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State formation in South India, 850 – 1280

James Heitzman

Villanova University, Pennsylvania

The present study utilises inscriptional records from the Chola period (AD 849–1279) in South India in order to address several major problems connected with Chola kingship in particular and with early Indian polities in general: (1) What were the mechanisms evolved by kings to exert their authority over relatively large areas and disparate human groups? (2) To what extent did the authority of kings vary over distance and in relation to local conditions of geography and socio-economic organisation? (3) What was the relationship between royal political systems and local or intermediate powers?

I will describe the early state as a problem in intermediate authority, that is, an attempt to unite large numbers of localised social and economic units within varying ecological niches into overarching systems of political control through the creation or remodelling of mediating social institutions or communications. The goal of this description is a view of kingship as an agency representing the dominating classes of an agrarian society but challenging, through its impact on political and economic organisation, the positions of dominant groups. The methodology employed for this study utilises descriptive statistics and strict controls over variables of time and space in order to relate changes in state institutions at the highest levels to changes in the productive and extractive modes operating in local environments.

The study addresses three models of state formation—bureaucratic, segmentary, and feudal—that portray the state in pre-modern South Asia. These models focus on the relationship of state institutions to local and intermediate arenas of power, and their ultimate relationship to forms of

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production and control of resources in an agrarian world.¹ The models disagree on the nature of the relationship between royal administrative organs, however defined, and intermediate or local power-holders. Earlier scholars stressed central bureaucratic power,² the students of feudalism have stressed independent, intermediate political offices,³ and proponents of the segmentary state have stressed local authorities.⁴ Each model takes its position within different approaches to time and space. The bureaucratic approach is the most static, since it posits little structural change, or motivation for change, from the time of the Mauryas (fourth–third centuries BC) until the ‘Muslim invasions’ of the eleventh century and beyond. The

¹ Herman Kulke has discussed the three main models of pre-modern South Asian historiography in ‘Fragmentation and Segmentation Versus Integration? Reflections on the Concepts of Indian Feudalism and the Segmentary State in Indian History,’ *Studies in History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1982), pp. 237–54. See also James Heitzman, ‘Socio-Economic Formations in Premodern South Asia: Case Studies and Methodology,’ *Peasant Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 47–60.

² R. C. Majumdar ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. 2, Bombay, 1951, pp. 303–34; K. A. Nilakantha Sastri ed., *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. 2, Calcutta, 1957, pp. 50–66; Anant Sadashiv Altekar, *The Rāshtrakūtas and Their Times*, Poona, 1934, pp. 174–76; Krishna Murari, *The Cālukyas of Kalyāni (from circa 973 A.D. to 1200 A.D.)*, Delhi, 1977, pp. 191–98; Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, Delhi, 1961, pp. 98–123. Burton Stein has summarised South Indian versions of this historiography in ‘The State and the Agrarian Order in Medieval South India: A Historiographical Critique,’ in Burton Stein ed., *Essays on South India*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 65–69; *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 254–64.

³ Ram Sharan Sharma, *Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1959, pp. 199–230; *Indian Feudalism: c. 300–1200*, Calcutta, 1965; *Sūdras in Ancient India: A Social History of the Lower Order Down to circa A.D. 600*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 171, 192–93, 243, 260–61; *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 128–56; ‘How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?’ *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 12, Nos. 2 and 3 (1985), pp. 33–36; D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 192–98; Ganesh Prasad Sinha, *Post-Gupta Polity (A.D. 500–750): A Study of the Growth of Feudal Elements and Feudal Administration*, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 198–219, B.N.S. Yadava, ‘Secular Land Grants of the Post-Gupta Period and Some Aspects of the Growth of Feudal Complex in Northern India.’ In D. C. Sircar ed., *Land System and Feudalism in Ancient India*, Centre of Advanced Study in Ancient Indian History and Culture, Lectures and Seminars No. 1-B, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 72–94.

⁴ Burton Stein, ‘The Segmentary State in South Indian History,’ in Richard G. Fox ed., *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, Durham, S.C., 1977; *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 101–09, 134–40, 173–82, 270–72; ‘Politics, Peasants and the Deconstruction of Feudalism in Medieval India’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 12, Nos. 2 and 3, pp. 61–65; ‘State Formation and Economy Reconsidered,’ *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, Part 3 (July 1985), pp. 393–400; Kenneth Hall, ‘Peasant State and Society in Chola Times: A View from the Tiruvidaimarudur Urban Complex,’ *IESHR*, Vol. 18, Nos. 3 and 4 (1982), pp. 393–96; R. Champakalakshmi, ‘Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India: A Review Article,’ *IESHR*, Vol. 18, Nos. 3 and 4, pp. 411–26; Venkata Ragotham, ‘Religious Networks and the Legitimations of Power in Fourteenth Century South India: A Study of Kumara Kampana’s Politics of Intervention and Arbitration,’ in Madhu Sen ed., *Studies in Religion and Change*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 150–66; David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, Princeton, 1985, pp. 26–40, 214.

segmentary state of Burton Stein contains explicit references to spatial variability, since it originates and flourishes in 'nuclear areas' of peasant farming communities within irrigated zones in distinction to non-irrigated, drier zones; ritual control becomes more tenuous with increasing distance from the nuclear zones, exhibiting central, intermediate and peripheral forms of political authority.⁵ The dynamics for systemic change over time are not as clear as spatial dynamics in the segmentary model. Feudalism, on the other hand, offers a clear-cut chronological progression, from the crisis of an ancient socio-economic and political formation in the early Christian era through subsequent fragmentation of state rights. The feudal hypothesis remains weaker in its spatial aspects, since 'feudal' relations may be described almost anywhere in early South Asia, poorly articulated with local modes and relations of production.⁶

In the following discussion, I will address the central problematic of historical models of pre-modern state formation—the articulation of central, intermediate and local authority—within parameters that explain spatial variability and temporal change. The Chola dynasty is the choice for this case study because the numerous records of the Chola period, amounting to over 10,000 inscriptions, provide data that allow statistical analyses impossible in most other areas of early South Asia for which data are scarcer and more fragmentary. The rich Chola-period data may produce insights that may then be extrapolated to other areas of South India or South-Asia as a whole, where historical sources are less plentiful for early times.

The Study Areas in the Chola Heartland

The sources for Chola-period history are inscriptions found almost entirely on the stone walls of temple structures in Tamil Nadu and surrounding states. These records describe gifts to Brahman communities and to temples in order to support ritual performances. Because almost all inscriptions contain brief or lengthy preambles mentioning the reigning king and his regnal year, approximately 90 per cent of the records engraved during the period of Chola hegemony may be dated with great accuracy.⁷

⁵ Stein describes nuclear areas as *nadus*, or agrarian zones clustered around common irrigation facilities and containing distinct social or kinship zones (*Peasant State and Society*, pp. 90–140). His interpretations rest on the work of Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chola Country* (Madras, 1973, pp. 19–55: 'The Cōla State,' *Studies in History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (July-Dec. 1982), p. 273.

⁶ See suggestions of the 'proto-feudal' character of the Chola State in M.G.S. Narayanan's review of Noboru Karashima's *South Indian History and Society*, in *IESHR*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan.-March 1985), pp. 95–101.

⁷ We must note the peculiar nature of the inscriptional record, which is predominantly limited to records of donations for deities. On one hand, the inscriptions are a goldmine of information on contemporary social, political, and economic organisation, which emerges obliquely, and in a pristine form, from deeds that ostensibly record religious devotion. On the

For purposes of statistical aggregation, the inscriptions fall into four sub-periods, each lasting about a century, and conforming to discernible changes in the political fortunes of the Chola dynasty and the formats of the records themselves. Sub-period one (849–985) saw the rise of the Chola dynasty within the central area of modern Tamil Nadu, with their capitals at Tañjāvūr and Paḷaiyāru within the Kaveri river delta. Most inscriptions during this time were short, concentrating on gifts of perpetual lamps to temples in memory of deceased relatives. Sub-period two (985–1070) began with the accession of the greatest of the Chola kings, Rājarāja I, who extended Chola military power throughout Tamil Nadu and over much of peninsular India. Under his immediate successors, Chola military expeditions travelled as far as the Ganga river, Southeast Asia, and Sri Lanka. Inscriptions during this time became more detailed and often included poetic preambles (*praśasti*, *meykkirti*) praising in chronological order the accomplishments of the kings. Sub-period three (1070–1178) began with the accession of Kulottunga I, who inherited the thrones of the Chola empire and the kingdom of the Eastern Chalukyas in modern Andhra Pradesh. Despite the union of two major royal lineages, Chola military power entered a period of slow decline. Inscriptions from this time contain increasing information on land transactions. During sub-period four (1178–1279) the Chola dynasty collapsed. The Pandya dynasty based in the southern town of Madurai, the Hoysala dynasty from modern Karnataka, and local chiefs from northern Tamil Nadu divided up the Chola realm. Inscriptions record increasing land transactions and greater numbers of local leaders arrogating to themselves high titles and local powers.⁸

The present approach, building on the lead of Karashima and others,⁹ concentrates on five discrete study areas, each containing large numbers of individual villages, each representing varying ecological, political and

other hand, the necessity of concentrating historical inquiry on temple records constantly focuses attention on a forum that was certainly important, but probably only a single environment within a much larger universe of human activity. Even within the world of temple records, accidents of history have left us a limited view of the large number of social transactions occurring in the environs of religious institutions. In the present study, then, we analyse samples of samples that represent central historical processes but do not exhaust the potential for alternative social formations.

