

THE 19TH-CENTURY
UNIFORM of the
Academy of Sciences
included a bicorne hat
and épée.



Academic uniform

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Like many other organisations, the Academy of Sciences has had its own sartorial traditions that contribute to internal cohesion, representativeness and exclusiveness. The watercolour to the right demonstrates the Academy's preferred style during the 19th century. Modern members do not look quite like this when they gather for meetings or celebrations, but the old style has left its mark. The black tailcoat with an embroidered collar reflects the Academy's ideology and is part of its material culture.

As far as we are aware, there was no express rule about the members' attire on formal occasions during the first decades of the Academy. There was no internal tradition to lean on, instead it was up to individuals to follow the fashion ideals of the time which, for men of this social class, usually entailed a jabot, knee-length breeches and a mid-length jacket in fairly exclusive fabrics. It was only towards the end of the century that a more uniform academic attire began to be used, and this change was linked to the introduction of the Swedish costume by King Gustav III in 1778.

There were several intentions behind the national costume: one was to bring splendour to the nobility and officials while also having a nostalgic design, a reminder of Sweden's history that strengthened a sense of fatherland. There was also an idea that it would stop aristocrats and burghers from imitating foreign fashions. The costume would thus prevent the luxury consumption of primarily imported goods, which was expected to benefit domestic business. The national costume was produced in two versions for men and women: a general one and one that was only to be worn at court. There was no significant difference in appearance between the two models apart from the colours of the fabric: the court costume had some set colour combinations, while the general costume was a single colour. All colours



WATERCOLOUR with the proposed uniform of the Academy of Sciences. The painting was ordered from the Academy illustrator, Johan Abraham Aleander, and delivered in 1828.

were permitted, but it was decreed that a black version would be used at the royal academies, including the Academy of Sciences.

The national costume, which for men was a short jacket, short cape, breeches with a belt, low boots and a hat with a rounded crown and the rim folded up on one side, was apparently commonly worn by men during the reign of Gustav III and after his son Gustav IV Adolf had assumed the throne. However, following the French Revolution and during the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century, men's fashion in Europe underwent marked changes. Breeches lost their status and long trousers became increasingly popular. At the same time, Britain replaced France as the country that set the standards for men's fashion. This was where the tailcoat was developed at the end of the 18th century – a jacket with a divided skirt to the rear. This garment was originally intended to be worn by horsemen, but over time it became popular among the nobility and the military and diplomats.

In 1827, the Academy of Sciences' members began to discuss the need for a new and uniform attire, one that matched the style ideals of the time.

Secretary Jöns Jacob Berzelius presented the idea that the Academy should adopt a civilian uniform in the form of a black tailcoat and, after an Academy meeting in early 1828, a group of members was tasked with producing a proposal for its design. The uniform committee consisted of three men: Christian Ehrenfried von Weigel, Magnus Martin af Pontin and Carl Eduard Gyldenstolpe. The first two were prominent doctors, while the third was a lieutenant general and baron. One must assume that they were also believed to possess a certain aesthetic competence.

The proposal to establish a new Academy costume was not only linked to changes in European men's fashion. The foremost reason the Academy considered it needed a more representative style at precisely this time was probably because it, like the universities, had been awarded the right to appoint two of its own representatives to the clergy estate of the Riksdag. Also in 1828, two members, lawyer Gabriel Poppius and doctor Carl Johan Ekström, took places in the Parliament of the Four Estates. (This right only applied until 1866, when the representation reform came into force.) In this context, the entire Academy as an organisation was also in a state of change. Class divisions were adjusted under Berzelius' leadership and, in practice, the Academy of Sciences increasingly began to function as a department of the civil service, even if it was in private hands. The Annual Meeting was also introduced, and is still celebrated today; this was another occasion on which representative clothes were highly appropriate.

After two weeks' work, the uniform committee was able to present a proposal, via von Weigel, that the Academy's representatives in the Riksdag, and its members and officials, should wear a tailcoat-like uniform. The idea was that the tailcoat would be blue, something that was not unusual in Britain, where tailcoats were worn in various colours. The Academy's tailcoat was also to have gold buttons with three crowns, and a tall black velvet collar with embroidery. Opinions were divided on which colour was preferable and, after a vote, with 16 votes to 15, it was decided that the uniform should be black. This colour was possibly considered to be more proper than blue, and this choice also matched Berzelius' original idea.

According to the final proposal, which was approved by King Charles XIV John in the spring of 1828, attire at the Academy should be a black tailcoat with notched lapels and a black embroidered velvet collar bearing the Academy's emblem, and black buttons. A hat and a civilian épée should also be worn with the tailcoat. As shown in the watercolour on the previous page, trousers should be long and slim, and the Academy's hat was available in two versions. Academy members who were also members of parliament were to



wear round hats, while the other categories were to wear tricornered hats. The sketch in the left corner of the painting shows the collar's embroidery which, in addition to the laurel wreath, was to consist of a five-pointed star with rays – the symbol of the North Star, part of the Academy emblem since 1741.

