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Spanish researchers to analyse purported remains of Columbus

(AFP)

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BARCELONA, Spain - Scientists from the University of Granada, deep in southern Spain, announced this weekend that they will head to the Dominican Republic next month to analyse human remains in Santo Domingo believed to be those of Christopher Columbus.

"Essentially, what we will do is study the skeletal structure and determine whether we need to isolate the bones, control the storage temperature or take steps to prevent the formation of fungus which could cause damage," profesor Marcial Castro, head of history at Seville's Ostippo Institute, told AFP.

After obtaining clearance for their mission the team will observe the opening of the tomb bearing the remains, assess their condition and attempt to take samples of DNA during their February 14 and 15 stay in the Dominican capital.

The party had been waiting for several years for Dominican clearance for their trip as they look to prove one way or the other whether the remains are those of Columbus, credited with discovering the New World in 1492, or if his bones are in fact in Seville Cathedral.

Dominican vice-minister for culture, Sulamita Puig, last week authorised a visit by a Spanish specialist team of anthropologists and a genetics expert.

"That authorisation does not go as far as allowing us to take DNA samples," according to Castro.

Wide-ranging anthropological study

However, "we are going to establish whether there exist real possibilities of obtaining a DNA sample on the basis of our first



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analyses," he added.

Castro explained furthermore that his team would write up a "preliminary, technical report to advise the Dominicans regarding the state of the bones and the means of preserving them."

After that, the Spaniards will have to convince their hosts to authorise a "wide-ranging anthropological study" which would involve bringing on board researchers of various nationalities.

If the remains are sufficiently well preserved the DNA sample will be taken and compared with samples of the Genoese explorer's son Hernando and brother Diego. The sample or samples will also be matched with existing samples taken in Seville.

The Dominican Republic says that it believes there are authentic remains of Columbus on its soil.

However, tests on the Seville samples do not rule out that those are genuine, according to recent comments by Jose Lorente, director of Granada University's genetic identification laboratory.

Columbus, born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451, died in the northern Spanish city of Valladolid in 1506 and his remains were taken, along with those of his son, to San Domingo in 1544, in line with his express wishes.

In 1795, Spain left its former Dominican colony and transferred the presumed remains, and those of his son, to Cuba, from where they were repatriated to Spain in 1898 following the Hispano-American War.

Photo courtesy: research.att.com

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