Miquel Ballester - Columbus

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MIGUEL BALLESTER, A CATALAN FROM TARRAGONA.

Both Miguel Ballester and Pedro Casaus, also Catalan and father of Bartolomé took part in Columbus’ second voyage to the New World in 1493 and both were given lands and estates. In 1493 Pedro Casaus returned to Seville where he lived with his family. He took with him a young Tain Indian native as a slave for his fourteen-year-old son Bartolomé. The slave became the centre of attraction and the envy of all his companions.

Later, the young Casaus was to convert his name to the Castilian version of Las Casas, as was the custom with emigrants who embarked with the squadrons of Castile to the Indies. In 1502 Queen Isabel of Castile published an order whereby all of the approximately three hundred Indian slaves who had been brought to Spain were to be returned to their country of origin. One can imagine how upset Bartolomé must have been at having to part with his slave after four years of careful coaching and who had probably become a close friend and companion. This was a significant event in his life, which was to lead Bartolomé to become a strong defender of the rights of the native Indians of the New World for the rest of his life.

Many years later Brother Bartolomé de la Casas was to write of Miguel Ballester the Catalan sailor from Tarragona in his “Historia de las Indias”, stating that ‘Miguel certainly seemed to be Catalan because he spoke Spanish imperfectly, but that he was an honest and virtuous man with a simple and sincere nature and that he was well known to him’.

The reproduction of the paragraphs on Miguel Ballester appeared in 1690 in a copy of the manuscript “Historia de las Indias.” It was written by Brother Bartolomé de las Casas, who started it in Seville in 1537 and finished in Valladolid 22

years later. Las Casas in his last will and testament requested that the manuscript not be published until 40 years after his death, which occurred on 17th. July 1566.

Despite the interest value of its content the “Historia” was not published until three hundred years later in 1885. However during this time the work was used and consulted by historians even though some of them were strong adversaries of its content, namely Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, chronicler of the Emperor Charles V.

1454: Ballester and Columbus provoke a rebellion between peasants and landowners on the Island of Majorca.

Miguel and Simon Ballester together with the two brothers Joan (Christopher) and Bartolomé Columbus (later known as Colón) were fighting on the side of the peasants against the landowners in Majorca in 1454. The revolt was motivated by the abusive increase implicated in the lease of the land to the peasant tenants and the heavy taxes levied by the King of Aragon.

With reference to these events the Majorcan writer, José María Cuadrado, in his work “Forenses y cuidadanos” (1847) wrote ‘ Resistance collapsed without the support of the two Columbus brothers, who on the publication of an edict pardoning all the rebels except themselves escaped together with Miguel Ballester, son of Simon Ballester, head of the conspiracy’. This revolt was suppressed by the arrival of 2000 well-armed and equipped troops sent from Naples by King Alfonso V of Aragon.

Map of the Catalan lands. (Gran Enciclopèdia Catalana. Barcelona ,1978). Territoris de la Corona d’Aragó.

1470: Miguel and Simón Ballester in Genoa and Savona, together with the Columbus family of Cuneo.

Juan Gil and Consuelo Varela in their book “ Cartas de particulares a Colón y Relaciones coetáneas”(Personal letters to Columbus and contemporary relationships) (1984) in Ch.XVI “ Relationship of Miguel de Cuneo” pages 235-236 write ‘ In 1470 a certain Simon of Cuneo a weaver is mentioned in a document together with other members of this profession, one of whom is Domenico Colombo, where they establish the price they should be paid for their work. (Racc. ,II p.115, 33). Shortly afterwards a certain Bartolomé of Cuneo appears as resident of Savona and together with

Dominico Colombo and other artisans is involved in drawing up a series of union statutes (Racc., II, I, p. 141, 8, the agreement is dated 7th. December 1474). 'It consequently seems more logical thus' say the writers, 'that Miguel de Cuneo was descended from that same family of wool weavers, fellow citizens of the Columbus family and that he had known the future Admiral Christopher Columbus from childhood'. Gil and Varela were surprised to observe, as they later added, 'Here lie some stray but not fortuitous strands in the thick tangle woven about Columbus with respect to his Italian acquaintances, as in this case where they make a fleeting entry onto the scene only to withdraw immediately in "discretisimo mutis"

COLOM - COLOMBO - COLÓN

On our behalf and facing the facts analysed we deduce that the families Ballester and Columbus, the latter later known as Colombo in Genoa, (1470) as Scolvus in Scandinavia (1477), as Colom when he lived in Portugal, and as Colón before leaving for Castile in 1484 are the same Columbus family of Jewish-Catalan sailors, subjects of the Crown of Aragon, who for religious and economic reasons were obliged to emigrate to the Liguran Coast, according to the Galician investigator Salvador de Madariaga. We believe that they are the same Colombo family that lived in the region of Genoa from 1470-1474. In the five notarial registers and other Genoese documents all dated between 1470 and 1474 the Columbus family are registered as Colombo. According to Las Casas the Columbus family were known as being from "Terra Rubra" or "Terra Ruja" the region on the Ligurian Coast of Catalan-Aragonese Sardinia and were privateers in the Mediterranean Sea. This is also confirmed by Columbus' son Hernando Columbus in his "Historia del Almirante", where in the first chapter he writes 'Colombo, was in fact the family name or surname of his elders, but he in accordance with the new land in which he was to dwell and begin a new life, filed off the end of his surname in order to conform better to the old style and for his descendants to be able to make a distinction from other similar name forms, and thus called himself Colón'.

Here we observe that if it were necessary as his son Hernando says, to file down his name, then he was most likely originally called Colom and not Colombo, as filing down would have meant reducing the third part of the letter "m" to convert it into an "n", whereas, had he been called Colombo, he would have had to eliminate the syllable "bo" as well as substituting "m" with "n"

False and adulterated Italian documents

It has been demonstrated that the Italian documents on which the hypothesis of Columbus being Genoese was based, are either false or adulterated. The same can be said of his lineage when in 1498 he is said to have confirmed being from Genoa 'because I was born there and lived there'. Another disqualified document is that of Assereto which appeared in 1904 with the intention of confirming the birth of Columbus in the city of Genoa in 1451 and in accordance with the Genoese hypothesis. Along the same lines, the letter addressed to a certain Jenaro Annari of Savona known as "Relazione de Michele de Cuneo" to which Gil and Varela make reference previously, appeared suspiciously in the year 1885, just previous to the Italian commemorations in 1892 of the IV Centenary of the Discovery of America. This same year, the historian from Savona, A. Bruno published the illustrious article "La Saona" e la suposta Relazione de Michele de Cuneo in which he states that after having investigated in great detail the registers and archives of his city, he found no reference at all to this particular person.

