

Gender and Power
in the Premodern World



RELIGION, GENDER, AND POLITICS IN MEDIEVAL SRI LANKA

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF BUDDHIST KINGSHIP, ca. 1070–1215

by
BRUNO M. SHIRLEY

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK HAD its origins as a dissertation, and so I first pay homage to my teachers: to my dissertation committee, Lawrence McCrea, Daniel Boucher, and Tamara Loos; to my language teachers, particularly Bandara Herath; and above all to Anne Blackburn, who believed in this project from its earliest inception. I am grateful to Alastair Gornall, who generously read every page of the manuscript and provided key interventions; to Trent Walker, who patiently answered many questions about Southeast Asian languages, texts, and inscriptions, and allowed me to cite forthcoming work; and to Tyler A. Lehrer, who accompanied me on several fieldwork trips. The index was prepared by Carlos Garcia-Jane. Miranda Abrahams, Sarah R. Meiners, and Ashleigh Pearson were kind enough to proof-read several chapters. My word limit does not allow adequate thanks to the many other friends and colleagues who generously answered questions and helped further shape my thinking. At Arc Humanities, I am grateful to Danna Messer, Tania Colwell, and to the anonymous peer reviewer, whose insights considerably strengthened the work. All errors remain my own.

The bulk of the research was completed during graduate studies in Asian Studies at Cornell University; the bulk of the writing was completed while a guest lecturer in Religious Studies at Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University of Wellington, and in Transcultural Studies at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. I am grateful to these institutions, and to my friends and colleagues therein, for their support. The American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies supported several fieldwork trips and provided a welcome home base in Colombo. I am grateful to the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, and particularly to Jagath Weerasinghe, for their flexibility during COVID-19 disruptions to fieldwork plans. I was honoured to carry out research for this project as an American Council of Learned Societies/Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Dissertation Fellow in Buddhist Studies. Open-access publication of the book was made possible through a further grant from the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Global.

Thanks are due, above all, to Natalia, without whose love and support this could never have been possible.

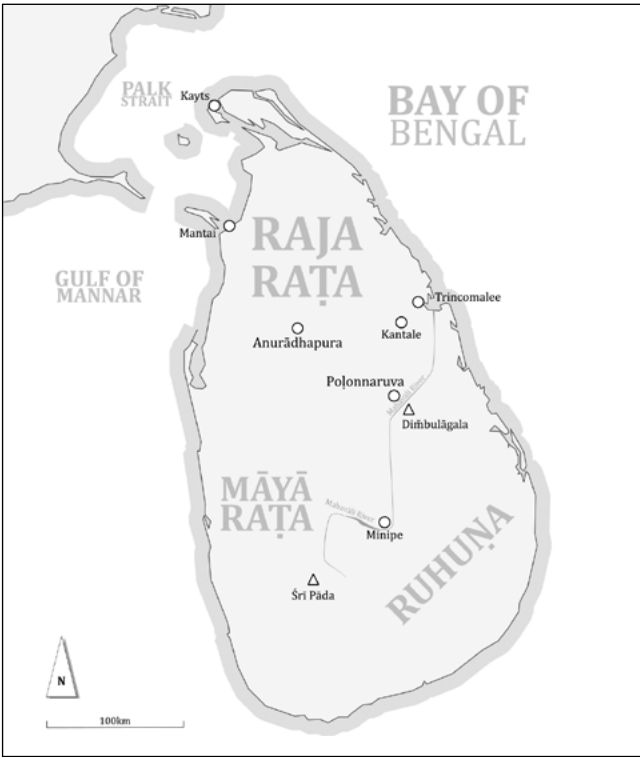


Figure 1. Map of Sri Lanka, showing relevant sites. Map by the author, using geospatial data from OpenStreetMaps, available under the Open Database Licence.

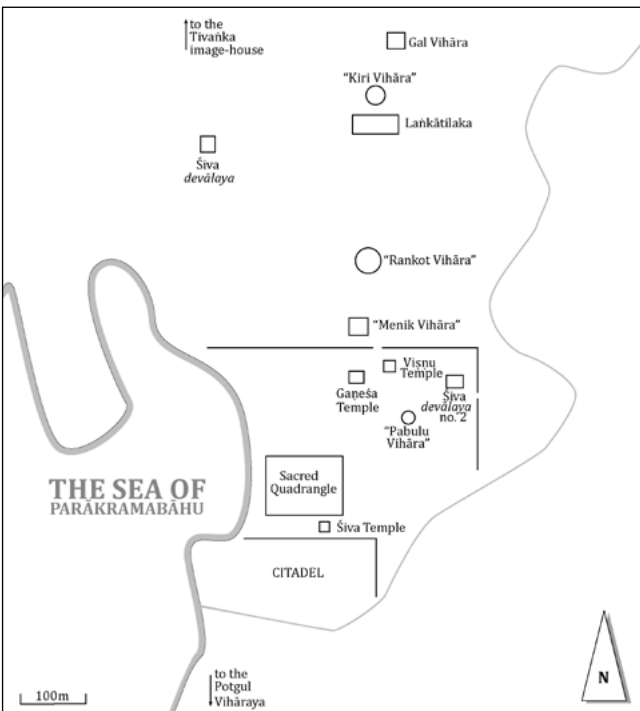


Figure 2. Map of Pojonnaruva, showing relevant sites. Map by the author, using geospatial data from OpenStreetMaps, available under the Open Database Licence.

CONVENTIONS

THE SOURCES IN this book move fluidly between four languages, each often containing variant spellings and loanwords. I note the original spelling in translations, but for consistency prefer the Sanskrit (Skt.) variants in-text. I note the Pali (P.), Sinhala (Sin.), and Tamil (T.) equivalents when relevant. These four languages are Romanized following ISO 15919, with two minor modifications. I use ä/ã rather than æ/ǣ for the sixth Sinhala vowel and, following Sri Lankan manuscript practice, I do not mark long ē and ō in Sanskrit and Pali (so Sin. *bōsat* but Skt. *bodhisattva*). Thai and Khmer are Romanized following Trent Walker's "Unified Transliteration System," which best preserves the etymological relationship to Pali and Sanskrit.

When possible, I present the names of individuals in Sanskrit (so Parākramabāhu rather than P. Parakkamabāhu or Sin. Pārakuṃba; Rājarāja rather than T. Irācarāca). When no Sanskrit name is witnessed, as in the case of some consorts and officials, then I use the variant favoured in their own inscriptions. For institutions which primarily operated in Tamil (the Cōḷa Empire, the Vēḷaikkāra merchant/mercenary guild) I use the Tamil variant of their names. I use modern placenames (in the common transliteration) only when referring to geographic areas (e.g., "in what is now Kantale"), and otherwise favour historical placenames in full transcription, based on the language predominantly spoken in that area (e.g., "the Kantaḷāy *brahmādeya*").

All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. My translations of inscriptions are based on the editions in *Inscriptions of Ceylon (IC)* and *Tamil Inscriptions in Sri Lanka (TISL)* respectively, with any modifications noted in footnotes. I refer to inscriptions and their editions within these texts by volume and number (i.e., IC 6.12 is the twelfth inscription in the sixth volume); when citing the opinions of these texts' editors, I instead use volume and page numbers separated by a colon.

Dates follow those of da Silva's *History of Sri Lanka*.



Figure 3. Statue near the Potgul Vihāra, holding what may be a manuscript. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after a photograph by Tyler A. Lehrer. Used with permission.

INTRODUCTION

ON THE COVER of this book is a curious structure known today as the Potgul Vihāra. Located just south of Poḷonnaruva, Sri Lanka's royal capital in the first centuries of the second millennium (ca. 990s–1215), the building's original function is uncertain. The elevated terrace it sits on, surrounded by four miniature *stūpas* (hemispherical reliquaries), with monastic cells arranged beyond the terrace, identify it as a Buddhist site. The domed shape of the central building, however, is unusual for the place and period.¹ The modern name—literally “Library Monastery”—is based on the site's association with a nearby statue of an unidentified man holding what appears to be a palm leaf manuscript (Fig. 3).² Faint traces of paint on the inside walls suggest, perhaps, that it was once used as an image-house: a shrine for contemplation and veneration of the Buddha. The only clue to the site's history is a short donative inscription (*IC* 6.23) carved into its *maṇḍapa* (ritual entranceway).³ This tells us that the original structure was built by Parākramabāhu I (r. 1153–1186), the period's most illustrious king; that it was later rebuilt by Līlāvatī, a widow of Parākramabāhu who later became a monarch in her own right; and finally that the *maṇḍapa* itself was constructed by Candavatī, another of Parākramabāhu's former consorts.

¹ Sirisena, *Sri Lanka and South-East Asia*, 135–39.

² Although cf. Paranavitana, “The Statue Near Potgul-Vehera.”

³ Inscriptions are referred to in-text by their volume and number in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* (*IC*) or *Tamil Inscriptions in Sri Lanka* (*TISL*). References to primary sources are by text name only; full details are given in the bibliography.

This structure and its accompanying inscription are little more than a footnote in most histories of medieval Sri Lanka. The Archaeological Survey's annual report for the year of the structure's (re)discovery, for example, concludes only that, "In twenty-six lines of clear-cut letters of the twelfth century is a record in Pali of its original construction by Parākramabāhu I, and its rebuilding and improvement by his two queens."⁴ The most significant use to which this inscription has been put is as evidence that royal widows like Candavatī had independent means of patronizing such construction projects.⁵ Candavatī's very name has a tenuous hold in modern historiography: the editors of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, in which this inscription was first published, suggest that she should instead be identified by the name "Rūpavatī."⁶

What none of these scholars dwell on is the fact that Candavatī's inscription is written entirely in Pali, rather than in the other languages used more frequently in medieval Lankan inscriptions: Sinhala, Tamil, or Sanskrit. Pali would later become ubiquitous throughout the Theravāda kingdoms of Southern Asia;⁷ in such a context, it might be reasonable to assume that there was nothing particularly distinctive about Candavatī's choice of Pali as an inscriptional language. In reality, however, this is the *earliest* known example of a Sri Lankan royal inscription composed entirely in Pali.

Prior to the second millennium, Pali in Sri Lanka had largely been the preserve of monks: particularly those ordained in the Mahāvihāra *nikāya* (ordination lineage).⁸ The Mahāvihāra's fortunes were rarely in the ascendant. Archaeological evidence, the travel writings of Chinese pilgrims, and even historical narratives (*vaṃśas*) sympathetic to the Mahāvihāra together suggest that both royal and popular support went instead to its more illustrious rivals: the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *nikāyas*. While these latter institutions likely adhered to canonical texts written in Pali (including a

⁴ Bell, *ASCAR 1906*, 16.

⁵ Siriweera, "Economic Conditions," 54.

⁶ de Silva Wickremasinghe in *EZ* 2:240. The reasons for this renaming are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

⁷ The premodern application of the term "Theravāda" is contested among modern scholars. I deploy it throughout as an etic term, indicating "something, or some things, which can be seen, or argued, to be genealogically related to what we now call "Theravāda," following Collins, "Periodizing Theravāda History," 18.

⁸ This differs sharply from parts of peninsular Southeast Asia, in which inscriptional evidence speaks to a longer-standing engagement with the Pali language. Assavavirulhakarn, *Ascendancy*; Skilling, "Precious Deposits."

Pali-language *vinaya*, or monastic disciplinary code), both were receptive to Sanskrit texts, and possibly even to texts and practices explicitly associated with the Mahāyāna movement—today considered the great rival of proper, Pali-oriented Theravāda Buddhism.⁹ At one point, the Mahāvihāra-penned *Mahāvamsa* laments, its very buildings were deconstructed in order to provide raw materials for expansions of the Abhayagiri compound.¹⁰ While this may have been a dramatic embellishment, the first-millennium inscriptional corpus certainly suggests far more frequent royal engagement with the Abhayagiri, in particular, than with the Mahāvihāra. Of course, this is not to suggest that first-millennium kings were entirely uninterested in the latter institution and its Pali-language literature. For the most part, however, the notion that kings across the Indian Ocean would one day carve inscriptions in Pali, or heap praise upon the memory of the Mahāvihāra, must have seemed a very distant possibility.

In light of this, inscriptions like that of Candavatī take on a new significance. We cannot simply dismiss the choice of the Pali language, or, more generally, expressions of support for the Mahāvihāra, as an uninteresting expression of an underlying and unchanging affinity between Sri Lankan kingship and “Theravāda Buddhism.” Such references represent instead a radical reconfiguration of royal attitudes towards Buddhist languages and Buddhist institutions. Some of these moments of reconfiguration are found in the inscriptions of those men who dominate modern historiography. Most notably, perhaps, this includes the Galvihāra inscription of Parākramabāhu I (IC 6.13), discussed further in Chapter Five. However, far more of these critical inscriptions, in which royal attitudes towards Buddhist monastic institutions and languages seem to shift, are the product of slightly more peripheral figures. Candavatī’s inscription may be the earliest to be composed *wholly* in Pali, but she was following in the footsteps of another royal consort: the Great Lady Sundarā, the wife of Vikramabāhu I (r. 1111–1132) and mother of Gajabāhu II (1132–1153). As I discuss in Chapter Five, Sundarā’s inscriptions contain the earliest Pali verses known in Sri Lankan inscriptions, as well as evidence for patronage of a *Mahāvihāra*-aligned monastery which would later play a pivotal role in Parākramabāhu’s later restructuring of the monastic community (*saṅgha*).¹¹ But Sundarā, like Candavatī, is largely

9 Cousins, “Teachings.”

10 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 37, vv. 10–12.

11 We should note here the Nāgarī-script copper-plate inscription unearthed from the Jetavana compound in 1893, dated on palaeographic grounds to the second half of the tenth century. Scholars are divided on whether this inscription is a Sanskrit

absent from extant histories of Poḷonnaruva. It is, I suspect, not merely an unfortunate oversight that these women's inscriptions, or the inscriptions of other noblewomen from Poḷonnaruva, have been so long overlooked. Rather, it is symptomatic of a broader problem in our historiography of the Poḷonnaruva period, and therefore of our histories of how the Theravāda came to be as it is today.

A plethora of material evidence from the Poḷonnaruva period—inscriptions, art, architecture, coinage—is available to us, and indeed has been well-studied in the fields of archaeology and art history. Our understanding of the history of Poḷonnaruva, however, and of the religious transformations therein, has thus far been overwhelmingly reliant on a series of textual narratives composed from the thirteenth century onwards. The historical value of Poḷonnaruvan inscriptions rests, in one illustrative example, on the basis that they “very often corroborate statements in the [textual narratives] and occasionally supplement the knowledge we have from the latter source. It is only very seldom that these inscriptions contradict the [textual] account of the period.”¹² Material culture is used to flesh out the positivist bones provided by these narratives, which remain ossified at the core; when material data contradicts or simply falls outside the remit of the narratives (as does the inscription by Candavatī, who has no place in later texts about Poḷonnaruva), it is similarly overlooked by modern historians.¹³

The dangers of such a heavy reliance on textual accounts are compounded when we consider their own historical context. The foundation of modern historiography is the thirteenth-century “extension” to the *Mahāvamsa* (sometimes called *Cūlavamsa*) composed in the Daṁbadeṇiya-based court of Parākramabāhu II (r. ca. 1236–1269).¹⁴ The *Mahāvamsa* focuses its attentions on the careers of two exemplary kings: Vijayabāhu I

verse (EZ 1.3) or a quotation from the Pali-canonical Vaṭṭaka-jātaka (EZ 3.16). If the latter, then Sundarā's inscription would be the earliest use of original (rather than citational) Pali verses.

12 Wickramasinghe, “Sources,” 174–75.

13 See Jeganathan, “Authorising History”; Walters, “Buddhist History,” 163.

14 On the dominance of the *Mahāvamsa* over modern historiography, see Walters, “Buddhist History”; Walters and Colley, “Making History.” Given their self-representation as seamless “continuations,” dating the *Mahāvamsa* extensions is difficult. Sirima Wickramasinghe argues that while chs. 59–79 were written in the court of Parākramabāhu II, chs. 33–57 may have been written during the period of Cōḷa occupation: Wickramasinghe, “The Age of Parākramabāhu I,” 11–19. Her evidence for this, however, is relatively tenuous, and so I follow the traditional interpretation that chs. 33–79 *in toto* were written under Parākramabāhu II.

(r. ca. 1070–1110), who rose up against his Śiva-worshipping Cōḷa overlords, established an independent kingdom based at Poḷonnaruva, and then revitalized the monastic orders which had suffered under Cōḷa tyranny; and Parākramabāhu I, who reunited the island after a period of fragmentation, and then reunited the three *nikāyas* under Mahāvihāra-oriented leadership. The *Mahāvamsa*'s androcentric focus is echoed in two Sinhala-language texts also frequently consulted for information about Poḷonnaruva: the thirteenth-century *Pūjāvaliya*, also composed under Parākramabāhu II; and the fourteenth-century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, which elaborates on the *Pūjāvaliya* account.¹⁵ These texts are firmly the product of later periods, and reflect those periods' concerns. These concerns resulted in a very particular narrative of the Poḷonnaruva period: a narrative of heroic and pious kings who fought back Tamil and Sanskritic heresies to “restore” the Sinhala-speaking, Pali-oriented Buddhism of the Mahāvihāra to its “proper” dominance over the island.¹⁶ Like other *vamśa* texts, in other words, the *Mahāvamsa* extension was:

composed not as neutral accounts of the *sāsana*'s unfolding, but in the explicit or implicit service of a particular monastic group, generally in the context of a competitive local and/or regional monastic conversation (or debate) about the purity and authenticity of various lineages and their practices.¹⁷

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the historical events related in the *Mahāvamsa* were invented wholesale: Vijayabāhu I *really did* expel his Cōḷa overlords to declare his independent kingship; Parākramabāhu I *really did* unite the island and then initiate monastic reforms which would forever influence Buddhism across the Indian Ocean region; later monarchs like Niśsaṅka Malla and Līlāvatī *really did* struggle to maintain control while the kingdom splintered and ultimately fell apart around them. However, even if we accept the veracity of these historical events we must acknowledge the interpretive choices which the *Mahāvamsa*'s author made in narrativizing

15 On the historical production of the former, see Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*, 54–61; on the latter, Bretfeld, “Theravāda.”

16 Very often, “Sanskrit Buddhism” is assumed to be Mahāyāna (and therefore antithetical to the “proper” Theravāda of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia); the Tamil language and the Tamil country are assumed to be devoted almost exclusively to the worship of Śiva. Neither of these assumptions is true. On Tamil-language Buddhism in particular see Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism*; Schalk and Vēluppillai, *Buddhism among Tamils*.

17 Blackburn, “Sihala Saṅgha,” 316.

them. Here I am following Hayden White's insights that no "historical writing" is truly objective, but is—necessarily—a subjective "emplotment" of past events in ways sensible to the author's own social and intellectual context.¹⁸ The extent to which we have accepted the narrativization of Poḷonnaruva contained within the *Mahāvamsa*, *Pūjāvaliya*, and *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* as historical fact has skewed our understanding of the period, and therefore, crucially, of the circumstances under which the Mahāvihāra's version of Buddhism eventually became dominant across the Indian Ocean.

This book therefore constitutes a radical revision of Poḷonnaruva's history, eschewing entirely these later accounts in favour of *only* those sources which we know to have originated from within the period: primarily, and most reliably, the inscriptional record (discussed further below). On the basis of these sources, I make a range of arguments intervening in broader scholarly debates. At the broadest level, I demonstrate that the intellectual and institutional histories of "religion," "gender," and "politics" were fundamentally entangled in the Poḷonnaruva period, and that we therefore cannot adequately study any one without also attending closely to the others. The following sections lay out more specific arguments: about the intellectual dynamism of Buddhist kingship; about the overlooked significance of noblewomen in Poḷonnaruva's political culture; and about the methodological and evidentiary foundations on which we can build more detailed intellectual histories.

Buddhist Kingship

Central to these histories are shifting ideas about what it meant to be a "good king." We have assumed for far too long that the answer to this remained more or less static and self-contained over time: that the ideals of "Buddhist kingship" were both (1) narrowly confined to only those phenomena we today consider "Buddhist" (primarily in contrast to "Hindu kingship"); and (2) more or less contiguous from the earliest "canonical texts" down to the violent imposition of colonial governance and Christian proselytization. In other words, any "Buddhist king" from Aśoka to Ayutthaya worked from within the same strictly limited political *imaginaire*: an ahistorical construct we refer to as "Buddhist kingship."

18 White, *Metahistory*. While White is concerned exclusively with "modern" historical writing, his insights have been productively applied to *vamśa* texts: see Berkwitz, *Buddhist History in the Vernacular*; Scheible, *Reading the Mahāvamsa*.

This neat construct is tested, however, by the sheer abundance of evidence of historical Buddhist kings acting in ways apparently contrary to our idealized “Buddhist kingship.” These monarchs’ “failure” to live up to the standards we have set them, based on *our* readings of canonical Pali literature, has led some modern historians to question whether these individuals were “really” Buddhist kings at all. Rather, they must have been waylaid by the “influences” of some external force: theist practices; Mahāyāna heresies; local or populist superstitions. Such critiques have been levelled at Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs. In particular, as discussed in Chapter Five, Vikramabāhu I and his son Gajabāhu II are both routinely characterized by modern historians as Śaiva (Śiva-worshipping), rather than Buddhist, kings. It is certainly true that Poḷonnaruva’s kings looked to wider models of kingship. As I argue throughout this book, they found the ideals and practices of kingship circulating in Sanskritic and Tamil worlds at least as influential as they did those laid out in “canonical” Pali texts. Given this, we might validly wonder whether these monarchs truly are best considered “Buddhist kings,” and whether this book is really a study of “Buddhist kingship” after all.

A valid scholarly response to ahistorical notions of “Buddhist kingship” is to discard the concept altogether. Thus Anne Blackburn, for example, argues that later polities across Southern Asia are best regarded not as “Buddhist kingdoms,” but as “Buddhist-inflected sovereignties.”¹⁹ This move shifts our focus firmly onto the transcultural connections underlying these polities’ ideals of kingship, and so displaces the narrow insistence on representations of kings in the Pali canon which has so distracted past generations of scholarship. Such an approach is, clearly, extremely productive, and offers us new and more nuanced ways of conceptualizing kingship’s contingent relationship(s) to Buddhism. However, I remain convinced that there is some heuristic value to be found in the concept of “Buddhist kingship”—if it can be reconciled with the more capacious and cosmopolitan practices of kingship found in premodern Southern Asia.

I am motivated in this defence of “Buddhist kingship” by an emic invocation from within Poḷonnaruva itself. As many scholars have noted, the concept of “Buddhism” in use today—as a “religion,” as an “identity,” as an “-ism”—is a decidedly modern construction without a one-to-one equivalent in the premodern period.²⁰ The closest emic term from medieval Southern

19 Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*.

20 The modern origin of “religion” is a well-worn path to tread. Key landmarks include Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*; Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious”; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers*.

Asia is Buddha-*śāsana*: literally “the teachings of the Buddha.” This term was often also used to refer to the institutions which preserve and promote those teachings, but (unlike modern “Buddhism-as-religion”) not to individuals, much less non-monastic individuals. Some individuals are, however, referred to with the adjective *bauddha*: an abstractive meaning something like “of the Buddha” or simply “Buddhist.” We see this most frequently in Sanskrit philosophical literature, in which proponents of a distinctly *bauddha* epistemology distinguish themselves from their Mīmāṃsikā and Nyāya rivals.²¹ It also occurs, however, in a relatively small number of royal inscriptions, including one from Poḷonnaruva: the Galpota inscription of Niśśaṅka Malla (*IC* 6.24).²² As discussed in Chapter Seven, here Niśśaṅka Malla juxtaposes himself—an explicitly “Buddhist king” (*bauddha rājan*)—against his non-*bauddha* rivals in the Cōḷa and Pāṇḍya polities, suggesting that such a distinction was indeed meaningful in medieval Sri Lanka.²³

Niśśaṅka Malla may have been the only Poḷonnaruvan monarch to explicitly refer to his rivals as un-Buddhist (*abauddha*), but he was far from alone in expressing a particular affinity for the Buddha-*śāsana*. The majority of royal figures discussed throughout this book describe themselves as engaged in acts of worship (*pūjā*) oriented towards the Buddha or his relics (*dhātus*), or express an understanding that as monarchs they are in some way obligated to protect, preserve, or make prosper the *śāsana*. We are told that Vijayabāhu declared himself king in order “to protect the Buddha-*śāsana*” (*TISL* 42, 1.8); that Parākramabāhu desired to personally serve the Buddha-*śāsana* (*IC* 4:13, 1.8) and “further the world and the *śāsana*” (*IC* 6.15, 1.13); and that Līlāvati’s

21 These rivals are often grouped, by modern scholars and practitioners alike, under a general heading of “Hinduism.” On the complex history of the various sects, movements, and philosophical traditions which later became “Hinduism” see Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*; cf. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*. In brief: rather than a singular theistic institution, we see more frequently instead sects oriented towards individual deities as the supreme godhead (Śaivas for Śiva; Vaiṣṇavas for Viṣṇu; less frequently in this period Sauryas for the sun god Sūrya), alongside other philosophical/soteriological movements like the functionally atheistic Mīmāṃsā—all of which clashed philosophically with, and competed for patronage amongst, one another at least as often as they did their Buddhist and Jain rivals.

22 Beyond Sri Lanka, we see this term most frequently in Pāla inscriptions, which routinely contain the epithet “Best of Buddhists” (*paramabauddha*).

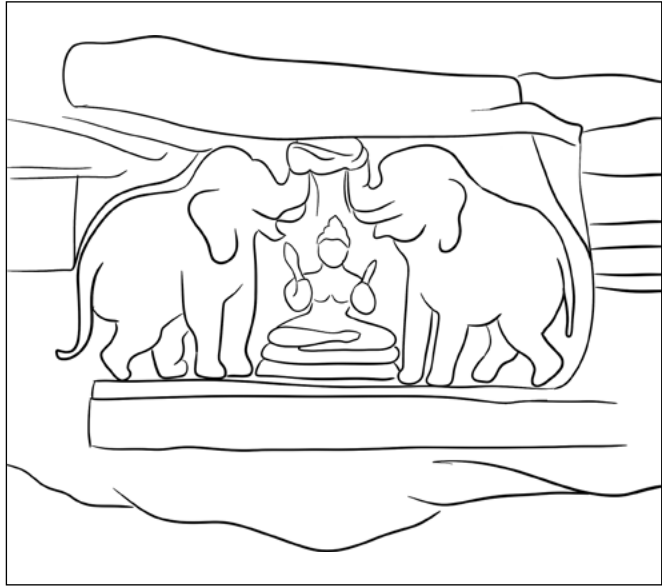
23 By “meaningful” here I intend only that the terms *bauddha* and *abauddha* could be uttered with the expectation that the distinction was intelligible to at least some audiences. Whether those audiences would have themselves agreed with Niśśaṅka Malla’s implicit arguments about who “ought” to sit on Sri Lanka’s throne is another question.

reign “brought peace to the world and the *śāsana*” (IC 6.90, ll. 10–11). Such references, I demonstrate in the following chapters, are not incidental to how these individuals understood themselves as monarchs. Rather, their various engagements with the Buddha-*śāsana* represented a crucial arena for the performance of kingship. With this term “performance” I invoke contemporary theories of social performativity, and particularly Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, to which I return below. When monarchs engaged with this arena of Buddha-*śāsana*, through public and often monumental displays of support, it therefore provided them with opportunities to act out the role of a virtuous Buddhist monarch. What interests us, of course, is not merely the fact that Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs professed obligations towards Buddhism. Rather, we are concerned with the considerably varied actions which they describe themselves as carrying out in fulfilment of these obligations, and how these actions in turn shaped the development of Theravāda Buddhism throughout the Poḷonnaruva period. What form or forms of “Buddhism” are considered worthy of such support? What forms of relationship with the *saṅgha* are enabled or even necessitated by such obligations: respect for their institutional autonomy; or interference intended to rectify internal disciplinary lapses? If a king does *not* seem well-placed to protect the *śāsana*, should they be replaced—and who has the authority to make such a decision? Such questions were heatedly contested throughout the period.

References to *bauddha-rājans* and obligations to the Buddha-*śāsana* allow us to take “Buddhist kingship” as a valid subject of analysis. We should not extrapolate out from such references, however, a starkly dichotomous account of “Buddhists” on the one hand and “non-Buddhists” on the other. Such an account poorly fits the evidence from Poḷonnaruva, which suggests a more inclusive and fluid set of soteriological practices. While certain professionals—Buddhist monks, Śaiva priests, hereditary Brahmins—were certainly oriented towards very particular “religious” institutions, this only rarely resulted in an outright rejection of alternatives. As discussed in Chapter Five, a procedure for royal consecration (*abhiṣeka*), first laid out in the *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* but later repeated verbatim by Parākramabāhu’s monastic grandmaster Śāriputra, calls for the royal *purohita* (hereditary priest) to represent the wider community of Brahmins, while Buddhist monastics are nowhere to be seen in the ritual. A mural in the Mahiyaṅgana *stūpa*, dated to the latter half of the first millennium, shows Viṣṇu and Śiva attendant on the Buddha;²⁴

24 Ward, “Recently Discovered Mahiyangana Paintings.”

Figure 4. The carving of Gaja-Lakṣmī on the southern face of the Galpota inscription. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after a photograph by Tyler A. Lehrer. Used with permission.



Buddha-centric poetry, such as the *Muvadevdāvata*, freely used Śaiva iconography to construct aesthetically pleasing metaphors.²⁵ Śaiva *bhakti* (devotional practices) may also have played a part in the emergence of what Charles Hallisey calls *mamāyana* (“the Vehicle of ‘Mine’”): the identification of the Buddha as “our Buddha” (*apē budu*, a term which recurs frequently in inscriptions of the period).²⁶ And, most tellingly, the very same inscription in which Niśśaṅka Malla claimed to be a “Buddhist king” prominently features a figure of Gaja-Lakṣmī (Fig. 4), the consort of Viṣṇu and embodiment of prosperity (*śrī*).²⁷ To be “Buddhist” in medieval Sri Lanka, in other words, did not necessarily mean to be “not non-Buddhist,” or *vice versa*.

All of the above suggests the necessity of a more capacious understanding of the “Buddhist” in our Buddhist kingship. Poḷonnaruva’s kings were not, I argue in the following pages, “deviating” from a predetermined ideal

25 Shirley, “Buddhist Poetics.”

26 Hallisey, “Devotion,” 178–86.

27 The image is carved on the southernmost vertical face of the Galpota, above a short colophon relating the details of the inscription’s construction. The apparently documentary nature of this colophon has led to it being interpreted as a postscript in modern critical editions, in which it is usually printed *after* the main text of the inscription. However, the location of the Galpota within the Sacred Quadrangle necessitates that viewers approach it from the south: the colophon and Lakṣmī are, in fact, the first part of the inscription with which one engages.

laid out in the Pali canon; rather, they were actively *constituting* “Buddhist kingship” through their selective engagement with models available to them in a wide variety of canons and contexts. That engagement was made most visible in acts of royal patronage of Buddhist institutions, which provided both an opportunity to perform certain practices of kingship and—vital, for our purposes—to record that ephemeral performance in the inscriptional form still available to us today. Tracing the history of those engagements—and the manifold ways in which these visions conflicted with one another—helps us better understand what it *could* mean to be a “Buddhist king” at this historically vital moment.

Finally, it is important to note that my focus on “kingship” should not be taken as a return to the “great man” model of history, in which we focus primarily on individual kings and their actions. As Daud Ali argues, “kingship” as both a concept and a practice transcends the figure of the individual king.²⁸ Nor do I take the view that discourses of idealized kingship were cynically manipulated in order to “legitimize” either individual kings or the entire institution of autocratic rule. The “legitimation” approach has been much critiqued in recent years.²⁹ Rather, I align this work with more recent scholarship that interrogates the varied and highly contextual intellectual histories of “kingship” in second-millennium Sri Lanka,³⁰ across Southern Asia,³¹ and throughout the wider Buddhist world.³² These works together orient us towards more nuanced histories of political thought in Asia: not a brittle edifice of “Buddhist values,” cast in unyielding iron from supposedly authoritative texts; but an intricate mesh of steel links, each forged in context and interwoven with those before, after, and adjacent.

28 Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 5.

29 See most influentially Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, 514–23; for Sri Lanka specifically see Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning*, 90; but cf. Gellner, “Sheldon Pollock and Max Weber”; and McCrea, “In the World of Men.”

30 Particularly Berkwitz, “Reimagining Buddhist Kingship”; Berkwitz, “Divine Kingship”; Berkwitz, “Strong Men and Sensual Women”; Berkwitz, “Men of Virtue”; Friedrich, “Merchants, Ministers, and Monks.”

31 Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*; Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry*; Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*; Thompson, *Engendering the Buddhist State*.

32 Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra*; Balkwill, *The Women Who Ruled China*; Bryson, “The Great Kingdom”; McBride, “Buddhist Kingship”; and the essays in Balkwill and Benn, *Buddhist Statecraft*.

Engendering Buddhist History

My pointed references to “kingship” (rather than the gender-neutral terms “monarchy” or “sovereignty”) above orient us towards what is perhaps the most significant finding of this work: the desperate need to reconsider the contested relationship(s) between gender and power in Poḷonnaruva, and the implications for our understanding of Buddhist history more generally.³³ Most immediately, this reconsideration involves the recovery of historical actors beyond the normatively masculine. These actors’ acts are often obscured by our over-reliance on later texts written by certain elite men (particularly monastic literati) who devote much of their efforts to valorizing the deeds of other elite men (male monarchs). Recovering their stories is a necessary corrective to the androcentric approach taken in these monastic writings and uncritically reproduced in modern historiography. As Barbara Andaya points out, such recovery is made particularly challenging in pre-modern Southern Asia by the relative lack of alternative voices available to us.³⁴ However, this situation is far from unique to our region, and we can benefit here from the pioneering work done by feminist scholars of the more global medieval. Kathleen Nolan’s description of the difficulties of “reading women’s lives, especially powerful women’s lives, through the words of suspicious male monastics, [which] requires careful sorting through the biases and motivations of the author” sounds all too familiar to those of us working on premodern Southern Asia, despite the geographical and cultural distance from her Capetian France.³⁵ Nolan’s response—which I enthusiastically emulate throughout this work—is to focus instead on material culture, which she argues often allowed powerful women more direct expression of their own agency.

A pattern is evident amidst this material evidence: the visibility of powerful women—specifically, royal consorts—seems to be inversely related to the centralization of political control under “strong kings.” During the reigns of Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I, two of the longest-reigning and (as far as we can tell) most politically centralized monarchs, no inscriptions

33 The English language is unusual, but by no means unique, in its sharp etymological and semantic distinction between “king” (always signifying a man in power) and “queen” (from a proto-Germanic root meaning “wife” or “woman,” and referring to either a woman in power *or* the wife of a powerful man). See further Earenfight, “Without the Persona of the Prince”; Woodacre, *Queens and Queenship*, 6–7.

34 Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, 52–55.

35 Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 13.

are extant that can be attributed to royal consorts, and consorts are very rarely mentioned in the inscriptions of others. It is only in periods of relative “instability” that we see clear references to these women’s status in their husband’s inscriptions; have evidence of these women patronizing Buddhist institutions; and ultimately see two of these women—Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvatī—sit on the throne themselves. That two of Sri Lanka’s five pre-colonial female monarchs ruled in such close proximity suggests that something rather unusual took place in the political landscape of Poḷonnaruva, necessitating a structural explanation.

I advance such an explanation in the following chapters. In Chapters Four and Five, I argue that the status of royal consorts, particularly their connections to powerful mainland dynasties, gained greater discursive significance during the power struggles which marked the period between the reigns of Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu. While male monarchs likely intended their consorts’ pedigrees to shore up their own claims to power, the consorts’ increased prominence seems to have also afforded them more autonomy in their own deeds, allowing women like Sundarā to patronize *Mahāvihāra*-affiliated monasteries. During the political instability following Parākramabāhu’s death, I argue in chapters Six and Seven, anxieties about dynastic security led to monarchs like Niśsaṅka Malla explicitly including royal consorts in the line of succession. He seems to have intended that these women would safeguard the throne for future (male) heirs, but this may well have provided the precedent for Līlāvatī and Kalyāṇavatī to eventually be crowned. I argue, in other words, that political instability provided *opportunities* for royal women, not available to them under the rule of powerful men.

Why have these opportunities, and the women who took them up, gone overlooked for so long? I have suggested above that one cause of this historiographic exclusion is the relative paucity of non-male voices from medieval Southern Asia. This paucity is, in turn, partly the result of a historical attitude: what Kashi Gomez describes as “a ubiquitous sentiment in the Sanskrit tradition: that women cannot or should not speak Sanskrit.”³⁶ However, it is not only (some) premodern Sanskritists who are averse to female voices. In every public presentation I have given on the inscriptions of Līlāvatī and Kalyāṇavatī, Poḷonnaruva’s two regnant monarchs, I have received at least one question about these women’s direct involvement in the crafting of their epigraphic self-presentation. This is, in some ways, a fair question: a host of officials, literati, and artisans would have been involved

36 Gomez, “Ghanaśyāma and His Co-Wives,” 6.

in the production of Līlāvātī and Kalyāṇavatī's inscriptions.³⁷ However, it is telling that I have never been asked this question of the period's *male* monarchs, who are generally referred to as having “written X inscription” with no further need for qualification. Similarly, as Ashley Thompson has critically discussed, while George Cœdès accepted that the famous Phimeanakas inscription of Indradevī (ca. twelfth century) was indeed written by Indradevī herself, his only comment on its unique nature—the only Sanskrit-language inscription attributed to a woman in the entire Cambodian corpus!—is that the grammar is “remarkably correct, while nonetheless written in a language much more simple than the productions of the prince-authors of [other inscriptions].”³⁸ In other words, modern scholars have accepted the medieval assumption that literary production was the realm of men. Before accepting that a premodern text genuinely does reflect a non-masculine voice, we require more definitive evidence of personal involvement, and we then consider it “remarkable” that such voices can express themselves “correctly” in such fundamentally masculine languages as Sanskrit.

Our uncritical acceptance of essentialized gender binaries, in other words, has blinded us to key evidence of historical actors on the “wrong side” of those binaries (let alone those who transcended such binaries altogether). This uncritical acceptance of masculinist ideologies risks not only inaccurate depictions of historical pasts; it naturalizes binary essentialism, and so can inadvertently justify patriarchal oppression as a “universal norm.”³⁹ To counter this bias, I therefore draw heavily—if cautiously, bearing in mind its overwhelmingly Western and modern origins—on contemporary gender theory, which I argue provides us with the most powerful tools available to simultaneously (1) accurately identify the influence of historical

37 Those familiar with the historiography of Poḷonnaruva will recall at this point the presence of powerful men in the courts of Līlāvātī and Kalyāṇavatī, generally understood to have been the real power behind the throne with the women themselves as mere “puppet queens.” As I discuss in Chapter Seven, this perspective is based primarily on, again, the descriptions of these courts in literary texts which sought to maintain kingship's inherent masculinity.

38 Quoted and discussed in Thompson, *Engendering the Buddhist State*, 122–23, 184.

39 To take a particularly pointed example, Blake Wentworth tells us that a constant premise of premodern India was that “Womanhood is a nature that responds to the bewitching radiance of power, instinctively yielding its promise of a nourishing fertility to a display of might experienced as natural, total, and right. Across its vast sweep of regions, eras, and cultures, India has always maintained a tightly welded bond between the sexual and the political.” Wentworth, “Yearning for a Dreamed Real,” 2.

women on the history of Buddhism, and (2) track the discursive construction of “womanhood” itself, and its supposed limitations. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, attending to inscriptional discourses about “femininity,” *and* the actions of women recorded in those inscriptions, allows us to identify parallel developments throughout the period. To do so is not to dismiss “social reality” in favour of an abstract history of ideas; rather, it is to acknowledge that the discursive and the social are necessarily entwined and mutually constitutive.

It is worth expanding on this intertwining. A growing number of scholars have cautioned us against assuming that not only the specific genders of “man” and “woman,” but the very ontological category of “gender” itself, are to be found in every historical context. Very often, these scholars argue, the mapping of “gender” and genders onto those contexts was a vital part of the colonial mission of categorization and control.⁴⁰ Such an understanding of “gender’s” historical contingency necessitates that we embark on our study of gender from first principles: approaching our historical context *on its own terms*, and beginning from what we find there rather than from what we expect to be gendered. It is worth noting that none of Sri Lanka’s medieval languages had a single conceptual term for which we can simply substitute “gender.” Nonetheless, the social ontologies of medieval Sri Lanka do present us with a clear analogue for modern conceptions of “gender.” Textual sources from the period maintained a strict ontological distinction between “men” (*puruṣa*) and “women” (*strī*), as well as other categories such as *ubhatobyañjanakas* (“those with both signifiers”) and the untranslatable *paṇḍaka*. These categories were understood to arise from essentialized *dharma*s (the *puruṣendriya* and *strīndriya* respectively), which resulted in strictly binarized physiologies (*liṅga*, *nimitta*) and psychologies (*ākālpa*, *klṛpta*).⁴¹ This is, I suggest, at least *analogous* enough to modern gender ontologies to benefit from the application of modern gender theory.

In particular, I draw on Butler’s arguments for the “performativity” of gender: the notion that genders are the contingent result of “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”⁴² Such a focus on performativity lends itself well to a study of gender’s connection with kingship, particularly in a premodern

⁴⁰ Lugones, “Gender and Universality”; Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*.

⁴¹ Shirley, “Wrestling with Essentialism.”

⁴² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43–44.

Asian context; we might well recall here Clifford Geertz's notion of the "theatre state," in which such stylized repetition played a central role. He tells us, for example, that:

The state cult was not a cult of the state. It was an argument, made over and over again in the insistent vocabulary of ritual, that worldly status has a cosmic base, that hierarchy is the governing principle of the universe, and that the arrangements of human life are but approximations, more close or less, to those of the divine.⁴³

As Andaya has more recently argued, in such argumentative performances of power "women were indispensable, usually in supporting roles but at times as directors and lead actors."⁴⁴ We might here productively turn to Loos's argument that the political culture of later Siam "encompassed the accumulation of women as a necessary expression of masculine power, not solely a mode of creating political alliances";⁴⁵ or, looking further afield, Patricia Ebrey's argument that *realpolitik* alone cannot explain the sheer numbers of women accumulated in Northern Song palaces.⁴⁶ The discursive history and performative construction of gender difference underlies the social strictures applied to specific genders; attending to this discursive history therefore *sharpens*, rather than distracts from, our sense of the social. Rather than only laying out the historical actions of "women"—actions subsequently obscured by inherently patriarchal "men"—this book therefore attends closely to shifting understandings of what, exactly, it meant to be a "man" or a "woman" in this period; how men and women were expected to perform their masculinity or femininity with respect, particularly, to Buddha-*śāsana*; and, crucially, how the subversion of these expectations by some individuals fundamentally altered both the construction of gender and the nature of Buddhism itself.

The Language(s) of Politics

The dominant account of language's relation to power in Southern Asia remains that of Sheldon Pollock's first-millennium "Sanskrit cosmopolis," giving way (around the time of the present study) to a "vernacular turn."⁴⁷

⁴³ Geertz, *Negara*, 102.

⁴⁴ Andaya, "Women and the Performance of Power," 24.

⁴⁵ Loos, "Sex in the Inner City," 888.

⁴⁶ Ebrey, "Rethinking the Imperial Harem."

⁴⁷ Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*. To be more precise, Pollock's focus is on literature's relation to power, with literature defined at points as high poetry (*kāvya*)

This vernacular turn represented, he argues, a self-conscious re-fashioning of vernacular languages on an explicitly Sanskritized model, in order that they could then carry out the functions (both literary and political) previously only possible in Sanskrit. Pollock's model has provoked considerable critical discussion, and so made a lasting and welcome theoretical contribution to our field. His treatment of Sri Lanka is nuanced, as it builds on the ever-insightful work of Charles Hallisey. Pollock notes several points on which Lankan literary culture challenges his model: critically, including the relative infrequency of Sanskrit-language royal inscriptions from the first millennium.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, his explanation for this divergence is misled by the common, but false, assumption of Pali's eternal relevance to Sri Lankan royal culture. He incorrectly suggests that earlier inscriptions were written in a "prosaic Pali," and that later Sinhala poets only accessed Sanskrit literary theory as "mediated through Pali."⁴⁹ Neither was the case, as we will see in subsequent chapters. An alternative model for understanding the linguistic choices made in royal inscriptions of the Polonnaruwa period is clearly necessary.

Here I find it useful to turn to Pocock's concept of a "political language," as a shorthand for the linguistic context in which a given utterance is made and the range of intelligible meanings which could therefore have been intended by it.⁵⁰ Individual words never have fixed meanings; rather, they have subjective and ever-varying frames of reference, specific ways in which they can be used to communicate specific and intelligible meanings. This frame of reference constitutes the language-system of a given utterance, which both (1) demarcates the conceptual world by determining the range of conceivable and intelligible utterances, and (2) lends a certain authority to utterances which *are* so meaningful: utterances which we might call, following Blackburn's invocation of Derrida, "citational."⁵¹ Importantly, such systems are to be understood as neither closed nor static. Rather, any given utterance can seek to shift the underlying paradigm—the range of

but elsewhere (particularly in his Chapter Three) also encompassing inscriptional culture.

48 Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, 386–87; building on Hallisey, "Works and Persons." Other points of divergence include the extremely early use of Sinhala-language Brahmi inscriptions, and the early evidence of poetic Sinhala in the Sigiri inscriptions.

49 Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, 387.

50 Pocock, "Languages."

51 Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*, 177–81.

intelligible meanings—by conforming to (other elements of) the existing paradigm closely enough to borrow its authority.

A concrete example may help to illuminate this rather abstract discussion. Let us say that an individual makes the claim “I am a good Buddhist king.” To understand what it means to be “a good Buddhist king,” we must first consider how both that individual and others in their immediate intellectual context elsewhere describe goodness, Buddhist-ness, and kingliness. These descriptions may be indirect: the statement “As a good Buddhist king, I routinely read *sūtras*” is, implicitly, an argument that “reading *sūtras*” is a behaviour expected of such kings; the statement “Behold that good Buddhist king, respectfully asking monks to recite *sūtras* in his presence,” meanwhile, may constitute a counterargument that kings ought *not* to read *sūtras* themselves. Any of these statements in isolation may be taken as merely expressing a general admiration for a particular monarch; read together, however, a conceptual tension begins to emerge: ought a “good Buddhist king” read, or listen to the monastic recitation of, *sūtras*?

What this means for us, methodologically, is that we cannot simply assume that even a concept as apparently self-evident as “protecting the Buddha-*śāsana*” maintained a stable referent throughout Buddhist history. We must carefully attend to the circumstances under which such terms were uttered; to other contemporary uses of the same term to which the utterer might be responding; and to *their* circumstances of utterance, and so on, before we can begin to suggest what might have been intended by such an utterance. Such an approach is particularly relevant to a study of Poḷonnaruva precisely because of the more literal “languages” in use at the time. Rather than the Sanskrit term *buddhaśāsana*, one might choose instead to utter the Pali cognate *buddhasāsana*—indicating, perhaps, a proclivity towards the Mahāvihāra’s Pali-oriented Buddhism over its more cosmopolitan rivals. Alternatively, the *eḷu* (“pure”) Sinhala cognate *budusa-sun* was also available, which might speak to yet a different set of concerns. The choice between these three alternatives was not merely determined by which language one happened to be operating in (itself, of course, a choice); all three, and various combinations thereof, were available as loanwords when writing or speaking Sinhala. Yet further choices were available in the Tamil language, in which the cognate term could be written in Grantha script as *buddhaśāṣaṇam*, or in Tamil script as *puttarcācaṇam*. Paying close attention to which of these variants are deployed in any given text therefore provides us with useful clues about the author’s wider linguistic context: they may be writing in Sinhala, but are they “thinking” in Sanskrit or in Pali?

These linguistic choices are often obscured by the tendency, in Theravāda Studies, to standardize all terms in the Pali spellings: the pure Sinhala *daham* and Sanskrit loanword *dharmaya* are both often “translated” into Pali *dhamma*. I reject this approach, attempting instead to reflect as accurately as possible the terms actually used in my sources. This should not be taken as a dismissal of Pali’s significance in the history of Theravāda Buddhism. Rather, it is an argument against presupposing that significance, for two crucial reasons. First, attending only to Pali impoverishes our understanding of the motivations of monarchs who, ultimately, set up the conditions under which Pali flourished. Second, and relatedly, it blinds us to the significance of moments in which technical language expressed in Pali *does* appear in royal discourses. If we suppose Pali to have always been *the* prestige language of Buddhist kings in Sri Lanka, it is easy to dismiss such moments as everyday and insignificant. Instead, I demonstrate throughout this book that such engagements with Pali shed new light on the circumstances under which Pali-language texts and ritual practices came to dominate Buddhism in Sri Lanka and, eventually, across the Indian Ocean. Tracing the trajectories of certain words and phrases across the period’s inscriptions, noting both continuities and points of disjuncture, offers us a more nuanced sense of who was emulating or critiquing whom, or reading what, or listening to whose preachings. I show that these trajectories are not always, as scholars like Pollock have assumed, direct routes from the Pali canon into political discourse. Rather, they wend more circuitous routes: through Tamil and Sanskrit, through literary manuals and poetry, and—sometimes—only subsequently into the rarefied realm of Pali scholastic writing.

To be more explicit about the methodological aims of this book: we cannot write histories of medieval Sri Lanka without engaging, to the best of our abilities, with all *four* of medieval Sri Lanka’s languages. While Sinhala and Pali have long been a strong focus of epigraphists and textualists alike, sources in these languages have only relatively rarely been read as participant in a wider Sanskritic world. Tamil epigraphy, meanwhile, has been effectively siloed into a discrete field of study. It is indicative, I think, that the recent effort by the Department of Archaeology to republish Sri Lankan inscriptions in a single series (the *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, discussed further below) contains only Sinhala-, Sanskrit-, and Pali-language inscriptions. Tamil-language inscriptions, meanwhile, are collected in a distinct volume (*Tamil Inscriptions in Sri Lanka*) published by the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs. While many scholars, particularly those based in Sri Lanka, have certainly been capable of working in all four of these languages effectively, it is only relatively rarely that we have seen serious efforts

to engage with primary sources in their original languages; to critically re-translate key texts and inscriptions in those languages; and to attempt to track between these languages the history of ideas and practices.⁵²

Evidentiary Bases

Central to my efforts in tracking these discursive developments is the wider range of evidence on which I draw. As I have suggested above, the present historiography of Sri Lanka closely follows the narratives presented in a limited set of textual sources. These sources are, often, invaluable resources. But a myopic focus on texts alone paints only one side of a multifaceted image. This is particularly the case when we consider questions of gender. In his studies of Indian Buddhist inscriptions, Gregory Schopen has suggested that:

If, because of an almost exclusive reliance on textual sources, our picture of the actual Indian Buddhist monk is more than a little skewed, the picture of the Indian Buddhist nun—for the same reason—has been almost obliterated.⁵³

Historians of Sri Lanka have therefore increasingly turned to material evidence as a valuable counterweight against the biases of these sources. We now have available excellent studies of how art,⁵⁴ architecture,⁵⁵ landscapes both urban and natural,⁵⁶ and even archaeological efforts themselves have operated as sites of discursive production.⁵⁷ The present book follows in this “material turn,” eschewing later narrative texts almost entirely in favour of a range of data from the Polonnaruwa period itself: textual, yes; but also architectural, plastic, numismatic, and—above all—epigraphic.

As I have indicated above, inscriptions are far from underutilized in Sri Lankan history. They are primarily read, however, at face value: as sources

52 I am particularly inspired by the multilingual work of S. Pathmanathan and R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, although much of this remains in a firmly positivist historical mode. More recent works, which adopt a text-critical approach to their multilingual sources, include Henry, *Ravana's Kingdom*; McKinley, *Mountain at the Center of the World*; and the unpublished dissertation of Friedrich, “Merchants, Ministers, and Monks.”

53 Schopen, “On Monks, Nuns and ‘Vulgar’ Practices,” 163.

54 Bandaranayake, *Rock and Wall Paintings*; Holt, *The Religious World of Kīrti Śrī*.

55 Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture*; Basnayake, *Sri Lankan Monastic Architecture*; Meegama, *Temples to the Buddha and the Gods*.

56 Duncan, *The City as Text*; McKinley, *Mountain at the Center of the World*.

57 Blackburn, “Early Preservation Efforts”; Jeganathan, “Authorising History.”

to be mined for detailed positivist data about the locations of *vihāras* or the titles of royal officials. This kind of data can, as studies from throughout Southern Asia have increasingly shown, prove extremely effective in challenging the gendered biases of textual sources.⁵⁸ But this is not the only way to read inscriptions, or indeed to “read” material evidence more generally. We might turn here to Dominick LaCapra’s useful distinction between the “documentary” elements of a given text, which situate it “in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it,” from those which are “work-like,” which seek to intervene in that empirical reality.⁵⁹ LaCapra stresses that all texts—even those which may appear *prima facie* to be merely documentary—contain elements of both the documentary and the work-like, if to varying degrees. This means that “a documentary historiography that tries to exclude interpretation or to see it only in the guise of bias, subjectivity, or anachronism” is therefore necessarily missing half of the point of a given text.⁶⁰ For all that inscriptions can, therefore, provide us with positivist data, they are also rich “textual” sources in their own right, which tightly control the manner in which that data is presented.

This kind of approach has been increasingly applied to premodern Asia. Within South Asian Studies, we have been charged by Ronald Inden, Daud Ali, and Jonathan Walters with moving from a “philological to a dialogical” mode of reading: to consider texts (particularly inscriptional texts) not,

as dead monuments, as mere sources of factual information or the expression of a creative and exotic genius that we can only appreciate in itself for itself, or as the accidental expression/sedimentation of some larger structure or context...[but] as living arguments both in their historic uses and by virtue of our re-enactment of their arguments in our own present.⁶¹

Once again, this has applications to gender: in studies which particularly inspired my own, Alice Collett, Cynthia Talbot, and Ashley Thompson have demonstrated the benefits of close attention to gendered inscriptional

58 Andaya, “Studying Women and Gender”; Collett, “Women as Teachers and Disciples”; Milligan, “The Economic Power of Women”; Schopen, “On Monks, Nuns and ‘Vulgar’ Practices”; Suprodjo, “Women of the Old Javanese Period”; Talbot, “Temples, Donors, and Gifts.”

59 LaCapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History,” 250.

60 LaCapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History,” 272.

61 Inden et al., *Querying the Medieval*, 14; see further Ali, “Royal Eulogy,” particularly 166. I have taken further hermeneutical inspiration from Mucciarelli, “How to Carve a King”; and Olivelle, “Aśoka’s Inscriptions.”

personae throughout Southern Asia.⁶² Within Buddhist Studies, too, a growing number of scholars have moved towards more three-dimensional readings of inscriptions, appreciative not just of what they *say* but also of what they *do*. Most recently, Stephanie Balkwill's project on "Buddhist Epigraphy and Women's History" has explored the possibility that "Buddhist" inscriptions—by which we mean inscriptions which evince a particular dedication to Buddhist ideals or practice, particularly in contexts in which such forms of dedication are not dominant—may have been a particularly useful means of subverting the gendered conventions which dominate other forms of media across the Buddhist world.⁶³ And more generally, we might also look to exemplars from Classical and Medieval Studies, which have long taken more methodologically interesting approaches to inscriptions.⁶⁴

I therefore emulate in this work a growing body of scholars who take seriously the rhetorical elements of Lankan inscriptions, from differing periods, as engaged with and themselves constituent of Lankan history.⁶⁵ In doing so for PoĻonnaruva-period inscriptions, a rather alternative version of events begins to emerge: one which does not consist solely of the actions of masculine kings, which does not presume the eventual and rightful ascendancy of Pali-oriented Buddhism, and which does not take for granted the ahistorical consistency of institutions and concepts such as "kingship" itself. Instead, we see more clearly how the dynamic agencies of noblewomen, monks, ministers, and—yes, still—monarchs together allowed for the contingent emergence of new kinds of Buddhist kingship in medieval Sri Lanka.

The nature of the inscriptional record imposes some caveats onto all the conclusions drawn throughout this book. We are faced not only with the typical restrictions of incomplete and ongoing archaeological surveys, which still routinely uncover previously undocumented inscriptions;⁶⁶ the

62 See, respectively, Collett, "Reimagining the Sātavāhana Queen Nāgaṇṇikā"; Talbot, "Rudrama-Devi, the Female King"; Thompson, *Engendering the Buddhist State*.

63 A forthcoming special issue of *Hualin* 8, no. 2, will, we hope, elucidate further what we have dubbed—tongue firmly in cheek—the "Malibu School of Philology."

64 An exhaustive list is impossible; I will only note that I have found particularly helpful the essays collected in Petrovic et al., *The Materiality of Text*.

65 Berkwitz, "Reimagining Buddhist Kingship"; Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*; Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*; Walters, "Buddhist History."

66 A recent archaeological survey reports an additional 335 inscriptions, yet to be edited and published, found within a 50km radius of PoĻonnaruva, 62 of which appear to be within the temporal scope of the present study. Manuel et al., "Low Density Urbanism in Medieval Sri Lanka."

repurposing of some inscriptions in the works of later monarchs and then colonial administrators, disguising their original locations and context;⁶⁷ and, of course, weather damage which leaves sections of text entirely unreadable. Additionally, Sri Lankan inscriptions are particularly plagued by incomplete *publications* even of those inscriptions which are known, and by the extremely limited access offered to researchers (particularly, but not exclusively, foreign researchers) to unpublished estampages and records.⁶⁸ The majority of those inscriptions which have been edited and published appeared in volumes of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (EZ); others, however, appeared elsewhere, and until recently no attempt had been made to take stock of all published Lankan inscriptions (let alone index them with adequate metadata).

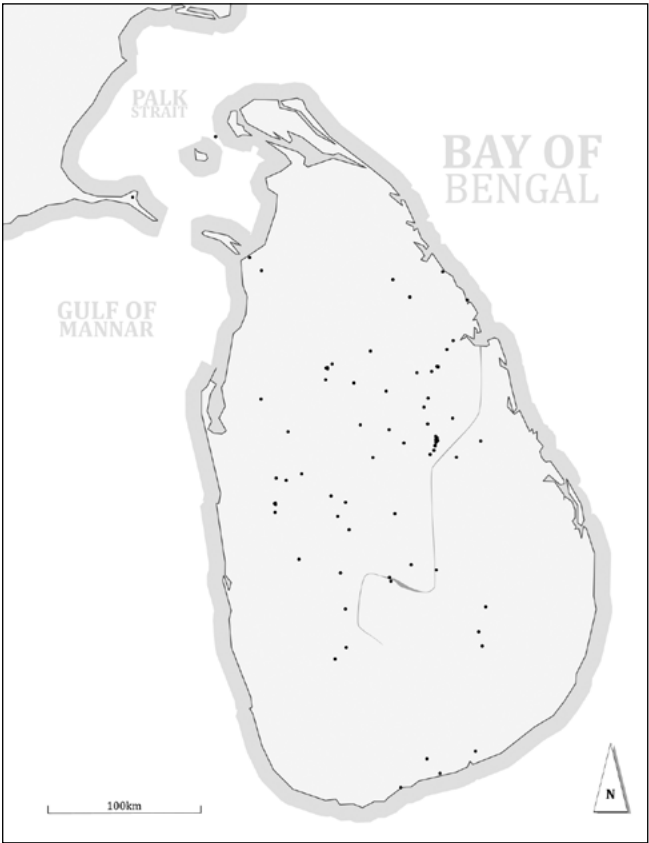
Several decades ago, the Department of Archaeology set out to correct this. A series of volumes—the *Inscriptions of Ceylon* (IC)—aimed to bring together all previously published inscriptions, plus additional materials made available to the editors from the Department’s archives, in chronologically arranged volumes. Unfortunately, there have been several setbacks in this project. Most crucially, IC vols. 3 and 4, which together should have covered the first half of the first millennium CE, have yet to be published. Thankfully, IC 6, which covers the Polonnaruwa period, was published in 2007; all translations of Sinhala-, Pali-, and Sanskrit-language inscriptions in the present work are based on these editions. However, this volume entirely excludes inscriptions published in Tamil, without any explanation or indeed acknowledgement of their absence. I therefore supplement this volume with Pathmanathan’s *Tamil Inscriptions in Sri Lanka* (TISL), published not by the Department of Archaeology but by the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs.

Between these two volumes, 141 inscriptions fall within the temporal span of this study. While not all are in their original location—and early colonial archaeologists are often frustratingly vague about the exact findsites—

67 Blackburn, “Early Preservation Efforts.”

68 COVID-19 related disruptions to fieldwork prevented me from attempting to access these archives myself. Here I follow anecdotal remarks made in confidence by colleagues, corroborated by published remarks like those of ven. Dehigapse Pannasara, who writes of inscriptions relevant to his research “in the possession of the Archaeological Department, still unpublished. But, unfortunately, students of research are precluded from making any use of them, owing to the attitude of the officials”: Dehigapse Pannasara *thero*, *Sanskrit Literature*, 55.

Figure 5. A map of known inscriptional findsites. Map by the author, using geospatial data from OpenStreetMaps, available under an Open Database Licence.



I have been able to geolocate, with varying degrees of accuracy, 121 of these inscriptions. These are plotted in Figure 5.

Before turning to the close readings which constitute the methodological core of this book, it is worthwhile attending to some features of the corpus as a whole. We might begin by observing that the distribution of findsites is strongly clustered around Poḷonnaruva itself, with several smaller clusters further afield, particularly at the key ritual site of Anurādhapura. Several factors again limit any conclusions we might draw from this distribution. Once again, we face the issue of an incomplete inscriptional record: we do not know what data we might be missing for any number of reasons. When it comes to geographical distribution, this risk is particularly heightened. Inscriptions located within areas already known to have historical significance (i.e., Poḷonnaruva and Anurādhapura), which have therefore received focused archaeological attention, are simply more likely to have been found than those inscriptions dispersed throughout the wider island. We must therefore read the distribution pattern shown above with some caution.

We might also note the distribution of languages across Poḷonnaruva's inscriptions. As discussed above, studies of the Poḷonnaruva period, particularly when focused on Buddhism, have tended to draw primarily on Sinhala- and Pali-language sources. We have already noted that Pali is poorly represented in the corpus, appearing in only two inscriptions (both by royal consorts). Sinhala, on the other hand, does indeed dominate the corpus. 114 of the 141 inscriptions are written mostly or entirely in Sinhala language and script (80.9 percent). But to focus exclusively on Sinhala-language production in our period would be to overlook the twenty-six inscriptions (or 18.4 percent of the total corpus) which deployed Tamil. While no inscriptions from the period were created solely in Sanskrit, sixteen (11.3 percent) did use at least some Sanskrit (typically in opening or closing summative verses).

One final trend which emerges from the corpus as a whole is its gendered dynamics. Only eleven out of the 141 inscriptions (7.8 percent) are attributed to female donors or dated in a female monarch's regnal year. This may seem a slim foundation for a book focused on gender. We must bear in mind, however, that inscriptions by, or recording the activities of, women constitute only five of the 367 inscriptions included in *IC* vol. 5, covering the late Anurādhapura period (1.3 percent). Something has clearly shifted. The late Anurādhapuran corpus differs, in turn, from the *earliest* corpus of Sri Lankan inscriptions—cave inscriptions from the early centuries BCE—which contain a relatively high proportion of inscriptions by women (both monastic and lay). In the absence of *IC* vols. 3 and 4, and therefore of a comprehensive inscriptional record of the earlier first millennium, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the circumstances under which this shift took place. Nonetheless, a general trend is evident. Women were active donors, and epigraphers, in the earliest stages of Buddhism on the island, only to fade into the background by the late Anurādhapuran period. This reflects a broader trend in early South Asian Buddhism, in which women are often heavily represented in early corpora of donative inscriptions.⁶⁹ However, unlike in mainland South Asia, Poḷonnaruva's royal women begin to reverse this trend, and to reassert themselves in the inscriptional record. That this occurred in the same period in which not one but two royal women sat on the throne requires historical explanation.

