



Cristoforo Colombo. Documenti and Prove della sua Appartenenza a Genova. by Città di Genova

Review by: John Bigelow

The Hispanic American Historical Review, Vol. 13, No. 2 (May, 1933), pp. 204-212

Published by: [Duke University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2506692>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Cristoforo Colombo. Documenti & Prove della sua Appartenenza a Genova. By the CITTÀ DI GENOVA. (Genoa[?]: Officine dell' Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, Bergamo, MCMXXXI—Anno X. E. F. [Era fascista]. Pp. XXIII, 292.¹

The early writers on Christopher Columbus did not attempt to prove where he was born. They simply asserted that it was in Genoa in the province of Liguria, Italy. Later historians and biographers brought this assertion into question. All attempts to prove it have failed. The one before us is perhaps the most noteworthy, not only because it comes a little nearer than its predecessors to succeeding, but because it is the most elaborate. Under the patronage of the city of Genoa, a commission of fourteen members, presided over by the *Podestà* (fascist mayor), has brought forth this volume measuring 15 x 12 x 2 inches and weighing 9½ pounds, to prove, not where Christopher Columbus was born, but that he was born in the city of Genoa, Italy.

Besides the XXIII and 292 pages indicated, there are 201 sheets, or 402 pages, interpolated and not serially numbered, making the total number of pages 717. There are no running titles. There is no index. The table of contents is sketchy. There are no designated chapters. Neither lines nor paragraphs are numbered for reference. A preface by the *Podestà*, together with a note at the end of the volume, authenticates the work as a product of Genoa's municipal scholarship. This is followed by an introduction by a member of the commission, Dr. Giuseppe Pessagno, which is referred to (p. 287) as a *Studio critico introduttivo*. It informs us that the documents presented were selected for their pro-Genoa tendency (“*Esaminata la massa documen-*

¹ A translation of this work into English and German was issued in 1932. The English appears on the left hand page or column and the German on the right. The English title is *Christopher Columbus: Documents and Proofs of his Genoese Origin*; and the German, *Christoph Columbus: Dokumente und Beweisse seiner Genueser Herkunft*. This edition is substantially bound in heavy white canvas-like cloth. The inside papers, front and back are a reproduction of the Juan de La Cosa map of 1500. The facsimiles of documents are excellent and bound in with care. There are also many facsimiles of title pages.

taria col criterio della prova della 'genovesita', si e visto' . . . p. XIX); that its method is strictly "*objective and impersonal*" (p. XVIII), and on the same page, that it is "*objective and necessarily not impartial, because the voice of the documents is one and does not admit of variants or compromises*"; in other words, that this work is not a study, but a brief; that the case is argued with documents making links in a chain of absolute proof; that, therefore, no other evidence than that presented is worth considering; either the discoverer of America was the Christopher Columbus of Genoa, figuring in the Genoese documents, or he never existed. ("Cristoforo Colombo e quello dei documenti genovesi o non è". P. XVI.) This dictum is the keynote of the work. With only apparent exception, the evidence presented is circumstantial. Being admittedly picked for its partiality, it is not the best obtainable, and fails to convince or satisfy,—to say nothing of justifying the haughty pretensions of the author.

The body of the work is made up of facsimiles of printed matter and manuscripts compiled by another member of the commission, Professor Giovanni Monleone, with the assistance of Dr. Pessagno. It is interspersed with comments and discussions by Professor Monleone, and includes three colored illustrations which might better have been maps.

Part I sets out printed texts and a few manuscripts dating from 1502 to 1837, most of them of the sixteenth century. They represent the discoverer variously as *Genovese, di nazione or patria Genovese, cittadino [di Genova]*, without indicating whether natural born or nationalized, and in a few cases as a native of Genoa. I take the name *Genova* to stand for the city and the qualification *Genovese* to refer to the state; the word *patria* to imply native country or place of birth, according to context, and the word *nazione*, not. On this basis, I find that, of the 103 statements only eleven clearly credit the discoverer with being born in the city of Genoa. None includes its authority or source of information. Scant or no reference is made to persons who may have represented him as born outside of that place or have acknowledged or implied that they did not know where he was born.

Parts II and III are manuscripts; most of them unsigned and undated fragments. These are generally accompanied by a transcript and translation in print. For the date, the reader must rely on the

printed heading or footnote, which he would do well to check when he can. On page 127, the heading gives the period of a series of documents as running from 1 October, 1450 to 1 November, 1451. The facsimiles, which happen to include the dates, show it to run from 10 November, 1450 to 25 September, 1451. The provenance and authenticity, rarely indicated in the facsimile, may be learned from footnotes, but not always as explicitly as desired.

