



A DIFFICULT LEGACY: CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLISH AND ITALIAN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

TRUDNE DZIEDZICTWO. KRZYSZTOF KOLUMB
W PERSPEKTYWIE POLSKIEJ I WŁOSKIEJ NAUKI I EDUKACJI
W XXI WIEKU

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— ABSTRACT —

Actually, Christopher Columbus, the discoverer of the New World and the godfather of American Indians (Native Americans), never set foot on the territory of the contemporary United States. However, since 1937, Americans have been celebrating the federal holiday named Columbus Day. From the 1960s, commemoration of October 12 has been subject to gradually increasing criticism by ancestors of Native Americans. On the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the New World the counterproposal was presented to commemorate this day as the Indigenous Peoples' Day. In the 21st century, Columbus has become for many the symbol of extermination performed by white colonizers in the New World during the Age of Discovery. His monuments were stained with red paint as a symbol of blood shed by colonizers. According to some opinion poll from 2017, the US society is divided almost in half on which of these two holidays should be commemorated. The purpose of this paper is to present the

— ABSTRAKT —

Krzysztof Kolumb, odkrywca Nowego Świata i ojciec chrzestny amerykańskich Indian, nigdy nie postawił stopy na terytorium współczesnych Stanów Zjednoczonych, jednak od 1937 roku Amerykanie obchodzą federalne święto o nazwie Dzień Kolumba. Od lat 60. XX wieku upamiętnienie 12 października jest przedmiotem coraz większej krytyki ze strony potomków amerykańskich Indian. W 500. rocznicę odkrycia Nowego Świata przedstawiono kontrpropozycję upamiętniającą ten dzień jako Dzień Ludów Rdzennych. W XXI wieku Kolumb stał się dla wielu symbolem eksterminacji dokonywanej przez białych kolonizatorów w Nowym Świecie w Wieku Odkrywców. Jego pomniki są oblewane czerwoną farbą, będącą symbolem krwi przelanej przez kolonizatorów. Według niektórych sondaży z 2017 roku społeczeństwo amerykańskie jest podzielone niemalże pół na pół co do tego, które z tych dwóch świąt należy upamiętnić. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie zmian dotyczących

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changes regarding the image of Columbus and the history of colonialism by comparing scientific and educational perspectives in Italy and Poland in the 21st century.

Keywords: Christopher Columbus; history and memory; history of America; colonization; Italian and Polish perspective

wizerunku Kolumba oraz dziejów kolonializmu poprzez porównanie perspektywy naukowej i edukacyjnej we Włoszech i w Polsce w XXI wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: Krzysztof Kolumb; historia i pamięć; historia Ameryki; kolonizacja; perspektywa włoska i polska

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The text consists of two parts. In the first, the assessment of the achievements of the great explorer and sailor will be presented in relation to the history of colonialism. The author will also take into account the so-called Black and Pink Legends of the colonialism associated with the explorer. Columbus was the perpetrator of the first great step of globalization, which was the encounter of the Old and the New World. Thus, it was the beginning of the Eurocentric narrative of this meeting, which over time was also supplemented with a more multicentric version. The second part is devoted to the evolution of the image of an explorer in Polish and Italian science as well as historical and contemporary education. The aim of the author is to answer the following questions: How has the image of Columbus changed over the centuries in both countries, including the symbolism attributed to him? Did colonial discourse appear in Poland and Italy, and what role did the figure of Columbus play in it?

“There is nothing to feel sorry about, nor is there any reason to condemn him. The removal of monuments in memory of Columbus is a cultural aggression.”

Santiago Muñoz Machado

“He started a period of mass murder by the European conquerors [...] and that makes him the founding father of genocide in the New World.”

Roger Crowley¹

I. Controversial legacy: Columbus in the context of colonialism

The contemporary *Encyclopedia Britannica* presents a balanced opinion on explorer's legacy (*Christopher Columbus Legacy*, 2021). As specified by its authors,

¹ Citation from Machado and Crowley after: Suarez, 2020.

discovery-related achievements of Columbus have been assessed and challenged for over 5 centuries. The 1992 commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the first voyage to the New World resulted in a significant change regarding how this event is currently presented. Nowadays, the events of 1492 are generally regarded as “the encounter between two worlds”, as described by the Mexican historian and anthropologist, rather than the “discovery” of the New World by the Old World (León-Portilla, 2006). Eurocentrism of this approach was rejected in favour of presenting a certain point of view of American indigenous people on this event. Columbus is presented as an enforcer of the Spanish idea of colonialism, performed under influence of religious passion, who executed and enslaved local people in its name. However, the Encyclopedia mentions that Columbus became a scapegoat, fully responsible for sins of the colonizers (greed for gold, slavery) who arrived in the New World after the death of its discoverer. As concluded by the authors, his courage, determination and achievements as navigator and explorer deserve decent recognition by contemporary people.

