

ALEXANDER MCKINLEY

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy, Religion and Modernity, with distinction, with certificate in Anthropology and History, May 2018
DUKE UNIVERSITY, Durham, NC

Master of Theological Studies, South Asian Religious Traditions, May 2012
HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL, Cambridge, MA

Bachelor of Arts, Major in Religious Studies, with honors, May 2008
GRINNELL COLLEGE, Grinnell, IA

RESEARCH LANGUAGES: Sinhala, Tamil, Pali, German

PUBLICATIONS

“Adam’s Peak and Muslim Identity in Modern Tamil Texts.” In *Serendipitous Translations: A Sourcebook on Sri Lanka in the Islamic Indian Ocean*, 274-291. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2025.

“COVID-Curing Kali Syrup and the Stubborn Subaltern: Resisting Elite Restrictions with a Popular Goddess.” *Asian Ethnology*, 84, no. 2 (2025): 335-357.

“The Empty Chair.” [translation of Liyanage Amarakeerthi’s “His Puṭuva”] *Southern Humanities Review* 57, no. 4 (2024): 86-87.

Mountain at a Center of the World: Pilgrimage and Pluralism in Sri Lanka. New York: Columbia University Press, 2024.

“Healing Buddhist Knowledge from Palm Leaves to Print: Exorcising *Yakṣas* from Sinhala Literary Reproduction.” In *Buddhism and Healing in the Modern World*, 35-59. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2024.

“A Plague on Buddhist Houses: Retelling Disaster in Sinhala Poetry.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 46 (2023): 305-338.

“The Deconstruction of Dafther Jailani: Muslim and Buddhist Contests of Original History in Sri Lanka.” *History of Religions* 62, no. 3 (2023): 254-283. (with Merin Shobhana Xavier)

“Religious Innovation in the Pilgrimage Industry: Hindu bodhisattva worship and Tamil Buddhistness.” In *Multi-Religiosity in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Innovation, Shared Spaces, Contestation*, 113-125. New York: Routledge, 2022.

“Merchants, Maidens, and Mohammedans: A History of Muslim Stereotypes in Sinhala Literature of Sri Lanka.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 81 (2022): 523-540.

“On an Unfamiliar Island: A Sri Lankanist Review of *Banishment and Belonging*.” *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 43, no. 1 (2022): 87-100.

“Coronavirus and Ill-fated Crowns: Buddhist Lessons in Pandemics and Politics.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 28 (2021): 121-166.

“The Apotheosis of Emptiness: God Suniyan and the Soteriological Necessity of Negativity in Sinhala Buddhism.” In *The Meaning and Power of Negativity*, 343-61. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021.

“Making Lanka the Tamil Way: A Temple History at the Crossroads of Landscapes and Watersheds.” *South Asian History and Culture* 11, no. 3 (2020): 254-76.

- “No Sympathy for the Devils: A Colonial Polemic Against *Yakṣa* Healing Rituals (1851).” In *Buddhism and Medicine: Modern and Contemporary Voices*, 45-51. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.
- “A Requiem in Many Movements: Obeyesekere’s Reordered Opus of the Last Sri Lankan King.” *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 42, no. 1&2 (2018): 105-118.
- “Mysteries of the Universe: The Tamil Muslim Intellectualism of M.C. Siddi Lebbe.” *South Asia: Journal of South Asia Studies* 41, no. 1 (2018): 51-68. (with Merin Shobhana Xavier)
- “Farming Songs from the Poet King: Translation and Explication of a Sinhala *Janakavi* Work.” *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 41, no. 1&2 (2017): 64-117.
- “The Spacing of Pilgrimage: Two Journeys to Sri Pada in Sinhala Verse.” *SAGAR: A South Asia Research Journal* 25 (2017): 96-133.
- “No Self or Ourselves? Wittgenstein and Language Games of Selfhood in a Sinhala Buddhist Form of Life.” In *Self or No-Self?*, 195-210. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2017.
- “The Sacred Second: Religious Moments in a Colombo Marketplace.” *Culture and Religion* 17, no.2 (2016): 162-182.
- “Fluid Minds: Being a Buddhist the Shambhalian Way.” *Buddhist Studies Review* 31, no. 2 (2014): 273-91.

