

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ  
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 250

## A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Brihadisvara Temple, Thanjavur

Location : State of Tamil Nadu

State Party : India

Date : October 15, 1982

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the inclusion of the proposed cultural property on the World Heritage List be deferred.

## C) JUSTIFICATION

The nomination concerning the Brihadisvara in Tanjore (Thanjavur) was expected: after the rock-cut and free standing monuments of Mahabalipuram, included in 1984 and which bear witness to the incomparable Pallava civilization (7th-8th centuries), it seemed fitting to include on the World Heritage List a sanctuary which illustrates the Chola civilization (10th-13th centuries). The Cholas were the second great historic dynasty of the Tamil Nadu, the Tamil country, which was the home of the ancient Dravidian culture whose influence was so considerable in the whole of South East Asia.

Rather than the immense religious complex on Srirangam Island in Trichinopoly (Tiruchirapalli), where the buildings from the Chola period are lost in the disorderly mass of later additions, the Indian government has rightly chosen an early monument which is both homogeneous and well dated and without doubt the most representative of Chola art. The great temple of Tanjore was built in a few years, from 1003 to 1010, during the reign of the great king Rajaraja (985-1014), true founder of the Chola Empire which spread throughout the whole of southern India, part of Ceylon and the Maldiva and Lacadive archipelagos. Richly endowed by the sovereign, the sanctuary, which also bears his name - it is sometimes called Rajarajesvaram - had a permanent staff of several hundred priests, four hundred devadasi (sacred dancers), and fifty-seven musicians, according to inscriptions and chronicles. The Brihadisvara's income in gold, silver and precious stones during the Chola period has been precisely evaluated. These vast resources were efficiently managed and provided not only for the upkeep and improvement of the buildings (which was continued up to the 17th century) but also for real investments to be made. The temple lent money, at

rates which could sometimes reach 30%, to ship owners, village assemblies, craft guilds.

Dedicated to Shiva, the Brihadisvara stands to the south west of the historic city. A first rectangular surrounding wall, measuring 270 x 140 m, marks the outer boundary. This is dominated on the east side by a 30 m high gopuram. A second wall, with its entrance in line with the first and crowned with a smaller gopuram decorated with two dvarapala (gate keepers), surrounds a colonnaded inner courtyard. The temple itself, built of granite blocks and, in part, of bricks, is oriented east-west like the courtyard.

The layout takes its inspiration from the Pallava tradition, and especially from the layout of the Shore Temple in Mahabalipuram. There is a succession of halls and vestibules (mukta-mandapa, maha-mandapa, ardha-mandapa) leading to the shrine, which is crowned with a thirteen storey pyramidal tower.

This vimana, which is 60.95 m high and, in turn, crowned with a bulb-shaped monolith weighing an estimated 70 tons, is rightly considered to be one of the architectural masterpieces of India. The intricately carved decorations covering the outer walls of the temple are continued inside by the well known representations of the one hundred and eight poses of the Bharata-Natyam, the classical Indian dance, mimed by Shiva in person. The iconographic program, inspired by Shiva mythology, also consists of a series of murals from the Chola period which decorate the corridor around the shrine. The famous series depicting Rajaraja in conversation with his guru, Karuvur Devar, gives a good idea of the graphic quality, the delicacy of the colors, the expressiveness of the characters which make this sequence one of the great masterpieces of Chola art.

Inside the inner courtyard, the Nandi-mandapa, a pavillion which houses the colossal statue of Nandi, the bull mounted by Shiva (vahana), is of very great interest. The temple of Devi, built in the 13th century by the Pandya king Konerinmaikondan, the temple of Subrahmanya, built and covered with carvings in the 17th century by a Nayak king of Madurai, together with additional temples and chapels of a later date (temple of Ganesh, mandapa of Nataraja) complete this remarkable religious architectural group.

While it is favorable to the inclusion of the Brihadisvara temple on the World Heritage List, ICOMOS feels it would be better to defer this inclusion until more details have been provided.

Having received no information as to the exact limits of the nominated property, ICOMOS would be interested to know what its exact area is. Does the nomination concern the 14.75 hectares delimited by a brick wall and known as Sivaganga Little Fort? Or the first temple enclosure? Or the second enclosure? Or the temple itself? Since the proposition only contains very old plans with insufficient legends, no answer can be found to these questions.

Furthermore, the nomination, which was submitted in 1987, was written on 20th April 1982. At that time mention was made both of projects to repair the surrounding walls and of desirable measures for the improvement of the environment. The Committee would like to know, with the help of a complete and updated nomination together with recent photos, what has become of these five year-old projects and what conservation problems are facing the temple of Brihadisvara in Tanjore today.

ICOMOS, May 1987

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Nomination : Brihadisvara Temple, Thanjavur

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State Party : India

Date : October 15, 1982

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on condition that the Indian authorities provide the exact boundaries of the site.

## C) JUSTIFICATION

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While it is favorable to the inclusion of the Brihadisvara temple on the World Heritage List, ICOMOS wishes to receive complementary indications.

Having received no information as to the exact limits of the nominated property, ICOMOS would be interested to know what its exact area is. Does the nomination concern the 14.75 hectares delimited by a brick wall and known as Sivaganga Little Fort? Or the first temple enclosure? Or the second enclosure? Or the temple itself? Since the proposition only contains very old plans with insufficient legends, no answer can be found to these questions.

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ICOMOS, October 1987

# THANJAVUR: OLD FORTIFICATIONS & SRI RAJARAJESVARAM

