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The *Manigramam* Guild: Epigraphical Development, Temple Patronage, and Economic Integration

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Abstract: The Chola temples are being recast by new narratives in global maritime history not merely as religious monuments, but as the monumental core of a sophisticated Indian Ocean world defined by long-distance trade and cultural fusion. These structures are positioned in this paper not merely as religious monuments, but as the ultimate destination of capital generated by transoceanic networks, which forcibly integrates South India into the broader story of maritime-driven civilization. Although well-established are the art historical and political narratives of these structures, the critical economic pathways that enabled their construction remain underexplored. It is worth stating that a decisive financial conduit was acted upon by the *Manigramam* merchant guild, with capital accumulated from Indian Ocean maritime trade methodically transformed into the physical and institutional fabric of Chola temple complexes. Moving beyond a simplistic patronage model, the precise mechanisms of this transformation are interrogated in this study. It is demonstrated how the profits from the trade in luxury commodities like spices, textiles, and precious stones were mobilized through direct monetary endowments, land grants, and the sponsorship of specific architectural components by the guild.

This analysis proposes the *Manigramam* were not merely donors but strategic investors in a “sacred economy,” where social prestige, political favour, and commercial privileges were secured through their contributions within the Chola imperium.

Keywords: Maritime, Trade, Chola Kingdom, Guilds, Economy.

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Introduction

The Chola Empire (c. 9th-13th centuries CE) is represented as a formative period in South Indian history, characterized not merely by political expansion but by the emergence of complex state structures, unprecedented artistic and architectural achievements, and the strategic integration of South India into extensive maritime trade networks that were spanned by the Indian Ocean

from the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea. This era is witnessed as the flourishing of a sophisticated economic system wherein a crucial role was facilitated by powerful merchant guilds functioning as intermediaries for multi-sectoral economic exchange across ecological zones and political boundaries. Among these corporate bodies, the *Manigramam* guild is distinguished for its widespread operations, considerable economic influence, and multifaceted role in religious patronage. The economic functions of the *Manigramam* guild are examined in this paper through a dual analytical lens: firstly, as long-distance maritime commerce that connected the Chola heartland to Southeast Asian markets is architected, and secondly, as religious architecture that was financed by key patrons whose commercial wealth was translated into enduring socio-religious capital, thereby shaping the monumental temple landscape of medieval South India. These were not mere loose associations of traders but were identified as sophisticated corporations with defined leadership, operational protocols, and the ability to transcend political jurisdictions. As a body, these guilds were constituted as a state within a state, with their own troops employed, immunities enjoyed, and international connections maintained that often extended beyond the direct control of reigning monarchs.

The oldest inscriptional evidence of the *Manigramam* guild dates to the ninth and tenth centuries at the port of Quilon (Kollam), Kerala (N.Karashima 2015). The guild evolved as a separate institution during the Pallava period (Champakalakshmi 1996). The early inscriptions showed the initial conception of the guild through treaties made amongst local authorities and emigrant Christian merchants, with its cosmopolitan nature indicated from the start (N.Karashima 2015). An authoritative economic powerhouse was recognized by *Manigramam* during the elevation of Chola authority, with manoeuvres conducted broadly throughout Tamil Nadu and active trade betrothed in throughout Southeast Asia (Hall 2011). Even though the guild's term is alleged to have initiated in a specific locale, a transregional network was created that connected coastal emporia with agricultural vicinities, demonstrating notable adaptability across monetary zones. The *Manigramam* guild formed and upheld the extensive sea trade networks which associated the Coromandel Coast to China, Southeast Asia, and other areas. A ninth-century Tamil inscription found at *Takuapa* on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula delivers tangible evidence of the guilds' involvement in long-distance maritime trade from a particularly early stage. *Manigramam's* position as a dynamic transitional in the worthwhile commodity trade between the Chola heartland and the Southeast Asian archipelago empowered the movement of precious goods that exemplified the Indian Ocean trading system (Heitzman 1997).

