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# Treasures fit for a king

## King Charles III of Spain's Indian elephants

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*The practice of collecting exotic animals saw an unprecedented rise at the Spanish court in the eighteenth century, particularly during the reign of Charles III. His most prized specimens were three Indian elephants, regarded as genuine crown jewels and symbolizing the power, wealth and prestige of a great sovereign more eloquently than any other animal. They gave a clear sign of the breadth and strength of his diplomacy, the influence of which extended as far away as India. The interest aroused by their acquisition and the diplomatic procedures involved are examined here, together with the problems encountered in bringing these animals to the Iberian Peninsula and maintaining them in the unusual conditions of the Aranjuez Palace.*

### Prestige collecting

'It has always been customary for monarchs to display their greatness by keeping the rarest and most unusual species of animals, plants and fruits from other countries in their palaces and royal houses.' So begins one of the chapters of Juan Antonio Álvarez de Quindós's book *Descripción histórica del Real Bosque y Casa de Aranjuez*, which records the strange and exotic animals kept at this royal residence during the reign of Charles III. These included a Mexican bison, several African zebra, guanacos from Chile and the magnificent Asian elephants which were the great jewels in the monarch's zoological collection.[1] Collecting exotic animals was a tradition in the Spanish court stretching back to medieval times; it became hugely popular in the Habsburg era and reached its peak with the Bourbon dynasty in the eighteenth century.[2] The increasing popularity of the practice over this period was due to the convergence of a number of factors, in particular the deep-rooted habit of sumptuous and prestige consumerism and a fascination for the exotic, together with the love of animals felt by many members of the royal family, including Queen Isabel of Farnesio, her sons Charles and Louis, and nearly all her grandchildren. Other factors were the increase in trade and the opening up of new navigation routes, and the broad spectrum of attitudes to nature that characterized enlightened culture and sensitivity, expressed through a mixture of intellectual curiosity and a desire to approach and to imitate the natural world. This fascination for nature embraced a love of hunting and zoological collecting, a passion for agriculture and gardening, and the study of natural science.

It is true that Spanish monarchs, as observed by the French ambassador to Madrid at the end of the eighteenth century,[3] never reached the stage of having a genuine Baroque menagerie in the style of Versailles: there, a single set of premises housed the entire collection and functioned as a form of 'cabinet of living curiosities', enabling the animals to be presented in hierarchical order according to the latest scientific classification while providing a simultaneous view of them all.[4] However, the lack of such a facility did not prevent Spain from establishing a genuine zoological collection, since what really defines the existence of any collection is not so much the repertoire of objects it contains or how they are arranged and exhibited to others, but rather the relationship that their owners have with them.[5] Precisely because during the period discussed here, the collecting of exotic animals was largely a matter of personal taste and was not simply another form of prestige consumerism, the specimens were dispersed around various palaces and residences with a view to their new owners having more frequent physical and visual contact with them, rather than being exhibited together in public in a single menagerie. The desire frequently to enjoy the rarest and most highly prized specimens, to provide them with


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the best possible living conditions and to encourage them to reproduce were matters that were taken into account when deciding where to house these 'pleasure animals' on the various royal estates. Consideration was also given to the time of year in which the court was in residence at each estate and the respective territorial and climatic conditions which they offered.

In Madrid, the Buen Retiro palace became the main home of the royal zoological collection, rather than the Casa de Campo, which continued to be given over mainly to hunting.[6] Largely unsuccessful attempts were made in San Ildefonso to house all kinds of ornamental birds, such as swans, ducks and pheasants, and to acclimatize them so that they would ornament the gardens. However, amongst the other royal estates that made up the Spanish court's yearly itinerary, the Real Heredamiento de Aranjuez, set in the fertile meadows at the confluence of the rivers Tajo and Jarama, where the court took up residence each spring, offered almost unlimited possibilities for housing all kinds of exotic and native fauna.[7] In addition to an abundant hunting stock of deer and boar, the main reserves of livestock belonging to the Crown were raised on this royal estate: mares, milking cows, buffalo and fighting bulls. Philip II chose the Aranjuez gardens and surrounding area to house most of his small private zoo, consisting of ostriches, American turkeys, swans, etc., as well as the famous population of dromedaries, which bred so successfully on this royal estate for nearly 200 years.[8] It was Charles III who reinstated this activity on the estate in the eighteenth century, marking the occasion by ordering two fountains to be built at the Calle Príncipe entrance, with a pair of sculptures representing two of the most famous animals ever preserved on the royal estate – a bison and an elephant.[9] The decision to house these specimens here was integral with the monarch's intense activity on the estate, with the intention of converting it into a model agricultural and livestock operation, according to the physiocratic ideas in vogue at the time.[10] As a result, over the final four decades of the eighteenth century, Aranjuez became a courtly town that was also immersed in an idyllic rural landscape, linked to the palace and the recreational gardens by avenues and tree-lined squares. Undisturbed nature, cultivated spaces and ornamental gardens struck up an increasingly intense process of dialogue and reciprocal influence, whose rustic and evocative 'natural' character infused the whole area with a Rousseauesque spirit that drew progressively closer to the new principles of the English landscape garden.[11] With this style of garden, the search for the 'natural' also required that the animals they contained, preferably tame, were able to roam freely in the countryside or in large enclosures, instead of being exhibited in closed menageries or in aviaries.[12] It is no coincidence that Charles III's small zoo centred on one of his favourite projects, the Casa de Vacas, a new milking parlour constructed along the lines of those in Lombardy and for which he ordered 100 splendid Swiss cows to be especially imported. Attempts were also made there to breed some American species considered particularly useful for developing Spain's textile industry, such as guanacos and vicuñas. From the 1770s, all kinds of strange and rare creatures ended up at the Casa de Vacas and the surrounding area (Fig. 1), including a bison, an American 'hairless' cow and two zebras that the French ambassador recalled seeing 'grazing and jumping in a nearby meadow … as if they were in their homeland'.[13] But of all the exotic animals and all the zoological rarities that lived on the royal estate, the most prized specimens in Charles III's collection were undoubtedly the elephants.

