

# The Academical Dress of Finland: A Contemporary (Re)Introduction

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## Abstract

With its elegant tailcoat, doctoral hat and doctoral sword, the style and tradition of Finland's doctoral dress offer a dramatic contrast to more commonly seen forms of academical dress around the world. While a few standard works have superficially touched on the topic, there is a perhaps explainable dearth of work on Finnish academical dress in either academic literature or wider writing in any language. However, digital media have begun to yield accounts of Finnish doctoral 'graduation', and its dress and traditions are gaining exposure. In order to bring academical dress scholars up to date with this setting, this work offers a contemporary (re)introduction to the history and form of Finland's academical dress that goes beyond the coverage of existing works, explaining some of the meaning of its regalia, highlighting its unique features, and offering an insight into the possible psycho-social attitudes behind its adoption and use. Furthermore, it presents the first collated historical account of the origins and practices of Finnish academical dress published in English, and offers the first published photograph of the original doctoral sword designed by Akseli Gallén-Kallela, which is still in production today.

## Introduction

Finland has performed to a consistently high level across the educational strata, ranking highly in the international PISA study,<sup>1</sup> the UN Development Programme Education Index,<sup>2</sup> and the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report.<sup>3</sup> Be it design and architecture, the discovery of elements, or the development of the mobile phone, Finland's educational system produces academics, scientists and professionals who are globally influential, despite having a population of only 5.5 million, and a total of only thirteen universities and twenty-two universities of applied sciences.<sup>4</sup> Behind this performance lies a cadre of master's qualified primary and secondary school teachers, and doctoral qualified university professors, docents and lecturers, each one of whom has undertaken extensive specialist study in their fields, and been awarded their culminating degree and the right to wear its associated academical dress and regalia. However, while the majority of higher education institutions around the world favour elements such as gowns and robes, hoods, and headdress such as a square academic cap or bonnet, Finland has a relatively unique tradition of wreaths, rings, tail coats, tall hats and doctoral swords.

1 Schleicher.

2 United Nations.

3 Schwab, pp. 130–31.

4 Study in Finland.

The traditions and history of these elements are little known outside of Finland, so it is worth taking a brief look at what makes Finnish academical dress so different, how it evolved, and what it means in the cultural context of those who wear it.

## History

The Royal Academy of Turku or the Royal Academy of Åbo was Finland's first university. It was founded in 1640 in the capital city of Turku in southwest Finland by Queen



**Fig. 1. Author wearing the *Frakki*, *Tohtorinhattu* and *Tohtorinmiekkä* (tailcoat, doctoral hat and doctoral sword) of a PhD from the University of Lapland.**

Christina of Sweden at the behest of the statesman Count Per Brahe the Younger (1602–80), and situated on the grounds of the former Åbo Cathedral School (founded 1276).<sup>5</sup> At that time, Finland was part of the Swedish Empire, and the Royal Academy of Turku became the third university in the Empire alongside Uppsala University in Sweden (1477) and the Academia Gustaviana (now the University of Tartu in Estonia, 1632). In 1809, Finland was ceded to Russia, and the capital was relocated to Helsinki in 1812 as Turku was regarded as being too remote from Saint Petersburg. After the Great Fire of Turku all but razed the city in 1827, the University was also moved the following year by order of Emperor Nikolai I (as Grand Duke of Finland) to Helsinki, and renamed the Imperial Alexander University.<sup>6</sup> Between 1642 and 1828, about 4,433 dissertations were published at the Royal Academy of Turku.<sup>7</sup>

Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917, and the Imperial Alexander University was renamed as the University of Helsinki in 1919.<sup>8</sup> Universities became re-established in Turku with the founding of the Swedish-speaking Åbo Akademi University in 1918, and the Finnish-speaking University of Turku in 1920. These were quickly followed by universities being founded in Tampere (1925), Jyväskylä (1934), Oulu (1958), Vaasa (1966), the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi (1979), the University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu and Aalto University in Helsinki (2010), together with technical institutions that also had doctoral degree granting authority, and a rich history of further education institutions.<sup>9</sup>

As part of the Finnish tradition, a university degree was required to be formally bestowed during a conferment ceremony. The Royal Academy of Turku held its first ceremonial conferment of master's degrees in 1643, conferring ten new master's degree holders, and a further eighteen in 1647. The first ceremony to confer doctoral de-

5 UNESCO National Committee; Välimaa, pp. 75–86.

6 UNESCO.

7 Doria.

8 UNESCO.

9 Uni Rank.



**Fig. 2.** *Inauguration of the Academy of Turku in 1640 (Turun akatemian vihkiäiset)*, Albert Edelfelt (1904). Per Brahe the Younger is depicted in the central panel of the triptych.

