

Perennial Questions after a Humanities MA

How to Combat PhD Rejection and March on

Eugenia Russell



Introduction

This article approaches the complex issues facing graduates of MA courses considering a PhD in a Humanities discipline. The individualistic and subjective nature of a Humanities PhD as well as the economic and social pressures that arise from the fact that it is increasingly modeled upon its Science counterpart, make decisions nothing but straightforward. Scholarly work on this subject has been done mainly in the Social Sciences¹ and Modern Languages² and then again not specifically on the transition from MA to PhD. This article is setting a hypothetical scenario of having had a PhD proposal rejected because this scenario offers rich opportunities for discussing the issues of transition that are generally unspoken of within the postgraduate community. It is therefore addressed not only to candidates with that particular experience but to all postgraduates and also to doctoral supervisors and education practitioners at large. Although the article is mainly concerned with developments in the UK, it has a relevance to scholars internationally not only for the purposes of comparison with their own country but also for outlining the possibility of becoming part of the UK educational system either as students or staff. It will also allow comparisons with existing articles specifically written for other countries, of which there is a sizeable body.³

Coping with rejection

Having a PhD proposal rejected can be a significant blow for a candidate, especially if they have a good academic record up until that point and this is their first major rejection. However, if one is to view a PhD proposal as a piece of writing, and we take into account that most authors have less than a 10% success rate, especially early on in their careers, having a piece rejected may be taken just as a rite of passage. It may also be helpful to reflect upon what exactly has been rejected.

¹ Rosemary Deem, 'The Future of Educational Research in the Context of the Social Sciences: A Special Case?', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 44 (1996), 143–158; James J. Dowd, 'Revising the Canon: Graduate Training in the Two Sociologies', *Teaching Sociology* 19, Graduate Education (1991), 308–321; Yves Gingras, Jean-Philippe Warren, 'A British Connection? A Quantitative Analysis of the Changing Relations between American, British and Canadian Sociologists', *The Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 31 (2006), 509–522; John Hockey, 'Motives and Meaning Amongst PhD Supervisors in the Social Sciences', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 17 (1996), 489–506.

² David P. Benseler, 'Grant Proposals in Foreign Languages and Literatures: Some Perspectives', *Monatshefte* 69 (1977), 256–267; Christian Gundermann, 'The Place and Placement of Foreign Nationals in English, Foreign Languages, and Comparative Literature', *PMLA* 115 (2000), 1195–1199; Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'After Three Decades of Crisis: What Is the Purpose of a PhD Program in Foreign Languages?' *PMLA* 115 (2000), 1228–1238.

³ Ivar Bleiklie, Roar Høstaker, 'From Individual Pursuit to Organised Enterprise: Norwegian Higher Education Policy and the Postgraduate Curriculum', *European Journal of Education* 29 (1994), 305–322; Anna Czekanowska, 'The Teaching of Ethnomusicology in Poland: Experiences and Prospects', *Acta Musicologica* 58 (1986), 24–35; Jeroen Huisman; Egbert de Weert and Jeroen Bartelse, 'Academic Careers from a European Perspective: The Declining Desirability of the Faculty Position', *The Journal of Higher Education* 73, Special Issue: The Faculty in the New Millennium (2002), 141–160; Svein Kyvik, Berit Karseth, Jan Are Remme and Stuart Blume, 'International Mobility among Nordic Doctoral Students', *Higher Education* 38 (1999), 379–400; Svein Kyvik, Olaf Tvede, 'The Doctorate in the Nordic Countries', *Comparative Education* 34 (1998), 9–25; Herbert W. Marsh, Kenneth J. Rowe and Andrew Martin, 'PhD Students' Evaluations of Research Supervision: Issues, Complexities, and Challenges in a Nationwide Australian Experiment in Benchmarking Universities', *The Journal of Higher Education* 73 (2002), 313–348; Arne Mastekaasa, 'Educational Transitions at Graduate Level: Social Origins and Enrolment in PhD Programmes in Norway', *Acta Sociologica* 49 (2006), 437–453.

