

Miquel Ballester



The tarragonan friend of Christopher Columbus

Ernest Vallhonrat i Llurba

 Port de Tarragona

AROLA EDITORS

MIQUEL BALLESTER

**THE TARRAGONAN FRIEND OF
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS**

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MIQUEL BALLESTER

**THE TARRAGONAN FRIEND OF
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS**

Prologue by
Dr. Lluís Navarro Miralles

Taken from the book

*COLÓN SÚBDITO
DE LA CORONA DE ARAGÓN*

by Ernest Vallhonrat i Llurba

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INTRODUCTION

Under the eye-catching title of *Miquel Ballester, the Tarragonan friend of Christopher Columbus* we present the voyages of these two personalities across oceans and through life, from Italy to America, passing through Tarragona. The personal relationship between Miquel Ballester and Christopher Columbus was close and enduring and even led to Columbus appointing Ballester as his son's tutor.

The work you hold in your hands has been taken from the book *Col·lon subdito de la Corona de Aragon* by the same author, Ernest Vallhonrat i Llurba. However, this does not make it less interesting; quite the contrary. It is for this reason that we have decided to publish it, as we believe it is important to bring to a wider audience this account of a small part of the life of the famous seafarer and discoverer that is linked to Tarragona and, more specifically, to a Tarragonan. Suffice it to say, therefore, that we thought it important to give greater emphasis to this episode.

Finally, we have to express our gratitude for the work, effort and quality of this account to its author, Ernest Vallhonrat i Llurba, in the hope that he will continue to delight us with his writings for many more years to come.

JOSEP ANDREU I FIGUERAS
President of the Tarragona Port Authority

PROLOGUE

This publication is part of a longer work by Ernest Vallhonrat i Llurba entitled *Colon subdito de la Corona de Aragon* (*Columbus, Subject of the Crown of Aragon*). These pages taken from that book tell us of the friendship between Miquel Ballester, a seafarer from Tarragona, who may also be considered to have been a businessman, and the discoverer of America, Christopher Columbus, «an inseparable friend». In 1493, Ballester joined Columbus on his second voyage and in America he would be named governor of the fortress of La Concepcion and later of Bonao.

As Vallhonrat tells us, their friendship and mutual trust pre-dated the American enterprise. It was forged during difficult and risky times, on «youthful adventures» in Mallorca, which had adverse consequences that led them to seek refuge on the coast of Liguria. However the time spent on Italian soil, where they traded and experimented in commerce, was later used by researchers to blur the figure of Miquel Ballester and gave rise to arguments in defence of characters with a more than doubtful historical veracity. From the ensemble of Italian surnames, Vallhonrat culls the true reality of the seafarer and merchant from Tarragona.

Thanks to Columbus, Miquel Ballester came into contact with the sugar business that the future discoverer of America had in the Portuguese islands in the Atlantic and, logically, he learned about its production and trade. As the author accurately points out, Ballester, an experienced seafarer, was the visionary of a future for the new lands. He foresaw the possibilities of acclimatising sugar cane to America; he would set up a sugar refinery and «professionalise» naborias (native Indian workers), freedmen, in the delicate and specialised techniques of sugar production. This book recalls for us Father Bartolome de las Casas' opinions about Miquel Ballester, of whom he affirms «I knew him well». Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo adds «he was the first to make sugar». When Miquel Ballester died, already into his eighties, de las Casas, a critic of the con-

quest of America, recalled him as an «old and venerable person». By the end of the 16th century there were numerous sugar refineries operating in La Hispaniola.

The friendship between Columbus and the Tarragonan becomes obvious in these pages. It would reach a high degree of trust when the Admiral appointed Ballester as tutor to his firstborn, Diego, and later the executor of his will. When Columbus was brought back to Spain as a prisoner in chains, Ballester did not abandon him, but, temporarily leaving America, accompanied him on that bitter journey. Vallhonrat also gives the city of Tarragona a natural protagonism. It was present in part of that historical journey. The author tells us of the possibility that Columbus passed through the capital of Tarragona province on his way to Barcelona to report on his discoveries to the Catholic Monarchs. Likewise, Ballester's Tarragona would have accommodated the Admiral when he was planning his second largest and most complete voyage, in which Miquel Ballester would take part, also setting sail for America. Years later, Hernando Columbus spent some time in Tarragona, no doubt with members of the Ballester family.

Miquel Ballester's memory is kept alive in America. This is graphically depicted by the author. In the Dominican Republic there is an exceptionally large monument that summarises the work of our subject: oxen are pulling a cart with the much appreciated sugar cane and, at its foot, the mention of the man who took such a valuable crop to those coasts. For us, that monument should be an incentive and a historical debt owing to Miquel Ballester.

Sugar cane was «white gold», treacle, «honeyed», as Vallhonrat accurately points out in this book, and above all, the raw material for producing the rum that is so closely linked to those lands and to seafaring. In the Caribbean, where cruises to Europe are organised, at least one should call at the port of the city that was the birthplace of Miquel Ballester, the American sugar cane man. Among so much history in our city, cruise passengers would be able to visit, in the Upper or Historical Part, the places where Miquel Ballester lived and where he would have spent time with the Discoverer. Tarragona, a gateway and a port of call for America.

For this work, for his book of research, we owe to Ernest Vallhonrat i Llubra the historical renovation of the figure of Miquel Ballester, an illustrious *Tarraconense* and a good American.

LUIS NAVARRO MIRALLES

THE PORT OF TARRAGONA IN THE TIME OF BALLESTER AND COLUMBUS

The Aragonese archbishop Pedro de Urrea, a great friend of King John II of Aragon, occupied the metropolitan see of Tarragona from 1444. The archbishop had been named Captain of the Pontifical Army by the first Borgia pope, Calixtus III.

At the end of 1483, the archbishop of Tarragona asked the General Courts of Tarazona (Zaragoza) to have the old Roman wooden dock replaced with a new stone jetty on the site of the old Roman breakwater. It was to be a new, 155-metre-long stone wharf, an true dock.

On the following 8th of March, King Ferdinand II of Aragon authorised its construction and thus began the rise in importance of the port of Tarragona.

TARRAGONA IN THE TIME OF COLUMBUS AND BALLESTER

There are four facts worth emphasising, both for their historical importance and the relevance of the persons involved in them. We will talk about them below.

The legitimate dispensation for the marriage of the Catholic Monarchs was arranged in Tarragona

As we know, Isabella and Ferdinand were married in Valladolid in October 1469. The ceremony was illegal under the law at the time, due to the blood relationship between the bride and the groom. However, and at least on the face of it, the impediments were resolved by the intervention of the archbishop of Toledo, Alfonso Carrillo, who presented a bull issued by Pope Pius II. It dispensed the degree of consanguinity that had prevented the marriage. It later turned out that the supposed papal document had been forged by Ferdinand himself and his father, John II, with the consent of Archbishop Carrillo.

The Viennese historian, Susanne Schtiller-Piroli, relates the following events in which we can see that the dispensation was requested in the Palace of the Patriarch of the Archbishop of Tarragona. The prelate at the time was Pedro de Urrea from Aragon, a friend of the king. He held the position from 1444 until his death in 1489, and had stated:

«[...] the reputation of the young Ferdinand of Aragon suffered a hard blow when the eldest of his step-brothers, Carlos de Viana, died in gaol, where he had been cruelly imprisoned by his own father. The responsibility for this tragic death of the legitimate heir to the throne of Aragon and Navarra fell on Ferdinand –the son of King John and his second wife– and his mother, Juana Enriquez. Catalan indignation was directed mainly at her. Even

greater was the hostility in Navarra, where John reigned only as the heir of his first wife, Blanca d'Evreux.

Rodrigo (de Borja, the Valencian cardinal) acted with great caution. He first arranged to meet Prince Ferdinand in person before making a pronouncement on him. The future pope and future king met before the end of summer 1472 in Tarragona. The first result of this encounter –as explained by the historian Schtiller-Piroli– was that Rodrigo urgently recommended Pope Sixtus IV to issue a legitimate marriage dispensation for Ferdinand and Isabella. Only in this way could they achieve internal peace in Spain and win the nation over to the fight against the infidels. The Pope heard these arguments and empowered his legate to legalise the young couple's marriage».

A bill of exchange issued in Tarragona in the time of Columbus and Ballester

In August 2000, the London-based antiquarian booksellers Bernard Quaritch offered for sale at a price of £20,000 an important and historical mercantile document that proves the relationship of the city of Tarragona with people in Columbus' circle.

It was a bill of exchange signed by Luis de Santangel in favour of his brother Jaime; there are three lines written on vellum (210 x 54 mm) and signed at the bottom, Tarragona, 8 March 1484. On the reverse is the following text: «To my dearest and magnificent Broth. Mons. Jaime de Santangel in Valencia» and it is endorsed by the notary Salvador. The letter was handwritten by the financier Luis de Santangel, treasurer of the Crown of Aragon and provider of funds for Columbus' first voyage of discovery.

The document contains instructions to pay £800: «Pay through this first bill of exchange [...] eight hundred pounds of that coinage known as DCC C's to Piero Spannochchi» of the money destined for Johan de Pero Sanchiz, in the coinage of Barcelona.

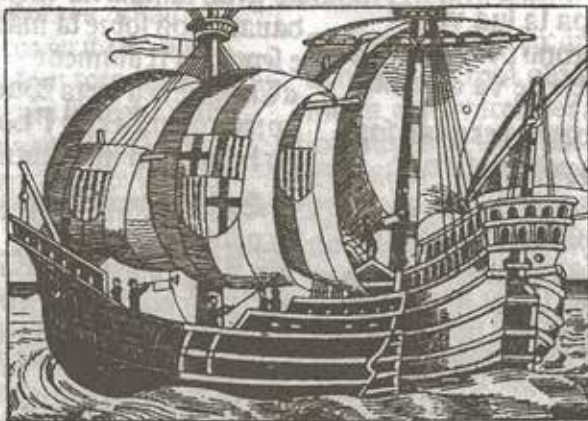
The discovery of the bill of exchange issued by Luis de Santangel in Tarragona is more important than appears at first sight. It implies a close personal relationship between the Archbishop of Tarragona, Pedro de Urrea, and the royal family of Aragon and particularly King Ferdinand the Catholic. The king's own treasurer, Luis de Santangel, was in Tarragona on 8 March 1484. Around that time Christopher Columbus left Portugal after becoming a widower on the death of his wife, the Portuguese aristocrat Fili pa Moniz de Perestrelo.



A Portrait of Hernando Columbus; a 19th century illustration from the book «Columbus» by Alphonse de Lamartine.

Cobles de tristor de les tres Naus catalanes de conserua.

Any Mil.CCCC.Lx.



Christians deuotament
preguem la Verge Maria
queus deliure 'n aquest dia
ab son Fill omnipotent.

C De conserua erē tres naus,
totes tres molt ben armades,
mossen Johan de Pontons,
en Gatorres e en Bujades:
vn diumenge sol hient
partiren de la Turquia,
tots fehiem nostra via
de la volta de Ponent.

Lo dilluns ab mar bonāça,
ab lo vent fresch e molt larch,
nauegant ab gran purança
no trobā res queus embarc:
e verem cantar la gent
moguts de gran alegria,
nunqua ves tal jutglaria
que tots anauen rient.

A romance acquired in Tarragona by Hernando Columbus in 1513

It was Hernando Columbus' custom to note the date, place and price of all the publications he acquired for his extensive library. Thanks to these personal records, we know that in 1513 he was in Tarragona. This is confirmed in the text of the Genoese catalogue for the International Columbus Exhibition (1950-1951). It tells us that Christopher Columbus' son purchased in Tarragona for one dinero an engraving or romance that was shown at the Italian exhibition. What brought Hernando to Tarragona? It is obvious he did not come just to buy a document that in itself is not important. We have to link his visit to the city with Christopher Columbus' personal relations with some of its citizens with whom he had travelled to the New World. We have to remember that Tarragona was the home of the Ballester family, from whom he may have been able to obtain some information about his father.

The «*Libro Copiador* of Christopher Columbus» or the «Tarragona Manuscript»

The *Libro Copiador* is a compilation of the documents Columbus sent to the Catholic Monarchs. It covers a long period, from 1492, the year of the discovery, to 1504, his fourth and final voyage to America. It is known by researchers all over the world as the «Tarragona Manuscript», as it was in that city in 1986 that this priceless document was found in an antique bookshop. The find was decisive for our knowledge of the first written report of the discovery of the New World and the moments of relaxation when Columbus told the monarchs of his concerns and state of mind in the face of solitude and illness. «No other surviving text can be compared to it in terms of length and quality», according to Rumeu de Armas. What we have to ask ourselves is why one of the most valuable manuscripts we have for our understanding of the story of Columbus was found in Tarragona and what were the Admiral's connections with that Mediterranean city.

There were various links with Tarragona

Pedro de Urrea, a native of Aragon, was archbishop of Tarragona for forty-five years, from 1444 to 1489, the year he died, three years before the discovery of the New World. During the pontificate of Calixtus III –the first of the Borgias– from 1455 to 1458, the Pope named the archbishop Captain General of the Pontifical Army, a post he held until the pontiff's death in the same year as that of the King of Catalonia and Naples, Al-

phonse V the Magnanimous, the paternal uncle of Ferdinand the Catholic. The second Borgia pope, Alexander VI, awarded Father Boyl several bulls naming him Vicar of Rome in the New World.

Between 1462 and 1468 the royal family lived in the Chamberlain's Palace in Tarragona cathedral, the metropolitan see of Archbishop Pedro de Urrea, a great friend of John II of Aragon, father of Ferdinand the Catholic, who was ten years old when he arrived in the city. Archbishop Urrea was Prince Ferdinand's tutor and accompanied him to the Battle of Calaf in 1465. On 13 February 1468 the queen mother, Joanna Enriquez, died and was buried in the monastery of Poblet, where her remains are in the royal pantheon. It was also in Tarragona in 1472 that arrangements were made to legitimise the marriage between Isabella and Ferdinand. As far as Colom (Columbus) and Ballester are concerned, the historical archives of Tarragona record the existence of these families between the 14th and the 16th centuries.

In 1489, Andreu Colom, a cousin of the great seafarer, had problems with the Tarragona Inquisition. He, his wife Blanca and his mother-in-law Francisca, all of whom were converts from Judaism, were condemned for having observed Jewish rituals. Columbus' cousins, Andreu and Joan Anton, the Discoverer's squire and servant respectively, accompanied him on his third and fourth voyages to the New World.

