

= Subrahmanya Temple , Saluvankuppam =

The Subrahmanya Temple at Saluvankuppam , Tamil Nadu , is a shrine dedicated to the Hindu deity Murugan . Archaeologists believe that the shrine , unearthed in 2005 , consists of two layers : a brick temple constructed during the Sangam period (the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD) and a granite Pallava temple dating from the 8th century AD and constructed on top of the brick shrine . The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) team which conducted the excavation believe that brick temple could be the oldest of its kind to be discovered in Tamil Nadu . However , noted Indian archaeologist R. Nagaswamy is critical of this claim owing to lack of references to the shrine in the popular literature of the period .

The temple was discovered by a team of archaeologists from the ASI based on clues found in a rock inscription left exposed by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami . Initially , excavations revealed an 8th @-@ century Pallava @-@ era shrine . Further excavations revealed that the 8th @-@ century shrine had been built on the brick foundation of an earlier shrine . The brick shrine has been dated to the Sangam period .

The temple faces north , unlike most Hindu temples . Artefacts from two phases , the Sangam phase as well as the Pallava phase , have been found . The temple is Tamil Nadu 's oldest shrine to Murugan . It is also believed to be one of only two pre @-@ Pallava temples to be discovered in the state , the other being the Veetrirundha Perumal Temple at Veppathur .

= = Discovery = =

After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami had subsided , archaeologists discovered rock inscriptions which had been exposed by the tsunami waves close to the hamlet of Saluvankuppam , near the UNESCO @-@ designated World Heritage Site of Mahabalipuram . The inscriptions by the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III and the Chola kings Parantaka I and Kulothunga Chola I spoke of a Subrahmanya Temple at Thiruvizhchil (the present day Saluvanakupam) . S. Rajavelu , epigraphist with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) , identified a nearby mound as the site of the temple . In 2005 , archaeologists unearthed an 8th @-@ century Pallava temple under the mound . G. Thirumoorthy , ASI Assistant Archaeologist , believed that the shrine could be the oldest Subrahmanya temple to be excavated in Tamil Nadu . There were speculations on whether the temple could be one of the " Seven Pagodas " .

However , further excavations revealed that the 8th @-@ century temple was constructed over the remains of an older brick temple . According to Thirumoorthy , the garbhagriha or sanctum sanctorum of the brick temple was filled with sand and covered with granite slabs upon which the newer temple was constructed . Sathyamurthy , Superintendent , ASI Chennai Circle , said that the brick temple could be dated to the Sangam period as the shrine faced north unlike modern temples which face either east or west . This proved conclusively that the temple was constructed before the 6th or 7th century AD when the shilpa shastras , the canonical texts of temple architecture , were written . Estimates of the age of the brick shrine range from 1700 to 2200 years .

Archaeologists believe that the brick shrine was destroyed either by a cyclone or a tsunami which took place 2 @, @ 200 years ago . The Pallavas built a granite temple on the brick foundation in the 8th century AD , which also was likely to have been destroyed by a tsunami . Archaeologists believe that the second tsunami must have occurred in the 13th century AD as the latest inscriptions which speak of the shrine have been dated to 1215 .

= = Historical background = =

Although the city of Mahabalipuram was constructed by the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I in the 7th century AD , there is evidence that a small port might have functioned at the site even earlier . Megalithic burial urns dating to the very dawn of the Christian era have been discovered near Mahabalipuram . The Sangam age poem Perump?????uppa?ai describes a port called Nirppeyyaru which some scholars identify with the present @-@ day Mahabalipuram . Sadras near

Mahabalipuram has been identified as the site of the port of Sopatma mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea .

= = Inscriptions = =

There are many rock inscriptions near the temple . The discovery of three granite pillars with inscriptions of grants made to the shrine led to the discovery of the temple itself . While one pillar contains an inscription recording the donation of ten kazhanchus (small balls) of gold by one Kirarpiriyan of Mahabalipuram in 858 , another records the donation of 16 kazhanchus of gold in 813 for the maintenance of a lamp by a Brahmin woman named Vasanthanar . The third pillar has an inscription by Raja Raja Chola I. Apart from these , there are five other pillars with inscriptions by the Pallava kings Dantivarman I , Nandivarman III and Kambavarman , the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III and the Chola king Rajendra Chola III .

= = Architecture = =

The temple is dedicated to the Hindu deity Murugan and faces north . The garbhagriha or sanctum sanctorum is 2 metres long and 2 @.@ 2 metres wide and is made of 27 courses of bricks . The bricks used are similar to the ones used in other Sangam age sites such as Puhar , Urayur , Mangudi and Arikamedu . A stone vel is positioned at the entrance of the shrine . During the excavations , a terracotta plaque depicting a Kuravai Koothu , a dance which is mentioned in the 1st century AD Tamil epic Silappadhikaram , was discovered . Sathyamoorthy feels that there may not have been any idol in the square garbhagriha as it is too small to house one . The temple is surrounded by a prakara or a compound wall dating from the Sangam period . According to Thirumoorthy , the shrine is " the biggest brick temple complex dating to the pre @-@ Pallava period " .

The temple is built on a cushion of alluvium on which a layer of man @-@ made bricks were laid . On top of this were another four layers of man @-@ made bricks separated by four layers of laterite . There were two types of bricks used : large @-@ sized laterite bricks of the Sangam period and thin , tabular bricks of a later age . The bricks were plastered together with lime .

= = Artefacts unearthed = =

A terracotta Nandi (the bull of the god Shiva ? father of Murugan) , head of a woman , terracotta lamps , potsherds and a shivalinga (aniconic symbol of Shiva) made of green stone are some of the important artefacts found at the site . The Nandi is the first one made of terracotta to be found . While most of the items unearthed belong to the Sangam period , artefacts of a later period including a Chola copper coin have also been found .