Women in Early Indian Buddhism
Comparative Textual Studies

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narratives, in which each monk or nun explains, in the first person, the process that led to his or her achievement of arahantship.

Some of these men and women are well known from other (often earlier) sources, but the majority of them are known only to *Apadāna*. This majority is listed therein as personifications of meritorious deeds (with names like “Lamp-Giver” or “Foot-Worshiper”) rather than being assigned names of historical individuals believed to have played important roles in the early Buddhist community. In their *apadānas* particularly, but even in those of the otherwise famous monks and nuns, *Apadāna* often merely alludes to, or even falls altogether to mention, certain details. The sorts of details of the present/final life that might be expected of a biographical or hagiographical narrative and that, in the case of the famous monks and nuns, are known from other sources are often absent. Instead, in all cases, *apadānas* narrate the process leading to arahantship (or in the case of the Buddha, Buddhahood) as the result primarily of meritorious deeds performed in previous lives, during the times of previous Buddhas and Paccekabuddhas. Thus in a typical *apadāna* a monk or nun begins by describing the meritorious deed he or she performed during the time of a previous Buddha, details the subsequent happy rebirths (both human and divine) experienced as results of that deed, and concludes by portraying his or her present-life arahantship as the culmination of that same kammic trajectory.

In other work (Walters 1997) I have interpreted this focus on pieties performed during previous lives in light of the expansion of the Buddhist community after the 3rd century BCE. The earlier texts in the Pāli canon had certainly established by then the expectation that good deeds performed by laypeople and less advanced monks and nuns would result in good rebirths among people and in various heavens. However, the achievement of arahantship—which entails the end of all rebirth, nibbāna—was narrated as the exclusive domain of advanced monks and nuns, whose intellectual penetration and meditative effort produced that religious goal. Ordinary people could look forward to future lives as advanced monks and nuns, during which they too could pursue arahantship. But the sorts of religious activities that they typically performed in the present life (and which most Theravāda Buddhists still typically perform today)—giving alms; building temples and monuments; worshiping bodhi trees, thāpas, and similar reminders of the Buddha; adopting special moral codes during full moon day celebrations; listening to sermons—were not explicitly

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1. This chapter has been composed as part of a larger project to *translate the entire Apadāna* into English, which at this writing (2012) I am pursuing with the generous support of sabbatical leave from Whitman College, and for which I express my gratitude. *The Apadāna* is the only text of the vast Pāli Tipiṭaka that remains untranslated into a Western language, though portions of it have appeared in various publications, including my own (Walters 1995). It figures centrally in Walters (1990); Walters (1994); Walters (1997); Walters (2003). For fuller studies of the entire text than I am able to provide or engage here, see also Bechert (1998); Cutler (1994). All translations of the *Apadāna* in this chapter are my own, and I provide them in English verse approximating the meter of the original Pāli due to my conviction that these texts were meant for *rhythmic performance*. Filler words, odd alternate forms, repetitious phrases, fudged grammar, and so forth in the text betray the centrality of metrical composition to the original authors and editors, and so I have followed suit. While my translations aim to be literal, in small ways I have taken poetic license in order to meet the daunting challenge of making the Pāli meter work in modern English. In this chapter I have not reproduced the critical apparatus that indicates those junctures, but the interested reader can find it in the scholarly version of the full translation, which will be available for free at www.whitman.edu/Penrose once it is completed. Cf also notes 3, 5, and 7, below.

2. Waldschmidt identifies this method of “naming” in a manuscript colophon from Central Asia, whereby a key event of a story takes the place of the name in the colophon (1980).
linked to that eventual goal. This limitation became problematic when, after the advent of Asoka Maurya in the 3rd century BCE, whole populations came to embrace the Buddha's religion. It then became vital to provide religious paradigms that laypeople and less advanced monks and nuns could emulate and thereby progress toward the soteriological goal of nirvana.

The authors of *Apadāna* overcame this limitation with the remarkable insight that if the present-life biographies of the arahants serve as appropriate paradigms for advanced monks and nuns, then their previous-life biographies, when they too were ordinary men and women, must serve as appropriate paradigms for less-advanced people. By doing now what the arahants did then, the *Apadāna* assures its audience, one can expect in the future to achieve the same release from suffering and rebirth that the arahants achieved as a result of having done those pious deeds. *Apadāna*’s great contribution here was to draw an explicit link between pieties performed in the present life and the achievement of arahantship during a future one. To make this revelation *Apadāna* provides biographical details of the previous lives of the arahants that sometimes are and always seem extensive especially in light of the short shrift given their present-life biographies. In most cases *Apadāna* provides names, occupations, places of residence, dates (either the name of the previous Buddha, or the number of aeons ago during which he lived), descriptions of the piety performed, and more or less detailed accounts of the intermediate human and divine results each arahant experienced prior to the present life. Because the collection is also very large (it narrates the *apadānas* of some 550 male and 40 female arahants), the result of this variation in detail is a vast catalog of efficacious pieties coupled with an almost universal appeal. People in all walks of life, castes, occupations, and regions, young and old, male and female—even animals and supernatural beings—could find a homologue among the previous lives of the arahants. Put differently, *Apadāna* embraced the whole of society and offered it a vast number of possible pieties that could be performed to effect future arahantship.

Yet for all this interest to address the real lives of ordinary people by detailing the previous-life biographies that the arahants are believed to have recalled, the *apadānas* ascribed to male arahants—constituting the bulk of the whole *Apadāna* collection—curiously have virtually nothing to say about marriage and previous-life spouses. Marriage is not one of the categories of biographical detail provided in the monks’ past-life stories, let alone in the present-life ones, and the wives of these saints thus remain almost entirely unmentioned and unnamed. Reading the *Therāpadāna* one might well conclude that there were no women at all behind these great men. This is curious because marriage is an institution that centrally defines lay life and distinguishes it from monastic existence. Even though these stories all narrate the eventual escape from such worldly bonds, in many or most cases that escape itself presumably would have involved certain struggles. These would have included the struggle to give up the pleasures of marriage, as well as struggles with abandoned spouses, and such struggles in turn would have been highly relevant to the audience of laypeople and still-struggling monks and nuns addressed by these texts. Interestingly, husbands and wives do figure

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3. The Pali Text Society edition of *Apadāna* (Lilley 1925–27) includes 547 *apadānas* of males (theras); the Buddhist Library Tripitaka Series *Apadāna* (Vajirakāṇā et al., 1951–53) includes 553; the commentary (Gadalumbura 1954) includes 521. The PTS and BJTS editions agree in relating 40 *apadānas* of females, though there are some reasons to believe that the collection once contained additional nuns’ *apadānas* (see Collett 2011, 220). While I have not taken on the monumental project of constructing a critical edition of the text (for a model of which see Cutler 1997), my translation does take into account the variance in readings between the PTS and BJTS editions. Where they disagree, the critical apparatus (see n. 1) indicates the disagreement in a footnote and indicates why I have chosen one over the other; where one edition includes verses not found in the other, I translate them anyway at the appropriate juncture, double-numbering each verse according to both the PTS and the BJTS reckonings so that readers can track the differences in the two editions. This too I refrain from reproducing in the present chapter, for reasons of space, and I encourage the interested reader to pursue it via the critical apparatus supplied in the scholarly version of the complete translation online. In the present instance I have found it sufficient to refer only to the PTS edition, which will be most accessible to readers of English. I number the verses only according to the PTS edition, and accordingly also adopt the occasionally archaic transliteration system which the PTS edition also employs, notably the use of "ŋ" for the now-more-common "n" to denote the anusvāra.

