

technical competence. The new ministers lacked practical experience and were less adept at handling the reins of power than the old bureaucratic elite, so for much of his reign Victor Amadeus III's policies faltered. The court and the government were rife with intrigues and divisions, which led to frequent changes of ministers, and undercut the stability of the regime. But in one sense the change was positive, for it relaxed the tight control the old king and Bogino had exercised over every aspect of life in the Savoyard state, and opened the way for rapid social and cultural change.

The effects of this change of regime were quickly felt at Turin. Travelers began to remark on the new freedom they observed in social and intellectual life, and on the new respect now accorded to men of letters. Charles Emanuel III and Bogino had had no time for writers and philosophers. Furthermore they had distrusted any form of spontaneous association that was not tied to the state, so that academies, discussion circles, and Masonic lodges, common in other Italian cities, barely existed at Turin. The first Masonic lodge did not appear there until 1765, decades later than in most other cities in the peninsula, and was only able to form because of the support it received from the heir to the throne. After 1773 all this changed, however, and a profusion of new associations suddenly blossomed, in a kind of Indian Summer of the Old Regime, among them a Patriotic Society, an Agrarian Society, the Sampolina Academy, all devoted to the public good. Two more Masonic lodges were founded, their hundreds-strong membership overlapping and dovetailing with that of the academies. The spread of Freemasonry provides an indicator of the spread of Enlightenment principles among the elite. Freemasonry shared with the Enlightenment a belief in the brotherhood of mankind and in the betterment of human life through the right use of reason. Intellectual life at Turin, hitherto inward-looking, quickly adopted a cosmopolitan outlook. Educated people followed events abroad, through the medium of foreign periodicals and books, and the *Biblioteca Oltremontana*, the city's foremost journal of opinion which appeared in the 1780s. The war in the American colonies, and then events in France in 1789, were eagerly watched and debated by Turin's citizens.

A complex new relationship had emerged between the government and the educated classes, who were beginning to look upon themselves as a political force in their own right, as the voice of public opinion, more rational and more moral than the actions of statesmen. One sign of this new relationship was the formation of the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1783, under the patronage of Victor Amadeus III. The Academy had