

Artwork in Publicly Illustrated Maps in Japan as a Medium for Cultural Insights

Simon Potter

Introduction

Illustrated cartography can provide insights into a society or culture, certainly through content and to some extent through artistic style. In the European tradition, for example, there have been such outstanding works as the late-thirteenth-century Hereford and Ebstorf maps of the world which used illustrations to show important places linked with Christian mythology and history, as well as other imaginative pictures in less important places, while in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, notably, many printed maps included vignettes and cartouches that had heraldry of the social elite, images of monarchs, or themes from Greek mythology, religion, or regional geography.¹ Japan also has a heritage of illustrated maps and, in recent decades, an innumerable quantity has been published in books and atlases, printed as single sheets or in series, made available in cyberspace, and put on a variety of media for public display. It is the last set which this essay delves into, and it examines Japanese publicly displayed maps from an artistic angle to see how such maps provide insights into a culture.

A lot of the artwork on such Japanese maps might feel odd to people from other countries who are not used to Japanese culture, and it certainly is difficult verbalizing the qualities and even messages of such pieces of art. Still, such terms as “soft,” “flat,” “colorful,” “simple,” “childlike,” “naïve,” “friendly,” and “idealistic” might be usefully applied to many pictures on the illustrated maps as well as to the entire composition in some cases. While traits such as friendliness and idealism would reflect attempts to attract tourists and casual visitors, some can be interpreted as static manifestations of cultural ideals and the values of contemporary Japanese, especially at play, and others can be seen as continuities from the history of Japanese pictorial art. The following sections therefore aim to shed some light on this by making some observations about the stylistic roots of the illustrated maps in Japanese art history and about specific examples of pictorial art in contemporary maps on public display.

Japanese Art History in Regard to Cartography

From some unclear time in the middle of the Heian Period (794-1192) until early in the Meiji (1868-1912), and officially during the Edo (1603-1867), the Japanese word used for “map” was *ezu* (繪圖, now 絵図), which translates literally as “picture-diagram” and hints at the importance placed on the pictorial component(s) of such a composition.² In the prolific Edo Period, maps flourished as a form of useful art in Japan for such things as way-finding, identifying properties, explanation, or visual ornamentation, and many samples have survived until now. The Tokugawa shogunate sponsored five projects to survey and to map the provinces of Japan, from which four national maps were compiled by 1702, and between the fourth (1697-1702) and fifth (1836-38) projects it sponsored Inō Tadataka’s (1745-1818) precise survey that led to a composite map of the country in 1821. These and a host of other projects not connected to the shogunate created numerous maps of the provinces, cities, lesser settlements, roads, and architectural compounds (notably castles and religious institutions). It appears that during the Edo Period, as well as earlier, there were no common artistic rules for mapmaking as a whole, but the craft did seem to have expectations within a genre (e.g. Jambudvīpa, the country, provinces, cities, rural settlements, roads, rivers, religious establishments). Whereas many maps were biased artistically toward the informative side, that is to emphasize the topographic content in a functional way, the extant record also suggests that decorative maps which could be valued equally or, perhaps in most cases, more for their visual appeal were also made. The tendency for these was to be popular, in the sense that they could be used by people of different backgrounds, and the most common medium was the woodblock print which increased in popularity throughout the Edo Period and greatly eased the production of multiple copies. To suggest that Edo mapmaking had strong links with contemporary pictorial art, it is worth noting that outstanding samples of maps have been attributed to such *ukiyoe* (floating-world-picture) artists as Ishikawa Ryūsen (fl. 1686-1713) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849).

Ukiyoe was a genre that employed colorful exaggerations to capture key elements of an otherwise realistic scene and developed as an offshoot of paintings of ordinary life that had been produced during the Momoyama Period (1568-1615). Such prints and paintings had stylistic similarities with a painted genre known as *yamatoe* (Japanese pictures), which started in the Heian Period as an indigenous reaction to established *karae* (Chinese pictures) that had been introduced