Miquel Ballester would take part in Christopher Columbus' second expedition to the New World, accompanied by the Aragonese cleric Bernardo Boyl, a friend of Archbishop Urrea of Tarragona, who King Ferdinand had named Secretary and Diplomatic Ambassador to France. Boyl went as Vicar of Rome and the first evangelist in the New World. Tarragona, therefore, was linked to these people and it was to that city that Hernando Columbus went in 1513 in search of information about his father's background and it was there that he purchased the aforementioned poem.

These facts may also explain why in 1986 such an important document as the *Libro Copiador* of Columbus, known by scholars worldwide as the «Tarragona Manuscript», turned up in the archiepiscopal see of Tarragona.

Miquel Ballester, a Catalan and native of Tarragona

Miquel Ballester was a Tarragonan seafarer and merchant; Pedro Casaus, also of Catalan origin but resident in Seville, was the father of Bartolome Casaus or de Las Casas. Both went on Columbus' second voyage to the

New World in 1493 and there received lands and commissions. In 1498, Pedro Casaus returned to his family home in Seville with a very special present for his son Bartolome, who was twenty-four at the time. The gift was a young Tafno Indian slave who would subsequently be trained as a servant and become the centre of attraction and envy of his friends. Later, the young Casaus changed his surname to the Castilian Spanish «Las Casas», thus following the custom of emigrants setting sail for the Indies with the Castilian fleets. In 1502 Queen Isabella of Castile enacted an order that obliged the repatriation of the almost three hundred Indian slaves the Spanish conquerors had brought to Spain during those years of discovery and conquest. One can imagine the pain felt by the young Bartolome, now twenty-eight years old, when he had to say a permanent farewell to the slave he had so carefully trained as a servant. This event would begin his life-long interest in defending the rights of the native Indians of the New World.

Years later, referring to Miquel Ballester, Fray Bartolome de Las Casas –the son of Pedro Casaus, a friend of the Tarragonan seafarer–, would write in the *Historia de las Indias*: «Miguel Ballester, Cathalan, native of Tarragona, an old and very venerable person...», later adding «this is his letter, and you can well see he was Catalan, because he spoke imperfectly, but he was a virtuous and honourable man of sincere and simple will; I knew him well».

Thanks to information provided by Isabel Company of the Tarragona Historical Archive and the important contribution of Francesc Cortiella i 6dena, we have the following references to the Ballester and Colom families, who resided in that city between the 14th and the 16th centuries:

The Ballester lineages in Tarragona (15th-16th centuries)

Until 1427, every year, around St Michael's Day, the city paid 50 *sous de censo* for the schools to **Bartomeu Ballester**, presbytery beneficiary of the cathedral (CORTIELLA, p. 295).

Hasta 1427, cada año, por San Miguel, la ciudad pagaba 50 s. de censo para las escuelas a **Bartomeu Ballester**, presbítero beneficiado de la catedral (CORTIELLA, p. 295).

Bartomeu Ballester, presbytery beneficiary of the See, for the benefit of St Martin, receives 50 *sous de censo* «for the lodging of the schools of grammar», by agreement of the council of 17 July 1425 (AM, 41, 1425-1427).

nombre la concepció. En esta puso por alcaide
 a vn hydalgo que se llamo Juan de ayala: des
 pues la tuuo vn miquel ballester catalan na
 tural de Tarragona viejo y muy venerable pso
 na. Por manera que ouo en esta ysla tres
 .16. de octubre. miquel ballester. esta es su
 carta y bje parece q era castellan per q habla
 ya imperfecta mete: pero hombre virtuoso y
 honrrado y de valuneros singulay. miquel
 y o le cognosci mucho.

Reproduction of the paragraphs about Miquel Ballester, a «native of Tarragona»
 written by Fray Bartolome de las Casas in his *Historia de las Indias*.

Pere Ballester (1469, November, 11) City councillor, bladesmith (AM, 75 1469 and 1470). «1469, November, 11. For the supply of wheat due to the war. The Count of Prades (Joan Ramon Folc III de Cardona), captain general of the Principality. **Pere Ballester**, bladesmith, as councillor (AHT, Tarragona City Council collections, Municipal proceedings, 75, *Liber conciliorum civitatis Terracone*, 1469 and 1470, f. 7).

Tomás Ballester (end of the 15th– beginning of the 16th centuries) (AHT, paper documents 23/111).

Esperança Ballestera, daughter of Tecla Besora, 1507. Both wish to make and sell bread (AHT, paper documents, 7 / 80).

The Colom lineages in Tarragona (14th–16th centuries)

Pere Colom (1331). Old index, p. 219 «811. (12 July 1331-11 July 1331). Syndicate made by the university of Vilaseca de Solcina to **Pere Colom** and Guillem Amigo to pay homage to that administrator. In IIII idus iulii MCCCXXI. Closed by Joan de Figuerola, rector of Vilaseca. Syndicated by the men of Barenys to said effect. In V idus iulii anni. Closed po, fol. 616.»

Nicolau Colom (1403). Candidate for *almotacen* (a municipal official charged with comparing weights and measures). Cortiella, p. 103.

Joan Colom (1467). Old index, p. 210 «772. Likewise an establishment made by Joan Albarratzi procurator of the same archbishop and Patriarch of Alexandria to Pedro de Calatayud of a house that was of Pau Vidal, opposite the house of **Joan Colom** and of the house of the abattoir, with the rear part of the archiepiscopal castle and in front of the street, at a census of 4 *sueudos* 4 *dineros* to Pascua and another 4 *sueudos* 4 *dineros* to Arcediano of Vilaseca for whom he also has, was adjudicated to the Mensa by censuses due, neither can he put censuses. Made this 6th of May 1467, closed by Nicolau Ortells, notary, no. 53, fol. 355».

Street of **Montserrat Colom** (1472) (Archiepiscopologio, 11, p. 114 and 115).

Gabriel Colom, beneficiary. In 1483, together with canon Jaume Campaner and the *comensal* Miquel Cisterer, received a commission from Pedro de Urrea to prepare a new breviary, for the use of the diocese, completed in one year, engraved in Barcelona by Joan Rosembach (Archiepiscopologio, II, p. 117 and 118 and RAM6N, 2001, p. 456).

Andreu Colom (13 April 1495). Appears as a witness (AHT, Tarragona Notarial Collection, 2, f. 42).

Pere Colom (1605). Old index, p. 110.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BALLESTERS AND THE COLOMS

1452. The Ballesters and the Coloms instigated a peasant revolt against the landowners on the island of Mallorca

In 1452, we find Miquel Ballester and his cousin Simon «Tort» Ballester in Mallorca with the brothers Joan (Cristobal) and Bartolome Colom, who would be known years later as Colon (Columbus). During their stay they encouraged and took part in a peasant revolt against the landowners. The rebels aimed to bring an end to the onerous increase in the taxes they were forced to pay for their contracts to farm the land, as well as the special taxes demanded by the king of Aragon. Various Mallorcan authors from different periods, including Vicente Mut, Joan Binimelis and Jose Maria Quadrado, have recorded these events.

The armed opposition against the royal taxes would lose strength. With the Coloms being sought by the island's authorities, the resistance quickly collapsed from the base. An edict was published giving amnesty to all the rebels except Joan and Bartolome Colom, who fled in the company of Miquel Ballester and Simon «Tort» («One-eyed») Ballester, the leader of the conspiracy. The revolt was put down thanks to the intervention an army of two thousand well-armed and wellequipped men sent from Naples to Mallorca by King Alphonse V of Aragon.

The Colom and Ballester trading company

Almost twenty years after the events in Mallorca, and possibly as a result of them, we find the Coloms and the Ballesters established in Genoa and Savona. Later, Miguel Ballester would be associated with the enigmatic and hazy figure of Michele de Cuneo, who is worth a few remarks.

In the chapter «Relacion de Miguel de Cuneo» of their book *Cartas de particulares a Colon y Relaciones coetáneas* (Columbus' Private Letters and Contemporary Relationships) (1984), Juan Gil and Consuelo Varela write:

«In contrast, in 1470 one Simon de Cuneo, a cloth weaver present in Genoa, appears in a document together with other members of the profession, among them Domenico Colombo, to fix the price they had to receive from the wool merchants for their work; a little later one Bartolome de Cuneo appears as a resident of Sao-na, subjecting himself, with D. Colombo and other artisans, to a series of guild statutes. It appears more logical, therefore, that Miguel de Cuneo was a descendant of that family of wool-weavers, compatriots of the Colombos, and that their contacts with the future Admiral would have dated from childhood».

With this well-chosen observation, Gil and Varela are aiming –at the very least– to question certain information about Miguel de Cuneo that they consider is not well founded, as they declare in a subsequent comment:

«We have here, therefore, some unconnected but not fortuitous threads of the overcrowded web that is woven around Columbus and his Italian acquaintances, who at times, as in this case, make a fleeting appearance on stage, only to make most discrete theatrical exit».

In fact, Michele de Cuneo is one more element in this «overcrowded web», judging by Gil and Varela's comments. He appears in some of the writings related to the life and voyages of the Admiral, enough so that the reader realises that he existed and had established a personal relationship with Columbus similar to that between the Discoverer and Miguel Ballester, his friend from Tarragona. However, there is no conclusive proof of the existence of said Miguel de Cuneo.

Colom/Colombo/Colon (Columbus) and Ballester/Ballestero

The Colom family, although well known in Genoa as «Colombo» (1470), as «Scolvus» in Scandinavia (1477), as «Colom» during their stay in Portugal and as «Colón» before their departure to Castile in about 1484, was one and the same. They are, therefore, the same Coloms belonging to the Jewish-Catalan family of seafarers, subjects of the Crown of Aragon, who for political and economic questions had to emigrate to Genoa, as not-

ed by the Galician researcher, Salvador de Madariaga. This identification confirms that they are the same Colombos who, during this five year period, resided in the jurisdiction of Genoa, like Miguel Ballester, who in Santo Domingo de La Hispaniola, went by the name of Miguel Ballester, as is recorded on the plaque of the grand monument to sugar cane in that Caribbean city.

Hernando Columbus confirms this when he writes in the *Historia del Almirante (History of the Admiral)*: «Colombo [...] because in fact that was the sobriquet or surname of the elders, although he, in accordance with the country in which he went to stay and begin a new condition, filed down the word to conform with the old version, and distinguished those who came from him, from those others who were collateral, and thus he was called Colón».

If we analyse this paragraph carefully, we can see the exactitude with which every term is used. The aim of this is none other than to make the reason for the name changes quite clear, in order to leave no room for false interpretations. He distinguishes the sobriquet «Colombo» from the true surname, which he does not quote. However, it is obvious that it is the original name of Colom. Hernando uses the term «file» with extraordinary precision and not the more common «shorten» or «reduce». Colón is the result of having filed the longer letter «m» down to the shorter «n» at the end of the word. By doing this he achieved two objectives: coming as close as possible to the original surname «Colom» and adapting it to the Castilian language with the new «Colón», as Castile was the place «where he went to stay» and where he reached his «new condition». With that modification it was possible to distinguish his ancestors, those of his own generation –known as «Colombo»– who emigrated to the lands of Liguria and from then passed on to his own descendants.

There can be no doubt that the three surnames correspond to the different periods in the Admiral's life, with the definitive one being the Castilianised «Colón».

SPURIOUS OR FALSE ITALIAN DOCUMENTS: THE IDENTITY OF MIQUEL BALLESTER

«The Asseretto Document»

This document was named after General Hugo Asseretto, who discovered it in the library of Bologna University in 1904. He stated that the draft was in the State of Genoa Notarial Archive, in the agreement witnessed by the notary Gerolamo Veintinuglia issued in that city on 25 August 1479. Thanks to this document we know that Cristofaro Colombo swore an affidavit in Genoa and declared himself to be «of some twenty-seven years» of age and resident of Lisbon, to which city he soon had to return. This statement is used by those who maintain, despite so many testimonies and indications to the contrary, that Columbus was born in 1451. As we know, the Admiral died in Valladolid in 1506 at the age of seventy, according to his friend Andres Bernaldez, the priest of Los Palacios in Seville. Therefore, this Genoese person could not have been the Great Navigator.

«The Asseretto Document» –says Ulloa– «shows no signs of authenticity. It lacks the signature of the declarer and the notary's signature and stamp, relieving it of any kind of value».

According to Antonio Rumeu de Armas, a former director of the Royal Academy of History, one of the basic texts for identifying Cristofaro Colombo with Christopher Columbus is the «Asseretto» document of 25 August 1479. According to this historian, this document «shows clear signs of falsification».

The Primogeniture

Primogeniture is the family legacy that is always inherited by the firstborn child. It is a very ancient institution and is still valid in many places. The primogeniture is presented in a public deed on 22 February 1498 in which Columbus bequeaths his properties to his son Diego. This is considered to be the definitive proof –although apocryphal and spurious according to some researchers– to justify the «Genoese-ness» of Columbus. The Admiral, who never mentioned his place of origin, states in this document that he was from Genoa because «from Genoa I came and in Genoa I was born». However, this statement is contradicted in other parts of the text.

In one of them, the Admiral beseeches «Prince John to not consent to be in disagreement with this my primogeniture and testament». The prince referred to in the document had died on 4 October 1497.

We ask ourselves how it is possible to make a request of somebody who was already dead. Moreover, we have to take into account that Columbus' sons –Diego, eleven, and Hernando, five– from 1493 were pages in the court of Prince John and after his death they continued in the service of the Catholic Monarchs. It is impossible to believe that Christopher Columbus had not learned of the Prince's death. On the other hand, in the primogeniture of 1502, the original of which has been lost, Columbus made not even the slightest mention of the primogeniture of 1498.

It is also strange that following the death of Queen Isabella I of Castile Hernando continued in the court of King Ferdinand until the latter's death and would stay in it when the throne was taken over Ferdinand's grandson, the Emperor Charles I of Spain and V of Germany, in 1516. What led the king to offer Columbus' son such lengthy protection, considering that at the same time his father was suffering ignominy and humiliation and being forced to take legal action against the crown in defence of his rights?

«Relazione de Michele de Cuneo»

Along these same lines we have the document mentioned by Gil and Varela: the letter to one Jenaro Annari –a native of Savona– «Relazione de Michele de Cuneo», which was suspiciously leaked in 1885, prior to the Italian commemorations of the fourth centenary of the Discovery of the New World in 1892.

