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Published in:

Kaj Munk - An Introduction to a Controversial Danish Priest, Playwright, and Debater in the Inter-Bellum

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Publication date:
2023

Document Version
Også kaldet Forlagets PDF

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Øhrstrøm, P. (2023). Interfaces to the Digital Kaj Munk Archive as Research Tools. I S. Dosenrode, & N. Mihaylova (red.), *Kaj Munk - An Introduction to a Controversial Danish Priest, Playwright, and Debater in the Inter-Bellum* (s. 163-176). Aalborg Universitetsforlag. <https://aauforlag.dk/produkt/antologier-og-monografier/kaj-munk-2>

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Interfaces to the Digital Kaj Munk Archive as Research Tools

Peter Øhrstrøm

Scholars and students with some knowledge of Danish language and with an interest in the study of the works of Kaj Munk may benefit from the use of the digital research tools provided by the Kaj Munk Research Centre at Aalborg University (AAU). The aim of this chapter is to give a brief presentation of these interactive tools.

Since its inception in 2005, the Kaj Munk Research Centre has worked on the digitization of the large Kaj Munk collection that has been placed at AAU, making it available online to the public in Denmark and elsewhere. The digital Kaj Munk Archive will eventually include annotated versions of everything Munk published during his life, and everything published after his death: his sermons, his speeches, and everything else he wrote, including unfinished works that he might have considered for publication at a later date. The digital archive should ideally also include the letters he wrote, as well as those he received. Furthermore, it should include Munk's personal notes and documents, diaries, preliminary drafts, photos, etc. Finally, the ambition is to include as much as possible of what has been written and broadcast about the life and works of Kaj Munk.

Obviously, the Aalborg collection, started as it was in 2005, is not sufficient to provide everything necessary to establish a digital archive as described above. Material from many other sources must be added. For this reason, the members of staff at the Kaj Munk Research Centre have constantly been trying to

locate relevant material included in other collections around the country. This means that both the physical collection at AAU and the digital archive at the Centre have grown significantly over the years. Many texts have been transcribed, and dates, publication venues, and other metadata about the texts have been meticulously researched and added. Furthermore, explanatory notes and editorial introductions have been created for a large number of the texts. In this way, it has been made possible to search broadly and view texts online from the Aalborg collection, as well as items from other collections.

The number of items in the digital archive is currently 4511 (accessed 1 August 2023). An item can be anything from a picture, a letter, or a poem of just a few lines, to a manuscript of several hundred pages.

The aim has been not only to make the texts of the Kaj Munk collection available in digital form to the public, but also to provide tools that support research into Munk's texts and thought. A small selection of the research that has been made possible by the Kaj Munk Archive is cited in the Bibliography section (2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2014, 2021).

Two user interfaces

Since 2005, a number of user interfaces to the digital archive have been discussed, explored, and implemented at the Kaj Munk Research Centre (2023a, 2023b, 2010). Over the years, the Centre has constantly tried to make access to the online collection as user friendly as possible. Two user interfaces are offered on www.kajmunk.aau.dk, *The Digital Archive* and the *Timeline*. The choice between the two interfaces will obviously depend upon the task that the user has in mind and its context.

The Digital Archive

This approach makes it possible to search the digital archive in a straightforward and traditional manner, referring to basic properties of the items in the database, including a categorization that has been added and is currently under further development. Sometimes more than one category has been added to an item in the archive. An illustration of the use of the Digital

Archive is shown in Fig. 1. A video explaining the options available when using this approach is available on the website.

Fig. 1. The User Interface to the Kaj Munk Digital Archive. The illustration shows a search attempting to locate Kaj Munk's most famous poem, "Den blaa anemone" ("The blue anemone").

