

structed and enlarged, and in the surrounding countryside, especially on the hills across the river Po, some of Turin's better-off citizens were building villas where they could withdraw from the heat and squalor of the city in summer. For the lower classes, life was still precarious, but for these well-to-do citizens at least, it was getting better. There were more amenities, more possibilities for diversion for those with money to spend and leisure to spend it. The streets were now lighted at night by hundreds of oil-lamps, to guide pedestrians and discourage crime. Mountebanks and traveling players performed on improvised stages in the piazzas. There were more carriages in the streets; there were cafés where people could meet to discuss the day's news, and a few purveyors of luxuries, like chocolate and spirits. The book trade was flourishing. Bookshops offered a wide range of titles, not only from local presses, but also from abroad, even including books and pamphlets banned by the censors. From 1740 there were regular winter seasons at the new opera-house, while another theater, owned by the prince of Carignano, offered performances of plays and operas. Turin was also home to a school of violinists and string players, headed by the virtuoso Giovanni Battista Somis, who were renowned all over Europe.

Victor Amadeus II's diplomatic and military actions during the wars against Louis XIV not only elevated him to kingly rank; they made Turin for the first time into a city of international significance, linked diplomatically to the principal European capitals by a constantly changing network of alliances. The major powers all dispatched ambassadors to the court of Turin. Partly because of this heightened political profile, foreigners now frequented the city in greater numbers. They came too because of the vogue for the Grand Tour, now the preferred way for young gentlemen to complete their education by visiting Italy's cities and admiring their antiquities and their artistic treasures. For travelers from France or Britain, Turin offered a convenient place to rest and recover after the dangerous journey over the Alps. What they found, however, was not the customary destination on the Grand Tour. Gentlemen – and gentlewomen like the celebrated Lady Mary Wortley Montagu – did not come to Turin to view the picturesque remnants of antiquity, which the city lacked. They came to study it as a model of order, careful planning, and good government. Many left accounts of their impressions. For their benefit the first guide-book describing Turin's monuments was published in 1753, for the tercentenary of the Corpus Domini miracle. Guide-book in hand, visitors would admire the Military Academy, which was attended by many young foreign noblemen, the cannon-foundry at the Arsenal, the royal palaces and the residences