**Nobility**

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[Burmese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burmese) nobles and servants

**Nobility** is a [social group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_group) - [status State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estates_of_the_realm) - which possesses more acknowledged [privileges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privilege) or [eminence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eminence) than members of most other classes in a society, membership therein typically being hereditary. The privileges associated with nobility may constitute substantial advantages over or relative to non-nobles, or may be largely honorary (e.g. precedence), and vary from country to country and era to era. Historically membership in the nobility and the prerogatives thereof have been regulated or acknowledged by the government, thereby distinguishing it from other sectors of a nation's upper class. Nonetheless, nobility *per se* has rarely constituted a closed caste; acquisition of sufficient power, wealth, military prowess or royal favor has, occasionally or often, enabled commoners to ascend into the nobility.

There is often a variety of ranks within the noble class. Legal recognition of nobility is more common in monarchies, but nobility also existed in such republics as the [Dutch Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_Republic) (1581–1795), [Republic of Genoa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Genoa) (1005–1815) and [Republic of Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Venice) (697–1797), and remains part of the legal social structure of some non-hereditary regimes, e.g. [San Marino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Marino) and [Vatican City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vatican_City) in Europe. Hereditary titles often distinguish nobles from non-nobles, although in many nations most of the nobility have been un-titled, and a hereditary title need not indicate nobility.

**History**



Nobility offered protection in exchange for service

The term derives from Latin *nobilitas*, the [abstract noun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_noun) of the adjective *nobilis* ("well-known, famous, notable"). In [ancient Roman society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_class_in_ancient_Rome), [*nobiles*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobiles) originated as an informal designation for the political governing class who had allied interests, including both [patricians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrician_(ancient_Rome)) and [plebeian families](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plebs) *(*[*gentes*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gens)*)* with an ancestor who had risen to the [consulship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_consul) through his own merit (see [*novus homo*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novus_homo), "new man").

In modern usage, "nobility" is applied to the highest social class in [pre-modern societies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-industrial_society). In the [feudal system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) (in Europe and elsewhere), the nobility were generally those who held a [fief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fief), often land or office, under [vassalage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vassalage), i.e., in exchange for [allegiance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegiance) and various, mainly military, services to a [suzerain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suzerain), who might be a monarch or a higher-ranking nobleman. It rapidly came to be seen as a hereditary [caste](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caste), sometimes associated with a right to bear a hereditary title and, for example in pre-revolutionary [France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France), enjoying fiscal and other privileges.

While noble status formerly conferred significant privileges in most jurisdictions, by the 21st century it had become a largely honorary dignity in most societies, although a few, residual privileges may still be preserved legally (e.g. Netherlands, Spain, UK) and some Asian, Pacific and African cultures continue to attach considerable significance to formal, hereditary rank or titles. (Compare the entrenched position and [leadership](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leadership) expectations of the nobility of the Kingdom of [Tonga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tonga).)

Nobility is a historical, social and often legal notion, differing from [socio-economic status](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_status) (or [*class*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_class)) in that the latter is mainly based on income, possessions and/or [lifestyle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifestyle_(sociology)). Being wealthy or influential cannot, [*ipso facto*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ipso_facto), make one noble, nor are all nobles wealthy or influential (aristocratic families have lost their fortunes in various ways, and the concept of the 'poor nobleman' is almost as old as nobility itself).

Although many societies have a privileged '[upper class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_class)' with substantial wealth and power, the status is not necessarily hereditary and does not entail a distinct [legal status](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_status), nor differentiated [forms of address](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Style_(manner_of_address)).

Various republics, including former [Iron Curtain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Curtain) countries, [Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece), [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_nobility), and [Austria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria) have expressly abolished the granting and/or use of titles of nobility to or by their citizens. This is distinct from countries which have not abolished the right to inherit (formerly) noble titles, but which do not grant legal recognition or protection to them, such as [Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany), and [Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy), although Germany recognizes their use as legal surnames. Still other countries and authorities allow their use, but forbid attachment of any privilege thereto, e.g. Finland, France, Norway and the European Union, although French law also protects lawful titles against [usurpation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usurpation).

