

their own professional duties, rather than leaving it to historians like Winter, no matter how talented these historians may be?

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**Atlas historique de Montréal.** JEAN-CLAUDE ROBERT n.p. Art Global and Libre Expression, 1994. 167 p. ISBN 2-920718-48-7 (Art Global); ISBN 2-89111-525-2 (Libre Expression).

The *Atlas historique de Montréal* is an impressive and attractive synthesis of the history of Montréal from its founding to the present. It was produced by the Fondation Lionel-Groulx as part of the 350th anniversary celebrations of Montréal and is the third in a trilogy of works, the others being a bibliography, *Clés pour l'histoire de Montréal* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1992), and a coffee-table album on the founders of the city, *Pour le Christ et le Roi* (Montréal: Libre Expression, 1992). According to Jean-Marc Léger, the director of the Centre de recherche Lionel-Groulx, the *Atlas* was conceived with a socio-political objective in view, i.e., to recall "à qui serait enclin à l'oublier, que notre ville fut d'abord une oeuvre française, qu'elle fut ville française pendant plus de 120 ans."

The *Atlas* resembles the distinguished *Historical Atlas of Canada* in its multidisciplinary approach, combining geographical, sociological, and demographical perspectives. The author, Jean-Claude Robert, has in fact worked on the *Historical Atlas of Canada* and brings to the *Atlas historique de Montréal* personal and academic qualifications that account in large part for its undeniable quality. Born and educated in Montréal, and professor of history at the Université du Québec à Montréal, he brings to his work both the insight of a native son and the knowledge and detachment of an academic. Part of the second generation of Quebec historians to be profoundly influenced by the *École des annales* in France, Robert completed a Ph.D. thesis in 1977 entitled *Montréal, 1821-1871: aspects de l'urbanisation*. At the same time he joined a grant-funded research group called the "Groupe de recherche sur l'histoire de Montréal," and, alone or in collaboration, has published numerous articles on various aspects of the city's history.

In keeping with its more or less nationalist objective, the *Atlas historique de Montréal* is designed by its attractive appearance to interest a cultivated general public. Its broad appeal is a function, too, of the non-specialist language used in the text, written in a style both elegant and economic. At the same time, the multidisciplinary approach and depth of the research underpinning its contents provide a synthesis of the evolution of Montréal which is useful to academics, students, and professionals in the fields of history, historical geography, demography, and sociology as well as urban studies.

The *Atlas* consists of reproductions of some seventy-five historical maps and plans, judged essential to an understanding of the history of Montréal and forming the heart of the book; an abundant historical text, establishing continuity and supported by 525 notes on sources, historiographical debates, and interpretational difficulties; reproductions of historical illustrations; and numerous charts and graphs which illustrate aspects of urban life neglected by cartographers in the past. The book is completed by a summary table of contents, but, sadly, lacks an index, a list of the maps, charts, and graphs, and a bibliography.

The historical maps and plans are not necessarily reproduced in their entirety, the object of the *Atlas* not being to reproduce historical documents but to use historical documents to support and illustrate analytical development of themes in the text. Thus some documents are reproduced in part, others integrally but in reduced format, although, in the case of the latter, the factor of reduction is impossible to determine since neither it nor the dimensions of the original are given. In some cases the reduction is so great that a magnifying glass must be used to read the maps, although the quality of reproduction is such that they are all legible under that instrument. Robert is fully aware of the qualities and limits of the map as a historical document, and regrets that it is often used only as decorative illustration. He acknowledges that a map can provide numerous and valuable details about an historical phenomenon, but realizes that it is a work of abstraction that portrays a choice of elements reflecting the cartographer's culture, ideals, intentions, and options. Like all archival documents, it provides proof of the encounter between its creator and a reality which the creator addressed. The map is a trustworthy witness to that encounter but, in its rendering of the reality portrayed, it is circumscribed by personal and technical limitations. All of these constraints, Robert realizes, pose interpretational problems; however, to the extent that one avoids the pitfalls, maps can be valuable sources. Indeed, Robert warns that the shortcomings of historical cartography limit to some extent the subjects he is able to address. Thus, in principle, the plates for a given period deal only with those aspects of urban life interpreted in the cartography of that period; if the cartography did not deal with population density, religious practices, or electoral behaviour, neither does the *Atlas*. In practice, however, the text, based on manuscript sources and published studies, and the graphs and charts created for the work generally compensate more than adequately for the gaps in the historical cartography. There is one glaring exception, however: cultural and symbolic developments, such as the construction of theatres, parks, and historical monuments, are largely absent.

Robert's thesis, in keeping with the nature of the publication as an historical atlas, is that the site of Montréal, at the heart of a network of water routes providing communication with the interior of the North American continent, was essential to a constantly evolving definition of the city's role in North American life. The thesis is developed through a division of the history of

Montréal into six parts, viz Montréal before Montréal; the founding of Ville-Marie, 1636-1663; the second founding, 1663-1699; the gateway to the west, 1700-1799; from city to metropolis, 1800-1899; and from the metropolis of Canada to the metropolis of Québec. Robert justifies his division of Montreal's history essentially on the neutral basis of centuries as permitting him to handle all phenomena on their own terms, rather than subordinating them to one supposedly primary explanatory factor, such as economics or political developments, that would determine the periodization for all. Each of the six parts consists of an introduction, synthesizing published and unpublished studies and providing an overview of developments, as well as plates addressing significant chronological and thematic changes. For example, plate sixteen in part four deals with daily life in the mid-eighteenth century; plate twenty-one, with urban transformation between 1800 and 1850.

Notwithstanding the ideological objective presented by Jean-Marc Léger, Robert's handling of his subject is both comprehensive and even-handed, avoiding any hint of ethnocentric bias in, for example, his treatment of the conflict with the natives during the early period of the French regime, the anglophone dominance of the economy and society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or the flow of immigrants in the late twentieth century. The only major omission in terms of content (apart from cultural developments) is any discussion of the depression of the 1930s and its effects on Montréal.

As a whole, the work is not without minor but annoying flaws. The lack of an index and a bibliography has been mentioned. In addition, the charts and graphs created for the work are untitled (the historical maps and plans are identified by their original titles); in many cases, to be understood they must be consulted in conjunction with the introductory text, which, in justice, they are designed to complement. Titles would, nevertheless, be useful to help identify their purpose at a glance. Titles would also have made it possible to provide a list of maps, plans, charts, and graphs which would have facilitated access to them for future reference. Finally, and particularly annoying to archivists, rarely does Robert provide more than the institutional location of the unpublished historical maps and plans he reproduces. Full bibliographic citation would have facilitated access to the original for those who wished to consult it or obtain a copy of it.

These quibbles in no way undermine, however, the overall quality of this excellent reference work. Its relevance in providing an illuminating historical context to the economic plight and social conflicts currently plaguing the development of Montréal is evident, for the *Atlas historique de Montréal* provides a thoughtful historical perspective on those problems. In doing so, it justifies the (largely unheard) claims of archivists that archives are precious touchstones with a past that informs the present and that we ignore at our peril.

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