

— A STUDY OF —  
BUDDHISM,  
GENDER, AND  
POLITICS  
IN EARLY SECOND MILLENNIUM  
SRI LANKA

A Dissertation

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# A STUDY OF BUDDHISM, GENDER, AND POLITICS

## IN EARLY SECOND MILLENNIUM SRI LANKA

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This dissertation presents a significant revision of religious, social, and intellectual developments in the Polonnaruva period of Sri Lankan history (eleventh to early thirteenth centuries). While this period has long been acknowledged as a significant turning point in the history of Theravāda Buddhism, our understanding has been over-reliant on retrospective narrative accounts written in Pali and Sinhala. By turning instead to inscriptional evidence from within the period itself (written primarily in Sinhala, Tamil, and Sanskrit, and only exceptionally in Pali), a more granular and expansive understanding of the Polonnaruva period becomes available to us. Crucially, I argue that the histories of Buddhism, gender, and politics were fundamentally entwined in this period, and that we therefore cannot write one in isolation from the others. Royal women, absent from or downplayed within later narrative accounts, were fully participant in shaping the course of Buddhism; selective engagement with particular Buddhist institutions provided opportunities for the articulation of rival visions of ideal kingship; and those visions both relied on and were constitutive of notions of idealised masculinity. Attending to the specificities of these interrelations both allows us new insights into, and suggests new methodological approaches for, Theravāda history.

## **Biographical Sketch**

Bruno M. Shirley is a pākehā scholar from Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Ngā mihi au ki te maunga ō Tangi Te Keo (“Mount Victoria”); me te roto ō Whakatipu Waimāori. He holds an MA (with Distinction) in Religious Studies from Te Herenga Waka (Victoria University of Wellington), where he has also subsequently been an adjunct research fellow and adjunct lecturer; and an MA in Asian Studies from Cornell University. He is presently an affiliated research fellow in Buddhist Studies at Universität Heidelberg, Germany.

for my mother, who encouraged me to take gender history seriously,  
and my father, who I know will read every last page over his morning coffee.

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## List of Abbreviations and Editions

References to editions of inscriptions are given by their volume and number, followed, if needed, by the specific line number (e.g. “IC VI:13, a12–13”). References to interpretive comments made by the inscriptions’ editors are made by page number (e.g. “IC VI, 57”). References to Sanskrit texts not listed below are taken from the *Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages* (GRETIL).

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AN     | the <i>Anguttara-nikāya</i> (PTS edition).  |
| Apte   | Apte’s <i>Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> .                                       |
| AV     | the Pali <i>Anāgatavaṃsa</i> (Norman 2006).   |
| BCE    | Before Christian Era.   |
| BE     | Buddhist Era.   |
| CE     | Christian Era (always intended if not specified otherwise).                                 |
| CII    | the <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum</i> .   |
| Cone   | Cone’s <i>Dictionary of Pali</i> .  |
| DĀ     | Buddhaghosa’s commentary on DN (PTS edition).   |
| DN     | the <i>Dīgha Nikāya</i> (PTS edition).  |
| DāV    | Dhammakitti’s <i>Dāṭhāvāṃsa</i> (Rhys Davids 1884).   |
| DāV-s  | Dhammakitti’s auto-commentary on DāV (Piyaratna 2008).                                      |
| DīV    | the <i>Dīpavaṃsa</i> (Oldenberg 1992).  |
| EI     | <i>Epigraphia Indica</i> .  |
| EZ     | <i>Epigraphia Zeylanica</i> .   |
| IB     | <i>Inscriptions of Bengal</i> .   |
| IC     | <i>Inscriptions of Ceylon</i> .   |
| JĀ     | Buddharakkhita’s <i>Jīnālaṅkara</i> (PTS edition).  |
| JV     | the <i>Jātaka-vaṇṇanā</i> attributed to Buddhaghosa (PTS edition).                          |
| JRASCB | the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch.                                    |
| KĀ     | Daṇḍin’s <i>Kāvyaḍarśa</i> (Tarkabāgīsā 1863).  |
| KĀ-RŚJ | Ratnaśrījñāna’s commentary on KA (Tarkabāgīsā 1863).  |
| KV     | the <i>Kathāvatthu</i> (PTS edition).   |
| KV-AK  | Buddhaghosa’s commentary on KV, part of the <i>Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā</i> (PTS edition). |
| MBV    | the Pali <i>Mahābodhivaṃsa</i> (PTS edition).   |
| MDV    | the <i>Muvadev Dā Vata</i> (Ariyaratna 1932; with reference to Indika Sampath 2014).        |
| MN     | the <i>Majjhima-nikāya</i> (PTS edition).   |

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| MP     | Buddhaghosa's <i>Manorathapūraṇī</i> (PTS edition).   |
| MV     | the <i>Mahāvamsa</i> , including the extensions sometimes called <i>Cūlavamsa</i> (PTS editions). |
| MW     | Monier-William's <i>Sanskrit Dictionary</i> .   |
| NS     | the <i>Nikāya-saṅgrahaya</i> (Samaranāyaka 1966).   |
| P.     | Pali (language).  |
| PED    | the Pali Text Society's <i>Pali-English Dictionary</i> .  |
| PV     | the <i>Pūjāvaliya</i> (Ñāṇavimala 1965).  |
| RV     | the <i>Rājāvaliya</i> (Vatuvatta Pemananda <i>thero</i> 1923).                                    |
| ŚE     | Śaka Era.   |
| ŚŚ     | Vālvīṭṭiye Sorata <i>thera's Śrī Sumaṅgala Śabdakoṣaya</i> .                                      |
| SBL    | the <i>Siyabaslakara</i> (Jayatilaka 1892).   |
| SDV    | the <i>Sasa Dā Vata</i> (Guṇavardhana 2013).  |
| Sin.   | Sinhala (language).   |
| Sin-AV | the Sinhala <i>Anāgatavaṃśaya</i> (Vaṭṭaddara Medhānanda <i>thero</i> 1934).                      |
| Skt.   | Sanskrit (language).  |
| SP     | Buddhaghosa's <i>Samantapāsādikā</i> (PTS edition).   |
| T.     | Tamil (language).   |
| TL     | The University of Madras <i>Tamil Lexicon</i> .   |
| TISL   | <i>Tamil Inscriptons of Ceylon</i> .  |
| UCHC   | The University of Ceylon's <i>History of Ceylon</i> .   |

## Language Conventions

I transcribe with a modified version of ISO 15919, “Transliteration of Devanagari and related Indic scripts into Latin characters.” ISO 15919 resembles the IAST transliteration scheme common in Sanskrit-oriented Buddhist studies, but with the wider variety of diacritics necessary to transcribe Sinhala and Tamil sources. Out of personal preference, I use ä/ā rather than æ/ǣ for the sixth vowel. Following Sinhala-script manuscript practice, I only mark long ē or ō if my source text does so (i.e., Sinhala *bōsat* but Sanskrit *bodhisattva*). For the few Thai and Khmer quotations, I follow Walker (2018, xiii–xix).

Scholars of Pali-oriented Buddhism tend to favour the use of Pali words to signify general concepts under discussion (i.e., Pali *kamma* instead of Sanskrit *karma*). In such general discussions, I prefer instead Sanskrit, on the grounds that (1) Sinhala sources of my period use these terms more frequently than they do Pali, (2) this is a more common practice among wider Buddhist Studies, whether working with texts in Gāndhārī or Japanese, and (3) the terms themselves are often more recognisable to non-specialists (e.g., *karma*, *dharma*). When necessary for clarity in translations, I try to provide in brackets both the original word as it appears in the source text (to reflect the specifics of word choice), and the Sanskrit equivalent for wider salience.

In translations I have also attempted to preserve, as much as possible, the original structure of verses (for poetry) or clauses (for prose). These structural choices often convey (or withhold) key information, which more “free” translations into English cannot capture. However, this poses an additional challenge in translating Sinhala and Tamil prose, as both of these languages rely much more heavily on analytic grammar than do Sanskrit and Pali, and both are (unlike English) left-branching. As

Wilden (2018, 63–71) discusses with reference to classical Tamil, this results in certain ambiguities over syntactical attribution when these clauses mention individuals other than the subject, to whom earlier clauses might plausibly apply. To give a simplified example, the subject (S) of a Sinhala sentence may be introduced after two sequential clauses, the first providing an adjective (C<sub>1</sub>) and the second describing the subject’s relationship to another person (C<sub>2</sub>). The syntactical relationship between these clauses may be interpreted, in the absence of any further contextual clues, as either

“S, who is both described by C<sub>1</sub> and is related to the person introduced in C<sub>2</sub>.”

OR

“S, who is related to the person introduced in C<sub>2</sub>, who is in turn described by C<sub>1</sub>.”

This ambiguity is only increased in lengthier sections of prose, particularly donative inscriptions, which typically refer to many individuals related in some way to the donor. I suspect that in many cases this attributive ambiguity is intentional; qualities in earlier clauses may be intended to describe *both* the subject and those whose names they invoke. To preserve this sense of ambiguity, my translations therefore often reverse the sequence of clauses (“S, who is related to the person introduced in C<sub>2</sub>, who is described in C<sub>1</sub>”).

The dissertation is written in New Zealand English. In accordance with national conventions,<sup>1</sup> the few terms in te reo Māori are not italicised.

All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

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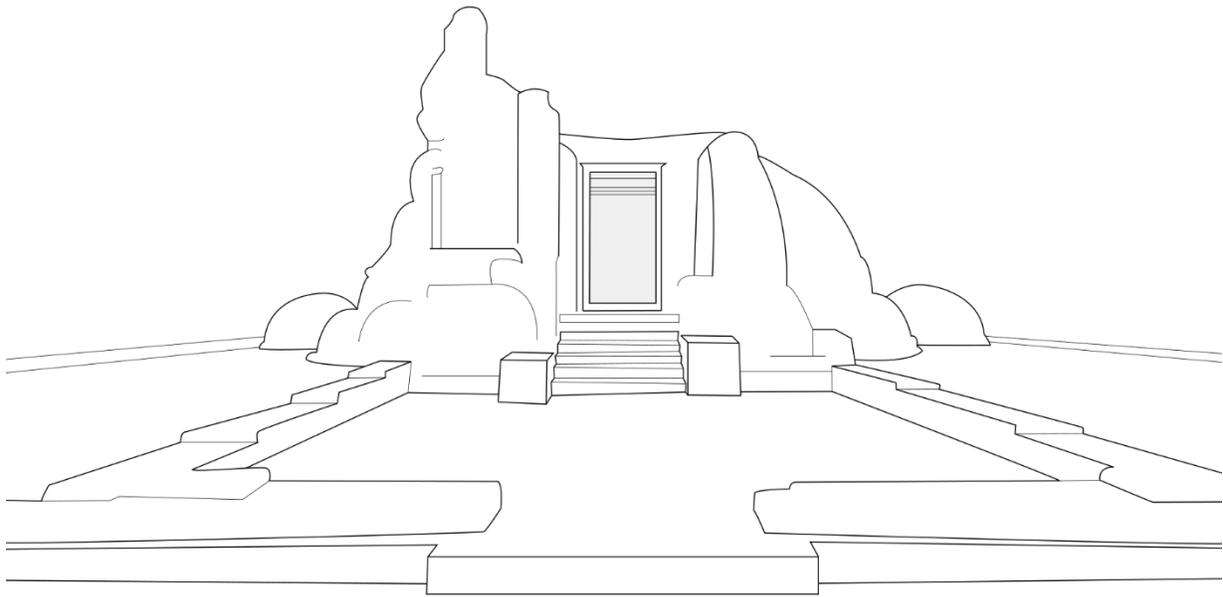
<sup>1</sup> *Nga korero a ipurangi o Aotearoa/NZ History Guide to Style*, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, s.v. “Māori language,” last updated 21 May 2022, [nzhistory.govt.nz/hands/a-guide-to-style#Maori](https://nzhistory.govt.nz/hands/a-guide-to-style#Maori).



Figure 0.1: map of Sri Lanka

## Chapter One: Introduction

Just south of Poḷonnaruva—Sri Lanka’s royal capital in the first centuries of the second millennium—stands a curious structure known today as the Potgul Vihāraya (Figure 1.1). The original function of this building is uncertain. The elevated platform it sits on, surrounded by four miniature *stūpas*, identify it as a Buddhist site, but in an architectural style and site layout unusual for the place and period. The modern name—literally “Library Monastery”—is based on the site’s association with a nearby statue of an unidentified man holding what appears to be a palm leaf manuscript; meanwhile, faint traces of paint on the inside walls suggest, perhaps, that it was once used as an image-house. The only clue to the site’s history is a short donative inscription (IC VI:23) carved into its *maṇḍapa* (ritual entranceway). This tells us that the original structure was built by Parākramabāhu I (r. 1153–1186), the period’s most illustrious king; that it was later rebuilt by Līlāvatī, a widow of Parākramabāhu who became a monarch in her own right after his death; and finally that the *maṇḍapa* itself was constructed by Candavatī, another of Parākramabāhu’s former consorts (*mahiṣīs*).



**Figure 1.1: the contemporary remains of the Potgul Vihāraya, facing west**

This structure, and its accompanying inscription, is little more than a footnote in most histories of medieval Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> The Archaeological Survey’s annual report for the year of the structure’s (re)discovery, for example, concludes only that “In twenty-six lines of clear-cut letters of the twelfth

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<sup>2</sup> In the midst of Medieval Studies’ “global turn” (Flechner 2020; Heng 2013), valid questions have been raised about the applicability of “medieval” periodisation beyond Europe, and the ensuing risk of implying structural homogeneity across the globe. See the nuanced discussion, with reference to South Polynesia, in M. Williams (M. Williams 2021, particularly 18-19). In Sri Lankan history, there is a happy coincidence between the temporal range usually considered “medieval” (500–1500CE) and the understudied period between Buddhaghosa’s commentaries (c. fourth or fifth century) and the advent of European colonisation (from c. 1505). This should not be taken, however, as an intending any form of structural homogeneity across the period. I see medieval studies as providing a useful toolkit upon which we can (selectively and judiciously) draw to help make sense of sources neither exclusively archaeological nor primarily archival: European medievalists have long been comfortable working amongst the material and the literary in ways which are *often* productively applied outside of Europe. More generally, I position this work as a study of “medieval” Sri Lanka to signal my willingness to participate in more global and comparative conversations.

century is a record in Pali of its original construction by Parākramabāhu I, and its rebuilding and improvement by his two queens” (Bell 1906, 16). It says much about the priorities of these colonial archaeologists that only Parākramabāhu, and neither of his “two queens,” is named here. The most significant use to which this inscription has been put is as evidence that non-regnal consorts (*mahiṣī*) like Candavatī had independent means of patronising such construction projects (Siriweera 1970, 54). Candavatī herself, patron of the *maṇḍapa* and inscription, is not mentioned by name in any other premodern source; indeed, the editors of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, in which this inscription was first published, suggest that she should instead be identified by the name “Rūpavatī” (EZ II, 240).

What none of these scholars seem to dwell on is the fact that Candavatī’s inscription is written entirely in Pali (rather than in the other languages used more frequently in medieval Lankan inscriptions: Sinhala, Tamil, or Sanskrit). Pali had been the liturgical and scholastic language of the Mahāvihāra monastery in Anurādhapura (the former royal capital) since the early centuries of the first millennium; it would later become ubiquitous throughout the Theravāda kingdoms of Southern Asia.<sup>3</sup> In such a context, it might be reasonable to assume that there was nothing particularly distinctive about

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<sup>3</sup> I am mindful of the arguments made over the past decade that “Theravāda” was a term with relatively limited emic salience prior to the modern period: see the essays in Skilling et al. (2012), particularly Gethin (2012) and Perreira (2012); and more recently Bretfeld (2022). I certainly do not mean to intend that my twelfth-century subjects considered themselves to be “Theravāda Buddhists” in the same manner as would a modern Buddhist. However, I deploy this term throughout the dissertation to signal that (1) the events of twelfth-century Poḷonnaruva played an important role in setting the direction for what would become “Theravāda Buddhism” in the modern sense, and (2) that these events might therefore be of interest to scholars working on a (temporally and geographically) broader set of phenomena conventionally grouped under the heading “Theravāda Studies.” In other words, I follow Collins’ (2017) use of the term as indicating “something, or some things, which can be seen, or argued, to be genealogically related to what we now call ‘Theravāda’” (18). I return to this discussion in the General Conclusions.

Candavatī's choice of Pali as an inscriptional language. In reality, however, this is the *earliest* known example of a royal inscription composed entirely in Pali.

Prior to the Poḷonnaruva period, Pali seems to have largely been the preserve of monks: particularly those ordained in the Mahāvihāra *nikāya* (ordination lineage). The Mahāvihāra's fortunes were rarely in the ascendant. Archaeological evidence, the travel writings of Chinese pilgrims, and even historical narratives (*vaṃsas*) sympathetic to the Mahāvihāra together suggest that both royal and popular support went instead to its more illustrious rivals: the Abhayagiri and Jetavāna *nikāyas*. While these latter institutions likely adhered to canonical texts written in Pali (including a Pali-language *vinaya*, or monastic disciplinary code), both seemed to have been receptive to Sanskrit texts, and possibly even to texts and practices explicitly associated with the Mahāyāna (Cousins 2012). At one point, the Mahāvihāra-penned *Mahāvāṃsa* laments, its very buildings were deconstructed in order to provide raw materials for expansions of the Abhayagiri compound (MV 37:10–12). While this may have been an dramatic embellishment, the first-millennium inscriptional corpus certainly suggests far more frequent royal engagement with the Abhayagiri, in particular, than with the Mahāvihāra. Of course, this is not to suggest that first millennium kings were entirely uninterested in the latter institution and its Pali-language literature. I discuss the evidence for this in more detail in Chapter Two. For the most part, however, the notion that kings across the Indian Ocean would one day carve inscriptions in Pali, or heap praise upon the memory of the Mahāvihāra, must have seemed a very distant possibility.

In light of this, inscriptions like that of Candavatī take on a new significance. We cannot simply dismiss the choice of the Pali language, or, more generally, expressions of support for the Mahāvihāra,

as an uninteresting expression of an underlying and unchanging affinity between Sri Lankan kingship and “Theravāda Buddhism.” Such references represent instead a radical reconfiguration of royal attitudes towards Buddhist languages and Buddhist institutions; a reconfiguration which was, itself, an important factor in the emergence of the form of Buddhism we can today call “Theravāda.” Some of these moments of reconfiguration are found in the inscriptions of those men who dominate modern historiography; most notably, perhaps, including the Galvihāra inscription of Parākramabāhu I (IC VI:13), discussed further in Chapter Four. However, far more of these critical inscriptions, in which royal attitudes towards Buddhist monastic institutions and languages seem to shift, are the product of slightly more peripheral figures. Candavatī’s inscription may be the earliest to be composed wholly in Pali, but she was following in the footsteps of another royal consort: the Great Lady Sundarā, the wife of Vikramabāhu I (r. 1111–1132) and mother of Gajabāhu II (1132–1153).<sup>4</sup> As I discuss in Chapter Three, Sundarā’s inscriptions contain the earliest Pali verses known in Sri Lankan inscriptions, as well as the evidence for patronage of a particular monastery which would ultimately play a pivotal role in Parākramabāhu’s later restructuring of the *saṅgha*. But Sundarā, like Candavatī, is largely absent from extant studies of Poḷonnaruva and the reform period. It is, I suspect, not merely an unfortunate oversight that Candavatī’s inscription, or the inscriptions of other noblewomen from Poḷonnaruva, have been so long overlooked. Rather, it is symptomatic of a broader problem in our historiography of the Poḷonnaruva period, and therefore of our histories of how the Theravāda came to be as it is today.

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<sup>4</sup> Dates generally follow those given in the UCHC, unless otherwise noted.

Our understanding of Poḷonnaruva’s religious transformation has, so far, been overwhelmingly based on a single source: the thirteenth-century “extension” to the *Mahāvamsa* composed in the Daṁbadeṇiya-based court of Parākramabāhu II (r. c. 1236–1269).<sup>5</sup> “The Chronicle” (as it is often designated, always capitalised)<sup>6</sup> focuses its attentions on the careers of two exemplary kings: Vijayabāhu I (r. c. 1070–1110), who rose up against his Śiva-worshipping Cōḷa overlords, established an independent kingdom based at Poḷonnaruva, and then re-vitalised the monastic orders which had suffered under Cōḷa tyranny; and Parākramabāhu I, who reunited the island after a period of fragmentation, and then reunited the three *nikāyas* under Mahāvihāra-oriented leadership. The *Mahāvamsa*’s androcentric focus is echoed in two Sinhala-language texts also frequently consulted for information about Poḷonnaruva: the thirteen-century *Pūjāvaliya* (on which see Blackburn 2024, 54–61) and the fourteenth-century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* (Bretfeld 2022). While a number of sources originating from within the Poḷonnaruva period

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<sup>5</sup> This text is sometimes called *Cūlavamsa* to distinguish it from the fifth-century “original.” As the text clearly positions itself as an extension to that original, and continues to name itself “*mahāvamsa*” at the end of each chapter, I retain this naming convention. Given their self-representation as seamless “continuations,” dating the *Mahāvamsa* sections is difficult. S. Wickramasinghe (1958) argues (11–19) that Chapters 33–57 were written by a different author than were Chapters 57–79 (which cover the Poḷonnaruva period up to the death of Parākramabāhu I); she suggests that the former section, because it seems to express a “personal resentment” towards the Cōḷas (18), was written during the period of Cōḷa occupation, while the latter was likely a product of Dhammakitti II in the court of Parākramabāhu II.

<sup>6</sup> This “Chronicle” naming convention is significant. A chronicle is, in the medieval European tradition, a document which lists a combination of local and more general events without distinguishing between them in “significance.” These documents were also, often, updated periodically; such chronicles are therefore often treated as first-hand primary evidence of a given historical moment. This is in contrast to other genres of writing about sequences of events (“histories”), which *do* make an obvious effort to highlight events deemed “significant.” Casting the *Mahāvamsa* as a “chronicle” is therefore an attempt to assign it a certain degree of verity. However, as White (1987) shows, European “chronicles” are indeed constituted of significant interpretive choices (16–22); the same is clearly true of the *Mahāvamsa*, which (as Scheible 2016 shows for its fifth-century core) *explicitly* aims to present events “of the past” for present purposes (namely to evoke “the serene joy and emotion of the pious”).

itself have long been available to historians, including a vast inscriptional corpus, these have primarily been consulted only as supplementary to the retrospective textual narratives.<sup>7</sup>

The dangers of such a myopic focus on these later texts are compounded when we consider the thirteenth-century context of the *Pūjāvaliya* and *Mahāvamsa* extension. Both were produced in, and so were responsive to the more immediate concerns of, the court of Parākramabāhu II (Blackburn 2024, chap. 1). These concerns resulted in a very particular narrative of the Poḷonnaruva period: a narrative of heroic and pious kings who fought back Tamil and Sanskritic heresies<sup>8</sup> to “restore” the Pali-oriented Buddhism of the Mahāvihāra to its “proper” dominance over the island. Like other *vamsa* texts, in other words, the *Mahāvamsa* extension was

composed not as neutral accounts of the *sāsana*’s unfolding, but in the explicit or implicit service of a particular monastic group, generally in the context of a competitive local and/or regional monastic conversation (or debate) about the purity and authenticity of various lineages and their practices (Blackburn 2015a, 316).

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<sup>7</sup> S. Wickramasinghe’s (1954) introduction to Poḷonnaruva’s inscriptions, in her comprehensive overview of sources for the period’s history, provides an illustrative example. Her explanation for the historical value of these inscriptions rests on her claim that “the Ceylon inscriptions... very often corroborate statements in the [*Mahāvamsa*] and occasionally supplement the knowledge we have from the latter source. It is only very seldom that these inscriptions contradict the [*Mahāvamsa*] account of the period” (174–5). Similar sentiments are repeatedly throughout various epigraphical publications (*Epigraphia Zeylanica* and *Inscriptions of Ceylon*); “standard” histories such as the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* and de Silva’s (1981) *History of Sri Lanka* largely just “paraphrase” (in the words of Walters 2000, 163) the *Mahāvamsa*’s account, with some inscriptional details interjected throughout. Inscriptions, in other words, have served only to flesh out the positivist details of Poḷonnaruva’s story, while the general contours of the *Mahāvamsa*’s narrative remain ossified at its core.

<sup>8</sup> My mention here of Tamil is in reference to the popular but problematic assumption that—while at least some of those engaged in the Sanskrit world were overtly Buddhist—Tamil as a language and the Tamil country as a geographical region were devoted almost exclusively to the worship of Śiva. In reality, Tamil-speaking Southern India has always been religiously diverse, and Tamil-language Buddhism (on both sides of the Palk Strait) flourished before, during, and after the period under discussion (Monius 2001; Schalk and Vēluppiḷai 2002).

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the historical events related in the *Mahāvamsa* were invented wholesale: Vijayabāhu I *really did* expel his Cōḷa overlords to declare his independent kingship; Parākramabāhu I *really did* unite the island and then initiate monastic reforms which would forever influence Buddhism across the Indian Ocean region; later monarchs like Niśsaṅka Malla and Līlāvātī *really did* struggle to maintain control while the kingdom splintered and ultimately fell apart around them. However, even if we accept the veracity of these historical events we must acknowledge the interpretive choices which the *Mahāvamsa*'s author made in narrativizing them. Here I am following Hayden White's insights that no "historical writing" is truly objective, but is—necessarily—a subjective emplotment of past events in ways sensible to the author's own social and intellectual context.<sup>9</sup> The extent to which we have accepted the narrativization of Poḷonnaruva contained within the *Mahāvamsa*, *Pūjāvaliya*, and *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* as historical fact has skewed our understanding of the period, and therefore, crucially, of the circumstances under which the Mahāvihāra's version of Buddhism eventually became dominant across the Indian Ocean.

This dissertation therefore constitutes a radical revision of Poḷonnaruva's history, eschewing entirely these later accounts in favour of *only* those sources which we know to have originated from within the period: primarily, and most reliably, the inscriptional record (discussed further below). On the basis of these sources, I am able to make a range of arguments intervening in broader scholarly debates. At the broadest level, I demonstrate that the intellectual and institutional histories of

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<sup>9</sup> See, most influentially, White's (1973) *Metahistory*; for White productively applied to Sri Lankan *vamsa* texts, see Berkwitz (2004) and Scheible (2016).

“Buddhism,” “politics,” and “gender” were fundamentally entangled in the Poḷonnaruva period, and that we therefore cannot adequately study any one without also attending closely to the others. The following sections lay out more specific arguments: about the intellectual dynamism of Buddhist kingship; about the overlooked significance of noblewomen in Poḷonnaruva’s political culture; and about the methodological and evidentiary foundations on which we can build more detailed intellectual histories.

## **Buddhist Kingship**

Central to this dissertation are the shifting ideas about what it meant to be a “good king.” We have assumed for far too long that the answer to this remained more or less static and self-contained over time: that the ideals of “Buddhist kingship” were both (1) narrowly confined to only those phenomena we today consider “Buddhist” (primarily in contrast to “Hindu kingship”); and (2) more or less contiguous from the earliest “canonical texts” down to the violent imposition of colonial governance and Christian proselytization.<sup>10</sup> In other words, any “Buddhist king” from Aśoka to Ayutthaya worked from within the same strictly limited political imaginaire: an ahistorical construct we refer to as “Buddhist kingship.”

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<sup>10</sup> As Mancall (2010) starkly put it, “Political theory in the Buddhist world is primarily a response to the encounter and confrontation with the modern and the Western... Traditional society throughout the Buddhist world never ceased changing, but this did not require the reconceptualization of society and the polity as profoundly, and as theoretically, as has the impact of the West” (n.p.).

This neat construct is tested, however, by the sheer abundance of evidence of historical Buddhist kings acting in ways apparently contrary to our idealised “Buddhist kingship.”<sup>11</sup> These monarchs’ “failure” to live up to the standards we have set them, based on our readings of canonical Pali literature, has caused conceptual issues for modern historians and religio-nationalist narratives alike—issues to which they have largely responded by questioning whether these individuals were “really” Buddhist kings at all. Rather, they must have been waylaid by the “influences” of some external force: theist practices; Mahāyāna heresies; local or populist superstitions. Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs are certainly not unfamiliar with such critiques. In particular, as discussed in Chapter Four, Vikramabāhu I and his son Gajabāhu II are both routinely characterised by modern historians as a Śaiva (Śiva-worshipping), rather than Buddhist, kings. There is certainly some truth to the notion that Poḷonnaruva’s kings looked to wider models of kingship: as I argue throughout this dissertation, they seem to have found the ideals and practices of kingship circulating in Sanskritic and Tamil worlds at least as influential as they did those laid out in “canonical” Pali texts. Given this, we might validly wonder whether these monarchs truly are best considered “Buddhist kings,” and whether this dissertation is really a study of “Buddhist kingship” after all.

A valid scholarly response to ahistorical notions of “Buddhist kingship” is to discard the concept altogether, in favour of more nuanced terminology not so baggage-laden. Thus Blackburn (2024), for

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<sup>11</sup> We might take this as one instance in the long list of “apparent contradiction[s] between the highest ideals and goals of Theravada Buddhism and the actual lived tradition in Southeast Asia [which] has long perplexed Western scholars” (Swearer 2010, 1).

example, argues that that later polities across Southern Asia are best regarded not as “Buddhist kingdoms,” but as “Buddhist-*inflected* sovereignties.”<sup>12</sup> This move shifts our focus firmly onto the transcultural connections underlying these polities’ ideals of kingship, and so displaces the narrow insistence on representations of kings in the Pali canon which has so distracted past generations of scholarship. Such an approach is, clearly, extremely productive, and offers us new and more nuanced ways of conceptualising kingship’s contingent relationship(s) to Buddhism. However, I remain convinced that there is some heuristic value to be found in the concept of “Buddhist kingship,” if it can be reconciled with the more capacious and cosmopolitan practices of kingship found in premodern Southern Asia.

I am motivated in this defence of “Buddhist kingship” by what I see as an emic invocation from within Poḷonnaruva itself. As many scholars have noted, the concept of “Buddhism” in use today—as a “religion,” as an “identity,” as an “-ism”—is a decidedly modern construction without a one-to-one equivalent in the premodern period.<sup>13</sup> The closest emic term from medieval Sri Lanka is *Buddha-śāsana*: literally “the teachings of the Buddha.” This term is often used to refer to something like the institutions which preserve and promote those teachings, but never (unlike modern “Buddhism-as-religion”) to individuals, much less non-monastic individuals. Some individuals are, however, referred to with adjective *bauddha*: an abstractive meaning something like “of the Buddha.” We see this most frequently

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<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Anne Blackburn for generously sharing with me earlier copies of the manuscript. Ruminating on her argument over this longer period of time has proved invaluable in shaping my own thoughts in this section.

<sup>13</sup> The modern origins of “religion” is a well-worn path to tread. Key landmarks include J. Smith’s (1998) critical definition of key terms; Asad’s (1993) genealogical critique; Masuzawa (2005) on the colonial origins of “comparative religions”; and McCutcheon (2001) against “religious studies” itself as a distinct discipline.

in Sanskrit philosophical literature, in which proponents of a distinctly *bauddha* ontology distinguish themselves from their Mīmāṃsīkā and Nyāya rivals.<sup>14</sup> It also occurs, however, in a relatively small number of royal inscriptions, including one from Poḷonnaruva: the Galpota inscription of Niśśaṅka Malla (IC VI:24).<sup>15</sup> As discussed in Chapter Five, here Niśśaṅka Malla juxtaposes himself—an explicitly Buddhist king—against his *abauddha* rivals in the Cōḷa and Pāṇḍya polities, suggesting that such a distinction was meaningful in medieval Sri Lanka.<sup>16</sup>

Niśśaṅka Malla may have been the only Poḷonnaruvan monarch to explicitly refer to his rivals as un-Buddhist (*abauddha*), but he was far from alone in expressing a particular affinity for the Buddha-*śāsana*. The majority of royal figures discussed throughout this dissertation describe themselves as engaged in acts of worship (*pūjā*) oriented towards the Buddha or his relics (*dhātus*), or express an understanding that as monarchs they are in some way obligated to protect, preserve, or make prosper the *śāsana*. We are told that Vijayabāhu declared himself king in order “to protect the Buddha-*śāsana*” (*buddhar cāsana rakṣitta*, TISL 42, 8); that Parākramabāhu desired to personally serve the Buddha-*śāsana*

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<sup>14</sup> These rivals are often grouped, by modern scholars and practitioners alike, under a general heading of “Hinduism.” On the complex history of the various sects, movements, and philosophical traditions which later became “Hinduism” see Nicholson (2010; cf. Fisher 2017). In brief: rather than a singular theistic institution, we see more frequently instead sects oriented towards individual deities as the supreme godhead (Śaivas for Śiva; Vaiṣṇavas for Viṣṇu; less frequently in this period Sauryas for the sun god Sūrya), alongside other philosophical/soteriological movements like the functionally atheistic Mīmāṃsā, which clashed philosophically with, and competed for patronage amongst, one another at least as often as they did their Buddhist and Jain rivals.

<sup>15</sup> Beyond Sri Lanka, we see this term most frequently in Pāla inscriptions, which routinely contain the epithet “Best of Buddhists” (*paramabauddha*).

<sup>16</sup> By “meaningful” here I intend only that the terms *bauddha* and *abauddha* could be uttered with the expectation that the distinction was intelligible to at least *some* audiences; not that those audiences would necessarily have themselves agreed with Niśśaṅka Malla’s implicit arguments about who “ought” to sit on Sri Lanka’s throne.

(*budusasunaṭa mā vahal vuva*, IC IV:13, 8) and “further the world and the *śāsana*” (*losasun āti karavami*, IC VI:15, 13); and that Līlāvati’s reign “brought peace to the world and the *śāsana*” (*lokaśāsana semehi tabā*, IC VI:90, 10–11). Such references, I demonstrate in the following chapters, are not incidental to how these individuals understood themselves as monarchs. Rather, their various engagements with the Buddha-*śāsana* represented a crucial arena for the performance of kingship;<sup>17</sup> publicly engaging with this arena, through demonstrations of support for the *śāsana*, seems to have therefore been an extremely high priority. What interests us, of course, is not merely the fact that Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs professed obligations towards Buddhism. Rather, we are concerned with the considerably varied actions which they describe themselves as carrying out in fulfilment of these obligations, and how these actions in turn shaped the development of Theravāda Buddhism throughout the Poḷonnaruva period. What form or forms of “Buddhism” are considered worthy of such support? What forms of relationship with the *saṅgha* are enabled or even necessitated by such obligations: respect for their institutional autonomy; or interference intended to rectify internal disciplinary lapses? Such questions starkly divided Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs.

References to *bauddha-rājas* and obligations to the Buddha-*śāsana* allow us to take “Buddhist kingship” as a valid subject of analysis. We should not extrapolate out from such references, however, a starkly dichotomous account of “Buddhists” on the one hand and “Śaivas” on the other. Such an account poorly fits the evidence from Poḷonnaruva, which suggests a more inclusive and fluid set of soteriological

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<sup>17</sup> By “the performance of kingship” here I intend to evoke contemporary theories of social performativity, particularly Butler’s (1999) “performativity of gender.”

practices.<sup>18</sup> While certain professionals—Buddhist monks, Śaiva priests, Brahmins, royal *purohitas*—were certainly oriented towards very particular “religious” institutions, this seems to have only rarely resulted in an outright rejection of alternatives. The royal anointment (*abhiṣeka*) procedure described in the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini* (a c. tenth century commentary on the *Mahāvamsa*), for example, has the royal *purohita* (hereditary priest) symbolically represent the collective interests of Brahmins, while Buddhist monks are nowhere to be seen in the ritual (VAP I:305–6).<sup>19</sup> Buddha-centric poetry, such as the *Muvadev Dā Vata*, freely used Śaiva iconography to construct aesthetically pleasing metaphors.<sup>20</sup> Śaiva *bhakti* (devotional practices) may also have played a part in the emergence of what Hallisey (1988) calls *mamāyana* (“the Vehicle of ‘Mine’”): the identification of the Buddha as “our Buddha” (*apē budu*, a term which recurs frequently in the inscriptions discussed throughout this dissertation).<sup>21</sup> And, most tellingly, the very same Galpota inscription in which Niśsaṅka Malla claimed to be a “Buddhist king” prominently features a figure of Lakṣmī (see Figure 1.2), the consort of Viṣṇu and embodiment of prosperity (*śrī*).<sup>22</sup> To

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<sup>18</sup> Against such a dichotomous approach as applied to Poḷonnaruva’s art and architecture, see particularly Meegama (2010).

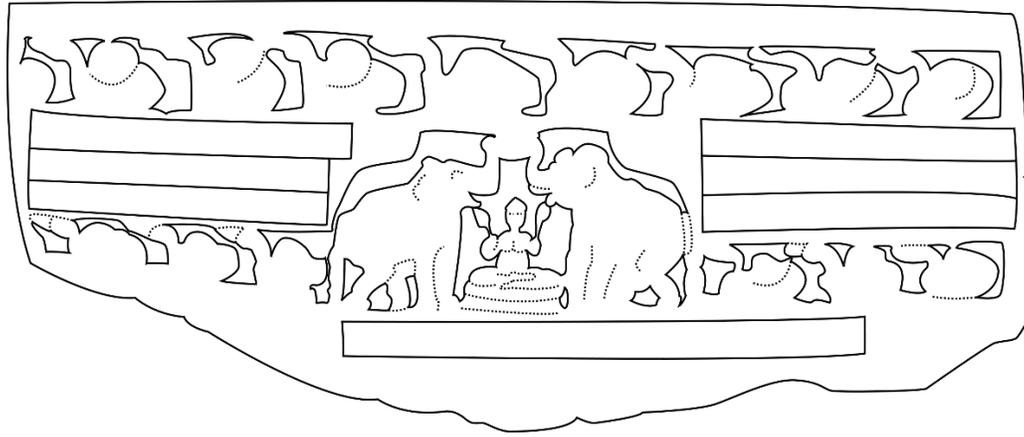
<sup>19</sup> This passage would later be copied, verbatim, by Parākramabāhu’s *mahāsvāmin* Śāriputra in the introduction to his *Sāratthadīpanī* (a *ṭīkā* on Buddhaghosa’s *Samantapāsādikā*). See further Gunasena (1974, 171–74) and Walters (2000, 130).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., the *Muvadev Dā Vata*’s favourable comparison of its titular king’s palace to Śiva/Hara’s own mountain-top dwelling: “Entering inside the great palace, Hara doubted: ‘Is this Kailāsa, so large and white?!’ In its luminescence, the half-moon decorating his tresses appeared full” (MDV 12, *paḷa hela kelesa hoyi lāṅgeta rudu pahakus hara | daḷa lakāḷa kalā sisī rasnī lada pabasarā*). This verse indicates not only that the *Muvadev Dā Vata*’s author was familiar with Śiva’s iconography, but that the poem’s audiences were similarly expected to understand the references.

<sup>21</sup> For Hallisey’s nuanced take on this Śaiva “influence” see his 178–86. Note particularly the discussion of anti-Śaiva rhetoric in the latter pages.

<sup>22</sup> The image is carved on the southernmost vertical face of the Galpota, above a short colophon relating the details of the inscription’s construction. The apparently documentary nature of this colophon has led to it being

be “Buddhist” in Poḷonnaruva, in other words, did not necessarily mean to be “not non-Buddhist,” or *vice versa*.



**Figure 1.2: southern face of the Galpota, facing the image of Lakṣmī**

All of the above suggests the necessity of a more capacious understanding of the “Buddhist” in our Buddhist kingship. Poḷonnaruva’s kings were not, I argue in the following pages, “deviating” from a predetermined ideal laid out in the Pali canon; rather, they were actively *constituting* “Buddhist kingship” through their selective engagement with models available to them in a wide variety of canons and contexts. That engagement was made most visible in acts of royal patronage of Buddhist institutions, which provided both an opportunity to perform certain practices of kingship and—vitaly, for our purposes—to record that ephemeral performance in the inscriptional form still available to us today. Tracing the history of those engagements—and the manifold ways in which these visions conflicted with

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interpreted as a postscript in modern critical editions, in which it is usually printed *after* the main text of the inscription. However, the location of the Galpota within the Sacred Quadrangle necessitates that viewers approach it from the south: the colophon and Lakṣmī are, in fact, the first part of the inscription with which one engages.

one another—provides us with a more capacious understanding of what it could mean to be a “Buddhist king” at this historically vital moment.

It is important to note that my focus on “kingship” should not be taken as a return to the “great man” model of history, in which we focus primarily on individual kings and their actions. As Ali (2004) argues, “kingship” as both a concept and a practice transcends the figure of the individual king (5). Nor do I take the view that discourses of idealised kingship were cynically manipulated in order to “legitimise” either individual kings or the entire institution of autocratic rule. The “legitimation” approach has been much critiqued in recent years.<sup>23</sup> Rather, I align this work with a more recent wave of scholarship which interrogates the varied and highly contextual intellectual histories of “kingship” in second millennium Sri Lanka (particularly Berkwitz 2016; 2019a; 2019b; 2023), across Southern Asia (Blackburn 2024; Cox 2016; Moin 2012; Thompson 2016), and throughout the wider Buddhist world (Balkwill 2015; Bryson 2019; McBride 2021; and the essays in Balkwill and Benn 2022). These works together orient us towards more nuanced histories of political thought in Asia: not a brittle edifice of “Buddhist values,” cast in unyielding iron from supposedly authoritative texts; but an intricate mesh of steel links, each forged in context and interwoven with those before, after, and adjacent.

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<sup>23</sup> See most influentially Pollock (2006, 514–23); for Sri Lanka specifically see Blackburn (2001, 90). As Gellner (2017) observes, however, while Pollock “is certainly right that simply invoking ‘legitimation,’ and not asking probing questions about timing, chronology, dissent, contest, etc., is lazy and in itself not much of an explanation” (225), the alternative conception of “power” which Pollock offers bears remarkable resemblance to what Max Weber described, long ago, under the banner of *die Legitimität* (see further McCrea 2013, 123).

## Engendering Buddhist History

My pointed references to “kingship” (rather than the gender-neutral terms “monarchy” or “sovereignty”)<sup>24</sup> above orient us towards what is perhaps the most significant finding of this dissertation: the desperate need to reconsider the contested relationship(s) between gender and power in Poḷonnaruva, and the implications for our understanding of Buddhist history more generally. Most immediately, this reconsideration involves the recovery of historical actors beyond the normatively masculine: actors whose acts are often obscured by our over-reliance on later texts written by certain elite men (particularly monastic literati) who devote much of their efforts to valorising the deeds of other elite men (masculine kings). Such recovery is a necessary corrective to the androcentric approach taken in these monastic writings and uncritically reproduced in modern historiography. As Andaya (2006, 52–55) points out, such recovery is made particularly challenging in premodern Southern Asia the relative lack of alternative voices available to us.<sup>25</sup> However, this situation is far from unique to our region, and we can benefit here from the pioneering work done by feminist scholars of the more global medieval. Nolan’s (2009) description of the difficulties of “reading women's lives, especially powerful women's

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<sup>24</sup> The English language is unusual, but by no means unique, in its sharp etymological and semantic distinction between “king” (always signifying a man in power) and “queen” (from a proto-Germanic root meaning “wife” or “woman,” and referring to either a woman in power or the wife of a powerful man). See further Earenfight (2007) and Woodacre (2021, 6–7).

<sup>25</sup> Looking to earlier Buddhist literature, of course, we are blessed with what may be the single largest corpus of poems in women’s voices from premodern South Asia, in the form of the *Therīgāthā*. See particularly the recent re-translation with an introduction by Hallisey (2015). In Sri Lanka, the *Dīpavaṃsa* lists the names of multiple female monastics, several of whom are specifically praised as scholars and literati (see Gunawardana 1988, particularly 13). There is also a long-standing theory that the *Dīpavaṃsa* may itself have been composed by female monastics (Scheible 2016, 143–44). These texts are, sadly, relative outliers.

lives, through the words of suspicious male monastics, [which] requires careful sorting through the biases and motivations of the author" (13) sounds all too familiar to those of us working on premodern Southern Asia, despite the geographical and cultural distance from her Capetian France. Nolan's response—which I enthusiastically emulate throughout this work—is to focus instead on material culture, which she argues often allowed powerful women more direct expression of their own agency.

A pattern is evident amidst this inscriptional evidence. The actions of powerful women—specifically, royal consorts—seems to have become more visible in the inscriptional record during periods of decentralised political control. During the reigns of Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I, two of the longest-reigning and (as far as we can tell) politically centralised monarchs, royal consorts are referred to only rarely in others' inscriptions, and we have access to none of their own inscriptions. It is only in periods of relative instability that we see clear references to these women's status in their husband's inscriptions, have evidence of these women patronising Buddhist institutions, and ultimately see two of these women—Kalyāṇavatī and Lilāvatī—sit on the throne themselves. That two of Sri Lanka's five pre-colonial female monarchs ruled in such close proximity suggests that something rather unusual took place in the political landscape of Poḷonnaruva, necessitating a structural explanation.

I cautiously advance such an explanation in the following chapters. In Chapter Three, I argue—building particularly on Day (1996) and Loos (2005)—that the status of royal consorts, particularly their connections to powerful mainland dynasties, gained greater discursive significance during the power struggles which marked the period between the reigns of Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu. While these women may have been thrust into the spotlight to shore up their husbands' claims to power, their

prominence seems to have also afforded them more autonomy in their own deeds, allowing women like Sundarā to patronise Mahāvihāra-affiliated monasteries. During the political instability following Parākramabāhu's death, I argue in chapters Five and Six, anxieties about dynastic security led to monarchs like Niśśaṅka Malla explicitly including royal consorts in the line of succession. He seems to have intended that these women would safeguard the throne for future (male) heirs, but this may well have provided the precedent for Līlāvati and Kalyāṇavatī to eventually be crowned. I argue, in other words, that political instability seems to have provided *opportunities* for the autonomy and even authority of royal women, not available to them under the rule of powerful men.

Why have these opportunities, and the women who took them up, gone overlooked for so long? I have suggested above that one cause of this historiographic exclusion is the relative paucity of non-male voices from medieval Southern Asia. This paucity is, in turn, partly the result of a historical attitude: what Gomez (2022) describes as “a ubiquitous sentiment in the Sanskrit tradition: that women cannot or should not speak Sanskrit” (6). However, it is not only (some) premodern Sanskritists who are adverse to female voices; in a more recent publication, Gomez (2023) writes that

Scholars, confronted with Sundarī and Kamalā's authorial production, have expressed remarkable anxiety over its attribution. Did they or did they not write it? Does it express a female voice or is it an artificial female voice? ...Anecdotally, this [suspicion of Sundarī and Kamalā's authorship] is the most widely held view, and the first question scholars ask upon hearing about the commentaries of Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives Sundarī and Kamalā (20).

I can corroborate Gomez's anecdotal evidence: in every public presentation I have given on the inscriptions of Līlāvati and Kalyāṇavatī, Poḷonnaruva's two regnant monarchs, I have received at least one question about these women's direct involvement in the crafting of their epigraphic self-

presentation. This is, in some ways, a fair question: monarchs were, as Ali (2004) puts it, “manifestly complex agents” (5), and a whole host of other officials, literati, and artisans would have been involved in the production of Līlāvātī and Kalyāṇavatī’s inscriptions.<sup>26</sup> However, it is telling that I have never been asked this question of the period’s *male* monarchs, who are generally referred to as having “written X inscription” with no further need for qualification. Similarly, although thankfully in a less contemporary example, Thompson (2016) has critiqued Coèdès for his treatment of Indradevī’s Phimeanakas inscription (c. twelfth century), the only Sanskrit *praśasti* in the Cambodian corpus composed by a woman. While Coèdès accepts that Indradevī did indeed write the *praśasti* herself, his only comment on the unique nature of this instance of Sanskrit textual production is that it is “remarkably correct, while nonetheless written in a language much more simple than the productions of the prince-authors of [other inscriptions]” (quoted and discussed in Thompson, 122-3, 184). In other words, modern scholars seem to have accepted the medieval assumption that literary production was the realm of men (even “manifestly complex” men). Before accepting that a premodern text genuinely does reflect a non-masculine voice, we require more definitive evidence of personal involvement, and we then consider it “remarkable” that such voices can express themselves “correctly” in such fundamentally masculine languages as Sanskrit.

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<sup>26</sup> Those familiar with the historiography of Poḷonnaruva will recall at this point the presence of powerful men in the courts of Līlāvātī and Kalyāṇavatī, generally understood to have been the real power behind the throne with the women themselves as mere “puppet queens.” As I discuss in Chapter Six, this perspective is based primarily on, again, the descriptions of these courts in literary texts which sought to maintain kingship’s inherent masculinity. Evidence from Līlāvātī’s reign in particular suggests that she maintained certain policies across multiple reigns (and therefore across the influence of multiple “puppet-masters”). I argue that the simplest explanation is the most likely: that Līlāvātī herself exercised agency as a monarch.

Our uncritical acceptance of essentialised gender binaries, in other words, has blinded us to key evidence of historical actors on the “wrong side” of those binaries (let alone those who transcended such binaries altogether). This uncritical acceptance of masculinist ideologies risks not only inaccurate depictions of historical pasts; it naturalises binary essentialism, and so can inadvertently justify patriarchal oppression as a “universal norm.”<sup>27</sup> To counter this bias, I therefore draw heavily—if cautiously, bearing in mind its overwhelmingly Western and modern origins—on contemporary gender theory, which I argue provides us with the most powerful tools available to simultaneously (1) accurately identify the influence of historical women on the history of Buddhism, and (2) track the discursive construction of “womanhood” itself, and its supposed limitations. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, attending to inscriptional discourses about “femininity,” and the actions of women recorded in those inscriptions, allows us to identify parallel developments throughout the period. To do so is not to dismiss “social reality” in favour of an abstract history of ideas; rather, it is to acknowledge that the discursive and the social are necessarily entwined and mutually constitutive.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> To take a particularly pointed example, Wentworth (2011) tells us that a constant premise of premodern India was that “Womanhood is a nature that responds to the bewitching radiance of power, instinctively yielding its promise of a nourishing fertility to a display of might experienced as natural, total, and right. Across its vast sweep of regions, eras, and cultures, India has always maintained a tightly welded bond between the sexual and the political” (2). Wentworth’s insistence on this naturally bewitched and yielding womanhood is made particularly grating by the fact that his own preceding examples contain no mention of women whatsoever: his quotation from Valmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* emphasises Rāma’s masculine beauty; and his quotation from Kampaṇ’s later Tamil adaption refers to men who want to *become* women in order to be with Rāma. That either of these verses illustrates “womanhood’s nature” and its relationship to men in power is entirely Wentworth’s projection.

<sup>28</sup> I acknowledge here that the two goals I have outlined—the recovery of women’s agency, and the deconstruction of gendered assumptions—are often perceived, I think incorrectly, to be at odds with one another. This is a common critique, by both feminist scholars and activists, of Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, a work which has found an audience far broader than that which Butler themselves originally intended (Patel 2020; Loos 2020; Butler 2020). This critique is

It is worth expanding on my note of caution. A growing number of scholars have cautioned us against assuming that not only the specific genders of “man” and “woman,” but the very ontological category of “gender” itself, are to be found in every historical context. Very often, these scholars argue, the mapping of “gender” and genders onto those contexts was a vital part of the colonial mission of categorisation and control (Lugones 2020; Oyěwùmí 1997). As I have argued elsewhere (Shirley 2022), such an understanding of “gender’s” historical contingency necessitates that we embark on our study of gender from first principles: approaching our historical context *on its own terms*, and beginning from what we find there rather than from what we expect to be gendered.<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that none of Sri Lanka’s medieval languages had a single conceptual term for which we can simply substitute “gender.” Even in modern Sinhala, theorists are divided over the most conceptually accurate translation; Chamila Somirathna, for example, suggests *samājalimṅikatvaya* (lit. “being socially marked”) over the more common *strīpuruṣabhāvaya* (“being female [or] male”).<sup>30</sup> The nuances at stake here, even in a modern

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largely based on a misreading of Butler’s argument as intending that gender is *merely* performative (thus rendering needless, or at least misdirected, “feminist” activism). However, to acknowledge that “gender is performative” is by no means to suggest that “gender is insignificant,” or to disagree that androcentric biases in extant historiography are in dire need of feminist correction. Butler reflects on this misreading of *Gender Trouble*, and attempts to clarify matters, in their later monograph *Bodies That Matter*.

<sup>29</sup> Errington (1990) provides us with an exemplary model on these lines. Writing specifically about Southeast Asia, she suggests that we begin by examining a given society’s ideas about the body; proceed to how the society expects a person to properly use that body; and finally consider the degrees of access to or exclusion from power that the bodily usage allows. This necessarily results, she emphasises, in an intersectional understanding of “gender,” constructed from the emic concerns of the society being studied rather than the etic interests of the student.

<sup>30</sup> Somirathna makes these arguments in a yet-unpublished article, entitled *Vēdikāva mata raṅgapāma saha sābā lōkaya tuḷa raṅgapāma: Edirivīra Saraccandragē manamē saha Juḍit Baṭlargē samājalimṅikatva rangakriyākārī nyāya* (Performance on the Stage and Performance in the Real World: Edirivīra Saraccandra’s *Manamē* and Judith Butler’s Theory of Gender Performativity). I am grateful to her for kindly sharing an early draft of this important work.

context fully engaged with contemporary gender theories, are indicative of the conceptual gulf between modern readers and medieval pasts. Nonetheless, I have argued in a yet-unpublished paper (Shirley in preparation a) that the social ontologies of medieval Sri Lanka do present us with a clear analogue for modern conceptions of “gender.” Textual sources from the period maintained a strict ontological distinction between “men” (Skt. *puruṣa*, P. *purisa*) and “women” (*strī*, *itthi*), understood to arise from essentialised *dharmas* (the *purisindriya* and *itthindriya* respectively) and exhibiting binarised physiologies (*liṅga*, *nimitta*) and psychologies (*ākappa*, *kutta*): all of which, I suggest, is at least *analogous* enough to modern gender ontologies to benefit from the application of modern gender theory.

In particular, I draw on Butler’s (1999) argument for the “performativity” of gender: the notion that genders are the contingent result of “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (43-44). Such a focus on performativity lends itself well to a study of gender’s connection with kingship, particularly in a premodern Asian context; we might well recall here Geertz’s (1980) notion of the “theatre state,” in which such stylised repetition played a central role. He tells us, for example, that

The state cult was not a cult of the state. It was an argument, **made over and over again in the insistent vocabulary of ritual**, that worldly status has a cosmic base, that hierarchy is the governing principle of the universe, and that the arrangements of human life are but approximations, more close or less, to those of the divine (102, emphasis added).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> I do not cite Geertz here as an endorsement of his abstracted “model of the *negara* as a distinct variety of political order... which can then be used generally to extend our understanding of the development history of Indic

As Andaya (2008) has more recently argued, in such argumentative performances of power “women were indispensable, usually in supporting roles but at times as directors and lead actors” (24). We might here productively turn to Loos’s (2005) argument that the political culture of later Siam “encompassed the accumulation of women as a necessary expression of masculine power, **not solely** a mode of creating political alliances” (888, emphasis added); or, looking further afield, Ebrey’s (2002) argument that *realpolitik* alone cannot explain the sheer numbers of women accumulated in Northern Song palaces. The discursive history, and performative construction of, gender and gender difference underlies the social strictures applied to specific genders; attending to this discursive history therefore *sharpens*, rather than distracts from, our sense of the social. Rather than only laying out the historical actions of “women”—actions subsequently shadowed by inherently patriarchal “men”—this dissertation therefore attends closely to shifting understandings of what, exactly, it meant to be a “man” or a “woman” in this period; how men and women were expected to perform their masculinity or femininity with respect, particularly, to Buddha-*śāsana*; and, crucially, how the subversion of these expectations by some individuals fundamentally altered both the construction of gender and the nature of Buddhism itself.

### **The (Trans)language of Politics**

The dominant account of language’s relation to power in Southern Asia remains that of Pollock’s (2006) first-millennium “Sanskrit cosmopolis,” giving way (around the time of our present study) to a

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Indonesia” (9); I find such abstractions suspiciously essentialised. Rather, I read in Geertz a useful call for us to take seriously the performative nature of power: not just in nineteenth century Bali, but in general.

“vernacular turn.”<sup>32</sup> This vernacular turn represented, he argues, a self-conscious re-fashioning of vernacular languages on an explicitly Sanskritised model, in order that they could then carry out the functions (both literary and political) previously only possible in Sanskrit. Pollock’s model has provoked considerable critical discussion, and so made a lasting and welcome theoretical contribution to our field. His treatment of Sri Lanka—building on the ever-insightful Hallisey (2003)—is nuanced, as he notes several points on which Lankan literary culture seems to challenge his model: critically, including the relative infrequency of Sanskrit-language royal inscriptions from the first millennium (Pollock 2006, 386–87).<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, his explanation for this divergence is misled by the common, but false, assumption of Pali’s eternal relevance to Sri Lankan royal culture.<sup>34</sup> An alternative model for understanding the linguistic choices made in royal inscriptions of the Poḷonnaruva period is clearly necessary.

Here I find it useful to turn to Pocock’s concept of a “political language,” as a shorthand for the linguistic context in which a given utterance is made, and the range of intelligible meanings which could therefore have been intended by it.<sup>35</sup> Individual words never have fixed meanings; rather, they have

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<sup>32</sup> To be more precise, Pollock’s focus is on *literature’s* relation to power, with literature defined at points as high poetry (*kāvya*) but elsewhere (particularly in his Chapter Three) also encompassing inscriptional culture.

<sup>33</sup> Other points of divergence include the extremely early use of Sinhala-language Brahmi inscriptions, and the early evidence of poetic Sinhala in the Sīgiri inscriptions.

<sup>34</sup> Pollock incorrectly asserts that inscriptions prior to the “vernacular turn” were “written in prosaic Pali” (387), and that the later rise of “Sanskrit-style praise poetry” (which I take as a reference to works like the *Pārākum̃bā Siritā*) utilises an *eḷu* (“pure”) Sinhala lexicon (i.e. free of Sanskrit loanwords) because “Sanskrit had long been mediated through Pali” (ibid.). Of course, this would not explain the lack of *Pali* loanwords in *eḷu* poetry! As Berkwitz (2016) has argued, these later poetic works seem to have been a continuation of, and response to, the inscriptional eulogies of the Poḷonnaruva period—which, as we will see, are replete with Sanskrit loanwords.

<sup>35</sup> This language of utterances and intentions is more often associated with the work of Pocock’s colleague Quentin Skinner (see, for a useful overview, the collection of essays in 2002); both in turn draw on the philosophy of John Austin (1962). In brief, Austin argued that all “utterances,” even those which appear to be merely descriptive (such

subjective and ever-varying frames of reference, specific ways in which they can be used to communicate specific and intelligible meanings (see particularly Pocock 1971, 14–15). This frame of reference constitutes the language-system of a given utterance, which both (1) demarcates the conceptual world by determining the range of conceivable and intelligible utterances, and (2) lends a certain authority to utterances which *are* so meaningful: utterances which we might call, following Blackburn’s (2007; 2024) invocation of Derrida, “citational.” Importantly, such systems are to be understood as neither closed nor static. Rather, any given utterance can seek to shift the underlying paradigm—the range of intelligible meanings—by conforming to (other elements of) the existing paradigm closely enough to borrow its authority.

A concrete example may help to illuminate this rather abstract discussion. Let us assume that an individual makes the claim “I am a good Buddhist king.” To understand what it means to be “a good Buddhist king,” we must first consider how both that individual and others in their immediate intellectual context elsewhere describe goodness, Buddhist-ness, and kingliness. These descriptions may be indirect: the statement “As a good Buddhist king, I routinely read *sūtras*” is, implicitly, an argument that “reading *sūtras*” is a behaviour expected of such kings; the statement “Behold that good Buddhist king, respectfully asking monks to recite *sūtras* in his presence” is, meanwhile, a counterargument that kings ought instead act otherwise. Any of these statements in isolation may be taken as merely

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as, famously, “the ice is thin over there”), actually contain some degree of illocutionary force (“I warn you, in the hope that you will move to safety: the ice is thin over there!”). Skinner argued that the primary task of the intellectual historian was to identify the intended illocutionary force behind past utterances, which “will always reflect a wish to impose a particular moral vision on the workings of the social world” (Skinner 2002, 1:180).

expressing a general admiration for a particular monarch; read together, however, a conceptual tension begins to emerge: ought a “good Buddhist king” read, or listen to the monastic recitation of, *sūtras*?

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

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

To be more explicit about the methodological aims of this dissertation: we cannot write histories of medieval Sri Lanka without engaging, to the best of our abilities, with all *four* of medieval Sri Lanka’s languages.<sup>36</sup> While Sinhala and Pali have long been a strong focus of epigraphists and textualists alike,

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<sup>36</sup> I emphasise here “to the best of our abilities” because I make no pretence of particular proficiency in Tamil. I am able to work with Poḷonnaruva’s Tamil-language inscriptions only because they are so heavily influenced by

sources in these languages have only relatively rarely been read as participant in a wider Sanskrit world. Tamil epigraphy, meanwhile, has been effectively siloed into a discrete field of study. It is indicative, I think, that the recent effort by the Department of Archaeology to republish Sri Lankan inscriptions in a single series, the *Inscriptions of Ceylon* (discussed further below), contains only Sinhala- and Pali-language inscriptions, while Tamil-language inscriptions are collected in a distinct volume (*Tamil Inscriptions of Sri Lanka*) published by the Department of Hindu Cultural Affairs. While many scholars, particularly those based in Sri Lanka, have certainly been capable of working in all four of these languages effectively, it is only relatively rarely that we have seen serious efforts to engage with primary sources in their original languages; to critically re-translate key texts and inscriptions in those languages; and to attempt to track between these languages the history of ideas and practices.

A number of recent doctoral dissertations have effectively demonstrated the benefits that can come of such an approach applied to medieval Sri Lanka. Justin Henry (2017) productively brings Tamil-language historical narratives (*purāṇas*) into conversation with Sinhala literature in his study of the “later medieval period” (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). McKinley (2018) draws on a wealth of sources—textual, inscriptional, and ethnographic—in both Sinhala and Tamil in his excavation of the layered histories of the Śrī Pāda (Adam’s Peak). His temporal scope spans the mountain’s earliest

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Sanskrit; Wickramasinghe suggests (in EZ II, 246) that they could nearly be considered Maṇipravāḷa (on which see Akepiyapornchai 2020), if they used more frequently “those bombastic expressions replete with Sanskrit *tatsamas*” which he considers characteristic of the language. For earlier Tamil inscriptions in Sri Lanka, and for wider Tamil literary production, I follow closely the published work of more skilled scholars. Nonetheless, even with these limitations, the following pages demonstrate the many fruits available to us when we read inscriptions in these languages *together*, in conversation, rather than anachronistically divide them on linguistic grounds.

geological formation through to the present day, but with a particular emphasis (in Chs. 3–5) on Buddhist, Śaiva, and Muslim narratives of the Peak beginning towards the end of the Poḷonnaruva period. Most recently, Friedrich (2020) has provided us with a granular study of the social and political transformations which took place between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, during which time (he argues convincingly) Tamil-speaking sodalities played a central role. My dissertation follows, I hope, in the model set by these scholars: by extending their methodological multilinguality temporally backwards into the Poḷonnaruva period “proper;” and also by narrowing its focus even more tightly onto the inscriptional record.

Finally, it is worth noting that the politics of language are not peripheral to the questions of gender’s construction, contestation, and reconstruction discussed above. Rather, they are central to them. Medieval thinkers routinely presented kingship as an inherently “masculine” position of power (Hansen 1992; Talbot 1995); this necessitates that power’s expression was, itself, performed and described in an adequately masculine fashion. This expression often, necessarily, involved the project of masculine power through and onto a discursively feminised subject: a heteropatriarchal form of masculinity. As Sutherland Goldman (2000) has pointed out, it is not insignificant that the (grammatically and semantically feminine) Vedic Goddess Vāc, “speech,” dwells in the minds and mouths of erudite men (63–7). The construction of speech as a feminine possession of men, she argues, encodes “anxieties that underlie issues of sexual power and possession” (76). By the medieval period Vāc was invoked less frequently than was Sarasvatī, whose remit was broader (including arts, particularly music), but who still nonetheless spent her time in men’s minds and mouths (particularly the mouth[s] of her four-headed

husband Brahma). The opening of the *Siyabaslakara*, for example, follows Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa* by asking that "the all-white swan Sarasaviya, who emerges from the lotus-forest mouth of the Four-Headed One, adorn the blossoming Maṇḍāv Pond, the mind of poets" (SBL 1:1).<sup>37</sup> The Poḷonnaruva-period *Muvadev Dā Vata*, meanwhile, offers us the delightfully innuendo-laden claim that "While sitting in the womb of a blossoming lotus, which is the mouth of that Elephant among Men [Muvadev himself], Sarasaviya does not feel the wind of Mahabaṁba's cow-tail fan" (MDV 2:40).<sup>38</sup> So firmly is Sarasvatī in the mouth of Muvadev, in other words, that her own husband cannot access her. If we wish to discuss Sanskrit, for example, as an aestheticized "language of power," without explicitly reflecting on these heteropatriarchal assumptions, we can only reproduce and naturalise them.<sup>39</sup>

## The Inscriptural Corpus

As I have indicated above, inscriptions are far from underutilised in Sri Lankan history. They are primarily read, however, at face value: as sources to be mined for detailed positivist data about the locations of *vihāras* or the titles of royal officials.<sup>40</sup> This kind of data can, as studies from mainland South Asia have increasingly shown, prove extremely effective in challenging the narrow biases of textual

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<sup>37</sup> sadāvā muva taṁbara venenada sivumuvā | sarasaviyahasa savsudu kivisit pul meṇdevuvil. Hallisey, Meegaskumbura and Gornall (2023) provide a far richer translation (152-154); what I provide here is intended only to illustrate my wider point about the gender of language, and I encourage readers interested further in this verse or work to turn instead to Hallisey, Meegaskumbura, and Gornall.

<sup>38</sup> vasatenaravaraṇā muva pul taṁburu gābehī | mahabaṁba no lada vidunā sarasaviya val vidunā.

<sup>39</sup> See the critiques of Pollock for overlooking both "the recurrent sexualised paradigm of cosmopolitan-vernacular relations" (Thompson 2016, 176) and the "absolute gendering of the Sanskrit voice as male" (Gomez 2023, 171).

<sup>40</sup> For a representative (and valuable) example of this positivist approach, see Perera's meticulous two-volume *Institutions of Ancient Ceylon from Inscriptions* (2001; 2005).

sources. I am of course indebted here to Schopen's (1991) landmark argument that textual sources provide us with only very particular views of what "Buddhism" ought to look like; views often challenged or subverted by consideration of material sources on their own terms. This seems to particularly be the case when we consider questions of gender; in an argument closely related to the present study, Schopen has more specifically suggested that

If, because of an almost exclusive reliance on textual sources, our picture of the actual Indian Buddhist monk is more than a little skewed, the picture of the Indian Buddhist nun—for the same reason—has been almost obliterated (1988, 163).

Attending to inscriptional data has allowed us to increase our understanding of, for examples, the participation of Buddhist nuns in earlier donative practices (Milligan 2019; Schopen 1988, 163–65); and the ongoing involvement of royal women in temple patronage throughout the medieval period (Talbot 1991)—both highly suggestive trends for our own consideration of Polonnaruva.

But this is not the only way to read inscriptions. We might turn here to LaCapra's (1980) useful distinction between the "documentary" elements of a given text, which situate it "in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it," from those which are "work-like," which seek to intervene in that empirical reality (250). LaCapra stresses that all texts—even those which may appear *prima facie* to be merely documentary—contain elements of both the documentary and the work-like, if to varying degrees; this means that "a documentary historiography that tries to exclude interpretation or to see it only in the guise of bias, subjectivity, or anachronism" (272) is therefore necessarily missing half of the point of a given text. For all that

inscriptions can, therefore, provide us with positivist data, they are simultaneously rich textual sources, which tightly control the manner in which that data is presented.

This kind of approach has been increasingly applied to premodern Asia. Within South Asian Studies, Inden *et al.* (2000) have charged us with moving from a “philological to a dialogical” mode of reading, to consider texts (particularly inscriptional texts) not

as dead monuments, as mere sources of factual information or the expression of a creative and exotic genius that can only appreciate in itself for itself, or as the accidental expression/sedimentation of some larger structure or context... [but] as living arguments both in their historic uses and by virtue of our re-enactment of their arguments in our own present (14; see further Ali 2000, particularly 166).<sup>41</sup>

In studies which particularly inspired my own, Talbot (1995) and Thompson (2016) have shown the benefits of close attention to gendered inscriptional personae in, respectively, southern India and Cambodia. Within Buddhist Studies, too, a growing number of scholars have moved towards more three-dimensional readings of inscriptions, appreciative not just of what they say but also of what they *do*. Most recently, Stephanie Balkwill’s project on “Buddhist Epigraphy and Women’s History” has explored the possibility that “Buddhist” inscriptions—by which we mean inscriptions which evince a particular dedication to Buddhist ideals or practice, particularly in contexts in which such forms of dedication are not dominant—may have been a particularly useful means of subverting the gendered conventions which dominate other forms of media across the Buddhist world.<sup>42</sup> And more generally, we might also look to

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<sup>41</sup> From South Asian Studies, I have also found Collett (2018), Mucciarelli (2021), and Olivelle (2012) to be particularly useful methodological exemplars.

<sup>42</sup> A forthcoming special volume will, we hope, elucidate further what we have dubbed—tongue firmly in cheek—the “Malibu School of Philology.”

exemplars from Classical and Medieval Studies, which have long taken more methodologically interesting approaches to inscriptions.<sup>43</sup>

I therefore emulate in this dissertation a growing body of scholars (Berkwitz 2016; Blackburn 2024; Friedrich 2020; Gunawardana 1979; Walters 2000) who take seriously the rhetorical elements of Lankan inscriptions, from differing periods, as engaged with and themselves constituent of Lankan history. In doing so for Polonnaruva-period inscriptions, a rather alternative version of events begins to emerge: one which does not consist solely of the actions of masculine kings, which does not presume the eventual and rightful ascendancy of Pali-oriented Buddhism, and which does not take for granted the ahistorical consistency of institutions and concepts such as “kingship” itself. Instead, we see more clearly how the dynamic agencies of noblewomen, monks, ministers, and—yes, still—monarchs together allowed for the contingent emergence of new kinds of Buddhist kingship in medieval Sri Lanka.

Given the focus the dissertation brings to bear on these inscriptions, this section provides an outline of state of the corpus. The key point which must be emphasised is the fragmentary nature of the inscriptional record, which imposes severe caveats onto all the conclusions I draw throughout this dissertation. We are faced not only with the typical restrictions of incomplete and ongoing archaeological surveys, which still routinely uncover previously undocumented inscriptions (see, e.g., Manuel et al. 2021); the repurposing of some inscriptions in the works of later monarchs and then colonial administrators, disguising their original locations and context (Blackburn 2011); and, of course, weather

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<sup>43</sup> An exhaustive list is impossible; I will only note that I have found the essays collected in Petrovic *et al.* (2018) particularly helpful.

damage which leaves sections of text entirely unreadable. Additionally, Sri Lankan inscriptions are particularly plagued by incomplete *publications* even of those inscriptions which are known, and by the extremely limited access offered to researchers (particularly, but not exclusively, foreign researchers) to unpublished estampages and records.<sup>44</sup> The majority of those inscriptions which have been edited and published appeared in volumes of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (EZ); others, however, appeared elsewhere, and until recently no attempt had been made to take stock of all published Lankan inscriptions (let alone index them with adequate metadata).

Nearly two decades ago, the Department of Archaeology set out to correct this, by commissioning a series of volumes—the *Inscriptions of Ceylon* (IC)—which would bring together all previously published inscriptions, plus additional materials made available to the editors from the Department’s archives, in chronologically arranged volumes. Unfortunately, there have been several setbacks in this project. Most crucially, IC vols. III and IV, which together should have covered the first half of the first millennium CE, have yet to be published. Thankfully, IC VI, which covers the Polonnaruva period, was published in 2007, and I rely on it heavily throughout this dissertation. However, this volume seems to entirely exclude inscriptions published in Tamil, without any explanation or indeed acknowledgement of their absence. I therefore supplement this volume with Pathmanathan’s *Tamil Inscriptions of Ceylon* (TISL),

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<sup>44</sup> COVID-19 related disruptions to my fieldwork plans prevented me from attempting to access these archives myself. Here I follow anecdotal remarks made in confidence by colleagues, corroborated by published remarks like those of Ven. Dehigaspe Pannasara (2016), who writes of inscriptions relevant to his research “in the possession of the Archaeological Department, still unpublished. But, unfortunately, students of research are precluded from making any use of them, owing to the attitude of the officials” (55).

published not by the Department of Archaeology but by the Department of Hindu Affairs. In both IC VI and TISL, only limited and inconsistent reference is made to earlier editions of the inscriptions published therein, making it difficult to cross-reference between different publications.

In an attempt to reconcile these various publications, and to provide the more detailed metadata necessary for a detailed study of the inscriptional corpus, I have constructed a digital relational database in SQLite (a streamlined variant of “Structured Query Language”). The full database will, eventually, be made freely available to other researchers; I include a condensed output, listing the various editions of each inscription, as Appendix A. Relational databases allow researchers to identify broad trends across inter-connected sets of data (inscriptions, location, historical actors...) at a scale far greater than close reading alone can allow. While SQL databases also allow for quantitative analysis, these methods are best reserved for robust, “big data” corpora; because of the extremely fragmentary nature of the Lankan inscriptional corpus, I limit my use of this database to the identification of broad trends only, further substantiated by close reading of the inscriptional texts themselves.

One initial insight which arises from the corpus as a whole is the distribution of languages across Poḷonnaruva’s inscriptions. As discussed above, studies of the Poḷonnaruva period, *particularly* when focused on Buddhism, have tended to draw primarily on Sinhala- and Pali-language sources. We have already noted above that Pali seems to have been used, in this period, exclusively in the inscriptions of royal women, never men. On the other hand, it is certainly true, as shown in Table 1.1, that Sinhala was the dominant inscriptional language in the period, being used in 114 out of the 141 inscriptions I consulted (80.9%). But to focus exclusively on Sinhala-language production in our period would overlook

the 26 inscriptions (or 18.4% of the total corpus) which deployed Tamil; and while no inscriptions from Poḷonnaruva were created solely in Sanskrit, 16 (11.3%) did use at least *some* Sanskrit (typically in opening or closing summative verses).

**Table 1.1: inscriptions by language, c. 1070–1215**

| <b>Language</b>  | <b>No. of inscriptions</b> | <b>% of corpus</b> |
|------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Sinhala          | 98                         | 69.5%              |
| Sinhala/Sanskrit | 15                         | 10.6%              |
| Sinhala/Pali     | 1                          | 0.7%               |
| Pali             | 1                          | 0.7%               |
| Tamil            | 25                         | 17.7%              |
| Tamil/Sanskrit   | 1                          | 0.7%               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>141</b>                 | <b>99.9%</b>       |

And while Tamil and Sanskrit may have been relative minorities overall, in certain reigns they came to the fore (see Table 1.2). As we might expect, those inscriptions created towards the beginning of the Poḷonnaruva period, when Cōḷa rule was more temporally proximate, were more likely to be written in Tamil. Most significantly, as discussed further in Chapter Four, only five of Parākramabāhu’s 11 extant inscriptions are composed purely in Sinhala.<sup>45</sup> The “language” of politics for this king, at least, was nearly as much Sanskrit (and, to a lesser extent, Tamil) as it was Sinhala.

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<sup>45</sup> This number deviates from that in Table 1.2 because one inscription, IC VI:11, is attributed equally to Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu together. See further the discussion in Chapter Four. This is difficult to represent in tabular form, so I attribute this inscription below solely to Gajabāhu II.

Table 1.2: inscriptional languages by inscriber, c. 1070–1215

| Inscriber                   | Sinhala | Sin./Skt. | Sin./Pali | Pali | Tamil | Tamil/Skt. | Total |
|-----------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|------|-------|------------|-------|
| Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla        | 55      | 9         |           |      |       |            | 64    |
| Parākramabāhu I             | 4       | 5         |           |      | 1     |            | 10    |
| Āyirattu Aññūvar            |         |           |           |      | 9     |            | 9     |
| Gajabāhu II                 | 3       |           |           |      | 4     |            | 7     |
| Vijayabāhu I                | 4       |           |           |      |       |            | 4     |
| Lilāvatī                    | 3       |           |           |      |       |            | 3     |
| Sala Kasdā and family       | 3       |           |           |      |       |            | 3     |
| Coḍagaṅga                   | 2       |           |           |      |       |            | 2     |
| Sundarā                     | 1       |           | 1         |      |       |            | 2     |
| Sāhasa Malla                | 1       | 1         |           |      |       |            | 2     |
| Vēḷaikkāras                 |         |           |           |      | 1     | 1          | 2     |
| Ayittaṅ                     |         |           |           |      | 1     |            | 1     |
| Bhāma (or Bhūma)            | 1       |           |           |      |       |            | 1     |
| Candavatī                   |         |           |           | 1    |       |            | 1     |
| Cundhamalli                 |         |           |           |      | 1     |            | 1     |
| Cētarāya                    |         |           |           |      | 1     |            | 1     |
| Dehattarā                   | 1       |           |           |      |       |            | 1     |
| Gajabāhu, an official       | 1       |           |           |      |       |            | 1     |
| Jayabāhu I                  |         |           |           |      | 1     |            | 1     |
| Kalyāṇavatī                 | 1       |           |           |      |       |            | 1     |
| Kitā, lord of Nungamalagala | 1       |           |           |      |       |            | 1     |
| Kiḷivai Aprimāṅgarāmaṅ      |         |           |           |      | 1     |            | 1     |
| Kāliṅga Māgha               |         |           |           |      | 1     |            | 1     |
| Lag Vijayasiṅgu Kit         | 1       |           |           |      |       |            | 1     |

|                     |           |           |          |          |           |          |            |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Lokissara II        | 1         |           |          |          |           |          | 1          |
| Mākkaliṅga Kaṇavadi |           |           |          | 1        |           |          | 1          |
| Mānābharaṇa II      | 1         |           |          |          |           |          | 1          |
| Parākrama           |           |           |          | 1        |           |          | 1          |
| Vijayānāvan         | 1         |           |          |          |           |          | 1          |
| Vikramabāhu I       | 1         |           |          |          |           |          | 1          |
| Man[...] Cūḍāmaṇi   | 1         |           |          |          |           |          | 1          |
| Ātittamakātēvaṇ     |           |           |          | 1        |           |          | 1          |
| [unknown]           | 11        |           |          | 1        |           |          |            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>        | <b>98</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>25</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>141</b> |

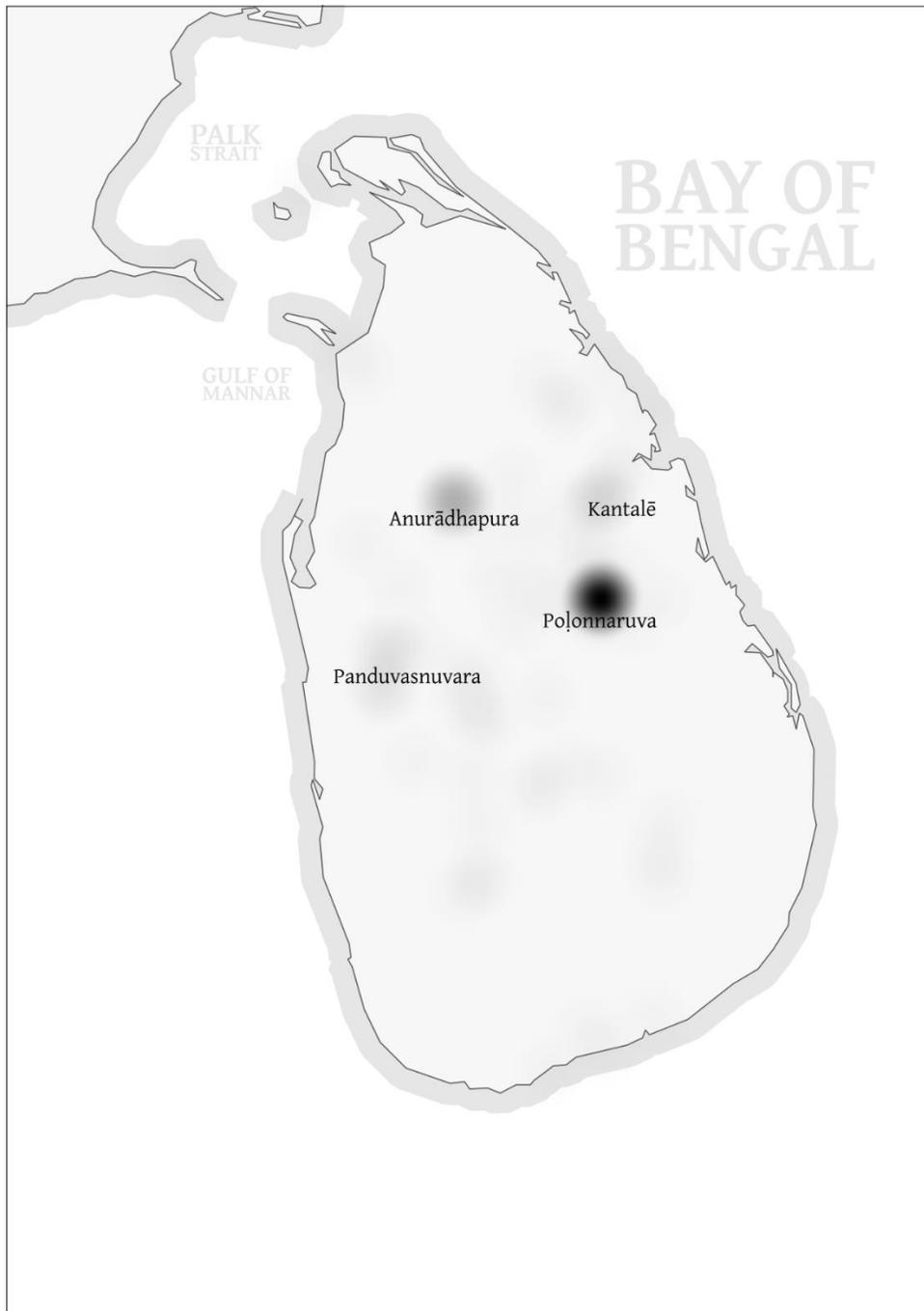
This database also allowed for the mapping of inscriptional findsites, to give a clearer sense of their distribution across the island. Not all of these findsites are easily geolocated; even when the inscription has not been moved from its original location, references in archaeological reports are often frustratingly vague, and refer to places whose names have long since changed, or even to individuals who owned particular plots of land, now long dead. I have been able, nonetheless, to geolocate (with varying degrees of accuracy) 121 of my 141 inscriptions. These are plotted in Figure 1.3.



