

## Chapter 10

### "Christopher Pellegrino or Christopher Columbus: A Critical Study on the Origin of Christopher Columbus"

From

*THE DISCOVERY OF NORTH AMERICA*  
(A Documented History)

by

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A short time after accomplishing the task of writing *The Discovery of North America*, I decided to extend my investigation by adding a final chapter devoted to the controversial origin of the great discoverer, the enigmatic man from Genoa: Christopher Columbus.

The purpose of this critical chapter is not only to dissect and analyze the already established findings on this subject, but also to illuminate as fully as possible the intricate historical processes which shaped both the content and form of these findings, a complicated task which, to my knowledge, has never been undertaken before.

With this objective in mind, I will present findings chronologically, as they unfolded through the centuries in the writings of various historians and annalists, providing all of the critical documentation, and historical evidence upon which I have reached my conclusions. I have strived to present as clearly as possible to readers the paths of evidence, so that they may make their own assessments relatively independently of my own commentary and final conclusions.

Let me add that while historians must inevitably interpret documents and historical evidence, I have conscientiously labored to be primarily informative, adhering as closely as possible to available historical documents and archival records.

Some of our most prestigious contemporary historians, including S.E. Morison, argue that all major doubts have been resolved concerning the origin of Christopher Columbus and the genealogy of his family of the Colombos. They firmly assert that the great discoverer was born in Genoa (or nearby) just as he stated in a surviving copy of his testament or "mayorazgo" of February 22, 1498, recording that from that city he had left and there he was born "pues que della sali' y en ella naci'." Copious notarial deeds and papers were found at the archives in Genoa

and its sister city Savona. These revealing deeds (most of which were discovered in the 19th century) pertaining to a Colombo family were selected among thousands of such documents and construed by scholars to constitute proof that Columbus was a Colombo born in Genoa or nearby between August 26 and October 30, 1451.

On the strength of this legal documentation, the city of Genoa published in 1932 a large volume reproducing in facsimile selected documents, some of which had been already published dating back as far as 1602 when the Savonese juryconsult Giulio Salinerio presented the first findings on Columbus from the archival records of Savona. This 1932 volume titled *Colombo* was printed with the clear intent of supplementing the already available 15 large volumes published in 1892-96 by the Italian government (R. Commissione Colombiana) to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the New World. In three editions (Italian, English-German, and French-Spanish), the volume leaves little doubt that it was intended to convey to the whole reading world that, yes, Christopher Columbus was not only an Italian born in Genoa, but as a natural consequence, also a Christian of proven faith.

The 1932 *Colombo* published by the city of Genoa (with the contribution of Giuseppe Pessagno and others) is the ultimate product of the "Scuola Genovese" whose scholars had been involved in Columbian Literature from the time of Gerolamo Bordoni in 1614 (as stated by Pessagno in his 1926 work) down to Ugo Assereto who, at the closing of the 19th century, had found the most assertive of all notarial deeds, thus crowning the already "synchronous documentation."

In 1904, Assereto had finally published his newly found document under the revealing title of *The date of birth of Colombo asserted by a new document*. This precious "Assereto Document," once matched with the one previously found in 1887 by Marcello Staglieno, definitely established the birth of Columbus, as previously mentioned, between August 26 and October 30, 1451.

In the preface to the multilingual *Colombo*, the mayor "Il Podesta" of the city of Genoa thought to reassure his international readership of the primacy of Genoa on the longstanding issue of the origin of Columbus, categorically stating:

To reject the documents here assembled in their authentic and legitimate form is to deny the light of the sun; their acceptance signifies the freeing of truth from the infinity of idle words that are increasing every day in vain attempts to find outside Genoa the origin of the discoverer of America.

The Podesta' of Genoa  
Ing. Eugenio Broccardi

In the all-inclusive commentary to the *Colombo*, one finds other statements which were in full agreement with the mayor and no less emphatic, including this direct warning to readers:

In order to destroy this chain of evidence it is necessary to suppress legal deeds committed to history...whoever wishes to deny the discoverer's Genoese origin must face this documentation...

I have faced head-on this fortress of documentation during the course of my years of research on the origin of Columbus, and must agree wholeheartedly that challenging these intimidating (but judicious) warnings places scholars in the plight of Don Quixote fighting the windmills. As far back as 1602, Salinerio in his *Adnotationes...ad Cornelium Tacitum*, after having in his possession only a few Savonese documents related to Columbus, had voiced the same discouraging conclusion:

Christopher made such clear mention of his country, that it is most incredible that anyone today should doubt it or make research...

Yet, let me add, that from Salinerio to our own days, regardless of such advice or warnings, from time to time inquiries about the true origin of the famous man (whatever their nationalistic, ethnic or religious motives) have continued to surface, like stubborn weeds which refuse to go away. Hope never completely seems to die out of finding new interpretations of what are still undeniably perplexing and inexorable issues surrounding the origins of the great discoverer. What fuels this hope, many researchers including myself could testify, is curiosity, stubbornness, and progressive involvement.

In 1864, for example, Henry Harrisse (1829-1910), still young and doubtless unaware of the numerous implications and complexities of the Columbian Literature, wrote an essay optimistically titled *Columbus in a Nutshell*. As it turned out, Harrisse eventually abandoned his promising legal career and devoted the rest of his life to unraveling the mysteries left behind for future scholars to solve by the enigmatic Christopher Columbus.

Indeed, despite the copious documentation available today (and despite what many modern luminaries suggest) many aspects of Columbus's life are still stubbornly obscured by a thick veil of mystery which, quite justifiably, generate uncertainty and considerable suspicion. While some scholars, for whatever reasons, choose to ignore this historical veil, it forms an intriguing, irreducible arabesque which will not disappear even if one pretends it does not exist.

Much of the continuing mystery enveloping the private life of the great discoverer was, as we shall see, created or devised by Columbus himself, almost as if he envisioned himself the victim of unspeakable facts which could only be mastered or supported through tactics of secrecy, evasiveness, innuendo, and doubletalk. Although this assessment is rather frankly psychological, I believe it is fully supported by a careful examination and evaluation of his actions as well as by an analysis of certain intangibles of his private life. These personal idiosyncracies surface in his surviving writings as well as in the descriptions and analyses of him reflected in the works of many people who knew him personally.

One of the most celebrated detectives of the human mind, Cesare Lombroso, the 19th century criminologist, judged Columbus's penchant for secrecy so pronounced, in fact, that he labeled

him decidedly paranoid. Consider, for example, the fact that after Columbus became famous, he eliminated altogether his family name from the signature in his letters. He substituted for the name a small pyramid of Roman letters spaced with strategically placed dots. For the past 500 years, this signature has represented a puzzle whose solution has remained as elusive as many other enigmas surrounding Columbus, all of which together give rise to the conviction that his motives were not mere eccentricity, but a concerted, deep-rooted desire to keep his true origin unknown.

What happens, sooner than later, to scholars who get intellectually involved in the sum of Columbus's apparent oddities is that they find themselves caught in an inexorable spider's web. One of these scholars, HARRISSE, made in 1888 the following revealing statement justifying his many years of dedication to the captivating but thankless task of wandering through the dense thickets and enigmas of the Columbian literature:

The consolation that remains is that if a single copy survives, and the book has been honestly written, time may instill into its discarded pages new elements of life, and perhaps elicit from painstaking students of history a word or two of esteem and gratitude.

HARRISSE was only one of the many scholars who dedicated their lives to wandering through the magic tunnel of the Columbian Literature, but certainly he fully deserves the belated title of "Prince of the Americanists" attributed to him by Carlos Sanz in 1958.

If HARRISSE were still alive today, I would like to ask him one specific, very direct question: If it was known from the very beginning that Christopher was a Colombo born in Genoa, why did you neglect a promising legal career and spend the rest of your life trying to piece together the truth about his origins? HARRISSE's hypothetical answer might be, "Why don't you read my books?" But his *Columbus in a Nutshell* does not confine the enigmas of Columbus to a nutshell unless it is a nutshell suspended in the center of an expanding web of contradictions and irreducible ambiguities.

My suspicion is that many writers on Columbian Literature enter the historical fray by wishfully thinking, like HARRISSE, that they can write a book encompassing all of the complexities of the man in a few pages. Then after a while, without fully realizing it, they find themselves surrounded by enigmas on all sides; like Dante they find themselves trapped in the middle of nowhere wandering on the verge of a Divine Comedy.

On this leit-motif, let me recount the story of my own entrapment in the Columbian labyrinth. In retrospect, it may have begun the first time I went to Mexico, but I failed to identify the symptoms which were those of an uncomfortable illness that affected me almost like the experience of seasickness. I was told my symptoms were nothing to worry about, that I was probably just another victim of "Montezuma's revenge." But in 1983 I traveled to the Dominican Republic, and there on the beautiful island of Hispaniola, I experienced again these same 'new world' symptoms of a vague sickness. Eventually I recovered from this sense of physical discomfort and what I now know to be the first signs of my Columbian entrapment. And

wandered into the hills with my backpack, very much aware this time of feeling like a reincarnated Christopher Columbus in search of the ghosts of his adventurous era. From up there, the night view of the island was captivating, compelling: I stood among palm trees, under the starry arch of a tropical sky, with the moon silvering the surface of the exotic sea crowned by a string of small bays and coves, stretching as far as my eyes could see. Feeling caught up in mysterious influences, I spent three nights on the hilltop living in a primitive hut, "bohio," that seemed to be a relic from the preColumbian times. This experience was so overwhelming, I wrote, *Lights Across the Bay*, a romantic short story of an imagined Columbus drawn mostly from school-day fantasy and reminiscences.

In retrospect, I wish that my approach to Columbian Literature had remained similarly romanticized that way, but instead the Columbian web entrapped me and transformed me into a researcher, a historian compelled to write with the mind as well as the heart. Now after devoting so many years of almost compulsive investigation of the Columbian web, I hope that I can free myself by unraveling all that I have learned.

After this lengthy introduction to the dangers of Columbian Literature, let us focus in this chapter on the complex scholarship of Columbus' origins. We will conclude through a radical reinterpretation of a document known to Columbian scholars (but whose extraordinary significance has for various reasons been generally ignored), that Christopher was a child born out of wedlock and forsaken by a father who he probably never knew but who carried his family's name.

It goes beyond the scope of this work to attempt a psychoanalytical understanding of why Christopher kept to himself the traumatic secret of his humble beginnings. But one must recognize that Columbus lived during a time when both honor and fortune were attached to a family's name. And one can speculate that the humiliating experience of being born out of wedlock (difficult perhaps for some moderns to appreciate) strengthened Christopher's later determination to prove to himself and to his fellow men; and that the discovery of a New World was born, in effect, of compulsive overachievement and great individual struggle for personal rehabilitation.

For the reader to properly evaluate the conclusions I have reached on Christopher's modus vivendi and origin, he must now undertake to travel along a long tortuous road, composed of 15th century historical facts, of contemporary chroniclers and historians writing about Columbus, of a great body of circumstantial evidence and, of course, of the works of the First Admiral of the Ocean Sea himself.

To reiterate, what we know today of Columbus' Genoese origin derives primarily from notarial deeds in the possession of the State archives of Genoa and Savona, most of which were not found until the 19th century. From these deeds, one can establish, with a reasonable degree of certainty, that a Christopher, son of a Domenico Colombo, was indeed born in Genoa or nearby in the year 1451.

However, we must keep in mind that the search for the origin of the Discoverer did not begin in the 19th century. In the previous 300 years (particularly in the 16th century), considerable research work had already been undertaken in an effort to arrive at some vestige of truth about which family was in fact the real family of the famous discoverer. This search had not been simple or straightforward, but extremely controversial, producing in its wake an array of unreliable documentation.

Complexity was inevitable from the outset for the simple reason that, apart from the sparse information about Christopher's family, his own birth or baptismal paper was never available. It was not until after the "Concilio di Trento" (1545-1563) that the Roman Church authorized the issuing of baptismal certificates. Most churches, however, probably kept a listing of the baptized, an assumption whose particular relevance in the case of Christopher we will discuss later. On the question of Columbus's age, however, statements (unfortunately confusing) were directly recorded not only by Columbus, but by his son Fernando, and the historian Bartolome' de Las Casas. The latter two historiographers were in possession of Columbus' writings; they were in close personal contact with him and members of his family. Nevertheless, even so, remarkably, they seem unable or else unwilling to reveal anything conclusively elucidating the matter of Columbus's exact age. Naturally, their failure has greatly added to the mystery surrounding the true Christopher.

Columbus himself, in a letter addressed in 1501 to the Spanish Sovereigns, gave the following information:

De muy pequeña edad entre' an la mar navegando y lo he continuado hasta hoy; la misma arte inclina a quien la prosiguea desear saber los secretos deste mundo; ya pasan de quarenta años que yo voy en este uso.

By 1501, here Columbus writes, he had been navigating for forty years which, if factual, would indicate that he first went to sea in 1461. If by an early age, "de muy pequeña edad," we intend the age of 14, then he could have been born in 1447. The statement by Columbus was reported by his son Fernando in Chapter IV of his *Historie...* and by Las Casas in his *Historia de Las Indias*, Libro I, cap. III.

In the entry for Columbus's journal for December 21, 1492, we read this biographical information:

Yo he andado veinte y tres años en la mar, sin salir della tiempo que se haya de contar...

If we deduct 23 from 1492, we arrive at the year 1469, from which further deducting 14 years we are left with a birthdate of 1455!

It is not surprising, then, judging only from these two conflicting statements, taken from others just as contradictory, that a great natal confusion has plagued Columbian scholars since the very beginning.

To the information obtained from Columbus, Fernando, and Las Casas, we have to add similarly conflicting data obtained from his contemporary historians, namely Oviedo as well as Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire), a close friend of Columbus (and of his two children, namely, Diego and Fernando, who were pages at the Castillian court where Martyr was a teacher).

We will also recall interesting observations on Columbus's origin made by prominent historians such as HARRISSE, VIGNAUD, PERAGALLO, etcetera. In particular, Henry Vignaud, referring in his Critical Study of 1903 to the historiographers who related intimately to Columbus, did not hesitate to suggest a conspiracy of silence on their part, expressing his concern as follows:

Columbus has never correctly reported his age...both his son and Las Casas, who have written his life in its fullest details, who knew him personally, who had been in the closest relation with all members of his family and who had had all his papers in their hands, maintain on this point a silence which is undoubtedly remarkable... when any special circumstances bring any individual prominently into light...the first questions asked about him bear upon his age and whence he comes...

Vignaud supports his theory of a conspiracy of silence on the fact that the abovementioned Fernando and Las Casas "did not wish to convey to us what they knew..." Considering this last statement by Vignaud, one wonders whether it ever entered the historian's mind that Fernando and Las Casas themselves were, perhaps, kept totally in the dark about the origin of Columbus.

After all, if, as I believe, Columbus had been born out of wedlock and then abandoned, obviously he would not wish to reveal more of himself than the world already knew, namely that he was born in Genoa and that from there he had left "de muy pequeña edad."

At this point, let us briefly summarize some basic historical information about the known life of the Discoverer which is imperative in comprehending notarial deeds and other evidence pertaining to his case.

From the traditional historical information obtained from Fernando (the second son of the discoverer, whose last name was "Colón"), Las Casas, and Christopher himself, we have a future discoverer who leaves Genoa at an early age. Eventually, he becomes an expert seaman who will navigate as Admiral the most unknown and perilous waters of the world. However, if from the multitude of notarial deeds, we examine contracts and obligations of various kinds which have been laboriously assembled from the archives of Genoa and Savona at the time when the Colombo family of Christopher lived in those two cities, a very different portrayal emerges.