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The conclusion we may therefore make from an assessment of these facts is that Michele de Cuneo is a fictitious character made up by the chroniclers of that time to substitute the person ofMiguel Ballester, in order to strengthen the unverified authenticity of the discoverer being of Genoese origin. Miguel Ballester, the sailor from Tarragona was

always to be a key figure in Columbus' life, True and loyal friend from childhood, he later participated in Columbus' mercantile ventures, either selling wares at the medieval markets of Cuneo or in Savona or Genoa, or in the establishments belonging to the wool traders and taverners Domenico and Bartolomé Columbus, and his father Simon, all of which traded in the merchandise obtained from the spoils of the privateering practice in the Mediterranean Sea.

"TERRA RUBRA" on the Ligurian Coast of Catalan-Aragonese Sardinia.

Punta de Terra Ruja (Terra Rubra in Latin) is situated at the Capo de Cazzia (Cape of the Hunt), the western arm of Port del Compte and the largest natural port in the Mediterranean Sea. Known today as Il Porticciolo it is the only place on the whole continental or insular coast of the Western Mediterranean which corresponds to the toponym denoting the region from which the Columbus family are said to have come. The situation and orography of the region would have made it the ideal place for an emigrant Jewish-Catalan family of sailors involved in privateering, to settle. Moreover, the place is very near L'Alguer, which had been repopulated in 1384 with Catalans, particularly from the province of Tarragona. The emigrants had maintained the Catalan language for cultural and safety reasons, and it remains today, L'Alghero being known as "la citta catalana de Italia" (the Catalan city of Italy).

In 1460, Juan II of Aragon declared L'Alguer a free port in order to protect that coast from the piracy to which it was continually exposed.

Map of Capo de Cazzia (Cape of the Hunt) where Punta de Terra Ruja (Terra Rubra in Latin) is situated. It is near to the Cala del Infierno (Hell's Cove) and the Island of Foradada with its Grottes de Palombini (the Doves' Cave) and the larger caves of Neptuno and la Verda, which were used as warehouses by the pirates of that time. (Map published in the leaflet "Il Promontorio più bello della Cerdeña" enclosed in the Italian magazine Airone, November 1982 issue.

Map of the northwest coast of the Island of Sardinia with the toponym Il Porticciolo, in place of Terra Ruja or Terra Rubra.

THE ORIGINS OF THE COLUMBIAN VENTURE.

There is no doubt that Joan (Christopher) Columbus was an expert and knowledgeable

Sailor who had studied under the supervision of excellent teachers. His many and extensive writings show him to have possessed a very good literary style and a command of Latin and the grammar. From the age of 14, when he first began to sail, he constantly acquired culture by reading and by his experiences in dealing with important people of all walks of life. He held long and interesting conversations on the most diverse subjects whenever he spent time berthed at a port or in a city. He himself writes in a missive addressed to the Catholic Monarchs in 1501: -

'I have already sailed to all parts of the Earth known today, which was my desire and for which God has given me the spiritual strength. He made me an expert in the art of sailing, gave me the knowledge of astrology, geometry, and arithmetic that I needed. He gave me strength of spirit, hands to use and so occupy myself while waiting by drawing cities, rivers, mountains, islands and ports all in place on a chart. In all this time, I have visited and dedicated study to all that I have written; cosmography, history, chronicles, and philosophy of other arts of which Our Lord gave me understanding and made it possible for me to sail to the Indies.'

An analysis of this paragraph explains that the "exploit of discovery" had been in preparation ever since Columbus had begun to navigate at the time of Pope Borja -Calixto III, King Alfonse V of Aragon (the Magnanimous) and when Alfonse's brother (later Juan II and father of Ferdinand "the Catholic King)) was made Lieutenant General of Catalonia as representative of the King in 1454.

Pedro de Urrea had held the Archbishopric of Tarragona for nine years, and would continue to do so for another forty-five years, dying three years after the Discovery of America. Calixto III, as soon as he became Pope in 1455, named Urrea Captain General of the Pontifical Squadron which was to create and organise the fleet of seven vessels re to go and fight the Infidel Turks who had taken over Byzantine. The Turks were a danger to the Church of Rome as well as a hindrance to the passage of the vessels of the Crown of Aragon and other states sailing to the Orient where they participated in the very lucrative Spice Trade. When Pope Calixto III died in the summer of 1458, and King Alfonso V of Naples died in the autumn of the same year, Pedro de Urrea decided to return to the see of the Archbishopric of Tarragona. He thence became the right-hand-man in ecclesiastical and military affairs of the new King Juan II of Aragon during the ten-year war against the Generalitat (the Catalan Government) from 1462-72.

The Catalan vessel of 1454

The vessel"Santa Maria"

A PRIVATEER NAMED COUMBUS.

Hernando Columbus, in Ch. V of his Historia del Almirante says:

“Cuando al principio y motivo de la venida del Almirante a España y de haberse él dado a las cosas del mar, fue causa un hombre señalado de su nombre y familia, llamado Colombo, muy nombrado por la mar por causa de la armada que él traía contra los infieles, y también por causas de su patria, tal que con su nombre espantaba a los niños en la cuna”

(This is a reference to how famous Columbus was as a sailor and how his name was feared and respected even by children).

In another letter, which Columbus wrote to the Catholic Monarchs from La Española in January 1495, he spoke of the differences and errors that frequently occur when plotting courses and piloting, saying:

“A mi acaeció, que el Rey Reynel, que Dios tiene, me envío a Túnez, para prender la galeaza “Fernandina”, y estando ya sobre la isla de san Pedro, en Cerdeña, me dijo un saetia....”

(It happened that King Reynel sent me to Tunisia to take the large galley “Fernandina”, and whilst on the Island of San Pedro in Sardinia, I was told about a “saetia”).

It is important to add that King Reynel of Provence had died in 1470 and it was precisely in that same year that the “Consulado del Mar (Maritime Consulate) of Barcelona had published a “warning” to sailors regarding a privateer named Columbus who with his fleet of seven vessels was causing havoc along the Catalan coast.