This missive was designed to supplant the person of the Tarragonan, Miquel Ballester. It was based on an unquestionable fact: none of

the contemporary chroniclers of Columbus, nor any others in the whole of the 16th century, mentioned anyone called Michele de Cuneo. The title referred to in the heading corresponds to a story «about the novelties of the islands of the Hesperian Ocean discovered by Christopher Columbus, a Genoese» dated Savona 15 October 1495. The Savonese, Michele de Cuneo, sent the narration in question to Jeronimo Annari, a nobleman friend of his also from Savona, informing him in detail of the vicissitudes of that important journey to unknown lands. Pere Catala i Roca has exhaustively researched the identity of this false (?) personage.

Pere Catala i Roca's study

Pere Catala i Roca is the author of the booklet in Catalan, *Un frau historic: la relacio del segon viatge atribuida a M. de Cuneo* (*A Historical Fraud: the Story of the Second Voyage attributed to M. de Cuneo*). From the beginning of his study, to which he declares he has dedicated «meticulous attention», he does not hesitate to state that «said protagonist never existed».

Catala defines himself as having been a «Colombinist» from his youth. One of his first contacts with the discovery of America he owes to the book *Cristóbal Colón, genoves* (*Christopher Columbus, a Genoese*) (Barcelona, Editorial Maucci) by the Peruvian writer Rómulo Cuneo Vidal. Although we do not know its exact publication date, the «Judgements on the work» in the prologue are dated Lima 22 November 1927 and 18 January 1928, as well as Genoa on 9 January of that same year. The book also has an «Appendix» dedicated to Miguel de Cuneo, a Genovese sailor in the service of the Catholic Monarchs, a companion of the Admiral on his second voyage to the New World. Our attention is drawn to the dedication:

«To S.E. Benito Mussolini I respectfully dedicate this book. The Author».

Everything points to the fact that the content of the book had to be in consonance with the context of nationalist exaltation of the historical period in which it was published. It is also easy to conclude that the book by the Peruvian Rómulo Cuneo-Vidal was designed to intercept other theories opposing the Genoese origin of the Admiral. In fact, a few months earlier, another Peruvian historian and researcher, Luis Ulloa Cisneros, had published a book in Paris entitled *Colom, català* (*Columbus, Catalan*).

From the analysis of Miguel de Cuneo in the book *Cristóbal Colón, genovés* (*Christopher Columbus, Genovese*), one thing there can be no doubt about is the aim of the author: to show the close ties between the «Sa-

vonese» and Christopher Columbus. The author attributes to him a professional relationship: «he accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the New World», and a personal relationship: «We know that he had more than one point of affinity with the Discoverer». He also delves into their origins: «the son of parents whose ancestors –like those of Columbus– were natives of the Fontanabuona Valley» and the residence of his parents: «Domingo Colombo went to work as a wool merchant in the premises of ‘Saona’ [...] and met Conrado Cuneo, from the same province as he, resident in ‘Saona’ [...]». Pere Catala warns us about the inconsistency of a character who, with his supposed links to Columbus, appears so rarely on the stage.

«La ‘Saona’ e la supposta Relazione de Michele de Cuneo»

Català's study includes a very valuable article. In 1892, the Savonese historian, A. Bruno, published *La «Saona» e la supposta Relazione de Michele de Cuneo* (*La «Saona» and the Supposed Relationship with Michele de Cuneo*) in which he demonstrates having carried out a meticulous investigation into the records and archives of his city without finding any references to this singular personage. He transcribes his conclusion, which is not exempt from a certain indignation at the premeditated or deliberate historical fraud:

«Concludo col confermare il dubbio manifestato che la supposta relazione non sia che una burla: e son meravigliato come scrittori di merito, abbiano potuto prestarvi fede assoluta».

With this fragment, Bruno confirms Catala's theory that the personage was an invention and our thesis about the supplanting of Miquel Ballesster.

The result of the study

This thesis has brought to light the person who had remained hidden behind the fictitious Cuneo. Miguel de Cuneo is not only a fable created to reinforce the thesis of a Genoese Columbus, but also the appropriation of a real person from a different place and with a different name: Miquel Ballesster. He was the true, loyal friend of Columbus, his companion on their youthful adventures in Mallorca and his right-hand man in the organisation of the mercantile company belonging to the expert navigator Colom/Colombo/Colon/Columbus. He undertook his main activity in the large

4
— SAVONA, MAGGIO 1892 —

PRO
CHRISTOPHO DE COLUMBO

PUBBLIC

CIRCOLO FILODRAMMATICO LIT.

NELLA SOLENNE COMMEMORAZIONE

DEL IV CENTENARIO DELLA SCOPERTA DELL' AMERICA

LA SAONA
E LA SUPPOSTA RELAZIONE DI MICHELE DE CUNEO

SOMMARIO DEGLI ARTICOLI

P. DE GONZALEZ - La festa colombiana in Savona - A. BAIRO - Savona ai tempi di Colombo - A. BAIRO -
Via s. Giuliano - A. BAIRO - Piazza Colombo - A. BAIRO - Le circonvoluzioni operale in Savona nel
secolo XV - F. BAIRO - Cives non immeritores - G. B. GARASINI - La marineria savonese nel sec. XV -
A. BAIRO - A proposito del « Christophe Colomb et Savone » del signor Henri Harlet - G. B.
GARASINI - Le Argomentazioni dell'abate A. Sanguineti - A. BAIRO - La « Supposta » supposta
relazione di Michele De Cuneo - A. BAIRO - L'America dopo la sua scoperta - G. B. GARASINI -
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Per Cristoforo Colombo - A. BAIRO - L'Arte della lana in Savona - A. BAIRO - L'Arte della lana in Savona - A. BAIRO -

MEZZO CENT. 25

Document presentat per Pere Català i
Roca en la seva conferència: "Un fra his-
tòric: La relació del segon viatge atribuït
a Michell de Cuneo", pronunciada el
dia 25 de febrer de 1999 en el Centre
d'Estudis Colombins de Barcelona.

SAVONA
TIPOGRAFIA NAZIONALE DI F. G. GOZZO & NICOLA
— HECODESI —

mediaeval market of Cuneo. In the ports of Savona and Genoa he had the points of sale for the merchandise obtained by the corsair, Colombo, both those of the wool merchants and tavern governors Domenico and Bartolome Colombo and Simon «Tort» Ballester, as well as those of Miquel Ballester. All this can be proven by documents dated between 1470 and 1475 in which we can see the close relationship between the Colombos and the Ballesters.

Continuing along these lines and as we stated in the study of «La Relazione de Miguel de Cuneo» from the book *Cartas de particulares a Colon y Relaciones coetáneas* (*Private Letters to Columbus and Contemporary Relations*) (published by Juan Gil and Consuelo Varela in 1984), in which they state: «more logical, therefore, appears to be the possibility that Miguel de Cuneo was a descendant of that family of wool weavers and fellow citizens of the Colombos, whose dealings with the future Admiral dated from childhood».

The Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons, on learning of the supplanting of the historical personage from Tarragona, Miquel Ballester, by the imaginary Savonese, showed his surprise, saying «Now I understand the gaps there are in the information about Michele de Cuneo».

Translation of A. Bruno's writings from Italian to English

In 1885 Olindo Guerrini wrote to the Deputation for Homeland History of the provinces of La Romagna about a manuscript in the library of the University of Bologna known as the «black manuscript». He said it contained, among other things, a kind of list written in the form of a letter from the Savonese, Michele De Cuneo, to one Geronimo Annari, a Savonese nobleman, about the voyage in which De Cuneo said he had participated.

First of all, is there any other proof that Michele De Cuneo took part in Columbus' second expedition? We know of none, although it is known that men from Savona accompanied Columbus on his voyages. However, the most important question is: Who was the Geronimo Annari to whom De Cuneo sent his letter? Neither in my own research, nor in the considerable knowledge I have acquired through the assiduous study of the Savonese archives, have I found any family or individual with those surnames.

However, in the letter Annari is described as a Savonese nobleman and it assures us that he was a friend of Cristoforo and Bartolomeo Colombo. In the records of the noble families, gathered mainly from the de-

liberations of the city council and ceremonies of bestowal of nobility over the centuries, no Annari is to be found.

...although one may have been Spanish and the other Italian, De Cuneo exaggerates himself too much and does not allow it to be said and affirmed, even when it is unnecessary, that Columbus is from Genoa and that Genoa never had a more important citizen, which adds to the suspicion that it is not a true document.

Columbus, who we know never financed his own voyages, invested in the property of Savona, or, as the letter states, «la bella savonesa», drawing up a genuine deed before a public notary. But how did Columbus gain possession of that island without the consent of Spain? And what memories of this supposed property remain in the Quarda family and the Admiral's memory?

I conclude by confirming the suspicion that the supposed relationship was no more than a mockery and I am amazed that well known writers have given it any credibility.

Conclusions about the supplanting of the Tarragonan Miquel Ballester

The Italian town of Cuneo was founded at the end of the 12th century. It is located in the foothills of the Maritime Alps in the region of Piedmont. The name Cuneo comes from the fact that it grew up in an interior space in the form of a triangle or wedge in the vertex of which the Gesso Torrent and the Stura River converge.

By the 15th century, when the Colombos and Ballesters were resident in Genoa and Savona, it was already an important market town thanks to its strategic location. Seventy kilometres to the south is the city of Savona, 75 kilometres to the west is Turin and to the east are Occitania and French Provence, from whose regions merchants and buyers arrived. The Colombos and the Ballesters were known in Savona as «those from Cuneo», due to their habitual presence at that market. The market is still held in the same place today. In the history of the town of Cuneo there is not the slightest reference to Michele de Cuneo and local historians consulted knew nothing of him.

The supplanting of Miquel Ballester with Michele de Cuneo is due to the strength of the person from Tarragona in terms of his unquestionable and loyal friendship throughout the life of Christopher Columbus. The «Relazione de Michele de Cuneo» was invented with the aim of reinforcing the false Genoese thesis.

We have to take into account that in the year 1452 we find the Ballesters and the Coloms together in Mallorca fighting alongside the rebels. Between 1470 and 1475, the same individuals were known in Savona and Genoa as «those from Cuneo».

The truth about Ballester and his friendship with Columbus can be seen in the following points

In 1493 Miguel Ballester accompanied the Admiral on his second voyage to the New World. There he was named governor of the fortress of La Concepcion and a short time later, during the search for gold, he was also named governor of Bonao.

When Roldan rebelled against Christopher Columbus, Ballester was his most important and efficient mediator.

He accompanied the Admiral, who was handcuffed and imprisoned by Bobadilla, on his journey to Castile for trial.

To Ballester he entrusted two domestic groups of Indians with twenty-eight servants, not slaves, in the town of La Buenaventura in the newly-discovered lands.

In Santo Domingo Miguel Ballester was named tutor and testamentary executor of Diego Columbus, the Admiral's eldest son.

Of considerable importance was the transfer to the New World of the knowledge of growing sugar cane of which we deduce, quite plausibly, that he had experience. Where did Miquel Ballester from Tarragona learn this if he did not collaborate with his friend Christopher Columbus in the latter's sugar business?

Therefore, he was of such importance in the life of the Admiral, that it was essential to supplant him, as it was not possible to conceive of the life of Christopher Columbus without that of Miguel Ballester.

COLUMBUS AND BALLESTER IN THE PORTUGUESE ISLANDS OF MADEIRA

A thousand kilometres to the south of Portugal and 600 kilometres from Morocco we find Madeira, an Atlantic archipelago of four islands. The largest is the island of Madeira itself, which is mountainous with deep valleys and lush vegetation. Its capital, Funchal, is located on the eastern side of the southern coast. Fifty kilometres to the northwest of Funchal is the island of Porto Santo, which is much smaller and has a different climate and landscape. The other two islands that make up the archipelago –La Desierta and La Salvaje– are some thirty kilometres to the southeast of the capital. They are uninhabited, although their flora and fauna are protected.

Christopher Columbus' stay in Porto Santo is related by his own son, Hernando. Chapter 5 of his *Historia del Almirante (History of the Admiral)* describes how Columbus was shipwrecked after a naval battle in the waters off Cape St Vincent (1476), south of Portugal. After recovering from the damage and suffering in Lagos, he travelled to Lisbon, near where «it was known that there were many acquaintances; as quickly as possible he went there, where being known by them, they gave him such courtesy and such a warm welcome that he took up residence in that city; he married» Filipa Moniz, of noble family, as we have already mentioned. Her father, the late Pedro Moniz de Perestrelo, led the discovery in 1419 of the islands of Porto Santo and, a year later, of those of Madeira. Columbus' father-in-law would be the first governor-donatory of the island of Porto Santo, a position he held until his death. Years later, his son, Fili pa's brother, would occupy the post. Hernando summarises the importance of that wedding in a few lines.

As far as the islands and their links to Columbus are concerned, in Chapter 3 of *Historia de las Indias (A History of the Indies)*, Bartolome de Las Casas places on record some annotations written by Columbus himself in

which he considers it proven that the equinoctial was also inhabited. «I was in Castillo de la Mina del Rey in Portugal, which is below the equinoctial» and Las Casas himself writes in the following chapter:

«Thus Christopher Columbus went to live on said island of Puerto Sancto, where he begot his firstborn heir, Diego Columbus, perchance, for only the reason of wanting to sail, to leave there his wife, and because there on that island and on that of Madeira, which is nearby, and had also been discovered then, there began to be a great concurrence of vessels on its population and neighbourhood and frequent news every day of the discoveries that anew were made [...] thus he sailed sometimes that route in the company of the Portuguese, as a person already resident and almost a native of Portugal, and because he lived sometime on that island of Puerto Sancto, where he left some estates and inheritances of his father-in-law Perestrelo».

It is documented that Christopher and Bartolome Columbus, together with some fellow countrymen, were in Madeira, Equatorial Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands – Portuguese territory where they must have



The façade of Christopher Columbus' house in Porto Santo, Madeira (Portugal).

specialised in growing and processing sugar cane. Columbus took four expert growers from the African plantations to train the new workers in the Caribbean.

Columbus, seafarer and merchant

Christopher Columbus' presence in Madeira from 1478 to 1484 cannot be disassociated from his contacts with the people he had known during his stays in the Genoan and Portuguese communities of the island in whose capital, Funchal, lived the Genoan, Joao Esmeraldo, an important sugar merchant.

