

# American Institute for Lankan Studies

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United States Director - Dr. John Rogers  
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## Newsletter

September-December 2019

### INAUGURATION OF AISLS DIGITIZATION INITIATIVE



**SAOA**  
South Asia  
Open Archives



**AISLS is pleased to announce that the South Asia Open Archives [SAOA] launched the open-access online publication of The Star of Islam, a weekly newspaper published in Colombo during 1939-1940. Accessible through the SAOA on JSTOR at;**

**<https://www.jstor.org/site/south-asia-open-archives/saoa/star-of-islam-26318857/>**

The open-access online publication of 42 issues (1939-1940) of the Star of Islam, a weekly newspaper published in Colombo is now online!

The South Asia Open Archives (SAOA), a subset of the South Asia Materials Project (SAMP), creates and maintains a collection of open access materials for the study of South Asia. This major collaborative initiative is aimed at addressing the current scarcity of digital resources pertinent to South Asia studies and at making collections more widely accessible both to North American scholars and to researchers worldwide. AISLS funded the digitization of the Star of Islam and the project was managed by Ramla Wahab-Salman at the AISLS Colombo Center under the direction of Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara. The project was undertaken in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Malay Association.

For a general account of the Star of Islam, see Ramla Wahab-Salman's article "Reading the Star of Islam," published by HIMAL Southasian on 17 July 2019: <https://himalmag.com/reading-the-star-of-islam-ramla-wahab-salman-sri-lanka-2019/>



Photo: Ramla Wahab-Salman AISLS Associate Director Programming [right] with Neel Agrawal Digital Librarian of the South Asia Open Archives [SAOA], Chicago at the launch of the Star of Islam Newspaper Collection with SAOA

#### LAYING THE DIGITIZATION FOUNDATION

Above photo: Right: Mr. Maas Juragan Majid, the custodian of the Star of Islam publications, also former president of the SLMA & the nephew of his namesake the Star of Islam's founding editor, Maas Juragan Majid with Head of AISLS Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara [2<sup>nd</sup> from right], Ramla Salman-Wahab [4<sup>th</sup> from right] with SLMA Officials at the 97<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SLMA



## Head of AILS Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara makes a presentation at the US Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission on "Conducting Social Sciences Research in Sri Lanka"



Head of AILS Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara made a presentation on "Conducting Social Sciences Research in Sri Lanka" on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, at the Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission's 4-day in-country Orientation Program for the new cohort of U.S Fulbright Grantees at the Fulbright Commission. The body of her lecture consisted of four areas: research questions and how to investigate concepts in the field, conducting field research, interpreting data and generalization, and research ethics and she briefed on the key aspects of conducting qualitative research on- and in Sri Lanka providing a brief background on the type of questions that were/are being asked in social science research conducted on-and in Sri Lanka in the past ten years, and the centrality of conflict in these questions. The 2018 cohort of grantees includes 5 Fulbright English Language Teaching Assistants, 3 Fulbright Student Researchers and 4 Fulbright Senior Scholars who will be conducting research, teaching and collaborative projects in partnership with various academic and other

Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara elaborates on *Conducting Social Sciences Research in Sri Lanka*

institutions in Sri Lanka. U.S. Fulbright grantees are ambassadors of exchange and will foster understanding between the people of Sri Lanka and the people of the United States. The session was chaired by Sandarshi Gunawardena, Executive Director, United States—Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission.

## Visit of Professor Tobias Kelly [University of Edinburgh] to AILS Colombo to discuss Digitization Projects



Professor Tobias Kelly, Professor of Political and Legal Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh visited AILS Colombo to discuss Digitization Projects with the Head of AILS, Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara, AILS Associate Director, Digitization and Programming Crystal Baines and team. Prof. Kelly's research interests include Human Rights, War and Peace, and Political and Legal Anthropology. He has carried out Ethnographic and Archival Research in Israel/Palestine, the UK and at the UN. He received a PhD in Anthropology from the London School of Economics in 2003 and has worked at the Institute of Law of Birzeit University, the Crisis States Programme at the LSE, and the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies at the Oxford University.

Photo: From left: Prof. Tobias Kelly, Crystal Baines & Head of AILS Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara, inspecting a collection of manuscripts suitable for Digitization

AISLS U.S. Director Dr. John Rogers delivers the keynote speech at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Social Sciences & Humanities of the National Centre for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences [NCASS] Sri Lanka – on December 12, 2019.

At the inception, Dr. John Rogers' well-received keynote address revealed coming to Sri Lanka in 1981 to undertake research at the National Archives of Sri Lanka and the history of American scholarship in Sri Lanka and the strong contributions made up to the present, resulting in developments that have improved the prospects of constructive collaboration between Americans and Sri Lankans in the social sciences and the humanities and the balanced disciplinary distribution of American academic work on Sri Lanka with Anthropology remaining the strongest discipline followed by Buddhist Studies. Explaining how the humanities and social sciences contribute to sustainable development as a transformation that lead to long-term improvements in the quality of life of the mass of citizens including the poorer segments of society, he revealed that in recent years many Americans with Sri Lanka family origins pursue research on Sri Lanka giving priority to establish productive relations with Sri Lankan academic staff, producing research that will be relevant not only to international scholarship, but to sustainable development in Sri Lanka. His speech also instilled optimism about the prospects for continued mutually beneficial prospects for productive American-Sri Lankan Collaboration in the humanities and social sciences partnership with more Americans and Sri Lankans building impactful collaborative yielding great results leading to sustainable development.



