

Crossing Boundaries, Fostering Dialogue: Humanities, Academia and the City of Rome

Postdoctoral Giornata di studi: *Boundaries and Intersections in Premodern Italy*

October 19, 2026

Call for papers

Boundaries both define and destabilize. They expose the fragility of inclusion and exclusion, shape identities, delimit canons, construct centers and margins, and separate the sacred from the secular, the political from the literary, the human from the non-human. Yet they are never static: negotiated, contested, transgressed, and redrawn across time and space.

Premodern culture offers especially fertile ground for examining this inherent fluidity. The porous threshold between theology and poetry in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* unsettles distinctions between revelation and fiction, authority and imagination—a tension that resurfaced in intellectual debates following the sixteenth-century rediscovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Communities such as the Beguines—lay religious women who lived in semi-monastic settings without taking permanent vows—occupied an ambiguous space between cloister and city, autonomy and obedience. Figures like Hadewijch and Catherine of Siena further complicated gendered and ecclesiastical divisions: as visionary writers and spiritual advisors, they claimed forms of theological authority typically reserved for ordained men while remaining formally outside clerical structures. The geographic and epistemological frontiers opened in the wake of the voyages of discovery likewise reconfigured Europe’s understanding of the world and of itself. These examples represent only a few of the many research strands and interpretive paths the conference seeks to explore, inviting participants to trace additional sites where social, textual, intellectual, and spiritual boundaries were constructed, contested, and transformed.

By tracing these shifting lines, the conference aims to investigate how they shaped premodern societies while simultaneously enabling new configurations of knowledge, identity, and belief. By bringing together scholars of literature, theology, philosophy, history, and material culture, the event fosters a dialogue on how these thresholds operated—and how their permeability generated new forms of thought, expression, and community.

This postdoctoral *giornata di studi* invites early-career scholars—especially, though not exclusively, those who are or have been affiliated with Notre Dame and the Università degli Studi “Roma Tre”—to explore the theme of “boundaries” in its broadest sense and to present their work at *Boundaries and Intersections in Premodern Italy*. Possible lines of inquiry include, but are not limited to:

- Disciplinary boundaries and interdisciplinarity
- Political and cultural borders
- Religious and secular divides
- Marginality and centrality
- Canon formation and exclusion
- Linguistic, geographic, and intellectual frontiers
- The human/non-human divide
- Gendered boundaries, social roles, and structures of authority

We welcome contributions engaging historical, theoretical, literary, musical, philosophical, theological, or cultural perspectives. Comparative and transnational approaches are particularly encouraged. The forum is conceived as a space for sustained intellectual exchange; work in progress is therefore warmly welcomed.

The *giornata di studi* constitutes the first part of the two-day program *Crossing Boundaries, Fostering Dialogue: Humanities, Academia and the City of Rome*. The second day, titled *Boundaries of Academia: Impact, Careers, and the Postdoctoral Condition*, will feature a roundtable, an open discussion, and a keynote address reflecting on pressing questions concerning the direction of academia and the relationship between contemporary culture and premodern studies.

Submission guidelines

Paper proposals accompanied by a title, a 300-word abstract, and a short bio-bibliographical profile needs to be sent to [Submittable](#) by July 30, 2026 and in a pdf file and named "Surname_Title".

The participation in the Seminar is free and includes lunch, dinner and refreshments on both days.