

Plan

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Plan of the city and fortifications of Montreal. Source: Grand Magazine of Magazines; Kershaw 1092.

Accession Number 2009.28

Date 1758

Materials ink, paper

Measurements 12,5 x 20,5 cm



Historical context

This is a map of the city of Montreal and the surrounding area, commonly referred to as the “spy map”. An English spy officer provided this map to the British during the Seven Years’ War. This English officer was present in Montreal between 1756 and 1758. The map was published in London in 1758 by Thomas Jeffreys, geographer to Frederick, Prince of Wales. The map was probably inspired by the fortification plan of Gédéon de Catalogne, a French surveyor, cartographer and officer. The spy map is accompanied by scornful comments about the surrounding walls. The officer mentions that they are only 4 feet thick and have an 8-foot ditch, and that “these shabby fortifications have never been used.” The cartographers and engineers are of such strategic sensitivity that Vauban (a French engineer and architect) even goes so far as to suggest that one of them (Robert de Villeneuve) should be eliminated, as he “knows enough to be able to do harm”. Is he being ironic at this point? No matter, the importance of this knowledge is clearly paramount.

Several other cases of espionage are documented during this period of great conflict. A French spy collaborated with the English in Acadia, providing, among other things, plans of forts and comments on fortifications. We also know that the ships of Wolfe’s army were manned by French pilots, enabling them to navigate the St. Lawrence River unhindered. And what of the traitor who pointed out the Foulon trail to the British, enabling them to scale the cliffs of the Plains of Abraham?

This spy map was of no use, however, as Montreal surrendered without a fight. Indeed, Vaudreuil, faced with the sheer numbers of Amherst’s army, realized he had no chance. He surrendered on September 8, 1760,

leaving the fate of the colony in French hands.

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