



Time Tamed by Nick Foulkes

Any attempt to write an exhaustive account of the millennia *Homo sapiens* have spent trying to ‘tame time’ would, as the celebrated luxury commentator and *The Rake* contributor Nick Foulkes puts it in his introduction to this tome, be a task “as Sisyphean as it is Canute-like”. Wisely, what Foulkes has done instead is curate 28 timepieces whose remarkable stories act as a kind of literary degustation menu, delving into choice fragments from a topic as vast as it is rich. The result is an edifying, readable book that will not only delight watch lovers but enrich the relationship they have with the timepieces they own.

A Homeric journey geographically as well as temporally, *Time Tamed* takes the reader from Upper Palaeolithic Africa to the Moon via Ancient Greece, 11th-century China and Jacobean London as it delves into 25 millennia in which mankind has attempted to harness the passing of time by giving formal structure to its measurement.

Along the way we meet the likes of Abbot Richard of Wallingford, an English mathematician and astrologer whose life work was a complicated astronomical clock; Emperor Rudolf II, who used a cannon hooked up to a time-measuring device to provide pre-prandial entertainment for guests; and

César de Trey, a Swiss denture maker who, challenged by British soldiers in Raj-era India to invent a watch that would endure blows from polo balls and mallets, came up with the Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso — the first sports watch.

As the narrative’s scenic route unfolds — from 13th-century attempts to make a wheel whose spin matched the period of one day to the most expensive and advanced watch ever created (the Patek Philippe Henry Graves Supercomplication) — what becomes apparent is that this book is not just a history of time-measuring instruments: it’s a history of humanity itself, of its desperate attempts to harness the forces around it and find its place in the cosmos, told via the various clocks and watches and the fascinating stories behind them.

Foulkes — whose other books include *High Society: The History of America’s Upper Classes*; *Last of the Dandies: The Scandalous Life and Escapades of Count D’Orsay*; and exhaustive treatises on subjects from cigars to trench coats and brands including Tag Heuer, Patek Philippe and Dunhill — has come up with a Christmas-list perennial for anyone whose appreciation of horology goes beyond the tangible.

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