

Flags of the XX International Congress of Vexillology

Jan Oskar Engene

The Nordic Flag Society and its first flag

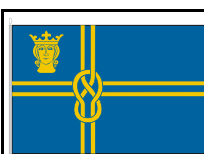
In late January 1973 twenty-one people from Denmark, Norway and Sweden met in Copenhagen to establish an association aimed at promoting vexillology in the five Nordic countries. Chaired by Christian Fogd Pedersen of Denmark, the meeting was held on 27 January 1973 in the Frederiksberg main library. At the meeting Klaes Sierksma, Secretary General of FIAV, represented the international vexillological community and gave a presentation on the Frisian flag. Atle Grahl-Madsen of Norway presented his work on Norwegian flag legislation, while Karl-Erik Weggerup from Sweden talked about the flag of Scania. Those present agreed to form a *Nordic Flag Society* and a board, consisting of two representatives from each the three Scandinavian countries, was appointed.

Thus, the a *Nordic Flag Society* celebrates its thirtieth anniversary in the year the society acts as host to the twentieth International Congress of Vexillology. In this article the history of the flags of the a *Nordic Flag Society* and of the XX International Congress of Vexillology will be told.¹

Naturally the new society founded in 1973 needed a flag. Dr. Atle Grahl-Madsen brought to the founding meeting a proposal, sew up in full size: A medium blue field with a yellow pennant-shaped triangle based on the hoist side and with a red Scandinavian cross set on the yellow triangle (Fig. 1). By combining the blue field and the red cross on yellow, the idea was to symbolize a flag on a flag. Red and yellow suggested the colours of the Union of Calmar and the off-set cross represented the Scandinavian type of cross flags. The founding meeting unanimously adopted professor Grahl-Madsen's proposal as the flag of the *Nordic Flag Society* and the original flag was handed over to the society. A description, in English, of the flag was communicated to flag societies in other countries.

A flag incident between vexillologists

The design drew criticism from the start. Upon hearing the news of the formation of the *Nordic Flag Society* and the adoption of its flag, *Flagmaster*, the publication of the British *Flag Institute*, went public for the first time with the institute's own flag, obviously similar to that of the Nordic Flag Society, except for the use of white instead of



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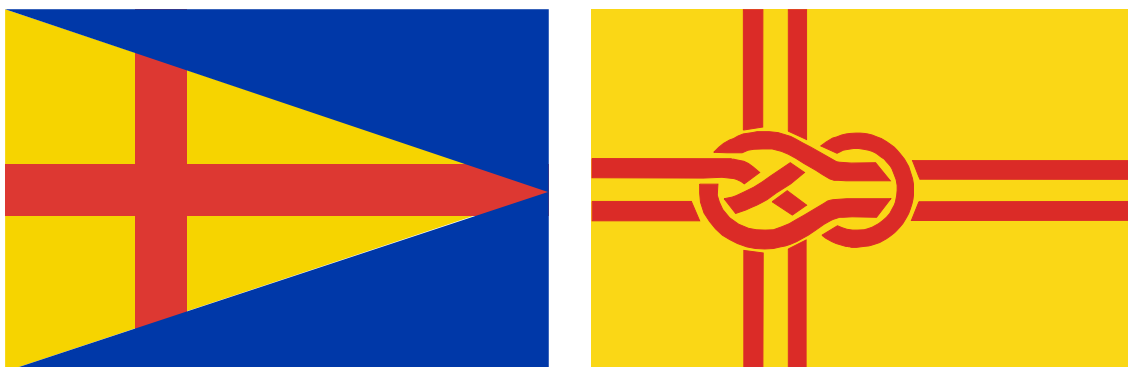


Figure 1 Nordic Flag Society flags, 1973-1987 (left) and from 1987 onwards (right).

yellow in the triangle. This flag, explained *Flagmaster*, had “not been widely published before,” though it had been “in a state of gestation” since the founding of the *Flag Institute* in 1971.² It remains unclear whether the designer of the *Nordic Flag Society* flag actually knew of the *Flag Institute*’s plans.

