

## Who Built the Stone Temples of Ancient South India?

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### Part I: Two Key Monuments of the Pallava Period

Descent of the Ganges (Ganga) / Arjuna's Penance, Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram), second half of the 7th century, rock-cut granite

compare Varaha cave temple, Mamallapuram, second half of the 7th century, rock-cut granite

compare Vishnu shrine ("Bhima Ratha"); 1 of the 5 Rathas, Mamallapuram, 7th century, rock-cut granite monolith

compare Shiva Gangadhara ("with Ganga descending"), Shiva Cave Temple, Trichy (Tiruchirappalli), ca. 600 AD, rock-cut granite

compare Arjuna fights Shiva, Kailasanatha Temple, Kanchi, ca. 700-728

Kailasanatha Temple Complex, Kanchi (Kāñcīpuram / Conjeevaram), ca. 700-728, granite and sandstone (constructed), built by King Rajasimha Pallava, his son Mahendra III, and at least three Pallava queens

plan  
*linga* shrine

Compare Shiva with his wife, Umā, and son, Skanda (*Somaskanda-murti*), Shore Temples, Mamallapuram, early 8th century, granite and sandstone (constructed), built by Rajasimha Pallava

*Rajasimha's vimāna* (towered shrine)

North-facing sculptures:

Shiva destroys the Three Cities (*Tripurāntaka-murti*)

The Goddess as Triumph

Shiva kicking Death/Time (*Kālāri-murti*)

South-facing sculptures:

Shiva seduces the wives of the sages (*Bhikshatana-murti*)

Shiva as the Great Teacher (*Dakshina-murti*)

Inscription around the vimana, in Sanskrit; poem praising king Rajasimha Pallava and tracing the Pallava lineage to Brahma

Shiva catching Ganga (*Gangādhara-murti*)

Tamil Nadu, Madras/Chennai  
*mangala/amangala*

## Part II: Key Monuments of the Early Chola Period

Kaveri River, central Tamil Nadu

Triple temple (Muvarkoyil), in Kodumbalur, granite (constructed), 9th century, inscribed by a king of the Irukkuvel family

*vimana*

*shikhara* (tower) and figures in *shikara*

inscriptions

Shiva Ardha-narishvara ("Shiva whose half is woman"), in *devakoshtha* (doorway-like wall niche); note "split pilaster"

basement moldings

Shiva Temple, in Narttamalai, granite (constructed), 9th century, inscribed by Muttaraiyar patron

*vimana* and *mandapam* (hall)

plan

*dvarapala* (door guardians)

*shikhara* (tower) and figures in *shikara*

basement moldings

Nageshvara ("Lord of the snakes") temple, in Kumbakonam, granite (constructed), ca. 900 CE

*vimana*

Shiva Ardha-narishvara ("Shiva whose half is woman")

plan

*mandapam*

figures in subordinate niches (from the *Ramayana* epic?)

Rajarajeshvara (or Brihadishvara) Temple, Tanjavur (Tamilnadu), 1010, constructed of sandstone and granite, built by King Rajaraja I Chola

plan

two *gopura* (gateways)

*vimana*

Shiva as the naked mendicant (Bhikshatana), in *devakoshtha* on *vimana*

basement moldings with inscriptions

Goddess and Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), metal alloy often called "bronze"

Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), in *devakoshtha* on *vimana*

### Suggested Readings:

*Opening Kailasanatha: The Temple in Kanchipuram Revealed in Time and Space*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021.

"Playful Ambiguity and Political Authority in the Large Relief at Mamallapuram." *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994): 1-27

"Early Cola Kings and 'Early Cola Temples:' Art and the Evolution of Kingship." *Artibus Asiae* 56, 1/2 (1996): 33-66.

"A Man's World? Gender, family and architectural patronage in medieval India." *Archives of Asian Art* LIII (2002-2003): 26-53.