



The History of Ceremonial Conferments in Turku

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Traditions Dating Back to the Royal Academy of Turku

The history of ceremonial conferments organised by European universities goes back to the Middle Ages, as bachelors were conferred as masters in Paris and Bologna already in the 13th century. From the European universities, the tradition of conferring academic degrees spread to Sweden, where the ceremony was first organised at the Uppsala University in 1600 and at the Royal Academy of Turku in 1643. At that time, Finland and Turku were part of the Swedish kingdom and the Royal Academy of Turku, founded in 1640, was the first university in Finland. This university was situated in Turku until the great fire of 1827, after which the university was moved to Helsinki, the new capital of Finland. Ceremonial conferments have been an important celebration for the community, as not only does the ceremony confer scholars as part of the academic community, but it also builds internal hierarchy and symbolism.

At first, ceremonial conferments were celebrations of master's degrees as they were more important at the universities than doctoral degrees. Master's degrees could only be attained in the ceremonial conferment. This was preceded by the thesis *pro gradu*, the public defence of the thesis, as well as a separate public lecture, *lectio praecursoria*. In Turku, doctoral degrees were conferred for the first time in 1781 when the faculty of medicine organised its own ceremonial conferment. Between 1640 and 1827, 70 degree

conferments were organised at the university and 18 of these were ceremonial conferments of doctoral degrees. The last ceremonial conferment was a master's degree conferment in the summer of 1827.

Public ceremonies were part of the conferment already in the Royal Academy of Turku and many citizens participated in the celebration as guests. At the beginning of the 19th century, it was typical that citizens who were not part of the academia participated in the ceremonial conferment organised at the Old Academy Building next to the cathedral as well as in the ball that ended the celebrations. In addition, the service following the ceremonial conferment was open to the public, while the academic procession was reserved only for the professors and conferred doctors and masters.

The ceremonial conferment was an important ceremony to the academy, but it was also significant to the wider urban society. With the ceremonial conferment, the university became more visible to the rest of society and this visibility was highlighted with different kinds of prominent symbols, clothes, and sounds. In addition, speeches, music, and poetry were important elements in the celebration. It was typical to start the proceedings with, for example, a military salute. The thunder of the guns announced the prominence of the university to the entire city. Many of these traditions and ceremonial customs continued on after the university was transferred to Helsinki. Later on, they were picked up by the new Finnish universities.

The traditions of the Royal Academy of Turku were continued by the University of Helsinki, but many of the old customs were reintroduced later on at the University of Turku founded in 1920. In this overview, I discuss the history and traditions of the ceremonial conferments organised at the University of Turku and consider their relation to the customs of the Royal Academy.

First Ceremonial Conferment of the University of Turku

Academic celebrations returned to Turku after Finland gained its independence in 1917, as both the Swedish-language Åbo Akademi University and the Finnish-language University of Turku were founded in the city, in 1918 and 1920 respectively. For a new country establishing its self-esteem as a nation and mending the wounds of a recent civil war, the academic institutions became important sources of national pride. The universities were supported in many ways, and the events they organised received much attention in the press, even though only few Finns actually studied at the universities.

The new universities of a young nation traced their origins to the Royal Academy of Turku, where they also sought a model for their own traditions. The ceremonial conferment was the most important of these historic academic celebrations that returned to the city after an interruption of a hundred years. The first ceremonial conferment of the University of Turku was organised in May 1927 in a favourable economic situation. The ceremonial conferment was part of the grand inauguration that had not been held in the first few

years following the founding of the University. This way, the University's first ceremonial conferment received even more attention than it otherwise would have.

The first day of the conferment celebrations started with a wreath-weaving ceremony and a banquet. The actual conferment ceremony began on 12 May with an academic procession of the conferred graduates and the professors. The procession started from the University's main building Phoenix that was situated next to the market square. It proceeded to the Old Academy Building, where the invited guests ranging from members of the government to foreign diplomats were already waiting. Altogether 29 bachelors of Arts and six licentiates from the University's two faculties, the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, were conferred in the ceremony. With the conferment, they became masters and doctors. An honorary doctorate was conferred on the University's first chancellor, J. R. Danielson-Kalmari.

The first ceremonial conferment was both for masters and doctors, similar to the custom at the Imperial Alexander University in Finland, which had become the name of the Royal Academy of Turku once Finland became part of the Russian Empire and the university was moved to Helsinki. Following the tradition of the old Royal Academy of Turku, the masters were presented with a wreath and a ring and the doctors with a hat and a sword. The doctoral hat symbolises the freedom of thought and research and the sword the sharpness of the mind. The value of both symbols in the academic community was ensured with a diploma which strengthened the ceremonial significance.

