



Shaun Halper Receives LGBT Religious History Award

The LGBT Religious Archives Network (LGBT-RAN) honors Shaun Jacob Halper with its 2009-10 LGBT Religious History Award. Halper's paper, "Fashioning Gay Jewish Identity in Interwar Prague: The Case of Jiří Langer (1894-1944)," was selected by the review jury to receive this award.

Shaun Jacob Halper is a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at University of California Berkeley doing pioneering work in Jewish gay and lesbian history. His winning paper takes up the long-neglected life and work of a gay Hasid in interwar Prague, Jiří Langer, who wrote on the problem of Judaism and homosexuality and articulated, as Shaun has argued, what may be one of the earliest cultural articulations of homosexual-Jewish consciousness and identity in the historical record.

Until now, historical studies of pre-Stonewall Jewish LGBT culture have been meager. Shaun's paper, part of his broader doctoral dissertation, "Jews in the Age of Homosexual Emancipation 1897-1948," inaugurates a new subfield of gay and lesbian history within modern Jewish history. Shaun situates Langer's story within a broader narrative concerning the migration of German Jewish sexologists and homosexuals to Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s. His doctoral study takes up three historical problems: first, the disproportionate Jewish contribution--both as historical actors and cultural symbols--to the formation of the German homosexual emancipation movement; second, the question of how religious German Jews outside the realm of gay emancipatory politics responded to "the invention of sexuality" and navigated conflicting religious and sexual identities; and third, how Jewish homosexuals and sexologists transplanted their institutions and identities across boundaries in their encounter with Zionism in Palestine.

In his late teens, Halper was an Orthodox Jew and studied at several prestigious *yeshivot* [talmudic academies] both in Israel and in the U.S. where he prepared for the rabbinate. He then turned to the critical historical study of the Jews, and later LGBT history, as an undergraduate at Columbia. His training at Columbia culminated in his senior thesis in which Shaun examined the transsexual fantasies of a fourteenth-century Provencal rabbi who prayed that God transform him into a woman. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude from Columbia University in 2005 with a double major in Art History and History. More recently, Shaun has written on LGBT rights and national politics for *The Huffington Post* and is currently working with an Israeli documentary filmmaker on converting portions of his research on gay and lesbian Jewish history into a film. His other academic interests related to LGBT history include the history of homosexual persecution during the Third Reich, gay and lesbian historiography since Stonewall (that is, the history of LGBT historical writing), and the aesthetics of interwar German homosexual culture.

Halper is the fourth recipient of the LGBT Religious History Award that was initiated by the LGBT Religious Archives Network in 2005. It is the only award given for outstanding scholarship in this field. Halper's paper was selected by the jury from among eight papers submitted this year from scholars in the U.S., U.K. and Australia. Halper will receive the award and its cash prize at a dinner on Saturday evening, May 8, 2010, at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. More details will be available on the www.lgbtran.org web site.

Submissions for next year's LGBT Religious History Award must be postmarked or received electronically by December 1, 2010. Complete information on submission guidelines for the award can be found at: www.lgbtran.org/historyaward.aspx.

The LGBT Religious Archives Network, a project of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at the Pacific School of Religion, is a ground-breaking venture to preserve the history of LGBT religious movements. It has two primary purposes: a) to assist LGBT religious groups and leaders in preserving their records in appropriate repositories; and b) providing an electronic information clearinghouse on LGBT religious collections and other historical source materials on its web site: www.lgbtran.org.

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