from overseas as early as the sixth century A.D. Since elements of both *karae* and *yamatoe* can be detected among the illustrated maps currently on public display, it is worth sketching a set of contrastive characteristics, with the understanding that the criteria are based on a visual feel or sense and, in some cases that include the contemporary maps, can lead to subjective decisions.³ A *karae* composition is likely to have lines that function to create nearly stylized forms by delineating shapes and contours in an unobtrusive fashion, colors that are softish (delicate, subtle) and not overly dominant (yet bright, clear, even vivid), a third dimension that is artificially constructed by juxtaposing two-dimensional constituents, characters and other objects that are disproportionately large vis-à-vis their background but (because of the more-or-less delicate lining and coloring) stand against it in a softish way, and an overall feel that might be described as clear, neat, and calm. On the other hand, a *yamatoe* composition might be characterized by dynamic, expressive lines often of differing thickness that define objects and create simplified forms, brilliant or striking colors, an oblique perspective to cover the third dimension, figures that are not overly disproportionate but (because of the more dominant lining) can be abrupt vis-à-vis their background, and a somewhat confused, even neurotic feel that is created by overlapping constituent elements.

Another historical genre of note for the present study, and one which synthesized elements of *yamatoe* with others from abstract Buddhist diagrams, is the *miyamandara* (shrine mandala). Whereas illustrative maps or plans existed to depict the structures and layout of a religious establishment known as a *shaji* (shrine-temple) or *jisha* (temple-shrine), reflecting the syncretism of Shintō and Buddhism, the *miyamandara* combined this function with illustrative content that could be traced to abstract mandalas and Buddhist teachings, especially characters that expressed religious ideals, served as guardians, or were experiencing the consequences of earthly behavior. Having apparently come into existence late in the Heian Period, flourished from the Kamakura (1185-1333) into the Edo, and even been made afterwards, this genre employed an oblique perspective to show the structures and surrounding landscape of a (syncretic) shrine in a realistic way, while a subset known as the *sankeimandara* (mandalas for visitations) was notable for including detailed pictures of people going about their business at a sacred site or district.⁴

Related to *ukiyo* is *manga* (comics or cartoons), which evolved into an important pictorial genre from the middle of the Edo Period and has in recent years

spread to markets outside Japan. Quite often the characters are found in a fashion akin to that in *karae*, with the forms trumping the lines, the characters and other objects generally being fragmentable, and the characters and other things being typically “flat” or in a two-dimensional form. In recent decades *manga* has enjoyed immense popularity, not only for amusement (comic books) but also for education and advertisement because of its adaptability to virtually any theme and its visual simplicity in conveying likenesses, ideas, and messages.

In regard to cultural innovation and diffusion, other than *karae*, these pictorial genres were products of domestic evolution, with a domestic audience in mind during what turned out to be a long period of cultural crystallization in relative isolation from the international scene. Much has been made of the enforced isolation under the Tokugawa regime, but it is also important to remember that from early in the Heian Period, Japan had little of consequence to do with the rest of the world, primarily because China could not offer anything of cultural significance as it had from late in Japanese prehistory throughout the Nara Period (710-94). Cartography itself appears to have been an artistic subset of this cultural crystallization, and even though there has been an infusion of European and North American models for practical reasons since the eighteenth century, elements of the indigenous artistic heritage continue to exist within the domain of Japanese cartography today. Among the illustrated maps on public display in particular, it is possible to detect elements of the artistic genres mentioned above as well as a continuation of cartographic art forms from the period of cultural crystallization.

Examples of Pictorial Art in Contemporary Maps

Japanese cartographic illustrations tend to bring life to their maps, and their visual messages are usually straightforward and do not require any special training to interpret. Elsewhere,⁵ these illustrations have been put into four categories, although occasionally it is difficult to decide into which one a particular illustration or set of illustrations belongs. The group that is closest to purely abstract sym-



Map 1: *Sagaken Kankōji Annai* (Information about Places for Tourism in Saga Prefecture), north to the top. Photographed in the city of Saga, November 1997.

bols has been termed “symbolic resemblances,” illustrations that are not concerned with peculiar characteristics but which are readily associated with what they represent (e.g. rounded hills for a mountainous landscape; trees for wooded areas or forests; fruit; “generic” castles, temples, or boats); if there is more than one sample of the same type in a map, they are depicted in the same or closely similar way (Map 1). The second category are “idealized portraits,” pictures which while not paying attention to the details of a subject, capture its essence with some degree of artistic license (mainly buildings but also, for example, vehicles and plants), and the third are “realistic portraits” which could be photographs or reasonably detailed, (almost) lifelike drawings or paintings with no or very limited artistic license (respectively Maps 2 and 3). Cartoon characters comprise the fourth category, and these involve drawings of people and animals which can create a lively feel as well as provide cultural insights in terms of artistic style and recreational ideals and values (Map 4).

