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Swiss clock that calls to prayer

The Belal prayer clock is equipped with software and a satellite location system which enables it to calculate the time of daily prayers from anywhere in the world. Its unique feature is the sound of a muezzin, or public crier, who summons the faithful to prayer in Islamic countries. The clock, manufactured in canton Bern, aims to alert Muslims visually and by sound to the five daily prayer times in strict accordance with the rules of the Koran.

Belal, who was a companion of the Prophet Mohammed, was the sixth person to accept Islam and devote himself to Allah's cause. He became the prophet's muezzin and is said to have possessed a clear and resonant voice.

The timepiece takes into account that the times of prayer are determined by the position of the sun and consequently vary depending on location and date. The company behind the design, development and sale of the clock is IPTEQ (Innovative Prayer Time Equipment) of Geneva. One of the shareholders is the Moser-Baer company (Mobatime) of Sumiswald in canton Bern, where the clock is manufactured. Mobatime is perhaps best known for its industrial time systems, notably the clocks that hang in Swiss railways stations. The Belal can be used in the home, office, in hotels or at prayer locations. They would also be useful in embassies, on board ships or at airports.

Information is not only announced automatically in sound but also visually. Below the analogue time display is a high-resolution display, which features two adages or sayings linked to the Koran. Known as hadiths, they relate to the teachings or acts attributed to Mohammed. They are automatically changed every day from a collection of around 800 stored inside the clock's high-tech brain.

The clock has a certificate of conformity issued by the Islamic Centre of Geneva. It also draws attention to other optional prayers or important moments in a Muslim's day. These include an indication of the start of abstinence during the period of Ramadan or during a voluntary fast and a signal for the period of day during which prayer is forbidden.

During the next two years, IPTEQ hopes to sell between 500 and 800 pieces. It will first concentrate on the Middle East (about 75 per cent of sales) and Europe (25 per cent), particularly France and Britain. These are markets where there is not much competition. It later plans to sell the prayer clock on the Asian and American markets. *swissinfo*

Herbsttag

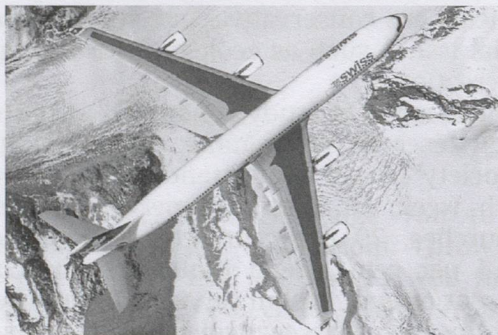
*Herr: es ist Zeit. Der Sommer war sehr gross.
Leg deinen Schatten auf die Sonnenuhren,
und auf den Fluren laß die Winde los.*

*Befiehl den letzten Früchten voll zu sein;
gib ihnen noch zwei südlichere Tage,
dränge sie zur Vollendung hin und jage
die letzte Süsse in den schweren Wein.*

*Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr.
Wer jetzt allein ist, wird es lange bleiben,
wird wachen, lesen, lange Briefe schreiben
und wird in den Alleen hin und her
unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben.*

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

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