grees was organized in Turku in 1781, and after the University transferred to Helsinki in 1828, the faculties of philosophy and medicine conducted their first conferment ceremonies in 1832.<sup>10</sup> As well as being a ceremonial occasion, conferment was seen as a pre-requisite to being allowed to lecture in universities, hence the emergence of the Finnish concept of a '*Promootio*' event which allowed the *promovendi* to move forward with their academic careers.<sup>11</sup>

Universities around the world tend to have awards ceremonies where graduating students don academic dress to receive their degree, and where doctoral graduates are presented with their doctoral gown and cap. Finland (along with Sweden) preserves a historical tradition of conferring both its master's and doctoral degrees. In most Western cultures, a doctorate is often pre-requisite for teaching in a university, and a master's degree does not generally hold the same entitlement. So, in Finland, master's regalia are seen as a mark of achievement and are never used as a formal part of academic ceremonial after conferment, whereas the doctoral tailcoat, hat, and sword are required dress for a range of academic occasions such as doctoral examinations, institutional occasions, and future conferment officiation. In extension to its doctoral education, Finland also has a strong tradition of docentship, originating in the licence to teach. Docentship was awarded as far back as 1738 at the Royal Academy of Turku, where to be acknowledged as holding the rank equivalent of an associate professor, a doctor is expected to continue their development to the level of a second or third PhD (depending on institution), as well as acquiring concrete teaching skills and experience, and evidence of their continued independent research and scholarship. So doing allows them to be appointed as professors, act as principal investigators, and to supervise doctoral students.<sup>12</sup> However, whilst conferred as a formal academic rank (and often for life), this further habilitation is not associated with any form of academical dress or regalia.

<sup>10</sup> Aalto University (2018).

<sup>11</sup> Helsinki University (2023).

<sup>12</sup> Turku University Docents' Association.

As a further observation, there is no present tradition of academical dress or graduation ceremonies for undergraduate degree holders, and the ‘cap and gown culture’ seen in many institutions of higher education is generally absent in traditional Finnish universities. However, it can sometimes be seen, for example, in Universities of Applied Sciences such as the Laurea Ammattikorkeakoulu, where blue university-specific robes are worn by graduands for the occasion.<sup>13</sup> This differs even from its Nordic neighbours (e.g. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden), where undergraduate graduation has become a growing feature, although the master’s and doctoral academical dress of Sweden has strong similarities with that of Finland.<sup>14</sup> However, in regard to students, Smith and Sheard and Strömberg discuss the attire of Finnish university ‘Nations’, which are nowadays essentially voluntary member societies and associations based on the province or area that students come from, and signified by a coloured sash worn over the right shoulder.<sup>15</sup> Klinge mentions that undergraduate uniforms for students had been used as early as 1817, and were only replaced by the wearing of a frock coat in 1847, and supplemented in 1851 with a peaked cap with a lyre shaped cockade (the current student cap dates from the 1870s).<sup>16</sup> Although originally formed in 1643,<sup>17</sup> in contemporary university dress, Nations have been somewhat overtaken by a common use of ‘guilds’ based on the major subject a student is taking.<sup>18</sup> Today’s guilds employ a wide variety of colourful overalls and insignia that lie beyond the scope of the current article, and the white student cap with a black peak (*ylioppilaslakki*) is ever present in Finnish society at social events even remotely linked to education and study. But although the Nations were once a mandatory level of organization and their sashes and uniforms could rightly be considered as academical dress, the current guild and nation systems are voluntary, and their dress and insignia are not a formal part of their university’s attire.

### Changes in dress as a societal statement

In the conferment ceremonies, *promovendi* and honorary doctors are presented with the insignia of their degree. Master’s *promovendi* are crowned with a laurel wreath and presented with their master’s ring, while doctoral *promovendi* and honorary doctors are presented with their doctoral hat and doctoral sword. Following on from Roman traditions, a hat was seen as a sign of a free and independent man, and in academic circles, the presentation of a hat signified the freedom of its wearer to pursue academic enquiry.<sup>19</sup> Universities originated with strong ties to the church, and early academic dress echoed the style of the ecclesiastical pileus and robes of the old institutions. However, the doctrine of papal power has been a debated issue from the earliest times in the Nordic territories,<sup>20</sup> and following the religious reformation that swept Europe in the sixteenth century, many academic institutions which were keen to shed

13 Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

14 University of Southern Denmark; Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Chalmers University of Technology.

15 Smith and Sheard, p. 973; Strömberg, pp. 537–49.

16 Klinge, p. 413.

17 Välimaa, pp. 75–86.

18 ‘Student organizations in Finland—the system of guilds’.