At the fifth International Congress of Vexillology, held in London in September 1973, the *Nordic Flag Society* met to apply for FIAV membership. The question of the applicant society’s flag was raised before the FIAV General Assembly.³ However, no solution to the dispute was found, and the *Nordic Flag Society* kept its flag.

The flag is changed

The similarity between the flags of the two vexillological societies worried members of the *Nordic Flag Society* for some time. In the 1986 issue of the society’s newsletter, chairman and editor Ole Bjerring raised the question of finding new symbols. Members were invited to submit proposals and an award of a bottle of wine was offered to the artist responsible for the successful entry.

Half a year later, in the spring 1987 issue of *Nordisk Flagkontakt*, six proposals for a new flag were presented. The proposals sought to express some Nordic theme, either in colours or in other design elements. Some saw red and yellow as the Nordic colours, other favoured blue and white, whereas other still sought to combine all colours of the flags of the Nordic countries in one single cross flag. Several designs played on variations on the Nordic cross flag. Prominent among proposals was design A, in which the FIAV knot of vexillology was dressed up in the Nordic colours of red for the field and yellow for the knot, and which had an extra set of halyards, also in yellow and running vertically, added to give the new flag the appearance of a Nordic cross flag. This innovative design seemed to compete for favour with design F which combined all colours found in the national flags of the Nordic countries in a single cross flag.

Initially the board of the *Nordic Flag Society* was unable to reach agreement on which proposal to recommend, and members were invited to write in to give their opinions about the best new design. However, as the annual general meeting scheduled



Figure 2 The emblem of the Nordic Flag Society with the society's name written in the five Nordic languages.

for Gothenburg in October 1987 approached, the board did agree on proposing the design containing the knot with halyards as the new flag. The design was proposed by Ole Bjerring, who originally suggested that the field be red and the knot and halyards be yellow. Following a suggestion from Magnus Persson, Sweden, the board proposed to change around the colours, thus making the field yellow and the charges red. The change of symbols for the *Nordic Flag Society* was eventually instituted by General Assembly meeting in Gothenburg, Sweden, on 17. October 1987.

Symbolism of the *Nordic Flag Society's* flag

In sum, the flag of the *Nordic Flag Society* combines three sets of symbolism. First, the colours yellow and red are indicative of the historical community of the Nordic countries for which the *Nordic Flag Society* was formed to promote vexillology. The Union of Calmar (1397-1521), which brought together the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and which also encompassed territories that are today the independent republics of Finland and Iceland, may have had a cross flag with a red cross on a yellow field. In our time this flag has been revived by associations working for the strengthening of cultural ties between the five Nordic countries.

Second, the attachment of the *Nordic Flag Society* to the Nordic region is also expressed in the fact that the society's flag is in the shape of a Nordic (Scandinavian) cross flag. This shape may also be seen as pointing to the long and rich flag history of the Nordic countries.

Third and finally, the use of the knot, the international symbol of vexillology, shows that the *Nordic Flag Society* is devoted to promote vexillology in the Nordic countries and that the society is a member of the international community of vexillological associations.

The *Nordic Flag Society* also has a coat of arms and an emblem, both adopted in 1987. Based on the society's flag the, the coat of arms consists of a yellow (gold) shield charged with the red knot of vexillology and halyards. As opposed to its orientation in the flag the knot is vertically oriented in the arms. The emblem (Fig. 2) is in the shape of a seal and has the arms in centre. Around the shield are inscribed the name of

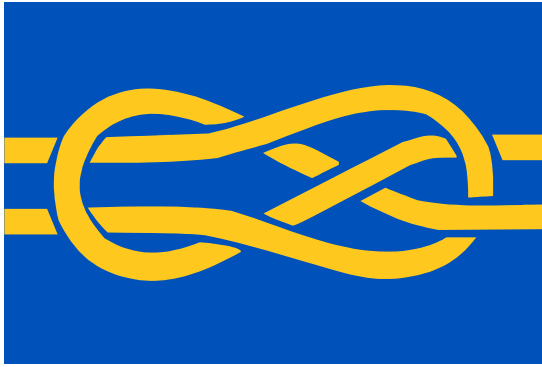


Figure 3 The flag of the Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques — FIAV.

