

A STRANGER KINGSHIP

THE NEW DYNASTY OF NIŚŚAÑKA MALLA (1187–1196)

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Rodriguez et al., *Dynastic Change*.

4 Liyanagamage, “Decline,” 142.

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

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

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

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

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

As we will see below, Sahlins’s theory has been productively applied to Sri Lankan narratives of dynastic origin. Niśśaṅka Malla’s own “strangeness,” as a Kālīṅga-born monarch, also seems a neat fit with Sahlins’s archetype. However, I will argue that this neatness was no accident, much less the product of some structuralist universal. Rather, Niśśaṅka Malla’s “strangeness” was carefully *constructed*, as part of a deliberate politics of difference.

We can track the evolution of this construction throughout Niśśaṅka Malla’s reign, with considerable granularity, thanks to his unusually large inscriptional corpus. Of the 115 inscriptions published in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* vol. 6, sixty-four are attributed to Niśśaṅka Malla, making him the single most prolific epigrapher of all Sri Lankan history. While modern scholars have disparagingly referred to these inscriptions as “bombastic,” they are no shallow boasts.⁹ Rather, they reflect a more general dedication on Niśśaṅka Malla’s part to shaping the very landscape of his kingdom on a scale not otherwise known in Lankan history. It is no

Kālīṅga” (*kālīṅgayen ā*): *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriālle Ñāṇavimala, 783–84; see also *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, ed. Samaranāyaka, 79; *Rājāvaliya*, ed. Suravīra, 59.

7 The Nāyakkaras, like Niśśaṅka Malla, had their origins in “mainland” South Asia, and so have often been called “aliens” in the Kandyan kingdom: see, e.g., Dharmadasa, “Sinhala Buddhist Identity,” 1; Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, 279; Obeyesekere, *Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity*, 48. Against this, see Obeyesekere’s more recent writings: Obeyesekere, “Between the Portuguese and the Nāyakas”; Obeyesekere, *The Doomed King*.

8 Sahlins, “Stranger-King,” 111.

9 Bell, *ASCAR 1903*, 17; Bell, *ASCAR 1911–1912*, 100; Fernando, “Niśśaṅka Malla Aśōka hā Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstraya,” 175; Goonatilake, “Impact,” 363; Paranavitana, *EZ* 4:267; Ranawella, *IC* 6:363.

coincidence that nearly half of Poḷonnaruva's extant citadel grounds are dedicated to Niśsaṅka Malla's own palace and council chambers, surrounded by his expansive gardens, dwarfing the earlier palace complexes of Parākramabāhu and Vijayabāhu. Among Niśsaṅka Malla's many contributions to the Poḷonnaruvan landscape, one inscription in particular stands out: the monumental "Galpota" ("stone book") inscription (IC 6.24), carved to look like a giant palm-leaf manuscript and erected within the Sacred Quadrangle at the heart of Poḷonnaruva. This inscription owes much, stylistically, to the *sirit/katikāvata* inscriptions of previous monarchs. It consists of a long preamble, constructed as a single continuous sentence, leading up to a series of discrete injunctions. Unlike these earlier inscriptions, however, these injunctions are not directed at monks. Instead, Niśsaṅka Malla calls these "instructions" (Sin./Skt. *avadāva*, P. *ovāda*) which ought to be heeded by all Lankans, monastic or not (IC 6.24, l. c4).¹⁰ Truncated variations on the same injunctions appear in the much shorter (and likely earlier) inscriptions carved at the citadel gates (IC 6.28, 29, and the fragmentary 30). Significantly, as discussed further below, these injunctions appear to be primarily concerned with questions of succession and rightful claims to the throne. These inscriptions therefore constitute the closest we have to an explicit "law of succession" from our period.

I do not take this "law" to be self-evident. Rather, as with other inscriptions examined throughout this book, I understand the succession laws articulated in the Galpota and Gate inscriptions to be dialogical arguments for Niśsaṅka Malla's dynastic desires, levelled against implicit counterarguments. To understand these arguments, and how they developed throughout Niśsaṅka Malla's reign, we need at least a general sense of inscriptional chronology. While the vast majority of these inscriptions are not explicitly dated, several clues allow us to tentatively piece together a chronological arc.

Several inscriptions mention activities carried out in a particular regnal year. These include a grand tour in year two (see, e.g., IC 6.32, 37, 39, 40, 57, 69, 70, 71, 74, 75), a visit to Anurādhapura in year four (IC 6.27), and a pilgrimage to the Śrī Pāda in year nine (IC 6.43 and 49). Inscriptions which mention these events must postdate them. References to "five years of tax remittance" (in IC 6.24, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 52, 55) *could* be read as promissory, but from context I suspect that these instead all postdate

10 The term *avavāda*, in a Lankan Buddhist context, perhaps orients us towards the canonical *Siṅgālovāda-sutta* (*Dīgha-nikāya* 31), called a *gihivīnaya* ("Vinaya for Householders") in Buddhaghosa's commentaries and still today.

the fifth regnal year (at the earliest).¹¹ Similarly, mentions of “seven years of tax remittance” in an inscription found in Ruhunu (*IC* 6.54) cannot be from earlier than the seventh regnal year. We can also date some inscriptions relative to one another. The Galpota (*IC* 6.24) mentions the inscriptions on the citadel gates (*IC* 6.28, 29, 30, and 31), and so must postdate them. Those inscriptions which mention edificial works at Rameśvaram (*IC* 6.24, 43, 45, 49, 48, 51, 56, 60, 67, 76, 77, and 78) must postdate the inscribed throne found on the island (*IC* 6.46). One of the inscriptions at the Hāṭadāgē (*IC* 6.57) describes the creation of inscribed distance markers (*IC* 6.74, 75, 76, 77, and 78). I take those inscriptions concerned primarily with marking a specific event as dating closely to that event (as for the inscription *IC* 6.27, found in Anurādhapura, and which describes a royal visit to Anurādhapura in the fourth regnal year). Similarly, we might tentatively assign the controversial slab-inscription near the Poḷonnaruva canal (*IC* 6.26) to Niśśaṅka Malla’s first or second regnal year, given that it is almost entirely concerned with the transition of power from Vijayabāhu II. Finally, those inscriptions which share common features uncommon in the wider corpus—such as the titles *virudarāja viraveśyabhujāṅga*, which occur only in the two inscriptions we can definitively date to year nine (*IC* 6.43 and 49), and in the council chamber seating inscriptions (*IC* 6.85)—can tentatively be grouped together temporally.¹²

11 The Anurādhapura inscription (*IC* 6.27) postdated to Niśśaṅka Malla’s fourth year concludes by telling us that he remitted taxes for “another” year (*nāvāta havuruddakaṭa aya hārā*), which implies that by this point the years of tax relief were ongoing, and subject to the king’s whim year-to-year. I take mentions to “five years,” therefore, as retrospective references made once the taxes had been reinstated. This is complicated by *IC* 6.25 (and the fragmentary *IC* 6.61), which mention both “five years of tax relief” and the announcement of “another year” at Anurādhapura. I suspect that *IC* 6.25 and 61 were created long after the five year period, and simply note both that five years of taxes were remitted overall and that a specific and noteworthy instance of remittance-extension happened in year four.

12 The title *cakravartin* might similarly be a useful temporal marker. The title is present in so many of Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions that it is hard to imagine him without it. But those few in which it is absent include *IC* 6.26 and 27, which we can date with reasonable confidence to Niśśaṅka Malla’s first and fourth regnal years respectively. It is therefore possible that Niśśaṅka Malla only began using the title *cakravartin* sometime after his fourth regnal year, at which point (I assume) he would use it consistently. This would mean that the vast majority of his inscriptions were, in fact, a product only of the latter half of his reign. Without stronger evidence of this, however, I do not include this principle in my chronologizing.

These principles together offer us the following chronology of Niśsaṅka Malla’s inscriptions:

Group	IC 6 Numbering	Year
A	26	One or two
B	32, 37, 39, 40, 53, 57, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73a, 73b, 74, 75	After two
C	46 (Rameśvaram inscription)	After two
D	45, 67, 76, 77, 78	After C
E	27 (Anurādhapura inscription)	Four
F	28, 29, 30, 31 (Gate inscriptions)	Prior to G
G	24 (Galpota inscription)	After five
H	25, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 44, 48, 51, 52, 55, 56, 60, 61, 63	After five
I	54 (Ruhuṇa inscription)	After seven
J	85	Likely eight or nine
K	43, 49	Nine

Twenty-six additional inscriptions contain no clues to their dating.

Fortified with this sense of chronological development, the first half of this chapter traces how Niśsaṅka Malla’s self-presentation as a “stranger king” changed over time. While his earliest inscriptions emphasize *continuity* with Poḷonnaruva’s earlier kings, particularly Parākramabāhu I, later inscriptions increasingly orient themselves away from this lineage, and towards Niśsaṅka Malla’s mainland origins. This is not, I argue, a direct reflection of already-existing identity markers (“foreign-ness”) or origin myths, but rather a novel fashioning of difference intended to set Niśsaṅka Malla’s nascent dynasty apart from domestic rivals. In the second half of the chapter, I attend to the unusually prominent role that royal women—his mother, wives, and daughter—played in this dynasty-making. I suggest that we might productively consider this a “matrilateral” vision of kingship, one defined primarily by male-to-male homosocial relations mediated through female relations. Despite this masculinist emphasis, however, the centrality of royal women to this vision of kingship provided a valuable opportunity for them to exert their own power.