On page 123, Document No. 1, which might be taken for an original of 1440 or a contemporary certified copy, appears from the facsimile, to be an uncertified copy found in a pro-Genoese propaganda compilation, such as the one before us, made in the seventeenth century. The notable *Assereto* document (pp. XIII, XIX, 137, 173) passes as an original until critical examination finds it to be an indifferent, uncertified copy of two documents, themselves perhaps unauthenticated. On pages 108 and 144 we find material which in the manuscript appears to be struck out. If there is justification for its restoration, the reader may complain that it is not set forth.

Part II is divided into two parts, which we may call Section I and Section 2. Section 1 is composed of notarial deeds and deeds of the Genoa government, all in Latin, and section 2, of "other documents". Section 1 is subdivided into what may be called chapters, as follows:

1. Genealogical acts.
2. Acts showing Genoa as the birthplace of Christopher Columbus, and determining the year of his birth.
3. Acts showing changes of residence between Genoa and Savona. . . .
4. Acts proving [?] the identity of the Columbus of Genoa and the discoverer of America.

Section 2 consists of six miscellaneous documents testifying as to the birthplace of the discoverer.

In the above Chapter I, the seven 'genealogical deeds' are intended to prove his descent from one *Johannes de Columbo*, a wool weaver from Moconexi, eastern Liguria, residing (February 21, 1429) in Quinto, a suburb of Genoa, through one *Dominicus de Columbo*, son of a *Johannes de Columbo*, provenance and occupation unknown, and his wife *Sozana*, daughter of one *Jacobus de Fontanarubea* of Bisagno, also in eastern Liguria. The bits of more or less dubious and unrelated lineage, contained in these documents, are forced together into a rickety structure which, in the form of a family tree, is presented

as Document VIII. This, all the same, is not a document, but a questionable composition by the author.

The object of the next chapter is to determine the birthplace and date of birth of the discoverer. The documents show, says the author, "that the birthplace is revealed by Christopher himself, who, being in Savona, declared himself in a legal deed to be '*a weaver of Genoa*'". . . Turning to this deed, we find that the declaration was made, not by Columbus, but by the notary, on what authority does not appear. Let us assume that he got it from Columbus. How does this prove place of birth? The author says, . . . "by this last declaration, made in a city of Liguria which was not Genoa, Columbus evidently intended to indicate the place in Liguria in which he was born". According to the author (p. 141, item IV), *Cristoforo* had been a wool weaver in Savona as well as in Genoa. If then, in Genoa he had declared himself a wool weaver of Savona, he would have proved himself born in both places! So much for the place of birth.

The date of birth is placed between the 26th of August and 31st of October, 1451. The earlier date is computed by our author for a *Christoforus Columbus civis Janue* (citizen of Genoa) summoned in 1479 from Lisbon to Genoa as a witness to a commercial operation of a *Lodovico Centurione*, about a year before (p. 173, Assereto doc.). Examined on the 25th of August, 1479, he gave his age as *annorum viginti septem vel circa* (about 27 years), which would put his birth about the 25th of August, 1452, or including his 28th year, as about said day and month in 1451.

The later date, 31 October, 1451, is determined for a *Christoforus de Columbo filius Dominici* (citizenship or birthplace or provenance not given) *maior annis decem novem* (between 19 and 20 years of age). The deed is dated 31 October, 1470. This would place the birth between the 31 October of 1451 and of 1450. According to the author, the age given in this deed was declared by the witness himself (p. 121, No. VI). It was apparently a conclusion of the notary's, set down by him as evidence:

1. As to the identity of the witness.
2. As to his being of age to testify.

Neither of these purposes called for correctness. The first might be served by the current belief, the reputed age; and the second by an indefinite one definitely over or under the legal age. The author's

conclusion that the discoverer was born between his two dates, 26 August and 31 October, 1451, depends upon the identity of his two Columbuses with each other and with the discoverer. This identity is not demonstrated, but assumed—a begging of the question which the author was to prove. Even assuming that the two ages were both given by the discoverer, they are too indefinite for the definite maximum and minimum of the author. They intimate that the witness did not know or believe his age to lie within such or any other precise limits.

Chapter III treats of the movements of certain Columbuses between Genoa and Savona.

In Chapter IV we come upon the crux of the whole work: "Deeds proving the Identity of the Genoese Columbus with the Columbus Discoverer of America", followed by a *Conclusionione* (pp. 161-178). With one exception, the seven documents here presented refer to the Columbus of Genoa. The exception is the questionable Assereto document. The relationships on which the author seems to rely for the identification of the two Columbuses are:

1. Genoese cousins (3 sons of Antonio, brother of Dominic, Christopher's father) arranging to get in touch with a *Christoforus de Columbo*, admiral of the king of Spain.
2. The Genoa firm of *Lodovico Centurione* and *Paolo di Negro*, as employer in 1478, of a Columbus, citizen of Genoa and resident of Lisbon; together with the remembrance of this firm by the discoverer in his will.
3. One *Ieronimus de Portu*, a Genoa creditor of the Genoa Columbus and, according to author, of the discoverer.