**Figure 1.3: geolocated findsites of individual inscriptions, c. 1070–1215**

The distribution of findsites is strongly clustered around Poḷonnaruva itself, with several smaller clusters further afield. Several factors again limit any conclusions we might draw from this distribution. Once again, we face the issue of an incomplete inscriptional record: we do not know what data we might be missing for any number of reasons. When it comes to geographical distribution, this risk is *particularly* heightened. Inscriptions located within areas already known to have historical significance (i.e. Poḷonnaruva and Anurādhapura), which have therefore received focused archaeological attention, are simply more likely to have been found than those inscriptions dispersed throughout the wider island. We must therefore read the distribution pattern shown above with some caution.

Nonetheless, it seems to speak to a pattern of royal engagement echoed in the text of both the inscriptions themselves and throughout the wider corpus of literary and scholastic texts produced in Poḷonnaruva. These patterns become even more apparent when we represent the findsites as diffused heatmaps, as in Figure 1.4.



**Figure 1.4: heatmap of inscripational findsites, c. 1070–1215**

It becomes clear in this visualisation the extent to which Poḷonnaruva was the inscripational point of focus for the monarchs who ruled there. But, as discussed further in Chapter Two, while Poḷonnaruva may have been the new seat of power, the former royal capital of Anurādhapura remained an important touchstone

for historical connections. We should therefore be unsurprised to see that it boasts the second-largest cluster of inscriptional findsites from the Poḷonnaruva period; the monarchs ruling from slightly further south clearly maintained a strong interest in the old capital. Two other locations, given less attention in the extant historiography than the royal capitals, also seem significant: Kantalē (T. Kantaḷāy) and Panduvasnuvara. The inscriptions found at Kantalē are largely due to its hosting a community of Brahmins, and—as discussed in Chapter Three—to the apparent interest of Gajabāhu II in this community. Panduvasnuvara, meanwhile, seems to have served as the regional capital of Dakkhiṇadeśa, which—as also discussed in Chapter Three—was, like Ruhunu to the south, ruled independently during the turbulent “interregal period” before the rise of Parākramabāhu I. Unlike Ruhunu, however, Dakkhiṇadeśa’s seat of power seemed to remain relevant even after Parākramabāhu’s unification of the three kingdoms, with later monarchs (most notably Niśsaṅka Malla) continuing to leave inscriptions there. While the dispersal of inscriptional findsites suggests more intensive engagement with Poḷonnaruva and its immediate surroundings, in other words, we still have evidence of sustained royal interest in more localised seats of power.

Creating even this modest database of Poḷonnaruva-period inscriptions required considerable labour, and we are many years off a comprehensive digital corpus of all Sri Lankan inscriptions. This work has very recently been begun by a Sri Lanka-based team, who are also including full searchable transcriptions (based on IC volumes), at [inscriptions.lk](http://inscriptions.lk). Once completed, this will be a revolutionary contribution to the field; as of the time of writing, this database only contains inscriptions up to IC II. Even without full use of this searchable database—and, moreover, even given the fragmentary nature of

the inscriptional record and the absence of IC III and VI—we can identify some broad developments in the history of Sinhala-language inscriptional culture, which provide important context for the discussion in Chapter Two.

The earliest such inscriptions (contained in IC I) are the cave inscriptions of the first two centuries BCE. These are written in Brahmi script and in a Middle Indo-Aryan dialect (often called Prakrit); all are variations on the same standardised formulation, naming the “owner” of the cave who then donates it to the *saṅgha* (monastic community) for use as a dwelling. A representative sample, all taken from the Vessagiri caves, was published in the first volume of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*:

damarakita teraśa agataanagatacatudiśasagaśa aṅikatoṇapitaha bariya upaśika tiśaya leṇe.

For Damarakita *tera* [and] for the *saṅgha* of the four directions, present and future, [this is] the cave of the *upaśika* Tiśa, wife of the father of Aṅikatoṇa (EZ I:2a)

parumaka palika puta upasaka harumasa leṇe catudisaśagasa.

This is the cave of the *upasaka* Harumasa, son of the *parumaka* Palika, for the *saṅgha* of the four directions (EZ I:2b).

parumaka palikadasa bariya parumaka śirikita jhita upaśika citaya leṇe śagaśa catudiśa.

This is the cave of the *upaśika* Citaya, daughter of the *parumaka* Śirikata [and] wife of the *parumaka* Palikadasa, for the *saṅgha* of the four directions (EZ I:2c).

Even this early, we see what would become hallmarks of the later Sinhala inscriptional style. Except for the first example, all open with genealogical claims (typically, here, to *parumakas*, local officials or subkings); the donative act which the inscription both enacts and records constitutes the second half of the record. As discussed in Chapter Two, the inscriptions of the later Anurādhapura period clearly seem to be elaborations on this basic formula. The opening of the inscription consists of a (much lengthier)

biography of the donor, concluding with their name. Documentation of the inscription's supposed core function (a donation or royal proclamation) then follows, frequently preceded by a detailed description of the specific events leading up to the donative act.

What *does* seem to have changed in the millennia between the early Brahmi inscriptions and the beginning of the Poḷonnaruva period is the extent to which women are represented in the inscriptional record. Two out of the three examples above record donations by women; specifically, by lay devotees (*upāsikā*). This is reflective of a broader trend in these early inscriptions, and also perhaps in early South Asian Buddhism more generally, in which women (both lay and monastic) were often heavily represented in corpora of donative inscriptions (Milligan 2019; Schopen 1988, 163–65). As discussed further in Chapter Two, however, by the later Anurādhapura period male donors nearly entirely dominate the inscriptional record. In the absence of IC vols. III and IV, and therefore of a comprehensive inscriptional record of the earlier first millennium, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the circumstances under which this shift took place. Nonetheless, the contrast between the early Brahmi inscriptions and those of the early second millennium is an evocative starting point for the following discussion of the interrelation between Buddhism, politics, and gender in Sri Lanka.

## **Outline of the Dissertation**

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

Chapter Two focuses on the overthrow of Cōḷa governance by Vijayabāhu I, and his establishment of an independent kingdom at Poḷonnaruva. Later narrative accounts, from the *Mahāvamsa* onwards,

portray Vijayabāhu's rise as a rejection of Tamil-speaking and Śiva-worshipping Cōḷa rule in order to "return" to Sinhala- and Pali-oriented Buddhist kingship. I argue, however, that Vijayabāhu's reign is best understood as an intentional localisation of Cōḷa institutions of rule. In particular, I suggest that Vijayabāhu's inscriptional practices seem to have been deliberate emulations of earlier inscriptions (particularly those of Mahinda IV) informed by literary manuals like the *Siyabaslakara* (itself modelled on Daṇḍin's Sanskrit *Kāvyālaṅkāra*). The "Sinhala Buddhist kingship" inaugurated by Vijayabāhu, in other words, represents a moment of intentional constitution, informed by wider Tamil and Sanskritic models, rather than a simple "return" to a pre-Cōḷa *status quo*.

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

Among these women was the Great Lady Sundarā: consort of Vikramabāhu I and mother of Gajabāhu II. Her inscriptions, I argue, represent the first evidence of sustained royal patronage of a particular Mahāvihāra-affiliated monastery, the Diṃbulāgala Vihāra. This monastery would later provide the leaders for Parākramabāhu’s “purification” of the *saṅgha*, the central focus of Chapter Four: a position of prominence likely made possible thanks to Sundarā’s patronage. Her influence, I argue, extended into the court of her son Gajabāhu II, who has too often been dismissed by modern historians—on extremely spurious evidence—as a Śaiva rather than a Buddhist monarch. I show instead that his inscriptions, including his joint inscription with Parākramabāhu I, seem to be concerned with several of what would come to be central features of the post-reform *saṅgha*: specifically, the cult of the Buddha’s Tooth Relic and the royal descent from Mahāsammata laid out in the Mahāvihāra’s *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*. The influence of Gajabāhu and his mother Sundarā on the eventual form of the post-reform *saṅgha*, I suggest, therefore merits reconsideration. This then necessitates some reconsideration of the nature of Parākramabāhu’s intervention into the *saṅgha* itself. I suggest that millenarian concerns, in what seems to be a Buddhaghosan chronology, provided a central motivation here. Finally, I demonstrate a sustained influence of Sanskrit and Tamil political culture on Parākramabāhu’s self-representation as a monarch, which seems to have been systematically downplayed in modern scholarship.

Chapters Five and Six deal with figures often overlooked in the extant historiography, due to their coming to prominence in the tumultuous period after Parākramabāhu’s death. These figures, however, both left behind significant material evidence which allows us to further probe the

development of “Buddhist kingship” in the later Poḷonnaruva period, and so merit more sustained attention than they have been afforded in the extant historiography.

Chapter Five turns to Niśśaṅka Malla (r. c. 1187–1196), the most prolific inscriptionist of any Sri Lankan monarch. In his vast inscriptional corpus, I identify a recurring focus on his immediate family—including consorts, a daughter, and possibly also his mother—as vital extensions of his kingly persona. The shifting configuration of this family over the course of his reign suggests an attempt to consolidate his vision of kingship—exclusively and emphatically high-caste and Buddhist—in support of future dynastic claims: primarily those of his son, Vīrabāhu I, but also those of his female family members. This results in the most explicit theorisation of the possibility of female regnancy (albeit in a wording which more suggests *regency*) in premodern Sri Lanka—a possibility which would prove necessary after Vīrabāhu’s unexpectedly early death.

Finally, Chapter Six turns to the inscriptions of three royal women: Līlāvātī, a former consort of Parākramabāhu who would later rule herself in three separate periods (1197–1200, 1209–1210, and 1210–1211); Kalyāṇavatī, a widow of Niśśaṅka Malla who ruled 1202–1208; and Candavatī, another former consort of Parākramabāhu I, with those inscription we opened this Introduction. Their inscriptions together, I argue, provide a powerful challenge to established gender politics. Līlāvātī in particular is noteworthy both for the central role she clearly played in the period’s power struggles (evidenced by her repeated depositions and reinstatements), and for her consistent policy across these reigns of patronising new forms of Buddhist literature in both Pali and Sinhala. Contrasting her portrayal in these patronised literary works with her inscriptional self-representation allows us, I argue, to critically reflect

on assumptions of kingship's inherent masculinity—assumptions which Līlāvati's regnancy necessarily challenged. I conclude by returning to the inscription of Candavatī, which I argue represents an attempt on her behalf to leverage Līlāvati's unsettling of the gendered social order to her own advantage. Together, the inscriptions of these women illuminate the extent to which even the most apparently self-evident features of medieval Lankan political culture were in fact contingent, and therefore contestable.



## Chapter Two: Reconstituting Buddhist Kingship at Poḷonnaruva

Between the 990s and c. 1070CE, the island of Sri Lanka was a division (T. *maṅṭalam*) of the vast Cōḷa Empire:<sup>46</sup> ultimately ruled from Kaṅkaikoṅṭa Cōḷapuram (in what is now Tamil Nadu) but administered by local governors in Poḷonnaruva,<sup>47</sup> a city on the banks of the great Mahavāli river, some eighty kilometres southeast of Lanka’s historic capital Anurādhapura. Standard chronologies of premodern Sri Lanka, however, begin the “Poḷonnaruva period” (Sin. *Poḷonnaruve yugaya*) in a year curiously bisecting the period of Cōḷa rule: in c. 1055, on the death of a local ruler in Lanka’s southeastern region of Ruhunu (P. Rohaṇa) named Mahinda.<sup>48</sup> Over the following fifteen years, Mahinda’s son—known later by the regnal

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<sup>46</sup> I argue elsewhere (Shirley under review b) against uncautious applications of terms like “empire” and “emperor” (as distinct from mere “kingdoms” and “kings”). Often we apply these terms on structural (i.e. etic) comparative grounds, but then assume they may have held some form of emic weight; this is behind, I have suggested, our over-eagerness to identify various monarchs as *cakravartins* (understood merely to be a European emperor with some differing regalia). In this case, however, I think the term “empire” is an accurate description of the Cōḷa polity. It clearly differentiated a core region—the “Cōḷa country” (*cōḷanāṭu*)—from various peripheral subordinates, usually called *maṅḍalas*. These subordinate regions were, as discussed below, ruled by king-like governors (rather than by largely independent tributaries), and so the polity as a whole seems to have been emically understood to be of a higher order than “mere” kingdoms.

<sup>47</sup> A popular tradition is that the name “Polonnaruva” is an invention of English colonial scholars. However, the name Poḷonnaruva is attested in inscriptions as early as Vijayabāhu’s own reign (see e.g. IC VI:5, 7-8). In Pali sources, most prominently the *Mahāvamsa*, it is usually rendered as Pulatthinagara (“the City of Pulasthya,” named for the Purāṇic *ṛsi*). Tamil inscriptions refer to the city as Pulanari (see e.g. TISL 15, 10-11), which Pathmanathan (2019) takes as a Tamil rendering of the Sinhala name (187). However, Tamil *pulakar* is a common epithet for Pulasthya (from Skt. *pulaha*); this is similar enough to the title *pula-kaṛ* (lit. “he who teaches”) that we might wonder whether Poḷonnaruva is a Sinhala rendering of the earlier Tamil name.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., the periodisation in Sannasgala (1994, 92–93), which distinguishes between “the beginnings of Poḷonnaruva” (*poḷonnaruvē ārambhaya*, 761–1058CE) and “the Poḷonnaruva kingdom” proper (*poḷonnaru rājadhāniya*) beginning in 1058. Cf. the common alternative of dating the period proper as beginning in the 990s with Cōḷa conquest (Sastri 1959; B. L. Smith 1978).

name Vijayabāhu I—waged a long war against the island’s Cōḷa overlords, finally concluding with his capture of both Anurādhapura and Poḷonnaruva in 1070. Vijayabāhu himself seems to have considered this the beginning of his reign proper, counting his own regnal years from the day of his consecration (*abhiṣeka*) in Anurādhapura.<sup>49</sup> But the *Mahāvamsa* extension compiled in the Daṁbadeṇiya court of Parākramabāhu II counts Vijayabāhu’s regnal years—and, therefore, his reign as rightful king of the island—as beginning in 1055, the year of his father’s death; modern scholars have simply followed the Daṁbadeṇiyan lead. Why has this retrospective dating so definitively informed our temporal definition of the “Poḷonnaruvan period”? What assumptions—about royal succession, about continuity of Anurādhapuran institutions of kingship, and about the distinction between “Buddhist” and “Śaiva” rule—informed, and continue to inform, such periodisation?

Vijayabāhu’s reign has come to signify, in both premodern narratives and modern scholarships, a pivotal moment of “return:” a return from the half-century of Śaivite Cōḷa “interruption” back to the “traditional” Buddhism which had defined the earlier Anurādhapura kingdom. Of course, the period of Cōḷa rule left its legacy. But this legacy, in such accounts, was always secondary to the triumphant return of Sinhala Buddhist kingship, which magnanimously tolerated—but never partook in—ongoing theist practice, Tamil and Sanskrit languages and literatures, and perhaps even some vestiges of the Cōḷa administrative apparatus. Stark dichotomies between Cōḷa and Sinhala rulers are evident in the earliest Anglophone histories of the Poḷonnaruva period;<sup>50</sup> their most emphatic expression appears, however, in

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<sup>49</sup> See the dates in IC VI:2, discussed further below.

<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Knighton (1845, 130–32); Tennent (1859, 404–5); and Codrington (1926, chap. 4).

K. A. N. Sastri's (1955) evocatively titled "Vijayabāhu I: The Liberator of Lankā." Here Sastri provides a rich narrative of Vijayabāhu's life, informed by archaeological data but replete with extensive quotations from Geiger's translation of the *Mahāvamsa*. Sastri opens this piece by declaring Vijayabāhu "one of the greatest kings of Ceylon," and then goes on to tell us

At his accession Cōḷa rule was well established in the island, and its indigenous rulers were hiding themselves in the mountains of Rohaṇa (Sin. Ruhūṇu). The Buddhist faith and the foundations sustaining it suffered much damage at the hands of the Śaiva conquerors... Halfway through Vijayabāhu's reign the picture begins to change. Internal dissensions among the Sinhalese chieftains are composed or abolished by the dissidents being destroyed or subjugated; the occasion afforded by political trouble in South India is availed of to roll off the Tamil Cōḷa hegemony over the island which is now united under one king. Buddhism once more comes into its own... (45).

Sastri paints a particularly vivid picture of Vijayabāhu's triumph over his Tamil-speaking and Śiva-worshipping former overlords, and of the resulting benefits for the Buddha-*śāsana*. Sastri's narrative is far from an outlier in the historiography of Poḷonnaruva; more recent scholarly publications continue to emphasise the decline of Buddhism under Cōḷa rule and its restoration under Vijayabāhu.<sup>51</sup> Yet more emphatic variations of this narrative occur in the realm of public discourse: from museum displays to urban plans.<sup>52</sup> Such media are often held as peripheral to the scholarly pursuit of historical accuracy. But

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<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Sastri's later contribution to the UCHC, which concludes by calling Vijayabāhu "the author of Sinhalese freedom, and one of the chief architects of Sinhalese nationality" (1959, 437); see further Frasch (2017, 70–71); Walters (2000, 143).

<sup>52</sup> The 2019–2030 Polonnaruva Urban Development Plan lays a heavy emphasis on the history of the city, primarily for its potential interest to tourists. It provides a short, but suggestive, summary of how that history ought to be portrayed: "In 1017CE, once they had defeated Mahinda V, the royal capital (*rājadhaniya*) was moved to Poḷonnaruva, called "Jananāthapuram," by the Cōḷa people. According to the *Cūlavamsa*, while remaining an independent kingdom (*nidahas rājayyak*) from the beginning of the Poḷonnaruva period until the time of King Vijayabāhu, the country (*raṭa*) was made kingless (*arājika*) by the cultural destruction of the Cōḷa... The country was [subsequently] freed from foreign invaders by King Vijayabāhu" (*kri. va. 1017 dī solī janayā visin pasvana mihiṇḍu raju parājayata*

due to their sheer visibility to audiences beyond the academic—both in Sri Lanka and around the world—they cannot be so easily discounted. They present an image of Poḷonnuva’s origins as borne out of stark opposition: between Tamil-speaking and Śiva-worshipping “foreign invaders” and Buddhist, Sinhala-speaking “indigenous kings.”

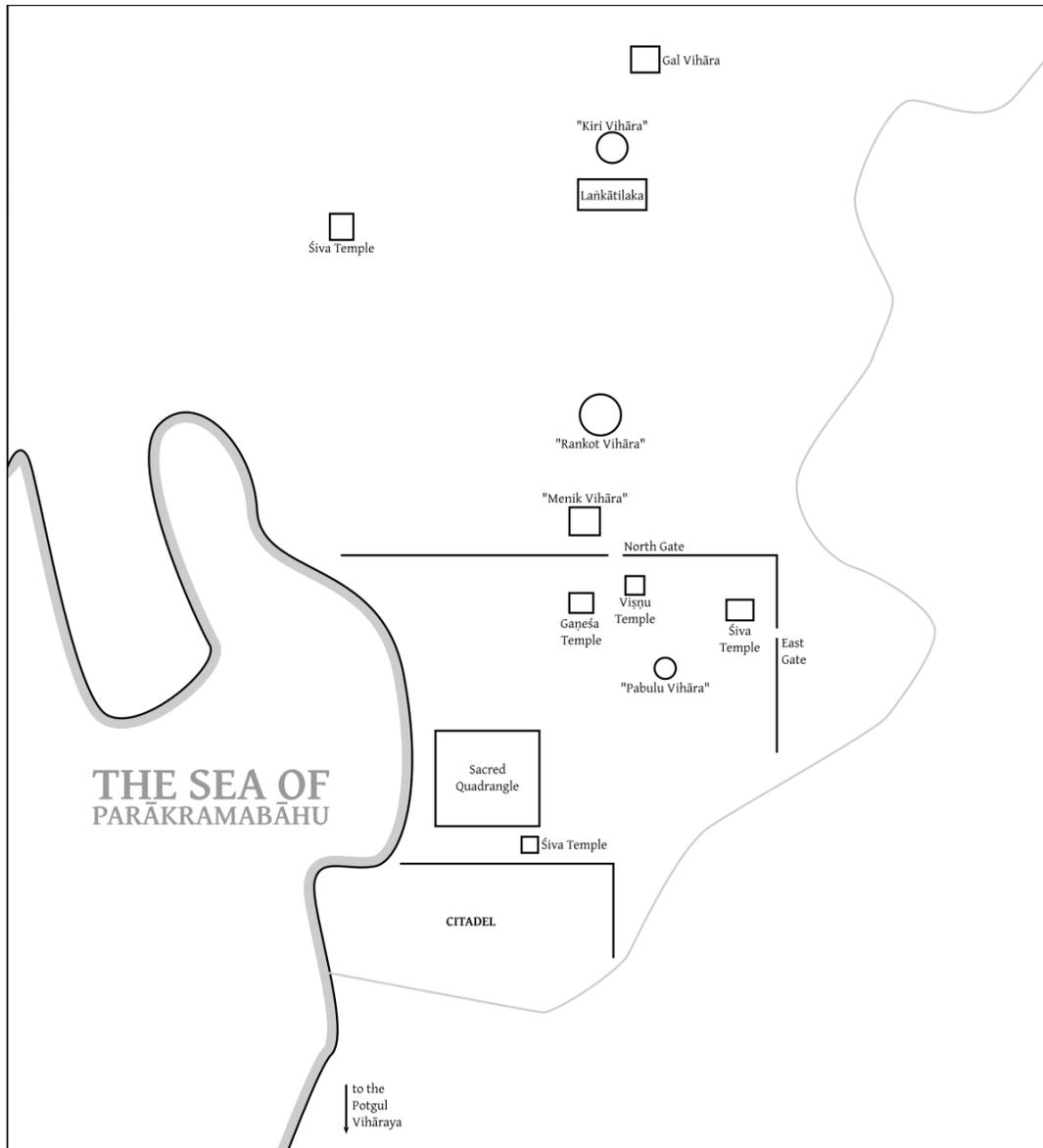
This narrative is not the wholesale invention of modern historians. Rather, as I suggest above, it follows the interpretation of the two texts composed under the patronage of Parākramabāhu II: the *Pūjāvaliya* and the *Mahāvamsa* extension. Both texts, I argue, are primarily interested in establishing a *continuity* of Sinhala Buddhist kingship which effectively bypasses the 90-odd years of Cōḷa rule. They seek to create, in other words, a single unbroken *vamśa* (lineage) of appropriately “Buddhist” kings stretching backwards from their own patron, Parākramabāhu II, to the mythical Sinhala founder-king Vijaya. The period of occupation by Śiva-worshipping Cōḷa rulers would complicate such a narrative, necessitating a creative response. Neither text so much as mentions, during the period of Cōḷa rule, the names of the Cōḷa monarchs or even their local governors (see MV ch. 56; PV 782). Instead, both focus exclusively on the Sinhala-speaking rulers of Ruhunu, presented as monarchs-in-exile of Sri Lanka as a whole, and concluding with Mahinda and his son Vijayabāhu I. It is on the basis of this narrative that

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*patkala atara rājadhaniya jananāthapuram namin poḷonnuvaṭa gena yana ladī. cūlavamśayaṭa anuva poḷonnuva yugaya ārambhayē siṭa vijayabāhu rajugē kālaya tek nidahas rājyayak lesa pāvātuna atara solin saṃskṛtiya vināśa karamin raṭa arājika bavāṭa patkarana ladī... vijayabāhu raju visin vidēśa ākramaṇayangen raṭa nidahas kara gannā ladī; 52). The English version of this document adds that the Cōḷas destroyed the culture “as demons,” a phrase which does not seem to appear in the Sinhala. This is, needless to say, a rather dramatically polarised vision of Poḷonnuva’s history, one which the Urban Development Plan sought to manifest in tourist-oriented “heritage management.” Of the powerful potential for such heritage projects to reify nationalist discourses, see N. Wickramasinghe (2012) and Harris (2018).*

Vijayabāhu’s “succession” from his father in 1055 is taken as the starting-point of his reign, and therefore of the Poḷonnaruva period proper, despite his own preference for dating his regnal years beginning in 1070.

This chapter challenges this narrative, and the neat periodisation of Sri Lankan history marked by the Cōḷa “interruption,” and Vijayabāhu’s subsequent “resumption,” of Buddhist rule. Of course, such a challenge is not entirely novel. Gunawardana (1979; 2008) and Pathmanathan (1982) have long been critical of the supposed distinction between “Anurādhapura,” “Cōḷa,” and “Poḷonnuruva” periods, and argue for a steadier continuity of ideas and institutions across all three. Archaeological evidence, too, suggests that the shift of power from Anurādhapura to Poḷonnaruva was hardly marked by a sharp distinction in demographic, agricultural, or hydraulic patterns (Gilliland et al. 2013). This is reflected in the urban landscape of Poḷonnaruva itself, in which Buddhist *vihāras* and ritual precincts were comfortably constructed alongside earlier, Cōḷa-period temples to Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Gaṇeśa (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1: map of Poḷonnaruva, including major structures still extant**

The construction of the city itself serves, I think, as a useful metaphor for Vijayabāhu’s (re)construction of Lankan kingship: vigorous efforts dedicated to new Buddhist edifices, but not at the expense or to the exclusion of the Cōḷa period institutions which remained (physically and metaphorically) central.

The first two sections of this chapter argue that Vijayabāhu’s apparent “continuity” of Anurādhapurān kingship was carefully constructed: first by the king himself and his court; and then

subsequently (to an even greater extent) by retrospective narratives like *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvaliya*. I establish, in the first section, a heuristic distinction between “Anurādhapurān” and “Cōḷa” models of Lankan rule; in the second section, I demonstrate the intentional ways in which Vijayabāhu engaged with both of these models to constitute a new form of Buddhist kingship at Poḷonnaruva. The third section draws on inscriptional evidence of Vijayabāhu’s engagements at the *śrī pāda*, a significant Buddha-Relic, as a performance of this new model of Buddhist kingship. Here I argue that he attempted to articulate—and make concrete through material interventions at the site—a strictly hierarchical socio-political order in a Buddhist milieu. Finally, through a close reading of the (near-contemporary, but likely posthumous) *Velaikkāraṅ* inscription at the centre of Poḷonnaruva’s “sacred quadrangle,” I reconsider the revival of Buddhist ordination lineages under Vijayabāhu. This “revival,” I suggest, represented a greater departure from the traditional “three *nikāya*” system than our later Mahāvihāra-oriented narratives let on; a useful synecdoche, perhaps, of Vijayabāhu’s novel re-orientation of Lankan kingship. Together these arguments destabilise our received wisdom about Buddhism in Poḷonnaruva, and prime us to better understand the emergence of the Pali-oriented Buddhism we now call the Theravāda.

### **Late Anurādhapurān and Cōḷan Models of Kingship**

This section outlines some of the key events leading up to Vijayabāhu’s reign, and the discourses of kingship employed by those participant in those events. As will become apparent in the following section, this does not constitute mere “background information.” Rather, the rival visions of kingship articulated in this period, particularly in relation to the island’s three rival *nikāyas*, seem to have served as citational exemplars for Vijayabāhu and his courtiers in their crafting of his own Buddhist kingship. These first

millennium visions were every part as diverse, nuanced, and transculturally engaged as those of the second millennium discussed in the remainder of the dissertation. For heuristic purposes, however—and perhaps at the risk of oversimplification—we might divide them very loosely into two temporally distinct categories: respectively “late Anurādhapura” and “Cōḷa.” By discussing these two periods as distinct models of royal discourse, I do not intend to imply a fundamental disconnect between the two. Rather, I wish to highlight characteristics of both models which, as the following sections demonstrate, were available to Vijayabāhu for “citational” purposes.<sup>53</sup>

Until the last decade of the first millennium, inscriptional visions of kingship in Sri Lanka were almost exclusively articulated in Sinhala script and language, and seem to have generally been oriented towards protection of the Buddha-*śāsana* as a fundamental duty of kingship. This does not mean, however, that Sri Lanka’s kings were entirely insular in this period, and unconcerned with developments in wider South Asia. Rather, they were fully immersed in a wider political culture which encompassed much of what we now call South India, and deeply connected to wider polities across the Indian Ocean region and beyond (see particularly the essays in Bandaranayake 1990). The effect that these connections had on ideals of kingship, however, has been relatively understudied, with the notable exception of Walters (2000). Walters provides a nuanced reading of the relationship between Lanka’s kings and *śāsana*, in both literary and inscriptional sources, across an impressive temporal period, and I follow his account closely in my understanding of late Anurādhapuran visions of kingship. From his analysis, supplemented

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<sup>53</sup> My reference to “citations” here follows Blackburn’s invocation of Derrida (see Blackburn 2007, 194; laid out more fully in 2024, “Conclusions.”)

by the subsequent publication of a more complete inscriptional corpus,<sup>54</sup> we can identify three key developments of late Anurādhapurān inscriptional discourses which would have a clear impact on later Poḷonnaruva-based visions of kingship.

The first of these is the elaboration, from the reign of Udaya II (r. 887–898) onwards, of “worklike” royal biographies preceding the more “documentary” contents of inscriptions. This is usually, and I think accurately, attributed to an emulation of the Sanskrit inscriptional preamble called *praśasti*, part of the broader phenomenon of vernacular literarization described by Pollock (2006).<sup>55</sup> The term *praśasti* is therefore sometimes heuristically used as a catch-all for any grandiose inscriptional preamble. But this is inaccurate: the *praśasti* is a highly typified genre, almost always in verse, which typically “...would begin with an auspicious sign or invocation such as *svasti* followed by one or more *maṅgala* (invocatory) verses, and then an account of the ruling king’s lineage, full of lavish praises of his own and his ancestors’ physical power and beauty, moral qualities and reputation, just rule, conquests, learning and artistic skills, and so on” (Salomon 1998, 112). As Cox (2016) demonstrates, this is entirely distinct from the Tamil *meykkīrtti*, which foregoes the genealogical emphasis of a *praśasti* and instead highlights military

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<sup>54</sup> I refer here to *Inscriptions of Ceylon* volume 5, which is vast enough to have been printed in three parts. The numbering of inscriptions between these parts is not continuous, and so I cite from it with part numbers marked in small roman numerals (e.g. IC V ii:17, the seventeenth inscription in part two of volume five).

<sup>55</sup> For Pollock’s discussion of this process in Lanka, see his pp. 386–7. As noted in the Introduction, however, this discussion is misled by his assumption that earlier inscription had been written in “prosaic Pali” (387), which then gave way to Sanskritised Sinhala. Prior to Udaya II, all royal inscriptions were in fact written in Sinhala (or, in the earliest Brahmi inscriptions, what we might call a proto-Sinhala Middle Indic dialect). While Udaya II and his heirs did begin to integrate into their inscriptional eulogies imagery which seems to be inspired by a Sanskrit imaginaire, it is also worth noting that their language remains distinctly Sinhala (replete with the vowel “ä” and prenasal consonants like “-ñd-”), with Sanskrit *tatsāmas* (loanwords) only entering the inscriptional repertoire very late.

conquests, as exemplary of the donor’s “possession of a range of royal virtues, chiefly [their] association with the goddesses of prosperity and victory” (53). This is distinct again from the (emically unnamed) Sinhala royal inscriptional style under discussion here, which—among other points of difference—is never in verse, a hallmark of both *praśasti* and *meykkīrtti*.

The second development which concerns us is the increasing prevalence of royal promulgations about proper monastic conduct, documented and enacted by inscriptions found within monastic complexes. These promulgations are typically referred to in this period as *sirit* (cf. Skt. *carita*, “[a code of] conduct”).<sup>56</sup> This term—a clear *tadbhāva* (semantic borrowing) from Sanskrit—may, perhaps, suggest a “mainland” influence behind such royal interventions into monastic conduct, a suspicion reinforced by one of our earliest examples of this intervention, found in the Anurādhapura Jetavana complex, being written in the Sanskrit language with Nagari script (see EZ I:1).<sup>57</sup> These *sirit* inscriptions are a direct precursor to Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* inscription at the Galvihāra, a central focus of this dissertation (discussed in Chapter Four).<sup>58</sup> The emergence of this inscriptional genre, I suggest, offered new opportunities for monarchs and monks to work out the parameters of royal obligations to—and authority to intervene in—the affairs of the *saṅgha*, nominally in service of the *śāsana*’s longevity. Careful attention

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<sup>56</sup> The term *katikā* does appear at least once, in an inscription (IC V ii:40) of a king Sena (it is unclear which). I use the term *sirit* rather than *carita* for these inscriptions to avoid confusion with the Sanskrit-language biographical genre of the same name.

<sup>57</sup> The section of the inscriptions which would reveal the name of the sponsor is, sadly, irrevocably displaced, and we cannot even be sure that it is truly a “royal” intervention after all (Gunawardana 1979, 250–55).

<sup>58</sup> On *katikāvatas* in Sri Lanka, see Ratnapāla (1971), Schonthal (2021), and Schonthal’s forthcoming monograph. On this genre’s influence across the Indian Ocean, see Blackburn (2024).

to how these royal inscriptions position their disciplinary interventions therefore offers considerable insights into the self-fashioning of their patrons as “Buddhist kings.”

Walters sees, in these late Anurādhapurān inscriptions, an increasing re-orientation of royal favour towards the Mahāvihāra *nikāya* at the expense of their rivals. In his view, the c. 840 defeat of Sena I (r. 833–853) at the hands of Pāṇḍya invaders signalled the inefficacy of Abhayagiri patronage; his son Sena II (853–887) turned instead towards the Mahāvihāra, as “a change of royal policy, a *tentative* effort to displace the authority of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monasteries onto the Mahāvihāra” (135, italics added). By the reign of Kāśyapa V (r. 924–935), Walters’ language is more emphatic: here, he tells us, these royal interventions represented attempts to “position the Abhayagiri within a polity that recognised the Mahāvihāra as supreme” (136). The strongest support for this supremacy comes, however, from the interpretive lens provided by later, Mahāvihāra-oriented retroactive accounts.<sup>59</sup> While Walters is, elsewhere in the article, extremely nuanced in his treatment of such accounts as “dialogical,” he seems to be more willing to accept the *Mahāvamsa* extension as evidence for ninth-century developments. A closer inspection of the inscriptional evidence, shorn of this interpretive framework, makes the ascendancy of the Mahāvihāra less certain.

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<sup>59</sup> This includes the notion that Sena II “celebrated his shower bath (*abhiṣeka*) into kingship in association with [the Mahāvihāra]” (Walters 2000, 134). Walters is explicit that this is only reported retroactively by a “Mahāvihāran historian.” But Sundberg (2016) cites Walters as evidence that “it is clear beyond all doubt that Sena II had taken unprecedentedly Theravādin rites of coronation with the grounds of the Mahāvihāra itself” (361; see also his n19). This is a useful demonstration of how rapidly even cautious hypotheses can ossify into supposed fact.

Walters' central evidence for this re-orientation towards the Mahāvihāra is that the majority of *sirit* inscriptions are located within monasteries affiliated with the Abhayagiri or Jetavana *nikāyas*. For Walters, these attempts at regulation seem to have necessarily represented an unwelcome intrusion on monastic life; that Mahāvihāra-affiliated institutions only received donative inscriptions, with no attempts at disciplinary regulation, conversely indicated royal respect for their independence. Writing about the *sirit* inscriptions of Mahinda IV (r. 956–992), for example, he suggests that

Mahinda IV spent a lot of money at the rival monasteries [of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana] and even praised them in flowery language in his inscriptions, but it is clear that this honouring was also repositioning them, bringing them under Mahāvihāran rule... Mahinda IV thus regulated and insulted only the rivals; his Mahāvihāran inscriptions are less ornate, but with no strings attached (139).

Walters' evidence that *sirit* regulations constituted “Mahāvihāran” rule is largely based on the references in these inscriptions to *pirit* (P. *paritta*) recitation,<sup>60</sup> and to both study and ritual use of *abhidharma* texts,<sup>61</sup> both of which he seems to present as specifically non- or even anti-Mahāyāna practices (see respectively 129 and 134). Since the Abhayagiri and Jetavana are generally accepted to have been more open to

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<sup>60</sup> Walters argues that the *Vamsatthappakāsini* enjoined *pirit* specifically as an alternative to *dhāraṇī*. There certainly is, as he points out, archaeological evidence of *dhāraṇī* incantations in the Abhayagiri and Jetavana compounds (on which see further Schopen 1982). Further, both *pirit* and *dhāraṇī* seem to fulfil overlapping apotropaic functions (Skilling 1992). However, it seems a stretch to read into the *Vamsatthappakāsini*'s advocacy of *pirit* an explicitly sectarian motivation, given that it does not so much as mention, let alone denigrate, *dhāraṇī*.

<sup>61</sup> *Abhidharma* texts—with their ontologies of actually-existing *dharmas*—were increasingly critiqued by Madhyamaka philosophers (Westerhoff 2018, 99–101, 107–15), who took seriously the *sūnyatā* teachings espoused in Mahāyāna *prajñāparamitā* literature (denying the inherent existence, *svabhāva*, of such fundamental *dharmas*). Although *ābhidharmikas*, particularly those in Lanka, seem to have been far less willing to acknowledge, let alone directly critique, their Mahāyāna rivals, we might still take the ongoing production of *abhidharma* texts as, at minimum, a rejection of the *sūnyatā* doctrine which characterises so much Mahāyāna thought.

Mahāyāna texts, Walters reasonably understands these to have been exclusively Mahāvihāra practices imposed on their unwilling rivals.

However, we might question this stark dichotomy. While later, Mahāvihāra-oriented texts denigrate the Abhayagiri in particular as heretical (see particularly Walters 1997, 117–18), it is unclear how sharply the intellectual and ritual cultures of the three *nikāyas* diverged throughout the first millennium. There is good reason to believe that all three *nikāyas* shared a core canon in Pali (Cousins 2012, 83–85); at minimum the three *nikāyas* must have had a common *Vinaya*, even if their interpretations thereof later diverged.<sup>62</sup> What I am suggesting here is that when we see royal injunctions to Abhayagiri and Jetavana monastics to dutifully recite *pirit* and study *abhidharma*, repeated for over two centuries, and accompanied with various other disciplinary injunctions which seem unlikely to have been controversial, we should not rush to assume that these inscriptions were working against these monks' interests and inclinations. The simplest explanation appears to me to simply be that these were, in fact, practices already accepted with these *nikāyas* (alongside, perhaps, more explicitly Mahāyāna practices).

If the concentration of *sirit* inscriptions within Abhayagiri and Jetavana compounds is not so clearly explained by a royal imposition of Mahāvihāran practices on their unfortunate rivals, what else might underlie this pattern? I wish to suggest that we take the self-declared motivations of these monarchs a little more seriously: they intervened in the internal disciplinary affairs of the Abhayagiri and the Jetavana, but paid relatively little attention to the discipline of Mahāvihāran monks, because

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<sup>62</sup> On this interpretive divergence, as deployed rhetorically in the later twelfth century, see Kieffer-Pülz (2005).

they saw this as the best way to ensure the flourishing of the *śāsana*. An inscription of Kāśyapa V (IC V i:104, c. 929–39) located in the Abhayagiri complex provides a useful illustration of these dynamics in action.<sup>63</sup> The inscription contains much which might attract our attention; most pertinent, however, is the description, in the inscriptional preamble, of Kāśyapa’s having honouring both the Buddha-gem (*buduruvan*, Skt. *buddharatna*) and *dharma*-gem (*dhamruvan*, Skt. *dharmaratna*) through, respectively, relic-festivals and the preaching and ritual inscription on golden plates of *abhidharma* texts. This would prime Buddhist audiences to anticipate an equivalent “honouring” of the third gem, the *saṅgharatna*, to follow. What follows, of course, is the promulgation of *sirit* rules for the Abhayagiri monks. I therefore read this inscription as framing Kāśyapa V’s *sirit* rules as part of a broader set of his public veneration of Buddhism’s triple gem: relic-worship for the Buddha; *abhidharma* preaching for the *dharma*; and ensuring the high disciplinary standard of Abhayagiri monks for the *saṅgha*. This is suggestive, I think, of a particular concern with the internal purity of this particular monastic order—a concern which did not necessarily extend to their rivals in the Mahāvihāra.

A similar concern seems to be evident in the inscriptions of Mahinda IV, Kāśyapa’s youngest son. His inscriptions routinely praise him for his patronage of all three *nikāyas*;<sup>64</sup> and he—along with an

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<sup>63</sup> This inscription is particularly noteworthy because large sections seem to have been cited, in close translation, in the later *Mahāvamsa* extension (see MV 52:44–60). The *Mahāvamsa* follows this up, however, with a longer list of pious donations made to the “Thera school” of the Mahāvihāra (MV 52:61–65). Walters cites both inscription and *Mahāvamsa* testimony simultaneously in his analysis of the former, suggesting the extent to which he has read it through the retrospective sectarian lens of the latter (137).

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., his inscription IC V ii:62 located at Rambāva, which lists his pious donations at a monastery of the Tisaramā *nakāhi* (another name for the Mahāvihāra *nikāya*); at the Devnā (Jetavana) *mahavehera*; and at the Abhayagiri *vehera*. The inscription itself is concerned with lands partially appropriated for maintenance at a Mahāvihāra shrine, and states that Mahāvihāran monks should be called upon to resolve any disputes (*meyaṭ van*

enigmatic figure named the Lady Vidurā—certainly did patronise the Mahāvihāra-aligned Vessagiri monastery.<sup>65</sup> Most salient to our purposes, however, is Mahinda’s *sirit* inscription at the Jetavana, which famously concludes with the declaration that “none but a *bodhisattva* should attain sovereignty of Sri Lanka.” This passage is frequently cited as evidence that Sri Lankan kings in this period were all understood to be *bodhisattvas* (see, e.g., Gunawardana 1979, 172–73; Pathmanathan 1982, 130–31; Tambiah 1976, 96–97; cf. the thoughtful critique of Berkwitz 2019a, paras. 28–35). Little attention has been paid, however, to the rhetorical effect of the full section as a conclusion to, and *rationale for the maintenance of*, the preceding *sirit* regulations:

...siri lakdivhi no bohosat hu no rajvanhayi sähakulakot savāniya muniraj hu niyat viyāraṇa lad tumā paysivur raknu vas mahasat hu piḷivāyū rajsiri päminā sāṇābisev viñḍna dasas mahasaṅg haṭ meheyat uvasar vas seveḷ bañḍna apa parapuren basna budbāti kāt usab visin niratur suhur ātiyāvānu rākiya yutu.

By those who have received the eternal prophecy (*viyāraṇa*, cf. Skt. *vyākaraṇa*) of the Omniscient King of Sages, pinnacle of the Śākya family, that “None but a *bodhisattva* shall attain sovereignty in Siri Lakdiv”; who are accustomed to wearing white vestments<sup>66</sup> to serve and attend on the *mahāsaṅgha* on the day of their receiving consecration (*abhiṣeka*), in the moment of attaining royal splendour bestowed by the *mahasat*<sup>67</sup> to protect His Bowl and Robe (relics);

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*viyavulak āta mahaveherā mahaboge saṅgun sähā denu koṭ isā*). This is presumably the inscription Walters refers to when he claims that Mahinda IV forced Abhayagiri monks “to submit to the adjudication of royal officers *or even the Mahāvihāra monks*” (139, italics added for emphasis); he cites four inscriptions here, but this is the only one which seems to explicitly mention such adjudication.

<sup>65</sup> See inscriptions IC V ii:69 and 70 for Mahinda IV and the Lady Vidurā respectively. On the Lady Vidurā’s inscription, see Shirley (under review a). The Vessagiri monastery patronised here is almost certainly not the original founded by Devanampiyatissas for Ven. Mahinda and the first monks (Nicholas 1959, 98–99). It is, however, clearly identified as such in this inscription, in close proximity to its invocation of its Mahāvihāra affiliation (see ll. 8–16). There is clearly an element of history-making at work in this inscription.

<sup>66</sup> Following EZ’s reading of *seveḷ* as Skt. *śveta-veṣṭa*; likely a scarf or turban twisted (*veṣṭana*) around the head or body.

<sup>67</sup> Both EZ and IC take this as standing for Skt. *mahāsaṅgha*, but we see elsewhere in this same section (the more usual) *mahasaṅg*. I suspect, based on the proximity to the *bodhisattva* reference, that this may instead intend Skt.

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

Here the ongoing enforcement of disciplinary purity within the Abhayagiri is positioned as central to the duties of kings—explicitly, good *Buddhist* kings, dedicated to serving the *śāsana* at the moment of their consecration. This is connected, certainly to the prophecy of *bodhisattvaship* which has received so much scholarly attention. But this *bodhisattvaship* does not seem, to me, to constitute the *telos* of this paragraph. Rather, here Mahinda IV is telling his successor that their kingship is bestowed upon them by, and for the benefit of, the Buddha-*śāsana*; as good kings (who happen to be *bodhisattvas*) they should therefore dedicate themselves towards such service, exemplified in royal attempts to ensure the ongoing disciplinary purity of the Abhayagiri monks.

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

The third key feature of these inscriptions is their treatment of any individuals who were not normatively masculine. Out of the 367 inscriptions collected in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* volume V, only two

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*mahāsattva*, “great being,” a common epithet of *bodhisattvas* (including the Buddha himself). In this reading it would be the Buddha himself who bestows royal splendour during the *abhiṣeka* anointment ceremony.

or three women are recorded as exercising any economic or political agency of their own: a Lady Kitā in 879CE (IC V i:27); another woman of the same name is mentioned in several inscriptions from the 920-30s (IC V ii:12; 13; and 32);<sup>68</sup> and a Lady Vidurā, with some unclear connection to Mahinda IV (IC V ii:70).<sup>69</sup> Beyond these brief glimpses, “women” (understood broadly) seem to only be invoked in royal inscriptions in two ways, both found in the inscriptions’ stylised introductions. These introductions routinely mention the mothers of kings, sometimes stressing their high status (often in the formulation “born equal [to the king’s father],” *samadā*); clearly matrilineal status was important to kingly self-representation. The only consort ever mentioned, however, was island of Lanka itself, anthropomorphised in the stock phrase

...kātusabanaṭa agamehesun vū lakdivpoḷonavayona parapuren himi...

...lord/husband (*himi*, Skt. *svāmin*), by descent, of the young woman, the earth of the island of Lanka, who is the primary consort (*agamehesu*, Skt. *agramahiṣi*) to the best of the Kṣatriya...<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ranawella suggests in IC that these women may have been one and the same, on the basis that the only women of this name mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa* are both active in the tenth century (see IC V i, 70).

<sup>69</sup> Vidurā’s inscription, marking a donation to the monks at Vessagiri, is carved on the obverse of an inscription by Mahinda IV (IC V ii:69). There is clearly some form of connection between the two, and their donations, but neither inscription makes the nature of their relationship clear.

We also have a mention, in an unfortunately severely damaged inscription, of a *piriveṇa* constructed by both a (grammatically masculine) *vat-himiyan* and (grammatically feminine) *vat-hāmbuvan* together (IC V iii:110); these titles are only applied to either royalty or monks. No further information is available, due to the extent of the wear on the inscription.

<sup>70</sup> This particular phrasing is taken from IC V ii:66, but variations occur throughout nearly all royal inscriptions of the later Anurādhapura period. The inscribing of this line seems to have become so commonplace, perhaps even mechanical, that some rather interesting scribal errors sometimes occur: most notably, in an inscription of Mahinda IV, the crucial “husband of the earth of Lanka” phrase is omitted, and we are told that *he himself* was “primary consort to the best of the Kṣatriya” (*kātusabanaṭa agamehesun vū salamevan maharaja*)!

Together, these two references suggest that (human) royal consorts were entirely peripheral to the inscriptional performance of kingship in the later Anurādhapura period; it was only if a consort's son attained the throne himself that she became “worthy” of epigraphic mention. Royal *daughters*, perhaps unsurprisingly, are even more absent from the inscriptional record. This is worth mentioning here both for how this attitude was continued by Vijayabāhu himself, as described below, but also for the dramatic contrast in attitudes towards royal consorts (and even, fleetingly, daughters) we will see evident in Chapters Three, Five, and Six.

All three of these features—elaborations of inscriptional prose, royal intervention into monastic affairs, and the exclusion of women—would prove influential on Vijayabāhu I and the subsequent monarchs of Poḷonnaruva. Before Vijayabāhu's rise, however, another kingly paradigm became dominant in Sri Lanka. Around the turn of the millennium, the island was increasingly incorporated into the Cōḷa imperial apparatus, and the dominant discourse of kingship on the island reflected Cōḷa inscriptional practices (including the primary use of Tamil rather than Sinhala). This process of incorporation seems to have begun with the military defeat of Mahinda V (r. from 982),<sup>71</sup> the son of Mahinda IV, at the hands of Rājarāja I Cōḷa (r. 985–1014); the island was fully brought under Cōḷa control by Rājarāja's successor Rājendra (r. 1012–1044). As Ali (2000, 199) suggests, the conquest of Lanka seems to hold great significance for Rājendra, whose standardised *meykkīrtti* thenceforth listed his victory over Mahinda V, and the capture of the royal palladia, in its opening verses. Several inscriptions bearing

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<sup>71</sup> Standardly scholarly dating places the “end” of Mahinda's reign in c. 1029 (see, e.g., Walters 2000, 141)

Rājendra's *meykkīrtti* have been found within Lanka, including at least one at a Buddhist *vihāra* at Periyakuḷam (TISL 20; see also TISL 13b, original findsite unknown). The conquest of Lanka clearly had a large impact on the inscriptional self-representation of its new Cōḷa overlords. So too did it influence the language of power within Lanka itself.

The personal *meykkīrtti* of Cōḷa sovereigns were far from the only expressions of this new royal discourse in Lanka. We have extant a large corpus of Tamil-language inscriptions from this period produced by junior members of the royal family or its cadet branches, who, as Indrapala (1978) notes, were positioned as something like “royal governors” of the island (as in other non-core regions of the Cōḷa empire). These governors were invested with kingly stylings, effectively replacing earlier independent monarchs with new “kings” subordinate to the Cōḷa overlord. The inscriptions of these governors, even at their most eulogistic, are entirely stylistically distinct from the formal *meykkīrtti* of the Cōḷa emperors. The imperial *meykkīrtti* were composed in an “austere, self-consciously ‘classical’ diction” (Cox 2016, 54), and could therefore be inscribed entirely in Tamil script. Gubernatorial inscriptions in Lanka, however, often heavily rely on Sanskrit loanwords, and therefore required the use of Grantha script (which can express both Tamil and Sanskrit phonemes), often alongside the Tamil.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> For an illustrative example see the two inscriptions found on a single pillar at Tirukkēṭīśvaram (TISL 13a and b). TISL 13a records a donation by a Lord Caṅkaraṅ, *uṭaiyāṅ* of Cīrukuḷattūr, to the temple’s resident god. Sanskrit loanwords are present throughout, particularly in descriptions of ritual acts (e.g. the temple is called Rāmīśvara instead of Irāmēccuram; lanterns are to be lit on the *kṛṣṇapakṣa* or dark fortnight...) and even in the names of the Cōḷa emperors themselves. The surviving section of TISL 13b contains only the *meykkīrtti* of Rājendra I, and seems to be inscribed purely in Tamil characters other than the opening *svasti śrī*. The first word of Rājendra’s *meykkīrtti*, “*tiru*,” is itself a Tamil *tadbhāva* of *śrī*; this auspicious term is therefore evoked twice-over, both in the Cōḷa imperial style and the Sanskritic form used more locally. On the significance of the *tiru* opening to Rājendra’s *meykkīrtti*, as imitated by his grandchild Vīrarājendra, see Cox (2016, 73).

Central to Indrapala’s analysis is an inscription found near Trincomalee, created by local officials but dated to, in my translation, “the tenth year of *kō śrī* Caṅkavarmarāṇa (Skt. Saṅghavarman) *uṭaiyār*, Cōḷa Ilaṅkēsvaratēvar (Skt. Lankeśvaradeva)” (TISL 19).<sup>73</sup> This title “Cōḷa Ilaṅkēsvaratēvar,” borrowed from the title “Lankeśvara” long used by Anurādhapura’s monarchs, is suggestive of the extent to which Saṅghavarman seems to have positioned himself as their rightful successor—rearticulated in the Tamil language, and firmly yoked to the Cōḷa imperial apparatus.

These inscriptions are far from outliers. In the period between Rājendra Cōḷa’s defeat of Mahinda V in the first years of the second millennium, and the rise of Vijayabāhu I in c. 1070, Tamil inscriptions proliferated throughout Lanka: marking private donations to religious institutions (predominantly, but not exclusively, Śaiva temples); adjudicating on matters of taxation and administration; or marking the growing power of merchant-mercenary corporations like the Veḷaikkāra, who would remain influential throughout the Poḷonnaruva period and beyond (on which see particularly Friedrich 2020). However, we should not over-emphasise the Cōḷa conquest as a moment of total disjuncture, or as a totally unprecedented shift in royal discourses.

The Tamil language had long been present in Lanka,<sup>74</sup> and Lankan kings in the late Anurādhapura period seem to have been keenly aware of the inscriptional moves made by their cross-straits rivals.

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<sup>73</sup> svasti śrī kō śrī caṅkavarmarāṇa uṭaiyar cōḷa ilaṅkēsvara tēvarki yāṇṭu pattavātu... Both *kō* and *uṭaiyār* are standard epithets for powerful men with no direct equivalents in English; I therefore leave them untranslated (as I do elsewhere for Sinhala *vahansē*).

<sup>74</sup> The first inscription in TISL is written in Brahmi characters, tentatively dated to the fourth or fifth centuries CE, and seems to acknowledge the authority of a Jaina nun (*kuratti*) named Vēmi.

In the inscription of Kāśyapa V (IC V i:104) discussed above, for example, he refers to himself by the rather distinctive title *maharajyutār*, likely influenced by the Tamil honorific suffix *-ār*. Nor did this period signal anything like a repression of Sinhala-language inscriptional practices. On the contrary, local governors seemed at pains to co-position themselves both within the wider Cōḷa imperial apparatus and more locally recognisable power structures. One representative example—marking a donation to the Tirukkētīśvaram temple in Mannar, sometime during the reign of Rājarāja I—opens:

...cōḷamaṇṭalattu kṣatiriyacikāmaṇivalānāṭṭu vēḷārnāṭṭuc ciṟukūrṇanallūr kiḷavaṇ tālīkumaraṇ  
 ḷamāṇa mummuṭicōḷamaṇṭalattu mātōṭṭamāṇa rājarājapurattu eṭuppittu rājarāja īsvarattu  
 mahā tēvarkku cantrātittaval niṟka...

Tālīkumaraṇ, the *kiḷavan* [of] Ciṟukūrṇanallur in Vēḷārnāṭu in the *vaḷanāṭu* called “Kṣatriya-  
 śīkamāna” in the Cōḷa-*maṇḍala*, having established [this temple] in Rājarājapura, called  
 Mātōṭṭam, in the Mummuṭi-Cōḷa-*maṇḍala* called ḷam, establishes [the following grant] for the  
 duration of the sun and moon for the *mahādeva* of the Rājarāja-Īśvara temple... (TISL 12, A1-20).

We see here a careful mapping of the administrative language of the wider Cōḷa empire—a *maṇḍala* divided neatly into sub-*maṇḍalas* and then again into *vaḷanāṭus*—onto more localised, and likely pre-existing, placenames, each diligently marked off with the adjectival suffix *-āṇa*, translated here “called.” Tālīkumaraṇ’s doubly-toponymic self-positioning would have been sensible to audiences from both anywhere throughout the Cōḷa polity and within the local area (as long as those audiences could read Tamil, of course). His grant to a local temple, forever immortalised in lithic form, represents an engagement with Lanka far from a mere “occupation” or military “pillage” (as MV ch. 55 would have it): this was a serious attempt to subsume kingship of Lanka into an imperial apparatus, attentive to the specifics of Lankan power relations but re-contextualised as part of the broader Cōḷa empire.

Between these sets of inscriptions, we are faced with two rather different paradigms of kingly self-expression: two different “political languages,” in Pocockian terms. These languages map, broadly speaking, onto distinct real-world languages: Sinhala for the late Anurādhapuran kings; Tamil for the Cōḷa royal governors and officials. It would be easy to assume that Vijayabāhu I, upon claiming the throne in c. 1070, might have simply rejected the latter, and instead “reverted” to the earlier Anurādhapura discourse of kingship. After all, all four extant inscriptions of this monarch are written in Sinhala, not Tamil, and—as I demonstrate below—are clearly strongly influenced by the discourse of monarchs like Kāśyapa V and Mahinda IV. This is certainly the interpretation favoured by the *Mahāvamsa*, which takes pains to present Vijayabāhu as a direct successor of Anurādhapura’s kings. However, a closer reading of these inscriptions, and of other evidence from within his reign, complicates this narrative, and suggests a more deliberate engagement on the new king’s behalf with *both* models of sovereignty available to him.

### **(Re)constructing Kingship**

Vijayabāhu’s final decisive victories over the Cōḷas came in c. 1070, with his conquest of both Anurādhapura—which had been the royal capital for over a millennium, prior to Rājendra’s conquest of the island—and Poḷonnaruva, the Cōḷa’s own administrative capital. The capture of both of these cities entailed, both symbolically and pragmatically, Vijayabāhu’s total control over the island as its new king, independent from Cōḷa overlordship. The question which must have then faced him was—in light of the two very different models of kingship described above—exactly what kind of king he intended to be.

The later narrative accounts paint Vijayabāhu as a Sinhala Buddhist liberator, throwing off the yoke of Tamil-speaking, Śiva-worshipping oppression. On the basis of this account, a rejection of Cōḷa

discourses of kingship and a “reversion” to the model of the later Anurādhapuran kings seems only natural. A cursory inspection of Vijayabāhu’s extant inscriptional corpus would also seem to support this. All of the four extant inscriptions attributed to him personally (in other words, leaving aside the famous Vēḷaikkāra inscription, discussed further below) are written in Sinhala language and script; almost every clause in their respective preambles has a parallel in the inscriptions of Mahinda IV. One possible explanation for this apparent continuity between the inscriptions of Mahinda IV and those of Vijayabāhu is that Anurādhapuran practices of kingship were somehow “preserved” throughout the period of Cōḷa occupation. This seems to be the explanation favoured by our later retrospective texts, which exclude any mention of Cōḷa governors from their descriptions of this period, and instead focus on a succession of “independent” monarchs ruling in exile from Ruhūṇu, the island’s southernmost province (see respectively MV ch. 56; PV, 782). The *Mahāvamsa* additionally describes an elaborate genealogy for Vijayabāhu which establishes him as a descendant of Mahinda V and, farther back, the founders of the Uttaramūla fraternity of the Abhayagiri (MV 59:4–42, discussed further below).<sup>75</sup> Modern scholars seem to have generally accepted this tradition that Ruhūṇu—which Knighton (1845) poetically calls “that division which yielded shelter to the traitor, refuge to the rebel, and armies to the pretender” (120)—

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<sup>75</sup> Geiger notes the jarring dissonance of this chapter from that which precedes it, but such is his dedication to the idea that the *Mahāvamsa* is a “chroniclar” record that he attributes this to it being “taken from a new source, possibly from what I have called the ‘Chronicle of Rohaṇa’” (1929, 1:192, n3). No such *Rohaṇavamsa* has ever been found, or even mentioned in premodern sources; this is entirely a fiction of modern historiography seeking to preserve the value it has assigned to the *Mahāvamsa* as a “historical source.” Paranavitana invokes this genealogy in his discussion of Vijayabāhu’s copper-plate inscription (IC VI:1), which refers to Vijayabāhu’s father Moggallāna by the regnal name Abhāsalamēvan. As Paranavitana notes, “the Chronicle” tells us that Moggallāna never exercised total control of Lanka, and Paranavitana therefore takes pains to justify the righteousness of Moggallāna’s claim to the regnal name (see EZ V, 4–5).

retained much of its independence throughout this period, even while the Cōlas occupied the Rajaraṭa to the north.<sup>76</sup>

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

To understand the intentionality with which Vijayabāhu engaged and synthesised these dual discourses of kingship, we need first to abandon the notion of a (Sinhala, Buddhist, non-Tamil, non-Śaiva) continuity stretching back to the "pre-Cōla" kingship of Anurādhapura, unconsciously preserved and

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<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., Knighton (1845, 130); Ranawella (1966, 149); Sastri (1959).

transmitted down the generations by equally Sinhala, Buddhist, non-Tamil, and non-Śaiva individuals. Such a conservative view of discourses—as pre-packaged along “cultural” lines, determinative of conceptual scope, and relatively insulated from the impositions of the social worlds around them—are poorly equipped to explain moments of creativity and innovation in intellectual history. We might turn here to Narayan’s (1998) important critique of what she termed “cultural essentialism:”

Essentialist pictures of culture represent “cultures” as if they were natural givens, entities that existed neatly distinct and separate in the world, entirely independent of our projects of distinguishing between them. This picture tends to erase the reality that the “boundaries” between “cultures” are human constructs, underdetermined by existing variations in worldviews and ways of life; representations that are embedded in and deployed for a variety of political ends. Essentialist representations of culture eclipse the reality that the labels or designations that are currently used to demarcate or individuate particular “cultures” themselves have a historical provenance, and that what they individuate or pick out as “one culture” often changes over time (92).

Narayan’s primary concern was the risk that such essentialism poses issues (conceptual as well as pragmatic) for feminists beyond the West; but she also shows (in the cited piece and elsewhere) how easily historians could be misled by essentialised notions of cultural divide. Instead, she urges us to attend to both the arbitrary boundaries *between* supposedly distinct cultural groups, and to the “values, interests, ways of life, and moral and political commitments [which] are internally plural and divergent” *within* those same supposedly homogenous groups (88). This approach, I suspect, can helpfully inform our reading of Vijayabāhu’s reign.

If nothing else, we must remember that by the time Vijayabāhu claimed Anurādhapura’s throne in c. 1070, the island had been under Cōḷa occupation for over six decades. While, as discussed above, we have extensive inscriptions in Tamil from the Cōḷa period, we have identified none in Sinhala from the

entire period between Mahinda IV and Vijayabāhu I.<sup>77</sup> While we know too little about the practicalities of Lankan royal inscriptions—who in the royal court composed them? Were they inscribed by local craftspeople, copied from manuscript templates? Or did royal scribes travel to oversee this process or perhaps even take the chisel themselves?—this long absence of a living Sinhala inscriptional culture should alert us to the possible loss of the *skills* involved. Parallels to inscriptions of Mahinda IV, therefore, cannot be taken lightly as simply a continuity of practice: those involved in the production of Vijayabāhu’s inscriptions must have intentionally studied the work of their forebears, in a deliberate and concentrated effort to emulate his inscriptional style.

The strongest clue to the studious intentionality of Vijayabāhu’s Anurādhapurān citations comes from his earliest extant inscription, a copper-plate grant dated to his 27<sup>th</sup> regnal year (c. 1097).<sup>78</sup> Shortly into the “work-like” portion of the grant, describing the circumstances under which Vijayabāhu issued the proclamation, we are told that he

...kiruḷu miṇi rasiṇ paḷa sesat kis tavaramin vāḍā...

...illuminated his white parasol’s interior with light refracted from the jewels of his crown... (IC VI: 1, A6).

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<sup>77</sup> See the discussion of epigraphic sources in Ranawella (1966, 34–35). The only inscription *possibly* from this period is the Kapārārāma Sanskrit inscription (IC V ii:74), which records a private donation made in the thirteenth regnal year of a monarch named Śri Saṅghabodhi, likely Mahinda V.

<sup>78</sup> IC notes that this inscription may well be a (slightly) later forgery, created by the family to whom the grant is dedicated “for as long as the sun and moon.” It seems unlikely to me that, even if this were the case, the opening eulogy was entirely invented by those later forgers. Notably absent from the entire inscription is any mention of Vijayabāhu’s overtures to the Rāmañña *saṅgha*, which seems to have become a defining feature of his reign in the later *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvāliya*. This leads me to believe that, even if the grant itself is a forgery, it must at least be based on an actual inscriptional eulogy from Vijayabāhu’s realm, and since it is dated to his twenty-seventh year, the simplest explanation is that this date too was copied from whatever the forgers took as their source.

This imagery is far from unusual in itself: sparkling gems and royal parasols are ubiquitous in South Asian poetics. The wording, however (including the unusual *kiruḷu*, from Skt. *kirīṭa*, instead of *oṭuṇu* for “crown,” and the *kis* for *kus*), is specific. I have been unable to find any earlier inscriptional use of these terms, much less the entire phrase together.<sup>79</sup> However, a nearly parallel phrase (accounting for metrical word distribution) does appear in the *Siyabaslakara*, a poetic manual dated perhaps to the tenth century (Hallisey, Meegaskumbura, and Gornall 2023), in a verse describing its own royal author:<sup>80</sup>

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

At the invitation of the noble Amaragiri Kāśyapa, a receptacle for the jewels of poetic qualities, an abode for the splendour of faultless ministry, whose self is one [with, presumably, that of the author],<sup>81</sup>

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

this treatise<sup>82</sup> was made by the auspicious Salamevan, Lord of Men, [who possessed] armies of scholars, [and] whose lineage (*vas*, Skt. *vaṃśa*) was illuminated by their **white parasols’ interiors with light refracted from the jewels in their crowns** (SBL, 406–7).

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<sup>79</sup> The term *kiruḷu* does not appear in any inscriptions of the late Anurādhapura period (collected in IC vol. V). ŚŚŚ gives only later witnesses for the term: in the thirteenth century *Kaviḷuma* and fourteenth century *Saddharmālaṅkāraya*.

<sup>80</sup> These verses, the identity of this king Salamevan, and his relationship to the earliest extant commentator Ruvanmī, have been the subject of intense scholarly debate. See most recently Dimitrov (2016, sec. 2.2); cf. Gornall (2017) and Hallisey, Meegaskumbura, and Gornall (2023, 144–45). I am grateful to Alastair Gornall for discussing this work with me, and for generously providing me with some useful resources.

<sup>81</sup> The meaning of this last phrase is opaque, and I have chosen to leave it untranslated. Jayatilaka’s edition of Ruvanmī’s “old commentary” unhelpfully glosses this phrase “*tamā ekatma: tamā hā ekātma [hevat tamāgē sahodaravū]*.” On the basis of this second clause, many scholars have interpreted this as meaning that Amaragiri Kāśyapa was the king’s brother (*sahodaru*). Dimitrov (2016) suggests, however, that the line in square brackets was Jayatilaka’s editorial imposition.

<sup>82</sup> Several of my modern editions read *gat* (“book,” Skt. *grantha*) rather than *sat* (Skt. *śāstra*). Jayatilaka’s edition of the “old commentary” clearly reads *me sat* and glosses it *mē śāstraya*.

The parallel wording here is, I think, a clue that the wordsmiths and craftspeople involved in the production of Vijayabāhu's inscriptions were actively engaging with *Siyabaslakara*. Rather than take this as evidence of synchronicity—to revive Godakumbura's (1955, 330) argument that *Siyabaslakara* might actually be a twelfth-century product after all—I suspect that what we are seeing here is *Siyabaslakara* being used for exactly its intended purpose: to instruct later readers how best to write well in Sinhala (albeit in inscriptions rather than poetry). For Vijayabāhu and his court scribes, such a guide was likely a valuable resource, to be consulted alongside the inscriptions of earlier kings with whom he sought to identify himself. As we will see in later chapters, this was far from the last engagement with *Siyabaslakara* by Poḷonnaruva's rulers.

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

The most obvious example of Vijayabāhu's continuity with his erstwhile overlords is the city of Poḷonnaruva itself. He received his royal consecration (*abhiṣeka*) at Anurādhapura, which indicates an acknowledgement of that city's long association with Lankan kingship. There is also good evidence that Anurādhapura continued to remain significant throughout his reign. The same copper-plate inscription discussed above (IC VI:1) records a proclamation made from atop the lion-throne in Anurādhapura, surrounded by a full royal court (*rajaḡaṇa*) consisting of his brothers, designated heirs (the *āpā* and *mahāpā*, here called *māyā*) and sub-king (a6–7).<sup>83</sup> Despite the clear symbolic importance of Anurādhapura, however, Vijayabāhu chose to keep his residence at, and carry on the daily business of government from, Poḷonnaruva. The later kings of Anurādhapura had certainly spent time in Poḷonnaruva, and a large number of inscriptions from this period are still extant there. But it was the Cōḷas who made it their dedicated administrative centre. This new location may have provided added security against uprisings from the south, thanks to the natural protection offered in that direction by the Mahavāli river (de Silva 1981, 26). While ports further north, at Mantai and Kayts, remained important centres of trade throughout the Poḷonnaruva period (Siriweera 1970, 228–30), the Mahavāli may also have offered easier access to developing ports on the eastern coast. Whatever their reasons for basing themselves at Poḷonnaruva, the day-to-day bureaucratic institutions of rule were located in the city for the six-plus decades of Cōḷa administration. For these reasons, and despite Anurādhapura's prestige, it may have simply been more prudent for Vijayabāhu to carry on ruling from the same site as his predecessors had

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<sup>83</sup> The entirely male composition of this group provides a useful contrast to that involved in the issuing of Niśsaṅka Malla's copper-plate grant (IC VI:58), discussed in Chapter Five.

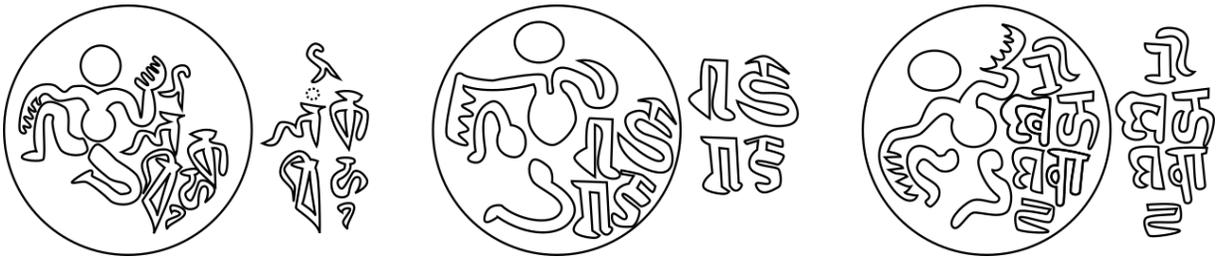
done for so many years. This rule seems to have included ongoing patronage of the various theistic shrines in which dwelt the Cōḷa's personal deity, Śiva, and various other non-Buddhist deities like Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, and Kālī still present in Poḷonnaruva today. Meegama (2010) suggests that the ongoing patronage of these shrines was a conscious attempt to emulate Cōḷa patterns of rule: such practices were clearly not as antithetical to “Buddhist kingship” as our more rigid modern boundaries might have us believe.<sup>84</sup> This division of labour across the two capitals may well have had symbolic weight: Vijayabāhu issued copper-plate grants from Anurādhapura, recalling the memory of powerful independent monarchs like Mahinda IV; but he also ruled from Poḷonnaruva, simultaneously replacing the Cōḷa governors.

Another important source of evidence here is Vijayabāhu's royal coinage. Coinage has increasingly been recognised as a powerful tool through which medieval monarchs “conveyed potent, officially sanctioned messages to mass audiences in every stratum of society in ways that no other medium was capable of” (Solway 2015, 13; see further Erickson 2019, particularly 10). Close attention to numismatic choices can therefore reveal much about a ruler's self-fashioning in a hyper-compacted format. Numismatic evidence from Poḷonnaruva (in Figure 2.2) provides us with a powerful indicator that Cōḷa-Lankan influences were not unidirectional. Lankan coinage prior to the Cōḷa period was typically stamped only with the legend *Śrī Laṃkā Vibhu*, and a distinctive humanoid figure (Codrington 1924, 54). Upon Rājarāja Cōḷa's annexation of Lanka, he seems to have incorporated this “standing man”

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<sup>84</sup> While Meegama's argument is extremely plausible for the Poḷonnaruva period as a whole, her evidence for this is primarily drawn from the retroactive *Mahāvamsa*, and from some later inscriptions of Gajabāhu II discussed in the following chapter. This evidence cannot speak for the specific motivations of Vijayabāhu, in other words.

iconography into his own coinage, alongside the monarch’s name in Nagari script (Biddulph 1968, 25; Medis 1992, 61–62). Vijayabāhu’s coinage, and that of all Poḷonnaruvan kings following him, imitated this Cōḷa style by including both the “standing man” and the monarch’s name in Nagari (Codrington 1924, 63–64). Once again, we see a dual evocation: the long-standing visual symbolism of Anurādhapura’s kings, coupled with the Cōḷa practice of announcing the name of the reigning monarch.



**Figure 2.2: early "Śrī Laṃkā Vibhu" coins (L), coins of Rājarāja, and coins of Vijayabāhu I<sup>85</sup>**

The continued use of Nagari script is particularly significant, suggesting that these coins may have been intended to communicate Vijayabāhu’s kingship not only internally. Rather, as Hall (1999) suggested for the original uptake of Nagari script in Cōḷa coinage, the intent was likely “interaction with external networks of communication, which were perceived as being important to local needs” (549). These coins, and their regionally-recognisable script, are therefore a useful indication of how broad the intended audience of Vijayabāhu’s kingly self-representation was.

We should not assume, however, that the internal/external audience distinction can be neatly mapped upon linguistic lines: that domestic audiences were addressed in Sinhala, while more regional languages such as Tamil and scripts like Nagari were directed towards foreign rulers. We have good

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<sup>85</sup> Illustrations are simplified representations based on sources cited in this paragraph.

evidence, after all, that Tamil remained in use as a courtly and administrative language, *alongside* Sinhala, long into the Poḷonnaruva period. Tamil-language inscriptions, attributed to kings and courtiers alike, are extant through to the time of Līlāvati.<sup>86</sup> No Tamil-language inscriptions of Vijayabāhu I himself survive, but we might take the Vēḷaikkāraṅ pillar-inscription (TISL 42)—despite almost certainly having been created after Vijayabāhu’s own death—as evidence of the ongoing relationship between the titular merchant-mercenary guild and the institutions of kingship in the post-Cōḷa era.<sup>87</sup> In this inscription, the Vēḷaikkāraṅ describe themselves as being invited by the royal preceptor (*rājaguru*), accompanied by the royal ministers (*rājāmātyarōṭuṅ kūṭa*), to take charge of the protection of the Buddha’s Tooth Relic. As

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<sup>86</sup> Later Tamil-language inscriptions are attributed to an official of Jayabāhu I (TISL 43); to Gajabāhu II (TISL 28b; 29; 30; 52); to an official of Mānābharaṇa (TISL 51b); to Parākramabāhu I (TISL 53); and to an official of Līlāvati (TISL 54).

<sup>87</sup> Dating this inscription is more complicated than it might appear. The “auspicious astral conjunctions” (*tirunaḷṣatraṅ*) clearly refer to an annual astrological cycle; epigraphists are undecided whether Vijayabāhu’s “observation” (*celuttu-tal*) of these began count from his first birthday or from the date of his birth (in other words, whether he had completed or was still in his seventy-third year at the point this inscription references). The stakes of this debate over the *nakṣatras* are, of course, only a single year. More concerning to me, and yet undiscussed in the extant literature, is the question of Vijayabāhu’s regnal years. All editions of the inscription agree that he reigned for *aimpattay yāṅṭu* (EZ II:42 reads the presumably cognate *aiṅpattayyāṅḍu* in Roman script, with no Tamil transcription provided; Pathmanathan refers to an edition by Paranavitana in EI, but the citation appears to be incorrect). Both Wickramasinghe and Pathmanathan translate this as “fifty-five years,” presumably taking *yāṅṭu* as a variant on *aintu* (“five”) with -yy- infix for *sandhi*. But this would require both a geminated *sandhi* infix (-yy- instead of just -y-) and a consonant shift from dental *ntu* to retroflex *ṅṭu*. Although I am far less proficient a Tamilist or epigraphist than either Wickramasinghe or Pathmanathan, it seems to me that a far more natural reading would be to take *yāṅṭu* as “year,” and to therefore translate *aimpattay yāṅṭu* as “fifty years.” Presumably both scholars preferred the earlier reading because it aligns with the *Mahāvāṃsa*’s account of Vijayabāhu having ruled for “fifty-five years” (MV 60:91). But this is contradicted by *Pūjāvaliya*, which tells us that Vijayabāhu ruled for only fifty years (*mahalu vijayabāhu nam raja... sūpanas havuruddak rājyaya keḷēya*, PV 782)! If we take *aimpattay yāṅṭu* as “fifty years,” two interpretations are possible. One is that the *Mahāvāṃsa* got the length of Vijayabāhu’s reign wrong, and it was actually only fifty years (as recorded both here and in the *Pūjāvaliya*). But, alternatively, if we do not wish to deviate from the *Mahāvāṃsa* (and therefore throw off our entire dating scheme for this period’s monarchs...), this inscription could simply have been created during Vijayabāhu’s lifespan, in his fifty-first regnal year (which happens to be either his seventy-third or seventy-fourth birth year), and not actually record his death at all.

