

Aśoka's Wives and the Ambiguities of Buddhist Kingship

In: Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie, Vol. 13, 2002. pp. 35-54.

Citer ce document / Cite this document :

Strong John S. Aśoka's Wives and the Ambiguities of Buddhist Kingship. In: Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie, Vol. 13, 2002. pp. 35-54.

doi : 10.3406/asie.2002.1176

http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/asie_0766-1177_2002_num_13_1_1176

Résumé

Cet article porte sur les épouses du roi Aśoka et sur les notions complexes de la royauté dans le bouddhisme indien. Il essaie de mieux saisir les dimensions du phénomène monarchique à la lumière des spécificités du contexte religieux indien et ainsi d'affiner les perceptions qu'avaient jusqu'alors les spécialistes des sciences religieuses. La figure des « reines » ou des épouses royales est l'une des clefs pour comprendre les ambiguïtés de la fonction dans le monde indien bouddhisé. Le personnage d'Aśoka prend tout son relief au travers de ses diverses femmes telles que les textes bouddhiques les ont présentées. Elles sont un prisme qui permet de mettre en lumière diverses facettes de la fonction royale. Les femmes d'Aśoka peuvent se répartir en deux catégories : celles qui reflètent son implication et son incarnation du dharma, de la Loi faisant de lui le souverain bouddhique par excellence, et celles qui, mauvaises et femmes fatales avant la lettre, le forcent à s'éloigner de l'idéal bouddhique du monarque et à redevenir une personne plus laïque et prise dans les rets des passions, un roi en un autre sens. Un examen attentif des divers récits mettant en scène les femmes du roi Aśoka rend possible de suivre l'élaboration de la figure symbolique du souverain dans le contexte de la doctrine bouddhique. La répartition entre bonnes et mauvaises épouses est l'une des figures de l'imaginaire royal dans le bouddhisme, ainsi qu'en témoignent également les femmes du roi Udena dans les commentaires du Dhammapada. Il s'agit également d'un thème dans lequel le discours sur le souverain peut se montrer, de manière indirecte, critique. On y retrouve aussi les tropes classiques du discours misogyne du bouddhisme indien ; discours qui devait ensuite imprégner les divers pays d'Asie où il s'implanta. Les stéréotypes féminins, surtout ceux de la femme mauvaise, sont également à l'origine d'épisodes cruels dont le rôle est, dans leur horreur, de justifier et d'illustrer certaines prérogatives de la fonction royale. Une réflexion sur ces figures féminines typiques permet ainsi de mieux saisir les complexes jeux de sens et les multiples définitions de la souveraineté monarchique dans le contexte bouddhique. Le rôle des épouses royales, à travers leur biographie réduites à des catégories bien tranchées est l'un des intermédiaires privilégiés pour expliquer et illustrer l'image ambiguë du roi.

ASOKA'S WIVES AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF BUDDHIST KINGSHIP¹

John S. STRONG

Cet article porte sur les épouses du roi Asoka et sur les notions complexes de la royauté dans le bouddhisme indien. Il essaie de mieux saisir les dimensions du phénomène monarchique à la lumière des spécificités du contexte religieux indien et ainsi d'affiner les perceptions qui avaient jusqu'alors les spécialistes des sciences religieuses. La figure des « reines » ou des épouses royales est l'une des clefs pour comprendre les ambiguïtés de la fonction dans le monde indien bouddhisé. Le personnage d'Asoka prend tout son relief au travers de ses diverses femmes telles que les textes bouddhiques les ont présentées. Elles sont un prisme qui permet de mettre en lumière diverses facettes de la fonction royale. Les femmes d'Asoka peuvent se répartir en deux catégories : celles qui reflètent son implication et son incarnation du dharma, de la Loi faisant de lui le souverain bouddhique par excellence, et celles qui, mauvaises et femmes fatales avant la lettre, le forcent à s'éloigner de l'idéal bouddhique du monarque et à redevenir une personne plus laïque et prise dans les rets des passions, un roi en un autre sens. Un examen attentif des divers récits mettant en scène les femmes du roi Asoka rend possible de suivre l'élaboration de la figure symbolique du souverain dans le contexte de la doctrine bouddhique. La répartition entre bonnes et mauvaises épouses est l'une des figures de l'imaginaire royal dans le bouddhisme, ainsi qu'en témoignent également les femmes du roi Udena dans les commentaires du Dhammapada. Il s'agit également d'un thème dans lequel le discours sur le souverain peut se montrer, de manière indirecte, critique. On y retrouve aussi les tropes classiques du discours misogyne du bouddhisme indien ; discours qui devait ensuite imprégner les divers pays d'Asie où il s'implanta. Les stéréotypes féminins, surtout ceux de la femme mauvaise, sont également à l'origine d'épisodes cruels dont le rôle est, dans leur horreur, de justifier et d'illustrer certaines prérogatives de la fonction royale. Une réflexion sur ces figures féminines typiques permet ainsi de mieux saisir les complexes jeux de sens et les multiples définitions de la souveraineté monarchique dans le contexte bouddhique. Le rôle des épouses royales, à travers leur biographie réduites à des catégories bien tranchées est l'un des intermédiaires privilégiés pour expliquer et illustrer l'image ambiguë du roi.

The institution of Buddhist kingship, though varying in its expressions from culture to culture, has been a pan-Asian phenomenon. It may be useful, therefore, in looking at the roles of “kings” and others in Medieval Japanese Buddhism, to keep in mind the origins and background of that institution in

¹ I would like to thank participants in the 1998-99 Evans-Wentz Conference for their remarks and questions on the original draft of this paper, and most especially Max Moerman, my respondent, for a transcript of his stimulating and insightful comments.

ancient India. It has long been recognized that the 3rd century B.C.E. Indian Emperor Aśoka—or at least the Buddhist legends about him—became a paradigm for Buddhist monarchs elsewhere. The story of his reign—of his offerings to the saṃgha and his distribution of Buddha relics—inspired kings and emperors not only throughout South and Southeast Asia but in China and Japan as well (see Ruppert 2000: 17ff).

In this paper, I wish to focus on the Indian “Aśokan model” of kingship, but I want to approach it in a somewhat unconventional way: by looking at traditions concerning Aśoka’s various wives. This, as Max Moerman (1999: 2) has put it, enables us to view Buddhist kingship “through the looking glass,” or rather through several looking glasses, for, by holding up Aśoka’s queens as mirrors to his own sovereignty, we can see reflected several different images of Aśoka that help reveal the inherent ambiguities of Buddhist kingship.

