



**LGBTQ**  
Religious Archives Network

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | January 28, 2025**

Contact: Mark Bowman, [communications@lgbtqreligiousarchives.org](mailto:communications@lgbtqreligiousarchives.org)

### **Achille Marotta Receives 2024-25 Virginia Ramey Mollenkott Award**

#### **His Research Uncovers the Untold Story of Intimacy Between Male Muslims and Christians in the 1700s**

The LGBTQ Religious Archives Network (LGBTQ-RAN) today announced that Achille Marotta, Ph.D., is this year's recipient of the [2024-25 Virginia Ramey Mollenkott Award](#).

The Mollenkott Award honors outstanding research and scholarship in LGBTQ religious history and is the only award of its kind. The review jury selected Marotta's "The Muslim Friend: Cross-Confessional Male Intimacy in Eighteenth-Century Italy" from among eight papers submitted for the award this year. Marotta will be presented this award at a public event on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at Chicago Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois.

In addition, the jury gave honorable mention to Brian Blackmore's "God and Every Human: Quakers and the Gay Rights Movement."

Achille Marotta is a postdoctoral research fellow at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. He was trained in Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics, but soon after graduating he turned to history, inspired by his late uncle's amateur historical work on his family's Southern Italian village. Fascinated by the way that Mediterranean cultures influenced each others' music, language, and legends, Achille set out to study the city of Genoa in which he was born, a port town which has been a Mediterranean crossroad since the Middle Ages.

"The Muslim Friend: Cross-Confessional Male Intimacy in Eighteenth-Century Italy" began with an archival encounter. Reading trials for sodomy in eighteenth-century Genoa, Marotta noticed that a surprisingly large number of cases prosecuted relations between local Christian men and Muslim men from North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, who lived in the city as slaves, freed slaves, and merchants. Critically comparing these court records with different kinds of sources from Genoa and other Italian port-towns, Marotta argues that they reveal how anxieties over male-male sexuality crossed over with worries about religious intermixing. In doing so, Marotta transcends the sexual focus of the police and judicial authorities who produced these documents. Instead, he reads them with a critical eye, using them to show how men of different faiths could build enduring bonds of affection and mutual obligation that closely resembled ties of kinship.

Marotta's article was published in the *Journal of Early Modern History* in June 2024 and is [freely available online in open access form](#).

His Ph.D. thesis, defended at the University of Bologna in 2024 under the supervision of Vincenzo Lavenia and Daniel Hershenzon, dealt with the presence of enslaved and freed Muslims in Genoa, reconstructing the social and legal institutions that governed slavery in early modern Italy. He is currently transforming his thesis into a book.

Jury members Joanne Carlson Brown, Ph.D., Johari Jabir, Ph.D., and Gillian Frank, Ph.D. highlighted Marotta's paper for "the sheer sophistication and depth of research; the critical reading of sources with and then against the grain; and the kinds of sources deployed (textual, visual, state authored, everyday people authored). The writing is inviting and welcomes the non-specialist reader into a complicated past. It holds in dialogue and tension a wide range of categories in order to make sense of same-sex and inter-religious sexual encounters between men: slave/free, foreigner/local, state-definition/self-definition, friendship/romance, masculine/feminine, etc. What a joy to read and learn from this paper."

Marotta is the 16th recipient of [LGBTQ-RAN's award for papers](#) since its inception in 2005 and the third honoree since the award was named in memory of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, a renowned trans-feminist religious scholar, in the summer of 2022.

In giving honorable mention to Brian T. Blackmore, Ph.D.'s "God in Every Human: Quakers and the Gay Rights Movement" the jury noted the importance of his scholarship in an under-researched arena. Blackmore examines a spontaneous gathering of Quakers at a conference in 1972 who wrote the first statement in support of bisexual people in the United States, the many gay rights groups in the 1960s and 1970s who received training by Quakers in nonviolent resistance, and the influential gay rights activists of this era who were Quakers themselves—including being at the Stonewall riots and the first gay pride parade. Blackmore earned his Ph.D. from Temple University in 2023 and is a community-based independent scholar who also serves as the Director of Quaker Engagement at the American Friends Service Committee. His writing about the role Quakers have played in the U.S. gay rights movement can be found in *The Quaker World* (Routledge 2023), his first monograph *To Hear and To Respond: The Quakers' Groundbreaking Push for Gay Liberation, 1946-1973* (Brill 2025), and a virtual exhibit produced by the OutHistory Project.

Submissions for next year's Virginia Ramey Mollenkott Award must be postmarked or received electronically by December 1, 2025. Complete information on submission guidelines for the award can be found at [lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/vrm-award-guidelines](http://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/vrm-award-guidelines)

The [LGBTQ Religious Archives Network](#) is a groundbreaking venture to preserve the history of LGBTQ religious movements around the world. The organization assists LGBTQ religious leaders and groups in determining how best to preserve their records and papers; provides an electronic information clearinghouse about LGBTQ religious history for the use of historians, researchers and other interested persons; and encourages scholarship in LGBTQ religious history. Learn more about LGBTQ-RAN at [lgbtqreligiousarchives.org](http://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org).