

## Chapter v

### Capital of an Absolutist State, 1536-1798

#### 1. *Turin under the Old Regime.*

Turin was twice occupied by invading French armies: in 1536, and again in 1798. These two occupations mark the opening and closing of a new chapter in the city's history. During this period the heterogeneous territories ruled by the House of Savoy evolved into a centralized bureaucratic monarchy, governed from Turin. In 1563 Duke Emanuel Filibert moved the capital there from Chambéry, the ancestral seat of the dynasty, on the other side of the Alps. From this time onward Turin's primacy within the entire Savoyard state, and not merely over the other Piedmontese cities, was assured. Emanuel Filibert's decision concluded a crucial period of historical evolution for Turin: from being the eastern outpost of the Savoyard rulers in the late thirteenth century, it had become the regional capital of their Italian domains in the fifteenth century, and finally, in the sixteenth century, it became the center of their whole state. Elevation to the status of capital accelerated Turin's growth: at this point political factors rather than geographical location became the chief determinants of its social and economic development. The history of Turin and the Savoyard monarchy were now inextricably intertwined.

Throughout this period the Savoyard rulers systematically strengthened the machinery of their state, turning it into a model absolutist monarchy of the Old Regime. (Historians use this term to describe the couple of centuries before the French Revolution, when monarchical rule was in the ascendant all over Europe). It defined itself as absolutist, in the sense that authority was concentrated in the hands of the ruler alone, and was not limited by representative assemblies. Its structure was hierarchical, mirroring the social order, in which power was a function of birth. The monarch's court, where the flower of the nobility gathered, represented the apogee of both social status and political power. The social order was permeable, however, for non-nobles could rise in rank through wealth or service to the state. The monarchs were not despots; they were obliged to obey the fundamental laws of the state,