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Constructing Kingship

Nāyaka Rule in Early Modern Madurai

Introduction

The Nāyaka warriors migrated to the Tamil region in the fourteenth century, where they ruled first as subordinate governors on behalf of the Vijayanagara empire, then as autonomous kingdoms after the empire's collapse. As their ties to Vijayanagara waned, the Nāyakas began to redefine kingship in early modern south India through literary and architectural traditions that challenged norms of sovereignty and the royal body. The consolidation of Nāyaka rule corresponded to a shift in discourses of kingship from narratives of valor, loyalty, and conquest to narratives of devotion and spirituality. This chapter presents a brief overview of Nāyaka history, drawing focus upon Nāyaka patronage of the Mīnākṣī-Sundaresvara temple and its Pudu Maṇḍapam, a major architectural project of Tirumala Nāyaka (r. 1623–1659 CE). Tamil chronicles, missionary reports, temple manuscripts, and epigraphical records illustrate how the Nāyaka rulers, and Tirumala Nāyaka in particular, became central to the history and identity of the Madurai temple. Tirumala's contributions to the temple were celebrated in prose poetry that lauded the king not as a soldier but as a great devotee: the corpulent statues that line the Pudu Maṇḍapam, in turn, reflect transformations in the aesthetics of sovereignty that accompanied transformations in political relations in south India.

Beginnings of Nāyaka rule in Madurai

The Nāyakas were warrior-peasants from Andhra territory who penetrated the Tamil country beginning in the fourteenth century. The word *nāyaka* referred to military officers in command of troops with prebendal rights over land. There are several speculated reasons for their southward migration: an opportunity to display their military prowess and expand their wealth; the promise of plentiful, thinly populated tracts of black soil for cultivation; or a desire to escape tax and conscription by the Bahmani and Golconda sultanates.¹ Among the early Nāyaka settlers were Telugu soldiers who settled in the Tamil country during general

Kumāra Kampana's campaigns to extend the Vijayanagara empire in the late fourteenth century.² Another early settlement was populated by the 1,400 bowmen, soldiers, and retainers who accompanied Eṭṭappa Nāyaka when he left his natal home of Candragiri in 1423 to settle in Madurai.³ During this period, merchants and artisans also journeyed from the north⁴ and settled in the arid and black-soil land peripheral to fertile areas.⁵ Telugu warriors, as *nāyakas* ('leaders'), initially served as local governors or intermediary authorities between the Vijayanagara overlords and peasants, but later ascended to political prominence as the imperial center disintegrated in the sixteenth century. They established kingdoms in Senji, Tanjavur (Cōla capital), and Madurai (Pāṇḍya capital), while maintaining nominal subordination to the Vijayanagara emperors (Figure 1.1).

A handful of texts offer narratives on the origins of the Nāyaka kings in Madurai. An early eighteenth-century Telugu text, *Taṅjāvūri Āndhra Rājula Caritra* ('Story of Tanjavur's Andhra rulers'), is a popular reference and a likely source for the Tamil chronicle translated by William Taylor in 1835.⁶ These texts recount the heroic legend of Viśvanātha Nāyaka (r. 1529–1564 CE), son of Nāgama Nāyaka, an officer and revenue collector for the Vijayanagara empire.⁷ In these stories, a childless Nāgama Nāyaka bathes in the Gaṅgā river for forty days, until Śiva visits him in a dream with a prophecy of Viśvanātha's birth. When Viśvanātha is a youth, a strong buffalo is caught for the annual Navarātri festival sacrifice in the Vijayanagara capital, but the emperor, Kṛṣṇadevarāya, is worried that the buffalo cannot be beheaded in a single blow, and he fears an omen of catastrophe if the sacrifice fails. Goddess Durgā visits Viśvanātha in a dream, and advises him to volunteer to perform the sacrifice using a special sword from the royal armory; when Viśvanātha succeeds, the emperor invites the young man into his service and promises him a kingdom of his own. One day, Vīracēkaṇ, the Cōla king of Tanjavur, invades the Pāṇḍya country and usurps the throne from Cantiracēkaṇ, the Pāṇḍyan king of Madurai. Although the Vijayanagara emperor reigned over the southern peninsula from the capital in Hampi, he left the Pāṇḍyas and Cōlas to preside over these remote lands, the ancestral territories of the lesser kings.⁸ At the Pāṇḍyan king's request for aid, the emperor dispatches Viśvanātha's father, Nāgama, to defeat the invading Cōlas and make peace—however, rather than restore the kingdom to the Pāṇḍyan king, Nāgama declares himself ruler in Madurai and reorganizes the territory's administration under his own men in order to collect revenue and recover the costs of war.⁹ When Kṛṣṇadevarāya assembles his courtiers to bring back Nāgama's head, Viśvanātha volunteers: he tells the emperor that his duty to his king supersedes his loyalty to his father. Viśvanātha travels to Madurai and delivers a proposal to his father:



Figure 1.1 Map of south India

Source: Map prepared by John Kelly.

Note: Map not to scale and does not represent authentic international boundaries.

if Nāgama restores the kingdom to the rightful Pāṇḍyan king, Viśvanātha will ask the emperor to spare Nāgama's life. Nāgama refuses the offer and informs his son that he conquered Madurai for his son's benefit, so they could rule together; Viśvanātha ignores the overtures, subdues his father, and returns to Kṛṣṇadevarāya. The emperor is impressed with Viśvanātha's loyalty, and he spares Nāgama's life. The Pāṇḍyan king has no heir, and the Vijayanagara emperor makes good on his promise—he appoints Viśvanātha as Madurai's ruler, inaugurating the new Nāyaka dynasty in 1529.¹⁰

There are many accounts of Viśvanātha's ascendance to the throne that contradict the narrative in *Taṅjāvūri Āndhra Rājula Caritra* and its derivatives:¹¹ one Telugu text claims that the Pāṇḍyan king adopted Viśvanātha as his son after Nāgama's defeat; another text asserts that Nāgama killed the Pāṇḍyan king and the throne was passed on to Viśvanātha. A Dutch East India Company document from 1677, referencing the alleged testimonies of some Madurai Brahmins, contends that there was no relation between Nāgama and Viśvanātha at all. According to the Dutch report, a wealthy merchant ruled Madurai and loaned money to the Vijayanagara court, and his son Nāgama was given the title of Nāyaka. Nāgama, so the story goes, fell out of favor with the imperial court, and upon his death, the emperor placed his loyal servant on the throne, Viśvanātha, who received the title of Nāyaka through marriage.

In spite of the discordances and contradictions in these narratives, they contain several distinct motifs, as detailed in Lennart Bes' historiography of Nāyaka origin stories.¹² Viśvanātha's lineage is never traced back more than one generation, and his legitimacy as ruler has little to do with his paternity. Viśvanātha's right to rule is tied to his loyalty and service to the Vijayanagara emperor, and his extraordinary feats of heroism and conquest. In addition to his military victories, these stories often emphasize Viśvanātha's physical prowess and aptitude for combat: a young Viśvanātha slaughters a strong buffalo whose horns "bended backwards and reached to its tail,"¹³ and as ruler of Madurai, he overcomes a band of rebel chiefs, relatives of the former Pāṇḍyan king, by killing the strongest amongst them in a one-on-one struggle. In almost every case, there is an effort to establish continuity between Viśvanātha and the Pāṇḍyan line that preceded him: through adoption by the Pāṇḍyan king or through the ceremonial transmission of Pāṇḍyan regalia, the scepter of the goddess Mīnākṣi, the Pāṇḍyan queen considered to be Pārvatī. *Taṅjāvūri Āndhra Rājula Caritra* reports that Nāgama Nāyaka was visited by Mīnākṣi in a dream with a prophecy of Viśvanātha's regal destiny; in other stories, Viśvanātha himself is directly descended from Mīnākṣi. The divine authorization of Viśvanātha's rule is self-evident: there is no need for Brahmins in this story, whether as ministers, advisors, or recipients of gifts.

