

# CHOLAS, PANDYAS, AND 'IMPERIAL TEMPLE CULTURE' IN MEDIEVAL TAMILNADU

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The period of the ninth to thirteenth centuries in the Tamil country is one that is highly significant both for its extraordinary artistic production and for its witness to religious developments that shaped the Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism of later times. This era is frequently referred to as the Chola period, after the dynasty that ruled from the region of the Kaveri river from 850 up until its final collapse in about 1280. Indeed it has become commonplace to credit the Chola kings with the direct or indirect sponsorship of much of the religious and aesthetic culture of the age. So we have 'Chola bronzes' and 'Chola temples' – and the establishment by the Cholas of a 'royal Śiva cult' which was, in Burton Stein's words, 'the keystone of the system of ritual hegemony' that allowed the Cholas to claim sovereignty over a vast realm (Stein 1980, 341). The Cholas are acclaimed as the premier patrons of religious art and architecture in medieval Tamilnadu (Stein 1980, 230, 364-65; Dehejia 1990, 10). We are given to believe that the great eleventh-century temples built by Rājārāja I at Tañjāvūr and by his son Rajendra I at Gangaikondacholapuram served as models, in terms of both architecture and ritual, for the many stone temples built or renovated in the following centuries (Nagaswamy 1987, 53; Vasudevan 2003, 89; Stein 1980, 341). As Karen Pechilis Prentiss puts it, 'in building the Rājārājeśvara temple at his capital in Tañjāvūr, Rājārāja I aspired for it to be paradigmatic: The capital temple was the largest and most complex representative of a model of relations [among priests, kings, gods, and worshippers] that would be institutionalized in all other temples in the kingdom' (Prentiss 1999, 115). The Cholas are held to be responsible for the incorporation of Tamil hymns into temple liturgy (and the worship of the poet-saints who authored these hymns) and for the elevation of the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram to a position of central importance – these being the 'two pillars of the religious policy' of the early Cholas, according to Paul Younger (1995, 136; see also Champakalakshmi 1994). The Chola kings are also credited with having had a hand in the entrenchment of a ritual orthodoxy based on the Āgamic texts and the expertise of teachers of the Śaiva Siddhānta school (Prentiss 1999, 100, 119-120; Ali 2000, 214; Vasudevan 2003, 101-102), while the many temple festivals instituted in this era are said to reflect 'the structured symbolism' and 'ordered ceremony that characterized every form of behavior during the imperial rule of the Cōḷas' (Younger 1995, 73; see also Champakalakshmi 1996 and Younger 2002, 60)

My effort in this paper will be, first, to consider whether we should speak of an 'imperial temple culture' – as is so often done – that is, whether we are justified in linking the artistic and religious developments of this age to the policy (or piety) of Chola kings. Following this, I will discuss some features and patterns that complicate and enrich our understanding of the ways in which medieval South Indian temple culture was in fact related to dynasty, chronology and geography.

## THE 'IMPERIAL' CHOLAS

Let us first try to determine whether the term 'imperial' ought to be applied to the Chola polity. In this context, it is important to make the acquaintance of some royal figures with whom the Cholas had to contend as they sought to exercise power in South India – notably, members of the Pāṇḍya dynasty, who were a force to be reckoned with more than two hundred years before the Cholas arrived on the scene,

and who carried on for at least three centuries after they were gone (Gopinatha Rao 1910; Nilakantha Sastri 1929; Sethuraman 1978, 1988, and 1994). The concept of a Chola ‘empire’ largely rests on the idea that the Chola kings, from their home territory in the Kaveri River basin – Cholanadu, which they had laid claim to in the ninth century – conquered and occupied the lands to the south that had long been ruled over by the Pāṇḍya kings from their capital in Madurai. The first invasion of Pandyanadu by the Cholas took place in the early tenth century, under Parantaka I, who was also successful in taking over the territory of the Pallavas, around Kanchipuram, in the northern part of Tamilnadu. Although Parantaka effectively conquered this northern region, his hold over the far south was less secure, and in the early eleventh century further campaigns into the Pāṇḍya territory were undertaken by the armies of the Chola kings Rājarāja I and Rajendra I, resulting in the installation of Rajendra’s sons as ‘Chola-Pāṇḍya viceroys’ in Pandyanadu.

The assumption that this marked the establishment of the ‘empire’ of the Cholas – an empire which in some cases is depicted as extending into Southeast Asia as well as covering the whole of southern India (see the map in Balasubrahmanyam 1975; cf. Nilakantha Sastri 1955, 209-223) – seems to derive from the interpretation of the evidence of inscriptions of this period. The inscriptional material that is of particular interest for political historians in this connection appears in the prefaces (*praśastis*) of stone and copper-plate inscriptions. On the one hand, the concept of a Chola empire is based on a rather literal reading of the *praśastis* of the Chola kings – and particularly the Tamil *praśastis* that begin to appear in stone and copper-plate inscriptions during the reign of Rājarāja I and which, unlike the Sanskrit *praśastis*, focus on the king’s military exploits rather than his genealogy. Rājarāja’s Tamil *praśasti*, for instance, proclaims that he ‘destroyed the splendour of the Pāṇḍyas, just when they were at their most resplendent.’ The Sanskrit *praśastis* of the Cholas, for their part, provide accounts of the accomplishments of the king’s forebears, and here again we find declarations of the Cholas’ victories over the rival Pāṇḍyas. So the eleventh-century Kanyakumari inscription of Virarajendra, says of the king’s ancestor Parantaka I: ‘He destroyed the Pāṇḍya king together with his whole army, took all his wealth, and burnt his capital Madurai’ (TAS 3, 87ff). George Spencer has argued that Chola military campaigns were more oriented toward plundering than imperial expansion and suggests that ‘we have been misled by the language of territorial conquest in which the inscriptional claims about these raids were conventionally expressed’ (Spencer 1976, 406).<sup>1</sup>

Another element in the prefaces of inscriptions that has served as the basis for notions of empire is the reference to the names of kings as a means of dating the record in a particular regnal year. Because of the mention of Chola kings in this context, in the inscriptions of Pandyanadu, we have assumed that the Cholas ruled over the far south in the same manner that they did in their home territory (and, apparently, in the zone of former Pallava dominance, to the north of Cholanadu), where their names similarly appear. But a closer look at the actual frequency and distribution of Chola and Pāṇḍya regnal years forces us to reconsider the notion of Chola hegemony that is so often accepted as fact. I have undertaken an area study, surveying all inscriptions – over 3000 of them – from the eighth through thirteenth centuries in key zones of the traditional Chola and the Pāṇḍya territories. For Cholanadu, I surveyed three small areas along the Kaveri river: Tiruchirappalli taluk (the site of the ancient Chola capital Uraiyur, and the important medieval temples of Srirangam and Tiruvanaikka), Kumbakonam taluk (an area not far from Rājarāja I’s capital city of Tañjāvūr and dense with ‘Chola temples’), and Chidambaram taluk (with the important temple dedicated to Nataraja, a site that appears to have had ritual significance for the Chola rulers). In Pandyanadu, I examined Madurai and Melur taluks (the region around the ancient and medieval Pāṇḍya capital) and further to the south, four taluks strung along the fertile banks of the Tamraparni river (including Tirunelveli, which was in medieval times a secondary capital for the