**Noble privileges**



Detail from [*Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tr%C3%A8s_Riches_Heures_du_Duc_de_Berry) (*The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry*), c. 1410

Not all of the benefits of nobility derived from noble status *per se*. Usually privileges were granted or recognized by the [Crown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown) in association with possession of a specific title, office or estate. Most nobles' wealth derived from one or more [estates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estate), large or small, that might include fields, pasture, orchards, timberland, hunting grounds, streams, etc. It also included infrastructure such as castle, well and mill to which local peasants were allowed some access, although often at a price. Nobles were expected to live "nobly", that is, from the proceeds of these possessions. Work involving manual labor or subordination to those of lower rank (with specific exceptions, such as in military service) was either forbidden (as derogation from noble status) or frowned upon socially. On the other hand, membership in the nobility was usually a prerequisite for holding offices of trust in the realm and for career promotion, especially in the military, at court and often the higher functions in the government and judiciary.

Prior to the [French Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution), European nobles typically commanded tribute in the form of entitlement to cash rents or usage taxes, labor and/or a portion of the annual crop yield from [commoners](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commoner) or nobles of lower rank who lived or worked on the noble's [manor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manorialism) or within his [*seigneurial*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) domain. In some countries, the local lord could impose restrictions on such a commoner's movements, religion or legal undertakings. The nobles enjoyed the privilege of [hunting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunting). In France, nobles were exempt from paying the [*taille*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taille), the major direct tax. The peasants were not only bound to the nobility by dues and services. The nobility also had the [jurisdictions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jurisdiction) of the courts and the police over them. In many parts of western Europe the right of [private war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_war) long remained the privilege of every noble.

During the early Renaissance, [dueling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duel) established the status of a respectable [gentleman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentry), and was an accepted manner to resolve disputes. According to Ariel Roth, during the reign of [Henry IV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_IV_of_France), over 4,000 French aristocrats were killed in duels "in an eighteen-year period" whilst a twenty-year period of [Louis XIII](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_XIII_of_France)'s reign saw some eight thousand pardons for "murders associated with duels".

**Ennoblement**

In France, a *seigneury* might include one or more manors surrounded by land and villages subject to the noble's prerogatives and disposition. *Seigneuries* could be bought, sold or mortgaged. But if erected into, e.g. a barony or countship, was legally [entailed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entail) for a family, who could use it as their title (although most nobles were untitled: "seigneur of Montagne" meant ownership of the lordship but not, if one was not otherwise noble, the right to use its associated title). However, any French noble who bought a countship was allowed, *ipso facto*, to style himself as its *comte*.

By contrast, in the United Kingdom royal [letters patent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letters_patent) were necessary to take a noble title, which also carried a seat in the [House of Lords](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Lords), but came with no automatic [entail](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entail) nor rights to the local peasants' output.

Quite often, however, nobility came to be associated only with specific social privileges and a general expectation of deference from those of lower rank. An example of the latter would be early 20th-century [Polish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland) [nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szlachta) after their political, economic, judicial and religious privileges were abolished in 1923 and they remained only landed proprietors on the same legal basis as their commoner neighbors.

**European nobility**



The [Battle of Barnet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Barnet) in 1471. Large numbers of English nobility perished in the [Wars of the Roses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_the_Roses)



Russian [tsar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsar) [Mikhail I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_of_Russia) with [boyars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boyars)

European nobility originated in the feudal/seignorial system that arose in Europe during the [Middle Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages). Originally, [knights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knight) or nobles were mounted [warriors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrior) who swore allegiance to their sovereign and promised to fight for him in exchange for an allocation of land (usually together with [serfs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serf) living thereon). During the period known as the [Military Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Revolution), nobles gradually lost their role in raising and commanding private armies, as many nations created cohesive national armies.

This was coupled with a loss of the socio-economic power of the nobility, owing to the economic changes of the [Renaissance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance) and the growing economic importance of the merchant classes, which increased still further during the [Industrial Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution). In countries where the nobility was the dominant class, the *bourgeoisie* gradually grew in power; a rich city merchant came to be more influential than a nobleman, and the latter sometimes sought inter-marriage with families of the former to maintain their noble lifestyles.

