



**Dannebrog 800**



2 The history of the Dannebrog is the history of Denmark

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# The Dannebrog - the legend of the Dannebrog's origin

There is a beautiful legend attached to the Dannebrog. Valdemar the Victorious (1170-1241) was on crusade to Estonia with his army. During the Battle of Lyndanisse on 15th June 1219, a red banner with a white cross came down from the heavens. The Danish army were victorious, and since that time this banner has been the Danish flag, which we call the Dannebrog. The legend was first recounted by historians at the start of the 16th century, and since the start of the 17th century it has been firmly established in all subsequent histories of Denmark.

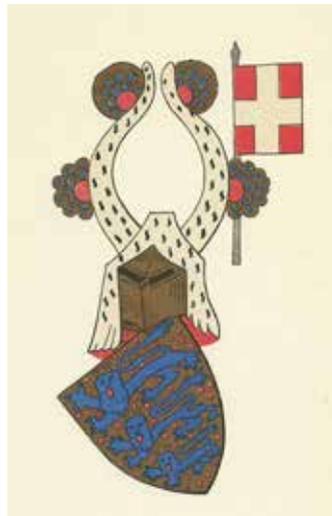
In 1809 the artist C.A. Lorenzen gave this legend visual form, which has helped to preserve the legend and keep it popular up to the present day. The legend thus has its own history.

The events of the battle of 15th June 1219 cannot be proven from contemporary sources, and today we know that there might be other explanations behind the legend, for instance that someone brought the flag with them. But for centuries that date has been associated with the history of the Dannebrog. It is therefore completely natural for this legend to be included when Danes celebrate their old flag, as it was decided to do this year, 800 years after that date!

# The oldest mention of the Dannebrog

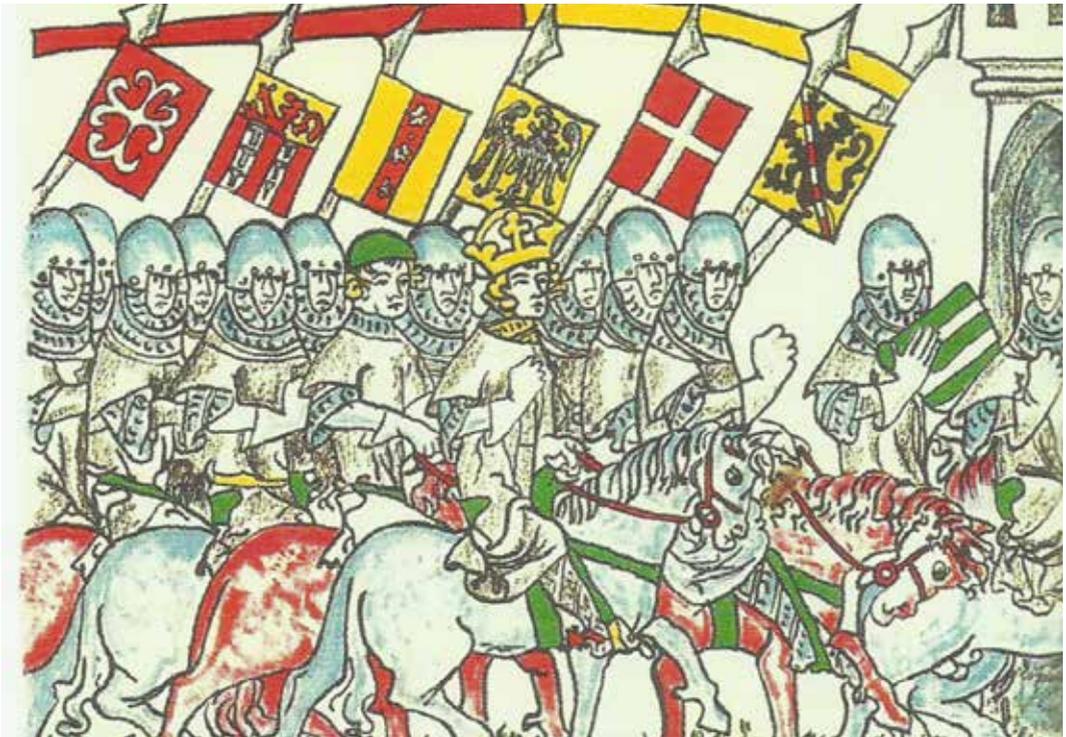
We do not know with any certainty when the kings of Denmark started to use a red banner with a white cross on it, but most indications are that it must have been in the middle of the 14th century. The oldest depiction known to us today of a red flag with a white cross in connection with Denmark is in the Dutch *Gelre Armorial*, which appeared in the years after 1370. Under the designation “die coninc van denmarke”, the king of Denmark, can be seen a gold shield with three blue lions or leopards between scattered red hearts, a coat of arms borne by the Danish kings since the 12th century.

