First of all, I should say that I am a philosopher. If medievalists have a bad reputation anywhere, that is in philosophy. At least, that is how I felt in the beginning. That is how I have been feeling up to this point. The problem lies mostly with people’s conceptions regarding the Middle Ages: a sort of dark, historical parentheses whose content remains mostly unknown. No surprises here. Anyway, my intention here is not to complain about other people’s thoughts, but most importantly to share my own. Thus, I will start by what it was or what it is to be a medievalist within my academic environment, that is, in my experience, but I will also try to briefly provide our field with some constructive ideas in order to face the “I am a lone medievalist” issue.

When I told my colleagues in Spain that I would focus my research on medieval philosophy, their questions made me feel I had to justify my choice. It was already hard enough to explain to the world that I had decided to study philosophy, but it was even harder to find obstacles from people who should have been more open, since they called themselves philosophers, the lovers of wisdom. Not of every kind of wisdom, it seems. Furthermore, as medieval philosophy was not a widely-studied area — as you may imagine by now — the materials at the university library
were close to non-existent. So I was left, not only with nearly no one to discuss my research with, but also with very few, if any, materials. For years, my best friend in academia was a very old but excellent Latin dictionary.

When it comes to philosophy, the prejudice against the Middle Ages came from an aversion towards religion. Most philosophers think of the medieval period as completely linked to religion, and, therefore, they assume that there is no proper philosophy as such within this epoch, since it cannot be considered as completely “rational” — remember, everything is a matter of faith, or so they presume. I believe in this way they show how irrational they are because their judgment is based on nothing but ignorance, while they claim to make an appeal to reason. Sadly, I have found a lot of this during my academic career.

Things were not better within our research seminars at the philosophy department, where Antiquity was far more “interesting.” However, I have to admit I was allowed to present the influence that the texts we were discussing had in the Middle Ages. I did not have as much feedback as my colleagues while talking about my work, but I was prepared for that. There was only one exception, when they could not believe that Thomas Aquinas had said that the earth was round in his Summa Theologiae.¹ Didn’t they think that the earth was flat in the Middle Ages?

In any case, my purpose here is to be as helpful as possible, and it is about time to try to be so. We, medievalists, often forget that we have a tool that not every field can count on, and that is solidarity among peers. We usually share our work and discoveries; we do not mind asking for help when we need it; and we are happy to help other medievalists — be it with materials or translations — because we are well aware of the difficulties all of

¹ “The astronomer and the natural philosopher both conclude that the earth is round, but the astronomer does this through a mathematical middle that is abstracted from matter, whereas the natural philosopher considers a middle lodged in matter. Thus there is nothing to prevent another science from treating in the light of divine revelation what the philosophical disciplines treat as knowable in the light of human reason” (Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Iª q. 1 a. 1 ad 2).
us face. We may not be physically in touch, but we are a strong ongoing community. Another thing we can benefit from is the multidisciplinarity of medieval studies, which opens paths both for intellectual exchange and when applying for positions: history, philosophy, literature, religious studies, etc., converge in the study of the Middle Ages. Thus, when it comes to intellectual exchange, people from disciplines different from ours can give us great ideas. At the same time, we can apply for positions we might not have thought of in the beginning. A philosopher, for instance, can apply for a position that may seem to be for an historian of literature, and certainly all of us can — or should be able to, in my opinion — work with Latin to some extent, which is a great asset for many positions. We have to be more multifaceted and versatile than many other scholars, that is true, but I think we in fact are, even though we tend to forget that.

Another thing we should take advantage of is the increasing development of Digital Humanities. This should be done not only by being in touch with other scholars, but also by properly placing ourselves within the academic sphere. We are sometimes our own worst enemies and we tend to think that people do not really care about what we do. That is exactly how I felt when I was starting my research, and I promised myself not to feel that way ever again. Humanities have been questioned for a long time already, and we are not doing things well if we do not stand up for ourselves in this regard by being more visible, more present. Collaborative blogs, online journals, Facebook groups… we have a world of possibilities ahead and we should make the most of it. It is time to stop questioning or justifying the value of what we do and show it to the world.

These are, of course, very personal reflections on the subject, but if any of my contributions can help or encourage other medievalists in any way, I will feel truly satisfied. I hope we grow stronger as a community in which sharing our research is an everyday task, rather than questioning the impact of what we do. That day will come, and, then, those who are lone medievalists will no longer feel lonely.