

February Revolution in France, which overthrew the Orleanist monarchy and sowed panic among the crown heads of Europe. These events had an especially dramatic impact on the Italian peninsula where a new political order had apparently triumphed by the end of March 1848. By then urban insurrections in Vienna and elsewhere in the Habsburg Empire had forced the Austrians out of northern Italy and every state on the peninsula had undergone sweeping political changes. Against a background of public meetings and street demonstrations in Turin and mounting nationalist unrest elsewhere on the peninsula, on February 8, 1848 Charles Albert promulgated a constitution, the so-called *Statuto*. Although the royal document left a number of questions unanswered, it clearly envisioned a government that was monarchical and representative, with legislative power shared by the king and two chambers: an elective lower chamber and an upper chamber whose members were appointed for life by the throne.

The importance of the *Statuto*, which appeared in its full form in March 1848, extended well beyond the borders of Piedmont, since it provided the model for the monarchical-constitutional order of the newly unified Italian national state after 1861. From its inception, the Piedmontese constitution marked an uneasy compromise between royal authority and parliamentary politics that reflected its origins in a climate of fear and social unrest. On the one hand, it explicitly recognized a number of fundamental liberal principles. Thus, while it proclaimed Roman Catholicism as the “Religion of State”, it guaranteed the emancipation of the principal religious minorities, the Waldensian Protestants and the Jews, who now were assured freedom of association, conscience, and opinion as well as equal rights of citizenship. At the local level, the *Statuto* increased the prerogatives of elected municipal councils and thus opened the door to political participation by previously excluded social groups. On the other hand, the new constitution also attributed sweeping powers to the monarch. The king remained the “supreme head of the state” and as such he enjoyed a monopoly of executive authority, commanded the armed forces, controlled foreign policy, and made nominations to all state offices.

The proclamation of the *Statuto* reflected, in turn, the larger success of Turin’s moderate elite of liberal nobles and bourgeois notables in guiding political developments in Piedmont during the winter of 1847-48. Under the charismatic leadership of Roberto d’Azeglio, who enjoyed both aristocratic prestige and a popular following, the moderates oversaw the formation of a municipal guard to exercise control over the piazzas in the capital. In this fashion, they were able to guide the