In the above mentioned book, Las Casas tells us o(one of Columbus' stays in Madeira:

«And because then war had broken out with France, he had news of a French fleet that was waiting off Cape St Vincent to take the Admiral. For this reason he deliberated and turned round, setting course for the island of La Madera. He arrived at the island of Puerto Sancto, Thursday, 7 June, where he stopped to take on firewood and water and provisions. And he heard mass; and found there all agitated and raised all the estates, furniture and livestock, fearing that they may be the French. And later that night they sailed for the island of Madeira, which, as stated above [in Chapter 36], is at 12 or 15 leagues, and he reached there the following Sunday, 10 June. In the town he was very well received and there was great feasting as he was well known there, where he had resided for some time. He was there, duly provisioning himself with water and firewood and the other things necessary for his voyage, six days. On Saturday 16 June he sailed with his six ships from the island of Madeira, and arrived the following Tuesday at the island of La Gomera».

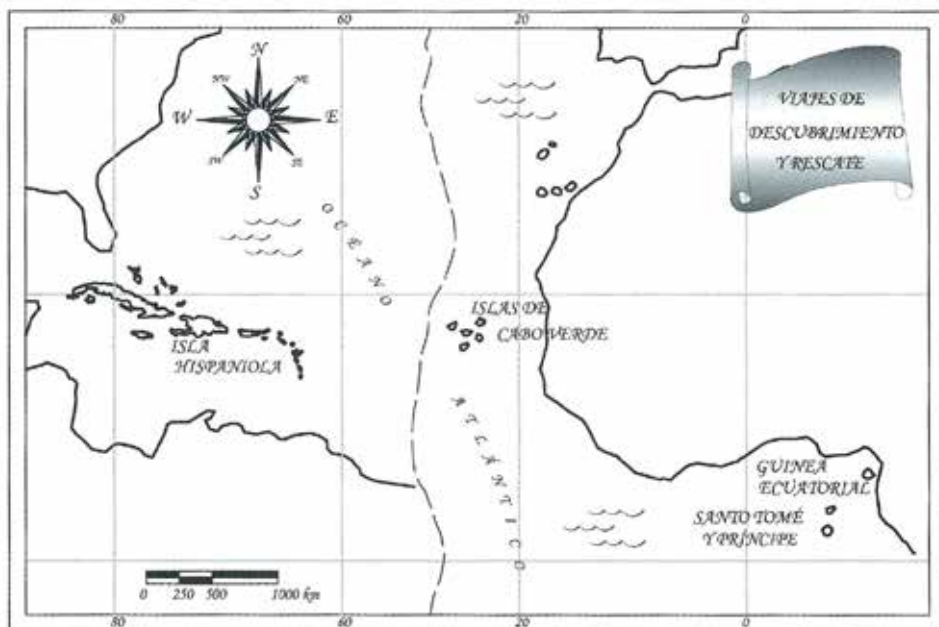
Madeira, the European sugar market

In 1425 sugar cane began to be exported from the Atlantic, specifically from Madeira. From 1484 large sugar cane plantations began to be exploited on the African coast of Equatorial Guinea, in the Cape Verde Islands and on Santo Tome, in the African Atlantic tropics and, later, in 1493, on the island of La Hispaniola.

In his book *Canaviais, açúcar e aguardente na Madeira* (*Canaviais, sugar and liquor on Madeira*), the Madeiran researcher Alberto Vieira alludes to Columbus' links with the sugar trade:

«Colombo opened the gates to the New World and drew the lines for the expansion of sugar cane. Its cultivation was not unknown to him, as the navigator had in his curriculum certain activities linked to the sugar trade in Madeira. The navigator, prior to his affective relationship with the archipelago, was an example of many citizens of Genoa in the Madeiran sugar market. In 1478 he found himself in Funchal at the service of Paolo di Negro to take to Genoa 2,400 *arrobas* (a measure of twenty-five pounds) to Ludovico Centurione. With this voyage and after a long stay of seafaring on the island, Columbus, together with his friend Ballester, became knowledgeable of the dynamic and importance of sugar on Madeira».

In January 1493, while preparing his second voyage, the Navigator recommended the Catholic Monarchs to embark 50 barrels of honey and 10 boxes of sugar from Madeira for the use of the crews, telling them that in accordance with the accumulated experience, the best time to acquire



Map: Voyages of «discovery and rescue» on the Portuguese African coast.

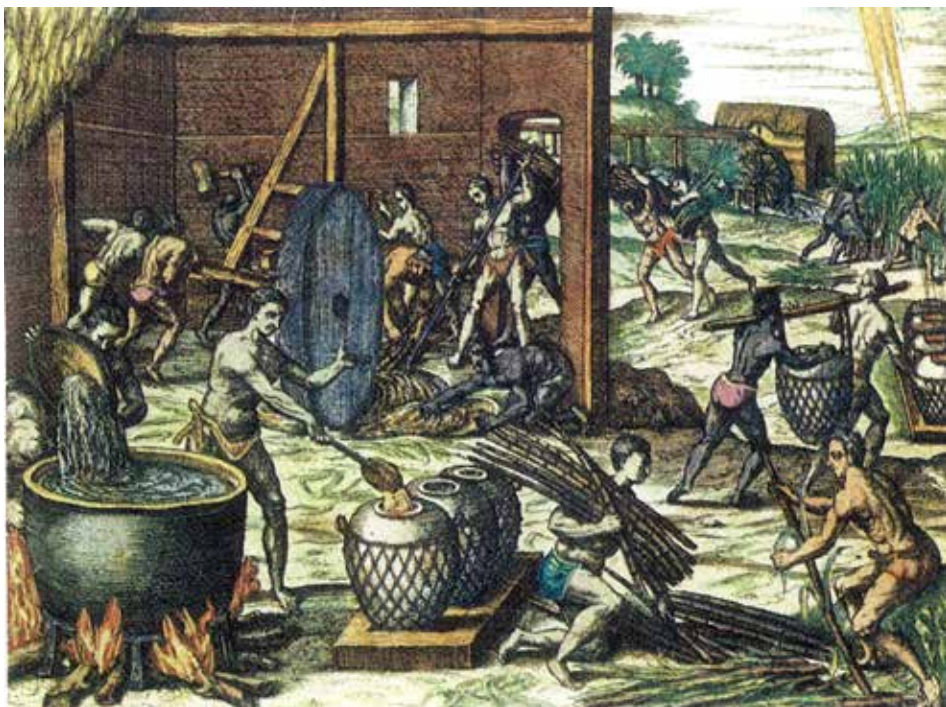
it was the month of April. To this we can add a stopover the Admiral made in Funchal during the third voyage in June 1498. He says it is very likely that there were cane shoots from Madeira in the baggage of the farmers accompanying him, so that they could be planted on any newly discovered islands. By this time, sugar cane plantations had reached a grand climax on the island, with a major strip of plantations all along the southern slopes.

During this interval of time, Christopher Columbus' activity is decisive. Between 1478 and 1484 the Admiral made several voyages of «discovery and rescue». According to Las Casas, he was usually accompanied by his brother, Bartolome:

«On those voyages and discoveries, or on some of them, were Admiral Christopher Columbus and his brother Bartolome Columbus, according to what I can infer from letters and things, writings I have of their hands.¹⁴¹ [...]they went both many or some times, as I said above, occupied and in the company of the Portuguese in these discoveries».

The route began in Madeira and continued to the positions recently discovered by the Portuguese in Equatorial Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands. These are located on the same parallel as the Antillean island of La Hispaniola (Santo Domingo), on the western coast of the Atlantic Ocean, where the Admiral would set up his residence from the first voyage in 1492. Cape Verde was a redoubt of slaves captured in Africa for the European market and later the American market. The slaves worked on large sugar plantations where they built mills worked by human or animal power. Later, water-powered mechanical devices would be built and installed. The objective of those voyages of «discovery and rescue» was, therefore, to select the seeds of tropical fruits, such as sugar cane, and to recruit African slaves who knew about their cultivation and preparation, so that once there they could transport them to farm the new lands they expected to find.

Funchal, as we have said, was the home of Joao Esmeraldo, a farmer, sugar trader and supplier to Columbus. Twenty years later he would have one of the largest fortunes on the island. On returning from his third voyage, Columbus put in at Funchal for six days and Esmeraldo invited the Admiral, Viceroy and Governor of the Indies to stay in the magnificent new house he had built in 1495 near where the Sugar Museum stands today.

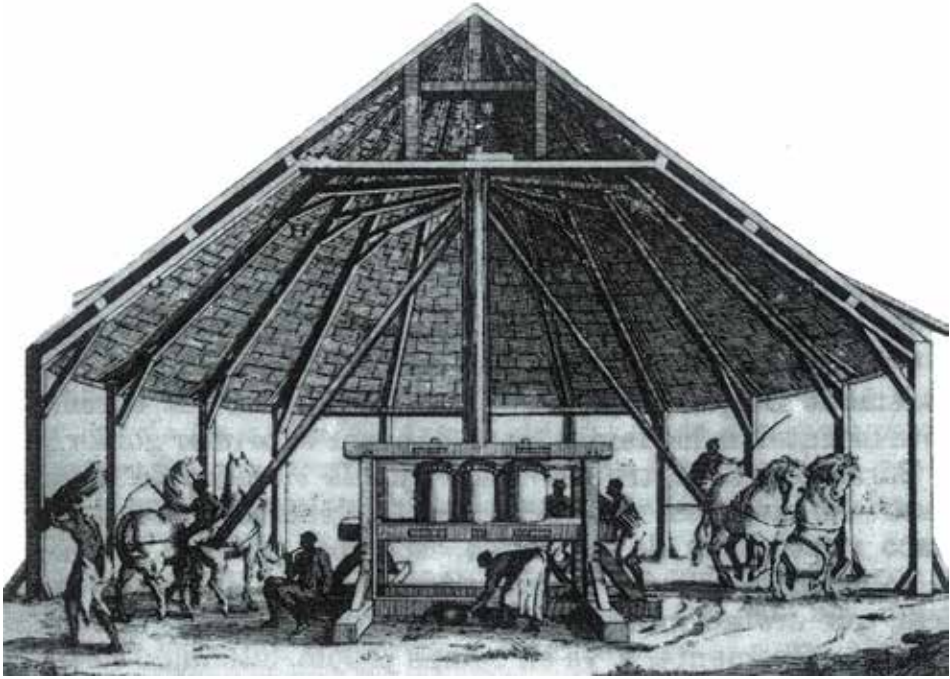


A slave-powered sugar cane mill.

Madeira flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries; the island became the centre for the European sugar market. In addition to its own production, enormous quantities were imported from the Portuguese plantations in Equatorial Guinea, the Cape Verde Islands, Santo Tome, the Antilles and, fundamentally, Brazil. Brazilian sugar was shipped in large crates made of Amazonian wood, which was subsequently used to make the magnificent furniture that can still be admired today in the Quinta das Cruzes Museum in Funchal.

In *I viaggi di Colombo*, Paolo Emilio Taviani notes the parallelism that Columbus established between the already-known products in Guinea and those of the discovered lands:

«A una prima impressione, il Genovese, che ha conosciuto gli ignami in Guinea, confonde con essi l'ajes, cioè la batata [...] Qui le ajes crescono piu grosse e buone di quante abbia visto altrove, poiche l' Ammiraglio dice che ne aveva gia visto in Guinea [...]



One of the first animal-powered sugar mills.



Vestiges of the first sugar cane mill on the River Nfgua.

Studi recenti compiuti particolarmente in Dominicana hanno portato a concludere che l'ajes e il tubero che lo Scopritore definisce, per il ricordo della Guinea».¹

«Il fallimento dell' impresa coloniale di Colombo all' Hispaniola: Nel Manual de historia dominicana –che, in qualche punto riportiamo integralmente e il resto riassuntivamente– Moya Pons sottolinea che il piano di Colombo era stato di costituire nell' Hispaniola una fattoria o colonia simile a quelle che egli aveva visto, molti anni addietro, lungo le coste di Guinea e Capo Verde, in Africa».²

On the second voyage to the New World, Columbus was accompanied by the Tarragonan, Miguel Ballester and, according to Fray Bartolome de Las Casas and corroborated by Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo in his *Historia Natural y General de las Indias* (*Natural and General History of the Indies*), «Miguel Ballester, a native of Catalonia, was the first to extract the juice of the sugar cane on the Caribbean island». From 1493, Miguel Ballester –a friend of the Discoverer and his most loyal collaborator on La Hispaniola– took sugar cane shoots and specialist farmers to the new lands.

In 1505, Miguel Ballester was the first person to extract the juice of the sugar cane at his mill in San Cristobal (Santo Domingo). The climate of those lands and the features of the terrain were favourable for planting the «white gold» and allowed him to farm large plantations and introduce mechanical mills to increase production. It was then that the sugar industry truly began to develop and spread to many territories of Hispano-America.

In his book *Los catalanes en America* (*Catalans in America*) (Havana, 1919), the Cuban writer Carlos Martf refers to Ballester as the owner of the first sugar extraction mill located at the mouth of River Nigua –San

- 1 «In a first impression, the Genoese, who knew yams (a tuber) from Guinea, confused them with ajos (potatoes)»(...) «Here ajos grow larger and better than I have ever seen in other places, after which the Admiral says he had already seen them in Guinea» (...) «Recent studies carried out, particularly in the Dominican Republic have led to the conclusion that those ajos and the tuber the Discoverer defines, for the memory of Guinea».
- 2 «The failure of Columbus' colonial project in La Hispaniola: In the 'Manual of Dominican History' –that, at some points we quote fully and at others in summary– Moya Pons emphasises that Columbus' plan had been to build in La Hispaniola an agricultural estate or colony similar to those he had seen many years before on the coasts of Guinea and in Cape Verde in Africa».

Cristobal (Santo Domingo)– and specifies that at the end of the first decade of the 16th century he had twenty mills on the island of La Hispaniola.

Ballester, precursor of «ouro branco» in America

Few products have had such a great influence on the history of the Western World as sugar, mainly since its introduction to the New World by Christopher Columbus on his second voyage (1493).

The Granada researcher, Adela Fabregas Garcfa, confirms the importance of the sugar trade in her article «From the cultivation of sugar cane to the establishment of the plantations»:

«The penetration of new sugars such as the Portuguese sugar produced in Madeira in ancient producing areas on the Mediterranean Levant is little more than a timid precursor of what would happen later with the American sugars, which would come to saturate the European market».

