2006 when 3.7 tonnes of this confiscated ivory vanished from the Bureau of Customs’ stores. Some tusks were recovered and certain officials prosecuted (Milliken et al. 2009). Smugglers bring ivory shipments from Africa through various ports to disguise the origin of the containers and they choose countries where there is a small risk of seizures due to corruption. The Philippines continues to be such an entrepot: in January 2009, 2.2 tonnes were seized in Guangdong, China, after transit via the Philippines; in May 2009, 4.8 tonnes were seized in Manila in transit to China. Tusks again went missing from the stocks. Police found some in a raid; these missing tusks had been carved into religious figures (Christy 2013). In November 2013, 2.9 tonnes of ivory were intercepted in Zanzibar destined for the Philippines/China (Jackson Miller, analyst, C4ADS, pers. comm., August 2015). Vendors spoke freely about raw ivory that ‘leaked out’ of the official stores in the Philippines.

Occasionally sailors and travellers sell tusks to vendors, but this has become rarer as officials may set up a sailor to sell a tusk for carving in order to catch the vendor. If a policeman is corrupt he may keep the tusk to sell later, a vendor stated. For this reason, transactions were now conducted in the vendors’ homes, they said.

Some vendors remarked that the wholesale price of raw ivory had doubled in the last 10 years but there was only a slight price rise over the last four years. The wholesale price of an average tusk of ‘arm thickness’ was 20,000–25,000 pesos (USD 455–468)/kg in early 2015, compared with an average of USD 446/kg in 2011, and USD 320/kg in 2009 (Martin et al. 2011).

One vendor reported paying 30,000 pesos (USD 682)/kg for a tusk of 'leg thickness' in early 2015.

Ivory carving in the Philippines

Materials that are naturally white are associated with purity, virtue and spiritual goodness in the Philippines, as in many cultures. Ivory from the elephant, more than shell or bone, is preferred for carving, being large, lustrous, from an animal of power, and of limited supply. Thus it is also associated with wealth and status. For centuries, intercontinental trade in ivory enabled carvers in the Philippines to use Asian and African ivory interchangeably; however they preferred East African ivory because it was softer and easier to cut and less prone to cracking than ivory from forest elephants (Jose and Villegas 2004).

Many ivory carving families are based in Kabiti in the south; there are also about 10 carvers in the Bikol area, and others in Bulacha and Pampanga, north of Manila. Some ivory carvers in the greater Manila area are employed to produce work for specific shops. The older more experienced vendors said, however, that the better carvers of the 1980s who produced santo faces of artistic merit were too old to work now, and that the younger carvers rush the work. There were some very crude earrings, rings and bangles seen in two shops that still had the white ivory powder on them from filing that had not been polished off. One shop owner said that his carvers use wood today, but part-time ivory carving, especially re-use of broken items and repair work, continues.

During this survey, vendors stated that ivory carvers were still active and charged 1,000–1,500 pesos (USD 23–34) per inch, which is an average of USD 11.4/cm, for carving, if the piece of ivory were 'arm-size'. The price in early 2015 for a 10 cm carved ivory head was around USD 114. In 2011 a carver received about 400 pesos (the equivalent then of USD 9/cm), while the price received for carving a 10 cm head was about USD 91; Martin et al. 2011). For santos that are most in demand, carvers can charge more. A vendor lamented that carvers had raised their prices in 2015 for new ivory Niños (baby Jesus figurines). She now had to sell these for more to make a profit she explained. Carvers used to sell a 10 cm Niño for 14–15,000 pesos (USD 318–340); but by 2015 carvers were selling them

to vendors for 25,000 pesos (USD 568) so she has to sell them retail at 30,000 pesos (USD 682). Vendors said, as there was still ivory from "stolen stashes" floating around, carving could continue. Numbers of active ivory carvers in the country may be similar to the previous estimate of 50 people (Martin et al. 2011).