Pāṇḍyas; other taluks are Ambasamudram, Srivaikuntham, and Tiruchendur).<sup>2</sup> With reference to the issue of regnal years, the results of the area study are rather unexpected. Of the 231 inscriptions with unambiguous regnal years in the two taluks around the Pāṇḍya capital of Madurai, only three are dated in the regnal years of Chola kings (of the tenth and eleventh century) and two give the regnal years of the eleventh-century Chola-Pāṇḍya viceroys.<sup>3</sup> It seems clear that the Cholas' administrative authority in the Madurai region was scant and fleeting. Further south, in the four taluks around Tirunelveli, we see that the Chola claim to sovereignty was exerted more forcefully, and roughly one quarter of the inscriptions are dated in Chola regnal years – of 714 inscriptions, we have 119 dated in Chola regnal years, including some as late as the first part of twelfth century in the times of Kulottunga I, and 65 in the regnal years of Chola-Pāṇḍya rulers. The proportion of 24% is roughly ten times what one sees in the Madurai area. But the fact that such inscriptions overlap in time with those dated in the reigns of Pāṇḍya kings suggests a less than complete Chola conquest of this part of Pāṇḍyanadu as well.<sup>4</sup>

Another issue that must be considered with respect to the significance of regnal years arises from the fact that large numbers of *Pāṇḍya* regnal years are found in the inscriptions of Cholanadu. For example, over 20% of the inscriptions on the walls or in the vicinity of the famous temple of Cidambaram (88 out of 414) are dated in the reigns of Pāṇḍya kings.<sup>5</sup> It is true that most of the 'Pāṇḍya inscriptions' of Cholanadu date from the thirteenth century, but we also find such inscriptions from as early as the eighth century, before the Chola dynasty had established itself. In fact, the only century when Cholanadu's inscriptions were entirely free from references to the Pāṇḍya king is the eleventh century. If we want to use regnal years as an indicator of political authority, it would be difficult to find support for the notion of a Chola empire, and we might even consider relabelling the era of the eighth to thirteenth centuries the 'Pāṇḍya period.'

## DYNASTIES AND ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

If the Cholas were not quite as 'imperial' as they (or we) might have hoped, they did seem nonetheless to have developed a royal style. The next question to consider is whether this style is expressed through the construction of temples. Unfortunately, our knowledge of what exactly a 'Chola temple' might be has been obscured by the all-too-common use of this phrase to apply to any temple constructed in medieval times in the Chola country regardless of whether or not it was a royal foundation; a similar problem occurs in the case of the temples of Pandyanadu.<sup>6</sup> It is tempting, perhaps, to apply a dynastic label to an architectural style in this particular period, as a shorthand way of referring to a number of exceptionally beautiful temples found in the Chola country. But even when the 'Cholanadu style' is considered purely in regional terms, without reference to patronage, the distinctiveness of this style has been exaggerated (cf. Kaimal 2005). This can be demonstrated by considering temples of ninth- and tenth-century Cholanadu side by side with those – much less known – of Pandyanadu.

Figure 1 shows us the south wall of a ninth-century temple dedicated to Viṣṇu at Vijayanarayanam, south of Tirunelveli, in the southernmost part of Pandyanadu. The *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture* classifies this temple as representative of the 'middle Pāṇḍinadu style,'



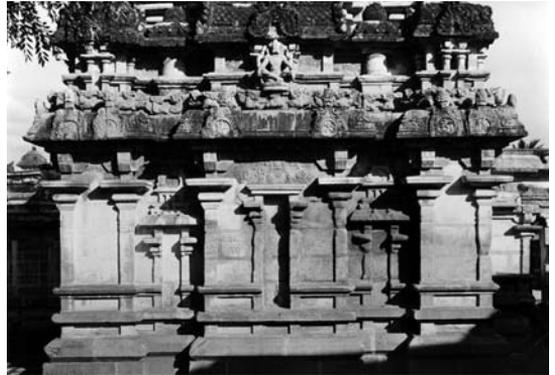
Figure 1: Vijayanarayanam, Viṣṇu temple, detail of exterior from the south, 9<sup>th</sup> century; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies

with its square *brahmakānta* pilasters set into plain flat walls, unadorned with figural sculpture (Soundara Rajan 1983a, 112-115). Yet this ‘Pāṇḍya’ look is also seen in the Sundareśvara temple of Sendalai, near Tañjāvūr in the heart of Cholanadu, constructed a few decades earlier (*Figure 2*). Built in territory controlled by the chiefly Muttaraiyar family – but soon to be taken over by the Cholas, who had just seized control of Tañjāvūr – this temple has an eighth-century inscription dated in the reign of a Pāṇḍya kings built into the wall of a shrine, indicating an earlier Pāṇḍya presence in the region (Balasubrahmanyam 1966, 137-140; Barrett 1974, 60-61; Soundara Rajan 1983b:135-137). The two temples – despite their distance from one another in geographical terms and their proximity to the capitals of rival dynasties – exhibit striking similarities, particularly in the wall treatment. Both temples are set into a high base with strong horizontal moldings. The sense of the walls’ height is diminished further by the way in which the compacted layers of the pilasters’ outward-projecting capitals fall well short of the superstructure, to make room for bracket forms that are deep at the walls’ projecting corners, but shallow and schematically rendered where the surface of the walls is flat.

Another pair of temples with apparently distinct dynastic and regional affiliations again problematizes dynastic and regional classifications. The Talinātha temple (*Figure 3*) of Tiruppattur, in Ramnad district to the north of Madurai, was built in the second half of the ninth century, and is said ‘to anticipate some of the elements of Cōḷa buildings, but is otherwise fully rendered in Pāṇḍya idiom’ (Soundara Rajan 1983a, 117; cf. Hoekveld-Meijer 1981, 56-57, 392-395). Yet the ‘Pāṇḍya idiom,’ including the characteristic feature of shallow niches, not deep enough to accommodate the images of deities, is apparently also manifest in a temple constructed fifty years later, in the time of the Chola king Parantaka I, at Tiruccennampundi in the Kaveri region (*Figure 4*) (Balasubrahmanyam 1971, 56-58; Barrett 1974, 70-71; Soundara Rajan 1975, 276- 77; Hoekveld-Meijer 1981, 105-6;



*Figure 2: Sendalai, Sundareśvara temple, from the northwest, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century; the superstructure is modern; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies*



*Figure 3: Tiruppattur, Talinātha temple, west wall, AD 867; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies*



*Figure 4: Tiruccennampundi, Caṭaiyarkoyil, south wall, c. 920; today used as a goddess temple; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies*

Dhaky 1983a, 169). Although we see in this temple of Cholanadu an image of Śiva (as Vīṇādharamūrti) occupying the central niche of the south face, the flanking niches are rendered in the shallow 'Pāṇḍya' style, clearly designed to be empty. Capping the central niche of both temples is a finely-carved ornamental medallion in low relief. The floor plan of the two temples is almost identical, as are the arrangement and details of the first tier of the superstructure, including the form and ornamentation of the cornice, the lively style of carving of the figural frieze (featuring *vyalas* at Tiruppattur and lions at Tiruccennampundi), and the placement of the architectural elements supporting the roof of this tier, which is partly destroyed at Tiruccennampundi. As compared with the temple at Tiruccennampundi, the first tier of the superstructure of the Tiruppattur temple has a more complex arrangement of pillars, of which two on each face are crowned with lotuses; also at the centre of the tier there is a figure of a deity – on the west face which we see in Figure 4, it is Narasiṃha.