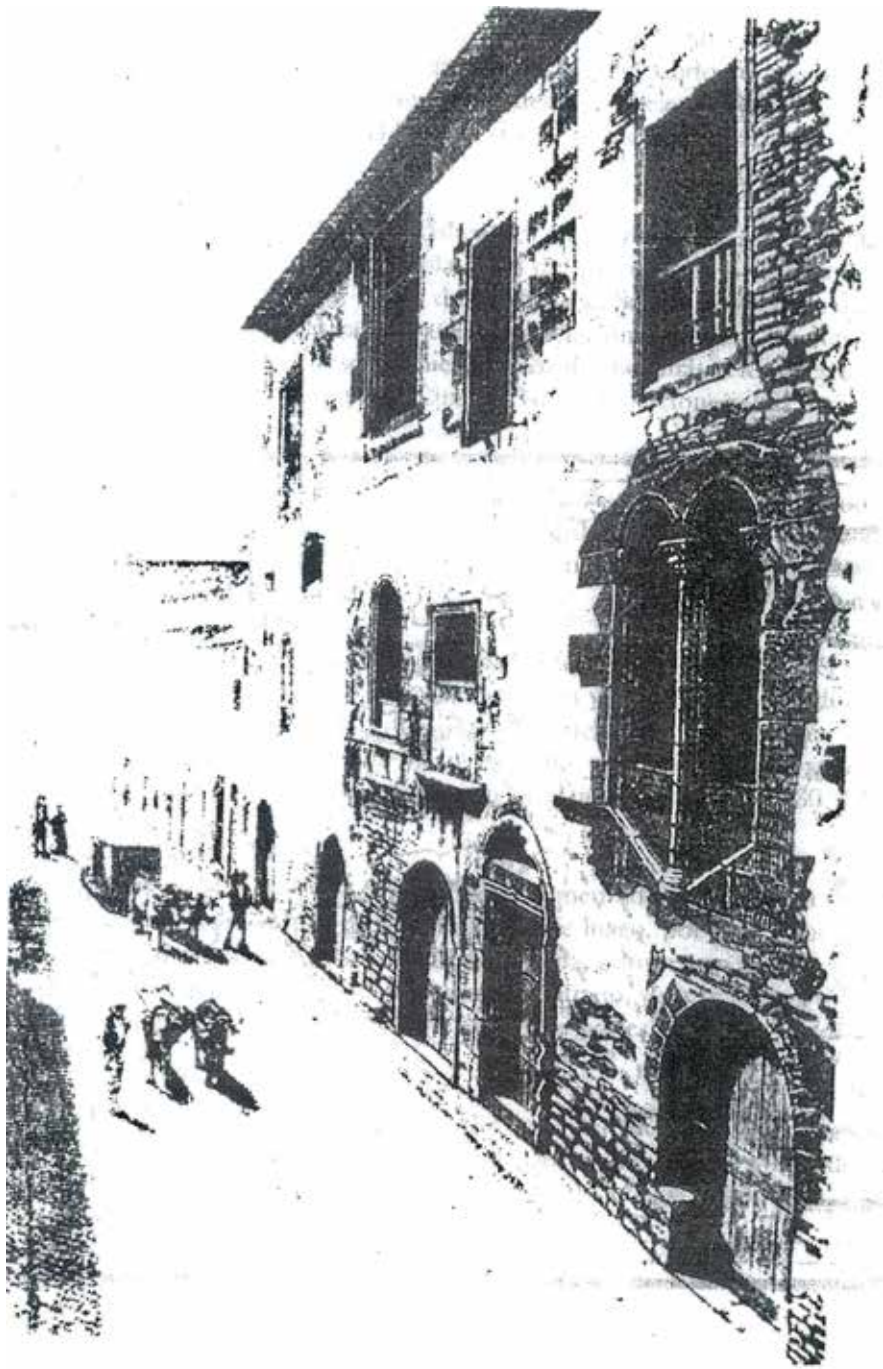
She later adds:

«Let us remember briefly that until the middle of the 16th century, when major innovations were introduced from the new American production areas, the milling system used in the Mediterranean continued to be that inherited directly from the Roman technological traditio_n, which combined the grinding and macerating of a mill with the subsequent pressing».

It can therefore be stated without fear of contradiction that Miguel Ballester was the promoter of the development of the sugar trade in America and Europe.

The work of slaves: an obligatory reference

Adela Fabregas analyses the characteristics of work in the sugar cane plantations. «Let us remember only that it combines intensive phases with others of extreme specialisation. Therefore, together with highly qualified workers dedicated to controlling such delicate stages as the cooking and purging, with processing secrets that sometimes determine the final quality of the sugar, we find groups of workers that are more abundant than qualified and that cover above all the need for the speed and exhaustive care with which the process has to be completed».



Joao Esmeraldo's house in Funchal (Madeira).

The production process requires the participation of two essential and complementary groups of workers. Fabregas Garcfa details the attributes of each of them.

«With respect to the first group, who are generally identified with the figure of the master sugar maker, the *tachero* (the person who handles the containers) and the banker, the responsibilities carried out by the spicers and pharmacists are increasingly clear, at least in those functions that require a certain knowledge of chemical processes».

«In the second case we find the majority of those professions known since the 8th century in Egypt, probers (*lammāsin*), whose job was to examine the cane and decide when it had to be cut; cutters (*qutā'in*), peelers (*maqā'srin*), charged with removing the leaves fixed to the stalk, pilers (*rusās*) and loaders (*rufā'*), transporters (*naqālin*), unloaders (*turrāh*), choppers (*nayābin*), millers (*hayārin*) and those who shaped or made the loaves of sugar (*gilmān-l-'ibāliyy*)».

The demand for a vigorous workforce dedicated exclusively to this task at the most delicate times during the process takes on prime impor-



Map: Madeira and its sugar trade.

tance with the Atlantic and American capital period. This need had a painful, and for some inevitable, repercussion: slavery.

The traffic of African slaves to be sold in Mediterranean markets was monopolised by the Arabs until the 15th century, when it began to come under the control of Europeans.

In 1444 the Portuguese shipped 235 Africans from Lagos to Seville, where they were sold as slaves. Ten years later, the Pope recognised the slave traffic and from then on it was used to increase the productivity of the sugar cane plantations in Madeira and, from 1493, in America. We do not know how many Africans the slavers uprooted from their lands and sent to the New World. We do know that this huge business began in 1518 when the first Portuguese *negrero* set sail from Africa and unloaded its «cargo of pieces of ebony» in Brazil, from where they were sent all over America to be used as specialised labour.

TARRAGON A AND THE RETURN OF THE VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

Columbus' journey to Barcelona to be received by the Catholic Monarchs

When Columbus returned to the Iberian Peninsula following the discovery of the New World, the Catholic Monarchs were in Catalonia. King Ferdinand was recovering from an attempt to assassinate him with a knife in December 1492 during which he suffered a serious neck wound. There is evidence that it was on 3 April 1493 that the monarchs received Columbus following his feat of navigation.

Columbus disembarked in Restelo (Lisbon) on 4 March 1493, mooring his vessel in the Tajo estuary where it remained for cleaning and repairs until the fourteenth of that same month. Before sailing for Seville on board *La Nina*, Columbus sent a messenger on horseback with a letter and a list for the Catholic Monarchs; in it he told them of his discovery and the most important details. He sent a similar letter to his friend Luis de Santangel, the King of Aragon's financier and guarantor of the financing of the voyage of discovery.

On Friday 15 March *La Nina* anchored in waters of the Guadalquivir with a cargo of natives and exotic animals from the Indies. From Seville, Columbus travelled overland on royal roads until he reached Cordoba, where his lover Beatriz lived with his two sons, Hernando and the first-born Diego.

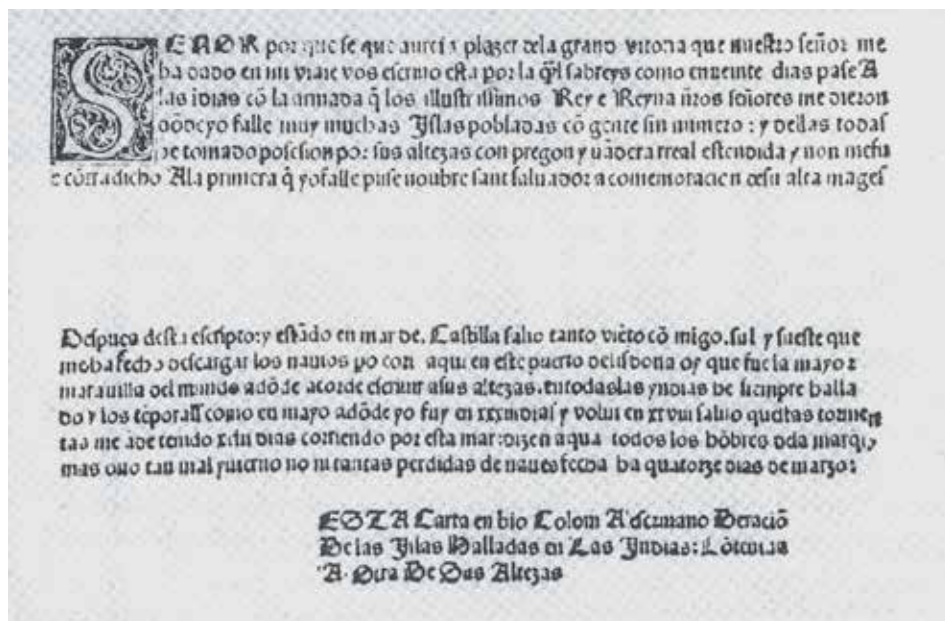
In the *Historia de las Indias*, Father Las Casas tells us that at the age of nine he witnessed the colourful arrival in Seville of Columbus and his entourage, with native Indians, animals and exotic products that he had brought from the new lands. He also confirms that on 14 March 1493 Columbus had sent a long letter from Lisbon explaining the whole voyage to the monarchs and that they had replied with a letter dated the 30th of the same month that concluded with the following words:

«[...]and because we wish that what you have commenced with the help of God be continued and taken forward, and we wish that your arrival be soon, hence, for our service, that you make the greatest haste possible in your coming, as with time everything that is needed is provided. And because, as you see, the summer is beginning, do not pass the time for the journey here, see if something can be done in Seville or in other parts for your return to the land you have found.

And write to us soon with this courier who has to return rapidly, so that after it can be designated how it should be done, while you come and that all should be arranged. From Barcelona, on the thirtieth day of March of the year ninety-three. –I the King. –I the Queen».

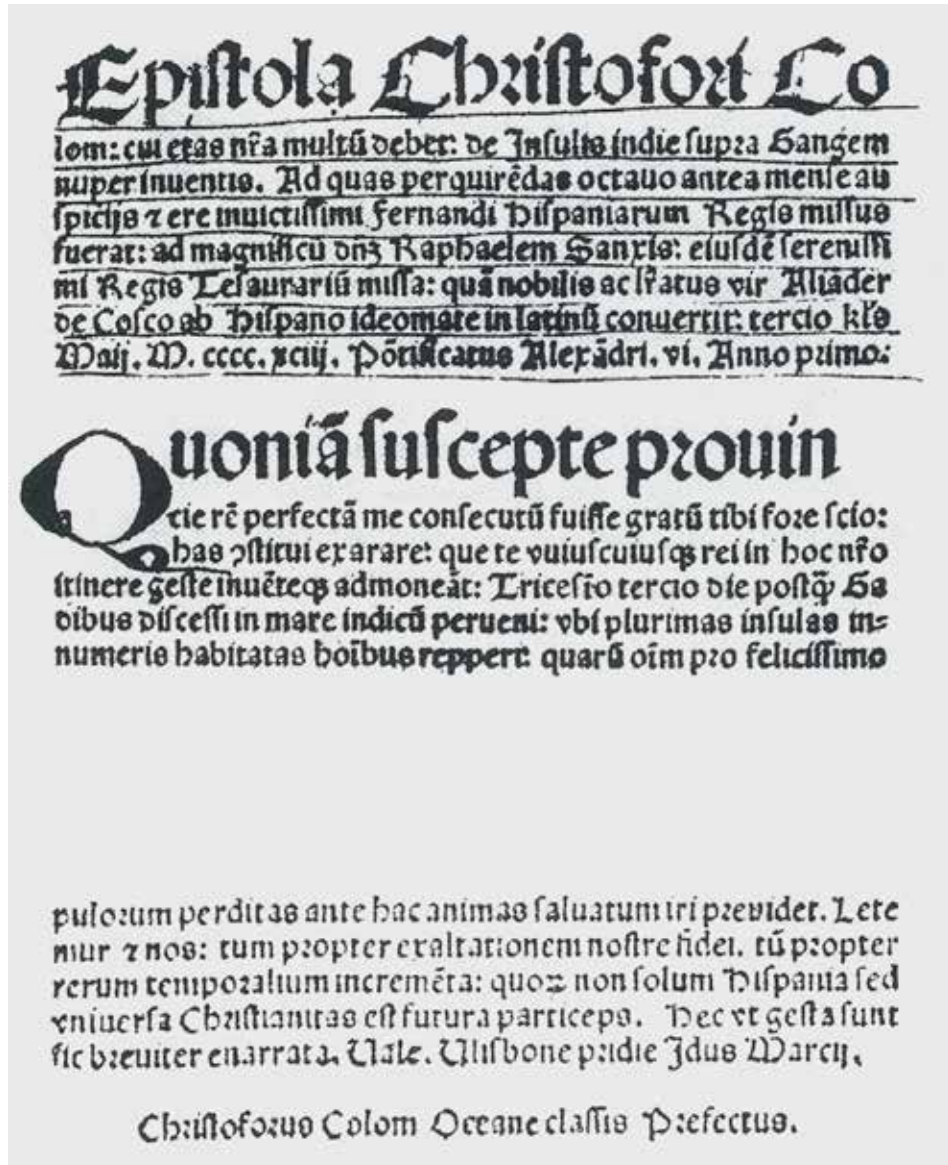
A historical error

The fact that the letter written by the king and queen is dated 30 March and that Columbus appeared before them on 3 April has given rise to many questions. Some historians conclude that if Columbus had still been



The letter Christopher Columbus wrote in 1493 to Luis de Santangel.

in Andalusia he would not have had enough time to make the journey. The absence of information about the reception he received, which is not recorded in either the account books or the official registers of Barcelona, reinforces this scepticism. Perhaps it has not been taken into account that,



The Roman edition of Cosco's Latin version of Columbus' letter to Santangel.

given the interests and ambitions of other states, the monarchs would have treated the Admiral's arrival with the maximum discretion and caution.

