

Newton Project Canada Update: Newton in Israel, June 2007

Twenty Newton scholars from Britain, Canada, Israel, Italy, Switzerland and the United States assembled at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute in Israel between 17 and 20 June 2007 for a ground-breaking conference entitled: "Newton in Pursuit of the Secrets of God and Nature". This was the first Newton conference to bring together in a significant way scholars who work on Newton's science with those who work on his theology and alchemy. One major theme addressed by several of the conference delegates was the question of how Newton's study of nature may have related to his study of theology. Does Newton's thought reveal an over-arching unity between these fields or did Newton compartmentalise them?

The Van Leer conference coincided with an exhibition of Newton's manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library (now called the National Library of Israel) in Jerusalem, which holds the single largest collection of Newton's theological papers, along with significant manuscripts by Newton on alchemy and other subjects. This exhibition official opened in Jerusalem on 17 June 2007. Its three lead curators are Yemima Ben-Menachem (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Mordechai Feingold (CalTech, Pasadena) and Stephen Snobelen (King's College, Halifax). The manuscripts and books on display were accompanied by captions in Hebrew and English. A guidebook entitled "Newton's Secrets" was also made available to those attending the exhibition, which ran until August 2007.

Stephen Snobelen was selected the prophetic and theological manuscripts for the exhibition and some of those he selected contain Newton's discussions of the time of the end, the return of the Jews to Israel, the Jerusalem Temple and his now-famous comments on the year 2060.

The JNUL Newton exhibition made headlines around the world, gathering more publicity than the co-organisers could have hoped. The media stories focussed mostly on the strong component of Newton's prophetic papers that were put on display to the public for the first time. The first media story was published in Haaretz (in Hebrew and English) on the opening day of the exhibition).

The JNUL exhibition website can be viewed at:

<http://www.jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/mss/newton/>

The English version (slightly truncated) can be read at:

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/871786.html>

This was followed by a report by the Associated Press:

http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/discoveries/2007-06-19-newton-religious-papers_N.htm

The Israeli online news site YNET NEWS published the following report based on an interview with Snobelen on 21 June at the exhibition site:

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3416287,00.html>

A major focus of this piece is Newton's prophetic beliefs, including his fervent belief that the Jews would return to Israel according to biblical prophecy.

Further details about the conference and the exhibition can be obtained from the Director of the Newton Project Canada (snobelen@dal.ca)