This volume results from a conference held in Tokyo in 2011 with a similar name as the book’s subtitle. It contains a brief introduction, six essays, two indices, and a handsome color hardcover.

The first essay is Yigal Levin’s “Judea, Samaria, and Idumea,” in which he compares the three “geo-ethnic” groups as successors of Iron Age states that were exiled, incorporated as imported populations, and re-created as autonomous ethnic groups in the Hellenistic period. The paper summarizes and synthesizes research for each area, with a concluding summary comparing the trajectory of each group. In his discussion “From Judah to Yehud to Judea” (6–13), Levin follows Lipschits and Faust in arguing for the severe destruction of Judah but with administrative continuity through to the Persian period. He sees a strong integration of Judahite and nonnative groups united by the worship of YHWH. “From Israel to Shamrayn to Samaria” (13–23) traces the region from the eighth century until the revolt against Alexander in 332 B.C.E. He sees only the Galilee and Gilead as heavily destroyed by the Assyrians and immigration as involving the depopulated areas and a governing class in Samaria. The populations remained distinct but slowly amalgamated by the time of Nehemiah. “From Edom to Idumea” (24–39) proposes an ethnic continuity between the two polities, although the region remained
under the Qedarites until it was organized as a unit in the wake of Gaza’s resistance to Alexander. Levin sees the formation of Edomite identity, including worship of Qaus/Qos, as a reaction against Arab control and Judean exclusivity. Levin concludes by noting that in the Persian period the division between Yehud and Samarina was merely administrative and that the Idumeans were in a process of ethogenesis, yet that in the Hellenistic period each would again have separate fates.

Editor Johannes Unsok Ro’s first contribution, “Piety of the Poor in the Community of Qumran,” explores the use of various terms for poverty as self-depictions in the Hodayot, Qumran generally, and the Psalms. He argues for a pattern of “the redemptive God,” “the oppressed supplicant,” and “the adversaries intimidating the supplicant.” He also suggests that the various terms for poverty indicate humility of the group before God but that this is linked with an polyvalent idea of lowness before God and oppressors, which itself has an eschatological connotation. After exploring the Hodayot and several other Qumranic texts, Ro moves to the “historical root of the Qumran-Essenic Piety of the Poor” (70–81) in the Psalms. He understands the use of poverty language to indicate “piety orientation” that is linked to eschatology and a cult-critical stance. He relates the origins of the poverty psalms to a sectarian theological circle that formed the backdrop to Qumran (81).

The third essay, “The Theological Concept of YHWH’s Punitive Justice,” again by Ro, reprises an article previously published (VT 61 [2011]: 406–25) that explores some issues around individual and collective responsibility and punishment. Ro reads Gen 18 as indicating that Judeans in Yehud were poor, vulnerable, and desirous of protection from the wicked rather than of the wicked’s punishment. Genesis 18 is a “product of a more reflective age” concerned with the “social function of the righteous few” (91). Using monotheism, “dualistic eschatology,” and divine judgment as criteria, Ro attempts to place a number of texts in a chronological order (102–3), with Gen 18 at the end with Isa 66.

Avraham Faust, in “Social, Cultural, and Demographic Changes in Judah,” continues his previous work (esp. 2007), arguing against the thesis that Judah was little affected by the Neo-Babylonians. Rather, Persian period Yehud should be classed as a “post-collapse society,” in the terms of Tainter 1994. Faust contends that the reduced use of Judahite rock-cut tombs and the end of the construction of four-room houses evidence major social change (109–13). He then discusses settlement and demographic changes through comparison of surveys and both planned and salvage excavations, summarizing various scholars’ interpretations in three separate graphs, concluding that previous studies erred by placing the peak population during the period at positions other than the end. His chosen model then sees a very sharp decline from the Iron Age. The essay concludes that Persian period Yehud fits Tainter’s description of a postcollapse society.
The penultimate essay, by Alexander Fantalkin and Oren Tal, “Judah and Its Neighbors in the Fourth Century BCE,” is by far the longest. It contends that the Achaemenids reorganized their administration of southern Palestine in the wake of the Egyptian revolt in 404–400, but the focus of the paper is Yehud and Idumaea. The authors see one result of this reorganization to be the canonization of the Torah. They redate Lachish level I to 400 (135–45), which they suggest requires a revised understanding of Achaemenid policy in the region. The building of the site could relate to border stabilization due to the influx of Arabic and Edomite settlers. They view the mainly fourth-century Judahite coins as evidence for increased Achaemenid interest in the region (148–50) and the distribution of the YHD stamp seals as symptomatic of a reorganization (151–53). They argue that a number of new administrative sites were built or refurbished in the fourth century, including Ramat Râhel, 'En Gedi, and Beth-Zur, among others (153–63). They see these as a line of fortifications to protect Arabian traders and warn against Egypt. The reason for this fourth-century change was the loss of Egypt circa 400 B.C.E., rather than the Inarus rebellion, which suddenly increased the importance of both Yehud and Idumea (163–68). The remainder of the essay (169–80) contends that this change provided the context for the collation and proto-canonization of the Torah in Ezra’s time (under Artaxerxes II): a response by priests to garner favor with the Persians by painting Egypt negatively. The contradictions of the Pentateuch simultaneously flustered the Persians while empowering priestly interpreters (174). The emphasis on the exodus portrayed Egypt as chaotic in line with Persian ideology.

The last contribution is a brief essay on Greek depictions of the Persians, “The Representations of the Persian Empire,” by Yoshinori Sano. Primarily in reference to Herodotus and Aeschylus, Sano discusses depictions under the headings of luxury, military equipment, freedom versus slavery, and the figure of Darius, the latter of which focuses on the idea of hubris. He places both of these authors within the development of Greek consciousness in the fifth and fourth centuries. The volume closes with an index of references and an index of authors.

Several of the contributions contain useful summaries and syntheses of the highly contested subject of Achaemenid period archaeology in Yehud, Samaria, and Idumea, with interesting theses on how the archaeological information could be related to the biblical information. Levin offers an interesting comment on how communities can have different trajectories even in similar circumstances, highlighting both the general and the particular in human history. Faust remakes a forceful case for the social consequences of the Babylonian conquest, and his analysis should prompt readers to explore the broader sociological concept of collapse. Fantalkin and Tal strengthen a case for a change in Achaemenid administration in the region, while their thesis on the Pentateuch’s formation will surely provoke discussion.
Several others are weaker. Ro’s first essay appears to revive a method that sees a divide between hierocrats and eschatological prophets and postulates movements for each. Ro’s second essay relies too much on complex philosophical and theological concepts (i.e., theory of justice) as dating criteria and moves too directly from an idea to a sociological context. Finally, I wish that the last essay had been expanded considerably, with more detailed analysis of Greek texts.

As a collection, the essays feel a bit disparate; a more extensive introduction would have been desirable, to bring the various archaeological, biblical, and classical threads more closely together. Overall, while the volume deals with “socio-economic structures and processes” less than I had expected from the title, its relatively modest size makes it a useful starting point or refresher for some of the various debates current around Persian period Yehud, from archaeology to the formation of the Torah to the origins of Qumran.