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THE RISE OF THE BAHA'I FAITH COMMUNITY IN TUNISIA

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Abstract: *The Bahá'í faith derives from Babì movement and takes its first steps in Persia during the first half of the 19th century. Bahà'u'llàh reveals to be the new Manifestation of God in 1863. Thanks to his successors, the Bahá'í faith transcended its geographical boundaries, initially Persian and Arab, by embracing Western Countries and adapting its characteristics to those cultural contexts. Commencing from my doctoral project, the contribution aims to focus on the presence of the Bahá'í religious minority in Tunisia, which arrived in the 1920s of the 20th century. The Country, in addition to the Bahá'í one, welcomes the Shiite Muslim minority, as well as various Christians, which can be categorized as indigenous (converted Tunisians), European, Sub-Saharan, and the Jew minority. The presence of the Bahá'í community, as reported by the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA), is estimated to be around 2,000 believers, however, it appears to engage in a fluid coexistence with other religions and navigate a cold conflict within a predominantly Sunni Muslim context. The oral testimonies range from examples of "peaceful coexistence" to "fear of openly declaring oneself". Moreover, they reveal that the number of believers ranges between 200 and 250, as many believers do not officially declare their affiliation.Prior to the Revolution in 2011, nobody dared to openly acknowledge their affiliation with the Bahá'í faith; subsequently, thanks to a newfound spirit that has animated religious, national, and ethnic minorities (including Berber and Black communities) – Bahá'í adherents have reported an increased sense of freedom of expression. However, instances of believers experiencing apprehension regarding potential acts of violence and discrimination persist.*

Keywords: *Bahá'í, Religion, conflict, coexistence.*

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Introduction

The present paper aims at analysing the arrival of the Bahá'í faith in Tunisia, investigating the written sources, albeit meager, but especially the themes emerging from the oral testimonies collected. The methodology employed for this contribution is based on the integration of various approaches. A preliminary phase of the study was devoted to conducting a bibliographic analysis of relevant theories and examining online archives pertaining to the Bahá'í religion. The Bahá'í community, through the diligent effort of believers from various communities worldwide and under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, has implemented a vast collection of documentation and works created by the founder and his successors. This vast array of elements is now largely accessible through online platforms, such as Bahá'í.it; Bahá'í.org; bahaipedia.it. Among the written sources on the subject, I would mention a few works that have enabled me to reconstruct the foundation and consolidation of the Country's community: *Cent ans de la fois Baha'ie enTunisie* (2021), published by the local community and crystallising the origins of the Bahá'í religion in Tunisia; Miryam Achour's doctoral thesis on Bahá'í conversions, discussed in 2018. The former could be considered a founding myth, as it describes in meticulous details the arrival of a Bahá'í pioneer[2] in the city of Tunis in 1921, his first contacts with the citizens and the creation of the community in the Country. My interest in the Bahá'í religion emerged in 2019 through research focused on its inception and subsequent development in its Country of origin, Persia, as well as its dissemination in Italy and Bahrain, based primarily on oral sources, analysing witness reconstructions of the origins in their respective territories, focusing on the topic of religious freedom, their perceptions of considering themselves a religious minority, the discourse on religious pluralism, and the prospects of transmitting their knowledge to future generations. This research has given rise to the master's thesis work in Historical-religious Sciences and continues, to this day, with the doctoral project, which also includes the Tunisian community in its study.

The contribution consists of three sections: the first one traces the rise of Bahá'í faith in Persia, from its origin rooted in the Babi movement, emphasising the possible Shayki influence, to the foundation of the Universal House of Justice. The second paragraph investigates the arrival of the first Egyptian Bahá'í pioneer in Tunisia, Muhyi'd-Din Sabrì al-Kurdì al-Kanimeshkání, whose aim was the spreading of the faith in the Tunisian territory; the first Tunisian believers and the description of the personalities of Moustafa Bouchoucha and Habib Bourguiba. The third one tries to outline the current situation of the Bahá'í minority in a Muslim-majority Country, portrayed as a *liquid* minority. The last paragraph traces conclusions.

