



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## The Rector's Office

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# 4

*Lund University's Rector's [Vice-Chancellor's] Office has a grand and lengthy history. In this article, which is a shortened version of the article 'Rektoratet vid Lunds universitet – några historiska glimtar,' Fredrik Tersmeden takes a look at the history of the role and some of the traditions surrounding it.*

## The Rector's Office



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## The Rector's Office – a Historical Overview

### History

The sitting term for the rector at Lund University is six years. When the university was founded, the rector only sat for a term at a time. Twenty years later, from 1688, the sitting term was extended to a whole year. This lasted for almost 200 years. The only change that happened during this period was the date of entry. Until 1810, the change of rector took place on Karl's Day, the 28th January, and afterwards in the break between the spring and autumn terms. "Thereafter" writes Martin Weibull in his historical account from 1868, "started a new time period." The 'new academic year' that Weibull speaks of refers to the administrative division into school years, which is still applied in education, with the exception of the university's economic department, which (since 1996) uses a regular calendar year.

It is interesting to note that the decisions for Lund University's rector's office from 1688 and 1810 have no counterpart in Uppsala, despite the fact that both universities constitutions and administration in general were almost identical. The northern university kept the term-long sitting periods until 1840, when academic terms were introduced.

The tight changes in olden days were aided by the fact that the post of rector was 'ambulatory'. There was in other words a prepared timetable which stated when each university professor would become rector. A natural consequence of the short sitting periods and the rotation system was that many professors had time to hold the rectorate several times in their careers. The record – four times each – is held by professors Jonas Linnerius (theology), Gustaf Harmens (practical medicine) and Sven Johan Munthe (Eastern languages and Greek, later theology). In the latter case, one of the four periods was however only as 'serving pro-rector' during a so-called *rector illustris* (more on this later).

Despite the predetermined order, rectors were not assigned fully automatically. A formal election within the consistory was undertaken and then sanctioned by the university chancellor even if the result in general was a given. There are however individual exceptions. When the mathematics professor Andreas Riddermarck in 1696 was elected rector, the chancellor's sanction for some reason did not materialize and after having served half a mandate period as de facto rector, Riddermarck decided to step aside and leave the post to the next in turn, philosopher Johan Lundersten. Riddermarck was rewarded in return by being sworn in as rector the following year. Attempts to disturb the order from within could also occur. The famous Samuel Pufendorf tried already in 1673 to prevent

his antagonist Josua Schwartz from becoming rector by writing a letter to the king. In this case however the higher powers let the order have its course.

One could also refuse to accept the rectorate. If this happened without legal reason, the reluctant rector, after a serious warning, should be punished by being excluded from their duties. At least one case of such refusal is known. It was the renowned Esaias Tegnér who in 1818, with an ironically formulated motivation, declined the dignity of becoming rector. He perhaps reasonably thought that he was already well respected enough to be able to refuse the post. Among the legal reasons that on the other hand should have been included would be that professors because of their age or illness could refuse to become rector (it was first in 1873 that professors received regular retirement).

It was first in 1877 that Lund University elected its first rector, the professor in aesthetics Gustaf Ljunggren. He had already been rector according to the old rules between 1867-1868 and had proved himself to be an excellent organiser, not least of the university's 200-year anniversary. That he did not disappoint his colleagues even as an elected rector is testified by the fact that he was re-elected three times. He was followed by the linguist Theodor Wisén, who had been pro-rector during the whole of Ljunggren's mandate. Wisén as well as his closest successor, the astronomist Axel Möller, had also been rector during the old system and were re-elected during the new order. One invested therefore initially in people who had already proven their worth. In the past, rectors were chosen from within the own group of professors but nowadays it is entirely possible to elect a rector from outside the own university.

Many rectors after 1877 have been re-elected after a first completed mandate period. There are however examples – both before and after this date – of rectors who for various reasons have left their post early. At least three rectors have died whilst in office – Daniel Menlös 1743, Magnus Blix 1904 and Bengt Jönsson 1911. Even less tragic circumstances have led to rectors leaving their post early. In 1865 for example the theological professor Wilhelm Flensburg left after only half a mandate period since becoming bishop of Lund (and automatically therefore also becoming the university pro-chancellor). A similar situation occurred in 1980 when Carl-Gustaf Andrén left his position as rector to become head of Universitets- och Högskoleämbetet (UHÄ). In modern times, a couple of rectors who have been re-elected for a second mandate period have chosen to leave the position early, Håkan Westling (1992) and Boel Flodgren (2003).