Fashioning a Stranger Kingship

Central to Niśsaṅka Malla’s claims to kingship was that he was not the first monarch of a Kāliṅga dynasty to rule Sri Lanka. The prose section of his earliest extant inscription (IC 6.26) opens by recapitulating the narrative of the mythical founder-king Vijaya, described as:

King Vijaya, the eldest son of King Siṃhabāhu who was born into the lineage of glorious (*śrīmat*) and supernaturally powerful Kāliṅga *cakravartins*; who travelled from Kāliṅga to Laṃkā; expelled the *yakṣas* (P. *yakkhas*, non-human beings); made [the island fit for] human dwellings; and ruled [it] under a single canopy (*IC* 6.26, ll. a8–14).

This rather generous retelling elides many of the stranger features of the Vijaya mythos. In the *Mahāvamsa*'s telling, for example, Vijaya's father Siṃhabāhu (P. Siṃhabāhu) is the son of a lion (*siṃha*) and an abducted princess, who kills his own bestial father and marries his sister. Vijaya is expelled from his home region due to his excessive immorality, and travels with some followers to the island of Lanka. There, he subdues the *yakṣas* by forcing one of their number, a *yakṣiṇī*, to both assist in his conquest and serve as his wife, before eventually discarding her in favour of a high-caste human bride.¹³ Bestiality, incest, rape, and violence—these are hardly the illustrious origins we would expect to be boasted of in an inscriptional eulogy, and they necessitate some explanation.

R. A. L. H. Gunawardana has argued—controversially, but I think convincingly—that the *Mahāvamsa*'s account of Vijaya presents what he calls “a political definition of the Sinhala identity.”¹⁴ His central argument is that at the time of the *Mahāvamsa*'s composition (and for some time afterwards) the name “Siṃhala” referred only to the ruling dynasty descended from Vijaya, grandson of a lion (*siṃha*), and his immediate followers. Excluded from this category were the “service castes” (descended from those who later followed from the mainland) and “Pulindas” (likely Vāddas, the indigenous people of the island, descended in this narrative from Vijaya's children with the forcibly espoused *yakṣiṇī*). But this in itself does not explain why Vijaya's narrative, as presented in these early chronicles, was so decidedly unsavoury. Nor does it explain why Niśsaṅka Malla would so emphatically associate himself with Vijaya, come again from Kāliṅga to rule Lanka. Alan Strathern provides us with such a possible explanation, showing just how clearly Vijaya fits the “stranger-king” model of Marshall Sahlins.¹⁵ Strathern ultimately disagrees with Gunawardana that the *Mahāvamsa*'s narrative of Vijaya serves *only* kingly ends. But his reading of this narrative certainly would have made a “stranger king” ideology available to kings who wished

¹³ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, chs. 6–7.

¹⁴ Gunawardana, “People of the Lion,” 55; cf. Dharmadasa, “The Roots of Sinhala Ethnic Identity.”

¹⁵ Strathern, “The Vijaya Origin Myth,” 8, 13–15.

to avail themselves of it; to present themselves as inheritors of a lineage set apart from, and so capable of ruling, Lanka.

Strathern's reading is compelling. But if a "stranger king" model of sovereignty is indeed present in the text, we must next ask whether, when, and how this thus-offered ideology was actually *accepted*, let alone deployed, by later historical subjects. This is particularly necessary because the *Mahāvamsa*, despite its omnipresence in our field, was far from an expression of kingly ideology at the time of its production. The scholarly consensus is increasingly that it was produced in a period of crisis for its Mahāvihāran authors.¹⁶ It therefore represented a desperate plea for relevancy, for royal patronage, or at minimum for a redress from royal oppression. It offers up what *seems to us* to be an ideology of kingship in the form of this Vijaya narrative. But we have no evidence that any monarchs before Niśsaṅka Malla necessarily engaged with that ideology. While later Anurādhapurān monarchs like Mahinda IV traced genealogies back to Ikṣvāku and the Buddha's own Śākya clan, the less genteel Vijaya remains conspicuously unmentioned in these inscriptional eulogies. So when Niśsaṅka Malla identifies himself so incessantly as being of Vijaya's lineage, we ought to read this not as a repetition of kingly tropes (universal or Lankan), but as something rather novel: a new vision of kingship which emphasizes its own "strangeness." We gain further evidence for this novelty when we consider the ways Niśsaṅka Malla's inscriptional association with Vijaya—and with the more proximate memory of Parākramabāhu I—changed over time. Over the course of his reign, he identified himself decreasingly with the latter, and increasingly with former, a shift I explain as a gradual reorientation in priorities from securing his own ascendancy to securing that of his heirs.

Let us return to his earliest inscription, from which I quote above to introduce the Vijaya narrative. What distinguishes *this* early instance of the Vijaya association from those in Niśsaṅka Malla's later inscriptions is that, here, it is not the Kālīṅga-born Niśsaṅka Malla himself who is being so associated. Instead, this inscription claims Vijaya as an ancestor of the Lankan-born *Parākramabāhu I*. The fuller introduction reads:

When Parākramabāhu, descended from the lineage of King Vijaya—the eldest son of King Siṃhabāhu who was born into the lineage of glorious and supernaturally powerful Kālīṅga *cakravartins*; who travelled from Kālīṅga to Laṃkā; expelled the *yakṣas*; made [the island fit for] human dwellings; and ruled under a single canopy—was ruling alone in Lakdiva; desiring to establish the future of his own lineage, having sent [emissaries] to Siṃhapura for

16 Scheible, *Reading the Mahāvamsa*; Walters, "Buddhist History," 112–24.

that purpose as was done previously; having fetched back his *bāna* (either sibling's son or son-in-law); having given his own name (Parākramabāhu) [to that *bāna*]; having placed him in the office of *himi*; having made him competent in the science of warfare (*śatraśāstra*); and having thus ensured the longevity of the kingdom, attained heaven (IC 6.26, ll. a8–23).

Here we are being assured of Niśśaṅka Malla's qualifications to rule, yes, but only obliquely. The focus is so firmly on Parākramabāhu I that, outside of the Sanskrit verses which bookend the Sinhala prose, Niśśaṅka Malla is not even referred to by name. He is only called the *bāna*—a nephew or son-in-law—of his illustrious predecessor, eventually placed into the office of *himi* (Skt. *svāmin*, “master”). The inscription proceeds to narrate the circumstances under which this *himi* eventually ascended to the throne:

[Then,] having done ill to (i.e., assassinated) Vijayabāhu (II), who had been consecrated according to seniority, wicked ministers became treacherous; Vijayā Yāntānnāvan, having overcome the ruin done to Laṅkā [by those ministers], established peace [in the kingdom]; the *himi*, having been consecrated in the kingdom given [to him by Vijayā Yāntānnāvan]; having mounted the lion-throne, adorned by ornaments including the crown; having reflected “prosperity is suitable for those who have served”—because Vijayā Yāntānnā protected the splendid body [of the *himi*] from [when he was in] Ruvandaṃbuya; and because he secured the kingdom for the Kāliṅga lineage, just as it had previously been; and because his lineage too had served the Kāliṅga lineage beginning from the time of King Vijaya—for these services...[he awards Vijayā Yāntānnā various land-grants] (IC 6.26, ll. a23–37).

On the level of *realpolitik*, this inscription serves to codify rewards given to a loyal retainer for his service in installing Niśśaṅka Malla on the throne after a *coup* by Vijayabāhu II's ministers. But it also serves as a first attempt at articulating two distinct lines of claim to the throne: one of continuity, and one decidedly “stranger.”

The first line of claim positions Niśśaṅka Malla within an orderly succession of more temporally proximate kings. In this particular inscription, Niśśaṅka Malla positions himself as something of a “backup heir” appointed by Parākramabāhu I himself, primed and trained to take the throne in case something were to befall Vijayabāhu II. Presumably, had Vijayabāhu's reign lasted longer, he would have appointed his own heirs in due course, and Niśśaṅka Malla would have faded into obscurity as a royal “spare” never called into service. But Vijayabāhu's assassination (and the usurpation of the throne by a minister never appointed by any reigning monarch as a legitimate heir) necessitated Niśśaṅka Malla's intervention, aided by his own minister Vijayā Yāntānnā. In this narrative, Niśśaṅka Malla emphasizes both

his connection to Parākramabāhu I (who personally appointed him as heir and groomed him for the role) *and* his respect for the “order of seniority” (*jyeṣṭha kramaya*), dutifully standing by for Vijayabāhu II to rule before him. The orderly succession of rulers is maintained, as per the wishes of the illustrious Parākramabāhu.

But entwined with these claims of continuity is a second narrative, operating on a much grander temporal scale. This narrative seeks not to incorporate Niśsaṅka Malla, and his immediate family members, into the Lanka-based succession order desired by Parākramabāhu I. Instead, it distinguishes them as a decidedly “non-Lankan” dynasty which nonetheless rightly rules Lanka. This is, in other words, a narrative of intentionally crafted strangeness. This is the narrative which would come to dominate Niśsaṅka Malla’s later inscriptions, at the expense of claims to continuity with Parākramabāhu I, who is never thereafter mentioned in a positive light or in any connection with Vijaya.

