

The Reign of Vishnuvardhana III: A Tale of Two Records



Reconstructing a 37-Year Rule from Copper Plates and a Rival's Chronicle



The Subject: Vishnuvardhana III (719 – 755 A.D.)

The presentation begins with the official record of the Eastern Chalukya king, Vishnuvardhana III. His 37-year reign is initially defined by the powerful sovereign titles recorded in his court's decrees:

Samastha Bhuvanasraya ~

Refuge of the whole world

Tribhuvanankusa

An elephant goad to the three worlds

Vishamasiddhi ~

Successful in conquering the inaccessible



A Foundation of Stability

The official history of **Vishnuvardhana III**'s rule begins with the resolution of a significant internal threat. He successfully settled a problem with his usurping younger brother, **not through protracted conflict, but through a political compromise**. The brother was dispatched to **govern Madhya Kalinga**, securing the throne for Vishnuvardhana and paving the way for his long and stable reign of thirty-seven years.



Vishnuvardhana III

Succession



Usurping Brother
Governs Madhya Kalinga

~ A Stable Reign of 37 Years ~



Evidence File: The Copper-Plate Decrees

A number of surviving copper-plate grants provide direct insight into his rule, painting a picture of *a well-administered kingdom* with active participation from the royal family.

Exhibit A: Dynastic Continuity

A grant that reviews an earlier decree by the dynasty's founder, Kubja Vishnuvardhana, demonstrating continuity and respect for tradition.

Exhibit B: The Queen's Authority

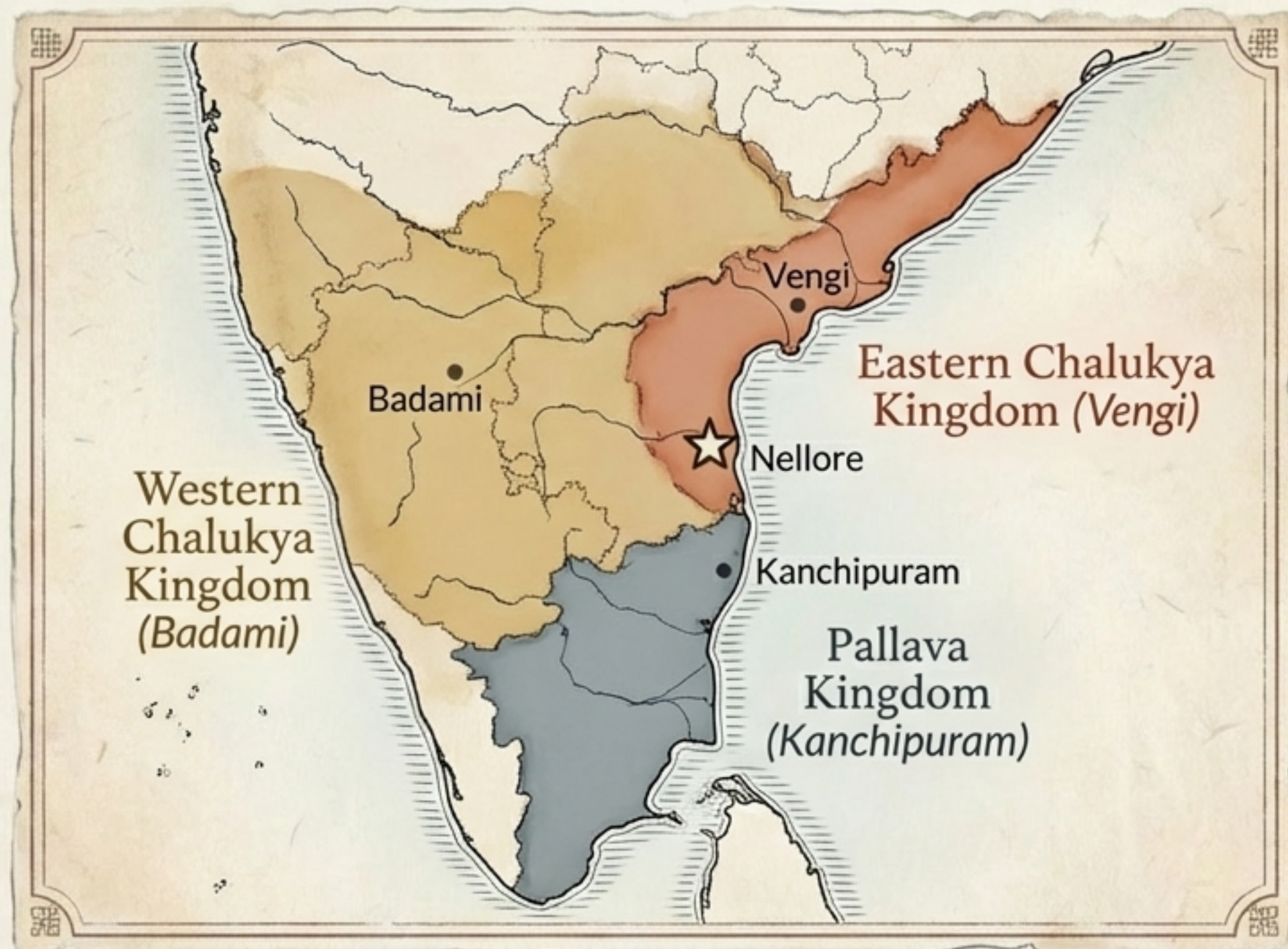
A grant where the king's queen, Vijayamahadevi, is named as the *ajnapti* (executrix), highlighting her official role in state affairs. The king is described here with the title *Tribhuvanankusa*.

