



Medieval LGBTQ+ people: Evidence and Frameworks

What is a research proposal?

- Used to develop/formulate ideas
- Present main questions and evidence for a research essay
- PROPOSAL = positing, suggesting, putting forward
- Should NOT be definitive

What do you need to include?

1. Main research question
2. Historiography
3. Primary Sources
4. Concluding Section



Main Research Question

- Tell me what your topic is about!
- What is/are the central question(s) that are guiding your research?
- Why are you interested in this topic?

Historiography

- How have other historians discussed your topic?
 - Summarize the main arguments of each secondary source (article or book)
 - Compare your secondary sources to each other
 - Pose any questions you might have about them
 - Discuss how these secondary sources might help you answer your research question

Primary Sources

- Describe each of your primary sources. What are they about?
- What is the CONTEXT for these sources (author and their background? When written? Where written? Why written?)
- How can these primary sources help you answer your research question? What kinds of evidence do they provide?

Concluding Section

- If you were going to write a research essay, what would your central points be?
- How might you organize your paper?
- What might your argument or thesis statement look like?

Proposal

Ask questions

Provides evidence that can potentially answer questions

Shows what you're thinking about regarding your topic right now

Used to see if a research question can be answered with available evidence

Research essay

Answers questions

Uses evidence to support arguments

Provides all of your thoughts regarding your topic after ALL research is done

Provides clear and definitive answers to any questions

Peccatum sodomiticum

- Direct translation = sin of Sodom
- Meaning in the Middle Ages
 - Sex acts between men
 - Improper sexual relations between 'active' and 'passive'
 - Impotence
 - Eunuchs
 - Moral deviation
 - Any kind of sexual intercourse outside of penis in vagina, man on top
 - Sex against nature
 - Sexual sin in general
 - Sex between two women

Queer people in the Middle Ages

1. Evidence—what survives and how do we use it?
2. Frameworks—main research questions historians ask of that evidence: identity, community, repression

Tess Wingard, “The Trans Middle Ages: Incorporating Transgender and Intersex Studies into the History of Medieval Sexuality.” *English Historical Review* CXXXVIII.593 (January 2024).

Evidence

Challenges?



- Documentary evidence: legal records, chronicles, medical and scientific treatises, law codes, theological works
- ‘Literary’ evidence: poems, stories, songs... hagiographies
- Material culture: objects
- Archeological evidence: skeletal remains

Active Suppression of Evidence

- A.H. Thomas, *Calendar of Select Pleas 1381-1412* (published 1924-1932)
 - “Examination of two men charged with immorality, one of which implicated several persons, male and female, in religious orders.”
 - John Britby and Eleanor Rykener, 1395
- A. Hamilton Thompson, 1915-1927
 - “things, or rather their particulars [which] we certainly do not want to mention.”
 - John Dey, 15th century

FRAMEWORKS ■



Identity

Saints Maurice and Theofredus, 15th c.



Community



Persecution



Identity

Saints Maurice and Theofredus, 15th c.

1. Identifying queer lives in the historical records
2. Unpacking queer identity—how did they see themselves?

Rolandina Roncaglia

- “Many believed she was a girl by outward appearance and he often heard many saying ‘she is a woman.’ “
- “It became known that everyone believed he was female, including his outwardly evident female gestures and many called him Rolandina.”

Eleanor Rykener, 1395 London

- “committing that detestable, unmentionable, and ignominious vice.”
- ”dressed up as a woman, thinking he was a woman, asking him as he would a woman if he could commit a libidinous act with **her**.”

Katherine Hetzeldorfer, 1477 Germany

- “during carnival she says that she [he] who stands in the dock, whored like a man, and she [he] grabbed her like a man. She also says that with hugging and kissing she [he] behaved exactly like a man with a women...”

Queer gender identity

- Determined through clothing, actions, physical appearance, anatomy
- Jobs held
 - Eleanor Rykener as tapster, sex worker, embroideress



Tapster, Parish Church of St. Laurence, England

Queer sexual identity

“The identities of medieval people were fundamentally shaped by their sexual status—not whether they were homosexual or heterosexual, as today, but whether they were chaste or sexually active. This distinction created a dividing line between two very different kinds of people in medieval society.”

--Ruth Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe* 3rd ed. (2017)



Community

Did queer subcultures exist in the Middle Ages?

Late medieval Florence (Michael Rocke)

Arnaud of Vernouille, 1320s in southern France

Sir William Neville and Sir John Clanvowe, English knights,
Constantinople 1391

Eleanor Rykener, London 1395



Das der vorgenant kaiser ritter
der star zuwuch, als vorhin abgerett
was genungen/und verbrant wuert

und also nach jennischen erpungnen sachen und gehalten
wegen allen wurden die von zuwuch/dyren dungen auch
nach gedenden was hien darmit an emt und dem andern
gelegen were. Und an einem dinstag des vorge
nanten kaysen laves do siis der vorgenant kaiser ritter

Persecution

Shift in Sodomy charges

- Increase after the 12th and 13th centuries, especially in the 14th and 15th centuries
- “othering” and growth of persecution overall

Why is SODOMY
so threatening?



Image from Dante's *Inferno* (15th c.)

Tess Wingard

- Anxieties about sodomy = transphobia
- **Katherina Hetzendorfer** trial: detailed descriptions of her sexual acts, use of an implement as a penis, behaving sexually like a man and looking like one physically
- Anxieties about sodomy = homophobia
- **John Dey**: only his sexual activities with other men warranted a fully inquiry, including detailed witness testimony