The reproduction of the coat of arms shows that the banner shown may have been in use for some time before 1370. In another Dutch armorial, the *Bellenville Armorial*, from roughly the same time, the Danish coat of arms can be seen, but without the banner. But on one side of the Danish coats of arms in this armorial, the word *Denenbroce* appears next to a shield featuring a cross. This could be the word that became “Dannebrog”, which is what we call our flag. We can see the term *Danebroka* in a Swedish text from 1439 and in a Danish text from 1478. The meaning of the word is uncertain, but it probably means “cloth or banner of the Danes”. It was probably *Valdemar IV Atterdag*, who reigned 1340-1375, who began to use the cross flag as a banner.



# The Dannebrog – one of the oldest European cross flags

In connection with the European crusades of 1100-1300 the cross became a widespread and popular symbol. It was placed on armour, horse blankets and banners to signal that people were fighting for the Christian faith.



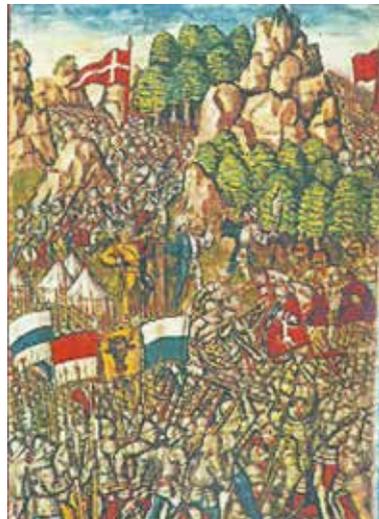
Therefore, contemporary drawings and objects display numerous examples of a red flag with a white cross without this having anything to do with Denmark or the Dannebrog.

The two great orders of knights that arose in connection with the crusades, the Knights Templar and the Knights of St John, carried, respectively, a white flag with a red cross, and a red flag with a white cross. These cross flags are today recognisable in a variety of contexts. The flag of the Knights Templar was later used as the flag of England, and today forms one element of the flag of the United Kingdom. The Knights of St John established themselves in Malta, and therefore up until 1789 Malta used a flag that resembled the Dannebrog. Until 1945 a red emblem with a white cross was part of the Italian national coat of arms, and it is still used today in Savoy as the emblem of the region. The Swiss flag was first used in 1339, but was not used as the national flag until much later. The Austrian flag – which is not a cross flag – dates from 1230, but it was not used in the period 1700-1945. The Dannebrog was thus one of the many cross flags that were in use in Europe in the Middle Ages.

But it is remarkable that it is the only one to have survived a straight 700-800 years as a national flag in constant use. This makes the Dannebrog the oldest national flag in the world.

# Valdemar IV Atterdag and the Dannebrog

Valdemar IV Atterdag became king of Denmark in 1340. In 1347 he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and on his way home visited the Holy Roman Emperor Louis IV (known as the Bavarian). He carried a red banner with a white cross, which can be seen in many depictions. Many examples of the use of a red emblem with a white cross are thus known with certainty to have a connection with this imperial banner. Valdemar IV Atterdag spent his childhood and youth at the court of Louis IV, so it seems likely that, following his pilgrimage and in order to demonstrate his association with Louis, the Danish king began to carry a banner corresponding to that of the Holy Roman Emperor – a red flag with a white cross. Valdemar died in 1375, and the reproduction in the Dutch Gelre Armorial from around 1380 shows that it was generally known in Europe that the Danish king carried this cross banner during his time as regent. It may therefore be asserted that the Dannebrog, as we know it today, has been used as the Danish royal flag since the mid-14th century at any rate.



