

CONTESTING KINGSHIP

THE INTERREGNAL PERIOD (1110–1153)

THE PERIOD BETWEEN the death of Vijayabāhu I (in ca. 1110 CE) and the rise of Parākramabāhu I (1153 CE) was marked by a dramatic fragmentation of political control. Vijayabāhu's brother and heir, Jayabāhu, effectively ruled for only a very short period (ca. one year) before being overthrown and exiled by Vijayabāhu's son, Vikramabāhu I. The *Mahāvamsa* tells us that Jayabāhu died in Ruhuna, the southeastern province (*raṭa*), sometime after Vikramabāhu's ascension to the throne.¹ Vikramabāhu's own control, however, was limited to the region around Polonnaruwa itself—the northern part of the island known as the Rajaraṭa (“King Country”) or Pihiti—while the rest of the kingdom was divided between various cousins, the sons of yet another of Vijayabāhu's siblings. Mānābharaṇa I ruled Māyāraṭa (sometimes called Dakkhinadēśa) in the southwest, while Ruhuna was divided between his two younger brothers Kīrtiśrīmegha and Śrīvallabha. The following four decades were filled with internecine conflicts and intradynastic marriages alike, as the various branches of Vijayabāhu's family jostled against one another for position.

The *Mahāvamsa* provides us with a highly literary account of this conflict, from the perspective of its protagonist Parākramabāhu, the son of Mānābharaṇa I and a sister of Vikramabāhu.² As the names of the relevant male family members, at least, are also attested in the inscriptional record, it is worth rehearsing this account briefly to provide context for the following discussion. After the death of Mānābharaṇa I, Māyāraṭa passed not to his son, Parākramabāhu, but to his brother Kīrtiśrīmegha, leaving all of Ruhuna in Śrīvallabha's control. Parākramabāhu, along with his mother and sisters,

1 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 62, vol. 1. The names of the three provinces and the notion of a “trifold kingdom” (Sin. *tunrājyaya*) are attested in relatively early sources. Nicholas, “Historical Topography,” 16–17. The provinces and their boundaries are outlined in the ca. thirteenth-century *Kadaimpota* (“Boundary Book”). Abhaya-varadhana, *Boundary Divisions of Mediaeval Sri Lanka*.

2 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, chs. 60–72.

travelled to Poḷonnuarva in the Rajaraṭa, now ruled by Vikramabāhu's son Gajabāhu II. Parākramabāhu's sisters were married off to Gajabāhu, and to Śrīvallabha's son Mānābharaṇa II, who inherits Ruhunu; Parākramabāhu in turn marries Mānābharaṇa's sister Līlāvatī. Parākramabāhu overthrows his uncle Kīrtiśrīmegha to claim his father's former province of Māyāraṭa; he then defeats Gajabāhu in battle, is declared the rightful heir to the Rajaraṭa, and eventually inherits that province after Gajabāhu's later death. He then defeats his cousin/brother-in-law Mānābharaṇa II to conquer Ruhunu and finally reunite the island.

Existing scholarship has looked poorly on this period of Poḷonnaruva's history. Chapters in the University of Ceylon's still-authoritative *History of Ceylon* refer to it as "a state of anarchy" which "prevented any architectural undertaking of note for over four decades."³ If there was any silver lining, it was that:

The loss of a considerable portion of the temporalities of the *saṅgha* in and around the capital had the desirable effect of making those of its members who had adopted the spiritual life in earnest resort to secluded places where they spent their lives in spiritual exercise and study.⁴

De Silva's *History of Sri Lanka* similarly characterizes the period as "a relapse into civil war and turmoil," but adds that, thankfully, "before anarchy had become all but reversible, a return to order and authority took place under Parākramabāhu I."⁵ This juxtaposition of anarchy against authority, in which the former state serves only to hinder cultural and intellectual flourishing, is hardly unique to the historiography of Sri Lanka. Rather, such attitudes are common in teleological accounts of political "development." Periods like that betwixt Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu are portrayed as "dark ages," unfortunate detours on the otherwise steady march towards centralization, institutionalization, and, eventually, constitutionalism.⁶

Modern arguments for the benefits of political stability are not without emic precedent. Canonical Buddhist texts often describe the perils of a kingless world. And as discussed in the Introduction, inscriptions and texts from

³ See respectively Nicholas, "Civil Wars," 440; Paranavitana, "Religion, Literature, and Art," 592.

⁴ Paranavitana, "Religion, Literature, and Art," 566. Paranavitana refers here to forest-dwelling (*araṇyavāsini*) monasticism, particularly at the Diṃbulāgala monastery, a matter discussed further below.

⁵ de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 60.

⁶ So argues Forrest, "Medieval History and Anarchist Studies," 46.

our period also frequently praise powerful kings for their ability to protect and promote the Buddha-*śāsana*. But, as Alastair Gornall has recently argued for Pali-language literary production in a slightly later period, we should not so readily assume that political instability is necessarily an impediment to the flourishing of Buddhist institutions, cultural production, or intellectual innovations. Rather, Gornall argues, the efflorescence of literary works upon which he focuses:

was not a by-product of political stability or of the munificent patronage of a single emperor, as has often been thought. Rather, it was rooted in chaos, the destruction of the old social order and the birth of a more fragmented political environment.⁷

Political fragmentation and the breakdown of the *status quo*, in Gornall's view, created new dialogic relationships and ties of patronage, resulting in novel forms of literary expression. In this chapter, I advance a similar argument for *political* novelty in the fraught period between Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu. This period should not be treated, as it has overwhelmingly been to date, as an unfortunate deviation from the otherwise glorious trajectory of Lankan and Theravāda history. Rather, we ought to recognize this period, and the fraught politics therein, as having provided opportunities for figures other than powerful, authoritative kings to move beyond the *status quo*.

In making this argument, I draw particularly on the insights of Tony Day. In an important article on the historiography of early modern Southeast Asia, he argues against what he sees as a tendency to overemphasize structural institutionalism and political stability as the norm. In place of this norm, he urges us to take seriously “the incoherence expressed in the turbulent relations between families as normative rather than as a departure from the putative norm of a rational, absolutist state which must ‘deal’ with disorder.”⁸ It is these turbulent relations, he believes, which truly bound together historical agents before the rise of the modern State, and the more impersonal (or supposedly impersonal) politics it demands. Heeding Day's call, in this chapter I take seriously the hostile politics between the period's divided kings, and the ways in which they sought to balance or imbalance those politics. In particular, I argue that the fraught politics of the interregal period resulted in an increasingly significant role—both symbolic and pragmatic—for Poḷonnaruva's royal consorts, as living embodiments of ties

⁷ Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 213.

⁸ Day, “Ties That (Un)Bind,” 398.

between powerful dynasties both on and off the island. Here I also build on Tamara Loos's argument that the political culture of (much later) Siam was dependent on the extent to which "women's bodies mediated political loyalty and integrated powerful groups throughout the kingdom by linking them to the monarch in the capital."⁹ A similar dynamic, I suggest, was at work in Poḷonnaruva; this in turn had a previously under-acknowledged impact on the development of Theravāda Buddhism, and set the stage for Parākramabāhu's eventual reform of the *saṅgha*.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I complicate simplistic accounts of the period which overemphasize the "institutions" of kingship. In place of such institutionalism, I argue instead for a more interpersonal and consensus-based politics, in which political figures constantly negotiated with one another for authority. I first provide a close reading of the famous Vēḷaikkāra inscription (*TISL* 42), and argue that this represented a negotiation over the proper performance of kingship between the titular merchant/mercenary guild and the monastic community. I then turn to the island beyond Poḷonnaruva, and to the complex jostling for political power which seems evident in inscriptions by both monarchs and local officials alike. I then suggest that this decentralization of political power created *opportunities* for some individuals who may not have been otherwise able to assert themselves so publicly. As royal men struggled to assert the superiority of their lineage, and to establish alliances with powerful continental dynasties, their consorts became increasingly significant embodiments of such matrilateral ties, and so became increasingly influential. This was only a period of political "weakness," in other words, from the perspective of certain men who perhaps aspired to a particular form of (centralized, hierarchical, patriarchal) power. From other perspectives, this was a period of political refiguration and experimentation. I expand on this in the third section, focusing on an inscription by Cundhamalli, co-consort of Mānābharaṇa I and daughter of the Cōḷa emperor Kulottuṅga I.

