

THE ELEPHANT HUNT OF JAYAVARMAN III:
A POLITICAL MYTH OF ANGKORIAN CAMBODIA

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Little has been written about the 9th-century Cambodian king Jayavarman III. His famous father, Jayavarman II, was recognized in the Angkorian period (9th-14th centuries CE) as a dynastic founder and political unifier. The son's life was apparently more pedestrian. He went by the pre-regnal name Jayavardhana and the posthumous title "He who has gone to Viṣṇuloka," or simply Viṣṇuloka. Dating the beginning of his reign remains a contested issue;¹ one text suggests that he inherited the throne at a young age.² He ruled from Hariharālaya at modern Roluos to the immediate southeast of Angkor. His cousin and successor Indravarman came to power at Hariharālaya in 877 CE. Later inscriptions describe Jayavarman III's gifts of land to or patronage of ancestors of the Cambodian elite. Finally, he is remembered in five inscriptions for his losing, chasing, capturing, and releasing of elephants. For a king about whom we know so little else historically and for whom not a single contemporary inscription has been found, it is perhaps understandable that his elephant hunts have

¹ George Cœdès, correcting his own previous misreading of the date given in K.521, settled on 850 CE as the first year of Jayavarman III's reign. Claude Jacques tentatively modified the date to 834 CE. Michael Vickery has forcefully argued for Jacques' revision. See Cœdès, "Nouvelles précisions sur les dates d'avènement de quelques rois des dynasties angkoriennes": 12-13; Claude Jacques, "Sur les données chronologiques de la stèle de Tuol Ta Pec (K.834)": 165; Michael Vickery, "Resolving the History and Chronology of 9th-century Cambodia": 1-7. For the details of this problem, see Ian Lowman, "The Descendants of Kambu: The Political Imagination of Angkorian Cambodia": 82-84. This paper is a modified version of the fourth chapter of the author's dissertation.

² K.286, verse XXII; see George Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge* [hereafter *IC*] Vol. IV: 91.

been treated almost as a disappointing curio.³

If the presence of these elephant hunt episodes has often been noted, their significance has not. Though we may well imagine that every Angkorian king was active in capturing elephants for his court, it happens that only the hunts of the enigmatic Jayavarman III were recalled in later epigraphy—and in relatively exceptional detail for a genre of writing that is notorious for its opaque panegyrics and terse inventories. Claude Jacques has commented on the rare narrative quality of the miraculous elephant hunt incident in K.521 from Prasat Cak which resonates with the legendary portions of Cambodia’s 19th-century royal chronicles and which may represent, in Jacques’ view, a locally reworked passage from Angkorian Cambodia’s vernacular histories.⁴

Jacques takes an important interpretive step in this regard, though without exploring the compelling implication: the elephant hunt of Jayavarman III was a kind of political myth.⁵ The five accounts preserved in the epigraphic corpus employ the same basic myth to establish specific elite claims to property and position in the present. One might ask why a myth about hunting elephants was used to support such claims. The answer which emerges from a comparative reading of the inscriptions is that Jayavarman III’s elephant hunt was, to borrow a phrase of Jan Assmann, a “fiction of coherence,”⁶ a political tradition that effectively linked present to past and periphery to center for a generation of elites who had embraced the ideal of Cambodian belonging.

PROPERTY HISTORIES

As variations of a single myth, the elephant hunt stories in the inscriptions have an analogous narrative structure, feature a similar set of historical actors, and address common themes. The meaning of the myth must therefore be understood in relation to the style in which Angkorian Cambodians

³ In the words of Ian Mabbett, “little is known about [Jayavarman III] except that he liked to hunt elephants.” Mabbett and Chandler, *The Khmers*: 261. To date the only article dealing exclusively with the elephant hunt of Jayavarman III is Ham Chay Li’s “Sīlacārik prāsād cak niñ braḥ pād jayavarman dī bīr [*The Prasat Cak inscription and Jayavarman III*],” 44-54. The author translates K.521 into modern Khmer and, comparing this text to K.449 and K.956, presents what he deems to be literal evidence that the historical Jayavarman III was a prolific and well-traveled elephant hunter.

⁴ Claude Jacques, “Nouvelles orientations pour l’étude de l’histoire du pays khmer,” 47.

⁵ George Cœdès once suggested that the Jayavarman II and Jayavarman III of the inscriptions are figures of myth: “Pour l’épigraphie angkoriennne qui commence en fait avec le règne d’Indravarman en 877, ceux de Jayavarman II et de son fils dont on n’a pas encore trouvé d’inscription constituent une époque semi-légitime.” See Cœdès, *IC* VII: 129. The myth surrounding Jayavarman II has been explored by Michael Vickery in “A Legend concerning Jayavarman II,” paper presented at EFEO Paris, September 2004, unpublished. For a stimulating discussion of late (13th-century) Angkorian legends related to important monuments, see Ang Chouléan, “Est-ce si surnaturel?,” 81-99.

⁶ Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, 7-8.

wrote about the past. Apart from the genealogical inscriptions of the kings, most writing about the past appears in a kind of epigraphic discourse composed in both Sanskrit and Old Khmer which I will call the “property history.” This is my translation of the Old Khmer technical term *śākha* (sometimes spelled *śāka*), derived from the Sanskrit word for “branch,” and what Philip Jenner defines as “a succinct statement of the origin and successive ownership of landed property.”⁷ One should note that not all of these statements were succinct, and though the inscriptions typically addressed ownership of land, listing human (i.e., servant or “slave”) property was also common.⁸ In the 10th- and 11th-century inscriptions, *śākha* texts sought to trace, whether succinctly or at length, the history of a certain claimant’s territorial or human property, detailing the claimant’s lineage and the role of his/her ancestors in accruing and preserving that property to the present. Unlike royal genealogies, *śākha* inscriptions were not commissioned by the king, but rather by provincial officials and landed elites. Elites often prefaced *śākha* inscriptions with eulogies in honor of the king or of the inscription’s patron, but their more immediate aim was less to glorify themselves poetically than to specify the causes of personal and familial entitlement.

The importance of property in early Cambodian politics is reflected in the quantity of *śākha* inscriptions in the corpus and their persistence as a public mode of communication throughout the Angkorian period. The *śākha* inscriptions appear in the 10th-century, beginning in the reign of Rājendravarman (944-969 CE)⁹ and lasting into the 14th-century.¹⁰ They become particularly prevalent during the reign of Sūryavarman I (1002-1050 CE) when a dramatic reordering of loyalties and property ownership seems to have taken place. Michael Vickery has argued persuasively that the ascent of Sūryavarman I opened the floodgates of discontent among downgraded members of the provincial elite—Cambodians who traced their entitlements back to the 9th-century kings

⁷ Philip Jenner, *A Dictionary of Angkorian Khmer*, 587. n.3. Saveros Pou prefers a broader definition, “history,” in *Dictionnaire vieux khmer – français – anglais*, 526-527.

⁸ 15 inscriptions from the Angkorian period in Cœdès’ inventory use the word *śākha/śāka* conveying this sense of a “property history”: K.19, K.158, K.175, K.235, K.254, K.255, K.262, K.263, K.373, K.425, K.468, K.591, K.679, K.702, K.754. K.255 from Kok Po, late 10th-century, prefaces a list of slaves and a description of the means by which a temple donator acquired them with the phrase *neḥ gi roḥ śākha khñuṃ neḥ*: “Here is the origin of the slaves.” George Cœdès and Pierre Dupont, “Les inscriptions du Prasat Kok Po”: 384. An inscription from Ubon province in Thailand, K. 697, hesitantly dated by Cœdès to the reign of Īśānavarman II (c. 925 CE), uses exactly the same formulaic language before listing the order in which a certain Loñ Myañ acquired various lands: *neḥ gi roḥ śākha*... An early 10th-century date for this inscription is reasonable but not certain. Cœdès, *IC VII*, 96, side B, line 2.

⁹ The stèle of Trapeang Sambot, K.19, dated 964 CE, in Cœdès, *IC VI*, 143-146. See 144, line 13 in Khmer: *niveda[na] gi śākha aṃviy khñuṃ phon man steñ nādānta mān*... “[They] informed [Rājendravarman] of the origin [of the property], beginning with all the slaves, which Steñ Nādānta possessed...”