This year it will be 530 years since the first voyage of Christopher Columbus to the New World (1492–1493) and his legacy will surely be challenged. Contemporary historians of the Age of Discovery and colonization, as well as researchers of cultural memory, still discuss the symbolism seen in Columbus and significance of his achievements, even if there are no new facts anymore. Curious enough, this discussion, already over 500 years old, is generally referential and constitutes a kind of *re-revisionism* (Mann, 2007). It does not produce new historical arguments and the negative consequences of the year 1492 are put in front in the first place. Columbus is assessed without historical context of his times². However, using his example, we can take a closer look at how this discussion impacts the image of explorers and their discoveries in contemporary science and education in Poland, Italy, and America.

² US sociologist Robert Bierstedt invented the term of ‘temporocentrism’ for the tendency to evaluate all events solely in context of their time.

EUROCENTRISM VS. MULTICENTRISM

On October 12, 1492, Christopher Columbus reached one of the Bahamas archipelago island which he named San Salvador, discovering the *Other World*³. Edmundo O’Gorman, Mexican writer, philosopher and historian, said that America was invented rather than discovered by Columbus (O’Gorman, 1961). While sailing Santa Maria, Columbus had some ideas on the purpose of his voyage, comprising of some knowledge and benightedness (gossips, stereotypes, estimations) of people of the Ancient and Medieval Ages. In fact, Columbus’ voyage was supposed to prove the validity of the thesis on existence of the western maritime route to India⁴. The Genoese thought he reached some islands near the Asian coast and “the Admiral named them Western Indies after the closest land supposedly laying nearby” (Colón, 1965, p. 64). Also, Columbus’ voyages stimulated European imagination of rich lands and people living in Eden-like gardens as nature intended. In his letters sent during the first voyage, the “Great Admiral of the Ocean Sea and Viceroy and Governor General of all discovered islands and lands”⁵ wrote about “kind” islanders “with no religious beliefs who asked us if we came from heaven”, and concluded that “it would be easy for them to convert to Christianity” (Kolumb, 1970, p. 45). Columbus notices that “some wear a small piece of gold hung at holes they make in their noses, but they take all small items to exchange them for gold” (Kolumb, 1970, pp. 45, 52). In his letter to Luis Santángel, the General Chancellor of the Catholic Monarchs, Columbus promised to get gold, spice, cotton, aloe, and “unnumbered slaves” (Kolumb, 1970, p. 154). The motifs of the “discoveries” were political (expansion of Spanish overseas influence), ideological (Christianization of local people), and economic (access to new markets and raw materials). For Columbus, the greatest lifelong challenge was to convince others to find his idea of voyage right (lasting for over ten years on several European royal courts) and then to protect significance of

³ Columbus named his discovery *Otro Mundo*, i.e., “Other World”. In his relations from the voyage, he wrote that “no one has ever sailed this route and this sea is completely unknown” (Kolumb, 1970, p. 203). The term of *New World* was probably used for the first time by Amerigo Vespucci in his letter to Lorenzo di Medici in 1503 (*Mundus Novus*..., 1503/1916, p. 1).

⁴ The important achievement of Columbus was the “discovery of the sea”, i.e., gaining knowledge on when and where oceanic currents and winds can be found in order to sail ships (see: Parry, 1981).

⁵ The title awarded to Christopher Columbus together with recognition of his ennoblement on the basis of the contract he had concluded with Isabel I of Castile and Ferdinand the Catholic prior to the first voyage.

his achievement. In his letters to Ferdinand the Catholic and Isabel I of Castile, he indicated that “no one has ever conquered so much land with so few effort and assets, when compared to ancient Greeks and Romans”⁶. He argued with the allegation of small profits resulting from his voyages and consistently made effort to increase their efficiency, even by paying the price of human trafficking or bloody suppression of Indian rebellions, thus clearing the path of colonization that intensified after his death⁷. In 1514, the Spanish king Ferdinand the Catholic sent the fleet of Pedrarias Dávila and equipped it with document called *Requerimiento*. The manifesto addressed to Indians, read out in Spanish that was unknown to local people, contained information on world creation, assignment of lands to Spain by the pope and the offer to submit to power of Ferdinand. Possible refusal would lead to war, seizure of goods, or slavery (Palacios Rubios, 1513/2020). Over time, Spaniard people in the New World implemented the system of feudal dependency called *Encomienda* [entrustment]. Indians were subordinated by Spaniards who were responsible for their Christianization and could demand their labour (Chasteen, 2007, p. 35).