69 Milligan, "The Economic Power of Women"; Tournier, "A Tide of Merit," 25.

Outline of the Book

The above arguments are laid out in the following chapters, which proceed in a generally chronological order.

Chapter One outlines, for those unfamiliar with the history of Sri Lanka or of South Asia more generally, the four main bodies of “political thought” available to Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs: those communicated in Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhala, and Tamil languages. This distinction is heuristic and tenuous. The point is not to define, in rigid terms, what a “Pali version of kingship” *should* look like, against which we can judge later monarchs; but rather to give us the conceptual tools to identify when these monarchs (or others) draw on and intertwine multiple discursive traditions.

Chapter Two focuses on the overthrow of Cōḷa governance by Vijayabāhu I, and his establishment of an independent kingdom at Poḷonnaruva. Later narrative accounts, from the *Mahāvamsa* onwards, portray Vijayabāhu’s rise as a rejection of Tamil-speaking and Śiva-worshipping Cōḷa rule in order to “return” to Sinhala- and Pali-oriented Buddhist kingship. I argue, however, that Vijayabāhu’s reign is best understood as a localization of Cōḷa institutions of rule. In particular, I suggest that Vijayabāhu’s inscriptional practices were deliberate emulations of earlier inscriptions (particularly those of Mahinda IV) informed by literary manuals like the *Siyabaslakara* (itself modelled on Daṇḍin’s Sanskrit *Kāvyālaṅkāra*). The “Sinhala Buddhist kingship” inaugurated by Vijayabāhu, in other words, represents a moment of re-constitution, informed by wider Tamil and Sanskritic models, rather than a simple “return” to a pre-Cōḷa *status quo*.

Chapters Three and Four cover the period between Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I, characterized by political division and fraught intradynastic conflict. A central problematic of this period is the apparent lack, for long periods of time, of any claims to total kingship over the island. While earlier historians have attempted to explain this by recourse to unmet ideals of kingship, I suggest in Chapter Three that it is best understood as an intentional power-balancing arrangement entered into by the island’s political leaders, as they cautiously jockeyed for position. In this unstable balance of power, greater emphasis was placed on the dynastic pedigrees of consorts and wives brought to the island from powerful mainland kingdoms, from which Lanka’s kings could borrow prestige, and on whom they could potentially call for military support. Once on the island, however, it seems that many of these women were not content to merely be accessories to their husbands’ claims to power. Their inscriptions speak to the considerable economic, political, and religious influence they wielded throughout the interregal period.

Among these women was the Great Lady Sundarā: consort of Vikramabāhu I and mother of Gajabāhu II. These men's courts are often excluded from histories of Buddhism in Sri Lanka on the grounds of their supposed "non-Buddhist" or even Śaiva affiliations: I show, in Chapter Four, that our evidence for such affiliations is late and tenuous, and argue that we ought to reconsider their place in the history of Sri Lankan Buddhism. In particular, I show that Sundarā's inscriptions represent both the earliest known use of Pali in a royal inscription, and the first evidence of sustained royal patronage of a particular Mahāvihāra-affiliated monastery, the Diṃbulāgala Vihāra. This monastery would later provide the leaders for Parākramabāhu's "purification" of the *saṅgha*, the central focus of Chapter Five: a position of prominence likely made possible thanks to Sundarā's patronage.

Sundarā's inscriptions are far from the only connection between Parākramabāhu and the court of Gajabāhu. I further show that Gajabāhu's inscriptions, including his joint inscription with Parākramabāhu I, were concerned with several of what would come to be central features of the post-reform *saṅgha*: specifically, the cult of the Buddha's Tooth Relic and the royal descent from Mahāsammata laid out in the Mahāvihāra's *Vamsatthappakāsinī*. The influence of Gajabāhu and his mother Sundarā on the eventual form of the post-reform *saṅgha*, I suggest, therefore merits reconsideration. This then necessitates reconsideration in turn of the nature of Parākramabāhu's intervention into the *saṅgha* itself. In Chapter Five, I suggest that millenarian concerns, in a Buddhaghosan chronology, provided a central motivation here. Finally, I demonstrate a sustained influence of Sanskrit and Tamil political culture on Parākramabāhu's self-representation as a monarch, which has been systematically downplayed in modern scholarship.

Chapters Six and Seven deal with figures often overlooked in the extant historiography, due to their coming to prominence in the tumultuous period after Parākramabāhu's death. These figures, however, both left behind significant material evidence which allows us to further probe the development of "Buddhist kingship" in the later Polonnaruva period and so merit more sustained attention than they have been afforded in the extant historiography.

Chapter Six turns to Niśsaṅka Malla (r. ca. 1187–1196), the most prolific inscriptionist of any Sri Lankan monarch. In his vast inscriptional corpus, I identify a recurring focus on his immediate family—including consorts, a daughter, and possibly also his mother—as vital extensions of his kingly persona. The shifting configuration of this family over the course of his reign suggests a consolidation of his vision of kingship as exclusively and emphatically high-caste and Buddhist. This was an attempt, I suggest, primarily to secure the future dynastic claims of his son, Virabāhu I. But they

also covered the possibility that female family members may need to take the throne, to protect the dynasty's legacy. This resulted in the most explicit theorization of the possibility of female regnancy (albeit in a wording which more suggests *regency*) in premodern Sri Lanka—a possibility which would prove necessary after Virabāhu's unexpectedly early death.

Finally, Chapter Seven turns to the inscriptions of three royal women: Līlāvati, a former consort of Parākramabāhu who would later rule herself in three separate periods (1197–1200, 1209–1210, and 1210–1211); Kalyāṇavatī, a widow of Niśsaṅka Malla who ruled 1202–1208; and Candavatī, another former consort of Parākramabāhu I, with those inscription we opened this Introduction. Their inscriptions together, I argue, provide a powerful challenge to established gender politics. Līlāvati in particular is noteworthy both for the central role she clearly played in the period's power struggles (evidenced by her repeated depositions and reinstatements), and for her consistent policy across these reigns of patronizing new forms of Buddhist literature in both Pali and Sinhala. Contrasting her portrayal in these patronized literary works with her inscriptional self-representation allows us, I argue, to critically reflect on assumptions of kingship's inherent masculinity—assumptions which Līlāvati's regnancy necessarily challenged. I conclude by returning to the inscription of Candavatī, which I argue represents an attempt on her behalf to leverage Līlāvati's unsettling of the gendered social order to her own advantage. Together, the inscriptions of these women illuminate the extent to which even the most apparently self-evident features of medieval Lankan political culture were in fact contingent, and therefore contestable.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF KINGSHIP

SANSKRIT, PALI, SINHALA, AND TAMIL POLITICAL THOUGHT

IF “RECONSTRUCTION” IS the central metaphor of this book, then it is worth beginning our discussion with the materials of construction—both metaphorical and edificial. One of the most distinctive features of Poḷonnaruva’s built landscape is its three monumental vaulted image-houses (P. *paṭimāghara*, Sin. *pīlimagē*), located respectively in the Sacred Quadrangle (called today the “Thūpārama”), the Āḷāhana monastic complex (the “Laṅkātilaka”), and north of the Galvihāra complex (the “Tivaṅka,” likely constructed by Parākramabāhu I himself).¹ In an early Archaeological Survey report, these structures were described as a distinct “class of sacred edifice...a triplet of structures unique to Poḷonnaruva. No building of [their] sort exists at Anurādhapura; nor, as far as is known, anywhere else in Ceylon.”² The basic groundplan follows those of earlier Anurādhapuran image-houses: an image of the Buddha is displayed in a square central shrine (*garbha*), which is accessed through a rectangular antechamber (*antarāla*).³ What distinguishes the three great Poḷonnaruvan image-houses from others on the island is their elaborate external moulding, their entrance pavilions (*maṇḍapas*), and the vaulted ceilings—only preserved intact in the Thūpārama—which once supported their distinctively domed roofs. These features place the three vaulted image-houses firmly within the “Drāviḍa” architectural style otherwise typical of South Indian temples. More specifically, they appear to be modelled closely on the small shrines (*devālayas*) to Śiva and other deities located throughout the city, founded during the

1 None of the three structures carries an inscription indicating its original name, and modern designations have shifted confusingly over time: see further the discussion in Chapter Five. On the architectural history of the image-house in Sri Lanka see Meegama, *Temples to the Buddha and the Gods*.

2 Bell, *ASCAR 1903*, 28.

3 Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture*, 189–213.

Cōla regime in the first half of the eleventh century.⁴ The crucial difference—other than the choice of a Buddha-image over Śiva, of course—is that the *devālaya*, like most other Drāviḍa-style buildings, was constructed out of cut stone, while the vaulted image-houses are made entirely from brick.

From this variation in construction material, a vast cultural difference has been demarcated by modern archaeologists and art historians: Sinhala Buddhists built in brick and wood; Indian theists built in stone.⁵ And so while the influence of South Indian architecture on the vaulted image-houses is hard to deny,⁶ Senake Bandaranayake has argued that this is limited only to their “superstructure,” while the choice of brick as a building material makes the buildings “distinctly Sinhalese.”⁷ As Sujatha Meegama has argued, such a divide has its heuristic merits. We cannot study connections to South India without first identifying markers of those connections. But it also risks, when overzealously applied, maintaining an ahistoric dichotomy which ultimately only limits our understanding of historical architectural practices.⁸ In a recent close examination of architectural practices across second-millennium Sri Lanka, she argues that the “Drāviḍa” architectural style is best understood not as a foreign import at all, but rather a transnational phenomenon in which Sri Lanka-based architects and patrons were participants alongside South Indians.⁹ Efforts to recognize an enduring Sinhala and Buddhist foundation to Poḷonnaruva’s built landscape, in other words, cannot be allowed to mask our appreciation of the novel architectural forms only made possible by the transcultural combination of materials, techniques, and aesthetics.

I take Meegama’s critical analysis of the art historical dichotomy—“stone or brick”—as both an organizing principle and a caution for this chapter, which examines the more metaphorical “materials” out of which Buddhist kingship was reconstructed in Poḷonnaruva. I outline four distinct traditions of political thought, each articulated and communicated within

4 Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture*, 353; Meegama, *Temples to the Buddha and the Gods*, 42–45. Meegama shows that the terms *devālaya* and *kōvil*, later used exclusively for “Buddhist” and “Hindu” shrines, were interchangeable in the Poḷonnaruva period.

5 See most influentially Coomaraswamy, *Mediæval Sinhalese Art*, 114.

6 Although cf. Paranavitana, “The Art and Architecture of the Polonnaruva Period,” 73–75.

7 Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture*, 353.

8 Meegama, “South Indian or Sri Lankan?”

9 Meegama, *Temples to the Buddha and the Gods*.

a single language. None of these traditions was static and unchanging, but each maintained at least some degree of shared referents throughout. All four provided models of idealized kingship on which Poḷonnaruva's monarchs could draw. Existing studies of "Buddhist kingship" in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia have tended to emphasize just one of these models: that found in the *Sutta-piṭaka* of the Pali canon, the collection of texts believed by Theravāda Buddhists to record the sermons given by the Buddha in his own words.¹⁰ These studies have often been extremely productive, and it is certainly true that certain narratives from the *Sutta-piṭaka*, including narratives about kings, have been influential in various parts of the Theravāda world at various times. However, in assuming the eternal primacy of "what the Buddha taught"—and, therefore, our own modern ability to read such teachings and deduce "what the Buddha meant"—we have set ourselves up for historical confusion. Very often, the historical "Buddhist kings" of Theravāda Asia have acted in ways totally unlike the idealized Buddhist kings of the Theravāda canon: one apparent contradiction among many which have, in the words of Donald Swearer, "long perplexed Western scholars."¹¹

This contradiction is readily dissolved if we recontextualize the Pali canon, and even the influential fifth-century commentaries of Buddhaghosa, as only one thread—albeit an important thread—in the weft and warp of Buddhist intellectual history, itself part of the yet-broader tapestry of Southern Asia. Buddhist thought on the political did not ossify at the closing of this canon; nor did historical Buddhists refuse to engage with the many other ideas about the political with which they came into contact. These included ideas about kingship transmitted primarily in languages like Sanskrit, in which hereditary priests carried out rituals on the king's behalf, and in which the king was increasingly presented as either a model devotee or even a human embodiment of a tutelary deity—ideas often segmented off, in other words, as a distinctly "Hindu" model of kingship. Even within first-millennium Sri Lanka—often understood to be a Buddhist bastion, holding out

10 The *Sutta-piṭaka* ("basket of sermons") constitutes one of the three traditional divisions of the canon, alongside the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, which contains monastic rules and regulations, and the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, which contains discussions of ontological theory. The *Sutta-piṭaka* is further divided into five collections (called, like monastic ordination lineages, "*nikāyas*"): the *Dīgha-nikāya* (hereafter DN); *Majjhima-nikāya* (MN); *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (SN); *Āṅguttara-nikāya* (AN); and *Khuddaka-nikāya* (KN).

11 Swearer, *The Buddhist World*, 1.

against an increasingly theistic South Asia¹²—Pali-canonical models of kingship were not mechanically reproduced. The kings of Anurādhapura developed their own distinctive ways of presenting themselves as ideal kings, articulated primarily in the Sinhala language, and grounded in distinctive ways of conceptualizing kingship. And when the Anurādhapuran kings were overthrown at the end of the tenth century, and Sri Lanka was annexed into the powerful Cōḷa Empire, a fourth tradition of political thought, articulated primarily in Tamil, was introduced to the island.

In outlining these four intellectual traditions—the Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhala, and Tamil—I do not intend a return to the tired notion of distinct “models” of kingship blindly imitated by later monarchs on sectarian (let alone “ethnic”) lines. Rather, my purpose here is to outline, in admittedly broad strokes, the “materials” which these later monarchs had to hand. Just as Sri Lankan architecture from the Poḷonnaruva period onwards was constructed from timber, brick, *and* stone, so too did Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs draw on multiple materials in constructing their versions of Buddhist kingship.

Sanskrit Political Thought

The historiography of political thought in Sanskrit often begins—often critically—with Max Weber.¹³ Weber’s analysis may have grossly simplified many key points, but his key insights are nonetheless still useful as a point of departure. The *Vedas*—the earliest extant liturgic texts of Southern Asia—enjoin a series of ritual sacrifices (*yajñas*), to be carried out by hereditary Brahmin priests on behalf of wealthy patrons.¹⁴ Later auxiliary texts of the core *Vedas* described increasingly conspicuous ways for those patrons, particularly kingly patrons, to demonstrate their piety and largess. These included the *rājāsuya* and *abhiṣeka* rituals to consecrate a monarch into kingship, and the elaborate *aśvamedha* horse sacrifice, intended to inaugurate a new dynasty.¹⁵ For Weber, these rituals formed the basis of a symbiotic

¹² See, e.g., Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism*, 138–39; de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 50.

¹³ Weber, *The Religion of India*; see further Gellner, *Anthropology*.

¹⁴ The four core Vedic texts are the *samhitās* (collections of hymns) themselves called the *R̥g-veda*, *Yajur-veda*, *Sama-veda*, and *Atharva-veda*. Each of these acquired a series of what I call throughout this chapter “auxiliary texts,” namely the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas*, and the *Upaniṣads* (sometimes also called *Vedānta*, “the end of the *Vedas*”). Each *samhitā* has varying numbers of auxiliary texts, all of which can also be collectively referred to as the respective *Veda*.

¹⁵ See Walser, *Genealogies*, 256–59.

relationship between Brahmins and their patrons. As Johannes Bronkhorst puts it,

Brahmins did not try to convert anyone in the usual sense of the term. All they did was remind their interlocutors of some, for them, elementary facts. The hierarchical division of society was one of them; the role of Brahmins as natural counsellors to kings another; the natural place of Sanskrit—the only true and correct language—in matters relating to the state a third...If rulers wanted to get the best out of Brahmins in their kingdom, they might donate settlements (*agrahāras*) to them: the Brahmin inhabitants of those *agrahāras* would be able to spend their time performing rites for the benefit of the king and his kingdom.¹⁶

It is perhaps no surprise that by the time Aśoka (r. ca. third century BCE) carved his inscriptions across Southern Asia, he tells us that Brahmins were present in every land he knew of other than those of the Greeks.¹⁷ We should not think, however, that Brahmanical attempts to position themselves at the right hand of power were internally homogenous and conflict-free. Different *Vedic* texts offer conflicting procedures for key royal rituals, and we can easily imagine the priests who were hereditary specialists in these respective textual traditions competing to prove the efficacy of *their* version (and, therefore, the efficacy of patronizing *them* as court priests).¹⁸ Likewise, we should not imagine that Buddhists—and members of other heterodox movements, such as the Jains, Cārvākas, and Ājīvikas—let these arguments for political efficacy go uncontested. Joseph Walser has argued, for example, that both the philosopher Nāgārjuna and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* scripture sought, in their own ways, to displace Brahmanical claims to socio-political primacy.¹⁹ As we will see both in the following section, on Pali conceptions of ideal kingship, and in later chapters, this contest was very much still ongoing during the Poḷonnaruva period.

Outside of the world of textual scholarship, Sanskrit gained increasing relevancy as a language of political expression. This took some time: the inscriptions of Aśoka mentioned above were written in a dialect of Middle

¹⁶ Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, 44.

¹⁷ Cf. the reading of Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, 31–36.

¹⁸ Joseph Walser has suggested, in a yet-unpublished paper, that *Chandogya-upaniṣad* 6.2 (part of the *Sāma-veda* tradition) is a critical response to *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* 7.2 (part of the *Yajur-veda*), and that this disagreement had political implications. I am grateful to Prof. Walser for sharing his thoughts with me in personal communication.

¹⁹ Walser, *Nagarjuna*; Walser, *Genealogies*, particularly ch. 10.

Indo-Aryan (MIA) often called Prakrit; later dynasties like the Sātavāhanas (early first century BCE through early second century CE) produced inscriptions in a more self-consciously literary variant of this same language.²⁰ In the early first millennium CE, however, rulers across Southern Asia began to almost exclusively inscribe in Sanskrit, making this the sole language for the expression of royal power from Kashmir to Java.²¹ These inscriptions typically followed a strict formula, called the *praśasti*:

A typical inscription of this class would begin with an auspicious sign or invocation such as *svasti* followed by one or more *maṅgala* (invocatory) verses, and then an account of the ruling king's lineage, full of lavish praises of his own and his ancestors' physical power and beauty, moral qualities and reputation, just rule, conquests, learning and artistic skills, and so on. The actual purpose of the inscription, namely, the dedication or memorial, is typically mentioned only at or near the end of the text. This is often followed by concluding, benedictory, and/or signature verses giving the composer's name.²²

The formulaic opening verses of the *praśasti* were often the central focus of royal inscriptions, as much so as the purported occasion of the inscription (such as a donation to a religious institution).²³ From reading these *praśasti*, and noting subtle shifts over time, we therefore gain considerable insights into how first-millennium monarchs presented themselves as ideal rulers: which genealogies were invoked or downplayed; which physical qualities were valorized; which deeds were given the most lavish attention.²⁴

Alongside the inscriptions created by monarchs themselves, first-millennium scholars produced a number of textual sources *about* monarchs and monarchy which provide us with further insights into Sanskrit political culture. The most commonly-cited of these texts is the Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* ("The Treatise on Success"), which explicitly aims to advise kings on ideal kingship.²⁵ The *Arthaśāstra* has been long noted as espousing a pragmatist or even *realpolitik* outlook, warning kings against the ambitions of their own sons and maintaining that the enemy of one's enemy is, at least temporarily,

20 Ollett, *Language of the Snakes*.

21 See generally Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*.

22 Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, 112.

23 Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, 140.

24 See, e.g., Ali, "Royal Eulogy"; Talbot, "Rudrama-Devi, the Female King"; Thompson, *Engendering the Buddhist State*, ch. 1.

25 Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India*; see further McClish, "Political Brahmanism and the State."

a friend.²⁶ Other *śāstras*, even those not directly addressed to kings, are far from apolitical. Often, they seek to articulate an idealized social order, and so necessarily reflect on an idealized *political* order. Thus modern scholars have productively read political themes in *Dharmaśāstras* ("Treatises on [Religio-social] Duty");²⁷ *Śilpaśāstras* ("Treatises on Artisanry") and *Vāstuśāstras* ("Treatises on Architecture");²⁸ and even *Kāmaśāstras* ("Treatises on [Sexual] Desire").²⁹ Very often, these texts describe an orderly hierarchy of kingship descending from a world-ruling *cakravartin* at the apex down to more local rulers, each court a microcosm of those above.³⁰ Other genres, such as the aphoristic texts concerned with *nīti* ("Statecraft"), also explicitly offer political advice to their readers.³¹ It seems that there was no shortage of Sanskrit-language texts which outlined ideal ways of doing politics—even if it is not always clear how strictly historical kings in Southern Asia necessarily modelled their behaviour on those texts.

Sanskrit literary sources, too, provide useful information about idealized visions of the political. Narratives of perfect rulers, upon which historical kings might model their own self-representation, are central to the very earliest literary epics in Sanskrit. The first of these, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, presents the titular incarnation of the god Viṣṇu as both the ultimate prince and the ultimate man: the entirety of its first *sarga* ("chapter") consists of praise for Rāma as an exemplar for all others to follow. It is no surprise, therefore, that many later kings across Southern Asia modelled themselves on Rāma,³² or that *rāmarājya* ("the kingship of Rāma") came to signify political utopia.³³

26 Boesche, *The First Great Political Realist*; Dar, "Beyond Eurocentrism"; Misra, "The Indian Machiavelli"; Prasad, "Politics and Ethics in Kautilya's Arthashastra"; cf. Shahi, *Kautilya and Non-Western IR Theory*.

27 Eltschinger, "Aśvaghōṣa on Kings and Kingship"; McKnight, "Kingship and Religion in the Gupta Age"; Olivelle, "Manu and the 'Arthaśāstra'."

28 Inden, "Hierarchies of Kings"; Mills, "The Master May Wander into Servanthood."

29 Ali, *Courtly Culture*.

30 Inden, "Hierarchies of Kings"; cf. Shirley, "Towards an Intellectual History of *Cakravartin* Kingship."

31 Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "An Elegy for Niti."

32 Rao, "A New Perspective"; Sahgal, "Situating Kingship." Rāma became a particularly important referent for Thai kingship: the Ayutthaya kingdom was named for Rāma's royal city Ayodhya, and Thai kings have historically adopted "Rāma" as (part of) their regnal names. See further Singaravelu, "Rāma in the Thai Cultural Tradition."

33 Menon and Schokker, *Conception of Rāma-Rājya*; Skaria, "Relinquishing Republican Democracy."

The second great epic, the *Mahābhārata*, again presents us with an ideal king, Yudhiṣṭhira, and devotes an entire *parva* (“book”) to a lecture on kingship itself, delivered by the dying statesman Bhīṣma.³⁴ In addition to their exemplary status, Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira are presented as members of, respectively, the Solar and Lunar Dynasties (the *śūrya*- and *candra-vaṃśas*), and so would feature heavily in the genealogical claims of later monarchs.³⁵ The scope of these epics cannot be reduced to politics alone, of course. But the visions of kingship outlined therein continue to reverberate throughout Southern Asia today.

Later works of Sanskrit literature, particularly those in the *mahākāvya* (“epic poem”) genre, continued to develop these themes. The earliest extant *mahākāvya* are, interestingly, both explicitly Buddhist texts: the *Buddhacarita* (“Deeds of the Buddha”) and *Saundarananda* (“Handsome Nanda”) of Aśvaghoṣa. The *Buddhacarita* in particular, the first complete hagiography of the Buddha in Sanskrit, has been read as a Buddhist response to the socio-political visions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*.³⁶ As the Buddha himself rejected kingship in favour of enlightenment, here the Buddha’s father Śuddhodana is presented as the ultimate literary king, complete with an elaborate genealogy traced back to the Solar Dynasty. Later Sanskrit-language Buddhist literary works, such as the influential *Aśokāvadāna*, seem to inherit their visions of kingship from these early precedents.³⁷

The idealized kingship described in these early poems was later formalized by works of literary theory (*sāhitya-śāstra* or *alankāra-śāstra*), which strictly prescribed how Sanskrit literati *ought* to describe kings and kingship. Daṇḍin’s ca. seventh-century *Kāvyaadarśa* (“Mirror of Poetry”)—perhaps the most widely influential of these works—illustrates this in its example of the “Virile” poetic mood (the *vīra-rasa*):³⁸ “Having not conquered

34 On Yudhiṣṭhira see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*. On Bhīṣma’s sermon in the *Śāntiparva* see Fitzgerald, “Negotiating the Shape of Scripture”; Pollock, “Divine King,” 523. On political themes in a later adaption of the *Mahābhārata* narrative, Māgha’s *Śisupālavadha*, see McCrea, “Lord of Glory.”

35 On the elaboration of these dynasties in the *purāṇas*, see Inden, “Imperial Purāṇas”; Thapar, “Historical Traditions,” 567–68.

36 Eltschinger, “Aśvaghōṣa on Kings and Kingship”; Hiltebeitel, “Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita*”; Olivelle, “Aśvaghōṣa’s Apologia.”

37 Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, ch. 2.

38 On Daṇḍin’s influence see the essays in Bronner, *A Lasting Vision*; particularly Hallisey et al., “Beauty to Beauty.” On my translation of *vīra*, usually “Heroic,” as “Virile,” see Hansen, “Heroic Modes of Women,” 1.

the earth with its oceans, having not honoured [the gods] with various sacrifices, and having not given to beggars that for which they beg—how would I be kingly?”³⁹

In this verse, Daṇḍin equates the satisfactory performance of kingship with military conquest, the performance of ritual sacrifice (aided by court Brahmins), and the donation of alms (*dāna*) to supplicants. It is significant that Daṇḍin’s earliest commentator, the Lanka-born Ratnaśrījñāna, specifies that these rituals include the Vedic *aśvamedha* horse sacrifice and *rājāsuya* consecration.⁴⁰ Even for a Buddhist monk like Ratnaśrījñāna, this is still a thoroughly Brahmanical vision of ideal kingship. Other parts of Daṇḍin’s work, and Ratnaśrī’s commentary thereon, provide us with other insights into the social ideals of Sanskrit poetry. We are told elsewhere, for example, that a manly literary hero can only feel pleasure (*ratī*) and passion (*ānuraktī*), emotions suitable for the “Erotic” mood (*śṛṅgārarasa*), towards women, whereas similar feelings towards other men are best understood as platonic “affection” (*preyas*).⁴¹ Of course, we should not misread literary advice as a social norm. But equally, we should not underestimate the importance of such advice. If a king wanted to be portrayed in some literary eulogy as a “good king”—one approaching Rāma or Yudhiṣṭhira, perhaps—then he would do well to have his court poet describe him as engaged in these activities endorsed by Daṇḍin.

One major development of the first millennium which significantly influenced Sanskrit visions of kingship was the emergence of the *bhakti* (devotional) movement.⁴² As the *Vedas* and the ritual sacrifice they enjoined became less prominent in public ritual, personal devotion to a tutelary deity—such as Śiva, or Viṣṇu, often in the form of his avatars Kṛṣṇa or Rāma—became central. Monarchs increasingly fashioned themselves as model devotees of their chosen deities, adopting titles in their inscriptions which declared them foremost among the followers of Viṣṇu (with epithets like *paramavaishṇava* or *paramabhāgavata*) or Śiva (*paramamāheśvara*). It is important to note that this royal style was not limited to theist devotees: some monarchs of the Bengali Pāla dynasty declared themselves

³⁹ *Kāvyaadarśa*, ed. Tarkabāgīsā, ch. 2, v. 284. This verse is repeated, nearly verbatim, in the ca. tenth-century Sinhala *Siyabaslakara*, ed. Jayatilaka, ch. 2, v. 277.

⁴⁰ *Ratnaśrī-ṭīkā*, ed. Tarkabāgīsā, 264, commenting on *Kāvyaadarśa* ch. 2, v. 284. On Ratnaśrījñāna generally see Pollock, “Ratnaśrījñāna.”

⁴¹ See the discussion of *Kāvyaadarśa* ch. 2, v. 279 and *Ratnaśrī-ṭīkā* thereon in Shirley, “Beyond Masculinity,” 491.

⁴² On which see generally Venkatkrishnan, *Love in the Time of Scholarship*.

paramasaugata, “Foremost Among Those of the Sugata (i.e., the Buddha).”⁴³ In some cases, monarchs began to increasingly identify themselves as representations or even human incarnations of those deities. This phenomenon is particularly well-documented in pre-Buddhist Angkor,⁴⁴ but was a widespread phenomenon throughout the Sanskrit world.⁴⁵ There is textual support for such royal claims to divinity. The *Ahīrbudhnya-saṃhitā*, in Pollock’s translation, tells us that:

The king is the ultimate being, a lord consisting of [parts of] all the gods. He is the locus of the effective energy of Viṣṇu, he consists of the Blessed One himself. The Lord God created the king long ago, emitting him from His own head: consecrated on the head, therefore, the king is placed far above other creatures...the wise man who seeks earthly and heavenly prosperity will esteem the king, the supreme deity of all worlds.⁴⁶

This is a significant shift from the position of the king as sacrificial patron as described in the earliest *Vedas*.

Nonetheless, the wide range of kingly models represented in the first-millennium Sanskrit world—from the literary exemplars of Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira, through the stylized *praśasti* inscriptions, down to claims to literally embody divinity—share certain commonalities. Kings in the Sanskrit imaginaire won victories in war, and used the spoils to patronize Brahmanic rituals. They embodied literary qualities like the *vīra-rasa*, and amassed ranks of consorts and courtesans to demonstrate their exemplary masculinity. Above all, they expressed their ideal kingship through inscriptions, and through courtly poetry under their patronage, always written in Sanskrit: the premier language of power and prestige throughout first-millennium Southern Asia. However, Sanskrit was not the only language in which ideals of kingship could be described. Alternative discourses emerged from an early period, articulated in other closely related languages (“Prakrits”) and often associated with particular religious movements. These included discourses associated with Jainism, and with Buddhism.⁴⁷

⁴³ Shirley, “Towards an Intellectual History of *Cakravartin* Kingship,” 198.

⁴⁴ Cœdès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*; Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*.

⁴⁵ Gonda, “The Sacred Character of Ancient Indian Kingship”; Pollock, “Divine King.”

⁴⁶ *Ahīrbudhnya-saṃhitā* ch. 16, vv. 14–19, translated in Pollock, “Divine King,” 526.

⁴⁷ On Jaina ideals of kingship, beyond the scope of this chapter, see Taylor, “Aesthetics of Sovereignty.”

Pali Political Thought

Multiple corpora of texts claim to accurately record the teachings of the historical Buddha. These corpora vary considerably in their contents, in the practices they enjoin, and of course in the languages in which they were and are transmitted.⁴⁸ The Pali canon presents itself as a complete and accurate record of what was recited by the Buddha's foremost disciples immediately after his death, at the First Dharma Council (P. *dharmasaṅgīti*). Later (we are told) some groups of monks deviated from the precedent of these elders, and so formed their own ordination lineages (such as the Mahāsāṅghika and Dharmaguptaka) with faulty disciplinary procedures and corrupted recitation traditions, necessitating censure and correction in the Second and Third Dharma Councils. Others, however, remained true to the teachings (*vāda*) recited by the elders (P. *theras*) at the First Dharma Council, and so became known as adherents to the *thera-vāda*.⁴⁹

The Theravāda ordination lineage (*nikāya*), with its orally preserved canon in Pali, arrived in Sri Lanka in the third century BCE; that canon was first written down in the first century BCE.⁵⁰ At some point after this, the Sri Lankan monastic community trifurcated into three rival sub-*nikāyas* centred on the Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri, and Jetavana monasteries in Anurādhapura.⁵¹ In around the fifth century CE, the Mahāvihāran monk Buddhaghosa completed a set of commentaries on the *Sutta-piṭaka* ("Collection of Teachings") of the Pali Canon, as well as a meditation manual (the *Visuddhimagga*)

48 We have available full canons in Pali, Tibetan, and Chinese, alongside less complete corpora in Sanskrit and Gāndhārī. The Pali canon has also been fully translated into a number of modern languages, including both Sinhala and English.

49 This account largely follows the *nidāna-kathā* of Buddhaghosa's *Pañcappakaraṇa* commentary on the *Kathāvatthu*. On the firmly partisan nature of this account, in Buddhaghosa's writing and in later texts, see e.g., Bretfeld, "Theravāda"; Gethin, "Was Buddhaghosa a Theravādin?"; Skilling, "Theravāda in History."

50 See generally Collins, "On The Very Idea," 74–80. There is a long-standing academic debate regarding whether the version of the Pali canon to we have access can be taken as an accurate reflection of "what the Buddha taught." Some argue that, while minor alterations may have taken place before the canon's writing-down, these were the exception rather than the rule, and its veracity is generally reliable: see, e.g., Anālayo Bhikkhu, "Historical Value"; Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism*, 21–22; Wynne, "Oral Transmission." Others maintain that we cannot be sure about the contents of the canon until, at the earliest, the fifth-century commentaries of Buddhaghosa: Norman, *A Philological Approach*, ch. 8; Schopen, "Two Problems."

51 On this schism see the Introduction, and more generally Walters, "Mahāyāna Theravāda."

which synthesized the totality of Mahāvihāran thought. Commentaries on the remaining sections of the Canon were later attributed to him.⁵² Two highly literary histories of Buddhism on the island, from the Mahāvihāran perspective, were respectively composed in the fourth and fifth centuries: the *Dīpavaṃsa* (“Lineage of the Island”) and the original *Mahāvamsa* (“The Great Lineage”).⁵³ While other Pali texts were composed after the fifth century—some of which will become very relevant to the discussion of later chapters—we might, cautiously, take the canon, Buddhaghosa’s writings thereon, and the early histories of that canon in Lanka as together representative of the first-millennium Pali worldview.

Pali-canonical texts about kings and kingship are hyper-aware of Brahmanical norms, and often explicitly subvert or even satirize them.⁵⁴ The nature of these responses, however, seem *prima facie* to vary radically from *sutta* to *sutta*, and perhaps even contradict one another. Matthew Moore has attempted to overcome these apparent contradictions by distinguishing between the *political system* endorsed by the Pali canon and its more general *theory of politics*. The political system is, in his reading, an “enlightened monarchy based on a primal social contract.”⁵⁵ Underlying this political system, however, Moore discerns what he sees as a rather radical political theory, which he synthesizes from more general ethical and soteriological Buddhist positions.⁵⁶ I am less convinced that such a neat synthesis is possible. Instead, I read the Pali canon as responding, in various places and in various ways, to a range of different internal needs and external interlocutors. We can heuristically group these in three distinct—if overlapping—modes of discussing the political, which I call the “elective mode,” the “critical mode,” and the “ideal mode.” These modes cannot be easily assigned to neat chronological order. Even if we accept that some sections of the Pali canon were in fact composed or compiled later than others, multiple modes

52 Buddhaghosa presents his commentaries as “translations” back into Pali of Sinhala texts, themselves translations of the Pali-language discussions of monks at the First Dharma Council. This claim to commentarial originality is apparently unique in the Buddhist world. Skilling, “Scriptural Authenticity,” 11.

53 Buddhaghosa knows and cites the *Dīpavaṃsa* but not the *Mahāvamsa*. Scheible, *Reading the Mahāvamsa*, 130.

54 On such satire in the *Aggañña-sutta* see Collins, “Discourse on What Is Primary,” 317–22; see further McGovern, *The Snake and the Mongooses*.

55 Moore, *Buddhism and Political Theory*, 23.

56 This theory is outlined in brief at Moore, *Buddhism and Political Theory*, 28–30; see further his chs. 4–6.

can be read within singular *suttas*, weaving together with varying degrees of grist and give.

By the “elective mode” I refer to those Pali texts, and sections of Pali texts, which can be read as presenting the ideal form of governance as something almost akin to republicanism. Two passages are frequently cited in support of this reading. The first is the advice that the Buddha claims to have given to the Vajjians on good governance (*Dīghanikāya* 16; *Āṅguttaranikāya* 7.22), which Moore reads as at least “quasi-republican” and even “implicitly criticizing monarchy.”⁵⁷ The second passage is the mythical *election* of the primordial king Mahāsammata (*Dīghanikāya* 27), long discussed in terms of social contract theory.⁵⁸ A long-standing theory holds that the Buddha himself, although valorized in later hagiographies as the son of a mighty king, may actually have been born into a republican society, and that this influenced his advice to the Vajjians in particular.⁵⁹ If so, this would make this “elective” mode of political thought representative of the actual thought of the historical Buddha (as opposed to the accretions and amendments potentially made by later redactors): a boon to scholars, like Moore, who see such republicanism as more aligned with the posited “core principles” of Buddhism. If so, this had little impact on later Buddhist political thought. Later references to Mahāsammata (particularly royal claims to belong to his family) rarely dwell on his elected status.⁶⁰ I know of no later invocations of the Vajjian advice, let alone calls for its practical implementation. These few texts aside, Buddhist political thought therefore assumes hereditary monarchy to be the norm.

This is the case for both the “critical” and “ideal” modes of talking about politics in the Pali canon, both of which take hereditary monarchy for granted. Following Steven Collins, among others, I read these two modes as decidedly reflective of an ongoing engagement with wider social and political circumstances, including the Brahmanical conceptions of kingship described above.⁶¹ In the “critical” mode, emphasis is placed on the coercive

57 Moore, *Buddhism and Political Theory*, 22; see further Collins, *Nirvana*, 443–48.

58 Collins, “Discourse on What Is Primary”; Huxley, “The Buddha and the Social Contract”; see further the response in Collins, “The Lion’s Roar”; Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, ch. 2.

59 Gokhale, “Early Buddhist Kingship,” 15; Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 48.

60 Collins and Huxley, “Post-Canonical Adventures”; Huxley, “When Manu Met Mahāsammata.”

61 Collins refers to these as “two modes of [kingly] *dhmma*”: Collins, *Nirvana*, ch. 6.

and punitive violence (*daṇḍa*, literally “the rod”) necessarily part of a king’s duties. This contradicts the more general ethical imperative to avoid such violence (*ahiṃsa*). As Collins neatly summarizes it, “The only advice possible for kings in [the critical mode] is ‘Don’t be one!’”⁶² Thus a number of canonical texts, as Collins shows, recount the cunning ways in which those in line for the throne manage to dodge the ethical bullet, such as feigning disability. However, such explicit critiques of kingship are relatively uncommon among Pali writings, particularly later Pali writings. The “critical mode,” for all its apparent harmony with deontological readings of Buddhist ethics, is simply not representative of how most Pali scholars have written about kingship.

Far more frequently, scholar-monks have attempted to articulate an “ideal” form of kingship: a king (*rājan*) who ascends the throne and then rules by exemplary *dharma* (here perhaps “morality”) alone, and so has no need for the ethically dubious coercion of *daṇḍa*.⁶³ *Dharmic dharmarājas* are mentioned throughout the Pali canon; Buddhaghosa supplements this with a list of ten *rājadharmas*, moral duties incumbent on kings.⁶⁴ The most exemplary form of *dharmarāja* is a *cakravartin* (“wheel-turning”) monarch, the classic description of which is:

a *cakravartin*, *dharmic*, a *dharma*-king, whose domain extended to the four directions, who had achieved stability within the kingdom, who had received the seven treasures. These seven treasures were as follows: the wheel-treasure, the elephant-treasure, the horse-treasure, the jewel-treasure, the woman-treasure, the householder-treasure, and it is the the leader-treasure which is the seventh. He had over a thousand sons, heroic and well-built,

⁶² Collins, *Nirvana*, 420.

⁶³ In personal communication, Alastair Gornall has suggested that *dharmika* refers to a king’s moral status, while *dharma-rājan* is best interpreted as king *by dharma*, i.e., rightful ascent to the throne (rather than patricide or usurpation). *Dharmika dharmarājan* could therefore best be glossed as “a king both righteous [in action] and rightful [in claim].”

⁶⁴ These ten *dharmas* are, as enumerated by Buddhaghosa in Pali, charity (*dāna*), discipline (*sīla*), generosity (*pariccāga*), forthrightness (*ajjava*), mildness (*maddava*), asceticism (*tapa*), non-anger (*akkodha*), non-violence (*avihiṃsā*), quiescence (*khantī*), and non-adversity (*avirodhana*). It is frequently claimed that the ten *rājadharmas* are listed in the *Jātaka*. However, they do not appear in the canonical verses, only in Buddhaghosa’s prose commentaries thereon. In fact, I have found no reference to *rājadharmas* in any Theravāda canonical materials. It therefore seems likely that Buddhaghosa took the term—although not the specific list, which is decidedly Buddhist—from Sanskrit texts such as the *Rājadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, and interpolated it into canonical sources.

crushing his enemies' armies. He ruled having conquered this ocean-bound earth without rod or sword.⁶⁵

The *cakravartin* seems, as Collins has shown, to neatly sidestep the critique levelled at the coercive violence usually necessary of kingship. This is a king so thoroughly ethical that he has no need to punish criminals or even conquer other kingdoms by force.⁶⁶ We might take this, in many ways, as an extension of the elective model: here, however, the people "elect" to follow the *cakravartin* by sheer force of his merit, rather than to serve a social good. This is clearly a very *aspirational* model, one far out of reach for most monarchs. But it is nonetheless a rejection of the "critical mode" outlined above, which holds that *no* form of kingship should be aspirational. At least two, mutually compatible, factors might help to explain this radically different view of kingship.

First, the *dharma*-king and *cakravartin* may well represent attempts by early Buddhists to appeal to kingly patrons: decrying all kings as fundamentally morally flawed would hardly win support for a growing religious movement. The model of the *dharma* king may therefore be a Buddhist alternative to the sacrificial patron of Brahmanic texts: an alternative way for kings to perform "good kingship," opening a space for Buddhist monks and Buddhist ritual practices at royal courts. If so, this model (transmitted through Sanskrit texts, not Pali) was extremely successful in East Asia, where Buddhist *cakravartin*ship was repeatedly invoked as a royal ideal.⁶⁷ Despite common assumptions, *cakravartin*ship was claimed far less frequently in first-millennium Southern Asia.⁶⁸ As we will see in subsequent chapters, it was only in the Polonnaruwa period that this became a standard component of Buddhist kingship in Sri Lanka.

Second, the hyper-idealized kingship of the *cakravartin* king allowed Buddhists to hagiographically associate the Buddha himself with the trappings of kingship, without compromising his perfect moral standing. This is particularly evident in stories about the Buddha's various past lives as

⁶⁵ *Cakkavatti-sutta* (*Dīgha-nikāya* 26), ed. Rhys-Davids and Carpenter, 3:59. The passage is repeated verbatim elsewhere in the canon.

⁶⁶ Collins, *Nirvana*, ch. 6. See also Vessantara as another kind of exemplary king at Collins, *Nirvana*, ch. 7.

⁶⁷ Balkwill, *The Women Who Ruled China*. On the Sanskrit texts from which these Chinese monarchs drew their own *cakravartin* ideal see Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*.

⁶⁸ See particularly Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*; cf. Shirley, "Towards an Intellectual History."

a king, which often position him in this exemplary mode. Even in his final life as the Buddha, he was born with the bodily markings of a “Great Man” (*mahāpuruṣa*), destined to become either a Buddha or a *cakravartin*. Much has been made of this parallel.⁶⁹ Pali-language texts from first-millennium Sri Lanka, interestingly, seem to have taken a “have your *cakra* and eat it too” approach to this prophecy, referencing the metaphor of the Buddha’s teachings as a “Wheel of *Dharma*” to designate him as a *dharma-cakravartin*.⁷⁰

What is crucial here is that these ideal representations of kingship in Pali writings rarely seek to directly challenge the Brahmanical *status quo*. Far more frequently, they adopt something of a conciliatory stance. They seek to open a space for Buddhist rituals (and Buddhist monks) in kingly procedure, while largely leaving the wider “apparatus” (to borrow Walser’s terminology) intact.⁷¹ This is a theme we will see repeated throughout the following chapters: to be “Buddhist” does not necessarily mean “to *not* be theistic”; to deny the existence and efficacy of gods like Viṣṇu and Śiva; or to reject the significance of Brahmanical rituals in the performance of kingship. Buddhism offered an alternative soteriology to that of the *Upaniṣads*, of the *bhakti* movement, or of later sectarian developments like the Śaiva Siddhāntas or Śrīvaiṣṇavas.⁷² On an ultimate (*lokottara*) level, it therefore held itself apart; on the level of “this-worldly” (*laukika*) concerns, however, Buddhism has always been open to a large pantheon of gods, protective magic, and Brahmanical rituals.⁷³ This was certainly the case for the Buddhist monarchs of early medieval Sri Lanka.

Sinhala Political Thought

Buddhism came to Sri Lanka (so the story goes) thanks to the intervention of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, who sent his own children—the monk Mahinda and nun Saṅghamitta—to the island’s royal capital of Anurādhapura, to convert the monarch and to establish their respective monastic communities (*saṅghas*). From this moment onwards, all evidence (textual and material)

69 Wimalaratana, *Concept of Great Man*; cf. Radich, “The Somatics of Liberation,” section 3.1.

70 See further Shirley, “Towards an Intellectual History of *Cakravartin* Kingship,” 194n23.

71 Walser, *Genealogies*, 249.

72 On Śaiva Siddhāntas see Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*; on the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, Akepiya-pornchai, “Translation in a Multilingual Context.”

73 On the *laukika/lokottara* distinction in Sri Lanka see Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*.

suggests that Sri Lanka's monarchs were fervent patrons of Buddhist institutions, and sought to present themselves as such in their various inscriptions. As noted above, the monastic community within Sri Lanka eventually trifurcated into distinct *nikāyas* respectively based at Anurādhapura's Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri-vihāra, and later Jetavana-vihāra monasteries. Because of the eventual dominance of the Mahāvihāran legacy, and of the Pali canon they maintained, scholars have tended to assume that these kings (and others across Southern Asia) were naturally oriented towards, and modelled themselves upon, the visions of kingship presented in the Pali canon. A fierce scholarly debate raged, for example, over whether certain monarchs were viewed as *cakravartins*, given their obvious divergence from the superhuman monarchs described in the Pali canon.⁷⁴ However, despite the long association between Sri Lanka and the Pali language, it is not so clear that Sri Lankan monarchs were emulating Pali-canonical examples. Rather, a distinct discourse of kingship emerged in the inscriptional record, almost exclusively expressed in the Sinhala language. It is worth our attending to the specifics of this political discourse.

Until the last decade of the first millennium, Sri Lankan sources describing kings and kingship were strictly divided on linguistic and social grounds. On the one hand, scholar-monks (particularly those associated with the Mahāvihāra-*nikāya*) continued to produce serious theoretical and narrative works in the Pali language. Non-monastic elites, however—meaning, primarily, monarchs—articulated their visions of kingship almost exclusively in Sinhala script and language, only rarely leaving behind records in Sanskrit, and never in Pali.⁷⁵ This does not mean that Sri Lanka's kings were entirely insular in this period, and unconcerned with developments in wider South Asia. Rather, they were fully immersed in a wider political culture which encompassed much of what we now call South India, and deeply connected to wider polities across the Indian Ocean region and beyond.⁷⁶ The effect that these connections had on ideals of kingship, however, has been relatively understudied, with the notable exception of Jonathan Walters's work.⁷⁷

74 Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*; Spiro, "Review of *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*"; Tambiah, "The Buddhist Conception"; Spiro, "The Buddhist Conception"; cf. Shirley, "Towards an Intellectual History of *Cakravartin* Kingship."

75 Dias, "Sanskrit and Pali Inscriptions of Ceylon."

76 On which see particularly the essays in Bandaranayake, *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*.

77 Walters, "Buddhist History."

Walters provides a nuanced reading of the relationship between Lanka's kings and *śāsana*, in both literary and inscriptional sources, across an impressive temporal period, and I follow his account closely in my understanding of late Anurādhapuran visions of kingship. From his analysis, supplemented by the subsequent publication of a more complete inscriptional corpus,⁷⁸ we can identify three key developments of late Anurādhapuran inscriptional discourses which would have a clear impact on later Poḷonnaruva-based visions of kingship.

The first of these is the elaboration, from the reign of Udaya II (r. 887–898) onwards, of “work-like” royal biographies preceding the more “documentary” contents of inscriptions. This is usually, and I think accurately, attributed to an emulation of the Sanskrit *praśasti* described above.⁷⁹ This conforms with the broader pattern of “vernacular literarization” occurring across Southern Asia at this time, in which monarchs increasingly turned to their own local languages for inscriptional self-representation.⁸⁰ Because of the clear, and often self-conscious, influence of Sanskrit *praśasti* on these vernacular inscriptions, the term *praśasti* is therefore sometimes heuristically used as a catch-all for any grandiose inscriptional preamble. But this is inaccurate. As described above, the *praśasti* is a highly typified genre, almost always in verse, following a strict formula. This was not the case for the Sinhala royal inscriptional style. As Whitney Cox has argued for the Tamil *meykkīrtti* (discussed further below), we should not overlook the significance of such distinctions by conflating them all under the heading “*praśasti*.”⁸¹

The second development which concerns us is the increasing prevalence of royal promulgations about proper monastic conduct, documented and enacted by inscriptions found within monastic complexes. These promulgations are typically referred to in this period as *sirit* (cf. Skt. *carita*, “[a code of] conduct”).⁸² This term is a clear *tadbhāva* (semantic borrowing)

⁷⁸ I refer here to *Inscriptions of Ceylon* vol. 5, which is vast enough to have been printed in three parts. The numbering of inscriptions between these parts is not continuous, and so I cite from it with part numbers marked in small roman numerals (e.g., IC 5.ii.17, the seventeenth inscription in part two of volume five).

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Berkwitz, “Reimagining Buddhist Kingship.”

⁸⁰ Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, see particularly 386–87.

⁸¹ Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry*, 53.

⁸² These promulgations are often called *katikāvata* by modern scholars, following Ratnapala, *The Katikāvatas*. I suspect that this is anachronous for the first millennium, in which the inscriptions usually refer to themselves as *sirit*. The term *katikā* does

from Sanskrit, which may suggest a “mainland” influence behind such royal interventions into monastic conduct. This suggestion is reinforced by one of our earliest examples of this intervention, found in the Anurādhapura Jetavana complex (EZ 1.1), being written in the Sanskrit language with Nāgarī script.⁸³ These *sirit* inscriptions are a direct precursor to Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* inscription at the Galvihāra, a central focus of Chapter Five below.⁸⁴ The emergence of this inscriptional genre, I suggest, offered new opportunities for monarchs and monks to work out the parameters of royal obligations to—and authority to intervene in—the affairs of the *saṅgha*, nominally in service of the *śāsana*’s longevity. Careful attention to how these royal inscriptions position their disciplinary interventions therefore offers considerable insights into the self-fashioning of their patrons as “Buddhist kings.”

Perhaps the most notable of these royal self-representations comes from a *sirit* inscription of Mahinda IV (r. 956–972) located at the Jetavana monastery (IC 5.ii.68). This inscription famously concludes with the declaration that “none but a *bodhisattva* should attain sovereignty of Sri Lanka,” frequently cited as evidence that Sri Lankan kings in this period were all understood to be *bodhisattvas*: those on the long, multi-lifetime path to eventual Buddhahood.⁸⁵ Little attention has been paid, however, to the rhetorical effect of the full section as a conclusion to, and *rationale for the maintenance of*, the preceding *sirit* regulations:

By those who have received the eternal prophecy (*viyāraṇa*, Skt. *vyākaraṇa*) of the Omniscient King of Sages, pinnacle of the Śākya family, that “None but a *bodhisattva* shall attain sovereignty in Siri Lakdiv”; who are accustomed to wearing white vestments to serve and attend on the *mahāsaṅgha* on the day of their receiving consecration (*abhiṣeka*), in the moment of attaining royal splendour bestowed by the Great Being (*mahasat*) to protect His Bowl and

appear at least once, in an inscription (IC 5.ii.40) of a King Sena (it is unclear which). I use the term *sirit* rather than *carita* for these inscriptions to avoid confusion with the Sanskrit-language biographical genre of the same name.

83 The section of the inscriptions which would reveal the name of the sponsor is, sadly, irrevocably displaced, and we cannot even be sure that it is truly a “royal” intervention after all. See Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, 250–55.

84 On the longer *durée* influence of *sirits*/*katikāvatas*, see Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*; Schonthal, “Buddhist Law beyond the Vinaya;” and Schonthal’s forthcoming monograph.

85 Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, 172–73; Pathmanathan, “Kingship,” 130–31; Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 96–97. Cf. the thoughtful critique in Berkwitz, “Divine Kingship,” paras. 28–35.

Robe (relics); who are born of our lineage; who are devoted to the Buddha; [and] who are best of the *kṣatriyas*, should the above-stated be protected (IC 5.ii.68).

Here the ongoing support for disciplinary purity within the Jetavana-*nikāya* is positioned as central to the duties of kings: explicitly, of good *Buddhist* kings, dedicated to serving the *śāsana* at the moment of their consecration. This is connected, certainly to the prophecy of *bodhisattva*hood which has received so much scholarly attention. But this *bodhisattva*hood does not constitute the *telos* of this paragraph. Nor was it unusual in a period increasingly marked by claims to *bodhisattva* status.⁸⁶ Rather, here Mahinda IV is telling his successors that their kingship is bestowed upon them by, and for the benefit of, the Buddha-*śāsana*. As good kings (who happen to be *bodhisattvas*) they should therefore dedicate themselves towards such service, exemplified in royal attempts to ensure the ongoing disciplinary purity of the Abhayagiri monks.

Throughout these last centuries of the first millennium, in other words, we see simultaneously an elaboration of Sinhala-language royal inscriptions and increasing evidence of royal involvement in monastic affairs (particularly disciplinary affairs). These two developments were not, necessarily, causally linked. Together, however, they provided Anurādhapura's last independent monarchs with opportunities for new forms of royal self-fashioning, in which depictions of idealized kingship were increasingly intertwined with concerns for monastic disciplinary purity.

The third key feature of these inscriptions is their treatment of any individuals who were not normatively masculine. Out of the 367 inscriptions collected in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* vol. 5, only two or three women are recorded as exercising any economic or political agency of their own: a Lady Kitā in 879 CE (IC 5.i.27); another woman who is mentioned in several inscriptions from the 920–930s (IC 5.ii.12, 13, and 32);⁸⁷ and a Lady Vidurā, with some unclear connection to Mahinda IV (IC 5.ii.70).⁸⁸ We also have a mention, in an unfortunately severely damaged inscription, of a monastic college

⁸⁶ On the frequency of such claims see Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, particularly 124.

⁸⁷ Ranawella suggests in IC that these women may have been one and the same, on the basis that the only women of this name mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa* are both active in the tenth century (see IC 5.i:70).

⁸⁸ Vidurā's inscription, marking a donation to the monks at Vessagiri, is carved on the obverse of an inscription by Mahinda IV (IC 5.ii.69). There is clearly some form of connection between the two, and their donations, but neither inscription makes the nature of their relationship clear. See further Shirley, "Donative Inscriptions."

(Sin. *piriveṇa*) constructed by both a (grammatically masculine) *vat-himi-yan* and (grammatically feminine) *vat-hāmbuvan* together (*IC* 5.iii.110); these titles are only applied to either royalty or monks. Beyond these brief glimpses, “women” (understood broadly) were invoked in royal inscriptions in two only ways, both found in the inscriptions’ stylized introductions. These introductions routinely mention the mothers of kings, sometimes stressing their high status (often in the formulation “born equal [to the king’s father],” Sin. *samadā*). Clearly, matrilineal status was important to kingly self-representation. The only consort ever mentioned, however, was the island of Lanka itself, anthropomorphized in the following stock phrase: “Master (*himi*, Skt. *svāmin*), by descent, of the young woman, the earth of the island of Lanka, who is the primary consort (*agamehesu*, Skt. *agramahiṣī*) to the best of the Kṣatriya.”⁸⁹

This imagery is taken to its furthest extreme in a section of the ca. tenth-century *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*, in a section translated and discussed by Jonathan Walters.⁹⁰ Here, the island is described in lavish (and increasingly erotic) detail as a beautiful woman, with the city of Anurādhapura as her face, the Mahavāli River her girdle and so on. Walters draws several productive links between the specific terms used in this poem and the inscriptional and edificial output of Anurādhapura’s kings, demonstrating the extent to which the island was both anthropomorphized and sexualized across genres and media. Together, these references suggest that (human) royal consorts were entirely peripheral to the inscriptional performance of kingship in the later Anurādhapura period; it was only if a consort’s son attained the throne himself that she became “worthy” of epigraphic mention. Royal *daughters*, perhaps unsurprisingly, are even more absent from the inscriptional record. This is worth mentioning here both for how this attitude was continued by Vijayabāhu, as described below, but also for the dramatic contrast in attitudes towards royal consorts (and even, fleetingly, daughters) we will see evident in Chapters Four, Six, and Seven.

All three of these features—elaborations of inscriptional prose, royal intervention into monastic affairs, and the exclusion of women—would prove influential on Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs. Before this period, however, another kingly paradigm became dominant in Sri Lanka: one articulated in the Tamil language, and developed in the South Indian courts of the Cōḷa monarchs.

⁸⁹ This particular phrasing is taken from *IC* 5.ii.66, but variations occur throughout nearly all royal inscriptions of the later Anurādhapura period.

⁹⁰ Walters, “Lovely Lady Lanka: A Tenth Century Description.”

Tamil Political Thought

Tamil is a Dravidian language, cousin to Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada, and therefore linguistically very distinct from Sanskrit, Pali, and Sinhala. Tamil has a venerable literary tradition to rival Sanskrit, including religious poetry (such as the Śaiva *caṅkam* poems) and prose (the Buddhist *Maṇimēkalai*) from the early centuries of the Christian Era. Scholars in the Tamil country (T. *nāṭu*) worked in Sanskrit for much of the first millennium, until the development of a hybrid script (Grantha, capable of expressing both Sanskrit and Tamil phonology) and dialect (Maṇipravāḷam, which draws its vocabulary primarily from Sanskrit but its grammar from Tamil) allowed for increasingly sophisticated philosophical writings in Tamil.⁹¹ This meant that, despite the linguistic gulf between Tamil and Sanskrit, many of the ideals of Sanskrit kingship described above also circulated and were generally accepted in South India. From an early period, kings in the Tamil country claimed *kṣatriya* caste status, and descent from either the Solar or Lunar lineages described in Sanskrit *purāṇas*.⁹²

Among these claimants to Solar and Lunar heritage were the three great dynasties (the *mūvēntar*, “Three Kings”) whose rivalry constitutes a recurring theme in Tamil history: the Pāṇḍya, the Cōḷa, and the Cēra.⁹³ Literary epics and archaeological evidence together document the rise and fall of their respective fortunes (or, at least, the fortunes of those claiming to be the rightful heirs of one of the *mūvēntar*) throughout the medieval period. In the early second millennium, it was the Cōḷa who were ascendant. A series of military victories against the Pāṇḍya, and the Andhra-based Pallava kingdom, allowed Vijayālaya (r. ca. 850?–870) and his son Āditya I (870–907) to claim both territory and descent from earlier Cōḷa monarchs; later monarchs expanded Cōḷa influence further, both northwards by land and across the maritime Bay of Bengal. There is a long-standing academic debate regarding the extent to which the Cōḷa monarchs directly administered these lands, or whether the vassalage of other kings was purely symbolic and/or intended to support the commercial interest of merchant guilds.⁹⁴ Even in the latter

91 Akepiyapornchai, “Translation in a Multilingual Context.”

92 Veluthat, “The Status of the Monarch.”

93 The early history of these dynasties has been reconstructed primarily from *Caṅkam* literature: Abraham, “Chera, Chola, Pandya”; Sastri, *The Cōlas*, ch. 3. Herman Tieken has argued that this literature was composed as late as the ninth century CE, and so represents only a nostalgic imagination of early Tamil history. Tieken, *Kāvya*.

94 See the discussion in Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*.

case, the Cōla facilitated the spread of Tamil language, literary, and intellectual culture outwards from their capital, Kaṅkaikoṇḍa Cōlapuram, across Southern Asia on a scale unprecedented in earlier periods.

Particularly significant in this dissemination—both for its facilitation through military victories, and for his own innovations in kingly self-representation—was the monarch Rājarāja I Cōla (r. ca. 985–1014), who in ca. 993 captured the Lankan capital of Anurādhapura, exiled the then-monarch Mahinda V, and so annexed Sri Lanka into the Cōla imperial apparatus. This conquest seems to have been hugely important to Rājarāja, who thereafter mentions it at the very opening of his own Sanskrit *praśastis*.⁹⁵ But Rājarāja's royal self-fashioning was not limited to the Sanskrit-language texts and genres described above. He was the first Cōla monarch known to have opened his inscriptions with a *meykkīrtti*: a stylized poetic eulogy, comparable to the Sanskrit *praśasti* but written in a decidedly un-Sanskritized dialect of Tamil.⁹⁶ Rājarāja's own *meykkīrtti* was likely composed by his court poet, Karuvūrttevar—a man so important to Rājarāja's kingly self-representation that the two appear together in the king's only extant portrait, plastered on the wall of the Br̥hadiśvara Temple in Tanjore.⁹⁷

Later Cōla monarchs developed further ways of describing kingship unique to Tamil literary culture. Particularly important among these early second-millennium literary developments was the *ulā* ("Procession") genre of poetry, in which a (male) hero promenades through a city, causing all of the women who witness him to fall madly in unrequited love. The earliest *ulā* was Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ's eighth-century *Tirukkayilāyaññavulā*, which long pre-dates the period of our study. But it was Cōla court poets who turned this genre into a vehicle of royal praise. The most notable among these poets was Oṭṭakkūttar, who composed *ulās* dedicated to his successive patrons Vikrama (r. 1118–1135), Kulottuṅga II (1135–1150), and Rājarāja II (1146–1173).⁹⁸ Oṭṭakkūttar's poems, in David Shulman's reading, represented a "self-conscious contribution to the essential visibility of the king and patron."⁹⁹ To Oṭṭakkūttar was also (incorrectly) assigned the

95 Sastri, *The Cōlas*, 172–73.

96 On the *meykkīrtti* generally see Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry*.

97 See discussion in Shulman, *King and Clown*, 16–18.

98 Shulman, *King and Clown*, 312–24; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 198–99. Cōla monarchs often practised co-rulership with designated successors, hence overlapping regnal dates.

99 Shulman, *King and Clown*, 313.

Kaliṅkattupparaṇi, now known to be the work of Cayaṅkoṇṭār, court poet of Kulottuṅga I (r. 1070–1120). This *paraṇi* poem glorified its patron not as the impassive subject of his subjects' desire, as in the *ulā* genre, but as a heroic warrior, through juxtaposition of the gruesome bloodiness of his battlefield; the delight of his victorious soldiers' wives on their triumphant homecoming; and the distress of the enemy's widows.¹⁰⁰ By patronizing these courtly poets and their works, the Cōla monarchs developed an impressive corpus of literary portraits of idealized kingship entirely discrete from the otherwise dominant Sanskrit models.

The centrality of women to both *ulās* and *paraṇis* orients us towards a key feature of South Indian political culture, also distinct from the traditions described above: the prominence of women, particularly royal women, in both depictions of royalty and in the performance of politics. Unlike in Anurādhapuram inscriptions, South Indian monarchs frequently mentioned their principal consorts in their own *meykkīrttis*, with elaborate praise which celebrates "their illustrious character and independent sovereignty."¹⁰¹ Macro-level studies of inscriptional corpora suggest that these consorts were frequent and high-profile donors to temples and other religious institutions, (literally) carving out distinctive inscriptional personae for themselves in the process.¹⁰² Very often, and in a complete inversion of the Anurādhapuram dynamic described above, these royal women were more active donors to temples than were their husbands. As a result, we know far more about individual consorts in South India than we do about those in Anurādhapura. The names of fifteen consorts of Rājārāja I, for example, are known to us; his primary consort, Dantiśakti Viṭankiyār, even left behind a sculpture of herself and her husband engaged in worship.¹⁰³ This pattern seems to hold from the highest-status "dynastic queens," like Dantiśakti Viṭankiyār herself, down to far more local "chiefly queens."¹⁰⁴

Tamil political culture at the turn of the first millennium was therefore entirely distinct—in its literary expressions and in its gendered practices—from the Sanskrit, Pali, and Sinhala traditions described above. Separated

100 Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry*, 153–71; Shulman, *King and Clown*, 276–92; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 207–12.