¹⁰ See the mixed Pali and Sanskrit inscription of Śrīndravarman dated 1230 śaka, or 1308 CE. The use of *śākha* in the enumeration of villages (*sruk*) is found in the Khmer portion. George Cœdès, “La plus ancienne inscription en pali du Cambodge,” 17.

and yet were marginalized from the centralized administrative expansion of the 10th-century.¹¹ The inscriptions from this period suggest a feverish effort on the part of this marginalized elite to lay claim to property and position by appealing to family history. Vickery points to several examples of impossible or invented claims, including one bizarre case where a series of thirteen brothers in one generation are said to have received titles from kings for over a span of two hundred years.¹²

While private ownership of land during this period suggests a considerable degree of elite independence, land claims depended as a matter of custom if not law on a pretense of royal approval. In one well-known *śākha* text, the Sdok Kak Thom inscription (K.235) dated 1052 CE, the family supports its claims by detailing its privileged position in the service of each king from Jayavarman II to Udāyadityavarman II (1050-c. 1066 CE).¹³ Underlying this family's role as a lineage of officiants for the king's god (the *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja*) is the family's gradual accumulation of land in each new generation.¹⁴ For example, we read that when Jayavarman II moved his capital, the family's ancestor followed to officiate for the king's deity, after which the king is said to have given the family villages and lands in the capital's vicinity. The two parallel narratives—one royal and prestigious (the journeys of the king and his royal deity), the other legal and mundane (the family's legitimate acquisition of lands)—serve to explain the scattered nature of the Sdok Kak Thom family and its lands and, simultaneously, to magnify the role of the family's illustrious ancestors as actors on the stage of royal Cambodian history.

Though not all the *śākha* inscriptions feature an elaborate royal frame story, nearly all participate to some extent in the vision of an ideal royal past. The notion that all things had a royal beginning, that all property was once a royal gift (*karuṇā prasāda*), pervades the thought-world of the inscriptions. Even if we agree with M.C. Ricklefs that the royal gift in Cambodia was in a practical sense typically little more than a charade, present in every exchange in which it had no business as a sort of nod of approval and solicitation of respect,¹⁵ we would be remiss to strip the king, or more precisely

¹¹ On the politics of land claims in the 11th-century inscriptions, see Michael Vickery, "The Reign of Sūryavarman I and Royal Factionalism at Angkor," 16, no. 2, 226-244.

¹² *Ibid.*, 233. This is the 11th-century inscription K.834, translated in Cœdès, *IC V*: 244-269, and briefly discussed above; see also the discussion of the text's obvious irregularities in Claude Jacques, "Sur les données chronologiques," 163-176.

¹³ For K.235, see Dupont and Cœdès, "Les stèles de Sdok Kak Thom. . .," 56-154; Adhir Chakravarti, *The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription, Part 2: Text, Translation and Commentary*; Chhany Sak-Humphry and Philip Jenner, *The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription*.

¹⁴ This deity is the *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja*, called in the Sanskrit *devarāja*, about which a considerable amount of debate has taken place as to its origin and function. See Hermann Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*; for a more recent take, see Éric Bourdonneau, "La fondation du culture devaraja. Danse, sacrifice et royauté au Prasat Thom de Koh Ker," 155, no. 3, 1343-1382.

¹⁵ M.C. Ricklefs, "Land and the Law in the Epigraphy of Tenth-Century Cambodia," 411-420.

the image of the king, of social consequence. Angkorian Cambodians recognized the force of the king's image in all social experience; it motivated all public behavior from the gift of land to the inauguration of a community's shrine.¹⁶ Perhaps more importantly, the king's image stood for the intangible and transcendent qualities of life beyond the particular, the circumscribed and the mundane. A desire for a sharpened picture of a transcendent past likely inspired the practice of inscribing family property histories, motivating local elites to couch stories of their ancestors in the myths of Cambodia's most famous kings.

THE ELEPHANT HUNT NARRATIVE

The royal elephant hunt narrative presents an ideal setting for this kind of local history in which a king from the distant past is remembered to have legitimized a certain family's claims to property. Because the elephant hunt was a common royal pursuit, the story gives a plausible explanation for the king's presence far from his capital. It also conveniently lends itself to hyperbole; the king's hunt is not merely a pleasure trip but also a political rally, the king being accompanied on his march by his whole court, including his favorite companions. Finally, the elephant hunt narrative features a richly specialized vocabulary that makes it especially adaptable to local traditions, especially those which explain the origin of place-names.

In early Southeast Asia the elephant hunt provided an archetypal pattern for enacting royal sovereignty.¹⁷ The elephant hunt was an occasion for the sovereign to be seen traveling throughout the kingdom accompanied by armies and retainers. For a 17th-century Acehnese queen, it was not enough to send out her servants to catch elephants for her court; she would take part in the hunt herself alongside all who were fortunate enough to be invited.¹⁸ Even if the hunt was unsuccessful, the royal progress was itself a powerful symbol of territorial power, serving to map out, by a sort

¹⁶ For an overview of the culture of Angkorian kingship, see Ian Mabbett, "Kingship in Angkor," 1-58.

¹⁷ In one interesting theory, the ritually symbolic elephant hunt inspired the name of the capital of Cambodia's foundational polity "Funan" (pre-7th-century CE). George Cœdès believed that this capital was called Vyādhapura, Sanskrit for "City of the Hunter," and that *vyādha* ("hunter") was a translation of Old Khmer *dalmāk* ("one who lassos elephants"), preserved in the Chinese name for Funan's capital as To-mou. Cœdès, *IC* II, 110, n.5; see also Jacques Népoté, "Entre discontinuités chronologiques et diversités régionales, à propos du Founanais et de quelques travaux sur le Khmer," 214-215. For a convincing critique of the Vyādha/Dalmāk/To-mou hypothesis, see Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th-8th-Centuries*, 36-37 and 421-422. For a study of the ritual meaning behind the royal elephant hunt in more recent Cambodian history, see Jean Ellul, "Le coutumier rituel des capteurs d'éléphants de l'ouest du Cambodge".

¹⁸ Leonard Andaya, "Aceh's Contributions to Malayness," 62.

of performative tracing, a “diagrammatic” vision of Indic cosmology onto the actual realm.¹⁹ The 14th-century Javanese text *Deśawarṇana*, a “description of the country [of Majapahit],” illustrates this “cosmic ordering of the state” by following the itinerary of King Hayam Wuruk’s royal procession.²⁰ The same territorial symbolism was applied in the early Cambodian royal progress. In the first south-facing bas-relief panel at Angkor Wat, the king is depicted in a procession flanked by armies representing various territorial units within the empire, as if they are gradually joining the king’s ranks as he passes through their domains.²¹ The royal elephant hunt seems to have served a similar political function: to ritually actualize the king’s extensive territorial dominion.²²

Elephant hunt stories from relatively recent Cambodian history convey this theme of political integration. In the late 19th-century Étienne Aymonier recorded such a story from the area of Sangkha in Surin Province, a historically Khmer region in present-day northeast Thailand.²³ A humble Kuay woodcutter (the Kuay being the predominant ethnic group, along with the Khmer, in southern Surin) befriends and aids the Cambodian king while the king is hunting a white elephant in a forest far from the capital. Because of this service, the woodcutter is awarded the title of Lord of Saṅghapura (i.e., Sangkha) when he visits the king at Angkor. The clear political-cultural message is that the king’s elephant hunt in a distant land transforms a lowly member of a peripheral ethnic minority into a person of title and high esteem. The myth accounts for the political conversion of the territory Sangkha and its people from a once-wild frontier to a centered, royally sanctioned province.

Another feature common to elephant hunt stories in recent Cambodian tradition is the act of naming. Two early 20th-century recensions of Cambodia’s chronicles describe an elephant hunt of the early 17th-century king Jaijetṭhā as the context for the invention of a place-name. Having captured several elephants, the king commands his fellow hunters to lead the animals to a village supposedly in the vicinity of modern Phnom Penh where they are to be domesticated. The story explains that this is how the village was called Bniet ṭamrī, “corral for the elephants,” before it came to be known simply as Bniet.²⁴ Creative toponym traditions such as this likely responded to certain provincial aspirations. A distant memory of a king traveling through one’s village helped establish local prestige, linking the otherwise insignificant to the politically extraordinary.

¹⁹ See Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power,” 130.

²⁰ Ibid. See also Stuart Robson, tr., *Deśawarṇana (Nāgarakṛtāgama) by Mpu Prapañca*.

²¹ The “historical procession” relief of Angkor Wat is described in Vittorio Roveda, *Sacred Angkor: The Carved Reliefs of Angkor Wat*, 29-37.

²² Thomas Allsen, in his comparative study of the pre-modern hunt, notes the tension between polity and the stateless in royal hunt narratives throughout pre-modern Eurasia.²² Thomas Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, 179.

²³ Étienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge : Le royaume actuel*, Vol. 2, 193.

²⁴ Mak Phoeun, *Chroniques Royales du Cambodge (de 1594 à 1677)*, 305.

Royal domestication of the frontier and place-naming happen to be two distinctive elements of the myth of Jayavarman III's elephant hunt, which seems to have spread throughout Cambodia as a polity-wide formula for the fashioning of local origin stories. Taken together, the five versions of the elephant hunt, found in disparate parts of the country, seem to embellish a basic account of Jayavarman III roaming the country's outer provinces, catching kingly elephants, and bequeathing land, nobility, and history to his peripheral subjects. By the late 10th century the elephant hunt story was far enough removed from the present to result in multiple retellings; it was also ubiquitous, free to be circulated and altered by families beyond the capital who sought to present their 9th-century ancestors as the beneficiaries of the itinerant king's favor.

