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STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN CULTURE
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Identity, Literacy, and Communication in the Middle Ages

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Chapter Eight

St. Canute Lavard around the Baltic Sea

Nils Holger Petersen

This chapter discusses the Baltic Sea-area manifestations of the cult of the Danish Royal saint, Canute the Duke (ca. 1096–January 7, 1131), in Danish, Knud Lavard. Canute was murdered by his cousin, Prince Magnus, and on June 25, 1170 after a papal canonization bull issued in 1169 he was translated into his new shrine in the Benedictine abbey church in Ringsted, on the island of Zealand, where he had been buried soon after the murder. In Danish historiography, the canonization of Canute has often been seen in the context of church politics: Duke Canute’s son Valdemar, born exactly a week after the murder, became king of all of Denmark as Valdemar I in 1157 after a civil war that ultimately was a consequence of the murder and the political turmoil that arose from it. In the following years, Valdemar launched a campaign for the canonization of his father and was eventually successful in obtaining a papal bull to this effect.

In modern Danish scholarship the ensuing translation solemnities for Canute the Duke have been seen as representing a turning point in Danish medieval history, manifesting a new era of the Christian Danish kingdom. Canute’s uncle, King Canute IV (d. 1086) had been canonized at the beginning of the century at roughly the same time as the pope approved the establishment of a Danish archbishopric in Lund (in Scania, in present-day Sweden). Carsten Breengaard has argued that the aims of the Danish church in connection with the ecclesiastical events in 1170, which also comprised the crowning of King Valdemar’s seven-year-old son Canute as the future King Canute VI, concerned the establishing of new social norms to “criminalize insurrection and the involvement of the king in feuding.” While St. Canute the Duke stands as an important figure
in Danish medieval history, his cult did not spread outside of Denmark, except for the area where Denmark had its strongest political influence during the following centuries. Arguably, the cult of Canute the Duke did not have a great impact, even in Denmark, until around the time of the Danish Reformation. In this chapter, I shall attempt to understand this in light of theories of cultural memory put forward by Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann.

Cultural Memory, History, and St. Knud Lavard

The research behind this chapter was part of the EuroCORECODE project, *Symbols that Bind and Break Communities: Saints’ Cults as Stimuli and Expressions of Local, Regional, National and Universalist Identities*, sponsored by the European Science Foundation. This project concerns the ways and extent to which the cults of saints and their receptions in later (also non-Catholic) cultures inform us about regional, national, and possibly even universal identity formations. The subproject carried out at the University of Copenhagen has the title “Saints, Identity and Cultural Memory in Regions around Øresund-Gotland, from ca. 1100 to the Present Day.” Jan and Aleida Assmann’s work on “cultural memory,” drawing also on Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of *mémoire collective*, constitutes an important background for the project and also provides, more specifically, a terminological framework for the discussion of the development of the cult(s) of Canute the Duke.

The Assmanns’ concept of a “cultural memory” is designed as a term for communal—even institutional—influence on the formation of individual historical consciousnesses and identities. Jan Assmann, taking his historical point of departure in early oral cultures, points out that in such cultures rituals were the basis for a cultural memory. In the course of the rise of written cultures, it is a fundamental point for Assmann that interpretation gradually becomes more important, although as he emphasizes, all rituals have a double aspect of repetition and actualization:

In connection with the writing down of traditions, a gradual transition takes place from the dominance of repetition to the dominance of actualization, from a “ritual” to a “textual coherence.” In that way a new connective structure has been established. Its connective power is not imitation and conservation but interpretation and memory. Hermeneutics replaces liturgy.
In Christian medieval devotions based on appropriations and interpretations of biblical texts, developed in ritual contexts over centuries, the interactions between textual interpretation and ritual function are complex, and these two aspects of preserved liturgical ceremonies and of how they were considered in the Middle Ages do not exclude each other. Rather, the two aspects were integrated to establish a constant innovation of types and genres in medieval public celebrations during this long and not at all unified period. Assmann’s brief summarizing statement, however, may stand as a heuristic point of departure for discussing devotional practices as we know of them in their positions between the two poles: the ritual repetition and the interpretation of biblical and other narratives and texts as part of these ritual repetitions, which in reality changed substantially over the centuries.

Historical ideas of “memory” and “history” in more recent times, not least those of Friedrich Nietzsche and the already-mentioned Maurice Halbwachs on either side of the turn of the twentieth century, as well as the modern French historian Pierre Nora, form an important backdrop for both Jan and Aleida Assmann. The latter has pointed out how the two concepts have often been regarded either as in sharp opposition to each other or as basically equal. In her opinion, ideologically based or value-filled memories, or reconstructions of memories, make the cultural memory of a particularly defined social group distinctly different from a more scientific, objective notion of history. Conversely, in some modern critical understandings of history, the claim that the scholarly writing of history as a purely rational, disinterested, objective endeavor is not only difficult to achieve, but in principle not possible, has led to the opposite idea of a kind of equivalence between history and memory, whether individual memory or cultural memory of a social group. In order to overcome this dichotomy, Aleida Assmann has made the following proposition:

The important step to get beyond the alternative of a polarisation or an equalisation of the notions of memory and history consists in perceiving the relationship between inhabited and uninhabited memory as one of two complementary modes of memory. We shall use the notion “functional memory” (Funktionsgedächtnis) to refer to the inhabited memory. Its most important characteristics are its dependency on a group and its selectivity; and that it is value bound and future oriented. In relation to this, the historical sciences constitute a memory of a second order, a memory of memories which includes what has lost its vital relationship to
the present. This memory of memories I propose to call “storage memory” (Speichergedächtnis). Nothing seems more common to us than the constant process of forgetting, the unrecoverable losses of valued knowledge and vital experiences. Under the wide roof of the historical sciences such uninhabited relics and collections, which have become ownerless, can be preserved, but they can also be prepared again in such ways that they may offer new possibilities for being connected to the functional memory. 7

