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Timepieces: Masterpieces Of Chronometry



Synopsis

Over the centuries, clocks have slowly, methodically and inextricably come to regulate every aspect of our lives. Timepieces tells the history of clocks and how the pursuit of an ever better clock has had a remarkable influence on scientific and technological developments. The 800-year journey to a perfect clock involved the greatest thinkers, scientists and mechanical geniuses, including those who improved the accuracy of mechanical clocks to such a degree that sailors could successfully determine longitude. That advance alone resulted in an explosion of travel, commerce and political expansion that would change the world map. Tracing the history of "the key machine of the modern industrial age" is a remarkable way to trace the histories of technology and society. Each chapter focuses on one era of the clock's growth: The Celestial Clock A Call to Prayer The Priceless Possession of a Few From Tabletop to Waistcoat and Beyond The Craft Era in Watchmaking The Industrial Revolution Swiss Watchmaking The Standardization of Time The Quartz Revolution Illustrated with beautiful artworks and photographs from museums and clock collections, Timepieces is a thorough and attractive historical survey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book begins by briefly telling how units of time more precise than the day were introduced. It takes some thought to think of breaking up time into units of hours. Christianson writes that the length of an hour originally varied with the time of year (p. 8). If the day is broken into 12 hours then in the summer an hour will be longer than an hour in the winter. The first chapter of the book is about

the the use of timekeepers for regulating when monks prayed. On pp. 21-22 Christianson describes the important verge and foliot clock which was used to ring a bell at certain times to wake the monks for prayer. I'm suspicious of his claim that "during the Middle Ages time was the only aspect of science that moved ahead" (p. 25), but I do agree that medieval Europe was surprisingly more advanced than Rome at timekeeping. For the history of science and technology clocks are very important, and it seems like the spread of clocks led to a diffusion of technical skill that is probably important in European history. I believe that David Landes deals with the importance of clocks in European history in his book "Revolution in Time". I hadn't read anything about craft guilds before and thus I found Chapter 4 on the guild system for clockmaking especially enjoyable. The photographs and pictures in the book are good, and the diagrams are also good, e.g. verge and foliot (p. 22), escapements (pp. 32-33), the stackfreed and fusée (p. 36), cylinder and detached level escapements (pp. 80-81), and multiple views of the movement of a watch with a detached lever escapement (p. 93). Jean-Antoine Lépine introduced in 1770 a thinner pocket watch (p. 53). Before Lépine, pocket watches had several stacks. Compare to the "oignon watch" on p. 69. Christianson explains that it was possible to have thinner pocket watches because of the "simpler small-cylinder escapement that allowed this arrangement," and also "better mainspring metallurgy that permitted longer, thinner and more flexible springs to drive the watch." This is a book for casual reading, not a reference book. It would make a good coffee table book, since it is printed on high quality pages and it has good photos and diagrams. One can read a few pages of the book and come away with something. Examples of special topics explained in the sidebars: "Clockwork gearing" (p. 23), "Lépine and the modern watch" (p. 53), "The bored-ruby jewel" (p. 70), and "How the mechanical watch works" (pp. 152-153). "The oscillator and escapement are the heart of the clock. The more consistent or stable the oscillations are and the more efficient the escapement is, the more accurate is the clock." (p. 32)

This is the best book explaining how we keep time, the history of the development of our different timepieces, and the illustration of a wide variety of historically important and beautiful clocks and watches. The explanations are understandable, logical, and well illustrated. In fact, the diagrams of the essential mechanics of a clock or watch are one of the most educational features of the book. I've always been fascinated with mechanical clocks and watches; now I know how the ubiquitous Quartz watch works as well!

This book is a resume of what is written on the brilliant book of David Landes, *Revolution in Time*. It

has a huge amount of photos, and worths every penny paid. The book, as mentioned by the reader above, does not cover American Watches history in depth. Even though, it is a very good book.

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