Figures 5 and 6 show us a pair of ninth-century temples both of which are found in the Pudukkottai area, between Madurai and the Kaveri zone. In Figure 5 we see the Balasubrahmaṇya temple at Kannanur, described by Soundara Rajan as being 'in Pāṇḍya style,' who further suggests that it may in fact have been sponsored by a Pāṇḍya king: 'the location of the temple inside traditional Pāṇḍya territory also points to Pāṇḍya patronage' (Soundara Rajan 1983a, 118).<sup>7</sup> The Sundareśvara temple of Tirukkattalai (Figure 6), on the other hand, is taken as representative of the 'mixed Irukkuvēḷ idiom,' named for one of the chiefly families that was dominant in this region before the rise of the Cholas, incorporating niche figures 'in late Muttaraiyar idiom,' with other architectural elements that 'reflect Cōḷa convention' (Soundara Rajan 1983c, 209-210; see also Balasubrahmanyam 1966, 89-92; Barrett 1974, 60;



Figure 5: Kannanur, Balasubrahmaṇya temple, south side, before AD 878; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies



Figure 6: Tirukkattalai, Sundareśvara temple, from the west, late 9<sup>th</sup> century; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies

Hoekveld-Meijer 1981, 286-92). Yet despite these disparate dynastic attributions of the two temples, the *pādabandha* base, the brackets and the cornice above them, and the *brahmakānta* pilasters – including those that frame the central niche – are so similar that they could belong to a single temple. Although there is a slight projection of the central face of the wall at the Tirukkattalai temple, there is almost no depth to the niche, which houses an image (of Viṣṇu, on the west wall, in Figure 6) evidently from an earlier temple on the site, which fits rather uncomfortably in this space. This arrangement corresponds to what we find at Kannanur, where the shallow central niches were, in typical ‘Pāṇḍya’ fashion, not designed to contain images, although these were introduced some time after the original construction of the temple – as in the case of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, whom we see here on the south wall of the temple in Figure 5.

Figures 7 and 9 illustrate the tenth-century temple at Tiruvalisvaram to the west of Tirunelveli in the far south. Much of the original structure of this finely-proportioned temple remains intact, within a spacious and somewhat neglected temple compound within which other buildings have been constructed over the years. Soundara Rajan (1975, 269-70; 1983a, 122-123) draws attention to the features of the central shrine that are ‘typical of Pāṇḍya temples’ – including the type of base used, the style of representation in the friezes of *vyālas*, and the treatment of the walls with plain *brahmakānta* pilasters and false niches capped with Tiruppattur-type toranas (the filigreed medallion over the

central niche and miniature temple towers over the flanking niches; cf Figure 3). On the other hand, SR Balasubramanyam describes the Tiruvalisvaram temple as ‘a beautiful specimen of Chola art of the middle period in the Pāṇḍyan region,’ it having ‘been built by the Cholas during their imperial sway... started in the days of Parantaka I near his military station of Brahmadesam and completed by Rājarāja I during his early days after the conquest of Pandi Nadu’ (Balasubrahmanyam 1975, 201, 207-209). ‘In India,’ Balasubrahmanyam concludes, ‘Art follows the flag’(1975, 208). In fact, the assertion that this temple constitutes a manifestation of ‘Chola syle’ seems largely to rest on a consideration of the sculptures of deities – which of course are not present on the walls of the temple, but are found instead around the tier above.<sup>8</sup> Some of these sculptures are illustrated in Figures 7 and 9, which provide two views of the west face of the temple, bearing sculptures on the superstructure of Śiva in the forms – from left to right – of Bhikṣāṭana, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Lingodbhava, Aṣṭabhujanṛttamūrti, and Tripurāntaka. Interestingly, however, Balasubrahmanyam, the most adamant proponent of this temple’s Chola origins, suggests that the Tiruvalisvaram images are fitted somewhat awkwardly into their niches and thus seem to be later additions (1975, 209).



Figure 7: Tiruvalisvaram, Tiruvalisvara temple, from the west, AD 996 or earlier; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies



Figure 8: Narttamalai, Vijayalayacoṭisvara temple, south wall, mid 9<sup>th</sup> century; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies

Whether we consider it to be 'Pāṇḍya' or 'Chola,' the Tiruvalisvaram temple bears a resemblance to the Vijayālayacoḷīśvara temple at Narttamalai, in the Pudukkottai area at some distance to the north of Tiruvalisvaram, built by a Muttaraiyar chief in the mid ninth century, and shown in Figure 8 (Soundara Rajan 1983b, 133-135). The walls of the Narttamalai temple are even plainer than those of the temples of Pandyanadu that we have so far examined, altogether lacking niches – even shallow ones – and adorned with plain *brahmakānta* pilasters, with four narrow recesses between the projecting parts of the wall. This pattern of projections and recesses is more complex than what we see at Tiruvalisvaram, but a comparison of Figures 8 and 9 shows similarities between the two temples with respect to the form of the pilasters and brackets, and the arrangement of friezes of *bhūtas* and *vyālas* below and above the cornice. Focussing on the superstructure, we see that the Narttamalai temple is taller – and some of the elements of the upper stories are damaged and worn – but the first tier bears figures of celestials and dancers positioned in a manner similar to the images of Śiva that we see at Tiruvalisvaram. The correspondances between these two temples would no doubt be attributed to their shared 'Chola-ness' by Balasubramanyam, who considers the Narttamalai temple as the 'grandest of the early Chola structural temples... the forerunner of the glorious monuments of the Cholas' (1966, 52), yet there is no evidence that the Cholas had anything to do with either temple, and, in fact, the inscriptions at Narttamalai clearly identify those who sponsored the building and renovation of this temple as local chiefs of the Pudukkottai region.<sup>9</sup>

Another ninth-century temple of this region, the Mūvarkoyil of Kodumbalur, was constructed by a chief of the Irukkuvēḷ clan; Figure 10 shows us the centre shrine of the three shrines originally built at this site (Balasubrahmanyam 1971, 108-109, 131-132; Soundara Rajan 1983c, 202-208; Kaimal 2002). Soundara Rajan regards the Mūvarkoyil as an exemplar of a distinctive regional style: 'the clearest statement of the Kōṇāḍu idiom,' which, although reminiscent of Chola conventions, 'interpreted and ordered these elements in a way all its own' and produced sculpture that is 'quite distinctive when compared to Cōḷa work of the same period' (1983c, 202, 208). On the other hand, in Hoekveld-



Figure 9: Tiruvalisvaram, Tiruvalīśvara temple, west side, AD 996 or earlier; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies

Meijer's view, the Irukkuvēl chief has modelled the Mūvarkoyil on the Cholas' 'imperial example' – temples such as that at Tiruvaiyaru, in the heartland of Cholanadu (1981, 291-95; cf. Kaimal 2002). Yet the Mūvarkoyil's resemblance to the Tīruvalisvaram temple (Figure 9), deep in the Pāṇḍya country to the south, is noteworthy. The Mūvarkoyil's single central niche is flanked on either side by a plain wall punctuated by square *brahmakanta* pilasters, which are ornamented with relief sculpture but are otherwise very similar in form to the pilasters of Tīruvalisvaram, with their subtly shaped upper element topped by a mushroom-like cap and a strongly horizontal projecting capital. The cornice of both temples is not only the same shape but is adorned almost identically, and a similar program of friezes is found in both temples.<sup>10</sup>

Dynastic labels seem to be applied with even more enthusiasm to temple architecture dating from the eleventh century onwards. For example, the Chola 'occupation' of Pandyanadu under Rājarāja I, Rajendra I, and the 'Chola-Pāṇḍya viceroys' is considered to be responsible for the introduction of a new style of temple building – as in the case of the Viṣṇu temple at Mannarkoyil, west of Tirunelveli (Figure 11). This temple's construction was sponsored by a Chera king of the far south, who named it Rājendracola Viṣṇakar in honour of the Chola king. The temple lies within an extensive compound, behind forbidding walls, and is a three-story structure; inside the upper stories, whose wooden ceilings are beautifully carved and painted, are images of Viṣṇu in seated and reclining positions. The outer walls of the temple bear no images of deities in their shallow niches and are punctuated by *brahmakanta* pilasters whose shape is very similar to those at nearby Tīruvalisvaram, built a century earlier (cf. Figure 9). Also, as at Tīruvalisvaram, a frieze of charming and animated *vyālas* adorns the lower part of the wall.<sup>11</sup> On the basis of such features Balasubrahmanyam regards this temple as representative of a 'Chola-Pāṇḍya idiom' of temple architecture, sponsored by the Chola 'viceroys' and Chola 'feudatories' but incorporating stylistic elements of the Pāṇḍya country (1975: 317). Dhaky,



Figure 10: Kodumbalur, Mūvarkoyil centre shrine, c. 880; photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies



Figure 11: Mannarkoyil, Viṣṇu temple, south side, c. 1024; photo by author

on the other hand, considers the Mannarkoyil to be 'more in line with contemporaneous buildings in Cōḷanāḍu than with buildings in the Pāṇḍya tradition' (Dhaky 1983b, 264).

