

Call for papers:

“Human rights in eighteenth-century global and colonial contexts: Scandinavia and beyond”

Department of History, Lund University

11th-12th June 2024

The history of human rights is a thriving field in significant development. One important recent development has been the revision of the historical genealogy of our modern notion of human rights. If the theoretical and doctrinal homogeneity of the concept of "human rights" over time has been questioned, this serves to emphasise the need for historical investigations into both the theoretical developments and practical uses of concepts of human rights at specific times and in specific contexts.

One time and place where a concept and term of human rights came to the fore was late eighteenth-century Scandinavia and its global entanglements. Here, it arose from and supplanted older notions of natural rights. This was not just a theoretical development that can be traced in the classroom or the academic treatise; it was also used in and informed a wide variety of political developments and practical reforms.

The Scandinavian kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark-Norway were engaged in diplomatic, commercial, and colonial endeavours with states and communities across the world: the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, West Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Greenland and Sápmi in the far north. These connections and encounters stimulated legal and political thinking on a range of topics, including natural and human rights.

The workshop aims to contextualise Scandinavian discussions of human rights with non-European perspectives in global and colonial contexts, as well as in other European states. To what extent and how were discourses of natural and human rights adopted and used by Asian, African, and other non-European actors and thinkers?

Second, the workshop aims to provide an alternative to the focus on national constitutions by investigating the link between theoretical concepts of human rights and their practical uses. So, we might see notions of human rights employed in discussions of slavery and abolition in Africa or India, or in claims to freedom and security in the Mediterranean.

We invite both scholars working on natural and human rights in the Scandinavian countries and scholars working on other European and non-European countries.

The workshop will take place in Lund over two days, with a keynote lecture given by Professor Saliha Belmessous (UNSW/Oxford).

The workshop is funded by seed money from the “Profile Area Human Rights” at Lund University. The organisers can therefore offer financial contributions of up to 5000 SEK to cover the travel and accommodation of the participants.

Please send an abstract of no more than 200 words by 07.03.2024 to Mads Langballe Jensen (mads.jensen@hist.lu.se) or Joachim Östlund (joachim.ostlund@hist.lu.se).