19 Aalto University.

20 Strömberg, pp. 537–49.

their Catholic past adopted caps or bonnets that had a more ‘civilian’ appearance. In his seminal work on the University of Helsinki, Klinge notes that portraits of distinguished university professors were quite rare in Turku.<sup>21</sup> The images available tend to reflect dress that depicted the noble status and attire of the individual concerned (for example as a high-ranking member of the clergy or member of state), and most feature civilian dress forms common at the time. Notable features are a lace collar and cape; however, it was only in the eighteenth century that the Royal Academy of Turku began to turn from theology to science as a base for its existence.<sup>22</sup>

A red hat was historically awarded to masters *promovendi*,<sup>23</sup> but this was replaced in the nineteenth century by the symbolic crowning with a laurel wreath as a symbol of having achieved the master’s degree, together with the presentation of a master’s ring. This may have reflected a desire to disconnect visibly from any notions of ecclesiastical allegiance (a red hat is still a common marker of Catholic ecclesiastical office), especially given the strong Lutheran sentiment of the country. This disconnection or state of contention between universities and the church had been seen across Europe since the Middle Ages,<sup>24</sup> and early Finnish doctoral hats have been described more as a ‘beret’,<sup>25</sup> which may also have reflected a literal disassociation from ecclesiastical allegiance. This change in orientation was marked in Finland with the relinquishment of the vice-chancellorship of the University by Archbishop Tengström in 1817,<sup>26</sup> and mirrored a similar trend seen in European universities that veered strongly away from any revolutionary associations that had been seen in universities during the revolutionary period in France. Once the ‘new’ university tradition had become established in Helsinki, the doctoral beret was replaced by a hat similar to a bourgeois top hat in the nineteenth century (see Fig. 7b for an early example), although the early work by Baty erroneously claims them to have been worn ‘from ancient times’.<sup>27</sup> The company of E. R. Wahlman has been manufacturing doctoral hats in Helsinki since 1901, and state that the current design was inceptioned in the promotion event of 1840.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, formal academic robes were replaced with a black, open-front tailcoat and black trousers, a white or black waistcoat and bow tie. Hargreaves-Mawdsley states that at Helsingfors (referring to the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki), ‘all wore the military type of dress prescribed in 1817’, yet there is no confirmatory detail,<sup>29</sup> and Snellman clearly describes and depicts the tailcoat ensemble as being a standard part of the dress of the Finnish nobility as late as 1877.<sup>30</sup> However, a water-colour by Severin Falkman of 1853 does depict a version of student dress featuring a double-breasted blue frock coat with embroidered collar flashes and a ceremonial dagger and knot that was proposed by the Pro-Chancellor J. R. Munck for the Emperor’s

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21 Klinge, p. 166.

22 University of Helsinki.

23 Ibid.

24 Vällimaa, pp. 75–86.

25 Aalto University (2018).

26 Klinge, p. 288.

27 Baty, p. 81.

28 Wahlman.

29 Hargreaves-Mawdsley, p. 184.

30 Snellman, pp. 3–35.

approval, although the design was not adopted.<sup>31</sup> It is notable that with the exception of high ceremonial events, all subsequent images (portrait or photograph) of eminent individuals at Finnish universities feature either civilian dress, or the relatively plain ‘white tie’ that can be seen today.

Klaus Solberg Søylen notes that Finnish academic dress closely follows that of Sweden, largely because of their long historical links, and that Sweden adopted the ‘white tie’ form of dress shortly after 1833.<sup>32</sup> Thus, its formal adoption in Finland is likely to lie between 1833 and 1840. However, while Smith and Sheard give considerable attention to the sash attire of the student Nations, they dismiss the tailcoat ensemble as a form of academic costume, and simply regard it as a form of dress, even though it is worn solely to high academic occasions.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, while their work on Finland spans some thirty-one pages (twenty-eight of which are hand-drawn plates), there is no indication of the date or grounds for their observations, and they reference no sources, despite the existence at the time (1970) of documentary and photographic archive material and repositories. However, in a more recent work, Klinge depicts a range of student sashes that were in use across Finnish universities in the 1950s, based on the pennants of the historical provinces.<sup>34</sup>

To complete the dress transformation, a sword was introduced as a final part of the doctoral regalia as a symbol of doctoral value, and featured in the celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the University of Helsinki (then the Imperial Alexander University) in 1840.<sup>35</sup> Once Finland became a republic in 1919, the official civilian sword designed by Akseli Gallén-Kallela (see Fig. 3) was adopted. Gallén-Kallela (1865–1931) was a prolific artist, and undertook the design of a variety of swords and uniforms for the Finnish armed services,<sup>36</sup> and one line of thinking (albeit unconfirmed) is that following the Imperial Russian tradition, a doctorate holder was held to be of equal social rank to an officer of the armed services. As well as serving as a symbolic weapon of the spirit to defend the truth, right and good deduced by the researcher,<sup>37</sup> the sword acted as a visible symbol of their noble status in society. In support of this idea, the two-hundredth anniversary celebration of the University of Helsinki has been acknowledged as having been dominated by the idea of improving cultural and scientific connections with Russia.<sup>38</sup> The wearing of a sword extended a message of social parity with the Imperial institutions in Russia, and also (in the eyes of Sweden) indicated that Finland had distanced itself from its Swedish past.<sup>39</sup>