Historians of religion interested in kingship have long been familiar with the importance of “queenship,” whether they have viewed that in the context of producing royal progeny, magically insuring the fertility of the realm, making possible political alliances, or assuring the ability to perform certain rituals. For the most part, however, as students of Buddhist kings, we have not been very good in focussing on Buddhist queens. In our studies as well as in our sources, the importance of the queen has remained theoretical, stereotyped, idealized. Consider, for example, the case of the perfect wife of the ideal king, the *strīratna*, literally a “gem of a woman” who figures as one of the seven jewels of a *cakravartin*. She is described only in the most hackneyed terms. She is “lovely, fair to see, charming, with a lotus-like complexion,” a sort of physical embodiment of the middle way who is “not too tall or too short, not too thin or too fat, not too dark or too fair.” For the king, she acts as a kind of sexual air conditioning unit: her limbs are cool to the touch in summer, and warm to the touch in winter. And of course, she is a model of subservience and obedience; she gets up before her husband and retires after him, she is “always willing to do his pleasure,” and she is never ever in her thoughts or in her body unfaithful to him (D. 2: 175–76, trans., Walshe 1987: 282). This is a person who figures as context rather than text, and it is not surprising that so little attention has been paid to her.

We have been a little bit better at focussing on queens when, as rulers, heroines, or saints, they have achieved a certain independence from their husbands or from societal expectations. Consider, for example, our fascination with the Empress Wu (e.g., Forte 1976, Guisso 1978), our notice of Śrīmālādevī (e.g., Wayman and Wayman 1974), our interest in Queen Cāma (e.g., Swearer and Sommai 1998), in Ye-ses-mtsho-rgyal (e.g. Klein 1995, Gross 1987), in the Empress Suiko (Aston 1896, 2: 121–56), each one a significant Buddhist figure. We have not, however, generally treated these women as *wives* (even when they have been married), or at least we have failed to focus on the partnerships of power that involve them with their male counterparts.² Instead, we have

² An exception to this would be Swearer and Sommai who, in their analysis of the *Cāmadevīvaṃsa*, reveal interesting complex relationships between kings, queens, ascetics, and the Buddha (1998: 6–8).

marginalized them in a different way and seen them as noteworthy anomalies.

Stephanie Jamison (1997: 257) has commented that scholars who have dealt with wives in India—either of kings or of ordinary individuals—have generally tended either to “overglorify [their] positive roles” or to “wallow in [their] humiliations.” In this paper, I would like to try to find a middle path, and to look at Aśoka’s queens as wives of the king, and to look at King Aśoka as husband of his queens, in order to see what this two-way relationship can tell us about the nature of power and authority in Buddhist Asia. More specifically, I want to see how various aspects of Aśoka’s kingship are marked on the lives—and sometimes on the bodies—of his various queens, and conversely how the traditions about his wives have served to mark and make the institution of monarchy, to raise questions about it, and to express fears—and hopes—about the royal power it assumes.

Some years ago, in a study of the Aśokan legends that are preserved in Sanskrit *avadānas* (see Strong 1983), I suggested that the image they present of Aśoka as an ideal dharmic king was not untainted by the realization that he could also be a ruthless and cruel monarch. Glorification of the king as *dharmarāja* was thus countered by the realization that he had also to fulfill his *rāja-dharma*—his royal duties. These were defined in quasi Machiavellian terms in treatises on power and politics such as the *Arthaśāstra*,³ where “*dharma*” (“righteousness,” “law and order”) was to be coupled with, and to some extent maintained by “*daṇḍa*” (“the stick,” or punishment). As a ruler, then, Aśoka was portrayed both as “Dharmāśoka” (“Righteous Aśoka”) and “Caṇḍāśoka” (“Fierce Aśoka”). Much the same ambiguity may be found in his designation as a “*balacakravartin*,” an “armed cakravartin” who, unlike a fullfledged *cakravartin*, needs to use or threaten force in order to establish his rule. His power was thus symbolized by an “iron wheel” instead of a “golden one.”

Much the same duality may be found in other cultural contexts. Swearer and Sommai (1998: 139), for instance, have remarked that in Northern Thailand “popular Buddhist literature expresses an ambivalence toward kings. On the one hand, ... they do good works such as enshrining Buddha relics and supporting the saṅgha. On the other hand, because of their potential to exercise abusive, autocratic power they are also feared and sometimes vilified.” More specifically, they note (1998: 44) that, in the Northern Thai text that they translate, the unrighteousness of kings which brings about disastrous results and the downfall of their kingdom revolves, at least in part, around the oppression of women—specifically of wives and mothers. Correspondingly the righteousness of kings may be seen in the absence of such oppression.

At a more general theoretical level, such ambiguity may be reflected in rival definitions that have been presented for the notion of “sacred kingship” as a pan-cultural phenomenon. Cristiano Grottanelli (1983: 314), for instance, has maintained that, in many ideologies of kingship, “the welfare of the realm is

³ It is worth remembering that the *Arthaśāstra* was authored by Kauṭilya, an advisor to Aśoka’s own grandfather, Candragupta Maurya.

believed to be upheld not only by the well-being of kings but also by their correct behavior, behavior often identified with the king's capacity for upholding justice and for defining cosmic truth..." This theory would seem to be well reflected in the Buddhist notion of a *dharmarāja*—an ideal king who is paradigmatic of "righteous rule."

On the other hand, Laura Lévi Makarius (1974: 155) has argued just the opposite: that "the essential task of the king—the maintenance and furtherance of the fertility of the fields, of the fecundity of the cattle, and of everything that is conducive to assuring the prosperity of his subjects—is accomplished not by an act of sympathetic magic, such as a sexual union resulting in numerous progeny, but by an act of magical transgression [of societal prohibitions such as those against incest, shedding blood, violence, etc]. *The violative function of the king is the essence of kingship.*" This notion—that a king owes his sacrality, his power and authority, to his being "above" the law, to his willingness and ability to transcend societal norms of ordinary moral behavior—is more problematic, perhaps, but it is equally involved in Buddhist notions of kingship and might be said paradoxically to be paradigmatic of "realistic rule." It seems to me that both models—of righteous rule and realistic rule—though contradictory, are complementarily true and that the Buddhist tradition recognizes this. Kings embody the law (*dharma*) and they are also violators of that law.