4. The only clear exception to this statement which I have found is in the *apadāna* of one Khomadyaka Thera (“Cloth Provider,” 850; Ap. 1:80, v. 1) who is made to say:

In the city Bandhumati
I lived as a trader back then.
In that way supporting [my] wife (datraw)
I planted the seeds of [great] wealth.

There are a number of additional instances in which the becoming-arahants refer more generally to “friends, family, and relatives” whom they gathered together to perform their root pieties, as a collective agent which presumably included their wives and other women. We know from inscriptions that women were included in many such group pieties during the historical period of *Apadāna*’s composition (see below, n. 13), and women surely were intended to be among its audience (and presumably were included among its authors, on which see my next note). But the fact that this phrase specifically falls to mention wives is really a case-in-point, as becomes explicit in *Bhadda-Kapiyāna-apadāna*’s refusal to let Mākā-Kassapa-apadāna get away with it (see below, section 2).
regularly in the roughly contemporary, parallel jātaka stories of the Buddha's previous lives, in which many of the "rebirth precursors," to borrow Frank Reynolds' (1991) salubrious phrase, of the famous arahants also play roles. Husbands and wives also figure in various ways in this life-focused biographical accounts of the famous monks and nuns found in earlier canonical texts such as the Pāli vinaya and the Theravāda and Therigāthā.

Indeed, it appears from a close reading of the parallel Therī-apadāna that this elision of wives from the monks' apadānas troubled some Buddhists of the day, too. While still not given the prominence we might expect, marriage plays a number of interesting roles in the nuns' apadānas. There, marriage is one of the details of previous, intermediate, and even present lives that the authors regularly are concerned to relate. In two of the nuns' apadānas in particular—that of Bhaddā-Kāpilāni Therī ("Auspicious Woman of the Kapila Clan," #27), this-life wife of the arahant Mahā-Kassapa, and that of Yasodharā Therī ("Famous," #28), this-life wife of the Buddha himself—we are provided in-depth reflections on the role of marriage in the kammic trajectory that leads from root piety to arahantship.

Thus we can note at the outset that concern with marriage was gendered. So it behooves us to examine that concern for the insight it might provide into the larger gendered contexts of the historical period during which, and for which, Apadāna was composed. This chapter therefore proceeds by exploring in Section 1 the generalized concern with marriage evinced in the Therī-apadāna accounts, and interpreting it vis-à-vis the absence thereof in the Therāpada. It then nuances that examination through close attention to the apadānas of Bhaddā-Kāpilāni (Section 2) and Yasodharā (Section 3). It concludes by returning to the collection as a whole and the gendered differences between those apadānas written about (and presumably by) men, and those written about (and presumably by) women.3

6. For example, the apadāna of the Buddha's chief disciple Sāriputta Therī (8; Ap. I:33–31) opens with a minutely detailed description of the flora, fauna and geography of his hermitage during a previous life as the ascetic Sarucī (v. 1–33), followed by a lengthy passage describing the virtues of his students during that time (v. 35–69). It also contains two beautiful, extended speeches in which Sarucī praises the knowledge of Buddha Ananadda (v. 77–92) and then, reborn as Sāriputta, he praises the Buddha Gotama (v. 159–208). The apadāna of Upāli Therī (8; Ap. I:37–48) is similarly rich with extended metaphors describing the virtues of the Buddha and his followers, and the positive effect discipleship had upon Upāli, which seem more a display of poetic skill than a necessary detail of the kammic trajectory.

7. The tradition, which maintains that these verses were actually spoken by the monks to whom they are ascribed, would lead us to believe that there were more than five hundred authors of just the Therāpadāna.

8. Beginning with #171 (Pattupupphiya Therī, who is #174 in the BJTST edition) the manuscripts conclude almost all the texts in Therāpadāna with a fuller three-verse refrain that prefaces the main formula quoted here with two additional verses. There is some variation in the first twenty or so subsequent apadānas, which sometimes invert the order of the two prefaced verses, and in some instances the text substitutes a different two feet ("All my outflows are exhausted") for "Like elephants... without constraint." But the "inverted version" (below) becomes the consistent reading for all the rest of the Therāpadāna and for all of the Therī-apadāna.
This is followed by an equally formulaic colophon that “thus indeed Ven- erable [so-and-so] Thera spoke these verses. The apadāna of [so-and-so] Thera is finished.” As well as this formulaic conclusion, various verses and especially individual feet of verses recur over and over throughout the texts, similarly creating a sense of consistency. Most notably, many of the famous monks are said to have received a prediction of their future arahantship from a previous Buddha, and multiple-verse parts of that narrative are also shared, verbatim, across numerous apadānas. Buddhas are regularly referred to in strings of epithets that likewise are shared across the texts, as are the dates (in numbers of aeons ago that they lived) ascribed to the previous Buddhas.

I begin with this structural introduction to the Therāpadāna in order to suggest that the brief sections attributed to the Buddha (Buddhāpadāna) and to the Paccekabuddhas (Paccekabuddhāpadāna), as well as the section attributed to the nuns (Therāpadāna), are fruitfully interpreted as subsequent additions to an original core of texts about the male arahants. Buddhāpadāna follows none of these conventions of the monks’ apadānas, being in fact a very unique text not only for Apadāna but for the whole Theravāda tradition (it is described in detail below). Paccekabuddhāpadāna similarly is lacking these same conventions, being as it consists mostly of

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[My defilements are [now] burnt up: all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint.
Being in the Best Buddha’s midst
was a very good thing for me.
The three knowledges are attained;
I have done what the Buddha taught!
The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
I have done what the Buddha taught.

It would thus appear that this full three-verse refrain was being worked out and played with during the composition of the texts prior to about #390 of Therāpadāna (although the BTTS manuscripts also add the [non-inverted] full version to some of the first ten monks’ apadānas). The fact that Therāpadāna consistently employs this finalized “inverted version” of the three-verse refrain may be taken to confirm the point suggested below, namely that Therāpadāna’s composition was subsequent to that of Therāpadāna, i.e., to the working out of the three-verse refrain. The four pātimokkhas or analytical modes, eight vimokkhas or deliverances, and six abhinirvānas or special knowledges are generalized attainments of arahanta well known in the earlier canonical texts.