# The Dannebrog in the 15th century

We do not know if Queen Margrethe, who was regent of Denmark 1375-1412, used the Dannebrog as a banner. However, her successor, Eric of Pomerania, who sat on the throne until 1439, was interested in using this banner. In a seal from 1398 bearing his coat of arms, he had the first field show the three lions from the old Danish coat of arms together hold the Dannebrog in their paws. A clever and interesting heraldic detail. This shows that the banner was also well known in Margrethe's time.



This is also emphasised in a seal used by Everschip Herred (Eiderstedt) in Slesvig. This appears in a seal on a document dating from 1414, which shows that the Danish banner was being used as a ship's flag in the same period.



According to historian Christern Pedersen, when Eric of Pomerania had to leave Denmark in 1438, he took with him several of the country's treasures from Kalundborg Castle, including a "banner called dannebrog".

# The Dannebrog in the 16th century



After King Hans came to the throne in 1483, there is greater evidence of the use of the Dannebrog. The king was apparently interested in the use of the Dannebrog. Thus it can be clearly seen on the edging of his coronation cloak from 1483.

In 1500 King Hans carried out a raid on the small state of Dithmarschen. He took the Dannebrog with him, most likely in the hope that it would bring him victory. Unfortunately, the campaign ended in catastrophe. The king's army of hired cavalymen was beaten by a peasant army, who also captured the flag. A German source says that this was "the king's main banner, which was said to have been given to a Danish king in earlier times by a miracle against the Russians". It was hung up in Dithmarschen's main church in Wöhrden. In 1559 this flag was recaptured by Frederik II and was then placed in Slesvig Church, where it subsequently remained.

It is worth noting that at this very time, in the first decades of the 16th century, historians formulated the legend of the Dannebrog as having been sent down to the Danes from Heaven in 1219. Perhaps these facts are connected.



In a manuscript from 1585 about artillery, the Dannebrog can clearly be seen as the army's banner together with a banner featuring the Oldenburg colours of yellow and red. This manuscript was later used to teach the art of war to Christian IV.

# The Dannebrog at sea



Apart from the king and his armed forces, there must have been a need previously for the use of banners or similar on ships to designate nationality.

It has been thought that from early on, Danes used a red banner featuring two ravens, but nothing is known for certain. From around 1500, however, we can confirm that the Dannebrog was used as an identifying

flag on Danish ships.

A number of preserved murals dating from the start of the 16th century show the Dannebrog being used on the ships depicted. The frontispiece of a 1550 book on navigation shows a ship flying the Dannebrog both as the masthead flag and as a pennant.

In the 16th century the Dannebrog became the emblem of Danish nationality and one way to identify both warships and trading vessels.