Monks and Mercenaries

In the preceding chapter, we made passing reference to the Vēḷaikkāra inscription (*TISL* 42), likely created shortly after Vijayabāhu's death, which provides our most proximate record of some of Vijayabāhu's later achievements. This inscription does more than just flesh out the positivist record, however. It offers us quite a radically different vision of kingship: one entirely

⁹ Loos, "Sex in the Inner City," 889.

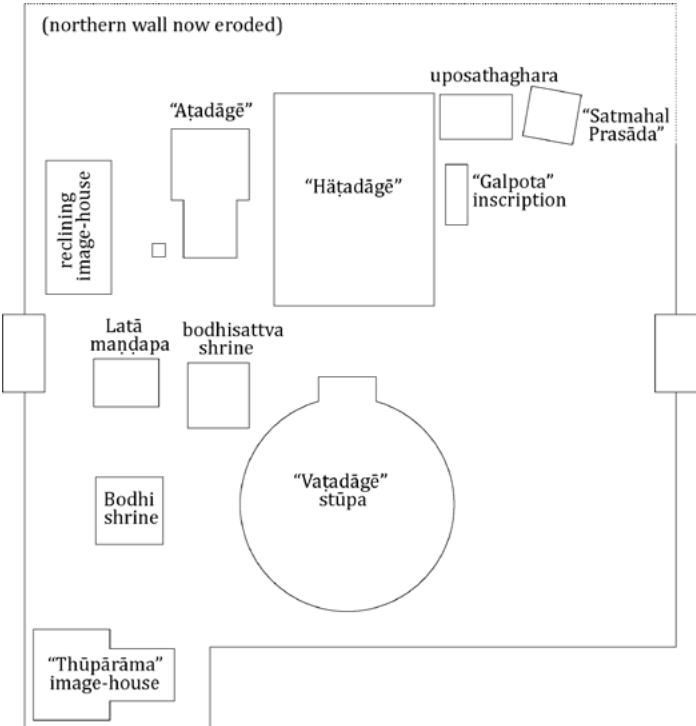


Figure 8a. Current layout of the Sacred Quadrangle, by the author.

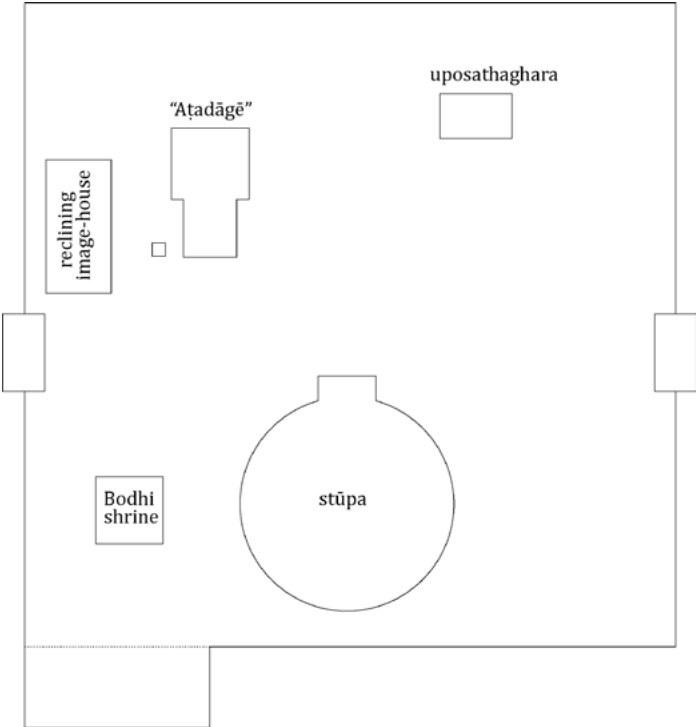


Figure 8b. Hypothetical reconstruction of the early Quadrangle, by the author.

subordinate to the needs of the Buddha-*śāsana*, as embodied in the monastic community, which drew on new resources in the absence of a strong royal protector. More specifically, this inscription records a monk of the Abhayagiri's Uttaromūla ("principal fraternity"),¹⁰ Mugalan (P. Moggallāna, Skt. Maudgalyāyana), positioning himself as almost an heir to Vijayabāhu, and discharging to the Vēḷaikkāra merchant/mercenary guild the duty of protecting the Buddha-*śāsana*.

It is worth beginning our discussion of the Vēḷaikkāra inscription by attending to its location. The inscription stands near the centre of the "Sacred Quadrangle," a raised terrace dedicated primarily to the Buddha's Tooth Relic (Sin. *daḷadā*).¹¹ Poḷonnaruva's Buddhist monarchs, from Vijayabāhu onwards, made it their business to renovate and add to the growing number of shrines within the terrace. What remains today is therefore a complex layering of religious patronage, often with mixed or unclear attributions. The standard layout for terraced complexes in the period included, usually in four equal quadrants, an image-house (P. *paṭimāghara*, Sin. *pīlimagē*); a domed *stūpa* enshrining a relic; a house for the sacred Bo tree (*bodhighara*); and a platform (P. *pāsāda* or *uposathaghara*) upon which monks would gather fortnightly to recite the *Vinaya-paṭimokkha*.¹² We might therefore assume that the earliest form of the Quadrangle included only the reclining Buddha image-house still extant in the northwest corner; the *bodhighara* to its south; the *uposathaghara* in the northeast; and perhaps also a *stūpa* or other reliquary in the southeastern corner, where stands today the Vaṭadāgē ("Round Relic-House," constructed by either Parākramabāhu I or Niśsaṅka Malla).¹³

Over the following century, more buildings and shrines would be added. The terrace was extended in the southwestern quadrant to allow room for the vaulted "Thupārāma" image-house.¹⁴ Niśsaṅka Malla, in particular, would cover the precinct with his own inscriptions, claiming credit for much of

10 From the seventh century onwards, eight fraternities (*mūlas* or *āyatanas*) rose to prominence within the *saṅgha*. Four (including the Uttaromūla) are known to be affiliated with the Abhayagiri; one with the Jetavana; the institutional affiliation of the remaining three is unknown. See Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, ch. 8.

11 Colonial archaeologists found the inscription lying on its side near the Aṭadāge, slightly north of the present location.

12 Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture*, 73. Bandaranayake notes that the Sacred Quadrangle is not a true monastery, but otherwise bears many similarities with his ideal model: 85n1.

13 On the construction of the Vaṭadāgē, see Nicholas, "Historical Topography," 178.

14 Bell, *ASCAR 1903*, 26.

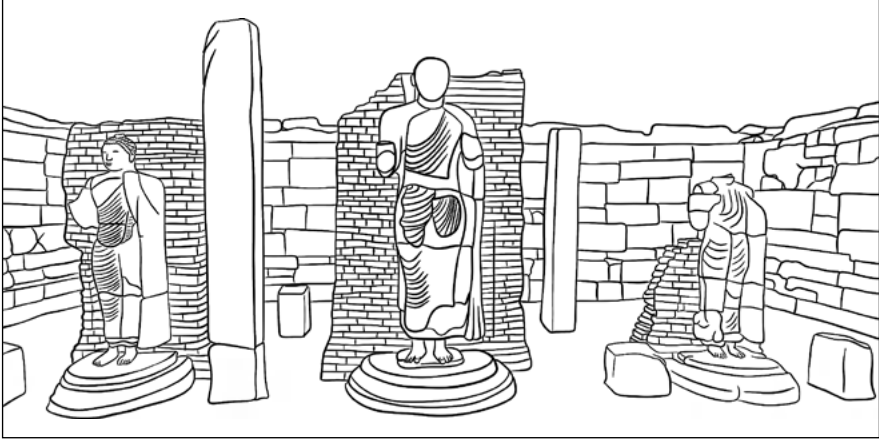


Figure 9. Inner shrine of the Aṭadāgē, facing north. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after a photograph by Tyler A. Lehrer. Used with permission.

the present form. Vijayabāhu’s own major modification to the Quadrangle was the construction of an elaborate temple for the Tooth Relic, today called the Aṭadāgē (“Eight-Relic-House”).¹⁵ The central shrine area on the ground floor contains three standing Buddha images (Fig. 9). Nothing remains of the upper floor, likely constructed out of wood, beyond the bottom steps of a stone staircase.

