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# MAPPING CENTRAL EUROPE: THE CATALAN ATLAS AND THE EUROPEAN IMAGINATION

*Clara Estow*

SURPRISINGLY, IN SPITE OF CENTRAL EUROPE'S INFLUENCE on Spanish history and Spain's future role in continental affairs from the 16th century on, medieval Iberian historiography has shown little interest in the subject.<sup>1</sup> References to Central European events and locales, albeit not entirely absent, appear scattered and peripheral. The dearth of current research on the topic is further incentive for the present investigation, which uses the fourteenth-century Catalan Atlas as a point of departure, arguably the single most important Iberian medieval document encompassing the entire region. Given the Atlas' careful and largely accurate depiction of the geography of Central Europe, the researcher can assess the mapmaker's vision and ways in which this representation relates to the written historical record and accords with depictions of other parts of Europe and the rest of the world. Lastly, this essay will gauge the degree of interest on the part of medieval Iberians in the fate of their distant neighbors with whom they would someday share the bonds of empire.

The Catalan Atlas has received well-deserved scholarly attention for its high artistic merit and vision, but only features pertinent to the subject of this essay will be addressed.<sup>2</sup> The work has been lauded for its historical significance, the

<sup>1</sup>The celebration of the 2003 annual meeting of the Mediterranean Studies Association in Budapest led me to consider what types of connections existed between medieval Iberia, my field of interest, and Hungary, more particularly how Central Europe was acknowledged and represented in Iberian sources of the Middle Ages. For the purposes of this paper, the term Central Europe is used rather loosely to refer to the geographical area between eastern France, the west coast of the Black Sea, and north of the Mediterranean basin. In addition to today's Scandinavian countries, it includes the regions of Germany, Poland, Romania, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia.

<sup>2</sup>The years immediately before and after the 500th anniversary of Columbus' first Atlantic crossing witnessed great activity in this area, much of it spurred by the work of historians of cartography whose interest in the ideological underpinnings of maps and the relationship between geographic representation and power re-energized the field and expanded substantially our ability to read and understand maps. J. B. Harley and David Woodward deserve much of the credit; see their *The History of Cartography*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1987); see the more recent Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore, 2001) and P. D. A. Harvey, *Medieval Maps*

thoroughness of its geographic representation of well-known and not so well-known lands, and for the artful and imaginative reconstruction of scenes and vignettes drawn from various written sources, some of dubious authenticity.<sup>3</sup> Imaginary entries in the Atlas, however, only add to our interest. The same is true for the choice of pictorial and narrative commentaries used to supplement geographic detail. These features contribute to making the Atlas into a fascinating and valuable artifact of its age and a rich source of information about how cultured western Europeans represented themselves and others.

The Catalan Atlas was produced on the island of Majorca in the 1370s. The largest of the Balearic Islands, Majorca became a possession of the Crown of Aragon/Cataluña in the thirteenth century and an important source of revenue and prestige for the Aragonese Crown. Even before its incorporation into Aragon/Cataluña, Majorca's strategic location rendered it a cosmopolitan emporium of people and goods from throughout the Mediterranean and northern Europe. The island was a waystation for European and African traders with commercial ties to the Low Countries and Asia, and a place where Christian, Muslim, and Jewish travelers, merchants and navigators practiced their respective crafts. It is not surprising, therefore, that the island did a lively cartographic business, and by the late fourteenth century Majorcan mapmakers enjoyed the reputation of being Europe's finest.<sup>4</sup>

Authorship of the Atlas has long been attributed to Abraham Cresques (b. 1325), a member of a Jewish family of uncertain origin—either from Catalonia or North Africa—residing in Majorca.<sup>5</sup> The technical complexity and encyclopedic quality of the work suggest that the project was likely executed in a workshop of skilled technicians, artists and illustrators under Cresques'

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(Toronto, 1991) and Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed their World* (London, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>The Atlas is often praised for the soundness of the information it contains, when compared with the fictional and legendary qualities of other medieval mappamundi.

<sup>4</sup>The bibliography on Catalan cartography is enormous and the titles that follow are merely suggestive; *La cartografia de la Península Ibèrica u la seva extensió al continent americà* (Barcelona, 1991); *La cartografia catalana* (Barcelona, 2000); Julio Rey Pastor and Ernesto García Camarero, *La cartografia mallorquina* (Madrid, 1960); Fuat Sezgin, *The Contribution of the Arabic-Islamic Geographers to the Formation of the World Map* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), Gerald R. Crone, *Maps and their Makers: An Introduction to the History of Cartography* (Folkestone, 1978).

<sup>5</sup>Questions have been raised about the correct identification of Cresques as the author of the Atlas; see Jean Michel Massing, "Observations and Beliefs: The World of the Catalan Atlas," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, ed. Jay A. Levenson (New Haven, 1991):26-33, at p. 26, n. 1. The designation of Cresques as a Jew here echoes most references to him and his family in documents of the age; see, for instance, A. Rubió i Lluch, *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana medieval* [hereafter *Documents*], 2 v., facsimile ed. (Barcelona, 2000), i:295, doc. CCCXXII, i:345-6, doc. CCCLXXXVI; ii:245, doc. CCLI; ii:253, doc. CCLX; ii:255, doc. CCLXII.

supervision, rather than by a single hand. Cresques himself, however, appears in contemporary sources as both mapmaker and illustrator, making it is possible that he, in fact, was the Atlas' sole author.