The Timeline

The most recent user interface offered by the Kaj Munk Research Centre is the so-called Timeline. It is based on the dates added to texts in the Archive, and it offers a quick overview of items found in the Archive that fulfil a number of selected criteria. For example, Fig. 2 (Next page) shows the result of a search in the archive for texts in which Kaj Munk uses the word "evighed" ("eternity"). It is assumed that, for some reason, the user wants to limit the search to texts written in the date range from 9 June 1935 to 9 June 1945.

Clearly, the Timeline Interface can be very useful when we want to find texts in which Munk refers to a certain topic (here: "eternity"). The various colours represent categories of texts: books (pink), newspaper articles (blue), dramas (yellow), sermons (orange), or articles about Munk (purple). In this way, the user may gain a first indication regarding the categories in which the word "eternity" is mentioned, i.e., where to look for sources relevant to a discussion of Munk's ideas. In fact, the timeline gives direct access to Munk's texts themselves. The

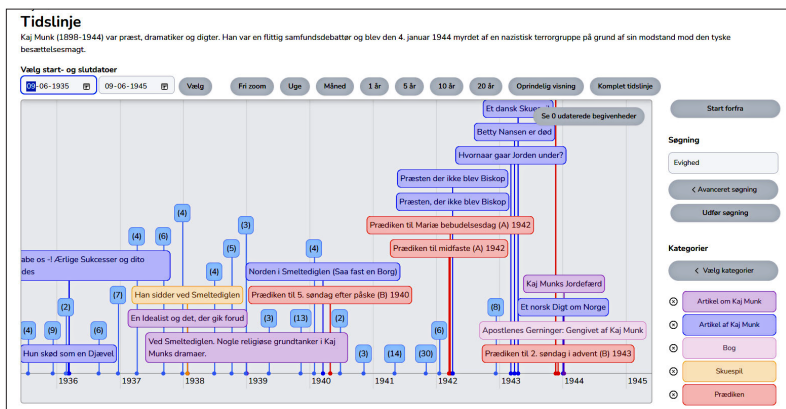


Fig.2. Timeline illustrating the search for texts containing the word "evighed" ("eternity").

user may also zoom in and out, in order to find the most interesting text and click on it. This will bring up the text in pdf format, for easy reading.

Another example in the same vein could be relevant to anyone who wants to study Munk's strong interest in the concept of miracles. Fig. 3 shows the posts in the Archive that include the word "mirakel" ("miracle"), or one of its declinations. The search has been limited to the period from 1 January 1920 to 31 December 1944, and has furthermore been narrowed down to the four most important categories, "Dramas", "Articles", "Sermons", and "Manuscripts for Speeches".

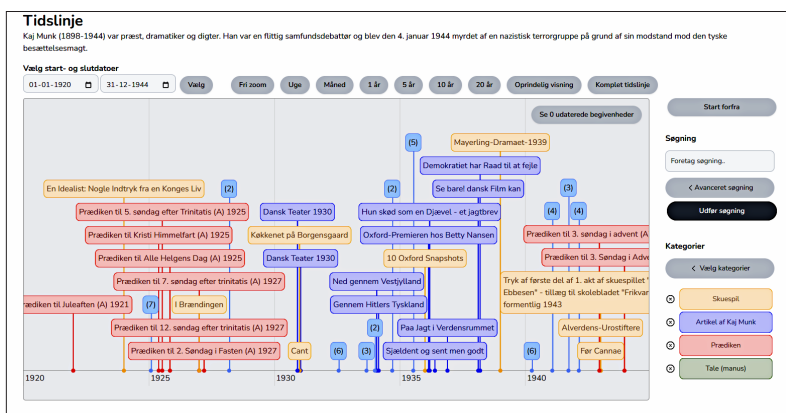


Fig. 3. A search for texts by Kaj Munk containing the word "mirakel" ("miracle") or one of its declinations.

