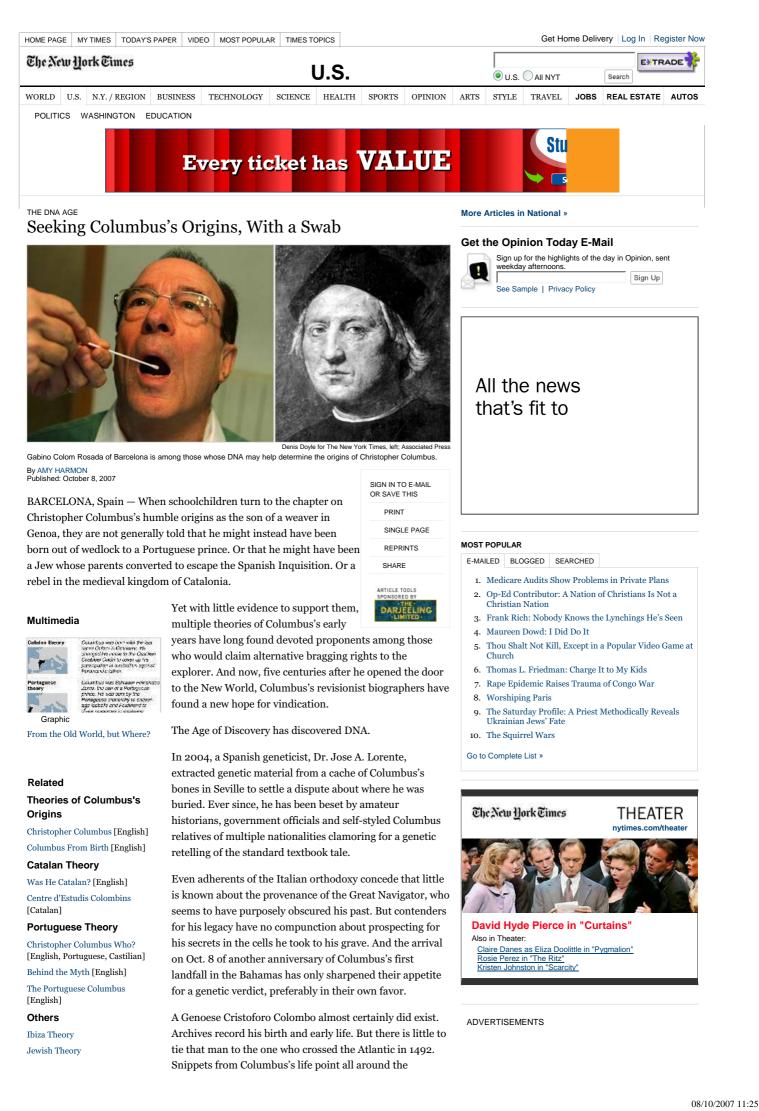
1 de 3



Columbus Citizens Foundation

Information on DNA Testing and Geographical Origins The Genographic Project

(nationalgeographic.com)

The DNA Age

Discovering the Discoverer Articles in this series explore the impact of new genetic technology on American life.

Previous Parts of the Series »



Stefano Buonamici for The New York Times A statue of Columbus stands over Barcelona, Spain, whose claim to the explorer is challenged by several other places.

southern European coast. He kept books in Catalan and his handwriting has, according to some, a Catalonian flair. He married a Portuguese noblewoman. He wrote in Castilian. He decorated his letters with a Hebrew cartouche.

Since it seems now that the best bet for deducing Columbus's true hometown is to look for a genetic match in places where he might have lived, hundreds of Spaniards, Italians, and even a few Frenchmen have happily swabbed their cheeks to supply cells for comparison.

"You would be proud to know that the man that goes to America the first time was Catalan," said Jordi Colom, 51, an executive at a local television station whose saliva sample will help test the contention that Columbus was born in Catalonia, the once-independent eastern region of modern Spain that still fosters its own language, culture and designs on independence.

No chance, said Renato Colombo, 62, a retired Italian engineer who proffered his DNA to reassert his nation's hold on the status quo. "It has never been in doubt that he was from Liguria," the region in northwest Italy of which Genoa is the capital, he insisted. "In his personality, there are the characteristics of the Genoese, mostly represented by his project and his visceral attachment to money and his determination."

Mr. Colom and Mr. Colombo are both "Columbus" in their native tongues. And along with their names, each inherited

from his father a Y chromosome — a sliver of DNA passed exclusively from father to son — which would have been virtually unchanged since the 15th century. A Columbus match to either man's Y chromosome would tie him to that paternal line's Italian or Catalonian home.

"What I want to write is the final book on Columbus, and I will not be able to do it without science to settle this," said Francesc Albardaner, who was seduced by the possibility that DNA — a tool whose answers are treated as indisputable fact in courtrooms and on TV shows — would endorse his deeply held belief in the Catalonian Columbus.

Mr. Albardaner, a Barcelona architect, took more than three months off work, called 2,000 Coloms and persuaded 225 of them to scrape their cheeks at his Center for Columbus Studies in Barcelona. The swabs along with 100 Colombos collected in Italy are being analyzed by Dr. Lorente at the University of Granada and scientists in Rome.

1 2 NEXT PAGE »

Peter Kiefer contributed reporting from Rome.

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2 de 3

08/10/2007 11:25

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