

## CUCCARO MUSEUM - AUDIOGUIDE

### FOLLOWING COLUMBUS' FOOTPRINTS IN THE LAND OF HIS ANCESTORS

#### **1: THE REASON FOR THE MUSEUM'S GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION**

You may have asked yourselves why this museum is located here. The Museum, dedicated to Christopher Columbus, was founded to fix a landmark for the many people coming from all over the world, who, following their interest in the Discoverer of America, have been visiting his place of origin for many years.

The inhabitants of Cuccaro, together with scientists and researchers from Association *Centro Studi Colombiani Monferrini*, the local authorities *Regione Piemonte, Provincia d'Alessandria and Comune di Cuccaro*, and other public and private sponsors, have tried to give the museum a unique character designed to underline the strong relationship between Christopher Columbus and his family in Cuccaro.

As you may have noticed on your way to the museum, the town of Cuccaro, which has a population of about 400, is all centred around its three embodiments: the Town Hall, the Castle, depicted in the picture on your right, and the Church situated opposite the museum entrance and built by the Columbus family in 1676.

On the museum façade are two important motifs: the Landing in the New World, depicted in the azulejo, by Anna Casartelli Colombo di Cuccaro, and the coat of arms with a pigeon on a blue background (the word COLOMBO means pigeon in Italian); both symbols will be seen as the common thread throughout the tour. We recommend that you pay particular attention to the press review which shows how the main themes developed in the museum route are deeply felt in this area of Montferrat, besides being studied all over the world.

Two events gave voice to scholars from all over the world: the first was the meeting of March 1999, for the fifth centenary of the discovery of America and, particularly, of present-day Venezuela, which took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1498, during Columbus' third exploration voyage; the second was the conference which took place in June 2006, at the same time as this museum opening, to celebrate the fifth centenary of Christopher Columbus' death.

#### **2: FROM THE PICTURES TO THE NEW FOOD ITEMS**

The three pictures, placed on the wall on your right, show three important moments in Christopher Columbus' life: in the first on the left, under the coat of arms used in Spain by Columbus, the navigator is depicted while showing Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, sovereigns of Spain, the way to reach East Indies, across the Atlantic ocean, travelling around the globe westwards. This interview was, for Columbus, the last chance to secure reliable sponsorship for the undertaking, as he had already been pleading, fruitlessly, for financial backing in the courts of England, France and Portugal.

The painting in the centre portrays Columbus going ashore on the island of San Salvador in October 1492.

Remarkable is the contrast between the opulence of the Spanish costumes and the ornaments of the natives, who appear naked in front of the navigator; Columbus introduces them in his logbook as follows: "They all wander mother-naked, women included... and all the ones I saw were very young, not older than thirty years, and they are all very well-built, with a beautiful body and gracious features. Their hair is thick, almost like horsehair... Some of them paint themselves grey, white or other colours; some of them paint their faces, some others paint their bodies, or their eyes only, or their nose only... they don't carry weapons nor are they familiar with any: I showed them some swords and they wrongly took them by the blade, cutting themselves. They have no iron at all..."

The third painting depicts Columbus, back from his first great voyage to find a route to the East Indies, at the royal court of Spain, while offering gifts to the sovereigns in the natives' presence.

As you glance down you will see some of the food items brought back from the New World,

which radically changed eating habits in Europe.

Can you imagine, nowadays, a pizza without tomatoes or a roast without crispy potatoes? 1492 was a year to remember: if the New World hadn't been discovered by Christopher Columbus, we wouldn't have two tasty food items which are so popular in Italy; and what about delicious chocolate or pineapple, appearing on our tables at the end of a meal? With his discover, the great navigator offered Europe a great variety of products: potatoes and sweet potatoes, tomatoes, beans, pumpkins and courgettes, pineapples, strawberries, cocoa, maize, sweet and hot peppers. However, these items became part of our food habits only after some years. About tomatoes - did you know that, until mid-seventeenth century, only the poor ate them fried like aubergines, whereas the rich only used them to decorate?

Pepper was brought home from the first voyage but became widespread only later when it was combined in recipes with salt-preserved anchovies from Liguria; Hot, spicy peppers, on the other hand, were found not to be as lucrative as the most prestigious spices of the traditional trade but they were easily grown and became a substitute for the far more expensive eastern pepper. In the seventeenth century it was assigned both aphrodisiac and thaumaturgical powers: the hot pepper decoction was indeed widely believed to heal toothache.

As for American beans, called in Italian *cannellini* or Spanish beans, they were considered so valuable as to be used even as wedding present: Catherine de' Medici received them from her brother, Alexander, when she married Henry II, king of France.

Turkeys were first known as "Indian cocks" as, for years, Columbus was believed to have discovered the East Indies: they were later given the Italian name of tacchino, after the cry 'toc toc' of the hen turkey to recall her chicks. Imported into Spain, they soon made their way into the kitchens of Europe as white meat was preferred by nobles everywhere and poultry meat, rather than red meat, was indeed considered the finest of foods.

A curious fact: in the court of Montezuma, overlord of Mexico, about a thousand turkeys a day were eaten!

And what about potato? It had remained for more than a century, a simple botanic curiosity and, despite being largely employed among the Andean population, in Europe it was used to feed animals or, like the tomato, as an ornamental plant. During the wars and famines of the eighteenth century, however, it became a major food item and started appearing on tables because it was cheap and very nutritious. The same happened to maize, which was grown because of its high productivity, compared to wheat. Maize and potatoes increased the availability of cheaper food for the poor thus contributing to population increases. All in all, the words written by Columbus after his first exploration, "... I think I have found rhubarb and cinnamon, and I shall find plenty of other valuable things which will be discovered by the men I left over there..." were definitely confirmed by deeds!

### 3: CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS IN ART

There is a natural curiosity among many of us as to what Columbus looked like: unfortunately, in the absence of photos, we have to rely on his contemporaries' descriptions, particularly on his son Fernando's *Historias* (his father's biography), in which the Admiral is described as "having a long face and high cheekbones".

