



Swedish

Academic

Ceremonies

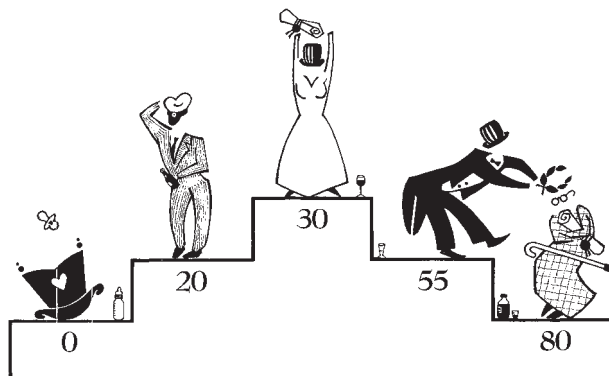
and Traditions

Swedish Academic Ceremonies and Traditions: a brief survey

by Torgny Nevéus

*in collaboration with members of the Swedish
University Ceremony Convention*





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This booklet can be obtained from the respective university / college
Academic Ceremonies' Office (or equivalent)

Contact information for the universities and colleges as well as a calendar of their upcoming
academic ceremonies may be found on www.akademiskahogtider.se.

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(3rd edition)

Paper cover 250 gr *Keaykolour Recycled Limestone*

Paper insert 115 gr *Scandia 2000*

Fonts Sabon and Cochin

Print Universitetsservice US-AB, 2011

INTRODUCTION

Every university in the world has its own traditions and festivities. These are often associated with regularly-occurring events such as the welcoming of new students, formal installation of professors, and not least to graduation ceremonies. Swedish academic traditions are, of course, rooted in the various rites and ceremonies that developed throughout Europe, beginning in the thirteenth century when the first universities were founded.

We hope that this booklet will provide the non-Swedish reader with some background about academic traditions in Sweden. The awarding of doctoral degrees has been given particular prominence here.



TRADITIONS IN RETROSPECT

The Swedish Universities

Uppsala University is the oldest university in Scandinavia. When it was founded in 1477, it was the northernmost institute of higher education in the world.

During the Middle Ages, Uppsala University had three faculties: theology, law and philosophy. There was no medical faculty at the time. We do not know much about the studies pursued or the ceremonies celebrated at the medieval university, but we have good reason to assume that there were both degree conferment ceremonies and ceremonies for installation of professors. The religious and political unrest of the early sixteenth century, including the Reformation etc., swept away the foundations for the existence of this institution, however, and beginning around 1530 “Uppsala University” existed only in the mind. It was reinstated in reality in 1595, at which point a great deal of effort was invested in giving the university an identity, and proving that it belonged amongst the learned circles of European academia. The excellent extant source documentation tells us that degree conferment ceremonies were held in January 1600.

The seventeenth century was an expansive time for Sweden in terms of foreign policy and military strength, and the country began to outgrow its single university. Two more were added, one in Dorpat (today Tartu, Estonia) in 1632 and one in Åbo (today Turku in Finland) in 1640.

The Lund University was founded in 1668, as a step in the ultimate “Swedification” of the provinces of Skåne, Halland and Blekinge, which were finally won from Denmark in the 1650s. As Estonia was later ceded to Russia, there were three Swedish universities in the eighteenth century: Uppsala, Åbo and Lund. There was a fourth one as well - Greifswald in Pomerania, but it was entirely a German language, Germanic-culture institution.

Major developments in ceremonies to the present time

Let us now examine the most important ceremonies at Swedish universities in the past. From the 17th century, the universities had four faculties: the faculties of theology, law, medicine and philosophy. There were relatively few professors, by present standards. Uppsala, an unusually well-endowed institution, had 19 professorial chairs in 1632 at the time of the death of Swedish King Gustav II Adolf. Moreover, there were relatively few students at Swedish universities in the past. In the mid-seventeenth century Uppsala University only had a few hundred students at any given time, and even a century later in the time of Linnaeus, in the heyday of Uppsala University, the total student body numbered only about 800.

When a student was accepted at the university, he was subjected to a “deposition”, quite a crude custom the symbols of which included rams’ horns, asses’ ears, etc. New students were literally sanded, tarred and feathered, etc. All



of this symbolised their leaving his “crude” past. Today, there are customs that are the successors of the “deposition”, but as such ceremonies, often rowdy and quite noisy, are conducted primarily by student organisations, they are not the object of attention in this booklet. Formal matriculation ceremonies are not common at Swedish universities, as opposed to at Danish universities and elsewhere.

