

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBU'S LINKS WITH MALLORCA



One of the most widely debated points in the life of Columbus is his origin and social background. I hope the information that follows will add to an understanding of the background of one of the most transcendental figures in history.

From the analysis of records consulted in the Archives of the Kingdom of Mallorca (censuses, polls, elections and especially wills), I have discovered a series of connections between various figures with a bearing on Columbus, Genoese and converts, and with the islands of Mallorca and Eivissa.

1. The Genoese. Columbus's testamentary codicil, made on 19 May 1506, the day before he died, contains the names of some Genoese former creditors of his: Lluís Centurió, Paulo Negro, Baptista Espíndola. These people belong to three of the great houses or *alberghi* of Genoa with most economic and social power, and the three had long-standing links with Mallorca. Lluís Centurió even appears in documents from the years 1454-57 in relation to members –converts– of the Vidal family, who were related to the Santàngel and Pardo families, also converts, and to Joan Bartomeu, a Majorcan merchant who died in Naples in 1470. Furthermore, one of Joan Bartomeu's sons, Francí (or Francesc) was procurator to Joan de Coloma, secretary to King Ferdinand the Catholic, who on 7 April 1492 signed the Santa Fe agreement between Columbus and the monarchy.

At the same time, Pollo di Negro is one of the shipowners who went to Eivissa in search of salt in 1483, along with other members of the Centurió, Espíndola, Grimaldi and other families.

2. The converts. Lluís de Santàngel, a scribe at the court of Ferdinand the Catholic, appears in Majorcan documents of the years 1458 to 1465, in connection with the Pardo family, to which he was related. Furthermore, his brother Galceran de Santàngel lived in the city of Mallorca, according to the poll of 1478. The Pardo, Lacavalleria and Santàngel families were related to one another. Also, the paternal and maternal grandparents of the humanist Joan Lluís Vives lived in Mallorca and were related to a number of merchant converts.

3. Nicolau Esteve, cooper and shipowner. Nicolau Esteve is the Majorcan whose signature appears on the *Informe y juramento de cómo Cuba era tierra firme, que el almirante hizo tomar a los marineros que le*



acompañaron, dated 12 June 1494 in the course of the second journey to the New World.

Nicolau Esteve was the son of Nicolau Esteve, shipwright, and figures as a resident in the city of Mallorca in 1478, according to the census of that year, in the parish of Santa Creu, on the islet of the church of Sant Joan. He also appears in documents between the years 1471 and 1478 in

relation to various merchants and Majorcan craftsmen.

4. The Pinzón brothers and Eivissa. In 1479 the corsairs Martín Alonso Pinzón and Vicente Yáñez seized a whaler belonging to Bernat Galamó and Gaspar Brondo of Eivissa. According to a lawsuit in the records of the Consolat del Mar, the two co-owners of the whaler went to court because they were not in agreement over this act of piracy.

5. Bartolomé Colón and the Balearic Isles. Bartolomé Colón, the brother of the discoverer, is the author of a report or description of the fourth journey to the New World, in which he makes a remark that could indicate a first-hand knowledge of the Balearic Isles: "... their food consists principally of a certain white grain the size of a chick-pea, and it forms ears, just as it grows in the Balearics..."

6. The corsair Columbo. In the minutes of the Grand and General Council of 7 November 1474 and of 9 January 1478, mention is made of a corsair named Columbo, a subject of the King of France, who is a threat to Majorcan, Neapolitan and Venetian vessels sailing in the Western Mediterranean.

7. A Colom family in the city of Mallorca. I have managed to trace a family by the name of Colom in the city of Mallorca, traditionally devoted to trade in cloth, slaves, etc., whose members belonged to the rank of citizens and merchants.

Antoni Colom, one of the most conspicuous members, who died in 1494, held various public posts: juror, councillor, *morber* (responsible for reporting deaths from the plague), etc. and was also consul of the Florentines. He first appears as a merchant and years later as a citizen of Mallorca. His sister Maciana was married to Polí Brondo, brother of Jordi Brondo, consul of the Genoese.

In the censuses of the city of Mallorca of 1478, 1483 and 1512, various members of this family appear, as well as various Coloms, craftsmen, converts and some former slaves who adopted this surname. □