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9. This is SN 5.2, a brief sutta in which Mara (Death) approaches the Bodhisatta during the six years of severe asceticism he undertook prior to attaining Buddhahood. Mara points to his emaciation and similar bodily suffering as a reason to give up the quest, then departs when this ploy fails to undermine the Bodhisatta’s determination.
10. See, however, n. 8, above: their consistent employment of the finalized, “inverted version” of the three-verse refrain may confirm that they are later/separate compositions.
Many of the Therī-apadāṇa references to marriage are merely offhand ones that establish biographical context for the main story. Thus both Ekapiṇḍāyikā Therī (“One Ball of Food” Donor,” #6) and Uppalādāyikā Therī (“Lotus Donor,” #33) open by naming a king from the past and indicating that “I was the wife of that king” (tassa raṁha ahaṁ bhariya). This wife, reflecting on her failure to perform any meritorious deeds, and thereby her consequent destiny for rebirth in hell, asks her husband to provide her with a monk to whom to give alms (Ap. II:515–16, v. 1–4; Ap. II:601, v. 1–5). In each of the two narratives, the wife is granted this opportunity and proceeds to perform the root piety that eventuates her arahantship. Similarly, Uppalaṇḍā Therī (“Lotus-Colored,” #19) relates that in one of her intermediate births she, “having been the chief queen of the king of Benares” (kastiraṁha mahaṁ ‘haṁ hirva), gave birth to no fewer than 500 royal sons. In their youth, while sporting in the water, they all become Pacceka-buddhhas after seeing fallen lotus leaves. Bereft of them she dies in grief, but reborn in the next life, while providing alms to eight Pacceka-buddhhas, she remembers her former sons and in her maternal love milk them then flows from her breasts (Ap. II:555, v. 58–62). In her present/final life Paṭilcārī Therī (“Wanderer in a Cloth,” #20) marries a commoner (naraṇa janapadaṇa, “a man of the countryside”) and goes off with him against the wishes of her opulent parents. When she is pregnant with her second child, however, she sets out to visit her parents, carrying the first-born with her. Her husband, displeased, chases after her, but when he reaches her a terrible storm arises. Going off to build a shelter, he is killed by a serpent. Grieving and beset with labor pains she crosses a river and gives birth, but when she then goes back across the river to retrieve her elder son the infant is carried off by an osprey, while the older boy is swept away in the current of the river. She then returns to her home only to discover that her parents and siblings have all died and are being cremated together at that very moment. Thereupon meeting the Buddha, she is quickly able to grasp his teaching that sons, parents, and relatives offer no protection against suffering and attains arahantship (Ap. II:558–59, v. 22–35). Kiśā-Gotami Therī (“Lean Gotami,” #22) is likewise born in a millionaire’s clan during her present/final life, but her own family is destitute. She marries into a well-off family (gataḥ ... sādhanaṁ kulataḥ) but other than her husband (patisya ḫapetavā) the rest of them despise her poverty until she gives birth to a son, upon which she is much-beloved. When, however, the son then dies she goes mad with grief and wanders about with the corpse in hand, trying to find a medicine to revive him. She finally meets the Buddha who famously tells her that he can bring the son back to life with a white mustard seed obtained from a home that has experienced no death. Going from home to home she eventually comes to understand death’s terrible universality, and like Paṭilcārī makes this realization the foundation for her own arahantship (Ap. II:565–66, v. 19–25). Dhammaddinā Therī (“Given by Dhamma,” #33) “goes to another family” (parakulaj gantvā) and lives happily until her husband (sāṁko) hears the dharmma and becomes a non-returner; she then also goes forth and becomes an arahant (Ap. II:569, v. 24–26). Like her, Sonā Therī (“Cleansed,” #26) “goes to a husband’s family” (gantvā patikulajā) and gives birth to ten sons, but when her displeasure they all renounce the world along with their father, she tracks them to the monastery where they are staying. Meeting a nun who instructs her in the nature of suffering, she quickly achieves arahantship (Ap. II:577, v. 10–17).

In each of the foregoing examples, the fact of marriage is a necessary contextualizing detail, in the absence of which the main story could not be narrated. This no doubt reflects a historical situation in which a grown woman’s status was largely defined by her husband (and after his death, her sons), just as an unmarried girl’s status was largely defined by her father and other male relatives. Marriage (or birth) to powerful men largely determined the power of women. Alice Collett (2011) has persuasively argued that a central goal of the Therī-apadāṇa narratives was “to establish a female past for the [Buddhist] tradition” in which, we know from inscriptional and archaeological evidence, women did play significant roles as nuns and lay donors. Given that historical situation, it

12. It is important to recognize that some of the nuns’ apadāṇas refer to fathers and other male relatives as a contextualizing detail that functions much like marriage does in the foregoing examples. This is especially clear in the repeated narrative about the seven daughters of Kīrti the King of Kasi (Benares) studied by Alice Collett (2011). They—among several of the nuns just mentioned (Uppalaṇḍā, Paṭilcārī, Kiśā-Gotami, and Dhammaddinā)—were sisters (during the time of the previous Buddha Kassapa) who, refused permission by their father to become nuns, nevertheless remained in the home unmarried and devoted themselves to performing meritorious deeds. In Therī-apadāṇa a number of other nuns similarly perform their root piety “while tagging along with father,” e.g., Sīglaka-mātā Therī (#34; Ap. II:563, v. 3) and Mahāpiṭa Gotami Therī (#37; Ap. II:537, v. 97). This displacement of women’s agency onto their husband and other male relatives was formalized in the classic legal books of Brahmanism (dharmaśtras), which maintained that marriage was the single and definitive life-cycle ritual (saṁskāra) for women. See the next chapter of this volume, chapter nine, for a discussion of some Brahmanical notions of marriage.

should come as no surprise that this past was often established on the basis of a given woman’s marriage (or parentage).

The necessity of marriage to establish this female past becomes especially apparent when we consider another category of marriage references found in the Therī-apadāna. The text contains a stock claim made by many of the individual female arahants that during her intermediate lives she “was fixed in the chief queen’s place” (maheṣitaṁ akāraviyā) of a certain number of kings of the gods, and likewise of a certain number of human kings, some of whom usually are specified to have been wheel-turning (cakkavatti, Skt. cakravarti) monarchs.¹⁴ This claim is best understood in light of the parallel Buddhist history constructed in Therīpadāna. Here a great number of male arahants, using parallel stock phraseology, claim the reverse. During their intermediate lives they were kings of the gods and wheel-turning or lesser human kings some specified number of times (usually bearing personal names reflective of the root piety that led them into those exalted stations).³ This sovereign achievement is sometimes included among the predictions that the previous Buddhas make of them. The history of divine and human rulership thus constructed—which is populated by becoming-arahants and fuelled by the good kamma of their root piety—opens an obvious space for female counterparts because divine as well as human kings famously enjoy superior (and oftentimes numerous) wives.¹⁵ Sometimes the previous Buddha’s prediction specifies, as in the case of Sāriputta (“Sāri’s Son”) Therī:

¹⁴. This stock claim recurs in the apadānas of Sumedhā Therī (“Wise,” #1); Tilokapālakī Therī (“Three Reed Garlands,” #2); Ekānādakāyā Therī (“One Ball of Food Donor,” #3); Kajacchabhiḥkādasyā Therī (“A Spoonful of Begged-for Food Donor,” #4); Samippalālagatī Therī (“Seven Blue Lotus Flowerers,” #5); Pañcakādyā Therī (“Five Lamps,” #6); Udānādakāyā Therī (“Water Donor,” #7); Ekāpāsottikī Therī (“One Full Moon Observance,” #8); Ekānādakāyā Therī (“One Seat Donor,” #9); Pañcakādyā Therī (“Five Lamps Donor,” #10); Sālākāmālī Therī (“Salt Garlands,” #11); Rāmeśa Therī (“Peace,” #12); Bhaddī-Kungalakāsa Therī (“Auspicious Curly-Hair,” #13); Nāṇa or Janapadakāyā Therī (“Joy” or “Beauty of the Countryside,” #14); Uppalādāsa Therī (“Lotus Donor,” #15); Several more nuns, including Bhaddi-Kāpila Therī (#27) and Yasodharī Therī (#48), who are discussed in the next two sections, also claim to have been married to human and/or divine kings without however employing this stock phraseology.