With respect to the first, it is alleged (p. 178) that the three cousins had arranged to visit the admiral. They had in fact arranged only to share the expense of a visit to be made by one of them, *Johannes* (Giovanni, p. 174). The author says "evidently for reasons of kinship". His evidence is not specified, but appears to be:

1. The statement, on the 11th of October, 1496, as a fact of common report in Savona, that *Christophorus*, *Bartolomeus* and *Jacobus*, sons of *Dominicus de Columbo*, of Savona, had long been beyond the jurisdiction of Savona, living in Spain (p. 176); together with the identity previously established, of the Savona and Genoa Columbuses.
2. The coincidence of the *Christophorus de Columbo* of Genoa and the admiral of the King of Spain, in name, in age, and in relationship in Genoa.

That the name of the admiral was, in Latin, *Christophorus de Columbo* should be supported by better evidence than the statement of a Genoa notary (p. 175) or an irresponsible interested party, in a Genoa document. If there was a Spanish document in Latin that gave to the admiral the name of *Christoforus de Columbo*, the author should have produced it. Let us assume that there was one; also that the son of Antonio, *Johannes de Columbo*, did present himself to the admiral and was eventually given command of one of his ships. In all this there is no proof that in resorting to the admiral, *Johannes* was actuated by a call of the blood; that either he or the admiral recognized the other as a cousin; that the admiral claimed or admitted filial relations with *Johannes's* uncle *Dominicus*. Diego, a brother of the discoverer, does in his will, name a *Giovanni Antonio* Colon, but did not give his father or identify him or relate himself to him in any way (p. 259). The text of the will is taken in print from HARRISSE (*C. Colomb*, II. 467), who does not give his source.

The Columbus of Lisbon, who is represented by the author as serving the firm of Centurione and Dinegro, appears in the Assereto document (p. 172) as *Christofforus* and as *Cristoforus, Columbus*, not as *Christoforus de Columbo*. He is said by the notary to be a citizen of Genoa. In his testimony, given under oath, he says nothing about citizenship or origin, but that he did go, for the forementioned *Paolo Dinegro*, on a commercial mission to the island of Madera in 1478. He does not tell how he knew, if he did know, that his Paolo Dinegro was the one in this case, the partner of our Centurione. It appears from the document that the testimony of Centurione was shown or read to the witness as a preliminary to his examination; that he thus knew what he was summoned and expected to testify; also that his testimony is not given in his own words, but at best, in those of the notary and, possibly, not in the notary's words, but in those of a copyist. Under these circumstances, we can hardly take this testimony as proof of his having had any dealings with our Paolo Dinegro.

In 1502, the discoverer made a will which is lost. We have no certain knowledge of its contents. In 1505, he made a supplement, or codicil, to this will, without incorporating therein the will itself. This codicil was executed in 1506. Its original is lost. Our author presents it in print (p. 253) taken from NAVARRETE (*Colección de los Viajes . . .* II. (1859), 350), who gives it as a legally authenticated

instrument (*Testimonio autorizado*) in the archives of the Duke of Veragua. It is not apparent why he does not furnish a manuscript copy of it. Navarrete's text may be divided into two parts:

1. The aforementioned codicil, said by the *escribano*, *Pedro de Hinojedo*, to be in the handwriting of *Cristóbal Colon*, and signed [in the same handwriting?] with his name.
2. A postscript to the foregoing supplement, or codicil. This postscript is not signed by the discoverer, but is said by another *escribano*, *Pedro de Azcoytia*, to be in the handwriting of the first part. There is no date to the postscript, but it was evidently written between the signing of the first part by the discoverer and *escribano*, August 25, 1505, and its execution with the signing by the other *escribano*, May 19, 1506.

In the postscript, Columbus names the heirs of *Luis Centurion*, "a Genoese merchant", and those of *Paolo de Negro* as legatees. He leaves a sum of money to be divided equally between the two families and another to go to the Centuriones alone, each sum in round numbers, without indicating any particular financial, civic, or blood relationship.