The construction of the Aṭadāgē is mentioned briefly in the *Mahāvamsa*, but our main source of information comes from the nearby Vēlaikkāra inscription. An opening verse in Sanskrit tells us that the structure was built by Vijayabāhu through one of his officials, “Deva” (literally just “lord”), called later in the inscription “Nuvarakaḷ Deva”:

Svasti! Śrī! May the Vēlaikkāra forces continually protect that abode—which was built for the Conqueror’s Tooth Relic by General Deva in the city of Pulasti in Lanka on the order of Śrī Vijayādibāhu, the Lord of Men—and its surrounding *devālayas* assembled by the Velaikkāras, until the end of the *kalpa* [and the end of] the world. Homage to the Buddha! (*TISL* 42, ll. 1–5).

15 The meaning of the name is unclear, and seems to be a modern invention intended to parallel the nearby Hāṭadāgē (“Sixty-Relic-House”). While the name of the Vaṭadāgē is witnessed in nearby inscriptions, “Hāṭadāgē” is likely also modern, derived from a mention in the *Pūjāvaliya* that it was built in just sixty days: *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Nāṇavimala, 784. No name is mentioned in the original archaeological report on the Aṭadāgē, which already knows the name Hāṭadāgē: Bell, *ASCAR* 1903, 8–11.

Prima facie, we might infer that the Vēlaikkāras undertook to protect Vijayabāhu's temple on Vijayabāhu's behalf, perhaps mediated by this same General Deva. This impression is furthered by the opening lines of the Tamil prose, which constitute a eulogy for Vijayabāhu that would not be out of place in his own Sinhala-language inscriptions.

[By him who was] born in the lineage of Ikṣvāku, in the Solar Dynasty (*śūrya-vaṃśa*), on the island of Śrī Laṅkā; who accomplished victories over many enemies; who entered Anurādhapura; who had his head crowned by order (*niyōkam*, Skt. *niyoga*) of the *saṅgha* for the purpose of protecting the Buddha-*śāsana*; who invited members of the *caṅkam* (Skt. *saṅgha*) from Arumaṇam; who effected a *saṅgha* purification within the three *nikāyas*; who gave three *tulābhāras* to the three *nikāyas*; who cast the shadow of his singular parasol (of sovereignty) across the entirety of Ilaṅkai (Lanka) for fifty years, through the ten *rājadharmas*; who delighted in the performance of auspicious kingship; who observed auspicious astral conjunctions of seventy-three years: the *cakravartin* Śrī Vijayabāhu *dēvar*, [known] as *kō* Śrī Saṅghabodhi *vanmarāṇa* (TISL 42, ll. 6–16).

Leaving aside the unprecedented use of the title *cakravartin*, already discussed above, this would appear to be relatively standard fare for a royal inscription of the period. The selective use of Grantha script again allows for key Sanskrit-derived terminology to be represented fully. We have references to the Solar Dynasty (*sūrya-vaṃśa*, rather than T. *cūriya-vaṇcam*), *śāsana* (T. *cācanam*), and even the ten (*dasa*) *rājadharmas* (T. *pattu irācatarumaṅkal*). The Sanskrit *saṅgha*, interestingly enough, appears alongside Tamil *caṅkam*. The use of this vocabulary, in praise for Vijayabāhu which would not appear out of place in any Sinhala-language inscription, seems to position the Vēlaikkāra inscription deep in the shadow of Vijayabāhu's royal parasol.

However, it is generally agreed that this inscription was created posthumously. If so, then the political situation would have been anything but standard. As noted above, Vijayabāhu's death was followed by what seems to have been a vicious power struggle among his family members. It is in this context of rapidly shifting overlordship, I argue, that we must read the remainder of the inscription. To begin with, we must first note that this is *not*, in fact, a royal inscription, for all it resembles the royal style. After introducing Vijayabāhu with the elaborate praise translated above, the grammar shifts—somewhat awkwardly¹⁶—to a new primary agent:

¹⁶ We are only told that Vijayabāhu “commanded to Nuvarakaḷ Deva,” without specifying what was commanded. The opening Sanskrit verses suggest that this command was to build the Tooth Relic Temple, but the inscription seems uninterested in spelling this out.

the senior monk (*mahāsthavīra*) Mugalan, versed in all *śāstras*, a model of disciplined behaviour, royal preceptor, and *vyāriṇī*¹⁷ of the Uturuḷmūla, [who] having seated himself with the royal ministers, summoned us and [said] to us: “You should protect the Daḷadā Perumpalli—which is a perfume-hall (*gandhakuṭi*)¹⁸ for the vast stone-wrought Lord Buddha, where annually the auspicious eyes are opened,¹⁹ kohl is applied by painters, and good fortune is created; [and is also] the ceremonial hall for the principal consecration (Skt. *prathama-abhiṣeka*); [and] the eternal residence for the Tooth and Bowl Relic *svāmi devas*, crest-gems of the three worlds—in the Uttoruḷmūla, which is the principal fraternity (Skt. *agra-āyatana*) of the Abhayagiri-*mahāvihāra*, a *mūlasthānam* created in the royal city of Vijaya [known] as Pulanari” (17–28).

Mugalan’s proximity (or perhaps parallels) to royalty are stressed throughout this description. Among his accomplishments as a monk, we are explicitly told that he served as a royal preceptor (*rājaguru*); he is seated like a king in court, surrounded by the royal ministers; he “commands” (*aruḷiceyttal*), using a verb often reserved for royal decrees and the utterances of saints.

Why might a monk be described in such a way? We have already seen, in the description of Vijayabāhu above, that he is said to have been crowned at the *saṅgha*’s discretion. We are now told that the Tooth Relic Temple itself served as “ceremonial hall for the principal consecration,” possibly meaning here a royal consecration.²⁰ This would suggest that it was not just any members of the *saṅgha*, but members of the Uttaromūla in particular—who administer this temple, and who claim to be the “principal” fraternity of Anurādhapura’s Abhayagiri-*nikāya*—who were involved in this endorsement

17 Likely “grammarian,” although this is not certain.

18 On the wider significance of this term see Schopen, “The Buddha as an Owner”; Schopen, “The Fragrance of the Buddha.” Within Sri Lankan art history, *gandhakuṭi* is the term used for any image-house with the square-and-rectangle ground plan that also characterizes the Thūpārama image-house. Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture*, 190. We might therefore take that structure as this *gandhakuṭi*. However, I am not convinced that the term was used thus in the Polonnaruwa period, and suspect instead that the Aṭṭadāgē itself was the *gandhakuṭi* referenced here.

19 On this ceremony in a modern context, with the Sinhala name *nētrapīṅkama*, see Gombrich, “The Consecration of a Buddhist Image.”

20 It may, however, refer to a monastic ceremony. In the colophon to his 1153 *Jinālaṅkāra*, Buddhārakkhita refers to himself as having received an *abhiṣeka* from the preeminent teachers of both Lanka and the Cōla “Copper Country”: *Jinālaṅkāra*, ed. Vāliṭaṇvīla Dīpaṅkara and Baṭapolē Dhammapāla, v. 276. See further on *abhiṣekas* below.

of the king. This reads to me as an argument that, in the absence of said king, the duty of protecting of the *śāsana* falls back on that same Uttaromūla. Their chief monk, Mugalan, therefore assumes the persona of the king in order to discharge the royal duty of protecting the *śāsana*—which he does by entrusting his order’s premier shrine, the Temple of the Tooth Relic, to the Vēḷaikkāra guild.

