

Nomination form International Memory of the World Register

Isaac Newton's Theological Papers

2014-47

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) is regarded by the science community to be one of the most important thinkers from the 17th century to the present day. By the public, he is universally recognized for his immeasurable contribution to the study of physics. However, Newton was also a theologian, historian, and philosopher.

The National Library of Israel holds a collection of Sir Isaac Newton's papers comprised of 7500 pages. This archive, bequeathed to the library by the scholar Abraham Shalom Yahuda in 1951, contains the vast majority of Newton's theological and historical papers, and is the most extensive collection of his writings in existence. The library also possesses some of Newton's alchemical papers, bequeathed to the library as part of the Sidney Edelstein collection, a specialized collection on the History of Science.

The theological papers reveal an extraordinary and unfamiliar side of this celebrated scientist, and contribute to a fuller understanding of his character, his religious views, and his interaction with society and the world around him in 17th and 18th century England. The papers shed new light on Newton's mystic and apocalyptic interests, and show that he was as original and radical a religious thinker as he was a scientist. They add a significant and valuable body of knowledge to the study of European intellectual and religious history, as well as to the history of science.

These papers are of great importance to Western civilization and are worthy of being included in the International Memory of the World register.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

This nomination is submitted by Oren Weinberg, Director of the National Library of Israel.

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

The National Library of Israel is the sole owner of these papers.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Dr. Milka Levy-Rubin

2.4 Contact details

Name	Address
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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

In this part of the form you must describe the document or collection in sufficient detail to make clear precisely what you are nominating. Any collection must be finite (with beginning and end dates) and closed.

The National Library's collection of Newton papers includes forty-one sets and three smaller collections of assorted documents. Thirty-nine of the forty-one sets are theological treatises on revelation and the apocalypse, the history of the Church, biblical exegesis, and paganism. Three of the sets are a record of Newton's personal correspondences including a list of his expenses at Cambridge and a genealogical record. The smaller collections of assorted documents include Newton's writings on alchemy and draft passages on biblical history.

The collection can be dated to between 1670 and 1727.

The items in the digital collection can be identified as follows:

- Newton Papers 1 - Untitled Treatise on Revelation
- Newton Papers 2 - Various texts on Revelation, Solomon's Temple and Church History
- Newton Papers 3 – Introduction to Continenens Apocalypseos Rationem Generalem
- Newton Papers 4 - Variantes Lectiones Apocalypticæ (version 1)
- Newton Papers 5 - Theological Notes
- Newton Papers 6 - The Synchronisms of the Three Parts of the Prophetick Interpretation
- Newton Papers 7 - Miscellaneous Drafts and Fragments on Prophecy, Principally Daniel and Revelation
- Newton Papers 8 - Notes on Prophecies
- Newton Papers 9 - Treatise on Revelation (sections 1-3)
- Newton Papers 10 - Notes and Extracts on Interpreting the Prophets (part 1-3)
- Newton Papers 11 - Proœmium and First Chapter of a Treatise on Church history
- Newton Papers 12 - Treatise on Church History
- Newton Papers 13 - Miscellaneous Theological Extracts and Notes (part 1)
- Newton Papers 14 - Miscellaneous Notes and Extracts on the Temple, the Fathers, Prophecy, his Church
- Newton Papers 15 - Drafts on the History of the Church (sections 1-7)
- Newton Papers 16 - Miscellaneous Draft Portions of Theologiæ Gentilis Origines Philosophicæ
- Newton Papers 17 - Three Bundles of Notes for a Work on the Ancients' Physic-Theology,

related to *Theologiæ Gentilis Origines Philosophicæ*

- Newton Papers 18 - Fragment on the History of the Church's Apostasy
- Newton Papers 19 - Treatise on Church History with Particular Reference to the Arian Controversy
- Newton Papers 20 - Expanded Latin Translation of the First Part of 'Two notable corruptions'.
- Newton Papers 21 - Exposition of 2 Kings 17:15-16
- Newton Papers 22 - Copies of second and third 'Professions of Faith' by early Church Councils
- Newton Papers 23 - Roman Catholicism and Prophecy
- Newton Papers 24 - Proposals Concerning Calendar Reform
- Newton Papers 25 - Draft passages on chronology and biblical history
- Newton Papers 26 - The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms, amended (draft) (part
- Newton Papers 27 - Seven drafts of Newton's Defense of the Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms
- Newton Papers 28 - Fragments on the kingdoms of the European tribes
- Newton Papers 29 - Fragment on Church history, mainly concerning Athanasius
- Newton Papers 30 - Out of La Lumiere Sortant des Tenebres and Out of the Commentator on La Lumier
- Newton Papers 31 - Miscellaneous notes on history, chronology and theology
- Newton Papers 32 - Tract against signing the Oxford address
- Newton Papers 33 - Notes on ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian deities
- Newton Papers 34 - Newton's expenses at Cambridge
- Newton Papers 35 - Newton's obligation as master
- Newton Papers 36 - Phrases and translations from Terence's *Andria* and *Eunuchus*
- Newton Papers 37 - "Historia Coelestis" of Flamsteed (parts)
- Newton Papers 38 - De Igne Sopororum et Materia Quam Calefacit
- Newton Papers 39 - Notes on early Church history and the moral superiority of the barbarians
- Newton Papers 40 - Newton family genealogy
- Newton Papers 41 - Draft chapters of a treatise on the origin of religion and its corruption
- Newton Papers 254a – Collected Papers

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- Newton Papers 259 – Collected Papers
 - Newton Papers 25 (Test) – Collected Papers
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3.4 History/provenance

Describe what you know of the history of the collection or document. Your knowledge may not be complete, but give the best description you can.