With this information, it becomes easy to count the occurrences, and to group them into periods of, e.g., five years each:

Period	Number of texts by Kaj Munk including the word “mirakel” or one of its declinations
1920–1924	2
1925–1929	16
1930–1934	18
1935–1939	16
1940–1944	22

Obviously, not a great deal can be deduced from an overview of this kind. On the other hand, it does suggest that Munk focused on the notion of miracles, and that he frequently mentioned it in his writings from 1925 onwards, which was also the year in which he wrote his most famous play, “Ordet” (“The Word”), which is often understood as a treatment of the very idea of miracles and its role in Danish culture and faith. It should be noted that, in Fig. 3, this important play has been hidden in a group of seven texts. However, in Fig. 4, below, the search has been limited to the Drama category, and thus the famous play is explicitly displayed. Some of the plays occur in

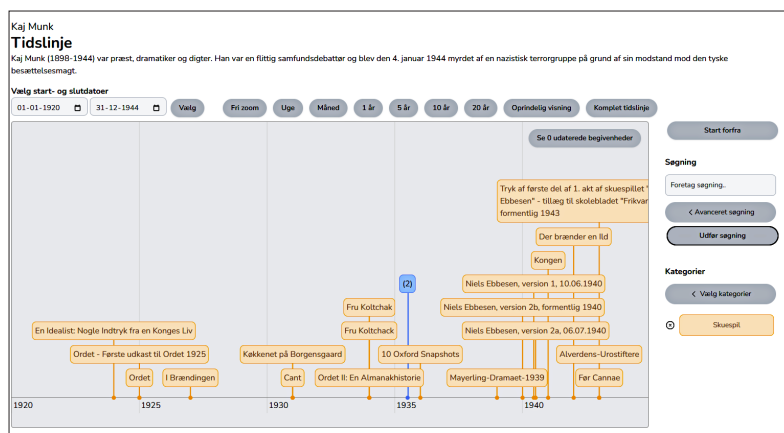


Fig. 4. The search in Fig. 3 limited to the Drama category.

several versions, each of which gives rise to a “hit”. This obviously increases the occurrence count. However, it is evident from the overview presented in the figure that Munk made references to miracles in several of his plays.

In the same way, we may also choose to limit the search to Munk’s articles. It might be noted that none of them are dated before 1930. This is probably due to the fact that Munk became an employee at *Jyllands-Posten* in 1930. Having Munk’s newspaper articles displayed, one might click through to the texts and read them, in order to obtain a more detailed account of his view on miracles.

One important article to select would be Kaj Munk’s reply to the senior leader in the Student Organization, Professor Brøndsted, who had recently asked the religious students in the organization to be religiously tolerant in their discussions – apparently in the sense that they should not refer too often to religious ideas in their discussions with their non-religious fellow students on matters such as courage (see Fig. 5). The topic of courage was clearly on the agenda among students during the German occupation of Denmark. However, in a rather polemical manner, Munk argued that, if the purpose of the discussion was to create new courage in someone who had none, then there is an obvious need for a miracle – apparently

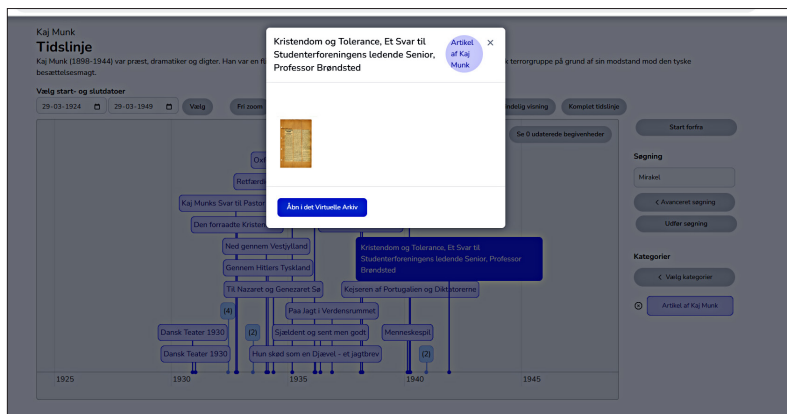


Fig. 5. One article is selected from the display. The text itself can be accessed by clicking through to the Virtual Archive.