K.175

The first and most concise of the five elephant hunt episodes in the Angkorian epigraphic corpus is recounted in the inscription K.175.²⁵ Discovered at the site of Kok Rusei just east of the Kulen mountains and northeast of Angkor (see fig. 1), K.175 is a four-sided stele dated to the late 10th century during the reign of Jayavarman V. Three faces of the stele speak of the king's servant Śivācārya and the history of his land acquisitions in the vicinity of that site, which the inscription calls Vraḥ Ganloñ.²⁶ The damaged commencement of the text informs us that four "village elders (*grāmaṅṅddhi*)" were responsible for verifying Śivācārya's claims to the village of Vraḥ Ganloñ.²⁷ The text then identifies itself as "a property history of this forested land" (*śāka bhūmi vraī neḥ*). "The village elders (*grāmaṅṅddhi*)," it continues, "have said that the forested land of Vraḥ Ganloñ was where He who has gone to Viṣṇuloka (i.e., Jayavarman III) once caught an elephant."²⁸ Two centuries later, "officials and village elders surveyed this forested land which had never been a village and never been a ricefield and set up boundary stones,"²⁹ after which they informed the king Jayavarman V, who gave the forest to Śivācārya to be cleared for a new settlement.³⁰

²⁵ K.175, Cœdès, *IC VI*, 173-180.

²⁶ Cœdès, *IC VI*, 175, line 2. The fourth face of the inscription is a near replica of two other inscriptions from the Jayavarman V period, the inscription of Kampong Thom (K.444) and that of Tuol Dan Khcan (K.868). Mention of the elephant hunt occurs on the third line of the east face; only the first five lines of that face are relevant to a discussion of the myth.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 175, line 1. On the function of *grāmaṅṅddhi*, or *grāmaṅṅddha*, in Angkorian Cambodia, see S. Sahai, *Les institutions politiques et les administrations dans l'ancien Cambodge*, 84-85. This was a kind of local official in charge of determining the veracity of land claims, origins, and boundaries.

²⁸ *grāmaṅṅddhi kathā man bhūmi vraī vraḥ ganloñ ti dhūli vraḥ pāda ta stac dau viṣṇuloka stac cāp taṅṅmrya*. . . Cœdès, *IC VI*, 175, lines 2-3.

²⁹ *pratya nu grāmaṅṅddhi chvatt bhūmi vraī ta vvaṅ tel jā sruk ta vvaṅ tel jā sreṅ karuṅā gol*. . . *Ibid.*, 175, lines 3-5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 178, lines 1-6.



Figure 1. The Elephant Hunt Inscriptions.

In describing the clearing of the forest and the establishment of a new territory, the story conveys not only an anecdotal local memory but also a local political statement. Śivācārya received the land only after the village elders had confirmed that it had once been royally possessed, by virtue of the ostensible elephant hunt that had taken place there, and was therefore free to be given away. It would therefore appear that identifying a place as the site of a royal elephant hunt somehow qualified that site as royal/state property and hence worthy of settlement. The village elders' account of how the land came to be royally owned intimates a metaphorical contrast between that which is settled and domesticated and that which is wild and untamed. By taming an elephant in the forest—asserting his political will on a territorial frontier—Jayavarman III makes way for the forest's eventual transformation by Śivācārya into habitation (*sruk*) and rice field (*sre*). New settlers of a relatively unpopulated area east of the Kulen plateau such as Kok Russei may have found reassurance in the village elders' explanation that the site had already been ritually, if not yet physically, transformed into civilized space. The village elders' story about Jayavarman III's elephant hunt may preserve the memory of an actual event, but it may also reflect a kind of story commonly related to elites like Śivācārya who were looking for local justification and support for their claims. In other words, it is possible that the elephant hunt story was adapted to meet a legal need for historical clarity—and to satisfy Śivācārya's desire for free land.

K.521

The formula of royal possession and domestication is more explicit in the elephant hunt story of K.521, a Khmer inscription from the temple of Prasat Cak within the Siem Reap city limits and just south of Angkor (see fig.1).³¹ K.521 actually stands for two inscriptions written seemingly by the same hand on the doorjamb of two adjacent brick shrines dated to the late 9th-early 10th-centuries (see fig. 2). As for when the texts were inscribed, we know that one of the author's ancestors (*aji*) was a royal servant in the first half of the 11th century, which means that the inscriptions can only date to the latter half of that century at the earliest, and perhaps to the 12th-century. The southern doorjamb of the north tower recalls in 15 lines the origin of the shrine,³² called in the inscription Viṣṇugrāma (the village of Viṣṇu) and dedicated to a deity Śakavrāhmaṇa, and the means by which the temple and its surrounding lands came into the possession of the author via a female ancestor (*aji*), Teñ Hyañ. This ancestor and her husband were ordered into the service of the deity of the shrine as royal representatives (*pre paṃmre panlas vraḥ śarira*) of Jayavarman III.³³ They then requested ownership of the adjacent land, Jnañ Prāñ, which Jayavarman III had given to the shrine.

The 16-line inscription of the south shrine, leaping forward a century and half in time, describes how another of the author's male ancestors through the matrilineal line (*mātrpākṣa*) solicited help from the queen of Sūryavarman I (1002-1050 CE) in demarcating the inherited land of Jnañ Prāñ.³⁴ The property history narrated in both texts is therefore a legal verification of the author's claims to inheritance of the temple of Prasat Cak (Viṣṇugrāma) and its adjacent land (Jnañ Prāñ).

In a rather exceptional example of Old Khmer prose the author narrates the miraculous capture of an escaped elephant by Jayavarman III, which precedes the gifting of temple lands to the author's ancestors:³⁵

³¹ Cœdès, *IC IV*, 167-170.

³² Cœdès confuses the location of the two inscriptions. The first inscription is on the north tower, not the south; the second inscription is on the south tower. Cœdès, *IC IV*, 168.

³³ *Ibid.*, 168, line 11.

³⁴ A fascinating application of the south tower's inscription, with its listed territorial boundaries, to the question of the relative age of certain Angkorian hydraulic features, can be found in Christophe Pottier, "À la recherche de Goloupura," no.1, 95-96.

³⁵ See Cœdès' transcription, *IC IV*, 168, south doorjamb of the north tower, lines 1-11, (1) 772 *śaka gi nu vraḥ pāda śrījāvarmmadeva stāc dau viṣṇuloka ta rājaputra* (2) *vraḥ pāda parameśvara vraḥ - - - vraī slā 'nin svey rāja chnām tap pra(3)mvāy cāp taṃmrya duk - - - lāñ mann taṃmrya rat cval ta vraī* (4) *neḥ ta jmaḥ viṣṇugrāmma yap phdaṃ ta gi svaṃ pratyādeśa yol kaṃ(5)mrateñ añ vaisnava mvay pandval ta vraḥ pāda viṣṇuloka thā da(6)ha ñyāñ vi - - pi sthāpa rūpa 'añ bhaktiy 'añ oy taṃmrya* (7) *noḥ viñ udaiya guḥ aṃpān taṃmrya noḥ ta vraī neḥ pandval* (8) *pre chgā ta neḥ sthāpanā rūppa kaṃmrateñ 'añ śakavrāhmaṇa di(9)kṣā jmaḥ viṣṇugrāmma jvan bhūmi trey jnañ prāñ 'ji añ khñuṃ paṃcyām* (10) *mvāy jmaḥ teñ hyañ jā svāmiy loñ las jā vraḥ khlayi to(11)y vraḥ dnāy mok jvan ta vraḥ neḥ pre paṃmre panlas vraḥ sarira* (12) *teñ hyañ nu loñ las paṅgaṃ thpvañ nivedana svaṃ bhūmi. . .*



Figure 2. Prasat Cak, north tower in foreground. Photographed by Anne Lowman.

772 śaka (850 CE), His Majesty Jayavarman, He who went to Viṣṇuloka (i.e., Jayavarman III), son of Parameśvara (i.e., Jayavarman II) of Vrai Slā in Anin(ditapura),³⁶ having reigned for sixteen years, captured an elephant and kept it . . . Then the elephant ran away into the forest called Viṣṇugrāma. At night while lying down to sleep (*yap phdam*) the king prayed for counsel (*pratyādeśā*). [In a dream] he saw a Vaiṣṇava deity,³⁷ who addressed Viṣṇuloka as follows: “If you strive. . . set up my statue and devote yourself to me, I will return the elephant to you.” The very next morning (*udaiya guḥ*) the king caught the elephant in this forest. He ordered that the forest be cleared to erect a statue of Lord Śakavrāhmaṇa, gave [the shrine] the name of Viṣṇugrāma, and gave it a plot of riverside land [called] Jnañ Prāñ.