It was common in the past for a professor to be installed in his chair at a formal ceremony, an “installation”. This ceremony was adopted from the medieval church and is today used as an opportunity to spread information to the public about research activities. The Vice-Chancellor of a Swedish university was also granted his position at a special ceremony. In the past, the position rotated amongst the professors at each Swedish university, with a new Vice-Chancellor taking over every semester. Today, all Swedish universities still have the inauguration ceremony.

The institution of the “public defence” of a thesis permeated the medieval university culture, and continued throughout most of the nineteenth century. The main emphasis was not on the content of a thesis, but on the student’s ability to show that he had learned to argue and to defend what he, or in many cases his teacher, had written. The rite had fixed parts: the respondent was the individual defending a thesis, and the opponents were to criticise the work in minute detail. Although we still have the institution of the public defence in Sweden, the ceremony has been greatly simplified.

6 As mentioned above, the main occasions of celebration

in Swedish academia have always been “degree conferment” ceremonies. Such ceremonies are alive and well at all Swedish universities and colleges today, and are the main focus of this booklet.

Until this century, the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Theology was not a frequent occasion. The degree of Doctor of Theology was bestowed only by the King, who is the head of the Swedish church, upon deserving clergymen, often bishops. Most frequently, this ceremony took place at the time of royal coronations, or the celebration of anniversary years of universities. Another distinguishing feature of this ceremony was that the person appointed to confer the degrees was not a university teacher, as is common at other doctoral degree conferment ceremonies, but the Archbishop of Uppsala or the Bishop of Lund. Such a degree conferment ceremony can be most readily compared with the awarding of a royal order. In older times, degree conferment ceremonies for Doctors of Law were also often of the nature of an honour bestowed by the ruler, although they might also be associated with the conferring of degrees. Degree conferment ceremonies for Doctors of Philosophy in medicine were also an unusual phenomenon for a long time, but the international success of Linnaeus at Uppsala University in the eighteenth century (he was Professor at the Faculty of Medicine there) marked the turn towards this becoming a more common event.

All such degree conferment ceremonies at “faculties of higher learning” (i.e. theology, medicine and law) took place



at irregular intervals, determined by necessity. In contrast, degree conferment ceremonies at the fourth faculty, the faculty of philosophy, took place at regular intervals, once every third year. Originally, in the eighteenth century, each of the three state universities, Uppsala, Åbo and Lund, were intended to circulate, on each year. However, it proved to be impossible to follow this strategy in the long run.

The custom at the faculties of theology, law and medicine was to award each individual who was receiving a degree with a hat, while at the faculty of philosophy, each “magister” as the individual was called, received a crown of laurels, a custom still followed. In the late nineteenth century the meaning of the title magister changed, and these degree conferment ceremonies became known as doctoral degree conferment ceremonies even at the faculty of philosophy.

During the nineteenth century two new types of doctorates were introduced. The first, introduced early in the century, was that of “jubilee doctor”. This degree was awarded to all those who had been awarded their doctoral degrees fifty years earlier. Each fifty-year celebrant was invited back to his old university to receive a diploma and - at the faculty of philosophy - a new crown of laurels. The second custom began in Uppsala in 1839 and was based on a pattern imported from abroad, the establishment of “doctors of philosophy honoris causa”. From the beginning this meant that the title “magister honoris causa” and later “doctor honoris causa” was awarded to individuals on the basis of merits other than the formal earning of the degree.

In the late nineteenth century, the degree system underwent major changes at the Swedish universities. The main ceremonial change was that degree conferment ceremonies gradually lost a great deal of their pomp and circumstance, in fact one might say that between 1877 and 1935 there was an extreme lull in this respect. Since 1935, with only a few exceptions, however, degree conferment ceremonies have been held annually. Each university also has annual festivities for all those who have received doctoral degrees at any of its faculties that year.

*What may be regarded as typically
Swedish in terms of academic ceremonies?*

This section summarizes all that may be regarded as particularly Swedish in terms of academic festivities. It should be borne in mind that Swedish and Finnish traditions are often similar, because from a historical point of view Finland is part of the Swedish cultural sphere.

Four phenomena can be distinguished with regard to degree conferment ceremonies:

Elsewhere, an individual, for instance a foreign head of state or a prominent politician, may be awarded the title of doctor honoris causa at a special ceremony held entirely for him or her. In Sweden, such individual degree conferment ceremonies are never held to confer honorary doctorates. Also, as a rule (with the occasional exception of Umeå University) honorary doctorates and traditional doctoral degrees are awarded at one and the same degree conferment ceremony.



