

One morning in 852 CE, a man climbed to the top of a minaret of a large mosque in Cordoba. "There must be a way, he thought. 'Birds can fly. Why can't I?' So, for several years, Firnas worked on improving his design. Finally, his new flying machine was ready. The wings were made of silk and eagle feathers. This time, the nearly 70-year-old Firnas climbed to the top of a mountain in Cordoba that looked out over the city. Once again there was an audience who had gathered to watch him. Firnas was nervous. Were the wings strong enough to carry his weight? Would he really fly? He was already well known as a poet, astronomer, musician, engineer, scientist and inventor. The man was Abbas Ibn Firnas and he was attempting to fly. The minaret shone in the sun and the crowd fell silent as the man stretched open his arms and prepared to jump. Shouted one man in the crowd, and true enough, Firnas began to fall quickly to the ground like a bird with an injured wing. The look of wonder on the faces of the crowd quickly turned to horror. However, as he fell, his cloak spread out like a parachute and slowed his fall. The crowd that had gathered below were eagerly watching and waiting to see what would happen. He had already tried to fly over the desert, and hoped to fly successfully in Cordoba. The crowd held its breath as Firnas launched himself into the air. He flapped his arms frantically up and down. Firnas soon was shaken but not badly hurt. "Next time I will fly," he said. Firnas was a brave man and, despite this failed attempt, he was determined to try again. He was wearing a cloak with pieces of wood attached. The crowd rushed to help him. He checked the wings carefully one more time. Then he looked up at the sky, took a deep breath and leapt into the air. He was determined to find a way to fly, and spent many years thinking up designs for wings to help him take flight. He's falling!