The possibilities include:

- a) **your choice of subject:** they may not have an expert in your field of study, even if superficially it appears that they have. This one can be tricky because if your topic is very original, innovative and ambitious they may not have an expert that can successfully supervise or examine it anywhere! Maybe you should do something more modest for your PhD and write your controversial or majestic *magnum opus* later.
- b) **the way you have organised your proposal:** PhDs have become more and more regularized and they are processed in the same way as any other product of human endeavour. Whether in your opinion that is a good thing, the fact is you can only influence procedures once you have qualified, so it may be worth thinking more about the formatting of your work because, within the present system, it may be what is holding you back. In any case, a well-organised (if bland) PhD proposal may be very helpful to you when you come to plan your research programme with your supervisor once accepted.⁴
- c) **your perceived level of competence:** there are many ways to make a PhD work, but you must recognise that your supervisor and the University are taking a risk on you. Any project that is going to last between three and seven years is risky, and completion rates are lower in the Humanities than they are in the Sciences. There are of course remedial courses in the first year of the degree to fill in any gaps in knowledge and to strengthen your skill base. Having said that, if for any reason it is thought that you lack some of the essential skills to complete your doctorate, they may still be reluctant to allow you to embark on the project at all. It may be worth including a paragraph on your skill base as part of your research proposal.
- d) **your scholarly objectives;** this is especially likely at your home institution or if your style of scholarship does not fit in with a particular institutional culture.

The variations in expectation, scope, research style, rewards and scholarly culture from country to country, from institution to institution within countries, and within sub-disciplines even at the same University can indeed be significant; it is advisable, therefore, to do some research on the top six Universities on your hit list before you make your decision.

I have expressed my views on scholarly objectives in my particular field of study in a bold opinion essay,⁵ the first of its kind in my discipline.⁶ In the essay I have outlined the many divisions within an apparently very compact discipline such as Byzantine Studies. Having grouped such divisions into three broad categories, namely period of study, geographical region of institution and style of scholarship, I have argued and still maintain that these divisions are becoming more pronounced and tend to lead to further subdivisions, and that – if the trend continues – they will develop into autonomous sub-disciplines with even less in common. As far as the graduate student is concerned, there is very little they can do about any of this at this stage in their careers, except to

⁴ For an excellent discussion on the expectations of supervision see Noela Murphy, John D. Bain and Linda Conrad, 'Orientations to Research Higher Degree Supervision', *Higher Education* 53 (2007), 209–234.

⁵ Eugenia Russell, 'Byzantine Studies: a discussion of methodologies', *Perspectives on History* 48 (American Historical Association, April, 2010), 25–7; the article is also available online at

<http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2010/1004/1004vie1.cfm>

⁶ This essay is the only discussion of methodology in the field of Byzantine Studies except for one much more extensive piece, an art historical treatment of the same subject in a very different context, one concerned with scientific procedure: Sister Daniilia, Sophia Sotiropoulou, Dimitrios Bikiaris, Christos Salpistis, Georgios Karagiannis and Yannis Chryssoulakis, 'Diagnostic methodology for the examination of Byzantine frescoes and icons. Non-destructive investigation and pigment identification', *Comprehensive Analytical Chemistry* 42, Non-Destructive Microanalysis of Cultural Heritage Materials (2004), 565–604.

have an opinion on whether it is good or bad – if they care to. However, it is important that they understand the rules of the game, unspoken until my essay, because these are the rules by which they will be accepted or rejected for their PhD. To assist students within my particular field of expertise, I have followed up my original methodologies essay with a longer piece dealing specifically with the research questions of the medieval cult of saints.⁷ Such essays can help students build on existing work and they are successful in bridging original research with postgraduate teaching.⁸

- e) **assorted institutional reasons:** University policies, Departmental dynamics, student numbers, career changes, sabbaticals, and several other random factors that you cannot know or predict may mean that what seemed like your ideal slot has turned out to be a red herring.
- f) **your projected later-career persona;** i.e. how useful you might become as a cog in the cogwheel in five to eight years' time.⁹ Are you a prestigious commodity for the institution?¹⁰ Although this is not a scholarly way of approaching the candidate and it may even be bordering on discrimination, it would be naïve to assume that professional interest and prejudice are not going to inform the way applications are prioritised. It would strengthen your application if you can show that you see yourself staying in the profession but only say so if it is your true desire; there are many other ways to strengthen your application, and in this article I am suggesting several.
- g) **you as a person:** this one is straightforward. If they don't like you somewhere, it is not worth wasting your breath. There are other people and places where you can make your mark. Your aim is to become a brilliant scholar not to show them the error of their ways. In the political-correctness-conscious culture we inhabit personal dislikes are not supposed to happen but they are true enough.

