This book is an updated, revised, and expanded version of Oded Lipschits’s dissertation from Tel Aviv University (director, Nadav Na’aman). In this study Lipschits examines the Babylonian control over the region of Judah and Judah’s slow recovery from the Babylonian campaign. Emphasizing the lack of historical sources for this period, he focuses on the demographic and geopolitical processes that shaped the sixth century B.C.E. Lipschits investigates the political relations between Babylon and Egypt, setting this up as the determining factor for how Babylon interacted with Judah. In his analysis, he uses archaeological research and textual material extensively in order to offer a synthesis of the history of the Babylonian period. After laying the groundwork of the historical conditions in Judah during the sixth century B.C.E., he examines the historiography of the biblical texts in order to ascertain different aspects of their composition as well as their intended audience. In an attempt to point out that this oftentimes-ignored period was a pivotal time for historical events in Judah, Lipschits succeeds in writing a very significant study of Judah in the Babylonian period.

Lipschits first examines the final years of the kingdom of Judah, concentrating on both the geopolitical and geographical circumstances from the period of Assyrian rule to the beginning of Babylonian control. He provides an overview of the kingdom of Judah in the broader context of its position in between the two great powers of the Fertile Crescent: Egypt and Babylon. He sets the stage by examining Assyria’s policies toward the region “Beyond the River” and also investigates the different regions of this province. At the end of the era of the pax Assyriaca, the rapid decline of the kingdom was due to
constant conflicts with the Babylonians, who persistently revolted in the seventh century B.C.E. When Assyria was forced to withdraw from the Levant, Egypt quickly filled in the power vacuum. Lipschits lists the economic and strategic interests, as well as the immediate sphere and remote sphere of interest, for Egypt’s control of the region. He then considers the reasons for Babylon’s interest in the Levant, arguing that both empires wanted control over it for stability against the other superpower as well as for the economic benefits that could be gained. He offers a brief but sufficient analysis of the events that brought down the Assyrian Empire and established Egypt and Babylon as contenders for the Levant.

In chapter 2 Lipschits focuses on Judah’s condition under the command of the Babylonians in order to ascertain how much hegemony Babylon really exercised in the Levant. Lipschits argues that their control over Hatti-land evolved from Nebuchadnezzar II’s early policies of limited interest to more direct involvement in the region. The struggle between Egypt and Babylon brought about the decline of Judah, signaled by the death of Josiah. Because of the instability in the region and his interest in Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar invested time and resources into controlling the region of Hatti-Land. When pressures from Egypt increased in the Levant, Babylon modified earlier policies and conquered the small kingdoms in the Levant, including Judah, so they could rule over the region with absolute control. Lipschits argues that the consequences for the changes in Babylonian policies were detrimental to the small kingdoms because they did not allow for economic growth. The Babylonians attempted to create a buffer zone between Egypt and themselves, whereas the Assyrians regarded these small kingdoms as a bridge to Egypt. He then turns to the history of the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian policies that were implemented in the region of Judah. When Jerusalem was destroyed, the Babylonians made a calculated decision to take control away from the Davidic line and focus attention away from Jerusalem. The subsequent collapse of the periphery around Jerusalem, including the Negev, Jordan Valley, and Shephelah, was not calculated but rather a side effect. After addressing the destruction of Jerusalem, Lipschits turns his attention to the establishment of Mizpah as the new center of power and Gedaliah as the governor of Judah. He offers a thorough presentation of Gedaliah’s family line and his position in Judah leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. Lipschits asserts that Gedaliah was given the status of governor during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and later was murdered as a result of his collaboration with Babylon. Finally, the parties that fled to Egypt after his death did so because they were fearful of Babylonian retaliation. Lipschits argues that people must have viewed Egypt as the likely place to go to seek asylum from the Babylonians. At the end of the chapter, he offers two excurses: the first is in regard to the names in 2 Kgs 25:23 and Jer 40:8; the second is a discussion of the redaction of Jer 40:7 and 11.
Turning to the demographic and geopolitical situation of the sixth century B.C.E., Lipschits examines the size and scope of Judah from the end of the Iron Age to the Persian Period. He sets up the limits of his study by investigating settlement lists from the end of the Iron Age and the Hellenistic Age and then turns to the Babylonian and Persian periods. The lists from Josh 15:21–62; 18:21–18; 19:2–8; and 19:40–4 establish the boundary of Judah from the time of Josiah. Following Na’aman’s model, Lipschits lays out the borders of Judah in the last days of the Judahite monarchy. He then considers the Judean boundaries during the Hellenistic Period, using 1 Maccabees as his main source, before examining the Babylonian period. Lipschits argues that the $\text{mws}^h$ (or $\text{msh}$) seal impressions that date to the sixth century B.C.E. were used to mark the place of origin for the pottery vessels that were used to supply agricultural goods to the governor living in Mizpah. As for the people living in the land, he argues that the area between Benjamin and the northern Judean hills marks the territory where the people who remained in the land were allowed to stay. He cites the archaeological evidence that points to relatively little damage in this region as well as the fact that the $\text{mws}^h$ seals were found in this region.