³⁶ I follow Cœdès’ translation in *IC IV*, 169, with the exception of this part of line 2, *rājaputra vraḥ pāda parameśvara vraḥ - - - vraī slā ‘nin*, which Cœdès translates: “the son of Parameśvara, (residing in) Vrai Slā in Anin(ditapura).” I believe that that *vrai slā ‘nin* in the text’s introduction should be taken as a marker of Parameśvara’ s family identity, not necessarily an indication of territorial residence,³ and that the missing word is probably *sruk*: *vraḥ pāda parameśvara vraḥ sruk vraī slā ‘nin* (“Parameśvara of the sacred territory of Vrai Slā of/in Aninditapura”).

³⁷ From my own photograph of the inscription the letters *vais-ava* are clear; the subscript *na* below the *sa* is no longer visible, but the word should undoubtedly be restored as *vaisnava*, a misspelling of *vaiṣṇava*, “belonging or related to Viṣṇu.” Cœdès read *vaiṣṇava*, though he remained uncertain. Cœdès, *IC IV*, 169, n.1.

My ancestor Teñ Hyañ, the wife of Loñ Las who was the king's in-law in the royal service,³⁸ came as a royal servant to make offerings to the god and was ordered into its service as a representative of the king. Teñ Hyañ and Loñ Las requested the land. . .

The primary purpose of this account is to explain the origin of the name of the shrine, Viṣṇugrāma (“village of Viṣṇu”). Jayavarman III, the one early Angkorian-period king with a posthumous name evoking Viṣṇu, apparently named (*dikṣā jmaḥ*) the “village of Viṣṇu” after the “Vaiṣṇava deity,” Śakavrāhmaṇa, who had helped him recapture the elephant and whom he had promised to honor in the form of a statue at the place of the shrine.³⁹ As will be seen below, the elephant hunt story follows an apparent pattern for structuring a local history of place, particularly through an act of naming.

The domestication of the elephant with the aid of a god is not an everyday victory; it is, to use Claude Jacques' word, a “marvelous” sign of divine favor, and by implication, of the legitimacy of the royal center.⁴⁰ The king's feat is a political event; the forest, having sheltered the escaped elephant, is cleared (*chgā*, i.e., *chkā*) for a temple and for its useable land. The taming of the forest frontier makes way for worship, settlement, and territorial definition. The evolution from forest to settlement, like the transition from wild elephant to tame, parallels the establishment of powerful people and their deities in once ungoverned places.⁴¹

K.956

The elephant hunt myth of the Vat Samroñ inscription, K.956,⁴² throws this thematic connection between royal power and settlement into higher relief. The inscription comes from the

³⁸ I interpret the phrase *toy vraḥ dnāy* to mean “in the royal service.” In a 12th-century inscription (K.254) *dnāy* appears to have the sense of “royal service,” and seems to be related to the Thai word (borrowed from Old Khmer) *thanāy*, meaning a representative or counselor. See Jenner, *Dictionary of Angkorian Khmer*, 265.

³⁹ This so-called “Scythian brahmin,” Śakavrāhmaṇa was a common deity in Angkorian Cambodia, though its origin and significance are unknown. See George Cœdès, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, 93. In K.521 we are led to believe that the god was one of many local deities in a Vaiṣṇava pantheon.

⁴⁰ Jacques, “Nouvelles orientations,” 47.

⁴¹ The tension between forest (*brai*) and settlement (*sruk*) is a perennial preoccupation of Cambodian culture. For an illuminating meditation on *sruk*/civilization and *brai*/wild in the context of 19th-century Cambodia's war-ravaged society, when “the frontier between the two was not especially sharp” (page 96), see David Chandler, “Songs at the Edge of the Forest: Perceptions of Order in Three Cambodian Texts,” reprinted in *Facing the Cambodian Past*, 76-99.

⁴² Cœdès, *IC VII*, 128-136.

southeastern corner of Cambodia in present-day Prei Veng province (see fig. 1), in a region where the influence of Angkor was relatively subdued. K.956 is actually two texts, the top six lines composed in a stately, impressed pre-Angkorian script (see fig. 3), while the remaining fifty-five lines are an Angkorian cursive, scribbled and shallowly incised on the borrowed stone and covering the entire face as if to squeeze in as much information as possible (see fig. 4). Its content is as confusing as its form. Its narrative ends abruptly, which makes it impossible to date; by comparing it to other *śākha* inscriptions, I suggest we attribute it to the 11th or 12th centuries.⁴³ Like many *śākha* texts, the Angkorian section of K.956 seeks to explain the origin of various lands, both immediate and distant, that make up a family's inheritance.



Figure 3. K.956. Photographed by the author.



Figure 4. K.956, magnified.

As in most *śākha* inscriptions, K.956 seeks to establish the most politically relevant “facts” of a family’s genealogy. The authors, using the plural “we” (*yeñ*), claim that their ancestors came originally from the pre-Angkorian polity of Bhavapura. Jayavarman II, who had married one of their ancestors in the maternal line, moved the family to southeastern Cambodia where he and his wife had seven children who make up the primary progenitors of the family. Two of the king’s daughters subsequently inherited property in southwestern Cambodia, Sratāc at the site of the

⁴² Coedès, *IC VII*, 128-136.

inscription and R̥dvāl, while several other relations rose to prestigious positions at the Angkorian court. The most important person in this mix of ancestors is, as we shall see, Teñ Hyañ Narendra, granddaughter of Jayavarman II, who married Jayavarman III's successor, Indravarman (877-889 CE).⁴⁴

Curiously, unlike the two other kings mentioned in the account, Jayavarman III is not shown to have any blood or marital relationship to the family's ancestors. Yet his appearance in the inscription as the famed elephant hunter provides a frame narrative in which the family's land claims can be neatly contextualized. After listing a cohort of ancestors who had successfully solicited land from Jayavarman III, the text relates how the king himself came to name the land of Sratāc, one of the principal lands previously inherited by the family:

“Sratāc was originally named Haripura. Then He who has gone to Viṣṇuloka (i.e., Jayavarman III) went [there] to release (*pi tāc*) the holy elephant named Vraḥ Śrījaiyaśikṣadharmā. He ordered that [Haripura] be called Sāra Tāc (“the powerful elephant has been released”).⁴⁵ He who has gone to Viṣṇuloka erected [there] Vraḥ Vīra, dug Vraḥ Tvāt, and gave the following lands to Mratāñ Śrī Satyāyudha, our ancestor in the maternal line. . .⁴⁶

Due to Jayavarman III's visit, Sratāc became the new name for a domain previously called Haripura. The text's explanation of how this name came to be is probably an example of local folk etymology. Because “an elephant was released” (*sāra tāc*) there, Jayavarman III called the place Sāra Tāc, which ostensibly explains the contracted form Sratāc (which is otherwise meaningless).⁴⁷ This

⁴³ K.956 cuts off during the reign of Yaśovarman I (889-c.910 CE), and Cœdès considered dating it to this early period. However, Cœdès noted that an inscription K. 72, found nearby, is perhaps a continuation of the text. K.72 lists two more kings and then cuts off again. I assume that the original inscription was longer, or had been intended to continue up to the 11th-12th centuries. The expository style of the inscription, focusing on a complex family history, is certainly more characteristic of the 11th-century than of the 10th-, though a 10th-century date is not impossible. For K.72, see Cœdès, *IC VI*, 114. The inscription of K.956 is now preserved at the depot of Angkor Conservation in Siem Reap.

⁴⁴ Cœdès, *IC VII*, 130-131.

⁴⁵ As Cœdès notes, *sāra* exists in modern Khmer where it means “a robust male elephant.” *IC VII*, 134, note 4.

⁴⁶ *sratāc jmaḥ haripura teṃ man vraḥ pāda stac dau viṣṇuloka stac dau pi tāc vraḥ tamrya ta jmaḥ vraḥ śrījaiyaśikṣadhārmma pandval pre hau sāra tāc man vraḥ pāda stac dau viṣṇuloka sthāpanā vraḥ vīra jyak vraḥ tvāt oy vraḥ dakṣiṇa bhūmi ta aṃpāla neḥ ta mratāñ śrīsatyāyudha ta aji yeñ toy māṭṭpakṣa. . .* See Cœdès, *IC VII*, 131, lines 33-36. I follow Saveros Pou's implied translation of lines 33-34 in “Vocabulaire khmer relatif aux éléphants,” no. 3-4, 319; compare this with Cœdès, *IC VII*, 134, in which Cœdès takes the phrase *sratāc jmaḥ haripura teṃ* with the preceding sentence.