The Aragonese royal house was an important client of the island's cartographers, and Cresques was a frequent recipient of their patronage. In the mid-fourteenth century, King Pere III (of Catalonia, Pedro IV of Aragon) ordered that all ships under the Aragonese flag be equipped with at least two sea charts,<sup>6</sup> a windfall, no doubt, for the mapmaking trade. Both he and his son and successor Joan I were bibliophiles, energetic collectors, and patrons of the arts. They commissioned several maps of their own from Majorcan mapmakers, one of which might have served as direct inspiration for the Catalan Atlas.<sup>7</sup> To date, however, no identifiable precursors have been found; the Atlas that has survived is the version completed in the 1370s dedicated to king Charles V of France (1337–1380).<sup>8</sup>

A learned ruler and renowned bibliophile himself, Charles' extensive art, manuscript, and book collection became the foundation of France's Louvre Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale. There is some question as to the exact date the Atlas arrived in France, though it appears that a Catalan atlas was delivered to Paris in 1381, where it has remained ever since. Today, it is part of the Bibliothèque's map collection and is available on the BN's website.<sup>9</sup> Charles is

<sup>6</sup>A virtual version of the Atlas may be found at [www.bnf.fr/enluminures/texte/atx3](http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/texte/atx3). He is known both as Pedro IV of Aragon and Pere III of Catalunya "the Ceremonious"; his long and energetic rule led to a number of significant reforms, including the reorganization of the royal navy (1354); see T. N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Oxford, 1986), 117; see also *Pere III. Chronicle*, trans. M. Hillgarth, 2 vols. (Toronto, 1980).

<sup>7</sup>In September 1379, for example, Joan commissioned a mappamundi that would explain everything reported by a Majorcan recently returned from Tartaria and the Indies; *Documents*, i:279-80 (doc. CCCIII); see also i:345-6 (doc. CCCLXXXVI), i:363-4 (doc. CCCXCIX) and ii:202 (doc. CCXIII).

<sup>8</sup>Francesc Reliño, *The Shaping of Africa: Cosmographic Discourse and Cartographic Science in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002), 101, and n. 61, p. 112 mistakenly cites, in *Documents* (docs. CCCXXI and CCLXV) i:294, 251 to account for the fate of the Atlas; he notes that Charles wanted a "mappamundi representing all that could be shown of the eastern and western parts of the world." Document CCLXV in *Documents* i:251 is a 1373 letter written by the then Infant Joan of Aragon to a Majorcan cartographer commissioning a "carta de navegar" not a mappamundi. The document that mentions a "mapa mundo catalá," (CCCXXI, pp. 294-5) is dated November, 1381 and is (due to a typesetter's error that has caused great confusion) mistakenly addressed to Charles V instead of his successor Charles VI. Charles had died the year before, in late 1380. As for the Infant Joan, he had to wait seven years to inherit the throne and rule as Joan I, as Reliño refers to him for the earlier date.

<sup>9</sup>The complete Atlas appears on the Bibliothèque's website, and is available in a CD-ROM produced by the Bibliothèque. Numerous other Internet sites contain all or parts of the Atlas as well. There is an excellent facsimile edition of the entire work, commissioned to commemorate the Atlas' 600th anniversary in 1975, *L'atlas catala de Cresques Abraham* (Barcelona, 1975). This portfolio edition also includes useful critical commentaries on the map; the citations used in this essay are based on the *atlas catala*'s transcriptions. There is also a facsimile edition in Castilian, *Atlas catalán de 1375*

known in French history with the well-deserved sobriquet of *le Sage*. Unlike other rulers whose devotion to learning was thought to have distracted them from more important affairs of state—Alfonso *el Sabio* of Castile comes to mind here—Charles *le Sage* enjoys an excellent reputation as much for his good taste as for the soundness of his statecraft, namely his strengthening of centralized institutions and a decisive foreign policy that turned the tide of the Hundred Years War in France's favor, reversing some 25 years in which the English enjoyed the upper hand.

Geographic proximity and dynastic and historical bonds between Aragon and France might be sufficient to account for the Atlas' destination in a French royal library. A more personal connection, however, may have played a role. In 1380, Violante de Bar, niece of Charles V, became the third wife of the future Aragonese ruler, the Infant Joan, then Duke of Gerona, who would inherit the throne upon his father's death in 1387. Like his formidable predecessor, Joan was a serious reader and highly cultured individual; his extant correspondence reveals an avid bibliophile—in several languages—a penchant for literature and music, and an interest in scientific and technical instruments, treatises, and maps.<sup>10</sup> Violante, his wife, was in every way his intellectual equal, curious and accomplished, albeit more energetic than her husband. By all accounts, they made a formidable couple. Even before Joan's ascent to the throne, Violante involved herself actively in affairs of state, although her efforts were not universally appreciated, in particular by her father-in-law.<sup>11</sup> After her husband's death, she spent the rest of her long life in Barcelona, where she died in 1431.<sup>12</sup> Like her uncle and husband, Violante appreciated art and literature and is credited (and criticized) for having brought French learning and refinement to the Aragonese court.<sup>13</sup> She was also an eager correspondent, and an extensive collection of extant letters (many addressed to her husband) awaits publication.<sup>14</sup>

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based on a BN manuscript version the map in Spanish, eds. Joan Vernet and David Romano (Barcelona, 1961); see also G. Grosjean, *Mappa Mundi. Der katalanische Weltatlas vom Jahre 1375* (Zurich, 1977).