Aleida Assmann’s double notions of functional and storage memories correspond, as she herself points out, to a high degree at least on a structural level to certain fundamental thoughts about the use of memory in the Middle Ages, notably as expressed by Hugh of St. Victor in the early twelfth century. Aleida Assmann refers not least to Hugh’s notion of arca sapientiae, the storage of knowledge by memory in the chest or box of the heart (the seat of memory in the Middle Ages) as this notion was developed especially in Hugh’s De arca Noe morali. 8

Aleida Assmann’s notions have obvious applications within the study of saints’ cults. The ways saints are remembered in their cults represent, often in rather extreme ways, versions of inhabited or functional memory. Conversely, a cult in the process of losing its importance and being marginalized, possibly even forgotten in the society in which it has its place, exemplifies a process of de-inhabitation of the cultural memory into a state of storage memory. From that state, as Aleida Assmann points out, it may possibly be reconnected to a state of functional memory since the narratives as well as the events and objects that form part of the storage memory are not completely forgotten but have only become uninhabited, seemingly irrelevant to the group for which it formerly served a function. Stated differently, one might say that while a saint’s cult that forms an important part of the identity of the community (or of communities) venerating the saint may become less important for that identity or even lose this function altogether, it may regain this function under certain circumstances.

Aleida Assmann’s notions thus form a framework within which to conceptualize the changing roles of saints and saints’ cults in (groups within) a society; however, the notions of functional and storage memory should not be seen as a simple dichotomy since it is evident that different degrees of inhabitation and functionality exist. The storage memory is basic to a functional memory, and it is a precondition for a potential refunctionalization of a stored memory. What in a particular historical
situation may lead to such a reinhabitation requires detailed investigation of the historical situation in question. Explaining why the cult of Canute the Duke in the later decades of the fifteenth century was no longer repressed as it had been during the previous two centuries, Lars Bisgaard has pointed to the political solution concerning the relation between the duchy of Schleswig and the kingdom of Denmark in 1460. This provides an adequate argument in the context of Bisgaard’s investigation, but it does not explain why, at this point, it would have been relevant to refunctionalize the cult, which seems to have become uninhabited during the previous two centuries. It seems unlikely, however, that this question can be answered authoritatively. Even so, it is the aim of this chapter to contextualize and discuss the question of the reinhabitation of the memory of Knud Lavard around 1500 and to suggest possible answers.

The Establishing of the Cult of Canute the Duke

Canute was son of King Eric the Good of Denmark, who set out on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1103 after having secured the establishment of the first Nordic Archbishopric in Lund through negotiations with Pope Paschal II, thus freeing the Scandinavian countries from the ecclesiastical dominance of Hamburg-Bremen. King Eric never reached Jerusalem as he died in Cyprus en route; he was succeeded on the throne consecutively by two of his brothers. Eric’s young son, Canute, was brought up in one of the principal families of the kingdom, the dynasty of Hvide. As Canute grew up, he became an important figure in Danish politics. According to the *Chronica Slavorum* by Helmond von Bosau (mid-twelfth century), Canute had been sent to Duke Lothar of Saxony (crowned German king in 1125 and Holy Roman emperor in 1133) for further education. However, by 1113 he was back in Denmark, and probably around 1115 he was made praefectus of Schleswig, near the Danish-German border, by his uncle King Niels (king of Denmark 1104–1134), the father of Canute’s future murderer, Prince Magnus. As King Lothar’s vassal Canute had also been made ruler (“knes”) of the Slavonic Obotrites in Saxon Holstein, south of the Danish border, in 1129. Altogether, Canute the Duke was a powerful young man in the years prior to his murder, appearing as a strong future candidate for the Danish throne, which, at the time, was not hereditary.

The story about the murder of Canute was primarily remembered and told from the perspective of those who supported him and who won the civil war that followed the murder. Unsurprisingly, the preserved
narratives are not in total agreement in all details. However, the overall picture, also accepted generally by modern historians, is that the main motivation for the murder was the fear of Magnus and his followers that Canute would be a strong competitor for the throne.¹¹ Toward the end of the royal Christmas celebrations of 1130/31 in Roskilde, a main royal seat at the time, to which Canute had been invited, Magnus managed to arrange a private meeting with him in Haraldsted Forest some distance away. There, on January 7, 1131, Magnus murdered Canute. Within a few years, it appears that Canute had begun to be regarded as a saint, not least by the monks at the nearby Benedictine monastery in Ringsted. The monastery had been established in 1135, and had taken over the late eleventh-century Church of St. Mary, in which Canute’s body had been buried. It is likely that a vita was composed as early as the 1130s, probably by Robert of Ely, thought to have been an English monk at the Ringsted monastery.¹² Only fragments of this book have been preserved; quite likely, it was one of the sources behind the St. Canute legend as it can be pieced together from the readings at Matins for the Offices of St. Canute the Duke as preserved in a unique thirteenth-century manuscript, now in the University Library of Kiel (Kiel Univ. Lib. MS S.H.8 A.8o). The manuscript contains the offices and masses for the two days on which Canute the Duke was celebrated, June 25, the day of his translation, and January 7, the day of his murder, possibly as copies of what was composed for the feast of the translation in 1170 or within the following decades. The legend and some of the liturgical songs were edited more than hundred years ago; recently the full liturgy has been edited, textually by Michael Chesnutt in 2003 and again together with transcriptions of the music in 2010 by John Bergsagel.¹³ Michael Chesnutt argued that a complicated process of adaptation and composition must lie behind the version preserved in the aforementioned thirteenth-century manuscript. John Bergsagel maintains the traditional understanding that the manuscript offices are best understood as copies of what he assumes must have been composed in connection with the translation in 1170.¹⁴

