

Research Article

Identifying Emblems from Augustinian and Franciscan Churches in the Philippines: Arts and Linguistics of Sacred Symbolic Archaeology

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Abstract: Augustinian and Franciscan orders in the Philippines brought spiritual cultures among Filipinos. One of these was the influence of their arts and practices which have been visible to their enormous churches built and established during the early 16th to 19th century. Part of the arts used by the two religious orders is the iconic symbols and emblems drawn, etched, affixed, molded or stamped on most of their liturgical objects which they have been using and transferred through space and time, from generation to generation. Many of their sacred symbols can also be found in other institutions, organizations, sacred and non-sacred societies. The focus of this paper is on the identification of sacred symbols common to the two religious orders. This paper gives comparison on the iconic emblems as arts, designs and adornments and understand its depicted characteristics. This paper also gives initial findings on the interpretations of common sacred symbols used by the Augustinian and Franciscan orders.

Keywords: Augustinians, Franciscans, Linguistics, Symbolic Archaeology, Semiotics.

Introduction

A society needs architecture not only as symbolic edifice to realize its practical needs, but also to communicate its institutions' aspirations. As explained in Encyclopedia Britannica (2018), the differences in expression might be distinguish from the forms of architectural types (e.g. the house from the church, etc.). For instance, the kinds of use in the Catholic is different from the Protestant church, as well as the customs and traditions of the congregation. In the same manner, religious orders vary in such practices. When architectural forms become the vehicles of content – in plan, elevation, and decoration for instance—they are symbolic. Symbols could be defined as objects, acts, relationship or linguistic formations with an explicit expression that stand for a multiplicity of meaning of what is behind the veil of direct perception (Nabofa, 1994; Otite, 1982). Among all creation, only humans possess the creative powers in mental and psychological forms, which lead to his experience being reflected and expressed with symbols. Moreover, art, like other manifestation of symbols (e.g. science, myths, dreams and rituals) represents memory, imagination and religious experience (Uyovwirume, 2013). For anthropology, symbolism encompasses a vast expanse of human life, from the body to the meaning of colors, to the adoration of idols and religious symbols; its characteristic is that they represent something different from their intrinsic property (Keesing, 1998). For example, in a number of societies the color red is associated with danger (Klinger, Burton, & Pitts, 2000). In contrast however, it can also be perceived as the color of luck or marriage for Chinese and Indian cultures (Roland, 2018). For Catholics, bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and in sharing the elements, the believer commemorates Christ's sacrificial death. Religious art symbols could help achieve greater mystical exercise and spiritual development, such as divination, medicine and

education. For example, a diviner who uses mirror, water, kola nut lobes or cowries during divination usually develops a higher intellectual spiritual capacity to solve a human problem that a normal person, cosmologies and cosmogonies have in common (Uyovwirume, 2013).

The Augustinians and Franciscans in the Philippines

In the historical context of the Philippines, Spanish colonization started in 1500s. Spaniards brought ideologies, cultures, and beliefs through various symbolic representations like images, sculptures, and even massive churches. Some of these churches were San Augustin Church in Manila, St. James Parish Church in Plaridel, Minor Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel in Taytay Quezon, and *Inmaculada Concepcion* Church in Sta. Maria, Bulacan. Other churches were devastated by calamities like, Tiwi, Cagsawa, and Budiao ruins in Albay. These churches were built by Augustinians and Franciscans during 1500s to 1800s.

Augustinians and Franciscans were the first two primary religious orders dominated the Philippine religion in the 16th century. Not only spirituality, these two religious orders contributed vast impact to the world of Philippine arts and architecture through their massive churches with spiritual symbols and adornments. Some of these are found on their liturgical objects, church walls, ceilings, and pillars. The architectures and even liturgical arts of both orders continued to spread all over the country up to the present times (Del Castillo, 2015).

The aim of this research was to identify the iconic emblems as arts, designs and adornments commonly used by Augustinians and Franciscans as part of their churches' structure. Specific objectives were also used to resolve and achieve significant findings for this study such as: compare common Augustinian and Franciscan symbols in terms of design elements, emblems, and adornments; describe the characteristics of symbols as arts, designs, adornments and its religious significance; and compare the symbols and its similarities with other symbolic emblems comparable to those of Augustinians and Franciscans in terms of religious significance.