In this respect, Antonio Rumeu de Armas, in his «Historical-Critical Study» of the *Libra Co-piador* of Christopher Columbus –otherwise known as the «Tarragona Manuscript»– clarifies:

«The sovereigns of Castile, faced with the ambiguous conduct of the King of Portugal, John II, had decided to accelerate the development of the Indian enterprise in order to consolidate the possession of the recently discovered mainland and islands, to populate them with subjects from their states and to continue, with redoubled efforts, the task of exploration already begun. On that 30 March, the second oceanic expedition was firmly resolved».

The error of some historians has been to base their theories on when the monarchs sent their message to Columbus, who was somewhere in Andalusia: in the Pinzon house in Palos, with the Franciscan Fathers in Santa Marfa de la Rabida in Huelva, or in Seville or Cordoba. They therefore consider it impossible for him to have reached Barcelona in four days, between 30 March and 3 April. They do not take into account the possibility that the Admiral was actually much closer, in Tarragona, where he would have been beginning to organise, together with his friend Miguel Ballester, the imminent and most important second voyage –with a larger number of ships, men and equipment– which was to be of exploration, colonisation and evangelisation of all those newly discovered lands.

Without considering that Columbus had already left Andalusia, it is logical that Morales Padron in *Cristóbal Colón, Almirante de la Mar Océana* (*Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Oceanic Sea*) deduces that: «at the end of April, the Catholic Monarchs received the Admiral in Barcelona with great honours». In the *Gran historia de América* (*The Great History of America*) Ricardo de La Cierva details the route Columbus had planned and which is in his *Diario de a bordo* (logbook):

«He (Columbus) had expected to travel to Barcelona by sea, but given the order of the monarchs that he should arrive at the beginning of April, he began immediately his journey by land, via Cordoba –where he embraced his lover Beatriz de Arana and his sons–, Murcia, Valencia, Tarragona and Barcelona. This triumphal journey culminated in the most important moment in Columbus' life, being received by the King and Queen in Barcelona».

Columbus' itinerary via royal roads from Seville to Cordoba and Murcia and from the coast of Murcia to Barcelona by sea

As La Cierva accurately states, Columbus wrote in his *Diario de a bordo* (logbook) that he planned to go to Barcelona by sea. The bearing, according to the historian, followed by the Admiral confirms as much. The journey from Seville to Cordoba and from there to Murcia would of course have been made on horseback following royal roads. Another opinion is that in a port on the coast of Murcia, possibly Cartagena –which was the safest port– his entourage and the crew that had accompanied him on the return voyage would have been waiting with the caravel *La Nina*; from there he would have continued by sea to Valencia, Tarragona (where his friend Ballester was) and, finally, to Barcelona.

There is a convincing argument to support this version: if Columbus had travelled to Barcelona overland, it would not have made sense to head east from Cordoba to Murcia. It would have been more logical to take the shorter route to the north via Albacete, Almansa and Valencia. However, that itinerary presented two major disadvantages: the amount of time it would have taken with a slow means of transport and the danger of the roads across the Sierra Morena Mountains, on which travellers were regularly attacked by outlaws. The quickest and safest way would have been to make the last part of the journey by sea, a method in which the Admiral was an expert.

We find a very interesting remark in *Cristóbal Colón. Retrato de un hombre* (*Christopher Columbus. Portrait of a Man*) by Consuelo Varela:

«Columbus, like any good sailor, liked to live on his ship and whenever he could he avoided disembarking on his voyages. Even Oviedo, maliciously –according to Varela– relates how on the first voyage he did not disembark until they reached the island of Cuba».

This was indeed true. We know for certain that the night before Christmas 1492, when the *Santa María* ran aground, Columbus rested on board the vessel; he did not disembark either to sleep or to celebrate the festival with the rest of the crew.

Some authors maintain that in their letter of 30 March the Catholic Monarchs summoned Columbus to appear before them in Barcelona. However, to prove this they have to work useless miracles with the destination of the royal missive and the date

of the reception by the monarchs. According to the most reliable chronicles, Columbus arrived in Barcelona on 3 April 1493. This is affirmed by López de Gomara in his *Historia general de la Indias*; by Monfart in the catalogue or memorial of the councillors of Barcelona; by Father Fidel Fita in his *Panegrico de la Inmaculada Concepción* (*Panegyric of the Immaculate Conception*); and by other authors who also quote that date.

Miquel Ballester's stay in Tarragona

The stay in Tarragona is a key piece of information that helps to clear up any doubts about the monarchs' reception of Columbus on 3 April. This day allows us to give a simple explanation for Columbus' arrival in Barcelona. There are four days between 30 March –the date of the letter sent by the monarchs to Columbus– and 3 April. This is more than enough time for a letter to be carried from Barcelona to Tarragona –only 55 miles away– in a single day, using a courier such as the expert Collantes and with horses galloping along royal roads. This meant that Columbus and his followers still had three days to prepare for the journey and to sail to Barcelona.

But why Tarragona? Columbus had more than enough reasons to choose that city. Miquel Ballester, his intimate friend and one of his most trusted companions was from there. Also citizens of Tarragona were his cousins Andreu and his brother Joan Antón, Columbus' squire and servant respectively who had accompanied him on other journeys, and the Aragonese friar linked to Tarragona, Bernardo Boyl, who five years before had been secretary to King Ferdinand II and diplomatic envoy to France. Pope Alexander VI –the Valencian, Rodrigo Borja– awarded Father Boyl various bulls naming him Vicar of the Church of Rome in the New World and ratified the treaty of Alcaçobas that defined and delimited the demarcation line dividing the recently discovered territories, and those yet to be discovered, between Spain and Portugal. Neither is it unusual that the *Libro Copiador* of Christopher Columbus, otherwise known as the «Tarragona Manuscript», would appear in Tarragona, an ancient Catalan and Mediterranean city, archiepiscopal metropolitan see and primate of Spain, five hundred years after it had been written.

Many years after that return journey, in 1513, Hernando Columbus visited the ancient Roman city, perhaps in the hope of finding some document, or at least an indication that would reveal his origins.

MIQUEL BALLESTER ON THE SECOND VOYAGE

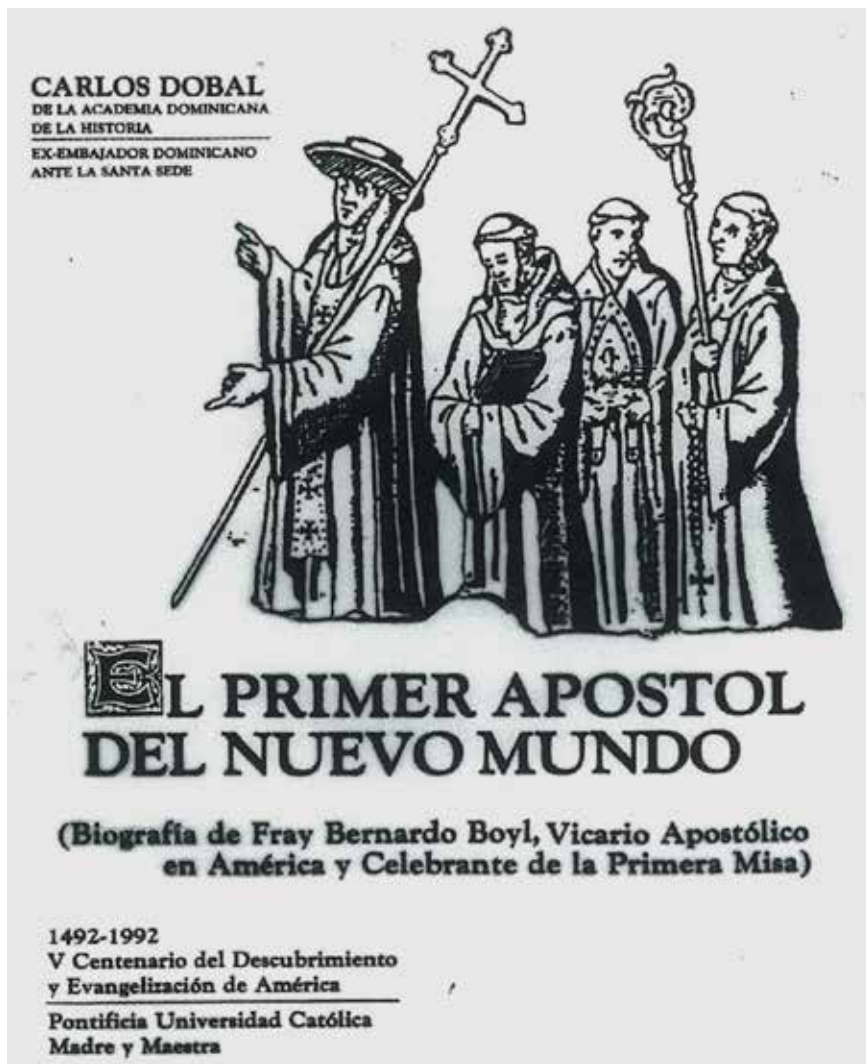
Some of those who embarked with Colwnhus and Ballester for the Indies

In September 1493, Columbus began his second voyage. He was accompanied by men from his naval company. Outstanding among them was Miguel Ballester, his great friend since their youth, Miguel Muliart, the Admiral's brother-in-law, who was married to a sister of his Portuguese wife, Filipa Moniz, and Pedro Casaus, the father of Bartolome de Las Casas, who at that time was living in Seville. On the third and fourth voyage he was accompanied by other friends and relatives from Tarragona, including Las Casas himself and his above mentioned cousins, Andreu and Joan Anton.

Another person who went with Columbus was Fray Bernardo Boyl. A sailor before he was a monk and a former hermit on the mountain of Montserrat, he held the title of Superior of the Mfnimos of Castile and Aragon. King Ferdinand named him secretary and diplomatic ambassador to France and managed to have him participate in the second expedition as the Vicar of Rome and the first evangeliser of the New World. Boyl was accompanied by twelve monks from the Catalan monastery of Montserrat. However, none of Columbus' Franciscan friends from the monastery of Santa Maria de la Rabida, who had helped him so much, embarked with him. It is clear that they were replaced by King Ferdinand's confidant, his secretary Father Boyl, and the monks from Montserrat.

The Genoese historian, Paolo Emilio Taviani, writes in his book *I viaggi di Colombo* (*Colombo's Voyages*):

«Padre Boil era nato a Tarragona. Giovanissimo aveva vestito l'abito di monaco a Montserrat e, alcuni anni dopo, si ritirava in un eremo della stessa montagna. Nel 1482 era superiore dei dodici romitaggi della zona. Nella primavera del 1490, abbandona il ritiro, viene chiamato a Corte con una lettera di re Ferdinando,



On 6 January 1494 Bernardo Boyl held the first mass on La Hispaniola.

datata 30 giugno, da Cordoba. Da allora il monarch gli manifesta simpatia e gli accorda fiducia affidandogli incarichi diplomatici in Francia.³

- 3 «Father Boyl had been born in Tarragona. He dressed in the habit of a monk of Montsen-at at an early age and, some years later, he retired to a hermitage on that mountain. In 1482 he was the head of twelve recluses in the area. In the spring of 1490 he left the retreat and was called to court by a letter from King Ferdinand dated 30 June in Cordoba. From that time on, the monarch took a liking to him and showed his confidence in him by appointing him to diplomatic assignments in France».



Map: Columbus' first return voyage.



Map: Columbus' second voyage.

La carriera del benedettino cambia all'improvviso: i Re hanno pensato a lui per l'evangelizzazione delle Indie. Compiuta la scelta, scrivono, in data 7 giugno 1493, da Barcellona una lettera ai loro ambasciatori in Roma per sollecitare dal Santo Padre una bolla apostolica per la missione che egli dovrà compiere. 11 25 giugno Alessandro VI spedisce la bolla richiesta con la quale padre Boil viene nominato vicario apostolico delle Indie. La Curia non poteva rispondere con maggiore prontezza al desiderio dei sovrani».⁴

1496-1498. Roldan's rebellion against the Admiral

The exorbitant rights demanded by Columbus in the Capitulations of Santa Fe, which had inexplicably been accepted and signed by Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile, were undoubtedly the beginning of the downfall of the Admiral, viceroy and governor of the Indies.

On returning from the first voyage, Columbus named Francisco Roldan –one of his servant squires-mayor of the entire island of La Isabela, a post he continued to hold in March 1496. As administrator of justice, Roldan took up arms on the instigation of Bernat Boil and other outstanding personages in the so-called King's Party, as the men led by Ferdinand the Catholic were known. Together they made up an Aragonese pressure group formed to act as a counterbalance to the prepotency of the «colonists» – relations and friends of the Admiral. Since the discovery, La Española had been divided into two opposing groups: conquerors and colonisers. Miguel Ballester belonged to the second group.

On this subject, Taviani writes: «11 più autorevole era un benedettino, padre Boil, al quale i sovrani affidarono il compito d'intraprendere e dirigere l' opera di conversione. [...] Lo incontreremo più avanti durante le defezioni e le rivolte all'Hispaniola e vedremo che i suoi rapporti con

4 «Note: The career of the Benedictine monk took a sudden turn: the monarchs decided he was the person to evangelise the Indies. Having made their choice, on 7 June 1493 they wrote a letter from Barcelona to the ambassadors in Rome to request that the Holy Father issue an apostolic bull to cover his mission there. On 25 June, Alexander VI sent the required bull that named Father Boil Apostolic Vicar of the Indies. The Curia could not have replied any quicker to the wishes of the sovereigns.

Colombo degenereranno in aperti dissidi, facendosi il religioso portavoce della maldicenza e consigliere dei cospiratori».⁵

When the discontent of Roldan's group had become manifest, a royal letter arrived naming Bartolome Columbus *Adelantado*, receiving reinforcements. The Monarch's decision caused the situation to move into a critical phase.

A letter written by Miguel Ballester, mayor of Bonao, to the Admiral speaks of Roldan's revolt. More than once the latter had had to act as a mediator with the rebel, thus demonstrating his loyalty to Columbus' authority. In the letter he says:

«And I certainly believe that after the hidalgos and upright citizens that Your Lordship has, together with their servants, that those Your Lordship has very certain to die in your service, and the other people I place in great doubt».

