

he seized power from two kings in one day in a divided kingdom in 1113 CE.¹⁷ He would expand Cambodian control from the Malay Peninsula in the south, along the Burmese border, and in the east to Vijaya in Champa, though his repeated incursions into the Đai Việt were to prove fruitless.¹⁸ After consolidating his hold on the Khmer heartland, he turned first to Champa to help their struggle to recover land from the Đai Việt, which in the 1120s was according refuge to dissident Khmer and Cham notables. In addition, the Song court annals show that China solicited support from Champa and Cambodia to help restore its centuries-old control over what it called Giao Chi (Đai Việt), which had wrenched itself from China in 939 CE and was now ruled by the well-respected Buddhist Lý dynasty. Sūryavarman began with diplomacy (Whitmore in this volume p. 32), sending Khmer and Cham envoys to the Song capital and to Thăng Long (Hà Nội). After a break of several reigns, missions to China were sent in 1116, 1117 and 1120 CE. During a fourth mission in 1128, China conferred the elevated status of 'great vassal of the Empire' on the Cambodian king.¹⁹ In the background, the economy and trade were playing an important role. The Song were again opening up to foreign trade by sea²⁰, yet neither the Khmers nor the Chams had a deep water port. Thu Bồn was riverine. But the Vijaya port of 'Śrī Banōy' (today Thị Nại, near Quy Nhơn) was capable of development and offered an opportunity for both states to benefit from the proven world class water management and construction capabilities of the Khmers. These testaments to Cham-Khmer cooperation soon bore fruit in what John Whitmore calls 'a major surge in trade [that] moved around the Southeast Asian coasts from east to west. (Whitmore p. 32).

On the death of the emperor Lý Nhân Tông in 1128 CE, Sūryavarman sent an army of 20,000 against the Đai Việt, probably passing through Savannakhet in modern Laos. A small inscription in Angkor Wat suggests we can see this large military expedition force in the celebrated military parade on the southern gallery of the temple. The inscription is carved into a 'cartouche' recess in the wall above a portrait of the king addressing his ministers, before he mounts a war elephant, along with his generals, and marches in a large military parade, which is shown in extraordinary detail. The subordinate kings named show the army had contingents from as far as Lavo and Phimai beyond the Dangrek hills in modern-day Thailand.



Fig. 5 Portrait of Sūryavarman II on the south gallery of Angkor Wat. (P. Sharrock)

Above the parasols over the king the inset cartouche inscription (K. 298-2) identifies him by his posthumous, deification title Paramaviṣṇuloka '[in] supreme Viṣṇu's world'. The use of the posthumous title indicates the cartouche was added after Sūryavarman's death in 1149 CE and after his state funeral, when the title is conferred. The author of the cartouche was presumably his younger brother and successor Tribhuvanādityavarman. This assumption is supported by Claude Jacques' reading of the Khmer letters in the cartouche, which he sees as evolving towards the squarish form well known from Jayavarman VII's many small inscriptions on the walls of the later Bayon temple.²¹

The cartouche says in Old Khmer:

*'saṃtac vrahḥ pāda kamrateñ añ
paramaviṣṇuloka nā stac nau vnaṃ śivapāda
pi pañcuḥ vala'.*

'His Majesty (supreme sacred feet lord) Paramaviṣṇuloka was pleased to be on Mount Śivapāda to dispatch [his] troops.'

Fig. 6 Cartouche above the parasols over the king's head. (Courtesy C. Jacques)

