

ing their own armies and extending their dominance over the towns and the peasantry. The succession wars of the preceding century had afforded them many opportunities to extort privileges and land from the different contenders for the crown, in return for their support. As the Carolingian dynasty faded away, these territorial magnates fought to reign over the Kingdom of Italy in their stead. In these recurring contests for the crown, might made right. The title of king went to the strongest magnate, who could defeat his rivals and win the support – or at least the acquiescence – of his fellow lords. But none of these contending warlords could hold onto power for long: their reigns as kings of Italy were brief and unstable. Events in the county of Turin illustrate how political and military power had devolved to the territorial magnates, and how they constantly fought one another for supreme power.

In the last years of Carolingian rule, Turin and its county formed part of a conglomeration of territories ruled by Count Suppo II. His family was allied by marriage to the powerful feudatory Berengar, lord of Friuli in northeastern Italy. After Suppo died, some time between 882 and 888, the county of Turin passed under the sway of his three sons. But their rule was short-lived, for the deposition of Charles the Fat in 887 precipitated a contest for the crown of Italy which destroyed Suppo's lineage and transferred the lordship of the county of Turin to other hands. Early in 888 Berengar of Friuli proclaimed himself king of Italy at the ancient capital of Pavia, with the support of Suppo's lineage. In addition to being the most powerful territorial magnate in northern Italy, Berengar could also boast his descent from the Carolingian dynasty through the female line. But he was soon defeated in battle by a rival claimant, Guy Duke of Spoleto, who was then proclaimed king in his turn. The repercussions of this conflict were felt at Turin. To secure his hold on the crucial northwestern frontier of his kingdom, in 891 Guy created a new territorial unit, the March of Ivrea; it covered a vast area that embraced the county of Turin, and extended as far south as the coast of Liguria. This territory he entrusted to one of his loyal followers, a Burgundian noble named Anscar. Suppo's sons now vanish from the historical record, and Anscar's lineage would dominate the region for several generations to come. After Anscar's death in about 899 the March of Ivrea passed to his son Adalbert, with the title of marquis (or ruler of a March). In a move typical of the volatile political allegiances of the time, he soon abandoned the dukes of Spoleto and aligned himself with Guy's former foe, Berengar of Friuli, one of whose daughters he married.

Guy of Spoleto died in 894 and Berengar then reclaimed the crown.