By Niśsaṅka Malla’s fourth year—in which he creates the next inscription which we can date with a high degree of confidence—the references to Parākramabāhu, and therefore to what I call above the first line of claim, are decidedly less rosy. In this year, Niśsaṅka Malla created an inscription (*IC* 6.27) to commemorate a pilgrimage to the Great Stūpa of the Anurādhapuran Mahāvihāra. The tone of the preamble to this inscription has shifted significantly from the earlier inscription discussed above. It dwells heavily on what we might call economic concerns—particularly an allegedly large number of people turning to crime out of poverty—and the various fiscal and charitable measures Niśsaṅka Malla had taken to address this.¹⁷ Crucially, the root cause of this poverty is blamed on the people “having been oppressed by unrestrained punishment (*daṇḍa*), in excess of the habits of previous kings, [by] Parākramabāhu the First” (*IC* 6.27, ll. 4–5). No longer are the treacherous ministers of Vijayabāhu II to blame for the country’s fall to ruin; now it is the very king of whom Niśsaṅka Malla had previously claimed to have been the protégée.¹⁸

17 It is a common trope in Buddhist texts that poverty leads to crime, and that virtuous kings can therefore eradicate crime by distributing vast wealth to all citizens. See Collins, “What Is Literature?,” 661–62.

18 This inscription is the most explicit in naming Parākramabāhu I as the cause of the island’s ills. Others blame only “previous kings” for their excessive taxes and punishments (see *IC* 6.32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 52, 54, 55, 69, 70, and 71). The Galpota (*IC* 6.24), which I date to after Niśsaṅka Malla’s fifth year (and therefore after the Anurādhapura inscription under discussion) refers to Parākramabāhu I more neutrally as Niśsaṅka Malla’s “senior family member” (Sin. *kulajeṭu*).

In subsequent inscriptions this trend is taken further. Instead of continuities with Parākramabāhu I, Niśśaṅka Malla increasingly presented an alternative vision of kingship based on three key points of difference. It subsumes Lankan kingship into a broader Kāliṅga-based *lineage*; it reinscribes *caste* differences; and it emphasizes the auspicious circumstances of Niśśaṅka Malla's non-Lankan *birth*. I address each of these points in turn below.

Lineage

In the early inscription IC 6.26 discussed above, Niśśaṅka Malla stresses his own parallels with Vijaya, whose lineage was only most *recently* embodied in Parākramabāhu I and Vijayabāhu II. These more recent kings are therefore only peripheral to the longer *durée* association with Vijaya. That Niśśaṅka Malla was Parākramabāhu's *bāna* and appointed heir is secondary to his position as a member of the same Kāliṅga lineage; his claim to the Lankan throne predates any intervention on Parākramabāhu's behalf. Even the service and protection of Vijayā Yāntānnā is positioned not as that of a loyal retainer to the duly appointed heir of a recently departed king, but simply as the most recent iteration of a generation-spanning connection between the Kāliṅga dynasty and their loyal servants in Lanka.

In that first inscription, as noted above, it is Parākramabāhu who is presented as the scion of Vijaya's Kāliṅga-based lineage. Not so in Niśśaṅka Malla's fourth-year Anurādhapura inscription, which begins:

Niśśaṅka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *rajaṇā vahanse*—born in Siṃhapura as a *tilaka* mark for the royal lineage of Kāliṅga *cakravartī*-kings; descended from the royal lineage of Okā, splendid (*śrīmat*) and distinguished by a mass of virtues such as generosity (*tyāga*), truthfulness (*satya*), and heroism (*śaurya*)—having united the island of Lanka which was of the succession of his own lineage (IC 6.27, ll. 1–4).

Here it is the illustrious lineage of Niśśaṅka Malla himself, and not that of Parākramabāhu, which is foregrounded. The only remnant left of his connection to the earlier king is the shared regnal name, which Niśśaṅka Malla maintains throughout his reign.

Notably, the connection to Vijaya in this inscription is made only implicitly, through the reference to the “royal lineage of Kāliṅga *cakravartins*.” This is worth dwelling on. Textual sources from the first millennium do not actually locate Vijaya's own birthplace in Kāliṅga, but rather in the Vaṅga country to the north (now modern Bengal). The earliest of these accounts, the *Dīpavaṃsa*, makes no connection between Vijaya and

Kāliṅga.¹⁹ The *Mahāvamsa* tells us that a king of the Vaṅgas married a Kāliṅgan princess; their daughter was Vijaya's grandmother.²⁰ The *Vamsatthappakāsinī's* commentary on these verses indicates no interest in the Kāliṅga connection.²¹ Buddhaghosa's brief discussion of Vijaya mentions neither his Vaṅga nor Kāliṅga ancestry (although Parākramabāhu's grandmaster Śāriputra, commenting on Buddhaghosa, does specify that Vijaya's grandmother was a "daughter of the Kāliṅga king").²² In none of these sources are either the Kāliṅgans or, for that matter, the Vaṅgas, called *cakravartins*. The notion that Vijaya was descended from "Kāliṅga *cakravartins*" therefore appeared quite late. The *Mahābodhivamsa*, dated sometime between the tenth and twelfth centuries, explicitly tells us that Vijaya's father, Sīhabāhu, was born in the "lineage of Kāliṅga *cakkavattis*."²³ When Niśśaṅka Malla claims, as in the Anurādhapura inscription above, to be descended from such a lineage, this may well be a referent to the *Mahābodhivamsa*, and through its narrative to Vijaya.

However, not all references to Kāliṅga *cakravartins* throughout Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptional corpus are necessarily tied to (any known variant of) the Vijaya narrative. Other inscriptions tell us that Niśśaṅka Malla's "Kāliṅga *cakravartin*" ancestors had the supernatural power of travelling through the air (*ākāśa-cārin*: IC 6.24, l. a2; 6.52, ll. 3–4). I have found no earlier connections between Vijaya's ancestry and this particular supernatural power. The only other referent I have identified is in the fifth-century commentary on the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka* attributed to Buddhaghosa.²⁴ This narrative centres on a *cakravarti*-king of Kāliṅga (himself also named Kāliṅga, as are, with some variation, his father, uncle, grandfather, and principal advisor), who similarly flies through the skies. This suggests that Niśśaṅka Malla was synthesizing *multiple* positive accounts of Kāliṅga-based monarchs into his own inscriptional genealogies: the *Mahābodhivamsa's* claim that Vijaya was descended

19 *Dīpavamsa*, ed. Oldenberg, ch. 9, v. 2.

20 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 6, vv. 1–2.

21 *Mahāvamsa* ed. Geiger, ch. 6, v. 1; *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, ed. Malalasekera, 1:243.

22 *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. Takakusu and Nagai, 1:72; *Sāratthadīpanī*, Chāṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition, 1:139.

23 *Mahābodhivamsa*, ed. Strong, 111. A "Kāliṅga *cakravartin*" is also mentioned in *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 54, vv. 9–10, from whose family Mahinda IV (r. 956–72) procured a consort. This portion of the *Mahāvamsa* was almost certainly compiled in the Daṁbadeṇiya period, and so is not necessarily reflective of the regnal stylings of Mahinda's tenth-century father-in-law.

24 *Jātaka-aṭṭhavaṇṇanā*, ed. Fausbøll, no. 479.

from Kāliṅga *cakravartins*, and the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka*'s account of aviatic Kāliṅga *cakravartins*. We might note here that both the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka* and the *Mahābodhivaṃsa* are, as the names suggest, firmly oriented towards the worship of *Bodhi* trees. This is a practice that Alastair Gornall has shown was increasingly important in the Poḷonnaruva period.²⁵

Other inscriptions, however, are more direct in asserting a connection to Vijaya. Two other inscriptions refer to Niśśaṅka Malla with the rather elaborate title:

“Śrī Virarāja Niśyaṃka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *cakravartti*, Master (*himi*) of Laṅkā by descent from King Vijaya who made Śrī Laṅkā [suitable for] human habitation” (*IC* 6.54, ll. 1–4; *IC* 6.48, ll. 1–4).

Although difficult to render fluently in English sentence order, it is Vijaya's name and deed which are first presented to the reader; Niśśaṅka Malla follows on in grammatical structure as in filial descent. One of these two inscriptions, *IC* 6.54, must postdate Niśśaṅka Malla's seventh regnal year, and so we might tentatively take this regnal styling as representative of the latter half of his career.

Similar language is invoked in the final injunctions of Niśśaṅka Malla's Galpota (*IC* 6.24) and Gate (*IC* 6.28 and 29) inscriptions. The wording differs slightly between these inscriptions, but all three explicitly invoke the Kāliṅga lineage in conjunction with the Vijaya narrative:

If a royal person in the Kāliṅga lineage, masters (*himi*) of Lakdiv from the time of Prince Vijaya, can be found, [then] making him master (*svāmi*) is the conduct which protects the world and the *śāsana* (*IC* 6.24, ll. c22–23).

...therefore, if a royal person who is master (*himi*) for Lakdiv—having come from the lineage of King Vijaya who made Lakdiv [fit for] human habitation—can be found, one ought to be loyal to [them as one's] master (*svāmin*), joining [with them] in protecting those dwelling in the world as though protecting [one's own] eyes, [and thereby] protecting one's own group (*varga*) and wealth (*sampat*) (*IC* 6.28, ll. b24–27; 6.29, ll. b19–22).

It is unfortunately impossible to date these inscriptions, and so the use of the Vijaya genealogy, relative to that discussed above. All we can say is that the Galpota likely postdates Niśśaṅka Malla's fifth regnal year; the Gate inscriptions must *pre-date* the Galpota. However, it seems that this is something of a crystallization of the Vijaya/Kāliṅga connection invoked elsewhere in his

²⁵ Gornall, *Rewriting Buddhism*, 131.

inscriptional corpus. Here we are told explicitly that the Lankan throne has always belonged, and should always belong, to those of this lineage.