Exhibit C: The Royal Sister's Role

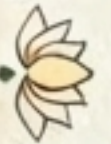
An inscription recording a grant by Prithivi-pori, the king's sister, further emphasizing the prominent role of royal women in his administration.

The Geopolitical Chessboard of the 8th Century

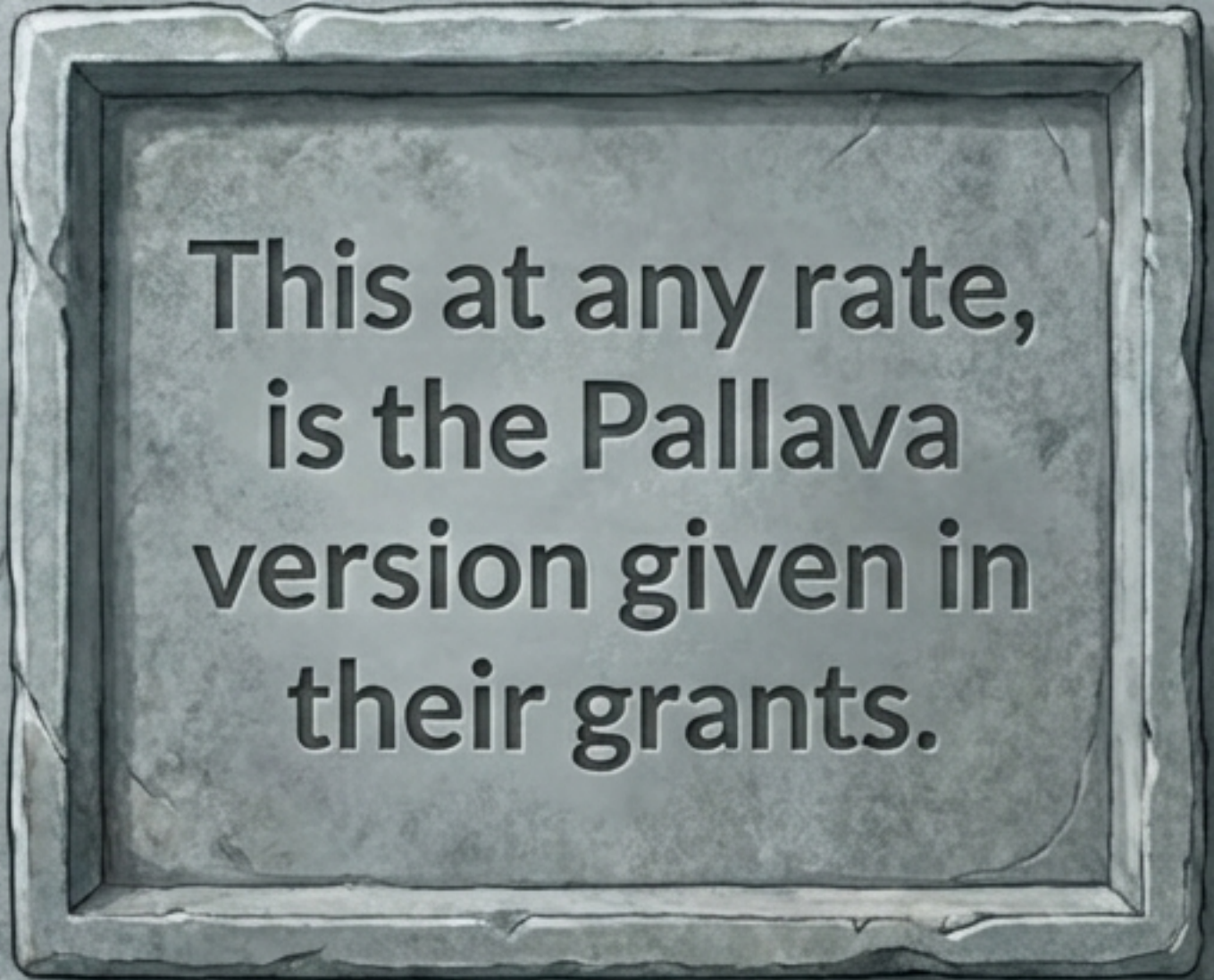
To understand the external pressures of Vishnuvardhana III's reign, we must look at the regional powers. His **Eastern Chalukya** kingdom was positioned between two major forces: his cousins, the Western Chalukyas of Badami, and the powerful **Pallava dynasty** of Kanchipuram to the south, their common enemy.