As Philip Friedrich has argued, in his insightful study of such guilds in early second-millennium Sri Lanka, this agreement between Mugalan and the Vēḷaikkāras must have been of high significance to the latter, serving “to connect an existing regime of merchant patronage with the prerogatives of Buddhist kingship.”²¹ The remainder of the inscription makes it clear that the Vēḷaikkāras took their newfound duties seriously. They refer to protection of the Temple as a “duty of defence” (*aṛaṇ-kāval*), the same term which would come to refer in modern Tamil to a charitable trust. They name the temple after themselves—the “Tooth Relic Temple of the Threefold Auspicious Vēḷaikkāra” (*mūṇṇrukait tiruvēḷaikkāran daḷadāyp perumpaḷḷi*)—and, in kingly fashion, dedicate land and servants to its continual upkeep. Finally, they tell us that they engraved the agreement in copper and stone in order that it last as long as the sun and moon (the very symbols carved into the top of the granite pillar itself), a standard trope of royal donative inscriptions.

Both Mugalan and the Vēḷaikkāras, in other words, appear to be claiming for themselves some of the functions of kingship. They do so in the context of an argument: that these functions are bestowed upon kings in the first place for the purpose of protecting the Buddha-*śāsana*. In the absence of a king capable of discharging that duty, monks must step back in, and find new protectors to ensure the longevity of the *śāsana* and of their most prized Buddha-relic, the Buddha’s Tooth.

This relic would eventually become one of the most crucial palladia of Sri Lankan kingship, with even the colonial British government seeking to claim it for their own.²² For this reason, several scholars have understood Mugalan’s agreement to constitute a handing-over of kingship itself to the Vēḷaikkāras. Friedrich himself suggests that “If we are to trust the political logic that fueled contestations for the Tooth Relic, the Vēḷaikkāras were thus the legitimate kings of Sri Lanka.”²³ I am not convinced that we have sufficient data about the relationship of the Tooth Relic to kingship from the

²¹ Friedrich, “Merchants, Ministers, and Monks,” 42.

²² See generally Strong, *The Buddha’s Tooth*.

²³ Friedrich, “Merchants, Ministers, and Monks,” 85–86.

pre-Poḷonnaruvan period to make this case so confidently. The *Mahāvamsa* does track the fortunes of the Tooth Relic; we also have a fragmentary inscription of Mahinda IV (r. 956–972) which records a major donation to a Tooth Relic Temple in Anurādhapura (EZ 1.8).²⁴ However, nothing in this inscription suggests quite the same level of significance which later kings would place upon the Tooth Relic. Vijayabāhu's construction of a new temple in his new capital of Poḷonnaruva may have been an important moment in the *development* of the Tooth Relic-kingship complex. So too may have been Mugalan's entrusting of that same temple to the Vēḷaikkāras. As we will see in later chapters, other Poḷonnaruvan kings continued to engage heavily with the Tooth Relic, building their own increasingly grandiose temples to house it within the Sacred Quadrangle.

In this inscription, in other words, we see two somewhat unprecedented parties negotiating over the performance of kingship, in ways which may have had ongoing implications for political practice on the island until the modern era. Mugalan's overtures to the Vēḷaikkāras was hardly the only such negotiation taking place after Vijayabāhu's death, however. Across the island, other members of Vijayabāhu's family jostled for power, in ways which have been poorly captured by our retrospective narratives, and so by colonial-era historians.

One, Three, or Four Kings?

As I suggested in the Introduction, colonial historians and their heirs have been determined to lay out an orderly succession of Sri Lanka's premodern kings. In the case of Vijayabāhu's claim to the throne, they were aided in this task by thirteenth-century historical accounts which similarly sought to trace continuities between Anurādhapura and Poḷonnaruva (and then to their own context, the court at Daṁbadeṇiya). Modern scholars have delighted in arranging these lineages into neat tables of successive paramount kings in orderly succession: from Vijayabāhu to his brother Jayabāhu; then to Vijayabāhu's son Vikramabāhu; then to *his* son Gajabāhu II; and finally down to Parākramabāhu.²⁵ This neat succession, too, is not entirely a

²⁴ For a nuanced reading of the *Mahāvamsa* account in particular see Fräsch, "Buddha's Tooth Relic." In a more recent work, Fräsch has suggested that as ties to the Anurādhapuran monastic lineages became increasing tenuous, later kingdoms turned to the Tooth Relic as a marker of continuity with Anurādhapura and Poḷonnaruva. Fräsch, "Kontakte, Konzile, Kontroversen," 139.

²⁵ A particularly clear illustration of this approach is provided by Tennent, who numbers each monarch in turn. Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu II are listed as kings

colonial invention. The thirteenth-century *Pūjāvaliya* tells us that Jayabāhu ruled after his brother Vijayabāhu, and Vijayabāhu's son Vikramabāhu ruled after him in turn.²⁶ Curiously, this narrative skips over Gajabāhu II entirely, and moves straight onward to Kīrtiśrīmegha's son Parākramabāhu I. The fourteenth century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* similarly describes a singular "procession" (*āvāma*) of three kings—Jayabāhu, Vikramabāhu, and Gajabāhu—following Vijayabāhu.²⁷

But the *Mahāvamsa*'s authors seem to have had a rather different narrative in mind, one which stresses a more fragmentary nature for the period. The chapter covering the period following Vijayabāhu's death is titled "Deeds of the Four Kings" (P. *caturājacariyaniddeso*). This refers to the fraught internecine conflict between four branches of Vijayabāhu's family—his siblings and their descendants on one side, his son Vikramabāhu on the other—mapped across Lanka's three constituent sub-kingdoms: Rājaraṭa, Ruhaṇa, and Māyāraṭa. The point here seems to be that during this period there was *not* a single paramount king in Poḷonnaruva facing unwarranted opposition from remote upstarts, but that all four were "kings" on equal footing. This point was entirely missed by the *Mahāvamsa*'s modern translator and editor, Wilhelm Geiger, who instead inserted the name of whichever monarch happened to be ruling in Poḷonnaruva at the top of each page of his translation. Geiger's editorial choice suggests that the Poḷonnaruvan monarchs were in some way more central—perhaps even higher-ranked—than were their peers in Rohaṇa and Māyāraṭa. As we will see below, this view does not seem to have been held by those living and ruling in medieval Lanka, including perhaps the Poḷonnaruvan monarchs themselves.

The political fragmentation of this period was not, in the world of the *Mahāvamsa*, a morally neutral state of affairs. In times of such disunity, the text explicitly tells us, virtuous kingship is impossible, and the kingdoms slip into chaos.²⁸ The purpose of this description, in the narrative logic of the *Mahāvamsa*, seems very clearly to be setting up the stakes for Parākramabāhu's eventual heroic reconciliation of both family and kingdom.

number 117 and 118 respectively, with the note "a disputed succession," and with Mānābharaṇa and then "Sirivallabha or Kitsiri Maivan" listed as "subkings" of Rohaṇa. Tennent, *Ceylon*, 323.

26 *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 782.

27 *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, ed. Samaranāyaka, 76. Very similar wording appears in the much later *Rājāvaliya*, which clearly draws on *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* for a source: *Rājāvaliya*, ed. Suravīra, 58.

28 See particularly *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 61, vv. 48–78.

Parākramabāhu's youthful adventures result in him being said to have "three fathers": he is the rightful heir to all three kingdoms and all three branches of his own family, by descent and by consanguineous marriage and, eventually, by conquest.²⁹ The disunity of this period is therefore vital to the *Mahāvamsa's* narrative of eventual glorious unification.