<sup>10</sup>See for example in *Documents*, ii:247-8 (doc. CCLIII), ii:314-15 (docs. CCCXL and CCCXVI), ii:363-4 (doc. CCCCIX).

<sup>11</sup>For a brief description of Joan's reign, see Bisson, *The Medieval Crown*, 120-25.

<sup>12</sup>Violante's father in law, King Pere III (Pedro IV of Aragon) disapproved of his son's choice of a wife, a dislike Pere took to the grave. In the account of his own reign, Pere says little of Violante (Yolant) but reports that she "had many children but none lived except a daughter named Yolant." The princess married Louis II of Naples; see Pere III's *Chronicle*, ii-594.

<sup>13</sup>The Catalan writer Bernat Metge (d. 1413), Violante's contemporary, prominent intellectual, and Aragonese court official, praises her for her liberality—in contrast to women in general, whom he chastises for their innate avarice—for her intelligence and great accomplishments; in his principal work *Lo Somni*, in a section devoted to several Aragonese queens whose virtue Metge celebrates, he writes about Violante: "*¿Qui et poria dir, a ésser sufficient relador, de las virtuts de la regina dona*

We know that Charles V was a patron of Christine de Pisan's, arguably the Middle Ages' first woman professional writer. It should not surprise us, therefore, that Violante, the king's niece, grew up in an environment that provided ample opportunities for a female to nourish her intellectual skills. And while it is not yet possible to document Violante's direct role with regard to the Atlas, we know that her husband made the arrangements to deliver an atlas to France in 1381. It would be Charles V's son and heir, Charles VI (*le Bien-Aimé*, 1380–1422), Violante's first cousin, who would have taken delivery of it in 1381.<sup>15</sup>

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The Atlas' first two sections serve as an introduction to the last four, the mappamundi. The introductory panels, pictorially and in narrative form, explain the origins of the physical universe and record fourteenth-century wisdom on matters pertaining to cosmology, astronomy, astrology, and meteorology. In this particular respect, the Atlas is a judicious medieval compendium of knowledge, combining biblical sources with authoritative classical texts, from authors such as Pliny and Isidore of Seville.<sup>16</sup>

The mappamundi proper is the second section of the Atlas and consists of the map of the world in four folios enhanced with narrative details of medieval travel accounts to Asia, chiefly Marco Polo's. The Atlas differs from preceding works of its type by representing the world in a series of flat plates. Prevailing models, as custom prescribed, enclosed the world in the "rigid geometry" of a

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*Violant, muller de mom senyor qui assí és? No m'hi tinc per bastant, però diré-te'n breument, per no tenir temps, ço que poré. Natura femenina és naturalmente a avarícia inclinada, e aquesta, contra natura, és estada la pus liberal que haja llest ne oyt, que em record ... La sua casa és estada, e és encara, temple de liberalitat, e molt pus ocupada en donar que en reebre. De subtilitat singular, d'entendre, de comprendre, de gosar emprendre grans fets, no pens que persona del món vivent li'n port avantatge; e jo deig-ho saber entre los altres, qui de mon flac poder l'he servida llongament.*" See B. Metge, *Lo Somni*, ed. Lola Badia (Barcelona, 1999), 156. Not all queens in Metge's list deserve the encomia he bestows on them, as Badia points out, 226-7. In Violante's case, her liberality could be read as a penchant for overspending in lavish entertainments, decorations, and books of poetry and adventure. The moralist Francesch Eiximenis, another influential contemporary and notorious misogynist, criticizes the queen and her profligate habits. Violante's direct involvement in the political affairs of the kingdom, in support of her indecisive husband, elicited resentment as well; see *Obras de Bernat Metge*, ed. Martín de Riquer (Barcelona, 1959), 342-3, n. 31.

<sup>14</sup>Dawn Bratsch-Prince, a professor of Spanish at Iowa State University, plans to edit this correspondence and maintains a webpage on Violante.

<sup>15</sup>Two letters from the Infant Joan written 5 November 1381 pertain to making delivery of the mappamundi to the French king; the king in question is Charles VI; see *Documents*, 294-5.

<sup>16</sup>For an extensive discussion of the Atlas' sources, see *L'atlas catala*.

circle.<sup>17</sup> Other features of the Atlas set it apart from traditional mappamundi.<sup>18</sup> Medieval maps, typically, served theological and symbolic purposes and were allegorical renderings of a round space encapsulating a mixture of historical episodes, beliefs, and lore. The Atlas departs from this allegorical model by its realism and accuracy, thus its fame as “a world map built around a portolan chart.”<sup>19</sup> *Portolanos* were used to guide sailors to a particular destination. Originating in Italian ports in the thirteenth century, they charted actual voyages, chiefly around the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and northwest Europe. *Portolanos* were drawn from observation and practical seafaring, were simple and inexpensive, and were drawn to serve as aids to navigation.<sup>20</sup>

Since European sailors in the late fourteenth century did not as a rule navigate Far Eastern waters, the Atlas’ lines crisscrossing much of Asia are purely imaginary. In fact, the Atlas specifically differs from its most immediate predecessor, the 1339 Angelino Dulcert map<sup>21</sup>—the first of the famous surviving works of the so-called Majorcan cartographic school—by drawing and rendering navigable a section devoted to the Far East, a region unaccounted for in the traditional charts that inspired both works. Moreover, the use of polychromatic images, extensive commentaries, and luxurious detail sets the Atlas apart and justifies its destiny: to adorn a royal library rather than serve on board a ship.