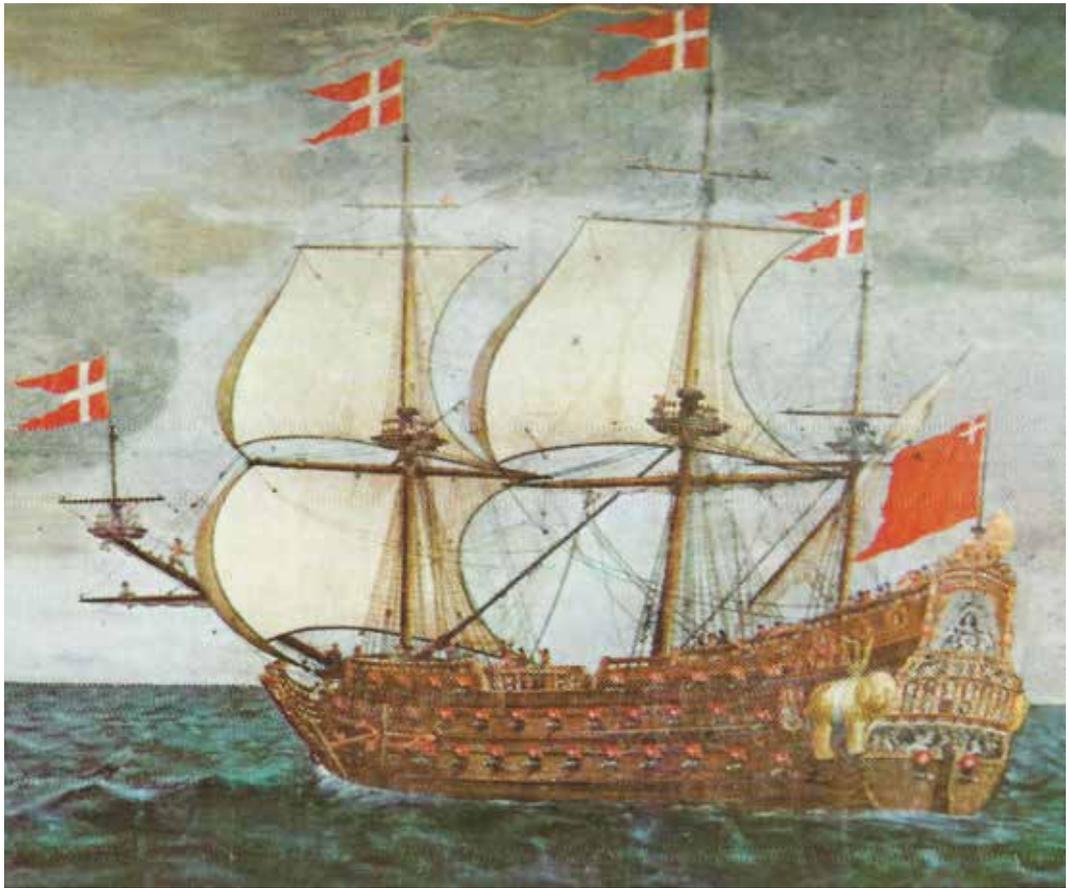
Rudolf von Deventer's 1585 textbook on artillery shows this battle between a Danish and a Swedish warship during the war of 1563-70. The illustration clearly shows the Dannebrog being used. Note the Swedish flag. At that time the Swedes had not yet introduced the cross flag they later came to use.

# The Dannebrog and Christian IV.



In the 1580s, the later Christian IV (1577-1648) drew in his exercise book a fictitious battle between Danish and Swedish warships. In his youth the king was greatly interested in naval warfare, ships and flags. Christian IV saw that there was a need for regulating the various forms in which the Dannebrog was being used.

Rectangular flags, pennants and swallowtail flags were used side by side. It was also important to be able to clearly distinguish between the royal ships and privately-owned ships. Therefore, in 1625 Christian IV introduced a resolution that only royal possessions such as castles and fortresses, and the navy's ships, could fly a swallowtail flag, i.e. a Dannebrog split into two on the fly side. All others should fly an ordinary rectangular flag, known as a square. It is thus Christian IV who introduced the swallowtail flag, which only the Scandinavian countries use as state flags. The king cared deeply that this resolution should be upheld. This was defined more closely in later naval warfare articles and resolutions.



This contemporary painting at Gaunø Castle of the warship "Friderich", which was in service 1649-71, shows the use of the state and naval flag that was introduced in 1625. The ship's gun ports are painted as square Dannebrog flags.

