

**ARISTOCRATS IN BOURGEOIS
ITALY**

THE PIEDMONTESE NOBILITY, 1861-1930

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the evolution of aristocratic identities and roles in an ostensibly post-aristocratic society, namely that of Italy from the middle of the nineteenth century to the decade following World War I. As such, it aspires to contribute not only to our understanding of traditional elites, but also to the ongoing scholarly discussion of the social contours and characteristics of the Italian bourgeoisie at its upper reaches. The changing relations between old aristocratic and new bourgeois elites has long been viewed as one of the central themes in the larger processes of modernization in Europe. Indeed, historians have used this relationship to explain England's extraordinary political stability (and more recently its industrial decline), Germany's authoritarian path to modernity, the failure of liberal polity in Italy, and the crisis of the late Czarist regime in Russia.

Most scholars would agree that at some time between the early nineteenth century and the end of World War II the aristocracies and upper middle classes of Europe became so intertwined and intermarried that they no longer functioned as separate groups and effectively merged into a single upper class. There has been considerably less agreement, however, on the pace, mechanisms, terms, and consequences of this fusion of aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Older approaches strongly influenced by the French revolutionary experience have either stressed the overwhelming political triumph of the capitalist bourgeoisie or else argued that the old nobility lost its distinctiveness and disappeared into the ranks of a new class of propertied notables in the course of the nineteenth century. Developments in central Europe have shaped a second approach that emphasizes the relative weakness of the middle classes and the resilience of aristocratic elements who blocked or distorted democratic advances by dominating both politics and society into the twentieth century. The English experience has suggested a third vision of aristocratic-bourgeois relations as a mutually beneficial compromise or

what Perry Anderson has called a “deliberate, systematized symbiosis” in which the landed elite remained the senior partner.

Despite the interpretive weight that has been attached to relations between new and old elites, until quite recently European nobilities, with the exceptions of the English and Russians, have remained relatively uncharted territory in the modern era.¹ Both Marxist and liberal historiographical traditions as well as newer theories of modernization led historians to focus on the great agents of change in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the rise of the factory system, the growth of cities, the formation of the working class, and middle-class triumphs provided the main themes of scholarly research and debate. Nor did the explosion of social historical research initially alter this picture, since it was devoted chiefly to illuminating the lives of the lower classes.

As Arno Mayer argued in his *Persistence of the Old Regime*, however, concentration on the agents of modernization results in a neglect of those forces of tradition and continuity that, in his view, continued to shape and condition all aspects of European society at least until World War I.² Such neglect has been strikingly evident in the case of the nobility in Italy. While the past decade and a half have seen a number of new works on the Italian middle classes in the nineteenth century, virtually all studies of the local nobilities have stopped with the French Revolution.³ Aristocrats appear in the historical literature on Italy after 1815, but chiefly as exceptional individuals in an essentially bourgeois drama. As a social group, the old titled elites have been left largely to genealogists, novelists, and the society pages of the popular press.

What little work has been done on the role of noble groups in Italian

¹ On the limits of the work done on the European nobility, Dominic Lieven has observed that “many German historians and social scientists share with some of their European and more of their North American peers the conviction that in the modern world aristocracy is an irrelevant and politically suspect area of study, to which only scholars tainted by social snobbery and attracted by a love for superficial glitter will dedicate themselves.” See *The Aristocracy in Europe*, pp. xix–xx. For the most recent work on the British aristocracy, see Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*. On the Russian case, see Manning, *The Crisis of the Old Order in Russia*, Hamburg, *Politics of the Russian Nobility*, and Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia*.

² Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime*.

³ Romanelli, “Political Debate, Social History, and the Italian *Borghesia*,” pp. 717–39 provides the most recent survey of the work done on the Italian middle classes. For the most recent and most complete study of Italy’s middle classes in the nineteenth century, see Banti’s *Storia della borghesia italiana*. For the literature on the Italian nobility in the early modern period, see Visceglia (ed.), *Signori, patrizi, cavalieri nell’età moderna*, pp. v–xxxiii. The paucity of scholarship on the Italian nobility in the nineteenth century is clearly evident in Petersen’s survey “Der italienische Adel von 1861 bis 1946.”