101 Orr, "Women and the Gift in Medieval South India," 178.

102 See particularly the work of Talbot, "Temples, Donors, and Gifts"; Orr, *Donors, Devotees, and Daughters*; and Venkataraman, *Temple Art Under the Chola Queens*.

103 Sastri, *The Cōlas*, 186.

104 Orr, "Chiefly Queens." See further Orr, "Women and the Gift in Medieval South India."

only by the narrow stretch of water called today the Palk Strait, and with people and ideas moving frequently back and forth between the island and the mainland, Lanka's kings must have been at least passingly familiar with Tamil-language ideas and practices of kingship throughout the first millennium. But it was with the tenth century Cōla conquest that these ideas and practices were fully imposed on the island.

Several inscriptions bearing the *meykkīrtti* of Rājendra I (r. 1012–1044) have been found within Lanka, including at least one at a Buddhist *vihāra* at Periyakulam (*TISL* 20; see also *TISL* 13b, original findsite unknown). We also have extant a large corpus of Tamil-language inscriptions produced by junior members of the royal family or its cadet branches, who, as Indrapala notes, were positioned as something like “royal governors” of the island (as in other non-core regions of the Cōla empire).¹⁰⁵ These governors were invested with kingly stylings, effectively replacing earlier independent monarchs with new “kings” subordinate to the Cōla overlord. The inscriptions of these governors, even at their most eulogistic, are stylistically distinct from the formal *meykkīrtti* of the Cōla emperors. The imperial *meykkīrtti* were composed in an “austere, self-consciously ‘classical’ diction,”¹⁰⁶ and could therefore be inscribed entirely in Tamil script. Gubernatorial inscriptions in Lanka, however, often heavily rely on Sanskrit loanwords, and therefore required the use of Grantha script (which can express both Tamil and Sanskrit phonemes), often alongside the Tamil. Central to Indrapala's analysis is an inscription found near Trincomalee, created by local officials but dated to “the tenth year of *kō śrī* Caṅkavarmarāṇa (Skt. Saṅghavarman) *uṭaiyār*, Cōla Ilaṅkēsvaratēvar (Skt. Lankeśvaradeva)” (*TISL* 19).¹⁰⁷ This title “Cōla Ilaṅkēsvaratēvar,” borrowed from the title “Lankeśvara” (“Lord of Lanka”) long used by Anurādhapura's monarchs, is suggestive of the extent to which Saṅghavarman positioned himself as their rightful successor—rearticulated in the Tamil language, and firmly yoked to the Cōla imperial apparatus.

These inscriptions are far from outliers. In the period between Rājārāja Cōla's defeat of Mahinda V in the last years of the first millennium, and the rise of Vijayabāhu I in ca. 1070, Tamil inscriptions proliferated throughout Lanka: marking private donations to religious institutions (predominantly, but not exclusively, Śaiva temples); adjudicating on matters of taxation and

105 Indrapala, “An Inscription.”

106 Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry*, 54.

107 Both *kō* and *uṭaiyār* are standard epithets for powerful men with no direct equivalents in English; I therefore leave them untranslated (as I do elsewhere for Sinhala *vahansē*).

administration; or marking the growing power of merchant-mercenary corporations like the Veḷaikkāra, who would remain influential throughout the Poḷonnaruva period and beyond.¹⁰⁸ However, we should not over-emphasize the Cōḷa conquest as a moment of total disjuncture, or as a totally unprecedented shift in royal discourses. The Tamil language had long been present in Lanka,¹⁰⁹ and Lankan kings in the late Anurādhapura period were keenly aware of the inscriptional moves made by their cross-straits rivals. In an inscription of Kāśyapa V (*IC* 5.i.104), for example, he refers to himself by the rather distinctive title *maharajyutār*, likely influenced by the Tamil honorific suffix *-ār*. Nor did this period signal anything like a repression of Sinhala-language inscriptional practices. On the contrary, local governors seemed at pains to co-position themselves both within the wider Cōḷa imperial apparatus and more locally recognizable power structures.

One representative example—marking a donation to the Tirukkētiśvaram temple in Mannar, sometime during the reign of Rājārāja I—opens:

Tāḷikumaraṇ, the *kiḷavan* [of] Cīrūkūrṇanalluṛ in Vēḷārṇātu in the *vaḷanātu* called “Kṣatriya-śikamāna” in the Cōḷa-*maṇḍala*, having established [this temple] in Rājārājapura, called Mātōṭṭam, in the Mummuṭi-Cōḷa-*maṇḍala* called Īlam, establishes [the following grant] for the duration of the sun and moon for the *mahādeva* of the Rājārāja-Īśvara temple (*TISL* 12, ll. a1–20).

We see here a careful mapping of the administrative language of the wider Cōḷa empire—a *maṇḍala* divided neatly into sub-*maṇḍalas* and then again into *vaḷanātus*—onto more localized, and likely pre-existing, placenames, each diligently marked off with the adjectival suffix *-āṇa*, translated here “called.” Tāḷikumaraṇ’s doubly-toponymic self-positioning would have been sensible to audiences from both anywhere throughout the Cōḷa polity and within the local area (as long as those audiences could read Tamil, of course). His grant to a local temple, forever immortalized in lithic form, represents an engagement with Lanka far from a mere “occupation” or military “pillage”: this was a serious attempt to subsume kingship of Lanka into an imperial apparatus, attentive to the specifics of Lankan power relations but re-contextualized as part of the broader Cōḷa Empire.

Tāḷikumaraṇ’s inscription was hardly the only marker of serious Cōḷa engagement with Sri Lanka. At the outset of this chapter, we noted that

108 See further Friedrich, “Merchants, Ministers, and Monks.”

109 The first inscription in *TISL* is written in Brahmi characters, tentatively dated to the fourth or fifth centuries CE, and seems to acknowledge the authority of a Jain nun (*kuratti*) named Vēmi.

Poḷonnaruva's three vaulted image-houses seem to have been modelled closely on the small Śiva *devālaya* ("No. 2") northeast of the citadel walls. Fragmentary inscriptions on the walls of this temple date it to the reign of Rājendra I Cōḷa (r. 1012–1044); a later inscription, dated to the reign of Adhirājendra Cōḷa (1067–1070), tells us that the temple's original name was Vāṇavaṇ-mātēvi-iśvaram ("[Temple of] the Deity of the Great Lady Vāṇavaṇ"), almost certainly named for one of Rājendra's consorts.¹¹⁰ We have already noted that Cōḷa consorts engaged in extensive temple patronage as a public performance of royal largess. It is therefore tempting to wonder whether Vāṇavaṇ herself had anything to do with the establishment of this small temple on the island; the alternative explanation is that she was so well-known as a patron that the island's governors established a temple in her name in their new capital. In either case, the Śiva *devālaya* named for the Great Lady Vāṇavaṇ seems to have made an indelible mark on the architectural history and ongoing religious practices of Poḷonnaruva: an apt metaphor, perhaps, for the gendered and cultural influences on Poḷonnaruva's discursive history, traced in the following chapters.

Conclusions to Chapter One

At least four distinct political cultures—sets of ideas and practices which were primarily transmitted and expressed in their own linguistic traditions—were known in early second-millennium Sri Lanka. Sanskrit texts, inscriptional genres, and ritual practices offered a way of being "kingly" which would have been intelligible anywhere from Kashmir to Java. The Pali Canon and its commentaries describe other kinds of kingship—sometimes at odds with one another, but doubtless compelling for a Buddhist monarch who wanted to demonstrate their piety and munificence. A long-standing tradition of Sinhala-language inscriptions provided a uniquely Lankan way of expressing kingship, in continuity with the earlier Anurādhapura kingdom. The Tamil-language innovations of the Cōḷa court, meanwhile, provided another set of kingly ideals—the dispassionate subject of desire in the *ulā*, the conquering hero of the *paraṇi* and the *meykkīrtti*—an aspiring monarch might choose to emulate.

It would be easy to assume that, once the Cōḷas were overthrown, and an independent Lankan kingdom was established at Poḷonnaruva, this last tradition in particular was simply rejected outright, in favour of

¹¹⁰ See *TISL* 26, and discussion therein.

the “properly” Lankan Buddhist traditions of Pali- and Sinhala-language political culture. This is certainly the narrative presented in retrospective texts like the *Mahāvamsa*, and so repeated by some modern historians. However, later chapters of this book will show that this was not the case. While Poḷonnaruva kings certainly took pains to present themselves as Anurādhapura’s heirs, and as good Buddhist monarchs, this did not result in an outright rejection of the ideas and practices of kingship articulated in either Tamil or Sanskrit. On the contrary: a closer reading of the evidence available from the reigns of Poḷonnaruva’s earliest independent monarchs suggests a deliberate engagement with all four of these political traditions, in order to reconstruct an entirely new form of Buddhist kingship.

Chapter 2

ESTABLISHING KINGSHIP

THE RISE OF VIJAYABĀHU I (1070–1110)

BETWEEN THE 990s and 1070 CE, the island of Sri Lanka was a division (T. *maṇṭalam*) of the vast Cōḷa Empire. While the Cōḷas themselves ruled from Kaṅkaikoṇṭa Cōḷapuram, in what is now Tamil Nadu, the island was administered by local governors in Poḷonnaruva, a city on the banks of the great Mahavāli river, some eighty kilometres southeast of Lanka's historic capital Anurādhapura. In the southeastern region of Ruhunu, however, a local ruler—later known by the regnal name Vijayabāhu I—after claiming his father's throne in ca. 1055, waged a long war against the island's Cōḷa overlords, finally concluding with his capture of both Anurādhapura and Poḷonnaruva in 1070. Vijayabāhu himself seems to have considered this the beginning of his reign proper, counting his own regnal years from the day of his consecration (*abhiṣeka*) in Anurādhapura.¹ But the *Mahāvamsa* extension compiled in the Daṁbadeṇiya court of Parākramabāhu II counts Vijayabāhu's regnal years—and, therefore, his reign as rightful king of the island—as beginning in 1055, the year of his father's death; modern scholars have simply followed the Daṁbadeṇiyan lead. Why has this retrospective dating so definitively informed our temporal definition of the “Poḷonnaruvan period”? What assumptions—about royal succession, about the continuity of Anurādhapuran institutions of kingship, and about the distinction between “Buddhist” and “Śaiva” rule—informed, and continue to inform, such periodization?

Vijayabāhu's reign has come to signify, in both premodern narratives and modern scholarship, a pivotal moment of “return”: from the half-century of Śaivite Cōḷa “interruption” back to the “traditional” Buddhism which had defined the earlier Anurādhapura kingdom. Of course, the period of Cōḷa rule left its legacy. But this legacy, in such accounts, was always secondary to the triumphant return of Sinhala Buddhist kingship, which magnanimously tolerated—but never partook in—ongoing theist practice, Tamil and Sanskrit languages and literatures, and perhaps even some vestiges of

¹ See the dates in IC 6.2, discussed further below.

the Cōḷa administrative apparatus. The earliest Anglophone histories of the period insist on a stark dichotomy between Cōḷa and Sinhala rulers.² The most emphatic expression of this dichotomy appears, perhaps, in K. A. N. Sastri's evocatively titled "Vijayabāhu I: The Liberator of Laṅkā." Here Sastri provides a rich narrative of Vijayabāhu's life, informed by archaeological data but replete with extensive quotations from Geiger's translation of the *Mahāvamsa*. Sastri opens this piece by declaring Vijayabāhu "one of the greatest kings of Ceylon," and then goes on to tell us:

At his accession Cōḷa rule was well established in the island, and its indigenous rulers were hiding themselves in the mountains of Rohaṇa (Sin. Ruhūṇu). The Buddhist faith and the foundations sustaining it suffered much damage at the hands of the Śaiva conquerors...Halfway through Vijayabāhu's reign the picture begins to change. Internal dissensions among the Sinhalese chieftains are composed or abolished by the dissidents being destroyed or subjugated; the occasion afforded by political trouble in South India is availed of to roll off the Tamil Cōḷa hegemony over the island which is now united under one king. Buddhism once more comes into its own.³

Sastri paints a particularly vivid picture of Vijayabāhu's triumph over his Tamil-speaking and Śiva-worshipping former overlords, and of the resulting benefits for the Buddha-*śāsana*. Sastri's narrative is far from an outlier in the modern historiography of Poḷonnaruva—and this narrative is not the wholesale invention of modern historians. Rather, it follows the interpretation of the two texts composed under the patronage of Parākramabāhu II: the *Pūjāvaliya* and the *Mahāvamsa* extension. Both texts, I argue, are primarily interested in establishing a *continuity* of Sinhala Buddhist kingship which effectively bypasses the seven decades of Cōḷa rule. In so doing, they outlined a single unbroken *vamśa* (lineage) of appropriately "Buddhist" kings stretching backwards from their own patron, Parākramabāhu II, to the mythical Sinhala founder-king Vijaya. The period of occupation by Śiva-worshipping Cōḷa rulers complicated this lineage, necessitating creative reworkings. Neither text so much as mentions, during the period of Cōḷa rule, the names of the Cōḷa monarchs or even their local governors.⁴ Instead, both focus exclusively on the Sinhala-speaking rulers of Ruhūṇu, concluding with Vijayabāhu I, who were presented as monarchs-in-exile of Sri Lanka as a whole.

² See e.g. Knighton, *History*, 130–32; Tennent, *Ceylon*, 404–5; Codrington, *A Short History Of Ceylon*, ch. 4.

³ Sastri, "Vijayabāhu I, The Liberator of Laṅkā," 45; see further Sastri, "Cola Invasions," 437.

⁴ See *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 56; *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 782.

This chapter challenges this narrative, and the neat periodization of Sri Lankan history marked by the Cōla “interruption,” and Vijayabāhu’s subsequent “resumption,” of Buddhist rule. Of course, such a challenge is not entirely novel. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana and S. Pathmanathan have long been critical of the supposed distinction between “Anurādhapura,” “Cōla,” and “Poḷonnuruva” periods, and argue for a steadier continuity of ideas and institutions across all three.⁵ Archaeological evidence, too, suggests that the shift of power from Anurādhapura to Poḷonnaruva was not immediately accompanied by a change in existing demographic, agricultural, or hydraulic structures.⁶ This is reflected in the urban landscape of Poḷonnaruva itself, in which Buddhist *vihāras* and ritual precincts were comfortably constructed alongside earlier, Cōla-period temples to Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Gaṇeśa.⁷ The construction of the city itself serves, I think, as a useful metaphor for Vijayabāhu’s (re)construction of Lankan kingship: vigorous efforts dedicated to new Buddhist edifices, but not at the expense or to the exclusion of the Cōla period institutions which remained (physically and metaphorically) central.

The first section of this chapter argues that Vijayabāhu’s apparent “continuity” of Anurādhapuran kingship was carefully constructed: first by the king himself and his court; and then subsequently (to an even greater extent) by retrospective narratives like *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvaliya*. I demonstrate how Vijayabāhu engaged with multiple political cultures—the metaphorical “construction materials” described in the preceding chapter—to constitute a new form of Buddhist kingship at Poḷonnaruva. The second section draws on inscriptional evidence of Vijayabāhu’s engagements at the Sacred Footprint, a significant Buddha-Relic, as a performance of this new model of Buddhist kingship. Here I argue that he attempted to articulate—and make concrete through material interventions at the site—a strictly hierarchical socio-political order in a Buddhist milieu. Finally, I turn to what is often remembered as Vijayabāhu’s greatest contribution to Theravāda history: his supposed revival of monastic higher ordination with the assistance of monks from Rāmañña. Accounts of this revival, I show, have no support in contemporary evidence, and seems to originate entirely in later textual narratives. Together these arguments destabilize our received wisdom about Buddhism in Poḷonnaruva, and prime us to better understand the emergence of the Pali-oriented Buddhism we now call the Theravāda.

⁵ Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*; Gunawardana, *Periodization in Sri Lankan History*; Pathmanathan, “Kingship.”

⁶ Gilliland et al., “The Dry Tank.”

⁷ See further Meegama, *Temples to the Buddha and the Gods*, ch. 1.

(Re)Constructing Kingship

Vijayabāhu's final decisive victories over the Cōlas came in ca. 1070, with his conquest of both Anurādhapura, the previous royal capital, and Poḷonnaruva, the Cōla's own administrative capital. The capture of both of these cities entailed, both symbolically and pragmatically, Vijayabāhu's total control over the island as its new king, independent from Cōla overlordship. The question which must have then faced him was, in light of the very different models of kingship described in the preceding chapter, how exactly such a "king" was expected to act.

The later narrative accounts paint Vijayabāhu as a Sinhala Buddhist liberator, throwing off the yoke of Tamil-speaking, Śiva-worshipping oppression. On the basis of this account, a rejection of Cōla practices of kingship and a "reversion" to the model of the later Anurādhapuran kings seems only natural. A cursory inspection of Vijayabāhu's extant inscriptional corpus would also seem to support this. All of the extant inscriptions attributed to him personally (in other words, leaving aside the famous Tamil-language Vēlaikkāra inscription, discussed further below) are written in Sinhala language and script; almost every clause in their respective preambles has a parallel in the inscriptions of Mahinda IV, one of Anurādhapura's last independent monarchs.

One possible explanation for this apparent continuity between the inscriptions of Mahinda IV and those of Vijayabāhu is that Anurādhapuran practices of kingship were somehow "preserved" throughout the period of Cōla occupation. This is the explanation favoured by our later retrospective texts, which exclude any mention of Cōla governors from their descriptions of this period, and instead focus on a succession of "independent" monarchs ruling in exile from Ruḥuṇu, the island's southernmost province.⁸ The *Mahāvamsa* additionally describes an elaborate genealogy for Vijayabāhu which establishes him as a descendant of Mahinda V and, farther back, the founders of the Uttaromūla fraternity (discussed further below) of the Abhayagiri-*nikāya*.⁹ Modern scholars have generally accepted this tradition,

⁸ See respectively *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 56; *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Nāṇavimala, 782.

⁹ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 59, vv. 4–42. Geiger notes the jarring dissonance of this chapter from that which precedes it, but such is his dedication to the idea that the *Mahāvamsa* is an accurate "chronicle" that he attributes this to it being "taken from a new source, possibly from what I have called the 'Chronicle of Rohaṇa,'" in Geiger and Rickmers, *Cūlavamsa*, 1:192n3. No such *Rohaṇavamsa* has ever been found, or is even mentioned in premodern sources. This is entirely a fiction of modern

and suggest that Ruḥuṇu retained much of its independence throughout this period, even while the Cōḷas occupied the Rajaraṭa to the north.¹⁰

It is certainly possible that Cōḷa control over Ruḥuṇu was limited, and that this resulted in more cultural continuity in the region. But we might well doubt the implication that the institutions of (Sinhala, Buddhist) Anurādhapuran kingship were perfectly preserved in this rebellious southern province, waiting only for Vijayabāhu's ascension to be born anew. I argue instead that Vijayabāhu, upon his coronation in Anurādhapura, did not simply have a pre-existing sense of how the business of kingship "ought" to be carried out. Rather, he would have been faced with the challenge of (re)constructing what it meant to be a Lankan monarch from the ground up, in a manner intelligible both to internal audiences—the local rulers on whose support he relied to administer his realm—and external rivals, including of course the Cōḷa monarchs themselves. To these rivals Vijayabāhu would need to demonstrate not only his independence from his former overlords, but also his equal standing as a monarch, and therefore his equal ability to participate in the transregional arena of kingship. To achieve this careful balance between internal and external audiences, I suggest that Vijayabāhu drew on multiple models of kingship available to him—including, crucially, the Tamil-language practices of his erstwhile Cōḷa overlords.

To understand the degree to which Vijayabāhu engaged and synthesized these multiple discourses of kingship, we need first to abandon the notion of a (Sinhala, Buddhist, non-Tamil, non-Śaiva) cultural continuity stretching back to the "pre-Cōḷa" kingship of Anurādhapura, rigorously preserved and transmitted down the generations by equally Sinhala, Buddhist, non-Tamil, and non-Śaiva individuals. By the time Vijayabāhu claimed Anurādhapura's throne in ca. 1070, the island had been under Cōḷa occupation for over six decades. While, as discussed above, we have extensive inscriptions in Tamil from the Cōḷa period, we have identified none in Sinhala from the entire period between Mahinda IV and Vijayabāhu I.¹¹ We know too little about

historiography seeking to preserve the value it has assigned to the *Mahāvamsa* as a "historical source."

10 See further Knighton, *History*, 130; Ranawella, "A Political History," 149; Sastri, "Cola Invasions."

11 See the discussion of epigraphic sources in Ranawella, "A Political History," 34–35. The only inscription *possibly* from this period is the Sanskrit-language inscription at Kapārārāma (*IC* 5.ii.74), which records a private donation made in the thirteenth regnal year of a monarch named Śrī Saṅghabodhi, possibly Mahinda V (therefore ca. 995).

the practicalities of Lankan royal inscriptions: Who in the royal court composed them? Were they inscribed by local craftspeople, copied from manuscript templates? Or did royal scribes travel to oversee this process or perhaps even take the chisel themselves? However, this long absence of a living Sinhala inscriptional culture should alert us to the possible loss of the *skills* involved. Parallels to inscriptions of Mahinda IV, therefore, cannot be taken lightly as simply a continuity of practice: those involved in the production of Vijayabāhu's inscriptions must have studied the work of their forebears, in a deliberate and concentrated effort to emulate an existing inscriptional style.¹²

The strongest clue to the studious intentionality of Vijayabāhu's Anurādhapurān citations comes from his earliest extant inscription, a copper-plate grant dated to his twenty-seventh regnal year (ca. 1097).¹³ Shortly into the "work-like" portion of the grant, describing the circumstances under which Vijayabāhu issued the proclamation, we are told that he "illuminated his white parasol's interior with light refracted from the jewels of his crown" (IC 6.1, l. a6). This imagery is far from unusual in itself: sparkling gems and royal parasols are ubiquitous in South Asian poetics. The wording, however, is specific, and it is worth turning here to the original Sinhala. It reads: *kiruḷu miṇi rasiṇ paḷa sesat kis tavaramin vāḍā*. The term *kiruḷu* for "crown" is unusual in this period; we would more usually see *oṭuṇu*. So too is *kis* for head, rather than *kus*. I have been unable to find any earlier inscriptional

12 It is unclear whether this emulation can be described as "intentional." The internal psychology of these figures is of course entirely lost to us. We might well read these efforts as simply a product of their times, directed by the intellectual genealogies of power available to them: I am mindful of the thoughtful critiques made in Abeysekara, "On Rewriting Buddhism." My purpose in this chapter, and those which follow, is to document the extent to which those genealogies were more diverse than we have often thought, and that the resulting performance of Buddhist kingship at Polonnaruwa was therefore transcultural in nature. If my language leans towards the agentive in places, this is only because I have no clearer vocabulary available to describe the novelties borne of such processes.

13 IC notes that this inscription may well be a (slightly) later forgery, created by the family to whom the grant is dedicated "for as long as the sun and moon." It seems unlikely to me that, even if this were the case, the opening eulogy was entirely invented by those later forgers. Notably absent from the entire inscription is any mention of Vijayabāhu's overtures to the Rāmañña *saṅgha*, which seems to have become a defining feature of his reign in the later *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvaliya*. This leads me to believe that, even if the grant itself is a forgery, it must at least be based on an actual inscriptional eulogy from Vijayabāhu's realm, and since it is dated to his twenty-seventh year, the simplest explanation is that this date too was copied from whatever the forgers took as their source.

use of these terms, much less the entire phrase together.¹⁴ However, a nearly parallel phrase does appear in the *Siyabaslakara* (“Ornaments of Our Own Language”), a poetic manual dated perhaps to the tenth century, in a verse describing its own royal author:¹⁵

kivi guṇa māṇa maṇḍos nidos māti siri nives | kaḷa tātin ekatma tamā amaragiri kasub utumā ||

At the invitation of the noble Amaragiri Kasub (Skt. *Kāśyapa*), a receptacle for the jewels of poetic qualities, an abode for the splendour of faultless ministry, whose self is one [with, presumably, that of the author],

sirimat sen viyat **miṇi rasni kiruḷu** mē sat | **pāhāyu** vas **sēsāt kis** niriṇḍu kaḷē salamevan ||

this treatise was made by the auspicious Salamevan, Lord of Men, [who possessed] armies of scholars, [and] whose lineage (*vas*, Skt. *vaṃśa*) was illuminated by their **white parasols’ interiors with light refracted from the jewels in their crowns**.¹⁶

The parallel wording here is, I think, a clue that the wordsmiths and craft-people involved in the production of Vijayabāhu’s inscriptions were actively engaging with *Siyabaslakara*. Charles Godakumbura has long argued that the *Siyabaslakara* may actually be dated to the twelfth, rather than the tenth century.¹⁷ If so, the parallels between this verse and Vijayabāhu’s inscription might be taken as further evidence in support of Godakumbura’s dating. However, modern scholarship makes a tenth-century date for *Siyabaslakara* far more likely.¹⁸ Rather than synchronicity, I therefore suspect that what we are seeing here is the *Siyabaslakara* being used for exactly its intended purpose: to instruct later readers how best to write well in Sinhala (albeit in

14 The term *kiruḷu* does not appear in any inscriptions of the late Anurādhapura period (collected in *IC* vol. 5). The *Śrī Sumaṅgala Śabdakoṣaya* gives only later witnesses for the term: in the thirteenth-century *Kavsiḷuma* and fourteenth-century *Saddharmālaṅkāraya*.

15 These verses, the identity of this king Salamevan, and his relationship to the earliest extant commentator Ruvanmī, have been the subject of intense scholarly debate: Dimitrov, *Legacy of the Jewel Mind*, sec. 2.2; cf. Gornall, “Ratnamati et ses œuvres”; Hallisey et al., “Beauty to Beauty.” I am grateful to Alastair Gornall for discussing this work with me, and for generously providing me with some useful resources.

16 *Siyabaslakara*, ed. Jayatilaka, vv. 406–7.

17 Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature*, 330.

18 See most recently Hallisey et al., “Beauty to Beauty,” 145.

inscriptions rather than poetry). For Vijayabāhu and his court scribes, such a guide was likely a valuable resource, to be consulted alongside the inscriptions of earlier kings with whom he sought to identify himself. As we will see in later chapters, this was far from the last engagement with *Siyabaslakara* by Poḷonnaruva's rulers.

That Vijayabāhu's inscriptions seem to be modelled on those of Mahinda IV, in other words, might well be the result of careful craft. His revival of Anurādhapuran discourses of kingship—expressed primarily in Sinhala, exemplified in certain acts of pious protection of the Buddha-*śāsana*—should not be taken as an inevitable result of a “Sinhala Buddhist” way of doing things. Rather, it represents a deliberate attempt on Vijayabāhu's behalf to emulate Anurādhapura's kings, to fashion himself as their heir. Simultaneously, I argue, Vijayabāhu positioned himself as a successor to the Cōḷa overlords, drawing on Cōḷa practices of kingship with as much deliberation as he did the Anurādhapuran. His objective here was to make the rightfulness of his kingship intelligible to a broader transregional community of monarchs stretching across the Indian Ocean region, with whom he sought to communicate as a peer and equal.

The most obvious example of Vijayabāhu's continuity with his erstwhile overlords is the city of Poḷonnaruva itself. He received his royal consecration (*abhiṣeka*) at Anurādhapura, which indicates an acknowledgement of that city's long association with Lankan kingship. There is also good evidence that Anurādhapura continued to remain significant throughout his reign. The same copper-plate inscription discussed above (IC 6.1) records a proclamation made from atop the lion-throne in Anurādhapura, surrounded by a full royal court (*rajagaṇa*) consisting of his brothers, designated heirs (the *āpā* and *mahāpā*, here called *māyā*) and sub-king (ll. a6–7).¹⁹ Despite the clear symbolic importance of Anurādhapura, however, Vijayabāhu chose to keep his residence at, and carry on the daily business of government from, Poḷonnaruva.

The later kings of Anurādhapura had certainly spent time in Poḷonnaruva, and a large number of inscriptions from this period are still extant there. But it was the Cōḷas who made it their dedicated administrative centre. This new location may have provided added security against uprisings from the south, thanks to the natural protection offered in that direction by the Mahavāli

¹⁹ The entirely male composition of this group provides a useful contrast to that involved in the issuing of Niśśaṅka Malla's copper-plate grant (IC 6.58), discussed in Chapter Six.

river.²⁰ And while ports further north, at Mantai (T. Mātōṭṭam, P. Mahātitttha) and Kayts (T. Ūrattuṟai, Sin. Ūrātoṭa), remained important centres of trade throughout the Poḷonnaruva period, the Mahavāli may also have offered easier access to developing ports like Trincomalee (T. Tirukkōṇamalai, Sin. Gokaṇṇa) on the eastern coast.²¹ Whatever their reasons for basing themselves at Poḷonnaruva, the day-to-day bureaucratic institutions of rule were located in the city for the seven decades of Cōla administration. For these reasons, and despite Anurādhapura's prestige, it may have simply been more prudent for Vijayabāhu to carry on ruling from the same site as his predecessors had done for so many years. This division of labour across the two capitals may well have had symbolic weight: Vijayabāhu issued copper-plate grants from Anurādhapura, recalling the memory of powerful independent monarchs like Mahinda IV; but he also ruled from Poḷonnaruva, simultaneously replacing the Cōla governors.

As Sujatha Meegama has recently shown, the built landscape of Poḷonnaruva itself suggests continuity between its Cōla and Sinhala rulers. Inscriptional evidence tells us that the many theist *devālayas* within and around the city walls were first built during the Cōla period. However, Meegama argues that monarchs from Vijayabāhu onwards continued to patronize these shrines alongside their own, more explicitly Buddhist, sites.²² Alongside later passages in the *Mahāvamsa*, her evidence includes two inscriptions at Kantale (some 45km north of Poḷonnaruva). The earlier of these inscriptions, dated in the forty-second regnal year of Vijayabāhu (ca. 1096), records a private donation by a Brahmin woman named Naṅkaicāṇi to “the Deity of [the temple] Teṇ Kailāsam Śrīvijayarāja Īśvaram, in the district of Vijayarāja[c] Caturvvēdi, also called Kantalāy” (*TISL* 7, ll. 3–5). The second inscription (*TISL* 29), dated ca. 1144, uses the same name. Earlier inscriptions in Kantale, however, refer to it as Rājarājac Caturvēdi, presumably named after the Cōla monarch who conquered Lanka at the end of the tenth century. Meegama interprets this as evidence that Vijayabāhu took over patronage of town and temple from his erstwhile overlords, and renamed them accordingly. In other words, even as a “Buddhist king” he continued the Cōla-period practice of patronizing theist temples and their wider institutions.

²⁰ de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 26.

²¹ Blackburn, “Buddhist Connections,” 243; Siriweera, “Economic Conditions,” 228–30.

²² Meegama, *Temples to the Buddha and the Gods*, 23–25.



Figure 6a. Design of Anurādhapuran coinage, reading *śrī laṃkā vibhu*. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after H. W. Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency* (Richards, 1924), pl. II, no. 45. Used with permission.



Figure 6b. Design of Rājarāja's coinage, reading *śrī rāja rāja*. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency*, pl. IV, no. 104. Used with permission.



Figure 6c. Design of Vijayabāhu's coinage, reading *śrī vija yabā hu*. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency*, pl. III, no. 74. Used with permission.

Another important source of evidence here is Vijayabāhu's royal coinage. Coinage has increasingly been recognized as a powerful tool through which medieval monarchs "conveyed potent, officially sanctioned messages to mass audiences in every stratum of society in ways that no other medium was capable of."²³ Close attention to numismatic choices can therefore reveal much about a ruler's self-fashioning in a hyper-compacted format. Numismatic evidence from Poḷonnaruva provides us with a powerful indicator that Cōḷa-Lankan influences were not unidirectional (Fig. 6a–c).

²³ Solway, *Medieval Coins and Seals*, 13.

Lankan coinage prior to the Cōḷa period was typically stamped only with the legend *śrī laṃkā vibhu*, and a distinctive humanoid figure.²⁴ Upon Rājarāja Cōḷa's annexation of Lanka, he incorporated this "standing man" iconography into his own coinage, alongside the monarch's name in Nāgarī script.²⁵ Vijayabāhu's coinage, and that of all Poḷonnaruvan kings following him, imitated this Cōḷa style by including both the "standing man" and the monarch's name in Nāgarī.²⁶ Once again, we see a dual evocation: the long-standing visual symbolism of Anurādhapura's kings, coupled with the Cōḷa practice of announcing the name of the reigning monarch. The continued use of Nāgarī script is particularly significant, suggesting that these coins may have been intended to communicate Vijayabāhu's kingship not only internally. Rather, as Kenneth Hall suggests for the original uptake of Nāgarī script in Cōḷa coinage, the intent was likely "interaction with external networks of communication, which were perceived as being important to local needs."²⁷ These coins, and their regionally-recognizable script, are therefore a useful indication of how broad the intended audience of Vijayabāhu's kingly self-representation was.

We should not assume, however, that the internal/external audience distinction can be neatly mapped upon linguistic lines: that domestic audiences were addressed in Sinhala, while more regional languages such as Tamil and scripts like Nāgarī were directed towards foreign rulers. We have good evidence, after all, that Tamil remained in use as a courtly and administrative language, *alongside* Sinhala, long into the Poḷonnaruva period. Tamil-language inscriptions, attributed to kings and courtiers alike, are extant through to the time of Līlāvati.²⁸ No Tamil-language inscriptions of Vijayabāhu I himself survive, but we might take the posthumous Vēḷaikkāra pillar-inscription (*TISL* 42, discussed further below) as evidence of the ongoing relationship between the titular merchant-mercenary guild and the institutions of kingship in the post-Cōḷa era—a relationship made concrete in a Tamil-language inscription.

24 Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency*, 54.

25 Biddulph, *Coins of the Cholas*, 25; Medis, "An Over View," 61–62.

26 Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency*, 63–64.

27 Hall, "Coinage, Trade, and Economy," 549.

28 Later Tamil-language inscriptions are attributed to an official of Jayabāhu I (*TISL* 43); to Gajabāhu II (*TISL* 28b, 29, 30, and 52); to an official of Mānābharaṇa (*TISL* 51b); to Parākramabāhu I (*TISL* 53); and to an official of Līlāvati (*TISL* 54).

Finally, we have good evidence for Cōḷa influence on royal titles themselves, particularly the title *cakravartin*. While it has long been assumed that Buddhist monarchs in South Asia from Aśoka downwards freely adopted the title *cakravartin* in emulation of the superhuman monarchs of the Pali canon (discussed in the preceding chapter), this title is in fact rarely attested in Southern Asia prior to the twelfth century.²⁹ The earliest monarch to have explicitly claimed this title for himself in an extant inscription was Rājakesari Virarājendra Cōḷa (r. 1062–1070), in an inscription dated 1070; he was soon followed by his more famous successor Kulottuṅga I, who in May 1074 began calling himself *tiripuvaṇac cakkiravarttikaḷ* (the “*cakravartin* of the three worlds”). Vijayabāhu I is called a *cakravartin* (as T. *cakravarttikaḷ*) in the (posthumous) Vēlaikkāra inscription TISL 42, but not in any of his own extant inscriptions (IC 6.1 and 2). This might, therefore, be a retrospective assignment of *cakravartin* status. But his son, Jayabāhu, is also called *cakravartin* in several inscriptions of the “interregnal” period discussed in the following chapter, again all in Tamil (see, e.g., TISL 51a and b). It is only with an inscription of Gajabāhu II that we see a *cakravartin* claim appear in Sinhala (as *aṇasakviti* in IC 6.9). The title therefore likely entered Sri Lankan courts through Tamil first, and only later appears to have been taken up in Sinhala-language political discourse. If we accept, as I have suggested above, that both Sinhala and Tamil continued to be used as courtly languages from Vijayabāhu’s reign onwards, then it seems very possible, if not likely, that the title *cakravartin* was indeed used in Vijayabāhu’s own court (in Tamil), but was simply not recorded in any of his own Sinhala-language inscriptions.

That *cakravartin* claims first appear in Sri Lankan royal inscriptions in the Tamil language, and so soon after the Cōḷa monarchs began to call themselves *cakravartins*, is unlikely to have been a coincidence. S. Pathmanathan identified this pattern over four decades ago, and suggested that the likely inspiration “was due to influences from contemporary neighbouring kingdoms and sources outside the Buddhist tradition,” particularly the Cōḷas.³⁰ We might also assign to Lanka’s *cakravartin* claims, which rapidly followed those of their former Cōḷa overlords, a certain strategic value: what better way to signal one’s independence from a rival than to claim an equivalent “rank”? “The Cōḷa monarch may well be a *cakkiravarttikaḷ*,” we can imagine

²⁹ See further Shirley, “Towards an Intellectual History of *Cakravartin* Kingship.”

³⁰ Pathmanathan, “Kingship,” 124. Pathmanathan is, unfortunately, led astray by Sastri, who claims that Rājārāja I was the first Cōḷa to be called a *cakravartin* by his subjects despite the lack of inscriptional evidence: Sastri, *The Cōḷas*, 448; quoted in Pathmanathan, “Kingship,” 124–25.

the logic proceeding, “but so too are we Poḷonnaruva monarchs *cakravartins*—they can have their *cakra* on Jambudvīpa, and we shall have ours on Laṅkādvīpa.” Alternatively, we might explain the rapid proliferation of these claims as simply an effort at “Keeping Up with the *Cakravartins*.” After all, once a critical mass of monarchs in the Indian Ocean region had begun to claim *cakravartin* status, who would want to be the last to do so?

Although I argue, here and elsewhere, that we should not confuse historical claim to *cakravartin* status with canonical descriptions of superhuman *cakravartins*, there is one textual point to which we should attend. Canonical texts tell us, repeatedly, that a *cakravartin*—along with a Buddha, the god Śakra (Indra), Māra (the Buddhist “devil”), and the god Brahmā—cannot be a woman.³¹ *Cakravartinship* in a Buddhist context might therefore not only represent a claim to higher political status; it is a claim to an exclusively masculine status, unavailable to women. We will return to the implications of this in Chapter Seven.

These four points—the cityscape, numismatic design, the ongoing use of Tamil as a courtly and administrative language, and the adoption of Cōḷa regional stylings—challenge the idea that an essential Sinhala kingship reemerged in Polonnaruva unchanged. Together with the evidence presented above for engagement with sources like the *Siyabaslakara*, they suggest a careful deliberation in Vijayabāhu’s royal self-representation. Vijayabāhu’s identity as a “Buddhist king” cannot be reduced to unconscious mimesis of his Anurādhapurāna predecessors, but was instead the synthetic product of the multiple discursive paradigms available to him. It seems intended to be doubly intelligible: both to the internal audiences who constituted his officials, subordinates, and tributaries; and to external audiences across the Indian Ocean, who could recognize him as an independent and sovereign peer, on equal standing to his former overlords.

This has not been to suggest that discourses of kingship at Polonnaruva can be simply reduced down to a mixture of pre-existing components borrowed, respectively, from discrete “Sinhala,” “Pali,” and “Tamil” precursors. This framing has had a heuristic value in pushing back against the notion that Polonnaruva kingship represented an outright rejection of Cōḷa influences. To hold too firmly to this cultural distinction going forward, however, would blind us to the discursive innovations made possible within this referent framework. The purpose of this section has been to illustrate the broad range of referents on which Vijayabāhu and his Polonnaruva successors

31 The “Five Impossibles.” See most succinctly *Aṅgutta Nikāya*, ed. Morris, 1.279–83.

could draw in their own self-fashioning as Buddhist kings—broader, perhaps, than modern disciplinary boundaries (“Buddhist Studies,” distinct from classical Indology; “Sri Lankan history,” distinct from wider South Asian history) might normally look towards. In the following sections we can begin to trace out what Vijayabāhu and his successors made of these referents: the novel visions of kingship articulated at Poḷonnaruva, which repeatedly refigured the proper relationship between king and *śāsana* in a densely interconnected world.

Hierarchies of Kingship at Śrī Pāda

On a hill near Ambagamuwa, just south of the mountain called (among other names) Śrī Pāda, stands a long inscription (*IC* 6.2) dated to Vijayabāhu’s thirty-eighth regnal year (ca. 1108).³² This inscription records the king’s donation of the local area to the titular Sacred Footprint (*śrī pāda*) atop the mountain, believed by Buddhists to be a use-relic (*pāribhogika-dhātu*) of the Buddha himself. There is good reason to think that this inscription was once part of a matching series, established in villages surrounding the mountain to mark a large swathe of donations to the Sacred Footprint.³³ As Anne Blackburn has shown, engagement with Buddha-relics like the Sacred Footprint often served as a core technology of statecraft for Buddhist rulers across the Indian Ocean region, particularly in moments of political transition or instability.³⁴

32 Other names for the mountain include Samantakūṭa or Samanaḷakanda (“the Peak of [the god] Saman”), Civaṇḍipātamaḷai (“the Peak of Śiva’s Lustrous Foot[print]”), or Adam’s Peak, variously reflecting Buddhist, Śaiva, Muslim, and Christian claims about the Sacred Footprint at its peak. On the long history of such claims, see McKinley, *Mountain at the Center of the World*. To avoid suggesting endorsement of any particular sectarian claims, I refer to the mountain as simply Śrī Pāda throughout.

33 This inscription lists its own findsite, Amubagamuwa, as just one among many such villages donated to the upkeep and maintenance of the Sacred Footprint’s temple and environs. It seems likely, therefore, that matching inscriptions once stood in other villages surrounding the sacred mountain. A heavily effaced inscription found at Gilīmalaya (*IC* 6.3) shares some, but not all, of its text with the Ambagamuwa inscription. Gilīmalaya is mentioned in the later *Mahāvamsa* account as another village donated for the maintenance of rest-houses along the pilgrimage route. *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 60, vv. 64–67. This may suggest that a second set of inscriptions was created to mark such rest-house donations, based on the same template as that used in villages like Ambagamuwa donated directly to the footprint. If so, even more deliberation must have been put into the wording of this “mass-produced” inscriptional text than usual, meriting our close attention to its contents.

34 Blackburn, “Buddha-Relics,” 320.

Through their evocation of protective and benedictive powers—and, simultaneously (if perhaps more cynically), demonstrating the economic power and pious largess of the royal donor—such engagements provided unparalleled opportunities for the public articulation of idealized visions of society, led by idealized monarchs.

In this section I suggest that we can productively read the Ambagamuva inscription as articulating a hierarchical vision of society on a cosmological scale, in which Vijayabāhu himself serves as a vital pivot between the sovereign Buddha and the earthly kingdom. Here I draw heavily on Ronald Inden's notion of a "hierarchy of kingship:" an understanding of authority cascading down from a supreme deity (*usually* Viṣṇu or Śiva) to a paramount king, through subordinate kings, then down to other social classes.³⁵ As Alastair Gornall has argued, monastic authors from the later Poḷonnaruva period were concerned with rhetorically establishing just such a hierarchy within Lanka:

Monastic elites presented themselves, rather than the king and his court, under the Buddha at the apex of Lanka's long chain of lordship, and believed that the superior rights enjoyed by the Buddha should extend first to them before the king.³⁶

Gornall's analysis succinctly lays out the political and economic stakes which could lie in such re-articulations of social hierarchies under the auspices of a new king-of-kings: the Buddha himself. Long before Gornall's monastic authors attempted such a re-articulation in their own favour, however, I suspect that Vijayabāhu may have done the same.

The inscription at Ambagamuwa can be divided into four unequal parts. The first section (ll. a1–21) is a series of adjectival and verbal clauses all describing Vijayabāhu himself (named in l. a21), who then constitutes the main agent of the following text. This section, like the copper-plate inscription discussed above, closely follows the exemplar of Mahinda IV, borrowing large chunks of text from the earlier monarch's inscriptions. Several lines, however, appear to be unprecedented in Anurādhapurān (or, for that matter, Cōḷa) inscriptions; their stock metaphors and use of clear Sanskrit loanwords speak to an ongoing engagement with wider regional literary trends by Vijayabāhu and his courtiers. Following this opening, a short second section (ll. a22–23) sets the temporal frame: in the thirty-seventh year after his defeat of the "Tamils" (*demeḷa*) and coronation as monarch. A lengthy third section (ll. a23–b50) describes the actions carried out in this year at, and

35 Inden, "Hierarchies of Kings."

36 Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 13.

with respect to, the Sacred Footprint atop Śrī Pāda, including the donation of villages. Finally, the (partially erased) final section lists the local officials by whom Vijayabāhu's will was carried out. Three elements of this inscription are central to my reading of it as a social hierarchization: one taken from the first section, describing Vijayabāhu himself; and the latter two from section three, describing his actions at the mountain.

The first crucial point is a list of auspicious beings and objects, against whom the monarch's virtuous qualities are favourably compared. Such lists were not uncommon in late Anurādhapurān inscriptional culture. The Jeta-vana inscriptions of Mahinda IV, for example, describe its kingly patron as:

being the moon in munificence; the ocean in depth; Meru in firmness; the Lord of Wealth (Kubera) in wealth; a container for *guṇas* (lit. "qualities," typically virtuous qualities); a dwelling for the ten *raddhammas* (Skt. *rājadharmas*); a casket for the gem of the Triple Gem; a single supporting pillar for the Sage's *sasna* (*śāsana*); like Śirī (Śrī) for every prosperity (*sirī/śrī*); [and] a support for the world" (IC 5.ii.67, ll. 5–7).

These references—particularly to the ten *rājadharmas*, discussed in the preceding chapter—are more or less what we might expect from a solidly "Buddhist" monarch. While Kubera was a pan-sectarian figure, he was firmly enshrined in the Buddhist cosmos as one of the four directional guardian deities, and based on archaeological evidence was a popular cultic figure in Anurādhapura.³⁷ The comparison to the goddess Śrī might strike us as unusual, but we should note that this is the only figure in Mahinda IV's list who is described with the particle of analogy, "*sē*"; Mahinda IV is only *like* Śrī, whereas he is fully identified *as* the other entities on the list.

Vijayabāhu's list, however, exhibits a wider pantheon of kingly virtues. He is described as having:

surpassed the sun in ascetic heat (*tēda*, Skt. *tejas*), Mehesura (Maheśvara, i.e., Śiva) in expressed anger, Uvindu (Upendra, Viṣṇu) in great pride,³⁸ Surendra (Indra) in kingly conduct (*rāja-virit*, *rāja-vṛtta*), the Lord of Wealth (Kubera) in continuous giving, Kitisuru in *satseta*,³⁹ Suraguru (Bṛhaspati) in essen-

37 Paranavitana, "Sīgiri"; Mudiyanse, "Three Unpublished Mahāyāna Bronzes," 47–49.

38 Among Viṣṇu's thousand names (as listed in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*) are Darpahan ("destroyer of pride") and Darpada ("Producer of Pride").

39 The potential significance of this line outweighs any confidence we have in its meaning. Both Wickramasinghe and Ranawella render *satseta* as "[bestowing] happiness to living beings" (IC 6:9; EZ 2:215); I would instead interpret it as "the good (*sat*) peace (*kṣanti*)," which must refer to *nirvāṇa*. Wickramasinghe renders

tial wisdom, the moon in munificent quality, Kandap (Kandarpa) in bodily excellence, [and] the *bodhisattva* in the splendour of compassion (IC 6.2, ll. 10–13).

This is a considerably more cosmopolitan cosmos than that of Mahinda IV. We are presented with a nearly doxographic list of South Asian deities: from Śiva and Viṣṇu, major gods adopted as personal deities by powerful rulers across the Indian Ocean region; to less highly-ranked deities like Kandarpa.⁴⁰ This should not be a surprise. South Asian religions have long been recognized as kathenotheistic. Even the most devout Vaiṣṇava does not necessarily deny the existence or the potency of Śiva; she merely believes him to be subordinate to her own deity Viṣṇu. Yet Buddhism (and, for that matter, Jainism) are often sectioned out as natural “outsiders” to this ecumenical dynamic. The inclusion of these deities as salient references for Vijayabāhu’s laudable qualities therefore serves as a powerful counterpoint to the tired trope of fundamental antagonism between Buddhists and theists.

However, this section of the inscription goes beyond mere cosmological inclusivity. Kathenotheism is fundamentally hierarchical: multiple deities exist and are potentially potent sources of protection or benediction, but not all are equal. This dynamic is very evident in Vijayabāhu’s list of superlative virtues. Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the other deities are set alongside a *bodhisattva*, a “mere” Buddha-in-training. The Buddha himself, meanwhile, remains apart and therefore above; he alone is incomparable. This is an example, in other words, of what John Holt might call assimilation into a Buddhist soteriology.⁴¹ Vijayabāhu, meanwhile, is described as not just *being* the auspicious individuals listed, as in the inscriptions of Mahinda IV, but as *surpassing* them: he is positioned somewhere between the Buddha, at the apex of the hierarchy, and the ranks of “lesser” deities like Śiva and Viṣṇu. A clear cosmological hierarchy is set in place by this description, one in which theist deities are

Kitisuru (I think correctly) as Kīrtiśvara (“Lord of Fame”). While there are several temples with variants on that name throughout South Asia, I do not know a single deity commonly referred to by the title. Ranawella suggests Avalokiteśvara, which—while I think less plausible on philological grounds—would certainly provide more punch to my reading of “surpasses in [proximity to] *nirvāṇa*.”

40 Kandarpa is an alternate name for Kāma, the god of desire and love; see *Amarakośa*, ed. Sastri, ch. 1, vv. 53–56. This section of the *Amarakośa*, notably, also includes Māra—the Buddhist embodiment of death and rebirth in *saṃsāra*—as another alternative name for Kandarpa; an apparently unlikely reference point for a Buddhist monarch like Vijayabāhu!

41 Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, ch. 1.

certainly participant, but subordinate to the earthly monarch and then, yet higher, to the Buddha himself.

To be clear, the inclusion of Viṣṇu, and even Śiva, in a Sri Lankan divine hierarchy was not unprecedented. Both deities clearly appear in fragmentary images found inside a relic chamber at Mahiyaṅgaṇa, dating perhaps as early as the eighth century.⁴² The centrepiece of the visual program seems to have been four images of the Buddha enthroned under a Bo tree, with various divine beings watching on. This is a standard scene from all narratives of the Buddha's life, but the explicit inclusion of Viṣṇu and Śiva among the attendants is noteworthy. The Mahiyaṅgaṇa mural portrays them as eagerly expecting the awakening of a Buddha, if not as full-blown devotees, suggesting that even by this period the island's Buddhist artisans were thinking about the relative status of the Buddha and these particular "rivals." Vijayabāhu's positioning of Viṣṇu and Śiva, alongside other deities, as inferior to the Buddha is therefore certainly not unprecedented. But it does seem to be particularly pointed that he positions *himself* as surpassing them, alongside a "mere" *bodhisattva*.

Further on in the same inscription, Vijayabāhu describes the Buddha as having been elevated by further ritual acts he carried out atop Śrī Pāda in his thirty-seventh regnal year. Here the inscription departs from the expected syntax. Instead of the typical run-on sentence with its string of gerunds, we are faced instead with discrete, short sentences punctuated by final verb forms. This shift in tone encourages us, perhaps, to read slower; it lends a sense of deliberation to the royal actions thus described.

He made a *pūjā* with various adornments, made of the seven gems of variegated colour, at the Footprint Relic at Samanōlakuḷa, which bore the Sacred Relics of the lotus-feet of the four Buddhas—Kakusanda, Koṇāgamana, Kāssapa, and Gotama—who were awakened in this eon (*kāpa*; Skt. *kalpa*). He raised aloft various silk canopies, flags, and banners. Having anointed it with four perfumes, he enhanced the Footprint Relic with his own bejewelled crown (*IC* 6.2, ll. a24–29).

Vijayabāhu's ritual offering up of his *own* crown to the Sacred Footprint positions the relic as his overlord. Alexander McKinley has shown that later monarchs and monks increasingly treated the mountain itself as a monarch.⁴³

⁴² Ward, "Recently Discovered Mahiyangana Paintings." Cōla coins from the eleventh century were found within the chamber, suggesting use until at least that late: Paranavitana, "The Art and Architecture of the Polonnaruwa Period," 88.

⁴³ McKinley, *Mountain at the Center of the World*, 63.

Here, however, it is specifically the relic, an ongoing manifestation of the Buddha himself—and, before him, the other three Buddhas of our current era—who are thus exalted. This regalization of the Footprint is not limited to the offering-up of the crown. Reading these acts as simultaneously a *pūja* and a coronation ceremony allows us to tease out deeper meanings behind the offerings. The “seven jewels” (*satruvan*, Skt. *saptaratna*) evoke the physical gemstones which are mined from the area surrounding Śrī Pāda, and which have long been associated with it. But they also, perhaps, represent the seven metaphorical “jewels” which serve as the palladia of a *cakravartin* monarch in Buddhist scriptures. Mentions of “silk canopies, banners, and flags” might similarly evoke the parasol (Skt. *chatra*), an iconic symbol of royal authority throughout Southern Asia. These ritual acts together, I am suggesting, served to subordinate Vijayabāhu—the exemplary, but merely human, king—to the higher kingship of the Buddha himself, as manifested in his Footprint relic, establishing a thoroughly Buddhist “hierarchy of kingship.”

This hierarchy, however, did not only extend upwards. Here we might attend to the edificial works Vijayabāhu’s inscription describes as having been carried out at the mountain itself, supported by the donation of villages like Ambagamuwa. This donation was, we are told, made in order:

to bestow renovations, *pūjā*, images [and] lamp-lighting at Samanoḷakūḷa which bears the Footprint Relic; and for the food-offerings made to the honourable *mahāsaṅgha* which arrives from the four quarters to worship the Relic here; and to bestow alms, given to the remaining pilgrims who have come and gathered to worship the Relic; and, having had alms-halls established in Our name at each *gavu* (a unit of distance) in the final five *gavu* along the Rajaraṭa way, having furnished them with the means for alms, to give [those] alms; and, having had made a lower terrace (*maḷuva*) below the terrace which bears the Footprint Relic, to have the Sage’s Relic worshipped by the low-born (*adhamajātīn*); and, having raised a great wall around the upper terrace, having had built two gates at the two paths, having furnished them with keys and locks, to have the Sage’s Relic worshipped by those engaged in protection (*IC* 6.2, ll. b28–37).

Here, Vijayabāhu constructs (both literally and discursively) a clear stratification of worship. The sequence is, I think, significant: the king himself provides the most elaborate offerings; then monks who have travelled to do worship; then the “remaining” (*sesu*) pilgrims. These individuals, presumably, all had *some* degree of access to the relic itself in its temple complex.

Vijayabāhu then creates, however, a lower level to this temple complex; a secondary terrace intended for the worship of those of lower castes (*jāti*). This is a decidedly *dharmaśāstric* term, which earlier commentators on this

inscription have noted is “unusual” in a Lankan context.⁴⁴ The invocation of this group in the inscription is *framed* positively: Vijayabāhu builds them this dedicated terrace to provide them an opportunity to worship. But it is hard to read this as anything but a decisive segregation (not least when we consider the immediately subsequent references to walls, gates, and locks protecting the upper terrace). Finally—perhaps to strengthen the security provided to the upper terrace by the aforementioned physical protections—Vijayabāhu invokes the worship of “those engaged in protection” (*rakṣāyodāviyāyuttan*), presumably dedicated guards. It is possible that such guards were foreign mercenaries, the services of whom had long been considered prestigious on the island.⁴⁵ As discussed below, the other significant relic of the Poḷonnaruva period—the Tooth Relic—was entrusted to the care of the Vēḷaikkāra merchant/mercenary guild not long after Vijayabāhu’s death.

Together, these discursive references and physical interventions at Śrī Pāda lay out a clear social hierarchy. The Buddha himself sits at the apex, his physical relic crowned by the earthly monarch Vijayabāhu. That monarch, in turn, surpasses a doxographic pantheon of other deities in his laudatory qualities; he also makes the most prestigious offerings to that same relic, placing him at the forefront of the Buddha’s worshipper-subjects on the island. Those subjects are then ranked in turn: monks and (high-caste) pilgrims below the king, but still given a degree of direct access to the Buddha’s footprint relic; low-caste worshippers kept at a (literal) distance on their own dedicated terrace; and finally those whom the king has tasked with protection of the relic, its ritual complex, and therefore the integrity of the tiered social order constructed within. By engaging with Śrī Pāda, Vijayabāhu was able to articulate in lithic form a new, explicitly Buddhist social order on the island, with the Buddha at the apex but he himself close behind. This hierarchy did not exclude (what we might think of today as) Buddhism’s soteriological rivals, primarily the gods Viṣṇu and Śiva: rather, it integrated them into, and so subordinated them within, the Buddhist social order.

This would not be the last time that a Poḷonnaruvan monarch engaged significantly with Śrī Pāda. As we will see in Chapter Six, Niśśaṅka Malla made several pilgrimages of his own to worship at the Buddha’s footprint, and even left behind what may be a rare portrait of himself still visible on the rockface. For now, however, let us return to Poḷonnaruva itself, and to what has been remembered as the most influential act of Vijayabāhu’s reign: his revival of the monastic order.

⁴⁴ Walpola Rahula *thero*, *History*, 237.

⁴⁵ Indrapala, “South Indian Mercantile Communities,” 158.

“Reviving” the *Saṅgha*

Nearly all later historical narratives relate how Vijayabāhu was faced, at the advent of his reign, with what would become a semi-recurring problem throughout Lankan history: there were simply too few monks available on the island to meet the quorum required for further higher ordinations (*upasampadā*).⁴⁶ These narratives insist that this was a result of Cōla oppressions. The *Pūjāvaliya*, for example, tells us that the *śāsana* was outright “destroyed by the Tamils.”⁴⁷ This is almost certainly an embellishment. While the Cōlas were devotees of Śiva, we have no evidence for intentional suppression of Buddhism within the Cōla heartlands, and it would be surprising to see such a policy enacted—for no obvious gain—in the new *maṇṭalam* of Lanka. A more moderate interpretation would be that the sudden absence of royal patronage arrangements, upon which the monastic communities had long relied, simply disrupted their institutional and ritual lives to an extent that Vijayabāhu, decades later, could claim an absence of fully ordained monks.⁴⁸ Whatever the cause, all our retrospective narratives are clear about Vijayabāhu’s response. He sent gifts to a “King Anuruddha” in Rāmañña (Sin. Aramaṇa, T. Arumaṇam; likely King Anaurathā of Pagan, r. ca. 1044–1077),⁴⁹ and procured in return a quorum of fully-ordained monks, which he used to “revive” the *saṅgha* in Lanka. Memories of Vijayabāhu’s overtures to Rāmañña would be repeatedly invoked in later centuries across the Indian Ocean region, as monks continued to travel back and forth, and the ties between *nikāyas* wove together yet more tightly.

However, an incongruity lurks within this account. If the *śāsana* so declined under Cōla rule that there were fewer than five monks left on the

⁴⁶ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 60, vv. 4–7; *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 782; *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, ed. Samaranāyaka, 76. The Theravāda *Vinaya* requires that male monastics receive their *upasampadā* from a quorum of five fully-ordained male monastics; female aspirants for higher ordination require (in the most conservative reading) a quorum of five male and five female fully-ordained monastics. This latter requirement continues to complicate modern attempts at reviving female higher ordination in Theravāda countries today.

⁴⁷ *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 782.

⁴⁸ See the arguments made in Blackburn, “Buddhist Connections,” 241.

⁴⁹ On the identity, and names, of this locale, see Aung-Thwin, *Pagan*, ch. 3; Blackburn, “Buddhist Connections,” 242. Aung-Thwin suggests, incorrectly, that the Sinhala placename “Aramaṇa” should not be taken as synonymous with the Pali placename “Rāmañña.” “Aramaṇa” is a highly plausible adaption of the Tamil “Arumaṇam,” in turn a highly plausible adaption of the Pali “Rāmañña.” Compare *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 782; *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 58, vv. 8–10.

island altogether, this would have presumably entailed the extinction of all three of Anurādhapura's ordination lineages (the Mahāvihāra-, Abhayagiri-, and Jetavana-*nikāyas*). Yet all these narratives continue to refer to three distinct *nikāyas* in the period following Vijayabāhu's reign. Indeed, the core narrative of the Parākramabāhu chapters of the *Mahāvamsa* (discussed in Chapter Five below) is arguably his unification of these *nikāyas* into one. We have good reason to think that these *nikāyas* did indeed maintain distinct institutional identities between Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu. The Vēlaikkāra pillar inscription (*TISL* 42, discussed below and in the following chapter) refers to the monks of Poḷonnaruva's central monastery as affiliates of the Abhayagiri. An inscription dated to Vijayabāhu's fiftieth or fifty-fifth regnal year, meanwhile, records a donation made to a monastic college (*piriveṇa*) affiliated to the Mahāvihāra (*IC* 6.6). Multiple inscriptions of later monarchs, including Parākramabāhu himself, refer explicitly to the "three *nikāyas*." Does this mean that Vijayabāhu revived all three *nikāyas* as distinct institutions with his Rāmaññan monks, only to have them unified by Parākramabāhu in the following century?

This seems unlikely on pragmatic grounds. While all three first-millennium *nikāyas* likely shared a common set of core texts, probably including a Pali-language *Vinaya*, their interpretations of this *Vinaya* differed significantly enough that they could no longer co-ordain or co-habitate. The legal and ritual capacity to co-habitate is, after all, a defining feature of a distinct *nikāya*.⁵⁰ As a result of these incommensurate *Vinaya* interpretations, a rivalrous network of monasteries developed in the Anurādhapuran hinterlands, each following the interpretation of—and therefore affiliating to—only one of the three central monasteries.⁵¹ These networks also extended beyond the island. We know of a monastery in Java with possible connections to the Abhayagiri.⁵² Buddhist monks in Southeast India, meanwhile, seem to have had a longstanding connection to the Mahāvihāra;⁵³ and as late as the twelfth or thirteenth century the Cōḷa monk Mahākāśyapa famously critiqued his rival Śāriputra, discussed in Chapter Five, as having been waylaid by the schismatic opinions of

50 Following Schonthal, "Judging in the Buddha's Court," 4n12.

51 Coningham et al., "Archaeology and Cosmopolitanism," 40.

52 Sundberg, "Wilderness Monks."

53 Most famously, the Mahāvihāran exegete Buddhaghosa tells us that he spent time in Kāñcīpura. Other references to Mahāvihāras and Jetavanas have been found in inscriptions throughout Southeastern India, but cf. the arguments against overconflation in Tournier, "A Tide of Merit," 21–35.

the Abhayagiri.⁵⁴ It therefore would have been very possible for Vijayabāhu to have assembled, from among this monastic diaspora, three quora (of at least five senior monks apiece) for three separate ordination lineages, complete with their own respective *Vinaya* hermeneutics. However, this is not what any of sources describe Vijayabāhu as having done.

Rather, every available account (including the Vēḷaikkāra inscription discussed below) tells us that he retrieved these monks from Rāmañña. The *nikāya* identity of Buddhism in Lower Myanmar at this stage is somewhat unclear. A large number of Pali-language citational inscriptions—meaning inscriptions quoting various canonical phrases or verses, most frequently the *Paṭiccasamuppāda-gāthā*—have been found in the region dating from the second half of the first millennium.⁵⁵ However, the presence of Pali does not necessarily mean an institutional affiliation to the Mahāvihāra of Anurādhapura. Even laying aside the problem that all three of Lanka’s *nikāyas* engaged with Pali to some degree, it is also likely that “Pali-language Buddhism” came to mainland Southeast Asia through other routes of transmission.⁵⁶ Prior to the eleventh century, then, we cannot say with certainty that there was any institutional connection between Rāmaññan monks and any of the three Lankan *nikāyas*.