The attempt of exploring the church emblems and adornments focuses on the Sacred Symbolic Archaeology because the concept of symbol analysis is to discover the fundamental principles of the human mind as reflected in myth, art and language in the context of Sacred Archaeology.

On one hand, sacred archeology, as explained in *Annuario Pontificio*, was founded in 1852 in Rome, Italy, and Pope Pius IX created a particular Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archeology with the primary objective of the preservation, further exploration, research and study of ancient sacred cemeteries (cited in Recto, Recto, & Avellana, 2018). On the other hand, symbolic archaeology is one of the various forms of semiotic analysis concerned with how people manipulate the meaning of material culture embedded in structural codes to communicate meanings and statements. Sacred symbolic archaeology is not common in Philippine archaeology particularly in analyzing spiritual activities (Preucel, 2006).

The concept of sacred symbolic archaeology has several arguments throughout the centuries. Semiotics that is a study of sign and symbols, on the other hand is not new in the field linguistics and archaeology. When symbolic behavior is recognized, archeologists are often prepared to leave an interpretation of material culture. Nevertheless, new archeological research extends our knowledge of the past to the immaterial and what in the archeological record is not immediately visible (Vianello, 2012). The processual view of symbols is similar as demonstrations that represent reality. It was argued that archaeologists need to deal with

symbols to intelligently understand the early societies. The diversity of symbols such as cognitive structures; ritual icons; identities such as gender, prestige and ethnicity; technological knowledge; and political ideologies need multiple approaches of dealing appropriately (Robb, 1998).

Current archaeological studies of symbols originate from various articles and many sources such as: the earliest new archaeology (Binford, 1962), stylistic studies (Carr & Neitzel, 1995), structuralist archaeologies (Conkey 1982; Deetz 1977; Friedrich, 1970), structural and symbolic archaeology (Hodder, 1982), and diverse post- processual works (Hodder et al. 1995; Barrett, 1994). Recently, several of these lines of research have begun to converge within a general framework involving cultural actors and symbols.

Several studies, in South Asia for instance, deal with the semiotic analysis of architectures and temples (e.g. Kanitkar, 2018; Singh, 2018) share profound ideas on varieties of artworks incised in every wall, pillars and ceilings like in the fifteen temples at Kadhawa India (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Temple Vimana in Kadwaha
(Source: Saurabh Saxena)**

These temples are under the protection of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). These temples have been carried out in three stages of semiotical analysis. The first stage is represented by simple vedibandha (moldings) and lacks sculptural art on the vimana temple. In the second phase, sculptural art is shown on the external panels of the temple. This phase shows also some progress in vedibandha molding. The third stage shows an increase in the temple's total height (Saxsena, 2011).

The focus of an archaeological research moves from the study of materials recovered during excavations to past landscapes filled with plants, animals, objects and ultimately people in addition to monuments and geographical characteristics. Artifacts connected to power or religion, both portable and not portable, embody symbolic meanings that can be revealed by analyzing them as part of semiotically interpretable behaviors (Vianello, 2012). Linking specific objects to particular functions is a way to reconstruct past activities as well as gestures. It is preferable to interpret symbols in the context of the host culture, not based on visual similarity in space and time with other cultures, unless an unbroken link can be proven (Hulin, 1989).

The Augustinian and Franciscan orders are rich in sacred symbols and emblems found in their massive churches and liturgical objects which influenced majority of the Philippine arts and religion. These sacred symbols emanate to different societies and create multiple meaning and interpretations. Their influences were all began when the Legazpi expedition in 1565, as represented by Fray Andres de Urdaneta with four - Fray Martin de Rada; Fray Diego de Herrera; Fray Andres de Aguirre; and Fray Pedro de Gamboa, missionaries brought the Augustinians (Order of Saint Augustine, [OSA]) in the Philippines. The Augustinians were known to build the oldest church in the Philippines. This is the church and convent of St. Paul or more popularly known as the San Agustin Church in *Intramuros* Manila. (Augustinian Province of Santo Niño de Cebu-Philippines, 2018).

The second group of friars arrived in the Philippines on June 24, 1577 was the Franciscans or Order of Friar Minor (OFM). This religious order established their mother church inside *Intramuros* in honor of *Nuestra Senora de los Angeles* (Our Lady of Angels). Today, the Mapua University stands on the site of the old Franciscan church. At present, the mother church of the Franciscans is located at the *Santuario de San Pedro Baustista* in Quezon City.