From 1470-74 the names of Christopher Columbus and his father Domenico appear in the five notarial registers of Genoa in acts of a mercantile nature, meaning that at this time the Columbus clan lived and carried out their activities in the Ports of Genoa, Savona and in the city of Cuneo where a very important market took place and which people from all corners of the Earth attended.

Narrative poem, purchased by Hernando Columbus in Tarragona in 1513 according to the information on the back cover of the publication. The Admiral’s son, founder of the Columbian Library, used to note down the place, date and price of every purchase he made.

THE ADMIRAL'S STAY IN PORTUGAL WAS DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS DISCOVERY OF THE WEST INDIES.

Something happened in 1476 that was to give the Admiral his lasting ties with Portugal. Hernando Columbus gives the following account:

'…The young Columbus had been sailing for a long time when eventually they came upon four large Venetian galleys between Lisbon and the Cape of San Vicente, which is in Portugal. They attacked the galleys, which were returning from Flanders, and fought fiercely and with great feelings of hate, wounding each other badly both with firearms and other weapons. They fought from dawn till dusk and many were killed or badly wounded on both sides. Columbus' ship caught fire together with one of the galleys, and he was obliged to swim to shore, hanging on to the remains of an oar. Fortunately he was an excellent swimmer as the distance was two leagues from land. He was convinced that God had spared him for more important things…'

By fortune and by chance, when the future Admiral arrived in Lisbon, Portugal, the Scandinavian King, Christian of Denmark, was looking for one or more Portuguese sailors capable of taking part in a naval expedition to Iceland, or further afield.

There is no doubt that Columbus took part in that voyage, because not only is it confirmed by Hernando Columbus in his Historia del Almirante, and by Las Casas in his Historia de las Indias, but also Luis Ulloa Cisneros in Noves proves de la Catalanitat de Colom, makes a reference to these mentioned works saying that they are written as though they had been copied directly from a text written by Columbus where he himself says:

"I sailed in 1477, in the month of February to Tile, an isle of one hundred leagues, of which the southern part is found at a latitude of 73º and not of 63º as some say.

This is a fact, which is not admitted by the Genoese thesis, but it is however, known and accepted, that in February 1477 Columbus sailed to Tile in Greenland. There are several historians that confirm this voyage as Ulloa exposes:

'The Director of the Copenhagen University Library, the knowledgeable Sajus Larsen, has published (1925-26) a series of studies, which after what I have just exposed clears up many points, says Ulloa, 'Mr. Larsen has demonstrated, with his studies that in the year 1476, King Christian of Denmark, together with the Portuguese King Alfonse V, sent out a naval expedition, under the command of the Norwegian corsairs, Pining and Poshort, which reached Greenland. The navigator (N.B.) was a certain Joannes Scolvus (which translated into Catalan is Joan Colom), according to the Latin text written by the famous Portuguese geographers Mercator and Friscius on one of their globes made in 1537, which is now in Zerbest.

What we know today of the Vikings is largely due to the sagas written down during the XIIIth. Century, which had previously been transmitted orally from generation to generation. According to the Greenland sagas and those of Erik the Red, in the year 1000 Leif Erikson (son of Erik) reached an unknown land to which he gave the name of Vinland. That land was situated on the northeast coast of the continent, and is known today as America, the New World, which 500 years later and at a more southerly point, was discovered by the great sailor Christopher Columbus, and was later to be explored, colonised and evangelised.

Columbus had verified on his previous “field trip” on this ocean voyage with the Norwegians in 1477 that by way of the Ocean, he was to reach the East by sailing west.

“Live Erikson discovers America” (five centuries before Columbus) By Christian Krong. 1893

COLUMBUS’ TIES WITH PORTUGAL.

Hernando Columbus and Las Casas inform us that: ‘As soon as he returned from this exploit, Columbus went to Lisbon, where he was well known, had many friends, and was well received. So well received was he that he established a home there and married a noblewoman Doña Felipa Muñiz, daughter of Don Pedro Muñiz de Perestrelo and,at the time a novice at the Monatery of Todos Los Santos. His father-in-law being deceased, Columbus and his wife were to live with his mother-in-law, who on discovering her son-in-law’s zeal for cosmography explained to him that her husband had been a great man of the sea and had voyaged together with two other sea captains under license of the King of Portugal to discover new lands. They had made a pact to share what they discovered in three parts, so when they reached the undiscovered Islands of Madeira and Porto Santo, they divided Madeira into two parts, the third part being Porto Santo. By drawing lots Perestrelo was to receive the Island of Porto Santo, which he governed until his death. Seeing that Columbus was so keen and interested in voyages of this type, his mother-in-law handed over to him all her late husband’s documents and maps, upon which he became even more enthusiastic searching for information about other voyages made by the Portuguese to the Mina de Oro and the Guinea Coast, and he delighted in talking to those who had navigated to these places’. Columbus, on obtaining all this information, became convinced beyond a doubt that to the west of the Canary Islands and the Isles of Cabo Verde, lay many lands waiting to be discovered.

During those prodigious years from 1476-84, whilst he was living between Portugal, the colonies of Guinea, Porto Santo and the Isle of Madeira, a series of important events had taken place. First his compulsory arrival in Lisbon in August 1476, the voyage to Greenland in 1477, and then his marriage to Doña Felipa Muñiz, and perhaps his move to Porto Santo, where probably his eldest child, Diego was born. Columbus’ time spent on the Isles of Madeira had been very positive for him, as he had had direct access to information from the old Madeiran sailors and others who birthed and set sail from these ports, and who spoke of islands and lands on the horizon of that undiscovered dark and sinister ocean.

While living on the Island of Porto Santo, he got to know about the sugar cane plantations and the elaboration techniques. In the XVth. Century, sugar was a luxury commodity and extremely expensive. He sailed to African Equatorial Guinea on various voyages of discovery and “rescue”, which meant, not trading voyages, but rather voyages to discover and explore warmer lands and collect seeds and produce to transplant in the “Indies”. It is quite possible that he took natives as slaves from these lands, to work in the elaboration of these crops.

Map of the West Coast of Africa, with the situation of the South of Spain, the Isles of Madeira and Porto Santo, the Canary Islands with Hierro and Gomera and La Mina de Oro on the Portuguese Guinean Coast.

LA MINA DE ORO AND THE SUGAR CANE.