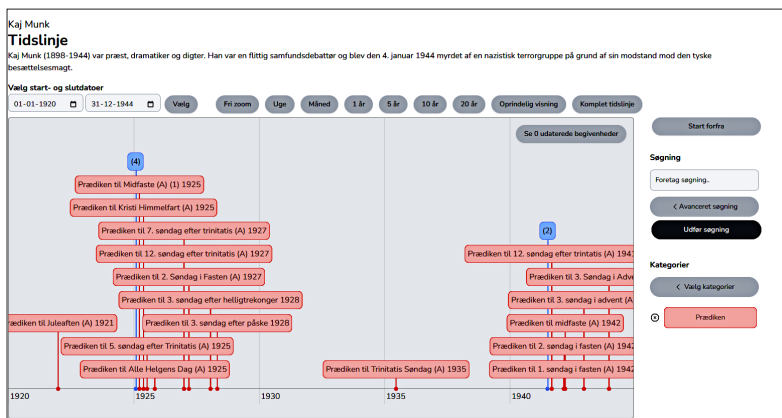


Fig. 6. A search in the digital archive for sermons by Kaj Munk that contain references to miracles.

because the courage in this case would have to be created from nothing. And in the article, Munk pointed out that, if we need miracles, then we cannot make do with anything less than a God who can make them happen. (In Danish: “Skal vi til at have Mirakler, kan vi ikke klare os med mindre end en Gud til at gøre dem.”)

It is obvious that if we want to explore Kaj Munk’s understanding of miracles, there is a lot of information to be found in his sermons. The diagram in Fig. 6 shows the result of a search in the digital archive for sermons in which there are references to miracles. At first, it may look as though Munk mainly referred to miracles during the 1920s and the 1940s. However, we must be careful here. For it is also clear that the total number of sermons dated to the 1930s in the digital archive is significantly lower than the total number of sermons stored in the archive dating from the 1920s, and it is also much lower than the number of sermons from the 1940s stored in the archive. It is likely that many of Munk’s sermons during the 1930s are unknown because he simply preached without a manuscript and felt experienced enough to do so. However, during the German occupation of Denmark, he had to have his sermons in a written form, because he knew that many of them were going to be published – in many cases as an important expression of his resistance against the German occupation.

Using the Timeline Interface to Solve Riddles

As we have seen above, the Timeline Interface of the Kaj Munk Digital Archive can offer a quick overview of the texts we want to study, and it can also provide easy access to the texts. In addition, this interface can sometimes assist us in solving particular problems or riddles that we face when working with Munk's writings. To illustrate how the Archive can be used in this context, we consider the following famous letter to "The Hunting Master"; see (Harfeld et al. 2021):

Below, we provide a translation of the text in the letter shown in Fig. 7:

"Vedersø Pastor's Home 9/4–1935

Dear Hunting Master,

Never, never, never ask
whether it will avail anything,
only,
whether it is true.

Kind regards,
Your affectionate
Kaj Munk."

However, it is not stated in the letter who the "Hunting Master" is. Although the letter is very well known and often quoted, its context is almost never mentioned. This obviously gives rise to an interesting historical riddle that needs to be solved based on the sources. In fact, the answer follows from information stored in the Digital Kaj Munk Archive.

In this case, the Timeline Interface turns out to be very useful. Fig. 7 shows the result of a search in the Digital Archive for letters and articles written during the period immediately prior to 9 April 1935:

As shown in Fig. 8 (Next page), the writer Gunnar Nislev (1895–1978) wrote a letter to Munk on 7 April 1935. It is obvious that this is the letter to which Munk is replying a few days

Vedersø Byd 9/4 1935-

Kære Jørgen,

aldrig, aldrig, aldrig spørg,
om det nytter,

bare,

om det er sandt.