⁸ The standard histories are K.A. Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cōlas: A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, London, 1958, pp. 173–210; T.V. Sadasiva Pandarathar, *Piṅkalac cōlar varalāru*, Annamalaiagar, 1958–61. The four-part chronology used here appears first in B. Sitaraman, Noboru Karashima, and Y. Subbarayalu, 'A List of the Tamil Inscriptions of the Chola Dynasty,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (Tokyo), No. 11, 1976, p. 89; Noboru Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu and Toru Matsui, *A Concordance of the Names in the Cōla Inscriptions*, Madurai, 1978, p. xiv.

⁹ Noboru Karashima ed., *Socio-Cultural Change in Villages in Tiruchirappalli District, Tamilnadu, India*, Part I, Pre-Modern Period, Tokyo, 1983; *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions A.D. 850–1800*, Delhi, 1984.

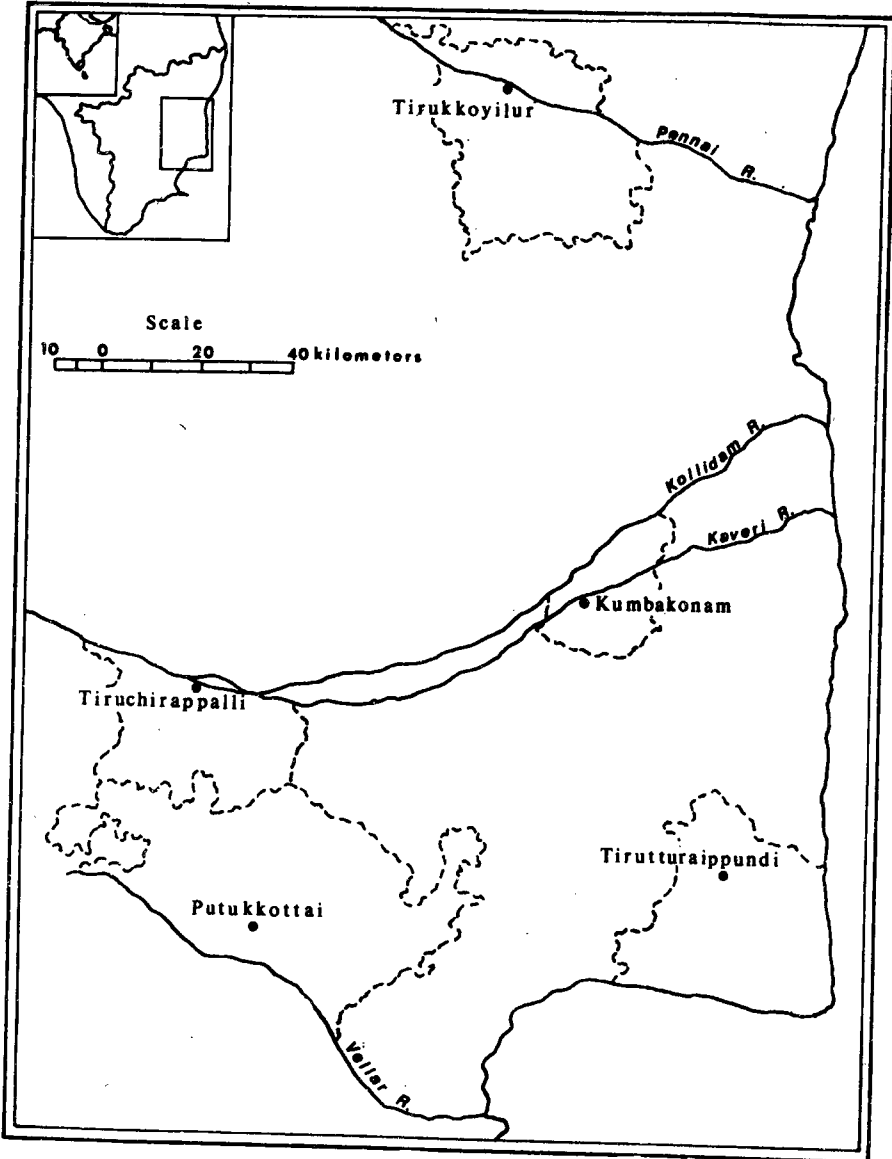
historical features characteristic of the Chola polity (see Map 1.). The study areas lie within the traditional 'circle of the Cholas' (Cholamandalam), where we may expect the fullest possible record of political processes featuring the Chola kings. (1) Modern Kumbakonam taluk lies in the very centre of the Chola polity, near the capital of Palaiyaru, always controlled by the Chola dynasty. Its economy was, and is, oriented to the production of rice through artificial irrigation systems dependent on the Kaveri river and its effluents. (2) Tiruchirappalli taluk lies on the southern bank of the Kaveri river, where lands benefiting from riverine irrigation have supported a rice economy and, in the Chola period, a number of important temples headed by sacred Srirangam. This area was a traditional part of the Chola homeland, but Pandya and Hoysala influence became more important as the Cholas collapsed after 1220.¹⁰ (3) Tirutturaippundi taluk lies on the ocean to the southeast, at the tail end of the irrigation channels carrying Kaveri river water. This area is a good example of a political backwater, always integrated within the Chola empire but having no impact on political affairs. (4) Tirukkoyilur taluk has a mixed economic base, with a zone of rice cultivation concentrated along the banks of the Pennai river and around scattered tanks farther away from the river, but with large expanses of poorly-watered lands supporting the cultivation of millets and animal husbandry. This area had the characteristics of a march or border on the northern edge of the Chola heartland. In the tenth century it was briefly overrun by Rashtrakuta armies from the northwest, and in the early thirteenth century it fell under the control of the rebellious Kopperuñcinkaṇ, whose kidnapping of Rājārāja Chola III signalled the collapse of the Chola political order.¹¹ (5) Pudukkottai refers to the area of modern Pudukkottai district lying north of the Vellar river, the traditional southern boundary of Cholamandalam. This southern march of the Cholas had no natural access to major riverine sources for irrigation and remains the scene of dry cultivation and agriculture centred on scattered man-made lakes. The Cholas conquered this area from the Pandya rulers in the late ninth century, but the resurgent Pandyas took over again after about 1220.

The five study areas exhibit an ecological and agricultural continuum ranging from Kumbakonam and Tiruchirappalli taluks, with good availability of irrigation waters, through the more intermediate or mixed zones exemplified by Tirutturaippundi and Tirukkoyilur taluks, to the relatively dry zone of Pudukkottai (see Table 1).¹² Politically and historically, the five

¹⁰ K.R. Venkataraman, *The Hoysalas in the Tamil Country*, Annamalaiagar, 1950, pp. 7–18; J. Duncan, M. Derrett, *The Hoysalas: A Medieval Indian Royal Family*, London, 1957, pp. 105–28; Nilakantha Sastri, *The Pāṇḍyan Kingdom*, Madras, 1972, pp. 124–37.

¹¹ Altekar, *op. cit.*, pp. 115–19; S.R. Balasubrahmanyam, *Kopperuñcinkaṇ*, Madras, 1965, pp. 14–15, 124–37; Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 128–34, 417–44.

¹² For historical characterisation of wet and dry zones in Tamil Nadu, see David Ludden, 'Patronage and Irrigation in Tamil Nadu: A Long-term View,' *IESHR*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (July–Sept. 1979), pp. 349–65; *Peasant History in South India*, pp. 81–94; Christopher John Baker,



Map I The Five Study Areas in Cholamandalam

The inset map shows the study areas in relation to the modern state of Tamil Nadu in India.

areas display a somewhat similar continuum from those zones closer to the centre of the Chola political system and controlled by the Chola kings for longer periods, to the outlying zones where political fortunes and distance from the centre contributed to shorter periods of control by the Chola kings.

TABLE I
Characteristics of Five Study Areas

<i>Study Area</i>	<i>Agrarian ecology</i>	<i>Relationship to political centre</i>	<i>Period of integration within Chola polity</i>
Kumbakonam taluk	wet	central	c.850–1279
Tiruchirappalli taluk	wet	central	c.850–1250
Tirutturaippundi taluk	wet/dry	intermediate	c.850–1279
Tirukkoyilur taluk	dry/wet	peripheral	c.880–950 975–1220
Pudukkottai	dry	peripheral	c.880–1220

The methodology for this study involved the collection and reading of all extant Chola-period inscriptions from the five study areas, the compilation of references to key terms relating to state formation within the collected inscriptions, and the breakdown of the distribution frequencies of those terms within the four sub-periods of the Chola period.¹³ Changes in the distributions of the terms within the five study areas and over time suggest relative differences in political integration which may then be correlated with the ecological, political, and historical characteristics of the different areas. The terms chosen for analysis refer to the king and the royal family, officials of the king, taxation, and control over local property rights.