The concept of “jubilee doctor” is also peculiar to Sweden.

Thirdly, Sweden, like Finland, uses the symbol of the crown of laurels at degree conferment ceremonies for Doctors of Philosophy. Also, once a person has been awarded the crown of laurels at a degree conferment ceremony, he or she has the right also to wear the “doctoral hat” used at the faculty of philosophy.

Fourthly, in Sweden degree conferment is individual. This means that each person being awarded a degree is handed his or her insignia personally by the person appointed to confer the degree and is, for one moment, the absolute focus of attentions. Group degrees are never conferred in Sweden.

In this context, it may be mentioned that the dress code in Sweden is somewhat different from that at universities elsewhere. Although a foreign guest may often wear the dress of his or her university at a Swedish ceremony, it is always wise to enquire, as customs differ from one Swedish university to the next. Some require full evening dress, with a black or white waistcoat, while others also accept a dark suit. One rule of thumb is that a black bow tie is never worn in Sweden at an academic ceremony or the banquet held in conjunction with it.

It should be pointed out that in the past participation in the ceremonies were required to be formally conferred doctor and installed as professor. However, that is not the case today. A non-conferred doctor is as much a doctor as those participating in the conferment ceremony and a professor

who did not attend the installation ceremony is to the same extent a professor as the ones present.

It may also be added that the matriculation, or reception of new students, is not a formal occasion arranged by Swedish universities today. Instead, new students are welcomed in simple, informal ways, at information meetings about studying at the given university or college. And the student union organizations themselves organize the fun and games associated with becoming a university student.



SWEDISH SYMBOLS OF ACADEMIA AND ACADEMIC RITES TODAY

*Distinctions and symbols associated
with degree conferment ceremonies*

The doctoral hat

The hat symbolizes both freedom and power. In ancient Rome, only free men, as opposed to slaves, were permitted to cover their heads. The Swiss legend of William Tell tells of how the oppressed people were forced to bow down to a hat on a pole, where the hat symbolized the ruler.

The Swedish doctoral hat, once colourful (they were sometimes green or violet, for example) and available in straight, upturned or three-cornered styles, is now always black, straight, and pleated. The hat denoting a Doctor of Theology (in Uppsala and Lund) has a black bow at the front, while the hats from the other faculties have a gold clasp at the front with the insignia of the faculty.



The crown of laurels

The crown of laurels originated in classical mythology. The laurel was associated with Apollo, and the crown of laurels was the only prize awarded at the Olympic games. In the triumphal processions of the Roman Empire, the crown of laurels symbolized victory, and the Emperor was often portrayed wearing one. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, laurels came to represent the poet, and was

also associated with wisdom. This marked the transition of this symbol to the world of academia, where it is now used, as mentioned above, at the ceremony for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The Ring

The doctoral ring is always made of gold, and symbolizes the loyalty of the individual receiving the degree to his discipline. In the past, the ring was set with precious stones. Now each university and faculty ornaments the ring with its own symbols.

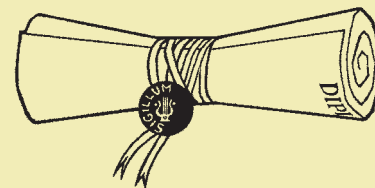
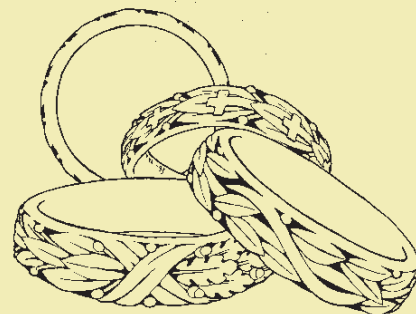
The diploma

Actually, the diploma is a certificate of graduation. In past times, it was important for a person who had been awarded a doctorate to be able to prove it when he travelled abroad by presenting his diploma. Today, the diploma is more like an object of art, and many recipients frame theirs and hang them on the wall. Naturally, each university has its own diploma. Some are in Latin, some in Swedish.

Other academic symbols

The chain of the Vice-Chancellor

Today, the Vice-Chancellor of each university and college wears a chain on official occasions. The tradition originated in the late nineteenth century, when King Oscar II awarded chains to the universities of Uppsala and Lund.





Moreover, the Vice-Chancellor of Lund University wears an old-fashioned, richly ornamented hat at degree conferment ceremonies and other especially solemn ceremonies.