A Conflicting Narrative from Kanchipuram



While the Chalukyan copper plates project an image of internal harmony, contemporary inscriptions from the **Pallava court at Kanchipuram** tell a starkly different story. These records claim that the Pallava monarch, Nandivarma II, successfully conquered a part of Vishnuvardhana III's kingdom.

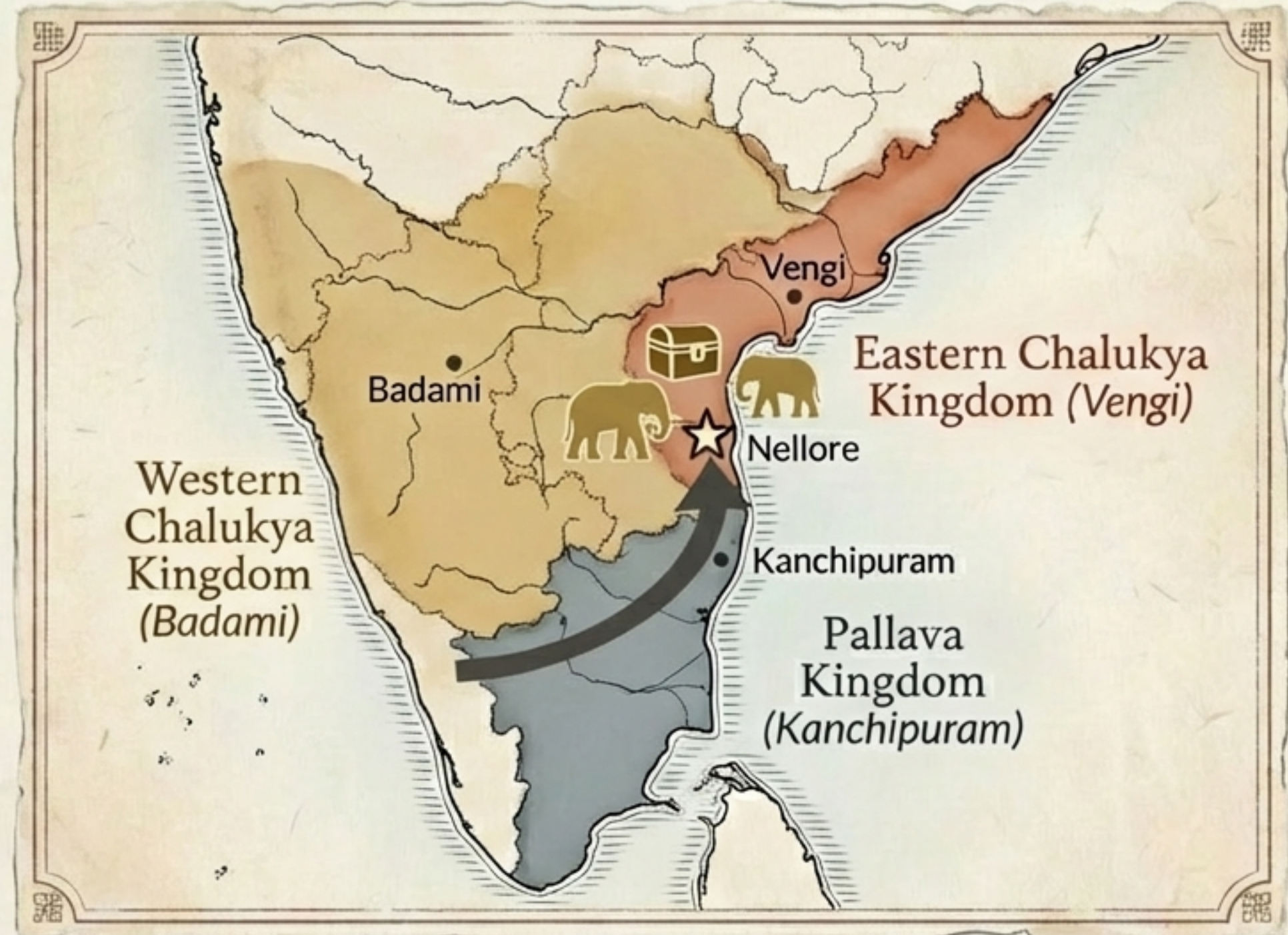


**This at any rate,
is the Pallava
version given in
their grants.**

The Pallava Account: The Battle of Nellore

The Pallava grants provide a detailed account of a military engagement.

- **The Aggressor:** The celebrated Pallava general, Udayachandra.
- **The Defender:** A Nishada, Boya chieftain named Prithvi Vyaghra, an officer of Vishnuvardhana III.
- **The Outcome:** Udayachandra defeated Prithvi Vyaghra in the
- **The Spoils:** The Pallava forces captured 'many elephants and much booty.'
- **The Consequence:** A portion of 'Vishnu Raja's' territory was secured for the Pallava king, Nandivarma II.



Connecting the Clues: Who was Prithvi Vyaghra?

The Pallava account names the defeated leader as Prithvi Vyaghra, a Boya chief. Historical analysis suggests he was a feudatory ruler under Vishnuvardhana III. This connection is critical. A feudatory chief of a specific region could not have independently engaged the powerful, organized forces of the Pallava empire.

Key Inference: The conflict must have occurred with the “active consent and co-operation of his overlord,” Vishnuvardhana III. This battle was not a random skirmish, but a clash sanctioned by the Chalukyan king himself.



Vishnuvardhana III
(Overlord)



Prithvi Vyaghra
(Feudatory of the
Boya country)

A Second Front: The Chief named 'Niravadya'

The Pallava records contain another intriguing clue. They mention that their general, Udayachandra, also proceeded against a chief called **Niravadya**, from whom he extracted "pearl necklaces, gold, and elephants."

Niravadya
(A title, not a name)



Jayasimha II of Vengi
(Eastern Chalukya)



Vijayaditya of Badami
(Western Chalukya)

Hypothesis: A United Chalukyan Front

The mention of Niravadya strongly suggests a broader alliance.

The Western Chalukyan king, who ruled the present-day Ceded Districts of Andhra and was also known as Niravadya, likely joined hands with his cousin, Vishnuvardhana III.

Together, they mounted a combined challenge against the Pallavas, their shared adversary.



Re-evaluating the 'Disaster'

How do we reconcile the triumphant Pallava account with the silent Chalukyan record? The evidence suggests that while the Pallavas were victorious, the engagement was not a major military disaster for the Chalukyas.



