

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 Cōla administrative apparatus. The earliest Anglophone histories of the period insist on a stark dichotomy between Cōla 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 Cōla 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 Cōla 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 Cōla 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 Cōla rulers complicated this lineage, necessitating creative reworkings. Neither text so much as mentions, during the period of Cōla rule, the names of the Cōla 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 Cōḷa “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,” “Cōḷa,” 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, Cōḷa-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 Cōḷa 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 Niśsaṅka 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 Poḷonnaruvan 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 Anurādhapurān 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 Polonnaruvan 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 Poḷonnaruvan 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”), Civaṇḷipātamaḷai (“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 over-conflation 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 Cōlas, 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-Cōla 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 Cōla 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 Cōla 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 Cōla-period suppression.

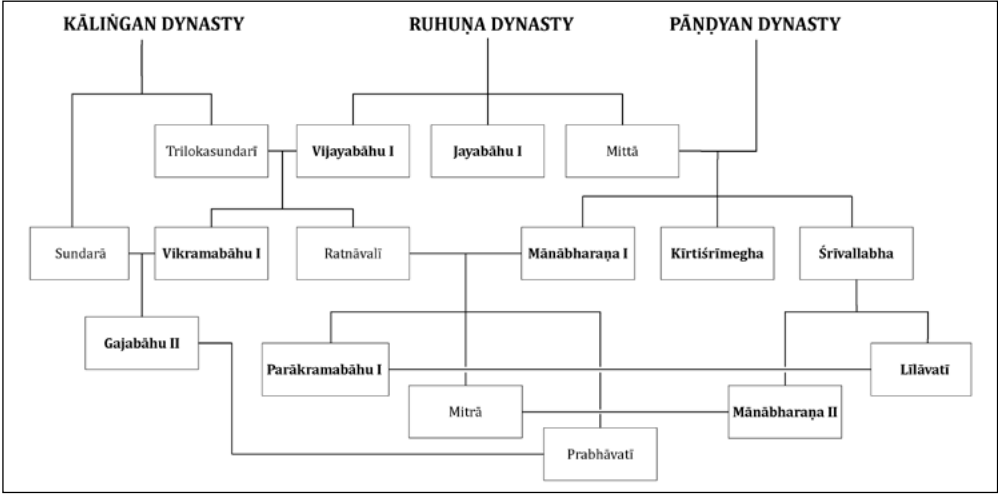


Figure 7. Family tree of Vijayabāhu I by the author, with monarchs in bold type.

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 Cōla 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, Kīrtiśrīmegha, 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.

