

## Staff at ESO

### Eleonora Sani

I've always been fascinated by natural behaviour — why things work in one way rather than another. But, sincerely, I hadn't thought to become an astronomer. I started to be interested in astronomy just by chance when I was in my late teens. Walking in the city centre I saw an amateur telescope in a shop and thought, "Well it would be nice to look at stars and galaxies with such a thing!"

I became enthusiastic about going around the countryside camping and looking at the sky with my brand-new telescope, but still astronomy was not my first choice for future studies. I started studying physics at the University of Florence with some vague idea of taking a Masters in quantum physics or something related to the super-small world. But then, when I had to choose my specialisation I realised that astrophysics is the most complete discipline, because it spans the range from atomic physics, Solar studies, radiation processes, plasma physics and complex dynamics to cosmology, and entails the use of many different kinds of technologies, from ground-based facilities to satellites and many more. How can a researcher desire more than having almost all these fields rolled into one?

I had taken the first step, but still had to choose the topic for my degree thesis (and thus, once more, an important challenge for the future). I was interested in observational work on Solar spectroscopy and had already contacted one team, since the Observatory of Arcetri (where I was supposed to finish my Masters) had a great tradition in such studies. But then I had a meeting with the director, Professor Franco Pacini, and he convinced me that working in extragalactic astronomy with a recently formed team of young researchers would be really stimulating. So once more I changed my plans and started a curriculum centred on supermassive black holes and their co-evolution with galaxies. My PhD and my first postdocs were great periods, during which I started my own project based on Very Large Telescope data and had the opportunity to visit the Max Planck Institut für extraterrestrische Physik in Garching to work on both satellite and interferometric data.

My first experience with an 8-metre-class telescope came when I went to Paranal to observe with the Infrared Spectrometer and Array Camera (ISAAC) for my own project. I remember how nervous and excited I was at the same time because of the scientific challenge and I was also a bit fascinated by the skills of the



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support astronomers, who appeared to me as super-heroes!

Now I have become part of this team, supporting VLT Unit Telescope 1 and I am in training as the instrument scientist for the K-band Multi-Object Spectrograph (KMOS), a jewel of infrared technology. I am not a super-hero for sure, but will face new challenges and exciting times in the future with the new generation of facilities.

## Fellows at ESO

### Matthieu Béthermin

I was born in Paris in 1985 and grew up in Suresnes in the western suburbs. From there, the night sky was a sort of bright orange haze caused by all the sodium streetlights. The city of light was certainly not the best place to enjoy the faint and diffuse Milky Way. At a young age, I was already fascinated by the question of our origins. Everything about astronomy, dinosaurs, and prehistoric

men attracted me. But this was nurtured only through reading books and watching TV documentaries.

One of the main events that pushed me towards astronomy, paradoxically, happened on a crowded urban highway in the south of Paris. I was ten years old. After being stuck in a traffic jam for three hours trying to re-enter Paris after a weekend, my parents had decided that Paris was no longer a place to bring

up kids. A few months later, we moved to the south of France. There, I discovered why people say the night sky is black and I saw the Milky Way for the first time. This was beautiful. I started to explore this new world with binoculars and then with a small telescope. After observing the Andromeda Galaxy and reading that the light from there had travelled 2.5 billion years before hitting my retina, I was so fascinated that I decided I wanted to study the cosmos.