

Chapter III

The Bishop, the Commune, and the Count of Savoy, 1100-1280

1. *The Rise and Fall of the Commune.*

In the course of the twelfth century the citizens of Turin developed the institutions that transformed their city into a self-governing commune. This process was not a simple linear transformation from dependency to autonomy; it was slow and halting, for in their struggle for independence the citizens had to contend with the entrenched power of their bishop, and the intervention of external powers, notably the emperor. Nevertheless, by the end of the century the institutional structure of the commune was complete. Turin had by then become a small city-state, with all the attributes of sovereignty: it chose its own officials, levied taxes, administered justice, made laws, and fought wars against its neighbors. In the early thirteenth century the now-mature commune eclipsed the bishop as the dominant force in the city's political life.

This hard-won autonomy was destined not to last, however, for Turin never developed the strength to defend its independence and expand its territory. The city was never big enough or rich enough to assume more than a minor role in the politics of its region. Hemmed in by many nearby cities and local lords, it was never able to acquire a large dependent territory, as Milan, Venice and Florence did, and as a result it lacked the resources to become politically powerful, and ultimately to safeguard its independence. In the harsh political environment of northern Italy it was constantly menaced by its neighbors, whether rival communes like Asti or Vercelli, or feudal princes like the marquises of Saluzzo and Monferrato, and the counts of Savoy. So in the later thirteenth century Turin fell under the sway of one after another of these predatory neighbors, in a pattern that was repeating itself throughout northern and central Italy: the smaller cities were either swallowed up by their neighbors, or were taken over by a powerful magnate, who made himself *signore* or lord of the city. In the later thirteenth century, after first coming under the domination of Asti, and then being forced to accept the marquis of Monferrato as *signore*, Turin was subjugated by Thomas III