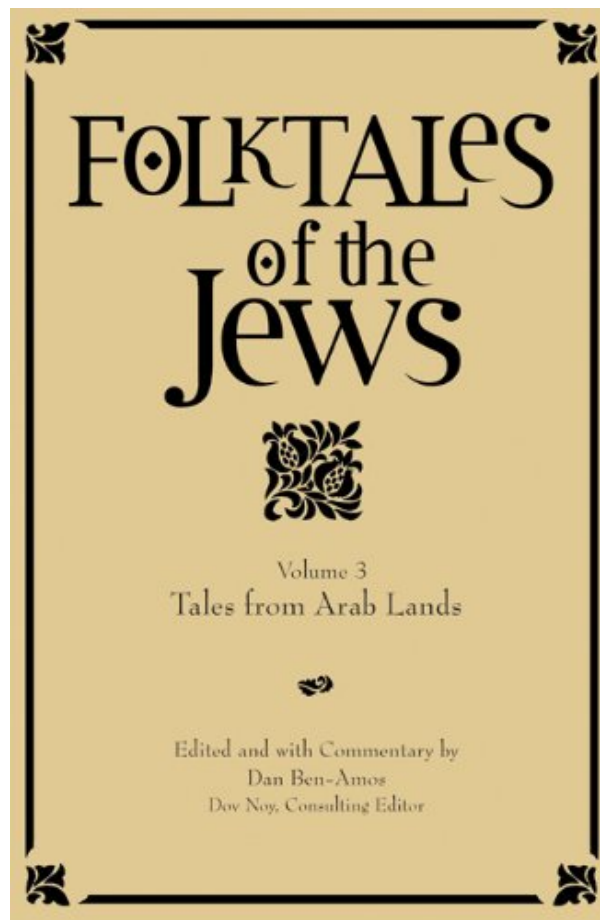
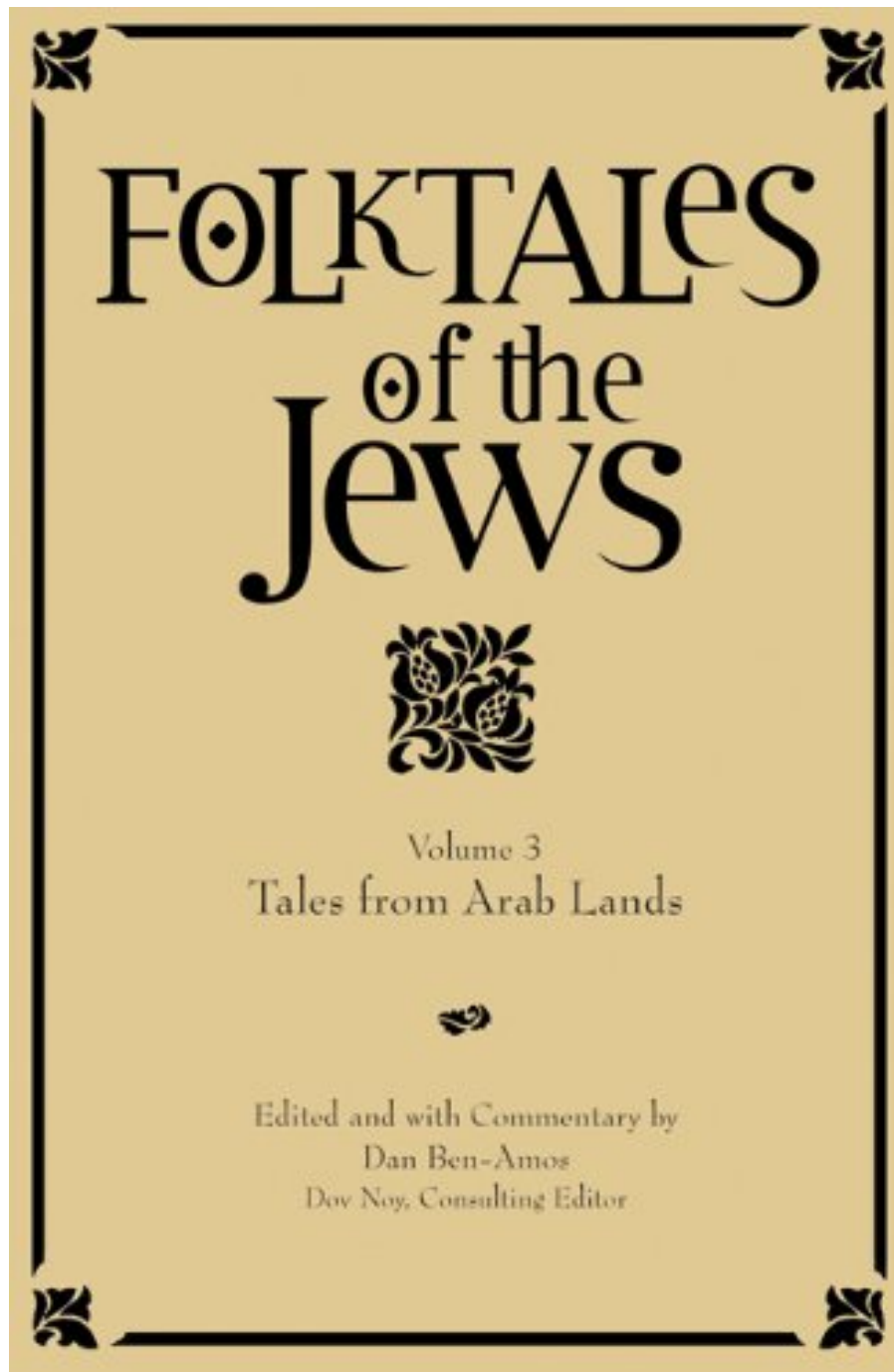