However, in many countries at this time, the nobility retained substantial political importance and social influence: for instance, the United Kingdom's government was dominated by the nobility until the middle of the 19th century. Thereafter the powers of the nobility were progressively reduced by legislation. However, until 1999, all [Hereditary Peers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hereditary_peer) were entitled to sit and vote in the [House of Lords](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Lords). Since, a reduction has been undertaken, whereby 92 sit, with 90 being elected by other hereditary peers to [represent the peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representative_peer).

The countries with the highest proportion of nobles were [Castile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_Castile) (probably 10%?), [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish%E2%80%93Lithuanian_Commonwealth) (15% population in the 18th century with 800.000), Spain (722.000 in 1768 which was 7-8% of the entire population) and other countries with lower percentages like Russia in 1760 with 5-600.000 nobles (2-3% of the entire population), and France before the 1789 Revolution where there were no more than 300.000 which was 1% of the entire population (even if some scholars believe this figure was too big). In 1718 Sweden accounted from 10 to 15.000 nobles which was 0.5% of the entire population. Globally speaking all the nobles in 18th century Europe were maybe 3-4 million on a total of 170-190 million inhabitants.   
In [Hungary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Hungary), yet another frontier region, nobles made up 5% of the population. On the frontiers of Europe, western and eastern alike, ongoing warfare against ethnic outsiders – Turks and Tatars in eastern Europe, Moors (until 1492) in Spain – gave large numbers of new men access to higher status; and the booty of conquest provided the material bases for their advancement.

**Rank within the nobility**



[Polish magnates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_magnates) 1576-1586

Nobility might be either inherited or conferred by a [*fons honorum*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fount_of_honour). In its broadest manifestation and strictest sense nobility is an acknowledged preeminence that is *hereditary*, i.e. the status descends exclusively to some or all of the [legitimate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legitimacy_(law)), usually [male-line](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrilineality) descendants of a nobleman. In this respect, *nobility* has long been distinguished from a [title of nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Title_of_nobility), such as [peerages in France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage_of_France) and the United Kingdom, [*grandezas*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grandee) in Portugal and Spain, and some noble titles in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, [Prussia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia) and Scandinavia. In the Netherlands and Spain, noble titles are now equally heritable by females and males.

Aristocrat and [aristocracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristocracy), in modern usage, refer informally and broadly to persons belonging to the nobility or [upper class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_class).

In [France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France), some wealthy [*bourgeois*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeoisie), most particularly the members of the various [*parlements*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parlement), were ennobled by the king, constituting the [*noblesse de robe*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobles_of_the_Robe). The old nobility of [landed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landed_gentry) or [knightly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chivalry) origin, the [*noblesse d'épée*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobles_of_the_Sword), increasingly resented the influence and pretensions of this [*parvenu*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parvenu) nobility. In the last years of the [*ancien régime*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancien_r%C3%A9gime) the old nobility pushed for restrictions of certain offices and [orders of chivalry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chivalric_order) to noblemen who could demonstrate that their lineage had sufficient "[quarterings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quartering_(heraldry))", i.e. noble ancestry ([matrilineal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matrilineality) as well as patrilineal), to deserve to compete as equals with nobles of [medieval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval) descent for offices and favors at [court](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_(royal)), (although historians such as [William Doyle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Doyle_(historian)) have disputed this so-called "Aristocratic Reaction"). Various court and military positions were reserved by tradition for nobles who could "prove" an ancestry of at least *seize quartiers* (sixteen quarterings), indicating exclusively noble descent (as displayed, ideally, in the family's [coat of arms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms)) extending back five generations (all sixteen great-great grandparents).



Ball at the court of [Henry III of France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_III_of_France), c. 1580

This illustrates the traditional link in many countries between [heraldry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldry) and nobility; in those countries where heraldry is used, nobles have almost always been [armigerous](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentry), and have used [heraldry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldry) to demonstrate their ancestry and [family history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_history). However, it is important to note that heraldry has never been restricted to the noble classes in most countries, and being armigerous does not necessarily demonstrate nobility. Scotland is, though, an exception.

