

# **John Cabot and Christopher Columbus Revisited**

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## **Introduction**

The Iberian peninsula is very rich in historical archives, and research in their holdings occasionally unearths new documents about important historical figures. While the most famous archives have been catalogued, and their most important documents studied by scholars, there are still a large number of repositories of lesser importance, housed in places like monasteries, churches, town halls, notarial associations and the like, that still contain uncatalogued records that have the potential to alter the way we think about significant historical events.

In the last twenty years, several important documents relating to John Cabot and Christopher Columbus have come to light. In the 1980s an antiquarian bookseller in Tarragona sold the Spanish Ministry of Culture a manuscript that included several copies of letters written by Columbus, some of which were known but others which were completely new. This manuscript has now been deposited at the Archivo de Indias in Seville. These documents on Columbus have been studied and published by Antonio Rumeu de Armas, a member of the Royal Academy of History.<sup>1</sup>

John Cabot has not been so popular among Iberian historians in recent years. Nonetheless, Professor Juan Gil has located and published three new documents from the Municipal Archives of Seville, along with many other pieces of evidence relating to the discovery of America.<sup>2</sup> Without denying the importance of the Columbus documents, in my opinion the three Cabot documents are more significant for two reasons. First, little is known about his life. Second, and even more important, there is a scholarly debate about his identity that these records may be able to clarify.

In this paper I will evaluate much of this new evidence. But since a significant part of the debate has been invisible to the English-speaking audience, I will also have to go back in time to examine arguments advanced as far back as the 1920s in order to provide context. If the result is not a definitive clarification of the lives of these two men, it should at the very least lead to a better appreciation of the complexity of the evidence relating to the lives of these two important explorers.

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### **John Cabot in Valencia and Barcelona, 1490-1493**

In 1930 Salvador Carreras Zacaes wrote an article about a fifteenth-century attempt to construct a permanent harbour for Valencia, a town that at the end of that century was at least as important as Barcelona in maritime trade, as well as being the economic and cultural centre of the kingdom ruled by the "Catholic King," Ferdinand.<sup>3</sup> Carreras' article was based on several documents he had discovered in the Royal Archives of the Kingdom of Valencia and the Valencia Municipal Archives.<sup>4</sup> For our purposes the importance of this essay was that it identified the progenitor of this project as a Venetian variously referred to as Johan Caboto Montecalunya, Johan Caboto or Johan Cabot. Carreras, however, did not relate this person to John Cabot, the explorer and discoverer of Canada.

Little more than a decade later, Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois published a paper which claimed that the architect of this harbour development was indeed the famous John Cabot.<sup>5</sup> He based his argument on the same documents Carreras had used, supplemented by some new sources in the Royal Archives in Barcelona.<sup>6</sup> Since then, many authors have considered the relationship between John Cabot and Johan Caboto Montecalunya.<sup>7</sup> The translation and publication of these documents by J. A Williamson in 1962 seem to have convinced most that Cabot was in Valencia between 1490 and 1493. Nonetheless, there are still scholars, like Brian Cuthbertson, who are more sceptical, believing that "although it is impossible to be certain, in all likelihood... 'Johan Caboto Montecalunya' is our John Cabot."<sup>8</sup>

From letters sent by King Ferdinand to the Lord Mayor of Valencia, Don Diego de Torres, we may deduce that John Cabot was received by the monarch in Barcelona in September 1492, together with Gaspar Rull, a Catalan, who introduced Cabot to the court. The first letter from the King to the Lord Mayor (27 September 1492) suggests that Johan Caboto showed him some drawings of the harbour project. Since it was not easy to gain an audience with the King, it seems logical that Caboto had been in Barcelona for weeks or even months awaiting the meeting. This meeting convinced the ruler that there would be great benefits from the construction of the harbour; as a result, he became a strong supporter. This letter also tells us that Caboto had lived in Valencia since September 1490.

Don Diego answered the King on 25 October. We can deduce from this letter that Caboto and Rull returned to Valencia after meeting the King to conduct some feasibility tests related to the harbour project and to select the quarry to provide the stone. When the tests turned out positive, the Mayor recommended going ahead and sent Caboto back to Barcelona to explain the results to the King. This means that Caboto likely was in Barcelona in November 1492. The next letters from the King to the Mayor about the new harbour were on 6 and 25 November 1492 and 26 February 1493. While this correspondence does not tell us how long Caboto remained in Barcelona, it likely was less than one month, since he had to solve many problems in Valencia, especially finding financial support for the project.<sup>10</sup>

This contact between Caboto and King Ferdinand raises other questions. Did Caboto go to Barcelona alone, or was he accompanied by one or more of his sons? It would be especially interesting to know if Sebastian met Ferdinand in 1492, since this could explain future relations among two important historical figures. The possible appearance of Sebastian Caboto in Barcelona could also explain why he chose Catalan sailors for his expedition to South America in 1525, despite the fact that the entire expedition was planned and prepared from Seville.

