



What Time is It There

Serge Gruzinski

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What Time is it There? is a history of worlds that encounter each other without ever meeting. The title comes from a film by Tsai Ming-liang which explores the desire to conquer the barriers of space and time by abolishing time differences and inventing substitutes for a coveted elsewhere. This preoccupation with other worlds and consciousness of the differences that separate them have become a persistent theme of our world today, shaped as it has been by the complex flows of people, images and ideas that we have come to associate with the term 'globalization'. But the dismantling of closed worlds that gradually opened cultures and peoples to one another is by no means new.

In this remarkable book, Serge Gruzinski takes us back to the early modern period and examines two testimonies that require us to navigate between America and the Islamic world long before the images of 9/11 had entered our heads. One is a chronicle of the New World compiled in Istanbul in 1580, the other is a Repertory of the Times written in Mexico in 1606, which dwells at length on the Empire of the Turks. Why and how did the Turks come to know so much about America, and what made readers in Mexico ask questions about the Ottomans?

Gruzinski conducts a dialogue between these two texts that emphasizes the singularities of the two visions, that of Islam and that of America, each already keeping a watchful eye on the other and yet irreducibly different, with this question always in the background: what did it mean to 'think the world' at the dawn of modern times?

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