For the next five centuries, the two images of *La Conquista* and colonization have battled each other, namely, the so called Pink and Black Legends. The Black Legend of colonialism started as early as in the 16th century thanks to the publications of *De Orbo Novo* (1530) by Peter Martyr d’Anghiera and *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552) by Bartolomé de Las Casas. In multiple relations “insatiable ambitions and greed of Spaniards” led to the “extermination of Indians”, who died in thousands because of slavery and forced labour. The mistreatment caused escapes and epidemics of diseases brought from Europe, decimating Indians and leading to kidnapping them for forced labour in ore mines or *encomiendas* of conquistadors. Eduardo Galeano, the 20th-century left-wing author, described this period as follows: “America was the vast kingdom of the Devil, its redemption impossible or doubtful; but the fanatical mission against the natives’ heresy was mixed with the fever that New World treasures stirred in the conquering hosts” (Galeano, 1983, p. 17).

⁶ “Wasze Wysokości zdobyły teraz ziemie tak rozległe, że tworzą one nowy świat i na których z czasem chrześcijaństwo wiele zadowolenia odniesie, a wiara nasza poważnego rozszerzenia dozna” [Your Majesties have just conquered the lands so vast they create the new world where, over time, Christianity will gain great joy and our faith will be significantly extended] (see: Kolumb, 1970, p. 211).

⁷ Columbus’ voyages resulted in expansion of various species, e.g., pigs, cattle, as well as pests, diseases, and people of the Old World (see: Crosby, 1972).

The scale of criticism of colonialism forced conquistadors themselves to make opinions on the matter. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who participated in the voyage of Hernán Cortés, which led to the conquest of the Aztec state in 1519–1521, accused historians of his age (Gomera, Illescas, Jovio) that they wrote only on wrongdoing of conquistadors (e.g., that they provided falsely high numbers of Indian victims or did not consider the fact of Spaniards being outnumbered by Indians) (Díaz del Castillo, 2008, p. 34). According to Díaz del Castillo, *La Conquista* led to unquestionable successes, like introduction of faith, rights and craftsmanship and eradication of cannibalism, human sacrifice, and such practices like deforming and piercing of foreheads, ears and tongues. Pedro Pizarro, who participated in the conquest of the Inca empire, accused Peru inhabitants of immorality and brutality, providing the example of cutting off hooves of horses captured by Indians⁸ (Pizarro, 2012). Arguments of advocates and opponents of *La Conquista* and colonization, referring to law and theology of that time, were presented in the famous debate held between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés De Sepúlveda (1550–1551)⁹. Followers of *La Conquista* used the following arguments: right of a first explorer, worldwide sovereignty of the emperor and the pope regarding granting overseas lands, refusal to adopt the Catholic religion (idolatry)¹⁰, rejection the Spanish rule by Indians or, finally, Indian sins against nature (cannibalism, human sacrifice). Indicating that Indians lacked the features of civilized nations, Sepúlveda justified the need of Spanish “care” over them. Bartolomé de Las Casas convinced that forcible imposing the Catholic faith on Indians was prohibited and could not be seen as an element of just war. In his opinion, the conquest of the New World was more of a plundering inhuman raid than an alleged attempt of Christianization of Indians (Buchner, 2007, pp. 202–243).

⁸ He also admired skills of Inca craftsmen and their hard-working women.

⁹ *La Conquista* was performed in the name of the emperor Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. Cortés gave him as a gift some gold gained from Aztecs, the emperor also funded the Earth circumnavigation voyage of Ferdinand Magellan. Assets for the voyages were borrowed from Walser banks who were in turn given licenses to search for gold and export black slaves to the New World. Charles V, who ruled “the empire on which the sun never sets”, was not able to control his officials due to “vastness” of his state, in turn they were unable to force Spaniards to observe the law in the New World. Las Casas encouraged the emperor to implement the New Rights that prohibited to enslave Indians and force them to work in plantations. The Valladolid debate was the most serious attempt of self-criticism of the colonial system in the 16th century (see: Brandi, 1969).

¹⁰ Las Casas, Protector of Indians and a Dominican monk, proved that human sacrifice is a proof of deep godliness of Indians.

The critical opinion on Spanish colonization of the New World makes them plunderers and destroyers in various contexts: biological (expansion of European illnesses, animals, and plants), social and demographic (disintegration of clan and tribal structures and introduction of new Christian norms), political (new model of the Spanish colonial administration ignoring local power structures), economic (exploitation of raw materials, making trade dependent on Spain). In the opinion of opponents of this process, *La Conquista* and colonization of Latin America was the “original sin” resulting in the social structure of domination by newcomers over locals (Chasteen, 2007, p. 7). The Soviet biographer of Columbus, Jakow Swiet, called him “pirate” and “Crusader of capitalism origins” (Swiet, 1979). In more subdued opinions, by destroying local culture Spaniards did the same what other European nations of that time did, as well as later, when conquering other continents (Collis, 1999). The French colonialism researcher Marc Ferro convinced that neither the Pink Legend, nor the Black Legend of colonialism were true. Idealization of the pre-conquest period or ignoring good aspects of colonialism, e.g., emancipation of women, distorts the true image of its history.