For example, a notarial document drawn in Savona in 1472 indicates that at the age of 21 Christopher was still there working as a weaver; obviously he could not have started a meaningful sea life until at least 1473. We are presented then with two radically different stories. Now add to this difficulty the fact that no record exists indicating that Christopher, after he had left Genoa, ever called himself Colombo or Columbus. Throughout his known life, he used what

amount to aliases; thus the whole matter of trying to identify the real Columbus becomes even more muddled.

This is not a fanciful assessment of the difficulty. Ever since Salinerio published in 1602 the first documentation from Savona, esteemed luminaries over the centuries have found themselves confronted with the perplexing task of matching the information obtained from notarial deeds with the accounts provided by Fernando, Las Casas, and Christopher.

With the hope of creating some kind of order from chaos, some scholars chose to discredit the works and words of those witnesses who knew Columbus most intimately, namely Fernando, Las Casas, and Christopher himself. After all, they had all long died and could no longer defend themselves; on the contrary, those scholars were alive and present.

Thus, Henry Vignaud (1830-1922), whose 365-page book of 1903 embraces some of HARRISSE'S perplexing finds and final assessment, practically accuses Columbus, Fernando, Las Casas, and even Bartolome' Colón, Columbus's brother, of fraud! However, Vignaud, becoming cautious at the end of his work and after having exhausted his theories, chose to reveal that he still maintained some reservations about the conclusions he had reached, stating:

However logical and convincing they may be, they cannot have other than purely hypothetical character.

Let us review the basic account of Christopher Columbus's whereabouts before he made his great and fateful crossing of the Ocean Sea, relying on traditional history, and my own assessment and interpretive commentary.

First of all, I see no critical reason why we should not believe Columbus's famous words when he stated that he was born in Genoa and that from there he had left at a very early age. Taking into consideration some of the legal documents and contemporary Genoese chroniclers, we can surmise that Christopher, perhaps at the traditional age of 12, was employed as an apprentice woolcarder in the shop of a Domenico Colombo, a woolweaver by profession. We can also surmise that the young Christopher was not at all fascinated by the prospect of spending the rest of his life engaged in such tedious work and patiently awaited the nights to rest and dream of a better world. An entirely New World which, hopefully, someday, he would try to reach following the direction of the breeze that inflated the sails of the caravels that so often he had observed leaving the harbor of Genoa for mysterious voyages toward the horizon.

If he followed Genoese tradition, then at 14, an age confirmed by Fernando, we can see him as a "mozo" or deck hand finally on his way to fulfill his ever present dream of escaping his life in Genoa, finding a new life in the sea, becoming an expert seaman and reaching his new world wherever it might be.

Except for the notarial documentation, there are no historical records that he ever called himself "Cristoforo Colombo" or its Latin equivalent of Columbus; however, at the time of his first departure, it is hardly possible to think that he did not do so. Still, no document pertaining to the



maritime history of Genoa of that time has ever come to light revealing any sailor of this name (Pessagno).

After leaving Genoa for his first (and probably short) experience with the sea, Christopher navigated for many years over the Mediterranean Sea arriving as far as the Island of Chios and the African coast. During this time, again no historical records exist indicating that he ever called himself Colombo or any other family name.

Not until he resided in Portugal was he known as "Colón." And Fernando Colón, the second son of the discoverer who was born in Spain, admitted in the famous biography that the origin of his father "was not without some mysteries."

Concerning the arrival of Columbus in Portugal, we have information obtained from the notarial archives which contradicts Columbus's account as cited by Las Casas. In May of 1501, writes Las Casas, the Admiral (Columbus) was received by King Ferdinand in Segovia and, at that time, the discoverer, to make a point, stated that he had spent 14 years trying to convince in vain the Crown of Portugal to sponsor his great design.

It is generally accepted that Columbus moved from Portugal to Spain at the end of 1484 or in the first half of 1485.

If we accept Las Casas's reference, then we can deduce that Christopher first arrived in Portugal around 1470 with enough credentials as navigator to be able to submit, some time later, his plans and impress the Crown. On the other hand, according to the notarial deeds, Columbus did not put out to sea until 1473 and, as a businessman or trade representative, made it to Portugal only in 1476 (say some historians) by swimming to shore after surviving a sinking ship.

These conflicting dates are so important that throughout most of the 19th century, the best that scholarship had to offer was dedicated to the pursuit of determining the right date of Columbus's arrival in Portugal, thus solving the dilemma.

The credibility attached to other documents versus the credibility of the biographers underwent an arduous process of evaluation. And, as frequently happens, the documentation eventually won the day. The importance of finding the right date is self-evident because if one does not subscribe to the idea of a Columbus businessman who first arrives in Portugal in 1476 without having much prior experience as a navigator, but mostly experiences at sea as a passenger, not only is a particular document made questionable, but a whole series of supporting documents as well.

These documents, as we will see later, constitute the pieces of a very carefully assembled mosaic of legal evidence on the life and actions of a Christopher and his Colombo family of Genoa and Savona. In addition, if it can be established that Columbus did not arrive in Portugal until 1476, this in effect means that the Discoverer was not there in 1474, where and when, according to both Fernando and Las Casas, Columbus received upon request the famous letter and nautical chart (showing the westward approach to Japan) from the Florentine astronomer and savant Paolo Dal Pozzo Toscanelli. By this date, Columbus had enough cosmographical knowledge to

build a globe and send it to the famed Florentine for his opinion on the idea of reaching Asia by navigating the Ocean Sea westward. Toscanelli replied by sending his encouragement, good wishes, the chart, and a copy of a letter that he had previously sent to a Portuguese canon named Fernam Martins.

A sketch of this much debated nautical chart that Las Casas stated that he himself had seen and that Columbus had carried with him during his first crossing of 1492 was eventually found in the 19th century in Florence annexed to a lecture by Toscanelli on the comet of 1456, and for this reason attributed to him. Now it belongs to the "Codici Magliabecchiani" of the "Biblioteca Centrale di Firenze" and the esteemed Florentine historian Gustavo Uzielli (1837-1911) refers to it in these words: "No doubt it was a similar sketch which Toscanelli employed to draw the map he sent to Martins."

In any event, whether Christopher reached Portugal in 1470 as an experienced sailor or in 1476 as a representative of a Genoese merchant house, he was to remain there until 1485.

We will relate a few important events of his Portuguese life as "Cristovam Colón" or "Christovao Colom" as the Portuguese chronicler João de Barros (1496-1571) called him in his work.

The ship that carried Christopher had sunk as a consequence of a fierce sea battle which took place some two miles off Portugal near Lagos and the future discoverer managed to survive by swimming to shore with the help of an oar that had floated free. Although injured, he recuperated with the assistance of helpful people and moved on to Lisbon which had at the time a considerable community of Genoese (Peragallo).

Much has been written about the life of Columbus in Portugal, but even the best narratives by the most prestigious historians reveal very little for the simple reason that no reliable documentation has ever appeared to substantiate any of his activities. One of the narratives most intriguing for its implications, however, is one by Salvador de Madariaga (Madrid, 1984, 4th ed.) under the title *Vida del muy magnifico señor Don Cristobal Colón*. Madariaga, incidentally, has Christopher landing in Portugal exactly on August 13, 1476. And as a consequence of having survived a "trial by fire" (to use the historian's words), the future discoverer immediately, then and there, was born again, "Volvio'a nacer." With a marvelous narrative of 500 pages, rich in insights and careful evaluations, the author suggests on the basis of considerable circumstantial evidence that Columbus could have been the son of a Jewish family who had moved to Genoa to escape the Inquisition and/or to seek better opportunities. Without the help of precious documentation, Madariaga's case could, of course, never be substantiated and the author himself was the first to recognize this fact.

To elaborate for the moment on the issue of a Jewish Colombo or Colom family in Italy, I consulted Dr. Raffaello Lattes of the Synagogue of Modena who mentioned to me that in the 19th century, there was in fact a rabbi in Leghorn named Colombo. He also showed me a booklet by Samuele Schaerf published in 1865-1925 and titled *I cognomi degli ebrei d'Italia* (*The lastnames of Italian Jews*) which listed a Colombo. Having no direct bearing on my present work, however, my inquiry ended there.

In Lisbon, Columbus met his younger brother Bartolome' Colón who, like Christopher, had a great inclination for cartography. As everyone seems to agree, it was the study of this art form that helped both brothers start their Portuguese life. Where they learned and how they practiced such a talent is still one of the many mysteries of Columbian Literature. Some scholars suggest that they had studied in Genoa where almost certainly there were nautical schools. Madariaga states that Christopher was a "Doctísimo cosmógrafo" and already possessed considerable experience on the sea.

At the time of Columbus's arrival, the throne of Portugal was occupied by King Alfonso V. Even though his country was not yet seeking to change the shape of the world, in 1470 he had appointed his son (who in 1481 would become King João II) as chief of explorations and discoveries.

Whether Christopher by 1476 had been a proven seaman or just an aspiring one, no one denies that he navigated in 1477 from Portugal to Iceland, making observations on sea tides that later in 1497, I may add, John Cabot also made, indicating that Columbus may have gone further northwest than many scholars are generally willing to accept. He also undertook several voyages to the western coast of Africa and the island of Puerto Santo. Without going into details, it was in either Puerto Santo or in Lisbon that he met his future wife, Doña Filipa de Perestrelo y Moniz, daughter of Bartholomeu Perestrello of Italian origin from Piacenza who had been the Captain or Governor of Puerto Santo. From this marriage in 1479 or 1480, Diego Colón was born, the future Second Admiral of the Ocean Sea.

The ascent to the throne of João II in 1481 gave Columbus his last chance to gain a sponsorship from the new King for his grand design but, as we know, he failed. By the end of 1484, Columbus was a widower and with his child Diego, writes Fernando, secretly moved to Spain.

Tradition has it that Christopher Colón arrived in Spain at Palos de La Frontera on board a ship with his son Diego, then about five years old. Almost destitute, he found assistance at the nearby Franciscan Monastery of Santa Maria de La Rabida where he met Friar Juan Perez (who was a confessor of Queen Isabel) and Friar Antonio de Marchena to whom he confided his fantastic designs and showed his charts. Both of them proved receptive to the future discoverer's presentation, and worked to arrange an audience for him with the Sovereigns of Spain. Friar Marchena (who S.E. Morison describes as a "a man of imagination and human sympathy") was already well connected with the Royal Court as a "buen astrologo." The first audience with Queen Isabella took place in May of 1486 at the Alcazar of the Royal city of Cordoba. Before leaving for the court, Columbus left Diego under the care of the friars.

A point of minor controversy is exactly when Columbus left Diego with the friars of La Rabida, indicating just how seriously scholars have researched the life and actions of Columbus in Spain, particularly his first years. Both HARRISSE and NAVARRETE have brought forward a court deposition of 1515 by a Garcia Hernandez, friend of friar Juan Perez, who testified that Diego was not left at La Rabida at the care of Franciscan friars until 1491!

Christopher Colón, the widower, while in Cordoba met Beatriz Enriquez who became his mistress and in 1488 out of wedlock gave birth to his second son Fernando, already very familiar to us as the author of his father's biography, the famous *Historie*...

Dated May 5, 1487, we possess (thanks to the Documentos Diplomaticos assembled by Don Martin Fernandez de Navarrete in book II of 1825) a first document certifying the presence in Spain of Columbus. He is identified simply as Cristobal Colomo "Extrangero." On this date, 3.000 maravedis were paid to him by Alonso de Quintanilla on the order of the Bishop of Palencia for unspecified services rendered to their Highnesses of Spain.

On March 20, 1488 Columbus received a letter from the Portuguese King João II addressed to Cristovam Colón, "our special friend in Seville." In summary, this brief letter informs Colón that the King is willing to re-examine his plans and that he can go back to Portugal without fear of being persecuted by the law.

On May 12, 1489, an order was issued by the Spanish Sovereigns to officials, justices, et cetera, and all other subjects of Castille to facilitate and assist Cristobal Colomo in traveling to court and other places in their Kingdom. Let me comment that this order which was widely circulated undoubtedly provoked the envy of many officials who subsequently joined the growing list of his detractors. They must have asked themselves who this stranger was who deserved so much attention.

We come to the most interesting of the Spanish documents, dated April 17, 1492, "Villa de Sancta Fe de La Vega de Granada." It contains the famous agreements, or "Capitolaciones," between the Sovereigns of Spain and a foreigner, exapprentice woolcarder from Genoa who is identified as "Don Cristobal Colón," their Admiral.

With the fall of Granada and the end of the war with the Moors, the Sovereigns of Spain finally consented and agreed to organize an expedition led by Columbus which would reach the Indies by going westward. According to these capitulations, Columbus would gain the titles of Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor General of all lands that he would discover, and take for himself to use as he wishes ten percent of whatever would be acquired overseas, whether pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, spices or any other merchandise. Further, the agreement specifies that if the said Don Cristobal Colón wished to contribute one eighth of the expenses required to equip future expeditions, he would be entitled to one eighth of their profits as well. And also that the rights to these entitlements, covered by hereditary laws, upon the death of Don Cristobal Colón would pass on to his successors in perpetuity.

It is superfluous to comment here on the extravagance or quixotic aspects of these agreements dictated by a Columbus who appears extremely fearful of deceptions and frustrated by so many years of constant procrastination. As it turned out, Columbus had reason to be wary; all of these Royal Grants did not constitute, to paraphrase Madariaga, a juridical document but only the basic draft for one. In fact, when Columbus returned from his second voyage to the New World of 1493-1496 (see Chapter 9), some of these grants and privileges were abruptly withdrawn, and the discoverer found himself surrounded by detractors, growing hostilities and indifference, all of

which would endure to his death. Surely his original fears and suspicions of being deceived were eminently justifiable.

What is mindboggling about these capitulations is the thought of what ten percent of all the exports from the Americas would be worth today. Consider only, for example, the petrodollars earned from Mexico and Venezuela's oil sales abroad!

From 1496, the financial position of Columbus, highly indebted already with what today we may call promissory notes, did not ameliorate; in fact, it grew progressively worse and the only income he could count on was the 10,000 maravedis life pension that the crown had granted to him in 1493 for having been the first to sight a flickering light in the New World.

Columbus had renounced a noble title and large estate in exchange for his peaceful retirement from the political enterprise that the New World had become. He was still hopeful of setting out on a new voyage of exploration, and survived precariously for two years, having no visible possessions, and living on whatever he could carry on his horse, wandering, like Dante, from place-to-place as he had done before his great discovery. Being a man of Spartan customs and of an extraordinarily resourceful mind, the material pain was probably not as unbearable as feelings of ingratitude and obsolescence.

For some time in 1497, Columbus was the guest of one of his few remaining friends, Andres Bernaldez, the curate of the Royal Palaces. Bernaldez seems to have been a graceful confidant to whom Columbus revealed in detail some of the most interesting aspects of his actions in the New World. Bernaldez put this material to good use when he wrote his *Historia de los Reyes Catolicos D. Fernando y Da. Isabel*. One intriguing aspect of the curate's *Historia* is that he is the only contemporary historian who ever mentioned Columbus's age. He revealed that when the discoverer died, he was more or less 70 years old. This statement presumably remained hidden since his work would not be published in Granada until 1856 (see endnote 1). Since Columbus died in 1506, if the esteemed curate's estimate were accurate, he would have been born on or around 1436. When in 1887 a document was found (in the archive of Genoa by Marcello Staglieno) of a Christopher Columbus born between 1446 and 1451, the curate's assessment of the discoverer's age became the focus of a controversy among the most prominent historians.