TEACHING

- Instructor**, Fall 2020-Present — Loyola University, Chicago, IL
Introduction to Religious Studies, Buddhism, Global Religious Ethics, Demonology
- Lecturer**, Fall 2021-Spring 2025 — Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, IL
Religious Perspectives on the Environment, Buddhism & Social Activism, Demonology, Religion & Popular Culture
- Lecturer**, Fall 2019-Spring 2020 — Colgate University, Hamilton, NY
Challenges of Modernity core course, World Religions
- Instructor**, Spring 2019 — Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA
World Religions
- Instructor**, Fall 2018-Spring 2019 — Loyola University, New Orleans, LA
Varieties of Hindu Traditions, Buddhism across Asia
- Teaching Assistant**, January 2014 – May 2015 — Duke University, Durham, NC
Religion & Culture in Korea, Introduction to Hinduism, Muslim Philosophy and Theology
- Environmental Science Instructor**, June-July 2012 — Fenwick High School, Oak Park, IL
Intensive summer-school course
- Educational Assistant**, September 2009-June 2010 — Beacon Preparatory School, Bloomington, MN
Implemented inclusive accommodations and academic support for students in a sixth-grade classroom
- Exchange Fellow**, September 2008-June 2009 — Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China
Instructor for Spoken English courses

AWARDS

- PEN Presents x South Asian Literature in Translation**, Prize in translation for project entitled “Palm Tree Poetry”
- American Council of Learned Societies**, Project Development Grant, for new archival research into Sinhala palm-leaf manuscripts, May 2024

Magis Teaching Award Runner-Up, awarded for part-time instructors by the Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy at Loyola University Chicago, April 2023.

National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute Grant, awarded to attend the summer institute *Colonial Experiences and their Legacies in Southeast Asia*, at the East-West Center in Honolulu, HI, June 10 – July 5, 2019.

American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies Curriculum Development Grant, awarded in 2018 for building a teaching module about the multi-religious pilgrimage site of Adam's Peak, for use in college courses on religion.
Module available at: <https://www.aisls.org/resources/teaching-about-sri-lanka/teaching-about-adams-peak/>

Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, awarded in 2017 for dissertation completion through the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, for research addressing ethical and religious values.

Udo Keller Stiftung Forum Humanum Grant, awarded twice for selection to the 2015 and 2017 Claremont Conference in the Philosophy of Religion.

Fulbright Research Grant (Sri Lanka), awarded funding for 2015-2016 academic year to conduct ethnographic and archival field research on the pilgrimage site of Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka.

Kearns Summer Research Fellowship, awarded grant five times by Duke University for Sinhala language study in Sri Lanka and archival research during summers 2013-2017.

Foreign Language Area Study (FLAS) Scholarship, awarded tuition and stipend for Summers 2011 and 2015 Sinhala language study at the South Asian Summer Language Institute hosted by University of Wisconsin, Madison.

SERVICE

Treasurer, American Institute for Sri Lanka Studies, October 2022-Present
Elected executive committee member. Responsible for reviewing tax and audit filings and giving annual report to the board.

Charter Member, Berwyn Tree Canopy Initiative, December 2021-Present
Awarded TreePlanters Grants in 2023 and 2024 from the Openlands organization to restore urban canopy cover and improve tree equity in Berwyn through community planting events. Awarded a Garden for Nature Grant in 2025 from the West Cook Wild Ones organization to install native plants, shrubs, and trees in the public way. Over one hundred trees planted so far.

Peer Reviewer, 2019-Present
Reviewer for *Journal of Global Buddhism, Religion and Culture, South Asian History and Culture, South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, Comparative Literature Studies*

Elected Board Member, American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies, October 2020-October 2022.
Helped create a guide to digital libraries about Sri Lanka: <https://www.aisls.org/guide-to-digital-libraries-on-sri-lanka/>

Fulbright Pre-Departure Orientation Alumni Representative, June 2017
Prepared future Fulbright grantees traveling to Sri Lanka for cultural transitions and foreign research.

INVITED TALKS & WORKSHOPS

SummerSALT, South Asian Literature in Translation Workshop, Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 5-9, 2024.
Selected to participate in the multilingual poetry group led by Ranjit Hoskote.

American Institute for Lankan Studies, International Workshop: The Eighteenth Century and the Making of Modern Sri Lanka, Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 4-5, 2023
“Notes on the Hollanders in Sinhala and Tamil Sources.”