Fray Juan Clemente OFM was a famous Franciscan lay brother who established the *Hospital de San Juan de Dios* in *Intramuros* near the Parian. *San Juan de Dios* stood in *Intramuros* for over 300 years until it was destroyed by the last world war. Today, the Lyceum occupies the site. The Franciscans are also known to have established the Leprosarium Hospital de San Lazaro. San Lazaro Hospital is located in Sta. Cruz Manila and it is known as quarantine for deadly diseases and rabies vaccine (Cusato, 2009).

Archaeological Significance

The concentrations of this paper focused on the sacred symbols and emblems depicted in arts, design and adornments of both Augustinian and Franciscan churches through sacred symbolic archaeology. The main purpose of sacred symbolic archaeology is to interpret how diverse types of symbols confirm the presence of their original creator, and connect to its original meaning and purpose in order to understand and reconstruct the events of the past. Sacred symbolic archaeology would give clearer understanding from how these two churches –Augustinian and Franciscan have evolved in the Philippines to how they continuously influence the Philippine arts and religion through their symbols, arts, designs and adornments from the coat of arms, characteristics of spirituality, to their way of living.

Methods

This paper employed archival research in tracking the symbols of the Augustinian and Franciscan orders used in their churches built in 16th century where they initially landed to spread their doctrine and discipline. The timeline and chronology of significant events relevant to the Augustinian and Franciscan religious orders were exposed through their historical accounts.

Comparative research was also considered in looking the similarities and differences of the symbols, arts, designs and adornments used by the two religious orders which may contribute to their cultural activities. Photo documentation using Nikon D7100 with DX VR AF-S Nikkor 18-300mm 1:3.5-6.3G ED was also done to capture significant figures, artworks, and designs. Photographs were also used to compare relative features of the emblem, artworks, figures and other liturgical objects with significant symbols. Ethnography was also involved during the conduct of this study to cross-validate and confirm some or even most of the archival and historical findings of the study.

Findings and Discussions

Several infrastructures were established by the Augustinian and the Franciscan orders in proliferating their characteristics of spirituality. Part of the infrastructures are the symbolic representation of sacred iconic images, figures, objects, and emblem. These symbolic representations brought different interpretations among patrons.

The Orders and the Sacred Symbols

Basically, sacred symbol is an image that in a particular cultural practice symbolizes a faith or philosophy, or a concept (Tolentino, 2019). Humans live in symbolically marked worlds, operating within limits constructed by normatively structured groups (McBrearty & Brooks, 2000; Henshilwood & Marean, 2003). Symbolic materials and objects had become a common topic of several articles in science and even pseudoscience in the early modern period. Magical qualities of stones such as that of Zoroaster and Serpentine, believed when worn as amulets, are said to relieve headaches and snakebites (Barnett, 2018).

Several researches (e.g. Currie, 2016; Roepstorff, 2008) argued that philosophy of art should have a significant contribution to the archaeological discussion between explanation and interpretation of symbols which may have the connection between internal representations and objects in the world.

The Emblem. Rovelstad and Camilli (1994) described the significance and role of emblems as part of the visual embellishments of Baroque architectural interiors. Its components, functions, meanings, and locations may describe the iconology and concept. In the introduction of her essay, Wade (2015) also described the emblem as one of the primary vehicles of cultural knowledge during the early modern period (ca. 1500-1750), capable of expressing highly complex ideas in compact and compelling forms.

In the preface to his *Companion to Emblem Studies* (2006) Peter Daly estimates that ca. 6,500 emblem books were published during the Renaissance. Symbolic emblems also represent organizations, cults or group of societies. One of the representations of the two religious orders – the Augustinian and the Franciscans that influenced the Philippines during the Spanish colonization. The most common symbols found in the Augustinian and Franciscans orders are cross, all-seeing eye, fish, and lotus. The cross, all-seeing eye, fish, and lotus become a significant emblem of the Augustinian and Franciscan among their churches and even liturgical objects. It comes with variations, and masterpiece.

In Gallispie (2011), art historians specializing in iconography (the study of meaning in art as distinct from its formal aspects) have also recognized different levels or types of meaning in artworks and design motifs, based on analogies to linguistics and more generally to semiology or semiotics (the science of signs). Moreover, the magical element of symbolic object may add quality to someone who wear it (e.g. Barnett 2018; McHam 2011).