Historical consensus has increasingly recognized the crucial role those commercial institutions played in regulating the economic life of early medieval South India (Champakalakshmi 1996). Together with modern corporate entities like the Ayyavole (Ainnurruvar, or "The Five Hundred") and the Anjuvannam, the *Manigramam* guild was established as powerful transregional economic organizations that functioned with significant autonomy across political boundaries and various ecological zones (Abraham 1988). To integrate hinterland production with coastal emporia and larger Indian Ocean maritime circuits, these guilds systematically organized and maintained extensive trade networks, institutionalized commercial practices, and offered sophisticated financial services (Hall 2011).

This historiographical void is filled by this research through the employment of a tripartite methodology which examines the guild's institutional structure and commercial networks, its many functions in temple financing and building, and its intricate symbiotic connection with the Chola state.

The *Manigramam* Guild: An Institutional History

Founded by ethnic Indian traders on the move, the *Manigramam* is recognized as the most important commercial organization in early medieval South India. Together with other important guilds like the Anjuvannam (a guild often associated with West Asian traders) and the Ainnurruvar (the Ayyavole Five Hundred), the *Manigramam* was founded as a vital part of the region's economic infrastructure. Unlike the Anjuvannam, which was mostly restricted to metropolitan port towns, the *Manigramam* had a wider range of operations. An extensive and substantial epigraphic heritage is held by the guild. Copper plate charters from locations in Karnataka, including Melekote in Tumkur and the Hassan area, show that operations date back to the fifth century CE (S. Settar 2004). Additionally, a land endowment to a Buddhist temple is documented by the Melekote donation documents, demonstrating the early recorded engagement of the guild in religious patronage (Gururajachar 2005). By the ninth century, tactical expansion into marine commerce and joint partnerships with the Anjuvannam along the Malabar coasts are confirmed by inscriptional evidence, such as the Quilon Syrian copper plates (Nair 2009). A contemporaneous Tamil inscription found at Takua Pa in Thailand, which provides evidence of the aforementioned guilds presence in Southeast Asian commercial outposts, is further supported by its transoceanic reach (N.Karashima 2015).

Historical accounts indicate that the guild is initially appeared in the ninth and tenth centuries. Important port cities on the coasts of Kerala and Coromandel, including Quilon, record its early economic privileges and operations (N. Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds* 2002). A crucial era of growth was enabled by direct Chola support over the next 10th and 11th centuries (Hall 2011). The activities of the guild were expanded, emanating from the one that powers the Tamil region into Sri Lanka amid the aforementioned period, with mercantile groups being created in historic cities like Anuradhapura and subsequently Polonnaruwa (K.Indrapala 2005). It also became firmly ingrained in the temple economy. The mutually beneficial relationship that existed between imperialist aspirations and commercial industry was demonstrated by this geographical expansion, mirroring the political and military triumphs of the Chola state (Spencer 2001). By the 11th and 13th centuries, the pinnacle of power had been achieved by the guild, when close collaboration with other powerful guilds such as the Ayyavole was conducted, and a significant role in funding and managing temple patronage throughout South India and its trade stations in Southeast Asia was played (Abraham 1988).

Additionally, a great deal of religious and cultural diversity was present in *Manigramams* social makeup. Hindu and perhaps Jain traders were gradually incorporated into it as it expanded into Tamil country, despite a strong affiliation with Christian merchants in its early composition in Kerala. This inclusive membership model was recognized as a strategic advantage, mirroring

the multi-confessional character of distinct guilds like the Anjuvannam, which included Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traders. From the coastlines of Malabar and Coromandel to far-off ports of trade in Southeast Asia, many commercial domains were traversed and integrated by the guild, promoting cross-cultural commerce.

The Epigraphical Corpus: Primary Sources on the *Manigramam* Guild

Beginning in the eleventh century, a substantial consolidation of the institutional architecture of the South Indian merchant guilds was experienced, with the Ainnurruvar (Ayyavole) being emerged as the preeminent corporate entity. During this time, once autonomous guilds like the *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam* were gradually absorbed into the vast Ayyavole network. By the twelfth century, an all-encompassing umbrella organization was established by the Ayyavole, and by the thirteenth century, the *Manigramam* had been completely subjugated, reflecting an increasingly widespread pattern for commercial centralization within the political economy of the region (Abraham 1988). The trade acquaintances transversely the west coast of India and West Asia, as described in modern Arab sailing instructions (*akhbār*) and geographies, are supported by these epigraphic foundations, particularly those from the ninth century (Rougiat 2019). The annal's clear orientation to certain trading sites and goods confirms the *Manigramams* role as a key establishment within this expanding maritime commerce network (Chakravarti 2000).