¹⁵. This theme, in one variation or another, is found in virtually all the monks’ apadānas, even those which are only a few verses long (and in which, therefore, this claim becomes the most salient biographical detail provided). I leave off listing them here for considerations of space.

¹⁶. For a provocative examination of just how seriously human kings’ superior sexuality was taken see Ali 2004.

Women numbering sixteen thousand, ladies who’re all-ornamented with varied clothes and jewelry and wearing earrings made of gems with long eyelashes, lovely smiles and slim waists, pleasant to look at will ceaselessly surround this one; that’s the fruit of Buddha-pūja.


And the wheel-turning monarchs are regularly introduced with the epithet “possessor of the seven gems” (sattaratanasaṃpanno), among which the “woman gem” (ithiratana, Skt. sthitatana) was reckoned an especially significant one.²⁸ But none of the texts of the Therīpadāna draws the obvious (and marvelous) conclusion, namely that the superb female consorts of such becoming-arahant god-kings and human-kings were (and in the context of the day, are) themselves becoming-arahant god-queens and human-queens. Only in Therī-apadāna does this possibility becomes explicit. In its opening verses, Sumedhā Therī (“Wise,” #1) states that “being the chief queen of one who possessed the seven gems, I was the womangem” (Lilley II:512, v. 3; sattaratanassa maheṣaḥ ithiratanaḥ abhijyāvijyā). As Therī-apadāna proceeds to enumerate the vast number of times that particular nuns were chief queens of god-kings and human-kings, it repopulates Therīpadāna’s universal history with the women who later became arahants in the dispensation of Gotama Buddha. This establishes further place for women in the Buddhist past and likely proved especially poignant to those in the Therīpadāna’s audience who were themselves Buddhist queens.

The necessity of marriage that I have been discussing certainly points to the dependence of Buddhist queens on Buddhist kings. This is the case whether we are talking about legendary queens in a constructed Buddhist past or real ones in a then-present Buddhist audience. But as John Strong...
(2003) has provocatively suggested in his study of “Buddhist Queenship,”
dependence was only one-third of the case. In his reading of the story of
Asoka Maurya’s queen, Asandhimittā, Buddhist queens and kings were
also to some extent *interdependent*: possessing the “seven gems” made
marriage a requirement for the cakkavattin kings too. Also, we know from
inscriptional evidence that Buddhist and later non-Buddhist kings relied
upon their queens to perform Buddhist pieties for them (cf. Walters 2000,
110–11; Walters 2008, 174–77, 179). More important, according to Strong,
Buddhist queens were also to some extent *independent*. We start to see
what I have dubbed the “feminist edge” in Theriṭ-apadāna when we re-
member that these women became queens of divine and human kings not
because of those males, but because of the male pieties that they them-
selves performed during their own previous lives. This point is made ex-
licit in the way Bhaddā-Kunḍalakesā Theriṭ’s *apadāna* (#2) presents the
generalized attainment:

In whichever place I’m reborn,
as a result of that *kamma*
I was fixed in the chief queen’s place
of kings in this and that heaven.
Fallen from there, among humans,
I was fixed in the chief queen’s place
of kings who turned the wheel [of Law]
as too of kings in [their] circles."  
(Ap. II:361, v. 11–12)

The repetition of these two verses in the *apadāna* of Nanda (Janapadakalyāṇi)
Theriṭ (#25) adds emphasis to its explicit revelation that one becomes a
Buddhist queen through one’s own meritorious *kamma*.

Many of the additional *Theriṭ-apadāna* passages about being the chief
queen or so many kings of gods and cakkavattins nuance this point. The
stock claim is phrased in such a way as to emphasize that these exalted
marriages during the intermediate lives were about female, in addition to
male, power. Thus Ekapiṇḍadāyikā Theriṭ (#6) states:

19. That is, kings whose underlordship to world-conquering emperors was enacted through
their participation in his imperial circle (*rajamanḍala*), on which see especially Inden (1981);
Inden (2000). For its playing out in the ancient and medieval Sri Lankan Buddhist king-
doms that preserved the *apadāna* see Walters (2000); Walters (2008).

20. These same two feats are repeated in the same context in the *apadāna* of Salamālikā
21. The highest heaven.

Similarly, the previous Buddha Tissa predicts of the becoming-arahant
Kaṭacchubhhikkhuddāyikā Theriṭ (#7) that:

Giving this spoonful of begged food,
you will go to Tavatimsa.

You’ll be fixed in the chief queen’s place
of thirty-six kings of the gods.

You’ll be fixed in the chief queen’s place
of fifty kings who turn the wheel.

Everything your mind may wish for
you will receive (it) every day.

Having enjoyed [great] happiness
you will go forth possessionless.

Destroying all [your] defilements,
you’ll reach *nibbāna*, undefiled.


In a stronger statement still, Sattupalamālikā Theriṭ (#8) claims:

I was fixed in the chief queen’s place
of seventy kings of the gods.

Everywhere a female ruler
I transmigrated life to life.

I was fixed in the chief queen’s place

(Ap. II:316, v. 8–9)
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of sixty-three wheel-turning kings.
They all conform to my [wishes];
I'm she whose words are listened to.

(Ap. II:518, v. 11-12)

The rulership of the queens, and the good kamma that produced it, was their own. Many of the individual nuns' apadānas also stipulate that Buddhist queens enjoyed many pleasures, including being happy, being wealthy, being attended upon by others, and enjoying fabulous heavenly mansions. These were likewise their own, experienced independently of their royal husbands.

Strong's threefold analysis of the Buddhist queen as simultaneously dependent, interdependent, and independent helps us make sense of the complexity found in the apadānas of the two most famous wives of saints, Bhaddā-Kāpilānī and Yasodhara. Both of them were likewise chief queens to their present-life husbands (Mahā-Kassapa and the Buddha, respectively) when the latter were enjoying their intermediate lives as divine and human kings. In the apadānas of those therti, too, we see ways in which they were dependent on their husbands, but also ways in which they and their husbands were interdependent, and an insistence that in some ways they were independent of their husbands. I turn to these detailed pictures of karmic marriage in the following two sections. But I conclude this section by pointing to a final apadāna in which this "edgy" independence of wives from their husbands is especially clear, that of Bhaddā-Kuṇḍala-kāsā Therti (#21).