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TALES FROM ARAB LANDS FROM BRAND:
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“For anyone who wants an introduction to what the Diaspora really means, hand them any volume in this masterful collection. . . . Each tale has a life of its own, lit from within, and each piece of commentary and footnote records a story of telling stories, human, lively, deep. . . . We are indebted to JPS for publishing this astonishing collection.”—Roger Abraham, PhD

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From the Publisher

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About the Author

Dan Ben-Amos, PhD is professor of Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania, and the editor of the National Jewish Award Winner *Folktales of the Jews: Tales from the Sephardic Dispersion* and of *Folktales of the Jews, Volume 2: Tales from Eastern Europe*.

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Thanks to these generous donors for making the publication of the books in this series possible: Lloyd E. Cotsen; The Maurice Amado Foundation; National Endowment for the Humanities; and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture

Tales from Arab Lands presents tales from North Africa, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq in the latest volume of the most important collection of Jewish folktales ever published. This is the third book in the multi-volume series in the tradition of Louis Ginzberg's timeless classic, *Legends of the Jews*.

The tales here and the others in this series have been selected from the Israel Folktale Archives (IFA), named in Honor of Dov Noy, at The University of Haifa, a treasure house of Jewish lore that has remained largely unavailable to the entire world until now.

Since the creation of the State of Israel, the IFA has collected more than 20,000 tales from newly arrived immigrants, long-lost stories shared by their families from around the world. The tales come from the major ethno-linguistic communities of the Jewish world and are representative of a wide variety of subjects and motifs, especially rich in Jewish content and context.

Each of the tales is accompanied by in-depth commentary that explains the tale's cultural, historical, and literary background and its similarity to other tales in the IFA collection, and extensive scholarly notes. There is also an introduction that describes the culture and its folk narrative tradition, a world map of the areas covered, illustrations, biographies of the collectors and narrators, tale type and motif indexes, a subject index, and a comprehensive bibliography.