The *Taṅjāvūri Andhra Rājula Caritra* portrays Viśvanātha as a strong and able king, who swiftly secures the territory under his newfound supervision.¹⁴ The Nāyakas' formal relationship with the Vijayanagara center was that of partnership, or *pālu* (Telugu, 'share' or 'parcel'), in the 'world empire' (Skt, *prthivī rājyam*) of Vijayanagara, which involved *nāyankara*, an agreement that entitled Nāyakas to collect revenue in their territory and keep a specified share; Nāyakas therefore took an active interest in clearing new lands, encouraging settlement, and cultivating new sources of revenue through the taxation of farms.¹⁵ Accordingly, the chronicle of the Madurai Nāyakas narrates Viśvanātha's efforts to divert water sources for better irrigation, clear jungles, and found new villages that add to the region's population. He demolishes the old Pāṇḍyan rampart around the Mīnākṣi temple, builds a new double-walled fortress, and provides living quarters for Brahmins. Aided by Ariyanātha Mudaliyār, his *taḷavāy* ('military commander') and *piratāni* ('financial officer'), Viśvanātha departed from both Pāṇḍyan and Vijayanagara idioms of government by organizing the new Nāyaka state into seventy-two bastions called *pālaiyams*, each manned by an administrator, or *pālaiyakkārars*.¹⁶ *Pālaiyakkārars*, a class of territorial military chiefs, collected taxes, ran the local judiciary, protected civilians from robbers, and maintained troops for the Nāyaka ruler, while paying him a fixed tribute. The chronicle of the Madurai Nāyakas describes Viśvanātha's victorious efforts to suppress revolts by local nobility disempowered by the new *pālaiyam* system. In this way, the origin narratives establish two clear 'axes' of Nāyaka legitimacy: 'vertical legitimacy,' the fiscal and symbolic relationship to the Vijayanagara center, and 'horizontal legitimacy,' the conquest and successful defense of territory against rivals.¹⁷

In the years after Viśvanātha's death in 1564, the Vijayanagara empire suffered precipitous declines. In 1565, the Vijayanagara capital of Hampi was destroyed in a humiliating defeat to the Deccan sultanates in the Battle of Talikota. As Viśvanātha's descendants successfully fended off *pālaiyakkārars* rebellions and captured territory stretching to the tip of the southern peninsula, the Madurai Nāyakas retained their loyalty to Vijayanagara's Araviḍu line of kings, which succeeded the Tuḷuva line of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Nevertheless, there was a clear shift in the dynamics between the Nāyaka rulers and the imperial center; the institution of *nāyankara* declined, and fewer and fewer resources were transferred from the Nāyaka localities.¹⁸ During a Vijayanagara succession struggle and civil war beginning in 1614, the Madurai Nāyakas were emboldened: Muttu Viṛappa Nāyaka (r. 1609–1623 CE) seized the opportunity to "discard the phantom of imperial sovereignty" and halted tribute payments to Vijayanagara.¹⁹ The Tanjavur and Madurai Nāyakas were divided in their loyalties in the Vijayanagara civil war, and Muttu Viṛappa transferred his capital from Madurai to Tiruchirappalli,

on a high, impregnable rock by the bountiful Kāvēri river, to wage war against Tanjavur.²⁰ This series of events set the stage for Tirumala Nāyaka to advance the cause of Madurai's independence from Vijayanagara.

The king as god's servant and devotee

Nearly sixty years after Viśvanātha's death, Tirumala Nāyaka ascended the throne: he began his rule in 1623.²¹ Tirumala inherited a kingdom that stretched to the southern coast and extended northward into Konganadu.²² He relocated the capital back to Madurai, perhaps because Madurai was in a more central location relative to the rest of the kingdom, and it was more distant from the encroachments of an invading Mysore king, buffered by the citadels in Tiruchirappalli and Dindigul. In the popular legend, Tirumala fell gravely ill in Tiruchirappalli, and while traveling to Madurai, he was visited by Mīnākṣi and Sundareśvara in a dream: he was told that if he moved the capital to Madurai and restored the temple there, he would be cured of his disease.²³ Madurai was the home of the Mīnākṣi-Sundareśvara temple, a pilgrimage site of great spiritual significance. Tirumala vowed to serve the deities: he promised a golden ornamental arch (*tiruvāṭci*) to place over processional images of the deities, a jeweled throne for the god, a temple pond for devotional festivals, a pillared hall, and various temple ornaments.²⁴ In William Taylor's 1835 chronicle "The Accounts of Tirumali-Naicker, and of His Buildings," the pillared hall is the Pudu Maṇḍapam, called by its other name, "Vasanta-Mandabam," referring to Vasantam ('spring'), the Tamil months of Cittirai (April/May)—when Mīnākṣi and Sundareśvara are married—and Vaikāci (May/June)—when metal embodiments of Mīnākṣi and Sundareśvara rest and receive guests inside the hall during ritual functions. Taylor's manuscript, based on undated Tamil texts, names Tirumala Nāyaka as the patron of the Pudu Maṇḍapam, but there are no stone or copperplate inscriptions substantiating this claim, nor any clear references to the hall's construction date.

A possible resource for identifying the hall's origins is *Maturaittala-Varalāru* ('History of the place of Madurai'), part of *Śrītāla*, the palm-leaf manuscripts at the Madurai temple and later published by the Madurai Tamil Saṅgam. This text provides some of the political history of the temple and traces the succession of monarchs. The entry for Tirumala states:²⁵

On the seventh day of Mārkaḷi in the year of Dundubi,²⁶
Muttutirumalanāyakkar, brother of Muttuvīrappanāyakkar,
became a great devotee of Mīnākṣi and Sundareśvara by their grace.
For the god, he

gifted many ornaments,
 built the Pudu Maṇḍapam and Teppakkuḷam,
 constructed a golden throne, an ivory chariot, a stone seat, and a throne inlaid with
 precious stones,
 ordered construction projects in seven temples,
 endowed lands yielding 44,000 *poṇs* income for daily worship (*pūjā*),²⁷
 granted tax-free villages for the sustenance of temple employees,
 created his own endowment and donated protected villages,
 conducted temple festivals in a grand manner,
 created a chariot for lord Aḷakar during the sacred day of Cittirai festival,²⁸ and
 made places very famous.

Whenever he came for *darśan*, he offered 1,000 *poṇs* at god's feet for *abhiṣekam* and
naivēdyā.²⁹

When the god was taken in procession on Maci Street, he presented 1,000 *poṇs* at
 god's feet.

In this way, he ruled for thirty-six years from the seventh day of Māci in the year of
 Dundubī until his death on Tuesday night, the fourth day of Māci in the year of
 Vīlambī.³⁰

According to *Maturaittala-Varalāru*, Tirumala granted many large estates of
 crown lands to religious institutions. Epigraphical evidence documents these land
 grants during the Nāyaka's reign: a 1634 inscription shows that at Tirumala's
 request, Vijayanagara king Veṅkaṭa II granted the Kuniyur village to Brahmins;
 a 1635 inscription from Aladiyur, Tirunelveli area, and a 1637 inscription from
 Kapilamalai, Namakkal district, mention Tirumala's land gifts to local temples.³¹
 Agricultural output from these land grants provided the economic basis for
 an endowment, or *kaṭṭalai*. Revenues of entire villages were granted to temple
 personnel such as *bhaṭṭārs* ('priests') either for specific ritual purposes such as a
pūjā ('worship') or *utsavam* ('festival') or for materials used in rituals.³² The largest
 Madurai temple endowment, called Tirumala Nāyaka Kaṭṭalai, comprised twenty-
 one villages in Madakkulam Taluk (including Madurai) that generated a sizable
 revenue for the temple.³³

Tirumala's flowing coffers supported many substantial endowments, funded
 by land tax, income from crown lands, and tribute from *pālaiyakkārars*.³⁴ Since
 the time of the Pāṇḍyas, pearl fisheries along the oyster bed coast between Ramnad
 and Tirunelveli also gave profits for Madurai's rulers, who maintained long-
 standing associations with the maritime trading community along the Gulf of
 Mannar by offering special patronage to Christian and Muslim pearl fishermen
 and traders. According to Augustin Saulière, a missionary who translated
 Jesuit Baltasar da Costa's 1646 account of the Madurai kingdom, Tirumala

had an annual income of millions of *patacas* (the currency used in Portuguese territories).³⁵ Tirumala conferred upon a prominent pearl trader (Mudaliyār Pillai Maraikkāyar) “kingly” honors and gave him authority over the local pearling population.³⁶ Nāyaka iconography reveals a penchant for pearls;³⁷ pearls can be seen in crowns and ornaments for royalty and for the gods—such as the pearl turban (*muttu talaippākai*) for Sundarēśvara and the pearl crown (*ambāl tirumuṭiccāttu*) and pearl dress (*muttu kavacam*) for Mīnākṣi—and on temple canopies.³⁸ *Maturaittala-Vāralāru* describes Tirumala’s gifts of ornaments to the temple deities possibly embellished with pearls.

Another Tamil temple manuscript, *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai* (‘Garland of sacred works at the Madurai temple’) details Tirumala’s specific contributions to the Mīnākṣi-Sundarēśvara temple, as part of a record of all the kings, nobles, and merchants who donated to the temple. The document is attributed to Tāṇṭavamūrttippaṇṭāram, but Madurai temple historian A. V. Jeyechandrun suggests that the style and vocabulary of the 106 verses cannot be credited to a single poet.³⁹ These verses, a form of prose poetry, are sung when processional deities stop in festival *maṇḍapams*.⁴⁰ *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai* was a new genre during the Nāyaka period, in which the patron’s devoted service to the temple’s god is lauded in verses celebrating the financing of temple construction, additions, renovations, or repairs.⁴¹ *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai* praises Tirumala Nāyaka as the temple’s main financier, and the text devotes more passages to him than to any other patron of the Madurai temple. Verses 80 to 86 of *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai* specify Tirumala Nāyaka’s “sacred works”:

80. King Tirumalai,⁴² the garlanded, bejeweled, and most eminent king, and son of the benevolent king Muttukṛṣṇappa whom other kings respected, built the everlasting Pudu Maṇḍapam like the renowned Mount Mēru who took many forms and came before god after doing penance, and featuring one hundred and twenty-four pillars, sculpted images, and two smaller *maṇḍapams* that flank the great *maṇḍapam* as garlands, so Mīnākṣi with *kuravam* flowers in her dark hair and Sundarēśvara with *konrai* blossoms can rest together during the good Vasantam festival he initiated.