Cross. Cross believed existed during pre-Christian period and used as sacred emblem of pre-Christian or pagan religion. Other historians signifies the execution and punishment method used by Roman authorities and later on associated with the execution of Christ. Cross has become a general and supreme emblem of Christians on their any religious significance (Benson, 1934). Early historians believed that cross does not symbolize divinity but a torture instrument. (Issitt & Main, 2014). Franciscan Tau/ Taucross/ Tau Cross comes with different meanings and interpretation. As described by Mollett (1883), aside from a cross formed like the letter T (Figure 2), it is also called the Cross of St. Anthony. For the Franciscans, the Tau

was for the pre-eminent sign of spiritual conversion. As such, Franciscans never associated the sign of the Tau a sign of the violence of the cross but rather the healing of the human fraternity fractured by such violence (Cusato, 2009).

The shape of the cross, as represented by the letter T, came to be used as a "seal" or symbol of Early Christianity by the 2nd century (Kohler, 2011.). It was mentioned in the Octavian of Minucius Felix at the end of the 2nd century, rejecting the claim of detractors that Christians worship the cross. (Glover & Rendall 1931).



Figure 2. Tau

The Tau cross is an important symbol for all the Franciscans. As its standard, Saint Francis adopted the Tau cross. He had such love for this symbol that in later years he used it as his signature. The accounts of the Franciscan Sisters of Peace stated the wearing of the Tau cross as the official symbol of their community.

“Associate members also wear a Franciscan Tau version. The Tau is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet—the Greek alphabet’s omega. The first mention of the Tau comes from Ezekiel 9:4: ‘Go through the city of Jerusalem and put a Tau on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.’ In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council was opened by Pope Innocent III: ‘We are called to reform our lives, to stand in the presence of God as righteous people. God will know us by the sign of the Tau marked on our foreheads.’ (Franciscan Sister of Peace, 2013)

“In the time of St Francis, Pope Innocent III, aware of the sad state of the world in which they lived, looked back to the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel for inspiration ‘Go all through Jerusalem, and mark a Tau on the foreheads of all who deplore and disapprove of all the evil practices in the city... Follow him through the city and strike. Show neither pity nor mercy, kill and exterminate them all. But do not touch anyone with the sign of the Tau’. The Pope chose the sign of the Tau as a spiritual logo, for the reforms he wished to bring about in the Church. During his address to all the Bishops gathered in Rome for the Fourth Lateran Council on the 11th of November 1215, he went so far as to say that this sign of the Tau was also a sign of the Cross of Christ” (Franciscan Seculars, 2018)

The history of the cross tells another version of the Tau. Many historians have claimed that the cross symbol did not originate in Christianity, instead it was present in different pre-Christian culture (Issitt & Main, 2014).

The Tau cross was a symbol of St. Anthony’s cross, also known as crux commissa (Figure 3).

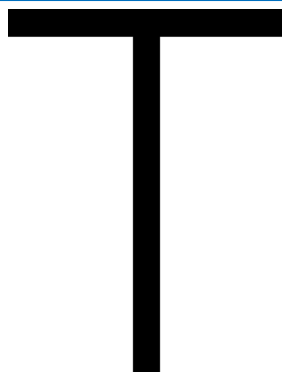


Figure 3. Crux commissa

Augustinian cross comes in variations though it uses the typical Latin cross or crux immissa, a “†-shaped” cross (Figure 4).

Moreover, Augustinian uses another symbolic emblem aside from the cross itself which is unique for them. This symbolic emblem is the flaming heart with an arrow and book which signifies complex meaning (Figure 5). Augustinian uses this emblem for the historians believe that St. Augustine is also known as the “Doctor of Love” (Boynton & Harding, 2018).

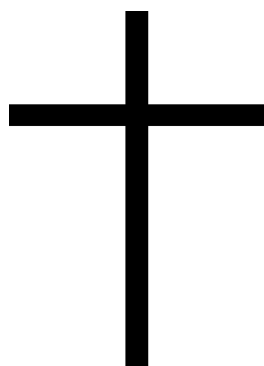


Figure 4. Crux immissa



Figure 5. L-R Carvings on the wooden door panel of San Agustin Church, Intramuros, Manila. Source: RPG Tolentino; Edifice adornment on the façade of St. James Church, Plaridel, Bulacan. Source: RPG Tolentino

Nowadays, Christian cross spreads in varieties of form – from pre-Christian religion up to the present time. These forms carry only one religious significance – the passion of Christ. Crosses may found in different embellishment (e.g. pendant, medallion, church ornaments,

architectural plans etc.). In some instances, Franciscan architecture also uses crux immissa and other forms of cross (e.g. St. Michael the Archangel church in Tayabas, Quezon).



