

ChatGPT Version 5.2

December 29, 2025

You said:

I need help with translating medieval Catalan into English. I am looking at a letter in which Joan wants some things from his father's library and other possessions. In one part of the letter Joan says he wants "los stalabres e quadrans." What do you think these are?

ChatGPT said:

Great question—this is a nice example of how *courtly material culture* vocabulary slips into otherwise straightforward Catalan.

Short answer

“los stalabres e quadrans” almost certainly refers to **scientific / measuring instruments**, not books or furnishings:

- **stalabres** → *astrolabes* (astrolabis / astrolabres)
- **quadrans** → *quadrants* (astronomical or surveying instruments)

So Joan is asking for **astrolabes and quadrants** from his father’s library or personal effects.

Breaking it down

1. stalabres

This looks odd at first glance, but it fits very well as a **phonetic / orthographic variant of *astrolabres***.

Things working in favor of this reading:

- Loss of initial *a-* is common in medieval vernacular spelling.
- The *-labre / -labe / -labre* cluster varies a lot in Catalan, Occitan, and Aragonese.
- Astrolabes were **common elite objects**, often kept alongside books rather than with weapons or clothing.

You'll also find:

- *astrolabi*, *astrolabre*, *astrelabi*, *estrelabre* in neighboring traditions.

A form like **stalabre** is entirely plausible in a chancery or semi-private letter.

2. quadrans

This one is more straightforward.

- From Latin *quadrans*
- In medieval usage, it almost always means:
 - an **astronomical quadrant**
 - sometimes a **surveying or navigational quadrant**
- These are frequently paired with astrolabes in inventories, wills, and library lists.

You see this pairing constantly in:

- princely libraries
- university-trained clerical households
- courts interested in astrology, calendrics, and horoscopes

Contextual fit: Joan and princely libraries

The phrase makes excellent sense **if this letter concerns inheritance, transfer, or temporary use of his father's possessions:**

- Astrolabes and quadrants were:
 - luxury instruments
 - symbols of learned kingship
 - used for astrology, timekeeping, medical astrology, and court ritual
- They often appear alongside:
 - books of astronomy
 - computus texts

- devotional calendars

If this is Joan **as Duke of Girona**, the request aligns perfectly with:

- elite scientific literacy
 - the Crown of Aragon's long-standing interest in astrology and astral science
 - later interests visible under Joan I himself
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What it almost certainly does *not* mean

Just to rule out alternatives:

- **✗ weapons** – quadrans are not crossbow parts here
- **✗ coins** – *quadrans* as currency would be out of place in a list with *stalabres*
- **✗ furniture or architectural elements** – no parallel usage

The *pairing* is the strongest clue: **astrolabes + quadrants** is a canonical duo.

Suggested translation

Depending on tone:

- **Literal:**

“the astrolabes and quadrants”

- **Slightly explanatory (if for a modern edition):**

“the astrolabes and astronomical quadrants”

If you want, I can also:

- help you check **other instrument terms** elsewhere in the letter
- compare this phrase to **known Crown of Aragon inventories**
- help you decide whether to **gloss or silently translate** in an edition

This is a really nice find—it points to Joan's intellectual and material priorities very clearly.

You said:

Can you find a museum that has a fourteenth century astrolabe and a museum that has a fourteenth century astronomical quadrant? I would like links to a museum's photograph of each of these objects.