Retail outlets and prices of ivory items

In February 2015 there were 24 retail outlets counted in Manila, which had 350 ivory items on sale (Table 1). As the number of items per outlet averaged only 15, it was possible to record details of each piece (Tables 2 and 3) regarding their origin, age, and prices. (This is not possible in many cities such as in China, where surveys uncover thousands of pieces.) Although there is a large China Town in Manila, no outlets were seen there selling ivory items. This area remains poor, unlike booming China, so there is very limited demand for expensive utilitarian and decorative objects. No new ivory chopsticks or name seals were seen during this survey (and very few old ones). In Manila only one hotel gift shop (out of nine visited) sold some ivory items that were sourced from China. Three malls (out of six visited) contained a total of four outlets selling worked ivory. The majority of outlets were antique shops in Ermita, which is near the sea front, an area once popular with tourists, but now turned seedy. The rather run-down establishments were packed with old ornaments for sale and many wooden santos, sometimes with ivory faces and hands. Most of the items were not marked with prices, but the vendors were nearly always helpful and friendly, volunteering prices and information about the items, especially the santos, hoping for a good sale. Most outlets also allowed photographs to be taken, welcoming the interest, very different from Mainland China and Hong Kong. There

Table 1. Retail outlets and number of ivory items surveyed in Manila, early 2011 and early 2015

Type	Number		Number of items		Average number of items/outlet	
	2011	2015	2011	2015	2011	2015
Antique shop	16	19	190	307	12	16
Gift shop	2	3	65	18	32	6
Hotel shop	2	1	9	5	5	5
Religious shop	-	1	-	20	-	17

Table 2. Types of ivory items for retail sale in Manila in February 2015

Type	No.	Per cent of total
Santos	113	32
Humans fig	56	16
Animals fig	34	10
Pendant	24	6.8
Bangle/bracelet	22	6.3
Necklace	17	5
Earring pr	10	3
Button	9	2.6
Ring	8	2.3
Lid	6	2
Broach	5	1.4
Cigarette holder	5	1.4
Container	5	1.4
Carved tusk/bridge	4	1.1
Dice box	4	1.1
Misc.	26	7
TOTAL	350	100

were no ivory specialist shops seen and most of the items for sale were at least second-hand and carved before the 1990 CITES ban.

People come with items to sell from all over the world, vendors explained, including overseas Filipino workers and ‘seafarers’ from Africa (Table 3). There were relatively few expensive antiques from abroad, but those few were usually labelled carefully with the origin, date of carving and price.

There was a little locally carved jewellery: antorium flower earrings and a broach, three rose pendants, and a pendant of Jesus’s face, all made before 1990 by the more skilled carvers.

Santos remained the main items for sale in 2015. Vendors remarked that it is harder to obtain old santos, however. Before, people came to sell their family heirlooms, but now vendors must go to private houses seeking santos. Sometimes santos are partly antique, such as the clothes or glass container, with a more recently made body, making pricing complicated. Most in demand are santos of the virgin and baby and Niños, even by people of modest income, especially if they do not have a family heirloom. At Christmas, demand rises for an ivory Niño for the family manger, this is important to them as ivory is considered honourable to God.

The biggest santos seen during this survey were new statues, 120 cm tall with ivory heads and hands, seen in a mega-mall shop selling many new Roman

Catholic items (See colour pages iv). Malls, especially at weekends, are packed with Filipinos drawn in by the air conditioning. Some of the santos in the mall appeared almost life-size, raised on stands. The bodies of most of them were entirely of fibreglass; however 17 had new ivory heads and hands. The ivory criss-cross pattern was clearly visible on the Caucasian faces that had been partly painted with rosy cheeks, pink lips and neatly defined brown eyebrows. They all had a ‘chocolate box’ attention to detail. As well as the statues, there were three large ivory heads (with necks), about 20–25 cm in height, so that the customer could buy one and order a saint statue of choice. One new large statue of Jesus with an ivory head and ivory hands was naked so that the customer could order the preferred clothing.

The vendor said statues and other figures containing new ivory in the shop were made by their own artisans in Manila. She later claimed they were old and that the owner could write this on the receipt for export purposes.

During the survey, 113 santo items were recorded in 17 outlets. There were 56 figures of 20–30 cm with ivory heads and hands and usually a wooden body clothed in lavish gold-embroidered capes (six being new). There were 32 of solid ivory, mostly dating from the 1970s/1980s when ivory was readily available; however four were new: one of the Virgin Mary, one of St Joseph and two of Our Lady of Guadalupe. There were 12 full ivory figurines of baby Jesus, measuring 10–20 cm, as well as eight heads or pairs of hands (three new), and four sets of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, each measuring 20–30 cm (two sets being new). There were five new santos measuring 60–120 cm with fibreglass bodies and ivory heads and hands.