The King and the Royal Family

The kings personally appear very rarely in the Chola-period inscriptions. In a few records pious donors instituted rituals producing merit for the

An Indian Rural Economy 1880–1955: The Tamilnadu Countryside, Delhi, 1984, pp. 22–34; Hans-Georg Bohle, 'The Cauvery Delta: An Investigation into the History and Determinants of Agrarian Development and Rural Underdevelopment,' *Indian Geographical Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (1983), pp. 29–46; *Bewässerung und Gesellschaft in Cauvery-Delta (Südindien)*, Wiesbaden, 1981, pp. 10–38.

¹³ 'Chola-period inscriptions' are all extant records from the five study areas containing references to Chola kings and/or regnal years that situate those records within the time period 849–1279. Also included within the data base are Rashtrakuta inscriptions and pre-1250 inscriptions of Kopperucinkan from Tirukkoyilur taluk, and pre-1250 records of Pandyan or Hoysala kings from Tiruchirappalli taluk and Pudukkottai. The following discussions of the royal family and officials utilise only records inscribed under the authority of the Chola kings. The later discussions of tax and property terms utilise the entire data base.

well-being or success of the king, indicating that some localities were officially concerned over the ruler's illnesses or military adventures.¹⁴ In one case the great Rājarāja I appears on a tour of inspection through the Tiruchirappalli area, and in several cases the kings personally intervened in the arbitration of local disputes.¹⁵ But if we expand the concept of royal presence to include members of the Chola lineage, and especially the wives of the kings and princes, we obtain a larger population of records describing the activities of the royal house as a whole.¹⁶ The policies of the Chola house fall into the two main categories of donations and royal orders.

Donations include a number of gifts to temples by the king or other members of his family in order to institute and support brahmanical sacrifices and/or the worship of the god Śiva. Most of these donations were large gifts such as ornate shrines, images and ornaments of precious stones and metals to adorn images, funding for the expensive and elaborate consecration ceremonies initiating temple worship. Even in this sphere the kings themselves appeared relatively infrequently, since queens or princesses usually performed the honours. The ritual leadership of the royal family appears quite dominant in the large-scale donations, when the ostentatious public support of the moral universe, in the name of personal piety, was the explicit message.¹⁷

Royal orders occur in altered contexts featuring direct royal interference into local temple affairs. A standard scenario for the issuance of a royal order began with the presentation of an official request (*viṅṅappam*) by a person bearing high honorific titles, typically asking permission for the deferment of taxes on agricultural land and their transfer for the funding of rituals at a specific temple. The king, hearing the request, granted permission for tax deferment and ordered that the official transfer of taxes to the temple be entered in public records. Some inscriptions appear to be word-for-word transcriptions of these interchanges, indicating that the king was personally involved.¹⁸

¹⁴ *SII* 23: 252; *IPS* 169; *KK* 128; *ARE* 1917: 280. Following are the compendia of published inscriptions used in this study, with their abbreviations: *Annual Reports on Epigraphy (ARE)*; *Epigraphia Indica (EI)*; *Inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State (IPS) Kuṅṅantai Kalveṅṅukkaḷ (KK)*; *South Indian Inscriptions (SII)*; *Tirutturaippūṅṅi kalveṅṅukkaḷ (TK)*. All *ARE* references indicate unpublished records viewed in transcript or estampage form in the Epigraphy Office in Mysore. My thanks to Dr K.V. Ramesh, Chief Epigraphist, and his staff for their assistance in reading unpublished inscriptions.

¹⁵ *SII* 23: 310; *ARE* 1908: 468; 1914: 109; 1918: 1; 1927: 229, 231, 1931–32: 70, 71.

¹⁶ George W. Spencer, 'When Queens Bore Gifts: Women as Temple Donors in the Chola Period,' in K.V. Raman ed., *Śrinidhiḷ: Perspectives on Indian Archaeology, Art and Culture*, Madras, 1983, pp. 361–73.

¹⁷ Examples of the kings' donations include *SII* 3: 276; 6: 28, 33; 23: 52, 307; *KK* 18, 43. Important examples of donations by female members of the royal family include *SII* 3: 96; 4: 542; 8: 237; 13: 197; 23: 42; *KK* 144, 147, 154; *ARE* 1908: 459. Donations by members of the royal family outnumber donations by the kings 67 to 11 in the five study areas.

¹⁸ *SII* 5: 723; 7: 1012; *IPS* 141, 153; *TK* 39. Related phenomena are inscriptions describing the exact location of the king or queen during the issuing of a royal order: *SII* 5: 706; 8: 223; 23: 48, 272, 351; *ARE* 1921: 533; 1934–35: 184; 1937–38: 3, 21; 1961–62: 429.

The royal order was called the *tirumukam*, or 'sacred face' of the king; when the written form of a royal order reached local villages for implementation, village leaders greeted and revered it as if it were the king himself.¹⁹ Descriptions of court procedures show that, in keeping with the quasi-sacred character of the royal order, careful transcription and checking of the written forms was standard procedure.²⁰ It seems certain that even those inscriptions beginning with the simple phrase 'according to the royal order' (*tirumukattup paṭi*) reflect the final, locally inscribed versions of a decision-making process revolving around the king personally. It is doubtful whether the ceremonial issuance of the royal order indicated in all cases royal control over local resources, since in many instances the official request by local leaders may have marked local initiatives with the simple acquiescence of the king.²¹ Nevertheless, the centrality of the ruler in these transactions demonstrates a marked interest in, and ultimate control over, the resource allocations associated with temples at the local level. In distinction to royal donations, usually involving one-time gifts within a cash nexus, royal orders reflect penetration into local agrarian economy.

Table 2 portrays the number and relative frequency of inscriptions containing references to either donations of the Cholas or royal orders of the kings. The spatial distributions reveal a clear concentration of the activities of the kings and their family members within the two central areas of Kumbakonam and Tiruchirappalli taluks, for these two areas yield 134 out of 167 total records, or 80 per cent of all references. The other more distant study areas yield very few references, especially in the category of donations (9 out of 68 records, or 13 per cent), suggesting that the kings and other members of their families rarely went outside the central areas around the Kaveri river. Changes in the distributions over time reveal a consistent decline in references to donations and a consistent increase in references to royal orders, a trend visible in all study areas. In Kumbakonam taluk, for example, royal orders increased from only three in the tenth century to twenty-one in the thirteenth, while donations declined from a high of twenty-eight in the eleventh century to only two in the thirteenth.

The original dominance of donations early in the career of the Cholas may mirror an emphasis on displays of ritual primacy in the construction or consecration of temples and the patronage of brahmanical rituals, a policy that peaked during the period of greatest Chola power in the eleventh century. But the eleventh century also witnessed a shift toward greater penetration of the royal will into local arenas of power through the issuing of

¹⁹ Village leaders, along with the person requesting the royal order, met the order when it arrived, placed it on their heads to show obeisance, and then circumambulated donated lands with the royal order, mounted on a female elephant (*SII* 3: 72; 23: 264; *ARE* 1931–32: 74).

²⁰ *SII* 8: 222, 223; *ARE* 1931–32: 74.

²¹ Burton Stein, 'All the Kings' Mana: Perspectives on Kingship in Medieval South India,' in J.F. Richards ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, Madison, 1978, pp. 136, 144–46.

TABLE 2
Distributions of References to Donations and Royal Orders of the Cholas in Five Study Areas

Key to Columns: A = Royal Orders
 B = Donations

	Sub-period 1 (849–985)		Sub-period 2 (985–1070)		Sub-period 3 (1070–1178)		Sub-period 4 (1178–1279)	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Kumbakonam taluk	3 .01*	14 .05	6 .04	28 .20	14 .08	5 .03	21 .17	2 .02
Tiruchirappalli taluk	5 .03	6 .07	3 .03	5 .05	3 .02	4 .03	20 .19	5 .05
Tirukkoyilur taluk	0 .00	5 .03	5 .04	1 .01	4 .03	0 .00	3 .03	1 .01
Tirutturaippundi taluk	1 .01	1 .01	1 .05	0 .00	1 .05	0 .00	1 .01	0 .00
Pudukkottai	0 .00	1 .01	0 .00	0 .00	1 .02	0 .00	5 .06	0 .00
Totals	9 .01	27 .04	17 .04	24 .06	23 .04	9 .02	50 .09	8 .01

* Ratios refer to the number of occurrences in each sub-period to the total of all inscriptions in that sub-period.

royal orders, an activity still surrounded by an ideology of ritual primacy but entailing an active royal role in the allocation of resources at the local level. This policy of local involvement continued to grow even as the Chola state contracted in the thirteenth century.