This, as Max Moerman (1999: 2) has pointed out, is a slightly different way of expressing "an ambivalence [that may be] foundational to Buddhism: a tension found within [...] the earliest tradition in which the Buddha and the king are placed in a relationship of both identity and opposition. Śākyamuni abjured kingship in order to become a buddha and yet his hagiography, his iconography, and his ritual perquisites are those of the cakravartin, the wheel turning universal king. By abdicating the throne he became the royal *par excellence*. One could thus say that the king is always already present in the figure of the Buddha and hence also the Buddha in the figure of the king. [...] The dyad of Buddha and king—the king's two bodies, if you will, of renunciation and conquest—is traditionally expressed as the two wheels of the *dharma*. In medieval Japan the relationship between Buddhist and royal [*buppō* and *ōbō*] was similarly described as the two wheels of a cart, the two wings of a bird, the two horns of an ox, all images that recognize a structural parallel in the service of an essential unity."

Concubines

In order to unpack this ambivalence further in terms of the relationships of Buddhist kings and queens, I want to start with two stories about Aśoka and his concubines. As king and husband, Aśoka, like all ancient Indian monarchs, had not only several wives, but a harem (*antahpura*) of concubines, over which must have presided his chief wife, known in India as the *mahiṣī* (lit. "great buffalo cow").⁴ Within the harem she, as A. L. Basham (1954: 91) has pointed out,

⁴ In addition to the *mahiṣī* (chief wife), ancient Indian monarchs, at least within the

wielded power “rather harshly over the lesser queens and concubines.” The same harshness—and more—could be exhibited by the king. The story is as follows:

King Aśoka, together with his harem, went out to a park east of the city. It was springtime and the trees were in bloom.... Strolling through the park he came across an *aśoka* tree whose [scarlet] blossoms were at their peak, and thinking “this beautiful tree is my namesake,” he became very affectionate.⁵ King Aśoka’s body, however, was rough-skinned, and the young women of the harem did not enjoy caressing him. So after he had fallen asleep, they, out of spite, chopped all the flowers and branches off the *aśoka* tree. After some time, the king awoke; his eyes immediately fell on his dismembered tree.

“Who did this?” he asked his servants...

“Your majesty’s concubines,” they answered.

On learning this, Aśoka flew into a rage and burned the five hundred women alive (Strong 1983: 210-11; text in *Aśokāv.*, p. 43).

Here we have an example of the vivid ruthless power that could be exerted by ruling monarchs in ancient India (as well as in other parts of Asia and the world), but it should be noted that, though perhaps impetuous, this is not a random act of violence; rather it is an act of punishment (*daṇḍa*), a reaction brought on by the spiteful deeds of the concubines, and the resentment they expressed in the transparently symbolic act of chopping up the *aśoka* tree. We may find Aśoka’s reaction extreme, and may argue that *dharma* (righteousness) should have won out over *daṇḍa* (punishment), but, in the context of a text like the *Arthaśāstra*, which would have the king tolerate no such expression of insubordination or insult, his execution of the women becomes not excusable but more understandable. To be sure, in one line of Buddhist thought, these acts are seen as “cruel” and non-Buddhist, and earn Aśoka the epithet “Caṇḍāśoka” (Fierce Aśoka), but in another context, they are a realistic recognition of the powers and abusiveness of kingship.

A rather different picture emerges in a second harem story preserved in the Chinese version of the Aśoka legend, the *A-yü wang chuan* 阿育王傳 (T. 2042; Fr. trans., Przyluski 1923). There we are told that when Aśoka first turned towards Buddhism, he invited some Buddhist monks to come and preach in his palace. He wanted the women of his harem to be able to listen to them, but, mindful of the laws of *purdah*, he strictly forbade them to approach the monks directly, and set up a curtain behind which they could sit and listen. Though

brahmanical context, had several other official wives each of whom had particular ritual responsibilities at great sacrifices such as the Aśvamedha and Rājasūya. These included the *parivṛktī* (avoided wife), *vāvātā* (favorite wife), and *pālāgalī* (low-caste wife). See Jamison (1996: 65ff + 99ff) for a careful study of their different functions. In the Buddhist context, see also Horner 1930: 35.

⁵ In India, the *aśoka* tree (especially the gentle kicking of it by maidens [as depicted in the bas-reliefs at Sanchi and elsewhere]) is associated with amorousness, sexuality and fertility. See Kimura 1960.

pardah was not widely in vogue in ancient India prior to Muslim times, it was generally the custom in royal households. Thus the *Arthaśāstra* (Kangle 1986, 1: 29; trans., 2: 50) specifies that women in the king's harem should be kept isolated and, specifically, forbidden contact with "shaven-headed" or "matted-haired" ascetics.⁶

When preaching to the women, it was the misogynist habit of Buddhist monks to limit themselves to sermons on the practice of good deeds, on the grounds that women would be attached to worldly pleasures and incapable of understanding the deeper *dharma*. One day, however, in our story, at the conclusion of a monk's sermon, one of Aśoka's concubines came out from behind the curtain, approached the monk, and asked whether there were not more to the Buddha's *dharma* than what he had told them. The monk, realizing that here was a woman of potential understanding, then preached to her the four noble truths, and the concubine attained the fruit of entering the stream. In spite of this, her companions, knowing the character of the king, fully expected that she would be executed for her transgression of the royal order. Indeed, the concubine herself, after confessing her violation of *pardah* to Aśoka, offered to kill herself for it. But this time, Aśoka, instead of flying into a rage at her insubordination, marvelled at the glory and effectiveness of the Buddha's teaching and ordered that, thenceforth, his wives should no longer have to sit in *pardah* when listening to Buddhist monks.⁷ Here then, *dharma* does win out over *danda*, but once again, as in the case of the dismembered *aśoka* tree, it is important to see that the king's deeds are presented as reactions to the actions of his concubines. In these stories, rather than being mere adornments, the concubines are, in fact, makers and markers of their lord's kingship, on both sides of its ambiguity.

Aśoka's Wives

This dual image of Buddhist kingship, however, was more complex and nuanced than these two stories suggest, and with this in mind, I would like to

⁶ This may not have been just a matter of sexual worry. The same text (Kangle 1:30, trans., 2: 54) specifies that the king himself should "grant an interview to a holy ascetic [only] in the company of trusted armed guards." Aśoka's use of the curtain (*pardah*) here is only one possible solution; another was to have nuns preach to the women of the harem, as in the case of the queen of Roruka who was visited by the nun Śailā (See *Div.*, p.552; see also Sharma 1985: 96). On the topic of *pardah* and restrictions on women of harem, see also Basham 1954: 179.