1. Brief historical notes: from Babism to the Bahá'í religion through Shayki influences

The Bahá'í religion stands as one of the most recent monotheisms. It emerged in Persia in the second part of the 19th century. This belief emphasises the real and spiritual unity of all humanity. Three cardinal principles establish the basis of the Bahá'í teachings: the unity of God, one God who is the source of all creation; the unity of religion, all the great religions have the same spiritual origin and come from the same God; the unity of humanity, all people are considered equal before God and cultural and ethnic differences are considered gifts worthy of esteem and acceptance. It derives from the Babi movement, which in turn is a product of the messianism characteristic of Shia Islam. Its developments show relevant territorial peculiarities as they would have an antecedent in the precursor movement of shaykhi (shaykhism) founded by Shaykh[3] Ahmad Aḥsā'ī in Persia between the

[2] For the meaning of the term, please refer to the section 2.

[3] Adapted into Italian as 'sheikh', it is an appellation or title given to leaders and notable people in the Arab world. The term, in addition to its original meaning of 'elder', has that of 'chief' (of tribe, village, religious confraternity,

18th and 19th centuries[4]. Some sources, including oral sources researched among Bahraini believers[5], report that their religious community developed from the stimuli that Shaykhism allegedly induced and subsequently intertwined with that movement, as the succession of different dominations, resulting in the intermingling of different traditions and cultures, allowed for the influx of people from different geographical areas. Some scholars, however, consider the link between Shaykhism and Babism, and that of the movement with the Bahá'í religion, to be rather questionable, if not outright false (Corbin, 1972: 213). For the Babis and later for the Bahá'ís, however, this link would have been emphasised because it legitimised the believers historically and doctrinally: they presented themselves as the successors of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾi, who probably represented the most arduous challenge to the authorities of the 19th century, following the process of reconstructing an 'authenticity' necessary to accredit themselves as a 'worthy' religion (Dupront, 1993). The Babi and Bahá'í leaders, however, described themselves as revolutionary dissidents (Hermann, 2017).In these terms can be interpreted the thinking of Shoghi Effendi, the last descendant of Bahá'u'lláh, who presented the Bahá'í faith as a process of transformation from Shaykhism to a religion that was spreading throughout the world: «[La foi Baha'ie est] la transformation de l'école Šayḵi, simple secte hétérodoxe et relativement négligeable de l'islam shi'ite duodécimain, en une religion mondiale» (Smith, 1999: 151). The Babis and Bahá'ís therefore regard Shaykhism as a 'spiritual ancestor' of their movement that paved the way for the Báb and probably also for Bahá'u'lláh. Babism, or the Babi movement, initially showed itself as an intense expression of certain radical tendencies peculiar to the Shaykhi school. Siyyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the future leader, was recognised as the first prophet and source of divine revelations in 1844 (Warburg, 2006: 7). He himself announced that he was the «promised messianic leader expected by many Shaykhis» (Smith, 2000: 56), the Báb, which in Arabic has the meaning of 'Gate': symbolic gateway between the old prophetic era and the new era of fulfilment, which would provide access to the knowledge of divine truth (Gibb, Kramers, 1953: 52) and the Hidden Imam, whose existence is a cornerstone of Shiite doctrines because he is considered the last of the series of divine successors of the Prophet Muhammad; the bearer of a message destined to transform humanity, even coinciding - at least this is how he presented himself for some phases of his preaching - with the occult imam, manifested through him and come to inaugurate a new prophetic cycle (Bausani, 1956). The Báb, who announced to mankind that he was on the threshold of a new era, had only six years to complete his mission: to prepare the way for the coming of a Manifestation of God, a divinely inspired Educator, whom he called "He Whom God will manifest".

The new Divine Messenger was Mirza Husayn'Alí Nūrī, the son of an important minister in the court of Fath-'Ali Shah Qajar. Internal Bahá'í sources indicate that he did not attend any schooling. During his younger years he showed an interest in religious matters and mysticism. Listening to 'the new word', Mirza Husayn'Alí at the age of twenty-seven accepted the Báb's declaration, committed himself to spreading the new (Cole, 1989). Following a suggestion from the Báb, he assumed a theophanic name to glorify God through divine name attributes: he chose the name Bahā' (God), which became Bahà'u'llàh, the Glory or Splendour of God (Bausani, 1960). Bahà'u'llàh understood that focusing on one's spirituality was the right tool to bring vigor back to the Babi community. During his various imprisonments, he had mystical experiences, during one of which a young girl appeared to him and entrusted him with the Divine Mission (Bahà'u'llàh, 1988: 21-22; Effendi, 1971: 101; Warburg; 2006). This episode marks the initial moment of the Bahá'í Revelation. To believe in Bahà'u'llàh as a

trade guild), and then of schoolmaster, professor, or person eminent in Islamic sciences or even mysticism, head of school in religious or philological disciplines. Encyclopedia Treccani, URL: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/shaikh/,consulted on 06.03.2024.