the society in the five Nordic languages: *Nordisk Flagselskab* (Danish), *Pohjoismaiden Lippuseura* (Finnish), *Norræna Fánafélagið* (Icelandic), *Nordisk Flaggselskap* (Norwegian), and *Nordiska Flaggsällskapet* (Swedish). The letters and the rings are all red and set against a white background.

The knot of vexillology: The flags of FIAV

At the second International Congress of Vexillology, held in Zurich, Switzerland, in the three first days of September 1967, a flag was adopted for the *Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques*, perhaps better known only by its acronym — FIAV. The idea for the flag originated with Klaes Sierksma of the Netherlands, while Paul Krog of Switzerland executed the final design.⁴

Like so many international organizations, the international federation of vexillological societies and institutions adopted for itself a flag with a blue field. In the congress report the flag is described as “On a blue field, extending horizontally from hoist to fly, two yellow halyards forming two interlaced loops.” (Fig. 3). This particular arrangement is reminiscent of a knot, but not, apparently, a flag knot. Rather, as the congress report explains, “the halyards allude to the study of flags and banners.” Together with the blue colour, the halyards “evoke the maritime origins of the first flags.” A further symbolism is added: “The interlaced loops recall the love-knots well-known to heraldists and symbolize the friendship which unites vexillologists of all lands.” One could say, then, that the halyards form a *knot of vexillology* rather than a flag knot.

But there is more symbolism in the halyards. The congress report explains: “The loops formed by the halyards resemble two hemispheres and in adding the four ends of the halyards, we arrive at the number six, standing for the six parts of the world. These elements of the flag thus underline the international character of our Federation.” But why does the halyards extend across the field of the flag the whole way to the edges? This is done, we learn, to “express the considerable – almost infinite – extent of vexillological studies in time and space.”

While the flag of FIAV initially had a rather dark blue field, a lighter shade was officially specified at the International Congress of Vexillology held in Victoria, Canada, in 1999. FIAV’s General Assembly then decided that the blue colour was to correspond to U293 in the Pantone Matching System and that the yellow colour was to correspond to U123 in the same system.