⁷ T. 2042, 50: 158c; Fr. trans., Przyluski 1923: 412-13. For a longer version of the same story, see also Huber 1908: 150-57. This is, of course, a direct challenge to at least part of the *Arthaśāstra* provision mentioned above—the interdiction against shaven-haired ascetics entering the royal apartments. Indeed, the historical Aśoka may have opened things up even more since he declares, in Rock Edict VI (Bloch 1950: 107), that no one with a petition to make or a message should hesitate to come and see him, even when he is in his gynaeceum ("orodha"). On the equivalence of orodha and stryāgāra ("women's apartments"), see Barua 1968, 1: 219.

turn now to traditions about Aśoka's several official wives, whom he had in addition to his many concubines.⁸ Various sources name no fewer than five wives of King Aśoka:

- (1) Kāluvākī, the mother of Tittivāla.⁹
- (2) Vedisa-devī, the mother of Mahinda and Sanghamittā.¹⁰
- (3) Padmāvātī, the mother of Kunāla.¹¹
- (4) Asandhimittā.¹²
- (5) Tiṣṣarakṣitā (Pali: Tissarakkhā).¹³

Not all of these five wives overlapped in time (Asandhimittā, for instance, is specifically said to have predeceased Tissarakkhā's installation as queen), and scholars disagree as to whether or not some of them may or may not have been one and the same person.¹⁴ In what follows, however, we shall ignore such problems and consider each wife in turn, under different, more general, headings.

Partners in Patronage and Power?

Kāluvākī is named only once in our sources, but in an important place—in the Aśokan inscription that has been dubbed “the Queen's Edict” (Bloch 1950: 159). There she is specifically called the “second queen” and identified as the mother of someone named Tīvala, who is otherwise unknown. The text of the edict has

⁸ For general surveys of Aśoka's wives, see Barua 1968, 1: 51-54; Yamazaki 1979: 229-40; Bongard-Levin 1971; Mookerji 1928: 8-9. In addition to the sons and daughters of his named wives whom we shall deal with below, a number of legends mention other children of Aśoka (by unnamed wives) who were instrumental in the introduction of Buddhism into various peripheral countries: his son (or, in some traditions, grandson), Kustana is associated with Khotan; his daughter, Cārumatī, is associated with Nepal; his son Jalauka with Kashmir; three other sons with the kingdom of Nan-chao in Yünnan, etc. On these traditions, see Lamotte 1988: 255-59, and Yamazaki 1979: 213-29.

⁹ See Bloch 1950: 159.

¹⁰ See *Mhv.* 13.6ff., trans., Geiger 1912: 88; *Dpv.* 6.16f., trans., p. 147; *Sp.* 1: 70, trans., Jayawickrama 1962: 62; see also Bapat and Hirakawa 1970: 49.

¹¹ See *Aśokāv.* p. 105, trans. Strong, 1983: 268; *T.* 2042, 50: 108a, Fr. trans., Przyluski 1923: 281; *T.* 2043, 50: 144a, trans., Li 1993: 63.

¹² See *Mhv.* 5. 59-60, 85. + 20.2, trans., Geiger 1912: 30,33 + 136; *Sp.* 1.42, trans., Jayawickrama 1962: 37; *Mbv.*, p. 152. For other references to Pali commentaries, see Malalasekera 1938, 1:205. See also Reynolds and Reynolds 1982: 172-89; Ver Eecke 1976: 45-54 (text), 50-59 (Fr. trans.); and Malalasekera 1937: 74-77.

¹³ See *Mhv.* 20.3ff., trans., Geiger 1912: 136; see also *Aśokāv.*, pp. 93-94, 107-23, trans., Strong 1983: 257-58, 270-85; *T.* 2043, vol. 50: 144-45; trans. Li 1993: 65-79; Przyluski 1923: 281-95; *Avk.*, pp. 346-47; Bongard Levin and Volkova 1965: 13-39; Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1970: 76-77; *T.* 2087, 51: 885a-b, trans., Li 1996: 95-97; See also Eggermont 1980.

¹⁴ Bongard Levin (1971: 138), for example, equates Kāluvākī and Tiṣṣarakṣitā; while Barua (1968, 1: 54) has suggested identifying her with Padmāvātī, and Vedisa-devī with Asandhimittā.

been translated as follows: “At the word of Devānampriya, the Mahāmātras everywhere have to be told this: What gifts (have been made) here by the second queen, viz., mango-groves or gardens, or alms-houses or whatever else, these (shall) be registered (in the name) of that queen. This (is the request) of the second queen, the mother of Tīvala, Kāluvākī” (Bhattacharya 1960: 76).

There is some debate as to who the “author” of this edict was. Most scholars agree that it was Aśoka and that he is here proclaiming that gifts (*dāna*) made by Kāluvākī should be specifically acknowledged and credited as such and not seen as anonymous royal donations. Bongard-Levin, however, has a different interpretation: claiming that the “Queen’s Edict” was issued very late in Aśoka’s reign, and pointing to various legendary sources that hint at a decline in Aśoka’s power and a usurpation of his authority late in his rule, he suggests that the edict was actually issued by Queen Kāluvākī, and that it reflects a sort of “palace coup” in which she, as an ambitious person, increasingly took control of the reins of rule, and wanted credit for it.¹⁵ A different interpretation has been presented more recently by K. R. Norman (1991: 52–58). He suggests that the edict iterates instructions that were sent by Aśoka to his “charity commissioners” (*mahāmātras*), and that sought to clear up some confusion that had arisen about the identity of his “second queen” who had previously made donations. The message itself was never actually intended to be inscribed, but was simply a “post scriptum” meant to specify that the aforementioned “second queen” was indeed Kāluvākī, that those donations were to be credited to her account and to none other, and that the same should be done in the future.¹⁶ In support of his interpretation, Norman (1991: 57) quotes a significant line from another inscription of Aśoka—the Seventh Pillar Edict—that states that one of the functions of his *mahāmātras* was to be in charge of the delivery of gifts made by himself *as well as* those made by his queens. The same pillar edict, moreover, goes on to indicate that he also involved his sons in this scheme of *dāna* (see Bloch 1950: 171).

