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VIEW MONTREAL, NOT TRANSFERRED MOHAWK TERRITORY?

Montreal, a mohawk territory?

The Mayor Denis Coderre begins his speech stating that Montreal is in not transferred mohawk territory, a controversial assertion which is not unanimity among historians. The debates section asked four experts to shed light on the issue. Today: Alain Beaulieu

Alain Beaulieu Professor at the Department of history at the University of Quebec in Montreal

Montreal Island is part, as asserted by the Mohawks of their traditional territory? The evidence in favour of such a view is very thin or non-existent.

To the arrival of the French in the Valley of the St. Lawrence, the territory of the Iroquois Confederacy, which included the Mohawks, stood to the South of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence, to the West of the axis formed by Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River. There was then no occupation mohawk (or Iroquois) along the River, which was frequented by the Innu and Algonquin, whose control over this region, however, remained fragile.

In 1603, Champlain described the area as a kind of no-man's-land, where nobody dared settle permanently because of Iroquois incursions. The political motivations of the Mohawks remained impossible to identify with certainty, but they probably stemmed from their desire to establish their dominance in the context of the development of the fur trade. If that was the case, their project failed, because the French allied to their enemies (Innu, Algonquin and Wendat) and succeeded, after a military offensive in 1666, to impose a "universal peace" encompassing all the native allies of the New-France.

This peace, which lasted twenty years, also marks the beginning of the installation of the Mohawks in the St. Lawrence Valley. At the invitation of the French authorities, several Iroquois migrate there in the following years, especially attracted to the Catholic religion. Mainly from the mohawk nation, they settled, under the direction of the Jesuits, on land granted by Louis XIV in 1680: the land of the Sault-Saint-Louis, who would become Kahnawake. At the same time, the Sulpicians founded another Iroquois mission on the island of Montreal. Moved a few times, this mission leads finally to the Lake of two mountains, giving birth to the Kanesatake community.

The installation of the Mohawks in the Montreal area is therefore in a colonial context, which certainly didn't transform the region, controlled by the French, in mohawk territory.

So the idea that the island of Montreal was part of the territory of the Mohawk? Essentially links the Mohawks established a few decades between their ancestors and the Iroquoians encountered in 1535 by Jacques Cartier in the St. Lawrence Valley.

These people, who left the region in the second half of the XVIIe century, probably as a result of wars with other Amerindian nations, were said to Kahnawake, Mohawk. The installation of their

ancestors in the Montreal area after 1666 would, in sum, that the reoccupation of a traditional territory.

In recent years, including archaeological research, contradict this interpretation. They show rather than the Valley of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians were a separate group, which disappeared as a political entity in the second half of the XVIe century. This interpretation doesn't fit either with the oral tradition of the Mohawk gathered at the XVIIIe century. This tradition does never associate their presence in this sector with a prior occupation.

At this time, the Mohawks themselves nor as the original site occupants. They gave this right to the Algonquins who, for their part, continued to perceive as from foreigners settle on their land, as "borrowed" the pejorative words that they sometimes used against them: "we are the first who have inhabited this land," they said in 1756 in the presence of the Mohawks; «you guys [...]» "came, you were also well received by the French then you're declared you their children."

In the aftermath of the conquest, the British, who knew the history of the mohawk community, shared this vision of things overall. In their legal logic, the Mohawks could not expect compensation for their hunting grounds, as provided for in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, because they had abandoned their ancestral territory to come under the protection of the French .

Should the island of Montreal then be considered an aboriginal territory not ceded? The question deserves to be asked in the wider context of English policy on Aboriginal land in the aftermath of the conquest. The Mohawks, because of their history, do not seem to meet the criteria laid down by the British, but other nations or communities could potentially take advantage of such recognition.