A fractional Tamil inscription from the ninth century found in Takua Pa, Thailand, is provided as decisive impermeable of the guilds intercontinental reach. It is believed that the inscription may have been written during the time of Pallava king Nandivarman III (c. 826–850 CE), according to palaeographic studies, particularly by historian K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (Sastri, Takuapa and its Tamil Inscription Part I. 1949). A water tank (*totti*) which is protected by the *Manigramattar*, or *Manigramam* members, is mentioned in the text, and a group of armed fighters that are frequently used by these guilds as a militia to protect their commercial property and colonies in foreign ports is referenced. This soldierly feature is emphasized as symptomatic of the associations character as a semi-autonomous business body with the capability to project power overseas. The existence of a Tamil commercial society is also supported by the sites creative and material culture. A long-lasting Hindu trade enclave is clearly suggested by the combination of the Tamil epigraph and the ornamental remains at Takua Pa, which show a clear Pallava stylistic influence. Material substantiation is provided by the archaeological record, which comprises pottery, glassware, and bead collected at the point of entrance of the Takua Pa River (Arokiaswamy 2000). The derivation of these items, which spans West Asia, China, and perhaps India, is emphasized by the purpose of the *Manigramam* dealers as distributors in a long-distance trading system, with appreciated goods being handled from all over the maritime world (George Coedès 1968).

The *Manigramam* inscriptions are extensively disseminated across Tamil Nadu and beyond, with the widespread impact and viable reach of the guild being verified. Epigraphic indication initiate at numerous places in South India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia has been demonstrated to designate the guilds pan-regional commercial activity (N. Karashima 2014). When the *Madamalingam* described in Rajendra Chola Is Tanjore inscriptions was connected by researchers with the coastal state of Tambralinga in Southeast Asia, the position of the guild in transoceanic trade networks was further solidified. One important hub of this international activity was identified

as Tambralinga. Important epigraphic discoveries in the Tamil area are included in inscriptions at locations like Courtallam in Tirunelveli district, Srinivasanalur and Tiruvellarai in Tiruchirappalli district, and Ramanathapuram in the erstwhile Malabar district (Narayanan 2013). The early tenth-century inscriptions are attributed to Courtallam and Ramanathapuram, according to palaeographic study, whilst the rest are dated to a later era. The substantial religious endowments of the guild are mostly documented in these archives, demonstrating involvement in the support of religious establishments. Considerable control over its day-to-day operations was given to the merchants by the assembly while a levy in equivalent on the market booths was imposed (Gurukkal 2010). The *Manigramam* guild is specifically mentioned in the subsequent part of the Talakkad inscription, which is decisively attributed to the first half of the 11th century. Interestingly, *ulgu*, a tax on items brought by sea, is put among the regular fees that must be paid by other traders. Additionally, it is stated that local residents were free to deal at this market (Abraham 1988). The *ulgu* tax is recognized as direct epigraphic evidence of the continued engagement of the *Manigramam* in international trade, as well as their profound involvement in local market economies, all of which are demonstrated by this extensive record.