## Dynastic traditions

The possession of these splendid beasts – intermediate between ceremonial animals and living curiosities – also constituted an ancient tradition in the Iberian courts. After having had an intermittent presence in the Mediterranean basis in ancient times – first in Greek and Roman armies, later in the circus games – elephants seldom reached Europe in the Middle Ages (Fig. 2), until exploratory voyages by the Portuguese around the coasts of Africa and Asia provided them with a means of access.[14]

King Manuel I had up to five elephants at his palaces in Lisbon during the first two decades of the sixteenth century and he liked to exhibit them on the most solemn occasions, thus emulating the magnificence of Eastern monarchs.[15] King Manuel famously set up a battle at his court between an elephant and a rhinoceros – the first to be seen in Europe for centuries – news of which inspired Albrecht Dürer to produce the first woodcut ever to depict a rhinoceros. The Portuguese monarch gave another of his elephants, Hanno, to Pope Leo X in 1514. Hanno was possibly the most famous elephant of the Renaissance period, admired

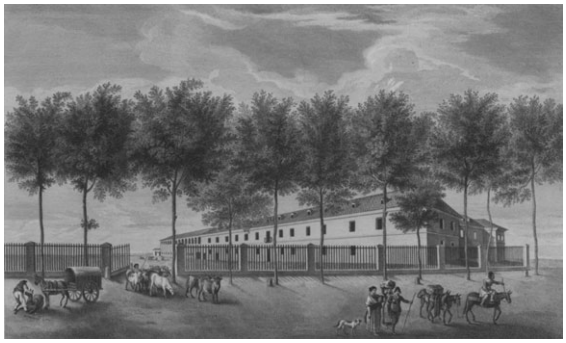


**Fig. 1.** Diego de Aguirre, *The Casa de Vacas in the royal site of Aranjuez, seen from the new road from Madrid,* 1773. Engraving, Madrid, Real Biblioteca. © Patrimonio Nacional.

**Fig. 2.** *Romanesque fresco from the San Baudilio of Berlanga Church (Soria) representing a war elephant*, twelfth century. Now in Madrid, Museo del Prado.

by the Romans and immortalized by all the great artists who worked in the Vatican City at the time.[16]

The close family ties established between the Portuguese royal family and the Habsburgs brought about the arrival of the first elephants in the Spanish court. Juan III and Catherine of Austria sent a thirteen-year-old elephant named Suleyman – a deliberate snub to Christianity's arch enemy – to his niece Maria and her husband, the Archduke Maximilian, as a farewell gift on their departure for the Empire. After travelling by ship with the royal party from Barcelona to Genoa and crossing the Alps and the Tyrol on foot, the elephant made its official entrance to the city of Vienna on 7 May 1552, where it survived for barely a year. Ten years later, the young King Sebastian sent another elephant to Austria for his uncle Maximilian.[17] The two young elephants with which the ill-fated Prince Charles played in his youth in Aranda de Duero and Alcalá de Henares must also have been a gift from his grandmother, Queen Catherine.[18] In 1583, when he was already King of Portugal, Philip II brought another elephant with him from Lisbon, sent by the Viceroy of Eastern India for his heir. It was exhibited in Madrid and wandered around the cloisters of El Escorial together with the rhinoceros that had been living in Lisbon since 1577, provoking huge interest amongst other European monarchs, particularly Emperor Rudolf II and the Grand Duke of Tuscany.[19] The last people to record having seen the elephant in the Spanish court were Japanese nobles who visited in 1584. In 1603, Philip III agreed to send his uncle Rudolf the dead pachyderm's tusks and molars as a gift.[20] Another elephant appears to have been living in the Casa de Campo early in the reign of Philip IV, for whose living quarters the doors were repaired and other refurbishments carried out in 1621. However, following the secession of the Portuguese crown it appears that Spanish monarchs no longer enjoyed the presence of elephants in their animal collections.[21]

This was not the case for their great rivals, the kings of France. Henry IV received one as a gift in 1591, but at that time he was too busy with the civil war that was bleeding the country dry and was very short of money, so he decided to present it to Queen Elizabeth of England.[22] In contrast, his grandson, the Sun King, was able thoroughly to enjoy the satisfaction of having another elephant in his *ménagerie* between 1668 and 1681, allowing the period's most illustrious men of science to have the opportunity of examining and describing it.[23] It is possible that Charles III's wish to have his own elephant might have been influenced by the glorious memory of his great grandfather. This was certainly one of his major whims, on which he squandered

influence and resources throughout practically the whole of his life. This was undoubtedly because no other animal could act as such a vigorous symbol of a great sovereign's power, wealth and prestige.

## The Naples elephant

In the eighteenth century, with the opening of new trade and navigation routes and with faster ships, transporting an elephant to Europe remained an expensive and difficult undertaking, even for a king. There was an elephant in the Versailles *ménagerie* once again between 1772 and 1782, until one night the animal broke down the fence around its enclosure and drowned after falling into one of the canals running through the park. Louis XVI made an unsuccessful attempt to acquire another one during his reign, but the French had to wait until the Republican army seized two elephants in occupied Holland, which made their triumphant entry into Paris in March 1798.[24]

The first elephant owned by Charles of Bourbon was delivered in 1742, while he was still King of Naples, and was undoubtedly the most outstanding specimen in the collection of exotic animals that he acquired for his palace at Portici. The elephant was publicly presented as a gift from the Ottoman Sultan, Mahmud I, as a token of the good relations that existed between the courts of Naples and Constantinople after the signing of a trade and navigation treaty in April 1740. The true situation, however, was a little more complex. Two years earlier, the Marquis of Salas, the Neapolitan monarch's Secretary of State, had been continually reminding Count Finocchietti, his ambassador in Constantinople, that Charles wished to acquire a pair of elephants, male and female, at any cost, from anywhere in the Ottoman Empire or on its border with Persia. The prospects of getting them, however, were not at all promising, so Finocchietti resorted to making a proposal to the ministers of the Sublime Porte for the exchange of at least one elephant for a richly decorated hardstone table that had been sent from Naples as a gift for the Sultan. The ruse was successful and the animal was finally disembarked at the port of Brindisi in September 1742. Charles immediately wrote to his parents telling them that 'a thousand things are being said [about the elephant] more than a third of which I do not believe until I see it'. But when he at last set eyes on it, in Portici on 1 November, he admitted that 'it is surely a very peculiar animal both for its figure and its movements … very tame and obedient, and it seems very intelligent …' Proud of his latest acquisition and determined to give it as much publicity as possible, Charles immediately commissioned a portrait of the elephant from the painter Giuseppe Bonito to send to his parents in the Madrid court (Fig. 3). The following year, it was painted once again by Pellegrino Ronchi and the famous nativity crib maker Gennaro Reale made a terracotta statuette of it.[25]

The naturalist Francesco Serao described the animal in a long and scholarly dissertation entitled *Descrizione dell'elefante*, in which he not only referred to all the animal's physical features and its character, but also firmly established the principle that in India, the elephant's country of origin, only people of royal rank could possess such an animal. He then proceeded to write a review of the elephants previously owned by great European monarchs.[26] The elephant quickly acquired celebrity status in the Neapolitan court. At Christmas 1742 it was exhibited on stage at the Teatro di San Carlo during the performance of Metastasio's drama *Alexander in India* and over the course of the following fourteen years of its life at the Portici palace it was an undisputed symbol of the prestige of the Neapolitan monarchy and of its wide-ranging and solid diplomatic alliances extending to the Turkish Empire. On its death in 1756 the elephant was stuffed and its remains are still preserved in the University of Naples Zoological Museum. The Spanish painter Juan Álvarez de Quiñón was commissioned to make a number of drawings of its skeleton and bones.[27]

