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## DNA to settle Columbus debate

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Discovery News

DNA in bones thought to belong to the explorer Christopher Columbus will be analysed by Italian researchers to settle the long-standing debate about his final resting place.



Christopher Columbus landing in the West Indies, on an island he named San Salvador (*U.S. Capitol*)

Scientists from the [University of Pavia](#) will examine fragments of bones kept in a box in the university's library.

The remains come from Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, one of Columbus' debated burial places.

Although the analysis would destroy the remnants, the investigation could settle the riddle of Columbus.

Is Columbus, the man who discovered modern America, buried in the Gothic cathedral of Santa Maria in the Spanish city of Seville, the city he sailed from in 1492? Or is he resting under a cross-shaped lighthouse in Santo Domingo, where he landed in the New World?

Columbus travelled as much after his death as in his life. In his will, he asked for his remains to be taken to what is today the Dominican Republic. Yet he was initially buried in the Spanish city of Valladolid, where he died on 20 May 1506.

He remained there only three years as his bones were dug up and moved to Seville's Carthusian monastery. In 1537 they were finally sent for burial in Santo Domingo, along with the body of his legitimate son, Diego.

But in 1795, the French took control of the island and the Spaniards then moved Columbus' bones to Havana, Cuba. In 1898, when the Spaniards were thrown out of Cuba, the remains were taken back to Seville and buried in the cathedral.

### Mistaken identity?

The debate began when a box containing bone fragments and bearing the inscription "illustrious and enlightened male Don Cristobal Colon" was found in Santo Domingo's cathedral in 1877.

According to the Dominicans, in 1795 the Spaniards took the wrong body, that of Columbus' son Diego who was buried nearby.

In the attempt to solve the mystery, Spanish scientists exhumed Columbus'

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supposed remains in Seville Cathedral, as well as those of his brother Diego and his son Hernando.

Dr José Antonio Lorente Acosta from Spain's [University of Granada](#) is now conducting DNA analysis to find out whether the two sets of bones are related to those of Hernando, whose identity is certain.

Since authorities in Santo Domingo have not allowed the remains buried under the lighthouse to be exhumed, DNA tests on the bones in Pavia could provide a definitive answer to the Caribbean tomb.

The bishop of Santo Domingo gave the bones to the University of Pavia in 1880 as it was thought Columbus studied there, said Anna Maria Campanini Stella, director of the university library.

"They could be enough to conduct DNA tests," she said.

DNA tests could also reveal whether Columbus was Spanish or Italian: the son of Genoese wool trader Domenico Colombo or the illegitimate son of Spain's Prince of Viana.

Pavia University would also verify a third hypothesis, that Columbus was the son of Pope Innocent VIII.

"The physical resemblance between the two is really impressive," said Ruggero Marino, who formulated the claim in a book on Columbus' Vatican links.

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