Though not a queen, in her present life Bhaddā-Kuṇḍala-kāsā was the daughter of an opulent millionaire. Becoming infatuated with a thief she sees being led for execution, she soon marries him after her father purchases his freedom. She lives as his “trustworthy, very loving and friendly” wife but “that enemy, being greedy for [her] valuable ornaments,” leads her to a mountainprecipice on the pretense of performing a sacrifice. In fact, he intends to murder her. Discerning his plan she attempts to save her life by offering him her finery freely and lowering herself to the status of “bed-slave” (mañcha-dāsī). But then he replies:

Take it off, o beautiful one,
[and] do not feel a lot of grief;
I am unable to accept wealth that I did not kill to get.

(Ap. II:562, v. 28-29)

She quickly devises a ruse to get him to the edge of the cliff, then throws him into the precipice, revealing:

The man is not the one who's wise in every single circumstance;
paying attention here and there the woman is the one who's wise.
The man is not the one who's wise in every single circumstance;
quickly thinking strategically the woman is the one who's wise.

(Ap. II:562, v. 31-32)

2. Bhaddā-Kāpilānī as the wife of a saint

Bhaddā-Kāpilānī Therti (“Auspicious Woman of the Kapila Clan” #27) of the Therī-apadāna (Ap. II:578-84, 70 verses), was the this-life wife of one of the Buddha's chief disciples, the arahant Mahā-Kassapa (“Great Kassapa”) Thera. Mahā-Kassapa was reckoned the male member of the early community most advanced in austere practices, and his own apadāna appears as #3 in the Therīpadāna (Ap. I:33-35, 22 verses). In this section of the chapter I compare the apadānas of husband and wife because together they allow me to further illustrate a number of the general themes introduced in the previous section, and because Bhaddā-Kāpilānī's apadāna provides a particularly detailed account of the intersection of marriage and kamma in the trajectory from root piety to arahantship.

Mahā-Kassapa's apadāna is typical of the Therīpadāna. It is completely silent about Mahā-Kassapa's marriages, but in his case this is particularly jarring because, as we shall see, their multi-life conjugality figures so centrally in the apadāna of his wife. The husband's comparatively brief apadāna opens with a description of his root piety: building a splendid...
the thūpa for the departed Padumuttara Buddha (100,000 aeons ago) in concert with his “family and friends” (v. 1–6). This is followed by thirteen verses (v. 7–19) detailing the heavenly mansion he enjoyed among the gods: the worldly palace he enjoyed as the cakkavattin named Ubbiddha 60,000 aeons ago (during which aeon he was a cakkavattin, presumably by the same name, “fully thirty times”); and the great city Rammaka that those cakkavattins ruled. The text concludes with the briefest allusion to his present/final life:

Having lived there and having left
I returned to the world of gods.
In this, my final existence,
I’m born in an accomplished clan.
Born into a brahmin family
I had a massive heap of gems.
Eight hundred million [worth of] gold
abandoned, I renounced [the world].
The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (v. 20–22)

The wife’s apadāna also opens in the time of Padumuttara, but it tells the back-story to the building of the thūpa then. At that time, Mahā-Kassapa was then named Videha, a leading millionaire with many gems in the city of Happiness. One time, along with his servants, he went to hear Padumuttara Buddha preach and on that occasion the Buddha praised the disciple who was foremost in the practice of austerities. The millionaire served the Buddha alms for a week then aspired to attain that state himself, making everyone in his retinue smile. At that very instant Padumuttara Buddha predicted the future arising of Gotama Buddha and the millionaire’s rebirth as Kassapa, who would indeed be foremost among the disciples who practice austerities. Gladdened by that he then lovingly served Padumuttara Buddha the rest of his life (v. 1–9). Only then does the Buddha pass away (v. 10) and:

When that World-Chief reached nībāna
assembling [his] kinsmen and friends
to do pūjā to the Teacher

with them [Videha] had constructed
a thūpa that was made of gems
rising up seven leagues [in height]
which blazed forth just as does the sun;
like a regal sal tree in bloom. (v. 11–12)

The wife’s apadāna here unmistakably refers to the opening of her husband’s apadāna by mentioning the detail that he acted in concert with his family and friends; it even borrows the imagery of blazing like the sun or a blooming sal (Vateria acuminata) tree from the husband’s apadāna. But as though all the details of the back-story weren’t enough, Bhaddā-Kāpilāni then proceeds to describe the thūpa itself in far greater detail than even Mahā-Kassapa’s somewhat elaborate (for these texts) account. Her apadāna supplies, in nine verses, a description of the thūpa’s architectural features and the rituals that, she says, her husband performed there for the rest of his life (v. 13–21).

Bhaddā-Kāpilāni’s apadāna proceeds to describe a series of additional root piety performed by her husband during previous lives:

1. As a Brahmin living in Bandhumatt who gave Vipassi Buddha (91,000 aeons ago) a cloak (v. 24–30).
2. As a “ruler of the earth” in Benares who gave costly alms and various gold objects to eight Paccekabuddhas (v. 30–35).
3. As one of three brothers in a happy landholding family outside the Benares gates who gave alms to a Paccekabuddha (v. 35–41).
4. As a sage named Sumitta, again in the region of Benares, who gave an unspecified number of Paccekabuddhas a mother’s cloak (v. 47–48).
5. As a member of the Koliya clan in the kingdom of Kasi (Benares) who with 500 kinsmen served 500 Paccekabuddhas alms for three months then gifted them all with monastic robes (v. 49–51).
6. As a king named Nanda whose specific piety is unmentioned (v. 52).
7. As the world-ruling King Brahmadatta who personally served 500 Paccekabuddhas (v. 53–55).

Bhaddā-Kāpilāni’s apadāna further provides details of Mahā-Kassapa’s present/final life, including his given name, birthplace, and parentage (v. 56), and the details of his arahantship (which occurs when he is moved at the sight of a crow devouring some creature, v. 59). None of these details—not even a reference to the austere practices for which he is best known—is found in Mahā-Kassapa’s own apadāna.
On first blush the subject of the wife's apādāna is thus actually the husband, but the interest of the text goes beyond mere reportage of biographical details about Mahā-Kassapa. Throughout this narrative, Bhadda-Kāpiḷānī gently but consistently is inserted into the rich kammic biography thus produced of her husband:

There was then in Harisavatī, a leader known as Vīdea, a millionaire with many gems; I was the wife of him [back then]. (v. 2)
Along with that millionaire I, as long as I lived [also] did those merit-filled deeds thoroughly; [and] with [him] I [had] good rebirths.
Experiencing happiness both as a human and as a god, I was reborn along with him, like a shadow with the body. (v. 22–23)
And at that time, of the same mind, I was his brahmin woman [wife] . . . (v. 26)
. . . he spoke these [words] to me [just then]: “Approve of this great good kamma, the cloak given to the Buddha.”
Then clasping hands together I, well-satisfied, did [then] approve: “Husband, this cloak is gifted well to Best Buddha, the Neutral One.” (v. 28–29)
I was the chief queen of that [king], supreme in his troupe of women.
I was extremely dear to him due to past love for [my] husband. (v. 31)
. . . I gave that very almsgiving with the Kāsi king [way] back then. (v. 35)
I was [the Sage Sumitā's wife, happy, joyful and [much] beloved . . . (v. 48)
[I] too sharing in that merit approving of that great alms gift . . . (v. 49)
I was the [Koliyan's wife then following [his] path of merit . . . (v. 51)

... I was [King Nanda's] chief queen [then]; my every desire was fulfilled. (v. 52)
. . . dwelling in the royal garden I [too] worshiped those Gone-Out Ones. (v. 54)
My father having adorned me with a thick golden ornament gave me to the wise Kassapa who'd avoided desire for me. (v. 58)
When wise [Kassapa] had renounced I followed him in renouncing . . . . (v. 61)

Though many of these passages are indicative of her dependence on her husband—“like his shadow”—Bhadda-Kāpiḷānī clearly takes this to be a good thing:

After not a very long time
I achieved the arahant-state.
O! Being the “beautiful friend”22 of the resplendent Kassapa (v. 69)

And as with the Buddhist queens discussed in the previous section, dependence is not the end of the story here.

Many of the passages just quoted are suggestive of the interdependence of husband and wife, who perform these pious deeds together. The brahmin who gives Vipassī Buddha a cloak seems to need his wife's approval (which she gives). Also, it takes but a small stretch of the imagination to realize that the wife would have been integral to any of these pieties: the duties of a wife would include organizing things, cooking the food, and sewing and then replacing the cloak that had been given away.23 In Bhadda-Kāpiḷānī's account of Mahā-Kassapa's almsgiving to a Pacceka-buddha, when he was one of three landholding brothers (v. 35–41), we get

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22. Kalyāṇa-mittā is a term the Buddha uses in the suttas to indicate the sort of companion who enables, encourages, and entwines one in meritorious things. It is juxtaposed with the “ugly (akalyāṇa) friend” who enables, encourages, and entwines one in demeritorious things.

23. Such domestic service is an especially prominent theme in Yasodhara Therī's apādāna, discussed in the next section.
a particularly rich glimpse into what must indeed have been the complex inner workings of a household committed to performing acts of merit. The eldest brother (who is Mahā-Kassapa's rebirth precursor) is away from the house when the Pacceka-buddha comes for alms. The youngest brother offers the Pacceka-buddha his eldest brother's portion of food. When the eldest returns and his wife (Bhāddā-Kāpiḷāni's rebirth precursor) tells him what has happened, he "does not rejoice about that almsgiving" (nābhinnānditha so dāṇṇay), so the wife takes the food back from the Pacceka-buddha and gives it to her husband. When he then gives it back to the Pacceka-buddha himself, the wife is enraged. She retrieves the bowl for a second time, throws away the food, fills it up with mud, and then gives it once again to the Pacceka-buddha! But when she then notices the Pacceka-buddha's equanimity—he has remained unmoved by the whole scene, and accepts the bowl of mud without any difference from the way he accepted the home-cooked meal—she has a change of heart. She takes back the bowl for a third time, cleanses and perfumes it, fills it with clarified butter (ghata, ghee) and offers it to him with proper reverence (sakkāraṇa dāṇṇay). This restores to the whole household the meritoriousness of giving alms to a Pacceka-buddha, which means that in that instance, anyway, Kassapa's rebirth precursor, in several ways, would not have made merit except for the actions of his wife.

This interdependence of husband and wife becomes explicit at two points near the end of Bhāddā-Kāpiḷāni's apādana. Here the syntax of the text, otherwise narrated in the third person, with first person interjections, suddenly shifts to the second person plural:

Both of us having built thūpas,
going forth [renouncing the world]experienced the boundless states[and] then we went to Brahma's world. (v. 55)
Seeing the dangers in the worldwe both [went forth] as renouncers.
We are now free of defilements;tamed, cooled off, gone to nibbāna. (v. 67)

Though in Mahā-Kassapa's apādana his kammic trajectory involves only himself, in Bhāddā-Kāpiḷāni's apādana the story is about a team effort; her husband's kammic trajectory is intimately interlinked with her own. The support, approval, work, and co-participation she provides her husband, life after life, enables both of them to progress toward their eventual arahantship. Being his wives she enriches his lives, paralleling the way in which the wife's apādana enriches the husband's by adding numerous bare-bones details and fleshing them out with human texture, struggle, and humor. In this concern with the human texture of the details, and with finding women a place in an otherwise all-male Buddhist history, Bhāddā-Kāpiḷāni's apādana is as typical of Therāpādana as is Mahā-Kassapa's of Therāpādana.

Finally, in the denouement of the story about the bowl of mud we catch a glimpse of the wife's independence from her husband, too. The almsgiving, in the end, is entirely her own doing, and produces kammic results accordingly. For several verses Mahā-Kassapa uncharacteristically disappears from the narrative, which is explicitly only about Bhāddā-Kāpiḷāni:

In whichever place I'm reborn,because [I gave] alms I'm gorgeous;through [giving] Buddha tasteless foodmy breath has a horrible stench.Again when Buddha Kassapa'sthūpa was being completed,delighted, I [then] gave [for it]an excellent tile made of gold.Through four lifetimes having appliedscented [substances] to that tileevery one of [my] limbs was freedfrom the defect of bad odor.
Having made seven thousand bowls [each adorned] with the seven gems and filled with clarified butter, placing [in them] a thousand wicks with a mind that was very pleased I proceeded to light [them all] and laid them out in seven rows to do pūja to the world’s lord and at that time especially I was the merit-receiver . . . (v. 42–47)

In light of this, we can understand that even when she was following after her husband it was she who gave alms, she who approved of the cloak, she who followed after him, she who worshipped the Paccekabuddhas. Accordingly, Mahā-Kassapa also disappears in the narrative of her own arahantship (v. 61–63). Ultimately, these are all her deeds, not his.

3. Yasodharā as the wife of a saint

The female arahant’s interdependence with, and independence from, even a saintly husband like Mahā-Kassapa is even clearer in the other text of the Therī-apādana that takes up the intersection of marriage and kamma as a central theme, namely the apādana of Yasodharā Therī, this-life wife of the Buddha (#28, Ap. II:584–90). Like Bhaddā-Kāpilāni’s apādana, Yasodharā’s autohagiography also provides biographical details not found in the parallel apādana of her husband (the Buddhāpadāna). The most notable absent detail is the very fact that he was, after all, married to her throughout that karmic biography. In providing these details, the Therī-apādana forcefully inserts Yasodharā into that biography and makes explicit that she was integral to the Buddha’s eventual Buddhahood (interdependence). Further, her apādana asserts that through her own merit-making, service, and final/present life religious practice she became

25. The discussion which follows is based on the Pali Text Society edition, and rather than attempting to exhaust the story of Yasodharā it merely highlights those passages most relevant to our discussion of marriage and kamma. For fuller accounts the interested reader should certainly consult Sally Mellick Cudler’s (1997) groundbreaking critical edition, translation, and study of the Pali text, as well as Ranjini Obeyesekere’s (2009) excellent translation and study of two medieval Sinhala retellings of it. For a non-Theravādin parallel see also Strong (1997).