Gunawardana has suggested that monks from Sri Lanka (ordained in one of the three Lankan *nikāyas*) may have travelled to Rāmañña during the period of Cōḷa occupation, neatly allowing Vijayabāhu to simply “re-import” monks from a proper Lankan *nikāya* back to the island.⁵⁷ This is plausible. The author of the *Upāsakajanālaṅkāra*, writing just over a century later, similarly refers to himself as a “Sinhalese teacher” in exile while “all of the island of Lanka was disrupted by the fires of the Tamils.”⁵⁸ In other words, we know that Lankan monks travelled in times of crisis, while still

54 See most comprehensively Kieffer-Pülz, “Die Klassifizierung.”

55 On this verse and its significance see Boucher, “The *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā*.” On Pali citational inscriptions generally see Skilling, “Precious Deposits.”

56 See the careful consideration of these routes in Assavavirulhakarn, *Ascendancy*. Skilling has also shown, however, that a sixth-century inscription from central Thailand has parallels to Buddhaghosa’s writings, suggesting either that these writings were known even this early in Southeast Asia, or that both Buddhaghosa and the creator of this inscription drew from a common source: Skilling, “New Pāli Inscriptions.”

57 Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, 274.

58 See further the discussion in Liyanagamage, “A Forgotten Aspect of the Relations Between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.”

self-identifying with their island origin. However, is it likely that representatives of all *three nikāyas* sought refuge in Rāmañña in this manner, and were then subsequently invited back to Lanka by Vijayabāhu? I suspect not. The most straightforward scenario is that Vijayabāhu's Rāmaññan monks were members of a single ordination lineage. Given the Rāmaññan proclivity towards the Pali language, as evidenced in the inscriptional record, this lineage *may* have been the Mahāvihāra-*nikāya* originating in Anurādhapura—but we cannot be certain.

What does this mean for our understanding of Vijayabāhu's "revival"? How can we reconcile the *nikāya* of the Rāmaññan monks with later references to three distinct *nikāyas* in Lanka? We gain more clarity when we disregard the retrospective textual evidence and look, again, at the inscriptional. These overtures to Rāmañña are not mentioned in any of the inscriptions, discussed above, which are attributed to Vijayabāhu or his ministers from within his own lifespan. The earliest mention we have of monks from Rāmañña therefore comes from the Vēlaikkāra pillar inscription (TISL 42, discussed further in the following chapter), likely produced shortly after Vijayabāhu's death. Three brief clauses of this inscription tell us that Vijayabāhu, "invited members of the *saṅgha* from Arumaṇam; effected a *saṅgha* purification within the three *nikāyas*; [and] gave three *tulābhāras*⁵⁹ to the three *nikāyas*" (TISL 42, ll. 9–12).

It is *likely*, but not explicitly stated, that the clauses are related, and that the monks from Rāmañña were involved in (or perhaps even invited for) the "*saṅgha* purification" (*saṅgha-suddhi*) mentioned in the following clause. Such royally-sponsored purifications, frequently mentioned in later inscriptions (including Parākramabāhu's), usually entailed an expulsion of monks accused of living contrary to expectations.⁶⁰ This term is written in Grantha characters to allow the full range of Indo-Aryan phonemes (*saṅgha-suddhi* as opposed to Tamil *caṅka-cutti*); it is therefore perhaps significant, given the Pali-language inscriptional culture of Rāmañña discussed above, that we have Pali *suddhi* rather than Sanskrit *śuddhi*. Perhaps this was therefore an expulsion of those monks found to be living outside the Pali *Vinaya*'s code, as interpreted by these Rāmaññan. This *suddhi* could, however, easily be a scribal error, and lends itself to no clear conclusions.

59 In the *tulābhāra* ("scale-weight") ceremony, the donor gifts a portion of a commodity equal to their own weight, as measured on a giant scalepan.

60 On such purifications, and their politics, see Blackburn, "Buddhist Technologies," 74.

What is clear is the total absence of any mention of an insufficient quorum of monks on the island. Nor is it explicitly stated that the monks from Rāmañña were invited to carry out higher ordinations. In short, the earliest source we have available which mentions Vijayabāhu's overtures to Rāmañña, prior to textual records composed nearly two centuries later in the court of Daṁbadeṇiya, does not connect these overtures to any "revival" of the *saṅgha*. If we are to disregard this later evidence, we are left with no reason to think that the *śāsana* actually died out under the Cōḷas, and no reason to think that Vijayabāhu then revived it. This may well be entirely a Daṁbadeṇiya-period elaboration of Vijayabāhu's overtures to Rāmañña and subsequent purification, interpreted through an anti-Cōḷa lens.

Conclusions to Chapter Two

The patchwork evidence available from within the period of Vijayabāhu's reign frustrates detailed analysis. Nonetheless, certain points are clear. Vijayabāhu's vision of kingship was not a direct continuation of earlier trends of "Buddhist kingship" carried over from Anurādhapura. Rather, it was an intentionally constituted amalgam of varied models: memories of Anurādhapuran kings, yes, as available to him in inscriptional form; but also manuals of poetry like the *Siyabaslakara*; the wider world of Sanskritic kingship; and, crucially, the institutional and administrative apparatus left to him from the half-century of Cōḷa rule. This latter inheritance in particular meant that Tamil remained, alongside Sinhala, as a vital language of politics: a trend we will see continued in following chapters.

Despite these connections to the Cōḷa model of kingship, and engagement in a wider world of kingly language, Vijayabāhu seems to have been at pains to present himself as a decidedly Buddhist monarch. Like his Anurādhapuran predecessors, he attempted to realize this vision of Buddhist kingship through significant engagement with the *śāsana*. What differed, however, was the specific form of his engagements. His extensive donations to the Sacred Footprint established a hierarchical social order on a cosmological scale, incorporating and subordinating "rival" deities under the Buddha's ultimate overlordship. This hierarchy also extended downwards, excluding "low-caste" (*adhama*) people from direct access to the Sacred Footprint itself, an exclusion enforced by walls, locks, and guards. He also invited monks from Rāmañña to come to the island, possibly for the purposes of assisting in a *saṅgha* purification—although we have no evidence to believe, as later accounts tell us, that this involved a wholesale revival of the *saṅgha* after a Cōḷa-period suppression.

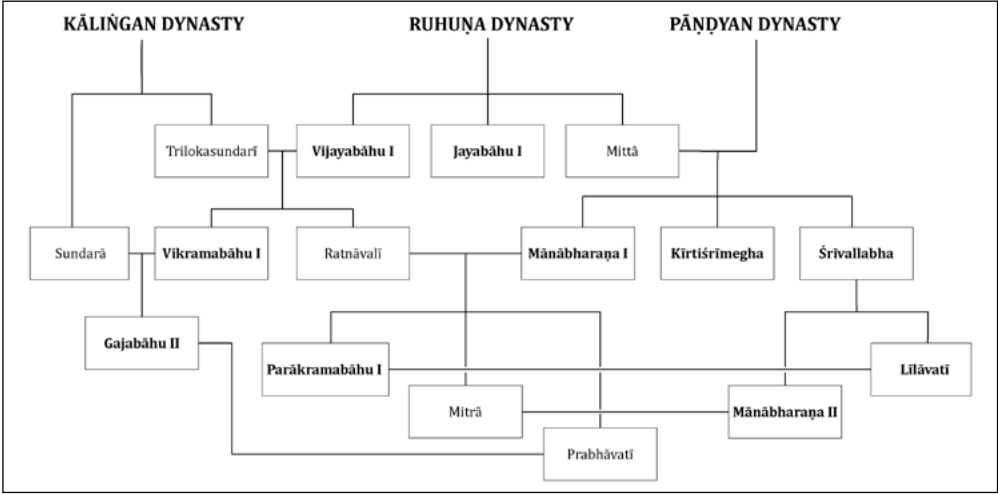


Figure 7. Family tree of Vijayabāhu I by the author, with monarchs in bold type.

Significantly, for a book concerned with “gender,” we have seen thus far only a tentative interest in the gendered dimensions of sovereignty. His claim to *cakravartin* status *may* have had a canonical link to exclusive masculinity—but it may also have been a response to the Cōḷa uptake of the same title. In a continuation of Anurādhapurān inscriptional practices, the only “women” present in Vijayabāhu’s inscriptional corpus are his mother Devugon (Skt. Devā), mentioned in passing in IC 6.2, and of course the island of Lanka itself, anthropomorphized as his principal consort. Any human consorts of Vijayabāhu—including, presumably, the mother of his son Vikramabāhu I—let alone any daughters, are entirely peripheral to his inscriptional persona. This is a stark contrast to the description of Vijayabāhu’s reign in the later *Mahāvamsa* account, which provides many details about his supposed dynastic matchmaking (Fig. 7).⁶¹ He is said to have had two wives: the daughter of a former monarch of Ruhuṇu, and a Kālīṅga princess called Trilokasundarī (P. Tilokasundarī), who would become the mother of his heir Vikramabāhu I. He married his younger sister Mitrā (P. Mittā) to an unnamed Pāṇḍyan prince; their children Mānābharaṇa I, Kīrtiśrimegha, and Śrīvallabha (Vikramabāhu’s rivals) are therefore sometimes called the “Pāṇḍyan” dynasty by modern historians. Finally, he arranged a marriage between his son Vikramabāhu and Sundarā (P. Sundarī), the younger sister of his own wife (Vikramabāhu’s aunt). As Nicholas points out, the Kālīṅga and

61 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 59, vv. 23–50.

Pāṇḍyan dynasties were geopolitical rivals of the Cōḷa Empire, and therefore may have represented key strategic interests of Vijayabāhu I.⁶² However, if these marital ties were significant to Vijayabāhu I, there is no evidence of this in materials from his own reign. Similarly, while Vijayabāhu's inscriptional corpus only touches lightly on examples of his idealized masculinity (the physical perfection of his body), this too is a far cry from later praise of his martial prowess and bodily marks.⁶³

This does not mean, of course, that either marriage alliances or performative masculinity were not important to Vijayabāhu in other ways, in contexts and media no longer available to us. Rather, the point I am making here is that, for Vijayabāhu, there seems to have been no need to emphasize his idealized masculinity or the status of his wives; no need, perhaps, to prove or even *defend* such masculinity and the prowess granted by heterosexual relations, which may well have simply been taken for granted. By the Daṁbadeṇiya period, however, in which the *Mahāvamsa*'s account of Vijayabāhu's life was written, something shifted in how an ideal king *ought* to be described. More explicit evidence of Vijayabāhu's masculinity, and of the status—and dynastic connections—of his wives, had attained a higher significance. In the following chapter, we turn to what I suggest was a first step in that shift: the turbulent period after the death of Vijayabāhu, in which political circumstances began to bring royal women far more into the spotlight of inscriptional discourse.

62 Nicholas, "The Reign of Vijayabāhu I," 429.

63 See, e.g., *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 57, vv. 43–49.

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 Dakkhiṇadēśa) 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 (*araṇyavāsīn*) monasticism, particularly at the Dimbulāgala 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.

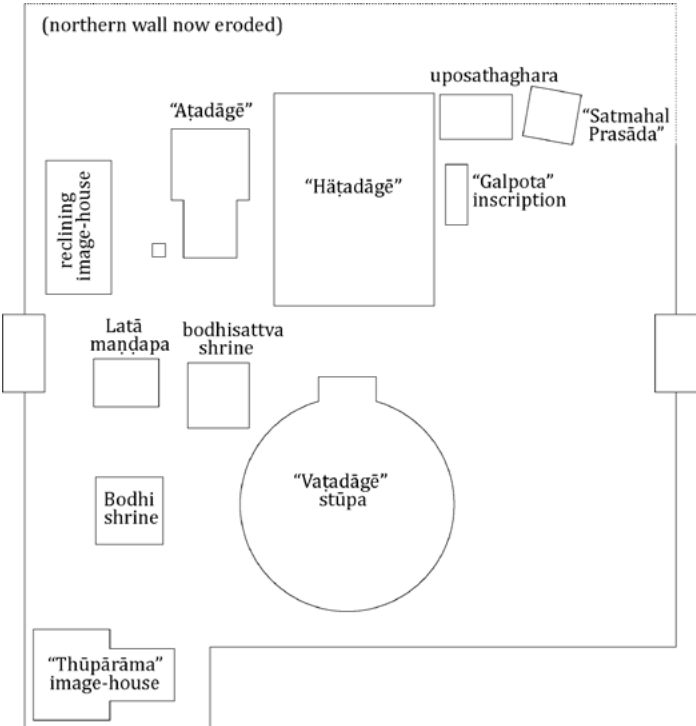


Figure 8a. Current layout of the Sacred Quadrangle, by the author.

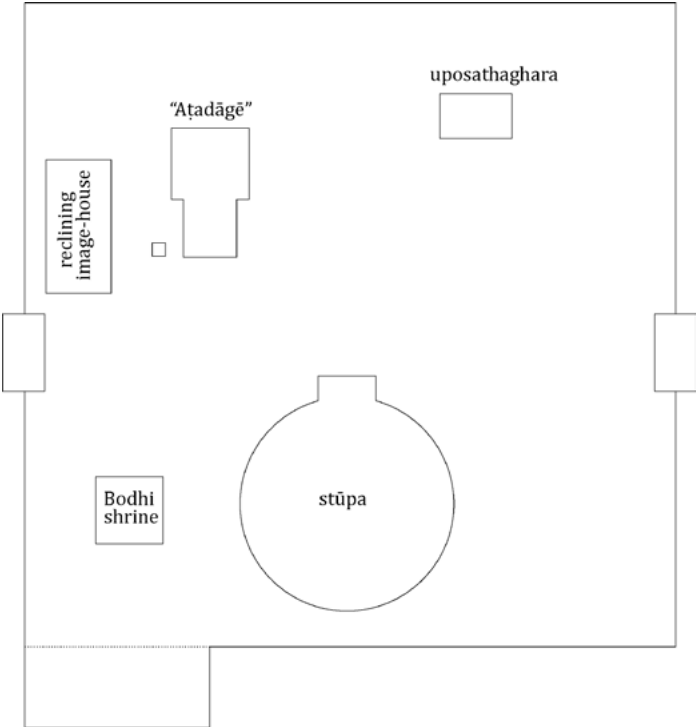


Figure 8b. Hypothetical reconstruction of the early Quadrangle, by the author.

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.

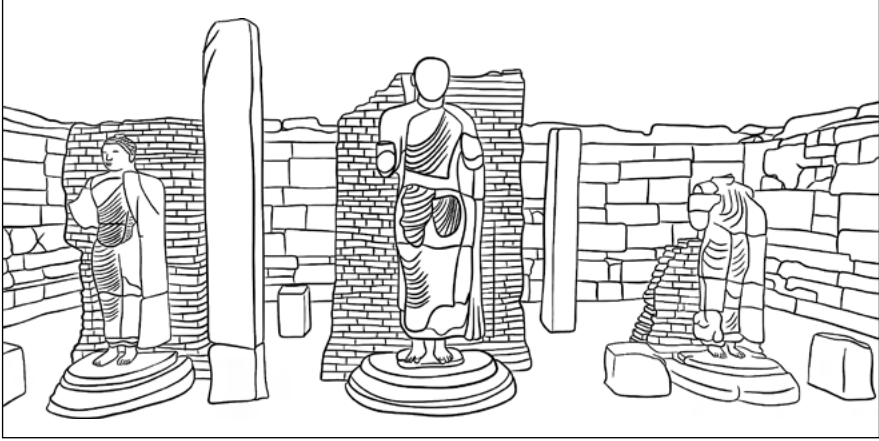


Figure 9. Inner shrine of the Aṭadāgē, facing north. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after a photograph by Tyler A. Lehrer. Used with permission.

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 “Kirtu 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 *cakravartin*ship, 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 Māyārāṭa and Rajarāṭa, and then took a *second abhiṣeka* once he had also secured Ruḥṇa.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 *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*—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 Rajarāṭa 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 Daṇḍadeṇiya 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 Cōla lord (*tēvar*) named Kulōttuṅka (whose name, alone, is rendered in Tamil rather than Grantha script). In 1118, this could only refer to the Cōla 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 Cōla 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 Cōla 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 Manta 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.

Chapter 4

KINGSHIP OVERLOOKED

THE COURTS OF VIKRAMABĀHU (1111–1132) AND GAJABĀHU II (1132–1153)

THE PRECEDING CHAPTER largely focused on contestations in the political landscape outside Poḷonnaruva's royal palace: from the Sacred Quadrangle, within the citadel walls; to the farther-flung regions of Ruhuna and Māyāraṭa. This follows a more general trend in histories of the “inter-regnal” period to set aside the internal machinations of Poḷonnaruva's court as something alien or even inimical to the properly Buddhist culture of the island. Vikramabāhu I and his son Gajabāhu II are frequently regarded by modern historians, again following the lead of the *Mahāvamsa*, as being “non-Buddhist” or even “Śaiva” kings.¹ In this view, the transition from Gajabāhu II to Parākramabāhu I is therefore characterized—in an echo of the Vijayabāhu narrative—as a triumph of Theravāda Buddhism over its others.

In this chapter I argue instead that the Poḷonnaruvan court between the reigns of Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu was, in fact, far more religiously dynamic than these accounts might let on, and that we exclude it from our historical narrative to our detriment. In the first section, I show that—leaving aside later textual accounts—there is little evidence for the supposedly Śaiva status of either king, and none at all for the repression or neglect of Buddhism under their reigns. On the contrary, we have considerable evidence for Gajabāhu, in particular, patronizing Buddhist institutions and even drawing on Pali Buddhist textual sources in his inscriptions. Specifically, I argue that his use of the title *aṇasakviti* (Skt. *ājñā-cakravartin*, P. *āññ-cakkavattin*) in a Sinhala-language inscription—the earliest extant instance of a royal *cakravartin* claim in the Sinhala language on the island—may be a reference to Buddhaghosa's distinction between the monastic *dharmacakka* (Skt. *dharmacakra*, the wheel or “sphere” of *dharma*) and the royal *āññ-cakka* (Skt. *ājñā-cakra*, the sphere of command).

¹ Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration”; Pathmanathan, “Hinduism,” 58–60; Paranavitana, “Religion, Literature, and Art,” 566.

The possibility that Buddhism—and, more specifically, the Pali-language Buddhism of Buddhaghosa—was of interest in Gajabāhu’s court offers us new insights into the development of Buddhist institutional history during this “interregal” period. In particular, this allows us to more closely interrogate the connections between Gajabāhu’s court and the Diṃbulāgala (P. Udumbaragiri) monastery, some sixteen kilometres south of Poḷonnaruva. It was from this community, as discussed in the following chapter, that Parākramabāhu selected the monk Mahākāśyapa to oversee his historical intervention into the *saṅgha*, and so arguably set the course of Buddhist history in Southern Asia. As I discuss further below, existing explanations for Parākramabāhu’s choice (as ever, mostly derived from retrospective textual accounts) are unsatisfactory, necessitating further consideration of how Diṃbulāgala and its chief monk Mahākāśyapa came to prominence. I point to a factor, until now largely overlooked, in the rise of the Diṃbulāgala’s fortunes: the patronage of the Great Lady Sundarā (Sundaramahādevī), consort of Vikramabāhu and mother of Gajabāhu, as documented in her two extant inscriptions. These inscriptions suggest, I argue, an enduring interest in Pali-oriented monastic communities, and the Diṃbulāgala monastery in particular, unusual among royal patrons to this point. Sundarā’s patronage may therefore represent a watershed moment in Theravāda history—a moment which has gone underappreciated due to (1) our assumption that Theravāda Buddhism had *always* been closely entangled with Lankan royalty, rendering her specific engagement un-novel and un-interesting, and (2) the ease with which both later monastics and modern historians have dismissed the agency of women from histories of Buddhism.

In the final part of the chapter, I turn to the “treaty inscription” at the Saṅgamu Vihāra (IC 6.11), created in the names of both Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu together. From this inscription, I suggest that there may have been more continuity between the two monarchs than the retrospective accounts—which overwhelmingly position them as bitter rivals—may have let on. This allows us to construct an alternative genealogy of Parākramabāhu’s eventual intervention into the *saṅgha*. His selection of a Mahāvihāra-aligned monk, Mahākāśyapa, to lead his reforms may be traced back to the court of his uncle Gajabāhu, and perhaps even to the influence of Gajabāhu’s own mother Sundarā.

Against “Non-Buddhist” Kingship

In this section, I push back against the characterization of Gajabāhu II—and, to a lesser extent, his father Vikramabāhu I—as “inadequately Buddhist,” and therefore against the supposedly stark division between the reigns of these kings and that of Gajabāhu’s nephew and political rival Parākramabāhu I. I first review the evidence for Gajabāhu’s supposed Śaiva leanings, primarily as presented by Sirima Kiribamune.² In a contrast to Kiribamune’s wider corpus of writings about the period, which is meticulous and compelling,³ I show that the evidence marshalled in support of the Śaiva hypothesis is late and generally unconvincing. I then turn to evidence from Gajabāhu’s own inscriptional record, which suggests considerable engagement with both Buddhist institutions and Pali Buddhist textual sources.

The first body of evidence for Gajabāhu’s supposed non-Buddhism comes from retrospective narratives. Most frequently cited is the *Mahāvamsa*’s condemnation of Gajabāhu for having brought “princes of sinful view” (*rājakumare pāpadiṭṭhino*) from abroad, generally understood to mean Śaivas from South India.⁴ This occurs, however, in the midst of the narrative valorizing Parākramabāhu’s great victory over Gajabāhu, and even those historians who otherwise hew closely to the *Mahāvamsa*’s account treat this reference as an “excuse” and “pretext to justify [Parākramabāhu’s] aggression into [Gajabāhu’s] territory.”⁵ After this point, as Justin Henry has shown, Gajabāhu’s memory was completely excised from Sinhala-language texts (beginning with the *Pūjāvaliya*, near-contemporary with the *Mahāvamsa* extension).⁶ Some later Tamil-language accounts, primarily the *Śrītaḥṣiṇakailācapurāṇam* (“History of the Auspicious Southern Kailāsa”) and the *Kōṇēcar Kalveṭṭu* (“Inscription of [Tiruk]kōṇēsva[ram Temple]”), have been interpreted as identifying Gajabāhu II as a Hindu.⁷ However, Henry dates these works to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively,

2 Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration”; Kiribamune, “Buddhism.”

3 See particularly Wickramasinghe, “Sources” (under her maiden name); Wickramasinghe, “The Age of Parākramabāhu I”; Kiribamune, “The Mahāvamsa.”

4 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 70, vv. 53–55; cited in Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration,” 26; Gunawardana, “People of the Lion,” 64.

5 Liyanagamage, “Decline,” 97.

6 Henry, “Distant Shores of Dharma,” 125.

7 See the respective discussions in Gunawardana, “People of the Lion,” 64; Pathmanathan, “Hinduism,” 58–60.

long past our period.⁸ At least in the case of the *Śrītakṣiṇakailācapurāṇam*, it is not clear that it is even Gajabāhu II intended here. The context makes it more likely that this is a legend of the second century monarch Gajabāhu I, who by this point was well-enmeshed in the Tamil historiographic tradition.⁹ The *Kōṇēcar Kalveṭṭu* seems to more clearly focus on Gajabāhu II.¹⁰ However, its (seventeenth century) concern is so explicitly on providing a string of patron monarchs for its titular temple's credentials we ought to take it extremely cautiously as evidence for the religious orientation of a twelfth century king.

Putting aside later retrospective narratives, much of the argument for Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu's status as Śaivas rests on the fact that both monarchs seemed to tolerate, or perhaps even patronize, "Śaiva temples." As discussed in previous chapters, however, such starkly dichotomous accounts of sectarian patronage are an ill fit for the reality of Poḷonnaruva, and more typically reflect colonial and post-colonial attitudes towards religious difference. We see a useful illustration of this dynamic in a pillar-inscription of Gajabāhu's found in Matale District (IC 6.9), recording a donation to a religious official named Mihindu (P. Mahinda). Mihindu is described as having created painted images for a Lakṣmī *pūjā* (possibly, although readings of the key word are contested, images of Kṛṣṇa). But he is also called the "leader" (*nā*, Skt. *nāyaka*) of the Tooth-Relic Procession (*perāra*, mod. Sin. *perahāra*) and of the Tooth Relic itself. This hybrid patronage—of an individual who seems to be simultaneously involved in Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist ritual practices—is, certainly, what Henry calls "religiously eclectic."¹¹ But this was hardly unusual for Poḷonnaruva-period monarchs, who as we have seen in earlier chapters continued to tolerate or even support theist shrines throughout the royal capital.¹²

Beyond this conceptual rejection of the "theist patronage" argument, however, we can also turn a critical eye to more specific claims. A frequent argument rests on Gajabāhu's "retirement" to Kantale after his surrender to Parākramabāhu. We know from earlier inscriptions at Kantale that it was a *brahmadeya*—a community of Brahmins supported by royal land grants, characteristic of the Cōḷa imperial apparatus—established during the period

8 Henry, "Distant Shores of Dharma," 95, 115.

9 Obeyesekere, "Gajabāhu."

10 Henry, "Distant Shores of Dharma," 120, 123.

11 Henry, "Distant Shores of Dharma," 122.

12 See further Meegama, *Temples to the Buddha and the Gods*.

of Cōḷa rule.¹³ Gajabāhu's retirement to Kantale is reported primarily in the *Mahāvamsa*, but two extant inscriptions recording Gajabāhu's intervention into boundary disputes do support the notion that he had a particular interest in this settlement.¹⁴ We might add to this an inscription found within Kantale Śiva Temple (*TISL* 29). The donor is not named, but based on the date (ca. 1145, well within Gajabāhu's regnal years) and the honorific plural verb used to mark the donation (*iṭṭār*), it has been tentatively assigned to Gajabāhu.¹⁵ This is all at least *suggestive* of a link between Gajabāhu and Kantale. However, nothing in these inscriptions—shorn of the *Mahāvamsa*'s account—can be taken as evidence that he later dwelled there himself. It certainly cannot allow us to conclude, as does Kiribamune, that Gajabāhu chose to retire here specifically *because* the town itself was “clearly a Hindu centre.”¹⁶ Even if we did have strong evidence that Gajabāhu eventually settled down in Kantale, this seems to be to be rather shaky grounds on which to base an exclusive religious identity.

Kiribamune's arguments regarding the religious identity of Vikramabāhu I, Gajabāhu's father, are even more insistent—despite the fact that, “for some unknown reason, the [*Mahāvamsa*] is reluctant to make this admission.”¹⁷ She presents two pieces of evidence in support of this claim. First, she notes that the Śaiva temple patronized by Cundhamalli (discussed in the preceding chapter) was named for a Vikrama Calāmēka (Skt. Vikrama Śalamegha), whom she identifies as Vikramabāhu I. Pathmanathan, however, has argued that the placename predates even Vijayabāhu I, and so this was likely a throne name used by a Cōḷa governor.¹⁸ Second, Kiribamune argues that Vikramabāhu's sole extant inscription (*IC* 6.6) compares him (indirectly) to both Śiva and Viṣṇu, but not to any specific “Buddhist” parallels.¹⁹ However, as we have seen in the inscriptions of Vijayabāhu I discussed in the previous chapter, such parallels were commonplace even among kings now heralded as adequately “Buddhist.” We have little evidence, in other words, for the supposedly “Śaiva” affiliations of either father or son. We have *no* evidence

13 *TISL* 19. On the *brahmadeya* see Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*, 6.

14 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 71, v. 1; *TISL* 28a and b.

15 See discussion in Pathmanathan, *Tamil Inscriptions in the Colombo National Museum*, 329.

16 Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration,” 27.

17 Kiribamune, “Buddhism,” 122.

18 Pathmanathan, “Vikramabāhu and Vikrama Salamevan.”

19 Kiribamune, “Royal Consecration,” 25.

from the period itself that Gajabāhu was in any way inimical to the Buddha-*śāsana* in the manner described in the *Mahāvamsa*.

In contrast, the inscriptional record provides us with fairly solid evidence for Gajabāhu's ongoing support of Buddhist religious institutions. Perhaps the most explicit of these is an inscription carved on a stone pillar near Anurādhapura, which reads:

Svasti! Śrī! May the merit in the "Gajabā Embankment"—donated to the Ruvanmāli *mahasā* ("Great Reliquary," Skt. *mahācaitya*), established for five thousand [years], by the auspicious Lord Gajabāhu born from the solar lineage—be rejoiced at by [other] kings as though they had made it themselves. One who protects this, without doing harm [will have] success! (IC 6.10).

This is a difficult inscription to reconcile with the popular image of Gajabāhu as a "non-Buddhist" king. Here he tells us that he has made a significant donation to a Buddhist institution: the Great Stūpa of the Mahāvihāra complex (here called the Ruvanmāli), first built by the semi-mythical king Duṭṭugāmuṇu.²⁰ The inscription is capped with a small carved image of a reliquary, flanked by the sun and moon to symbolize the longevity of the grant. The donation is also explicitly framed as an act of merit (*pin*, Skt. *punya*), which is then dedicated to Gajabāhu's rival monarchs "as though they had made it themselves." The verb translated here as "rejoiced at," *anumo vā* (from P. *anumodanā*), makes it clear that this is a ritual transference of merit, a core devotional act in Sri Lankan Buddhism, in which:

the recipient of the transfer becomes a participant of the original deed by associating himself [sic] with the deed done. Thus, this identification of himself with both the deed and the doer can sometimes result in the beneficiary getting even greater merit than the original doer.²¹

Gajabāhu's transference of that merit to "other kings" is therefore munificent indeed. But it is perhaps a double-edged benediction. Implicit in this dedication is the reminder that *only* Gajabāhu, who controlled Rajaraṭa, had the opportunity to actually make such munificent transferees of merit at Anurādhapura's sacred structures, let alone to generate merit for his own right. Such merit-making opportunities were often regarded highly by Buddhist rulers across the Indian Ocean world. As Anne Blackburn has argued,

20 The name in modern Sinhala is Ruvanvāli, but in inscriptions of this period it is consistently called Ruvanmāli. I use "Great Stūpa" throughout to avoid confusion. On Duṭṭugāmuṇu and the Great Stūpa, see Berkwitz, *Buddhist History in the Vernacular*.

21 Malalasekera, "'Transference of Merit' in Ceylonese Buddhism," 85.

A ruler's power resulted from, and depended upon, merit-making that accrued from acts of Buddhist devotion to traces of a Buddha, to the *dhamma*, and to the *saṅgha*. Royal ritual traffic with Buddha relics was part of the public performances of rule—it affirmed a right to kingship even as it enhanced this right by adding to the ruler's stock of merit. In addition, according to an implicit hierarchy of potency, the relics most closely associated with a Buddha offered the richest storehouse of magical power that could be deployed to protect the royal person, his family, and his realm.²²

Through his donated embankment, in other words, Gajabāhu is able to leverage his control over the religious sites of Rajaraṭa to publicly perform the duties of a pious Buddhist monarch. Then, by selflessly directing the resulting merit towards other kings, he becomes yet more pious in turn. This is a savvy political move. But it is one articulated, and only sensible within, a decidedly Buddhist context.

It is certainly true that Gajabāhu left behind more Tamil-language inscriptions than any other post-Cōḷa monarch, and that this language therefore dominates his inscriptional corpus. This linguistic trend, combined with his interest in the Kantale *brahmadeya* discussed above, does suggest a more extensive engagement with Cōḷa-style rule than other monarchs of Poḷonnaruva. We should note, however, that a preference for Tamil-language inscriptions seems to have been the norm for monarchs in the “interregional” period, as shown in the preceding chapter. Further, when Gajabāhu *did* inscribe in Sinhala, he seems to have modelled his style very closely on that of his grandfather Vijayabāhu I—with the notable inclusion of a claim to *cakravartin* status, so far only witnessed in Sri Lanka's Tamil-language inscriptions.

This appears in the more substantial pillar-inscription IC 6.9, found at Kapuruvāḍu-oia near the modern city of Matale. The inscription is undated, which makes it difficult to juxtapose the grandiose stylings of this inscription against the more frequent use of “*deva*” in other inscriptions of the period, discussed in the preceding chapter. It is tempting to imagine that this inscription was created later in Gajabāhu's career, as he attempted to position himself in a more hegemonic position over his rivals in Māyaraṭa and Ruhunu. If so, this would perhaps explain the elaborate genealogy it provides for Gajabāhu:

Born from the royal lineage of Okā (Skt. Ikṣvāku); lord by descent of the earth-maiden [which is] the island of Lanka, the primary consort to the best of the Kṣatriya; who has attained kingship: the *aṇa-sakviti* Gajabāhu *rajaṇa vahanse* (IC 6.9, ll. a1–8).

22 Blackburn, “Buddha-Relics,” 328.

This is a far cry from the modest title of “Lord” (*devaya*, *devār*) with which Gajabāhu is addressed elsewhere. Instead, he refers to himself with both the title *rajapā*—an epithet used previously in inscriptions of Vijayabāhu and Jayabāhu, as well as by the later Anurādhapura-period kings—and the rather more novel title *aṇa-sakviti* (Skt. *ājñā-cakravartin*). As discussed in the preceding chapters, *cakravartin*ship was a particularly elevated form of “wheel-turning” kingship, once reserved (in earlier textual sources, both Buddhist and theist) only for the most superhuman of mythical kings. Claims to *cakravartin*ship appear to have entered the inscriptional practices of more “earthly” kings only in the 1170s, beginning with the Cōla monarchs and possibly emulated soon after by Vijayabāhu. But while Vijayabāhu is called a *cakravartin* in the posthumous Vēḷaikkāra inscription, and officials of Mānābharaṇa II also refer to Jayabāhu by this title (TISL 51b), Gajabāhu’s inscription here is both the earliest extant in which a monarch claims the title for himself, and the earliest use of this title in the Sinhalese language.

It also seems to be the earliest use of the prefix *aṇa* (Skt. *ājñā*, T. *āṇai*, P. *āṇā*), “command,” with the title *cakravartin*. This together reads, therefore, as “He who turns the wheel of command.” “Wheels of command” (usually in some mixture of Sanskrit and Pali loanwords) have since become so ubiquitous across Southeast Asia that it is impossible to discuss politics without referring to them. In modern Thai, they distinguish the “secular sphere” (Thai *āṇācākr*) from the “religious sphere” (*śāsana**cākr*, from Skt. *śāsana**cakra*).²³ They demarcate the limits of political power (*āṇācākr*) in Burmese *Dhammasattha* literature.²⁴ And, of course, they are in the very name of the modern Kingdoms of both Thailand (*rāja-āṇācākr Daiy*) and Cambodia (*braḥ rājāṇācākr Kambujā*). It would therefore be easy to overlook the significance of Gajabāhu’s title *aṇasakviti*. But I have found no earlier witnesses, in textual or inscriptional sources, of this particular combination of terms. This seems to have been the first moment in which a monarch specifically associated themselves with such a “wheel of command.” What might the motivation have been, and what can this tell us about Gajabāhu’s religious orientations?

23 Reynolds, “Buddhist Monkhood,” 5; Swearer and Premchit, “Religious and Political Orders.”

24 Lammerts, “Buddhism and Written Law,” 483.

In the preceding chapters, we noted that few “earthly” kings in Southern Asia seem to have claimed the title *cakravartin* until the early second millennium. The Sanskrit hagiography *Aśokāvadāna*, likely composed in the early centuries CE, does give this title to Aśoka, and this influenced uptake of the title in East Asia. But the Sri Lankan literary tradition, despite its general praise for Aśoka, seems to have been reluctant to follow suit. The title *cakravartin* is not associated with Aśoka (or any other “historical” monarchs) in any Sri Lankan text prior to the fourteenth century.²⁵ Instead, the only *cakravartin* present in these texts is the Buddha himself, called *saddharmacakravartin* (“He who turns the wheel of the true *dharma*”), often by Aśoka himself.²⁶ That these texts place these words in Aśoka’s mouth, while denying him the title *cakravartin* for himself, was perhaps an ideological move. It suggests that Aśoka, as a mere earthly monarch, himself bowed down before a higher sovereign. The depiction of the Buddha as a *dharmacakravartin* is so ubiquitous, in art and literature alike, that we scarcely question it now. But it is worth remembering that according to the Pali Canon, the choice prophetically placed before any Great Man is to become either a Buddha or a *cakravartin*. Explicitly calling the Buddha a *dharmacakravartin* is, once again, to subordinate the latter choice to the former. To choose *cakravartinship*, these texts seem to be telling us, is to choose *cakravartinship* alone. To choose Buddhahood is to become a Buddha and also a *dharmacakravartin*.

Gajabāhu’s novel self-reference as an *aṇa-sakviti*, rather than as a regular, unmarked *cakravartin*, might be productively read in light of these textual referents. Even if Lankan monarchs had begun to emulate their Cōla rivals by calling themselves *cakravartins* in their Tamil-language inscriptions, there may well have been some hesitancy to declare themselves full *cakravartins* in languages more cognate with Pali and Sanskrit. This may have been out of deference for the Buddha-as-*saddharmacakravartin*, or—as John Strong has suggested for other contexts—a more general anxiety about the smaller scale on which earthly *cakravartins* operated compared to the superhuman examples found in Sanskrit and Pali literature.²⁷ In response to this anxiety, multiple “hierarchies” of greater and lesser *cakravartins* seem to have emerged across Asia. Strong discusses

25 Cf. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*.

26 See *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. Takakusu and Nagai, 43; *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 5, v. 90; *Mahābodhivamsa*, ed. Strong, 82.

27 Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, 50–56.

the *balacakravartin* (“*cakravartin* by force”) in the *Aśokāvadāna*; this same title appears in the eleventh-century inscriptions of Kyanzittha, roughly contemporaneous with both the Cōla *cakravartin* inscriptions and with the nascent use of the term in Poḷonnaruva’s Tamil-language inscriptions. In the fourteenth-century Thai-language *Tebhūmikathā* of Mahādharmarāja I, Aśoka is called—likely on a similar impulse—a *cūlacakravartin* (“lesser *cakravartin*”).²⁸ Gajabāhu’s self-identification as an *aṇasakviti* seems to be another example of this same trend.

But why this particular qualification *aṇa*? Tracing the genealogy of this term is made easier by its rather unusual etymology. The verbal root in Sanskrit is literally “to perceive” or “to comprehend,” but has an applied sense of “an order,” as something to be perceived or understood. These two meanings became bifurcated in Pali: the more expected form *aññā* preserves the verbal meaning of “to perceive” in reference to the perfected perception which characterizes enlightenment; a distinctive “western Middle Indic” formulation, *āṇā*, takes over the sense of an order or command.²⁹ Thomas Oberlies has suggested that some of these “doubled” terms, specifically including *āṇā/aññā*, are no grammatical accident, but rather an attempt to differentiate mundane from more technical or soteriologically significant meanings.³⁰ In other words, it seems that Buddhists were discussing *aññā* (“perfected perception”) in Pali at a very early stage; the term *āṇā* (“order”) was then subsequently added to the language in order to discuss authority and command. This is of particular interest because it allows us to better track when historical individuals, or even linguistic groups, were thinking about such matters of authority through a Pali lens. In Tamil, for example, the term for “order” is not only *āññai*, the expected Sanskrit loanword, but also *āṇai*, which must be borrowed from another intermediary language—very likely Pali.³¹ One of the earliest witnesses of this term in Tamil comes from the *Maṇimēkalai*, an explicitly Buddhist epic. We might therefore suspect that this term *āṇai* entered Tamil from Pali *āṇā*.

28 Note, however, that despite the text’s clear interest in *cakravartin*ship, Mahādharmarāja himself “disclaims any pretensions to *cakravartin* status” in his inscriptions: Andaya, “Statecraft,” 13. I first noticed this reference in Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds*, 188; I am grateful to Siriethorn Siriwan and Manasicha Akepiyapornchai for guiding me through the original Thai.

29 Oberlies, *Pāli*, 3.

30 Oberlies, *Pāli*, 101.

31 Anavaratavinayakkam Pillai, “Sanskritic Element,” 10.

Gajabāhu's use of *aṇa* as a prefix suggests, like the Tamil *āṇai*, a Pali influence. This is supported by the fact that while some Sanskrit texts do use the term *ājñācakra*, this is only ever in mystical or alchemical contexts, and never in any sense which might plausibly relate to kingship or political power. But Pali sources—and, more specifically, the works of Buddhaghosa—are rife with *āṇācakkas*, used in two distinct contexts. The first of these is in reference to the Buddha's own commands, and has no clear association with kingship.³² We might well take this as the “command of the Triple Gem” (*tunuruvan ājñā*) invoked in the treaty inscription of Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu discussed below (IC 6.11). The second instance of this term *ājñācakra* in Buddhaghosa's writings, however, seems to be directly concerned with the relationship between the “authority” of the Buddha and that of temporal kings. It is from this instance which I suspect Gajabāhu drew his inspiration.

The term appears in a line of dialogue which Buddhaghosa attributes, in the introduction to his various commentaries, to the canonical King Ajātaśatru. Ajātaśatru is a villainous figure in most Buddhist literature, and so an unlikely exemplar of idealized kingship.³³ He is a patricide, allied with the Buddha's cousin/antagonist Devadatta, who only later in life sees the error of his ways and becomes a lay devotee. Unsurprisingly, he is therefore never assigned *cakravartin* status in canonical texts.³⁴ In Buddhaghosa's fifth-century commentaries, however, Ajātaśatru is given a partial redemption, and attributed a wheel of a different kind. The historical introductions to the *Vinaya* and *Dīgha-nikāya* commentaries, attributed to Buddhaghosa, provide a new account of the First Dharma Council (*P. dhammasaṅgīti*) following the Buddha's death. At this event (Buddhaghosa tells us), King Ajātaśatru places himself at the monks' disposal with the words, “I have the wheel of command (*āṇācakka*), you have the wheel of *dhamma*. Command me (*āṇāpetha*), sir! What do I do?”³⁵

32 See, e.g., Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* (MN 22), in which a monk's transgressions of the Buddha's orders (*āṇāvītikkamantarāyikā*) “strike a blow at the Conqueror's Wheel of Command” (*jinassa āṇācakke pahāraṃ adāsī*).

33 For his post-canonical adventures, particularly in East Asia, see most comprehensively Radich, *Ajātaśatru*.

34 Jaina works are even more explicit. They tell us that Ajātaśatru (under his Jain alias Kūṇika) once *claimed* to be a *cakravartin*, only to be firmly rebuked by Mahāvīra. Wu, “Buddhist Salvation,” 99–101.

35 *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. Takakusu and Nagai, 1:10; *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, ed. Rhys-Davids and Carpenter, 1:8–9.

This *āṇā/dhamma-cakka* formulation, particularly in the mouth of the unlikely figure of Ajātaśatru, appears to have been entirely Buddhaghosa's invention. I have found no earlier accounts of the life of Ajātaśatru, or of the First Dharma Council, which include any variant of this line.³⁶ I read this as an attempt to reiterate the proper relationship between royal and monastic authority. Buddhaghosa is taking a clear stance on this matter: the deliberate repetition of *āṇā*, "command," in the imperative verb seems intended to rather unsightly subordinate the domain of kings to that of monks. Even the kingly "wheel of command" is commanded by the wheel of *dharma*.

To be clear, we cannot be certain that Gajabāhu had a Pali referent in mind in his choice of the title *aṇasakviti*. Given the close association of Lankan *cakravartin* claims and the Tamil language up to this point, we might suspect that he was drawing on the similarly cognate Tamil *āṇai*. However, based on the relevance of the subject matter, it seems most likely that Gajabāhu was drawing on Buddhaghosa's discussion of royal *āṇacakkas* in his choice of the title *aṇasakviti*. If so, this would suggest a considerable degree of interest in Pali textuality within Gajabāhu's court. We see further evidence for such interest in the inscriptions of Gajabāhu's mother, the Great Lady Sundarā, discussed below. First, however, it is worth considering the status of monastic institutions in Poḷonnaruva's hinterland during the reigns of Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu, and the circumstances under which the Mahāvihāra-aligned Diṃbulāgala monastery rose to prominence.

The Great Lady Sundarā at Diṃbulāgala

In Chapter Two, I questioned the narrative of Vijayabāhu's "revival" of monastic ordination, which would likely have resulted in a single unified *nikāya*, on the grounds that many monks and institutions post-Vijayabāhu continued to identify themselves with the three *nikāyas* of Anurādhapura: the Mahāvihāra, the Abhayagiri, and the Jetavana. Notably, this included the monk Mugalan of the Abhayagiri Uttaromūla, discussed in the preceding chapter. In this section, we turn to another community of monks, associated with another Anurādhapuran *nikāya*: the Diṃbulāgala monastery, who would later be described as "monks dwelling in [the legacy] of the Mahāvihāra" (IC 6.13, l. 10).³⁷ We have good reason to think that these

36 I am grateful to Liyu Hua for checking the Chinese parallels.

37 The term used is *mahāvihārādhivāsibhikṣu*. The literal meaning of *adhivāsin* is simply "one who dwells in," but in both Pali and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit it can also have the sense of "consenting to" or "agreeing with." To combine both meanings, I

Diṃbulāgala monks took their Mahāvihāran credentials seriously. As discussed further in the following chapter, Parākramabāhu's Galvihāra inscription tells us that he invited their chief incumbent Mahākāśyapa (P. Mahākassapa, Sin. Mahākāsup) to preside over his purification and unification of the *saṅgha* (IC 6.13, ll. 9–10). Mahākāśyapa would later be praised by Śāriputra, Parākramabāhu's first grandmaster (P. *mahāsāmi*), in his various writings, all of which are firmly in the Mahāvihāran intellectual tradition. These events, as discussed in the Introduction, were pivotal to the establishment of the Mahāvihāra's legacy as authoritative within Lanka and, eventually, across the Indian Ocean region.

The significance of Diṃbulāgala, and its chief incumbent Mahākāśyapa, is apparent. What is less apparent is *why* these Diṃbulāgala monks, with their Mahāvihāran leanings, were approached by Parākramabāhu in the first place. Existing explanations of this choice have suggested that the Diṃbulāgala monks distinguished themselves through particularly rigorous practice. Specifically, they are frequently called “forest-dwelling” (Skt. *araṇyavāsin*, P. *araññavāsin*) monks, in reference to the common Buddhist trope pitting such valorized asceticism against the cushier lifestyle of city-dwelling (*grāma**vāsin*, *gāma**vāsin*) rivals.³⁸ Many Buddhist monks, past and present, did indeed adhere to such strict practices, and ascetic practice may well have provided the social context for significant innovations in wider doctrine and practice.³⁹ In other cases, however, claims to *araṇyavāsin* status seem less reflective of social reality than they are a rhetorically invoked ideal. Anne Blackburn argues, for example, that eighteenth century leaders of the Siyam-*nikāya* were frequently described as “forest-dwellers” to ward off potential criticisms of excessive scholasticism.⁴⁰ Presumably the Diṃbulāgala monks are assumed, by modern scholars, to have observed such ascetic practices because of the relatively remote location of their monastery—the mountain is, indeed, covered in forests, and the trail to the caves discussed below is perilous even today—and because of the praise lavished

therefore translate this as the metaphorical “monks who dwell in [the legacy of] the Mahāvihāra.”

38 Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 23; Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, 46, 350; Lagamuva, *Madhyakālina Rājadhāniya Poḷonnaruva*, 38; Paranavitana, “Religion, Literature, and Art,” 566; Yabuuchi, “Kingship and the Sangha,” 6.

39 Most notably, the emergence of the early Mahāyāna: Boucher, *Bodhisattvas*; Harrison, “Searching for the Origins of the Mahāyāna,” 65–66; Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 93–96.

40 Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning*, 94–95.

on them for their “discipline” (*śīla*) in both Poḷonnaruva-period inscriptions and retroactive narratives. However, we have no evidence from the period itself that the Diṃbulāgala monks considered themselves to be *araṇyavāsins*. The term does not appear in either of the inscriptions which mention them by name (IC 6.8 and 13). By the later Daṃbadeṇiya period, it seems as though the *araṇyavāsin*/*grāma**vāsin* split had become institutionalized within the *saṅgha*’s internal structure.⁴¹ Even in texts composed in this later period, however, I have not found references to the Diṃbulāgala as being a particularly ascetic or forest-dwelling monastery. Nor, crucially, is this explicitly linked in these sources to their leader’s selection by Parākramabāhu as a leader of his unification project. If the monks at Diṃbulāgala were “forest-dwellers,” in other words, it was only on the most literal level: that they did not dwell in urban areas (*grāmas*). They may well have also engaged in ascetic practices. But we cannot take this alone as an explanation for why they might have been so singled out by Parākramabāhu I, given that none of our sources seem to even mention it.

What I am suggesting is that we are missing a chapter in the story of the Theravāda’s eventual ascendancy. If we accept that the appointment of a Diṃbulāgala monk to oversee Parākramabāhu’s purification and unification led, more or less directly, to the widespread acceptance of Buddhaghosan thought and monastic identification with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra—in other words, to the ascendancy of the Theravāda in Sri Lanka and across Southeast Asia—we need to better understand the circumstances under which this particular monastery came to prominence.

While our knowledge of the monastery’s longer history is murky, it does not seem to have been the focus of much royal intervention prior to the period under discussion. Cave inscriptions on the mountain tell us that monastics have dwelt there, not necessarily continuously, since as early as the second century before the Christian Era.⁴² Among these pre-Christian Era inscriptions we do see some evidence of royal interest in the site: we have mentions of an *aya* (likely Skt. *āryya*, “prince”; IC 1:272); we also see donations by two *parumakas* (Skt. *pramukha*; IC 1:273, 279), an honorific used by high-ranking individuals sometimes associated with royal courts. More immediately prior to the Poḷonnaruva period, however, the history of this site becomes hazier. A tenth-century inscription (IC 5.i.109) found somewhere near Paṇḍuvasnuvara (in what is now Kurunegala District)

41 Bechert, “Theravada Buddhist Sangha,” 765; Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 44–45.

42 Nicholas, “Historical Topography,” 40.

refers to villages in “Diṃbuḷa,” but there is no mention of either the mountain (*gala*, literally “stone”) or a monastery. We do have references in the *Mahāvamsa*—both the fifth-century original and the medieval extension—to a Dhūmarakkhāga mountain which seems, on geographic grounds, to be another name for Diṃbulāgala. The only reference to a monastery at this site, however, appears in the medieval extension, which tells us that King Mahānāma (at the behest of his consort) established some buildings there and donated them to the Theravāda.⁴³ However, this is a Daṃbadeṇiya-period *Mahāvamsa* entry, influenced by the post-Parākramabāhu prominence of the Mahāvihāra and associated sites, and so we should not take these references at face value. In short, there appears to be little evidence for royal interest in this particular monastery at Diṃbulāgala prior to the Poḷonnaruva period. How, then, did this monastery come to be so prominent by the later twelfth century that its leader would be placed in charge of Parākramabāhu’s purification and unification of the *saṅgha*?

In this section I argue that the pivotal factor here is one entirely overlooked in the *Mahāvamsa*: the patronage of the Great Lady Sundarā, consort of Vikramabāhu I and mother of Gajabāhu II. Her absence from our existing histories of the Theravāda is almost certainly a direct result of her absence from the literary sources on which we too often rely. She is mentioned only once in the *Mahāvamsa*: as the sister of Vijayabāhu’s consort, Tilokasundarī, from Siṃhapūra (in Kalinga, likely modern Odisha or northern Andhra Pradesh), whom he had married to his son Vikramabāhu.⁴⁴ As if to illustrate how insignificant a role she plays in this narrative, in almost all extant manuscripts her name has become corrupted to “Sunārī.” She is not mentioned at all in either the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* or the *Pūjāvaliya*. She has, in effect, been written out of the story. But her two extant inscriptions suggest a particular orientation towards the Pali language and towards the monastery at Diṃbulāgala, and are, to a degree, exceptional in the extant inscriptional record. Neither of these inscriptions can be dated, but as one mentions only her husband Vikramabāhu, and the other adds a mention of her son Gajabāhu, we might cautiously estimate an active period spanning the two men’s reigns: evidence for the continuing influence of queen mothers in their children’s courts.

⁴³ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 37, v. 213.

⁴⁴ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 59, v. 49. The *Mahāvamsa* also refers to her very indirectly in a later chapter, when it tells us that Vikramabāhu’s other son Mahinda was of lower status than Gajabāhu because of his mother’s clan (*mātugottena*; *Mahāvamsa* ch. 62, 59).

The first of the two inscriptions is, sadly, fragmentary. The surviving section represents, in Paranavitana's estimation, only one-sixth of the original. The original slab was destroyed, and the surviving section incorporated into the structure of a *maṇḍapa* by some later patron.⁴⁵ The original location of the inscription is entirely unknown. All that we have left to us is an invocatory Pali verse, eulogizing a monk in rather martial terms, and the beginnings of the preamble:

Svasti! Śrī! May the excellent sage known as Ānanda—possessor of supernatural powers, a flag raised in the land of Laṅkā—be victorious; he who, resolute (*dhīra*), became a *thera*...[illegible]...the ascetics of Tambaraṭṭha; who did...[illegible]...the *sāsana* among the Cōḷa.

By the Great Lady Sundarā, best of the Solar Family (*rivikulakot*), the primary consort to the Lord Vikramabāhu; who was born of the Lord Sirisaṅgabo Vijayabāhu, who was born in the royal lineage of Okā (Skt. Ikṣvāku)—who excelled in a collection of auspicious, endless virtues unequalled in the world, and who subjugated the other *kāt* (Skt. *kṣatriya*) families of Dambadivahi (Skt. Jambudvīpa)—who was like a sole refuge for the world and the *śāsana*, and who ruled having united all of Lanka without transgressing the ten *rājadharmmas* (*IC* 6.7).

Paranavitana, and the epigraphists who followed him, considered the contents and form of this inscription to be “nothing worthy of particular attention.”⁴⁶ What seems to have been overlooked is the significance of the Pali verse which opens the inscription: not the identity of the monk Ānanda, which due to the fragmentary nature of the inscription is likely impossible to reconstruct; but the very decision to compose this verse in Pali. As discussed in the Introduction, this is the earliest extant inscription in Sri Lanka to contain original Pali verse. Even if created towards the end of Vikramabāhu's reign (1111–1132), it was within decades of the earliest Pali *ad hoc* inscription, at Myazedi in lower Myanmar (ca. 1113).

This seems, in other words, to be a moment “worthy of particular attention” indeed. Yet, to my knowledge, the only scholar to comment explicitly on this is Alastair Gornall:

Never before had Pali been used as a language of inscriptional encomium, and nor had a member of the royal family treated the monastic community as a political overlord by placing a praise poem to a monk before the traditional eulogy to the monarch.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Likely, Parākramabāhu himself: see discussion in *EZ* 4.9.

⁴⁶ In *EZ*, 4:68.

⁴⁷ Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 28.

How could we have overlooked such a landmark moment for so long? The root cause is almost certainly the common assumption that Sri Lankan Buddhism is “properly” Theravāda Buddhism, which means that it is “properly” Buddhism expressed in the Pali language. This assumption is ungrounded. Theravāda Buddhists have long engaged with both Sanskrit and the various “vernacular” languages (Sinhala, Burmese, Thai, Khmer) alongside their liturgical and scholastic use of Pali. Inscriptional uses of Pali prior to the twelfth century were limited to “citational” inscriptions, rather than original verse composition, and even then are only found in the areas surrounding the Irrawaddy River, and in central mainland Southeast Asia.⁴⁸ However, the modern belief that Pali ultimately underlies all non-Pali, but “Theravāda,” literary and inscriptional evidence has distorted the way that we read and even translate them. In the Sri Lankan context, terms relating to Buddhism in Sinhala-language texts, even when clearly derived from Sanskrit, are too-often “corrected” in translations to their Pali equivalents. Thus the Sanskrit title *ācāryayan*, “teacher,” is listed elsewhere under Pali *ācariya*;⁴⁹ while the Sinhala *daham* is consistently “translated” into Pali *dhamma*.⁵⁰ Unwarranted Pali-cizations like these together exaggerate the dominance of Pali in the language order of late first-millennium Lanka, and obfuscate the relatively rare cases in which Pali *does* seem to be on the epigrapher’s mind.

Sundarā’s inscription is one such case, the significance of which seems to have been entirely overlooked until now. Pali was, very clearly, on her mind, to (as best we can tell from the incomplete inscriptional record) an unprecedented extent. Unfortunately, the fragmentary nature of the inscription makes it impossible to determine exactly what her intervention was. The inscription likely recorded some form of support given to the monk Ānanda, praised in the opening verse, or to an institution with which he was affiliated. Alternatively, he may have been involved in the recorded transaction only peripherally, but because of some close personal relationship with Sundarā (as a relative, for example, or as a tutor) was worthy of homage at the opening of the inscription. It is likely that Ānanda had some influence in Sundarā’s linguistic choices. The inscription tells us that he is connected in some way with the Cōla country and with Tambaraṭṭha. The location of this Tambaraṭṭha is contested. It may well be a variant of Tambapaṇṇa, a

⁴⁸ Skilling, “Epigraphic Pāli as a Southeast Asian Geographic Zone.”

⁴⁹ Compare the text of *IC* 5.ii.41 with the list at *IC* 5.ii, p. xli.

⁵⁰ Compare the editions and translations of *IC* 5.i.115 and *IC* 5.iii.56.



Figure 10. The remains of Sundarā's cave, looking east, with her rectangular inscription visible on the roof towards the rear. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after a photograph by the author. Used with permission.

term sometimes used for Sri Lanka itself; other scholars have located this Tambaraṭṭha in Southeast Asia or, most convincingly, Southern India.⁵¹ Without a definitive identification, few conclusions can be drawn from this reference. More is known about Buddhism in the Cōḷa Empire, thankfully. Cōḷa monks seem to have been active participants in Pali literature and scholarship throughout this period and beyond.⁵² Given Ānanda's connection to this community (whatever that connection may have been), we might well speculate whether Sundarā's choice to praise him in Pali was in some way inspired by his own interest in or engagement with that language. All we can say with confidence is that Sundarā was more open to inscribing in Pali verse than were other royal figures, to a degree unprecedented in the extant inscriptional record. This alone is worth noting as a development in Lankan inscriptional culture. Read alongside her later inscription, however, it takes on a new significance.

Sundarā's second extant inscription is found within a cave on Diṃbulāgala itself, part of a system of shallow overhang caves (the "Mārāvīdiye caves")

51 See, respectively, Paranavitana, "Religion, Literature, and Art," 565; cf. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 78; and Tournier, "A Tide of Merit," 24–27, and particularly n102.

52 For a general overview, see Schalk and Vēluppiḷai, *Buddhism among Tamils*, 387–95.

on a cliff-face one kilometre east of the modern Ahas Māligāva. Other cave monasteries in the region feature external walls extending the usable space beyond the natural cave roof. But the Mārāvīdiye caves have only a narrow lip between the overhang roof and the sheer cliff-face, meaning that all built structures are within the caves themselves. Sundarā's cave (Fig. 10) is the last one accessible by a series of metal railings and, at one point, a horizontal rope ladder.

The remains of a brick-and-plaster structure are preserved under the overhang; also preserved, thankfully, is her inscription on the roof of the cave. It reads in full:

Unbroken [in lineage] from the solar clan in the lineage of Sudonā (Skt. Śuddhodana, the father of the Buddha), born from the royal family of Ikṣvāku; who overcame Śrī in bodily splendour; primary consort to the Lord of Men Vikramabāhu, born from the crowned; who gave birth to Gajabāhu: the Great Lady Sundarā *vahanse*, who having seen the suffering of people who clung to the eroded chains on the path between the Great Lunar Cave and the Great Solar Cave at Diṃbulagala, which is home to 500 of the *mahasaṅgana* (Skt. *mahāsaṅgha*) and where are established the bodily relics of Our King of Sages; having had arranged the stones [of the path]; having improved the path; having had placed in the cave [Buddha-]images, reliquaries, and Mahābodhi [trees]; having given it the name "Kaliṅga Cave"; having had made the auspicious wholesome act (*siri-kusala*, Skt. *śrī-kuśala*) of "*demaḷā-pāhā*,"⁵³ on the full-moon *uposathā* day in [the month of] Poson in the twenty-seventh year of Jayabāhu; having offered it for [the provision of] cooked rice; to [witness] the fact of its being given for the duration of the world's existence, I am the Great Lady Sundarā (IC 6.8).

There is much in this inscription which suggests—despite the Sinhala language—Sundarā's "mainland" origins. We have noted that the *Mahāvamsa* describes her as hailing from Siṃhapura, the capital of the Kaliṅga kingdom in (what is now) Odisha or northern Andhra Pradesh. This is supported by her choice of the name "Kaliṅga Cave" for her newly refurbished shrine. She would probably have been a member of the Eastern Gaṅga dynasty, which dominated southern Kaliṅga during the period under discussion.⁵⁴ Although the Eastern Gaṅgas used Telugu in their inscriptions, rather than Tamil, they were closely intertwined (often adversarially) with the political culture of other dynasties further south (including the Cōḷas), and so perhaps shared

⁵³ Wickramasinghe tentatively suggests that this is the name of a monastery (in *EZ*, 2:189). Ranawella takes it instead as the name of a village, gifted to provide cooked rice in perpetuity (in *IC*, 6:21).

⁵⁴ Rao, *Kaliṅga under the Eastern Gaṅgas*.

the expectation of extensive religious patronage by royal women. Sundarā's consistent self-reference with the title "Great Lady" (Sin. *mahadevī*), rather than the more typical *mahiṣī* or *biso*, also accords with South Indian consortial titles like *mahādevī*/*mātēvī*.⁵⁵ At the same time, however, Sundarā is described as a descendant of the Buddha's own father, Śuddhodanā, who is himself a member of Ikṣvāku's Solar lineage. This fusion of Buddhist and *purāṇic* genealogical claims has precedent on Lankan soil. Jonathan Walters has described it as a key intervention made by the ca. fourth-century Mahāvihāran text *Dīpavaṃsa*, and continued in the later *Mahāvaṃsa* (ca. fifth century) and its ca. tenth-century commentary *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*.⁵⁶ Although a direct connection between these specific texts and Sundarā cannot be established—it is possible that the genealogical link was by this point circulating elsewhere—it is nonetheless again suggestive of a particular interest on her behalf in Pali-language textuality.

Beyond the nuances of its text, Sundarā's inscription, and the renovations and additions to the complex it describes, represents the earliest evidence of royal interest in Diṃbulāgala since the BCE Brahmi cave inscriptions. By Sundarā's own account, the site seemed to be a bustling centre of both resident monks and (likely lay) visitors, traversing a difficult path between two auspicious caves. Both communities would have benefitted, however, from the significant additions Sundarā had gifted to (one of) the cave(s), and from the perpetual grant she established through the "*demaḷā-pāhā*." Notably, she appears to have furnished the "Kaliṅga Cave" with three of the four features of the "sacred precinct" which, as discussed in Chapter Two, had come to characterize Lankan *vihāra* design by this period: an image-house, reliquary, and Bodhi tree. Space is limited in the wide, but shallow, cave: if a Bodhi tree was once planted there, it must have been in the narrow lip of earth between the overhanging roof and the sheer cliff beyond. None of the trees growing by the cave today are of the Bodhi species (*Ficus religiosa*). The fourth characteristic of a "sacred precinct," an *uposathaghara*, presumably already existed somewhere nearby, if there were already monks in residence. With these three additional features, Sundarā was therefore converting the "Kaliṅga Cave" into a fully-equipped ritual precinct.

55 On titles for royal women in Sri Lanka see Shirley, "Beyond Masculinity," 492–97. For Tamil titles see Sastri, *The Cōlas*, 188, 228, 332–33. Note that Kulottuṅga's daughter Cundhamalli does not use this title in her own Lankan inscription (*TISL* 51a), discussed in the preceding chapter.