On June 25, 1170, Canute the Duke’s remains were translated to the high altar of what was then the monastic church in Ringsted, where he had already been buried (now known as St. Bendt’s Church), in accordance with the mentioned papal bull issued by Pope Alexander III on November 8, 1169, which a delegation sent to Rome had managed to obtain. As mentioned above, Valdemar the Great (as he is usually called in Denmark) became ruler of all of Denmark only after several years of civil
war (1146–1157) between several competitors for the Danish throne. During the early years of his reign, relations between the church and the king were not harmonious. Archbishop Eskil of Lund and King Valdemar supported rival papal candidates during the schism between Alexander III and Victor IV. Eskil spent some time in exile during the 1160s. It appears that he may originally have opposed the canonization of Canute the Duke as remarks in the legend, in lessons six and eight for matins in the office for the translation, which refer—unspecifically—to a time before Valdemar was king of all of Denmark, seem to imply:

Then, forming a plan to the honour (as they saw it) of Valdemar’s father and Sven’s uncle, they decided to transfer his remains from the grave to a bier. When word of this reached Archbishop Eskil, he tried to divert the young men’s wish from their declared purpose, not because he opposed their motives but out of reverence for the Holy See; and he issued an episcopal prohibition against it being done. However, displaying obstinacy to save face, they persisted in what they had begun and placed his bones, which had previously lain in the grave, on a bier.¹⁵

The remark about the “obstinacy” of the king and his cousin would seem to reflect an already existing local cult in Ringsted. In the eighth lesson for the translation, then, the acceptance of Eskil is related as Valdemar, now king, returns to his original plan:

Returning, I tell you, to his original purpose, when he saw how the miracles of his father, the glorious martyr, increased in number, he devoted himself to the cause of his translation and prudently consulted Archbishop Eskil in the matter. Proceeding sensibly, Eskil fulfilled the wise king’s wish. And sending a delegation under the leadership of Archbishop Stefan of Uppsala he legally obtained what he had justly sought from the supreme Pontiff Alexander.¹⁶

In the end then, Eskil accepted and presided at the canonization solemnities in Ringsted.¹⁷ This event may thus also possibly have marked the reconciliation between king and archbishop. Altogether, as already mentioned, it can be seen as the culmination of the establishment of the Danish royal house as protectors of the Roman Church in Denmark. Moreover, the event solidified the rule of the dynasty of King Valdemar, since the celebrations in Ringsted on June 25, 1170 were not only about St. Canute the Duke but also included the crowning of Valdemar’s young
son as future king of Denmark, the first of several attempts to transform the Danish throne, otherwise awarded by election, into a hereditary one.

The ceremony that combined the translation of Canute the Duke with the coronation of Canute VI promoted St. Canute as an official saintly protector of the kingdom. It is worth emphasizing how the orientation of Canute the Duke through his upbringing was far more international than that of his cousin and murderer, Magnus. Canute the Duke was an ideal royal saint, and, as Karsten Friis-Jensen has recently pointed out, this is how Saxo Grammaticus’ influential narrative about Canute the Duke in his *Gesta Danorum*, constructed the memory of the young duke. Friis-Jensen writes:

[...] it is evident that Saxo shows a thorough fascination with Christian sainthood, in spite of his classicising ideals. But the sainthood of St. Canute in Saxo is a very complex entity indeed. It contains elements of the miraculous, of ancestor worship and a family’s need for legitimacy, and finally of national assertiveness in times when Danish expansion took the form of crusade-like conquests in the eastern Baltic.\(^{18}\)

The aspect of St. Canute the Duke as a protector for the Danish expansion policy has been highlighted by Thomas Riis and others.\(^{19}\) However, while it seems well founded that the cult of Canute the Duke was appropriated in this way, the theological representations of Canute in the thirteenth-century offices and masses on the whole do not seem to emphasize him as a figure justifying expansion and holy war; he is rather constructed in a Christological light, as a pious, humble leader protecting and helping the weak.\(^{20}\) This image seems to be more in line with Carsten Breengaard’s understanding of the translation event. He argues that the event should not be seen primarily in the light of dynastic policy or as the victory of the crown over the church but rather in a wider social context:

This conflict had no bearing on the conditions under which the Church existed, whereas the latter was precisely the subject of the council at Ringsted in 1170. On the other hand, the Ringsted council had nothing whatever to do with an ideological confrontation between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*; it is argued that the central issue at this council was a hallowing of those social values which the clergy had long been preaching as the fundamentals of a Christian community.\(^{21}\)
If Breengaard is right, the emphasis of the preserved thirteenth-century offices would seem to lend some further support to Bergsagel’s (and the traditional) view that the manuscript is a copy of offices composed originally at the time of the canonization, since the offices do not in a marked way reflect the appropriations of the cult in terms of a nationalist policy of expansion or crusading, but rather celebrate the Christian values which were manifested by Knud Lavard to the benefit of the Danish nation.

Cults of St. Knud Lavard

As pointed out above, the presentations of St. Knud Lavard vary in the different sources. Among such different accounts, one of the most important is the so-called Roskilde Chronicle (*Chronicon Roskildense*), probably finished less than a decade after the murder of Knud Lavard, and thus long before his canonization, except for a chapter added later, which must have been written in the very early thirteenth century. This chronicle gives a less one-sided presentation of the various protagonists in the narrative; in particular, it is very favorably inclined toward Prince Magnus, withoutcondoning the murder. The last chapter briefly mentions Valdemar’s victory in the civil war and Eskil’s crowning of King Valdemar. Knud Lavard is positively described in the chronicle, although only in passing, and the murder is seen as instigated by the devil. Although the canonization of Knud Lavard is not mentioned in the chapter that was added later, Knud is twice referred to as a saint and martyr, in the capacity of his being Valdemar’s father. Interestingly, the oldest manuscript containing the Roskilde Chronicle is the thirteenth-century manuscript containing the offices and masses of St. Knud Lavard, and both parts of the manuscript are written by the same hand.