# The Dannebrog as a state and merchant flag in the 18th

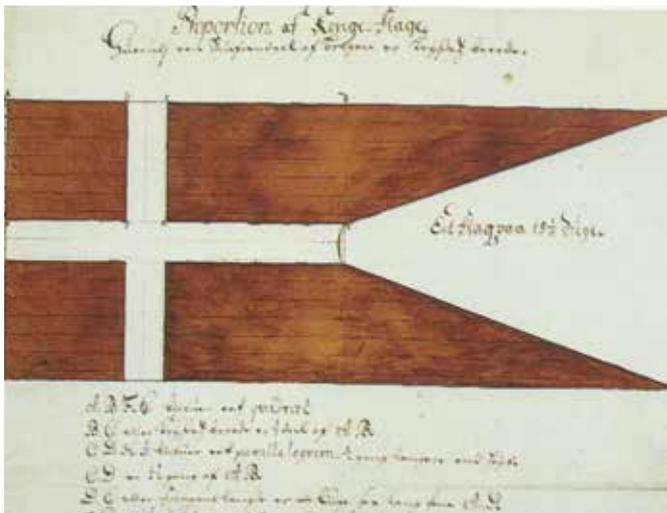


In the 18th century, the Dannebrog gained widespread usage as the state, naval and merchant flag for the Denmark-Norway Dual Monarchy. This is largely due to increased trading on the world's oceans, which took ships far



and wide. At all fortresses in Denmark and Norway and in the colonies, the Dannebrog flying was seen as a sign of the Danish king's sovereignty and might.

# Dannebrog usage regulated



In 1696 the proportions of the royal flag, as the swallowtail flag was termed, were fixed for the first time.

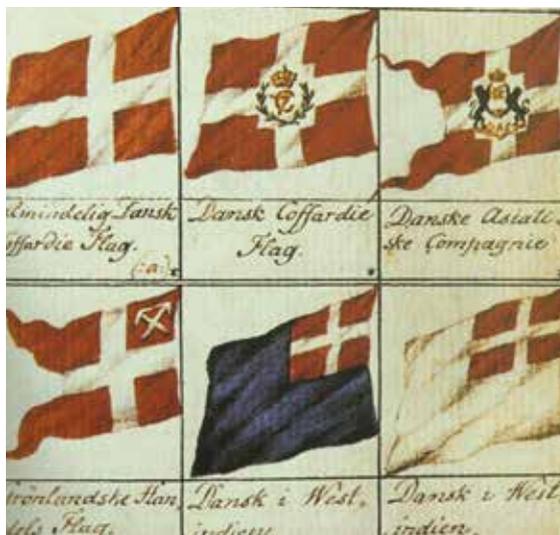
It was also used as a naval flag. The red colour of the original, approved drawing is very dark, especially when compared with the subsequent resolutions regarding the flag. It is not known if that is merely accidental. The resolution contains nothing on the

shade. This dark shade of red has, however, been interpreted to mean that the royal and naval flag, and later the naval flag exclusively, is darker than the other variations of the Dannebrog that were used. This tradition has been maintained to this day, but it is only in recent years that it has been established officially.

From the start of the 18th century, the flag, with special symbols inserted, was assigned to various trading companies and similar organisations. Along with a deliberately increased usage of the Dannebrog as a state and nati-

onality indication, this meant that the 18th century saw a need for further regulation of the flag's appearance and use.

Thus, in 1731 a separate royal flag was established. In the swallowtail flag, which was approved in 1696, the royal coat of arms was placed in a white square in the centre of the cross. In 1743 a set of specific flag rules were issued for the navy, and on 11th July 1748 an ordinance was issued regarding the merchant flag and its proportions. It was to be rectangular, with no swallowtail, and a lighter shade of red than the royal flag. This ordinance still applies. In 1757 a resolution followed, stating that the merchant flag, which was used in the Mediterranean, should be provided with the royal monogram in a white square, so that Danish ships could be distinguished from Maltese ships, which flew the old Knights of St John flag that looked similar to the Dannebrog.