We are faced, in other words, with two conflicting schemes of kingship. In the *Pūjāvaliya's* account, one single king ruled in Poḷonnaruva. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, however, we have *four* rather antagonist kings spread between *three* neatly delineated kingdoms: Vikramabāhu I in Rajaraṭa, Mānābharaṇa I in Māyāraṭa, and Kīrtiśrīmegha and Śrīvallabha dividing Ruḥuṇa between them. I wish to suggest, however, that both of these schemes are suspiciously *orderly*. Both assume a certain institutionalization of kingship: either an acknowledgement of the inherent overlordship of whoever ruled Rajaraṭa, or a gentlemanly agreement to divide territory amongst one another along predetermined lines. Either scenario would be rather an outlier in the more global twelfth century, in which—with few exceptions—politics were decidedly less institutionalized, and relied instead on more contingent (and often contested) claims to authority and overlordship.

One Tamil-language inscription (*TISL* 52) from ca. 1153 provides a useful illustration of how the lines between conflicting claims to authority blurred on the ground. This particular inscription serves to mark a transfer of property rights between the inscription's patron—an official, likely of Mānābharaṇa II, named Mintan Korṇan—and a religious entity named the "ālvār of Veykavēram."³⁰ The inscription was found ca. 13km north of Trincomalee on Sri Lanka's eastern coast, and we might reasonably assume that the property in question was located in this area. In its careful negotiation of royal jurisdictions, it offers us an unusually vivid insight into how a relatively low-ranked official inserts himself into the inscriptional record:

29 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 64, vol. 33.

30 An ālvār/ālvār is literally a distinguished religious leader, but in practice usually refers to the Śrīvaiṣṇava "saints" whose hymns became canonized as sacred text. It can also refer, more generally, to Buddhist and Jaina holy figures. Pathmanathan states that in the present inscription ālvār "must" refer to the Buddha: Pathmanathan, *TISL*, 573. But he provides no rationale for this statement, and it is unclear to me why the Buddha—rather than Gaṇeśa, who is also mentioned, or even a Vaiṣṇava holy figure, given the role Viṣṇu would increasingly play in Sri Lankan pantheon—must be intended.

Svasti! In the forty-third year of Śrī Abhaya Śalāmegha *panmarāṇa cakkara-varttika*! Lord Śrī Jayabāhu, I am Mintaṇ Korraṇ, supervisor of the palace palanquin-bearers. The *perumā*! Gajabāhu assigned the [lands with their] boundaries, [which were previously] assigned to me as maintenance-land [by that same] Lord Gajabāhu, [named] “Tel Vecār” and “Kiratu Naratu Vecār,” as a land-grant to the Veykavēram *ālvār*.

The inscription was established [to record] the message sent by Lord Mānāparaṇa (Skt. Mānābharaṇa), which stated “[This is a] deed done [by] Lord Gajabāhu,” with respect to the king’s intentions. One who impedes this [will be reborn] in hell. [This] is an oath to the Buddha [and] to the Lord Vallavar (*TISL* 52).

We see here an inscription (*śilalekha*) made to record a message (*tirumukham*) from Mānābharaṇa II—ruler of the southeastern kingdom of Rohaṇa—which in turn assents to a previous intention (*kurippu*) of Gajabāhu II, ruler of the Rājaraṭa to the north. The image this suggests of Mintaṇ Korraṇ is something akin to a modern civil servant caught between overlapping jurisdictions, diligently documenting his best attempt to satisfy all parties. In what may be an attempt to reflect the courtly practices of these different overlords, the names of both Jayabāhu and Gajabāhu are in Grantha script (allowing them to be rendered in their Sanskritic forms), while Mānābharaṇa is written, like the rest of the inscription, as Tamil-script Mānāparaṇa. Even the closing warning to those who might in future challenge the *ālvār*’s use of the land-grant is made in the name of both the Buddha *and* Vallavar, the distinctly Tamil epithet for Gaṇeśa. All bets are firmly hedged.

Mintaṇ Korraṇ’s inscription is a useful indication that, on the level of land administration, things were perhaps not quite so clear-cut as later retrospective narratives might wish to portray. It is all well and good to speak of Gajabāhu “ruling Rājaraṭa” and Mānābharaṇa “ruling Ruhaṇa.” But when it comes to transferring land-grants between worthy subjects, a more local official felt the need to document both parties’ assent. Bearing in mind that the land was being transferred *away* from said local official, by the very same king (Gajabāhu) who he explicitly tells us first granted it to him, we might further wonder if Mānābharaṇa was brought into the matter by Mintaṇ Korraṇ himself in an attempt to appeal Gajabāhu’s decision. If so, clearly the appeal was unsuccessful, and Mintaṇ Korraṇ’s inscription would document his own acceptance that no further avenues of redress were available to him; both monarchs were clearly set against his holding on to the lands.

We might also note that the forty-third year of Jayabāhu I is, very approximately, 1153—the same year in which Gajabāhu II would later die,

and Parākramabāhu I would eventually defeat Mānābharaṇa to unite all of Lanka. If we detect any concerns about stability in Mintan̄ Korraṇ's inscription, his situation could only have become more complex as the year progressed. This system of dating, in the regnal years of Jayabāhu, further suggests that Mintan̄ Korraṇ was not caught between only two kings. Despite invoking the authority of both Mānābharaṇa II and Gajabāhu II, Jayabāhu is clearly still positioned as the paramount monarch, complete with regnal name ("Abhaya Śālāmegha") and *cakravartin* title, while the "actual" rulers of Rājaraṭa and Rohaṇa are referred to only by the "lesser" titles *tēvar* (Skt. *deva*) and *perumaḷ*.

However, Jayabāhu did not rule for forty-three years. If the sequence of events in the *Mahāvamsa* can be at all trusted, he was deposed by Vikramabāhu shortly after taking the throne, and in fact would have died long before Gajabāhu succeeded his father Vikramabāhu in Rājaraṭa. This convention of continuing to use Jayabāhu's regnal years long past his effective deposition, and even death, was a widespread practice in the period. Twelve extant inscriptions, written in both Sinhala and Tamil and spread across the island, date themselves by Jayabāhu's regnal years long after he was actually deposed by Vikramabāhu I.³¹ The practice of referring to the island's "actual" monarchs by lesser titles, while reserving *cakravartin* for Jayabāhu, was also not only limited to local officials like Mintan̄ Korraṇ. Even Gajabāhu II, while ruling from Poḷonnaruva, is referred to in his own inscriptions and those of his courtiers by "lesser" titles like *deva/tēvar* (IC 6.8; TISL 47) and *rajaṭā* (IC 6.9). In only one inscription (IC 6.9) does he use the title *cakravartin*, in the Sinhala form *aṇa-sakviti*, for himself.

The long shadow Jayabāhu cast over the inscriptions of the earlier Poḷonnaruva period clearly necessitates some consideration. The most detailed examination of this peculiar dating practice is provided by Sirima Kiribamune, as part of her wider study of the *abhiṣeka* ("consecration," literally "sprinkling") ritual.³² This ritual was clearly an important marker of sovereignty—in Sri Lanka as across broader Sanskritic and Buddhist Asia—but its nature, procedure, and significance are still poorly understood.³³

31 These inscriptions are TISL 51a and b (both in regnal year eight); TISL 44 (year eighteen); IC 6.6 (year twenty-three); TISL 30 (year twenty-four); IC 6.8 (year twenty-seven); TISL 49 (year twenty-eight); TISL 29 and IC 6.12 (both year thirty-five); TISL 50 (year thirty-eight, also dated to year fifteen of Gajabāhu's reign); TISL 47 (year forty); and TISL 52 (year forty-three).