American Institute for Lankan Studies, Seminar Series: New Research in Sri Lankan History, March 11, 2022
“Healing Buddhist Knowledge from Palm Leaves to Print: Exorcising *Yakṣas* from Sinhala Literary Reproduction”

Religion and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Mediating Presence and Distance, National University of Singapore, Apr. 2021.
“Buddha Relics, Kali Syrup, and Covid Cures: Resisting Elite Restrictions with a Popular Goddess.”

Tulane University, Asian Studies Seminar, February 12, 2021
“Cementing Buddhist Supremacy: Militarized Development at a Sri Lankan Pilgrimage Site”

University of Texas at Austin, South Asia Institute, South Asia Seminar Series, October 1, 2020
“The Urban Nature of a Wilderness Reserve: Political Ecology & Pilgrimage at Adam’s Peak in Sri Lanka”

South Asia Conference Symposium, Writing Sri Lanka: Futures Past, Madison, WI, October 17, 2019
“Doing History in the *Dēvālaya*: Buddhist Deities and the Devolution of Power”

Columbia University, Institute of Religion, Culture and Public Life – Time, Space, Memory workshop, October 3-4, 2019
“Making a Mountain like a City: Accelerating Pilgrimage & Abbreviating Memory in Sri Lanka”

Savitribai Phule Pune University, Philosophy Department, Pune, India, October 28, 2017
“Natural Philosophy in the Anthropocene: What does Buddhist thought bring to new academic debates on ecology?”

International Workshop: Innovative Religiosity in Post-War Sri Lanka, Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 11-13, 2017
“Highland Tamil Worship of God Saman: Religious Innovation in the Pilgrimage Industry, or Who is a ‘Tamil Buddhist?’”

The United States-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission, Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 26, 2016
“Sacred Forests and Mountain Footprints: Religion, Environment, and Conservation in the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary”

Open University of Sri Lanka, Seminar Series, Nawala, Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 29, 2016
“The Nature of Divinity: The Peak Wilderness Sanctuary and its Multireligious Forest”

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings, San Diego, CA, Nov. 2019.
“Plant Persons and Sentient Stones: Human Relativity in Theravada Philosophies of Nature.”

American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings, Denver, CO, Nov. 2018.
“Merchants, Maidens, and Muhammadans: A History of Muslim Stereotypes in Sinhala Literature of Sri Lanka.”

South Asian Graduate Student Conference: The Limits of Humanistic Inquiry, University of Chicago, IL, Mar. 2018.
“How Humans Retell a Mountain’s Story: Planetary Pluralism in South Asian Religious History.”

Claremont Conference on Philosophy of Religion: Negativity, Claremont University, CA, Feb. 2017.
“The Apotheosis of Emptiness: God Suniyan and the Soteriological Necessity of Negativity in Sinhala Buddhism.”

American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings, San Antonio, TX, Nov. 2016.
“Forest Miracles and The Miracle of Forests: Pilgrimage and Ecological Reasoning at Adam’s Peak in Sri Lanka.”

Fulbright Conference of South and Central Asia, Jaipur, India, Feb. 2016
“A Mountain of Myth: Adam’s Peak and Centuries of Storytelling.”

South Asian Graduate Student Conference: South Asian Mobilities, University of Chicago, IL, Mar. 2015
“Sacred Sole on *Makkama* Sands: Transoceanic Mythmaking and Sinhala Buddhist Visions of Mecca.”

Claremont Conference on Philosophy of Religion: Self or No-Self, Claremont University, CA, Feb. 2015.
“No Self or Ourselves? Wittgenstein and Language Games of Selfhood in a Sinhala Buddhist Form of Life.”

American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings, San Diego, CA, Nov. 2014. Religion and Cities group.
“The Sacred Second: Religious Moments in a Colombo Marketplace.”

History of the Religions, Part II, Columbia University, NY, Mar. 2014
“To Climb a Mountain: A Morphological History of Religions at Adam’s Peak in Sri Lanka.”

Southeast Conference / Association of Asian Studies, Duke University, NC, Jan. 2014

“After a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual: Toward Ritual as Event & Discipline in South Asia.”

American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings, Baltimore, MD, Nov. 2013

“Fluid Minds: Being a Buddhist the Shambhalian Way.”

Sri Lanka Graduate Student Workshop: Intersections, Stanford University, CA, Nov. 9, 2012

“Village Life and City Living: Catholic Interreligious Dialogue, Cultural Crossings, and Modernity in Sri Lanka.”