The tight rotation in the past, combined with the fact that the university was a small place with academic traditions often being inherited in a limited number of families, meant that several near relations through the years have held the

position of rector, in some cases directly after each other. In this way, the philosopher and theologian Andreas Rydelius was replaced in both 1724 and 1733 by his brother Magnus, professor in latin and theology. Approximately one hundred years later, in 1860, professor of law Christian Naumann was replaced as rector by his brother Carl Fredrik, professor in anatomy. Two more brothers who were appointed rector in the middle of the 1800s, albeit not directly after each other, were John Mortimer and Jacob Georg Agardh, professors in astronomy and botany respectively. They were both sons of Carl Adolph Agardh who was rector 1819-1820. Even since free elections replaced the old system has the unique circumstance occurred that father and two sons became rector, namely in the case of Martin P:son Nilsson and his sons Nils and Per Stjernquist. The true family record however is held by the family Stobæus, of which no less than five family members have become rector a total of nine times: Andreas (1684-85, 1694, 1706), his nephew Kilian (1735) and son Nils (1747, 1752), the latter's son Andreas Peter (1778, 1787) and finally his next-cousin Kilian (1786).

As long as the rectorate rotated automatically, it was difficult to say very much about the rector's competence and merits. It can therefore be of interest to see to which extent Lund University's rectors have received other, more meritocratic offices and honours. Ten rectors have been knighted, of which two (Johan Jacob von Döbeln 1717 and Sven Lagerbring 1769) during sitting periods as rector. Even more, 21 rectors – most of them, but not all, professors in theology – have become bishops, of which four have become archbishops (Jacob Benzelius, Henric Benzelius, Henrik Reuterdahl and Anton Niklas Sundberg). Ten Lund rectors have been elected into the Swedish Academy. Politically the dividend has been leaner. Two of the rectors who became archbishops were also presidents of the parliament's clergy and one of them, Anton Niklas Sundberg, has been elected speaker of the parliament. Two rectors have been ministers in the Swedish government: Henrik Reuterdahl (rector 1849-1850, minister of education 1852-1855) and Johan C W Thyren (rector 1916-1926, minister of justice 1926-1928). As a curiosity, it can be finally mentioned that two rectors in Lund (Anders Spole and Petrus Holm) have later become rector in Uppsala, while the opposite has not yet occurred.

## Role and duties

The constitution from 1666 lists the rector's various responsibilities in a total of 15 points. The second of these establishes the rector's role within the university leadership and even internal quality control:

*“He will lead the Board over the Academy, lead the Professors’, the Students’, and all of the Academics’ customs, studies and exercises, and carefully ensure that everyone proves due obedience to His Majesty the King, but in particular he must make himself thoroughly informed of the Professors’ work and occasionally interrogate their Lectures.”*

Despite this, the role of the rector can probably be seen to have been more the role as a *primus inter pares* (first among equals) in professor circles than as a chief executive in modern terms. Up until the 1960s, that role was mainly given to the university chancellor, who was the highest personal supreme governing body for the university, although physically located in Stockholm.

Looking at the rector's more concrete privileges and duties, these included the right to convene the two co-ordinators of the higher education institution (boards in which he also had the deciding vote in an equal number of votes), the obligation to settle disputes between professors, the overall oversight of scholarships, other financial administration and the university's buildings.

Another important role for the rector in older times was also to act as judges. Until 1852, Swedish universities had their own jurisdiction (court of law) over both students and employees and the families of the latter, and it was primarily the rector who exercised this court of justice. In smaller cases, he could judge entirely himself in the presence of the academy secretary, while more serious crimes required that either lesser or larger consistory be summoned as a court. It was also the rector who alone had to ensure that issued judgments were enforced. Even after 1852, the rector retained a certain limited right to judge students (but not employees) and can to some extent be said to still do so in his capacity as statutory board member of the university's disciplinary committee.

Another task that the rector had for a long time was to personally receive and ceremoniously install each new student who arrived at the university. The oath that the students had to make to the rector was abolished in 1868, but still in the 20th Century the personal visit of the rector remained in connection with enrolment at the university.

It is hardly possible here to go into more detail about all of the various tasks that the rector has performed through the centuries, especially not in modern times when it has been transformed from a temporary side assignment to an annual full-time civil servant. However, the fact that the overall workload has increased

is hardly a hasty summary. Nonetheless, the headmaster has been relieved of one duty that was otherwise historically central to the position: namely to lead the university board. This has been done since 1998 by an externally recruited chairman.