In addition to the chronicles mentioned thus far and the preserved liturgy of the time, a number of other versions of the offices of Knud Lavard exist, but from much later. In particular, a number of printed liturgies, breviaries, and missals are preserved around 1500 in liturgical books, mainly from Denmark but also from other Nordic countries. Variations between these late offices themselves and also between the thirteenth-century version and the later ones are quite considerable. This is particularly apparent with regard to the day or days on which the feasts of St. Knud Lavard were celebrated.

In the aforementioned letter to Archbishop Eskil announcing the canonization, the pope had specifically pointed to June 25 as the *dies*
natalis of St. Knud, rather than to the day of his death, which is not even mentioned in the papal letter:

Accordingly, therefore, insofar as we have received the mentioned king’s and your petition to canonise him, and assuming his merits by the mercy of God and the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, we have inscribed him in the list of the saints in accordance with the general council of our brothers, deciding by apostolic authority that you shall celebrate his dies natalis seven days before the kalends of July [i.e. June 25].

According to Saxo, Knud had (finally) been convinced by his men to carry a sword before going to Haraldsted Forest to meet Magnus on January 7, which he also tried—in vain—to draw as Magnus and his men assaulted and killed him. According to this narrative, Knud did not fulfill the requirements for being a martyr, and this might be taken as a possible explanation for why the pope did not mention Knud as a martyr, pointing to June 25 as his saint’s day. The legend, on the other hand, explicitly mentions that Knud Lavard refused to wear a weapon as he went to Haraldsted Forest and thus was killed without any attempt to defend himself. June 25, the day of the translation, also happened to be the day on which King Niels was murdered in Schleswig by angry townsmen in 1134, as he fled after having lost the battle at Fodevig (where Magnus was killed). Thomas Riis has speculated that Valdemar may have wished to have the celebration of Knud on that very day as a means of preventing a possible request for the canonization of King Niels.

As is obvious from the thirteenth-century offices, both January 7 and June 25 came to be celebrated, since the manuscript contains a full office and a mass for each of the two days, the In passione sancti Kanuti on January 7, and the In translacione sancti Kanuti on June 25. Many parts of the sung texts are the same for both days, as, for example, the Introit to the masses, indicated jointly for both days and explicitly characterizing Knud as a martyr in the rubric and the beginning of the sung text:

Introit on the holy day either the day of his passion or his translation:
Let us all rejoice in the Lord; celebrating the solemn day of his passion in honour of Knud the martyr angels rejoice and praise the Son of God [...].

As already implied, in the preserved manuscripts and printed versions, liturgical items often do not agree between the various offices and masses
in different localities and at different times. Mainly, I refer to the work of Michael Chesnutt and, most recently, Jan Brunius who, based on the recently catalogued fragment collection at the State Archives in Stockholm, Catalogus codicum mutilorum (CCM), available in a database, has published a survey of Nordic saints in medieval mass books including the preserved and now catalogued fragments. These, as summarized very briefly, confirm the impressions based previously on the few earlier known manuscripts and the surviving printed material.\textsuperscript{30}

I shall briefly mention a few examples confirming this: the incipit of the Introit in the Ringsted office, as we have just seen, is \textit{Gaudeamus omnes} whereas the printed \textit{Missale Lundense} of 1514 has \textit{Letabitur iustus} and yet another Introit for the feast of the translation, \textit{Justus non conturbabitur}.\textsuperscript{31} Also, the collect prayers and many other items do not coincide with what is found in the masses of the Ringsted offices. In Sweden there are very few sources for the cult of Knud Lavard. However, in Västerås in eastern Sweden (northwest of Stockholm, southwest of Uppsala), Knud Lavard was celebrated and a number of records of masses and offices in his honor are preserved throughout the Middle Ages, mainly for January 7, but in one case seemingly for June 25. Otherwise there are only scant notices of celebrations for Knud Lavard in Sweden.\textsuperscript{32}

In Lund, as already indicated, both feasts for St. Knud Lavard were celebrated, as was generally the case in Denmark.\textsuperscript{33} In its calendar for January, the \textit{Missale Aboense} (1488) indicates a feast for St. Canute the King on January 7, although the \textit{dies natalis} for Canute the King was July 10.\textsuperscript{34} Finnish scholars have explained this as a result of coincidences involving not only the two Canutes but also St. Henry of Finland, which in the end made Knud Lavard lose the day to Knud the King.\textsuperscript{35}

A different type of calendar indicates the celebration of a “Canutus” on January 7, the day of Knud Lavard’s martyrdom. This is the so-called Gotland Runic Calendar of 1328, written on parchment and preserved only through Ole Worm’s early seventeenth-century transcription. Worm published the calendar, in the belief that it was Danish, in his \textit{Fasti Danici} of 1626; in more recent times its provenance has been relocated to Gotland.\textsuperscript{36}

A much wider and, as it seems, much more important reception of the cult of St. Knud Lavard, and very likely the main phenomenon behind the scattered records of the cult mentioned here, occurred through the establishing of guilds in the saint’s honor.\textsuperscript{37} The medieval guilds have been studied for more than a hundred years, and preserved statutes of medi-
eval Danish guilds were published around 1900 by the Danish historian Camillus Nyrop. Since then, a number of historians have tried to understand the activities and the social and legal functions of these guilds.38 Guilds in honor of St. Knud Lavard were established quite early and seem to have been major and powerful centers for the promotion of the saint as well as possibly of trade and other financial and social agendas. Guilds of a St. Knud (it is not always clear which of the two saints) existed during the Middle Ages in a number of places around the Baltic Sea most of them—at least in periods—belonging to Denmark. These include Ystad as well as Malmö (both in present-day Sweden), Visby on Gotland, Ringsted on Zealand, of course, and importantly also in Schleswig and Flensburg in the duchies in the Danish–German borderlands, as well as in the Estonian town of Tallinn, known as Reval during the medieval period.39

