

an important collateral branch of the royal family which supplied high officials to the kingdom and whose founder, the original *Sārthavāha*, was a nephew of Rudravarman II, the first king of the dynasty, and a brother of the principal queen of Indravarman II. His three sons Ajña Mahāsamanta, Ajña Narendranrpavitra, and Ajña Jayendrapati subsequently occupied high positions in the kingdom as ministers of king Bhadravarman and erected with a younger sister, called Ugradevi, an image of Mahā-Rudradeva, 'out of devotion to, and in imitation of the features of their father.'² Religious endowments made by other members of the royal family are also acknowledged in the inscription. The *sārthavāha* title is often attributed to those who were merchants or traders who had knowledge of foreign countries and were in charge of loading and unloading of commodities.

Ports and Trade in Amarāvati seen from archaeological evidence

Recent archaeological excavations in modern-day Đà Nẵng and Quảng Nam province have unearthed a significant amount of trade ceramics originating from various regions of Asia, which affirm the economic prosperity of this region. Archaeological recoveries reveal that the economic activities of *nagara* Amarāvati took place mostly on the northern bank of the Thu Bồn river, whose estuary is recorded in Chinese accounts as the economic centre of Huan-wang kingdom – or Linyi town (V: Lâm Ấp Phố). The Thu Bồn river, as Trần Quốc Vượng and Trần Kỳ Phương have both suggested, served as the nexus of economic activities of Amarāvati region by connecting several economic zones stretching from the western mountains to the eastern river estuary. Contemporary Chinese accounts report it as the economic centre of the *Huanwang* kingdom and the *Linyi* town (*Lam Ap Pho*). At the Hậu Xá I excavation site in the north side of the Thu Bồn estuary, archaeologists have excavated many Chinese ceramic sherds dating to the Tang and Song periods, as well as Middle Eastern ceramic sherds dating back to 9th-11th centuries. Excavations on the north side of Thu Bồn estuary, the sites of Hậu Xá II, Trảng Sỏi and Bàu Đá have unearthed many Chinese ceramics sherds from the Yuezhou kilns in South China in 10th century, as well as the Longquan celadons and Dehua white wares in the 13th century. Based on these archaeological finds, Seiichi Kikuchi suggests that the northern bank of Thu Bồn river

had become a favorable location for commodity exchanges for merchant ships on the East-West maritime trade route during the Song period and thus the Lâm Ấp Phố in Chinese records could be identified with this area.³ South of the Thu Bồn estuary, archaeologists have found both ceramic artifacts and ancient coins. In 1990, the archaeologist Roxanna Brown did a survey in this area and discovered many Guangdong porcelains from 11th to 16th centuries. In a subsequent survey, Trần Quốc Vượng and his colleagues also discovered many Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics and coins from 9th-12th centuries in the Trung Phường area.

Cù Lao Chàm, an island located off the rivermouth of Thu Bồn River in Quảng Nam province, has emerged as an important site in the archaeology of Champa. The maritime voyages of both Chinese and Arab merchants noted that Cù Lao Chàm was an important location for the seafaring sailors because they could obtain fresh water, firewood and food for their long journeys. The archaeological study of Cù Lao Chàm began in 1992 with a large-scale survey conducted by a group of Vietnamese and Japanese scientists. During the period from 1997 to 2000, local archaeologists in conjunction with those from Vietnam National University had conducted detailed surveys and archaeological excavations in which the 1999 excavations were the largest. These archaeological studies in *Cù Lao Chàm* had important implications for the study of the commercial history of Amarāvati, as they provide physical evidence and an accumulated volume of trading artifacts that originated from China, Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East.

In the 1999 excavation, most of the Chinese ceramics were found dating back from the 7th to the 10th centuries CE and were classified as Tang by Vietnamese archaeologists. Regarding morphology, Chinese ceramics were relatively diverse, including pitchers, bowls, kandy, plates, jars and lidded pots. The artefacts originated from Yuezhou, Guangdong and Changsha kilns in southern China. These ceramics are said to be similar to the ceramic artifacts discovered in numbers at archaeological sites in Thailand, Malaysia and other places.⁴

According to the excavation report, there were 55 pieces of Middle Eastern pottery along with other items of Middle East origin. The Middle Eastern recoveries have contributed significantly to the general map of Middle East items found at