## Rector Illustris

A recurring peculiarity in the older traditions of the rector is the presence of so-called *rectores illustres*. According to the constitutions, instead of the professor who was in turn, one could also appoint “a distinguished person of brilliant genealogy, who, in respect of age, learning and love of the academy and statute in his conduct, can be regarded as useful for such office”. In practice, this opportunity came primarily to be used to honour the sons of powerful high-ranking men – including chancellors – whom the university had an interest in keeping well with, and it may be somewhat doubtful to what extent respect was paid to their age and learning. The very first such “Rector of Honor” (1670) was, for example, the 16-year-old baron Nils Banér, who was fortunate to be the son of the then Governor-General of Skåne, but who later in life distinguished himself mainly through the deadly sin of converting to Catholicism, after which, at 30 years of age, he was defeated in a duel in London. Fortunately, the university was not entirely in the hands of these exalted youngsters, but instead under the professor who, under normal circumstances, would have held the rector's office, but who now held the office of serving pro-rector.

However, it should be pointed out that there were also nobles who really tried to make their appointment to the *rector illustris* worthy. One such was Edmund Gripenhielm, who as a nobleman had the opportunity during his rectorate (1726) to attend the Riksdag and guard the interests of the university. The chancellor's son Gustaf Fredrik Gyllenborg, who, as a 19-year-old, also held the position in 1750, was determined, in his own opinion, to do the same. Gyllenborg became Lund's sixth and last *rector illustris*. Gradual equalisation had by then begun to make these appointments unmodern, but the formal opportunity to appoint to the position continued until 1829.

## Rector shifts

The 1666 constitutions contain detailed instructions for the change of rector, which in the past was one of the university's two most important official celebrations – the other was the Doctoral conferment ceremony.

For the changeover ceremony, the academic state was to gather at eight o'clock in the morning at the departing rector's office to then head down to the cathedral. In the church, the outgoing rector would give a speech "which is at the moment, place and time appropriate" but not last any longer than half an hour. Thereafter, the chosen successor would be called and presented, informed of what "as if the Rector's Office is established" and then give a comprehensive oath of the kind that, as far back as the 1800s, was customary for a large number of public services and assignments. Thereafter, the outgoing rector handed over to his successor the "office signs": the sceptre, the seal, the constitutions and "the keys to the archive, the prison and the room where the academy's cash register is kept". The latter must, of the wording, reasonably be judged to have been a set of real keys, not the two symbolic keys of silver which were also included in the university's insignia. The prison key is reminiscent of what has been said above about the rector's role as proclaimer and executor of convictions. On top of the above, the new rector read a text given in the constitutions, which is almost a prayer for blessing over the university, after which the festival ended with "ordinary prayer" and music down in the main choir. It would all be over by ten.

Almost as regulated as the ceremony itself was also the ensuing feast. The 17th century may appear to have been a period of absurd gluttony in the higher strata of society, where a dinner could very well include more than a hundred dishes. Nevertheless, the governing authorities did not want it so at the universities. Here it was thrift rather than baroque greed that was offered to the party participants.

However, financial documents from the university's early years show that the partying at these handover dinners often far exceeded the limits in the number of guests and expenses set by the constitutions – yes, to the extent that the payment of the professors' regular salaries was sometimes prevented! Perhaps in the light of this, but probably even more so against the generally despairing economic situation at the end of Carl XII's reign, the then Chancellor of the University, Nicodemus Tessin d y, decided in early 1718 that the meal should be completely abolished. That this decision, at least in the long run, was not observed is evident from the fact that also a later chancellor, Carl Gustaf Löwenhielm, took in 1765 the renewed decision to abolish the dinner in connection with the change of rector (the same Löwenhielm who also criticized the university management for accepting that the students left the city and their

lectures on some day in November to celebrate Mårtensfest; in other words, he did not appear to have been a promoter of festivities).

Whether this later abolition was complied with must be left unsaid. The shift ceremony itself continued anyway, but began to be called into question during the latter part of the 19th century. The fact that the terms of office now became annual and that many holders were also re-elected contributed to reduce the frequency of this ceremony. Sometime in the 20th century, the tradition of changing ceremonies died out. The youngest printed invitation program that has been found is from 1909, so at least then the tradition must have lived on. Most of the 20th century, however, all ceremony and pomp around these academic shifts of power have been absent in Lund. Former rector Carl-Gustaf Andrén, for example, has testified about how his entry in 1977 meant nothing more than that he stepped into a new office and immediately started his duties. It was first with Göran Bexell's accession in 2003 that the rector's change once again became a "new" festive event.

