

El abogado que dibujó el mundo: Martín Fernández de Enciso (1469-1533), una biografía apasionante

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REVIEWS

El abogado que dibujó el mundo: Martín Fernández de Enciso (1469-1533), una biografía apasionante

By CARMEN MENA GARCÍA and JOSÉ ANTONIO DÍAZ REINA. 5
Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2020. 304 pp. ISBN 978-8447229031.

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El abogado que dibujó el mundo: Martín Fernández de Enciso (1469- 10
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Q1. Martín Fernández de Enciso (1469–1533) was known mainly for his involvement in the Spanish conquest of today’s Panama and for authoring the earliest systematic geographical description of the New World. Now, his first-ever complete biography has been published by Carmen Mena García and José Antonio Díaz Reina, revealing an even more multi-faceted character who was at the same time lawyer, merchant, geographer, polemicist, and royal advisor. Professor Mena is a well-known authority on the period while Díaz debuts in historical research with this work. 15
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After a short introduction in which the authors defend biography as a fully respectable and useful genre of historical research (pp. 9–10), the book’s chapters cover Enciso’s life in chronological order since his beginnings in Old Castile to his final days in Seville. This organization has the advantage of clarity, making the story easy to follow, but it also has the drawback of blurring certain facets of Enciso’s life, as connected facts become scattered over different chapters of the book. 25

By combing Spanish archives (mainly Simancas, Indias, and the Histórico Provincial de Sevilla) for documentary evidence, the authors have substantially expanded our understanding of several stages of Enciso’s life. They have identified his birthplace, family origins, and early profession and, what is more important, they have discovered why Enciso was forced to leave all that and start a new life elsewhere. A substantial knowledge gap remains however between 1503, when 30

Enciso was banished from his native town, and 1509, when he was a wealthy and well-connected lawyer in Santo Domingo.

Mena and Díaz show that Enciso actually spent only a small part of his life in the Indies and a particularly short time in exploration and conquest expeditions to the American mainland. They also claim that he, and not Vasco Núñez de Balboa as is normally stated, may have been the real instigator of the criminal banishment of Diego de Nicuesa from Darien in 1510 (p. 36). A few months later, Enciso would in turn be deprived of his bounty and banished by Balboa and his companions. The book shows how that event intensely marked Enciso, triggering an insatiable thirst for revenge. He promptly started a series of intrigues that would take him back to Darien aboard a powerful royal armada led by Pedrarias Dávila, an aristocrat who eventually executed Balboa. Enciso persecuted Balboa's men until his last day and even beyond, as his children would still file lawsuits against the survivors. For example, in 1529 we see Enciso sue and jail Francisco Pizarro as soon as the latter set foot on Spain to negotiate the conquest of the Inca Empire (pp. 187–188). Litigation was definitely a common thread in Enciso's life, as the authors abundantly demonstrate.

Enciso was a key figure in the legal debates about the rights of the Amerindians that took place in Spain, first in 1512 under King Ferdinand and later in 1526 under Emperor Charles. Enciso lobbied the Crown on behalf of the conquistadores, successfully watering down all royal provisions that originally intended to protect the Crown's native subjects in the Indies. Mena and Díaz put forward the theory that Enciso was one of the *coauthors* of the infamous *Requerimiento*, a text that was read aloud to native peoples to request their submission under pain of war and therefore provided legal cover to wars of conquest. Adopting Enciso's perspective, the authors shed new light on the controversies, *interests*, and rivalries that shaped these complex events, thus providing an example of the usefulness of historical biography.

The book describes Enciso's only known publication, the *Suma de geographia*, quite thoroughly but in general just following earlier scholarship on the topic. A somewhat novel insight is that Enciso wrote the *Suma* in a period of his life where he was back in Seville and on a wait-and-see mode, as power games played out at the Court between King Ferdinand's old guard and Prince Charles's newcomers. One can now better grasp Enciso's political intention when he dedicated the *Suma* to the new monarch.

The authors have nevertheless missed the opportunity of discussing what actual knowledge Enciso possessed about geography and cosmography. Elsewhere in the book, the reader is told that Enciso advised Dávila in 1514 on the route to follow from Dominica to Darién (p. 75), that in 1516 he sent a map to the Court (p. 82) and that he authored what the authors interpret as a map of some unknown type ("por planta e simiente," p. 178). Was Enciso a mapmaker then? Or just able to read maps made by others? It is not clear. The authors also unfortunately omit his acquaintance with renowned cosmographer Amerigo Vespucci, who mentioned Enciso in his testament.

The book ends with short biographies of each of Enciso's children. This epilogue is one of the most novel parts of the work, drawing on a large corpus of unpublished documents, and it illustrates how the father's principles (or lack thereof) and *modus operandi* were adopted by his children, with dramatic consequences. 80

Overall, Mena and Díaz have struck a balance between scholarly rigor and popularization. The prose flows easily and the information, while thoroughly researched, does not overwhelm the reader. Several minor mistakes and typos will hopefully be corrected in future editions. This book will find its way into the shelves of specialists of Spanish exploration and conquest of America and, at the same time, 85 provide an enjoyable read for the general public.