The dilemma was obvious: how could it be possible, on the one hand, to assume that the respected and reputable Bernaldez had been wrong when he had known Columbus so intimately? On the other hand, how can one doubt the content of a notarial document? Eventually, some scholars found a compromising solution that would spare Bernaldez's reputation by assuming that Columbus must have looked much older to him than his real age or that, as a consequence of clerical error, 70 had been written instead of 60.

One cannot help but wonder about this enigmatic Columbus. Why was he not more candid and forthcoming, and at least reveal his age for posterity knowing that he was a famous man? Why was he so mysterious about his beginnings that not even his son Fernando, or Las Casas, Martyr, or Oviedo could penetrate his secrets? But to add a comment to these hypothetical questions, Columbus was not merely a secretive man; he possessed, above all, the uncompromising virtues

of a Biblical man who believed devoutly that his life had been designed for a particular mission. From his writings, we know he could not succumb to secular forces, to either defeat or compromise.

After two years of practical confinement in Spain, which would have sufficed to demoralize anyone else, he finally sailed away on May 30, 1498, engaged in a new mission which on August 1 would result in the discovery of an entire new continent: South America.

Before leaving on this voyage, Columbus was preoccupied with the future of his two children and the uncertainty related to his fragile capitulations with the Spanish sovereigns. He wrote the most revealing and, at the same time, most puzzling of his compositions: his first testament dated February 22, 1498, endorsed with the cryptic cabalistic signature which we have described earlier. This testament, or Mayorazgo, asserting the rights of his first son Don Diego Colón, was published in nine printed pages by Navarrete in 1825. His son Don Diego since May 8, 1492 had been the page of prince Don Juan at the court of Castille and was now joined on February 18, 1498 by his halfbrother Fernando as a page to the Queen. Leaving his two children temporarily behind in good hands and with a drawn testament, Columbus once more pursued his appointed destiny on the Ocean Sea.

Even to attempt a summary of the content of this lengthy testament would be a hopeless task and I will mention only the most pertinent passages. Columbus reminds the Sovereigns of how much he has contributed to the treasury of Castille through his personal struggles and, with pleading words, wants reassurance that the crown of Spain will protect his rights which he here wills to his son Don Diego Colón who carries the legitimate name of his father and his ancestors which is the one of Colón, "Llamados de los de Colón." Should Diego die without male heirs, the rights should pass to his halfbrother Fernando and likewise if he should die without male heirs, the inheritance should pass onto his brothers Bartolomy and then James (Diego) in perpetuity. It is further specified that the rights must follow a male line and that under no circumstances should it switch to a female, unless a male can no longer be found as legitimate heir.

Here let me point out that this last-mentioned part of the Will is the key, as we will see later, that caused search from 1578 on in several Italian localities to produce a male Colombo eligible to inherit the rights in spite of the fact that the name mentioned in the Will is "Colón" and not Colombo. To the chagrin of many future historians, the discoverer fails to mention the name of his father and refers to his family predecessors as belonging to the Colóns which he states to be his true lineage, "mi linage verdadero." The discoverer also reminds the Sovereigns that he came to serve them in Castille having been born in Genoa, "siendo yo nacido en Genova." He charges Diego, or whoever inherits his rights, to maintain and support in the city of Genoa someone of their "lineage" who will establish himself there as a citizen with a house and a wife because in that city he will be able to enjoy favors and "the things that he may need." He ends the paragraph with his most popular statement: "Since from there I left and there I was born." Further on, he returns to the subject of Genoa and again charges the inheritor "to always endeavour for the honor and welfare of the city of Genoa."

It certainly seems clear from all of the above statements that Columbus intended to emphasize the fact he had been born in the city of Genoa and not in the Republic of Genoa or somewhere else. Why his son Fernando would at a later time visit several other places in Italy to locate his father's birthplace and relatives remains another unsolved mystery.

In his testament, Columbus did not forget to protect his soul as well. He suggests to the inheritor that he invest the future income granted by the Sovereigns at the bank of Saint George in Genoa in secure instruments paying six percent, and that he utilizes some of this income to help King Ferdinand in case he launches a Holy mission to go forth and conquer Jerusalem. He also specifies that in a suitable location of his beloved island of Hispaniola, a church be built named "Santa Maria de la Concepcion" as well as a hospital with the most modern equipment, similar to those in Castille and Italy.

Now we come to perhaps the most puzzling part of the Will in which Columbus instructs Diego (or whoever will be the recipient) how to sign or endorse their papers. They must sign it, as is his own practice, without any family name whatsoever; and regardless of how many titles they may acquire, they must identify themselves only with the title of Admiral. The signature is required to be exactly as he details it:

.S.  
.S.A.S.  
X M Y  
El Almirante

To reiterate what we have said before, Columbus never used a family name in any of his letters, substituting in most of them "Xpo FERENS" instead of "El Almirante" as shown below:

.S.  
.S.A.S.  
X M Y  
: Xpo FERENS.

In this puzzle, "Xpo FERENS" stands for a latinization of Christopher, the carrier of Christ, or symbolically his cross. Most scholars have attempted to solve the puzzle by attributing its significance simply to Columbus's religious fervor; but I perceive this cryptic signature as much more complex, as layered with levels of intrinsic meaning which we can only find by looking at it within the context of his very personal nature. I believe we can detect in this formulation the intimate trauma of a Christopher born out of wedlock and abandoned by his father, as I have premised earlier. The Christopher that shares with the Biblical Moses not only a Godly mission, but the childhood suffering and abandonment as well. A Christopher unsure of his origin, of his family name, who had arrived at the time in his life when he can be true to himself, finally, and shed all of his previous aliases of Colonus, Colón, Colom, or Colomo, just as he had earlier abandoned the appellation of Colombo which did not belong to him. A Christopher who chooses to manifest his resolve to purge himself of all that is not his, but in a manner which will not

openly reveal his secret, which will not expose his already stained reputation to the added burden of being publicly known as a bastard.

Later in this chapter, I will bring this matter into clearer perspective. For the time being, let me note only that since Columbus himself expressed the wish to be identified only as Christopher or "the Admiral," I see no good reason why I should not adhere to it and identify him more frequently in my own text in such a manner.

As we know, the Admiral was brought back in chains from his third voyage, arriving at Cadiz on November 20 or 25, 1500. In addition to this great humiliation, he had lost all the privileges and "mercedes" granted to him from time to time to appease his fear and suspicion concerning the basic concessions formulated in the Capitulations of 1492.

What is almost impossible to fathom is how the Admiral, after having experienced all of these debilitating struggles, succeeded in rehabilitating his mind and body and successfully organized a fourth expedition to the New World. He left Cadiz with four small and wormeaten caravels on May 11, 1502. On this mission, he took with him his son Fernando, then only 14 years old. The unfailing determination of this man who never seemed to succumb to overwhelming odds is another of the mysteries surrounding his life.

In the year or more that he spent in Spain before leaving for this fourth and last voyage, Christopher drew up a modified version of his testament of 1498. This new version of 1502 has never been found, but the Admiral himself mentions (in the last and final codicil to his testament of May 19, 1506) that he had indeed executed it and that before leaving, he had entrusted it for safekeeping with other of his papers to Friar D. Gaspar in the monastery of "Las Cuevas en Sevilla." This latest codicil of 1506 is of importance and we will return to it later.

Waiting to embark on a voyage of exploration in which he would discover Central America and survive an incredible trial, the Admiral was in poor health, and naturally concerned this voyage could be his last one, at least on this earth. Apprehensive as ever that all of his Royal grants and privileges would eventually be proven unworthy of the paper they were written on, he collected and illustrated them in a book and sent a first copy for safekeeping to the prestigious bank of Saint George in Genoa. I have a facsimile of this precious book of privileges in my possession. Its dimensions are 11½" x 8½" x ¾" and it is titled *Cartas y Previlég<sup>s</sup>, Cédulas y otras Escrituras de Dōxpoval Colón Almirante Mayor dl Mar Oceano, Visorey y Governador de las Islas y Tierra Firme*.

Several of the pages are decorated with charming flowery designs, and in the space of one entire page is depicted the Colón emblem or family heraldic crest granted to him by the Spanish sovereigns upon his triumphal return of 1493. It is divided into four parts with the first two sections on top showing, on the upper left, a golden castle against a red field, and on the upper right, a rampant lion featured with human expression in his eyes and endowed with a menacing protruding red tongue, and protruding red penis as well. The Lion is depicted in a silver field. Lion and Castle, of course, are the heraldic symbols of "Castile y León." The lower two parts of the page show, on the left, a silver ocean with innumerable golden islands and a golden



continent; and on the right, a deep blue ocean interspersed with five large golden anchors. The entire emblem must have been designed by the discoverer himself and rich patterns of its intrinsic meaning can be genuinely appreciated.

According to the words of the Admiral, the copy which he forwarded to the Bank of Saint George was of red Moroccan, and secured with a silver safety lock.

The fact that the Admiral chose to deliver his most valued possession and manifested his intent to entrust his "potential" future income from the Indies to the Bank of Saint George, "Ufficio di San Giorgio in Genova," was a well calculated move as will be evident from the following documentation and commentary. The bank paid the high interest rate of six percent (a high rate for the 16th century? Columbus seems to imply that it was) and at this time, an investor could not find a more secure place in the world than in that bank. Richard Davey (who wrote a historical appraisal of that financial institution in the National Review of October 1892) summarizes the power of Saint George at this time:

The bank of Saint George, for seven hundred years, held an unrivalled position in the world, and combined the qualifications of the Bank of England with those of the East India Company.

Davey further informs readers who may have an interest in history that:

At the siege of Acre, Richard I, fighting side by side with the brave Genoese, placed England under the patronage of the Genoese Patron Saint, George of Cappadocia. He also took from the Genoese banner its Red Cross and placed it at the centre of the national flag of Old England.

What may be pointed out as an "ironia del destino" is that Christopher, by discovering the New World, was the major cause that ruined Italian commerce with the Orient, which inevitably brought the Great Republic of Genoa to its doom. The discoverer undoubtedly had another important thing in mind when he tried to tie the financial future of his children with the Bank of Saint George. This clearly surfaces in an examination of the content of his correspondence with Saint George which had developed with the consignment to it of the book of privileges and other papers. The "Ufficio," besides being a commercial bank, was responsible also for tax collections and for all of the other financial transactions inherent in the administration of the Genoese Republic.

The revealing correspondence mentioned above comprises five letters dated from March 21, 1502 to December 27, 1504. The most important feature of this correspondence is that neither Christopher nor his son Diego are ever identified with a last name, as if either they had none, or else an appropriate one for them could not be found! Not once are the names of Columbus, Colombo, Colón, et cetera mentioned, incredibly remarkable since the parties related at an ambassadorial level. This omission could be justified to some extent on the part of the Admiral; but for officials of the Bank of Saint George to follow through in this strange fashion, in those days of highly reverent diplomacy, is nothing short of amazing. The Admiral signed with his

cryptic signature and the Bank addresses him as "Domino Christoforo," our beloved fellow citizen, "amatissime concivis."

The first letter is dated in Seville, March 21, 1502, and accompanies the book of privileges that the Admiral forwards through the Genoese merchant in Seville, Francisco de Ribarol, to the Genoese Ambassador Nicolo' Oderico at the court of Spain to be shown to officials of the Bank of Saint George to appraise his financial resources. Christopher pleads with the Ambassador that since he is leaving for overseas, to notify as soon as possible by letter his son D. Diego as to where the book will be kept. The letter also reveals that the Admiral had obtained new royal "guarantees" and that the Sovereigns "promise" to give him all that is due to him and that they will protect the rights of Don Diego.

The second letter is dated April 2, 1502, and is addressed to officials of the Bank to be delivered through the good services of the Genoese Ambassador. Like all the letters of the Admiral, it is written in Castillian and since quite brief, I will translate it in its entirety:

To the most noble gentlemen of the most magnificent office of St. George.

Most noble gentlemen,

Even thus my body is here, my heart is there at all times. Our Lord has bestowed upon me the greatest mercy that was ever given to any man except for David. The result of my labors already shine and they would produce a great light if the blanket of the government would not conceal it.

I am returning to the Indies in the name of the Holy Trinity to come back promptly but since I am a mortal I leave with my son D. Diego the charge to deposit in your institution all the income that will be obtained from my rights. One tenth of which, every year forever, should pay for the taxes on wheat, wine and the victuals to the relief of the population of Genoa. If this tenth will amount to something accept it; if not, accept my good will. What I ask for is that this son of mine be well respected.

Mr. Nicolo' Oderico knows more about my affairs than I do and to him I have consigned my privileges and other papers to keep in a well guarded place after you have examined them. The King and the Queen my Lords are pleased to honor me more than anyone else.

May the Holy Trinity protect your noble persons and the increase of the magnificent office.

The next two letters are both dated December 8, 1502. One is the reply to the Admiral who is addressed as "Domino Christoforo" and beloved fellow citizen; the other addressed to Don Diego to reassure him of Genoese hospitality and to remind him of the tax relief generously offered to the city by his father. Unfortunately, officials of the Bank delayed the reply to Don

Diego for eight months instead of "as soon as possible" as the Admiral had requested. This delay apparently caused the discoverer upon his return to write to Oderico the last letter dated December 27, 1504, expressing his disappointment by reminding them of the saying "Who serves city hall does not serve at all."

As it turned out, no document was ever found showing that the Bank had received any investment by the Admiral or his heirs. Both letters from the Bank were written in vulgar Italian still quite readable today and basically correct. I make this observation because misinformed writers have suggested that the Admiral did not write in Italian since Italian could not be understood on paper. In point of historical fact, there were and still are available more letters written in vulgar Italian or Genoese than one would wish to read. I suspect instead that if Christopher, who was certainly not an illiterate, did not write in Italian the reason was probably personal, another one of the mysterious reasons surrounding his secretive life.

Concerning the bank's long delay in answering Don Diego, one may speculate that officials, having been well informed by Oderico of the shaky legal status of the Capitulaciones and of the discoverer's departure from Spain, did not attach much urgency to the matter of the Admiral's finances.

I may add purely by way of historical footnote that this famous book of privileges is known to have remained, eventually, in the possession of Nicolo' Oderico who kept it in his house in Genoa; in 1670, one of his descendants donated it to the Republic of Genoa.

In spite of his many detractors, the Admiral left for his fourth and last voyage in a fleet of four old and very badly equipped caravels destined never to make it back. That he himself survived to tell the story must have been seen by everyone, including his Sovereigns, as little short of a miracle.

Before concluding this dissertation on Christopher's epistolary relationship with the Bank of Saint George, let us cite revealing passages of the last letter of December 27, 1504 in which the Admiral, in fact, complains to the Genoese Ambassador Nicolo' Oderico at the Spanish court not for having received a delayed answer from the bank (as the Admiral emphasizes strongly) but for not having received an answer at all! One may ask, then, how could the Admiral complain of not having received a reply when the Bank in fact had written a reply which was eight months late? What happened to the two letters from the bank written to him and Don Diego?

My attempt to find a plausible answer to these questions has revealed a twist in the whole affair which I will try to unravel with a closer evaluation of this letter of December 27, 1504, from a very concerned Admiral to the Genoese Ambassador in Spain, Nicolo' Oderico.

