

and to rule benevolently, dispensing justice and upholding the God-given social order. Turin occupied a central place in the structure of the absolutist state as the residence of the Savoyard rulers and their court, and the headquarters of their expanding bureaucracy, whose tasks were to administer justice, increase revenue, build up the army, and maintain order.

In the eighteenth century, the Savoyard rulers, their ministers and their bureaucrats strove to make government more rational, more efficient, and more enlightened, in an effort to bring it into line with the philosophical principles of the age. Their avowed aim was to procure the general good, or as it came to be called, "public happiness", through conscientious administration guided by reason rather than the blind force of tradition. This was an essentially paternalistic conception of government: the benefits of enlightened rule flowed from the top downward, not from the bottom up. Since the population as a whole was held to be ignorant and irrational, it was the duty of the sovereign and his ministers to discipline them for their own good, and to assure their moral and material welfare. The first duty of the lower orders, as taught by both the secular and the religious authorities, was to obey the powers that be, and gratefully accept the benefits their benign rule conferred.

As successive Savoyard rulers worked to construct the apparatus of their state, they also strove to expand, strengthen and beautify Turin. Within the framework of their absolutist monarchy, the capital city was assigned several key functions, both symbolic and practical. In a practical sense, it was the place where the ruler, the court and the central bureaus of the government all resided: it was the physical locus of political authority, the site of sovereignty. It was also the military heart of the state, designed to protect the rulers from danger: in 1706 it fulfilled this vital function by resisting a determined French siege and thus preserving the state and the dynasty from dissolution. Its symbolic functions, however, were equally important. Turin served as the dynasty's showplace, advertising the benefits of its rule, and representing in iconic form the power and glory of the House of Savoy. Its regular streetplan and architectonic unity were consciously conceived as representations of monarchical power and of the order the absolutist state was seeking to instill throughout its domains. Turin's grand avenues and broad public spaces were planned as a gigantic open-air theater in which the monarchs could act out the rituals of power, flanked by their courtiers and the high officials of their state, before an admiring populace.

Throughout the Old Regime, therefore, the Savoyard rulers paid very close attention to the planning of Turin. They were deeply involved