to bear stigma. There are ways of being, knowing, and caring for bodies that are conditioned by caste but involve stigma in complex ways, at times reshaping or even undermining it. This is the body of the birth-workers (neither "midwife" nor "sweeper") I spent time with in Uttar Pradesh; it is the sacred body of the *devdasi* Rao refers to as targets of reform; it is a body that is often female or defined as female, subject to respect and revulsion, self-determination and exploitation; it is a body whose demeaned labor may have ritual components, sacralized in ways that are beyond recognition by agents of reform but attract their delimiting attentions. These elements are not incompatible with the "corporeal politics" Rao describes; they may enliven or unsettle it. Though Rao gestures to them, they are beyond the purview of this account. But for those with knowledge of or interest in caste and everyday life in South Asia, they shadow it throughout.

Echoing with "the archaic," the Dalit bodies on which Indian secular democracy is founded can appear as threats to the very political modernity they have created, as is evident in rebukes to reserved placement in institutions. The place of history in visions of equality is often unstable. Rao's powerful arguments show that, at the juncture of the universal and the particular, the stigmatized and free, the religious, and the secular, Dalit political subjectivity upends received categories of Western political thought. But it does not, she emphasizes, represent Indian politics' otherness. Rather, it offers, as does this book, a method for re-examining categories of political action anywhere that privilege is invisible, demands for recognition are viewed as interruptions, and certain people bear disproportionately the heavy effects of history. It is not only in India that the cultural imaginary of the liberal citizen is destabilized at the same time that its contours are charted in countless acts of law. Rather than using caste to describe India's difference, Rao provides an exemplary account of the way politics are generated by those on the underside of privilege, troubled by the voices and actors in their midst.

———Sarah Pinto, Tufts University

Jay M. Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011.

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It takes a brave and experienced hunter to again track down "the beast of the Gévaudan," shorthand for an unusual series of wolf attacks in this centrally situated and deeply isolated French province that between 1764 and 1767 captured the French and European imagination, and have lived on in folklore, novels, film, and a recent resurgence of historical monographs. Jay M. Smith, an eminent historian of the nobility in Ancien Regime France,

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with its privilege and expertise of the hunt, is more than up to the task. This excellent book provides two fundamental contributions across the disciplines. First, it introduces the events and their extraordinary resonance in France to an English-reading audience for the first time. Smith offers fine-grained readings of the often gruesome and unusual attacks on the women and children of the Gévaudan region, and the responses by local authorities, lords, and Louis XV himself. But Smith does an even greater service in taking as his historical target not the identity of the "beast" itself—wolf, hyena, prehistoric monster?—but rather the cultural and political contexts and the "mental environment" that made the events and the animal possible.

Eschewing interpretations that point to the "superstitions" of an ignorant and primitive peasantry, Smith convincingly demonstrates that "elites" were at the center of the making of the beast—and specifically, its monstrous qualities—and this at a critical, transformative moment in French society. Smith keenly locates the panic, fascination, and search for a heroic solution in the years following France's ignominious defeat and loss of empire in the Seven Year's War (1757–1763). The defeat fueled interest in the beast among the local aristocracy, seeking honor in its traditional role as hunters; in the burgeoning international news market, where journalists filled pages left empty by the end of the war with fabulous narratives of the events in the Gévaudan; and at the court itself, where Louis XV made the capture of the beast a high priority.

In the central chapters of the book, Smith offers a cultural and at times psychological explanation of the interest; elsewhere, notably in its illuminating first chapter on the place of the "monster" in the natural science of the Enlightenment, Smith makes a signal contribution not only to studies of the beast but more generally to a cultural history of science. He is elsewhere attentive to the religious contexts (who would have thought to link, for example, the miraculous interpretation of the beast by the Bishop of Mende to the raging quarrels between Jansenists and Jesuits?), and most especially to the political one (Louis XV as the hunter-king who failed). The book does a fine job teasing out the emergent notion of "publicity" that was to shape the decline of the absolute monarchy, and the French Revolution itself.

Rural historians might be disappointed that Smith chose not to dig deeper into inherited cultural practices in his haste to dismiss local "superstition" as a motive force in the events. And the author might have done even more to explain the consequences of the abrupt arrival of "skepticism" beginning in the summer of 1765, during which the king and elites "normalized" the wolf attacks, and elite interest began to wane. But this informative and well-told history will be read with great interest by scholars working on media markets, animals, social elites, scientific thought, religious history, and the public sphere in France and elsewhere.

———Peter Sahlins, University of California, Berkeley

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