It remains an open question whether, and when, this connection became accepted beyond Niśśaṅka Malla and his dynastic heirs. Vijaya's lineage is invoked in an inscription of Niśśaṅka Malla's half-brother Sāhasa Malla (*IC* 6.94, ll. a23–27), but in no other inscriptions of Poḷonnaruva monarchs. An inscription found near Miṇipe, created by a local warlord named Mal-*evi* Bhūma (discussed further in the following chapter), refers to Niśśaṅka Malla's widow Kalyāṇavatī as,

Having attained the highest position in Sirilak, in the succession of many kings in the lesser lineage (*suḷuvasā*, *P. cūlavamsa*) [and] the great lineage beginning with Prince Vijaya, who ruled having made human habitation in the island of Laṅkā (*IC* 6.100, ll. 7–10).

We might well take this as evidence that this warlord, at least, accepted Niśśaṅka Malla's claim that all rightful Lankan kings were descended from Vijaya. Kalyāṇavatī was, like her husband Niśśaṅka Malla, foreign-born. She is described in several of his inscriptions as of the Gaṅga lineage, likely in reference to the Eastern Gaṅgas of Kāliṅga—aligning again with Niśśaṅka Malla's increasingly explicit claims to a Kāliṅgan connection. Beyond this reference, however, few of Poḷonnaruva's later monarchs adopted Niśśaṅka Malla's Vijayan rhetoric in their own claims.

Caste

The Galpota and Gate inscriptions do not only single out the Kāliṅga lineage by virtue of their connection to Vijaya. They also emphasize the *kṣatriya* status of Niśśaṅka Malla and his line. “Caste” is a somewhat fraught topic in any premodern context. It is a decidedly modern word only imposed on South Asia by Portuguese colonizers.²⁶ It maps imperfectly onto two distinct social categories: *varṇa*, a fourfold hierarchy of purity status (Skt. *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*); and *jāti*, hereditary labour specializations with considerable localization. The relationship between these two categories even in northern South Asia was complex, despite efforts by *dharmaśāstric* texts to integrate the latter into the former;²⁷ matters only became more tangled further south. Buddhist texts, meanwhile, often describe a threefold class structure, with *kṣatriyas* displacing Brahmins at the apex of the

²⁶ Barrero Xavier, “Languages of Difference”; Guha, *Beyond Caste*.

²⁷ Olivelle, *The Early Upanisads*, 191.

hierarchy and the two lower *varṇas* replaced by a general “householder” (Skt. *gṛhapati*) class.²⁸ Given all of this, we ought not to be surprised that “caste” was more of a rhetorical arena than a structural principle in premodern Lanka, prior to its ossification under colonial rule.²⁹

Niśśaṅka Malla’s arguments for caste-based kingship are made most forcefully in the same inscriptions mentioned at the end of the last subsection, those on the Galpota and city gates. These arguments about caste seem targeted at a particular group: the *Govi kula* (“community,” here analogous to *jāti*). Although we should not anachronistically conflate them, this *Govi kula* is likely the antecedent of the more modern Goyigama or Kandyan Govi-ya *jātis*, which are traditionally associated with agricultural (*govi*) work, but in practice include powerful landowners with considerable economic and political leverage.³⁰ We have good reason to think that in Niśśaṅka Malla’s time, too, the *Govi kula* represented a powerful landowning class, and therefore a potential threat to royal power.³¹ Niśśaṅka Malla’s Gate inscriptions therefore warn us, in delightfully poetic language, that:

[In Sinhala:] Like the crow to the swan, the donkey to the Saindava [horse], the worm to the *nāga*-king, the firefly to the brilliance of the sun, the snipe to the elephant, or the jackal to the lion—those in the *Govi-kula* should not wish for the joys (*līlā*) of kings. However powerful, those in the *Govi-kula* must not be looked to for kingship (*IC* 6.28, ll. b12–19; 6.29, ll. b9–15).³²

[In Sanskrit:] The crow to the gait of a swan, the donkey to the best of horses, the worm to the serpent, the firefly to the sun, the jackal to the play of the lord of beast (the lion), the snipe to the elephant. Another *varṇa* imitating the deeds of kings, variously ripped asunder, would be laughable; so says Lord Niśśaṅka Malla, skilled in statecraft (*IC* 6.28, ll. b31–36; 6.29, ll. b25–30).

The anxiety about powerful upstarts is palpable. Niśśaṅka Malla surely had on his mind the assassination of his predecessor Vijayabāhu II by his own ministers, one of whom then claimed the throne as Mahinda VI. Perhaps he also wondered about the loyalty of *his* own ministers, who had already shown—by overthrowing Mahinda in Niśśaṅka Malla’s favour—that they,

²⁸ Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 22–25.

²⁹ Rogers, “Caste.”

³⁰ Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, ch. 3; Kemper, “Reform and Segmentation.”

³¹ Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, 54; Liyanagamage, “Decline,” 123; Liyanagamage, *Society, State, and Religion*, 198.

³² There seems to have been a parallel (in Sinhala) in the Galpota (*IC* 6.24, ll. c15–16), but it is now effaced.

too, could act as kingmakers. It is no surprise, then, that his inscriptions then go on to warn that:

As kings dislike those who become big-headed, those who have received positions and wealth from them should not become big-headed (*IC* 6.24, ll. c14–15).

Those who treat ministers, who are equal to them [in status], like kings, bowing down to them, and who receive positions from them—they are named “traitors” (*IC* 6.28, ll. b20–22; 6.29, ll. b15–18).

But on what grounds does Niśsaṅka Malla distinguish his own kingship, only made possible by violent *coup* against his predecessor Mahinda, from that of Mahinda, also made possible by violent *coup* against his predecessor Vijayabāhu II? What distinguishes “righteous kings” from big-headed ministers? Niśsaṅka Malla’s answer is, of course, his *kṣatriya* status: membership in the only *varṇa* eligible for kingship according to *dharmaśāstra* texts. Govis, he argues, are not *kṣatriyas*; no matter how powerful (*balavat*) they may become in practice, they ought still never to aspire to kingship. Crucial to this argument is a terse set of three aphorisms in the very middle of the Galpota’s various admonitions. Here we are told:

These [aphorisms] should be protected: *real* knowledge (*dānum nam*) is knowledge of the virtue of [service] performed; the *real* work of *veḷaṇḍas* (*veḷaṇḍaham nam*) is the position of *govi*; *real* treasure (*hastasāra*) is the *dharma* (*IC* 6.24, ll. c12–13).

The first and third aphorisms seem relatively straightforward. But what does it mean to equate the position or status (*tāna*) of the *govi*—literally “agriculture,” but here likely in reference to the landowning Govi *jāti*—with the work of *veḷaṇḍas*? De Silva Wickramasinghe and Ranawella translate this latter term rather literally, as “occupation” and “trade” respectively.³³ But I suspect that a more pointed argument about caste hierarchy is intended here. In literary works of the early to mid-second millennium, the term *veḷaṇḍa* usually refers to the *vaiśya-varṇa*. This is a statement, in other words, that the Govi *kula* “properly” belongs to the third *dharmaśāstric varṇa*, ranked below *kṣatriyas* and therefore unable to claim kingship.

It is important to note that this, too, was a rhetorical claim, and not simply an expression of a long-standing understanding of the *varṇa* status of various Lankan *jātis* and their resulting right to rule. Concerns about *varṇa* status are certainly evident in earlier literature. To return to the narrative of

³³ de Silva Wickremasinghe, *EZ* 2:122; Ranawella, *IC* 6:64.

Vijaya, for example, the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa* makes a point of telling us that he,

Having founded communities [throughout Lanka], all the counsellors having assembled said “Lord, be consecrated in sovereignty.” The Prince said, “I do not wish for consecration, without the simultaneous consecration of a *khattiya* (Skt. *kṣatriya*) maiden [as my] consort (P. *mahesī*, Skt. *mahiṣī*).”³⁴

The *varṇa* status of Vijaya’s wife was clearly of *some* importance to the *Mahāvamsa*’s authors, enough at least that they would be so specific. The tenth-century *Vamsatthappakāsinī* seems less interested in the specifics of these two verses, and provides only a perfunctory commentary. However, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the *Vamsatthappakāsinī* does elsewhere include an *abhiṣeka* procedure—echoed by Parākramabāhu’s monastic grandmaster Śāriputra—which specifically requires a *kṣatriya* maiden to represent the entire collective (*gaṇa*) of her *varṇa*.³⁵ However, I do not think that we can go so far here as does Gunawardana, who sees in the above verses evidence of a fifth-century attitude that “only such a king who is a *kṣatriya* and who also has a queen of the same *varṇa* status can be consecrated as king; others do not have a legitimate right to rule.”³⁶ This is, after all, the *only* mention of *kṣatriya* status in the entire Vijaya saga of the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa*—and it is not even applied to Vijaya himself.

In the wider textual corpus, we are presented with a rather fluid sense of the intersections of *varṇas*, the more specific Lankan identity groupings variously called *jātis* and *kulas*, and the right to rule. This was, *contra* Gunawardana, by no means fixed by the time of the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa*, and it stayed open for (re)interpretation long after Niśsaṅka Malla’s reign. We have already noted that Buddhist texts often deploy a three-fold class system (*kṣatriya*, *brāhmaṇa*, *gṛhapati*) in place of the *Dharmaśāstric* four (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*). We cannot assume that the Govi *jāti* was “always” understood to be within the *vaiśya-varṇa* if that *varṇa* simply did not exist in a wide variety of textual treatments. Some texts, like the tenth-century Pali *Anāgatavaṃsa*, do offer us a fourfold system, with a fairly standard translation of the Sanskrit *varṇas* into Pali *vaṇṇas*: *khattiya*, *brahmaṇa*, *vessa*, and *sudda*.³⁷ But when that same text was later adapted into the fourteenth-century Sinhala *Anāgatavaṃśaya*, the four classes are

34 *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 7, vv. 46–47.