[4] The use of 'Persia' instead of 'Iran' follows Barrington, who notes that until 1935 Iran was known in Europe and North America as Persia (Barrington, 2012: 121).

[5] Reference is made to an earlier ethnographic work carried out for the master's thesis, based on interviews with Bahá'í believers in Bahrain.

divine Manifestation constitutes one of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í religion and is what sets it apart from Islam, both from a Bahá'í and a Muslim perspective (Warburg, 2006). According to Bahá'í doctrine, the founders of the great religions are human Manifestations of an invisible and indescribable deity, known as God (Warburg, 2006). The new religion of Bahà'u'llàh, named after him as Bahá'í, is proposed as an exemplification and universalization of the Babi movement: while preserving the Islamic concept of later revelations, transforms the 'prophet' of Islam, *rasul*, into *mazhar*, or 'Divine Manifestation'. The Bahá'í religion places Baha'u'llàh in the chain of prophets that leads from Judaism to Islam - thus also recovering Christian dictates - as a further Messenger: it is a strictly monotheistic religion that stands in contiguity with earlier expressions of monotheism itself.

Upon Baha'u'llàh's death on 29 May 1892, the leadership role was entrusted to his eldest son, Abbas Effendi; known by various appellations, including the 'Most Important (or Mighty) Branch' and the 'Mystery of God' (Smith, 2000: 14), during his existence, he preferred to use the name Abdu'l-Bahà, Servant of Bahà, and so is generally recognized. He is considered by believers as a divinely inspired and authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í writings (Warburg, 2006). His father officially designated him his successor and leader of the movement in his last will, entrusted to the text *The Book of the Covenant*, making him a model of life (Bausani, 1960), 'Centre of the Covenant', as believers considered this choice to be the result of the covenant made between Baha'u'llàh and his followers (Taherzadeh, 1995). With Abdu'l-Bahà, the Bahá'í religion began to spread worldwide and establish itself as a global religion (Fozdar, 2015: 281). In his will, he named his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, as his successor and 'Guardian of the Faith' (Bausani, 1960: 392); outlined the scheme to be followed to elect the members of the Universal House of Justice, already shown earlier by Baha'u'llàh, also encouraged the creation of locally elected Bahá'í Councils. Shoghi Effendi assumed the offices of 'Guardian of the Cause of God' and 'Sign of God on Earth' in 1921, at the age of twenty-four. He was the first and last 'Guardian' (Smith, 2019: 55), thus leaving no heirs and excommunicating all possible kinsmen, the lineage ended with him. His existence was almost entirely subordinated to his work on the task of applying principles, promulgating laws, and adapting the Bahá'í religion by shaping it to the changing society. With his contribution, it became much more structured in terms of institutions and practices, experiencing a remarkable spread that emancipated it from its regional character and promoted its internationalization. He foresaw the need to strengthen the Bahá'í organization: he established the organizational principles that formed the Administrative Order (of the Baha'u'llàh Faith), as he called it (Effendi, 1976: 143-157) and defined: «by virtue of its origin and character, unique in the annals of the world's religious systems» (Effendi, 1971: 326). The Administrative Order has doctrinal significance in that it presents itself as a guideline for a future politico-religious world order, the World Order of Baha'u'llàh (Warburg, 2006).