Christopher Columbus, presenting the visions of conversion of Indians and the Earth paradise full of gold under influence of religious passion, can be seen as the originator of evil brought by *La Conquista* and colonization, however, greatness of his achievements and resulting consequences seem to be undisputable, both for people living in the 16th century¹¹ and nowadays¹².

II. John Scolvus and Small Shoes of Moctezuma: Columbus, Age of Discovery and colonialism in the perspective of Polish science and education in the 21st century

In Polish language, there is a phrase “to discover America”, which means that somebody said something obvious thinking it was their own conclusion (Bralczyk, n.d.). The origin of this phrase is not clearly known, possibly because the discovery of America was, in fact, not a single event, mistakenly attributed to

¹¹ “I was born in century in which the whole world became known”, as Italian Girolamo Cardano wrote in his memoirs (2002, p. 189).

¹² According to Marshall Eakin, the most important discovery in the last millennium was “the moment of Columbus” (see: Eakin, 2007).

one person, namely Christopher Columbus (Machowski, 2015). Meanwhile, this process started approximately 40 thousand years ago and the list of mythical and historical pretenders for the title of the discoverer of America is long (e.g., Leif Eriksson) and the reason may be the fact of existence of own candidate for this title.

History of perceiving Columbus and his discovery in Poland from the 16th to the 21st century should be seen from the two following perspectives: Columbus as navigator and explorer; and *La Conquista* and the fate of Indians. As a result of geographical distance and lack of participation of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in overseas colonization, information of the New World was second-hand and got to Poles with some delay. In the Polish *Kronika wszystkiego świata* of the mid-16th century by Marcin Bielski, compiling information from few other chronicles, e.g., by Simon Grynaeus¹³, we can find only a short comment on America. Polish opinions of the New World were also shaped by letters of conquistadors. Johannes Dantiscus of Gdańsk, the envoy of the Polish king at the Spanish court of Charles V, kept correspondence with Hernán Cortés. Many were jealous of treasures Spaniards had gained, but the tragedy of the Indian population was commented with outrage¹⁴. Private voyages of Polish noblemen against the Tsardom of Russia in the early 17th century were compared to conquistador voyages (Tazbir, 1969, p. 470). The development of the Enlightenment conception of human natural rights and increasing inability of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century, followed by its liquidation, resulted in the Indian perspective becoming gradually closer for Poles than the perspective of conquistadors. The authors of Enlightenment school books on geography and history were quite critical regarding methods of the New World conquest (Jurkowska, 2010). While in Western Europe of Enlightenment era writers expressed grief about destruction of the civilization of pre-Columbian America, Polish authors rather regretted annihilation of highly developed states (Tazbir, 1969, p. 136). According to historian Janusz Tazbir, in Poland of that time

¹³ Citing Simon Grynaeus (*Novus orbis regionum* [...], Basileae 1537), Bielski retells fantastic information on people with horse or dog heads living in the New World. In his relation Columbus is Venetian (see: Śnieżko, 2003).

¹⁴ In nonsectarian Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16th and 17th centuries, forcible religious conversion was strongly condemned. In the 15th century, during wars with the Teutonic Order the Polish school of international law was developed (Stanisław of Skarbimierz, Paweł Włodkowic) that granted pagans the right to have their own states and undermined superiority of the pope and the emperor over them (see: Tazbir, 2000).

Indians were perceived as fighters for independence, and in Western Europe as “religion-mocking philosophers”. In 1772, when the first partition of Poland occurred, *The Dialogues between Fernand Cortez and Moctezuma* by Bernard Fontenelle was published in Poland. In the book, Moctezuma rejected the opinion on superiority of the Old World over America, argued with accusations of barbarity and regretted that lack of knowledge on ships made it impossible for Indians to discover Europe. In the first Polish museum established after dissolution of the Polish state, supposed to store relics of its history, “Moctezuma’s little shoes” could be found¹⁵.

Increasing significance of America makes Poles living in partitioned Poland more interested in that land and its discoverer. In the 19th century, books of Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper on the Italian explorer were published. The first Polish biography of Columbus by Stanisław Krzemiński, *Krzysztof Kolumb. Przypomnienie życia i zasług* [Christopher Columbus: His Life and Merits] was published in Warsaw in 1893. It comprised the clash of the romantic vision of Irving and the critical relation of Justin Winsor (1892) who accused Columbus of slave trade and ineptness in management of discovered lands. Krzemiński also wrote that the continent was discovered by other explorers. Also, the 19th century was the time when the idea of the Polish discovery of America was born. Historian Joachim Lelewel was convinced that a Pole, John Scolvus, had participated in the Danish voyage of 1476 that had supposedly reached Labrador. The 20th-century historian Bolesław Olszewicz tried to refute Lelewel’s revelations, indicating there was no evidence this sailor was Polish¹⁶. Half-authentic and half-mythical, John Scolvus is still very popular, especially among the Polish diaspora whose members can feel more significant this way. According to Tazbir, during the period of partition of Poland the history of John Scolvus was a way to find some Polish contribution into general progress of the human civilization¹⁷.

