

2 Myth and History

India, like many ancient cultures, often gives much greater importance to myth than to history, preferring the limitless universe of magic and power to the precisely contained facts of perceived reality. Therefore, attempting to find and corroborate information on the early history of Guruvayur Temple yields few verifiable results.

Only in the temple's myth do details overwhelm.

Although the many-stranded story is not generally told chronologically, its beginning declares that eons ago there was a devout king called Pracheenabarhis who had ten sons

known collectively as the Prachetas. Pracheenabarhis was so anxious to ensure the continuation of his dynasty that he sent his sons to perform punishing austerities in the sacred Rudra Theertha, the stretch of water that now forms Guruvayur's tank.²⁰ As they approached the lake, Siva, who had been meditating on Vishnu beneath its sacred

*An early photograph (pre-1970)
of the temple tank.*

²⁰Although the tank contains healing properties, particularly beneficial for those with skin diseases, the 4 underground streams that originally flowed over sulphur rocks were sealed when a water-treatment plant was installed.

