Purposeful Poets and Trickster Gods: The Worlds of the Āḻvār Poem

In this paper, I will explore poetic self-construction of the Āḻvār poets. Focusing on the poetry of three major poets—Tirumaṅkai, Śaṭhakōpaṇ, and Kōtai—I will trace both the ways in which they frame their works—as garlands of song composed in chaste, pure, Sangam-Tamil—and of themselves as god’s own poets. Rather than focus on how these poets adapted Sangam poetics and categories, I will engage with the question of what the Āḻvār thought made a poet and what they imagined poetry could (or should) accomplish.