

ers, but also men with little or no connection to agriculture. In the first year, more than 500 professionals, 211 government officials, and 80 merchants, manufacturers, and bankers became members. For his part, Charles Albert supported the project by recognizing the association as an official royal institution. The initiative received an enthusiastic reception as well from influential middle-class spokesmen like Lorenzo Valerio, who praised it as “the widest and most useful application of the principle of association ever” in Piedmont. From a group of 36 founders in 1842, the organization grew to over 2,700 by the end of 1844.

The evolution of the Subalpine Agrarian Association, however, quickly revealed the difficulties and limits of inter-elite collaboration in Turin before 1848. On the one hand, the association gave new middle-class men an unprecedented organizational base to advance their own projects and their own claims to genuinely equal status. At a less exalted level, the association also provided a forum for the expression of long-standing bourgeois resentments at the privileged status, arrogance, and condescension of the old nobility. On the other hand, aristocratic moderates appeared reluctant to accept the social consequences of their own political reforms. They certainly seemed to be offended by the lack of deference displayed by their middle-class colleagues who refused to accept passively their presumed leadership. The ensuing factional struggles within the Agrarian Association between 1844 and 1846 increased in intensity and bitterness until the government was finally forced to intervene and take charge of nominating its officials and regulating its meetings and topics of discussion.

Neither the vibrant new cultural and civic initiatives of Turin’s educated classes nor their internecine social conflicts appeared to have much of an impact on the lives of the majority of the city’s population, who still remained closed off within their old mental and physical spaces in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. A short distance from the fashionable public squares like Piazza San Carlo, where the upper classes passed their leisure time in theaters, cafés, and gentlemen’s clubs or else simply strolling under the arcades, there existed a very different city of dark, dirty, insecure, and foul-smelling streets inhabited by humble working families, more than 10,000 beggars, 2,000 prostitutes, and countless petty criminals. Stratified by their varying levels of misery and desperation, these people were concerned less with the issues of constitutions and political participation than with the challenges of daily survival.

During the reign of Charles Albert, Turin suffered from a chronic