society has grown out of the lively debate on the supposed weaknesses and peculiarities of Italy's bourgeoisie. Older Marxist approaches closely associated with the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Emilio Sereni underscore both the backwardness of the middle classes and their predisposition to compromise with "semi-feudal" aristocratic and landowning elements during the Risorgimento. The result, in their view, was a socially conservative power bloc that promoted parliamentary transformation, economic protection, and increasingly authoritarian domestic policies which paved the way to Fascism.⁴

Recently, this interpretation has come under heavy attack on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Raffaele Romanelli, for one, has argued that the concept of feudal vestiges is a holdover from political and ideological debates of the nineteenth century and rests upon German sociological models that simply do not fit the Italian situation.⁵ At the same time, a new body of revisionist scholarship has challenged the picture of bourgeois subordination in favor of one that emphasizes the vitality of the middle classes and the corresponding marginality and decorative impotence of old aristocratic groups. According to this view, the varied and checkered nobilities in Italy lacked the necessary monarchical, caste, and landed traditions of their German and British counterparts to survive for long as autonomous and influential forces in the new nation state that emerged after 1861. Once legal distinctions between the nobility and commoners had disappeared, nobles suffered a crisis of identity and either declined rapidly or else fused into a larger and more heterogeneous class of landed proprietors. The results of this revisionist scholarship have led to the conclusion that although aristocratic values continued to model the path of upward mobility for the middle classes, "nobility as such did *not* play an important role in the Italian nineteenth century social structure, because it did not constitute a well-defined group in itself, due to its regional more than national status."⁶

⁴ See Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne (1860-1900)* and *La questione agraria*; for Gramsci's views, see Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York 1971).

⁵ Romanelli, "Political Debate, Social History, and the Italian *Borghesia*," pp. 717-721.

⁶ Romanelli, "In search of an Italian bourgeoisie: trends in social history," paper presented to Round Table n. 1 "The Bourgeoisie. Structures and Cultures in 19th Century Europe" of the 18th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Montreal, September 1995, p. 9. The principal revisionist works are Rumi, "La politica nobiliare del Regno d'Italia 1861-1946", Banti, "Note sulle nobiltà nell'Italia dell'Ottocento"; Di Gregorio, "Nobiltà e nobilitazione in Sicilia"; Jocteau, "Un censimento della nobiltà italiana", Romanelli, "La nobiltà nella costituzione dell'Italia contemporanea."

The fate of traditional elites has been attributed in part to the characteristics they inherited from the past. Various scholars have stressed, for instance, how important segments of the Italian nobility were, in fact, patrician aristocrats with strong urban, commercial, and republican rather than feudal, monarchical traditions. Even before the French Revolution, these patriciates defined themselves less in legal than economic terms, and were largely open to the more successful members of the propertied middle classes.⁷ The political and legal reforms of the Napoleonic Era greatly accelerated the processes of social osmosis, especially in the south where the abolition of feudal entails greatly accelerated the decline of the old Neapolitan nobility and its coalescing with a new class of bourgeois *galantuomini*.⁸

Amalgamation continued apace in the decades after 1815 as the growth of a wealthy bourgeois propertied class and the resultant lure of large dowries and financial assistance led increasing numbers of nobles into marriages with non-noble families. Politically, aristocratic-bourgeois fusion found its highest expression in the middle decades of the century in the moderate liberal party that guided the campaign for national unification and then forged a new governmental order based on property rather than birth or privilege. The story of aristocratic decline and fusion typically concludes with the exodus of the old elites from both public life and the countryside in the wake of electoral reforms and agricultural depression in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As a separate and distinct component of the Italian upper classes, the nobility disappears completely from the historical literature on the period after the 1880s.⁹

While these revisionist historians have greatly enriched our understanding of Italy's middle classes, in their treatment of the old nobilities, they have relied largely on legalistic and positional notions of social formation and political power. As a result, they have tended to underestimate the role of cultural values, symbolic practices, and more specifically those informal mechanisms of prestige and influence that

⁷ See Meriggi, "La borghesia italiana," pp. 180-182; Romanelli, "Political Debate, Social History, and the Italian *Borghesia*," pp. 726-727. For a regional case in point, see Giacomelli, "La dinamica della nobiltà bolognese," pp. 55-112.