81. King Tirumalai, son of the pleasant and victorious Muttukṛṣṇappa with mighty mountain-like shoulders, constructed a new temple pond (*teppakkulam*) as splendid as the ocean for the fame of Madurai’s ruler, featuring an excellent *maṇḍapam* at its center that resembles golden Mēru and earth’s nine continents in the middle of indescribable seven seas because the ocean shattered into pieces, burned, dropped its level, dried up, and became flat, causing it to suffer and lose its significance when Rāma shot arrows at the sea god’s fish-filled waters, sage Agastya swallowed the

sea in one handful, the anklet-wearing Pāṇḍyan king (*māraṇ*) halted the sea god's downpour, Viṣṇu took the fish *avatāram*, and Subrahmaṇya threw his spear (*vel*).⁴³

82. King Tirumalai should receive all merit for performing several hundred *crores* of good deeds to repair Mīnākṣi's temple properly so it survives through time. For the goddess, he generously gave money to have broken stone pillars and beams replaced, decayed mortar removed, and strong, indestructible mortar of mixed lime, jaggery juice, and twice-ground paste of gallnut, gooseberry, *tāṇṟikkai*,⁴⁴ and black gram soaked in good water applied on laid-down bricks.

83. King Tirumalai of Kacci granted land for cultivating dry crops and gained fame for ensuring that the daily distribution of food from the temple kitchen would occur on earth for temple employees and those who came to the choultry to be fed while in the presence of the goddess with sharp, spear-like eyes.

84. King Tirumalai of ever-increasing fame and the son of Muttukṛṣṇappa on whom Lakṣmī resides, gold-plated the flagpole and sacrificial altar (*balipīḍam*) in front of the shrine to Sundareśvara, our lord of Madurai.

85. King Tirumalai, given by god's grace, ruler of Madurai, and seeker of pleasures, also renewed with gold the excellent flagpole and sacrificial altar of the goddess with a beautiful forehead, so she will be praised well.

86. King Tirumalai, adorned with gold ornaments and garlanded shoulders, made copper guardian deities (*dvārapālas*) that received god's sweet grace for Sundareśvara with matted *jatā* locks on his six-legged throne and the resplendently beautiful Mīnākṣi on her six-legged throne.⁴⁵

These verses celebrate Tirumala's construction of the Pudu Maṇḍapam with two water-filled trenches for cooling deities during the Vasantam festival; the Māriyamman Teppakkuḷam, the artificial pond for the Teppam ('float') festival for Mīnākṣi and Sundareśvara; the replacement and renovation of dilapidated elements of the goddess's shrine; the gilded and beautified structures in and around the shrines; and, importantly, the endowment of agricultural lands to sustain temple workers and their families. Both *Maturaittala-Varalāru* and *Tiruvālavāyutaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai* record Nāyaka benefactions to the Madurai temple through a network of individual patrons, documenting the contributions of each donor to the temple. They speak of transactions with the Madurai temple as either pious donations (such as endowment of lamps, creation of flower gardens for *pūjās*, and gifting ornaments for the idols), land tenorial arrangements that subsidized the temple (such as transfer of tax revenue from an assigned parcel of land), or building construction and renovation.

While the laudatory temple manuscripts appear documentary in nature, their remaking of ideal narratives involves an imaginative refashioning of Nāyaka identity in Madurai. There is a striking absence of any remark about Nāyaka temple donations in the *Maturaittala-Vāralāru* before Tirumala's rule. We find parallels in *Tiruvālavāyutaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai*, where Tirumala's ancestors are characterized in fantastic, heroic terms. For example, verse 49 describes Viśvanātha as "famous and victorious with a cloud-like generosity, the great one who restored the country to the Pāṇḍyan and took tribute when he came and fought,"⁴⁶ referring to the legend of Viśvanātha removing his father from the Pāṇḍyan throne. Later verses identify Viśvanātha's son Kṛṣṇappa Nāyaka as one who "fights in wars," "is adept in using bows to conquer in wars," and "kicks the golden crowns of enemy kings who tremble before him."⁴⁷ Such heroic panegyrics are virtually absent in the verses dedicated to Tirumala Nāyaka. The *Maturaittala-Vāralāru* and *Tiruvālavāyutaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai* shower effusive praise on a munificent king; the texts render the ruler not as a valiant war hero, but as god's most devout servant and devotee.

Although the temple manuscripts make little reference to Tirumala Nāyaka's martial attributes, the king spent much of his reign engaged in war.⁴⁸ Tirumala inherited a wealthy kingdom saddled by constant conflict at its borders: he successfully fended off invasions from Mysore in the north, he invaded a defiant Travancore to the southwest, and he allied with the Portuguese to quash a revolt by a neighboring Sētopati vassal in Ramnad, backed by the Dutch, in the southeast. A weak Vijayanagara had failed in its commitments to protect Madurai from northern invasion, and Tirumala refused to pay tribute, much like his predecessor Muttu Vīrappa Nāyaka.⁴⁹ Venkaṭa III, the Araviḍu king of Vijayanagara, accepted this state of affairs until his death in 1642, but his successor Śrīraṅga III demanded payment of debts, and he marched southward to provoke a confrontation. Tirumala proposed an alliance with the Nāyakas in Tanjavur and Senji, but he was betrayed when the Tanjavur ruler revealed the plot to the Vijayanagara king. Tirumala then turned to the Golconda sultan for aid—with Tirumala's encouragement, the sultan attacked Vellore, a Vijayanagara stronghold, to divert the emperor and halt his progress. The maneuver was successful, and the Vijayanagara army was defeated at Vellore—but the Golconda sultan was emboldened, and with the aid of the Bijapur sultan, he marched on Senji and captured the Nāyaka territory in 1649. The Muslim armies subsequently advanced on Tanjavur and Madurai, but were routed by Tirumala's army with the support of Kaḷḷar soldiers. The Vijayanagara king made a final effort to reinstate his kingdom by forming a partnership with Mysore, but Tirumala incurred a massive debt to buy the protection of the Bijapur

sultan, and the plot was extinguished. The Vijayanagara empire was finished, and the Madurai Nāyakas' independence preserved—at great cost.

Tirumala's strenuous efforts to support temple endowments, both inside and outside Madurai, must be interpreted in terms of the inherent fragility of his rule in a time of political volatility and threats to Nāyaka sovereignty. From the earliest days of his reign, Tirumala was concerned with the interconnected problems of northern invasion and independence from a weakened Vijayanagara court. Indeed, before his coronation, the deities instructed the crown prince to move the capital from Tiruchirappalli, a fortress at greater risk of northern penetration, and restore the Madurai temple, to cure his illness and restore himself to strength. The relationship between his illness, his devotion, and the security of his kingdom could not have been lost on Tirumala and his advisors. As Caleb Simmons observes in his study of nineteenth-century Mysore kings, religious devotion “provided a unique idiom in the face of change that could work to bridge previous forms of sovereignty into new realities,” especially in periods of uncertainty and unrest.⁵⁰ Land endowments simultaneously generated sources of agricultural revenue and cultivated local allegiances,⁵¹ while the temples they supported provided ritual contexts for performing novel, public imaginations of kingship. The collective memory of Tirumala's rule was shaped by his patronage and the rituals celebrating these achievements. The gifts of temple construction, maintenance, and preservation, and the cyclical performance of those gifts at mass religious festivals attended by pilgrims from far and wide, articulated a form of kingly valor in the Nāyaka state that conquest narratives and martial attributes could not.

