

A Note on the Dating of Dr. Max Lilienthal's Birth

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The biographer of Dr. Max Lilienthal soon finds that various sources dealing with the biographical data of this nineteenth-century German rabbi, teacher, and writer contradict one another concerning the date of his birth. Lilienthal's official biographer and disciple David Philipson noted two different dates of birth (November 6, 1814, and October 16, 1815) and, furthermore, did not offer overwhelmingly decisive data proving the authenticity of either.¹ Other writers have offered still different dates.² We shall herein attempt to offer some suggestions which may lead to clarification, if not solution, of the problem.

Philipson's argument for the 1815 date is as follows: Lilienthal referred to the date of a letter written his fiancée Pepi Nettle as his birthday; "I wonder what you are doing on this, my birthday," he wrote on October 16, 1841. Furthermore, in his "My Travels in Russia," Lilienthal wrote: "I was but 23 years of age when I left for Russia."³ As he departed for Russia on October 8, 1839, he was soon to be twenty-four years of age.

If, however, Lilienthal had indeed been born on October 16, 1815, as Philipson contended, upon his departure for Russia (i.e., prior to October 16, 1839) he would have been going on twenty-five years of age, *not*, as has been argued, twenty-four. Actually, there

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¹ David Philipson, *Max Lilienthal—American Rabbi, His Life and Writings* (New York, 1915), p. 4; *idem*, *Centenary Papers* (Cincinnati, 1919), p. 149; *Tribute to the Memory of Reverend Dr. Max Lilienthal, on the Tenth Anniversary of his Death . . . April 9, 1892* (Cincinnati, 1892), p. 5.

² Herman Rosenthal, in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (VIII, 86), suggests November 6, 1815; Peter Wiernik, in "Max Lilienthal and the Educational Plans of the Russian Government" (*Jewish Forum*, I [1918], 546), suggests the date of October 7, 1815.

³ Philipson, *Lilienthal*, p. 4, n. 2.

is considerable evidence that he was born in 1814. In an autobiographical letter to Count Sergi Uvaroff, Lilienthal stated that he had been born on November 6, 1814. The year of his birth is further substantiated by the fact that his tombstone, although lacking a specific date, notes the year of birth as 1814.⁴ Samuel Lilienthal, our subject's younger brother, was born on November 19, 1815, a fact making any date in 1815 most improbable.⁵

It was suggested by Gotthard Deutsch⁶ that Lilienthal was born on the first of Marcheshvan (which would correspond to October 15, 1814, and to November 4, 1815). As we have shown cause for dismissing 1815 as the probable year of birth, we will conclude on the following note: Lilienthal acknowledged October 16, 1841, as a birthday because it coincided that year with the first of Marcheshvan. It remains to be ascertained why, in his introductory letter to Uvaroff, he had given November 6, 1814, as his date of birth. Whether this or the October 15 date is more accurate, certainly 1814 is to be preferred to the heretofore accepted theory of 1815.

⁴ Saul Ginsburg, "Max Lilienthal's Activities in Russia: New Documents," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XXXV (1939), 42.

⁵ F. Gordon O'Neill, *Ernest Reuben Lilienthal And His Family* (San Francisco, 1949), p. 16. The genealogical evidence in Sophie Lilienthal's *The Lilienthal Family Record* (San Francisco, 1930), p. 5, indicates an 1814 date of birth.

⁶ Gotthard Deutsch, "Max Lilienthal" (*B'nai Brith News*, VIII, No. 2 [October, 1915], p. 6a).

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The year 1975 marks the centennial of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, founded at Cincinnati in 1875 by Isaac Mayer Wise. The November, 1974 issue of *American Jewish Archives* will be devoted to a documentary survey of the history of the College-Institute.