⁸ Pasquale Villani has written that with the elimination of "baronial privileges and feudal bonds, there was no real difference between nobility and haute bourgeoisie and the two classes tended to merge." See Villani, "Ricerche sulla proprietà fondiaria," pp. 240-241, as well as Lyttelton, "Landlords, Peasants, and the Limits of Liberalism," pp. 120-121; Davis, "The Napoleonic Era in Southern Italy," pp. 133-148; Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto*, p. 514. For a general discussion of the French Revolution's impact on the Italian peninsula, see Capra, "Nobili, notabili, elites," pp. 12-42.

⁹ Banti, "I proprietari terrieri nell'Italia centro-settentrionale," pp. 45-103.

serve to perpetuate consensual hierarchies and inequalities. In the process, they wind up resuscitating, at least implicitly, an old-fashioned and rather teleological vision of nineteenth-century developments as the inexorable triumph of the bourgeoisie and decline of the aristocracy.

Most of the arguments for the fusion of old and new elites, in fact, focus on four major developments: the juridical reforms that eliminated the legally privileged status of old nobles, the growth of non-noble land-ownership, the new forms of political collaboration based on propertied status and gradual change, and the shrinking numbers of nobles within the political institutions of the new national state.¹⁰ As John Davis has observed, however, one should not infer changes in cultural and social values and practices from changes in economic behavior and political organization. Paolo Macry's study of Neapolitan patrician families, for instance, shows how old elites could come to terms with economic changes without losing their sense of caste or their aristocratic pretensions.¹¹ Even the most outspoken proponents of aristocratic marginality concede that "the actual paths of this process of osmosis remain to be investigated in depth at the level of matrimonial alliances, social networks, and elite associational life."¹²

It is in this context that my work addresses a number of basic questions: What did it mean to be a noble in the nineteenth century and did individual nobles continue to constitute a distinctive and self-conscious nobility? To what extent and in what ways did they remain a ruling status group exercising social, cultural, and political sway on the society as a whole? More specifically, to what degree and at what levels did nobles continue to share a common moral ethos? What was the frequency and nature of social contacts and relationships within the nobility? In what settings and how often did aristocrats interact with new men from commerce, finance, and industry? How successful were nobles in adapting to an increasingly industrialized society and democratic polity, and what did they sacrifice in the process? In order to provide answers to these questions, I have explored changes and continuities in political roles, wealth, economic behavior, educational and professional preferences, residential and marriage patterns, and processes

¹⁰ The principal exception to this generalization is the recent work on elite associational life. See, for example, the issue of *Quaderni Storici* devoted to the theme of "Elites e associazioni nell'Italia dell'Ottocento," 77: n. 2 (August 1991), and Meriggi, *Milano borghese*.

¹¹ Macry, *Ottocento*. For Davis's comments, see his essay, "Remapping Italy's Path," p. 301.

¹² Banti, "I proprietari terrieri," pp. 56-57. For Banti's most recent views on the role of the nobility in Liberal Italy, see his "Note sulle nobiltà," pp. 13-27.

of social assimilation and exclusion within a prominent regional aristocracy over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A regional study offers both advantages and limitations as an approach to the issues of aristocratic survival and influence in the Italian setting. On the one hand, it provides a social group that is sufficiently circumscribed geographically and numerically to allow the type of comprehensive treatment that would be inconceivable at the national level. The tangled history of the Italian peninsula greatly accentuates the difficulties inherent in a national study. At the end of the eighteenth century there really was no cohesive Italian nobility. The geography, history, and the economic features of the various states produced a number of nobilities that "differed from one another in organization, in custom and taste, in the wealth they possessed, and in the power they exercised."¹³ On the other hand, this enormous variety of circumstances necessarily limits the scope of the generalizations that can be made on the basis of a single region. Indeed, quite different conclusions can be drawn from the study of different regional nobilities.¹⁴

Thus, I have chosen to focus on the Piedmontese nobility not because they were somehow typical or representative of all titled elites on the peninsula, but rather because of the prominent and influential role they played in the life of the country in the nineteenth century. The region of Piedmont, situated in the northwest corner of Italy, lends itself to a local study of aristocracy for a variety of reasons. Over the centuries, the nobility's close association with the ruling House of Savoy and their strong martial traditions gave them a high degree of cohesion and continuity that helped them adjust to the loss of privileged status and enhanced their role in the unification of the Italian peninsula in the middle of the nineteenth century. Headed by Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, they contributed key ideas, models, and leadership to the campaign that successfully brought the new national state into existence in 1861. After unification the Piedmontese nobles continued to account for more parliamentary deputies, senators, statesmen, and army officers than any of the other old titled elites. At the same time, Turin, the capital city of Piedmont, began to emerge as one of the most dynamic business centers of Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. As a result, the city offers an ideal setting for exploring the impact of industrial development and urbanization on aristocratic status, comportment, and values.