In these examples, such *karae* features as “flat,” disproportionately large characters and other objects with unobtrusive lining to create forms, softish coloring, fragmentability, and an artificial third dimension may be seen in Maps 1, 2, and 4. *Yamatoe* characteristics – notably a realistic third dimension via an oblique perspective, subjects that are not terribly disproportionate to their back-



Map 2: *Hagijō Jōkamachi* (The Castle Town of Hagi Castle), north to the bottom. Photographed in Hagi, Yamaguchi prefecture, November 2002.



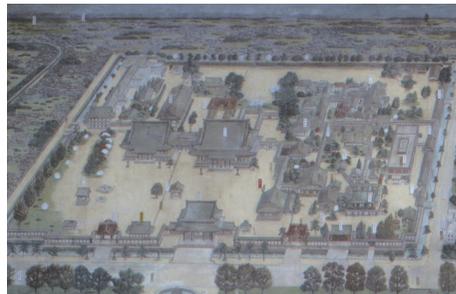
Map 3: *Onioshidashien* (Onioshidashi [Demon(s) Push(ed) Out] Park), north to the bottom right. Photographed in Tsumagoi, Gunma prefecture, October 1995.



Map 4: *Shima Onsen Goannai* (Honorable Information about Shima Hot Springs), north to the upper right. Photographed in Nakanōjō, Gunma prefecture, November 1999.

ground, and lining or coloring that creates a transitional tension with the background – may be detected in Map 3, while Map 5 can be considered to be descended from the *miyamandara* genre minus the metaphysics, and Map 6 has an illustration in the *ukiyo* mold, presumably chosen to highlight its historical theme of the Akishino River in Nara having been used as a water route for transporting commodities. An interesting stylistic technique which has often been used throughout the history of Japanese art, including on some old works of a cartographic nature, is the clouding-out of unnecessary or undesired elements in a landscape, a variant of which is in Map 7.

Maps with *manga* are worth considering in some detail because their characters bring life to a scene and bear witness to contemporary recreational values. The three examples with *karae* features mentioned above (Maps 1, 2, and 4) also include cartoon pictures, to which are added four more maps for specific commentary shortly (Maps 9-12). With the exception of Map 2 where the characters are three busts and a statue of historical figures, the cartoon people and (where they exist) animals provide a happy, playful, colorful feel to the composition, which can detract from the topographical information or at least arouse an interest in the map.



Map 5: *Higashi Honganji Keidai Zenkei* (Complete View of the Precincts of [the temple] Higashi Honganji), north to the right. Photographed in the city of Kyōto, June 2000.



Map 6: *Akishinogawa* (Akishino River), north to the top. Photographed in the city of Nara, June 2000.

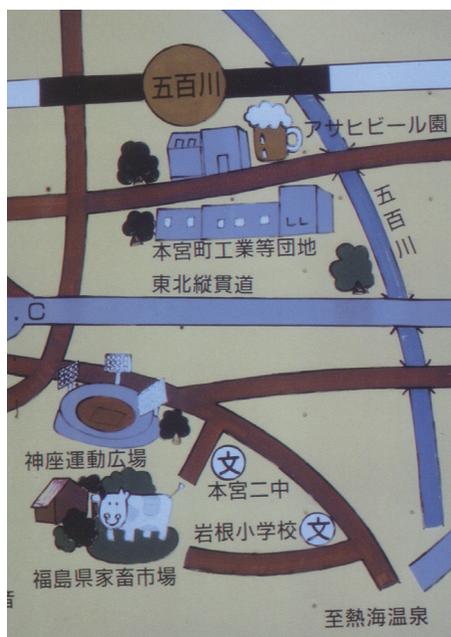


Map 7: *Kita* (North [the view to the north from Matsuyama Castle]), north to the top. Photographed in Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture, November 1999.

close-up (Map 9a) the three individuals at play are also advertising a prefectural forest or woodland (on a hike), the Adatarara Country Club (on a putting green), and the Dake Spa (bathing), the second of which would be exclusive. The second close-up (Map 9b) has a full mug of beer to advertise the Asahi Beer Garden (a place for eating and drinking the company's beer) at the top, while at the bottom the idealized portrait shows the Jinza sports stadium and the smiling cow advertises the prefectural cattle market. Such pictures refer to contemporary recreational and economic activities, yet in the third close-up (Map 9c) an historical battlefield is indicated by two warriors in period attire, one of whom clearly runs against the grain of cartoon characters in these illustrated maps enjoying themselves.