The most lifelike among the portrayals appears to be the one by Columbus' contemporary, painter Berruguete, who attended the court of Spain.

The Admiral's personality, the importance of his role, the relevance of his discovery which opened new routes to the world, his charm, the mystery still enshrouding many moments of his life, have certainly each contributed to the creation of a mythical aura surrounding him. He has, therefore, inspired many painters in different periods who, following the aesthetic standards of their days, depicted him in many different ways, as will be seen in this succession of pictures.

Painters are not the only artists to be inspired by the Admiral's personality: musicians also composed valuable works. Columbus indeed has appeared in the last three centuries in operas, ballets, operettas, musicals, *farsas*, parodies, cantatas, tone poems, and more. World-renowned musicians such as Gaetano Donizetti and Richard Wagner drew inspiration from Christopher Columbus' life. All of these artists idealized the Admiral's figure in many different ways and literature dedicated to him poems and rhymes. If we want to get closer to what was Christopher Columbus' real personality, we can [discover it together by listening to](#)

## detailed explanation 3 A.

### DETAILED EXPLANATION 03 A – COLUMBUS THROUGH HIS WRITINGS

Here are some interesting passages drawn from the letter handwritten by Christopher Columbus in Spanish, then translated into Latin and addressed to the chamberlain of the Spanish sovereigns, Don Rafael Sanchez, "...Thirty-three days after my departure from Cadiz I reached the Indian sea, where I discovered many islands, thickly peopled, of which I took possession. To the first of these islands, which is called by the Indians Guanahani, I gave the name of the blessed Saviour (San Salvador), relying upon whose protection I had reached this as well as the other islands; to each of these I also gave a name, ordering that one should be called Santa Maria de la Concepcion, another Fernandina, the third Isabella, the fourth Juana.

From this point I saw lying eastwards another island, fifty-four miles distant from Juana, to which I gave the name of Espanola. ... the other islands of the same place are exceedingly fertile ... surrounded with many bays, spacious, very secure, as I have ever seen; numerous large and healthful rivers intersect it, and it also contains many very lofty mountains. All these islands are very beautiful, and distinguished by a diversity of scenery; they are filled with a great variety of trees of immense height, and which I believe to retain their foliage in all seasons; for when I saw them they were as verdant and luxuriant as they usually are in Spain in the month of May, -- some of them were blossoming, some bearing fruit, and all flourishing in the greatest perfection ... moreover La Espanola abounds in various kinds of spices, gold, and other metals. Its inhabitants are very simple and honest, and exceedingly liberal with all they have ...

It even happened that a sailor received for a leather strap as much gold as was worth three golden nobles ... On my arrival at that sea, I had taken some Indians by force from the first island that I came to, in order that they might learn our language, and communicate to us what they knew respecting the country; which plan succeeded excellently, and was a great advantage to us, for in a short time, either by gestures and signs, or by words, we were enabled to understand each other. These men are still travelling with me, and they continue to entertain the idea that I have descended from heaven ... crying out, "Come, come and look upon beings of a celestial race" ... what I conceive to be the principal wish of our most serene King, namely, the conversion of these people to the holy faith of Christ, to which indeed, as far as I can judge, they are very favourable and well-disposed. ... Finally, to compress into a few words the entire summary of my voyage and speedy return, I promise, that with a little assistance afforded me by our most invincible sovereigns, I will procure them as much gold as they need, as great a quantity of spices, of cotton, and of mastic (which is only found in Chios), and as many men for the service of the navy as their Majesties may require. I promise also rhubarb and other sorts of drugs, which I am persuaded the men whom I have left in the aforesaid fortress have found already and will continue to find ... Therefore let the king and queen, our princes and their most happy kingdoms, and all the other provinces of Christendom, render thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who has granted us so great a victory and such prosperity. Let processions be made, and sacred feasts be held, and the temples be adorned with festive boughs. Let Christ rejoice on earth, as he rejoices in heaven in the prospect of the salvation of the souls of so many nations hitherto lost. Let us also rejoice, as well on account of the exaltation of our faith, as on account of the increase of our temporal prosperity, of which not only Spain, but all Christendom will be partakers."

#### 4: THE 1<sup>ST</sup> VOYAGE: THE DISCOVERY

For the first of his voyages to find a route to the East Indies, Columbus and his crews sail in three caravels, the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria, and try to take advantage of the stronger autumn and winter trade winds, the prevailing winds which blow from east to west, with the intention of returning the following spring.

Even today, one of the two sea-routes used to reach America is the same route set by Columbus during his four voyages: he reached the Caribbean through the Azores, the Canaries and Cape Verde. This route, lying between the 40<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> parallel, is considered, today, as ideal for pleasure trips. A curiosity: it took Columbus about twenty-one days to reach the Caribbean, whereas today the same distance is covered in nine days of navigation.

Until the Canary Islands, the first stop, is reached, all of the sailors are familiar with the route: after that point they face the unknown. During the voyage Columbus keeps two logbooks: the first one, available to everybody, reports fewer nautical miles than covered, and meant to calm the fears of the sailors who worry that the further they sail, the more unlikely become their chances of returning home safely. The second one, kept secret, reports the exact sailing data and is drawn for the sovereigns, with a view to promoting further voyages.

The captivating discovery tale describes how the Pinta's crew saw, floating on the sea a cane, a stick and vegetation common only to mainlands, and a plank. The Niña's crew saw some land signals as well, and a thornbush trunk with red fruits ... at two hours after midnight, land appears only two leagues away: they lower the sails and wait for the new day before going ashore.

Before the departure, the Admiral, considering the length of the voyage, loads on board great quantities of supplies, calculated on one year of sailing. Besides the essentials, he purchases low-value and gold-brick goods, suitable for exchanges with the natives, such as glass beads, mirrors, pins, bells, coloured caps. In the Admiral's logbook we read, "Its inhabitants are very nice and very poor and they long so much for our things, even if they have nothing to give us in exchange. If they can have anything from our ships, they throw themselves into the water and swim to pick it up, and come back to the mainland. But they give everything they possess for very little; they even took in exchange fragments of bowls and broken glass cups ..."