In the course of time, the Cholas' military strength and territorial claims came to be much diminished, and by the thirteenth century we have an art historical phase of the 'Late Cōḷanāḍu style' which the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture* labels the Pāṇḍya 'Occupation Period' (Dhaky 1983c, 331). One of the temples built in the Chola country in the second half of the thirteenth century is the Viṣṇu temple at Kattumannargudi, near Chidambaram (Figures 12 and 14). Although Balasubramanyam's



Figure 12: Kattumannargudi, Viṣṇu temple, north wall, 13<sup>th</sup> century; photo by author

contention (1971, 301) that the Pāṇḍya king had a direct hand in the construction of this temple is highly questionable, it was built during a period when Pāṇḍya patronage – and Pāṇḍya troops – were pervasive throughout the whole of the Tamil country. The Kattumannargudi temple, rebuilt on the site of an earlier temple, has slightly deeper (although empty) niches and faceted rather than square pilasters, but in other respects bears an unexpected resemblance to the Mannarkoyil temple built in the far south two centuries earlier. Both temples rest on a similarly-formed base above which is a frieze of *vyālas* and then a prominent molding from which the pilasters emerge. The spacing and proportions of the pilasters produce a similar effect, although they are placed more closely to one another in the eleventh-century temple of Pandyanadu. Above the pilasters, in both temples, are tall and rather chunky brackets which extend upward into a deep cornice. Why might the temple architecture of ‘Chola-occupied’ Pandyanadu be similar to ‘Pāṇḍya-occupied’ Cholanadu two centuries later? One suggestion is that really *all* of these buildings were built in the Chola style. According to M.A. Dhaky, there was ‘no change of character in late Cōḷanāḍu style, which progressed and prospered under Pāṇḍya domination’ since ‘Pāṇḍinaḍu style at this time had nothing to match the grandeur of Cōḷanāḍu style’ (Dhaky 1983c, 331). Yet it seems difficult to maintain that the temple of Kattumannargudi was built in purely ‘Chola’ or ‘Cholanadu’ style, when we compare some of its features with the ninth-century Tiruppattur temple (Figure 13) outside Madurai, to which we have already been introduced and which, as we have seen, is said to be ‘fully rendered in Pāṇḍya idiom’ (Soundara Rajan 1983a, 117).

#### KINGS AND TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION

There is no evidence that any of the temples we have considered was actually built by a Chola or Pāṇḍya king, despite the implication made by several authors that the political fortunes and military triumphs of these kings had an impact on the style of these buildings. A closer look at the question of royal temple construction is in order.

According to the Anbil Plates of Sundara Chola (AD 956-973), his predecessor the great Aditya I, who had ruled nearly a century earlier, had constructed temples dedicated to Śiva up and down the banks of the Kaveri River (EI 15.5). Although a number of stone temples seem in fact to have been built during the reign of Aditya, in the late ninth century, none of these bears an inscription that indicates the role of the king as founder.<sup>12</sup> It seems that before the time of Rājārāja I, who acceded to the throne in 985, there is only a single case in which the construction of a temple by a Chola king can be corroborated by evidence from the temple itself: this is the temple at Tondaimanad built by Parantaka I in the mid-tenth century to commemorate his father’s death. All that remains of this temple, in the far north of the Tamil country, is the base of the *vimāna*, but stylistically it is evidently ‘not in typical Cōḷanāḍu idiom,’ and therefore in one sense is not really a ‘Chola temple’ at all (Dhaky 1983a, 173; Barrett 1974, 77). But even after the accession to the throne of Rājārāja I, in 985, we do not see temple building as an important royal activity. Rājārāja, of course, built the great temple at Tañjāvūr, Rājārājeśvara (Venkataraman 1985; Pichard 1995; L’Hernault 2002; Vasudevan 2003). But the extent of his temple building apart from this seems to be limited to four temples. These are two temples in Melpadi, far to the north in Chittoor district (ARE 101 of 1921, SII 3.17) – neither of which resemble Rājārāja’s construction in his capital (Balasubrahmanyam 1971, 213-217, 270; Barrett 1974, 117-118) – a temple in Madagadipattu near Pondicherry (PI 281 and 331, Balasubrahmanyam 1975, 132-133), and a temple at Tirumalavadi, downriver from Tañjāvūr (SII 5.652, Balasubrahmanyam 1975, 267-269). Rājārāja’s successor, Rajendra I, has only a single temple to his name, that at his capital Gangaikondacholapuram.<sup>13</sup>

It has been proposed that the Rājārājeśvara temple in Tañjāvūr served as a model not only for Gangaikondacholapuram but for other temples that were built in Cholanadu and beyond. For example,

Vasudevan (2003, 89) maintains that 'the Śiva temples that Rājarāja and his successors built in these conquered regions [including Pandyanadu] were modelled, in form and content, after the royal temple of Rājarājesvara' (see also Nagaswamy 1987, 53). However – apart from the question of whether the Chola rulers were actually responsible for such temple-building – the royal temples at Tañjāvūr and at Gangaikondacholapuram are unique, in terms of their scale and form. The temple at Tañjāvūr was five times the size of the largest contemporary temple, and apart from Gangaikondacholapuram no other temple built in later times approached it in scale. Many of its novel features seem to have been inspired by buildings in Eastern Andhra, ruled in this period by the Chalukyas, or by temples built earlier in the Pallava territories to the north of Cholanadu.<sup>14</sup> The architectural elements of the Tañjāvūr temple that came to be widespread in later temples in the Tamil country – including the design of corbels and urn pilasters, and the general



Figure 13: Tiruppattur, Talinātha temple, south side, AD 867; photo by author

pattern of having a *gopura* marking the entrance to the temple compound – had little impact on the shape of the *vimāna* itself, or on the relative sizes and dispositions of *vimānas* and *gopuras* as the pattern of the temple complex developed in the later Chola period. Yet despite its original and atypical character, the temple at Tañjāvūr has taken on iconic status as the archetypal 'Chola temple.'

Rajendra's temple at Gangaikondacholapuram (Pichard *et al* 1994) and the temple at Darasuram built in the twelfth century by Rājarāja II (L'Hernault 1987) were added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites in 2004. Together with the Tañjāvūr temple (which was listed by UNESCO in 1987), these three are recognized as 'Great Living Chola Temples.' Ironically, the temple at Gangaikondacholapuram, built in the eleventh century in a rather remote area, ceased to be 'alive' after the middle of the thirteenth century. It was revived 400 years later, in the seventeenth century, by the Nayakas of Tañjāvūr who laid claim to the Chola legacy. They, and their successors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Marathas, also restored and made additions to the Tañjāvūr temple, Darasuram, and the Tribhuvanam temple which had been built by Kulottunga III in the late twelfth century (SII 23.190; L'Hernault 1987; Pichard 1995, 99-101, 119).