¹³ Roberts, "Lombardy," p. 60.

¹⁴ On the difficulties of making national generalizations on the basis of regional experiences, see Romanelli, "La nobiltà nella costituzione dell'Italia contemporanea," pp. 11–12, paper delivered to the conference, *Anciennes et nouvelles aristocraties, de 1880 à nos jours*, Toulouse, France, September 21–24, 1994.

In my examination of the Piedmontese nobility, I have attempted to avoid the limitations of much of the literature on elites in Italy which has either adopted ideal types that tend to mask the complexity of social identities or else generalized on the basis of the experiences of a single prominent, but exceptional individual or family.¹⁵ Accordingly, I have utilized both quantitative and qualitative source materials to examine the attitudes and practices of a comparatively large body of aristocratic families. This book rests, first and foremost, on an exhaustive exploration of all surviving probate records in Turin from unification to World War I. These records have yielded an abundance of information not only on the changing structure and distribution of aristocratic and large bourgeois fortunes, but also on family networks, inheritance strategies, patterns of landownership, and investment practices. Probate materials have been supplemented by a wide range of other primary sources that include genealogies, luxury tax records, electoral and urban property owners' rolls, private school class rosters, as well as the membership lists of corporate boards, professional societies, civic, cultural, and charitable organizations, and local gentlemen's clubs. With the assistance of the state archivists in Turin and a few of the surviving old-line families, I have also consulted a large number of family archives. In addition to legal and financial records, these archives include some private correspondence that illuminate more intimate aspects of aristocratic family life and values.

The predominantly quantitative approach I have taken in this book has been largely dictated by the taciturn character of the Piedmontese nobility. Unlike their French or British counterparts, they left virtually no published memoirs or diaries that might have shed light on how they saw themselves or experienced the great challenges and problems that confronted them in the post-1861 era. The very few memoirs that I did locate were private documents written for the immediate family. In the absence of an impressionistic literature, I have tried to interpret values and attitudes from the collective practices and actions of large numbers of aristocratic families.

As Dominic Lieven has recently written, "blurred definitions and

¹⁵ For an example of the former, see Sereni, *La questione agraria*, pp. 76–99. There have been a number of excellent studies of individual aristocratic families. See, for instance, Romeo, *Cavour e il suo tempo*; Pescosolido, *Terra e nobiltà*; Biagioli, "Vicende e fortuna di Ricasoli imprenditore," pp. 77–102; Girelli, *Le terre dei Chigi*; Coppini, "Aristocrazia e finanza in Toscana," pp. 297–332; Petruszewicz, *Latifondo*; Massa Piergiovanni, *I Duchi di Galliera*; Romanelli, "Famiglia e patrimonio nei comportamenti della nobiltà borghese dell'Ottocento," 9–27. The new book by Montroni, *Gli uomini del Re*; attempts to provide a broader treatment of the nobility, but much of its argument rests on examples drawn from only a few families.

unclear dividing lines" are inevitable in virtually any study of Europe's aristocracies.¹⁶ The case of Piedmont is certainly no exception. Here a wide range of groups could advance some legal claim to noble status in the nineteenth century. Moreover, there was no necessary correspondence between titles and wealth or status in Piedmont, since some of the oldest, richest, and most prestigious families could be found in the ranks of the lesser titles. Consequently, I have not attempted to provide a formal legalistic definition of nobility. Instead I have relied on a more fluid sociological concept that involves not only the possession of hereditary titles, but also a set of social and economic values and practices that collectively distinguished aristocratic families from other segments of the Piedmontese propertied classes.