As Caboto's period of residence in Valencia seems to have been planned, perhaps as a representative of a Venetian merchant firm, it seems likely that he would have been accompanied by his entire family." And since the Catalan language is quite similar to a number of Italian dialects, Johan Caboto's sons might have learned Catalan during their stay. If so, this would explain the presence of a number of Catalan words on Sebastian Cabot's 1544 map of the western hemisphere.

Although Ferdinand put his best efforts into the harbour project, the Council of Valencia voted against it on economic grounds. The last letter of the King to the members of the Council was dated 16 April 1493. The King searched for support especially from the influential brothers, Lluís and Jaume de Santangel, but with no success.<sup>12</sup>

But there is more: Christopher Columbus passed through Valencia at the end of March 1493, perhaps the same day, 28 March, on which the Valencia Council decided against going ahead with the harbour project. Was it the coincidence of the rejection of his project in Valencia and news about a "new world" that drove Johan Caboto to Seville?

### **John Cabot in Seville, 1493-1495**

Juan Gil, Professor of History at the University of Seville, is an extremely influential scholar who has published a number of books on Christopher Columbus and the discovery of America. Yet many scholars interested in John Cabot may have missed a book he wrote to commemorate the events of 1492 in which he brought to light three documents from the Municipal Archive of Seville dealing with Cabot.<sup>13</sup>

These records tell us that a Venetian named Johan Caboto arrived in Seville at the end of 1493 and remained throughout 1494, working for the municipality on a project to construct a stone bridge to link the city with the fishing village of Triana across the Guadalquivir River, where previously there had only been a "boat bridge" (*puente de barcas*). Although Professor Gil has not found the actual contract, its conditions can be deduced from two registered payments. The first was dated 15 September 1494:

We, the mayor, the constable, the secretary and the twenty-four councilmen of the very noble and very loyal town of Seville, order you, Alonso Gonçález de la Taça, superintendent of this town in the present year...to pay to Mr. Johan Caboto, Venetian, currently living in our town, from today onwards and during the following five months, the amount of three *reales de a treinta* and three *maravedises* every day...in order that he may begin stocking cut stones and gathering wood as well as workers and other things that are necessary for the construction of this work.<sup>14</sup>

This first order was a necessary administrative formality so that Gonçález de Taça could proceed to pay Caboto. But a second document, issued the same day, was also required to transmit the funds. Among other things, it tells us that Johan Caboto had already been working for the municipality for three months. From this we may deduce that Caboto arrived in Seville at the end of 1493 or the beginning of 1494.

We, the mayor, the constable, the secretary and the twenty-four councilmen of the very noble and very loyal town of Seville, order you, Alonso

Gonçález de la Taça, superintendent of this town for the present year...to pay to Mr. Johan Caboto, Venetian, resident in our town, fifty Castilian *doblas*, equivalent to seven thousand and three hundred *maravedies*...to cover the costs during the time that he has worked for us on the construction of a masonry bridge in this town, and from now on, we order you to pay him some amount of *maravedies* every day in order to cover the costs for the prosecution of the work as previously decided.<sup>15</sup>

Three months later, on 24 December, the councilmen learned that although Caboto had received several payments, construction had not yet begun. As a result, they voted to dismiss him, subject to consultation with the Count of Cifuentes.

It was said to the lieutenant and counsellors by Luis Méndez Portocarrero, that, as they knew, they have ordered to pay to Johan Caboto, Venetian, fifty Castilian *doblas* from the treasury of this town, plus three *reales* every day for five months, to cover the costs of his stay in this town and to cover...costs for the construction of a masonry bridge over the river of this town...[A]s the works have not yet begun, [Méndez] asked the counsellors of the town not to give more money to him...and to ask advice of the Count of Cifuentes.<sup>16</sup>

Although we cannot document the final outcome, it seems clear that the Count of Cifuentes decided to dismiss John Cabot and to forget about the bridge. It is therefore likely that Cabot left Seville sometime around January 1495.