⁴⁷ Au Chhieng first noted the etymological connection between *sratāc* and *sāra tāc*. See Au Chhieng, “Études de philologie indo-khmère (IV): Un changement de toponyme ordonné par Jayavarman III,” 151-161. Saveros Pou correctly explains that Sratāc was originally called Haripura (*jmaḥ haripura teṃ*), that the king had it renamed Sāra Tāc (*pre hau sāra tāc*), and that this name only later became Sratāc (“nom devenu plus tard Sratāc”). See Pou, “Vocabulaire khmer relatif aux éléphants,” 319; see also Pou, *Dictionnaire*, “sratāc,” 515. In my own interpretation, Sāra-tāc was probably an 11th-12th-century folk etymology of an otherwise inexplicable toponym Sratāc.

etymological tradition not only accounts for the origin of the place-name but it gives the place royal legitimacy: Jayavarman III commemorates the liberation of the elephant by constructing a shrine in the vicinity, giving it a name, digging a reservoir, and giving more lands to one of the family's male ancestors.

Having explained the reason for Jayavarman III's coming to provincial Sratāc, the story proceeds to draw the most important of the family's ancestors—particularly Teñ Hyañ Narendra, the queen of the future king Indravarman—into the story as guests of Jayavarman III in one of his wandering elephant hunts:

Then He who has gone to Viṣṇuloka (i.e., Jayavarman III) went to catch elephants in the mountains. He who has gone to Īsvaraloka (i.e., Indravarman) also went, which is why Teñ Hyañ Narendra went—[as did] Kamrateñ Añ Vraḥ Mūla who was married to Teñ Pavitra, mother of Teñ Hyañ Narendra (and daughter of Jayavarman II), [as well as] Teñ Nau, her younger sister, who had been given to the royal brahmin entitled Mratāñ Khloñ Gauri.⁴⁸

The long list of people in the king's hunting party suggests a concerted effort by the author(s) of the inscription to account for the participation in the famous hunt of each of the family's important ancestors. Teñ Hyañ Narendra, followed by her father and sister, goes along *because* her husband, the future King Indravarman, is Jayavarman III's traveling companion.⁴⁹ Perhaps a casual claim that one's ancestor was part of the famous hunt would have taxed credulity, because the inscription takes pains to prove that the matrilineal ancestor Teñ Hyañ Narendra would have naturally, as wife of Jayavarman III's successor, accompanied the king. The journey of the elephant hunt sets the stage for the moment when, along the way to the mountains, Jayavarman III gives her father Kamrateñ Añ Vraḥ Mūla (apparently the whole family was invited!) a distant territory called Ldau,⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *man vraḥ pāda stac dau viṣṇuloka stac dau cāp tamrya āy vnaṃ vraḥ pāda kamrateñ añ ta stac dau ĩsvaraloka dau ukk gi pi teñ hyañ narendra dau man kamrateñ añ vraḥ mūla dā teñ pavitra ta ame teñ hyañ narendra uk teñ nau ta ph'van ti oy ta vrāhmana rājapurohita ta jmaḥ mratāñ khloñ gauri.* See Cœdès, *IC VII*, 131, lines 38-42. This is my translation, which can be compared with Cœdès' translation in *IC VII*, 134.

⁴⁹ Cœdès, *IC VII*, 134, translates this passage: "Īsvaraloka also went because Teñ Hyañ Narendra was going there." I agree that the particles *gi pi* are causal; however, I believe Cœdès mistakenly reversed the order of causation. The use of *gi pi* in Old Khmer is often found in the construction: *pi . . gi pi . .* ("because . . that is why . ."). Alone *gi pi* can mean "this is why." Hence: "Īsvaraloka also went, which is why Teñ Hyañ Narendra went." Judith M. Jacob notes this meaning of *gi pi* in "A diachronic survey of some Khmer particles," *Cambodian Linguistics, Literature and History*: 190, 203. See also the example of *gi pi*, which clearly means "this is why," in line 45 of this same inscription: *gi pi yeñ mān sruk āy ldau* ("this is why we have the territory at Ldau").

⁵⁰ The intended destination for the hunt is *āy vnaṃ*, "in the mountains," i.e., probably not in the flat vicinity of Prei Veng Province where the inscription was found. It is relevant to note that there are very few candidates for mountains near Prei Veng province. There is no indication where Ldau could be located.

and repeats nearly *verbatim* the key familial relationships justifying the royal gift:

Then when they had arrived at Ldau, Kamrateñ Añ Vraḥ Mūla—who had taken [as his wife] Teñ Pavitra, mother of Teñ Hyañ Narendra, who was married to He who has gone to Īsvaraloka (Indravarman)—obtained the land of Ldau as a favor from He who has gone to Viṣṇuloka (Jayavarman III), conducted boundary rituals, placed boundary markers, erected an inscription at Sratāc, and gave [the land of Ldau] to our matrilineal ancestor named Teñ Som, daughter of Teñ Pavitra. This is why we have the territory at Ldau.⁵¹

The story of the elephant hunt and the royal gift is meant to give credence to two key pieces of information: the family's identity and the precise history and extent of its property. A male ancestor Kamrateñ Añ Vraḥ Mūla, with a family connection to King Indravarman through his daughter, oversees the incorporation of Ldau into the family's expanding territorial property, and the royal journey that memorializes this event justifies the family's claim. The family's tradition is, on the one hand, a claim of autonomy and distinction on the Cambodian periphery—it exalts a family's ancestors and images its collective territory, however scattered it is in reality, as a unique whole. On the other hand, the tale is an affirmation of the family's dependence on the political center, personified by the traveling king. Reading the journey to the mountains in K.956 alongside the hunt in the forest in K.521, and considering the repetitive persistence with which the family of K.956 asserts its genealogical and historical connections to Cambodian royalty, we can observe how family ownership and status were understood to be predicated on the state's historical dominance over its frontiers.

K.449

A belief in the power of the royal center to ennoble the political periphery characterizes the final two elephant hunt inscriptions. These inscriptions were composed in Sanskrit rather than in the Khmer vernacular. Both texts were imperfectly executed and feature curious vernacularisms.⁵²

The two-sided stele of Palhal, K.449 narrates the history of a family that settled in a region

⁵¹ *man lvaḥ ldau kamrateñ añ vraḥ mūla kṣṭa teñ pavitra ta 'me teñ hyañ narendra ta ti praveṣa vraḥ pāda kamrateñ añ ta stac īsvaraloka dā prasāda bhūmi ldau ta vraḥ pāda stac dau viṣṇuloka cāt thve semavidhī sāñ gol duk ta prasāṣṭa āy sratāc oy ta 'ji yeñ ta jmaḥ teñ soṃ ta kvan teñ pavitra toy māṭṭpakṣa gi pi yeñ māñ sruk āy ldau.* Cœdès, *IC* VII, 131, lines 42-46. I follow Cœdès' translation on page 134 apart from the last words *gi pi yeñ māñ sruk āy ldau*, which Cœdès translates: "afin que nous ayons le pays à Ldau."

⁵² Cœdès notes the "incredible incorrectness" of the Sanskrit of K.449. The errors are both orthographic and grammatical (no minor sin in a Sanskrit composition), and their preponderance makes an interpretation of the text particularly difficult. Cœdès, "La stèle de Pālhal (province de Mòn Ru'sei)," 27.

called Malyāñ during the time of Jayavarman II, precisely in the year 734 śaka (*avdhitrigiribhiś śakaiḥ*, oceans-three-mountains), or 812 CE (see fig. 5).⁵³ The inscription itself is firmly dated to 991 saka (1069 CE), which means that it was composed long after-the-fact; the text appears to recognize the problem this time gap presents for believability by qualifying the supposedly original measurement of the lands in Malyāñ with the word *smṛtam*, “according to [oral] tradition.”⁵⁴ The region of Malyāñ most likely corresponds to the site of the inscription, on the border of Battambang and Pursat province in western Cambodia and nearly in the foothills of the Cardamom Mountains—as peripheral a location for an inscription as any in the corpus (see fig. 1).⁵⁵ The inscription names the site “Garyāk,” the property history of which, in 61 lines (54 verses of Sanskrit and seven lines of Khmer), occupies the entirety of the text.

The text, though primarily a narration of the history of a family from Garyāk, has an important bearing on the political history of greater Cambodia, particularly on the relationship between Angkor and the newly conquered frontier. The inscription relates how two ancestors, Śivakaivalya and Śivavinduka, accompanied Jayavarman II’s general Pṛthivinarendra on a successful expedition to pacify the country/province (*viṣaya*) of Malyāñ.⁵⁶ In a damaged and obscure verse we learn that the people of Malyāñ were forced to pay tribute while the new Cambodian conquerors moved to settle the land.⁵⁷



See Figure 5. K.449, side A. Photograph AMPP003179 courtesy of EFEO and the National Museum of Cambodia.

⁵³ Ibid., 29, line 20.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29, line 21.

