

succession. When Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious died in 840 a civil war erupted between his three sons; it ended with the partition of the empire between them. Louis's eldest son, Lothar, received a middle kingdom stretching from Italy to the Low Countries. In 870 another succession war was followed by another round of partitions which carved up this middle kingdom, leaving Lothar's son Louis II as ruler of the Kingdom of Italy alone. As a result of these partitions it now re-emerged as a separate territorial unit. Louis II struggled to defend his Italian kingdom against external attackers, and to curb the growing independence of his great vassals, the counts and dukes who ruled vast swathes of the kingdom under him. When Louis II died in 875, another round of succession wars ensued, as his uncles fought over his kingdom. His uncle Charles the Bald, ruler of the western Frankish state, succeeded in winning the Italian crown, but was then defeated by an alliance of the kingdom's magnates who swung their support behind his brother, Louis the German, ruler of the eastern Frankish realm. Charles was forced to retreat through Turin and Susa over the Alps to Maurienne, where he died late in 877.

Louis the German had died in 876, and was soon followed to the grave by his son Carloman: the male line of the Carolingian dynasty was fast dying out, creating the possibility for the great territorial magnates to put forward their own claims to the throne. Charles the Fat, son of Louis the German and last of the Carolingians in the male line, was elected king of the western Franks, then assumed the imperial title, and was crowned by the pope in 881. But he faced overwhelming difficulties: besides the unruliness of his great lords, his empire was under attack from fierce foes, the Vikings in the north and the Saracens in the south. Charles proved incapable of overcoming these dangers, was judged incompetent by his great vassals, and was deposed by them in 887. The direct line of Carolingians came to an end. With no undisputed king to rule it, the Kingdom of Italy became a battleground in which the territorial magnates contended for the crown. A century of anarchy ensued.

5. After the Carolingians: The March of Turin.

In the twilight of the Carolingian empire, power was passing from the descendants of Charlemagne to their great vassals. In the course of the ninth century a handful of great lords – counts, dukes, marquises – had taken advantage of the weakening of imperial authority to assert a hereditary right to their offices. They ruled extensive territories, levy-