26. As already mentioned in Section 2, the Buddhāpadāna proper also does not follow this standard convention of the monks’ apādanās.
numbers of kings, but merely a general depiction of the pleasures divine and human kings receive by “just stretching out their hand” (v. 52–61). These pleasures include, detailed in a series of repetitious verses, savory foods, fabulous precious gemstones, clothes of various sorts, divine foods, all gemstones, all perfumes, all vehicles, all garlands, all ornaments, all maidens, granulated sugar, and all solid foodstuffs. The final eulogy, like the visualization of the palace, appears surprisingly Mahāyānistic in its invitation to reader-listeners to perfect the ten perfections (of a Buddha) themselves, and to marvel in the unfathomableness of Buddhism (which is itself the root piety performed by the Buddha). 27

The other, “disguised” Buddhāpadāna, “The Rags of Previous Kamma,” does, conversely, allude by name and event to specific previous lives and especially to the final/present life of the Buddha. After a prologue indicating that these verses were preached by the Buddha to the whole community of monks (nuns are not mentioned) at the mythic Lake Anotatta (Skt. Anavatapta, v. 1–3), it details twelve incidents in the life of the Buddha and describes the kammic cloth from which that “rag” remained (v. 4–31). These are not however the positive acts and happy intermediate lives we would expect from an apadāna. Rather, the twelve incidents from this life are all comparatively bad things that befall the Buddha: physical ailments, slander, attacks from his wicked cousin Devadatta, and the six years of extreme asceticism he endured prior to becoming Buddha. The acts of which these were the remaining “rags” were all of a depraved and evil sort, mostly known nowhere else in the vast Theravāda literature on the Buddha’s previous lives. The intermediate lives they produce entail countless aavos the Buddha’s rebirth precursors spent “roasting in hell” and suffering on earth. The text concludes with a pithy statement of his turn to merit-making and eventual Awakening (v. 32) and a reiteration of the context in which he declared the text (v. 33).

While both these texts are worthy of further comment, the point for us to notice here is that marriage plays no role in either of them. The closest we come is in the mention of maidens in Buddhāpadāna (v. 59) and the stories of the slanderers Sundarī and Cīcāmānavikā, who both accuse the Buddha of having impregnated them in “The Rags of Previous Kamma” (v. 9, 14). Here too, this absence even of a mention of marriage is particularly apparent given its centrality to the apadāna of his wife, Yasodharā.

Yasodharā’s apadāna is also a remarkable one, with a complex literary structure. Unlike most apadānas, but closely paralleling that of the Buddha’s stepmother Mahāpajāpati Gotami (171; see Walters 1994; Walters 1995), it begins with a prologue (v. 1–25). 28 On the day of her final passing into nibbāna (death), she tells the Buddha that her time has come:

I’m seventy-eight years old now, the last of old age has arrived; I’m reporting to the Great Sage; I’ve attained [sainthood] in a cave.

Old age has ripened for me [now]; verily my life’s a trifle.

Giving all you up I will go: my refuge is made in myself. In the final days of old age, death breaks [the body into bits];

today at nighttime, Great Hero, I shall achieve my nibbāna.

Where there’s no birth, no growing old, nor sickness and death, O Great Sage, I’m going to the [great] city  

[which,] unconditioned, has no death. (v. 3–6)

She asks that any lapse in their long transmigration together be forgiven, to which he replies:

28. Sinhala editions such as Vajirinātha et al., 1962–1981 11a (1988): 758, v. 952–57 provide six verses at the beginning of the text which are not found in the Lilley/PTS edition. The PTS edition begins (Ap. II 584, v. 1) at what corresponds to the seventh verse (v. 958) of the Sinhala/BPTS edition. The six extra verses spell out that, as with Gotami, Yasodharā came to the realization of the time of death by reasoning it out for herself, then went to report it to the Buddha. The PTS begins as it were in media res, with Yasodharā at the head of 500 nuns on her way to report the realization to the Buddha.

29. That is, nibbāna.
Put on a show of miracles
to disciples of my teaching;
let all doubt be cut off [thereby]
in all the teaching’s assemblies. (v. 9)

She proceeds to thus demonstrate her achievements with great spectacle
(v. 10–24).

Then, in that same context, she declares her actual *apadāna* (v. 25–87),
concluding (v. 85–87) with the standard “inverted” three-verse refrain.

The core section of her autobiography contains three distinct movements,
each of which constitutes a “mini-*apadāna*” in its own right. In the
first (v. 25–40) Yasodharā addresses the Buddha directly, in the second person,
referring to him in the vocative “O Great Sage” (*mahātmuna*) or “O Great Hero”
(*mahātva*). She recalls all the service she provided to him over the “tens of
billions of lives” she gave to an equal number of his rebirth precursors, as
their wives and attendants. She spells out this service in considerable detail—
waiting upon him, cooking for him, dressing and undressing for him, giving
up everything for him to acquire merit (including money, treasure, villages,
small towns, fields, sons, daughters, elephants, horses, cows, slaves, slave
girls, and all the wealth he gave her). All of this is portrayed as being done “for
your sake” without distress despite all the suffering it admittedly entailed.

The second mini-*apadāna* (v. 45–62) recalls a moment in the time of
Dīpankara Buddha (some 100,000 regular aeons plus four incalculable
aeons ago) when the Bodhisatta (future Buddha, Skt. *bodhisattva*), then
reborn as the ascetic Sumedha, made his initial vow to become a Buddha
and received his first prediction of its future realization. This famous
narrative, absent from both the Buddha’s own *apadānas* (and so, in the
*Apadāna*, supplied only here), is however told from Yasodharā’s perspective: she was then a maiden named Sumitā. Seeing Sumedha in the crowd
assembled to honor Dīpankara Buddha, and immediately smitten with
him, she gives him five of the eight handfuls of the flowers she is carrying,
retaining three handfuls for herself, with the aspirations that as a result of
them offering her flowers to the Buddha together she should “always
know [Sumedha]” (v. 49). He takes the flowers and offers them to the
Buddha “for the sake of knowing [Yasodharā]” (v. 50) and after predicting
Sumedha’s future Buddhahood

The Great Sage named Dīpankara
predicted [too] that my *kamma*

would for numberless aeons hence
be exalted, that Sage So Great:
“She will be a like-minded [wife],
with *kamma* and conduct like [yours];
through this *kamma* she’ll be loving
for your [own] sake, O Great Rishi.
Nice looking and much beloved,
desirable, speaking sweet words,
she will be a loving woman,
Just as husbands are protecting
the goods that they accumulate
so this one likewise will protect
[all] the things that are most wholesome.
Compassionate for [future] you,
she will fulfill the perfections.
Like a lion [freed] from a cage
she will achieve Awakening.” (v. 52–56)

Thrilled at his words, she dedicates her future lives to Sumedha, then fi-
nally is born a Śakyam and becomes the chief woman of his harem when
he has been born as Prince Siddhattha (v. 57–62).