My interpretation of the letter may reveal also the quincentennial question of whether when the great discoverer died on May 20, 1506, he was rich or poor. As will be apparent from the content of this letter, written seventeen months prior to his death, the Admiral not only seems to have died with no visible possessions (he did not own his own house, for example), but probably left this world with debts incurred by the phantom collateral of his Royal privileges and contested

capitulations. The Admiral had miraculously returned home, so to speak, in 1504 after two years of explorations (see Chapter 9) and a shipwreck in Jamaica where he would be abandoned even after Governor Ovando of Hispaniola had known for months that he had survived there. He came home from this tragic last voyage with some gold that had belonged to him in Hispaniola. But one may assume that being old and sick from the gout, and God knows what else, and having no house of his own in Spain, as previously stated, he could only find refuge in a boardinghouse.

The Admiral had landed in Spain on November 7, 1504, and at the time of his writing to Oderico on December 27, over fifty days had lapsed. Upon his return, he confided to the Ambassador that he had been very ill and unable to attend to his financial affairs. Then the Admiral complained that he had not received any reply at all to the two letters he had forwarded to Oderico along with his papers and book of privileges. At this point, we are left to speculate on the reasons for the Admiral's lack of up-to-date information on a matter obviously important to him. We can assume that during his two year absence, the letter addressed to him had simply got misplaced. But what about the letter sent to Don Diego? Christopher himself supplied the answer when he further informed Oderico that his son Don Diego had not yet been able to gain his rights as had been agreed by the Crown. Here then is evidence that the Admiral, before leaving for his mission, had stipulated an agreement with the Crown for Don Diego to administer his income during his long absence. This being the case, it becomes evident that, since Don Diego during the two year absence of his father had no income at his disposal from the Royal grants to invest or administer, he elected not to raise an unpleasant issue, simply keeping silence and thereby sparing his sick father additional sorrow.

But could Oderico have played his hand in this as well? The Admiral, after all, had admitted in his letter of April 2, 1502, to the officials of the Bank of Saint George that "Oderico knows more about my affairs than I do." And what, we may speculate, did Oderico know? He knew two important facts: one, that numerous intrigues surrounded the discoverer in Spain; and two, that the Admiral had left on what must have seemed by many, or actually been hoped, a voyage of no return.

From reading this letter to Oderico, it seems clear that Christopher, at least at this late date in his worldly affairs, would be concerned about the primogeniture rights of Don Diego to whom the future of Fernando as well as his other proteges was attached.

Don Diego, still a page at court, was already 24 years old in 1504, and Don Fernando who had been at sea with him for two years (having left his position as a page of Queen Isabella), now at the age of 16, was "a second son" unemployed and in need of assistance. That the famous Christopher was beginning to sense his mortality is manifested in the final words of his letter to Oderico, which reflect concern not for himself but for his children. These words also suggest the not unusual predicament of a man who, after having masterminded a great design, ultimately discovers he has become its victim. Unless his last energies were employed in defending his rights, the future of his beloved children would be compromised.

The recent death of the Queen put an additional burden on the Admiral's ability to further claim his rights. The Queen has died, he lamented to Oderico, and I was not present, adding: "God be

with her." His beloved patroness Queen Isabel had expired in Medina del Campo on September 26, 1504. As of now, the Admiral confided, he had not the slightest idea regarding the future of his affairs. I believe, he added wistfully, that Her Highness must have made provisions to cover them in her will, and that "the King, my Lord, is a sufficient guarantee." But King Ferdinand of Aragon was only titular King of Spain and, the whole matter of the Admiral's inheritance upon his death, as we shall see later, went before the court and Don Diego eventually lost his case.

With the Queen gone, half the team went with her and the old seaman was left alone to nurse his wounds and plan a fifth voyage in his dreams. Christopher, the First Admiral of the Ocean Sea, died in Valladolid, Spain, on May 20, 1506. According to tradition, his body was set to rest there in a Franciscan convent. In 1507 (according to the 1878 work by HARRISSE), the remains were transferred to the Monastery of the "Cartuja de Las Cuevas" in Seville. This would be only the first of several other relocations. After June 2, 1537, but the year cannot be established with certainty (HARRISSE), the discoverer's remains along with those of his son Don Diego, who had died in Puebla de Montalvan near Toledo on February 23, 1526, were transported to the island of Hispaniola and interred in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo. In the same Cathedral would also be interred the remains of Christopher's grandson Don Lujs Colón, son of Don Diego, and probably the First Admiral's two brothers, namely Bartolome' and Diego Colón, plus Christopher II, the discoverer's "biznieto" or greatgrandson (HARRISSE). When in 1795 (with the Treaty of Basel), the Spanish part of the island was surrendered to France of Napoleon, the remains of the First Admiral were pompously transferred to the Cathedral of Havana, Cuba. To be rigorous about a controversial matter, writes HARRISSE, the remains transferred to Havana could have been those of the discoverer's son Don Diego. With the independence of Cuba in 1898, the presumed remains of the discoverer were transported to Spain where they were reinterred once more in the Monastery of the "Cartuja de La Cuevas" in Seville where they still rest today.

On the eve of his death on May 19, 1506, Christopher in the presence of witnesses and the public notary Pedro de Hinojedo, ratified his last testaments of 1498 and 1502 and codicil that he had drawn on August 25, 1505 (Archive of the Duke of Veragua). The codicil of 1506, handwritten by the Admiral, is of particular importance for the present work because the Admiral added, as a last recollection and in his own hand, a brief list of creditors whom he mentions by name. Except for one, they are all Genoese, men from the old days when he lived in Genoa, Savona, and Portugal, to whom he owed money or favors. Their names are those also mentioned in the notarial deeds which later in the 19th century would be found and coordinated by researchers of the Genoese school whose work of establishing the origin of Columbus will be later brought into perspective.

Below is a listing of those names, the intended compensation, and (within parentheses) the date of the corresponding Genoese notarial documents which relate to some of those names:

...to the inheritors of Geronimo del Puerto father of Benito del Puerto, chancellor in Genoa, twenty ducats or its corresponding value (September 22, 1470, notary Giacomo Calvi, Genoa).

To Antonio Vazo, Genoese merchant who used to live in Lisbon, 2500 Portuguese reals.

To a Jew (no name) who used to live near the Jewish Gate in Lisbon half a mark of silver to pay for a priest to pray for his soul.

To the inheritors of Luis Centurion Escoto, Genoese merchant, 3000 Portuguese reals.

To the inheritors of Paulo de Negro, Genoese, five ducats or its corresponding value (August 25, 1479, notary Gerolamo Ventimiglia, Genoa. This is the Genoese deed from which it can be argued that Christopher Columbus was born in 1451.)

To Baptista Espindola or his inheritors, if he is dead, 20 ducats. This Baptista Espindola (clarifies the Admiral) is the son-in-law of the above-mentioned Luis Centurion and was the son of master Nicolao Espindola of Locoli de Ronco (Ronco Scrivia) who was in Lisbon in 1482.

With respect to the authenticity of the Admiral's testament of 1498, Navarrete seems to confirm it by stating that, even though only an unnotarized copy, it had been used in several court proceedings without ever being found to be apocryphal. The codicil of 1506 (which mentions the previous executions of the testament of 1502 and codicil of 1505), I may add, can be considered authentic, having been found in the archives of the Duke of Veragua.

The Admiral's two sons, Don Diego and Don Fernando Colón, who had received an aristocratic upbringing as pages at the court passed into history as well-educated men who gained much respect for their prudent but likable personalities. Don Fernando, whose financial position was tied to his older brother's, became a known literary man by writing his father's biography, the famous *Historie...* When he died in 1539, he left a collection of thousands of precious books, some of which are housed today at the "Biblioteca Colombina" in Seville. Don Diego after the death of his father spent considerable time in and out of court to assert his inherited rights aided by his noble wife Doña Maria de Toledo, the niece of the famous Duke of Alba, a relative of King Ferdinand. Don Diego secured only the title of Second Admiral of the Ocean Sea and, in 1509, became the Governor of Hispaniola. He fathered seven children by his wife and two more with two different women. In 1523, his Governorship was revoked and he returned to Spain where he died in 1526.

Let us return now to the main subject of Christopher's origin and family name. After the Admiral returned in 1493 from his first voyage of discovery (elaborated in Chapter 9), he addressed two similar letters in Castillian relating the account of his voyage: one to Luis de Santangel, and the other to Rafael Sánchez to be forwarded to the Spanish Sovereigns. The Sanchez letter reached Italy and was printed in Latin in April of the same year. In this letter, the discoverer was identified for the first time in print as "Christofori Colom." The following June 15, Rome, the Florentine poet Giuliano Dati poetically rendered the discoverer's adventures in vulgar Italian

verses, identifying him as "Xpofan Colobo," a Latinization of Cristoforo Colombo (see chapter 9). It would be interesting to know how Dati came to know Christopher's last name, but I speculate that since Christopher had been known to be originally from Genoa, Dati must have looked in that direction. In 1498 the Venetian Marcantonio Coccio (1436-1506), a humanist and historian popularly known as Sabellico, published in Venice his work titled *Sabellici Enneades* identifying the discoverer as "Christophorus cognomento Columbus, vir rei maritimae assuetus..." (a man accustomed to maritime matters). And in Genoa, probably in 1499, Antonio Gallo, chancellor of the Bank of Saint George, would also identify him as "Christophorus Columbi." Gallo's work *De Navigatione Columbi...*, however, would not be published until 1733. The other contemporary Genoese historians, namely, Bartolomeo Senarega (official annalist of the republic) and the Bishop Agostino Giustiniani, copied from Gallo and we will analyze their contributions later.

What is both revealing and paradoxical at the same time is that the Italian historian Peter Martyr (who had known Christopher for many years) called the discoverer "Christophorus Colonus." And when Fernando Colón in his *Historie...* tried to explain to readers why his father was called Colonus, or why he also went by the name of Colón, he resorted to inconclusive guesswork, revealing ignorance on this subject, conceding that "with respect to the truth about such a name and last name it did not come about without some mystery." Imagine this concession from the discoverer's own son who, during the Admiral's last two-year voyage, had shared situations of life and death with him. Now he is a mature man engaged in writing the biography of his father, a famous man, and he must explain to readers his inability to provide basic genealogical data, including the first name of the Admiral's father, which he justifies on the vague religious grounds that "our Lord was pleased that his parents be less known."

Fernando Colón took on the task of writing his father's biography for two specified reasons: The first, he writes, because his father had been so occupied and worried about other things he had neither time nor leisure to do it himself. The second, he emphasized, because others had attempted to do it without knowing the true facts. And when he said "others," he specifically singled out the Genoese Dominican friar Agostino Giustiniani, Bishop of Nebbio in Corsica who, in 1516 and again in 1537, had published two works which seemed to Fernando not only untruthful, but to taint the memory of his father. In effect, the only thing that the respected scholar Giustiniani had done was to put into print his *Psalterio Poliglotta* of 1516. For the first time in Columbian Literature, we have (in addition to obvious errors on the Admiral's discoveries) a few sparse biographical notes. He had stated that "Christophorus Columbus" was a Genoese by nationality and of plebeian origin, "Vilibus ortus parentibus." Such a characterization, even today, could infuriate a sensitive son. As a consequence, Fernando sought to find a noble origin for his father, hoping to contradict Giustiani. He traveled to Italy, visiting several places where he had located a Colombo of some rank to interview, striving to find relatives of stature that he could call his own. He failed to find any.

But why did Fernando look outside of Genoa? In trying to solve this riddle, Harris has scrupulously investigated Fernando's movements in Italy. He found him in Genoa in December 1520; in Savona on January 2, 1521; on May 1521, in Ferrara; in July of the same year in Venice; and in November in Treviso, et cetera. In 1537, the other work by Giustiniani,

*Castigatissimi Annali* (or brief chronicles) was published, causing Fernando additional pain. Fernando had almost concluded his biography, but now felt he had to include in his work critical answers to Giustiniani. He did so by inserting these answers at the beginning of his *Historie...*

In the new publication, Giustiniani (who died in 1536 in a shipwreck) had reiterated that "Colobo" of first name Christoforo was of plebeian parentage and justified this assertion by specifying that Columbus's father (who remained nameless) was a woolweaver, while Christoforo himself worked as a silkweaver. In order to cover himself from the anticipated offensive reaction of Fernando, and from whoever else might think his revelations offensive, Giustiniani made it clear he was taking his cues from Antonio Gallo. The prestigious Chancellor of the Bank of Saint George, Gallo was a man beyond reproach. Giustiniani's new work may well have hastened Fernando's death who died only two years later in 1539, overcome by the difficult biographical burden he had imposed upon himself, in addition to attending various other trying tasks for the Crown of Spain. He was fifty-one years old, unmarried and left no heirs.

Fernando's reply to Giustiniani was formulated in these terms: I can accept, he conceded, my father being of plebeian origin, but not a "mechanic," meaning a man employed in manual labor. That he could not accept. "My father," he emphasized, with diluted rancor, "may have been of plebeian origin; that is not a disgrace." In this quote of a Biblical passage from the Admiral himself, Fernando reveals his feelings about Giustiniani's new characterization of his father:

David the most prudent King, was first a shepherd and afterwards chosen King of Jerusalem, and I am servant to that same Lord who raised him to such dignity.

On the charge that his father was engaged in manual labor, Fernando refused to concede. He insisted that a man who could draw maps and execute great designs could only be a man of great intellect and learning. Fernando's defensive approach was reasonable against Giustiniani, who probably thought he was simply recording the truth. As it turned out, these literary exchanges of views between Fernando and Giustiniani represented the first controversy to openly surface on the mysterious origin of the Discoverer. Had Christopher been less secretive and more forward with his future historians about his origin, the main victim would have been Columbian Literature. What today has developed into a mountain of scholarship would probably have remained a small hill!

Giustiniani had given to scholars a key that led to Antonio Gallo. But what actually Gallo knew about Christopher would remain locked up in his diaries until 1733, when finally they were published in the prestigious *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* of the Modenese priest Ludovico Antonio Muratori. Now scholars could finally learn the knowledge of Gallo, which had remained secreted away as if in deference to the wishes of the Admiral. According to some scholars, Gallo in fact had known Christopher personally, and probably also his family. His work in the *Rerum...* appeared (in Latin) in the year 1506 with the title, *The navigation of Colombo in the Ocean never before explored*. A fairly long composition that today would not affect many scholars, in 1733 this sparse but revealing personal data on the navigator served as the catalyst that propelled a 200-year search for the true Christopher Columbus.



Gallo reveals that Christopher was the older of three brothers, Bartolomeo being the second born, and Jacobo (James or Diego) the younger, all of them born in the city of Genoa from plebeian parents. Their father was a woolweaver (as Giustiniani had stated) and all the sons woolcarders (Giustiniani had labeled Christopher a silkweaver). At the age of puberty, "et pubere deinde facti," Cristoforo and Bartolomeo took to the sea (this statement confirms the assertions of Fernando, Christopher himself, Las Casas, et cetera). The first to leave, adds Gallo, was Bartolomeo who went to Lisbon, Portugal, where he painted nautical maps and later persuaded Christopher to join him, instructing him in that profession.

The work of Bartolomeo Senarega (the other contemporary Genoese "official" chronicler of the Republic) was also published in the *Rerum...* but, except for suggesting that Christopher was a "scarzadore" (a vulgar term) rather than "carminatore" (a woolcarder), he literally copied the work of Gallo. Gallo, Senarega, and Giustiniani all shared one common omission: they did not mention the name of Christopher's father, almost as if afraid of revealing the Admiral's long kept secret.

I have no way of knowing who, in those early days, was the first to state that Christopher's father was named Domenico; perhaps it was the Discoverer himself or one or both of his two brothers Bartolomeo and Giacomo. We know, however, from legal deeds found in the 19th century that Christopher, while still living in Genoa and Savona, declared himself to be the son of Domenico Colombo.