#### TEMPLE PATRONAGE AND ROYAL STYLE

The responsibility for the construction of temples in the Tamil country belonged primarily to non-royal patrons. The same can be said of other kinds of gifts made to the temple to support worship and supplementary building projects. In the area study I undertook, examining inscriptions of the eighth through thirteenth centuries, I found that the proportion of stone inscriptions that recorded the gifts of Chola kings was nowhere greater than 1%. In Cholanadu, Chola kings were overshadowed not only by their queens, who were more active as temple patrons than their husbands, but even at some sites (in Chidambaram and Tiruchirappalli taluks) by *Pāndya* kings.<sup>15</sup> The notion that the Chola monarchs were paradigmatic temple patrons is questionable not only because of the small numbers of their gifts,

but also because of their lack of chronological priority. In several areas of Cholanadu, for example, (in Kumbakonam and Tiruchirappalli taluks) we find that the gifts to temples made by Chola kings were preceded not only by those of Chola queens, in the tenth century, but by those of Pallava and Pāṇḍya kings in the ninth. When we turn to Pandyanadu, we find a higher degree of involvement in temple patronage on the part of kings – Pāṇḍya kings – but the royal hand still does not exert great force in shaping temple life. In the Madurai study-area, 4.4% of the inscriptions record the gifts of Pāṇḍya kings, which are particularly plentiful in the thirteenth century, and are concentrated at a few particular temples located in and around the capital.<sup>16</sup> In the Tirunelveli district study-area, along the banks of the Tamraparni River and in the region of the Pāṇḍyas' second capital city at Tirunelveli, temple patronage by the Pāṇḍya kings is referred to in 2.7% of the inscriptions, beginning in the ninth century and continuing throughout the period under review.<sup>17</sup>

The early Pāṇḍyas created a royal style that seems to have served as a model for the Chola kings in several significant respects. With reference to gestures of royal generosity, the recording of lavish *tulabhāra* or *hiranyagarbha* gifts or claims that ones ancestors had made such gifts – which we begin to see in inscriptions of the time of the Chola kings Rājārāja I and his son Rajendra – are anticipated by the Pāṇḍyas in stone and copper-plate inscriptions as early as the seventh and eighth centuries. There is no inscriptional evidence that such acts were performed by the kings of the Pallava dynasty, so it seems likely that it was the Cholas' royal neighbours to the south who provided a model for this type of royal largesse.<sup>18</sup> And the early Pāṇḍyas devised another new mode of regal self-presentation that the Cholas were later to embrace. The Cholas – and Rājārāja I, in particular – are credited for introducing the Tamil *praśastī* as a feature of stone inscriptions. Before the time of Rājārāja (985 - 1014), there are a few copper-plates issued by Chola kings that contain royal eulogies composed in Sanskrit, but the Tamil *praśastīs* of the later Chola kings have a different character, focusing more on the king's military conquests than on his genealogy. Meanwhile, however, as early as the eighth century, we find the forerunner of such *praśastīs* in the copper-plate grants of the Pāṇḍyas, which contain eulogies that were composed in Tamil and that stressed the king's valour and success on the battlefield.<sup>19</sup> The early Pāṇḍyas' Tamil *praśastīs* not only contained descriptions of triumph in battle, but also allusions to the king's loving relationship with the goddesses of good fortune and of the earth, which seem to have been taken up by the Cholas in their own *praśastīs*. The Pāṇḍya king is described as being wedded to Lakṣmi or to the Earth, as is the Chola in a later time, and we find in the early Pāṇḍya inscriptions a phrase that is copied by the Chola court poets, for example by the eleventh-century composer of a *praśastī* of Kulottunga I, who says that the king has 'put an end to the promiscuity of the goddess Lakṣmi' (SII 3.72). It is in the eighth-century Velvikkudi plates and Smaller Cinnamanur plates (PCP 1 and 3) that we first encounter this figure of speech, where the king is said to remove the 'common-ness' (Ta. *potumai*) of the Earth goddess, who is no longer enjoyed by various kings and chiefs, but exclusively by the Pāṇḍya ruler.

One may debate the extent to which the Chola kings deliberately adopted the royal idiom of the southern kings who preceded them and against whom they struggled for sovereignty in the Tamil country, but there can be no doubt about the impact of the style of self-presentation and patronage that was developed by the later Pāṇḍyas. This royal style took shape both in the Pāṇḍyas' home territory and in the more northern parts of Tamilnadu which they invaded as the Chola dynasty disintegrated in the course of the thirteenth century, and it was enthusiastically embraced by the rulers from Vijayanagara who in turn displaced the Pāṇḍyas. The Pāṇḍya royal style took up several elements that were already manifest in inscriptional records produced in the time of the Cholas, but the Pāṇḍyas mobilized and magnified these features in a more pointedly political fashion. The first element is the issuing of royal orders, which was an action undertaken more frequently by the Pāṇḍyas than by the Cholas – or one that the Pāṇḍyas made

more of a point of proclaiming publicly. Of 900 inscriptions in the Tirunelveli study-area, at least 50 of them (5.6%) record the Pāṇḍya king's order, while in the Madurai study-area, fully 9% of the inscriptions are Pāṇḍya royal orders.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, in Cholanadu, we find that just 2.2% of the inscriptions of Kumbakonam taluk are orders issued by the Chola king, and in Tiruchirappalli taluk, the proportion is only 6 out of 744 inscriptions, or 0.8%.<sup>21</sup> A second feature of the Pāṇḍya royal style was the reference to the king's being enthroned in a particular palace while he received petitioners or issued commands. In the eleventh century in Tiruchirappalli and Kumbakonam taluks, and in the twelfth century in Chidambaram taluk, we find a few such references to the Chola king. But starting in the late twelfth century, there is a proliferation of references to the Pāṇḍya king enthroned, in the inscriptions of the far south and even in a few inscriptions in the erstwhile Chola territory.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 14 Kattumannargudi, Viṣṇu temple, south wall, 13<sup>th</sup> century; photo by author

A third element in the Pāṇḍya royal style was the establishment of special temple services and festivals in honour of the king. Of the more than 3000 inscriptions in my area study, only four refer to temple celebrations named for the Chola king or marking his birthday; in two cases, that king is Rajendra I.<sup>23</sup> But there are close to thirty inscriptions that describe special services established in honour of a Pāṇḍya ruler. Over half of these (15 out of 28) appear in the Tirunelveli study-area, beginning in the twelfth century, but the Pāṇḍya rulers' name is also attached to newly-instituted rituals in temples in Cholanadu, especially at Tiruvanaikka, Chidambaram, and Kattumannargudi. Jatavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya I, who acceded to the throne in 1251, is especially prominent in this latter context.