Until the establishment of the IFA, we had had only limited access to the wide range of Jewish folk narratives. Even in Israel, the gathering place of the most wide-ranging cross-section of world Jewry, these folktales have remained largely unknown. Many of the communities no longer exist as cohesive societies in their representative lands; the Holocaust, migration, and changes in living styles have made the continuation of these tales impossible. This series is a monument to a rich but vanishing oral tradition.

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This is a very entertaining book with a delightful university-type education

By Israel Drazin

This superb and comprehensive volume not only has sixty legends, moral, humorous and folk tales, it also introduces readers into the world of Jews in Arab lands, the cultures at various times, the histories, and thought processes. These added materials include well informed commentaries on the tales, explanations of terms, comparisons with other Jewish and non-Jewish stories, notes filled with information that will satisfy readers with stronger curiosities, and much more. These materials are a university education, as if readers were taught by the school's most-friendly, articulate, and well-liked professor. The sixty tales probably take up no more than about 150 pages; the other close to 700 pages contain this exemplary and entertaining education.

For example, pages 79-86 have a comprehensive explanation of the biblically mandated counting of days, popularly called "counting of the omer," between Passover and Shavuot. It explains that we really have no idea why this 49 day period was converted into a time of mourning during the middle ages and why a middle day, the thirty-third day of the counting, called lag b'omer, became a happy day in the middle ages. Rabbis, as is well-known, explain that the 49 days was the time that the students of Rabbi Akiva, who participated in the Bar Kochva rebellion against Rome in 132-135 died - some say in a plague, others in battle, the numbers also vary. This is a good homily, but is unlikely. The commentary also reveals similar customs in other countries among non-Jews.

Before this, on pages 71 and 72, the book tells the tale of how Rabbi David Alshqar knew when he would die, used the day to give his friends a final message, a shroud magically appears, his friends dig his grave, he gets in and dies, they cover the grave, walk home, and because the day is Friday and the Shabbat is fast approaching, the sun stands still for them until they reach their homes. In pages 73-79, there is interesting information about the rabbi, the cultural, historical, and literary background to this miracle tale, how both Jews and Arabs give significance to gravesites, about other tales where a person foretells the time of his death, and about miracles, interment, descending into a grave, and about songs sung to commemorate deaths of "holy" men.

Another example is the legend about Rabbi Shelomoh, a very pious man, who runs from Arabs, enters a cave, sees a lion with a thorn in its paw, and pulls it out. This one page tale tells how the thankful lion protects the saint. The commentary discloses similar fables in other cultures, such as the famed "Androcles and the Lion," and how the Irish anti-Christianity playwright George Bernard Shaw used his two-act play "Androcles and the Lion" in 1912 to mock Christianity.

Virtually every fact and every tale is interesting. There is the fact that many Arab saints are really Jewish, but the Arabs took them over and gave the hero an Arab name, and the Jews did the same to the Arabs. There is the tale that threatens the listener that if he shaves and violates what the story teller feels is a biblical prohibition "you will be reincarnated as an ass." There is the story of a resurrection created by a small inanimate Torah scroll that was once taken from the community and brings itself back. The story is followed by a discussion about magic, among other things. There is a fable of how the Baal Shem Tov approached a picture containing Jesus, pulls him out of the picture, and uses him to stop a blood libel against the Jews. The rabbi travels to the picture at warp speed and the commentary discusses, among other matters, other tales of such magical traveling. Some stories have jokes within them, others draw on ancient myths, such as King Solomon and the king of the demons, many have anachronisms, some give comfort, some encourage obedience to Torah laws such as the Sabbath, some take dreams as their theme, or speak of friendship, riddles (such as "which direction does God face?"), the evil eye, the court Jew, astrology, the power of a fish, and many others. In short, this is a book that everyone will enjoy and smile about.

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Bought as a gift for my Aunt.

By DMH

Bought as a gift for my Aunt. She adores this set. It has great stories and the book is made of high quality materials. Good collector item for people who like folktales & mythology from different ethnic backgrounds.

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