

Thomas meanwhile was bargaining from his prison cell with the government of Asti, in the hope that it would force its Turinese ally to release him. Asti declared its willingness to mediate between the count and his captors, for it had designs of its own on Turin and hoped to use the negotiations to supplant him as its lord. The Turinese however refused to free their prisoner. To put pressure on Asti to expedite his release Thomas then enlisted the aid of his relatives in the ruling families of France and England. They confiscated the goods of the city's merchants who were trading in their countries, demonstrating the long international reach that the House of Savoy had now achieved through its dynastic alliances. Finally in February 1257 the commune of Turin handed Thomas over to Asti, whose government soon released him. He died two years later, leaving two young sons, Thomas III and Amadeus V, who would eventually succeed him. The lordship of Turin, once almost in his grasp, had eluded him.

The dominant force now in Turinese politics was not the House of Savoy but the commune of Asti, which was seeking to turn the smaller city into its satellite. As part of the agreement to free Thomas II, the Turinese had agreed to accept the rule of a Podestà appointed by the commune of Asti, to be chosen from among that city's leading men. Turin's city council reached this crucial decision only after a stormy debate, which revealed deep fissures in the communal leadership. The pressure of the conflicts that had raged for the last generation had split the civic elite into opposing factions, some favoring alignment with the House of Savoy, others seeking alliance with Asti. In the end the commune accepted Asti's terms, despite the consequent limitation on its sovereignty, in order to ward off a greater peril that had now appeared; Turin needed Asti's protection against the Guelph leader Charles of Anjou, who was rapidly extending his influence in Piedmont. Buoyed by his victory over the last Hohenstaufen princes and his conquest of the kingdom of Sicily, he was winning the allegiance of a number of cities and local lords in southern Piedmont, who accepted him as their overlord and declared for the Guelph cause. In this way he quickly built up an extensive but heterogeneous – and ultimately fragile – principality for himself. The advance of Angevin power alarmed many of the region's communes and great lords. Asti formed a league of local cities and nobles to combat him, under the Ghibelline banner. Turin originally formed part of this alliance, but in 1270 the commune changed sides and expelled the Podestà Asti had installed at the head of its government. This change of sides was probably motivated by Turin's new bishop, Goffredo di Montanaro, a loyal Guelph and a determined enemy of