



### **Dr. Amnon Netzer, World-Renowned Iranian Jewish Scholar, Dies at 73**

In the academic world of Middle Eastern studies he was considered an intellectual giant for his comprehensive works in the field. To the tight-knit Iranian Jewish community worldwide he was considered a legend who had researched and helped preserve the near 2,500 year history of Iran's Jewry. For his life's work, the death of Dr. Amnon Netzer at the age of 73 on Feb. 15 was a blow to Iranian Jews living in the U.S., Israel and Iran.

Nearly 500 local Iranian Jews gathered at the Nessah Synagogue in Beverly Hills on Feb. 17 to honor Netzer whose coffin was draped in the flags of Israel and former Iranian government. The mourners were mostly older Iranian Jews and close friends including Nessah's Rabbi David Shofet. "His life and love was with reading, discovering and sharing the history of Iranian Jews," Shofet said. "He sacrificed his entire life in order to record our community's history and he traveled the world including to the most remote villages in Iran in order to uncover the truth about Iranian Jews."

Netzer was born in the northwestern Iranian city of Rasht in 1934 and immigrated with his family to Israel in 1950. He is credited for working as an editor for various Persian language newspapers in Tel Aviv during the 1950's and as the first producer/anchor of the Persian language news broadcasts on the Voice of Israel radio between 1955 and 1958. After receiving a degree in Middle East and International Affairs from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in 1965 Netzer obtained a degree from New York's Columbia University in Iranian Studies, Indo-European languages, as well as Semitic Languages and literature. Later in 1969, Netzer obtained his doctoral degree in the same subjects from Columbia and went on to teach at various universities through out his career.

In 1970, Netzer returned to Israel where he co-founded the Iranian Studies department at Hebrew University and began his research on Iranian Jewish history as well as the ancient Judeo-Persian language. He not only authored scores of articles about Iranian Jewish history but helped compile, "Padyavand," a rare and comprehensive three-volume book detailing various significant events in Iranian Jewish history. "In the period of time after the [1979 Iranian] revolution when Iranian Jews were not at all knowledgeable about their history which was not documented, Amnon Netzer was the one who started the process of gathering the documents about our 2,500 history," said George Haroonian, an Iranian Jewish activist. "He woke us up as to our background and roots."

Netzer's colleagues and former students said he was unique because he was one of the world's foremost authorities in a wide range of topics within his field. These included general Iranian history, Persian linguistics, Iranian cultural and literature, Judeo-Persian history, literature, and Judeo-Persian linguistics as well Islamic culture. "In my opinion, Professor Netzer was one of the rare geni that emerges once in a few centuries," said Dr. Nahid Pirnazar, Netzer's mentee and a UCLA professor of Judeo-Persian history. "His knowledge of his field was both comprehensive and diverse. What set him apart was his ability to present the history of Iranian Jewry in the context of solid academic evidence, not his personal feelings or agenda."

While the Iranian Jewish community is still struggling to come to grips with Netzer's passing, his close friends said future generations will undoubtedly benefit from his legacy and knowledge he left behind. "As I have said before and still feel, it will only be in the future that we truly appreciate and understand the depth of Amnon Netzer's work and contributions to his field," Pirnazar said. Netzer's friends said he was also among a small and distinguished panel of academics that were frequently called on by Israeli government officials to share their expertise regarding Iran and the Middle East.

Netzer died at UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles and his body was returned to Israel for burial after the memorial. He is survived by a wife and two children living in Israel.