Columbus had, without a doubt, long projected his voyage to the Indies. The first voyage was made with a very small fleet of vessels, and the motive was for the crew to witness and verify the exploit, and to take samples of natives, flora and fauna from the land to the Kings of Aragon. Another more important expedition was soon to be organized, with more vessels, more crew and passengers, some of who would be priests and members of the clergy to carry out the religious services that would be held and to evangelise the natives. There would be soldiers, farmers and artisans all with their tools and utensils, and knowledge. There would even be some native slaves from Guinea to cultivate the tropical produce, as well as domestic animals such as dogs and horses, all for the conquest and colonization of the new lands.

This was why the voyages to the Portuguese colonies were of such interest to Columbus. Some he made in the company of his brother Bartolomé and Miguel Ballester, who as we will see, on the second voyage to the New World, was to be the first man to plant of sugar cane on the Island of La Española and to extract the juice.

Paolo Emilio Taviani in I viaggi di Colombo (Novara, 1986) p. 32, writes:

"A una prima impresione, il Genovese, che ha conosciuto gli ignami in Guinea, confonde con casi l`ajes, cioé la batata (...) Chi le ajes crescono piú

grosse e buone di quante abbia visto altrove, poiché l´Ammiraglio

dice che ne aveva giá visto in Guinea (...) Studi recenti compiuti particolarmente in Dominicana hanno portato a concludere che l´ajes e il tubero che lo Scopritore definisce, per il recordo della Guinea..."

The same author on p.429 writes:

"Il fallimento dell´impresa coloniale di Colombo all´Hipaniola: Nel " Manual de historia dominicana" - che, in qualche punto riportiamo integralmente e il resto riassuntivamente - Moya Pòns sottollinea che il plano di Colombo era stato dii constituire nell´Hispaniola una fattoria o colonia simile a quelle che egli aveva visto, molti anni addietro, lungole coste di Guinea e Capo Verde, in Africa".

There is no doubt then, that Columbus visited Castillo de la Mina (of gold) in Guinea, from the numerous manifestations made by the sailor and which Hernando Columbus and Las Casas wrote down. The latter insists on making a point that Columbus' voyages to la Mina, were made whilst he was resident in Portuguese territory, namely Porto Santo where he was nationalized by way of his marriage to a Portuguese woman, and that he was frequently accompanied by his brother Bartolomé.

His words read:

'On these voyages of discovery, or at least, some of them, the Admiral was joined by his brother D.Bartolomé Columbus, confirmed by the information that I have obtained from letters and other written documents that have come into my hands' he continues 'the two men were frequently accompanied by others of Portuguese nationality.

Columbus had planned his navigation project well, and had voyaged to Guinea in order to learn about tropical agricultural produce, how to cultivate and later manufacture it.

As we have said Columbus, and his team, studied the possibility of planting and cultivating the produce from the Guinea Coast in the new tropical lands of the Antilles. Columbus had already sailed with the Norwegians Pining and Poshort from Tile or Tule (known today as Greenland) to Vinland (land of wine) on the north-east coast of Canada, and he knew that the Antilles Islands, which he wanted to reach, were situated on a lower parallel of latitude than that he had previously sailed on i.e. in the Tropics and that it was a straight course from the Gulf of Guinea to the Carribean.

A BRIEF LOOK BACK INTO HISTORY SO AS BETTER TO UNDERSTAND THIS STORY.

Catalonia under the Crown of Aragon.

From the XIIth Century onwards, Catalonia had had ties with the Crown of Aragon and from the middle of the XIIIth Century also with the Kingdoms of Valencia and Majorca as well as other possessions in the Mediterranean belonging to these Crowns as a result of successive conquests. These territories have all been ruled, at times under the same government and at times by independent governments under the same head, namely the Crown of Aragon, whose subjects were denominated Aragonese, although they were perhaps from Valencia or the Balearic Islands. At that time, Aragonese subjects were considered as foreigners by the land of Castile.

The General Courts of the Crown of Aragon were held, subject to convenience, in different parts of the territory; Zaragoza, Alcañiz, Barcelona, or Cervera, and to them came representatives of all the different geographic possessions of the realm, for example the Island of Sardinia.

At the end of the XVth. Century the new peninsular dynasties of Avis in Portugal and Euvre in Navarre opened ways to create a union of the different kingdoms, which up till then had never been consolidated. With their marriage, the Catholic Monarchs brought about, if not a union within the mainland, at least the possibility of confederating the two crowns following the Conquest of the Moors in Granada, the Expulsion of the Jews from Castile and Aragon and the great Discovery of America by Columbus all of which happened in 1492.

The marriage of Isabel of Castile to Ferdinand of Aragon. Archbishopric of Tarragona, the see at which the dispensation for the legitimate marriage of the Catholic Monarchs was negotiated.

The Royal Family had lived in Tarragona from 1462 because of the 10-year War against the Generalitat (Catalan Government) being fought by the troops of Juan II of Aragon. Queen Juana Enriquez died on 13th February 1468, after suffering a long and cruel illness whilst living in this city,. Daughter of the Admiral of Castile, second wife of Juan II, and mother of the heir to the throne Ferdinand, she was not able to live long enough to see the long sought after marriage of her son Ferdinand to Isabel, both members of the Trastamara family, and cousins.

At the Courts celebrated in August 1469 in Cervera (Lérida), situated half way between Zaragoza and Barcelona and where the Kings of Aragon had a palace, a parliament took place. Ferdinand, King of Sicily as from 13th. June of the previous year and Heir to the Crown of Catalonia and Aragon accepted the conditions for his marriage to Isabel of Castile. The ceremony would be held illegitimately in Valladolid in October of the same year (1469).

The Archbishop of Toledo, Alfonso de Carrillo, solved the problems involved in the question of kinship by presenting a Papal Bull issued by Pio II, which dispensed the marriage contractors of any degree of consanguinity. However, later on this document was proved to be false, forged by Ferdinand himself and his father Juan II, in confabulation with Archbishop Carrillo.

In her book “The Borgia Popes Calixto III and Alexander VI” (Valencia 1991), the Viennese historian Susanna Schüller-Piroli writes (p.109):

‘…Young Ferdinand’s reputation suffered very badly when his eldest stepbrother Don Carlos de Viana died in the prison where he had been cruelly held by his own father. The responsibility for the tragic death of the legitimate Heir to the throne of Aragon and Navarre fell on the shoulders of Ferdinand’s mother Doña Juana Enriquez. Ferdinand was the son of Juan II by his second marriage. The indignation felt by the Catalans was directed mainly towards Doña Juana, but stronger still was the hostility of the people of Navarre, where Juan had been ruler only thanks to his first wife Blanca d’Evreux from whom he had received Navarre as inheritance on her death’.