Welcoming visitors in four languages (Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese), but verbally providing information on the map in Japanese and English, Map 10 advertises sites of recreational interest in Yamaguchi prefecture and even a couple in neighboring Shimane. Among the idealistic portraits are airplanes and boats, which would be important for some visitors in

that they locate points of (dis)embarkation, while the main routes for transportation within the prefecture (railroads and highways) are shown by colored lines. Symbolic resemblances include hills, trees, and fruit (apples and oranges), and examples of other idealistic portraits are a lighthouse, rock formations, and Mount



Map 9b: Close-up from the lower right corner of Map 9.



Map 9c: Close-up from the lower center of Map 9.

Kasayama (all along the northern coast), a *fugu* (blowfish, lower left corner), and a factory belching smoke at Tokuyama (along the southern coast). The close-up (Map 10a) shows several such illustrations – the five-storied pagoda of Rurikō Temple and the newly rebuilt chapel that commemorates the Jesuit Francisco Xavier (1506-52, in Yamaguchi 1550-51) in the city of Yamaguchi as well as the entrance to a cave in the Akiyoshidai karst area being notable – and a few cartoons that animate the map. Of the latter, the women are shown in hot-springs baths, perhaps the premier recreational attraction that involves rather lengthy travel within the country, while the giraffe and lion serve as an advertisement for a safari park.

Located on the main island of Okinawa prefecture, Map 11 draws attention to a host of local recreational opportunities. Okinawa offers two important geographical attractions for domestic Japanese tourists, one being its tropical feel (year-round warmth, corals and diving possibilities, vegetation including sugarcane as a cash crop) and the other its ethnic culture (cuisine, folk dancing and costume, history), a considerable bit of which may be detected on this map of the small Chinen peninsula and adjacent islands. Two snorkelers (upper right) and a scuba diver (lower center) have been drawn in with tropical fish next to them, while a sunbather and (unusual in Japan) an overweight



Map 10: *Yamaguchiken Kankō Annaizu* (Guide Map for Tourism in Yamaguchi Prefecture), north to the top. Photographed in Oguri, Yamaguchi prefecture, November 2002.



Map 10a: Close-up from the left center of Map 10.



Map 11: *Umi to Midori to Asahi no Sato* (Village of the Sea, Greenery, and the Morning Sun), north to the top. Photographed in Chinen, Okinawa prefecture, February 2003.

lady with a circular bathing float may be seen next to a coconut tree (lower right). Several boats are on the map, including one with a glass bottom for viewing creatures in the water and two that have an historical connotation (upper right), and a variety of other recreational possibilities such as playing golf or watching bullfights (left center) are indicated. The local sugar industry is represented next to the latter two by a field with a smiling farmer standing on its edge and another riding a tractor in it, with cut lengths of cane lying to the top. In the first close-up (Map 11a) six smiling dancers in historical costume are performing an ethnic dance next to two traditional huts on Kudaka Island, while a fisherman seems to be struggling with his net, and the girl swimmer there and the three children rope-skipping next to the gymnasium in Map 11b suggest that even local residents can enjoy themselves.

The “symbolic resemblances” and “idealized portraits” mentioned earlier might also be categorized as *manga* since they could or do serve as backdrops for the animated characters. A good example of how the idealized portraits might be used as an architectural study is Map 12, of a museum with houses, other buildings, tools, utensils, clothing, and other artifacts connected to historical lifeways since the Edo

Period in the district of Aizu, now a part of Fukushima prefecture. In the scene five cartoon visitors in casual attire are in the central open space, while the other “char-



Map 11a: Close-up from the lower right corner of Map 11.



