This book, by Sarah J. K. Pearce, Ian Karten Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Southampton, is a revised, updated, and expanded version of the author’s 1995 Oxford DPhil thesis. The study seeks “to provide a detailed commentary on the laws of Deuteronomy in Second Temple period sources” (x). Pearce examines the reception of “the words of Moses” (see Deut 1:1) with a focus on the Temple Scroll and other writings from Qumran, LXX Deuteronomy, the works of Philo of Alexandria, and Josephus using the example of three laws unique to Deuteronomy: the establishment of local judiciaries (Deut 16:18–20), the prohibition of single testimony (Deut 17:6 par.), and the law for the supreme court (Deut 17:8–13). Accordingly, the study consists of the following parts: an introduction that provides initial considerations concerning the laws in Deut 16:18–17:13; the various text traditions representing the text of Deuteronomy in the Second Temple period and the main sources for its reception; three main chapters, each dedicated to one of the three laws to be examined; and a short epilogue summarizing Pearce’s observations and conclusions. A bibliography and some forty pages of indexes (sources, modern authors, and subjects) complete the volume.

The introduction (1–42) opens with a translation of and introductory remarks on the Masoretic Text of Deut 16:18–17:13. Of the long-known features that distinguish these and the following laws (17:14–18:22) from other traditions of the Hebrew Bible, Pearce notes that in Deuteronomy the king is given no judicial role. She asserts, “this material is
the product of a revisionary process, incorporating earlier traditions for a new age” (3). Although there is a lack of consensus on dating the final redaction, she regards the assumption of origins in the era of Josiah followed by a process of reworking during the exile as the most plausible hypothesis. Pearce addresses the question whether Deut 16:18–18:22 were designed as a constitution for Israel and defines the aim of her study: to answer “what Deuteronomy’s laws on the administration of justice meant for Jews in the Second Temple period” (6). Subsequently, she reviews the texts of Deuteronomy in the Second Temple period (Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Qumran manuscripts of Deuteronomy), excluding rabbinic sources and targums from the main sources. The introduction finally discusses the main Second Temple period sources for the reception of MT Deut 16:18–17:13, namely, the books of Chronicles, LXX Deuteronomy, the Temple Scroll, Philo of Alexandria (Special Laws 4) and Flavius Josephus (Jewish Antiquities and Against Apion).

Chapter 1 (43–144) turns to Deut 16:18–20 and the establishment of local judiciaries. Part a provides an introduction to MT Deut 16:18–20, discussing its context within the legal corpus of Deuteronomy, local justice, the combination of judges and other officials in Deuteronomy in comparison to traditions in Exodus and Numbers, the issue of corrupt judging as addressed in Deut 16:19 and the exhortation to pursue justice in 16:20. The question regarding the addressee of 16:19–20 (the judges themselves or the people as a whole, as in 16:18) is left open.

Part b investigates the Second Temple period interpretations of Deut 16:18–20, starting with the account of Jehoshaphat’s judiciary for the fortified cities in 2 Chr 19:4–7. According to Pearce, the text reflects the Chronicler’s concept of ideal judicial government but is in no way related to the actual judicial history of Judah. The Chronicler relates the Jehoshaphat story with Deut 16:18–20 to “illustrate the ideal of the pious ruler as one who observes the law of Deuteronomy in practice” (68). Pearce describes the LXX translation of Deut 16:18–20 as “both literal and free.” Regarding word order and tenses, it mostly follows the Hebrew, but at the same time “the translator also introduces some substantial interpretative points” (75) that emphasize the distinction between divine and human action, reveal an influence of Deut 4:1 on LXX Deut 16:20, and make the judicial officials more like Greek law-court officials. The following source under discussion, the Temple Scroll, represents more differences from and deliberate manipulations of the text of Deuteronomy. Furthermore, the retelling of the Deuteronomic law in the Temple Scroll probably adds information from other scriptural traditions (e.g., 2 Chr 19; Ezekiel). Philo presents Deut 16:18–20 together with other pentateuchal traditions he regards as being addressed by Moses to judges as special laws related to the ninth commandment. He argues for the Mosaic law’s superiority over all other laws and for the biblical tradition’s accordance with Greek wisdom. Finally, in
Josephus’s *Antiquities* 4.214–217 Pearce finds “a substantial reworking of Deut 16:18–20” (138) that integrates elements from several other biblical sources. Like Philo, Josephus intends to actualize the words of Moses so that they become plausible in Greco-Roman culture.