So hold your head high and believe in yourself. Remember that an easy path early on in one's career does not necessarily produce the most prolific, prominent or profound scholars (or human beings) and that even if it does there are many other pathways that can take you to your goals. Do not be envious of others. This is not a scholarly attitude. Think about your own objectives and desires and focus on them. Defining your goals should not be too hard, once you gain some emotional distance from the situation. This will stop your decision being forced by a sense of despair.

⁷ Eugenia Russell, 'Sources and themes for the study of the cult of saints in the Middle Ages: the case of St Demetrius', *Peer English: The Journal of New Critical Thinking* 6 (2011), 6–17.

⁸ Cf. Bruce M. Shore, Susan Pinker and Mary Bates, 'Research as a Model for University Teaching', *Higher Education* 19 (1990), 21–35; Ruth Neumann, 'The Teaching-Research Nexus: Applying a Framework to University Students' Learning Experiences', *European Journal of Education* 29 (1994), 323–338.

⁹ Ann E. Austin, 'Preparing the Next Generation of Faculty: Graduate School as Socialization to the Academic Career', *The Journal of Higher Education* 73, Special Issue: The Faculty in the New Millennium (2002), 94–122; Grit Laudel, Jochen Gläser, 'From Apprentice to Colleague: The Metamorphosis of Early Career Researchers', *Higher Education* 55 (2008), 387–406; cf. Chris M. Golde, 'Signature Pedagogies in Doctoral Education: Are They Adaptable for the Preparation of Education Researchers?', *Educational Researcher* 36 (2007), 344–351; Pat Bazeley, 'Defining "Early Career" in Research', *Higher Education* 45 (2003), 257–279.

¹⁰ Burris, Val, 'The Academic Caste System: Prestige Hierarchies in PhD Exchange Networks', *American Sociological Review* 69 (2004), 239–264.

Becoming stronger

Now that you have been turned down, you are in possession of immense freedom. You are not tied to the institution upon which you had pinned your hopes and your life reverts back to you. Whether you will turn this rejection to the opportunity that it can become is largely a matter of personal choice. I am assuming for the purposes of this article that you are still interested in doing a PhD but the same principle applies if you go on to excel in something completely different.¹¹ The first thing you must do, is take responsibility for your destiny. Not unlike publishers, recruiters, and other professionals who work with Humanities graduates, lecturers are employees with a lot on their plates and their own careers to manage. They cannot, and in most cases will not, be able to spend large amounts of time and energy on doctoral candidates that they and their institutions have rejected to give on-going advice and pastoral support. You are not a student any more – is it not marvelous in a way? The creativity, drive and imagination required to make your new plan and the expert execution of your next move will have to come from you.

Defining your goals

There is a heightened sense of liberty in owning your destiny, as is in all the perennial subjects of the human condition: solitude, alienation, death, love... Defining yourself as a scholar can be an extremely difficult journey but it is a necessary and very rewarding part of what you are striving to become. From the point of view of writing this article, it is not particularly easy talking in general about the experience candidates will have in a wealth of Humanities disciplines with quite different demands but the basic principles are the same; I think, therefore that it is worth outlining some of them.¹²

First of all, why do you want to do a PhD? Is it because it seems like a natural progression after your MA? Is it because you want to say something pertinent that you could not condense into the 10,000 words of your MA dissertation? Because you see it as an apprenticeship that will lead to your future authorship? Because you love teaching and you need the qualification to enter the profession? Or maybe because you like the kudos of the letters after your name? All or any of these reasons are fair enough and being open about them will bring great clarity to the discussion (within your own mind or with others) regarding your future. It is still perfectly valid wanting to do a PhD for its own sake.¹³ In any case, one thing is for certain: the PhD is now a requirement for an academic career, not only in the UK but internationally. If you want to be an academic then you do need one. You have to be aware of all the potential dangers and overcome them.¹⁴

Your MA as an asset

It may not feel like it at the time of rejection but your MA is a great asset to you, academically, personally and professionally. In fact, I would argue that the MA equips you with the skills needed in your post-doctoral life far

¹¹ Anne Clark Bartlett, 'Is It Terminal? Re-Evaluating the Master's Degree', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 37 (2004), 26–29.

¹² See Sharon Parry, 'Disciplinary Discourse in Doctoral Theses', *Higher Education* 36 (1998), 273–299.

¹³ Paul Cooper, 'The Gift of Education: An Anthropological Perspective on the Commoditization of Learning', *Anthropology Today* 20, *Anthropology and Education* (2004), 5–9.