Upon Newton's death in Cambridge in 1727, his relatives, the Conduitts, took possession of his papers. Newton's papers reflected an array of various interests and occupations: papers in mathematics and physics, documents written as part of his function as head of the Royal Mint and President of the Royal Society, and more obscure and intriguing papers on theology, history and alchemy.

In 1872, one of Newton's descendants, the 5th Earl of Portsmouth, donated the mathematical and scientific papers to the University of Cambridge, where Newton had studied and taught. His theological papers, as well as the alchemical and the historical writings, were returned to the family. In July 1936 the non-scientific papers were put up for sale by Sotheby's in London. The auction was poorly attended since at the same time in London Impressionist paintings were being sold at Christie's. Newton's papers were thus sold to a variety of people for the mere sum of 9,000 pounds.

Having found out belatedly about the sale, two important scholars were resolved to purchase the papers and to reunite them. The first was the famous British economist, John Maynard Keynes, who strove to buy all the alchemical papers; the second was the Jerusalem born well-known Orientalist, Abraham Shalom Yahuda. At some point, they even exchanged some of the papers between them. While Keynes bequeathed the alchemical papers to King's College Cambridge (where they arrived after his death in 1946), A.S. Yahuda bequeathed his papers upon his death in 1951 to the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem.

The Newton Project was created in 1998 under the direction of Rob Iliffe in order to transcribe these writings to the highest of scholarly standards, and to make them freely available online to anyone with access to the Internet. At the time of writing, all of Newton's alchemical, theological and historical writings have been transcribed, and all of these will be available online by the end of 2014.

The Newton Project has established the provenance for every document sold at Sotheby's in 1936 and offers an introduction to every group of documents, along with much other contextual information and links to the images of the originals provided by the National Library of Israel. Although the theological writings lie at the heart of the Newton Project, in 2011 it began publishing online transcriptions of Newton's scientific and mathematical writings, and plans to have transcribed and published everything Newton wrote by 2020.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address	
The National Library of Israel	E.J. Safra Campus, Givat Ram, Jerusalem 9139002 Israel	
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4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	
The National Library of Israel	E.J. Safra Campus, Givat Ram, Jerusalem 9139002 Israel	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email
+972-74-733-6100	+972-74-733-6337	Orly.simon@nli.org.il

4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage.

The National Library of Israel is both legally and administratively responsible for preservation of the documentary heritage, according to standards and procedures promulgated by the National Library.

4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

Encouraging accessibility is a basic objective of MoW. Accordingly, digitization for access purposes is encouraged and you should comment on whether this has been done or is planned. You should also note if there are legal or cultural factors that restrict access. All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

The National Library's complete collection of Newton's manuscripts is available online in several formats. Digital images are available on the National Library website. From this website the collection is also linked to the Newton Project website. The Newton Project, under the director of Professor Rob Iliffe, is an initiative that aims to transcribe all of Newton's writings and to give the general public free online access to this work.

The Newton Project website presents the complete set of Newton Papers held by the National Library in two versions: a "diplomatic" version that includes all the changes and corrections as they appear in the original manuscript, and a "naturalized" version that enables a continuous reading of the text. There are no restrictions on access to either the images on the National Library Website or the transcriptions on the Newton Project website.

To view the digital images visit:

http://dlib.nli.org.il/R/?func=collections-result&collection_id=5732

To visit the versions on the Newton Project website

visit: <http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/prism.php?id=1>

4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

*Where copyright status is known, it should be stated. However, the copyright status of a document or collection has **no bearing** on its significance and is not taken into account in determining whether it meets the criteria for inscription.*

The documentary heritage material is no longer protected by copyright, and has long been in the public domain.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

Is the documentary heritage what it appears to be? Have identity and provenance been reliably established?

Newton's papers were relatively undisturbed until they travelled to Cambridge University in 1872 in order for the 'Portsmouth Committee' to extract and retain the papers relating to the exact sciences. Scholars have established that the first descriptions of the arrangement and scale of Newton's archive of non-scientific papers, made immediately after his death, correspond exactly with the detailed accounts given of the same documents in the catalogue of the 1936 Sotheby Sale. The comprehensive records relating to Yahuda's purchase of the Newton materials during and after the sale, and the inventory of Newton's papers made by the Newton Project show conclusively that the papers have been transmitted to the present day with no diminution in the quality or scale of the archive.

