Ten Commandments join Isaac Newton's notes online

(Reuters) - A copy of The Ten Commandments dating back two millennia and the earliest written Gaelic are just two of a number of incredibly rare manuscripts now freely available online to the world as part of a Cambridge University digital project.

The Nash Papyrus -- one of the oldest known manuscripts containing text from the Hebrew Bible -- has become one of the latest treasures of humanity to join Isaac Newton's notebooks, the Nuremberg Chronicle and other rare texts as part of the Cambridge Digital Library, the university said on Wednesday.

"Cambridge University Library preserves works of great importance to faith traditions and communities around the world," University Librarian Anne Jarvis said in a statement.

"Because of their age and delicacy these manuscripts are seldom able to be viewed - and when they are displayed, we can only show one or two pages."

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nash Papyrus, was by far the oldest manuscript containing text from the Hebrew Bible and like most fragile historical documents, only available to select academics for scrutiny.

The university's digital library is making 25,000 new images, including an ancient copy of the New Testament, available on its website (cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/ [1]), which has already attracted tens of millions of hits since the project was launched in December 2011.

The latest release also includes important texts from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism.

In addition to religious texts, internet users can also view the 10th century Book of Deer, which is widely believed to be the oldest surviving Scottish manuscript and contains the earliest known examples of written Gaelic.

"Now... anyone with a connection to the Internet can select a work of interest, turn to any page of the manuscript, and explore it in extraordinary detail," Jarvis said.

The technical infrastructure required to get these texts to web was in part funded by a 1.5 million pound ($2.4 million) gift from the Polonsky Foundation in June 2010.

($1 = 0.6210 British pounds)

(Reporting by Dasha Afanasieva, editing by Paul Casciato)

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