

The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image (S. Mark Taper Foundation Imprint in Jewish Studies)

Immanuel Etkes

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A legendary figure in his own lifetime, Rabbi Eliahu ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-1797) was known as the "Gaon of Vilna." He was the acknowledged master of Talmudic studies in the vibrant intellectual center of Vilna, revered throughout Eastern Europe for his learning and his ability to traverse with ease seemingly opposed domains of thought and activity. After his death, the myth that had been woven around him became even more powerful and was expressed in various public images. The formation of these images was influenced as much by the needs and wishes of those who clung to and depended on them as by the actual figure of the Gaon. In this penetrating study, Immanuel Etkes sheds light on aspects of the Vilna Gaon's "real" character and traces several public images of him as they have developed and spread from the early nineteenth century until the present.



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