5.2 World significance

Is the heritage unique and irreplaceable? Would its disappearance constitute a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of humanity? Has it created great impact over time and/or within a particular cultural area of the world? Has it had great influence (positive or negative) on the course of history?

In polls conducted among scientists and the general public, Isaac Newton is considered (with Albert Einstein) to be one of the two most influential physicists of all time. In addition to discovering the heterogeneity of white light and universal gravitation, he was also a mathematician of the highest rank, being the first to enunciate the two major branches of calculus. However, his primary interest was in the general field of religion, which involved the painstaking study of Jewish worship, early Christian doctrine, and sacred history. He devoted his life to understanding prophecy, and in particular, how the proper decoding of obscure Jewish and Christian prophetic texts explained the history of the world.

The Yahuda collection of Newton's papers at the National Library of Israel offers unrivalled insights into the mental world and spiritual life of one of the greatest thinkers in recorded history. It records the development over six decades of his extraordinary views on Judaism, Christianity and the history of the world. The size of the archive makes it one of the largest surviving collections of papers for any early modern individual, and its destruction would represent a significant loss for those invested in the study of philosophy, theology, science, and the history of science, as well as the public. In short, it is unique and irreplaceable.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

1 Time

Is the document evocative of its time (which may have been a time of crisis, or significant social or cultural change)? Does it represent a new discovery? Or is it the "first of its kind"?

2 Place

Does the document contain crucial information about a locality important in world history and culture? For example, was the location itself an important influence on the events or

phenomena represented by the document? Does it describe physical environments, cities or institutions that have since vanished?

3 People

Does the cultural context of the document's creation reflect significant aspects of human behaviour, or of social, industrial, artistic or political development? Or does it capture the essence of great movements, transitions, advances or regression? Does it illustrate the lives of prominent individuals in the above fields?

4 Subject and theme

Does the subject matter of the document represent particular historical or intellectual developments in the natural, social and human sciences? Or in politics, ideology, sport or the arts?

5 Form and style

Does the document have outstanding aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic value? Or is it a typical exemplar of a type of presentation, custom or medium? Is it an example of a disappeared or disappearing carrier or format?

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – does documentary heritage have an emotional hold on people who are alive today? Is it venerated as holy or for its mystical qualities, or revered for its association with significant people and events?

(Once those who have revered the documentary heritage for its social/ spiritual/ community significance no longer do so, or are no longer living, it loses this specific significance and may eventually acquire historical significance.)

The Yahuda manuscripts in the National Library of Israel comprise the vast majority of Newton's religious writings and are of immense cultural significance. The writings satisfy many of the criteria mentioned above.

In the first place, these papers are indicative and evocative of a radical European intellectual milieu. Although Newton was a highly independent thinker, he was not unaware of currents of debate that flowed around him. His writings, though almost entirely private, open an extraordinary window onto the revolutionary intellectual world of early modern Europe, and the topics that obsessed him were also those discussed by the learned culture of his time. This corpus of four million words on theology, church history, Jewish ritual and prophetic exegesis from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would be significant, even if their author were not the one many credit with founding modern science.

Secondly, the papers display the great seriousness and erudition that underlay Newton's work in religion, and they reveal the same courage and originality that characterised his writings in the exact sciences. No-one can doubt any longer that the study of religion was his abiding passion of his life, and the values he derived from his religious existence penetrated every facet of his life. The papers show in detail how his ideas developed from the earliest notes on the Bible and other religious texts, to his much more expansive treatises on prophecy and Scriptural exegesis. Many of these writings are brilliant pieces of work in their own right, and deserve to be seen by the wider public. Nor are these papers from his alleged dotage, for by the time he wrote the *Principia Mathematica* in 1687, he had a mastery of the Bible and of fourth century patristic literature that had very few equals anywhere.

Thirdly, the papers show that many of the metaphysical beliefs and ethical commitments that Newton brought to his work in the exact sciences originated in his religious values. These include his belief in an Absolute Space and Time that was intimately related to God, along with his deep-seated sense that research should be evidence-based, rational, and independent.

Finally, these papers say more about Newton himself and his personal views than any other collection of his writings, and the continuing fascination with his personality and his discoveries is evident from the numerous readers that have visited the Newton Project site. For example, they demonstrate clearly his view that individuals and states should be tolerant of other groups, provided that the latter obeyed the laws of the land. On the other hand, his writings betray a man who shared many of the same prejudices against other religions (particularly Roman Catholicism) that were held by most Protestants. Aside from the content of the archive, its great extent also shows that his religious study was Newton's chief form of worship.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

These manuscripts are unique. There are no extant copies beyond the National Library's collection.

6.2 Integrity

The most substantial part of Newton's theological and historical writings are held by the National Library of Israel. However, some manuscripts on these topics are dispersed among the following institutions: King's College, Cambridge; University Library of Cambridge; Trinity College, Cambridge; Huntington Library, San Marino, CA; and New College Library, Oxford.
