

Philip of Achaea died soon afterwards at Pinerolo, and was succeeded by his son James. Philip left his son in a strong position. The chief opponents of Savoyard rule in Turin had been defeated and exiled. To strengthen his hold over the city, in 1336 Prince James oversaw the formation of an association of non-noble families, sworn to support Savoyard rule and defend the public peace by armed force against the turbulent urban nobility. This association was comparable to similar groupings of non-nobles that had sprung up in the preceding century in other Italian cities, with the purpose of protecting non-nobles, or *popolani*, against the indiscriminate violence regularly perpetrated against them by the urban nobles. Later in the century this popular association would evolve into a defensive organization dedicated to the city's patron saint, the Società di San Giovanni Battista, which was formally constituted with its own statutes in 1389. By organizing this association James of Achaea adroitly harnessed the longstanding resentment of Turin's common people against the families that constituted the city's ruling elite, and that had for so long prosecuted their feuds in the city's public places, without regard for the damage they inflicted on the rest of the population. After 1334 Savoyard rule over Turin was still not fully secure: other conspiracies were hatched and uncovered from time to time. But these plots all failed. The defeat of Giovanni Zucca's conspiracy by Philip of Achaea and the common people of Turin thus marked a turning point in the evolution of Savoyard domination over the city, and stabilized the new political order on a much firmer footing.

3. *The Impact of the Black Death.*

The Black Death, or bubonic plague, struck Turin in the summer of 1348. This was the first attack of a disease that would strike the city in recurring epidemics for more than three centuries to come. It was a mysterious disease, terrifying in its virulence, against which there were no known remedies. Today we know that it first reached western Europe in 1347, carried on Genoese ships from the Black Sea to Sicily, and that from there it spread rapidly, reaching Scotland and Norway by the middle of 1349, and wiping out perhaps a third of the continent's population at its first onset. We know too how it was transmitted, by the lice and fleas that lived parasitically on rats, and that communicated the infection to the human population. But in the mid-fourteenth century, when the plague first struck, none of this was known, and no counter-measures could be taken. Only gradually would governments come to understand