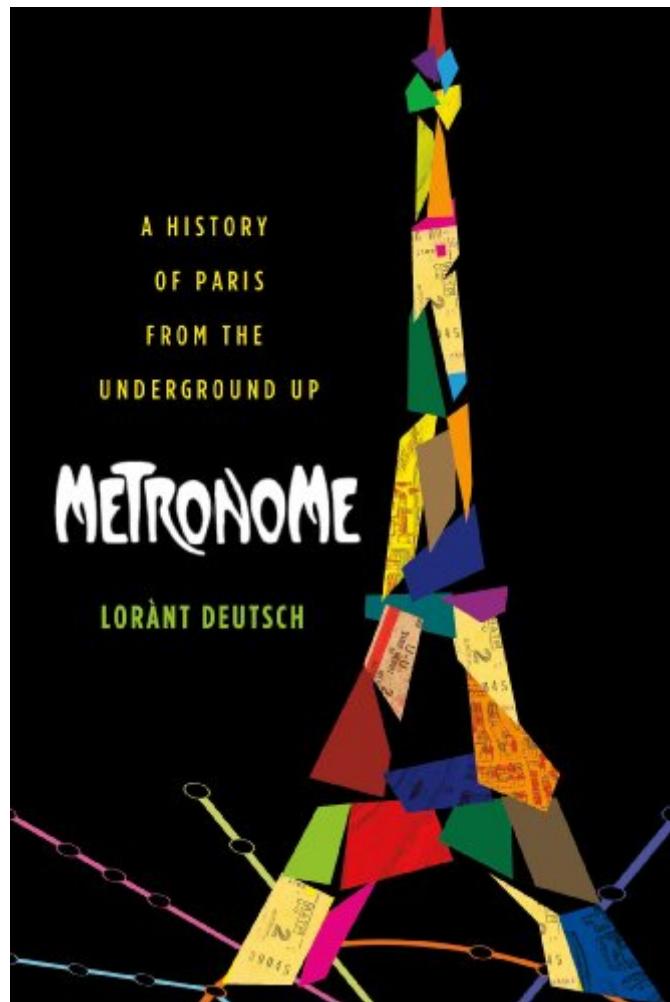


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Metronome: A History Of Paris From The Underground Up



Synopsis

A phenomenal bestseller in France, Metronome presents a fascinating history of Paris through the lens of the city's iconic Metro system. Did you know that the last Gallic warriors massacred by the Romans lie beneath the Eiffel Tower? That the remains of Paris's first cathedral are under a parking lot in the Fifth District? Metronome follows Laurant Deutsch, historian and lifelong Francophile, as he goes on a compelling journey through the ages, treating readers to Paris as they've never seen it before. Using twenty-one stops of the subway system as focal points—“one per century”—Deutsch shows, from the underground up, the unique, often violent, and always striking events that shaped one of the world's most romanticized city. Readers will find out which streets are hiding incredible historical treasures in plain sight; peer into forgotten nooks and crannies of the City of Lights and learn what used to be there; and discover that, however deeply buried, something always remains.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a physical object, the book is very disappointing. It is printed on the cheapest paper, and the layout is a disaster (they have chosen to put sidebars all over the place, like you might see in a magazine article. The problem is that it completely disrupts the flow of the reading. In the French

original, everything is in-line). As for the content, well, this was a huge hit in France, largely because it combines a clever organizing principle (metro-stops as history markers) with a guided chronological tour of French history. I think one of the endorsements talks about how this brings history to people who otherwise would never have cracked a history book, which pretty well sums up both its greatest strength and weakness. That is, the author does a good job of evoking a sense of awe, and like an engaging tour guide, his (historically accurate) account grabs your attention through anecdotes and dramatic flair. But the price you pay for engagement is often a lack of critical distance. On the spectrum between "fun fact" and peer-review academic work, this falls fairly close to the "fun fact" side of thingsâ "closer than, say, Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong or Graham Robb's The Discovery of France. As I mentioned earlier, the book suffers from the onslaught of sidebar columns on nearly every page. The layout disrupts the narrative flow, and after a while, begins to feel like laziness on the part of the writer (i.e. "well, I can't figure out how to make all this history stuff fit together, so I'll just throw my notes into a separate column on the side"). I borrowed the French edition from a friend and was shocked by how much more readable (which I realize is of no help if you don't read French) it is, and how much the layout helps the narrative flow.

This book, Metronome, was a runway best seller in France. When this English translation is read, it is easy to see why. The easy-going, reader-friendly manner in which these and other stories are told shines through in the English translation. It presents the history of France in an innovative, out-of-the-box manner. It makes the narrative of history an enjoyable reading experience. Chapters in the history of France are told with reference to the subway stations found in the inner core of Paris. For example, the story of the Bastille is told through what the commuter sees at the Bastille metro station (which, incidentally, is not a whole lot because the Bastille was completely destroyed during the French Revolution). The story of the Louvre are told with reference to the Palais-Royale-Musee du Louvre metro stop. The chaotic and bloody events of the civil war between the Armagnacs and Burgundians during the Fourteenth Century while the country was battling the Hundred Years War with England are told at the Chateau de Vicennes metro stop. Half-way through the book Lorant Deutsch brings the reader barely to 1000 C.E. This should not be surprising. By Western standards, Paris is an ancient city with a rich history. The metro stops described in his book constitute the very core of the city center where the events of Parisâ ™ earliest history took place. Throughout the book Deutsch will present mini stories on the side of the page. These side stories include, What is on Dogobertâ ™s Tomb? How did Les Halle disappear? Where have all the colleges gone? Who was Nicolas Flamel? These stories are almost more interesting than the main

text. One does not need to be a Francophile to enjoy this book, but this book will make you one.

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