

Chapter VI

Between Revolution and Reaction, 1798-1830

1. *Turin in the Era of the French Revolution.*

A traditional way of life abruptly ended and a new era began for the city of Turin and its people in December 1798. That month the old royal capital experienced the full force of the French Revolution in the form of military occupation and the abdication of the Savoyard monarch, Charles Emanuel IV. As the French troops approached, the king abandoned the city and went into exile with his court on the island of Sardinia. These traumatic events marked the opening stage in Turin's transformation from a center of a Catholic, aristocratic society of orders into a more secular society dominated by a more open elite of propertied notables. In the process Turin would gradually lose its character as a fortress-capital of an absolutist monarchy and evolve instead into a modern bourgeois city in the nineteenth century.

The era of French dominance over the former Savoyard capital came in two separate phases. In the wake of the king's abdication, the first and more radical phase commenced in December 1798 amid the rhetoric of liberty and equality and celebrations by local supporters of the revolution in the streets and public squares of the city. That month saw not only the disappearance of the monarchy and its replacement by a republican form of government, but also the elimination of the aristocracy's privileged status. Two days after the king had gone into exile, the French authorities abolished all noble titles and distinctions, and prohibited the use of livery, weapons or coats of arms. Additional decrees eliminated any remaining feudal privileges and monopolies regardless of their origins or legal status, and denied title holders the right to compensation or even payment of back taxes and dues. The new rulers of Turin also launched a major assault on the power and influence of the Catholic Church. During the first two months of republican rule, they closed the local seminary, abolished the professorial chairs in Theology and Canon Law at the university, got rid of the tithe, clerical legal immunity, and the inquisition, limited the prerogatives of bishops, and reduced the number of religious holidays.