Nāyaka aesthetics of sovereignty

The Mīnākṣi-Sundareśvara temple boasts twelve *gōpurams* (‘tall pyramidal gateways’), some as high as 52 meters, and a golden-sculptured *vimānam* (‘tower’) over each sanctum to the two main deities. It has four main entrances facing the four cardinal directions, an uncommon configuration for many Tamil temples. The temple complex is divided into many concentric quadrangular enclosures that comprise several shrines (including those for Mīnākṣi and Sundareśvara), a temple tank, numerous *prākārams* (‘large enclosure corridors’), and several columned halls or *maṇḍapams* (Figure 1.2). The Madurai temple was built during Pāṇḍyan rule, but most major improvements and renovations occurred in the Nāyaka era, spanning the reigns of Viśvanātha and Tirumala. Chief additions during this period include the south and north outer monumental *gōpurams*, several inner *gōpurams* near Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣi's shrines, temple outer walls, steps for Porṛāmaraiḱkuḷam (‘golden lotus tank’), Māriyamman Teppakkuḷam (a huge



Figure 1.2 View of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple, Madurai, from the south *gōpuram*

Source: American Institute of Indian Studies.

artificial pond located away from the temple), several *prākārams*, and many *maṇḍapams* including the Āyirakkāl Maṇḍapam (‘thousand pillar hall’) and the Pudu Maṇḍapam.⁵²

The Pudu Maṇḍapam was built in a phase of major expansion during Tirumala’s rule. Temple manuscripts do not provide concrete dates of the hall’s completion; architectural historian George Michell infers from the documented dates of Tirumala’s rule that the Pudu Maṇḍapam was finished in the year 1635.⁵³ Tirumala relocated priests’ homes to near the north *gōpuram* (where they still stand), to align the Pudu Maṇḍapam axially with the eastern *gōpuram* between East Cittirai and East Avani Mula Streets.⁵⁴ Tirumala’s unfinished Rāya (‘king’) Gōpuram near the Pudu Maṇḍapam’s eastern entrance, if completed, would have expanded the temple complex much farther. According to legend, Tirumala took an active interest in the Pudu Maṇḍapam’s construction. Once, when he visited to check the hall’s progress, he rolled some betel leaves for Cumantira Mūrti Ācārya, the chief sculptor and principal architect, who was deeply engrossed in his work. The *sthapati* did not realize that the king had prepared the betel, and he hurriedly

ate it without waiting for the king, a sign of disrespect. When the architect realized what he had done, he cut off the two fingers with which he had placed the betel in his mouth; moved by this action, Tirumala rewarded the sculptor with a gift of cloth and gold.⁵⁵

The *maṇḍapam* is a stone pillared hall in a Tamil temple complex. One type of *maṇḍapam* is an attached hall: either an *ardhamāṇḍapam* ('half-*maṇḍapam*') that directly connects to the main shrine, or a *mabāmaṇḍapam* ('large *maṇḍapam*') that sits beyond the *ardhamāṇḍapam*. The other type of *maṇḍapam* is a detached structure used to celebrate and perform festival (*utsavam*) rituals.⁵⁶ While the development of the separate festival *maṇḍapam* dates to the twelfth century, it was not until the early sixteenth century that it became a central component of later Tamil Drāviḍa (south Indian) temple-building tradition.⁵⁷ The purpose of festival *maṇḍapams*, reflected in the Pudu Maṇḍapam's design, is to house the deity's movable metal image during Hindu festivals after it leaves the main shrine to travel outside the temple to receive worshippers in the hall near the east gateway. The Pudu Maṇḍapam's pronounced axial interior emphasizes a single line of approach leading to the central nave, whose western end has the black granite throne platform used to conduct rituals to the sacred image. There is also a concentric processional aisle for the deity's circumambulation, and lower trenches for water once used to cool the god during the hot summer months.

The Pudu Maṇḍapam is one of the largest festival *maṇḍapams* on the Indian subcontinent. The precise dimensions of the hall vary depending on who performed the measurement and when the measurement was taken. The Pudu Maṇḍapam measures 340 feet long by 127 feet wide according to nineteenth-century Archaeological Survey of India superintendent Henry Hardy Cole; 330 feet long by 105 feet wide according to historian D. Devakunjari; or 328 feet long by 82 feet wide according to art historian Crispin Branfoot.⁵⁸ The decreasing length and width is explained in part by the many shops and stalls that had encroached into the Pudu Maṇḍapam's processional space over the years.⁵⁹

One hundred and twenty-four granite piers rich with sculptural detail support the hall's flat roof. Figural columns are concentrated at the east and west entrances of the *maṇḍapam*, along the processional aisle, and in the central nave. These large, nearly 2-meter tall sculptures that project from the monolithic columns are carved in the round and mounted high so they are on level with the gods' processional festival images when carried on bearers' shoulders. The Pudu Maṇḍapam showcases sculptures of deities and mythological figures that appear in the local Tamil myths of the Madurai temple: Parañcōti Muñivar's seventeenth-century *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam*, or 'Story of Śiva's sacred games,' in Madurai.⁶⁰



Figure 1.3 Central nave, Pudu Maṇḍapam, seventeenth century, Mīnākṣī-Sundaresvara temple, Madurai

Source: Photo by author.

The Pudu Maṇḍapam's most distinctive feature is the sculpted dynastic history of the Madurai Nāyakas, located in the central nave (Figure 1.3). The massive granite pillars of the huge rectangular hall include portraits of the Nāyaka lineage with joined palms in a gesture of reverence, facing the center aisle, and arranged in chronological order—Tirumala Nāyaka, the sponsor of the project, stands at the end.⁶¹ They are situated at an elevated height: when strong temple personnel walk through the corridor holding the processional icons of the gods aloft, the deities are on the same level as the royal statues. This style of sculptural composition on piers, the ability to liberate the stone carvings from their supports, and the development of full-bodied, formal portraiture into a temple art form are Nāyaka-period innovations.⁶² The ten stone portrayals that construct the Nāyaka family genealogy show the kings accompanied by diminutive consorts on the sides (Figure 1.4). Although all figures stand with splayed bare feet, pressed palms, and a rigid formality lacking suggestion of age or mood, the kings are adorned with various forms of headwear (conical or cloth-wraps), textile fabrics (plain or patterned), decorative ornaments, and body bulk (Figures 1.5 and 1.6). Tirumala is the most elaborately sculptured: unlike his bare-chested ancestors, he is clothed in a dense paisley-patterned garment, with several rows of beads or pearls, and



Figure 1.4 Madurai Nāyaka portraits, south side, Pudu Maṇḍapam

Source: Photo by author.

a knotted red cloth that holds his gathered hair to one side in a chignon (the standard headdress of later Nāyaka monarchy) (Figure 1.7).⁶³ Colorful coats of paint give Tirumala special prominence within the hall. Directly opposite him is a figure believed to be Viśvanātha, the first Madurai Nāyaka king, who wears a less ostentatious, diaphanous, and thinly patterned loincloth (Figure 1.8).⁶⁴

The Nāyaka kings are reproduced with paunches, a major departure from the stereotypical images of perfect *kṣatriya* kings. Where earlier depictions of south Indian monarchs—such as the Vijayanagara likeness of Kṛṣṇadevarāya in low relief on the Naṭarāja temple’s north *gōpūram* in Cidambaram and as a free-standing metal statue within the Tirumala Veṅkaṭeśvara temple’s Pratimā Maṇḍapam in Tirupati (Figures 1.9 and 1.10)—exhibited ‘ideal’ and streamlined bodies, paradigms of divinely perfection with wide, elephant trunk-like shoulders and tapered, lion-like waistlines, Nāyaka rulers received full-sized, portly presentations. While Nāyaka men typically had ample proportions with swelling stomachs and

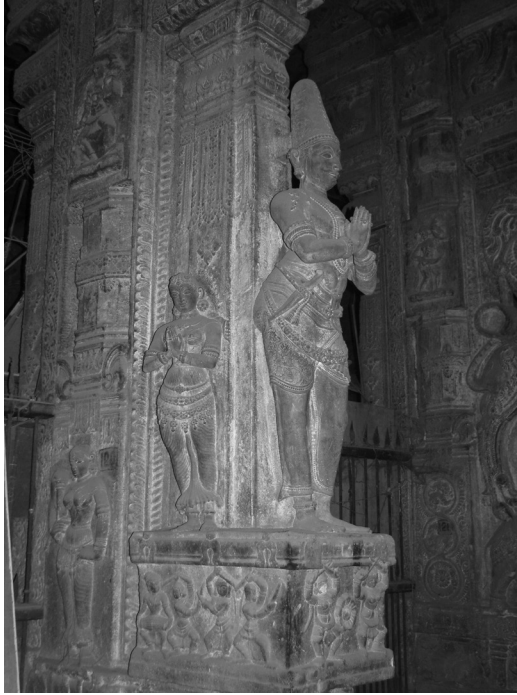


Figure 1.5 Nāyaka ruler, Pudu Maṇḍapam

Source: Photo by author.

heavy hips, Tirumala is portrayed as extraordinarily plump (Figure 1.7). One of his necklaces hangs to his protruding abdomen, drawing the viewer's eye to his large belly that bulges out of the lower waistband. His clasped hands and arms form a triangle whose sides frame his broad girth.