56 Walters, "Buddhist History," 117–18.

It is likely, of course, that other such sacred precincts already existed elsewhere on Diṃbulāgala. The site known today as the Namal Pokuna (“Ironwood Pond”) contains all four components of the sacred precinct, and it is possible that it—or other sites no longer extant—predate Sundarā’s additions to the Kaliṅga Cave. Unfortunately, further archaeological analysis is frustrated by the extensive alterations which have occurred across Diṃbulāgala, both as a result of neglect at some sites and intentional remodelling at others. In Sundarā’s cave today, two weathered Buddha statues are set up within the remains of brick-and-plaster walls. These statues could well be those noted by H. C. P. Bell, in his 1897 visit to the caves, but it is impossible to say whether they date from Sundarā’s time or were a later addition.⁵⁷ Only scant traces of paint survived on the cave walls until the twentieth century. Prior to vandalism by “a religious fanatic,” art historians were able to identify a scene from the *Sasa-jātaka*, and tentatively date it to the twelfth century.⁵⁸ Even if it were possible to date Sundarā’s Kaliṅga Cave relative to other sites at Diṃbulāgala, her contributions cannot be held solely responsible for the flourishing of the monastery in the early twelfth century, and thence to its leader’s eventual appointment by Parākramabāhu I. But her inscription here is certainly indicative of a royal interest in the site which seems unusual for the period, and which comes at a vital moment in the lead up to the 1165 purification and unification of the *saṅgha*.

Paranavitana describes this intervention as entirely the result of the “forest-dwelling” monks’ conduct, which “was such as to induce Sundaramahādevī, the Kaliṅga princess who was the consort of the impious Vikramabāhu, to make benefactions for the upkeep of the monastery, and to undertake essential building works at the place.”⁵⁹ Here, once again, we see minimal agency ascribed to historical women. Instead, Sundarā is merely “induced” to act in a certain way. But taken together with her earlier inscription praising Ānanda, I do not think we can so readily dismiss her own agenda. We have here two inscriptions created (presumably, bearing in mind the tentative dating) during the reigns of two different men, her husband and then her son. The first of these inscriptions speaks to an interest in the Pali language which is unprecedented in the extant corpus. The second records extensive works at a monastery which,

⁵⁷ Bell, *ASCAR* 1897, 9.

⁵⁸ Paranavitana, “Religion, Literature, and Art,” 611. The *Sasa-jātaka* would later become the subject of a poem, *Sasadāvata*, composed in the court of Lilāvati, discussed further in Chapter Seven.

⁵⁹ Paranavitana, “Religion, Literature, and Art,” 566.

at least by the time of its later involvement in Parākramabāhu's purification and unification, seems to have identified itself with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra. Sundarā held, in other words, a sustained interest in Pali-language and Mahāvihāra-aligned Buddhism over a period of some years. As the Diṃbulāgala inscription suggests, that interest led to Sundarā mobilizing substantial material support for her favoured institutions. Even in the conservative case—in which the Diṃbulāgala inscription records Sundarā's *only* material contribution to monastic institutions—this would still represent a significant intervention in the trajectory of Buddhist history, given the prominence to which this particular institution would later rise. At *minimum*, Sundarā was an “early adopter” of Mahāvihāra- and Pali-oriented Buddhism in the royal court. She likely offered similar support to the monk Ānanda, eulogized in her earlier extant inscription. We must also account for the possibility that she made other donations, marked by other inscriptions no longer extant (given that at least one of those “extant” seems to have been broken down and reused in later construction projects). These two inscriptions, therefore, suggest a far more prominent role in the rise of the Mahāvihāra for Sundarā, and perhaps also for other royal consorts, than our later literary accounts would admit.

Between Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu I

In the preceding sections, I have shown that both Gajabāhu and his mother Sundarā seem to have provided material support for Buddhist institutions and perhaps also drawn on Pali-language Buddhist sources in their inscriptional stylings. In particular, I have argued that Sundarā's substantial patronage to the Diṃbulāgala monastery may have established the conditions of prestige in which its chief monk, Mahākāśyapa, would be chosen to oversee Parākramabāhu's purification and unification of the *saṅgha*: the event which eventually allowed the Pali-oriented Buddhism associated with the Mahāvihāra's legacy to become dominant on the island and across Southern Asia. This is, already, a fairly radical departure from the general treatment of Gajabāhu's court as irrelevant to the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. I further suggest a more direct connection between these developments in Gajabāhu's courts and the events of Parākramabāhu's reign. This argument continues into the following chapter on Parākramabāhu's reign proper; it begins, however, with a re-examination of the two monarchs' joint “treaty” inscription at the Saṅgamu Vihāra (IC 6.11).

According to the *Mahāvamsa*, Parākramabāhu conquered Rajaraṭa but, with the encouragement of the *saṅgha*, magnanimously returned it to

Gajabāhu.⁶⁰ The latter, who had no sons or brothers, then had an inscription made at a “Maṇḍalīgiri Vihāra” guaranteeing that Parākramabāhu would inherit his kingdom after his death, before promptly dying.⁶¹ This episode serves two functions in the overall narrative of the *Mahāvamsa*: it sets up Parākramabāhu as the “rightful” inheritor of Rajaraṭa; it then gives Parākramabāhu a cause for war with Mānābharaṇa II, by then king of Parākramabāhu’s natal Ruhuṇu, who attempts to ignore Gajabāhu’s wishes and “unrighteously” claim Rajaraṭa for himself. Modern scholars have assumed the Saṅgamu inscription to be another copy of Gajabāhu’s Maṇḍalīgiri inscription.⁶² The language of the inscription found at Saṅgamu, however, suggests a rather more egalitarian footing than the one-sided account given in the *Mahāvamsa*:

Svasti! Śrī! Descended in unbroken succession from Mahāsammata; rich in truth: we are Gajabāhu [and] Parākramabāhu, two kinsmen. For the agreement made by us: we [will] not fight until the end of [our] lives; who[ever] is first of us to die... [at least one clause illegible]; if there is a king who is an enemy to one of us, it is to us both that they are an enemy. If one were to contradict this, it would be [as though contradicting] the command (*ājñā*) of the Triple Gem; and they would not be liberated from hell.

[In Sanskrit verse:] May these words protect the world for as long as the Moon and Stars; the union of those whose wealth is others’ success...suf-fused with affection (*IC* 6.11).

At every point, the inscription stresses the equality between the two. There is no hint here of, as the *Mahāvamsa* would have it, Parākramabāhu’s upper hand; instead, the inscriptions repeatedly invokes the language of “we” and “us.” Even the fragmentary Sanskrit verse which concludes the inscription speaks selflessly of *others’* success. The missing second clause of the agreement is almost certainly what would become the focus of the *Mahāvamsa*’s supposed Maṇḍalīgiri inscription, but it is clear that here *both* monarchs promise to leave their kingdom to the other, should they be the first to die. As others have pointed out, Parākramabāhu’s relative youth does mean that this mutual-inheritance agreement was, pragmatically, weighted in his favour.⁶³ But I suggest that we take seriously the self-appellation which Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu assign to themselves here: they present themselves as

⁶⁰ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 70, v. 336.

⁶¹ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 71, vv. 4–5.

⁶² Liyanagamage, “Decline,” 99; Nicholas, “Civil Wars,” 454.

⁶³ Codrington and Paranavitana, *EZ*, 4:4–5.

being “rich in truth” (*satyadhana*), anxious perhaps to demonstrate the sincerity of their promise to one another. Let us therefore assume at least some sincerity in this language of “us,” and read this as a text crafted by uncle and nephew together: a *joint* vision of what kingship over Lanka could be.

Doing so makes us more receptive to the potential influence of Sundarā, Gajabāhu’s mother, both on this inscription and those of Parākramabāhu’s later reign. I have argued that Sundarā seems to have held an unusual, perhaps unprecedented, interest in supporting monks working in the Pali language and monasteries which (would eventually) align themselves with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra. I have also pointed to her interest in genealogical claims linking together the Buddha’s own family with the Solar lineage of Ikṣvāku. We have a hint in the treaty inscription, too, of an interest in such genealogical claims. This is the invocation of Mahāsammata as the common ancestor of Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu.

As discussed in Chapter One, Mahāsammata is presented in the Pali canonical *Aggañña-sutta* as the first king, elected by his peers to solve societal ills. Mahāsammata appears in other Buddhist traditions,⁶⁴ but his shadow is cast longest in the Theravāda world. The fifth-century *Mahāvamsa* presents an elaborate genealogy for Mahāsammata, tracing his lineage down to Ikṣvāku (P. Okkāka, Sin. Okā), the progenitor of the Solar Dynasty;⁶⁵ to the Buddha himself;⁶⁶ and eventually to the Lankan king Paṇḍukābhaya.⁶⁷ This genealogy is elaborated on in the ca. tenth-century *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*, a commentary on the *Mahāvamsa*. Jonathan Walters has shown how this was part of a series of rhetorical moves intended to establish that “only the Sri Lankan kings were entitled to claim overlordship among the Okkākas and Kṣatriyas of Jambudīpa.”⁶⁸ By the mid-second millennium, claims to descent from Mahāsammata and his illustrious heirs had become commonplace throughout the Theravāda world. As Collins and Huxley note, “claims by real, historical kings to be descended from Mahāsammata are ubiquitous in Sri Lanka, standard in Burma, and somewhat rarer in—but by no means absent from—Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.”⁶⁹ This ubiquity, however, is complicated by Collins and Huxley’s conflation of any claim in a Buddhist context to

64 Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, 69; Simpson, “Like a Fierce God.”

65 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 2, v. 11.

66 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 2, v. 22.

67 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, chs. 8–9.

68 Walters, “Buddhist History,” 129.

69 Collins and Huxley, “Post-Canonical Adventures,” 631.

be descended from Mahāsammata himself, or to be descended from Ikṣvāku, or to be a member of the Buddha's own Śākya clan. A closer inspection of the Lankan inscriptional corpus reveals a more staggered introduction of such genealogical claims.

As Walters notes, Udaya II (r. 887–898) was the first monarch to claim an Ikṣvākan genealogy. Walters takes this as a reference to the *Vamsatthappakāsinī*'s genealogical arguments, a crucial moment in “the emergence of the Okkāka imperial imaginary.”⁷⁰ However, we must remember that Ikṣvāku was by this point a decidedly transregional figure, every bit as central in *purāṇic* genealogies as he was in the *Mahāvamsa*'s. Even the Cōlas, from the reign of Rājendra I (1014–1044) onwards, claimed Ikṣvāku as an ancestor in their own Sanskrit *prāśastis*.⁷¹ As discussed in Chapter One, the inscriptions of Udaya II are among the earliest to exhibit the marked influence of the Sanskrit *prāśasti*, including the elaborately genealogical opening. We therefore cannot assume that Udaya's claim to an Ikṣvākan lineage, or those claims made after him, were *necessarily* a reference to the specific lineage articulated in the *Mahāvamsa*, and so a claim to descent from Mahāsammata in particular: this may instead have been a response to mainland genealogies articulated in Sanskrit, both in *purāṇas* and *prāśastis*.

Claims to Śākyan descent are considerably less standardized, but are still present in pre-Poḷonnaruvan inscriptions. The earliest of these appears to be in the inscriptions of Kāśyapa V (r. 914–923), who frequently refers to himself as a descendant of Ikṣvāku, a member of the Śākya clan (as Sin. “Sāhā”), and a descendant of Paṇḍukābhaya, the first Lankan king said in the *Mahāvamsa* to be of this same lineage (see, e.g., *IC* 5.i.104). One of Kāśyapa's sons similarly refers to himself as a “*tilaka*-mark” for the Sāhā clan and as a descendant of Paṇḍukābhaya (*IC* 5.i.110). These references to Paṇḍukābhaya provide strong support to Walters's argument that the *Mahāvamsa*'s genealogy lay behind late Anurādhapuran inscriptional claims to descent from the Buddha's own clan. Mahinda IV (r. 956–972) refers to himself as being “best of the Sāhā family” (*sāhākulakot*) in several inscriptions, including those found at Mahāvihāran (*IC* 5.ii.69) and Jetavānan (*IC* 5.ii.65) monastic complexes, but this does not seem to be a consistent feature of his inscriptional

70 Walters, “Buddhist History,” 135.

71 Ali, “Royal Eulogy,” 195. Earlier *purāṇas* tended to list the Cōlas (and other southern dynasties like the Pāṇḍya, Kerala, and Cālukya) not among Ikṣvāku's “Solar” descendants, but as members of the (perhaps less prestigious) “Lunar” lineage. Rājendra was therefore articulating, in Ali's reading, a novel genealogy for his dynasty.

self-presentation.⁷² Claims to descent from the Buddha's father Śuddhodana (usually as Sin. Sudonā) are even rarer: we see this in inscriptions of Dappula IV (r. 924–935) (*IC* 5.ii.18; 37); in an inscription by Mahinda IV (*IC* 5.iii.26);⁷³ and, of course, the inscription of Sundarā discussed above. Nonetheless, it seems that by the end of the Anurādhapura period there certainly was a widespread dissemination of the notion that Lanka's kings were descended from the Buddha's own clan, as suggested in the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa*, and these claims of descent appeared frequently enough in inscriptions.

What appears to have considerably less precedent are explicit claims to descent from Mahāsammata. Collins and Huxley themselves suggest that the earliest of these claims is made by Parākramabāhu himself, in the Galvihāra inscription discussed in the following chapter.⁷⁴ But, as we have seen above, that claim appears even earlier: in the treaty inscription created in union with Parākramabāhu's uncle Gajabāhu. Those who maintain that this treaty was a record of generous concessions made by Parākramabāhu might, of course, respond that the text itself (and therefore this reference to Mahāsammata) was solely, or at least primarily, the product of the victor. Any proclivity towards the Mahāvihāra and its textual products might therefore merely foreshadow Parākramabāhu's eventual religious restructuring in that institution's favour, rather than reflect dynamics within Gajabāhu's court. However, the body of evidence examined throughout this chapter suggests otherwise.

We have established that Gajabāhu's mother, Sundarā, patronized Pali-oriented and Mahāvihāra-aligned Buddhist monks and monasteries. I have further suggested that this reflected a particular interest on her behalf in the form of Buddha-*śāsana* represented by the legacy of the Mahāvihāra. This interest seems to have been sustained throughout the life of her husband, Vikramabāhu I, and into the reign of her son Gajabāhu, despite these monarchs' supposedly "non-Buddhist" tendencies (for which our evidence

72 Compare particularly *IC* 5.ii.72, which opens with the very similar *kātakulakot*, "best of the Kṣatriya families." This wording is so similar that we might suspect a transcription error, but the estampage provided in *EZ* 1.8 (plate 16) very clearly reads *kāta* rather than *sāhā*. The motivation behind this variant claim is unclear to me.

73 Note, however, that Ranawella considers his own transcription, from which I make this identification, to be "extremely tentative." Ranawella also criticizes Paranavithana's earlier, and more confident, attempt at translation (in *EZ* VI, 39–58) as "imaginary and questionable."

74 Collins and Huxley, "Post-Canonical Adventures," 631.

is late and spurious). It therefore seems to be at least *plausible* to suggest that Sundarā's religious orientations influenced Gajabāhu's in turn. It would be a further stretch, given the scanty nature of the evidence, to suggest that Gajabāhu in turn influenced his nephew Parākramabāhu. But this is not impossible. The *Mahāvamsa* tells us that Parākramabāhu spent time in Gajabāhu's court as a youth. It paints this time, naturally, as a devious stratagem on Parākramabāhu's behalf, to ingratiate himself with his uncle while secretly spying out weaknesses for his future war of conquest. But, if we are inclined to read any truth into this youthful sojourn, we might equally see this as a period in which Gajabāhu, and his pro-Pali, pro-Mahāvihāran mother Sundarā, might have genuinely engaged the young Parākramabāhu on the finer points of Buddhist doctrine, and on the royal genealogies laid out in Mahāvihāran texts. If so, perhaps we see some echoes of this years later, when the two kinsmen created their joint treaty inscription, positioning themselves as Mahāsammata's heirs on the island.

This is, at this stage, still a tentative argument. In the following chapter, however, we turn to the inscriptions of Parākramabāhu himself: first, and most significantly, his *katikāvata* inscription at the site now known as the Galvihāra. Throughout these inscriptions, I demonstrate further evidence of both (1) an interest in the textual tradition of the Mahāvihāra, particularly the commentaries of Buddhaghosa and (2) what appear to be further echoes of inscriptional moves first made by Gajabāhu. I suggest, in other words, that this *katikāvata* inscription was not the product of Parākramabāhu's mind alone, but rather that the seeds might have been sown much earlier: in the court of his cousin and erstwhile rival Gajabāhu, thanks to the influence of his aunt Sundarā.

Conclusions to Chapter Four

The court of Poḷonnaruva between the reigns of Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu has been overlooked for far too long. On the rather tenuous basis that Vikramabāhu and his son Gajabāhu were "inadequately Buddhist," we have assumed that they have little to offer historians of Buddhism. But, as I have shown in this chapter, this is not the case. We have little evidence of their supposedly non-Buddhist status, and some significant evidence for Gajabāhu's patronage of Buddhist institutions like the Ruvanmāli *stūpa*. The Great Lady Sundarā—consort of Vikramabāhu and mother of Gajabāhu—seems to have been particularly consistent in her patronage of Buddhist monks and Buddhist institutions, with inscriptional evidence from within the reigns of both men.

Sundarā seems to have been particularly invested in the Pali language, evidenced by her articulation of the earliest extant Pali-language inscription by a Sri Lankan royal, and in a monastery, Diṃbulāgala, which we know was affiliated with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra. This latter patronage in particular, I have argued, constitutes an important (but until now overlooked) chapter in the history of the Theravāda, as it was from this monastery that Mahākāśyapa, appointed by Parākramabāhu to oversee his great intervention into the *saṅgha*, rose to prominence. This was not the only link between the court of Gajabāhu and the rise of Parākramabāhu: the joint “treaty inscription” created by the two men together, I suggest, speaks to a more mutually respectful relationship than that suggested in retrospective narratives like the *Mahāvamsa*, allowing us to speculate about continuities, rather than hostile disjuncture, between their reigns. We take this argument yet further in the following chapter.

UNIFYING KINGSHIP

THE REIGN OF PARĀKRAMABĀHU I (1153–1186)

PARĀKRAMABĀHU IS OFTEN remembered, for good reason, as one of the most significant monarchs in Sri Lankan history. After a long period of internecine conflict, he unified the island politically, and ruled for an impressive thirty-odd years. This was a period, it seems, of relative stability in an otherwise turbulent time. He then initiated another unification, with greater ramifications for the later history of the Theravāda: an institutional reconciliation of the island's monastic lineages (*nikāyas*) into a single institution, headed by a single grandmaster (*mahāsvāmin*). This was accompanied by a "purification" (P. *parisuddha*) of the *saṅgha*, meaning in practice the expulsion of "sinful" (*pāpa*) monastics. Later Sri Lankan accounts, compiled by monks who by then associated themselves with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra, interpreted Parākramabāhu's unification and purification on sectarian and doctrinal lines.¹ The *Mahāvamsa* suggests that the purification occurred first, but only to Mahāvihāran monks. The "schismatic" Abhayagiri and Jetavana monks, who preached the "*Vetulla-piṭaka*" (likely a reference to Mahāyāna teachings) as the word of the Buddha, were brought into accord with the purified monk of the Mahāvihāra.² The later *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* suggests instead that it was only the "ill-disciplined and impure" (Sin. *duṣprattipattin kelesana*) monks

1 Tilman Frasch notes that monastic accounts composed *outside* of Sri Lanka, however, seem "far less impressed" by Parākramabāhu's interventions: Frasch, "Kontakte, Konzile, Kontroversen," 139.

2 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 78, vv. 20–28. These events are recounted twice, in *Mahāvamsa* chs. 73 and 78. Two explanations have been offered for this duplication. Geiger suggests that the compiler of this section of the *Mahāvamsa* was attempting to reconcile two separate accounts of Parākramabāhu's reign, and yet somehow did not notice the repetition of this key event at different points in time. Geiger, *Cūlavamsa*, 2:102n2. S. Wickramasinghe suggests instead that chapters 78 and 79 together act as a recapitulation of Parākramabāhu's most notable deeds. Wickramasinghe, "The Age of Parākramabāhu I," 15. We might note that the first of these two accounts, in ch. 73, is both shorter and decidedly less sectarian than the second.

of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana who were expelled. Mahāvihāran monks, apparently, required no purification.³

Modern scholars have therefore tended to interpret these events as a suppression of Mahāyāna Buddhism on the island, and a partisan victory for the “orthodox” Theravāda represented by the Mahāvihāra.⁴ This is a vast overstatement. As R. A. L. H. Gunawardana has long since shown, there is no evidence from the period itself that Parākrāmabāhu, or those involved in his reforms, were at all concerned with Mahāyāna doctrine or practice, or that the “unification” was intended to bring the Abhayagiri- and Jetavana-*nikāyas* under the Mahāvihāran heel.⁵ However, it is certainly true that the unification and purification favoured the Mahāvihāra, and established the circumstances under which later Lankan monks—including those who wrote the *Mahāvamsa* extension and the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*—would come to understand themselves as heirs to the Mahāvihāran legacy. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the purification was led by a monk named Mahākāśyapa, the head incumbent of the Mahāvihāra-affiliated Diṃbulāgala monastery. Parākrāmabāhu’s inscription documenting this purification (discussed further below) itself quotes in Pali from Buddhaghosa’s *Samantapāsādikā* commentary.⁶ Finally, and perhaps most significantly, a series of new scholastic works firmly in the Mahāvihāran textual tradition were composed under Parākrāmabāhu’s largess, helping to set the future course of Theravāda thought and practice.

This chapter seeks to better understand the motivations behind Parākrāmabāhu’s reforms, and his relationship to the *saṅgha* in the post-reform period. Central to Parākrāmabāhu’s intervention into the *saṅgha*—and, therefore, to this chapter—is his “*katikāvata*” inscription (IC 6.13), carved on a monumental scale onto living rock at the site now called the Galvihāra. The inscription, like the earlier *sirit* inscriptions discussed in Chapter One, contains both a set of disciplinary injunctions (the *katikāvata* proper) and a record, in typical inscriptional style, of the circumstances under which those injunctions were promulgated. Unlike those earlier inscriptions, however, this is not directed to a single monastic community, but rather to the

3 *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, ed. Samaranāyaka, 78–79; see on this account Bretfeld, “Theravāda.”

4 See most influentially Paranavitana, “Mahāyānism in Ceylon”; for a more recent argument see Bechert, “*Nikāyas*.”

5 Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, ch. 9.

6 IC 6.13, ll. 47–48, quoting from *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. Takakusu and Nagai, 4:1232.

entire *saṅgha* across the island. For this reason Ratnapala calls this the first “*sāsana-katikāvata*,” in contrast to the earlier “*vihāra-katikāvatas*,” a model which would be followed by subsequent monarchs from Parākramabāhu II onwards.⁷ However, we ought not to teleologically read this inscription as a first entry in a later tradition. Instead, we must read it in the context of the wider inscriptional and textual corpus available to Parākramabāhu I himself at the time of its creation. When we do so, several new insights become available to us.

First, I argue against the common assumption (again, furthered by later accounts) that Parākramabāhu was motivated in promulgating this *katikāvata* by the exemplar of Aśoka. I suggest instead that references to Aśoka made in the *katikāvata* inscription are in fact unprecedented within the Lankan inscriptional and literary corpus, and so must be treated as intentional innovations rather than timeless motivations. In the following section, I argue instead for millenarian concerns, on an explicitly Buddhaghosan timeframe, as a central motivation behind Parākramabāhu’s *saṅgha* intervention. We then turn to Parākramabāhu’s relationship with the scholar-monk Śāriputra, the first royally-appointed Grandmaster (*mahāsvāmin*) of the newly unified *saṅgha*. This relationship was evidently complex. Śāriputra describes himself, in his own writings, as a grateful recipient of Parākramabāhu’s support and patronage. But, drawing on archaeological evidence, I argue that Śāriputra’s support was vital to Parākramabāhu’s own control over Poḷonnaruva’s hinterlands, in which monastic institutions—now under Śāriputra’s administration, and unified legally and ritually by his jurisprudential interpretations—played a vital role in settling and developing semi-urban communities. This complicates yet further the ideal monk-monarch relationship we have seen described by other actors, like the royal preceptor Mugalan, in previous chapters. Finally, I turn to the wider inscriptional and material evidence available from Parākramabāhu’s reign, and the memory of him and his Grandmaster Śāriputra as key figures in the renaissance of Pali and Sinhala literature throughout the remainder of the early second millennium. This reputation is not entirely unfounded. As Gornall has argued, while royal influence on textual production was overstated by earlier scholars, “the reforms of Parākramabāhu I were a crucial moment in the monastic community’s cultural resurgence.”⁸ However, I show that this interest in Pali literature did not extend beyond the walls of the monastic *vihāra*.

⁷ Ratnapala, *The Katikāvatas*, 7–8.

⁸ Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 19.

The language politics of Parākrāmabāhu's kingship were far more firmly oriented towards Sanskrit and Tamil than they were a form of "Pali kingship."

Setting a Precedent

A common explanation of the motivations behind Parākrāmabāhu's purification and unification of the *śāsana* is that it was intended to emulate the earlier "precedent" of Aśoka, who famously presided over the Third Dharma Council (P. *dharmasaṅgīti*). The extent to which this model is said to have influenced Parākrāmabāhu varies throughout the historiography. Some scholars merely note that Parākrāmabāhu "had before him the example of the Emperor Aśoka,"⁹ or that he "followed the traditional model of Aśoka's *sāsana* reform."¹⁰ Others, however, go further. Stanley Tambiah, in his landmark study of Buddhist kingship across Southern Asia, tells us that the Aśokan precedent "can be shown to have acted down the ages as a model procedure imitated by the Buddhist kings of Ceylon and Siam."¹¹ Tambiah's wording is worth dwelling on. It gives the precedent itself a degree of historical agency, with which it "acts" on or through Parākrāmabāhu and his successors. In this section I argue for a more nuanced understanding of Parākrāmabāhu's relationship to the Aśokan precedent. Rather than simply continuing in an unchanging "tradition" of kings intervening in *śāsana* affairs, I suggest instead that references to Aśoka in Parākrāmabāhu's own account of his 1165 *katikāvata* were a deliberately crafted rhetorical device, employed among other such devices to *create* a precedent for his own intervention. The "tradition" of invoking Aśoka as justification for a *katikāvata* did not motivate Parākrāmabāhu, in other words; it was constructed by Parākrāmabāhu himself.

Arguments of Aśoka's "influence" on Parākrāmabāhu tend to rest heavily on the evidence of the *Mahāvamsa*, which indeed emphasizes the parallels between the two.¹² But Parākrāmabāhu also makes the parallel explicit in his *katikāvata* inscription:

like the great king Dharmmāśoka—who, having enlisted the *mahātera* Mogalliputtis (P. the *mahāthera* Mogalliputtatissa), approved by the Buddha as almost Buddha-like; expelled the sinful (*pāpa*) monks; suppressed

9 Ratnapala, *The Katikāvatas*, 221.

10 Bechert, "Nikāyas," 15.

11 Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 168.

12 See, particularly, *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 78, v. 6.

(*māḍa*) those with incorrect views (*durllabdhī*); purified the blemishes on the *śāsana*; and caused the Third Dharma Council to be held—

[so too Parākramabāhu,] having exiled many hundreds of sinful monks from the Master's *sāsana*; created a single *nikāya* by unifying what was three *nikāyas*, disunified despite the great efforts of past kings, when there were Great Unfettered Ones (*mahākṣiṇāśrava*) endowed with groups of virtues such as the Six Knowledges (*IC* 6.13, ll. 11–13).

Parākramabāhu is, indeed, very explicitly comparing himself to Aśoka before him. But what prior studies overlook is the extent to which this parallel was itself an innovation on Parākramabāhu's behalf. When Max Deeg writes that Aśoka “had been elevated to a model status such that it became virtually impossible to speak of rulership and not think of Aśoka,” he was referring to the thoughts of premodern Buddhists.¹³ But we might equally take this as a comment on modern scholars, who tend to find Aśokan references wherever we look for them.

In East Asian contexts, of course, explicit references to Aśoka, and to the hagiographic *Aśokāvadāna*, are plentiful.¹⁴ Evidence of Aśoka's legacy in South Asia is less copious. The Sātavāhanas—arguably the imperial heirs to Aśoka's Mauryan polity—famously included an image of Aśoka, unambiguously labelled “*Rāyā Asoko*,” among those of their dynastic founders on the great *stūpa* at Kanaganahalli. The second Gupta monarch, Samudra (r. 335–376) left an inscription on an Asokan pillar. But these were outliers in the wider corpora of both Sātavāhana and Gupta inscriptional corpora, which are otherwise disinterested in drawing connections or parallels to Aśoka.¹⁵ Aśoka is similarly “ignored or reduced to a mere name in the dynastic lists of the *purāṇas*,” compiled throughout the first half of the first millennium CE.¹⁶ We do know that the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang was very interested in Aśoka's legacy during his travels through South Asia, and he tells us that local guides were eager to identify Aśoka's inscriptions as belonging to that king—even if modern scholarship suggests that the guides were unable to actually decipher the content of the inscriptions.¹⁷ But there

13 Deeg, “Aśoka,” 363.

14 Balkwill, “Metropolitan Buddhism,” 36–37; Barrett, “Stūpa, Sūtra, Śarīra,” 14–22; Bryson, “Images,” 100; Deeg, “Aśoka,” 370–72; McBride, “King Chinhüŋ,” 51. On the *Aśokāvadāna* see Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*.

15 Sinopoli, “On the Edge of Empire,” 159–61.

16 Thapar, “Ashoka,” 34.

17 Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, 6–7.

is little evidence that memories of Aśoka were of particular relevance to his political heirs in Southern Asia throughout the first millennium.

The situation may have differed in first-millennium Sri Lanka. The first-millennium historical narratives—the *Dīpavaṃsa*; *Mahāvamsa*; and Buddhaghosa's *Samantapāsādikā*—do laud Aśoka as a great monarch, and as a partisan for the institutional legacy with which the Mahāvihāran monks identified. Although these accounts are firmly hagiographic, it is likely that the “historical Aśoka” did indeed have a hand in introducing Buddhism to the island, and that his overtures to Lankan kings made quite an impression. Aśoka's regnal name, Devānam Piya (“Beloved of the Gods”) was emulated by multiple early Sri Lankan monarchs.¹⁸ This influence lasted throughout the first millennium. The ca. tenth century *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* attributes its elaborate *abhiṣeka* consecration ritual (discussed further below) to Aśoka, suggesting that he remained an influential reference point for idealized kingly behaviour throughout these centuries.

But, beyond the regnal name of early monarchs, these textual references to Aśoka do not seem to have translated into the realm of kingly practice. Aśoka does not appear to be referenced in any extant inscriptions prior to Parākramabāhu's invocation in the Galvihāra *katikāvata*. Lineages are frequently traced back to other varying-historical kings—particularly to Ikṣvāku, the mythical progenitor of the Solar Dynasty—and references are often made to Buddhism's long-past arrival on the island's shores. But Aśoka's name is never once mentioned in inscriptions as the monarch who sent those first missionaries; events so extensively lauded in the textual tradition. Nor is his memory invoked as a standard for kingship against which one might measure up. Aśoka may have come to serve as a “paradigm” for Buddhist kingship, as Tambiah and others have claimed, but there is no evidence of that paradigm in the inscriptions of Lankan kings prior to Parākramabāhu. To say only, then, that Aśoka's reform “became a model for later reforms” is to miss a crucial point: this particular later reform intentionally *made* that of Aśoka into its model.¹⁹ There is, in fact, good reason to think that we have gotten the association between Aśoka and Parākramabāhu entirely backwards. Rather than Parākramabāhu being “inspired” by a pre-existing memory of Aśoka, it is the later memories of Aśoka which were inspired by Parākramabāhu.

18 Deeg, “Aśoka,” 372.

19 Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, 31.

This reverse-attribution can be illustrated by turning, once again, to the title *cakravartin*. We have already noted that this title was unknown in pre-Poḷonnaruvan inscriptions; that it enters Sri Lankan political discourse first in Tamil-language inscriptions; and that Gajabāhu II was the first monarch (based on extant inscriptions) to use the title in Sinhala, with the notable prefix *aṇa-sakviti*. I argued in the preceding chapter that this prefix both (1) served a similar function to that of the *bala-cakravartin* in John Strong's reading of the *Aśokāvadana*, distancing the "mere" earthly *cakravartin* from the superhuman *cakravartins* of canonical and scriptural sources; and (2) drew specifically on Buddhaghosa's articulation of distinct *cakras* for kings (the *āṇā-cakka*) and monks (the *dhmma-cakka*) in his account of Ajātaśatru, in which the former is firmly subordinate to the latter. In that chapter, I also began to argue, on the basis of their shared "treaty" inscription, that there may have been more continuity between Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu than the *Mahāvamsa*'s telling lets on.

This argument is further supported by Parākramabāhu's reference, in the *katikāvata* inscription, to himself as an *ājñā-cakravartin*: the Sanskrit cognate of Gajabāhu's Sinhala *aṇa-sakviti*. The full section reads:

the Great King Śrīsaṃghabodhi Parākramabāhu—being anointed with the anointment of sole sovereignty over all the earth of Lanka, [and] possessing an abundance of manifest merit (*puṇya*)—having seen, while enjoying royal comforts, the gentlemen within the *śāsana* who were hell-bound, having been afflicted by the poisons of "lack of practice" (*apratipatti*) and "bad practice" (*duṣpratipatti*) caused by lack of knowledge (*ajñāna*) and bad knowledge (*durjñāna*; see further below); [thought] "If an *ājñā-cakravartin* like myself, seeing a stain like this, became indifferent with respect to the very pure Buddha-*śāsana*, [then] the Buddha-*śāsana* would be destroyed [and] many beings would go to hell. It would be good to do great service for the Buddha-*śāsana*, which was established for five thousand years" (*IC* 6.13, ll. 7–9).

Because Aśoka is so often considered a *cakravartin* by modern scholars, it would be easy to assume that Parākramabāhu was, once again, modelling himself after the earlier monarch in this claim to *cakravartin* status. But as I have shown elsewhere, Aśoka was simply not recognized as a *cakravartin* (let alone an "*ājñā-cakravartin*") in the first-millennium Sri Lankan textual tradition.²⁰ If Parākramabāhu did intend to link himself with Aśoka through this title, it was to the best of our knowledge a link being forged for the very first time.

20 Shirley, "Towards an Intellectual History of *Cakravartin* Kingship," 192–95.

Why might this *ājñā-* prefix have appealed to Parākramabāhu, beyond simply the link to Gajabāhu? We ought to note the significance of the context in which Buddhaghosa deployed the *āṇā-cakka/dhamma-cakka* distinction: Ajātaśatru's patronage of the First Dharma Council, an attempt to reconcile contradictions within the *saṅgha*. There is a clear parallel to the context of Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* inscription, in which he presents himself—like Ajātaśatru, in Buddhaghosa's narrative—as merely providing the opportunity for venerable monks like Mahākāśyapa to correct infelicities within the *saṅgha*. This parallel does not so readily apply to Gajabāhu, of course, who used the title *aṇasakviti* long before Parākramabāhu claimed to be an *ājñā-cakravartin*. Nonetheless, the adoption of this title by Gajabāhu and then Parākramabāhu left its mark on the later textual tradition.

Later Pali-language accounts of the Third Dharma Council follow their first-millennium predecessors in not naming Aśoka as a *cakravartin* of any kind. Sinhala-language texts post-Parākramabāhu, however, seem to be increasingly preoccupied with the “two wheels” model of sovereign-*saṅgha* relations. The *Pūjāvaliya* does not include the “I have the wheel of command” phrase in its account of the First Dharma Council.²¹ Nor does it refer to Aśoka by any form of *cakravartin* title. But it *does* warn us that it is the decline of the king's *ājñācakra* which leads to the decline of the *dharmacakra*.²² It later exhorts Lanka's kings to protect *both* of these wheels above ruling their own kingdom or securing the inheritance of their family.²³ The fourteenth century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* goes further, calling Aśoka an *ājñācakravartin*—the same title used in Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* inscription.²⁴ This is, to my knowledge, the earliest explicit reference to Aśoka as a *cakravartin* in the Sri Lankan textual tradition. It is no coincidence that it appears with the same distinctive prefix we have traced through the inscriptions of Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu I.

What I am suggesting here is that Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* cannot be explained as mere repetition of an earlier precedent, stretching back to the memory of Aśoka's patronage of the Third Dharma Council. Rather, it was an intervention into *saṅgha* affairs on a scale not previously witnessed within Lanka, for which Parākramabāhu intentionally *crafted* precedents: a parallel to the deeds of Aśoka (as recorded in earlier Pali texts), yes; but also

21 *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 739.

22 *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 733.

23 *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 746.

24 *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, ed. Samaranāyaka, 60.

an evocation of the “two wheels” of sovereign-*saṅgha* relations articulated by Ājatasātru (also as recorded in certain Pali texts, and drawn on earlier by Parākramabāhu’s uncle Gajabāhu II). Later accounts, from the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* onwards, would both take these two distinct points of reference at face value and conflate them. This resulted in the modern notions that Parākramabāhu intervened in the *saṅgha* “because” that is what Aśoka did; and that because Parākramabāhu associated his intervention with (*ājñā*) *cakravartin* status, so too must Aśoka be an *ājñā-cakravartin*.

This leaves open the question of motivation. If Parākramabāhu did not carry out his purification and unification of the *śāsana* because of a pre-existing Aśokan precedent, why did he do so? In the following section I suggest one possibility: a millenarian concern with the decline of the *śāsana*, framed in explicitly Buddhaghosan terms.

Millennial Discipline

As Ratnapala points out, the island-wide scale of Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* marks an important departure from earlier, community-specific interventions into monastic discipline.²⁵ We might wonder what prompted—or, more cynically, justified—such an increase in the scale of royal intervention. In this section, I suggest that Parākramabāhu’s intervention speaks to what we might call millenarian concerns about the inevitable decline, and eventual disappearance, of the Buddhist *śāsana*. I refer to these concerns as “millenarian” to align them with broader studies of:

movements and sects that embrace ideologies positing the (typically traumatic) end of one era, promising relief from the sufferings of this world and its present age, and purporting to give rise to salvation in a new “golden age,” “heaven on earth,” or realized utopian social order.²⁶

In recent years, such concerns have increasingly become the subject of analysis as “an active and motivating force in Buddhist history.”²⁷ However, given the explicitly Abrahamic origins of the term “millenarian,”²⁸ it would

²⁵ Ratnapala, *The Katikāvatas*.

²⁶ Hall, “Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements.”

²⁷ Turner, *Saving Buddhism*, 24.

²⁸ From the Latin *millēnārius*, “containing a thousand.” We also frequently see references to millennialism, from Latin *mille-annus*, “one thousand years.” Both refer to the thousand-year reign of Christ prophesied in Revelations 20:2–7. As discussed

be prudent to consider how exactly we are applying this term to historical Buddhism (i.e., prior to sustained contact with Christianity).

We can heuristically divide Buddhist attitudes towards decline into two broad groups, which I term “pessimistic millenarianism” and “optimistic millenarianism.” The former holds that the decline of the Buddha-*śāsana* is already too advanced to allow one to make significant soteriological progress within this life. This may also be compounded with concerns about the moral degradation of the world which is said to accompany such *śāsana*-decline. The only option available to pessimistic millenarians (in a Theravāda context, at least) is to await the salvific coming of the future Buddha Maitreya. This attitude motivated a large range of historical, Maitreya-oriented movements throughout Theravāda Buddhist history.²⁹ However, this “pessimistic” view does not account for the frequent occurrence, throughout Buddhist history, of individuals and groups who believed that *śāsana* decline—while inevitable—can be slowed down, or perhaps even temporarily halted, by their devout efforts; or, at minimum, that these efforts are worthwhile activities in and of themselves within certain timeframes.³⁰ I refer to this attitude as “optimistic millenarianism,” to capture the fact that it is motivated by dire eschatological concerns, but maintains the possibility of these concerns being delayed or even averted. The possibility of averting decline, I suggest, lies behind many key moments of “reform” throughout Buddhist history. This includes the *katikāvata* of Parākramabāhu I inscribed on the rockface of the Galvihāra.

Concerns with such decline suffuse the Galvihāra inscription, from the very opening lines. These read:

Our Buddha, having fulfilled the thirty perfections [in] a period lasting 104,000 innumerable and unlimited eons (*kalpas*); having ascended the seat [under] the Mahābodhi, which was the field of battle with Māra; having defeated the irresistible Māra with his entourage; having obtained a state of omniscience; having—by proceeding like a great raincloud [over the] four continents for forty-five years, extinguishing the beings aflame with the fires of sin (*kleśa*), in one hundred thousand *koṭis* (a crore, ten million) of various *kalpas*, with the ambrosial waters of *dhamma*—completed the duties [incumbent upon] every Buddha; passed away with the sphere of *nirvāṇa*

below, the number “one thousand” does not (consistently) have significance within Buddhist prophecies we might otherwise consider “millenarian.”

29 Collins, *Nirvana*, ch. 5.

30 Blackburn, “Buddhist Technologies”; Fräsch, “Buddhist Network”; Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*; Turner, *Saving Buddhism*.

without remainder (*nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇadhātu*) in the Sāla-tree Grove of the Malla Kings, near the city of Kusināra;

from the day of the Great King Valagam Abhā, four hundred and fifty-four years later;

when the *śāsana* was declining (*piriyemin*), its *nikāya* having been schismed [for] one thousand, two hundred, and fifty-four years;

arisen in the Solar Dynasty, from the lineage beginning with Mahāsammata; the king of kings, lustrous with rays of fame extended in various direction, the Great King Śrīsaṃghabodhi Parākramabāhu (IC 6.13, ll. 1–6).

Prior scholarship on this dating has, understandably, focused on the ability this gives us to specifically date Parākramabāhu's inscription (1,708 years after the Buddha's death, or 1165 CE). Taking this as a starting point, and the length of reigns given in texts like the *Mahāvamsa*, we can then calculate the regnal years for all other monarchs in Sri Lankan history. However, too little attention has been paid to Parākramabāhu's own calculations. As Anne Blackburn has shown, in reference to the inscriptions of the Sukhothai monarch Mahādharmarāja I, a monarch's ability to accurately reckon the precise date—specifically in reference to the decline of the Buddha-*śāsana*—was a significant technique of statecraft across the Indian Ocean world.³¹ We have good reason to believe that Parākramabāhu, too, was interested in such chronological accuracy because of concerns about decline. We might return here to how he describes his own assessment of the state of the *saṅgha*, and his motivation to intervene:

the Great King Śrīsaṃghabodhi Parākramabāhu—being anointed with the anointment of sole sovereignty over all the earth of Lanka, [and] possessing an abundance of manifest merit (*puṇya*)—having seen, while enjoying royal comforts, the gentlemen within the *śāsana* who were hell-bound, having been afflicted by the poisons of “lack of practice” (*apratipatti*) and “bad practice” (*duṣpratipatti*) caused by lack of knowledge (*ajñāna*) and bad knowledge (*durjñāna*; see further below); [thought] “If an *ājñā-cakravartin* like myself, seeing a stain like this, became indifferent with respect to the very pure Buddha-*śāsana*, [then] the Buddha-*śāsana* would be destroyed [and] many beings would go to hell. It would be good to do great service for the Buddha-*śāsana*, which was established for five thousand years” (IC 6.13, ll. 7–9).

As in the extract above, the language is decidedly Sanskritic rather than Pali-inflected. Nonetheless, there are two pieces of evidence here which strongly suggest that Parākramabāhu was thinking about *śāsana*-decline in

31 Blackburn, “Buddhist Technologies,” 76.

a uniquely Buddhaghosan manner; in other words, that he was drawing on what we might call a Theravādan textual tradition.

First, Parākramabāhu characterized the *śāsana* as being “established for five thousand years” (*pasvādahasak pavatnā*). Presumably by this he means that the *śāsana* was expected to last for five thousand years before its eventual, inevitable, disappearance. This temporal scale seems to be unique to Buddhaghosa’s chronology of *śāsana*-decline. As Jan Nattier has shown, the earliest such chronologies (including those given within the Pali Canon) assign an expiration date of just five hundred years.³² Notoriously, this date is given in texts dealing with the first ordination of female monastics (such as the *Gotamī-sutta*, and the opening of the *Vinaya’s Bhikkunīkkhandhaka*). In these texts, the Buddha is reported to have said that the inclusion of female renunciants reduced the lifespan of his *śāsana* from one thousand to a mere five hundred years. However, Buddhists living later than five hundred years after the death of the Buddha, and so in the period in which the *śāsana* ought to have died out, experienced what Nattier calls “a crisis of historical self-consciousness.” Many therefore revised their interpretation so that only the “true” *dharma* (the *saddharma*) would expire after five hundred years, but some version of the *dharma* would continue for varied periods thereafter: up to one thousand years after the Buddha’s death; or 1,500 years; or even as distant as ten thousand years (in some texts preserved only in Chinese canons). To our knowledge, however, only Buddhaghosa settled on a *śāsana* expiration date of five thousand years after the Buddha’s death.

It is possible, of course, that Buddhaghosa did not do so in isolation. Similar chronologies may have been outlined in texts of the Abhayagiri- and Jetavana-*nikāyas*, no longer extant. However, I have found only one earlier inscription which similarly refers to a five-thousand-year period. This is the Nelūbāva inscription of Gajabāhu II (*IC* 6.10, discussed in the preceding chapter), which records his donation to the Great Stūpa of the Mahāvihāra, said to have been established for five thousand years (in the same phrasing, *pasvādahasak pavatnā*). This stūpa is said to have been built by Duṭṭhagāmaṇi in the second century BCE, which might appear to be a different timeframe to that invoked by Parākramabāhu (five thousand years since the death of the Buddha). But we might note that this stūpa contains Buddha-relics: ongoing manifestations of the Buddha himself in the world. Buddhaghosa tells us that the final, total disappearance of the *śāsana* at the end of its five thousand years will be marked by the spontaneous disappearance of

32 Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, ch. 3.

all Buddha-relics; both *śāsana* and relics therefore have a coterminous five-thousand-year expiry date. We might therefore take Gajabāhu's Nelūbāva inscription as referring to the establishment of these *relics* for five thousand years, in conformity with Buddhaghosa's chronology of decline. If so, this common phrasing *pavādahāsak pavatnā* in their inscriptions is yet another indication of an interest in Mahāvihāran texts shared by both Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu I.

The Galvihāra inscription aligns with a Buddhaghosan chronology of decline in more than just the sheer number of years until the total disappearance of the *śāsana*. Buddhaghosa offers us two distinct accounts of how the *śāsana* will gradually fade and ultimately disappear. The shorter of these accounts is found, in identical wording, in his commentaries on the *Bhikkunīkhandhaka* and the *Gotamī-sutta*: the two texts which blame the hastening of decline on female ordination.³³ This is the version which explicitly lays out a five-thousand-year chronology. A second, variant account is found in the early leaves of Buddhaghosa's *Manorathapūraṇī*.³⁴ Here, Buddhaghosa outlines five different kinds of "disappearances": the disappearance of attainments (*abhiḡamas*) of higher states of enlightenment; of proper Buddhist practice (P. *paṭipatti*; Skt. *pratipatti*); of learning (*pariyattī*), specifically the study of Buddhist scriptures; of the external signs (*līṅga*) of monastic discipline such as the wearing of robes and observance of chastity; and finally, once again, of the Buddha's relics. Modern scholars have tended to conflate these two accounts of decline, and assume that each of the five "disappearances" will occur in sequence, over a thousand-year period each. Chris Clark has shown, however, that this is not the case. There is no indication in Buddhaghosa's *Manorathapūraṇī* account that these five disappearances are sequential, or tied to a specific thousand-year span each.³⁵ Clark identifies the source of the confusion as George Cœdès's reading of a Thai inscription of Mahādharma-rāja I (dated 1357). This inscription does indeed tell us that each of the "disappearances" takes place in thousand-year stages. Cœdès seems to have assumed that this sequential order was implied in the *Manorathapūraṇī* account.³⁶

33 Respectively *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. Takakusu and Nagai, 6:1291 and *Manorathapūraṇī*, ed. Kopp, 4:136–37.

34 *Manorathapūraṇī*, ed. Walleser, 1:87.

35 Clark, "A Note on the Disappearance."

36 Clark, "A Note on the Disappearance," 105. I have consulted the inscription in translation. Griswold and Nagara, "Epigraphy of Mahādharma-rāja I," 98–101.

In other words, the “five stages of decline over five thousand years” model may have originated later than previously assumed. It appears explicitly in Mahādharmaśāstra’s 1357 inscription; I suspect that it is also implicit in, and the motivation behind, Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata*. Parākramabāhu dates his inscription 1,708 years after the death of the Buddha: firmly in (and approaching the end of) the second of the thousand-year periods. This is the period in which (according to the sequential model) proper practice, *paṭipatti*, will slowly decline and eventually disappear forever. In Buddhaghosa’s account, the decline of practice is really a decline in monastic discipline (*śīla*): over the course of the millennium, small lapses eventually lead to more grievous infractions, finally resulting in the “disappearance of the last monk, either by breaking with discipline or the end of their life.”³⁷ It seems, to me, to be an unlikely coincidence that Parākramabāhu tells us his intervention into the *saṅgha* was motivated by the sight of monks bound for hell because of the poisons of “lack of practice” (*a-pratipatti*) and “bad practice” (*duṣ-pratipatti*) among the monks, necessitating disciplinary reform.

These two references together—the five-thousand-year establishment of the *śāsana* and the apparent decline in proper practice—seem to place Parākramabāhu’s inscription firmly in a Buddhaghosan understanding of *śāsana* decline. It should therefore be little surprise that to remedy this decline, he turned to Mahākāśyapa—a monk leading the Diṃbulāgala Vihāra, a monastery “dwelling in [the legacy of] the Mahāvihāra” (*mahāvihārādhivāsin*), Buddhaghosa’s own institution—to remedy the twin poisons of *a-pratipatti* and *duṣ-pratipatti* supposedly afflicting the *saṅgha*. We might also attend here to the cause (literally “root”) of these poisons given in the extract above: *a-jñāna* and *dur-jñāna*, respectively a “lack of” and “bad” knowledge. Given that Buddhaghosa distinguished between the decline of *paṭipatti* and the decline of *pariyatti* (“learning,” or more specifically scripture) as distinct phenomena, this cannot refer to a lack of/bad knowledge *in general*. Rather, I suspect that it refers specifically to knowledge about the proper conduct or practice expected of Buddhist monks. In other words, to exactly what the *katikāvata* proper, as formulated with the input of the *mahāvihārādhivāsin* Mahākāśyapa, seeks to address.

The *katikāvata* consists of a series of injunctions, each concluding with the polite imperative *yutu*, literally “is it proper” (from Skt. *yukta*). The first

On this inscription and the significance of its dates, Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*, 84–85.

37 *Manorathapūraṇī*, ed. Walleser, 1:87.

of these injunctions (ll. 18–24) sets out the duties of fully ordained monks, divided into those engaged in scholarship (*granthadhura*, lit. “the book task”) or meditation (*vidarśanadhura*). The second injunction (l. 25) sets out, in considerably less detail, duties for novices (*heraṇanu*, from P. *sāmaṇera*). Among these duties are the study of ten named works, divided by ordination status and capacity.³⁸ In keeping with Parākramabāhu’s focus on proper practice, we should note that the majority of the texts are concerned with monastic discipline; we might further note that only two (the *Sikhavaḷaṇḍa-vinisa* and *Heraṇa-sikha*, both Sinhala-language disciplinary manuals) are not written in Pali. Despite the heavily Sanskrit-inflected Sinhala in which these injunctions are written, in other words, this is a firmly Pali-oriented curriculum of monastic discipline. The following injunctions are concerned with monastic travel outside of the *vihāra* (three *yutu* clauses, ll. 26–30); the daily routine of all members of the *saṅgha* (one clause, ll. 30–37);³⁹ proper decorum, particularly in interactions with others (seventeen distinct clauses, ll. 37–47); conditions of admittance to the monastic order (five clauses, ll. 48–49); and finally disciplinary procedure (two clauses, ll. 50–51). I read these together as seeking to thoroughly regulate every aspect of monastic practice. With the *katikāvata* so articulated, none could possibly plead “lack of knowledge” (*a-jñāna*) as justification for lack of practice (*a-paṭipatti*).

Together, the above suggests that a Buddhaghosan chronology of decline provided the context for Parākramabāhu’s unification and purification of the *saṅgha*, with its particular focus on monastic “practice” (P. *paṭipatti*). He attempted to rectify this *paṭipatti* decline on a scale not evident in the earlier disciplinary inscriptions of Anurādhapuran kings, which seem to have been confined to the inhabitants of single monasteries, rather than to

38 Fully ordained monks are enjoined to study “[1] the *Kudusikha* (P. *Khuddasikhā*) and [2] *Pāṃok* (P. *Pātimokkha*) from the Vinaya, and also [3–5] the three *Dasadham-sūtras* (P. *Dasadhamma-sutta*) and [6] the *Anumāna-sūtraya* from the *Sutata* (P. *suttanta*, i.e., the *Sutta-piṭaka*)” (l. 19). Those unable to carry out this task are encouraged instead to study “[7] the *Mul-sikha* (P. *Mūlasikkha*) and [8] the *Sekhiyā*, [and also] recite [9] the *Sikhavaḷaṇḍa-vinisa*” (l. 22). Novices are to study only the *Sekhiyā*, *Dasadham*, and additionally [10] the *Heraṇa-sikha* (l. 25). The latter work, like the *Sikhavaḷaṇḍa*, is an early Sinhala-language disciplinary manual (Godakumbura 1955, 18–19). I do not include among these ten works the *Catusampajamṇā-kathāya*, which lays out a daily agenda to be followed by meditation-focused monks (l. 24).

39 This clause addresses “elders, novices, middlers, every dweller in the *saṅgha*.” I therefore take this as intentionally more capacious than the earlier sections addressed specifically to either ordained monks or novices; *all* of those in the *saṅgha* must follow this particular routine, no matter their rank or specific tasks.

the entire monastic order. Moreover, Parākramabāhu's precise calculations that he lived in the second millennium after the Buddha's death, and the references to the decline of *paṭipatti*, suggest that he understood the latter to be a feature of this particular millennium, in ways that the later Thai inscription of Mahādharmarāja I would make more explicit. In other words, this may be an early witness of the "five stages of decline across five millennia" model which modern scholars would read back into Buddhaghosa's *Manorathapūraṇī*.

This acceptance of a Buddhaghosan chronology, and therefore evidence of engagement with Buddhaghosa's works, seems to have been connected with the appointment of the monk Mahākāśyapa to lead Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* creation. Of course, we cannot be certain of the causality. Was a *mahāvihārādhivāsin* monk appointed to this position because Parākramabāhu was already inclined towards a Buddhaghosan eschatology? Or was it Mahākāśyapa himself who framed the *katikāvata* in the millenarian context laid out by his Mahāvihāran predecessor? How might we further connect Sundarā's earlier patronage of Mahākāśyapa's monastery, or the time a young Parākramabāhu spent (per *Mahāvamsa* ch. 66, vv. 110–158) as an honoured guest in the court and kingdom of Sundarā's son Gajabāhu II? The available evidence offers no clear answers to these questions. It does, however, strongly suggest that these are questions worth asking. There were more factors involved in Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* inscription than later narratives would have us believe.

Parākramabāhu and the Grandmaster Śāriputra

The *katikāvata* inscription laid out a clear disciplinary and textual foundation for the newly unified *saṅgha*, based on a corpus of Pali *vinaya* texts with Sinhala commentaries. However, the *saṅgha* must still have been divided on a large number of interpretive points—including points of *vinaya* interpretation, which if unaddressed might threaten the *saṅgha*'s ritual and legal integrity. Further intervention was necessary. As Alastair Gornall has convincingly shown, the "reform" of the *saṅgha* was by no means a single event, but rather a process which continued long after the deaths of Parākramabāhu, Mahākāśyapa, and many others involved in the initial *katikāvata*.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, a significant first step in this process was taken

40 Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 43–48 and *passim*.

by the monk Poḷonnaruve Śāriputra (P. Śāriputta, Sin. Sāriyut), the first Grandmaster (*mahāsvāmin*) of Parākramabāhu's newly unified *saṅgha*.⁴¹

Śāriputra played a key role in the post-*katikāvata saṅgha*. In addition to his formal administrative role as head of the *saṅgha*, he produced a rather staggering volume of scholarly literature, spanning three languages and a range of subjects. Only five of these works are still confirmed extant:

1. The *Sārāthadīpanī*, a Pali subcommentary on Buddhaghosa's *Vinaya* commentary called *Samantapāsādikā*.
2. The *Pālimuttakavinayavinicchayaśaṅgaha* (sometimes called *Vinayaśaṅgaha*), a Pali compendium based on the *Sārāthadīpanī*.
3. The *Anuttānatthadīpanī* (sometimes called *Vinayaśaṅgaha-ṭīkā*), a Pali autocommentary on the *Vinayaśaṅgaha*.
4. The *Sārāthamañjūsā*, a Pali subcommentary on Buddhaghosa's *Aṅguttaranikāya* commentary called *Manorathapurāṇī*.
5. The *Abhidharmāthasāṅgraha-sannaya*, a Sinhala commentary on Anuruddha's (ca. tenth century) *Abhidhammatthasāṅgaha*.

Additionally, references in both the colophons of these works and in the later *Saddhammasāṅgaha* (a bibliographic work dated to the fourteenth century) have allowed Primoz Pecenko to identify a further six works.⁴² None are confirmed extant; the only one about which we have further information is the *Pañcīkālankāra*, a Sanskrit commentary on the grammatical work *Cāndravyākaraṇaṭīkā*.⁴³ For the remaining five, nothing more is known than their names (respectively *Visuddhipathasāṅgaha*, *Kammaṭṭhānasāṅgaha*, *Maṅgalasuttaṭīkā*, *Sampasādanī*, and *Padāvatāra*).

Among Śāriputra's extant writings, the *Vinaya* works are particularly significant. Kate Crosby has suggested that these served an important function in the newly unified *saṅgha*, of reconciling—or, at least, attempting to reconcile—potentially conflicting interpretations of monastic law.⁴⁴ This gives us some indication of why Śāriputra might have been so important to

⁴¹ Śāriputra does not use this title in his own works. However, see Rohanadeera, "Mahāsāmi Sangha Rāja."

⁴² Pecenko, "Śāriputta and His Works." On the *Saddhammasāṅgaha* see Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 179–80.

⁴³ Dragomir Dimitrov has identified a manuscript in Cambridge University Library (Or.1278) as a potential copy of this work: Dimitrov, *The Bhaikṣukī Manuscript of the Candrālankāra*.

⁴⁴ Crosby, "Śāriputta."

Parākramabāhu: he was, perhaps, responsible for maintaining the internal cohesion of his newly unified *saṅgha*. He seems to have been largely successful in this endeavour within the island itself, although further afield his interpretations were met with more reservation. A South Indian monk, Cōḷa Mahākāśyapa, wrote his own *Vinaya* treatise, the *Vimativinodanī*, in response to Śāriputra's *Sārattḥadīpanī*, in which he famously accuses Śāriputra of having been waylaid at one point by the teachings of "schismatics like the Abhayagiri."⁴⁵ This suggests that, in Mahākāśyapa's eyes, the true heirs to the legacy of the Anurādhapuran Mahāvihāra's textual tradition were not to be found on Lanka, but rather across the Palk Strait in the Cōḷa heartlands: a significant claim.

Even if his interpretations were not universally accepted, it seems that Śāriputra was a major figure on the island itself, enjoying considerable royal favour. His major *Vinaya* sub-commentary, the *Sārattḥadīpanī*, concludes by describing the rather opulent circumstances of its production:

This commentary (*vaṇṇanā*) for the *Vinayaṭṭhakathā*, which is undertaken to enhance the *sāsana* and for the sake of skill in the *vinaya*, called *Sārattḥadīpanī*, is complete; it comprises in total 30,000 *ganṭhas*.⁴⁶ I, invited by this Lord of Men Parākramabāhu—illuminator of the *sāsana*, who longs for the continuance of the good *dhamma*—in the beautiful [*vihāra*] built by him, adorned with a hundred terraces/palaces (*pāsādas*, Skt. *prasādas*), lush with various excellent trees, a place to delight in meditation, dwelling in this Jetavana, which abounds in cool waters, have made this sound analysis, complete in both meaning and letter.⁴⁷

Here Śāriputra tells us that not only did Parākramabāhu commission the sub-commentary; he also established a rather well-furnished monastery for the Grandmaster. The archaeological record seems to support Śāriputra's claims. A large monastic complex is located directly north of the city, and while it does not have a *hundred* terraces or palaces, it is generally identified as Śāriputra's Jetavana. This choice of name should not escape our notice. The primary reference is the Buddha's own historical monastery; the more proximate connection, of course, would have been Anurādhapura's Jetavana monastery and associated *nikāya*. This is a useful indication that neither Parākramabāhu nor Śāriputra, despite their Mahāvihāran leanings,

⁴⁵ See most comprehensively Kieffer-Pülz, "Die Klassifizierung."

⁴⁶ While *grantha/gantha* often means a discrete textual composition (a "book"), Lawrence McCrea has suggested in personal communication that here it might follow South Indian usage in referring to a smaller unit of text-length.

⁴⁷ *Sārattḥadīpanī*, Chatṭha Saṅgāyana edition, 3:418.

were as hostile to the Mahāvihāra's rivals as later accounts made out. The *Mahāvamsa*, significantly, seems to have renamed the monastery "Āḷaḥaṇa," likely to remove the association with the Anurādhapuran *nikāya*.⁴⁸

Whatever the name, the scale of Śāriputra's monastic dwelling is indicative of the benefits he received from royal patronage. In several of his writings, he attributes this patronage to the support of Diṃbulāgala Mahākāśyapa, the monk appointed by Parākramabāhu to oversee his *katikāvata* interventions.⁴⁹ It seems likely that Mahākāśyapa was Śāriputra's monastic preceptor, formally sponsoring his higher ordination, and that he introduced Śāriputra to the king. Śāriputra in turn seems to have leveraged his own position to elevate his own chosen disciples: many of those involved in the great flourishing of Pali and Sinhala literature in the subsequent generation identify themselves as Śāriputra's students, and thank him for his support.⁵⁰ As Alastair Gornall has argued, we cannot simplistically reduce the efflorescence of Pali-language writing post-Parākramabāhu I to the largess of kingly patronage.⁵¹ However, it is clear that elite monasticism was closely entwined with the royal court during Parākramabāhu's reign.

Our sense of this entanglement is strengthened by recent archaeological findings in the hinterlands of both Poḷonnaruva and, for an earlier period, Anurādhapura. Historians had generally assumed that the settling and administration of the hinterland was largely the responsibility of monarchs in Southern Asia: this is, after all, what Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, the most famous Sanskrit-language treatise on kingship, tells us.⁵² However, it has become increasingly evident that in both Sri Lanka and South India, religious institutions often formed the nucleus of emergent communities, and in various cases served as an administrative, commercial, and even industrial hub as those communities developed. During the Anurādhapura period, the existence of three rival *nikāyas* with distinct networks of monastic communities across the hinterland resulted in a heterarchical pattern of settlement and administration.⁵³ Once the *saṅgha* was unified by Parākramabāhu, however, this inter-*nikāya* rivalry was no longer a factor, and so the hinterland

48 See *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 78, vv. 48–70. This is the name most commonly used today.

49 See, e.g., *Sāratthadīpanī*, Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition, 1:1–3.

50 It is for good reason that Chapter Ten of Malalasekera, *Pāli Literature* is titled "Śāriputra's Circle."

51 Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*.

52 See, e.g., the discussion in Coningham et al., "The State of Theocracy," 700–1.

53 Coningham et al., "Archaeology and Cosmopolitanism."

could be settled in a more centrally planned manner.⁵⁴ The ongoing unity of the monastic community, in other words, was central to the ongoing unification of the island's non-monastic communities beyond the royal city itself. Given this context, it is little wonder that Śāriputra and his textual project of reconciling disciplinary differences received so much royal support.

In short, it seems that Śāriputra's intellectual output was (in his own words) the product of royal patronage; that he leveraged his position to further the careers of his chosen disciples; and that all of these efforts may have served to settle and administer Poḷonnaruva's hinterland, through the establishment and development of new monastic communities under Śāriputra's authority. This is, it seems to me, a thoroughly political context. To acknowledge this is not to suggest that the *saṅgha* was merely a tool of royal (or "state") control. As Gornall has shown, the *saṅgha* maintained and asserted its own legal and political independence throughout this period.⁵⁵ However, it does suggest that Śāriputra's writings on kingship—and his references to Parākramabāhu in particular—should be taken very seriously indeed.

