

2. *The Reforms of Charles Albert.*

Nonetheless, these early developments of Charles Albert's reign did not signal a new era of reaction and repression as many feared at the time. In sharp contrast to his predecessors, the new ruler simultaneously embarked on an ambitious program of bureaucratic, legal, and economic reforms that lead to a cautious modernization of his kingdom and its capital city over the next two decades. From the outset, these reforms aimed to strengthen the absolute monarchy by transforming it from an arbitrary despotism into a more efficient administrative and consultative institution. Ideally, such a monarchy would deepen the support of its subjects by providing them with tangible social and economic benefits. Already in 1831 and 1832, Charles Albert moved to make his regime more efficient and centralized by creating a Council of State and setting up new governmental commissions to reform the Savoyard legal system and to find more effective ways of combating the recurring problem of cholera epidemics. The work of these commissions bore their first fruit in the second half of the decade with the promulgation of new civil, criminal, and commercial codes, the *Codici Albertini*, which incorporated features of the most progressive legal systems on the continent, while perpetuating the authority of the Church and noble patriarchs in the area of family life. Charles Albert also introduced a series of economic reforms to promote freer trade and stimulate production and investment within his realm. Between 1834 and 1847, the crown slowly dismantled the old protectionist system in the Kingdom of Sardinia, reducing tariffs on foreign grain and manufactured goods and repealing bans on the export of raw silk and other local products. During the same period, his officials negotiated twenty-six commercial treaties with other European and American states in these years. Closer to home Charles Albert eliminated the guilds in 1844 in order to create a more open labor market. He also carried out public works projects that reduced unemployment, built much needed economic infrastructures, and improved communications. One of the most important initiatives in this regard was a state plan developed in the mid-1840s to encourage the construction of a railroad system in Piedmont by private companies with the involvement of local financiers, landowners, and foreign investors. His government took the lead by building a new line between Turin and Genoa in 1845. Finally, to promote investment and the flow of capital, the crown approved the founding of the Banks of Genoa and Turin between 1844 and 1847.