

**The Poets as Anthropologists:
The Representation of Hill/Forest Tribes in
“Classical” Tamil Literature**

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ABSTRACT ‘Representation’ has become one of the major issues not only in anthropology at large but also in South Asian Studies. The present paper is concerned with the classical Tamil ‘Cankam’ literature and pursues the quest of how tribal cultures are depicted in these texts. As the paper shows the poems rather than being mirrors of the social reality of the time are to considerable extent literary constructions. The paper thus reveals that the Cankam poets, despite their realistic rhetoric presented a rather fictitious ordered and harmonic social/cultural landscape. Accordingly the poems, often composed in the service of local rulers, can be seen as windows offering a glimpse on the process of political legitimization with poetical means.