The Officials of the Chola Kings

The identification of 'officials' working for the Chola kings is a continuing problem that revolves around the interpretation of personal names in the inscriptions. As they appear in the surviving records, personal names follow a typical south Indian format: first comes a place intimately associated with the person, perhaps his/her native place or a village where property is owned, then comes the father's/husband's name, then the personal name. Additional names and terms usually follow the personal name as aliases, including a variety of honorific terms denoting high status (*arāyan*) or modelled after the epithets of the Chola overlords (e.g. *Rājarāja coḷa muventaveḷān*), and a separate series of titles that seem to denote functions. Historical scholarship has tended to concentrate on all these additional terms as markers of participation in state structures. Older studies assumed

that all honorific titles indicated a role within the administrative system of the bureaucratic state, an approach that has continued with modifications until today.²² Burton Stein's segmentary state model has suggested that all additional terms were pure honorifics perhaps bestowed by the kings but empty of administrative functions outside those already performed by locality leaders.²³ In the present study I will avoid these two extreme viewpoints and concentrate instead on the more limited group of terms that more obviously point to supervisory functions.²⁴ These functional terms are divisible into two general categories.

The first group of terms appear at first sight to denote persons whose roles may well include participation within an articulated administrative framework. A category of men performing the 'settlement of the nadu' (*nāṭu vakai ceykiṅṅa*) in inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries is reminiscent of the more recent officials who compiled 'settlements' of land revenue in British India. In a typical example, the 'chief superintendant' (*kaṅkāṇi nāyakaṅ*) called together temple officials at Tirunamanallur to determine the amounts due annually from several villages and assemblies, and the requisite allocations for temple deities.²⁵ There are also 'administrators' (*adhikāri*) appearing at court and also in more outlying areas, taking care of a variety of supervisory tasks, along with 'leaders of the army' (*senāpati*). For example, a record from Tiruvidaimarudur describes the intervention of *adhikāri Ciṅṅkaṅ uṭaiyāṅ*, performer of 'sacred work' (*sṛī kāryam*) at the temple. He hears various arguments concerning the revenue obligations of the local community, orders leaders to produce relevant documents, and on the basis of these records adjusts the scale of allocations for worship.²⁶ Then there are a number of persons associated with the retinue (*parivāram*) of the king and the royal family (e.g. *paṇi makaṅ*, or 'work son'), concentrated near the palaces but also appearing as donors in other areas of the Chola heartland.²⁷

²² Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *op. cit.*, pp. 264–72, 376–77; Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 462–74; Sadasiva Pandarathar, *op. cit.*, pp. 477–86; R. Champakalakshmi, *op. cit.*, pp. 415–17.

²³ Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, pp. 257–58, 270–73.

²⁴ Earlier studies in this vein are Karashima, *et al.*, *A Concordance of the Names in the Cōla Inscriptions*, Vol. 1, pp. xiv–lvi; Y. Subbarayalu, 'The State in Medieval South India 600–1350,' Ph.D. dissertation, Madurai Kamaraj University, 1976, pp. 134–63, 192; 'The Cōla State,' pp. 281–85, 288–91.

²⁵ *ARE* 1939–40: 228. See also *SII* 7: 988; 8: 580(a); *IPS* 90; *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India*, 1958–59, pp. 84–110.

²⁶ *SII* 3: 202, 203; *SII* 5: 718. See also *SII* 7: 1000; 23: 225; *IPS* 234; *TK* 95; *ARE* 1914: 6. M. T. Rajakumar has stressed the importance of these types of interventions in local decision-making for political unification under sacred kingship: 'Kōyil poruḷātārattil araciṅṅ pāṅku,' *Cenkai māvaṭṭavaralārṅṅ karuttarāṅku*, ed. R. Nagaswamy, Madras, 1978, pp. 124–29.

²⁷ Most often these persons are part of the 'entourage' (*parivāram*) of the king or other members of the royal family (*SII* 5: 706, 723; 8: 234). Many of these persons appear as donors of memorial lamps after the death of prince Rājāditya in battle in 949 (*SII* 7: 954–66). Other palace servants worked as dancers, waiting women or accountants in one of the palaces (*veḷam*) in a capital of the Cholas. Some of the associates of the rulers appear as 'intimates' (*aṅṅkaṅ*) or 'friends' (*saciva*) of the kings; these latter persons often claim ranks higher than those of other palace servants, including titles of lordship (*araiyaṅ*, *nāyakaṅ*, *uḷaiyāṅ*) (*SII* 23: 243, 286, 339; *ARE* 1927: 336).

A close inspection of the circumstances in which all these 'officials' appear provides a composite picture of their functions. When the officials do not act simply as donors in their own right, they act as arbitrators of local disputes, perhaps resolving problems concerning amounts due for the god from particular plots of land. Typically, an official comes into a village, investigates (*ārāy*) relevant documents and hears relevant testimony, and in the presence of local assemblies delivers a judgement that has the force of law. With very few exceptions, all persons bearing functional titles who perform such investigations—nadu settlement performers, *adhikāris*, *senāpatis*—seem to act either on their own initiative or with a generalised fiat from the Chola king, and have no apparent relationship with royal administrative machinery or with standardised procedures. There was a body of persons bearing these titles congregated at the royal court, and it appears that as local disputes arose and came to the court's attention someone from this floating body of loyal, honourable men would receive the commission to handle the problem.²⁸ The various performers of tasks for the royal family fit the pattern of a household staff rather than a ramified administrative organisation. Investigation of these 'official' terminologies reveals, then, little indication of a ramified bureaucratic system for ruling the Chola state, but rather an 'extended court' peopled by high-ranking associates of the king, including the creatures of the king, scions of other noble families allied to the Chola dynasty, and close relatives of the royal family. Despite the rather ad hoc basis for the interventions of these royal representatives, they do function as arms for royal penetration into local affairs and therefore perform crucial roles for the extension of royal influence outside the framework of a centralised bureaucracy.

Later inscriptions include references to a quite different group of royal representatives described as members of the 'land revenue department' (*puravu vari tīṇaik kaḷam*). While the agents of the extended court performed wide ranging actions, members of the land revenue department focus on one objective: the recording of land measurements and the amounts of taxes due from lands for the royal government or its chosen beneficiaries. Often the department appeared in records featuring royal orders, and several long inscriptions portray the role of the department in effecting the king's will and its articulation with other political structures. When the king issued an order, it was transcribed and then witnessed by several high-ranking persons in the royal presence, and often by a host of *adhikāris* who happened to be present. Only then the royal writ came to members of the land revenue department, who in distinction to the rather undifferentiated mass of *adhikāris* appeared as holders of specific, hierarchically organised offices associated with the processing of the royal order and its transmission to the locality it affected. Tasks included the overseeing of the department, copying

²⁸ These courtiers are the 'overlords who have joined together' (*uṭṭaṅ Kūṭṭatu atikārikaḷ*).

of the record, and affixing of the royal seal, and in several cases linked with local agents or with the activities of other accounting departments in the palace.²⁹ The rationality of procedures and recruitment in the land revenue department must not be carried too far; some of the stages in document processing seem quite generalised and even redundant, and a majority of members in the department appear as 'possessors' (*uḍaiyār*) of landed wealth in their own right, thus members of the class and status group that produced the *adhikāris*.³⁰ Nevertheless, the land revenue department exhibits systematic, centralised features—a specific topic of activity, a chain of command with differentiated, hierarchised roles, and subordination to the orders of the king—that mark this as a bureaucratic state organ.

Table 3 portrays the relative frequencies of inscriptions from the five study areas yielding references to either extended-court or bureaucratic agents of the Chola kings. The spatial pattern displayed here is familiar from the discussion of the royal family above; the central study areas of Kumbakonam and Tiruchirappalli generally provide larger numbers of references to officials than do the outlying taluks. The two former areas alone yield 159 out of 239 total records, or 67 per cent of all references. The general pattern over time again resembles patterns seen for changes in the activities of the royal family; agents of the extended court form the largest category in the early Chola period, but tend to decline subsequently, while the bureaucratic agents of the land revenue department appear more frequently after the beginning of the eleventh century. In Kumbakonam taluk, for example, twenty-six records of the extended court in the tenth century declined to three records in the thirteenth, while references to the land revenue department simultaneously increased from none to twenty-one.

The data in Table 3 portray the progressive replacement of more arbitral, occasional administrative policies by those involving direct penetration into local economy and precise determination of royal rights and their allocations through royal orders. During the early stages of Chola rule, the more decentralised policies were in order, as the polity rested on the ritual supremacy of a generally distant king. After about 1000, with the triumphs of Rajaraja I, royal policies continued to stress ritual leadership but began to subtly change the rules of the game by introducing the land revenue department and royal orders more frequently into local arenas. Ritual, arbitral forms were thus the hallmark of early political integration, more centralised forms were the result of later and more formalised central control. The data from Tiruchirappalli taluk provide the exception that proves the rule.

²⁹ *SII* 6: 34; 8: 222, 223; 23: 288, 389, 292; 24: 46, 142; *ARE* 1931–32: 74, 115; 1978–79: 291.

³⁰ Y. Subbarayalu, 'The State in Medieval South India,' pp. 151–52. For discussions of 'possessors,' see Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 15–23, 26–30, 57–58. The concept of 'bureaucracy' used here conforms to Max Weber's idea of rationality under legal authority in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, Talcott Parsons ed., New York, 1964, pp. 328–45.