¹⁵ According to Cortés, Moctezuma was the only among Aztecs who greeted him in their capital city and wore sandals, while other dignitaries were barefoot, thus they were a symbol of ruler’s status. As a result of partitions of Poland, the partitioning states became conquistadors, while Poles became Indians.

¹⁶ In the *Dictionary of the Canadian biography* we can read about John Scolvus: “His nationality is disputed, but probably he was Danish or Norwegian; the suggestion of his being Polish is perhaps based on a corruption of *pilatus* to *polonus*” (see: Cooke, 2003).

¹⁷ Columbus was also compared to the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus: “Columbus discovered some part of world, while Copernicus discovered the new world”. Stefan Giller named

Christopher Columbus also became one of the topics of fiction dominated by the romantic vision of great individuality. In Adam Mickiewicz's *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [Books of the Polish Nation and Its Pilgrimage], Columbus was named "the last knight for freedom and America he had discovered became the land of freedom, the holy land"¹⁸. In turn, in his poem *Coś ty Atenom zrobił, Sokratesie?* [Socrates, What Have You Done to Athens?], poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid compared the Italian navigator to other great people, such as Socrates, Dante, or Napoleon Bonaparte (Norwid, 1960, p. 37). Norwid indicated that Columbus, as his great companions, was not appreciated when alive, while their remains did not find peace even after death¹⁹.

During the partition period the myth of Indians, depicted as "fair savages" and a symbol of one's own fate, appeared in the Polish literature. Resistance against colonizers was supposed to encourage to fight for independence (Tazbir, 1969, p. 146). In his 19th-century novelette *Sachem* Henryk Sienkiewicz ironically writes about persecutions of Indians in America as "triumph of the good cause". In fact, this piece of literature reflects care and fear of the process of denationalization of Poles living in the partitioning states.

Nowadays, in Polish school and academic perspective Columbus is generally perceived as one of navigators of the Age of Discovery. Short information in some high school history textbook highlights achievements of the explorer who "discovered the best trans-Atlantic route sailed for next 400 years" (Kopczyński, 2006, p. 16). Colonial conquests are explicitly associated with people like Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro. Effects of their actions, shown from the perspective of local people, are clearly negative: enormous profits for Spain and Portugal, resulting from pillage and exploitation, depopulation of various areas of America, epidemics brought from Europe, slave labour at plantations and mines, African slave trade, destruction and marginalization of Indian cultures and dominating political, social and economic life of Latin America by ancestors of white set-

Copernicus "Columbus of the heavens" (1873), calling him "the sailor of sunny scarlets" (see: Brodziński, 1926, p. 33).

¹⁸ Mickiewicz also created the playful lyric poem called *Kartofla* [Potatoes], in which he presented the argument taking place in the heaven on whether Columbus should be let discover the New World. Saint Dominic was in favour of granting the consent, talking about Christianization of Indians. His adversary is the Polish saint Stanisław Kostka who thinks that this will result in spilling of innocent blood. Finally, the dispute is won by Saint Dominic who takes the upper hand saying that potatoes brought from the New World will save Europe from famine (Mickiewicz, 1955, pp. 41–57).

¹⁹ Columbus had three tombs: in Valladolid, Seville, and Hispaniola.

tlers called Creoles (Kucharski & Niewęgłowska, 2020, pp. 19–20). High school textbooks do not contain information on human sacrifice performed by Aztecs.

Columbus is still popular among Polish scientists as a research object. Medievalist Wojciech Iwańczak tried to create a psychological image of the discoverer of America based on Columbus' legacy. In the opinion of the medievalist, the source of the discoverer's stubbornness in pursuing a goal, close to madness, was deep faith²⁰. Self-confidence, in turn, was based on solid knowledge and sailing practice. In this way, Iwańczak exposed Columbus as a man of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The Polish traveler and Columbus expert, Jarosław Molenda, in the debate on the origin of the discoverer, went beyond the hypothesis of Genoa and Spain and pointed to the Byzantine trail²¹. In turn, the linguist Marzena Chrobak, reconciling various concepts of the discoverer's origin, argued that Columbus used the Levantine language, i.e., a mixture of Italian, French, Provençal, Catalan, Portuguese, and Castilian (Chrobak, 2012, pp. 64–65).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Columbus became more popular among Polish history lovers thanks due to his association with the figure of the Polish fifteenth-century king Władysław Warneńczyk [Ladislaus of Varna]. According to official knowledge, he was killed in the famous Battle of Varna in 1444. However, the king's corpse was not found after the battle and various rumors about his fate meant that his successor, younger brother Kazimierz, waited another 3 years with the coronation. Historians have assumed that the king avoided death in the fields of Varna and after a long journey he settled in Portugal where he ended his life under the assumed name of Henrique Alemão (Kielanowski, 1991; Świąch, 1995). The Portuguese legend of the Polish king in Madeira was unexpectedly tied to the history of the discoverer of America (Ziejka, 2003). Manuel Rosa, the Portuguese historian from Azores (Rosa, 2012, 2020), insisted that the father of the great explorer was the Polish king Władysław III. In opinion of the Portuguese historian, after being defeated in this battle, the woeful Polish

