The chapters in this volume are the product of a workshop on the southern Levant in the Assyrian period held at the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, 11–12 November 2015. The goal was to develop a better understanding of how Neo-Assyrian rule “influenced the demographics, economy, and culture of the region” (10–11). The papers focus on the southwest under Assyrian rule and provide an interdisciplinary approach that reconsiders the assumptions associated with the idea of *pax Assyriaca*. Each chapter presents new data to consider or revisits known data in light of new discoveries, thus providing a review and opportunity to consider again the influence of the Assyrians on this region during their dominion.

In chapter 1, Faust and Aster introduce the state of the discussion and propose the reconsideration of established positions. After their review of the importance of the southern Levant to the ancient world, the editors describe the use of textual and material evidence in the following studies. Excavations of the southern Levant provide a long history of the material culture of the region and evidence for life in the region prior to the arrival of Assyria, during their hegemony, and after their departure. This scope of evidence enables the studies to propose conclusions regarding the demography and economic development in the region. In their brief history of the study of the southern Levant under Assyrian rule, the editors illustrate the various positions staked out in the past. Those who have held that *pax Assyriaca* provided for economic stability and growth have
been challenged by others who note that the most notable economic expansion occurred in areas that were in so-called client kingdoms outside of the Assyrian provinces (9).

Describing the methods of analysis in the studies, the editors point out the distinctions between the declared intentions in royal inscriptions, the real intentions gleaned from study of other texts and what they term “the reality on the ground,” the imperial policy implemented and discernible through archaeological evidence, and, finally, the reactions of local populations discerned through the archaeological evidence or local texts (10).

In chapter 2, “The Assyrian Century in the Southern Levant: An Overview of the Reality on the Ground,” Avraham Faust reviews the archaeological data from the Assyrian provinces, the client kingdoms, and the Assyrian sources with the goal of reconstructing the settlement patterns, demography, and the economic realities there. The data enable Faust to survey the historical development of power and economics in the region before and after the arrival of the Assyrians. He doubts that Assyrian dominion in the region fueled economic growth, noting disparities between the economic growth in client kingdoms as compared to the economic deficiencies within Assyrian provincial areas.

“The Assyrian Provinces of the Southern Levant: Sources, Administration, and Control,” by Peter Zilberg, analyzes the Assyrian sources that mention or discuss the region. By setting these sources in a chronological framework from Tiglath-pileser III to Assurbanipal and providing tables that organize the data by place, type, publication, source, and so on, he illustrates the range of Assyrian social and economic authority. Zilberg describes Assyrian social realities evident in the documents, such as the administrative system, the military conscription obligations of provinces, economic issues, trade and valuations in the economic system, political propaganda, contracts and legal matters, and the language issues in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This study is important for further discussion of the Neo-Assyrian sources for social and economic activity in the southern Levant.

Shawn Aster’s “Treaty and Prophecy: A Survey of Biblical Reactions to Neo-Assyrian Political Thought” (ch. 4) highlights biblical texts that mention the Assyrian presence. Explaining that the bilingualism of the society of Judah in the Assyrian period provides an avenue of conceptual exchange, Aster illustrates biblical authors appropriating Assyrian concepts, adapting them to their own purposes. In some instances, such as the Deuteronomic appropriation of the treaty format, Aster suggests the authors subvert Assyrian royal claims as they identify YHWH in the position of the Assyrian king (98). He follows Tigay’s (2003) comparisons between the royal psalms in the Bible and imagery in Assyrian legends. His survey of Assyrian references in Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah supports his position that these were not the product of later editors but were written in the Assyrian period (102). Aster concludes that the literary influence of Assyria on biblical writers is evident in their appropriation and adaptation of material for their own purposes, which was focused upon shaping their own unique identity, albeit with Assyrian forms (112).
Chapter 5, “‘Your Servant and Son I Am’: Aspects of the Assyrian Imperial Experience of Judah,” by Amitai Baruchi-Unna, uses information from sources that illustrate the Assyrian Empire’s demands of client kingdoms and examines the experience of Judah as subjects of the Assyrians. Reading Assyrian sources, Baruchi-Unna isolates the expectations Assyria held for subject kingdoms and the commitments understood as incumbent upon the empire. The author identifies the empire’s expectation that client kingdoms would supply military units to fight in the Assyrian army and to assist in building projects in the capital. In the biblical texts he identifies Ahaz’s request for assistance in 2 Kgs 16:5–9 as evidence that the empire owed loyal kings military aid when the latter were under threat. He discusses invocation of local deities to trouble those who break their oaths as starting with Assyrian treaty forms evident in Essarhaddon’s loyalty treaties, which are adapted in Ezekiel and Nehemiah. He concludes that the Assyrians developed the imperial practice of political power bound by oaths taken in the presence of local deities that shaped the imperial patterns of later empires as well.