32 Kiribamune, "Royal Consecration."

33 See here particularly the forthcoming dissertation of Yuanyuan Duan, "Esoteric

This is no doubt due to the fact that *abhiṣekas* writ large were so varied across a wide range of cultural and soteriological contexts. The best-understood *abhiṣekas* are those which were deployed in esoteric rituals, in which the act of anointing was understood to mark a spiritual (and sometimes somatic) transformation of the initiate.³⁴ Some of these *abhiṣekas*, especially those practised in East Asia, were used to transform mere “kings” into superior “*cakravartins*.”³⁵ However, this was not universally the case. We have many records of royal *abhiṣeka* procedures, including the very earliest, which make no mention of *cakravartinship*, or of any change in royal title.³⁶

The royal *abhiṣeka* procedure was clearly considered to be significant in early second-millennium Sri Lanka. However, I suspect that this significance may have been overemphasized by modern scholars, misled yet again by an overreliance on the thirteenth-century *Mahāvamsa* instalment. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, one of the primary complaints that Vikramabāhu’s cousins had against him was that he ruled Rājaraṭa without having received an *abhiṣeka*.³⁷ Even some of the most cautious scholars of Poḷonnaruva-period history, including Kiribamune, taken this retrospectively attributed motivation as fact, rather than as Daṁbadeṇiya-period concerns and priorities mapped backwards onto Poḷonnaruva.³⁸ This being the case, it would be easy to draw a parallel between Vikramabāhu’s supposed, and supposedly problematic, lack of an *abhiṣeka* ceremony, and the continued use of (the presumably consecrated) Jayabāhu’s regnal years for dating.

But this neat parallel raises an important question: *why* would Vikramabāhu not undergo an *abhiṣeka*, if it was indeed so important a marker of kingly status? Kiribamune systematically works through the possible

Rituals and Buddhist Sovereignty in Dali 863–1424.” Duan’s study of *abhiṣeka* rituals in particular promises to considerably reconfigure our understanding of knowledge vectors between medieval South, East, and Southeast Asia.

34 See, e.g., many of the essays in Aciri, *Esoteric Buddhism*.

35 Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 331–32; Bryson, “The Great Kingdom,” 93–94.

36 See Tsuchiyama, “*Abhiṣeka* in the Vedic and Post-Vedic Rituals,” particularly 53–54.

37 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 60, v. 31.

38 Kiribamune suggests that a “rockbase of accepted opinion” (whose?) “precluded [some monarchs] from the royal consecration” (by what means?): Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration,” 13; see also Pathmanathan, *TISL*, 312. Ranawella notes that this was only “a passage put into the thoughts of senior Mānābharaṇa [i.e., Mānābharaṇa I] and his brothers” by the *Mahāvamsa*’s later composer, but nonetheless takes it as evidence of a more general expectation that kings *should* undertake this ritual. Ranawella, “A Political History,” 370.

explanations of this “bewildering” failure of Vikramabāhu, and all other kings of the period before Parākramabāhu I, to become fully anointed kings.³⁹ Control of the entire island cannot be the deciding factor: the *Mahāvamsa* tells us that Parākramabāhu himself received his first *abhiṣeka* while ruling only Māyāraṭa and Rajaraṭa, and then took a *second abhiṣeka* once he had also secured Ruhaṇa.⁴⁰ Kiribamune therefore concludes that the most plausible explanation for Vikramabāhu and his son Gajabāhu not having received *abhiṣekas* while ruling from Poḷonnaruva was that neither were adequately “Buddhist.”⁴¹ I discuss this claim, and the tenuous nature of the evidence for it, further in the following chapter. For now, let us simply note two counterpoints. First, that the royal *abhiṣeka* ritual is primarily documented in “non-Buddhist” textual sources.⁴² The notion that only Buddhists could have received *abhiṣekas*, should they so desire it, simply does not carry water. Second, the only *abhiṣeka* procedure documented in a self-consciously “Buddhist” text from Sri Lanka—namely the *Vamsatthappakāsinī*—does not, as I discuss further in Chapter Five, seem to require any particular proclivity towards Buddhism on behalf of the consecrated, nor the participation of Buddhist monks as consecrators. In other words, this procedure gives us no reason to think that even a supposedly “non-Buddhist” king would be unable to receive an *abhiṣeka*. The only evidence that we have available for such an absence of *abhiṣeka* is, therefore, the account of the *Mahāvamsa*, which as we have seen takes great pains to emphasize—or perhaps exaggerate—the illegitimacy of Parākramabāhu’s rivals.

All of this is to say that we cannot assume that Jayabāhu’s regnal years extended beyond his effective reign simply because other kings were “ineligible” or “unable” to perform their own *abhiṣekas*. Instead, we must wonder what made these other kings *unwilling* to claim paramount kingship for themselves, and to use their own regnal years in their inscriptions, long after Jayabāhu’s deposition and even death, especially when they

39 Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration,” 20–28.

40 See, respectively, *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 71, vv. 19–32; ch. 72, vv. 311–29. Geiger suggests that this second *abhiṣeka* was necessitated because Parākramabāhu had had to flee Rajaraṭa for a brief time between the two, negating the effect of his first *abhiṣeka*: Geiger and Rickmers, *Cūlavamsa*, 1:347n1. However, in the slightly later Daṁbadeṇiya period, we also see references to multiple consecrations for Parākramabāhu II: Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*, 59.

41 Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration,” 25–28.

42 See the detailed discussion in Tsuchiyama, “*Abhiṣeka* in the Vedic and Post-Vedic Rituals.”

were actively hostile to Jayabāhu (as was Vikramabāhu, according to the *Mahāvamsa*'s account). I wish to suggest that Jayabāhu's nominal paramount kingship—even when both the *Mahāvamsa* account and the lack of inscriptional evidence speak to a lack of any concrete power—served a useful role in maintaining the balance of power between the divided kingdoms of the interregal period, even after his pragmatic deposition and his eventual death.

The balance of power is a fundamental axiom of the “Neorealist” school of modern international politics. In this account, “wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive,” political actors will necessarily operate competitively. They will also, however, put aside common differences in order to keep one of their number from rising above and overpowering the rest, preserving the anarchic and therefore egalitarian *status quo*.⁴³ Kenneth Waltz himself, the doyen of Neorealism, does not consider this state of pure anarchy—a balance of power between *all* members of given political system—desirable, likening the necessary tensions and conflicts to Hobbes's state of nature.⁴⁴ A preferable alternative, he argues, is the relative stability of a “Great Power” system, in which two hegemonic entities (for him, the USA and USSR) keep one another in check while enforcing peace downwards on their various subordinates.

The Neorealist account is, of course, hopelessly reductive. But, as its Constructivist critics have argued persuasively, one can accept that some political actors *believe* themselves to be in a balance-of-power situation, and so act according to Neorealist expectations, without advocating the inevitability or universality of such beliefs and actions. As Alexander Wendt succinctly put it, “anarchy is what states make of it.”⁴⁵ We might wonder if such beliefs, or similar, preoccupied Vikramabāhu I and his cousins once he had ousted his uncle Jayabāhu, and if continuing to acknowledge Jayabāhu's paramountcy therefore provided some mutual benefit. Vikramabāhu may have taken control of Rajaraṭa, but his cousins—who together controlled the majority of the island—were unlikely to acknowledge him as overlord, and could together prevent his military expansion. Simultaneously, if any one of the three brothers—Mānābharaṇa, Kīrtiśrīmegha, and Śrīvallabha—had declared their own paramountcy, or made a play for Rajaraṭa, their siblings

⁴³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 121, 164–65.

⁴⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 103.

⁴⁵ Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It.”

might have taken this as a threat to their own autonomy, and allied against the disruptor in favour of the *status quo*. Lanka would have been, in other words, in what Neorealists would recognize as structural “state of anarchy,” with nothing to keep the four cousins from violently jostling one another for the upper hand, and from cutting down any one of their number who stood poised to gain too much. Maintaining the fiction of Jayabāhu’s ongoing overlordship, on the other hand, may have made an uneasy truce easier. So long as all four of the island’s divided rulers (Vikramabāhu, Mānābharaṇa, Śrīvallabha, and Kirtisīrimegha) acknowledged a shared higher power, under whom they nominally served as regional sub-kings, they could trust that none of the others was positioning himself for supremacy.

This argument is necessarily speculative. But it does suggest some context for the increasing tensions which marked the end of the interregal period. Most significantly, of course, it recasts the character of Parākramabāhu I, and the nature of opposition towards him. As narrated in the *Mahāvamsa*, Parākramabāhu is so obviously a rightful and heroic king that those who oppose him (particularly Mānābharaṇa II) must do so only out of some moral failing.⁴⁶ If we suspect, however, that a balance of power was in the interests of the period’s rulers, then Parākramabāhu’s ambitions must have seemed a dangerous threat to the *status quo*, to which the only reasonable response was alliance and opposition.

