

the Romans had opened up for commercial purposes. Augusta Taurinorum became a key junction on the great network of highways the Romans built across northern Italy for the movement of troops, goods and imperial messengers. Here the Via Postumia from the east joined a branch of the Via Aurelia coming up from the coast; other roads led from Eporedia in the north, and along the river Po from Ticinum (present-day Pavia). At Augusta Taurinorum all these routes converged to join the highway leading to Segusio (modern Susa) and the Alpine passes. By creating this system of arterial roads and opening the Po to river traffic the Romans capitalized on the strategic and commercial potentialities inherent in Turin's site, making the city a vital node in the communications between Italy and western Europe. The Romans thus created the fundamental conditions that would determine the city's history for the next one-and-a-half millennia, until it took on its new role as the capital of the Savoyard state in the sixteenth century.

For more than two centuries, as far as we can tell, the history of Augusta Taurinorum was uneventful. The repercussions of distant political upheavals were occasionally felt, as in 69 C.E., "the year of the four emperors", when after the death of Nero troops loyal to the would-be emperor Vitellius campaigned in the Po valley against the army of his rival Otho. The campfires of a detachment of troops stationed close to the walls started a conflagration which destroyed part of the town. Vitellius emerged victorious in this struggle, but was soon defeated in his turn by Vespasian, who secured the imperial throne. But for the most part the citizens of Augusta Taurinorum lived a tranquil, provincial existence, untroubled by the march of armies and the rise and fall of emperors. Like any Roman town, it was governed by a civic elite of the better-off citizens. The elite was fairly open to ascent from below; families that accumulated wealth would have been readily inducted into it. The civic leaders' wealth came mainly from their estates; numerous villas belonging to them dotted the countryside outside the city walls, and they probably spent much of their time in these rural retreats. This group of elite citizens provided the members of the city council, monopolized the local magistracies, and met in an exclusive religious brotherhood that celebrated the cult of the emperor. There were also other, less exclusive, fraternities: we know of one dedicated to the worship of Jupiter, and another, drawn it seems from the lower classes, which worshipped the *Matronae*, female deities whose origin can probably be traced to the indigenous *Taurini*. Still other brotherhoods united practitioners of the same trade or craft. The civic elite does not seem to have been over-generous in endowing the town with monuments and amenities, for