In political terms, the discovery of new lands causes friction between Portugal and Spain. Portugal had exclusive rights over the ocean routes, but Spain wanted to take control of the new lands; now, let's ask ourselves why: in 1454, through a papal bull, pope Nicholas V had granted Portugal a corner on the African coasts, as well as permission to take possession of the areas previously conquered. After the discovery of America, a new papal bull was required: to this purpose, pope Alexander VI issued two bulls, called "Inter caetera", respectively on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1493, whereby he ratified the control of the Spanish Crown over the conquered areas. The two papal bulls cut Portugal out of all trading activity on the West Ocean, thus causing that country to react. As a result, in 1494 Spain and Portugal signed the Treaty of Tordesillas, and the Atlantic ocean was divided into two expansion areas, along a North-South axis, which correspond to a meridian named *raya*. Such division gave Spain the western lands and Portugal the eastern lands. **For a detailed explanation of how Christopher Columbus managed to find a sponsor and talk it into his undertaking, please press button 4 A.**

## **DETAILED EXPLANATION 04 A: COLUMBUS' INTUITIONS BETWEEN SCIENCE AND FAITH**

In the last decades of the fifteenth century, as shown in maps of that time, mathematicians and astronomers shared a belief in a boundless ocean surrounding all lands. However, the map drawn by Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli reduced the distances covered, in opposition to the common belief. Columbus, moved by his thirst for knowledge, his geographic and astronomic knowledge and his experience at sea, sees for the first time Toscanelli's map, and strengthens his belief in the possibility of sailing west to the spice islands of the East. Las Casas writes in his "Historia de la Indias" that "Columbus was inflamed by that map", and, from that moment on, new enthusiasm and energy push him to search for a sponsor.

He goes to Portugal, but King John II sits by, first postponing the answer, then refusing his support. Columbus doesn't give in, and decides to turn to the Spanish sovereigns: at this stage he needs support inside the court. Among the ones who believe in his project are two personalities: the first one is Father Antonio Marchena, a cosmographer and humanist, fond of nautical studies, who lives in the monastery of La Rabida, in Palos; he is well-known inside the court. The second one is the monastery's prior Father Juan Perez, the Queen's personal confessor: he can plead with the Queen in support of the ambitious project. They manage to grant Columbus an interview, during which the navigator submits to the Queen an undertaking which would bring prestige to Spain and to the whole Christianity. The meeting creates a positive synergy between the navigator's thirst for knowledge and the strong religiosity of both parties. However, the final evaluation of the enterprise is entrusted to a committee headed by Father Fernando de Talavera, superior of the Monastery of Prado and the Queen's confessor.

Columbus is summoned to the University of Salamanca, where he unfolds the cosmographic

principles on which his project is based: the earth is round, the antipodes are inhabited, all seas are navigable and Asia extends eastwards, both with mainland and with, possibly, a significant number of islands.

The navigator is sure that such islands exist and are at a reasonable distance, whereas the majority of his audience refuses to entertain the idea. Among this audience are certain ecclesiastical personalities who, following Saint Austin, believe that most of the globe is composed not of solid ground, but of waters or inhabitable places.

In the first instance the committee refuses its support, even if not all its members are against the project. The Queen is made aware of the clashing opinions and, influenced by Father Juan Perez, she eventually grants Columbus a second interview: but it's the fall of Granada, the last bulwark of the Moors in Spain, which leads to a definite, favourable opinion: indeed, having ousted the Moors, the Spanish sovereigns no longer have the expense of warring against them and are free to pour money into the search for new lands, rich in spices and precious metals, where they will place the banner of the Cross.

## **5: THE ANCESTORS OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS' FAMILY**

On this wall several objects appear: coats of arms, maps, the prints of some castles, marble busts and the family tree of Christopher Columbus' ancestors.

The importance of Columbus' family in Cuccaro is underlined by the many marital unions with important and noble families, both from Genoa and from Montferrat, recorded by the coats of arms. The family tree of Christopher Columbus' ancestors highlights the most important personalities.

First of all, we must make it clear that when we mention the "Genoese families", we refer to the great noble dynasties of the Republic of Genoa, whose members, in the Fifteenth century, lived in Genoa, in Savona, in the major European cities and in the Genoese colonies; they were ship-owners and international traders, and did business particularly with the Iberian peninsula. Given the great extent of the related families, we restrict ourselves to a few remarkable individuals: one of the personalities with whom Columbus had been quite intimate, was Michele da Cuneo, from Savona, who accompanied him during most of his second journey across the Atlantic, which lasted from September 1493 to June 1496. Michele da Cuneo is thought to have come back to Europe earlier, in February 1495, with three caravels loaded with Indians who were destined for the slave market. We also remember him for a curious event described in a letter: Michele reports that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1494 he had caught sight of an island; Columbus, using his power of viceroy, offered him the island, naming it "Bella Saonese" (beautiful island from Savona) in his honour.

The Admiral's Genoese family relationships are chronicled by historian Fernandez Armesto. According to Armesto, Christopher Columbus himself had claimed a family relationship with the powerful family of the *Fieschi*; a member of the *Fieschi* family was indeed a close partner of Columbus' in Spain and a witness to his will.

Most Italian and Spanish scholars have accepted, by now, the Admiral's affiliation with aristocracy before the discovery of the New World, which is proved by his marriage to Felipa Moñiz Perestrello, a member of a noble family closely related to the Portuguese royal family.

Columbus' family in Cuccaro was closely related, over the centuries, to several eminent families from Liguria, particularly to the Genoese family of the Spinola. Together with families Doria, Fieschi and Grimaldi, the Spinolas had been, ever since the year 1000, one of the most important progenies of the Republic of Genoa.

Moreover, the importance of Columbus' family in Cuccaro is shown by the great number of strongholds they owned (more than twenty): Cuccaro, Conzano, Rosignano, Altavilla, Lu, Ricaldone, Calamandrana, Rocchetta Palafea, Bistagno, Ozzano, Mirabello, Camagna, Quattordio, Motta, Castellengo, Treville, Vignale, San Giorgio, Baldesco, Olivola, La Sala, Mornese.