¹⁴ Alison L. Booth, Stephen E. Satchell, 'The Hazards of Doing a PhD: An Analysis of Completion and Withdrawal Rates of British PhD Students in the 1980s', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)* 158 (1995), 297–318.

better than the doctoral degree itself can ever do. Start thinking of your post-doctoral persona and start putting your MA to good use straight away. Here is how:

a) The MA dissertation

Your MA dissertation is the perfect length for a first publication. Especially if you were fortunate enough to receive a high mark for the dissertation element of your MA, you may like to consider pursuing its publication. There is of course the possible objection that you are not ready, that your work is not mature enough, that you should wait until you are more mature and confident as an author. All these reservations are valid. On the other hand, scholarship dates quickly and if you shelve your MA dissertation until after you receive your PhD the lapse in time (anything from five to ten years) may mean that your MA piece is not anymore publishable without major revision. If it is publishable, or indeed published, unaltered (without taking any regard of the last ten years of publications in your field) it may just show you as a lukewarm, out-of-touch scholar to the outside world, however good it is otherwise, and it may even bring down with you the reputation of the scholarly journal who decided to publish you. If you decide to publish it in ten years with major revisions, congratulations; that is win-win. In any case, I will explore the option of using your greatest asset now.

We are lucky in our profession to have the reassurance of peer review. The system has its imperfections and drawbacks but, in general, I believe that if your essay is published by what you regard to be one of the top five journals in your field, it is probably good enough by the standards that the profession has set. It is still possible of course that you will mature and grow as a scholar beyond recognition in which case your MA dissertation would have been even better treated by your future self; this is something you will have to weigh up. There are also the essay competitions. These you have to take advantage of at an early stage in your academic career because they dry up soon after. The prestige of winning an essay prize is often accompanied by a monetary reward, which comes in useful in the case of most postgraduate budgets. Such essay prizes are sometimes automatically published but if not the accolade might make it easier to attract attention in your award-winning piece for publication elsewhere. MA dissertations as well as MA essays may give you the basis for such a submission. In Appendix 1 at the end I am listing some examples of such essay prizes relevant to my specialism by manner of illustration.

b) Professional experience gained

If you have not done so already, this is a good time to start building your academic CV. And I am saying building, not writing, because it is all very well to have salesmanship but you will also need content. Consider any specialist skills that you have gained during your MA training, be it research techniques, map or 3-D model making, modern or classical languages, computer platforms, presentation techniques, acting or public speaking, field trips, sports or fundraising. List them in a logical manner, together with any volunteering, work experience, Student Union office or publications portfolio. If you have earned scholarships during your University career, list them too. The real work starts afterwards, when having listed your skills you see how you can improve.

c) Subjects covered and employment potential (by way of a case study)

The subjects covered during your MA year may lead to further academic opportunities, a new career or employment opportunities that can help you fund your future PhD. Additionally, showing that you can support yourself during your PhD studies and are financially independent can make your application more attractive to a selection panel. Incidentally, if you are eligible for funding from a major funding body always apply and give it your best shot; self-funding your PhD should be a back-up plan if no other option is available to you.¹⁵

On your CV you may like to simply list your areas of expertise or group them in sub-categories. The fact that you have an MA in History, for instance, does not immediately communicate to the reader that your first degree was in History and Anthropology (Joint Honours) that you have an additional research interest in Ethnomusicology, you play the piano (Grade 8) and learning the harpsichord (2 years), you have directed a Mystery play in the York Early Music Festival and plan to learn Classical Portuguese in your year out before embarking on your PhD examining the reception of the work of Marrano historian Samuel Usque (b. 1492). Such a background could make you an attractive candidate to employers in a number of industries if explained well. Such employers would include publishers, translation houses, commercial magazines, theatre groups, music organizations, theatres and youth groups amongst others.

d) Get experience in publishing

If you have taken some time out to re-group, work on your academic skills and obtain the necessary funding, this may be an ideal opportunity to also get experience in publishing. Publishing is a profession fairly akin to academic work and certainly a healthy relationship with academic publishers will make your life much more pleasant once you have entered the academic profession. Also, it will provide you with an alternative career option and another stream of income when writing the PhD. Several publishers have internship programmes from time to time, most notably HarperCollins and Macmillan, but it may be worth also taking the initiative and sending out some speculative letters enquiring about a first position (paid or unpaid).

