

Rural Judaism in the Wasgau Cattle Buyers and Jewish Butchers in Dahn

1994

By Otmar Weber

Translated by Peter Blystone, Arizona & Peter Levy, NY

At the turn of the century there were four Jewish cattle buyers in Dahn. (1) Two of them also ran a kosher butcher shop. They were Halfen & Oppenheimer in Marktstraße 20 and 22, and Jakob Levy, with his son Sally, in Schäfergasse 9.

The Jewish butchers had their large livestock (cattle and calves) butchered in a Christian butcher's slaughterhouse. The butcher was usually also the Jewish teacher.

In Dahn, the Jewish teacher had to perform this job, which was assigned to him for a fixed fee when he took office as a teacher at the Israelite school.

Before World War I, the teacher was Feibelmann, and until World War I, teacher Haas worked as a shepherd (Schechet).

(2) After World War I, until the end of 1933, teacher Ludwig Nußbaum was the shecheter. He kept the shechita knife in his apartment and only he was allowed to wield it. Small animals, such as sheep, goats, kids, chickens and pigeons, were slaughtered by teacher Nußbaum in the Jewish private houses.

As payment for slaughtering, he earned about 1 mark for a goat, and 10 to 20 pennies for a chicken. He removed feathers from the neck of the chicken before the slaughter in order to be able to make a safe cut. He let the blood drip onto the floor, onto ashes prepared especially for this purpose.

(3). Teacher Nußbaum moved with his family from Dahn to Frankfurt at the end of 1933. From here he, his wife Selma, née Blumental, his oldest daughter Ilse and his mother Dorothea were deported to the East in 1942/43 and murdered. Daughter Grete, today Tova Weinstein, and son Manfred, now Moshe Egozi, came to Israel in 1939 with a Kindertransport via Switzerland. Tova lives today in Kibbutz Dovrat and Moshe lives in Jerusalem.

(4). After the departure of teacher Nußbaum, Simon Levy II at Schäfergasse 8 and Julius Levy at Weißenburger Strasse 2 acquired the small shechita patent - "Small Knife" - and shechited small livestock and poultry for their brothers in the faith. According to Karl-Heinz Levy, the "Small Knife" was intended only for personal use. The blade of the "Small Knife" was about 20 - 30 cm long. His father, Julius Levy, kept the self-sharpened knife in a wooden case and used it only for butchering.

(5). Large livestock like cattle and calves, were slaughtered in the slaughterhouse of master butcher Fritz Engel in Pirmasenser Straße 12, and in the slaughterhouse of Michael and Albert Lambert, respectively, in Kanalstraße.

For Mrs. Meta Serrand, née Rosenstiel, it is still incomprehensible today how the "lanky teacher Nußbaum was able to slaughter the large animals."

(6) But in shecheting it is not so much a matter of strength as of skill, and teacher Nußbaum is said to not have lacked this. The cattle were tied by the front and hind legs, the head was held by two assistants, so that teacher Nußbaum could lead his cut in peace and with full concentration.

(7) It is said that the shecheting did not always work right away. Even today, older Dahners can remember that on their way home from elementary school they curiously and shyly wanted to watch the shecheting through the yard gate at "Lambert Michel." The butchers, however, sent the curious "onlookers" home.

(8) The butchering and marketing of the slaughtered large animals was done by the Jewish butchers. The first kosher butcher shop in the village was operated by Halfen & Oppenheimer at Marktstraße 20 and 22. After the turn of the century, the Oppenheimer, Kullmann and Leopold Halfen families, who were related by marriage, lived at Marktstraße 20.

In Marktstraße 22 lived Sigmund Halfen and his wife Flora. They had no children.

(9) Samuel Halfen, born on 05.11.1824 and died on 01.04.1878, (10) Together with his wife Elisa, ran a kosher butcher shop in addition to cattle trading. According to Emil Halfen, his grandfather Samuel Halfen opened this butcher shop around the middle of the 1850's ?? as the first kosher butcher shop in Dahn.

(11) Their son Leopold Halfen I, married Regina, née Katz, took over the butcher shop and continued it together with Oppenheimer.

The general partnership Halfen & Oppenheimer in Dahn, the livestock, flour and feed business, which had existed since 1900, dissolved on September 7, 1931.

(12) After the death of the co-partner Oppenheimer, Leopold Halfen I. took over the butchering and cattle trading and later handed it over to his son Emil Halfen, born on 12.06.1912. Leopold Halfen I. died on 08.08.1937 in Dahn. The cattle trade and the butcher shop were continued by Emil Halfen until 1936.

(13) The butcher shop and store of Halfen & Oppenheimer were located at the property No. 22, which was attached to the Wieslauer. Even today, colored tiles from the former Jewish butcher's shop are preserved in the basement room. It was a familiar sight in the streets of Dahn, and witnesses can still remember Leopold Halfen I, called "Elje-Schebb", (14) walking through the streets with a basket full of meat, his clean white apron over his head, advertising his wares in a loud voice. He brought the ordered portioned meat to his regular customers' houses.

