such as "a system used in multiple politically independent or geographically diverse regions may diverge over time into several systems" (no. 14, p. 412). One might have guessed as much, and while Chrisomalis' empirically demonstrates what was otherwise merely probable, he does little to advance the discussion beyond this plausible point.

One of the book's most intriguing sections comes at the very end (p. 421ff.), where Chrisomalis engages in a quantitative macrohistory of notation systems. Beginning with only a few in the 4th millennium BCE, the number of numerical notation systems being used simultaneously peaked around 1500 CE, when there were thirty-two different ones in use worldwide. This was followed by a collapse in the number of systems leading to our own time, in which western numerals are overwhelmingly dominant worldwide. Chrisomalis ties each stage in the global rise and decline of the number of active systems to the broad outlines of world history, culminating with the emergence of global capitalism in the sixteenth century. One could no doubt argue with the author's specific historical interpretations. But more significantly, he adds a new and previously hidden numerical dimension to traditional accounts of world history.

Numerical Notation is a masterly work—comprehensive, authoritative, and methodologically rigorous. It will be a cornerstone in the study of number systems for years to come.

———Amir Alexander, UCLA

Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009

doi:10.1017/S001041751200014X

Several years ago, during a wave of resistance to caste-based reservations in higher education in India, it was common to hear detractors accuse reservations, and the reformers who advocated them, of *reviving* caste in a modern society where it had no place. Though similar to reactions to affirmative action measures in other parts of the world, this assertion voiced unique anxieties about not only the challenges minority groups might pose to an imagined meritocracy, but also what Anupama Rao refers to in this book as "the archaic."

In this instance, "the archaic" was not only the fact of caste but also the stain it might bring to modernity, a threat also posed by the bodies of low-caste people. Rao's brilliant account of Indian democracy from the perspective of caste offers ample material for rebutting the idea that caste-politics reintroduce long-dead features of Indian life, and exposes the bodily politics of such claims.

In a compelling and detailed account of "how untouchables became Dalits," she argues that caste reform and the emergence of Dalit political identity were integral to creating democracy in India. Focusing on Dalit history in the central Indian state of Maharashtra from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, this theoretically rich account details the ways caste has been made legible in modern political terms, and shows the roots of postcolonial strategies for political recognition in pre-Independence reform. Visions of equality in India are inseparable, Rao argues, from Dalit efforts to imagine a future free of caste while creating a visible political space as subjects of historical oppression. As such, the Dalit became an "inaugural" political entity (p. 271), at once "emancipated citizen" and "vulnerable subject" (24), who by writing caste irrevocably into liberal governance exposed the stakes involved in the ordering of experience into political structure (35).

Rao asks, "If the Dalit subaltern brings central aspects of the Indian political into view, is there a structuring relationship between caste subalternity and Indian democracy…?" (269). The answer arrives in rich and complex arguments that track shifting stakes of political claim-making and, through them, the instability of categories of political thought (public, private, religion, politics). In compelling chapters on the nineteenth-century non-Brahminism of Jyotirao Phule, the pre-Independence efforts of B. R. Ambedkar to establish a separate electorate for Dalits, and the consolidation and fracturing of Dalit political identity during the rise of the Hindu right, Rao attends to the often paradoxical relationships of social exclusion to political inclusion, and historical suffering to visions of emancipation.

Rao's inquiries feel guided by questions that drove Ambedkar, the activist and political philosopher beloved of contemporary Dalits: What kind of political subject is the Dalit? What kind of polity might Dalits form? In this spirit, Rao observes that the political dimensions of caste are also the limit points of secularism, and Indian secular democracy is a political idea undone by caste's relationship to religion, evident in Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism. At the same time, concepts of equality formed through caste-reform involve constant movement between the universal and the particular. Dalits' position as subjects from whom universal political visions might be extended is in tension with their status as subjects of specific historical formations. *The Caste Question* settles on neither side of this equation, and traces a situated universal subject through a political philosophy in which equality is seen as achieved through political action rather than naturally endowed.

Rao uses both results of Dalit political thought—the instability of the secular and tension between the particular and the universal—to understand democracy as a "cultural object" (271). She extends the stakes of this position, arguing that the separate status Ambedkar envisioned for Dalits as essential to caste equality has rendered them, decades later, perpetual "exceptions," visible primarily as "targets" of liberal reform. The "principle of separation" is "a

permanent reminder of the impossibility of justice for Dalits' historic suffering" (274), a condition that may resonate with other, similar political subjects, those who enter the frame of law carrying the weight of historical oppression.

Dalit history makes it clear that this political subject is corporeal. Dalit history is at once a history of the body and a history of violence. Describing temple-entry reform, property rights debates, and incidents of "atrocity," Rao notes the embodied conditions by which a "suffering subject" (xi) becomes a political subject. Though the "corporeal politics" of Dalit life involve conditions on the body (268), such forms of embodiment must be distinguished not only from the liberal individualism of Western political imaginaries, but also from key critical visions of governance. The corporeal subject of caste is not the subject of disciplined life produced by the form of modern power Foucault identified as biopolitics. This is a point Rao makes in a footnote, but it deserves greater elaboration, particularly since the symbolically fraught, ritually potent bodies of caste, bodies that are never entirely individuated or defined in isolation from the group to which they belong, are integral to modern political strategy, even as they are separated from it through discursive imaginaries of "tradition."

In a related vein, chapters considering violence the legislation of "caste atrocity" note a vexed conflict in caste studies: the tension between symbolic and political ways by which caste becomes meaningful. Resisting scholarly tendencies to portray the "caste subaltern" as a pre-modern source of "oppositional consciousness" (11), Rao skillfully locates symbolic registers that lubricate both violence and strategies for political recognition, and shows those frames of meaning to be malleable and never devoid of political content.

In her discussion of "caste atrocity," Rao makes an important contribution to conversations about sexual violence. Describing a 1963 assault on five Dalit women in Sirasgaon, Maharashtra, she argues that sexual violence against Dalit women *is* caste violence, since acts cannot be disarticulated from the historical pattern of upper-caste men enforcing sexual access to low-caste women. In seeing systematic exploitation, rather than communalized otherness, as a foundation for violence, Rao departs from dominant understandings of gendered violence in conditions of conflict—those that see women's bodies as violated in their capacity to represent the body of the other. This important intervention situates the female body amid multiple economies of power and association that pertain to, but complicate, pictures of violence and group identity.

It is on the matter of the body, however, that Rao's account stops short of addressing questions of subjectivity that caste is uniquely suited to exploring. Rao astutely examines the dual nature of recognition—the way stigma can become the source of political identity, and political identity can be reinscribed as a new source of exclusion. This is an important insight. But while recognition often comes via the shock of disgust (265), the body is central to casted life beyond (but never separate from) its role in violence and capacity

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.

doi:10.1017/S0010417512000151

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,