### **Why the Seville Documents are Important**

Since the life of John Cabot is filled with lacunae, the Seville documents concerning a Johan or Juan Caboto matter more than they would if we were interested in other people whose lives have been better documented. Of course, as in the case of the documents found in Valencia, there is no objective reason to identify Johan Caboto with John Cabot. Yet there is an important difference between the two sets of records. As the ambassador of the Catholic King at the court of Henry VII, Pedro de Ayala, wrote about Cabot on 25 July 1498, "the discoverer is another Genoese as Colon, who has lived in Seville and Lisbon trying to find some help for realising this discovery."<sup>17</sup>

If we believe Ayala, then the discoverer of Canada, John Cabot, had lived in Seville before travelling to Lisbon and Bristol. This suggests that the three documents found by Professor Gil are even more suggestive than those from Valencia. In the Seville records the name is Johan or Juan Caboto, without the mysterious appendage of "Montecalunya," making the similitude with John Cabot quite extraordinary.

But the Seville documents, in my view, are also important in linking the Valencia records to John Cabot. Both sets of evidence refer to civil engineering projects related to water that were directed by a Venetian called Johan Caboto. Such specialties would be quite logical for a citizen of Venice, where techniques to overcome water had a long tradition. The two sets of records are about a person with the same name, the same knowledge base - and they even detail similar proceedings to release funds for construction. Another

important point about the Seville documents is that they cover a period just after those from Valencia, which also suggests (although it does not prove definitively) that we are dealing with the same man. After failing in the construction of the harbour in Valencia, Cabot decided to go to Seville. When Columbus' discovery of America became known, Cabot understood that Seville would rapidly become an important focus of world trade and decided to try his luck in this rising city.

Ballesteros Gaibrois, one of the foremost Cabot specialists and the author of a recent biography, accepts that Seville's Johan Caboto is also John Cabot.<sup>18</sup> Juan Gil goes even further, arguing that the Seville records shed new light on the identity of the figure in the documents from Valencia, writing that the two sets of "documents will clear away any doubt about the identity of this historical figure, sometimes debated due to simple controversial pleasure."<sup>19</sup>

### **New Light on John Cabot**

The documents from Valencia and Seville suggest that John Cabot was neither a seaman nor a merchant but rather a builder, architect or civil engineer who mastered some water-related techniques in Venice. Nevertheless, his lack of success in Seville seems due to his misconduct and lack of rigour. He seems to have been a convincing salesman but a poor executive. If this is true, it might have been likely for him next to appear in a city like Lisbon, which was transformed by news of all the new discoveries. Perhaps in Lisbon he might also have recognized that long-distance exploration was at least as much about selling an idea as it was about possessing some finally honed navigational skills.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless, we know that he arrived in Bristol no earlier than 1495. This leads to the question of how in such a short time he earned the confidence of the local seamen. The answer is crucial, since it is likely that the success of his 1497 expedition to America was due to the skill of these seamen rather than to Cabot's ability as a pilot or a captain.

While the Valencia and Seville records allow us to generate new hypotheses about the character, education and activities of John Cabot, there still remain major questions about his life, including his country of origin. Do these documents shed any new light on this matter?

### **Johan Caboto Montecalunya**

If we accept, following Gil and Ballesteros, that the documents from Valencia and Seville refer to John Cabot, it may make sense to examine the way his name appears in these records. The Valencia documents are all in Catalan, while those from Seville are in Castillian (Spanish). The record of 27 September 1492 refers to "Johan Caboto Montecalunya, *venesià*; Johan Caboto; and Joan Caboto." In the record of 25 October 1492, he is "Johan Caboto Montecalunya, *venesià*; Johan Caboto; and Johan Cabot." The two Seville records from 15 September 1494 mentioned him as "Johan Caboto and Juan Caboto," while the document of 24 December 1494 refers to "Johan Caboto, *veneçiano*."

If we analyse this list, it is clear that the most usual form of rendering his name was as Johan Caboto. If we focus on his Christian name, we see that in the Valencia documents his name is always written as Johan, in the old Catalan spelling. In the first letter we also found the form "Joan," which is the modern way of writing this name. But it is significant

that he was never called Giovanni. In the Seville documents, strangely enough, he kept the Catalan form "Johan" in two cases and the form Juan once. But this latter document, which was transcribed by Juan Gil, is in especially bad condition which makes it difficult to distinguish his first name. While it is logical that John Cabot would be called Juan in documents written in Castillian, the use of the form Johan in a Castillian text is less so.