When contrasted to other contemporary tradesmen, an unparalleled and distinguished socioeconomic status was held by the *Manigramam* merchants. The sophisticated consuming habits of the Cholas and their incorporation of a commercialized economy are demonstrated by the strong purchasing power of rural areas for goods beyond local sustenance, including luxury goods from abroad (Arunachalam 2015) (Hermann Kulke 2009). Kodumbalur's reputation as a hub in the interregional trade corridor is emphasized by its advantageous location in the Pudukottai area, about equal to the capitals of Pandyan (Madurai) and Chola (Thanjavur). Additional proof is provided by an inscription in Piranmalai that was co-issued by the Citrameli organization, a strong coalition of farmers, and the Ayyavole guild. This text is measured vital because the guilds' engrossment in inter-corporate congregations apprehended to converse and complement the transit taxes (*sunkam*) levied on goods poignant through the area is shown (Champakalakshmi 1996). The commercial importance of the Kodumbalur region is highlighted by the inscription from Tiruchirappalli. This recurrent epigraphic insinuation strengthens its reputation as a crucial profitable territory within the Chola kingdom. The political climate in this region was controlled by the Irukkuvels, a dynasty of powerful feudatories who were ardent martial adversaries of the Chola monarchs (Sastri, *A History of South India* 1955). The strategy of the Chola state to actively promote itinerant commerce benefited this strategic area, creating a welcoming atmosphere for traders passing through. The economic role of Kodumbalur was inextricably related to its physical location (Sundaram 1968). A vital hub in the interregional commerce network was functioned as, providing quick access to significant harbors like Tondi along the Pandyan coast (Pandimandalam), and being almost equal distance between the capitals of Chola and Pandya (Kambhampati 1975). The sustained existence of the *Manigramattar* is inveterate by an eleventh-century epigraph from Natham in the Dindigul region and by a thirteenth-century account from Kovilpatti (Aiyangar 1941). A twelfth-century inscription about a merchant named Vaisyapalan, whose names etymology highlights the Vaisyavarnas' ongoing association with mercantile occupations, that was given particular accommodations by the *ūrār* (village assembly) of Menaveli sheds light on the social identity of its members. A copper plate inscription discovered in the Kottayam Church in Kerala from the thirteenth century

is provided as more evidence of the guilds widespread impact (Hermann Kulke 2009). According to records, ginger, pepper, cardamom, and betel nuts are exported by the merchant to Arab nations. Exclusive rights to a number of expensive goods, such as sugar, salt, and musk, are also given to the guild by the inscription. Trade is not only participated in by the *Manigramam* but also regulatory functions are carried out by it, which is deeply ingrained in the distribution systems of both domestic and international commerce, with substantial influence across the circulation and taxation of goods, as evidenced by its monetary autonomy and control over important trade items. An inscription at Tittadanapuram in the Ramnad area is served as another example of this inter-guild cooperation paradigm (N. Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds* 2002). The Kaikolas, a weaver's guild, the Valanjiyar, a strong merchant community, and the Anjuvannam, a multiethnic port guild, are among the important economic groupings with which a commercial partnership was worked by the *Manigramam* members (Champakalakshmi 1996). Cotton textiles were purchased by the *Manigramam* merchants from the Kaikolas and were in charge of being exported to outside markets, suggesting that a whole export value chain was overseen by this partnership. The close proximity of Tittadanapuram to Tondi, a significant port, is clearly implied to indicate that this guild coalition was actively involved in international trade, with this vital maritime gateway being utilized.

The Kodumbalur branch of the guild was continued to be well-known far into the 13th and 14th centuries. A donation to a temple was made by a merchant with the name Kodumbalur Manigramattuadalvallan Chockan, which is clearly identified with the Kodumbalur Manigramam, according to a thirteenth-century inscription from Melmangalam in the Theni area (N. Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds* 2002). In possession with this pattern, unambiguous proof of the guilds continuing economic activities is obtainable by two engravings from the Kovilpatti district and the Rajaraja Cholisvaramudaiyar temple from the fourteenth century. The Kovilpatti inscription is exclusively noteworthy meanwhile it lists the dissimilar goods of international commerce that were passed through this inland town, demonstrating its function as a hub in a flourishing commercial network. Kodumbalur was continued to be a significant operational hub for the *Manigramam* guild and its international trade endeavours until at least the fourteenth century, according to the combined testimony of these dispersed but consistent sources. This collection of data is unequivocally demonstrated to reflect the extraordinary lifespan of the *Manigramam*, with active participation in maritime trade evidenced from as early as the sixth century to the fourteenth century, roughly eight centuries.