²⁰ The Spanish rulers' support for their exploration plans, after previous refusals from other countries, saw the work of the Holy Spirit as a result. Columbus emphasized the providential role of the expedition in acquainting multitudes of unbelievers with God's revelation. He also speculated that the gold obtained in the New World could be used to organize a crusade and reclaim Jerusalem from the hands of the Ottomans (see: Iwańczak, 2021).

²¹ According to Molenda, Krzysztof Columbus is a Spanish Byzantine. Raised on the Greek island of Chios, related to Genoa, and related to the imperial family of Palaeologi, who was seeking refuge from the Turks in the West after the fall of Constantinople (see: Molenda, 2016; Durlacher-Wolper, 1982).

king left for Madeira and took the name of Henrique Alemão. As evidence for this thesis was doubtful (DNA tests), Rosa's revelations were ignored or treated as a kind of curiosity. Rosa's information was defiantly rejected by historian Krystyna Łukasiewicz who finds the two sources allegedly confirming his thesis a forgery created by the Teutonic Order for their political purposes (Łukasiewicz, 2010).

III. Defending the Italian origins of the Columbus in the context of colonialism. Columbus in the perspective of Italian history and present day

In Italy, Christopher Columbus has been a subject of interest for very long time, as well as his significance in the history of the world and Europe. I was particularly because of his Italian, more precisely Genoese, origins, especially after the unification of Italy in the second half of the 19th century and in the interwar period during the Mussolini rule, when highlighting of Italian achievements and successes was a tool of development of the Italian national identity. Moreover, Columbus has remained a symbol of "Italian genius" also after the World War II in Italy itself, but also in relations with the Italian diaspora in the USA (e.g., Columbus Day). In the late 20th and the early 21st century, this interest resulted in various scientific, popular science and typically journalistic publications. For Italian researchers of the Age of Discovery and its effects, i.e., also European colonialism with its all negative effects, source publications were significant, particularly memoirs of Christopher Columbus himself from his "voyage to India" (Colombo, 1988; Colombo, Torino, 1992; Colombo, 1992), leading to discovery of the new continent quickly named the New World (*Il Mondo Nuovo*), and finally named after other Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci. Also, publications on both Italian protagonists of the first phase of exploration of the newly discovered continent were published in Italy, as well as biographies of Columbus himself, including information on his origins and the city of Genoa, the place of his birth (Castellazzo, 2006). Columbus' place in the Italian literature became particularly important because of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, celebrated in 1992 (Mannu, 1992; Baldacci, 1992; Frezzia, 1992; Almagià, 1992; Bossi, 1992). Another issue, particularly in science, but also in public life in recent decades, has been the thoughts on centuries-old consequences of the Age of Discovery and on European colonialism. Italian publications on this issue could not and still cannot abstract from sources of this phenomenon, especially from the discovery of the "New World" by Christopher Columbus. The life and activity

of the Genoese navigator and Spanish admiral have also become the point of reference for cross-sectional studies called *Studi Colombiani*²².

Undoubtedly, the image of Columbus' life and activity was influenced by research and publications of Cesare De Lollis, the researcher active in the late 19th and the early 20th century to such extent that his way of thinking and conclusions are referred to by contemporary academics (De Lollis, 1985), among whom Diego Stefanelli is worth paying some attention to (Stefanelli, 2013). Both Stefanelli and other authors refer to the fundamental work of De Lollis, which was his critical edition of Columbus' works, published for the first time in 1892–1894 and being the effect of the political initiative of the Italian state that had recently unified, willing to underline this way the Italian contribution in the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America (Franceschini, 1988). Diego Stefanelli also underlines significance of De Lollis' work presenting Columbus "in context of legend and history" (De Lollis, 1969). According to Stefanelli, for De Lollis the basic purpose of research works, publication of documents and the dissertation on Columbus was to present the accurate relation between Columbus and the Italian Renaissance and its achievements in science, culture, and art (Stefanelli, 2013, p. 275).