His family name, on the other hand, was almost always written as Caboto; there is only one case in which it was rendered as Cabot. If we accept that John Cabot had not yet gone to England, where his family name was often Anglicized as Cabot, what was the reason for this change? The most logical explanation is a *lapsus calami* on the part of the author of the manuscript. In all the old territories of the Catalan-Aragonian kingdom, especially in Catalonia, there was a noble family that since the tenth century had been known as Cabot.<sup>21</sup> This would suggest that the writer was familiar with this name and probably made an error. Nevertheless, we wonder why in England he became known as Cabot. The Catalan family name Cabot would quickly be changed to Caboto when pronounced in the Italian fashion. The historically close connection between Catalonia and the Kingdom of Naples might suggest that the Caboto family of Gaeta had a Catalan origin. But even if few definitive conclusions can be drawn from all this, the most reasonable is that Caboto belonged to a family originally from the Italian peninsula.

Far more interesting is the second name, Montecalunya. While I have not traced its origin definitively, it is possible to make some informed speculations. The most obvious is that Montecalunya was a place name. If we translate the Valencia name into Italian, it would become something like Giovanni Caboto da Montecalunnia (or Montecalogna). If we could find some place in Italy (or anywhere else) called Montecalunnia, we would have grounds to assume that the word referred to his birthplace or the original home of his family. Unfortunately, an exhaustive search of Italian gazetteers has turned up no likely match. It seems that there is not now, and may never have been, a place in Italy with such a name.

A second possibility could be that it was a nickname. This approach has a certain logic, since many nicknames have negative connotations and a literal translation of Montecalunnia would be "mount of calumny." But it seems unlikely that an ambitious individual would continue to use a nickname that hinted at some ominous past.

It seems more logical, then, to look in a different direction. It is noteworthy that Caboto used this second name only in the Catalan Kingdom; he never used Montecalunya in Castille or in England. In a recent book about Cabot, the authors used the form "Montecatalunya" (Mount of Catalonia).<sup>22</sup> While Montecatalunya is likely a transcription error, it suggests that Montecalunya may be a riddle: if we invert the order of the second and third syllables, we get "Moncatelunya," which means "My Catalonia." Could it be that Johan Caboto wanted to declare that he had been a Catalan before being nationalized as a Venetian? While such an argument is both speculative and risky, let us pursue this a bit to see if it sheds any new light on the life of John Cabot.

### **The Theory of John Cabot's Catalan Origins**

While it is obvious that Cabot's most probable origin was in Italy, and perhaps in Genoa, his presence in Valencia, Barcelona and Seville raises the possibility that he really was from Catalonia. Such a theory has been around since at least 1928 when the archivist of the Barcelona Notarial Archives, Ricard Carreras i Vails, first advanced this contention. After

Luis Ulloa Cisneros claimed that Columbus was of Catalan origin, Carreras was encouraged to go public with a similar argument about Cabot.<sup>23</sup> Carreras' argument goes something like this. First, there is the family name. Next, he argues that the few Italian Cabotos were descendants of the Catalan family, which can be traced back to the tenth century. He then notes that several toponyms in Sebastian Cabot's famous map - especially those that relate to the land discovered by his father, seems to be written in the Catalan language.<sup>24</sup>

Carreras theory was quickly attacked by Italian scholars. For example, Alberto Magnaghi, a Professor of the University of Turin, wrote that "in reference to the very recent theory, that tries to give a Catalan origin to Caboto, it is so absolutely inconsistent and foolish, that it does not merit consideration."<sup>25</sup> But it is perhaps hasty to dismiss this argument so quickly. Professor Magnaghi was correct in noting that there is no definitive proof of Cabot's Catalan origin, but the Carreras hypothesis is not totally implausible. At any rate, Cabot's long stay in the Iberian Peninsula merits further consideration, especially because there are so many questions for which we still need answers. Why did Cabot leave Venice? Was he escaping from justice? Why did he come to Valencia and did he bring his entire family? Did Sebastiano Caboto meet King Ferdinand in Barcelona? Was there a meeting between Columbus and Cabot in Valencia? Did Cabot make a third visit to King Ferdinand in Barcelona after the Valencia Council declined to pay for the new harbour? Could Cabot have met Columbus on this last visit to Barcelona?

### **John Cabot, Genoese**

Many historians emphasize two documents that prove that John Cabot was of Genoese origin. These are the letters of Ruy Gonzalez de Puebla and Pedro de Ayala to the Catholic Kings, both dated 25 July 1498.<sup>26</sup> In these letters, the ambassadors of the Catholic Kings refer to John Cabot as "another Genoese like Columbus." Yet all the other documents that touch on his Italian origin refer to him as citizen of Venice. Is it reasonable to believe that Puebla and Ayala had more precise information about Cabot's origin than other contemporaries? Professor Alberto Magnaghi is dubious: "probably," he has written, "the two Spanish documents used the term Genoese as a synonym for Italian."<sup>27</sup> If we accept Magnaghi's thinking, there is no logical reason to believe that John Cabot was from Genoa.

