

mont on their way to conquer parts of the peninsula. These repeated invasions left a trail of devastation behind them and undermined the dukes' authority. In 1494 King Charles VIII of France led his army across the Alps on his way to conquer the Kingdom of Naples. On November 5 he arrived at Turin. Outside the city he was greeted with rowdy songs and dances by the Abbey of Fools. At the western gate he was greeted – more decorously this time – by the regent, Duchess Blanche, and her young son. They presented him with a fine charger, named Savoye, and were persuaded to advance him a loan on the security of the duchess's jewels. The French king spent the night in the castle at Turin, then hastened on his way the next morning. In the following year he again passed through Turin on his way back to France, after conquering Naples. This conquest however was short-lived. Charles VIII's invasion provoked a counter-attack by King Ferdinand of Aragon, whose army swiftly expelled the French from Naples. The epic conflict between the French and Spanish crowns for control of Italy had begun.

In 1499 Duke Filibert II permitted the new king of France, Louis XII, to march through his territories on his way to conquer Milan. Once again, however, the conquest proved ephemeral. Within a few years the French were expelled from Milan by a Swiss army, and the Swiss Confederation, now at the zenith of its military power, began to pose a grave new threat to the integrity of the Savoyard state and to the ambitions of its rulers. Since the mid-fifteenth century the dukes of Savoy had been working to gain control of the small, independent city-state of Geneva, which was almost encircled by their provinces of Savoy, Bresse and Vaud, at the western end of Lake Geneva. The city of Geneva was a tempting prize for it was far bigger and richer than either of the Savoyard capitals, Chambéry and Turin. Its population at this time was roughly twice that of Turin, and it formed an important commercial hub on the trade route between the Rhône valley and the Swiss Cantons. Geneva was governed by a prince-bishop, and in the middle of the fifteenth century the dukes of Savoy had secured the right to appoint him; this enabled them to extend their political influence over the city. By the early sixteenth century they were well on the way to establishing their direct sovereignty over the city, through the agency of the bishops they appointed. It is likely that if the dukes of Savoy had managed to fulfill their plan and make themselves full sovereigns of Geneva, they would then have made it their capital city, leaving Turin as a secondary provincial center. But in the end their bid to annex the city would fail in the face of powerful opposition from the Swiss Confederation, and Turin would assume the role of capital of their states.