Rodrigo (de Borja, the Cardinal from Valencia) was extremely prudent in dealing with this problem. Firstly he arranged to meet Prince Ferdinand in person and judge for himself before making any decision about him. The future Pope and future King

met at the end of the summer of 1472 in Tarragona (Archbishop Urrea’s see). The first result of this meeting, Schüller explains, was that Rodrigo urgently recommended Pope Sixto IV to concede a dispensation for the legal marriage of Ferdinand to Isabel. Only this way, could the nation be united as one force in the struggle against the Infidels. The Pope listened to this advice and granted his representative the power to legitimise the marriage between the two young people.

Palace of the Cambreria in the Cathedral of Tarragona, where in 1468 Queen Juana Enriquez, daughter of the Admiral of Castile, second wife of Juan II of Aragon, and mother of Ferdinand the Catholic King died.
(The photographs by Joan Farré are published in Tarragona Medieval, edited by Diario de Tarragona 1999)

Palace of the Cambreria in the Pla de la Seu of Tarragona

Interior of the Palace of the Cambreria in the Pla de la Seu, Tarragona

1493: THE CATALANS WITH COLUMBUS IN LA ESPAÑOLA
Columbus in Tarragona on his return from the Voyage of Discovery of the New World, before being received by the Catholic Monarchs.

Regarding the return voyage to Spain after the discovery of the New World, it is worth mentioning that their Catholic Majesties were in Catalonia as the previous December, the King had suffered an attack on his life and had been badly injured in the neck by a knife. This fact confirms the 3rd April 1493 as the date that the Admiral was received by the Catholic Monarchs in Catalonia.

Columbus arrived first at Restelo (Lisbon) on 4th March 1493, where he stayed until 14th anchored in the Tajo Estuary, cleaning and repairing the ship. It is strange that it was not until 14th March 1493 that Columbus wrote the letter and list to the Catholic Monarchs in which he tells them of his discovery, explaining the most relevant facts in detail. This letter was sent by courier on horseback before Columbus left for Seville,

on board the craft “La Niña” on which he had returned from the New World.

On Friday 15th March “La Niña” anchored in the waters of the Guadalquivir with a cargo of natives and exotic animals brought from the Indies. From Seville

Columbus set off on his journey by land, by way of Royal Highways to Cordoba, where his mistress Beatriz Enriquez de Arana lived with their son Hernando and his son by his first marriage Diego.

Father Las Casas explains in his Historia de las Indias that he was very young, nine years old in fact when he witnessed the colourful arrival at Seville of Columbus' caravan and retinue of native Indian slaves, exotic produce and animals brought from the new lands. He also confirms that from Lisbon on 14th March 1493 Columbus had sent an extensive letter explaining the whole voyage, to which the Monarchs had replied with a missive dated 30th March and which concludes:

'… And as we wish you to continue that which with God's help you have begun, we desire your return in our service as soon as possible. Time is important, the summer is advanced and there is no time to journey there ,therefore, proceed to arrange your return to the land from which you come.'

Write to us by this post of returning soon to see how it is to be done, while you leave and return so that all is ready. Barcelona, the thirtieth of March of the ninety third year. I the King. I the Queen.

The young nine-year-old witnessed the caravan passing through Seville on its way to Cordoba (where Columbus was to visit his mistress Beatriz Enrique and his sons Diego and Hernando, in her care). He saw Columbus and his retinue of men, native Indians, exotic fruits and birds brought from the Indies all of which were to be presented to the Catholic Monarchs in Barcelona.

An error made in History.

The fact that the letter from the Catholic Monarchs is dated 30th March and that Columbus was received by them on 3rd April (an event not noted in any official diary or register of the Ciudad Condal (Barcelona) has evoked many doubts among historians who think that Columbus must still have been in Andalucia on this date as he could not possibly have made the journey in so short a time. Probably, because of the many interests and ambitions involved in this discovery the Catholic Monarchs would have been extremely discreet and cautious regarding the arrival of the Admiral.

With respect to this fact, Antonio Rumeu de Armas, in his Estudio Histórico-Crítico of the Libro Copiador de Cristóbal Colón (known as Columbus' Copy book or the Tarragona Manuscript because of where it was discovered) tells us:

'The Monarchs of Castile, due the ambiguous behaviour of Juan II of Portugal regarding the discovery, have decided to bring forward the project of the development of the Indies so as to consolidate their position with respect to the lands and islands recently discovered, and, as the task of exploration has already been initiated, to renew the effort to repopulate them. On this day 30th March the second oceanic expedition was firmly decided'.

Some historians, supposing that when the Monarchs sent their missive to Columbus he was still somewhere in Andalucia, either in the house at Pinzon en Palos, or with the Franciscan Fathers at Santa María de la Rábita in Huelva, or in Seville, or Cordoba, believe it unfeasible for him to have reached Barcelona in four days. The error is that they have not contemplated the possibility of him having reached a location nearer to Barcelona, for example Tarragona, where he would have organised together with his companions his imminent and most important voyage, with a larger fleet of vessels, men and utensils, since this voyage was to be one of exploration, colonisation, and evangelisation of all the new lands discovered.

So, Morales Padrón in Cristobál Colón, Almirante de la Mar Océana (Madrid 1988) tells us that it was 'about the middle of April' stating more exactly 'between the 15th and the 20th. A similar claim was made by the north American writer Washington Irvine in 1827, who said: 'In the middle of April, Columbus arrived in Barcelona'. In his Gran Historia de América, published in weekly instalments by the magazine "Epoca" 1991-1992, Ricardo de la Cierva says:

'Columbus had considered arriving at Barcelona by sea, but on receiving the Royal summons to arrive at the beginning of April, he immediately started his journey by land by way of Cordoba, (where he was to embrace his mistress Beatriz de Arana and his sons), then on by way of Murcia, Valencia and Tarragona to Barcelona, where his triumphant journey was to culminate in the momentous occasion of his reception by their Royal Majesties'.

Just as la Cierva says, Columbus had written of his intention to sail to Barcelona in his Ship's Diary. The route, which the Admiral actually took, according to this historian, confirms this theory. He would have had to travel by carriage from Seville to Cordoba, and then on to Murcia, but in our opinion, at some point on the coast, possibly Cartagena , his vessel "La Niña" and her crew were waiting for him, and he continued his route by sea from then on, by way of Valencia and Tarragona finally arriving at Barcelona. If Columbus had continued his journey by land, there would have been no reason for him to make the detour from Cordoba to Murcia. It would have been much more logical to travel northwards to Albacete, Almansa and then Valencia. To follow this route however, would not only have taken longer with the slow passage of the carriages, but would also have exposed them to the dangers lurking along the highways. It was much quicker and safer to make the last part of the journey by the means of transport in which the Admiral was most expert.