In an attempt to recover from his ever increasing unpopularity, on 12 September 1498 Columbus issued a communique announcing that all those who wished to return to Spain were free to do so. However, some of the seditious element went to Bonao to exchange impressions with Ballester. Roldan, installed as mayor of Santo Domingo, did not alter his position. Columbus considered the advantages of going to Spain. Faced with the fear of an indigenous uprising during his absence, he decided to send Ballester in his name with a report. Miguel Ballester and another emissary sent by Columbus, Garçfa Barrantes, explained to the Spanish court what had taken place and the critical situation in the Indies. However, Roldan had also sent a report giving his version to the monarchs, who at that time were in Seville.

The result of these appearances was the transfer to the island of La Hispaniola of Francisco de Bobadilla, a knight of the military order of Calatrava, with a letter of accreditation dated 26 May 1499. Brief and very general, the Monarchs' missive was sent to Columbus with the omission of his title of viceroy and was drawn up in the following terms:

«We have sent Knight Commander Francisco de Bobadilla, the bearer, who speaks to you in our name of things that he will tell

5 «The most competent was a Benedictine monk, Father Boyl, to whom the sovereigns had entrusted the mission of undertaking and leading the work of conversion»(...) «We find him later during the defections and the revolts in La Hispaniola and we see that his relations with Columbus degenerated towards open dissidence, converting the cleric into the spokesperson for the slander and councillor for the conspirators».

you: we beg you to give him credence and faith, and that you put them into action».

In the end Bobadilla decided to take Columbus back to Spain and Ballester decided to accompany the Admiral on his enforced journey in chains. The Discoverer, stripped of his honour, began the journey-of-no-return to ignominy and shame. In a demonstration of his friendship, Ballester remained with Columbus throughout those difficult times.

MIGUEL BALLESTER, THE FIRST TO MAKE SUGAR IN AMERICA

Sugar cane takes root in the Caribbean

There is a series of references that allow us to confirm the important role Miguel Ballester played in the cultivation and processing of sugar cane in the Caribbean. In the Museo de las Casas Reales in Santo Domingo there is an inscription that reads:

«1505.-Sugar is produced in La Vega by the residents Ballester and Aguillon or Aguilo».

In addition, on the grand monument to sugar cane in the same city there is a plaque with the following inscription: «[...] being Miguel Balles-tero (sic) the first to extract its juice [...]», as we had already learned from the contemporary historian Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo in his *Historia general y natural de las Indias*: «[...] the governor of La Vega, Miguel Ballester, a native of Catalonia, was the first to produce sugar».

In his account, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo writes that Miguel Ballester was the first to extract the juice of the sugar cane on the Caribbean island of La Hispaniola.

Another comment in this respect is that of Carlos Martf writing in *Los catalanes en America* about Miguel Ballester's first sugar mill in San Cristobal in the Dominican Republic, near the mouth of the River Nigua.

In a list of the main sugar cane plantations and mills on La Española in the 16th century, which is in Oviedo's book, we find:

«Plantations belonging to Miguel Ballester:

1514 –La Concepcion (La Vega) Governor Miquel (sic) Ballester.

1516 – San Cristobal (S. Cristobal) Miquel (sic) Ballester (Governor)».

We can see that Oviedo writes «Miquel», the Catalan version of Ballester's given name.

In Luis Arranz Marquez's work, *Repartimientos and encomiendas en la isla Espafiola. El Repartimiento de Alburquerque de 1514* we find the lists of the encomenderos (colonists granted control of land and Indians to work it) by towns and *encomiendas*. The book tells us that Miguel Ballester controlled thirty-five encomendados, distributed over four encomiendas located in the region of La Buena Ventura. In the same book we also find an alphabetic list of *caciques* classified by towns, in which we see the post of cacique of the by-then deceased Adrian and Miguel

Ballester himself, together with other purchasers. The director of the National Archive of Santo Domingo, Dr. Ramon A. Font Barnard, says that it was the custom among the conquerors to marry the widows of the caciques, thus increasing their authority, both over the natives and the territory that was the object of trade.

The last three decades of Miguel Ballester's life

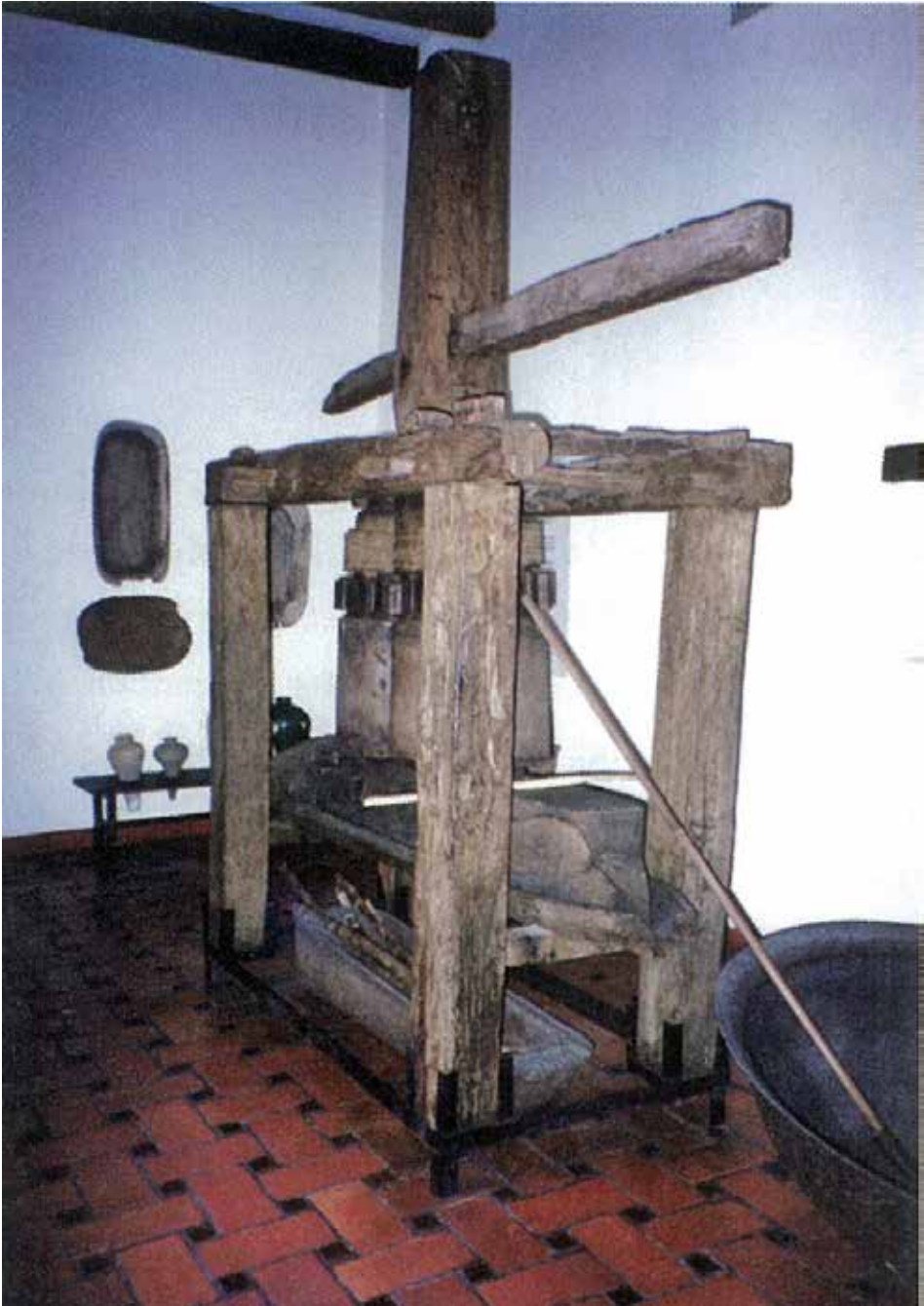
Father Jose Luis Saez of Santo Domingo affords us the following on the work of the Dutch historian Harry Hoetink in his *A Brief History of Sugar in Santo Domingo*, in which he states:

«[...] the governor of that fortress, Miquel (sic) Ballester, would later do the same thing in La Concepcion de la Vega».

This information is corroborated by that of the author of *Historia de las Indias*, Father Las Casas, who tells us that the graduate Velloso «managed to make one that is called a *trapiche*, which is a mill driven by horses, in which the canes are crushed or pressed and they extract the mellifluous juice of which sugar is made».

In an annex to Hoetink's book there are some «Notes on the population of the island», based on a historical compilation from Alexander Llenas' *Estadística de la isla de Santo Domingo* (*Statistics of the island of Santo Domingo*) that refers to the distribution of Alburquerque and Pasamonte –royal inspector and treasurer respectively– and in which it says they reached Concepcion de la Vega on 23 November 1514. There they found, among *caciques*, Indian slaves and *naborías de casa* (Indian house servants), 2,824 persons, without counting old people and children. For example:

«On the estates and mines of the King: the *cacique* Diego Enrique Guzman and ninety-two persons of service (47 men and 45



One of the first sugar cane mills.



Plaque on the monument in which the Castilianised «Miguel Ballester» is cited as the first to have extracted the juice of the sugar cane.



The monument to sugar cane in Santo Domingo.



The ruins of the fortress of La Concepción de La Vega after the earthquake.



Another view of the remains of the fortress.

women). The added four old people and seven children who were not of service, etc.»

«Miguel Ballester, resident of said town, was entrusted with two Indian house servants of those which were registered, in addition to those of the *cacique* Adrian with twenty-eight persons of service, and four children of the same *cacique*, who are not of service».

«Pedro and Hernando de Medina, residents of the town, were entrusted with fourteen Indian house servants and in addition one more that belonged to Miguel Ballester».

«To Alonso de Moratón, resident of the town and married to a woman of Castile, were added three Indian house servants of those registered by Miguel Ballester».

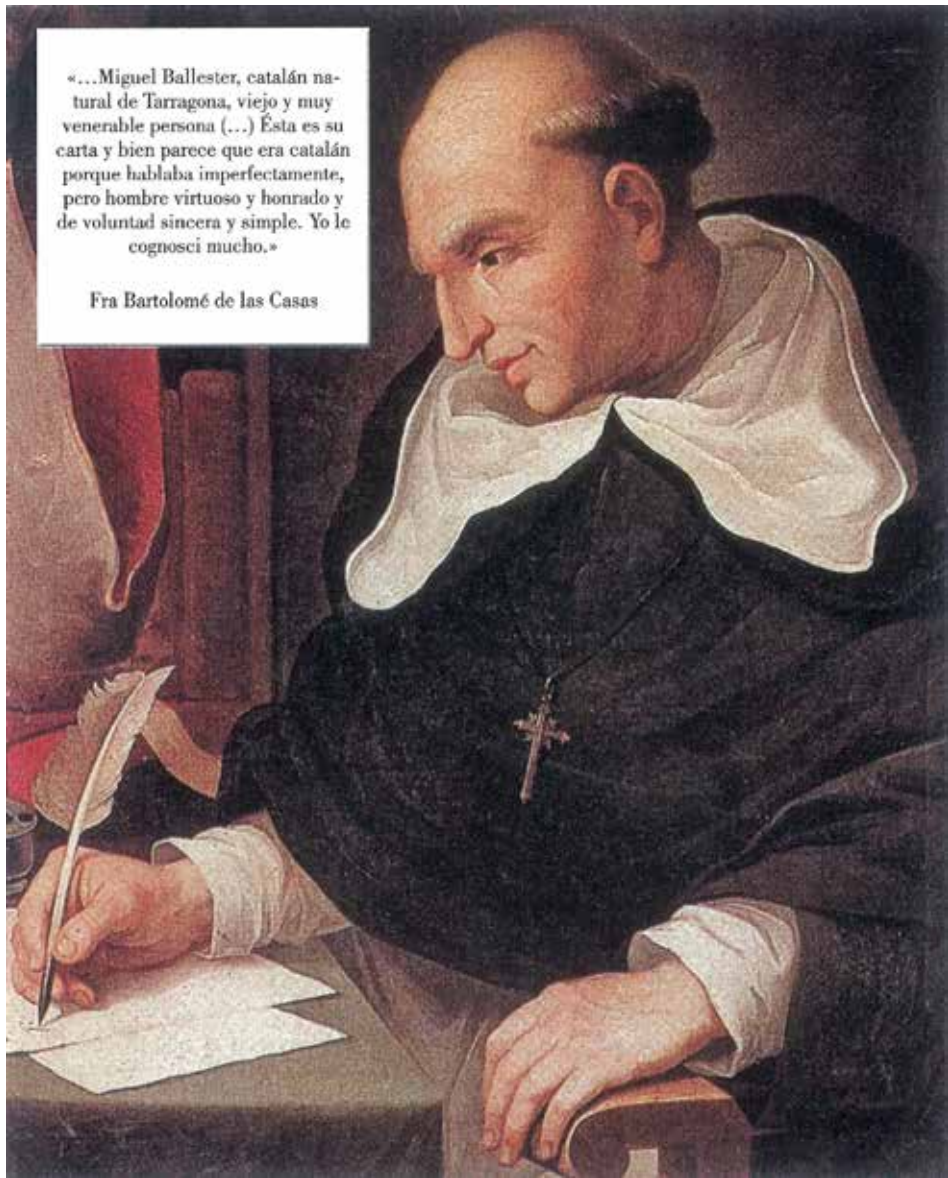
The indigenous peoples worked as servants or slaves. In the New World a *naborí* was a free native who worked as a domestic servant, while a slave was somebody's property. According to the documents consulted, the natives entrusted to Miguel Ballester were all servants.

The chronicler Pedro Martir de Angleria wrote in 1514:

«[...] twenty years after the discovery of the New World, in La Espafiola there were twenty-eight sugar cane plantations with their corresponding mills».

One of the most recent pieces of information about Miguel Ballester comes from the Catholic Monarchs' chronicler of the period, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, who compiled news of the sugar cane plantations and mills on the Dominican island of La Espafiola in the year 1516, quoting among them that of San Cristobal, property of the governor Miguel Ballester, who at that time was about eighty years old. This *Tarraconense*, «an honoured and venerable old person» according to Bartolome de Las Casas, who knew him well, spent the last three decades of his life on La Espafiola. He died on that Dominican island, caressed by the warm waves of the Caribbean Sea, far from the city of his birth, Tarragona, which is also embraced by the waters of another sea, the Mediterranean, the first he sailed.