Apart from these features of royal style, the Pāṇḍyas developed a distinctive pattern of distributing and publicising their gifts. One novel feature of royal largesse that emerges (or perhaps re-emerges) in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is the recording of the foundation by kings of *brahmadeyas*, Brahman settlements (Ludden 1985, 36, 43). We have, for example, a series of lengthy inscriptions covering the fourth enclosure wall at Srirangam which detail the arrangements made by Jatavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya III to provide a village, temple, and land revenues for a group of learned Brahmans (AD 1312 - 1314; SII 24.223-228). While it has always been assumed that the Chola kings were instrumental in establishing *brahmadeyas* (see especially Stein 1980), there is scant inscriptional evidence that this was the case. Certainly it is true that the Cholas did not emphasize such patronage in their records, whereas their successors did. With reference to temple patronage, the Pāṇḍyas also took a distinctive approach, concentrating their donative activity in Cholanadu on several key temples – notably, Chidambaram, Kattumannargudi, Srirangam, and Tiruvanaikka. This showy and strategic display of largesse at specific sacred sites in newly conquered areas – both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples in the Chola heartland – seems to have provided a model for the Vijayanagara rulers who seized power in the fourteenth century, and who, coming from outside the Tamil country, sought to represent themselves as the legitimate successors of the Pāṇḍyas. That the newcomers self-consciously cast themselves as the inheritors of Pāṇḍya sovereignty is evident in the late fourteenth-century poem *Madhurāvijaya*, which describes the campaigns in the Tamil country of

Kampana, the eldest son of the Vijayanagara ruler Bukka I. Having defeated the forces of the Sambuvaraya chief and established himself in Kanchipuram, Kampana is visited by a mysterious goddess, who describes the terrible troubles being visited by the Muslim rulers on the territories further south. She presents him with a sword that had once been Śiva's, telling him that it had been given 'to the Pāṇḍyan king as a favor for his rigorous austerities, and the king's descendants kept it and ruled the earth without opposition for a long time. But, king, the sage Agastya has ascertained that the Pāṇḍyan lineage has now lost its heroic vigor (*virya*) through the passage of time, and so he has passed this round-bladed sword on to a ruler with stronger arms – namely, you' (trans. Davis 1997, 118).<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the conquering Vijayanagara rulers found themselves influenced in another way. The adoption in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of a Tamil style of temple architecture in the Vijayanagara capital has been described by Michell (1994) as 'Chola revivalism,' the imitation of the 'imperial style' of the earlier Cholas. Yet the characteristic 'Chola' features that Michell sees being employed in Vijayanagara constructions – such as their nature as complexes, rather than single buildings, with multiple *maṇḍapas* and shrines surrounded by high walls and *gopuras* – seem to belong more to the post-Chola period, when rulers other than the Cholas, including the Pāṇḍyas, were undertaking building projects at places like Chidambaram and Srirangam (see, eg Younger 1995, 104-109).

#### A CHANGING TEMPLE CULTURE

In the Chola period, most temples were not built by Chola kings – and even fewer were built by Pāṇḍya kings. The architectural forms and ritual arrangements of royal foundations did not become models for other temples. Royal insignia and paraphernalia were not employed in temple ritual. And the vast majority of gifts to temples were made by non-royal donors. What can be said, then, about the impact of the Cholas and the Pāṇḍyas on medieval temple culture?

Through the period of the ninth to thirteenth centuries, in fact, we see a rather remarkable continuity with pre-Chola patterns of temple worship. But there are several novel features of temple culture that appear, and I would like to conclude my analysis with a comparison of developments in the Chola and Pāṇḍya territories in order to highlight the ways in which changes in the life of the temple were brought into being. I would like to suggest, however, that we can best understand these innovations and variations if we consider them in regional rather than dynastic terms.

The incorporation into temple liturgy of Tamil hymns dedicated both to Śiva and Viṣṇu, and the emerging worship of the saints who had composed these hymns in pre-Chola times, were among the new developments of the Chola period. Before the tenth century, there is only a single inscriptional reference to hymn-singing, which can be dated to AD 863 (SII 3.43; cf. Balasubrahmanyam 1975, 77). In the tenth century such references come to be more plentiful. The earliest bronze images of the poet-saints can be dated to the late tenth century, and worship of such images is referred to in inscriptions of the eleventh century. Although there are a few references to the poets and their hymns in Pandyanadu – and especially the mention of the Vaiṣṇava poet-saints Nammālvār and Āṇṇāḷ, who lived in the far south – the greatest numbers of inscriptional references to hymn-singing and the worship of the poet-saints are found in Cholanadu. Although it has been argued that Chola 'religious policy' fostered these liturgical and ritual activities (e.g. by Champakalakshmi 1994 and Younger 1995, 136), this pattern seems rather to be a consequence of the fact that the great majority of the temples praised in the poems of the Śaiva saints are situated in the region of the Kaveri river, and that the very prolific Vaiṣṇava poet-saint, Tīrumānkai ālvār, composed many hymns on Viṣṇu's abodes in this region (Chevillard 2000; Hardy 1983).

But in medieval Cholanadu there was an extraordinary preponderance of temples dedicated to Śiva. In the three study-areas in Cholanadu, more than 85% of the temples bearing inscriptions of

the eighth to thirteenth centuries are Śaiva temples. The situation is very different in Pandyanadu where – especially in Tirunelveli district – the number of Vaiṣṇava temples is almost equal to that of Śaiva temples.<sup>25</sup> One feature of Vaiṣṇava temple life that emerged in Pandyanadu in the thirteenth century came in later times to be highly significant for temple culture across the Tamil country and in Śaiva as well as Vaiṣṇava contexts. This is the practice of distributing *prasādam* – consecrated food or other substances offered to the deity. In inscriptions of the period surveyed here, this practice is barely mentioned, yet there is a cluster of inscriptions – all from Vaiṣṇava temples in Tirunelveli district – that record the granting of *prasādam*. For the most part, this was given to temple servants, but it was also received as a special honour by temple patrons, in a manner that anticipates future practices. Another aspect of changing temple culture seems to have a particular connection with the Pāṇḍya country. Starting in the thirteenth century, we find a number of inscriptional references to *sannyāsīs* and other ascetics who belonged to teaching lineages and *maṭha* communities, particularly in the far south. And in a few cases we even see the members of the Pāṇḍya royal family playing a part in fostering this development, with royal orders whose object was to support – or import – ascetics (eg SII 5.420).

The Pāṇḍya kings cannot be regarded as the inventors of the system of temple honours, or of the network of *maṭhas*. Nor can they be credited with promoting Vaiṣṇavism in the far south any more than the Cholas can be considered instrumental in spreading Śaivism in their territory. Instead of looking for royal figures or dynasties as the agents of change, as those responsible for inspiring or instituting new religious and artistic forms, we would do well to attend to the ways in which variations and transformations were related to a complex and shifting backdrop of regional and local on-the-ground realities. We must acknowledge the agency of a variety of types of people in shaping medieval temple culture – including, for example, the women of chiefly families (Orr 1998; Kaimal 2002) or the intermediate authorities that James Heitzman (1997) calls 'lords' – and resist the notion that monolithic political and cultural institutions effectively exerted a top-down influence. Our ideas of empire, of government, of temple life, and of Indian kingship have been coloured by the history of more recent times, and we must exercise caution in using these ideas to interpret the past. Finally, our success in reimagining this past very much depends on our ability to mobilize and coordinate art historical, epigraphical, and literary materials – and to extend and deepen collaborations among those who work with these materials.