Lipschits then examines the province of Yehud during the Persian period, using the lists in Ezra and Nehemiah as one of the main pieces of evidence to determine the provincial boundaries. He does point out, however, that these lists are problematic and thus establishes the degrees of overlap among the lists in Ezra 2 and Neh 7; 3; 11; and 12. He concludes this discussion by pointing out the continuity between the end of the Iron Age kingdom of Judah and the Yehud province, significant in that it strengthens the importance of the Babylonian period. Yet it should be noted that these lists might have been written to maintain an ideological representation of Yehud that was meant to draw the reader back to the picture of the Judean monarchy but not necessarily reflect a realistic picture of Persian period Yehud. Lipschits then points to the $\text{yhwd}$ seal impressions but argues against their significance for marking the extent of the province of Yehud. At the end of the chapter he presents a brief summary of the processes that shaped Judah between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C.E.

In chapter 4 Lipschits investigates the material culture in Judah to ascertain the history of Judahites remaining in the land a “wretched existence” (186). Lipschits argues that this is not necessarily the case, but rather the extreme drop in economic activity and change in the level of governance of the land from the time of Assyrian domination should be examined in light of two factors: the duration of the empire and the difference in the administration of Hatti-Land. The Babylonians did not establish an empire because of the relatively short length of their dominance and also because they did not establish an “imperialist ideology” like the Assyrians did (188). He points to the continuity in
pottery assemblages between the Iron Age and the Persian period and provides a catalog of the major types of pottery that appear. This continuity is meant to strengthen his thesis that the population of the region continued from the Iron Age through to the Persian period. Other types of pottery also appear during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., featuring new shapes, material, and also processing techniques, primarily in the Benjamin region. Thus he posits that the sixth and fifth centuries reveal a distinct period that can be identified from the earlier and later cultural material. As for Jerusalem, Lipschits argues that during the period of Babylonian rule the city remained practically empty but remained a site of pilgrimages and continued to serve as a religious center even with the temple destroyed. He then provides a brief survey of the regions around Jerusalem, looking at both the destruction of the region and also evidence of a remnant in the land. Finally, he offers a lengthy discussion of the demographic evidence for settlement patterns between the Iron and Persian Periods.

His final discussion is an examination of the “perception and trends in biblical historiography” (272). He begins with a discussion of the historiography concerning the Deuteronomistic Historian. He provides a brief overview of Noth, Van Seters, von Rad, Jepsen, Smend and the Göttingen school, F. M. Cross and the U.S. school, and Helga Weippert, to name a few. Lipschits then argues for his own Deuteronomistic theory, asserting a Dtr\(^1\) who wrote during the time of Josiah’s reforms. He also posits a Dtr\(^2\), which was a supplement to the preexilic material. This author was active during the destruction of Jerusalem, adding material when it was ideologically necessary and also extending the earlier material to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Dtr\(^2\) writer was present in Babylon. A third addition, or appendix, was added thirty to forty years later, describing the destruction of Jerusalem. Finally, in the early period of the return to Zion, more additions were written in order to highlight the perspective of the Babylonian exiles (e.g., 2 Kgs 24:13–14; 25:12). Lipschits then focuses on Jeremiah and the details surrounding the composition of the text. He sees the writing as consisting first of Jeremiah’s prophecies as the foundation of the book. These were reworked before they were incorporated into the book; later the prose sections were added to the prophecies. Finally, a follower of Jeremiah wrote down the events that occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem. Lipschits argues that there are three major redactional phases to the composition of Jeremiah that occurred during the end of the kingdom of Judah, during the Babylonian exile, and finally upon the return to Zion. He also maintains that the differences between LXX and MT Jeremiah reflect different editions of the book, with the LXX reflecting an earlier stage in the formation of the book. Additionally, he argues that a member of Jeremiah’s inner circle, probably in Egypt, composed Jer 37–44.

This book is an excellent examination of the position of Judah during the period of Babylonian dominance. One of the author’s biggest contributions to the field of biblical
studies is his discussion of the struggle between Egypt and Babylon. This struggle is introduced at the beginning of the book, which lays the groundwork for the late seventh-century situation of the kingdom of Judah. This starting point leads the reader into the history of the fall of Jerusalem with a succinct framework. Further, his extensive footnotes are very helpful and a great benefit to any scholar interested in the Babylonian period. Lipschits does an excellent job combining the archaeological material with the textual material, providing a balanced presentation of the evidence. His writing style is lucid but at times a bit repetitious. Also, his twenty-eight-page summary at the end of the text is useful for anyone who has not read the book and who is interested in a short overview of his main points. But the summary is not necessary for anyone who has read the book. The fall of Jerusalem is insightfully investigated and explained in great detail. Overall, this book is an admirable work and an important addition to the scholarship of the Babylonian period.