In the [modern age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_age), inherited nobility with [special rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_rights) has largely been abolished in the [Western World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_World) as intrinsically [discriminatory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discrimination), and discredited as inferior in efficiency to individual [meritocracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meritocracy) in the allocation of societal resources.

Many nations traditionally had an untitled lower nobility (including, in continental Europe, hereditary knights) in addition to titled nobles. Examples are the [*landed gentry*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landed_gentry) of the [British Isles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Isles), the [*Junkers*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junker) of Germany, the [*noblesse de robe*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noblesse_de_robe) of France, the [*hidalgos*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hidalgo_(Spanish_nobility)) of Spain and the *nobili* of Italy.

Some [con artists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Con_artist) sell [fake titles of nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_titles_of_nobility), often with impressive-looking documents to back them up. These may be illegal, depending on local law. They are more often illegal in countries that actually have nobilities, such as European monarchies. In the United States, such commerce may constitute actionable [fraud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraud) rather than criminal [usurpation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usurpation) of an exclusive right to use of any given title by an established class.

**"Blue" blood**

See also: [Limpieza de sangre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limpieza_de_sangre)

*Blue blood* is an [English idiom](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Category:English_idioms) recorded since 1834 for noble birth or descent; it is also known as a translation of the Spanish phrase *sangre azul*, which described the Spanish [royal family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_family) and other high nobility who claimed to be of [Visigothic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visigoths) descent, in contrast to the [Moors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moors).

The idiom originates from ancient and medieval societies of Europe and distinguishes an [upper class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_class) (whose [superficial veins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superficial_vein) appeared blue through their untanned skin) from a [working class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Working_class) of the time. The latter consisted mainly of agricultural peasants who spent most of their time working outdoors and thus had tanned skin, through which superficial veins appear less prominently.

[Robert Lacey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Lacey) explains the genesis of the blue blood concept:

It was the Spaniards who gave the world the notion that an aristocrat's blood is not red but blue. The Spanish nobility started taking shape around the ninth century in classic military fashion, occupying land as warriors on horseback. They were to continue the process for more than five hundred years, clawing back sections of the peninsula from its Moorish occupiers, and a nobleman demonstrated his pedigree by holding up his sword arm to display the filigree of blue-blooded veins beneath his pale skin—proof that his birth had not been contaminated by the dark-skinned enemy.

**Eastern nobility**



[Sikh Maharaja, Maharaja of Kapurthala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagatjit_Singh_of_Kapurthala)



In [Korea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korea), royalty and [yangban](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yangban) aristocrats were carried in litters called *gama*. A Korean *gama*, circa 1890.



An [aristocratic family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_classes_of_Tibet) in Lhasa, [Tibet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet) in 1936.



Emperor Farrukhsiyar Bestows a Jewel on a Nobleman



Viceroy [Lord Canning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Canning) meets Maharaja [Ranbir Singh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ranbir_Singh) of Kashmir, 9 March 1860

Many other non-European nations have had noble or aristocratic classes of various kinds: these are so diverse that it is somewhat misleading to try to translate them all into western feudal terminology.

*For the feudal hierarchy on the* [*Indian subcontinent*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_subcontinent)*, see* [*princely state*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princely_state)*.*

**Islamic**

In some [Islamic countries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_countries), there are no definite noble titles (titles of hereditary rulers being distinct from those of hereditary intermediaries between monarchs and commoners). Persons who can trace legitimate descent from [the Prophet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed) (as can several present or formerly reigning dynasties, and their relatives) are widely regarded as belonging to the ancient, hereditary Islamic nobility. In some Islamic countries they inherit (through mother or father) hereditary titles, although without any other associated privilege, e.g., variations of the title [Sayyid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid). Regarded as more religious than the general population, many people turn to them for clarification or guidance in religious matters.