Photo: From left: Dr. John Rogers, Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka - Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Secretary to the Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation - Mr. Anura Dissanayake, Head of the Department of Geography University of Kelaniya Prof. Lal Mervin Dharmasiri, Prof. Chamindi Dilkushi Senaratne - Professor in English Language Teaching Unit of the University of Kelaniya.



Dr. John Rogers receives a commemorative plaque in Appreciation from NCASS

Dr. John Rogers in discussion with the Chief Guest Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka - Taranjit Singh Sandhu

**AILS READING GROUP PROGRAM LED BY PROF. ANNE BLACKBURN**



A reading group led by AISLS Vice President Prof. Anne Blackburn (Cornell University) titled "Visions of Sovereignty and Practices of Statecraft in the Pali World" was hosted by AILS on September 11th, 2019. The discussion was based on articles by Blackburn titled "Buddhist Connections in the Indian Ocean: Changes in Monastic Mobility, 1000-1500" (2015) and "Sihaja Saṅgha and Laṅkā in Later Premodern Southeast Asia" (2015). Understanding intellectual and institutional histories in the context of Indian Ocean mobility, the discussion focused on the eleventh century, as a historical period characterized by a sharp rise in international trade through the Indian Ocean region due to coinciding trade-oriented policies of the Cōlas, the Song, and the Fāṭimids. Drawing on movements of globally interconnected specialists and experts, the group mapped connections from the period. The group also discussed methods of translation and archival work in a project involving multiple languages and regions falling within the "Pali World".

Prof. Anne Blackburn



Prof. Blackburn with participants

### Mr. Marshal Fernando Director, Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue signs MoU with AILS to Digitize the Yohan Devananda Collection at Devasarana Kurunegala

In October 2019, Mr. Marshal Fernando - Director, Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue signed a Digitization MoU with AILS on behalf of the Yohan Devananda collection at Devasarana. Yohan Devananda started *Devasaranaya*, a haven of spirituality influenced by multiple religions and a center dedicated to welfare of the people creating a practice called *New World Liturgy*, which drew from Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism and from progressive philosophies, even from the Upanishads and Karl Marx as a way of achieving the envisioned religious harmony. The collection is now housed at the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue. Crystal Baines AILS Associate Director Digitization & Programming, counter-signed the MoU on behalf of AILS.



Mr. Marshal Fernando

Adam's Peak [Sri Pada Mountain Sri Lanka]  
 Painting by Captain C. O'Brien in 1844  
<https://www.aisls.org/resources/teaching-about-sri-lanka/teaching-about-adams-peak/>



### AISLS Member Institutions

- Brandeis University, Center for Global Development and Sustainability** <https://heller.brandeis.edu/gds/>
- Brown University, Center for Contemporary South Asia** <https://watson.brown.edu/southasia/>
- Bucknell University, Pennsylvania** <https://www.bucknell.edu/>
- Columbia University, Southern Asian Institute** <https://www.sai.columbia.edu/>
- Cornell University, South Asia Program** <https://sap.einaudi.cornell.edu/>
- Five Colleges Buddhist Studies Consortium** <https://www.fivecolleges.edu/buddhism/>
- IFSA Butler Intercollegiate Sri Lanka Educational (ISLE) Program** <https://www.ifsa-butler.org/program/intercollegiate-sri-lanka-education-isle-program/>
- Johns Hopkins University, Department of Anthropology** <https://anthropology.jhu.edu/>
- Miami University (Ohio), Asian/Asian American Studies** <http://miamioh.edu/cas/academics/programs/aaa/>
- New York University, India and South Asia Research** <https://www.southasianyu.org/>
- Princeton University, Program in South Asian Studies** <http://piirs.princeton.edu/sas>
- Stanford University, Center for South Asia** <https://southasia.stanford.edu/>
- University of California-Berkeley, Institute for South Asia Studies** <https://southasia.berkeley.edu/>
- University of Chicago, Department of South Asia Languages and Civilizations** <http://salc.uchicago.edu/>
- University of Michigan, Center for South Asian Studies** <https://www.ii.umich.edu/csas/>
- University of Pennsylvania, South Asia Regional Studies** <http://www.southasia.upenn.edu/>
- University of Texas-Austin, South Asia Institute** <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/southasia/>
- University of Virginia, Center for South Asian Studies** <http://southasia.as.virginia.edu/>
- University of Washington, South Asia Center** <https://jsis.washington.edu/southasia/>
- University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for South Asia** <https://southasia.wisc.edu/>
- Wake Forest University, Middle East and South Asia Program** <http://mesas.wfu.edu/>
- Yale University, South Asia Council** <https://macmillan.yale.edu/>