## NOTES

- 1 The later Pāṇḍyas, in turn, had elaborate *prasastis* in which they celebrated their military prowess and their humiliation of the Chola rulers, as they began to invade Chola territory from the twelfth century onward (see eg Krishnaswami Aiyangar 1921, 208-221), but for some reason – perhaps because the Pāṇḍya dynasty has in general attracted so little scholarly attention – these are taken less seriously than the *prasastis* of the Cholas.
- 2 Tiruchirappalli taluk has 744 extant stone inscriptions dateable to the period of the eighth through thirteenth centuries; the count is 822 for Kumbakonam taluk and 497 for Chidambaram taluk. For the study areas in Pandyanadu, we have 297 inscriptions in the area around Madurai and 900 inscriptions in the four taluks along the Tamraparni, in Tirunelveli district. Note that in the discussion of regnal years that follows, the total number of inscriptions given for each study area includes only those in which a king's name appears as a means of dating the inscription.
- 3 The proportion of 5 out of 231, or 2.3%, is similar to the frequency of reference to Chola rulers of 2.4% that one finds for the 589 inscriptions for the whole of Madurai district.
- 4 For example, at Shermadevi, in Ambasamudram taluk, to the west of Tirunelveli, we find an inscription dated AD 1070, in the Cōḷa-Pāṇḍya viceroy's regnal year, succeeded by several inscriptions of the 1090's dated in the regnal years of a Pāṇḍya king – with an inscription dated with reference to Kulottunga I's reign intervening among the 'Pāṇḍya inscriptions.' Such alternation and interpenetration of the regnal years of rulers of various dynasties is even more frequently encountered in thirteenth-century Cholanadu, particularly at large temples such as Cidambaram and at Srirangam and Tiruvanaikka near the town of Tiruchirappalli, where references to Chola kings are intermingled with and gradually displaced by references to Pāṇḍya, Hoysala, and later 'Pallava' rulers, among others.
- 5 Eleven per cent of the inscriptions of Tiruchirappalli taluk (62 out of 547) are dated in the reigns of Pāṇḍya kings. Although only 3.4% of the Kumbakonam taluk inscriptions are dated in Pāṇḍya kings' regnal years, this is nonetheless a higher proportion than what we saw for the Cholas in Madurai.
- 6 More than thirty years ago, KV Soundara Rajan urged us to 'rid ourselves of Cōḷa bias' and 'disabuse our minds... that all temples containing Cōḷa grant or endowment inscriptions... should ipso facto be Cōḷa foundations' (1975, 248-49, also 296-99), yet he considered that royal patronage was indeed salient in the case of other dynasties, maintaining that in post-Pallava times, 'the most noteworthy contributions made to architecture were by the three regional houses, the Pāṇḍya, Muttarayar and Irukkuvel' (295). In the volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture* on early medieval Tamilnadu, Soundara Rajan's contributions reflect this view of the impact of political developments on architectural style, while the 'Cōḷa bias' is represented in the chapters authored by MA Dhaky – who affirms, for example, that 'the major patrons for the development of Cōḷanāḍu style were of course the Cōḷas of Tañjāvūr' (1983a, 193). It is quite surprising that we continue to find such categorical and entirely erroneous statements as the following, by R Champakalakshmi (2000, 237): 'Almost all Cōḷa temples have foundation inscriptions which identify the patrons under whom the temples were built. ... Invariably, the construction of the *vimāna* is by a royal personage or by a chieftain; there is not a single instance in the entire Cōḷa period of any *vimāna* being constructed by a Vellala or a group from the local populace.' (Cf. Dehejia's statement (1988, 6) that while 'bronze images of the gods and the saints were gifted by a variety of donors to the temples of south India...these temples themselves were invariably royal constructions.') None of this is correct. We rarely find foundation inscriptions on temples built in medieval Tamilnadu, and when we do, there is ample evidence of the engagement of a variety of types of people in temple construction. See, for example, the classification by Hoekveld-Meijer of the temples at Govindaputtur, Gandaradittam and Tirukkuhakavur as 'citizen' koyils (1981, 209), and Kaimal's list of eleven early Chola period temples constructed by local people unconnected to the Chola rulers (1988, 361-2; see also pp 163-166 and 256).
- 7 Elsewhere, Soundara Rajan describes the Kannanur temple as a Muttaraiyar temple in an area under the direct influence of Pāṇḍya art (1975, 281-82). Hoekveld-Meijer (1981, 282-84) takes issue with this, and considers it a combination of Pandyanadu and early Chola styles. For SR Balasubrahmanyam, it is 'one of the most important among the early Chola temples of the days of Aditya Chola I' (1966, 86).
- 8 Soundara Rajan says that the 'advanced and varied iconography, and the best of the sculptures... show acquaintance

- with Cōḷanāḍu' (1983a, 123), while KD Swaminathan calls this temple 'a veritable museum of superb early Cōḷa sculpture' (1990, 21).
- 9 Barrett considers that the name of the Narttamalai temple – Vijayālayacolīśvara – has misleadingly suggested to art historians that the Chola kings were responsible for its construction (1974, 44-46). Interestingly, Hoekveld-Meijer rejects both Muttaraiyar or Chola patronage, and – on the basis of its resemblance to temples built by the Pallavas, Western Gangas, and Banas – maintains that the temple was founded by 'outsiders' (1981, 280-82).
- 10 The Mūvarkoyil's 'Pāṇḍya' appearance is attributed by Soundara Rajan to the fact that the Irukkuvēḷ style had absorbed Pāṇḍya, as well as Pallava, artistic influences (1975, 272-73). Balasubrahmanyam draws attention to the resemblances between Tīruvalisvaram and Kodumbalur's Mūvarkoyil with respect to the design of the superstructure, but offers no explanation of why these should exist (1975, 208-209). As at Tīruvalisvaram, he admires the sculpted images of the deities as being 'among the finest specimens of early Chola Art' (1971, 132). The Tīruvalisvaram sculptures we see in Figure 10 include Arđhanarīśvara in the lower niche, and, in the upper tiers, Pārvatī seated on Śiva's lap and Indra (or Skanda?). On the problems of regarding the Mūvarkoyil as a 'Chola temple,' see Kaimal 2002.
- 11 It is strange that Dhaky describes the sculpture of this temple as 'degenerate figural decoration,' and the ornamentation of the pilasters as 'decadent' (1983b, 264).
- 12 It is perhaps significant that in the Valanceri copper-plates, issued by Aditya's successor Parantaka I, there is no reference to Aditya's engagement with the construction or patronage of temples (*Thiruttanai*). See Barrett's discussion of SR Balasubrahmanyam's claims about the temple-building activities of Aditya I (1974, 49-50). Unlike Barrett, Hoekveld-Meijer seems in no doubt about the impact of Aditya on the development of a Chola imperial style, suggesting that this king 'may well have ordered his sthāpatīs to prove their creativity by designing new and more impressive types of temples. It is even possible that he commissioned them to construct the... Saptā Sthānas' – i.e. the temples at Tīruvaiyaru, Tīruppalanam, Tīrucchaturai, Tīruvedikkudi, Tīrukkandiyur, Tīruppundurutti, and Tīllaisthanam, which display three 'new' types of floor plan (1981:94). Lefèvre similarly identifies as 'un modèle royale' a particular floor plan – with a central projection on each wall – the earliest example of which is the temple at Lalgudi, built by Aditya's sister in 880 (2006, 238-41). Lefèvre's conclusions about 'l'existence réelle d'un modèle royale' must be understood with reference to his system of classification of temple builders and temple patrons as 'royal'; this category is extremely broad, encompassing not only kings, but royal women, members of the court, and people with royal titles. Padma Kaimal's (1988; 1996) demonstrations of the paucity of evidence for the role of ninth- and tenth-century Chola kings as the founders of temples remain persuasive (cf. Ogura 1999 and Lefèvre 2006, 235-37).
- 13 Ogura (1999) and Lefèvre (2006, 236) suggest that Rajendra I is also responsible for the building of the temple at Ramanathakoyil as a memorial (*pallippatai*) for his step-mother.
- 14 According to Pierre Pichard (1995), the Tañjāvūr temple's enclosure wall, storied sanctum, and the two-storied treatment of the facade all seem to be inspired by buildings in Eastern Andhra, in the kingdom of the Chalukyas, while the design of the temple's base and the pattern of five projections on the facade seem to be borrowings from temples built in the time of the Pallavas.
- 15 In Tīruchirappalli taluk, 0.4% of the 744 stone inscriptions of the eighth through thirteenth centuries record the gifts of Chola kings, while the proportion both for Chola queens (who were active as donors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries) and for Pāṇḍya kings (who appear in the ninth as well as in the thirteenth centuries) is 1.1%. Even the queens of the Hoysala dynasty, with their gifts to the great temples of Srirangam and Tīruvanaikka, outshone the Chola kings as temple patrons (at 0.54%). In Chidambaram taluk, 1.8% of the 497 inscriptions record gifts made by Pāṇḍya kings (for the most part in the thirteenth century), while the figure for Chola kings is just 1%. Kumbakonam taluk is the only one of the study areas where donations by Chola kings outnumber those of Pāṇḍya rulers, but only 1% of the 822 inscriptions refer to the generosity of the Chola king – in contrast to 2.3%, which record the gifts of Chola queens. On temple patronage by royal women, see Orr 2000a, 69-85 and Orr 2000b. The finding of Vincent Lefèvre (2006, 135-143) – that 10% of the religious construction projects and divine images in the Tamil country were sponsored by royal figures – seems to result from his rather capacious category of 'royal patron,' which includes many people apart from kings, as well as the fact that his