TABLE 3
*Distributions of References to the Extended Court and
 the Land Revenue Department in Five Study Areas*

Key to columns: A = Agents of the extended court
 B = Agents of the land revenue department

	Sub-period 1 (849-985)		Sub-period 2 (985-1070)		Sub-period 3 (1070-1178)		Sub-period 4 (1178-1279)	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Kumbakonam taluk	26 .10*	0 .00	21 .15	3 .02	11 .06	10 .06	3 .02	21 .17
Tiruchirappalli taluk	1 .01	1 .01	8 .09	4 .04	18 .12	4 .03	14 .13	14 .13
Tirukkoyilur taluk	26 18	0 .00	14 .10	0 .00	4 .03	6 .04	2 .02	1 .01
Tirutturaippundi taluk	6 .09	0 .00	1 .05	0 .00	0 .00	1 .05	0 .00	2 .02
Pudukkottai	2 .03	0 .00	9 .36	1 .04	0 .00	1 .02	2 .02	2 .02
Totals	61 .08	1 .00	53 .13	8 .02	33 .06	22 .04	21 .04	40 .07

* Ratios refer to the number of occurrences in each sub-period to the total of all inscriptions in that sub-period.

Unlike the other study areas, where manifestations of the extended court were decreasing by 1070, in this area they increased dramatically. This phenomenon may be traced to dislocations connected with the accession of Kulottunga I and concomitant incursions of Hoysalas and Western Chalukyas into the Tiruchirappalli area at that time.³¹ The renewed instability of the west resulted in an increase in displays of ritual sovereignty around Srirangam, followed later in the twelfth century by an increased presence of the land revenue department. The segmentary state and the ritual polity thus appear as stages in political development which the Chola dynasty took steps to abolish as far as they were able, once their military control was firmly established. The extent of the changes they were able to effect depended, however, on distance from the centre of the polity and on the military strength of opposing monarchs.

Taxes and Tax Collectors

Terms generally described as taxes (*vari*) usually appear in lists at the end of inscriptions which record the transfer of rights to the produce from land.

³¹ Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 305-10.

The purpose of such donations was to endow tax-free land for religious institutions, and the tax lists provide the names of various cesses defrayed for the purposes of religious sacrifice and worship.³² The following discussion pursues the analysis of tax terminology—important for an understanding of any state's finances—by defining major categories of taxes, tracing changes in the distribution of major tax terms over time, and finally studying the agencies most likely to collect these cesses in different study areas.

Two main divisions of land cesses existed during the Chola period in relation to the processes of production and distribution of agrarian produce.³³ (1) At the local level, a variety of duties were incumbent on the controllers of lands to pay for the annual expenses associated with maintenance of irrigation facilities and local processes of self-government within the villages. (2) Beyond the local level there were demands from superior agencies for proportions of agrarian produce, in turn entailing several kinds of exactions. Land taxes called *kadamai* were generally paid in kind, according to schedules that were, at least in the central area of the Chola heartland, determinable by the land revenue department. Additional payments in cash or kind were necessary to defray the expenses arising from the collection of land taxes, especially for the temporary maintenance of collection agents. The two main divisions of agricultural cesses found expression in the categories of the 'upper share' (*melvāram*) due to the superior agents and comprising land taxes in kind and collection expenses, and the 'lower share' (*kiḷvāram*) retained by the controllers of the land and used to pay all cultivating expenses.³⁴

³² These lists of terms only rarely provide hints concerning the meaning of individual terms, and much of the work done on these terms has concentrated on glossaries or, more recently, large scale studies of their distributions: T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, Madras, 1954, pp. 421–28; T.N. Subrahmaniam, *South Indian Temple Inscriptions*, Vol. 3, Madras, 1953–57, Part 2, Annexure; D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, Delhi, 1966; Noboru Karashima and B. Sitaraman, 'Revenue Terms in Chola Inscriptions,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, No. 5 (1972), pp. 87–117. See also Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 520–45; P. Shanmugam, 'Revenue System under the Cholas (850–1279 A.D.),' Ph.D. dissertation, University of Madras, 1977; R. Tirumalai, *Studies in the History of Ancient Townships of Puḍukkottai*, Madras, 1981, pp. 199–268, 357–58.

³³ This discussion passes over a variety of commercial cesses—significant transactions in the dynamic economy of south India during the Chola period—levied on or collected by mercantile groups. In the five study areas, such commercial cesses appear rather rarely, concentrated mostly in Tirukkoyilur taluk. See James Heitzman, 'Gifts of Power: Temples, Politics and Economy in Medieval South India,' Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1985, pp. 388–92. This concentration may relate to an extended commercial network focused on Kanchipuram to the north. See Kenneth Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cōlas*, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 83–97, 123–30; Kenneth Hall and George W. Spencer, 'The Economy of Kāñchipuram, A Sacred Center in Early South India,' *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Feb. 1980), pp. 128–33.

³⁴ These terms are rarely mentioned in the Chola-period inscriptions of the five study areas, but the existence of the broad divisions between upper and lower shares is well-known (and debated) in a number of studies and in modern parlance: A. Appadorai, *Economic Conditions in Southern India (1000–1500 A.D.)*, Madras, 1936, pp. 171–78; Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 522–27; Leonid Alayev, 'The System of Land-Rights in Southern India (900–1300 A.D.),' in

Aside from isolated and random references to fees for various forms of village government,³⁵ the largest number of local cesses concerned expenses for the annual or occasional upkeep of irrigation facilities, so crucial for an economy dependent on water for rice cultivation. Terms relating to irrigation dues carried with them connotations of local collection and expenditure, at times in cash but mostly in personal labour; the frequency of these terms peaks in the records of the early twelfth century but declines thereafter.³⁶ A separate term for 'dues of cultivators' (*kuḍimai*) refers to similar types of local personal labour, but occurs more often in contexts suggesting collection by superior agencies outside the village; this term is rare in the early Chola period but steadily increases in frequency during later times.³⁷ Similar increases occur for the more generalised term *viniyogam*, which contextually includes the cesses for local personal labour with an element of supra-village control (see Table 4).³⁸ The data on labour dues suggest a twelfth-century decline in local responsibilities in relation to an increase in the involvement of supra-village agencies.

The single greatest demand for agrarian produce was the land tax, *kaḍamai* or more rarely *irai*.³⁹ It is currently impossible to determine the percentage of the yield demanded as *kaḍamai*, but there was an attempt during the eleventh century to standardise the evaluation and measurement of rice land and to impose standard land tax rates in the areas around the Kaveri river.⁴⁰

Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies, Vol. 2, Part 14, Madras, International Association of Tamil Research, 1981, pp. 17–22; R. Tirumalai, *op. cit.*, pp. 204–06; Kathleen Gough, *Rural Society in Southeast India*, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 110–11, 152.

³⁵ These terms range from cesses for village government (*ūr ācci*, *ūr iṭu vari*, *ūr kaḷancu*) or nadu government (*nātācci*) to fees for plough teams (*erppon*), marriage (*kaṇṇālak kāmam*) or legal expenses (*vivastai*). The terms are scattered randomly through time and space, and there are not more than six references to any individual term. We may assume that such local cesses were ubiquitous, but rarely crop up in inscriptions because they were rarely defrayed in donation arrangements.

³⁶ Terms for irrigation dues include several kinds of *veṭṭi* and *veṭṭai* (often glossed as 'forced labour'), *kulai* and *kurampu* (terms for embankments), *nir* (water) or *āl* (manual) *amañci*, *muṭṭaiyāl* and *cuṭṭi*.

³⁷ Most occurrences of the term *kuḍimai* refer to labour services for local agencies, especially temples or other public buildings (e.g. *SII* 24: 58, 94; *ARE* 1927: 211, 355; 1931–32: 89). One instance records *kuḍimai* levied by the nadu (*IPS* 327). A number of references describe *kuḍimai* going for 'the sacred victorious gate' (*niruk korra vācal*), meaning either the temple or the king's palace but probably the latter (*SII* 24: 64; *ARE* 1917: 276). How or when labour services for the king were enforced remains unclear, although periodic military or construction labour seems plausible.

³⁸ There are *viniyogams* for the village, the Brahman assembly, and agricultural castes (*TK* 132, 190), and *viniyogam* including a variety of local labour cesses (*TK* 212; *ARE* 1927–28: 205). See also *irāja niyogam* (*SII* 17: 540) and *viniyogam* including *kuḍimai* and *kaḍamai* (*TK* 163).

³⁹ The term *kaḍamai* rarely appears in a generic sense as a 'duty' to pay all kinds of taxes (e.g. *SII* 24: 53). *Irai* takes the place of *kaḍamai* at times in Kumbakonam taluk (e.g. *SII* 8: 611; *ARE* 1917: 227) and often in Pudukkottai (e.g. *IPS* 135, 151, 158, 190):

⁴⁰ Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 94–105.

TABLE 4
Distribution of Major Tax Terms in Five Study Areas

Tax terms	Sub-period 1 (849–985)	Sub-period 2 (985–1070)	Sub-period 3 (1070–1178)	Sub-period 4 (1178–1279)
Eccoru	25 .08*	11 .03	8 .01	3 .001
Antarayam	2 .002	5 .01	35 .06	38 .07
Kadamai	26 .04	26 .06	39 .07	79 .15
General tax terms	1 .001	5 .01	32 .06	32 .06
Irrigation dues	38 .05	45 .11	57 .11	17 .03
Kudimai	1 .001	12 .03	33 .06	39 .07

* The ratios refer tax term to total inscriptions from each sub-period.