⁵⁵ The only other inscription that may refer to Malyāñ as its immediate vicinity, K.693, was found only 20 or so kilometers to the west of Pālhal along the upper Moñ River of southern Battambang Province. See Cœdès, *IC* V, 209. Midway between the two sites is Brai Tralāc, which until recently was still a Pear village.

⁵⁶ Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālhal,” 29, line 17. The suggestion that Malyāñ was somehow “other” from Cambodia is confirmed in several pre-Angkorian inscriptions that mention an ethnic group Maleñ, which may correspond to the Pearic peoples who until recently were the primary inhabitants of the foothills of the Cardamom Mountains, i.e., precisely where the present inscription was found. On the connection Maleñ/Malyāñ, and the possibility of Pearic ethnicity, see Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics*, 249.

⁵⁷ . . . *narā dāntā tadgatyā karadās sadā*. . . Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālhal,” 29, verse XV, line 18. “Then the men [of Malyāñ] who had been subdued by the expedition were made to pay tribute in perpetuity. . .”

An intimate story of family inheritance typical of a property history is then told in the context of this invasion and settlement of Malyān. Having secured the new territory, the general Pṛthivarendra seizes a large plot of land in Malyān at a place that will eventually be called Garyāk, and then donates it to his companions, Śivakaivalya and Śivavinduka. As in K.956, these illustrious ancestors hail from a noble pre-Angkorian lineage, in this case Vyādhapura—undoubtedly the homeland and lineage of the inscription’s authors.⁵⁸ It is implied that the gift of land to the two ancestors was due to Jayavarman II’s preferential treatment of Vyādhapura’s inhabitants, the king’s “favorites [who were], along with their kin, praised in eulogy for the pleasure of the nobility.”⁵⁹

The story proceeds with an account of Jayavarman III and two more ancestors of the same privileged Vyādhapura family—the king’s “two favorites in that family”—named Kaṅṭhapāśa and Brāhmarāśika (the *nṛpahastigrahadhipo*, “chief of royal elephant catchers”)⁶⁰ who are said to have accompanied Jayavarman III on an elephant hunt.⁶¹ Traveling with the king’s entire army (*caturangavalānvitah*),⁶² the men catch three elephants with the noble names of Śvetebha (white elephant), Śvetapucchaka (white tail), and Vaiśi.⁶³ In keeping with a well-known Khmer custom, the elephants are released (*mukta*) and then followed (apparently to an auspicious place of their choosing).⁶⁴ The released elephants either cross or follow the descending course of a river Sītānadi⁶⁵

⁵⁸ The word Vyādhapura is damaged in the context of verse XI (line 13), but it can confidently be restored for two reasons. First, the verse states that Śivakaivalya and Śivavinduka were inhabitants of the villages of . . . pura, one of which is listed as Vrai Krapās, known from another 11th-century inscription, K.222, to be the name of a place in Vyādhapura. Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālhal, 29, note 1, and Cœdès, *IC* III, 64, note 3. Secondly, the present inscription identifies Vyādhapura as the residence, and by implication lineage, of two maternal relatives of Śivakaivalya and Śivavinduka, “La stèle de Pālhal,” 29, line 24. As seen in K.956, ancestral lineages were traced back to original homelands (i.e., Bhavapura) through the maternal line.

⁵⁹ . . . *vallabhās tu sanmāde vācane sāvayās stutāh*. Ibid., 29, line 13.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 29, line 24.

⁶¹ Ibid., 29, lines 23-24. Brāhmarāśika is said to reside in a village of Vyādhapura (*vrāhmarāśika vyādhapuragrāmasamsthō*); the fact that he is a kinsman of Kaṅṭhapāśa suggests that they are both of the same Vyādhapura lineage.

⁶² Literally “accompanied by an army comprising four parts (i.e., elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry).” Ibid., line 24.

⁶³ Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālhal,” 29, lines 25-26.

⁶⁴ Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālhal,” 29, line 26. As Michael Vickery has recognized, this detail about releasing and following an elephant resonates with several episodes in 19th-century Khmer literature. Michael Vickery, *History of Cambodia*, 62. See, for example, the 19th-century “verse novel” (*lpaēñ*) *Kruñ Subhāmitr* summarized in Judith M. Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia: A Preliminary Guide*, 162.

⁶⁵ *sītānnadinadiñ cemām avatīryya*. Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālhal,” 29, line 26. If Cœdès’ translation of *avatīryya* as *tīryya*, “having crossed,” is correct, we can imagine that the river Sītānadi formed a boundary between Malyān and a province to the north. In this case, the river Sītānadi might correspond to the Tampan River of Battambang (likely the city’s namesake), on which can be found the 11th-century temple of Baset, and which was the province’s principal watercourse before it was diverted in the 19th-century into the present-day Karuṅāke River (see Aymonier, *Le Cambodge* II, 279). But *avatīryya* literally means “having descended.” Perhaps the elephants followed a river from near its source in the foothills of the Cardamom Mountains down to the plains. The site of Pālhal where the present inscription was found

on their way to Malyāñ.⁶⁶ When the king and his two companions arrive at the village of Garyāk (we will learn that this is not yet its name), they are seen by Śivakaivalya and Śivavinduka, who cry: “Are those not our maternal relations?”⁶⁷ The royal hunt narrative therefore accounts for the arrival of each of the four main ancestors of the family at the ancestral village.

The significance of this royal visit to the village is not merely that it brings about a family reunion of these four men—it bestows a name on the village and “gives” the village again to its already owners. The explanation of the toponym Garyāk found in the record of this event is explicit: “Having caught a noble elephant with reddish tusks, and having led it here, because it was bound (or: “on account of the binding,” *bandhināt*) the king named the village ‘Garyāk’ (i.e., Garyāk). Then the king gave this land again to the four men.”⁶⁸ The account of the village’s naming suggests that “Garyāk” is connected semantically with Jayavarman III’s “binding” of an elephant. In modern Khmer *kriek*, very likely equivalent to Old Khmer *garyāk*, means to tie a domesticated or captured animal with a rope to a stake.⁶⁹ Hence, the naming of Garyāk (“The Binding”) is remembered to have commemorated the successful completion of the elephant hunt—the moment of the elephant’s “tying down.”

Just as in the other versions of the myth where an elephant is caught before a forest can be felled or a territory claimed, the binding of an elephant means that the land can be tamed—completing,

is located on the bank of the Svay Don Kev River, which descends from the Cardamom Mountains and forms the border between the provinces of Battambang and Pursat. The text refers to “this (*imām*) river Sītānadi,” which suggests that the inscription was on or adjacent to this river.

⁶⁶ *malyāñ gataḥ*. Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālḥāl,” 29, line 26.

⁶⁷ *mātrto me kulam nv iti*. Ibid., line 28.

⁶⁸ (line 28) *grḥtvā lohitudantam gajam niddvandvadeśajam* (line 29) *nīyātra vandhinād grāme garyākñāmākaron nṛpaḥ* (line 30) *nṛpo nṛbhyaś cathurbhyaś tāṃ bhūmīm bhuyo pyadāt tadā*. Ibid., 29-30. This sentence actually consists of half of line 28 (Sanskrit verse XXV) and lines 29-30 (verse XXVI). Compared to the rest of the inscription, the elephant hunt story is narrated without much respect for verse and meter. George Cœdès in his translation of this sentence interpreted the ablative *bandhināt* to be *bandhinam*, which he took with *grāme* to mean “in the village of those who had caught (the elephant).” See Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālḥāl,” 29, note 1, and his translation on page 32. Recognizing the ablative of cause in *bandhināt* (“because of the binding”) gives us a more coherent, if still awkward, Sanskrit sentence.

⁶⁹ Pou, *Dictionnaire*, “garyāk,” 134. Pou offers the modern *kriek* in a side-note as a possible derivative, but refrains from equating the two words in her actual definition. Connecting *kriek* with **griek*/*garyāk* is problematic, given that Old Khmer *g* may have still been voiced in the 11th-century. It is entirely possible, however, that *kriek* (*k* being unvoiced in Old Khmer) is simply a modern misspelling of an original form **griek*. Due to the loss of voice distinction in modern Khmer, the two forms would have developed identical pronunciation and could have been spelled either way. This would have prevented 20th-century lexicographers from correctly identifying the original initial. This passage from K.449 certainly appears to confirm that the meaning of *garyāk* corresponds to modern *kriek*, and that the initial should in fact be a voiced *g*: *griek*.

as it were, the process of colonization begun during the invasion of Malyāñ by Jayavarman II. The act of domestication symbolized by the capture of the elephant seems to echo the earlier invasion, with Jayavarman III on the hunt arriving like a conqueror “accompanied by his whole army” (*caturangavalānviṭaḥ*).⁷⁰ Though the king’s intention is not war, it is “binding” or subjugation. The elephant hunt story reaffirms an act of political integration on the country’s periphery; Malyāñ was in a sense twice “invaded” from Angkor. For the family of Garyāk who recalls these events in K.449, the elephant hunt also signifies that Garyāk was twice given. The family’s history and territorial identity are worked into and (doubly) substantiated by a memory of Cambodian expansion and consolidation. Nevertheless, alongside this positive view of the family’s place in Cambodian history is a sense of uncertainty over the family’s relationship with the Cambodian center. While affirming the family’s ties to Cambodia’s founders and the royal domestication of the family’s territory, the story contains a note of undesired provinciality, or an anxiety caused by distance from the center. The family in Malyāñ lives among a conquered foreign people who are forced to pay tribute. The surprise of the two ancestors in Garyāk on meeting their two prestigious relatives in the king’s hunting party seems to betray their state of exile, in distant Malyāñ, from the world of political importance.

