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**AMSTERDAM**  
**A QUEER HISTORY**

Boom – Amsterdam

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## FOREWORD

Amsterdam has long been known for its colorful diversity and willingness to welcome everyone. It makes me think back to the nineties and nights out in clubs like the RoXY and cafés in the Zeedijk area such as 't Mandje. Later, I found that same openness at festivals such as Milkshake on the Westergas site and the Streetheart Festival in the Kerkstraat. These places let me experience the warmth and energy of our LGBTIQ+ community and they epitomize my belief that a city should give everyone the freedom to be themselves.

Pride remains a highlight for Amsterdam every year. It is more than a festive spectacle; it reminds us of the values that our municipal policy is based on: freedom, equality, and respect. I and my city councilors join in the Pride Walk, sail in the Canal Parade, attend the festivities, and engage in countless conversations with members of the community, both in my official mayoral residence and elsewhere. These moments show that Amsterdam is more than just a geographical location; it is a living statement of inclusion.

We must not ignore reality, though. The most recent Rainbow Europe Index ranks the Netherlands thirteenth. Violence and intimidation against LGBTIQ+ individuals are unfortunately not decreasing; vandalism of the rainbow flag and fear on the streets undermine the sense of security that every resident deserves. Freedom is therefore not something that can be taken for granted. That is why the municipality has set up targeted information campaigns, strengthened cooperation with the police and civil so-

ciety organizations, and implemented specific measures to better protect everyone.

At a time when the rights of LGBTIQ+ people are under pressure worldwide, I would like to express our solidarity with my fellow mayors in other major cities—such as the mayor of Budapest. Despite attempts by the authorities to ban that city’s Pride event, he ensured that the march went ahead, with a record turnout of tens of thousands. Our joint efforts show that the struggle for freedom and equality transcends national boundaries.

My message to everyone in Amsterdam, and to the LGBTIQ+ community in particular, is simple but powerful: stay true to yourself, keep loving whoever you want, and continue to shine in your own colors. Let’s build a city together where freedom is not an empty promise but a principle that we live by.

Amsterdam may no longer be the undisputed Gay Capital of the World, but the spirit of that sobriquet lives on in the hearts of its residents. Cherish, protect, and express that spirit—not just during Pride but every day, because when we feel free to be who we are, that produces a society where everyone can flourish.

I look forward with pride and hope to the next chapter in our pink history.

Femke Halsema  
Mayor of Amsterdam

## INTRODUCTION

In the nineties, Amsterdam was the proud center of the homosexual subculture. The city was brimming with energy and there was an infectious sense of freedom, bordering on arrogance. Amsterdam was the gay capital of the world. This status fitted the city's traditionally idiosyncratic character perfectly. It's not without reason that historian Russell Shorto called Amsterdam the "most liberal city in the world."

These achievements weren't just handed on a plate to homosexual men and women in Amsterdam; they too had to fight, suffer, demonstrate, and lobby for their rights. What have been the experiences over the years of men who are into men and for women who are into women? The history of Amsterdam's homosexual subculture is fragmented across various sources. There are solid social-history publications on the gay and lesbian subculture in the Netherlands.

In addition to this academic research, there are many journalistic articles and good overviews, including the excellent books *Lesbo-encyclopedie* and *Homo-encyclopedie van Nederland* (Lesbian and gay encyclopedias respectively). There are also well-documented photo exhibitions, other exhibitions, and fascinating documentaries, such as *De Roze Revolutie* (The pink revolution) by Dutch broadcaster VPRO. The subculture has a wealth of specialized media, nowadays mainly online. But although Amsterdam often plays a big role in these sources, they generally cover the whole of the Netherlands. None of them tell the specific pink story of Amsterdam.

Hence this book, which provides a selection of highs and lows from the history of Amsterdam's homosexual inhabitants. The focus here is on those areas where homosexual men and women have had a big influence and presence: activism, emancipation, culture, and nightlife.

The book is based on a selection of existing sources. In various places, this has been supplemented with interviews I conducted with researchers specializing in gay and lesbian history, activists, and people who were part of the gay and lesbian subculture. It was striking how everyone I spoke to spontaneously started sharing their own stories and personal experiences. The pink past is an objective history, but often also a very personal history.

This book takes the reader through ten chapters of the city's pink history, from sodomites, tribades, homophiles, lesbians, and gays to LGBTIQ+ individuals. I adhere to the most commonly used terms in the period in question. The book starts with a brief introduction about homosexual behavior before 1900. Then it moves on to the first cautious steps on the path to emancipation, the first gay demonstration in Amsterdam and the Gay Games, to end with the reopening of the iconic café 't Mandje.

This book focuses on sexual orientation towards individuals of the same sex. Of course, there have been other tastes and preferences since time immemorial. In recent decades, transgender, intersex, and queer individuals have emerged into the spotlight alongside homosexual and bisexual men and women. They are claiming their place in the media, political debates, and the city's nightlife. The different communities often intersect and overlap, and they frequently show solidarity with each other's causes. The visibility of the aforementioned groups is recent. Their history is still sparsely documented, in part because they have received hardly any attention in research and publications about homosexual and lesbian history. Therefore, these groups are mainly covered in the final chapter of this book. That does not detract from the fact that they deserve more historical research and more coverage in future publications.





Members of the Pink City Village on the Pride Walk, 2022

By shining a light on the stories of pink Amsterdam, I hope to make this shared city history visible. It is a colorful history that the people of Amsterdam can be proud of, and hopefully can continue to be proud of in the future.

Angelica to. 115



There were five trials in Amsterdam between 1792 and 1798 in which a total of thirteen women were accused of some form of sexual intercourse with each other (Source: Ziel en zinnen)

## THE BIRTH OF THE HOMOSEXUAL

The terms for homosexuality, the position of homosexuals in society, and the degree of social acceptance have changed over the years, but homosexual men and women have always been around. That includes in Amsterdam.

Nonetheless, relatively little can be found about the lives of homosexual men and women before 1900. Most research on homosexual behavior in this period is based on judicial reports and police interrogations. Those documents speak of “deviant sexual practices such as tribadism, lollyng, and sodomistic filth.” Later, we see medical and psychiatric reports.

There are few other documented factual accounts about sodomites and tribades, the names given to homosexual men and women respectively who had same-sex relations. There are fragments, hints, and references to be found in literature and painting while in well-to-do circles in particular, letters were exchanged that spoke volumes. It all means the sparse sources regarding homosexual behavior are rather fragmented and one-sided.

In the following pages, we take a trip through the pink history of Amsterdam, from the city’s founding up to 1900. If we want to form an image of the prevailing views on sexuality at the time, then the documents on sexual offenses serve as an important source, even though these offenses only formed a small portion of the total number of convictions from that time. And although sodomy ceased to be a criminal offense in 1811, sodomites con-