

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 *Kāvyaḍarśa* (“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 Lilāvatī'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 Pivivatubimi 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 *Kāvyaadarśa*, 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 (*trisiṃhalarajaya*) 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 lilā 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 Śālameghavarṇa) 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 aggataṃ 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 (*aggataṃ*) 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 aggataṃ*, 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.