Norman’s interpretation is less imaginative, perhaps, than Bongard-Levin’s, but it seems more plausible. What it reflects is a system in which members of the royal family were all involved in the granting of favors and making of charitable donations throughout the kingdom, and that they individually sought both political and religious (i.e., meritorious) credit for doing so.¹⁷ Indeed, in the legend about Aśoka’s great quinquennial festival (see Strong 1983:265), we can read the amusing tale of how Aśoka and Kunāla, father and son, competed

¹⁵ Bongard-Levin 1971:137–38. Bongard-Levin’s interpretation requires him to identify Kāluvākī with the ruthless Tīṣyarakṣitā whose story we shall consider below.

¹⁶ Thus, Norman (1991: 58) translates the edict as follows: “By His Majesty’s command, *mahāmātras* everywhere are to be addressed (as follows): Whatever gift there is of the second queen in your area, either mango-grove, or pleasure-park, or alms-house, or anything else at all, that (at present) is accounted to that queen. (In future) thus account it: to the second queen, (namely) Kāluvākī the mother of Tīvala.”

¹⁷ For a study of the involvement of consorts of the ruler in merit-making activities in Heian Japan, see Ruppert 2000: ch. 6.

with each other in making donations; and we know from other legendary sources (Strong 1983: 287) that Aśoka was meticulous in tabulating the sum total of his gifts to the Sangha. It would seem that such accounts were kept as well for members of his family, including his queens, much as laypersons in South and Southeast Asia today keep merit books recording their good deeds.

It is gradually becoming more clear how much kingship, at least, in Mauryan times, was a family affair, with the king, of course, as *pater familias*, but with his queens and sons involved in his rule to various degrees. Much the same thing may be seen, in a somewhat different light perhaps, in the legend about the next of Aśoka's wives on our list, Vedisa-devī. Vedisa-Devī appears only in the Pali tradition and we know very little about her. She is featured as the mother of two of Aśoka's saintly children, Mahinda (who was instrumental in converting the island of Sri Lanka), and his sister, Sanghamittā (who, a bit later, was important in bringing the order of nuns to the island, as well as a branch of the bodhi tree). Aśoka first met Devī in her hometown of Vedisa when, as a young man, he was on his way to Ujjain to subdue and rule, as his father's viceroy, the district of Avanti. Devī is said to have been the daughter of a local merchant, and she accompanied Aśoka to Ujjain where, as his wife, she gave birth to Mahinda, and, after two years more, to Sanghamittā (see *Mhv.* 13, 8-11, trans., Geiger 1912: 88-89). Eight years later, Aśoka's father Bindusāra died, and Aśoka promptly returned to the Mauryan capital of Pāṭaliputra to kill off his brothers and take over the throne. His children went with him, and both eventually entered the Buddhist order.¹⁸ Interestingly, however, Devī did not accompany her husband and her children to the capital but stayed in her hometown of Vedisa (*Mhv.* 5.204-211, trans., Geiger 1912: 43-44).

Some may speculate that Devī was thus "forgotten and forsaken" when her husband acceded to the throne. This conclusion is belied, however, by her continued importance in the tradition. Indeed, years later, when Mahinda was sent to convert the island of Sri Lanka, he first went "home" to Vedisa, where he tarried for the better part of a year, visiting his mother, preaching to her, ordaining a grand-nephew of hers, living in a vihāra provided by her, and getting her blessing before leaving for Lanka.¹⁹ Barua (1968, 1:52-53) has speculated that Aśoka may, in fact, have kept palaces with wives and families in different places as part of a network of political alliances that unified his empire, and that Devī's establishment may thus be seen as an example of this. Far from being abandoned when her husband moved to the capital, she would have continued as his representative in an important region of central India.

Similar patterns may be found in other parts of Asia. In the ancient Mon kingdom of Burma, for example, a king, not coincidentally named Siridhammāsoka, split up his kingdom into 32 districts, in each of which he

¹⁸ Prior to her ordination, Sanghamittā had been married to a nephew of Aśoka, Aggibrahmā, by whom she had a child. He apparently left her to join the order two years before she did.

¹⁹ *Mhv.* 13.3ff., trans., Geiger 1912: 88. See also Dpv., 12.14ff (text), p. 168 (trans.).

installed one of his wives as his representative (while he and his chief queen remained in the capital). Each wife's position and authority in this scheme was reinforced by having her enshrine, in a temple in her own sub-kingdom, one of 32 tooth relics of the Buddha (see Shorto 1963). This centrifugal, mandalaic distribution pattern, which sends queens of the king as symbols of central sovereignty out to provincial centers, has its centripetal counterpart, perhaps, in the uneme tradition of pre-Heian Japan, in which women from the provinces were sent to the capital for "service" to the emperor.

Mothers of Dharma, Fonts of Merit

In terms of the Buddhist religion, however, it is clear that Vedisa-devī is primarily glorified because of her being the mother of two children who became important missionaries and saints—bearers and further spreaders of *dharma*. This is also true of the third of Aśoka's wives on our list, Padmāvatī, the mother of Kunāla, who, in the Sanskrit tradition, replaces Mahinda as Aśoka's featured saintly son. If we know very little about Vedisa-devī, we know next to nothing about Padmāvatī. All that we are told in the *Aśokāvadāna* (Strong 1983: 268) is that she gave birth to Kunāla "on the very same day that Aśoka built the 84,000 *stūpas* [*dharmarājikās*]." Significantly, however, this is an event which not only associated her with Aśoka's distribution of relics and power, but which also marked the king's acquisition of the epithet "Dharmāśoka," and the start of his career in spreading the Dharma throughout the world. Accordingly, Kunāla was first given the name "Dharmavivardhana" ("Dharma-Increasing") (see *Aśokāv.*, p. 55, trans., Strong 1983: 221).

In the world of legend, the act of getting born, or the ability to give birth, at the very same time as an important event, is a sign of greatness. A similar simultaneity can be found, in the Mūlasarvāstivādatradition, between the Buddha's attaining of enlightenment at Bodhgaya and his wife Yaśodharā's giving birth to their son, Rāhula, at home in the palace.²⁰ In that family context, Yaśodharā (who is almost a queen, i.e., a princess) and Rāhula (a prince), in their own ways, participate in the great event of the Buddha's bodhi. Here too Padmāvatī and Kunāla may be seen to participate in the building of the 84,000 *stūpas*, and Aśoka's achievement of *dharmarāja* status.

