



## BALĀĠĪ, MOḤAMMAD-JAWĀD

**BALĀĠĪ, MOḤAMMAD-JAWĀD** B. ḤASAN B. ṬĀLEB B. ‘ABBĀS RABA’Ī NAJAFĪ, Imami author, poet, and polemicist. Born in Najaf in 1282/1865-66 (or, less probably, in 1285/1868-69 or 1280/1863-64) to a well-known family of scholars, he spent his early years at his birthplace (except for a sojourn in Kāẓemayn between 1306/1888-89 and 1312/1894-95), before departing in 1326/1908 for Samarra, where he lived for ten years. Following the British occupation of the city he moved back to Kāẓemayn and supported circles seeking independence for Iraq. Two years later he returned to Najaf, and devoted his time to teaching and writing. He was admired by many for his modesty and piety. In his last years he suffered from ill-health; he died of pleurisy on Sunday, 22 Ša‘bān 1352/10 December 1933.

Balāġī was versed not only in the traditional Islamic sciences, but was also acquainted with some Western Biblical and Orientalist publications, and knew English, Hebrew (which he acquired mainly from Baghdadi Jews), and Persian. He was thus well equipped for the task which he had set himself in many of his forty-eight works (and which earned him the honorific *al-mojāhed*), proving the superiority of Islam to other faiths. In his two major works, *al-Hodā elā dīn al-moštafā* and the more popular *al-Reḥla al-madrasīya* (both written in response to Christian missionary books), Balāġī analyses passages from the Old and New Testaments with a view to proving that these are replete with inconsistencies, contradictions, linguistic errors, and blasphemous expressions, and that the Bible as we have it today (*al-rā’ej*) preserves little of the original book (*al-ḥaqīqī*). His opposition to Bahaism was



particularly vehement, and he was actively involved in the successful campaign to deny the Bahais possession of the house in Baghdad in which Bahā'-Allāh had lived during his Iraqi exile, and which had become a Bahai shrine (cf. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, 1944, pp. 356-60).

In addition to his polemical writings, Balāġī wrote extensively on Imami *oṣūl* and *forū'*. His strong commitment to Imami Shi'ism was expressed in various ways: he composed a poem defending the belief in the Hidden Imam, and is also credited with reviving the '*āšūrā*' mourning ceremonies at Karbalā'.

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