

mits, like the hill of Superga, crowned by its magnificent church, are tall and easily visible from the city, a constant tangible presence like the Alps on the opposite side. This range of hills forms a barrier along the eastern side of the river, and has always checked the city's expansion in that direction. Since the middle ages these pleasant hills have been the place where Turin's better-off citizens have chosen to build villas with gardens and vineyards, where they could take their ease away from the heat of the city in summertime. The hills, though steep, form no great obstacle to communication, for they are intersected by river valleys. Since Roman times one of the main routes leading westward from Lombardy has passed through this broken, undulating country to reach the crossing at Turin, while another route reached it by skirting the hills along the eastern bank of the Po.

Just as the encircling ring of hills and mountains has conditioned Turin's historical development, so too have the waterways on which the city is situated. Its site was originally chosen because it commanded a point where the Po could be crossed with relative ease, first by a ford, and later by a bridge. Close to this crossing point the Dora Riparia flows into the Po from its source in the valley of Susa. Its course originally lay beyond the city's walls, but today it is engulfed by urban sprawl. For centuries the Dora and the canals derived from it supplied much of the city's water, and provided the motive power that drove Turin's silk-spinning plants, the machinery of its cloth manufactories and metallurgical workshops, and the mills that ground its grain. The ready availability of water-power called forth an industrial suburb north of the city walls before the factory age. Like its sisters, the Po, the Stura di Lanzo a little to the north, and the torrent of the Sangone to the south, the Dora today is a domesticated river, although even today in the winter floods they can still reveal some of the primal strength that once swept away everything in their path: dwellings, bridges, mills, manufactories, dikes, sluices, and canals.

These rivers provided water to irrigate farmlands in the nearby Piedmontese plain and in the market gardens that were cultivated just outside the city walls. Because they are fed by the melting snow from the Alps, for much of the year they provide a dependable source of water, and from the middle ages a network of canals and ditches was gradually constructed, radiating out from the rivers, to irrigate the plain in which Turin is situated. What little archaeological information we possess suggests that originally this plain was covered by forest, scrub and marsh. Neolithic farmers began the slow process that has modified the landscape into its present form. Today almost nothing remains of the an-