***Manigramam* in the Maritime Trade Networks**

The widespread nautical trade webs which associated the Coromandel Coast to the wider Indian Ocean dominion were recognized and maintained by the *Manigramam* guild, a keystone of the Chola dogmatic economy. Through its profitable activities, South India's dedicated artisanal and agrarian production pivots were impeccably linked with a erudite comprehensive trading system that extended from the Middle East to Southeast Asia and China, leading to a fundamental economic transformation (Champakalakshmi 1996). A complex system of market intelligence, logistical

coordination, and commercial risk management was included into the operations of the guild in addition to simple transportation, thereby enabling the regular flow of high-value commodities. A crucial role was played by *Manigramam* in directing South Indian products, including the valuable cotton textiles of the hinterland, spices (particularly pepper), precious jewels, and ivory, toward foreign markets through its sophisticated commercial structure. In exchange, the guild made it easier for currency and interesting goods to enter the Tamil interior, such as West Asian glassware and gold, Arabian horses, and Chinese silks and China. In accumulation of being an economic activity, this reciprocal commerce also served as a catalyst for cultural impact and social change, with craft specialization, urban expansion, and the introduction of new aesthetic sensibilities being promoted (Hall 2011).

Additionally, the extensive involvement of the guild in this maritime domain was inextricably linked to Chola geopolitical aspirations; the renowned expeditions of the Chola navy, such as the campaign against the Srivijaya Empire in 1025 CE, were primarily motivated by the protection of trade routes and the commercial interests of merchants. As a result, more than simply functioning within these networks, the *Manigramam* guild was served as the fundamental nerve system that propelled and maintained the period of transoceanic trade of the Chola (Majumdar 1979).

Transregional Trade Networks and Maritime Expansion

Through a complex network that linked regional agricultural economies with vast marine trade routes, an essential economic middleman was served by the *Manigramam* guild in medieval South India. This guild structure, which connected hinterland manufacturing areas with maritime emporia and global marketplaces throughout the Indian Ocean region, was exemplified by the economic integration typical of the Chola era. The movement of cultural contributions and technical advancements across regional borders was enabled by the *Manigramam* merchants in addition to the interchange of goods through their complex commercial activities.

The Nagaram centres, which were typical market towns that functioned as organized mercantile companies across the Chola dominion, were focused on by *Manigramams* local trading activities (Champakalakshmi 1996). In addition to the distribution of imported goods that were brought in via marine networks, these commercial cities were served as essential hubs where agricultural surpluses and local specialties were gathered by the guilds merchants from the countryside. Within the Nadu (district) level of the Chola administration, the Nagaram was not just a passive marketplace but was also regarded as an active governing organization that collected taxes on business transactions and established rules and laws for commerce (Hall 2011).

A variety of specialized merchants, such as *Chettis* (general merchants), *Sankarappadiyars* (oil merchants), *Saliyars* (weavers), and *Tattars* (goldsmiths), are found in these market centers, according to historical evidence (Champakalakshmi 1996). An equally intricate system of transactional techniques, painstakingly documented in modern inscriptions, was underpinning this varied strategy. A barter system was frequently used for regular local trading, especially for ordinary goods and agricultural output. On the other hand, gold-based monetary transactions were utilized as the main method in long-distance and luxury commerce, which dealt in expensive items (Champakalakshmi 1996). In addition, participation in transregional trade was required and advanced financial tools that controlled the risks associated with extended trade networks and

enabled credit were made use of by the guild. It is evident that a wide variety of commodities were handled by the guild; South Indian goods including rice, pepper, cardamom, cotton textiles, premium iron (particularly the renowned Wootz steel), ivory, and other valuable stones were dominated in exports. In exchange, imported prestige items were directed into the interior of the peninsula by the guild, such as West Asian glassware, Chinese silks and porcelain, and brass or bronze kitchenware. Steady, widespread demand for local produce was created, and development was encouraged by this complex system, which drastically changed local economies while simultaneously flooding inland markets with foreign imports (Rao 2001).

Significant institutional authority that enabled a broad economic reach was possessed by the *Manigramam* guild, which was taken beyond the traditional bounds of a mercantile organization. A legal identity that gave significant autonomy in conducting business across political jurisdictions was held by the guild. It was operated as a *samaya*, a corporate body subject to internal rules and contractual obligations (Chakravarti 2000). The powerful economic advantages of the guild, such as the ability to impose maritime taxes (*ulgu*) on imported goods, retain monopoly control over strategic commodities like musk, salt, and sugar, and collect transit duties on goods passing through operational zones, are well-documented in epigraphic sources. The proof that these rights were officially recognized by the reigning authorities is provided by the Quilon Syrian copper plates from the ninth century, so the quasi-governmental operations of the guild were approved (Abraham 1988). A predictable climate for transregional trade was created by this, enabling the standardization of business processes across cultural boundaries by the *Manigramam*, advantageous commercial contracts being negotiated with regional polities, and armed protection being provided for its trade caravans.

