

Chapter IV

The First Centuries of Savoyard Rule, 1280-1536

1. *The Later Middle Ages: An Era of Dramatic Change.*

Two fundamental developments shaped Turin's history in the later middle ages: the establishment of Savoyard domination at the end of the thirteenth century, which put an end to the commune's autonomy; and the catastrophic onset of the Black Death in 1348, which was followed by recurring, virulent epidemics that caused cumulative population losses and gravely disrupted economic life. These two events represent a turning point, both political and economic, in the city's history.

The imposition of Savoyard lordship curbed the influence of the powerful clans that comprised the oligarchy that had dominated Turin for the past century. This oligarchy did not however form a single united front against the House of Savoy; since at least the middle of the thirteenth century it had split into opposing factions, and its divisions facilitated the imposition of Savoyard rule. One faction had aligned itself with the city of Asti or the great Piedmontese feudatories against the counts of Savoy, while the other faction had favored the Savoyards, and it was this faction that triumphed when Thomas III of Savoy seized control of the city from William of Monferrato in 1280. The fissures within the urban nobility would persist into the next century, and the Savoyard princes would exploit them to strengthen their hold over the city. Turin's ruling oligarchy was forced to adjust as best as it could to the new conditions of Savoyard rule. Its autonomy and sovereignty, already compromised in the political turmoil of the thirteenth century, were now things of the past. The council that had once acted as the supreme authority in the commune had to accept a subordinate role, and defer to its lord's legislative and political will. Most of the city's elite families accepted the new situation; a few did not. In the long run, however, Savoyard rule brought some compensations for the loss of urban autonomy. Although at first the Savoyard princes did not make Turin the capital of their domains in Piedmont, by the early fifteenth century it had become the seat of government, the residence of the court when it visited the Savoyard domains east of the Alps, and the seat of