

Catalan Atlas worksheet

The Catalan Atlas was created in 1375. It was drawn by Abraham Cresques a Jewish cartographer (person who draws or produces maps) from the island of Majorca. Cresques was a highly skilled craftsman and also built clocks, compasses and other nautical instruments. The Catalan Atlas was commissioned by Prince John of Aragon and was gifted to his cousin Charles (who later became Charles VI, King of France). Today, it is in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, France.



The Catalan Atlas shows the world as it was understood in the 1300s. The map is made up of 6 panels (each panel consists of 2 sheets of vellum (prepared animal skin typically used as a material for writing on) that were originally were connected to each other). It does not provide a complete representation of the world as we know it today, but does show parts of Europe, Africa and Asia.

The Catalan Atlas is a cross between a marine chart and a mappa mundi (a type of medieval map created in Europe. These were often heavily illustrated and not meant to be used for navigational purposes). It represents the various regions of the world that were known at the time alongside some of the people who inhabited them- one of the people represented on the map is Mansa Musa, seen here. The map is designed to be laid flat and shows the North at the bottom rather than the top.



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Questions

- The Catalan Atlas includes depictions of various famous figures from the 1300s, including Mansa Musa. Who do you think would appear on a pictorial map like this today?
- Mansa Musa is one of the people depicted on the Catalan Atlas. Why do you think he is included?
- What differences are there between the Catalan Atlas and modern maps? Can you find out what is missing from the Catalan Atlas and why it is missing?
- Can you find any other examples of mappa mundi?

