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Elephant Clock is Centrepiece of Science Museum's Islamic Exhibition

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A replica of a 13th century 'elephant clock' by the Muslim inventor Al-Jazari, which relies on a Greek water mechanism to mark time has gone on display at the Science Museum.

The 20-foot high (6m) clock is as part of an exhibition of science from the Islamic world. The clock also features Chinese dragons, an Egyptian phoenix and wooden robots dressed in Arabian clothing.

Al-Jazari was an outstanding mechanical engineer from what is now Iraq, who wrote a book detailing how to build dozens of machines including suction pumps, crank shafts and water-raising devices. Professor Salim Al-Hassani, chairman of 1,001 Inventions, the organisation which is helping put on the exhibition of the same name, said of the clock: "It gives physical form to the concept of multiculturalism. It embodies cultural and scientific convergence of civilisations and is an appropriate centrepiece for an exhibition about the roots of science and technology."

The exhibition charts the development of science across the Islamic world from the 7th century until the 17th.

Prof. Chris Rapley, Director of the Science Museum, said those 1,000 years were "a time of exceptional scientific and technological advancement in China, India, Persia, Africa and the Arab world" which "gave us huge advances in engineering, the development of robotics and the foundations of modern mathematics, chemistry and physics."

Also in the exhibition is a model of a ninth century flying machine – effectively a wooden-ribbed hang glider – and a scaled down model of a 100 yard long Chinese junk built by a 15th century Muslim admiral called Zheng He.

More everyday objects with roots in the Islamic world include coffee, toothbrushes and soap, according to curators.

1,001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in Our World runs until April 25, although it is closed from February 25 to March 12 inclusive.