## Three elephants for the King

Once he was King of Spain, Charles III acquired three more elephants, thanks to the fortunate negotiations undertaken in India by Simón de Anda y Salazar, his Governor-General of the Philippines, between 1770 and 1776. Throughout his term of office, Anda, who fitted closely the typical profile of an enlightened politician of the period, showed a profound interest in promoting the Philippine archipelago's economic activities and in strengthening its trade with Asian territories. However, he also had good reason to please the King

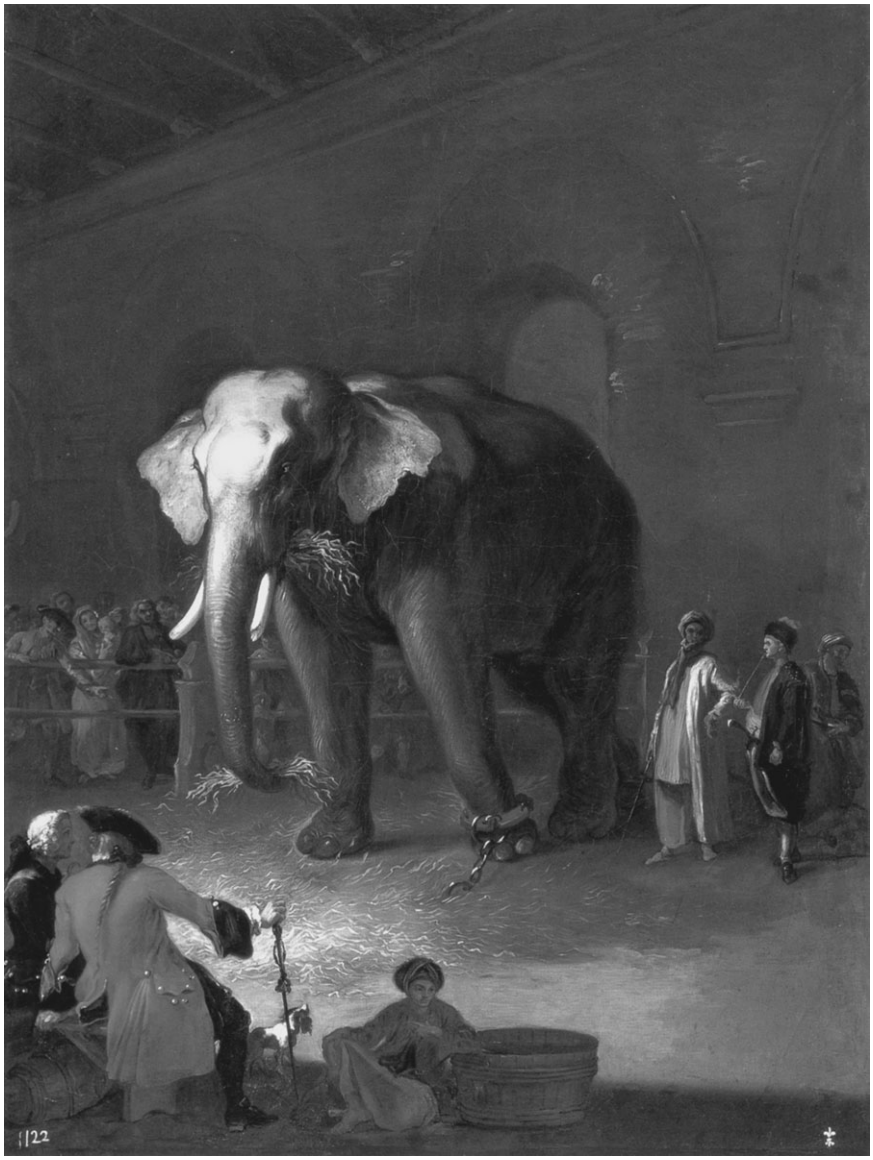



**Fig. 3.** Giuseppe Bonito, *The Naples Elephant*, 1742. Segovia, Palacio de Riofrío. © Patrimonio Nacional.

and keep in favour by satisfying his whims. Anda was a hero of the Philippine resistance during the English occupation of the island between 1762 and 1764. After making a triumphal return to mainland Spain and being appointed member of the Council of Castile, he was pressed by the monarch to accept the appointment of Governor-General of the archipelago in order to reinforce Spanish defences on the islands and to remedy the possible irregularities committed by his predecessor in expelling the Jesuits and confiscating their possessions. Simón de Anda was an ill-tempered and authoritarian man, who could be intolerant and sometimes impetuous and who made himself many enemies on his return to the Philippines in July 1770. He also became involved in a complicated campaign against the administration of the previous governor and other local officials, although without a great deal of support either in Manila or from the political machine controlling colonial government affairs from the court. More than ever he needed his sovereign's support if he was to emerge unscathed from the situation and to make an early return to Spain as a wealthy man.[28]

Anda's policies also had a major foreign focus. He tried to increase commercial exchange between the Philippines and China, Batavia (now Jakarta), Mauritius and Siam (Thailand), but in particular with India, where Anda knew he could turn the intense political rivalries in those territories to his own advantage. In a panorama of changing alliances and incessant feudal fighting, the main contenders were the various Indian states that arose from the dismemberment of the Mogul Empire and the British East India Company, which was also attempting to foster its own interests by skilfully setting the native states at loggerheads with each other. It was thanks to these contacts in India that Anda was in a position to present his king with a magnificent elephant early in 1773. The animal was a gift from the Nawab of Carnatic, Mohammed Ali Khan Walajan (1777–95), an extravagant and refined sovereign with whom the Governor of the Philippines had established relations and exchanged various gifts. As Anda acknowledged in a letter to the Secretary for the Navy and the Indias in Spain, it was

> … a small elephant, aged three years, as docile and playful as a lamb, and able to do various tasks as instructed by an Asian Indian. Since it seems to me that this treasure, strange though it may appear in these Kingdoms, will be pleasing to the King, I have arranged for it to be delivered to him … so I hereby notify your Excellency of this fact and in view of this I beg you to remind His Majesty of my unshakeable gratitude for the honours that with his magnanimous and pious heart he has seen fit to grant me, although I am not worthy.