It is, however, the fourth of Aśoka's wives on the list, Asandhimittā, whom the Pali tradition was to feature as most responsible for furthering Aśoka's *dharma*. In the *Mahāvamsa*, Asandhimittā is featured as Aśoka's chief queen (*agga-mahisī*). Her relationship with Aśoka goes way back to a previous life

²⁰ In this tradition, Gautama impregnates Yaśodharā on the eve of his Great Departure, and she bears their child six years in the womb, following, in her own way, her own quest for enlightenment. She gives birth to Rāhula at the very moment Gautama attains enlightenment, just as the full moon is eclipsed by Rāhu. See Strong 1997: 113-28. In other, more widespread traditions, Rāhula, of course, is born much earlier, but there too his birth marks a momentous event: the bodhisattva's Great Departure.

when she, observing the future Aśoka (then a honey merchant) make an offering of honey to a pratyekabuddha, wished that she might become his queen in a future life, when he obtained his vowed for sovereignty over Jambudvīpa (*Mhv.* 5.49-61, trans., Geiger 1912: 30). By the force of her karma, these events came to pass.²¹

The *Mahāvamsa* (20.2) specifies that she (Asandhimittā) was a faithful follower of the Buddha and that she passed away in the thirtieth year of Aśoka's reign, much to the latter's chagrin. The commentarial tradition adds that she became a stream-enterer before she died.²² Later Theravāda traditions, however, were to go beyond these simple points and expand on her story in a significant way. In particular, her tale was more fully developed and her merits magnified in three texts: a 9th-10th century (?) chronicle, the so-called Cambodian or Extended *Mahāvamsa*;²³ a 14th century (?) Pali collection of tales, the *Dasavattbhuppakaraṇa* (see Ver Eecke 1976: 45-54 (text), 50-59 (Fr. trans.)); and a 15th century Thai cosmological text, the *Trai Bhūmi Kathā*.²⁴

These sources begin by reworking slightly the story of Aśoka's gift of honey to a pratyekabuddha in a previous life, adding to it an accessory gift of a piece of cloth made by Asandhimittā to the same pratyekabuddha. They then relate a long tale that may be summarized as follows: One day, King Aśoka, whose tremendous merits resulted in his being daily provided with all sorts of luxuries and foodstuffs [including sugarcane] brought from Lake Anotatta by the gods, saw Asandhimittā enjoying a heavenly piece of sugarcane. Jokingly, he mocked her for consuming what she had not karmically earned. "How is it" he teased, "that you have come to drink this smooth juice that is sweet as honey?" This teasing upset her: she felt that he thought that she had no merit of her own, and so, in a pout, she replied that everything she enjoyed was due solely to her own good merits. Now it was time for Aśoka to get upset. "Oh, is that so?" he replied, and he demanded, as a test of her merit, that she procure him sixty thousand monastic robes by the next day so that he could make an offering to the community of monks. Now Asandhimittā was at a loss as to what to do. In the middle of the night, however, the guardian god, Kuvera, came to her and told her to fear nothing, for in a past life she had made an offering of a piece of cloth to a pratyekabuddha and, as a result, her merit was great. He then gave her a magical polished lacquer ball from which she could endlessly pull out pieces of cloth fit for making monastic robes. And indeed, the following day, miraculously (or rather karmically), she was able to dispense from this single ball 60,000 robes, which Aśoka presented to the Sangha.

Aśoka was tremendously impressed by this. Henceforth, Asandhimittā

²¹ For a fuller study of traditions about Asandhimittā, see Strong 2000.

²² For references, see Malalasekera 1938, 1:205.

²³ Malalasekera 1937: 74-77. The Asandhimittā episode is one of the few stories in the *Extended Mahāvamsa* that is found neither in Mahānāma's *Mahāvamsa* nor in the *Mahāvamsa* commentary.

²⁴ Reynolds and Reynolds 1982: 172-89. See also Cœdès and Archaimbault 1973: 111-123.

became his favorite queen, and he went so far as to offer her his own sovereignty, which, however, she declined. But this favoritism occasioned the jealousy and ill will of Aśoka's sixteen thousand other wives. In order to silence these jealous concubines, Aśoka ordered another test of Asandhimittā's merit. He had sixteen thousand (presumably 16,001) identical cakes baked, one of them containing his royal seal. He then asked all of his wives, including Asandhimittā, to choose a piece of cake and to break it in two. They all did so, one by one, Asandhimittā getting the last piece left, but such was her worthiness that it was the one that contained the royal seal. Again, however, she declined the sovereignty that this implied (see Strong 1994: 116ff).

Clearly this is a story designed to proclaim the great merit of the queen, but, in one version of the tale at least, her merit is operative on Aśoka in even more significant ways; in the *Trai bhūmi kathā*, Asandhimittā, having impressed her husband with her merit, proceeds to preach a sermon to him, encouraging him to turn towards Buddhism by listening to the Dharma, to observe the precepts, and to undertake the construction of the 84,000 *stūpas*. In other words, it is Asandhimittā here who not only marks Aśoka's turn to the *dharmā*, but who actually becomes the one responsible for making him into a dharmic king. And he announces to her: "from now on into the future I will listen to your words concerning what is wrong and what is right; when you who have merit speak to me, I will listen to everything you say." (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982: 188).

This theme—that of the queen being a positive *dharmalogical* force transforming her husband the king into a better Buddhist—is by no means unique to Aśoka's reign. Indeed, in the stories of early Buddhist kings in the Pali Canon, it is a fairly common one. Thus, King Udena was converted to Buddhism by his chief wife, Sāmāvatī (*DhA.* 1:217-18; trans. Burlingame 1921, 1:286-87), and King Pasenadi's queen, Mallikā, brought her husband to a realization of the Dharma's truth as well (*M.* 2:111-12; trans., Horner 1954-59, 2: 296). Pasenadi and Mallikā's daughter, moreover, was Queen Śrīmālā, whose fame is extolled in the *sūtra* that bears her name. Alex Wayman (1974: 2) suggests that she may have been a queen in South India where during the Īkshvāku dynasty, "almost all the royal ladies were Buddhists" and were the driving forces behind the spread of the Dharma in the region, though often their husbands remained more religiously uncommitted (see Sastri 1963: 96). Analogous tales may be found in Tibet, where the seventh century monarch, Srong btsan sgam po, the first of Tibet's kings, is said to have been converted to Buddhism by his two wives, one from Nepal and the other from China and both said to be incarnations of Tārā (see Tucci 1980: 1 and Powers 1995: 126-27). And yet, the completeness of Srong btsan sgam po's commitment to his new faith has sometimes been questioned. Buddhist kings, in fact, given the down-to-earth practicalities of *Realpolitik*, could not always afford to be fully righteous, although their wives could, at least in legend.

