

# The Historical Department at the Danish Library in South Schleswig in Germany

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DANSK CENTRALBIBLIOTEK  
FOR SYDSLESVIG

Dansk Centralbibliotek for Sydslesvig – the Danish Library in South Schleswig – houses a history department, which includes two unique collections; The Schleswig Collection and the Danish minority archive. These collections constitute the basis of the historical research made at the library.

## The history department

The department was established in 1963 to promote historical and scientific research, especially concerning the history of the Danish minority in South Schleswig and the history of the old Duchy of Schleswig.

The research is disseminated through lectures, articles, digital presentations, summer schools and not least via books. Since the first book was published in 1966, the department has published more than



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80 titles. A large part of these publications are available as PDF files, and can be freely downloaded from our website.

The historical department also helps and gives advice to university students and scholars about the use of our materials and the history in the region and offer students the possibility of a traineeship. We work closely together with both German and Danish universities in the region, and in cooperation with them we arrange an annual summer school. Usually we have a PhD research fellow attached to the department that is enrolled at a Danish university.

## **The Schleswig Collection**

The Schleswig Collection is a unique book collection covering the old Duchy of Schleswig. Today, the Danish-German border divides this Duchy, and the northern part – South Jutland/North Schleswig – belongs to Denmark whilst the southern part – South Schleswig – is a part of Germany. Schleswig is still characterized by a common history and culture transcending the borders, and formerly the population felt a regional identity that was neither Danish nor German.

One main objective of The Schleswig Collection is to preserve this cultural heritage and make it accessible to the public. The collection is open to all and has a wide range of users, e.g. students, scholars and historians working on assignments, articles and books. We also offer different kinds of events, lectures and exhibitions with a focus on Schleswig.

The Schleswig Collection can be traced back to 1891, when Danish-minded people in Schleswig wanted to establish a 'scientific collection of source material on the history of Southern Jutland intended for all who would examine the history of our people and the development of our

country and language through the ages'. The Danish-minded member of the German Reichstag in Berlin, Gustav Johannsen, agreed to establish the book collection in his private home, and this was the start of the Danish Library in South Schleswig. Today many of Johannsen's books are still available in the collection.

The first time The Schleswig Collection was registered as an independent collection was in 1949. At that time, it numbered 2.587 works. For many years the collection was in a stack-room separated from the rest of the library, but in 2010 it was opened up and made accessible to all users. In recent years we have worked on developing the collection into a research library. Since 2018 the ECMI Library (European Center for Minority Issues) has been located together with The Schleswig Collection. The ECMI Library is a book collection with literature on minorities throughout Europe, consisting of approx. 3,500 works. Together these two collections offer a unique opportunity to explore and examine minority issues in a local as well as in a more global context.

The Schleswig Collection contains books, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, etc. about Schleswig, predominantly in the five languages and dialects spoken in the region; Danish, German, Frisian, Southern Jutlandic (Sønderjysk) and Low German. Thematically it includes history, biographies, art, language and dialect research, social conditions, nature and the environment, and much more. Fiction, music and children's books from the Schleswig area are also richly represented in the collection. The aim is to collect and preserve all literature that deals with Schleswig, and as something special it includes material from both the Danish and the German side of the border. Today, The Schleswig Collection consists of approx. 55.000 materials, the vast majority of which can be lent through the library's own website. The materials can also be lent to Danish libraries via [bibliotek.dk](http://bibliotek.dk) or as interlibrary lending in Germany.

The crown jewel is the antiquarian book collection, which consists of approx. 600 books from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 1880s. The oldest book is a law book from Eiderstedt, which can be dated to 1591.



**Figure 1:** In September 2019, Queen Margrethe II visited The Schleswig Collection. Here she was introduced to the collection and some of its oldest books. Reference: Danish Central Library for Southern Schleswig.

These books are stored securely in climate and theft-proof cabinets and can only be used at the library. In 2014, the old books were digitized with OCR (Optical Character Recognition) and are now freely available on our website.

We have around 20 reading places, which can be used freely during the library's opening hours, just as it is possible to reserve a study or a group room.

Genealogists are a special target group that often use the collection to place their Schleswig family relations in a broader historical context. Every other year, we also arrange a large Danish-German genealogy day.

**Figure 2:** In 2018 The Schleswig Collection held a Danish-German genealogy day for the third time. This is a picture from one of the many stands that participated in the event. Photo: Marco Petersen.