In a similar vein, the terms aristocratic, noble, blue blood, old-line, and titled have been used interchangeably for stylistic variety to describe the subjects of this book. I have given the most attention to a core group of families who already possessed titles and fiefs and played leading roles in the Savoyard state and army in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I have done so because it was these families who continued to enjoy the greatest wealth, prestige, and influence after 1848 and who set the standards and tone for the nobility as a whole up to the Great War. As a group, this titled elite conformed to Benedict Anderson's description of traditional aristocracies as pre-bourgeois social formations whose concrete, rather than imagined, solidarities were the products of kinship, friendship, and personal acquaintance.¹⁷

The portrait of the Piedmontese aristocracy that emerges from my study challenges those interpretations that have stressed the rapid fusion of old and new elites and the resultant marginal importance of nobilities in Liberal Italy. In the case of Piedmont, the pace of aristocratic decline was slower and the extent of fusion with newer business, professional, and bureaucratic elites less complete than recent scholarship has suggested. Here dominance was followed not so much by decadence and disappearance as by the development of more indirect forms of aristocratic influence that exploited a hunger for leadership based on something older and deeper than abstract principles or electoral politics. The enduring importance of a nobility of pedigree and patent in public life resulted less from social accommodation with new elites than from the appropriation of new economic arrangements and ostensibly bourgeois forms of sociability based on statutory institutions and voluntary access to bolster their wealth as well as their traditional way of life. Far from

¹⁶ Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*, p. xiv.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 76–77.

fusing with other elements of the propertied classes, Piedmontese nobles remained a largely separate and distinct group within local upper-class society at least up to World War I, distinguished by their attachment to the values of lineage, military service, landownership, endogamy, patriarchy, and social exclusivity. Distinctive patterns of investment, marriage, profession, residence, and life-style demonstrate that the social gulf separating old-line aristocrats from other segments of the propertied classes in Piedmont remained pronounced, and may well have actually widened in the decades prior to 1914.

In this respect, the case of aristocratic persistence in Piedmont also diverges from Arno Mayer's model of *ancien régime* elites who diversified their presence, modernized their influence, and spread their cultural model by selectively coopting and assimilating new men from the worlds of finance, industry, and the professions. Piedmont's old-line titled families responded to the challenges of civil equality and parliamentary politics by closing ranks socially; they showed relatively little interest in absorbing elements of the bourgeoisie or winning their support for an aristocratic forms of behavior. For their part, Turin's business elites showed less and less of an inclination to imitate aristocratic values, let alone assimilate into or seek the social acceptance of the aristocracy in the last decades preceding World War I. While a few prominent industrial and banking families continued to pursue hereditary titles of nobility, most wealthy non-nobles seemed increasingly content to remain within their own social circles and to follow a "bourgeois" way of life. This situation suggests an alternative vision of upper-class relations to the view that in Italy there existed a contrast between those regions with a strong aristocracy and a subordinate bourgeoisie and those where the bourgeoisie emancipated itself. In Piedmont aristocratic prestige co-existed with bourgeois autonomy so that upper-class social relations, much as in pre-war Germany, were characterized by the presence of two parallel but separate elites before 1914.¹⁸

The experience of the aristocracy in the heartland of the "industrial triangle" before World War I certainly lends credence to the view that a status system distrustful of private enterprise and based less on wealth than older forms of social distinction may well have continued to exercise a powerful and widespread hold on Italian society into the early twentieth century.¹⁹ In this context, enduring aristocratic exclusivity

¹⁸ Lyttelton, "The middle classes in Liberal Italy," p. 231. On the issue of "bourgeois autonomy" in Germany, see Kaelble, "Borghesia francese e borghesia tedesca. 1870-1914," pp. 127-160 and Augustine-Perez, "Very wealthy businessmen in imperial Germany," pp. 299-321.

¹⁹ Lyttelton, "The middle classes in Liberal Italy," pp. 227-228.

and influence both reflected and helped to perpetuate a more diffuse culture of deference, traditional patronage, and territorial parochialism, a culture that still conditioned in subtle but significant ways social relations and political allegiances in pre-war Piedmont.

