

A large Spanish Colonial Neoclassical ormolu lapis lazuli vase *navette* after the model by Jean-Charles Delafosse, attributed to Manuel Tolsá (Spain 1756-Mexico City 1816). The importance of the blue colour started with Maya culture and continued until the baroque period. Mexico, late 18th century.

Height: 32¾ in. (43 cm)  
Width: 11 in. (45 cm)  
Depth: 9 in. (30 cm)



**Manuel Tolsá** (1757-1816) was a well-known sculptor and architect in Spain and Mexico. In 1790 he was named director of sculpture at the new Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. He arrived in Mexico in 1791 with a huge library and collection of plaster casts and set about introducing the neoclassical style. His most important projects were the completion of the cathedral in Mexico City, the College of Mines and the High Altar of the Cathedral of Puebla. His most celebrated sculpture is the equestrian statue of Charles IV (1803). The statue was cast, under his direction, from thirty tons of bronze. Tolsá established a bronze foundry in Mexico which also cast cannons.

The design derive from engravings after Jean-Charles Delafosse taken from his influential *Nouvelle Iconologie Historique* in 1769. Delafosse (1734-1789) was an architect as well as an engraver and decorative designer, and one of the most influential figures in the development of the early neo-grec Louis XVI style. The designs have been slightly simplified from the original engravings. This and the construction and assembly techniques employed would suggest that these candlesticks were not made in France. It is therefore likely that they were made in Mexico under the direction of the architect and sculptor, Manuel Tolsá. Manuel Toussaint in *Colonial Art in Mexico*, Austin, 1967, p.452 notes that all the famous Mexican silversmiths of the time worked also in gilt bronze and it is therefore to one of these that one should attribute the authorship of the candelabra. Antonio Camaño is known to have made the gilt bronze ornaments for Tolsá's altar at Puebla (see M. Romero de Terreros, *Las Artes Industriales en la Nueva España*, Mexico, 1923, p. 70), as well as for the chapel of the College of Mines. The famous naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) remarked on the quality of the ormolu candelabra made for the Cathedral at Puebla (see *ibid.*, p. 72). Tolsá is also known to have worked with Jéronimo Antonio Gil. Rodríguez Alconedo is recorded gilding bronze, receiving 6,282 pesos in 1794 for his work on the Cathedral in Mexico City.

**Literature:**

M. Romero de Terreros, *Las Artes Industriales en la Nueva España*, Mexico, 1923, p. 70 fig. 23.

**Concerning Chile origin of the stone:**

Gian Carlo Parodi, *Lapilazzuli Magia del Blu*, Sillabe, 2015, pp.28-30, fig.15; p.43 fig.d,



Big lapis lazuli stone, from Rio Casadero, Ovale, Limarí, Coquimbo, Chile, formerly Pier Pont Morgan Collection, now Paris, MNHN, inv.105.721.

**Comparative example:**

Sotheby's, *Important European decorative arts*, 23 October 2013, NY, Lott.94 (Fig.1); 95(Fig.2).



Fig.1



Fig.2