

## Historian Jordi Bilbeny believes that Columbus' discovery of America, and Castile's subsequent eagerness to appropriate the New World, led to a massive falsification of history

● (continued from previous page) and Enric Mitjana de las Doblàs, who produced important genealogical evidence on the matter and, more recently, Caius Parellada, the author of the study *Colom venç Colombo*.

During the second half of the 20th century, many other scholars added their voices to the subject, such as Josep Porter, who claimed that Columbus was the son of a distinguished Barcelona family; Salvador de Madariaga, who concluded that Columbus was born in Genoa to a family of Catalan immigrant Jews.

Meanwhile, Enric Bayerri claimed that Columbus was born on the old isle of Genoa, located by the Ebre delta, near Tortosa. Ernest Vallhonrat put forward the idea that Columbus was born in Sardinia, which at that time was part of the Kingdom of Aragon, while Gabriel Verd believed that Columbus was the illegitimate son of the Prince of Viana and a Mallorcan woman. Ibiza-born Nito Verdera claimed that Columbus was born on his island to a noble family of Jewish origin, while Josep Maria Castellnou wrote a number of important studies on Columbus' native language.

### A daring theory

One of the most controversial researchers is Jordi Bilbeny, who believes, along with his partners at the Fundació d'Estudis Històrics, that the discovery of America, and Castile's subsequent eagerness to appropriate the new land in order to create a new hereditary kingdom in America led to a falsification of history which began by declaring that Columbus was a foreigner and ended up with the twisting of information in books and documents during the reigns of Carlos I and Felipe II.

### An important media ally

However, in October 2004, the theory received the invaluable support of Discovery Channel, the American television documentary channel, which broadcast a program—entitled *Enigma Colón*—that gave wide-ranging support to the idea that Christopher Columbus was in fact Cristòfor Colom, the son of



Columbus being welcomed back from his historic voyage of discovery by the king and queen in Barcelona/EL PUNT

Catalan nobleman. The documentary also gave credence to the theory that he had at some time in his life been a pirate. But the most important claim, as far as Jordi Bilbeny and his colleagues are concerned, was that Columbus spoke and wrote in Catalan. The ideas that were put

forward by the Discovery Channel could soon be proven beyond all doubt, as the channel is currently carrying out comparative studies of Columbus' DNA and that of Catalans who have the surname Colom. The tests are also being carried out on Italians with the surname

Colombo, as the accepted theory is that this was Columbus' surname, and that he was born in Genoa.

### Why all the secrecy?

Even so, this does not answer the question that everyone has been asking for years: why did Columbus hide his origins? Francesc Albardaner, a researcher at the Centre d'Estudis Columbians who has participated in the DNA project, and who for years has spent much of his time on researching Columbus' origins, believes that it could be for many reasons, some of which back up the Catalan theory—firstly, that he was of Jewish origin, secondly that he was the bastard son of a nobleman or a member of the clergy (according to Albardaner, of Francesc Colom i Bertran, whose family was opposed to Joan II), or simply a pirate who did not want to pay for his crimes.

In any case, Admiral Columbus took his secrets to the grave, though it could be that 500 years later, we might be about to unearth them at last. In fact, it was Columbus himself who once wrote "I trust in you, my lord, that the confusion does not last for eternity". Let's hope that he is right.

## A life story with a multitude of gaps and grey areas

● Columbus' biography is filled with gaps. Officially, he was born in Genoa in 1451, though this does not tie in with reports that he captained a ship in 1472: he would have been too young for the post. Very little is known about his youth, though Columbus wrote that he had been a sailor from a very young age. This does not fit with the official version, which claims Columbus left his hometown of Genoa at



23. History claims that Columbus arrived in Portugal in 1476 after a mysterious naval battle, though others claim he was exiled after the Catalan Civil War (1462-1472). During his time in Portugal, when Columbus built up a close relationship with Joao II, he sailed to Africa, Iceland and even (some say) to America. In 1485 Columbus left Portugal, after the king had refused to back his voyage to the New World.