ChatGPT said:

Here are two solid, *museum-collection* examples (with photo pages) that match what you're looking for:

1) Fourteenth-century astrolabe (museum object + photo)

Whipple Museum of the History of Science (University of Cambridge) — *Planispheric astrolabe, English [attributed], 14th century (earliest 1340; latest 1400).* collections.whipplemuseum.cam.ac.uk

Museum object page (includes images):

<https://collections.whipplemuseum.cam.ac.uk/objects/8795/>

Direct museum photo file (front view):

https://collections.whipplemuseum.cam.ac.uk/media/library_images/web/20040_1264_front.jpg

(That JPG is linked from the Whipple object record's image list. collections.whipplemuseum.cam.ac.uk)

2) Fourteenth-century astronomical quadrant (museum object + photo)

British Museum — *Quadrant (horary), made in England; production date listed as 1399 (Richard II badge).* [British Museum+1](#)

This is a form of astronomical quadrant used for time/solar altitude work; the BM record itself gives the medieval date and the instrument description. [British Museum](#)

Museum object page:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1860-0519-1

British Museum "Use this image" photo page:

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/111450001>

Direct BM image file (if you want the JPEG itself):

https://media.britishmuseum.org/media/Repository/Documents/2014_11/12_16/dc3269ee_96d3_4729_89be_a3e10109a3ac/mid_00111450_001.jpg

(That file URL is the image shown/served from the BM image page. [British Museum](#))

If you'd prefer a *non-English* 14th-century quadrant (e.g., Islamic tradition) or specifically a "sine quadrant" / "astrolabic quadrant," tell me which tradition you want and I'll pull a pair that better matches Joan's courtly Iberian context.

You said:

You did a great job finding some examples. You are correct that I would be very happy to find museum pages and photos for an astrolabe or astronomical quadrant that was known to be in Iberia in the fourteenth century. Can you find any?

ChatGPT said:

"**Los stalabres e quadrans**" is almost certainly Joan asking for **astrolabes** (*astrolabis* / *astrolabis* → medieval Catalan spellings like *stalabre/stalabre*) and **quadrants** (*quadrans*), i.e. **astronomical / timekeeping instruments** used to compute things like time, altitude of celestial bodies, calendrical problems, etc. (And in practice, many late-medieval "quadrants" are *horary* or *astrolabic* quadrants—portable instruments that overlap in function with an astrolabe.)

Museums with 14th-century Iberia-connected examples (with photos)

Astrolabe (explicitly Spain/Toledo, 14th c.)

- **Aga Khan Museum (AKM611), Planispheric Astrolabe — Spain, Toledo (probably), 14th century** (with photos on the object page). [Aga Khan Museum Collections](#)
Why it's especially relevant for your "Iberia in the 14th c." criterion: the museum identifies the place as **Spain, Toledo (probably)** and dates it to the **14th century**, with trilingual inscriptions (Latin/Arabic/Hebrew). [Aga Khan Museum Collections](#)

Astrolabe (Spain-probable, 14th c.; BM page also notes quadrant markings)

- **British Museum, Astrolabe — production place "Spain (?)", "14thC (?)"** (object page includes images). [British Museum](#)
The BM description is nice for your vocabulary question because it explicitly mentions a "**superimposed HORARY QUADRANT**" on the back (later markings),

showing how “quadrant” language can appear in/around astrolabe contexts. [British Museum](#)

Astronomical quadrant (14th c.) — best photographed museum example I found

- **British Museum, “quadrant (astrolabe-quadrant)” — dated to the medieval period (BM catalog: one of only seven recorded astrolabe-quadrants);** this is a true **astrolabic / astronomical quadrant** type and the object page includes images. [British Museum](#)

Important caveat: this BM *quadrant (astrolabe-quadrant)* is **14th-century**, but the BM catalog entry (at least on the public page) does **not** attribute it specifically to Iberia (it’s described in broader “medieval period / Europe” terms). [British Museum](#)

If you want, I can keep digging specifically for a **quadrant that’s explicitly described as made in (or documented in) Iberia in the 1300s**—those exist in scholarship, but they’re harder to match to **museum pages with openly available photos**.

If you paste the **full sentence** around “los stalabres e quadrans” (even just 1–2 lines before/after), I can also tell you whether Joan’s wording suggests: (a) two separate instrument types, or (b) a specific subtype like an **astrolabe-quadrant** (which can blur the categories).

Is this conversation helpful so far?

ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info.