

isolation and legal codes introduced by the French and by restoring the Royal Constitutions of 1770 and any subsequent revisions and additions decreed by his predecessors prior to June 1800. In one fell swoop, the new regime eliminated the principle of equality before the law, civil marriage and divorce, while resurrecting the patriarchal prerogatives of the family, the old civil restrictions on Jewish and Waldensian communities, and the central role of the Catholic Church in public life. In line with these changes, the king dismissed all those men who had cooperated with the “usurper” state that had preceded him and excluded them from positions in his regime. Victor Emanuel I’s program of integral restoration also carried over to the monarchy’s economic policies. His officials halted the public notification of mortgages, which had facilitated economic transactions, reintroduced old tariff barriers both at the borders and within the Kingdom of Sardinia, and revived the guilds and preexisting industrial privileges.

Not surprisingly, the titled nobility and the Catholic Church emerged as the chief beneficiaries of the newly restored monarchical order. Although Victor Emanuel I and his entourage did not go so far as to revive feudal bonds, they did reinstate aristocratic primogenitures and other privileges and pursued policies that openly favored the nobility in the selection and promotion of state officials. The attempt to return to a caste system was evident at the municipal level, where aristocratic families enjoyed once again official corporative representation after 1814. Turin’s local administration was put back in the hands of a general council of sixty decurions who were chosen for life. The decurions were divided into two categories with the first coming from the nobility and the second from the other classes of citizens. Much as in the past, titled decurions had their own special places in church and at court, and enjoyed the rights of precedence at state and church functions. In a similar fashion, the reconstituted Royal Military Academy of Turin accepted almost exclusively the sons of aristocratic families.

The House of Savoy also reinforced aristocratic caste-consciousness in Turin at the level of high society by making its highly traditional court the focal point and exclusive setting for much of the nobility’s social activities. The rigid etiquette observed at the court of Victor Emanuel I ensured that titled status remained a virtual prerequisite for admission to royal festivities. There appears to have been equally little informal mingling between the aristocracy and other urban social groups in the decades after 1815. As the French ambassador reported in the 1820s, between nobles and the non-nobles “the separation that defines social customs is complete, profound, and without exception”. In her mem-