



1001 Inventions and the Library of Secrets

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My fascination with science achievements of the Muslim Golden Age, which started in the 7th century, has nearly been wiped out by my frustration with the current state of science in the same region.

Usually, at mention of the rich scientific achievement of the region many centuries ago, I flinch and comment that we are better of focusing on how to create scientific achievements now, rather than talk about the past.

However, even I couldn't help but be excited over the 1001 Inventions exhibition, which started its five-year world tour in London at the beginning of this year. The exhibition lasted for six months and, according to their website, "has broken all known records with more than 400,000 visitors." Next month it will start its second leg, in the historic Turkish city of Istanbul, before moving on to North America afterwards.

I'm particularly excited about the exhibition because it isn't continuously trying to remind Muslims of their scientific achievements to feel good about themselves. Rather, it is actually trying to explain to younger generations in the West the contribution that these Muslim scientists have made to their own lives and civilizations.

It is effectively science diplomacy, reversed to reach out to the West from Muslim nations, rather than the other way round.

And judging from the success of the exhibition so far, I think it is working pretty well. By the time the complete tour is done, millions of people would have seen it and been exposed to a new side of Muslims.

A 13-minute video starring Oscar-winner Sir Ben Kingsley was produced to serve as opening introduction to the idea behind the 1001 Inventions initiative. It depicts the story of three school children who enter a magical library for research but get more than they expected. Since being put on the internet, the movie was downloaded over a million times. It has so far received dozens of awards including five at the US International Film Festival and eight at the 2010 New York Film Festivals.

I think the video has been so successful because it manages to capture the exact essence of what the organizers of the 1001 Inventions exhibition were trying to achieve; reach out to a Western audience effectively.

The video was recently also uploaded to YouTube so if you want to get excited about the exhibition, I definitely recommend watching the video below.