“The Assyrian Influence on the Architecture of Hospitality in the Southern Levant” (ch. 6), David Kertai focuses on architectural influences that shape social organization and relations. Using his knowledge of administrative architecture in Mesopotamia, Kertai demonstrates that the structures identified as administrative facilities in the southern Levant probably did not have that function and were probably from a later period. Highlighting shared features in Assyrian, Babylonian, and Syro-Anatolian architecture, Kertai introduces the Assyrian composite tradition to discuss the heterogeneity of architecture and the Assyrian adaptation of traditions into its monumental architectural forms. This adaptation represents “the expansion of Assyria and the cultural diversity associated with this” (156). Identification of these forms in the architecture of the southern Levant demonstrates the social influence of Assyria upon the region.

Alexander Fantalkin’s “Neo-Assyrian Involvement in the Southern Coastal Plain of Israel: Old Concepts and New Interpretations” questions established views regarding the political structure of the southern coastal plain. He challenges the centrality of Ashkelon to Assyrian administrative presence and concludes that dating its prosperity to the Assyrian period is a mistake. It is more properly indicative of a later flourishing of the site in the Baylonian period. Using the evidence of recent excavations of Ashdod and Ashdod-Yam, Fantalkin concludes that it was Ashdod-Yam that received the investment of development resources from Assyria and became the capital of the region after the destruction of Ashdod.

In “On Phoenicia’s Trade Relations with Philistia and Judah under the Assyrian Hegemony: The Ceramic Evidence” (ch. 8), Lily Singer-Avitz examines the locations and dating of Phoenician ports in order to outline the timeline for trade interruption in the region as an indication of imperial influence. She uses this influence upon trade, dated by the identification of Phoenician pottery types, as an opening to discuss Assyrian policy and the shifting concerns of different administrations in the region.
Chapter 9, “The Beirut Decree and Mesopotamian Imperial Policy toward the Levant,” by Yigal Bloch, examines this Aramaic inscription to investigate the imperial concerns and identify a date for it. Bloch concludes that it properly belongs to the Neo-Babylonian period rather than the Neo-Assyrian, based upon linguistic evidence and a discussion of the appropriateness of the concern regarding emigration to the Levant from the east.

Wayne Horowitz’s “The Last Days of Cuneiform in Canaan: Speculations on the Coins from Samaria” discusses the cuneiform on coins from Samaria as evidence of the survival of a Mesopotamian community into the Persian period. Interestingly, Horowitz frames his essay with modern references to the use of orthographic forms by communities as a symbol of historic identity. Mentioning the Arminian community in Jerusalem and the use of paleo-Hebrew orthography on modern coins, Horowitz explains the appearance of cuneiform on Persian period coins in Samaria as a further example of a community’s attempt to link to their past.

Though some discussion in the volume may challenge established positions, the use of material culture and innovative methods of analysis make it required reading for those interested in this period in the region. The extensive bibliographies of each chapter and the comprehensive indices of authors, biblical and cuneiform texts, and geographic names make this a well-designed reference volume for any serious scholar. It is a well-conceived and extremely well-executed collection.