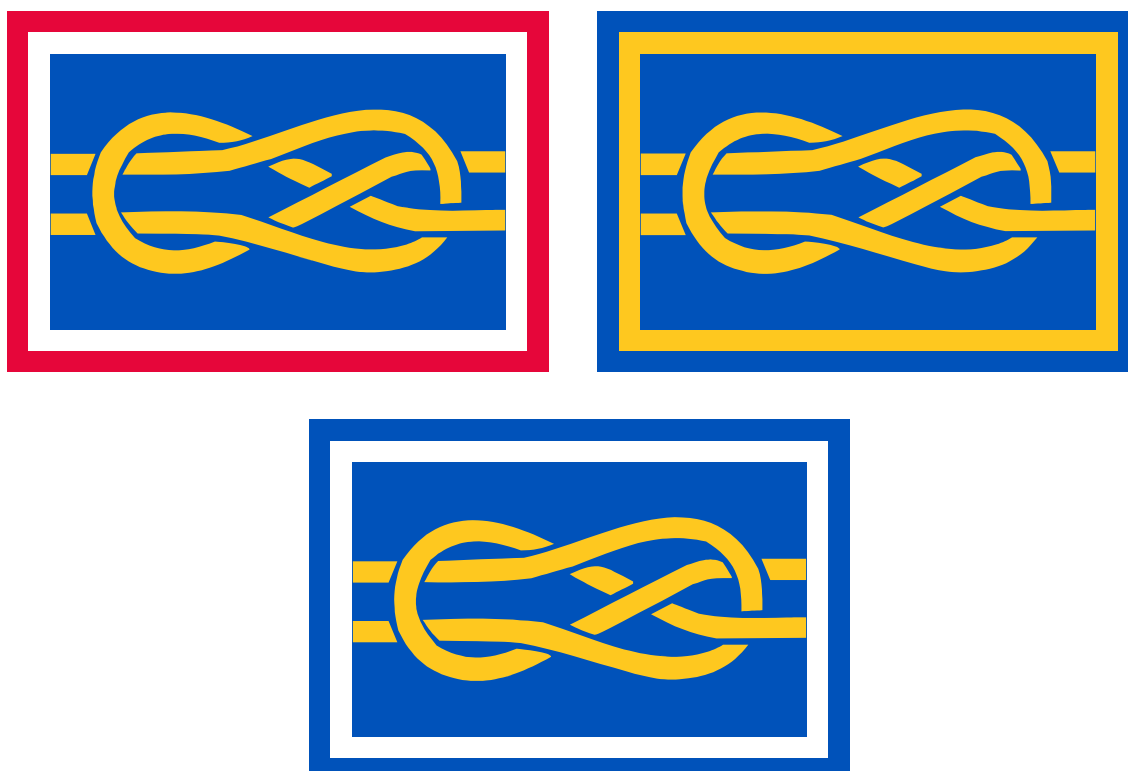


Figure 4 Flags for FIAV officers: President (top left), Secretary-General (top right), and Secretary-General for Congresses (bottom).

Flags for FIAV's officers

The FIAV flag remained the only flag of the international federation for many years. When the office of FIAV President was held by William Crampton of the United Kingdom, ideas for further flags were developed. These were flags for the positions in FIAV's three man executive, that is for the President, the Secretary-General, and the Secretary-General for Congresses (Fig. 4).⁵

Based on the FIAV flag, borders were added to distinguish the officers: A border of red and white for the President, blue and yellow for the Secretary-General, and blue and white for the Secretary-General for Congresses. Unfortunately, Crampton died before seeing the proposals for officer's flag adopted. However, at the 1999 congress in Victoria, the General Assembly of FIAV officially inscribed the flags of the federation's officers in the FIAV constitution.

Flag of the Stockholm congress

Sitting on the train from back from the International Congress of Vexillology in York in July 2001, the *Nordic Flag Society's* Vice-President Gustav Söderlund started preparing for fulfilling the mandate given to the *Nordic Flag Society* by FAIV's General

