

LAUDATIO DAN H. YAALON

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We can call Prof. Dan Yaalon 'a young historian' and, although he has several grandchildren, he still has one young child : 'the history of soil science', a rather new branch on the tree of sciences.

What is the age of the soil? As old as the earth and hence not precisely known? Does soil differ from earth, ground or land? Is subsoil the same as underground? What is a 'new' soil and what is an 'old' soil? Does soil contain the four elements of nature being : earth, water, air and fire? Is soil part of the earth, its source of life?

Who can better respond to those questions than Dan Yaalon? Most of the answers can be found in his book 'History of Soil Science', a product of his long-term interest and activities in the field of soil science and more in particular its history. For those efforts he deserved the nomination and now the honour of receiving the Sarton Medal.

But not only for writing a book he is winning a medal. Dan Yaalon's life was and still is devoted to soils, soil science and the history of soil science. Born in the former Czechoslovakia in 1924 and after studying at the Agricultural Universities in Copenhagen and Uppsala, he became a citizen of the new state of Israel in 1948, a new state with 'new' promised land (a territory, a surface, square meters, ...), with 'new' soil (a volume, cubic meters, ...) ... it's a matter of dimension.

At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he got his PhD in Soil Science. He specialised and taught courses in clay mineralogy, soil salinity, pedology, soil survey, erosion and sedimentation, geochemistry.

He was a postdoctoral fellow at the Rothamsted Experimental Station in England and an Unesco fellow in Tashkent in the former USSR. He was a lecturer and a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the University of Melbourne in Australia, the Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore, USA, the University of California at Davis and at Berkeley, the University of Arizona, Tucson, USA, the Australian National University at Canberra, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, U.K., the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheba,

Israel. He was a visiting professor of our Ghent University in 1993. This is the history of his academic highlights and appointments.

Although we cannot live with the past we can learn from it. Science can help us in this endeavour and we owe our predecessors in soil science that their achievements should be recognised.

It is Dan Yaalon who took the initiative and founded in 1982 the Committee on the History, Philosophy and Sociology of Soil Science within the International Society of Soil Science (ISSS) and in 1997 of the Commission on the History of Soil Science within the Division of History of Science of the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science (IUHPS). Through Newsletters the study of the history of soil science is encouraged. During the congresses of the ISSS in 1990, 1994 and 1998, symposia have been organised and chaired by Dan Yaalon. In 1990 in Kyoto (Japan) there was a symposium on historical, philosophical and sociological aspects of development in soil science. In 1994 in Acapulco (Mexico) the theme was : 'Origin and transmission of ideas in soil science' and in 1998 in Montpellier (France) : 'Attitudes to soil care and land use through human history'. His lectures on 'Paradigm shifts in the history of soil science' are now being published. Those shifts were identified as Liebig's numeral theory of plant nutrition of the 1840's; the recognition of the soil profile as an organised body subject to the influences of largely independent soil forming factors in the 1880's by Dokuchaev, Hilgard and later Jenny, and the acceptance of the deterministic process-response model for soil reconstruction in the 1960's and 70's.

The past has passed away, the present does not exist and the future never begins. If future could start then it becomes immediately part of history. Only history can exist ... in fact everything is history.

We are privileged that at our Faculty of Agricultural and Applied Biological Sciences with its history in soil science we can honour today Dan Yaalon as soil scientist with the Sarton Medal. Soil Science has no age but will always be remembered through its history.