In 1535, the Spanish historian Fernandez de Oviedo (1478-1557), in his *Historia General y Natural de Las Indias*, libro II, cap. II, fol. ii, states that, according to what he had learned from some Genoese, the father of the discoverer was named Domenico, "Viviendo Dominico Colom, su padre...". Thus Oviedo may have been the first writer to set under the light of print the presumed name of the great discoverer's father.

Fernando Colón in his *Historie...*, published in 1571, surprisingly does not reveal any name for the discoverer's parents. In Chapter I, in fact, he states that:

...since the major part of his undertakings (the Admiral's) were the work of some mystery, so what concerns his name and last name it did not come as well without mystery...

In Chapter II, specifically titled, "Who were the father and mother of the Admiral...", Fernando does not reveal the names of Christopher's parents either. Then, finally, in Chapter LXXIII (73), he belatedly (and strangely) reveals Domenico as the father of Bartolomeo.

Fernando leaves his readers to wonder why he chose to reveal the name of Bartolomeo's father in Chapter 73 when he could not provide a name for the Admiral's father in Chapter II, which was specifically dedicated to the discoverer's mother and father!

This issue of Christopher's paternity is crucial to the present work, and we will return to it later.

To summarize, Oviedo in 1535 was able to discover a name for Christopher's father (attributing his unique knowledge to the help of some Genoese), but Giustiniani, Senarega, and particularly Gallo, Martyr, Las Casas, and Fernando, who knew the Admiral intimately, could not "discover" (and certainly they knew more Genoese than Oviedo) a name for him. This fact is indeed remarkable!

Nevertheless, events of 1578 related to the Admiral's rights of inheritance popularized the Colombo nomenclature in Italy. In this year, we know there were at least 200 Colombos in the city of Genoa alone (and many more throughout the Republic, Piedmont, and other areas of Italy and the Mediterranean basin), many of whom labored mightily to find documentary proof they were indeed the true relatives of the great discoverer. Their rush was justified, since at stake was the honor of being a descendant of the famous man, an annuity of 1000 gold doubloons, the honorary title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea, and two noble titles, namely Duke of Veragua and Marquese of Jamaica. And the whole lot in perpetuity.

One recalls that in his will of 1498, which was ratified in 1506, Cristobal Colón had established a clear line of descendants eligible to claim his rights as inheritors; they were required to be males of the same "lineage." A female could accede to such inherited rights only if a male were no longer available. This turn of events occurred in 1578. Don Diego Colón, the Second Admiral of the Ocean Sea, son of Christopher, had died in 1526. He passed to his first son, Don Luis Colón, the Third Admiral, the family rights. Don Luis went to court, by now a family tradition, to reassert his rights. Emperor Charles V was now occupying the throne of Spain as Charles I, and magnanimous enough (after the intercession of Fernando Colón, a bachelor, and the arbitration of Cardinal Loaysa, President of the Council of the Indies) to grant to the Third Admiral, Don Luis, the title of "Capitan General," equivalent to the Governor General of Hispaniola, but in practice simply an honorary title.

Nevertheless, Don Luis sailed for Santo Domingo to assume his new role. To briefly summarize his experiences, he quickly met with so many difficulties that he returned to Spain to assert his rights in court. This time the Emperor finally reached an agreement with Don Luis which was apparently the result of a satisfactory compromise to solve the longstanding issue of the First Admiral's rights. In exchange for the ten percent of the New World's products and titles, which had originally been granted to the great discoverer, Don Luis in 1537 (probably quite happily) accepted in addition to the title of Third Admiral, the titles of Duke of Veragua and Marquise of Jamaica. With these titles he received an annuity of 1000 Spanish gold doubloons in perpetuity. For the record, on February 12, 1830 by Royal Order, the annuity was reduced to 23.400 pesos, and charged against the following treasures:

- The Philippines 4.000 pesos
- Puerto Rico 3.400 pesos
- Cuba 16.000 pesos

When Spain lost Jamaica to England, the Marquisate of Jamaica dissolved in the wind. By 1912, the annuity was raised (adjusted for inflation) to 24.000 pesos and was still granted in perpetuity to the Duke of Veragua of that time.

Don Diego Colón, the son of the discoverer, had left seven legitimate children: Don Luis, as well as six others, Felipa (a nun), Maria Colón y Toledo, Juana Colón y Toledo, Isabel Colón y Toledo, Cristoval Colón y Toledo, and Diego Colón y Toledo. Don Luis, the Third Admiral and Duke of Veragua, after having lived (to all accounts) a rather dissolute life, including a prison stint in Oran, died without leaving a legitimate son. The inheritance passed on to his brother, Don Cristoval Colón y Toledo, the Fourth Admiral, who had one son, Diego, and one daughter, Francisca. When Don Cristoval died, the rights were passed on to his son Don Diego, the Fifth Admiral. Don Diego, the Fifth Admiral, died in 1578 without progeny and therefore the direct male line of the First Admiral Cristobal Colón, at this time terminated. Doña Francisca Colón, daughter of Don Cristoval Colón y Toledo, the Fourth Admiral, claimed the inheritance and readied herself to do battle in court. But she was not the only Spanish claimant. There were also the descendants of the other three daughters of Don Diego Colón, the Second Admiral, namely, Don Cristoval, son of Maria Colón y Toledo; Don Nuno of Portugal, Count of Gelbes, son of Isabel Colón y Toledo; and the elderly Doña Juana Colón y Toledo.

On the throne of Spain sat King Philip II who, some scholars suggest, felt little sympathy for the Spanish nobles or, for that matter, for the idea of a female becoming the Sixth Admiral. It transpired that King Philip had little trouble in finding other pretenders whom he was more willing to support in the Spanish court. Word soon spread throughout Italy; many Colombos, claiming to be direct descendants of the First Admiral, frantically searched notarial archives in order to appear at the Spanish court armed with as much documentation as possible. Once the Colombo last name was accepted as equally valid as that of "Colón," the last name of Christopher (as shown in his testament), the next step was to determine what, in fact, his father's name was. This was the key to start assembling all the proofs of parentage. The name of Christopher's father, of course, also had to be the same name as the father of the two well-known brothers of the discoverer, namely Bartolomé and Diego (Jacobo, Giacomo).

As earlier confessed, I have been unable to find knowledge of how and when the name Domenico became officially established. I can only paraphrase once more what Christopher's own son concluded after his many speculations and conjectures about his father's parents: he did not know, the subject remained obscure to him.

Italian pretenders to the inheritance were circumscribed by the fact that most documented evidence revealed that names such as Domenico, Christopher, Bartolomeo, and Jacobo (Giacomo) were fairly common among the Colombos of Italy. The biggest challenge lay in sorting out these names in such a manner that they all belonged to the same family. Eventually two of these pretenders succeeded in actually incorporating a name for Christopher's grandfather as well; a third, even the name of his greatgrandfather. One of three known claimants was Anton Francesco Colombo, a canon and doctor from Piacenza. He had accumulated all the documents pertaining to his predecessors, a Colombo family of farmers owning their own land in Pradello, a hamlet in the province of Piacenza. He presented a genealogy traced back to the 1400s which included a Giovanni Colombo, the grandfather of the discoverer, and also a Bertolino Colombo, his

greatgrandfather. Unfortunately for Anton Francesco Colombo, however, he was forced to drop out of the race when he could not produce conclusive evidence relating him to Christopher. Perhaps he reconciled himself with the thought that at least the grandfather of the discoverer could have been the Giovanni Colombo from Pradello. He also failed to produce evidence that the third son of Domenico was named Giacomo.

Below is the family tree of the Colombos from Pradello:

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graph TD
    Bertolino[Bertolino Colombo (1400 ca)] --> Giovanni[Giovanni (his son)]
    Giovanni --> Domenico[Domenico]
    Giovanni --> Nicolo[Nicolo']
    Domenico --> Cristoforo[Cristoforo Bartolomeo (unnamed)]
    Domenico --> Giovanni2[Giovanni Domenichino]
```

This family tree is probably the first attributed to Christopher Columbus. We have accounts of the Colombo family of Pradello from Pietro Maria Campi, a canon in Piacenza who recorded them in detail in his work of 1651, *Dell'istoria ecclesiastica di Piacenza*. Campi had met with Anton Francesco Colombo in 1621 and had seen the notarial documentation pertaining to the case which he identified and described. Campi reported that in 1443 Domenico Colombo moved to Genoa and became a seaman; in 1470, his sons Cristoforo and Bartolomeo had gone to sea as well and never returned. Campi further stated that eventually Anton Francesco Colombo was forced to abandon the case before becoming a petitioner at the Court of Spain because the original of a particular document he considered essential to his case was in Genoa. The asking price of 50 "scudi" was beyond the reach of his purse; besides, he was suspicious of becoming the victim of a fraud. This good canon from Piacenza may well have been the first genealogist to produce a family tree for Christopher that included his greatgrandfather; even so, he could not produce for Campi a potential mother for the discoverer.

The next claimant was a Bernardo Colombo from the village of Cogoleto on the Italian Riviera, located between Genoa and Savona. We know his account from Felice Isnardi who in 1838 in Pinerolo, Piedmont, published a dissertation on the Colombos of Cogoleto. Bernardo Colombo, writes Isnardi, was a poor peasant. With the help of others who hoped to share the inheritance, Bernardo armed himself with what he hoped was sufficient documentation to become a petitioner and traveled to Spain in 1586 to present his case to the Supreme Council of Madrid. Of course, Isnardi comments apologetically, he did not succeed. Being a poorman, how could he compete with the likes of the Toledos and Gelbes? In his long dissertation of 1838, Isnardi dwells on the analysis of some of the most important of Cogoleto's documents.

One in particular is of importance because it is a Domenico Colombo's testament, and it introduces a mother for Christopher. Her name is Maria, wife of Domenico Colombo and

daughter of Iacobi Iusti, from Lerdra near Cogoleto, "Maria ejus uxor et filia Iacobi Iusti de Lerdra villa Cogoleti." This testament records Domenico residing at the time in Cogoleto, with three sons, "Christophorum, Bartholomeum et Iacobum nuper natum (just born)." The testament is dated in Cogoleto, August 23, 1449 and notarized by Agostino Chiodo.

Another document of Bernardo is dated in Cogoleto, August 25, 1468, notarized by Gaspare Ardissonne, and indicates a Domenico Colombo of Cogoleto, son of Giovanni, appearing for a sales contract. On a document dated August 25, 1477, notarized by Antonio Sibantolone, is recorded the name of a Cristoforo Colombo, son of Domenico of Cogoleto. Isnardi also mentions that in the annals of the Dominican fathers of Taggia (dating back to 1460), an entry exists under the year 1498 which translating from the Latin reads: *Christopher Columbus a Ligurian from Cogoleto located between Savona and Genoa.*

I may add that if this entry did exist, it would indicate that from the very early times, Cogoleto attributed to itself the honor of having the great discoverer as its native son. In fact, by perusing the *Atlas Novus Mercator* printed in "Amsterdami" by "Gerardi Marcatoris" in 1638, I discovered that he identified Cogoleto as: "Coguretto Christophori Columbi patria."

In 1650, writes Isnardi, a priest named Antonio Colombo lived in Cogoleto. In the facade of the house that local tradition wants to be the birthplace of Christopher, Antonio had written three inscriptions of which a curious one reads:

Unus erat mundus; duo sunt ait iste, fuere.

There was but one world; let there be two said he, and it was so.

I must restate that Isnardi wrote his dissertation in 1838 at a time when the city of Genoa itself was warming up to assert itself, with its own documentation, to be the true birthplace of Christopher. Isnardi's work, therefore, became part of a growing controversy. However, although I have not examined all of Isnardi's documentation, his work is of considerable importance in this study.

In the family tree of Christopher, according to Isnardi, a name for the discoverer's mother appears for the first time:

Giovanni (of Cogoleto, dead in 1449)

Domenico (residing in Cogoleto in 1449, married to  
Maria, daughter of Iacobi Iusti of Lerdra near Cogoleto)

Cristoforo Bartolome Giacomo (just born)

The last of the three Italian claimants of whom some documentation is available was a unique character. His name was Baldassarre Colombo of Cuccaro Monferrato, a small town in Piedmont between Alessandria and Casale. What is remarkable about Baldassarre is that he possessed hardly any valid documentation to support his case. Nevertheless, not only did he travel to Spain practically destitute to present his petition, but he survived to the end of the proceedings. He remained one of the very few last petitioners facing the court, battling no less than Doña Francisca Colón, the very determined daughter of Cristoval Colón, the Fourth Admiral of the Ocean Sea. The uncompromising determination of "Baltasar Colón" (so named in the court papers) must have appeared to many as a character trait that could only belong to a reincarnated Christopher Columbus.

The proceedings took place in Madrid, then a small city of 30.000, and must have been a great show with the audience taking enthusiastic sides. Baltasar was presumably quite popular, receiving considerable support not only from his sympathizers, but even from King Philip II himself who eventually agreed to pay him supporting expenses (probably by popular demand) to be (eventually) deducted from his future inheritance. The account of Baldassarre Colombo was written in 1808 by Galleani Napione who published his dissertation, *Della patria di Cristoforo Colombo, dissertazione*. I was also able to obtain precious information on the case from a 1586 Spanish printing showing a partial transcript of the court's proceedings titled: *Apuntamiento del hecho por parte de Don Baltasar Colón, Doña Francisca Colón, Don Cristoval Colón pretendores del Estado de Veragua, en los artículos siguientes que estan vistus* (NY Public Library Rare Book Division). Napione points out that Baldassarre was able to convince the court that Cristoforo, in fact, was the son of his Domenico Colombo. The historian writes that two witnesses had apparently been sufficient to prove that Baldassarre's Domenico was the legitimate father of Christopher. From a document presented and dated May 23, 1443, Cuccaro, notarized by Pavone de Bulzano, one can deduce that "Dominico de Columbus," son of the last "Domini Langae," was living in Cuccaro in 1443 and, according to witnesses, had three sons named Cristoforo, Bartolomeo, and Giacomo.

Below is the family tree of Baldassarre Colombo as shown in Napione's work:

Lancia

Enriotto Franceschino Domenico (living in Cuccaro in 1443)

Bonifacio

Baldassarre

Bonifacio

Baldassarre (petitioner)

Unfortunately, Baldassarre lost his case as did Doña Francisca. In 1608, the inheritance was granted by the court to Don Nuño of Portugal, Count of Gelbes, who thus became the Sixth Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Duke of Veragua, and Marquis of Jamaica.

One may ask why there were no petitioners to the Spanish proceedings from the city of Genoa where Christopher himself said he was born and where in the XIX century most of the documentation on Christopher's family would eventually be found. I have been unable to answer this legitimate historical question although I have perused the works of Genoese chroniclers and historians of the XVI and XVII centuries. The lack of records of Genoese claimants, if any existed, could be one answer. Another possible answer is that, in spite of the fact that Cristobal Colón or Colom had declared himself born in Genoa, the quintessentially prudent Genoese were unsure of his family's real origin and last name. (This assumption I will explore later by examining the work of the Genoese historian, Filippo Casoni [1662-1723].)

An important letter published in 1892 by the abbot Angelo Sanguinetti (titled *Della Patria di Cristoforo Colombo*, annotations and notes by G.B. Fazio) shows that the Government of the Republic of Genoa, by vote of the "Serenissimo Senato," gave instructions by letter in 1586 to their Genoese Ambassador Giambattista Doria in residence at the Spanish Royal Court to contribute his assistance to Genoese subjects petitioning for the inheritance. This letter clearly indicates that the Genoese had accepted Cogoleto as the true birthplace of Christopher Columbus; therefore, one concludes, in 1586 the Genoese as yet had found no documentation whatsoever to assert their claim that Genoa was the actual birthplace:

The Colombo of Cogoleto (Christopher Columbus) who is so great in Spain, as you know, has among other things ordered in his testament, according to our understanding, that in his memory a house (?) of his last name be permanently established in Genoa and that for its support he has assigned a good income; furthermore, it seems that his inheritance is open to his relatives and to those related to his last name. It is said that in Madrid his inheritance is disputed among some Spaniards of his last name and some of our subjects who pretend to be his true relatives.

Since this affair is very important and it is righteous to protect our own subjects, we want that you procure a copy of such testament. You will be able to obtain it easily from doctor Scipione Caneva who is at that court. If what we have inferred above is true you must not only obtain the testament but also provide to our Genoese as much help as you possibly can.

Waiting for your news, we know that you will not fail our expectations.

This letter is something the Genoese Government "may have done," because I cannot confirm that the original of this letter ever existed. In this regard, it is also important to

note that the work of the abbot Sanguinetti was not published until 1892 (Savona), the time when controversy on the birthplace of the discoverer was reaching its apex. However, this letter clearly endorsing Cogoleto in 1586 as the origin of Christopher Columbus is historically compatible, as late as 1638, with the Mercator Map which stated: "Coguretto Christophori Columbi patria." Concerning the assistance to Genoese subjects that the Senate of Genoa may have been concerned with, this aid appears to have been particularly directed to Bernardo Colombo of Cogoleto and other Genoese expatriates in Spain who may have considered themselves related to the discoverer.

To repeat, my research on works of Genoese chroniclers and historians of the XVI and XVII centuries has failed to reveal any trace of Genoese claimants. In fact, in the work of Uberto Foglietta, 1559 (Roma) *Di Uberto Foglietta, della Repubblica di Genova* and its revised edition of 1575, Milan), among the famous citizens of Genoa not even Christopher Columbus is recorded! For the historical record, among Genoese Captains mentioned in Foglietta's annals of 1475, there is Biagio D'Assereto, captain of thirteen ships and three galleys who valiantly broke up the Aragonese Armada near Genoa; in 1467, Lazaro Doria with six ships fought the Catalans and acted well, "si comporto' bene"; in 1466, Captain Simone Vignoso, with three ships, was at the service of the Republic of Genoa during the "exploit" in Chios; in 1477, Ludovico di Riparolo, Captain of six galleys acted well, et cetera, to the year 1500. Foglietta was obviously concerned about Genoese captains, but the fact that he never mentioned Christopher Columbus, presumably the most famous of all Genoese captains, is a remarkable omission.

My research of 15th and 16th century Genoese annalists (apart from Giustiniani, Gallo, and Senarega) has yielded no results either. Nor does the Genoese historian Senator Federico Federici (who died in 1647) offer any information about the Genoese Colombos. The annals of the 18th century Genoese Gianbattista Richeri (like Federici, of Patrician origin) failed to shed more light on the issue; his annals from 1299 to 1502 record the existence of 18 Colombos, but no Domenico or Christopher appears in his *Foliatum Notariorum Genuensium* (1724 ca.) (original resides at the "Biblioteca Comunale Berio di Genova"). The MS. of Guglielmo Da Cassina includes annals dated from 1191 and offers no lead either.

In summary, until we reach the 18th century, heralded by the 1708 work of Genoese annalist Filippo Casoni (1662-1723), the Genoese do not appear concerned about locating the great discoverer's family in the city of Genoa. Nor do they appear preoccupied with whether documents in their notarial archives could prove such existence "with any degree of certainty." Genoese scholars until the time of Casoni, it seems, had a real problem in pairing the name of Colón or Colom with documentation showing the name Colombo. In fact, this uncertainty endured even after 1708 since Casoni's work, which produced a great revelation, was not published until 1799 (Genova). Genoese scholars of the 16th and 17th centuries, one may speculate, waited before pronouncing themselves for the ultimate outcome of the Spanish Court's examination of the documentation presented by the Colombos of Cuccaro and Cogoleto.



The verdict of the Court had not been favorable to the Colombos of Cuccaro and Cogoleto. But one determining factor had emerged from the Spanish hearings, namely that not only had the last name of Colombo been accepted as equally valid as the name of Colón, but Spain had also legitimated as legal precedent the name of Domenico as Christopher's father and Giovanni as his grandfather. The city of Genoa had stayed on the sideline, but the fact that Christopher now had a well identified Italian family was a great breakthrough for anyone concerned with his origin.

Genoese scholars nevertheless remained extremely cautious about taking a firm position until the 19th century when they could produce "hard genealogical facts" on their own. However, while the Madrid court proceedings were still in progress, the jurisconsult Giulio Salinerio from Savona, Genoa's sister city, published in 1602 (Genoa) some legal deeds related to the Admiral. These had previously been found in the local archives of his city by Giovanni Giacomo Pavese (1566-1612?). Salinerio published these deeds in his work, *Adnotationes Iulii Salinerii iureconsul Savonensis ad Cornelium Tacitum*. One document dated in Savona, March 2, 1470 (notary Giovanni Gallo), states that Bartolomeo Castegnelli of the last Nicola Fontanabuona bound himself as apprentice to serve his master Domenico Colombo, a woolweaver and tavernkeeper, citizen of Genoa and son of Giovanni from Quinto, until the next Easter.

This document from Savona represents the first piece of what eventually (once it became integrated with later 19th century documents found "piecemeal" in the archives of Genoa) would become a complex mosaic establishing the most accepted genealogy of the discoverer. Based on a Domenico Colombo as father of Christopher which paternity had been accepted by the Spanish Court, this important document shows multiple levels of implication. It reveals that Domenico is a citizen of Genoa and that his father, named Giovanni, lived in Quinto (a small village on the Riviera five miles south of Genoa) and that any further research for Christopher's past relatives would have to lead in that direction. It further shows that Domenico resided at the time in Savona, working as a tavernkeeper and a woolweaver which latter activity he previously professed in Genoa. It confirms the statement made by Antonio Gallo that Christopher's father was a "textor" or weaver in the wool manufacturing business or "lanifici."

A second document from Savona, dated September 10, 1484, states that Giacomo Colombo, son of Domenico a citizen of Genoa, voluntarily pledges and bounds himself for 22 months as an apprentice, "famulus et discipulus" to Luchino Cademartori in order to learn the craft of woolweaver, and that the aforesaid Giacomo was over 16 years of age. Here we have the name of the youngest of the three sons of Domenico also mentioned by Gallo, who stated that Giacomo was the younger, "ac tertium fratrem Jacobum." If Giacomo in 1484 was at least 16 years old, we deduce he could have been born in 1467.

A third document dated in Savona, January 26, 1501, states that in that year the neighbors of the Colombo family declare before a magistrate of that city that "Cristofori, Bartolomei et Jacobi de Columbibus quondam Dominici, et ipsius heredum..." Or, in

substance, that the three sons of the last Domenico, here named, and his heirs are absent from Savona and are known to be living in Spain. The document further explains that "Jacobus" has assumed the Spanish version of his name and is known as Diego: "Jacobum dictum Diegum."

With this last document presented by Salinerio, a new family tree for Christopher can be drawn:

Giovanni Colombo (from Quinto)

Domenico (a woolweaver citizen of Genoa, dead by 1501)

Cristoforo Bartolomeo Giacomo (Diego)

(In 1501, known to be living in Spain)

In 1602, then, Salinerio lays claim to the first Savonese connection. This will be of great importance later in the 19th century when the Genoese begin to assert their claim to Columbus. Soon after Salinerio's revelations, however, the Genoese began to stir the waters. In 1614 (six years after the Spanish hearings were concluded), the Genoese Gerolamo Bordoni published in Milan a new Italian edition of Don Fernando Colón's *Historie...*. Bordoni, according to Giuseppe Pessagno, was the Master of Ceremonies of the Republic of Genoa. He dedicated his work, *F. Colombo vita di C. Colombo*, to the Most Serene Republic of Genoa. At the beginning of this new edition, he added (possibly for the first time in print) the letters of correspondence dated 1502 between the Bank of Saint George, Christopher and his son Don Diego, as well as excerpts from the testament of "Cristobal Colon" of 1498 and the codicil of 1506. We analyzed these three letters earlier in this chapter: the letter of April 2, 1502, wherein the Admiral signs with his cryptic Roman lettering and "Xpo ferens"; and the two letters of December 8, 1502, addressed by the Bank to "Domino Cristoforo... amatissime concivis" and to Don Diego, his son. The name Colombo or Columbus does not appear in any of them.

Bordoni, unfortunately, does not add to this correspondence any documentation (if available) relative to the Genoese family of Christopher. For this documentation to become public, another century would have to pass until 1708 when Genoese Filippo Casoni takes on the task of presenting a Genoese genealogy of Christopher's family. He does so in a work which would be posthumously published in Genoa in 1799 titled, *Annali della Repubblica di Genova*. The Discoverer's epitome is (just as Gallo's) under the year 1506.

Casoni begins this annal with a most revealing statement: Cristoforo Colombo, he writes, ended his days at the age of 60! This abrupt statement, after 200 years of total silence on the part of the Genoese annalists, comes as a dramatic revelation. It clearly implies that, having died in 1506, Christopher must have been born in 1446. But Casoni has many more surprises in store. He attempts to equate the last name "Colom" (used occasionally

by the Discoverer) with that of Colombo. Casoni arrives at this intriguing similitude in oblique fashion: The family of the Colombo, "or rather of the Colom," he contrives, has been very honored in the region of Liguria since ancient times! What this clever manipulation of the two last names tries to convey is that "Colom" stands for nothing else but Colombo. With this artifice, his Christopher Colombo is created, and he can now proceed to formulate the discoverer's Genoese genealogy from the documentation which must have been available to him at the time.

Casoni's predecessors had been stymied by the many aliases of the Admiral, i.e., Colom, Colón, Colonus, and Colomo, and they had been unable or unwilling to resort to Casoni's daring assertion. The ancestors of Christopher, Casoni reveals, lived in an area called "Terrarossa" near Nervi on a slope of "Monte Fasce," located somewhere between Moconesi and Fontanabuona which gives the name to the valley where an old tower called the "Colombi" is still located. Christopher's grandfather, he further reveals, was named Giovanni from Quinto who was still alive in 1440. The father, named Domenico, was a citizen of Genoa living in the parish of Santo Stefano (the Benedictine Abbey of Santo Stefano dating from 972 A.D. which still exists today near "Via 20 Settembre" and is now under parochial priests). Now Casoni throws the genealogical bombshell: the mother was named Susanna Fontanarossa, and she was born in Saulo Luogo near Nervi. For many years, Domenico and Susanna "vissero insieme" (lived together, were they not married?) and their first "fruit" was Cristoforo!

