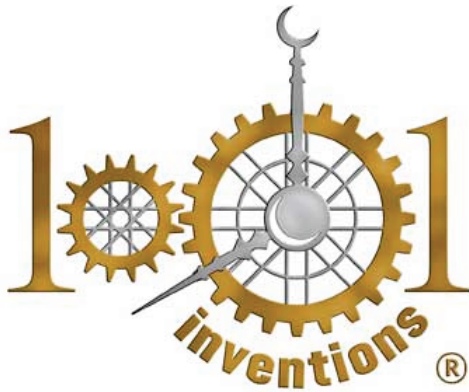


06.02.11

'1,001 Inventions' Celebrates Muslim Heritage

By Sarah Khan | Arts + Culture, Openings & Closings | [Comments](#)



Did you know that a Turkish cartographer drafted one of the oldest surviving maps of the Americas? That a Muslim woman in Morocco founded the world's first modern university, which still holds classes today? That a man named Abbas ibn Firnas tried to invent a flying machine... more than a thousand years before the Wright Brothers finally succeeded? That the word candy came from the Arabic qand?

With the recent congressional hearings on Muslim Americans and the furor surrounding the community center near Ground Zero, it's easy to overlook all the positive contributions Muslims have made to modern society. So "1,001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in Our World," which opened May 27 at the California Science Center, in Los Angeles, couldn't have come at a more opportune moment.



While medieval Europe was stumbling through the Dark Ages, the Muslim world was thriving in its own Golden Age with innovations in science, education, mathematics, and philosophy. "1,001 Inventions" showcases just a few of them. There's a scale model of a football-field-size ship built by the 15th-century Chinese Muslim general Zheng He; a display of 10th-

century surgical tools, some of which are still in use today; an explanation of the scientific method pioneered by the "father of optics," Alhazen; and, the exhibition's magnificent centerpiece, a 20-foot replica of a clock devised in the 13th century by the inventor al-Jazari, symbolizing world cultures working together—Chinese dragons, an Egyptian phoenix, a Persian rug, and Arab figures adorn an Indian elephant, and the clock is operated by Greek water mechanisms. An award-winning video featuring Oscar-winner Ben Kingsley as al-Jazari provides a helpful introduction.

I was so eager to visit the exhibition during its recent stint at the New York Hall of Science that my brother, sister-in-law, and I took my nephew, Amaan, for his first-ever museum adventure. Though most of the fascinating factoids went over his head, both literally and figuratively (the pint-size cutie is just two), he had a blast with all the interactive elements—lots of buttons to push, knobs to turn, and lights to activate. And in general, the Hall of Science is a wonderful place for a family outing. With bubbles, shadows, lights, and mirrors galore, not to mention Rocket Park mini golf and a science playground, the museum has plenty to keep kids of all ages occupied and enlightened.



After drawing more than a million visitors during its time in London, Istanbul, and New York, the exhibition will follow up its Los Angeles tour with Washington, D.C., in June 2012. So check it out for a whole different perspective on Islam—and come home with your very own miniature elephant clock. Mine's presiding over my desk at work as I type.



Sarah Khan is a copy editor at Travel + Leisure. You can follow her on Twitter @BySarahKhan.

Photographs courtesy of 1001 Inventions and Akbar and Naureen Khan