Chapter 2 (145–239) is dedicated to the prohibition of single testimony as expressed in Deut 17:6 and its parallels and “traces the history of the interpretation of Deuteronomy’s laws on sufficient testimony, from developments within the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History to the traditions of the New Testament” (145). Like the previous chapter, it opens with an introductory part that presents the relevant texts from the Hebrew Bible: Deut 17:6 (MT, Qumran, Samaritan Pentateuch), a verse that for Pearce together with the following verse 7 “looks like a conscious correction of the procedure in 13:7–12” (147); Deut 19:15–21, which turns the prohibition of single testimony for capital cases (Deut 17:6) into a general rule (and therefore, according to Pearce presupposes Deut 17:6); Num 35:30; and, finally, 1 Kgs 21:10–13, where “Deuteronomy’s innovation in witness law was adopted for the court of the wicked queen Jezebel” (151).

Accordingly, part b turns to Second Temple period interpretations, starting with the text of LXX Deuteronomy, which suggests that “the translator followed a Hebrew text that is very close to, but not identical with MT” (158). In general, the same applies to the Temple Scroll. However, it is the only ancient source that applies Deut 17:6 to a special instruction for treason. In contrast to the pentateuchal prohibition of single testimony and its strict interpretations in the other sources, the Damascus Document describes cases and circumstances where single testimony is sufficient. Under certain conditions it allows the combined testimony of three single witnesses. This interpretation probably adjusts the pentateuchal laws to the Damascus Document’s communal setting. As he did with Deut 16:18–20, Philo discusses the prohibition of single testimony under the generic heading of the ninth commandment. He understands the prohibition of single testimony as a guardian against human misperceptions, which cause false testimony. Josephus supplements the pentateuchal law by defining groups of people whose testimony is to be excluded, specifically women and slaves. Here (again) Josephus adjusts the law to Roman standards, as testimony by women in Roman courts was technically not forbidden but not expected and testimony by slaves was generally understood as problematic, admissible only in certain cases and to be extracted by torture. As in other cases, Josephus’s reception of the prohibition of single testimony aims at showing that “Jewish Law embodies the best principles upheld by the Roman ruling class” (189).

In part c of the second chapter, headed “Other Second Temple Sources,” Pearce discusses the reception of the prohibition of single testimony in the book of Susanna and the Testament of Abraham. The former is rather not a call for judicial reform but “portrays a
world where Deuteronomy’s law is normative … with illustrating the Deuteronomic principles that just retribution awaits the wicked, and that life is the reward for those who, like Susanna, remain loyal to the words of Moses” (205). The latter contradicts Deut 17:6 and 19:15 by prohibiting not only single testimony but also the testimony of two witnesses and insisting on three. “This claim is made in order to support an unprecedented vision of a three-stage eschatological judgment that, for reasons no longer clear, was so important for the author of the Testament” (213).

The concluding part d, “New Testament Traditions,” considers (1) 2 Cor 13:1–3 (three visits to Corinth correspond to three witnesses, and the last proves Paul’s authority); (2) Heb 10:28, a warning against apostasy that explicitly refers to LXX Deut 17:6; (3) Matt 18:15–17 (“the first known example of a Christian community rule that draws on Deut 19:15,” 219); (4) the Gospel of John, especially 5:31–40 (four witnesses: John the Baptist, Jesus’s own miraculous acts, the Father himself, Scripture) and 8:14–18 (two witnesses: Jesus himself, the Father); (5) 1 John 5:4b–12 (three witnesses: Spirit, water, blood); and (6) 1 Tim 5:19, “another example of a Christian community rule drawing on the witness laws of Deuteronomy” (231).