The ease with which Anda had obtained the animal was due, among other reasons, to the fact that the Nawab of Carnatic suffered from an excessive economic and military dependence on the British, and was therefore always willing to establish new relations with other potential allies. Thanks to these favourable circumstances, the following year Anda was delighted to receive the official response from his sovereign expressing his thanks: 'The delivery of the elephant which your Excellency sent the King has given His Majesty so much pleasure that he has asked me to convey his deep royal gratitude for your pains in providing him with treasures befitting his sovereign status'.[29]

The success of this acquisition encouraged Charles III and his Governor to endeavour to obtain further specimens and, if possible, a female as a companion for the elephant that had been settled at Aranjuez. The opportunity soon arose when, in August 1773, the Jew Isaac Goldsmith and his partner André Hearton came before the Spanish ambassador in The Hague as plenipotentiaries of Haydar Ali (1760–82), Nawab of Mysore, an enemy of the British and Mohammed Ali Khan's main rival. They had gone there to request safe conduct papers for travelling to Madrid, where they sought to propose a lucrative commercial treaty between Mysore and Spain that could provide the basis for a future military and commercial alliance between the two courts. This interview marked the start of a long and peculiar adventure that would end by taking a Spanish mission to the Malabar port of Mangalore and the city of Seringapatam, where the Nawab's court resided, in the spring of 1776. The person in charge of organizing the whole expedition was none other than Simón de Anda, who designated his personal secretary, Ramon Isasi, as commander-in-chief.[30] The expedition was plagued by innumerable misunderstandings and delays, caused mainly by Goldsmith's bad faith and deceit, as he tried to pass off the Spanish arriving in Mysore as Prussian officials. After Isasi's death from a fever, the second-in-command of the expedition, the military engineer Miguel Antonio Gómez, heard that, in addition to the possible military and commercial treaty with Haydar Ali, the principal aim of the expedition was 'on orders from His Majesty [to] request a female elephant and a coin collection and Natural History, in the three kingdoms of animal, vegetable and mineral, in order to increase the Cabinet of the Most Serene Prince Gabriel'. Isasi had brought with him a number of letters of recommendation for this purpose, issued by the Governor of the Philippines for the Nawabs Mohammed Ali Khan and Haydar Ali, as well as for the governors of the main European establishments in India and Mauritius. Negotiations had borne fruit and thus, towards the end of 1776, Gómez found himself in possession of twenty-two crates containing the pieces gathered together for the Prince's Cabinet of Natural History and a female elephant, 'that this Nawab cleared with some difficulty'. The problem was that the animal was too big to take to the Philippines and from there to Spain, prompting Gómez to ask Haydar Ali to exchange it for a smaller specimen.[31] The new animal, provided by the Rajah of Bidnur, was a young elephant aged five years and three months, named Sundapari, 'which had been forcibly taken from her mother's breast'.[32]

At last, on 25 March 1777, the Spanish frigate *La Deseada* sailed from the port of Mysore with its elephant on board and, after a fairly straightforward voyage, docked at Subic Bay in the Philippines on 25 June. However, much had happened since the expedition's departure more than a year and a half earlier: Anda had died on 30 October of the previous year, and either his own negotiations from Manila or Isasi's from Mangalore evidently had proved successful since, in the intervening period, Mohammed Ali Khan, Haydar Ali's rival, had sent a gift of several animals to the King of Spain, including another elephant – a three-year-old male which had already been shipped to Cádiz at the beginning of the year.[33]

From that moment on, a string of problems and troubles was to begin for Juan Francisco de Anda, nephew and executor of the former Governor-General, when overnight he found himself responsible for looking after Sundapari in his own home. He had already taken care of sending on the second elephant to Madrid and, in view of the fact that in that year the royal frigate had already sailed for the Peninsula, he went to the interim Governor of Manila to request that the new animal be admitted as a 'King's treasure' and that the royal estate cover the costs of its keep and transport to Spain the following year. However, the new Governor, Pedro Sarrió, had not enjoyed good relations with his predecessor and had very little information about the mission entrusted to Isasi in Mysore. Neither had he received the confidential instructions concerning the female elephant, but in any case he was convinced that even if he was able to ensure that she arrived at court, the King's gratitude would be directed not at him but at Anda's relatives. The Governor and the Royal Court judges therefore placed all available obstacles in Juan Francisco de Anda's path in order to avoid having to take official responsibility for the animal. They had no record of any letter from the King ordering the elephant's procurement and delivery, so it had to be dealt with as a private gift for the monarch from the former Governor-General; it was up to his executor to decide whether he was willing to charge all the costs to the deceased's estate. Nevertheless, not all the judges had been Simón de Anda's adversaries and neither did they agree with this decision; accordingly, for the sake of legality, the Treasury Board, comprising six members, met on 11 October to vote on the matter. The Board again turned down Juan Francisco de Anda's proposal by three votes in favour and three against, with the deadlock being resolved by Pedro Sarrió's casting vote.

Juan Francisco de Anda's indignant response was not long in coming. He was unsure whether the goods bequeathed by the deceased would be sufficient to meet all the costs arising from the female elephant, which in the end totalled 25,000 Reales,[34] as the court, using the pretext of the forthcoming residence hearing, had withheld both the former Governor's salary for the previous year and the personal pension granted him by the King. Despite his lack of financial resources, however, Anda would do everything possible to get the elephant to the King and to avoid the shame of letting it die of starvation:

> … in view of the high regard and opinion as Powerful, Magnanimous, Liberal and Pious which is rightly held of our Beloved King and Lord by the potentates of Asia, whose friendship is highly important, if they were to find out that such a desired, special and rare animal had been abandoned and left to die of hunger, their regard would, as might be expected, decline.

News of the scandal did not take long to reach Madrid and it was Simón de Anda's own son, Tomás de Anda y Salazar, who defended the family's interests before the Secretary of the Indias, José de Gálvez, who was also his employer. He acknowledged that the elephant was a gift to his father from the Nawab of Mysore, 'because of the determination with which he requested it in order to have the honour of presenting it to the King, in view of the particular expressions with which His Benign Majesty had received the first animal of this species that reached him in previous years'. He also stated that, after his father's death, the Philippine authorities had tried to take their revenge and to insult his memory by preventing the animal's delivery, forcing his cousin to cover all the costs at the expense of the scarce resources left by the deceased. He asked his superior to let the King know the whole story and to request that the Royal Treasury should cover the elephant's delivery costs, since it was the third specimen to be sent to the monarch thanks to his father: 'and gifts of this kind from more than five thousand leagues away are only within the capacities of one sovereign to another'. As might be expected, the King agreed to pay the costs and to reimburse Juan Francisco de Anda for his previous expenses. Instructions were given to the Viceroy of New Spain to take charge of the elephant's transport to the Spanish Peninsula if it

were to travel to Acapulco in the Manila Galleon, but in the event, it arrived directly in Cádiz towards the end of 1779, by now considerably larger than when the engineer Miguel Antonio Gómez had taken charge of it in Mangalore, nearly three years earlier.[35]

## On the way to the court

If it had been difficult to acquire the elephants in India, it was no less problematic to get them to Spain. In fact, the chances of transporting them safely and relatively quickly to the Andalusian coast depended on another recent innovation: the direct commercial routes between Cádiz and Manila that the Spanish Crown had decided to sponsor for ships of the Royal Fleet from 1765. This new communication route around the Cape of Good Hope cut by more than half (some six or seven months) the traditional itinerary normally followed by goods when shipped by the Manila Galleon, via Manila, Acapulco, Mexico, Veracruz and on to Cádiz, making it much more feasible to send live animals from the archipelago to the Peninsula.[36] The three elephants arriving in Spain from the Philippines in 1773, 1777 and 1779 did so in three of these royal frigates: the *Venus*, the *Juno* and the *Astrea* respectively, and the other animals sent from Manila during Charles III's reign travelled by identical means of transport.[37]

The arrival of the first elephant in Cádiz attracted crowds of local inhabitants, who had never seen such an animal. On a visit to the town during the summer of 1773, the traveller Richard Twiss felt compelled to write in his diary about the occasion of the elephant's disembarkation.[38] It spent several days there, resting from its voyage while preparations were made for taking it to San Ildefonso, where the court was in residence, and while the gala clothing to be worn by the elephant and its handler at their presentation to Charles III was being made.