35 *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, ed. Malalasekera, 2:305.

36 Gunawardana, “People of the Lion,” 56.

37 *Pali Anāgatavaṃsa*, ed. Norman, v. 64.

instead listed as *rāja*, *bamuṇu*, *veḷaṇḍa* and *govi*.³⁸ Here we see confirmation that—at least by the fourteenth century—the term *veḷaṇḍa* was used to signify the *vaiśya-varṇa*, and that kingship was so strongly associated with *kṣatriya* status that the terms were interchangeable. But here the Govis are decidedly *not* mapped onto this *veḷaṇḍa/vaiśya* class. Instead, they are held to be the equivalents of the *śūdra-varṇa*: yet another rung lower down the *dharmaśāstric* ladder.

The *varṇa* status of the Govis, in other words, remained up for debate long beyond the period of the present study. When Niśśaṅka Malla refers to them as *veḷaṇḍas* in his inscriptions, therefore, we must take this as just one argument put forward in this longer debate. Here, the argument seems to be rather unsubtle in its intention: to position the Govis as ineligible for kingship, and so to (hopefully) remove a potential challenge to the claims of Niśśaṅka Malla's dynastic heirs.

Birth

The third point of difference Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions fashion for him, and by extension for other members of his dynasty, is the circumstance of his birth. The Galpota inscription, for example, tells us that he was born “in Siṃhapura, in the Kaliṅga country, in noble Daṃbadivhi (Skt. Jambudvīpa), which gives rise to Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and *cakravartins*” (IC 6.24, ll. a3–4). Emphasizing that it is Jambudvīpa, not Lanka, in which such exalted figures have tended to arise serves to further set apart Niśśaṅka Malla and his brothers from any more local rivals (such as those who overthrew his predecessor Vijayabāhu II). Of course, it is only Buddhas—not *bodhisattvas* or *cakravartins*—who are *necessarily* born in Jambudvīpa,³⁹ but the inscription can be read as suggesting that the same is true of all three. Implicitly, only a monarch born on the mainland (such as Niśśaṅka Malla himself) ought to claim *cakravartin* status. More specifically, perhaps, the ambiguity of Sinhala adjectival attribution allows us to read the “which gives rise to” clause as applying not just to Jambudvīpa, but to the Kaliṅga country or

³⁸ *Sinhala Anāgatavaṃśaya*, ed. Vaṭaddara Medhānanda, 133.

³⁹ All Buddhas follow more or less the same pattern in their lives, including birth in (northern) Jambudvīpa. More proximately, we might note that another core component of the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka* narrative discussed above is this very repetition: the *cakravartin* named Kāliṅga is prevented from flying through the air *above* the one spot on which all Buddhas achieve enlightenment. This is explained to him by his advisor Kāliṅgabharadvaja, who is himself the Buddha Śākyamuni in a previous life.

perhaps even to the city of Siṃhapura itself. This is a decidedly uncanonical claim, but one within the realms of semantic possibility for readers attuned to such suggestive nuances. Such a reading is made more plausible by other references throughout the inscriptional corpus which suggest a more-than-ordinary birth for Niśsaṅka Malla.

Some of these references have been over-emphasized by past scholars, when closer reading shows them to clearly be metaphorical in nature. The prime example here is the claim made in the Galpota that “Kings, although having human form, should be regarded like (*sē*) gods (*deviyan*) due to their being lords of men (*nara-deva*)” (IC 6.24, ll. c4–5). This has frequently been interpreted as a claim for the literal divinity of kings, taking “*naradeva*” as “human gods.”⁴⁰ But I am mindful in my own translation of Berkwitz’s call for us to attend to the significance of the analogical particle “*sē*”: kings are to be viewed *like* gods, not *as* literal human gods.⁴¹ I therefore interpret *nara-deva* as the kind of etymological explanation we might see in, for example, Pali commentaries of the period, in its more “humanistic” meaning of “lord” rather than god.

A similar issue of misinterpretation has plagued another of Niśsaṅka Malla’s inscriptions. Partway through his inscription near the Prītīdāna Maṇḍapa, Niśsaṅka Malla tells us of an aspiration which has been translated as, “I will now show myself in my [true] body which is endowed with benevolent regard for and attachment to the virtuous qualities of a *bodhisatta* king.”⁴² This translation has been quoted by a large number of scholars as evidence that Niśsaṅka Malla considered himself to be a *bodhisattva*, understood to be fulfilling the earlier prophecy (discussed in Chapter One) that only *bodhisattvas* ought to rule Sri Lanka.⁴³

I suspect that the phrasing “my body...is *endowed*...with the virtuous qualities of a *bodhisattva*” has been interpreted as a reference to the thirty-two Marks of a Great Man (Skt. *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*, P. *mahāpurisalakkhaṇa*): the somatic manifestation of a *bodhisattva*’s accumulated virtues which appear

40 Goonatilake, “Impact,” 363; Hallisey, “Works and Persons,” 701; de Silva Wickremasinghe, *EZ* 2:102.

41 Berkwitz, “Divine Kingship.”

42 de Silva Wickremasinghe, *EZ* 2:176; repeated verbatim in Ranawella, *IC* 6.69. Note particularly the choice of P. *bodhisattva* over the *bodhisatva* actually present in the Sinhala.

43 Goonatilake, “Impact,” 364–65; Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 60; Pathmanathan, “Historical Writings,” 11n31; Pathmanathan, “Kingship,” 132–33; Samuels, “The Bodhisattva Ideal,” 405.

in their final life. The idea that these *bodhisattva* “qualities” are indeed bodily marks (*lakṣaṇa*) might also be further supported by the inscription’s opening lines, which conclude with a mention of bodily marks (here in Sin. *lakuṇu*) appearing at the moment of Niśśaṅka Malla’s birth:

Sirisaṅgabo Niśśaṅka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *cakravarttīn*—who was like a *tilaka* for the Solar dynasty in the royal lineage of Okā; who was adorned with the crown, having received sovereignty in [order of] royal succession; who attained the rank of *mahārāja*—having been seen, at the very moment he was born from the womb of the Great Lady Pārbbatī and the *mahārāja* Śrī Jayagopa, to have marks of prosperity (*sāpat-lakuṇu*), and a pleasing horoscope and hour, was declared a *tilaka* for his family (IC 6.25, ll. 3–8).

Here, however, we would do well to note that not all bodily marks, even in a Buddhist context, are necessarily the specific thirty-two marks of a *bodhisattva*. If we turn, briefly, to the retrospective *Mahāvamsa* account, we do see that both Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I are said to have been born with auspicious bodily marks.⁴⁴ But so too was Vijayabāhu’s mother, Lokitā, and Vijayabāhu’s daughter (Parākramabāhu’s mother) Ratnāvalī.⁴⁵ None of these figures are said to be *bodhisattvas* in the *Mahāvamsa* (let alone in their own inscriptions); none of these marks are specifically called the thirty-two Marks of a Great Man; and, as the androcentric title suggests, those thirty-two marks describe a distinctly male body (including a sexual organ “concealed in a sheath,” *P. kosohitavatguyho*), which presumably means that these are *not* the marks with which Lokitā and Ratnāvalī were endowed.⁴⁶ It seems evident to me that in these *Mahāvamsa* references to bodily marks, and in Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptional claim above, we are dealing with a broader set of bodily signs which can be interpreted (alongside other astrological portents) at the moment of birth. In other words, Niśśaṅka Malla’s reference to the *lakṣaṇa* on his body are not a claim to *bodhisattva*-hood, but rather are participant in broader (i.e., not exclusively “Buddhist”) practices of somatic and astrological divination which circulated widely in the Indian Ocean world as vital “technologies of statecraft.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See, respectively, *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 57, v. 49; ch. 62, v.29 and vv. 45–52.

⁴⁵ *Mahāvamsa*, ed. Geiger, ch. 57, v. 41; ch. 59, v. 35.

⁴⁶ On the masculinity of final-life *bodhisattvas*, see Balkwill, “Why Does a Woman Need to Become a Man?”

⁴⁷ Blackburn, “Buddhist Technologies”; building on Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

With this in mind, let us return to the “I will show myself” phrase, quoted above in translation. This would seem, in the phrasing so frequently repeated in secondary literature, to be an unambiguous claim to *bodhisattva* status. However, the easy wording of this translation disguises more ambiguity in the Sinhala, and I do not think we can so readily take it as a claim that Niśsaṅka Malla was, himself, a *bodhisattva*. The Sinhala reads: *bodhisatvarājaguṇayaṭa met sit āti snehapakṣapātaśarīrayen mā pāmha yi* (IC 6.25, ll. 16–17). It is clear that Niśsaṅka Malla intends to show himself (*pāmha*) with a body (*śarīra*) that is in some way devoted to or oriented towards (*pakṣapāta*) affection (*sneha*). That body further possesses (*āti*) a mind (*sit*), characterized by compassion (*met*, P. *metta*), and oriented towards the qualities or virtues of a *bodhisattva*-king. Together, we can therefore read this aspiration as: “I will show myself, with a body devoted to affection, compassionately mindful of the qualities of a *bodhisattva*-king.”