At the same time, a set of special circumstances contributed to the capacity of Piedmontese aristocratic families to resist social fusion. To begin with, they had constituted Italy's only feudal, martial, service nobility, which imbued them with a stronger set of pre-bourgeois values and traditions than most of their counterparts on the peninsula. Accordingly, the cultural ideal of the proud and aloof "cavalier and man of honor," who disdains commerce and trade, flourished among them, buttressing their strong sense of hierarchy and separateness from the rest of society. Piedmontese nobles, much like the Prussian Junkers, also benefited from the capitalist transformation of their country estates, which ironically made it easier for them to perpetuate a view of society based on status and obligation. Most titled families continued to enjoy a level of wealth sufficient to sustain a dignified, if not opulent, standard of living without recourse to intermarriage with the new rich or demeaning involvement in trade and industry.

The longstanding ties of the nobility in Piedmont to the House of Savoy and the state apparatus of the Kingdom of Sardinia further paralleled the situation of the Prussian Junkers, providing local titled families with a host of advantages not shared by other aristocratic groups on the Italian peninsula. From the outset, the allegiance and service of Piedmontese nobles to a single dynastic family, for instance, gave them a degree of continuity and cohesion as well as a tradition of exercising state power that contrasted sharply with the more polyglot noble groups in Lombardy and the Kingdom of Naples which were the accretions of successive waves of foreign rulers. More importantly, their special relationship with the dynasty that unified Italy and became the national monarchy after 1861 assured the old titled elite of Piedmont a secure place in the army and civil service of the new state and thus another way of perpetuating caste traditions. These conditions were largely absent in the case of other regional nobilities who either lacked a state of their own or, worse yet, had supported regimes and dynasties that opposed unification and had fallen from power between 1859 and 1870.²⁰ The enduring prominence and active presence of the royal family in Piedmontese society helped mightily to legitimize and perpe-

²⁰ On the weaknesses and shortcomings of the regional nobilities in the nineteenth century, see Meriggi, "La borghesia italiana," pp. 167-168.

tuate traditional social hierarchies in which old-line aristocrats still occupied a preeminent position of leadership and prestige.

Such advantages, however, should not lead automatically to the conclusion that the experience of Piedmontese nobility is simply the exception that proves the rule of aristocratic marginality in nineteenth-century Italy. On the contrary, new work on southern titled elites suggests that many attitudes and practices of Piedmontese aristocratic families were echoed elsewhere on the Italian peninsula. In Naples, for instance, nobles remained far and away the wealthiest social group prior to the Great War, while in certain provinces of the south a shrinking group of titled families actually increased their share of the wealth in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, much like their Piedmontese counterparts, Neapolitan nobles displayed a pattern of increasing social rigidification and exclusivity after 1860 that found expression in high levels of endogamy, separate forms of sociability, and life styles. Their wealth and distinctive identity permitted southern nobles to conserve a notable prestige and influence in public life into the new century.²¹

Finally, the experience of Piedmontese aristocrats underscores the importance of World War I as the great watershed in the history of Italy's traditional elites. Pierre Bourdieu has observed how strategies of reconversion designed to safeguard or improve family or individual positions in social space become especially important "at a stage in the evolution of class societies in which one can conserve only by changing – to change so as to conserve."²² For the old titled families of Piedmont, World War I and its aftermath constituted just such a stage. Indeed, the war proved to be a considerably more pivotal event than the agricultural depression of the late nineteenth century in the transformation of the local aristocracy. Its consequences posed formidable new problems and challenges that few old families were able to surmount without substantial changes in attitude and behavior. In this regard, the very practices that contributed so much to the cohesion and prestige of aristocrats in Piedmont before 1914 – reliance on caste-like exclusivity, land-ownership, and military service, together with a decided reluctance to enter the board rooms of industry and high finance – proved to be handicaps after 1918 as they delayed social accommodation with new entrepreneurial elites and thus limited the role of noble families in the greatly transformed society that emerged from the Great War. Much as elsewhere in Europe, the war and its aftermath seriously eroded the material foundations of the old aristocratic way of life at the same time

²¹ For these arguments, see Montroni, *Gli uomini del Re*.

²² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 157.

that they undermined the prestige and glamour associated with the officers' corps and military service. As a result, when the economic pressures for adaptation greatly intensified in the inter-war decades, accommodation tended to take place in Piedmont on terms that were relatively unfavorable to titled families. Those nobles, who avoided decline and disappearance by entering the worlds of business and finance, did so rather late and thus wound up less as partners and equals than as employees of the new industrial dynasties. And even that modest success came at a high price, namely the abandonment of most of the customs and traditions that had defined and distinguished the Piedmontese nobility.