The sculptural emphasis on Tirumala's well-fed stomach suggests the importance of food to Nāyaka political philosophy, in which political authority was signified primarily by gift-giving and expenditure of wealth, rather than traditional norms of *varṇa* or caste. Madurai rulers were of likely Baliya heritage, merchant-warriors proud of their *śūdra* status, who came from the relatively less-stratified arid zones of the Andhra region, where wealth and influence were wielded by families who built up factions of clients in positions as village headmen and accountants.⁶⁵ The practice of giving gifts—of food, of titles and emblems, of privileges to use land, of special rights to rule—played a principal role in defining the sovereignty of south Indian kings, especially in the “shared” sovereignty of Vijayanagara and the Nāyakas.⁶⁶ Nicholas Dirks considers the *pūjā*, the ritual of



Figure 1.6 Nāyaka ruler, Pudu Maṇḍapam

Source: Photo by author.

worship, as the “root metaphor” and “cultural mechanism” for all political relations in the Nāyaka kingdom, in which the taking and eating of food given by the deity (*prasādam*) signifies a privileged relationship with the god. The gift (a second meaning of *prasādam*) can trump even kinship ties—indeed, in *Taṅjāvūri Āndhra Rājula Caritra*, when the Vijayanagara king asks why Viśvanātha has volunteered to subdue his own father, he replies that he has “eaten the king’s food.”⁶⁷

Wealth had two primary functions in Nāyaka political life, both symbolically connected to food: gift-giving and enjoyment (Skt, *bhoga*). This sentiment is captured by a popular Telugu verse: “Giving gifts [*dānamu*], enjoyment [*bhōgamu*], loss [*nāśamu*]: there are only these three paths for money on this earth. The ignorant fool who does not take the first two paths will see his money take the third.”⁶⁸ The semantic scope of *bhoga* underwent numerous transformations in Indian courts from the early centuries CE, as the concept came to encompass enjoyment of sensual pleasures, enjoyment of one’s possessions, ‘enjoyment’ of a sovereign domain, and eventually a vast range of privileges and entitlements



Figure 1.7 Tirumala Nāyaka and his consorts, Pudu Maṇḍapam

Source: Photo by author.

in the arts of government.⁶⁹ The theme of *bhoga* was prominent in the Telugu genre of *abhyudayamu* poetry, popular in the Nāyaka Tanjavur court, which relayed the Nāyaka kings' highly ritualized and strictly patterned daily routines, dominated by sensual scenes of bathing, dressing, eating, and lovemaking.⁷⁰ Such displays are also visible on *kalamkāri* textiles and ivory panels attributed to Nāyaka-period Madurai.⁷¹ Even the Tamil temple document discussed earlier describes Tirumala as a “seeker of pleasures” (*pōkam*).⁷² The Nāyaka kings seemed especially concerned with the public performance of such experiences—a significant part of Tirumala's daily routine was to *show himself* to the public, by way of massive royal processions, accompanied by courtiers, nobles, and soldiers.⁷³ The temple, where a manuscript reports Tirumala's daily distribution of food, was an important space for such performances.⁷⁴

The humanizing and individualized representation of corpulent Nāyaka kings in the Pudu Maṇḍapam bears a marked contrast with bronze statues of earlier



Figure 1.8 Viśvanātha, founder of the Madurai Nāyakas, Pudu Maṇḍapam

Source: Photo by author.



Figure 1.9 Vijayanagara king Kṛṣṇadevarāya, sixteenth century, north *gōpuram*, Naṭarāja temple, Cidambaram

Source: Photo by author.



Figure 1.10 Vijayanagara king Kṛṣṇadevarāya and his consorts, copper, sixteenth century, Pratimā Maṇḍapam, Veṅkateśvara temple, Tirumala hill, Andhra Pradesh

Source: Private collection.

Vijayanagara kings. As Vidya Dehejia wrote of Kṛṣṇadevarāya and his two queens depicted in Tirupati, the Vijayanagara trio appear as “generic idealized aristocratic images that could equally well be portraits of any royal or aristocratic group.”⁷⁵ By contrast, Henry Heras, a Spanish Jesuit priest and historian living in India, proclaimed the sculptures in Tirumala Nāyaka’s pillared hall as “true” and “not idealized” portrayals.⁷⁶ Every Nāyaka portrait in the Pudu Maṇḍapam is unique with physiognomic and sartorial specificity: each statue is not only labeled with the ruler’s name, but also contains distinguishing, readily identifiable idiosyncrasies (in terms of anatomy, facial detail, headgear, attire, and ornament), rendering each king discernible as a particular king, rather than an abstract ‘ruler.’ The distinctive Nāyaka form—large-scale, three-dimensional figures sculpted from monolithic columns lining corridors and filling *maṇḍapams*—departs from prior ones carved in low relief in shallow architectural niches or smaller-than-life-size bronze images installed in halls. Branfoot observes an inherent dynamism in Nāyaka figural columns not present in previous Tamil temples: the individual images of deities

and rulers emerge from the column as “expanding form,” they “spread forwards and sideways, becoming larger and more active until they are visually dominant, hardly appearing to be attached to the column at all.”⁷⁷

The royal genealogical portraiture in Madurai traces the changing relationship between the Nāyaka governors and the waning Vijayanagara empire. In 1565, the Vijayanagara emperor suffered a devastating defeat to the Deccan sultanates in Talikota, and the sacking of the royal capital in Hampi set into motion the gradual disintegration of Vijayanagara power. As indicated by the Madurai Nāyaka origin narratives, the Nāyaka kings were linked inextricably to the Vijayanagara court, and Viśvanātha’s loyalty to Kṛṣṇadevarāya—now, a weakened reigning center produced a basic contradiction in the ideological form of Nāyaka sovereignty. The Pudu Maṇḍapam genealogy illustrates this shift: on the south side of the central nave, four of the first five carvings exhibit early Nāyaka rulers wearing tall conical cloth hats, or *kullāyi*, common in the Vijayanagara court,⁷⁸ signaling their allegiance to the Vijayanagara regime. On the north side, four of the last five carvings exhibit later Nāyaka rulers sporting tight-fitting cloth caps, the customary Nāyaka court headdress, reflecting their political (and vestimentary) distance from the declining authority of the final Araviḍu dynasty of Vijayanagara kings.

Imperial inscriptions chart the transition from subservience to autonomy in Nāyaka statecraft: a 1535 village grant introduces Viśvanātha Nāyaka as the Vijayanagara king’s officer, a 1634 grant states that Tirumala Nāyaka requested the Vijayanagara king to bestow land and provides both dynastic genealogies, and a 1653 land grant records Tirumala Nāyaka’s tour of his kingdom with no Vijayanagara allusion.⁷⁹ As Phillip Wagoner observes of this period of transition in Nāyaka history:

Nayaka power was real, but ideologically dependent, while Vijayanagara’s power, even though remaining ideologically absolute, had all but vanished in any real sense. With the legitimacy of their legitimizing overlord now itself in question, Madurai’s rulers were confronted with a serious dilemma that could be resolved only by means of a thorough transformation of the ideological system on which all political relations were based.... Eventually, the dilemma would be resolved by a simple but drastic solution: with the final collapse of Vijayanagara authority, the rulers of Madura would themselves rise to assume the role of great kings, no longer “looking upward” for legitimation of their power, but now beginning to constitute their authority by “looking downward” to their own subordinates, the chiefly Palaiyakkars, who would themselves be elevated to the status of little kings.⁸⁰

This “looking downward,” the political ascension of the Nāyaka kings, is architecturally represented in the elevated position of the Nāyaka statues in the



Figure 1.11 Mīnākṣī's metal image travels in front of Tirumala Nāyaka's stone image, Pudu Maṇḍapam, 2009

Source: Photo by author.

Pudu Maṇḍapam. In other temples, Tirumala's stone images—attached to the granite column, life-size with erect frontality, stout physique with distended stomach, waistband with dangling dagger, head with a lopsided cloth covering, and hands joined in devotion—are on a low plinth closer to ground level, as seen near the inner sanctum at the Subrahmaṇyam Cave temple in Tirupparankunram and in the Tirumala Nāyaka Maṇḍapam at the Kaḷḷaḷakar temple in Alakar Koyil.⁸¹ In the region surrounding Madurai and beyond, such portraits can serve as visual records of the Nāyaka ruler's patronage when donative inscriptional evidence engraved on temple walls and copperplates is absent.⁸² The royal devotional statuary in the Pudu Maṇḍapam, however, appear on raised platforms, so that their feet rest at the level of worshippers' heads, standing eye-to-eye with the *utsava mūrtis*, the movable metal processional forms of the gods that travel through the hall during religious festivals (Figure 1.11).⁸³ By elevating the corpulent, relatively 'authentic' and recognizable dynastic portraits to the same level as the deities at the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple, the Nāyaka kings transcended their former subordination, and articulated a relationship of parity with the gods themselves.