An association between Niśsaṅka Malla and *bodhisattva*-kingship is certainly *suggested* by this phrasing. But I find it a stretch to read this as a claim that Niśsaṅka Malla himself manifested the somatic markings of a late-stage *bodhisattva*. Instead, I read this as a reassurance only that he is mindful of the qualities of such a king, and that he wishes to present himself to his subjects in a manner reflective of this mindfulness. The somatic presentation of kingship is clearly important throughout this inscription, but perhaps not in the manner it has largely been understood to date.

Together, these references to the circumstances of Niśsaṅka Malla’s birth—auspicious in geography, in bodily marks, and in astrological conjunction—were presented as yet another means to distinguish him, and his nascent dynasty, from potential rivals within Sri Lanka. References to these circumstances, along with the lineage- and caste-based arguments discussed above, appear with increasing intensity throughout those inscriptions of Niśsaṅka Malla which we know to be later. Coupled with the decreasing emphasis on Parākramabāhu after the early inscription IC 6.26, this begins to suggest a shift in the substance of his claims to kingship. He was, less and less, the king of Lanka *through Lankan succession alone*. Instead, he presented himself as a member of a translocal dynasty centred at Kaliṅga, but always with members ruling over Lanka. He emphasized, in other words, the distinctive nature of his own immediate family relative to any other possible claimants within Lanka itself, who lacked such pedigrees. This claim was not only made through inscriptional means. As I argue in the following section, he also sought to reify it through matrilateral ties.

Family Matters

In Chapter Three, I suggested that the political trifurcation between the reigns of Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I resulted in an increasing emphasis, in the inscriptions of some royal men, on the dynastic pedigrees of their wives as representative of powerful marital alliances with mainland rulers. I then further argued that this allowed (some of) those women what seems to be an unprecedented level of autonomy: crafting their own inscriptional personae and patronizing religious institutions of their own choosing. During the reign of Parākramabāhu I, however, royal women became, once again, invisible in the inscriptional record. I suggested that this may have been the result of Parākramabāhu's relatively strong hold on the throne, and the concomitant non-necessity of appealing to such dynastic marriage alliances. The inscriptions of Niśśaṅka Malla, as I have suggested above, exhibit considerably more anxiety about rival claims to the throne. It should therefore perhaps not be surprising that royal women are yet *more* central to the vision of kingship portrayed in these inscriptions than they were even in the interregal period.

The inscriptions of Niśśaṅka Malla are replete with lists of mainland dynasties, friend and rival alike, from whom he “procured consorts” (*bisōvarun genvā*) both for himself and for his son, Vīrabāhu. A particularly striking example comes from the Galpota inscription, in which the victorious conclusion to Niśśaṅka Malla's mainland expeditions is related thus:

having heard the words said by the frightened Pāṇḍyan king and his mother—“Having given [to ourselves] only the villages [necessary to sustain] our lives, the kingdom is yours!”—; having had the fire of wrath extinguished by the stream of water, namely the many gifts received in this way from the Cōḷa country [such as] golden “fingers” (ingots), **royal maidens**, elephants and horses, etc., and various [other] gifts; having established friendship...[section illegible]...with royal persons who value virtue in various countries, such as Karṇṇāṭa (Karnataka), Nellūru (Nellore), Gauḍa (Bengal), Kaliṅga, Tiliṅga, and Gurjjara (Gujarat); having inspired fear in those who do not value [virtue] through his own excellence in heroism; having procured **consorts** and gifts from those countries (*IC* 6.24, ll. b16–19).

This most obviously expresses certain geopolitical aspirations. The Pāṇḍyas, the most geographically proximate rivals, are subjugated and humiliated; the Cōḷas, powerful former overlords, escape the same fate only through appeasement; new allies and newly fearful subordinates alike seal their relations through similar tributes. We might also note, however, that both forms of relation—adversarial and “friendly”—are secured through the

gifting of consorts. This includes the alleged subjugation of the Pāṇḍyas, which is listed in other inscriptions as a source of consorts (*IC* 6.32, 35, 36, 45, 65, 71, and 82), as is the region of Veṅgi to the north (*IC* 6.45, 57).

The most important source of royal wives, however, seems to have been Niśśaṅka Malla's own home region of Kālīṅga, from whence came his primary consort Subhadrā. As he himself explains in the Galpota:

having dispatched [messengers] to the Kālīṅga country, for the sake of the royal lineage; having procured many consorts of the Lunar and Solar Dynasties; having produced also royal maidens for his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, who had attained the rank of *yuvaraja*; he [thus] increased the royal family (*IC* 6.24, ll. b1–2).

We might take his self-stated motivation—the royal lineage—as extending in multiple temporal directions. Consorts, of course, “increase the royal family” by producing children and grandchildren. But high-caste Kālīṅgan consorts in particular would have strengthened relations to Niśśaṅka Malla's natal dynasty, supporting (both symbolically and, potentially, through military and fiscal means) the claims discussed in the preceding section.

The various dynastic ties of Niśśaṅka Malla's consorts may have played a role in determining their relative status within his “Inner City” (*antaḥpura*). This ranking shifted over the course of his reign, as new consorts (representing, perhaps, more strategically valuable dynastic ties) become increasingly visible in his inscriptions. This becomes particularly clear when we attend to his changing descriptions of the *tulābhāra* ceremony, in which he—and other members of the royal family—ascended giant scales and made a valuable offering equivalent to their collective weight (*tula*). This ceremony is often described as having taken place “annually” (*havurudu patā*), and in at least three different locations: at Rameśvaram, to celebrate Niśśaṅka Malla's triumphant return from his second mainland expedition;⁴⁸ at Devakulama, likely what is now Tampalakamam in Trincomalee district (only in *IC* 6.65); and at least once more, presumably in Poḷonnaruva itself.⁴⁹ I say “at least” because the number of people said to have participated in this *tulābhāra* varies considerably from inscription to inscription. It matters less to us whether this reflects “in reality” multiple *tulābhāras* with varying

48 All inscriptions which specify Rameśvaram mention two such expeditions: see *IC* 6.43, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 56, 60, 67, and 76–82 (the Ruhuna *gavuta* inscriptions).

49 *IC* 6.45 and 48 both mention two *tulābhāras*, the second at Rameśvaram. It is possible, but I think unlikely, that the first of these is the *tulābhāra* at Devakulama described in *IC* 6.65.

participants. What is significant for our purposes is which family members, at which times, are said to have joined Niśsaṅka Malla on the scales in his grand display of kingly munificence. These changing descriptions, I suggest, allow us to trace the rise to prominence of Niśsaṅka Malla's secondary consort, Kalyāṇavatī, who would later go on to rule in her own right (in 1202–1208).

The most frequent description of the Poḷonnaruva *tulābhāra* lists five participants, but we also have three-, four-, and even eight-person variants. The only one of these variant descriptions that we can positively date is the three-person variant, as described in the Anurādhapura inscription (IC 6.27) dated to Niśsaṅka Malla's fourth year. This means that the *tulābhāra* itself must have taken place before the trip to Anurādhapura; more significantly, the language used to describe the *tulābhāra* must be reflective of that fourth year (regardless of its connection to the actual event), making it a useful benchmark for other *tulābhāra* descriptions. Here, as discussed above, the *tulābhāra* is framed as a remedy to the poverty-driven crime caused by Parākramabāhu I's (alleged) excessive punishments and taxation. In response, the inscription tells us, Niśsaṅka Malla

having resolved to mount the *tulābhāra*, as no prior kings had done,⁵⁰ [thinking] “Those begging in my day should live comfortably”; having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by three people, namely (1) his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, (2) his primary consort (*agamehesun*, Skt. *agramahiṣī*) the *bisōva* Kālīṅga Subhadrā, and (3) he himself wearing jewellery and the crown; and having caused a great rain of alms (*dāna*) by scattering about in the royal street an continual [shower of wealth] including the seven gems and silver *tiram* coins (IC 6.27, ll. 10–14).

This is a lavishly described performance of kingship: Niśsaṅka Malla publicly sets himself apart from previous kings; he appears bedecked in all his regalia; and he draws a parallel to the dramatic finale of the *Vessantara-jātaka* through the “great rain of alms.”⁵¹ The inclusion of his son and desig-

50 This is patently untrue: we have references to *tulābhāra* ceremonies in inscriptions dating back to Vijayabāhu I (see IC 6.2, l.14, where it is called a *tulatara*; and TISL 42, l.11, which specifically uses Grantha script to call it *tulābhāram* instead of T. *tulāpāram*). This is a valuable reminder that we can not take inscriptional claims as documentary evidence of “what actually happened,” rather as evidence of what was important to have said happened.

51 Upon Vessantara's triumphant return to his kingdom, the god Sakka (Skt. Śakra, i.e., Indra) causes a shower of seven jewels to rain down across the city, thereby pacifying his potential rivals. In Steven Collins's excellent study of this episode, he argues that the shower of gems serves to remove the risk that Vessantara (actually

nated heir (*mahapā*) Vīrabāhu in such an event makes sense: Niśśaṅka Malla publicly and ritually signals his desired line of succession, and ensures that the future king shares in the whatever merit (and social capital) he gains from such ostentatious charity. But equally central is his primary consort Subhadrā, called here a *bisōva*: a term indicating that she has received some form of consecration (*abhiṣeka*) as a senior consort. Subhadrā is *presumably* Vīrabāhu's mother, and so we might see this as yet another move to secure the line of succession. But the prominence of her own Kāliṅga heritage also serves, yet again, to underline Niśśaṅka Malla's ties northwards; the "strangeness" discussed in the previous section.

