The present work—the author’s first monograph devoted primarily to Josephus—is a very welcome addition to the ever-growing bibliography concerning our single most important source for ancient Jewish history. As spelled out briefly in the preface (vii–x), the work constitutes a self-conscious effort on Schwartz’s part to explain and defend a more traditional “philological-historical” approach to Josephus’s works over and against the largely literary approach currently advocated by Steve Mason. It quickly emerges that Schwartz is concerned not just with Josephus in particular but with historiography in general: the work is also meant to caution readers against those (unnamed) scholars who despair of historical reconstruction “either because (as many theorists would have it) all historiography is only ‘narrative’ or ‘empowerment’ or because, for antiquity, at least, our documentation is so meager that it does not allow responsible reconstruction of what really happened” (vii). Schwartz’s book sets forth to explain, precisely, how students and scholars can embark on the process of constructing a history of ancient Judaism that includes events that happened—really.

Chapter 1 (“Introduction: Who Needs Historians of the First Century?”) begins, as its title suggests, very generally. After offering brief explanations of the significance of the first century as well as Josephus’s works, Schwartz describes in basic terms what ancient
historians do with the sources at their disposal. Attending to his dispute with Mason in particular, Schwartz explains how all historians (even those of a literary bent) will inevitably read Josephus in light of other writings, be they sources we know Josephus to have used (such as 1 Maccabees or Nicolas of Damascus) or authors who produced independent accounts of the same subjects Josephus addresses (such as Tacitus). So the real disputes concern (1) whether scholars are also interested in determining the veracity of Josephus’s accounts of given events and (2) whether scholars will also use source-critical tools to search for otherwise-unknown sources preserved within the works of Josephus themselves. In a move that will be characteristic of the work as a whole, Schwartz boils down the various possibilities into two main approaches (8–9). The literary critics are, simultaneously, less interested in verifying events and more interested in attributing material to the author whose literary achievements interest them. At the same time, Schwartz admits that historians who believe that historical events can be verified have a vested interest in using source criticism to find additional independent witnesses to events buried within Josephus’s works, thereby adding to catalogue of distinct extant sources. Having established these contrasts, the remainder of the chapter probes a series of “test cases”—none analyzed for more than a few pages, though a good number of the issues raised here (such as Josephus’s disagreements with Philo concerning Pontius Pilate) will be addressed again in subsequent chapters.

The four main chapters of the book are related by an overarching spatial metaphor regarding what is to be found beneath, within, behind, and among the extant texts of Josephus (26). As in the introduction, each of these chapters briefly surveys a dozen or more test cases. Indeed, the structure of the work is baroque—so the five-page table of contents (xi–xv) proves indispensable, as does the numeration of the headings and subheadings. These strings of numbers can run at times as long as five digits: a subheading in chapter 2 entitled “Governmental context? The case of Pilate’s successor (Ant. 18.89, 237)” is given the number 2.2.3.3.1 (!). True to the book’s title, a great many of Schwartz’s examples throughout are drawn from Ant. 18–20—covering, roughly, the first century. So readers of this work are treated to a taste of the author’s commentary promised to the ongoing Brill Josephus Project (edited by Steve Mason). Scholars of the New Testament may be pleasantly surprised by (and surely interested in) Schwartz’s treatment of topics such as crucifixion, John the Baptist, the “Magnificat” (Luke 1:46–56), Quirinius’s census, and even shipwrecks (Life 15 compared with Acts 27). There are various nuggets buried within for scholars of rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls as well.

Chapter 2 (“Beneath the Text: What Text Shall We Read?”) grapples with text-critical problems. Keeping his readers on their toes, Schwartz begins with what could be a nod to the literary approach, by examining the case of Alexander Jannaeus’s crucifixion of his
Pharisaic enemies. Seeking to verify Josephus’s condemnation of Jannaeus’s behavior as not only abhorrent but also un-Jewish (Ant. 13.380–383), Schwartz finds that Josephus’s personal opposition is balanced by Jannaeus’s own murderous behavior that Josephus records. The rabbinic material is late, and the promising Qumranic material (especially 4Q Pesher Nahum) is problematically incomplete, beyond text-critical repair. Schwartz therefore concludes that Josephus’s assertion that crucifixion was abhorrent to the Jews is simply unverifiable (27–31). Schwartz continues with additional cases, at times standing against older proclivities to emend the Josephan text. Schwartz maintains this position even when, at times, Josephus’s text is clearly in error. For instance, Antiquities asserts that Herod was only fifteen years old when he came to the throne (14.158). This unlikely claim mathematically contradicts Josephus’s own report that Herod was nearly seventy when he died (Ant. 17.148). Because the manuscripts are unanimous, the text should remain unfixed, despite being erroneous (34). Josephus may well have made mistakes, as all historians do. Straying from Josephus—while developing the related theme of overactive scribes—Schwartz concludes the chapter with his reconstruction of the composition history of the Magnificat scene in Luke 1:46–56. Over the course of nearly five pages (66–70) Schwartz argues that the manuscript readings attributing the hymn to Elizabeth (and not Mary) are more likely original.