When Shoghi Effendi died during a trip to London in 1957, the situation for the world community changed completely: leaving no heirs, no children, and no disciples, it seemed that the leadership led by the descendants of Baha'u'llàh would come to an end. Before long, a group of twenty-seven Baha'is, known as the 'Hands of the Cause', decided to elect within their own group a nine-member committee called the 'Custodians', whose purpose was to manage on an interim basis the issues pertaining to the communities[6], until 1963 when the Universal House of Justice was officially established (Warburg, 2006). When the Universal House of Justice was established in 1963, it represented the idea of a coalition to guide the whole community (Taherzadeh, 1995: 437), both with regard to political decisions and to support believers. Since the beginning of the 20th century, it has stood at the foot of Mount Carmel in the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa (Warburg, 2006): It consists of nine persons, male

[6] The Universal House of Justice published a series of important documents about this important historical moment for the community, entitled The Ministry of the Custodians. One of the custodians was the widow of Shoghi Effendi (Warburg, 2006).

only, elected every five years by the members of the Spiritual National Assemblies and has the task of applying the Bahá'í teachings to the needs of a changing society. It also has the power to legislate on matters not explicitly provided for in the Bahá'í sacred texts.

2. The arrival in Tunisia

The Bahá'í religion took its first steps in Tunisia in the early 1920s. Both the oral and written sources I have analyzed report the anecdote of the meeting between the Egyptian shaykh, Muhyi'd-Din Sabrì al-Kurdì al-Kanimeshkání, and two young Tunisians, 'Abdu'l-Hamíd el-Khemírí and Muhammad Wahbí Kasraoui: one afternoon in the autumn of 1921, two young individuals were strolling in Tunis along Avenue de la Marine, subsequently recognized as Avenue Jules Ferry and presently Avenue Habib Bourguiba, and observed a middle-aged gentleman approaching with an apparent intention to engage in conversation with someone. From his attire, they presumed he was a shaykh from al-Azhar, the prestigious university in Cairo. They commenced a conversation with him, and he conveyed that he had recently arrived from Egypt to introduce a significant innovation. The shaykh went to Tunisia as a pioneer (Communauté Bahá'íe de Tunisie, 2021). The figure of the pioneer is fundamental to the Bahá'í vision of spreading the faith. Pioneers are missionaries invited to migrate to Countries where there are still no believers or where their numbers are small. There exist various pioneering methods, all of which are deemed valid and highly beneficial to the field of education. There is, first and foremost, the pioneer who ventures into a specific Country, devoting the remainder of their life to the service of faith in that land, and ultimately laying their remains to rest in its soil. Secondly, there is the pioneer who ventures to a location, diligently works there until the native Bahá'í community is firmly established, and then transitions to new fields of service. Thirdly, there are individuals, such as young adults transitioning from school to their chosen profession, who embark on a limited and specific pioneering period. Similarly, this has been the case for Tunisia, with the advent of a believer from another location (Fozdar, 2015).

The shaykh intended to spread the new belief in Tunisian territory and bring as many people as possible closer; to make Bahà'u'llàh's message known and to inform them that he had been sent by Abdu'l-Bahà himself. Al-Kurdì of Persian origin but from Egypt and educated at al-Azhar, a prestigious university in Cairo, seems to have been the first Bahá'í to reach Tunisia. It is pointed out, however, that previously a Babi believer, a follower of the Bāb forerunner of Bahà'u'llàh, Ethel Stefana Stevens, had come to Tunisia around 1910, as had Hippolyte Dreyfus, the first Bahà'í convert from France in 1898 who arrived in 1913. Nevertheless, there is no scientific evidence of their presence in Tunisia. The two young Tunisians, feeling a strong involvement in the shaykh's words, were fascinated by the idea of the coming of a new Messenger of God.The unity of mankind, the unity of religions, the abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty, the importance of cultural education for both men and women, the creation and adoption of a universal language, natural or artificial, to facilitate communication between people around the world, and the new idea of work aimed at social improvement: the principles of Bahá'í belief as pieces of a large mosaic to create a new civilization are attracting more and more followers interested in the 'new word' reported by al-Kurdì. For his part, the shaykh added that the 'path ahead', which was long and complex, would gradually become clearer as he progressed through a thorough study of the Writings (Communauté Bahá'íe de Tunisie, 2021).

The first two young men who met the shaykh, 'Abdu'l-Hamíd el-Khemírí and Muhammad Wahbí Kasraoui, along with others, began to attend meetings and soon declared their affiliation with the Bahá'í faith. They were impressed and amazed by his way of speaking, his perfect command of the Arabic language, pronouncing it like a melody. Even more so by his arguments, which resembled Koranic verses.

