

The Jew as a Bloodthirsty Butcher: Laws Banning Ritual Slaughter (Shechita)

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Shechita is the Hebrew word for animal ritual slaughter, or the technique of slaughtering animals according to religious law in order to obtain kosher meat.

The point today is not to examine whether shechita is more cruel or more humane than other methods of animal slaughtering—for decades, scientists, physiologists, and veterinarians have sided with shechita or against. What is interesting to me is the fact that small countries with an insignificant Jewish community—and an even more insignificant population of kosher meat eaters—would ban shechita, under what outspoken and tacit arguments, and what the ongoing attacks on this Jewish practice reveal on contemporary Antisemitism.

Through attacks on shechita, four classic stereotypes of Antisemitism are identifiable:

- Deicide (Jews as murderers of Christ)
- Blood libel (Jews need the blood of a Christian child to make matzot)
- Inassimilable Other (Jews are everywhere and belong nowhere)
- Jewish greed and conspiracy to control the world

These themes appear repeatedly in attacks against ritual animal slaughter, and particularly at three moments in modern history:

1. Ban on shechita in Switzerland (1893)
2. Nazi Germany
3. Post Holocaust world (2000s)
 - A. Europe
 - B. USA
 - C. Muslim world

While attacks on shechita seem to belong to another day and age, and concern a small minority within a minority in countries that do not have a significant Jewish population, they are incarnations of classic anti-Semitic clichés. Simultaneously, attacks on shechita are themselves recycled and revived in contemporary manifestations of Antisemitism, such as anti-Zionism and Holocaust denial.