A second major cartographic innovation is the Atlas’ use of flat plates with room for projecting landmasses to the east and west. Asia, for example, is portrayed as a complete continent for the first time. Since European knowledge of Asia came from narrative sources, rather than European sailors, the Atlas’ crisscrossing rhumb lines foster the sense that the continent is reachable and navigable; the numerous figures and legends dotting the landscape render it knowable and familiar.

As a world map built around a portolan chart, therefore, the Atlas is most precise when drawing the well-traveled Mediterranean basin. The general contours of the coastal regions, north and south, are totally recognizable, as is the map’s rendition of parts of Africa. Asia is full of interest and allure, notwithstanding the simplistic shape of the coastal regions of the Far East and the continent’s southeast. Central Europe lies somewhere in between; while its

<sup>17</sup>The issue is discussed by Relaño, *Shaping of Africa*, 7-22, 98-102. Notwithstanding the advantages of flat plates with regard to accommodating regions to the east and west, areas in the north and south are not highly detailed.

<sup>18</sup>Mappamundi are discussed in David Woodward, “Medieval mappaemundi,” *The History of Cartography*, 2 vols. eds. J. B. Harvey and David Woodward (Chicago and London, 1987), v. 1, 286-370.

<sup>19</sup>Henry Davis, in [henry-davis.com/MAPS/LMwebpages/235mono.html](http://henry-davis.com/MAPS/LMwebpages/235mono.html), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>For the history of portolanos, see Tony Campbell, “Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500,” in *History of Cartography*, v. 1, 371-463.

<sup>21</sup>It is also known as the Angelino Dalorto map.

general geography is recognizable and several places and areas are identified, the region's history and lore are almost entirely ignored.

Both shores of the Mediterranean contain as many place names as could fit the space, with the highest concentration of names along the coastlines of Iberia and France. An anomalous detail in an otherwise correct scheme is the rather large size of a few of the principal Mediterranean islands, in particular Majorca, Corsica, Sardinia, and Cyprus. As an islander, perhaps Cresques was trying to minimize their relative isolation by making them larger! To the northwest, the southern half of an oversized Ireland and the southern and eastern coasts of England are also heavily annotated. Europe's northern coast, on the other hand, is poorly drawn and rather bare; regular features of its geography, such as the North Sea and the Baltic coasts, are hardly recognizable. Inland, west of France, the continent appears stretched out in its east-west dimensions.<sup>22</sup>

Major European and African mountain ranges are drawn both as birds' claws—the Atlas mountains in North Africa and the Alps—while the mountainous coastline of Norway is shown as a continuous square composed of a chain-like arrangement of rocks. Others mountains, namely the Pyrenees and the Bavarian Alps, are drawn in green, as is Mt. Sinai. The Balkans, however, appear as a series of connected mounds, colored in yellow. Inland cities are shown with fortified walls around them, the number of red-lined towers indicating their relative size and importance; Christian cities are noted by a cross atop one of the towers; for others, as in eastern Russia, a dome caps them. No image of a single ruler is drawn for any part of Europe, in contrast with territories of the Near East, Africa, and Asia. Here figures are noted for their historical importance, some reasonably contemporary, such as the African king Mansa Musa, others, like the "Arabian" queen of Sheba, from the distant past. Still others are apocryphal, as is the case of the Christian King Stephen. Perhaps, as F. Relaño notes, the medieval mapmakers' imagination focused on the unknown rather than the known.

Since medieval maps did not include territorial borders separating recognized kingdoms or autonomous political entities, several are noted in large bi-color capital letters and through the use of heraldry, chiefly flags. This stylistic practice was also common in prose narratives and is one of the distinguishing qualities of the anonymous *El Libro del conocimiento de todos los reinos*, a late fourteenth-century text that shares a number of features with the Catalan Atlas, some of which will be discussed below.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup>A similar distortion appears in a recent American Airlines route map!

<sup>23</sup>Presumed to have been written during the last quarter of the fourteenth century by an unknown author generally referred to as the Anonymous Franciscan, the book recounts the adventures of a couch potato whose itinerary and use of detail are highly reminiscent of, although not identical to, the Catalan Atlas. It is presumed that the author of the narrative and the mapmaker used common sources. For a full discussion of the text and a bilingual edition, see *El libro del conocimiento de*



Before examining in detail how the Atlas represents Central Europe, it is useful to consider, however briefly, historical links between Iberia and Central Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a period during which Iberian rulers consolidated their frontiers at home and looked for opportunities to project their interests abroad. Though scattered, the evidence points to a fairly consistent level of contact; these ties, however, appear to have escaped the mapmaker's attention.

In the thirteenth century, the dramatic territorial gains of peninsular Christian rulers against the Muslims coincided with the westward advance of the Mongols and the warriors of the Golden Horde, which by 1242 had reached Poland, Hungary, and Croatia. Western European rulers deemed the Mongols potential allies in Christendom's struggle against Islam, especially in the Holy Land, and diplomatic advances were made to secure their aid. St. Louis of France, among others, was strongly committed to this course.

These concerns, and western Christendom's still enthusiastic crusading spirit, expanded the geographic vision of educated Europeans, while shifting political and religious frontiers fostered a heightened awareness of the vulnerability and penetrability of Christendom's borders. Such a threat, however, does not find its way to the map. Instead, the Atlas' rich pictorial rendition of the kingdom of the Golden Horde and its ruler Jani-Beg (d. 1357) locates them in Asia Minor, north of the Caspian Sea, in what turns out to be an entirely separate plate.

