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FEBRUARY 1, 2010 • 2:00 PM

AMAZING FORGOTTEN ISLAMIC INVENTIONS

1001 Inventions

Science Museum, First Floor
Exhibition Road,
South Kensington, London SW7 2DD

Open 21 Jan 2010 – 25 Apr 2010 BUT closed February 25 – March 12 2010 inclusive.

Free

1001 Inventions traces the forgotten story of a thousand years of science from the Muslim world, and from the 7th century onwards, explores the shared scientific heritage of diverse cultures. As this exhibition demonstrates, many of our modern inventions can be traced back to early Muslim civilisation.

In this forgotten period of history, whilst medieval Europe was literally stuck in the dark ages, incredible scientific advances were being made in the Muslim world. Geniuses in Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus and Cordoba took on the scholarly works of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, India and China, developing the foundations of what we would call 'modern' science. New disciplines emerged – algebra, trigonometry and chemistry as well as major advances in medicine, astronomy, engineering and agriculture. Arabic texts replaced Greek as the founts of wisdom, helping to shape the scientific revolution of the Renaissance.



A scale model of Al-Jazari's 13th-century Elephant Clock

The exhibits in '1001 Inventions' include a reproduction of a 9th century flying device and a five-metre high replica of the fabled Elephant Clock. This clock, the centrepiece of the exhibition, is a three-metre high replica of an early 13th-century water clock: one of the engineering marvels of the medieval world.

The Elephant Clock was built by al-Jazari, and gives physical form to the concept of multiculturalism. It features an Indian elephant, Chinese dragons, a Greek water mechanism, an Egyptian phoenix, and wooden robots in traditional Arabian attire. The timing mechanism is based on a water-filled bucket hidden inside the elephant.

This exhibit is a particular favourite with children: powered by water, the 16ft-high machine marks each half hour with rattling drums and moving serpents.



Al-Idrisi's 12th-century world map

Also featured is a reproduction of the famous 12th-century map by the Andalusian cartographer, Al-Idrisi (1100-1166). Produced in Sicily, this map is regarded as the most elaborate and complete description of the world made in medieval times. It was used extensively by travellers for several centuries and contained detailed descriptions of the Christian north as well as the Islamic world, Africa and the Far East.

The exhibition also features a camera obscura experiment by the greatest scientist of the medieval world: a 10th century Arab by the name of Ibn al-Haytham. Among his many contributions to optics was the first correct explanation of how vision works. He used the Chinese invention of the camera obscura (or pinhole camera) to show how light travels in straight lines from the object to form an inverted image on the retina.

Visit http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/visitmuseum/galleries/1001_inventions.aspx and <http://www.1001inventions.com/> to find out more.