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Netherlands Returns 11th-Century Chola Copper Plates to India

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The Netherlands officially returned the historic 11th-century Chola Copper Plates to India during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the country. The restitution ceremony took place in the presence of Dutch leadership and marks a significant achievement in India's efforts to recover its cultural heritage from abroad.



About the Chola Copper Plates?

The returned artefacts, popularly known as the Leiden Plates, are among the most important surviving records of the Chola Empire. They had been preserved for more than a century at the Asian Library of Leiden University in the Netherlands.

The collection consists of:

21 large copper plates

3 small copper plates

Bound together by a bronze ring carrying the royal Chola seal

The inscriptions are written in:

Tamil

Sanskrit

The plates are associated with:

Rajaraja Chola I

Rajendra Chola I

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Kulottunga Chola I

Historical Significance

The copper plates are royal charters issued during the Chola period and provide important details about:

Land grants

Tax revenues

Temple and monastery donations

Administration of the Chola Empire

Maritime trade links

Cultural exchanges with Southeast Asia

The inscriptions formalised the grant of Anaimangalam village to the Chudamani Vihara, a Buddhist monastery in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu.

Historians consider these plates crucial primary sources for understanding:

South Indian history

Chola administration

Religious coexistence

India's maritime connections with Southeast Asia

Cultural and Diplomatic Importance

The repatriation reflects:

Growing India–Netherlands cultural cooperation

India's global campaign for return of stolen or displaced artefacts

International recognition of cultural restitution

India had reportedly been pursuing the return of the artefacts since 2012.

Key Facts for Government Exams

Artefacts returned: Chola Copper Plates (Leiden Plates)

Period: 11th Century CE

Returned by: Netherlands

Preserved at: Leiden University

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Language of inscriptions: Tamil and Sanskrit

Chola rulers associated:

Rajaraja Chola I

Rajendra Chola I

Kulottunga Chola I

Related place: Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu

Buddhist monastery mentioned: Chudamani Vihara

About the Chola Dynasty

The Cholas were among the most powerful dynasties of South India.

Important Chola Rulers

Vijayalaya Chola – Founder of Imperial Chola rule

Rajaraja Chola I – Expanded empire and built Brihadeeswara Temple

Rajendra Chola I – Conducted naval expeditions to Southeast Asia

UNESCO Heritage Related to Cholas

The Great Living Chola Temples are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Important temples include:

Brihadeeswara Temple (Thanjavur)

Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple

Airavatesvara Temple

What are Copper Plate Inscriptions?

Copper plate inscriptions were official royal records used in ancient and medieval India to document:

Land grants

Administrative orders

Tax exemptions

Religious donations

India's Cultural Repatriation Efforts

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India has been actively working with foreign governments and museums to recover:

Sculptures

Idols

Manuscripts

Ancient artefacts illegally taken abroad

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