Iberian historical chronicles regularly report on contemporary events outside their kingdoms and by recording noteworthy information—royal accessions, the election of new popes, wars and their outcome, major political events—they are an excellent source for gauging official interest in events abroad. Alfonso X of Castile's—the Wise—*Primera crónica general de España*, for one, aims at recounting “de las grandes cosas que acahescieron por el mundo, desde que fue començado fastal nuestro tiempo” (all the great things that have occurred throughout the world, from its beginning to our time). It is the first historical chronicle written in the Castilian language, a project the king initiated in the 1270s. Demonstrating a profound historical consciousness, the account describes the major stages of European history, including migration and war among Germanic tribes and their contact with the Romans in Central Europe. The Vandals, Suevi, Alans, and Goths receive the most attention, given their eventual presence in many parts of the Iberian Peninsula in the fifth century. And while each group is recognized as a distinct entity, all are praised for their bellicosity

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*todos los reinos (The Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms)*, ed. and trans. Nancy F. Marino (Tempe, 1999), xxix-xxxi. Marino disputes the generally held view that the book was written by a Franciscan missionary, suggesting instead that the writer might have been a herald, xxxviii-xlviii.

and courage. The “hugnos,” who would eventually settle in Hungary, are singled out for more extensive treatment. They might have elicited the chronicler’s interest for the fact that their inauspicious beginnings belied future success, chiefly territorial gains that once threatened the frontiers of “las Francias.”<sup>24</sup>

The chronicle tells us that the *hugnos* were slender, small in stature, dark, curly haired, and barely resembled human beings; they were also arrogant by nature. The tongue they spoke was so strange, only they understood each other. Their faces had holes for noses and small openings for eyes, which rendered their appearance ugly and deformed. They succeeded in expelling the Goths from the land of Scicia (Scythia), not by force but by fright! (“No tanto por guerra cuemo por espantosos de uista.”) But they were not all bad; they were quick on their feet, fast riders, and good shots with the bow. They killed plenty of deer, the staple of their lives. Lastly, thanks to their mingling with other people and coupling with other women, the *hugnos* lost their strangeness and, in time, began to resemble other men.<sup>25</sup>

The late fourteenth-century *Libro del conocimiento* contributes a couple of noteworthy details to the historical connection between Iberia and Central Europe. In one example of inventive revisionism, our traveling narrator visiting the kingdom of *Boemia* and the city of Prague, mentions the start of the river Vandalor, near the land known as Avandalia, from where its people “in ancient times conquered Andaluzia in Spain and gave it its name, that is Andaluzia.”<sup>26</sup> He, no doubt, is referring to the Vandals, who settled in Andalucía—while the actual name Andalucía derives from the Arabic *al-Andalus*—and the anonymous author’s attempt to minimize the role of Islam in the history of the peninsula is one of the earliest examples of an important historiographical debate.<sup>27</sup> The traveler also visits Gotia, a province between Suevia and Noruega, “whose people conquered Spain and were lords of it for a long time.”<sup>28</sup> This is a reference to the Visigoths, who entered the Peninsula in the 5th century and ruled until their defeat by the Muslims in 711. We hear no more about them,

<sup>24</sup>*Primera crónica general de España*, ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1977), v. 1, 207-30 ff.

<sup>25</sup>*Primera crónica general*, v. 1, 225-6. I am grateful to Carmen Benito Vessels, University of Maryland, for this reference.

<sup>26</sup>“Et las gentes desta tierra Avandalia conquyrieron antiguamente el Andaluzia de España et pusieronle su nonbre, conviene a saber, Andaluzia.” *Libro del conocimiento*, 12, 13. The *Primera crónica general* does not make this connection.

<sup>27</sup>This issue, thankfully, has been put to rest after consuming a great deal of energy in the 1950s and 60s. For a summary view, see J. O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca, 1975), 18-20.

<sup>28</sup>*Libro del conocimiento*, 16, 17. The *Primera crónica general* notes their Central European origin, from the great island of Scança, the frozen northern part of which was not navigable; the Goths migrated south to a land they called Gothiscança, after themselves, and went on to conquer other lands, 216ff.

except that their native land is very cold and frozen, an observation echoed in the Catalan Atlas.

Alfonso X's interest in Central Europe grew during his negotiations to secure the crown of the Holy Roman Empire. As the son of Fernando III of Castile (d. 1252) and Elizabeth (Beatriz) of Swabia, a Bavarian-born princess, Alfonso based his claims on his mother's Staufen lineage and spent considerable effort and hefty sums of money seeking the election, the so-called *fecho del imperio* in Castilian history.<sup>29</sup> His career, traditionally noted for impressive cultural achievements and equally impressive administrative blunders,<sup>30</sup> is now being reassessed, and Alfonso is credited for his contributions to the "construction of Europe," a theme enjoying great popularity at the moment. Noteworthy in this regard are Alfonso's fiscal and legal reforms, his approach to religious minorities, and the success of his works on astromagic.<sup>31</sup>

Alfonso's imperial ambitions led to frequent mention of *Alemaña*, the name given to the hoped-for throne;<sup>32</sup> while his dreams ultimately failed, Alfonso energetically promoted himself abroad in an effort to gain support and strengthen his case. In 1257, five years before his hopes were definitively dashed, Alfonso negotiated an agreement with King Haakon IV of Norway, himself an imperial candidate, that led to the arrival in Castile of the Norwegian princess Cristina in 1257; she married the Archbishop-elect of Seville Felipe, one of Alfonso's brothers. En route, the princess passed through Aragon, where King Jaime I, taken by her beauty, offered to marry her himself.<sup>33</sup> Alfonso also assisted Maria of Brienne, Empress of Constantinople, in ransoming her son, another Felipe,

