

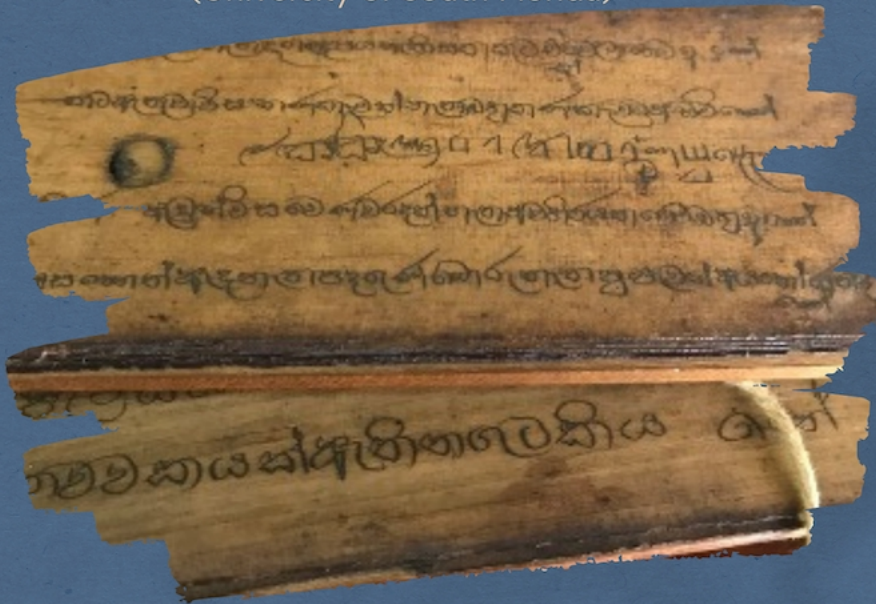


**DAAM**  
DIPARTIMENTO ASIA,  
AFRICA E MEDITERRANEO



# Justin Henry

(University of South Florida)



## Sri Lankan Buddhist History in the Vernacular

May 13th, 4:30 pm

**Venue:** L'Orientale University of Naples  
Palazzo Corigliano, **T3 room**

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The *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*—Pali accounts of the kings of Sri Lanka with origins in the 4<sup>th</sup> century—stand out as early examples of historical writing in South Asia, and as charters for normative relations between the Sangha and state which proved influential through to the present day. These chronicles famously relate that the arrival of the first human inhabitants of Sri Lanka corresponded to the exact moment of the Buddha Gotama's death, designated as the year 486-7 BCE by Buddhist convention. These original settlers—a band of 700 castaways from northeast India—were according to this story the stock from which the Buddhist kings of Lanka were descended, as well as the progenitors of the Sinhala people as an ethnic group on the interpolation of later tradition. This talk considers this account of the peopling of Sri Lanka in juxtaposition to competing mythological accounts in Sinhala vernacular literature and folklore—later accounts which associate the Sinhala people with the island's *rākṣasa* and *yakṣa* denizens of hoary antiquity and which imply, contrary to the Pali chronicles, Sinhala indigeneity to Sri Lanka.