

Educator Guide

FEATURED WORK OF ART



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource includes factual information, cultural context, glossary of terms, as well as prompts and discussion questions related to the *Archangel Michael*, 71.490.

This resource is recommended for High School audiences and Social Studies subjects. Students will learn about the historical and religious context of this object to be able to relate and compare it to other historical cultures, the spread of ideas, and the impact of imperialism. These suggestions were informed by the Maryland State Department of Education 2024.

[The Archangel Michael](#)

Unidentified artist

Philippines, 17th Century

Elephant ivory with paint, gilding, and marble base

Acquired by Henry Walters, before 1931, acc. no. 71.490

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Facts About the Work of Art

- The Archangel Michael, a spiritual warrior in the Catholic faith, is depicted in many works of art at the Day of Judgment holding a flaming sword raised in his right hand while standing on a demon who is lying on the ground.
- A number of pieces of ivory were used to create this statue. The Archangel's head and torso are carved from a single elephant tusk, whereas the arms are in two segments and the legs are each of a single piece. Separate sections have been dovetailed to the torso to make the skirt. Each wing is formed by three sheets of ivory held together with supports. The head and torso of the demon are also carved from a single solid tusk with separate pieces for the tail and limbs.
- This sculpture was made of ivory that was sourced from both Africa and Southeast Asia. Many statues like this one were made of African or Asian ivory that was shipped to the Philippines by European merchants and carved by Chinese immigrant artists living in the Philippines known as Sangleys to be sold to Catholic patrons either in the Americas or Spain.
- Michael's skirt contains a mysterious inscription in the hem: SARA BADOS BARBOVTAN SIRARE PERIOVAM CEQATO PERIOVAM 1303. The language and meaning of the writing remain unknown, but scholars have suggested it may be in a pseudo Latin that emerged in the Philippines.
- In the Catholic tradition, Michael is the defender of the Church and assists people at the time of death. According to the Christian Bible's book of Revelation, Michael the Archangel will fight an apocalyptic battle against Satan, who will wage this last war in the form of a dragon. Satan is depicted here as a demon with a human head and torso and a scaled serpentine tail.

Cultural Context

- For almost 250 years, Manila, the capital of the Philippines, and Macau (an island off of southeast China) were principal places where ivory sculptures depicting Christian subjects were created to be sold to Spanish territories in Asia and the Americas.
- Masterfully carved, polished, and painted, these ivories were among the most prized goods in the Filipino and **trans-Pacific** markets from the late 16th to the early 19th century.
- Catholicism, which is practiced by the majority of people in the Philippines, has its origins in the **archipelago's** long period as a Spanish colony. The institution of the Catholic Church in the Philippines strengthened due to the orders of Dominicans, Augustinians, Franciscans, and

Jesuits (different sects of Catholicism) who took over territories in various parts of the islands. Over time, Spain spread their rule through the vehicle of Catholicism, replacing or heavily influencing several of the local spiritual traditions, including those around nature spirits, deities, and ancestor worship.

- Trade in African ivory, in addition to the expansion of Catholicism, was part of Spain's **colonial** enterprise and the 17th-century trade network called the Manila Galleon Trade. Spain devised this trade network to tie the Philippines and Mexico, as a way of extracting and moving resources from the colonies it controlled. In addition to the movement of materials, images, and ideas, people migrated along this trade route as well, either by choice, such as in the case of missionaries and artisans, or against their will, as in the case of enslaved peoples.
- The history of the sculpture of the Archangel Michael began in East Africa where the ivory was extracted from elephants that were killed for their tusks. African ivory was first shipped to Asia, including to Goa in India and workshops in Manila in the Philippines, where Chinese artisans shaped the raw materials. The finished ivory sculpture was likely then transported on the Manila **galleon ships** carrying other goods such as porcelain, silk, and spices to the Americas. From there, the sculpture probably followed two possible paths: it was either sold in Acapulco, Mexico, alongside other Asian luxury goods, or it traveled across the Atlantic to be sold in Seville or Salamanca, Spain. Works of art such as this, which brought together the materials and styles of the vast world, had a high value in European society and were prized by their owners.

GLOSSARY

Archipelago: A geographic area that contains a series of islands in a body of water. The Philippines is an archipelago, of over 7,100 islands, in southeastern Asia.

Colonial: A political entity who settles and develops a colony, while establishing power over the land and Indigenous people.

Galleon Ships: A type of sailing ship used for carrying cargo which also acted as a warship.

Trans-Pacific: Across the Pacific Ocean.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[National Geographic Mapmaker](#)

PROMPTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Think about this artwork as though it were a scene in a play. Identify who the characters might be and explain what you think is happening in this scene. Support your statement with visual evidence.
2. Describe what you notice about the materials this artwork is made out of.
3. Chinese artisans, living in the Philippines, made this artwork out of ivory from African elephants for it to be sold to European buyers. Examine what this tells us about imperialism at the time this artwork was made.
4. Reflecting on the fact that many different cultures and peoples had a hand in the creation and trade of this Catholic object, examine what this tells us about Catholicism at the time this artwork was made.
5. Just like when this artwork was made, much of today's markets rely on products being transported around the world. Describe some ways global markets impact the lives of people around the world today. Compare and identify three similarities or differences between how global markets function and impact society today versus the past.