Maritime and land route which Columbus took through Spain after his return voyage from the Discovery of America

Columbus' itinerary up to his reception by the Catholic Monarchs in Barcelona, by way of Royal Highways from Seville to Cordoba and Murcia and up the coast by ship.

In Consuelo Varela's Critóbal Colón. Rertato de un hombre, her opinion is of particular interest: 'What Columbus really desired, seaman that he was, was to be aboard his ship, and whenever he could, to avoid going on land. Even Oviedo tells us wickedly' she says 'that, on his first voyage, he did not go on land until reaching the Island of Cuba. It is almost

certain that on Christmas Eve of 1492, when the craft Santa María ran aground Columbus was resting on board, and had not disembarked either to sleep or to celebrate the Christmas with the rest of the crew.

The course set for Tarragona is a key factor which sheds light on what has been considered as an error made in assuming that 3rd April was the date on which the Catholic Monarchs received Columbus in Barcelona, because it allows us to give a much more simple explanation. Between the date of the royal missive on the 30th March and the reception on the 3rd April there are four days, more than enough time for a missive to travel from Barcelona to Tarragona. A distance of 55 miles could be covered in one day by a courier on horseback such as Collantes galloping along the Royal Highways, so Columbus and his crew would have had three more days with which to prepare the voyage and sail from Tarragona to Barcelona.

Miguel Ballester was from Tarragona, a true and loyal friend, and one of Columbus'right-hand men. Fray Bernat Boyle , who 5 years earlier had been secretary to Ferdinand II and foreign diplomat in France, was also from Tarragona and we could add still other citizens to the list of people who accompanied Columbus on other voyages, such as a certain Andreu and his brother Joan Anton, who served Columbus as page and valet.

Pedro de Urrea had held the Archbishop's see of Tarragona from 1445-89. He had been the right-hand man of King Juan II of Aragon. When he died Gonzalo Fernández de Heredia, was nominated Archbishop. Gonzalo had also been ambassador of Juan II at the Court of Rome continuing to occupy this same position during the reign of Ferdinand II. Among the positions that Gonzalo occupied in Rome, the most noteworthy was that of Captain of the Guard of the Sacred Palace. He held this position at the time of The Conclave that took place in 1492, on the death of Inocencio VIII, when the Valencian Cardinal Rodrigo Borja was elected Pope, taking the name of Alexander VI. He was also a Prefect of the Eternal City in 1503 when this same Pope died. The late Pope had granted various bulls to Bernat Boyle, nominating him Vicar of the Church of Rome in the New World and had ratified the Treaty of Alcaçobas in which the boundaries separating the recently discovered Spanish and Portuguese territories were clearly defined.

The "Tarragona Manuscript" or Christopher Columbus' Copy Book.

It is not surprising that it was in Tarragona, the ancient Mediterranean Catalan city and metropolitan Archbishopric, where 500 years after it was written, Columbus' Copy Book was found. Known to all erudite scholars as the "Tarragona Manuscript", this important document, found on the shelves of an antique bookshop, was acquired by the Spanish state in 1987, for a considerable sum of money,although its value is incalculable. Today, this manuscript is to be found in the Archive General of the Indies in Seville.

A Crucial meeting.

The "Tarragona Manuscript", is no more nor less than a book in which Columbus copied down all the documents that he wrote to the Catholic Monarchs, a total of 38 pages written on both sides and which reproduce seven letter reports and two other missives of an intimate nature, written on the Admiral's voyages to the New World between 1492 and 1504, this last year being when he returned from his fourth and last voyage.

One of these letters is considered as "the Birth Certificate of America ", because in it is to be found the first written news referring to the lands named the West Indies.

From the seven letter reports, two were already known, and had been published more than once, which itself

guarantees the authenticity of the document. It is interesting to note that the text written in the “Libro Copiador” (Copy Book), is full of Catalan, Portuguese and occasionally Italian terms.

Rumeu de Armas, author of the transcription of the commentaries in Estudio Histórico-Crítico, says that the “Copy Book” constitutes one of the most important findings for the Commemorative Acts of the 500th Anniversary of the Discovery of America. Taking into consideration the details of the “manuscript”, Rumeu himself writes: ‘Although it is risky to prophesise the development of future events, we do not hesitate in claiming that one of the most significant and memorable incidents, from a historical point of view, is without doubt the appearance on the scene of Columbus’Copy Book. The finding is absolutely transcendental because it gives us such highlighted and extensive information about the first expeditions to America.

On a visit we made in January 2000 to Dr. Ricardo E. Alegría, Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean in Viejo San Juan, the knowledgeable archaeologist informed us that thanks to “the Tarragona Manuscript”, a hundred-year long controversy had been solved between Puerto Rican erudite scholars as to whether Columbus had disembarked on the Island of Boriquén (native denomination) or had only sailed around it. The precision and detail, with which the landscape flora and fauna is described, shows that Columbus must have inspected the place in very great detail.

Columbus took possession of the Island of Boriquén, which in the Araucan native language means “land of the brave man”, on 19th November 1493 and renamed it the Island of San Juan Bautista, in honour of Prince Juan, son of their Catholic Majesties. He disembarked there, apparently at the farthest point on the west coast, and was surprised at the transparent waters, rich vegetation, and abrupt coastline of the place.

The Testimonio Compañia Editorial in Madrid published Christopher Columbus’ Copy Book in three volumes in 1989 to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the Discovery. The first volume corresponds to the Estudio Histórico-Crítico, of which Antonio Rumeu de Armas writes. The second volume is the translation of the seven informative letters and the two private letters, and the third volume is a facsimile publication of the manuscript itself, bound in embossed leather and decorated with five gold nails on each cover.

A limited edition of 980 copies was made and registered in a notarial act signed by Don Alberto Ballarin Marcial, notary of Madrid and member of the Illustrious College of Notaries. The act states that a part of the edition, 42 copies to be precise, each numbered with Roman numerals in red ink were to go to the 21 Hispano-American countries. On a visit that we made to the Museo del Faro de Colón in Santo Domingo, we were able to see a copy on show in a glass case.