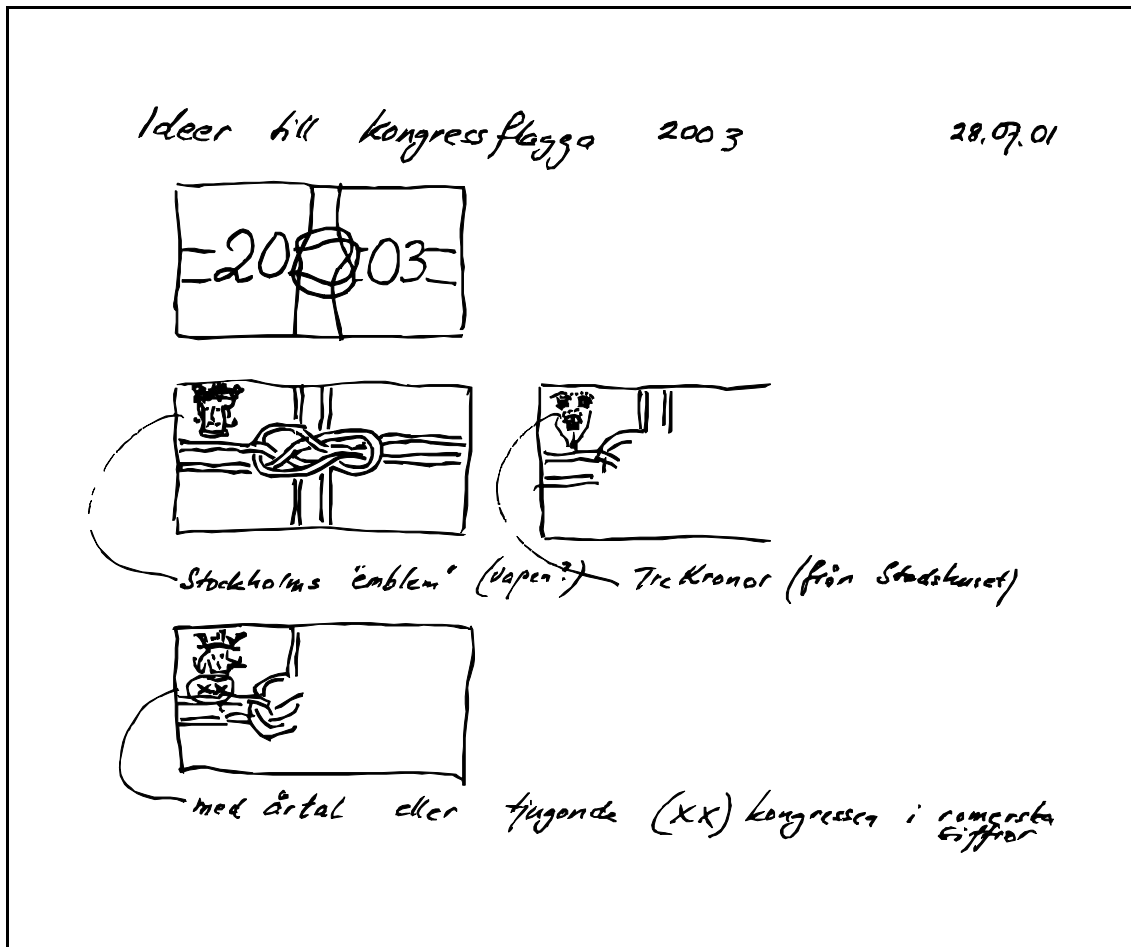


Figure 5 Gustav Söderlund's sketches for a flag of the XX International Congress of Vexillology dated 28. July 2001.

Assembly: Organizing the twentieth International Congress of Vexillology to be held in Stockholm in two years time. So many things had to be planned. But one important piece of the puzzle found its solution right there on the train: The congress flag. Ideas were put down on a sheet of notepaper (Fig. 5). The year of the congress – 2003 – should that be part of the flag? What about XX representing the fact that the Stockholm event would be congress number twenty? The knot of vexillology would be a natural feature of a congress flag, and appears in all the sketched designs. And something to represent the host city. Perhaps Stockholm's coat of arms, St. Erik, or maybe the Sweden's famous three crowns as they appear on top of the tower of Stockholm's City Hall?

Later, when preparations for the congress progressed, Söderlund's ideas for a congress flag were put on the agenda of the organizing committee. A combination of FIAV's knot of vexillology – in its Nordic form with halyards added – and Stockholm's St. Erik found favour with the committee. No need for letters or numbers. Then what about colours? Since the congress takes place in Sweden, the national colours of blue and yellow seemed a national choice, though the Nordic colours of yellow and red