One problem that—as just implied—is reflected in many preserved statutes is that it can often be impossible to determine whether a St. Knud guild (a Knudsgilde in Danish) was in honor of Knud Lavard or Knud the King. Often references are simply to St. Knud which makes it impossible to know which of these two related martyr saints, both canonized during the twelfth century, was meant. The general opinion in the present is that the guilds seem originally to have been founded in honor of Knud Lavard. Beginning in around 1300, however, Knud the King seems to have regained his position as the main Danish saint, and he may in several cases have replaced Knud Lavard as patron of the guilds. As Lars Bisgaard has noted, some historians have suggested that guilds by this time could no longer distinguish between the two identically named saints, so that the two saints were conflated. Bisgaard connects this mysterious change of patron to the highly contentious political conflicts concerning the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein from around the second half of the thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century. These caused the perception of Canute Lavard, in the words of Bisgaard, to change “from the venerable father of Valdemar I to a dubious ancestor of the dukes in Schleswig.” Consequently, his cult may have been suppressed by the Danish kings during this period.40 An official repression of the cult of St. Knud Lavard during this time may also be reflected in the lack of visual representations of Knud Lavard during this period,41 and in the greater number of preserved offices for King Knud than for Knud Lavard.42 A certain renaissance of the cult of Knud Lavard may have taken place in Denmark around 1500, especially on Zealand.43
One of the earliest sources for the establishing of the Knud guilds, written by King Valdemar I in ca. 1177, is a letter addressed to a group of “Gotland-travellers” who have recently established a guild, which the king praises and also wants not only to protect and support but even to join:

For this reason, we embrace the connection with your brotherhood and partnership, which you have established with a healthy intention and a most useful foresight in honour of the martyr St. Knud, with the grace of much favour [...].

Therefore, we instruct your community, that the annual alms, which are received in this fraternity, either with you in Gotland or in all towns of our kingdom, wherever the company of blessed Knud is celebrated, shall be transferred to the place of this martyr by faithful men, [...].

Historians have understood this to concern a guild in honor of Knud Lavard; this seems reasonable in view of King Valdemar’s particular connection to this cult, but also because the source for the letter is a copy from the sixteenth century preserved in Ringsted in a collection of letters concerning royal gifts to the shrine of Knud Lavard. The letter seems, on the one hand, to point to the religious importance of this brotherhood for the promotion and support of the cult of St. Knud Lavard. On the other hand it may also be indicative of the guild’s political significance, since the king declares that he wants to be a member and “we will be part of everything in which your lawful institution will consent with the determination of our authority.”

The letter mentions trade and possible disagreements with opponents, which led Lauritz Weibull in particular to regard the guilds of St. Knud as having been trade organizations from the beginning.

In any case, whichever social functions such guilds had, they also had a religious and festive practice connecting them to their patron saint. The beginning of a preserved fragment (from an eighteenth-century transcription) of statutes dated 1231 for a confraternity specifying St. Knud Lavard as its patron not only mentions the patron saint, but specifically calls attention to the saint’s passion. This seems to provide a close identification between saint and confraternity, emphasizing a contemporary aspect of functionality: “Statutes for the society of St. Knud of Ringsted, martyred in the forest of Haraldsted, which senior and wise men once invented for the use of this society; they established these to serve the members in good as well as difficult times.” Interestingly, a guild explicitly dedicated
to St. Knud the King could hold its councils on specified feast days, which included both of Knud Lavard’s feast days, as well as the feast day of St. Knud the King, as seen here in statutes from a Malmö guild around 1300:

Also, we have assigned the following four days for celebrating the general council […] The first day is the Feast of St. Knud the day after the Feast of St. John the Baptist; the second is the birthday [saint’s day] of St. Knud the King and Martyr; the third the Feast of St. Knud the day after Epiphany, and the fourth on the second drinking day of the society.\(^49\)

Similarly, the statutes for a guild in Malmö (ca. 1350), where it cannot be determined which of the two saints Knud was the official patron, indicate days for holding masses during the year for deceased brethren and for the preservation of the guild on feast days including the days of martyrdom of both Knuds:

Concerning masses to be held. For the preservation of the guild and the freeing of the souls of the dead brothers, we submit that five masses should be held every year; the first on Pentecost […]; the second time on the day of St. Knud the King […]; the third time on St. Knud’s day which comes after Christmas […].\(^50\)

The last day must refer to St. Knud Lavard’s day of martyrdom on January 7, the day after Epiphany. The guilds in honor of St. Knud, whichever Knud that might have been, provide us with the insight that, at least as time went by, the distinctions between the two Knuds were not always clearly marked, but also that in a number of cases the feast days of both were marked, remembered, and celebrated, regardless of which Knud was the (main) patron. One would imagine, however, although this is not specified in the preserved documents, that the mass formulas would have depended on the day of the celebration, and that the reference to the days of St. Knud Lavard would have necessitated a mass for Knud Lavard, thus making an actual forgetting or repression of the cult difficult.

