Most every student of Roman history learns that the Samnites were an avowed enemy of the Romans and that, compared to Rome's virtuous legions, the Samnites are always perceived as somehow lesser, if not downright nefarious. Beyond this casual awareness of the Samnites as a hostile "other," the mainstream knowledge of the realities of ancient Samnium and its people is often quite limited. In addition to this typecasting effectively carried out by Latin authors, a relative scarcity of monumental urban sites hampers Samnite visibility compared to other contemporary neighbors in the Italian peninsula and, like many non-Roman peoples in Italy, Samnite archaeology can find itself obscured by the Romans still today. In this monograph Scopacasa provides a welcome synthesis that aims to present the current state of the archaeology of Samnium and the Samnites. Such a task necessitates a reexamination of fundamental topics related to the study of the Samnites, as well as a review of existing scholarship and the state of scholarly inquiry. Traditional text-based approaches to Samnium and the Samnites (e.g., E.T. Salmon, Samnium and the Samnites [Cambridge 1967]) seem inadequate in the face of a consideration that focuses on the archaeological record, and Scopacasa considers the available datasets in this volume.

This monograph is divided into five chapters. The introduction offers a brief outline of the history of Samnite scholarship in addition to defining the author's own approach to the subject in terms of methodology. In chapter 1 ("Locating the Samnites"), Scopacasa begins to engage with issues related to ethnicity and identity and declares, rather strongly, that "Samnite identity was a malleable construct" (24) and, additionally, that the interchangeability of ethnic terms in ancient texts—e.g., "Campanians" and "Samnites"—should give us cause to think
about the ancient authors and their approach to ethnic labels. Labeling Samnite identity as malleable is noteworthy and in line with other scholarly thinking about the nature of non-Roman communities confronted with the Roman conquest of the Italian peninsula. The mutability of identity within the changing political landscapes of Italy creates its own host of challenges, particularly in a region like Samnium.

The second chapter ("Society and Culture in Iron Age Samnium") involves a consideration of settlement trends, as well as evidence derived from the funerary record. In settlement terms the so-called "big sites" that are spaced at rough intervals of 10 to 15 km and cover some 2.5 hectares on average provide evidence for settlement hierarchy, despite the absence of the expected large, nucleated centers that would parallel contemporary realities in Latium and Etruria. Scopacasa argues that, despite this absence, centralization was nevertheless taking place and that evidence for settlement hierarchy can be identified. Funerary evidence constitutes a main dataset for Samnium, yet the material wants for comprehensive and synthetic publication. Scopacasa raises questions as to how indicative the material culture assemblage that comes from funerary contexts can be of group identity, especially since we see mostly evidence for burials of the social elite. Iron Age graves in Samnium demonstrate regional connectivity and affinities for funerary practice that are shared in common with other contemporary Italic elites. Funerary culture in Samnium begins to change in the sixth century B.C.E., with a more complex cist tomb coming into use. In the fifth century B.C.E. cremation appears, likely inspired by coastal sites. We also see social differentiation in marking elite graves, with some local elites employing monumental funerary sculpture for this purpose.

The third chapter of this volume ("The Roman Intervention") addresses the role and activities of the Romans in Samnium, a complicated picture that relies on textual evidence which remains contested among scholars. Here Scopacasa mainly summarizes the state of the debate, highlighting issues of the hypercritical approach adopted by the school of Ernst Badian as well as the more forgiving interpretations by scholars such as Stephen Oakley, whom Scopacasa seems to follow in large part. Issues of pro-Roman distortion and bias in the history of Livy are discussed, as well as the seesaw effect of Roman-Samnite interaction during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. It is clear from the sources that the events related to the so-called Samnite wars had profound effects on the dynamics of settlement and land use in Samnium, not to mention the obvious effects on Samnite identity.

