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Younis Sabet, the Godfather of soil mycology in Egypt

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Studies on fungi in Egypt dated back to the beginning of the 19th century on lichens by several investigators like Delile, Nylander, Müller and Sickenberge. In the early 20th century, Sickenberger and Steiner provided information for collections of lichens from Egypt in the 19th and early 20th century.

By the beginning of the 20th century, special attention was being given to phytopathogenic fungi on wild and domesticated plants of economic importance since 1902 by Fletcher and other British, Egyptian and American researchers.

Both Reichert and Melchers are worked on documentation of phytopathogenic fungi in Egypt, Israel Reichert (1891-1975) obtained his doctorate on Die Pilzflora Ägypten in which 237 species were recognized, of which 42 were new to science. Unfortunately, none of his specimens were retained in Egypt. In 1927 Leo E. Melchers went to Egypt at the invitation of the Egyptian Minister of Agriculture as chief mycologist for 18 months. He met a series of difficulties such as there being no records available on occurrence, distribution, or dates of investigator in Egypt, any mycological observations conducted previously by any investigator in Egypt, and no mycological reference collection existing in the country. His checklist, however, included 345 species of fungi, especially those causing plant diseases (Melchers 1931). No studies were carried out on the soil fungi until the 1935. Research on Egyptian soil fungi was probably commenced by Professor Younis Sabet.

Younis Sabet

The Godfather of soil mycology in Egypt was born on the 1st of January 1898 in the Arab Gohina village of the Qalubiya Governorate. In 1921 he received his degree from the Agricultural High School (now Cairo University's Faculty of Agriculture). Shortly thereafter,

he was sent to England to study botany at the University of London, where he earned his B.Sc. Diploma of honor in 1925. After his return, he joined the Agriculture Ministry staff in the plant breeding section. In 1927 he was appointed lecturer in Botany Department at the Faculty of Science of the newly established Egyptian University.



Late Prof. Dr. Younis Sabet

He went on to teach botany with enthusiasm and energy, and prepared his lectures and laboratory courses with great care. In addition to his teaching duties, Professor Sabet devoted a good deal of time to research, for a part of which he was awarded the M.Sc. degree. Shortly thereafter, the whole of his scientific output was evaluated by referees from abroad, eminent botanists, who reported enthusiastically in his favor and subsequently he was promoted to Assistant Professor and in due course he was appointed Professor of Botany and Head of the Department in 1943. During these and the following years, he gradually built up a strong Department of Botany in the Faculty of Science, while continuing his research work with painstaking, persistent care and ingenuity. In 1946, Professor Sabet was appointed Professor of Agricultural Botany and Dean of

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the Faculty of Agriculture of Farouk I (now- Alexandria University). It was with great reluctance that he accepted this post, which he kept till he was chosen as Under Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture in 1952. In this capacity, he remained till 1958 when he reached the age of retirement. During those years, he also held the membership of the Egyptian delegation to the FAO. Immediately after his retirement, and because of his wide agricultural experience, he was first appointed technical advisor in the Ministry of Agriculture and later in the National Research Centre. It is beyond any doubt that Prof. Sabet has given leadership and inspiration to the botanical studies in embryology, soil fungi and mycorrhiza, and he has achieved undisputed authority in these fields in Egypt. In mycology, he discovered three species of molds new to science and reported on many species to the Egyptian fungal flora, and on the factors affecting their distribution in the soil. His investigations on the vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhiza embody a new approach to reveal experimentally if possible, the hidden role of this type of mycorrhiza on the cultivated host plants examined (cotton, citrus, palm tree). Because of good experience, strict discipline, clean hand and pure spirit, Prof. Sabet has gained fame as a competent administrator and thus he was invited to preside or join the executive board of the following companies: The New Egyptian Company for Land Reclamation, The Agriculture Insurance Bank, The Sugar and Distillery Co., and The Eastern Company for Tobacco. His activities in these companies did not take him away from

his main field, botanical studies. This can be demonstrated by his association with the Faculty of Agriculture of Ain Shams University where he lectured to graduate students from 1962 up to his death.

Professor Sabet was an active member of a number scientific and technical government bodies and committees of which can be mentioned: The Higher Council of Science, The Committee for Granting State Prizes for Biological Studies and the Standing Committee for Evaluating the Scientific Achievements of Applicants for Professorship in Egyptian Universities. He was also an active member of a technical commission established by the Association of Islamic Studies on interpretation of Koran verses that relate to the universe and natural phenomena. Professor Sabet took the initiative in the establishment of some scientific organizations, and served as a member and president for several years in some others. His activities in the following are particularly noted: The Egyptian Academy of Sciences, The Egyptian Botanical Society, The Egyptian Science Union, The Egyptian Association for Scientific Culture, The Society of Applied Microbiology, The Egyptian Phytopathological Society, The Society for the History of Science, and the Society of Atomic Energy. All his life, Prof. Sabet was a prodigious worker, not sparing himself in youth or old age. He was accomplished much in several rather diverse fields, peace upon his soul and we appreciated his invaluable contributions to the fungi in Egypt.

Further readings

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