Notes

1. Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara*, The New Cambridge History of India I.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 46.
2. Cynthia Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 197.
3. David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 51.
4. Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, 51.
5. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 394–396.
6. Vēṭūri Prabhākaraśāstri, ed., *Taṅjāvūri Āndhrarājula Caritra* (Telugu) (Haidarābādu: Maṇimaṅjari Pracuraṇa, Vēṭūri Prabhākaraśāstri Memōriyal Ṭraṣṭ, 1984). See William Taylor, “History of the Carnataca Governors Who Ruled over the Pandiya Mandalam,” in *Oriental Historical Manuscripts, in the Tamil Language*, vol. II, ed. and trans. William Taylor (Madras: Printed and Published by Charles Josiah Taylor, 1835), 3–49, and R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayakas of Madura*, introduction by S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1924), 34–35.
7. Taylor, “History of the Carnataca Governors Who Ruled over the Pandiya Mandalam,” 3–15; V. Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *The Indian Antiquary, A Journal of Oriental Research* 43 (September 1914): 187–192, 191–192; V. Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *The Indian Antiquary, A Journal of Oriental Research* 43 (December 1914): 253–262, 253–257.
8. Pāṇḍyas, Cōlas, and Cēras were three royal lineages of south India known as the Mūvēntar, or ‘Three Crowned Kings.’
9. Epigraphical data of Nāgama Nāyaka is meager. One 1483 inscription written in Tamil located in Tirukachur (Chingleput), and under Narasiṅgarāya’s rule, states a private individual founded a village for the merit of the king and Nāgama Nāyaka, the foremost of his servants. It also mentions taxing the village’s *kaikkōlars* and other weavers as well as several professional classes. See *Annual Report on Epigraphy 1909–1910* (Madras: Government of Madras Public Department, G.O. No. 665, July 28, 1910), 27: 318 of 1909. Another example is a 1482 inscription from Tittakkudi (Vriddhacalam, South Arcot), which states that Nāgama’s agent settled a dispute between two factions. See *Annual Report on Epigraphy 1902–1903* (Madras: Government of Madras Public Department, G.O., etc., Nos. 655–656, July 24, 1903), 20: 6 of 1903.
10. It is possible that Cantiracēkaraṇ did not die but was merely incompetent or had died but was not the last of his dynasty, that Kṛṣṇadevarāya was not the presiding monarch in Hampi when Viśvanātha was sent to Madurai, and 1529

- was not the inaugural year of the Nāyaka dynasty. See Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura” (December 1914): 255, 257–260. This book follows Aiyar who assigns a 1529 date. See Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 39–48.
11. Lennart Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara: Court Politics in Early Modern South India* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022), 78–79.
 12. Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara*, 75–81.
 13. Taylor, “History of the Carnataca Governors Who Ruled over the Pandiya Mandalam,” 5.
 14. Taylor, “History of the Carnataca Governors Who Ruled over the Pandiya Mandalam,” 15–23.
 15. Christopher Chekuri, “A ‘Share’ in the ‘World Empire’: Nayamkara as Sovereignty in Practice at Vijayanagara, 1480–1580,” *Social Scientist* 40, no. 1/2 (January–February 2012): 41–67.
 16. V. Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *The Indian Antiquary, A Journal of Oriental Research* 44 (April 1915): 69–73, 69–70, 71–73; Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 58–62. Other spellings include *poligar*, *polygar*, and *palegar*. The *pālaiyam* system of shared sovereignty may have originated with Pratāparudra, the Kākatīya ruler in the Andhra area from 1289 to 1323 CE, who similarly divided his kingdom into a political network of seventy-plus subordinates. See Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 201–202.
 17. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 258–259.
 18. Chekuri, “A ‘Share’ in the ‘World Empire,’” 61.
 19. Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 108.
 20. Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 103.
 21. Horace Hayman Wilson, “Historical Sketch of the Kingdom of Pāndya, Southern Peninsula of India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3, no. 2 (1836): 199–242, 230. Wilson describes Tirumala’s reign as “a period of chronological certainty” in his historical account of the Nāyakas. Temple documents, not epigraphical evidence or Jesuit accounts, support a February 19, 1623, accession date. See Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 110–113.
 22. M. Arokiaswami, *The Kongu Country: Being the History of the Modern Districts of Coimbatore and Salem from the Earliest Times to the Coming of the British* (Madras: University of Madras, 1956), 336–338.
 23. William Taylor, “The Accounts of Tirumali-Naicker, and of His Buildings (As Extracted, for Information, from Written Authorities),” in *Oriental Historical Manuscripts, in the Tamil Language*, vol. II, ed. and trans. William Taylor

- (Madras: Printed and Published by Charles Josiah Taylor, 1835), 147–155, 147–149. Taylor extracted from *Mṛtyunḥaya MSS* of the Mackenzie Collection. See William Taylor, “Carnataca Dynasty, sec. 9,” in *Oriental Historical Manuscripts, in the Tamil Language*, vol. II, ed. and trans. William Taylor (Madras: Printed and Published by Charles Josiah Taylor, 1835), 146.
24. Taylor, “The Accounts of Tirumali-Naicker, and of His Buildings,” 149.
 25. *Maturaittala-Varalāru*, in *Tiruvālavāyutaḥyārkōyil Tiruppanimālai* (Tamil), Centamiḥ Piracuram-27, ed. Po. Pāṇṭitturaittēvar (Maturai: Maturait Tamilccaṅka Muttirācālai, 1929 [1909]), 3–13, 4–5 (my translation).
 26. Fifty-sixth year of the Jupiter cycle.
 27. Type of gold currency (its exact value is unknown) and worship.
 28. Local incarnation of Viṣṇu near Madurai and Tamil month from mid-April to mid-May.
 29. Beholding of a deity and receiving a blessing, pouring libations on the image of the deity being worshipped, and food offered to the Hindu deity as part of worship.
 30. Tamil month from mid-February to mid-March and thirty-second year of the Jupiter cycle.
 31. “No. 34. Kuniyur Plates of the Time of Venkata II,” in *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India*, vol. III—1894–1895, ed. E. Hultzshe (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1894–1895), 236–258; Robert Sewell, *Archaeological Survey of Southern India, Lists of the Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras: Compiled under the Orders of Government*, vol. I (Madras: E. Keys, at the Government Press, 1882), 309, 203. J. H. Nelson states that Tirumala frequently granted large land grants to support temples without “materially impairing his resources.” See J. H. Nelson, *The Madura Country: A Manual Compiled by Order of the Madras Government* (Madras: Asylum Press by William Thomas, 1868), Part III: 152–153.
 32. Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, “The Śrī Mīṇākṣī-Sundarēsvāra Temple: Worship and Endowments in South India, 1833 to 1925” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1976), 261–262. See chapter 5 for an extensive discussion on temple endowments at the Mīnākṣī-Sundarēsvāra complex. Endowments originally established by the Nāyaka kings are now controlled by the Tamil Nadu government’s Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR & CE) Department, which appoints the temple’s executive officer, who heads the *dēvastānam* (temple’s administration). While funds are controlled by this administration, the concept of separate endowments still persists.
 33. Breckenridge, “The Śrī Mīṇākṣī-Sundarēsvāra Temple,” 273–277. In addition to designating economic resources through cash or land, the donor also specified and sponsored particular rituals; a discussion of this component of temple endowment appears in chapter 2.

34. Nelson, *The Madura Country*, Part III: 149–153. Nelson draws from missionary accounts. Tirumala inherited the Telugu warrior conception of kingdom from Viśvanātha. Taylor lists the bastions under Tirumala’s rule. See William Taylor, “A List of the Seventy-Two Palliyams Appointed to Guard the Bastions of the Pandion Capital,” in *Oriental Historical Manuscripts, in the Tamil Language*, vol. II, ed. and trans. William Taylor (Madras: Printed and Published by Charles Josiah Taylor, 1835), 161–168.
35. A. Sauliere, “The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks,” part 1, *Journal of Indian History* 42, no. 1 (April 1964): 89–105, 91.
36. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 323–324. The Sētopatis, prominent feudal chieftains, or *pāḷaiyakkāvars*, in Ramnad under the Madurai Nāyakas, established similar forms of patronage with pearling specialists. See James Hornell, *Report to the Government of Madras on the Indian Pearl Fisheries in the Gulf of Mannar* (Madras: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, 1905), 11.
37. Jean-François Hupré, “The Royal Jewels of Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai (1623–1659),” in *The Jewels of India*, ed. Susan Stronge (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1995), 63–80, 68–69, 74–75, 78.
38. K. Rajaram, *History of Thirumalai Nayak* (Madurai: Ennes Publications, 1982), 58; D. Devakunjari, *Madurai through the Ages: From the Earliest Times to 1801 A.D.* (Madras: Society for Archaeological, Historical, and Epigraphical Research, 1979), 258–259 and four images of temple crowns and ornaments between pages 224–225.
39. A. V. Jeychandrun, *The Madurai Temple Complex (With Special Reference to Literature and Legends)* (Madurai: Publications Division, Madurai Kamaraj University, 1985), 32–33.
40. Tā. Kurucāmi, “Maturai Tirukkōyilil Tirumuṟai Viṇṇappikkum Varalāru,” in *Maturait Tirukkōyil: Tirukkuṭa Nanṇīrāṭṭup Peruvilā Malar (The Madurai Temple Complex: Kumbabbisbeka Souvenir)* (Tamil and English), ed. A. V. Jeychandrun (Maturai: Aruḷmiku Miṇāṭci Cuntarēcuvavar Tirukkōyil, 1974), 267–270, 268.
41. David Dean Shulman, *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90–91.
42. In the poem, the spelling of Tirumala Nāyaka appears as Tirumalai Nāyakkar, which is an alternate pronunciation of the ruler’s name.
43. This verse alludes to several stories that deal with the sea/ocean. In Kampan’s twelfth-century *Rāmāyaṇa*, the demon king Rāvaṇa kidnaps Sītā and takes her to his island kingdom of Lanka. Rāma, Sītā’s husband and the king of Ayodhya, prays to Varuṇa to permit him and his army to cross the ocean (in what is now