The volume of Śāriputra's writings, and the extent to which he recycled materials from earlier works, makes it difficult to survey his writings on kings and kingship comprehensively. Nonetheless, comparing the penultimate verses of his *Sāratthadīpanī*—his longest and perhaps most influential work—with the later *Anuttānatthadīpanī* provides us with a sense of how he may have thought about the proper relationship between kings and the Buddha-*sāsana*. The *Sāratthadīpanī* concludes:

sadā rakkhantu rājāno dhammeneva imampajaṃ |
niratā puññakammesu jotentu jinasāsanaṃ ||

May it always be **by dhamma** that kings protect this world, and devoted to acts of merit make shine the *sāsana* of the Conqueror!⁵⁶

The penultimate line offers us a rather explicit exhortation to future kings: that they protect the world (meaning, in practice, the people in the world, from both external threats and hardship) by *dharma*. The emphatic particle *eva* after *dharma* above adds considerable weight to this exhortation: it is *by dharma and dharma alone* that kings should carry out their fundamental duty. The *Anuttānatthadīpanī*, Śāriputra's commentary on his own *Vinaya* compendium, which Kate Crosby has shown is in turn closely based on the

⁵⁴ Manuel et al., "Low Density Urbanism in Medieval Sri Lanka."

⁵⁵ Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 135–37, 205–8, and *passim*.

⁵⁶ *Sāratthadīpanī*, Chatṭha Saṅgāyana edition, 3:418.

Sāratthadīpanī, offers a variant reading. The *Anuttānatthadīpanī* closely follows the colophon of *Sāratthadīpanī*, but with one important shift in this penultimate verse:

*sadā rakkhantu rājāno **dhmmañ c’eva** imampajaṃ |*
niratā puññakammesu jotentu jinasāsanaṃ ||

May it always be **dhmma** and this world that kings protect, and devoted to acts of merit make shine the *sāsana* of the Conqueror!⁵⁷

This is a minor shift in reading, which—in the absence of robust critical editions of both texts—could be due to little more than scribal errors. But both readings are, at minimum, metrically valid. This could suggest a shift in the imagined relationship between kingship and *dharma*: in the earlier *Sāratthadīpanī*, *dharma* guides or otherwise enables kings to carry out their protective duty towards the world; in the later *Anuttānatthadīpanī*, kings are responsible for protection of world and *dharma* alike. In both formulations, the relationship between king and *dharma* is significant. But the later places, perhaps, more of an obligation on the king: not just to be guided by the *dharma*, but to actively protect and preserve it.

Perhaps the most striking discussion of kingship in Śāriputra’s corpus comes from the historical introduction (*nidāna-kathā*) of the *Sāratthadīpanī*, in which he includes a full procedure for the royal *abhiṣeka* consecration ceremony. He borrows this procedure from an earlier text, the ca. tenth century *Vamsatthappakāsini*, which has already been productively analyzed by both Sujatha Gunasena and Jonathan Walters.⁵⁸ At minimum, this is the procedure which Śāriputra is implicitly suggesting that kings like Parākramabāhu *ought* to follow. It is at least possible that Parākramabāhu underwent this particular procedure himself. What is most interesting about this procedure is that Buddhist monks are nowhere to be seen in the ritual. The consecration is instead to be carried out by a *kṣatriya* maiden, the hereditary royal priest (*purohita*), and the treasurer (P. *seṭṭha*), respectively representing the communities (*gaṇas*) of *kṣatriyas*, Brahmins, and householders. We might reasonably interpret the *kṣatriyas* as representing military power held by regional political elites, with the “*kṣatriya* maiden” as a stand-in for marriage alliances made with those groups; the treasurer and householders would therefore represent economic power. But why Brahmins and a hereditary priest instead of Buddhist monks? After all, we saw in Chapter Four

⁵⁷ For an edition and translation of the *Anuttānatthadīpanī* colophon see Crosby, “Śāriputta,” 52–53.

⁵⁸ Gunasena, “Kingship,” ch. 4; Walters, “Buddhist History,” 130.

that patronage of a *brahmadeya* was, for most modern historians, evidence that Gajabāhu II was an inadequately Buddhist monarch—and yet here we have Parākramabāhu’s favoured monk Śāriputra claiming that Brahmins were central to an important royal ritual.

What seems to be at work here is a division of ritual labour between monks and Brahmins, with the performance of *royal* rituals left to the latter. We should not take this, for the reasons outlined above, as a genuine disinterest in what we would today call “the political.” After all, as Joseph Walser points out, “the fact that religious virtuosi and texts from time to time make a *display* of being distinct or indifferent to political concerns and stakes is not really an argument that they were not essential to the exercise of political authority.”⁵⁹ We might instead interpret this division of labour as an attempt by monks like Śāriputra to set themselves aside from and above such mundane concerns as the consecration of kings—all the while, as the evidence documented above suggests, they were both engaged with the affairs of the court and furthering the practical control of Poḷonnarvan monarchs in the hinterlands. Whatever Śāriputra’s motivation for ascribing to Brahmins and the royal *purohita* such a central role in the *abhiṣeka*, it reflects a broader trend across Buddhist Southeast Asia. Still today, hereditary Brahmins are employed in the Thai monarch’s *abhiṣeka* consecration.⁶⁰

What makes the relationship between the consecrators and consecratee in Śāriputra’s *abhiṣeka* procedure yet more striking is that it is conditional. Each of the three consecrators approach the king in turn, and while pouring sacred water over his head recite a variant of the following:

Lord, with this consecration all the groups of *khattiyas* (Skt. *kṣatriyas*) make [you into their] consecrated *mahārāja*, for the purpose of their own protection. Rule, firm in the *rājadhammas*, through *dhamma* and impartiality (*sama*, Skt. *sama*)! Have a heart of paternal compassion, and a heart of goodwill (*hita*), tranquility (*sama*, Skt. *śama*), and loving-kindness with respect to these same groups of *khattiyas*! And let them protect, defend, and guard you [in turn].

...

Those who say the above [then say further], as though cursing the king: “If you rule according to our words, that is beneficial (*kusala*). If you do not, may your head split in seven!”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Walser, *Genealogies*, 266.

⁶⁰ McGovern, “Balancing the Foreign and the Familiar”; Skilling, “King, *Saṅgha*, and Brahmins.”

⁶¹ *Sāratthadīpanī*, Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition, 1:146–47; quoting from *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, ed. Malalasekera, 1:305.

This seems, in many ways, to be a return to the “elective” model of political thought introduced in Chapter One. The king is elected by, and to represent the interests of, three powerful communities—and, crucially, if the king fails to live up to expectations, there is an explicit and dire penalty.⁶² “Kingship” here is something granted, which must be performed according to strict moral expectations (the ten *rājadharmas*, through *dharma* and impartiality), else it can once again be taken away. To be clear, if this *abhiṣeka* procedure was actually practised in medieval Sri Lanka, the “election” described here was almost certainly symbolic. But such symbols of support from elite communities nonetheless had power. More importantly, that Śāriputra chose to copy such a procedure (and such a threat!) from the *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* into his own *Sāratthadīpanī* provides us with an interesting insight into his views on kingship. Despite the gratitude he shows to his kingly patron in the final verses of the *Sāratthadīpanī*, his *abhiṣeka* procedure suggests that he did not believe kingship to be unconditional.

Śāriputra’s relationship with Parākramabāhu was evidently complex, and possibly even conflicted. On the one hand, both men clearly benefitted from their association with the other. Śāriputra had a position of prestige from which he could write his scholarly texts and guide the newly unified *saṅgha* across the island. Parākramabāhu, meanwhile, ensured that the *saṅgha* stayed unified on disciplinary grounds, and saw an increasingly centralized network of monastic communities settle and administer the hinterlands of his realm. At the same time, we should not reduce this relationship to a purely symbiotic union: the “thugs and legitimators” model of Ernst Gellner, in which monks happily (re)produce the ideological basis for kingly rule.⁶³ As the example above demonstrates, Śāriputra’s *abhiṣeka* procedure suggests that his view of kingship was not unconditional, but rather in service of elite communities and constrained by moral expectations. Looking forwards, as Gornall has shown, monk-monarch relations even after Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* were rarely stable and often contentious. They were, however, always intertwined. The *nature* of the relationship,

62 This threat of a head splitting into seven pieces originates in the *Upaniṣads*, and was later incorporated into Pali canonical materials. Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India*, 80–88; Black, “Ambaṭṭha and Śvetaketu,” 154–58. Black shows that head-splitting is a motif characteristic of formal debate (*brahmodya*) and, even in the early Pali materials, is invoked only as a forfeit for loss in debate rather than a punishment for wrong-doing. This seems very distinct from the context presented in the *abhiṣeka* procedure, which borrows the wording but not the *brahmodya* context.

63 Gellner, *Plough, Sword, and Book*; for its application in Buddhist Southern Asia see Collins, *Nirvana*, 12.

and the obligations owed by a king to the *śāsana*, was ever up for debate. But the centrality of this relationship to the functioning of a Buddhist kingdom was not.

The Politics of Language and the Languages of Politics

We have seen that the explosion of Pali scholasticism associated with Śāriputra and his disciples was thoroughly enmeshed with, and perhaps even indebted to, royal patronage. But we should not mistake this efflorescence of Pali-language monastic scholarship, even if attributed to Parākrāmabāhu's largesse, as evidence of a newfound interest on his behalf in what we might call "Pali kingship." There is little evidence that this royal interest in Pali literary productivity was reflected in Parākrāmabāhu's material culture—his inscriptions and edifices—or in how Poḷonnaruva's kings (from Parākrāmabāhu onwards) represented themselves as kingly. Parākrāmabāhu's reign may have ushered in an "Augustan Age" for Pali, as Malalasekera describes it, but this did not extend beyond the realm of monastic textuality.

Parākrāmabāhu's inscriptions are particularly useful evidence for us because, despite the praise heaped upon him as a patron of scholarly works (discussed above), we know of no literary works which were created directly under Parākrāmabāhu's patronage, or which position their authors as members of his court. This means our only written evidence of his vision of kingship comes from his inscriptions, of which only nine are extant.⁶⁴ None, tellingly, is written in Pali: all are written in some combination of Sinhala, Tamil, and Sanskrit. We have already noted in the (Sinhala-language) *katikāvata* inscription itself a decided preference for Sanskrit loanwords over Pali; this is reflective of the language practice among his other Sinhala-language inscriptions, none of which is marked by clear Pali loanwords. This suggests far more continuity with the visions of kingship described in earlier chapters than the explosion of Pali literature might suggest.

This continuity with earlier models of kingship is perhaps most evident in the inscription at Devanagala, created in Parākrāmabāhu's twelfth regnal year (ca. 1165 CE). As Ranawella notes, the opening of this inscription is nearly identical to those of Vijayabāhu and, before him, Mahinda IV—but

⁶⁴ Namely *IC* 6.13 through 16; *IC* 6.18 through 22; and *TISL* 53. *IC* 6.17 marks a private donation which happens to be dated in a regnal year of Parākrāmabāhu I; *IC* 6.23 (which is included in the Parākrāmabāhu chapter of *IC*) marks a donation by his widow Candavatī, which is discussed in Chapter Seven below.

it also closely follows the inscriptions of Gajabāhu II and Sundarā (e.g., *IC* 6.9 and 7 respectively, discussed in the preceding chapter).⁶⁵ In fact, other than the final line—offering an explanation for the name Parākramabāhu (“Whose Arms Are Mighty”)—every clause is borrowed from earlier inscriptions:

Born in the royal lineage of Okā (Skt. Ikṣvāku)—who excelled in a collection of virtues resplendent, unequalled, and supreme in the world and who subjugated the other *kṣatriya* families of Jambudvīpa—lord by descent of the earth of the island of Lanka who is the primary consort to the best of the *kṣatriya*; who anointed the heads of other kings with the rays of light reflected from his own toenails; who surpassed the sun in ascetic heat (Skt. *tapas*), Mehesuru (Maheśvara, i.e., Śiva) in expressed anger, Uvindu (Upendra, likely Viṣṇu) in pride, Surindu (Indra) in kingly conduct, the God of Wealth (Kubera) in continuous giving, Kitisuru in *satseta*, Suraguru (Bṛhaspati) in essential wisdom, the moon in munificence, Kadavu in bodily excellence, [and] the *bodhisattva* in the splendour of compassion; who, having mounted the scale-pan adorned with vestments which radiate kingly splendour, including the crown, had narratives of his glory spread across the entire world, by filling the ocean—which is the heart of every pauper spread across various countries (*deśas*)—with the flood of alms, [consisting of] unlimited and varied gems and treasures from the wishing-tree of his own body; who has the might (*parākrama*) of a lion in crushing the skulls of elephants, which are enemy kings: Parākramabāhu *vat himiyan vahansē* (*IC* 6.15, ll. 1–11).

Other inscriptions, meanwhile, incorporate more extensive uses of Sanskrit verse than we have seen in earlier periods. These inscriptions have only recently been made available to scholars in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* vol. 6; even here the Sanskrit is imperfectly edited, with no translations attempted. One inscription (*IC* 6.16) is absent altogether, as Ranawella was unable to locate an estampage within the Department of Archaeology archives. A set of pillar-inscriptions (*IC* 6.18–22) record, in both Sinhala and Sanskrit prose, irrigation works carried out by Parākramabāhu “for the benefit of the entire world” (*viśvalokārtham*). It is unclear why it was important to Parākramabāhu that these particular works have bilingual pillars established for them; nor is it clear why one of these pillars features an additional Sanskrit verse, which sadly has so far frustrated editorial attempts.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ranawella, in *IC*, 6:42.

⁶⁶ See discussion in Shirley, “Buddhism, Gender, and Politics,” 200–1.

One more pillar inscription is worth particular attention. This is dated in Parākramabāhu's regnal years, but is attributed to an official (*adhikāra*) called Tiṣyādimāra (Sin. Tisa Mārana), carrying out orders on behalf of the monarch, and supposedly expressing Parākramabāhu's own words (*vadan*):

[Sinhala prose:] Śrī! On the second day of the month Vāp in the ninth year of Śrīsaṅghabodhi Parākramabāhu *vat himiyan vānse*—who is descended from the royal lineage which descends from Mahasamuva (Mahāsammata); possessing glory, fame, and lustre spreading across the ten limits; being furnished with epithets (*viruda*) such as “Lover of Enemy Kings’ Concubines” (*arirājaveśyābhujāṅga*)—this [inscription] praises the [village] Mārānhālla, founded by the *adhikāra* Vatakāmi Dālābim Tisa Mārānāvanā *svāmī*, who possesses the epithet “Terror of Other Kings” (*pararājabhayaṅkara*), while he was the *atvasundhura*⁶⁷ of the Māyā Country, so that it may last for a long time, until the dawn of a *kalpa*, for five thousand years.⁶⁸

[Sanskrit verse:] Śrī! [The above was done] by the minister Tiṣyādimāra—the Terror of Other Kings, who is titled in recognition of his public works (*vāstukarma*) as an *adhikāra*—on the orders of King Śrīsaṅghabodhi, named Parākramabāhu, who is associated with teachings which delight the mind.

[Sinhala prose:] These are the words [of] Pārākum, called Lord Śrīsaṅghabo, who preserves the earth-maiden which illuminates the Lord of Lanka (IC 6.14).

Tiṣyādimāra's inscription operates in multiple linguistic registers to an even greater extent than the irrigation pillar-inscriptions described above. Here we see names and epithets articulated in both Sanskritic and “pure” (*eḷu*) Sinhala forms, including the rather striking “Lover of Enemy Kings’ Concubines” (*arirājaveśyābhujāṅga*) for Parākramabāhu. This does indeed seem to have been a regnal name used by Parākramabāhu: it appears in the later *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, where we are told it was (rather incongruously!) applied to a monastic *vihāra*.⁶⁹ Further evidence for its contemporary usage by Parākramabāhu himself is discussed below.

For now, let us note that these inscriptions together suggest for Parākramabāhu an interest in Sanskrit-language inscriptional practices which exceeds that of any preceding Lankan monarchs. With the notable exception of the famous Jetavana inscription (*EZ 1.1*), written entirely in

⁶⁷ An official title related in some way to regional administration.

⁶⁸ The temporal range intended here is unclear. Given that a *kalpa* is so much longer than “five thousand years,” it seems to me that this is merely rhetorical repetition and exaggeration for emphasis.

⁶⁹ *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, ed. Samaranāyaka, 78.

Sanskrit verse and in Nāgarī script, Sanskrit had been almost entirely peripheral to Lankan inscriptional culture prior to the reign of Parākramabāhu.⁷⁰ We ought also to note that our earliest evidence of Parākramabāhu's interest in Sanskrit comes, once again, from the "treaty inscription" discussed in the preceding chapter; we might therefore suspect that this, too, was an interest which emerged in some conjunction from his uncle.

Finally, we have Parākramabāhu's sole extant inscription in Tamil, located on the northern island of Nainativu (T. Nayaṇāṭivu, Sin. Nāgadīpayā). Even at this early stage, there was clearly some degree of affinity between the Tamil language and Sri Lanka's north. The most straightforward explanation for this is simply that this was, by Parākramabāhu's time, already a predominantly Tamil-speaking region, even before the rise of a distinct Tamil kingdom ruled by the Āryacakravartti dynasty in later centuries.⁷¹ The contents of the inscription provide us with insights into what we might call Parākramabāhu's foreign trade policy. In particular, the inscription outlines the policies he employed to incentivize the import of horses and elephants, important military assets for which he also tells us he had a particular fondness (*snēha*). After a sadly effaced introduction, the remaining text tells us of Parākramabāhu's wishes:

This order (*vivastai*, Skt. *yavasthā*) [section effaced]...that foreign merchants come and stay at Ūrattuṛai (Sin. Ūrātoṭa, now Kayts); that they are protected; that foreign merchants from many ports come and gather at our own port; that, due to Our affection for elephants and horses, when a ship which carries elephants and horses for Us is destroyed, one quarter [of the salvaged goods] is for the Treasury, [and] the [remaining] three parts should be reserved for the owner; that when a [regular] trade-ship is destroyed, half is for the Treasury, half should be reserved for the owner. Lord Parākramabhujā, forest-fire for the lineage(s) of enemy kings, *cakravartin* of all Sinhala, made this order [and] had it carved on stone and on copper to last as long as the sun and moon (*TISL* 53)

We see here again the title *cakravartin*, here qualified not with reference to a wheel of command but rather to the entirety of "all Sinhala." That this instance appears, again, in a Tamil-language inscription, further supports the argument that this title entered the Lankan repertoire via Cōḷa usage, not as a reference to Pali-language canonical texts. Even here, however, Parākramabāhu seems to be drawing heavily on Sanskrit influences. His

⁷⁰ As the opening section of *EZ* 1.1 is missing, it has not been definitively dated, but is tentatively assigned to the early ninth century.

⁷¹ Indrapala, "Dravidian Settlements"; Kulasuriya, "Regional Independence."

titles are written in Grantha script to accommodate Sanskrit, rather than Tamil, phonetics.

These inscriptions together speak to a radically alternate language of politics in Parākramabāhu's reign than the existing historiography would have it. If anything, the language of kingship under Parākramabāhu was more linguistically diverse than ever, drawing on Sanskrit to an unprecedented degree while continuing to produce Sinhala- and Tamil-language inscriptions. We see further evidence of this transcultural engagement in architectural remains: specifically, in the "Tivaṅka" image-house located three kilometres north of the city gates; and in an unusually named council hall constructed within the royal palace complex.

None of Poḷonnaruva's vaulted image-houses contain inscriptions, frustrating attempts to definitively date their construction. However, we might look here to the *Mahāvamsa*'s later description of an image-house constructed by Parākramabāhu to house a three-jointed (P. *ti-vaṅka*, likely Skt. *tri-bhaṅga*) Buddha-image.⁷² This almost certainly describes the central Buddha statue of the northernmost image-house, which does indeed bend at the hips and slightly at the knees; as the head is missing, the neck bend cannot be made out (Fig. 11). The image-house is today called, I think accurately, the Tivaṅka. The Tivaṅka image-house is particularly noteworthy for the murals painted on its inner walls, which were the best-preserved examples of Poḷonnaruva-period art—until, sadly, they were extensively damaged by careless colonial explorers.⁷³ The murals in the *maṇḍapa* (entrance hall) were likely painted over during the reign of Parākramabāhu II (r. 1236–1270), and so reflect a slightly later art style.⁷⁴ However, those in the inner shrine (*garbhagrha*) and antechamber (*antarāla*) may be original. They bear a stylistic resemblance, with their striking red ochre, to other art from the Poḷonnaruva period, including that near Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* inscription.⁷⁵ Two of the figures in the Tivaṅka mural are also posed in the same uncommon crossed-arm posture as one of the great statues near the *katikāvata*.⁷⁶ All of this strongly suggests that Parākramabāhu was indeed

⁷² *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 78, vv. 39–40. The northernmost "Tivaṅka" image-house was extensively refurbished during the reign of Parākramabāhu II, in whose court the *Mahāvamsa* extension was composed. This might explain the composer's familiarity with Poḷonnaruvan architecture.

⁷³ Bandaranayake, *Rock and Wall Paintings*, 79.

⁷⁴ Paranavitana, "Religion, Literature, and Art," 611.

⁷⁵ Bandaranayake, *Rock and Wall Paintings*, 88.

⁷⁶ Devendra, "An Unusual Hand Position"; Bandaranayake, *Rock and Wall Paintings*, 80.

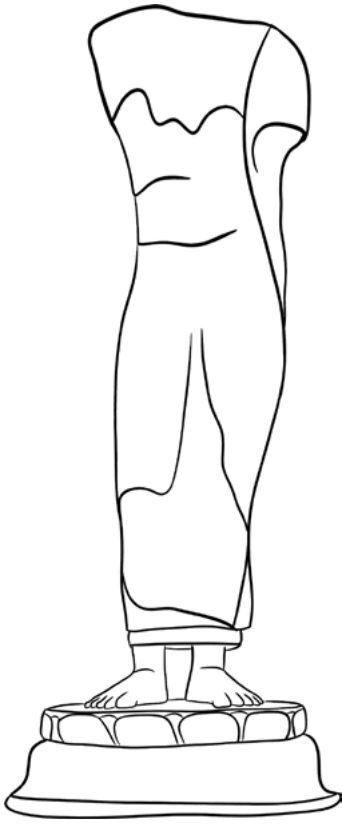


Figure 11. Statue in the northern image-house. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after photographs by Tyler A. Lehrer and the author. Used with permission.

the patron of this image-house, and these murals, as suggested by the *Mahāvamsa*.

Given this, we might return again to Bandaranayake's discussion of these buildings' architectural influences. As noted in Chapter One, the Tivaṅka was constructed in a decidedly South Indian aesthetic, modelled (directly or indirectly) on a Śiva *devālaya* constructed in Poḷonnaruva by the Cōḷas. Even the titular Buddha-image echoes, to an extent, the classic three-jointed (*tri-bhaṅga*) pose characteristic of Cōḷa period statuary. The *tri-bhaṅga* posture was known in Sri Lanka even before the Cōḷa period, and had been used in earlier statues like the famous bronze Tārā (ca. seventh or eighth century) now in the British Museum.⁷⁷ It is therefore difficult to say whether the three-jointed Buddha statue erected by Parākramabāhu in his

Tivaṅka image-house took inspiration directly from Cōḷa bronzes of Śaiva deities, or from earlier Lankan bronzes of Mahāyāna figures like Tārā. In either case, the image-house and its statue reveal a far more inclusive vision of Buddhism than the extant historiography of Parākramabāhu's reign might suggest—one clearly engaged with wider regional artistic and architectural developments.

The Tivaṅka murals are also noteworthy in this regard. We have noted that the murals in the *maṇḍapa* likely belong to a later period, but that those of the sanctum and antechamber seem to be original (and stylistically match those found near Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* inscription). Many are fragmentary, and those on the southern wall of the shrine proper are extremely damaged by exposure. Nonetheless, a coherent program can be discerned in what remains, and in the records left by earlier observers.⁷⁸ While the outer

⁷⁷ British Museum number 1830,0612.4.

⁷⁸ Bell, *ASCAR* 1909; Godakumbura, *Tivaṅka Pilimageyi Bitusituvam*; Bandaranayake, *Rock and Wall Paintings*, 80–87.

murals all display scenes from *jātaka* stories, those in the sanctum focus on the Buddha himself as an object of worship and devotion. In the narrow ante-chamber, the southern wall is crowded with ranks of divine beings engaged in homage; the northern wall is largely effaced. The focal point of the scene is missing, but this may well be the moment in which the gods entreat the Buddha to be reborn as a human, and eventually attain Buddhahood. The figures are human-sized, giving the effect that those in the passageway are themselves part of the divine crowd.

The southern wall of the sanctum once displayed an image of the Buddha seated on a throne, with two devotees in attendance. This mural is now entirely destroyed by colonial-era negligence. On the northern wall, a vast mural depicts the Buddha descending from the Trāyastrimśa Heaven on three parallel ladders after preaching the *abhidharma* to his deceased mother. This is a classic scene of Buddhist visual art, witnessed from an early period.⁷⁹ Here, as in other depictions, the Buddha is accompanied by the gods Brahma and Indra, both with their distinctive iconography. What distinguishes this image from many others, however, is that Indra, the king of the gods, holds a jewelled parasol—the classic symbol of royal authority—above the Buddha’s head.⁸⁰ More divine figures watch on from the eastern wall of the shrine, facing the colossal, three-jointed Buddha statue itself. None of the five still visible can be positively identified, but they are generally understood to represent those who greeted the Buddha on his return from Trāyastrimśa.⁸¹ These images together convey two clear messages to the visitor: the Buddha is to be worshipped, and he is to be treated like a king, even by the very gods themselves. We might recall here the discussion, in Chapter Two, of Vijayabāhu’s hierarchy of kingship, which explicitly positioned deities like Viṣṇu and Śiva below the Buddha; a similar logic, I suspect, was at work in the visual program of Parākramabāhu’s Tivaṅka image-house.

Finally, we have further evidence of Parākramabāhu’s engagement with more regional practices of kingship—and their gendered implications

79 See, e.g., the Gāndhāran panel from the early centuries CE now at the Victoria and Albert Museum, accession number IS.11-1947.

80 The parasol alone has long stood in for the Buddha during the “aniconic period” of Buddhist art. I am not familiar, however, with earlier images of Indra specifically holding a parasol over the Buddha’s head, and Indra is not typically mentioned in textual accounts of the scene.

81 On the identity, and gendered implications, of these figures as described in textual sources, see Young, “Female Mutability and Male Anxiety.”

—within the royal palace complex itself. We have already noted above that at least one contemporary inscription (IC 6.14) attributed to him the rather striking epithet “Lover of Enemy Kings’ Concubines” (*arirājaveśyābhujāṅga*). This is very clearly not the language we see used to describe kingship in sources like the Pali canon. Instead, this points us towards discourses, emerging in Sanskrit-language literature (such as the *Kāma-sūtra*) from the Gupta period (ca. 350–550 CE) onwards, regarding the king’s idealized masculinity as made evident in his (hetero)sexual relations with large numbers of palace women.⁸² These women were generally confined to a dedicated part of the palace called the “Inner City” (*antaḥpura*),⁸³ which was ordered both hierarchically and spatially. Principal wives occupied apartments at the centre, while lower-ranked entertainers, concubines, and courtesans (including *veśyās*) were more peripherally located.⁸⁴ We know that Parākramabāhu, like most Lankan kings before him, had multiple wives, who are discussed further in Chapter Seven. This epithet, and its invocation of *veśyās*, suggests a further interest in the full hierarchy of royal women as described in Sanskrit texts. With this in mind, we might look to the structure on the east of the royal palace complex which is called, in an inscription near its entrance, the Rājaveśyābhujāṅga-maṇḍapa, “Hall of the Lover of Royal Concubines.” There is archaeological evidence that the current structure was refurbished by later monarchs.⁸⁵ However, the similar epithet, and the *Mahāvamsa*’s description of Parākramabāhu having built “a beautiful *maṇḍapa* named Rājavesibhujāṅga,” strongly suggest that he had a hand in the original.⁸⁶ This structure is known today as the “Council Chamber,” presumably following the *Mahāvamsa*’s comparison of the Rājaveśyābhujāṅga-maṇḍapa to the Sudharmā *sabhā*, the assembly hall of the Gods. This would also agree with the *Arthaśāstra*’s dictum that the assembly hall be located east of the royal quarters, with the Inner City to the west.⁸⁷ If this was indeed Parākramabāhu’s assembly hall—the seat of his power, in which his subjects would approach his person to make petitions or give obeisance—then it

⁸² See, generally, Ali, *Courtly Culture*; on dating see his p. 20.

⁸³ I avoid the term harem, for reasons laid out in Ahmed, “Western Ethnocentrism”; Foster, “Colonialism and Gender in the East.”

⁸⁴ Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 219–20.

⁸⁵ Paranavitana, “Religion, Literature, and Art,” 602.

⁸⁶ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 73, vv. 87–91.

⁸⁷ Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 38–43.

seems to have been named for his engagement with the *Kāmasāstric* pursuit of concubinal pleasure.

All of this together presents a far more cosmopolitan image of Parākramabāhu than the extent historiography might allow. He was a patron of Pali-language monastic scholarship, yes; he also seems to have invoked a Buddhaghosan chronology of decline in his *katikāvata*, which enabled the eventual ascendancy of Mahāvihāra- and Pali-oriented Buddhism in Sri Lanka and, arguably, across Southern Asia. But he also created more inscriptions in Sanskrit than any earlier Lankan monarch; he created shrines and Buddha images which draw upon South Indian aesthetics; and he used an epithet (after which he named his own assembly hall) which boasts of his virile and polygynous masculinity. This cannot be reduced to a conservative, insular, “Sinhala Buddhist” kingship (whatever such a narrowly defined cultural construction might look like). This was a thoroughly transcultural presentation of monarchy; firmly grounded in a Buddhist “substructure” but fully participant in wider practices of idealized kingship.

Conclusions to Chapter Five

The shadow of Parākramabāhu’s parasol is cast long across history. Memories of his rule spread rapidly across the Indian Ocean region, and were invoked by later monarchs in support of their own political projects.⁸⁸ More recently, Polonnaruwa’s newest urban development plan articulates a desire to “to redevelop this glorious city anew” on the model of Parākramabāhu’s “golden age.”⁸⁹ His vision of kingship, in other words, is one that has stood the test of time.

This chapter has not sought to challenge or undermine such assessments of Parākramabāhu’s reign as a “golden age.” Indeed, there is much to support such a claim. It seems to have been a period of relative stability in a time otherwise marked by political turmoil. However, this chapter has sought to nuance Parākramabāhu’s legacy, by interrogating how exactly he presented himself as such an ideal king. It would be easy to follow the cue of the later *Mahāvamsa*, which presents him as a partisan for the Mahāvihāra and a fierce opponent to “inadequately Buddhist” rivals like Gajabāhu II. However, I have suggested that Parākramabāhu was a far more cosmopolitan king than such narratives let on. The text and content of his *katikāvata* inscription certainly suggest some leanings towards a Pali-language form

⁸⁸ See particularly Blackburn, *Buddhist-Inflected Sovereignties*, 148–57.

⁸⁹ Polonnaruwa Urban Development Plan 2019–2030, 1:115.

of Buddhism, which is unsurprising given his relationship with the monk Dīṃbulāgala Mahākāśyapa. But his wider inscriptional oeuvre, and material evidence from his edificial constructions across Poḷonnaruva, shows that he was aware of and participant in more diverse—linguistically, aesthetically, performatively—practices of kingship. And while he may well have been an important patron and sponsor of the scholar-monk Śāriputra, their relationship had pragmatic dimensions which belie the simple division of political kings and legitimating monks.

Only nascent in this chapter is the question of gender politics. We have noted only one piece of evidence that gender was at all on Parākramabāhu's mind: his epithet (*ari*)*rājaveśyābhujāṅga*, “Lover of (Enemy) Kings’ Concubines.” This speaks, I have suggested, to an engagement with Sanskritic ideals in which kingly masculinity is performed through (hetero)sexual relationship with a variety of royal women. The women themselves, however, seem to be otherwise entirely absent from the story. Other than the implicit existence of these *rājaveśyās*, we would hardly know that Parākramabāhu had any consorts at all. Given the argument made in Chapter Three—that royal women only become “visible” in the absence of stable, centralized, masculine rule—this is perhaps hardly surprising in the reign of Parākramabāhu, the most stable and centralized of all Poḷonnaruva's monarchs.

Yet in the period following his rule, two of the three longest-ruling monarchs—Lilāvatī (who ruled for three to five years, spread across three separate reigns in 1197–1200, 1209–1210, and 1210–1211) and Kalyāṇavatī (six years, 1202–1208)—were, respectively, the widows of Parākramabāhu I and Niśśaṅka Malla (the third of these long-reign monarchs, ruling for nine years between 1187 and 1193). Clearly, something shifted dramatically between the reign of Parākramabāhu, in which royal wives seemed all but invisible, and the first reign of his own widow Lilāvatī, a decade later. In the following chapter I suggest that the reign of Niśśaṅka Malla was a crucial turning-point in this regard.

A STRANGER KINGSHIP

THE NEW DYNASTY OF NIŚŚAŅKA MALLA (1187–1196)

NIŚŚAŅKA MALLA was never meant to rule. If Vijayabāhu II, Parākramabāhu's appointed heir, had survived longer than a single year on the throne, he would doubtless have designated an heir of his own.¹ But after Vijayabāhu's assassination in ca. 1187, the Kālīṅga-born Niśśaṅka Malla was installed on the throne, and a new dynasty rose to prominence in Lankan history.² Despite the repeated assurances that Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions give us of his readiness to rule—they stress, for example, his training in “swordsmanship, *śāstras*, scripture (*āgama*), and all arts” (IC 6.24, l. a6)—this cannot have been a comfortable position for the new monarch. Parākramabāhu's legacy left a long shadow over the later Poḷonnaruva period, in which any later monarchs had to struggle to find their own patch of sunlight. Simultaneously, Niśśaṅka Malla faced the dual threats of further uprisings by powerful local landowners and officials—of the sort which had led to Vijayabāhu II's death—or even the possibility of military invasion by powerful mainland polities.

These challenges were, of course, faced by all of Poḷonnaruva's monarchs. What sets Niśśaṅka Malla aside was the apparent distance of his family ties to his immediate predecessors. The exact nature of his relationship to Parākramabāhu is contested (discussed further below), but he was very clearly not a direct descendant of Vijayabāhu I, let alone the later

1 The relationship between Niśśaṅka Malla, Vijayabāhu II, and Parākramabāhu is murky. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, Niśśaṅka Malla was the *uparāja* of Vijayabāhu II, not of Parākramabāhu. See *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 80, vv. 18–20. I suspect otherwise, for reasons discussed below.

2 Although Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions use Kālīṅga, Kālīṅga, and variants thereon interchangeably, I use “Kālīṅga” in reference to the region and “Kālīṅga” to the dynasty. Kālīṅga is a region located on the mainland's east coast, somewhere between the Ganges and the Godāvari. Paranavitana has argued that Niśśaṅka Malla was actually born in Southeast Asia, but this is unconvincing: see, e.g., Paranavitana, “Ceylon and Malaysia in Medieval Times”; cf. Gunawardana, “Ceylon and Malaysia”; Sirisena, “The Kālīṅga Dynasty”; and many others.

Anurādhapuran kings. Instead, he positioned himself as the first member of a *new* ruling dynasty, tracing his lineage back to the Kāliṅga region rather than to Anurādhapura. As a recent collection of essays has demonstrated, such moments of dynastic shift were often pivotal moments in the global medieval world, providing opportunities both for new forms of kingship and for novel challenges to dynastic claims.³ Niśśaṅka Malla succeeded in this task, if we define “success” as securing for other family members accession to the throne (however quickly and violently some of these family members were then subsequently deposed). Of the eleven monarchs who followed Niśśaṅka Malla, over half were members of the Kāliṅga dynasty. How did this lineage—originally never intended to sit on the throne at all—become so firmly ensconced in Lanka’s political landscape? How did Niśśaṅka Malla adequately fulfil the expectations of kingship inherited from his illustrious predecessor, and re-orient it so thoroughly towards his own dynasty that his own half-brothers and consort were eventually placed on the throne?

Modern historians have often reduced these challenges—I would suggest reduced to an unhelpful degree—to a need to overcome the dynasty’s “foreign” origins. Amaradasa Liyanagamage, for example, distinguishes between the powerful general-*cum*-advisors who often played kingmaker in Poḷonnaruva (many of whom share confusingly similar names) by identifying them as members of “rival factions” respectively supporting the “Kāliṅga” and “Pāṇḍya” dynasties.⁴ Even S. Pathmanathan, often the most nuanced historian of this period, suggests that some Poḷonnaruvan monarchs and courtiers belonged to a “Kāliṅga faction,” the presence of which “seems to have strengthened Hindu influence on court life and ideas of kingship.”⁵ But Niśśaṅka Malla’s own inscriptions make no secret of his foreign origins; even our later textual sources do not seem particularly concerned with his purported “foreignness.”⁶ Much like, perhaps, treatments of the later Nāyakkara

3 Rodriguez et al., *Dynastic Change*.

4 Liyanagamage, “Decline,” 142.

5 Pathmanathan, “Kingship,” 122. Pathmanathan does not suggest that this trend began with Niśśaṅka Malla, but calls our attention to the much longer tradition of intermarriage with nobility from Kāliṅga.

6 The *Mahāvamsa* has a relatively large amount to say about Niśśaṅka Malla, devoting nine verses to him in a chapter which otherwise tends towards extreme brevity: *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 80, vv. 18–26. But while the first of these verses notes that he was indeed “Kāliṅga-born” (*kaliṅgaja*), it does not otherwise suggest that there was anything particularly “non-Lankan” about him or his reign. We see a similar pattern in *Pūjāvaliya*, which also notes only that he “came from the

dynasty (1739–1815), this may be more reflective of modern preoccupations with “nationality” than an actual concern of the Poḷonnaruva period.⁷ I do not think that we can take Niśśaṅka Malla’s frequent references to his birth in Kālīṅga as some sort of pre-emptive defence against critique. Rather, I suspect that this was presented as a useful point of difference with which to elevate his dynasty: a deliberate construction of—to borrow from Marshall Sahlins—“strangeness.”

Sahlins’s theory of the stranger-king was based on his observation that:

It is a remarkably common fact that the great chiefs and kings of political society are not *of* the people they rule. By the local theories of origin they are strangers, just as the draconic feats by which they come to power are foreign to the conduct of the “real people” or “true sons of the land.”⁸

As we will see below, Sahlins’s theory has been productively applied to Sri Lankan narratives of dynastic origin. Niśśaṅka Malla’s own “strangeness,” as a Kālīṅga-born monarch, also seems a neat fit with Sahlins’s archetype. However, I will argue that this neatness was no accident, much less the product of some structuralist universal. Rather, Niśśaṅka Malla’s “strangeness” was carefully *constructed*, as part of a deliberate politics of difference.

We can track the evolution of this construction throughout Niśśaṅka Malla’s reign, with considerable granularity, thanks to his unusually large inscriptional corpus. Of the 115 inscriptions published in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* vol. 6, sixty-four are attributed to Niśśaṅka Malla, making him the single most prolific epigrapher of all Sri Lankan history. While modern scholars have disparagingly referred to these inscriptions as “bombastic,” they are no shallow boasts.⁹ Rather, they reflect a more general dedication on Niśśaṅka Malla’s part to shaping the very landscape of his kingdom on a scale not otherwise known in Lankan history. It is no

Kālīṅga” (*kālīṅgayen ā*): *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 783–84; see also *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, ed. Samaranāyaka, 79; *Rājāvaliya*, ed. Suravīra, 59.

7 The Nāyakkaras, like Niśśaṅka Malla, had their origins in “mainland” South Asia, and so have often been called “aliens” in the Kandyan kingdom: see, e.g., Dharmadasa, “Sinhala Buddhist Identity,” 1; Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, 279; Obeyesekere, *Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity*, 48. Against this, see Obeyesekere’s more recent writings: Obeyesekere, “Between the Portuguese and the Nāyakas”; Obeyesekere, *The Doomed King*.

8 Sahlins, “Stranger-King,” 111.

9 Bell, *ASCAR 1903*, 17; Bell, *ASCAR 1911–1912*, 100; Fernando, “Niśśaṅka Malla Aśōka hā Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstraya,” 175; Goonatilake, “Impact,” 363; Paranavitana, *EZ* 4:267; Ranawella, *IC* 6:363.

coincidence that nearly half of Poḷonnaruva's extant citadel grounds are dedicated to Niśsaṅka Malla's own palace and council chambers, surrounded by his expansive gardens, dwarfing the earlier palace complexes of Parākramabāhu and Vijayabāhu. Among Niśsaṅka Malla's many contributions to the Poḷonnaruvan landscape, one inscription in particular stands out: the monumental "Galpota" ("stone book") inscription (IC 6.24), carved to look like a giant palm-leaf manuscript and erected within the Sacred Quadrangle at the heart of Poḷonnaruva. This inscription owes much, stylistically, to the *sirit/katikāvata* inscriptions of previous monarchs. It consists of a long preamble, constructed as a single continuous sentence, leading up to a series of discrete injunctions. Unlike these earlier inscriptions, however, these injunctions are not directed at monks. Instead, Niśsaṅka Malla calls these "instructions" (Sin./Skt. *avadāva*, P. *ovāda*) which ought to be heeded by all Lankans, monastic or not (IC 6.24, l. c4).¹⁰ Truncated variations on the same injunctions appear in the much shorter (and likely earlier) inscriptions carved at the citadel gates (IC 6.28, 29, and the fragmentary 30). Significantly, as discussed further below, these injunctions appear to be primarily concerned with questions of succession and rightful claims to the throne. These inscriptions therefore constitute the closest we have to an explicit "law of succession" from our period.

I do not take this "law" to be self-evident. Rather, as with other inscriptions examined throughout this book, I understand the succession laws articulated in the Galpota and Gate inscriptions to be dialogical arguments for Niśsaṅka Malla's dynastic desires, levelled against implicit counterarguments. To understand these arguments, and how they developed throughout Niśsaṅka Malla's reign, we need at least a general sense of inscriptional chronology. While the vast majority of these inscriptions are not explicitly dated, several clues allow us to tentatively piece together a chronological arc.

Several inscriptions mention activities carried out in a particular regnal year. These include a grand tour in year two (see, e.g., IC 6.32, 37, 39, 40, 57, 69, 70, 71, 74, 75), a visit to Anurādhapura in year four (IC 6.27), and a pilgrimage to the Śrī Pāda in year nine (IC 6.43 and 49). Inscriptions which mention these events must postdate them. References to "five years of tax remittance" (in IC 6.24, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 52, 55) *could* be read as promissory, but from context I suspect that these instead all postdate

10 The term *avavāda*, in a Lankan Buddhist context, perhaps orients us towards the canonical *Siṅgālovāda-sutta* (*Dīgha-nikāya* 31), called a *gihivīnaya* ("Vinaya for Householders") in Buddhaghosa's commentaries and still today.

the fifth regnal year (at the earliest).¹¹ Similarly, mentions of “seven years of tax remittance” in an inscription found in Ruhunu (*IC* 6.54) cannot be from earlier than the seventh regnal year. We can also date some inscriptions relative to one another. The Galpota (*IC* 6.24) mentions the inscriptions on the citadel gates (*IC* 6.28, 29, 30, and 31), and so must postdate them. Those inscriptions which mention edificial works at Rameśvaram (*IC* 6.24, 43, 45, 49, 48, 51, 56, 60, 67, 76, 77, and 78) must postdate the inscribed throne found on the island (*IC* 6.46). One of the inscriptions at the Hāṭadāgē (*IC* 6.57) describes the creation of inscribed distance markers (*IC* 6.74, 75, 76, 77, and 78). I take those inscriptions concerned primarily with marking a specific event as dating closely to that event (as for the inscription *IC* 6.27, found in Anurādhapura, and which describes a royal visit to Anurādhapura in the fourth regnal year). Similarly, we might tentatively assign the controversial slab-inscription near the Poḷonnaruva canal (*IC* 6.26) to Niśśaṅka Malla’s first or second regnal year, given that it is almost entirely concerned with the transition of power from Vijayabāhu II. Finally, those inscriptions which share common features uncommon in the wider corpus—such as the titles *virudarāja viraveśyabhujāṅga*, which occur only in the two inscriptions we can definitively date to year nine (*IC* 6.43 and 49), and in the council chamber seating inscriptions (*IC* 6.85)—can tentatively be grouped together temporally.¹²

11 The Anurādhapura inscription (*IC* 6.27) postdated to Niśśaṅka Malla’s fourth year concludes by telling us that he remitted taxes for “another” year (*nāvāta havuruddakaṭa aya hārā*), which implies that by this point the years of tax relief were ongoing, and subject to the king’s whim year-to-year. I take mentions to “five years,” therefore, as retrospective references made once the taxes had been reinstated. This is complicated by *IC* 6.25 (and the fragmentary *IC* 6.61), which mention both “five years of tax relief” and the announcement of “another year” at Anurādhapura. I suspect that *IC* 6.25 and 61 were created long after the five year period, and simply note both that five years of taxes were remitted overall and that a specific and noteworthy instance of remittance-extension happened in year four.

12 The title *cakravartin* might similarly be a useful temporal marker. The title is present in so many of Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions that it is hard to imagine him without it. But those few in which it is absent include *IC* 6.26 and 27, which we can date with reasonable confidence to Niśśaṅka Malla’s first and fourth regnal years respectively. It is therefore possible that Niśśaṅka Malla only began using the title *cakravartin* sometime after his fourth regnal year, at which point (I assume) he would use it consistently. This would mean that the vast majority of his inscriptions were, in fact, a product only of the latter half of his reign. Without stronger evidence of this, however, I do not include this principle in my chronologizing.

These principles together offer us the following chronology of Niśsaṅka Malla’s inscriptions:

Group	IC 6 Numbering	Year
A	26	One or two
B	32, 37, 39, 40, 53, 57, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73a, 73b, 74, 75	After two
C	46 (Rameśvaram inscription)	After two
D	45, 67, 76, 77, 78	After C
E	27 (Anurādhapura inscription)	Four
F	28, 29, 30, 31 (Gate inscriptions)	Prior to G
G	24 (Galpota inscription)	After five
H	25, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 44, 48, 51, 52, 55, 56, 60, 61, 63	After five
I	54 (Ruhuṇa inscription)	After seven
J	85	Likely eight or nine
K	43, 49	Nine

Twenty-six additional inscriptions contain no clues to their dating.

Fortified with this sense of chronological development, the first half of this chapter traces how Niśsaṅka Malla’s self-presentation as a “stranger king” changed over time. While his earliest inscriptions emphasize *continuity* with Poḷonnaruva’s earlier kings, particularly Parākramabāhu I, later inscriptions increasingly orient themselves away from this lineage, and towards Niśsaṅka Malla’s mainland origins. This is not, I argue, a direct reflection of already-existing identity markers (“foreign-ness”) or origin myths, but rather a novel fashioning of difference intended to set Niśsaṅka Malla’s nascent dynasty apart from domestic rivals. In the second half of the chapter, I attend to the unusually prominent role that royal women—his mother, wives, and daughter—played in this dynasty-making. I suggest that we might productively consider this a “matrilateral” vision of kingship, one defined primarily by male-to-male homosocial relations mediated through female relations. Despite this masculinist emphasis, however, the centrality of royal women to this vision of kingship provided a valuable opportunity for them to exert their own power.

Fashioning a Stranger Kingship

Central to Niśsaṅka Malla’s claims to kingship was that he was not the first monarch of a Kāliṅga dynasty to rule Sri Lanka. The prose section of his earliest extant inscription (IC 6.26) opens by recapitulating the narrative of the mythical founder-king Vijaya, described as:

King Vijaya, the eldest son of King Siṃhabāhu who was born into the lineage of glorious (*śrīmat*) and supernaturally powerful Kāliṅga *cakravartins*; who travelled from Kāliṅga to Laṃkā; expelled the *yakṣas* (P. *yakkhas*, non-human beings); made [the island fit for] human dwellings; and ruled [it] under a single canopy (*IC* 6.26, ll. a8–14).

This rather generous retelling elides many of the stranger features of the Vijaya mythos. In the *Mahāvamsa*'s telling, for example, Vijaya's father Siṃhabāhu (P. Siṃhabāhu) is the son of a lion (*siṃha*) and an abducted princess, who kills his own bestial father and marries his sister. Vijaya is expelled from his home region due to his excessive immorality, and travels with some followers to the island of Lanka. There, he subdues the *yakṣas* by forcing one of their number, a *yakṣiṇī*, to both assist in his conquest and serve as his wife, before eventually discarding her in favour of a high-caste human bride.¹³ Bestiality, incest, rape, and violence—these are hardly the illustrious origins we would expect to be boasted of in an inscriptional eulogy, and they necessitate some explanation.

R. A. L. H. Gunawardana has argued—controversially, but I think convincingly—that the *Mahāvamsa*'s account of Vijaya presents what he calls “a political definition of the Sinhala identity.”¹⁴ His central argument is that at the time of the *Mahāvamsa*'s composition (and for some time afterwards) the name “Siṃhala” referred only to the ruling dynasty descended from Vijaya, grandson of a lion (*siṃha*), and his immediate followers. Excluded from this category were the “service castes” (descended from those who later followed from the mainland) and “Pulindas” (likely Vāddas, the indigenous people of the island, descended in this narrative from Vijaya's children with the forcibly espoused *yakṣiṇī*). But this in itself does not explain why Vijaya's narrative, as presented in these early chronicles, was so decidedly unsavoury. Nor does it explain why Niśsaṅka Malla would so emphatically associate himself with Vijaya, come again from Kāliṅga to rule Lanka. Alan Strathern provides us with such a possible explanation, showing just how clearly Vijaya fits the “stranger-king” model of Marshall Sahlins.¹⁵ Strathern ultimately disagrees with Gunawardana that the *Mahāvamsa*'s narrative of Vijaya serves *only* kingly ends. But his reading of this narrative certainly would have made a “stranger king” ideology available to kings who wished

¹³ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, chs. 6–7.

¹⁴ Gunawardana, “People of the Lion,” 55; cf. Dharmadasa, “The Roots of Sinhala Ethnic Identity.”

¹⁵ Strathern, “The Vijaya Origin Myth,” 8, 13–15.

to avail themselves of it; to present themselves as inheritors of a lineage set apart from, and so capable of ruling, Lanka.

Strathern's reading is compelling. But if a "stranger king" model of sovereignty is indeed present in the text, we must next ask whether, when, and how this thus-offered ideology was actually *accepted*, let alone deployed, by later historical subjects. This is particularly necessary because the *Mahāvamsa*, despite its omnipresence in our field, was far from an expression of kingly ideology at the time of its production. The scholarly consensus is increasingly that it was produced in a period of crisis for its Mahāvihāran authors.¹⁶ It therefore represented a desperate plea for relevancy, for royal patronage, or at minimum for a redress from royal oppression. It offers up what *seems to us* to be an ideology of kingship in the form of this Vijaya narrative. But we have no evidence that any monarchs before Niśsaṅka Malla necessarily engaged with that ideology. While later Anurādhapurān monarchs like Mahinda IV traced genealogies back to Ikṣvāku and the Buddha's own Śākya clan, the less genteel Vijaya remains conspicuously unmentioned in these inscriptional eulogies. So when Niśsaṅka Malla identifies himself so incessantly as being of Vijaya's lineage, we ought to read this not as a repetition of kingly tropes (universal or Lankan), but as something rather novel: a new vision of kingship which emphasizes its own "strangeness." We gain further evidence for this novelty when we consider the ways Niśsaṅka Malla's inscriptional association with Vijaya—and with the more proximate memory of Parākramabāhu I—changed over time. Over the course of his reign, he identified himself decreasingly with the latter, and increasingly with former, a shift I explain as a gradual reorientation in priorities from securing his own ascendancy to securing that of his heirs.

Let us return to his earliest inscription, from which I quote above to introduce the Vijaya narrative. What distinguishes *this* early instance of the Vijaya association from those in Niśsaṅka Malla's later inscriptions is that, here, it is not the Kālīṅga-born Niśsaṅka Malla himself who is being so associated. Instead, this inscription claims Vijaya as an ancestor of the Lankan-born *Parākramabāhu I*. The fuller introduction reads:

When Parākramabāhu, descended from the lineage of King Vijaya—the eldest son of King Siṃhabāhu who was born into the lineage of glorious and supernaturally powerful Kālīṅga *cakravartins*; who travelled from Kālīṅga to Laṃkā; expelled the *yakṣas*; made [the island fit for] human dwellings; and ruled under a single canopy—was ruling alone in Lakdiva; desiring to establish the future of his own lineage, having sent [emissaries] to Siṃhapura for

16 Scheible, *Reading the Mahāvamsa*; Walters, "Buddhist History," 112–24.

that purpose as was done previously; having fetched back his *bāna* (either sibling's son or son-in-law); having given his own name (Parākramabāhu) [to that *bāna*]; having placed him in the office of *himi*; having made him competent in the science of warfare (*śatraśāstra*); and having thus ensured the longevity of the kingdom, attained heaven (IC 6.26, ll. a8–23).

Here we are being assured of Niśśaṅka Malla's qualifications to rule, yes, but only obliquely. The focus is so firmly on Parākramabāhu I that, outside of the Sanskrit verses which bookend the Sinhala prose, Niśśaṅka Malla is not even referred to by name. He is only called the *bāna*—a nephew or son-in-law—of his illustrious predecessor, eventually placed into the office of *himi* (Skt. *svāmin*, “master”). The inscription proceeds to narrate the circumstances under which this *himi* eventually ascended to the throne:

[Then,] having done ill to (i.e., assassinated) Vijayabāhu (II), who had been consecrated according to seniority, wicked ministers became treacherous; Vijayā Yāntānnāvan, having overcome the ruin done to Laṅkā [by those ministers], established peace [in the kingdom]; the *himi*, having been consecrated in the kingdom given [to him by Vijayā Yāntānnāvan]; having mounted the lion-throne, adorned by ornaments including the crown; having reflected “prosperity is suitable for those who have served”—because Vijayā Yāntānnā protected the splendid body [of the *himi*] from [when he was in] Ruvandaṃbuya; and because he secured the kingdom for the Kāliṅga lineage, just as it had previously been; and because his lineage too had served the Kāliṅga lineage beginning from the time of King Vijaya—for these services...[he awards Vijayā Yāntānnā various land-grants] (IC 6.26, ll. a23–37).

On the level of *realpolitik*, this inscription serves to codify rewards given to a loyal retainer for his service in installing Niśśaṅka Malla on the throne after a *coup* by Vijayabāhu II's ministers. But it also serves as a first attempt at articulating two distinct lines of claim to the throne: one of continuity, and one decidedly “stranger.”

The first line of claim positions Niśśaṅka Malla within an orderly succession of more temporally proximate kings. In this particular inscription, Niśśaṅka Malla positions himself as something of a “backup heir” appointed by Parākramabāhu I himself, primed and trained to take the throne in case something were to befall Vijayabāhu II. Presumably, had Vijayabāhu's reign lasted longer, he would have appointed his own heirs in due course, and Niśśaṅka Malla would have faded into obscurity as a royal “spare” never called into service. But Vijayabāhu's assassination (and the usurpation of the throne by a minister never appointed by any reigning monarch as a legitimate heir) necessitated Niśśaṅka Malla's intervention, aided by his own minister Vijayā Yāntānnā. In this narrative, Niśśaṅka Malla emphasizes both

his connection to Parākramabāhu I (who personally appointed him as heir and groomed him for the role) *and* his respect for the “order of seniority” (*jyeṣṭha kramaya*), dutifully standing by for Vijayabāhu II to rule before him. The orderly succession of rulers is maintained, as per the wishes of the illustrious Parākramabāhu.

But entwined with these claims of continuity is a second narrative, operating on a much grander temporal scale. This narrative seeks not to incorporate Niśsaṅka Malla, and his immediate family members, into the Lanka-based succession order desired by Parākramabāhu I. Instead, it distinguishes them as a decidedly “non-Lankan” dynasty which nonetheless rightly rules Lanka. This is, in other words, a narrative of intentionally crafted strangeness. This is the narrative which would come to dominate Niśsaṅka Malla’s later inscriptions, at the expense of claims to continuity with Parākramabāhu I, who is never thereafter mentioned in a positive light or in any connection with Vijaya.

By Niśsaṅka Malla’s fourth year—in which he creates the next inscription which we can date with a high degree of confidence—the references to Parākramabāhu, and therefore to what I call above the first line of claim, are decidedly less rosy. In this year, Niśsaṅka Malla created an inscription (*IC* 6.27) to commemorate a pilgrimage to the Great Stūpa of the Anurādhapuran Mahāvihāra. The tone of the preamble to this inscription has shifted significantly from the earlier inscription discussed above. It dwells heavily on what we might call economic concerns—particularly an allegedly large number of people turning to crime out of poverty—and the various fiscal and charitable measures Niśsaṅka Malla had taken to address this.¹⁷ Crucially, the root cause of this poverty is blamed on the people “having been oppressed by unrestrained punishment (*daṇḍa*), in excess of the habits of previous kings, [by] Parākramabāhu the First” (*IC* 6.27, ll. 4–5). No longer are the treacherous ministers of Vijayabāhu II to blame for the country’s fall to ruin; now it is the very king of whom Niśsaṅka Malla had previously claimed to have been the protégée.¹⁸

17 It is a common trope in Buddhist texts that poverty leads to crime, and that virtuous kings can therefore eradicate crime by distributing vast wealth to all citizens. See Collins, “What Is Literature?,” 661–62.

18 This inscription is the most explicit in naming Parākramabāhu I as the cause of the island’s ills. Others blame only “previous kings” for their excessive taxes and punishments (see *IC* 6.32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 52, 54, 55, 69, 70, and 71). The Galpota (*IC* 6.24), which I date to after Niśsaṅka Malla’s fifth year (and therefore after the Anurādhapura inscription under discussion) refers to Parākramabāhu I more neutrally as Niśsaṅka Malla’s “senior family member” (Sin. *kulajeṭu*).

In subsequent inscriptions this trend is taken further. Instead of continuities with Parākramabāhu I, Niśśaṅka Malla increasingly presented an alternative vision of kingship based on three key points of difference. It subsumes Lankan kingship into a broader Kāliṅga-based *lineage*; it reinscribes *caste* differences; and it emphasizes the auspicious circumstances of Niśśaṅka Malla's non-Lankan *birth*. I address each of these points in turn below.

Lineage

In the early inscription IC 6.26 discussed above, Niśśaṅka Malla stresses his own parallels with Vijaya, whose lineage was only most *recently* embodied in Parākramabāhu I and Vijayabāhu II. These more recent kings are therefore only peripheral to the longer *durée* association with Vijaya. That Niśśaṅka Malla was Parākramabāhu's *bāna* and appointed heir is secondary to his position as a member of the same Kāliṅga lineage; his claim to the Lankan throne predates any intervention on Parākramabāhu's behalf. Even the service and protection of Vijayā Yāntānnā is positioned not as that of a loyal retainer to the duly appointed heir of a recently departed king, but simply as the most recent iteration of a generation-spanning connection between the Kāliṅga dynasty and their loyal servants in Lanka.

In that first inscription, as noted above, it is Parākramabāhu who is presented as the scion of Vijaya's Kāliṅga-based lineage. Not so in Niśśaṅka Malla's fourth-year Anurādhapura inscription, which begins:

Niśśaṅka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *rajaṇā vahanse*—born in Siṃhapura as a *tilaka* mark for the royal lineage of Kāliṅga *cakravartī*-kings; descended from the royal lineage of Okā, splendid (*śrīmat*) and distinguished by a mass of virtues such as generosity (*tyāga*), truthfulness (*satya*), and heroism (*śaurya*)—having united the island of Lanka which was of the succession of his own lineage (IC 6.27, ll. 1–4).

Here it is the illustrious lineage of Niśśaṅka Malla himself, and not that of Parākramabāhu, which is foregrounded. The only remnant left of his connection to the earlier king is the shared regnal name, which Niśśaṅka Malla maintains throughout his reign.

Notably, the connection to Vijaya in this inscription is made only implicitly, through the reference to the “royal lineage of Kāliṅga *cakravartins*.” This is worth dwelling on. Textual sources from the first millennium do not actually locate Vijaya's own birthplace in Kāliṅga, but rather in the Vaṅga country to the north (now modern Bengal). The earliest of these accounts, the *Dīpavaṃsa*, makes no connection between Vijaya and

Kāliṅga.¹⁹ The *Mahāvamsa* tells us that a king of the Vaṅgas married a Kāliṅgan princess; their daughter was Vijaya's grandmother.²⁰ The *Vamsatthappakāsinī's* commentary on these verses indicates no interest in the Kāliṅga connection.²¹ Buddhaghosa's brief discussion of Vijaya mentions neither his Vaṅga nor Kāliṅga ancestry (although Parākramabāhu's grandmaster Śāriputra, commenting on Buddhaghosa, does specify that Vijaya's grandmother was a "daughter of the Kāliṅga king").²² In none of these sources are either the Kāliṅgans or, for that matter, the Vaṅgas, called *cakravartins*. The notion that Vijaya was descended from "Kāliṅga *cakravartins*" therefore appeared quite late. The *Mahābodhivamsa*, dated sometime between the tenth and twelfth centuries, explicitly tells us that Vijaya's father, Sīhabāhu, was born in the "lineage of Kāliṅga *cakkavattis*."²³ When Niśśaṅka Malla claims, as in the Anurādhapura inscription above, to be descended from such a lineage, this may well be a referent to the *Mahābodhivamsa*, and through its narrative to Vijaya.

However, not all references to Kāliṅga *cakravartins* throughout Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptional corpus are necessarily tied to (any known variant of) the Vijaya narrative. Other inscriptions tell us that Niśśaṅka Malla's "Kāliṅga *cakravartin*" ancestors had the supernatural power of travelling through the air (*ākāśa-cārin*: IC 6.24, l. a2; 6.52, ll. 3–4). I have found no earlier connections between Vijaya's ancestry and this particular supernatural power. The only other referent I have identified is in the fifth-century commentary on the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka* attributed to Buddhaghosa.²⁴ This narrative centres on a *cakravarti*-king of Kāliṅga (himself also named Kāliṅga, as are, with some variation, his father, uncle, grandfather, and principal advisor), who similarly flies through the skies. This suggests that Niśśaṅka Malla was synthesizing *multiple* positive accounts of Kāliṅga-based monarchs into his own inscriptional genealogies: the *Mahābodhivamsa's* claim that Vijaya was descended

19 *Dīpavamsa*, ed. Oldenberg, ch. 9, v. 2.

20 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 6, vv. 1–2.

21 *Mahāvamsa* ed. Geiger, ch. 6, v. 1; *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, ed. Malalasekera, 1:243.

22 *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. Takakusu and Nagai, 1:72; *Sāratthadīpanī*, Chāṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition, 1:139.

23 *Mahābodhivamsa*, ed. Strong, 111. A "Kāliṅga *cakravartin*" is also mentioned in *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 54, vv. 9–10, from whose family Mahinda IV (r. 956–72) procured a consort. This portion of the *Mahāvamsa* was almost certainly compiled in the Daṁbadeṇiya period, and so is not necessarily reflective of the regnal stylings of Mahinda's tenth-century father-in-law.

24 *Jātaka-aṭṭhavaṇṇanā*, ed. Fausbøll, no. 479.

from Kāliṅga *cakravartins*, and the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka*'s account of aviatic Kāliṅga *cakravartins*. We might note here that both the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka* and the *Mahābodhivaṃsa* are, as the names suggest, firmly oriented towards the worship of *Bodhi* trees. This is a practice that Alastair Gornall has shown was increasingly important in the Poḷonnaruva period.²⁵

Other inscriptions, however, are more direct in asserting a connection to Vijaya. Two other inscriptions refer to Niśśaṅka Malla with the rather elaborate title:

“Śrī Virarāja Niśyaṃka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *cakravartti*, Master (*himi*) of Laṅkā by descent from King Vijaya who made Śrī Laṅkā [suitable for] human habitation” (*IC* 6.54, ll. 1–4; *IC* 6.48, ll. 1–4).