During later centuries the growing land revenue department was concerned primarily with the determination of *kaḍamai* rates on agricultural land of various sorts. Occurrences of the term *kaḍamai* increase constantly in the inscriptions of the Chola period. (see Table 4.) Parallelling this increase was a rise in the occurrence of a general term for the 'large tax' (*peruvari*) which apparently applies to the cesses of the upper share or *kaḍamai*.⁴¹

Expenses for the collection of superior taxation fell into the early concept of *eccoru*, a term referring to various supplies of cooked rice provided for officials.⁴² This term was prevalent during the early Chola period but steadily declined over time (see Table 4). Simultaneously another term referring to 'intermediate income' (*antarāyam*) steadily increased in frequency, contextually connected to several other words suggesting expenses of the threshing floor and ratios of produce. The intermediate income was a tax in cash coupled consistently with the land tax in kind, and determined by the land revenue department as part of the share for the Chola kings.⁴³ The decline of *eccoru*, a term connoting occasional provisions tendered in the

⁴¹ Whereas the term *peruvari* does not occur in the data base in contexts that explain its meaning, references to the paired term for 'small tax' (*cilvari*) often include descriptions of other, local cesses comprised within it. The term 'lower tax' (*kīl irai*) reinforces a parallel between large taxes as part of the upper share and small taxes as part of the lower share (*IPS* 90; *KK* 72, 73, 74; *ARE* 1931–32: 93).

⁴² P. Shanmugam, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

⁴³ Heitzman, *op. cit.*, pp. 395–97. For explicit references to royal collection of *antarāyam*, see *SII* 6: 33; 23: 49; *ARE* 1911: 211.

village, relates to the rise of *antarāyam*, a cess linked to a more standardised and centrally managed tax structure.

Table 4 portrays the frequencies of important tax terminology during the four temporal divisions of the Chola period. The central changes in taxation during that time are visible by treating the six major terms as three separate pairs. *Eccoru* and *antarāyam*, referring to the expenses of superior tax collection, show an obvious inverse relationship, with a steady decrease in the frequency of the more nebulous and perhaps occasional *eccoru* cess and a steady increase in the frequency of *antarāyam*, a cess determined by the revenue department of the Chola kings. A similar relationship exists between the aggregated terminology connected with local irrigation cesses and the term *kuḍimai* which was more closely associated with collection by superior state agencies. As the term *kuḍimai* came into more general use, increasing from one occurrence in the tenth century to thirty-nine in the thirteenth century, the local terms declined after the late twelfth century. Meanwhile, relative frequencies of the land tax (*kaḍamai*) and other general tax terms (*peru vari* and *viniyogam*), officially the prerogatives of the Chola kings, continually increased over time, occurring by the thirteenth century in 15 per cent of all inscriptions.

A consistent pattern emerges from the study of major tax terms during the Chola period, pointing toward a greater concentration of tax-collecting power in the hands of superior agencies and a decline in the importance of cesses collected and officially controlled by village administrations. These findings suggest an increasing penetration of the village environment by outside agencies officially subordinate to the Chola kings. Comparison of tax developments with the changes in the actions of the Cholas themselves and the duties of their official representatives supports the view of ever greater royal authority and control of local agricultural environments during the time after around AD 1000.

Kumbakonam, Tiruchirappalli, and Tirutturaippundi taluks, all participating to various degrees in the irrigation economy connected with Kaveri river water, provide no indications that agencies other than those of the Chola kings (especially the land revenue department) were in charge of the collection of taxes. Central royal control was tied to the presence of the kings themselves and the concentration of their officials within the geographical area of the Kaveri river basin. This centrality of state control is less visible in the more outlying study areas.

The Tirukkoyilur area was the centre of operations for subordinate families even at the dawn of written records, when Malayaman chiefs ruled there at the beginning of the Christian era and defied the ancient Chola, Pandya and Chera kings. During the late tenth century, as Rājarāja I consolidated the empire, a family of Milāḍu chiefs came to power in Tirukkoyilur and retained local prerogatives in return for service to their Chola overlords. After 1070, the leaders of the Tirukkoyilur area called themselves

Malaiyamān, hearkening back to the glories of their more ancient predecessors, and supported the Chola cause to the bitter end around 1250.⁴⁴ These latter Malaiyamān chiefs appear in numerous instances as collectors of special 'protection' taxes (*pādikāval*), cesses almost unknown from the other four study areas during the Chola period.⁴⁵ In addition, several cases suggest that the Malaiyamān family at times collected land taxes (*kaḍamai*) and other cesses associated elsewhere with the superior rights supposedly due to the kings.⁴⁶ It appears that the Chola kings made arrangements with locally powerful families in the Tirukkoyilur area, allowing a certain amount of local autonomy in finances in return for military support and the handling of local administration.

In dry Pudukkottai to the south, some of the administrative and tax-collecting activities elsewhere associated with agents of the king remained the responsibility of the *nāṭṭār*, or assembly of *nadu* leaders. A large percentage of references to the *nāṭṭār* within the five study areas comes from Pudukkottai alone, despite the fact that this area has yielded relatively few inscriptions.⁴⁷ When the *nāṭṭār* met together in Pudukkottai, they sometimes performed the arbitrational activities of *adhikāris* or allocated taxes in the manner of the land revenue department.⁴⁸ But within Pudukkottai they did not always act in this way. Larger percentages of inscriptions refer to their activities in the tenth and the thirteenth centuries, with a distinct fall in references during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁴⁹ It is surely no coincidence that the periods of their decline correspond to the times of greatest Chola power, while the periods of their greatest visibility were times when royal authority was most tentative. The Chola kings and their officials extinguished the primacy of local assemblies when they consolidated power in the south, but as the Chola kings and their administrative organs retreated the local assemblies bounced back to establish their own local dominance.

It is possible now to discern three types of supra-local political authority competing with varying success for tax revenues extracted from the village economies. At times of imperial weakness, dry and tank-irrigated zones, with their discrete and fragile economic bases, supported *nāṭṭār* assemblies

⁴⁴ S. Srinivasan, 'A Study of the History of Tirukkoyilur down to A.D. 1600,' Ph.D. dissertation, Karnatak University, Dharwad, 1980, pp. 117–19, 147ff.

⁴⁵ Y. Subbarayalu, 'The State in Medieval South India,' pp. 53–54; P. Shanmugam, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61; Karashima and Sitaraman, *op. cit.*, p. 91. Within the inscriptions of the five study areas, references to *pādikāval* number 54, with 47 occurrences from post-1070 Tirukkoyilur taluk.

⁴⁶ *ARE* 1906: 158; 1934–35: 135, 186, 190.

⁴⁷ Total numbers of Chola-period inscriptions from the five study areas are as follows: Kumbakonam taluk—743; Tiruchirappalli taluk—541; Tirukkoyilur taluk—631; Tirutturaippundi taluk—231; Pudukkottai—245. References to the *nāṭṭār* in the data base total 43; references to the *nāṭṭār* from Pudukkottai alone number 21, or 49 per cent.

⁴⁸ *SII* 17: 462, 540; *IPS* 125, 285.

⁴⁹ Thirteen total references to *nāṭṭār* occur in records pre-dating 985, seventeen references occur in records post-dating 1178. The time of greatest royal power (985–1070) yields only five references to *nāṭṭār*.

which balanced local political tensions and performed arbitrational functions. The limited zones of riverine irrigation around the Pennai river supported the lineages which acted as little dynasties, complete with ancient legends and the poetic praises surrounding royal families.⁵⁰ The big irrigation systems within the Kaveri river basin supported the imperial Cholas, the biggest kings. The Cholas were so big that their military power and ritual pre-eminence overshadowed the outlying areas of central Tamil Nadu. They destroyed for some time the effectiveness of discrete *nāṭṭār* assemblies and reduced to subordination the smaller 'kings' of the smaller river systems. The boundaries of these three types of political institutions were never fixed; the outlying parts of the Chola country experienced different mixes of centralised, chiefly or *nāṭṭār* administration, depending on the energy of the centre and the resistance of the localities. In this way the Chola agents and the *nāṭṭār* acted side-by-side in Pudukkottai, or Chola agents, *nāṭṭār* and Malaiyamāṇ chiefs acted side-by-side in Tirukkoyilur taluk. The general tendency seen in the variables of royal activity, official presence, and important taxation favours a period of increasing central dominance from at least 1000 to 1150, as more 'segmentary' or 'feudal' political organisations succumbed to royal dominance. After 1150, the political forms typical of local ecology and economy reemerged as significant arbiters of revenue allocation and political power.