The doctoral sword was first manufactured by W. K. C. Stahl und Metallwarenfabrik, which had been producing swords in Solingen in Germany since 1573. Figure 4 shows what is thought to be the first manufactured Finnish doctoral sword. The whereabouts of the actual sword are unknown, but it is likely that a first sample was

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31 Klinge, p. 296.

32 Solberg Søylen, pp. 35–36.

33 Smith and Sheard, p. 974.

34 Klinge, p. 721.

35 Oulun Yliopisto.

36 National Biography of Finland.

37 Helsinki University.

38 Klinge, p. 337.

39 Dhondt, p. 13.

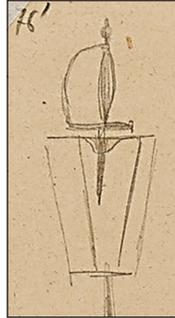
**Fig. 3. The development of the Finnish doctoral sword, 1832–present.**



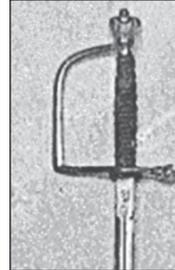
**3a. Russian small sword with laurel wreath guard, c. 1832, from the Imperial Alexander University.**



**3b. Åbo Akademi University doctoral sword, c. 1924.**



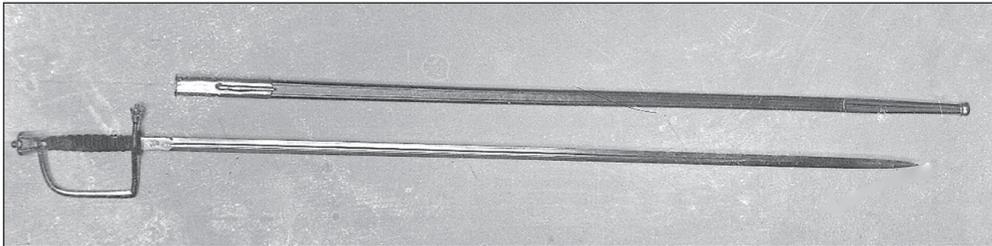
**3c. Preliminary sketch of the official civilian sword designed by Akseli Gallén-Kallela, 1918.**



**3d. First manufactured Finnish doctoral sword, c. 1918–19, by W.K.C. Solingen, Germany.**



**3e. Current Finnish doctoral sword, c. 2022, by W.K.C. Solingen, Germany.**



W.K.C. Stahl und Metallwarenfabrik Hans Kolping GmbH

**Fig. 4. Archive photo: Glass plate ambrotype of the first manufactured Finnish doctoral sword, designed by Akseli Gallén-Kallela in a c. 1918 photograph.**

recorded for approval or as a sales picture by the company, and that it acted as a reference model for future production. In 1944 during the Second World War, the W. K. C works were the target of Allied bombardment and almost all of the company's buildings and machines were destroyed, and production was finally stopped.<sup>40</sup> Along with it, all of the company records were lost, and probably the original sword if it was kept as a reference model (it is unlikely that the sword would have been transferred to another storage facility or museum, as a Finnish doctoral sword is unlikely to have held any particular importance outside Finland). As such, the glass plate ambrotype is likely to be the only remaining record of the original sword.

Production at W. K. C. was resumed in 1955,<sup>41</sup> and the company still produces the Gallén-Kallela designed sword today, albeit with minor changes such as the replacement of a central fullered blade with a double-edged hollow ground/diamond

40 W. K. C. Stahl und Metallwarenfabrik.

41 W. K. C.

cross-section blade. However, the image is still of utmost historic and academic value, as the Gallén-Kallela designed sword was formally adopted in 1919, and this date falls within the scope of the UNESCO registered Archives of the Royal Academy of Turku and the Imperial Alexander University, which span from 1640 to 1924.<sup>42</sup> As such, this original image is a central remaining link between the changes in academical dress inaugurated in 1840 at the newly named University of Helsinki (Helsingin yliopisto in Finnish; Helsingfors universitet in Swedish) and the ongoing practices of Finland's doctors of today.