K.1258

This note of provinciality, of being politically sidelined or somewhere else, is similarly implied in an undated⁷¹ Sanskrit inscription from southern Cambodia, K. 1258, which accounts for the donation of land to one of the king’s officials during a journey in “other domains.”⁷² The “other domain” in which this eight-line account of the elephant hunt takes place appears to be in southern Cambodia, Takeo Province, the presumed site of the inscription—though its provenance has not been positively

⁷⁰ Cœdès, “La stèle de Pālḥāl”: 28, line 24.

⁷¹ Dating the inscription is problematic. The year given in the text, supposedly during the reign of Jayavarman III, is nonsensical: 862 śaka or 940 CE, if we are reading it correctly, which would be about 63 years after Jayavarman III’s death. It is possible that the author was simply misinformed. Such a mistake suggests that the inscription is very late, from a time when the facts of early Angkorian history were not readily accessible, and hence more prone to embellishment. I hypothesize a 12th or even 13th-century date, though there may be no paleographic support for this theory. According to Gerdi Gerschheimer, in a letter dated May 24, 2008, “la date de rédaction de K.1258 reste un mystère, que des études paléographiques ne permettront peut-être pas de résoudre.”

⁷² I thank Gerdi Gerschheimer for a transliteration of this text, received May 24, 2008, and Dominic Goodall for a translation (unpublished). Unless otherwise noted, I follow Dominic Goodall’s French-language edition, received Oct. 13, 2009.

identified (see fig. 6).⁷³

The inscription consists of a eulogy to Jayavarman III, a nod to his famous parentage, an brief account of his journey to distant lands on an elephant hunt, and a reference to a gift of land to an accompanying official who we can probably assume was the ancestor or the local political forebearer of the inscription's author.



Figure 6. K.1258. Photograph AMPP000961 courtesy of EFEO and the National Museum of Cambodia.

⁷³ The inscription was found in 1993 by William Aspell at Tuol Tumpong market in Phnom Penh, after which it was given to the National Museum. A vendor informed him that the stone had been purchased from another merchant in Takeo Province, although this could not be verified. Personal comm., June 9, 2010. In 1994 Michel Tranet recorded the provenance of K.1258 (which he labels Ka 2) as “Brai Khcay Ravien” (Brai Khjāy in Raviēn district), Takeo Province to the immediate west of the Angkorian ruins of Nāñ Khmau. See Michel Tranet, “Découvertes récentes d’inscriptions khmères,” in *Southeast Asian archaeology 1994: proceedings of the 5th international conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, Paris*, 105.

- I. (1) tad viṣṇulokaṅṅpatir nṛpatīndravaṅśa- |⁷⁴
 dhātaḥ⁷⁵ kṣītau kṣītipater anu sevyamānaḥ
 (2) tasyāṃ vabhūva vata madhyadine rkkabhāsa- | s
 karuṅāghair dadhad vigatameghakaras sute[jaḥ]
- II. (3) atha dvijair mmantrisahasrasa(m)khyai- | ś
 cacāra rājā viṣayāntareṣu
 (4) surebhasitagrahaṇe⁷⁶ varāma⁷⁷ |
 bharttā mṛgendragrahaṇe samarthaḥ
- III. (5) anintanlaugrāmabhavaṃ hi daṣṭuṃ |
 daṣṭvindram eva prathitaṃ pṛthivyām
 (6) śuklebham iti tvam asi samarthaḥ |
 tadācacakṣe grahabhūpatīndraḥ
- IV. (7) deśāsivanivāsaṅ ca⁷⁸ | ānandanapurair yuktam⁷⁹
 (8) tadā dadau nṛpo daṣṭu | hināmne ṣṭarasadvayaiḥ

I. Formerly⁸⁰ King Viṣṇuloka [i.e., Jayavarman III], venerated on the earth after the lord of the earth and founder of the lineage of the king of kings [i.e., Jayavarman II], was born on this [earth]—how wondrous! (*vata*)—shining with the light of the sun at midday, whose rays dispelled the clouds, bearing a beautiful splendor, with his companies.

II. One day the king was traveling in other domains with brahmins, with a thousand counselors.⁸¹ The lord, who was capable of capturing lions, took pleasure (*rarāma*) in capturing divine white elephants (*surebhasitagrahaṇe*).⁸²

III. Then the king of the land and of the hunt addressed Hi Daṣṭu, a native of the

⁷⁴ This vertical line or *daṅḍa* incised between the two *pāda* of each line appears instead of the expected space.

⁷⁵ We would expect *dhātuḥ*.

⁷⁶ Goodall notes that the meter would have us read *surebhasīta*, while in context we would expect *sitasurebha*.

⁷⁷ The text shows *varāma*, which Gerschheimer interprets to be a scribal error for *rarāma*, “he delighted.” Alternatively, Dominic Goodall suggests *varāma* could be a strangely contracted form of *avararāma*, “he stopped.”

⁷⁸ Gerschheimer assumes *deś(aṃ) śivanivāsaṅ ca*.

⁷⁹ The form should perhaps be *yutam*, rather than *yuktam*, as the meter requires a heavy syllable.

⁸⁰ This is my tentative reading of *tad*, which would typically be translated as a temporal adverb “at that time.”

⁸¹ I follow Goodall, who takes the compound *mantrisahasrasaṃkhyaiḥ* as *mantribhiḥ sahasrakaruṅākhyaiḥ*.

⁸² The meaning of the compound *surebhasīta* is clearly “divine (*sura*) white (*sita*) elephant (*ibha*),” though the compound is in the wrong order.

village of Tanlau in Anin[ditapura] (*anintanlaugrāmabhavaṃ*),⁸³ even the lord of the Daṣṭus (*daṣṭvindram eva*),⁸⁴ famous on the earth, a [veritable] white elephant (*śuklebham*), as follows: “You are able.”

IV. Then [in the year marked] by eight, flavors, and two [862],⁸⁵ the king gave the one named Daṣṭu Hi (*daṣṭuhināmne*) the territory Śivanivāsa,⁸⁶ together with the cities of Ānandana⁸⁷ (*ānandanapurair yutam*).

This inscription has very little to say in terms of pure documentary information apart from that Jayavarman III gave some lands and a temple to a certain Daṣṭu Hi (or Hi Daṣṭu).⁸⁸ Nonetheless, on a close reading the text reveals a number of subtle parallels with the other elephant hunt stories. There is, for example, a genealogical connection to K.521 implied in verse III. Daṣṭu Hi is said to have come from Aninditapura, which, as we see in K.521, was the homeland and lineage of Jayavarman II and his son. We are told in K.1258 that Daṣṭu Hi was a favorite of the king, but more importantly he was a member of the family. Recall that K. 956 also details genealogical linkages to justify a family’s participation, in that case involving several individuals, in the king’s traveling retinue.

⁸³ Goodall translates *anintanlaugrāmabhavaṃ*: “native of the village of Anintanlau.” I would suggest that *anin* and *tanlau* be understood as two parts of a tatpuruṣa compound meaning “Tanlau of/in Anin(ditapura).” The abbreviated form *anin*, or *nin*, for Aninditapura is also found in K.521 (see above) designating the homeland of Jayavarman II’s lineage; see Cœdès’ translation of K.521, *IC* IV: 169. The correspondence *anin/aninditapura* was first suggested by Louis Finot in his edition of K.598, “La stele du Pràsàt Trapan Run,” 77.

⁸⁴ Or: “lord of Daṣṭu?”

⁸⁵ In Sanskrit compound numbers are typically written in reverse order; hence, *aṣṭarasadvayaiḥ* would normally read 2-6-8, which as a śaka date (268, or 346 CE) would be nonsense. Gerschheimer, in a letter dated May 24, 2008, proposes that we take the number as 8-6-2, equivalent to 940 CE, citing the 12th-century K.692 of Jayavarman VII (Cœdès, *IC* I, 238, verse LXI), in which the date 1117 śaka (1195 CE) is exceptionally not written in reverse order. Of course, the date 862 śaka, or 940 CE, presents a chronological problem for which I have no solution but to assume that the author of the inscription was misinformed.