Friedrich (2020) suggests, in his insightful reading of this inscription, this act “works to connect an existing regime of merchant patronage with the prerogatives of Buddhist kingship” (42)—specifically, with the protection and maintenance of a Buddha-relic, a physical manifestation of the Buddha’s *śāsana*, an act apparently sanctioned both by the *saṅgha* and the royal court.<sup>88</sup> That a transregional merchant guild operating primarily in Tamil retained so much influence within Lanka, and that such a symbolically rich act would be made concrete with a Tamil-language inscription, says much about the language’s ongoing significance in the post-Cōḷa period.

Finally, we have good evidence for Cōḷa influence on royal titles themselves: particularly the title *cakravartin*. Vijayabāhu I is called a *cakravartin* (as T. *cakravarttika!*) in the same (posthumous) Vēlaikkāra inscription TISL 42, but not in any of his own extant inscriptions (IC VI:1 and 2). This might, therefore, be a retrospective assignment of *cakravartin* status. But his son, Jayabāhu, is also called *cakravartin* in several inscriptions of the “interregnal” period discussed in the following chapter, again all in Tamil (see, e.g., TISL 51a and b). It is only with an inscription of Gajabāhu II that we see a *cakravartin* claim appear in Sinhala (as *aṇasakviti* in IC VI:9). The title therefore likely entered Sri Lankan courts through Tamil first, and only later appears to have been taken up in Sinhala-language political discourse. If we accept, as I have suggested above, that both Sinhala and Tamil continued to be used as courtly languages from Vijayabāhu’s reign onwards, then it seems very possible, if not likely, that the title *cakravartin* was indeed used in Vijayabāhu’s own court (in Tamil), but was simply not recorded in any of his own Sinhala-

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<sup>88</sup> Friedrich goes so far as to suggest that “If we are to trust the political logic that fueled contestations for the tooth relic, the *vēlaikkāra*s were thus the legitimate kings of Sri Lanka” (85–6).

language inscriptions. Pathmanathan (1982) identified this pattern over four decades ago, and suggested that the likely inspiration was “was due to influences from contemporary neighbouring kingdoms and sources outside the Buddhist tradition” (124), particularly the Cōḷas.<sup>89</sup> In an article currently under review, I note near-simultaneous claims to *cakravartin*ship in Angkor (in c. 1058), the Cōḷa empire (c. 1070), Lanka (sometime from c. 1070, the date of Vijayabāhu’s consecration in Anurādhapura), and Pagan (from c. 1084, the consecration of Kyanziththa). Building on the excellent studies of Thompson (2016) for Angkor and Cox (2016) for the Cōḷas, I argue that this near-simultaneity is the product of a transregional practice of kingship. We might assign to Lanka’s *cakravartin* claims, which seem to have rapidly followed those of their former Cōḷa overlords, a certain strategic value. What better way to signal one’s independence from a rival than to claim an equivalent “rank”? “The Cōḷa monarch may well be a *cakravartikaḷ*,” we can imagine the logic proceeding, “but so too are we Poḷonnaruvan monarchs *cakravartins*—they can have their *cakra* on Jambudvīpa, and we shall have ours on Lanḱādvīpa.” Alternatively, we might explain the rapid proliferation of these claims as simply an effort at “Keeping Up

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<sup>89</sup> Pathmanathan is, unfortunately, led astray by Sastri, who claims that it was Rājarāja I Cōḷa who “*may* be said, now, to become ‘emperor,’ *cakravartigaḷ*’ as he is occasionally called by his subjects, though in his official records he is still described only as ‘*udaiyār*’” (quoted in Pathmanathan 1982, 124–25, my emphasis added). It is unclear to me what records we have available to us of what Rājarāja’s subjects called him, beyond the (inscriptional and literary) products of his court. This seems, in other words, to be an example of the modern conflation between etic identifications of premodern monarchs as “imperial” and the emic designation “*cakravartin*.” Modern scholars may consider Rājarāja to be “imperial” in form, but in the absence of any evidence that he referred to himself as a *cakravartin* we should not impose that title on him. To do so is to miss the significance of moments in which the title is actually claimed.

with the *Cakravartins*.”<sup>90</sup> After all, once a critical mass of monarchs in the Indian Ocean region had begun to claim *cakravartin* status, who would want to be the last to do so?

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

This has not been to suggest that discourses of kingship at Poḷonnaruva can be simply reduced down to a mixture of pre-existing components borrowed, respectively, from discrete “Sinhala Buddhist” and “Cōḷa” precursors. This framing has had a heuristic value in pushing back against the notion that Poḷonnaruvan kingship represented an outright rejection of Cōḷa influences. To hold too firmly to this Anurādhapura/Cōḷa dichotomy going forward, however, would blind us to the discursive innovations made possible within this referent framework. The purpose of the preceding two sections has been to

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<sup>90</sup> Daniel Bass is entirely to applaud, or bemoan, for this excellent reference.

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

### **Kingship at the Śrī Pāda**

On a hill near Ambagamuwa, just south of the mountain variously called Samantakūṭa or Samanaḷakanda (“the Peak of [the god] Saman”), Civaṇoḷipātamalai (“the Peak of Śiva’s Lustrous Foot[print]”), or Adam’s Peak, stands a long inscription (IC VI:2) dated to Vijayabāhu’s 38<sup>th</sup> regnal year (c. 1108).<sup>91</sup> This inscription records the king’s donation of the local area to the sacred footprint (*śrī pāda*) atop the Peak, believed by Buddhists to be a use-relic (*pāribhogika-dhātu*) of the Buddha himself. There is good reason to think that this inscription was once part of a matching series, established in villages surrounding the Peak,<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> As the varied names suggest, the sacred footprint atop this mountain has been variously claimed to belong to the Buddha, Śiva, the Prophet Muhammed, and to the primordial man Adam. On the long history of such claims, see McKinley (2018). Following McKinley’s lead (xvi), I refer to the mountain as “the Peak” throughout this section avoid suggesting endorsement of any particular sectarian claims.

<sup>92</sup> This inscription lists its own findsite, Amubagamuwa, as just one among many such villages donated to the upkeep and maintenance of the *śrī pāda*’s temple and environs. It seems likely, therefore, that matching inscriptions once stood in other villages surrounding the sacred mountain. A heavily effaced inscription found at Gilīmalaya (IC VI:3) seems to share some, but not all, of its text with the Ambagamuwa inscription. Gilīmalaya is mentioned in the later *Mahāvamsa* account as another village donated for the maintenance of rest-houses along the pilgrimage route (MV 60:64-67). This may suggest that a second set of inscriptions was created to mark such rest-house donations, based

marking a large swathe of donations to the *śrī pāda* which allowed for substantial ritual and edificial engagement on Vijayabāhu’s behalf. As Blackburn (2010) has shown, engagement with Buddha-relics like the *śrī pāda* often served as a core technology of statecraft for Buddhist rulers across the Indian Ocean region, particularly in moments of political transition or instability (320). Through their evocation of protective and benedictive powers—and, simultaneously (if perhaps more cynically), demonstrating the economic power and pious largess of the royal donor—such engagements provided unparalleled opportunities for the public articulation of idealised visions of society, led by idealised monarchs.

In this section I suggest that we can productively read the Ambagamuva inscription as articulating a hierarchical vision of society on a cosmological scale, in which Vijayabāhu himself serves as a vital pivot between the sovereign Buddha and the earthly kingdom. Here I draw heavily on Inden’s (1981) notion of a “hierarchy of kingship:” an understanding of authority cascading down from a supreme deity (*usually* Viṣṇu or Śiva) to a paramount king, through subordinate kings, and then down through other *varṇas* (social classes). We might take issue with Inden’s model—supposedly drawn from a reading of “normative texts,” but which he seeks to map onto a real-world succession of historical “paramount kings”—from the perspective of *realpolitik*.<sup>93</sup> But as Gornall (2020) has argued, monastic authors from the

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on the same template as that used in villages like Ambagamuva donated directly to the *śrī pāda*. If so, even more deliberation must have been put into the wording of this “mass-produced” inscriptional text than usual, meriting our close attention to its contents.

<sup>93</sup> Inden focuses firmly on the internal establishment and maintenance of hierarchy according to *dharma*, but is less clear on *how* exactly an “exceptionally successful” monarch might “even become paramount overlord of all India” (103). Surely the only way that this success could actually be accomplished would be through violent disruption of existing hierarchies, but while Inden hints at the importance of (taxation?) revenue and (subsequent?) military readiness (102), he stops short of actually discussing the business of warfare. Texts like Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra*,

later Poḷonnaruva period seem to have been concerned with rhetorically establishing just such a hierarchy within Lanka:

Monastic elites presented themselves, rather than the king and his court, under the Buddha at the apex of Lanka’s long chain of lordship, and believed that the superior rights enjoyed by the Buddha should extend first to them before the king (13).

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

The inscription at Ambagamuwa can be divided into four unequal parts. The first section (ll. a1-21) is a series of adjectival and verbal clauses all describing Vijayabāhu himself (named in l. a21), who then constitutes the main agent of the following text. This section, like the copper-plate inscription discussed above, closely follows the exemplar of Mahinda IV, borrowing large chunks of text from the earlier monarch’s inscriptions. Several lines, however, appear to be unprecedented in Anurādhapurān (or, for that matter, Cōlā) inscriptions; their stock metaphors and use of clear Sanskrit loanwords speak to an ongoing engagement with wider regional literary trends by Vijayabāhu and his courtiers.<sup>94</sup>

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meanwhile, suggest that the risk of violent conquest was a primary concern of monarchs, suggesting a far less stable political landscape than the idealised hierarchies described in Inden’s textual sources.

<sup>94</sup> These lines respectively describe Vijayabāhu as he “...who anointed the heads of various kings with the rays of light reflected from his own toenails...” (IC VI:2, a9-10: *...tumā saraṇā niyārasin nan raja mundunā bises vū...*) and who “had narratives of his glory (Skt. *yaśas-prabandha*) spread across the entire world, by filling the ocean—which is the heart of all paupers spread across various lands (*deśas*)—with the flood of alms, [consisting of] unlimited and varied gems and treasures from the wishing-tree of his own body” (IC VI:2, a14-16: *...tumā tunu kapturu min nomin nan ruvin dun danvaturen nan desen pataḷe muḷu dīḷindu sit sayurā puramin muḷu levihu pataḷe yasa pabanda āti...*).

Following this opening, a short second section (a22-23) sets the temporal frame: in the thirty-seventh year after his defeat of the “Tamils” (*demeḷa*) and coronation as monarch. A lengthy third section (a23-b50) describes the actions carried out in this year at, and with respect to, the *śrī pāda* atop the Peak, including the donation of villages. Finally, the (partially erased) final section lists the local officials by whom Vijayabāhu’s will was carried out. Three elements of this inscription are central to my reading of it as a social hierarchisation: one taken from the first section, describing Vijayabāhu himself; and the latter two from section three, describing his actions at the *śrī pāda*.

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

...somiyaṇ nisayura vā gāmbureṇ sayura vā taḥavureṇ meru vā denena dīnisaṇ vā guṇaṭṭavura vā dasa raḍa dhammaṭṭa neva vā tunu ruvaṇa ruvaṇaṭṭa māṇḍosa vā munisaṇṇaṭṭa ekavaḥaḷa ṭāmba vā hāma siriṭṭa siri se vā diyaṭṭa piḥṭa vā...

...being the moon in munificence (Skt. *saumya*); the ocean in depth; Meru in firmness; the Lord of Wealth (Kubera) in wealth; a container for *guṇas* (lit. “qualities,” typically virtuous qualities); a dwelling for the ten *rājadharmas*; a casket for the gem of the Triple Gem; a single supporting pillar for the Sage’s *śāsana*; like Śrī for every prosperity (*śrī*); [and] a support for the world... (IC V ii:67, 5-7).

These references are more or less what we might expect from a solidly “Buddhist” monarch. While Kuvera was a pan-sectarian figure, he was firmly enshrined in the Buddhist cosmos as one of the four directional guardian deities, and based on archaeological evidence was a popular cultic figure in Anurādhapura (Paranavitana 1950; Mudiyanse 1970, 47–49). The comparison to the goddess Śrī might strike us as unusual (the editors of EZ comment as much), but we should note that this is the only figure

in Mahinda IV’s list who is described with the particle of analogy, *sē*; Mahinda IV is only *like Śrī*, whereas he is fully identified as the other entities on the list.<sup>95</sup>

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

...sāhatedin hiru pālakevin mehesurā daḷadāpin uvindu rajaviritin surindu pabanda denen  
dinisuran sat setin kirisuru pānāsarin suraguru somiguṇen nisayuru rūsarīn kandap  
kuluṇusirin bosat dunu...

...surpassed the sun in bold *tejas*, Mehesura (Maheśvara, i.e. Śiva) in expressed anger, Uvindu (Upendra, Viṣṇu) in great pride,<sup>96</sup> Surendra (Indra) in kingly conduct (*rāja-vṛtta*),<sup>97</sup> the Lord of Wealth (Kubera) in continuous giving, Kitisuru in *satseta*,<sup>98</sup> Suraguru (Bṛhaspati) in essential wisdom, the moon in munificent quality, Kandap (Skt. Kandarpa) in bodily excellence, [and] the *bodhisattva* in the splendour of compassion... (IC VI:2, 10-13).

This is a considerably more cosmopolitan cosmos than that of Mahinda IV. This is a nearly doxographic list of South Asian deities: from Śiva and Viṣṇu, major gods adopted as personal deities by powerful rulers across the Indian Ocean region; to less highly-ranked deities like Kandarpa.<sup>99</sup> This should not be a

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<sup>95</sup> On the significance of this particle, and a valuable caution against over-reading analogies in which it appears, see Berkwitz (2019a, para. 17).

<sup>96</sup> ŚŚŚ s.v. *daḷa-dāp*. Among Viṣṇu’s thousand names (as listed in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*) are Darpahan (“destroyer of pride”) and Darpada (“Producer of Pride”).

<sup>97</sup> This term appears in Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra* (1.9.4), but is not discussed in any detail. It recurs frequently throughout the *Rāmāyana*, but never in explicit relation to Indra.

<sup>98</sup> The potential significance of this line outweighs any confidence we have in its meaning. Both Wickramasinghe and Ranawella render *satseta* as “[bestowing] happiness to living beings” (IC VI, 9; EZ II, 215); I would instead interpret it as “the good (*sat*) peace (*kṣanti*),” which must refer to *nirvāṇa*. Wickramasinghe renders Kitisuru (I think correctly) as Kīrtiśvara (“Lord of Fame”). While there are several temples with variants on that name throughout South Asia, I do not know a single deity commonly referred to by the title. Ranawella suggests Avalokiteśvara, which—while I think less plausible on philological grounds—would certainly provide more punch to my reading of “overcomes in [proximity to] *nirvāṇa*.” On Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka see Holt (1991).

<sup>99</sup> Kandarpa is an alternate name for Kāma, the god of desire and love; see *Amarakośa* 1:1.53-56. This section of the *Amarakośa*, notably, also includes Māra—the Buddhist embodiment of death and rebirth in *saṃsāra*—as another alternative name for Kandarpa; an apparently unlikely reference point for a Buddhist monarch like Vijayabāhu!

surprise. South Asian religions have long been recognised as kathenotheistic: even the most devout Vaiṣṇava does not necessarily deny the existence or even the potency of Śiva, even if she understands the latter to be subordinate to the former; Saurya monarchs would happily list the virtues of other gods they understand to be mere servants of their own solar deity. Yet Buddhism (and, for that matter, Jainism) are often sectioned out as natural “outsiders” to this ecumenical dynamic.<sup>100</sup> The inclusion of these deities as salient references for Vijayabāhu’s laudable qualities therefore serves as a powerful counterpoint to the tired trope of fundamental antagonism between Buddhists and theists.

However, this section of the inscription goes beyond mere cosmological inclusivity. Kathenotheism is fundamentally hierarchical: multiple deities exist and are potentially potent sources of protection or benediction, but not all are equal. This dynamic is very evident in Vijayabāhu’s list of superlative virtues. Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the other deities are set alongside a *bodhisattva*, a “mere” Buddha-in-training. The Buddha himself, meanwhile, remains apart and therefore above; he alone is incomparable. This is an example, in other words, of what Holt (1991) might call assimilation into a Buddhist soteriology (see particularly his Ch. 1). Vijayabāhu, meanwhile, is described as not just *being* the auspicious individuals listed, as in the inscriptions of Mahinda IV, but as *surpassing* them: he is positioned somewhere between the Buddha, at the apex of the hierarchy, and the ranks of “lesser” deities like Śiva

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Some Jaina texts mention a female deity, Kandarpā, as being “fair in body.” I have unfortunately only found this in translation, and have not yet been able to source a Sanskrit original.

<sup>100</sup> This distinction has little support for much of premodern South Asian intellectual history. Even the emic term *āstika*—which came to mean something like “those who affirm [the existence of a God and the validity of the Vedas]”—was considered, in some early doxographies, to include Buddhism and Jainism (Nicholson 2010, 155).

and Viṣṇu. A clear cosmological hierarchy is set in place by this description, one in which theist deities are certainly participant, but subordinate to the earthly monarch and then, yet higher, to the Buddha himself.

The Buddha's apex authority is reaffirmed by the ritual acts Vijayabāhu is described as having carried out atop the Peak in his thirty-seventh regnal year. Here the inscription departs from the expected syntax; instead of the typical run-on sentence with its string of gerunds, we are faced instead with discrete, short sentences punctuated by final verb forms. This shift in tone encourages us, perhaps, to read slower; it lends a sense of deliberation to the royal actions thus described.

...me kăpă buduvū kakusandakoṇāgamanakāssapegotama yā sivubudun saraṇataṃburudā mundunen isilū samanoḷakuḷehi pihiṭi padalasdā pihiṭi visiturusatruvanin sāduṇu nanbaraṇin puda karayi. no ek paṭa vārāli viyan dada koḍi naṅgayi. sivudāgandin alevukoṭa tumā miṇivuṭunen padalasdā sadā vāḍasiṭā...

...he made a *pūja* with various adornments, made of the seven gems of variegated colour (*visituru*, Skt. *vacitra*), at the Footprint Relic at Samanoḷakuḷa, which bore the Sacred Relics<sup>101</sup> of the lotus-feet of the four Buddhas—Kakusanda, Koṇāgamana, Kāssapa, and Gotama—who were awakened in this *kalpa*. He raised aloft various silk canopies, flags, and banners. Having anointed it with four perfumes, he enhanced the Footprint Relic with his own bejewelled crown... (IC VI:2, a24-29).

Vijayabāhu's ritual offering up of his own crown to the *śrī pāda* positions the Relic as his overlord. McKinley (2018) suggests that later monarchs and monks increasingly treated the Peak itself as a monarch (82-3); here, however, it is specifically the Relic, the ongoing manifestation of the Buddha himself—and, before him, the other three Buddhas of our current era—who are thus exalted. This

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<sup>101</sup> By "sacred" here I intend the honorific suffix *mundun*.

regalisation of the *śrī pāda* is not limited to the offering-up of the crown. Reading these acts as simultaneously a *pūja* and a coronation ceremony allows us to tease out deeper meanings behind the offerings. The “seven jewels” (*satruvan*, Skt. *saptaratna*) evoke both the physical gemstones which could be mined from the area surrounding the Peak, and which have long been associated with it (McKinley 2018, 8); but also, perhaps, the seven “jewels” which serve as the palladia of a *cakravartin* monarch in Buddhist scriptures.<sup>102</sup> Mentions of “silk canopies, banners, and flags” might similarly evoke the parasol (Skt. *chatra*), an iconic symbol of royal authority throughout Southern Asia. These ritual acts together, I am suggesting, served to subordinate Vijayabāhu—the exemplary, but merely human, king—to the higher kingship of the Buddha himself, as manifested in his Footprint Relic, establishing a thoroughly Buddhist “hierarchy of kingship” (in Inden’s terms).

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

...padalasdā pihīti samanoḷakulehi kamnavāmpudasitīyam vāṭa dalvanu vaṭa hā, mehi dā vandanaṭa sivu desen vāḍi mahasaṅgun vahanseṭa vaṭanā piḍupasayaṭa hā, sesu dā vandanaṭa rāsvana āgata dubbāgatayanaṭa dena dan vaṭaṭa hā, rajaraṭamaṅgā age pasgavuyehi apa nāmin gavuyekā danhalak bāvin karavā dānopakaraṇa ātikoṭa dan denukoṭa hā, padalasdā pihīti maḷuyen pātāmaḷuvak karavā sesu adhamajātin ihidā vandanukoṭa hā, peramaḷuyehi mahavuru

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<sup>102</sup> The exact composition of the seven vary slightly between textual traditions. In Pali lists these are the wheel-treasure (*cakkaratana*), elephant-treasure (*hatthiratana*), horse-treasure (*assaratana*), jewel-treasure (*maṇiratana*), woman-treasure (*itthiratana*), householder- or treasurer-treasure (*gahapatiratana*), and leader- or minister-treasure (*pariṇāyakarātana*). As I argue elsewhere (Shirley under review b), throughout much of the first millennium the Buddha (but not earthly monarchs) was referred to as a (*saddharma*)*cakravartin* in many Pali-language Lankan texts, although none attribute to him the seven jewels we might expect of a more “earthly” *cakravartin* monarch.

bandavā demāṅgā dedoroṭuvak karavā kesimundu ātikoṭa rakṣāyodāviyāyuttan ihidā vandanukoṭa hā...

...to bestow (from Skt. *varṣana*) renovations, *pūja*, images [and] lamp-lighting at Samanoḷakuḷa which bears the Footprint Relic; and for the food-offerings made to the honourable *mahāsaṅgha* which arrives from the four quarters to worship the Relic here; and to bestow alms, given to the remaining pilgrims (lit. “those who travel with difficulty”) who have come and gathered to worship the Relic; and, having had alms-halls established in Our name at each *gavu* (a unit of distance) in the final five *gavu* along the Rajaraṭa way, having furnished them with the means for alms, to give [those] alms; and, having had made a lower terrace (*maḷuva*) below the terrace which bears the Footprint Relic, to have the Sage’s Relic worshipped by the low-born (*adhamaḷātin*); and, having raised a great wall around the upper terrace, having had built two gates at the two paths, having furnished them with keys and locks, to have the Sage’s Relic worshipped by those engaged in protection... (IC VI:2, b28-37).

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

Vijayabāhu then creates, however, a lower level to this temple complex; a secondary terrace intended for the worship of those of lower castes (*jāti*). This is a decidedly *dharmasāstric* term, which earlier commentators on the Ambagamuwa have noted is “unusual” in a Lankan context (Walpola Rahula *thero* 1956, 237). While the invocation of this group in the inscription is framed positively—Vijayabāhu builds them this dedicated terrace to provide them an opportunity to worship—it is hard to read this as anything but a decisive segregation (not least when we consider the immediately subsequent references to walls, gates, and locks protecting the upper terrace). Finally—perhaps to strengthen the security provided to the upper terrace by the aforementioned physical protections—Vijayabāhu invokes the

worship of “those engaged in protection” (*rakṣāyodāviyāyuttan*),<sup>103</sup> presumably dedicated guards. It seems likely (but far from certain) that such guards were foreign mercenaries, the services of whom had long been considered prestigious on the island (Indrapala 1990). As discussed below, the other significant relic of the Poḷonnaruva period—the Tooth Relic—was entrusted to the care of the Vēḷaikkāra merchant/mercenary guild not long after Vijayabāhu’s death.

Together, these discursive references and physical interventions at the Peak seem to lay out a clear social hierarchy. The Buddha himself sits at the apex, his physical Relic crowned by the earthly monarch Vijayabāhu. That monarch, in turn, surpasses a doxographic pantheon of other deities in his laudatory qualities; he also makes the most prestigious offerings to that same Relic, placing him at the forefront of the Buddha’s worshipper-subjects on the island. Those subjects are then ranked in turn: monks and (high-caste) pilgrims below the king, but still given a degree of direct access to the Buddha’s Footprint Relic; low-caste worshippers kept at a (literal) distance on their own dedicated terrace; and finally those who the king has tasked with protection of the Relic, its ritual complex, and therefore the integrity of the tiered social order constructed within.

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<sup>103</sup> Here my translation differs significantly from that of EZ (which IC copies verbatim). EZ suggests for *rakṣāyodāviyāyuttan* “those worthy of [Vijayabāhu’s] protection.” Pace ŚŚŚ, however, the meanings of *yodāviyā* all seem to relate to utility (one synonym given by ŚŚŚ is Skt. *nirukta*). Given the context of the clause, in which every other action appears to involved securing the upper terrace, it makes more sense to me to read this as those (*yuttan*) whom Vijayabāhu employed (*yodāviyā*) for the purpose of further protection (*rakṣā*).

## Reviving Which Śāsana?

Vijayabāhu’s reign is perhaps most remembered for his intervention in the development of what we now call Theravāda Buddhism across the Indian Ocean region. Nearly all later historical narratives relate how Vijayabāhu was faced, at the advent of his reign, with what would become a semi-recurring problem throughout Lankan history: there were simply too few monks available on the island to meet the quorum required for further ordinations (MV 60:4-7; PV, 782; NS, 76). Later narratives insist that this was a result of Cōḷa oppressions: the *Pūjāvaliya*, for example, tells us that the śāsana was “destroyed by the Tamils” (PV, 782; ...*demaḷun visin naṭa śāsanayehi...*). The true reasons were likely more nuanced and multifaceted (see Blackburn 2015b, 241). Nonetheless, Vijayabāhu’s response—sending gifts to a king Anuruddha (possibly Anawrahta, r. c. 1044-77<sub>CE</sub>) in Rāmañña,<sup>104</sup> and procuring in return a quorum of fully-ordained monks—would provide a precedent of cross-Oceanic connectivity which would continue to be evoked throughout the second millennium.

These overtures to Rāmañña are not mentioned in any of the inscriptions attributed to Vijayabāhu or his ministers from within his own lifespan. They are, however, mentioned in the Vēḷakkāraṅ pillar inscription (TISL 42, discussed briefly above), likely erected shortly after his death. In

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<sup>104</sup> Almost certainly in what is now lower Myanmar. On the identity, and names, of this locale, see Aung-Thwin (2005, chap. 3); cf. Blackburn (2015b, 242). Aung-Thwin suggests, I think incorrectly, that the Sinhala placename “Aramaṇa” should not be taken as synonymous with the Pali placename “Rāmañña” (49). “Aramaṇa” is a highly plausible adaption of the Tamil “Arumaṇa,” in turn a highly plausible adaption of the Pali “Rāmañña.” See also the closely parallel wording of the Sinhala *Pūjāvaliya* *pace* Aramaṇa (PV, 782) and the Pali *Mahāvamsa* *pace* Rāmañña (MV 58:8-10).

this inscription, after a short Sanskrit prologue, these events are given pride of place within Vijayabāhu's

prenominal inscripational eulogy:

svasti śrīḥ || laṅkāyām jinadantadhātubhavanam yaddevasenādhipo kārṣīt |  
śrīvijayādibāhunṛparādeśāt pulasteḥ pure || veḷaikkārasamāhitān<sup>105</sup> tadapi tat  
paryantadevālayān | velaikkārabalāni<sup>106</sup> pāntu nitaram ākalpasandher bhuvi || namo buddhāya  
||

Svasti! Śrī! Which abode for the Conqueror's Tooth Relic was built by General Deva in the city of Pulasti in Lanka on the order of Śrī Vijayādibāhu, the Lord of Men; may the Veḷaikkāra forces continually protect that [abode], and its surrounding *devālayas* assembled by the Velaikkāras, until the end of the *kalpa* [and the end of] the world. Homage to the Buddha.

śrīlaṅkādvīpattu<sup>107</sup> sūryavamcattu iṅṣvāku viṇ vaḷi vanta anēka catru vijayam paṇṇi  
anurādhapuram pukku buddharcāsanam rakṣikka vēṇṭi saṅgha niyōkattāl tirumuṭi cūṭi  
arumaṇattil niṅṛum caṅkattārai alaippittu mūṅṛu nikāyattu saṅghasūddhi paṇṇuvittu mūṅṛu  
tulābhāram mūṅṛu nikāyattukku kuṭuttu tasarājatarmmattāl aimpattay yāṅṭu ilaṅkai  
muḷuvatum oru kuṭai niḷarrit tiruvirājyaṅ ceytaruḷi eḷupattu mūvāṅṭu tiru nakṣatraṅ celuttiṅa  
kō śrī saṅghabōdhi vanmarāṇa cakravarttikaḷ śrī vijayabāhū dēvar...

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

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<sup>105</sup> TISL reads *-samāgatān*, and seems to take it as modifying *velaikkārabalāni* to together read “the assembled Velaikkāra forces.” But this first compound in *-ān* must be in plural accusative, and while this *could be* the case of *velaikkārabalāni*, it is clearly the subject of the sentence and must be plural nominative. In my own inspection of the inscription, it seems as though this line is particularly badly damaged, and I could not make out the reading clearly. I therefore revert to EZ's reading (II, 252) of *veḷaikkārasamāhitān* on purely semantic grounds.

<sup>106</sup> Sic. It is unclear to me why the preceding line has *veḷaikkāra* and this has *velaikkāra*.

<sup>107</sup> TISL: *dvīpattu*

That this eulogy was inscribed so soon after Vijayabāhu’s death, and in a prose style which—other than being in Tamil rather than Sinhala—is clearly reminiscent of his other inscriptions discussed above, gives strong credence to the notion that these events actually did happen as described, and presumably played a key role in Vijayabāhu’s own inscriptional style (even if we have no extant witnesses of that later style, in Sinhala or in Tamil, attributed to Vijayabāhu himself).

However, an incongruity lurks within this account. In this inscription, and in the retrospective narratives of Buddhism in the Poḷonnaruva period, we see explicit references to *three* distinct *nikāyas*: almost certainly intended to mean the Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri, and the Jetavāna. The institutional distinction between these three seems to have animated much of the religious politics of the first millennium, and the central mythos of Parākramabāhu I (discussed in Chapter Four below) was his unprecedented unification of these long-divided institutions.<sup>108</sup> But we are told in the Vēḷaikkāraṅ inscription (not to mention the retrospective narratives) that the *śāsana* so declined under Cōḷa rule that there were fewer than five monks left on the island altogether; presumably, this would have entailed the extinction of all three ordination lineages. For Vijayabāhu to have both purified and then later made a *tulābhāra* donation to “the *three nikāya*,” therefore, he presumably would have had to first arrange for the revival of these distinct ordination lineages.

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<sup>108</sup> See particularly the wording in Parākramabāhu’s Galvihāra inscription: “...having made one *nakā* of the **three** *nakās*, which had fallen into disunity despite the great efforts of past kings...” (IC VI:13, l. 13, ...*purvarājayan visin mahotsāhayenudu samaṅga no koṭṭā gatahuṇu tun nakā samaṅga kirimen ek nakā koṭṭā*...).

In this section I push back against this notion, and argue for a revised understanding of the monastic institution(s) between their revival by Vijayabāhu I and unification by Parākramabāhu I. Drawing particularly on evidence from the Vēlaikkāra inscription itself, and building on arguments first made by R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, I suggest instead that it is more likely that only a single *nikāya* was truly “revived” in Sri Lanka by the Rāmaññan monks. The three distinct *nikāyas* of the Anurādhapura period remained rhetorically significant, and continued to be evoked by monarchs; it is also certainly possible that some later generations of monks became increasingly attached to, and identified themselves with, the legacy of one particular *nikāya* among the three. Ultimately, however, I am unconvinced that the “three *nikāya*” existed in more than name alone in the period between Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu.

My primary reservation is pragmatic. While, as discussed above, all three first-millennium *nikāyas*, likely shared a common set of core texts, probably including a Pali-language *Vinaya*, their interpretations of this *Vinaya* differed significantly enough that they could no longer co-ordain or co-habitate. This is, after all, the defining feature of a distinct *nikāya*. It is certainly possible, as Gunawardana has argued, that the monks from Rāmañña were themselves connected with a Lankan *nikāya* (Gunawardana 1979, 274). After all, we know that we know monks from Lanka travelled widely, and even established (or had established in their name) what we might call “satellite monasteries” throughout the wider Indian Ocean region (Sundberg 2004; Tournier 2018, particularly 42).<sup>109</sup> But are we to believe that

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<sup>109</sup> Note, however, the long presence of non-Lankan, Pali-oriented Buddhism in peninsular Southeast Asia (Assavavirulhakarn 2010).

Vijayabāhu located, among this monastic diaspora, three quora (of at least five senior monks apiece) for three separate ordination lineages, complete with their own respective *Vinaya* hermeneutics?

It is more likely, I argue, that Vijayabāhu's Rāmaññan monks were themselves co-freres, ordained in a shared monastic lineage and following a single interpretation of the *Vinaya*; in other words, they were members of a single *nikāya*. Any new monks which they then ordained within Lanka must therefore logically have also been members of that same singular *nikāya*. If so, how can we account for the mention, in the Vēḷaikkāraṅ inscription, of Vijayabāhu purifying and then patronising the *three nikāyas*, let alone the “unification” apparently necessary by the period of Parākramabāhu I, some six decades later? There are two possible, and complimentary, explanations for this.

Here I wish to suggest that the notion of “three *nikāyas*” held—and perhaps continues to hold—some significance regardless of the actual state, and number, of its constituent institutions. We might note here Nicholson's (2010) argument that the existence of “six philosophical schools” (*ṣaḍḍarśana*) was a settled fact among South Asian doxographers long before they came to agree *which* six counted (see particularly his Ch. 8). One such doxographic effort (by the Jaina Haribhadra), Nicholson tells us,

...helps clarify just how the enumeration of the six schools functions. Haribhadra is not simply adding up all of the schools that he can find and then presenting this number as the total. Rather, the number six is an established total for the number of possible schools. Haribhadra's job is to look at all of the possible candidates and to see how they can be most reasonably categorised to number six (155-156).

The six schools are not alone in this regard: premodern South Asian texts are littered with such numbered lists, which may subtly vary in constitution from source to source. A similar dynamic, I am suggesting, may well have motivated the description of Vijayabāhu's pious deeds in the Vēḷaikkāraṅ

inscription: virtuous past kings patronised all *three nikāyas*, and so regardless of the actual administrative and institutional divisions within the *saṅgha* during Vijayabāhu's reign, he too must be described as supporting *three* distinct *nikāyas*.

We should also not rule out a more practical institutional division, one which may have ultimately led to a stronger sense of *nikāya* affiliation by the time of Parākramabāhu. Once ordained by the Rāmaññan monks, members of the revived Lankan *saṅgha* would have needed dwellings, administrative structures, *piriveṇas* for further training, and financial supports from donative villages associated with their monasteries. All of these would have most readily been found in the institutional and physical remnants of Anurādhapura period monasticism. It is very possible that, even under Cōla rule, these institutions remained occupied and in use by religious specialists, whom Vijayabāhu later deemed insufficiently ordained and replaced with his Rāmaññan lineage.<sup>110</sup> These “revived” monks would have taken the (literal) place of their Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri, and Jetavāna forebears, even without necessarily sharing their distinct ordination lineage and *vinaya* interpretations. If so, we can certainly imagine how within a few generations these monks may have become attached to their

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<sup>110</sup> I am mindful here of a possible parallel with the (much later) example of the *gaṇinnānses*, individuals who discharged many of the ritual and institutional duties expected of monastics but without having been formally ordained. *Gaṇinnānses* are generally regarded as being characteristic of the Kandyan period (Blackburn 2001, 37–38), and we have no documentation which suggests that similar figures kept the *vihāra* fires burning prior to the restoration of full ordinations under Vijayabāhu I. However, we ought to be mindful of the clear conceptual possibility that one could fulfil the duties of a monk, and perhaps even maintain some degree of institutional identity with earlier inhabitants of one's monastery, without having necessarily undergone ordination.

respective Anurādhapuran legacies, perhaps even identifying themselves as their true heirs in the Poḷonnaruva period.

Crucially, however, we have good reason to think that the legacy affiliations identified with by Poḷonnaruva's monks were not limited to the traditional three *nikāyas*. Here we might profitably return to Gunawardana's (1979) controversial, yet compelling, argument that the three *nikāyas* were, throughout the latter first millennium, functionally replaced by eight *āyatanas* or *mūlas*, which he translates loosely as "fraternities" (282). On an economic and administrative level, he argues,

Eight monastic establishments, some of which were founded as early as about the seventh century, grew during this period into large fraternities which replaced the three *nikāyas* in the organisation of the *saṅgha*... at least five of these eight fraternities grew from minor "colleges" within the *nikāyas* into organisations wielding considerable authority and responsibility. It appears that they soon loosened the bonds of the *nikāya*, assisted perhaps by the unrest and disorganisation resulting from constant warfare during the period of Cōḷa rule (311-12).

As a good Marxist, Gunawardana was quick to identify economic and institutional cause for the functional replacement of the *nikāya* system by the fraternities. We might wonder, however, about a more proximate cause; if the rise of the *mūlas* was accelerated by the rupture in distinct *nikāya* lineages during the Cōḷa period. A newly ordained Lankan monk then sent to reside in a particular *piriveṇa*, for example, might come to identify himself with the *nikāya* to which that *piriveṇa* once belonged; or, equally, he might associate himself with the more specific *mūla* itself, divorced from or only loosely related to its overarching *nikāya*.

The Vēḷakkāra inscription provides us with a powerful case study in such *nikāya/mūla* associations as they played out in the Poḷonnaruva period. The inscription documents the Vēḷaikkāras being charged, by an Abhayagiri monk, with the protection of

...pulanariyāṇa vijayarājapurattu eṭuppitta mūlastānamākiya abhayagirimahāvihārattu agrāyatanamāna uttoruṃmūlaiyil mūvulakukkum cikāmaṇiyākiya daḷadāpātradhātu svāmi tēvarkaḷukku nityavāsabhavanamāna prathamābhiṣēkattukku maṅkaḷagruhamāna aṭṭāṇṭu tōrum tirunayanamōkṣam paṇṇi aṅcananirukkum kaṇṇālaṅ ceyyum maṅgaḷa mahāsīlāmaya buddha dēvarkku gandhakuṭiyāṇa daḷadāypperumpalli...

...the Daḷadā Perumpalli—a *gandhakuṭī*<sup>111</sup> for the vast stone-wrought Lord Buddha, where annually the auspicious eyes are opened,<sup>112</sup> kohl is applied by painters, and good fortune is created; the ceremonial hall (Skt. *maṅgala-gr̥ha*) for the principal anointing (Skt. *prathama-abhiṣeka*); [and] the eternal residence for the Tooth and Bowl Relic *svāmi devas*,<sup>113</sup> crest-gems of the three worlds—in the Uttoruṃmūla, which is the principal fraternity (Skt. *agra-āyatana*) of the Abhayagiri-*mahāvihāra*,<sup>114</sup> a *mūlasthānam* created in the royal city of Vijaya [known] as Pulanari... (TISL 42, 17-24).

The Uttaromūla (“Uttoruṃmūla” above) was once a subordinate institution of the Abhayagirivihāra *nikāya* (Friedrich 2020, 37; Gornall 2020, 31; Gunawardana 1979, 289; Pathmanathan 2019, 462–63, 466).<sup>115</sup> This *nikāya* affiliation, however, seems to have become increasingly nominal by the Poḷonnaruva period. The wording of this particular inscription is indicative: here the Tooth Relic and its temple are said to belong

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<sup>111</sup> Literally a “perfume hall,” this refers to a monastic cell in which the Buddha himself dwells (Schopen 1990). Schopen has pointed out that while *gandhakuṭīs* are extremely common in mainland monasteries, only two (including this one) are known of in Sri Lanka; both are in monasteries associated with the Abhayagiri (Schopen 2015, 22–23).

<sup>112</sup> On this ceremony in a modern context, with the Sinhala name *nētrapīṅkama*, see Gombrich (1966).

<sup>113</sup> Here the Relics themselves are given noble titles; developing further, perhaps, the theme of the Buddha’s overlordship explored in the preceding section.

<sup>114</sup> This is likely a generic descriptor of a “great monastery” (a *mahā-vihāra*) belonging to the Abhayagiri. The Jetavana’s central *vihāra* was frequently referred to as a *mahāvihāra* in Anurādhapura-period inscriptions (see e.g. IC V ii:65, in which it is called the *denāraḷmahevera*).

<sup>115</sup> Much of this institution’s early history comes from textual sources. Its founding is only described in the retrospective *Mahāvamsa* account, in which it is entangled with Vijayabāhu’s own genealogy (see MV 57:22). We see similar connections between the Uttaromūla and the Tooth Relic (and therefore, by implication, the Abhayagiri) in later texts like the c. fourteenth century *Daḷadasirita*, by which time the Tooth Relic was very definitely associated with kingly authority (discussed in Gornall 2020, 184–85). This long history—straddling the Poḷonnaruva period—suggests an ongoing significance for the Uttaromūla as an institution, for which reason Gunawardana (1979) calls it “one of the most important and influential of the eight fraternities” (284).

to the Uttaramūla first and foremost, now called the “principal” (Skt. *agra*) *āyatana* of the overarching *nikāya*. The left-branching Tamil syntax makes it ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so, whether the *mūlasthānam* created in Poḷonnaruva belongs to the whole *nikāya* or only to its “principal” *mūla*. *Mūlasthāna* is a multivalent term in both Sanskrit and Tamil: it shares the central meaning, in both languages, of the “foundation” of a physical building; it can, however, also mean in Tamil a palace, or the inner core of a temple (TL, s.v. *mūlattāṇam*). I suspect that what is intended here is the entire complex known today as the “Sacred Quadrangle,” in which stands both the Tooth Relic temple attributed to Vijayabāhu and this inscription. If so, this suggests that a large ritual complex in the centre of Vijayabāhu’s new capital was possessed not by one of the three *nikāyas*, but instead by a specific fraternity; one nominally located within a particular *nikāya*, and acknowledging that connection, but functionally independent, in control of vitally important Relics, and—significantly—capable of contracting a powerful merchant/mercenary guild, the Veḷaikkāras, to protect those Relics within the very heart of the royal city.

What I am suggesting is that Vijayabāhu’s overtures to Rāmañña did not result in the restoration of three distinct and rival *nikāyas*, each direct heirs to the ordination lineages, jurisprudential hermeneutics, and administrative sub-divisions of their Anurādhapurā predecessors. Inscriptional references, eager to stress continuity with Anurādhapurā, would like us to think that this was the case; so too would later literary accounts, to anticipate the great unification of Parākramabāhu I (discussed in Chapter Four). But such a tripartite revival is logistically unlikely; more likely instead is that the revival resulted in a single ordination lineage, sharing a single *vinaya* interpretation, which was divided

administratively into discrete fraternities (variously called *mūlas* or *āyatanas*). These fraternities may have paid lip service to their historical predecessors, and to their *nikāya* affiliations. But, ultimately, we have little evidence that anything like the centralised control of the late Anurādhapura period, with its three great central monasteries heading dispersed networks of subordinates, was at work in Poḷonnaruva (prior to Parākramabāhu's centralising restructures). Some of these fraternities thrived under royal patronage; most prominently, the Uttaramūla, with its oversight of the Tooth Relic, seems to have been a (literally) central institution within Poḷonnaruva. But in the fractured period following the deaths of Vijayabāhu I and his short-lived heir Jayabāhu I, such direct patronage from powerful monarchs would not be as easy to come by; other strategies would become necessary for monastic prosperity, and other forms of Buddhist practice and selfhood were able to emerge.

## Conclusions to Chapter Two

Vijayabāhu's kingship, I have argued, was not an unconscious continuation of earlier trends of "Buddhist kingship" carried over from Anurādhapura. Rather, it was an intentionally constituted amalgam of varied models: memories of Anurādhapuran kings, yes, as available to him in inscriptional form; but also manuals of poetry like the *Siyabaslakara*; the wider world of Sanskrit kingship; and, crucially, the institutional and administrative apparatus left to him from the half-century of Cōḷa rule. This latter inheritance in particular meant that Tamil remained, alongside Sinhala, as a vital language of politics: a trend we will see continued in the following chapter.

Despite these connections to the Cōḷa model of kingship, and engagement in a wider world of kingly language, Vijayabāhu seems to have been at pains to present himself as a decidedly Buddhist

monarch. Like his Anurādhapurān predecessors, he seems to have attempted to realise this vision of Buddhist kingship through significant engagement with the *śāsana*; what differed, however, was the specific form of his engagements. His extensive donations to the *śrī pāda* established a hierarchical social order on a cosmological scale, incorporating and subordinating “rival” deities under the Buddha’s ultimate overlordship. This hierarchy also extended downwards, excluding “low-caste” (*adhama*) people from direct access to the *śrī pāda* itself, an exclusion enforced by gates, locks, and guards. He also sought to protect and preserve the *śāsana* through a revival of Anurādhapura’s ordination lineages. It is questionable, however, how literally we can take the claim that these lineages (in the plural) were truly revived as distinct institutions on the Anurādhapurān model. Based both on the singular origins of the revived lineages—monks imported from Rāmañña—and on the evidence for increasingly powerful, and perhaps independent, “fraternities,” a more likely explanation is that monks in a single revived *nikāya* were then subsequently assigned to pre-existing institution, which maintained only a nominal affiliation to their former *nikāyas*.

Significantly, we have seen thus far only a tentative interest in what we might call the gendered dimensions of sovereignty. In a continuation of Anurādhapurān inscriptional practices, the only “women” present in Vijayabāhu’s inscriptional corpus are his mother Devugon (Skt. Devā), mentioned in passing in IC VI:2, and of course the island of Lanka itself, anthropomorphised as his principle consort. Any *human* consorts of Vijayabāhu—including, presumably, the mother of his son Vikramabāhu II—let alone any daughters, are entirely peripheral to his inscriptional persona. This is a stark contrast to the description of Vijayabāhu’s reign in the later *Mahāvamsa* account, which provides many details about his

supposed dynastic matchmaking. He is described as having made a string of significant dynastic marriages: to a daughter of a former monarch of Ruhuṇu (in MV 59:23-26), who was also apparently a descent of Rāma in Ayodhya (MV 56:13-15); to a Kāliṅga princess Tilokasundarī, who would become the mother of Vikramabāhu I (MV 59:29-30); and between his sister Mittā and an unnamed Pāṇḍya prince, who would together give birth to Vikramabāhu's eventual rivals Mānābharaṇa I, Kīrtiśrīmegha, and Śrīvallabha (MV 59:41-43). As Nicholas (1960b) points out, these dynasties were all powerful rivals of the Cōḷa Empire, and therefore may have represented key strategic interests of Vijayabāhu I (429). However, if these marital ties *were* significant to Vijayabāhu I, there is no evidence of this in materials from his own reign. Similarly, while Vijayabāhu's inscriptional corpus only touches lightly on examples of his idealised masculinity (the physical perfection of his body), this too is a far cry from later praise of his martial prowess (MV 57:43) and bodily marks (MV 57:49).<sup>116</sup>

This does not mean, of course, that either marriage alliances or performative masculinity were not important to Vijayabāhu in other ways, in contexts and media no longer available to us. Rather, the point I am making here is that, for Vijayabāhu, there seems to have been no need to emphasise his idealised masculinity or the status of his wives; no need, perhaps, to prove or even *defend* such masculinity and the prowess granted by heterosexual relations, which may well have simply been taken

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<sup>116</sup> Note, however, that these marks were not limited to Vijayabāhu himself, nor were they necessarily signs of masculinity. His mother, Lokitā, was said to have been distinguished by some form of auspicious marks (MV 57:41); one of his daughters, Ratanāvalī, was likewise marked with a sign that she would give birth to a son marked with his own signs of power (MV 59:35): this son would become Parākramabāhu I, central hero of this section of the *Mahāvamsa*, and namesake of its patron Parākramabāhu II of Daṁbadeṇiya.

for granted. By the Daṁbadeṇiya period, however, something seems to have shifted in how an ideal king like Vijayabāhu ought to be described; specifically describing his masculinity and the status—and dynastic connections—of his wives had attained a higher significance. In the following chapter, we turn to what I suggest was a first step in that shift: the turbulent period after the deaths of Vijayabāhu and his son, in which political circumstances began to bring royal women far more into the spotlight of inscriptional discourse.



### Chapter Three: Opportunities Amidst Anarchy

The period between the death of Vijayabāhu I (in c. 1110CE) and the rise of Parākramabāhu I (1153CE) was marked by a dramatic fragmentation of political control. Vijayabāhu’s brother and heir, Jayabāhu, seems to have effectively ruled for only a very short period (c. one year) before being overthrown and exiled by Vijayabāhu’s son Vikramabāhu I.<sup>117</sup> Vikramabāhu’s own control, however, was limited to the region around Poḷonnaruva itself—the northern part of the island known as the Rājaraṭa, or “King Country”—while the rest of the kingdom was divided between various cousins, the sons of yet another of Vijayabāhu’s siblings. The following four decades were filled with internecine conflicts and intradynastic marriages alike, as the various branches of Vijayabāhu’s family jostled against one another for position.

Existing scholarship has looked poorly on this period of Poḷonnaruva’s history. Chapters in the University of Ceylon’s still-authoritative *History of Ceylon* refer to it “a state of anarchy” (Nicholas 1960a, 440) which “prevented any architectural undertaking of note for over four decades” (Paranavitana 1960b, 592). If there was any silver lining, it was that

The loss of a considerable portion of the temporalities of the *saṅgha* in and around the capital had the desirable effect of making those of its members who had adopted the spiritual life in earnest resort to secluded places where they spent their lives in spiritual exercise and study (ibid., 566).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> We are told in the *Mahāvamsa* that Jayabāhu died sometime after this exile (MV 62:1), but the exact date is unclear.

<sup>118</sup> Paranavitana refers here to forest-dwelling (*araṇyavāsīn*) monasticism, particularly at the Diṃbulāgala monastery, a matter discussed further below.

Political turmoil, it seems, detrimentally impacted the *śāsana* in matters from the economic to the lithic. De Silva's (1981) *History of Sri Lanka* similarly characterises the period as "a relapse into civil war and turmoil," but adds that, thankfully, "before anarchy had become all but reversible, a return to order and authority took place under Parākramabāhu I" (60). This juxtaposition of anarchy against authority, in which the former state serves only to hinder cultural and intellectual flourishing, is hardly unique to the historiography of Sri Lanka. Rather, such attitudes are common in teleological accounts of political "development," which tend to view periods like that betwixt Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu as "dark ages," unfortunate detours on the otherwise steady march towards centralisation, institutionalisation, and, eventually, constitutionalism (see Forrest 2020, particularly 46).

Modern arguments for the necessity of kingship are not without emic precedent. Canonical Buddhist texts often describe the perils of a kingless world. And as discussed in the Introduction, inscriptions and texts from our period also frequently praise powerful kings for their ability to protect and promote the Buddha-*śāsana* against decline. But, as Alastair Gornall (2020) has recently argued for Pali-language literary production in a slightly later period, we should not so readily assume that political instability is necessarily an impediment to the flourishing of Buddhist institutions, cultural production, or intellectual innovations. Rather, he argues, the efflorescence of literary works upon which he focuses

...was not a by-product of political stability or of the munificent patronage of a single emperor, as has often been thought. Rather, it was rooted in chaos, the destruction of the old social order and the birth of a more fragmented political environment (213).

Political fragmentation and the breakdown of the *status quo*, in Gornall's view, seems to inspire or create opportunities for innovation. In this chapter, I advance such an argument for Poḷonnaruva's political

culture in the fraught period between Vijayabāhu and Parākramabāhu. This period should not be treated, as it has overwhelmingly been to date, as a “dark age,” an unfortunate deviation from the otherwise glorious trajectory of Lankan and Theravāda history. Rather, we ought to recognise this period, and the fraught politics therein, as providing opportunities for figures other than powerful, authoritative kings to move beyond the *status quo*.

In making this argument, I draw particularly on the insights of Tony Day. In an important (1996) article on the historiography of Southeast Asia, he argues against what he sees as a tendency to overemphasise structural institutionalism and political stability as the norm.<sup>119</sup> In place of this norm, he urges us to take seriously “...the incoherence expressed in the turbulent relations between families as normative rather than as a departure from the putative norm of a rational, absolutist state which must ‘deal’ with disorder” (398). It is these turbulent relations, he believes, which truly bound together historical agents before the rise of the modern State, and the more impersonal (or supposedly impersonal) politics it demands. Heeding Day’s call, I therefore take seriously in this chapter the hostile politics between the period’s divided kings, and the ways in which they intentionally sought to balance (or imbalance) those politics. In particular, I advance the argument that the fraught politics of the

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<sup>119</sup> In the cited article, Day explicitly avoids any “attempt to argue for the existence of historical ‘structures’ or the persistence of ‘essentially’ Southeast Asian cultural themes relating to families and states over time” (385). However, in a later revision of the article as chapter in his (2002) monograph, he *does* argue for “a characteristically Southeast Asian mode through which relations of power have assumed statelike form” (38-39). However, I am not convincing that the many treasures of Day’s argument need necessarily be hoarded within the borders of the modern regional division. As Andaya (2006) acknowledges, Sri Lanka does seem to tick many of the boxes she identifies as lending a conceptual coherency to “Southeast Asia” as a region (33).

interregnal period resulting in an increasingly significant role—both symbolic and pragmatic—for Poḷonnaruva’s royal consorts, as living embodiments of ties between powerful dynasties both on and off the island. Here I also build on Loos’s (2005) argument that the political culture of (much later) Siam was dependent on the extent to which “women’s bodies mediated political loyalty and integrated powerful groups throughout the kingdom by linking them to the monarch in the capital” (889). A similar dynamic, I suggest, was at work in Poḷonnaruva; this in turn had a previously under-acknowledged impact on the development of Theravāda Buddhism, and set the stage for Parākramabāhu’s eventual reform of the *saṅgha*.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I complicate simplistic accounts of the period which overemphasise the “institutions” of kingship. In place of such institutionalism, I argue instead for a more interpersonal and consensus-based politics, in which political figures constantly negotiated with one another, and with their own overlords and subordinates, for authority. I then go on to suggest that this decentralisation of political power created *opportunities* for some individuals who may not have been otherwise able to assert themselves so publicly. As royal men struggled to assert the superiority of their lineage, and to establish alliances with powerful continental dynasties, their consorts became increasingly significant embodiments of such matrilateral ties, and so became increasingly influential. This was only a period of political “weakness,” in other words, from the perspective of certain men who perhaps aspired to a particular form of (centralised, hierarchical, patriarchal) power; from other perspectives, this was a period of political innovation and experimentation. I expand on this in the third section, focusing in on an inscription by an otherwise unremembered daughter of the Cōḷa monarch

Kulōttuṅka named Cundhamalli. Simultaneously, the lack of centralised patronage networks for the monastic lineage(s) newly re-established under Vijayabāhu I, as discussed in the previous chapter, allowed for alternative configurations of royal-monastic relations. In the final part of the chapter I focus particular on the two fragmentary inscriptions of the Great Lady Sundarā (Sundaramahādevī), which I argue suggest an interest in Pali-oriented monastic communities unusual among royal patrons. This patronage, I suggest, represented a watershed moment in the rise of the Theravāda—a moment which has gone underappreciated due to (1) our assumption that Theravāda Buddhism had always been closely entangled with Lankan royalty and (2) the ease with which both later monastics and modern historians have dismissed the agency of women from histories of Buddhism.

### **One, Three, or Four Kings?**

As I suggested in the previous chapter, colonial historians and their heirs have been determined to lay out an orderly succession of Sri Lanka's premodern kings. In the case of Vijayabāhu's claim to the throne, they were aided in this task by thirteenth century historical accounts which similarly sought to trace lineages (sometimes contradictory lineages) between Anurādhapura and Poḷonnaruva (and so, implicitly, on further to their own context, the court at Daṁbadeṇiya). Post-Vijayabāhu, the same quest for continuity was continued, resulting in neat tables of successive paramount kings in orderly succession: from Vijayabāhu to his brother Jayabāhu; then to Vijayabāhu's son Vikramabāhu; then to *his* son

Gajabāhu II; and finally down to Parākramabāhu.<sup>120</sup> This neat succession, too, is not entirely a colonial invention. The thirteenth century *Pūjāvaliya* tells us that Jayabāhu ruled after his brother Vijayabāhu, and Vijayabāhu’s son Vikramabāhu ruled after him in turn (PV 782).<sup>121</sup> Curiously, this narrative seems to skip over Gajabāhu II entirely, and moves straight onward to Kīrtiśrīmegha’s son Parākramabāhu I. The fourteenth century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* similarly describes a singular “procession” (*āvāma*) of three kings—Jayabāhu, Vikramabāhu, and Gajabāhu—following Vijayabāhu (NS 76).<sup>122</sup>

But the *Mahāvamsa*’s authors seem to have had a rather different narrative in mind, one which stresses a more fragmentary nature for the period. The chapter covering the period following Vijayabāhu’s death is titled “Deeds of the Four Kings” (*P. caturājacariyaniddeso*).<sup>123</sup> This refers to the fraught internecine conflict between four branches of Vijayabāhu’s family—his siblings and their descendants on one side; his son Vikramabāhu on the other—mapped across Lanka’s three constituent sub-kingdoms: Rajaraṭa, Rohaṇa, and Dakkhiṇadeśa (see Fig. 2.1, based on the c. 13<sup>th</sup> century *Kadaimpot*).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> A particularly clear illustration of this approach is provided by Tennent (1859), who numbers each monarch in turn: Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu II are listed as kings number 117 and 118 respectively, with the note “a disputed succession,” and with Mānābharaṇa and then “Sirivallabha or Kitsiri Maivan” listed as subkings of Rohaṇa (323). Geiger (1929) provides a more nuanced account in his opening essay and appendices, but still provides the name of the “paramount king” (in his estimation) as a headnote on each page of his influential translation of the *Mahāvamsa*.

<sup>121</sup> mahalu vijayabāhu nam raja... sūpanas havurrudak rājyaya keḷēya. ohu mal jayabāhu raja tudus havurrudak rājyaya keḷēya. ohu ayāmen mahalu vijayabāhu pit vikramabāhu aṭa visi havurrudak rājyaya keḷēya. pasu va kitsirimevan rajahu pit parākramabāhu nam mahalu maharaja...

<sup>122</sup> ikbiti ē mahaḷu vijayabāhu rajahu paṭan jayabāhuya vikramabāhuya gajabāhuya yana mē tun rajun āvāmehi... Very similar wording appears in the much later *Rājāvaliya* (RV, 58), which clearly draws on *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* for a source.

<sup>123</sup> Geiger records no variant readings of this chapter title among his manuscripts.

<sup>124</sup> These kingdoms (usually *raṭṭhas/ratas*, sometimes *deśas*) and the notion of a “trifold kingdom” (Sin. *tunrājya*) are attested in relatively early sources (Nicholas 1959, 16–17). It is unclear, however, whether these sub-kingdoms had fixed boundaries, or were more of a general reference to the *tunrājya*. On the one hand, this was of course a period

This conflict, as described in the *Mahāvamsa*, is briefly mapped out in Appendix B. The point here seems to be that during this period there was not one single paramount king in Poḷonnaruva facing unwarranted opposition from remote upstarts, but that all four were “kings” on equal footing. This point seems to have been entirely missed by the *Mahāvamsa*’s modern translator and editor, Wilhelm Geiger, who instead inserted the name of whichever monarch happened to be ruling in Poḷonnaruva at the top of each page of his translation. Geiger’s editorial choice suggests that the Poḷonnaruvan monarchs were in some way more central—perhaps even higher-ranked—than were their peers in Rohaṇa and Dakkhiṇadeśa. As we will see below, this view does not seem to have been held by those living and ruling in medieval Lanka, including perhaps the Poḷonnaruvan monarchs themselves.

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long before the territorialisation of political control (on which see generally Elden 2013; for colonial imposition see Winichakul 1994). However, firm boundaries seem to be attested at least as early as the thirteenth century, based on the evidence of the *Kadaiṃpot* (“boundary book”) tradition (see Abhayavardhana 1999).

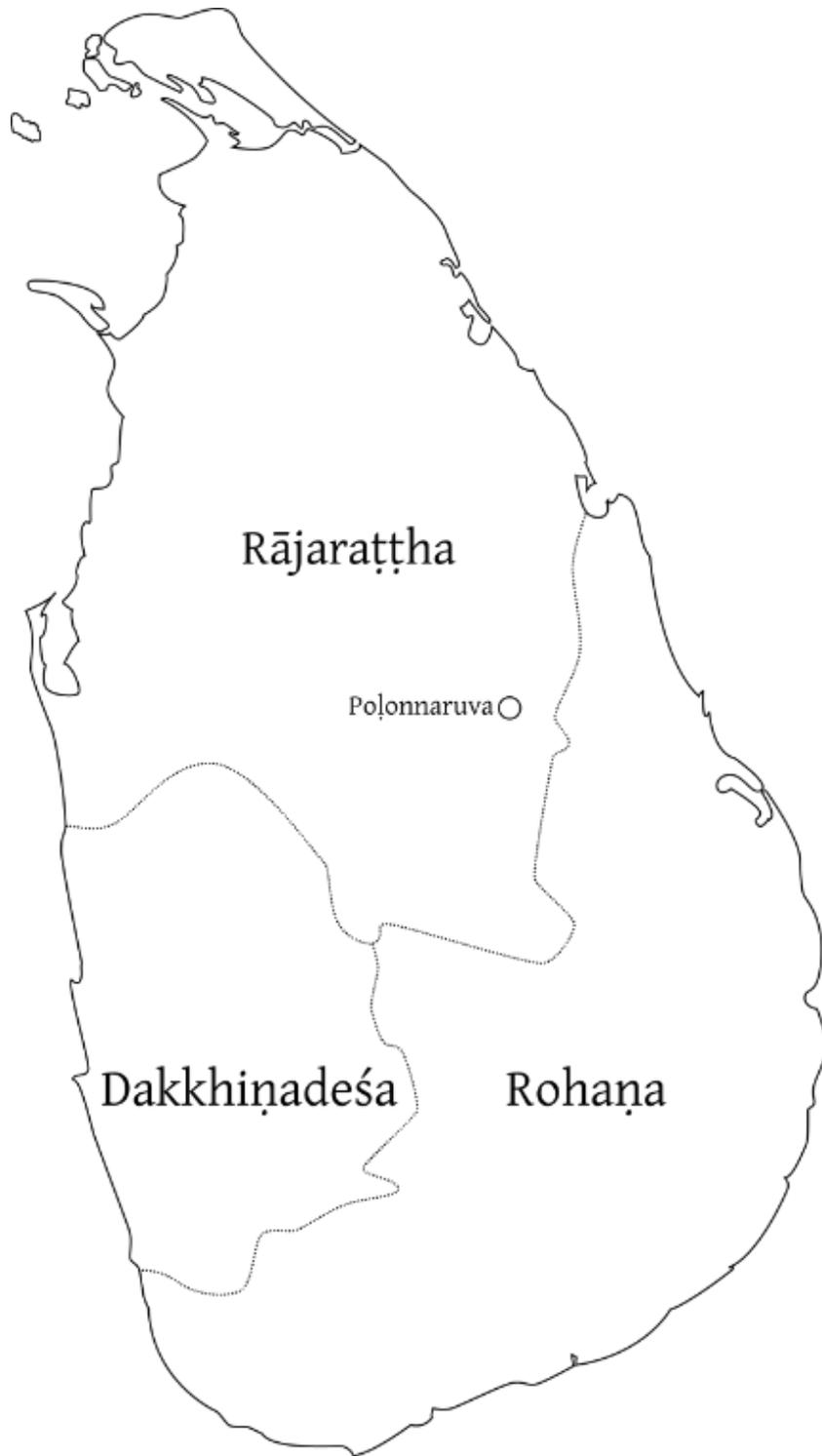


Figure 3.1: map of the “Three Kingdoms,” with indicative borders (c. 13<sup>th</sup> century)

The political fragmentation of this period was not, in the world of the *Mahāvamsa*, a morally neutral state of affairs. In times of such disunity, the text explicitly tells us, virtuous kingship is impossible, and the kingdoms slip into chaos (see particularly MV 61:48-62); some form of narrative resolution is necessary.<sup>125</sup> The purpose of this description, in the narrative logic of the *Mahāvamsa*, seems very clearly to be setting up the stakes for Parākramabāhu’s eventual heroic reconciliation of both family and kingdom. Parākramabāhu’s youthful adventures result in him being said to have “three fathers” (MV 64:33); he is the rightful heir to all three kingdoms and all three branches of his own family, by descent and by consanguineous marriage and, eventually, by conquest. The disunity of this period is therefore vital to the *Mahāvamsa*’s narrative of eventual glorious unification.

We are faced, in other words, with two conflicting schemes of kingship. In one account—that of the *Pūjāvāliya*, and apparently favoured by modern translators—One single king ruled in Poḷonnaruva. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, however, we have Four rather antagonist kings spread between Three neatly delineated kingdoms: Vikramabāhu I in Rajaraṭa, Mānābharaṇa I in Dakkhiṇadeśa, and Kīrtiśrīmegha and Śrīvallabha dividing Rohaṇa between them. I wish to suggest, however, that both of these schemes are suspiciously *orderly*. Both assume a certain institutionalisation of kingship: either an acknowledgement of the inherent overlordship of whoever ruled Rajaraṭa; or a gentlemanly agreement to divide territory amongst one another along predetermined lines. Either scenario would be rather an outlier in the more global twelfth century, in which—with few exceptions—politics were decidedly less

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<sup>125</sup> Here I draw on White’s (1973) understanding of history as narrative; see discussion in the Introduction.

institutionalised, and relied instead on more contingent (and often contested) claims to authority and overlordship.

One Tamil-language inscription (TISL 52) from c. 1153 provides a useful illustration of how the lines between conflicting claims to authority rather more blurred on the ground. This particular inscription serves to mark a transfer of property rights between the inscription’s patron—an official, likely of Mānābharaṇa II, named *Mintaṇ Korraṇ*—and a religious entity named the “*ālvār* of Veykavēram.”<sup>126</sup> The inscription was found c. 13km north of Trincomalee on Sri Lanka’s eastern coast, and we might reasonably assume that the property in question was located in this area. In its careful negotiation of royal jurisdictions, it offers us an unusually vivid insight into how a relatively low-ranked official inserts himself into the inscriptional record:

svasti śrī apaiya calāmēka panmarāṇa cakkaravarttikaḷ śrī jayabāhu tēvaṛkku yāṇṭu 43 āvatu  
tiruppaḷḷic civikaiyāril kaṅkāṇi mintaṇ korraṇṭēṇ. gajabāhu tēvar enakku jīvitamāka iṭṭa it tel  
vecārum kiratu naratu vecārum itil nār pāl ellai perumāḷ gajabāhu tēvar veykavēraṭṭāḷvārkkku  
pumitāṇam iṭṭaruḷiṇār.

Svasti! In the 43<sup>rd</sup> year of Śrī Abhaya Śalāmegha *panmarāṇa cakkaravarttikaḷ* Lord Śrī Jayabāhu, I am *Mintaṇ Korraṇ*, supervisor of the palace palanquin-bearers.<sup>127</sup> The *perumāḷ* Gajabāhu assigned the [lands with their] boundaries [which were previously] assigned to me as

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<sup>126</sup> An *ālvār/ālvār* is literally a distinguished religious leader, but in practice usually refers to the Śrīvaiṣṇava “saints” whose hymns became canonised as sacred text. It can also refer, more generally, to Buddhist and Jaina holy figures: see TL s.v. Pathmanathan (2019) states that in the present inscription *ālvār* “must” refer to the Buddha (573). But he provides no rationale for this statement, and it is unclear to me why the Buddha—rather than Gaṇeśa, who is also mentioned, or even a Vaiṣṇava holy figure, given the role Viṣṇu would increasingly play in Sri Lankan pantheons (J. C. Holt 2004, 14)—must be intended.

<sup>127</sup> The suffix *-ēṇ* attached to a noun (let alone a personal name) is unusual. Here I am tentatively taking it as the first person verbal suffix, implicitly *irukkīēṇ* (“I am...”). Alternatively, Jonas Buchholz has suggested in personal correspondence that this might instead be an apposition to the later *enakku* (read *eṇakku*), “to me,” and thus serve to connect what I have rendered as two distinct sentences: “In the 43<sup>rd</sup> year... Gajabāhu gave the lands previously assigned to me, *Mintaṇ Korraṇ*...”

maintenance-land [by that same] Lord Gajabāhu, [named] “Tel Vecār” and “Kīratu Naratu Vecār,” as a land-grant to the Veykavēram āḷvār.

nirupatitan kuṛippukku mānāparaṇa tevar gajabāhu tēvar ceypatu ceypal eṇṇu aruḷi tirumukam varakkāṭṭic cilālēkam ceypu kuṭuttatu iṭukku. oru vikkaṇaṅ ceyvārkaḷ narakil. puttarāñṇai vallavaraiyaṅ cūḷaravu.

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

We see here an inscription (*śilalekha*) made to record a message (*tirumukham*) from Mānābharāṇa II, which in turn assents to a previous intention (*kuṛippu*) of Gajabāhu II. The image this suggests of Mintāṅ Korraṅ is something akin to a modern civil servant caught between conflicting jurisdictions, diligently documenting (literally in triplicate!) his best attempt to satisfy all parties. In what may be an attempt to reflect the courtly practices of these different overlords, the names of both Jayabāhu and Gajabāhu are in Grantha script (allowing them to be rendered in their Sanskrit forms), while Mānābharāṇa is written, like the rest of the inscription, as Tamil-script Mānāparaṇa. Even the closing warning to those who might in future challenge the āḷvār’s use of the land-grant is made in the name of both the Buddha and Vallavar, the distinctly Tamil epithet for Gaṇeśa: all bets are firmly hedged.

Mintāṅ Korraṅ’s inscription is a useful indication that, on the level of land administration, things were perhaps not quite so clear-cut as later retrospective narratives might wish to portray. It is all well and good to speak of Gajabāhu “ruling Rajaraṭa” and Mānābharāṇa “ruling Rohaṇa,” but when it comes to transferring land-grants between worthy subjects, a more local official felt the need to document both parties’ assent. Bearing in mind that the land was being transferred away from said local official, by the

very same king (Gajabāhu) who he explicitly tells us first granted it to him, we might further wonder if Mānābharaṇa was brought into the matter by Mintan̄ Korṛan̄ himself in an attempt to appeal Gajabāhu's decision. If so, clearly the appeal was unsuccessful, and Mintan̄ Korṛan̄'s inscription would document his own acceptance that no further avenues of redress were available to him; both monarchs were clearly set against his holding on to the lands.

We might also note that the 43<sup>rd</sup> year of Jayabāhu I is, very approximately, 1153; the same year in which Gajabāhu II would eventually die, and Parākramabāhu I would eventually defeat Mānābharaṇa to unite all of Lanka. If we detect any concerns about stability in Mintan̄ Korṛan̄'s inscription, his situation could only have become more complex as the year progressed. This system of dating, in the regnal years of Jayabāhu, further suggests that Mintan̄ Korṛan̄ was not caught between only two kings. Despite invoking the authority of both Mānābharaṇa II and Gajabāhu II, Jayabāhu is clearly still positioned as the paramount monarch, complete with regnal name ("Abhaya Śalāmegha") and *cakravartin* title, while the actual rulers of Rajaraṭa and Rohaṇa are referred to only by the simple "Lord" (T. *tevar*, Skt. *deva*). However, Jayabāhu did not rule for 43 years. If the sequence of events in the *Mahāvamsa* can be at all trusted, he was deposed by Vikramabāhu shortly after taking the throne, and in fact would have died long before Gajabāhu succeeded his father Vikramabāhu in Rajaraṭa.

This convention of continuing to use Jayabāhu's regnal years long past his effective deposition, and even death, seems to have been a widespread practice in the period. We see it evident in both Tamil- and Sinhala-language inscriptions (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1: inscriptional references to Jayabāhu's regnal years, c. 1110–1153**

| Inscription | Patron  | Language | Regnal Year       |
|-------------|---|----------|-------------------|
| TISL 51a    | Cundhamalli, consort of Mānābharaṇa II                      | Tamil    | 8                 |
| TISL 51b    | “Five dignitaries” of Mānābharaṇa II                        | Tamil    | 8                 |
| TISL 49     | Kaṇavati, an official of an unknown ruler                   | Tamil    | 18                |
| IC VI:6     | Vikramabāhu I <sup>128</sup>                                | Sinhala  | 23                |
| TISL 30     | (unnamed)   | Tamil    | 24                |
| IC VI:8     | Sundarā, consort of Vikramabāhu I and mother of Gajabāhu II | Sinhala  | 27                |
| TISL 29     | (unnamed) <sup>129</sup>                                    | Tamil    | 35                |
| IC VI:12    | Mānābharaṇa II  | Sinhala  | 35                |
| TISL 50     | Gajabāhu II   | Tamil    | 38                |
| TISL 47     | Umpīḷa Ayittan, an official of Gajabāhu II                  | Tamil    | 40 <sup>130</sup> |
| TISL 52     | Mintaṇ Korraṇ, an official of an unknown ruler              | Tamil    | 43                |

The long shadow Jayabāhu cast over the inscriptions of the earlier Poḷonnaruva period clearly necessitates some consideration. The most detailed examination of this peculiar dating practice is provided by Kiribamune (1976), as part of her wider study of the *abhiṣeka* (“consecration,” literally “sprinkling”) ritual. This ritual was clearly an important marker of sovereignty—in Sri Lanka as across broader Sanskritic and Buddhist Asia—but its nature, procedure, and significance are still poorly understood.<sup>131</sup> This is no doubt due to the fact that *abhiṣekas* writ large were so varied across a wide range

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<sup>128</sup> Jayabāhu is not mentioned by name, and so the regnal years mentioned in this inscription have reasonably been interpreted by some as Vikramabāhu’s own. See, however, Kiribamune (1976, 16).

<sup>129</sup> TISL 29 is sometimes attributed to Vikramabāhu, but the donor (or, indeed, whether or not they were a king) is not named; the only evidence seems to be that Vikramabāhu was the ruler of Rajaraṭa in the relevant year.

<sup>130</sup> Again, Jayabāhu is not mentioned by name, but see Kiribamune (1976, 16).

<sup>131</sup> See here particularly the forthcoming dissertation of Yuanyuan Duan. Duan’s study of *abhiṣeka* rituals in the Dali kingdom promises to considerably reconfigure our understanding of knowledge vectors betwixt medieval South, East, and Southeast Asia; I refer to “Sanskritic and Buddhist” as a result of reflection on Duan’s early findings.

of cultural and soteriological contexts. The best-understood *abhiṣekas* are those which were deployed in esoteric rituals, in which the act of anointing was understood to mark a spiritual (and sometimes somatic) transformation of the initiate (see, e.g., many of the essays in Aciri 2016). Some of these *abhiṣekas* were used to transform mere “kings” into superior “*cakravartins*” (see, for a Japanese example, Abe 1999, 331–32); this has led some modern scholars to believe that *all* such royal *abhiṣekas* necessarily demarcated *cakravartin* status (against which see Shirley under review b).

The royal *abhiṣeka* procedure was clearly considered to be significant in early second millennium Sri Lanka. However, I suspect that this significance—at least with regard to the Poḷonnaruva period—may have been overemphasised by modern scholars, misled yet again by an overreliance on the thirteenth-century *Mahāvamsa* installment. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, one of the primary complaints that Vikramabāhu’s cousins had against him was that he ruled Rājaraṭa without having received an *abhiṣeka* (MV 60:31). Even some of the most cautious scholars of Poḷonnaruva-period history seem to have taken this retrospectively attributed motivation as fact, rather than as Daṁbadeṇiya-period concerns and priorities mapped backwards onto Poḷonnaruva.<sup>132</sup> This being the case, it would be easy to draw a parallel between Vikramabāhu’s supposed, and supposedly problematic, lack of an *abhiṣeka* ceremony, and the continued use of (the presumably *abhiṣikta*) Jayabāhu’s regnal years for dating.

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<sup>132</sup> Kiribamune herself suggests that a “rockbase of accepted opinion” (whose?) “precluded [some monarchs] from the royal consecration” (by what means?) (1976, 13). See also Pathmanathan (2019, 312). Ranawella (1966) notes that this was only “a passage put into the thoughts of senior Mānābharaṇa [i.e. Mānābharaṇa I] and his brothers” by the *Mahāvamsa*’s later composer, but nonetheless takes it as evidence of a more general expectation that kings *should* undertake this ritual (370). Gunasena (1974) suggests, in rather similar wording, that this was “a passage put into the thoughts of Mānābharaṇa and his brothers” (177).

But this neat parallel raises an important question: *why* would Vikramabāhu not undergo an *abhiṣeka*, if it was indeed so important a marker of kingly status? Kiribamune systematically works through the possible explanations of this “bewildering” failure of Vikramabāhu, and all other kings of the period before Parākramabāhu I, to become fully anointed kings (1976, 20–28). Control of the entire island cannot be the deciding factor: the *Mahāvamsa* tells us that Parākramabāhu himself received his first *abhiṣeka* while ruling only Dakkhiṇadeśa and Rajaraṭa (MV 71:19-32), and then took a *second abhiṣeka* once he had also secured Rohaṇa (MV 72:311-29).<sup>133</sup> Kiribamune therefore assumes control of Rajaraṭa alone determined which kings were eligible for an *abhiṣeka* (so Mānābharaṇa II, for example, would never have considered the ritual for himself, ruling only Rohaṇa). As for Vikramabāhu and his son Gajabāhu, she suggests that the only possible explanation for their supposed lack of an *abhiṣeka* is that neither were adequately “Buddhist” (25-28). I discuss this claim, and the tenuous nature of the evidence for it, further in the following chapter. These two criteria—control of Rajaraṭa and adequate Buddhist-ness—together apparently prevented all monarchs between Jayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I from receiving an *abhiṣeka*, thereby leaving Jayabāhu in the position of paramount king even after his own death, and necessitating that all subsequent kings (even Jayabāhu’s usurper Vikramabāhu!) number their own reigns according to Jayabāhu’s regnal years.

I find these links to be rather poorly chained together. While it seems clear that Jayabāhu’s status as “paramount king,” and therefore as benchmark for dating by regnal years, was respected even after

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<sup>133</sup> Geiger (1929) suggests that this second *abhiṣeka* was necessitated because Parākramabāhu had had to flee Rajaraṭa for a brief time between the two, negating the effect of his first *abhiṣeka* (347, f1).

his effective deposition and eventual death, I do not think we can attribute this to something so abstract as a lack of *abhiṣeka*. In fact, I am sceptical in general of the association between *abhiṣeka* and paramount kingship in twelfth-century Lanka, which seems to rest far too firmly on the evidence of the *Mahāvamsa* alone, and which does not seem to be supported by *either* of the two extant accounts we have of an *abhiṣeka* procedure from the precolonial period.

The first of these accounts is found first in the (c. tenth century) *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, repeated nearly verbatim in the *Sārāthhadīpanī* of Parākramabāhu's *mahāsāmi Śāriputra* (discussed in the following chapter). This procedure has been discussed in some detail by Walters (2000, 130) and Gunasena (1974, chap. 4), the latter of which also provides a full translation in the appendix. In brief: a *kṣatriya* is made into a *mahārājan* by being anointed with water from the Ganges. The only requirements laid on the *kṣatriya* are that he is of good family and over sixteen (and, implicitly, that *he* is normatively male). There are some economic and logistical requirements which might have been intended to frustrate less powerful candidates for the ceremony, including the aforementioned Ganges water, and the participation of a *kṣatriya* maiden, explicitly representing the interests of the *kṣatriyas*; the chief priest, representing the *brahmanas*; and the treasurer, representing householders. The most significant restriction imposed by this procedure is the requirement that clay be fetched from seven auspicious locations in or near Anurādhapura, all associated with early Buddhism; presumably this would indeed have prohibited any kings who did not rule Rajaraṭa from carrying out this specific procedure.

