

CEZARY GALEWICZ:

*A Commentator in Service of the Empire: Sāyaṇa and the Royal Project of Commenting on the Whole of the Veda.*

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In this bold and illuminating monograph, Cezary Galewicz systematically explores the complex relationships between sacred knowledge and political power in the fourteenth-century Indian kingdom of Vijayanagara. Specifically, the author explores the production of Sāyaṇācārya's commentarial texts on the Veda and their role in making the Vijayanagara empire. He argues that the first rulers of the burgeoning polity actively sought to align themselves with the charismatic authority of the Advaita monastery at Śrīgeri and the intellectual excellence of the two sagacious brothers, Mādhava and Sāyaṇa, who both held ministerial positions (*mantrin-*) at the imperial court: the latter polymath was employed to produce commentaries (*bhāṣya-*) on the whole of the Veda – a veritable “illumination of the meaning of the Veda” (*vedārthaprakāśana*).

While Galewicz's primary concern is not with the historical person of Sāyaṇa as such, he provides many insights into Sāyaṇa's intellectual life and his relationship with his brother. He is more concerned with how Sāyaṇa and his works (and those attributed to him) came to play an instrumental role in the cultural and political world of Vijayanagara. In a novel, yet rewarding, approach the author pays special attention to the “fringes of the text” (p. 28) such as opening stanzas, preambles, refrains and colophons, which, he argues, contain important information about authorial intent, editorship, and empire in the pan-regional Sanskrit culture of medieval India.

Sāyaṇa's introductions (*bhūmikā-*) and colophons to his commentaries, in particular the *Ṛgvedasamhitābhāṣyabhūmikā*, strongly suggest that a strategic relationship existed between knowledge and power as part of a planned royal enterprise (pp. 22–3, 67). Since the introductory sections of the texts share certain ideas about the mutual relationship between the king, his deity, and his guru, then they function to legitimize the commentarial project. “In this way the *vedārthaprakāśana* is presented as a highly rational and well-planned enterprise in which each *bhāṣya* is pictured as executed or guaranteed by the authorship (or supervision) of a qualified professional in the person of Sāyaṇa who works within the scheme of religious and kingly sanction” (p. 82). In their constant quest for political power, Vijayanagara kings aligned themselves with spiritual teachers and centres of religious authority so as to secure “powerful sources of legitimacy”

(p. 50), which in turn allowed such centres to claim direct influence on the institution of kingship. This mutual relationship is attested in the overlapping domains of kingly political power (*kṣatra*) and temple authority (*kṣetra*) (pp. 61–3). In particular, Vijayanagara kings embodied aspects of divinity by being equated with the presiding deity of a royal temple. To this end, the mutual exchange of royal and divine symbolism allowed for the “deification” of great kings and the “royalization” of great gods (p. 64). Moreover, religious leaders of monasteries such as the one at Śṛīgeri were able to appropriate images of kingly splendour, while rulers tapped into the “sacred charisma” of spiritual teachers.

Galewicz successfully demonstrates how the new empire initiated Sāyaṇa’s momentous undertaking of commenting on the whole of the Veda to construct a sacred and authoritative image of grandeur. Because of the nature of his source material, many of the author’s conclusions can only be speculative. Nevertheless, he provides many convincing and measured insights about the empire’s direct interest in the composition, editing, copying and circulation of manuscripts, while embedding commentarial texts in their socio-political worlds. The author has given us a rich monograph that will contribute much to our understanding of the complex relationship between political and religious authority and the production of sacred commentaries on the Veda that directly served the purposes of the Vijayanagara empire.

**Jarrod L. Whitaker**