### Contemporary Finnish academical dress

Reflecting the changed level of qualification now required to teach in most Western universities, the award and use of master's and doctoral regalia in Finland is an honest acknowledgment of how things work in academia, that moves beyond the display and credentialism of obtaining higher degrees. Particularly, a master's degree is rightly lauded as an achievement that is worthy of celebration by the academy, and given recognition by its token regalia. However, a doctoral degree is seen as entitling the bearer to enter the academy as a free-thinking independent scholar, and to undertake specific tasks for which a lesser degree (on its own) is viewed as being insufficient. As such, the doctor's dress and regalia are given higher esteem as markers of an on-going right to participate in the academy, and wearing them for specific tasks such as formal viva examinations reminds people of their qualification to do so, beyond a job title or position. In the 1970s, conferment ceremonies came to be considered as old-fashioned and elitist, but in the 1980s, the social atmosphere changed and conferment ceremonies regained their popularity.<sup>43</sup>

As a reflection of the academic culture of Finland, the Conferment Ceremony has been accepted as a part of the Finnish List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity because with its 400-year-old tradition; it is one of the oldest ceremonies still organized in Finland.<sup>44</sup> However, there is a relatively strong sense of social equality in Finland and the Nordic countries in general, and while achievement and position are highly respected, any portrayal of it as a reflection of status or entitlement is strongly frowned upon. Consequently, doctoral academic dress is reserved purely for ceremonial and high-academic occasions, and never worn in a working context within the university. As a further observation, a master's degree is a mandatory requirement to teach in Finnish schools, yet Finnish teachers do not wear academical dress of any kind (even if they hold a doctoral qualification), and even school uniforms for the students are absent.

Academical dress is worn by master's and doctoral degree holders during their ceremony of conferment. They are not referred to as graduands as they have already been awarded their degree by their universities without ceremony, and the conferral event serves to celebrate their achievements, and to confer them with the symbols of their degrees. Master's dress is only used for this specific event, and until recently there has been no academical dress for master's degree holders in the Finnish system, nor for any academic rank or qualification below that of Doctor. A similar tradition is seen

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42 UNESCO.

43 Elävä Perintö.

44 Helsinki University.

Fig. 5. Left to right: Rector's cape and chains of office, and the Beadle's gown and sceptres of the University of Helsinki.



in Sweden which is closely linked to Finland in cultural and historic terms.<sup>45</sup> Doctoral dress is worn for this occasion for the first time, and if the doctor continues in an academic career, they will wear academical dress only for high-academic occasions and as part of the traditional attire required for those officiating and examining in doctoral defence vivas.

However, high ceremonial dress and regalia are worn by university Chancellors and Rectors on special academic occasions. Figure 5 shows the Rector's cape and chains of office, and the Beadle's gown and sceptres of the University of Helsinki. The Rector's cape was manufactured in 1932 and donated by the Friends of the University of Helsinki, and the chains were received as a donation from the association of professors' wives at the University of Helsinki and the Student Union in 1956. The sceptres are the original sceptres carried in the inauguration ceremony of the Royal Academy of Turku in 1640, and the title of Beadle dates back to the University Statute of 1852.<sup>46</sup> Other Finnish university Rector's dress and regalia have been detailed to some degree by Smith and Sheard.<sup>47</sup> However, the wearing of formal 'ceremonial' is still quite rare in Finland, and generally limited to high office holders on special occasions.

### Master's dress

The extent of the conferment of master's degrees makes the Nordic ceremonies stand out (although it is practised in Sweden),<sup>48</sup> and Finland has a proud tradition that stretches back to its academic beginnings. A tailcoat for men or a white evening dress for women is required for most of the events. On the first day of the *Promootio*, master's *promovendi* tie the laurel wreaths that they will be awarded in the conferment act. The evening ends in a wreath-weaving banquet which includes speeches which are an integral part of the conferment tradition. On the day of conferral, during the conferment ceremony, the new masters receive their academic insignia. The *promovendi* approach the rostrum with their laurel wreaths pinned to the left lapel of their jacket or dress. The Conferner takes the laurel wreath and places it on their head, and places the

45 Nevéus.

46 Helsinki University Museum (2020b), *ibid*.

47 Smith and Sheard, pp. 996–1003.

48 Solberg Søylen, pp. 29–34.



Photo by Author

Fig. 6a. Master's *promovendi* waiting to enter the conferment hall in 2019.

#### Masters' rings



6b. 1778.



6c. 1832.



6d. 1869.