But there was still a long way to travel from Cádiz to Segovia and the journey required a complex logistical operation involving numerous authorities, from the Secretary for the Navy and the Indias to the President of the Contracting House, and including the Commander-General of the Cádiz maritime department. The safe passage of this first elephant was entrusted to the young Lieutenant José de Mazarredo, thanks to whose correspondence, preserved in the Naval Museum archives in Madrid and published by G. Sánchez Espinosa, a fairly detailed record survives of the circumstances surrounding the transfer of this animal to the court.[39] Mazarredo had taken command of a well-manned expedition, composed of a sergeant, a corporal and eight soldiers, a boat skipper and two naval artillerymen, a quartermaster and the two Malabar Indians who had come with the elephant from the Philippines. The party was completed by a buggy, a cart, three horses and six mules. According to instructions received, the journey to San Ildefonso had to be completed in short stretches of between eleven and fifteen kilometres, walking from dawn until 8 o'clock in the morning and from 5 o'clock in the afternoon until sunset, in order to avoid the hottest hours of the summer sun which might tire the animal unduly. As was customary, Mazarredo had to carry passports so that local authorities would provide him with board and lodging, food, provisions and anything else needed for 'the best custody and care of the elephant'. The party also carried food, water and medicines at all times for its own purposes.

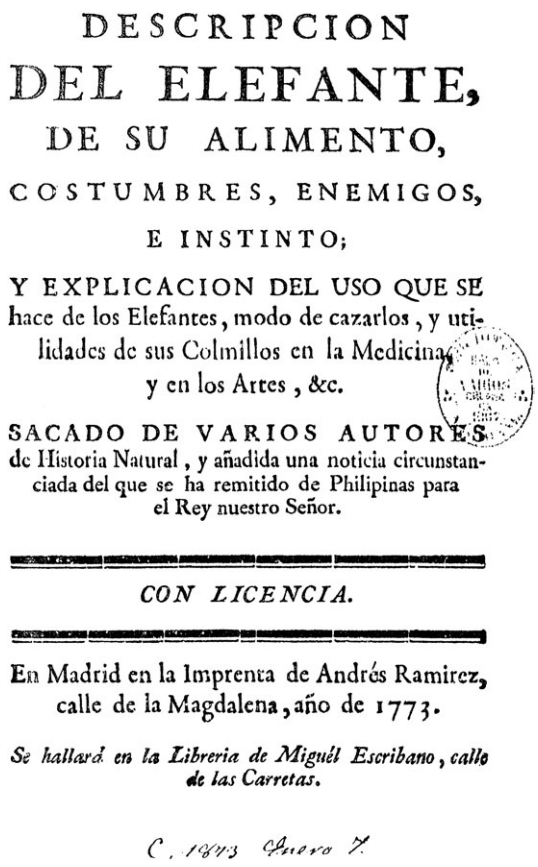
The march, in the full heat of summer, was unpleasant for all concerned. Having become accustomed to being immobilized on board ship, the elephant scarcely had the strength to walk up the hills during the first few days and the soles of its feet became bruised, so that shoes had to be made for it. Apart from the elephant's health, everyone was preoccupied with the possibility that accidents might be caused by the masses of curious bystanders who turned out along the route to see such a fantastic animal. Instructions had been given that the party should be extremely careful on entering and leaving villages, but their arrival in Écija attracted such crowds that the retinue was forced to leave the town secretly at 2 o'clock in the morning; the same manoeuvre proved necessary in Córdoba. Excitement grew as they drew closer to Madrid and on the outskirts of the capital it was not only the local population who turned out but also 'people of high status', who tried to use their influence to gain access to the elephant.

At last, on 26 September and after a lengthy journey of forty-two days, the retinue arrived at San Ildefonso, where the King and the whole court waited impatiently. It is easy to picture Charles III's satisfaction as he gazed proudly at his new possession. He spent the last days of the month in its company on

the royal estate before moving to El Escorial with the court and the elephant at the beginning of October. From there, the elephant was sent to the Buen Retiro palace in Madrid to be admired by the people of the city before its definitive journey to Aranjuez. Mazarredo, impatient, tried to speed up its transfer by alleging health issues and arguing that 'there is no person in Madrid who has not yet satisfied their initial curiosity to see the elephant, although thousands would never tire of seeing it constantly'. For his pains he was relieved of his commission, for the King preferred that 'the elephant remain in Madrid for longer so that the public can continue to see it comfortably and so that religious communities and pupils may obtain equal satisfaction'.[40] It is easy to imagine that the presence in the capital of such an exotic animal must have caused a great stir among the inhabitants, whatever their class or condition. As had happened in Naples, a description of the elephant was published and several engravings were printed and advertised in the *Gaceta de Madrid* (Figs. 4–5).[41] Fans painted with the animal's silhouette were also sold, such as the one shown held by a beautiful young woman, a *maja*, in one of the pastels in the series *Tipos populares españoles* by Lorenzo Tiepolo, a perfect example of the fervent passion of eighteenth-century fashion for reflecting all kinds of contemporary events (Fig. 6).

Always alert to opportunities provided by current events, the playwright Ramón de la Cruz decided to write and première in the Teatro del Príncipe a *sainete* or short play entitled *El elefante fingido* (The Pretend Elephant) in which he launched a critique of the demands made on the inhabitants of the towns and villages on which the retinue had descended and which had been required to provide accommodation and food for the animal. Another writer, Tomás de Iriarte, also used this opportunity to satirize the excessive attention – in his view rather vulgar and unhealthy – paid to the King's elephant during its stay in the Madrid court:

The elephant came to Madrid, Sir,
and strolled arrogantly through the streets
escorted by the people and the troops.
The gravest incident in Europe
would not have caused such fuss in Madrid
as the attention afforded to a beast …
Songs and quartets were written to it;
painted elephants appeared
on aprons, caps and shawls;


DESCRIPCION
DEL ELEFANTE,
DE SU ALIMENTO,
COSTUMBRES, ENEMIGOS,
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Y EXPLICACION DEL USO QUE SE hace de los Elefantes, modo de cazarlos, y utilidades de sus Colmillos en la Medicina, y en los Artes, &c.
SACADO DE VARIOS AUTORES de Historia Natural, y añadida una noticia circunstanciada del que se ha remitido de Philipinas para el Rey nuestro Señor.
CON LICENCIA.
En Madrid en la Imprenta de Andrés Ramirez, calle de la Magdalena, año de 1773.
Se hallará en la Libreria de Miguél Escribano, calle de las Carretas.
C. 1773 Caro 7.