Furthermore, the scientific and historic nature of the ceremony was highlighted by the ceremonial speeches. The primus master and doctor gave responses to the posed scientific questions and the ultimus master and doctor gave speeches to the guests of honour. The celebration was elevated by a cantata composed for the ceremonial conferment by Leevi Madetoja to a famous Finnish poem by V.A. Koskenniemi. Unlike in the time of the Royal Academy, a ceremonial conferment poem was no longer published, but the cantata can be seen as a symbolic nod towards the earlier traditions.

From the Old Academy Building, the participants proceeded to the cathedral to a service organised in honour of the official inauguration of the University of Turku. This way, the University also created a ceremonial bond with the Lutheran Church, which had been the custom for centuries. The actual conferment ceremony ended in a symphony concert at the Old Academy Building and a banquet at the Turku VFD House. On the next day, on 13 May, which is also the name day of Flora and a traditional day for celebrating students, additional two concerts and the ceremonial conferment and inauguration ball were organised at the Turku VFD House. The first ceremonial conferment ended in a sailing trip and a celebration of the master of ceremonies in the Turku archipelago on 14 May.

This is how the tradition for ceremonial conferments was created at the University of Turku and it has been followed in the succeeding ceremonies throughout the decades. However, while the customs of the ceremonial conferment are grounded in history and tradition, the celebration is not stuck in the past but the conventions of the 1927

ceremonial conferment have been subtly renewed in the following decades to reflect the changing times.

Ceremonies after the Second World War

Despite short breaks, the operation of the University of Turku continued throughout the Second World War. After the war, the number of students started to rise quickly. However, the University's first ceremonial conferment after the war was organised only in 1955. At that time, doctoral degrees were granted in all three faculties of the University: the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, and the Faculty of Medicine. At the ceremony, 13 honorary doctors, 12 doctors and 75 masters were conferred.

In 1970, large festivities were afoot in Turku, as the University organised an anniversary ceremonial conferment to celebrate its first 50 years. The celebration included a sword sharpening ceremony, conferment ceremony, service, banquet, and a third day of events, including a trip to the nearby city of Naantali and a play at a theatre in Turku. The ceremonial conferment was the culmination among the many events of the academic year 1970 at the University of Turku. Different kinds of anniversary seminars and meetings, exhibitions, theatre performances, and statue unveilings were organised at the University. Furthermore, another ceremonial conferment was organised that year, as the unofficial Culinary Faculty, which has operated under the Savo-Karelian Student Nation since 1931, conferred its doctors.

The University's conferment festivities also received the highest national recognition, as President Urho Kekkonen participated in the ceremony as a guest of honour. Also, the previous presidents and their spouses had visited the University and many of them later on received an honorary doctorate from the University. The first was President Kekkonen in 1965. He was conferred as an honorary doctor of the University of Turku three times altogether.

University graduates had a prominent position and status in society and there was hardly any academic unemployment. From today's perspective, there were still rather few graduates with a master's degree or a doctorate, even though the numbers were growing. Just a few ceremonial conferments were organised in the 1960s and 1970s, only twice per decade, which reflects the University's need to confer degrees. Of course, not all the graduates wanted to participate in the ceremonial conferment at that time.

Ceremonial Conferments at the Nationalised University of Turku

The nationalisation of the University of Turku in 1974 and the somewhat unenthusiastic attitude among Finns in the 1970–80s towards grand traditional celebrations, did not diminish the standing of ceremonial conferments in the academic community. The first ceremonial conferment of the nationalised University was organised in 1977, followed by three ceremonies in the 1980s.

However, social change was also visible in the ceremonial conferment. As a result of the exponential growth in the number of students, the University was unable to organise ceremonial conferments of master's degrees. The last conferment of master's degrees took place in the ceremonial conferment of the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences in 1977, after which only doctors and honorary doctors have been conferred at the University of Turku. The only exception has been the ceremonial conferment of master's degrees organised at Turku School of Economics in 2012. At the same time, one of the most visible ties to the academic celebrations of the Royal Academy of Turku was broken, or at least put on hold, as the ceremonial conferments of the Royal Academy mostly concerned master's degrees.

The new policy also had an impact on the programme, as when the conferment of master's degrees was given up also the centuries-old tradition of wreath weaving disappeared from the ceremony. The sharpening ceremony of the doctoral swords, which was introduced in the 1960s and 70s, has remained a part of the ceremonial conferment. This tradition was strengthened so that the ceremonial conferment programme started already on the day before the actual conferment ceremony. Inspired by a German tradition, the students' uniform used to include a sword, and the sword sharpening ceremony aimed to build a symbolic bridge to the times of the Royal Academy of Turku. At the University of Turku, swords were handed out to the doctors already in the first ceremonial conferment in 1927, but at that time they were not symbolically sharpened.