Although difficult to render fluently in English sentence order, it is Vijaya's name and deed which are first presented to the reader; Niśśaṅka Malla follows on in grammatical structure as in filial descent. One of these two inscriptions, *IC* 6.54, must postdate Niśśaṅka Malla's seventh regnal year, and so we might tentatively take this regnal styling as representative of the latter half of his career.

Similar language is invoked in the final injunctions of Niśśaṅka Malla's Galpota (*IC* 6.24) and Gate (*IC* 6.28 and 29) inscriptions. The wording differs slightly between these inscriptions, but all three explicitly invoke the Kāliṅga lineage in conjunction with the Vijaya narrative:

If a royal person in the Kāliṅga lineage, masters (*himi*) of Lakdiv from the time of Prince Vijaya, can be found, [then] making him master (*svāmi*) is the conduct which protects the world and the *śāsana* (*IC* 6.24, ll. c22–23).

...therefore, if a royal person who is master (*himi*) for Lakdiv—having come from the lineage of King Vijaya who made Lakdiv [fit for] human habitation—can be found, one ought to be loyal to [them as one's] master (*svāmin*), joining [with them] in protecting those dwelling in the world as though protecting [one's own] eyes, [and thereby] protecting one's own group (*varga*) and wealth (*sampat*) (*IC* 6.28, ll. b24–27; 6.29, ll. b19–22).

It is unfortunately impossible to date these inscriptions, and so the use of the Vijaya genealogy, relative to that discussed above. All we can say is that the Galpota likely postdates Niśśaṅka Malla's fifth regnal year; the Gate inscriptions must *pre-date* the Galpota. However, it seems that this is something of a crystallization of the Vijaya/Kāliṅga connection invoked elsewhere in his

²⁵ Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 131.

inscriptional corpus. Here we are told explicitly that the Lankan throne has always belonged, and should always belong, to those of this lineage.

It remains an open question whether, and when, this connection became accepted beyond Niśśaṅka Malla and his dynastic heirs. Vijaya's lineage is invoked in an inscription of Niśśaṅka Malla's half-brother Sāhasa Malla (*IC* 6.94, ll. a23–27), but in no other inscriptions of Poḷonnaruva monarchs. An inscription found near Miṇipe, created by a local warlord named Mal-*evi* Bhūma (discussed further in the following chapter), refers to Niśśaṅka Malla's widow Kalyāṇavatī as,

Having attained the highest position in Sirilak, in the succession of many kings in the lesser lineage (*suḷuvasā*, *P. cūlavamsa*) [and] the great lineage beginning with Prince Vijaya, who ruled having made human habitation in the island of Laṅkā (*IC* 6.100, ll. 7–10).

We might well take this as evidence that this warlord, at least, accepted Niśśaṅka Malla's claim that all rightful Lankan kings were descended from Vijaya. Kalyāṇavatī was, like her husband Niśśaṅka Malla, foreign-born. She is described in several of his inscriptions as of the Gaṅga lineage, likely in reference to the Eastern Gaṅgas of Kāliṅga—aligning again with Niśśaṅka Malla's increasingly explicit claims to a Kāliṅgan connection. Beyond this reference, however, few of Poḷonnaruva's later monarchs adopted Niśśaṅka Malla's Vijayan rhetoric in their own claims.

Caste

The Galpota and Gate inscriptions do not only single out the Kāliṅga lineage by virtue of their connection to Vijaya. They also emphasize the *kṣatriya* status of Niśśaṅka Malla and his line. “Caste” is a somewhat fraught topic in any premodern context. It is a decidedly modern word only imposed on South Asia by Portuguese colonizers.²⁶ It maps imperfectly onto two distinct social categories: *varṇa*, a fourfold hierarchy of purity status (Skt. *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*); and *jāti*, hereditary labour specializations with considerable localization. The relationship between these two categories even in northern South Asia was complex, despite efforts by *dharmaśāstric* texts to integrate the latter into the former;²⁷ matters only became more tangled further south. Buddhist texts, meanwhile, often describe a threefold class structure, with *kṣatriyas* displacing Brahmins at the apex of the

²⁶ Barrero Xavier, “Languages of Difference”; Guha, *Beyond Caste*.

²⁷ Olivelle, *The Early Upanisads*, 191.

hierarchy and the two lower *varṇas* replaced by a general “householder” (Skt. *gṛhapati*) class.²⁸ Given all of this, we ought not to be surprised that “caste” was more of a rhetorical arena than a structural principle in premodern Lanka, prior to its ossification under colonial rule.²⁹

Niśsaṅka Malla’s arguments for caste-based kingship are made most forcefully in the same inscriptions mentioned at the end of the last subsection, those on the Galpota and city gates. These arguments about caste seem targeted at a particular group: the *Govi kula* (“community,” here analogous to *jāti*). Although we should not anachronistically conflate them, this *Govi kula* is likely the antecedent of the more modern Goyigama or Kandyan Govi-ya *jātis*, which are traditionally associated with agricultural (*govi*) work, but in practice include powerful landowners with considerable economic and political leverage.³⁰ We have good reason to think that in Niśsaṅka Malla’s time, too, the *Govi kula* represented a powerful landowning class, and therefore a potential threat to royal power.³¹ Niśsaṅka Malla’s Gate inscriptions therefore warn us, in delightfully poetic language, that:

[In Sinhala:] Like the crow to the swan, the donkey to the Saindava [horse], the worm to the *nāga*-king, the firefly to the brilliance of the sun, the snipe to the elephant, or the jackal to the lion—those in the *Govi-kula* should not wish for the joys (*līlā*) of kings. However powerful, those in the *Govi-kula* must not be looked to for kingship (*IC* 6.28, ll. b12–19; 6.29, ll. b9–15).³²

[In Sanskrit:] The crow to the gait of a swan, the donkey to the best of horses, the worm to the serpent, the firefly to the sun, the jackal to the play of the lord of beast (the lion), the snipe to the elephant. Another *varṇa* imitating the deeds of kings, variously ripped asunder, would be laughable; so says Lord Niśsaṅka Malla, skilled in statecraft (*IC* 6.28, ll. b31–36; 6.29, ll. b25–30).

The anxiety about powerful upstarts is palpable. Niśsaṅka Malla surely had on his mind the assassination of his predecessor Vijayabāhu II by his own ministers, one of whom then claimed the throne as Mahinda VI. Perhaps he also wondered about the loyalty of *his* own ministers, who had already shown—by overthrowing Mahinda in Niśsaṅka Malla’s favour—that they,

²⁸ Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 22–25.

²⁹ Rogers, “Caste.”

³⁰ Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, ch. 3; Kemper, “Reform and Segmentation.”

³¹ Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, 54; Liyanagamage, “Decline,” 123; Liyanagamage, *Society, State, and Religion*, 198.

³² There seems to have been a parallel (in Sinhala) in the Galpota (*IC* 6.24, ll. c15–16), but it is now effaced.

too, could act as kingmakers. It is no surprise, then, that his inscriptions then go on to warn that:

As kings dislike those who become big-headed, those who have received positions and wealth from them should not become big-headed (*IC* 6.24, ll. c14–15).

Those who treat ministers, who are equal to them [in status], like kings, bowing down to them, and who receive positions from them—they are named “traitors” (*IC* 6.28, ll. b20–22; 6.29, ll. b15–18).

But on what grounds does Niśsaṅka Malla distinguish his own kingship, only made possible by violent *coup* against his predecessor Mahinda, from that of Mahinda, also made possible by violent *coup* against his predecessor Vijayabāhu II? What distinguishes “righteous kings” from big-headed ministers? Niśsaṅka Malla’s answer is, of course, his *kṣatriya* status: membership in the only *varṇa* eligible for kingship according to *dharmaśāstra* texts. Govis, he argues, are not *kṣatriyas*; no matter how powerful (*balavat*) they may become in practice, they ought still never to aspire to kingship. Crucial to this argument is a terse set of three aphorisms in the very middle of the Galpota’s various admonitions. Here we are told:

These [aphorisms] should be protected: *real* knowledge (*dānum nam*) is knowledge of the virtue of [service] performed; the *real* work of *veḷaṇḍas* (*veḷaṇḍaham nam*) is the position of *govi*; *real* treasure (*hastasāra*) is the *dharma* (*IC* 6.24, ll. c12–13).

The first and third aphorisms seem relatively straightforward. But what does it mean to equate the position or status (*tāna*) of the *govi*—literally “agriculture,” but here likely in reference to the landowning Govi *jāti*—with the work of *veḷaṇḍas*? De Silva Wickramasinghe and Ranawella translate this latter term rather literally, as “occupation” and “trade” respectively.³³ But I suspect that a more pointed argument about caste hierarchy is intended here. In literary works of the early to mid-second millennium, the term *veḷaṇḍa* usually refers to the *vaiśya-varṇa*. This is a statement, in other words, that the Govi *kula* “properly” belongs to the third *dharmaśāstric varṇa*, ranked below *kṣatriyas* and therefore unable to claim kingship.

It is important to note that this, too, was a rhetorical claim, and not simply an expression of a long-standing understanding of the *varṇa* status of various Lankan *jātis* and their resulting right to rule. Concerns about *varṇa* status are certainly evident in earlier literature. To return to the narrative of

33 de Silva Wickremasinghe, *EZ* 2:122; Ranawella, *IC* 6:64.

Vijaya, for example, the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa* makes a point of telling us that he,

Having founded communities [throughout Lanka], all the counsellors having assembled said “Lord, be consecrated in sovereignty.” The Prince said, “I do not wish for consecration, without the simultaneous consecration of a *khat-tiya* (Skt. *kṣatriya*) maiden [as my] consort (P. *mahesī*, Skt. *mahiṣī*).”³⁴

The *varṇa* status of Vijaya’s wife was clearly of *some* importance to the *Mahāvamsa*’s authors, enough at least that they would be so specific. The tenth-century *Vamsatthappakāsinī* seems less interested in the specifics of these two verses, and provides only a perfunctory commentary. However, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the *Vamsatthappakāsinī* does elsewhere include an *abhiṣeka* procedure—echoed by Parākramabāhu’s monastic grandmaster Śāriputra—which specifically requires a *kṣatriya* maiden to represent the entire collective (*gaṇa*) of her *varṇa*.³⁵ However, I do not think that we can go so far here as does Gunawardana, who sees in the above verses evidence of a fifth-century attitude that “only such a king who is a *kṣatriya* and who also has a queen of the same *varṇa* status can be consecrated as king; others do not have a legitimate right to rule.”³⁶ This is, after all, the *only* mention of *kṣatriya* status in the entire Vijaya saga of the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa*—and it is not even applied to Vijaya himself.

In the wider textual corpus, we are presented with a rather fluid sense of the intersections of *varṇas*, the more specific Lankan identity groupings variously called *jātis* and *kulas*, and the right to rule. This was, *contra* Gunawardana, by no means fixed by the time of the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa*, and it stayed open for (re)interpretation long after Niśsaṅka Malla’s reign. We have already noted that Buddhist texts often deploy a three-fold class system (*kṣatriya*, *brāhmaṇa*, *gṛhapati*) in place of the *Dharmaśāstric* four (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*). We cannot assume that the Govi *jāti* was “always” understood to be within the *vaiśya-varṇa* if that *varṇa* simply did not exist in a wide variety of textual treatments. Some texts, like the tenth-century Pali *Anāgatavaṃsa*, do offer us a fourfold system, with a fairly standard translation of the Sanskrit *varṇas* into Pali *vaṇṇas*: *khattiya*, *brahmaṇa*, *vessa*, and *sudda*.³⁷ But when that same text was later adapted into the fourteenth-century Sinhala *Anāgatavaṃśaya*, the four classes are

34 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 7, vv. 46–47.

35 *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, ed. Malalasekera, 2:305.

36 Gunawardana, “People of the Lion,” 56.

37 *Pali Anāgatavaṃsa*, ed. Norman, v. 64.

instead listed as *rāja*, *bamuṇu*, *veḷaṇḍa* and *govi*.³⁸ Here we see confirmation that—at least by the fourteenth century—the term *veḷaṇḍa* was used to signify the *vaiśya-varṇa*, and that kingship was so strongly associated with *kṣatriya* status that the terms were interchangeable. But here the Govis are decidedly *not* mapped onto this *veḷaṇḍa/vaiśya* class. Instead, they are held to be the equivalents of the *śūdra-varṇa*: yet another rung lower down the *dharmaśāstric* ladder.

The *varṇa* status of the Govis, in other words, remained up for debate long beyond the period of the present study. When Niśśaṅka Malla refers to them as *veḷaṇḍas* in his inscriptions, therefore, we must take this as just one argument put forward in this longer debate. Here, the argument seems to be rather unsubtle in its intention: to position the Govis as ineligible for kingship, and so to (hopefully) remove a potential challenge to the claims of Niśśaṅka Malla's dynastic heirs.

Birth

The third point of difference Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions fashion for him, and by extension for other members of his dynasty, is the circumstance of his birth. The Galpota inscription, for example, tells us that he was born “in Siṃhapura, in the Kaliṅga country, in noble Daṃbadivhi (Skt. Jambudvīpa), which gives rise to Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and *cakravartins*” (IC 6.24, ll. a3–4). Emphasizing that it is Jambudvīpa, not Lanka, in which such exalted figures have tended to arise serves to further set apart Niśśaṅka Malla and his brothers from any more local rivals (such as those who overthrew his predecessor Vijayabāhu II). Of course, it is only Buddhas—not *bodhisattvas* or *cakravartins*—who are *necessarily* born in Jambudvīpa,³⁹ but the inscription can be read as suggesting that the same is true of all three. Implicitly, only a monarch born on the mainland (such as Niśśaṅka Malla himself) ought to claim *cakravartin* status. More specifically, perhaps, the ambiguity of Sinhala adjectival attribution allows us to read the “which gives rise to” clause as applying not just to Jambudvīpa, but to the Kaliṅga country or

³⁸ *Sinhala Anāgatavaṃśaya*, ed. Vaṭaddara Medhānanda, 133.

³⁹ All Buddhas follow more or less the same pattern in their lives, including birth in (northern) Jambudvīpa. More proximately, we might note that another core component of the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka* narrative discussed above is this very repetition: the *cakravartin* named Kāliṅga is prevented from flying through the air *above* the one spot on which all Buddhas achieve enlightenment. This is explained to him by his advisor Kāliṅgabharadvaja, who is himself the Buddha Śākyamuni in a previous life.

perhaps even to the city of Siṃhapura itself. This is a decidedly uncanonical claim, but one within the realms of semantic possibility for readers attuned to such suggestive nuances. Such a reading is made more plausible by other references throughout the inscriptional corpus which suggest a more-than-ordinary birth for Niśsaṅka Malla.

Some of these references have been over-emphasized by past scholars, when closer reading shows them to clearly be metaphorical in nature. The prime example here is the claim made in the Galpota that “Kings, although having human form, should be regarded like (*sē*) gods (*deviyan*) due to their being lords of men (*nara-deva*)” (IC 6.24, ll. c4–5). This has frequently been interpreted as a claim for the literal divinity of kings, taking “*naradeva*” as “human gods.”⁴⁰ But I am mindful in my own translation of Berkwitz’s call for us to attend to the significance of the analogical particle “*sē*”: kings are to be viewed *like* gods, not *as* literal human gods.⁴¹ I therefore interpret *nara-deva* as the kind of etymological explanation we might see in, for example, Pali commentaries of the period, in its more “humanistic” meaning of “lord” rather than god.

A similar issue of misinterpretation has plagued another of Niśsaṅka Malla’s inscriptions. Partway through his inscription near the Prītīdāna Maṇḍapa, Niśsaṅka Malla tells us of an aspiration which has been translated as, “I will now show myself in my [true] body which is endowed with benevolent regard for and attachment to the virtuous qualities of a *bodhisatta* king.”⁴² This translation has been quoted by a large number of scholars as evidence that Niśsaṅka Malla considered himself to be a *bodhisattva*, understood to be fulfilling the earlier prophecy (discussed in Chapter One) that only *bodhisattvas* ought to rule Sri Lanka.⁴³

I suspect that the phrasing “my body...is *endowed*...with the virtuous qualities of a *bodhisattva*” has been interpreted as a reference to the thirty-two Marks of a Great Man (Skt. *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*, P. *mahāpurisalakkhaṇa*): the somatic manifestation of a *bodhisattva*’s accumulated virtues which appear

40 Goonatilake, “Impact,” 363; Hallisey, “Works and Persons,” 701; de Silva Wickremasinghe, *EZ* 2:102.

41 Berkwitz, “Divine Kingship.”

42 de Silva Wickremasinghe, *EZ* 2:176; repeated verbatim in Ranawella, *IC* 6.69. Note particularly the choice of P. *bodhisattva* over the *bodhisatva* actually present in the Sinhala.

43 Goonatilake, “Impact,” 364–65; Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 60; Pathmanathan, “Historical Writings,” 11n31; Pathmanathan, “Kingship,” 132–33; Samuels, “The Bodhisattva Ideal,” 405.

in their final life. The idea that these *bodhisattva* “qualities” are indeed bodily marks (*lakṣaṇa*) might also be further supported by the inscription’s opening lines, which conclude with a mention of bodily marks (here in Sin. *lakuṇu*) appearing at the moment of Niśśaṅka Malla’s birth:

Sirisaṅgabo Niśśaṅka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *cakravarttīn*—who was like a *tilaka* for the Solar dynasty in the royal lineage of Okā; who was adorned with the crown, having received sovereignty in [order of] royal succession; who attained the rank of *mahārāja*—having been seen, at the very moment he was born from the womb of the Great Lady Pārbbatī and the *mahārāja* Śrī Jayagopa, to have marks of prosperity (*sāpat-lakuṇu*), and a pleasing horoscope and hour, was declared a *tilaka* for his family (IC 6.25, ll. 3–8).

Here, however, we would do well to note that not all bodily marks, even in a Buddhist context, are necessarily the specific thirty-two marks of a *bodhisattva*. If we turn, briefly, to the retrospective *Mahāvamsa* account, we do see that both Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I are said to have been born with auspicious bodily marks.⁴⁴ But so too was Vijayabāhu’s mother, Lokitā, and Vijayabāhu’s daughter (Parākramabāhu’s mother) Ratnāvalī.⁴⁵ None of these figures are said to be *bodhisattvas* in the *Mahāvamsa* (let alone in their own inscriptions); none of these marks are specifically called the thirty-two Marks of a Great Man; and, as the androcentric title suggests, those thirty-two marks describe a distinctly male body (including a sexual organ “concealed in a sheath,” *P. kosohitavatguyho*), which presumably means that these are *not* the marks with which Lokitā and Ratnāvalī were endowed.⁴⁶ It seems evident to me that in these *Mahāvamsa* references to bodily marks, and in Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptional claim above, we are dealing with a broader set of bodily signs which can be interpreted (alongside other astrological portents) at the moment of birth. In other words, Niśśaṅka Malla’s reference to the *lakṣaṇa* on his body are not a claim to *bodhisattva*-hood, but rather are participant in broader (i.e., not exclusively “Buddhist”) practices of somatic and astrological divination which circulated widely in the Indian Ocean world as vital “technologies of statecraft.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See, respectively, *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 57, v. 49; ch. 62, v.29 and vv. 45–52.

⁴⁵ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 57, v. 41; ch. 59, v. 35.

⁴⁶ On the masculinity of final-life *bodhisattvas*, see Balkwill, “Why Does a Woman Need to Become a Man?”

⁴⁷ Blackburn, “Buddhist Technologies”; building on Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

With this in mind, let us return to the “I will show myself” phrase, quoted above in translation. This would seem, in the phrasing so frequently repeated in secondary literature, to be an unambiguous claim to *bodhisattva* status. However, the easy wording of this translation disguises more ambiguity in the Sinhala, and I do not think we can so readily take it as a claim that Niśsaṅka Malla was, himself, a *bodhisattva*. The Sinhala reads: *bodhisatvarājaguṇayaṭa met sit āti snehapakṣapātaśarīrayen mā pāmha yi* (IC 6.25, ll. 16–17). It is clear that Niśsaṅka Malla intends to show himself (*pāmha*) with a body (*śarīra*) that is in some way devoted to or oriented towards (*pakṣapāta*) affection (*sneha*). That body further possesses (*āti*) a mind (*sit*), characterized by compassion (*met*, P. *metta*), and oriented towards the qualities or virtues of a *bodhisattva*-king. Together, we can therefore read this aspiration as: “I will show myself, with a body devoted to affection, compassionately mindful of the qualities of a *bodhisattva*-king.”

An association between Niśsaṅka Malla and *bodhisattva*-kingship is certainly *suggested* by this phrasing. But I find it a stretch to read this as a claim that Niśsaṅka Malla himself manifested the somatic markings of a late-stage *bodhisattva*. Instead, I read this as a reassurance only that he is mindful of the qualities of such a king, and that he wishes to present himself to his subjects in a manner reflective of this mindfulness. The somatic presentation of kingship is clearly important throughout this inscription, but perhaps not in the manner it has largely been understood to date.

Together, these references to the circumstances of Niśsaṅka Malla’s birth—auspicious in geography, in bodily marks, and in astrological conjunction—were presented as yet another means to distinguish him, and his nascent dynasty, from potential rivals within Sri Lanka. References to these circumstances, along with the lineage- and caste-based arguments discussed above, appear with increasing intensity throughout those inscriptions of Niśsaṅka Malla which we know to be later. Coupled with the decreasing emphasis on Parākramabāhu after the early inscription IC 6.26, this begins to suggest a shift in the substance of his claims to kingship. He was, less and less, the king of Lanka *through Lankan succession alone*. Instead, he presented himself as a member of a translocal dynasty centred at Kaliṅga, but always with members ruling over Lanka. He emphasized, in other words, the distinctive nature of his own immediate family relative to any other possible claimants within Lanka itself, who lacked such pedigrees. This claim was not only made through inscriptional means. As I argue in the following section, he also sought to reify it through matrilineal ties.

Family Matters

In Chapter Three, I suggested that the political trifurcation between the reigns of Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I resulted in an increasing emphasis, in the inscriptions of some royal men, on the dynastic pedigrees of their wives as representative of powerful marital alliances with mainland rulers. I then further argued that this allowed (some of) those women what seems to be an unprecedented level of autonomy: crafting their own inscriptional personae and patronizing religious institutions of their own choosing. During the reign of Parākramabāhu I, however, royal women became, once again, invisible in the inscriptional record. I suggested that this may have been the result of Parākramabāhu's relatively strong hold on the throne, and the concomitant non-necessity of appealing to such dynastic marriage alliances. The inscriptions of Niśśaṅka Malla, as I have suggested above, exhibit considerably more anxiety about rival claims to the throne. It should therefore perhaps not be surprising that royal women are yet *more* central to the vision of kingship portrayed in these inscriptions than they were even in the interregal period.

The inscriptions of Niśśaṅka Malla are replete with lists of mainland dynasties, friend and rival alike, from whom he “procured consorts” (*bisōvarun genvā*) both for himself and for his son, Vīrabāhu. A particularly striking example comes from the Galpota inscription, in which the victorious conclusion to Niśśaṅka Malla's mainland expeditions is related thus:

having heard the words said by the frightened Pāṇḍyan king and his mother—“Having given [to ourselves] only the villages [necessary to sustain] our lives, the kingdom is yours!”—; having had the fire of wrath extinguished by the stream of water, namely the many gifts received in this way from the Cōḷa country [such as] golden “fingers” (ingots), **royal maidens**, elephants and horses, etc., and various [other] gifts; having established friendship...[section illegible]...with royal persons who value virtue in various countries, such as Karṇṇāṭa (Karnataka), Nellūru (Nellore), Gauḍa (Bengal), Kaliṅga, Tiliṅga, and Gurjjara (Gujarat); having inspired fear in those who do not value [virtue] through his own excellence in heroism; having procured **consorts** and gifts from those countries (*IC* 6.24, ll. b16–19).

This most obviously expresses certain geopolitical aspirations. The Pāṇḍyas, the most geographically proximate rivals, are subjugated and humiliated; the Cōḷas, powerful former overlords, escape the same fate only through appeasement; new allies and newly fearful subordinates alike seal their relations through similar tributes. We might also note, however, that both forms of relation—adversarial and “friendly”—are secured through the

gifting of consorts. This includes the alleged subjugation of the Pāṇḍyas, which is listed in other inscriptions as a source of consorts (*IC* 6.32, 35, 36, 45, 65, 71, and 82), as is the region of Veṅgi to the north (*IC* 6.45, 57).

The most important source of royal wives, however, seems to have been Niśśaṅka Malla's own home region of Kālīṅga, from whence came his primary consort Subhadrā. As he himself explains in the Galpota:

having dispatched [messengers] to the Kālīṅga country, for the sake of the royal lineage; having procured many consorts of the Lunar and Solar Dynasties; having produced also royal maidens for his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, who had attained the rank of *yuvaraja*; he [thus] increased the royal family (*IC* 6.24, ll. b1–2).

We might take his self-stated motivation—the royal lineage—as extending in multiple temporal directions. Consorts, of course, “increase the royal family” by producing children and grandchildren. But high-caste Kālīṅgan consorts in particular would have strengthened relations to Niśśaṅka Malla's natal dynasty, supporting (both symbolically and, potentially, through military and fiscal means) the claims discussed in the preceding section.

The various dynastic ties of Niśśaṅka Malla's consorts may have played a role in determining their relative status within his “Inner City” (*antaḥpura*). This ranking shifted over the course of his reign, as new consorts (representing, perhaps, more strategically valuable dynastic ties) become increasingly visible in his inscriptions. This becomes particularly clear when we attend to his changing descriptions of the *tulābhāra* ceremony, in which he—and other members of the royal family—ascended giant scales and made a valuable offering equivalent to their collective weight (*tula*). This ceremony is often described as having taken place “annually” (*havurudu patā*), and in at least three different locations: at Rameśvaram, to celebrate Niśśaṅka Malla's triumphant return from his second mainland expedition;⁴⁸ at Devakulama, likely what is now Tampalakamam in Trincomalee district (only in *IC* 6.65); and at least once more, presumably in Poḷonnaruva itself.⁴⁹ I say “at least” because the number of people said to have participated in this *tulābhāra* varies considerably from inscription to inscription. It matters less to us whether this reflects “in reality” multiple *tulābhāras* with varying

48 All inscriptions which specify Rameśvaram mention two such expeditions: see *IC* 6.43, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 56, 60, 67, and 76–82 (the Ruhuna *gavuta* inscriptions).

49 *IC* 6.45 and 48 both mention two *tulābhāras*, the second at Rameśvaram. It is possible, but I think unlikely, that the first of these is the *tulābhāra* at Devakulama described in *IC* 6.65.

participants. What is significant for our purposes is which family members, at which times, are said to have joined Niśsaṅka Malla on the scales in his grand display of kingly munificence. These changing descriptions, I suggest, allow us to trace the rise to prominence of Niśsaṅka Malla's secondary consort, Kalyāṇavatī, who would later go on to rule in her own right (in 1202–1208).

The most frequent description of the Poḷonnaruva *tulābhāra* lists five participants, but we also have three-, four-, and even eight-person variants. The only one of these variant descriptions that we can positively date is the three-person variant, as described in the Anurādhapura inscription (IC 6.27) dated to Niśsaṅka Malla's fourth year. This means that the *tulābhāra* itself must have taken place before the trip to Anurādhapura; more significantly, the language used to describe the *tulābhāra* must be reflective of that fourth year (regardless of its connection to the actual event), making it a useful benchmark for other *tulābhāra* descriptions. Here, as discussed above, the *tulābhāra* is framed as a remedy to the poverty-driven crime caused by Parākramabāhu I's (alleged) excessive punishments and taxation. In response, the inscription tells us, Niśsaṅka Malla

having resolved to mount the *tulābhāra*, as no prior kings had done,⁵⁰ [thinking] “Those begging in my day should live comfortably”; having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by three people, namely (1) his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, (2) his primary consort (*agamehesun*, Skt. *agramahiṣī*) the *bisōva* Kālīṅga Subhadrā, and (3) he himself wearing jewellery and the crown; and having caused a great rain of alms (*dāna*) by scattering about in the royal street an continual [shower of wealth] including the seven gems and silver *tiram* coins (IC 6.27, ll. 10–14).

This is a lavishly described performance of kingship: Niśsaṅka Malla publicly sets himself apart from previous kings; he appears bedecked in all his regalia; and he draws a parallel to the dramatic finale of the *Vessantara-jātaka* through the “great rain of alms.”⁵¹ The inclusion of his son and desig-

50 This is patently untrue: we have references to *tulābhāra* ceremonies in inscriptions dating back to Vijayabāhu I (see IC 6.2, l.14, where it is called a *tulatara*; and TISL 42, l.11, which specifically uses Grantha script to call it *tulābhāram* instead of T. *tulapāram*). This is a valuable reminder that we can not take inscriptional claims as documentary evidence of “what actually happened,” rather as evidence of what was important to have said happened.

51 Upon Vessantara's triumphant return to his kingdom, the god Sakka (Skt. Śakra, i.e., Indra) causes a shower of seven jewels to rain down across the city, thereby pacifying his potential rivals. In Steven Collins's excellent study of this episode, he argues that the shower of gems serves to remove the risk that Vessantara (actually

nated heir (*mahapā*) Vīrabāhu in such an event makes sense: Niśśaṅka Malla publicly and ritually signals his desired line of succession, and ensures that the future king shares in the whatever merit (and social capital) he gains from such ostentatious charity. But equally central is his primary consort Subhadrā, called here a *bisōva*: a term indicating that she has received some form of consecration (*abhiṣeka*) as a senior consort. Subhadrā is *presumably* Vīrabāhu's mother, and so we might see this as yet another move to secure the line of succession. But the prominence of her own Kāliṅga heritage also serves, yet again, to underline Niśśaṅka Malla's ties northwards; the "strangeness" discussed in the previous section.

We have descriptions of the four- and five-person *tulābhāras* in inscriptions which must postdate Niśśaṅka Malla's fifth regnal year, and so I think it is reasonable to understand these as constituting a progression of scale. More family members were included in (the description of) the ceremony over the years. Supporting this notion is that in some of these inscriptions (as in that quoted below) the *tulābhāra* is now described as "annual" (*havuruda patā*); the three-person *tulābhāra* of year four might have been followed by a four-person *tulābhāra* the following year, and so on.

The four-person *tulābhāra* is mentioned in three inscriptions, but only one—the Prītidānaka Maṇḍapa rock inscription (IC 6.25)—tells us who the fourth participant was: Kalyāṇavatī, who would eventually be installed on the throne herself. Several other features of this description also deviate from the three-person *tulābhāra* described above:

having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by (1) his primary consort the *mahādevī* Kāliṅga Subhadrā **of the Solar Dynasty**, (2) **the mahādevī Kālyāṇa of the Gaṅga dynasty**, (3) his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu who had **become yuvarāja**, and (4) he himself wearing **royal** jewellery and the crown, **annually**, as no prior kings had done; and having caused a great rain of alms, [consisting of] **the nine gems** (IC 6.25, ll. 11–14).⁵²

Here the lineages of both primary consorts are emphasized, again stressing these matrilinear links to powerful mainland dynasties. Subhadrā's status as a member of the solar dynasty is, of course, also a reminder of Niśśaṅka Malla's similar claim, as a fellow member of the Kāliṅga dynasty. Kalyāṇavatī's lineage, meanwhile, is given as Gaṅgavaṃśa. This is likely a

the Buddha in his penultimate incarnation) will ever have to act in the immorally violent ways that typically characterize kingship (fighting rivals, punishing criminals): Collins, *Nirvana*, ch. 7.

52 See also IC 6.37, which mentions a four-fold *tulābhāra* but does not name the participants.

reference to the powerful Eastern Gaṅga dynasty, whose domains at this time included the Kāliṅga region.⁵³ It seems likely that Niśśaṅka Malla's father Jayagopa (and presumably also the family of his primary consort Subhadrā) was a Kāliṅga-based tributary of this dynasty. The sudden inclusion of Kalyāṇavatī in descriptions of the *tulābhāra* from this point onwards suggests that Niśśaṅka Malla had secured, and wished to publicize, a valuable marital alliance with his own father's overlord. We might also note that Virabāhu has received an additional title, *yuvarāja*, intended to further signal his status as designated heir-apparent.

If we take Niśśaṅka Malla's claims of "annual" *tulābhāras* at face value, then this four-person *tulābhāra* ought to have taken place in his fifth regnal year, and the five-person *tulābhāra* (which is mentioned in many more inscriptions than any other configuration) ought to have taken place in his sixth year. Of course, we may well wish to remain cautious about taking *any* of Niśśaṅka Malla's claims at face value. But this sequence at least aligns with the inscriptional dating laid out above. Notably, the Ruḥuṇa inscription (IC 6.54), which must postdate year seven, is among those which mention a five-person *tulābhāra*, suggesting that this variant remained in Niśśaṅka Malla's rhetorical performance of kingship until that point.

Although the five-person variant is the most widely attested in the inscriptional corpus, we are once again only told *which* five people participated in a single inscription: the Galpota. Here the formulation is given as:

having mounted the *tulābhāra* together with (1) his primary consort the *mahādevī* Kāliṅga Subhadrā of the Solar Dynasty, (2) the *mahādevī* Kālyāṇa of the Gaṅga dynasty, (3) his son the *mahapā*, **wearing the royal jewellery and crown**, and (4) **his daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī**; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually (IC 6.24, ll. b2–4).

Niśśaṅka Malla himself clearly makes up the fifth person. But it is Virabāhu who now wears the royal regalia, and Virabāhu's sister now joins the party.⁵⁴ Niśśaṅka Malla's inclusion of consorts (symbolizing powerful matrilateral connections) and heir in such a public act of kingship is understandable; his inclusion of his daughter is slightly less so. We might wonder if she is being primed to secure matrilateral alliances of her own. However, she is mentioned further on in the same inscription, in what seems to be a ritual context. We are told that Niśśaṅka Malla "having offered his son and daughter to

⁵³ See, for the most comprehensive overview, Rao, *Kāliṅga under the Eastern Gaṅgas*.

⁵⁴ Virabāhu's name and longer list of titles are likely only absent here because they were mentioned in the preceding clauses.

the Tooth and Bowl Relics, offered up riches, including a solid gold *dāgaba*, and [thus] saved [the children]" (IC 6.24, l. b24). We see a variant description of this event in one of the inscriptions on the Hāṭadāgē: "having offered his son, the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, and his daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī to the Tooth and Bowl Relics, [then] saved the two" (IC 6.52, ll. 17–18).

From these two descriptions together we gain the sense of some kind of ritualized offering-up of the children to the Relics, only to redeem ("save") them through a substitute offering of considerable value. If only Vīrabāhu were involved in this offering, we might wonder if he were being dedicated to the monkhood (only to be later "saved" for kingship by the substitute offering). But it is unclear whether the female monastic order survived into this period of Lankan history; the only hint of their presence is a single word on an inscription which can also be read otherwise.⁵⁵ Even if some details of the ritual are thus unclear, Niśsaṅka Malla's inclusion of Sarvāṅga Sundarī in this ritual (and his inscribing the inclusion, twice over, in the sacred quadrangle at the heart of his city) speaks to a surprising centrality of a royal daughter in his self-presentation as a devout king. This is, to my knowledge, the only early second millennium inscription in which a king mentions, let alone names, his own daughter.

Other descriptions of the five-person *tulābhāra* give fewer details but, significantly, retain mention of the royal women. The Rameśvaram throne inscription, for example, mentions only the titles of those who accompanied Niśsaṅka Malla: "having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by five persons, including the *bisōvas* and the *mahapā*; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually" (IC 6.46, ll. 1–2). Presumably, Sarvāṅga Sundarī is one of the five persons mentioned here. An inscription found near the Vānduruppa Vihāra, meanwhile, excludes even Vīrabāhu's title of *mahapā* from the list, but still singles out the consorts: "having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by five persons, including the *bisōvas*; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually" (IC 6.53, ll. 6–7). Here it is the inclusion of *only* the royal women which seems relevant. Later—in the year-seven-plus Ruhūṇa inscription, and at least one of the year-nine inscriptions—even the women are excluded, and the event was reduced down to the minimalistic formula "having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually" (IC 6.43, l.2; 6.54, l.12).⁵⁶ It seems that in these later years more recent events (including the *tulābhāra* at Rameśvaram)

⁵⁵ Gunawardana, *Subtile Silks*, 38–39.

⁵⁶ IC 6.49, the other inscription from Niśsaṅka Malla's ninth year, is effaced in the section we might expect to see mention of the five-person *tulābhāra*, so we cannot be sure if it was included here or not.

appeared more salient to Niśsaṅka Malla's kingly self-representation, and so descriptions of the five-person *tulābhāra* became increasingly truncated.

The eight-person *tulābhāra* is only mentioned in a single inscription (*IC* 6.57), which is—frustratingly—difficult to date. It is located on the outer wall of the Hāṭadāgē, the same shrine discussed above in the context of Niśsaṅka Malla offering his children up to the Tooth and Bowl Relics. But this inscription is unlike those others found within the Hāṭadāgē. It employs a different regnal title (*Siṃhapureśvara Laṃkeśvara Kāliṅga cakravartin*, otherwise witnessed only in *IC* 6.53), and it mentions edificial works (like the construction of a seven-story palace in only forty-five days) not otherwise discussed in the extant corpus. We do know, because it mentions the creation of both stone thrones and distance-marker pillars, that it must postdate *some* of the inscriptions found on these respective objects.⁵⁷ But we do not know which, and so cannot say for sure where the eight-person *tulābhāra* fits in sequence. This is unfortunate, as the list of participants has three fascinating inclusions:

having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by eight persons, including (1) the *bisōva* Kāliṅga Subhadrā, (2) the *mahādevī* Kalyāṇavatī, (3) the *mahapā*, (4) **the āpā Vikramabāhu**, (5) **the bisōva Candrā**, (6) **Pārvatī**, and (7) Sarvāṅga Sundarī; and having given [charity] annually in this way (*IC* 6.57, ll. 12–15).

Once again, Niśsaṅka Malla himself presumably makes up the unnamed eighth person. The inclusion of the secondary heir Vikramabāhu is, perhaps, unsurprising. We know that this was the position Niśsaṅka Malla himself (claimed to have) occupied under Parākramabāhu I; perhaps he was preparing for the eventuality that his son Virabāhu, just like his own predecessor Vijayabāhu II, would need someone waiting in the wings. This would prove to be prudent. Virabāhu I would only rule for a single night before he passed away, and Vikramabāhu II (r. three months in 1196) took the throne.

More interesting, however, is the addition of two *more* royal women to the list of participants. One, Candrā, is named as a consecrated consort (*bisōva*). We know nothing about her life or lineage, although we may speculate about a connection to Parākramabāhu's similarly-named widow Candavatī (discussed in the following chapter). As we have seen throughout this chapter from the case of Kalyāṇavatī, Niśsaṅka Malla frequently

57 The stone seats were likely created throughout Niśsaṅka Malla's reign, and so evince a wide variety of inscriptional styles. Some (*IC* 6.33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, and 44) must postdate year five; all others must postdate year two at least. The *gavuta* distance pillar inscriptions are *IC* 6.74 through 82. *IC* 6.74 and 75 must themselves postdate year two, but we cannot even say this about the remaining pillars.

drops the *-vatī* suffix in his inscriptions; Candrā might therefore be a plausible read for Candravatī. However, this was also a fairly common name for royal women across medieval Southern Asia, and we should not place too much weight on this possible connection. The second woman, Pārvatī, is—like Niśśaṅka Malla's daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī—not called a consort. It is unlikely that she is a second, younger, daughter, given that she is listed before Sarvāṅga Sundarī. We might wonder, therefore, if this is actually Niśśaṅka Malla's *mother* Pārvatī, returned from Kaliṅga and invited to participate in Niśśaṅka Malla's grand display of royal munificence.

No matter where we place the eight-person *tulābhāra* in this sequence, the changing descriptions of the *tulābhāra* seem to reflect both the centrality of the immediate family to Niśśaṅka Malla's vision of kingship, and that family's increasing scope over time. Consorts, daughters, and possibly even Niśśaṅka Malla's mother were included in descriptions of the *tulābhāra* ritual alongside male heirs: these women clearly *mattered* to him, and to his kingly self-representation. We might well conceptualize this as something akin to what Sjurzen describes as a "lordship unit," a "theory of complementary rulership [which] would suggest that a noblewoman's authority derived from her status as part of the lordship unit rather than [solely from] her access to a husband or son."⁵⁸ This authority, crucially, was more than symbolic. As the Relic-offering ritual's inclusion of Niśśaṅka Malla's daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī perhaps suggests, the public centrality of these noblewomen to Niśśaṅka Malla's performance of kingship translated into direct influence on his choices of patronage.

In two of Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions, he explicitly tells us that his pious religious works at the Mahāvihāra's Great Stūpa (here called Ruvanvāli) were carried out at the request of his consorts:

having, because the women of the Inner City (*antaḥpurastrī*) said "we wish to worship also at the Ruvanvāli *mahasā* (Skt. *mahācaitya*, "great reliquary")," said in reply "This was done in the past by a royal person like myself";⁵⁹ having spent limitless wealth; having made his labourers happy; having made the Ruvanvāli *dāgaba* into a veritable lotus for the Pihiti Kingdom (the Rajaraṭa); and having enabled the women of the Inner City to worship it (*IC* 6.53, ll. 9–13).

⁵⁸ Sjurzen, "War of the Two Jeannes," 11.

⁵⁹ Presumably he refers here to Duṭṭagāmuṇu, who first established the Great Stūpa; or perhaps even to the inscription of Gajabāhu discussed in Chapter Four.

Here, Niśśaṅka Malla portrays himself as undertaking this monumental act of patronage in communication with and at the request of his consorts, primarily to satisfy *their* pious wishes. We might take this, of course, as merely a rhetorical show of appeasement. But then, what does it tell us about the performance of kingship that consorts should be so shown to be appeased?

One final piece of evidence further suggests the centrality of Niśśaṅka Malla's consorts to his performance of kingship. This comes from his copperplate grants: legal texts which do not just *record* the donation of land to an individual's family, but through their own production legally enshrine that donation. Tellingly, in these inscriptions' representation of the royal procession, leading up to the announcement of the grant, the two principal consorts are listed even before any of the ministers:

The *sakviti* (Skt. *cakravartī*) Niśśaṅka Malla Niṣkaḷaṃka Kāliṅga *cakravartī* *suvāmīn vahanse*, having entered the *abhiṣeka-maṇḍapa* in the Tundāgedora; wearing the royal jewellery including the crown; in procession with the *aga biso* Subhadrā *mahādevī*, Kalyāṇavatī *mahādevī*, his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, and the group of ministers including Lakvijaya Siṅgu *senevī* Tāvurunā, the *laṅkādhikāra* Lolupāḷākuḷu Kitalnā, the *adhikāra* Toṭadanavu Suvanā, the *adhikāra* Toṭadanavu Sātānā, and the *sabhāpatināyaka* Dahambaḍahāli Gajabāhunāvan (*IC* 6.58, ll. c2–d6; 6.59, ll. a3–5).

And this priority ranking seems more than symbolic. At the end of both extant grants, the records are witnessed, and so made legally binding, by the four core members of the royal family together:

Given (*dattam*) by Vīrarāja Niśyaṃkhamalla Kāliṅga Laṃkendra, and given by Subhadrā *mahādevī*, and given by Kalyāṇavatī *mahādevī*, and given by the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu (*IC* 6.58, ll. h2–6).

Given by Śrī Kāliṅga Laṃkendra, and given by the *aga biso* Subhadrā *mahādevī*, and given by Kalyāṇavatī *mahādevī*, and given by the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, [Niśśaṅka Malla's] son who is in the position of *yuvarāja* (*IC* 6.59, ll. b9–10).

The royal consorts, in other words, were active participants in the affairs of the court, engaged in the discharge of “royal duties” (*rājadhura*, *IC* 6.58 l. d6; 6.59, l. b1) as well as guiding the direction of pious public works.

The most emphatic shift in the treatment of royal women in Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions, relative to earlier models of kingship, comes in two of his inscriptions: the Galpota (*IC* 6.24), and those carved on the gates of the citadel itself (*IC* 6.28 and 29). Here he famously lays out the most explicit articulation of a “succession law” in premodern Sri Lanka. The Galpota's version is unfortunately partially effaced. It reads:

One ought to...the (son?) of a king, [duly appointed to the titles of] *āpā* [and/or] *mahapā*, even if young, because they are the [rightful] master (*svāmin*) of the world, having watched over the kingdom..."caste" (*kula*) customs...

In their absence, one ought to protect [the kingdom] by living according to the command (*ājñā*) of the consecrated consorts (*bisōvas*).

In *their* absence, one ought to protect the kingdom [by] placing in the position of king even a slipper which has been on the foot of the *mahārāja* (*IC* 6.24, ll. c19–21).

The wording here—"living according to the command of the *bisōvas*"—might indicate merely a support for regency. But a variant of this argument in Niśsaṅka Malla's Gate inscriptions suggests that he may be advocating for full succession:

It is necessary to not be king-less. Therefore, in the case that there is not a person appointed to the *mahārāja*-ship, it is necessary to appoint the *yuvarāja*, or, if there is not (a *yuvarāja*), the royal princes, or, if there is not, the *bisōvas*, to the kingship (*rājya*) (*IC* 6.28, ll. b2–8; 6.28, ll. b1–6).

Here it is clear that the *bisōvas* themselves are in Niśsaṅka Malla's intended line of succession (even if as a last resort), if the alternative is being "king-less" (*a-rājaka*). This implies that *bisōvas* (or, in the worst case, royal footwear) could effectively function *as kings*, if no other suitably masculine candidates were available. This situation would, of course, come to pass, with the ascendancy of Parākramabāhu's consort Lilāvati, and then Niśsaṅka Malla's consort Kalyāṇavatī, to the throne.

All of this together suggests a far more composite nature to Niśsaṅka Malla's vision of kingship than we might receive from retrospective monastic records alone, or even from a cursory reading of his inscriptional corpus. While the latter certainly emphasizes, at great length, his *personal* virtues as a monarch, it also suggests the centrality of royal women to the exercise and symbolic extension of kingship. They were vital, it seems, to the differentiation of Niśsaṅka Malla and his dynasty as uniquely positioned to rule.

Conclusions to Chapter Six

This chapter has focused on Niśsaṅka Malla's refashioning of kingship in a manner favourable to his dynastic aspirations. I have suggested that these efforts centred around a politics of *difference*: a distinction drawn between Niśsaṅka Malla and his family from local elites on a number of axes (the connection to Vijaya, *kṣatriya* status, and the auspicious circumstances of his birth). This fashioning of difference did not emerge overnight. In what seem

to be his earliest inscriptions, he emphasizes a more immediate connection to the prior rule of Parākramabāhu I, and therefore positions himself in the regular continuity of Lankan kingship. It is only in his later inscriptions that we see a distancing from the legacy of Parākramabāhu, and a new emphasis on the uniquely Kalingan origins of Niśśaṅka Malla's dynasty.

Niśśaṅka Malla's intention in this refashioning of kingship was, almost certainly, to secure the longevity of his own dynasty. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, he succeeded in this regard. The majority of Poḷonnaruva's subsequent monarchs, before the kingdom's invasion in 1215 CE, did indeed claim some relation to Niśśaṅka Malla as evidence of their right to rule. However, the vision of kingship articulated in his inscriptions—and, particularly, the succession laws he attempted to lay out in his Galpota and gate inscriptions—had ramifications for Lankan politics beyond his immediate family. In particular, it seems to have set the stage for the centrality of royal women in Lankan politics to a degree unprecedented in Lankan history. Niśśaṅka Malla's vision of kingship attempted to centre royal women in a manner parallel to that described in Chapter Two: as embodied evidence of homosocial ties with powerful mainland rulers. Inadvertently, however, the prominence placed on the women of Niśśaṅka Malla's dynasty—and therefore, by extension, on all royal consorts—may well have strengthened their own position. We see Niśśaṅka Malla's own inscriptions present him as deferential to the religious and economic wishes of his consorts, directing patronage according to their agenda. His primary consorts, Subhadrā and Kalyāṇavatī, joined him in affairs of state and co-witnessed his legal grants. We have also seen that this resulted in their being placed in the line of succession, in the absence of suitable male heirs. After his death, and the untimely death of his son Vīrabāhu, this new rule of succession and the possibility of female regnancy seem to have been taken seriously. We turn to this phenomenon in the following chapter.

GENDERING KINGSHIP

THE POLITICS OF ROYAL WOMEN (1187–1215)

NIŚŚAÑKA MALLA'S NINE-YEAR reign would be the longest of the later Poḷonnaruva period. His death, in ca. 1196, was followed by a rapid succession of untimely deaths, *coups d'état*, and succession crises. Only three monarchs remained on the throne for longer than a year, including Niśśaṅka Malla's brother Sāhasa Malla (r. ca. 1200–1202). The longest reigns of this otherwise turbulent period were, notably, those of female monarchs: Niśśaṅka Malla's former consort Kalyāṇavatī (r. ca. 1202–1208) and, in three separate reigns, Parākramabāhu's former consort Līlāvatī (1197–1200, 1209–1210, and 1210–1211). These two women dominated the political culture of the later Poḷonnaruva period. In the thirteen years between Līlāvatī's first accession and her final deposition, there was only a single year—1201—in which neither was on the throne. This succession of female regnancy is a marked outlier in the longer span of Sri Lankan history, in which the throne was almost exclusively held by normatively masculine kings.¹ This period represents, in other words, a rather dramatic shift in the Lankan gender order.

Yet scholarly treatments of this period tend to overlook the significance of these women's reigns. Neither has been the subject of a sustained scholarly discussion as were their more illustrious predecessors Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu, or even Gajabāhu II and Niśśaṅka Malla.² When the reigns of Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvatī are mentioned in scholarly treatments of the Poḷonnaruva period, closer attention is paid to the legacies of their respective husbands or to the powerful men who helped to install them on the throne. This treatment is by no means a wholesale invention of modern

1 The *Mahāvamsa* records only two earlier women on the throne: Anulā (r. ca. 48–44 BCE), who murdered her way through a string of husbands (described in lurid detail in *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 34); and Sivali, who ruled for a single year in ca. 33 CE. Only one other woman, Kusumāsana/Dona Catarina (r. 1581–1592), would subsequently sit on a Lankan throne.

2 The notable exception is Indrani Iriyagolle, who does mention both Līlāvatī and Kalyāṇavatī, and attempts to situate their circumstances in a *longue durée* perspective of Buddhist attitudes towards women: Iriyagolle, "The Unique Position of Sinhala Women."

historians, but rather—once again—a reflection of the *Mahāvamśa*’s relative disinterest in the two women. Līlāvātī’s three reigns, for example, are described as follow:

Then Kittī (Skt. Kīrti), the powerful lord of the army (*senānātha*), having torn out of the eye of that [former] Lord of Men and exiled him, ruled through Līlāvātī, the primary consort (P. *aggamahesī*, Skt. *agramahiṣī*) of the pure lord Parakkamabāhu (Skt. Parākramabāhu), for three years without mishap.

...

Then his (Anikaṅga’s) own general Vikkantacamūnakka, of ill intent, having killed the monarch Anikaṅga, ruled for one year through the first lady (*devī*) of the king (presumably Parākramabāhu), named Līlāvātī, by whom rule had previously been done.

...

Then the general Parakkama (Skt. Parākrama)—mighty and powerful, most excellent among those with resolve, born of the Kālanāgara lineage—anoointed in sovereignty that consort Līlāvātī, who had arisen from the Solar and Lunar Dynasties, who subsequently shone in kingly splendour.³

Beyond these passing verses, Līlāvātī is curiously absent from the *Mahāvamśa*’s narrative—even from its narrative of her husband Parākramabāhu I. We are told that she was a daughter of Śrīvallabhā, and the sister of Parākramabāhu’s rival Mānābharaṇa II, but nothing more.⁴ Kalyāṇavatī’s reign receives a slightly longer treatment, but one which nonetheless similarly foregrounds the agency of her minister Āyasmanta.⁵ We might also note certain features of the verses above which reinforce the notion that Līlāvātī served as a mere “puppet queen” for powerful men. In all three verses, Līlāvātī is never assigned grammatical agency. It is always men (Kīrti, Anikaṅga, and then Parākrama) who instigate her reigns. We also see a curious absence of clear regnal titles: while Līlāvātī is described as being the consort of her departed husband Parākramabāhu, she is never called anything resembling “king”

3 *Mahāvamśa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 80, vv. 30–31, 45–46, and 49–50.

4 *Mahāvamśa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 62, v. 2. Līlāvātī’s absence from the narrative is most striking in the introductory verses of Chapter 63, which opens after the death of Parākramabāhu’s father Mānābharaṇa I. Parākramabāhu, his mother, and his two sisters then travel to the court of Śrīvallabha, and the elder sister is married to Śrīvallabha’s son (and Līlāvātī’s brother) Mānābharaṇa II, in order to prevent a marriage alliance with Gajabāhu II. Līlāvātī herself is not mentioned at all in this scene, despite presumably also being at her father’s court and meeting, for the first time, the cousin (Parākramabāhu) she would eventually marry. The only consort of Parākramabāhu mentioned at all until his death is “the Lady Rūpavatī” (in *Mahāvamśa* ch. 73, vv. 136–47, a passage discussed further below).

5 *Mahāvamśa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 80, vv. 33–41.

(*rājan*). Instead, her regnancy is described obliquely. Men rule “through” her, or at most “anoint her in sovereignty.”

This reflects a broader attitude, outlined in Chapter One, held by literati and literary theorists towards gender roles. Classical South Asian literary theory dictates that the protagonists of literary works must be heterosexual, high-caste, and whole-bodied men. This view was codified by influential works like Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa* (“Mirror of Poetry”), which served as the inspiration for the Sinhala-language *Siyabasalakara* (“Ornaments of Our Own Language”), as well as the later Pali-language *Subodhālaṅkāra* (“Lucid Ornaments”). Sri Lankan literati were guided by these texts, and so we should not be surprised when their descriptions of social reality closely conform to the ideal proscribed by Daṇḍin and his heirs. We might therefore be suspicious of the *Mahāvamsa*’s claim that it was powerful *men* in the courts of Līlāvati and Kalyāṇavati, rather than the women themselves, who held the reins.

This suspicion is supported by the outsized impact Līlāvati, in particular, had on the political and cultural landscape of the later Poḷonnaruva period. The very fact that she was repeatedly re-instated on the throne after not one but two depositions is already a strong indication of her prominence (even if we take that prominence as merely a symbolic façade to enable the politics of her masculine puppet-masters). Līlāvati’s three reigns are significant for more than just their tenacious reoccurrence, however. Two of the four poetic works composed in the Poḷonnaruva period—the Pali-language *Dāṭṭhāvamsa* (“Lineage of the Tooth [Relic]”) and the Sinhala *Sasadāvata* (“Story of [The Buddha’s] Birth as a Hare”)—were composed under Līlāvati’s patronage, and eulogize members of her court in their introductions.⁶ Alongside the roughly-contemporaneous Pali *Jinālaṅkāra* (“Ornaments of the Conquerer”) and Sinhala *Muvadevdāvata* (“Story of the Birth as [King] Makhadeva”), the *Dāṭṭhāvamsa* and *Sasadāvata* are pivotal in the cultural history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. With some noteworthy exceptions, existing discussion of either poem again tend to attribute patronage exclusively to the agency of Līlāvati’s ministers.⁷ However, the *Sasadāvata* and *Dāṭṭhāvamsa* were patronized,

6 The *Sasadāvata*, composed during in Līlāvati’s first reign (1197–1200) by an unknown author, is an adaption of the canonical *Sasa-jātaka*. See further Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature*, 146–48; Sannasgala, *Siṃhala Sāhityavamsaya*, 134–36. The *Dāṭṭhāvamsa* was composed in Līlāvati’s final reign (1211–1212), by a monastic poet named Dharmakīrti (P. Dhammakitti). See Malalasekera, *Pāli Literature*, 207–8; Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 142.

7 Saparamadu attributes patronage of the *Sasadāvata* to “the request of Kittī the Minister of Queen Līlāvati”: Saparamadu, “Sinhalese Literature and Language,” 111. Wijesekera tells us that the *Dāṭṭhāvamsa* was written “at the request of a minister

respectively, in Līlāvati's first and third reigns. In other words, this policy of patronizing such works spanned multiple ministers: Līlāvati herself was the only constant throughout. We might also note that Līlāvati's longest extant inscription (IC 6.90, discussed further below) includes the epithet "who has reached the [distant] shore in all arts" (*siyalukalātera pāmiṇi*) immediately before her regnal name, a designation of particular mastery and skill. This epithet appears to be unique among Poḷonnaruva's inscriptions, and so may speak to a particular concern on her behalf with such crafts, and therefore with their patronage.

I am suggesting that, despite Līlāvati's considerable influence on the development of Buddhist literature in both Pali and Sinhala, her reigns have been relatively understudied by modern scholars. While this oversight is most apparent with reference to Līlāvati, for whom we have such abundant evidence still available, it is symptomatic of a broader dismissal of the significance of royal women in the last decades of the Poḷonnaruva period. As I have argued elsewhere, this dismissal is the product of a selective engagement, by colonial-modern scholars, with treatments of these women in certain premodern sources; sources themselves informed by discourses about kingship's supposedly inherent masculinity.⁸ Similar discourses, as Cynthia Talbot describes in a landmark work, are what led some female rulers of Andhra Pradesh to adopt publicly masculine personae, while others (primarily widows) disavowed their own *regnancy* to keep up the ruse of mere *regency* on behalf of male kinsmen.⁹ These discourses were, by no means, uncontested within the Poḷonnaruva period itself. However, it was under the influence of these discourses that medieval monks and modern scholars alike have tended to downplay the agency of royal women in their histories of the period; to attribute that agency instead to powerful men serving as ministers and generals in their courts; and so to reify the ideology that kingship is, properly, masculine.

called Parākrama" (94), with no mention at all of for whom Parākrama was a minister: Wijesekera, "Pali and Sanskrit," 94. The University of Ceylon *History* tells us only that Parākrama is eulogized in the *Dāṭhāvamsa*, after he installed Līlāvati on the throne, without mentioning Līlāvati's own praise therein: Paranavitana, "Religion, Literature, and Art," 571. More balanced assessments can be found in Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature*, 146; Malalasekera, *Pāli Literature*, 208; and Sannasgala, *Siṃhala Sāhityavamaṣaya*, 134.

⁸ Shirley, "Beyond Masculinity."

⁹ Talbot, "Rudrama-Devi, the Female King."

In this chapter I provide a series of correctives to this tendency, by discussing three women who challenged the established politics of gender: the monarchs Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvatī; and the dowager consort Candavatī. In the first section, I address the ways in which Kalyāṇavatī's (nominal) subordinates, powerful men who exercised varying degrees of local autonomy, attempted to account for her occupation of the apex social position (Sin. *agatāna*, Skt. *agrasthāna*) in their own inscriptional outputs. The second section contrasts the literary treatments of Līlāvatī's sovereignty—including those composed under her patronage—with a wider selection of inscriptional, numismatic, and even commentarial sources. In these latter sources, I argue, we gain a clear vision of the nuanced and context-sensitive ways in which Līlāvatī presented herself as a monarch, including selective claims to the (grammatically and semantically) masculine title *rājan*, "king." Finally, I turn to Candavatī, with whose inscription at the Potgul Vihāra this book began. Through a close reading of the three short lines of this inscription, I suggest that it sought a dramatic intervention into the gender politics of Poḷonnaruva, re-articulating Candavatī's own social standing relative to that of Līlāvatī.

Female Regnancy Viewed from Below

Having reigned for six years, Kalyāṇavatī is the second-longest-ruling monarch of the post-Parākramabāhu era (after her husband Niśśaṅka Malla's nine years). Yet, despite this, we have extant no inscriptions recording her own acts.¹⁰ We can view her only as reflected in the inscriptions of others: those of her husband, as seen in the preceding chapter; and those, discussed in this section, of her (nominal) subordinates and tributaries. While the loss of her own "voice" is of course lamentable, our access to these alternative perspectives does allow us the unusual opportunity of reconstructing—with more granularity than we can for most rulers of this period—how Kalyāṇavatī's regnancy was depicted in inscriptions of those outside her immediate circle; how a female monarch was incorporated into wider political discourses.

This section therefore focuses on the inscriptions of individuals who operated in the shadow of Kalyāṇavatī's metaphorical "parasol" (*chatra*): a local official (*adhikāra*) named Cūdāmaṇi; a (former?) treasury official

10 A possible exception is the highly defaced IC 6.98. The few extant lines include her personal and regnal names ("Abhā Salamevan Kalyāṇavatī *svāmin vahanse*"), but no other donor or patron can be identified.

named Pirivatubim Vijayānā and his family; and Malevi Bhūma, a local warlord (*senādhirāja*) ruling somewhere north of what is now Minipe. Reading their inscriptions together paints an evocative picture of power dynamics during Kalyāṇavati's reign. Localized rulers appear to have taken advantage of both official positions and family ties to operate relatively autonomously at the peripheries of the Poḷonnaruvan hinterland. As we saw with reference to Jayabāhu II in the "interregnal" period discussed in Chapter Three these local rulers appear to have nonetheless positioned themselves rhetorically as subordinate to Kalyāṇavati. The vital difference, however, is that they seemed unable or unwilling to explicitly name her as a "sovereign."

We see this dynamic evident in a partially effaced slab inscription found near the Batalagoda reservoir (*IC 6.97*), which documents the repairs to that reservoir and donations to a nearby monastic college (*piriveṇa*) carried out by a local official named Cūḍāmaṇi. The opening section of the inscription, which seems to more precisely identify Cūḍāmaṇi's rank and relationship to higher tiers of government, is sadly largely effaced. We can make out, however, that he had the title *adhikāra* ("minister," "official"), or possibly even *Laṅkādhikāra*. In other contexts this latter title might imply that Cūḍāmaṇi was a high-ranking official on an island-wide level, overseeing all of Lanka on behalf of the monarch. Here, however, mentions in the surviving text of a "middle province" (*mādhyadeśa*) in the Māyāraṭa suggests a more local jurisdiction. Also visible in this section is the name Lakvijaya Ābo Siṅgu, who seems to have been a key political figure in this period, mentioned in both inscriptions and later textual accounts.¹¹ This is likely the same general (Sin. *senevi*) identified in the *Pūjāvaliya* as "Eḷalu Ābo," and in the *Mahāvamsa* as "Āyasmanta," who overthrew Sāhasa Malla (r. 1200–1202) in favour of Kalyāṇavati.¹² The earliest reference to this general comes, ironically, in an inscription of Sāhasa Malla himself, in which he is granted the titles of

11 Modern scholars have long conflated Lakvijaya Siṅgu Ābo with a number of other similarly-named figures. These include a *laṅkādhikāra* named Lolupālākuḷu Dūttāṭi Ābo, on the basis that they share a personal name and that both were rewarded for their loyalty to Sāhasa Malla; a Lakvijaya *senevi* Tāvuru mentioned in inscriptions of Niśsaṅka Malla; and/or the chief minister of Liḷāvati's first reign called Lagvijaya Siṅgu Kit. If we were to accept that all of these were, in fact, the same man, he would have been behind nearly every single *coup d'état* in the second half of the twelfth century; even some, as Liyanagamage points out, which removed monarchs he himself had previously placed on the throne: Liyanagamage, "Decline," 142. This seems far-fetched, and so I follow Liyanagamage in treating these four as separate figures, possibly members of a single family distinguished by personal name.