<sup>29</sup>The complicated claims and counterclaims of the various aspirants to the crown of the Holy Roman Empire will not be recounted here; for details see "El sueño del imperio (1254–1261)" in Manuel González Jiménez, *Alfonso X el Sabio: Historia de un reinado*, 2nd ed. (Burgos, 1999), 61–88 and next note. The account of his reign reports that the electors could not decide on an emperor from "the land of Alemaña and sent messengers to Alfonso, so great was his fame throughout the world, for his greatness and goodness and generosity"; see *Crónica del rey Alfonso décimo*, in *Biblioteca de autores españoles* 66 (Madrid, 1953): 13; an English translation of this work has been published recently, *Chronicle of Alfonso X*, trans. Shelby Thacker and José Escobar (Lexington, 2002). The *Primera crónica* does not cover Alfonso's reign.

<sup>30</sup>This is the judgment of J. O'Callaghan, North America's foremost authority on Alfonso; his bibliography on the subject is extensive; see, in particular, his *Alfonso X, the Cortes, and Government in Medieval Spain* (Aldershot, 1998).

<sup>31</sup>Spain's membership in the European Community and the effort to highlight common bonds with other European nations have influenced this approach and is the subject of a lavishly produced collection of essays by Spain's most distinguished medievalists; see *Alfonso X: Aportaciones de un rey castellano a la construcción de Europa*, ed. Miguel Rodríguez Llopis (Murcia, 1997).

<sup>32</sup>*Crónica del rey Alfonso*, 13.

<sup>33</sup>This information is derived from the Norwegian king's chronicle; cited in Manuel González Jiménez, *Alfonso X*, 84–5, n. 53. Jaime was 45 years old at the time.

captive of the Sultan of Egypt.<sup>34</sup> A separate episode relates how an Egyptian delegation sent by the Mamluk ruler of Egypt reached Castile in 1261, dispatched with the purpose of seeking a military alliance against the Mongolian threat, expected to be felt by Alfonso as well. This time, however, it was a Muslim ruler reaching out to a Christian against a putative shared enemy! Since the Mongolian advance had ceased some twenty years earlier, the Egyptian entreaty makes sense only in the context of Alfonso's imperial ambitions, which would soon fail for unrelated reasons. The Egyptian ambassadors came bearing exotic gifts, a giraffe and a zebra among them. Several ivory pieces and a stuffed crocodile that traveled with the delegation survive into our own day and are now displayed in one of the cloisters of Seville's cathedral.

Alfonso's Castilian successors remained abreast of developments in Central Europe, in particular matters related to the politically charged election of the Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>35</sup> Curiously, some three centuries later, Alfonso the Wise's imperial dreams would be fulfilled as Charles I of Spain became Holy Roman Emperor and ruled as Charles V.

Aragon, the second most important medieval Iberian kingdom, established its own connections with Central Europe. Alfonso II's daughter, Constanza de Aragón, married Emmerich, King of Hungary (1196–1204) and, upon his death, the Holy Roman Emperor Fredrick II Hohenstaufen (1212–50).<sup>36</sup> Her grandnephew, Jaume I of Aragon (1213–76) married, for the second time, Princess Violante (Yolant, 1235–51) daughter of Andrew II, King of Hungary and his wife, Queen Violante of Constantinople, daughter of Byzantine Emperor Pedro and his wife Yolant, of the French royal house.<sup>37</sup> Known in Catalan history as Violante de Hungría, she was born in Esztergen and died in the Peninsula. Her daughter with Jaume, another Violante (de Aragón, 1252–84) married Alfonso X of Castile. In ways reminiscent of yet another Violante (de Bar), mentioned at the start of this essay, Queen Violante (de Hungría) was a formidable presence at court, and instrumental in her husband's policies

<sup>34</sup> Alfonso paid the entire ransom, although the Pope and the King of France were prepared to help out; González Jiménez, *Alfonso X*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> The chronicle of Alfonso XI, for example, devotes a long chapter to recounting the simultaneous election of two separate emperors and the battles that ensued; see *Corónica de don Alfonso el Onceno*, BAE 66 (Madrid, 1953): 221–2.

<sup>36</sup> *Primera crónica* reports on these marriages and adds that her son with the second husband married the daughter of the Duke of Austria, v. 2, 478.

<sup>37</sup> Using a prudish and scolding tone, the editor of the chronicle of Jaume's reign chastises the king for his excessive lust, of which his marriage to Violante is a prime example, because the king's first marriage had to be annulled, on previously vetted claims of consanguinity; *The Chronicle of James I, King of Aragon*, ed. Pascual de Gayangos, 2 vols. (London, 1883), v. 1, xxvi. For an interesting discussion of how the king viewed his marriage options, see v. 1, 225. Brief mention of these marriages is made in the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of San Juan de la Peña*, trans. and ed. Lynn H. Nelson (Philadelphia, 1991), 62–3.

pertaining to Majorca.<sup>38</sup> Given the paucity of published information about these figures, it is difficult to reconstruct the motives and negotiations that produced these dynastic alliances, much less assess their significance. The Atlas observes little about the queen's native land and says nothing about the threat that the Byzantine Empire, in particular, and Central Europe, in general, faced from the Ottoman Turks.