### **Rector's suit and chain**

Prior to the university inauguration in 1668, Professor Nils Beckman personally shipped a number of important symbolic objects from Stockholm to Lund. This included, among other things, the university's and faculty's sealing stamps as well as the academy's silver sceptre, but also a number of "togæ professorum", i.e. special black "expensive silk gowns" for the professors. There was also a particular costume for the rector. Some details of that costume are referred to in a speech held by astronomist Anders Spole when he left the office as rector in 1673:

*"For it is a glorious mission and an office of dignity and honour, but as all honour entails its omnis honos onus – so a heavy burden lies hidden in the luminous purple, many troubles accompany the shine of the sceptre, and no other than he who wears the pearl-studded hat knows what troubles may be known, whose head it adorns and weighs at once."*

The rector's costume is also included in the inventory that three years later was drawn up on the university's property which would then be brought safely to Malmö in the outbreak of the Skåne war. Here is talked about "Rectoris magn. habit [large costume], such as a hat and coat of violet brown velvet, with a large pearl hat band". The first image of this rector's suit is in a portrait of the Latin

professor and historian Andreas Stobæus (see below), who was the rector in three rounds between 1684 and 1706. The coat and hat in this picture certainly look more blue-black than violet-brown or purple, but this is perhaps a result of the colour of the painting darkening over time.

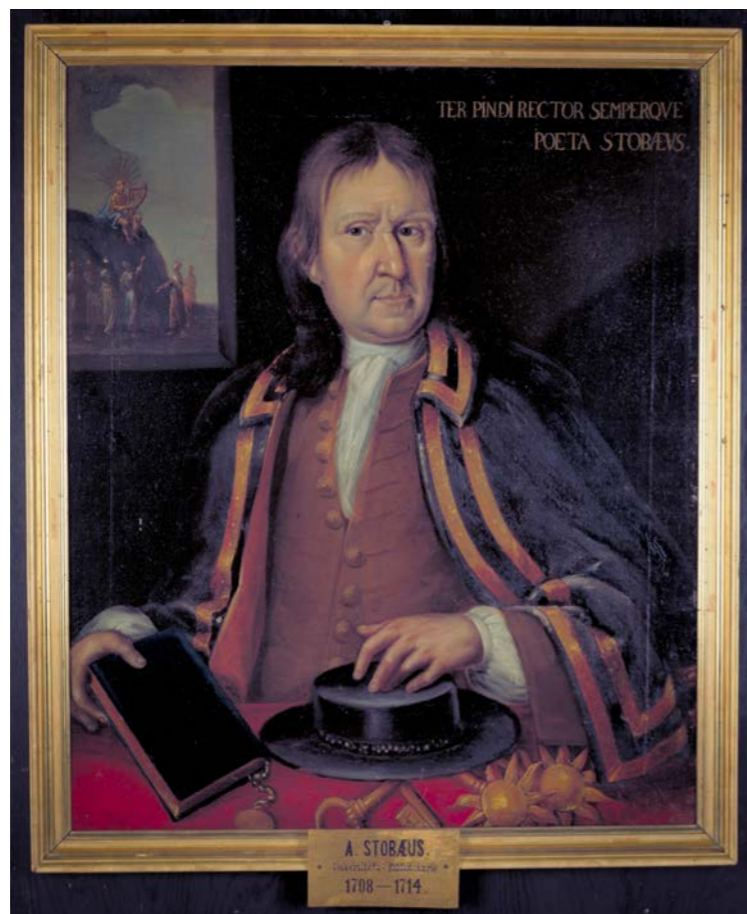


Photo from Lund University's art collection

However, this older set of garments was considered to have outlived their purpose in the mid-18th century. When the University, for its 100th anniversary in 1768, received from the state office 800 daler of silver coins for special costs, most of them were put on a new hat and coat. A total of 336 daler went to the purchase of purple velvet as well as yellow and white cloth. In addition, locally woven gold bands for 116 daler and the buckles for coat and hat for 104 – additionally adorned with rock crystals for 250! In addition, a storage box painted by the university's teacher of drawing was specially ordered.

In the 19th century, however, the use of this new 1768 investment declined; this as the tailcoat became the more obvious academic festive garment. For the 200th anniversary of 1868, the then rector, the aforementioned Gustaf Ljungren, wore the old costume. After that, however, the hat and coat fell ever more into oblivion, especially after Oscar II's donation of a stately rector's chain in 1882, and for a period the old rector's hat was supposed to have been lying in an attic and served as a cat's nest for a period of time!

It was only in connection with the 1951 doctoral promotion that the then rector Assar Hadding reintroduced the use of the old rector's garments, now in combination with the chain, which had survived. Today, however, modern replicas of a hat and cape are used while the original from 1768 is safely stored at the university's historical museum.

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