The whole of these strongholds formed two wide areas, one in high Montferrat, the other one in low Montferrat: they were, to a degree, an independent country, as they had autonomous administrations, and were only subject to the far Empire. In this regard we mention a significant event: in 1341 the Columbus family in Cuccaro submitted to the Paleologi family, marquises of Montferrat; and they received in exchange, besides the ancient strongholds they already owned, another eight strongholds. The ancient engravings show the castles of some of

the mentioned strongholds.

Finally, the marble busts sculpted in the nineteenth century and originally belonging to the castle, portray two members of the Columbus family in Cuccaro.

## **6: THE AREA OF MONTFERRAT IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY**

Side A of the bright board shows a document of 1411. Through this document Berrettino Colombo of Cuccaro, brother of Domenico, father of Christopher, in accordance with the powers granted to him by Theodore II, marquis of Montferrat, was allowed to take the marquis' place for everything in high Montferrat. Side B of the board shows the notarial deed through which Domenico, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1419, receives the stronghold of Cuccaro.

The ancient engraved maps, placed on the wall in front of you, depict in detail the area of high and low Montferrat and the cities of the Ligurian coast. By these means, we are able to tell you that the historic marquisate, later to become the Duchy of Monferrat, had been independent for seven centuries. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, at the time of Christopher's birth, Piedmont was formed by the Savoy properties on this side of the Alps. Borders between Montferrat, Piedmont, the Republic of Genoa and the Duchy of Milan, weren't as well-defined as they are today, but they constantly altered according to political changes in the different spheres of influence. Moreover, Montferrat was so connected to the city of Genoa, to be considered as its hinterland; Genoa was indeed the natural commercial outlet of this flourishing land, which was only troubled by the frequent wars. Montferrat was placed, indeed, between the two historic districts of Liguria and Lombardy, and had always been affected by their influence: we particularly mention the invasion of the Viscontis in the first half of the fifteenth century, whereas, at the beginning of the same century, the Marquisate, at the peak of its power, had conquered Genoa.

The borders' historic mobility is also proved by the ties between the Spinola and the Doria families and the Columbus family in Cuccaro, as depicted in the coats of arms.

## **7: BETWEEN THE STRONGHOLD AND THE CHURCH**

The reproduction of the church façade, built by the Columbus family in 1676, the vestments of the nineteenth century, the wooden Madonna and the brass plate in which the Columbus family call themselves "founders and patrons of this parish", show the close connection between the town's church and the stronghold authorities. Through this connection, called "giuspatronato", the family provided the church with some lands, in order to sustain the parson and the building. They had, in exchange, a right to bury their dead in the holy ground, to elect the parson and to choose the prelates.

To confirm such a connection and the importance of the Columbus family, you can admire a fresco depicting the miracle of the consecrated host which took place in Turin in June 1453, inside the church. Among the depicted prelates, there is Giovanni Berrettino Colombo of Cuccaro, later ordained as the bishop of Bethlehem.

To conclude, a curious fact: the ancient prints of the site and the excavations show a well owned by the parsonage on the square opposite the museum. Inside this well, at a two-meter depth there was a broad, secret room in which the castle prelates and inhabitants presumably hid during the sieges, thus protecting property and people from the enemy raids.

The reliquary in the centre of the hall houses some ancient finds, among them a ceramic plate originating in the castle of Cuccaro, and showing the coat of arms of the Cuccaro family branch, i. e. three silver pigeons on a blue background. We remind you, in this regard, that the coat of arms carried to Spain by the Great Admiral and displayed at the beginning of the museum tour, has only one silver pigeon on a blue background, as does the ancient coat of arms of the Columbus family in Cuccaro on the museum façade.

## **8: CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS' WILL**

Ferdinand Columbus, author of what is reported on side A of the bright board, is depicted on the wall; the navigator's son tells us in the second chapter of his "Historias" that, "the Admiral's parents found themselves in poverty further to the wars in Lombardy". As a matter of fact, in 1431 they fled their stronghold after it had been taken up by Filippo Maria Visconti, lord of Milan; after this invasion Columbus family in Cuccaro lost their control over the strongholds of Cuccaro, Conzano, Camagna and Ozzano, as testified in the notarial deed of January 1432. The family would regain control over these strongholds in the following years.

The document reproduced in the lower part of the bright board shows some passages of the Admiral's will. To understand the historical value of this document, we have to recall Columbus' intentions regarding the inheritance of his legacy. After he had been given permission by the Spanish sovereigns, Christopher Columbus set up the majorat, a legal institution according to which "the whole of his legacy would go to the first-born male offspring of his son Diego, possibly replaced by the second-born, and so on in birth order." The inheritance would then go to Christopher's second-born Fernando, and to the Admiral's brothers, all of them without offspring. In any case, females were always excluded in favour of males (en ninguna manera lo erede mujer).

With the majorat the Admiral involves all his male offspring; Columbus himself writes about that: "... I intend by that the closest relative to my line of descent, and this forever". This legal institution, dating back to the Roman Law, was in force during all the middle age.

In 1578, following Diego's death (the last male descendant), a quarrel arises in Spain among the heirs, all of female offspring, as to who is entitled to the rich inheritance in which the lands at stake include: the State of Veragua (present-day Panama), the Marquisate of Jamaica, some islands in the West Indies archipelago, besides the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea.

At this stage, an Italian eighth-degree relative, named Baldassarre Colombo of Cuccaro, comes forward: he arrives in Spain provided with the advice of an eminent jurist, Pietro Sordi, showing how, being the closest relative, he is the only one to have the right of majorat.

