

London Shows Islam Science Contributions

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LONDON – A British exhibition showed on Thursday, January 21, the debt owed by European scholars to their Muslim counterparts on everything from water pumps and blood circulation to engineering and map-making.

"As we move into a new global world, we need to respect and recognize the contributions of all other races and cultures into what we have today," Professor Salim Al-Hassani, the organizer of the exhibition, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

"This exhibition demonstrates that."

The "1001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in Our World" exhibition is hosted at London's Science Museum and runs from the 21 January to 25 April.

It features exhibits spanning from about 700 to 1700 based on hundreds of manuscripts from North Africa to China.

The exhibition aims to highlight contributions by Muslim scholars to the development of astronomy, maths, architecture, medicine and engineering that have been largely ignored in European history.

For example, at the 13th-century observatory in Maragha, Iran, astrologists developed new models for understanding the universe which helped pave the way for Copernicus' ideas of a sun-centered solar system in 1543.

Abbas Bin Firnas, a ninth-century scholar, also performed one of the first recorded human flights when he leapt from the minaret of the Grand Mosque in Cordoba using a glider stiffened with wooden struts.

Iraqi physician Ali Ibn Nafi is credited for inventing the diagram of the human circulatory system in 1242 CE and being the first to have accurately described the part of the cardiovascular system involving the heart and lungs.

The exhibit also shows the 12th century Syrian engineer Ibn Ismail al-Jazari who invented the double-action suction pump, and his contemporary Al-Idrisi who drew up a world map centuries before Columbus and Marco Polo set off exploring.

Gap-bridging

The claims of discoveries have been verified by experts at the Science Museum.

"The Muslim world was carrying the torch of human knowledge and understanding while the West went through its dark ages," Science Museum director Professor Chris Rapley told AFP.

The organizers hope showing such contributions would help improve understanding between the Muslim world and the West.

"If you neglect the contributions of other cultures then it gives you a sense of having cultural superiority, which is dangerous," says Al-Hassani.

Rapley, the Science Museum director, agrees.

"Science throughout its history has claimed a hugely important role in diffusing through or simply sidestepping cultural or political barriers."

The Liberty Science Center in New Jersey hosted in 2007 an exhibition on Islam's early contributions to science and technology.

The "Islamic Science Rediscovered" exhibition focused on nine disciplines: astronomy, engineering, exploration, flight, medicine, optics, water control, mathematics and art and architecture.

The organizers use state-of-the-art interactive display tools so that guests can have a hands-on experience of the devices invented by Muslim scientists from A.D. 700 to 1700.

The magnificent tools and devices were accompanied by portraits of the Muslim scientists and briefs of their accomplishments on touch screens.



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