

1001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim Heritage in Our World

By: Arlene McKanic | Posted: December 8, 2010

The U.S. leg of "1001 Inventions" – a fun, splashy, fascinating exhibit – just started at the New York Hall of Science in Queens, N.Y., on Dec. 4. Created by the U.K.-based Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation, the exhibit showcases the inventions and discoveries of the Muslim world during a 1,000-year time span starting around the seventh century, a period that overlaps Europe's Dark Ages and Middle Ages.



During these years, Muslim civilization stretched from southern Spain through the Middle East and into China. Those who lived in the Muslim world seem to have discovered, invented and cataloged everything from the circulation of blood to the distillation of perfume; from water clocks to medical instruments still in use today; from algebra and [astrolabes](#) to the physiology of the eyeball (which led to the creation of the camera). They not only built great cities but also made sure those urban centers had clean running water, hospitals, libraries, schools, restaurants and other necessities and amenities.

A number of these geniuses were also African. Abbas Ibn Firnas was a Berber polymath who created what is thought to be the first flying machine. Constantine the African, from Tunis, was a doctor who translated the works of Arabic doctors into Latin. Al-Jahiz was a writer and scientist of African descent who worked in Basra, Iraq, under the patronage of the caliph. He wrote 200 books on science, literature, theology, biology, zoology and semantics and posited theories of evolution a thousand years before Darwin was born. He also had ideas as to why some people had black skin and others white. (He speculated that it had something to do with the environment.)

The exhibit continues its run at the New York Hall of Science through April 24, 2011. It will move on to the California Science Center in Los Angeles and then, in 2012, to the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D.C.

Learn more about the exhibit [here](#).