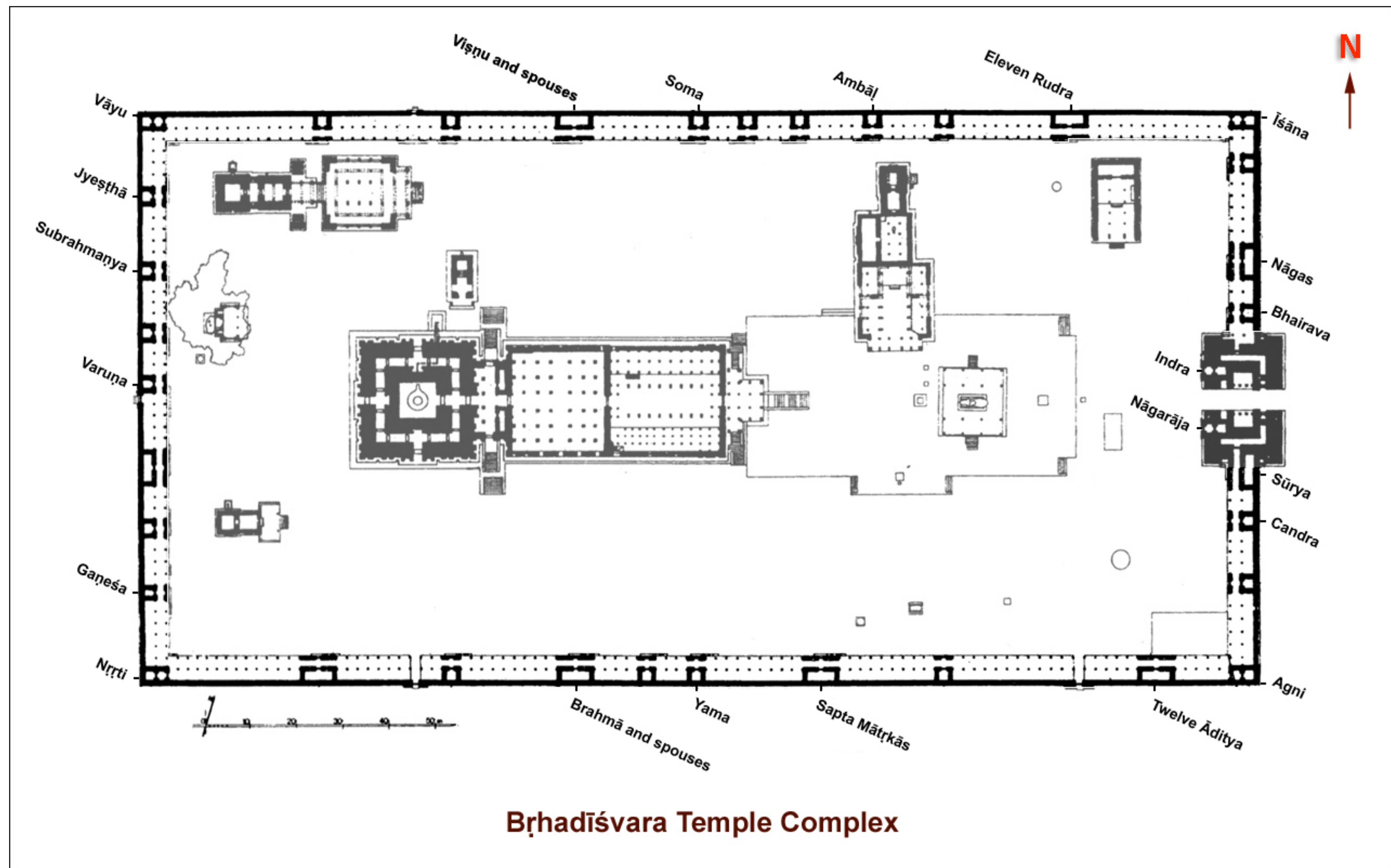


The Enclosures



The prākāra (enclosure) was built by the Commander-in-chief of the Cōlas, Śrī Kṛṣṇan Rāman, following the orders of Rājārāja I. The prākāra forms an absolute rectangle (its length being exactly double its width) around the temple complex and is pierced by four gateways; one on each side of the rectangular enclosure. On the crest of the enclosure wall and running along the entire length are figures of Nandi. The enclosure wall is two-storeyed and has, on its inner side, a single-storeyed gallery. The gallery along the enclosure wall consists of two bays, separated by parallel rows of monolithic pillars. The median rows of pillars divide the gallery into two very distinct parts: the part immediately around the courtyard and the part against the enclosure wall. Isolated walls on the upper storey suggest that an upper gallery was also foreseen.

The inner bay of the gallery, against the enclosure wall houses 36 sub-shrines of secondary deities, some of which are no longer seen. The sub-shrines, assuming the form of miniature temples, are distributed at appropriate locations in the prākāra, following prescriptions in the Vāstu texts. They face either the inner side of the central yard or the main shrine and form an integral part of the prākāra. The median and the corner sub-shrines are marked by an upper story with a dome covering.

There are inscriptions in the prākāra that records several aspects of the temple construction. There are also paintings on the walls of the western and northern enclosure. These depict various scenes from a popular work called Tiruvilayāḍal, on the 64 divine sports of Śiva.



South-east corner



West view from north-west corner of enclosure



West enclosure view from south



West view from north-west corner of enclosure



South-east corner and Inner gateway of enclosure