This situation brings to mind the celebration of St. Knud the King on St. Knud Lavard’s day of martyrdom, January 7, in Turku.\(^31\) That it was possible to substitute one Knud for the other, deliberately or not, in Turku as well as in some guilds, points to a loss of the functional memory of the Saints Canute, making it unimportant to the communities in question which of the saints actually was celebrated.
Tallinn has preserved much material on its guild of St. Knud and how members of the guild played a crucial role in the local Lutheran Reformation. Whether it could originally have been founded as a guild in honor of St. Knud Lavard seems doubtful. In any case, the cults of the two saints Knud played a substantial role throughout most of the Baltic Sea region. On the other hand, it is much less clear to what extent these cults and the saints themselves were remembered in close connection with the historical narratives, indeed to what extent there was a consciousness of the protagonists of the cults, at least after the beginning of the fourteenth century. The overall picture points in the direction of the already-mentioned idea of a general de-inhabitation of the cultural memory of St. Knud Lavard underway toward the end of the thirteenth century.

Refunctionalizing St. Knud Lavard?

Summarizing the tentative results of the previous section, Canute the Duke seems in the later Middle Ages to a great extent to have disappeared from the functional memory of the Canute guilds. The same may have been the case more generally in late medieval Denmark, possibly—as mentioned earlier (and suggested by Lars Bisgaard)—because of royal suppression of his cult. However, the name of St. Canute and a cult of this saint clearly continued to exist in some places, something which also entailed the preservation of the feast days of St. Canute the Duke. But the memories of his identity and of the narratives about him seem in these situations to have become uninhabited and to no longer have clear ties to contemporary concerns. The area around Ringsted is probably an exception to this, since the shrine and the cult of Canute the Duke remained in force there until the Reformation. Similarly, the pilgrims’ chapel in nearby Haraldsted, ruins of which are still extant, was closely associated with the cult of Knud Lavard.

The way a guild was identified through its patron and its purpose as recorded in its statutes must be assumed to have had an important share in the perceived identities of its members. At a point where this collective identity was no longer explicitly connected to a functional memory of the patron saint, the same would have been true for most individual members of the guild. They would most likely no longer perceive their identity as connected to Knud Lavard’s doings, his life and death or the texts and music celebrating his feast days, even if the guild had originally been founded in his honor, and even if Knud Lavard masses were still sung on
(some of) the special feast days of the guild. The collective as well as the individual memory of Knud Lavard, in such situations, had then become a storage memory, because behind the name and the practices of the guild, it would still be possible to trace back to historical information and to retrieve the background for the lost corporate identity of the guild. The memory was not deleted; it had become uninhabited for (at least most) members.

As also briefly touched upon earlier in this chapter, there are signs of a reinhabitation of this memory in Denmark around 1500. As Bisgaard has emphasized, there was no longer any reason to repress the cult, but the question remains as to whether there were particular reasons to revive it. The documentation for a purported revival shortly before the Danish Lutheran reformation (officially imposed by Christian III in 1536) is too scant to allow any strong conclusions to be drawn. Altogether, however, across the Reformation, an overall picture shows that the cult is represented in all Danish printed liturgical books of the early sixteenth century and that there was a literary and historical interest in the traditional narrative about the murder of Canute the Duke in the sixteenth century after the abolishment of the actual cult. The late sixteenth-century saint’s play, *Ludus de sancto Canuto duce*, which is likely a rewriting of an earlier—now lost—saint’s play from Ringsted, and the Lutheran church minister and historian Anders Sørensen Vedel’s rewriting of an earlier ballad about Knud Lavard (also preserved from the sixteenth century) in accordance with post-Reformation sensibilities are remarkable manifestations of such an interest. Again, several centuries later, reinhabitations of the memory of St. Knud Lavard occurred in Danish poems, songs, novels, and plays during the so-called Romantic medieval revivals of the nineteenth century, as well as in other literary treatments of Knud Lavard up to this day. Such reinhabitations depend on new historical circumstances; they are concerned with an interest in identity, appropriating figures of the past as models for moral identification. The more specific circumstances for wanting to refunctionalize the narratives of such figures, including Knud Lavard, are primarily to be approached through interpretation of the reappropriated narratives in their cultural contexts.

The Danish literary critic Hans Brix has sought to explain why the *Ludus de sancto Canuto duce* came to be preserved in a manuscript dated to 1574. He found the background in the political turmoil of the 1520s, without being very explicit about the reasons for a particular interest in Knud Lavard at that time. The *Ludus* has clear local ties to Ringsted (the copyist...
of the manuscript was a senior teacher at the Latin school in Ringsted), and an interest in the cult in Ringsted in the late fifteenth century is not strange, since the local memory may simply never have become uninhabited, which could explain the interest in Knud Lavard even after the Reformation. The continued presence in the church of the shrine of Knud Lavard and the painted depiction of the saint in the vault above the intersection of the nave and transept would most likely have been able to keep a functional memory living in Ringsted throughout the Middle Ages.58

A likely scenario could be that the possible revival of the cult around 1500 and the interest in the figure of Knud Lavard had its origin in the local milieu of Ringsted, where his memory was (probably) not uninhabited. The early sixteenth century was a period of particular political and religious turmoil in Denmark, culminating in a civil war and finally in the Danish Reformation in 1536. Thus, the narrative about an honest Christian, a hero of the past, a holy person, innocently killed because of a struggle for royal power, may well have been seen as worth a revival during these decades.

Altogether, there are good reasons to think of a post-Reformation re-inhabitation of the memory of Knud Lavard as part of a quest for a national historical identity at a time when some traditional religious values and traditional narratives based on the saints’ calendar of the Roman Church were endangered for theological (ideological) reasons. The Ludus seems to corroborate this, since it represents Canute the Duke primarily as a Christian hero and contains none of the traditional cultic characteristics of a saint’s play. It is impossible to say whether this is the result of a rewriting of a pre-Reformation saint’s play at the time of the copying of the manuscript almost forty years after the Reformation.