The other side of the board displays a document which was found by Spanish researcher Angelica Valentineti in the National Historical Archives in Madrid. Through this document the Spanish Supreme Court grants Baldassarre Colombo of Cuccaro two-thousand ducats "otros dos mil ducados". This amount was his share in the division of the revenues coming from the State of Veragua, which was part of the inheritance. **To go through the preservation of the Admiral's original documents, PRESS DETAILED EXPLANATION 08 A.**

### **DETAILED EXPLANATION 08 A: THE PRESERVATION OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS**

The discoverer's documents had been kept for more than a century, from 1500 to 1609, in Seville by the monks of Santa Maria de las Cuevas Carthusian Monastery: we refer both to the private documents, such as wills and letters to his family, and to the official documents, such as the Capitulation of Santa Fe on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1492. Through this document, the catholic sovereigns ratified the privileges granted to Columbus in case of a positive outcome of his undertaking: he would get the title of *Admiral of the Ocean Sea* and viceroy of the discovered lands.

The Discoverer became intimate with the monastery as a result of his friendship with Friar Gaspar Gorricio. Around the year 1502 they worked out an evangelization project for the Indies, to be carried out by the Carthusian order; however, they were opposed by King Ferdinand, who feared complaints by other religious orders.

Until 1500, when Christopher Columbus and his brothers, Bartolomeo and Diego, were put in chains by the new governor of Hispaniola and sent to Spain, the Admiral had been in the habit of carrying his writings with him during voyages and expeditions.

But after his property had been seized on that occasion, he thought it wise to look for a safe place to keep his papers, representing, as they did, his records and conclusions of many years of expectations, suffering and disappointments. In those days monasteries were the safest places, as they enjoyed ecclesiastical immunity.

Friar Gaspar Gorricio kept Columbus' property in his cell until his death; not only writings and documents, but also jewels and money belonging to Columbus' family, which, after the Friar's death, would be kept in Saint Anne's Chapel inside an iron chest and a walnut chest.

The chapel also housed new documents such as the privileges granted to Louis Columbus starting from 1536, when, after thirty years, the famous Columbian quarrels between the

Admiral's heirs and the Crown came to an end. Many writings, however, were lost including the discoverer's will, drawn up on the 1st of April 1502, immediately after he had left for his fourth and last voyage to the New World. This document, ratifying the majorat, nullified the previous one drawn up between 1497 and 1498. The instructions of 1502 were clearly ratified in the codicil drawn up by Columbus on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1506, one day before his death, on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

## 9: THE DYING COLUMBUS

The nineteenth century painting by Luigi Sciallero, called "The dying Columbus" gives us the opportunity to hark back to Columbus' eventful life, in order to unveil its highlights and shadows.

The museum tour has shown the great navigator's abiding faith in the certainty of the discovery, his ability in relating to the authorities, his persistence in the search for gold and his obstinacy in proving his geographical intuitions.

The family tree and the coats of arms have highlighted the relationship between Christopher's family and the area of Montferrat; now, in order to better understand the varied difficulties and the important events of his life, we must go back in time.

His marriage in Portugal with Felipa Moniz Perestrelo, of Italian origin, daughter of Bartolomeo Perestrelo, governor of Portosanto Island and intimate with the court, leads to the interview with John II, king of Portugal. Before knocking on the king's door, Columbus had already carried out some business trips on behalf of Portugal, among them one to Guinea in 1482. Thanks to the papal bulls, Portugal had a corner on expeditions in the Atlantic Ocean south of the Canaries. It was during these travels that Columbus developed the idea of reaching the Indies by sailing westwards across the Atlantic Ocean.

Nevertheless, the king didn't believe in his project and didn't support him.

The future Admiral of the Ocean Sea didn't lose heart - as Lope de Vega has him say in his comedy *El Nuevo Mundo*, "*I am like one who has wings in his hands and a stone at his feet*" and turned to the kingdom close by.

Columbus' arrival in Spain and his eventful life, from the first interview with Isabella and Ferdinand to the famous journeys, has already been dealt with in [Detailed Explanation 4 A](#).

Now, let's pause for a while in front of Sciallero's painting depicting the Admiral's death, in order to focus on the symbolic meanings of the people and objects depicted in it. The Friar and the Madonna icon show his deep faith and his close links with the religious orders mentioned before. The Admiral, dictating his last will to the notary, is a hint at the problems related to the inheritance. The youngsters, smartly dressed, allude to Christopher Columbus' contacts with the Spanish sovereigns and other authorities. The portolan charts - showing coasts and landings in the new lands - and the globe take us back to his expertise as a map maker and to the first journey, during which the crew scoured the surface of the sea for signs such as plants, flowers or birds, to prove that they were close to land. We read once more in his logbook, "Those were the days of signs, of birds not used to sleeping at sea, of green grass, of living prawns, of less salted water, of recently cut reeds, of canes, of iron-engraved sticks, of thornbush trunks rich in red fruits; these signs made the sailors talk excitedly and strengthened their faith". In the painting the Admiral is surrounded by affection, expressed by the grief of his family, the sailor's simplicity and the spontaneous submission of the half-naked native which takes us back to the encounter with the aboriginals.

Although depicted on his deathbed, Columbus' features reveal a strong air, expression of a strong temper: his personality, rich in nuances - as reported by the many biographies - shows at first sight opposing facets, which emerge from some important events of his adventurous life. An example is his difficulty in relating to the Sovereigns and the Court and his continuous mediation work during the crossing both with the crew and with Martin Alonso Pinzon, the Pinta's Captain, whose behaviour was sometimes insubordinate and excessively independent.

We invite you to consider that Sciallero tells the story after the discovery of the New World: the spread of the catholic religion led to the Natives' conversion, often forced; the conquistadores' search for wealth led to the natives' exploitation and enslavement; furthermore, the attempts to debase and cast a shadow on the Admiral's conquests led to questioning even of his discoveries and many ambitious and unscrupulous people tried to take credit for his achievements.

In our close examination of the picture's symbols, we deliberately left behind the chains,



symbolizing the unjust allegations against Christopher Columbus, from which he was subsequently acquitted by the Spanish sovereigns. However, they metaphorically symbolize King Ferdinand's behaviour, who, after his wife's death, denied the capitulation of Santa Fe, casting a shadow on the Admiral's memory.