Polemics on Place of Columbus Birth:
Defending the Italian Origins of the Discoverer
of "The New World"

Underlining his role as an Italian author referring to Spanish DNA tests of Christopher Columbus' remains from the late 20th and the early 21st century, Rino Di Stefano noticed that "Spaniards were never able to accept the idea that the greatest navigator of all time, he who discovered the American continent and changed the history of old Europe, was not one of them". Also, they did not

²² International conferences on life and activity of Columbus in context of the age he lived in were organized since the early 1970s to the late 1990s and resulted in various publications containing texts of multiple authors (see: *Atti del IV Convegno internazionale di studi colombiani*, vol. II, Genova 1987; *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Colombiani 13 e 14 ottobre 1973*, Civico Istituto Colombiano, Genova 1974; *Atti del II Convegno Internazionale di Studi Colombiani Genova 6 e 7 ottobre 1975*, Civico Istituto Colombiano, Genova 1977; *Atti del 3. Convegno Internazionale di Studi Colombiani Genova 7 e 8 ottobre 1977*, Civico Istituto Colombiano, Genova 1979; *Atti del IV Convegno di Studi Colombiani 21–23 ottobre 1985*, vol. I–II, Civico Istituto Colombiano, Fondazione Colombiana, Genova 1987; *Atti del V Convegno Internazionale di Studi Colombiani „Navi e navigazione nei secoli XV e XVI. Genova 26–28 ottobre 1987*, vol. I–II, Civico Istituto Colombiano, Genova 1990).

consider comprehensive literature on the subject, which was definitely certain about the Italian origins of Columbus, namely, that he was a Genoese, a son of weaver Domenico and Susanna Fontanarossa. Also, sources from the times of Columbus were referred to, including the work of the Portuguese author Rui de Pina, who wrote in his *Chrònica d'El Rey don Juan II* of 1504 about “Christovan Collombo italiano”, or the Spanish philosopher from Salamanca, Hernando Alonso de Herrera, who in his dissertation of 1516 clearly called Columbus “Xristoval Colòn ginovés”. Moreover, according to Di Stefano, Columbus wanted to organize his voyage through the Atlantic Ocean in the name and on behalf of the Republic of Genoa. He presented such a proposal in 1485 to Paolo di Campofregoso, a Genoese doge, cardinal and admiral, who, however, rejected it, remembering the 1291 expedition led by Tedisio D’Oria and brothers Ugolino and Vadino Vivaldi, that had never come back to the port of departure. The future discoverer of America tried to convince the doge he already had other type of ships than those from the late 13th century, but was unsuccessful, so he came back to Seville, while Genoa “lost its great once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” (Di Stefano, 2002).

Italian researchers, followed by Italian journalists, paid significant attention to the issue of Columbus’ origins, in relation to theses that he was not born in Genoa, but in other city or even country, most often Spain, but even the famous “Polish trace” did not occur (some believe that Columbus was a son of the Polish king Władysław III, miraculously saved during the Battle of Varna in 1444) (Rosa, 2012)²³. The best summary of these speculations can be probably found in the description of the book by Giulio Busi of 2007, saying that “in fantasy of amateur historians, supporters of conspiracy theories or would-be authors, ‘true’ Columbus is always someone else and comes from various less and less probable locations, like Spanish Galicia, Catalonia or Poland” (Busi, 2007).

Also, in the 21st century the new approach to Columbus’ discoveries and actions performed in the New World occurred, namely, fierce criticism of European colonialism, related to its most brutal aspects, like slavery, persecutions and mass killings of local peoples in both Americas. As a result, and as a part of the phenomenon known as cancel culture, Columbus’ monuments were

²³ Revelations of the Portuguese author made headlines in Polish media; interview with the author and texts on this issue were published in the following journals: “Najwyższy Czas” (51–52, 2010, pp. LVI–LVII); “Newsweek Polska” (2, 2011, pp. 64–67); “Odra” (10, 2011, pp. 32–36); “Gazeta Wyborcza” (12.04.2012).

destroyed and there were demands to remove his name from textbooks, streets, or squares. There is no doubt that in the historical perspective such an attitude and actions would lead to actual falsification of history, including descriptions and interpretations regarding the discovery of America. On the other hand, the issue of colonial heritage is not abstract in Western Europe, including Italy, as it is important not only in terms of knowing the past, but also to ask questions about the future of Europe and its culture and civilization.

The Age of Discovery in the Context of European Colonialism

However, the issue mentioned above was present in relations from the Age of Discovery and in political and historical papers, especially in Spain and Italy, as early as in the 16th century. The best known testimonies – also referring to the repressive activities by Columbus towards local people – were provided by Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566). The papers of the Spanish cleric and the protector of *indios* have been known since the 17th century and they were also published in Italian in recent times (de Las Casas, 1987). His life and activity were also described in contemporary Italian research on universal human rights and rules of Christian morality also in context of the studies on the discovery of America and the role played in this event by Christopher Columbus.

