

power waned too. The final blow that destroyed the bishop's authority came in the renewed political turmoil that flared up in the early thirteenth century between the north Italian communes, the emperor, and the popes. Turin's communal government was able to weather these storms more successfully than the bishop. But they both faced the same danger, from the neighboring great lords who were profiting from the growing political instability to expand their territory and influence in Piedmont. By the end of the century one of them, the count of Savoy, would become the lord of Turin, effacing the authority of the bishop and the commune alike.

6. The Commune and the Emperor in the Thirteenth Century.

Frederick Barbarossa departed on crusade in 1187, and died two years later on his way to the Holy Land. His son Henry VI did not continue Barbarossa's efforts to restore imperial authority in the Kingdom of Italy, and allowed the administrative machinery set up by his father to fall into disuse. After he died in 1197, leaving an infant son who bore the family name of Hohenstaufen (he became the Emperor Frederick II), two rival claimants fought for the imperial throne. In the ensuing decade of civil war imperial authority was severely weakened. The absence of a strong emperor deprived the bishop of Turin of the main source of support that had sustained him over the past century, and his authority eroded. The commune expanded its authority at his expense, and assumed the lead in governing both the city and the episcopal diocese, which it now treated as its own territory. To uphold the bishop's nominal sovereignty over his diocese – and thereby to assert its own claims to the territory – the commune engaged in a series of little wars with its neighboring towns and some of the local feudatories. These conflicts drew it into wider regional conflicts and obliged it to navigate between the rival webs of alliance centering on the two most powerful Piedmontese cities, Asti and Vercelli. Turin was overshadowed by these more powerful communes and, lacking the manpower and resources to match theirs, always played a subordinate role in the region's politics.

Meanwhile the counts of Savoy were on the alert for any chance to make good their longstanding claims on the city. Their hereditary claim on the city gave them an advantage over the other great feudatories in the region, the marquises of Monferrato and Saluzzo, who could boast no comparable right. The counts of Savoy had advanced these claims from time to time during the preceding century, but had never managed