In [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran), historical titles of the nobility including [*Mirza*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirza), [*Khan*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khan_(title)), [*ed-Dowleh*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed-Dowleh) and *Shahzada* ("Son of a Shah), are now no longer recognized. An aristocratic family is now recognized by their [family name](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_name), often derived from the post held by their ancestors, considering the fact that family names in Iran only appeared in the beginning of the 20th century. Sultans have been an integral part of Islamic history .

During the [Ottoman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire) in the Imperial Court and the provinces there were many [Ottoman titles and appellations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Ottoman_titles_and_appellations) forming a somewhat unique and complex system in comparison with the other Islamic countries. The bestowal of noble and aristocratic titles was widespread across the empire even after its fall by independent monarchs. One of the most elaborate examples is the Egyptian aristocracy's largest family; the [Abaza family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abaza_family).

**Chinese**

In [East Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Asia) the system was often modelled on imperial [China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China), the leading culture. Emperors conferred [degrees of nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_nobility), which were not permanent but decreased a rank each generation. Imperial descendants formed the highest class of ancient Chinese nobility, their status based upon the rank of the empress or concubine from which they descend maternally (as emperors were polygamous). Numerous titles such as *Taizi*, and equivalents of "prince" were accorded, and due to complexities in [dynastic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynasty#Dynasts) rules, [rules](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_laws) were introduced for Imperial descendants.

China had a feudal system in the [Shang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shang_dynasty) and [Zhou dynasties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhou_dynasty), which gradually gave way to a more bureaucratic one beginning in the [Qin dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qin_dynasty) (221 BC). This continued through the [Song Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_Dynasty), and by its peak only the Emperor's immediate family members were considered to be nobles.

This development was gradual and generally only completed in full by the [Song Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_Dynasty). In the [Han Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_Dynasty), for example, even though noble titles were no longer given to those other than the Emperor's relatives, the fact that the process of selecting officials was mostly based on a vouching system by current officials caused a form of quasi-hereditary nobility or peerage as officials usually vouched for their own sons or those of other officials. This process was further deepened during the [Three Kingdoms Period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Kingdoms) with the introduction of the [Nine-rank system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nine-rank_system).

By the [Sui Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sui_Dynasty), however, the institution of the [Imperial examination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_examination) system marked the transformation towards a full bureaucracy, though the process would not be truly completed until the [Song Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_Dynasty)

Dynasties established by the minority, non-Han rulers via conquest in later years disrupted this ancient Han social class system. They compelled conformity to an ethnic policy wherein the [Mongols](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongols) and the [Manchus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchu_people) were accorded higher social status than the Han majority whom they dominated.

In the [Qing dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qing_dynasty), many titles had been obtained or degraded through abuse and perversion of the original Qin system. Titles of nobility were still granted by the emperor, but served merely as honorifics based on a loose system of favors to the Qing emperor and the forwarding of Manchu interests: under a centralized system, the empire's governance was the responsibility of the Confucian-educated scholar-officials and the local gentry, while the [literati](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scholar-bureaucrats) were accorded gentry status based on lineage. For male citizens, advancement in status was possible via garnering the top three positions in imperial examinations.

The bestowal of titles was abolished upon the establishment of the [People's Republic of China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) in 1949, as part of a larger effort to remove feudal influences and practices from Chinese society.

**Japanese**



Japanese samurai, 1798

Medieval [Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan) developed a feudal system similar to the European system, where land was held in exchange for military service. The [*daimyo*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daimyo) class, or hereditary landowning nobles, held great socio-political power. As in Europe, they commanded private armies made up of [*samurai*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samurai), an elite [warrior class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrior); for long periods, these held the real power without a real [central government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_government), and often plunged the country into a state of civil war. The *daimyo* class can be compared to European peers, and the samurai to European knights, but important differences include the distinction between the European code of [chivalry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chivalry) and the Japanese code of [*bushido*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bushido).

Feudal title and rank were abolished during the [Meiji Restoration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meiji_Restoration) in 1868, and was replaced by the [*kazoku*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazoku), a five-rank [peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage) system after the British example, which granted seats in the upper house of the [Imperial Diet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diet_of_Japan); this ended in 1947 following Japan's defeat in [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II).

