

A World of Discoveries at the Science Museum

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by Community Correspondent Angelika Mohr

Until the end of the month, the Science Museum in South Kensington is still hosting the exhibition "1001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in our World". The colourful and interactive exhibits tell the tales of the great, and largely forgotten, extent of influence of the ancient Muslim civilisations on our life today. From astronomy to surgery, camera lenses to universities, many inventions that are today firmly integrated into our western culture, have their roots in the ancient Muslim civilisations which, in the 7th century, stretched from southern Spain to China.

Scholars of many different faiths travelled far to study together and develop knowledge left behind by the civilisations of ancient Rome, Egypt and Greece. New inventions, as well as mathematical theory, architectural features and languages spread fast through extensive travel and trade, by land along the Silk Route, from Spain to China, and by sea throughout the Mediterranean. Whilst Western Europe was going through a period of economic and cultural decline after the collapse of the Roman Empire, many life-changing discoveries were made in the Muslim world. The exhibition focuses very much on a historical point of view and, although the information is very worthwhile, some visitors may be disappointed by the lack of connection between the historical and the way outsiders experience the Islamic world today, which is certainly an important aspect of Muslim culture.

Accompanying the exhibition is the educational short film "The Library of Secrets" starring Ben Kingsley, which is played every 10 minutes and provides a welcome repose in the centre of the exhibition and captures particularly young visitors' interest. The colourful displays, including a model of Al-Jazari's Giant Elephant Clock, the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, the centre of learning in at the time and the mosque complex al-Quarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, one of the world's first universities, surprisingly founded by a woman, make the exhibition particularly family-friendly, whilst still providing more in-depth printed information for those who wish to gain more than a first impression.