# The Dannebrog as part of the new in the 19th century

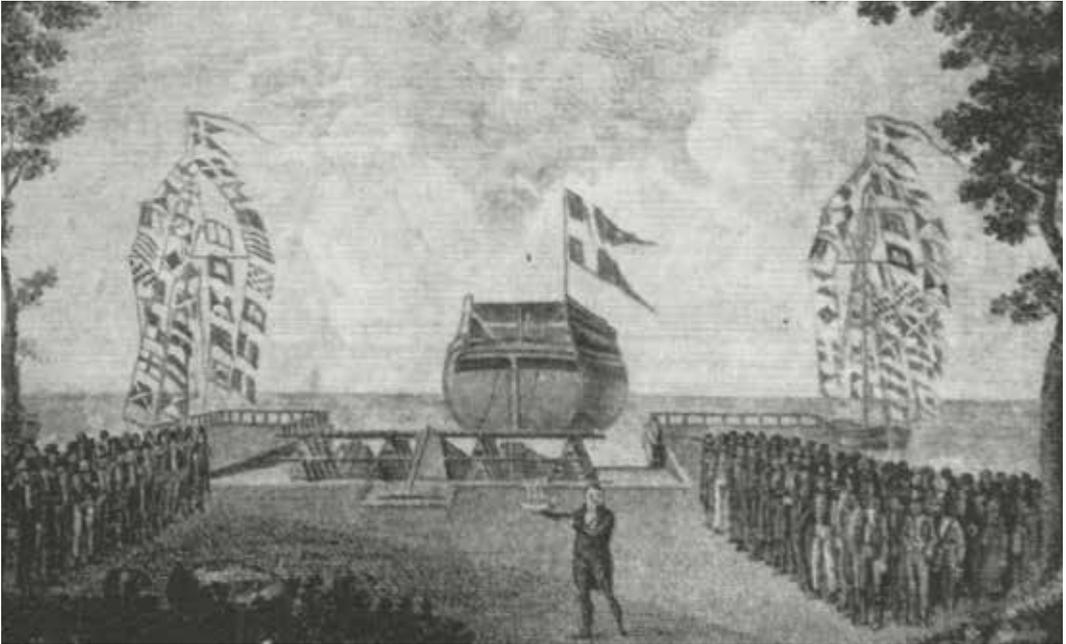


In 1785 the term “Dannebrog” was mentioned for the first time in an official resolution, and in the 1790s there are several examples of the Dannebrog also being used by ordinary Danes, no longer exclusively the king and state. There is one example in one of the Royal Copenhagen Shooting Society's targets from 1799. There was a growing sense of loyalty among the Danish people, not, as previously, directed exclusively towards the king, but towards the nation itself.

The Battle of Copenhagen on 2nd April 1801, when a British fleet attacked the Danish Navy anchored off Copenhagen, contributed to an increase in nationalist sentiments and patriotism among the population. This mood was strongly supported by initiatives undertaken by actor H. C. Knudsen.

# v nationalism

In the years after 1801 and 1807 he travelled around the country and presented tableaux in order to collect money for the wounded and for the dependants of the fallen. In these performances, which were accompanied by declamations, the Dannebrog played a very prominent role. This helped make the flag popular among the people.



# The Dannebrog in the 19th century – the flag of the nation



In the early decades of the 19th century, an increasing use of the Dannebrog was seen among the general public. However, this interest was considerably dampened when in 1834 Frederik VI issued a prohibition on ordinary Danes using the flag. Foreign consuls had requested permission to fly the flag of the country they represented. In order to avoid granting permission for this, the king issued this general prohibition. This was not formally repea-

led until 1854, but following the death of Frederik VI in 1839 the prohibition appears not to have been upheld. Christian Købke's 1838 painting from Dosseringen along Peblinge Lake shows a couple of ordinary Danes flying the Dannebrog.

The flag and the person in the painting may have been added later, but if we take the painting at face value, in 1838 it would have broken two prohibitions: flying the Dannebrog, and flying a swallowtail version!



In the triumphant three-year war of 1848-50 no regard was paid to the prohibition. The return of the troops unleashed a veritable orgy of the popular national symbol.