Chapter 3 (241–326) turns to Deut 17:8–13 and its instructions for a central court at the place of the central sanctuary, “the place the Lord your God will choose.” As in the preceding chapters, an opening part a offers an introduction to MT Deut 17:8–13, discussing the place of 17:8–13 within the sequence of laws starting with 16:18, the addressee of 17:8–13, the matters to be directed to the central court, its members, their judgment, and how to deal with cases of disobedience.

Part b again deals with Second Temple period interpretations, but now starting with the Samaritan Pentateuch. Its treatment not as a source but as an interpretation is justified by its only ideological distinction from MT (and LXX and the Temple Scroll), that is, the identification of “the place,” in this context of the high court, as already chosen, “a very well-known characteristic of the Samaritan tradition’s promotion of the status of the Gerizim sanctuary” (251). The Chronicler, in his account of Jehoshaphat’s Jerusalem judiciary (2 Chr 19:8–11), does the opposite and explicitly identifies the place with Jerusalem. His description largely reflects Deut 17:8–13. However, the Levitical officials for the court may show influence by LXX Deut 1:15 and the Chronicler’s conception of the Levites. According to Pearce, the LXX version of Deut 17:8–13 is very close to MT, with some harmonizing elements also visible in the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Temple Scroll. As an interpreter of MT Deut 17:8–13, the translator focuses on the definition of the matters for judgment by the central court and on the description of the court as representing God’s judgment. The Temple Scroll shows some more variations, especially in replacing “the word” with “the law,” thus to clarify “that ‘the word’
pronounced by the authorities of the central court is to be identified with the law of Deuteronomy” (286). In Philo’s Special Laws, unlike the command to establish judiciaries and the prohibition against single testimony, Deut 17:8–13 is discussed in relation not to the ninth commandment but to the virtue of justice. For Philo, it is a ruler’s duty to send cases in judgment that are beyond his abilities to a higher authority. Once again, Philo presents Moses as a role model the good ruler must follow: “Mosaic Law, on this view, seeks the highest standards of justice, benefitting the ruler’s subjects, and leading to judgments based on the greatest accuracy possible” (305). Finally, in the work of Flavius Josephus, Pearce finds two different echoes of the law of Deut 17:8–13. While in Against Apion the high court is depicted as a court of priests with the high priest as its leader, in Antiquities Josephus connects Deut 17:8–13 to 16:18–20, not to equate the central court with the Sanhedrin of the first century CE but to portray the central court as an ideal model of authority going back to Moses himself. In the epilogue (327–36) to the book, Pearce briefly summarizes her results and observations.

This book offers a thorough examination of an extensive amount of material on the reception of Deuteronomy in antiquity. It is arranged in a clear manner, which makes it easy to follow Pearce along these more than three hundred pages of investigation. Nevertheless, I am left with the impression that the main purpose and the various aims outlined on page 6 of the study are finally not pursued consequently, for the sake of the expressed “principal focus of the commentary” (x): “letting the ancient sources speak for themselves” (x; also 7). Without doubt, to a certain extent they do, and accordingly the numerous “conclusions” throughout the book provide summaries of what the sources say. But neither the conclusions nor the epilogue articulate clear answers to the questions posed on page 6 by way of letting the sources interact, in other words, by way of offering a clear comparative synthesis. To give just one example, I did not find a clear answer to the question “what Deuteronomy’s laws on the administration of justice meant for Jews in the Second Temple period” (6) but rather separate answers for the separate sources. I am puzzled whether readers are actually supposed to combine the separate answers to draw their own conclusions or if the supposed answer could be phrased in the form of a statement such as “the sources show that the laws of Deuteronomy had different meanings to different (groups of) people during the Second Temple period”—but what insight would be gained? Certainly a comparative synthesis would possibly involve a high degree of speculation, since the sources under investigation, as indicated by the term Second Temple period, cover a time span of several centuries. Still, I must admit that I am left with curiosity as to Pearce’s answers to questions regarding possible developments and connections between the sources. But what would (academic) life be without curiosity? So, anyone interested in the reception history of Deuteronomy during the Second Temple period should consult this book.