



We are pleased to announce the next Friends of the Kern Institute lecture:

***Kingship, Normative Ethics, and Religion in Early Modern Persian Ramayanas***

**by dr. Ayelet Kotler, Postdoctoral Researcher PURANA project, Leiden University**

**Date** : Friday, May 9, 2025

**Time** : 16.00h

**Venue** : Leiden University, Herta Mohr Building, room 0.02. The lecture will be followed by **drinks** in the LIAS common room of the same Herta Mohr Building (first floor).



Sita goes through her trial by fire, surrounded by Ram, Lachman, a few monkeys, and the gods who vouch for her chastity. Illustration from an early 18th-century Razmnāma. Courtesy of the University of Chicago Special Collections, Codex Ms. 341, f. 95r.

**Abstract**

Persian authors in early modern South Asia intensively engaged in various ways with Sanskrit texts and works in other South Asian vernaculars. Narrative literature, scientific works, religious treatises, and historiography—many were rendered and commented upon in Persian. The wide array of topics and the large number of texts might give the impression that the main concern of Persian authors and their patrons was to enrich Persian literary culture with unknown and ever new information and stories, submitting new texts to Persian-knowing audiences. Quite a few of those Sanskrit texts, however, and particularly narrative literature, were repeatedly retranslated and retold in Persian over a relatively short period of time. This talk will explore the phenomenon of retranslation in South Asia through the rich archive of Persian Ramayanas. Asking why this popular epic in its classical and medieval recensions was retold more than a dozen times in Persian over a period of 200 years, this study seeks to reconstruct and historically contextualize the changing meanings of the Ramayana in early modern Persianate South Asia.

**Ayelet Kotler**

Ayelet Kotler is a Postdoctoral Researcher affiliated with the ERC-funded PURANA project at Leiden University. She is a literary historian of Persianate South Asia, focusing on the Mughal and early colonial periods. Her research examines the reception and transformation of Sanskrit literature in Persian and traces the emergence of Persian as a language of Hindu devotion in North India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In her work, she addresses questions related to translation, multilingualism, Persian philology, Hindu-Muslim encounters, language orders and ideologies in South Asia, and the South Asian modalities of the Persianate. She holds a Ph.D. in South Asia Studies from the University of Chicago (2023).