The second account is found in a Sanskrit *śilpa-śāstra* (artisans' treatise) called the *Vaijayanta-tantraya*. Despite the strong relationship between such artisanal manuals and kingship recognised by

modern scholars (Inden 1981; Mills 2021), this text has only received attention in some short articles by its modern editor (Mudiyanse 1976; 1978), and has otherwise been overlooked. I suspect that this is largely because the work positions itself in a Śaiva *milieu*: the titular sage lives on Kailāsa and is urged to discourse by Śiva’s son Skanda (VT 1:1); a later chapter opens “having worshipped the feet of Śrī Śambhu” (VT 3:1). Further, dating this text is extremely difficult, as is the case for nearly all *śilpa-śāstras* (Mills 2021). For these reasons, we must therefore take any evidence from this source with more than a grain of caution. However, two points are noteworthy.

First, it tells us that the *abhiṣeka* procedure is “identical” (*abheda*) to the coronation ceremony (VT 15:1).<sup>134</sup> This aligns with Gunasena’s (1974) argument that from the eighth century onwards these two ceremonies were increasingly conflated—a development he suggests can be attributed to South Indian influences (156-158). It then lists a *series* of crowns, appropriate for decreasingly significant kings from *cakravartin* (VT 15:2) to mere *narendras* (15:7); presumably each of these monarchs also receives an *abhiṣeka* alongside each crown, no matter their status. If this were true of the Poḷonnaruva period, it would complicate the notion that “lesser” kings outside Rajaraṭa (such as Mānābharaṇa II) received no *abhiṣeka* at all. Second, the *Vaijayanta-tantraya* describes *multiple* coronations for a single king, increasingly grandiose in subsequent years of his (sic.) reign (VT 15:8-10). This contradicts Gunasena’s (1974) assumption that the *abhiṣeka*—in contrast to the *rājasūya*—is “a ceremony performed once and for all in order to bestow royal power on a king” (147).

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<sup>134</sup> athātaḥ vakṣate skanda maulibhūṣitalakṣaṇam | abhiṣekakriyābhedaṃ kramaṇa vidhivat śṛṇuḥ.

Of course, we cannot assume that the *Vaijayanta-tantraya* is any more reflective of Poḷonnaruva-period understandings of the *abhiṣeka* than we can the *Mahāvamsa*. But the *abhiṣeka* it describes, alongside that of the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini* (repeated later in the *Sārāthadīpani*) alerts us to how much more procedural variety could be involved in such rituals. There was clearly more than one way to understand (and perform) the *abhiṣeka* in premodern Sri Lanka, and these alternative ways included (in at least *some* periods of history) sequential *abhiṣekas* and *abhiṣekas* for lesser kings, alongside those for *mahārājans* and *cakravartins*. This necessitates a reframing in how we conceptualise *abhiṣekas*, and their relationship to “paramount kingship,” in the Poḷonnaruva period; we cannot be *sure* that this ritual was a one-off event which marked a single exalted rank above all others. Instead, we may need to return to the broad definition with which this tangential section began: an *abhiṣeka* is a ritual which marks a transition in status. That newly anointed status *might* be paramount kingship, with all attached regnal-year-dating privileges. But we must always keep open the door for other possibilities; other *abhiṣekas*, through which other monarchs claimed other kinds of authority. This would go some way to explaining Parākramabāhu’s two *abhiṣekas* as described in the later *Mahāvamsa*: rather than an odd doubling-up of a ceremony we assume to be a once-off occasion, this might simply be the *Mahāvamsa* noting two *abhiṣekas*—out of an unspecified total number—which happened to be of particular relevance to its own narrative arc. In the slightly later Daṃbadeṇiya period, we also see references to multiple consecrations for Parākramabāhu II (Blackburn 2024, 59). This further supports the notion that multiple kings may have received multiple *abhiṣekas* to mark multiple transitions to a “higher” level of sovereignty, rather than this being a ceremony reserved only for a single “highest” king.

All of this is to say that we cannot assume that Jayabāhu's regnal years extended beyond his effective reign simply because other kings were "ineligible" or "unable" to perform their own *abhiṣekas*. Instead, we must wonder what made these other kings *unwilling* to claim paramount kingship for themselves, and to use their own regnal years in their inscriptions, long after Jayabāhu's deposition and even death, especially when they were actively hostile to Jayabāhu (as was Vikramabāhu, according to the *Mahāvamśa's* account). I wish to suggest that Jayabāhu's nominal paramount kingship—even when both the *Mahāvamśa* account and the lack of inscriptional evidence speak to a lack of any concrete power—served a useful role in maintaining the balance of power between the divided kingdoms of the interregal period, even after his pragmatic deposition and his eventual death.

### **Jayabāhu's Kingship as a Power-Balancing Mechanism**

The balance of power is a fundamental axiom of the "Neorealist" school of modern international politics. In this account, "wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive" (Waltz 1979, 121) political actors will necessarily operate competitively; they will also, however, put aside common differences in order to keep one of their number from rising above and overpowering the rest, preserving the anarchic and therefore egalitarian *status quo* (Waltz 1979, 164–65). Waltz himself does not consider this state of pure anarchy—a balance of power between *all* members of given political system—desirable, likening the necessary tensions and conflicts to Hobbes's state of nature (Waltz 1979, 103). A preferable alternative, he argues, is the relative stability of a "Great Power" system, in which two hegemonic entities (for him, the USA and USSR) keep one another in check while enforcing peace downwards on their various subordinates.

The Neorealist account is, of course, hopelessly reductive. But, as Constructivist theorists have argued persuasively, one can accept that some political actors *believe* themselves to be in a balance-of-power situation, and so act according to Neorealist expectations, without advocating the inevitability or universality of such beliefs and actions. As Wendt (1992) succinctly put it, “anarchy is what states make of it.” We might wonder if such beliefs, or similar, preoccupied Vikramabāhu I and his cousins once he had ousted his uncle Jayabāhu, and if continuing to acknowledge Jayabāhu’s paramountcy therefore provided some mutual benefit. Vikramabāhu may have taken control of Rajaraṭa, but his cousins—who together controlled the majority of the island—were unlikely to acknowledge him as overlord, and could together prevent his military expansion. Simultaneously, if any one of the three brothers—Mānābharaṇa, Kīrtiśrīmegha, and Śrīvallabha—had declared their own paramountcy, or made a play for Rajaraṭa, their siblings might have taken this as a threat to their own autonomy, and allied against the disruptor in favour of the *status quo*. Lanka would have been, in other words, in what Neorealists would recognise as structural “state of anarchy,” with nothing to keep the four cousins from violently jostling one another for the upper hand, and from cutting down any one of their number who stood poised to gain too much. Maintaining the fiction of Jayabāhu’s ongoing overlordship, on the other hand, may have made an uneasy truce easier. So long as all four of Vikramabāhu, Mānābharaṇa, Śrīvallabha, and Kīrtiśrīmegha all acknowledged a shared higher power, under whom they nominally served as regional sub-kings, they could trust that none of the others was positioning himself for supremacy.

This is, of course, firmly in the realm of speculation. But it does suggest some context for the increasing tensions which marked the end of the interregal period. Most significantly, of course, it

recasts the character of Parākramabāhu I, and the nature of opposition towards him. As narrated in the *Mahāvamsa*, Parākramabāhu is so obviously a rightful and heroic king that those who oppose him (particularly Mānābharaṇa II) must do so only out of some moral corruption on their behalf.<sup>135</sup> If we suspect, however, that a balance of power was being intentionally maintained by the period’s rulers, then Parākramabāhu’s ambitions must have seemed a dangerous threat to the *status quo*, to which the only reasonable response was alliance and opposition.

The “balance of power” account also allows us to reconsider some of the inscriptions of Gajabāhu II, the son of Vikramabāhu I, and wonder if he, too, had begun to disrupt the *status quo*. Only two of Gajabāhu’s own inscriptions are extant (IC VI:9; IC VI:10), along with three created by officials recording his orders (TISL 28a, 28b, and 50), and the “treaty” inscription created by Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu together (IC VI:11). Only one, frustratingly, is dated, although it seems likely that the “treaty” inscription (created, by definition, towards the end of Gajabāhu’s reign and life) was the last created. Nonetheless, and leaving aside this “treaty” inscription, the five inscriptions together track an interesting shift of self-representation.

The shorter inscriptions (IC VI:10, TISL 28a and b), despite being composed in different languages, seem to establish a clear inscriptional style for Gajabāhu II. The first of these, found carved on a stone pillar near Anurādhapura, reads:

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<sup>135</sup> Note, for examples, the influence of “evil-minded people” upon Mānābharaṇa II (MV 71:9-10); Mānābharaṇa’s pained internal monologues and regrets for not having remained content with Rohaṇa (MV 72:216-9; 72:225-30); his cowardly abandonment of his own children (MV 72:278-83); and his deathbed regrets (MV 72:304-307).

svasti śrī sūryyavaṃśābhijāta śrīmat gajabāhu devayan pasvādāsak pavatnā se  
ruvanmālimahasā vahanseṭa pidū gajabāhu avuṇehi pin rajadaruvo taman kaḷa se anumō vā.  
meyāṭa yam antarāya no koṭa raktivā siddih.

Svasti! Śrī! May the merit in the “Gajabāhu-*avuṇa*”—donated to the Ruvamāli *mahācaitya*,  
established for five thousand [years], by the auspicious Lord Gajabāhu born from the solar  
lineage—be rejoiced at by [other] kings as though they had made it themselves. One who  
protects this, without doing harm [will have] success! (IC VI:10).

A double-edged benediction lurks in this inscription. The merit may well be “as though [other kings] had  
made it themselves,” a friendly overture, perhaps, to Gajabāhu’s co-rulers across the island.<sup>136</sup> We might  
particularly attend here to the wording translated here as “rejoiced at,” *anumo vā* (from P. *anumodanā*).  
This term is most typically deployed (in Sri Lankan Buddhism) in the context of a ritual transference of  
merit, in which

...the recipient of the transfer becomes a participant of the original deed by associating himself  
[sic] with the deed done. Thus, this identification of himself with both the deed and the doer  
can sometimes result in the beneficiary getting even greater merit than the original doer  
(Malalasekera 1967, 85).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> The specific term used here—*rajadaruvo*—literally means “royal children,” perhaps even “royal sons,” and it is  
tempting to read this with succession in mind: Gajabāhu securing merit for his own heirs. However, this particular  
compound is frequently used in inscriptions of the period (particularly those of Niśśaṅka Malla) to refer to royalty  
collectively, without any clear sense of age restriction. I therefore take this reference more generally, to refer to all  
those born into royalty, hence most likely “[other] kings.”

<sup>137</sup> Merit-transfer has long been an important practice in the Theravāda world, but modern scholars have remained  
somewhat preoccupied by its “surprising” (in the words of Bechert 1992, 99) presence therein. Malalasekera  
presents merit-transfer as generally conforming to canonical Theravāda doctrines. Gombrich (1971), however,  
argues that Malalasekera’s understanding of merit represents a novel development from sometime in the period  
immediately prior to the closing of the Pali canon, and is not necessarily representative of early Buddhism (see  
particularly 218). Holt (1982) has suggested that this shift may have involved a “karmatological” replacement for  
Brahmanical rituals to ensure postmortem wellbeing (18). Bechert (1992) himself argues that merit transfer is  
specifically denounced in the *Kathāvatthu*, and so may be the result of “Mahāyānistic” influences on Sri Lankan  
Buddhist practices (102); cf. Schopen (1985).

We should note the significance of merit-making opportunities, particularly those generated through access to an auspicious site like the Ruvanmäli. Blackburn (2010) has argued that, across the Indian Ocean world,

A ruler's power resulted from, and depended upon, merit-making that accrued from acts of Buddhist devotion to traces of a Buddha, to the *dhamma*, and to the *saṅgha*. Royal ritual traffic with Buddha relics was part of the public performances of rule—it affirmed a right to kingship even as it enhanced this right by adding to the ruler's stock of merit. In addition, according to an implicit hierarchy of potency, the relics most closely associated with a Buddha offered the richest storehouse of magical power that could be deployed to protect the royal person, his family, and his realm (328).

Gajabāhu's transference of that merit to "other kings" is therefore munificent indeed. But implicit in this is the reminder that *only* Gajabāhu, who controlled Rajaraṭa, had the opportunity to actually make such munificent transferences of merit, let alone to generate merit for his own right.

Nonetheless, in the inscription above Gajabāhu still only affords himself the title "Lord" (*devaya*).

We see this same title—in the Sanskritised form *devar*, rendered in Grantha script, rather than the Tamil *tēvar*—in the short Tamil-language inscriptions at Kantaḷāy:

svasti śrī laṅkēsvaran gajabāhu<sup>138</sup> devar aruḷic ceyya laṅkai vijayacēnaviruttar kiḷivai apimānarāman kantaḷāy piṭiy naṭanta kiḷakku ellaikku nātṭina (read "nātṭiṇa") kal.

Svasti! Śrī! On the order of Lord Gajabāhu, the Lord of Laṅkā; by Kiḷivai Apimānarāman, preeminent in the victorious army of Lanka; to [demarcate] the eastern boundary trampled by the elephant cow<sup>139</sup> [in] Kantaḷāy, [this] stone is established (TISL 28a).

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<sup>138</sup> Pathmanathan's Tamil-script transcription gives us *kajapāhu*; on the basis of his comments (TISL, 322) I assume this was an oversight, and the inscription actually reads *gajabāhu* in Grantha script.

<sup>139</sup> This refers to a ceremony of demarcating the boundary of a gift-land by perambulating around it with an elephant cow: see TL s.v. *piṭicūltal*.

svasti śrī laṅkēsvaran gajabāhu devar kantaḷāy brahmadeyam piṭi naṭanta pūmi iṭaiyarkallil  
ūrkaḷ tikku nāṭṭiṇa ellaik kal.

Svasti! Śrī! [On the order of] Lord Gajabāhu, the Lord of Laṅkā; [to demarcate] the boundary in the direction of the villages at Iṭaiyarkal;<sup>140</sup> [on] the ground trampled by the elephant cow [in] the Kantaḷāy Brahmadeya, [this] stone is established, (TISL 28b).

The repeated use of “lord” (*devaya*, *devar*) across all three of these inscriptions, rather than a loftier title, is reflective of broader patterns in the period, which tend to reserve more elevated language for the nominal overlord Jayabāhu.<sup>141</sup> There is no hint in this inscription, in other words, of Gajabāhu positioning himself in a hegemonic position, despite controlling the symbolically important Rajaraṭa.

The same cannot be said for the more substantial inscription IC VI:9. Here Gajabāhu seems to model the earlier inscriptions of his grandfather Vijayabāhu I (see Chapter One), in a move towards a more open declaration of his own paramount lordship. The inscription, frustratingly undated, is primarily concerned with a grant to a subordinate named Mihindu, mediated through two other officials. What most concerns us is that it opens with an elaborate genealogy for Gajabāhu, complete with regnal titles unprecedented in Sinhala-language inscriptions:

okāvas rajaparapuren baṭa kāt osabanaṭa agamehesun vū lakdivpoḷoyona parapuren himi raja  
pamuṇuvā siti aṇasakviti gajabāhu rajapā vahanse...

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<sup>140</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of *ūrkaḷ tikku* see Pathmanathan (2019, 327); while our English renderings differ, I follow his general interpretation that this stone is placed between the boundaries of village A and B, so that from the perspective of village A the boundary marker itself is located “in the direction of” village B.

<sup>141</sup> See, e.g., TISL 51b, created by dignitaries of Vīrabāhu *tēvar* (a throne name of Mānābharaṇa II) but dated in the year of the *cakkaravartikaḷ Jayabāhu tēvar*. Cf. Mānābharaṇa’s IC VI:12, which refers to Jayabāhu only by the title *tēvar*.

Born from the royal lineage of Okā (Skt. Ikṣvāku); lord by descent of the earth-maiden [which is] the island of Lanka, the primary consort to the best of the Kṣatriya; who has attained kingship: the *aṇa-sakviti* Gahabāhu *rajaṇā vahanse...* (IC VI:9).

This is a far cry from the modest title of “Lord” (*deva, tevār*) with which Gajabāhu is addressed elsewhere. Instead, he refers to himself with both the title *rajaṇā*—an epithet used previously in inscriptions of Vijayabāhu and Jayabāhu, as well as by the later Anurādhapura-period kings—and the rather more novel title *aṇasakviti* (Skt. *ājñā-cakravartin*). This is the earliest instance extant use of this title by a Lankan monarch in their own inscription,<sup>142</sup> and seems to be the earliest use of the prefix *aṇa* (Skt. *ājñā*, T. *āṇai*, P. *āṇā*), meaning something like “by command.” I discuss the implications of this unusual appellation further in the following chapter.

This is not the only inscription which suggests that, at some point in his career, Gajabāhu may have been affecting a higher status than a mere sub-king of Jayabāhu. A Tamil-language inscription (TISL 50) found near Poḷonaruva records a donation made, presumably on Gajabāhu’s behalf, by a “Great Lord” (*makātēvaṇ*) Ātitta. Crucially, although the full opening is defaced and illegible, the inscription seems to be dated in the regnal years of *both* Jayabāhu and Gajabāhu, here both also only called *tēvar* (“Lord”). The status of the two seems to have been equalised here; Gajabāhu is not quite ascribed the loftier *sakviti* status as in his Sinhala inscription IC VI:9 discussed above, but nor (at least in the section of the inscription which is still legible) is Jayabāhu. These two inscriptions, IC VI:9 and TISL 50, together may suggest a move on Gajabāhu’s behalf from out of the shadow of Jayabāhu. This is a valuable reminder

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<sup>142</sup> The Veḷaikkārar inscription calls Vijayabāhu I a *cakravartin*, but this is almost certainly posthumous (TISL 42); officials of Mānābharaṇa II similarly attribute the title to Jayabāhu (TISL 51b).

that the *status quo* was hardly an immutable force, in this period or any other, and individual agency and ambition could always push back at what might seem rigid boundaries.

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

## **Consortial Politics**

In the previous chapter, we noted the almost total absence of royal consorts from the inscriptional record, from the late Anurādhapurān period through to the reign of Vijayabāhu I. Only a very few extant inscriptions are attributed to, or even mention by name, these royal consorts, other than the donor's own mother. In the interregnal period presently under discussion, this seems to have changed: we see, to an unprecedented degree, inscriptions of royal consorts themselves, describing their own social status and (in some cases) patronage of religious institutions. This shift may appear gradual: only three of the inscriptions from this period are attributed to royal consorts, specifically to women named Cundhamalli and Sundarā; out of the 140 inscriptions discussed in this dissertation (see Appendix A), only 11 (7.8%) are attributed to female donors or dated in a female monarch's regnal year. We must bear in mind,

however, that inscriptions by, or recording the activities of, women constitute only five of the 367 inscriptions included in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* vol. V, covering the late Anurādhapura period (1.3%). More qualitative changes in the status of royal consorts also become apparent as the Poḷonnaruva period continues: in the years following the death of Parākramabāhu I, royal consorts (and even daughters!) are mentioned prominently in the inscriptions of their husbands (particularly the inscriptions of Niśśaṅka Malla, discussed in Chapter Five); some, eventually, claim the throne for themselves (as discussed in Chapter Six). The inscriptions of Cundhamalli and Sundarā, therefore, merit our attention if only as an early indication of this growing significance of the royal consort in later Poḷonnaruvan political culture.

In this section I advance a tentative explanation for why royal consorts seem to have become increasingly visible in the interregal period: that the delicate balance of power in this period of Sri Lankan history led to an increased significance of marital ties with powerful mainland dynasties, and therefore to the increasing and increasingly visible influence of the royal consorts who embodied those ties. The political value of such interdynastic connections, particularly in times of relative political instability, are well-documented across the medieval world: in Europe (d’Avray 2005; Molho 1994; Woodacre 2016, 180); China (McMahon 2013, 922); and in the Islamic world (Barton 2011; Ruggles 2004; Woodacre 2021, 20). The purpose of these marital ties, in the eyes of the male participants, was to further their mutual positions by solidifying inter-dynastic alliances—or at least by securing what *appeared* to be a powerful alliance in the eyes of one’s rivals—and by tying together divided branches of a family tree through intra-dynastic alliances. Put more bluntly, it seems that in many parts of the medieval world “bonds forged by sexual relationships were critical to successful diplomacy” (Andaya 2008, 25).

As discussed in the preceding chapter, however, the dynastic connections which might be made through marriage alliances seem to have been of little significance to the inscriptional self-representation of Lanka's monarchs prior to the period under discussion. The dynastic origins of royal consorts are rarely, if ever, mentioned in kingly inscriptions, or in the inscriptions of the consorts themselves (in the few instances in which they were able to leave behind inscriptional traces). In other words, if there was a common practice of marrying outside of Lanka prior to the Poḷonnaruva period, it seems to have been considered irrelevant to inscriptional self-representation, and to the language of politics engraved therein. This seems to have changed, however, during the interregal period, and in the fractured period post-Parākramabāhu I. We can easily imagine how, in such a politically fragmented context with recent memories of external conquest, such inter-dynastic connections may well have appeared valuable to Lankan monarchs desperately attempting to balance their own power against that of their neighbours, and that of their overseas rivals. Alliances with powerful dynasties across the Palk Straight would have both mitigated the risk of external invasion and served as a useful deterrent against potential hostilities from within.<sup>143</sup>

However, seeking out high-status wives, who would then embody a strategic interdynastic connection, was a risky strategy for men whose own grip on power was tenuous. As Walthall (2008) notes, even in contexts (like medieval Sri Lanka) in which royal consorts were less respected by their husbands

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<sup>143</sup> Lankan kings were certainly not averse to seeking military aid from abroad. Merchant/mercenary guilds like the *Vēlaikkāraṅ* and *Aiññūruvar* were deployed frequently throughout the Poḷonnaruva period, and eventually became fully integrated into Sri Lankan political culture (Friedrich 2020, chap. 1). We also have references from the later Poḷonnaruva period to military alliances within the Pāṇḍya kingdom (S. Wickramasinghe 1960, 251).

for their own personal qualities, respect was often still due “for their powerful relatives, who might take offence were they slighted” (12); for some royal consorts, these familial connections could be leveraged for influence both within and beyond the palace. Examples from the wider medieval world, deployed cautiously, can provide some useful illustrations of this dynamic. Perhaps the most dramatic example of a dynastic match “gone wrong,” from the perspective of the men involved, is the fourteenth century marriage of Isabella, a daughter of Philip IV of France and Jean I of Navarre, to Edward II of England. Isabella’s marriage was intended, by her father and husband, to cement ties between their two realms; ultimately, however, she overthrew (and allegedly murdered) her husband in 1327 in favour of her son Edward III, through whom she ruled as regent (before he overthrew her in turn). Two factors were vital to the success of her revolution: her connections with nobility in her natal land of France, with whom she formed alliances of her own; and her increased economic independence (through land ownership) from the late 1310s onwards (Evans 2023, 28–32; Menache 2012, 501–2). Other examples of independently powerful consorts were less fatal for their husbands. We might think here of the tenth century Bulgarian Tsaritsa Maria/Irene Lekapene, a daughter of the Byzantine Emperor who has traditionally been regarded as an “agent of Constantinople” in her husband’s court (although cf. the rigorous counterargument of Brzozowska and Leskza 2017, 2; 89–92). In the Ottoman world, Peirce (1993) has also suggested that “the Christian wives of sultans, **because of the greater diplomatic and military force behind them**, enjoyed greater independence and status at the Ottoman court than did women from the Anatolian principalities, about whom we know almost nothing after their marriages” (42, emphasis added). To be clear, I am not making a reductive argument that “independently powerful consorts would

always cause trouble for their hapless husbands.” However, these examples are suggestive of the kind of autonomy which royal consorts *could* wield in the medieval world, even if married off to further the political ambitions of their fathers and husbands, when they had a powerful dynasty behind them and some degree of economic foundation underfoot.

The limited evidence available to us precludes firm conclusions about the change in inscriptional representation of consorts from the interregal period onwards. I suspect, however, that a similar dynamic lies behind this shift as described above: that the trifurcated monarchs of Rajaraṭa, Dakkhiṇadeśa, and Ruhuṇu increasingly sought out consorts with ties to powerful overseas dynasties to help support their rule; and that by virtue of those same ties, some of these consorts were able to exert their autonomy to a degree perhaps unprecedented in Lankan history.

The sole extant inscription of Cundhamalli, dated in the eighth year of Jayabāhu (c. 1118CE), certainly seems to support this reading. The inscription is carved on a stone pillar: presumably once part of the Śaiva temple mentioned in the inscription, but now re-appropriated in the early modern construction of a temple near what is now Nikaweratiya (NW Province). Presumably, the Śaiva temple was once located in this vicinity, and therefore in Dakkhiṇadeśa. The inscription reads:

śrī jayabāku<sup>144</sup> tēvarkku yāṇṭu eṭṭāvatu pāṇṭiyanār vīrap perumāḷ nampirāṭṭiyār kolōttuṅka cōḷa  
tēvar tirumakaḷār cundhamalliyālvār mākalāṇa vikkiramacalāmēkapurattu vikkiramacalāmēka

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<sup>144</sup> Here I follow Pathmanathan’s transliteration (TISL, 554); earlier in his introduction, however, he includes “Jayabāhu devar” in his list of terms written in Grantha script, which, unlike Tamil script, includes the characters “b,” “h,” and “d” (ibid., 552). Parnavitana transliterates (and translates) the name as the rather improbable “Jayavāgu dēvar” (EZ III, 311). The facsimile of the inscription provided in EZ is too unclear for me to make out the characters myself.

īśvaramuṭaiyārkkku cantirātittavar niṇṇeriya iṭṭa tirunantāviḷakkonṇukkuyiṭṭa kācu pattu muṇ  
cāṇ ṇiḷattil tarānilai viḷakku onṇru.

Śrī!<sup>145</sup> In the eighth year of the Lord Jayabāhu, the consort (*nampirāṭṭiyār*)<sup>146</sup> [of] the Pāṇḍya king  
Vīra(*pperumaḷ*)<sup>147</sup> [and] auspicious daughter of Lord Kulōṭṭuṅka Cōḷa, Cundhamalli *ālvār*,<sup>148</sup>  
[gave] to the deity of the Īśvata-temple of Vikkrama Calāmēka (Skt. Vikrāma Śālamegha) in  
Vikkiramacalāmēka-pura, [also] called Mākala (Sin. Māgala, Skt. Mahāgalla), a lamp of alloyed  
metal [and] ten *kācus* [of gold] for a perpetual lamp that will permanently burn for as long as  
the sun and moon [endure] (TISL 51a).

This inscription provides evidence, at minimum, that Cundhamalli had a degree of economic autonomy:  
she was able to make a donation to a religious institution in her own name, and to record that donation  
in inscripational form. This is itself noteworthy: Cundhamalli's inscription is the only extant evidence of  
a donation by a royal woman to a Śaiva temple in Sri Lanka during this period.<sup>149</sup> But, as with all donative  
inscriptions from this period, this inscription served more than merely documentary purposes. In my  
reading, it locates Cundhamalli at the centre of a dense network of interdynastic ties.

We have already noted that, like other inscriptions of this interregal period, Cundhamalli dates  
her inscription in the regnal years of Jayabāhu. She is clearly aware of the political climate on the island,  
and follows the standard inscripational practice established by Lanka's trifurcated kings. Immediately

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<sup>145</sup> It is possible that this *śrī* modifies Jayabāhu's name, particularly given that both are in Grantha characters. I  
suggest in my translation that it is an auspicious invocation, as is typical of other inscriptions from the period.

<sup>146</sup> As discussed by Pathmanathan, this is the grammatically feminine form of *nampirān*, literally "our lord," a  
common honorific for kings (TISL, 549).

<sup>147</sup> This *perumaḷ* is often taken as part of Mānābharaṇa's proper name. I suspect instead that is instead a title, but  
include here to provide the most fulsome reading.

<sup>148</sup> I take this as a variant of the title *ālvār*, which can mean generically "lord" but typically has religious overtones:  
see the discussion of this title, as used in inscription TISL 52, above.

<sup>149</sup> TISL 52, discussed above, indicates the support of both Gajabāhu and Mānābharaṇa II for a (possibly Śaiva)  
religious institution. We have many inscriptions marking private donations to Śaiva temples, by both individuals  
and by mercantile organisations: see TISL pts. III and IV.

after this acknowledgement of Jayabāhu’s nominal sovereignty, Cundhamalli then introduces herself by way of relation to, in turn, her husband and her father. She refers to her husband as a Pāṇḍyan *vīraṭ perumāḷ*: literally “heroic king,” but usually understood to be a variant on Vīrabāhu, a throne name of Mānābharaṇa I, whose own father was Pāṇḍyan. According to the *Mahāvamsa* account, Mānābharaṇa I ruled Dakkhiṇadeśa—where Vikkiramacalāmēka-pura was likely located—during this time. Notably, this would make Cundhamalli a co-consort to Parākramabāhu’s mother Ratnāvalī, although she is never mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa*’s description of her husband’s courts. Cundhamalli’s father is then identified as a Cōḷa lord (*tēvar*) named Kulōttuṅka (whose name, alone, is rendered in Tamil rather than Grantha script). In 1118, this could only refer to the Cōḷa Emperor Kulottuṅga (r. 1070-1120), who adopted this then-novel name in 1074 to signal his singular status among the imperial family (Cox 2016). It is worth noting that Cundhamalli therefore invokes here both the Cōḷa and the Pāṇḍya, two of the three great Tamil dynasties. The third of these dynasties is the Cēra, who ruled over what is now Kerala. We might note that the title *perumāḷ*, here assigned to Mānābharaṇa I, is typically associated with the Cēra, to the point that the dynasty ruling Kerala in the twelfth century are often today called the “Chera Perumals.” As Pathmanathan points out, *perumāḷ* was used in other Tamil-language Lankan inscriptions of the period (TISL, 549). But we should not ignore the rhetorical significance of hinting at all *three* dynasties in just two clauses of the inscription.

On one level, then, we can take this as evidence of a marital alliance between the Cōḷa and Dakkhiṇadeśan polities. A marriage between Mānābharaṇa and a daughter of Kulottuṅga would have secured a mutually beneficial dynastic alliance for the two men: providing a link to the powerful

mainland empire for Mānābharaṇa, in exchange for a foothold into at least one branch of the ruling family for Kulōttuṅka, less than a generation after his own uncle Vīrarācēntira (Skt. Vīrarājendra) was defeated by Vijayabāhu I and lost control of Lanka. Cundhamalli's inscription, I suggest, frames the alliance in a different way. Let us bear in mind that the genealogical preamble typical of medieval Lankan inscriptions (as in other genres of inscription, such as the Sanskrit *praśasti*) serves to eulogise the most recent descendent: praise of their ancestors is, ultimately, praise of their own pedigree. The invocation of Cundhamalli's husband and father in the lead-up to her own name serves a similar function. *She* is the genealogical ego (a term borrowed from Collett 2018, 346), valorised through connection to both Lankan and South Indian dynasties.

This is, of course, a single inscription, from which we ought not draw over-generalisations. However, it seems to me to be a rather striking coincidence that the first inscription to record a religious donation by a royal woman in over 100 years<sup>150</sup> is also an inscription which valorises a royal consort as a daughter of the powerful emperor Kulottuṅga. I suspect that these matters are connected: that it was *because of* Cundhamalli's illustrious dynastic connections that she was able to exercise what seems to be an unusual degree of economic independence, making a donation in her own name and marked with her own inscriptional eulogy to a Śaiva temple in her husband's realm. As Chapters Five and Six will document, the emphasis placed here on Cundhamalli's dynastic origins were not unechoed in the following century. Rather, they seem to represent a first step towards a growing emphasis on the

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<sup>150</sup> Since the inscription of the Lady Vidurā (IC V ii:70), dated by context in the reign of Mahinda IV (r. 956-72).

dynastic origins of royal consorts in the inscriptional record. We should not be surprised, I am suggesting, that some of these interdynastic consorts—brought into a politically fragmented Lanka as living embodiments of powerful overseas polities—began to assert their influential status in unprecedented ways.

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

### **The Great Lady Sundarā as a patron of the Mahāvihāra**

In the preceding chapter, I suggested that we have little concrete evidence for distinct *nikāyas* (the Abhayagiri, the Jetavana, and the Mahāvihāra) following Vijayabāhu's c. 1086 revival of higher ordination (*upasampadā*). Instead, I suspect that a single ordination lineage, dispersed among various monasteries, took on institutional names associated with pre-existing distinctions (the three *nikāyas*, the eight *āyatānas*) while likely maintaining a (more or less) single disciplinary and ritual code: a shared, Pali-language *Vinaya*, and therefore the abilities to cohabit, to perform group *uposathā*, and to co-ordain new monks. This does not mean that the distinctions between individual groups of monks were not significant, or that the pre-existing names which each of these groups adopted was arbitrary. In the 80

years between Vijayabāhu’s revival and Parākramabāhu’s 1165 restricting of the *saṅgha*, many of these groups must have developed a strong sense of internal cohesion, and even identified with the respective legacies of their Anurādhapura-period namesakes.

We see a prominent example of such a self-identification in Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* inscription (IC VI:13, discussed in detail in the following chapter), which refers to the inmates of the Diṃbulāgala (P. Udumbaragiri) monastery, some sixteen kilometres south of Poḷonnaruva, as “*mahāvihārādhivāsibhikṣu*,” monks “dwelling in” the Mahāvihāra.<sup>151</sup> We have good reason to think that these Diṃbulāgala monks took their Mahāvihāran credentials seriously. As discussed further in the following chapter, Parākramabāhu’s inscription tells us that he invited their chief incumbent Mahākāśyapa (P. Mahākassapa, Sin. Mahākāsup) to preside over his purification and unification of the *saṅgha* (IC VI:13, 9-10); he would later be praised by Śāriputra, Parākramabāhu’s first grandmaster (P. *mahāsāmi*), in his sub-commentaries on Buddhaghosa’s works. These events, as discussed in the Introduction, were pivotal to the establishment of the Mahāvihāra’s legacy as authoritative within Lanka and, eventually, across Southeast Asia. In other words, even if (as I have argued) we have little evidence for strong continuity between the Mahāvihāra *nikāya* of the Anurādhapura period and the revived *saṅgha* of Poḷonnaruva, by the time of Parākramabāhu’s reforms these monks do seem to have identified

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<sup>151</sup> I give “dwelling in,” the literal meaning, for concision; in Pali and BHS this can also have the sense of “consenting to” or “agreeing with” (see PED and Cone s.v. *adhivāsa*). We might therefore take this in the sense of “monks who agree with the Mahāvihāra,” or more metaphorically “monks who dwell in [the legacy of] the Mahāvihāra.”

themselves with the former legacy, in ways which would shape the later history of Buddhism across the region.

What is less clear to us is why these Diṃbulāgala monks, with their Mahāvihāran leanings, were approached by Parākramabāhu in the first place. Existing explanations of this choice have suggested that the Diṃbulāgala monks distinguished themselves through particularly rigorous practice. Specifically, they are frequently called “forest-dwelling” (Skt. *araṇyavāsin*, P. *araññavāsin*) monks, in reference to the common Buddhist trope pitting such valorised asceticism against the cushier lifestyle of city-dwelling (*grāmovāsin*, *gāmovāsin*) rivals (Gornall 2020, 23; Gunawardana 1979, 46; 350; Lagamuva 2021, 38; Paranavitana 1960b, 566; de Silva 1981, 74; Yabuuchi 2004, 6). Many Buddhist monks, past and present, did indeed adhere to such strict practices, and ascetic practice may well have provided the social context for significant innovations in wider doctrine and practice (most notably, the emergence of the early Mahāyāna: Boucher 2008, chaps. 3–4; Harrison 1995, 65–66; Nattier 2003, particularly 93–96).<sup>152</sup> In other cases, however, claims to *araṇyavāsin* status seem less reflective of social reality than they are a rhetorically invoked ideal. Blackburn (2001) argues, for example, that eighteenth century leaders of the Siyam-*nikāya* were frequently described as “forest-dwellers” to ward off potential criticisms of excessive scholasticism (94–95). Presumably the Diṃbulāgala monks are assumed, by modern scholars, to have

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<sup>152</sup> See, for a more emphatic argument that such “forest monks” lay behind *all* moments of innovation in Buddhist history, Ray (1999). Interestingly, Ray suggests the inverse of those cited above; he believes, *pace* Rahula, that “forest-dwelling” monasticism was thoroughly quashed in Sri Lanka during the early centuries BCE, and only mentions Lanka peripherally thereafter (see his 41–42 and 433–434). Against Ray, see particularly the section of Nattier cited above.

observed such ascetic practices because of the relatively remote location of their monastery, and the praise lavished on them for their “discipline” (*śīla*) in both Poḷonnaruva-period inscriptions and retroactive narratives. However, we have no evidence from the period itself that the Diṃbulāgala monks considered themselves to be *araṇyavāsins*; the term does not appear in any of the inscriptions which mention them by name (IC VI:7; 8; 13). By the later Daṃbadeṇiya period, it seems as though the *araṇyavāsin*/*grāma**vāsin* split had become institutionalised within the *saṅgha*’s internal structure (Bechert 1970, 765; Gornall 2020, 44–45); even in texts composed in this period, however, I have not found references to the Diṃbulāgala as being a particularly ascetic or forest-dwelling monastery. If they were “forest-dwellers,” in other words, it was only on the most literal level: that they did not dwell in urban areas (*grāmas*). They may well have also engaged in ascetic practices. But we cannot take this alone as an explanation for why they might have been so singled out by Parākramabāhu I, given that none of our sources seem to even mention it.

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

While our knowledge of the monastery’s longer history is murky, it does not seem to have been the focus of much royal intervention prior to the period under discussion. Cave inscriptions on the

mountain tell us that monastics have dwelt there, not necessarily continuously, since as early as the second century before the Christian Era (Nicholas 1959, 40). Among these pre-Christian Era inscriptions we do see some evidence of royal interest in the site: we have mentions of an *aya* (likely Skt. *āryya*, “prince”; IC I:272); we also see donations by two *parumakas* (Skt. *pramukha*; IC I:273; 279), an honorific used by high-ranking individuals sometimes associated with royal courts.<sup>153</sup> More immediately prior to the Poḷonnaruva period, however, the history of this site becomes hazier. A tenth century inscription (IC V i:109) found somewhere near Panduvasnuvara (in what is now Kuruṇāgala district) refers to villages in “Diṃbuḷa,” but there is no mention of either the mountain (*gala*, literally “stone”) or the monastery. We do have references in the *Mahāvamsa*—both the fifth century original and the medieval extension—to a Dhūmarakkhāga mountain which seems, on geographic grounds, to be another name for Diṃbulāgala. The only reference to a monastery at this site, however, appears in the medieval extension, which tells us that King Mahānāma established some buildings there and donated them to the Theravāda (MV 37:213). However, this is a Daṃbadeṇiya-period *Mahāvamsa* entry, influenced by the post-Parākramabāhu prominence of the Mahāvihāra and associated sites, and so we should not take these references at face value.<sup>154</sup> In short, there appears to be little evidence for royal interest in this particular monastery at Diṃbulāgala prior to the Poḷonnaruva period. How, then, did this monastery come to be so prominent by

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<sup>153</sup> For discussions of these titles, see IC I, lxv-viii and lxxii-iv respectively.

<sup>154</sup> However, we might still note, in keeping with the theme of this section, that Mahānāma allegedly carried out these efforts at the request of his own consort!

the later twelfth century that its leader would be placed in charge of Parākramabāhu’s purification and unification of the *saṅgha*?

In this section I will argue that the pivotal factor here is one entirely overlooked in the *Mahāvamsa*: the patronage of the Great Lady Sundarā, consort of Vikramabāhu I and mother of Gajabāhu II. Her absence from our existing histories of the Theravāda is almost certainly a direct result of her absence from the literary sources on which we too often rely. She is mentioned only once in the *Mahāvamsa*: as a relative of Vijayabāhu’s consort, Tilokasundarī, from Siṃhapūra, who he had married to his son Vikramabāhu (MV 59:49).<sup>155</sup> As if to illustrate how insignificant a role she plays in this narrative, in almost all extant manuscripts her name has become corrupted to “Sunārī.” She does not appear to be mentioned at all in either the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* or the *Pūjāvaliya*. She has, in effect, been written out of the story. But her two extant inscriptions suggest a particular orientation towards the Pali language and towards the monastery at Diṃbulāgala, to a degree exception in the extant inscriptional record. Neither of these two inscriptions can be dated, but as one mentions only her husband Vikramabāhu, and the other adds a mention of her son Gajabāhu, we might cautiously estimate an active period spanning the two men’s reigns: evidence for the continuing influence of queen mothers in their children’s courts.

The first of the two inscriptions is, sadly, fragmentary. The surviving section represents, by Paranavitana’s estimation, only one sixth of the original; but the original slab was destroyed, and the surviving section incorporated into the structure of a *maṇḍapa* by some later patron (likely

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<sup>155</sup> The *Mahāvamsa* also refers to her very indirectly in a later chapter, when it tells us that Vikramabāhu’s other son Mahinda was of lower status than Gajabāhu because of his mother’s clan (*mātuḡottena*; MV 62:59).

Parākramabāhu himself: see discussion in EZ IV:9). The original location of the inscription is entirely unknown. All that we have left to us is an invocatory Pali verse, eulogising a monk in rather martial terms,<sup>156</sup> and the beginnings of the preamble:

svasti śrī ānandanāma vidito jayatiddhipatto laṅkātalussitadhajo pavaro yati so | yo  
tambaraṭṭhayati-^^therabhūto coḷesu sāsana ^-^^kāsi dhīro ||

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

sirivat apirivat lo ikut guṇamuḷin uturat dambadvahi an kātkula pāmili kaḷa okāvas  
rajaparapuren baṭa lokaśāsanaikaśaraṇa vā daśarājadharmma no kopā muḷu lakdiva eksat kārā  
rajakaḷa sirisaṅgabo vijayabāhu devayan urehi dā vikramabāhu devayaṅṭa agamehesun vū  
rivikulakot sundaramahādevin...

By the Great Lady Sundarā,<sup>157</sup> best of the solar family, the primary consort to the Lord Vikramabāhu; who was born of the Lord Sirisaṅgabo Vijayabāhu, who was born in the royal lineage of Okā (Skt. Ikṣvāku)—who excelled in a collection of auspicious, endless virtues unequalled in the world, and who subjugated the other *kṣatriya* families of Dambadvahi (Skt. Jambudvīpa)—who was like a sole refuge for the world and the *sāsana*, and who ruled having united all of Lanka without transgressing the ten *rājadharmmas*... (IC VI:7).

Paranavitana, and the epigraphists who followed him, considered the contents and form of this inscription to be “nothing worthy of particular attention” (EZ IV, 68). Ranawella copies both the introduction and translation verbatim from Paranavitana (IC VI, 18–19). What seems to have been

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<sup>156</sup> Military metaphors—the references to Ānanda as a banner, his “resolute” mind, and wish for his victory—are not unprecedented. A common epithet for the Buddha is, after all, “the conqueror” (*jina*); his disciple Śāriputra is often called the “general of the *dharma*” (P. *dharmmasenāpati*); for examples of both in a text composed just before the Poḷonnaruva period see, e.g., the opening verses of the *Anāgatavaṃsa*.

<sup>157</sup> This inscription lists four actors in relation to one another: Ikṣvāku, Vijayabāhu I, Vikramabāhu I, and finally Sundarā. For English-language readability, I list these actors in reverse order from that which they appear in the Sinhala; individual clauses describing each actor are listed in the original sequence.

overlooked is the significance of the Pali verse which opens the inscription: not the identity of the monk Ānanda, which due to the fragmentary nature of the inscription is likely impossible to reconstruct,<sup>158</sup> but to the very decision to compose this verse in Pali. As discussed in the Introduction, although the incomplete nature of the inscriptional record makes certainty impossible, this may well be the earliest extant inscription in Sri Lanka to contain original Pali verse.

This seems, in other words, to be a moment “worthy of particular attention” indeed. Yet, to my knowledge, the only scholar to comment explicitly on this is Gornall (2020):

Never before had Pali been used as a language of inscriptional encomium, and nor had a member of the royal family treated the monastic community as a political overlord by placing a praise poem to a monk before the traditional eulogy to the monarch (28).<sup>159</sup>

How could we have overlooked such a landmark moment for so long? Building on Skilling’s work, Assavavirulhakarn (1990) has argued against the common assumption that “any kind of Buddhism, if it is Theravāda, must have come from Sri Lanka” (239). We might make the same argument in reverse: it is common to assume that any kind of Buddhism in Sri Lanka must have been Theravāda, and therefore

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<sup>158</sup> There has been an attempt to identify this monk as the Ānanda who wrote the *Upāsakajanālaṅkāra* and was praised as the teacher of Vedeha and Buddhappiya (Paranavitana 1960b, 565). But based on intertextual references this *Upāsakajanālaṅkāra* Ānanda must have been active in the early thirteenth century at the earliest (Blackburn 2022, 247–48). A more plausible explanation is simply that there were multiple monks named Ānanda across the centuries.

<sup>159</sup> In keeping with his focus on the relative status of kings and monks (as representatives of the Buddha), Gornall further suggests that Sundarā “treated the monastic community as a political overlord by placing a praise poem to a monk before the traditional eulogy to the monarch” (28). I am not fully convinced of this point. Plenty of inscriptions from the period open with homages to the Buddha, and sometimes also to the *dharmā* and *saṅgha*, without seeming (to me) to imply political overlordship of the latter. That this Pali verse is more specific (focusing on a single monk) may therefore suggest less an overturn of political hierarchy than a shift in the scale and emphasis of veneration. I remain very open, however, to Gornall’s broader arguments about royal-monastic relationship negotiations in the period.

have been communicated primarily in Pali. This assumption has resulted in poor translation practices: terms relating to Buddhism in Sinhala-language texts, even when clearly derived from Sanskrit, are too often “corrected” in translations to their Pali equivalents. Thus a monk with the rather Sanskritic title “Buddhamittra *ācaryayan*” is listed as “*Ācariya* Buddhamittra” (compare the text of IC V ii:41 with the list at IC V ii, xli); while the Sinhala *daham* is consistently “translated” into Pali *dhamma* (IC V i:115; IC V iii:56). Unwarranted Pali-citations like these together exaggerate the dominance of Pali in the language order of late first millennium Lanka, and obfuscate the relatively rare cases in which Pali *does* seem to be on the epigrapher’s mind.

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

To underline the extent to which this inscription breaks with “Lankan” precedent, it is worth dwelling a little more on the transregional character ascribed to Ānanda in Sundarā’s verse. He said to have some form of involvement (the exact nature of which cannot be made out due to damage to the inscription) with ascetics (*presumably* Buddhist monks) both among the Cōḷa and in Tambaraṭṭha (literally

“the Copper Country”). The location of this Tambaraṭṭha is contested. Buddhaghosa refers to Sri Lanka as Tambapaṇṇa, and we might plausibly take Tambaraṭṭha as a variant thereof. Other scholars have located this Tambaraṭṭha in either Southeast Asia<sup>160</sup> or, most convincingly, Southern India (Tournier 2018, 24–27, and particularly n102). Without a definitive identification, few conclusions can be drawn from this reference. More is known about Buddhism in the Cōḷa Empire, thankfully; Cōḷa monks seem to have been active participants in Pali literature and scholarship throughout this period and beyond.<sup>161</sup> Given Ānanda’s connection to this community (whatever that connection may have been), we might well speculate whether Sundarā’s choice to praise him in Pali was in some way inspired by his own interest in or engagement with that language. All we can say with confidence is that Sundarā was more open to inscribing in Pali verse than were other royal figures, possibly to an unprecedented degree. This alone is worth noting as a development in Lankan inscriptional culture. Read alongside her later inscription, however, it takes on a new significance.

Sundarā’s second extant inscription is found within a cave at Diṃbulāgala itself. This inscription has, thankfully, survived intact, and reads in full:

okāvas rajakulen nīpan sudonā parapuren ā hirugot kulen abhinna vū rūsirin siri dinū lada  
voṭunu māndā upan vikumbā nirindahāṭa agamehesun vā gajabāhu devayan vāñdu sundara

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<sup>160</sup> Paranavitana has argued that this is a reference to Nakhon Si Dhammarat (Nagara Śrī Dharmaraṣṭra) in what is now southern Thailand (EZ VI, 69–71 Paranavitana 1960b, 565). On Paranavitana’s attempts to draw connections between Poḷonnaruva and Southeast Asia in his later career, particularly with reference to the Kāliṅga monarchs, see de Silva (1981, 78).

<sup>161</sup> For an general overview from Buddhaghosa onwards, with particular attention to the Pallava period (third to ninth century CE), see Schalk and Vēluppillai (2002, 387–95). We know that this Pali scholarly tradition was still alive and well in a slightly later period, thanks to the writings of the monk Cōḷa Mahākāśyapa, which must postdate the works of Parākramabāhu’s monastic grandmaster Śāriputra (Kieffer-Pülz 2005; Gornall 2014, 519–25). Blackburn (2022) has further argued that the *Upāsakajanāṅkāra* is primarily addressed to a subcontinental audience (250–1).

mahādevīn vahanse pansiyak mahasaṅganāṭa āvāsa vū apa munirajahu siruru dā pihīṭi dumbulāgala sandamahaleṇin hirimahaleṇa de aturehi maṅga<sup>162</sup> duṇu evu dama elī yana minisunge duka balā gal hasvā maṅga pavat koṭa leṇā piḷima dāgab mahabo pihīṭuvā kaliṅguleṇa yāy nam tabā jayabāhu vat himiyan vahanse satvisivana havuruda posonā pura pohoyā demaḷāpāhāsirikusalān karavā pābat pudanukoṭa lov pavatnā tāk kalaṭa dun bavaṭa sundara mahādevīmu.

Unbroken [in lineage] from the solar clan in the lineage of Sudonā (Skt. Śuddhodana, the father of the Buddha), born from the royal family of Ikṣvāku;<sup>163</sup> who overcame Śrī in bodily splendour; primary consort to the Lord of Men Vikramabāhu, born from the crowned;<sup>164</sup> who gave birth to Gajabāhu: the Great Lady Sundarā *vahanse*, who having seen the suffering of people who clung to the eroded chains on the path between the Great Lunar Cave and the Great Solar Cave at Diṃbulagala, which is home to 500 of the *mahāsaṅgha* and where are established the bodily relics of Our King of Sages;<sup>165</sup> having had arranged the stones [of the path]; having improved the path; having had placed in the cave<sup>166</sup> [Buddha-]images, reliquaries, and Mahābodhi [trees]; having given it the name “Kaliṅga Cave”; having had made/done the auspicious wholesome act (*siri-kusala*, Skt. *śrī-kuśala*) of “*demaḷā-pāhā*,”<sup>167</sup> on the full-moon *uposathā* day in [the month of]

<sup>162</sup> I read this as locative *maṅgā*, following EZ II, 198.

<sup>163</sup> Given Sinhala’s left-branching structure, we might take this clause as modifying Vikramabāhu. However, the intervening clause, “who overcome Śrī in bodily splendour,” would *more typically* be made about an idealised woman than it would a masculine king. I am therefore inclined to tentatively take this as a claim that Sundarā herself was descended from the Buddha’s own father, and through him Ikṣvāku.

<sup>164</sup> I tentatively take *voṭunu māndā upan* as modifying Vikramabāhu, as male monarchs frequently emphasise that both their fathers and mother were so crowned (i.e. that their mother was a high-ranking consort). Alternatively, however, this could modify Sundarā here, an evocative possibility given the emphasis placed in Cundhamalli’s inscription above on her own royal parentage.

<sup>165</sup> That Sundarā calls the Buddha *Our King of Sages* is, perhaps, significant. In Hallisey’s (1988) study of devotion in medieval Sinhala literature, he argued for the significance of this use of the plural possessive, as distinct from the patterns found in earlier Pali literature (78–79). The personal relationship with the Buddha evoked by such language, in Hallisey’s view, was a crucial step in the development of personal devotion. Hallisey’s earliest source is the *Amāvatura*, the first Sinhala-language prose work, written sometime in the twelfth century. The “Our Buddha” formulation (and variants, such as Sundarā’s “Our King of Sages”) firmly entered the inscriptional repertoire by the end of the twelfth century: Parākramabāhu’s Galvihāraya inscription opens by dating itself relative to the *parinirvāṇa* of “Our Buddha” (IC VI:13, line 1). But Sundarā’s use of the term here may be earliest extant.

<sup>166</sup> The term *lena* here is in the definitive singular, so “the” rather than “a” cave. Rather than either the Great Solar or Lunar Caves mentioned in the preceding clause, I take this as referring to a third cave, which is henceforth called the Kāliṅga Cave.

<sup>167</sup> Wickramasinghe tentatively suggests that this is the name of a monastery (EZ II, 189). Ranawella takes it instead as the name of a village, gifted to provide cooked rice in perpetuity (IC VI, 21). Although he does not explain his rationale in the context of this translation, it presumably builds on his discussion of the term *demeḷ* in an earlier

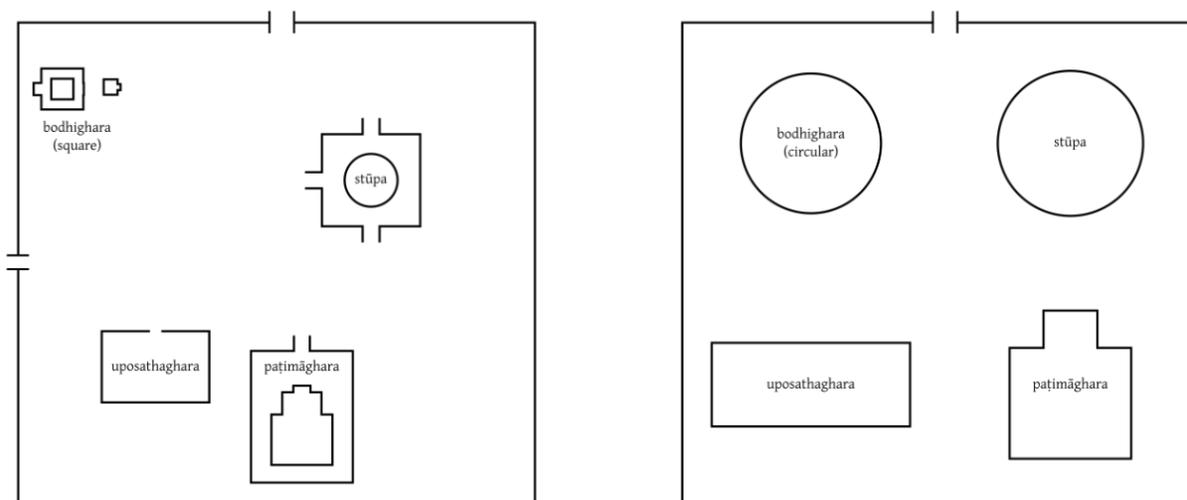
Poson in the twenty-seventh year of Jayabāhu; having offered it for [the provision of] cooked rice; to [witness] the fact of its being given for the duration of the world's existence, I am the Great Lady Sundarā (IC VI:8).

This inscription, and the renovations and additions to the complex it describes, represents the earliest evidence of royal interest in Diṃbulāgala since the BCE Brahmi cave inscriptions. By Sundarā's own account, the site seemed to be a bustling centre of both resident monks and (likely lay) visitors, traversing a difficult path between two auspicious caves. Both communities would have benefitted, however, from the significant additions Sundarā had gifted to (one of) the cave(s), and from the perpetual grant she established through the “*demaḷā-pāhā*.” Notably, she appears to have furnished the “Kaliṅga Cave” with three of the four features of the “sacred precinct” which had come to characterise Lankan *vihāra* design by this period (Bandaranayake 1974, 70): an imagehouse (*paṭimāghara*), reliquary (usually *stūpa*, here called *dāgab*), and Bodhi tree (*bodhighara*). The fourth characteristic, an *uposathaghara*, presumably already existed somewhere nearby, if there were already monks in residence. With these three additional features, Sundarā was therefore converting the “Kaliṅga Cave” into a fully-equipped ritual precinct.

It is very possible, of course, that other such sacred precincts already existed within the general area of the Diṃbulāgala. The site known today as the Namal Pokuna (“Ironwood Pond”) contains all four components of the sacred precinct, laid out in what Bandaranayake (1974, 68 and 73–74) would classify as “Type II” of the *pabbatavihāra* style of monastic layout (see Figure 3.2).

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volume (IC V ii, 175). Literally it might mean something like “Tamil oil” or “Tamil pigment.” Bandara Herath has suggested, in personal communication, that this *may* mean instead “a two-story building” (from *de-mahal prasādaya*), similar to the *demaḷamahāsāya* north of the Poḷonnaruva archaeological site.



**Figure 3.2: layout of the Namal Pokuna (left) and Bandaranayake's "type II" *pabbata vihāra* layout**

Bandaranayake tells us that this style was typical of suburban and provincial monasteries in the late Anurādhapura through Poḷonnaruva periods, and so we cannot date this section of the Diṃbulāgala complex relative to Sundarā's cave; it may have preceded her intervention. As Sundarā's cave has been extensively remodelled in subsequent centuries (most recently in the 1950s), no such detailed floorplan is available for her own sacred precinct. In other words, Sundarā's additions to the Kaliṅga Cave, and her repairs to the path taken by pilgrims between other caves on the mountain, cannot be held solely responsible for the flourishing of the Diṃbulāgala monastery in the early twelfth century, and thence to its leader's eventual appointment by Parākramabāhu I. But her inscription here is certainly indicative of a royal interest in the site which seems unusual for the period, and which comes at a vital moment in the lead up to the 1165 purification and unification of the *saṅgha*.

Paranavitana (1960b) describes this intervention as entirely the result of the “forest-dwelling” monks' conduct, which

...was such as to induce Sundaramahādevī, the Kalinga princess who was the consort of the impious Vikramabāhu, to make benefactions for the upkeep of the monastery, and to undertake essential building works at the place (566).

Here, once again, we see minimal agency ascribed to historical women; instead Sundarā is merely “induced” to act in a certain way. But taken together with her earlier inscription praising Ānanda, I do not think we can so readily dismiss her own agenda. We have here two inscriptions created (presumably, bearing in mind the tentative dating) during the reigns of two different men, her husband and then her son. The first of these inscriptions speaks to a certain interest in the Pali language which seems unprecedented within Lanka; the second records extensive works at a monastery which, at least by the time of its later involvement in Parākramabāhu’s purification and unification, seems to have identified itself with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra. Sundarā held, in other words, a sustained interest in Pali-language and Mahāvihāra-aligned Buddhism over a period of some years. As the Diṃbulāgala inscription suggests, that interest led to Sundarā mobilising substantial material support for her favoured institutions. Even in the conservative case—in which the Diṃbulāgala inscription records Sundarā’s *only* material contribution to monastic institutions—this would still represent a significant intervention in the trajectory of Buddhist history, given the prominence to which this particular institution would later rise. At *minimum*, Sundarā was an “early adopter” of Mahāvihāra- and Pali-oriented Buddhism in the royal court. But the possibility remains that similar support was offered to the monk Ānanda eulogised in her earlier extant inscription; we must also account for the possibility that she made other donations, marked by other inscriptions, which are no longer extant (given that at least one of those “extant” seems to have been broken down and reused in later construction projects). These two inscriptions, therefore,

suggest—if tentatively—a far more prominent role in the rise of the Mahāvihāra for Sundarā, and perhaps also for other royal consorts, than our later literary accounts would admit.

### **Conclusions to Chapter Three**

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

This reading of the period has implications for its representation in our standard chronologies of Sri Lankan history. As Walters (2000) has shown, colonial-modern historians have been preoccupied with constructing orderly lists of paramount monarchs stretching from Vijaya to Victoria. Sri Lankan texts—from the *Mahāvamsa* to the much later *Rājāvaliya*—seem to have shared this preoccupation, to the great delight of the early colonial scholars who “discovered” them. In the preceding chapter, I demonstrated some historiographic problems with this approach when it came to the period of Cōla overlordship: modern historians seem to have rather uncritically accepted the *Mahāvamsa*’s account of a continued succession of “rightful kings” in Ruhuṅu even while the majority of the island was clearly

integrated into the Cōḷa imperial apparatus. We might make a similar critique for treatments of this period: our standard lists of paramount monarchs only include those who were ruling in Poḷonnaruva itself (Jayabāhu, Vikrāmabāhu, and Gajabāhu II), effectively displacing the monarchs of Dakkhiṇadeśa and Ruhūṇu as peripheral. This is not just a simplification of a more complex political reality; it is a distortion of the clear and deliberate efforts the monarchs of these three kingdoms made to maintain the balance of power between them.

Crucially, I have argued that the fragmentation of political power which characterised this period provided *opportunities*, particularly for royal consorts, to operate with a degree of autonomy which may not have been possible during more “stable” periods of centralised royal authority. At least one of these consorts, Sundarā, seems to have taken advantage of this autonomy to patronise—and create inscriptions recording her patronage of—Buddhist monks and monasteries. These inscriptions suggest a particular inclination towards both the Pali language and towards an monastic site, Diṃbulāgala, which would become vital in Parākramabāhu’s eventual purification and reform. It is with this context in mind that we can now proceed to the reforms of Parākramabāhu themselves. He did not approach these reforms, I suggest, with an unprecedented proclivity towards the Mahāvihāra, and towards Pali-language scholar-monks. Rather, he may well have inherited this—like the kingship of Poḷonnaruva itself—from his uncle Gajabāhu, and his greataunt Sundarā.



## Chapter Four: Unification and Restructuring

The reign of Parākramabāhu I is often, I think rightly, portrayed as a watershed moment in the history of what is now known as Theravāda Buddhism. He initiated a unification of the island’s monastic lineages (*nikāyas*) into a single institution, headed by a single grandmaster (*mahāsvāmin*);<sup>168</sup> accompanied by a purification (P. *parisuddha*) of that institution through removal of “sinful” (*pāpa*) monastics. Later accounts, compiled by monks who already associated themselves with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra, would increasingly interpret this “unification” as “subordination” to what they understood to be the most authentic *nikāya*, and the purification as an expulsion of those monks who still clung to the heretical (*vaipulya*) doctrines supposedly disseminated amongst the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *nikāyas*. There is certainly some truth to the idea of the reforms favouring the Mahāvihāra. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Parākramabāhu appointed to the leadership of the purification committee a monk named Mahākāśyapa, the head incumbent of the Mahāvihāra-affiliated Diṃbulāgala monastery. The *katikāvata* inscription documenting this purification (discussed further below) itself quotes in Pali from Buddhaghosa’s *Samantapāsāsikā* commentary (IC VI:13, ll. 47–8, quoting from SP VI:1232).<sup>169</sup> Finally, and

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<sup>168</sup> The administrative structure of the unified *saṅgha* would grow increasingly complex over the following centuries. See Gornall (2020, 44–45) for the Daṃbadeṇiya-period administrative structure, and Ilangasingha (1992) for the later medieval period generally.

<sup>169</sup> “Renunciants! You should renounce having purified; you should ordain having purified; you should give the foundations having purified. For even a single gentleman, having taken renunciation and ordination, establishes the entirety of the *sāsana*” (*pabbājentā sodhetvā pabbājetha sodhetvā upasampadādettha sodhetvā nissayaṃ detha ekopi hi kulaputto pabbajjaṅca upasampadaṅca labhitvā sakalampi sāsanaṃ patitṭhāpeti*).

perhaps most significantly, the first grandmaster of the unified monastic institution, Śāriputra, composed a large number of subcommentaries on, and compendia derived from, Buddhaghosa's earlier works (Crosby 2006b; Pecenko 1997). These works reconciled the island's previously disparate interpretive traditions,<sup>170</sup> and in so doing played a large role in setting the future course of Theravāda thought and practice.

Even if, as I argue below, the purification and unification of the *saṅgha* did not mark a “formal” victory for the Mahāvihāra-*nikāya*, in pragmatic terms it does indeed seem to have ultimately resulted in the Mahāvihāra's legacy winning out against the memories of its former rivals. The fact that the subsequent generation of monastics—including the authors of the thirteenth century *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvāliya*, but particularly the fourteenth century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*—so strongly identified themselves with the Mahāvihāra, and denigrated the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *nikāyas*, is a direct result of the choices made in Parākramabāhu's reign. Yet we should not let ourselves be unduly led by the triumphant vision these later pro-Mahāvihāra partisans paint of what happened in the twelfth century. A closer reading of the *katikāvata* itself, contextualised in Parākramabāhu's broader inscriptional output, challenges later narratives of straightforward Mahāvihāran supremacy.

This *katikāvata* inscription (IC VI:13), carved on a monumental scale onto living rock at the site now called the Galvihāra, is the central focus of this chapter. The inscription, like the earlier *sirit*

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<sup>170</sup> Not to everyone's satisfaction. The Cōḷa monk Mahākāśyapa famously accused Śāriputra as being waylaid in some places by the interpretations of “schismatics like the Abhayagiri” (*bhinnaladdhikānaṃ abhayagirikādīnaṃ*) (Gornall 2014, 521–23; Kieffer-Pülz 2005, 200–223; Monius 2001, 125).

inscriptions discussed in Chapter Two, contains both a set of disciplinary injunctions (the *katikāvata* proper) and a record, in typical inscriptional style, of the circumstances under which those injunctions were promulgated.<sup>171</sup> Unlike those earlier inscriptions, however, this is not directed to a single monastic community, but rather to the entire *saṅgha* across the island. For this reason Ratnapala (1971) calls this the first “*sāsana-katikāvata*,” in contrast to the earlier “*vihāra-katikāvata*” (7-8), and—as he demonstrates in his excellent study—the later *katikāvatas* of monarchs from Parākramabāhu II onwards are indeed very indebted to this exemplar of Parākramabāhu I. However, we ought not to teleologically read this inscription as an first entry in a later tradition; instead, it is worthwhile attending to it as in connection with the wider inscriptional corpus as available to Parākramabāhu I himself at the time of its creation. When we do so, several new insights become available to us.

First, we can connect the framing of this inscription with those of Gajabāhu II, Parākramabāhu’s supposedly “non-Buddhist rival” (*pace* later narrative accounts). In the first section of this chapter, we pick up from the end of the last, and consider the possibility that the courts of Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu, far from being a heretical interlude in the Buddhist history of Lanka, actually played a vital role in the eventual rise of (what we would come to call) the Theravāda. I point to several points of continuity between Parākramabāhu’s inscriptions and those of Gajabāhu, which suggest that the latter may have influenced the former in ways which have previously escaped our notice. The following two sections then turn to the *katikāvata* inscription itself. I first argue against the common assumption (again,

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<sup>171</sup> The two sections are neatly divided by a stylised image of a fish, reproduced at the end of each chapter.

furthered by later accounts) that Parākramabāhu was motived in promulgating this *katikāvata* by the exemplar of Aśoka. I suggest instead that references to Aśoka made in the *katikāvata* inscription are in fact unprecedented within the Lankan inscripational *and textual* corpus, and so must be treated as intentional innovations rather than timeless motivations. In the following section, I argue instead for millenarian concerns, on an explicitly Buddhaghosan timeframe, as a central motivation behind Parākramabāhu’s *saṅgha* intervention. In the final two sections I push back against what I see as problematic misreadings of Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata*: first, the notion that this somehow instituted a “Pali-oriented” kingship; and second, that it involved a suppression of the Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka.

## **Buddhism between Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu I**

In the preceding chapter, I suggested that the Great Lady Sundarā played an underacknowledged role in the eventual ascendancy of the Theravāda: deploying the earliest extant Pali verse in Lankan inscriptions and patronising the monastery at Diṃbulāgala, which would go on to play a vital role in Parākramabāhu’s purification and unification. Her orientation towards Buddhism, let alone towards “Theravāda” Buddhism, might seem dissonant against her immediate social context: in the courts of her husband, Vikramabāhu I, and her son, Gajabāhu II. These two monarchs, as mentioned in passing throughout the preceding chapter, are generally dismissed in the modern historiography as being “non-Buddhist” or even “Śaiva” kings (Kiribamune 1976; Pathmanathan 1987, 58–60; Paranavitana 1960b, 566). In this view, the transition from Gajabāhu II to Parākramabāhu I is therefore characterised (in an echo of the Vijayabāhu narrative) as a triumph of Buddhism (specifically, of Theravāda Buddhism) over Śaivism, further underlining Parākramabāhu’s singularity.

In this section, I push back against the characterisation of Gajabāhu II—and, to a lesser extent, his father Vikramabāhu I—as “inadequately Buddhist,” and therefore against the supposedly stark division between the reigns of these kings and that of Gajabāhu’s nephew and political rival Parākramabāhu I. Instead, I argue for a degree of *continuity* between Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu, which would have particular influence on the nature of Parākramabāhu’s 1165 intervention into the *saṅgha*. I first critically review the evidence for Gajabāhu’s supposedly “Hindu” leanings, which I show to be extremely tenuous. I then discuss several points of continuity between his own inscriptional style and that of Parākramabāhu, focusing particularly on their joint “treaty” inscription (IC VI:11).

The first body of evidence for Gajabāhu’s supposed non-Buddhism comes from retrospective narratives. Most frequently cited is the *Mahāvamsa*’s condemnation of Gajabāhu for having brought “princes of sinful view” (*rājakumare pāpadiṭṭhino*) from abroad (MV 70:53-55), generally understood to mean Śaivas from South India (Kiribamune 1976, 26; Gunawardana 1990, 64). This occurs, however, in the midst of the narrative valorising Parākramabāhu’s great victory over Gajabāhu, and even those historians who otherwise hew closely to the *Mahāvamsa*’s account treat this reference as an “excuse” and “pretext to justify [Parākramabāhu’s] aggression into [Gajabāhu’s] territory” (Liyanagamage 1963, 97). After this point, as Henry (2017, 125) notes, Gajabāhu’s memory seems to have been completely excised from Sinhala-language texts (beginning with the *Pūjāvaliya*, near-contemporary with the *Mahāvamsa*). Some later Tamil-language accounts, primarily the *Śrītakṣiṇakailācapurāṇam* (“History of the Auspicious Southern Kailāsa”) and the *Kōṇēcar Kalveṭṭu* (“Inscription of Kōṇēcar [Temple]”), have been interpreted as identifying Gajabāhu II as a Hindu (see the respective discussions in Gunawardana 1990, 64;

Pathmanathan 1987, 58–60). However, Henry dates these works to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, long past our period (Henry 2017, 95; 115). At least in the case of the *Śrītakṣiṇakailācapurāṇam*, it is not clear that it is even Gajabāhu II intended here: the context makes it more likely that this is a legend of the second century monarch Gajabāhu I, who by this point was well-enmeshed in the Tamil historiographic tradition (Obeyesekere 1978). While the *Kōṇēcar Kalvēṭṭu* seems to more clearly focus on Gajabāhu II (Henry 2017, 120; 123), its (seventeenth century) concern is so explicitly on providing a string of patron monarchs for its titular temple’s credentials we ought to take it extremely cautiously as evidence for the religious orientation of a twelfth century king.

Putting aside later retrospective narratives, much of the argument for Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu’s status as Śaivas rests on the fact that both monarchs seemed to tolerate, or perhaps even patronise, “Śaiva temples.” As Meegama (2011) has argued, and I discuss in the Introduction, such starkly dichotomous accounts of sectarian patronage are an ill fit for the reality of Poḷonnaruva, and more typically reflect colonial and post-colonial attitudes towards religious difference. At most, we might follow Henry (2017) in categorising Gajabāhu’s donations as “religiously eclectic” (122), patronising Buddhist, Vaiṣṇava, and Śaiva institutions alike—but this was hardly unusual for Poḷonnaruva-period monarchs. Beyond this conceptual rejection of the “Śaiva patronage” argument, however, we can also turn a critical eye to more specific claims.

A frequent argument focuses on Gajabāhu’s “retirement” to Kantaḷāy after his surrender to Parākramabāhu, an act reported in the *Mahāvamsa* (MV 71:1). Inscriptional evidence is often cited in support of a connection between Gajabāhu and Kantaḷāy, particularly the two short boundary

inscriptions (TISL 28a and b) discussed in the preceding chapter. These inscriptions do suggest some interest in Kantaḷāy, but this may have only been on the level of dispatching officials to settle boundary disputes. Nothing in these inscriptions can be taken as evidence that he later dwelled there himself. An additional inscription found within Kantaḷāy's Śiva Temple (TISL 29) does not name its donor. But, based on the date (c. 1145, well within Gajabāhu's regnal years) and the honorific plural verb used to mark the donation (*iṭṭār*), it has been tentatively assigned to Gajabāhu (see discussion in TISL, 329). This might speak to a more direct interest in the town, but it still cannot allow us to conclude, as does Kiribamune, that Gajabāhu chose to retire here because the town itself was then “clearly a Hindu centre” (Kiribamune 1976, 27). Even if we did take this together as strong evidence that Gajabāhu eventually settled down in Kantaḷāy, this seems to be to be rather shaky grounds on which to base an exclusive religious identity, particularly in the face of the evidence of Gajabāhu's frequent patronage of Buddhist institutions alongside Śaiva.

Kiribamune's arguments regarding the religious identity of Vikramabāhu I, Gajabāhu's father, are even more insistent—despite the fact that, “for some unknown reason the [*Mahāvamsa*] is reluctant to make this admission” (Kiribamune 1978, 122). She presents two pieces of evidence in support of this claim. First, she notes that the Śaiva temple patronised by Cundhamalli (discussed in the preceding chapter) was named for a Vikrama Calāmēka (Skt. Vikrama Śalamegha), who she identifies as Vikramabāhu I. Pathmanathan, however, has argued that the placename predates even Vijayabāhu I, and so this was likely a throne name used by a Cōḷa governor (Pathmanathan 1993). We might further note that Vijayabāhu's throne name was Siri Saṅghabo, not Abā Salamevan (Skt. Abhāya Śalameghavarṇa).

Second, Kiribamune argues that Vikramabāhu's sole extant inscription (IC VI:6) compares him (indirectly) to both Śiva and Viṣṇu, but not to any specific "Buddhist" parallels (Kiribamune 1976, 25). However, as we have seen in the inscriptions of Vijayabāhu I discussed in the previous chapter, such parallels were commonplace even among kings now heralded as adequately "Buddhist." We have little evidence, in other words, for the supposedly "Śaiva" affiliations of either father or son.

Once we put aside this tenuous evidence for Gajabāhu's covert Śaiva affiliations, we can return to his reign with unblinkered eyes, and see more clearly the religious connections—rather than discontinuities—between him and his nephew, rival, and ultimate successor, Parākramabāhu. These connections are, perhaps unsurprisingly, most evident in the two monarchs' joint "treaty" inscription at the Saṅgamu Vihāra (IC VI:11).

According to the *Mahāvamsa*, Parākramabāhu conquered Rajaraṭa but, with the encouragement of the *saṅgha*, magnanimously returned it to Gajabāhu (MV 70:336). The latter, who had no sons or brothers, then had an inscription made at a "Maṅḍalīgiri Vihāra" guaranteeing that Parākramabāhu would inherit his kingdom after his death, before promptly dying (MV 71:4-5). This serves two functions in the overall narrative of the *Mahāvamsa*: it sets up Parākramabāhu as the "rightful" inheritor of Rajaraṭa; and it then gives Parākramabāhu a cause for war with Mānābharaṇa II, by then king of Parākramabāhu's natal Ruhūṇu, who attempts to ignore Gajabāhu's wishes and "unrighteously" claim Rajaraṭa for himself. Modern scholars have assumed the Saṅgamu inscription to be another copy of Gajabāhu's Maṅḍalīgiri inscription (see EZ VI, 3-4; Liyanagamage 1963, 99; Nicholas 1960a, 454). The

language of the inscription found at Saṃgamu, however, suggests a rather more egalitarian footing than the one-sided account given in the *Mahāvamsa*:

svasti śrī mahāsammataparamparāyen no pirihi ā satyadhana vū gajabāhu parākramabāhu de surubaḍu vamha. apa kaḷa sandhānayaṭa jīvitānta dakvā vighrayak no karam ha ovunovun ayāmehi paḷamu vū kenakunge... pasuvūvan atpat vanna... ekkenakun... vam... rājya viluṭṭa vana niyāyen... apa dedenā keren ekkenekunhaṭa saturu vū rajadaru kenek āt nam de denāṭa ma saturaha meṭa viruddhayak kaḷamo nam tunuruvan ājñā mā kuvam ha narakayen mukta no vūvam ha.

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

ācandratāram avatājjagad akṣarāḷir eṣā parārthadhanayoranayananyam... sneha arddratām... setā...

[In Sanskrit verse:] May these words protect the world for as long as the Moon and Stars; the union of those whose wealth is others' success... suffused with affection... (IC VI:11).

At every point, the inscription stresses the equality between the two. There is no hint here of, as the *Mahāvamsa* would have it, Parākramabāhu's upper hand; instead, the inscriptions repeatedly invokes the language of "we," of "us" and of "kin." Even the fragmentary Sanskrit verse which concludes the inscription speaks selflessly of *others'* success. The missing second clause of the agreement is almost certainly what would become the focus of the *Mahāvamsa*'s supposed Maṇḍaligiri inscription, but it is clear that here *both* monarchs promise to leave their kingdom to the other, should they be the first to die. As others have pointed out, Parākramabāhu's relative youth does mean that this mutual-inheritance agreement was, pragmatically, weighted in his favour (EZ IV, 4-5). But I suggest that we take seriously

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

Doing so makes us more receptive to the potential influence of Sundarā, Gajabāhu’s mother, both on this inscription and those of Parākramabāhu’s later reign. In the previous chapter, I have argued that Sundarā seems to have held an unusual, perhaps unprecedented, interest in supporting monks working in the Pali language and monasteries which (would eventually) align themselves with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra. We have a hint in this inscription, too, of a particular orientation towards that legacy: the invocation of Mahāsammata as the common ancestor of Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu.

Mahāsammata is, according to the canonical *Aggañña-sutta*, the first king, appointed by his peers in what Collins (1993) saw as a proto-social contract (cf. Huxley 1996). Mahāsammata appears in other Buddhist traditions (Heissig 1980, 69; Simpson 2022), but his shadow is cast longest in the Theravāda world. The fifth-century Mahāvihāran *Mahāvamsa* presents an elaborate genealogy for Mahāsammata, tracing his lineage down to Ikṣvāku (P. Okkāka, Sin. Okā), the progenitor of the “solar dynasty” (MV 2:11); to the Buddha himself (MV 2:22); and eventually to the Lankan king Paṇḍukābhaya (MV chs. 8–9). This genealogy is elaborated on in the c. tenth-century *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, a commentary on the *Mahāvamsa*, in a series of rhetorical moves intended to establish that “only the Sri Lankan kings were entitled to claim overlordship among the Okkākas and Kṣatriyas of Jambudīpa” (Walters 2000, 129). By the mid-second millennium, claims to descent from Mahāsammata and his illustrious heirs had become commonplace

throughout the Theravāda world; as Collins and Huxley (1996) note, “claims by real, historical kings to be descended from Mahāsammata are ubiquitous in Sri Lanka, standard in Burma, and somewhat rarer in—but by no means absent from—Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos” (631). This ubiquity, however, is complicated by their conflation of any claim in a Buddhist context to be descended from Mahāsammata himself, or to be descended from Ikṣvāku, or to be a member of the Buddha’s own Śākya clan (ibid.).<sup>172</sup> A closer inspection of the Lankan inscriptional corpus reveals a more staggered introduction of such genealogical claims.

As Walters (2000) notes, Udaya II (r. 887-98) was the first monarch to claim an Ikṣvākan genealogy (135). Walters takes this as a reference to the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini*’s genealogical arguments, a crucial moment in “the emergence of the Okkāka imperial imaginary” (ibid.). However, we must remember that Ikṣvāku was by this point a decidedly transregional figure, every bit as central in *purāṇic* genealogies as he was in the *Mahāvamsa*’s. Even the Cōḷas, from the reign of Rājendra I (1014-1044) onwards, claimed Ikṣvāku as an ancestor in their own Sanskrit *praśastis* (Ali 2000, 195).<sup>173</sup> We might also note that Udaya’s inscriptions, even more so than those which followed, seem to hew closely to the *praśasti* model of genealogical lists beginning with a semi-mythical ancestor:

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<sup>172</sup> Ratnapala (1971) appears to also conflate these in his discussion of earlier “*vihāra-katikāvata*” inscriptions, which he claims contain a royal ancestry “often traced back to Mahāsammata” (8). He cites as evidence an inscription of Mahinda IV (IC V ii:73), which in fact mentions only Okā (Skt. Ikṣvāku), not Mahāsammata.