In turn, in the Part IV of *Le Relationi Universali* (1596), Giovanni Botero, the famous Italian historian and political writer of the late 16th and the early 17th century, mentioned key significance of the discovery and the conquest of the New World (“lo scoprimiento e la conquista del Mondo nuovo”) executed by Columbus under the auspices of the Catholic Monarchs (Botero, 1596). And it was Botero who referred to the Age of Discovery and the beginning of the European rule in the New World, already in the late 16th century, i.e., a hundred years after Columbus’ “voyage to India”, particularly in context of the conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires by Spanish conquistadors. The opinions of the author of *The Reason of State* (1589) on this first phase of European colonialism were ambivalent, as Botero condemned “acts of violence and terror, though he never said a single word against such great conquistadors like Cortés or Pizarro” (Bielański, 1995, p. 87; Botero, 2019, p. 41).

We can see that critical opinions on the code of conduct of New World discoverers and conquerors were present in Italian literature at the very beginning, however much more critical were works of already cited Bartolomé de Las Casas. However, when the brutal side of European colonialism was not

hidden, depreciation of explorers' achievements or even removal their names from textbooks and demolition monuments of these discoverers, conquistadors, or colony settlers was not demanded, as it took place in 2020 in the USA and Western European countries. Among Italian authors who referred to this issue in 2020 were Giulio Busi (2020) and Alessandro Martire (2020). In his historical anthropology work the latter wrote that mass extermination of *indios* was one of the cruelest and it changed the image of activity of Columbus himself and the consequences of the discovery of America. Though, reception of Genoese navigator's deeds has not been subject to any significant change, as well as among the Italian diaspora in the USA. Columbus Day is still celebrated by this community and is a confirmation of its importance and the dual identity called *italo-americani*. In turn, actual significance of Columbus was synthetically described by Cesare De Lollis, the aforesaid biographer of the discoverer of America, who wrote the following: "History of mankind [la storia dell'Umanità], or at least the part of its history which refers to us, changed on the twelfth day of October in the year 1492 of the Age of Christ [...]; as it was the day when Christopher Columbus set foot on this part of Earth that had not been marked on any map. And in this very moment, on this very day, in the great book of history the page of the Middle Ages was turned and the new one emerged: the page of our Modern Era" (De Lollis, 1985, p. 6).

CONCLUSIONS

This year, i.e., 2022, the 530th anniversary of the first voyage of Columbus to the New World is an opportunity to assess his achievements and difficult legacy from the historical perspective. The difficult legacy left by Columbus results not only from the evaluation of his historical achievements, often made in isolation from the realities in which he lived. It results from making the discoverer of the "Other World", which will be called by Amerigo Vespucci the "New World", during his lifetime a symbol. Columbus is seen as the creator of the modern world and interdependent and interconnected societies (W.D. Phillips & C.R. Phillips, 1992). In the nineteenth century in the United States, he was a symbol of individualism, Europeanization, and the conquest of the continent from ocean to ocean (Paul, 2014, pp. 43–79). For the inhabitants of Latin America, Columbus symbolizes the ambivalence resulting from the pride of the cultural, language and religious heritage created by Spaniards in the New World of Columbus, but

also the negative experience of brutal colonialism (especially against Indians and black slaves) and diseases brought from the old continent (Suarez, 2020).

When comparing his image in the Polish and Italian perspectives, we will identify various similarities and differences. In both countries Columbus is highly regarded for importance of his achievement that made him one of the first great navigators and explorers. Nowadays, we can see that not only did he make an important step in the process of the discovery of our world, but also in its globalization. Acknowledgement of unquestioned impact of the Genoese explorer in general progress of the human civilization contributed to defiant support of the narration of his Italian origins in Italy, whose legacy was used for development of the Italian national identity, especially in the late 19th and the early 20th century, but also for the development of identification and bonds with the Italian immigrants in America. In Polish context, the history of John Scolvus as the discoverer of America, created during the partition of Poland, was a similar method to seek the Polish contribution to the development of human civilization. Nowadays, the theory of Polish origin of Columbus, created by Manuel Rosa from Portugal, attracted some interest, but was unanimously rejected by professional historians.

The assessment of colonialism and its effects has been the difficult legacy of Columbus' discoveries. Interestingly, it is usually not directly related to the Genoese explorer himself, both in Poland and in Italy. Partitioned Italia had not been a part of colonial conquests before the unification in 1871. Similarly, in the 16th and 17th centuries, for inhabitants of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth the process of colonization was rather associated with activities of such countries as Spain or Portugal. News on colonization that reached Poland from the New World resulted in the balanced image of European colonialism far from its Pink and Black Legends. Historical similarities (crisis, downfall of the Polish state in the late 18th century and the partition period) tipped the scales for liking in favour of colonized people.

Nowadays, this process is preserved especially in the newest history textbook, in which a clearly negative image of colonialism dominates. The unequivocally negative assessment of colonialism in the Polish and Italian perspectives is not directly related to Christopher Columbus, but rather to such conquistadors as Cortés and Pizarro. The process of "cancel culture" taking the form of removal of monuments or street names dedicated to the great explorer is currently present in the Western world, however in Poland and Italy it does not seem to happen in the nearest future.

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