

# Dan Ben-Amos, Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations

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DEATHS

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Dan Ben-Amos

Dan Ben-Amos, a former professor of Near Eastern languages and civilizations in the School of Arts & Sciences and a renowned expert in folklore, died on March 26. He was 88.

Dr. Ben-Amos received his BA in 1961 from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, then earned an MA (1964) and a PhD (1967) from Indiana University at Bloomington. While earning his PhD, he spent a year as an assistant professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, but joined the faculty at Penn immediately after graduating in 1967. Appointed as an assistant professor of anthropology, he was promoted to associate professor in 1971, and in 1977, he became a full professor of folklore and folklife. In 1999, he joined Penn's department of Asian and Middle Eastern studies, and

after that department was split into sub-specialties in 2004, joined the department of Near Eastern languages and civilizations. During the 1980s and 1990s, he also taught in Penn's College of General Studies (the equivalent of today's College of Liberal and Professional Studies).

"Dan was a great mentor, committed teacher, and wonderful colleague and friend," said his colleagues in Near Eastern languages and civilizations in an online tribute. "Learning and scholarship meant the world to him. Full of energy and enthusiasm, he was teaching his classes in NELC (Jewish Folklore and Jewish Humor) until a week before spring break. We will miss the joy of bumping into Dan in Williams Hall or on Locust Walk and launching into conversations full of his trademark insight, verve, and indeed, humor."

Dr. Ben-Amos was a leading specialist in folklore and folklife trained in the comparativist tradition. He edited a series of translations of folklore classics by European scholars and published many articles on folklore theory and the history of the field. His books include *Sweet Words: Storytelling Events in Benin* (1975), *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity* (1999), which he co-edited with Liliane Weissberg, and *Folklore Concepts: Histories and Critiques* (2020). In 2006, his edited volume, *Folktales of the Jews, Volume 1: Tales from the Sephardic Dispersion*, won National Jewish Book Award in the Sephardic Culture category. Dr. Ben-Amos was a fellow of the American Folklore Society (AFS) and won its Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Award in 2014.

"Dan was 88, and still holding to his vow never to retire, thereby, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett put it, holding 'the folklore flame at the University of Pennsylvania to the very end,'" said Mary Hufford, president of the AFS fellows and former director of Penn's Center for Folklore and Ethnography. "His signature, pivotal contributions to the field are legion, but it is the chance of running into Dan in a corridor at Penn or an AFS meeting, and the ensuing exchange—both jocular and erudite—that I grieve and want to celebrate."

A funeral was held on March 30 at West Laurel Hill Cemetery in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.