**Fig. 4.** Frontispiece from *Description of the Elephant, its food, customs, enemies and instincts* (Madrid, 1773). Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional. © Biblioteca Nacional de Espana.

and fashionable tables served
meat, sweet and pastry elephants.
A wave of elephants
swept over us in a host of guises:
in conversation, in nicknames,
in letters, in published texts,
in sermons and verses,
and, by the second or third day,
we were sorely vexed
by the disease of elephant-isis.[42]

## Elephants in Aranjuez

In the middle of December, after having enjoyed a whole month in the company of his elephant in San Ildefonso and El Escorial, and having allowed the people of Madrid plenty of time to see it, Charles III at last decided to move the animal to its permanent home at Aranjuez. It arrived there accompanied by its keepers and by a prolific set of instructions regulating

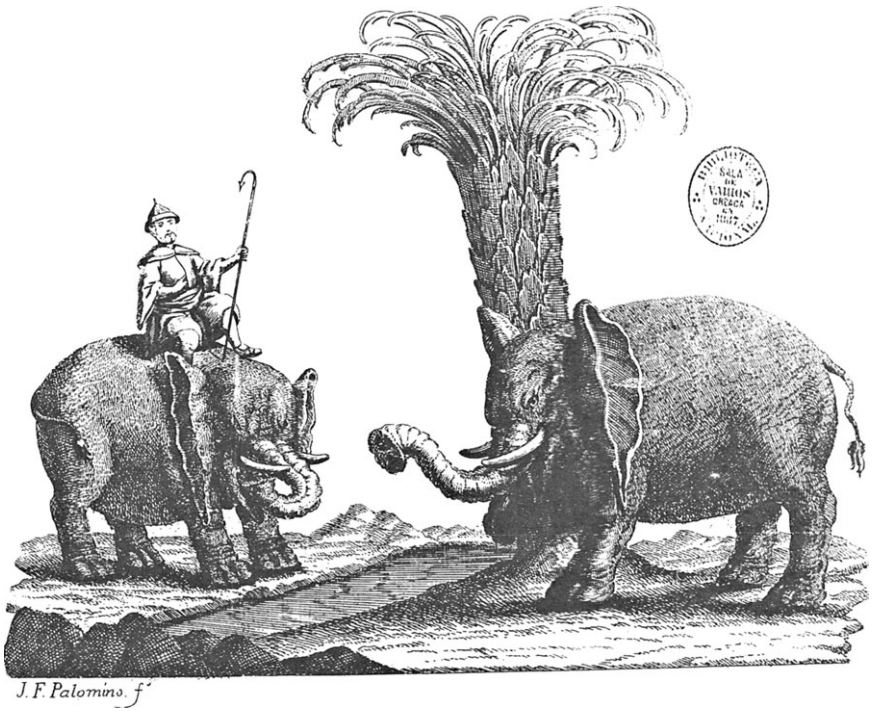


**Fig. 5.** Engraving from *Description of the Elephant, its food, customs, enemies and instincts* (Madrid, 1773). Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional. © Biblioteca Nacional de Espana.

every aspect of its day-to-day life on the royal estate.[43] A large room had been built for its accommodation very close to the Casa de Vacas; responsibility for its care also fell on the manager of this establishment, José Carabantes, a man trusted implicitly by the monarch. In the event of Carabantes's absence or illness, his duties would be taken over by his nephew and immediate subordinate, Petronilo Carabantes.[44] Either one or the other man had to be present whenever the elephant's fodder was prepared for it, to ensure that it was 'not cheated of food'. Its diet consisted primarily of as much fruit and vegetables as it could eat at any hour of the day or night, with every attempt being made to provide its favourite varieties. The elephant also had to be served two hot meals a day, at 11 o'clock in the morning and 8 o'clock in the evening, consisting of three or four pounds of cooked rice sprinkled with a further two pounds of sugar. This was the diet that had been recommended by its keepers. Years later, Álvarez de Quindós claimed that the animal was also given eau-de-vie for breakfast, but there is no supporting evidence in the accounts for its maintenance and it is mentioned only for medicinal purposes during the journey to Manila and while it was being moved to Madrid.[45]

In addition to food, other basic care involved daily walks and bathing. Provided the weather was not too cold, the elephant had to be exercised for an hour and a half in the morning and again in the afternoon, since this was deemed crucial to its good health. The baths with which it had to be provided whenever it showed an inclination were also considered essential, except in winter, when its keepers had to wash it with warm water at least twice a week. Medicines were administered only when necessary and urgent, 'endeavouring that this should be only from time to time … bearing in mind that frequent use may be noxious or damaging'. To provide relief from the fierce heat and to prevent it from catching the fevers that were prevalent in the Aranjuez summers, the elephant would be transferred each summer to the nearby Real Cortijo de San Isidro estate, a 'healthier and milder' location.

A fundamental aspect of the elephant's life was its relationship with its keepers. Each of the three elephants arriving from Manila in the 1770s was accompanied by its own tamers, whom the Spanish paperwork usually referred to as 'Indians', 'Malabars' or *elefanteros* (mahouts) without giving further details. However, we do have more information about the first elephant's principal keeper, Francisco de la Cruz, who

**Fig. 6.** Lorenzo Tiepolo, *Woman with mantilla and other figures.* Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional. © Patrimonio Nacional.

is mentioned in Simón de Anda's letters. Apparently, this animal arrived in Manila from Carnatic in the care of another Indian who refused to travel to Spain, as he was 'afraid of the cold in those lands', having travelled once to England for a similar purpose. To replace him, the commission was accepted by De la Cruz, also an Indian, who had served as a Malabar Company soldier in the port of Cavite for nearly ten years.[46] De la Cruz finally reached Cádiz accompanied by another Malabar, José Espino, but Mazarredo has observed that during the journey to Madrid the former continually attempted to monopolize control over the elephant and kept Espino well away. A third keeper named Ramón López joined them in Spain. When they arrived in Aranjuez, all three were assigned the same daily salary of 9 Reales, together with all the wood they needed for cooking and keeping themselves warm; they also benefited from customary rights to a doctor, surgeon and chemist whenever they fell ill. It was further decided that the tips 'normally given by people of class when the elephant does tricks' would be shared equally among all three of them. In exchange, the working conditions were strict: at least one of the keepers had to be permanently on duty close to the elephant, 'to assist and help it in the event of it showing any signs of worry or distress', and none of them could resign from their employment without three months' notice so that another person could be found and trained to look after the elephant.