We have descriptions of the four- and five-person *tulābhāras* in inscriptions which must postdate Niśśaṅka Malla's fifth regnal year, and so I think it is reasonable to understand these as constituting a progression of scale. More family members were included in (the description of) the ceremony over the years. Supporting this notion is that in some of these inscriptions (as in that quoted below) the *tulābhāra* is now described as "annual" (*havuruda patā*); the three-person *tulābhāra* of year four might have been followed by a four-person *tulābhāra* the following year, and so on.

The four-person *tulābhāra* is mentioned in three inscriptions, but only one—the Prītidānaka Maṇḍapa rock inscription (IC 6.25)—tells us who the fourth participant was: Kalyāṇavatī, who would eventually be installed on the throne herself. Several other features of this description also deviate from the three-person *tulābhāra* described above:

having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by (1) his primary consort the *mahādevī* Kāliṅga Subhadrā **of the Solar Dynasty**, (2) **the mahādevī Kālyāṇa of the Gaṅga dynasty**, (3) his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu who had **become yuvarāja**, and (4) he himself wearing **royal** jewellery and the crown, **annually**, as no prior kings had done; and having caused a great rain of alms, [consisting of] **the nine gems** (IC 6.25, ll. 11–14).⁵²

Here the lineages of both primary consorts are emphasized, again stressing these matrilinear links to powerful mainland dynasties. Subhadrā's status as a member of the solar dynasty is, of course, also a reminder of Niśśaṅka Malla's similar claim, as a fellow member of the Kāliṅga dynasty. Kalyāṇavatī's lineage, meanwhile, is given as Gaṅgavaṃśa. This is likely a

the Buddha in his penultimate incarnation) will ever have to act in the immorally violent ways that typically characterize kingship (fighting rivals, punishing criminals): Collins, *Nirvana*, ch. 7.

52 See also IC 6.37, which mentions a four-fold *tulābhāra* but does not name the participants.

reference to the powerful Eastern Gaṅga dynasty, whose domains at this time included the Kāliṅga region.⁵³ It seems likely that Niśśaṅka Malla's father Jayagopa (and presumably also the family of his primary consort Subhadrā) was a Kāliṅga-based tributary of this dynasty. The sudden inclusion of Kalyāṇavatī in descriptions of the *tulābhāra* from this point onwards suggests that Niśśaṅka Malla had secured, and wished to publicize, a valuable marital alliance with his own father's overlord. We might also note that Virabāhu has received an additional title, *yuvarāja*, intended to further signal his status as designated heir-apparent.

If we take Niśśaṅka Malla's claims of "annual" *tulābhāras* at face value, then this four-person *tulābhāra* ought to have taken place in his fifth regnal year, and the five-person *tulābhāra* (which is mentioned in many more inscriptions than any other configuration) ought to have taken place in his sixth year. Of course, we may well wish to remain cautious about taking *any* of Niśśaṅka Malla's claims at face value. But this sequence at least aligns with the inscriptional dating laid out above. Notably, the Ruḥuṇa inscription (IC 6.54), which must postdate year seven, is among those which mention a five-person *tulābhāra*, suggesting that this variant remained in Niśśaṅka Malla's rhetorical performance of kingship until that point.

Although the five-person variant is the most widely attested in the inscriptional corpus, we are once again only told *which* five people participated in a single inscription: the Galpota. Here the formulation is given as:

having mounted the *tulābhāra* together with (1) his primary consort the *mahādevī* Kāliṅga Subhadrā of the Solar Dynasty, (2) the *mahādevī* Kālyāṇa of the Gaṅga dynasty, (3) his son the *mahapā*, **wearing the royal jewellery and crown**, and (4) **his daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī**; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually (IC 6.24, ll. b2–4).

Niśśaṅka Malla himself clearly makes up the fifth person. But it is Virabāhu who now wears the royal regalia, and Virabāhu's sister now joins the party.⁵⁴ Niśśaṅka Malla's inclusion of consorts (symbolizing powerful matrilateral connections) and heir in such a public act of kingship is understandable; his inclusion of his daughter is slightly less so. We might wonder if she is being primed to secure matrilateral alliances of her own. However, she is mentioned further on in the same inscription, in what seems to be a ritual context. We are told that Niśśaṅka Malla "having offered his son and daughter to

⁵³ See, for the most comprehensive overview, Rao, *Kāliṅga under the Eastern Gaṅgas*.

⁵⁴ Virabāhu's name and longer list of titles are likely only absent here because they were mentioned in the preceding clauses.

the Tooth and Bowl Relics, offered up riches, including a solid gold *dāgaba*, and [thus] saved [the children]" (IC 6.24, l. b24). We see a variant description of this event in one of the inscriptions on the Hāṭadāgē: "having offered his son, the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, and his daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī to the Tooth and Bowl Relics, [then] saved the two" (IC 6.52, ll. 17–18).

From these two descriptions together we gain the sense of some kind of ritualized offering-up of the children to the Relics, only to redeem ("save") them through a substitute offering of considerable value. If only Vīrabāhu were involved in this offering, we might wonder if he were being dedicated to the monkhood (only to be later "saved" for kingship by the substitute offering). But it is unclear whether the female monastic order survived into this period of Lankan history; the only hint of their presence is a single word on an inscription which can also be read otherwise.⁵⁵ Even if some details of the ritual are thus unclear, Niśsaṅka Malla's inclusion of Sarvāṅga Sundarī in this ritual (and his inscribing the inclusion, twice over, in the sacred quadrangle at the heart of his city) speaks to a surprising centrality of a royal daughter in his self-presentation as a devout king. This is, to my knowledge, the only early second millennium inscription in which a king mentions, let alone names, his own daughter.

Other descriptions of the five-person *tulābhāra* give fewer details but, significantly, retain mention of the royal women. The Rameśvaram throne inscription, for example, mentions only the titles of those who accompanied Niśsaṅka Malla: "having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by five persons, including the *bisōvas* and the *mahapā*; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually" (IC 6.46, ll. 1–2). Presumably, Sarvāṅga Sundarī is one of the five persons mentioned here. An inscription found near the Vānduruppa Vihāra, meanwhile, excludes even Vīrabāhu's title of *mahapā* from the list, but still singles out the consorts: "having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by five persons, including the *bisōvas*; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually" (IC 6.53, ll. 6–7). Here it is the inclusion of *only* the royal women which seems relevant. Later—in the year-seven-plus Ruhūṇa inscription, and at least one of the year-nine inscriptions—even the women are excluded, and the event was reduced down to the minimalistic formula "having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually" (IC 6.43, l.2; 6.54, l.12).⁵⁶ It seems that in these later years more recent events (including the *tulābhāra* at Rameśvaram)

⁵⁵ Gunawardana, *Subtile Silks*, 38–39.

⁵⁶ IC 6.49, the other inscription from Niśsaṅka Malla's ninth year, is effaced in the section we might expect to see mention of the five-person *tulābhāra*, so we cannot be sure if it was included here or not.

appeared more salient to Niśśaṅka Malla's kingly self-representation, and so descriptions of the five-person *tulābhāra* became increasingly truncated.

The eight-person *tulābhāra* is only mentioned in a single inscription (*IC* 6.57), which is—frustratingly—difficult to date. It is located on the outer wall of the Hāṭadāgē, the same shrine discussed above in the context of Niśśaṅka Malla offering his children up to the Tooth and Bowl Relics. But this inscription is unlike those others found within the Hāṭadāgē. It employs a different regnal title (*Siṃhapureśvara Laṃkeśvara Kāliṅga cakravartin*, otherwise witnessed only in *IC* 6.53), and it mentions edificial works (like the construction of a seven-story palace in only forty-five days) not otherwise discussed in the extant corpus. We do know, because it mentions the creation of both stone thrones and distance-marker pillars, that it must postdate *some* of the inscriptions found on these respective objects.⁵⁷ But we do not know which, and so cannot say for sure where the eight-person *tulābhāra* fits in sequence. This is unfortunate, as the list of participants has three fascinating inclusions:

having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by eight persons, including (1) the *bisōva* Kāliṅga Subhadrā, (2) the *mahādevī* Kalyāṇavatī, (3) the *mahapā*, (4) **the āpā Vikramabāhu**, (5) **the bisōva Candrā**, (6) **Pārvatī**, and (7) Sarvāṅga Sundarī; and having given [charity] annually in this way (*IC* 6.57, ll. 12–15).

Once again, Niśśaṅka Malla himself presumably makes up the unnamed eighth person. The inclusion of the secondary heir Vikramabāhu is, perhaps, unsurprising. We know that this was the position Niśśaṅka Malla himself (claimed to have) occupied under Parākramabāhu I; perhaps he was preparing for the eventuality that his son Virabāhu, just like his own predecessor Vijayabāhu II, would need someone waiting in the wings. This would prove to be prudent. Virabāhu I would only rule for a single night before he passed away, and Vikramabāhu II (r. three months in 1196) took the throne.