6e. 1919.

gold master's ring on the index finger of the left hand. During the Conferment Act it is worn on top of a pair of white gloves, and in all other events after the Conferment Act it is worn under the glove. The ring may also be worn above the knuckle when wearing gloves so that the glove does not have to be considered in its measurement.<sup>49</sup> Smith and Sheard depict a number of master's rings from various Finnish universities;<sup>50</sup> however, modern convention allows a plain gold ring without gems or other embellishments to be used as a substitute for the master's ring. Sweden has a similar dress code, and confers their master's graduates with a crown of laurels and a master's ring.<sup>51</sup> However, the cap and gown culture seen in many institutions of higher education is beginning to emerge, and for instance, graduation robes featuring a purple-rimmed square cap, and a black master's gown with wide purple-lined sleeves and a purple-lined simple-shape hood, possibly the Wales [s5] or Sussex [s8], which have been designed by students for graduands of the MBA and Executive MBA programmes of Aalto University Executive Education (Aalto EE).<sup>52</sup>

## Doctoral dress

### *Doctoral tailcoat (frakki)*

Doctoral academical dress in Finland for men comprises a black, open-front tailcoat and black trousers, and a white or black waistcoat and white bow tie. The black waistcoat is worn for daytime events, while the white waistcoat is worn for evening events. White gloves are worn, and a white pocket square is worn in the left breast pocket. Women wear a full-length long-sleeved black gown, with black gloves, or a black fitted jacket with trousers or an ankle-length skirt. Shoes are required to be black with a smooth sole. Conventionally the men's shoes have been patent leather; however, the modern convention is less strict, and allows the wearers to make their own choices in

49 Helsinki University.

50 Smith and Sheard, pp. 988–90.

51 Solberg Søylen, pp. 29–34; Nevéus.

52 Aalto University (2016).

Fig. 7. Finnish doctoral hats and *lyyra* emblems



Photo by Author

7b. A range of doctoral hats waiting to be bestowed in 2019, each labelled with the recipient's name.



7a. Doctor's hat from the 1800s.



7c. Engineering hat, 1988.



7d. Hat lyre for PhD, 1918.

style and design, albeit in keeping with tradition. Sweden has a similar dress code, and academical dress centres on a tailcoat with white tie and a black or white waistcoat. However, Swedish tailcoats are embellished with an embroidered academic collar that is faculty- and university-specific.<sup>53</sup>

#### *The doctoral hat (tohtorinhattu)*

Doctorate holders in Finland are presented with a doctoral hat that is handmade to order, and is measured for the wearer using a conformateur which was originally patented in the 1850s.<sup>54</sup> Each hat follows a design specific to the discipline and degree for which it is being bestowed. There is no differentiation in hat form for men or women, although universities and faculties have a minor degree of licence in the hat's fine presentation details. The basic design of the hat has gone unchanged since its inception in 1840,<sup>55</sup> and the traditional hat colour is black symbolizing the freedom of science, but the colour may vary for specific fields. Doctors of Fine Arts use dark blue, Doctors of Law use crimson, Doctors of Medicine and Dentistry use dark green, Doctors of Military Science use grey, Doctors of Music use sky blue, and Doctors of Theology use purple. Similar colours have historically been used in Sweden for academical head-dress,<sup>56</sup> so even though the style of hat may have changed over time, the use of colour to identify different faculties is something that also stems from the Middle Ages.

Doctoral hats comprise a round slightly tapered cylinder, sheathed in silk of the designated colour. Most have a smooth brim, with the exception of Doctors of Engineering who have a mascara surround (referring to the edged brim; see Fig. 7c), and Doctors of Science (Technology) who have a slightly upturned brim. The hat band or sleeper is traditionally of satin or velvet, and drawn in a flat bow at the front of the hat. The bow is surmounted with a lyre (*lyyra*) of gilded brass that is usually specific to the doctoral degree being awarded, and may have variations depending on the university

<sup>53</sup> Nevéus.

<sup>54</sup> University of Eastern Finland.

<sup>55</sup> Wahlman.

<sup>56</sup> Solberg Søylen, pp. 35–36.

making the award. The oldest *lyyra* in use is the *Lyyra of Philosophy* (see Fig. 7D), introduced in 1840 and designed by Magnus von Wright,<sup>57</sup> and a variety of *lyyra* have been depicted by Smith and Sheard.<sup>58</sup> All of the hats have a satin lining, usually white in colour, and a soft leather headband. Although a doctoral hat is a part of Finnish doctoral dress, at functions and events, an academic still may not wear their doctoral hat unless they have had it formally conferred upon them in a conferment ceremony, regardless of position or qualification. Sweden also has a tradition of a doctoral hat, and although this was once of different colours and available in straight, upturned or three-cornered forms, the contemporary Swedish doctoral hat is now always black, straight and pleated, and adorned with a *lyyra* or mark of the awarding faculty, similar



Photos by Author

**Fig. 8.** A hand-turned grindstone, above, used during the sword-whetting ceremony. A Gallén-Kallela doctoral sword, right, from the University of Lapland.



to the basic Finnish form.<sup>59</sup> However, a Doctor of Theology (in Uppsala and Lund) has a black bow at the front of their hat,<sup>60</sup> while Finnish Doctors of Theology wear a purple hat with a plain band and no *lyyra*.