'Abdu'l-Hamíd el-Khemírí, born into a family of Berber descent, grew up in a Muslim environment; in 1928 he made a trip to the Holy Land where he met Shoghi Effendi, an experience that would completely transform his outlook on life. On his return, his small shop in 175, Rue de Kasbah in the medina of Tunis became a meeting hub and reference point for the Bahá'í community, fostering a sense of cohesion and providing valuable resources and guidance.

Over the next two decades, the Bahá'í community seemed to be disintegrating. Shoghi Effendi, with the Ten-Year World Crusade[7], decided to send believers from Egypt, Iran, and the United States to solidify the community and encourage its activities. In 1953 many young Tunisians were beginning to approach the Bahá'í faith. In 1956, the Guardian of the Faith called for the formation of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Northeast Africa: 'Abdu'l-Hamíd el-Khemírí is elected as a member for a four-year term. For his important work in propagating and serving Bahai belief, the Universal House of Justice published a citation upon his death in 1977:

«Nous nous souviendrons toujours des services rendus par M. Khemírí, car il n'était pas seulment parmi les premiers croyants en Tunisie, mais il a servi la Fois dans ce Pays pendent un demi-siècle, avec fidélité, devotion et dévouement» (UHJ, 1977).

About Muhammad Wahbí Kasraoui we have very few news. He came from a family of Berber origin, too, from the little village of Kesra, in Northwest Tunisia. We do not know the dates of his birth and death, we only know that one of his ancestors left for Syria where he married, and it seems that some Syrian cousins belonged to the Bahá'í community in Syria. This is probably the genesis of his religious affiliation. As his friend Khemírí, he contributed greatly to the spread of the Bahá'í religion in Tunisia.

Alongside the first two connoisseurs of the faith, other people of different ages and backgrounds joined them, enabling the establishment of the Local Spiritual Assembly in Tunis: Abdelaziz Hayouni, employed at Ministry of Agricolture, converted in 1921, hosted many Bahá'í meetings in his home and then the Ghadimi family, Bahai pioneers from Persia; Belhassen Ben Chedly Ben Mohamed Ben El Hattab, converted 1921 too, archivist at the Ministry, poet and songwriter, frequented the milieu of intellectuals, artists, poets and writers. We have no record of how he came to know the faith or that his family was unaware of his Bahá'í affiliation. François Ercolano and his mother Anna Maria Gnecco, born respectively in Trapani and Favignana, arrived in Tunis with the Italian migration during the first years of 20th century, during the third phase of Italian migration – that covered the years from the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th one. Tunisia represented a metaphor of a journey towhich one entrusts one's destiny elsewhere, to escape from very poor Sicily and to improve living conditions. Ercolano was a tram driver, and he knew the faith by listening to two people talking about in a train he drove; he asked for information and began to take part in gatherings, declaring to be a Bahá'í believer between 1923 and 1927. His mother followed in her son's footsteps.

A special mention is forMoustafa Bouchoucha, 'Abdu'l-Hamíd el-Khemírí and Muhammad Wahbí Kasraoui's friend, who became Bahá'í in 1922. One of the first Bahá'í believers in Tunisia, he served the faith with great devotion until the end of his days, so much so that all who knew him identified him with the faith itself. He was an important point of reference for the entire Tunisian community; an example of benevolence and a source of encouragement for all those who were going through times of suffering. He was a photographer and engaged in TV production, so he was an important figure at the time and succeeded in propagating the faith to even the most prominent public figures, bringing attention to his status of independent world religion, to his spiritual truths, and to his humanitarian

[7] The 'Ten Year World Crusade', from 1953 to 1963, allowed the faith to spread to various parts of the world, albeit not always in large numbers, thanks to the work of the so-called 'pioneers', the missionaries who were invited to migrate to countries where there were still no believers or where their numbers were small. This project was considered a decisive step towards the creation of the 'new world order' (Fozdar, 2015: 282).