The potential of the *Manigramam* to fundamentally integrate local economies into vast interregional networks, thereby establishing economic interdependencies that connected farming communities in the Tamil hinterland with consumers throughout Southeast Asia, China, and the Middle East, was recognized as the true significance of its institutional sophistication (Champakalakshmi 1996). Commercial partnerships were developed with other major guilds, such as the Anjuvannam (representing West Asian traders) and Valanjiyar; guild centers were strategically placed in geographically nodal locations, such as Kodumbalur, which was positioned equidistant between Pandya and Chola capitals to optimize distribution; maritime partnerships were upheld that linked interior collection centres with coastal ports; and market intelligence systems were created that effectively matched regional surpluses with distant demand (Aiyangar 1941) (Ray 2017).

Through these complex mechanisms, a transformation of the *Manigramam* guild from simple traders into essential facilitators of economic connectivity in medieval South Asia was achieved. Their ability to work in tandem with transoceanic trade routes to navigate local market dynamics rendered them indispensable to the Chola political economy and significantly supported the regions economic vitality from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries CE.

To facilitate long-distance trade, strategically placed trading territories in Southeast Asia were created by the *Manigramam* guild, which bring about in its most noteworthy maritime expansion. An epigraphic substantiation of the guilds operational presence in the area may be found in a ninth-century Tamil inscription discovered at Takuapa on the Malay Peninsula, which provides

substantial proof for this early transoceanic activity (N. Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds* 2002). The profitable Chinese market, which showed a persistent desire for exotic items flowing across the Indian Ocean economic realm, was made accessible by these Southeast Asian footholds. Hegemony over vital trade routes was considered a key source of income and power in the highly competitive political economy in which the guild functioned. Based on Sumatra, the Straits of Malacca and Sunda, two crucial coastal barriers in the Malay Peninsula that all Indian marine commerce to China had to pass through, were controlled by the Srivijaya Empire. Expensive transit charges of 20,000 dinars were enforced by Srivijayan officials as a requirement for access to Chinese marketplaces, according to contemporary reports, including those from Persian navigator Al-Ramhormuzis Ajaib al-Hind (*Wonders of India*) (Chaudhuri 1985). Such outrageous tariffs were directly threatening the business sustainability of Chola mercantile endeavours, which ultimately led to armed conflict. The Chola naval expeditions against Srivijaya in 1025 CE, which were organized under Rajendra Chola, were culminated in by these long-running commercial tensions. Most significant academic interpretations suggest that ships supplied by merchant guilds like the *Manigramam* were heavily relied upon by the Cholas, with no standing naval capability. According to this viewpoint, direct agency in geopolitical conflicts that affected commercial interests was used by these guilds (Hoogervorst 2013). Favourable trade terms were restored and a close relationship between state authority and commercial imperatives was illustrated by the successful campaign against Srivijaya.

Temple Patronage, Economic Integration, and Architectural Legacy

The economic activities of the *Manigramam* guild were conducted well beyond commercial trade and were included in a significant and crucial role in the religious economy of the Chola period, particularly through the funding, management, and actual building of temple projects. This patronage was viewed as a clever socioeconomic tactic that had two functions in addition to being an act of devotion (Champakalakshmi 1996). It was served as a vital tool for transforming financial gains into social and symbolic capital, improving the standing of the guild in the hierarchical structure of Chola society. At the same time, a way was offered to legitimize trade-related riches, which were frequently seen as less respectable than agricultural income, by associating them with the royal mission of building temples and the prevailing religious philosophy (Hall 2011) (Heitzman 1997).

Temples served as de facto financial institutions, storage facilities, redistribution centres, and agricultural estate managers within the Chola political economy. These diverse institutions went beyond their religious functions to become important centres of economic activity. Through clever financial techniques, the *Manigramam* guild carefully interacted with various temple economies, solidifying its place in the socio-religious fabric. These included direct contributions of animals, gold, and jewels; targeted finance for certain building projects; and the creation of perennial endowments for continuing structural upkeep and ceremonial observances (Stein 1986).

