

INTRODUCTION

LGBT+ STUDIES

AT THE SAXO INSTITUTE

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History



The last 5-6 years have experienced a boom in LGBT+ history in Denmark. In this introduction, I will shortly describe the major projects that have contributed to LGBT+ history in Denmark in recent years. Then I will introduce the articles in this special issue of *Culture and History – Student Research Papers* with the theme: LGBT+ studies. They have been written across several disciplines and sections at the Saxo Institute: history, ethnology, and the international section, Danish Culture Courses. Hopefully, they show the deep and committed interest of both Danish and international students in this field and can thus encourage further anchoring of LGBT+ studies.

Three major projects have in recent years contributed to our knowledge of LGBT+ history in Denmark and further across Scandinavia: The NordiQueer Project 2019-2022, the CHAD Project 2021-2024, and the Queer Kvinder (Queer Women) Project 2022-2026.

The project ‘A Nordic Queer Revolution? Homo- and Trans-Activism in Denmark, Norway and Sweden 1948-2018 (NordiQueer)’ gathered five scholars and an associated PhD fellow under the leadership of professors Jens Rydström (University of Lund) and Tone Hellesund (University of

Bergen). From Denmark, I participated and explored Scandinavian gay and lesbian activism from 1948-2021 (Edelberg 2024a; Edelberg 2024b).

At the Center for Gender, Sexuality and Difference at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures (NORS) at University of Copenhagen, the project ‘A Cultural History of Aids in Denmark (CHAD)’ resulted in a book that for the first time described and analyzed the cultural, political, and social history of hiv/aids in Denmark in the 1980s and 1990s (Nebeling Petersen et al. 2024) as well as several articles. The project was led by associate professor Michael Nebeling Petersen.

At Roskilde University an ongoing project on queer women in Danish history, ‘New Stories of Same-Sex Relations 1880-2020 (Queer Women)’, has already resulted in a book on protolesbian history in the period 1870-1920 (Andreassen 2025), as well as several articles. The project is led by professor in communication, Rikke Andreassen.

Other individual projects should be mentioned. In 2024, Danish historian, Jacob Preene started a 4-year PhD scholarship at the University of Örebro in Sweden on the project ‘History of Trans Activism in Scandinavia, 1960s to 2000s’, focusing on Denmark and Sweden. Another Danish-born PhD fellow, Christoffer Koch Andersen, is currently doing a project on ‘Codes of Life, Codes of Death: Tracing the (Im)possibility of Trans Lives in Algorithmic Assemblages’, also drawing on Danish data, at the University of Cambridge. In 2024, newly retired Danish historian, Karin Cohr Lützen, published an updated version of her seminal 1986-book, ‘Hvad hjertet begærer – Kvinders kærlighed til kvinder i 200 år (What the Heart Desires: Women’s Love of Women During 200 Years)’ (Lützen 2024).

This revolution in Danish LGBT+ history is truly astonishing, but unfortunately it might fizzle out. Still, no tenured scholar with designated research time, hired at a Danish historical department, with history of women, gender or sexuality as their primary field of inquiry, exist, to say nothing of tenured researchers at history departments with LGBT+ history as their primary field of inquiry. Luckily, the Gender Studies department at the University of Copenhagen, as well as the Department of Communication and Culture at Roskilde University has turned towards history in recent years, as we have seen, but their interest might go in other directions in the future. To ensure that we continue to produce LGBT+ historical studies, we need the historical departments to take responsibility, while historical projects at other departments will only enrich a cross-disciplinary investigation of history. One might also note the ‘brain drain’, the literary scholar Dag Heede once

remarked, when he noted that both younger and older Danish scholars who wished for positions where they could explore queer studies, would flee to e.g. Sweden. Not much has happened since with regards to designated positions or PhD scholarships in the field of queer history.

This special issue combines perspectives on LGBTQ+ studies from both history and ethnology students. Also, international students have contributed with a view on Denmark from the outside. Two articles outside of the theme, but serendipitously close to the theme of sexuality, minority and marginality, have been added to the issue.

In the first two articles, history students Stine Søby Fogh and Jacob Leisner conducts critical historical analyses of twentieth century history of sexuality. Leisner investigates an early Danish gay rights manifesto of 1954, and its peculiarly useful contradictory rhetorics, while Fogh traces the impact of (in)famous police inspector, Jens Jersild of the Copenhagen Vice Squad and his overlooked influence on the curriculum of sexual education in schools.

Ethnology student, Maria Louise Østengaard-Sejersen follows with an exploration of liquid gender identity in contemporary queer performance art. Another ethnology student, Thea Yde Petersen follows with a critical analysis of two surveys of the well-being of LGBTQ+ people in Danish workplaces and their widely differing results.

Two international students conclude the theme of the issue. Clara Rieger analyzes the importance of queer spaces based on her study of the lesbian/queer bar Vela in Copenhagen, and David Laufer explores the (im)possibility of living as a digital citizen in Denmark (who prides itself on its thorough digitization) if you are not cis-gendered.

Two articles outside of the theme follow. Emil Theodor Hansen studies slavery in ancient Athens and the socio-economical aspects of enslaved wet nurses, and Nuala Tranter discuss the male and, not least, the female gaze inside the harem during European colonialism. These two articles beautifully demonstrate how marginalization and sexualization are not just issues for LGBTQ+ or queer persons in history.

All in all, the articles illustrate the interest in LGBTQ+ studies or history and sexuality across the Saxo Institute and demonstrate what the students can achieve and contribute to the ongoing studies of sexuality, gender, marginalization and inclusion.



Bibliography

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