

A Court in exile: the Vatican 1870-1929

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Until 1969 there was a full-blown court serving the pope. The papal coronation was not abolished until 1978. Although the popes lost control of Rome to the Italian government in the 1870, they maintained a court in the Vatican. This was a deliberate act of policy. Pio Nono, who was a noble, saw pomp and ritual as a means to maintain his claim to sovereignty. There were two nobilities in Rome, the 'blacks' loyal to the pope, and the 'whites' who attended the court of the Kings of Italy in the Quirinal palace. There were also, as there still are, two separate corps diplomatique. Francis McNutt, a papal chamberlain wrote 'no court is comparable in majesty and sheer beauty to the pontifical'. The papal court became more ecclesiastical and more international after 1870. The pope retained 600 guards. The black nobility, however, slowly declined in status, wealth and loyalty. The popes instituted new titles of nobility and chivalric orders, in order to reward the foreign faithful. In reward for his contributions towards the papal finances, a Mellon became a papal marquis. Such was the rivalry with the Italian court, that the state visit of President Loubet of France to the Quirinal in 1904 led to the French Republic's break with the Vatican in 1905. Finally the Lateran treaty of 1929 consolidated changes which had already taken place. The Vatican became 'a shrine state', serving 'an imperial papacy'. In the subsequent discussion John Pollard confirmed that the Italian state confiscated papal properties in 1870, thus leading to the papacy's entry into the world of international finance. The Vatican ceased to live off its own. David Starkey asked when the faithful stopped kissing the papal toes. Pollard replied that some kissed the toes at the 1958 conclave. Paul VI gave away his papal tiara in 1970. John XXIII stopped dining alone. Titles, however, are still awarded by the popes and there is still a heraldic office in the Vatican. Every bishop has a coat of arms.