The third “mini-*apadāna*” (v. 63–87) returns to the topic of the first:
service. In a speech addressed (to the Buddha, the Buddha’s father? some-
one in the text’s audience?) in the vocative “O Great King” (*mahārāja*),
Yasodharā details the mind-boggling numbers of Buddhas, Paccekabudd-
hās, and *arahants* to whom she provided vast alms-givings (*mahādānay
pavattayā*). These are reckoned finally in the hundreds of thousands of
billions and are proof of her repeated claim that “[her] service (*adhikāraya*)
was constant” across that vast swathe of cosmic time:

Thus every day I practiced *dhamma*
for those who practiced *dhamma*;
a doer of *dhamma* I am at ease,
in this world and the next one. (v. 80)

Here the text once again returns to her final/present life, her renuncia-
tion, and her achievement of *arahantship*, concluding with the standard
refrain (v. 81–87).
early community who have attained the highest goal. Their apadānas—constructed largely on the basis of verses or parts of verses found in Yasodharā’s apadāna—completely parallel hers. Thus the apadāna of “The 10,000 Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā” (#29) has them all, during the time of Dipānkarabuddha, vow to be (and receive a prediction that they will be) the perpetual wives of the ascetic Sumedha. This is fulfilled up to and including their co-birth as beautiful women in the Buddha’s clan who then join his harem and who renounce and attain arahantship in union with Yasodharā. The apadāna of “The 18,000 Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā” (#30) makes them even more exact mirror-images of Yasodharā, reproducing the text of her first two “mini-apadānas” verbatim, except for minor changes (such as tweaking the first person pronouns and verbs from the singular to the plural). All 18,000 of these women approach the Buddha along with Yasodharā, and declare to him in unison that they too will now pass away. Like the first 10,000 their perpetual wife-ship for his sake was the fulfillment of a vow and prediction during the time of Dipānkarabuddha. They are even made to say “We are Yasodharās, Great Sage,” in the passages where she identifies herself to the Buddha as part of her/their spectacular miracle show! The third group, “18,000 Kṣatriya Maidens Headed Up by Yasodharā” (#31), declare with a lot less fanfare (and in a brief twelve verses) that they were also women of the inner chambers, born together after serving alms “for [Buddha’s] sake” during previous lives, who thereafter renounced and became arahants.

Taken together, these additional texts amplify the anyway strong message of Yasodharā’s own apadāna that marriage is a kammic matter that can extend over many lifetimes. Like Yasodharā herself, these parallel women all serve the Buddha both actually and metaphorically, wanting for themselves what he wants them to do (whether formerly, in terms of eroticism and political power, or presently, in terms of Buddhist accomplishments and religious power). In performing this service they collectively enable him to pursue his own Awakening, and even drive that process themselves. These texts contribute to the general Therī-apadāna project of finding space for women in Buddhist history, and find them a very wide space indeed: all 46,000 of these “Yasodharās” aspired to and achieved the station of “Buddha’s wife.”

30. In making this station a widespread achievement of religious women the texts call to mind—despite a very different cultural setting—the widespread claim among medieval Christian nuns and mystics, even some males, to be the “brides of Christ.”
community (Mahā-Kassapa as foremost among those who practice austerities) this is here generalized as a station to which numerous women can aspire among future Buddhas. While the numbers seem fantastic, we must recall the Indian expectation that at least kings, in the heavens as well as on earth, should indeed have vast numbers of wives. According to Yasodharā's _apadāna_ (v. 11) there were in fact many more women in the becoming-Buddha's harem—a total of 100,096—than became arahants and sang these _apadānas_. In recalling that so many women followed in Yasodharā's footsteps these texts also redress the general imbalance between male and female _apadānas_. If we take the numbers seriously, we must conclude that even though there are significantly more male than female _apadānas_, in fact the female arahants recorded in _Apadāna_ as members of the early Buddhist community vastly outnumber their male counterparts.

**Conclusion: wives of the saints in the _Apadāna_**

If nothing else, the great variety of _Therī-apadāna_ references to marriage makes clear that despite (or perhaps even because of) the _Therī-apadāna_ silence about the topic, some Buddhists—those who wrote about women, who were presumably women themselves—considered marriage an integral dimension of the kammic trajectory from root piety to arahantship. Following Alice Collett I have suggested that this concern with marriage was part and parcel of the project to establish a place for women in Buddhist history. At least for the women whose _apadānas_ we have reviewed—and presumably also for many of the historical women who heard them recited as members of the text's audience—marriage was a centrally important institution through which women found such place. By linking marriage with the kammic trajectory that leads to arahantship, the _Apadāna_ was able to insert many of its female subjects into the otherwise all-male history it constructed and thereby to address the historical females as well as the males who read or listened to these poems. In the process emerges a sort of sacralization of the institution, which like rebirth turns out not merely to be opposed to, but rather to be an important stage in the path that leads to Awakening. The nuns' _apadānas_ do, to an extent, reinforce the dependence upon and subservience to husbands enjoined upon wives by the larger culture. However, they simultaneously empower women with the knowledge that their husbands' kammic trajectories are intertwined with their own and that they enjoy a degree of independence in which, even while married, they can pursue their own arahantship and can act as driving forces in the progress their husbands, and others, may make.

Yet at the end of her long kammic biography, it is important to underline, Yasodharā, like Bhaddā-Kāpiḷani and each of the previous-life wives of the saints, human and divine, ultimately left her husband behind to realize her own Awakening. Arahantship entails the end of all ties to the world, even the world of the gods, and marriage in particular is an institution that finally must be transcended in order to become a monk or nun who can reach the end of the long, gradual path to Awakening that I have dubbed “the kammic trajectory.” In the _Therī-apadāna_ no less than _Therī-apadāna_, this is the central point. Though the former rebuts the latter by reflecting so widely on the important roles played by marriage during the earlier stages of that path, it agrees in taking the end point as the main point in each and every autohagiography it contains. The standard refrain encapsulates the real focus of each of the monks' and nuns' _apadānas_, namely his or her arahantship. The _Apadāna_ provides all that rich biographical detail, with such poetic flourish, only in the service of narrating the final achievement of _nibbāna_. And as much as the _Therī-apadāna_ weaves marriage into the kammic trajectories of all the saints, males as well as females, it also contains plenty of narratives of past lives as well as present lives of nuns in which marriage is not involved. These include the shared narrative of the seven sisters who explicitly resist marriage despite remaining in the house so that they can dedicate themselves independently and completely to religious activity (Collett 2011). However important it may be in some cases, in others marriage certainly is not a necessary condition of sainthood. But for the authors of the _Therī-apadāna_ and the wives who heard it recited, it was important to recognize that marriage does not preclude sainthood, either. In the early stages of the path, marriage can even be a positive soteriological force.