Chapter 3 (“Within the Text: Meaning in Context”) is where Schwartz turns to literary matters. Building from small units to ever-larger ones, Schwartz begins with a brief consideration of the middle/passive reference to Essene exclusion from the temple in Ant. 18.19 (eirgomenoi). Schwartz here echoes the point made by Ralph Marcus based on the work of H. St. J. Thackeray: Josephus always uses this verb in the passive, and therefore the passage must be understood to claim that Essenes were excluded from the temple. The larger the units Schwartz considers, the more he plays the literary game: the topos of cannibalism during the siege of Jerusalem (War 6.201–213) is recognized to be a biblically inspired motif (cf. Lev 26:29, Deut 28:56–57) and cannot be verified to be historical (though it remains historically possible [87–89]). Josephus’s account of his shipwreck (Life 15) is dismissed as a literary fancy (cf. Acts 27). But just before we get swept up in any literary tides, Schwartz reassures us that Josephus’s account of marrying Essenes (War 2.160–161) ought not be dismissed as a fictive invention (contra Steve Mason). After all, Schwartz avers, “to say … that we should interpret Josephus first of all on the basis of his own corpus, not on the basis of other writings, does not preclude the possibility of making such comparisons and coming up with positive results” (92). Schwartz then efficiently and judiciously summarizes the case that many scholars find quite reasonable: that Josephus’s marrying Essenes can be compared with the sectarians of the Damascus Document who live in camps, with their wives, begetting children, quite apart from other sectarians who live in more complete holiness (CD 7:3–10 [92–93]).
Chapter 4 (“Behind the Text: Josephus’ Use of Sources”) presents us with Schwartz’s case in favor of traditional methods of source criticism. After briefly reviewing (once again) what we can learn from Josephus’s use of known sources, whether extant (such as 1 Maccabees) or not (such as Nicolas), Schwartz proceeds to gather what he calls “Cumulative evidence for splicing” (96–100), including chronological contradictions and transitional catch-phrases. One key example for Schwartz is the unfulfilled “we shall relate that later” with regard to the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE (Ant. 20.144). Josephus nowhere else expresses even the hopes to write a work that could have possibly included more on this topic (or time frame). Besides, the account of Drusilla’s marriage to Felix (Ant. 20.142–144) “sticks out of its surroundings like a sore thumb” for its uncharacteristic hostility to Agrippa II (97). Schwartz therefore concludes that the stray “we shall relate that later” of 20.144 must have been taken by Josephus from some other source, and it is that other source that hoped to return to the topic of Vesuvius, at some other time. Through a brief aside and a few footnotes (99 n. 9, pointing back to 99 n. 6), Schwartz then directs his readers toward his own fuller treatment of these matters, where sufficient evidence is collected to reconstruct an anti-Agrippan source used by both Josephus and the later rabbis (JQR 72 [1982]: 241–68). Turning next to “The case of Vitellius’ visit(s) to Jerusalem (Ant. 18.89–122),” Schwartz proceeds to indicate how we can confidently find sources buried within sources. Within this complex, Schwartz identifies a priestly source (18.90–95), a more worldly source (18.96–125), and then, enmeshed within these two, brief notices that have been copied over from yet a third, annalistic source recording the transmission of the priesthood (18.95, 123 [104–6]). Lest readers despair of treating Josephus as an author, Schwartz concludes this chapter with his confident (and compelling) assessment that Josephus’s account of John the Baptist (18.116–119) is essentially Josephan (106–9).

Chapter 5 (“Among the Texts: Rubbing Sources Together”) is where Schwartz ties things together. Here the overall spatial metaphor is enhanced by a pyrotechnic one: once among the texts, “when you rub two texts together sparks may fly in all sorts of directions.” At fifty-seven pages, this is the longest chapter of the work, and within it Schwartz rubs sample chapters from Josephus against Luke (on Quirinius’s census), against Philo (on Pilate’s actions in Jerusalem), against papyri (on Claudius’s edict), against rabbinic literature (including b. Qiddushin 66a), and against select passages from Roman historians (especially Tacitus and Cassius Dio). Finally, Schwartz rubs Josephus against Josephus, devoting almost twenty pages to drawing a contrast between the priestly, landed, temple-centered Josephus of War and the somewhat later, more diasporic Josephus of Antiquities. While the former blames the revolt on Roman mismanagement and Jewish zealots, the latter casts blame on corrupt and even murderous late Second Temple high priests (e.g., Ant. 20.196–203 [149–50]). While the
former remains focused on Jewish laws that pertain to the temple and the land of Israel, the latter “upgrades the law” as the primary distinguishing marker of Jews wherever they may live (152–56).

