Anyone who has ever seen or touched the beautiful editions of early books published in Hebrew comes away from the experience with an appreciation of the craft of making early Hebrew Books. In this collection of essays Marvin J. Heller explains several interesting aspects of the craft of Hebrew book creation.

The collection is arranged in four sections. The first, entitled “Hebrew Book Arts,” deals with three fascinating aspects of the artistic images that often attend printed volumes in Hebrew. Chapter 1 deals with ornamental frames in early Hebrew books. After a short introduction to the use ornamental frames in Hebrew printing, Heller gives several examples of these frames. One such frame appears first in a printing of Aesop’s Fables, then in an edition of Perush Rashi and the Soncino Bible printed in 1488. After this, the frame appeared in four Soncino titles but was cut and repositioned to better accommodate printing in Hebrew, after which new frames were created that were modeled on this frame. Chapter 2 traces the borrowing and use of decorative woodcuts in Hebrew printing, with a specific focus on images of the Akedah in various pressmarks and title page vignettes. Chapter 3 traces a bear motif on title pages as head or tail pieces in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Heller argues that, since the bear motif is rather unfamiliar to Jewish iconography but appears with some frequency in non-Hebrew
printing, its appearance in Hebrew printing is attributable to the provenance of the printer.

The second, and largest, section of the book, "Makers and Places of Hebrew Books," is a collection of descriptions of various small publishers and publishing houses that operated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Chapter 4 discusses printing in Adrianople. Four books were printed in Adrianople by the Jabez brothers, who had previously operated a press in Salonkia and relocated to Adrianople at the outbreak of plague in 1553. Although this press operated only for a short period, the books printed there, Shevet Yehudah, She’erit Yoseph, Perush Masekhet Avot, and Tshuvot u-She’elot, remain influential and are republished yet today. Heller describes the contents and the printing of each of these titles.

Chapter 5 deals with Abraham ha-Ger, a convert to Judaism who published several books in Salonika from 1651 to 1655/56. This chapter describes several of the titles that Abraham published, with a view to representing the variety of his interest and his appeal to the Jewish community in Salonika.

Chapter 6 describes several books printed by Abraham ben Jedidiah Gabbai, in Izmir starting in 1657. Heller differentiates two periods of publication by this press. The first period, from 1657 to 1656, is when Abraham operated the press, during which time he published Rosh Yosef, Halikhot Eli, Ketubbot, and Shema Shelomo, among other titles. In the second period Abraham printed two works in Spanish, Esperanza de Israel and Apologia por la noble nacion de los Judios.

Chapter 7 describes a small Hebrew Press in Prostejov, established by Isaac ben Aaron Prostitz after he retired from his better-known press in Cracow. This chapter explains the background of the press and describes the works published by Isaac in Prostejov, which were Hiddushei Gemara Perush Tosafot, Ein Ya’akov, Kol Simah, and an edition of the Psalms with the commentary of R. Nathan Nata Hazon.

Chapter 8 explains several issues of confusion that surround two early publications of Sefer ha-Kavvanot. A second edition bearing a false title page and misleading information was published four years after the original publication in 1620. After describing both editions and discussing some modern understandings of the provenance of the second edition, Heller concludes that the second publication was unauthorized and its provenance intentionally obfuscated.

Chapter 9 describes the press operated by Gaspare Crivellari in Padua from 1611 to 1630. Crivellari published more than fifty works in this short period. In this chapter Heller
describes a few of those published by Crivellari: *Nahalat Ya’akov, Seder Mitzvot Nashim* (in Italian), and *Kinot Eikhah*.

Chapter 10 describes the simultaneous printing of two reprint editions of Don Isaac ben Judah Arabanel’s *Perush al Neviim Rishonim* in Leipzig and in Hamburg in 1686. Here Heller describes briefly the history of printing in each city and as well the version of *Perush al Neviim Rishonim* that each published. His conclusion is that neither publisher knew the other was printing this volume.

Chapter 11 describes a representative sample of volumes published by the press operated by Israel ben Abraham in Wandsbeck from 1726 to 1733, with a view to a description of Abraham’s activity as a publisher and of the interests of the Jewish community at Wandesbeck. The set of texts published is eclectic, including works in Hebrew and Yiddish.

Chapter 12 traces the life of Michael Levi Rodkinson in an effort to determine his influence on Hebrew literature, concluding that Rodkinson’s contribution is not for his relatively well-known translation of the Babylonian Talmud into English but the Hassidic tales that he collected, sometimes fabricated, and for his activity as a publisher.

Chapter 13 discusses the first English edition of the Babylonian Talmud, translated and edited by Michael Levi Rodkinson. This is an incredibly fascinating project, and Heller’s description of it is superb. Worth mentioning is the fact that Rodkinson was supported in his efforts by prominent members of the American Jewish community, among them Rev. Dr. Isaac M. Wise, who was then the president of Hebrew Union College. Yet, as Heller notes, Rodkinson was not fluent in English, being a native speaker of German, so the actual translation was done by several unpaid and unnamed Jewish high school students who translated Rodkinson’s Yiddish translation of the Talmud into English. Heller has included here an interesting selection of positive and negative reviews of the work that is worth reading if only to appreciate the cautious invective used to describe this work.

The third section, “Book Varia,” contains perspectives on Hebrew publication that rarely feature in discussions of Hebrew printing. Chapter 14 is a description of several small books published between 1602 and 1699, the majority of which were a single issue and never republished. A helpful table of such volumes is included on pages 283–84. Heller describes the contents and publication of several of these books, concluding that these are all interesting and worth further consideration.