Chapter four ("Settlement and Society between the Fourth Century B.C. and the Social War") addresses issues related to settlement and the society of Samnium between the fourth century B.C.E. and the Social War. This is a measured,
regional survey that highlights the nuance of Samnite settlement patterns and contrasts these patterns with contemporary trends elsewhere in Italy. Scopacasa reviews the methods by which scholars have attempted to explain the nature of settlement patterns in a “pre-urban” region such as Samnium. He suggests we should look beyond the polis-ethnos dichotomy in explaining Samnite settlement patterns. It is also suggested that perhaps Adriano La Regina’s pagus-vicus model is outmoded and has been superseded by the collection of more archaeological evidence since the model was first advanced in the early 1970s. Scopacasa instead prefers to examine the settlement patterns of Samnium along different lines, finding those communities to be flexible in terms of identity and status while also in some cases hewing to the demands of the ethnos. The “big sites” of the Iron Age continue to develop further, with land use becoming more intensive. At selected sites, there is clear evidence for heavy investment in monumental fortifications built in polygonal masonry. The circuit walls at sites such as Monte Vairano and Monte Pallano demonstrate that the walls themselves serve symbolic functions in addition to the more obvious defensive ones. It is possible that sanctuaries functioned in an administrative capacity and that networks of hill forts reflected defensive concerns but also created other systems of connectivity in the landscape. Wealthy sites such as Larino demonstrate clear indications of foreign exchange via the Adriatic seaboard and are situated along transport and communication networks. Samnite sanctuaries offer a look at identity construction at the local level, as epigraphic evidence from those sacred contexts attests. The federal sanctuary at Pietrabbondante became increasingly monumentalized during the second century B.C.E., perhaps reflecting Samnite elite priorities of identity construction as Italy drew closer to the Social War. These elites may have facilitated the sanctuary’s monumentalization as a bulwark to local and regional identity.

The fifth and final chapter (“The Impact of Rome?”) considers the question of how to gauge culture change in the wake of the Roman conquest, thus raising the issues of the Romanization debate. The archaeology of Samnium offers interesting opportunities to examine colonial landscapes. While textual sources record the establishment of colonies at Saticula (313 B.C.E.), Beneventum (268 B.C.E.), and Aesernia (264 B.C.E.), the details about the nature of the early colonies themselves remain sketchy. These colonies are part of a larger conversation in current scholarship about the nature of middle Republican colonialism in Italy, and Samnium may have more information to contribute to this debate. This is also true in terms of further discussion about viritane land assignments in the suspect prefectures of the Sangro and Volturno valleys. Scopacasa seems to prefer “Hellenization” to “Romanization” in assessing cultural change in Samnium, citing Greek imports, Greek wine consumption, and Greek architectural influence on
Samnite sanctuary design. Perhaps better situating culture change in Samnium within the broader Hellenistic koine is a good way forward as the scholarly dialogue continues to wrestle with questions of Romanization in the Italian peninsula.

The volume is accompanied by 22 illustrations and 12 tables, as well as a useful appendix of sites that appears at the close of the volume. The original maps presented in the volume seem quite basic for a monograph published by Oxford University Press and do not follow accepted cartographic conventions (e.g., they lack a scale bar and north arrow). The text overall is fairly clean and typographical errors are infrequent.

Scopacasa’s volume is a welcome contribution to the discussion about the changing landscapes of Italy during the Roman expansion and the role of settlement strategy in identity creation. The approach centered on Samnium provides an interesting opportunity to think outside of the traditional Roman paradigm. Readers will welcome the clear presentation and the useful summary of the current state of affairs. In terms of the originality of his contribution, it would seem that Scopacasa expands on two of his own articles published in 2014 (in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* and the *American Journal of Archaeology*) in discussing key themes related to burial and settlement organization. The discussion in the fourth chapter of the dynamics of settlement and identity creation stands out as some of the most original commentary in the volume and challenges us to think critically about assumptions drawn on the basis of textual evidence alone when assessing the landscapes of ancient Italy and to seek nuanced models that incorporate readings of both historical and material culture evidence.