(15) His son Emil no longer did any street selling. Whoever in the Dahn population had small livestock to slaughter, went to "Eljes" or to Halfen & Oppenheimer. The slaughtering, including sheep, goat, rabbit or cattle ??? was immediately carried out by Leopold Halfen, who charged 15 to 20 pfennigs and kept the resulting fur.

Since the early 1920s, Halfen & Oppenheimer owned a small cart wagon, used to collect the cattle from the farmers or brought to the farmers. Prior to that, cattle were transported by rail or driven across the country by rope. The preferred trading villages in the Dahn Valley were: Bruchweiler, Bundenthal, Rumbach, Schönau,

Fischbach and Ludwigswinkel. But also in Hinterweidenthal, Hauenstein, Lemberg and Salzwoog, cattle were bought and sold.

Halfen & Oppenheimer even operated their cattle trade as far as Annweiler and Albersweiler. (16) "Every week, 2 - 3 wagonloads of cattle were sold to the slaughterhouse in Pirmasens."

(17) At Marktstraße 20 and 22, Halfen & Oppenheimer raised cattle for their butchering trade, and maintained a farm with a horse, several cows and other small livestock.

(18) The actual financier of the Halfen & Oppenheimer company is said to have been Leon Halfen, still known to the older Dahners as "Gold or American Uncle". Leon, a brother of Leopold Halfen was born on April 3, 1856 in Dahn and emigrated to the USA in 1874, where he made his fortune in Texas from cattle trading.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, he returned to Dahn, where he was considered stateless and therefore had to report daily to the local police. His property in Texas, which had been "sequestered" in the USA during the war, was returned to him on application in the mid-1920s.

(19) After another stay in America, Leon Hafen returned to Dahn in 1926/27. When he drove into Dahn with his American luxury car, model "Terraplane" from the Studebaker company (a convertible with automatic gear shift, leather seats and radio), almost the whole village came out to look.

The "American Uncle" not only supported his relatives and Dahn businesses financially, but also donated a large sum of money and a silver "Jad" (a pointer in the shape of a hand used in reading the Torah) for the Dahn synagogue.

(20) After the ban on shechita by the National Socialists, Emil Halfen drove his delivery truck to Karlsruhe every Thursday from 1936 on, to get kosher meat and sausage products for the Jewish families in Dahn, Busenberg and Erlenbach. He did this as a service for his former customers.

(21) During this time, the Jews in Dahn made do with so-called "Neukosher meat". In this case, the beef was not slaughtered, but master butcher Fritz Engel had the animal particularly well bled. The koshering of the meat was done at home.

(22) Under pressure from the National Socialists, Emil Halfen was forced to sell his two houses, No. 20 and 22 in Marktstraße, in 1938. Today Emil Halfen lives in New Jersey, USA. His brother Siegfried was able to emigrate to the USA via Holland in 1939/40. His mother Regina, née Katz, reached the USA via Mannheim and Camp Gurs.

(23) At Schäfergasse 9, commonly known as Judengasse, Jakob Levy and his son Sally (24) conducted modest meat sales in addition to the livestock business. In a letter from the municipality of Dahn dated 22.06.1970 to the District Office for Reparation, the following information is given about Sally's butcher shop: "According to statements by various older people, it was not a butcher shop in the modern sense. Slaughtering took place at another butcher. Sausage was made at home and sold together with the meat out of a room at the property on Schäfergasse 9. No significant turnover would have been made, considering conditions at the time."

(25) On April 23, 1926, Sally Levy deregistered the butcher shop, but Blondine Levy, the sister of Jakob Levy, opened a butcher shop at the same address from that date and deregistered it again on March 9, 1927. Sally Levy transferred the livestock business to his wife Frieda, née Süsskind, on 10/13/1932.

26) From April 1933 to November 1935, Sally Levy was held at Dachau concentration camp. In a letter dated September 15, 1933, the mayor of Dahn at the time, asked the special commissioner in Pirmasens "to request the release of Sally Levy from prison, because the resulting consequences would mean a tangible financial relief for the community, and the cleansing and repression of Jewish influence for the entire Gau should not be underestimated."

(27) Sally Levy was released to Wickrath in the Rhineland, his wife's place of residence. Jakob and Sally Levy emigrated to France via Switzerland in 1938. Jakob Levy died in 1941 and Sally Levy in 1960 in Naillac/Southern France. Their daughter or sister Renée Bollag lives today in Basel/Switzerland.

(28) The house at Schäfergasse 9 (Judengasse) has been the clubhouse of the Dahn Gymnastics Club since 1992.

While the slaughtering and marketing of the meat was a role for the butcher; the koshering was done by the Jewish housewife. The Porschen, the removal of the veins, was the task - according to Karl-Heinz Levy – of the father of the house. This was done in the most scrupulous and conscientiousness manner, and never done by the Christian housekeeper.