Rameswaram, about 200 kilometers southeast of Madurai) so he can rescue his wife. When days pass with no response, Rāma unleashes his weapons, which burn the sea and its creatures, until the sea god allows a bridge to be built. See “Placating Varuna,” in *Kamba Ramayanam: Yuddha Kandam Part-1*, trans. P. S. Sundaram (Tamil Nadu: Department of Tamil Development-Culture, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1994), 97–110. Also in Kampan’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, *rishi* Agastya drank the ocean so that the Dēvas could kill the Asuras, who lay hidden within it. See verse 37. 2758 of “Paṭalam Three: Agastya,” in *The Forest Book of the Rāmāyaṇa of Kampan*, trans. George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 62–73, 68. In Parañcōti Muñivar’s seventeenth-century *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam* I.13, the fourth Pāṇḍyan king, Ukkira, throws his spear at Varuṇa sent by an envious Indra, and prevents the sea god from destroying Madurai with its torrential rain. In *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam* 1.14, the lack of rains causes the Tamil country to suffer. See R. K. K. Rajarajan and Jeyapriya Rajarajan, *Mīnākṣī-Sundaresvara: Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam in Letters, Design and Art* (Delhi: Sharada Publishing House, 2013), 25. In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Satyavrata, the king of Drāviḍa performs water rites in the Kṛtamālā river (identified as a tributary of Madurai’s Vaigai river) when a small fish swims into his cupped palms and pleads for its life. The king places the fish first in a water vessel, and later in a pond, then a lake, and finally the sea, as it grows larger and larger. The fish reveals himself to be god Viṣṇu and instructs the king to build a boat to house all flora and fauna to save them from an impending deluge. See “The Matsya Avatara,” in Ramesh Menon, *Bhagavata Purana* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2007), 580–586. In Aruṇakirinātar’s fifteenth-century *Vēl Viruttam*, the sharp spear (*vēl*) of Siva’s son Murukaṇ (Subrahmaṇya) sucks all the ocean’s waters and dries its beds so Gaṅgā and other rivers could once again flow after a demon (transformed into a mango tree and positioned himself in the middle of the ocean) had obstructed their journey. See verse 1 of Aruṇakirinātar, *Arunakirinātar Aruḷiya Vēl Viruttam, Mayil Viruttam, Cēval Viruttam* (Tamil), Commentary by Va. Cu. Ceṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai (Ceṅṇai: Tirunelvēlit Teṅṅintiya Caivacittānta Nūṛpatippuk Kaḷakam, 1971), 2.

44. Belleric myrobalan.

45. *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai* (Tamil), Centamiḷp Piracuram-27, ed. Po. Pāṇṭitturaittēvar (Maturai: Maturait Tamilccaṅka Muttirācālai, 1929 [1909]), 22–25 (my translation).

46. *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai*: v. 49, pp. 13–14.

47. *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai*: vv. 51–55, pp. 14–15.

48. The Vijayanagara empire’s declining power after the Deccan sultanates’ victory in the 1565 Battle of Talikota left the southern peninsula in a confused state

and provided an opportunity for Nāyaka ambitions. Tirumala augmented his army to improve his kingdom's defense and to remove Vijayanagara's hold, as the empire could no longer provide the security Tirumala needed from invading armies. He accepted the emperor in name only, but withheld the requested tribute. So Śrīraṅga III (r. 1642–1652 CE), the last Vijayanagara king, marched southwards to end Tirumala's independence around 1642. Tirumala formed an alliance with the Senji and Tanjavur Nāyakas. When Senji fort was seized and the panic-stricken Tanjavur Nāyaka betrayed his allies, Tirumala sought the Golconda sultanate's assistance. Golconda troops defeated the enemy by attacking Vellore, a Vijayanagara capital, but they also turned on the Senji Nāyakas. Tirumala, now aligned with the Bijapur sultanate, saved Senji fort temporarily and also defeated Śrīraṅga III and Kaṅṭhīrava Narasa Rāja, the Mysore king, who provided aid and asylum to the Vijayanagara emperor. Tirumala preserved his realm, but he isolated himself from Senji and Tanjavur and tolerated a hefty tribute to the Bijapur sultan.

Tirumala Nāyaka also faced rebellions from neighboring feudatories. In the early years of his reign, Tirumala encountered an invasion by Chāmarāja Uḍaiyār of Mysore and engaged in a counterattack of Mysore with the help of his able general Rāmappaia. In 1634, Tirumala ordered the invasion of Travancore that forced its chiefs to pay a tribute and reduced the Travancore king as a vassal and subordinate of Madurai. Towards the end of his reign, Tirumala endured another conflict with Mysore: Kaṅṭhīrava Narasa Rāja, who sought revenge for his defeat by capturing Coimbatore, which threatened Madurai's safety. Tirumala's devoted vassal, Raghunātha Sētupati of Ramnad, helped to vanquish the Mysorean army: for the Sētupati's efforts, Tirumala honored him with gifts and the title of Tirumalai Sētupati, and he terminated the tribute payment. The Sētupati's loyalty stemmed from Tirumala's earlier help in the 1630s that installed his own nominee and Raghunātha's relative to the Ramnad throne rather than the rival aspirant. During that dispute with the wayward chieftain, Tirumala relied on support from the Portuguese. Sauliere, "The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks," part I; A. Sauliere, "The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks," part 2, *Journal of Indian History* 44, no. 1 (April 1966): 163–180; V. Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *The Indian Antiquary, A Journal of Oriental Research* 45 (October 1916): 161–171, 166–171, (November 1916): 178–188, (December 1916): 196–204, 196–202.

Taylor's "History of the Carnataca Governors Who Ruled over the Pandiya Mandalam" fixates on this politically unstable time for Tirumala. After two sentences about Tirumala's building projects, the part of the text devoted to Tirumala delves on the rebellious Sētupati, the warring Mysorean ruler, and the loyal Sētupati from Ramnad whom Tirumala honored for his indispensable

military service. Furthermore, while Viśvanātha's exploits fill five sections in the chronicle (he appears as a larger-than-life figure: his miraculous birth, extraordinary feats, and physical exploits helped him establish a dynasty in Madurai), Tirumala requires only one, suggesting that he pales in comparison to his heroic forefather. See Taylor, "History of the Carnataca Governors Who Ruled over the Pandiya Mandalam," 29–33.

49. Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 107.
50. Caleb Simmons, *Devotional Sovereignty: Kingship and Religion in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 18. Simmons observes a turn to "devotion" in his study of Kṛṣṇarāja III (r. 1799–1868 CE) who succumbed to British control: stripped of his political power as administrative and revenue collection transferred to the colonial state, the Wodeyar king paid increased attention to Mysore's centers of religious power. See Simmons, *Devotional Sovereignty: Kingship and Religion in India*, 4–5, 17–20, 133–167.
51. Noboru Karashima, "Nāyakas as Lease-Holders of Temple Lands," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 19, no. 2 (1976): 227–232, 232.
52. For a list of temple projects and their donors, see Sri K. Palaniappan, *The Great Temple of Madurai* (Madurai: Sri Meenakshisundareswarar Temple Renovation Committee, 1970 [1963]), 70–78, and Rajarajan and Rajarajan, *Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara*, 115–119. These lists demonstrate that Tirumala's predecessors Kṛṣṇappa (r. 1564–1572 CE) and Vīrappa (r. 1572–1595 CE) contributed towards temple improvements more than any other Nāyaka and that wealthy patrons also supported the Madurai temple. For descriptions of the various temple components, see Jeyechandrun, *The Madurai Temple Complex*, 164–188, and Devakunjari, *Madurai through the Ages*, 220–250.
53. George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India*, *The New Cambridge History of India* I.6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 104.
54. A. Ki. Parantāmaṅār, *Tirumala Nāyakkar Varalāru* (Tamil) (Ceṅṅai: A. Cō. Cantāṇa Ilakkumi, 1995), 96.
55. Taylor, "The Accounts of Tirumali-Naicker, and of His Buildings," 149–151.
56. Crispin Branfoot, *Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple* (London: The Society for South Asian Studies, 2007), 252.
57. Branfoot, *Gods on the Move*, 138. For a general discussion about the Tamil Drāviḍa tradition in south Indian temple architecture, see G. Jouveau-Dubreuil, *Dravidian Architecture*, ed. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar (Madras: S.P.C.K. Press, 1917). Briefly, the main components are: *vimāṇam*, or shrine portion that houses the deity and its superstructure, *gōpuram*, or gateway with pyramidal tower, and *maṅḍapam*, or columned hall either attached or detached for festival celebrations.
58. H. H. Cole, "Appendix U: Great Temple to Siva and His Consort at Madura," in *Preservation of National Monuments. Third Report of the Curator of*

Ancient Monuments in India, for the Year 1883–84 (Calcutta: Printed by the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1885), cliii–clvii, clvii; Devakunjari, *Madurai through the Ages*, 244; Crispin Branfoot, “Tirumala Nayaka’s ‘New Hall’ and the European Study of the South Indian Temple,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 11, no. 2 (2001): 191–217, 193.