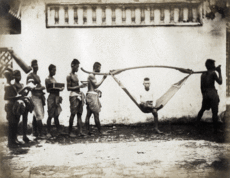
**Philippine**



A [Visayan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visayan_people) nobleman and his [consort](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consort) depicted in the [*Boxer Codex*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxer_Codex).

Like other [Southeast Asian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia) countries, many regions in the [Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines) have indigenous nobility, partially influenced by Hindu, Chinese, and Islamic custom. Since ancient times, [*Datu*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datu) was the common title given to the chief or monarch of the pre-colonial tribes and sovereign principalities in the archipelago; in some areas another term used was *Apo*. Together with the titles [*Sultan*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sultan) and [*Rajah*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajah), "*Datu*" (and its [Malay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malay_language) [cognate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognate), *Datok*) are still currently used in some parts of the Philippines, [Indonesia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia), [Malaysia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia) and [Brunei](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brunei). These titles are the rough equivalents of European [dukes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke), [marquesses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marquess), [Counts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Count) or [Barons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baron), depending upon the wealth and prestige of the bearer.

Upon the [Christianisation of the Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Philippines#Spanish_settlement_during_the_16th_and_17th_centuries), the datus retained their right to govern their territories under the [Spanish Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Empire). In a law signed 11 June 1594. [King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_of_Spain) [Philip II of Spain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Spain) commanded that the indigenous rulers continue to be given the same respect and privileges accorded them prior to their conversion. These nobles then formed part of the exclusive landed ruling class in lowland colonial Philippines called the [*Principalía*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principal%C3%ADa).



A [Siamese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siam) noble on hammock, 1900

**Pacific**

In [tribal societies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe), such as the [Polynesian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polynesia) island states, the system of often (semi-) hereditary [tribal chiefs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribal_chief) can also be considered a form of noble class. In [Tonga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tonga), after contact with Western nations, the traditional system of chiefs developed into a Western-style monarchy with a hereditary class of "barons", even adopting the English title.

**Nobility by nation**

A list of noble titles for different European countries can be found at [Royal and noble ranks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_and_noble_ranks).



[Italian Nobleman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility_of_Italy) of the Fifteenth Century. Engraving from the so-called [*Mantegna Tarocchi*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantegna_Tarocchi), about 1465.



A nobleman from [Bandoeng](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bandung) with his servant, [Dutch East Indies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_East_Indies), 1870s.

*For the proper address of holders of these titles, see* [*Royal and noble styles*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_and_noble_styles)*.*

*For the English Wikipedia category, see* [*Category:Nobility by nation*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Nobility_by_nation)

* [Armenian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_nobility)
* [Austrian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian_nobility)
* [Baltic nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_nobility) related to the modern area of Estonia and Latvia
* [Belgian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgian_nobility)
* [Bohemian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemian_nobility)
* [Brazilian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_nobility)
* [British nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_nobility)
  + [British peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_peerage)
    - [English peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage_of_England)
      * [Welsh Peers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Peers)
    - [Scottish peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage_of_Scotland)
    - [Irish peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage_of_Ireland)
    - [Peerage of Great Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage_of_Great_Britain)
    - [Peerage of the United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage_of_the_United_Kingdom)
* [Chinese nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_nobility)
* [Croatian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatian_nobility)
* [Cuban nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_nobility)
* [Danish nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danish_nobility)
* [Dutch nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_nobility)
* [Egyptian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahib-ul-Ma%27ali)
* [Ethiopian Nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_aristocratic_and_court_titles)
* [Fijian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratu)
* [Filipino nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principal%C3%ADa)
* [Finnish nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finnish_nobility)
* [French nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_nobility)



Hungarian [hussar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hussar) troops set up by the Hungarian nobility, during the [Austro–Turkish War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austro%E2%80%93Turkish_War_(1787%E2%80%931791)) of 1787–1791.