COLUMBUS’ SECOND VOYAGE

On his second voyage (September 1493) he took with him men from his mercantile colonisation venture, among whom we find Miguel Ballester, his great childhood friend, Miguel Muliart, his brother-in-law from his first marriage to his Portuguese wife Felipa Muñiz, and Pedro Casaus, father of Bartolomé de las Casas. On his third and fourth voyages, other friends and family also accompanied him from Tarragona, including his cousins, Andreu and Joan Anton.

Another person to accompany Columbus on his second voyage was a monk from the Monastery of Montserrat (Barcelona). He later became Abbot of Los Mínimos de Castile and Aragon and Secretary and Ambassador-Diplomat of King Ferdinand in France. The King had arranged for Boyl to join the second Expedition as Vicar of Rome and the first evangelist in the New World. Another twelve monks from the Catalan monastery of Montserrat were also to make the voyage.

The Genoese historian Paolo-Emilio Taviani in his book I viaggi di Colombo (Novara 1986) under the heading “Eclesiastici ed evangelizzatori” p. 308 writes:

"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, datada 30 giugno, da Cordoba. Da allora il monarca gli manifiesta simpatia e gli accorda fiducia affidandogli incarichi dipomatici in Francia.

La carriera del benediettino cambia all´improvisso. I Re hanno pensato a lui per l´evangelizzazzione delle Indie. Compiuta la scelta, scrivono, iin data 7 giugno 1493, da Barcellona una lettera ai loro ambasciatori in Roma per sollecitare del Santo Padre una bolla apostolica per la misssiones che agli dovrà compiere. Il 25 giugno Alessandro VI spedisce lal 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."

6th January1494, the monk from Tarragona, Bernat Boyle celebrated the first Mass to take place in the New World together with 9 members of the clergy.

1496 - 1498: Coup d’etat in Santo Domingo

On returning from his first voyage, Columbus had appointed his valet, Francisco Roldán, Mayor General of the Island of La Isabella. In March 1496 Roldán, still holding this position, rose up in rebellion against Columbus. Bernat Boyle, and other important men in the so-called King’s party, instigated the revolt. This party constituted a group exerting

pressure from Aragon in an attempt to counteract the power and prepotency wielded by Columbus, Admiral-Viceroy and Governor General of the Indies, and his friends and family. Right from the Discovery of La Española, the conquerors and settlers had divided into two bands.

With reference to this situation, Taviani on p. 308 of his work, writes:

"Il piú autorevole era un benedittino, padre Boil, al quale i sovrani affifdarono il compito d´intraprendere e dirigere l´opera di conversione.

Lo incontraremo piú avanti durante le defezioni e le rivolta all ´Hipaniola e vedremo che i suoi rapporti con Colombo degenereranno in aperti dissidi, facendosi il religioso portavoce della maldicenza e consigliere dei cospiratori"

When the unrest in Roldan's party became known in Spain a Royal missive arrived naming Bartolomé Columbus representative in the King's name and assigning him reinforcements. At this the situation became even more serious.

Regarding this revolt, there is a letter from Miguel Ballester, at the time Mayor of Bonao, to the Admiral. Despite his loyalty to the Admiral, Miguel Ballester, had on previous occasions acted as mediator in the disputes with the rebels. The letter reads:

'I know for sure that the gentlemen that you have in your service together with your servants would die serving you, but of the others, I have many doubts'

In order to recuperate his very dwindled popularity, Columbus sent out a communication on 12th September 1498 announcing that all those who wished to return to Spain, could do so. Certain rebels went to Bonao to talk over the situation with Miguel Ballester, still a firm collaborator and loyal to the Admiral's authority. However Roldan, as Mayor of Santo Domingo, would not alter his position. Columbus unable to risk returning to Spain to inform the Monarchs of the situation in case a native uprising should occur, decided to send Ballester in his place as delegate, with a report of the situation.

Miguel Ballester together with another emissary from Columbus, Garcia Barrantes, explained the facts and the delicate situation to the Spanish Court, but Roldán also presented a report of his version to the Monarchs who were at the time in Seville. The immediate consequence of the appearance of both reports was that of Judge Bobadilla's decision to go to the Indies and arrest the Columbus brothers.

When Judge Bobadilla decided to repatriate the Columbus brothers, Miguel Ballester accompanied the Admiral on his compulsory voyage and offered his services as mediator in the negotiations with the Monarchs in an attempt to improve the situation.

Columbus, in chains and under arrest, by order of Judge Bobadilla, is sent from Santo Domingo to the Court of the Catholic Monarchs in Spain.

Columbus, an expert merchant sailor.

The group of friends that accompanied Columbus were part of his mercantile company. The resourceful, organisational, and enterprising qualities of the people from this agricultural and maritime region of the Mediterranean soon became evident.

The Mediterranean Sea seemed to grow smaller after the Turks from Byzantium had closed the passage of vessels to the Orient. It became necessary to find new passages for commercial vessels and this is how the genius of the great sailor emerged. Joan Colom, later known as Christopher Columbus subject of the Kingdom of Aragon, privateer and merchant sailor, later known as Christopher Columbus was to become the man who discovered America.

Descended from a family of sailors, his first contact with the sea was at 14 years old. He received a solid cultural and scholastic preparation, which he continued to cultivate without interruption, throughout his life, as well as the time he spent programming his naval projects or attending to his mercantile or family affairs when on land.

During his voyages, the sailor learned how to communicate with all types and classes of people, ecclesiastics, laymen, Jews, Moors and Christians. He maintained conversations with everyone, enhancing his professional knowledge towards his naval project. On his voyages he sailed thousands of miles, visited hundreds of ports and crossed the Atlantic as navigator of the Norwegian corsairs Pining and Poshort in 1477. On that voyage he had become convinced that by sailing on a lower parallel of latitude, he would reach the East by sailing West. By his marriage to his Portuguese wife he had not only formed a family and begotten an heir but had obtained valuable maps, charts, and documentation for his project belonging to his late father-in-law, former Governor of Porto Santo in the Isles of Madeira, discovered in 1424.

In 1478 Columbus was in Madeira purchasing sugar for the Genoese merchants Paolo de Negro and Ludovico Centurione, and around the year 1481, he was living with his wife Felipa Muñiz and son Diego in Porto Santo. From there he set out on various voyages of discovery and “rescue” along the warm coast of Portuguese Guinea, where he learned about the local crops and their elaboration. We know that on some of these voyages he was accompanied by close friends and family such as his brother Bartolomé and the loyal Miguel Ballester, the first man to plant, cultivate and elaborate sugar cane in the New World.

