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**Columbus: Italian or Spanish?**  
Spanish Saliva May Reveal Real Columbus  
*By Rossella Lorenzi, Discovery News*  
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**Jan. 25, 2006**— Hundreds of saliva samples may reveal the disputed origins of Christopher Columbus, according to a genetic investigation aimed at finding possible distant descendants of the admiral's family.

A team of geneticists, led by José Antonio Lorente Acosta from the University of Granada, has begun to collect samples from Spanish men sharing the surname Colón (Columbus) in the effort to find a common ancestor who may be the link with the man credited for discovering the New World in 1492.

Columbus is widely thought to have been born in 1451 in Genoa, Italy, the son of wool trader Domenico Colombo and Susanna Fontanarossa.

Other theories, however, argue that the explorer was born in Spain, his real name being Cristóbal Colón.

Various versions of the story have Columbus as a pirate born in Catalonia, a Catalan Jew who fled to Genoa to hide from the Spanish Inquisition, and the illegitimate son, born in Majorca, of Spain's prince of Viana.

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Already 300 Spanish volunteers have agreed to take part in the genetic study. The search will be conducted in Catalonia, Majorca and Valencia; samples will be also taken in Genoa.

The DNA of hundreds of men sharing Columbus' surname will be then compared to DNA from the bones of Hernando — Columbus' son through an extramarital affair — whose identity is certain.

"If we find a chromosome (which males inherit through the paternal line) we could say they were related," Acosta told reporters.

It will not be an easy task: in Catalonia alone, there are about 2,000 Colóns in the electoral register.

"I believe the results will be inconclusive," Ruggero Marino, author of the controversial book "Christopher Columbus. The last Templar," told Discovery News.

According to Marino, who is a member of the Italian scientific committee for the Columbus celebrations, the Spanish researchers should also compare Hernando's DNA with that of Pope Innocent VIII.

"I believe Columbus was the son of Giovan Battista Cybo, the future Pope Innocent VIII. The physical resemblance between the two is impressive," Marino said.

According to this theory, the Pope would have dispatched Columbus on his voyage, hoping to use the gold of the New World to fund Crusades.

At Innocent VIII's death, his successor Alexander VI, the Spanish-born Borgia Pope, would have covered up the origins of the venture, giving credit to the Spanish throne.

Results of Agosta's genetic investigation are expected to be ready by May, to mark the 500th anniversary of Columbus's death.

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