## **The Danish minority archive**

The Danish minority archive was established in 1989 to collect, register and preserve archival material related to the Danish minority in South Schleswig. This applies to both archives from the many associations and institutions of the minority group, as well as to private individuals and companies associated with it. Since most of the minority organizations were established after the referendum in 1920, much of the archive materials dates from the time thereafter. However, the collection's many personal archives also contain significant and very varied material from the time before 1920. The archive is a private institution and therefore does not contain systematic state or municipal archives. In addition to containing material from the Danish minority, there are also several

personal archives submitted by people associated with the Frisian minority in the western part of Schleswig.

The predominant part of the collection consists of written records that are registered by type. This is personal-, association-, institutional-, business- and church archives, to which is added a topographical collection.

The personal archives are very different, but all the persons have had some connection to South Schleswig. In the vast majority of cases, they have also been part of the minority. In terms of content, the archives vary widely, from individual papers or letters to documentation of every aspect of a person's life and work. Often these are the leaders of the minority: politicians, editors, journalists, teachers, etc., while the ordinary members of the minority – e.g. workers, farmers or smallholders – are relatively poorly represented.

A very large part of the minority's work takes place in the associations, with the South Schleswig Association (Sydslesvigsk Forening, SSF), the South Schleswig Danish Youth Associations (Sydslesvigs danske Ungdomsforeninger, SdU) and the South Schleswig Electoral Association (Sydslesvigsk Vælgerforening, SSW) as some of the most important. Both the main departments and many of the local offices have handed in records to the archive, but for the latter there are many gaps both geographically and temporally. The archive also contains material from several associations north of the border, whose purpose is to maintain support for the Danish minority.

The institutional archives largely consist of materials from the minority schools and, as in the case of the local association archives, there are also many gaps here. The situation is different with the archive from SSF's central secretariat, which is very comprehensive and contains material from its founding in the 1920s until now, and which is the most extensive

collection in the archive. Other archives include the Danish Library and the History Department.

The church archives contain the church registration books from the Danish congregations in South Schleswig, as well as protocols and other papers from the parish councils.

There are relatively few business archives. Among them, however, are banks, actual production companies, trading companies and a few newspapers, including the main minority paper, *Flensborg Avis*.

The topographic archives and the 'diverse' archives are in many ways similar. The topographies are arranged geographically, and contain archives that happen to come from or illuminate a particular area. The 'diverse' archives are thematically arranged, and ranges widely from genealogical records over various personal papers and occasional songs to collections of cookbooks and banknotes. It also contains a chronological collection, which consists predominantly of various pamphlets.

In addition to written archival sources, the archive also contains a large number of pictures and maps in the form of photos, engravings and posters. We do not have a precise number of the amount of photos we have, but in terms of age, they stretch from the 1860s to the present. The collection consists of a mix of amateur and professional photos, with varied motifs ranging from portrait photos over landscapes and city photos to various events.



**Figure 3:** The archive contains a large amount of pictures from Flensburg including this picture from Große Str., which was taken in 1868. To the left is the old town hall.  
Reference: The archive at the Danish Central Library for Southern Schleswig.

The picture collection includes several large collections, for example the Flensburg photographer Remmer's large glass plate collection, which is completely digitized, and *Flensburg Avis'* photo archive from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.

The archive's collection of engravings consists partly of old maps, city plans and city prospectuses, some of which date from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Another part consists of illustrations, which mostly are from the Schleswig wars in 1848-1850 and 1864.

In addition to this there is a map collection, which mainly consists of maps from the last 150 years. We also have a poster collection that



includes a large number of plebiscite posters and leaflets from 1920 and many SSW election posters, just as we have many posters from the annual Danish minority meetings.



**Figure 4:** In 1932 the Nazis waged an active election campaign in Flensburg, where Hitler also visited the city. In our archives you can for instance find this image with Nazi election propaganda. Reference: The archive at the Danish Central Library for Southern Schleswig.

Finally, the archive contains a large collection of historical films, most of which have been digitized. A large part of our films is visible at the homepage 'Danmark på film' at [filmcentralen.dk/museum/danmark-paa-film](http://filmcentralen.dk/museum/danmark-paa-film)

The archive's various collections are searchable at the portal arkiv.dk. Far from all photographs are digitally registered, but those that are can be seen on arkiv.dk, which also applies to maps, cards, engravings and posters.

All archives are private archives, and the terms of access to them have been agreed with the individual donors. This means that some archives

are freely available, while others are subject to different clauses. This applies, for example, to several of the large archives from associations and institutions, where in many cases they have chosen to follow the Schleswig-Holstein archive legislation. In addition to these agreements, of course, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies.

**Keywords:** Schleswig Collection, Danish minority archive, Danish-German border, cultural heritage, minority issues and languages, Danish-German genealogy, Schleswig literature, topographic archives.