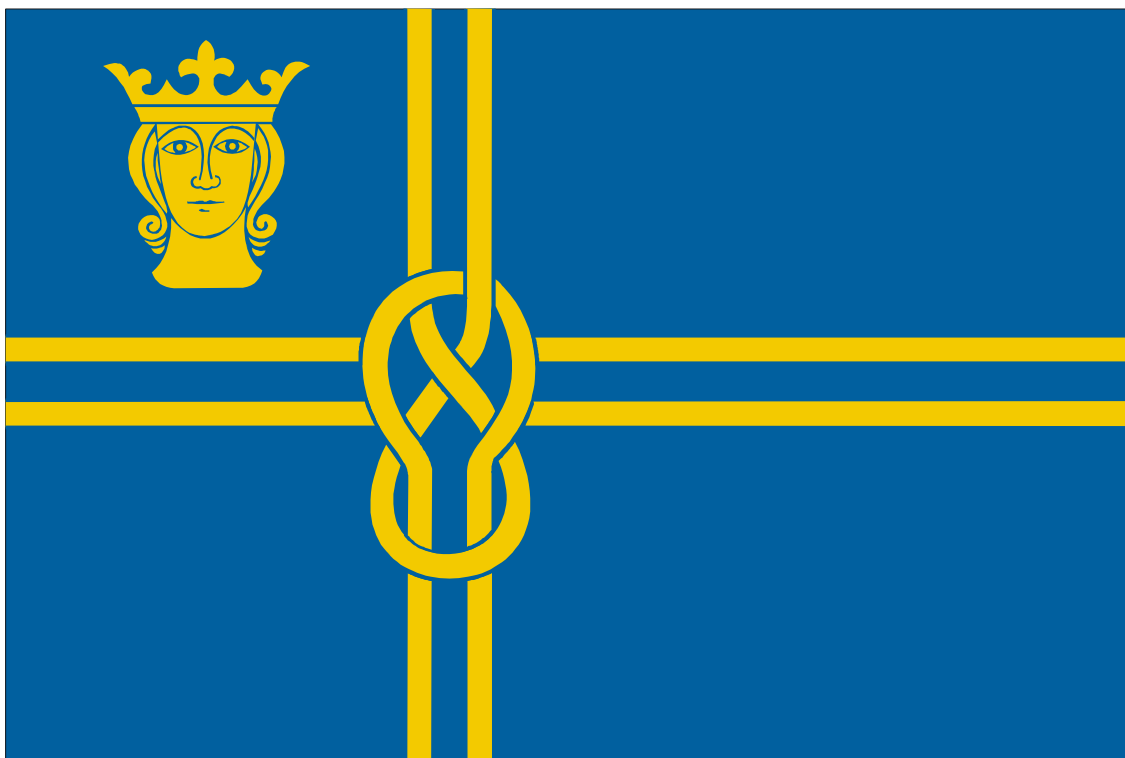


Figure 6 The design of the of the XX International Congress of Vexillology is based on the flag of the Nordic Flag Society though with a vertically oriented knot of vexillology. The flag carries the blue and yellow colours of Sweden's flag and the congress city, Stockholm, is represented by St. Erik in the canton. The Nordic cross design of the flag indicates that the congress is organized by the Nordic Flag Society. The proportions of the flag was set to 2:3. Vice-president Gustav Söderlund of the Nordic Flag Society came up with the idea for the congress flag. His idea was developed in cooperation with graphic designer Tiina Trimeloni who also made the final drawing.

were also discussed. Blue and yellow are, incidentally, also the colours of Stockholm. Permission to use St. Erik was obtained from city and heraldic authorities, and the final flag design (Fig. 6) was developed using the skills of graphic designer Tiina Trimeloni.

Only once before has the knot of vexillology been used for a congress flag. In the flag of the 1993 Zurich congress the knot was placed diagonally on a field divided from upper hoist to lower fly. The field was blue on the hoist side and white on the fly side, the knot being in the opposite colour order. Along the top edge of the flag ran a red *schwenkel* inscribed with XV in white Roman numerals to represent the congress number. For the other congresses symbols representing the host city, region or country has predominated, and vexillology has been represented by shapes suggestive of the letter V.

In its symbolism the congress flag not only relates to the symbols of vexillology but also to other 'flag families': That of the Nordic national flags with the characteristic cross off-set towards the hoist side, but also that of the flags of the host city and associated entities.



Figure 7 City of Stockholm.



Figure 8 County of Stockholm.

The City of Stockholm

St. Erik, also known as King Erik IX, is the patron saint of Sweden and of the city Stockholm. Erik Jedvardsson was elected king of the Swedes in 1150 and led a crusade to Finland. King Erik was murdered in Uppsala by a Danish rival to the throne, dated by tradition to 1160. According to the 13th century legend of the king a number of miracles occurred on his death, leading to his celebration as a saint despite the fact that he was never formally canonized by the Pope.