* [German nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_nobility)
  + [Freiherr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freiherr)
  + [Graf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graf)
  + [Junker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junker)
* [Hungarian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_nobility)
* [Imperial Roman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_Roman) titles
  + [Byzantine aristocracy and bureaucracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_aristocracy_and_bureaucracy)
* [Irish nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_nobility)
  + [Chiefs of the Name](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiefs_of_the_Name)
* [Italian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility_of_Italy)
* [Japanese nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazoku)
* [Korean nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_nobility)
* [Lithuanian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuanian_nobility)
* [Malay nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malay_titles)
* [Malagasy nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andriana)
* [Maltese nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility_of_Malta)
* [Mexican nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_nobility)
* [Mongolian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongolian_nobility)
* [Nigerian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigerian_traditional_rulers)
  + [Emir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emir)
  + [Oba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oba_(ruler))
  + [Obi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obi_(ruler))
* [Norwegian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norwegian_nobility)
* [Ottoman titles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_titles)
* [Polish nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szlachta)
* [Polynesian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariki)
* [Portuguese nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_nobility)
* [Romanian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Romanian_nobility&action=edit&redlink=1)
* [Russian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_nobility)
  + [Boyars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boyar)
* [Samoan nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fa%27amatai)
* [Serbian nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbian_nobility)
* [Spanish nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_nobility)
* [Swedish nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_nobility)
* [Swiss nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swiss_nobility)
* [Thai royal and noble titles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_royal_and_noble_titles)

**See also**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * [Almanach de Gotha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almanach_de_Gotha) * [Aristocracy (class)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristocracy_(class)) * [Blue Blood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Blood) * [Caste](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caste) (social hierarchy of [India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India)) * [Debutante](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debutante) * [Ennoblement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ennoblement) * [False titles of nobility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_titles_of_nobility) * [Gentleman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentleman) * [Gentry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentry) | * [Grand Burgher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Burgher) (German *Großbürger*) * [Heraldry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldry) * [King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King) * [Magnate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnate) * The [Military Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Revolution) * [Nobiliary particle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility_particle) * [Patrician (ancient Rome)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrician_(ancient_Rome)) * [Patrician (post-Roman Europe)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrician_(post-Roman_Europe)) * [Peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage) | * [Princely state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princely_state) * [*Redorer son blason*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redorer_son_blason) * [Raja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raja) * [Royal descent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_descent) * [Royal and noble ranks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_and_noble_ranks) * [Social environment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_environment) * [Symbolic capital](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbolic_capital) * [Honour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honour) * [Ascribed status](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascribed_status) * [Military elite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_elite) |

**External links**

* [The German nobility](http://wiki-en.genealogy.net/wiki/German_Nobility)
* [WW-Person](http://wwperson.informatik.uni-erlangen.de/cgi-bin/wwp/LANG=engl/?1), an on-line database of European noble genealogy
* [Paul Theroff's *An Online Gotha*](http://pages.prodigy.net/ptheroff/gotha/gotha.htm)
* [Genealogics, an extensive database of European nobles](http://genealogics.org/)
* [Worldroots, a selection of art and genealogy of European nobility](http://www.worldroots.com/)
* [RoyalArk- ruling houses in many non-European countries](http://4dw.net/royalark/)
* [The Russian Nobility Association in America](http://www.russiannobility.org)
* [Italian dynastic genealogies](http://www.sardimpex.com/) (in Italian, with an introduction in English)
* [Worldwidewords](http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-blu1.htm)
* [A Glossary of Titles in 35 Languages](http://www.heraldica.org/faqs/titel.htm)
* [Etymology OnLine](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=blue+blood&searchmode=none)
* [Friesian- Feudal Hierarchy (scroll down)](http://www.friesian.com/rank.htm)
* [Heraldica.org - European Noble, Princely, Royal and Imperial Titles](http://www.heraldica.org/topics/odegard/titlefaq.htm)
* [Genesis of European Nobility](http://www.tfp.org/tfp-home/books/nobility-and-analogous-traditional-elites.html)

This page was last modified on 1 February 2013 at 16:51.