survey extends from the sixth to the eighteenth century. There is no question that kings were more active as temple patrons in both pre-Chola and post-Chola times, so it is rather surprising that Lefèvre highlights the role of the Cholas in this context.

- 16 The total number of inscriptions dating from the period of the eighth through thirteenth centuries in the Madurai study area (comprising Madurai and Melur taluks) is 297. One percent record the gifts of Pāṇḍya queens, who were especially active in the tenth through twelfth centuries, and only 0.34% give evidence of temple patronage on the part of the Chola or Chola-Pāṇḍya rulers.
- 17 The temple patronage of Chola kings in this region is, again, negligible – being referred to in only 0.22% of the 900 inscriptions in the Tirunelveli study-area (composed of Tirunelveli, Ambasamudram, Srivaikuntham, and Tiruchendur taluks).
- 18 *Tulābhāra* and *hiranyagarbha* gifts, which involve the donation of ones weight in gold or silver, are attributed to Pāṇḍya kings in the *prasāstis* of the seventh-century Vaigai River bed inscription (EI 38, 27ff) and the eighth-century Velvikkudi plates and Smaller Cinnamanur plates (PCP 1 and 3). In the eleventh century, the *prasāstis* of the Karandai plates and the Tiruvalangadu plates of Rajendra I (*Karandai* and SII 3.205) credit the Chola king's predecessors with making such gifts, and we also find an inscription at Tiruvisalur (in Kumbakonam taluk) that records the *tulābhāra* of Rājarāja I and the *hiranyagarbha* of his queen Lokamahadevi (SII 23.42). The only Pallava inscription that mentions such acts is a late ninth-century stone inscription from Tirukodikkaval, in Kumbakonam taluk, which records the *tulābhāra* and *hiranyagarbha* of a Pallava queen (*Pallava* 178 = SII 12.74).
- 19 The Tamil portions of the Velvikkudi plates (PCP 1) of AD 770, and the Dalavaypuram and Larger Cinnamanur plates (PCP 4 and 5) of the early tenth century, describe the destructive power of the Pāṇḍya king and his army and his defeat of numerous enemies in a manner very similar to the Cholas' *prasāstis* of several centuries later. See Tieken (2001, 133-138) for a discussion of the character of the Pāṇḍyas' Tamil *prasāstis*. In their elaboration of the heroic idiom in the Pāṇḍyas' *prasāstis*, the court poets seem to have been inspired by the tradition of classical Tamil poetry of the so-called Cānkam age (see Kailasapathy 1968, 238-254).
- 20 Of 297 inscriptions from the Madurai study-area, dating from the eighth through thirteenth centuries, 27 are royal orders, and over half of these are inscribed on the walls of the temple at Alagarkoyil. The Pāṇḍya kings' royal orders both here and in the Tirunelveli study-area date for the most part to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the Tirunelveli study-area, we find four royal orders issued by the Chola-Pāṇḍya viceroys of the eleventh century, two of which were engraved at the temple in Mannarkoyil, where we also find a royal order of the Chera king who was the builder of this temple.
- 21 In fact, in the Tiruchirappalli study-area we find three Pāṇḍya royal orders. Of the six Chola royal orders, three were issued by Kulottunga III and inscribed at Srirangam. In the Kumbakonam study area, most of the 18 royal orders date from the twelfth century.
- 22 Several thirteenth-century inscriptions in Tiruchirappalli taluk describe the Pāṇḍya ruler enthroned in his palace. Meanwhile in the far south, in the eleventh century, there is one inscription that refers to Rajendra I in his palace at Kanchipuram and four inscriptions that refer to the Chola-Pāṇḍya viceroys enthroned in Pandyanadu.
- 23 The other two Chola kings for whom birthday celebrations were instituted are Uttama Chola (in the tenth century in Tiruvudaimarudur, Kumbakonam taluk) and Virarajendra Chola (in the eleventh century in the Tirunelveli study-area). For a survey of inscriptional references to birthday festivities for Rājarāja I, and other Chola rulers who followed him, see Sethuraman 1987. What I am referring to as a 'birthday' is in fact the star (*nakṣatra*) under which a royal figure was born. Since a *nakṣatra* recurs monthly, the birthday might be marked by monthly services, as well as annual ones. The Pāṇḍya rulers also instituted special daily worship services that bore their name.
- 24 The later kings of Vijayanagara at times adopted the title *pāṇḍyarājyasthāpanacārya*, 'establisher of the Pāṇḍya realm,' and depicted themselves as the protectors of the Pāṇḍya kings, whom they claimed as their dependents; see, for example, the sixteenth-century *Achyutarāyābhīyudayam* (canto 7, v. 27; Krishnaswami Aiyangar 1919, 165). The Nayakas succeeded the Vijayanagara rulers in the Tamil country, and they too cast themselves as inheritors

of the Pāṇḍya mantle. The early eighteenth-century Telugu chronicle, *Taṅjāvīri Andhra Rājula Caritra*, tells the story of the foundation of the Madurai Nayaka state during the time of the Vijayanagara ruler Krishnadevaraya two hundred years earlier (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992, 44-52). Nagama Nayaka, the manager of Krishnadevaraya's treasury, is asked by the ruler of Vijayanagara to rescue the Pāṇḍya king from invading Chola forces, but instead, after repelling the enemy, claims the throne of Madurai for himself. Nagama's son Visvanatha offers his services to Krishnadevaraya to bring the insubordinate Nagama back to Vijayanagara. In the end, Visvanatha succeeds in doing this, but the grateful Krishnadevaraya – hearing both from Nagama and the Pāṇḍya king himself that until Nagama had arrived there had been no stable rule in the Pāṇḍya country – awards the kingdom to Visvanatha. Visvanatha's claim to the throne is confirmed by the goddess Mīnākṣī of Madurai who had appeared to Nagama in a dream and told him that his son was the proper man to rule the Pāṇḍya kingdom.

25 See Hardy 1983 for a discussion of the distribution of the temples sung by the Vaiṣṇava poet-saints, and for maps showing the focus on temples of the far south in the hymns of the saints Nammālvār, Periyālvār, and Āṅṅāl. Hardy also proposes (225-26) a very early Vaiṣṇava presence in Pandyanadu.

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