e) Build a writing portfolio

Having an MA makes you an expert in a particular field and the only difference between you who is starting out and a professional writer is that they have the confidence to brand themselves as such. Your student experience in itself will have given you plenty of topics that you may like to write about for student magazines, local publications, literary small presses or more ambitious venues. You represent the new generation of the Humanities, in the broad sense of arbiters of culture and opinion, and your views are important; if you can make them heard they can make a difference, both to your community and to your career. There is also the possibility of reviewing. As an MA student you may have had the opportunity to review scholarly books as part of your degree; now why not do it for real and get your review published. Often you are given the book under review to keep and the publishers may even quote you in their own literature. And of course reviewing does not need to be restricted to books; if you go to the theatre, concerts, restaurants, ethical living events, street shows, book fairs, conferences, these are all reviewing opportunities waiting to be written up.

¹⁵ Cf. Ronald G. Ehrenberg, George H. Jakubson, Jeffrey A. Groen, Eric So and Joseph Price, 'Inside the Black Box of Doctoral Education: What Program Characteristics Influence Doctoral Students' Attrition and Graduation Probabilities?', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 29 (2007), 134–150; Ronald G. Ehrenberg, Panagiotis G. Mavros, 'Do Doctoral Students' Financial Support Patterns Affect Their Times-To-Degree and Completion Probabilities?', *The Journal of Human Resources* 30 (1995), 581–609; Monika Fludernik, 'Threatening the University: The Liberal Arts and the Economization of Culture', *New Literary History* 36, *Essays on the Humanities* (2005), 57–70.

f) Revisiting the PhD proposal

It is not unusual for students to gain their PhD by expanding an area of knowledge they first identified during their MA year. This is sometimes evident in listings of MA and PhD dissertation titles and is especially common amongst students who remained in their MA institution for their doctoral studies. Of course the requirements of the PhD degree are different, with the emphasis on producing an original piece of work that will make a contribution to the collective body of human knowledge, yet using your MA year as the basis for what is to come is perfectly legitimate. It may be sensible to revisit your PhD proposal in this light and see how you can re-write it building on the strength of your MA work. Also consider what other scholars in your field write about at doctoral level.¹⁶

g) The Graduation

Whatever happens in the future your MA is a prestigious qualification that no one can ever take away from you. The trouble with the PhD proposal being rejected is that it can obscure in your mind one very important fact: your academic success. It is the academic elite who tend to carry on to an MA and the fact that you are considering doctoral studies already shows your love of your discipline and intellectual aspiration. Be proud of your achievement and take a moment to reflect on your success. Perhaps make your MA Graduation that special moment of measured optimism.

h) Use every last bit of what the University has to offer

This may seem obvious but be sure to take advantage of the University facilities while you are still a registered student. There will be a strange lull after you have taken all your exams and you are still working on your dissertation over the summer. Although you are still working on your MA everything around you suggests that you have finished. This last chunk at the end is precious time for you. Make contact with other students, talk to your lecturers, visit the Career Service, attend performances and events and use your library card. Once you are out you are out...

i) Have a plan

Goal setting is as important in being admitted to do a PhD as it will be later in completing it. Although it is important to take time out of study, develop a rounded personality and enjoy some repose, these things will be even more appreciated in the context of an exciting future. Dare to dream and be prepared to work hard and show courage in trying to make your dreams happen.

j) Mutual support

Keep in touch with your MA group if you can. If small antagonisms and narrow-mindedness have not yet killed your friendship, you may become a great source of solace for one another in the hard and uncertain years of work, study, transition or bittersweet compromise that may be ahead of all of you. Seek strength in numbers and think of ways to help the group. It might pay dividends and, in the generally uncongenial and over-competitive climate of academia, you will distinguish yourselves as admirable scholars with scruples. It is easier to build strong bonds while you are still under the same Halls, in the same rowing club or watching the lacrosse matches to support classmates. But if you need to make contact later do not hesitate; act before everyone moves away, changes their number or leaves the country. If they do but you have established some kind of rapport it will be easier to keep in touch and even beg for help.

¹⁶ A very interesting article for historians is: Irena Nicoll, 'A Statistical Profile of the London PhD in History 1921–90', *Oxford Review of Education* 22 (1996), 273–294.