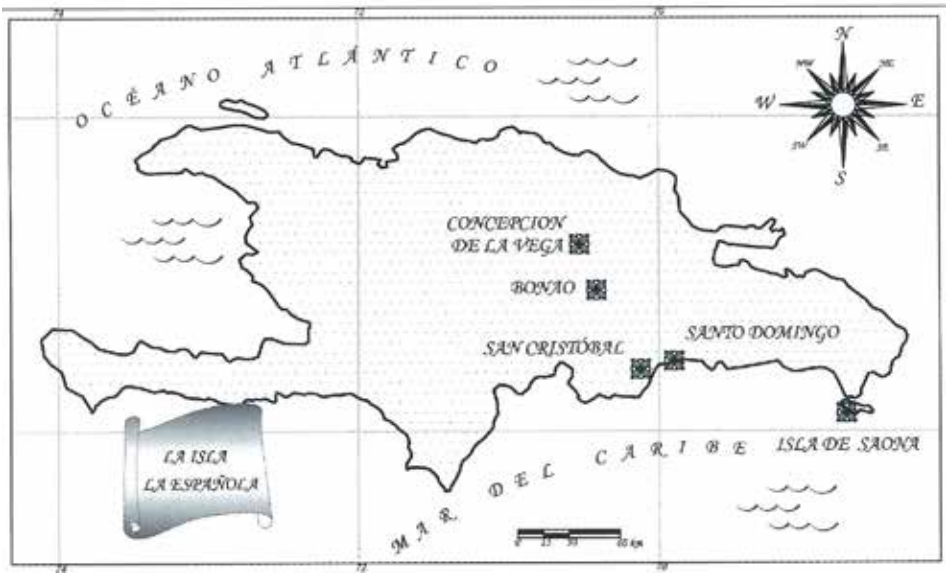
From the honeyed, sweet juice of the sugar cane that Miguel Ballester planted for the first time in America, a son would be born: the spirituous and joyful rum.



«...Miguel Ballester, catalán natural de Tarragona, viejo y muy venerable persona (...) Ésta es su carta y bien parece que era catalán porque hablaba imperfectamente, pero hombre virtuoso y honrado y de voluntad sincera y simple. Yo le cognosci mucho.»

Fra Bartolomé de las Casas

A portrait of Fray Bartolome de las Casas.

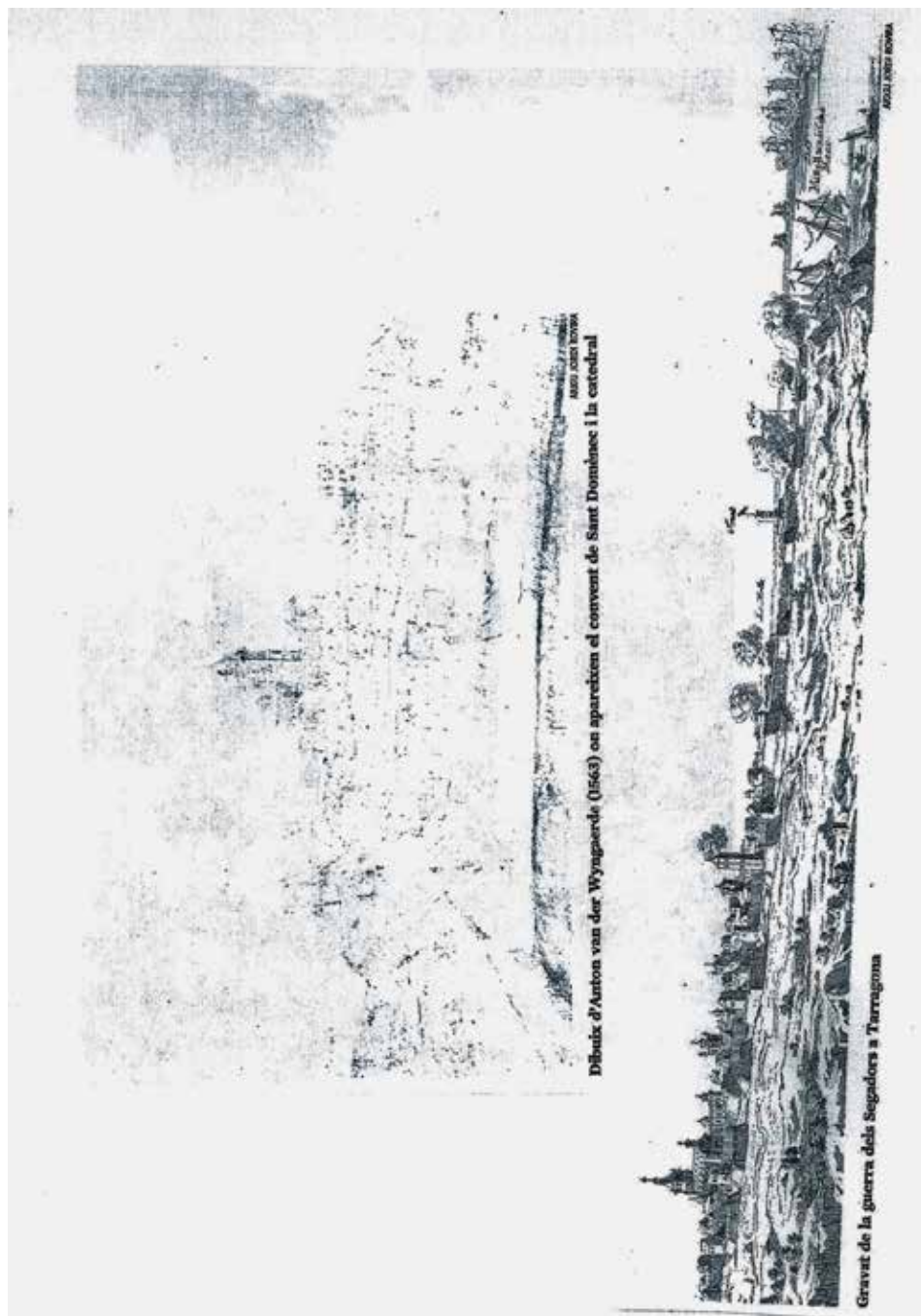


Map: the island of La Hispaniola.

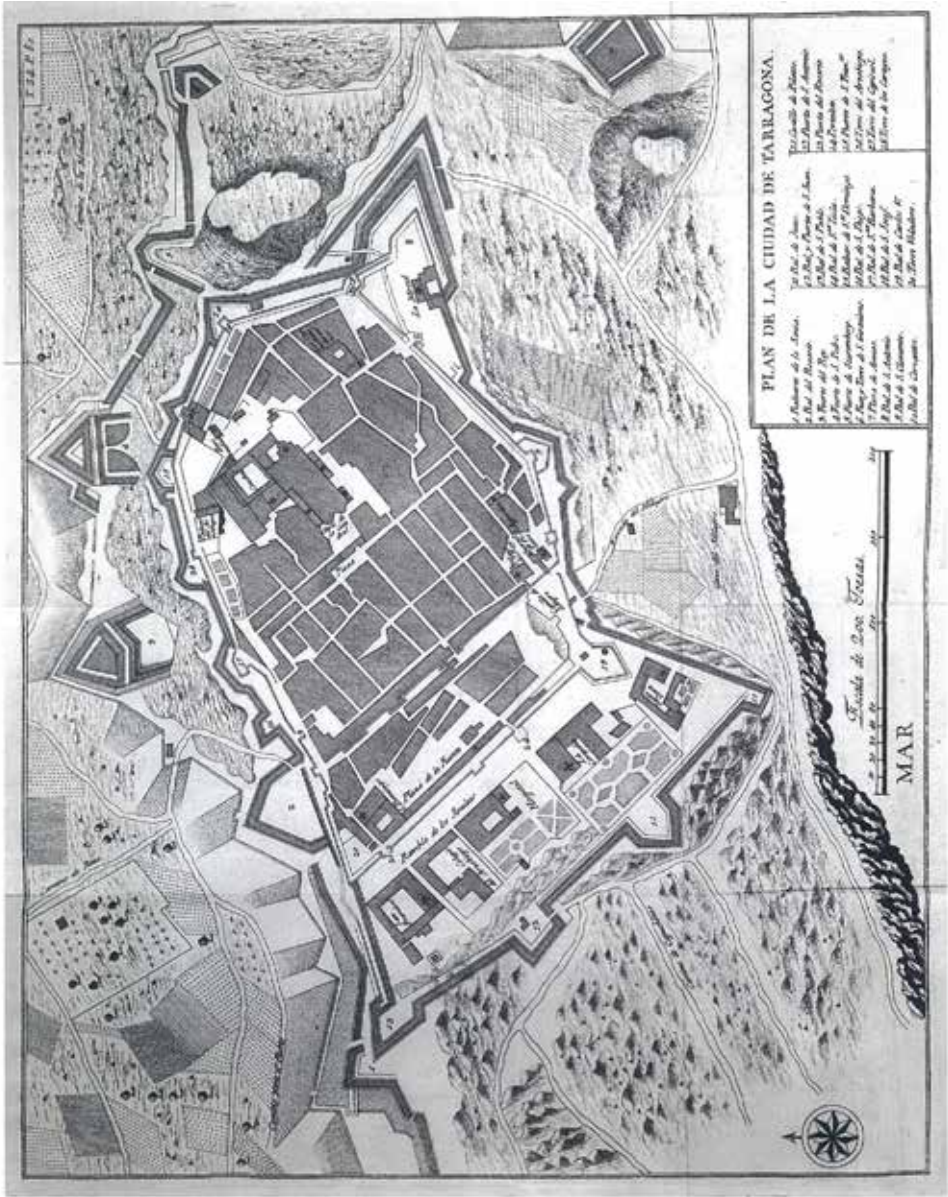
CHRONOLOGY

- 1452 Miquel Ballester and his cousin Simon Ballester, together with the brothers Joan (Cristobal) and Bartolome Colom took part in the Mallorcan insurrection against the King of Aragon. Simon was the leader of that revolt.
- 1470-75 The Colom brothers, together with the Ballester cousins were in Genoa and Savona, where they were known as Cristobal and Bartolome Colombo and, with the exception of Cristobal, they were known as «those from Cuneo».
- Towards the end of the 19th century, seven years before the lavish Italian celebrations of the Fourth Centenary of the Discovery of America, a document known as the «Relazione de Michelle de Cuneo» suspiciously appeared; this spurious document aimed to supplant the personage of the *Tarraconense* Miquel Ballester, the inseparable friend of Christopher Columbus.
- 1493 Miquel Ballester travelled with Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the Indies and was named by the Admiral governor of the fortress of La Concepcion and later, at the time of the search for gold, of Bonao. He was also the tutor of Diego Columbus, the Navigator's firstborn and the executor of his will.
- 1496 Following his first voyage, Columbus named Francisco Roldan, his right-hand man, mayor of the whole island known at the time as La Isabela and later as La Hispaniola. He still held that post in March 1496 when, as administrator of justice, he took up arms against Columbus on the instigation of Bernat Boyl and other important members of the King's Party, as the men led by Ferdinand the Catholic called themselves. Miguel Ballester, as mayor of Bonao, acted as an efficient mediator with the rebels.

- 1505 Miguel Ballester produced sugar cane in La Vega and was the first to extract its juice, according to the court chronicler, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo. This is also recorded on the monument to sugar cane in Santo Domingo.
- 1514 In the distribution of assignments of Albuquerque and Pasamonte (royal inspector and treasurer respectively) it is stated that Miguel Ballester, a resident of La Vega, was assigned two *naboris* or Indian house servants. A *nabori* was a free Indian, not a slave, who was employed in domestic service.
- 1516 One of the most recent pieces of information about Miguel Ballester comes from the Catholic Monarchs' chronicler of the period, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, who compiled information on the sugar cane plantations and mills on the Dominican island of La Espafiola in the year 1516, quoting among them that of San Cristobal, property of the Tarragonan seafarer, Miguel Ballester, who at that time was over eighty years of age.



16th- and 17th-century engravings of Tarragona.

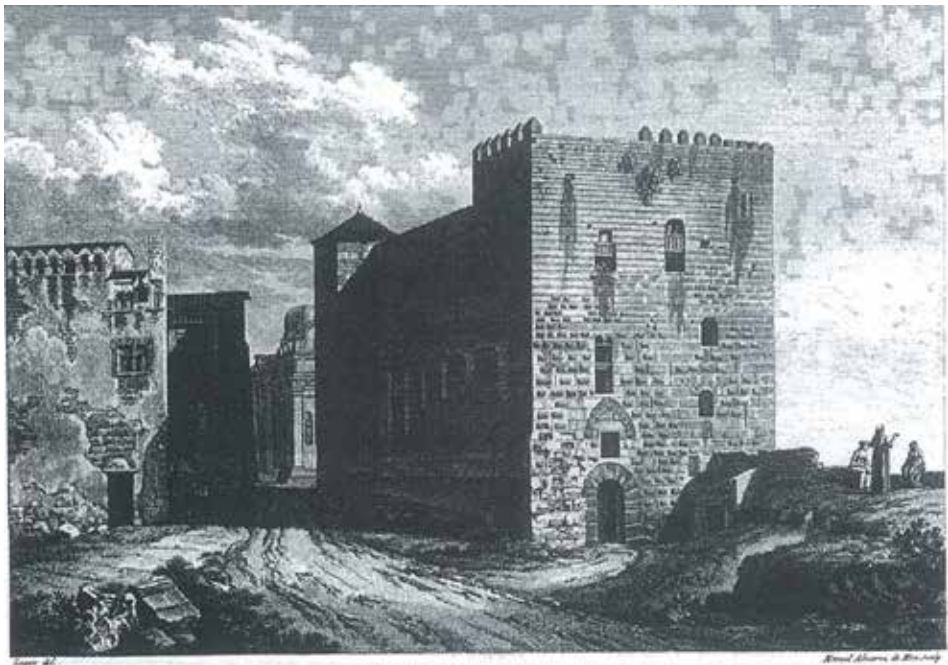


Plan of the city of Tarragona.



AND ALFRED, EARL OF BERA. ARCH OF BERA.

Engraving of the Arch of Bera.



Segunda vista del PALACIO de AUGUSTO.
seconde vue du PALAIS d' AUGUSTE | second view of the PALACE of AUGUSTUS.

Engraving of Augustus' Palace.



Engraving of the southern view of the city of Tarragona.



Scipios’ Tower with the city of Tarragona in the background.