In the last decades, the rising numbers of graduates and new doctors have increased the need for organising ceremonial conferments. Therefore, ceremonial conferments have been celebrated more often starting from the 1980s. In the 21st century, the rate of organising ceremonial conferments has sped up, as the number of graduating doctors has exploded and the University has aimed to keep the event manageable. In the 2000s, the number of promovendi has been approximately 150 persons, but the event has been organised at an increasing pace. This way, as many doctors as possible have been able to participate in the ceremony without it becoming too large.

The ceremonial conferments have been arranged by the University for all the faculties or the faculties have arranged their own, separate conferment ceremonies. An exception was made in 1990, when a shared ceremonial conferment for honorary doctors was organised together with Åbo Akademi University and Turku School of Economics. At that time, Turku School of Economics was its own university, as it merged with the University of Turku only in 2010. The ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors commemorated the 350th anniversary of the Royal Academy of Turku, and the City of Turku suggested to the universities that a joint celebration should be organised specifically at Turku. In addition to the ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors, different kinds of events, such as a historic procession simulating the founding procession of the Royal Academy, were organised at Turku.

Anniversaries and the historical rhetoric they lend to the events provide an excellent opportunity to organise ceremonial conferments. The University's first ceremonial

conferment in 1927 was also, at the same time, the University's inauguration festivity and the 100th anniversary of the last ceremonial conferment held at the Royal Academy of Turku. Significant anniversaries were also celebrated in 1970 and 1995 with a ceremonial conferment of all faculties. Also, the Faculty of Medicine took note of their 50th anniversary in 1993 by combining a ceremonial conferment and anniversary celebrations. Combining anniversary celebrations and ceremonial conferments reflects the significance of the ceremonial conferment in highlighting scholarship and learning as well as being the pinnacle of academic celebrations and ceremony. Similar combinations of ceremonial conferments and anniversary celebrations had already been organised at the Royal Academy of Turku, which, for example, conferred its masters in theology at the same time as it celebrated the 300-year anniversary of the Reformation in 1817.

Established and Changeable Traditions

For a hundred years, the programme of the ceremonial conferments at the University of Turku has followed the historic customs and modern traditions based on older practices. At the centre of the festivities is still the conferment ceremony, a celebration of science and scholarship and an academic rite of passage. The continuum of the traditions of the Royal Academy of Turku is highlighted by the impressive academic procession directed at the citizens of Turku and the service at the Turku Cathedral. In addition, organising a banquet at the end of the celebration is a tradition that goes back for centuries, as are toasts and academic decorations and emblems.

Despite the festive traditions, the ceremonial conferment at the University of Turku has not become frozen in time but has evolved in the course of the decades as traditions have changed and some have been given up entirely. After the ceremonial conferment in 1977, the wreaths and conferment of master's degrees disappeared from the ceremony and, in 1986, the address to the women was given up as a ceremonial conferment tradition. The official reason was making the programme more compact, but in reality, the tradition had become old-fashioned and the University wanted to give it up rather than adding a ceremonial address to the men. The traditional sailing trip that ended the festivities was previously organised in 2015, after which the celebration has been limited to two days. Other traditions that have been removed from the ceremony are the selection of the primus and ultimus doctors as well as carrying the conferrer and the wreath weaver in a gilded chair. Instead of the success of the individuals, the focus has been on the academic community.

The ceremonial conferment still has great significance in celebrating the academia, scientific achievements, and science and scholarship in general. The celebration is visible and noticeable on purpose both among its immediate community and among the citizens of Turku. Established traditions that evolve in the course of time ensure that doctors are still celebrated in the 100-year-old University of Turku. Academic traditions are most valuable

when they reflect the time period and the values of the community while maintaining their distinctive and often historic characteristics.

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Ceremonial conferments organised at the University of Turku

- 1927 Ceremonial conferment of master's and doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 1955 Ceremonial conferment of master's and doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 1960 Ceremonial conferment of master's and doctoral degrees of the Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences
- 1962 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the Faculty of Law
- 1965 Ceremonial conferment of master's and doctoral degrees of the Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences
- 1970 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 1973 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the Faculty of Law
- 1975 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the Faculty of Medicine
- 1977 Ceremonial conferment of master's and doctoral degrees of the Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences
- 1977 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the Faculty of Social Sciences
- 1980 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 1982 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the Faculty of Medicine
- 1986 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 1986 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the Faculty of Law
- 1987 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the Faculty of Medicine
- 1990 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the University of Turku, Åbo Akademi University and Turku School of Economics
- 1993 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of the Faculty of Medicine
- 1995 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2000 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2003 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2006 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2009 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2010 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of Turku School of Economics
- 2011 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2012 Ceremonial conferment of master's degrees of Turku School of Economics
- 2013 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2015 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2016 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of Turku School of Economics
- 2017 Ceremonial conferment of doctoral degrees of all faculties
- 2021 Ceremonial conferment of honorary doctors of the University of Turku

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