

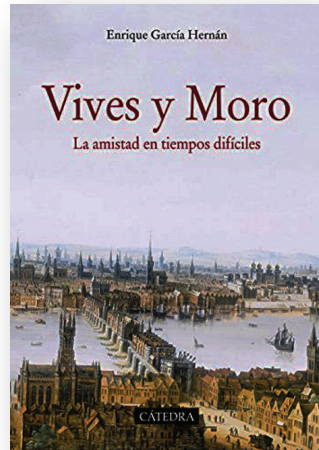
Enrique García Hernán. *Vives y Moro: La amistad en tiempos difíciles.* Madrid: Cátedra, 2016, 402 pages. ISBN 978-84-376-3605-4

REVIEWER

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Thomas More's fame has been decidedly on the increase over the last decades while Juan Luis Vives remains, by comparison, unknown and unappreciated, even in his native land. Obviously, More's *Utopia*, his public life and martyrdom, along with his canonization in 1935, make a huge difference. Vives was the quintessential scholar and educator, almost a recluse in Bruges. Thus when I heard of a new book about their friendship, I was immediately interested. Could the Spaniard benefit today from such friendship as he did so long ago? At the

same time, it's the rare biography of More that even mentions Vives (to say nothing of exploring in any depth their "friendship"), but when the author is Enrique García Hernán, a specialist in religion, politics, military history and international relations in the sixteenth century and beyond, notice should be taken. Among his other works, García Hernán is the author of a widely praised scholarly biography of Ignatius of Loyola in a series of *Españoles Eminentes* (Taurus: Madrid, 2013). Any contemporary historian who tackles the life of a canonized saint, and more so in the case of the Jesuits' founder, deserves much



respect. I always thought of the “friendship” between More and Vives as more of a respectful acquaintance. Vives was about fourteen years younger than More, their personal contact was limited to a few years, and their correspondence, if any, is not extant. Thus I imagined a slender book, centered on presenting their shared values and ideas on the liberal arts, education, women’s education, peace in Europe, Christianity, the Ottoman menace, and other burning questions of their age. When I got the book, four hundred dense pages, I was a bit surprised. Needless to say, the *hard times* of the subtitle naturally have taken over and, though the two writers appear and reappear, it often becomes hard to keep in focus their “friendship.” García Hernán’s capacity for reading and research, for the sheer gathering of data and information is remarkable, but he seems intent on putting everything he knows on the page, until the material is often more distracting than illuminating. Perhaps even historians will feel overwhelmed. Some of it could have found a better place in a long section of endnotes. The book I had expected, more an essay in cultural history, exploring in depth the common ideas and contributions of the two humanists, only comes to fruition in the epilogue. García Hernán must have obviously thought there was a need for a new updated presentation in Spanish about those *tiempos difíciles*, while my expectation was for a work on two great Christian humanists. Doubtless, it was such common interest in the liberal arts and Christian humanism that started and built their friendship.

García Hernán dates their first encounter in Cambrai during the Lenten season of 1517, that is, five years before the Spaniard’s trip to London in 1523 which has been the usual date (in view of More’s reference to Vives in a letter to Erasmus). More was keenly aware of the talent of the much younger scholar from Valencia and did help him while visiting England. The book reinforces the notion of a firm and well-established friendship, “each time more intense and beneficial to both, not only on a personal level but above all in terms of their scientific interests.” Vives loved More’s eldest daughter “like a sister” and, according to García Hernán, may have been infatuated

with her. Once Vives left England and returned to Bruges, where he died and was buried, we don't know much about their friendship. García Hernán also speculates about the connection between Vives, More and Ignatius Loyola. Did the future founder of the Jesuits meet More in London? In the chapter on Henry's divorce, he says that Vives's role as a counselor to Queen Katherine has been mostly unnoticed until our time and it is a good point to make. If Vives seriously thought of writing a "life of More" it's a pity he never did. In the epilogue García Hernán says that we understand them both better because we can "find More in Vives and Vives in More." Their emphasis on the unity of Europe, even though for the two it meant above all a united Christendom, is something we can appreciate today. He also underlines the freshness of their writings as witnesses of key events in western and Church history: "More renounced his domestic life and homeland for the Christian Utopia, that of the king of Sion, as Vives put it at the end of his *Expositio*, the Utopia in every human heart."

R. W. Chambers thought that Vives took the place that More should have had as the third in the triumvirate of great scholars of their age after Erasmus and Guillaume Budé. All four have been called the four evangelists of that difficult age and all four deserve our appreciation, even beyond the academic world. While reading this book, often overwhelmed by the sheer amount of historical data, I wished García Hernán had written instead a straight-forward biography of Vives, undoubtedly another "español eminente." More and their friendship would have figured in it, but the latter more as a short chapter perhaps. My reading done, I checked More's letter to Erasmus from Canterbury (1520) which ends with a wonderful petition: *Quiddam est, mi Erasme, de quo si mihi notus esset Viues, admonerem illum*. Reading Vives's *Aedes legume* and his *Somnium* the Englishman had noticed things expressed in an all too abstract manner, perhaps a bit confusing or unclear to non-specialists. Yet, convinced that everything the Spaniard writes is so good he asks Erasmus to correct Vives so that he could be understood by the largest

possible number of people. Their times were difficult indeed and I only hope the superabundance of information in *Vives y Moro* does not present an obstacle for many Spanish-speaking readers to appreciate again the great humanist from Valencia. They will read his best works with the same appreciation and respect that his famous friend in London showed.

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