More interesting, however, is the addition of two *more* royal women to the list of participants. One, Candrā, is named as a consecrated consort (*bisōva*). We know nothing about her life or lineage, although we may speculate about a connection to Parākramabāhu's similarly-named widow Candavatī (discussed in the following chapter). As we have seen throughout this chapter from the case of Kalyāṇavatī, Niśśaṅka Malla frequently

57 The stone seats were likely created throughout Niśśaṅka Malla's reign, and so evince a wide variety of inscriptional styles. Some (*IC* 6.33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, and 44) must postdate year five; all others must postdate year two at least. The *gavuta* distance pillar inscriptions are *IC* 6.74 through 82. *IC* 6.74 and 75 must themselves postdate year two, but we cannot even say this about the remaining pillars.

drops the *-vatī* suffix in his inscriptions; Candrā might therefore be a plausible read for Candravatī. However, this was also a fairly common name for royal women across medieval Southern Asia, and we should not place too much weight on this possible connection. The second woman, Pārvatī, is—like Niśśaṅka Malla's daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī—not called a consort. It is unlikely that she is a second, younger, daughter, given that she is listed before Sarvāṅga Sundarī. We might wonder, therefore, if this is actually Niśśaṅka Malla's *mother* Pārvatī, returned from Kaliṅga and invited to participate in Niśśaṅka Malla's grand display of royal munificence.

No matter where we place the eight-person *tulābhāra* in this sequence, the changing descriptions of the *tulābhāra* seem to reflect both the centrality of the immediate family to Niśśaṅka Malla's vision of kingship, and that family's increasing scope over time. Consorts, daughters, and possibly even Niśśaṅka Malla's mother were included in descriptions of the *tulābhāra* ritual alongside male heirs: these women clearly *mattered* to him, and to his kingly self-representation. We might well conceptualize this as something akin to what Sjurzen describes as a "lordship unit," a "theory of complementary rulership [which] would suggest that a noblewoman's authority derived from her status as part of the lordship unit rather than [solely from] her access to a husband or son."⁵⁸ This authority, crucially, was more than symbolic. As the Relic-offering ritual's inclusion of Niśśaṅka Malla's daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī perhaps suggests, the public centrality of these noblewomen to Niśśaṅka Malla's performance of kingship translated into direct influence on his choices of patronage.

In two of Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions, he explicitly tells us that his pious religious works at the Mahāvihāra's Great Stūpa (here called Ruvanvāli) were carried out at the request of his consorts:

having, because the women of the Inner City (*antaḥpurastrī*) said "we wish to worship also at the Ruvanvāli *mahasā* (Skt. *mahācaitya*, "great reliquary")," said in reply "This was done in the past by a royal person like myself";⁵⁹ having spent limitless wealth; having made his labourers happy; having made the Ruvanvāli *dāgaba* into a veritable lotus for the Pihiti Kingdom (the Rajaraṭa); and having enabled the women of the Inner City to worship it (*IC* 6.53, ll. 9–13).

⁵⁸ Sjurzen, "War of the Two Jeannes," 11.

⁵⁹ Presumably he refers here to Duṭṭagāmuṇu, who first established the Great Stūpa; or perhaps even to the inscription of Gajabāhu discussed in Chapter Four.

Here, Niśśaṅka Malla portrays himself as undertaking this monumental act of patronage in communication with and at the request of his consorts, primarily to satisfy *their* pious wishes. We might take this, of course, as merely a rhetorical show of appeasement. But then, what does it tell us about the performance of kingship that consorts should be so shown to be appeased?

One final piece of evidence further suggests the centrality of Niśśaṅka Malla's consorts to his performance of kingship. This comes from his copperplate grants: legal texts which do not just *record* the donation of land to an individual's family, but through their own production legally enshrine that donation. Tellingly, in these inscriptions' representation of the royal procession, leading up to the announcement of the grant, the two principal consorts are listed even before any of the ministers:

The *sakviti* (Skt. *cakravartī*) Niśśaṅka Malla Niṣkaḷaṃka Kāliṅga *cakravartī* *suvāmīn vahanse*, having entered the *abhiṣeka-maṇḍapa* in the Tundāgedora; wearing the royal jewellery including the crown; in procession with the *aga biso* Subhadrā *mahādevī*, Kalyāṇavatī *mahādevī*, his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, and the group of ministers including Lakvijaya Siṅgu *senevī* Tāvurunā, the *laṅkādhikāra* Lolupāḷākuḷu Kitālnā, the *adhikāra* Toṭadanavu Suvanā, the *adhikāra* Toṭadanavu Sātānā, and the *sabhāpatināyaka* Dahambaḍahāli Gajabāhunāvan (*IC* 6.58, ll. c2–d6; 6.59, ll. a3–5).

And this priority ranking seems more than symbolic. At the end of both extant grants, the records are witnessed, and so made legally binding, by the four core members of the royal family together:

Given (*dattam*) by Vīrarāja Niśyaṃkhamalla Kāliṅga Laṃkendra, and given by Subhadrā *mahādevī*, and given by Kalyāṇavatī *mahādevī*, and given by the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu (*IC* 6.58, ll. h2–6).

Given by Śrī Kāliṅga Laṃkendra, and given by the *aga biso* Subhadrā *mahādevī*, and given by Kalyāṇavatī *mahādevī*, and given by the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, [Niśśaṅka Malla's] son who is in the position of *yuvarāja* (*IC* 6.59, ll. b9–10).

The royal consorts, in other words, were active participants in the affairs of the court, engaged in the discharge of “royal duties” (*rājadhura*, *IC* 6.58 l. d6; 6.59, l. b1) as well as guiding the direction of pious public works.

The most emphatic shift in the treatment of royal women in Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions, relative to earlier models of kingship, comes in two of his inscriptions: the Galpota (*IC* 6.24), and those carved on the gates of the citadel itself (*IC* 6.28 and 29). Here he famously lays out the most explicit articulation of a “succession law” in premodern Sri Lanka. The Galpota's version is unfortunately partially effaced. It reads:

One ought to...the (son?) of a king, [duly appointed to the titles of] *āpā* [and/or] *mahapā*, even if young, because they are the [rightful] master (*svāmin*) of the world, having watched over the kingdom..."caste" (*kula*) customs...

In their absence, one ought to protect [the kingdom] by living according to the command (*ājñā*) of the consecrated consorts (*bisōvas*).

In *their* absence, one ought to protect the kingdom [by] placing in the position of king even a slipper which has been on the foot of the *mahārāja* (*IC* 6.24, ll. c19–21).

The wording here—"living according to the command of the *bisōvas*"—might indicate merely a support for regency. But a variant of this argument in Niśśaṅka Malla's Gate inscriptions suggests that he may be advocating for full succession:

It is necessary to not be king-less. Therefore, in the case that there is not a person appointed to the *mahārāja*-ship, it is necessary to appoint the *yuvarāja*, or, if there is not (a *yuvarāja*), the royal princes, or, if there is not, the *bisōvas*, to the kingship (*rājya*) (*IC* 6.28, ll. b2–8; 6.28, ll. b1–6).

Here it is clear that the *bisōvas* themselves are in Niśśaṅka Malla's intended line of succession (even if as a last resort), if the alternative is being "king-less" (*a-rājaka*). This implies that *bisōvas* (or, in the worst case, royal footwear) could effectively function *as kings*, if no other suitably masculine candidates were available. This situation would, of course, come to pass, with the ascendancy of Parākramabāhu's consort Lilāvati, and then Niśśaṅka Malla's consort Kalyāṇavatī, to the throne.

All of this together suggests a far more composite nature to Niśśaṅka Malla's vision of kingship than we might receive from retrospective monastic records alone, or even from a cursory reading of his inscriptional corpus. While the latter certainly emphasizes, at great length, his *personal* virtues as a monarch, it also suggests the centrality of royal women to the exercise and symbolic extension of kingship. They were vital, it seems, to the differentiation of Niśśaṅka Malla and his dynasty as uniquely positioned to rule.

Conclusions to Chapter Six

This chapter has focused on Niśśaṅka Malla's refashioning of kingship in a manner favourable to his dynastic aspirations. I have suggested that these efforts centred around a politics of *difference*: a distinction drawn between Niśśaṅka Malla and his family from local elites on a number of axes (the connection to Vijaya, *kṣatriya* status, and the auspicious circumstances of his birth). This fashioning of difference did not emerge overnight. In what seem

to be his earliest inscriptions, he emphasizes a more immediate connection to the prior rule of Parākramabāhu I, and therefore positions himself in the regular continuity of Lankan kingship. It is only in his later inscriptions that we see a distancing from the legacy of Parākramabāhu, and a new emphasis on the uniquely Kalingan origins of Niśśaṅka Malla's dynasty.

Niśśaṅka Malla's intention in this refashioning of kingship was, almost certainly, to secure the longevity of his own dynasty. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, he succeeded in this regard. The majority of Poḷonnaruva's subsequent monarchs, before the kingdom's invasion in 1215 CE, did indeed claim some relation to Niśśaṅka Malla as evidence of their right to rule. However, the vision of kingship articulated in his inscriptions—and, particularly, the succession laws he attempted to lay out in his Galpota and gate inscriptions—had ramifications for Lankan politics beyond his immediate family. In particular, it seems to have set the stage for the centrality of royal women in Lankan politics to a degree unprecedented in Lankan history. Niśśaṅka Malla's vision of kingship attempted to centre royal women in a manner parallel to that described in Chapter Two: as embodied evidence of homosocial ties with powerful mainland rulers. Inadvertently, however, the prominence placed on the women of Niśśaṅka Malla's dynasty—and therefore, by extension, on all royal consorts—may well have strengthened their own position. We see Niśśaṅka Malla's own inscriptions present him as deferential to the religious and economic wishes of his consorts, directing patronage according to their agenda. His primary consorts, Subhadrā and Kalyāṇavatī, joined him in affairs of state and co-witnessed his legal grants. We have also seen that this resulted in their being placed in the line of succession, in the absence of suitable male heirs. After his death, and the untimely death of his son Vīrabāhu, this new rule of succession and the possibility of female regnancy seem to have been taken seriously. We turn to this phenomenon in the following chapter.