This gives us some sense of the period’s intradynastic politics, and of the tense balance of power between rival kings and their subordinates. The mutual recognition of Jayabāhu’s nominal paramount status, long after his practical deposition and eventual death, may have gone some way to maintaining equilibrium. But this alone could not stop ambitious individuals, as discussed in the following chapter, from moving towards more exalted inscriptional styles; nor would it stop Parākramabāhu from eventually seizing hegemony in reality. Before this point, however, I wish to suggest that the relative instability and tensions of the interregal period opened doors for others to more boldly assert themselves than they had previously been able: the royal consorts.

46 Note, for examples, the influence of “evil-minded people” upon Mānābharaṇa II (*Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 71, vv. 9–10); Mānābharaṇa’s pained internal monologues (ch. 72, vv. 216–19 and 225–30); his cowardly abandonment of his own children (ch. 72, vv. 278–83); and his deathbed regrets (ch. 72, vv. 304–7).

Consortial Politics

In Chapter One, we noted the almost total absence of royal consorts in the inscriptional record, from the late Anurādhapuran period through to the reign of Vijayabāhu I. Only a very few extant inscriptions are attributed to, or even mention by name, these royal consorts—other than the donors' own mothers. In the interregnal period presently under discussion, this changed: we see, to an unprecedented degree, inscriptions of royal consorts themselves, describing their own social status and (in some cases) patronage of religious institutions. As noted in the Introduction, this is a quantitative shift from the dynamics of the Anurādhapura period. More qualitative changes in the status of royal consorts also become apparent as the Poḷonnaruva period continues: in the years following the death of Parākramabāhu I, royal consorts (and even daughters!) are mentioned prominently in the inscriptions of their husbands (particularly the inscriptions of Niśśaṅka Malla, discussed in Chapter Six); some, eventually, claim the throne for themselves (as discussed in Chapter Seven). The inscriptions of Cundhamalli and Sundarā, therefore, merit our attention if only as an early indication of this growing significance of the royal consort in later Poḷonnaruvan political culture.

In this section I advance a tentative explanation for why royal consorts became increasingly visible in the interregnal period: that the delicate balance of power in this period of Sri Lankan history led to an increased significance of marital ties with powerful mainland dynasties, and therefore to the increasing and increasingly visible influence of the royal consorts who embodied those ties. The political value of such interdynastic connections, particularly in times of relative political instability, are well-documented globally: in medieval Europe,⁴⁷ China,⁴⁸ and in the Islamic world.⁴⁹ The purpose of these marital ties, from the perspective of male participants, was to further their mutual positions by solidifying inter-dynastic alliances—or at least by securing what *appeared* to be a powerful alliance in the eyes of one's rivals—and by tying together divided branches of a family tree through intradynastic alliances. This was an example, in other words, of what Rubin famously called “the traffic in women,” in which the exchange of female bodies between men was believed by those men to ground political

⁴⁷ d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*; Molho, *Marriage Alliance*; Woodacre, “Ruling & Relationships,” 180.

⁴⁸ McMahon, “The Institution of Polygamy,” 922.

⁴⁹ Barton, “Marriage across Frontiers”; Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty”; Woodacre, *Queens and Queenship*, 20.

and economic ties.⁵⁰ Put bluntly, in many parts of the medieval world, “bonds forged by sexual relationships were critical to successful diplomacy.”⁵¹

As discussed in the preceding chapter, however, the dynastic connections available through marriage alliances seem to have been of little significance to the inscriptional self-representation of Lanka’s monarchs prior to the period under discussion. The dynastic origins of royal consorts are rarely, if ever, mentioned in kingly inscriptions, or in the inscriptions of the consorts themselves (in the few instances in which they were able to leave behind inscriptional traces). In other words, if there *was* a common practice of marrying outside of Lanka prior to the Poḷonnaruva period, it seems to have been considered irrelevant to inscriptional self-representation, and to the language of politics engraved therein. This changed, however, during the interregnal period, and in the fractured period post-Parākramabāhu I. We can easily imagine how, in such a politically fragmented context with recent memories of external conquest, such inter-dynastic connections may well have appeared valuable to Lankan monarchs desperately attempting to balance their own power against that of their neighbours, and that of their overseas rivals. Alliances with powerful dynasties across the Palk Strait would have both mitigated the risk of external invasion and served as a useful deterrent against potential hostilities from within.

However, seeking out high-status wives, who would then embody a strategic interdynastic connection, was a risky strategy for men whose own grip on power was tenuous. As Anne Walthall notes, even in contexts (like medieval Sri Lanka) in which royal consorts were less respected by their husbands for their own personal qualities, respect was often still due “for their powerful relatives, who might take offence were they slighted.”⁵² For some royal consorts, these familial connections could be leveraged for influence both within and beyond the palace. To be clear, I am not making a reductive argument that “independently powerful consorts would always cause trouble for their hapless husbands.” However, these examples are suggestive of the kind of power which royal consorts *could* wield in the medieval world, even if married off to further the political ambitions of their fathers and husbands, when they had a powerful dynasty behind them and some degree of economic foundation underfoot.

50 Rubin, “The Traffic in Women.”

51 Andaya, “Women and the Performance of Power,” 25.

52 Walthall, *Servants of the Dynasty*, 12.

The limited evidence available to us precludes firm conclusions about the change in inscriptional representation of consorts from the interregal period onwards. I suspect, however, that a similar dynamic lies behind this shift as described above: that the trifurcated monarchs of Rajaraṭa, Māyāraṭa, and Ruhunu increasingly sought out consorts with ties to powerful overseas dynasties to help support their rule. This was, to be clear, a continuation of an already-established pattern of exogamous marriage in Sri Lanka; many of the rulers in the period under discussion explicitly claim matrilineal links to powerful mainland dynasties. What changed in the period between Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu is that some of these consorts themselves leveraged those same connections, directing patronage in support of their own religious or political goals, in ways perhaps unprecedented in Lankan history.

The sole extant inscription of Cundhamalli, dated in the eighth year of Jayabāhu (ca. 1118 CE), supports this reading. The inscription is carved on a stone pillar: presumably once part of the Śaiva temple mentioned in the inscription, but now re-appropriated in the early modern construction of a temple near what is now Nikaweratiya (North Western Province). Cundhamalli's own Śaiva temple was likely once located in this vicinity, and therefore in Māyāraṭa. The inscription reads:

Śrī! In the eighth year of the Lord Jayabāhu, the consort (*nampirāṭṭiyār*) [of] the Pāṇḍya king Virapperumāl [and] auspicious daughter of Lord Kulōṭṭuṅka Cōla, Cundhamalli *ālvār*, [gave] to the deity of the Īsvata-temple of Vikkiramā Calāmēka (Skt. Vikrāma Śālamegha) in Vikkiramacalāmēkapura, [also] called Mākala (Sin. Māgala, Skt. Mahāgalla), a lamp of alloyed metal [and] ten *kācus* [of gold] for a perpetual lamp that will permanently burn for as long as the sun and moon [endure] (*TISL* 51a).

This inscription provides evidence, at minimum, that Cundhamalli had a degree of economic power. She was able to make a donation to a religious institution in her own name, and to record that donation in inscriptional form. This is itself noteworthy. Cundhamalli's inscription is the only extant evidence of a donation by a royal woman to a Śaiva temple in Sri Lanka during this period.⁵³ But, as with all donative inscriptions from this period, this inscription served more than merely documentary purposes. In my reading, it locates Cundhamalli at the centre of a dense network of interdynastic ties.

53 *TISL* 52, discussed above, indicates the support of both Gajabāhu and Mānābharaṇa II for a (possibly Śaiva) religious institution. We have many inscriptions marking private donations to Śaiva temples, both by individuals and by mercantile organizations: see *TISL* pts. III and IV.