Sugar cane takes root in the Caribbean.

In the museum “Casas Reales “ of Santo Domingo, there is an inscription, which specifies the following: - ‘1505 - sugar is produced by the residents of La Vega, Ballester and Aguillón or Aguílo.

There is also a plaque on the great monument dedicated to sugar cane in La Vega, which reads, ‘Miguel Ballester, ‘the first man to extract the juice…’ which is exactly what the chronicler of that time Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo wrote on p. 6 of his Historia General y Natural de la Indias: ‘…the Mayor of La Vega, Miguel Ballester, from Catalonia, was the first man to produce sugar’.

Monument to sugar cane in Santo Domingo, which reads, ‘…Miguel Ballestero extracted the juice….’

Map of the Island La Hispaniola (today the Dominican Republic)

In a list of the main sugar cane plantations and mills on La Española in the XVI century, which is to be found in the previously mentioned work of Oviedo, it states

Miguel Ballester’s Plantations

1514 - La Concepción (La Vega) Alcaide (warden) Miquel(sic) Ballester

1516 - San Cristóbal (S. Cristóbal) Alcaide (warden) Miquel(sic) Ballester

Note how Oviedo writes Ballester’s name in Catalan “Miquel)

Miguel Ballester, “the first man to produce sugar”

In Repartimientos y Encomiendas en la Isla Española (El Repartimiento de Alburquerque de 1514), (Madrid 1991) written by Luis Arranz Márquez on pages 543 and 567 are the lists of the native territories and those in charge of them in each town. The book states that Miguel Ballester was in charge of 35 workers divided among the four territories in the region of Buena Ventura.

In the above mentioned book, there is also an alphabetical list of chieftains grouped by townships, and the evidence of orders placed by Miguel Ballester and by the dead chieftain, Adrián, as well as other buyers.

The Director of the National Archives of Santo Domingo, Dr. Ramón A. Font Bernard, told us that it was a usual practice among the conquerors to marry a dead chieftain's wife in order to gain authority over the natives and their territory which was used by mercantile traffic.

One of the first mills or "trapiches" powered by animals force to crush the sugar cane on the Island of La Hispaniola.

Vestiges of the first sugar mill established at Boca del río Nigua in San Cristóbal (Dominican Republic)

The last three decades of his life.

I am very grateful to Father José Luis Sáez s.j. of Santo Domingo for the information he furnished me with on the Dutch historian Harry Hoetink and his work Breve historia del azucar en Santo Domingo, where among other things he says: 'the warden, that tower of strength, Miguel Ballester would do so much more shortly afterwards in Concepción de la Vega', The author of Historia de las Indias, Father las Casas, writes that Vellosa 'managed to make what is called a "trapiche", which is a mill or device moved by horses, where the cane is crushed or squeezed, and the mellifluous juice with which sugar is made, is extracted. It is obvious, however that before trapiches like those of Vellosa, Ballester and others were brought into use, this new type of farming had to be carried out with milling techniques of a much more primitive nature, such as those originally used in Ancient Egypt, which had been designed as olive presses.'

Hotink presented an annex to his work "Notas sobre la población de la isla" It was from a historical collection by Alajandro Llenas in Estadística de la Isla de Santo Domingo (Santiago de los Caballeros), 1875) which makes reference to the distribution by Alburquerque -Pasamonte (Royal tax inspector and later treasurer). It says that 2,824 people arrived on November 23rd. 1514, among whom there were chieftains, Indian slaves and house slaves (nabobs) without counting old people and children. In this list the distribution is as follows:

‘To the King’s estates and mines: the chieftain Diego Enrique Guzman and 92 people in service (47 men and 45 women)., as well as 4 old people and 7 children, not in service.’

‘To Miguel Ballester: resident of the township, 2 house slaves (nabobs) were assigned, as well as the chieftain Adrián with 28 people in service and 4 of the chieftain’s children, not in service.’

‘To Pedro and Hernando de Medina: residents of the township, 14 house slaves (nabobs) were assigned, as well as one or more that had belonged to Miguel Ballester.’

‘To Alonso de Moratón: resident of the township and married to a woman of Castile, 3 house slaves (nabobs) were assigned of those registered by Miguel Ballester.’

The natives served as “nabobs” or house slaves. In the New World “nabori” was the free native who worked in domestic service and a slave was a person who was owned like property. According to the documents that we have been able to consult, the people that were assigned to Miguel Ballester, were all nabobs.

Concepcion de la Vega, founded by Columbus in 1494, It was destroyed by an earthquake in 1562, but the 68 years of its existence it had become the first city of bricks and mortar in the New World. The Mayor of the Fortress of Concepción de la Vega, was Miguel Ballester, from Tarragona.

The forgotten remains of the old La Vega.

Photos by F. José Luis Sáez, s.j.

Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic)

From the Mediterranean Sea to the Caribbean Sea.

The Milanese chronicler at the Court of the Catholic Monarchs, Pietro Martyr de Anghiera, wrote in 1514 that ‘twenty years after the Discovery of the New World, there were 28 sugar cane plantations with their corresponding elaboration

systems, called “trapiches” or devices’. The writer Carlos Martí, in Los Catalanes en América, edited in La Habana and Barcelona in 1918 makes reference to Miguel Ballester’s first extracting mill or “trapiche”, which was in San Cristóbal in the Dominican Republic near to Boca del río Nigua.

One of the latest known facts that we have access to regarding Miguel Ballester, is from the same chronicler of the time of the Catholic Monarchs, namely Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, who collected information from the sugar cane plantations and “trapiches” on the Dominican Island of la Española in the year 1516, making mention of the mill at San Cristóbal, and property of the Mayor, Miquel (sic) Ballester, who was then eighty years old.

This man from Tarragona “an honoured and venerated old man”, according to the description by Las Casas, who knew him well, lived on La Española for the last three decades of his life and died on that beautiful Dominican Island caressed by the waters of the Caribbean Sea, far from his birthplace Tarragona, a place also caressed by waters, but those of the Mediterranean Sea, the first that he was to sail on.

Miguel Ballester was the first man to introduce sugar cane to the Caribbean, and the first to extract the honey-sweet juice of which later on the strong, spirited drink of rum would be born.

(c)Ernest Vallhonrat i Llurba