For items generally, prices ranged from USD 45 for a 5 cm oldish, African animal figurine to USD 15,909 for a 120 cm new santo partly made of ivory (Table 4). As well as customers of Philippines origin, Christian Chinese Filipinos buy new santos for worship, as they only desire items that have had no previous owner. According to vendors, collectors of antique santos are mainly from Mexico, USA, France and Italy, as well the Philippines. Vendors have no concerns offering items to foreigners for export and may advise them to ‘simplify the description of the item’ – for example, to send items by courier labelled as ‘household effects made of wood’. For transport by air, an item could be packed in a suitcase for check-in, but it was not recommended to carry it in hand luggage. However vendors leave it up to the customers.

Table 3. Origin and age of ivory items surveyed in Manila in February 2015

Item	Old(ish)	Recent	Total	Origin
Santo	87	25	113	Philippines
Bangle	1	12	13	Philippines
Pendant	2	3	5	Philippines
Ring		2	2	Philippines
Earring, pair		1	1	Philippines
Broach	1		1	Philippines
Hairpin set	1		1	Philippines
Knife (Kris)	1		1	Philippines
Human figure	26		26	China
Necklace		3	3	China
Earring, pair			3	China
Cigarette holder	5		5	China
Pendant		4	4	China
Ring	4		4	China
Container	4		4	China
Broach	1	1	2	China
Chopsticks, pair	2		2	China
Boat	1		1	China
Paint brush holder	1		1	China
Paper knife	1		1	China
Pipe	1		1	China
Lid	6		6	Hong Kong
Dice box	4		4	Hong Kong
Necklace			3	Hong Kong
Earring, pr			3	Hong Kong
Chess piece	3		3	Hong Kong
Plaque	3		3	Hong Kong
Name seal	2		2	Hong Kong
Vegetable	1		1	Hong Kong
Animal	20?		20	Africa
Bookends	1		1	Africa
Necklace		6	6	Africa
Human fig			16	Africa
Carved tusk/bridge	4		4	Africa
Pendant	2	1	3	Africa
Bridge	2		2	Africa
Fruit	1		1	Africa
Paper knife	1		1	Africa
Ring	1		1	Africa
Human fig	5		5	Africa
Broach	2		2	Europe
Pendant	4		4	Europe
Animal	2		2	Europe
Brush	2		2	Europe
Necklace	1		1	Europe
Razor	1		1	Europe
Human fig	7		7	Japan
Pendant	2		2	Japan
Hammer	1		1	Japan
Animal	1		1	Japan
Bridge	2		2	India
Pendant	2		2	India
Gong	1		1	Emirates
Container	1		1	Burma
Knife	1		1	Cambodia
Pendant			2	Thailand
Animal			1	Thailand
Various			40	Unknown
TOTALS	220	60	350	

Table 4. Retail prices for ivory items seen in Manila, February 2015

Item price	Size in cm	Origin	Range in USD	Av. USD
JEWELLERY				
Bangle	1-2	Mixed	114-1022	432
Earring, pr	13	Mixed	136-227	182
Necklace, beaded	50	Mixed	159-568	364
Pendant	4 cm	Mixed	57-216	136
Ring	0.25-1	Mixed	46-148	80
FIGURINE/FIGURE				
Animal	5	Africa	45-220	74
Human bust	15-20	Africa	568-1367	966
Human	10-15	China	568-1022	795
	15-20	China	795-1704	1250
	30-40	Africa	3409-5000	4205
	30		1590	1590
Head of Santo	5	Philippines	205-1022	450
Baby Jesus (Niño)	10-15	Philippines	568-1023	750
Saint (Santo) all ivory	20-30	Philippines	1136-9090	4078
Santo with ivory head & hands	30	Philippines	909-2727	1569
Santo antique as above	30	Philippines	1704-10227	4477
Santo new as above	90-120	Philippines	11364-15909	13637
MISC.				
Cigarette holder	10	China	80	80
Paper knife	25	Africa	568	568

NB: USD 1 = Philippine Pesos 44

Ivory substitutes

There was only a sprinkling of articles made of substitute materials. Among these were several bone items, including a 15 cm Chinese decorative carving selling for USD 318, two Japanese 25 cm figures made of resin, an old shell bangle, two 22 cm crocodiles made of hippo tusk, many old wooden santos (sometimes with bone faces and hands) and the new fibreglass ones. No mammoth ivory items were seen for sale. Even the more knowledgeable vendors did not know about mammoth ivory, raw or worked, and showed little interest in it. Vendors named their materials correctly when asked. They did not have fake ivory on display.

