

**NAOMI FEINBRUN-DOTHAN**  
**(1900–1995)**



Naomi Feinbrun, Professor Emeritus of Botany at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, died in Jerusalem on 8 March 1995, close to her ninety-fifth birthday. She was one of the first local botanists active in the research of the flora and vegetation of Israel and the Middle East.

Naomi Feinbrun (Dothan was added by her later, as a Hebrew name) was born in 1900 in Moscow. Her family fled during the revolution from Russia to Romania, where she graduated in Botany at the University of Cluj in 1923. In 1924, after immigrating to what was then Palestine, she worked for a short period as a schoolteacher. In 1925 she joined Alexander Eig and Michael Zohary, forming a study team. They became members of the staff of the department of Botany of the Hebrew University which was established in the same year and moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 1929.

The formal head of the Department of Botany was Prof. Otto Warburg, a well-known botanist from the University of Berlin. However the three local botanists were those who immediately undertook the thorough and enthusiastic research of the flora and vegetation of Palestine (Israel and Jordan of today) and of the neighboring countries. Their itineraries, in spite of the difficulties of moving around at that time in the Middle East, included Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, and reached as far as Iraq. Their observations laid

the foundations for the phytogeographic research of Israel, Jordan, and the Middle East in general, while the collections served as the basis for the Middle Eastern herbarium of the Hebrew University. A large number of phytogeographic, phytosociologic, and floristic-systematic studies of the region started at this time and were published by Alexander Eig, Naomi Feinbrun, and Michael Zohary, often by cooperative effort. Their knowledge of the local flora was summarized in a Hebrew “Analytical Key” in 1931 (several later editions followed). In this publication they introduced Hebrew botanical terminology (much of it new) and each taxon was provided, in addition to its scientific name, also with a Hebrew name, often taken from traditional sources or other semitic languages. The “Analytical Key” laid the first foundation for the education of an ever-increasing number of nature enthusiasts in Israel.

Prof. Feinbrun was the first scientist who introduced cytotaxonomic research in Israel and a large number of studies were published by her and by her students over the years. She was interested especially in the bulbiferous monocots and after finishing her PhD — a monograph of genus *Bellevalia* (1938–40) — she published many cytotaxonomic studies in this group, e.g., *Allium*, *Colchicum*, *Crocus*, to name only a few. At the same time she carried out research of genera of other families (*Papaver*, *Cuscuta*, genera of Cistaceae, etc.) and various vegetation studies.

After officially retiring in 1968, she continued with her scientific work and published one of the highlights of her career — volumes 3 and 4 of *Flora Palaestina* in 1978 and 1986, respectively (the first two volumes are by M. Zohary) — and together with A. Danin, published an updated Hebrew “Analytical Key” in 1991.

Naomi Feinbrun belonged to the pioneer generation of Israel and had, like many of that generation, a rather uncompromising attitude to life in general. Naturally the same approach was applied to scientific research and publication, making it often rather difficult for her students to live up to her high standards of perfectionism. However, those of her ex-students, like me, with whom she had a prolonged scientific and personal relationship, had the opportunity to see a very different person, one who easily accepted their more relaxed approach to life. They gained a friend who showed great interest in them, even up to a short time before her death, and who participated with joy in every step of their scientific career and personal life.

Though extremely modest, Naomi Feinbrun was much respected among her colleagues in Israel and abroad. There are a number of plant names given in her honor, among them *Astragalus feinbruniae* Eig (1970), *Bellevalia feinbrunae* Freitag & Wendelbo (1970), and the most recent, *Colchicum feinbruniae* Persson (1992). In a Festschrift on the occasion of her seventieth birthday (which also included a detailed bibliography — *Israel Journal of Botany*, Vol. 19, Nos. 2–3; 1970), the esteem of the scientific community was expressed. During the last decade of her life she was honored with the OPTIMA gold medal in 1986, and in 1991 received the “Israel Prize” — the highest national acknowledgment of scientific distinction.

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