Changing Property Relations in the Chola Heartland

Necessary causes of the Chola collapse were invasions by external enemies (the Hoysalas and Pandyas) and rebellions of chiefs in the northern parts of the Tamil country. But were these sufficient causes for the decline of the Chola state? The evidence indicates that the Cholas were engaging in ever more effective involvement in local economic spheres and the manipulation of tax revenues as time went on. Royal orders and central taxation generally increased in all study areas until the thirteenth century, although concentrated as usual in the central areas of the empire. If the dominance of the Chola polity rested on the ability of the kings to direct or mediate the allocation of local resources, then the very moment of its collapse was paradoxically the time of its greatest central authority. The power base that had allowed the Cholas to dominate their neighbours for so long failed them against those same enemies. Some weaknesses in that power base may have underlain this failure.

Evidence from the inscriptions concerning property relations holds a key to an understanding of changing local power during the Chola period and the infrastructural developments that actually weakened royal control as it

⁵⁰ R. Nagaswamy, *Tirukkōyilūrppāṭṭu*, Madras, discusses the extended praises of the land and rulers of Tirukkoyilur in *SI* 7: 863.

expanded. The evidence concerns frequency distributions of a crucial term for control over property—*kāṇi*.

The term *kāṇi*, related to the verb ‘to see’ (*kaṇ*), has immediate connotations of overseeing some right or thing, and in later times referred to ‘possession, right of possession, hereditary right.’⁵¹ Within the five study areas, the term occurs within three main contexts: (1) Occupational *kāṇi* describes a situation in which property or possession entailed performance of a specified duty within a village or a temple. The relatively few extant references to this type of right point to a general custom of granting village lands as the property of occupational specialists—accountants, security personnel, musicians, doctors—conditional upon their performance of their duties.⁵² (2) *Kāṇi* in temples refers to the enjoyment of properties or prerogatives in connection with membership in a temple staff. The performance of rituals or administrative tasks in a temple depended on support of personnel through grants of temple land which remained the personal property of the holders as long as they performed their stipulated temple functions.⁵³ (3) *Kāṇi* in land appears in three forms: (a) Donors possessed their own *kāṇi* land, inherited it, or purchased it from third parties, or alienated it to religious institutions with all rights to cultivation.⁵⁴ (b) The land tax in kind is called *kāṇi kaḍaṇ*, or the ‘dues from *kāṇi*,’ indicating that royal cesses were due from land that was officially possessed by persons or corporate bodies.⁵⁵ (c) Temple lands were ‘property of the holy name’ (*tirunāmatuk kāṇi*), obtained at times through alienation of the rights of the donors described above.⁵⁶

Several aspects of the term *kāṇi* indicate that it refers to the private property of individuals. Donors had the right to inherit, bequeath, alienate or subdivide their *kāṇi* land. Possessors of *kāṇi* in temples, typically Brahmans, at times seem to have manipulated their land as their own private

⁵¹ *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 859; Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, p. 18. Other recent discussions of the term *kāṇi* are Peter A. Granda, ‘The “Gift after Purchase” in Vijayanagara Inscriptions,’ *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol. 6 (1979), pp. 25–31; ‘Property Rights and Land Control in Tamil Nadu: 1350–1600’, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1984, pp. 89–110, 142–44, 221–22, 409; Dharma Kumar, ‘Private Property in Asia? The Case of Medieval South India,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (April 1985), pp. 340–66; David Ludden, *Peasant History*, pp. 38–39, 85–88.

⁵² In the five study areas, there are twenty-five total instances of this type of *kāṇi* holding. For more extended discussions of all types of *kāṇi*, see Heitzman, ‘Gifts of Power,’ pp. 123–47.

⁵³ Possessors of these rights are typically called the ‘Siva Brahmans possessing *kāṇi*’ (*kāṇi uṭaiya civapirāmmaṇar*) in Chola-period inscriptions. There are fifty-six total instances of these terms in the data base.

⁵⁴ In a typical transfer of *kāṇi*, a Brahman assembly sold waste land (*pāl*) in their village to a certain Taṅtōṭṭam uḍaiyāṇ, who enjoyed the land as his *kāṇi*, with crops of his choice, paying *kaḍamai* and *kuḍimai* taxes (*SII* 23: 303):

⁵⁵ There are fifteen total references to *kāṇi kaḍaṇ* in the data base, fourteen from Kumbakonam and Tiruchirappalli taluks alone.

⁵⁶ *SII* 23: 187; *TK* 131, 213, 223; *ARE* 1939–40: 242, 389; 1978–79: B293.

property.⁵⁷ Taxation depended on payment by the official possessor of *kāṇi* land. Temples possessed *kāṇi* lands in their own right as corporate owners. On the other hand, other contextual aspects of *kāṇi* imbued the individual rights it conferred within a variety of social duties. Occupational *kāṇi* and *kāṇi* in temples were contingent upon the performance of public services, while *kāṇi* in land necessitated the payment of taxes. Official title to land also masked a variety of social limitations on individual initiative. Privately possessed holdings were shares (*pangu*) within village communities dominated by assemblies of village notables who often made collective decisions over land use, including at times the essential questions of irrigation waters, agricultural labour, or cropping.⁵⁸ Inheritance customs put forward a single person as official possessor of property, but there were limits to the ability of that person to alienate or alter property without consideration of family dependents.⁵⁹ Embedded within ramified systems of social claims, and perhaps existing in the absence of a land market, *kāṇi* nonetheless referred to an indigenous structure of ownership that was invoked for officially private purposes in a number of Chola-period records.

Table 5 displays the changes in the relative frequencies of references to

TABLE 5
Total Numbers and Percentages of Records Referring to kāṇi in Five Study Areas

<i>Study area</i>	<i>Sub-period 2</i> (985–1070)*	<i>Sub-period 3</i> (1070–1178)	<i>Sub-period 4</i> (1178–1279)
Ku nbakonam taluk	12 / .08 [†]	61 / .35	94 / .75
Tiruchirappalli taluk	2 / .02	11 / .08	61 / .57
Tirukkoyilur taluk	2 / .01	9 / .06	14 / .13
Tirutturaippundi taluk	5 / .26	9 / .40	98 / .87
Pudukkottai	2 / .08	10 / .22	5 / .06
Totals	23 / .05	100 / .19	272 / .51

* Note that there are no reference to *kāṇi* from the inscriptions of sub-period 1 (849–985).

† The ratio refers to the number of records from each sub-period containing references to *kāṇi* divided by the total number of records from that sub-period.

⁵⁷ ARE 1906: 130, 146, 147. See also 'days' in the temple as transferable rights of Brahmans (ARE 1911: 267; 1914: 46; 1931–32: 115).

⁵⁸ I udden, *Peasant History*, pp. 86–89. Kathleen Gough has interpreted the system of shares as a type of village communal property, with the king as landowner, in 'Modes of Production in Southern India,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1980), pp. 343–46. Lately Burton Stein has stressed 'communal' ownership in 'Politics, Peasants,' pp. 75, 82.

⁵⁹ J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Essays in Classical and Modern Law*, Vol. 2 Leiden, 1977, pp. 21–25, 86–91; Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'Der Begriff des Eigentums in Hindurecht,' in J. Duncan M. Derrett, Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Graham Smith, *Beiträge zu Indischem Rechtsdenken*, Wiesbaden, 1979, pp. 90–93, 103; Yvonne Bongert, 'La notion de Propriété dans l'Inde,' *Travaux et Recherches de l'Institut de Droit comparé de l'Université de Paris*, 23, Etudes des Droit Contemporain, 1962, pp. 156–59, 162.

kāni in the inscriptions from the five study areas. Notable is the lack of references before 985, and the relatively few occurrences until about 1070. The relative and absolute number of references continue to increase dramatically thereafter, especially in those areas more closely connected to riverine irrigation. For example, in Tiruchirappalli taluk two references in the eleventh century increased to sixty-one references in the thirteenth century. The percentages of records containing references to *kāni* eventually outstrip those records mentioning the king, his officials and even centrally-oriented taxation. Compare the greatest presence of the land revenue department in Kumbakonam taluk (appearing in 17 per cent of the records) with the much higher figure for *kāni* (75 per cent) in the thirteenth century (Tables 3 and 5).

The interpretation of this terminological shift depends on the connections between word usage and local property control. Karashima has seen the growth of *kāni* in Tiruchirappalli as part of the consolidation of larger, private domains in the hands of 'possessors' (*uḍaiyār*) during the later Chola period, as influxes of plundered wealth and religious donations disrupted earlier communal properties within villages.⁶⁰ Transfers of *kāni* land to temples within the five study areas do reveal a predominance of 'possessors' among secular donors.⁶¹ Although the phenomenon of property differentiation may indeed have been important in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the more generalised increases in *kāni* references may reflect a greater specification of individual rights rather than origination of a completely new system of property rights.

A key may lie in parallel although rarer increases in terms specifying cultivators' rights (*kuḍi kāni*), the official recognition of the right to cultivate land even without title to that land as a private possession. Records especially from Pudukkottai describe donation arrangements with provisos that the cultivators of donated land may not be excluded (*kuḍi nīnkā*) from tenancy under the new temple owners. At times it seems that those permanent cultivators are the donors themselves.⁶² These provisos may provide a clue to procedures underlying many other land donations featuring *kāni* transfers. Official changes in ownership of property could entail retention by previous owners or their previous tenants of considerable rights to agrarian produce. Increasing specification of *kāni* rights was thus part of a larger movement toward greater specification of all kinds of property rights, in order to insure the preservation of local privileges within the framework of religious endowments.