59. A discussion about commerce in the Pudu Maṇḍapam follows in chapter 7.
60. Discussed in chapter 2.
61. Although the statues of the first ten Madurai Nāyakas are not inscribed, modern-day, painted labels installed above each portrait by temple authorities in the mid-twentieth century provide some identification: (a) Viśvanātha Nāyakkar, (b) Kumāra Kṛṣṇappa Nāyakkar, (c) Pēriya Vīrappa Nāyakkar, (d) Kṛṣṇa Vīrappa Nāyakkar (peeled paint), (e) Liṅgama Nāyakkar, (f) Kṛṣṇappa Nāyakkar, (g) Kastūri Raṅgappa Nāyakkar, (h) Muttu Kṛṣṇappa Nāyakkar, (i) Muttu Vīrappa Nāyakkar, and (j). Tirumalai Nāyakkar. These names (as well as the number of rulers) do not completely line up with lists in William Taylor’s 1835 *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, J. H. Nelson’s 1868 *Madura Country*, Robert Sewell’s 1884 *Lists of Inscriptions, and Sketch of the Dynasties of Southern India*, R. Sathyanatha Aiyar’s 1924 *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, H. Heras’ 1925 “The Statues of the Nayaks of Madurai in the Pudu Mandapam,” A. V. Jeyechandrun’s 1985 *The Madurai Temple Complex*, or temple manuscripts, *Stāṇīkar Varalāru* (a historical account of the Madurai temple priests) and *Sthala Varalāru* (an account of the temple’s political history). The disparity in the genealogy reflects the paucity of inscriptions from the Nāyaka period that has contributed to inconsistencies in the historical account, making definitive identities about the Madurai Nāyakas in the Pudu Maṇḍapam challenging, except for the last figure, Tirumala.
62. Branfoot, *Gods on the Move*, 165–242.
63. Hupré, “The Royal Jewels of Tirumala Nāyaka,” 68.
64. It is possible that the first ruler directly opposite Tirumala is not Viśvanātha, as is commonly believed and labeled as such, but Nāgama, Viśvanātha’s father. Jeyechandrun cites the palm-leaf manuscript from the Vētanārāyaṇa Perumāḷ temple, Tirunarayanapuram (Tiruchirappalli district), that mentions the custom of beginning the Madurai Nāyaka dynasty with Nāgama, the founder’s father. See Jeyechandrun, *The Madurai Temple Complex*, 309–310. This view was first proposed in 1954. See R. Sathianathaier, *Tamīlaham in the 17th Century* (Madras: University of Madras, 1956), 23–25. Lending credence to this interpretation is the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology’s 2007 discovery of engravings of two Nāyaka rulers on two pillars at the Nellaiyappar temple in Tirunelveli. The inscription above identifies them as Nāgama Nāyaka and Viśvanātha Nāyaka. See “Images of Nayak Kings Found in Sri Nellaiyappar

Temple,” *The Hindu*, June 6, 2007, <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/Images-of-Nayak-kings-found-in-Sri-Nellaiyappar-Temple/article14773856.ece>, accessed December 14, 2021. Furthermore, the first portrait does not wear the tall conical *kullāyi*, a common Vijayanagara-period headdress, unlike the second through fifth Nāyaka portraits, conveying themselves as the Vijayanagara king’s loyal servants, which Nāgama supposedly was not.

65. Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 170. G. S. Ghurye claims that the Madurai and Tanjavur Nāyakas were Balijas. See *Caste and Race in India* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1932), 96. Balijas are an agricultural/merchant/trading/warrior caste primarily from the Andhra region.
66. Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 47.
67. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 101–102.
68. Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 80–81.
69. Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98–99.
70. See the discussion of *abhyudayamu* in chapter 3 of Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 57–112.
71. For example, “Painted Canvas Depicting a Court Scene,” cotton (painted and resist dyed) textile, 155 x 202 centimeters, seventeenth century, MA 5678 (AEDTA 2221) Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris, <https://www.guimet.fr/collections/textiles/toile-peinte-representant-une-scene-de-cour/>, accessed December 14, 2021, and “Panel from a Box,” ivory plaque, 15.2 x 31.4 centimeters), seventeenth century, 80.171 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, <https://www.vmfa.museum/piction/6027262-12968824/>, accessed December 14, 2021. The Coromandel Coast was a major textile production center.
72. *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkkōyil Tiruppanimālai*: v. 85, p. 24.
73. Jesuit missionary Baltasar Da Costa, translated from Portuguese in Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 87, states:

Almost every day he appears on the terrace surrounded by his courtiers, while in front of them his elephants are drawn up in two rows, the space between them being occupied by three or four hundred Turks (*Turcos*), who form his bodyguard. When he comes out of the fortress to visit some pagodes, as he is wont to do on days of festivals, he is surrounded with great pomp. Sometimes he rides in a palanquin, at other times he mounts an enormous elephant.... Next come the elephants in a long file, mounted by his nobles and chief captains, preceded by the arms and insignia of the Nāyaka. Then the cavalry and the rest of the troops follow.

74. *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyārkōyil Tiruppaṇimālai*: v. 83, p. 24.
75. Vidya Dehejia, "The Very Idea of a Portrait," *ARS Orientalis* 38 (1998): 40–48, 45. An inscription in Telugu on each figure's shoulders identifies them as Kṛṣṇadevarāya and his two queens, Tirumaladēvi and Ciṅṅadēvi. See T. G. Aravamuthan, *Portrait Sculpture in South India*, foreword by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (London: The India Society, 1931), 46–47.
76. Henry Heras, "The Statues of the Nayaks of Madura in the Pudu Mantapam," *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* 15, no. 3 (April 1925): 209–218, 209. Heras' paper is perhaps the earliest analysis of the hall's Nāyaka lineage.
77. Crispin Branfoot, "'Expanding Form': The Architectural Sculpture of the South Indian Temple ca. 1500–1700," *Artibus Asiae* 62, no. 2 (2002): 189–245, 201.
78. Phillip B. Wagoner, "'Sultan among Hindu Kings': Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (November 1996): 851–880. One cap has a slight forward projection.
79. *Annual Report on Epigraphy 1908–1909* (Madras: Government of Madras Public Department, G.O. No. 538, July 28, 1909), 17: 113 of 1908, explanation on p. 118; Hultzshe, *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 236–258; Robert Sewell, *Archaeological Survey of Southern India, List of Inscriptions, and Sketch of the Dynasties of Southern India. Compiled under the Orders of Government*, vol. II (Madras: E. Keys, at the Government Press, 1884), 14: no. 92. For an analysis of this shift in inscriptions, see Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 45–47.
80. Phillip B. Wagoner, *Tidings of the King: A Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of the Rāyavācakamu* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 30.
81. A devotional statuette of Tirumala Nāyaka accompanied by his queen is located inside the Kaḷḷaḷakar temple, Alakar Koyil; while elevated with a modern-day label, it is not life size and was most likely added to the original structure by Tirumala for whom the temple was important.
82. Anna Lise Seastrand, "Text, Image, and Portrait in Early Modern South Indian Murals," *Artibus Asiae* 78, no. 1 (2018): 29–60, 33–35. See also Crispin Branfoot, "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," *South Asian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2000): 11–36, 12–23.
83. According to Crispin Branfoot, bases for the Pudu Maṅḍapam's family portraits measure between 145 to 163 centimeters in height. As a comparison, the bases for the Senji Nāyaka genealogical portraits in the Bhū Varāha temple, Srimushnam, are about 1 meter (100 centimeters) high. See Crispin Branfoot, "Dynastic Genealogies, Portraiture, and the Place of the Past in Early Modern South India," *Artibus Asiae* 72, no. 2 (2012): 323–376, 326, 331.