Your MA group can also provide the basis for creating opportunities for new professional introductions and even lasting friendships. There are many events you can organize that would be of value to yourselves and to the wider community. There are many functions for professional academics and for PhD students and early career scholars but there is not much effort put into helping MA students, partly because there is no academic tradition of doing so and partly because the more advanced scholars, naturally, think about how to advance themselves. If you want to initiate events, however, there will most certainly be some good response, and there is also funding around if you know where to look and persist. Most large-scale events need between six and eighteen months to plan but there is nothing to stop you organising some closed seminars with a small number of fellow-scholars (and perhaps a few PhDs or professors if they are free to come – ask, you never know, they may be flattered). An additional tool to your closed seminars could be the establishment of an Academic Reading Group, akin to ‘ordinary’ reading groups but geared to your chosen area of study. Such a group, meeting once or twice a month, can keep the flame of the discipline alive for those of you who may be working or taking time out to pursue other goals and can act as a spring board for more ambitious academic projects such as joint writings, seminar series or skills-based workshops. By doing most of the work yourselves, you can keep costs to a minimum, make your CV look increasingly brilliant, have fun and pursue your goals all in one package. Even if the idea sounds daunting or totally crazy do not dismiss it out of hand. Together you could make light work of it and, more importantly, you may be able to build the future of your discipline.

k) Co-author

Finally, the possibility of co-authorship is available to you. A first paper with a classmate, more established colleague or supervisor may help ease the burden or broaden your horizons and make you a better scholar. This sounds very attractive but tread carefully. For every collaboration that goes to plan, be prepared to have at least as many that fail. Although pulling resources has its advantages, writing with others is not necessarily an easy option and your relationships and professional success are at stake here as well as your sanity. As in all aspects of creative work, apart from the issues of authorship, finding your voice, establishing your areas of interest and making your views heard, there are different sets of beliefs, agendas, ethics, working patterns and endgames to take into account. As a junior author you may not always feel ready to deal with such a minefield and can be vulnerable and open to exploitation. In the Humanities in general, fewer papers are co-authored and maybe the reasons and the rights and wrongs of that are ripe for reflection.¹⁷

Eugenia Russell, PhD
Department of History
Royal Holloway, University of London

AUTHOR BIO: Byzantine historian **Dr Eugenia Russell** teaches Political Philosophy and Pre-Modern History at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is the author of *St Demetrius of Thessalonica: Cult and Devotion in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2010) and also an experienced editor.

¹⁷ See Lisa Ede; Andrea A. Lunsford, ‘Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship’, *PMLA* 116 (2001), 354–369; J. Scott Long; Robert McGinnis and Paul D. Allison, ‘The Problem of Junior-Authored Papers in Constructing Citation Counts’, *Social Studies of Science* 10 (1980), 127–143.

Appendix 1: Examples of essay prizes in my field of study

The Norman Hepburn Baynes Prize (biannual)

Essay on a Greek subject (400 BC to AD 1453). Open to graduates or postgraduates of the University of London. Word limit: 15,000. Value: Pound Sterling 3,000. Further details from the Secretary of the Academic Trust Funds Committee, University of London, Senate House, Room 106, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU.

Prize in memory of Professor Nikolaos Panagiotakes (biannual)

Essay on Byzantine and post-Byzantine culture. Languages: Italian, Greek, English or French. Age limit: 40 years of age. Length of essay: 100 A4 sides. Value: 2,500 Euros. For further details: Prof. Caterina Carpinato, Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Antichità e del Vicino Oriente, Università Ca' Foscari, Palazzo Marcorà Malfanton, Dorsoduro 3484/d, 30123 Venezia, Italia.

Medium Ævum Essay Prize (annual)

An essay on a topic of interest to The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages (up to c. 1500). For postgraduates and recent early career scholars. Value: Pound Sterling 250. Deadline: the second Thursday of December each year. Further details: http://mediumaevum.modhist.ox.ac.uk/society_prize.shtml

Cultural History Essay Prize (annual)

Essays on a topic of interest to the International Society for Cultural History (ISCH). For PhD candidates or recent post-doctoral scholars. Languages: English or French. Length: 7,000 words. Value: Pound Sterling 250. Deadline: late May. Further details: <http://www.romanistik.de/aktuelles/newsartikel/article/essay-prize-cultural-history-2011-international-society-for-cultural-history/>

Alexander Prize (Royal Historical Society; annual)

A published essay on a historical topic by a doctoral student or recent post-doctoral scholar from a UK University. Value: Pound Sterling 250 or a silver medal. Further details: <http://www.royalhistoricalsociety.org/prizes.htm>

There are many other similar prizes and depending on your field of study you will be able to search for them in professional publications or targeted announcements or research them yourself.

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