

Memorial of Scholar



Professor Tigani El Mahi (1911-1970)

Photo source: ⁽¹⁾

The Republic of the Sudan has, since its independence in 1956 ⁽²⁾, to the best of its ability attempted to promote the absolute necessity of education and has seen to it that it manifests itself as a participant in the world stage. Despite this, Sudanese scholars are almost never mentioned in popular academic media. Here in NSJ, we have decided to manifest ourselves as a force of change and to, to the best of our ability, see to it that these under-recognized scholars are shined forth as they always should have. In this edition of NSJ, our persona of the edition is the father of African psychiatry, Professor Tigani El Mahi of the Republic of the Sudan.

Born in 1911 in El Kawa, Sudan (~300km south of the Sudanese capital of Khartoum ⁽³⁾), little did anyone present know that they were witnessing the birth of a legend who was destined for unfathomable greatness. In this article, we will be discussing Professor El Mahi's life in the following manner:

- i) His education
- ii) His career as a psychiatrist + his contributions to the field
- iii) His career as a politician
- iv) His poetry
- v) Interesting facts

His education:

For starters, young Tigani underwent his primary education in his native El Kawa. Following this, he would move to Rufa'a, Sudan ([14.75°N 33.35°E](#)) ⁽⁴⁾, where he would receive his middle school education. For his high school (secondary) education, young Tigani would once again move to the Sudanese capital of Khartoum after which he would join and graduate with a

diploma in Medicine, Surgery and Obstetrics (the equivalent of today's MBBS degree) from Kitchener's Medical School (Now: University of Khartoum) in 1935⁽¹⁾.

In July of 1949, Dr. El Mahi was granted a diploma in Psychological Medicine from the United Kingdom⁽⁵⁾.

His career as a psychiatrist + his contributions:

Prior to receiving his diploma in psychological medicine in 1949 (he joined the program in 1947), and following him obtaining his MBBS degree, Dr. El Mahi practiced as a doctor in the Sudanese Ministry of Health at the time moving about a number of the nation's states ⁽¹⁾.

Following his becoming a licensed psychiatrist (as aforementioned, in 1949), Dr. El Mahi returned to his native Sudan where he started the nation's first medical establishment specializing in mental health ⁽⁵⁾.

In 1959, Dr. El Mahi was appointed to the World Health Organization's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO-EMRO) where he served as an adviser in mental health until 1964.

As the father of psychiatry in Africa, Dr. El Mahi was a rather prominent figure on both a national and international scale. Especially given how the field was (and arguably still is) in its infancy. For example, he served as President of the 1st Conference on Education of Psychological Medicine which took place in New York⁽⁵⁾. In his time in the USA, he delivered over 40 lectures in his field of expertise ⁽⁵⁾.

Furthermore, Dr. El Mahi contributed to a plethora of committees including, but not limited to: 'the WHO Committee on Mental Health', the Executive Committee of the International Union of Health, and the Scientific Council for Technical Assistance'⁽⁵⁾.

In 1969, Professor El Mahi (unfortunately, it is unclear when Dr. El Mahi was promoted to Professor), was named Chair of Psychiatry (also known as: Head of Department) at the University of Khartoum.

Both the University of Colombia and the University of Khartoum awarded Professor El Mahi DSc degrees ⁽⁵⁾. Unfortunately, it is unclear when those degrees were awarded.

Of his notable publications would be his ‘Introduction to the History of Arab Medicine’ which we highly recommend.

His career as a politician

Not only was Professor El Mahi a legendary psychiatrist and doctor, but he was a notable Sudanese politician.

In fact, following the October revolution of 1964 in Sudan ⁽⁶⁾, Professor El Mahi was ‘chosen as Member and Rotational President of the Supreme Council of State’⁽⁵⁾ and was at one point in time President of the Sudanese Transitional Council ⁽¹⁾(in other words, he was the leader of the nation).

The image below is of Professor El Mahi to the right, Queen Elizabeth II in the center, and Prince Phillip – Duke of Edinburgh. The image was taken during the Queen’s visit to the Sudan in 1965 ⁽⁵⁾.



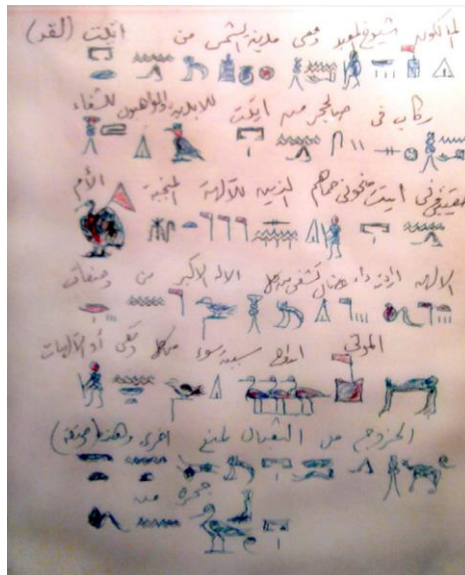
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His poetry

As per a short biography on Professor El Mahi, ‘He was a man of varied talents and interests. He was best known for his encyclopedic knowledge of history, sciences, literature and poetry, especially those of Sudan, Arab, Muslim, and the Old World’ (5).

Interesting facts

- 1) El Mahi was multi-lingual. In addition to his native Arabic, the psychiatrist was also well-versed in (in no particular order) English, Latin, Hausa, and Persian⁽⁵⁾.
- 2) In 1956, aged 45, Dr. El Mahi volunteered in the Suez War ⁽¹⁾ which broke out during the presidency of the well-known Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt⁽⁷⁾.
- 3) Professor El Mahi was, for some time, President of the Sudan Doctors’ Union ⁽⁵⁾
- 4) Professor El Mahi, during his lifetime, compiled an outstanding library which contained, approximately speaking, 6,000 documents, 19,000 items, and 20,000 letters. This library stands in the Khartoum University Library⁽⁵⁾.
- 5) Professor El Mahi was also an Egyptologist, the image below is of some of his translations of Hieroglyphics into Arabic (5).



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