principles. Bouchoucha was a great friend of Habib Bourguiba, the first President of Tunisia, who led the Country from 1956 to 1987. They were about the same age, they attended the SadikiCollege, the first Institute that provided a bicultural, bilingual education, founded by General Khéireddine Pacha, Ottoman-Tunisian statesman, and reformer. They shared a flat until 1924 when Bourguiba left to pursue his studies in France. During those years, Bourguiba had the opportunity to read the texts brought by Muhyi'd-Din Sabrì al-Kurdì al-Kanimeshkání on Bahá'í religion, was immediately very interested in them and learnt the Bahá'í principles. One of the principles that most caught his attention was recorded in the Bayan, the most significant writing left by the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh forerunner, about burial in a coffin. According to Bahá'í sources, Bourguiba decided to have a coffin built and be buried in it. Bouchoucha, noting Bourguiba's great interest in the Bahá'í faith, pointed out to him that his political interests could not be compatible with religion and tried to dissuade him from the latter. However, Bourguiba confessed to Bouchoucha to wanting to make Tunisia an independent Country and then to establish Bahá'í principles. As just stated, Bourguiba's interest in the Bahá'í religion is evident from texts written by insider authors, i.e. Bahá'í believers, and oral sources. I have so far found no scholarly sources on this.

3. Bahá'í faith community in Tunisia: a cold conflict with the religious majority

The Bahá'í religion emerged during a period, in the late 19th century and early 20th,when globalization was beginning to exert a significant influence in various aspects of human societies worldwide (Fozdar, 2015). Bahá'í adherents assert their active engagement in the process of globalization, as they strive towards their objective of global religious and political unification, thereby fostering cohesive communities worldwide. Some scholars venture to define the Bahá'í religion as a world religion because of its presence worldwide (Warburg, 2006). It ranks second only to Christianity, with a presence in 220 Countries worldwide and approximately 8 million units. The Country with the highest number of believers in the world is India, with a total of about 2 million individuals in 2010. Iran has 250 thousand believers, while the Country with the lowest number is Bhutan, with only 74 believers (Arda, 2010). As regards the number in Tunisia, I quote the title of the section: Bahá'í faith community in Tunisia: a cold conflict with the religious majority? This question turned out to be important because I detected two different versions. According to ARDA (Association Religious Data Archives) in Tunisia, in the last decades there are 2000 Bahá'í believers but based on the oral testimonies, there is a lack of correspondence. Some witnesses assert that the maximum figure may approximate around 200 units. According to oral testimonies, it has been revealed that the Tunisian government does not recognize the existence of a Bahá'í minority; it confirms the presence of some Bahá'í believers, but they specify that the believers are not of Tunisian origin but foreigners. Therefore, the government obfuscates the presence of Bahá'í individuals by categorizing them as Muslims. Contrary to this, an oral testimony has revealed that Habib Bourguiba maintained a close friendship with a Bahá'í individual, Moustapha Bouchoucha, as analysed in the previous section, and it appears that he had perused a significant portion of the Sacred Texts from which he drew inspiration for certain principles guiding his action. Thus far, I have not encountered any scientific evidence in this regard. Therefore, a cold conflict, because it seems that they are entirely transparent, invisible to the majority of the Muslim population, and not taken into consideration by religious institutions nor by political entities. My studies on this topic are continuing and my main aim is to investigate the real situation religious minorities live in Tunisia.

Conclusion

In this work, I aimed to pursue the objectives, as mentioned in the introduction, of critically highlighting the arrival of the Bahá'í faith in Tunisia. I have endeavoured to analyze internal perspectives transmitted through the oral history of Bahá'í believers and scientific perspectives to reconstruct the manner in which this religious community has established itself, evolved, and continues to do so, in order to achieve Bahá'í primary objective: to establish a widespread global presence and foster a community that is committed to universalism, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism. In the first section I analyzed the rise of the Bahá'í faith in Persia, the new Manifestation of God, Bahà'u'llàh and his successors; in the second one I investigated the arrival of Bahá'í faith in Tunisia, the first believers and the main characters; in the last section I tried to examine the difficult situation of religious minorities in Tunisia.

There is no definitive conclusion as the research is still in progress but mainly because it is not easy to outline the situation of religious minorities on Tunisian soil, in the past due to a lack of scientific evidence and today due to the fluidity of the non-Muslim majority presence.By this, I mean that it is not easy to identify the real number that makes up the Bahai community because not all believers feel free to express their religious affiliation.

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