Riccardo Bacchelli's words, "Christopher Columbus is one of the most insulted personalities of history, just like all the greatest people" attest to the details given here.

**The video in front of you shows the main points of the trial for the majorat assignment, which took place in front of the Council of the Indies.**

## **10: THE INHERITANCE**

In 1578 the death of Diego Colon, Christopher Columbus' last male descendant in the Spanish line, marked the beginning of the dispute over the majorat inheritance, which consisted in the duchy of Veragua, the marquisate of Jamaica, the title of Admiral of the Indies and other minor properties, and could only be passed on to a male offspring of the family. Many claimants came forth and the inheritance quarrel went first before the Spanish Court, then before the Council of the Indies, leading to a legal action which lasted over two centuries, until 1793.

There were many Spanish claimants, all descendants of female offspring, and Marchioness Maria Colon y Cardona appeared to be the likely winner of the inheritance until events arrived at a turning point when Baldassarre Colombo of Cuccaro arrived in Spain and he claimed not only to be Christopher's relative but also to belong to his peerage.

Madrid's Historical Archives keep the documents related to this famous case: there are ten files, divided into subfiles, whose length varies from three to 549 sheets.

The majorat case was structured in three degrees: the first instance, called *de vista*, in 1586, the second instance, called *de revista*, in 1605 and the final, second appeal, in 1608.

The first two petitions were presented to a court, whereas the last one was presented directly to the king.

We do not know how Baldassarre became aware of the inheritance and the following dispute but the fact is that on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1583 he makes Juan Gutierrez his proxy to appear before the Royal Council of the Indies and sue for the achievement of the State of Veragua, the Marquisate of Jamaica and the title of Admiral of the Indies. His request to be admitted to the case is approved on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July and probated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1583.

Baldassarre provides the Council with many documents and with the Cuccaro family coat of arms, depicting a silver pigeon on a blue background, which were the same Christopher Columbus had brought to Spain, and proved their affiliation to the same lineage.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1594 Baldassarre sues for the override of the first sentence in favour of Marchioness Maria Colòn y Cardona because it lacked authentic writing; he also asks for a delay of the case, in order to send new documents from Italy.

These documents showed that Baldassarre - as already proved by the certifications presented in Latin and Italian in 1584 - was the only male descendant of Lancia Colombo and his wife Bartolomea's offspring, from which Columbus himself had descended: indeed Lancia and Bartolomea had had, among their children, Franceschino Colombo, Baldassarre's great-great-grandfather and Domenico, Christopher's father.

Nothing helped in bringing the case to a speedy conclusion, not least because the King had named twelve judges from the Royal Council and from the Council of the Indies, to decide what was right and they finally ordered that the previous judgment in favour of the Marchioness should not be executed.

Many events occur in the meantime, including the deaths of two of the judges. Baldassarre has been away from home for ten years during which time he has received no benefit but has used up all of his own property making it now difficult for him to proceed further with the case. He writes to Phillip II, King of Spain, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1588, "in these six years I have spent all my movables. Only what I own of Cuccaro castle and stronghold have been left"; he asks therefore to receive, for the duration of the trial, two-thousand ducats every year.

The request was refused. A year later Baldassarre sent in vain a second letter to the king, because, through a second-instance sentence, the Council of the Indies had decreed that the Admiral's property, worth 130.000 ducats, should go to Dona Juana Colòn y Toledo and that Baldassarre only receive two-thousand ducats. The great Admiral's heir then gave up the majorat, but - stubborn as can be the people from Montferrat - went on fighting to receive the

promised two-thousand ducats. If we go through the case sentences, we can see that delays and plots went on and the money wasn't immediately paid nor did the pretenders agree on who should be paid first.

**If you want to know more about the Council of the Indies and the administration of Spanish justice, please listen to detailed explanation 10 A.**

### **DETAILED EXPLANATION 10 A: BALDASSARRE'S LEGAL VICISSITUDES**

The court in charge of the judgment is the Council of the Indies, based in Madrid, which was founded around 1524 by Charles II in order to run the American lands properly and maintain order, justice and the rights of the aborigines. Several times the Council steps in to restrain the conquistadores' ferocity towards the natives whose preservation, conversion and civilization are considered – according to Pope Alexander VI's bulls - as major duties of the Spanish sovereigns, who entrusted the Council with these tasks. The Council promotes the legal and theological discussion between Jesuit Juan de Sepúlveda, who was in favour of the Indians' forced conversion, and Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas, who supported the idea of the king as a peace missionary, as the "apostolic emperor of the Indies". The discussion takes place in Valladolid, between 1551 and 1552, and ends with Charles V following Bartolomé de las Casas' advice.

The Council of the Indies acts secretly, on behalf of the Sovereign, who is considered "the sole overlord of the Indies". It is composed of a president, a chancellor, an assistant chancellor, twelve advisors - four of whom are noble, the rest are "technicians" and jurists. A tax specialist, two secretaries, a court bailiff, a treasurer and four accountants complete the staff.

This governmental authority is rather flexible as its staff can vary: the number of advisors can increase or decrease according to circumstances. The advisors work hard: at least four hours a day, except on Sundays and Public Holidays.

The Council have jurisdiction over West Indies, for everything referring to administration, justice, trade and military issues. They submit to the king the appointments of viceroys, governors and so on. They exert legislative authority - upon the King's final approval - over the New World territories.

In 1579 the judicial case involving Don Baldassarre Colombo of Cuccaro is brought first before the Royal Council of Castile, then before the Council of the Indies, as the majorat properties were located in the New World.

At a certain stage of the majorat case, the witnesses - summoned from Montferrat by Baldassarre Colombo of Cuccaro - are examined in the presence of the notary and the ducal chancellor.

Depositions are given in Italian. The witnesses are local stronghold lords; if you look at the sites of their examinations in a map, they form a sort of cross, going from one edge to the other of Casale's diocese. Really poor people were never called to testify, as in those days they were considered unreliable; they were only called for unimportant cases, and only if they could prove their complete reliability. According to the law, all the witnesses are obliged to declare their income, in order to prove that they didn't receive anything for their deposition.