In any case, around the same time, in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Lutheran humanist Anders Sørensen Vedel deliberately worked to establish a Danish historical identity. Because Norway was ruled by the Danish Crown, aspects of Norwegian identity might also be considered to contribute to a larger sense of Danish historical identity. Vedel did this partly by translating Saxo’s Gesta Danorum into Danish (for the first time, published in 1575) and partly through collecting and rewriting ballads sung among the nobility. Many of these ballads were about historical heroes of the past; some of these were medieval royal saints like Knud Lavard, Knud the King, and the major Norwegian saint King Olav (venerated throughout and beyond the Nordic region during the Middle Ages). Vedel published a volume of Danish ballads, A Book of 100 Ballads,
in 1591. Vedel’s refunciation of these tales of saints, including that of Knud Lavard, involved a critical reassessment of the narrative. This entailed the purging of what Vedel explicitly viewed as Catholic superstitions, as well as an emphasis on the moral and heroic aspects of the narrative, so that Knud Lavard appeared as a figure to identify with in the new Lutheran Danish context.

New historical situations can make a stored memory vital or at least useful again. Such favorable historical circumstances may not occur everywhere in the same way, or even at all. Knud Lavard’s memory did not, naturally, have a similar relevance all around the Baltic Sea as in Denmark after the Reformation, and thus it did not become inhabited again outside Denmark; here, however, I have tried to refunctionalize this storage memory as a resource for understanding the exemplified difference in the development of the memory of this saint around the Baltic Sea.

NOTES


2 This collaborative research project was carried out by groups at five European universities (2011–2014) funded by the research councils of the respective countries. I herewith gratefully acknowledge the support of the Danish Council for Independent Research: Humanities (FKK).

3 Two other chapters in this volume also form part of this subproject, see the articles by Tracey R. Sands and Martin Wångsgaard Jürgensen in this volume. See also Anu Mänd’s chapter in this volume, which is part of the subproject carried
out at the University of Tallinn: “Shifting Identities: Communities in Medieval and Early Modern Livonia (c. 1200–c. 1700) through the Prism of Saints.”


For modern references, see note 1 above.


The main medieval liturgical textual source materials, detached, however, from the liturgical context, were printed in M. C. Gertz, ed., *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum* (Copenhagen, 1910), 2:189–247. These include the Matins lessons, some texts of liturgical songs as well as the few preserved fragments from the almost completely lost vita of Canute the Duke by Robert of Ely, probably written in the 1130s, and also Pope Alexander III’s canonization bull (1169). In Michael Chesnutt, *The Medieval Danish Liturgy of St. Knud Lavard* (Copenhagen, 2003) the full text of the liturgy is edited and compared to other (much later) preserved printed liturgies for St. Knud Lavard around 1500. Finally, and most recently, the above-mentioned thirteenth-century manuscript has been published in facsimile with full transcriptions of text and music in Bergsagel, ed., *The Offices and Masses of St. Knud Lavard*, 2 vols., with introductions and commentary.


In Book 14 of Saxo’s Gesta Danorum it is made clear that Eskil presided over the solemnities in Ringsted on June 25, 1170. See the net edition of Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* (14.40.12) maintained by The Royal Library, Copenhagen: http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/14/40/index.htm. As pointed
out by Dubois and Ingwersen, “St. Knud Lavard: A Saint for Denmark,” p. 154, the somewhat later Older Zealand Chronicle (Vetus chronica Sialandie), mid-thirteenth century, claims that it was the bishop of Roskilde, Absalon, who carried out the solemnities. Olrik, Knud Lavards Liv, pp. 284–85, combines the two statements, believing that Absalon assisted Eskil. Saxo’s account must be preferred, not only because it was written closer to the event, but also because of Saxo’s connection to Absalon, his patron. He would surely have mentioned it if Absalon had been the presider, cf. Karsten Friis-Jensen, “In the Presence of the Dead,” see esp. p. 202, and also p. 197 concerning the relations between Eskil and Valdemar.


21 Breengaard, Muren om Israels Hus, English summary, p. 332, see the full discussion on pp. 263–319.
23 Gertz, Scriptores Minores, pp. 27 and 33.
24 Riis, “The Historical Background,” p. xxiv.

26 See the Royal Library’s aforementioned net edition of the Gesta Danorum (13.6.6 and 13.6.9): http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dst/13/6/index.htm. See also Friis-Jensen, “In the Presence of the Dead,” p. 203.
28 Riis, “The Historical Background,” p. xx.


See *Missale lundense* (Paris, 1514), “De sancto Kanuto duce et martyre,” f. 184 r. and “De sancto Kanuto duce translatio eiusdem,” f. 199 r–v. I have consulted the online version of the Royal Library, Copenhagen on 9 February 2013. See also Chesnutt, *The Medieval Danish Liturgy*, p. 36.


See Chesnutt, *The Medieval Danish Liturgy* (as in note 21).

Brunius, *Atque Olavi*, pp. 35–36. The provenance of this missal is Åbo, Finland (today most often referred to as Turku).


Nils Lithberg and Elias Wessén, eds., *Den gotländska runkalendern* (Stockholm, 1939), p. 2 and facsimile of p. 1 verso from Worm’s original copying of the runes preserved in a manuscript now in the Royal Library, Copenhagen. See also Elias Wessén’s Preface, pp. vii–xiv.


See Bisgaard, “The Transformation of St. Canute Guilds,” p. 82, and also the brief summary of St. Knud guilds still in activity after the Lutheran reformation and their histories in Wallin, *De nordiska Knutsgillena*, pp. 11–17.

Bisgaard, “The Transformation of St. Canute Guilds,” p. 88. Bisgaard here claims that “no mural in the two-hundred-year period 1250–1450” of Knud Lavard is extant. However, at least one exception to this must be mentioned: the famous picture of St. Knud Lavard in the western vault of the intersection of the nave and transept in St. Bendt’s Church in Ringsted (the Church where St. Knud Lavard’s shrine was placed on its high altar). This has been dated to probably shortly before 1300 by the art historian Søren Kaspersen in the volumes about Danish murals in the Middle Ages published by the National Museum of Denmark, see Søren Kaspersen, “Dynastipolitik,” in Danske Kalkmalerier, vol. 2, Tidlig Gotik 1275–1375, ed. Ulla Hastrup (Copenhagen, 1989), pp. 84–87.

