

were supposedly martyred in 286, either for their refusal to fight against fellow-Christians, or for their refusal to worship at the altar of the imperial cult. The martyrdom took place, we are told, somewhere in the vicinity of Martigny, in what is today southern Switzerland, and to commemorate the martyrs' sacrifice, in the sixth century a monastery was founded at St-Maurice-en-Valais. It still stands today. Legendary or not, the martyrs of the Theban legion soon came to play a central part in the developing Christian tradition in Piedmont, where their cult had spread from the Valais. At Turin, the cult of three of the martyrs, Octavius, Avventore and Solutore, was already being celebrated in the late fourth century. They became the city's first patron saints, until their cult was eclipsed later on by that of St John the Baptist. They were claimed as local martyrs because after they had supposedly escaped the massacre they were hunted down and killed at Turin. Their relics were supposedly found there and preserved by a pious matron, Julia, who built an oratory in their honor. From that moment their cult flourished and put down deep roots in the region. Later on, the House of Savoy would adopt the reputed commander of the Theban legion, St Maurice, as one of its patron saints, and would found an order of chivalry in his name.

It seems clear that a community of Christians was already in existence at Turin by the middle of the fourth century. Towards the end of the century we find this community headed by a bishop, perhaps installed there by the redoubtable bishop of nearby Vercelli, Eusebius, who vigorously spread the faith across Piedmont. Turin became the center of a diocese over which the bishop exercised spiritual jurisdiction and in which he accumulated various territorial rights. It extended from the city into the surrounding countryside and into the mountains, to Susa and beyond. Its boundaries long remained fluid, and were the subject of constant disputes with neighboring lords, ecclesiastical and lay, but the new territorial reality it represented would be crucially important. The bishop's diocese would form the basis on which the city of Turin would construct its dependent rural territory in the middle ages, embracing the valley leading to Susa and over the Alps. For a long time the bishop of Turin's jurisdiction over the valley of Susa was contested by the bishop of Maurienne on the other side of the Alpine divide, but ultimately in vain: this critical zone was finally adjudicated to the see of Turin. The configuration of the episcopal territory thus maintained the crucial strategic linkage between Turin and the Alpine passes that had been the city's *raison d'être* since its foundation.

As far as we know the first bishop of Turin was a certain Maximus. We know very little of his birth and origins; he was probably a protégé