Verdy' Højen.

Der's hængene

Kaj Munk.

Fig. 7. Letter from Kaj Munk dated 9 April 1935.

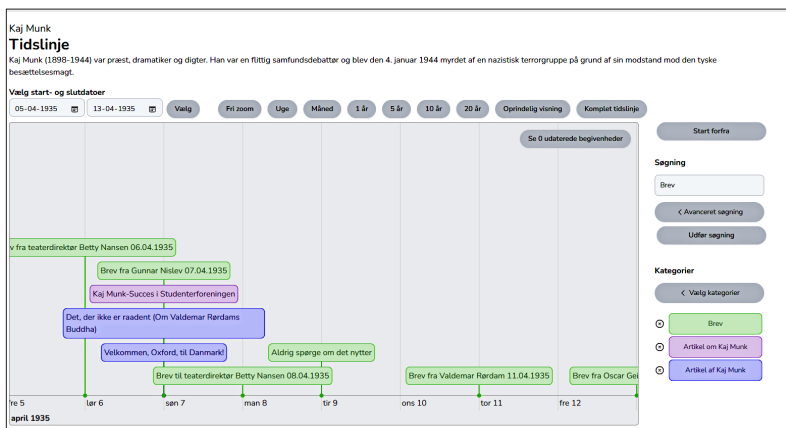


Fig. 8: The result of a search in the Digital Archive for letters and articles written during the period immediately prior to 9 April 1935.

later. This is evident from the signature used by Nislev in the letter, “Jægermester Plov” (trans: “Hunting Master Plov”), as shown in Fig. 9, below.

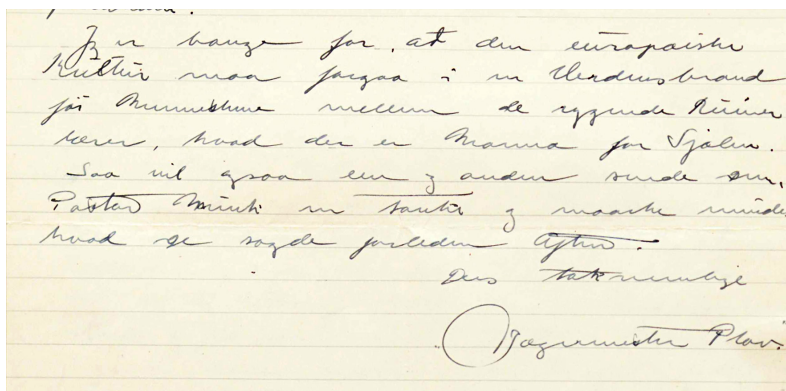


Fig. 9: Last part of the letter from Gunnar Nislev to Kaj Munk, dated 7 April 1935.

In his letter, Nislev wants to thank Munk for his recent talk to the Student Organization, which was reported in the newspapers. However, Nislev points out that he is uncertain whether Munk’s (and Nislev’s own) significant and serious messages about the importance of the soul and culture will be of any avail after all. Munk’s reply is a clear encouragement to continue sharing the truth with the public.

A Need for Further Development of the Digital Archive

The Digital Kaj Munk Archive is obviously a useful research tool as it is right now. As we have seen, it may help the researcher both to obtain a quick overview of any relevant Munk-related sources, and to gain access to the texts themselves. In some cases, the Archive may even assist the researcher in solving important research riddles.

On the other hand, it is also obvious that the tool could become even stronger in a number of ways. For example, more sources can and should be added to the Archive. Furthermore, the information related to each post could in some cases be expanded or made more precise. It is also very important that the organization of the digital archive is as user-relevant as possible. In particular, the system of categories should be carefully thought through and discussed with individuals with editor-level authority, as well as other key users.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Ulrik Sandborg-Petersen for valuable input to an early draft of this article.