



Islam & Science Exhibition at London's Science Museum

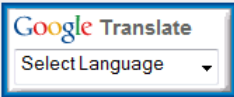
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An exhibition entitled "1001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in Our World" is underway at London's Science Museum. It aims at bringing greater public recognition to the contributions Muslim scientists have made throughout history.

Speaking at the opening of 1001 Inventions, Chris Rapley, the director of the Science Museum, said that the Islamic Golden Age had led to huge advances in engineering, physics and the foundations of modern mathematics, which continue to make an impact today.

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"The thousand-year period from the 7th century onwards was a time of exceptional scientific and technological advancement in China, India, Persia, Africa and the Arab world," he said.

Professor Rapley said that science had a significant role to play in developing common goals between the Islamic and Western countries in coming years, arguing that the most original scientific ideas emerge from multi-cultural collaboration.

"There's a lot of focus on the importance of interdisciplinary research, we should be talking more about multi-cultural research. People with different thought processes, different mental models, different ways of seeing things can spark off really new ideas," he said.

Muslim scientists have applauded the exhibition saying that a broader recognition of the role of their religion in science would lead to greater respect for Islamic communities.

Mohamed El-Gomati, a physicist at the University of York, called for the history of Islamic science to be made part of the National Curriculum. "If they learnt that a lot of the technologies we use today came from other cultures I think there would be more respect between children sitting next to each other in the classroom," he said.

He said that he had no difficulty reconciling his faith with his profession as a scientist. "My faith is my moral compass. Everything that I do in my labs is for the good of the community, the aim of my work in nanotechnology is to make people's lives easier," he said.

The exhibition also highlights the role women played in Islamic science, featuring an exhibit about Merriam Al-Ijlilya, an astrolabe maker and chief engineer for the Sultan.

Other exhibits featured in this interactive exhibition include a model of an energy efficient and environmentally-friendly Baghdad house, a 3 metre large reproduction Al-Idrisi's 12th-century world map, a model of Zheng He's Chinese junk ship, originally a 15th century wooden super structure over 100 metres long and a model of a 9th-century dark room, later called Camera Obscura, which Ibn al-Haytham used to revolutionise our understanding of optics.

A highlight of the show is a full-size replica of the Elephant Clock, a 6m (20ft) tall weight-powered water clock flanked by Chinese dragons and an Egyptian phoenix. In its day — 800 years ago — the instrument was unprecedented in its control of flowing water, its use of robotics and its reliability at marking out the passing of time in precise half-hourly intervals. It was invented by the famed medieval Iraqi engineer Al-Jazari.

Also on display is also a replica of the first person said to have flown with wings.

The exhibition was funded by the Abdul Latif Jameel Foundation, a charity set up in Britain by the Saudi Arabian company Abdul Latif Jameel Ltd. The free exhibition runs from 21 January to 25 April with a break between 25 February and 12 March.