

DNA used to trace Columbus' roots

May 15 2006

Five hundred years after Christopher Columbus' death, researchers are using DNA testing to identify where he was born and when.

The most prominent tale puts Columbus' birth in Genoa, Italy, but a look into his life finds a mysterious past. While numerous documents trace the family history in Italy, including mention of an "admiral of the king of Spain" in the 1490s, there is no paper trail of Columbus contacting them, The Washington Post reports.

And none of his writings were done in Italian, mostly broken Latin and fluent but error-prone Spanish.

The errors, however, may be clues too. Mount St. Mary's University historian Charles Merrill said they are mistakes someone from the Catalan region of Spain would make and similar to ones a person fluent in Portuguese would make as well.

Other doubts include what year he was born and his family's heritage, which may include French and Jewish roots.

In his writings and accounts of his life, Columbus refused to divulge his origins, the Post said.

Jose Antonio Lorente Acosta, a Spanish forensic pathologist from the University of Grenada, is leading a team of researchers determined to carry out DNA testing to find out more.

Since they don't have access to Columbus' remains, the team will use DNA from his son Fernando and compare with people from numerous countries who claim they are descendants, the newspaper said.

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