The guilds access to significant liquid capital amassed through transoceanic trade made this financial involvement possible, which not only made such patronage possible but also established the guild as an important financial middleman, with money being lent to the monarchy and public projects being funded when state resources were insufficient (N. Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval*

Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds 2002). Considerable political power was gained by the *Manigramam* as a result of their economic clout, thus creating what has been referred to by some academics as a “state within a state” (Hall 2011) The guilds tradition of holding its assembly and carrying out transactions within temple premises was regarded as a tangible manifestation of the geographical and functional convergence of the sacred and economic worlds. This was viewed as a potent symbolic act that upheld the moral validity of merchant riches and the integrity of business agreements, rather than just being considered a matter of convenience. As a result, vital hubs for commerce were served by the temples, where transactions were witnessed, contracts were sanctified, and business partnerships were formed (Heitzman 1997). Beyond monetary donations, the construction of the colossal temples that characterize the Chola era was crucially supported by the *Manigramam* guild, even if this function was frequently implied in the epigraph. The larger ecology of commercial patronage that funded church construction certainly included participation from the guild, with groups like the Ayyavole, even though precise architectural attributions are still difficult to determine.

Religious honour and reputation were gained by merchants through the enabling process, while the conceptual foundation of Chola sovereignty was also bolstered by this patronage. A crucial role was played in the conversion of commercial riches into socio-religious capital. Although displays of royal power were represented by imperial projects like the Gangaikondacholapuram temple and the Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur, the larger economic infrastructure maintained by merchant guilds was ultimately relied upon, which oversaw the intricate arrangements of material acquisition, artisanal workforce, and financial resource allocation. Additionally, it is shown by inscriptions that power was gained by merchant guilds in temple government through their financial donations, with the guilds role in administrative management being demonstrated. This growing administrative function was marked by the emergence of new, economically generated regions of authority that coexisted with and were negotiated with by traditional agricultural and religious elites, signifying a significant change in the social dynamics of Chola India.

Conclusion

The *Manigramam* guild is revealed by this research as a fundamental organization in early medieval South Indias economic architecture, acting as a vital link between regional artisanal and agricultural output and the dynamic currents of international Indian Ocean commerce. Concurrently, the deliberate use of financial resources for religious support was recognized as crucial in funding the construction of the colossal temple that symbolized and validated Chola political power. In Chola India, it was established that the economic, political, and religious spheres were not distinct domains but rather mutually constitutive fields of social action. The deep and intricate connections between these domains are collectively shown by the guild’s diverse operations, which included local commerce, transoceanic enterprise, temple finance, and diplomatic state relations.

Distinctions between "economic" and "religious" impulses which are anachronistic are profoundly challenged by this analysis, which instead reveals a complex socio-economic system in which mercantile money was methodically directed into artistic development. At the same time, the states ideological underpinnings were strengthened by this patronage mechanism, symbolic capital was accumulated for the merchant groups, and preexisting social structures were upheld.

In addition to reflecting the distinct historical context of the early second millennium Indian Ocean world, the guilds organizational sophistication, its capacity to negotiate various political jurisdictions and ecological zones, was also foreshadowed by later forms of mercantile corporatism and transnational enterprise.

The lasting impact of the *Manigramam* guild is twofold: it is preserved through the ancient trade routes that still connect South India and Southeast Asia, and it is literally memorialized in the stone of Chola temple buildings. Its history demonstrates how the construction of holy structures and the flow of goods were related events. Thus, the essential institutional conduit was provided by merchant guilds like the *Manigramam*, with the tangible gains from marine trade being converted into the religious expression that characterized one of the most active and powerful civilizations in medieval India.

Important study directions that might improve our comprehension of the guilds internal workings are still present. The subtleties of *Manigramams* operational strategies, regional variances, and its exact place within the larger ecosystem of medieval merchant corporations would be revealed by a more methodical and quantitative analysis of the vast epigraphic corpus from important temple sites combined with a thorough comparative study of modern organizations like the Ayyavole guild. A significant contribution to South Indias history as well as to more general comparative discussions on the connection between premodern economic systems, state development, and artistic production would be made by such academic pursuits.

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