Frisch attempts to answer the question: “what did the Jews [of the Second Temple period] think empire was?” (15). Though empires had been a part of the political context since the mid-second millennium, the first articulation of a self-conscious discourse of imperial rule is generally attributed to the Neo-Assyrians, during the first half of the first millennium. Although this ideology was engaged by various Israelite and Judean authors, Frisch argues that it was with the development of the later Danielic discourse about empire that emergent Judaism found its most significant set of categories for conceptualizing and responding to empire. Yet, as Frisch notes, in a colonized context that discourse was dependent upon empire’s own ideology (22).

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2, “The Hegemonic View of the Persian Empire,” actually begins with a survey of Judean responses to Assyrian and Babylonian imperial power. Though Frisch necessarily skims over some important nuances in this quick survey, she identifies the primary perspective as that of empires as subject to YHWH’s power and control, often as an instrument of the divine will. Whether intentionally or accidentally, this stance was an inversion of the empire’s own claims of divine authorization. More subtly, the Persian empire’s representation of itself as a continuation of the older Mesopotamian kingdoms appears to be echoed in references to Persian kings as “King of Babylon” or “King of Assyria” in Ezra and Nehemiah. How much one can read into those occasional references, however, would require further analysis.

In Chapter 3, “A New Greek Imperial Mythology,” Frisch’s treatment is unfortunately sketchy to the point of being misleading. Whatever Alexander’s initial self-understanding, both he and his successors in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires made extensive use of native royal ideologies, laying claim to continuity with earlier traditions, not asserting discontinuity. But Frisch is right that the encounter with the Hellenistic kingdoms does seem to have provoked new thinking about empire among Jews. Whether one finds such a new response in 1 Enoch 6–11, however, is more debatable. Frisch largely follows and extends the arguments of George Nickelsburg in interpreting 1 Enoch 6–11 as drawing on Greek mythological sources, including the Titanomachy and the gigan-tomachy. But the fundamental differences between 1 Enoch and the Greek sources that Frisch herself presents lead one to question the hypothesis. While it is possible that the violence of the Hellenistic wars left its imprint on the
imagery of 1 Enoch 6–11, I am not persuaded that the composition is an etiology of gentile empire.

With Chapter 4, “Daniel and Empire,” Frisch seems on sounder ground. She notes the subtle differences between the representation of empire as a unitary phenomenon (Daniel 2) and a succession of different empires (Daniel 7). The phenomenon of competing Greek empires, she argues, rendered the older scheme of unified imperial succession problematic. A more extensive treatment of the “Four Kingdoms Schema” and its varying use for imperial historiography and anti-imperial resistance would have been welcome.

In Chapter 5, “Daniel, Empire, and God,” the main part of the chapter is an investigation of possible connections between Genesis 1–11 and reflections on empire in Daniel and the Sibylline Oracles. This is an intriguing line of investigation, though I find the evidence for the impact of the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) on the Sibylline Oracles more persuasive than for Daniel. Similarly contestable is the discussion of Daniel 7 in relation to Gen 6:1–4 and 1 Enoch 6–11. I am not persuaded that 1 Enoch 6–11 is an etiology of empire as originating in divine rebellion (119). Furthermore, to say that “the beasts [in Dan 7] oppose God” (118) is to ignore the apparently divine actions and commands that direct the first three beasts. Only the fourth beast acts autonomously. But Frisch does rightly point out a tension within Daniel between a model that sees gentile empire as an earthly phenomenon, authorized and controlled by God (Daniel 1–6), and a model that is more dualistic, locating opposition within heavenly forces themselves (Daniel 10).

Chapters 6–8 trace “Danielic Discourse” in succeeding eras—the Hellenistic period (ch. 6), the early Roman period (ch. 7), and after the fall of Jerusalem (ch. 8). Evidence that the Third Sibylline Oracle knows Daniel is slight and, to me, unpersuasive (128). Of more interest is Frisch’s analysis of the role of Genesis 10–11 in the Sibylline Oracle’s view of empire and in the Enochic Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 83–90). Some version of the Four Kingdoms Schema also influences the four groups of shepherds in 1 Enoch 89–90, but is this a model derived from Daniel or from a broader knowledge of the Four Kingdoms Schema? Frisch does not discuss the possibility. Frisch gives an intriguing account of the recasting of Genesis 10 in Jubilees, and provides suggestive arguments for “a semblance of the four-part imperial sequence” (145). But there seems to be no clear evidence for direct dependence on Daniel, so that one wonders again if the notion of a sequence of kingdoms is not a more widespread cultural trope.

Chapter 8 helpfully introduces Roman imperial ideology into the discussion and shows how Jewish texts like the Testament of Moses draw on deuteronomistic theology to counter the ideology that sees Roman rule as established