Figure 6. St. Michael the Archangel church, Tayabas, Quezon. Source: Melo Villareal

The local people of Tayabas called it *Susi ng Tayabas* because of its key-shaped blueprint layout. This church used patriarchal cross or *crux gestatoria* (Figure 6.). The patriarchal cross (*crux gestatoria*), with or without a *corpus* (body), is a cross (e.g. a Latin Cross or Budded Cross) with an additional cross-beam (Murray, 1998; Pastoureau, 1997. Neubecker, 1997).

A Franciscan seal (Figure 7.) is also visible to the church. This is a symbol of Franciscan frays who lead the parish on the Hispanic era. This symbolizes the unity of Christ and San Francisco de Asis. The seal can be found in wall of the basilica fronting the *Alitao* River.



Figure 7. Franciscan seal found on the St. Michael the Archangel, Taytay, Quezon. Source: Melo Villareal

Aside from the cross, other symbolic emblem can also be found within the Augustinian and Franciscan complex. Some remarkable symbols such as fish, and all-seeing-eye is also noticeable.

Fish. Fish is another symbolic emblem which may found to both Franciscan and Augustinian architecture and liturgical objects. It is sometimes referred to as “Jesus Fish” due to its

connection to the ancient Greek *Ichthus* or *Ichthys* (Figure 8). The fish symbol is not so widely recognized as a Christian symbol to most people and largely known only “in-house”.

The fish is an ancient symbol used by other religions, such as Buddhism and Paganism. Our fish symbol page shows how Christians have hooked onto this symbol (Issitt & Main, 2014; Boynton & Harding, 2018). Symbols are quite extraordinary, both revealing and concealing the message hidden in them. They may seem interesting or strange to those who do not know the secret meaning of the signs. It does not matter if they are badly drawn as the symbol of “fish” for early Christians, because it was instantly recognizable as the Christian symbol for those who were baptized and initiated into Christian life. It was understood significantly as the symbol of the first apostles, mostly fishermen, and their experience of Jesus the Fisherman of men (Wolfendale, 2018).



Figure 8. The fish symbol with *Ichthys* encryption. Source: Religion Facts

Another intriguing symbol found in the St. Augustine church is the all-seeing-eye (Figure 9).

This symbol is also dominant to many organization and usually associated with different meaning and interpretations to many people. Other modern churches also used this symbol as one of their embellishments in their edifice and architecture.



**Figure 9. All-seeing eye, Trompe l'oeil in San Agustin Church Manila.
Source: RPG Tolentino**



Figure 10. All-seeing-eye at the back of one dollar bill. Source: RPG Tolentino

The all-seeing-eye can also be seen at the back of one dollar bill (Figure 10). There is conspiracy that this symbol is associated with freemasonry and even illuminati (e.g. Dice, 2009; Cassaro 2011). Sacred architecture brings not only aesthetic beauty. It has lots of symbolic embellishments and decorations which may give additional explanation on the cultural discipline and spiritual characteristics. Symbols travel through space and time resulting to adoption and adaptation of those who use it as their emblematic identity. The result of this investigation gives the idea on the probability that Christian religion—in the Philippines was influenced by other sacred societies. Part of the hypothesis is that the Augustinians and Franciscans adopted beliefs and cultures from other sects and societies. It needs a thorough and intensive semiotic archaeological research to deeply understand the history and provenance of these symbolic emblems. With this, it may reconcile the complexity of different interpretations to the symbols caused by symbol transference, not only those used by Augustinians and Franciscans, but also the different modern sects that are emerging in the present time.

Conclusion

The phonological transference of sacred symbols gives definition to both linguistics and archaeology. In the case of sacred symbols, the Augustinian and Franciscan orders have been used profound holy icons to spread and preserve the identity of the church. Some of the iconic figure has philosophical meaning based on its complexity or simplicity. In the same manner, the some symbol is still being used over time, however with different construal and understanding. The language of every symbol changes not only in meaning but also its purpose as art and adornment when attached to other object – material or immaterial. Symbol, tangible or nontangible also serve as an artifact which people from the past used to communicate, live, and create their culture. From this, it will be easy to determine how these sacred symbols used by the Augustinians and Franciscans evolved through time and changed the culture of the Filipinos.

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