The seal and the coat of arms

Each university and college has its own seal or logotype, used on stationery, printed matter, etc. At Uppsala University, the symbols on the seal, dating from around 1600, have been made into a coat of arms as well. The coat of arms is used on all printed matter from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor prepared for ceremonies and festivities.

The rods and sceptres

Sceptres, symbolising the self-determination the universities possessed until sometime in the nineteenth century, are used at Uppsala, Lund and Göteborg. They are carried by beadles at the head of formal processions, just ahead of the Vice-Chancellor. Sceptres are also used at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm as well as at the new universities in Karlstad, Växjö and Örebro. At Uppsala University, the chief beadle also carries a rod, made in the 1750s as a symbol of the power of the university. Linköping and Luleå also has faculty rods today.

Clothing with symbolic value

The “academic collar”, a tail-coat with embroidery, is common at all Swedish universities and colleges today, the embroidery differing from one university and/or faculty to

the next. In Lund and Göteborg there are also special academic suits, whereas elsewhere in Sweden, in comparison with other countries, there is relatively little in the way of colourful, ceremonial garb.

Other symbols in academic contexts

The newer universities have found it important to establish their own identities in the context of tradition, and for this reason, with Linköping being the outstanding example, the symbols of academia have been particularly cultivated. At the older universities symbols such as the book, the rapier and the Bible were used in degree conferment ceremonies of old, but are now a thing of the past.

The main traditions at degree conferment ceremonies

The language of degree conferment ceremonies

In older times, degree conferment ceremonies were always held in Latin, pursuant to international practice. This is still obligatory at Göteborg and Lund universities, while some of the other institutes allow the person appointed to confer the degrees on each occasion, the promotor, to select his language, and still others use Swedish exclusively. English is never the language spoken at degree conferment ceremonies, but honorary doctorates are often presented in English or another modern language.

Parnassus/the dias

Beginning in the Middle Ages, the symbol of the dias to signify the act of degree conferment took hold. The dias symbolizes the mountain of the Gods of Greek mythology, Parnassus. On Parnassus, the individual is awarded his or her honour, and when (s)he steps down on the other side of the “mount”, (s)he then has the right to disseminate academic learning. At the older universities, some kind of high dias is still used, but the actual ceremony varies substantially from one university to the next.

Salutes and fanfares

Salutes are still rung to celebrate degree conferment ceremonies at several universities, while others now use trumpet fanfares for the purpose.

The participants in the degree conferment ceremony

The promotor

A promotor is appointed by the university or the faculty to confer the degrees on any given occasion. (S)he must have been awarded a doctorate, although not necessarily at the faculty in question. As a rule, the promotor is also a professor.



Jubilee doctor

As mentioned above, a jubilee doctor is an individual who was awarded a doctoral degree fifty years earlier. He or she is invited back to his or her old university for a celebration and a tribute of gratitude.

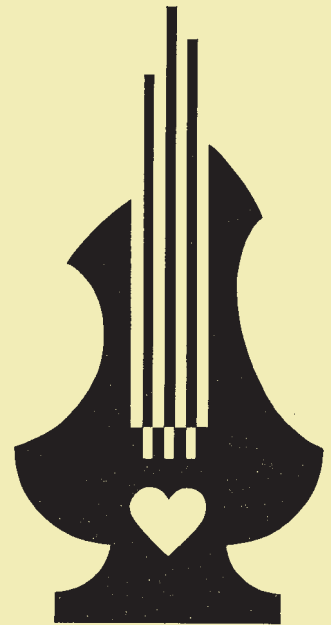
Honorary Doctorate

In principle, the degree of doctor honoris causa is conferred upon an individual who has acquired equivalent knowledge and insights in a given discipline in some way other than the traditional ones. Prominent individuals in the cultural sphere, Swedish or foreign, are examples of the kind of people who may be awarded an honorary doctorate. It may also be awarded to an outstanding scientist from another country with whose university the Swedish university collaborates. There is considerable difference amongst the Swedish universities in terms of the grounds on which honorary doctorates are awarded.

It may be emphasized, however, that in Sweden only the universities and their individual faculties have the right to determine who is to receive honorary doctorates. Neither the government nor any other authority may, or would wish to give guidance on this matter, or to apply pressure to have any individual awarded an honorary doctorate.

Doctor juvenis

This is the Latin term, still in use (plural, doctores iuvenes) for an individual who has completed post-graduate educa-



tion and publicly defended his doctoral thesis, at the ceremony when the degree is conferred upon him or her. It should be stressed that today - as opposed to in the past - it is voluntary to attend the degree conferment ceremony. Other formal terms for individuals awarded a doctorate in this way translate literally into English as “doctor who has completed the degree programme and examination” or “young doctor”.

