

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK — JUSTINIAN’S COUNTER OFFENSIVE IN ITALY

THE STATE OF THE NATION

- ◆ Single ruling class. (Whitby, 2021, p.9).
- ◆ “Endless peace” treaty with Persians in 532 forestalled war on two fronts. (Procop. 1:22.16).
- ◆ Eastern Empire was “far more organised and sophisticated” than the Barbarian kingdoms. (Barker, 1975, p. 137).
- ◆ “Imperial power with greater resources than those available to any of the new western successor kingdoms.” (Heather, 2018, p. 6).



THE CASE FOR WAR

- ◆ There was pressure at home. “An interconnecting web of ideological and political necessities made successful warfare an overarching priority for all Roman imperial regimes.” (Heather, 2018, p. 41).
- ◆ Justinian viewed Italy and especially Rome as a Roman possession.
- ◆ Religion: Chalcedonian Catholic against the Ostrogoths who were Arian Christians. (Barker, 1975, p. 134). The

THE PROCOPIUS CONUNDRUM

- ◆ Legal advisor to General Belisarius. (Papikinou, 2022).
- ◆ Part of Eastern landowning gentry. (Heather, 2018, p. 11).
- ◆ Shared the “predilection for the great man view of history.” (Heather, 2018, p.12).
- ◆ Wrote the standard propaganda of The Wars and the Secret History/ Anekdotia which was critical of Justinian. (Heather, 2018, p. 9-16).



THE BALANCE SHEET

- ◆ “I suggest ten thousand times ten thousand times ten thousand lost their lives.” (Procop. 2007, XVIII.).
- ◆ Parallels with Putin’s Russian Federation. Client states filled with populations waiting for restoration of former imperial order. Anticipation of a quick victory.
- ◆ Viewed by Justinian as a Counter-Insurgency rather than a Counter-Offensive.
- ◆ A taxation source that would take time to recover following the protracted siege campaigns. (Whitby, 2021, p.17).
- ◆ His successor Justin II was more a cause of later decline than Justinian’s programme of reconquest. It was he that provoked Khusro in 572. (Whitby, 2021, p. 17).
- ◆ The Age of an Empire, the undisputed dominance of a superpower was over and a new Age of Empires had begun.

THE OPPOSITION

- ◆ WEST: - 4 min groups: The Ostrogoths in Italy, The Visigoths in Spain, The Vandals in Africa and the Franks in France. They were fundamentally weak. The populations were still essentially Roman. (Whitby, 2021, p. 11).
- ◆ Theodoric 493-526. Ostrogoth ruler of Italy had a good deal of respect for Roman civilisation and made great efforts to “show deference to the positions and claims of his nominal warlord in Constantinople.” (Barker, 1975, p. 146). Diplomatic relations were poor when he died and exacerbated by a power vacuum, the murder of Justinian’s ally Amalsuintha to facilitate Theodahad’s rise to power. (Barker, 1975, p. 151).

THE ARMY

- ◆ Not accurately recorded by Procopius. 5 Army groups split into comitatenses and limitanei. (Whitby, 2021, p. 11).
- ◆ Agathias’ estimated size at 150000. Still 60% Roman. Not the heavily armoured infantry of old but more reliant on archers and cavalry. (Whitby, 2021, p. 11).



THE ITALIAN JOB

- ◆ Campaign followed the success against the Vandals in North Africa. A similar pretext was employed, the succession crisis following Theodoric’s death.
- ◆ Campaign started in Sicily as a probing attack, which was so successful that Belisarius soon entered the mainland and captured Naples in 536. Theodahad replaced by Wittigis but Belisarius soon took Rome, “entering the former capital ... through one gate while Gothic garrison left by another.” (Barker, 1975, p. 153).
- ◆ Wittigis countered and besieged Rome with a force of 15000. Eventually Belisarius broke out and drove Wittigis north. Peace in 539 with a Belisarius deception leaving the Empire also in control of Ravenna. (Barker, 1975, p. 153-8).
- ◆ Second phase began with brilliant leader, Totila, who surged down peninsular, first bypassing Rome and then besieging it. Narses replaced Belisarius and proved to be a military genius, destroying the Ostrogoths at Busta Gallorum and Mons Lactaris, securing the peninsular for the Empire, (Barker, 1975, p. 162-6).



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