

Call for Articles

Religiographies

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“The Architecture of Transnationalism: The Pioneers and the Formation of the Global Bahá’í Community”

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The Bahá’í Faith, which has its roots in Shia Islam, arose in Persia between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period when globalization was beginning to have a significant impact on various aspects of life in human societies across much of the world. It was precisely during the early stages of the development of global processes that Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, respectively the founder of the religion and his son and successor, proposed a doctrine that sought world unity. This aspiration did not remain a theoretical precept but became one of the pillars of the religion. Baha’u’llah’s social vision was significant for his time, centered on a “strong global perspective” aimed at achieving lasting world peace. Many Baha’is, both then and now, supported by a universalist and unifying ideology, feel a sense of community that transcends national borders.

The transformation of the Bahá’í Faith from a movement with Shi’i roots into a cosmopolitan, transnational, and independent religion is a unique case study in Global Studies. The synchrony between the rise of globalization and the emergence of this new religion on the world stage should not be underestimated or dismissed as coincidental. As early as 1868, Bahá’í leadership began directing its message beyond the Shia context, leading the community to occupy a prominent position in North America and Europe through a widespread outreach project, primarily via the pioneers: believers sent to new territories not to promote traditional proselytism but to integrate and reshape the doctrine of unity within local social fabrics.

By shifting the focus from a purely historical analysis to socio-cultural dynamics and the logic of global diffusion, and by highlighting how the actions of individuals (the pioneers) transform the universalist ideal into a concrete geographical reality, it seems appropriate to explore the Bahá’í Faith as a transnational religion and to examine the role of the pioneers as key figures.

This Special Issue aims to analyze how the pioneers’ actions have enabled the crossing of national borders, projecting the Bahá’í Faith onto the global stage and creating an “imagined community” that is both deeply local and radically transnational.

We welcome contributions that seek to investigate, including but not limited to:

- The pioneer as an “agent of transnationality,” a mediator among their identity of origin, the universal Faith, and the host culture;
- the work of the pioneers in the transition from the Persian context to the establishment of the Faith in North America and Europe (post-1925);
- the translation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s principles on world unity into geographical action plans;
- the study of the Tables of Bahá’í leadership to coordinate the transnational network;
- the creation of a sense of community that transcends nationality: the Bahá’í model as an alternative to 20th century nationalism;
- the definitive transcendence of the boundaries of Shi’ism and the formation of a new global collective identity;
- specific case studies (for example, pioneers in Africa, South America, or Europe in the early 20th century) to examine the “synchrony with globalization” discussed in the texts;
- the impact of the pioneers in establishing the first National Spiritual Assemblies as nodes within an interconnected global network.

Guest Editor

Marta Scialdone (Sapienza Università di Roma)

Abstracts and Timetable

You are invited to submit a brief proposals (title and max 500 words), accompanied by a CV by the 30th of August 2026 to religiographies@cini.it. A notification of acceptance will be forwarded by the 1st of October 2026. Following the notification of acceptance, we will ask you to send us the manuscript (between 6,000 to 10,000 words in length) by the 1st of September 2027. The manuscripts will be sent to blind peerreview and, after suitable revision, published in May 2028.