

DAGMAR 'BRINGER OF LIGHT' – THE NEW COMMANDERY IN EUROPE

We are frequently asked why we chose the name Dagmar for our Commandery in Denmark. The name Dagmar honours two great women of influence in Danish history. **Queen Dagmar of Bohemia**, whose life of caring for the sick and less fortunate emulates our mission and is an inspiration to us; and **Dowager Tsarina Maria Alexandrovna of Russia and Princess Dagmar of Denmark**, an energetic supporter of the Red Cross, hospitals and education for girls, whose foresight saved and protected the Holy Relics of our Sovereign Order, the Hand of John the Baptist; the Icon of Our Lady of Philermos, attributed to St. Luke; and a fragment of the True Cross, until her death in 1928 when they were entrusted to King Alexander of Yugoslavia.

QUEEN DAGMAR OF BOHEMIA, also known as Margaret of Bohemia, was born a princess in c. 1186 and died in childbirth on 24 May 1212. She was Queen Consort of Denmark between 1205 – 1212 as the first spouse of King Valdemar II (Valdemar the Victorious) of Denmark (1205) and daughter of King Premysl Ottokar I of Bohemia and his wife Adelheid of Meissen.

A Christian queen, she was known to be mild, patient and universally loved and is said to have done many good deeds for the Danes. The day after her marriage, she petitioned the king to repeal the plough tax, which was then a heavy burden on the Danes. She also begged for the release of all prisoners. Having rapidly won the love of the Danes because of her beauty, goodness and saintly life, Margaret was rechristened Dagmar ("the mother of the day") by a grateful nation. To the end of her life, she was constantly striving to ease suffering and relieve distress.

The deeds of Queen Dagmar are those which we most sincerely wish to emulate and we felt it was only fitting that we name our commandery after her, not only to honour her, but to constantly remind us of our mission to care for the sick and the less fortunate in Denmark. She would have made a grand Dame. Queen Dagmar is buried in St. Bendt's Church in Ringsted, on one side of Valdemar II.



2020 marks the 850th Anniversary of St. Bendt's Church, where many of Denmark's Kings and Queens are buried.

EMPERESS MARIA FEODOROVNA (26 November 1847 – 13 October 1928), known before her marriage as **Princess Dagmar of Denmark**, was a Danish princess and Empress of Russia as spouse of Emperor Alexander III (reigned 1881 – 1894). She was the second daughter and fourth child of King Christian IX of Denmark and Louise of Hesse-Kassel; her siblings included Queen Alexandra of the United Kingdom, King Frederick VIII of Denmark, and King George I of Greece.



Princess Dagmar, Prince Vilhelm, Christian IX of Denmark and Princess Alexandra.

Raised Lutheran, Princess Dagmar became the Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna of Russia when she converted to Orthodoxy immediately before her 1856 marriage to the future Emperor and Protector of our Sovereign Order, Alexander III.



EMPRESS (TZARINA) MARIA FEODOROVNA OF RUSSIA, circa 1885

Very much loved by the Russian people Empress Maria Feodorovna devoted her time and energies to her family and her charities. During the St. Petersburg cholera epidemic, she visited hospitals and spent time with the sick and wounded. She was also **President of the Russian Red Cross**. She encouraged the building of boarding schools for girls, for she believed in women having an education. Nearly each summer, Maria, Alexander, and their children would make an annual trip to Denmark where her parents, King Christian IX and Queen Louise, hosted family reunions.



Empress Maria Feodorovna and Emperor Alexander III vacationing in Copenhagen in 1893

In 1894 Emperor Alexander III died and their son **Nicholas II** was crowned **Emperor of Russia**. He was to be the **last Russian Proctor of our Sovereign Order**. After the Revolution of 1917 that saw the overthrow of the monarchy in Russia, *the protectorship of the Sovereign Order passed from Tsar Nicholas II upon his abdication, to King Alexander I of Yugoslavia who was related to the Russian Monarchy.**

*It is thus that until the Revolution of 1917, the famous relics of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem brought to St. Petersburg in 1798 and handed over to Emperor Paul I, were kept in Russia. They were initially deposited in the castle of Gatchina (favoured residence of the Emperor) and afterwards removed to the church of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg.** To save the Order's relics from desecration and destruction by the Communists during the Russian Revolution, they were taken by Father Bogoyavlenski to Reval in 1919 [and soon after delivered] to the Dowager Czarina Maria (Dagmar) in Copenhagen, Denmark.****

The Dowager Tzarina had chosen to take the villa Hvidøre near Copenhagen as her new permanent home, where she died on 13 October 1928 at the age of 80. Following services in Copenhagen's Russian Orthodox Alexander Nevshy Church, the Empress was interred at the Lutheran Roskilde Cathedral.

*After her death [in 1928], her daughters, the Grand Duchesses Xenia and Olga, decided to pass them [the Holy Relics] on to Alexander I of Yugoslavia for safe keeping, and they were kept in the chapel of the Royal Palace [Chapel of Dedinje] in Belgrade. Their subsequent fate, after the assassination of King Alexander in 1934 and the tragic events in Serbia during the second world war, is unfortunately not known.*****

On 28 September 2006, in accordance with her wish, she was interred next to her husband Alexander III in the Peter and Paul Cathedral, 140 years after her first arrival to Russia and almost 78 years after her death. Thus, Maria Feodorovna was truly the mother of her people.

Our Danish Dagmar Queens were loved both in life and in death.

Notes: * *Biographies of The Grand Masters of The Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller 1113 – 2006*. Rene J. Tonna-Barthet (Hamilton Publishing: 2006, p.256).

** **Biographies of The Grand Masters of The Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller 1113 – 2006**. Rene J. Tonna-Barthet (Hamilton Publishing: 2006, p.257).

*** *Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller. 900 Years of Chivalry*. Sir Robert Cave-Browne-Cave, Bt, GCSJ. (2nd Edition, June 2000. pp. 48-49).

**** *Biographies of The Grand Masters of The Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller 1113 – 2006*. Rene J. Tonna-Barthet (Hamilton Publishing: 2006, p.257).