An examination of these two documents suggests that Puebla's letter, which is preserved at the Public Record Office in London, is a kind of summary of Ayala's missive, which is in Simancas. Indeed, Ballesteros Gaibrois believes that the letter of Ruy Gonzalez is a summary of the letter written by Ayala.<sup>28</sup> If this is true, then only one document needs to be analysed - Ayala's, which is fuller. In that text there is another comparison: "News have come that one of these, in which sailed another Friar Buil, has made landfall in Ireland in a great storm with the ship badly damaged." Should we really believe that in John Cabot's second expedition there was a Friar called Buil, who likely was of Catalan origin? Ayala compares this man to Friar Bernat Boil, a Catalan priest in the Minimi Order of Saint Francesco di Paola, who sailed on Columbus' second voyage to America as a representative of the Catholic Church. Yet it is hardly credible that Cabot would have had a Catalan priest in the fleet. Since Bernat Buil sailed with Columbus mainly as a spy for Ferdinand than to save souls, I believe that the expression "another Frai Buil" in Ayala's letter really means "another spy in the service of the Catholic Kings."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, we know that this letter was

highly confidential since some parts used a numeric code; this increases the likelihood of the comparative meaning.

What kind of information may be behind the expression "another Genoese like Columbus?" Why did Ayala not use the name Johan Caboto along with his citizenship? I believe that the meaning of this expression gave far more information to the King, since it can also be taken to mean "the same kind of Genoese as Columbus was" - perhaps a special or a false Genoese.

In a letter to his ambassador in London, Ruy Gonzalez de Puebla, on 28 March 1496, Ferdinand used a similar comparative expression: "In relation to what you said, that there is gone another like Columbus." What meaning should we ascribe to the phrase "another like Columbus?" Did he mean another Genoese? Another sailor? Another explorer of new islands and continents? Another Portuguese or French Spy? As secret as the meaning may be, it seems more logical to conclude that the King is using Columbus as a model, since he (and the Catholic Church) were intimately familiar with Columbus. Therefore, any comparison with Columbus would have been a kind of shorthand.

The reader must also take care when confronted with the term "Genoese: as used by Castellians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the very long "Pleito del Mayorazgo" of Columbus' heirs, this phrase appeared several times in reference to Columbus.<sup>30</sup> Enrique de Gandia has examined the records of this trial to try to determine the "true meaning" of the term.<sup>31</sup> Two of the testimonies suggest that "in Spain all foreigners are called 'Genoese.'" Special attention should be given to the opinion of Antonio Frasca, a Sicilian who said "that during all the time that he has spent in Castilla and due to the many conversations that he had with many persons of this kingdom, he had detected that all the foreigners to this kingdom of Castilla are indistinctly named as 'Genoese,' although they may belong to another nation." Similarly, Antonio Frasca declared in 1594, during the inquiry of the trial demanded by Baltasar Colombo to the Consejo de Indias that "I believe and consider to be true that the Admiral Christopher Columbus could be called a 'Genoese' although he could be of any other nation." If this was true - if all foreigners in Castille were referred to as Genoese, the texts of Puebla and Ayala lose all their value as "proof that Columbus and Caboto were from Genoa. In this case, the expression "another Genoese like Columbus" would simply mean another foreigner in Castille.

A last caveat needs to be issued about this concept of nationality. Although Ferdinand and Isabella ruled Castille and Catalonia-Aragôn, these two nations remained completely independent, which means that the inhabitants of one was a foreigner in the other, not only culturally but also legally. It is a major historical error to talk about "Spain" in the fifteenth century as though it were a unitarian kingdom. For this reason, people considered foreigners in Castille, like Columbus and Caboto, might well still be from other parts of "Spain."

Johan Caboto, as we have seen, was considered a foreigner in both Castille and Catalonia-Aragôn. This is logical, because he had acquired Venetian citizenship in 1476. In the Catalan and Castellian public records, Johan Caboto appears correctly as a Venetian, as was required administratively. But there is a big difference between Cabot and Columbus: Columbus was clearly considered a foreigner in Castille, but not in Catalonia-Aragon. Why?