Obviously Casoni was a qualified and well-respected scholar who knew all too well how to employ the meaning of words. After Christopher, two more "males," according to Casoni, were born: Bartolomeo and Giacomo. Also a daughter (Casoni does not name her, but considerably refers to her as daughter rather than as "female") who married one Giacomo Bavarello. Christopher lived in his parents' house which, the annalist suggests, must have been quite affluent, since Domenico besides his possessions in Quinto had also acquired two houses in Genoa in a good neighborhood and was self-employed in the honorable profession of woolweaving. Nevertheless, he comments, Christopher and Bartholomy disdained such a mundane profession and, following Genoese tradition, went to sea "in 1459." According to Casoni, then, Christopher sailed away to sea more or less at the age of 14, which corresponds with the discoverer's own statement.

Below is the new Colombo family tree, according to Casoni:

Giovanni (from Quinto alive in 1440)

Domenico (a citizen of Genoa, lived with Susanna Fontanarossa, born in Saulo Luogo near Nervi)

Cristoforo Bartolomo Giacomo (a daughter, married to Giacomo Bavarello)

So in 1779, the munificent Casoni's work opened a floodgate of information that would feed Columbian Literature for two hundred successive years. We will now document how

with the birth of the 19th century, many scholars took full advantage of Casoni's extraordinary revelations.

However, before entering this new century of critical studies pertaining to the origin of the discoverer, it is of importance to briefly resume our chronological paths through the earliest documentation. First was Giulio Salinerio who in 1602 brought to light just a few documents from Savona; then the annals of Pietro Maria Campi in 1651 on Anton Francesco Colombo from Pradello; and lastly Filippo Casoni's work, which would be published posthumously in 1799. Clearly, then, this documented evidence over the course of two centuries appeared as sparingly as the finding of needles in a haystack. This is understandable not only because the research was laborious, but also because literary men and scholars in general have always been reluctant to expose themselves to ridicule or unpleasant criticism.

To my knowledge, the first 19th century publication which appeared in print was the work (already examined) of Galleani Napione (Giovanni Francesco, Count of "Cocconato and Passareto"). Under the auspices of the Imperial Academy of Sciences of Turin, he published his 1808 dissertation on Baldassare Colombo of Cuccaro, detailing this remarkable man's exploits at the Spanish Court hearings of 1578. With his dissertation, Napione revived the claim of Cuccaro as the true fatherland of the great discoverer, and may have provided the sparkling flame that ignited the interest of 19th century scholars, motivating them to at least challenge his preposterous assertions.

Still, scholars came forth reluctantly, as we see in the case of Tommaso Belloro who, after Napione, published additional documentation on Columbus. During my research, I had come across the name Tommaso Belloro, a literary man from Savona who had apparently published a book in Turin in 1810. I hoped he had produced important new findings on this issue. Determined to find his book, I traveled to Italy, where after making various telephone inquiries, was finally successful in locating it. The product probably of a limited printing, this book upon examination appeared more intriguing than a rare document. When I examined it, I realized at once its cover and preface were as revealing as its contents. For one thing, the author's name did not appear on the cover, only the names of the owner of the printing press in Turin and the typesetter, who was Genoese. The name of the author, however, had been identified by the library from the preface and written by hand on the cover as G.T. Belloro and catalogued as such. The title on the cover, in itself somewhat ambiguous, reflected in its formulation the evidence of great prudence. In English translation, it reads: *Notice of 15 papers concerning "a" Savonese family of the Colombos*. Inside, the author dared to be more explicit, the English translation reading: *Notice of documents existing in the notarial archives of Savona concerning "the" family of Christopher Columbus*. The preface, written in letter format to the publisher in Turin, is a piece of adroit literary craftsmanship in its careful evasiveness, being written by Giuseppe Nervi in the name of his father-in-law, Giovanni Tommaso Belloro "who is not well." Nervi elaborately clarifies the intentions of Belloro, stating: truly he had not intended on his own volition to write this commentary, but the publisher had expressly requested it; that the new findings presented in this book

concerning Columbus were naturally inherent in such a "restless subject"; that this commentary, no matter how it ends up being interpreted, will not really matter anyway; and besides, "a panel of prominent literaries from different places, as soon as they are able to get together, will deliberate on it." In any event, paraphrasing Nervi, the documents presented (which he considered indisputably authentic) prove that Christopher Columbus was born on the "Liguria Marittima" (Italian Riviera) and the people of Pradello or Cuccaro should be pleased that Columbus' grandfather Giovanni may have originated in one of these two places.

In his conclusions, Belloro disclaims even further his own responsibility by reminding readers that the deeds presented (14 from Savona and one from Genoa) had already been examined by men of the calibre of Pavese, the notary Andrea Siri, Salinerio, Pollero, Verzellino and, finally, by Belloro himself, a distinctive literary man with profound knowledge of such ancient documents. From these legal deeds, asserts Nervi, one can ascertain that Christopher's grandfather lived in Quinto and his father Domenico in Genoa. In 1470 (from what may be deduced from the deed of April 14, 1472, Genoa Not. Ambrogio Garumbero), Domenico "parted from some land sold in Bisagno (near Genoa) and his possessions in Genoa" and established himself in Savona where he lived with his three sons, "Christofaro, Bartolomeo, and Giacomo." Here he joined the local association of wool-manufacturers and woolweavers. In 1473 (March 12, Savona, Not. Federico Castro Delfino), Domenico appears as a master woolweaver, and in 1474 (August 19, Savona Not. Giovanni Ruggero) purchases some land in Valcada, village of leggine, Savona. At an unknown date, Domenico dies in Savona (Belloro presumably guessed). Nervi, unfortunately, made no mention of Christopher's mother as Casoni had done in his revealing annals.

Soon after Belloro's publication, a panel of Genoese scholars did, in fact (as noted by Nervi), take on the "restless subject" of Christopher's origin. These scholars, namely Serra, Carrega, and Piaggio, who were sponsored by the Academy of Sciences, Literature and Arts of Genoa, published their findings in 1812. Their work is titled:

***Ragionamento... or Reasoning in which is confirmed the general opinion on the Fatherland of Christopher Columbus.***

In their 53-page report critically analyzing the pretensions of Pradello, Cuccaro, and Cogoleto, the academicians conclude simply that they "concur" with the prior assessment of various other scholars including the American ambassador Barlow, the geographer Haltebrun, the American annalist Holmes, and the erudite writer Corniani. Such scholars as these "no less than us," the Academicians state, believed it certain that Christopher was not only a Genoese by origin, but also by birth.

In all fairness to these name-dropping academicians seeking concurrence in the opinions of distinguished authority figures, they did produce important leads which proved their research had been as thorough as possible. They referred to the information obtained by Belloro from the archives of Savona and regretted that Casoni's revelations were left unsubstantiated. Still they elaborated on Casoni's findings, implying that Domenico, for

example, was married to Susanna Fontanarossa, contrary to Casoni's statement they were merely "living together." The academicians were prompt to appreciate Casoni's precious information that Domenico had lived in the parish of Santo Stefano, and capitalized on this important historical lead. By concentrating their investigation in this direction, they learned that this parish was in fact during Columbus' time much populated by woolweavers. They also discovered that the records of the Benedictine Abbey of that name (after monks had relinquished it in the 18th century) had been removed to the archives of the city-hall during which relocation many of them had been lost. An ancient manuscript of Genoese genealogies, claims the academicians, confirms these facts. In the past, some footnotes had been added to the MS. by a well-known, respected notary named Piaggio, an ancestor of one of the present investigating academicians. The notary had written that he had seen a baptismal list in the papers of that abbey, ever since lost, with the name of Christopher. And, additionally, that the monks who owned that part of the city had given to a Domenico Colombo a long-term lease (emphyteusis) on a house. Piaggio was correct, state the academicians, since their own examination of some records at the archives (located in a small book of receipts, dated from 1456 to 1489) confirmed that Domenico had paid rent to the monks up until 1489 for a house he inhabited in "vicoletto di Mulcento" or Mulcento alley which his son-in-law later took over. They also discovered that Domenico, concurrently with the house in Mulcento alley, had leased another one near the gate of "Sant' Andrea (or Porta Soprana). But at this point in their search for documentation, the academicians seem to have lost their impetus.

Although the academicians revealed no further information on the second house of Domenico, a legal deed found later indicates this house had also been leased from the monks of Santo Stefano and was located just outside the city walls in "Vico Dritto." This document dated January 18, 1455, now resides at the "Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana" Cod. 9452, part II, Not. Giovanni Recco. Today this two-story house with backyard has been restored and is known as the "Casa di Colombo." It is located in "Piazza Dante" just outside the surviving gate of "Porta Soprana." (For further information on the Casa di Colombo, read the comprehensive work of Marcello Staglieno.)

In 1812, then, only two years after Belloro's work, offering a Savonese connection, had been published, and the information provided by the academicians on the whereabouts of Domenico in Genoa had been made available in the *Ragionamento...*, a clear challenge was sounded for further Genoese scholars to take up the gauntlet of Columbus' origin, and carry the battle forward.

In 1818, Sig. Luigi Bossi published in Milan his *Vita de Cristoforo Colombo*. His work, however, based not on new research but commentaries on the *Ragionamento...* and other previously known information, offers no new leads. In his interesting appendix, he illustrates the early Spanish and Italian letters Spanish and Italian letters pertaining to Christopher. He also comments on the *Historie...* of Don Fernando Colón and wonders at the strange fact that the biographer chose "for some particular motives" to pull a veil or "tirar un velo" on the obscure origin of his father. Bossi sets the date of Christopher's birth, in Genoa or nearby, of ca. 1445, thus concurring with Casoni. Later the

authoritative HARRISSE would agree on setting the date at 1446, a chronology which remained generally uncontested until 1887 (and even afterwards) when the Genoese Marquis Marcello Staglieno found evidence in a newly discovered deed that Christopher could have been born before October 31 of the year 1451.

In 1819, the Genoese cleric Don Giambattista Spotorno, a new member of the "Genoese School" called to order, so to speak, by the academicians, namely Serra, Carrega, and Piaggio, published in Genoa his work, *Della origine e della patria di Cristoforo Colombo*. Spotorno gives us inside information about what was really known at the Academic Circle of the Genoese on the birthplace of Christopher. It turns out they could not agree, in fact, whether he had been born in Genoa or nearby. The cleric records the findings up to that time on the thorny issue of Columbus' genealogy. He comments on the *Ragionamento...*, quite literally copying the most salient parts. So far as new findings in Genoa or elsewhere, he apparently had nothing new to add. From Savona, he excerpts nine of the already known documents, and concludes (contrary to Casoni) that Domenico was a poor man who could not raise 250 lire over a period of five years to pay a debt. He adds that Domenico lived in Savona many years, and in 1474 was still alive and well.

In 1823, Spotorno masterminded the *Codice Colombo-Americano*, published by the city of Genoa, a comprehensive collection of papers pertaining to Christopher Columbus. The book includes the letters in facsimile of the correspondence exchanged between Columbus and the Bank of Saint George as well as a substantial portion of the Spanish documents found by Muñoz and Navarrete, whose work is described in Chapter 9. This publication undoubtedly raised great interest in Italy, but does not interest us insofar as it offers no new revelations from the Genoese scholars.

Fifteen years later, the town of Cogoleto revived its own claim as the birthplace of Columbus. Its patriotic countryman Felice Isnardi published his work of 1838 with a lengthy title that leaves no misunderstanding to Italian readers: *Dissertazione onde e' chiarito il luogo preciso della Liguria Marittima Occidentale ove nacque Cristoforo Colombo*. If translated into English liberally, the title would read, more or less: Dissertation in which it is clarified that the exact birthplace of Christopher Columbus is Cogoleto! From this work by Isnardi, we earlier obtained information about Bernardo Colombo's petition to the Spanish court in 1586.

We can only speculate about what motivated Isnardi to assert so fervently the "birthrights" of Cogoleto at this particular time. Perhaps it was the pretensions which had been set forth in other places. But Isnardi's patriotic passions may have been directed particularly at the Genoese scholars. Although Genoa had not yet come up with hard facts, the highly successful publication of *Codice...* had promoted Genoa to the forefront of Columbian scholarship. Thus Isnardi's fervent defense of the primacy of Cogoleto may well reflect his irritation with the composed attitude of the Genoese scholars, their prudent silences, their proverbial pride, which seemed to infer that the entire world should take for granted that Columbus was born in Genoa.

Isnardi rested his case for Cogoleto with a statement as unequivocal as the title of his work: "We challenge anyone and 'guai' (great trouble) to whoever will accept our glove!" Genoa did not respond to his challenge, probably because the most important documentation supporting a Genoese Columbus resided in the archives of Savona. No doubt Savona was, in fact, already more than satisfied in being able to prove that the great discoverer, in his long stopover in their city before sailing to fame, had actually been their beloved fellow-citizen. But Savona picked up the glove anyway, beginning in earnest a fierce battle of printed works between literaries which lasted for considerable time. If Christopher himself had been present, he would probably have been anxiously awaiting the outcome, hoping to find out, finally, where his mother Susanna in her wanderings on the Italian Riviera, had settled long enough to give him birth.

The Savonese lawyer Giambattista Belloro, brother of Tommaso, acting more or less as Genoese surrogate, armed himself to do battle, publishing in 1839 his *Critical review on the dissertation of Felice Isnardi*. Belloro created an informed and eloquent answer to Isnardi, supported by deeds which had newly emerged (the battle of the deeds!). Isnardi's now desperate defense quickly began to crumble. Finding the printing presses of the "Stamperia Casamara" of Genoa obviously well-disposed toward his efforts, Belloro published in the same year an appendix to his previous work. In it, he sets Cogoleto's pretense to Columbian supremacy back to 1568, when Bernardo's petition had been rejected by the Spanish Crown for insufficient documentation.

If the Belloro-Isnardi squabble should have been a catalyst to stimulate needed research work in Genoa, it unfortunately failed. The War of Independence interfered until the 1861 unification of Italy, which became a Kingdom under King Victor Emmanuel II of the House of Savoy, and Genoa emerged as regional capitol of "Liguria." With nationalistic spirit at high peak, the Genoese School finally developed the determination to establish a team of researchers dedicated to find the legal evidence and settle, once and for all, the issue of Christopher's birthplace. The team was led by the last archivist of the Bank of Saint George, Cornelio Desimoni, who became superintendent of the State Archives of Genoa; it included the Marquis Marcello Staglieno and L.T. Belgrano. Joining their effort in order to certify to the world their findings, was the French-American Henry Harrisse, the internationally known expert on Columbian documentation. Harrisse arrived in Genoa in 1867; in 1888, he had published both in New York and London his *Christopher Columbus and the Bank of Saint George*, recording the positive results of the Genoese general effort. He had already published these results in French in 1884 under the title, *Christophe Colomb son origine...*. An Italian version of the 1888 work was also published in Genoa in 1890.

Recounting his experiences in Genoa, Harrisse uses the collective "we," including Desimoni, Staglieno and Belgrano. They had gone to work examining "mountains of bundles of documents" at the Bank of Saint George including tax collections, which had been one of the responsibilities of the defunct Bank. They also poured over the "Tabella Defunctorum," or the listing of the deceased. Their efforts at the Bank, however, yielded very few results. The most important documents, Harrisse reveals, were found in the



Special Section of the Notarial Archives, where all deeds were collected after the death of each public notary.

Summarizing their findings in his work, HARRISSE described dozens of new documents, but uncovered no new legal evidence that Christopher was born in Genoa. However, a document of great importance was found, I may add, by Staglieno who published it in 1887 in the *Giornale Ligustico A.XIV, p. 239*. Dated October 31, 1470 Not. Nicola Raggio, this document shows that a Christopher Columbus, son of Domenico, was at that date "over" 19 years old. This established that Christopher's date of birth had to be between 1446 and 1451 (the lengthy Genoese statutes of the time contained different majorities, reaching to the age of 25). HARRISSE opted for a birthdate after May 24, 1446 and before March 20, 1447. The other luminary of the time, Henry Vignaud, argued instead for a birthdate of 1451. In any event, this new finding by Staglieno would tax the skill of scholars and stir up controversy at least until 1904. In this year, the scholarly journal *Giornale Storico e Letterario della Liguria... La Spezia, 1904, 25ma, vol. 5, pp. 5-16*, announced a great new find on the birthdate of Christopher by the Genoese General Ugo Assereto. Sometime toward the end of the century, while searching for ancestral documents, the General found in his hands what turned out to be a highly revelatory document. This "Assereto Document," dated Genoa, August 25, 1479, Not. Gerolamo Ventimiglia, indicated that a Christopher Columbus of an unnamed father declared to be at that time a citizen of Genoa "approximately" 27 years old. Once compared with the Staglieno find of 1887, this precious new evidence set the birthdate between August 26 and October 30, 1451. Unfortunately for the present work, HARRISSE maintained his preference for his 1446 dating. He died in 1910 without expressing in print, to my knowledge, his authoritative opinion about this amazingly lucky find. Although the Assereto Document is a legal deed, it fails to record the paternity of Christopher, an omission which continues to arouse scholarly attention even now.

A summary of the relevant facts derived from the latest finds of Genoese researchers (which are still considered generally valid today) is provided by the 1926 work of the Genoese Giuseppe Pessagno. These conclusions as well as his own further studies were published in the *Miscellanea Storica-Atti della Societa' Ligure di Storia Patria, vol. III*.

