



Call for Papers

Sages and Symbols: Transmitting Knowledge Through Stories in Classical Persian Narrative Literature

International Conference

July 9–10, 2027, Department for Iranian Studies, University of Bamberg

Classical Persian literature displays a strong didactic tendency across different genres of narrative poetry. Its corpus encompasses a rich diversity of themes, motifs, and symbols that reflect the wisdom, beliefs, and values of different communities over the centuries. Beyond merely reflecting these cultural and intellectual traditions, narrative literature also provided a means of articulating, preserving, and transmitting the knowledge embedded in them. Such knowledge could take the form of moral and mystical lessons addressed to a broad range of audiences, from sovereigns, courtiers, and elites to the wider populace. However, how do these texts articulate and transmit different forms of knowledge, and what literary strategies do they employ to make such knowledge meaningful to their audiences?

Here, knowledge transmission refers to the ways in which narrative texts communicate, interpret, and transform intellectual and cultural information and erudition for their audiences. In this context, “knowledge” refers to a broad spectrum of intellectual and cultural resources, including ethical, mystical, religious, political, scientific, and philosophical learning, expertise, and wisdom, as well as ideas and guidance concerning governance, spiritual life, and social conduct. Narrative literature provided a wide range of literary genres and narrative forms through which different kinds of knowledge could be articulated, encoded, and transmitted. Classical Persian literature encompasses a vast corpus of narratives, from *qiṣṣa*, *dāstān*, *ḥikāyat*, *rivāyat*, *mathal*, Qur’ānic or prophetic tales, to long epics and romances, in verse and prose. It may be transmitted through a range of agents, including authors, narrators, sages, saints, rulers, counsellors, and protagonists, who may explicitly or implicitly articulate particular forms of knowledge within a literary narrative. They draw on a wide range of philosophical, religious, and literary traditions, including Greek philosophy, Buddhist parables, Hindu texts, biblical and Quranic tales, Sufi handbooks, and Zoroastrian and Mithraic romances. Composed in Persian, a lingua franca that bridged local and cosmopolitan cultures and mediated knowledge throughout the premodern Persianate world, this literature circulated across Anatolia, Central, South, and Southeast Asia.

The present call invites papers that explore how knowledge is articulated, encoded, and transmitted through narratives in Persian literature, with particular attention to didactic strategies and metanarrative dimensions, as well as the roles of narrators, literary figures, narrative devices, and intertextuality in shaping the transmission of knowledge. The title *Sages and Symbols* refers both to the human carriers of knowledge (sages, saints, wise counselors) and to the symbolic forms through which knowledge is encoded and transmitted: recurring motifs, allegorical figures, and semantically dense narrative elements that acquire meaning within specific cultural and intellectual contexts.

The conference aims to bring together scholars with PhDs who work on Persian literature and narrative traditions from different regions in the premodern and early modern Persianate sphere. We invite papers that discuss questions such as the following:

- How are different forms of knowledge narrated, (re)interpreted, and adapted in Persian narrative literature?
- How do narrative structures, literary devices, and linguistic features in classical Persian shape knowledge presentation and interpretation?
- What roles do literary characters play in the transmission and exchange of knowledge?
- How do symbols, motifs, and allegorical figures function within narrative language and plot, and how do their meanings evolve over time in communicating ideas related to knowledge and wisdom?
- How do narratives engage with established cultural norms by reinforcing, negotiating, or challenging them?
- How do Persian narratives engage with broader literary and intellectual networks and traditions, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts?

The aim of this conference is to address a gap in research on narrative literature and to develop a multifaceted understanding of how stories functioned as important vehicles for the transmission of knowledge across different literary, cultural, and intellectual contexts.

Submission Guidelines

To participate, please send an abstract of 250 words and a short résumé of 200 words to both christine.kaempfer@uni-bamberg.de and pegah.shahbaz@uni-goettingen.de.

Deadline for the submission of abstracts: October 31, 2026

Notification of acceptance: November 2026

An edited volume is planned, and presenters are requested to submit their final papers for publication by March 1, 2028.

Practical Information

The conference is jointly organized by the Department of Iranian Studies at the University of Bamberg and the Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Göttingen. The conference will be held at the Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Bamberg (Schillerplatz 17, 96047 Bamberg). The organizers will apply for external funding to cover travel and accommodation (three nights) expenses. The final confirmation of financial support will depend on the outcome of this application, and participants will be promptly notified once a decision is made.

Organizers

Dr. Christine Kämpfer, Department for Iranian Studies, University of Bamberg

Dr. Pegah Shahbaz, Institute of Iranian Studies, University of Göttingen