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1001 Inventions: Science in Muslim lands

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA

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ISTANBUL (AP) - For generations, the lore of "One Thousand and One Nights" helped shape Western notions about Muslim culture. The collection of tales described an exotic world of harems and flying carpets, [Sinbad\(/topics/sinbad/\)](#) and monsters, Aladdin and the jinn, [Ali Baba \(/topics/ali-baba/\)](#) and the 40 thieves.

Now an exhibition about innovation in Muslim civilization seeks to highlight what organizers say is an overshadowed period of history, a "Golden Age" in which advances in engineering, medicine and architecture laid groundwork for Western progress from the Renaissance until modern times.

In a play on the old stories, it is titled: "1001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in Our World."

The show seeks to be strictly academic, and shuns political or religious pronouncements. But the robust response of many young Muslims suggests a thirst for cultural pride against a contemporary backdrop of conflict and suspicion between the West and Muslim countries.

"Originally, it was aimed at the Western public," said [Salim Al-Hassani\(/topics/salim-al-hassani/\)](#), organizer of the [Britain\(/topics/britain/\)](#)-based exhibition and a professor of mechanical engineering at [Manchester University\(/topics/university-of-manchester/\)](#). "But we found that when people from the Muslim world, when they see it, they get fired up, especially the young people who are in search of identity."

It's a slick production, with an introductory film featuring a Harry Potter-like fantasy sequence with [Sir Ben Kingsley\(/topics/ben-kingsley/\)](#), the Oscar-winning actor, as a mysterious figure who dispels three skeptical students in a library of preconceptions about the past.

The centerpiece of the show is a replica of an elaborate "elephant" clock that symbolized a multicultural spirit and pioneered modern automation and robotics. It used Greek water-powered technology, and the figures of an Indian elephant, an Egyptian phoenix, a Persian carpet, Chinese dragons and men in Arabian dress.

It was designed 800 years ago by Al-Jazari, a Muslim engineer in what is today southeast [Turkey \(/topics/turkey/\)](#). Other giants of innovation during the 1,000-year period that began in the seventh century were physician [Al-Zahrawi\(/topics/abu-al-qasim/\)](#), whose innovations shaped European surgery, and [Fatima Al-Fihri\(/topics/fatima-al-fihri/\)](#), whose multi-subject institute of learning, with no gender restrictions, laid foundations for the [modern university\(/topics/university-of-manchester/\)](#).

"There is a perception that Islam was always backward and made no contribution to the world of science," said visitor [Sule Seda Tezer\(/topics/sule-seda-tezer/\)](#), who was especially pleased to note

the high profile of women in the displays. "The West has a phobia about Islam. I think there is an effort to break the phobia and build better ties between the East and West."

With 40,000 followers, the "1001 Inventions" [Facebook\(/topics/facebook/\)](#) page echoes her enthusiasm. "Come to [Algeria\(/topics/algeria/\)](#)!" and "we are waiting 4 u in Damascus" are among the posts. From [Saudi Arabia\(/topics/saudi-arabia/\)](#), Abdull-[Kareem Andeejani \(/topics/kareem-andeejani/\)](#) wrote:

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