12 *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Nāṇavimala, 784; *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 80, vv. 33–41.

general (*senevirat*) and chief minister (*agramantrī*, IC 6.94, ll. b46–47), along with “villages, followers, and all [kinds of] wealth” in perpetuity (IC 6.94, ll. b51–53). These resources, presumably, gave Lakvijaya Ābo the powerbase he would later use to mount his *coup* against Sāhasa Malla. Given the apparent autonomy of this powerbase, it has therefore been generally assumed by modern epigraphers that Cūḍāmaṇi was in some way Lakvijaya Ābo’s subordinate or local functionary.¹³

How did this local official position himself relative to Kalyāṇavatī? Once again, we are frustrated here by the damage done to the inscription’s opening. What is clear, however, is that the inscription itself is dated in Kalyāṇavatī’s regnal years. As I argued in Chapter Three, the use (or not) of an overlord’s regnal years is a significant acknowledgement of their authority. The surviving text supports this, clearly positioning Kalyāṇavatī in the sovereign position even while avoiding explicitly regnal titles: “in the fifth year [of] Abhā Salamevan Kalyāṇavatī...[section illegible]...established in the royal splendour of a single parasol in the *trisiṃhala*” (IC 6.97, ll. 1–2). Cūḍāmaṇi may, on a more pragmatic level, have been subordinate to the economic and political status of Kalyāṇavatī’s chief minister Lakvijaya Ābo. But it is in her person that all of the trappings of kingship—the regnal year, the royal splendour, the parasol of sovereignty—are ultimately vested.

We see a similar dynamic in the second of our inscriptions. Located at the Mahāvihāra’s Great Stūpa (called again “Ruvanmāli”) in Anurādhapura, this inscription marks a private donation by:

three people: the treasury administrator Pirivatubimi Vijayānāvan, who has administered the treasury of kings including Sirisaṅgabo Prākramabāhu *cakravartti*,¹⁴ experienced an extraordinary degree of serene satisfaction (*prasāda*) with reference to the Three Gems, is endowed with the qualities of pious confidence (*śraddha*) and wisdom (*buddhi*), and is resplendent with a heap of royal favour (again *prasāda*); and his wife (*ambu*), the Lady Sumedhā; and his nephew (*bāṇa*), the *laṅkādhikāra* Toṭadanavu Devalnāvan (IC 6.96, ll. 1–4).

13 This is further supported by the fact that the *piriveṇa* which Cūḍāmaṇi refurbished was, apparently, founded by a similarly-named Lakvijaya Saṃ[gha] Siṅgu. It is unclear whether this is another name for the same man, or if Lakvijaya Saṃ was a relative or ancestor of Lakvijaya Ābo (see, e.g., the discussion in EZ, 4:76). I am inclined to assume the latter.

14 This monarch must have been either Parākramabāhu I or Niśsaṅka Malla, as both used this same regnal name. I am inclined to think the latter, as he more frequently referred to himself by the title *cakravartin*.

Here we see a complex interplay of official titles (“treasury administrator,” *laṅkādhikāra*), interpersonal connections, and powerful emotive responses. As discussed above with reference to Cūdāmaṇi, the geographical jurisdiction of Toṭadanavu Devalnāvan cannot be assumed from his title alone. It is similarly unclear whether Vijayānāvan was still in his post as a treasury administrator at the time he made this donation, or if he had since retired. Either way, it is clear that this family had amassed a considerable fortune from their official posts. They lavished on the Great Stūpa a truly staggering array of offerings (so the inscription tells us):

having heard, from various pandits who knew scripture (*āgama*), [about] the types of *pūjā* offered to the Ruvanmāli *svāmi* by various kings beginning with Duṭṭagāmuṇu, [they] were overwhelmed by serene satisfaction (yet again *prasāda*) [and so thought] “it would be good to make a type of *pūjā* which is different and uncommon” (IC 6.96, ll. 4–7).

In other words, Vijayānāvan and his family set out to make an offering in line with, but distinct from—perhaps even rival to—those made by kings. They stress throughout the inscription that they were motivated by a powerful emotive response to Buddhist literature. In particular, they tell us that they listened to a recital of the *Thūpavaṃsa*, a Pali-language narrative of the Great Stūpa’s construction, on the platform of the *stūpa* itself. But it is hard not to also wonder about an element of conspicuous consumption. If we take even half of what they claim to have donated at face value, their independent economic power must have been truly vast. Yet the inscription is, once again, dated in the regnal years of “Abhaya Salamevan Kalyāṇavatī *suvāmin vahanse*” (IC 6.96, ll. 1). Even in an inscription which aims to rival kings in largess, the over-arching sovereignty of Kalyāṇavatī is still acknowledged at the very outset.

The figures discussed above—Cūdāmaṇi, acting perhaps on behalf of Lakvijaya Ābo, and Vijayānāvan and his family—were at least nominally subordinate to Kalyāṇavatī. The same cannot be said for our third figure, Malevi Bhūma (read by Parānavitana as Bhāma), who attributes to himself what seems to be a pseudo-royal title (*senādhirāja*, “king over the army” or, more simply, “warlord”). This suggests that he operated autonomously, as an independent local ruler with no sovereign relation to the monarchs based at Poḷonnaruva. As Ronald Inden has described in another context, however, such local rulers often still presented themselves as participant in the wider “hierarchy of kingship,” autonomous sub-kings paying symbolic tribute to a “superior” king above.¹⁵ Certainly, Bhūma’s sole extant inscription models

¹⁵ Inden, “Hierarchies of Kings.”

him as a king in his own right. It attributes to him, for example, a string of comparisons reminiscent of the earlier inscriptions of Vijayabāhu I and the late Anurādhapuran kings (discussed in Chapters Three and Two respectively). Alongside Bhūma's rather royal title *senādhirāja*, we are told that he was:

like Uvindu (Skt. Upendra, a name for Viṣṇu) to the goddess Śrī; like Brahma to the goddess of writing (Sarasvatī); like the sun for manifest ascetic heat (Skt. *tapas*); like the moon for gentleness; as unto a *tilaka*-mark for the Malevi family (*IC* 6.100, 15–19).

Although the specific pantheon differs, this is the same series of divine comparisons which characterized the inscriptions of both Mahinda IV and Vijayabāhu I. Bhūma's own Malevi family (*kula*) is elevated to the same status as the Solar and Lunar Dynasties, traced back to semi-mythic figures like Ikṣvāku. Through references such as this we are given the sense that he is a Poḷonnaruvan monarch in microcosm, reflecting the royal stylings of his nominal overlords even as he lays claim to more direct territory. Simultaneously, however, this inscription repeatedly positions his authority with reference to that of Kalyāṇavatī.

The inscription opens by dating itself with reference to Kalyāṇavatī's eighth regnal year.¹⁶ This dating in itself is noteworthy: Kalyāṇavatī is only said to have ruled for *six* years, between ca. 1202 and 1208. Not only were Kalyāṇavatī's regnal years used to date the inscriptions of more local rulers; this practice continued even after her death, into the short reigns of Dharmāśoka (r. ca. 1208–1209), Āniyaṅga/Anīkaṅga (r. fourteen days in ca. 1209), and possibly even Līlāvatī (in her second reign of ca. 1209–1210). As discussed in Chapter Three, with reference to the regnal years of Jayabāhu I continuing to be counted after his death, this seems to signify the ongoing (symbolic) overlordship of a ruler even after they have (more practically) vacated the throne. We might take this, in other words, as an endorsement on Bhūma's behalf of Kalyāṇavatī's sovereign status even after her deposition.

Supporting this reading, the inscription concludes with a list of monarchs who ruled (*raja-kaḷa*) after Parākramabāhu (*IC* 6.100, 33–37). This list includes both Līlāvatī and Kalyāṇavatī, showing that, at minimum, they were indeed accepted by Bhūma as legitimate links in the chain of succession. The final section of the inscription is unfortunately effaced, however, and so we cannot be sure whether the list included those monarchs who,

¹⁶ More specifically, it refers to a military invasion which occurred in Kalyāṇavatī's eighth regnal year, in which Bhūma proved his valour. The inscription itself may well have been made at any later point.

according to the *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvaliya*, briefly occupied the throne between Kalyāṇavatī and the second reign of Līlāvatī, or whether the list of rulers terminated with Kalyāṇavatī. Given that Bhūma appears to still use Kalyāṇavatī’s regnal years after she supposedly lost the throne, I suspect that the latter is more likely. However, the damaged nature of the inscription prevents us from being certain on this point.

The specific wording of the opening section, leading up to the evocation of Kalyāṇavatī’s regnal years, is yet more significant. As is typical of other inscriptions from the period, a long series of left-branching clauses precede the eventual mention of the monarch’s name. In this case, these clauses represent something of a genealogical claim on Kalyāṇavatī’s behalf, positioning her within a prestigious succession (*parampara*) of kingly predecessors:

In the eighth year of Abhā Salamevan Kalyāṇavatī *svāmīn vahanse*, who attained the highest position in Sirilak; in the succession of many kings of the Lesser and Greater Lineages beginning with Prince Vijaya, who ruled, having made human habitations in the Island of Lanka, [after] having arrived [in Lanka] on the fifteenth [day] of the bright fortnight in [the month] Vesaga in the eighth year of King Ajāsat (Ajātaśatru) of Daṁbadiva (Jambudvīpa); after Our Perfectly Awakened Gautama *vahanse*, a *tilaka*-mark in the Śākya family, having thrice visited the Island of Lanka; having established the great shrine (*māsāya*, Skt. *mahācaitya*) of Miyaṅguṇu on the banks of the Mahavāli, which was as sanctified as the Celestial River; [and] removed all fear of *yakṣas* (IC 6.100, 1–12).

Together, these two extracts of the inscription position Kalyāṇavatī firmly within the legitimate succession of Lankan kings. Her genealogy stretching back to Vijaya himself, and beyond him she is temporally connected to the Buddha’s own supposed visit to the island. Once again, however, we see an absence of explicit regnal titles applied to Kalyāṇavatī. Instead, alongside the honorific *svāmīn*, she is only referred to as having “obtained the highest position” (*aga-tāna*, Skt. *agra-sthāna*).

This rather roundabout way of referring to Kalyāṇavatī’s sovereignty brings us to fundamental tension of her reign: the social reality of a female monarch grating up against the idealized expectation of female subordination. What these inscriptions were grappling with, I suggest, is the seismic disruption to the established social order caused by a normatively female body sitting on Lanka’s throne. As suggested in Chapter One, the entire conceptual vocabulary of sovereignty in Lanka was masculine-coded. With Kalyāṇavatī in that “highest position,” atop the hierarchy, alternative vocabularies—creative re-mappings of the gender order—were necessary.

Beyond the Masculinity of Kingship

In this section, we consider further such “re-mappings” evident from the three reigns of Līlāvati. Due to the much larger amount of data available from this period, we are able to reconstruct with more granularity the *variety* of responses to her female regnancy. We can divide these responses into three broad categories. First, literary works—including both the later *Mahāvamsa*, and the two poems composed under Līlāvati’s own patronage—generally avoided *explicit* acknowledgement of Līlāvati’s status as a monarch. Second, those works composed under her patronage do, however, leave open the interpretive possibility of Līlāvati’s “kingship.” Like the inscriptions of Kalyāṇavati’s reign discussed above, they sought instead creative ways to acknowledge her sovereign status without going so far as to call her “sovereign.” Finally, in other media—inscriptions, coinage, and one commentary—we see varying explicit connections between Līlāvati and masculine-coded “kingship.” From these points, I suggest that, at minimum, the literary sources on which we over-rely for our historical data are only one perspective among many on Līlāvati’s status as a monarch, and cannot be taken as representative. More broadly, I suggest Līlāvati identified herself as a “king” more directly than literary sources, bound by strict aesthetic norms, were willing to admit.

These literary sources largely dealt with the problematic absence of female regnant titles, and of the conceptual possibility of female regnancy, by describing this regnancy only through the most oblique phrasing possible, and avoiding clear regnal titles altogether. In such works, Līlāvati is never explicitly called anything we might accurately translate as “monarch.” Instead, she remains always in the consortial mode; a pious and devoted wife, who happened to be “established in the kingdom” by other, more traditionally manly, men. This strategy attempts, in other words, to preserve the masculinity of kingship above all else. This is particularly evident in the *Mahāvamsa*, quoted and discussed in the introduction to this chapter. But it was also evident even in the literary works composed within, and praising members of, Līlāvati’s court: the Pali-language *Dāṭhāvamsa* and Sinhala *Sasadāvata*. These texts sought to realize nascent visions of poetry modelled on Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa*, as discussed above. Unsurprisingly, given Daṇḍin’s conventions for idealized royal femininity, both texts emphasize above all Līlāvati’s consortial status, linking her to her then-deceased husband Parākramabāhu. It was to powerful men in Līlāvati’s three courts, meanwhile, that these works attributed the qualities which literary theory tells us to expect of “kings.”

We see this dynamic clearly in the opening verses of the *Sasadāvata*, the earlier work composed in Līlāvati's first court. It includes an explicit discussion of the relationship between poetry and kingship, in ways which clearly echo the *Kāvyādarśa*'s idealized gender dynamics:

Literary works are brought about by that [previously mentioned] wisdom (*niyen*), [and] by the prosperity (*danasiri*, cf. Skt. *dāna-śrī*) of a realm made comfortable (*suva*, Skt. *sukha*). That prosperity is brought about by the power of a king, accompanied by virtuous and wise ministers.

Therefore: associated with the Chief Minister Kit Senevi, who was filled with compassion, with eyes of wisdom [trained upon] the benefit of the world, like a Lion who breaks the fierce pride of proud Cōḷa elephant-herds, [full of] adoration for the ruling family,¹⁷ forever protecting the wish-gem (a symbol of sovereignty), a flag of the Ruvanpā family...

[was] Lord (*himi saṇḍa*) Līlāvati, who was ornamented only by virtue, [a veritable garland of] flowers crowning the Solar and Lunar Dynasties, appearing in the manner of lovely Śrī, attracting the minds and eyes of the entire world, who furthered the world and the *sasun* (*śāsana*), by whose *daham-raja* splendour¹⁸ this work was made possible.¹⁹

Here it is Kit Senevi, Līlāvati's chief minister, presented as the classic literary protagonist with his martial accomplishments and leonine imagery. Līlāvati's dynastic ties, virtues, and physical beauty, meanwhile, are hardly the work of kings. Even the "royal splendour" (*rājaśrī*) she nominally instated in Sri Lanka, which bookends these five verses, seems to have been largely the practical result of Kit Senevi's military triumphs—triumphs characteristic, in the theory of high poetics, only of heroic kings. Notably, unlike the later *Dāṭhāvamsa* and yet-later-still *Mahāvamsa*, here Līlāvati is herself the main focus of the section, and her minister Kit Senevi is merely one with whom she is "associated" (*yut*, cf. Skt. *yukta*).

¹⁷ An undated commentary in the British Library archives (MS Oriental 6601[95]) offers two glosses for *himikulabaṇḍa adara*: either "adoration connected to the ruling family" (*svāmikulayehi baṇḍa vu ādaraya*) or (*hevat*) even "firm devotion to the royal family" (*rajakulayehi driḍa* [read *diḍa*] *vū bhaktiya*). Both readings emphasize the minister's loyalty above all else (although of course it does not specify *which* ruling family, a significant point given the period's frequent *coups*).

¹⁸ I have elsewhere translated this as "*dharma* and royal splendour." Shirley, "Beyond Masculinity," 500. But both of the undated commentaries (MSS Oriental 6601[95] and Oriental 6604[109]) in the British Library take *daham-raja* as a reference to the *dharma-rājan* ("king [who rules through] *dharma*") who figures so prominently in Buddhist discussions of ideal kingship.

¹⁹ *Sasadāvata*, ed. Guṇavardhana, vv. 10–14.

Above all, these verses say little about Līlāvati's status as a monarch. She is given the honorific title *himi* (Skt. *svāmin*), which is certainly noteworthy. In Sanskrit this is a grammatically masculine title, which can even have the sense of "husband" in *Dharmaśāstric* literature. The Sinhala term is often used in adjectival clauses to mark ownership or possession, including possession of Sri Lanka itself. Neither implication is drawn out in either of the (likely much later) commentaries in the British Library archives, however, which simply gloss Sinhala *himi* as Sanskrit *svāmin* and move on. Overall, the image we are presented is consonant with that of the later *Mahāvamsa*. The elaborate praise we would expect for a king is directed towards Līlāvati's general/minister, while she herself is described in femininized language we do not see elsewhere associated with sovereignty.

Similar dynamics are at play in Dharmakīrti's *Dāṭhāvamsa*, composed in Līlāvati's third and final reign. Here agency is vested even more heavily upon Līlāvati's then-chief minister, a military leader named Parākrama. Mirroring the *Mahāvamsa* structure, it is this general who is positioned as the grammatical agent of all actions, while Līlāvati is only mentioned in an oblique case:

[Parākrama] appointed Līlāvati—born in the lineage of Paṇḍu, which is spotless, shining, and stainless; in whom arose pious confidence in the *sāsana* of the King of Sages; sweet-worded; following the path of statecraft (*nīti*); always like a mother, a parent, to [all] beings; the beloved consort of King Parakkamabāhu (Skt. Parākramabāhu), lord of the earth; endowed with unequalled intelligence; giver of things which are desired—to the royal splendour of the entire land of Lanka.²⁰

Līlāvati is certainly generously eulogized, but in explicitly femininized terms. She is praised as being particularly intelligent and well-versed in *nīti*—both indications, perhaps, that the real-life Līlāvati was a far more skilful political operator than later textual accounts might suggest. But, once again, she is associated with no regnal epithet. We do see "*maheśī*" (consort, Skt. *mahiṣī*), but this is again qualified by her husband's name and (kingly) title in the possessive. Even decades after his death, she is still defined as *his* consort, rather than as a ruler in her own right. In his auto-commentary, Dharmakīrti additionally calls her a *rajaduva*, a "royal daughter" or "princess."²¹ This isn't inaccurate—her noble birth is emphasized both here and in Līlāvati's own inscriptions—but it is a strange gloss for a woman "appointed in the royal splendour," and certainly not one we would associate with regnancy.

20 *Dāṭhāvamsa*, ed. Piyaratna, ch. 1, vv. 5–6.

21 *Dāṭhāvamsa-sannaya*, ed. Piyaratna, 3, commenting on *Dāṭhāvamsa* ch. 1, v. 6.

These works both refrain, in other words, from explicitly acknowledging Līlāvātī as “king,” emphasizing instead the kingly qualities of her (more appropriately masculine) subordinates. However, both works contain references to kingship which might be read as indirect acknowledgement of kingly status. Let us return to the verses of the *Sasadāvata* quoted above, describing the circumstances under which literary works are made possible. Verse ten tells us that this is ultimately due to a king accompanied by virtuous and wise ministers; the following verses eulogize, in turn, the Chief Minister Kit Senevi and Līlāvātī. The implication, it seems to me, is that these two are meant to represent the just-described king and minister(s) who together establish the conditions in which literature can flourish. Implying that Līlāvātī has the *power* of a king is distinct from outright calling her a king, but it is certainly evocative.

The *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* similarly contains a verse which seems to complicate the starkly gendered dichotomy otherwise maintained throughout. Verse eight tells us that Parākrama, the general who placed her on the throne, “dispelled the ill repute which had for a long time befallen the Threefold Sinhala [due to] the absence of a Lord of Men (*narinda*).”²² “Lord of Men,” a common title for kings is, significantly, grammatically masculine. Who was it who claimed this title, and so dispelled the unfortunate absence? It could not have been Parākrama, for all that he is cast in the kingly mode throughout this section of the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa*. If Parākrama had taken on such an explicitly royal title as *narinda* himself, why would he have needed Līlāvātī as a nominal sovereign at all? I suspect instead that this verse refers to Līlāvātī herself, and it is *her* sovereignty that resolved the “absence of a lord of men”—for all that Dharmakīrti is unwilling to explicitly associate her with such a masculine title, either in the verses or his autocommentary.

These references to kingship fulfilled aside, the literary sources avoid explicitly acknowledging Līlāvātī as a monarch in her own right. This is true even of those composed under her patronage, and which seem intended to lavish her with (gendered, maternal) praise. As I have suggested above, this is likely because such highly stylized genres of writing were constrained by highly formalized conventions, outlined in texts like the *Kāvyādarśa* and *Siyabaslakara*. These conventions did not, however, constrain all genres and media, and the farther we go from the world of the high-literary the more an alternative politics of gender becomes apparent. In particular, when we look at Līlāvātī’s inscriptions and coins—media over which she perhaps had

22 *Dāṭhāvaṃsa*, ed. Piyaratna, ch. 1, v. 8.

more direct control—we see ways in which she draws on tropes of kingly masculinity, without transgressing her nominal femininity. This includes, most dramatically, indications that she used the masculine title *rājan*, “king,” under some circumstances.

Few of Līlāvati’s inscriptions have survived fully intact and legible. However, those to which we do have access provide us with several interesting pieces of information. One such inscription, for example, contains a complete stylized introductory section for Līlāvati:

The head-garland of the auspicious royal lineage of Okā; ablaze with a multitude of great virtues; who has reached the far shore of all arts: Abhā Salamevan Līlāvati *svāmin*, who having herself (*taman*) attained the kingship of the Threefold Sinhala (*trisīṃhalarajaya*) out of descent and through *dharma* and equanimity; having brought it under a single canopy; having assembled a circle of ministers possessed of wisdom, vigour, and devotion; having eliminated dangers to her own realm (*maṇḍala*) from other realms; having established the world and the *śāsana* in a state of peace; [thus] like one ruling through the ten *rāja-dharmas* (IC 6.90, ll. 1–12).

Unlike in the courtly poems discussed above, Līlāvati is praised in the language usually reserved for great kings. Indeed, nothing in this inscription other than her (grammatically feminine) personal name, and the absence of the (grammatically masculine) title *rājan*, would suggest that she was any different from her male peers. The ministers who take the focus of our literary sources above are still present, but they are no longer the focal point, and are indeed no longer named. Instead, the inscription emphasizes Līlāvati’s own agency in all acts through the reflexive *taman*, “by herself.” However, we do see again the use of more oblique language in descriptions of Līlāvati’s sovereignty than we do in the inscriptions of her male peers: she has “attained kingship” and is “like one ruling.” Clearly, even in the inscrip-tional medium there is some hesitancy about ascribing the title *rājan* to a woman.

We might also note that in the inscription above, as in one other (IC 6.91), she is referred to by the regnal name (*viruda*) Abhā Salamevan alongside her natal name Līlāvati. This is a grammatically masculine name, which had thereunto only been used by normatively male kings.²³ We should caveat the significance of this name. “Abhā Salamevan” is never witnessed apart from the natal name “Līlāvati,” while “Līlāvati” is witnessed, with great frequency, independently. This is not, therefore, an outright rejection of femininity in

²³ Kalyāṇavatī would later adopt the same *viruda*: see IC 6.98.



Figure 12. Design of Lilāvati's coins, engraved *śrī rāja līlā vatī*. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after a coin in the author's private collection. Used with permission.

favour of exclusive masculinity.²⁴ It is, nonetheless, a clear indication of some negotiation of her identity as simultaneously feminine (“Lilāvati”) and kingly (“Abhā Salamevan”). And we have good reason to believe that this adoption of a masculine *viruda* was accepted even by Lilāvati's political rivals. Prior to the Poḷonnaruva period such *virudas* were adopted in strict rotation: kings and their successors tended to alternate between Abhā Salamēvan (Skt. Abhāya Śālamēghavarṇa) and Siri Saṅghabō (Śrī Saṅghabodhi).²⁵ The Poḷonnaruva period's frequent usurpations and short reigns disrupted this pattern considerably, leaving long gaps with-

out a monarch in a position to claim the next *viruda* in sequence.²⁶ But, at minimum, we have no evidence that any monarch *broke* the sequence, by repeating the *viruda* name of their immediate predecessor out of turn.

What does the continuation of this sequence indicate about Lilāvati's place in the lineage of kings? If Sāhasa Malla, who overthrew Lilāvati's first reign in 1200, had rejected her claim to such a name we might expect him to have taken the *viruda* Abhā Salamevan, identifying himself as the true and direct successor to his half-brother Niśśaṅka Malla. Instead, however, he took the alternate *viruda* Siri Saṅghabo, effectively acknowledging that his predecessor—whom he himself had deposed violently—was, in a meaningful sense, a valid “Abhā Salamevan.” While the turbulent reigns of Kalyāṇavati's successors Dharmāśoka (r. 1208–1209) and Āniyaṅga (r. 1209) left behind no inscriptional evidence, it is telling that the first *viruda* of which we have evidence after Kalyāṇavati's was, again, the alternative.

²⁴ I am mindful here of the nuanced discussion around the sensitivities of naming practices, and the importance of avoiding deadnames, in Spencer-Hall and Gutt, *Trans and Genderqueer*, Appendix s.v. “names.”

²⁵ On a similar pattern in the Cōḷa Empire see Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry*, 40–42.

²⁶ See further Shirley, “Beyond Masculinity,” 504.

Both women, it seemed, had their otherwise masculine regnal names acknowledged and upheld even by their political rivals.

We see evidence too of masculine *titles* in Līlāvati's coinage, all of which is minted with the phrase "*śrī rāja līlā vatī*" (Fig. 12).²⁷ As discussed in Chapter Two, we must place particular weight on the rhetorical significance of coins, perhaps the most common means by which both Lankans and those overseas would engage with the visual imagery of a given monarch's sovereignty. Līlāvati's coins, as all those of the Poḷonnaruva period, were written in Nāgarī script, suggesting that they were intended to circulate widely, and perhaps to be read as Sanskrit.²⁸ But *rāja* as a standalone noun makes little sense in Sanskrit: we would expect to see *rājā* in the nominative or *rājan* in the vocative. It *could* suggest an unusual adjective compound, *rājalīlāvati* ("royal Līlāvati"). I suspect, however, that this inscription was meant to be read in Sinhala, in which *rāja* is a viable standalone noun: "the auspicious king Līlāvati."

Space on coins was, of course, limited, and we might interpret *rāja* here as merely a contraction of something "properly feminine" like *rājñī*. However, it is worth noting that the title *rāja* appears in no other coinage of the period. The coins of Līlāvati's predecessor Coḍagaṅga, for example, read *śrī coḍa ga[n]ga deva*. If syllable count were truly the deciding factor here, she could have followed suit and inscribed her own coins with the (grammatically feminine) *śrī līlā vatī devī*. Līlāvati's use of the title *rāja* is exceptional, and so must have been intentional. This was, I believe, an explicit claim to kingship, regardless of grammatical gender.

We have at least one suggestion that this supposedly masculine title was used in Līlāvati's own court, and possibly survived beyond her reign. There is at least one commentary extant for the *Sasadāvata*, the courtly poem composed in Līlāvati's first reign. Dating this commentary is difficult. The ephemeral nature of manuscripts in tropical climates means that our only copies are very late, and the text itself could have been composed at any point between the original poem's composition and the surviving manuscripts' nineteenth-century acquisition by British colonists. This commentary tells us that the original *Sasadāvata* was composed "in the time when, in accordance with the ten duties of kingship, the auspicious king Līlāvati

²⁷ Numismatic data in the following paragraphs is drawn from Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency*, 65–71; see also pl. IV, no. 80.

²⁸ And, indeed, they have been found as far afield as Mogadishu: Freeman-Grenville, "Coins from Mogadishu," 200.

was ruling.”²⁹ This is an explicit rejection of the claim that the title *rājan*, “king,” was only available (grammatically and conceptually) to those who were normatively masculine. For this commentator, at least, no ambiguity was necessary: Līlāvātī was not a “princess,” not a “consort of,” not someone whose proximity to power was best described in multivalent adjectival clauses. Despite her femininity—described so explicitly in the *Sasadāvata* itself—Līlāvātī was a king.

Reordering Gender within the Inner City

The preceding sections have outlined some of the creative ways that Poḷonnaruva’s female monarchs, and their male subordinates, adjusted conceptually and rhetorically to the presence of a woman at the apex of the social hierarchy. This constituted, I have suggested, a dramatic shift in the gender order of Poḷonnaruva, one which required discursive accommodation by powerful men and women alike. In this section, I argue that reverberations from this shift were felt even within the walls of Poḷonnaruva’s Inner City (*antaḥpura*). The presence of former royal consorts on Poḷonnaruva’s throne, I argue, along with concomitant shifts in the wider discursive social order, created opportunities for other consorts to also attempt rearticulations of their own social standing.

Līlāvātī was, prior to her ascension to the throne, a consort of Parākramabāhu I. This fact was, as discussed above, emphasized in almost all of the literary sources which mention her. But it also features in two of her extant inscriptions:

This inscription is made to record the gift, performed as a meritorious action (*kusala*, Skt. *kuśala*) by the one named Līlāvātī—the primary *biso*[va] of the *cakravartin* Śrīsaṅghabo Parākramabāhu *vahansē*, who de-thorned and unified the island of Lanka 1,700 years after the *parinirvāṇa* of our Perfectly Awakened Buddha—of the Kaṇatu Pallassava [in] Hatiheḷa, which borders Navaraṭin Āṁbulpatgama, which she herself [previously] received (IC 6.92).

By Līlāvātī, born in the Solar Dynasty, who was the primary consort (*agamehesu*, Skt. *agramahiṣī*) to the *cakravartin* Śrīsaṅghabo Parākramabāhu *vahansē* (IC 6.93).

Līlāvātī’s connection to Parākramabāhu was clearly central to her self-representation in these inscriptions, not to mention in those varied literary treatments of her reigns. It seems likely that her status as the former

29 *Sasadāvata-sannaya* (London, British Library, MSS Oriental 6601[95] and Oriental 6604[109]), v. 14; emphasis mine.

primary consort of such a powerful monarch lent her significant gravitas; it was, perhaps, central to her very claim to Lanka's throne. But if she was the *primary* consort, we might well wonder what became of Parākramabāhu's other, non-primary consorts, and how they responded to the rise to power of their former co-wife.

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, the *Mahāvamsa* is strangely silent on Līlāvati's marriage to Parākramabāhu (even where it documents the marriage of their siblings to one another). The *Mahāvamsa* does mention one consort of Parākramabāhu at length, however: a "Lady Rūpavati," who is extensively praised for her piety, her love of her husband, and—intriguingly—her own contributions to Poḷonnaruva's built landscape, in the form of a great golden *stūpa*.³⁰ Such an extensive eulogy for Rūpavati seems rather peculiar when we consider that there is no evidence from the Poḷonnaruva period itself that Parākramabāhu ever had a consort of that name.³¹ If she was so central to his reign—worthy of praise, personally responsible for the establishment of a central *stūpa*—what became of her? Why did Līlāvati, who receives so little mention in the *Mahāvamsa*'s account, eventually find herself on the throne, and not this Rūpavati? The *Mahāvamsa* provides us with no answer, and never again mentions Rūpavati by name. We might wonder, cynically, if she was entirely an invention of the *Mahāvamsa*'s later authors: a perfect wife for an idealized king.

We have stronger evidence of one other former consort, however. Here we return to the enigmatic Candavati, with whom we began this book, and her sole extant inscription on the *maṇḍapa* of the Potgul Vihāra. As discussed in the Introduction, this is the earliest known instance of a royal donative inscription composed entirely in Pali verse in Sri Lanka. It therefore merits a far closer reading than the cursory approach which has, until now, been applied to it. This is, clearly, far from a "documentary" text alone; significant intervention into the world is intended. The short inscription reads, in full:

He, the wise Supreme Lord of Lanka, purified the Conqueror's commands (*āṇā*); by him this entire *vihāra* was made to be built. The consort (*mahesī*) of that [same] wise Lord of Men Parakkama[bāhu] (Parākramabāhu), she who was established in the sovereignty, caused the entire *vihāra* to be built

30 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 73, vv. 136–47. The *stūpa* in question is usually identified with the so-called "Kiri-vihāra": Paranavitana, "Religion, Literature, and Art," 593.

31 As noted in the Introduction, early epigraphers were eager to identify Rūpavati as Candavati, the patron of the Potgul Vihāra inscription. No explanation is offered for this identification, and it was presumably motivated only by an impulse to line up the account of the *Mahāvamsa* with the available epigraphical evidence.

again. That Queen (*rājini*) Candavatī who secondarily attained primacy of/ for that same Lord of Men; she had the *maṇḍapa* constructed (IC 6.23).

A dense network of interrelations is described here. Central to all three verses is Parākramabāhu I. While he is named only in the second verse, and then with an abridged version of his name, the first verse describes a purification of the *saṅgha* (using the distinctive term *āṇā*, discussed in preceding chapters) which could only identify Parākramabāhu. Līlāvati is clearly, therefore, the consort of Parākramabāhu described in the second verse as having attained sovereignty herself.

Less clear is Candavatī's relationship to these two figures, and therefore her location within the gender order of Poḷonnaruva, as described in the final verse. In this section, I argue that this inscription—and the entire project of constructing a *maṇḍapa* for the Potgul Vihāra—represents a strategic attempt on Candavatī's part to re-articulate her own social position vis à vis other royal women of the period, in a time when, as I have argued throughout, considerable political stakes rested on such relative social positions. Careful attention to the specific titles used for the two royal women in this inscription—Līlāvati and Candavatī herself—reveals much. We might note, first, that Līlāvati is only referred to obliquely (not even by name!) as a consort of Parākramabāhu who was (in a now-familiar phrase) “established in the sovereignty.” Candavatī herself, however, has two striking appellations (as well as, of course, her given name).

The first of Candavatī's self-declared titles is “queen” (P. *rājini*, Skt. *rājñī*). This is the grammatically feminine equivalent of *rājan*, “king,” and provides the etymological base for many modern languages' terms for a regnant queen (Sin. *rājina*; Tamil *rāṇi*; Thai *braḥ rājīnīnāth*). But we have no record of Candavatī ever claiming the throne, and we see this term (or its multilingual equivalents) elsewhere in reference to non-regnant consorts. It may well have been a particular mark of honour among the royal consorts. We have references to multiple *mahiṣī*, and other terms like *bisōva* appear almost exclusively in the plural. But typically, only one *rājñī* is mentioned in a single king's inscriptions (usually the mother of the king, or the mother of the primary heir). However, if Parākramabāhu had children by any of his consorts, we have no record of it. While the relationship between Parākramabāhu and his successor Vijayabāhu II is contested (see Chapter Five), the latter was certainly not the former's son. On what grounds, then, does Candavatī give herself, and not Līlāvati, this title? Is this an accurate reflection of their respective statuses within Parākramabāhu's court, or a later claim on Candavatī's behalf to a title which might place her above her former co-wife Līlāvati?

Yet more significant is the other title Candavatī gives herself, in the rather unusual phrase “she who secondarily attained primacy” (*dutiyaṃ yā aggaṭaṃ gatā*). Wilhelm Geiger, noting that many monarchs mention two consorts in their inscriptions, interprets this phrase as evidence that Candavatī was a “second” (*dutiyaṃ*) primary (*aggaṭaṃ*) consort, alongside and equally ranked with Līlāvati.³² However, even leaving aside the conceptual quirk of a “second primary,” we are told in every other source—including the inscriptions of Līlāvati herself, discussed above—that *she* was the primary consort of Parākramabāhu I, with no mention of a co-primary. This cannot be taken, in other words, as a simple expression of Candavatī’s status in Parākramabāhu’s court.

Here, I suspect, the participle “attained” (*gatā*) comes into play. It indicates transition: at some point Candavatī was not *dutiyaṃ aggaṭaṃ*, but she had since “become” this. The strength of this participle, alongside the apparent contradiction of Līlāvati already being “primary” among the consorts, together offer us alternative readings of Candavatī’s “secondary” attainment of primacy. This could refer to status: “Candavatī was a ‘primary’ consort, relative to the other *mahiṣīs*, but still secondary to Līlāvati, the *primary* primary.” We can, however, also take *dutiyaṃ* adverbially, referring to Candavatī’s attainment as *temporally* secondary: “Līlāvati *was*, at one point, the primary consort, but subsequently Candavatī became the primary.” This latter reading is more likely on grammatical grounds, but again raises questions about the relative status of the two women. Presumably Līlāvati continued to be considered the primary consort of Parākramabāhu even beyond the point of his death, and this status played some part in her ascension to the throne. When, then, did Candavatī supposedly supplant Līlāvati as the primary consort? If we take the sequence of events between verses seriously—interpreting the *dutiyaṃ* as “subsequent [to the events described in the preceding verse]”—then the implication seems to be that Candavatī attained her primary status *after* Līlāvati became a monarch. This, in turn, would necessarily be over a decade after their co-husband passed away. We might understand this as a gracious move on Līlāvati’s part: relinquishing her “lesser” title of primary widow to the next highly-ranked member of the Inner City, in favour of her new royal position. But Līlāvati’s connection to her deceased husband remained, as we have seen above, central to her inscriptions throughout her three reigns. Once again, I suspect that we must read this as a dialogical attempt at contestation rather than as a statement of

32 Geiger and Rickmers, *Cūlavamsa*, 1:xvi.

historical fact; Līlāvātī and Candavatī may well not have agreed on which of the two was truly primary.

We might also suggest here a more subversive reading. Candavatī is said, in the third verse, to have subsequently attained primacy for “that same Lord of Men” (here *naradeva*). Most plausibly, based on both context and the masculine grammatical gender, this “same Lord of Men” is intended to refer to Parākramabāhu I, invoked so explicitly in verses one and two. However, as we have seen above, Līlāvātī seems to have also used masculine titles in certain limited contexts. Her coinage, and the *Sasadāvata-sannaya*, suggest that she used the title “king” (*rājan*); the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* may also indirectly associate her with the similar title “Lord of Men” (*narinda*). Is it possible that these verses are less antagonistic than I have interpreted them: that it is Līlāvātī, whose attainment of sovereignty is described in verse two, who is “that same Lord of Men” mentioned in verse three; and that this therefore refers instead to Candavatī subsequently becoming Līlāvātī’s primary consort? These are extremely tenuous speculations. However, queer theory reminds us that evidence of homosexual relations is often intentionally suppressed in our historical sources—buried as deeply, perhaps, as often is evidence for female agency.³³ This is particularly significant in parts of the world recovering from colonial suppression of indigenous social relations and ways of being.³⁴ Reading against the grain to recover such histories is therefore a task well worthwhile, lest we inadvertently reiterate the modern myth of an exclusively heterosexual past.³⁵ Bearing this in mind, I wish to note at least the *possibility* of such a reading.

It seems that, in the gender order of twelfth-century Poḷonnaruva, there were certain things that Līlāvātī—identified as, and subject to the expectations incumbent upon, a “woman”—was not meant to do. A woman ought not, for example, be identified by the supposedly masculine title *rājan*. Yet we have evidence that, in certain media, Līlāvātī was referred to by that title, even as other media acknowledge her sovereignty only through oblique expressions (including Candavatī’s inscriptions, with its “she who was established in sovereignty”). Clearly, some authors were less willing to

33 Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*; Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies*.

34 Kerekere, “Part of the Whānau”; Lugones, “Heterosexualism”; Rifkin, “Queering Indigenous Pasts.”

35 Buddhist sources, in particular, do not support this myth. While heterosexuality was certainly assumed to be the “default,” monastic disciplinary texts are well aware of the possibility of queer intimacy, and seek to regulate it with the same vigour as they do heterosexual sex acts. See, among others, Cabezón, *Sexuality*.

acknowledge Līlāvātī's deviation from the expected norm, and found instead creative alternatives. A woman also ought not act in the kind of "manly" fashion expected of a king. The literary sources from Līlāvātī's reign all reassure us that she did not do so; that the traditional activities (such as martial prowess) and qualities (virility) of manly kings were carried out on her behalf by powerful ministers within her court, while she herself remained suitably pious and devoted to the memory of her deceased husband. While here we have no evidence to the contrary, we might well be suspicious of how neatly these accounts locate Līlāvātī within the realm of normative femininity. Might these authors be, again, attempting to avoid an uncomfortable acknowledgement of Līlāvātī's refusal to conform with expectations of idealized femininity? A woman also ought not, according to idealized social norms, take a female consort of her own. If Candavatī, who became primary consort "subsequent to" Līlāvātī, was in fact the consort of the latter, we might similarly not expect other sources from the period to explicitly acknowledge this. Whether or not this was the case cannot be determined from the evidence alone; but neither can the possibility be dismissed out of hand.

Of whichever masculine-coded "Lord of Men" (*naradeva*) Candavatī became the primary consort, her inscription at the Potgul Vihāra was intended to firmly lay claim to her new social status. What might have rendered possible—or, at least, more plausible—such a re-articulation? Constructivist approaches to gender orders emphasize the extent to which they rely on "a stylized repetition of acts."³⁶ Breaks in, or deviations from, that repetition render the whole edifice unstable. If the pre-established gender politics of Poḷonnaruva consisted of a masculine king superordinate to a whole series of hierarchically ranked consorts, then the non-masculinity (or at least partial masculinity) of Līlāvātī's kingship might also accommodate a shift in the hierarchy of feminine roles. To make this point more explicitly: the female sovereignty of Līlāvātī and Kalyāṇavatī opened a conceptual space for other shifts in the gender order, other alterations to the established social fabric, and so for Candavatī's claim to have been "She who secondarily attained primacy."

It would be tempting, at this stage, to engage in speculation about Candavatī's motivations: whether she sought to be placed on the throne as her former co-consort Līlāvātī was; what kinds of political capital she might be seeking through her devout patronage of this Buddhist shrine; even, on a more explicitly religious level, what merit (*punya*) she sought to accrue from

³⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.

her pious actions. We might also wonder if what is at stake here is not immediate claims to the throne but eventual claims to *succession*. Might Candavatī have had a son, whom she or her supporters hoped to see on the throne, and whose own position she hoped to advance through her claims of “primacy”? If this were the case, it seems that she was not successful. Neither Candavatī nor anyone claiming descent from her ever sat on Poḷonnaruva’s throne before the kingdom’s eventual collapse, and she appears to have otherwise disappeared from both the inscriptional and literary records. But her solitary inscription at the Potgul Vihāra, and the novel vision of gender politics that it articulates, serve to caution us against the lures of overly determined “institutions” of Buddhist sovereignty, with fixed and accepted laws of succession ever distinct from the political actors—including elite women—who lived, negotiated and so constituted them.

Conclusions to Chapter Seven

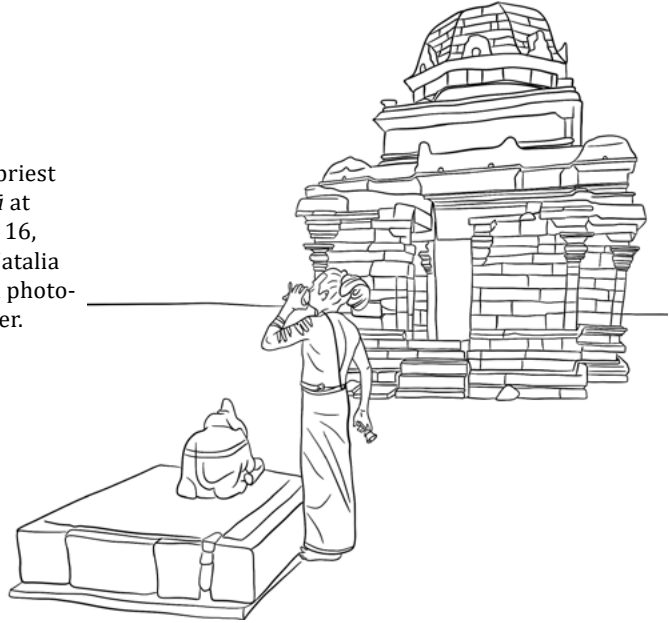
In this chapter, I have argued that the political language of Poḷonnaruva—which assumed the masculinity of kingship, and the consortial status of all women—failed to adequately account for the reality of female regnancy in the later Poḷonnaruva period. As a result of this conceptual lacuna, powerful men seeking to articulate their own position in the social hierarchy of medieval Sri Lanka had to be creative in their inscriptions: recognizing Kalyāṇavatī’s sovereignty without explicitly naming her as a (masculine-coded) “sovereign.” Some literary accounts, similarly, attempted to position Līlāvatī in the role of a figurehead or a regent, merely giving voice to or safeguarding the naturally masculine power of others. Other data from her reign, however, suggests otherwise: that she sought a more creative response to these linguistic limitations, and so transcended the supposed binary of masculine kingship and subordinate femininity.

Līlāvatī’s innovation here is, I believe, the most explicit illustration of the theoretical and methodological arguments I made in the Introduction. “Buddhist kingship” was never a pre-determined constant, but rather an arena for contingent contestation. When an individual monarch found themselves unable or unwilling to conform to the expectations their predecessors held for a Buddhist king, they could attempt to reconstitute it. We have seen this process occur throughout this book: from Vijayabāhu’s selective engagement with Sinhala, Tamil, and Sanskrit inscriptional models; through now to Līlāvatī’s presentation—in her coinage, and in literary commentary—as a (grammatically) masculine *rājan*, who was nonetheless (socially) female. Close attention to these contingent arguments about what, exactly, it meant

to be a Buddhist king lays bare the potential multivalence of this category, and perhaps of all such social and moral categories. Nothing about Buddhist kingship—from its gender to its linguistic expression—can be, or was, taken for granted.

LOCATING POḶONNARUVAN KINGSHIP

Figure 13. A Brahmin priest performing a Śiva-*pūjā* at Vāṇavaṇ's temple, July 16, 2025. Illustration by Natalia Lopez-Barbosa, after a photograph by Tyler A. Lehrer. Used with permission.



ON A VISIT to Poḷonnaruva with Tyler Lehrer in July 2025, we happened to arrive at Śiva-*devālaya* no. 2—the temple built in the Cōḷa period, named for Rājendra's consort the Great Lady Vāṇavaṇ, and on which Poḷonnaruva's Buddhist image-houses were modelled—just as a Śiva-*pūjā* was taking place. The officiating priest—hair in dreadlocks, sacred thread around his chest, ash smeared across his skin—generously invited us to participate in the *pūjā*, and we had the opportunity to speak with several of the gathered devotees. All of those we talked with, including the priest, spoke to us in Sinhala rather than in Tamil. When we expressed surprise about this linguistic choice to one of the devotees, who was proudly showing us one of the Tamil-language inscriptions on the temple's exterior, he simply replied that Śiva is worshipped at the *devālaya* by “Sinhalese, Tamils, Christians, and Muslims” alike. This productively complicates the strict religious boundaries often assumed of Sri Lanka's past and present. I saw no evidence, on this visit or others, of self-identified Christians and Muslims carrying out ritual activities at Poḷonnaruva: whether *pūjā* at the Śiva-*devālayas*, circumambulation of the monumental *stūpas*, or otherwise. Nonetheless, the devotee's

insistence that all of Sri Lanka's major identity categories—with the linguistic-ethnic labels “Sinhalese” and “Tamil” juxtaposed against the religious “Christian” and “Muslim”—*might* join in the *pūjā* reminds us that we cannot take the relationships between identity category and religious practice for granted.¹ Regardless of identity, all may worship Śiva at Vāṇavaṇ's temple.

This chance encounter demonstrates the ongoing complexity of lived religious practices in the ruins of Poḷonnaruva, in ways which helpfully prefigure the significant revisions I have proposed to the history of the Poḷonnaruva period itself. At the heart of these revisions is a core argument: that the histories of religion, politics, and gender in the Poḷonnaruva period (and perhaps beyond) cannot adequately be studied in isolation from one another. In support of this position, I have attempted to demonstrate that Poḷonnaruva's noblewomen were involved in crucial acts of patronage that helped to shape the eventual form of the Theravāda; that royal men sought to position themselves relative to these noblewomen for pragmatic political reasons; and that in so doing, the supposedly inherent masculinity of kingship was itself challenged and contested. These dynamics have previously been obscured by an overreliance on retrospective narrative accounts of the Poḷonnaruva period (primarily the *Mahāvamsa*, *Pūjāvaliya*, and *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*), which depicted the events of this period according to the priorities of their own.

I developed this argument through chronologically advancing chapters. In Chapter Two, I argued that the reign of Vijayabāhu I did not represent a “return” to an original and unaltered Sinhala Buddhist kingship after a period of Cōḷa interruption. Rather, he interwove models from earlier Anurādhapura-based kings; his erstwhile Cōḷa overlords; and perhaps also from wider *dharmaśāstric* norms of caste hierarchy (particularly evident in his material intervention at Śrī Pāda). I further challenged the claim that he revived monastic higher ordination (*upasampadā*) on the island with the help of monks from Rāmañña, as later retrospective accounts hold. His own extant inscriptions make no reference to such a revival; the Vēḷaikkāra inscription refers to monks from Arumaṇam and a “purification within the three *nikāyas*,” but makes no mention of ordinations; and sources from throughout this period refer repeatedly to the existence of three distinct *nikāyas*, suggesting that all three ordination lineages survived in some form from the Anurādhapura period.

¹ This is further complicated by the modern identification of Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan Muslims (sometimes “Moors”) as a distinct ethnic group; “Christian,” meanwhile, remains an exclusively “religious” identity.

Chapters Three and Four dealt with the period between Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I, often characterized as an unfortunate “dark age” in Sri Lankan history. In Chapter Three, I argued that while political power in this period was certainly decentralized, this may well have led to opportunities for individuals who otherwise did not have as ready access to that power, and to experiments with different models and rhetorics of Buddhist kingship. This included monks like the Abhayagiri/Uttaromūla-affiliated *rajaḡuru* Mugalan; merchant/mercenary guilds like the Vēḷaikkāras; and royal consorts like Cundhamalli, daughter of the Cōḷa Emperor Kulottuṅga. In Chapter Four, I argued that the court at Poḷonnaruva itself in this period—long dismissed as “inadequately Buddhist”—was also a participant in this reconstruction of Buddhist kingship. In particular, I suggested that the Great Lady Sundarā played a larger role in Theravāda history than has been previously acknowledged, given her apparent interest in patronizing both Pali-oriented monks and the Diṃbulāḡala monastery.

Crucially, I also argued for more continuity between the reigns of Gaḡabāhu and Parākramabāhu I than later narratives like the *Mahāvamsa* would allow. I continued this argument in Chapter Five, which focused on the reign of Parākramabāhu proper. Parākramabāhu is perhaps best remembered for his unification and purification of the *saṅgha*, an event which is often regarded as marking the triumph of the Mahāvihāra over its Abhayagiri and Jetavana rivals. While there is much in Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* inscription which suggests some leaning towards the textual legacy of the Mahāvihāra, Parākramabāhu’s own vision of kingship was decided more cosmopolitan, and his relationship with monastic leaders like Śāriputra was—while perhaps mutually beneficial—complex.

In Chapter Six, I turned to the vast inscriptional corpus of Niśśaṅka Malla, which offers us perhaps the most granular view available of kingly self-representation in medieval Sri Lanka. On the basis of this, I argued that this non-Lankan-born king intentionally played up his dynasty’s “strangeness” as evidence for his qualifications to rule Lanka. This strategy was, I suggested, likely in response to perceived challenges to dynastic succession both internal (but “lower caste” in *dharmaśāstric* terms) and external (but “non-Buddhist”). As in the period covered in Chapters Three and Four, royal consorts once again became central to the inscriptional discourse, and increasingly so over the course of his reign, to the point that he suggested that they might be placed on the throne in the absence of a (Buddhist, high-caste) male heir.

Chapter Seven explored cases of this possibility in action: the reigns of Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvatī, who between them dominated (on the basis of their collective length of rule) later Poḷonnaruva politics; and the

non-regnal consort Candavatī. I argued that the inscriptions of these three women, and other sources relating to the reigns of Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvatī, evidence a far less stable politics of gender than high-literary textual accounts might allow. The inherent “masculinity” of kingship itself, and the social hierarchies surrounding it, were subject to negotiation, contestation, and even subversion.

These chapters, I hope, productively problematize the standard histories of this time and place, which often overemphasize masculine agency, “Theravāda Buddhist” orthodoxy, and a sometimes nationalistic understanding of Sinhala cultural continuity. But across these chapters I have also advanced a set of broader theoretical and methodological interventions, which I believe have application beyond the specific time and place of Poḷonnaruva.

The first intervention is methodological. The historiography of Sri Lanka has been dominated by Pali- and Sinhala-language literary sources, and particularly by Pali-language sources written retrospectively by monastics. These sources present us with very particular versions of historical events, and very particular visions of Buddhist kingship. When we turn to material evidence—inscriptions, numismatics, art and architecture—a far wider range of voices and visions become available to us. These voices are still very firmly “elite,” of course, but nonetheless a valuable counterbalance against the culturalist and often androcentric narratives presented in the textual record alone. In particular, I have shown that Tamil and Sanskrit remained significant languages for political and religious expression throughout the period. To exclude from our studies sources in these languages (or, for that matter, royal courts which used these languages) is to grossly distort our historical understanding. I further identified a wider range of figures—consorts, monks, mercenaries—who intervened in debates over the proper performance of kingship.

The second intervention is theoretical. I have attempted to model in this book the benefits of engagement with a capacious range of scholarship, brought—selectively and cautiously—to bear on the particularities of a historical case. In particular, and perhaps unsurprisingly in a study focused explicitly on “gender,” I have drawn extensively on feminist and queer scholarship. The application of this kind of theoretical lens or methodological approach to premodern sources risks accusations of “presentism”: the imposition of decidedly modern frameworks—often dismissively called “identity politics”—onto ill-fitting historical contexts. It is certainly true that historical accounts can—and, as Hayden White famously suggested, perhaps necessarily always *do*—distort the evidence of the past in ways intelligible

to the present.² However, I entirely reject that such distortions are only present (and subject to critique) in histories attentive to social oppression, while earlier generations of historians remain supposedly “objective” and “neutral.” The value of critical theory is not that it tells us how we should interpret the inner lives of past subjects; it is that it can alert us to unquestioned biases which lurk in the extant historiography, and suggest possible methodological approaches which may allow us to correct those biases. Without feminist critique, we may not notice that our textual sources so heavily emphasize the heroic deeds of their male protagonists, or that the uncritical colonial-era reception of those androcentric accounts aligns very neatly with then-emergent Victorian ideologies.³ In short, the judicious application of critical theory makes us better historians: more alert to the particularities of our historical cases than we might otherwise be.

The combination of feminist theory and material methodology enables the third intervention: a call for the dramatic reconsideration of the roles of gender dynamics in, and the contribution of royal women to, Theravāda history. This call echoes that of other scholars, working on other places in the premodern Theravāda world—particularly Cambodia, in which the rich inscriptional record again preserves female voices.⁴ Too often, however, the actions of powerful men—kings and monks—are accepted as the driving factors of Theravāda history. This is largely a result of our evidentiary biases. These figures are the protagonists of (the vast majority of) textual sources from the premodern Theravāda world, and in Sri Lanka and elsewhere we have tended to accept these textual narratives as “historical fact” until proven otherwise. It is difficult to recover the lives of Buddhist women from within these manuscripts’ leaves, let alone to carefully consider how they may have contributed to the historical development of the Theravāda.

However, when we pay as much heed to material culture as we do to later textual sources, we arrive at a more balanced and nuanced view of Buddhist history, one which is not read solely “through the eyes of suspicious male monastics.”⁵ Within the Połonnaruva period alone, it is significant that our only extant Pali inscriptions from this period were produced by royal consorts (Sundarā and Candavatī), not by male monarchs or, for that matter, monastics. Further, we have evidence of royal women patronizing certain

2 White, *Metahistory*.

3 See further Shirley, “Beyond Masculinity.”

4 Thompson, *Engendering the Buddhist State*; Walker, “Inscriptions.”

5 Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 13.

Buddhist institutions (Sundarā) and forms of textual production (Līlāvātī) at pivotal moments. We may not have the evidence available to definitively recast these women in starring roles. However, we have at least as much evidence for the significance of their involvement as we do for many of their male peers, who nonetheless take centre stage in all of our standard histories of the period.

This has major implications for histories of Theravāda Buddhism in later Southern Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia, which have often (until recently) been based on two premises. The first is that “Theravāda” was a cultural product spread unidirectionally from Sri Lanka to Southeast Asia from the twelfth century onwards. The second is that the Theravāda’s androcentric biases had a deleterious effect on the status of women in Southeast Asia, who had previously enjoyed a relatively favourable position.⁶ The first of these premises is increasingly being challenged by the work of scholars like Prapod Assaviravirulhakarn and Peter Skilling, who have shown that Pali-oriented Buddhism has a far deeper history in Southeast Asia;⁷ and Anne Blackburn, who has shown that when monastic connections to Lanka did arise in the later second millennium, they did so in response to more local concerns.⁸ But even if we accept that events in Poḷonnaruva—such as the great commentarial project of Śāriputra, carried out at Parākramabāhu’s behest—had at least *some* influence on the later Theravāda in Southeast Asia, we might still be sceptical of an inherent link between the Theravāda and gender inequality.

It is certainly true that Buddhist texts contain many resources which *can be*, and perhaps often *have been*, deployed to denigrate women and other non-masculine individuals; we might go further and suggest that Theravādin commentarial interpretations of these texts are, in places, particularly misogynistic. But it would be a mistake, I think, to extrapolate out from such resources a monolithic and coherent “Theravāda attitude” towards gender. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, no such monolithic coherency is to be found even in a period which, arguably, set the course of the Theravāda to be oriented towards such Pali-language texts and the Buddhaghosan interpretation thereof. Rather, we see in this period (what seems to be, bearing in mind the fragmentary nature of the inscriptional record) appreciable *increases*, relative to the late Anurādhapura period, in the numbers of women

⁶ See, most influentially, Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, 75–81.

⁷ Assavirulhakarn, *Ascendancy*; Skilling, “Advent.”

⁸ Blackburn, “Sihala Saṅgha.”

patronizing monks, monasteries, and religious texts; creating inscriptions recording such donations in their own names, complete with genealogical pedigrees; being featured in their husband's inscriptions as participating in official procedures and public performances of munificence, and as motivating his own pious works; and even, ultimately, claiming the throne for themselves. I have found no evidence that these women were ever critiqued—even by those men who unseated them from the throne, and so arguably had the most vested interest in discrediting them—on the grounds that they were acting in any way contrary to “the Theravādin” understanding of proper gender roles. In this context, and at any later point in Theravāda history, the relationship between gender and power was never a settled matter; it was, and is, contested and contestable.

We began with a discussion of the Potgul Vihāra: a structure located well outside of the city walls, bearing an inscription which had similarly been left “outside” the historiography of the PoḶonnaruva period. We might do well to conclude by returning to a far more central structure: the assembly hall in the royal palace complex. We noted in Chapter Five that an inscription near the entrance bears the name of this structure, the Rājaveśyābhujāṅga-*maṇḍapa*, which allows us to identify it as the assembly hall of Parākramabāhu I himself. But this is not the only inscription on the walls of the Rājaveśyābhujāṅga-*maṇḍapa*. Fragments of other, earlier inscriptions have been found across the *maṇḍapa*'s tiered walls, steps, and mouldings, suggesting that the stone blocks were recycled from earlier structures for use in Parākramabāhu's great council hall.⁹

Among these recycled blocks is one which contains the fragmentary inscription of Sundarā discussed in Chapter Four: the earliest extant use of Pali verse in a royal donative inscription. The deconstruction of whatever structure Sundarā had originally patronized, and the reuse of its stones in Parākramabāhu's *maṇḍapa*, is presumably responsible for the severe defacing of the inscription it bears upon it. We cannot be sure if this particular block was used in the *maṇḍapa* during Parākramabāhu's initial construction of the structure, or during the renovations carried out in PoḶonnaruva during the reign of Parākramabāhu II.¹⁰ In either case, I suggest that this serves as an apt metaphor for the continual reconstruction of Buddhist kingship in the PoḶonnaruva period. What appears to us today as a unified edifice actually

⁹ See discussion in de Silva Wickremasinghe, *EZ*, 2:9.

¹⁰ Codrington and Paranavitana, *EZ*, 4:68.

consists of many individual parts, assembled *bricolage* over many generations: from Sundarā to Parākramabāhu I; from Parākramabāhu II to the modern archaeologists and historians who conserve, document, and present the structure to the public. Some of the structure's stones must have been quarried fresh for the new project; others were recycled from the edificial works of those went before, incorporating them into its foundations even as it obscures them from view.

Buddhist kingship is not, and has never been, a stable and unchanging concept. It was instead a *location*, in which multiple participants constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed the proper relationship between king and *śāsana*. We cannot therefore expect to look to “authoritative sources” like the Pali canon and expect to find a readymade definition of “Buddhist politics” waiting there for us. This is not to say that reading canonical materials is not worthwhile. Modern practitioners, philosophers, and activists alike find valuable inspiration in such texts. Productive re-readings of past texts is often a useful genesis for new ideas, as advocates of (for example) the ongoing relevance of Aristotelian political thought will happily remind us. But to present such novel re-readings as representative of “the Buddhist view” is questionable; to argue that they represent (a singular and definitive) “Buddhist political thought” would be problematic. This attitude diminishes the intellectual vigour and pragmatic creativity of Buddhists throughout history who constructed, contested, subverted, and constructed anew what it meant to be a “good Buddhist king.” At its worst, it revives all of the old colonial arguments that Buddhists themselves, past and perhaps also present, do not truly understand “what the Buddha taught,” and that Buddhism must therefore be saved from Buddhists by the superior interpretations of modern scholarship. This is, clearly, not the case, and to think it so impoverishes our understanding of what is, was, and could perhaps become politically conceivable. The relationships between religion, gender, and politics have never been set in stone.

GLOSSARY

Abhiṣeka — consecration, by which a monarch is anointed sovereign.

Ālvār — title for a religious figure.

Antarāla — in architecture, the antechamber before an inner shrine.

Bisōva — a royal consort who has received some form of consecration (Skt. *abhiṣeka*).

Brahmin (Skt. and P. *brāhmaṇa*) — a hereditary member of the class of scholars and priests.

Cakravartin (P. *cakkavattin*) — “wheel-turner,” an epithet for particularly elevated kings.

Devālaya — “House of God,” shrine for a theist deity like Śiva or Viṣṇu.

Dharma (P. *dhamma*) — the teachings of the Buddha, but also “morality” or “duty” in a more general sense (particularly in the context of *rājadharma*, the duties incumbent on a king).

Dharma-rājan (P. *dhamma-rājan*) — “dharma-king,” a monarch who rules by or through *dharma*.

Dharmaśāstra — a genre of texts concerned with proper society order.

Garbhagrha (P. *gabbhageha*) — an inner shrine, usually containing an image for veneration.

Image-house (P. *paṭimāghara*, Sin. *pīlimagē*) — a shrine, typical of Sri Lankan

Buddhism, housing an image of the Buddha for contemplation and veneration.

Kalpa (P. *kappa*) — an immeasurably long period of time.

Kṣatriya (P. *khattiya*) — a hereditary member of the class of kings and warriors.

Mahāyāna — a Buddhist movement with texts and doctrines not held canonical by the modern Theravāda.

Mahiṣī (P. *mahesī*, Sin. *mehesun*) — a royal consort.

Maṇḍapa — a ceremonial hall, particularly the entrance hall of a shrine or temple.

Nikāya — a monastic ordination lineage; also a division of the *Sutta-piṭaka*.

Pūjā — worship, usually of a deity or the Buddha.

Purohita — the royal priest, usually a Brahmin.

Rājaguru — the royal tutor, usually a monk.

Saṅgha, *mahāsaṅgha* — the monastic community.

Śāsana (P. *sāsana*) — the teachings of the Buddha, and the institutions which preserve them.

Śāstra (P. *sattha*) — a field of art or science, or a treatise relating to that field.

Sirit — a genre of Anurādhapura-period inscription laying out regulations for individual monasteries.

Stūpa (P. *thūpa*) — a domed structure enshrining relics.

Śudra (P. *sudda*) — a hereditary member of the servant class.

Śūtra (P. *sutta*) — a sermon given by the Buddha.

Svāmin (P. *sāmin*, Sin. *himī*) — master, lord, often “husband.”

Theravāda — the form of Buddhism today prevalent in South and Southeast Asia, and its forebears.

Tulābhāra — a ceremony in which valuable equal to the donor’s weight is donated to the needy.

Vaiśya (P. *vessa*) — a hereditary member of the agricultural class.

Vihāra — a Buddhist monastery.

Vinaya — the monastic disciplinary code; capitalized *Vinaya* refers to the canonical *Vinaya-piṭaka*.

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