Churchmen can be heard only in default of laymen, and they are bound to tell the truth, according to law, justice and charity duty.

No woman is called to testify in the Columbian case, as in those days women were considered changeable, and thus unreliable. This case in particular is centred on feudal issues - the duchy of Veragua, the Marquisate of Jamaica. For these kinds of issues the law excludes female testimonies, with the exception of notable women, such as stronghold ladies.

Witnesses are asked - under oath - forty-one questions, and, according to the Court records, they answer on average fifteen to twenty questions. Their depositions mirror, somehow, their cultural background.

At the end of each deposition, they give their names; they take an oath of the fulfilment of their church duties and of their lack of involvement in the current dispute. They finally sign and - if illiterate - sign with a cross.

We highlight the fact that perjury was severely punished: laymen were exiled and forced to pay for the damage. In the duchy of Montferrat it was even worst because false witnesses were marked on their forehead with a red-hot iron, all their property was confiscated, and they were forever banished from Montferrat. This punishment was extended also to whoever had

set up false witnesses; therefore it could have been applied to Baldassarre Colombo as well. Perjurer churchmen were excommunicated, dismissed from whatever offices they held and deprived of all benefits. The Columbian case witnesses, and with them Baldassarre Colombo, must have been aware of these rules.

## **11: THE 1671 PETITION TO THE SPANISH QUEEN**

On the first side of the board a special document is reproduced: it's the reverse of page 160 of the *Historia del Portugal*, printed in Spain in 1591, where Antonio de Herrera, "official chronicler of the Spanish King, Philip II" within a speech about Porto Santo island's discovery, says, "As happened to Christopher Columbus, called Colon, born in the Cuccaro castle, in the State of Montferrat, Lombardy, and not in Genoa, as commonly thought." The reference to Lombardy is not astonishing, as in those days the State of Milan extended as far as Quargnento, only 4 Km away from Cuccaro.

The other side of the board reproduces the important petition presented in 1671 by Don Pedro Colon de Portugal y Castro, Duke of Veragua, Christopher Columbus' direct descendant, to the Queen Mother, guardian of Charles II, the future King of Spain. As the Marquisate of Jamaica had been occupied by the English in the mid-seventeenth century, Don Pedro could no longer receive its revenue: therefore he begs Her Majesty to grant him a new stronghold. He writes, "I unjustly lost the island, its revenue and the over four-thousand houses of my vassals ... I am confident in Her Majesty's justice and magnanimity in order to receive a fair compensation."

Let's see in detail the lands referred above: you will see on the wall in front of you, a map of the Isthmus of Panama, with the State of Veragua, assigned to the Columbus family in 1536. Beside it you can see the map of La Espanola Island, where Columbus first landed. This subject is depicted in a ceiling fresco in a room in Cuccaro castle; here you have a copy of it.

**In his petition, Don Pedro gives a description of his ancestor, reported in detailed explanation n° 11.**

### **DETAILED EXPLANATION 11 A: DON PEDRO'S VISIT TO CUCCARO**

Don Pedro, back from his service in Milan, which was then occupied by the Spanish, writes about his visit to the Cuccaro castle, "Thanks to God's will, who was so generous to him, Christopher Columbus had the chance to be born in the great castle of Cuccaro in Montferrat, where I was received, together with all my people, on my way back to Spain. The lord of the castle acknowledged me as a descendant of this great lineage." Don Pedro then writes about the friendly welcome he received from the lord of Cuccaro, whom he acknowledged as his cousin. He furthermore acknowledged the lords of Cuccaro as descendants of Franceschino, brother of Domenico, father of Christopher. Those are important acknowledgements for a Spanish authority! Don Pedro considers himself Spanish, even though of Portuguese origin, because in those days, during Philip II's kingdom, Portugal belonged to the Spanish Crown.

## **12: THE DISCOVERIES AND THE CROWN GRANTS**

Christopher Columbus' requests were considerable and ambitious: the title of Admiral, the power of viceroy and overlord of all the discovered lands (these titles had to be passed on to his offspring); a 10% income on all trading between Spain and the new-found lands, including the value of gold, silver and precious stones.

At first the sovereigns were alarmed at these demands, but soon relented when they realized that, in the absence of any results, the Crown would have no obligations. They then made the contract official through a secret document, the Treaty of Santa Fe.

Columbus' undertakings and voyages came up to every expectation: not only did he discover the lands, but he was also their explorer, geographer and cartographer. He took note of their position and length, of the coastal relief, of the water depth by the shores and the river mouths, of berths and safe havens, of the fresh water springs, of streams and winds. Not only did he give the Spanish an empire, he also outlined the portolan chart of the New World.

When the Admiral discovers Veragua, in 1504, he writes a letter to the Sovereigns, explaining

that in the Veragua river valley there is a great quantity of gold... of pure gold, which the inhabitants derived from the ground, using only their knives. The mining region is called Veragua, a name that becomes famous when Columbus' descendants are given the title of "Dukes of Veragua".

Attempts to reach the gold fail, however, as barriers lie in the path of the explorers - high mountains covered with dense rainforest and river valleys flooded by heavy rains. Columbus has planned to found here the colony of Santa Maria de Belen, to celebrate the discovery, which took place on Epiphany day. When the building works are nearly finished, the Veragua River suddenly subsides and the ships become stranded in the estuary where they are attacked by natives.

As the final calamity, Columbus is struck down with jungle fever and is forced, reluctantly, to abandon his hopes and leave Veragua.

**To learn more about the sovereignty rights over the new-found lands, please press button n°12 A**

### **DETAILED EXPLANATION 12 A: THE SOVEREIGNTY RIGHTS OVER THE NEW-FOUND LANDS**

At the period of the great sea travels towards unknown lands, the sovereigns of the powerful European Countries were forced to deal with the political, economical and military problems which the expeditions involved, as well as the juridical aspects.

