

2ND ROUNDTABLE

“Open the gates, it’s Belisarius!”

Judicator’s *Let There Be Nothing* & Byzantine Studies

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1

The Christianity of Belisarius in Historical Texts and in Metal

The Roman general Belisarius (ca. 500-565 CE) is today most famous for his wars of reconquest in Northern Africa and Italy. Modern historians have spilled a lot of ink on his military career. However, they have had very little to say about his Christian faith, which is interesting since there has been a spirited debate about whether his secretary and historian, Procopius of Caesarea, was a Christian or not. In contrast, the power metal band Judicator crafted a rich, imagined spiritual life for Belisarius in their album *Let There Be Nothing* (2020). The lyrics imagine the general praying before battle and meditating on the forgiveness of Christ. In this paper I compare the portrayal of Belisarius’ belief in *Let There Be Nothing* with the handful of references we have to Belisarius’ faith in Procopius and other sixth-century sources. I also explore why the faith of Belisarius is not as popular a topic in modern historiography of the general as it is for Judicator.

2

Flavius Belisarius Epicus Metallicus

The Image of a General through Procopius and Heavy Metal

Heavy Metal has always had very close ties with the Classical Age and its sunset that is considered, mistakenly or not, Late Antiquity. Since Led Zeppelin, the presence of themes and characters bound to the graeco-roman world and mythology has found a fertile soil in a musical genre that avidly feeds itself with these topics. Following the trail blazers Alexander the Great and Achilles, the US power metal band Judicator has brought in the limelight, with their latest album *Let There Be Nothing*, one of the key figures of the Justinian wars in the western Europe, Flavius Belisarius. With this album, the band decides to plunge deep into the personage of the victorious Roman general and eviscerating its strokes of genius and bravery but at the same time its fears and flaws that cooperates in painting a multi-dimensional - and far from the topos of the knight in shining armour - man, general, father and husband. Although the scope of this paper is limited to the military side of the general, there is still

space for an analysis of concepts as masculinity and emotions such as fear, doubt and pain that have a very deep influence over human actions, be them on or off the battlefield.