Hungary also finds its way into a Catalan rendition of a well-known medieval tale, the mid-fourteenth century *Història de la Filla de rei d'Hungria*. It tells the story of a king who, bereft after the loss of his beloved wife, searches far and wide for a wife as beautiful as the one he lost. Only their daughter compares in beauty and refinement to the dead queen, and the princess's hands, the king's particular weakness, are even more beautiful than her mother's. Urged by his counselors to marry his own daughter, the king sets aside any moral and religious qualms and is determined to pursue her. More virtuous and prudent than her father, she cuts off her hands to diminish her appeal. Furious at her defiance, the king sets her adrift, alone, at sea. She survives the ordeal, marries, has a child, and finds happiness with the Count of Provence. When she reveals the truth about her origins to her husband, he is determined to travel to Hungary and meet the king. Meanwhile, an evil mother-in-law conspires to send the heroine and child adrift. Again, they survive and find refuge in a convent. One day, praying and looking at the hands of a statue of the Virgin Mary, to whom she is devoted, our heroine's own hands are miraculously restored; she and her husband are subsequently reunited. Upon seeing her hands, he at first does not believe that she is his beloved wife. The story has a happy ending as follows:

E visqueren ensems ab gran benenança aitant com a Deu plagué e hagueren fills e filles maridades: la una fo muller del rei d'Aragó e l'altre del rei de Castella. L'altre del rei d'Anglaterra e l'altre del rei de França. E d'aquel eixí lo llinatge del rei d'Aragó e tots los altres.<sup>39</sup>

The broad outlines of the narrative, including the threat of incest, self-mutilation, and the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary appear in similar stories common throughout medieval Europe and are not particularly original. However, for our purposes, the singling out of the daughter of the king of Hungary as the foundational figure in the ruling houses of Aragon, Castile, England, and France—as the end of the story indicates—is noteworthy.

We also know of several Central Europeans who traveled to Iberia to participate in peninsular wars. For example, among those who died in 1350

<sup>38</sup>She brought to Aragon a dowry of 10,000 silver and 200 gold marks, in addition to rights over a duchy in Flanders; see *Diccionario de Historia de España*, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1969), v. 3, 1014.

<sup>39</sup>*Història de la filla del rei d'Hungria*, ed. Veronica Orazi (Lucca, 1998), 83.

during Alfonso XI's siege of Gibraltar was the Count of Lons, from *Alemania*.<sup>40</sup> Fernando I, king of Aragon and his successors recognized several other Central Europeans by appointing them to the order of *Jarra y Grifo*; the earliest was an Oswald von Wolkstein (d. 1445) who had fought in the Christian conquest of Ceuta. Emperor Segismund (d. 1443) was extended the privilege of granting such honors himself.<sup>41</sup>

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Albeit scattered and piecemeal, contacts and relations linking Iberians and Central Europeans took place with some regularity, finding their way into such texts as the *Primera crónica* and *Libro del conocimiento*. The Catalan Atlas, however, is remarkably silent about any but the most basic matters, with perhaps the singular exception of heraldry. As befits the sumptuary needs of its recipient, a royal library, the Atlas makes full use of multicolor flags and emblems. For Central Europe, flags appear for Suessia, Skarsa (Sweden, Skaraborg); Noruega (Norway); Bregis (Bergen); Dasia, Viber (Denmark, Viborg); Allamania (Germany); Insula de Visbi (Gottland); Bohèmia (Prague); Polònia, Cuitat de Leo (Poland, Leopoldis); Rússia (Tifer); Perum; Baldachinto; Caffa (the northwest coast of the Black Sea); Boques del Danubi (the mouth of the Danube); Gallacy, (Galata); Hungria, Albargala (Hungary); and Narent (Narenta on the Adriatic coast). In spite of their symbolism, emblematic meaning, color, and unique design, these flags, with the single exception of Hungary's, receives no special attention. For the Hungarian tri-color, the Atlas notes that the use of red, gold, and blue was adopted upon the arrival in Hungary of the French house of Anjou.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Charles Robert (1308–42) was the founder of the Hungarian branch of the Anjou line; he and his successors ruled Hungary and Poland for much of the fourteenth century. This particular notation might have been included as a gesture toward the French king, to whom the Atlas was dedicated. It is also worth noting that the island of Majorca, enlarged at least five-fold, is drawn entirely draped with the Aragonese flag; the rest of the Mediterranean islands, while also enlarged, are uniformly filled with spirals.

Written in large capital letters are the territories of Noruega, Suessia, Dasia, Allamaia, Bavaria, Panonia, Polonia, and Burgaria. The lone annotation for the entire inland region is for Leo (Lvov), which the Atlas locates in Poland—and is in today's Ukraine. The accompanying text reads: "To this city arrive merchants

<sup>40</sup>*Corónica de Alfonso Onceno*, 390.

<sup>41</sup>Franz-Heinz von Hye, "Testimonios sobre órdenes de caballería españolas en Austria y estados vecinos Bohemia, Alemania, Suiza y Hungría," *En la España medieval* (Madrid, 1993), 169–87.

<sup>42</sup>See Gabriel Llompert, i Moragues, "Aspects iconogràfics," in *L'atlas català*, 41–56.

who come from the countries of the Levant and reach Flanders through the sea of Manega. This sea is known as the Manega Sea and the Gotland and Sweden Sea. It is known that this sea is frozen six months of the year, from mid-October to mid-March, and it is difficult to sail as it is to travel on land; and the climate is such because of the cold in the mountains.”<sup>43</sup> Clearly the Atlas’ portolan roots inform this particular comment, as the mapmaker was clearly familiar with the characteristics of continental trade routes.