This is difficult to know since very little information about Danish liturgy between the thirteenth century and the printed liturgical books of the early sixteenth century is extant. However, measured by the situation in Swedish liturgical books and manuscripts, Knud Lavard was definitely celebrated much less than Knud the King, see Brunius, Atque Olavi, pp. 33–38 and the tables pp. 108–14. It must be remembered in this context, that during the fifteenth century the three Scandinavian kingdoms were united in the Kalmar union under the Danish Crown (agreed in 1397).

See the presentation in Chesnutt, The Medieval Danish Liturgy, pp. 67–76, of preserved poems, prayers, and, not least, the saint’s play Ludus de sancto Canuto duce, preserved, however, only from after the Danish Lutheran reformation in a unique manuscript dated to 1574 (as indicated in the manuscript), but possibly based on a pre-reformation play. Anders Sørensen Vedel’s late sixteenth-century rewritings of ballads, and the slightly earlier texts on which he based them, may be taken as a sign of a fairly active interest in Knud Lavard and other historical figures at this time. See Petersen, “The Image of St. Knud Lavard in his Liturgical Offices and its Historical Impact” (note 20, above). This could be difficult to account for if it does not derive from a relatively active cult of the saint around 1500. Further, visual representations of Knud Lavard in Danish churches are known again after 1460, see Bisgaard, “The Transformation of St. Canute Guilds,” p. 88.

C.A. Christensen, Herluf Nielsen and Lauritz Weibull, eds., Diplomatarium Danicum (Copenhagen, 1976–77), 3:93–95, quotation, pp. 94–95: “Inde est quod uestræ fraternitatis ac societatis connexionem, quam in honore sancti Kanuti martyris salubri consilio atque utili<ssi>ma prouidentia incoastis, magni faworis gratia amplectimur […]. Propteræa præcipimus uniuersitati uestræ, quate- nus eleemosynæ annuales, quæ proueniunt de cadem fraternitate, siue apud uos in
Gutlandia, sitae in uniuersis ciuitatibus regni nostri, ubi conuiium beati Kanuti celebratur, ad locum eiusdem martyris per fideles homines transferantur [...]"


46 Christensen, Nielsen and Weibull, eds., *Diplomatarium Danicum*, 3:94: “[...] et in omnibus, in quibus uestra consenserit licta institutio, nostra authoritatis consensu participabimur.”

47 See Weibull, “St Knut i Österled,” pp. 88–89. See also the critical discussion in Gilkær, “In honore sancti Kanuti,” pp. 136–41; without denying that the tradesmen would often be members of these guilds, Gilkær doesn’t accept the claim that trade was the main objective at this point. Gilkær rather points to the common religious function of the Knud guilds up to the mid-thirteenth century. See further Bisgaard, “The Transformation of St. Canute Guilds,” pp. 77–78 and 83–84, pointing also to legal aspects of the guilds in the formation of municipal government.


51 See above at note 34–35.

52 See the discussion in Anu Mänd’s article in this volume. See also Wallin, *De nordiska Knutsgillena och reformationen*, pp. 15, 96, 111, and 128–47.

53 See above at note 43.

54 In general, the notion of a saint was not abolished by Lutheran reformers; saints were to be remembered but not venerated. See Carol Piper Heming, *Protestants and the Cult of the Saints in German-Speaking Europe, 1517–1531* (Kirksville, MO, 2003) and Nils Holger Petersen, “The Marian Feasts Across the Lutheran Reformation in Denmark: Continuity and Change,” in *Words and Matter: The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval Parish Life*, ed. Jonas Carlquist and Virginia Langum (Stockholm, 2015), pp. 199–219.

55 See above, note 43.
In the above-mentioned Copenhagen project, this reception history is studied, see Petersen, “The Image of St. Knud Lavard in His Liturgical Offices and Its Historical Impact” (see note 20). Here the sixteenth-century literary receptions of the Knud Lavard history (mentioned in this chapter) are discussed along with the modern treatments of Knud Lavard in Axel Juel’s play *Knud Lavard* (Copenhagen, 1932) and Maria Helleberg’s recent novel *Knud Lavard* (Copenhagen, 2011). Also included is B. S. Ingemann’s first historical novel, *Waldemar den Store og hans Mænd* (*Valdemar the Great and His Men*, 1824). This narrative poem, written in changing meters, follows the protagonist Duke Valdemar and his struggle to become king of Denmark and to secure the throne for his lineage. Although the action of the novel takes place after Knud Lavard’s death, he is an important reference throughout the narrative. St. Knud Lavard is seen as the ideal royal and saintly figure. At crucial points in the narrative, it is made clear that Christian salvation for the country has been embodied in the royalty manifested in the figures of St. Knud Lavard, Valdemar, and the future King Knud, who was crowned on the day of Knud Lavard’s translation, June 25, 1170. Each such—since the Middle Ages mainly artistic—representation of the Knud Lavard narrative appropriates or reinhabits the established medieval narrative, functionalising the memory of Knud Lavard in a new cultural context.


Concerning the painting in the vault, see above note 41.

See further the discussion in Petersen, “The Image of St. Knud Lavard in His Liturgical Offices and Its Historical Impact” of the *Ludus de sancto Canuto duce* and Vedel’s rewriting of a Knud Lavard ballad. The appropriations of St. Knud Lavard across the Reformation will be treated along with other topics concerning sainthood across the reformations of the Scandinavian countries in Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen, Nils Holger Petersen and Tracey R. Sands, *Saints Across the Reformation*, in preparation.