

Early Career Researcher (ECR) Interviews

Alicia López Carral, PhD candidate at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Editorial Assistant for *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*

- **What are your research interests?** My great interest is the study of medieval music and its interaction in medieval society.
- **What are the main highlights of your career so far?** The most important goal I have achieved in my career is to get a contract for research staff in training from the Ministry of Science and Innovation in the Spanish higher center of scientific research.
- **What is the greatest challenge you have faced as an ECR and how did you overcome it?** The most difficult challenge that I have faced as an ECR is the current global health crisis that we are experiencing. This unpleasant situation has made me approve of conventional research methods and has forced me, in part, to change methodologies. In my case, not being able to travel and not being able to see the objects personally because the institutions are closed, I am reinventing my methodologies and using digital technologies.
- **What advice do you have for ECRs looking to take the next step in their career?** The advice I would give to ECRs looking to take the next step in their career would be to trust your work, attend conferences, publish, and never stop training.
- **How did you build up your research experience as a student?** I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to be a researcher. Therefore, from that same year I began to carry out small research projects and present them, with the support of my professors, at conferences organized by the University. Having the supervision of my professors made me feel, apart from being lucky, confident about the quality of my work. This motivation was fundamental to continue and to continue forming myself.
- **What is the benefit of participating in a scholarly society as an ECR?** Apart from the motivation of being able to participate in an academic society like ECR, one of the main benefits is the support your research has at the economic and administrative level.

Hannah Maryan Thomson, PhD candidate at UCLA, Editorial Assistant for *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*

- **What are your research interests?** My research looks at the relationship between urbanism and architecture in a frontier context in medieval Iberia. I am especially interested in medieval walls and their tangible and intangible functions.
- **What are the main highlights of your career so far?** I was very fortunate to have been awarded a Fulbright research grant in 2019. This allowed me to advance my research while also traveling abroad and exploring the rich cultural heritage Spain has to offer. In general, I love interdisciplinary academic settings, because I think you learn so much from people outside your field and are inspired in new creative ways.

- **What is the most difficult challenge you have faced as an ECR and how did you overcome it?** Writing can be a source of anxiety for academics and something that isn't always talked about. It's something I struggle with, so I spend a lot of time reading about how to write and trying different systems. Sometimes the best thing to do is take a break from your research and go easy on yourself even when you're on deadline. I think stress management is one of the most important skills for someone in academia.
- **What advice do you have for ECRs looking to take the next step in their career?** I'm not sure about any single tangible "thing," but manifesting confidence, even when you don't feel it, is an important skill to learn and goes a long way.
- **How did you build up your research experience as a student?** I was lucky enough to have some research funds available for summers through my university, so I typically used them for travel to Spain where I pursued different research projects. I had the support of my advisor, but was on my own in archives, museums, and monuments. One of the most important things I did during those summers was talk to people, talk to locals; you never know who you will meet, and knowing people in your research area makes all the difference. In my experience, which is albeit limited to Spain, your bartender might also be an archeologist. These personal relationships are what made further research opportunities possible.

Kirstin Barnard, PhD candidate at University of York, Editorial Board member for *The London Journal*

- **What are your research interests?** My research interests relate mainly to social and ecclesiastical history. As a medievalist, my work concentrates on the later medieval period. For my thesis, I focus on studying the experiences of ordinary people. More specifically I consider informal relationships and neighbourliness in later medieval England. This work uses documentary and narrative sources including court witness depositions and miracle testimonies, though with a background in medieval studies, my interests are also more interdisciplinary.
- **What are the main highlights of your career so far?** I wrote an essay on St Thomas Becket in Reformation London which won the 2019 Curriers' Company London History Essay Prize. This essay has now been published as an article in the *London Journal* (45:3, 2020).
- **What advice do you have for ECRs looking to take the next step in their career?** My advice would be to take advantage of the resources and opportunities you have, as they may lead to interesting things you hadn't originally anticipated. I would also say, however, to make sure you do not attempt too much and are able to balance your time effectively.
- **How did you build up your research experience as a student?** Beyond my thesis, I am building up my research experience by taking part in internships which allowed me to undertake research, or research related activities, for another project. I also looked for essay prizes which would apply to my research interests.

- **How has ECR prize funding awarded you further opportunities in your research?** Winning the Curriers' History Essay Prize was beneficial in helping me to continue my PhD into my final year.

Dr. Sam Johnson-Schlee, Lecturer at London Southbank University, Editorial Board member for *The London Journal*

- **What are your research interests?** Urban Studies, Cultural Geography, Historical Geography
- **What are the main highlights of your career so far?** Honestly... joining the London Journal Editorial Board. Also Publishing in City and Geoforum.
- **What is the most difficult challenge you have faced as an ECR and how did you overcome it?** I don't think I've overcome it yet but writing bids and securing funding is the thing that keeps me up at night. Also finding time to write alongside a heavy teaching load is very tough, particularly during the pandemic! Again, I don't think I've overcome it exactly, at least not in any way I'd recommend, as it has taken writing in holidays/weekends etc. as with most of my peers.
- **What advice do you have for ECRs looking to take the next step in their career?** Write things you enjoy, find opportunities to teach from your research, develop a personal writing practice so that you don't only write for academic audiences, this will help you develop clarity and give you a chance to reach other audiences. Don't live in London unless you can afford it, there are lots of much more affordable places to live.
- **How did you build up your research experience as a student?** I did my Phd? I also participated in organising public events and conferences which was a great chance to network and learn organisational skills. Public events and talks have subsequently given me the chance to develop new strands of research alongside teaching. I also try to integrate reading for research and teaching where possible.