

was not entirely negative. The periodic visitations of the court to Turin, and the permanent presence of the ducal council and the university, with its numerous students, created a demand for goods and services that brought considerable benefit to the city's artisans and shopkeepers.

The presence of the ducal court and the university generated social tensions, however, adding to the problems of public order that the city council and the duke's Vicario strove in vain to overcome. The growing hostility between the Savoyard and Piedmontese nobles who frequented the court spilled over into Turin's streets: rival nobles and their retainers settled their scores in public, brawling in defiance of the city authorities. The university students too were a perpetual source of disorder. They fought with one another, committed thefts, and assaulted the citizens. When arrested, they claimed clerical privilege and refused to be tried by the Vicario and the Judge. The council petitioned the duke to disallow the students' claims to be tried as clerics, and increased the citizen guard to 200 men in an effort to suppress the violence. The Società di San Giovanni Battista had been dissolved after Amadeus VIII came to power, and this citizen militia, first constituted in 1336, offered the only means for maintaining public order. But it was hardly equal to the task. Like every city at the time, Turin was a dangerous and turbulent place. Men habitually went about armed, and were quick to use their weapons. Violence tended to peak during public festivities: the carnival season in particular was a time of heightened disorder, when the crowds of revelers, disguised and masked, gave cover to criminal activity.

Turin's so-called "Abbey of Fools" was especially active during the festive seasons. Like its counterparts in many other cities at this time, it was an association of young men that performed a curious mixture of functions, partly festive, partly ludic, partly disciplinary. It received official recognition from Duke Ludovico, who granted it a charter in 1434, perhaps in an attempt to domesticate an organization that already existed outside the law, and to temper its subversive potential. The Abbey was headed by an elected "Abbot", a young man from one of the city's leading families, and according to its statutes, its membership was made up of "good citizens", all of them male. It staged carnival festivities and mystery plays to entertain the citizens, and provided a liveried guard of honor for visiting dignitaries. This guard, up to one hundred strong, doubled on occasion as a kind of police force to maintain the public peace. The Abbey was thus in some ways the successor to the Società di San Giovanni Battista, which had disappeared after Amadeus VIII took power; the Abbey made its first appearance shortly after the armed as-