#### *The doctoral sword (tohtorinmiekkä)*

Doctoral swords were first formally introduced at the University of Helsinki (then the Alexander University) in 1840.<sup>61</sup> Once Finland became a republic in 1919, the official civilian sword designed by Akseli Gallén-Kallela was adopted as the doctoral sword. Solberg Søylen<sup>62</sup> notes that Finnish academical dress closely follows that of Sweden, and Sweden records a sword being worn up until at least 1811. But while Swedish doctors stopped carrying a sword prior to the change of dress adopted in 1833, Finland adopted it seven years later, and has maintained its use ever since. The sword is based on the ‘small sword’ that emerged in the seventeenth and late eighteenth century as an evolution of the Renaissance rapier, and which functioned both as a dress sword and

57 Wahlman.

58 Smith and Sheard, pp. 993–95.

59 Solberg Søylen, pp. 35–36.

60 See also Sjöberg, pp. 471–86.

61 Oulun Yliopisto.

62 Solberg Søylen, pp. 35–36.

as a duelling sword. The original civilian sword typically had an evenly curved knuckle guard that progressed to a rear cross guard quillon, and lacked the triangular, rhombic or spindle-shaped blade cross section and coquille hilt that were hallmarks of the duelling sword. However, while there is no information available as to the thinking and design behind the doctoral sword; given that it symbolizes the wearer's quest for and defence of truth in their work, then a sword originally designed to defend the wearer's honour is a fitting starting point.

The official civilian sword designed by Akseli Gallén-Kallela (see Figs 3 and 4) has a double-edged hollow ground blade ranging from 85 cm to 95 cm in length (choice depending on the height of the wearer), culminating in a spear point. Its knuckle guard features a right-angle front bow with a crowned quillon and crowned pommel. There are slight variations to be seen among suppliers, with some swords featuring a full curve patterned knuckle guard (reminiscent of the traditional small sword) and minor differences in the crown and pommel button design. However, these differences are minimal, and in keeping with the generally espoused directive that only the approved civilian sword may be carried, and that any other types of sword (e.g., military swords) are not permitted to be worn. Each sword bears a gold-plated emblem of the awarding university attached at the shoulder of the *ricasso*, and is carried in a leather-bound scabbard with a brass locket and hook, and a brass chape. The sword is worn on the left side, with the knuckle guard facing forward. Men may carry their sword hooked to a belt loop sewn into their trousers, or on a frog clipped to a sword sling that is worn either over the dress shirt, or beneath the shirt to emerge through a slot below their trouser band. Women either wear a sword belt on which to hook the sword, or they may carry the sword in their left hand. Doctors of Science (Technology) and Doctors of Theology do not traditionally take the doctoral sword. In Sweden, Denmark and Norway, doctors may be conferred with a gold doctoral ring that is adorned with the symbols of their university and faculty.<sup>63</sup> However, it is not an official part of the academic dress in Finland. No other country in the world other than Finland awards a doctoral sword.

On the first day of the doctoral *Promootio*, the *promovendi* attend a sword-whetting dinner, which like the master's wreath-weaving banquet includes speeches, which are an integral part of the conferment tradition. The *promovendi* are called in turn to symbolically sharpen their sword on a grindstone that is turned by the *Gratisti/Gratista* (the chair of the Conferment Committee) and the Marshals. Once they have sheathed the sword, the *promovendi* make a short speech to the company on what the sword means to them as a symbol of defending knowledge and truth, and make a pledge for their future as a new doctor. The swords are then gathered ready for conferral the next day. On the day of conferral, during the conferment act, the new and honorary doctors receive their academic insignia. The *promovendi* approach the rostrum in a formal and choreographed order. The Conferrer firstly places the doctoral hat on their bowed head. Then they present the sheathed sword which is received in two hands, and returned to the *promovendi's* left side. Once the certificate of promotion has also been awarded, the promoted doctor bows to the Conferrer, bows formally to the assembled audience, and returns to take their seat. After a succession of for-

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63 Umeå University; the University of Copenhagen; University of Oslo.

mal speeches and music, the assembly processes to a conferment service (which is not obligatory to attend), normally through streets lined with onlookers from the general public. A conferment dinner is held in the evening, and is seen as a grand celebration of what the *promovendi* have achieved, and features a series of speeches that address the past, present and future of the academy. For the dinner, the men are required to change into a white formal waistcoat, but whilst they may remove their sword whilst eating, their doctoral hat must remain in place until the festivities are over.

