This study (Israel’s Deliverance from Egypt. A Formula Analysis on the Theology of Deuteronomy) by Irene Schulmeister is a slightly revised version of her 2006 Ph.D. thesis, at that time written with the well-known Deuteronomy scholar Georg Braulik, O.S.B., from Vienna as her advisor. Braulik, retired in 2004, together with his no less respected colleague Norbert Lohfink, S.J., stands for a tradition in Deuteronomy exegesis that mainly focuses on the analysis of the language and the structure of the texts, especially the formulae that the Deuteronomic (or Deuteronomistic) author(s) use. Standing clearly in this tradition, already in the introduction Schulmeister states that her method is “mainly synchronic” and restricted to the canonical shape of the book (13). Thus, the long-neglected “context-dependent formulation” and the “poly-functional interconnection” of the exodus formulae as a “central subject of Deuteronomic theology” can be regained (13–14).

Schulmeister begins with a statistical overview and some disambiguation matters (17–38). The exodus formulae occur “about fifty-two times” in Deuteronomy, forty times with YHWH as a subject, twice with Moses, and ten times with Israel. While the latter occurrences are not analyzed, the forty remaining formulae can be grouped in three types: (1) formulated with יצא (or עלה) qal or hiphil, (2) with עשה (אשׁר), and (3) with פדה qal. Furthermore, a Deuteronomic exodus formula, according to Schulmeister, usually
consists of four characteristic parts that she calls: *terminus a quo* element (subgrouped by stem and subject: YHWH, Moses, Israel), qualification phrase (Qualifizierungswendung[en]), eyewitness (Augenzeugenschaft), and Egypt elements.

The actual analysis then divides into three parts (25–145, 147–252, 253–304) according to the above-mentioned groups, finished by a short concluding chapter (305–11).

Part 1 comprises the אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה—statements (Deut 4:34; 1:27, 30; 7:18–19; 10:21; 11:2–4 [7]; 29:1–2; 34:11–12; 3:24) and an investigation of the qualification phrase “signs and wonders” in Exod 1–15 and Deuteronomy and of the usage of אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה throughout the Hebrew Bible. Deuteronomy 4:34 (perhaps one of the latest verses of the Deuteronomic framework in chapters 1–11 from a literary-historical point of view) serves as an exemplar for Schulmeister’s method: a detailed view on the structure of the passage, precise word studies of the single elements of the formula, and conclusion. In this manner she shows that the phrase “terrifying displays of power” (מוראגדול) refers primarily to the desert wanderings (derived from a comparison of the usage of יָרָא, נָרָא, and מָוָא) and that the “signs and wonders” refer to the events within Egypt. YHWH has always fought for Israel (e.g., the Sea of Reeds, Exod 14). Neither Egypt nor other nations are crucial for the people of Israel, only—no more and no less—its relationship to God, characterized by Schulmeister as “signs-seeing-covenant-faithfulness” (Zeichen-Sehen-Bundestreue, 142 and passim, contrasted with “signs-seeing-faith” [Zeichen-Sehen-Glauben] in Genesis to Numbers). A fine example of her work is the proof that the mention of Egypt in Deut 1:27, 30 is not a kind of “Nostalgie de l’Égypte” (like Num 14:2, 4, and as often supposed) but, more radically, virtually an “anti-creed” against YHWH, the God of Israel (39–53).

Part 2, on the יצאhiphil statements, examines, after a short prologue on slavery legislation and the phrase “by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,” Deut 5:6, 15; 4:20, 37; 6:12, 21–23; 7:8; 9:26–29; 13:6, 11; 16:1, 3, 6; and 26:8. Here Schulmeister shows that the latter phrase relates directly to the exodus and the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. The exodus is an act of liberation from illegitimate slavery for Israel (which does, in a way, interfere with the covenant theology of the book and challenges the results from the first part).

Part 3, finally, takes a look at the פדהstatements (Deut 15:15; 24:18; 21:8) and concludes with an overview of the “harmonizing tendencies of the Septuagint.” The Hebrew root פדה in a religious sense does not mean “to ransom” but merely something like “to deliver [or redeem] by liberation [or deliverance]” (erlösen durch befreien, 258).
The conclusion recapitulates the results of the three parts. Schulmeister stresses the aesthetic and complex structure and stylistics of the texts and the consequent dyad of formulations underlining the perfection of YHWH’s acts before, for, and with Israel. The main direction of impact of the exodus formulae can be described as Israel’s “being prepared for the land,” demanding covenant faithfulness, commitment to YHWH exclusively, and obedience to his directions. This covenant is always threatened by external influences, but if Israel keeps to the merciful presence of YHWH “among his people”—and acts accordingly—there is no more danger to fear (311).

A review can of course not be the place to present all the single results of Schulmeister’s most detailed and thorough analyses of all twenty-two examples and thus has to refer the reader to the study itself. The main benefit of the study is the interpretation of the exodus formulae strictly in their respective immediate and nearer contexts. As a result, the overall conclusion is rather short and general, and a real overall view is not, or cannot, be given. Thus, the broader-scale results are likely to be less exciting for anyone working with the book of Deuteronomy; in contrast, the reader is rewarded with an inspiring multitude of minor, but perhaps no less important, observations.

The book has a nice layout but, unfortunately, more misprints than average (cf. the wrong Hebrew line breaks on 31, 33, 50, etc. or the missing litterae finalis on 34, 36, etc.); it is well-written and easy to read.

It is a pity that Schulmeister takes only a synchronic point of view. Although she concedes that Deuteronomy is a work that was gradually expanded, containing additions and expansions from many times and by many authors (14), she restricts herself to the “final shape,” defining the Masoretic Text as her point of departure. In a way, this relativizes her treatment of the Septuagint and other ancient witnesses. With a view on the literary history of the book, a composition- or redaction-critical view on the text, the study would have been even more beneficial. At the few places where she considers such an approach (e.g., 30–31, 147, 250), the analysis gains a depth—not only in a historical but also in a theological sense—that is difficult to reach by looking at the mere textual surface.

However, this is all wishful thinking, and Schulmeister should be taken at her word. On page 13 she states that her study “intends to be a formula analysis on the theology of Deuteronomy as it presents itself to us in the final canonical shape of the book” (Die Arbeit “will eine Formeluntersuchung zur Theologie des Deuteronomiums sein, wie sie uns in der vorliegenden kanonischen Endgestalt des Buches entgegentritt”). Schulmeister has fulfilled this task in a thorough, detailed, and worthwhile way. The book will undoubtedly find its place among future studies on Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic theology, as it represents commendable basic research on the exodus motif.