

west of the Alps. From this time onward their ambitions were focused on the politically fragmented territories of northern Italy, which offered a more fertile field for gain, and where they already possessed a firm bridgehead at Turin. From there Savoyard dominion spread steadily outwards into the rest of Piedmont. The city of Ivrea fell under Savoyard rule in 1313, Fossano in the following year, Savigliano in 1320, Chieri in 1347. In the later fourteenth century the Savoyards extended their reach further still: expanding southwards, they secured the strategic city of Cuneo in 1382, then Mondovì in 1418, while in the north they acquired the lordship of Biella in 1379, and an important prize, Vercelli, in 1427.

This successful territorial aggrandizement enhanced Turin's importance as the strategic hub of the Savoyard lands east of the Alps, and goes a long way to explaining why Turin became the effective capital of these lands in the first decades of the fifteenth century. Turin's central position in Piedmont made it the logical point from which the House of Savoy could conquer and administer a growing agglomeration of Italian territories. Meanwhile its new status as a regional capital stimulated its economic and demographic growth: in the course of the fifteenth century the court resided at Turin with increasing frequency, the officials who administered the Savoyard possessions in Piedmont were stationed there permanently, and the new university attracted growing numbers of students. This influx of new elements diversified Turin's population and social structure, enriched its culture, and created new sources of demand that stimulated its economy. Its social structure became more complex, as the old urban elite was supplemented by the nobles, professionals and bureaucrats brought in by the ruling dynasty. At the same time, other immigrants trickled in, bringing new crafts and commercial connections that aided the slow economic recovery that took off in the fifteenth century. Savoyard rule was interrupted in 1536, when a French army occupied Turin, but by then the city was far more diversified, socially and economically, than it had been when Thomas III seized power in 1280. By the time of the French invasion the rule of the dukes of Savoy was firmly rooted in Turin, and its ascendancy over the other Piedmontese cities was assured. When the French occupation ended in 1559, Turin would attain an even more dominant position, this time as the capital not only of Piedmont but of the entire Savoyard state.