<sup>173</sup> Earlier *purāṇas*, Ali points out, tended to list the Cōḷas (and other southern dynasties like the Pāṇḍya, Kerala, and Cālukya) not among Ikṣvāku’s “solar” descendants, but as members of the (perhaps less prestigious) “lunar” lineage. Rājendra was therefore articulating, in Ali’s reading, a novel genealogy for his dynasty. This would become significant in the reign of Kulottuṅga, who was a Cālukya (and therefore a “lunar”) prince who sought to claim the now-solar legacy of the Cōḷa (Cox 2016).

sirivat apiriyat guṇamuḷin uturat vā muḷudambadivhi an kāṭkula pāmili kaḷa okāvas  
radparapuren baṭ abā salamevan maharad’haṭ emā kulen sama nālagon biso tumā kusā ipādā  
āpāmahayāsiri vindā piḷiveḷa se dasa athi pātirā rada kaḷa sirisaṅbo maharad’hu<sup>174</sup> daru mihid  
mahayahu daru udā sirisaṅbo maharad tumā...

Born from the royal lineage of Okā, resplendent with a cluster of splendid and limitless virtues,  
[and] who subjugated the other Kṣatriya families in all Dambadiv; [was] the Great King Abā  
Salamevan.<sup>175</sup> From the womb of Nālagon *biso*, equal in family to him (Abā Salamevan), was born  
the Great King Sirisaṅbo, who, having enjoyed the splendour (*siri*) of [the titles] *āpā* and  
*mahayā* in sequence, ruled [with his fame or authority]<sup>176</sup> spread in the ten directions; [his] son  
[was] the *mahayā* Mihid; [his] son, the Great King Udā Sirisaṅbo himself [made the donation  
recorded below] (EZ III:10).

Later Anurādhapuran (and Poḷonnaruva) inscriptions do not follow Udaya’s suit in listing grandfathers  
and great-grandfathers, but they do closely follow the specific wording used to describe Ikṣvāku as a  
distant ancestor. We therefore cannot assume that Udaya’s claim to an Ikṣvākan lineage, or those claims  
made after him, were *necessarily* a reference to the specific lineage articulated in the *Mahāvamsa*, and so  
a claim to descent from Mahāsammata in particular.

Claims to Śākya descent are considerably less standardised, but are still present in pre-  
Poḷonnaruva inscriptions. The earliest of these appears to be in the inscriptions of Kāśyapa V (r. 914-  
23), who frequently refers to himself as a descent of Ikṣvāku, a member of the Śākya clan (usually by the  
*eḷu* Sin. name “Sāhā”), and a descendant of Paṇḍukābhaya, the first Lankan king said in the *Mahāvamsa*  
to be of this same lineage (see, e.g., IC V i:104). One of Kāśyapa’s sons similarly refers to himself as a

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<sup>174</sup> Paranavitana transcribes this word *maharadhu*, but the provided estampage clearly reads *maharad’hu*.

<sup>175</sup> There is not a final verb here in the Sinhala; I am adding this in to signal a more distinct break between Abā  
Salamevan and his consort Nālagon.

<sup>176</sup> “Fame” would be more typical from wider inscriptional usage, but as there is no obvious space for a missing word  
we might think that it is the rule itself which is so out-spread; hence the possibility of “authority.”

“*tilaka*-mark” for the Sāhā clan and as a descendant of Paṇḍukābhaya (IC V i:110). These references to Paṇḍukābhaya provide much stronger support for Walters’ argument that the *Mahāvamsa*’s genealogy lay behind late Anurādhapuran inscriptional claims to descent from the Buddha’s own clan. Mahinda IV (r. 956-72) refers to himself as being a “flag of the Sāhā clan” (*sāhākulakot*) in several inscriptions, including those found at Mahāvihāran (IC V ii:69) and Jetavānan (IC V ii:65) monastic complexes, but this does not seem to be a consistent feature of his inscriptional self-presentation.<sup>177</sup> Claims to descent from the Buddha’s father Śuddhodana (usually as Sin. Sudonā) are even rarer: we see this in inscriptions of Dappula IV (r. 924-35) (IC V ii:18; 37); in an inscription by Mahinda IV (IC V iii:26);<sup>178</sup> and, of course, the inscription of Sundarā discussed in the preceding chapter. Nonetheless, it seems that by the end of the Anurādhapura period there certainly was a widespread dissemination of the notion that Lanka’s kings were descended from the Buddha’s own clan, as suggested in the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa*, and these claims of descent appeared frequently enough in inscriptions.

What appears to have considerably less precedent are explicit claims to descent from Mahāsammata—the genealogical origin which would, *pace* Collins and Huxley, later become so ubiquitous throughout the Theravāda world. Collins and Huxley themselves suggest that the earliest of these claims is made by Parākramabāhu himself, in his Galvihāra inscription (Collins and Huxley 1996, 631). But, as we

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<sup>177</sup> Compare particularly IC V ii:72, which opens with the very similar *kātakulakot*, “flag of the Kṣatriya clan.” This wording is so similar that we might suspect a transcription error, but the estampage provided in EZ I:8 (plate 16) very clearly reads *kāta* rather than *sāhā*. The motivation behind this variant claim is unclear to me.

<sup>178</sup> Note, however, that Ranawella considers his own transcription, from which I make this identification, to be “extremely tentative” (IC V iii, 36); he also criticises Paranavitana’s earlier, and more confident, attempt at translation (in EZ VI, 39-58) as “imaginary and questionable.”

have seen above, that claim appears even earlier: in the treaty inscription created in union with Parākramabāhu's uncle Gajabāhu. Those who maintain that this treaty was a record of generous concessions made by Parākramabāhu might, of course, respond that the text itself (and therefore this reference to Mahāsammata) was solely, or at least primarily, the product of the victor. Any hint of affiliation towards the Mahāvihāra and its textual products might therefore merely foreshadow Parākramabāhu's eventual religious restructuring in favour of the Mahāvihāra, rather than be reflective of any dynamics within Gajabāhu's court. However, the body of evidence examined over the preceding chapters may suggest otherwise.

We have established that Gajabāhu's mother, Sundarā, patronised Pali-oriented and Mahāvihāra-aligned Buddhist monks and monasteries. I have further suggested that this reflected a particular interest on her behalf in the form of Buddha-*sāsana* represented by the legacy of the Mahāvihāra. This interest seems to have been sustained throughout the life of her husband, Vikramabāhu I, and into the reign of her son Gajabāhu, despite these monarchs' supposedly "non-Buddhist" tendencies (for which our evidence is late and spurious). It therefore seems to be at least *plausible* to suggest that Sundarā's religious orientations influenced Gajabāhu's in turn. It would be a further stretch, given the scanty nature of the evidence, to suggest that Gajabāhu in turn influenced his nephew Parākramabāhu. We see what *may* be evidence of this in their joint treaty inscription, in their claim to be jointly descended from Mahāsammata in particular.

This is, at this stage, an extremely tentative argument. In the following sections, however, we turn to the inscriptions of Parākramabāhu himself: first, and most significantly, his *katikāvata* inscription

at the site now known as the Galvihāra. Throughout these inscriptions, I demonstrate further evidence of both (1) an interest in the textual tradition of the Mahāvihāra, particularly the commentaries of Buddhaghosa and (2) what appear to be further echoes of inscriptional moves first made by Gajabāhu.

## **Wheels for Monarchs, Wheels for Monks**

In this section I argue against a common explanation of the motivations behind Parākramabāhu's purification and unification of the *śāsana*: that it was intended to emulate the earlier "model" of Aśoka, who famously presided over the Third Dharma Council (P. *tatiyadhammasaṅgīti*, lit. "third recitation of the *dhama*"). The extent to which this model is said to have influenced Parākramabāhu varies throughout the historiography. Some scholars merely note that Parākramabāhu "had before him the example of the Emperor Aśoka" (Ratnapala 1971, 221) or that he "followed the traditional model of Aśoka's *sāsana* reform" (Bechert 1993, 15). Others, however, go further: Tambiah (1976) tells us that the Aśokan precedent "can be shown to have acted down the ages as a model procedure imitated by the Buddhist kings of Ceylon and Siam" (168); here the account itself has historical agency, and "acts" on or through Parākramabāhu and his successors. In this section I argue for a more nuanced understanding of Parākramabāhu's relationship to the Aśokan precedent. Rather than simply continuing in an unchanging "tradition" of kings intervening in *śāsana* affairs, I suggest instead that references to Aśoka in Parākramabāhu's own account of his 1165 *katikāvata* were a deliberately crafted rhetorical device, employed among other such devices to *provide* precedent for his own intervention. The "tradition" of invoking Aśoka as justification for a *katikāvata* did not motivate Parākramabāhu, in other words; it was *invented* by Parākramabāhu.

Arguments of Aśoka’s “influence” on Parākramabāhu tend to rest heavily on the evidence of the *Mahāvamsa*, which indeed emphasises the parallels between the two (see, particularly, MV 78:6). But Parākramabāhu also makes the parallel explicit in his *katikāvata* inscription:

...budun visin anujñātabuddhakalpa moggaliputtismahaterun vahala koṭṭā pāpabhikṣu nirmmathanaya koṭṭā durllabdhi māḍā śāsanaṃ māla viśodhā tṛṭṭiyadharmmasaṅgāyanā kāra vū dharmmāśoka maharajahu men anekaśatapāpabhikṣuṃ śāstrsāsanaṃ apagata koṭṭā ṣaḍabhijñādyaneḷagaṇaḷopetamaḷākṣiṇāśravayaṃ āti kalhi pavā purvvarājayaṃ visin mahotsāhayenuḍu samaṅga no koṭṭā gatahuṇu tunnakā samaṅga kirimen eknakā koṭṭā...

...like (*men*) the great king Dharmmāśoka—who, having enlisted the *mahātera* Mogalliputtis, approved by the Buddha as almost Buddha-like;<sup>179</sup> expelled the sinful (*pāpa*) *bhikṣus*; suppressed (*māḍa*) those with incorrect views (*durllabdhi*); purified the blemishes on the *śāsana*; and had held the Third Dharma Council—

[so too Parākramabāhu,] having exiled many hundreds of sinful *bhikṣus* from the Master’s *sāsana*; created a single *nikāya* by unifying what was three *nikāyas*, which were not unified even through the great efforts of past kings, in times when there were great ones whose *āśravas* were removed, endowed with groups of virtues such as the Six Knowledges... (IC VI:13, 11–13).

It seems evident here that Parākramabāhu is, indeed, very explicitly comparing himself to Aśoka before him: a magnificent king who intervenes in the *saṅgha* in order to ensure its longevity. But what prior studies overlook is the extent to which this parallel was, itself, an innovation on Parākramabāhu’s behalf. When Deeg (2012) writes that Aśoka “had been elevated to a model status such that it became virtually

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<sup>179</sup> Following Daniel Boucher’s suggestion, I am taking *kalpa* here in the sense of “a little less than,” “almost like.” Cf. Ratnapala’s (1971, 304) suggestion of “a second Buddha.” I have found no narrative accounts in which the Buddha is said to have prophesied the coming of Moggaliputtatissa (let alone affirmed his nearness to Buddha-hood); in the *Mahāvamsa* (MV 5:95-6) and in Buddhaghosa’s *Samantapāsādikā* this prediction is made by monks present at the second council (see also VAP I:210-11). As the Pali cognate *anuññāta* has a stronger sense of “permitted” or “allowed” than the Sanskrit *anujñāta*, I suspect that here we may need to look further beyond Pali sources to understand what Parākramabāhu had in mind.

impossible to speak of rulership and not think of Aśoka” (363), he was referring to the thoughts of premodern Buddhists. But we might equally take this as a comment on modern scholars, who tend to find Aśokan references wherever we look for them.

In East Asian contexts, of course, explicit references to Aśoka, and to the hagiographic *Aśokāvadāna*, are plentiful (Barrett 2001, 14–22; Deeg 2012, 37–371; see further the essays in Balkwill and Benn 2022). Evidence of Aśoka’s legacy in South Asia is less copious. The Sātavāhanas—arguably the imperial heirs to Aśoka’s Mauryan polity—famously included an image of Aśoka, unambiguously labelled “*rāyā asoko*,” among those of their dynastic founders on the great *stūpa* at Kanaganahalli.<sup>180</sup> But this seems to have been an outlier; as Sinopoli (2001) has demonstrated, both the Sātavāhanas and their successors seem to have been generally uninterested in drawing connections or parallels to Aśoka. This is true also of the Guptas, who do not seem to mention Aśoka once in the entire corpus of their extant inscriptions.<sup>181</sup> Aśoka is similarly “ignored or reduced to a mere name in the dynastic lists of the *purāṇas*” (Thapar 2009, 34), compiled throughout the first half of the first millennium CE. We know, of course, that Chinese Buddhists like Xuanzang were interested in Aśoka’s legacy, and he tells us that local guides were eager to identify Aśoka’s inscriptions as belonging to that king—even if modern scholarship suggests that the guides were unable to actually decipher the content of the inscriptions (Strong 1983, 6–7). But there is

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<sup>180</sup> Although he does not dwell on this Aśoka image, for an overview of the Sātavāhanas and their inscriptions see Ollett (2017, chap. 2).

<sup>181</sup> See the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* III.

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

The situation may have differed in first millennium Sri Lanka. Aśoka is lauded extensively in all of our first-millennium historical narratives—the *Dīpavaṃsa*; *Mahāvāṃsa*; and Buddhaghosa's *Samantapāsādikā*—which Bechert (1961) has shown sought to represent Aśoka as a partisan for the institutional legacy with which the Mahāvihāran monks identified. And although these accounts are firmly hagiographic, it is certainly likely that the “historical Aśoka” did indeed have a hand in introducing Buddhism to the island, and that his overtures to Lankan kings made quite an impression. Deeg (2012), following Paranavitana, points to the early Sri Lankan regnal name “Devanapiya”—almost certainly a reference to Aśoka's “Devānam Piya,” “Beloved of the Gods”—as evidence of Aśoka's influence on early conceptions of kingship (372). This influence seems to have lasted throughout the first millennium. The c. tenth century *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* attributes its elaborate *abhiṣeka* ordination ritual (discussed above), later repeated in Śāriputra's twelfth century *Sāratthadīpanī*, to Aśoka, suggesting that he remained an influential reference point for idealised kingly behaviour throughout these centuries.

But, beyond the adoption of the regnal name Devanapiya, these textual references to Aśoka do not seem to have translated into the realm of kingly practice. Aśoka does not appear to be referenced in any extant inscriptions prior to Parākramabāhu's invocation in the Galvihāra *katikāvata*. Lineages are frequently traced back to other varying-historical kings—particularly to Ikṣvāku—and references are often made to Buddhism's long-past arrival on the island's shores. But Aśoka's name is never once mentioned in inscriptions as the monarch who sent those first missionaries—events so extensively

lauded in the *vaṃsa* tradition—and nor is his memory invoked as a standard for kingship against which one might measure up. Aśoka may have come to serve as a “paradigm” for Buddhist kingship, as Tambiah and others have claimed, but there is no evidence of that paradigm in the inscriptions of Lankan kings prior to Parākramabāhu. To say only, then, that Aśoka’s reform “...became a model for later reforms” (Bechert 1966, I:31) is to miss a crucial point: this later reform intentionally *made* that of Aśoka into its model. There is, in fact, good reason to think that we have gotten the association between Aśoka and Parākramabāhu entirely backwards: that rather than Parākramabāhu being “inspired” by a pre-existing memory of Aśoka, it is the later memories of Aśoka which were inspired by Parākramabāhu (see, for a later invocation of both kings together, Blackburn 2024, 149–56).

Here we might turn to the rather unusual title Parākramabāhu claims for himself, in an extract quoted above: an *ājñā-cakravartin*, one who “turns the wheel of command.” As noted in the preceding chapter, this title (in its *eḷu* Sinhala form *aṇasakviti*) was earlier used by Parākramabāhu’s predecessor Gajabāhu II. But I have found no earlier witnesses, in textual or inscriptional sources, of this particular combination of terms. It seems likely, then, that Parākramabāhu inherited this particular regnal title from Gajabāhu, and ascribed it to himself (in Sanskritised form) in the context of his *katikāvata*. It is easy to overlook the significance of this title. “Wheels of command” (usually in the Pali cognate *āṇācakka*) have since become so ubiquitous across Southeast Asia that it is impossible to discuss politics without referring to them: they distinguish the “secular sphere” (Thai *rājāṇācakra*, Lao *lasa anacakra*) from the

“religious sphere” (*buddhāṇācakra*);<sup>182</sup> they demarcate the limits of political power in Burmese *Dhammasattha* literature (Lammerts 2010, 483); and, of course, they are in the very name of the modern Kingdoms (*rājāṇācakra*) of both Thailand and Cambodia. But although these languages all draw on the Pali *āṇacakka* rather than the Sanskrit *ājñācakra*, this term appears nowhere in canonical texts. We might also note that both *ājñās* and *cakras* (and their respective cognates) are independently used to refer to “kingdoms,” “authority,” or “spheres of influence” in Pali, Sanskrit, and even Tamil materials.<sup>183</sup> Why, then, the need for the term *ājñācakra*, a compound which apparently comes to mean more or less exactly the same thing as its two components? I suspect here that the inscriptions of Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu may help to provide the missing link in the genealogical chain.

I have argued elsewhere (Shirley under review b) that throughout the first millennium, the title *cakravartin* (usually in the formulation *saddharmacakravartin*) seems to have been reserved in Lanka for the Buddha himself, not for earthly kings.<sup>184</sup> Gajabāhu’s novel self-reference as an *ājñācakravartin* (in the Sinhala cognate *aṇasakviti*) may have arisen from some hesitancy to claim the same title for himself, as well what John Strong (1983) has identified as a more general anxiety about the smaller scale on which

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<sup>182</sup> See, e.g., Reynolds (1973, 5); cf. *sāsanacakra* (sic.) v. *āṇācakra* in Swearer and Premchit (1978).

<sup>183</sup> For Sanskrit *ājñā*, see, e.g., Kalidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava* 3.22; for Pali *rājāṇā*, see *Jātakas* I:433 and III:351, and throughout the commentaries of Buddhaghosa (as discussed below); for Tamil *āṇai*, see *Maṇimekaḷai* 17.76. For Sanskrit *cakra* in the sense of “kingdom” see *Arthaśāstra*, *passim*. It seems that Pali *cakka* only attains this sense in later materials, possibly by extension of the *cakkavattin* metaphor (see Cone s.v. *cakka*) or through the influence of Sanskrit usage.

<sup>184</sup> This trend seems to have continued, to a degree, even after the Poḷonnaruva period. At least one Daṃbadeṇiya-period inscription (IC VII:1) refers to the Buddha as *saddharmacakravartti* (A9–10), while only calling its patron Parākramabāhu II a *trisiṃhaḷādhiśvara* (A13–14), and Aśoka a *daṃbadivaṭa aḡaraja* and *nirindu* (A14–15). As is typical, Aśoka’s titles are translated “emperor,” a title elsewhere used in this same volume only to translate *cakravartin* (see, e.g., the translation of IC VII:4).

earthly *cakravartins* operated compared to the superhuman examples found in Sanskrit and Pali literature (50–56). In response to this anxiety, multiple “hierarchies” of greater and lesser *cakravartins* seem to have emerged across Asia. Strong discusses the *balacakravartins* (“*cakravartins* by force”) in the *Aśokāvadāna*; this same title appears in the eleventh-century inscriptions of Kyanzittha. In the fourteenth-century *Trai Phum Phrā Rūang* of Lü Tai/Mahādharmarāja I of Sukhodaya, Aśoka is called a *cūlacakravartin* (“lesser *cakravartin*”).<sup>185</sup> The self-identifications as an *aṇasakvit/ājñācakravartin* by Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu respectively seem, together, to be another example of this same trend.

I suspect that the specific “variation” of *cakravartin* status claimed by Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu has, again, a Buddhaghosan origin. The term *ājñācakra* does appear in some Sanskrit contexts, but never in any sense which might plausibly relate to kingship or political power.<sup>186</sup> The Pali cognate *āñācakka*, however, appears throughout Buddhaghosa’s commentaries in two distinct contexts.<sup>187</sup> The first of these is in reference to the Buddha’s own commands, and has no clear association

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<sup>185</sup> Note, however, that despite the text’s clear interest in *cakravartin*ship, Lü Tai himself “disclaims any pretensions to *cakravartin* status” in his inscriptions (Andaya 1978, 13). I first noticed this reference in Reynolds and Reynolds’ (1982) translation of the *Trai Phum Phrā Rūang* (188); I am grateful to Sirithorn Siriwan and Manasicha Akepiyapornchai for guiding me through the Thai.

<sup>186</sup> The contexts of these Sanskrit *ājñācakras* appear to be exclusively mystical, alchemical, or meditative: see, e.g., the *Kāli-purāṇa* 55:29 and 56:33; the *Mātrkābheda-tantra* 11:44; the *Toḍala-tantra* 7:16, 7:29, and 9:31; and the *Ānandakanda* 1.20:60 and 1.20:172.

<sup>187</sup> The Pali *āñā* is a distinctive “eastern” Middle Indic form of Sanskrit *ājñā* (also “command,” but from a verbal root meaning “to perceive”), while the more expected “western” form would be *aññā*. The term *aññā* does exist in Pali, where it preserves the verbal meaning of “to perceive” in reference to the perfected perception which characterises enlightenment. It seems likely that this eastern-form *aññā* is an example of the “frozen phonetics” preserved as “relics from an earlier [i.e. pre-Pali] eastern dialect in which the ‘texts’ of early Buddhism were (orally) handed down” (Oberlies 2001, 3). Oberlies later suggests that some of these “doubled” terms, specifically including the *āñā/aññā* pair, were incorporated into canonical Pali as “a means of differentiating meaning” (101). In other words, it seems that Buddhists were discussing *aññā* (“perfected perception,” in an eastern form from Skt. *ājñā*) at a very

with kingship.<sup>188</sup> We might well take this as the “command of the Triple Gem” (*tunuruvan ājñā*) invoked in the treaty inscription of Gajabāhu and Parākramabāhu discussed above (IC VI:11). But this alone would not explain Gajabāhu’s use of the title *aṇasakviti* in the (presumably earlier) inscription IC VI:9). The second instance of this term *ājñācakra* in Buddhaghosa’s writings, however, seems to be directly concerned with the relationship between the “authority” of the Buddha and that of temporal kings; it is from this instance which I suspect Gajabāhu, and after him Parākramabāhu, drew their inspiration.

The term appears in a line of dialogue which Buddhaghosa attributes, in the introduction to his various commentaries, to the canonical King Ajātaśatru. Ajātaśatru is a villainous figure in most Buddhist literature, and so an unlikely exemplar of idealised kingship.<sup>189</sup> He is a patricide, allied with the Buddha’s cousin/antagonist Devadatta, who only later in life sees the error of his ways and becomes a lay devotee. Unsurprisingly, he is therefore never assigned *cakravartin* status in canonical texts.<sup>190</sup> In Buddhaghosa’s

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early stage; the term *āṇā* (“order,” in a western form also from Skt. *ājñā*) was then subsequently added to the language in order to discuss authority and command. This is of particular interest to us because it allow us to it allows us to better track when historical individuals, or even linguistic groups, were thinking about such matters of authority through a Pali lens. In Tamil, for example, the term for “order” is not *āññai*, which we might expect if it was taken directly from Sanskrit, but instead *āṇai*, which must be borrowed from a “western” Middle Indic form (Anavaratavinayakkam Pillai 1923, 10). The earliest witness of this term given by TL is *Maṇimēkalai*, an explicitly Buddhist epic; we might therefore suspect that this term entered Tamil from Pali.

<sup>188</sup> See, e.g., Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* (MN 22). The *sūtra* is concerned with a monk who believes that he can engage in what the Buddha defines as “obstructions” (*antarāyikas*) to liberation. Buddhaghosa begins by defining five categories of such obstruction, saving his most extensive critique for “transgressions intentionally transgressed, which are called the obstructions of transgressing commands” (*sañcicca vītikkantā sattāpattikkhandhā āñāvītikkamantarāyikā nāma*). The monk’s actions, Buddhaghosa concludes, “struck a blow at the Conqueror’s wheel of command” (*jinassa āñācakke pahāraṃ adāsi*).

<sup>189</sup> For his postcanonical adventures, particularly in East Asia, see most comprehensively Radich (2011).

<sup>190</sup> Jaina works like the *Āvassayacūṇṇi* and *Āvaśyakaṭikā* are even more explicit, telling us that Ajātaśatru (under his Jain alias Kūṇika) once *claimed* to be a *cakravartin*, only to be firmly rebuked by Mahāvīra (translated and discussed in Wu 2019, 99–101).

fifth-century commentaries, however, Ajātaśatru is given a partial redemption, and attributed a wheel of a different kind. In the introductions to his *Vinaya* and *Dīgha-nikāya* commentaries, Buddhaghosa provides a new account of the First Dharma Council following the Buddha’s death. At this event (he tells us), King Ajātaśatru places himself at the monks’ disposal with the words

mayhaṃ āṇācakkamaṃ tumhākaṃ dhammacakkamaṃ hotu. āṇāpetha bhante kiṃ karomīti.

“I have the wheel of command (*āṇācakkā*), you have the wheel of *dhamma*. Command me (*āṇāpetha*), sir! What do I do?” (*Samantapāsādikā* I:10; *Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā* I:8–9).

This *āṇā/dhamma-cakka* formulation, particularly in the mouth of the unlikely figure of Ajātaśatru, appears to have been entirely Buddhaghosa’s invention.<sup>191</sup> I read this as an attempt to reiterate the proper relationship between royal and monastic authority. Buddhaghosa is taking a clear stance on this matter: the deliberate repetition of *āṇā*, “command,” in the imperative verb seems intended to rather unobtrusively subordinate the domain of kings to that of monks; even the “wheel of command” is commanded by the wheel of *dharma*. We ought to note the significance of the context: the First Dharma Council, an attempt to reconcile contradictions within the *saṅgha*. There seems to be a clear parallel to the context of Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* inscription, in which he presents himself—like Ajātaśatru, in Buddhaghosa’s narrative—as merely providing the opportunity for venerable monks like Mahākāśyapa to correct infelicities within the *saṅgha*. This parallel does not so readily apply to Gajabāhu, of course, who seems to have used the title *aṇasakviti* long before Parākramabāhu claimed to be an *āṇācakra*vartin

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<sup>191</sup> I have found no earlier accounts of the life of Ajātaśatru, or of the First Dharma Council, which include any variant of this line. I am grateful to Liyu Hua for checking the Chinese parallels, to which I do not otherwise have access.

in his *katikāvata* inscription. But, while Buddhaghosa’s *āṇācakka/dhammacakka* occurs only infrequently in later Pali-language literary and scholastic works,<sup>192</sup> this seems to be the only “wheel of command” precedent related in some way to kingship which might have inspired Gajabāhu’s choice of epithet.

Later Pali-language accounts of the Third Dharma Council seem to follow their first-millennium predecessors in not naming Aśoka as a *cakravartin* of any kind. This is true even of those later texts, like the *Jinakālamāli* and *Sāsanavaṃsa*, which *do* include variants on the *mayhaṃ āṇācakkaṃ* phrase in their accounts of the First Dharma Council. Sinhala-language texts post-Parākramabāhu, however, seem to be increasingly preoccupied with the “two wheels” model of *sovereign-saṅgha* relations. The *Pūjāvaliya* does not include the *mayhaṃ āṇācakkaṃ* phrase in its account of the First Dharma Council (PV, 739), or refer to Aśoka by any form of *cakravartin* title. But it *does* warn us that it is the decline of the king’s *ājñācakra* which leads to the decline of the *dharmacakra* (PV, 733);<sup>193</sup> and it later exhorts Lanka’s kings to protect *both* of these wheels above ruling their own kingdom or securing the inheritance of their family (PV, 746).<sup>194</sup> The fourteenth century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* goes further, explicitly calling Aśoka an *ājñācakravartin* (NS, 60)—the same title used in Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* inscription.

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<sup>192</sup> Only one narrative text from the first millennium, the tenth-century *Mahābodhivaṃsa*, so much as repeats the “*mayhaṃ āṇācakkaṃ*” line (*Mahābodhivaṃsa*, 89; cf. *Mahāvaṃsa*, 3.16–18; *Vaṃsatthappakāsini*, I:145–6; *Thūpavaṃsa*, ch. 3 *passim*). First millennium sub-commentaries on Buddhaghosa merely provide word-for-word glosses and then move on to other sections they presumably found more worthy of detailed discussion.

<sup>193</sup> *mē mē kāraṇayen rajungē ma guṇa mulika va paḷamu koṭa āgnacakra ya piriḥuṇu kala āgnācakra ya nisā pavatnā vū dharmacakraya da pariḥāniyaṭa paṭan ganiti.*

<sup>194</sup> *mē mē kāraṇayen laṃkādhīpatirajun visin budun kerehi svabhāva vū ādarabahumānayanen sāsanapratīṣṭhāvehi apramāda va ājñācakra ya hā dharmacakraya rakṣā koṭa rāḷyaya koṭa kulapraveṇiya rakṣā kaḷa yutu.*

What I am suggesting here is that Parākrāmabāhu’s *katikāvata* cannot be explained as mere repetition of an earlier precedent, stretching back to the memory of Aśoka’s patronage of the Third Dharma Council. Rather, it was an intervention into *saṅgha* affairs on a scale not previously witnessed within Lanka, for which Parākrāmabāhu intentionally *crafted* precedents: a parallel to the deeds of Aśoka (as recorded in earlier Pali texts), yes; but also an evocation of the “two wheels” of sovereign-*saṅgha* relations articulated by Ājatasātru (also as recorded in certain Pali texts, and drawn on earlier by Parākrāmabāhu’s uncle Gajabāhu II). Later accounts, from the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* onwards, would both take these two distinct points of reference at face value and conflate them, resulting in the modern notion that Parākrāmabāhu intervened in the *saṅgha* “because” that is what Aśoka the *cakravartin* did.

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

### **Millennial concerns in Parākrāmabāhu’s Galvihāra Inscription**

As Ratnapala (1971) points out, the island-wide scale of Parākrāmabāhu’s *katikāvata* marks an important departure from earlier, community-specific interventions into monastic discipline. We might wonder what prompted—or, more cynically, justified—such an increase in the scale of royal intervention. In this section, I suggest that Parākrāmabāhu’s intervention speaks to what we might call millenarian concerns about the inevitable decline, and eventual disappearance, of the Buddhist *śāsana*. I refer to these concerns as “millenarian” to align them with broader studies of

movements and sects that embrace ideologies positing the (typically traumatic) end of one era, promising relief from the sufferings of this world and its present age, and purporting to give rise to salvation in a new “golden age,” “heaven on earth,” or realized utopian social order (J. R. Hall 2013, n.p.).

In recent years, such concerns have increasingly become the subject of analysis as “an active and motivating force in Buddhist history” (Turner 2014, 24). However, given the explicitly Abrahamic origins of the term “millenarian,”<sup>195</sup> it would be prudent to consider how exactly we are applying this term to historical Buddhism (i.e. prior to sustained contact with Christianity).

We can heuristically divide Buddhist attitudes towards decline into two broad groups, which I respectively term “pessimistic millenarianism” and “optimistic millenarianism.” The former holds that the decline of the *Buddha-śāsana* is already too advanced to allow one to make significant soteriological progress within this life; this may also be compounded with concerns about the moral degradation of the world which is said to accompany such *śāsana*-decline. The only option available to pessimistic millenarians (in a Theravāda context, at least) is to await the salvific coming of the future Buddha Maitreya. This attitude seems to have motivated a large range of historical, Maitreya-oriented movements throughout Theravāda Buddhist history (see most comprehensively Collins 1998, chap. 5). However, this “pessimistic” view does not account for the frequent occurrence, throughout Buddhist history, of individuals and groups who seem to have believed that *śāsana* decline—while inevitable—can

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<sup>195</sup> From the Latin *millēnārius*, “containing a thousand.” We also frequently see references to millennialism, from Latin *mille-annus*, “one thousand years.” Both refer to the thousand-year reign of Christ prophesied in Revelations 20:2-7. As discussed below, the number “one thousand” does not (consistently) have significance within Buddhist prophecies we might otherwise consider “millenarian.”

be slowed down, or perhaps even temporarily halted, by their devout efforts; or, at minimum, that these efforts are worthwhile activities in and of themselves within certain timeframes (Blackburn 2015b; Frasch 1998; Gornall 2020; Turner 2014). I refer to this attitude as “optimistic millenarianism,” to capture the fact that it is motivated by dire eschatological concerns, but maintains the possibility of these concerns being delayed or even averted. The possibility of averting decline, I suggest, lies behind many key moments of “reform” throughout Buddhist history: including the examples discussed by both Blackburn and Turner, cited above; and further the *katikāvata* of Parākramabāhu I inscribed on the rockface of the Galvihāra.

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

apa budun kalpaśatasahasrikādhikacaturasaṃkhyaparimitakālayak samatis pārūm purā  
mārasaṅgrāmabhūmi vū mahābodhiparyyamaṅkārūḍha vā durvvāra saparivāra māra parājaya  
koṭṭā sarvvajñāpadaprāpta vā pansālis havurrudak divas cāturdvīpaka mahāmeghayak seyin  
vādā siṭṭā anekakalpa koṭṭi śatasahasrayehi kleśāgnīn dagdhavemin siṭṭi satvayan  
dharmamāṃṣṭavarṣāyēn nivamin sakalabuddhakṛtya nimavā kusinārānuvarā abiyes’hi  
mallarājayange sālavanodyānāyehi nirupadhiṣeṣanirvāṇadhātuven pirinivī sārasiya sūpanās  
havurrudak giyakalā vaḷagamabhā maharaju dasasā paṭan ekvādahas desiya sūpanās  
havuruddak bhinnanikāya vā śāsanaya piriyeṃ siṭṭi kalhi mahāsammataḍi paramparāyāta  
sūryyavaṃśodbhūta rājādhirāja naikadigabhivyāptayaśomaricīn virājamāna śrīsaṃghabodhi  
parākramabāhu maharājanan...

Our Buddha,<sup>196</sup> having fulfilled the thirty perfections [in] a period lasting 104,000 innumerable and unlimited *kalpas*;<sup>197</sup> having ascended the seat [under] the Mahābodhi, which was the field of battle with Māra; having defeated the irresistible Māra with his entourage; having obtained a

<sup>196</sup> Note that the inscription opens, rather than with the auspicious syllable *śrī*, with *apa budun*. On the significance of the “Our” formulation, see the discussion in the preceding chapter in the context of Sundarā’s *apa munindu*.

<sup>197</sup> Here I follow Daniel Boucher’s suggestion, to conform with a more standard Buddhist temporal formulation. We might normally expect to see *śatasahasrikacaturādhika*.

state of omniscience; having—by proceeding like a great raincloud [over the] four continents for forty-five years, extinguishing the beings aflame with the fires of sin (*kleśa*), in one hundred thousand *koṭis* of various *kalpas*, with the ambrosial waters of *dharmma*—completed the duties [incumbent upon] every Buddha; had passed away with the sphere of *nirvāṇa* without remainder (*nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇadhātu*)<sup>198</sup> in the Sāla-tree Grove of the Malla Kings, near the city of Kusināra;

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

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

arisen in the solar dynasty, from the lineage beginning with Mahāsammatā; the king of kings, lustrous with rays of fame extended in various direction, the Great King Śrīsaṃghabodhi Parākramabāhu... (IC VI:13, 1-6).

Prior scholarship on this dating has, understandably, focused on ability this gives us to specifically date Parākramabāhu's inscription (1,708 years after the Buddha's death, or 1165CE). Taking this as a starting point, and the length of reigns given in texts like the *Mahāvamsa*, we can then calculate the regnal years for all other monarchs in Sri Lankan history.<sup>199</sup> However, too little attention has been paid to Parākramabāhu's own calculations. As Blackburn (2017, 76) has shown, in reference to the Sukhothai monarch Mahādhammarāja I, a monarch's ability to accurately reckon the precise date—specifically in reference to the decline of the Buddha-*śāsana*—was a significant technique of statecraft across the Indian Ocean world. We have good reason to believe that Parākramabāhu, too, was interested in such

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<sup>198</sup> This is the form characteristic of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit; in Pali we would normally see *anupādisea-nibbāṇadhātu*. This is a strong indication that Parākramabāhu was influenced here (directly or indirectly) by Sanskrit, rather than Pali, sources.

<sup>199</sup> This is, of course, complicated by the fact that our retrospective texts often disagree, if slightly, on the lengths of reigns.

chronological accuracy because of concerns about decline. Slightly further down the inscription, he explains his motivations for having undertaken his purification and unification of the *saṅgha*.

The inscription continues:

...śrīsaṃghabodhi parākramabāhu maharajāṇan sakalalaṃkātelehi ekarājyabhiṣekayen  
abhiṣikta vā vijṛmbhitapuṇyārdhi āti vā rājyasukhānubhava koṭā vasanuvan  
ajñānadurjñānamūlaka apratipattiduṣpratipattiviṣavegavihata vā apāyānna vana  
śāsanāvacarakulaputrayan dākā supariśuddhabuddhaśāsanayehi mā vāni ājñācakravarttiyak hu  
me vāni kiluṭak dākā dākā udāsīna vuva hot budusasna nassi bohosat hu du apāyabhāg veti  
pasvādahasak pavatnā budusanaṭa mā vahal vuva mānāvā yi.

...the Great King Śrīsaṃghabodhi Parākramabāhu—being anointed with the anointment of sole sovereignty over all the earth of Lanka, [and] possessing an abundance of manifest merit (*puṇya*)—having seen, while enjoying royal comforts, the gentlemen<sup>200</sup> within the *śāsana* who were hell-bound, having been afflicted by the poisons of “lack of practice” (*apratipatti*) and “bad practice” (*duṣpratipatti*) caused by lack of knowledge (*ajñāna*) and bad knowledge (*durjñāna*; see further below); [thought] “If an *ajñā-cakravartin* like myself, seeing a stain like this, became indifferent with respect to the very pure Buddha-*śāsana*, [then] the Buddha-*śāsana* would be destroyed [and] many beings would go to hell. It would be good to do great service for the Buddha-*śāsana*, which was established for five thousand years” (IC VI:13, 7–9).

As in the extract above, the language is decidedly Sanskritic rather than Pali-inflected. Nonetheless, there are two pieces of evidence here which strongly suggest that Parākramabāhu was thinking about *śāsana*-decline in a uniquely Buddhaghosan manner; in other words, that he was drawing on what we might call a Theravādan textual tradition.

First, he characterised the *śāsana* as being “established for five thousand years” (*pasvādahasak pavatnā*). Presumably by this he means that the *śāsana* was *intended* to last for five thousand years before its eventual, inevitable, disappearance. This temporal scale seems to be unique to Buddhaghosa’s

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<sup>200</sup> Literally “sons of families,” but implicitly high-ranking families.

chronology of *śāsana*-decline. As Nattier (1991, chap. 3) outlines, in her detailed study of such chronologies across Buddhist traditions, the earliest such chronologies (including those given within the Pali canon) assign an expiration date of just 500 years. Notoriously, this date is given in texts dealing with the first ordination of female monastics (such as the *Gotamī-sutta*, and the opening of the *Vinaya*'s *Bhikkunikkhandhaka*), in which the Buddha is reported to have said that the inclusion of female renunciants reduced the lifespan of his *śāsana* from 1,000 to a mere 500 years. However, Buddhists living later than 500 years after the death of the Buddha, and so in the period in which the *śāsana* ought to have died out, experienced what Nattier calls “a crisis of historical self-consciousness.” Many therefore seem to have revised their interpretation so that only the “true” *dharma* (the *saddharma*) would expire after 500 years, but some version of the *dharma* would continue for varied periods thereafter: up to 1,000 years after the Buddha's death; or 1,500 years; or even as distant as 10,000 years (in some texts preserved only in Chinese canons). However, it seems that only Buddhaghosa settled on an *śāsana* expiration date of 5,000 years after the Buddha's death.

It is possible, of course, that Buddhaghosa did not do so in isolation: that similar chronologies were given in texts, no longer extant, associated with the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *nikāyas*. However, I have found only one earlier inscription which similarly refers to a five-thousand-year period. This is the Nelūbāva inscription of Gajabāhu II (IC VI:10), which refers to his donation to the Ruvanmāli *mahācaitya*, said to have been established for five thousand years (in the same phrasing, *pasvādahasak pavatnā*). Five thousand years since the building of this *stūpa*—said in first-century *vaṃsas* to have been built by Duṭṭhagamuṇu in the second century BCE—might appear a different timeframe to that invoked by

Parākramabāhu (five thousand years since the death of the Buddha). But we might note that this *stūpa* contains Buddha-relics (see, for an elaborate description of their enshrinement, MV ch. 31). Buddhaghosa tells us that the final, total disappearance of the *śāsana* at the end of its five thousand year will be marked by the spontaneous disappearance of all Buddha-relics; both *śāsana* and relics therefore have a coterminous five thousand year expiry date. We might therefore take Gajabāhu’s Nelūbāva inscription as referring to the establishment of these *relics* for five thousand years, in conformity with Buddhaghosa’s chronology of decline. If so, this common phrasing *pasvādahasak pavatnā* in their inscriptions is yet another indication of an interest in Mahāvihāran texts shared between both Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu I.

The Galvihāra inscription aligns with a Buddhaghosan chronology of decline in more than just the sheer number of years until the total disappearance of the *śāsana*. Buddhaghosa offers us two distinct accounts of how the *śāsana* will gradually fade and ultimately disappear over the five thousand years. The shorter of these accounts is found, in identical wording, in his commentaries on the *Bhikkunikkhandhaka* (SP VI:1291) and the *Gotamī-sutta* (MP VI:137). Both of these texts are explicit that true *dharma* would last only thousand years (*vassasahassameva saddhammo tiṭṭheyya*) even in the best-case scenario (in which women were never admitted to the *saṅgha*). Buddhaghosa argues, however, that

vassasahassanti cetam paṭisambhidāpabhedappattakhīṇāsavānaṃ vaseneva vuttam. tato pana uttarim pi sukkhavipassakakhīṇāsavavasena vassasahassaṃ anāgāmiyasena vassasahassaṃ sakadāgāmiyasena vassasahassaṃ sotāpannavasena vassasahassanti evaṃ pañcavassasahassāni paṭivedhasaddhammo ṭhassati. pariyattidhammopi tāniyeva. na hi pariyattiyā asati paṭivedho

atthi nāpi pariyattiyā sati paṭivedho na hoti.<sup>201</sup> liṅgaṃ pana pariyattiyā antarahitāyapi ciraṃ pavattissatīti.

And this “one thousand years” is said only [with reference to] the power to remove the *āsavas* (i.e. become enlightened) through mastery of discrimination (*paṭisambhidā*) and division (*pabheda*). But then there is a further thousand years with the power to remove the *āsavas* through “dry insight” (*sukkha-vipassaka*); a thousand years with the power of non-return; a thousand years with the power of once-return; a thousand years with the power of stream-entry—thus, the *saddhamma* of comprehension (*paṭivedha*), and even the *dhamma* of learning (*pariyatti-dhamma*)<sup>202</sup> will last for five thousand years. For when there is learning,<sup>203</sup> there is comprehension; it is in the absence of learning that there is not comprehension. But outward signs (*liṅga*) will endure for a long time, even when learning has disappeared (SP VI:1291; MP VI:137).

This chronology of *dharma*-decline seems to suggest that even past the first millennium, at least *some* forms of spiritual progress are still attainable. Elsewhere in the *Manorathapūranī*, however, Buddhaghosa outlines a slightly different narrative of decline. In this account (MP I:87), the ability to gain all of the attainments (*adhigamas*), from Arhatship to stream-entry, will be lost by the end of the first millennium after the Buddha’s death. During the second millennium proper Buddhist practice (P. *paṭipatti*; cf. BHS

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<sup>201</sup> The critical edition records no variant readings, but I take this as a locative absolute (*asatī... hoti; satī... na hoti*). The first millennium *Manorathapūranī-ṭīkā* (consulted online in the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* corpus) also reads *asati* and *sati*, but seems to clarify the reliance of *paṭivedha* (using terminology drawn from Buddhaghosa’s other treatment of decline, discussed further below) on *pariyatti*: *pariyattimūlakaṃ sāsanti āha na hi pariyattiyā asati paṭivedho atthītiādi. pariyattiyā hi antarahitāya paṭipattiantaradhāyati paṭipattiyā antarahitāya adhigamo antaradhāyati. kiṃkāraṇā? ayaṇhi pariyatti paṭipattiyā paccayo hoti paṭipatti adhigamassa. iti paṭipattitopi pariyattiyeva pamāṇaṃ. Śāriputra* copies this wording verbatim in his own *ṭīkā*, and then adds *tattha paṭivedho ca paṭipatti ca hotipi na hotipi*.

<sup>202</sup> This term *pariyatti* is discussed further below. It literally means “accomplishment,” but more specifically study of Buddhist texts. Buddhaghosa defines it elsewhere as *pariyattīti tepītaṃ buddhavacanaṃ sātṭhakathā pāli* (MP I:88). Notably, in this section he goes on to specifically blame the decline of *pariyatti* on *adharmic* behaviour of kings: *yāva sā tiṭṭhati tāva pariyatti paripuṇṇā nāma hoti. gacchante gacchante kāle rājayuvārājāno adhammikā honti. tesu adhammikesu rājāmacchādayo adhammikā honti tato raṭṭhajanapadavāsīnoti. etesaṃ adhammikātāya devo na sammā vassati tato sassāni na sampajjanti. tesu asampajjantesu paccayadāyaka bhikkhusaṅghassa paccaye dātuṃ na sakkonti bhikkhū paccayehi kilamantā antevāsike saṅghetuṃ na sakkonti. gacchante gacchante kāle pariyatti parihāyati...*

<sup>203</sup> The Pali is a double negative *na... asati*, “not without.” I have been less literal in my translation for readability.

*pratipatti*) will decline and then vanish; then learning (*pariyatti*); then even the outwards signs (*liṅga*)<sup>204</sup> of monastic discipline such as the wearing of robes and observance of chastity. Finally, over the course of the fifth and final millennium the Buddha’s own relics will cease to be worshipped, and at the end of the 5,000 year lifespan of the *śāsana* they will spontaneously combust and disappear forever. This latter chronology, not the version which maintained the possibility of enlightenment throughout the entire five millennia, became more generally accepted: Nattier (1991) points out that this five-stage progression was later incorporated into the *Anāgatavaṃsa* textual tradition (56), a significant source for Collins’ (1998) own study of decline.

It also seems that this is the narrative of *śāsana*-decline which informs Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata*. Parākramabāhu dates his inscription 1,708 years after the death of the Buddha: firmly in (and approaching the end of) the second of Buddhaghosa’s 1,000-year periods. This is the period in which Buddhaghosa tells us that proper practice, *paṭipatti*, will slowly decline and eventually disappear forever. In Buddhaghosa’s account (MP I:87), the decline of practice is really a decline in monastic discipline (*śīla*): over the course of the millennium, small lapses eventually lead to more grievous infractions, finally resulting in the “disappearance of the last monk, either by breaking with discipline or the end of their life.”<sup>205</sup> It seems, to me, to be an unlikely coincidence that Parākramabāhu tells us his intervention into the *saṅgha* was motivated by the sight of monks bound for hell because of the poisons of “lack of practice” (*a-pratipatti*) and “bad practice” (*duṣ-pratipatti*) among the monks, necessitating disciplinary reform.

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<sup>204</sup> Nattier says *nimitta*; all editions which I consulted read *liṅga*.

<sup>205</sup> *pacchimakkassa pana bhikkhuno sīlabhedena vā jīvitakkhayena vā antarahitā hotīti.*

These two references together—the 5,000 year establishment of the *śāsana* and the apparent decline in proper practice—seem to place Parākramabāhu’s inscription firmly in a Buddhaghosan understanding of *śāsana* decline. It should therefore be little surprise that to remedy this decline, he turned to Mahākāśyapa—a monk leading the Diṃbulāgala *vihāra*, a monastery “dwelling in the Mahāvihāra” (*mahāvihārādhivāsin*)<sup>206</sup>—to remedy the twin poisons of *a-pratipatti* and *duṣpratipatti* supposedly afflicting the *saṅgha*. We might also attend here to the cause (literally “root”) of these poisons given in the extract above: *ajñāna* and *durjñāna*, respectively a “lack of” and “bad” knowledge.<sup>207</sup> Given that Buddhaghosa distinguished between the decline of *paṭipatti* (in the second Buddhist millennium) and the decline of *pariyatti* (“learning,” in the third millennium), I do not think that this can refer to a lack of/bad knowledge *in general*. Rather, I suspect that it refers specifically to knowledge about the proper conduct or practice expected of Buddhist monks; in other words, to exactly what the *katikāvata* proper, as formulated with the input of the *mahāvihārādhivāsin* Mahākāśyapa, seeks to address.

The *katikāvata* consists of series of injunctions, each concluding with the polite imperative *yutu*, literally “is it proper” (from Skt. *yukta*). The first of these injunctions (ll. 18-24) sets out the duties of fully ordained monks, divided into those engaged in scholarship (*granthadhura*, lit. “the book task”) or meditation (*vidarśanadhura*); the second (l. 25) sets out, in considerably less detail, duties for noviciates

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<sup>206</sup> See discussion in the preceding chapter.

<sup>207</sup> Presumably, although this is not explicit, the *a-jñāna* caused the *a-pratipatti* and the *dur-jñāna* caused the *duṣ-pratipatti*.

(*heraṇanu*, from P. *sāmaṇera*). Among these duties are the study of nine named works,<sup>208</sup> in keeping with Parākramabāhu’s focus on proper practice, we should note that all but two (the *Dasadhamma-sutta* and *Anumāna-sutta*) are concerned with monastic discipline; we might further note that only two (the *Sikhavaḷaṅḍa-vinisa* and *Heraṇa-sikha*, both Sinhala-language disciplinary manuals) are not written in Pali. The following statements are concerned with monastic travel outside of the *vihāra* (three *yutu* clauses, ll. 26-30); the daily routine of all members of the *saṅgha* (one clause, ll. 30-37);<sup>209</sup> proper decorum, particularly in interactions with others (17 distinct clauses, ll. 37-47); conditions of admittance to the monastic order (five clauses, ll. 48-49); and finally disciplinary procedure (two clauses, ll. 50-51). I read these together as seeking to thoroughly regulate every aspect of monastic practice: with this *katikāvata* so articulated, none could possibly plead “lack of knowledge” as justification for lack of practice (*a-paṭipatti*).

Together, the above seems to suggest that a Buddhaghosan chronology of decline provided the context for Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata*. Specifically, because he calculated himself as living within the

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<sup>208</sup> Fully ordained monks are enjoined to study “the *Kudusikha* (P. *Khuddasikhā*) and *Pāmok* (P. *Pātimokkha*) from the Vinaya, and also the three *Dasadham-sūtras* (P. *Dasadhamma-sutta*) and the *Anumāna-sūtraya* from the *Sutata* (P. *suttanta*, i.e. the *Sutta-piṭaka*)” (l. 19). Those unable to carry out this task are encouraged instead to study “the *Mulasikha* (P. *Mūlasikkha*) and the *Sekhiyā*, [and also] recite the *Sikhavaḷaṅḍa-vinisa*” (l. 22). The latter work is a commentary on one of the earliest Sinhala-language works: see the discussion in EZ II, 277n9. Novices are to study only the *Sekhiyā*, *Dasadham*, and additionally the *Heraṇa-sikha* (l. 25). The latter work, like the *Sikhavaḷaṅḍa*, is an early Sinhala-language disciplinary manual (Godakumbura 1955, 18–19). I do not include among these nine works the “*Catusampajamṇā-kathāya*,” which lays out a daily agenda to be followed by meditation-focused monks (l. 24).

<sup>209</sup> This clause opens by addressing “elders, novices, middlers, every dweller in the *saṅgha*” (*sthavira nava madhyama hāma saṅghayā visin*). I therefore take this as intentionally more capacious than the earlier sections addressed specifically to either ordained monks or novices; *all* of those in the *saṅgha* must follow this particular routine, no matter their rank or specific tasks.

second millennium after the Buddha’s death—the period in which Buddhaghosa believed monastic “practice” (P. *paṭipatti*) would decay and eventually disappear—he seems to have been particularly concerned with questions of monastic conduct. He attempted to rectify this *paṭipatti* decline on a scale not evident in the earlier disciplinary inscriptions of Anurādhapuran kings, which seem to have been confined to the inhabitants of single monasteries, rather than to the entire monastic order. This acceptance of a Buddhaghosan chronology, and therefore evidence of engagement with Buddhaghosa’s works, seems to have been connected with the appointment of the monk Mahākāśyapa to lead Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata* creation. Of course, we cannot be certain of the causality. Was a *mahāvihārādhivāsin* monk appointed to this position because Parākramabāhu was already inclined towards a Buddhaghosan eschatology? Or was it Mahākāśyapa himself who framed the *katikāvata* in what seems to be the millenarian context laid out by his Mahāvihāran predecessor? How might we further connect Sundarā’s earlier patronage of Mahākāśyapa’s monastery, or the time a young Parākramabāhu spent (*pace* MV 66:110-158) as an honoured guest in the court and kingdom of Sundarā’s son Gajabāhu II?<sup>210</sup> The available evidence offers no clear answers to these questions. It does, however, strongly suggest that these are questions worth asking; that there were more factors involved in Parākramabāhu’s apparently “pro-Mahāvihāran” *katikāvata* inscription than later narratives would have us believe.

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<sup>210</sup> The *Mahāvamsa* explains this time as a devious stratagem on Parākramabāhu’s behalf, to ingratiate himself with his uncle while secretly spying out weaknesses for his future war of conquest. I am, perhaps unsurprisingly, inclined to treat this entire episode with a degree of scepticism.

## Against “Pali Kingship”

Parākrāmabāhu’s reign is remembered, understandably enough, for the predominant position in which it established the Pali language. Malalasekera (1928) attributes Pali’s “Augustan Age” largely to Parākrāmabāhu’s patronage, and devotes several pages to eulogising the monarch (175–8).<sup>211</sup> Those monks who were placed in charge of his restructured *saṅgha*—primarily Mahākāśyapa, who led the reform committee, and Śāriputra, the first grandmaster (*mahāsāmi*)—and their chosen protégés produced a vast explosion of new Pali works, from *vinaya* and *abhidharma* commentaries and compendia to grammatical treatises and courtly poetry.<sup>212</sup> As I demonstrate below, many of their works explicitly praise Parākrāmabāhu as their patron, suggesting perhaps his ongoing interest in supporting Pali-language monastic scholarship. However, this interest did not seem to have immediately translated into new forms of Pali-oriented political discourse, of the type which would later become typical across the Theravāda world. We have already noted in the *katikāvata* inscription itself a decided preference for Sanskrit loanwords over Pali. This is reflective of Parākrāmabāhu’s wider inscriptional corpus, which seems to have been firmly engaged with Sinhala, Sanskrit, and Tamil political languages. Much of this corpus has only been transcribed and published relatively recent (in IC VI), and several inscriptions among it have yet to be translated into English. This section therefore serves double duty: both to lay out the political

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. Gornall (2020), who acknowledges that “the reforms of Parākrāmabāhu I were a crucial moment in the monastic community’s cultural resurgence” (19), but nonetheless argues that the singular influence of kings on Pali literary history has been significantly overstated.

<sup>212</sup> See, for a general overview of these works, Malalasekera (1928, chaps. 9–10) and Gornall (2020).

language under Parākramabāhu, inclusive of Sanskrit and Tamil while seemingly disinterested in Pali; and to bring attention to those inscriptions which have only recently come to light.

Before attending to these inscriptions, however, it is worthwhile briefly noting just how emphatic some of the Pali-language works produced in the years following Parākramabāhu's unification and purification are in presenting him as their patron. Śāriputra's subcommentary on Buddhaghosa's *Samantapāsādikā*, his longest and most comprehensive work, provides a useful example of the relationship between Pali literary production and Parākramabāhu's patronage. Śāriputra concludes the work with the following colophon:

vinaye pāṭavattḥāya sāsanaṃ ca vuddhiyā | vaṇṇanā yā samāradhā vinayaṭṭhakathāya sā ||  
sāratthadīpanī nāma sabbaso pariniṭṭhitā | tiṃsasahassamattehi ganthehi parimāṇato ||  
ajjhesito narindena sohaṃ parakkamabāhunā | saddhammaṭṭhitikāmena sāsanaṃ jōtakārinā ||  
teneva kārite ramme pāsādasatamaṇḍite | nānādumagaṇākiṇṇe bhāvanābhīratālaye ||  
sītalūdakasampanne vasaṃ jetavane imaṃ | atthabyañjanasampannaṃ akāsiṃ suvinicchayaṃ ||  
yaṃ siddhaṃ iminā puññaṃ yaṃ caññaṃ pasutaṃ mayā | etena puññaṃ dutiye  
attasambhavaṃ ||  
tāvatiṃse pamodento sīlacāraguṇe rato | alagga pañcakāmesu patvāna paṭhamaṃ phalaṃ ||  
antime attabhāvamhi metteyyaṃ munipuṇḍavaṃ | lokaggapuggalaṃ nāthaṃ sabbasattahite  
rataṃ ||  
divāna tassa dhīrassa sutvā saddhammadeśanaṃ | adhigantvā phalaṃ aggaṃ sobheyyaṃ  
jīnasāsanaṃ ||  
sadā rakkhantu rājāno dhammeneva imampajaṃ | nīratā puññaṃ kammaṃ jōtentu jīnasāsanaṃ ||  
ime ca pāṇino sabbe sabbadā nirupaddavā | niccaṃ kalyāṇasaṅkappā pappontu amataṃ  
padanti.

This commentary (*vaṇṇanā*) for the *Vinayaṭṭhakathā*, which is undertaken to enhance the *sāsana* and skill in the *vinaya*

is called the *Sāratthadīpanī*, comprising in total 30,000 *granthas*.<sup>213</sup>

I, invited by this Lord of Men Parākramabāhu—illuminator of the *sāsana*, who longs for the

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<sup>213</sup> While *grantha/gantha* often means a discrete textual composition (a “book”), Larry McCrea has suggested in personal communication that here it might refer—following South Indian usage—to a unit of text-length.

continuance of the *saddhamma*—  
 in the beautiful (*vihāra*) built by him, adorned with a hundred terraces (*pasādas*), lush with  
 various excellent trees, a place to delight in meditation,  
 and which abounds in cool waters; dwelling in this Jetavana, I have made this sound analysis,  
 complete in both meaning and letter.  
 Whatever merit is accomplished by this, and any other produced by me: by this meritorious act,  
 having in my subsequent reincarnation—  
 in which I will frolic in Tāvatisa, enjoying the virtues (*guṇas*) of discipline (*sīla*) and good  
 conduct (*ācāra*), and detached from the five sensual pleasures—accomplished the first fruit;  
 and then having in a future reincarnation (seen) Maitreya—Bull among Sages, First Man in the  
 World, Lord, who delights in the benefit of all beings—  
 and having heard the preaching of the *saddhamma* of the Wise One; having attained the highest  
 fruit: may I cause the *sāsana* of the Conqueror to shine forth!  
 May kings always protect this world by *dhamma* indeed, and devoted to acts of merit make  
 shine the *sāsana* of the Conqueror!<sup>214</sup>  
 And may all these beings be at all times free of misfortune and constantly well-intentioned, and  
 attain the Deathless (*Sāratthadīpanī* III, 418).

Śāriputra’s aspiration for future *arhat*ship under the tutelage of Maitreya, the Future Buddha, is not  
 uncommon in this period. But what most interests us is the extent to which he contextualises the work  
 in more worldly political and economic circumstances: it is written (he tells us) at the invitation of the  
 king himself, presumably out of his desire for the longevity of the *saddharma*; and it was written in a  
 particularly lavish environment provided by that same king’s largess.

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<sup>214</sup> Crosby (2006b) records a significant variant reading in the parallel verse in the colophon to Śāriputra’s  
*Anuttānatthadīpanī* (a commentary on the *Pālimuttakavinayavinicchayasāṅgaha*, itself a condensed version of his  
*Sāratthadīpanī*). In this work, this line appears “May kings always protect the *dhamma* and this world” (*sadā rakkhantu*  
*rājāno dhammañ c’ eva imaṃ paḷaṃ*); suggesting a significantly different relationship between kingship and  
*saddharma*. The two colophons also differ slightly in other lines, and so this variation may be a genuinely intentional  
 deviation on Śāriputra’s part rather than a later scribal error. However, the *eva* particle singles out *dharma* as being  
 particularly significant within the syntax of this line; I therefore lean towards the idea that it is by this *dharma* that  
 kings should protect the world.

This impression is furthered in the *Sāratthadīpanī*'s introduction. Here Śāriputra elaborates

further on his institutional context:

mahākāruṇikaṃ buddhaṃ dhammañ ca vimalaṃ vamaṃ | vande ariyaśaṅghaṃ ca dakkhiṇeyyaṃ  
niraṅgaṇaṃ ||  
uḷārapuññatejēna katvā sattuvimaddanaṃ | pattarajjābhisekena sāsanaṃ ujjotānattinā ||  
nissāya sihaḷindena yaṃ parakkamaḃhūnā | katvā nikāyasāmaggiṃ sāsanaṃ suvisodhitaṃ ||  
kassapaṃ taṃ mahātheraṃ saṅghassa pariṇāyakaṃ | dīpasmiṃ tambapaṇṇimhi  
sāsanodayakāraṃ ||  
paṭipattiparādhīnaṃ sadāraññanivāsinaṃ | pākāṭaṃ gagane candamaṇḍalaṃ viya sāsane ||  
saṅghassa pitaraṃ vande vinaye suvisāraḃaṃ | yaṃ nissāya vasantohaṃ vuddhippattosmi  
sāsane.

I would salute the compassionate Buddha, and the excellent unstained *dharma*, and the noble *saṅgha*, unblemished and worthy of worship!

I would salute him<sup>215</sup> who—with the support of Parākramabāhu, Lord of the Sinhala, who having achieved the destruction of the enemy through the keenness of excellent merit has received the royal consecration (*abhiseka*) and aims to illuminate the *sāsana*—having unified the *nikāyas* [and] purified the *sāsana*,  
[is] Kassapa *mahāthera*, leader of the *saṅgha*; a promoter of the *sāsana* on the island of Tambapaṇṇi; dependent on good conduct; always a forest-dweller; as renowned among the *saṅgha* as is the disc of the moon in the sky; father of the *saṅgha*; confident in the *vinaya*.  
Through his support I have arisen to dwell among the *sāsana* (*Sāratthadīpanī*, 1).

This introduction points to the significance of a *layering* of patronage, which eventually enables the kind of substantial Pali-language scholarship evident in Śāriputra's *magnum opus*. Śāriputra's own position is credited to the patronage of his mentor Mahākāśyapa—and Mahākāśyapa's position, in turn, was accomplished with the support of his own patron, Parākramabāhu I. We should not take such eulogistic praise at face value, of course, as clear evidence for actual flows of patronage. An equally plausible

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<sup>215</sup> The following verses cannot easily be presented in English in their original order, and so I have presented them following the *yam/tam* correlative clauses.

interpretation of these verses is that they were intended to *encourage* such patronage on behalf of the monarch: more a bid for ongoing support than a receipt for support already rendered. However, these effusive verses are a clear indicator of the extent to which scholastic monks like Śāriputra were invested in the *notion* of royal support for Pali intellectual work, and so were willing to lay credit for that work at Parākramabāhu's feet.

The explosion of Pali scholasticism in the immediately post-reform period, seems, in other words, to be thoroughly enmeshed with and perhaps even indebted to royal patronage. Yet there is little evidence that this royal interest in Pali literary productivity actually influenced Poḷonnaruva's political culture, and the ways in which kings (from Parākramabāhu onwards) represented themselves as kingly. We have no literary works created directly under Parākramabāhu's patronage, or which position their authors as members of his court. This means our only written evidence of his vision of kingship comes from his inscriptions, of which only nine are extant.<sup>216</sup> None, tellingly, are written in Pali: all are written in some combination of Sinhala, Tamil, and Sanskrit. This distribution of languages suggests far more continuity with the visions of kingship described in earlier chapters than the explosion of Pali literature might suggest. Parākramabāhu's reign may have ushered in an "Augustan Age" for Pali, as Malalasekera describes it, but this did not extend beyond the realm of monastic textuality.

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<sup>216</sup> Namely IC VI:13 through 16; IC VI:18 through 22; and TISL 53. IC VI:17 marks a private donation which happens to be dated in a regnal year of Parākramabāhu I; IC VI:23 (which is included in the Parākramabāhu chapter of IC) marks a donation by his widow Candavatī, which is discussed in Chapter Six below.

This continuity with earlier models of kingship is perhaps most evident in the inscription at Devanagala, created in Parākramabāhu’s twelfth regnal year (c. 1165CE). As Ranawella (2007, 42) notes, the opening of this inscription is nearly identical to those of Vijayabāhu (see particularly IC VI:2, translated and discussed in Chapter Two) and, before him, Mahinda IV—but it also closely follows the inscriptions of Gajabāhu II and Sundarā (e.g. IC VI:9 and 7 respectively, discussed in the preceding chapter. In fact, other than the final line—offering an explanation for the name Parākramabāhu (“Whose Arms Are Mighty”)—every clause seems to be borrowed from earlier inscriptions:

sirivat apirivat levu ikut guṇa muḷin ururat muḷu daṁbadivahi an kāṭkula pāmili kaḷa okāvas  
radaparapuren baṭa kāṭ osabanaṭa agamehesun vū lagdivu poḷoyohon parapuren himi tumā  
saraṇaniyarāsin an rajamundun bises vū sāhatedin hiru pāḷakevin mehesuru daḷadāpin uvindu  
rajviritin surindu pabanda denen dinisuru satsetin kitisuru pānasarin suraguru somiguṇen  
nisayura rusarin kadavu kuluṇusirin bohosat dinu sahavoṭunu rajabaraṇakiraṇa vudu rudu  
tulātala arā tumā kapturu men nomin nan ruvan dhanavaturen nan desen oṣaḷa muḷu diḷindu  
sitsayura puramin muḷulohi pataḷa yasapabanda āti rupurajamataṅgakumaṁba danalayehi  
siṁhaparākrama āti parākramabāhu vat himiyan vahansē...

Born in the royal lineage of Okā—who excelled in a collection of virtues resplendent, unequalled, and supreme in the world and who subjugated the other *kṣatriya* families of Jambudvīpa—lord by descent of the earth of the island of Lanka who is the primary consort to the best of the Kṣatriya; who anointed the heads of other kings with the rays of light reflected from his own toenails; who surpassed the sun in bold *tejas*, Mehesuru (Maheśvara, i.e. Śiva) in expressed anger, Uvindu (Upendra, likely Viṣṇu) in pride, Surindu (Indra) in kingly conduct, the God of Wealth (Kubera) in continuous giving, Kitisuru in *satseta*,<sup>217</sup> Suraguru (Bṛhaspati) in essential wisdom, the moon in munificence, Kadavu<sup>218</sup> in bodily excellence, [and] the *bodhisattva* in the splendour of compassion; who, having mounted the scale-pan adorned with vestments which radiate kingly splendour, including the crown, had narratives of his glory spread across the entire world, by filling the ocean—which is the heart of every pauper spread across various countries (*deśas*)—with the flood of alms, [consisting of] unlimited and varied gems and

<sup>217</sup> See discussion of this term in the translation of IC VI:2 in Chapter Two.

<sup>218</sup> In the parallel section of Vijayabāhu’s IC VI:2, this deity’s name appears to read Kandap (l. 13), presumably Skt. Kandarpa, another epithet for the deity of desire and death.

treasures from the wishing-tree of his own body; who has the might (*parākrama*) of a lion, in crushing the skulls of elephants, which are enemy kings: Parākramabāhu *vat himiyan vahansē* (IC VI:15, 1–11).

Other inscriptions, meanwhile, incorporate more extensive uses of Sanskrit verse than we have seen in earlier periods. These inscriptions have only recently been made available to scholars in *Inscriptions of Ceylon* vol. VI; even here the Sanskrit is imperfectly edited, with no translations attempted. It is worth, therefore, dwelling a little longer on these inscriptions.

One of these inscriptions (IC VI:16) was first identified by Paranavitana, who describes it in his (1933) epigraphical summary as follows:

On two vertical slabs of the *bō-koṭuva* of Śrī Bodhi Vihāra at Mādagama in the Hēvāvissa Kōraḷē, Vāuḍavili Hatpattu, Kuruṇāgala District... The opening Sanskrit *śloka* records that the *bodhi*-terrace was constructed by a *thera* named Ānanda who resided at the Sugalāvativāsa hermitage. The Sinhalese portion is much weathered. It gives the regnal year and 1[6]96 of the Buddhist era, presumably as the date of accession of the king whose name is obliterated (entry no. 665, p. 212).

As 1969BE is equivalent to 1153CE, the year of Parākramabāhu's coronation in Anurādhapura, this is almost certainly one of his inscriptions. Unfortunately, Ranawella was unable to locate an estampage of this inscription, and merely repeats Paranavitana's record without providing an edition.

We do have, fortunately, fairly good editions available of five of the many pillars which Parākramabāhu erected to mark his irrigation works (IC VI:18 through 22). These pillars were inscribed with varying configurations of set components. All open with the same stock phrase in Sinhala, praising Parākramabāhu as a builder of such works:

bāndā nī gaṅga vāvu sirilakā da ket karavā siyal diya randavā pārakumbā nirindu keḷe me.

With dammed streams, rivers,<sup>219</sup> and reservoirs, having made fields in Siri Laka, [and] having stored up water, this [reservoir] was made by Parākramabāhu, the Lord of Men.

Four of the pillars also conclude with a short description of the work's name and dimensions, again in Sinhala prose. Between these two, however, all five pillars all contain a short non-metrical phrase in Sanskrit:

śrī idaṃ laṅkādhināthena śrīparākramabāhunā kāritaṃ viśvalokārthaṃ kāryyaṃ  
vyāpāritātmanā.

Śrī! This [work] was caused to be done by Śrī Parākramabāhu, the Supreme Lord (*adhi-nātha*) of Lanka, who engaged himself [in this task], with the benefit of the whole world as its motive.

One of these pillars (IC VI:20) replaces the final Sinhala prose with a full Sanskrit verse. Ranawella offers us slightly conflicting transcriptions, neither of which conforms perfectly to metre.<sup>220</sup> With some plausible emendations, however, we might read this as:

svasti ekāhajātaṃ trayameva loke lokeśītāṃsaṃ śata yasya rājñāḥ vāpīchidasya sahasradhārā  
grāmāya kiṃ vā kathanāyamanyat.<sup>221</sup>

*Svasti!* There is a triad, born in the world on a single day: greatness in the world in a hundred parts, the king of which is the reservoir-divider; a thousand waters for the village; and what? This statement is the other.

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<sup>219</sup> The term *nī* is used in later poetic writing to refer to an extensive number of concepts, which include *nadiya* (“river”) or even *jalaya* (“water”). I am therefore taking *nī gaṅga* as distributively meaning different kinds of waterway, here “streams and rivers.”

<sup>220</sup> His Sinhala-script edition reads *svasti ekāhajātaṃ trayameva loke lokeśūtāṃsaṃ śata yasya rājāḥ vāpī cirasya sahasradhā(ha) grāmāya kiṃ cā kathanāyamanyat*. The Roman-script edition replaces *rājāḥ* with *rājāḥ*

<sup>221</sup> This is still not metrical (a syllable is missing in pada three), and is barely grammatical. But between Tarinee Awasthi and myself, this was the most plausible alternative we could find.

The significance of this verse and its “triad,” even with these emendations, is opaque to me. Certain of the terms—*ekāha*, *suta*—may suggest a Brahmanical undertone. But I suspect that a rather specific reference is being made here, which I have not yet been able to identify.

A final inscription (IC VI:14) includes not only a Sanskrit verse, but also some rather unusual Sanskrit epithets (*virudas*) for both Parākramabāhu and one of his senior officials (*adhikāra*).<sup>222</sup> Once again, Ranawella provides us with conflicting transcriptions of the Sanskrit verse, neither of which is metrically or grammatically plausible.<sup>223</sup> With the generous assistance of Tarinee Awasthi, we suggest an alternative reading for this verse; the full inscription together reads:

śrī mahasamuve ā rajaparapuren ā dasa at hi patala yasa kit teda pabanda āti  
 arirāyaveśyābhujāṅga yā yana virudayen vajarāmbanā sirisaṅgabo parākramabāhu vat himiyan  
 vānseṭa nava vanu vāpā pura diyavākā māyāraṭā atvasundhura koṭa siṭi pararājabhayaṅkara yā  
 yi viridu āti adhikāra vatakāmi dālābim tisā mārānāvanā svāmi vidhānayan bohokalak  
 kalpasthitavā pasvā dāsak pavatnā piṅisa kārā vū mārānhāllēhi stuti.

Śrī! On the second day of the month Vāp in the ninth year of Śrīsaṅghabodhi Parākramabāhu  
 vat himiyan vānse—who is descended from the royal lineage which descends from Mahasamuva  
 (Mahāsammata); possessing glory, fame, and lustre (*teda*, from Skt. *tejas*) spreading across the  
 ten limits;<sup>224</sup> being furnished with epithets (*viruda*) such as “Consumer of Enemy Kings’  
 Concubines” (*arirāyaveśyābhujāṅga*)<sup>225</sup>—this [inscription] praises the [village] Mārānhālla,  
 founded by the *adhikāra* Vatakāmi Dālābim Tisa Mārānāvanā svāmī, who possesses the epithet

<sup>222</sup> This inscription seems to have been created to document works carried out by an official of Parākramabāhu’s on his behalf, but it concludes by stating emphatically that these are indeed the words (*vadan*) of Parākramabāhu himself.

<sup>223</sup> The Sinhala-script edition reads *śrī tiṣyādīmārasacivena manaspramodaśiṣṭyā nibaddhyātaparākramabāhunāmānāḥ śrīsaṅghabodhinṛpateradhikāravastukarmmahvayena pararājabhayaṅkareṇa*; the roman-script reads *śrī tiṣyādīmārasacivena manaspramoda śiṣṭyānibadhyānaparākramabāhunāmānāḥ śrīsaṅghabodhinṛpateradhikāravastukarmmahvayena pararājabhayaṅkareṇa*.

<sup>224</sup> Unusually, here using *ata* (from Skt. *anta*) rather than the more typical “direction” (Skt. *diḡa*). On this sense of *ata* see ŚŚŚ s.v. *at*, 5. “*antaya*; *keḷavara*.”

<sup>225</sup> This does indeed seem to be a regnal name of Parākramabāhu I. It is repeated in the later *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* (78), in which it (along with other royal titles) is rather incongruously said to have been also applied to a *vihāra*!

“Terror of Other Kings” (*pararājabhayaṅkara*), while he was the *atvasundhura*<sup>226</sup> of the Māyā Country, so that it may last for a long time, until the dawn of a *kalpa*, for five thousand years.<sup>227</sup>

śrī tiṣyādimārasacivena manaḥpramodaśiṣṭyā nibaddhyātaparākramabāhunāmaḥ |  
śrīsaṅghabodhinṛpater adhikāravāstukarmāhvayena pararājabhayaṅkareṇa ||

Śrī! [The above was done] by the minister (*saciva*) Tiṣyādimāra<sup>228</sup>—the Terror of Other Kings, who is titled in recognition of his public works (*vāstukarma*) as an *adhikāra*—on the orders of King Śrīsaṅghabodhi, named Parākramabāhu, who is associated with teachings which delight the mind.

śrīsaṅghaboyindu sanda pārākum vadan vanā lakisura barañin mihikata rāndum vanā nisādi.

These are the words of Pārākum, called Lord Śrīsaṅghabo, who preserves the earth-maiden which illuminates the Lord of Lanka (IC VI:14).

These inscriptions together suggest for Parākramabāhu an interest in Sanskrit-language inscriptions which exceeds that of any preceding Lankan monarchs. With the notable exception of the famous Jetavana inscription (EZ I:1), written entirely in Sanskrit verse and in Nagari script,<sup>229</sup> Sanskrit had been almost entirely peripheral to Lankan inscriptional culture prior to the reign of Parākramabāhu. We ought also to note that our earliest evidence of Parākramabāhu’s interest in Sanskrit comes, once again, from the “treaty inscription” discussed above; we might therefore suspect that this, too, was an interested which emerged in some conjunction from his uncle.

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<sup>226</sup> Ranawella translates this, I think rather fancifully, as “the Office of the Interior Administrator” (IC VI, 42).

<sup>227</sup> The temporal range intended here is unclear. Given that a *kalpa* is so much longer than “five thousand years,” it seems to me that this is merely rhetorical repetition and exaggeration for emphasis.

<sup>228</sup> I take this as a Sanskrit transliteration of the *adhikāra*’s personal name, “Tisa Mārana,” rather than reading too much meaning into the association with Māra (the great adversary of the Buddha).

<sup>229</sup> As the opening section of the inscription is missing, it has not been definitively dated, but is tentatively assigned to the early ninth century (EZ I, 4).

Finally, we have Parākramabāhu’s sole extant inscription in Tamil, located on the northern island of Nayaṅāṭivū/Nāgadīpaya.<sup>230</sup> The contents of the inscription provide us with insights into what we might call Parākramabāhu’s foreign trade policy, and—yet more delightfully—the policies he employed to incentivise the import of horses and elephants, important military assets for which he also tells us he had a particular fondness (*snēha*). After a sadly effaced introduction, the remaining text tells us of Parākramabāhu’s wishes:

...nānkaḷ ūrāttuṛaiyil paratēcikaḷ vantu irukka vēṅṭum eṅṛum avarkaḷ rakṣaiṣpaṭa vēṅṭum eṅṛum palatuṛaikaḷil paratēcikaḷ vantu nantuṛaiyilē kūṭa vēṅṭum eṅṛum nām āṅai kutirai mēl snēha muṅṭātalāl namakku āṅai kutirai koṭuv antamarakkalam keṭṭatuṅ ṭākil nālattonṛu paṅṭārattukkuk koṅṭu mūṅṛu kuṛum uṭaiyavanukku viṭak kaṭavatākavum vāṅiya marakkalaṅ keṭṭatuṅṭākil cempakam paṅṭāratukkuk koṅṭu cempākam uṭaiyavanukku viṭak kaṭavatākavum. ivvivastai. candrādityar uḷḷataṅaiyum kallilum cempilum eḷuttu veṭṭivittu<sup>231</sup> ivvivastai ceytu kuṭuttu dēvar parākramabhujō ripurājāvamsa dāvānalas sakalacimkalacakravartti.

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

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<sup>230</sup> Even at this early stage, there was clearly some degree of affinity between the Tamil language and the northern part of the island. The most straightforward explanation for this is simply that this was, by Parākramabāhu’s time, already a predominantly Tamil-speaking region, even before the rise of a distinct Tamil kingdom ruled by the Āryacakravartti dynasty in later centuries (Indrapala 1965; Kulasuriya 1976; Pathmanathan 1978).

<sup>231</sup> Jonas Buchholz helpfully suggests that this could read instead *veṭṭuvittu*.

We see here again the title *cakravartin*, here qualified not with reference to a wheel of command but rather to the entirety of “all Sinhala.”<sup>232</sup> That this instance appears, again, in a Tamil-language inscription, further supports Pathamanathan’s (1982) argument that this title entered the Lankan repertoire *via* Cōḷa usage, not as a reference to Pali-language canonical texts (see further Shirley under review b). Even here, however, Parākramabāhu seems to be drawing heavily on Sanskrit influences: his titles are written in Grantha script to accommodate Sanskrit, rather than Tamil, phonetics.