The non-Dharmic flipside: Tiṣyarakṣitā

The very righteous Asandhimittā does not figure in the Sanskrit legends of Aśoka. These feature, instead, Tiṣyarakṣitā, who is the only one of Aśoka's wives to figure in both the Sanskrit and the Pali traditions. In the *Mahāvamsa* (20.3, trans., Geiger 1912: 136), where she is named Tissarakkhā,²⁵ she is said to have become Aśoka's queen four years after Asandhimittā's death. The two queens, however, could hardly have been more dissimilar. Where Asandhimittā is righteous, Tiṣyarakṣitā is conniving and treacherous, the antithesis of *dharma*. Moreover, as we shall see, she also brings out the fierceness of her husband.

Two tales serve to emphasize Tiṣyarakṣitā's character. The first is the story of her jealousy of the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya. According to the *Aśokāvadāna*, Aśoka, soon after his conversion to Buddhism, orders that many offerings of jewels and ornaments be sent to "Bodhi," as a token of his devotion. Tiṣyarakṣitā, who has no knowledge of "Bodhi," thinks the name belongs to some woman, a new paramour of the king whom she deems to be a rival. Angry that these gifts are not being presented to her, she hires a sorceress to effectuate "Bodhi's" destruction. The sorceress, who knows the arboreal identity of "Bodhi" is a bit perplexed by this request, but she asks no questions, and efficaciously sets to work. Using her black magic, she ties a thread around the trunk of the tree and soon it begins to wither. Aśoka is horribly distraught, so much so that, in one text at least, he is in danger of expiring himself. Tiṣyarakṣitā, however, tells him not to worry, that if "Bodhi" dies, she herself will be able to please the king. Aśoka then replies that "Bodhi" is not a woman, but the tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, and Tiṣyarakṣitā, realizing her mistake, asks the sorceress to reverse the spell. The tree is saved, Aśoka revives, and he never realizes who was responsible for its near demise (Strong 1983: 257-58).

In the Pali tradition, this story is worked a bit differently. Thus, in the *Mahāvamsa*, the same tale is summarized, except that the bodhi tree is not saved; Tissarakkhā's black magic is successful, and the tree perishes (*Mbv.* 20.4-6, trans., Geiger 1912: 136). The reason for this is pretty transparent: this is an attempt to glorify Sri Lanka as the sole and true inheritor of the Indian Buddhist tradition. For the bodhi tree perishing at Bodhgaya symbolizes the decline of the dhamma in its homeland, but, by the time it dies there, its Southern branch has already been safely sent to and successfully transplanted in the Sri Lankan capital of Anurādhapura. At the same time, however, the Pali tradition also recognizes the contrast here between Tissarakkhā and Asandhimittā; in the *Mahābodhivamsa* (10th century ?), for instance, Asandhimittā, in clear opposition to her malevolent counterpart, is specifically described as extremely devoted to "Bodhi" (the tree) to which she is said to make all kinds of offerings of flowers and ornaments (see *Mbv.*, p. 152).

²⁵ Tiṣyarakṣitā/ Tissarakkhā is the only one of Aśoka's queens who figures in both the Sanskrit and the Pali traditions.

The second story featuring Tiṣyarakṣitā is the tale of her blinding of Aśoka and Padmāvatī's son, Kunāla. This is by far the best known tradition about any of Aśoka's wives. Not only is the story found in the *Aśokāvadāna* and its Chinese versions,²⁶ but it got recounted in later texts such as Kṣemendra's *Avadānakalpalatā* (*Avk.*, pp. 346-47), the *Aśokāvadānamālā* (see Bongard Levin and Volkova 1965: 13-39), and Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* (see Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1970: 76-77). There is also a Jain retelling of it (see Jacobi 1885: 259-70). A version of the story appears in the 3rd century collection of tales, the *Liu tu chi ching* 六度集經 (T. 152),²⁷ and the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-tsang recounts it in his narrative of his voyage to India, when he visits the reputed site of Kunāla's blinding (see T. 2087, 51: 885a-b, trans., Li 1996: 95-97). In Japan, the tale resurfaces in the *Konjaku monogatari*, where it may have served as a model for the story of the blind singer, Semimaru (see Matisoff 1978: 168-72). Moreover, outside of the Buddhist context, there are interesting parallels with the tale of Hippolytus, made famous by Euripides (see Keene 1962), and with the story of Crispus, Constantine the Great, and his wife Fausta (Sénart 1889: 108).

The gist of the saga is as follows: Aśoka's son Kunāla was famous not only for his righteous ways, but for his handsome body and his bright and beautiful eyes.²⁸ One day, Tiṣyarakṣitā happened to see him in the palace while he was sitting all alone, and she became enamored of him. Embracing him, she said, "When I see your glorious body and your beautiful eyes, I get a burning feeling inside, as though a forest fire were consuming a dry wood." Kunāla, however, rebuffed her in no uncertain terms, telling her that she was like a mother to him, and that the non-dharmic path she was suggesting would only lead to a lower rebirth. Tiṣyarakṣitā, thus jilted, promised herself revenge.

Her chance comes when prince Kunāla is sent out of the capital to put down an uprising in the border city of Takṣaśilā. Soon thereafter, however, Aśoka becomes deathly ill, and, thinking his end near, he makes plans to recall Kunāla and install him on the throne. Fearing what Kunāla might do to her should he gain power, Tiṣyarakṣitā figures out a way to cure Aśoka of his illness and does so. Aśoka is tremendously grateful to her and grants her a boon. Seeing her chance to exact vengeance on Kunāla, she asks for the kingship for a period of seven days,²⁹ and as soon as she is on the throne, she promptly sends a royal command, in the king's name, to Takṣaśilā, ordering the destruction of Kunāla's

²⁶ See *Aśokāv.*, pp. 93-94, 107-23, trans., Strong 1983: 257-58, 270-85; T. 2043, vol. 50: 144-45; trans. Li 1993: 65-79; Przyluski 1923: 281-95.

²⁷ See on this Chavannes 1934, 1: 106-111. In this tale, Kunāla is called by the name Dharmavivardhana, and Tiṣyarakṣitā is simply referred to as the king's consort.

²⁸ Indeed, he is called "Kunāla" because that is the name of a bright-eyed Himalayan bird.

