

Christopher Columbus: Jew?

By Eli Rosenblatt

Wed. Feb 06, 2008

There may be a statue of Christopher Columbus next to an Astoria subway station in Queens, but some ambitious historians are promoting arguments that could lead some to think that such a statue is better placed on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Claims that Columbus was of Jewish origins have been circulating for years now, mostly from a handful of professors and history buffs. A recent article by Rivka Shpak Lissak on the Web site OMedia.org poses new evidence that Columbus was of Marrano heritage, meaning that his family descended from Sephardic Jews who practiced their religion in secret during and after the Spanish Inquisition.

The article suggests in part that Columbus's Jewish identity is affirmed by several factors: His crew included Jews, he referenced the Inquisition in his journal and his signature contained Jewish symbols. Those claims, however, have been met with researched assertions that Columbus was a Christian who lived during a time when learned European men viewed Jewish literacy as a sign of erudition. Findings in a DNA test performed by University of Granada forensic geneticist José Lorente at Columbus's gravesite in Seville, Spain, proved that Columbus was surely Caucasian. Lorente did not find any evidence that Columbus was of Jewish descent. Consuela Varela, a historian at Spain's Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, has stated that Columbus refused to baptize his slaves not because of his faith but because Spanish law forbade the enslavement of Christians.

In any case, the claim that Columbus was a Jew is a popular one. Browsing the Internet in search of answers will bring Web surfers to antisemitic sites as well as to sites that are Jewish run, each putting its own spin on the story. What we do know for a fact is that New Jersey contains more Columbus statues than any other state. Now that might make him Jewish.

Wed. Feb 06, 2008

Post a Comment:

Your Name: *(Required)*

Your Email Address: *(Required)*

Post Your Comment

The Forward welcomes reader comments in order to promote thoughtful discussion on issues of importance to the Jewish community. In the interest of maintaining a civil forum, the Forward requires that all commenters be appropriately respectful toward our writers, other commenters and the subjects of the articles. Vigorous debate and reasoned critique are welcome; name-calling and personal invective are not. While we generally do not seek to edit or actively moderate comments, the Forward reserves the right to remove comments for any reason.