Vendors and their views

Most vendors were the owners of their antique shops. Some stated that they were collectors themselves, or brokers gaining a commission for items sold. Some shops had vendors with similar names, who were related to one another in family businesses.

Of all Philippine artworks, vendors agreed ivory santos are probably the most ubiquitous and deeply

embedded in the Filipino experience and identity. Countless Filipinos have prayed to them in home shrines and in church niches over the centuries (Florendo 2001; Jose and Villegas 2004). Antique shop vendors differentiated and dated their santos by century with ease, and some took deep pleasure in describing them. Three shops kept a few expensive old ivory santos safely in drawers, carefully wrapped up, to show a customer only if ivory was specifically requested; Their main concern was lack of supply, and it is becoming more difficult to bring them back from Spain and Mexico as well as to sell to collectors abroad, due to the increased restrictions. Prices for antiques, they said, have remained fairly static over the last few years.

For newer businesses, however, the injection of stolen tusks onto the market has rejuvenated the sale of new carvings of santos, which vendors admitted are freely available to Filipinos in certain malls. Vendors commented it was often difficult for customers to obtain a new ivory baby Jesus figurine being particularly sought after. Old ivory trinkets were much less in demand and more difficult to sell, vendors remarked.

Trends and discussion

The wholesale price offered to a carver for illegal raw ivory has risen slightly in Manila since 2011, but the increase is not large enough to infer a change in demand. The wholesale price in China is quadruple that in the Philippines, but Filipinos have contacts in Manila, not China, and do not want to risk smuggling ivory into China.

There was a slight increase in the number of outlets counted, from 20 in 2011 (Martin et. al. 2011) to 24 in 2015. As before, the number of ivory items per outlet remained low (ranging from 1–44 in 2011 and 1–53 in 2015). There were 16 outlets in the same locations with a further 8 new ones counted (six antique outlets, a gift outlet and a religious outlet). There was a slight increase in total number of items counted, from 264 in 2011 to 350 in 2015. Most were still found in the antique shops (307 items in 2015, up from 190 in 2011), especially old ivory jewellery and figurines from China and Africa (that had either been recently smuggled into the country or owned for many years by people living in Manila). Santos on display for sale numbered 97 in 2011 and 113 in 2015. The Philippines has the world's third largest Roman Catholic population, with a tradition of worshipping ivory santos; the country has a growing population, currently of about 80 million people. Thus there is continuing demand for ivory santos.

Regarding turnover, most ivory items had been replaced between 2011 and 2015, but some seen in 2011 were still there and generally at similar prices. One expensive outlet had just sold an antique Joseph and Jesus for USD 10,227 that had been there for sale four years earlier at the same price. The price of another antique figure, of St Roche, had risen a little from USD 1,477 to 1,705. In a run-down outlet, an ivory scarab beetle from Egypt remained at USD 86 and a set of 4 old ivory bangles from the Bontok tribe was still on sale for USD 386. In other outlets, prices for the same antique Chinese bird carving had risen from USD 1,022 to USD 1,477, and a pair of hands (7 cm) from USD 227 to USD 272. For 30 cm santos carved in the 1980s with ivory heads and hands, the average price had, however, doubled from USD 738 in early 2011 to USD 1,569 four years later as these are becoming rarer.

It is the new ivory santos that are of concern. In 2015, the 20 new statues, some about 3 m high, that were seen in a religious shop were obviously designed for the rich and influential in Manila. It was both incongruous and ironic to see framed pictures of Pope

Francis beside some of these new almost life-size fibre glass santos with ivory heads and hands, openly for sale in a shopping mall. Pope Francis had spoken out against the ivory trade on his visit to Kenya in November 2015 and has a huge influence on the Filipino public. On 18 January 2015 he urged mercy and compassion towards fellow humans at an outdoor Mass in Manila that attracted six million people.

Conclusion

The Philippines' retail ivory market remains very small. The Philippines, however, is still an important entrepot for smuggled African ivory in transit to China, with some being officially seized and stockpiled. Some corrupt officials have stolen tusks for financial security, as an investment, while others have sold them on the local market, and this appears to continue. As the country is sea-bound, smuggling could be more easily controlled (like Japan), than in China that shares a land border with 17 countries and territories. But the combination of government corruption and a strong belief that ivory statues honour the saints makes law enforcement a significant challenge. Despite media coverage and CITES efforts to improve law enforcement, this is still inadequate with new ivory santos readily available for purchase especially by the rich elite.

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