²⁹ Tiṣyarakṣitā's eagerness for sovereignty here may be contrasted to the case of Asandhimittā, who, we have seen, is specifically said, in the *Extended Mahāvamsa*, *Dasavatthupparakaraṇa* and *Trai bhūmi kathā*, to have refused the throne when offered it by Aśoka.

eyes.³⁰ The officials of Takṣaśilā, who have become fond of Kunāla, are reluctant to carry out the order to blind him, but the prince, ever righteous, tells them they must follow the royal command, and himself asks the executioners to gouge out his eyes. He, in fact, goes even further than this, and uses his disfigurement as an occasion to meditate on the impermanence of the eye in particular, and the body in general. Eventually, Kunāla leaves Takṣaśilā and becomes a wandering blind musician, and, as such, he in time arrives back at the capital, where he is ultimately recognized by Aśoka. The king demands to know who has done this to his son, and he soon finds out it was Tiṣyarakṣitā (Strong 1983: 268-83).

At this point, the different versions of the tale diverge and exhibit different endings. In the *Aśokāvadāna* which we have been following up until now, Aśoka, in a rage, vows to punish Tiṣyarakṣitā. Glaring at her, he declares: "How is it, miserable creature, that you do not sink into the ground? I shall strike off your head with an axe! You wicked woman, attached to unrighteousness, I now disown you the way a self-possessed sage renounces wealth." And then, contemplating the various tortures he will make her undergo, he says: "First, I'll tear out her eyes, and then I think I'll rip open her body with sharp rakes, impale her alive on a spit, cut off her nose with a saw, cut out her tongue with a razor, and fill her with poison and kill her" (Strong 1983: 284). Kunāla, hearing all this, implores his father to be compassionate, not to let his own deeds be as dishonorable as those of Tiṣyarakṣitā, but to spare her life, "for the reward of loving kindness knows no equal, and forgiveness was extolled by the Blessed One" (Strong 1983: 284). And, as though to prove his point, he then performs an act of truth, declaring that his eyes should be restored at once, if it be true that he himself has only had kind thoughts towards his "mother." Kunāla's sight miraculously returns, but Aśoka remains unmoved: he refuses to forgive Tiṣyarakṣitā and has her burned to death in a lacquer house. And he has the citizens of Takṣaśilā executed as well (Strong 1983: 285).

This version of the story is significant because it shows that the ambiguity of Aśoka's kingship is basic to him and was not erased with his conversion to Buddhism. At this point, supposedly he is already "Dharmāśoka," a great righteous Buddhist monarch. He has ruled dharmically for years, yet he reverts here to being "Caṇḍāśoka"—a cruel, impetuous, fearful monarch, given to acts of *daṇḍa*. Kunāla is right: in this, there is no difference between Aśoka and his unrighteous queen.

That the significance of this point was not lost on the tradition, and that it was controversial is reflected in the variety of ways in which other texts have handled the dénouement of this story. In the *A-yü wang chuan* (Przyluski 1923: 293), and the *A-yü wang ching* (Li 1993:79), for example, much the same sequence of events takes place, except that there is no act of truth and Kunāla's eyes are not restored—something which, as Bongard-Levin and Volkova (p. 163) have pointed out, may help justify Aśoka's final violence against his

³⁰ The assumption here is that blinding him would exclude him from the kingship.

queen. In Kṣemendra's *Avadānakalpalatā*, the eyes are restored by an act of truth, and this is what causes Aśoka to forgive Tiṣyarakṣitā and to spare her life. In *Hsiian-tsang* (Li 1996: 97), Kunāla does not ask Aśoka to be compassionate; instead, he explains how he, being a filial son, had to ask the Takṣaśilans to carry out what he perceived to be his father's command. Aśoka then has Tiṣyarakṣitā executed, and only then are Kunāla's eyes restored not by an act of truth but by a saintly healer named Ghoṣa. Ghoṣa also appears in the *Konjaku monogatari* version (Matisoff 1978: 170), but there, interestingly, Aśoka gives into Kunāla's entreaties to spare Tiṣyarakṣitā and does not have her executed.

These variants, I would suggest, all reflect slightly different feelings about the nature of kingship, and its relationship to *dharma*. Whether Tiṣyarakṣita is punished or not is a measure of the degree to which King Aśoka gives in to *daṇḍa* or to *dharma*. The fact that he gives into the former in some versions of the story and to the latter in others indicates that there was considerable ambiguity about this issue.

Conclusion: Good Wife, Bad Wife, Ambiguous King

Aśoka is a monarch who is caught between his wives. Within the legendary context with which we are dealing, the good, righteous ones, Vedisa-devī, Padmāvatī, and Asandhimittā, reflect his (and/or his children's) turn towards *dharma*, and exhibit different aspects of that move—his partnership of power, his sponsorship of the saṃgha, etc. The evil, unrighteous ones, such as Tiṣyarakṣitā, reflect his turn away from *dharma*.

Aśoka, of course, was not the only monarch to have several wives, and not the only one to have a good one and a bad one. The saga of King Udena, in the *Dhammapada Commentary*, for instance, opposes Udena's two primary spouses—the saintly Queen Samāvatī, and the fiendish Māgandiyā, who constantly tries to frame and blame her rival and ends up murdering Samāvatī by burning her to death in her apartment. Udena's reaction to this makes Aśoka's outbursts seem mild by comparison: he has all of the evil Māgandiyā's relatives buried waist deep in a field, he covers them with straw and burns them to death; he then ploughs their bodies apart with an iron plough and forces Māgandiyā to eat the pieces, fried in oil like cakes! (*DhA.* 1: 220-22, trans., Burlingame 1921, 1: 288-89).

For the most part, in legend, individual wives of kings tended not to be ambiguous. They were all good or all bad, and accordingly were praised or blamed. They could be this way because they were plural and could offset one another. In this sense, royal polygamy in Buddhism made possible a network of legends and stories that allowed for the expression of multiple, and variant, attitudes towards kingship. Kings, however, were singular, and definitions of ideal kingship tended to require that they remain singular in their attitudes and policies. Thus, at a theoretical level, ambivalent feelings about them were difficult to express, even though those ambivalences clearly existed. In this context, then, it was the queens who became the bearers—not the exclusive

bearers, perhaps, but certainly one of the bearers—of the ambiguities that were felt towards the king. Kings were loved, kings were feared. Kings were honored, kings were detested, sometimes different kings, and sometimes the same king but with different queens.

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