Recent research into Columbus' writings have shown that his texts, all of them written in Castellian, are littered with Catalan words and expressions.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Rev. Gabriel Roura, a professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and Director of the



Capitular Archive of the Cathedral of Girona, has written in a recent paper that Columbus' calligraphy is remarkably Catalan in style.<sup>33</sup> These facts, together with many other studies carried out by disciplines of Ulloa Cisneros, shed new light on the life of Columbus and put him closer to the Catalan world and culture than ever before.<sup>34</sup>

When analyzing the lives of Cabot and Columbus, several parallels are obvious. Both were believed to have been born in Genoa around 1450; both had great experience as sailors; and both became famous for their overseas discoveries. But after analysing the documents in Valencia and Seville, I find very few similarities. Cabot, I believe, was born somewhere around 1450. His place of birth, which remains in dispute, is perhaps not so important, since we know that he arrived in Venice before 1461. His adolescence was spent in Venice and he learned to speak the Venetian language fluently. His professional orientation seems to have been in civil engineering, and we know a fair amount about his building activities in Venice, Valencia and Seville. He married a Venetian woman, and his sons were born in Venice; in short, he had a thoroughly Venetian family. He never hid his Venetian nationality and for that reason was considered a foreigner in Catalonia-Aragon and Castille. He seems to have had very poor skills and scant experience in the nautical world. He was an excellent salesman of great projects, but a bad executive. His success in his voyage of discovery to North America seems due more to the nautical dexterity of his Bristol crew than to any skills on his part.

Columbus, on the other hand, was likely born somewhere in the Catalan-speaking area of Catalonia-Aragon around 1440. His original family name was Colom and his family could originally have come from Genoa in the twelfth century to participate in the conquest of Tortosa. His natural lords were John II and Ferdinand, the Catholic King. He was never considered a foreigner in Catalonia-Aragôn, although he and his brothers were considered foreigners in Castille. He could not speak or write the Genoese dialect or the Tuscan language. His education was in a Catalan context: he spoke Castillian and Catalan, but his writing style was fully Catalan. He took part in the Catalan Civil War (1462-1472), became a Captain in the navy of King Reynel (Rainer d'Anjou) and battled John II and his son Ferdinand. An unapprehended rebel, he became a corsair. He was a skilful seaman, having descended from several admirals. He was of noble origin. He married a noble Portuguese woman and his sons were educated in the Castillian culture. He had a big interest in hiding his past. Why?

## **Conclusions**

All scientific and historical theories have to be revised when new data come to light. If we accept that the documents from Valencia and Seville really concern John Cabot, they reveal another side of him. We have documents of "Zuan Chabotto" that state he was in Venice, buying, repairing and selling houses until 1485. Five years later, we find Johan Caboto trying to build a harbour in Valencia. It seems impossible that during the five years for which we have no records he could have become an expert seaman. The documents from Seville describe Johan Caboto trying to build a bridge over the Guadalquivir, or even worse, cheating the local Council by taking significant amounts of money for doing almost nothing.

If Johan Caboto went to Lisbon after leaving Sevilla, it is possible to suppose that he remained there until 1495. If so, it renders implausible any theory that he joined any kind

of naval expedition from Bristol in this period. As a civil engineer, he was probably skilful in drawing, but he was no professional cartographer.

Even if no new documents come to light, those that we currently possess may be re-examined from different perspectives. Historical writing has changed a lot since the beginning of the twentieth century. While our assessments of some historical figures remain unaltered, others have been re-assessed dramatically. If the Seville documents change our concepts about John Cabot, how can we continue to identify Cristobal Colon, who had no idea of the "Italian" language, with the Cristoforo Colombo of Genoa? While prudence and an open mind have to prevail in historical research, we do not have to be afraid to revise received wisdom when compelling evidence questions old truths.

#### NOTES

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1. Antonio Rumeu de Armas, *Libra Copiador de Cristobal Colon. Correspondencia inédita con los Reyes Católicos sobre los viajes a America* (2 vols., Madrid, 1989).

2. Juan Gil, *Mitos y Utopías del Descubrimiento. I: Colonia su tiempo* (Madrid, 1989).

3. Salvador Carreras Zacares, "Proyecto de Puerto en la Playa de Valencia en el Siglo XV," *Almanaque Las Provincias* (1930), 225-228.

4. Archivo General, Valencia (AGV), Real, epistolarium, tomo 596 and diversorum 309; and Municipal Archives, Valencia (MAV), Manual de Conseils, N. 47 A.

5. Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois, "Juan Caboto en Espana - Nueva luz sobre un problema viejo," *Revista de Indias*, IV (1943), 607-627.

6. Royal Archives of Barcelona (ACA), registre 3610, ff. 16, 122v, 176v and 185v.

7. J.A. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII* (Cambridge, 1962); and Gil, *Mitos y Utopías*, esp. 77-81.