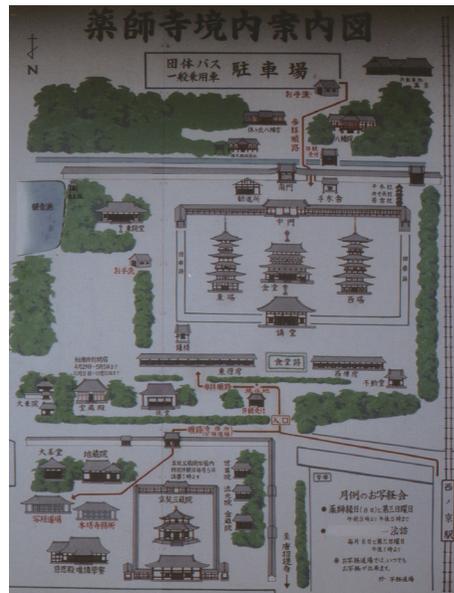
Map 11b: Close-up from the center of Map 11.



Map 12: Aizuminzokukan Annaizu (Guide Map for the Museum of Aizu Folkways), north to the left. Photographed in Inawashiro, Fukushima prefecture, September 2003.

acters” are three stone (child?) buddhas overlooking a tumulus devoted to departed souls on the right and the animal in the foreground seems to advertise the bobbing-head cow, a local craft. Although the buildings have been drawn in sufficient detail to warrant consideration as “realistic portraits,” they are probably better considered as “idealistic” because of the artificial, composite third dimension. Still, such salient aspects of historical, local architecture as steep roofs that might be thatched and overall designs may be made out. The large structure in the left center is the former residence of a family called Sasaki, and that to the right belonged to another called Baba; it is possible to enter these buildings to get some ideas of what life was like in the past. At the far left is a water mill in a “customary” pond.

Another important set of illustrated maps which are generally aimed at tourists are those of religious institutions. Some have features of the *karae* mold, an example being Map 13 which depicts the Buddhist temple Yakushiji in Nara with two-dimensional or “flat” “idealized portraits” of the buildings, gates, walls, and foliage; the main part of the compound is in the center, offset to the right, where rather detailed studies have been made of the two pagodas that have served as the trademark of the temple as well as the Golden Hall between them. Others, and perhaps the more appealing, are more akin to the *yamatoe* tradition through their oblique perspectives which create



Map 13: *Yakushiji Keidai Annaizu* (Guide Map of the Precincts of [the temple] Yakushiji), north to the bottom. Photographed in the city of Nara, June 2000.

a realistic, although often idyllic or not completed, third dimension and unfragmentability. Map 5 of the temple Higashi Honganji in Kyōto is a good example that also has topographic elements in common with the *miyamandara* genre mentioned earlier; although the city beyond the walls of the compound does not resemble what is shown on the map, the buildings, other structures, and foliage inside it are depicted rather faithfully and in detail. Because of the overlapping of most of the “realistic” constituents in the composition, it is generally not possible to separate

a subject and view it as complete without its surroundings, as can be done with those in the previous example. Similarly, Map 14 shows Ikuta Shrine in Kōbe in a *yamatoe* framework, but in this case the buildings, *torii*, other structures, and foliage are “idealistic portraits.”

Occasionally, copies of old maps such as Map 15 may be found on public display. Because their topographic data is out-of-date, they may be interpreted to be illustrated maps that were erected with the intent of arousing historical curiosity, although some viewers might take an interest in the artwork itself. The latter would be in tune with the spirit behind the word *ezu*, as in illustrative diagrams, which likely led to the preservation of countless old maps after they had outlasted their prosaic use. In the sample here, the map was probably compiled in the seventeenth century to show the layout of the buildings and other things inside Kubota Castle (no longer extant) in the city of Akita and is an example of the Edo-Period castle maps mentioned in *The History of Cartography* (see note 2). The topography inside the castle is shown through lining, coloring, and labeling, but not by drawings of any of the structures.



Map 14: *Ikuta Jinja Keidai Mitorizu* (Sketch Map of the Precincts of [the shrine] Ikuta Jinja), north to the top. Photographed in Kōbe, Hyōgo prefecture, May 2003.



Map 15: *Gojochū Ryakuzu* (Rough Map of the Honorable Castle), north to the right. Photographed in the city of Akita, September 2001.

In Perspective

Illustrated maps on public display in Japan are a good example of applied geography that can benefit a host of users who need not be specialists in geography or cartography. Although they do require some amount of cartographic understanding, it might be reasonably assumed that nearly all Japanese adults and even teenagers can figure out whatever abstract graphics there are based on map-reading skills which were acquired in school, and that a look around at the immediate surroundings would yield at least one landmark which can be found on the map and used to get one's bearings. Yet, these maps are not purely scientific diagrams that were compiled only to provide reasonably accurate, selected information about local topography. They are also works of pictorial art which can serve as advertisements and/or qualitative assessments of selected features in the landscape, and in so being they reveal some insights into Japanese society and culture.

