

# Preface

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The intimate relationship between civilization and soil has been an eternal theme in literature. Mostly it is celebratory:

You are the daughter of the sea, oregano's first cousin.  
Swimmer, your body is pure as the water;  
cook, your blood is quick as the soil.  
Everything you do is full of flowers, rich with the earth.

*Pablo Neruda*

Sometimes, forlorn:

O stony grey soil of Monaghan  
The laugh from my love you thieved;  
You took the gay child of my passion  
And gave me your clod-conceived.

*Patrick Kavanagh*

Since the Enlightenment and the pursuit of scientific knowledge, another literature concerning soil has developed; a literature that is diverse, technical and vast; it records our understanding of soil as part of the natural world and its relation to society.

Soil articles in scientific journals started to appear in the late 1800s, but the number of articles drastically increased from the 1930s onwards. Clearly, this trend reflects advances in our understanding of soil behaviour and the developments in soil science as an independent and successful discipline: about half a million soil science articles were published between 1910 and 2007. Many of these articles are now obsolete and have been surpassed by new insights and scientific advances. Nevertheless, there is a large body of soil scientific literature that may be old, but is still worth reading. Not only are these articles well written or show where the current ideas in our discipline are coming from, but they are also a source of inspiration and an example of how solid reasoning, theoretical development, data collection, analysis and interpretation lead to great scientific progress.

We have chosen 86 seminal soil science papers that are bound in this four-volume major reference work. The papers in these volumes are about 0.02 per cent of all soil articles published between 1910 and 2007. Although we, with help from

the advisory board, have done our best to select papers that are representative of the many avenues of progress in soil science over the past 100 years or so, some readers may well feel that papers deserving of inclusion have been overlooked. This is inevitable when the body of published work is so large and so diverse. Nevertheless, within the constraints imposed for this publication, we feel that the collected papers present a fair *aperçu* of the development of soil science from its early days to recent times, and we commend it to readers on that basis.

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