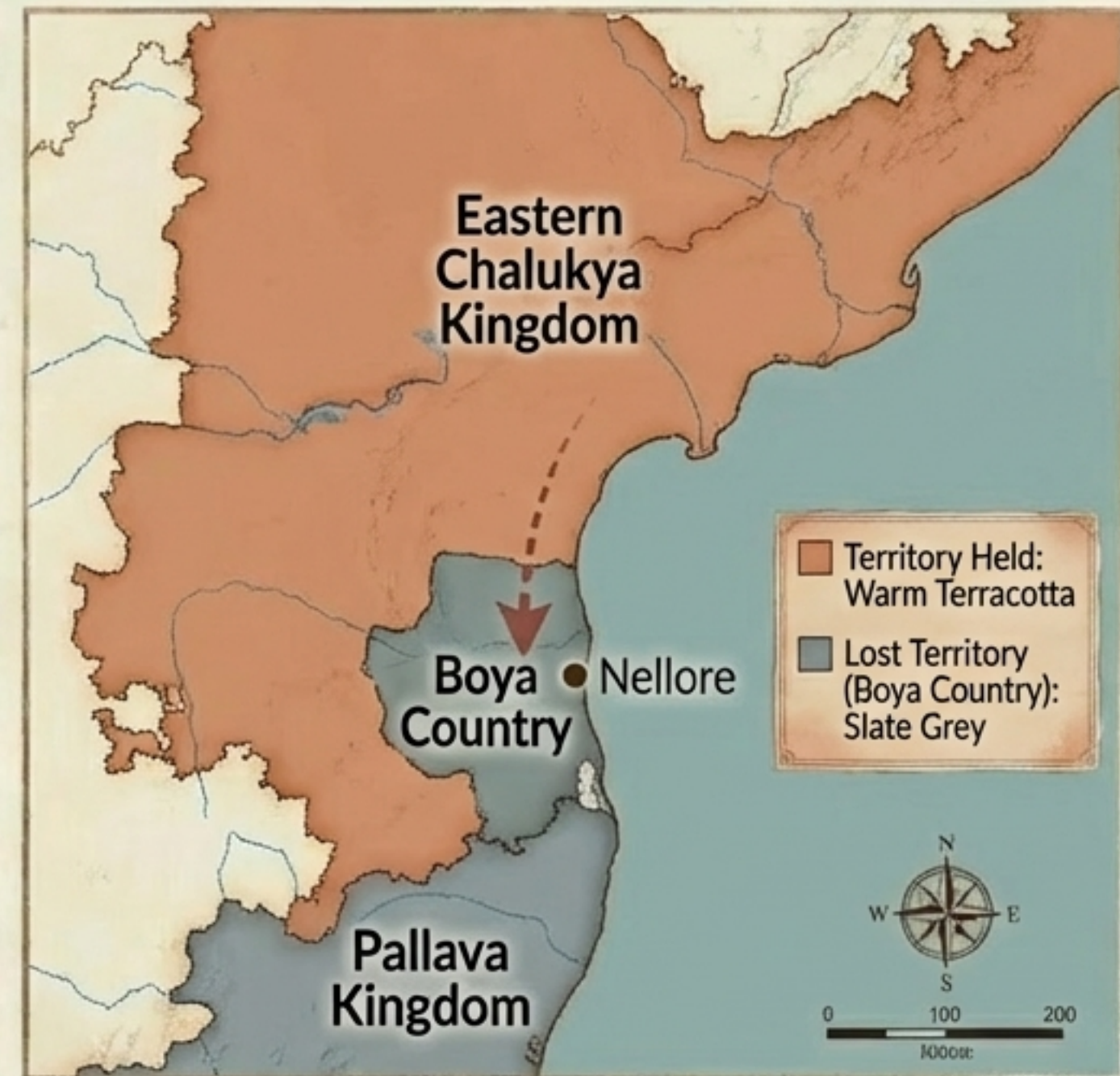
A more accurate assessment is that it was an **“unsuccessful skirmish on the frontier.”** The Chalukyas likely viewed it as a limited tactical loss, not a catastrophic defeat worthy of mention in their official chronicles, whereas the Pallavas celebrated it as a significant victory.

The Lasting Consequence: Loss of the Boya Country

Though not a catastrophic defeat, the battle of Nellore had a clear and lasting impact: the loss of the Boya country, the territory ruled by the feudatory Prithvi Vyaghra.

This loss was significant enough that the Eastern Chalukyas would not recover the territory until the later reign of Gunaga Vijayaditya III.

This demonstrates that the Pallava victory, while perhaps exaggerated, had concrete territorial consequences.



The Reign in Perspective: A Final Verdict

Our inquiry into the reign of Vishnuvardhana III reveals a complex picture:



At Home

He was a successful administrator who secured his throne, ruled for 37 years, and presided over a stable kingdom where his family played a key role in governance, as evidenced by numerous copper-plate grants.



Abroad

He engaged in a significant frontier conflict against the Pallavas, likely in alliance with his Western Chalukyan cousins.



The Outcome

While the Chalukyan records are silent, the evidence points to a limited military defeat at Nellore, resulting in the temporary but meaningful loss of the Boya territory.



History is a Story Told by Many Voices

The reign of Vishnuvardhana III is a powerful reminder that history is rarely a single, linear story. The official chronicles of a king may highlight stability and continuity, while a rival's records may focus on moments of conflict and victory. The truest picture emerges only when we place these competing narratives side-by-side and weigh the evidence for ourselves.