8. Brian Cuthbertson, *John Cabot and the Voyage of the Matthew* (Halifax, 1997), 25.

9. AGV, Real, epistolarium, tomo 596, ff. 106v and 107r; King to Lord Mayor of Valencia, 27 September 1492.

10. *Ibid.*, Lord Mayor of Valencia to King, 25 October 1492; and King to Lord Mayor, 26 February 1493; and ACA, registre 3610, f. 16, King to Lord Mayor, 6 November 1492; and f. 122v, King to Lord Mayor, 25 November 1492.

11. Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois, *Juan Coboto* (Valladolid, 1997), 142-143.

12. ACA, registre 3610, f. 185v, King to the Council of Valencia, 16 April 1493. Lluís and Jaume de Santangel were merchants of Valencia who came from a family of converted Jews. Both brothers entered the Royal administration without, however, leaving their private business activities, which were related primarily to commerce and banking. They used their access to capital to finance the crown. Lluís was the most influential and played a decisive role in sending Columbus on his voyage to America, which explains why Columbus sent one of the first three letters announcing the discovery of America to him. The brothers were also involved in Cabot's project at the behest of the King. Lluís became the collector of harbour dues for the Genoese in Tortosa and Valencia, an activity that linked him to all the most active merchants in Genoa.

13. Gil, *Mitos y Utopías*, I, 77-81. See also Gil, *Cartas de Particulares a Colon y Relaciones coetáneas* (Madrid, 1984); and Gil, *Cristobal Colon: Textos y documentos completos* (Madrid, 1992).

14. Municipal Archives, Seville (MAS), Papeles de Mayordomazgo, 1493-1494, First Letter of Payment, 15 September 1494.

15. MAS, Papeles de Mayordomazgo, 1493-1494, Second Letter of Payment, 15 September 1494.

16. MAS, Actas Capitulares, 1492-1499, 24 December 1494. The Count of Cifuentes was the representative of the King (Governor General) in Seville. Although the Council could dismiss Caboto without consulting him, one of the town councillors, Luis Mendez Portocarrero, thought it would be useful to know the opinion of the King or of Cifuentes, since he believed that the construction of the bridge was a "state" rather than a purely municipal affair. This prudent view was adopted by the entire Council.

17. Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Estado, tratado con Inglaterra, legajo 2, Pedro de Ayala to the Catholic Kings, 25 July 1498.

18. Ballesteros Gaibrois, *Juan Caboto*. Although Ballesteros fully accepts the Seville documents, it is curious that they are not included in the exhaustive list of records he cites. This is difficult to understand since his book appeared almost a decade after Gil's *Mitos y Utopias*.

19. Gil, *Mitos y Utopias*, 77, n. 64.

20. Unfortunately, there are no records in the Portuguese archives to substantiate his time in Lisbon. But see AGS, Ayala to King, 25 July 1498.

21. The noble Cabot family of Catalonia had its origins in a valley in the Pyrenees in what today is Andorra. The family named originally was Caboez and was transformed into Cabot after several intermediate stages (Caboet and Caboth). All these forms may be found in archive of the bishopric of Sea d'Urgell.

22. See A. Diaz, A. Pons and J. Serna, *La Construcción del puerto de Valencia. Problemas y Métodos 1283-1880* (Valencia, 1984).

23. Ricard Carreras i Vails, *La descoberta d'America. Ferrer, Cabot i Colom* (Reus, 1928); *Catalunya descobridora d'America* (Barcelona, 1929); *El Català Xpo Ferens Colom de Terras Rubra descobridor d'America* (Barcelona, 1930); and *Los Catalanes Juan Cabot y Cristobal Colom: Memoria presentada a la Real Academia de la Historia* (Barcelona, 1931). Luis Ulloa Cisneros, former director of the Central Library in Lima, Peru, tried to demonstrate (based on a theory proposed by Celso Garcia de la Riega about 1892) that Columbus was a member of the Colon family of Pontevedra in Galicia. Sent by the Peruvian government to find documents related to Peru's history in European archives, he took the opportu-

ity to pursue his own research on Columbus. In the end he concluded that Columbus in fact was a Catalan with the family name Colom. He presented his conclusions in, for example, *Ulloa Cisneros, Cristofor Colom fou Català - La veritable gènesi del descobriment* (Barcelona, 1927); *Noves proves de la catalanitat de Colom - Les grans falsedats de la tesi genovesa* (Paris, 1927); and *El predescubrimiento hispano-catalan de America en 1477* (Paris, 1928).

24. For example, XI mil Verges, Bacallaos, S. pera, Costa de don Marti, P. gines, and P. formose.

25. *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* (Turin, 1930-1939), VIII, 199-202.

26. AGS, Estado, tratado con Inglaterra, legajo 2, Pedro de Ayala to the Catholic Kings, 25 July 1498; and Great Britain, Public Record Office, Ruy Gonzalez to the Catholic Kings, 25 July 1498.