These inscriptions together speak to a radically alternate language of politics in Parākramabāhu’s reign than the existing historiography would have it. If anything, the language of kingship under Parākramabāhu was *more* linguistically diverse than ever, drawing on Sanskrit to an unprecedented degree while continuing to produce Sinhala- and Tamil-language inscriptions. Even in the *katikāvata* inscription, when (as I have argued) Parākramabāhu appears to draw on Buddhaghosan chronologies of decline, he uses Sanskrit rather than Pali loanwords in his Sinhala-language prose. While this may well have been an “Augustan Age” for Pali literature, that seems to have been very firmly a monastic concern; Pali was still not, at this point, a language of kingship.

### **Against “An End to the Mahāyāna”**

I have argued in the preceding chapters that the three Lankan *nikāyas* may have differed less in their core canons than later narrative accounts would have it, and that from Vijayabāhu’s revivals onwards

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<sup>232</sup> What precisely this “Sinhala” referred to in the medieval period is a matter of heated contention (see Dharmadasa 1996; Gunawardana 1990, particularly 63-65; Roberts 2004, 8). Here I tentatively take it as a synonym for Laṅkādvīpa, i.e. the island itself.

these *nikāyas* may even have existed in name only. Despite these connections, however, there seems to have been one crucial point of difference between the Mahāvihāra and their cousins in the Abhayagiri and Jetavana: the openness of the latter two *nikāyas* to texts in languages beyond Pali, including texts which self-consciously identify themselves as “Mahāyāna.”<sup>233</sup> Although the term “Mahāyāna” is practically unknown in pre-colonial Lanka (Bretfeld 2012; Perreira 2012), a large number of modern scholars have assumed that Parākramabāhu’s reforms were some form of purge of the Mahāyāna, allowing a return to the “natural” dominance of the Mahāvihāra and its brand of Theravāda Buddhism. Gunawardana (1979) has already provided rather substantial evidence that this was not the case, and that Parākramabāhu’s intervention into the *saṅgha* was focused exclusively on disciplinary purity and institutional centralisation. However, some scholars have continued to incorrectly claim that Parākramabāhu’s purification and unification entailed some form of “purge” of the Mahāyāna from Sri Lanka (Bechert 1993; Goh 2015, 53; P. Williams 2009, 268n8). It is therefore necessary to return to these arguments, and to add some new evidence made available to us since Gunawardana’s publication.

The “classic discussion” (*pace* Collins 1990, 89n39) of the Mahāyāna’s rise and fall in Sri Lanka is Paranavitana’s (1928) “Mahāyānism in Ceylon.”<sup>234</sup> According to this account, Mahāyāna Buddhism (in the

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<sup>233</sup> I refer here specifically to the fragments of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, which was inscribed on golden plates and buried in the grounds of monastic complexes (Hinüber 1984; Jayasuriya 1988). While the full text explicitly refers to the Mahāyāna, the fragments found at the Jetavana do not include these sections. The Chinese travel writer Faxian tells us that he stayed in Sri Lanka for two years, almost certainly at the Abhayagiri-*vihāra*, and departed with copies of a Mahīśāsika *Vinaya*, two *sūtra* collections, and a(n otherwise unknown) *Samyuktasañchaya-piṭaka* (trans. Legge 1886, 111). Silk (2002a) has further suggested that (at least some of) the “Vitaṇḍavādin” positions critiqued by Buddhaghosa may have been Mahīśāsika.

<sup>234</sup> Paranavitana would later publish (in 1959) a shorter summary with an updated chronology. While the 1959 version is more frequently cited, I refer to the original longer-form version here for its comprehensiveness.

“authoritative form” outlined by Nāgārjuna) was first introduced to Sri Lanka in the third century (35). The Mahāyāna subsequently “flourish[ed] side by side with the Theravādins” until the eleventh century (40), at which point Buddhism began to die out altogether under Cōḷa rule. When Vijayabāhu I re-introduced an ordination lineage (see Chapter One of this dissertation), it was “of course, of the Theravāda school; but a certain section of the clergy seems to have still adhered to the Mahāyānist doctrines” (ibid.). In response, Parānavitana tells us that “Parākramabāhu I found it necessary to summon a synod for the purification of the faith, expelled the heretical elements, and unified the Buddhist Church in Ceylon” (ibid.).

Parānavitana’s narrative has been comprehensively undermined by the work of R. A. L. H. Gunawardana (1979). As discussed, and expanded on, in Chapter Two, Gunawardana questioned the extent to which the Mahāvihāra/Abhayagiri/Jetavana distinction was even salient in the period leading up to Parākramabāhu’s reforms. And while later narratives may have emphasised both the Abhayagiri affiliation and (not unrelated) the “heretical views” of those monks who were expelled during the reforms, Gunawardana further showed that sources from the twelfth century itself paid little attention to doctrinal disputes (see particularly 348). Instead, Parākramabāhu’s reforms were primarily concerned with administrative centralisation and disciplinary adherence: what modern scholars might categorise as an orthopraxic, rather than orthodoxic, emphasis. Nonetheless, Gunawardana’s critiques do not seem to have persuaded—or, perhaps, come to the attention of—some more recent scholars, who continue to

claim that Parākramabāhu’s reforms marked an “end to the Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka” nearly a century after Paranavitana’s first publication on the subject. Others, most notably Heinz Bechert, are clearly aware of, but actively reject Gunawardana’s argument.<sup>235</sup> In addition to discussing (above) what our twelfth-century sources actually *do* reveal about this reform (namely, its disciplinary and administrative focus), it is therefore necessary to further clarify what does *not* seem to have been relevant: namely, the supposed “suppression of the Mahāyāna.”

A large part of the issue here is our frankly confused terminology, a problem which is well-identified in Early Mahāyāna Studies (see, e.g., Silk 2002b). We very frequently conflate membership in a monastic institution (such as the Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri, or Jetavana *nikāyas*); soteriological orientation (whether one aspires for *arhat*ship or *buddhahood*); canonical inclusivity (whether the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, for example, count as Buddha-*vacana*); and, finally, self-identification as part of the Mahāyāna.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Bechert has published a (1993) counter-argument which, unfortunately, seems to rather wildly misinterpreted Gunawardana’s thesis. Bechert accuses Gunawardana of having “not been able to quote a single piece of testimony which has at least some degree of probability in proving his case, **that the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *nikāyas* as such**, and not only some knowledge about their teachings, **continued to exist** after Parākramabāhu I” (18, emphasis added). This is almost exactly the reverse of Gunawardana’s argument, and I struggle to understand how Bechert has misunderstood him so. Gunawardana’s point is that the distinction between these *nikāya* ceased to be relevant even before Parākramabāhu’s reforms, one of the many factors which made said reforms possible. It is also not clear to me whether Bechert believes that the reforms did, in fact, suppress the Mahāyāna. Within a single page, Bechert makes the seemingly contradictory statements that “there was no major controversy on doctrinal matters... [because] the spread of Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka was a phenomenon of restricted periods,” and that “the *Vetullavāda* (i.e. the Mahāyāna) was no longer tolerated after the reform” (17).

<sup>236</sup> Bechert is hardly alone in making such a conflation. Paranavitana (1928) also seems to take the account of the later traveller Yijing, who claims that “In the Sinhala island, all belong to the Āryasthviranikāya, and the Āryamahāsaṅghikanikāya is rejected” (trans. Takakusu 1896, 10), as contradicting Xuanzang’s account (quoted and discussed below) of Mahāyāna practices in the Abhayagiri. But the Sthavira-*nikāya* and Mahāsaṅghika-*nikāya* are monastic ordination lineages (and accompanying *Vinayas*), not soteriological orientations; there is no contradiction

It is easy for us to imagine, from our contemporary vantage point, a monk who belongs to the Mahāvihāra *nikāya*, who aims for enlightenment as an *arhat*, who maintains that the words of the Buddha are preserved in the Pali Canon alone, and who therefore rejects the label “Mahāyāna”—in other words, to imagine a modern Theravāda monk, who we might encounter anywhere in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, or beyond. It is then tempting to think that the reverse must always go together: monks who are *not* members of the Mahāvihāra are therefore necessarily also *bodhisattvas* aspiring for full *buddhahood*, holding radically open canons, and publicly self-identifying as Mahāyāna. But the situation is, and was, not necessarily either/or.

Despite the often-cited claims of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Candrakīrti, the *bodhisattvayāna* is hardly the sole preserve of self-identified Mahāyāna Buddhists (Samuels 1997). Although few individuals in premodern Sri Lanka explicitly claimed the title *bodhisattva* for themselves,<sup>237</sup> aspirations for future Buddhahood were extremely commonplace, even in works by decidedly “Theravāda” authors.<sup>238</sup> The mere presence of such aspirations is clearly not a definitive symptom of “the Mahāyāna influence”—unless we want to rather dramatically expand our definition of the Mahāyāna. Instead, the relationship between *bodhisattva* aspirations and Mahāyāna identity is clearly one of *degree*; as Crosby (2014) suggests,

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between Yijing’s observation of how monks are ordained and Xuanzang’s observation of what those monks believe or do.

<sup>237</sup> Although see further my discussion, in the following chapter, of the notion of “*bodhisattva*-kingship” in Sri Lanka.

<sup>238</sup> A comprehensive table of such aspirations is provided in Gornall (2020, 139n35). Gornall, too, explains “the spread of the *bodhisattva* ideal among elites during the reform era as a lingering residue of the esoteric Buddhist practices cultivated, in particular, when the Abhayagiri was at the height of its powers before the tenth century” (124).

the distinction between “Mahāyāna” and “not” is more that the latter “regards the *bodhisattva* on the Buddha path as rare,” while the former “came to formalize the *bodhisattva* vow to achieve Buddhahood as a vow that all should undertake” (35). Given the absence of any texts from Sri Lanka either pre- or post-Parākramabāhu which explicitly call for such aspirations to be universally made, this is obviously an unhelpful metric for gauging the extent of Mahāyāna presence on the island.

Similarly unhelpful is the degree to which individuals considered the canon “open.” It is certainly true that we have no evidence of explicitly and self-identified “Mahāyāna” texts (such as a *prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*) from Sri Lanka after Parākramabāhu. We might note here that our youngest hard evidence for such texts in Sri Lanka—discounting the retrospective narratives’ insistence that Abhayagiri monks continued to engage in such “heresies” until their supposed suppression—dates to around the ninth or tenth centuries, well before Parākramabāhu’s time. Further, we cannot assume that “non-Mahāyāna” monks in Sri Lanka, pre- or post-Parākramabāhu, necessarily limited their understanding of *buddhavacana* to only those texts which today constitute the “Pali Canon.” As Collins writes, in his careful study of the very process of creating this Canon,

Did these and only these texts function as “scripture,” with no others having canonical authority...? No. We know that throughout Theravāda history, up to and including the modern world, many other texts, both written and in oral-ritual form, have been used. The evidence suggests that both in so-called “popular” practice and in the monastic world, even among virtuosos, only parts of the Canonical collection have ever been in wide currency, and that other texts have been known and used, sometimes very much more widely (Collins 1990, 81).

Many of these others texts, like Hallisey’s (1990) “allegedly non-canonical” *Tuṇḍilovāda-sutta*, would hardly appear out of place in the recognised Canon on the basis of their content or their self-representation as *buddhavacana*. Others push the boat further out, particularly when it comes to the

future Buddha Maitreya. We might think here of the *Dasabodhisattuppatti-kathā*, which presents a series of salvific future Buddhas following Maitreya, and which Paranavitana (1928) attributes to “a time when the people, familiar with Mahāyāna doctrines, were hankering after more *bodhisattvas* than were allowed to them by the Theravāda scriptures” (68); or of the literary tradition associated with the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, which increasingly cements itself as *buddhavacana*.<sup>239</sup> None of these texts, despite their interest in *bodhisattvas* and future Buddhas, can be said to be “Mahāyāna.” But they belie the easy assumption that Sri Lankan Buddhism is, or ever was (pre- or post-Parākramabāhu), a Buddhism oriented towards a closed canon of texts, exclusively written in Pali, with limited soteriological variation.

All of this is to say that we cannot take either *bodhisattva* aspirations or canonical flexibility as easy stand-ins for “the Mahāyāna.” Unfortunately, we have little else to work with. The most explicit statement of the Mahāyāna orientation of the Abhayagiri and the Jetavana comes from the writings of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang. He reported of Sri Lanka that, since the arrival of Aśoka’s son Mahinda,

...the people [of this country] have followed the pure faith. There are several hundred monasteries with more than twenty thousand monks who follow the teachings of both the Mahāyāna and Sthavira schools. More than two hundred years after the arrival of the *buddhadharma* they divided into two separate sects, each specializing in its own theories. One was the Mahāvihāra sect, which refuted the Mahāyāna teachings and advocated Hīnayāna tenets. The other was the Abhayagiri sect, which studied the teachings of both *yānas* and propagated the *Tripīṭaka* (trans. Li 1996, 292).

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<sup>239</sup> On the root *Anāgatavaṃsa*, see Collins (1998, sec. 5.2.b). On how its commentator Upatissa attempts to establish the root poem as *buddhavacana*, see Stuart (2017, xxxiii–xlvi). Note that Stuart also suggests that a Mahāyāna influence behind Upatissa’s work (xxxvi–xxxviii). In an yet-unpublished paper (Shirley in preparation b), I argue that the fourteenth century Sinhala *Anāgatavaṃśaya* presents Upatissa’s commentary in turn as part of the original text, and therefore also as *buddhavacana*.

It is noteworthy that Xuanzang's Abhayagiri studies *both* vehicles: the Mahāyāna and the so-called Hīnayāna. This would hardly have been unusual. Although some scholars do hold to the notion that the Mahāyāna developed as a discrete entity from the "Mainstream" monastic *nikāyas* (most prominently Hirakawa 1990), it seems far more likely that early Mahāyāna-oriented monks cohabitated with those who followed the more "conservative" path to *arhatship* (Boucher 2008, 74–77; Harrison 1995, 56; Nattier 2003). Almost all Mahāyāna texts also acknowledge the validity of the *śrāvakayāna* leading to *arhatship*, even if they ultimately argue for the superiority of the *bodhisattvayāna* to full *buddhahood*. Monastic institutions which were "exclusively Mahāyāna," in other words, were likely a relatively late development which occurred only in select parts of the world, and we should not necessarily expect this to be the case in first or even early second millennium Lanka. A more likely scenario, which seems to be that described by Xuanzang, is that *some* monastic institutions (those associated with the Mahāvihāra) maintained a conservative focus exclusively on the *śrāvakayāna* described in their closed canon; others (the Abhayagiri and Jetavana) were open to both paths, to more texts, and to monks who *may* have self-identified as "Mahāyāna."

The problem is that, beyond Xuanzang's travel writings, no evidence of this self-identification is extant. This is hardly surprising, given that no Abhayagiri or Jetavana records have survived until the present day. We do not need to read intentional suppression into this lacuna: manuscript culture in tropical Asia is ephemeral, and for a given text to be passed down the centuries it requires careful preservation and regular re-copying. As the legacy of the Mahāvihāra became increasingly valorised, in the centuries following Parākramabāhu's intervention into the *saṅgha*, it would have been only natural

that it was this institution's records which were prioritised over those of their rivals. Nonetheless, it leaves us in the unfortunate position of trying to discern whether a particular phenomenon, the Mahāyāna, was “surpressed” during Parākramabāhu's reign, without any actual evidence of that term ever having been used beforehand or afterwards.

By the time of Buddhaghosa, at the latest, the term *vaitulya* (P. *vetulla*; see also *vaipulya/vepulla*, *vaidalya/vedalla*) had come to refer to a range of unorthodox views. Several of these views, as described in Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Katthāvatthu*, seem to align with Mahāyāna positions: he calls them *mahāsuññavādins*, for example (KV-AK 17:6); and ascribes to them several docetic beliefs about the Buddha's apparent actions in the world (KV-AK 18:1). Other beliefs seem less consistent with any known fifth century Mahāyāna position, such as the position on sexual consent which Buddhaghosa attributes to both the Vaitulyakas and the Andhakas (KV-AK 23:1). Nonetheless, it does seem that *vaitulya*, and its related terms, did come to be associated with the Mahāyāna by some point, both in Sri Lanka and beyond.<sup>240</sup> And as Walters (1997) points out, we also have at least one inscription from the early first millennium (EZ VI:36) which seems to associate the Abhayagiri with “*vayatuḍala*” books. This is relevant because at least some of our retrospective narrative sources do seem to associate Parākramabāhu's purification of the *saṅgha* with *vaitulya* beliefs.

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<sup>240</sup> Baba (2021, 31–32) provides a helpful summary of these terms, and changes in their use over times. Looking beyond Sri Lanka, a commentary on Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya* explicitly tells us that *vaipulyaṃ vaidalyaṃ vaitulyamityete mahāyānasya paryāyāḥ* (*Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya*, 97).

The *Mahāvamsa* contains two separate accounts of Parākramabāhu’s intervention, both of which contain at least some mention of incorrect doctrine on behalf of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana.<sup>241</sup> The earlier account lists three problems facing the *sāsana*: that it was “long disturbed by admixture with a hundred false doctrines (*dulladdhi*, Skt. *durlabdhi*), divided by the division of the three *nikāyas*, [and] inundated by various shameless monks whose sole wish is the filling of their bellies” (MV 73:4–5).<sup>242</sup> The remainder of this section, however, seems to focus only on the latter two problems; no further mention is made of doctrine, false or otherwise.<sup>243</sup> The second account specifically accuses the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monks of “teaching as *buddhavacana* what is not *buddhavacana*, such as the *vetulla-piṭaka*” (MV 78:21–3).<sup>244</sup> But, significantly, in this account the *vetulla-piṭaka* is only listed as the first example (*-ādika*) of such *abuddhavacana* expositions; the point seems, to me, to be to malign these two *nikāya*, rather than to single out a particular “heretical” view for condemnation. Even so, it is again unification and disciplinary purification which occupy the compiler’s attention for the remainder of this section, and no other mention is made in this chapter of doctrinal deviation. Instead, it seems to be the expulsion of

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<sup>241</sup> There are two plausible explanations for the doubled account. One is that the compiler of this section of the *Mahāvamsa* was attempting to reconcile two separate accounts of Parākramabāhu’s reign, and yet somehow did not notice the repetition of this key event at different points in time (Geiger 1980, 2:102n2). This seems strange to me, given the editorial care taken elsewhere throughout the text. S. Wickramasinghe (1958) suggests instead that that chapters 78 and 79 together act as a recapitulation of Parākramabāhu’s most notable deeds (15). This seems more likely, although there is no in-text mention of such a summary.

<sup>242</sup> ... sāsanaṃ ca mahesino | dulladdhisatamissattā ciraṃ āvilataṃ gataṃ || nikāyattayabhedena bhinnaṃ nekehi bhikkhuhi | kuccipūraṇakicchehi alajjihi samosaṭaṃ ||

<sup>243</sup> Parākramabāhu himself is praised for his qualifications among “knowers of the Vinaya” (MV 73:14), emphasising the important of this *piṭika* among the three.

<sup>244</sup> abhayagirivāsī ca bhikkhū jetavanānuge | mahāsenanarindassa bhinne paṭṭhāya kālato || abuddhavacanaṃ yeva vetullapiṭakādikaṃ | dipente buddhavācāti paṭipattiparammukhe || mahāvihāravāsīhi samaggayitum ārabhi | asesaguṇasālihi kācamhe ratanehi va ||

“undisciplined” (*dussīla*) monks by which Parākramabāhu “purified” the Mahāvihāra (MV 78:19–20),<sup>245</sup> again supporting the notion that (at least in the eyes of this later compiler) the purification was on *disciplinary*, not doctrinal, terms.

The *Pūjāvaliya* deals with Parākramabāhu’s intervention in a far more perfunctory manner, with no mention of either doctrine or discipline. It tells us only that Parākramabāhu “united the *śāsana*, which had divided the *nikāyas* since King Vaḷagam Abhā” (PV 782–3).<sup>246</sup> The term *vaitulya* occurs nowhere in this text; *vaipulya* appears only once, as the name of a mountain (PV 292). As Bretfeld (2022) discusses in depth, the later *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* fleshes out this account considerably, with more emphasis placed on *vaitulya* beliefs. It tells us, for example, that such beliefs motivated the original schism between the three Lankan *nikāyas* (NK, 78).<sup>247</sup> More dramatically, it suggests that the three *nikāyas* from which many sinful *bhikṣus* were expelled were not the Mahāvihāra, Jetavana, and Abhayagiri, but rather the “Dharmaruci, Sāgalika, and Vaitulya” (NK, 79)!<sup>248</sup> Clearly, by this later point, heretical doctrines were more on the mind of monastic literati, and so seemed to warrant greater emphasis in their retellings of the past. Memories

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<sup>245</sup> uppabbājesi dussīle... evaṃ mahāvihāraṃ va mahussāhena sodhiya | paṭṭhāyābhayarājassa kālato vaggataṃ gate.

<sup>246</sup> ...vaḷagamabhā rajagehi paṭan bhinnanikāya va tubu śāsanaaya samaṅgi koṭa...

<sup>247</sup> pūrvokta kramayen śāsanaaya bhinna karanu saṅdahā anya tīrthikayan visin upadavan ladu va nindita va pāvata ena vaitulya vādādī vū adharmaya dharmā yā yi pavatvā gena vasana pāpī mahaṇun nisā, yaṭa kī valagam abā maha rajahu pasaḷos vannehi paṭan tamangē satara vannaṭa ek dahas desiya sivu paṇas avuruddak muḷullehi bhinna nikāya va...

<sup>248</sup> ikbiti nirmala vū sarvajñāśāsanaaya duṣpratipattīn kelesana dharmaruci ya sāgalika ya vaitulyavādī ya yana nikāyatrayavāsī vū noyek siya gaṇan duḥśīla pāpa bhikṣūn genvā, latā maṇḍapatehi sannihita karavā, tunyam rātriyehi siṭṭipiyehi siṭa, ovun hāma dena ma śāsanaṇpagata karava, buddhaśāsanaaya śuddhakoṭa, tun nikāya samaṅga karavā...

of the Mahāvihāra, meanwhile, had become so illustrious that it was no longer fitting to have it included among the three *nikāya* in which sinful monks could be found.

All of this is to suggest that our most emphatic evidence for a “Mahāyāna concern” motivating Parākramabāhu’s purification of the *saṅgha* comes from a far later text (the *Nikāyasaṅgrahaya*), in a section which does not appear in its usual source (the *Pūjāvaliya*), and couched in language (*vaitulya* beliefs, rather than *mahāyāna*) which only indirectly refers to the Mahāyāna. This is hardly strong evidence that Parākramabāhu suppressed the Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka.

The Galvihāra inscription also provides us with a strong suggestion that doctrinal matters were not a concern for Parākramabāhu and his monastic committee. We might return here to the parallel this inscription draws between Parākramabāhu and the memory of Aśoka:

...like the great king Dharmmāśoka—who, having enlisted the *mahātera* Mogalliputtis, approved by the Buddha as almost Buddha-like; expelled the sinful *bhikṣus*; suppressed those with incorrect views; purified the blemishes on the *sāsana*; and had held the Third Dharma Council—

[so too Parākramabāhu,] having exiled many hundreds of sinful *bhikṣus* from the Master’s *sāsana*; created a single *nikāya* by unifying what was three *nikāyas*, which were not unified even through the great efforts of past kings, in times when there were great ones whose *āśravas* were removed, endowed with groups of virtues such as the Six Knowledges... (IC VI:13, 11–13).

This parallel is missing one vital point of comparison. The composer of the inscription seems at pains to draw out and elaborate on these parallels: the *pāpabhikṣus* removed by Aśoka are removed many hundreds of times over by Parākramabāhu; while the Third Council is echoed in the unification of the three *nikāyas*. Noticeably absent from the “Parākramabāhu” half of the comparison, however, is the mention of those with incorrect views (*durlabdhi*) suppressed, which is so prominent in the Aśokan half. If Parākramabāhu had taken steps to suppress such views—if this additional parallel between the two

kings was even remotely plausible—then surely this too would have been emphasised alongside the other parallels to Aśoka. Instead, Parākramabāhu himself seems to be telling us that this was a feature of the Aśokan *saṅgha* intervention, but not of his own.

All of the above further reinforces Gunawardana’s long-standing arguments that doctrinal concerns were not a focus of Parākramabāhu’s purification of the *saṅgha*. While we do see a turn towards the Pali-language textual culture of the Mahāvihāra evident in his *katikāvata*, this cannot be taken as a rejection, much less a suppression, of alternative views. We have little evidence, prior to the fourteenth-century’s *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, that any of the figures involved in the twelfth century *katikāvata* were concerned with, or even conscious of, a meaningful distinction between the Mahāyāna and “Mainstream” Buddhism. None of these points will seem controversial to scholars of Lankan history—long familiar with Gunawardana’s arguments, among others—but the occasional references to the Mahāyāna’s twelfth century demise which are still made in broader literature necessitate such a sustained critique.

## **Conclusions to Chapter Four**

In this chapter, I have pushed back against retrospective depictions of Parākramabāhu’s reforms as a total victory for the (non- or anti-Mahāyāna; Pali-oriented) Mahāvihāra. Instead, I have largely supported Gunawardana’s earlier argument for understanding these reforms primarily as an institutional restructuring, which served more immediate political needs. I have similarly pushed back against the notion that these reforms immediately implicated the language of kingship itself. This remained, I argue, firmly located in a transregional and multivalent world: in particular, Parākramabāhu seems to have deployed Sanskrit verse inscriptions *more* frequently than did any of his predecessors. This challenges

our received wisdom about the origins of the “Pali cosmopolis” which would eventually connect Sri Lanka with polities in (what is now) Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Pali was not, it seems, a constituent of Parākramabāhu’s political language.

The present chapter has almost entirely avoided the question of gender politics. This reflects the seemingly total disinterest of our sources in the women of Parākramabāhu’s court—which in turn reflects the broad trend, discussed in the preceding chapters, of royal women becoming “visible” only in the absence of stable, centralised, masculine rule. We would hardly know from the inscriptions of Parākramabāhu, the most stable and politically centralised of all Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs, that he even *had* consorts, let alone any details about their lives. Yet in the period following his rule, two of the three longest-ruling monarchs—Līlāvātī (who ruled for three to five years, spread across three separate reigns in 1197–1200, 1209–1210, and 1210–1211) and Kalyāṇavatī (six years, 1202–1208)—were, respectively, the widows of Parākramabāhu I and Niśsaṅka Malla (the third of these long-reign monarchs, ruling for nine years between 1187 and 1193). Clearly, something shifted dramatically between the reign of Parākramabāhu, in which royal wives seemed all but invisible, and the first reign of his own widow Līlāvātī, a decade later. In the following chapter I suggest that the reign of Niśsaṅka Malla was a crucial turning-point in this regard.



## Chapter Five: Establishing a New Dynasty

Niśśaṅka 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.<sup>249</sup> But five days after Mahinda’s assassination of Vijayabāhu in c. 1187, Niśśaṅka Malla—scion of what seems to have been a minor branch of the Eastern Gaṅga dynasty, located in what is now Odisha—was installed on the throne, and a new dynasty rose to prominence in Lankan history. 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*),<sup>250</sup> and all arts” (IC VI:24, 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. We see (discussed further below) that early into his reign, Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions seem to carefully position him as a legitimate heir of Parākramabāhu, playing up the presumably salutary memories of the latter’s three decades in power. 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.

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<sup>249</sup> The relationship between Niśśaṅka Malla, Vijayabāhu II, and Parākramabāhu is contentious, and my introduction differs from the sequence given in the *Mahāvamsa*. According to that text Niśśaṅka Malla was the *uparāja* of Vijayabāhu II, not of Parākramabāhu (see MV 80:18–20). I suspect otherwise, for reasons discussed below.

<sup>250</sup> McCrea has suggested (quoted in Blackburn 2024) that from the tenth century onwards, “Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava intellectuals arguing in defence of the quasi- or extra-Vedic scriptures of their traditions start using the term ‘*āgama*’ specifically to refer to these extra-Vedic scriptures. Thereafter, when *veda* and *āgama* are used contrastively, *āgama* typically refers only to these extra-Vedic texts” (96n91). Here, in the absence of the contrastive *veda*, I take *āgama* in the earlier sense of religious texts in general, which may also include Buddhist texts.

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 male-line descendent of Vijayabāhu I, much less of the later Anurādhapurān kings. Instead, he seems to have positioned himself as the first member of a *new* ruling dynasty, tracing his lineage back to the Kāliṅga region rather than to Anurādhapurā.<sup>251</sup> As a recent collection of essays has demonstrated (Rodriguez, Santos Silva, and Spangler 2019), 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. Niśśaṅka Malla seems to have 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 (see Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1: the ascendancy of the Kāliṅga dynasty, c. 1187–1210**

| Monarch        | Regnal Years        | Relation to Niśśaṅka Malla |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Niśśaṅka Malla | 1187–1196           | Self                       |
| Vīrabāhu I     | 1196 (one night)    | Son                        |
| Vikramabāhu II | 1196 (three months) | (Fraternal?) half-brother  |

<sup>251</sup> In South Asian literature (including Buddhist literature), Kāliṅga is a region located on the mainland’s east coast, somewhere between the Ganges and the Godāvāri. I am aware of, but unconvinced by, Paranavitana’s (1960a; 1963; 1966) arguments that the “Kāliṅga” of Niśśaṅka Malla’s dynasty was actually located in Southeast Asia: see against this view Gunawardhana (1967), Sirisena (1971; 1978, 4–5), and many others. In Sanskrit, we can draw a clear distinction between Kāliṅga (the location) and Kāliṅga (the adjective); Sinhala-language inscriptions and texts seem to use both fairly interchangeably. As Niśśaṅka Malla himself seemed to use Kāliṅga more frequently in his inscriptions (cf. Sundarā’s “Kāliṅga cave” discussed in Chapter Three), I follow that convention throughout this chapter.

|               |                         |   |
|---------------|-------------------------|---|
| Coḍagaṅga     | 1196–1197 (nine months) | Nephew  |
| Lilāvati      | 1197–1200               | —   |
| Sāhasa Malla  | 1200–1202               | Fraternal half-brother  |
| Kalyāṇavati   | 1202–1208               | Consort   |
| Dharmāśoka    | 1208–1209               | —   |
| Āniyaṅga      | 1209                    | —   |
| Lilāvati      | 1209–1210               | —   |
| Lokeśvara     | 1210–1211               | Unclear, but a self-described <i>tilaka</i> of the Kāliṅga- <i>kula</i> (IC VI:99). |
| Lilāvati      | 1211–1212               | —   |
| Parākramaṇḍu  | 1212–1215               | —   |
| Kāliṅga Māgha | 1215–1236               | —   |

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. Niśśaṅka Malla, and his various half-brothers, were born in Kāliṅga: a fact which their inscriptions repeatedly call our attention to. Modern historians have often assumed that this “foreignness” must have posed an essential challenge to their claim. Liyanagamage (1963), for example, distinguishes between the powerful general-*cum*-advisors who often played kingmaker in Poḷonnaruva (many of who share confusingly similar names) by identifying them as members of “rival factions” respectively supporting the “Kāliṅga” and “Pāṇḍya” dynasties (142). Even 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” (1982, 122).<sup>252</sup> But Niśśaṅka Malla’s purported “foreignness” does not seem to be of particular concern to any of our later premodern sources.<sup>253</sup> Much like, perhaps, treatments of the later Nāyaka dynasty (1739–1815),<sup>254</sup> this may be more reflective of modern preoccupations with “nationality” than an actual concern of the Poḷonnaruva period.<sup>255</sup> I do not think that we can take Niśśaṅka Malla’s frequent references to his birth in Kāliṅga 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 “strangeness.”

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. VI, 64 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

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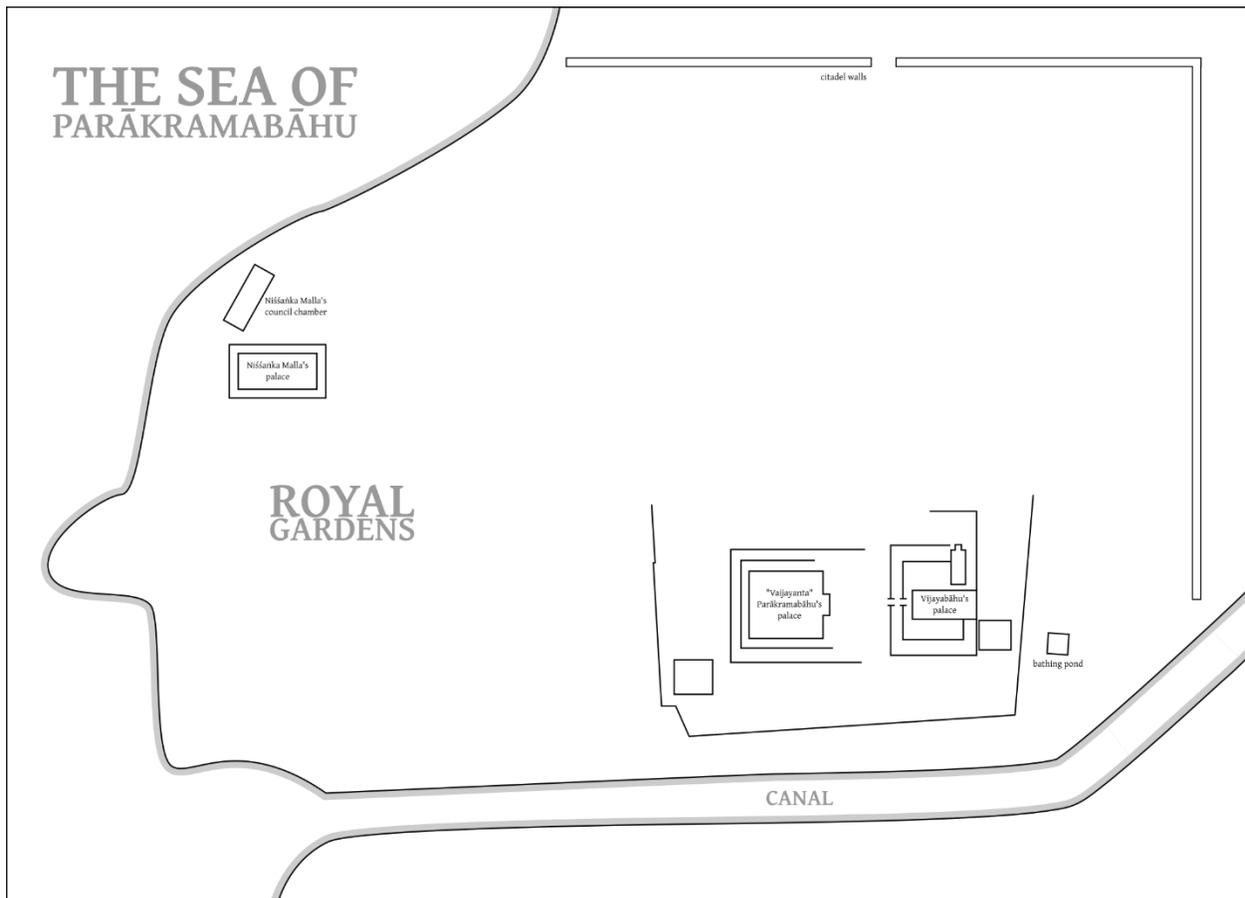
<sup>252</sup> To Pathmanathan’s great credit, he does not identify this trend as beginning with Niśśaṅka Malla alone, but calls our attention to the much longer tradition of intermarriage with nobility from Kāliṅga. I include him here merely to demonstrate how the language of regionally-oriented factions can infect even the most incisive writing.

<sup>253</sup> The *Mahāvamsa* has a relatively large amount to say about Niśśaṅka Malla, devoting eight verses to him in a chapter which otherwise tends towards extreme brevity (MV 80:18-26). But while the first of these verses notes that he was indeed “Kaliṅga-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 he “came from Kāliṅga” (*kāliṅgayen ā*) before listing a long strict of religious buildings he patronised (PV, 783-784). The much later *Rājāvaliya* copies *Pūjāvaliya* nearly verbatim (RV, 59); *Nikāya Saṅgrahaya* merely includes Niśśaṅka Malla’s name in a longer list of monarchs with no additional information (NS, 79).

<sup>254</sup> See, e.g., Dharmadasa’s (1976) “aliens in ethnicity, and in language, religion and other aspects of culture” (1); Dewaraja’s (2008) uncharacteristically reductive “alien faction” (279); or Obeyesekere’s (2004) claim, without citation, that the Nāyakas faced some “public debate regarding their Tamil origins and **consequently** also their legitimacy” (48, boldface added). Against such treatments, see Obeyesekere’s more recent (2017a; 2017b) writings.

<sup>255</sup> See, for a powerful critique of such modern preoccupations mapped on to Poḷonnaruva’s sacred architecture, Meegama (2010).

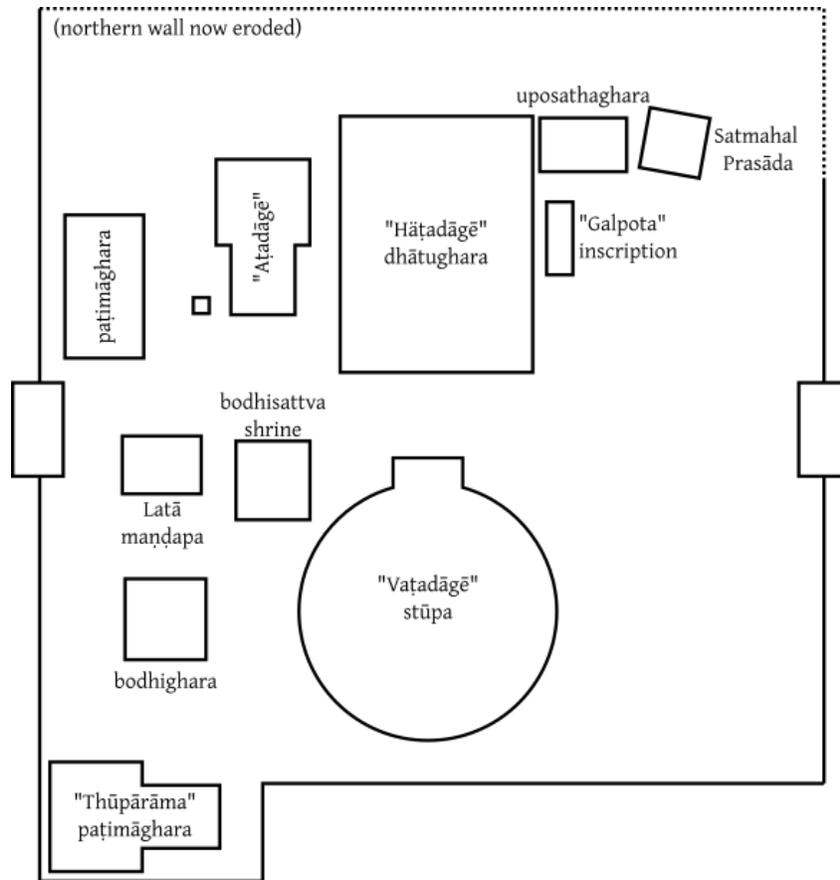
inscriptions as “bombastic,” they are no shallow boasts; they reflect a more general dedication on Niśsaṅka Malla’s part to shaping the very landscape of his kingdom on a scale not otherwise known in Lankan history. It is no coincidence that nearly half of Poḷonnaruva’s extant citadel grounds are dedicated to Niśsaṅka Malla’s own palace and council chambers, surrounded by his expansive gardens, dwarfing the earlier palace complexes of Parākramabāhu and Vijayabāhu (Figure 5.1).



**Figure 5.1: extant remains of the citadel complex**

To make the most of Niśsaṅka Malla’s vast inscriptional corpus, we need to have at least a tentative sense of chronological progress. I have laid out my rationale for the dates I assign in Appendix C. Among this vast corpus, one inscription in particular stands out: the monumental “Galpota” (“stone

book”) inscription (IC VI:24), carved to look like a giant palm-leaf manuscript and erected within the sacred quadrangle at the heart of Poḷonnaruva (see Figure 5.2).



**Figure 5.2: extant remains of the "Sacred Quadrangle"**

This inscription seems, stylistically, to owe much 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, Niśśaṅka Malla calls these “instructions” (*avadāva*, P. *ovāda*) which ought to

be heeded by all Lankans, monastic or not (IC VI:24, c4).<sup>256</sup> Truncated variations on the same injunctions appear in the much shorter inscriptions carved at the citadel gates (IC VI: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. In the absence of texts in the *nīti* genre<sup>257</sup> which we can confidently date to the Poḷonnaruva period, this inscription therefore constitutes the closest we have to an explicit statement of “political thought” from our period.

In the first part of this chapter, I trace how Niśśaṅka Malla’s self-presentation as a “stranger king” (*pace* Sahlins) changed over time. While his earliest inscriptions emphasise *continuity* with Poḷonnaruva’s earlier kings, particularly Parākramabāhu I, later inscriptions increasingly orient themselves away from this lineage, and towards Niśśaṅka Malla’s mainland origins. This is not, I argue, an unconscious reflection of already-existing identity markers (“foreign-ness”) or origin myths, but rather a deliberate fashioning of difference intended to set Niśśaṅka Malla’s nascent dynasty apart from domestic rivals. In part two, I attend to the unusually prominent role that royal women—his mother, wives, and daughter—

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<sup>256</sup> The term *avavāda*, in a Lankan Buddhist context, perhaps orients us towards the canonical *Siṅgālovāda-sutta* (DN 31), called a *gihivinaya* (“*Vinaya* for Householders”) in Buddhaghosa’s commentaries and still today. On the nuances of the term *gihivinaya* see Crosby (2006a).

<sup>257</sup> *Nītiśāstra* (“the science of statecraft”) was the genre of text in which political thought was most explicitly and directly debated in premodern South Asia. Niśśaṅka Malla refers to himself as being “skilled in *nīti*” in some of his inscriptions, including the Gate inscriptions (IC VI:28, b36; 29, b29). On the possible influence of the most famous *nīti* text, Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra*, on Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions, see Fernando (1976). Unfortunately, a far wider variety of *nīti* texts than just Kauṭilya’s were in circulation in this part of the world throughout the medieval and early modern periods, including in vernacular languages (V. N. Rao and Subrahmanyam 2008); we know of later Sanskrit-language *nīti* texts in Sri Lanka (Bechert 1980) and even Pali-language *nīti* in mainland Southeast Asia (Bechert 1981). We therefore cannot say, with certainty, with *which* specific texts Niśśaṅka Malla might have been familiar.

seem to have 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 agency.

## Fashioning a Stranger Kingship

Central to Niśśaṅka Malla’s claims to kingship was that he was not the first monarch from Kāliṅga to rule Sri Lanka. The prose section of his earliest extant inscription (IC VI:26) opens by recapitulating the narrative of Lanka’s mythical founder-king Vijaya, described as

śrīmat vū mahat ṛddhiprabhāva āti kāliṅgacakravarttīn vahansege vaṃśayehi upan siṃhabāhu  
rajaṇā vahanseṭa jyeṣṭha putravu kāliṅgayen laṃkāvaṭa bāsā yakṣa pralaya koṭā manuṣyavāsa  
koṭā ekātapatra rājya kaḷa vijaya rājayan vahanse...

...King Vijaya, the eldest son of King Siṃhabāhu who was born into the lineage of glorious (*śrīmat*) and supernaturally powerful Kāliṅga *cakravarttins*; who travelled from Kāliṅga to Laṃkā; expelled the *yakṣas*; made [the island fit for] human dwellings; and ruled under a single canopy... (IC VI:26, 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 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 Kāliṅga due to his excessive immorality; and he subdues the *yakṣas* by threatening violence towards one of their number, until she consents to both assist his conquest and serve as his wife, until he eventually discards her in favour of a high-caste human bride (MV chs. 6–7). Bestiality, rape, incest, and immorality; these are

hardly the illustrious origins we would expect to be boasted of in an inscriptional eulogy, and they necessitate some explanation.

Gunawardana (1990) argued—controversially, but I think convincingly—that the *Mahāvamsa*’s account of Vijaya presents what he calls “a political definition of the Sinhala identity” (55). 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 and his immediate followers), made distinct in this narrative from the “service castes” (descended from those who later followed from Madhurā) 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 necessarily unsavoury; nor does it explain why Niśśaṅka Malla would so emphatically associate himself with Vijaya, come again from Kāliṅga to rule Lanka. Strathern (2009) provides us with such a possible explanation, turning to the “stranger king” thesis of Marshall Sahlins. Sahlins’ central argument is that many cultures share foundational myths of a transgressive “foreign ruler and his absorption by the indigenous people” (Sahlins 1981, 107), who stands outside of society in order to govern it. His own exemplars were drawn primarily from fieldwork in the Pacific, but Strathern shows just how clearly Vijaya fits the model (see particularly Strathern’s pp. 8, 13–15). While Strathern ultimately disagrees with Gunawardana that the *Mahāvamsa*’s narrative of Vijaya serves *only* kingly ends (23–28), his reading of this narrative certainly would have made a “stranger king” ideology available to kings who wished to avail themselves of it: to present themselves as inheritors of a lineage set apart from, and so capable of ruling, Lanka.

My reservation with such sweeping theories as the “stranger king” thesis is that they often seem to remove the agency of those involved. In such a view, Niśśaṅka Malla invokes Vijaya simply because *all* kings invoke transgressive origin stories to buttress their own rule. This kind of perspective presents premodern subjects as mindless regurgitators of universal tropes, albeit with localised cultural ornamentation: never innovating, never varying, never choosing for themselves with which tropes they will engage or not. This is a dangerously narrow understanding of intellectual history. So while we may well accept Strathern’s compelling reading of *Mahāvamsa* as offering up an ideology of “stranger kingship,” what we might want next to ask is whether, when, how, and by whom this thus-offered ideology was actually *accepted*, let alone deployed, by later historical subjects.

This is particularly apt 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 (Scheible 2016; Walters 2000, 112–24): 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 Niśśaṅka 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 (discussed in Chapter Two), the less genteel Vijaya remains conspicuously unmentioned in these inscriptional eulogies. So when Niśśaṅka 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, and therefore certainly intentional:

a new vision of kingship which deliberately emphasises its own “strangeness.” We gain further evidence for this intentionality when we consider the ways his inscriptional association with Vijaya—and with the more proximate memory of Parākramabāhu I—changed over time. Over the course of his reign he seems to have 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 Niśśaṅka Malla’s later inscriptions is that, here, it is not the Kāliṅga-born Niśśaṅka 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:

śrīmat vū mahat ṛddhiprabhāva āti kāliṅgacakravarttīn vahansege vaṃśayehi upan siṃhabāhu rajapā vahanseṭa jyeṣṭha putravu kāliṅgayen laṃkāvaṭa bāsā yakṣa pralaya koṭā manuṣyavāsa koṭā ekātapatra rājya kaḷa vijaya rājayan vahansege vaṃśa paramparāyen ā lakdiva ekarājya kaḷa parākramabāhu vat himiyā vahanse svavaṃśaya mattata da pavatnā kāmāti vā pūrvavarāpayan koṭa ā paridden mā siṃhapurayaṭa yavā bānaṇuvan vahanse genvā taman vahanse namu lā himiyā paṭi bandavā śatraśāstrayehi nipuṇa karavā āti koṭa vadārā rājyaya sanātha koṭa kalaturen svargagastha vū kalhi...

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 Kāliṅga *cakravarttins*; who travelled from Kāliṅga 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 that purpose as was done previously; having fetched back his *bāna* (either sibling’s son or son-in-law),<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> The relationship between Niśśaṅka Malla and Parākramabāhu I is contended. In modern Sinhala, *bāna* exclusively refers to a sibling’s son; this accords with Skt. *bhāginēya*. The primary objection to this is that no later texts (i.e. *Mahāvamsa*) attributes to Parākramabāhu I a sister who could have plausibly been Niśśaṅka Malla’s mother Pārbbatī. Against this I would merely note that later generations of male historical writers (in Lanka and perhaps more

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 (*śatrasāstra*); and having thus ensured the longevity of the kingdom attained heaven... (IC VI:26, 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 sibling’s son—of his illustrious predecessor, eventually placed into the office of *himi* (Sanskrit *svāmin*). The inscription proceeds to narrative the circumstances under which this *himi* eventually ascended to the throne:

...jyeṣṭha kramayen abhiṣikta vū vijayabāhu vahanseṭa vārādā duṣṭāmātyayan rājadrohī vā  
laṃkāvaṭa kaḷa vilupta sādḥā vijayā yāntānnāvan semehi tabā dun rājyayehi himiyāṇan  
vahansē abhiṣikta vā sahaṇuṭunu aṃbaraṇin sādi siṃhāsanāruḍa vā daskam kaḷavunṭa  
abhivṛddhi vuva māṇāvi yi sitā vadārā vijayā yāntānnāvan ruvandaṃbuyehi paṭan  
śrīsarīrarakṣāyehi siṭi heyinut pera paridden mā kāliṅgaparamparāvaṭa mā rājyaya sādḥā dun  
seyinut mekunge vaṃśa paramparāva da vijayarājayan vahanse kere paṭan kāliṅgavaṃśayaṭa  
mā daskam koṭa ā heyinut me kaḷa daskamaṭa...

[Then,] having done ill to (i.e. assassinated)<sup>259</sup> Vijayabāhu (II), who had been anointed according to seniority, wicked ministers became treacherous;

Vijayā Yāntānnāvan having overcome the ruin done to Laṃkā [by those ministers], established peace [in the kingdom];

the *himi*, having been anointed in the kingdom given [to him by Vijayā]; 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

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globally) are not noted for their concern with the accurate numeration of sisters, particularly those who marry outside of the dynasty.

<sup>259</sup> There is considerable debate about this clause. Wickramasinghe reads *panadā*, “on the following day,” which he takes to mean that the ministers became treacherous the day after Vijayabāhu’s anointing (see EZ II:30). This seems grammatically unusual with the preceding dative form. Parānavitana’s reading, followed by Ranawella, suggests instead a distinct verb *vārādā*, “having done ill to,” which more obviously follows the dative.

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 VI:26, 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 of these claimage lines 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, always 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 emphasises 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: one which seeks not to incorporate Niśśaṅka Malla, and his immediate family members,

into the Lanka-based succession order desired by Parākramabāhu I, but rather to distinguish them as a decidedly “non-Lankan” dynasty which nonetheless rightly rules Lanka. This is, in other words, a narrative of intentionally crafted *difference*, or of what Sahlins might identify as “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. To commemorate a pilgrimage to the Ruvanvāli-dāgaba in Anurādhapura, Niśsaṅka Malla created an inscription (IC VI:27) dedicating the revenue of large swathes of paddy field to maintenance and restoration of various *vihāras*, and appointing another minister, Lokē Arakmēnā, to oversee it as an *adhikāra*. What interests us most, however, is the eulogistic preamble to this dedication, the tone of which has shifted significantly from the 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.<sup>260</sup> 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]

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<sup>260</sup> On the trope of poverty leading to crime—and therefore the ability of virtuous kings to eradicate crime by simply distributing vast wealth to all citizens—see Collins (2003, 661–62).

Parākramabāhu the First” (IC VI:27, 4–5).<sup>261</sup> 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 Niśśaṅka Malla had previously claimed to have been the protégée.<sup>262</sup>

In place of these connections with Parākramabāhu I, and with a continuity of Lanka-based kingship, Niśśaṅka Malla increasingly presented an alternative vision. This vision consisted of three key points of difference: it subsumes Lankan kingship into a broader Kāliṅga-based *lineage*; it reinscribes *caste* differences; and it emphasises the auspicious circumstances of Niśśaṅka Malla’s non-Lankan *birthplace*. I address each of these points in turn below.

In the early inscription discussed above, Niśśaṅka Malla stresses his own parallels with Vijaya, whose own lineage was only most *recently* embodied in Parākramabāhu I and Vijayabāhu II. These more recent kings are 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; and his claim to the Lankan throne predates any intervention on Parākramabāhu’s behalf. Even the service and protection of Vijayā Yāntānā 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.

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<sup>261</sup> ...mālu parākramabāhu vahanse pūrbba rāja carita ikmā kaḷa āti daṇḍa avinayen piḍita vū...

<sup>262</sup> 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 VI:32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 52, 54, 55, 69, 70, and 71); the Galpota (IC VI:24), which I date to after Niśśaṅka Malla’s fifth year (and therefore after the Anurādhapura inscription under discussion) refers to Parākramabāhu I more neutrally as Niśśaṅka Malla’s “senior family member” (*kulaḷeṭu maharaju*).

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

śrīmat vū tyāgasatyasauryyādi guṇaṇayen asādhāraṇa vū okāvas rajaparapuren ā kāliṅga cakravarttirājavaṃśayaṭa tilakāyamāna vā siṃhapurayehi sañjāta vū niśśaṅkamalla kāliṅga parākramabāhu rajapā vahanse svavaṃśayaṭa paramparāyāta laṅkādvīpayehi eksast koṭā...

Niśśaṅka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *rajapā vahanse*—born in Siṃhapura as a *tilaka* mark for the royal lineage of Kāliṅga *cakravartti*-kings;<sup>263</sup> descended from the royal lineage of Okā, splendid (*śrīmat*) and distinguished by a mass of virtues such as generosity (*tyāga*), truthfulness (*satya*), and heroism (*śauryya*)—having united the island of Lanka which was of the succession of his own lineage... (IC VI:27 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 seems to maintain in his long list of *virudas* 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*.” The Kāliṅga country is not mentioned at all in the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s account; instead, Vijaya’s ancestors are just called “Vaṅga kings” (DīV 9:2). In the *Mahāvaṃsa* account (which, as discussed in the preceding chapter, only refers to the Buddha as a *cakravartin*), these Vaṅgas are said to dwell in the Kāliṅga country, but are again simply called “king” (MV 6:1); the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini* commentary discusses the Vaṅga connection briefly, but does not even

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<sup>263</sup> It is unclear (I think intentionally) from the left-branching clause order in Sinhala whether the “descended from the royal lineage” clause applies only to Niśśaṅka Malla, or to the entire lineage of Kāliṅga *cakravartins* from whom he claims descent. I therefore present the clauses in reverse order here, to maintain this ambiguity.

mention “Kaliṅga/Kāliṅga” (VAP I:243). Buddhaghosa mentions neither the Vaṅga nor Kāliṅga ancestry in his own passing reference to Vijaya (SP I:72). This means that our only explicit reference to Vijaya as being descended from Kāliṅga *cakravartins*, in pre-Poḷonnaruva sources, comes in the *Mahābodhivaṃsa*, dated sometime between the tenth and twelfth centuries (von Hinüber 1996, 94; Norman 1983, 141). This text explicitly names Vijaya’s father, Siḥabāhu, as being born in the “*kāliṅgacakkavatti* lineage” in Siḥapura (Skt. Singhapura; MBV, 111).<sup>264</sup>

However, not all references to Kāliṅga *cakravartins* throughout Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptional corpus are necessarily tied to (any known variant of) the Vijaya narrative.<sup>265</sup> Other inscriptions tell us that these “Kāliṅga *cakravartins*,” from whom Niśśaṅka Malla claimed descent, had the supernatural power of travelling through the air (*ākāśa-cārin*: IC VI:24, A2; 52, 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 Buddhaghosa’s fifth-century commentary on the *Kāliṅgabodhi-jātaka* (JV 479), which centres on a similarly aviatic *cakravarti*-king of Kāliṅga (himself also named Kāliṅga, as are, with some variation, his father, uncle, grandfather, and principal advisor). This suggests that Niśśaṅka Malla was

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<sup>264</sup> tato pubbe yeva janabhamaragaṇassa vasantavanasannibhe lālaraṭṭhe naranārīhaṃsasañcayassa kamalasarasarikkhe siḥapure siḥassa lātattā siḥaloti laddhābhīdhānassa kāliṅgacakkavattivaṃsajassa siḥabāhunarindassa jeṭṭhaputto vijayakumaro...

<sup>265</sup> A “Kāliṅga *cakravartin*” is also mentioned in *Mahāvāṃsa* 54:9–10, from whose family Mahinda IV (r. 956–72) procured a *mahiṣī*. This portion of the *Mahāvāṃsa* was almost certainly compiled in the Daṃbadeṇiya period, and so is not necessarily reflective of the regnal stylings of Mahinda’s tenth-century father-in-law.

synthesising *multiple* positive accounts of Kāliṅga-based monarchs into his own inscriptional genealogies.<sup>266</sup>

Other inscriptions, however, are more direct in asserting a connection to Vijaya. Two other inscriptions refer to Niśśaṅka Malla as

śrī laṃkāva manuṣyāvāsa kaḷa vijaya rāja paramparāyen laṃkāva himi śrī vīrarāja niśyaṃka malla kāliṅga parākramabāhu cakravartti svāmīn vahanse...

Śrī Vīrarāja Niśyaṃka Malla Kāliṅga Parākramabāhu *cakravartti*, lord (*himi*) of Laṃkā by descent from King Vijaya who made Śrī Laṃkā [suitable for] human habitation... (IC VI:54, 1–4; IC VI:48, 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 VI: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.

The preceding discussion is significant because this language is invoked in the final injunctions of Niśśaṅka Malla's Galpota (IC VI:24) and Gate (IC VI:28 and 29) inscriptions; the last word, so to speak, in his arguments for proper succession in Lanka. The wording differs slightly between these inscriptions, but all three explicitly invoke the Kāliṅga lineage in conjunction with the Vijaya narrative:

vijaya rājakumārayan kere paṭan lakdiv himi kāliṅgavaṃśayehi rajadaruvanṭa yā soyā genāt mut vī nam un svāmi koṭā losasun rakṣā karanu ācāra yi

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<sup>266</sup> 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. Gornall (2020) has argued that relic-worship, including *bodhi*-tree worship, was an increasingly important ritual practice in the Poḷonnaruva period (131).

If a royal person in the Kāliṅga lineages, lords (*himi*) of Lakdiv from the time of Prince Vijaya, can be found, [then] making him lord (*svāmi*) is the conduct which protects the world and the *śāsana* (IC VI:24, c22–23).

...eheyin lakdiva manuṣyāvāsa kaḷa vijaya rājayan paramparāyen ā lakdivaṭa himi rajadaru kenekun soyā genādu vī nam āsa rakṣakarannā se lovāssun rakṣāyehi yedī svāmī pakṣavā taman vargga sampat rakṣā karanu mānāvi

...therefore, if a royal person who is lord (*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<sup>267</sup> to [them as one’s] lord (*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 (*vargga*, Skt. *varga*) and wealth (*sampat*) (IC VI:28, b24–27; 29, b19–22).

It is unfortunately impossible to date these inscriptions, and so the use of the Vijaya genealogy, relative to that discussed above.<sup>268</sup> However, it seems that this is something of a crystallisation of the Vijaya/Kāliṅga connection invoked elsewhere in his inscriptional corpus: here we are told explicitly that the Lankan throne has always belonged, and should always belong, to those of this lineage. Because of the relative lack of literary precedent for strongly identifying Vijaya as a Kāliṅgan monarch, and the apparent conflation of Vijaya’s Kāliṅgan ancestors with the aviatic Kāliṅga *cakravartins* of the *Kāliṅgabodhijātaka*, this cannot be understood as an unconscious repetition of a pre-existing “Vijayan ideology,” but rather as an innovative discourse on Niśśaṅka Malla’s part.

It remains a valid question when this discourse 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

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<sup>267</sup> Literally “on the side of,” from Skt. *pakṣa*.

<sup>268</sup> All we can say is that the Galpota likely postdates Niśśaṅka Malla’s fifth regnal year; the Gate inscriptions must pre-date IC VI:25, which itself must postdate the fifth regnal year.

(IC VI:94, a23-27), but in no other inscriptions of Poḷonnaruva monarchs. An inscription found near Miṇṇipe, created by a local warlord named Malevi Bhāma (discussed further in the following chapter), refers to Niśśaṅka Malla’s widow Kalyāṇavatī as

...laṃkādvīpayehi maṇṣyavāsa koṭṭā raja kaḷa vijaya rājakumārayan paṭan suḷavasā mahavasā boho rājaparamparāyehi sirilak ‘hi agatān pat...

Having attained the highest position in Sirilak, in the succession of many kings in the lesser lineage (*suḷavasā*, P. *cūlavamsa*) [and] great lineage beginning with Prince Vijaya, who ruled having made human habitation in the island of Laṅkā (IC VI:100, 7-10).

Within literary works, Vijaya’s legacy is similarly muted. Vijaya is mentioned only in passing as the first king in a long list, in both the thirteenth century *Pūjāvaliya* (PV, 768)<sup>269</sup> and the fourteenth century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* (NS, 36).<sup>270</sup> Neither work mentions a Kāliṅga connection. By the *Rājāvaliya*—which, in its present form, might date to as late as the seventeenth (Sannasgala 1994, 421–23) or eighteenth century (Godakumbura 1955, 10, 127–29)—Vijaya’s grandfather is explicitly called both Kāliṅgan and a *cakravartin* (*kaliṅgu raja sakviti*; RV, 16). Clearly at some point between the fourteenth century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* and the eighteenth century *Rājāvaliya* the connection between Vijaya and a Kāliṅga-based lineage of *cakravartins* had become more widely accepted. Careful reading of both royal inscriptions and literary works throughout the intervening centuries might shed further light on this process; for our purposes,

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<sup>269</sup> “From the first enlightenment of Our Great Gautama until the completion of this grateful worship of mine, 1,850 years have passed by. In this time, 153 kings, lords of the Sinhala, have ruled wearing crowns. Who? Vijaya was the first; [then] Upatissa; Paṇḍuvāsa... [and so on]” (*apa mahāgautama budungē prathamabodhiyehi paṭan māgē mē stutipūjāvagē avasānayaṭa ekvādahas aṭasiya sūpanas havurrudek atikrānta viya. mevakaṭa siṃhalādhipati rajahu ekasiya tepanas denek voṭunu pālaṅḍa raja kaḷaha. oḥu kinamha yat? paḷamu vana vijaya raja ya upatissa ya paṇḍuvāsa ya...*).

<sup>270</sup> “Of the kings who ruled this country, Vijaya was the first; [then] Upatissa; Paṇḍuvāsa... [and so on]” (*meraṭa raja kaḷa rajungen paḷamu vana vijaya raja ya upatissa ya paṇḍuvāsa ya...*).

we might simply note that Niśsaṅka Malla's varied references to his Kāliṅga lineage seem to have been an important early step.

The Galpota and gate inscriptions do not only single out the Kāliṅga lineage by virtue of their connection to Vijaya; they also emphasise the *kṣatriya* status of Niśsaṅka 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 colonisers (Barrero Xavier 2016; Guha 2013). It maps imperfectly onto two distinct social categories: *varṇa*, a fourfold hierarchy of purity status (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *sūdra*); and *jāti*, hereditary labour specialisations with considerable localisation. 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 (Olivelle 1998, 191); matters only became more tangled further south. Buddhist texts, meanwhile, often describe a threefold class structure, with *kṣatriyas* displacing *brāhmaṇas* at the apex of the hierarchy and the two lower *varṇas* replaced by a general "*grhapati*" (householder) class (Nattier 2003, 22–25). 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 (Rogers 2004).

Niśsaṅka Malla's arguments for caste-based kingship are made most forcefully in the same inscriptions mentioned at the end of the last subsection, those on the Galpota and city gates. These arguments about caste seem targeted at a particular group: the *Govi kula* (often "family," but here

perhaps analogous to *jāti*).<sup>271</sup> Although we should not anachronistically conflate them, this Govi *kula* is likely the antecedent of the more modern Goyigama or Kandyan Goviya *jātis*, which are traditionally associated with agricultural (*govī*) work, but in practice include powerful landowners with considerable economic and political leverage (Dewaraja 2008, chap. 3; Kemper 1980). 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 (Dewaraja 2008, 54; Liyanagamage 1963, 123; 2001, 198). The gate inscriptions therefore warn us, in delightfully poetic Sinhala and Sanskrit, that

kākayā haṃsa gatiyaṭa da koṭaḷuvā saindavayaṅṭa da gāṇḍhulā nāgarājayaṅṭa da kaṇamādiriyā sūryyaprabhāvataṭa da vaṭuvā hastiṅṭa da kāṇahilā siṃhayaṅṭa da bhāva karannā sē govikulehi āttan rāja līlāvaṭa no pātuva mānāvā kese balavat vuva da govikulehi ātto rājyayaṭa balā no gata yuttā.

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 jackel to the lion—those in the Govi-*kula* should not wish for the joys (*līlā*) of kings. However powerful (*balavat*), those in the Govi-*kula* must not be looked to for kingship (IC VI:28 b12-19; IC VI:29 b9-15).<sup>272</sup>

dhvāṅkṣo haṃsagatiṃ kharo hayavaram gaṇḍūpadaḥ pannagaṃ khadyoto mihiram mṛgēndralalitaṃ kroṣṭā dvipaṃ vartakaḥ<sup>273</sup> | varṇo<sup>274</sup> ‘nyo ‘nukaroti rājacaritan naivāvadartaṃ<sup>275</sup> kevalaṃ hāsyas syāditi vakti nītikūśalo niśśaṅkamallo nṛpaḥ.

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.

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<sup>271</sup> Dewaraja (2008) notes that, by the Kandyan period, the Govi were considered “*kulīna*” (“coming from a [reputable] family”) in contrast to the “*hīna-jāti*” (lit. “low-birth”) status of other social groups (53).

<sup>272</sup> There seems to have been a parallel (in Sinhala) in the Galpota (IC VI:24, c15–16), but it is now effaced.

<sup>273</sup> IC reads *vartatakaḥ* in Sinhala script and *varttakam* in Roman.

<sup>274</sup> IC reads *varṇo*.

<sup>275</sup> IC reads *naivāvadṛtaṃ*.

Another *varṇa* imitating the deeds of kings, variously ripped asunder, would be laughable; so says Lord Niśśaṅka Malla, skilled in statecraft (*nīti*) (IC VI:28, b31-36; 29, 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 through Mahinda's overthrow in Niśśaṅka Malla's favour that they, too, could act as kingmakers. It is no surprise, then, that these inscriptions then goes on to warn that

rajadaruvō darpoddhata vanuvan no rusnāha eheyin ungen nam tanaturu sampat ladin  
darpoddhata no viyā yuttē yā.

As kings dislike those who become big-headed,<sup>276</sup> those who have received positions and wealth from them should not become big-headed (IC VI:24, c14-15).

tamā hā sama gāttan vānda pudā rāja sambhāvanā kaḷāhu da ungen nam tanaturu laddāhu da  
rājadrohi nam mā veti.

Those who, having worshipped ministers who are equal to them [in status], treat them like kings; and who receive positions from them: they are named “traitors” (IC VI:28, b20-22; 29, b15-18).

But on what ground does Niśśaṅka Malla distinguish his 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 prideful ministers? Niśśaṅka Malla's answer is, of course, his *kṣatriya* status: membership in the only *varṇa* eligible for kingship

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<sup>276</sup> Lit. “swollen with pride.”

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

dānum nam keḷehi guṇa dānumā veḷaṅdaham nam govitānā hastasāra nam dahamā rākka  
yutuyā.

These [aphorisms] should be protected: knowledge is indeed knowledge of the virtue of [service] performed; the work of *veḷaṅdas* is indeed the position of *govi*; treasure indeed is the *dharma* (IC VI:24, 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 jati*—with the work of *veḷaṅdas*? Wickramasinghe and Ranawella translate this latter term rather literally, as “occupation” and “trade” respectively (see EZ II, 122; IC VI, 64). But I suspect that a more pointed argument about caste hierarchy is intended here. In literary works of the early- to mid-second millennium *veḷaṅda* usually refers to the *vaiśya-varṇa*.<sup>277</sup> This is a statement, in other words, that the *Govi kula* “properly” belongs to the 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 about the *varṇa* status of various Lankan *jatis* (and their resulting right to

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<sup>277</sup> See ŚŚŚ s.v. *veḷeṅda*, citing the fifteenth century *Guttiḷa-kāvyaya*; see further the following discussion of the *Anāgatavaṃsa*.

rule). Concerns about *varṇa* status are certainly evident in earlier literature: to return to the narrative of Vijaya, for example, the fifth-century *Mahāvamsa* makes a point of telling us that he

nivāsetvā janapadaṃ sabbemaccā samecca taṃ | avocuṃ rājatanayam sāmi rajjebhisecaya || iti  
vutto rājaputto na icchi abhisecanaṃ | vinā khattiyakaññāya abhisekaṃ mahesiyā.

Having founded communities [throughout Lanka], all the counsellors having assembled said “Lord, be anointed in sovereignty.” The Prince said, “I do not wish for anointment, without the simultaneous anointing of a *kṣatriya* maiden [as my] consort (*mahesī*)” (MV 7:46-47).

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 this verse (see the rather perfunctory commentary on these verses at VAP I:262). But, as discussed in Chapter Three, the *Vamsatthappakāsinī* does elsewhere include a procedure for the *abhiṣeka* which specifically requires a *kṣatriya* maiden to represent the entire collective (*gaṇa*) of her *varṇa* (VAP II:305). However, I do not think that we can go so far here as does Gunawardana (1990), 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” (56). 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.

Looking among a wider textual corpus, we are presented with a rather fluid sense of the intersections of *varṇas*; the more specific Lankan identity groupings variously called *jatis* 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*, *gr̥hapati*) in place of

the *Dharmaśāstric* four (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*). We cannot assume that the *Govi jati* 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 *Anāgatavaṃsa*, do offer us a fourfold system, with a fairly standard translation of the Sanskrit *varṇas* into Pali *vaṇṇas*: *khattiya*, *brahmaṇa*, *vessa*, and *sudda* (AV v. 64). But when that same text was later adapted into the Sinhala *Anāgatavaṃśaya*, the four classes are instead listed as *rāja*, *bamuṇu*, *veḷaṇḍa* and *govi* (Sin-AV, 133). 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” in the *dharmasāstric* 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 *veḷeṇḍas* in his inscriptions, therefore, we must take this as just one argument put forward in this longer debate. Here, the argument seems to rather unobtrusively intend: 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.

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

...budu bosat sakvittan upadanā utum daṃbadivhi kaliṅguraṭa siṃhapurayehi... ipādā...

...in Siṃhapura, in the Kaliṅga country, in noble Daṃbadivhi (Skt. Jambudvīpa), which gives rise to Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and *cakravartins* (IC VI:24, a3–4).

Emphasising that it is Jambudvīpa, not Lanka, in which such exalted figures have tended to arise serves to further set apart Niśsaṅka 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,<sup>278</sup> 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 Niśsaṅka 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 Kāliṅga country or perhaps even to the city of Siṃhapura itself: a decidedly uncanonical claim, but one certainly 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-emphasised by past scholars, when closer reading shows them to clearly be metaphorical in nature. The prime example here is the claim that

rajadaruvan manuśyarūpayen siṭiya da naradevatā heyin deviyān sē dākkā yutuyā.

Kings, although having human form, should be regarded like gods (*deviyan*) due to their being lords (*deva*) of men (IC VI:24 c4-5).

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<sup>278</sup> All Buddhas follow more or less the same pattern in their lives, including birth in (northern) Jambudvīpa, a pattern about which much has been written. 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.

This has generally been interpreted as a claim for the literal divinity of kings, taking “*naradevatā*” as “human gods” (see, e.g., Goonatilake 1974, 363; Hallisey 2003, 701; Ranawella 2007; and the discussion in EZ II:17). But I am mindful in my own translation of Berkwitz’s (2019a) 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. I therefore interpret *naradeva* 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 translation misinterpretation has plagued another of Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions. Partway through his inscription near the Prītidāna Maṇḍapa, Niśśaṅka Malla tells us of an aspiration which has been repeatedly 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” (EZ II, 176; IC VI, 69).

This translation has been quoted by a large number of scholars as evidence that Niśśaṅka Malla considered himself to be a *bodhisattva*, understood to be fulfilling the earlier prophecy (discussed in Chapter Two) that only *bodhisattvas* ought to rule Sri Lanka (Goonatilake 1974, 364–65; J. C. Holt 1991, 60; Pathmanathan 1976, 11n31; 1982, 132–33; Samuels 1997, 405). I suspect that the phrasing “my body... is *endowed...* with the virtuous qualities of a *bodhisattva*” has been interpreted as a reference to the 32 Marks of a Great Man (Skt. *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*, P. *mahāpurisalakkhaṇa*): the somatic manifestation of a *bodhisattva*’s accumulated virtues which appear 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:

okāvas rajaparapurehi sūryyavaṃśayaṭa tilakāyamāna vā rajapiḷiveḷin rājya ladin voṭunu pālandā maharajatan pat vū sirisaṅgabo niśsaṃka malla kāliṅga parākramabāhu cakravarttīn vahanse śrī jayagopa mahārājayan vahanse nisā pārbbatī mahadevīn vahanse kusen upan keṇehi mā sāpat lakuṇu manā nakat mohot dākā kulatilakayak latmi yi...

Sirisaṅgabo Niśsaṅka 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 *maharāja*—having been seen, at the very moment he was born from the womb of Pārbbatī *mahādevī* 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 (*kula*)... (IC VI:25, 3–8).

Here, however, we would do well to note that not all bodily marks, even in a Buddhist context, are necessarily the specific 32 marks of a *bodhisattva*. If we turn, briefly, to the retrospective *Mahāvamsa* account, we do see that both Vijayabāhu I (in MV 57:49) and Parākramabāhu I (prophecied in MV 62:29; extensively lauded in MV 62:45-52) are said to have been born with auspicious bodily marks, as was Duṭṭhagāminī in the fifth-century text (MV 22:59). But so too was Vijayabāhu’s mother, Lokitā (MV 57:41), and Vijayabāhu’s daughter/Parākramabāhu’s mother Ratanāvalī (MV 59:35). 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 32 Marks of a Great Man; and, as the androcentric title suggests, those 32 marks describe a distinctly male body (including a sexual organ “concealed in a sheath,” P. *kosohitavatgyho*), which presumably means that these are *not* the marks with which Lokitā and Ratanāvalī were endowed.<sup>279</sup>

It seems evident to me that in these *Mahāvamsa* references to bodily marks, *and* in Niśsaṅka Malla’s inscriptional claim above, that we are dealing with a broader set of bodily signs which can be interpreted

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<sup>279</sup> On the necessarily male bodies of final-life *bodhisattvas*, see further the excellent discussion in Balkwill (2018).

(alongside other astrological portents) at the moment of birth. In other words, Niśsaṅka 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” (Blackburn 2017; see also Moin 2012).

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:

bodhisatvarājagūṇayaṭa met sit āti sneha pakṣapāta śarīrayen mā pāmha yi (IC VI:25, 16–17).<sup>280</sup>

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*), or perhaps more figuratively “is mindful of,” the remaining terms. The mind is characterised by compassion (*met*, modern Sin. *maitriya*, P. *metta*),<sup>281</sup> and is oriented towards the qualities or virtues of a *bodhisattva*-king. Together, we can therefore read this aspiration as:

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<sup>280</sup> The preceding clause, *mavupiyān se losasun raknā*, may be taken as adjectivally modifying the *bodhisattva* king (“who protects the world and śāsana like parents [would their child]”). However, I interpret it as a participle: “having protect the world... I shall show myself.”

<sup>281</sup> ŚŚŚ notes that *met* can also indicate the future Buddha Maitreya (Sin. *Maitrī*), who very frequently has the epithet *budurājanin* medieval literature. We might wonder then if this reference to a *met* in conjunction with a *bodhisatvarājan* is intended to somehow signify Niśsaṅka Malla’s orientation towards (rebirth in the *śāsana* of) that future Buddha, a common aspiration during this period. This does not seem grammatically plausible, so I leave this out of my suggested translation.

“I will show myself, with a body devoted to affection, compassionately mindful of the qualities of a *bodhisattva*-king.”

There is no suggestion here that Niśśaṅka Malla’s own body itself directly manifests any somatic characteristics of a *bodhisattva*-king. 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 Niśśaṅka 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 Niśśaṅka Malla which we know to be later. Coupled with the decreasing emphasis on Parākramabāhu after the early inscription IC VI: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 Kāliṅga, but always with members ruling over Lanka. He emphasised, in other words, the distinctive nature of his own immediate family relative to any other possible claimants within Lanka itself, who lacked such pedigrees. This claim was not only made through inscriptional means: as I argue in the following section, he also sought to reify it through matrilineal ties.

## Family Matters

In Chapter Three, I suggested that the political trifurcation between the reigns of Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I resulted in an increasing emphasis, in the inscriptions of some royal men, on the dynastic pedigrees of their wives as representative of powerful marital alliances with mainland rulers. I then further argued that this allowed (some of) those women what seems to be an unprecedented level of autonomy: crafting their own inscriptional personae and patronising religious institutions of their own choosing. During the reign of Parākramabāhu I, however, royal women seemed, once again, to become 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, seem to 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 interregnal period.

The inscriptions of Niśśaṅka Malla are replete with lists of mainland dynasties, friend and rival alike, from whom he “procured consorts” (*bisovarun genvā*) for both himself and 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:

...bhaya pavtū pāṇḍirajjuruvan hā māṇiyan visin apa jīvat vana pamaṇa gam dī rājyaya taman vahansē mā genā vadāla mānāvā yi kiyā veḷa gena evū ran āṅgili hā **rājakanyakāvan** hā hastyaśvādi no ek paṇḍuru hā solīraṭin me sē mā evū bohō paṇḍu nāmāti jaladhārayen kopāgni nivā karṇṇāṭa nellūru gaḍa kaliṅga tiliṅga gurjjara ādi no ek deśayē guṇa kāmāti rajdaruvan

hā... [section missing] mitra santhāna koṭā no kāmāttavunṭa taman vahansege śauryyātiśayen bhaya eḷavā e e raṭin **bisovarun** hā paṇḍuru genvā...

...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 missing] with royal persons who value virtue in various countries, such as Karnataka, Nellore, the Gauḍa, Kāliṅga, Tiliṅga, and Gurjarat; 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 VI:24 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 VI:32; 35; 36; 45; 65; 71; and 82), as is Veṅgi to the north (IC VI:45; 57).

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

...rājavaṃśaya nisāyā yi kaliṅguraṭa yavā somasūryavaṃśa boho bisovarun genvā urehi dā yuvaraja tan pat vīrabāhu mahapāṇan vahanseṭa da rājakanyakāvan genvā rajakulaya mahat koṭā...

...having dispatched [messengers] to the Kāliṅga country, for the sake of the royal lineage; having procured many consorts of the Lunar and Solar lineages; having produced also royal

maidens for his son the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, who had attained the rank of *yuvaraja*; having [thus] increased the royal family... (IC VI:24, 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 Kāliṅgan 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” (*antahpura*, often translated “harem”).<sup>282</sup> This ranking seems to have shifting 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

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<sup>282</sup> The term “harem” is borrowed from Arabic *ḥarīm*, and has a strong association with the problematic trope of the “oriental despot” which so waylaid colonial-modern scholarship (Ahmed 1982). As Foster (2004) notes, the term *ḥarīm* originally designated “a social space where women could gather and talk,” and it is only thanks to orientalist discourses that it has come to indicate a man’s coterie of co-wives and concubines (7n5). Wishing to avoid both the overt sexualisation, and the reductive conflation of varied gender orders, I therefore also avoid the term “harem,” and prefer instead to use (following Loos 2005) the more specific “Inner City.”

his second mainland expedition;<sup>283</sup> at “Devakulama” (only in IC VI:65);<sup>284</sup> and at least once more, presumably in Poḷonnaruva itself.<sup>285</sup> I say “at least” because the number of people said to have participated in this *tulābhāra* vary considerably from inscription to inscription. It matters less to us whether this reflects “in reality” multiple *tulābhāras* with varying participants; what is significant for our purposes is which family members, at which times, are said to have joined Niśśaṅka 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 Niśśaṅka 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 Ruvanvāli inscription (IC VI:27) dated to Niśśaṅka 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

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<sup>283</sup> All inscriptions which specify Rameśvaram mention two such expeditions: see IC VI:43; 45; 47; 48; 49; 51; 56; 60; 67; and 76–82 (the Ruhuna *gavuta* inscriptions).