Chapter 6 (“Above the Texts: The Big Picture”) serves as the rather brief conclusion to the work (167–80), identifying the historical “winners” as the Jews and Christians who (like the Josephus of Antiquities) were able to maintain a non-Roman religion without pining for a non-Roman state. Such developments can be most clearly observed, Schwartz concludes, when historically minded readers of our sources will “tend first not to harmonize but, rather, see conflict and change” (180). In short, source criticism can reveal what an exclusively literary approach will miss.

The end-matter of the book begins with an appendix containing Schwartz’s English translation (from the Italian) of a brief essay on historical method by Arnaldo Momigliano (1908–1987), the Jewish-Italian classicist who is also the dedicatee of Schwartz’s volume (a quote from the essay is one of two epigraphs of the book’s preface; the other is a quote by Steve Mason about his literary approach [vii]). The appendix is followed by an extensive index of ancient sources (190–98), an index of modern authors (199–221), and a brief index of names, toponyms, topics and terms (202–4). No stand-alone bibliography is provided. Less helpfully, Mohr Siebeck fills the remaining fourteen pages with an already-outdated alphabetical index of the WUNT series.

In his brief introduction to his translation of Momigliano’s essay, Schwartz admits that after completing a draft of the present book he realized that “much of what I have offered here … can be read as footnotes exemplifying Momigliano’s views” (181). Indeed, a great deal of Schwartz’s book does read like a series of brief notes, with many larger historical questions left unanswered once the requisite methodological point has been registered. There is nothing wrong with this—and scholars will of course find their way to the fuller treatments of these topics cited in the footnotes and be all the wiser for it. Whether the Josephan (or even ancient-historical) neophytes addressed in the work’s introduction will do the same is quite another question, leaving me to wonder whether this book is, in fact, addressed primarily to students after all. It is these students’ teachers who will truly appreciate the appendix—and, I would venture to guess, much that precedes it.

Be this as it may, there is one prevalent tendency in the work that requires deeper critical consideration: the author’s inclination to establish binary oppositions—and then force choices between them. This shows up early on when source criticism is so closely linked with historical method that we are left with the impression that Schwartz’s own source-critical “historical-philological” approach is the only other option we have beside appreciating Josephus’s literary qualities and leaving things at that. The final chapter of
the book similarly constructs a rather fixed dichotomy (summarized above) between the “priestly” Josephus of War with the more “diasporic” Josephus of Antiquities (148–66). Curiously, at various points in between Schwartz dismisses various triads (such as the tripartite treatment of the fate–free will debate in Ant. 13.171–173) as a typically Josephan literary trope. Apparently twos make history, while threes are the stuff of creative writing (43, 137–38).

Presumably Schwartz will present us with a fuller account of Josephus’s “diasporic” transformation in his forthcoming commentary on Ant. 18–20 for the Brill Josephus Project. Schwartz also alerts us to a forthcoming book by Michael Tuval on Josephus’s diasporic development (a work began as a dissertation under Schwartz’s tutelage: see 164 n. 121). In the meantime, it is fair to wonder whether “priestly” versus “diasporic” accurately captures the contrasts between War and Antiquities (both written in the diaspora by a priest) or can adequately handle the complications arising from comparison with later rabbinic traditions (all postdestruction, whether diasporic or Palestinian), predestruction precedents (again, from Israel or the diaspora), or the Bar Kokhba revolt (see, briefly, 177 n. 22). This is not just a question of terms; it is also a question of whether the multiple variables of time, place, and perspective yield only two approaches. More significant, perhaps, is the broader implication arising from reconsidering Schwartz’s initial binary contrast: Is it really the case that we have to choose between literary approaches and “philological-historical” source criticism? Must we all line up behind either Mason or Schwartz? Surely it is possible to do more than literary analysis without resorting to elaborate source-critical reconstruction of sources embedded within sources.

In the final analysis, scholars who are serious about Josephus and ancient Jewish history will certainly want to read this book. It is brimming with insights from start to finish. Taken as a whole, the work articulates the most carefully conceptualized countervoice to a thoroughly literary approach to these matters. Readers should beware: at times this self-consciously methodological work stumbles into twofold traps of its own making. Yet there is a pedagogic purpose here. Determined students will learn a great deal about the decisions to be made. Their teachers can then use the work’s contrasts to shed light on the methodological middle ground that many Josephus scholars in fact occupy.