⁶⁰ Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 21–35.

⁶¹ Out of 65 recorded transfers of *kāni* land in the data base, 43 instances (74 per cent) involved persons whose names included the honorific titles for 'possessor' (*uḍaiyār*), 'elder' (*kiḷavan*), or 'lord' (*araiyan*).

⁶² A total of 26 references to the term *kuḍi nīngā* in the data base includes 16 references from post-1070 Pudukkottai. See donor-cultivators in *SI* 23: 257; *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India*, 1958–59, pp. 84–110, Plate 13.

A major cause of class differentiation and terminological change may lie in the activities of the Chola state that we have traced in this paper. The kings gradually and inexorably altered the rules of the political game by moving into local arenas such as Pudukkottai, traditionally dominated by local leaders or *nāṭṭār*. The main weapon for this penetration was increasingly a taxation system attempting to effectively control allocations of large proportions of agrarian produce. The kings simultaneously continued their support of ritual integration by building and endowing temples, a policy that in earlier stages of political consolidation was crucial for political integration of local allies. The *nāṭṭār*, appearing less frequently as arbiters of local administration, were increasingly threatened in their own backyards. Paradoxically, a way out was provided by the kings themselves, and lay in religious donations. A local possessor could on one hand establish his own position as a protector of the moral universe and supporter of the Chola kings, and ensure continued control over the distribution of local agrarian produce, by alienating lands to temples. On the other hand he could create provisos entailing continued rights to cultivation for himself or his client cultivators, or retain unofficial rights to appointment of ritual specialists or allocation of sacralised food connected with the ritual enactments supported by donated lands.⁶³ Most donated lands were made tax-free by royal orders after local requests, or were made tax-free through lump sums given by donors to defray all future taxes; it may have been worth an initial expense to eliminate later royal taxation in an environment where those taxes showed signs of rising further. Alienation of titles to temples in these ways did not entail a decrease in the burden of the upper share extracted from the producers, but signified a redirection of control over its uses that ultimately favoured local authorities.

The donation of lands to temples, and the verification in inscriptions of the particular rights enjoyed by all participating parties, were thus the signs of an increasing flight from royal control and the creation of tax shelters in religious institutions. The greater implementation of a centralised Chola state thus led to ever greater alienation of officially individual rights to temples, and the progressive starvation of the central state at its time of greatest need. In this view the local leaders were major actors in the growth of religious institutions, especially temples, and their need for differentiated and specified property rights spurred on a widespread terminological change that mirrored renewed political localism. But as the central state fell apart, temple endowments expanded until the temples themselves became the greatest institutions in South India, major landlords and political forces in themselves.

⁶³ Arjun Appadurai, 'Kings, Sects and Temples in South India,' *IESHR*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1977), pp. 47-73; Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, 'The South Indian Temple: Authority, Honour and Redistribution,' *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (July-Dec. 1976), pp. 187-211.

Conclusion

The study of the Chola period has revealed two main policies of royal political unification. The first and earliest policy displays the characteristics of the ritual, segmentary state, through which the Chola kings attempted to unite disparate and fairly autonomous local leaders under a single, mediating agency through ritual means. Keys to this mediating royal role were (1) the manifestation of royal protection over religious institutions (Brahman settlements and temples) through establishment of tax-free revenue grants and construction of shrines, and (2) periodic arbitration of local disputes, typically involving religious institutions, either in person or more often through representatives who were drawn from allied local elite groups. A second and later policy involved a tightening of royal control over local resources through the recruitment of elites into a more bureaucratic tax collection agency, and the implementation of tax collection or reallocation within the rich agricultural zones that supported religious institutions. This second policy reveals a drive toward increased revenue extraction and greater centralized control within the core area of the empire. The Chola kings remained ritual leaders, but aspired to be managers in the *Arthaśāstra* style.

The success of royal integrative policies depended on local variables of geography. The most striking feature of the data presented here is the rapid decrease in the penetration of all aspects of royal influence with increasing distance from the centre of the polity. Even within the outer reaches of Cholamandalam, the core area of an extended polity, the kings were more likely to strike deals with local leadership than to implement a centralised administrative apparatus. The nature of local leadership in turn varied according to ecological characteristics that underlay varying productive regimes. Smaller riverine tracts, with their relatively greater and assured agricultural surpluses, supported dominant lineages that appropriated some of the ritual or administrative characteristics of kings. When the Cholas overran peripheral riverine tracts, they reinstalled or created dominant lineages which supported their overlords in return for continuing local autonomy, in a process that resembles more closely 'feudal' political subordination. In drier zones, with discrete and more insecure productive regimes based on rain-fed fields or small artificial lakes, the kings encountered collective assemblies of many local power-holders. The local assemblies became insignificant as the waxing royal system absorbed leadership into roles as *nadu* settlement officials, *adhikāris*, and eventually tax department members. But as royal power waned, the assemblies of local leaders again came into view as forums for articulating and adjusting the disputes of the dry zones.

The three configurations of political dominance—royal centralisation, 'feudal' subordination, or *nāṭṭār* assembly—thus rested ultimately on the ecology and modes of production that underlay them in different areas.

The determinative impact of ecological features intersected with the historical processes whereby the Chola kings, through their military successes, consolidated enough power to allow a greater penetration of their own agents within the peripheral zones during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Despite the importance of the varying interactions of these superior political organisations or alliances for the historical development of the Chola state, the underlying dynamics of state formation rested on the ability of those superior agencies to coordinate the aspirations of elites emerging directly from the village level. Political and economic leadership within the predominantly agrarian economy rested on the possession of land and/or rights to the produce from land. The contexts of the term *kani* in the Chola inscriptions suggest that power over land and its produce was not communal (despite a variety of collective controls), but was instead divisible into a number of officially determinable legal rights or ownerships. Differential access to these rights raised up locally-dominant kinship groups and individuals representing their interests—individuals who entered *nāṭṭār* assemblies, who called themselves ‘possessors,’ and who ultimately interacted with superior state agents. The policies of these local leaders included the preservation or extension of their authority over agricultural resources. When superior state organisations encouraged these local prerogatives, local leaders offered support; thus the early policies of the Chola kings, who entered rarely into local affairs but offered avenues for local legitimisation and opportunities for booty, enlisted support for imperial policies. But when a superior state attempted to manipulate the village economy more directly, the arbiters of village affairs were naturally willing to abolish that state; thus policies of royal centralisation called forth the creation of tax shelters and ultimately open rebellion by the thirteenth century. In these ways the behaviour of local elites within fertile agricultural tracts was crucial to the political fortunes of premodern dynasts in South India.

The results of the present study exemplify the qualitative differences between ‘nuclear areas’—zones of rich alluvial soil and abundant water—and zones where stable agriculture was less rewarding or more insecure. The emergence of the Kaveri river delta as a dynamic agricultural tract was the salient feature underlying the hegemony of the Chola kings, who in turn initiated projects designed to stimulate further agrarian expansion. The dynamism of the Kaveri delta fuelled an imperialism that further stimulated investment in land reclamation and irrigation expansion within other, lesser riverine tracts and in peripheral areas. The impact of the Chola state was, then, to provide formats for the expansion of leaders within the agrarian society of Tamil Nadu. Several levels of leadership represented the upper level of a hierarchically organised production process that exploited advantages of land and water to create fertile agricultural tracts. The Chola period was thus a time when the riverine zones were being filled up, when complex, unequal social management brought techniques of land and water

exploitation toward the limits of the riverine zones. The political figures in this drama were the several layers of nobles and landowners, resting on the fruits of peasant cultivation, who interacted with the kings and constituted state institutions. The Chola polity was an 'early state'⁶⁴ in the sense that its agrarian base and the political power of its elites were in an early stage of expansion.

What were the legacies of the Chola polity as an early state? Perhaps the most striking images of secular change were the numerous and beautiful temples that dotted the landscape of fertile agricultural zones in south India—the legacy of an imperial policy that encouraged ritual manifestations of temporal authority. Behind the temples was an expanded agrarian and commercial base that found its expression in the urbanised environment that grew up around the holy sites and in larger areas of green fields at harvest time tilled by peasant cultivators. Four centuries of relative peace and encouragement of local initiatives had spurred on the medieval expansion, but the Chola kings had also instituted a new level of governmental involvement in the fertile *nadus*, including periodic overseeing of economic activities, the mediation of centrally-sanctioned officials, and the collection of taxes. The accomplishments of the Chola period—expansion, urbanisation, and central involvement in local affairs—were not lost during the succeeding Pandyan and Vijayanagara periods, but were exploited by later dynasts to build larger and more impressive state structures.

⁶⁴ See discussions of the features of the early state in H.J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik, *The Early State*, The Hague, 1976. The authors conclude that political organisation was a relatively closed system standing outside and exploiting large number of local communities, a feature corresponding to Marx's ideas of the Asiatic mode (pp. 546–54, 604–06, 642–43). The emphasis of the present study on intermediate authorities suggests that a variety of elite groups emerging from village-level production relations could interact with the central state apparatus and wield effective power in their own right in the early state.