A representation of a crowned man, often interpreted as St. Erik but as likely representing a generic image of a king, first appeared on the city's official insignia in a seal dating from about 1370, previous seal had shown fortified towers and castles. Though St. Erik gradually won the struggle for supremacy in representing the city, the coat of arms was not officially granted by the King until 1934.⁶

Since 1987, the Stockholm has used its coat of arms with the encircling inscription STOCKHOLMS STAD ('City of Stockholm').⁷ As customary for city flags in Sweden, Stockholm's flag is an armorial flag displaying the heraldic charge against a field coloured solidly in the tincture of the shield, thus producing a flag showing the head of St. Erik in yellow against a blue background (Fig. 7). In theory, Swedish heraldic flags should be square, but in actual use as witnessed by visitors to City Hall where a row of city flags are flown, Stockholm's flag is rectangular.⁸

The County of Stockholm

A number of other arms lend the charge from Stockholm's arms. Thus the county of Stockholm combine in its coat of arms St. Erik of Stockholm, from which the county takes its name, with charges based on the arms of the two provinces from whose territory the county was carved. Thus the flag (Fig. 8), granted in 1968, displays a field divided into blue and red by a yellow pile transposed. On the hoist side, in the place of honour, we find St. Erik in yellow against the blue. The globe of the province of Uppland is shown in yellow on red in the fly end, and on the yellow pale is placed a black griffin's head beaked, and tongued in red, a shortened version of the arms of the province of Södermanland.⁹

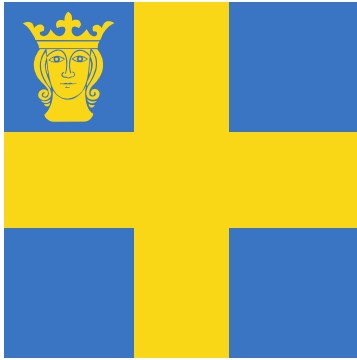


Figure 9 Diocese of Stockholm.



Figure 10 *Stockholm Sightseeing* house flag.

The Diocese of Stockholm

Both country and city lends its emblems to the coat of arms of the Diocese of Stockholm. Sweden is represented by the yellow cross on blue and the city's armorial charge, St. Erik, is placed in the canton. These arms are not used much, the diocese instead preferring in its visual communication a pictorial representation of a statue showing St. Göran (St. George) slaying the dragon. In flag form, the arms of the Diocese of Stockholm are even less used. Only one armorial banner exist, the one officially representing the Diocese of Stockholm in the in Uppsala Cathedral during national services or conventions of the Church of Sweden.¹⁰ In the illustration of the armorial flag shown here (Fig. 9), the version of St. Erik is the one by heraldic artist Bror Jacques de Wærn.¹¹

As we can see from the arms and flags of the city, county and diocese (Figs.7-9), heraldic artist present different interpretations of St. Erik. In the congress flag, the heraldic illustration of Bror Jacques de Wærn, as presented in *Ny svensk vapenbok* by then Swedish State Herald Clara Néveus, has been taken as the norm.

The congress on water: Touring Stockholm's archipelago

During congress delegates had the opportunity to break from formal congress business to relax on a trip into Stockholm's archipelago. Stockholm Sightseeing is one of several companies that take visitors around Stockholm's beautiful archipelago and the one that carried delegates for the Wednesday sightseeing trip. The company's yellow and red house flag (Fig. 10) is based on the capital letter S, crowned and shaped into a friendly looking sea monster.

The sightseeing trip took participants to Vaxholm for a guided tour of the fortress and then on to nearby Badholmen for lunch. The civilian settlement at Vaxholm developed around the military fortifications and was granted city rights in 1562. In 1944 the city was granted arms, showing a tower and the bow of a ship, combining the importance of shipping and defence for a fortified maritime city like Vaxholm. The city's first seal, dating from 1690, shows a round tower, no doubt representing the for-



Figure 11 The arms of the municipality of Vaxholm.

