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Strenuitas. The Life and Times of Robert Guiscard and Bohemond of Taranto: Norman Power from the Mezzogiorno to Antioch 1016 - 1111 A.D. Danny Chaplin
[Strenuitas: Latin, noun: vivacity, strenuous activity, ruthless determination.] By the end of his long military career, the 11th century Norman adventurer, mercenary and warlord Robert Guiscard had, together with his younger brother Roger of Hauteville, conquered all of southern Italy and Sicily, turning the Mezzogiorno into a powerful new Norman state. During his dramatic rise to prominence as Duke of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily, Guiscard brought both the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor to their knees and, at the height of his power, had even invaded the mighty Byzantine Empire by way of the Balkans. Guiscard's larger-than-life son, Bohemond of Taranto, was a no less towering figure. One of the few Crusader lords to return from the unimaginable hardships of the First Crusade, he was fêted as a celebrity throughout all of medieval Europe and won the hand in marriage of a princess of France. But he threw it all away on one last ditch attempt to fulfill his father's quixotic dream of conquering Constantinople and becoming basileus of all the Romans.

Together, they laid the foundations for the extraordinary Norman Kingdom of Sicily which was to last from 1130 to 1194. Strenuitas examines the life and times of these two giants of their era, vividly recreating the key battles which they fought such as Civitate (1053), Cerami (1063), Misilmeri (1068), Durazzo (1081) Dorylaeum (1097) and the sieges of Bari, Palermo, Syracuse, Nicea and Antioch. The book also explores the characters and motivations of some of the key figures of the 11th century from Popes like Nicholas II, Gregory VII and Urban II to the Western Holy Roman Emperors, the basileis of Constantinople as well as a varied cast of Norman, Lombard, Greek and Saracen princes, dukes, warlords and generals. Their shared story, one of great 'Strenuitas', is an epic tale writ large in fire and blood.

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