<sup>284</sup> This placename is uncharacteristically absent from Nicholas’s (1959) *Historical Topography*, presumably because the inscription was only made publically available recently. The inscription commemorates the construction of a reservoir called “Pāṇḍivijayakulama” (celebrating Niśśaṅka Malla’s victory over the Pāṇḍyas), following the *tulābhāra* and then the construction of an almshouse at Devakulama. We might reasonably take all three, and the findsite of the inscription itself, as the same location: near what is now Tampalakamam in Trincomalee district.

<sup>285</sup> IC VI: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 VI:65.

to the poverty-driven crime caused by Parākramabāhu I's (alleged) excessive punishments and taxation; in response, the inscription tells us, Niśśaṅka Malla

...mā davasā kāt siṅgā suvase visuva mānāvā yi perā rajadaruvan no kaḷa viru lesekā tulābhāra nāṅgemi sitā vadārā urehi dā vīrabāhu mahapāṇan vahanse hā agamehesun kāliṅga subhadrā bisovun vahanse hā saha voṭunu abaraṇin sādi taman vahanse hā tundenā vahanse tulābhāra nāṅgī satruvan hā ātuḷu ridī tiram hā ananta koṭā rāja vīthiyehi isvamin mahādānavarṣā pavatvā...

...having resolved to mount the *tulābhāra*, as no prior kings had done,<sup>286</sup> [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 *bisova* Kāliṅga 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 VI:27, 10–14).

This is a lavishly described performance of kingship: Niśśaṅka 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.”<sup>287</sup> The inclusion of his son and designated 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. She is

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<sup>286</sup> This is patently untrue: we have references to *tulābhāra* ceremonies in inscriptions dating back to Vijayabāhu I (see IC VI:2, 14, where it is called a *tulatara*; and TISL 42, 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.

<sup>287</sup> 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 Collins' (1998) excellent study of this episode (in his ch. 7), he argues that the shower of gems serves to remove the risk that Vessantara (actually the Buddha in his penultimate incarnation) will ever have to act in the immorally violent ways that typically characterise kingship (fighting rivals, punishing criminals).

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 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 be 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 VI: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:

...aga mehesun **sūryyavaṃśa** kāliṅga subhadrā mahadevīn vahanse hā **gaṅgavaṃśa kalyāṇa mahadevīn** vahanse hā **yuvarajavā siṭi** urehi dā vīrabāhu mahapāṇan vahanse hā samāṅgā saha voṭunu **rajaṃbaraṇin** sādī perā rajadaruvan no kaḷa virā lesā **havurudu patā** tulābhāra nāṅgī **mahānavaratnadānavarṣā** pavatvā...

...having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by (1) his primary consort the *mahādevī* Kāliṅga Subhadrā **of the Solar lineage**, (2) **the mahādevī Kālyāṇa of the Gaṅga lineage**, (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 VI:25, 11–14).<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> See also IC VI:37, which mentions a four-fold *tulābhāra* but does not name the participants.

Here the lineages of both primary consorts are emphasised, again stressing these matrilineal 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; likely a reference to the powerful Eastern Gaṅga dynasty whose domains at this time included the Kāliṅga region.<sup>289</sup> 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 might suggest that Niśśaṅka Malla had secured, and wished to publicise, a valuable marital alliance with his own father's overlord. We might also note that Vīrabāhu has received an additional title, *yuvaraja*, 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 in Appendix C. Notably, the Ruhuna inscription (IC VI:54) which must postdate year seven is among those which mention a five-

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<sup>289</sup> See, for the most comprehensive overview, Rao (1991). Kulke provides, among his many writings on the region, one particularly useful (2022) study of Eastern Gaṅga temple patronage, including the earliest claim of this dynasty to *cakravartin* status in 1135 (360).

person *tulābhāra*, suggesting that this variant remained in Niśśaṅka Malla's rhetorical performance of kingship until that point.

Despite the five-person variant being 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

...aga mehesun kāliṅga subhadrā mahadevīn vahansē hā gaṅgavaṃśa kalyāṇa mahadevīn vahansē hā **sahavoṭunu rajabaraṇin** sādī urehi dā daru mahapāṇan vahansē hā dū sarbbāṅga sundarīn vahansē hā ekvā tulābhāra nāṅgī havurudu patā pas tulābhārayak bāgin dī...

...having mounted the *tulābhāra* together with (1) his primary consort the *mahādevī* Kāliṅga Subhadrā of the Solar lineage, (2) the *mahādevī* Kālyāṇa of the Gaṅga lineage, (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 VI:24, b2–4).

Niśśaṅka Malla himself clearly makes up the fifth person; but it is Vīrabāhu who now wears the royal regalia,<sup>290</sup> and Vīrabāhu's sister now joins the party. Niśśaṅka Malla's inclusion of consorts (symbolising powerful matrilineal 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 matrilineal alliances of her own—except that she is mentioned further on in the same inscription, in what seems to be a ritual context. We are told that Niśśaṅka Malla

...daḷadāpātradhātun vahansēṭa putāṇuvan vahansē hā diyaṇīyan vahansē hā pudā ghanarandāgabak ātuḷu vū dhana pudā gaḷavā...

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<sup>290</sup> Vīrabāhu's name and longer list of titles are likely only absent here because they were mentioned in the preceding clauses.

...having offered his son and daughter to the Tooth and Bowl Relics; offered up riches, including a solid gold *dāgaba*; and saved [the children]... (IC VI:24, b24).<sup>291</sup>

We see a variant description of this event in one of the inscriptions on the Hāṭadāgē:

...daḷadāpātradhātun vahanseṭa urehi dā vīrabāhu mahapāṇan vahanse hā dū sarbbāṅga  
sundarī vahanse hā pudā dedenā gaḷavanu...

...having offered his son, the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu, and his daughter Sarvāṅga Sundarī to the Tooth and Bowl Relics; and saved the two persons... (IC VI:52, 17–18).

From these two descriptions together we gain the sense of some kind of ritualised 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 ultimately “saved” for kingship by the substitute offering). But it is unclear whether the *bhikṣuṇī* 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 (Gunawardana 1988, 38–39). 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.

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<sup>291</sup> IC’s Roman-script transcription erroneously omits the second *pudā* clause; the Sinhala-script transcription is correct.

Other descriptions of the five-person *tulābhāra* give fewer details but, significantly, seem to retain mention of the royal women. The Rameśvaram throne inscription, for example, mentions only the titles of those who accompanied Niśśaṅka Malla:

...bisovarun vahanse hā mahapāṇan vahanse ātuḷu vū pasdenā vahanse tulābhāra nāṅgī havurudu patā pas tulābhārayak bāgin dī...

...having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by five persons, including the *bisovas* and the *mahapā*; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually... (IC VI:46, 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:

...bisovarun vahansē ātuḷu vū pasdenā vahansē tulābhāra nāṅgī havurudu patā pastulābhārayak bāgin dī...

...having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by five persons, including the *bisovas*; and having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually... (IC VI:53, 6-7).

Here it is the inclusion of *only* the royal women which seems relevant. Later—in the year-seven-plus Ruhuna inscription, and at least one of the year-nine inscriptions—even the women are excluded, and the event seems to have been reduced down to the minimalistic formula “having given a fivefold *tulābhāra* annually” (IC VI:43, 2; 54, 12).<sup>292</sup> It seems that in these later years more recent events (including the *tulābhāra* at Rameśvaram) appeared more salient to Niśśaṅka Malla's kingly self-representation, and so descriptions of the five-person *tulābhāra* became increasingly truncated.

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<sup>292</sup> ... havurudu patā pastulābhārayak (bāgin) dī...

IC VI:43 omits *bāgin*. IC VI:49, the other inscription from Niśśaṅka 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.

The eight-person *tulābhāra* is only mentioned in a single inscription (IC VI:57), which is—frustratingly—difficult to date. It is located on the outer wall of the Hāṭadāgē, the same shrine discussed above in the context of Niśsaṅka Malla offering his children up to the Tooth and Bowl Relics. But this inscription is unlike those others found within the Hāṭadāgē: it employs a different regnal title (Siṃhapureśvara Laṃkeśvara Kāliṅga Cakravartin, otherwise witnessed only in IC VI:53), and it mentions edificial works (like the construction of a seven-story palace in only 45 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;<sup>293</sup> 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:

...kāliṅga subhadrā bisovun vahansē hā kalyāṅga mahadevīn hā mahapāṅan vahansē hā **vikramabāhu āpāṅan** vahansē hā **candrā bisavun** vahansē hā **pārbbatīn** vahansē hā sarbbhāṅga sundarīn vahansē ātuḷu vū aṭadenā vahansē tulābhāra nāṅgī havurudu patā me lesā dī...

...having had the *tulābhāra* mounted by eight persons, including (1) the *bisova* Kāliṅga Subhadrā, (2) the *mahādevī* Kalyāṅgavatī, (3) the *mahapā*, (4) **the āpā Vikramabāhu**, (5) **the bisova Candrā**, (6) **Pārvatī**, and (7) Sarvāṅga Sundarī; and having given [charity] annually in this way... (IC VI:57, 12–15).

Once again, Niśsaṅka Malla himself presumably makes up the unnamed eighth person. The inclusion of the secondary heir Vikramabāhu is, perhaps, unsurprising. We know that this was the position Niśsaṅka

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<sup>293</sup> The stone seats were likely created throughout Niśsaṅka Malla’s reign, and so evince a wide variety of inscriptional styles. Some (IC VI: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 VI:74 through 82. IC VI: 74 and 75 must themselves postdate year two, but we cannot even say this about the remaining pillars.

Malla himself (claimed to have) occupied under Parākramabāhu I; perhaps he was preparing for the eventuality that his own Vīrabāhu, just like his own predecessor Vijayabāhu II, would need someone waiting in the wings. This would prove to be prudent: Vīrabāhu 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 consort (*bisova*); we know nothing about her life or lineage, although we may speculate about a connection to Parākramabāhu’s widow Candavatī (discussed in the following chapter).<sup>294</sup> The second, 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 Kāliṅga and invited to participate in Niśśaṅka Malla’s grand display of royal munificence.

Wherever 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 conceptualise this as something akin to what Sjursen (2015) describes as a “lordship unit,” a “theory of complementary

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<sup>294</sup> As we have seen throughout this chapter from the case of Kalyāṇavatī, Niśśaṅka Malla frequently 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.

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” (11). 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 seems to have 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 Anurādhapura Ruvanvāli *dāgaba* were carried out at the request of his consorts:

...antaḥpurastrīn ruvanvāli mahasā vahansē dā vandanā kāmātamha yi kī heyin eyit mā sē mā rajadaru kekekun kārāvūyē vehe dā yi vadārā ananta vastu viyadam koṭā mehekaruvan ānanda karavā pihiṭirajayaṭa piyumak sē vū ruvanvāli dahagab vahansē karavā antaḥpurastrīn dā vandavā...

...having, because the women of the Inner City (*antaḥpurastrī*) said “we wish to worship also at the Ruvanvāli *mahasā* (Skt. *mahācaitya*),” said in reply “This was done in the past by a royal person like myself”;<sup>295</sup> having spent limitless wealth; having made his servants/labourers happy; having made the Ruvanvāli *dāgaba* into a veritable lotus for the Pihiṭi kingdom; and having enabled the women of the Inner City to worship it... (IC VI:53, 9–13).

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?

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<sup>295</sup> Presumably he refers here to Duṭṭhagāmiṇī, who first established the Ruvanvāli *mahāstūpa*. This is a central part of the *Mahāvamsa*’s Duṭṭhagāmiṇī narrative, and the main subject of the *Thūpavaṃsa*.

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:

...sakviti niśśaṅka malla niṣkaḷaṃka kāliṅga cakravartti suvāmīn vahanse tundāgedorā abhiṣeka maṇḍapayaṭa vāḍā sahavoṭunu rajabaraṇin sādi aga biso subhadrā mahādevīn vahansē hā kalyāṇa mahādevīn vahansē hā yuvaraja vā siṭi ureyi dā vīrabāhu mahapāṇan vahanse hā lakvijayasiṅgu senevi tāvurunāvan hā laṃka adhikāra lolupāḷākuḷu kitalnāvan hā adhikāra toṭadanavu suvanāvan hā adhikāra toṭadanavu sātānāvan hā sabhāpatināyaka dahambaḍahāli gajabāhunāvan ātuḷu vū āmātiḡaṇa pirivarā...

...The *sakviti* (Skt. *cakravarti*) Niśśaṅka Malla Niṣkaḷaṃka Kāliṅga *cakravartti 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 *senevi* Tāvurunā, the *laṅkādhikāra* Lolupāḷākuḷu Kitalnā, the *adhikāra* Toṭadanavu Suvanā, the *adhikāra* Toṭadanavu Sātānā, and the *sabhāpatināyaka* Dahambaḍahāli Gajabāhunāvan... (IC VI:58, c2–d6; 59, 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:

vīrarāja niśyaṃkhamalla kāliṅga laṃkendreṇa dattam subhadrā mahādevīm ha dattam kalyāṇa mahādevīm ha dattam vīrabāhu mahapāṇam ha dattam.

Given (*dattam*) by Vīrarāja Niśyaṃkhamalla Kāliṅga Laṃkendra, and given by Subhadrā *mahādevī*, and given by Kalyāṇavatī *mahādevī*, and given by the *mahapā* Vīrabāhu (IC VI:58, h2–6).

śrī kāliṅga laṃkendreṇa dattam agabiso subhadrā mahādevīm ha dattam kalyāṇa mahādevīm ha dattam yuvarajavā siṭi urehi dā vīrabāhu mahapāṇam ha dattam.

Given by Śrī Kāliṅga Lamkendra, 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 *yucarāja* (IC VI:59, 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 VI:58 d6; 59, 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 VI:24), and those carved on the gates of the citadel itself (IC VI:28 and 29). Here he famously lays what seems to be the most explicit articulation of a law of succession in premodern Sri Lanka. The Galpota's version is unfortunately partially effaced; it reads:

...rājayangē (daru) āpā mahapāvan bāla vuvada lokasvāmi (heyin) rājyayaṭa balā genā kula sirit da... [effaced] kaṭayutu.

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] lord of the world, having watched over the kingdom, *kula* customs...<sup>296</sup>

(ovu)nudu nāta(hot) bisovarungē ājñāyehi pāvātā rakṣā kaṭayutu.

In their absence, one ought to protect [the customs or kingdom] by living according to the command (*ājñā*) of the *bisōs*.

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<sup>296</sup> We are missing here, based on the spacing of the parallel lines c19 and c20, around nine or ten discrete characters. I can only make out, from the estampage provided in EZ II:17 and from my own inspection of the Galpota, a few stray characters (possibly *ga* and *ka*). Although from context it seems clear that the duty being enjoined (*kaṭayutu*) is the enthronement of the underaged male heir, it is too long a break for us to guess about the lacuna with any confidence.

unudu näta maharajun payä lū vahan mātrayakudu rajatan hi tabā rājya rākka yutu.

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 VI:24, c19-21).

The wording here—“living according to the command of the *bisōs*”—might indicate merely a support for regency. But a variant of this argument in Niśśaṅka Malla’s North Gate inscription (which seems to be an abridged version of his Galpota arguments) suggests that he may be advocating for full succession:

...arājaka vā da novisiya yutteyā. eheyin maharajatan patvā siṭiyavun näti tänekā yuvaraja vā siṭiyavun ho unudu nätahot rājakumāravarun ho unudu nätahot bisōvarun ho rājyayaṭa tākiya yutteyā.

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 *bisōs*, to the *rājya* (IC VI:28).

Here it is clear that the *bisos* themselves are in Niśśaṅka Malla’s intended line of succession (even if as a last resort), if the alternative is being “kingless” (*a-rājaka*). This would seem to imply that *bisos* (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 Līlāvati, 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 emphasises, 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 Five

This chapter has focused on Niśśaṅka Malla's deliberate 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 emphasises a more immediate connection to the prior rule of Parākramabāhu I, and therefore seems to be positioning 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 Kāliṅgan 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 seems to have succeeded in this regard: the majority of Poḷonnaruva's subsequent monarchs, before the kingdom's invasion in 1215CE, 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 Three: 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 wishes. We have also seen that this seems to have 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, seems to have been taken seriously. We turn to this phenomenon in the following chapter.



## Chapter Six: Shifting Politics of Gender

Niśśaṅka Malla's nine-year reign would be the longest of the later Poḷonnaruva period. His death, in c. 1196, was followed by a rapid succession of untimely deaths, coups d'etat, and succession crises. Only three monarchs remained on the throne for longer than a year, including Niśśaṅka Malla's brother Sāhasa Malla (r. c. 1200–1202). The longest reigns of this otherwise turbulent period were, notably, those of female monarchs: Niśśaṅka Malla's former consort Kalyāṇavatī (r. c. 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.<sup>297</sup> 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.<sup>298</sup> When the reigns

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<sup>297</sup> The *Mahāvamsa* records only two earlier women on the throne: Anulā (r. c. 48–44BCE), who murdered her way through a string of husbands (described in lurid detail in MV ch. 34); and Sivali, who ruled for a single year in c. 33CE. Only one other woman, Kusumāsana/Dona Catarina (r. 1581–92), would subsequently sit on a Lankan throne.

<sup>298</sup> The notable exception is Iriyagolle (1989), who does mention both Līlāvatī and Kalyāṇavatī (87), and attempts to situate their circumstances in a *longue durée* perspective of “The Unique Position of Sinhala Women.” The general arc of Iriyagolle's argument is that Buddhist humanism granted Sinhala women benefits not afforded to other South Asian women, or to those in “the custom-ridden societies of Africa” (ibid.). These values were, apparently, sadly eroded under the Nayakkar monarchs (97); although Iriyagolle, to her credit, does not explicitly evoke the supposed

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 historians, but rather—once again—a reflection of the *Mahāvamsa*’s relative disinterest in the two women. Līlāvatī’s three reigns, for example, are described as follows:

tato tassa narindassa uppāṭetvāna locane | dūrīkatvāna taṃ kittisenānātho mahabbalo ||  
līlāvatyā parakkantabhujindaggamahesiyā | rajjaṃ kārāpayī tīṇi vassāni nirupaddavaṃ.

Then 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 Līlāvatī, the *agramahiṣī* of the pure lord Parākramabāhu, for three years without mishap (MV 80:30–31).

atha tasseva vikkantacamūnakkacamūpati | hantvāna taṃ anikaṅgamahīpālaṃ sa dummati ||  
pubbe pi katarajjāya tāya rājagadeviyā | Līlāvatyabhīdhānāya vassaṃ rajjaṃ akārayi.

Then his (Anīkaṅga’s) own general Vikkantacamūnakka, of ill intent, having killed the monarch Anīkaṅga, ruled for one year through the first *devī* of the king (Parākramabāhu I), named Līlāvatī, by whom rule had previously been done (MV 80:45–46).

tadā dhīmatam seṭṭho mahābalaparakkamo | parakkamacamūnātho kālanāgaravaṃsajo ||  
līlāvatim mahesim taṃ candādiccakuloditam | rajjebhisiñci pacchā pi rājatejovilāsinim.

Then the general Parākrama—mighty and powerful, most excellent among those with resolve, born of the Kālanāgara *vaṃśa*—anointed in sovereignty that *mahiṣī* Līlāvatī, who had arisen from the Solar and Lunar families, who subsequently shone in kingly splendour (MV 80:49–50).

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Tamil and Śaiva origins of these monarchs as the primary cause for their apparent misogyny. While I am deeply appreciative of Iriyagolle’s groundbreaking attention to gender dynamics over such a long period of history, I seek here and throughout the dissertation a more nuanced explanation for these dynamics than recourse to nebulously defined “Buddhist values.”

Beyond these passing verses, Līlāvātī is curiously absent from the *Mahāvamsa*'s narrative—even from its narrative of her husband Parākramabāhu I.<sup>299</sup> Kalyāṇavatī's reign receives a slightly longer treatment, but one which nonetheless similarly foregrounds the agency of her minister Āyasmanta (MV 80:33–41). 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 (*mahiṣī, devī*) of her departed husband Parākramabāhu, she is never called anything resembling “king” (*rājan*). Instead, her regnancy is described obliquely: men rule “through” her, or at most “anoint her in sovereignty” (*rajje abhisiñci*). As we will see below, these ways of describing Līlāvātī's rule do not originate in Daṁbadeṇiya-period writing. Rather, they continue a pattern evident even in the court poetry she herself patronised.

However, such disinterest in the reigns of Līlāvātī is in fact rather at the odds with the outsized impact she clearly 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

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<sup>299</sup> We are told that she was a daughter of Śrīvallabhā, and the sister of Parākramabāhu's rival Mānābharaṇa II (MV 62:2), but nothing more. Her 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 MV 80:30–31, a passage discussed further below).

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 *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* (“Lineage of the Tooth [Relic]”) and the Sinhala *Sasa Dā Vata* (“[The Buddha’s] Birth as a Hare”)—were composed under Līlāvati’s patronage, and eulogise members of her court in their introductions.<sup>300</sup> Alongside the Pali *Jinālaṅkāra* (“Ornaments of the Conquerer”) and Sinhala *Muvadev Dā Vata* (“Birth as [King] Makhadeva”), these works are pivotal in the cultural history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Existing discussion of either poem again tend to attribute patronage exclusively to the agency of Līlāvati’s ministers;<sup>301</sup> Godakumbura, Malalasekera, and Sannasgala are noteworthy exceptions to this trend.<sup>302</sup> However, the *Sasa Dā Vata* and *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* were patronised, respectively, in Līlāvati’s first and third reigns. In other words, this policy of patronising such works spanned multiple ministers: Līlāvati herself was the only constant throughout. We might also note that Līlāvati’s longest extant inscription (IC VI:90, discussed further below) includes the epithet “who has reached the [distant]

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<sup>300</sup> The *Sasa Dā Vata* is a Sinhala-language elaboration of the canonical *Sasa-jātaka*, a narrative of an earlier life of the Buddha in which he was a rabbit. It was composed during in Līlāvati’s first reign (1197–1200) by an unknown author. See further Godakumbura (1955, 146–48). The *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* was composed in Līlāvati’s final reign (1211–12), by a monastic poet named Dhammakitti. See Malalasekera (1928, 207–8); Norman (1983, 142).

<sup>301</sup> Saparamadu (1954) attributes patronage of the *Sasa Dā Vata* to “the request of Kitti the Minister of Queen Līlāvati” (111). Wijesekera (1954) tells us that the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* was written “at the request of a minister called Parākrama” (94), with no mention at all of for whom Parākrama was a minister. The UCHC tells us only that Parākrama is eulogised in the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa*, after he installed Līlāvati on the throne, without mentioning Līlāvati’s own praise therein (Paranavitana 1960b, 571).

<sup>302</sup> Godakumbura (1955) tells us that Līlāvati was indeed the “royal patroness” of the *Sasa Dā Vata*, praised alongside her minister Kīrti (146). Malalasekera (1928) suggests that the minister Parākrama was the primary patron of the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa*, but acknowledges the extent to which the poem also praises Līlāvati (208). Sannasgala (1994) merely notes that the work was created during Līlāvati’s reign while Kit Senevi was chief minister, without speculating further about their relative influence on the work’s production (134).

shore in all arts” (*siyalukalātera pāmiṇi*) immediately before her regnal name. 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 (Shirley 2024), 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.<sup>303</sup> 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.

In this chapter I provide a series of correctives to this tendency. In the first section, I attempt to map, with more granularity, what I have called Poḷonnaruva’s “gender order.” I show that normative and

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<sup>303</sup> Such discourses, as Talbot (1995) 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.

narrative texts alike maintain a strict division between the “proper” spheres of masculinity and femininity, in which the latter is always subordinate to the former; I also pay particular reference to the internal hierarchy of femininities evident within the kings’ Inner City (*antaḥpura*). The following sections address, in turn, three women who seem to have challenged the established politics of gender: the monarchs Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvatī; and the dowager consort Candavatī. In section two, 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 position (Sin. *agatāna*, Skt. *agrasthāna*) in their own inscriptional outputs. The third section draws heavily on Shirley (2024), in which I contrast 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 Vihāraya I began this dissertation. 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.

## **Mapping the Gender Order**

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the established gender order of Poḷonnaruva was decidedly hetero-patriarchal: it was centred on “men,” understood to look and act in certain normatively defined ways, and held varieties of “women” (along with other non-masculine individuals) to be

varyingly peripheral objects for manly subjectivity to act upon. Building on the insights of Raewyn Connell, however, we can recognise that within these two broad hetero-patriarchal categories (“men” and “women”) there is internal diversity and hierarchy.<sup>304</sup> In this section, I begin to map out the idealised internal hierarchy of Poḷonnaruva’s elite femininities, in order to provide context for Lilāvati’s, Kalyāṇavatī’s, and Candavatī’s respective subversions of that same idealised gender order.

To do so, I rely heavily on the literary and didactic sources available to our historical actors. Such sources are not merely *products* of courtly culture; they were constitutive of it, in that they laid out “norms of behaviour [which] formed important ‘socialising’ or ‘integrating’ mechanisms for the ruling classes of medieval society” (Ali 2004, 8). Genres like courtly poetry and inscriptional eulogies alike reproduce “exemplary” performances of specific social roles, which serve as models for reenactment and reinstatement by living persons—who then, in turn, may create or inspire the production of future creative works. When we turn to the literary and didactic works available to Poḷonnaruva’s monarchs—the works which effectively demonstrate how to be an exemplary monarch—we see an explicit and overwhelming concern with the regulation of gender’s intersection with power: kings embody, and exercise their power through, explicitly “masculine” (*puruṣatvā*) traits, while women appear almost exclusively as objects of heterosexual desire.

Literary theory (*sāhitya-śāstra*, sometimes called *alaṅkāra-śāstra*) enjoined radically different treatments of men (particularly royal men) and women, and so offers us a particularly vivid illustration

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<sup>304</sup> Connell’s own work has focused primarily on the internal diversity within masculinities (see most famously Connell 2005). For an example of Connell’s approach applied to hierarchical femininities, see Schippers (2007).

of kingship's assumed masculinity.<sup>305</sup> This strict division of idealised masculinity and femininity is evident even in the earliest South Asian epic poetry,<sup>306</sup> and was later codified by literary theorists like Daṇḍin and his vernacular adaptors. Even villainous foes, texts like the *Kāvyādarśa* and *Siyabaslakara* tell us, ought to be praised for qualities which explicitly include their virility (*vīrya*):

vaṃśavīryaśrutādīni varṇayitvā ripor api | tajjayān nāyakotkarṣakathanam ca dhinoti naḥ.

And having praised the lineage, virility, learning and so on, *even* of the enemy; because of their victory over that, the narrative of the hero's superiority pleases us (KĀ 1:22).

vas vāra suru gatā vaṇā saturu rajanu du | dinīmen ovunisuru da kiyatnu managani tamā.

Having praised the lineage, virility, and learning of even the enemy king; speaking of the Lord's victory over them captures one's mind (SBL 1:30).

We might note here that the Sinhala adaption frames these as decidedly *kingly* virtues, a deviation from the Sanskrit on which it is modelled. The *rasa* (aesthetic mood) most suited for descriptions of these kings is, appropriately, the *vīra-rasa*, often translated as “the Heroic” but more literally “the Virile” (Hansen 1992, 1). This virility ought to be expressed, our texts tells us, through military conquests, the patronage

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<sup>305</sup> Of course, the social worlds imagined by literary theorists (in Sanskrit or in Sinhala) should not be taken as reflective of historical reality; but by examining the idealised visions of reality they present, we have the opportunity to ask *which* ideals, and of *whom*.

<sup>306</sup> Multiple scholars warn against a simplistic reading of binarized gender in texts like the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* as one-sidedly patriarchal. Sally Goldman (2018) has argued, for example, that the portrayal of feminine “threats” to the masculine gender order of the *Rāmāyana* served an important role in the text's underlying unity. See also Hansen's (1992) important study of women (including literary women) who subverted this gender order to be “seen, and see themselves, not simply as agents, but as *agents of heroic action*” (2, emphasis in original). On binarized depictions of idealised genders in *Buddhist* texts see particularly Wilson (1996), Powers (2009), and the essays in Bryson and Buckelew's (2023) *Buddhist Masculinities*.

of public rituals, and a generous giving of alms—the first two of which activities were generally available only to normative men:

ajitvā sārṇavām urvīm aniṣṭvā vividhair makhaiḥ | adatvā cārtham arthibhyo bhaveyaṃ  
pārthivaḥ katham || ity utsāhaḥ prakṛṣṭātmā tiṣṭhan vīrarasātmanā | rasavattvaṃ girām āsāṃ  
samarthayitum īśvaraḥ.

“Having not conquered the earth with its oceans, having not honoured [the gods] with various sacrifices, and having not given to seekers what they seek—how would I be kingly?”  
Exertion (*utsāha*), being here predominant, standing as the Virile *rasa*, is able to connote the *rasa*-ness of these words (KĀ 2:284–5).

nodānā saha sayuru deraṇa nokārā mahahunan | nopavatvā mahat dan mihipal vanem ma kesē.

“Having not claimed land and sea, having not performed great sacrifices, having not given manifold alms—in what way am I ‘king’?” (SBL 2:277).

We must bear in mind, of course, that these texts were themselves intended only for a very limited audience—poets and literary theorists—and were, moreover, prescriptive rather than descriptive. They were certainly not in any way a passive “reflection” of the actually-existing social order. But by proscribing the gendered ways in which one “ought” to describe kingship—as necessarily “masculine”—they constrain the adequate description of non-masculine sovereignty.

This is evident even in the literary works composed in Līlāvati’s court, and therefore in close proximity to a woman in power. These works, like the near-contemporaneous *Jinālaṅkāra* and *Muvadev Dā Vata*, seem to have been attempts to realise Sanskritic epic poetry in the Sinhala and Pali languages. They take seriously, however, the claim made by the *Siyabaslakara* that

peden budusiritā basin vat siritā | padayutubasin naḷu ā anaturu lakuṇu dakvam.

In verse [should be composed] the deeds (*sirit*, cf. Skt. *carita*) of the Buddha and so on; in prose, religious (*vat*, cf. Skt. *vrata*) deeds and so on; in prose mixed with verse, dramas and so on. I now show the definitions [of each]... (SBL 20).<sup>307</sup>

Only the deeds of the Buddha, in other words, are worthy of poetic treatment; more worldly genres belong to lesser literary forms. As Hallisey (2003) has discussed, such Buddha-centric sentiments were taken seriously in Sri Lankan literary culture (703–5); the works of the Poḷonnaruva period were no exception. We might presuppose that, given the Buddha’s celibate status post-enlightenment, this led to some downplaying of the hetero-patriarchal masculinity so beloved by Sanskrit poets. Instead, Poḷonnaruva’s poets found creative ways to praise the Buddha’s virile masculinity without impugning his vows of celibacy. This is perhaps most evident in the *Jinālaṅkāra*—which focuses on the physical prowess and many consorts of the Buddha pre-enlightenment—and the *Muvadev Dā Vata*, which depicts the Buddha in one of his earlier lives as King Makhadeva, a much more typical poetic protagonist. The poems composed in Līlāvati’s court, meanwhile, focus on less explicitly masculine manifestations of the Buddha, a choice which may be noteworthy in itself.

The *Sasa Dā Vata*’s central tale—the Buddha reborn as a rabbit who gives up his own life so that hungry humans may have a meal—provides few opportunities for the performance of exemplary masculinity. The bulk of the poem therefore consists of the “frame story,” the circumstances under which the Buddha (in his last life) recounted the birth-story of the rabbit (the *Sasa-jātaka*). Here, the Buddha is portrayed in kingly fashion, at the centre of a court of Gods and humans alike (see Chapter 13,

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<sup>307</sup> This verse has no parallel in the *Kāvyālaṅkāra*. The old commentary specifically gives us the Sanskrit translations for each of the key *ēlu* Sinhala terms: *carita* for *sirit*; *vrata* for *vat*; *nāṭaka* for *naḷu* and so on.

“The Buddha’s Assembly” [*budu peḷahara*]). This combination of non-human protagonist and celibate narrator allows little room for the strict gender ideology espoused in our Sanskrit literary manuals.

A similar dynamic is apparent in the *Dāṭhāvamsa*, which present the titular tooth relic—a nominally genderless object—at the apex of the social hierarchy, to which even the most idealised earthy kings must pay homage. In the triumphant finale of the poem, to give an illustrative example, the tooth relic itself is placed in the position of a mighty king proceeding through his city, while the king himself joins the rank and file of the following procession:

laṅkissaro ‘tha sasipaṇḍaravājjiyutte ujjotite rathavare ratanappabhāhi | dhātuṃ  
tilokatilikakassa patitṭhapetvā etaṃ avoca vacanaṃ paṇipātapubbaṃ ||

Then the Lord of Lanka, having placed in a splendid chariot—yoked to moon-white horses and illuminated by the radiance of gems—the Relic of he who was the *tilaka*-mark of the three worlds, knelt and then said this speech:

sambodhiyā iva munissara bodhimaṇḍaṃ gaṇḍambarukkhā iva titthiyamaddanāya |  
dhammañ ca saṃvibhajituṃ migadāyaṃ ajja pūjānurūpam upagaccha sayamaṃ padesaṃ ||

“As [you went] to the *bodhi*-terrace for enlightenment, O Lord of Sages, as to the Gaṇḍamba-tree to tame the *titthiyas* (Skt. *tīrthikas*),<sup>308</sup> and as to Migadāya to preach the *dharma*—go now, yourself, to a place fit for worship (*pūjā*).”

rājā tato samucitācaraṇesu dakkho vissajji phussaratham aṭṭhitasārathiṃ taṃ | pacchā sayamaṃ  
mahatiyā parisāya saddhiṃ pūjāvīsesam asamaṃ agamā karonto ||

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<sup>308</sup> This term is used ubiquitously to refer to followers of any religious tradition (a metaphorical “river-crossing,” *tīrtha*, to a higher state) other than one’s own: a *titthiya* for a Buddhist may be a Śaiva, Jaina, or Vaiṣṇava; a Śaiva would consider Buddhists, Jains, and Vaiṣṇavas alike to be *tīrthikas*, and so on. This is despite the fact that specific *tīrthas* are often sacred sites for several of these traditions, and in some limited contexts *tīrthika* can therefore refer to one who makes a pilgrimage to such an auspicious site (see Apte s.v. *tīrtham*; TL s.v. *tīrttan*).

Then the king, skilled in the appropriate acts, sent forth the excellent chariot (*phussaratha*)<sup>309</sup> without a charioteer; he himself followed behind, accompanied with a great retinue, doing unequalled and excellent worship.

ukkuṭṭhinādavisarena mahājanassa hesāravena viṣaṭena turaṅgamānaṃ | bherīravena mahatā karigajjitena uddāmasāgarasamaṃ nagaraṃ ahosi ||

The city was like a raging sea: with the spreading roar from the shouts of the great crowd; the neigh of horses; the thumping (of drums); and the great thundering of elephants.

āmoditā ubhayavīthigatā kulitthī vātāyanehi kanakābharāṇe khipiṃsu | sabbatthakaṃ kusumavassam avassayiṃsu celāni ceva bhamayiṃsu nijuttamaṅge ||

Delighted noblewomen (*kula-stri*) on both sides of the road threw golden ornaments from the windows, showered down everywhere a rain of flowers, and even twirled clothing above their own heads!

pācīnagopurasamīpam upāgatamhi tasmim rathe jaladhipiṭṭhigateva pote | tuṭṭhā tahiṃ yatigaṇā manujā ca sabbe sampūjayiṃsu vividhehi upāyanehi ||

Once that chariot reached the eastern gate, like a (ship's) captain crossing over water, the delighted groups of renunciants (*yati*) and men (*manujā*) there all worshiped [the relic] with various offerings.

katvā padakkhiṇam atho puram uttarena dvārena so rathavaro bahi nikkhamitvā | ṭhāne mahindamunidhammakathāpavitte aṭṭhāsi titthagamitā iva bhaṇḍanāvā ||

Then the excellent chariot, having circumambulated the city and exited by the north gate, stood—like a merchant-ship arrived in the harbour—in the place sanctified (*pavitra*) by the *dharma*-talk of the Sage Mahinda (DāV 5:53–59).

Here, however, we might note again the strict construction of an idealised gender order in this extract.

This passage seems to evoke the Tamil *ulā* (“procession”) genre of poetry, which was increasingly prevalent from the twelfth century onwards. This genre focuses on the procession of a masculine hero,

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<sup>309</sup> This refers to a special kind of royal chariot which can move on its own volition: PED s.v. *phussa*.

sometimes accompanied by a similarly masculine retinue, through a crowd of women who express erotic desire for that hero; the hero, however, remains impassive and continues on his way.<sup>310</sup> Here, too, we see a clear distinction maintained between the Relic-as-king with its followers, and the female onlookers described in verse 57.<sup>311</sup> It is the former group who are ultimately permitted to pay homage to the Relic when it finally comes to rest at Mihintale; the latter, it seems, are kept at arms' length.

Despite its focus on a nominally genderless object, idealised masculinity is certainly valorised elsewhere in the work. When the *Dāṭhāvamsa* does mention the Buddha himself, as the young prince Siddhartha, it calls him both “greatly strong” and “with a body pleasing in youth” (DāV 1:29).<sup>312</sup> Other kings are praised in the same work for their martial prowess:

karivaram atha disvā so guhādvārayātaṃ paṭibhayarahitatto sīharājā va rājā |  
nijanagarasamīpāyātaṃ etaṃ narindaṃ amitabalamahoghen' ottharanto 'bhiyāyi ||

Then the king (Paṇḍu)—like the king of lions, fearless [even] having seen the greatest of elephants enter the door of his cave—approached that [enemy] king who was approaching his (Paṇḍu's) own city, overwhelming him (the enemy) with the great flood of [his] immeasurable force (DāV 4:2).<sup>313</sup>

And for their pious confidence (P. *saddhā*, Skt. *śraddhā*):<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> See Wentworth (2011, 6–7), noting critiques made in the Introduction.

<sup>311</sup> These women are not said, of course, to express an erotic desire for the Relic. However, they are clearly depicted in a state of heightened emotional response, and described engaged in actions (throwing ornaments and flowers to the procession, twirling items of clothing above their heads) which would be not be out of place in a more explicitly erotic work.

<sup>312</sup> *yathatthasiddhatthakumāranāmako mahabbalo yobbanahāriviggaho...*

<sup>313</sup> The author's own commentary glosses *bala* (more literally “power”) as *sena* (“army”); I have used “force” in my translation above to suggest both meanings.

<sup>314</sup> This is a difficult term to translate without evoking Christian undertones; here I follow Berkwitz (2003, 581).

cārittam etam itare pi pavattayantā te Buddhadāsapamukhā vasudhādhināthā |  
saddhādayādhikaguṇābharaṇābhirāmā taṃ sakkariṃsu bahudhā jinadantadhātuṃ ||

Carrying on this custom, these and other Lords of the Earth—led by Buddhadasa and pleasingly adorned with the extraordinary virtues of faith and generosity—venerated the Relic of the Buddha’s Tooth in many ways (DāV 5:68).

These literary kings, in other words, were praised “not just for the religious virtues he embodies—e.g. generosity, wisdom, loving-kindness, etc., but especially for the beauty of his physical appearance and of his female subjects, which in turn serve as indices to his own attractive form” (Berkwitz 2019b, 65). This reflects a broader practice of reflecting inner virtues through outer beauty in a range of Buddhist texts (Boucher 2008, chap. 1; Mroziak 2006; Powers 2009; cf. Radich 2007, chap. 3).

Literary queens, in contrast, were presented in these texts as dutiful and submissive appendages, intended to further exemplify the glory of their respective kings—and, of course, to provide their husbands with male heirs.<sup>315</sup> In *practice*, of course, this was not necessarily reflective of reality, in which royal consorts were almost certainly engaged in degrees of co-rulership, “as part of a greater symbiosis of power and performance” (Strong 2003, 18).<sup>316</sup> But on the level of *theory*, our (primarily male monastic) literati understood, and therefore depicted, women as mere objects of manly actions and desires. The

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<sup>315</sup> There is a strong parallel here to Doran’s description of Tang harem politics, in which “The virtuous woman is defined as one who rules only in the minority or incapacity of the legitimate male authority and one who places the interests of the Imperial patriline above her own. Appropriate investment in the system includes fulfilment of the roles of both virtuous mother and dutiful wife” (Doran 2016, 54).

<sup>316</sup> See also, on “co-rulership” in medieval Europe, Sjursen (2015; see further the extensive and excellent work of Theresa Earenfight, particularly 2007).

literary theorist Ratnaśrījñāna explains, for example, that we can distinguish the literary ornament *preyas*, platonic affection, from the Erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) *rasa* primarily by the *gender* of the object of affection:

prāk preyasyalaṅkāre prītistuṣṭiḥ puruṣaviṣayā darśitā. yā punariyamanattaram udāhṛtā, sā  
tviyaṃratiḥ strīviṣayānuraktiḥ bhāvaviśeṣaḥ śṛṅgārarasayonis...

In the previous ornament *preyas*, happiness and satisfaction were shown with a man (*puruṣa*) as their object. What is given as the following example is pleasure and passion with a woman (*strī*) as their object: a particular state which is the birthplace of the Erotic *rasa*... (JŚJ on KĀ 2:279).<sup>317</sup>

In the world of high literature, men may be objects of admiration; but only women were to be depicted as objects of sensual desire (see further Pollock 2001, 212). This advice seems to have been heeded well by Poḷonnaruva's poets: compare, for example, the respective introductions of the *Dāṭhāvama*'s co-protagonists, Danta and Hemamālā, who together safely bring the titular tooth-relic to Lanka:

agaṇitamahimass' ujenirañño tanūjo purimavayasi yevāraddhasaddhābhiyogo |  
dasabalatanudhātaṃ pūjituṃ tassa rañño puravaram upayāto dantanāmo kumāro ||

The prince named Danta, son of the infinitely great King Ujjeni, dedicated to pious confidence (*saddhā*) from his youth, approached the city of that king (Guhāsīva of Kāliṅga) to worship the bodily relic of the Ten-Powered One.

guṇajanitapasādaṃ taṃ kaliṅgādhināthaṃ nikhilaguṇanivāso so kumāro karitvā |  
vividhamahavidhānaṃ sādhu sampādayanto avasi sugatadhātuṃ anvahaṃ vandamāno ||

That prince, an abode for all virtues, having made that Lord of Kāliṅga feel the serene satisfaction engendered by virtue,<sup>318</sup> dwelt [there] giving praise in various great ways and daily venerating the Well-Gone's relic.

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<sup>317</sup> Ratnaśrījñāna was certainly born in Lanka, but spent most of his career in Northern India, possibly Kashmir, and his inclusion here as representative of "Lankan" thought could reasonably be challenged (Pollock 2005; Dimitrov 2016; cf. Gornall 2017).

<sup>318</sup> My wording here is closer to the autocommentary's *guṇayen upadavanaladaprasāda āttā koṭa* than to the Pali's *bahubbhi* compound. My translation of *pasāda* as "serene satisfaction" follows Scheible (2016).

abhavi ca guhasīvassāvanīsassa dhītā vikacakuvalayakkhī haṃsakantābhiyātā | vadanajitasarojā  
hāridhammillabhārā kucabharanamitaṅgī hemamālābhidhānā ||

There was a daughter of Guhasīva named Hemamālā, whose eyes were blossoming water-lilies; whose gait was that of the swan-maiden (Śrī); by whose face the lotus was surpassed; who bore lovely braided hair; whose body was laden down by [the weight of her] breasts (DāV 4:7–9).

We might excuse the poet for dwelling on Hemamālā’s hair as foreshadowing the later plot, in which the titular tooth-relic would be hidden in her curls. But no other part of this description was necessitated by the plot, and the stock tropes—which, again, are explicitly theorised as heteronormatively erotic—stand in stark contrast to the pious depiction of her husband-to-be in the preceding paragraphs. Elsewhere royal women are literally reduced to the level of mere decorations: among the many pleasures of kingly life that the Buddha forsake to become an ascetic, the *Jinālaṅkara* tells us that his body was “marked with excellent marks, ornamented with divine ornaments, and resplendent with similar[ly ranked] queens” (JĀ 84).<sup>319</sup> Early second millennium literary works, in other words, tended overwhelmingly to treat royal women as a means for glorifying the Great Men with whom they shared the page.

These literary works illuminate, particularly brightly, the hard distinctions between royal masculinity and royal femininity, and therefore between the social performances expected of royal men and royal women. But this gender distinction was not limited only to the elevated speech of courtly poetry. Rather, as a survey of the period’s inscriptions and wider literature suggests, it marked other ways of speaking about proximity to power. This is particularly apparent when we consider the question of royal titles. While a range of grammatically feminine titles are frequently translated as “queen” in

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<sup>319</sup> sulakkhaṇe h’eva ‘bhilakkhitaṅgo pasādhito devapasāadhanena | virocamaṇo samarājinihi...

modern scholarship, this does not account for the wide valency of that title in modern English.<sup>320</sup> In practice, all of these terms were only ever used in practice to refer to royal *consorts*, not to women ruling in their own right. It seems, in fact, that the conceptual vocabulary for a “queen regnant” was simply not available in Polonnaruva. Moreover, these grammatically feminine titles were deployed in consistent and meaningful ways, even if we cannot always reconstruct the patterns of use. This suggests that they were not interchangeable variants on a universal concept of queenship; they had very specific meanings, which located women firmly within the wider (decidedly hetero-patriarchal) gender order.

To be clear, the women I discuss in this chapter are all very much “elite,” and racial or (writ-large) class hierarchies did not distinguish them.<sup>321</sup> This does not mean, however, that there were no stakes in their own articulations and performances of difference. Such stakes are very apparent when we look to more global studies of queen-consorts. While some polygamous courts were singly-ranked, those in South Asia typically contained strict internal hierarchies of consorts, and

The ranking and etiquette between these women, the introduction of new and junior brides to the household, and the king’s attentions to particular wives, not to mention the other women

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<sup>320</sup> The English language distinguishes between women who exercise royal power—“queens regnant”—from women who are only *associated* with such power by marriage or maternity: “queens consort” married to ruling kings; “queens regent” ruling on behalf of a minor; and “queens dowager” who were the wives of former kings, and who keep the title out of courtesy. “King,” meanwhile, almost always refers to a man exercising royal power, while non-ruling consorts are usually given the lower-ranked title “prince” to clarify their position. Theresa Earenfight (2007) has argued that this language serves to “[call] attention to the presumed anomaly of female political power” in order to “subordinate it” (to male power), and—as is the case for medieval Lanka—“obscures the reality of women’s rule” (1).

<sup>321</sup> It would be highly desirable to extend the analysis of this hierarchy into non-elite women, and so consider the royal household in a far more comprehensive manner than is allowed by a myopic focus on royalty alone. However, there is a lamentable paucity of evidence for the activities and agencies of non-elite women in premodern Sri Lanka. Careful reading of that evidence which *is* available might well offer valuable insights, but this would be a significance undertaking in its own right.

and attendants of these women, were all serious matters, which formed themes not only of numerous courtly dramas, but also the prescriptive literature (Ali 2004, 52).<sup>322</sup>

I suspect that within the walls of early second millennium Sri Lanka's "inner cities" (*antaḥpura*), a similar dynamic took place: a strict hierarchy of consorts was defined by specific titles.

We gain useful insights into this internal hierarchy by examining *śāstric* literature from wider South Asia. Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* does discuss the *antaḥpura*, but is more concerned with ensuring that it be made safe from assassins than with describing the internal politics of its inhabitants. Vātsyāyana's *Kāma-sūtra*, although not specifically directed towards "royal" readership, offers more granularity. It contains distinct chapters on the proper behaviour of a solitary wife (ch. 4.1) and of a wife in a polygynous relationship (4.2), consisting of a single principle wife (*bhāryādhikārikāṃ*) and any number of secondary wives. In this second chapter, Vātsyāyana includes a lengthy discussion of the *antaḥpura* and its inhabitants (4.2.56-62), listed in which order the king ought to attend to them: first the *devīs* ("Ladies," a term discussed further below), further ranked internally according to their familial social status (*arha*);<sup>323</sup> then remarried widows (*punarbhū*); and finally the courtesans (*veśyās*) and performers (*nāṭākīyās*). The influential commentator Yaśodhara suggests that the construction of the palace itself ought to reflect this ranking:

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<sup>322</sup> See, for similar arguments with reference to Southeast and East Asia, Andaya (2006, 189–90); Loos (2005); and McMahon (2013).

<sup>323</sup> The term *devī* first appears in *Kāma-sūtra* 4.2.56; but the suggestion of an internal ranking appears in KS 4.2.59, *āsāṃ yathākālaṃ yathārhaṃ ca sthānamānānuvṛttiḥ saparihāsās ca kathāḥ kuryāt*. The c. twelfth century commentator Yaśodhara specifically relates this *arha* (lit. "worthiness") to the status of the ladies' families (*kula*): *yathārhaṃ ceti yadyasyāḥ kulavayopekṣayā...*

The chambers (*kakṣa*) are described thus: in the centre is the residence of the Ladies (*devīs*); then, in an exterior chamber, [the residence] of the widows; then, exterior [again], of the courtesans; and further then of the performers (*Jayamaṅgala* of Yaśodhara, 4.2.62).<sup>324</sup>

These women were all, presumably, considered to be members of the Inner City, but were internally distinguished between those from noble families (*kulas*), who were regarded as “Ladies,” and those who were not so loftily born: courtesans and performers. Class and kinship ties, in other words, seem to have been key orientations in the gender order of the *Kāma-sūtra*.

This scheme does not map neatly onto twelfth century Sri Lanka. However, it does provide us with a useful point of departure, from which to more carefully consider the specific titles deployed in Lankan texts and inscriptions from the period, and their various interrelationships. We have at least one reference to *antahpura-stri* (“woman of the Inner City”) in an inscription of Niśśaṅka Malla (IC VI:53). This suggests that Niśśaṅka Malla, at minimum, was aware of the norms of the *śāstric* world, as represented by texts like the *Kāma-sūtra*. Given the evidence that other *śāstras* were also circulating in Lanka at that time (Pathmanathan 1982, 123), we might reasonably assume that Niśśaṅka Malla was not alone in his engagement with *śāstric* norms, and that these informed the construction of a more localised gender order.

The lowest-ranked status in this hierarchy, I suspect, was the rank of *kāminī* (“[woman] of pleasure”). This term appears in some commentaries of Buddhaghosa; but in the post-Buddhaghosan world the only witness I have identified is in the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa*, composed under Līlāvati’s patronage, in a

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<sup>324</sup> yathoktakakṣāṇṭi [sic] madhye devīnāṃ sthānam | tato vahiḥkakṣe punarbhuvām | tato vahirveśyānām | tato ‘pi nātākīyānāmiti.

passage describing King Kittisirimegha at leisure in the royal park (DāV 5:10).<sup>325</sup> We might be tempted to take *kāminī* here as synonymous with *antaḥpura-strī* as a whole, referring to all the royal women. The auto-commentary glosses *kāminī* as *pura-strī*, “city-women,” which *could* be taken as a reference to the *antaḥpura*. Alternatively, *pura-strī* can refer euphemistically to prostitutes (see Monier-Williams, s.v. *pura*). We might therefore prefer to interpret this group as analogous to the *veśyā*, “courtesans,” described in the *Kāma-sūtra*: inmates of the Inner City, yes, but of a decidedly lower rank, and in Yaśodhara’s ideal architectural scheme segmented off from consorts proper. However, other texts from the period use similar terms (such as *pura-yōna*, in MDV 12, 13, 20, and 26) to refer to women in buildings around the city, with no explicit sexual connotation. Without a wider range of witnesses it is impossible to judge.

*Devī* (or more frequently *mahādevī*) seems to have the widest range of reference throughout medieval South Asia, analogous perhaps to the generic “Lady” in medieval Europe. As in the *Kāma-sūtra*, it certainly could refer to royal consorts in Sri Lanka. We have already seen in Chapter Three the title *mahādevī* used by Sundarā, the consort of Jayabāhu I and mother of Gajabāhu II. The title is also applied to Niśsaṅka Malla’s two consorts Kāliṅga Subhadra (IC VI:24; 25) and (pre-coronation) Kalyāṇavatī (IC VI:24; 25; 57); and to the mothers of both Niśsaṅka Malla (IC VI:24; 25; 52) and Sāhassa Malla (IC VI:94). In literary works, *devī* is applied to the Buddha’s mother Mahāmāyā, a queen consort (in, e.g., *Amāvatura*,

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<sup>325</sup> *rājā vasantasamaye sahakāminīhi uyyānakeḷisukham ekadine ‘nubhonto | āgacchamābam atha tattha sudūrato va taṃ vippasannamukhavaṇṇam appasi bhikkhuṃ.*

135),<sup>326</sup> and wife Yaśodhara, a princess whose husband never ascended the throne (in, e.g., JĀ 47). The title seems to have applied, however, beyond the immediate family of the monarch. Sāhassa Malla, for example, granted the title *mahādevī* to the mother of his minister, Duttati Abonavan, in recognition of the latter’s assistance in his taking the throne (IC VI:94). It seems, therefore, that this title (*mahā*)*devī* served to signal higher, perhaps “noble,” status, regardless of one’s direct connection to royalty. We should note, however, that no Poḷonnaruva-period sources refer to Kalyāṇavatī as *mahādevī* after she attains sovereignty in 1202.

More frequent in both inscriptions and literature, but with what seems to be a more restricted sense, is the Sinhala title *bisō*. We have seen, in the preceding chapter, that Niśśaṅka Malla included *bisōs* in his ideal line of succession: this is, presumably, the logic under which Līlāvatī and, later, Niśśaṅka Malla’s own consort Kalyāṇavatī took to the throne.<sup>327</sup> Presumably thinking of the male-preference primogeniture inheritance of later medieval Europe—in which the *daughters* of monarchs may inherit, if they have no living brothers—the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* offer us the translation “princesses” for *bisōs*. This is, I think, a poor translation. We know of other terms for royal daughters,<sup>328</sup> which are never invoked in Niśśaṅka Malla’s succession discussions. Many texts and inscriptions of the period refer to royal consorts,

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<sup>326</sup> The *Amāvatura* is particularly noteworthy here because of its emphatically non-Sanskritic literary Sinhala, which makes it clear that the *devī* was not only sensible in Sanskrit or Sanskrit-inflected Sinhala. On *Amāvatura*’s deliberate rejection of Sanskritisation see Hallisey (1992) and Liyanage (2004). Elsewhere the *Amāvatura* also refers to Mahāmāyā by the title *devrājana* (8), an interesting hybrid of *devī* and *rājñī*.

<sup>327</sup> To be clear, I am not suggesting here that the rules of succession as laid out in Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscription were accepted as normative, or even that Līlāvatī and Kalyāṇavatī necessarily invoked his inscriptions long after his death in support of their own claims. Indeed, if they were generally accepted then he would have had little need to state them so emphatically in his inscription!

<sup>328</sup> Such as *kanyā* (P. *kaññā*, Sin. *kanyāva*: see, e.g., DāV 4:51; VAP I:305), or Sin. *rajaduva* (see, e.g., DāV *sannaya* 1:6).

including both Līlāvātī and Kalyāṇavatī, by the title *bisō*.<sup>329</sup> We might suggest that these women were, once, royal daughters (and so “princesses”). However, the etymology of this title is likely from Skt. *abhiṣikta*, “anointed”—the same term used in royal consecrations—suggesting that women were not *bisōs* as a result of the circumstances of their birth; rather, some ceremony of anointment served to make them into *bisōs*, specially consecrated consorts of the monarch.

The most obvious contender for the translation “queen” is *rājñī*, the grammatically feminine “equivalent” to the masculine *rājan*. The cognate *rājana* is most commonly used in modern Sinhala to refer to queens regnant both modern and historical (e.g. “Elizabeth II *rājana*”). But it appears relatively infrequently in either literary works or inscriptions of the Poḷonnaruva period, and is not associated with either of Līlāvātī or Kalyāṇavatī. In fact, one of its very few attestations is by Candavatī, in the inscription discussed in more detail below.

The apex position appears to belong instead, most frequently, to the title *mahiṣī* (P. *mahiṣī*, Sin. *mehesun*). Indeed, Dhammakitti’s autocommentary on the *Dāṭhāvamsa* glosses this title (as used by the Buddha’s biological mother Mahāmāyā) as the foremost (*agra*) *bisōva* (DāV *sannaya* on 1:26).<sup>330</sup> And even among the *mahiṣī*, there was yet another hierarchy: the *primary* consort of a given king was designated in

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<sup>329</sup> To give another example, the mother of the notorious Prince Ajātaśatru is repeatedly called *biso* or even *mavbiso* (mother-*biso*) in the *Amāvatura*’s discussion of his conception and birth, after which point she is never again mentioned in the narrative (*Amāvatura*, 112–13).

<sup>330</sup> Interestingly, Dhammakitti here calls her Mahāmāyādeviyan; she receives a trifecta of noble titles (*mahiṣī*, *agra-bisōva*, and *devī*) in a single gloss.

turn his *agra-mahiṣī*.<sup>331</sup> Notably, even this apex-of-apices title was nearly ubiquitously accompanied by the name of the *mahiṣī*'s husband—the *mahiṣī* of suchandsuch—even after that husband had long since passed away. This is true even of Līlāvātī, who used her dowager title in some of her inscriptions even once installed on the throne herself (IC VI:92; 93). This means that even the most exalted grammatically feminine title did not—perhaps *could not*—convey regnancy. It conveyed only a hetero-patriarchal relation to one's husband. To put it another way; there was no conceptual vocabulary available to describe a “queen regnant,” only a “queen consort.”

This should immediately suggest a historical problematic. If sovereignty was conceived by many (or, at least, by certain prominent monastic scholars and male monarchs) in early second millennium Lanka to be essentially “masculine,” we ought to wonder how a “female sovereign” was described. The titles we typically translate as “queen” referred in practice only to consorts of the male king, and so could not express regnancy. Poḷonnaruva's two female monarch—Līlāvātī and Kalyāṇavatī—therefore seemed

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<sup>331</sup> Even in courts with (presumably) multiple *mahiṣī*, the *agra-mahiṣī* could sometimes still be synecdochally represented by the more general title. We see this most clearly in the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini*, a commentary on the much earlier *Mahāvamsa*. The *Mahāvamsa* lists (in 2:16–22) several ancestors of the Buddha, including female ancestors: Kaccānā, the *mahiṣī* of Sīhahanu; Yasodhara, the *mahiṣī* of Añjanasakka; Amitā, the *mahiṣī* of Suppabuddha Sakka; and, finally, Māyā (the Buddha's own biological mother) and Prajāpatī (the Buddha's adoptive mother after Māyā's death). *Mahāvamsa* refers to these latter two collectively as the *Suddhodana-mahiṣīs*, after the Buddha's father. For all but the latter two, the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini* glosses *mahiṣī* as *agra-mahiṣī*.

A representative extract is the discussion of *Mahāvamsa* 2:18's *mahesī sā Yasodharā*: “The meaning is that she, Yaśodharā, the younger sister of King Devadahasakka, was the *agra-mahiṣī* of Añjanasakka in the city of Devadaha” (*sā sīhahanussa rañño kaṇiṭṭhabhagini* [sic.] *yasodharā devadahamhi nagare añjanasakkassa aggamahesī ahoṣi ti attho*) (VAP I:135). Presumably the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini*'s author understands the *Mahāvamsa*'s mention of only a single *mahiṣī* to indicate that they were the primary (if not the only) *mahiṣī*. The Buddha's mothers, however, receive no gloss at all. This may have been because the *Vaṃsatthappakāsini*'s author could not distinguish which, if either, was Suddhodana's “primary” consort; or, perhaps, to reflect that the “primary” title may have shifted hands after Mahāmāyā's death.

to operate in a conceptual limbo: neither masculine enough, according to the near-ubiquitous discourse of kingship’s masculinity, to be called “king” (*rājan*); nor adequately described by the many feminine consortial titles discussed above.<sup>332</sup> In the following sections, we turn to the varied solutions offered, across the four reigns of these two women and in multiple media, for the apparent conceptual lacuna of female regnancy.

## Female Regnancy Viewed from Below

Having reigned for six years,<sup>333</sup> Kalyāṇavatī is the second longest-ruling monarch of the post-Parākramabāhu era (after her husband Niśsaṅka Malla’s nine years). Yet, despite this, she seems to have left behind no inscriptions recording her own acts.<sup>334</sup> 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?)

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<sup>332</sup> This limbo was hardly unique to Lanka: see particularly Talbot (1995), discussed further below.

<sup>333</sup> *Pace* PV, 784; cf. MV 80:34, which gives us instead six months.

<sup>334</sup> A possible exception is the highly defaced IC VI: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.

treasury official 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 Kalyāṇavatī’s reign. Localised rulers appear to have taken advantage of both official positions and family ties to operated 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 Kalyāṇavatī. The vital difference, however, is that—for the reasons outlined in the preceding section—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 VI:97), which documents the repairs to that reservoir and donations to a nearby *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 Māyā country (*raṭa*) suggests a more local jurisdiction. Also visible in this section is the name Lakvijaya Ābo Siṅgu, a key political figure in

Kalyāṇavatī's court.<sup>335</sup> Ābo was the general (*senevi*) who, according to the later *Pūjāvaliya* (784, in which he is called Eḷalu Ābo) and *Mahāvamsa* (80:33-41, in which he is called Āyasmanta, Skt. Āyusmat)<sup>336</sup> had earlier deposed Sāhasa Malla and placed Kalyāṇavatī on the throne. The earliest reference to this general comes, ironically, in an inscription of Sāhasa Malla, in which he is granted the titles of general (*senevirat*) and chief minister (*agramantri*, IC VI:94, b46-47), along with “villages, followers, and all [kinds of] wealth” in perpetuity (IC VI:94, b51-53).<sup>337</sup> 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.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Modern scholars have long conflated Lakvijaya Siṅgu Ābo with a number of other similarly-named figures: see Wickramasinghe (EZ II, 101, 191 and 221), Geiger and Bode (1953, 2:130n2), Parnavitana (EZ IV, 75), and Ranawella, who copies Parnavitana's argument verbatim (IC VI, 228). This includes a *laṃkādhikāra* mentioned earlier in the same inscription IC VI:94 discussed below, named Lolupālākuḷu Dūttāṭi Ābo, on the basis that they share a personal name and that both were rewarded for their loyalty to Sāhasa Malla; the Lakvijaya *senevi* Tāvuru mentioned in inscriptions of Niśsaṅka Malla (IC VI:24, b15); and/or the chief minister of Līlāvati's first reign variously called Lagvijaya Siṅgu Kit *senevi* (IC VI:91), Kit *senevi* (SDV 12), or Kitti *senānātha* (MV 80:30). If we were to accept that all of these were, in fact, the same man, it would seem that he was behind nearly every single *coup d'état* in the second half of the twelfth century; even some, as Liyanagamage (1963, 142) points out, which removed monarchs he himself had previously placed on the throne. 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.

<sup>336</sup> Sin. *ābō* is generally accepted to be cognate with Skt. *āyusmat*; see ŚŚŚ, s.v. *ābō*.

<sup>337</sup> ...hirasanda pamunu koṭṭa lakvijaya siṅgu senevi ābonāvanṭa dī vadāḷa gamvara hā pirivāra hā siyalusampattiyāta...

<sup>338</sup> 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 IV, 76). Following my argument above that we ought to take personal names seriously, I am inclined to assume that this was a relative or ancestor of Lakvijaya Ābo.

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). To more accurately represent the fragmentary nature of the extant text, I render it here with Ranawella's critical paraphenalia:

... [tri]siṃhaḷayehi eksātrajasiri pā(miṇi)... (abhā salame)van kalyāṇavatī pasvannehi...

...in the fifth year [of] Abhā Salamevan Kalyāṇavatī... [who was] established in the royal splendour of a single parasol in the *trisiṃhala*... (IC VI:97, 1-2).

While Cūdāmaṇi may, on a more pragmatic level, have been subordinate to the economic and political status of Kalyāṇavatī's chief minister Lakvijaya Ābo, 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 Anurādhapura Ruvanvālisāya, this inscription marks a private donation by

...sirisaṅgabo prākkramabāhu cakravartti suvāmin vānse ātuḷu vu rajadaruvange bhaṅḍāra paripālanaya koṭā ratnatrayehi adhikappasāda āti śar[d]dhābuddhigūṇen samanvita rājappasādarāsīn virājamāta vu bhaṅḍārapotā pīrvatubimi vijayānāvan hā mekuṅge ambu sumedhādevīn hā mekuṅge bāṇa laṃkā adhikāra toṭadanavu devalnāvan hā tundenā...

...three people: the treasury administrator Pīrvatubimi Vijayānāvan, who has administered the treasury of kings including Sirisaṅgabo Prākkramabāhu *cakravartti*,<sup>339</sup> experienced an

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<sup>339</sup> This monarch must have been either Parākkramabāhu I or Niśśaṅka Malla, as both used this same *viruda*. I am inclined to think the latter, as he more frequently referred to himself by the title *cakravartin*.

extraordinary degree of serene satisfaction (*prasāda*)<sup>340</sup> 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*);<sup>341</sup> and his wife (*ambu*), the Lady Sumedhā; and his nephew (*bāṇa*), the *laṅkādhikāra* Toṭadanavu Devalnāvan... (IC VI:96, 1-4).

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 Ruvanvālisāya a truly staggering array of offerings, inspired (so the inscription tells us) by their

...āgamadhara no ek paṅditavarayangen ruvanmāli suvāmiṅṭa duṭugāmuṇu ādi vū no ek rajadaruvan visin karanalada pūjāviśeṣa asā prasāda paravaśa vā anun hā asādhāraṇa vū pūjāviśeṣayak kaḷa mānāvā yi.

...having heard, from various pandits who knew scripture (*āgama*), [about] the types of *pūjā* offered to the Ruvanmāli *svāmi* by various kings beginning with Duṭugāmuṇu, [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 VI:96, 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

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<sup>340</sup> Although the inscription uses the Sanskritic *prasāsa* instead of Pali *pasāda*, the context makes it clear that the latter sense is intended; I therefore translate it (as above) following Scheible’s “serene satisfaction.”

<sup>341</sup> Here, however, the Sanskrit sense of *prasāda* as “favour, kindness” makes more sense to me in context. This is a useful reminder about the multivalence of these loanwords, even when they appear in the same form and just a few clauses apart in the same text.

motivated by a powerful emotive response to Buddhist literature, particularly the *Thūpavaṃsa*. 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 *suvaṃin vahanse*” (IC VI:96, 1). Even in an inscription which seems to aim to rival kings in largess, the overarching 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—could also be considered to be at least symbolically subordinate to Kalyāṇavatī, located somewhere in what Inden (1981) would call a single “hierarchy of kingship.” The same cannot be said for our third figure, Malevi Bhūma (read by Parnavitana as Bhāma), who attributes to himself what seems to be a pseudo-royal title (*senādhirāja*, “king over the army” or, more simply, “warlord”). While Inden’s model does allow for subordinate kings with varying degrees of autonomy from their nominal overlords, we might still benefit from a yet-further-nuanced account of power relations between highly independent local rulers who acknowledged only tenuous connections to distant “superiors.” Here we might turn to Biedermann’s (2009) “Matrioshka principal,” developed to better explain the relationship between Kotte and Portugal in the sixteenth century. In this model,

...the overlord defined his authority according to a principle of non-intrusive suzerainty rather than one of expanding sovereignty. Power relations were, in both cases, based on the logic of indirect control, materialized in relations of vassalage implying periodic acts of symbolic submission and tributary payments, rather than an extensive involvement of the overlord in his vassals’ local affairs. Within the theoretical realm of the Empire of Kotte, yet outside the boundaries of the kingdom *stricto sensu*, a number of smaller polities remained intact, boasting “kings” (*rajas, reis*) of their own. In a way, these were the smallest units of the Matrioshka set: the little dolls that won’t pop open to reveal any smaller ones inside (277).

Bhūma may well have been an earlier example of this smallest Matrioshka; a relatively autonomous local ruler, claiming “royal” status with regard to a closely defined geographic area, but who nonetheless acknowledged some degree of (semi-symbolic) overlordship from Poḷonnaruva itself.<sup>342</sup> Certainly, Bhūma’s sole extant inscription models 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 Anurādhapurān kings (discussed in Chapter One). Alongside his rather royal title *senādhirāja*, lit. “over-king of the army,” we are told that he was

...sirikatata uvindu van lipikataṭa bambahu van paḷatedaṭa hiruhu van somilesaṭa sisiḥu van malevikulatilakāyamāna mahapinsara bhūma senādhirājayo...

...like (*van*) Uvindu (Skt. Upendra, a name for Viṣṇu) to the goddess Śrī; like Brahma to the goddess of writing (Sarasvatī); like the sun for manifest *tejas*; like the moon for gentleness; as unto a *tilaka*-mark for the Malevi family... (IC VI:100, 15-19).

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.

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<sup>342</sup> On the growing significance of such local leaders in a slightly later period, see Friedrich’s (2020) study of “local and regional dynamism in the island’s southwest between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries... [which] transpired below the formal apparatus of the state: in localities like merchant *nagarams*, extended royal households, temple management agencies, caste sodalities, and fortified marketplaces” (41).

The inscription opens by dating itself with reference to Kalyāṇavatī's eighth regnal year.<sup>343</sup> This dating in itself is noteworthy: Kalyāṇavatī is only known to have ruled for six years, between c. 1202 and 1208. It seems then that not only were Kalyāṇavatī's regnal years used to date the inscriptions of more local rulers; this continued even after her death, into the short reigns of Dharmāśoka (r. c. 1208-1209), Āṇiyaṅga/Anikaṅga (r. fourteen days in c. 1209), and possibly even Līlavatī (in her second reign of c. 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.<sup>344</sup> This list includes both Līlavatī 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, *pace* the *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvaliya*, briefly occupied the throne between Kalyāṇavatī and the second reign of Līlavatī; 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

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<sup>343</sup> 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 latter point.

<sup>344</sup> ...etān paṭan śrī parākramabāhu svāmīṅṭa visivanu dakvā pāvātā obin tudus avuruddak hanumbehi rajakaḷa kīrttivijayabāhu niśṣaṅka erapatta coḍagaṅga līlavatī sāhasamalla kalyāṇavatī... (IC VI:100, 33-37).

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 seem to represent something of a genealogical claim on Kalyāṇavatī's behalf, positioning her within a prestigious succession (*parampara*) of kingly predecessors:

śrī śākyakulatilaka vū apa gautama sambuduradun vahanse laṃkadvīpayāṭa tungamayak vāḍā ākāśagaṅgāva se atipavitra vū mahavāliḡaṃ terā miyaṅguṇumāsāya pīṭuvā siyaluyakṣabhaya duru koṭā vadāla kalhi daṃbadiva ajāsāt rajahaṭa aṭavanu vesagā pura pasaloṣvakā avut laṃkadvīpayehi manuṣyāvāsa koṭā rajakaḷa vijaya rājakumārāyan paṭan suḷuvasā mahavasā bohorājaparamparāyehi sirilak 'hi agatān pat abhāsalamēvan kalyāṇavatī svāmīn vahanseṭa aṭavanne...

In the eighth year<sup>345</sup> of Abhā Salamevan Kalyāṇavatī svāmīn vahanse, who attained the highest position (*aga-tāna*, Skt. *agra-sthāna*) 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 Laṅkā, [after] having arrived [in Lanka] on the fifteenth [day] of the bright fortnight in [the month] Vesaga in the eighth year of King Ajāsāt (Ajātaśatru) of Daṃbadiva (Jambudvīpa); after Our Perfectly Awakened Gautama vahanse, a *tilaka*-mark in the Śākyā family, having thrice visited the Island of Laṅkā; having established the great shrine (*māsāya*, Skt. *mahācaitya*) of Miyaṅguṇu on the banks of the Mahavāli, which was as sanctified<sup>346</sup> as the Celestial River; [and] removed all fear of *yakṣas*... (IC VI:100, 1-12).

Together, these two extracts of the inscription seem to position Kalyāṇavatī firmly within the legitimate succession of Lankan kings, in a genealogy stretching back to Vijaya himself. Once again, however, we

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<sup>345</sup> For clarity in the English, I have translated this inscription in reverse clausal order.

<sup>346</sup> Taking *ati* comparatively rather than superlatively, to make the English read more smoothly.

again 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 idealised 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 outlined in the first section of this chapter, the entire conceptual vocabulary of sovereignty in Lanka was masculine-coded; with this repertoire, powerful men could clearly communicate to one another their own positions in a single “hierarchy of masculinity” (Connell 2005) with the king at the apex. With Kalyāṇavatī in that “highest position,” atop the hierarchy, alternative vocabularies were necessary; creative re-mappings of the gender order.

## **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—seem to have generally avoided *explicit* acknowledgement of Līlāvati’s status as a monarch. Second, those works composed under her patronage do, however, seem to leave open the interpretive possibility of Līlāvati’s “kingship.” Like the inscriptions of Kalyāṇavatī’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 “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 more directly identified herself as a “king” than literary sources, bound by strict aesthetic norms, were willing to admit.

These literary sources seem to have 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 *Dāṭhāvamsa* and *Sasa Dā Vata*. Both texts emphasise above all Līlāvati’s consortial status, linking her to her then-deceased husband Parākramabāhu, in order to maintain the conventions of idealised royal femininity we have seen evident in other literary works. 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.”

The *Sasa Dā Vata*, the earlier work composed in Līlāvati's first court, represented one of the first attempts to fulfil the *Siyabaslakara*'s literary vision. We should not be surprised, therefore, that its opening discussion on poetry's reliance on good kingship so faithfully follows the latter text's gendered dynamics:

bāñdum da e niyenesuveneda desā danasirin | e siri guṇa nuvaṇa āti māti yut rajak'hu belen ||

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.

e bävin met sara nuvaṇāsa siṭi lō vāṭum | sahadat soḷi gajamuḷu daḷadap sun kesaravan ||  
himikulabañda adara niti situmiṇev raknā | rāvan pākula keheḷi agamāti kit senevi yut ||

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,<sup>347</sup> forever protecting the wish-gem,<sup>348</sup> a flag of the Ruvanpā family...

hudu pas guṇabaraṇa rivi sañda kula mudun mal | pasak Sirikata vilasin muḷu lō mana nuvan  
gat || kaḷa lōsasun vāḍa līlāvati himi sañda | pala kaḷa daham rajasiri mevāṭumhi piṭubala vī.

...[was] Lord (*himi sañda*) Līlāvati, who was ornamented only by virtue, [a veritable crown of] flowers crowning the solar and lunar families, appearing in the manner of lovely Śrī, attracting

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<sup>347</sup> An undated commentary in the British Library archives (Or.661[95]) offers two glosses for *himikulabañda adara*: either “adoration connected to the ruling family” (*svāmikulayehi bañda vu ādaraya*) or (*hevat*) even “firm devotion to the royal family” (*rajakulayehi driḍa* [read *diḍa*] *vū bhaktiya*). In either reading, it seems to emphasise 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).

<sup>348</sup> A symbol of sovereignty.

the minds and eyes of the entire world, who furthered the world and the *śasana* (*śāsana*), by whose *daham-raja* splendour (Skt. *dharmarājaśrī*)<sup>349</sup> this work was made possible (SDV, 10–14).

Here it is Kit Senevit, Līlāvati’s chief minister, who seems to embody the Virile mood through 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 virile kings. Notably, unlike the later *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* and yet-later-still *Mahāvaṃsa*, 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*).

Above all, these verses say little about Līlāvati’s status as a monarch. She is given the honorific title *svāmin* (Sin. *himi*), which is certainly noteworthy. In Sanskrit this is a grammatically masculine title, which can even have the sense of “husband” in *Dharmaśāstric* literature.<sup>350</sup> 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 glosses Sinhala *himi* as Sanskrit *svāmin* and moves on (although see further

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<sup>349</sup> I have elsewhere translated this as “*dharmarājaśrī* and royal splendour” (Shirley 2024). But both of the undated, but premodern, commentaries in the British Library seem to take this as a compound. Or.661(95) glosses it as *dharmmarājaśrī*; Or.6604(109) does not provide a gloss for all individual words in this verse. Both conclude their commentary on this verse by dating the composition of the original poem to “When Śrī Rāja Līlāvati *svāmin vahansē* was ruling, [in accordance] with with the ten *rājadharmas*” (*śrī rāja līlāvati svāmin vahansē dasarājadharmmayen rājīyaya karaṇa kalhi*). I expand more on this title “Śrī Rāja Līlāvati” below.

<sup>350</sup> See, e.g., *Āpastamba Dharmaśāstra* 2.10.26.24, in which *svāmis* are the legal guardians (fathers?) of unmarried women; but cf. 2.2.4.13, in which *svāmin* (in dual) refers to a husband *and* his wife; and 2.10.28.6-7, in which *svāmin* (in plural) seems to refer to owners of cattle without a *necessarily* gendered connotation.

discussion of these commentaries below). Overall, the image we are presented is consonant with that of the later *Mahāvamsa*: the elaborate praise we would expect for a king—the Virile *rasa*—is directed towards Līlāvati’s general/minister, while she herself is described in femininised language we do not see elsewhere associated with sovereignty.

Similar dynamics are at play in Dhammakitti’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:

sudhāmayūkhāmalapaṇḍuvaṃsajaṃ virūḷhasaddhaṃ munirājāsāsane |  
 piyaṃvadaṃ nītipathānuvattinaṃ sadā pajānaṃ janikaṃ va mātaraṃ ||  
 piyaṃ parakkantibhujassa rājino mahesim accunnatabuddhisampadaṃ |  
 vidhāya līlāvatiṃ icchitatthadaṃ asesalaṅkāṭalarajjalakkhiyaṃ ||

Having appointed<sup>351</sup> 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;<sup>352</sup> following the path of statecraft (*nīti*); always like a mother, a parent, to beings;<sup>353</sup> the beloved *mahesī* of King 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... (DāV 1:5–6).

Līlāvati is certainly generously eulogised, but in explicitly femininized terms: she is maternal, she is a beloved wife, of impeccable stock... She is praised as being particularly intelligent and well-versed in *nīti*—

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<sup>351</sup> Here I follow the autocommentary’s *piṭṭuvā*, “caused to be established.”

<sup>352</sup> Some components in this verse appear to be conceptually related to one another. In his auto-commentary, however, Dhammakitti seems to closely follow the order given here, and indicates no other relationships between Līlāvati’s various qualities.

<sup>353</sup> The auto-commentary gives us *satvayan* (cf. Skt. *sattva*), “living beings.” In context I interpret this as meaning “to all living beings.”

both indications, perhaps, that the real-life Līlāvātī was a far more skilful political operator than the Pali *vaṃsas* might otherwise want to suggest. But, once again, she is associated with no regnal epithet.<sup>354</sup> We do see *mahiṣī*, but this is again qualified by her husband’s name and (kingly) title in the possessive: she was still, above all, a consort. In his auto-commentary, Dhammakitti additionally calls her a *rajaduva*, a “royal daughter” or princess (DāV *sannaya* on 1:6). This isn’t inaccurate—her noble birth is emphasised both here and in Līlāvātī’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.

These words both refrain, in other words, from explicitly acknowledging Līlāvātī as “king,” emphasising 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 *Sasa Dā Vata* quoted above:

Literary works are brought about by that [previously mentioned] wisdom, [and] by the prosperity of a realm made comfortable. 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, forever protecting the wish-gem, a flag of the Ruvanpā family—was Lord Līlāvātī, who was ornamented only by virtue, [a veritable crown of] flowers crowning the solar and lunar families, appearing in the manner of lovely Śrī, attracting the minds and eyes of the entire world, who furthered the world and the *sasun*, by whose splendour of *daham-rajā* this work was made possible (SDV, 10–14).

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<sup>354</sup> Cf. the translations of this verse in Coomāra Swāmy (1874, 24) and Gornall (2020, 171), which both insert a “Queen” title before her name.