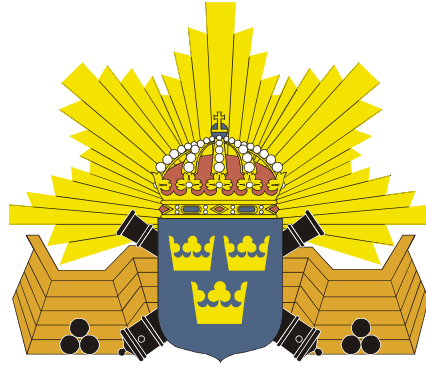


Figure 12 The arms of Vaxholm amfibieregemente.

truss at Vaxholm (Fig. 11). Construction of this tower started in 1549. It was torn down in the mid-1800's and replaced by the fortress still standing today.¹²

Though the fortress is now a museum the military importance of Vaxholm is remembered in the name of one of Sweden's military regiments responsible for defending Sweden's coast line. The arms of *Vaxholm amfibieregemente* (Vaxholm Amphibious Regiment), contains the royally crowned shield of Sweden supplemented by a brick bastion, cannons and cannon balls, and a semi circle of rays (Fig. 12).¹³

Notes

¹ The first part of this article, on the flags of the Nordic Flag Society and of FIAV, is adapted from articles in *Nordisk Flaggkontakt* Nos. 35, 36 and 37. Artwork for Figs. 1 and 2 by Jan Oskar Engene.

² *Flagmaster*, No. 9, Spring, 1973.

³ See *Flagmaster*, No. 11/12, Autumn/Winter, 1973).

⁴ The information concerning FIAV's flag is based on the *Receuil du Ile Congrès International de Vexillologie*, Zurich: Société Suisse de Vexillologie, 1968, with further information provided by FIAV President Michel Lupant. Drawings in Figs. 3-4 by Jan Oskar Engene.

⁵ Information on the flags of FIAV officers provided by FIAV President Michel Lupant.

⁶ See C. G. U. Scheffer: *Svensk vapenbok för landskap län och städer*, Stockholm: Generalstabens Litografiska Anstalt, 1967, p. 57, and Clara Nevéus: *Ny svensk vapenbok*, Stockholm: Streiffert, 1992, pp. 132-133.

⁷ Magnus Bäckmark: "Stockholms ansikte," *Vapenbilden*, No. 53, 2002, p. 41.

⁸ For guidelines on how Swedish civic flags ought to look like see the booklet by former State Herald Clara Nevéus: *Kommunvapen.Handledning för kommuner*, (Broschyr; 14, Meddelenaden från svenska Riksarkivet), Stockholm: Riksarkivet, 1987, p. 15. The drawing in Fig. 7 is by Jan Oskar Engene.

⁹ See C. G. U. Scheffer: "Stockholms läns vapen," in *Samfundet S:t Eriks Årsbok 1968*, Stockholm, 1968, pp. 17-18 + plate. Artwork for Fig. 8 is by Jan Oskar Engene based on illustration in Scheffer.

¹⁰ The presentation on the arms of the diocese is based on an article by Lars C. Stolt: "Stockholms stifts vapenföring," *Vapenbilden*, No. 53, 2002, p. 43. See also Nevéus, pp. 176-177.

¹¹ See the illustration in Clara Nevéus: *Ny svensk vapenbok*, Stockholm: Streiffert, 1992, pp. 177. The drawing in Fig. 9 was made by Jan Oskar Engene based on the illustration by de Wærn.

¹² For information on the arms of Vaxholm, see C. G. U. Scheffer: *Svensk vapenbok för landskap län och städer*, Stockholm: Generalstabens Litografiska Anstalt, 1967, p.65, and also Nevéus pp. 156-157. The drawing of the arms, shown in Figure 11, is taken from *Vaxholmssguiden 2003*.

¹³ Martin Sunnqvist: "Vendiska draken jagar nu i de sälla jaktmarkerna," *Vapenbilden*, No. 53, 2002, p. 56.

Part Two

Papers