The Latin terms used for individuals who are going to have degrees conferred upon them at a ceremony are: *promovendus* (masculine), *promovenda* (feminine) and *promovendi* (plural). The corresponding terms applied after the degree conferment ceremony are: *promotus*, *promota*, and *promoti*.

The crown bearers

This custom began in early nineteenth century Lund, but is also used in Göteborg today. The crowns of laurels to be awarded to the *promovendi* at the faculty of philosophy are carried into and held at the ceremony until the moment of conferment by a number of young girls and boys.

SWEDISH UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES – LARGER CEREMONIES TODAY

Uppsala University holds doctoral degree conferment ceremonies twice a year, on a Friday in late January and in late May or early June. An installation ceremony for professors is held separately once a year, in November.

Lund University also arranges its conferment ceremonies once a year in the spring. Large ceremonies for installation of professors are held once each spring and once each autumn.

Göteborg University holds conferment ceremonies on a Friday in late October, and installation ceremonies in May.

Stockholm University confers doctoral degrees and installs professors on the same occasion, the last Friday in September.

Umeå University holds an annual academic celebration one Saturday in late October. On that occasion, honorary doctorates are conferred and new professors installed. Doctores iuvenes have their degrees conferred one Saturday in late May or early June.

Linköping University holds degree conferment ceremonies twice a year on a Saturday in mid May and in mid November, and installation ceremonies on other occasions.

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) holds degree conferment ceremonies once a year, on a Saturday in early October and installation of professors on other occasions.

The Karolinska Institute in Stockholm holds annual



degree conferment ceremonies in May and in November, and installation of professors on other occasions.

The Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm has a combined degree conferment and professorial installation ceremony on a Friday in mid-November.

Chalmers University of Technology in Göteborg holds its degree conferment and professorial installation ceremony annually in late May.

The Stockholm School of Economics holds a biannual degree conferment ceremony, at its discretion.

Luleå University of Technology has a combined degree conferment and professorial installation ceremony on a Saturday in early November.

Jönköping University has a combined degree conferment and professorial installation every other year in September.

Blekinge Institute of Technology holds an annual conferment of doctoral degrees and installation of new professors on the Friday closest to 12th October

Malmö University holds an annual academic celebration in October, including degree conferment and professorial installation.

Karlstad University has an annual academic celebration on a Friday in late September.

Örebro University holds their annual academic celebration on a Saturday in Februari, including degree conferment and professorial installation.

20 **Mälardalen University** holds their ceremony of the conferment of doctoral degrees and installation of new professors each or every second year in April.

Mid Sweden University holds their biannual combined conferment and installation ceremony in mid-November alternating between the campuses in Härnösand, Sundsvall and Östersund.

Linnaeus University holds a combined presentation of new doctorates and installation of professors in May, the month of Carl Linnaeus's birth, alternating each year between Kalmar and Växjö.

Finally, it should be noted that, particularly when the degree conferment and professorial installation ceremonies are combined, the festivities may last for two days.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Academic traditions have developed over the course of centuries, but the development has not been without crises. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries degree conferment ceremonies were considered altogether too extravagant (not least because the individuals being awarded degrees were expected to pay for their own ceremonies) and there was a great deal of opposition. Between 1877 and 1935, as mentioned above, the ceremonies were extremely simple, and not particularly well organized. During the late 1960s and early 70s, there was a great deal of student unrest throughout the western world, and this was reflected in celebrations and ceremonies of the times. Sometimes the festivities were cancelled completely, on other occasions they were held with the greatest simplicity. Only a few years later, however, the tide began to turn, and today we can say that there is widespread interest in academic ceremonies and traditions. In the larger perspective, academic traditions are part of what gives every university its identity, its history and its uniqueness.

Examining the history of academic traditions, we find that they are far from being static, rigid phenomena. Traditions, too, must change and keep step with the times. Various factors also have to be taken into account, not least economic and personnel-related aspects. One might even go so far as to say that tradition is change. However, every tradition has its immutable core, which must be considered. If the core of a tradition is undermined, it may wither and die, possibly to be replaced by some other.

Institutes of higher education have increased in number in Sweden, notably during the last fifty years. This fact is also reflected in traditions and ceremonies. Local traditions and customs are being renewed, and made use of alongside the rites which are part of the original Swedish universities' heritage. This allows each university and college to develop its own profile, and it is easy to see that no two are perfe



