

a new university, founded by its princely ruler. This was a critical moment in the city's history. As the capital of the Savoyard possessions in northern Italy, Turin now began to establish its primacy over the other Piedmontese cities.

The recurring visitations of the Black Death after 1348 inflicted terrible demographic and economic losses on Turin. The ranks of the city's population thinned; in the surrounding countryside agricultural production fell drastically, as farms were abandoned and much of the land reverted to waste and scrub. Trade along the commercial artery between Lombardy and France dwindled, and revenue from the tolls charged on traffic moving through the city gates fell; manufacturing declined as labor became scarce and markets shrank. Turin's population and economic activity shrank to their lowest levels in the early fifteenth century. From about 1420 the frequency and ferocity of the plague epidemics began to diminish, and a gradual recovery began. But this recovery was slow and hesitant. More than a century would be needed to repair the economic and demographic losses inflicted by the plague. Figures for Turin's population, which provide a rough indicator of the pace of recovery, would not regain their pre-plague level until the later fifteenth century.

The impact of plague was exacerbated by the devastation wrought by the constant warfare between Turin's Savoyard rulers, their neighbors, and the ambitious Visconti rulers of Milan, between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-fifteenth century. Besides their own forces, the contending powers employed companies of mercenary troops commanded by their own captains, who sold their services to the highest bidder, and often acted as belligerents in their own right, marching where they pleased, and plundering whatever was in their path. Profiting from this endless warfare, the counts of Savoy (whose rising political power was recognized by their elevation to the title of dukes by the emperor in 1416) steadily expanded their domains in northwestern Italy. Turin's strategic position on the axis between the two parts of the Savoyard domains and its central location in their Piedmontese territories made it the fulcrum for their expansionist policies. They now had to direct their territorial ambitions eastwards into Italy, because the possibility of expansion west of the Alps was being cut off as the kings of France extended their hold over the region. In 1349 the French crown acquired the province of Dauphiné, which bordered on the ancestral lands of the House of Savoy, creating a major obstacle to any future expansion. In 1388 count Amadeus VII secured the city and county of Nice, but this was to be the House of Savoy's last significant territorial acquisition