⁸⁶ I take *deśaśivanivāsa* as a strangely ordered compound (see note 83 above) meaning “the territory/country/village Śivanivāsa.” There is one mention of a *sruk* (i.e., *deśa*) Śivanivāsa in the *pramān* Chpar Ransi (region of the Bamboo Grove) in a 10th-century inscription from Koh Ker, K. 682. See George Cœdès, “La date de Kòḥ Ker,” *BEFEO* 31 (1931), 15. Goodall offers an alternative translation based on Gerschheimer’s preferred transcription *deś(am) śivanivāsañ ca*: “a territory *and* a Śiva-temple,” which explains the function of the conjunction *ca*. Perhaps, however, *ca* in this context serves alongside *tadā* as a kind of sentence connector: “[And] then. . .”

⁸⁷ Goodall interprets Ānandana as a toponym, in which there was apparently a plurality of “cities” (*pura*).

⁸⁸ The word *daṣṭu* has no known meaning in either Sanskrit or Khmer, though from context it appears to indicate the name of a people or place. The word *hi*, taken nominally, may relate to a *hi* found in Old Khmer personal names in the inscriptions, though the contexts in which this word appears do not hint at any meaning. In the present inscription *hi daṣṭu* seems to be associated with the title *daṣṭvindra*, “lord of the Daṣṭus/of Daṣṭu,” which may be a clue to its meaning.

The scale and purpose of the royal progress are given special attention in K.1258. As in K.449, the king's entourage is said to consist not of a few adventurers but of a massive army of retainers. This is a literal army in K.449, but in K.1258 it is the entire structure of the court, consisting of "a thousand officials" (*mantrisaharasamkhyaiḥ*). It is as if the capital itself were on the move, gathering the "other domains" or outer provinces of the realm into its orbit.⁸⁹

Both K.449 and K.1258 feature participants in the royal hunt who are remembered by their descendants as having come as new settlers to the provinces. The four ancestors of K.449 who settled in Malyān during the time of Jayavarman III and his father were not original inhabitants—the indigenes were the conquered people of Malyān—but they were the first residents with the approval and mandate of the country's founding kings after the consolidation of the Angkorian polity. If we assume that the author of K.1258 was a descendant of Daṣṭu Hi seeking higher approval of his claims to local land, we can understand his effort to align his family with the authoritative Cambodian past, with a more transcendent lineage, and with a less peripheral place of origin. Daṣṭu Hi was from a more prestigious elsewhere, in the dynastic homeland of Aninditapura. His descendants in southern Cambodia may have valued the idea that, as self-identified strangers in their own land, their connections to the royal center at Angkor, and hence the security of their claims, were genealogically assured.

Of course, it is unlikely that provincial Cambodians with such royal connections would have identified themselves exclusively as "Cambodian," "Angkorian," or "Aninditapurian." The family identities of the authors of both K.449 and K.1258 were probably more variegated and, above all, local than their public inscriptions admit. What is important is that they felt the compulsion to position themselves from their peripheral places towards the political center of things. We find in the elephant hunt myth and in the related property/family histories a homogeneous identity that privileges the provincial as an official part of a Cambodian whole, rather than as—and this was likely the political reality as often as not—a semi-autonomous situation of multiple origins and contested political attachments.

⁸⁹ If these domains or *viṣaya* do in fact represent dominions beyond the king's immediate sway, they should not be understood as "foreign countries." In the Old Khmer inscriptions after the 9th century the word *viṣaya* takes on the distinct meaning of an administrative unit or "province," overseen by royally sanctioned officials called *khloñ viṣaya*, or "provincial governors." It is likely that *viṣaya* has the specific sense of "province" in this context. Unlike Jayavarman III's journey to the "foreign" and recently conquered Malyān in K.449, the king's elephant hunt in K.1258 merely reestablishes his claim over distant provinces that are already rightfully his and are therefore legitimately free for him to give away.

THE CAMBODIAN IDEA

The five elephant hunt episodes discussed above suggest that at some time in the 10th century a story about Jayavarman III entered the messy world of local Cambodian inheritance politics and was transformed in the process. It became a popular tradition in this sense: it was a myth, connected to an otherwise little known king, that was in practice beyond anyone's control and was, for that very reason, the property of everyone whose stories it could dignify.

Even if the process of the myth's dissemination was relatively anarchic, the common core of the myth—the journey of Jayavarman III throughout the country to domesticate the frontiers and to bless the ancestors of the people—likely originated in a politically sanctioned tradition. James Scott has observed that political traditions such as this are typical of literate rather than oral cultures, and are often related to attempts by central figures to “stabilize a claim to power that eluded such stabilization when it was asserted only orally.”⁹⁰ The 10th century probably witnessed the rise of official written histories, coincident with the increasing dominance of Angkor over political affairs in the provinces, which were designed to legitimize the dynasty of Jayavarman III's father, Jayavarman II, and to establish the cultural power of Angkor's current kings.

Ultimately, the widespread transmission of the myth of the wandering, omnipresent Jayavarman III speaks to the authority of a certain idea. The notion of a unitary, transcendent Cambodian space overrode all expressions of internal autonomy and difference. It was a space defined by what the polity had ideally subsumed: the rimland, the provincial family, and the wilderness of wild elephants. It was, above all, a space permeated by a single political culture. Those who chose to act on the political stage, at whatever level and however limited in scope, were caught up in the culture's promise of belonging and prestige.

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⁹⁰ James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, 233-234.

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សង្ខេប

ដំណើរទាក់ដំរីនៃព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី៣ ៖ ព្រះរាជនិទានដែលមានជម្រៅនយោបាយនៅ
សម័យអង្គរ

Ian Lowman

មានសិលាចារឹក៥ជាភាសាខ្មែរ ចារនៅចន្លោះស.វ.ទី១០និងទី១២ ដែលនិយាយពីព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី៣ ទៅទាក់ដំរីនៅទីផ្សេងៗនាស.វ.ទី៩។ អត្ថបទនេះព្យាយាមបង្ហាញថា ចារឹកថ្មទាំងប៉ុន្មានដែលហាក់ដូចជានិទាន រឿងខុសៗគ្នានោះ តាមពិតឆ្លុះបញ្ចាំងពីយុទ្ធនាការនយោបាយតែមួយ។ សាច់រឿងជាមូលដ្ឋានបង្ហាញថាក្នុង ដំណើរយាត្រាទាក់ដំរីនោះ ព្រះរាជាបង្ក្រាបអ្នកស្រុកនៅតំបន់ជ័យនគរ ព្រមទាំងប្រទានលាភរង្វាន់ដល់នរណា ដែលស្មោះត្រង់នឹងព្រះអង្គ។ ហេតុនេះហើយ យូរក្រោយមក អ្នកខ្លះខំពង្រឹងពូជពង្សខ្លួន ហើយអះអាងលើកម្ម សិទ្ធិនានាដោយផ្អែកលើកាយវិការនៃព្រះរាជាចំពោះបុព្វការីខ្លួនពីមុនមក។ ដំណើរទាក់ដំរីទាំងនោះហាក់ដូចជា ល្បីសុះសាយ ហើយបង្ហាញពីឥទ្ធិពលនៃព្រះរាជនិទាននៅសម័យកាលមួយដែលមានយុទ្ធនាការយ៉ាងខ្លាំងក្លាក្នុង ការបញ្ចុះបញ្ចូលរាស្ត្រ។

Abstract:

The Elephant Hunt of Jayavarman III: A Political Myth of Angkorian Cambodia

Ian Lowman

Five Cambodian inscriptions composed between the 10th and 12th centuries CE refer to the elephant hunts of the 9th-century king Jayavarman III. This paper argues that these texts contain variations of a single political myth. The basic story tells of a king who wandered the country catching elephants, subduing the periphery, and rewarding his loyal subjects. Cambodian subjects sought to connect their family histories to this story in their public inscriptions as a way of legitimizing their claims to ancestral property. The seemingly widespread dissemination of the elephant hunt myth during the Angkorian period reflects the authority of royal narrative at a time of unprecedented political integration.

Résumé

Les campagnes de chasse aux éléphants de Jayavarman III : un mythe politique du Cambodge angkorien

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Cinq inscriptions en khmer composées entre le 10^{ème} et le 12^{ème} siècles font état des campagnes de capture d'éléphants du roi Jayavarman III qui avaient lieu au 9^{ème} siècle. Cet article tente de démontrer que ces textes présentent des variations d'un seul mythe politique. Le récit de base dépeint un roi errant dans les campagnes, chassant les éléphants, soumettant les régions périphériques, et récompensant les sujets loyaux. Plus tard, d'aucuns chercheront à établir des relations entre ce récit et les histoires de leurs propres familles, à travers des inscriptions, en vue de légitimer leur assertion sur des propriétés ancestrales. Le mythe apparemment répandu de la capture d'éléphants durant l'époque angkoriennne reflète le poids des récits royaux au temps d'une campagne sans précédent d'intégration politique.