Keeping discipline among the elephant keepers was one of the most taxing issues during their first weeks in Aranjuez. According to royal instructions, the three men were under the orders of the Casa de Vacas manager and his nephew, whom they had to acknowledge as their superiors; they had the right to appeal to the palace governor only in particularly serious situations. However, the wage-slips produced by Carabantes show evidence of problems: in 1774, José Espino had eight days' wages deducted 'for not having come to work' and was imprisoned 'to correct his excesses'; in March, the Spanish servant, Ramón López, had six days' wages deducted for the same reason, and was eventually dismissed on 18 May for misconduct.[47] On the same date, Carabantes revealed what might be the cause of such poor discipline: the keepers were former soldiers, accustomed to obeying only their uniformed officers, and had difficulty in acknowledging him as their superior, in view of which he requested that he too might be permitted to wear a uniform.[48] As the weeks passed, the situation appeared to calm down. José Espino showed how well he had settled in to royal estate life by being baptized in the spring of 1775 and taking the name of his master, José Manuel Carabantes. He also applied for a licence to marry María Josefa Flores, daughter of one of the King's slaves who worked in the Buen Retiro porcelain factory.[49] At the same time, the other Malabar, Francisco de la Cruz, also requested permission to leave his post and return to Manila, apparently because of the elephant's attacks of rage whenever it saw him.[50]

Over the four years it lived on the royal estate, the first elephant sent by the Nawab of Carnatic seems to have had a reasonably happy existence. The memories of Álvarez de Quindós and those who visited Aranjuez at that time were stamped with the indelible image of the animal, dressed in its great garnet-and-gold mantle decorated with tassels and little bells, happily strolling around the avenues on the royal estate and proudly showing onlookers the skills it had been taught by its keeper:

> Its trunk was so spongy that it sucked up twenty-three quarts of water at once and, curling it up it placed the tip in its mouth and swallowed. With its trunk it grasped anything it was told and, with the lip at the end it even picked up a

silver Real and passed it to anyone riding it and giving it orders. It drank all the wine it was given and if it was a *generoso* wine, so much the better … It grew very large, attaining such strength that it played with the stone building blocks in its enclosure and with the household carts and wagons. It threw stones with its trunk with such accuracy that it was able to aim them exactly where it pleased.[51]

Like any other domesticated Indian elephant it was docile and obedient, causing its keepers few difficulties. It also seemed to enjoy relatively good health; in July 1775, however, unsalted lard had to be purchased to spread on some tumours on its head and, in September that same year, the animal had further problems with one of its fore-feet. Undoubtedly, the most serious incident took place one night in 1776, when it escaped from its enclosure and the entire royal estate had to be searched until it was found. It seems to have hurt itself on this occasion, for the following month expenses were recorded for 'baths of wine', honey for 'purging' and more unsalted lard.[52] The other information still preserved on the elephant's life is more difficult to interpret. Apparently, in the summer of 1777 it suffered several attacks of uncontrollable rage and caused a great deal of damage to its room in the Real Cortijo, shattering the wooden post to which it was tied, along with two windows and the door through which the servants entered to feed it. It also caused widespread damage to the metal-lined main door, and tore off one of the stone blocks from its bath: 'it is not known how the animal could have removed it'. As a result of these furious attacks the elephant broke a tusk and the King then gave instructions to restrain it in its room by tying one fore-foot and one hind-foot to two large stone slabs with an iron bar set into the centre. By this time, news had reached the court of the second elephant's arrival in Cádiz on 27 July, so work began on building double accommodation for them both in Casa de Vacas and in Cortijo de San Isidro.[53]

No document has been found referring to the first elephant's death, other than a laconic letter dated 17 November 1777 from the Secretary of State, the Count of Floridablanca, addressed to the director of the Cabinet of Natural History, informing him of the death of 'the large Aranjuez elephant'. The missive gave the order that the taxidermist Juan Bautista Bru should come immediately to the royal estate, as the King had decided to preserve the animal's remains and place them in the Cabinet.[54] Álvarez de Quindós attributes the elephant's death to its having been denied the diet it had become used to and changed to another, and to its having been shut in and restrained without being taken out to the countryside, but there is no trace in the documentation that its regime was changed and Álvarez de Quindós's comments seem to arise from the widespread prejudices held by enlightened people in respect of the difficulty of preserving wild animals in captivity.[55] There is one final detail that does, however, catch the eye. We have not found the official notification of the second elephant's arrival in Aranjuez, but if the accounting receipts are correct, the animal came to the royal estate on 16 November 1777[56] – that is, on the day its predecessor died. Are these two events connected or merely coincidental? We shall probably never know, and we can only contemplate with some sadness the animal's remains, still preserved in Madrid's National Museum of Natural Sciences (Figs. 7–8).

Documentary evidence relating to the other two elephants brought to Aranjuez is no less scarce. The so-called 'small elephant', also from Carnatic, survived for only a month and a half on the royal estate, after a difficult voyage during which almost all the animals travelling with it perished.[57] It died on 3 January 1778; its body was stuffed and in May the Malabar Indian who had come with it asked to return to the Philippines.[58] That is all we know about him.

As for Sundapari, the little female elephant who left Mysore in spring 1777, she did not arrive in Cádiz until two and a half years later, on 5 September 1779. Only a few scraps of information have survived of her transfer to the court, but such a large escort as the one assembled in 1773 must not have been deemed necessary, for her delivery was entrusted to Pedro Bares, a local waggoner who already had experience of transporting American animals from Cádiz to Madrid. As with the first elephant, Sundapari developed split feet and suffered from painful legs during her journey. Despite this, and in deference to Tomás de Anda, who was then working as an assistant clerk in the Indias Secretariat, Bares stopped to present the elephant at the San Bernardo convent in Casarrubios del Monte, where one of Anda's sisters was a nun, so that the community could admire the animal.[59] At last, in December, Sundapari was installed at Aranjuez in one of the new set of rooms that had been built in the Casa de Vacas.[60] It is clear from the accounts that she did not enjoy good health, for charges for medicines

