

The Golden Ages

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The Golden Ages of Islam was an incredible era, an era that is now unfortunately swept under the rug in school history lessons. Most people refer to this time between the 7th and 17th century as the 'Dark Ages,' a period of nothingness, but this is far from the reality. This era, which should be known as the Golden Ages, was one where the richness of the Muslim civilisation had radiated throughout the planet.

'...this civilisation was driven more than anything, by invention. Its architects designed buildings that defied gravity. Its mathematicians created the algebra and algorithms that would enable the building of

computers, and the creation of encryption. Its doctors examined the human body, and found new cures for disease. Its astronomers looked into the heavens, named the stars, and paved the way for space travel and exploration...'

Ms Carleton Fiorina, CEO of HP Corporation

Where would this world be without the intellect of our Muslim ancestors? Our modern society owes vast amounts to the science and technology of the Muslim heritage, which was explored in the 1001 Inventions exhibition at the Science Museum.

From the industrial revolution to modern day surgery and the latest electrical gadgets (plus all the many many things in between!), it is in fact the Muslim civilisation that is responsible for laying their foundations, if not inventing them. At its time, the Muslim empire was the greatest in the world stretching from ocean to ocean, consisting of a great diversity of people, transgressing boundaries of nationality and colour. This civilisation, unlike other nations, was not afraid to explore new ideas. 10th century Al-Zahrawi from Cordoba (known as Abulcasis) is a great example of this. He was a famous and extremely skilled surgeon who contributed immeasurably to the world of medicine. He designed hundreds of surgical tools which were so accurate and ideal, that they have barely undergone any modification since then and today. His designs were included in his medical encyclopaedia, named Al-Tasrif.

'Al-Zahrawi remains a leading scholar who transformed surgery into an independent science based on the knowledge of anatomy. His illustration and drawing of the tools is an innovation that keeps his contribution alive, reflected in its continuous influence on the works of those who came after him'

L Leclerc, 19th century French medical historian

And how about Al-Biruni who determined the circumference of Earth and discussed the rotation of the Earth's axis about its own axis 600 years before Galileo? Or Fatima al-Fihri, the devout and religious woman, who built Al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco, one of the first universities in history? Or Al-Kindi who was a philosopher, physician, pharmacist, ophthalmologist, physicist, mathematician, geographer, astronomer and chemist? (Who, by the way even made time for cooking!) Or Ziryab, who brought 3 course dining, music and fashion to the world? I could go on and on and on, as these are only a fraction of the magnificent minds that I learnt about in this exhibition. Cameras, mobile phones, iPods, computers – you name it; the foundations of these existed all those years ago in the great Muslim civilisation.



I want you to take a moment to think about and compare that time with today. The point I wish to make is, where has this all gone? What has happened to the glory of the Muslim civilisation that we once had? Why? Well, I think it is important to look back at the lifestyles of these great minds, and to see the unity between them – the unity that should exist between every Muslim brother and sister. The intentions and purposes that they had, how they followed the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to please Allah (SWT), and in their striving to please Allah (SWT), they were able to spread their knowledge and wisdom to the world and make such an impact that we can still feel it to this day.

Perhaps this is telling us something about the way we are today. How many of us go to university to get a good education, so that we can get a good job and earn enough money to live a comfortable life? And the other question, how many of us go to university because it is in the teachings of Islam for all men and women to seek knowledge, and to find out more about Allah's creations? So many of these remarkable inventors and scientists, made extraordinary discoveries in their pursuit to practise their deen as perfectly as they could.

When a Muslim tries to practise their deen with pure intentions, it can bring light to the world, The Golden Ages being a prime example. Sadly, most of our young Muslim brothers and sisters are not taught about this magnificent era at school and so it is our duty to research and tell others about this hidden gem that is missing in history timelines. Perhaps we need to take the initiative to ensure that it is taught in our mosques and institutions so that we are motivated and inspired by these individuals and seek to follow their example in their achievements.

Most of all, I hope this is something that will inspire more Muslims to strive hard in seeking knowledge and pleasing Allah, to make a positive difference to the world we live in, and follow in the footsteps of the great minds. I believe we all have the potential, we just need to poke around a bit and release it from within ourselves! It has certainly inspired me to a great extent.

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I wish I had been able to visit the exhibition and write about it earlier, because it is absolutely fantastic but ended last month. (It's going on a world tour, and next stop is Istanbul if you're really intrigued!) I would also recommend the book, which I'm sure you can buy from Waterstone's or Amazon – 1001 Inventions: Muslim Heritage in Our World by Salim T S Al-Hassani, Elizabeth Woodcock & Rabah Saoud. And I shall leave you with this:

"Successful indeed are the believers. Those that offer their salah with all earnestness and full obedience."

Surah Al-Mu'minoon 23:1-2

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