27. *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, VIII, 199-202.

28. Ballesteros Gaibrois, *Juan Caboto*, 27.

29. Bernat Boil was a member of a noble Catalan family who in his youth sailed with the Catalan navy and took part in the wars of pacification against Corsica and Sardinia. After this, he retired to the sacred mountain of Montserrat, where he lived as a hermit in the small chapel of the Holy Trinity and eventually became a priest (I have found all the documents pertaining to his ordination). Bernat Boil's assignment to Montserrat may have been ordered by King Ferdinand to exercise control over the Benedictine friars. In fact, early in 1492 Ferdinand expelled all the Catalan friars and replaced them with a whole new community from Valladolid. The King then sent Boil as ambassador to France to negotiate the return to Catalonia of the territories of Roussillon and Cerdagne, which had been occupied by the French. While there Boil met with Saint Francesco di Paola in Tours and became the first Catalan member of the new order of Minimi founded by Francesco di Paola. When Columbus organized his second voyage to America, he was allowed to choose his closest collaborators. He selected Pere de Margarit, a Catalan, as the head of the army, and his friend Miguel Ballester, a Catalan from Tarragona, as the Lord Mayor of the Isabella fort. But Ferdinand imposed Boil on Columbus as the chief representative of the Catholic Church. Both Boil and Margarit were intensely loyal to Ferdinand. After encountering some

trouble in America, the two escaped in a ship to meet Ferdinand without Columbus' permission. The information they gave the king about Columbus was not very positive and hence represented a kind of treason toward their commander. It is this evidence that suggests that **Boil** was in fact a spy. Significantly, Boil has a nephew, Guillem Boil, who became Bishop of Girona in 1522. The friar Boil (or Buil) who sailed on Cabot's second voyage could very well have been this nephew. It is certain that it was not Bernat, who was serving as abbot of the Monastery of Cuixà at the time.

30. Jordi Bilbeny, *Brevissima relació de la destrucció de la història. La falsificació de la descoberta catalana d'Amèrica* (Arenys de Mar, 1998), 121-122.

31. Enrique de Gandia, *Historia de Colon. Anàlisis crítico de las fuentes documentales y de los problemas colombinos* (Buenos Aires, 1942).

32. Recent studies on Columbus' writings include Josep M. Castellnou, *Cristòfor Colom, Català: com parlava Cristòfor Colom?* (Barcelona, 1989); Nito Verdèra, *Cristòbal Colom, catalanoparlant* (Ibiza, 1994); and Jordi Gàlvez, "Columbus' Native Language," in Josep M. **Sola Sole** (ed.), *The Catalan Contexts of Columbus - Proceedings of the Third Catalan Symposium* (New York, 1994).

33. Gabriel Roura, "A propòsit de l'escriptura de Cristòfor Colom," in *Primer Col·loqui Interna-*

*cional d'Estudis Columbians de Barcelona: La llengua i l'escriptura de Cristòfor Colom* (Barcelona, forthcoming).

34. See, for example, Francesc Albardaner i Llorens, "La Storia delle Nazioni Europee in cerca di Stato," in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale sulla scoperta Colombiana e la Cultura Europea Contemporanea* (Palermo, 1992); Albardaner i Llorens, "Joan Cristòfor Colom, in the Crossroads of Social Intolerance," in **Sola Sole** (ed.), *Catalan Contexts of Columbus*, 87-94; Bilbeny, *Brevissima relació*; J. Castellà Gassol, *La Conxorxa Americana* (Palma de Mallorca, 1987); Pere Català i Roca, "Quatre germans Colom el 1462," *Episodis de la Historia*, No. 228 (1978); Català i Roca, "Entorn de Cristòfor Colom," *ibid.*, No. 229 (1978); Català i Roca, "Un corsari anomenat Colom," *ibid.*, No. 287 (1991); Gérard Garrigue, *Cristophe Colom, les clés de l'énigme* (Millàs, 1992); Caius Parellada i Cardellach, *Colom venç Colombo* (Barcelona, 1986); Parellada i Cardellach, *Cristòfor Colom i Catalunya: una relació indefugible* (Barcelona, 1992); Jsoep Porter i Rovira, *El navegant Cristòfor Colom, entre els documents i la faula (1436-1506) - Biblioteca Serra d'Or* (Montserrat, 1997); Onofre Vaquer i Bennesar, *iDónde nació Cristòbal Colom?* (Palma de Mallorca, 1991); and Nito Verdèra, *Colom eivissenc: l'origen de Cristòbal Colom* (Ibiza, 1992).