There is notarial proof that in Genoa, on the 22d of September, 1470, *Dominicus*, son of *Johannes, de Columbo*, and *Christoforus*, son of *Dominicus*, agreed with one *Jeronimus de Portu*, son of *Bartholomeus de Portu*, to submit a money question to arbitration; that six days later, *Christophorus* and *Dominicus* were obligated by the award to pay to said *Jeronimus de Portu* thirty-five lire within a year. Our author says (p. 178, l. 16, 17) that this *de Portu* is named by the discoverer in his will. Turning to the will (p. 252) we find a provision for payment: "to the heirs of *Geronimo del Puerto* (Spanish), father of *Benito del Puerto*, Chancellor of Genoa, twenty [Spanish] ducats or its equivalent [in Italian money]"; nothing about the father of Geronimo. It is reasonable to suppose that this debt of the Columbuses was paid within a year or two of its creation by the arbitral award in 1470, and it may be surmised that the 20 Spanish ducats, equivalent to about 129 lire, bequeathed about 34 years later, were an obligation of another Columbus to the same or some other Puerto. According to the author (p. 252-b), 20 (Spanish) ducats are about equal to 35 lire. My number, 129, is computed from the figures of Desimoni (*Racc. di Doc.*, Pt. II, v. 3, pp. 124-125).

The "Deeds proving the Identity of the Genoese Columbus with the Columbus Discoverer of America" should leave us unconvinced,

but if they did convince us, the proposition that the Genoese Christopher Columbus was born in the city of Genoa would remain to be proved.

In the next and last section of Part II (pp. 179-194) are six documents bearing on these two points. Not one represents the discoverer unequivocally as a native of Genoa.

Part III is formed of Section 1, devoted to the autographs and other documents of the discoverer, in the archives of Genoa; and Section 2, to deeds of Christopher Columbus and of his relatives and descendants. These deeds consist of six wills and two formal affirmations. The first will is the notable entail, or *mayorazgo*, of 1498, containing the phrases: "I being born in Genoa" and "from it [the city of Genoa] I came, and in it I was born". This is the only piece of positive evidence as to the birthplace of the discoverer that can be taken seriously. Does it decide the question? The original of the *mayorazgo* is lost. No legally certified copy of it has come down to us, but its legality is here of secondary interest. A document may be in perfect legal form and full of lies. Was this declaration made, was the original deed signed, by Christopher Columbus, the discoverer? Nobody really knows; but assuming that it was, did the discoverer know where he was born, and if so, did he tell the truth about it? There is room for doubt and speculation on each of these points. Without cross examination or corroboration, this testimony of his cannot be accepted as proof.

The second will in our series is the discredited military codicil of 1506. It is recognized by our author as apocryphal, but this does not prevent his drawing on it for evidence. "It is very significant," he says, "that the forger wishing to give to the codicil every appearance of authenticity, could not but fashion a Columbus born in Genoa". The forger's words are "*meae Patriae Reipub[licae] Genuensi*"; not a word about the city of Genoa. Besides, how could naming Genoa as the place of birth give to the writing an appearance of authenticity, except on the assumption that Genoa was the discoverer's birthplace? This is another case of gratuitously assuming what is to be proved. Most of the remaining documents have already been considered. None of them calls for further comment.

It is hard to imagine any one reading this bulky, scrappy opus through. The further one gets into it, the greater the vexation and

disappointment. It will be used principally as a work of reference. In spite of the emasculation of the documents and the difficulty of finding one's way among them, it is a serviceable compendium of documentary data. As a demonstration that the discoverer of America was born in the city of Genoa, it stands a monumental failure.

JOHN BIGELOW.

Washington, D. C.

De Renaissance in Spanje, Kultuur, Litteratuur, Leven. By DR. G. J. GEERS, in collaboration with DR. J. BROUWER. (Zutphen: W. J. Thieme en C^{ie}, 1932. Pp. VIII, 383. Eleven guilders.)

This book is intended as a popular account of life and culture in the Golden Age of Spain. Dr. Geers proceeds along the path marked out by Professor Huizinga's studies on the Renaissance. He states that many writers have either minimized the Renaissance in Spain or even denied its existence. Nevertheless, it is quite evident that in Spain as well as in other European lands, there was a significant departure from the Middle Ages. The changes in art, literature, society, politics, and economic life from 1470 onwards all illustrate the transition from the medieval to the modern, which Professor Huizinga of Leiden has designated as the more general and significant feature of what may be called the Renaissance. The first five chapters are devoted to the history of Spain up to the death of Felipe IV. Dr. Geers wisely avoids reciting many events and giving an endless mass of dates, limiting himself rather to general conditions. He has succeeded admirably in portraying the social nexus which forms the basis of cultural activities described in succeeding chapters. This part of the book is a most valuable supplement to the political histories of the period. Particularly pleasing is the portrayal of Felipe II, who has suffered so much at the hands of modern historians. He is shown as a hardworking and conscientious king who sought to conduct his statecraft according to Christian principles. Catholicism was the cornerstone of his political edifice, and orthodoxy and citizenship were synonymous. The monarch was absolute and political functions were more highly centralized than in other lands. Felipe II, however, failed to give his realm an adequate economic policy and never understood the conditions which made possible the success of his enemies. The sad career of Don Carlos is effectively treated and full justice is