Though inhabited and subject to the authority of recognized local chiefs, the new lands were considered no-man's lands, meaning not being subject to a Christian authority, as decreed by Pope Alexander VI's bull "Inter Caetera", immediately following Columbus' first expedition.

In those days the right to occupy lands not yet subject to Christian authorities, was not questioned; the problem was in defining the expansion area of each Country, as some European sovereigns were competing for control of both oceans and lands. Discoveries weren't immediately followed by land settlements, as the sovereignty rights were not easy to apply; often, pushed by their conquering ambitions, the different nations aimed to cover huge areas, if not entire continents. Occupations were justified by the simple will to annex new lands, which could be expressed by raising a building, by affixing the royal emblems or by a solemn rite celebration. Moreover, occupations were often legitimated by official letters granting full power to the conqueror. But all these legitimating titles were clearly not enough: that's why sovereigns, starting from the second half of the fifteenth century, turned to the Holy See and the Pope's authority, to justify their sovereignty claims.

### **13: THE SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH VOYAGES**

Christopher Columbus' **second voyage** takes place between 1493 and 1496 and differs significantly from the previous one: for his first voyage, he had to fight for a sponsor to support it, whereas now he has at his disposal three big vessels, fourteen caravels, and a 1200-person crew. During this journey, he discovers the Lesser Antilles: the first one, rich in vegetation, is called "Dominica", after the day of its discovery (Sunday); the second one is called "Maria Galante", after the name of Columbus' vessel; and the last one is called "Santa Maria de Guadalupe" - the natives used to call it "Turuqueira". Columbus and his crew are disappointed to discover no gold on the islands; they continue, then, towards Cuba, and discover the island of Jamaica. During this voyage, a rebellion breaks out and the Admiral is slandered in the Spanish Court. The matter doesn't have any sequel, as his brother, Diego, goes to Spain with five hundred slaves and gold nuggets received from the natives, and he tells the Sovereigns about the rebellion and the discovery, thus restoring a good relationship between Columbus and the Crown.

The third voyage is very important as it caused the beginning of many historical discussions: it seems indeed that during this voyage, the Admiral realized he had discovered not only islands, but a whole continent - South America. Unfortunately, Columbus' original logbook was lost; we have only a summary of it - written by Bartolomé de las Casas - as well as fragments of some letters written by Columbus to the Sovereigns. These documents are imprecise as regards the route Columbus followed and the lands he chanced upon, particularly Venezuela. Bartolomé de las Casas tells us that, after Columbus had explored the mouth of the Orinoco river on 1<sup>st</sup>

August 1498, he was convinced he was on a mainland as opposed to an island and that it was a very big continent.

During the voyage they encounter two serious setbacks: the first one is the dead calm they found on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, which got them stuck in the equatorial area. The second one is the famous gigantic wave which caught the boats. The Admiral describes it this way, "I was onboard the ship and I heard a terrible noise coming from south. I got up to watch and saw the sea rising from east to west, to form a barrier, higher than the ships. We were approaching this barrier little by little; there was a blade of current on it, which roared, making a noise like waves breaking on the rocks. Even today, I shiver at the thought of this wave overturning the ship."

Neither of these two events could waver Columbus' courage, on the contrary, they urged him on.

At the end of this voyage, the Admiral of the Ocean Sea, slandered once again, is sent back to Spain in chains. This unhappy ending, however, was not enough to subdue his thirst for knowledge and only two years later he would set sail on a fresh adventure.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1502, he starts his fourth and last voyage accompanied by his son Fernando. The fleet sets a course for Dominica, but, instead, they find themselves in Martinique. They go on towards Margarita Island and they try to reach Cuba but currents drag them towards Jamaica. They move very slowly, because of the dead calm, as far as Bonacca Island (currently Guanaja in Honduras); from there, the Admiral travels by the coasts of present-day Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Veragua, as far as the Isthmus of Panama. **If you want to learn more about the third voyage, please press button 13 A.**

### **DETAILED EXPLANATION 13 A: THE TALE OF THE THIRD VOYAGE**

Among the many tales which Columbus' travels have inspired, we chose the one written by Gianni Granzotto, about the third voyage, "called "rumbo austral" (southern course), as it headed southwards, south of the equator. The route was completely different from the two previous voyages, even if the final destination remained the same, La Hispaniola, where Columbus' brother, Bartolomeo had already settled down... The fleet set a course for Madeira, they stopped by the Canaries - where they dropped anchor in San Sebastian haven, underneath the walls of Gomera castle ... Here, the six sailing ships separated: three went west, towards Dominica and La Hispaniola; three went south, towards Cape Verde. Columbus meant to go down as far as Guinea, where the Portuguese had found gold ... [but] on Cape Verde Islands, they only found wild goats, big tortoises and lepers. The heat became unbearable, as it was July and they were close to the equator. Six years after the first landing, in San Salvador, Columbus had not yet understood the area geography: he was in the middle of the Atlantic and thought he was sailing somewhere between Japan and the Philippines. He was still expecting to reach Nippon, Cathay, India and the far west." On the 31<sup>st</sup> of July they finally reach an island which Columbus calls Trinidad, but they dare not go ashore as the natives attack them with a hail of poisoned arrows. They then continue their route, travelling along the coast of present-day Venezuela. Here, judging the huge size of the Orinoco mouth, Columbus reasons that he must, indeed, have reached a continent; on this occasion, however, he officially makes the Spanish Court aware of his discovery. He then reaches Margarita island (so called, after the name of pearls, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century), where he finds friendly natives, wearing pearls and where he sees mangroves, their submerged trunks covered with the pearl-containing oysters, soon to become one of the sources of Spain's future wealth.

#### **LEGENDA:**

- **BLACK COLOUR FOR THE CHAPTERS (THE TITLES APPEARING ON THE DISPLAY HAVE TO BE READ)**
- **RED COLOUR FOR THE DETAILED EXPLANATIONS**
- **BLUE COLOUR FOR THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CHAPTERS AND CORRESPONDING DETAILED EXPLANATIONS**