



Chola Dynasty

For Prelims: Art and Craftmanship in Chola Era, Cholas Sculpture.

For Mains: Chola Dynasty.

Why in News?

The Tamil Nadu Idol Wing CID has initiated steps to **retrieve six Chola-era bronze idols**, stolen from the Nareswara Sivan temple, Tamil Nadu back in the 1960s, and currently kept at various museums in the United States.

- The idols were successfully traced to the US recently with the help of the images available with the Indo-French Institute, Pondicherry, which had documented nine bronze sculptures in 1956. Of them, seven were stolen five decades ago.
- The institute had provided images of antique Panchaloha idols of **Tripuranthakam, Thirupurasundari, Nataraja, Dakshinamurthy Veenadhara, and Saint Sundarar** with his wife Paravai Natchiyaar.

How was the Medieval Chola Dynasty?

- **About:**
 - The **Cholas (8th-12th century AD)** are remembered as **one of the longest ruling dynasties in the southern regions of India.**
 - The reign of the Cholas began in the **9th century when they defeated the Pallavas** to come into power. This rule stretched **over for over five long centuries until the 13th century.**
 - The **medieval period** was the era of absolute power and development for the Cholas. This is when kings like Aditya I and Parantaka I.
 - From here Rajaraj Chola and Rajendra Chola further expanded the kingdom into the Tamil region. Later **Kulothunga Chola took over Kalinga to establish a strong rule.**
 - This magnificence lasted **until the arrival of the Pandyas** in the early 13th century.

▪ **Prominent Monarchs:**

- **Vijayalaya:** The Chola Empire was founded by **Vijayalaya**. He took over the Tanjore kingdom in the 8th century and led to the rise of the mighty Cholas by defeating the Pallavas.
- **Aditya I:** Aditya I succeeded **Vijayalaya to become the ruler of the empire**. He defeated king **Aparajita and the empire gained massive power** under his reign. He **conquered the Pandya Kings** along with the Vadumbas and established control over the Pallavas' power in the region.
- **Rajendra Chola:** He succeeded the **mighty Rajaraja Chola**. Rajendra I was the first to **venture to the banks of Ganges**. He was popularly called the **Victor of the Ganges**. This period is referred to as the **golden age of the Cholas**. After his rule, the kingdom witnessed a widespread downfall.

▪ **Administration And Governance:**

- During the governance by the Cholas, the **entire southern region was brought under the umbrella of a single governing force**. The Cholas ruled in a sustained Monarchy.
- The massive kingdom was divided **into provinces which were known as mandalams**.
- Separate governors were held in charge for each mandalam.
- These were further divided into **districts called nadus which consisted of tehsils**.
- The system of rule was such that **each village acted as a self-governing unit** during the era of the Cholas. The Cholas were ardent **patrons of art, poetry, literature and drama**, the administration was seen **investing in the construction of several temples** and complexes with sculptures and paintings.
- The king remained the central authority who **would make the major decisions and carry out the governance**.

▪ **Architecture:**

- Chola architecture (871-1173 AD) was the epitome of the Dravida style of temple architecture.
- They produced some of the most grandeur temples in medieval India.
- Chola temples like Brihadeshwara temple, Rajarajeshwara temple, Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple took Dravidian architecture to newer heights. Temple architecture continued to flourish even after Cholas.

What are the Key Points of Cholas Sculpture?

- An important piece of **Chola sculpture was the sculpture of Nataraja in the Tandava dance posture**.
 - Though the earliest known Nataraja sculpture, which has been excavated at **Ravana phadi cave at Aihole, was made during the early Chalukya rule**, the sculpture reached its peak under the Cholas.
- The later phase of Chola art, in the 13th century, is **illustrated by the sculpture showing Bhudevi, or the earth goddess** as the younger consort of Vishnu. She stands in a gracefully flexed attitude on a lotus base holding a lily in her right hand, while the left arm hangs along her side.
- Chola bronze images are considered amongst the finest in the world.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following events in the history of India: (2020)

1. Rise of Pratiharas under King Bhoja
2. Establishment of Pallava power under Mahendravarman-I
3. Establishment of Chola power by Parantaka-I
4. Pala dynasty founded by Gopala

What is the correct chronological order of the above events, starting from the earliest time?

- (a) 2 - 1 - 4 - 3
(b) 3 - 1 - 4 - 2
(c) 2 - 4 - 1 - 3
(d) 3 - 4 - 1 - 2

Ans: (c)

Exp:

- The Pallava dynasty existed from 275 CE to 897 CE, ruling a portion of southern India. Pallavas became a major power during the reign of Mahendravarman I (571–630 CE) who ruled the Southern portion of present day Andhra region and Northern regions of what forms present-day Tamil Nadu.
- Pala dynasty reigned in Bihar and Bengal from the 8th to the 12th century. Its founder, Gopala (750-770 CE), was a local chieftain who rose to power in the mid-eighth century during a period of anarchy.
- From the middle of the eighth century the dominance over Madhyadesha became the ambition of two particular clans among tribal people in Rajasthan, known as the Gurjara and the Pratihara. According to a contemporary Arab account from 851 CE, Raja Mihir Bhoja (840–851 CE), the greatest of the Pratiharakings, was among the princes of India that battled against the Arab invaders.
- The **Chola Empire was founded by Vijayalaya**. The reign of the Cholas began in the 9th century when they defeated the Pallavas to come into power. The medieval period was the era of absolute power and development for the Cholas. **Parantaka I (reigned 907-953) laid the foundation of the kingdom**. He took the northern boundary up to Nellore (Andhra Pradesh), where his advance was stopped by a defeat at the hands of the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III. Parantaka was more successful in the south, where he defeated both the Pandyas and the Ganga

Mains

Q. Chola architecture represents a high watermark in the evolution of temple architecture. Discuss. (2013)

Source: IE