At the same time, no Central European individual is cited or portrayed, nor are any products of any sort listed; no inland means of transportation are identified; no flora, fauna, or natural resources are depicted. Unlike the Caspian Sea, where a rather elaborate manned sailing vessel appears, the Black Sea is empty, we know that it was navigable and that its principal ports had been charted in the *portolanos* used by Mediterranean sailors and merchants since the thirteenth century.<sup>44</sup> The Atlas includes meager geographic detail, largely the course of the region’s principal rivers, the Rhine, the Elbe, the Oder, the Vistula, and the Danube, evidence that the region held little allure for the mapmaker. A simple comparison of the number of places included in selected regions confirms Central Europe’s lack of consequence. Sixty-six names appear in Ireland; 10 in Scotland, 16 in Wales, 52 in England, 31 in Portugal; Corsica has 21, Sardinia 46 (!); the Azores 6, Madeira 4, and the Canaries 11. Over 224 are included in the southern Mediterranean. For all of Scandinavia—including Sweden, Norway and Denmark, there are 26; the coast of the North Sea has 22, and the Baltic 25. The interior of Central Europe lists 13, Bohemia 21, Panonia (Romania) 10, Polonia (including Hungria and Buda) 20.

The Atlas was composed during a period of great mineral activity and production in Central Europe; gold was mined in the south Tyrol; Kremnitz and Lvov, in today’s Ukraine; Saxony, Bohemia, Silesia, and regions of Hungary and Slovakia, and the rich silver mines of Serbia and Bosnia were in full production by the fourteenth century.<sup>45</sup> While the failed expedition to seek African gold in the 1340s by the Catalan merchant Jaume de Ferrer’s, makes it to the map,<sup>46</sup>—

<sup>43</sup>“Ciutat de Leó. En esta ciutat vénan alguns merchaders los quals vénan ves [les] pertides de levant per esta mar de la Manya en Fflandes.” As for the Sea of Manega, “E sapiats que aquesta mar és congalada .VI. messes de l’ayn, so és saber ...”; *Atlas catala*, 112. A similar comment about the cold appears in *Libro del conocimiento*, 16.

<sup>44</sup>I owe this information to an oral communication with Professor Rossina Kostova of the University of Veliko Turnovo in Bulgaria; a 2003 MSA Conference participant, she studies medieval settlement patterns along the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea.

<sup>45</sup>For gold, see my “Reflections on Gold,” *Mediaevistik* 6 (1993): 85-120; for silver, Ivor Wilks, “Wangara, Akan, and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” *Mines of Silver and Gold in the Americas*, ed. Peter Blackwell (Aldershot, 1997): 1-39.

<sup>46</sup>The image of a ship carrying Jaume de Ferrer, Catalan merchant and three crewmen is shown off the northwest coast of Africa, with the accompanying text noting that they had sailed in 1346, in search of gold.

revealing Europe's interest in the precious metal—the Atlas overlooks Central Europe's considerable mineral wealth.

The omission is puzzling yet consistent with the mapmaker's general disinterest in the region. Historians of cartography—Tony Campbell, J. B. Harley, David Woodward and, more recently, Jeremy Black—have argued that maps should be examined for meaning beyond their apparent purpose of representing abstractly geographic space. Looking at Central Europe, it is worth speculating what, indeed, may be read into the map's disinterest.

This exercise takes on particular importance because in the last couple of decades the Atlas has been interpreted as a document that presaged European expansion overseas at the close of the Middle Ages. While J. B. Harley cautions us not attempt to use maps to foresee the future, the Atlas, in its depiction of the Atlantic Islands and the Orient, even its inclusion of the unfortunate Jaume de Ferrer, renders the unknown more knowable, reduces the anxiety and uncertainty of venturing into distant lands and waters, and promises rich rewards, such as diamonds, pearls, and gold to those willing to undertake the journey. From such a perspective, the Atlas' obvious disinterest in Central Europe indicates that those lands did not beckon the mapmaker, the authorities that informed its content, nor the patrons who commissioned it. Dynastic unions between royal houses, as between Aragon and Hungary, were not a sufficient inducement to record additional detail about their homeland or sustain interest in their affairs.

Yet even in its prescience with regard to European expansion, the Atlas disappoints. It broadens the sense of geographic possibilities to the east and the west, while failing to incorporate important nascent developments that would prove just as significant in shaping the future of Western Europe and the Iberian peninsula: the success of the Ottoman Turks, the defeat and collapse of Byzantium, the rise of the house of Hapsburg, and the religious challenges of reformists such as Jan Hus. Moreover, the imperial throne that eluded Alfonso X in the thirteenth century would eventually be won by his descendant, Charles V, eleven generations later. It is impossible to conceive of Imperial Spain without the Hapsburgs and the Central European connection, just as it is to ignore the emergence of the Turks and the fall of Constantinople as the impetus for European expansion in the late fifteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, none of these factors, already evident when the Atlas was being composed, seem to have preoccupied the mapmakers. Perhaps the time has come to re-examine the map from a Central Europeanist perspective. It might very well turn out that the Catalan Atlas is truer to its portolan roots than to its historical mission; like the sailing and merchant class that gave rise to the *portolano*, the Atlas concerned itself with practical and tangible possibilities, choosing to emphasize the positive and reserving its imaginary and artistic capital to illuminating the great



unknown. Under these rules, Central Europe did not spark the imagination and was relegated to the periphery, out of which it would only emerge during the following century.