Fundamentally, Pessagno states in his general work, "the Columbian question, apart from useless polemic, is reduced to the following points": Columbus was born in Genoa in 1451 from Domenico of Giovanni and Susanna Fontanarossa of Iacobo. He had three brothers, Bartolomeo, Giacomo, Giovanni-Pellegrino, and a sister, Bianchettina, who married Giacomo Bavarello. His father Domenico, a woolweaver by profession and moonlighting as an innkeeper, also served two short terms as the keeper of Olivella's Gate, not far from his residence in Mulcento alley. He was appointed for this post by the city of Genoa. His other house was in Vico Dritto outside Saint Andrea's Gate, or Porta Soprana. Regarding the history of Columbus during the early years of his life, Pessagno provides this assessment of his whereabouts: in 1465, the 14-year-old Columbus sailed for what must have been short voyages since, in 1473, he was still working in Savona. From 1473 to 1475, he may have joined the Genoese naval expeditions to the island of

Chios in the Levant. In 1476, he was probably on board ships of the Genoese merchants Spinola and Di Negro, in a convoy directed to England. His ship was attacked near Cape S. Vicente, was on fire and sinking, but Columbus survived by swimming to shore, later reaching Lisbon. In 1477, on ships probably owned by Doria, he navigated to Bristol. In 1478, in the services of Di Negro, Columbus reached the Portuguese Island of Madera; in 1479, he was in Genoa (Assereto Document) where he testified on behalf of Paolo Di Negro.

After this brief summary of Pessagno`s conclusions, we arrive in the chronology of events to the 1932 work, *Colombo*, published by the city of Genoa. For all practical purposes, our literary journey has now come full circle back to the first Genoese work introduced in this chapter. "Dulcis in fundo,"--I will now make my own critical contribution to the study of the origin of Christopher Columbus. In my interpretation, a 525-year-old document (probably first published by Giambattista Belloro in his 1839 work) offers compelling proof that the discoverer was in fact born out of wedlock and abandoned by his real father, a father most probably he never knew, although he carried his family name.

In this Latin document dated in Savona, August 7, 1473, Not. Pietro Corsaro, Susanna Fontanarossa agrees to the sale of rights to the house which her husband Domenico Colombo leased in Mulcento Alley near Olivella's Gate. Susanna is present with only two (of their five) children to give their legal authorization to the transaction. The two children are identified as "Cristoforo and Giovanni Pellegrino," sons of the aforesaid parents. In addition to her husband Domenico Colombo, there are two witnesses, namely Bartolomeo De Cademartori and Pascuale Di Castagnello from Fontanabuona, both of whom knew Susanna and are acting in her behalf.

This basically summarizes the content of the two-page notarial deed. As clearly shown in its original text (and my English translation) and the photocopy of the original deed presented below, the notary has curiously crossed out the names of "Cristoforo and Giovanni Pellegrino," as well as other critical passages relating to their paternity.

Latin transcript with the parts crossed out by the Notary emphasized:

In nomine Domini, amen. Anno salutiffere nativitatis eiusdem millesimo quadingentesimo septuagesimo tercio, indicione sexta secundum cursum civitatis Saone, die vero sabati, septima mesis augusti.

Sozana filia quondam Iacobi de Fontanarubea de Bezagno et uxor Dominici de Columbo de Ianua, *ac Christoforus et Iohannes Pelegrinus filii dictorum Dominici et Sozane iugalium, et cum auctoritate et consensu dictorum parentum suorum, presentium*, consensientium et auctoritatem eorum prestantium, constituta in presencia mei notarii et testium infrascriptorum, *sponte, consulte, deliberate*, sciens et perfectam scientiam habens dictum Dominicum de Columbo virum ipsius Suzane, *et*

*patrem ipsorum Christofori et Iohannis Pellegrini*, vendidisse et alienasse et seu vendere et alienare velle quondam domum ipsius Dominici sitam in civitate Ianue, in contrata porte Orivelle....

English literal translation (except for the date):

In the name of the Lord, amen. Year of the salutary nativity of the Lord 1473, injunction sixth according to the course of the city of Savona, Saturday the seventh of the month of August.

Susanna daughter of Jacob of Fontanarossa in Bisagno and wife of Domenico Colombo from Genoa, *and Christopher and Giovanni Pellegrino, sons of the aforesaid consorts Domenico and Susanna, and with the authority and consent of their aforesaid parents, present*, in agreement and guaranteeing with their own authority, convened in the presence of myself, a notary, and of the undermentioned witnesses, *freely, consult, deliberate*, \* knowing and been perfectly cognizant that the said Domenico Colombo, husband of the said Susanna *and father of the aforesaid Christopher and Giovanni Pellegrini*, has sold or alienated or desires to sell and alienate a house of the aforesaid Domenico situated in the city of Genoa, in the street of the Olivella's Gate...

My interpretation of why the notary has crossed out the names of "Cristoforo and Giovanni Pellegrino" differs significantly from the analysis offered by authoritative scholars of the past, whose reasoning is still generally accepted by historians.

Contrary to previous interpretations, the two children are, as the document clearly indicates, "Cristoforo Pellegrino and Giovanni-Pellegrino"--not "Cristoforo and Giovanni-Pellegrino Colombo," sons of Domenico. It follows, then, that the two abovementioned children are to be identified only as sons of Susanna Fontanarossa, although their mother was, at the time of this deed, married to Domenico Colombo. We must assume then that after Susanna had given birth to Cristoforo and Giovanni, fathered by a man whose last name was Pellegrino, she must later have met Domenico Colombo and probably (as Casoni states) lived with him for some time. Eventually Susanna married Domenico Colombo and in time their union produced three more children, namely Bartolomeo, Giacomo and Bianchettina, who became Cristoforo's half-brothers and half-sister. It can be assumed also that Cristoforo later on became generally recognized as the son of Domenico Colombo, as indeed the two witnesses in the deed testified to the best of their knowledge.

Why did the notary cross out the names of "Cristoforo and Giovanni Pellegrino?" I reason it was because Domenico Colombo had not legally adopted them. The notary has left intact, in fact, the name of the mother, but significantly crossed out the words establishing Domenico Colombo as the father of the two children:

...at patrem ipsorum Christofori et Johannis Pellegrini...

...and father of the aforesaid Christopher and Giovanni Pellegrini...

At the end of the deed, the notary recorded, without further cancellations, the presence of the two children as agreeing and consenting to the sale.

For an explanation why the other three children of Susanna and Domenico were not included in the transaction, I refer readers to the following explanations offered by scholars:

In 1896 (Comm. Colombiana, parte 2, vol. I, p. 32), Marcello Staglieno states, for example, that Giacomo, being at the time (i.e., 1473) less than 18 years old, was not yet of legal age. In considering the omission of Bartolomeo's name from the deed, Staglieno argues only that he must have been out of the country ("certainly he was not in Savona."). The scholar does not mention the absence of Bianchettina's name, but my own research shows that as a daughter, she possessed no rights of entitlement (in Liguria, daughters, according to Roman law, were not heirs to their father).

Staglieno offers no reason why the notary crossed out critical passages of the deed, presumably not wishing to engage in a critical examination of a document so potentially controversial. However, he did record the fact that Cesare De Lollis, another historical luminary, did not agree that Bartolomeo was out of the country. De Lollis had asserted, in fact, that according to a deed of Savona, dated June 16, 1480 Not. Ansaldo Basso, Bartolomeo was still in town because on that date (7 years later) Domenico had given power of attorney to him.

However, neither Staglieno nor De Lollis, in their apparent squabble, focus attention to the real issue in the document, which is not whether Bartolomeo was in or out of town, but why the two children are given the last name of Pellegrino. This clearly documented fact simply cannot be ignored or deflected by scholars.

Henry Vignaud considered this critical document in his London work of 1903, titled *Critical Study...* After explaining the general content of the deed, Vignaud then presents only the first part of the passages which were crossed out by the notary:

...Christopher and Giovanni Pellegrino, sons of the said couple Domenico and Susanne and with the permission and consent of the said parents, present, consenting, and authorising...

His opinion of the notary's reason for crossing out this particular passage is stated as follows:

Thus the notary, after thinking it was well to stipulate that it was with the sanction of their parents that Christopher and Pellegrino convey their

consent to the intended sale, judged this formality needless and suppressed it.

Having offered an acceptable reason for the cancellation by the notary, Vignaud does not elaborate further, and offers no analysis of the other deleted passages.

But if we examine more closely the crossed-out section of the deed presented by Vignaud, we see that the following words were also deleted:

...the said parents, present...

Vignaud`s interpretation does not take into account the real legal motive prompting the notary to cancel out the phrase attesting the presence of "the said parents..."--the parents were not in fact present, only the mother Susanna!

Vignaud also failed to bring into clear perspective the most salient passage crossed out by the notary:

...and father of the aforesaid Christopher and Giovanni Pellegrini...

In essence, precisely the passage which clearly indicates Domenico was not the father!

In the final analysis, then, Vignaud offers at best only a partial interpretation, obscuring or refusing to deal fully with the real content and significance of the deed.

Let us now explore the opinion of the expert documentarist Henry Harrisse. As we shall see, this task is difficult insofar as Harrisse couches his interpretation in language which is evasive and philosophically cryptic in the extreme, obviously reflecting the scholar's desire, in spite of his elaborate disclaimers, not to upset the status quo of canonical interpretations.

Consider the following quote from his *Christopher Columbus and the Bank of Saint George*, New York, 1888, p. 74:

Yet the human mind is so constituted that it is materially impossible to make tabula rasa (to forget) of all previous knowledge. What we need to guard against, therefore, is that the document should be made to tally (agree) a priori (first) with what is already known. On the contrary, it is the information that we possess (what we believe is the truth) which must a posteriori (afterward) tally (agree) with the document. Now everybody is aware (believes) that Domenico Colombo had not two children only, but five, viz., Cristoforo, Giovanni-Pellegrini, Bartolomeo, Diego, and a daughter, Bianchinetta, married to a cheesemonger called Bavarello. ***How is it, then, that only two of these children are mentioned in the summons?***

[Emphasis mine]

I have emphasized critical passages and placed interpretive aids inside the parentheses, to aid readers in following HARRISSE's argument. What he seems to be saying "with extreme caution" (in order not to upset the well-established scholarly canon based on the fact that Domenico and Susanna had five children while this deed mentions only two)--is that we must contend with these two and forget, for the moment, the other three!

Of the two children shown in the deed, HARRISSE must certainly have had an opinion about the surprising last name of Pellegrino, but he declines further speculation. On page 78 he returns, in fact, to the subject of our deed, reassuring the reader that the "only one new element" presented in the document is the name of Christopher Columbus' mother:

We gather from the present act *only one new element* for our analysis, viz., the name of Christopher Columbus's mother. [Emphasis mine.]

I find it extremely difficult to believe that Henry HARRISSE, one of the most expert documentarists of his time, was not aware in 1888 that Susanna, wife of Domenico Colombo, appears in a previous deed dated May 25, 1471, Genova, Notary Francesco Camogli. This deed was published by Giambattista Belloro in his "*Revista Critica...*, Genova," 1839, pp. 40, 55, and 56. Susanna is identified as "Susanna figlia Del Quondam Giacomo de Fontanarossa e moglie di Domenico Colombo."

The "only one new element" in the deed of August 7, 1473 is not Susanna, Christopher's mother, but her son Giovanni-Pellegrino whose name *does not appear in any other deed!*

In my opinion, the four abovementioned scholars simply could not conceive or, if so, could not reveal the simple fact established by this unique deed, namely that Christopher Columbus' real name was, in fact, Christopher Pellegrino. Instead they chose to agree, on paper at least, to a child with two hyphenated first names, called "Giovanni-Pellegrino." This curious concoction can only be understood, if not exactly justified, if we consider the general unwillingness of 19th century scholars to upset the established Columbian canon, risk their academic reputations, and create chaos in the great mosaic of synchronous deeds so laboriously assembled in Genova and Savona on the genealogy of Christopher Columbus.

The only question which remains is when Cristoforo Pellegrino called himself "Cristoforo Colombo." One must assume naturally that when Christopher grew to adulthood in Italy and needed credentials, he would identify himself as the son of Domenico Colombo. Three notarial deeds exist, in fact, in which Christopher, in the presence of witnesses, identified himself precisely in this manner. With respect to the testimony of these witnesses, however, it must be kept in perspective that witnesses testify "only to the best of their knowledge."

These documents consist of three legal deeds, all related to debts incurred by Christopher.

The first dated in Genova, September 22, 1470, Not. Giacomo Calvi., reveals a 19-year old Christopher stipulating a compromise for a debt incurred by him and his father Domenico Colombo.

The second dated Fossatello, October 31, 1470 Not. Nicola Raggio (a Staglieno find of 1887), finds Christopher declaring himself to be older than 19 years of age. The future discoverer is here engaged in a business deal with a certain Pietro Balesio of Porto Maurizio (located on the coast, some 46 miles west of Savona), binding himself to pay him "48 lire, 13 soldi, and 6 denari di Genova" within one year as settlement for a quantity of wine received by him and his father Domenico. In addition to woolweaver, this document indicates that Christopher moonlighted as a sailor on coastal voyages in the Riviera, and got Domenico to guarantee his affairs, eventually leading to Domenico's involvement as a tavernkeeper in Savona.

The third deed of August 26, 1472, Savona, not. Tommaso del Zocco, has Domenico Colombo, wool-weaver, living in Savona, and his son Cristoforo declare to owe to Giovanni Signorio "50 lire di Genovini" for 7 "Cantari" (circa 172 lbs. each) for wool sold to them.

From the deed of August 26, 1472, Christopher is not found in any other deed until 1479 (except the one of August 7, 1473). During this period from 1473 to 1479, Christopher was at sea, and we have no record of how he called himself.

Once he arrived in Portugal, we know that he dropped the last name of Colombo and came to be known variously as Colonus, Colón and Colom. In 1479, the navigator briefly returned to Genova, summoned there by a controversy between Lodisio Centurione and the two brothers Paolo and Cassano Di Negro. We know this from a deed dated in Genoa, dated August 25, 1479, not. Gerolamo Ventimiglia (Assereto find, published 1904). Here Christopher Columbus declares himself to be "approximately" 27 years old.

Peculiarly for a legal deed, this document does not indicate the paternity of Christopher. Why this omission of paternity? Because Christopher no longer lived in Italy, and therefore, I believe, had no further need of Domenico Colombo's patronage. Furthermore, he had no further reason to fear that by dropping his acquired paternity of Domenico, he would offend or dishonor in some way his stepfather. One assumes also that Domenico could have been sensitive about his wife's previous relationship with Pellegrino, and that whenever in Italy Christopher "renamed himself Colombo" in deference to Domenico.

We know that Domenico was still alive from his presence in documents until September 30, 1494, Genoa, not. Giovanni Battista Passirola.

So far as known, Christopher never used the name of Colombo after he left Genoa. He adopted instead various aliases: Colonus, Colón, Colom, or Colomo. Finally, all of the aliases, the assumed names, are abandoned after the great discovery of 1492 achieves his status and wide recognition. A last name was no longer of importance; the mysterious

cryptic signature appeared, "Xpo Ferens," Christopher as the carrier of Christ. The Admiral frequently compared himself to David, and most particularly with Moses, a kindred soul born out of wedlock and also abandoned by his beloved father, but who pursues his great destiny under the tutelage of a spiritual father. At this time, Christopher feels the need to detach himself from secular names and to create a new name which identifies him with the world of the Holy Trinity.

However, the most compelling evidence we have affirming that Domenico was not Christopher's father comes from the *Historie...* of Fernando. In Chapter II, specifically titled, "Who were the father and mother of the Admiral...", Fernando fails to reveal their names. Finally, 71 chapters later (Chapter LXXIII), in the course of describing the Admiral's entrance into Sto Domingo, he curiously reveals that Domenico was the father of Bartolomeo. If Domenico had also been the father of Christopher, why could not Fernando state this simple fact in Chapter II, specifically dedicated to the Admiral's mother and father? Let us examine the crucial passages in Fernando's account of his father's entrance into the harbor of Sto. Domingo:

...therefore to the end his (the Admiral's) provisions might not fail him in time of need, he stood to the eastward of Santo Domingo, into which harbor he sailed on the 30th of August; for here *the Lieutenant his brother* (Bartolomeo) had appointed the city to be built on the east-side of the river, where it stands at present, and was called Santo Domingo *in memory of his father, whose name was Domenico*. [Emphasis mine.]

Here, in specifying Domenico "as his father" and not their father, Fernando clearly and unequivocally denotes Domenico as the father of Bartolomeo, and not of Christopher, a statement which has generally been misinterpreted by scholars.

In Chapter I, Fernando invokes the aliases of his father and mused on the extraordinary mysteries of his genealogy:

...and so he (the Admiral) called himself "Colón." Considering this fact, I believe that, since the major part of his undertakings were the work of some mystery, *so what concerns his name and last name it did not come without mystery*. [Emphasis mine.]

In concluding this critical study on the origin of Christopher Columbus, I would like once more to emphasize that the curious deed of August 7, 1473, offers the final clue to the mysterious paternity of the discoverer. Years ago, when I first undertook the task of examining and analyzing the marvelous mosaic of undoubtedly authentic deeds from the State Archives of Genoa and Savona, I was immediately aware this one enigmatic deed did not fit into the pattern so carefully laid out by scholars; and yet I, like other scholars, felt captivated by its outstanding features. However, unlike them, I have tried to explain and articulate its uniqueness, rather than attempting to ignore its supposed discrepancies from the already perfected and synchronous documentation. In doing so, I feel confident



that my expanded interpretation is essentially correct. I believe that far from adding more mystery to the origin of Columbus, my critical study reveals the final key to Christopher Pellegrino's quincentennial secret. A secret which he carried within himself all of his life, feeling it so great a burden that he devised strange and esoteric strategies to conceal it from the world.<sup>2</sup>

## FINIS

### NOTES:

1. Apparently, the original text of Andres Bernaldez was available to Juan Bautista Muñoz who, in his 1793 work titled *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, p. VIII, states that it was "...lo texto original, casi integro..." (...the original text, almost integral...). Muñoz sets the year of birth for C.C. in 1446 (Libro II, p. 42).

2. As an interesting coincidence, I have noticed that in the Jewish cemetery of Modena there is an early 20th century sepulchre of one Jacobo Pellegrino. This fact could be interpreted to mean that Cristoforo Pellegrino's father could have been of Jewish origin.

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