Important is the fact that the maps are within the common domain and are aimed at any Japanese with a reasonable degree of competence in reading the language and understanding spatial graphics. Neither the language nor the graphics assume expertise in cartography or a deep knowledge of any topic related to the contents of a map; similarly, they do not suggest that the viewers or users are intellectually inadequate or immature. The modest degree of intellectual respect that is implied also reflects expectations in educational achievement, as well as a desire on the part of the organizations which commissioned the maps not to appear condescending in either direction away from a presumed middle ground. In regard to the pictorial content which would not be found on maps that are purely abstract diagrams, virtually all of it is understandable whether it be a flat, symbolic cartoon character, another cartoon(like) drawing, a drawn oblique perspective, a painting that is close to reality, or a photograph.

The pictures in the illustrated maps portray objects in the natural and, especially, the cultural landscape, and they are pictures of things that actually exist in Japan. Such things as aircraft, ships, trains, and automobiles are a part of the contemporary culture, as are the various buildings, economic produce, sporting activities, and mineral-water bathing. Whereas illustrations about golf, tennis, diving, and recreational driving refer to leisure activities that have been fashionable within the last few decades, others such as those about hiking, mineral-water bathing, and festivals reflect activities that have been popular for much longer. Other illustrations, including those of secular buildings and religious

compounds and about local economy or history promote an interest in things Japanese, while the dominant, even exclusive use of the Japanese language implies that it is Japanese nationals who are expected to be engaged in these leisurely activities or to take an interest in their own culture. The *manga* illustrations in particular also convey a lighthearted feel that seems intended to evoke such positive expressions as *kawaii*, *tanoshii*, and *asobitai*, that is a sense of pleasure and escape from the rough edges of normal life.

Notes

1. Woodward (1987) is recommended for the Christian maps of the world. As for other illustrated maps made by Europeans, there are so many publications with reproduced samples that it would seem wrong to choose only a few or some for citation. Perhaps the most neutral way to direct readers to illustrated European maps from the time of the Renaissance onward is to suggest perusing the volumes of *Imago Mundi*, the flagship journal for the history of cartography.
2. In regard to the history of Japanese cartography, the volume of literature (especially in Japanese) is rather large by now, and some useful works are listed in the “References” at the end of this article. At present and for the foreseeable future, the best English-language introduction to the subject are two entries in Volume 2, Book 2 of *The History of Cartography*, Unno (1994) and Miyajima (1994). A large body of literature provides supplementary information and/or examples which were not covered in *The History of Cartography*, and a few recent samples of such books that treat terrestrial cartography are Hisatake and Hasegawa (1993), Katsuragawa Ezu Kenkyūkai (1988, 1989), Kinda (1999), Unno (1996, 2001), Yamashita (1996), Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan (2001), and Ōita Kenritsu Usa Fudoki no Oka Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan (1995), while Miyajima (1999) has some newer information about celestial cartography and Potter (2000) is a rather detailed study of Japanese cartographic vocabulary. Readers who might be interested in further literature or who would like to compile a lengthy bibliography are directed in the first instance to Unno (1994) and Miyajima (1994) and then to the other sources on Japanese cartography in the “References.”
3. The contrasts are based on information throughout Munsterberg (1985) and are also summarized in Potter (2003b: 202-03 or 838-39). Although it is not advisable to make too much of the following, it might be helpful to suggest that comparing *yamatōe* to *karae* is similar to comparing the baroque to the renaissance, or even the baroque and rococo to the renaissance and neoclassicism, in European art. Whereas, for instance, *karae* and renaissance and neoclassicist paintings generally included clearly delineated subjects which could be removed from the entire scene and treated as if they were complete subjects on their own (= fragmentability), as well as scenes in which the third dimension was often artificial, *yamatōe* and baroque and rococo paintings had subjects that tended to

blend into adjacent parts of the composition and could not easily be considered as discrete, clearly defined complete subjects on their own, and their third dimension was more realistic.

4. More information about maps of religious sites, including the mandalas mentioned here, may be found in and via Potter (2003c).
5. Potter (2003a: 91-92; and 2003b: 198-200 or 834-36); 2003a is a continuation of Potter (2002).

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