

13 PORTS AND TRADE IN AMARĀVATĪ

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The inscription C.96 recovered at Mỹ Sơn (dated 658 CE) provides information for the first time about the realm of Campāpura that is closely associated with king Prakāśadharmā.¹ Several years later, the Khmer inscriptions began to include mention of its eastern neighbour then ruled by Campāśvara ('Lord of Champa'). The appearance of name Campāpura in those inscriptions along with the Sanskrit term *viśaya* referring to an administrative 'district' suggest that by middle of seventh century a functional polity administrative system had been established in Champa realm, though we do not know exactly its scale and effectiveness. During the subsequent reign of king Vikrāntavarman (r. 653-? CE) the term *rājādhirājā* appeared for the first time referring to a 'king of kings'. The evidence from cotemporary archaeology remains, inscriptions and secular texts all tend to demonstrate that Trà Kiệu (Simhapūra in Sanskrit inscriptions) played a key role as political centre of nagara-Campāpura from the seventh century. Trà Kiệu citadel probably served as the capital of Champa where the royal family and other famous families resided and performed royal ritual ceremonies.

The period from the 9th to 12th centuries could be seen as the most prosperous period in the entire history of the Champa realm during the era of the Amarāvati-based realm, centered in the Đồng Dương and Mỹ Sơn temple sanctuaries. The Đồng Dương court sustained the most brilliant artistic and temple construction period of the Champa realm. Numerous Sanskrit and Cham inscriptions from this era are found throughout the Amarāvati and Kauthara regions. These inscriptions provide invaluable information relative to the various issues of Champa history, notably its political organization, religious and societal practices, and economic activities. Regional maritime trade based in the mercantile ports of the Amaravati coastline flourished during this era, as the profits from this trade were foundational to regional political stability and economic development.

The 10th century inscriptions in Amarāvati region especially record the integration of the regional maritime trade and with broadening

Cham regional diplomatic relationships. The Nhan Biều inscription (911/912 CE), for example, furnishes a detailed account of Pov Klun Rājāvarah, the son of the queen's cousin, who had become a favorite of king Jayasimhavarman and was sent on a diplomatic mission to Java. The contemporary Bàng An inscription also details the multitude of royal ambassadors coming from different countries to visit the Cham court. Based on the surviving evidence, there is no doubt that by the tenth century, Nagara Champa in general and Amarāvati in particular were internationally recognized as an important and powerful polity active in international politics.

According to the surviving sources, the political dynamics and economic development of Champa in the 10th century was accompanied by the emergence of new elite families, who maintained and benefited from close relationships with the royal court. Consequently the elite families that appear in Champa inscriptions controlled the realm's economic activities. Over time they gradually took control of the economic activities of the country. These nobles are listed in Champa inscriptions bearing the title '*sārthavāha*' ('merchants'). The Hóá Quê inscription refers to

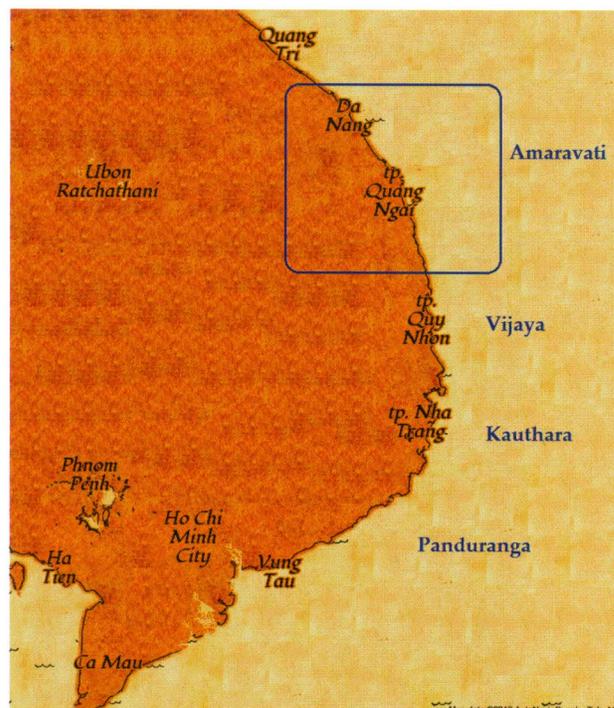


Fig. 1 Map of Amarāvati.