



This article was written by Jack Traut, a very interesting man and very knowledgeable about the people in Maitland, where he grew up, lived, went to school, and worked for some 60 years or so. He knew many of the Jewish families in Maitland, and having spent most of his working life at the abattoir, he knew the inner workings like no other. I asked him to share some of his insights and recollections.

Philip Stodel

The Cape Town Abattoir in Berkley Road, Maitland had always taken religious preferences into consideration. With the approval of the Moslem Judicial Council the whole stunning and bleeding operation of beef and sheep carcasses were carried out by selected Muslim staff. All animals except those selected for kosher were under their control. Out of respect for these two religious groups, pigs were slaughtered in a separate facility. The kosher slaughtering was carried out under the auspices of the Jewish Council controlled by the Chief Rabbi of Cape Town.

All incoming livestock was handled by various meat agencies (companies) and slaughtered under the approved halaal method. On the other hand, only one specified meat agency dealt with the kosher slaughtering procedure, and only one specific wholesaler operated on behalf of the Jewish Community. In Cape Town it was SA Butcheries, owned and managed by Mr. Benny Wagenheim, a member of the Jewish faith.

The main difference between the two procedures was basically that halaal was stunned (captive bolt pistol for bovines and electrical shocking for sheep) before cutting the throats. For kosher, on the other hand, the animals were restrained, not stunned, and bled by severing the jugulars with one quick slit of the throat. The shochet would have a special knife, over which prayers would be said between each animal. At Maitland abattoir, we had a special stunning box which was designed to clamp the legs of the animals (bovines) so that the stunning box could be rolled onto its side, which would give the shochet easier access for the slaughtering procedure.

Once the shochet was satisfied that the procedure was successful, the animal was released from the stunning box and then elevated onto the overhead mechanized rail system. The sheep, on the other hand, were placed on a mechanical line, and the slitting of the throats was carried out in a moving position, also with a smaller special knife over which prayers were said.

Kosher carcasses were marked by the shochet's assistant with a special stamp and recognizable ink for positive identification, bearing in mind that all the carcasses were moving along the conveyor system side by side with halaal carcasses. At the point of evisceration of the kosher carcasses, the shochet would be present to do his personal inspection of the pluck (liver, lungs and heart). If there was any evidence of adhesions of the organs to the pleura (lungs and heart) or the peritoneum (liver and spleen), the shochet would declare the carcass as treif (unsuitable for kosher) and remove all markings. The procedure for sheep was similar.

Just a note to remember - only the forequarter is used for kosher, as the blood vessels of the hind quarter cannot be successfully removed, and without the ability for refrigeration, the deep-seated vessels not cleared of blood can lead to putrefaction. At the abattoir, all the hind quarters

went to the normal trade, not halaal.

The offal was dealt with by the shochet's assistant, who captured all the kosher offal and marked them with a blom (lead seal)¹ for positive identification. This offal was taken from the slaughter floor in separate containers.

As the forequarter's blood vessels had to be cleaned before a certain period of time, long weekends were challenging, and there was a need for the shochets to come in over the weekend to do some cleaning of blood vessels.

Jack Traut

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*Jack Traut, Manager of Hygiene at the Cape Town Abattoir
(ca. 2000)*

¹ The blom was the small lead seal used on kosher meat during the slaughtering process. After the shechita, meat approved as kosher had a blom affixed, and this indicated that the meat had been properly slaughtered and inspected and supervised under the rabbinical authority.