# The Dannebrog as unifying symbol



The 20th century saw the Dannebrog's breakthrough as a unifying symbol for the Danish people. In 1908 the Denmark Society was founded. This would support Danish nationalism. In 1913, on 15th June (Valdemar's Day), which had a natural association with the legend of the Dannebrog from 1219, this organisation began to sell small Dannebrog flags featuring the letters DS in support of its work. This practice has continued up until the present day. Today the principal aim of the Denmark Society is to promote knowledge of the Dannebrog, its use, its history, and what it stands for. One

of the ways it does this is to bestow Dannebrog flags on associations in Denmark.

When southern Jutland was reunified with Denmark in 1920, the Dannebrog came into use to an extent not previously seen in Danish history.

Throughout the German occupation of Denmark in 1940-45, the Dannebrog played a major role as a unifying symbol. The patriotic badge known as the "kongemærke" was worn as a form of protest by almost everyone who wanted to demonstrate their Danishness.



# The Dannebrog as the people's flag

The Dannebrog has become an integral part of daily life in Denmark. The flag is used in sorrow and in joy, on allotments and at castles, in ordinary houses and in the Danish Parliament. The Dannebrog is always a beloved element of everything we do. To the outside world, the Dannebrog and the Danish colours have become a distinctive brand for the goods we produce, and at the same time a symbol of the society we have established, and the values we have chosen as our own.

The Dannebrog today represents the whole of the development the country has undergone.

It is at once the royal flag, the state flag and everyone's flag, which we put on cakes, hang on the Christmas tree, decorate the front of our houses with and run up flagpoles.

It is important that we maintain that the Dannebrog is the flag of the entire Danish people. This can only be maintained if everyone is interested and willing to use the Dannebrog in all day-to-day contexts.

Our society is developing, but there is one thing we agree on, and that is our flag – the Dannebrog.



# The Dannebrog today and in the future



The history of the Dannebrog is also the history of Denmark. As the world's oldest national flag, it has always been the symbol of the country and the development it has undergone in 800 years. It has therefore developed from being the king's flag, the state's flag and the nation's flag – to the people's flag. This last is well reflected in the postage stamps issued in 2019, which show the flag's connection with our daily life.

The beautiful legend surrounding the origins of the Dannebrog is today an integral part of our national symbol and how we relate to it. It was therefore obvious that the artist Bjørn Nørgaard chose to retain this legend in his description of the history of the Danes in the Christiansborg tapestries.

The Dannebrog and Denmark will also be inseparable in future.



# The Denmark Society Patron

– His Royal Highness Prince Joachim



## The Dannebrog is the people's flag.

The Denmark Society is a non-political member-based national organisation, with a background in Danish cultural tradition.

Its aim is to promote knowledge and use of the Dannebrog as a national symbol of Danish culture, community and identity.

The association has 2,000 members, of whom more than 1,000 are associations and organisations.

Further information on the website: [danmarks-samfundet.dk](http://danmarks-samfundet.dk)

### Become a member

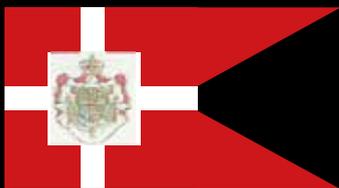
Join via the website or contact the national office by telephone on 24468126 or by e-mail to: [ds@danmarks-samfundet.dk](mailto:ds@danmarks-samfundet.dk)

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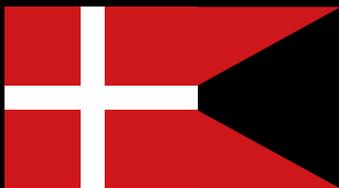


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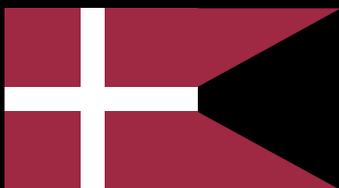
# Dannebrog basic formats



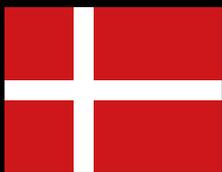
Royal flag



State flag



Naval flag



National flag



Standard



Pennant