The Academy had thus obtained its own tailcoat-like uniform that was in step with the times, but with details that created uniformity and allowed the members to stand out from the crowd. Attire specifically for potential female members was apparently not considered.

The Academy of Sciences' black tailcoat uniform with hat and épée was used throughout the 19th century, but interest in it declined after the turn of the century. Finally, in the 20th century, the outfit in its entirety came to be worn only on particularly notable occasions, such as in 1960, when the Academy's permanent secretary participated in the Royal Society's tricentenary jubilee. However, the black tailcoat had come to Sweden to stay, both inside and outside the Academy.

The idea of a tailcoat with an embroidered collar was adopted by other royal academies in Sweden. The Academy of Music started to use its own collar in 1841, the Academy of Agriculture in 1873, and the Academy of Engineering Sciences had its own collar from its founding in 1919. The fashion for tailcoats also left its mark in the university world. At Uppsala University, black tailcoats began to be used as formal attire for doctoral award ceremonies in 1838 and an embroidered collar was added here too. In the second half of the 19th century, the tailcoat was established as general evening wear, supplemented by a white starched shirt, white waistcoat and, generally, a white scarf. Another change in status occurred when the dinner jacket became popular social attire after World War One. Since then, tailcoats in Sweden have primarily come to be used at major events and at various academic ceremonies.

In the first half of the 20th century, it was taken for granted that all those present at the Academy of Sciences' meetings, even the ordinary members, would wear black tailcoats. It then became customary to wear a black waistcoat during the day and a white one in the evening. Even in the 1970s, the Academy's foremost representatives – the president, permanent secretary and members of the Academy Board – always wore tailcoats at meetings. However, the desire to wear tailcoats declined dramatically during this period; for some members, the tailcoat appeared to be, in the words of then head librarian Wilhelm Odelberg, “a meaningless trouble, perhaps a slightly ridiculous relic that has lost its meaning and which is additionally resonates poorly with the spirit of the times' demands for equity and equality”. Proposals that the requirement for tailcoats should be abolished were presented time and time again. This was finally achieved in 1976 when the issue was voted upon for the third time and, with 34 votes for abolition and 21 votes

against, an almost 150-year-old tradition was broken. In addition to the removal of compulsory tailcoats, a note was made in the minutes that “in future, newly appointed members shall not be encouraged to wear tailcoats when making their entry to the Academy”.

A free choice of suits now became viable attire for men at the Academy’s normal meetings. However, it was apparently still necessary to mark affiliation and exclusiveness, because a sober dark blue tie with the Academy of Sciences’ emblem was launched to accompany the suits, and only members were allowed to wear it. A scarf was designed for female members in the equivalent manner. A collar pin and cuff links were also produced for men, and a brooch for women. Black tailcoats are now only used by the Academy as formal attire, for example at the Annual Meeting and during Nobel celebrations. But there is a discreet trace of the 1820s: the embroidered collar which, even though its appearance has changed over time, still helps to differentiate the male members of the Academy from other tailcoat-clad people.

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Information about the Academy of Sciences’ sartorial traditions is taken from a draft presentation by Wilhelm Odelberg on 10 March 1976, the same day the Academy abolished the compulsory wearing of tailcoats. The unpublished manuscript is in the Academy of Sciences’ archive. The origin and appearance of the national costume is described in Eva Bergman, *Nationella dräkten: En studie kring Gustaf III:s dräktreform 1778* (Stockholm, 1938). The link between the tailcoat uniform and the Academy of Sciences’ representation in the Riksdag is described in Maria Asp’s undergraduate essay in the history of ideas, “Vetenskapsakademiens representationsrätt i ständsriksdagen: En övning i att bli representativ”, Stockholm University (2015). Internal discussions about the uniform are referred to in the Academy of Sciences’ minutes from 12 January 1828, paragraph 4, and 20 February 1828, paragraph 8, Royal Academy of Sciences. The proposal that was approved by Charles XIV John is found in the document “Underdånigt förslag til Högtids-drägt eller uniform för Kungl. Vetenskaps-akademien”. This undated document is signed “Gillas [Approved] Carl Johan” and is in the collection of Kungl. brev och skrivelser [Royal correspondence and texts], vol. 2, Royal Academy of Sciences. The decision to abolish tailcoats is in the Academy of Sciences’ minutes from 10 March 1976, paragraph 16, Royal Academy of Sciences.