

ter and ambassador, as rector of Turin's University in 1805. Balbo's intellectual prestige, diplomatic and political experience, and familiarity with Parisian circles enabled him to use his position to dominate virtually all aspects of local educational and intellectual activity. In addition to the university, colleges, and elementary schools, the new rector exercised authority over a wide array of institutions that included the Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Agriculture, astronomical observatory, library, and museums. Balbo and his collaborators also launched the first major effort to coordinate research and education in Piedmont. The rector oversaw a reformed imperial university divided into nine specialized schools for medicine, surgery, veterinary medicine, sciences, mathematics, law, language and classics, painting, and music. The thirty-six professors who presided over these schools included the leading luminaries of the Piedmontese scholarly community. During the same period, the revived Academy of Sciences became a center for scientific, literary, philosophical, and historical discussions, a point of contact with scholars from the most prestigious centers of learning in Europe, and a launching pad for careers in the university.

At least on the surface, Napoleonic France's ambitious array of legal and administrative reforms did appear to eliminate, undermine, or transform most of the institutions, traditions, and practices that had governed the economic and social life of the Turinese people for centuries. Above all, the French authorities profoundly modified the legal and institutional structures of the city in ways that greatly increased its role as a center of economic and commercial activity in Piedmont. The sale of Church lands, the elimination of important obstacles to trade and production, the promulgation of modern commercial legislation, and the development of new means of communications and public works projects, for example, helped lay the foundations for the long-term economic growth and expansion of the city in the nineteenth century.

The chief beneficiaries of these developments were ambitious men from the professional and commercial classes. The French regime knocked down many of the institutional and legal barriers to political and social integration at the highest levels of Turinese society. With their emphasis on efficiency, personal achievement, and equality, imperial reforms embodied values that were inimical to narrow and exclusionary forms of aristocratic power. As a result, they paved the way for the emergence of a new and broader local elite, whose positions depended less on birth and privilege than on landed property and professional expertise. From the outset, the sale of Church properties, real estate speculation, contracts for public works, and remunerative careers