### Summary and concluding remarks

Finland's academic history is well documented since 1640, and its traditions have been preserved with little change to the present day. However, there was a marked and purposeful change in academic dress that can be pinpointed to the University of Helsinki's (then the Imperial Alexander University) conferral ceremony of 1840. A conscious and declarative move was made to break with the old dress traditions that harked back to a rejected ecclesiastical past, and to introduce a form of dress that was purposefully 'civilian', yet drew on the fashions of the upper-middle class of the bourgeoisie. This is supported by Klinge<sup>64</sup> who observes that 'The external marks of university membership and insignia of particular degrees [here referring to laurel wreaths, sashes, student caps, doctoral hats and lyre emblems] took on a widely appreciated value during the Grand Duchy era, a value that emphasized study and learning with certain national and aristocratic overtones.' The *Frakki* and *Tohtorinhattu* (tailcoat and doctoral hat) were still a common form of formal dress at the time, and are clearly described and depicted by Alex Snellman as being a standard part of the dress of Finnish nobility as late as 1877.<sup>65</sup> The small sword on which the *Tohtorinmiekkä* (doctoral sword) was based had ceased to be carried in public some hundred years previously. However, as a symbol of gentlemanly status and as a statement of defending truth and honour, the doctoral sword positioned itself as a meaningful and understandable piece of regalia for Finns, particularly when seen against a strong cultural backdrop of social democracy, equality, and strong will. However, it is interesting that in his seminal history of the University of Helsinki, other than passing mentions of a doctoral hat, a laurel wreath, and more detailed mentions of undergraduate dress, at no point in the 928-page work does Klinge address academical dress as a specific point of interest, despite the fact that changes in dress mirrored and reflected the University's (and therefore the country's) transitions between its periods of Swedish and Russian rule and its independence, and the transition from an ecclesiastical to a scientific university orientation. Especially absent is any mention of changes in academical dress having been a feature of the university's bi-centennial celebrations of 1840, or the introduction of an officially sanctioned doctoral sword in the first degree conferral event of the newly independent Finland in 1919.

Today, the Finnish use (and absence) of academical dress tells of the Finnish approach to academic pomp and position, and similar to Solberg Søylen's observations in Sweden,<sup>66</sup> academical dress has never played a major role in academic ceremonies

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64 Klinge, p. 553.

65 Snellman, pp. 3–35.

66 Solberg Søylen, pp. 35–36.

and practices in the country. Despite their academic history and pedigree, Finns tend to focus on the functions and outcomes of education, and not those that deliver it. Particularly, Finland regards education as the natural right of every citizen, and enabling people to enter either higher education or the labour market as a qualified member of the workforce is a basic mission of Finnish educators that is taken for granted. So while teachers and educators are highly respected and valued in Finnish society, they are seen much in the same way as Finns tend to see any other profession that provides a societal service—they are simply people doing their job. Perhaps this is why going to school or graduating from university are far less ‘uniformed’ affairs in Finland, as it is something every citizen can expect, and there are strong efforts to ensure that rich or poor are treated fairly and alike. But Finns give credit where credit is due, and the higher degrees are acknowledged as achievements above and beyond the norm, and marked accordingly. The master is celebrated and awarded token regalia in light of what they have achieved, and the doctor is granted the respect and acknowledgment of achieving the top level of learning in their field. But from that point, doctoral academic dress is reserved purely for ceremonial and high-academic occasions, and never worn in a working context within the university. This contrasts dramatically with universities that hold graduation days for their bachelor and master students, and schools where teaching staff may don their academic robes for a range of scholastic events. Finnish academical dress may lack the colour and ceremonial adornment of many other forms seen around the world, but its reserved lines and understated refinement are perhaps among the most stylish yet pragmatic of academical dress forms. International exposure (especially through social media) has brought Finnish doctoral dress to the public eye, but it is indubitably the doctoral sword that attracts envious looks from academics and doctoral aspirants from every quarter.

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## Figure credits

### Fig. 3

- A. The National Museum of Finland (1832). Doctor's sword. Historical collections – H31025: 7. CC BY 4.0.
- B. Turku Museum Center (c. 1924). Åbo Akademi University doctoral sword. TMK23851: 3. CC BY 4.0.
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### Fig. 6.

- B. C. F. Borgström (1778). Master ring: 18k gold. Inscribed: 'G. Winter Ph. Mag. den 26 juni 1798'. The National Museum of Finland, H7818. CC BY 4.0.

- C. W. Fahlström (1832). Master ring: 18k gold. Inscribed: 'J: F: 18 21/6 32'. The National Museum of Finland, H31025: 17. CC BY 4.0.
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**Fig. 7**

- B. C. Fagerström, Raahe Museum – E270. CC BY 4.0.
- C. E. R. Wahlman Oy. The National Museum of Finland: A collection from the time of independence – IT20: 36a. CC BY 4.0.
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