The implication, it seems to me, is that these two represent, respectively, the king and the minister(s) who together establish the conditions in which literari 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 stark 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 *trisimhala* [due to] the absence of a Lord of Men” (DāV 1:8).<sup>355</sup> “Lord of Men,” a common title for kings is, significantly, grammatically masculine.<sup>356</sup> Who was it who claimed this title, and so dispelled the unfortunate absence? It could not have 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 Dhammakitti 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. This will not be particularly

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<sup>355</sup> *narindasuññaṃ suciran tisīhalaṃ itippatītaṃ ayasaṃ apānudi...*

<sup>356</sup> For witnesses of “Lord of Men” (Sin. *niriñdu*) see, e.g., the entirety of the *Muvadev Dāvata*’s “Chapter on Kings,” in which only six verses (34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 46) do not use some variant of the epithet. Among those six, only verse 37 does not use one of the similarly gendered epithets “Best of Men” (*naravara*), “Elephant among Men” (*naravaraṇa*), or “Ultimate Man” (*naraturu*).

surprising to those familiar with more global patterns of female regnancy, and with what Nolan (2009) calls the difficulties of “...reading women's lives, especially powerful women's lives, through the words of suspicious male monastics, [which] requires careful sorting through the biases and motivations of the author” (13). She urges us instead to look to the “visual imagery of queenship” evident in her subjects’ material products, which often reveal “...a dialogue between the calculated use of male emblems of authority and the assertive, even subversive employment of these emblems in a recognisably female sigillographic format” (163). Following Nolan’s lead, I argue that an alternative politics of gender is evident in Līlāvati’s inscriptions and coins, media over which she had perhaps more direct control, than we can perceive than by relying on our standard textual sources alone. Without explicitly transgressing her nominal femininity, she draws on tropes of kingly masculinity, including claims to the title *rājan*.

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 stylised introductory section for Līlāvati:

siribara okāvas rajparapurehi mundun māli visal guṇageṇen duḷu siyalu kalā tera pāmiṇi abhā  
 salamevan līlāvati svāmin vahanse taman vahanse paramparāyāta trisimhalarajaya dhāmin  
 semin pāmiṇā ekātapatra koṭā prajñāvikramabhaktisampanna amātya maṇḍala āti koṭā  
 svamaṇḍalaya paramaṇḍalāyen nirupadrava koṭā loka śāsana semehi tabā  
 dasarājadharmmayen raja karana seyek...

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 Triple 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 royal *dharmas*... (IC VI:90, 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 emphasises 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 inscriptional 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 VI: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 thereto only been used by normatively male kings.<sup>357</sup> We should caveat the significance of this name-adoption: "Abhā Salamevan" is never witnessed apart from the natal name "Līlāvati," while "Līlāvati" is witnessed, with great frequency, independent. This is not, therefore, an outright rejection of femininity in favour of exclusive masculinity.<sup>358</sup> It is, nonetheless, a clear indication of some negotiation of her identity as simultaneously feminine ("Līlāvati") and kingly ("Abhā Salamevan"). And we have good reason to believe that this adoption of a masculine *viruda* was accepted

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<sup>357</sup> Kalyāṇavatī would later adopt the same *viruda*: see IC VI:98.

<sup>358</sup> 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 (2021, Appendix s.v. "names").

even by Līlāvati’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 Śalameghavarṇa) and Siri Saṅghabō (Śrī Saṅghabodhi).<sup>359</sup> The Poḷonnaruva period’s frequent usurpations and short reigns disrupted this pattern considerably, leaving long gaps without a monarch in a position to claim the next *viruda* in sequence (see Table 6.1).<sup>360</sup> But—if we assume that both Jayabāhu I and Vijayabāhu II continued the sequence by taking the regnal name Abhā Salamēvan<sup>361</sup>—it is evident that no monarch *broke* the sequence, by repeating the *viruda* name of their immediate predecessor out of turn.

**Table 6.1: alternating *viruda* titles, c. 1070–1211**

| Monarch                             | Regnal dates                        | <i>Viruda</i> title                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Vijayabāhu I                        | 1070-1110                           | Siri Saṅghabo   |
| Jayabāhu I                          | 1110-1111                           | [no inscriptions extant, but presumably Abhā Salamevan] |
| <b>...interregnum 1111-1153...</b>  |                                     |   |
| Parākramabāhu I                     | 1153-1186                           | Śrī Saṅghabodhi   |
| Vijayabāhu II                       | 1186-1187                           | [no inscriptions extant, but presumably Abhā Salamevan] |
| Niśsaṅka Malla                      | 1187-1196                           | Siri Saṅghabo   |
| <b>...short reigns 1196-1197...</b> |                                     |   |
| Līlāvati                            | 1197-1200, 1209-<br>1210, 1210-1211 | Abhā Salamevan  |
| Sāhasa Malla                        | 1200-1202                           | Siri Saṅghabo   |
| Kalyāṇavatī                         | 1202-1208                           | Abhā Salamevan  |
| <b>...short reigns 1208-1209...</b> |                                     |   |
| Lokissara                           | 1210-1211                           | Siri Saṅghabo   |

<sup>359</sup> On a similar pattern in the Cōḷa kingdom see Cox (2016, 40–42).

<sup>360</sup> In the periods marked “short reigns,” we have no extant inscriptions of any monarchs, and I speculate that none took on a *viruda*. The version of this table presented in Shirley (2024) followed Sannasgala’s dates, which differ slightly from the UCHC dates used in this dissertation.

<sup>361</sup> IC VI:26 mentions Vijayabāhu II, but does not give him a *viruda* name.

What does the continuation of this sequence indicate about Līlāvati’s place in lineage of kings? If Sāhasa Malla, who overthrew Līlāvati’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 Niśsaṅka Malla. Instead, however, he took the alternate *viruda* Siri Saṅghabo, effectively acknowledging that his predecessor—who 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. 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 *massa* coinage, all of which is minted with the phrase “śrī rāja līlā vati” (see Figure 6.1).<sup>362</sup>



Figure 6.1: Līlāvati’s *massa* coinage

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<sup>362</sup> Numismatic data is drawn from Codrington (1924).

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 Nagari script, suggesting that they were intended to circulate widely,<sup>363</sup> and perhaps to be read as Sanskrit. 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 (see Table 6.2). 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.

**Table 6.2: regnal titles inscribed on extant coinage, c. 1070-1284**

| Monarch         | Regnal dates | Inscription               |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Vijayabāhu I    | 1070–1110    | śrī   vija   ya bā   hu   |
| Parākramabāhu I | 1153–1186    | śrī   parā   krama   bāhu |

<sup>363</sup> And, indeed, they have been found as far afield as Mogadishu (Freeman-Grenville 1963). This speaks to the interconnectedness of the wider Indian Ocean region in this time (on which see the essays in Bandaranayake 1990).

|                  |                                    |                                 |
|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Niśśaṅka Malla   | 1187–1196                          | śrī   kāle[n]   ga la[n]   keja |
| Coḍagaṅga        | 1196–1197                          | śrī   coḍa   ga[n]ga   deva     |
| Lilāvati         | 1197–1200, 1209–1210,<br>1210–1211 | śrī   rāja   līlā   vatī        |
| Sāhasa Malla     | 1200–1202                          | śrī   mat sā   hasa   malla     |
| Dharmāśoka       | 1208–1209                          | śrī   dharmmā   śoka   devaḥ    |
| Parākramabāhu II | 1236–1270                          | śrī   parā   krama   bāhu       |
| Vijayabāhu IV    | 1271–1272                          | śrī   vija   ya ba   hu         |
| Bhuvanekabāhu I  | 1272–1284                          | śrī   bhuva   naika   bāhu      |

We have at least one suggestion that this supposedly masculine title was used in Lilāvati’s own court, and possibly survived beyond her reign. There is at least one commentary extant for the *Sasa Dā Vata*, the courtly poem composed in Lilāvati’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 acquisition by British colonists. This commentary tells us that the original *Sasa Dā Vata* was composed “in the time when, in accordance with the ten duties of kingship, the auspicious *king* Lilāvati was ruling” (SDV *sannaya* on 14; emphasis mine).<sup>364</sup> 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: Lilāvati was not a “princess,” not a “consort of,” not someone whose proximity to power was best described in

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<sup>364</sup> śrī raja līlāvati svāmīn vahansē dasarājadharmmayen rājyaya karaṇa kalhiyaṭa... me buddha stōtraya suvasē karami yi seyi.

multivalent adjectival clauses. Despite her femininity—described so explicitly in the *Sasa Dā Vata* itself!—Lilāvātī 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.

Lilāvātī was, prior to her ascension to the throne, a consort of Parākramabāhu I. This fact was, as discussed above, emphasised in almost all of the literary sources which mention her; but it also features in two of her extant inscriptions:

apa sammā sambudun vānsē pirinivi ekdahassatsiyak havurudu ikut kalhi lakdiva niṣkaṇṭaka  
koṭa eksat kaḷa sirisaṅgabo parākramabāhu cakravarttin vahansegē agabiso lilāvātī namin ē  
tamā lada navaraṭin āṃbulpatgama him koṭa hatiheḷa kaṇatu pallassava kusalān koṭa dun  
bavaṭa kaḷa śilā lekhyā yi.

This inscription is made to record the gift, performed as a *kuśala* by the one named Lilāvātī—the primary *bisō* of the *cakravarttin* Sirisaṅghabo 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 (*śimā k.*) Navaraṭin Āṃbulpatgama, which she herself [previously] received (IC VI:92).

śrīsaṅghabo parākramabāhu cakravarttīn vahansēṭa agamehesu vū sūriyavaṃṣābhijāta  
līlāvātīn vahanse... [remainder unclear].

By Līlāvātī, born in the Solar Lineage, who was the *agra-mahiṣī* to the *cakravartin* Śrīsaṅghabo  
Parākramabāhu *vahansē*... (IC VI: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 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 Līlāvātī’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. Midway through its narrative of Parākramabāhu’s triumphs, we come across the following lavish praise of a “Lady Rūpavātī” (meaning “beautiful”—or, more literally, “she with the body”):

tato kittisirīmeghamahārājamahaṇṇavā | saṃjātā candalekhā va lokalocanahāriṇī ||

Then, arising from the great ocean—the great king Kīrtiśrīmegha<sup>365</sup>—like the crescent moon; a doe in the eyes of the world;

tassa khattiyavaṃsekaketussa bhariyā piyā | rāmaṃ sītā va rañjantī taṃ mahīpatisekharam ||

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<sup>365</sup> Rūpavātī’s father was presumably meant to be the Kīrtiśrīmegha who was the brother of Mānābharaṇa I and Śrīvallabha; ertwhile ruler of (half of) Rohaṇa and then later Dakkhīnadeśa; and uncle to both Mānābharaṇa’s son Parākramabāhu and Śrīvallabha’s daughter Līlāvātī (see further Appendix B).

the beloved wife of that sole banner of the *kṣatriya* clan (i.e. Parākramabāhu); adoring that peak of the earth-lords like Sītā adored Rāma;

anekasatasamkhānaṃ majjhe antopuritthinaṃ | accantavallabhatarā ratanattayavallabhā ||

ever the most beloved among the women of the Inner City, who number in the thousands,<sup>366</sup>  
lover of the Triple Gem;

ṭhapetvā nijabhattāraṃ api devindasādisaṃ | yādisaṃ yādisaṃ kañci na maññantī tiṇāya pi ||

steady [in her love] for only her own husband, akin to the lord of the gods, not thinking of another as anything other than straw (i.e. useless);

manāpacāriṇī tassa narindassa piyaṃvadā | saddhāsīlādikānekaguṇabhūsaṇabhūsitā ||

acting as pleases and speaking to delight that lord of men; adorned with the adornments of many virtues, such as faith and discipline;

naccagītassa kusalā kusaggamatisāminī | karuṇāguṇayogena sadā sītaḷamānasā ||

skillful in song and dance; master of a mind [as sharp as] the tip of the *kuśa* grass, [but] always cool-minded through the practice of the virtue of compassion (*karuṇā*).<sup>367</sup>

devī rūpavatī rūpavatīnaṃ pavarā satī | paññāvati puññavatī sucikammā yasassinī ||

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<sup>366</sup> We might plausibly take *ṭhapetvā* in the following verse as governing this clause: Rūpavatī is “established” as the most beloved among the women of the Inner City. However, I think that *ṭhapetvā*’s semi-adjectival sense of “steady, firm” is necessary in our reading of her relationship to her husband, compared to her disinterest in other straw-like men. As *ṭhapetvā* (at least in the sense of “established”) does not easily apply to her quality of devotion to the Triple Gem, and I do not wish to have it skip over this line to govern both *accantavallabhatarā* and *nijabhattāraṃ api*, I therefore leave these clauses unconnected in my translation.

<sup>367</sup> In isolation, we might take *sītaḷamānasā* as “cool-hearted,” to give the sense (in English) that Rūpavatī’s *emotions* were kept in check by her compassionate practice. Following on so closely from the mention of Rūpavatī’s intelligence, however, the implication seems to be that it is her quick wit she keeps in check, out of compassion for others around her...

Lady Rūpavatī! Distinguished among beautiful women (*rūpavatī*) [by virtue of also]<sup>368</sup> being wise; meritorious; pure in action; resplendent;

appaṃ āyu manussānaṃ hiḷayyānaṃ suporiso | careyyādittasīso va natthi maccussanāgamo ||  
iccādaniccatāyuttaṃ sarantī jinasāsanaṃ | sutāvadhāritānekamunipuṅgavabhāsītā ||

recalling (*sarantī*, Skt. *smṛṇvati*)<sup>369</sup> the Conqueror's *sāsana*, connected with impermanence [through such sayings as] “The life of contemptible men is short. The good man should act as though his head is on fire! There is no escape from Death”; by whom various sayings of the Bull of Sages are heard (*śruta*) and carried (*dhārita*);

appāyuttaṃ ca sattānaṃ bhamantānaṃ bhavaṇṇave | jānantī puññatulyāya patiṭṭhāya ca  
natthitaṃ ||

knowing the brevity of existence, and that for those swirling around in the ocean of existence there is no solid ground equal to merit[orious works],

nānappakāraṃ kusalaṃ sampādentī atanditā | saṃsārasāgarā khippaṃ kāretvā attatāraṇaṃ ||

she—having quickly accomplished her own escape from the ocean of *saṃsāra*, untiringly undertaking various skillful activities—

nibbānatīraṃ pāpetum nāvaṃ sovaṇṇayaṃ viya | kāresi puramajjhamhi mahāthūpaṃ  
suvaṇṇayaṃ |

had built a golden *mahāstūpa* in the centre of the city, like a golden boat to bring [others] to the distant shore of *nirvāṇa* (MV 73:136–147).

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<sup>368</sup> I suspect that the string of qualities which follow are intended to set Rūpavatī apart from other *rūpavatī* women; however, this is only a conjectural interpretation.

<sup>369</sup> In these two verses we have two terms which are closely associated with Vedic texts—remembering (Skt. */smṛ*) and hearing (Skt. */śru*)—along with a third, bearing or carrying (*/dhr*), which is used in various monastic titles associated with memorisation of Buddhist scripture (such as *tipitaka-dhara*). Rūpavatī's intelligence seems to be presented in a manner which would be intelligible beyond the Buddhist context alone, speaking to the diverse intellectual context of the medieval *Mahāvamsa*'s creator.

Such an extensive eulogy for Rūpavatī 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.<sup>370</sup> 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 Līlāvatī, who receives so little mention in the *Mahāvamsa*’s account, eventually find herself on the throne, and not this Rūpavatī? The *Mahāvamsa* provides us with no answer, and never again mentions Rūpavatī by name. We might wonder, cynically, if she was entirely an invention of the *Mahāvamsa*’s later authors: a perfect wife for an idealised king.

We have stronger evidence of one other former consort, however. Here we return to the enigmatic Candavatī, with whom we began this dissertation, and her sole extant inscription at the Potgul Vihāraya. 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:

laṃkādhinātho so dhīro jināṇatti[ṃ] visodhayi | paṭhamaṃ kāritan tena vihāraṃ sakalam imaṃ  
 || parakkamanarindassa mahesī tassa dhīmato | rajje ṭhitā sā kāresi vihāraṃ sakalam puna ||  
 tasseva naradevassa dutiyaṃ yā aggaṭaṃ gatā | sā rājinī candavatī tāya kārita maṇḍapo.

He, the wise Supreme Lord of Lanka, purified the Conqueror’s commands (*ānā*); by him this entire *vihāra* was made to be built. The *mahiṣī* of that [same] wise Lord of Men Parākrama, she who was established in the sovereignty, caused the entire *vihāra* to be built again. That *rājinī*

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<sup>370</sup> Early epigraphers were eager to identify Rūpavatī as Candavatī, the patron of the Potgal Vihāra inscription (IC VI:23) discussed below (Bell 1906, 13; de Silva Wickremasinghe 1928, 240). 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.

Candavatī who had subsequently become primary (Skt. *agra-tva*) of/for that same Lord of Men; she had the *maṇḍapa* constructed (IC VI:23).

A dense network of interrelations is described here. Central to all three verses is Parākrama[bāhu I]: while he is named only in the second verse, and then with an abridged version of his name, the first verse describes his purification of the *saṅgha* (using the distinctive term *āṇā*, discussed in preceding chapters) which could only identify that king. Līlāvati is clearly, therefore, the *mahiṣī* 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 patronising the construction of a *maṇḍapa*—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 this dissertation, 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 *mahiṣī* 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 *rājani* (Sk. *rājñī*), the grammatically feminine equivalent of *rājan* and the modern term for a regnant queen. We have no record of Candavatī ever claiming the throne, and—as discussed above—we see this term (or its multilingual equivalents)

elsewhere in reference to non-regnant consorts. However, it may well have been a particular mark of honour among the royal consorts: we have references to multiple *mahiṣī*; 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 *mahiṣīs*, 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 Līlāvātī, 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 Līlāvātī?

Yet more significant is the other title Candavatī gives herself, in the rather unusual phrase *dutiyam yā aggataṃ gatā* (Skt. *dvitīyam yā agratvaṃ gatā*). Geiger (1929), noting that many monarchs mention two *mahiṣī* in their inscriptions, interprets this phrase as evidence that (1) Candavatī was, like Līlāvātī, a *mahiṣī* of Parākramabāhu I; and further (2) that both were equally ranked, that Candavatī was a “second” (*dutiyam*) primary (*aggataṃ*) consort. However, even leaving aside the conceptual quirk of a “secondary primary,” we are told in every other source—including the inscriptions of Līlāvātī 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 *gatā* comes into play. It indicates a sense of transition: at some point Candavatī was not *dutiyam aggataṃ*, but she had since “become” this. The strength of this *gatā*, alongside

the apparent contradiction of Līlāvātī 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 Līlāvātī, the *primary primary*.” We can, however, also take *dutiyaṃ* adverbially, referring to Candavatī’s attainment as *temporally* secondary: “Līlāvātī 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 Līlāvātī 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 Līlāvātī 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* Līlāvātī 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 Līlāvātī’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 Līlāvātī’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 historical fact; Līlāvātī and Candavatī may well not have agreed on which of the two was truly primary.

We may also suggest here, tentatively, a more subversive reading. Candavatī is said, in the third verse, to have subsequently attained primacy for “that same Lord of Men” (*tasseva naradevassa*). 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. I have suggested above, however, that in some limited contexts (her coinage, and the *Sasa Dā Vata sannaya*) Līlāvati herself may have used apparently masculine titles. Is it possible that these verses are less contentious than I have interpreted them; that it is Līlāvati, 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 Candavati’s position as *Līlāvati’s agramahiṣī*? 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 (Burger and Kruger 1999; Lochrie 2005). This is particularly significant in parts of the world recovering from colonial suppression of indigenous social relations and ways of being (Kerekere 2017; Lugones 2007; Rifkin 2014). Reading against the grain to recover such histories—or, as Kerekere (2017) suggests for the context of Aotearoa (New Zealand), undertaking the arduous task of separating whenu, the strands of harakeke flax useable in weaving, from the large quantities of unusable para (43)—is therefore a task well worthwhile, lest we inadvertently reiterate the colonialist myth of an exclusively heterosexual past. Bearing this in mind, I wish to note the *possibility*—if not, I stress, necessarily the *plausibility*—of such a reading.

It seems that, in the gender order of twelfth-century Poḷonnaruva, there were certain things that Līlāvati—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, Līlāvati was referred to by that title, even as other media seem to

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 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 idealised femininity? A woman also ought not, according to idealised social norms, take a female consort—a *mahiṣī*—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.

Whichever masculine-coded "lord of men" (*naradeva*) Candavatī became the primary consort of, it seems to be that 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 emphasise the extent to which they rely on "a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler 2006, 191); 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 Līlāvati's kingship might also accommodate a shift in the hierarchy of feminine roles. To make this point more explicitly: the female sovereignty of Līlāvati 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 has subsequently become primary."

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 Līlāvati 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 merits (*puṇya*) she sought to accrue from 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, who she or her supporters hoped to see on the throne, and whose own position she hoped to advance through her claims to be of equal "primary" consort status? 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 Six

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: recognising Kalyāṇavatī’s sovereignty without explicitly naming her as a (masculine-coded) “sovereign.” Some literary accounts, similarly, seem to have attempted to position Līlāvati 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.

Līlāvati’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 dissertation: from Vijayabāhu’s selective engagement with Sinhala, Tamil, and Sanskritic inscriptional models; through now to Līlāvati’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.



## Chapter Seven: General Conclusions

The preceding pages have dealt with what may appear to be minutiae of Poḷonnaruva-period history. I have, I hope, provided sufficient detail to interest those scholars working on this period. By way of conclusion, however, I wish to both recapitulate the broadest sweeps of arguments made above, and to suggest some wider implications of my methodological and theoretical approaches to said arguments.

In the Introduction, I suggested that the central argument of the dissertation was that the histories of Buddhism, politics, and gender in the Poḷonnaruva period cannot adequately be studied in isolation from one another. In support of this position, I have attempted to demonstrate that Poḷonnaruva's noblewomen were involved in crucial acts of patronage that helped to shape the eventual form of the Theravāda; that royal men sought to position themselves relative to these noblewomen for pragmatic political reasons; and that in so doing the supposedly inherent masculinity of kingship was itself challenged and contested. These dynamics have previously been obscured by an overreliance on retrospective narrative accounts of the Poḷonnaruva period (primarily the *Mahāvamsa*, *Pūjāvaliya*, and *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*), which depicted the events of this period according to the priorities of their own.

I advanced this argument through chronologically advancing chapters. I will briefly summarise each of these chapters in turn, before presenting more synthetic arguments which cut across the work.

In Chapter Two, I argued that the reign of Vijayabāhu I did not represent a "return" to an original and unaltered Sinhala Buddhist kingship after a period of Cōḷa interruption. Rather, he seems to have intentionally interwoven models from earlier Anurādhapura-based kings; his erstwhile Cōḷa overlords; and perhaps also from wider *dharmaśāstric* norms of caste hierarchy (particularly evident in his material

intervention at the Peak). I further challenged the claim—made by sources temporally close to Vijayabāhu’s own reign, as well as in later retrospective accounts—that he revived all three of the Anurādhapura-period *nikāyas* (Abhayagiri, Jetavana, and Mahāvihāra) as distinct entities.

In Chapter Three, I argued that the period between Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I was not the unfortunate “dark age” it has often been characterised as. While political power was certainly decentralised, this may well have led to opportunities for individuals who otherwise did not have as ready access to that power; and to experiments with different models and rhetorics of kingship. In particular, I suggested that the agency of royal consorts became considerably more visible in this period than under the aegis of “strong kings.” One of these consorts, Sundarā, seems to have been involved in patronage of Pali-oriented monks and the Diṃbulāgala monastery, to an extent unacknowledged in retrospective historical narratives.

Chapter Four reconsidered the reign of Parākramabāhu I. I showed that, far from being a “Pali king,” his inscriptional corpus was resolutely multilingual. Even in his pivotal Galvihāra inscription, he draws on Sanskrit terminology more frequently than he does Pali. He certainly does seem to have engaged with certain phenomena now most strongly associated with the Mahāvihāra’s textual tradition: like Gajabāhu, he claims descent from Mahāsammata, and he seems to position his purification and unification of the monastic order within a Buddhaghosan chronology of decline. But he certainly does *not* give us any indication that he was involved in purging the monastic order of “Mahāyānism,” contrary to the account given in the later *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*.

In Chapter Five, I turned to the vast inscriptional corpus of Niśśaṅka Malla, which offers us perhaps the most granular view available of kingly self-representation in medieval Sri Lanka. On the basis of this I argued, borrowing from Sahlins, that this non-Lankan-born king seems to have intentionally played up his dynasty’s “strangeness” as evidence *for* his qualifications to rule Lanka. This strategy was, I suggested, likely in response to perceived challenges to dynastic succession both internal (but “lower caste” in *dharmasāstric* terms) and external (but “non-Buddhist”). As in the period covered in Chapter Three, royal consorts seem once again to have become central to the inscriptional discourse, and increasingly so over the course of his reign, to the point that he suggested that they might be placed on the throne in the absence of a (Buddhist, high-caste) male heir.

Chapter Six explored cases of this possibility in action: the reigns of Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvātī, who between them seem to have dominated (on the basis of their collective length of rule) later Poḷonnaruvan politics; and the non-regnal consort Candavatī. I argued that the inscriptions of these three women, and other sources relating to the reigns of Kalyāṇavatī and Līlāvātī, evidence a far less stable politics of gender than monastic accounts and *śāstras* might allow; that the inherent “masculinity” of kingship itself, and the social hierarchies surrounding it, were subject to negotiation, contestation, and even subversion.

We might productively group the arguments made in these chapters into three broader groups.

First, while the historiography of Sri Lanka has been dominated by Pali- and Sinhala-language sources, Tamil and Sanskrit remained significant language throughout the period, and to exclude sources in these languages from our studies is to grossly distort our historical understanding. Related to this, we cannot dismiss from our histories those royal courts which have been generally understood to be

particularly Tamil-oriented (and, by association, inadequately Buddhist): namely, the court of Gajabāhu II. We have little to no evidence that he was a “non-Buddhist” in some sense salient to his contemporaries; and we have at least *some* evidence for continuities, rather than outright ruptures, between his model of kingship and that of Parākramabāhu I.

Second, even with the piecemeal evidence available to us, we need to dramatically reconsider the role of royal women in this period of Theravāda history. At minimum, it is significant that our *only* extant Pali inscriptions from this period were produced by royal consorts (Sundarā and Candavatī), not by male monarchs or, for that matter, monastics. Further, we have at least some evidence of royal women patronising certain Buddhist institutions (Sundarā) and forms of textual production (Līlāvatī) at pivotal moments. We do not have the evidence available to definitely recast these women in starring roles. However, we have at least as much evidence for the significance of their involvement as we do for many of their male peers, who nonetheless take centre stage in all of our standard histories of the period. This is largely a result of evidential bias: retrospective textual narratives more frequently praise “powerful men” like Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu I for their contributions to Buddhist history; and we have, in Sri Lanka as elsewhere in the Buddhist world, tended to accept these textual narratives as “historical fact” until proven otherwise. But as Schopen (1991) puts it, “the ascription of primacy to textual sources in Buddhist studies not only effectively neutralizes the independence of archaeological and epigraphical sources as witnesses, it also effectively excludes what practicing Buddhists did and believed from the history of their own religion” (14). When we pay as much heed to this archaeological and epigraphical

evidence as we do the later narratives, we arrive at—at minimum—a more balanced view of Buddhist history, one which is not read solely “through the words of suspicious male monastics” (Nolan 2009, 13).

Finally, as my citation of Nolan is intended to invoke, I have attempted to model in this dissertation the benefits of engagement with a capacious range of scholarship, brought—selectively and cautiously—to bear on the particularities of a historical case. In particular, and perhaps unsurprisingly in a study focused explicitly on “gender,” I have drawn extensively on feminist and queer scholarship. The application of this kind of theoretical lens or methodological approach to premodern sources risks accusations of “presentism:” the imposition of decidedly modern frameworks—often dismissively called “identity politics”—onto ill-fitting historical contexts.<sup>371</sup> It is certainly true that historical accounts can—and, *pace* White (1973) perhaps necessarily always *do*—distort the evidence of the past in ways intelligible to the present. However, I entirely reject that such distortions are only present (and subject to critique) in histories attentive to social oppression, while earlier generations of historians remain (supposedly) “objective” and “neutral.” The value of critical theory is not that it tells us how we should interpret the inner lives of past subjects; it is that it can alert us to unquestioned biases which lurk in the extant historiography, and suggest possible methodological approaches which may allow us to correct those biases. Without feminist critique, we may not notice that our textual sources seem to so heavily emphasize the heroic deeds of their male protagonists, or that our uncritical reception of those androcentric

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<sup>371</sup> This critique was recently, and controversially, given voice in Sweet’s (2022) presidential column in the *American Historical Association’s* newsmagazine, in which he critiques “read[ing] the past through the prism of contemporary social justice issues: race, gender, sexuality, nationalism, capitalism” (n.p.).

accounts seemed to align very neatly with then-emergent Victorian ideologies.<sup>372</sup> In short, the judicious application of critical theory makes us better historians, *more* alert to the particularities of our historical cases than we might otherwise be.

Together, these arguments have, I hope, done considerable work to unseat the notion that “Buddhist kingship” was ever an unchanging concept. Instead, I have suggested that the “proper” performance of kingship in a Buddhist context was instead an arena of heated debate, in which multiple parties were participant. To reiterate a point made in the Introduction, “Buddhist Kingship” is not, and has never been, an ahistoric concept to be found lying dormant in the Pali Canon (or in any other set of supposedly authoritative texts). Modern philosophers and activists alike may well find valuable inspiration in such texts: a synthetic political theory resting on Buddhism’s key “underlying ideas” (Moore 2016); or an approach of “radical interdependence” to International Relations (Long 2021). Such productive re-readings of past texts is often a useful genesis for new ideas, as advocates of (for example) the ongoing relevance of Aristotelean political thought will happily remind us. But to present such novel re-readings as “Buddhist” is questionable; to argue that they represent (a singular and definitive) “Buddhist political thought” is problematic. This attitude diminishes the intellectual vigour and pragmatic creativity of Buddhists throughout history—“kings” and otherwise—who constructed, contested, subverted, and constructed anew what it meant to be a “good Buddhist king.” At its worst, it revives all of the old colonial arguments that Buddhists themselves, past and perhaps also present, do

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<sup>372</sup> I make this argument at slightly greater length in Shirley (2024), in which I trace the colonial European reception of evidence about Līlāvati.

not truly understand “what the Buddha taught,” and that Buddhism must therefore be saved from Buddhists by the superior interpretations of modern scholarship. This is, clearly, not the case, and to think it so impoverishes our understanding of what is, was, and could perhaps become politically conceivable.

Further work is still necessary to fully reconstruct the contested relationship(s) between gender and power in early second millennium Sri Lanka. In particular, a more thorough examination of the textual sources produced in the period immediately following Parākramabāhu’s *katikāvata*, with an eye to the central themes identified in this dissertation, promises to greatly enhance our understanding of the relationship between kingly rhetoric (particularly as recorded in inscriptions) and Pali- and Sinhala-language textual production. In the pages above, we have touched only lightly on the works of Śāriputra, the first *mahāsvāmin* of the united Lankan *saṅgha*. His works—from *vinaya* manuals to *abhidharma* subcommentaries—sought to impose a doctrinal and interpretive unity on the now-institutionally-united former *nikāyas*. I have suggested in an unpublished (2023) conference paper that political concerns necessarily suffuse (at least some of) Śāriputra’s writings; further research is necessary to unpack the role gender plays in *his* vision of kingship. Likewise, while we have discussed some of the literary products of Līlāvati’s court—the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* and *Sasa Dā Vata*—these were only initial contributions to the explosion of Pali- and Sinhala-language poetry in the following century. We benefit from Gornall’s (2020) excellent study of the Pali materials, which often touches on gendered themes; and from Berkwitz’s insights into the gendered nature of later Sinhala-language poetry (see, e.g., Berkwitz 2019b). However, too little attention has been paid to other early Sinhala-language works (such as the *Muvadev Dā Vata*).

Finally, we might attend to the new genres of texts aimed at laypeople—from the ethical treatise *Upāsakajanālaṅkāra* (on which see Young 2011) to the slightly later preaching-books (*baṇapot*) like *Saddharmaratnāvaliya* or even *Pūjāvaliya* (Deegalle 1997)—produced in the years following the fall of Poḷonnaruva. A synthetic reading of these sources together, along with the inscriptional corpus, promises an understanding of gender politics in early second millennium Lanka simultaneously broader and more granular than possible to date.

### **“Theravāda” beyond Poḷonnaruva**

Throughout this dissertation, I have maintained that the history of Poḷonnaruva had a significant influence on the development of (what we call today) “the Theravāda.” I acknowledged, in the Introduction, that this is an anachronistic term (*pace* Skilling 2009; Gethin 2012; Bretfeld 2022), but suggested—following Collins (2017)—that we might still tentatively use it in a heuristic sense, to refer to those phenomena which had some genealogical relationship to the modern “Theravāda” and which might therefore be of interest to others working in “Theravāda Studies.” I understand this approach to Theravāda history to be radically inclusive: rather than shackling ourselves to an ahistorical definition of “what counts as Theravāda,” and therefore *excluding* from our analysis all historical phenomena which do not appear to fit our definition, we can instead attend to an expansive range of texts, people, and practices which were all, in some way, entangled in the historical development of the modern Theravāda.

This genealogical and inclusive understanding of “what counts as Theravāda” is a stark contrast to—even a rejection of—the ways in which the term *theravāda* was actually deployed in premodern contexts. We have, until relatively recently, taken *theravāda* as a neutral descriptor for the name of a

particular “school” of Buddhist teachings (equivalent and opposed to “Mahāyāna” Buddhism). More recent studies have suggested instead that it is more narrowly a descriptor of institutional affiliation: that it (or a closely related term like *theriya*) is the name of a specific *nikāya* (so equivalent and opposed to the Sarvāstivāda or Dharmaguptaka *nikāyas*). I wish to suggest, in the remainder of this section, that *theravāda* was (until at least the end of the period covered by this dissertation) primarily a *rhetorical* term about the authenticity and originality of doctrine; and that this has some implications for how we might undertake the uptake of “Theravāda Buddhism” in the later Indian Ocean region.<sup>373</sup>

The most common interpretation of the term *theravāda* (or, sometimes, the closely related *theriya* and *thera-vaṃsa*) is as a Pali-language “translation” of the Sanskrit Sthavira-*nikāya*: one of the two monastic ordination lineages, along with the Mahāsāṅghika-*nikāya*, which emerged in a schism following the Second Dharma Recitation.<sup>374</sup> Certainly, as Bretfeld (2022) demonstrates in his excellent study, this is

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<sup>373</sup> I wish to acknowledge my debt, in the following discussion, to the insightful arguments variously made by ven. Anālayo, Bretfeld, Gethin, Skilling, and Walters. Their work has shaped my thinking on this matter beyond even the specific points on which I quote or cite them. Where I differ from their views is my increased emphasis on the doctrinal focus of the term *theravāda*; I am not convinced that it necessarily relates as cleanly, in many cases, to a specific monastic ordination lineage (variously called *theriya* or *theravaṃsa*) as these scholars suggest. It seems significant to me that, prior to the fourteenth-century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* (see NS, 57 and *passim*), only one of our Pali- and Sinhala-language texts explicitly refers to the Sthavira and Mahāsāṅghika, or any of the “eighteen schools” known from other traditions’ accounts as *nikāyas*, by that name. That one exception is Buddhaghosa’s *Pañcappakaraṇa* commentary on the *Kathāvatthu*, which refers to the “eighteen *ācariyavādas* which arose in the second century, the name of which is ‘the eighteen *nikāyas*’ and also ‘the eighteen families (*kulas*) of other teachers’” (...*aṭṭhārasācariyavādā dutiye vassasate uppannā aṭṭhārasācariyavādātipi aṭṭhārasācariyakulānītipi etesaṃyeva nāmaṃ*). Otherwise, the only *nikāyas* mentioned in these earlier texts are the three Lankan *nikāyas*: the Abhayagiri, the Jetavana, and the Mahāvihāra. However, to pursue this discussion further would require a considerable diversion into the specifics of these textual references, which is beyond the scope of this conclusion.

<sup>374</sup> As ven. Anālayo (2023) has pointed out, other extant *nikāyas* claim descent from the Sthavira side of the Sthavira-Mahāsāṅghika schism (9). This may raise, he argues, heuristic issues for modern scholars who wish to refer to a “Theriyā” Vinaya, understanding “Theriyā” to simply be the Pali equivalent of Sanskrit “Sthavira.”

the case in the fourteenth-century *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, which explicitly positions itself within “this continuity (*santatiya*) of *mahābhikṣus*, called the *Theriya-nikāya*, which has continued unbroken from the lineage of great *sthaviras* such as Śāriputra, Maudgalyāna, and Mahākāśyapa” (NS, 57).<sup>375</sup> Gethin (2012) has argued that this view may be present as early as Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the *Kathāvatthu*, in which the *theravāda* seems to be positioned as one of many *kulas* (literally “families,” but here perhaps “communities”),<sup>376</sup> which it later clarifies are also called both *vādas* and *nikāyas*.<sup>377</sup>

But the *Kathāvatthu* commentary seems to be something of an outlier among first-millennium texts in outright conflating rival *vādas* with monastic ordination lineages (*nikāyas*). Elsewhere, *vādas* seem to have a stronger sense of doctrine, conforming to the literal meaning of that which is said (*vāda*) by elders or seniors (*P. theras*).<sup>378</sup> Gethin (2012) therefore suggests that, outside of the *Kathāvatthu* and some other texts, “the term *theravāda* is not used to refer to a school or Vinaya ordination lineage at all; it is used to refer to a general body of received interpretation of the canonical texts” (14). And so we see *theravāda* being used to describe the compilation (*saṅgaha*) of *dharma* and *vinaya* made at the First Dharma Recitation (DīV 4:6)<sup>379</sup> and even “the compilation of the *Tipiṭaka* together with its commentary” (SP,

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<sup>375</sup> ...śāriputramaudgalyānamahākāśyapādīmahāsthaviraparamparāyen asambhinna va pāvāta ena theriyanikāya nam lada mē mahābhikṣusantatiya pasvādahasak no pirihi pavatnā paridden buddhaśāsanaya tan pat kāruvūha.

<sup>376</sup> These include the *Dhammaguttika* (Skt. *Dharmaguptaka*) and *Sabbatthivāda* (Skt. *Sarvāstivāda*), which are both extant *nikāyas* today.

<sup>377</sup> mahāsaṅghikānañca cha ācariyavādāti sabbeva aṭṭhārasa ācariyavādā dutiye vassasate uppannā. aṭṭhārasanikāyātipi aṭṭhārasācariyakulānītipi etesaṃyeva nāmaṃ.

<sup>378</sup> These *theras* are not necessarily, on semantics alone, Buddhist: the sole canonical witness of the term *theravāda* (in MN 36) is in reference to the doctrines of the Buddha’s previous teacher Ājāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta.

<sup>379</sup> tehi caññehi therehi katakiccehi sādhuhi | pañcasatehi therehi **dhammavinayasāṅgaho** | therehi **katasaṅgaho** theravadoti vuccati ||

I:52).<sup>380</sup> The *Mahāvamsa* refers to the recitation (*saṅgīti*) of the *saddharma* as “*theriya*,” which it then calls “the singular *theravāda*” (MV 5:1-2);<sup>381</sup> but in its commentary on this verse the *Vamsatthappakāsini* suggests that the First Great (Dharma) Recitation was itself called “*theravāda*” (VAP I:172).<sup>382</sup>

It is certainly true that all of these sources do refer, in various ways, to other groups schisming off from, rejecting, or abandoning this “*theravāda*,” to form groups of monks whose names we recognise from other lists of *nikāyas* (Mahāsāṅghika, Dhammaguttika, Sabbatthivāda...). But this is not an argument for equivalence. As Bechert (2022) has put it, “the dichotomy of the *Dīpavamsa* and all later *vamsas* runs not between “Theravāda” versus Mahāsāṅghika, but “Theravāda” against all others” (24). These others are all (*añña*)*ācariyavādins*, followers of “that which is said by other teachers;” these rival *vādas* are nothing more than erroneous misinterpretations of the singular *theravāda*, “that which is said by the elders.” As Skilling (2009) points out, in this context

The term “*thera*” does not refer to a[ny] lineal succession of “elders,” but to a specific “historical” or foundational group: the five hundred arhats who recited and collected the teachings of the Buddha at Rājagṛha after the first rains-retreat following the death of the Buddha (65).

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<sup>380</sup> atha mahindatthero upasampannakālato pabhuti attano upajjhāyasseva santike dhammañca vinayañca pariyāpuṇanto dvepi saṅgītiyo ārūlhaṃ **tipiṭakasaṅgahitaṃ sātṭhakathaṃ sabbaṃ theravādaṃ** tiṇṇaṃ vassānaṃ abbhantare uggahetvā attano upajjhāyassa antevāsikānaṃ saḥassamattānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ pāmokkha ahoṣi.

<sup>381</sup> yā mahākassapādīhi mahātherehi ādito | katā **saddhammasaṅgīti** theriyāti pavuccati || ekova theravādo so ādivassasate ahu | aññācariyavādā tu tato oraṃ ajāyisuṃ ||

<sup>382</sup> idāni dutiyasaṅgītiṃ niṭṭhāpetvā tatiyasaṅgītiyā nidānabhūtaṃ ācariyavādaṃ tāva kathetukāmo pubbe kataṃ **paṭhamamahāsaṅgītiṃ theravādaṃ nāma katvā** dutiyasaṅgītiyā orajātaṃ aññaṃ pi ācariyavādaṃ dassetuṃ yā mahākassapādīhīti ādimāha.

In other words, claims to follow the *theravāda* rather than, for example, the *sabbatthivāda* (Skt. Sarvāstivāda) are not claims to be members of one particular “school” rather than another. It is a claim to *singular authenticity*; to be participant in the sole tradition which still preserves the true and original teachings of the Buddha, as collected at the First Dharma Recitation, and the correct interpretations thereof.

This alters how we understand inter-*nikāya* tensions, and the resolution of those tensions, in Poḷonnaurva and beyond. In the eyes of a Mahāvihāran partisan, Parākramabāhu’s unification of the three *nikāyas* and the resulting dominance of Mahāvihāran views within the Lankan *saṅgha* was not simply an administrative matter: it was the victory of the one true *theravāda* against deviant *aññācariyavādas*. This is the perspective which was recorded, with increasing vehemency, into the *Mahāvamsa* and *Pūjāvaliya*, and later into the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*; this was the perspective which was then reproduced by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars over-reliant on those textual sources. But, crucially, this was the *emic* perspective. From an *etic* viewpoint, we can see that *theravāda* was a rhetorical and argumentative term, one which may well have also been deployed in arguments by the Abhayagiri- and Jetavana monks against their Mahāvihāran rivals: they, too, would have understood themselves as adherents to the most authentic kind of Buddhism, from which they no doubt believed the Mahāvihārans foolishly deviated (on which possibility see Walters 1997). The *theravāda/ācariyavāda* division deployed in “Theravāda” texts, in other words, is a parallel to the *mahāyāna/hīnayāna* distinction made by partisan “Mahāyāna” texts; or even to the orthodox/heterodox and catholic/partial claims made in Christian churches which eventually took on some of those rhetorical terms for their own singular identities. What

I am suggesting here is that “*theravāda*” was not necessarily a particular sectarian identity, or perhaps even a group of texts, in medieval Sri Lanka; it was a rhetorical strategy, an argument about what counted as “authentic,” like other religious arguments about what counted as “great,” “orthodox,” or “catholic.”<sup>383</sup>

This rather deconstructed view about what counts as *theravāda* has, I think, implications for our understanding of (what we call) “Theravāda Buddhism” across the Indian Ocean region. Some of these implications, particularly as they relate to monastic ordination lineages (Blackburn 2012) and even practices of kingship (Blackburn 2024), have already begun to be worked out: when individuals across the region chose to affiliate themselves with “*theravāda*” (or with any of the texts, practices, and genealogical claims we might recognise as “Theravāda”), they did so in response to decidedly local concerns. We might here profitably return to the question of gender, and particularly to Andaya’s (2006) landmark argument that a “geographically defined Southeast Asia largely coincides with the culture area where the position of women was relatively favourable” (231). While Andaya’s treatment of Buddhism is nuanced—she acknowledges, for example, that female patronage may have played a key role in Buddhism’s spread throughout the region (33), and that Southeast Asian women often had a “vested

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<sup>383</sup> There is an argument to be made for abandoning the term “Theravāda” altogether as hopelessly rhetorical and/or teleological, in favour of an alternative term for the *nikāya* which does not inadvertently reproduce claims to singular authenticity. A possible candidate here is *Vibhajjavāda* (P. *Vibhajjavāda*), which is both used by Buddhaghosa in his *Katthāvatthu* commentary and appears, alongside “*theriya*,” in the earliest extant Mahāvihāran inscriptions at Nagarjunakonda (see particularly the discussion in Cousins 2001; Tournier 2018, 21–22; Walters 1997, 105–6). However, this would put us at an unhelpful disconnect from (modern) Theravāda Studies; hence my preference for Collins’ inclusive genealogical approach.

interest in supporting the flow of young men in and out of monkhood” (79)—she nonetheless *generally* portrays “Theravāda Buddhism” (alongside Christianity and Islam) as antithetical to this supposedly characteristic Southeast Asian attitude towards women’s roles in society. A central chapter contrasts “Indigenous Religions” with the coming of the three “World Religions,”<sup>384</sup> which she argues was “not merely a defining feature of Southeast Asia’s ‘early modernity;’ it was also fundamental to evolving cultural constructions of being female” (102). Andaya cites attitudes to female rebirth (76), idealised representations of heterosexual relations (*ibid.*), and the textual “basis for authority in world religions” (102) as evidence for the “apparent misogyny” (76) wrought upon Southeast Asia by the arrival of the Theravāda. Andaya’s analysis has remained influential, and continues to be cited in more recent arguments for the deleterious effect of “Theravāda Buddhism” on women’s social roles in later Southeast Asia (Amirell 2015, particularly 450-451; Duindam 2021, 157; Roces 2022).

Of course, in the nearly two decades since Andaya’s work was published, considerable nuance has been given to accounts of an early second millennium “import” from Sri Lanka of a premade cultural package called “Therāvada Buddhism” (Assavavirulhakarn 2010; Blackburn 2012; Skilling 1997). It is increasingly clear that Southeast Asian Buddhists were engaged with Pali sources earlier than this period; and that the identification with the legacy of the Mahāvihāra and the commentaries of Buddhaghosa occurred over many centuries, in response to local (i.e. Southeast Asian) contexts and concerns. Further research has challenged the notion that, even in contexts which supposedly gave primacy to the Pali

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<sup>384</sup> “Hinduism” and “Hindu-Buddhism,” along with more specific terms like Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva, are mentioned throughout the work, but are not explicitly discussed in this chapter on “world religions.”

Canon and Buddhaghosa's commentaries thereon (both in Sri Lanka and across Southeast Asia), this did not necessarily narrowly confine or restrict interpretations of proper Buddhist thought and practice. New texts, in a wide variety of genres and languages, continued to be produced, circulate, and have meaning in the later second millennium Indian Ocean (Crosby 2020; Hallisey 1990; Walker 2018; 2021).

Even putting this more recent knowledge aside, however, we can further nuance Andaya's account on its own terms. Andaya's characterisation of "Theravāda Buddhism" relies on certain assumptions about the textual orientations of so-called "world religions." It is certainly true that Buddhist texts contain many resources which *can*, and perhaps often *have*, been deployed to denigrate women and other non-masculine individuals; we might go further and suggest that Theravādin commentarial interpretations of these texts are, in places, *particularly* misogynistic. However, bearing in mind Narayan's (1998) critiques of "cultural essentialism," it would be an error to extrapolate out from such resources a monolithic and coherent "Theravāda" attitude towards gender. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, no such monolithic coherency is to be found even in a period which, arguably, set the course of the Theravāda to be oriented towards such Pali-language texts and the Buddhaghosan interpretation thereof. Rather, we see in this period (what seems to be, bearing in mind the fragmentary nature of the inscriptional record) an *increase*, relative to the later Anurādhapura period, in the numbers of women patronising monks, monasteries, and religious texts; creating inscriptions recording such donations in their own names, complete with genealogical pedigrees; being featured in their husband's inscriptions as participating in official procedures and public performances of munificence, and as motivating his own pious works; and even, ultimately, claiming the throne for themselves. I have found

no evidence that these women were ever critiqued—even by those men who unseated them from the throne, and so arguably had the most vested interest in discrediting them—on the grounds that they were acting in any way contrary to “the Theravādin” understanding of proper gender roles. In this context, and at any later point in Theravāda history, the relationship between gender and power was never a settled matter; it was, and is, contested and contestable.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Concordance of Poḷonnaruva-period Inscriptions

| Editions                                   | Patron                      | Language         |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| IC VI:1; EZ V:1                            | Vijayabāhu I                | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:2; EZ II:35                          | Vijayabāhu I                | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:3                                    | Vijayabāhu I                | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:4                                    | Vijayabāhu I                | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:5; EZ V:26                           | Kitā, lord of Nungamalagala | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:6; EZ V:39                           | Vikramabāhu I               | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:7; EZ IV:9                           | Sundara Mahā Devī           | Sinhala/Pali     |
| IC VI:8; EZ II:31; II:34                   | Sundara Mahā Devī           | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:9; EZ V:38; JCBRAS 26 1918 pp53-60   | Gajabāhu II                 | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:10                                   | Gajabāhu II                 | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:11; EZ IV:1                          | Gajabāhu II                 | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:12; EZ V:11                          | Mānābharaṇa II of Rohana    | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:13; EZ II:41                         | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:14; JRASCB XXX, pp. 271-279          | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:15; EZ III:34; VI:4                  | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:16; Ceylon J. of Science G II, p 212 | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:17                                   | Devarad of Bulatgama        | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:18                                   | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:19                                   | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:20                                   | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:21                                   | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:22                                   | Parākramabāhu I             | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:23; EZ II:39                         | Candavatī                   | Pali             |
| IC VI:24; EZ II:17                         | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:25; EZ II:29                         | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:26; EZ II:30, V:17                   | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:27; EZ II:13                         | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:28; EZ II:28                         | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:29                                   | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:30                                   | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:31                                   | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:32; EZ II:24                         | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:33                                   | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla        | Sinhala          |

|                       |                      |                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| IC VI:34              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:35; EZ II:22    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:36; EZ II:19    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:37; EZ II:20    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:38              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:39; EZ II:25    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:40              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:41; EZ II:21    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:42              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:43              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:44; EZ V:44     | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:45; EZ II:42    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:46; EI XXXVI:90 | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:47              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:48; EZ I:9      | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:49              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:50              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:51; EZ II:26    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:52; EZ II:14    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:53; EZ V:42     | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:54; EZ V:43     | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:55; EZ II:16    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:56; EZ II:27    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:57; EZ II:15    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:58              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:59              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:60              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:61              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:62              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:63              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:64              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:65              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:66              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:67              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:68; EZ III:11   | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:69              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:70              | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:71; EZ II:23    | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:72; EZ V:22     | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:73; EZ V:41     | Kīrti Niśśaṅka Malla | Sinhala          |

|                      |  |                  |
|----------------------|--|------------------|
| IC VI:74             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:75             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:76             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:77             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:78             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:79             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:80             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:81             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:82; EZ III:35  | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:83             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:84; EZ II:18   | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:85             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:86             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:87             | Kīrti Niśsaṅka Malla                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:88             | Coḍagaṅga                                    | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:89             | Coḍagaṅga                                    | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:90; EZ I:14    | Līlavatī                                     | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:91; AIC 157    | Lag Vijayasiṅgu Kit, official<br>of Līlavatī | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:92             | Līlavatī                                     | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:93; EZ II:33   | Līlavatī                                     | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:94; EZ II:36   | Sāhassa Malla                                | Sinhala/Sanskrit |
| IC VI:95             | Sāhassa Malla                                | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:96             | Vijayānāvan and family                       | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:97; EZ IV:10   | Man[...] Cūḍāmaṇi                            | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:98; EZ II:32   | Kalyāṇavatī                                  | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:99; EZ IV:11a  | Lokissara II                                 | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:100            | Bhāma (or Bhūma)                             | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:101            | [unclear]                                    | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:102            | [not named]                                  | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:103; EZ IV:11b | A Vilgammula monk                            | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:104            | [not named]                                  | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:105            | Dehattarā                                    | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:106            | Siddharthā (a monk?)                         | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:107            | Gajabāhu, an official                        | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:108            | Mit, an official                             | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:109            | Sala Kesdā                                   | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:110            | Suva, wife of Sala Kasdā                     | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:111            | Sons of Sala Kasdā                           | Sinhala          |
| IC VI:112            | Suvsa of Pāluva                              | Sinhala          |

|  |   |                |
|--|---|----------------|
| IC VI:113  | Kit of Pisaviṭa                                 | Sinhala        |
| IC VI:114  | Uparuvan of [...]surusuva                       | Sinhala        |
| IC VI:115; EZ VI, pp126–132  | [name unclear]                                  | Sinhala        |
| TISL 53; K. Indrapala, “The Nainativu Tamil Inscription of Parakramabahu I,” <i>University of Ceylon Review</i> 21:1 (1963): 63–70 | Parākramabāhu I                                 | Tamil          |
| TISL 47; CTI I:10  | Ayittan, Akampaṭi to Gajabāhu II                | Tamil          |
| CTI I:14a  | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 34; CTI I:14b   | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 35; CTI I:14c   | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 43; CTI I:8   | Cētarāya, Velaikkaran and nāyakka of Jayabāhu I | Tamil          |
| TISL 37  | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 30; ET I:2; CTI I:9   | Gajabāhu II                                     | Tamil          |
| TISL 42; EZ II:40  | Vēḷāikkāras                                     | Tamil          |
| TISL 28a; SII 4, p492; CTI I:12  | Kiḷivai Aprimānarāmaṇ, general of Gajabāhu II   | Tamil/Sanskrit |
| TISL 28b   | Gajabāhu II                                     | Tamil          |
| TISL 29  | Gajabāhu II                                     | Tamil          |
| TISL 30  | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 51b; EZ III:33a   | Mākkaliṅga Kaṇavadi, official of Mānābharaṇa    | Tamil          |
| TISL 51a; EZ III:33b   | Cundhamalliyālvār, daughter of Kulottunga I     | Tamil          |
| TISL 32  | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 33  | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 36  | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 38  | Āyirattu Aññūvar corporation                    | Tamil          |
| TISL 41  | Kāliṅga Māgha                                   | Tamil          |

|         |                                   |       |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-------|
| TISL 44 | Vēļāikkāras                       | Tamil |
| TISL 49 |                                   | Tamil |
| TISL 50 | Ātittamakātēvaṅ                   | Tamil |
| TISL 52 | Gajabāhu II                       | Tamil |
| TISL 54 | Parākrama, general of<br>Lilāvati | Tamil |

## Appendix B: Summary of the *Mahāvamsa* chapters 60–72

|           |  |   |  |   |
|-----------|--|---|--|---|
| Ch.<br>60 | Vijayabāhu I rules from Poḷonnaruva as paramount king of <b>all Sri Lanka</b> .  |   |  |   |
| Ch.<br>61 | Vijayabāhu’s brother <b>Jayabāhu I</b> is placed on the throne with the support of their sister Mittā and her three sons: Mānābharaṇa I, Kīrtiśrīmegha, and Śrīvallabha. |   |  |   |
|           | Vijayabāhu’s son <b>Vikramabāhu I</b> ousts his uncle and rules <b>Rajaraṭa</b> from Poḷonnaruva.  | <b>Mānābharaṇa I</b> rules <b>Dakkhiṇadeśa</b> .  | <b>Kīrtiśrīmegha</b> rules “Dvādasasahassaka,” presumably a province of <b>Rohaṇa</b> .  | <b>Śrīvallabha</b> ruled “Aṭṭhasahassa,” likewise a province of <b>Rohaṇa</b> . |
| Ch.<br>62 | Jayabāhu remains paramount king in name only and eventually dies in exile. Vikramabāhu has a son, Gajabāhu II, but finds him inferior to his nephew Parākramabāhu.       | Mānābharaṇa I marries Vikramabāhu’s sister Ratnāvalī; they have two daughters, Mittā and Pabhāvatī, and a son, Parākramabāhu. |  | Śrīvallabha has a son named Mānābharaṇa (II) and a daughter Līlāvatī.           |
| Ch.<br>63 | On Vikramabāhu’s death, <b>Gajabāhu II</b> rules <b>Rajaraṭa</b> from Poḷonnaruva.   | On the death of Mānābharaṇa I, <b>Kīrtiśrīmegha</b> claims <b>Dakkhiṇadeśa</b> for himself...                                 | ...and leaves the entirety of <b>Rohaṇa</b> to his brother <b>Śrīvallabha</b> . The widow and children of Mānābharaṇa I travel from Dakkhiṇadeśa to Rohaṇa, and Parākramabāhu is raised by his uncle Śrīvallabha. Parākramabāhu’s sisters are married to their cousin Mānābharaṇa II. Parākramabāhu eventually returns to his natal province of Dakkhiṇadeśa and is welcomed by his other uncle Kīrtiśrīmegha. |   |
| Ch.<br>64 |  |   | On Śrīvallabha’s death, his son <b>Mānābharaṇa II</b> rules <b>Rohaṇa</b> .  |   |
| Ch.       | Parākramabāhu sets   |   |  |   |

|           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
| Ch.<br>60 | <b>Vijayabāhu I</b> rules from Poḷonnaruva as paramount king of <b>all Sri Lanka</b> .  |   |
| 65        | out to spy in Rajaraṭa.   |   |
| Ch.<br>66 | Gajabāhu II marries Parākramabāhu's youngest sister Bhaddavatī.   | Kīrtiśrīmegha attempts to bring Parākramabāhu back by force, but fails. |
| Ch.<br>67 |   | <b>Parākramabāhu</b> overthrows his uncle and rules                     |
| Ch.<br>68 |   | <b>Dakkhinaḍeśa</b> .   |
| Ch.<br>69 |   |   |
| Ch.<br>70 | Parākramabāhu defeats the combined forces of Gajabāhu II and Mānābharaṇa II to conquer Rajaraṭa, but ultimately spares his uncle on the condition he is made his heir.  |   |
| Ch.<br>71 | Gajabāhu dies, and Parākramabāhu inherits his throne to rule both <b>Rajaraṭa</b> and <b>Dakkhinaḍeśa</b> together. He receives his first <i>abhiṣeka</i> consecration. |   |
| Ch.<br>72 | Parākramabāhu defeats Mānābharaṇa, unites <b>all of Sri Lanka</b> , and receives his second <i>abhiṣeka</i> consecration as paramount king.                             |   |

## Appendix C: Dating Niśśaṅka Malla’s Inscriptional Corpus

Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptional corpus—the largest, by far, of any individual in Lankan history—is not well-regarded by the luminaries of Lankan epigraphy.<sup>385</sup> These inscriptions, we are told, “disclose little variation of detail, but ever nauseous iteration of self-laudatory paragraphs in wearisome monotony” (Bell 1915, 100) and repeat given points “again and again” (Fernando 1976, 175).<sup>386</sup> These points themselves represent merely “a blatant panegyric on the greatness of Niśśaṅka Malla’s mighty acts and munificence as assessed by himself” (ASCAR 1903, 17), “propaganda... on an organised scale” (Goonatilake 1974, 363), or even “magniloquent claims... due not solely to a desire to satisfy the megalomania of the ruler” (Ranawella 2007, 118, emphasis added). Among the scarce praise afforded to Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptional corpus is Paranavitana’s grudging admission that despite having “blown his own trumpet, and that very loudly... it is to his lasting credit that, unlike kings before and after him, he has not employed *mahātheras* to blow his trumpet” (EZ V, 267).

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<sup>385</sup> 27 of his inscriptions have been edited and published in the volumes of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (EZ hereafter); the *Inscriptions of Ceylon* (IC hereafter) contributes an additional 38. Dismissing the seven (IC VI:38, 50, 64, 68, 83, 86, and 87) which are either fragmentary or so lacking in substance to be worth interrogating, this leaves us with 58 individual inscriptions to deal with. There is reason to believe that this is still fewer than the total number of extant inscriptions identified by the Archaeological Survey: The *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon Annual Report* (ASCAR hereafter) for 1954, for example, lists an inscription no. 19 found “in the Timbiriya temple premises of Madagama, Uva Province,” which I have been unable to identify as any of the 65 published inscriptions. Many of the inscriptions listed in ASCAR were not attributed to particular monarchs, or they were listed with inadequate details for me to cross-reference against those later published in EZ or IC, so without access to the Archaeological Department’s inner archives it is impossible to estimate how many of Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions are truly extant.

<sup>386</sup> ...taman piḥiṭu vū lipivala nāvata nāvata kiyā āti karuṇak nam...

These men’s frustration was evidently born from a conviction that inscriptions should, above all, serve as records of History: actually-occurring past events which can be neatly catalogued and compiled into a unitary narrative of the past. Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions fail to deliver on this expectation thrice-over: they record events which seem (at minimum) hyperbolic, if not entirely false;<sup>387</sup> they rarely provide dates for these events, frustrating efforts at chronologization (a point to which we shall return shortly); and they repeat these claims so incessantly, with only minor variations, that an epigrapher might painstakingly transcribe and translate a dozen inscriptions without running across a single new “historical fact.” For those still operating in what Collingwood (1946, 257–61) disparagingly called the “scissors and paste” method of writing history—in which one simply cuts out and pastes together, verbatim, those pieces of evidence which seem both plausible and non-contradictory—such sources are almost entirely dissatisfying.<sup>388</sup>

But, as argued in the Introduction, this is not the only way that we can read inscriptions. In particular, I wish to suggest that we take much more seriously the fact that Niśśaṅka Malla seems so disinterested in providing dates for his putative exploits. Not all inscriptions in Southern Asia have dates, of course. But at least one genre—the copperplate grant—almost always did include such dates, as a crucial component of their legal documentation. Even when we wish to focus on a copperplate’s

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<sup>387</sup> See, e.g., the rather scathing comments in EZ II, p. 167.

<sup>388</sup> Even Sēnānāyaka (1998), who encourages us not to dismiss the historical value of Niśśaṅka Malla’s inscriptions, sees their value lying in the “Many details included in [these] inscription[s], such as King Niśśaṅka Malla’s lineage, royal succession, heroic deeds, welfare duties, religious duties, foreign wars, and public admonitions” (6; *Niśśaṅkamalla rajugē parapura, rājyatvayaṭa patvīma, vīrakriyā, subhasādhana kaṭayutu, āgamika kaṭayutu, vidēśa yuddha, mahajanatāvaṭa dūn avavāda ādi vaśayen bohō karuṇu vistara sahitava mema lipiyehi ātuḷat kara tibē*).

ideological and eulogistic content, we must acknowledge, as did Ali (2000) in his study of a Cōḷa grant, that this genre “locates itself very carefully in its context, and is very aware of its own production[;] its connection to property and state power is hardly concealed” (174). The sole extant copperplate of Vijayabāhu I (IC VI:1), for example, tells us that it was created

...muḷu lakdiv eksesat kārā raja vaḷaṅḍamin savisi havuruddak ikut sat lāṅgu ṣatvisi vannehi kätte saṅḍa ava vapmas’hi ava satavak dasas nurupuraveheri sihasinarā...

...having ascended the lion throne in the city of Anurādhapura on the seventh day of the month of Vap, in the waxing fortnight of the season of Kāṭṭa, in the twenty-seventh year of raising [the parasol of sovereignty], after twenty-six years of enjoying kingship having united the whole of Lakdiv... (IC VI:1).

It then concludes that

ṣatvisi vannehi kättehi ava satavak dasas pivin mattehi me vā(va)sthā kaḷa bavaṭa demaḷa leyidarupotā atvara liyana devmi.

I, the Tamil secretary Atvara Liyana Dev, [bear witness] to the fact of the creation of these rules, effective from the seventh day of Kāṭṭa in the twenty-seventh year (IC VI:1).

A certain temporal precision seems, in other words, to have been of high importance to Vijayabāhu and his secretary: precisely recording the dates in which the royal order came into being and was then later etched into metal. This accords with wider practices of copperplate inscriptions across mainland South Asia, and with the copperplates of the later Daṁbadeṇiya period (see IC VII:12; 23).<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> See on these inscriptions the unpublished dissertation of Phil Friedrich (2020).

But the copperplate inscriptions of Niśsaṅka Malla (IC VI:58 and 59) buck this trend, as does that of his nephew Coḍagaṅga (r. 1196–97), which was clearly modelled on his uncle’s oeuvre.<sup>390</sup> In these inscriptions, when held up against others of their type by other monarchs, the stark *absence* of dates is striking. And this is typical of Niśsaṅka Malla’s entire vast corpus, across which we see specific regnal years mentioned for only three events: a tour of the island beginning in his second regnal year;<sup>391</sup> a (first?) visit to Anurādhapura in his fourth;<sup>392</sup> and a pilgrimage to Dambulla in his ninth and final year.<sup>393</sup> Such vagueness frustrates all attempts to establish a chronology of Niśsaṅka Malla’s career.

There are some indications, however, that this vagueness might have been intentional. Returning again to the vexingly atemporal copperplate inscriptions, he claims in IC VI:34 and 41—two of his many “stone seat” inscriptions—to have

...rajadaru kenekun[ṭa] daskam kaḷavunṭa hiraśaṅda pamuṇu dena kalā vēyan mīyaṅṭa du povā sādharmaṇa vu tal patā liyā diyehi hāṅdi hiri se asthira no kotā gattavungē vaṃśa paramparāyen boho kalak siṭunā paridden hā dun rajadaruvangē namat e pasvā dahasaṭa pavatnā paridden hā tāmbra śāsana Laṃkāyehi pavat koṭā.

...introduced into Lanka copperplate grants (*tāmbra-śāsana*) so that they might remain for a long time in the succession of donees’ lineages, having made them not as impermanent as lines drawn on water, being written on the surface of leaves which are commonly devoured by mice and termites; and so that the names of the granting kings also might last for those five thousand [years].<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> See IC VI:89; note particularly the “staging” of Coḍagaṅga entering the *abhiṣeka* hall accompanied by his principal and secondary consorts, children, and various officials, all of which parallel that of his uncle Niśsaṅka Malla discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>391</sup> In, e.g., IC VI:32, 37, 39, 40, 53, 57, 72, 73a, 73b, 74, 75...

<sup>392</sup> Commemorated particularly in IC VI:27.

<sup>393</sup> Only in IC VI:43 and 49.

<sup>394</sup> Compare variant wording in IC VI:56.

Earlier epigraphists have fixated on the blatant falsity of his claim to have “introduced” copperplates to Lanka, when we have an extant example of such a grant by Vijayabāhu I (IC VI:1). I am more interested in his self-described and explicit motivations; the concern with the ephemeral nature of palm-leaves (how familiar to us all!), contrasted against copper’s ability to last for “five thousand years” or even “as long as the sun and moon.” This latter image in particular is by no means unique to Niśsaṅka Malla; but it is rare, I think, to see it applied not just to the legal status of a donative grant, but explicitly to “the names of the granting kings also” (*dun rajadaruvangē namat*).

Other inscriptions express a similar interest in the longevity of their message. Two (IC VI:24; 52) enjoin us to protect their *dharma* “for all times” (*sarbbā-dā*, read *sarva-dā*).<sup>395</sup> Multiple inscriptions are explicitly addressed to future (*matu*) kings (see, e.g., IC VI:24; 25); others tell us of edificial works created “with the intent of remaining for a long time” (*boho kalak pavatnā paridden*; see, e.g., IC VI:51; 56; 60). And there is evidence that this concern was more than rhetorical. The initial archaeological reports of the Galpota inscription (IC VI:24) note both its deeply incised lettering and evidence that a wooden structure

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<sup>395</sup> The full verse reads “This is that *dharma*, alone worthy of the entire world’s respect, which brings benefits, [and] which should be protected at all times. The virile Niśsaṅka Malla requests, again and again, [that] the lords of the world [treat the *dharma* thus], for the sake of *kīrti*” (*dharmas so ’yam sarbbalokaikamānyaś śreyodāyī sarbbadā rakṣaṇiyaḥ | bhūpāleṅdrān yācate kīrttihetorbhūyo bhūyo vīraniśsaṅkamallaḥ*). The editor of EZ II:17 takes “for the sake of *kīrti*” to mean “for the sake of the fame of the lords of the earth,” presumably not thinking Niśsaṅka Malla would be so explicit in his concern for his own fame; given the copperplate claim discussed above I suspect instead that this refers to Niśsaṅka Malla’s own *kīrti*.

In IC VI:24, the Galpota, we might be tempted to interpret this protection-worthy *dharma* as the injunctions with which we began this chapter. IC VI:52, the Hāṭa Dāgē portico inscription, contains no such injunctions; here clearly the narrower sense of *dharma* as the Buddha-*śāsana* must be meant.

had once been erected above it to protect it from erosion; these were messages to the future, literally built to last (see discussion in EZ II:17).

Of course, the same argument might be made about all cultural production by monarchs in medieval Southern Asia. Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarsā* is explicit that poetry, for example, serves as a mirror to reflect the glory (*yaśas*) of kings even after their own death (a sentiment echoed in the translation-adaptions of Daṇḍin's work into Sinhala).<sup>396</sup> But Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptional corpus, I suggest, seems *particularly* concerned with the preservation of such reflections, while simultaneously taking pains to distance itself from temporal specificities we might otherwise expect in such legal documents as copperplates. This is a vision of kingship which wants to transcend its own context, and to extend both backwards into the distant past and forwards into a near-eternal future.

Despite what I read as Niśśaṅka Malla's attempts to avoid concrete dating, I think that we can in fact make some chronological sense of this rather daunting inscriptional corpus. I present, in decreasing order of confidence, four principles which allow us to (at least tentatively) post- and ante-date certain inscriptions. I frame these principles in the most general terms possible, in the hopes that they may prove useful to scholars attempting to chronologise similarly vexing corpora from throughout the premodern world, before discussing their specific application to Niśśaṅka Malla's corpus. A concluding table summarises the likely post- and ante-dates of each inscription in the corpus.

**A. Inscriptions which mention activities carried out in a specific regnal year must postdate that regnal year.**

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<sup>396</sup> See, respectively, KĀ 1:5 and SBL 1:6.

Any inscriptions which tell us that Niśśaṅka Malla's tours of Lanka began in his second regnal year (see, e.g., IC VI:32, 37, 39, 40, 57, 69, 70, 71, 74, 75...) must be, at the earliest, from that same year; similarly for the inscription at the Anurādhapura Ruvanvāli Dāgaba (IC VI:27) which commemorates Niśśaṅka Malla's visit to that place in his fourth year. Most helpfully, the two inscriptions which mention a pilgrimage to Samantakūṭa (now "Adam's Peak") in his ninth (and final) year (IC VI:43 and 49) can logically *only* have been made in that year.

A more contentious application of this principle is the frequent claim that Niśśaṅka Malla "remitted taxes for five years" (*pas havuruddaka aya hārā*; see IC VI:24, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 52, 55...). The Anurādhapura inscription (IC VI:27) postdated to his fourth year (see under B below) 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, rather than promissory.<sup>397</sup> These inscriptions must therefore all post-date year five.

A single inscription addressed to the people of Ruhuṇu (IC VI:54) mentions seven years of tax relief. This inscription itself cannot be earlier than Niśśaṅka Malla's seventh regnal year. The only way I

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<sup>397</sup> This is complicated by IC VI:25 (and the fragmentary IC VI:61). This inscription contains both a reference to five years of tax relief and, after some intervening content, the visit to Anurādhapura and subsequent announcement of *another* year of tax remittance (which we know from IC VI:27 to have been in his fourth year). This would imply that the "five years of tax relief" mentioned initially was promissory, but that Niśśaṅka Malla felt the need to announce "another" year of tax relief no earlier than four years in to those five years. I suspect that a more likely explanation is simply that IC VI:25 was written long after the five year period, and that—in keeping with the deliberate atemporality I argue for in the chapter above—it simply notes both that five years of taxes were remitted overall and that a specific and noteworthy instance of remittance-extension happened in year four.

can explain a single reference to seven years of tax relief, when all others claim only five years, is that the five years applied to the entirety of Lanka (hence the wide geographic dispersal of inscriptions with this claim) and the additional two were applied only to Ruhunu. As we do not know whether these two years preceded or followed the more general five, we cannot use this inscription to antedate the “five year” claim;<sup>398</sup> but IC VI:54 itself must have been created in Niśsaṅka Malla’s seventh year at the earliest.

**B. Inscriptions which refer to the creation of other inscriptions postdate those to which they refer.**

This means that IC VI:25 must postdate the gate inscriptions (IC VI:28, 29, 30, and 31); IC VI:57 postdates the creation of (at least some of) the *gavu* distance-markers (IC VI:74, 75, 76, 77, and 78); and those inscriptions which mention edificial works at Rameśvaram (IC VI:24, 43, 45, 49, 48, 51, 56, 60, 67, 76, 77, and 78) must postdate the inscribed throne found at that place (IC VI:46).<sup>399</sup>

These first two principles rest on the firm banks of logic; from this point onwards, however, we wade into the murkier waters of interpretation.

**C. Inscriptions which primarily commemorate a single event were likely created shortly after that event.**

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<sup>398</sup> My logic here is that if we knew for certain that the two additional years of tax relief in Ruhuna *followed* the five years applied elsewhere, then the five year period must have ended by Niśsaṅka Malla’s seventh year at the latest (else there would not be enough years remaining in his reign for the additional two). However, without knowing the sequence for certain—or, indeed, if these claims were totally disconnected from reality other than the bare minimum of not exceeding the number of years Niśsaṅka Malla had actually been in power!—we cannot make such judgements.

<sup>399</sup> Note, however, a discrepancy: most of these inscriptions claim that Niśsaṅka Malla spent time in Rameśvaram after returning from his *second* expedition. The Galpota (IC VI:24), however, which is large enough to detail nearly every claim made elsewhere, mentions only one expedition, on returning from which Niśsaṅka Malla nonetheless spent time at Rameśvaram.

This means that IC VI:27, discussed under principle B above, likely not only *postdates* year four; it was likely made *in* year four, shortly after the trip to Anurādhapura it so elaborately commemorates. Similarly, we might tentatively assign the controversial slab-inscription near the Poḷonnaruva canal (IC VI: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 (r. 1186–87).<sup>400</sup> Bearing in mind the deliberate atemporality of the corpus, as discussed above, we should be very cautious about applying this rule too widely.<sup>401</sup>

At this point we might wish to turn to general patterns of inscriptional content; the principle that inscriptions with shared features (e.g. which describe similar events) were likely produced conterminously. A tempting example of this would be references to Niśśaṅka Malla’s two expeditions to Jambudvīpa; logically, mentions of “two” expeditions ought to postdate mentions of only one, assuming of course that Niśśaṅka Malla’s epigraphers would always opt for the more grandiose claim once available (two is better than one). But perceived patterns may waylay us, and must be viewed with extreme

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<sup>400</sup> This inscription represents such a dramatic deviation from the Niśśaṅka Malla’s later inscriptional style that it was initially misattributed to the Vijayabāhu II. Paranavita has, however, convincingly argued that the inscription is one of Niśśaṅka Malla’s; see the discussion in EZ V:17.

<sup>401</sup> For example, the sequence of events described in IC VI:25 (and the fragmentary IC VI:61) imply that the gate inscriptions were created before the fourth-year voyage to Anurādhapura. This inscription, however, seems to play particularly fast and loose with chronology. It tells us both that Niśśaṅka Malla remitted five years of tax (again before Anurādhapura; see the discussion of this remittance below), then travelled to Anurādhapura and remitted another year in year four (which he did seem to do; see IC VI:27). Even if the “five years of tax” were read as promissory rather than retroactive, this would still suggest that Niśśaṅka Malla remitted “*another* year of tax” while still in, at the latest, the fourth of his five years of “initial” tax remittance. A more likely explanation is simply that IC VI:25 and 61 are retroactive accounts of Niśśaṅka Malla’s many laudatory acts, in which strict chronology was unimportant, and so they happily reported both the total number of years of tax remittance (five) *and* the spontaneous announcement of another year of tax relief in year four; we therefore cannot assume that the sequence of gate inscriptions before Anurādhapura is chronologically ordered.

caution. This particular pattern does not hold: one of Niśśaṅka Malla’s final-year inscriptions (IC VI:49) only mentions one war while the other (IC VI:43) mentions both. Instead, I adopt the more modest principle that

**D. Inscriptions which share features uncommon to the wider corpus are more likely to have been produced together.**

Here I draw on the computational technique called “term frequency-inverse document frequency weighting” (or simply “tf-idf”).<sup>402</sup> I make no pretence of understanding the complex equations which lie behind tf-idf as used in computational data science; here I am merely following the principle that a feature “which occurs in many documents is not a good discriminator, and should be given less weight than one which occurs in few documents” (Robertson 2004, 503). The titles *virudarāja viraveśyabhujāṅga*, for example, occur *only* in the two inscriptions we can definitively date to year nine (IC VI:43 and 49), and in the council chamber seating inscriptions (IC VI:85). As the title occurs nowhere else in the corpus, the most likely explanation is simply that Niśśaṅka Malla adopted these particular titles late in his career, and so it only occurs in his youngest inscriptions; based on this assumption, we might (tentatively) date IC VI:85 to Niśśaṅka Malla’s ninth year (or just beforehand).

We might speculate whether the use of 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 VI: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

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<sup>402</sup> Introduced by Spärk Jones (1972).

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 chronologising.

These principles together allow us to arrive at the following table (A.1), which groups Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions by their contents and assigns, where possible, tentative datings.

**Table C.1: a tentative chronology of Niśśaṅka Malla's inscriptions**

| GROUP                              | IC VI NUMBERING            | YEAR       | RATIONALE                       |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| Accession inscription              | 26                         | One or two | Commemorates accession.         |
| Object of use C                    | 37                         | After two  | Touring from the second year.   |
| Objects of use A                   | 32, 39, 40, 69, 70, 71     | After two  | As above.                       |
| Object of use E                    | 65                         | After two  | As above.                       |
| Rameśvaram throne inscription      | 46                         | After two  | As above.                       |
| Gavuta A                           | 74, 75                     | After two  | As above.                       |
| Haṭa Dā Ge vestibule inscription   | 57                         | After two  | As above.                       |
| Rankot Dagaba inscriptions         | 72, 73a, 73b               | After two  | As above.                       |
| Vānduruppa slab                    | 53                         | After two  | As above.                       |
| Anurādhapura Ruvanvāli inscription | 27                         | Four       | Commemorates fourth-year event. |
| Galpota                            | 24                         | After five | Five years of tax remittance.   |
| Haṭa Dā Ge interior inscriptions   | 52, 55                     | After five | As above.                       |
| Objects of use B                   | 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 44 | After five | As above.                       |
| Prītidāna Maṇḍapa                  | 25, 61 (fragmentary)       | After five | As above.                       |
| Daṁbulla cave                      | 48                         | After five | As above.                       |
| Relic-worshipping inscriptions     | 51, 56, 60                 | After five | As above.                       |
| Thūpārāmaya frieze inscription     | 63                         | After five | As above.                       |

|                                  |                             |                          |                                    |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Ruhuṇa inscription               | 54                          | After seven              | Seven years of tax remittance.     |
| Council chamber                  | 85                          | Eight or nine            | Shared title with following group. |
| Final year inscriptions          | 43, 49                      | Nine                     | Events in final year.              |
| Gavuta B                         | 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82  | Any                      |                                    |
| Object of use D                  | 45                          | Any                      |                                    |
| Spillway pillar                  | 67                          | Any                      |                                    |
| Gate inscriptions                | 28, 29, 30, 31              | Any, but prior to no. 25 |                                    |
| Alms pavilion inscription        | 84                          | Any                      |                                    |
| Bhagavā cave inscription         | 62                          | Any                      |                                    |
| Citadel wall pillar inscriptions | 47, 66                      | Any                      |                                    |
| Copper plate                     | 58, 59 (only extant in mss) | Any                      |                                    |
| Lacking substantive details      | 38, 50, 64, 68, 83, 86, 87  | Any                      |                                    |

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