Black Nobility

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Pius IX

The **Black Nobility** (Italian: *aristocrazìa nera*) are Roman aristocratic families who sided with the Papacy under Pope Pius IX after the Savoy family-led army of the Kingdom of Italy entered Rome on September 20, 1870, overthrew the Pope and the Papal States, and took over the Apostolic Palace, and any nobles subsequently ennobled by the Pope prior to the 1929 Lateran Treaty. For the next 59 years, the Pope confined himself to Vatican City and claimed to be a prisoner in the Vatican to avoid the appearance of accepting the authority of the new Italian government and state. Aristocrats who had been ennobled by the Pope and were formerly subjects of the Holy See, including the senior members of the Papal Court, kept the doors of their palaces in Rome closed to mourn the Pope's confinement, which led to their being called the "Black Nobility".

Following the conclusion of the Lateran Treaty in 1929, the Black Nobility were given dual citizenship in Italy and Vatican City. Under the provisions of the treaty, noble titles granted by the pope were recognized in the Kingdom of Italy. Many of these families were members of the Papal Noble Guard; others were foreigners affiliated with the Holy See in various ways. In 1931, Pope Pius XI denied the request of Alfonso XIII of Spain to open the Noble Guard further to nobles from all Catholic countries.

Famous members of Black Nobility families include Eugenio Pacelli, who later became Pope Pius XII. Black Nobility families (in this instance families whose ancestors included Popes) still in existence include notably the Colonna, Massimo, Orsini, Pallavicini, Borghese, Odescalchi, and Ludovisi. Major extinct papal families include the Savelli, Caetani, the Aldobrandini family and Conti.

When Pope Paul VI abolished the Vatican City positions at court, as well as a number of privileges (licence plates and other perks), there was a fallout. In May 1977, some members of the Black Nobility, led by Princess Elvina Pallavicini, started courting traditional Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

See also

- Roman Question
- Law of Guarantees
- Prisoner in the Vatican

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