(29) The koshering happens in the following way:

- The Soaking: The raw meat is soaked in cold water for 1/2 hour.
- The Salting: then sprinkle the meat so liberally with salt that it looks like it has been rubbed, and place it on a perforated wooden board for 3/4 hour to bleed completely.
- The Basting: The salted and bled meat is rinsed thoroughly with clear water and is ready for further cooking preparation. The meat is now kosher.

The Dahner Jews professed a moderate orthodox direction: they were pious and God-fearing. Most of them strictly observed the dietary rules until the Nazi era. Due to the harassment of the Nazis, it was hardly possible to live according to the pure regulation. When it comes to survival, the rules, in the spirit of the Torah, have to take a back seat, including the dietary laws. Therefore, in 1938 in the Dachau concentration camp, Julius Levy ordered his son Karl-Heinz Levy to eat the blood sausage put in front of him every day in order to survive. (30) Julius Levy thus acted in accordance with both the Torah and rabbinic interpretation. His son Karl-Heinz survived.

Most of the former Jewish fellow citizens from Dahn no longer strictly observe the dietary regulations, but pork, according to Alice Romer and Lore Wertheimer, (31) is not eaten in their families to this day. This statement is probably also true for most of the former Dahn Jews.

Notes:

(1) At the turn of the century, there were the following cattle dealers in Dahn:

- Rosenstiel, Theodor, called Frumel, Pirmasenser Straße 16.
- Josef, Sigmund, called Hasebelz, Pirmasenser Straße 6.

- Halfen, Leopold, called Elje, Marktstraße 20 and 22.
- Levy, Jakob, Schäfergasse 9, called Judengasse.
- Siegel, Max, Schulstraße 11.
- (2) Serrand, Meta, née Rosenstiel, Schweinfurt. Unpublished reports, interviews, letters and tape recordings in the years 1988 - 1994 - Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. Interview on 07.10.1994 in Dahn.
- (3) Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. Interview on 07.10.1994 in Dahn.
- (4) Egozi, Moshe, Jerusalem, formerly Manfred Nußbaum, letter dated 10.11.1993; interview in April 1994 (Passover) in Jerusalem.
- (5) Lemberger, Ella, née Levy, Bernkastel-Kues. Unpublished letters from 1988 - 1991. - Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. Interview on 07.10.1994 in Dahn.
- (6) Serrand, Meta, née Rosenstiel, Schweinfurt. Testimony during a visit to Dahn in August 1994.
- (7) Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. Interview on 07.10.1994 in Dahn.
- (8) Lambert, Hermann, Dahn. Testimony in 1988. - Johann, Alfred, Dahn. Statement in 1988.
- (9) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. Written interview on 27.06.1994 in New York.
- (10) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. Written interview dated 06/27/1994 in New York. - Samuel Halfen's gravestone, a snow-white marble slab, is currently being restored. It lay broken in the Busenberg cemetery in the spring of 1994.
- (11) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. Interview in July 1993 in New York.
- (12) Dahner Verbandsgemeindearchiv. D II 85 / 061-62.
- (13) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. Interview in July 1993 in New York.
- (14) Halfen, Leopold was called "Elje-Schebb" in Dahn because of his Hebrew name Elijah and because of his stiff leg.
- (15) Loreth, Josefa, Dahn. Unpublished interviews from the year 1988. - Johann, Alfred, Dahn. Statements from the year 1988.
- (16) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. The statements on the Halfen, Oppenheimer, and Kullmann families are based largely on the written interview from June 27, 1994, in Englistown, N.Y.
- (17) Dahner Verbandsgemeindearchiv. D II 85 / 061-02.
- (18) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. Unpublished letters written from 1988 - 1991.
- (19) Dahner Verbandsgemeindearchiv. D I 50.
- (20) Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. Interview on 07.10.1994 in Dahn.
- (21) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. Unpublished letters from 1988 - 1991.
- (22) Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. Interview on 07.10.1994 in Dahn.
- (23) Halfen, Emil, Englistown, N.Y.. Unpublished letters written from 1988 -1991.
- (24) Levy, Sally, Dahn. Anecdotes about him circulate in Dahn to this day.
- (25) Dahn Verbandsgemeindearchiv. D II 86 / 061-02.
- (26) Dahn Verbandsgemeindearchiv. D II 86 / 061 02
- (27) Dahner Verbandsgemeindearchiv. D I 74.
- (28) Bollag, Renée, née Levy, Dahn. Testimony at the 1991 Heimattreffen in Dahn.
- (29) Serrand, Meta, née Rosenstiel, Schweinfurt. Unpublished interviews from 1988 - 1994. - Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. Interview on 07.10.1994 in Dahn.
- (30) Levy, Karl-Heinz, Brooklyn, N.Y.. K.-H. Levy made this statement at the home meeting in July 1991 and at his lecture on 15.09.1994 in the Methodist Church in Pirmasens.
- (31) Romer, Alice, Greensboro/USA and Wertheimer, Lore, Philadelphia/USA. Alice and Lore made this statement in unison during a visit by the author to the USA in July/August 1993.