Chapter 15 considers several books that were not printed completely; that is, because of the cost of printing, a short first volume was printed as a prospectus for a larger work or
series. The works considered here were never completed because either the prospectus did not gain enough support or did not make enough money. The individual works considered in this chapter are of surprising breadth: an encyclopedia, a grammar, discourses on the Torah, and others. These works show the variety of things members of the Jewish community were interested in, and the fact that they were not completed offers a very interesting window into the mechanics of Hebrew publication in the 1600s.

Chapter 16 describes the mechanics of publication and plagiarism in sixteenth-century Italy, considering three such cases in detail: the printing of Maimonides’s Mishneh Torah with Mahram’s glosses in the text by Alvise Bragadin in 1550 and the subsequent plagiarized publication of that work with Mahram’s glosses as an addendum by Giustiaiani; the publication of nearly identical editions of Sefer ha-Kavvanot by Bragadin in 1620 and in 1624 by an intentionally unknown publisher; and a similar publication of the Nisselius Bible and the Athias Bible, which were both published in 1659–61.

Chapter 17 discusses several different types of variation occurring in different editions of the same book. Heller provides examples of errors caused by typesetting and describes stop-press corrections in this context. Typography of Hebrew publications was made more difficult in the sixteenth century because Jews were prohibited from being employed as typesetters, so often errors entered into the publication because of the non-Hebrew speaking compositor. Heller notes also and provides examples for various other types of manuscript errors, including modifications to title pages, omissions, changes resulting from censorship, and and changes to reflect Jewish communal preferences.

Chapter 18 is a collection of harrowing tales told by several authors as included in the prefatory materials to the published editions of their texts. Heller here includes personal accounts from R. Abraham ben Jacob Saba, Gershom Soncino, R. Menahem ben Aaron ibn Zerah, R. Judah ben Samuel Lerma, R. Isaac ben Joseph Caro, Isaac Spira, R. Joseph ben Abraham, R. Abraham ben Judah, and R. Benjamin ben Immanuel Mussafia. All of these accounts give interesting background to the daily lives of these thinkers and the mechanics of publishing. Heller also highlights a few works that offer an interpretation of the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648–1649, including material by R. Jacob ben ha-Kadosh, R. Simeon of Tomashov, and R. Isaac ben Yedidah Liberman.

In chapter 19 Heller describes several Hebrew book titles that were taken from Song of Songs 4:4; finding that there are several different types of books titled by important phrases from this verse: Migdal David, Talipot, Elef ha-Magen, and Shiltei ha-Gibborim. He describes several examples of various books of each title in the remainder of the chapter.
Chapter 20 considers errors in and about early Hebrew books. Heller here details the way that cataloguing errors invented both a second Soncino printing of Bezah in 1493 and Daniel Bomberg’s son David. Next Heller goes on to describe and provide examples of several errors within Hebrew books. He recounts stop-press errors, compositor errors, errors by the author, errors in dating with chronograms, intentional misdating of editions to subvert censorship or governmental restrictions on Hebrew printing, and, finally, intentional obfuscation of the place of publication for various reasons.

Chapter 21 describes the earliest printed editions of Talmud tractates. The description of the Soncino printing of Berakot and the formal innovations that it contains begins the chapter and provides some organizational principles for the material that follows, which traces the acceptance of the standards established by Soncino through other early printed editions of the Talmud; the most important of these innovations were the creation of Rashi script, the standardization of the foliation, and the format of the commentaries.

The final section, entitled “Miscellanea,” is includes two chapters. The first (ch. 22) argues that the Sephardic practice of making two, not four, blessings over the arba’ah kosot at the Passover seder originated in the early part of the fourteenth century with the revision of R. Asher ben Jehiel. Chapter 23 describes three commentaries on Megillat Esther, R. Moses ben Israel Isserles’s Mehrî Yayîn, R. Yom Tov ben Moses Zahalon’s Lekah Tov, and Manot ha-Levi, by R. Solomon ben Moses ha-Levi Alkabetz.

This collection is worthwhile because it groups a variety of resources together that explain relatively unknown aspects of Hebrew printing. It contains helpful and interesting information about Hebrew printing generally and, more significantly, gives an interesting window into the life of Jews in the diaspora, specifically seen in the books produced and published in the small Jewish communities considered throughout the second section, though also in the personal information culled from prefatory material (ch. 18). The volume is well-produced and includes many images of decent quality that illustrate the features of the printing craft being explained in the text. In addition, the index is a valuable resource to quickly find information about specific authors or specific works, though it would have been nice to have listed the titles in Hebrew.

The weakest aspect of the book is the paucity of the introduction. The material contained within this volume is incredibly diverse and could have benefitted from a much more programmatic introduction to set the various studies on artistic features, small presses, and overlooked compositions into the wider context of Hebrew publishing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In addition, because this is a collection of essays published elsewhere (the new contributions are chs. 2, 9, 11, 13, 19, and 23), there are a
few redundancies in the text; most notably, chapters 17 and 20 contain similar descriptions of errors common to early Hebrew books.

By tracing the history of the artistic features, small presses, and nonstandard features of Hebrew books, Marvin J. Heller sheds interesting light on the craft of Hebrew printing itself, the mechanics involved, and the Jewish communities who read these editions. This volume is incredibly provocative and will be of great interest to any bibliophile.