

Title: **The Many Deaths of Jew Suss. 2017.**
Author: **Mintzker, Yair**
Genre: *Historical fiction*
Subject: *Four stories ... [about] the trial and 1738 execution of "court Jew" Joseph Suss Oppenheimer*
Hook: *Issue of antisemitism remains relevant*
Reviewer's opinion: *This story is an important one that remains relevant*
Personal recommendation *The reader who enjoys detailed history will enjoy this book*

Reviewed by **Amy Lewitz**
TBI member

Yair Mintzker, an associate professor of history at Princeton University, has linearly presented four stories in an effort to elucidate and clarify the events surrounding the trial and February 4, **1738 execution of the "court Jew" Joseph Suss Oppenheimer ("Jew Suss")**. By employing the polyphonic approach of story telling, Mintzker has offered a retelling of this famous story by attempting to limit the common historical dilemma of contradictions presented by the use of more than one source of information.

The first story is called "The Inquisitor". It is about Dr. Phillip Friedrich Jager, the lead **judge-inquisitor** who established the case against Joseph Suss who's role was "to negotiate with powerful men [m] and handle them". The court painted Joseph Suss as being responsible for the death of Carl Alexander, the duke of the small German state of Wurttemberg where Joseph Suss served. Jager, who had no expertise in criminal law, was a Lutheran with views that contrasted with the late Catholic duke, Carl Alexander, who was more accepting of Jews in government positions. Jager found Joseph Suss to be "**a usurper of power" with illegal influence over the late duke** "with no opposition to his pernicious projects." "He was without any religion at all, without conscience, without honor, without culture, without loyalty, without faith".

The second, third, and fourth stories shed more light on the case, and are respectively entitled "The Convert's tale" (converted Jews' opinions of Joseph Suss' guilt being related to his Jewish religious intransigence), "Joseph and His Brothers" (drawing parallels with the theme of jealousy in the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers), and "In the Land of the Dead" (a posthumous accounting of Joseph Suss' encounters in the afterlife, including a first person account of his execution and refusal to convert before being hung).

This story is an important one that remains relevant in the almost three centuries since Oppenheimer's execution: "the court Jew, transformed in a thousand ways, keeps making his appearances among us: in the cinema, and the opera; in novels, short stories, and poems".

This story adds to what can be learned from books such as Carroll's Constantine's Sword. Additionally, Jonathan Levi wrote an op-ed in the July 19, 2016 issue of the Forward entitled, "Is Jared Kushner the 'Court Jew' of Donald Trump's Realm?" - another example of transformation referred to by Mintzker.

The reader who enjoys detailed history will enjoy this book and be motivated to learn more about this ongoing challenge for the Jewish community at large.