

Chapter VII

Capital City of the Italian Risorgimento, 1831-1864

1. *Turin in the Mid-Nineteenth Century.*

In the decades between 1831 and 1861, Turin underwent remarkable transformation. From a minor dynastic capital, as much French as Italian, on the periphery of the peninsula, the city evolved into the command center of the movement for national unification. Indeed, the history of Turin and that of the emerging Italian nation became inseparably intertwined in these years. Few contemporary observers in the early 1830s, however, would have predicted the extraordinary role that the House of Savoy and its royal capital came to play in Italy three decades later. The succession of Charles Albert to the throne of the Kingdom of Sardinia in April 1831 did not appear to mark any break with the traditions and policies of his predecessors. A decade after his brief flirtation with the Piedmontese liberals in 1821, the new king came to the throne as a deeply religious man, a stalwart defender of the Catholic legitimist cause in Europe, and a relentless adversary of radicalism at home. His initial treatment of the University of Turin, for instance, suggested little change from the policies of his predecessors. The university remained closed throughout much of 1831 and 1832 as a result of royal concerns about public order. The following year Charles Albert provided an even more graphic demonstration of his fanatical hostility to revolution when he brutally repressed the democratic supporters of Giuseppe Mazzini in Piedmont. After his police uncovered a conspiracy to launch a revolt in the summer of 1833, the king ordered that all those involved in the plot be brought before military tribunals. At the insistence of the throne, the harsh punishments imposed by the tribunals, including a dozen death sentences, were carried out immediately without the possibility of appeal. At the same time, the king's self-proclaimed role as defender of Roman Catholicism led him to expand the power of the Church hierarchy, the Jesuits, and other religious orders over education, censorship, social welfare, and municipal government.