


Muslim world ancient efforts in science finally revealed in London Museum

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London: The debt owed by European scholars to their Muslim counterparts on everything from water pumps and blood circulation to engineering and map-making was unveiled in a London exhibition yesterday.

The organisers of "1001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in Our World" hope to illuminate 1,000 years of neglected science from north Africa to China that provided a bridge between ancient and Renaissance scholarship.

In doing so, they expressed hope it 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," said Professor Salim TS Al-Hassani, who masterminded the exhibition at London's Science Museum.

He said: "As we move into a new global world, we need to respect and recognise the contributions of all other races and cultures into what we have today. This exhibition demonstrates that."

The exhibits span from about AD 700 to 1700, which Science Museum Director Professor Chris Rapley described as a time of "exceptional scientific and technological advancement in China, India, Persia, Africa and the Arab world".

It aims to highlight the Muslim scholars who built on existing knowledge to develop new ideas about astronomy and maths, architecture, medicine and engineering — but who have been largely ignored in European history.

At the 13th-century observatory in Maragha in Iran, the exhibition notes, astrologists developed new models for understanding the universe which helped pave the way for Copernicus' ideas of a sun-centred solar system in 1543. Abbas ibn 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.

Cairo medic Ibn Al Nafis is also said to be the first to have accurately described the part of the cardiovascular system involving the heart and lungs, paving the way for William Harvey's full description of circulation in 1628.

The exhibit also examines 12th century engineer Al Jazari, who invented the double-action suction pump.