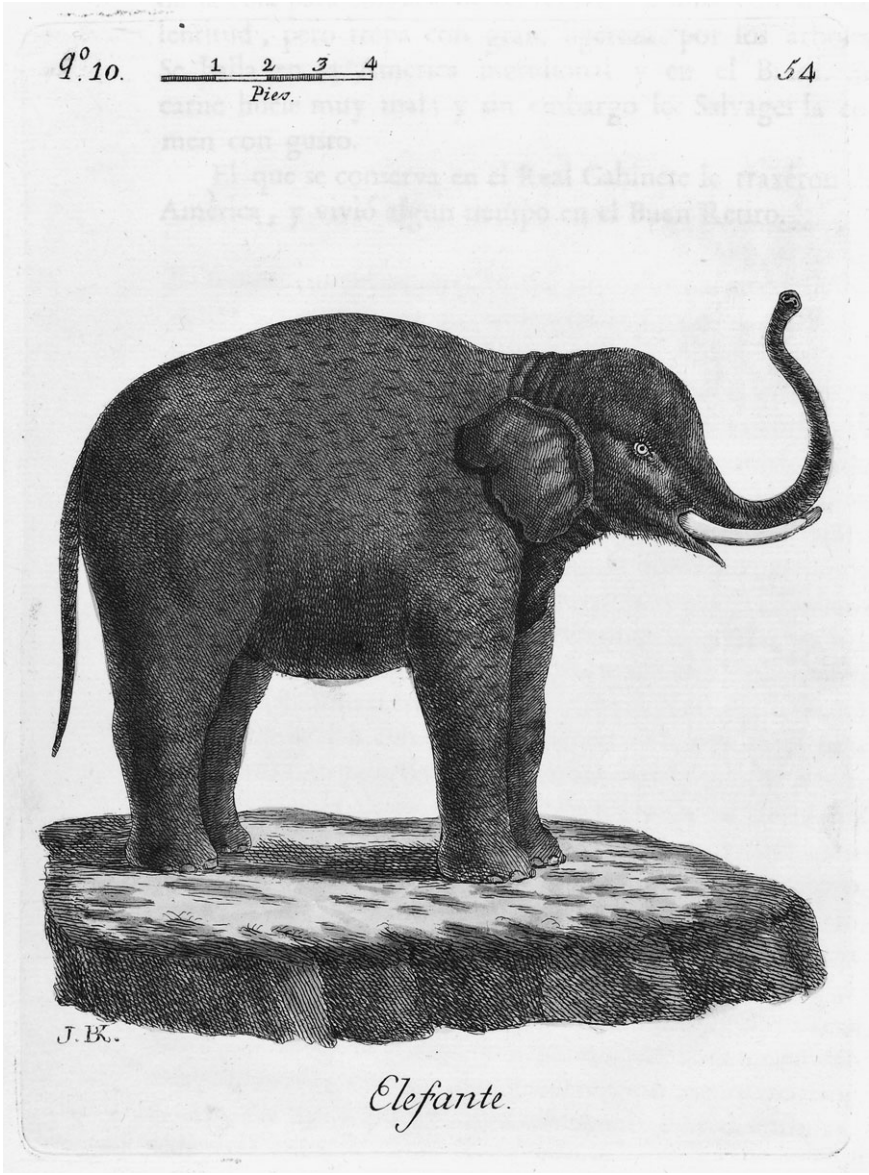


**Fig. 7.** J. B. Bru, *Collection of prints showing the animals and monsters in the Royal Cabinet of Natural History of Madrid, with an individual description of each* (Madrid, 1784–6), vol. I, pl. LIV. © Biblioteca Nacional de Espana.

are recorded every month.[61] She died on 1 September 1780 and this time the Count of Floridablanca sent a message to the Cabinet of Natural History asking if her remains were worth preserving.[62]

And that was all. Despite the huge achievement of bringing three elephants from India in the space of six years, none of them ever lived alongside the others in Aranjuez. We do not know for certain the total costs incurred by the Philippine and Spanish Treasuries, but we can make an approximate calculation. For example, Juan Francisco de Anda was paid almost 20,000 Reales for transporting Sundapari from Manila to Cádiz, an amount that we can also apply to the journeys made by her two companions.[63] The bill submitted by Mazarredo for transporting the first elephant by land to the court rose to another 32,576 Reales; their fifty-three days in the Retiro and the journey to Aranjuez added a further 8,200 Reales.[64] On the Aranjuez royal estate, caring for the first two elephants during their four years in residence there, between December 1773 and

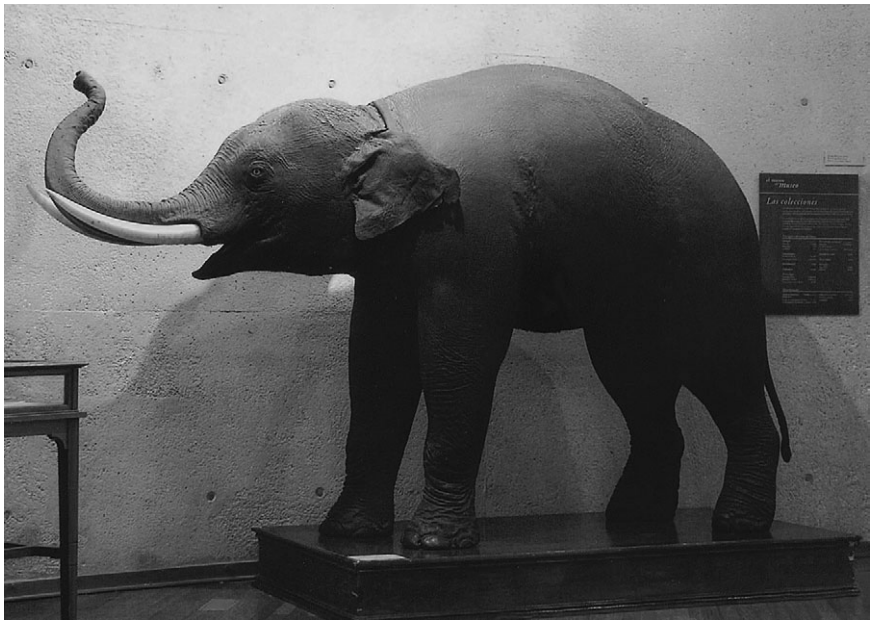

**Fig. 8.** *Stuffed elephant skin from the reign of Charles III.* Madrid, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales.

January 1778, and paying their keepers cost 70,455 Reales,[65] while maintenance costs for Sundapari during 1779 and 1780 totalled 11,327 Reales, not counting the wages paid to her keepers, which were charged to a separate account.[66] To all this should be added the building costs for the elephants' rooms in the Casa de Vacas and in the Cortijo, of which we know only the estimated amount for the extension carried out in August 1777, some 110,000 Reales.[67] In any event, the money spent on the elephant adventure must have been about half a million Reales or more – a small fortune.

After 1780 and up to 1808 there is no trace of the presence of any other elephant in the Spanish court's animal collections, nor any information about attempts to acquire one. All that survives is a street poster from 1807 for the travelling company owned by the Italian impresario José Padovini, encouraging the people of Madrid to see the skills of the 'Wise elephant', and claiming that 'its owner had the honour of showing its skills in the presence of Their Majesties and Their Royal Highnesses on the San Ildefonso Royal Estate'.[68] Such a show would most likely have greatly displeased the late monarch, Charles III.

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