We have already noted that, like other inscriptions of this interregal period, Cundhamalli dates her inscription in the regnal years of Jayabāhu. She is clearly aware of the political climate on the island, and follows the standard inscriptional practice established by Lanka's trifurcated kings. Immediately after this acknowledgement of Jayabāhu's nominal sovereignty, Cundhamalli then introduces herself by way of relation to, in turn, her husband and her father. She refers to her husband as a Pāṇḍyan *vīrap perumāl*, literally "heroic king." This is usually understood to be a variant on Virabāhu, a throne name of Mānābharaṇa I, whose own father was Pāṇḍyan. According to the *Mahāvamsa* account, Mānābharaṇa I ruled Māyāraṭa—where Cundhamalli's temple was likely located—during this time. Notably, this would make Cundhamalli a co-consort to Parākramabāhu's mother Ratnāvalī, although she is never mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa*'s description of her husband's courts. Cundhamalli's father is then identified as a Cōḷa lord (*tēvar*) named Kulōttuṅka (whose name, alone, is rendered in Tamil rather than Grantha script). In 1118, this could only refer to the Cōḷa Emperor Kulottuṅga (r. 1070–1120), who adopted this then-novel name in 1074 to signal his singular status among the imperial family.⁵⁴

It is also worth noting that Cundhamalli therefore invokes here both the Cōḷa and the Pāṇḍya, two of the three great Tamil dynasties discussed in Chapter One. The third of these dynasties is the Cēra, who ruled over what is now Kerala. We might note that the title *perumāl*, here assigned to Mānābharaṇa I, is typically associated with the Cēra, to the point that the dynasty ruling Kerala in the twelfth century are often today called the "Chera Perumals." As Pathmanathan points out, *perumāl* was used in other Tamil-language Lankan inscriptions of the period.⁵⁵ But we should not ignore the rhetorical significance of hinting at all *three* dynasties in just two clauses of the inscription.

On one level, then, we can take this as evidence of a marital alliance between the Cōḷa and Māyāraṭa polities. A marriage between Mānābharaṇa I and a daughter of Kulottuṅga would have secured a mutually beneficial dynastic alliance for the two men. For Mānābharaṇa, it would have provided a link to the powerful mainland empire. For Kulottuṅga, it would have provided a foothold into at least one branch of Lanka's ruling family, less than a generation after Kulottuṅga's own uncle Virarājendra was defeated

⁵⁴ On Kulottuṅga's rise, and adoption of his new name, see generally Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry*.

⁵⁵ Pathmanathan, *TISL*, 549.

by Vijayabāhu I and lost control of the island. Cundhamalli's inscription, I suggest, frames the alliance in a different way. Let us bear in mind that the genealogical preamble typical of medieval Lankan inscriptions (as in other genres of inscription, such as the Sanskrit *praśasti*) serves to eulogize the most recent descendant: what Alice Collett calls the "genealogical ego" of the inscription.⁵⁶ Praise of the genealogical ego's ancestors is, ultimately, praise of their own pedigree. The invocation of Cundhamalli's husband and father in the lead-up to her own name serves a similar function. *She* is the genealogical ego, valorized through connection to both Lankan and South Indian dynasties.

This would make sense given Cundhamalli's Cōla origins. As noted in Chapter One, royal women played a more prominent role in South Indian political culture than elsewhere in medieval Southern Asia. As Leslie Orr puts it,

It may be argued that for a woman to retain her identity as her father's daughter after her marriage—as did, for example, many Chola queens and princesses—is in fact an indication of her status as an instrument of exchange; that she was simply a pawn in the creation of political alliances among men. However, the way in which the inscriptions describe the women who figure in such marriage alliances actually sends quite a different message. These women, who are very often identified both as daughters and as wives, are referred to with elevated titles and honorific language and appear as major actors in the sponsorship of substantial gifts to temples.⁵⁷

This very accurately describes the contents of Cundhamalli's inscription. It is very likely that Mānābharāṇa and Kulottuṅga understood the marriage between Cundhamalli and the former as merely an instance of, in Gayle Rubin's terms, "the conversion of female lives into marriage alliances, [and] the contribution of marriage to political power."⁵⁸ Cundhamalli, however, might well have disagreed: these links, as framed in her own inscription, lend *her* political and economic status, and place her in a position from which she can patronize her preferred religious institutions in her own name.

This is, of course, a single inscription, from which we ought not draw over-generalizations. However, it would be a rather striking coincidence that the first inscription to record a religious donation by a royal woman in over a century *is also* an inscription which valorizes a royal consort as a daughter

56 Collett, "Reimagining the Sātavāhana Queen Nāgaṇṇikā," 346.

57 Orr, "Women and the Gift in Medieval South India," 177–78.

58 Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," 65.

of the powerful emperor Kulottuṅga. I suspect that these matters are connected: that it was *because of* Cundhamalli's illustrious dynastic connections that she was able to exercise an unusual degree of economic independence, making a donation in her own name and marked with her own inscriptional eulogy to a Śaiva temple in her husband's realm. As Chapters Six and Seven discuss further, the emphasis placed here on Cundhamalli's dynastic origins were not unechoed in the following century. Rather, they represent a first step towards a growing emphasis on the dynastic origins of royal consorts in the inscriptional record. We should not be surprised, I am suggesting, that some of these interdynastic consorts—brought into a politically fragmented Lanka as living embodiments of powerful overseas polities—began to assert their influential status in unprecedented ways.

Whatever the social causes, thinking about consorts as powerful agents has implications for our understanding of Poḷonnaruvan history, including the history of religious institutions. We have noted that the inscription of Cundhamalli discussed in this section marked, and was made possible by, a donation to a Śaiva temple. But she was not the only royal consort of the interregnal period to take an interest in, and patronize, particular religious institutions. In the following chapter we will return to the question of the rise of the Theravāda, and the conditions which set the stage for Parākramabāhu's 1165 *saṅgha* restructuring.

Conclusions to Chapter Three

This chapter has suggested that the period between Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I represented more than an uninteresting interlude in the otherwise glorious progress of Theravāda history. Rather, I have argued that the political turbulence of this period was also conducive to the emergence of new forms of politics; that in their attempts to balance power between three (or four) rival polities, Sri Lanka's monarchs constructed new models of kingly authority. The most obvious of these was, of course, the ongoing acknowledgement of Jayabāhu's "overlordship," in the continued use of his regnal years to date inscriptions, even long after his death. At a more local level, officials like Mintan̄ Korraṇ carefully documented their efforts to negotiate overlapping jurisdictions. This may have been a period of "anarchy," but anarchy was very much what kings made of it.

This reading of the period has implications for its representation in our standard chronologies of Sri Lankan history. As Jonathan Walters has shown, colonial-modern historians have been preoccupied with constructing orderly lists of paramount monarchs stretching from Vijaya to

Victoria.⁵⁹ Sri Lankan texts—from the *Mahāvamsa* to the much later *Rājāvaliya*—shared this preoccupation, to the great delight of the early colonial scholars who “discovered” them. In the preceding chapter, I demonstrated some historiographic problems with this approach when it came to the period of Cōla overlordship. Modern historians uncritically accepted the *Mahāvamsa*’s account of a continued succession of “rightful kings” in Ruhunu even while the majority of the island was clearly integrated into the Cōla imperial apparatus. We might make a similar critique for treatments of this period. Our standard lists of paramount monarchs only include those who were ruling in Poḷonnaruva itself (Jayabāhu, Vikrāmabāhu, and Gajabāhu II), effectively displacing the monarchs of Māyāraṭa and Ruhunu as peripheral. This is not just a simplification of a more complex political reality. It is a distortion of the clear and deliberate efforts the monarchs of these three kingdoms made to maintain the balance of power between them.

Crucially, I have argued that the fragmentation of political power which characterized this period provided *opportunities*, particularly for royal consorts, to wield political and economic power in ways which may not have been possible during more “stable” periods of centralized royal authority. In the following chapter, we turn to one of these consorts—the Great Lady Sundarā—in a court often excluded entirely from histories of Buddhism in Sri Lanka: that of her husband Vikramabāhu and son Gajabāhu.

59 Walters, “Buddhist History,” 163.