

Taisuke NAGUMO
The Rupture of the Roman Empire

Summary

This book is a study of the rupture of the Roman Empire in 399 CE, through a reconsideration of its political processes and administrative organisations in the late fourth century.

In traditional and widely accepted accounts, the Roman Empire was divided into the eastern and western parts between Arcadius and Honorius when Theodosius I died in 395 CE. It is also commonly agreed that this was the formal, 'final and permanent' (in the words of Edward Gibbon) division of the empire, for thereafter it was never again united as 'one'.

These accounts would seem to be easily understandable and persuasive at first sight. They are, however, not recognised as such in recent scholarship, as explained in the Introduction. The new academic consensus suggests the following two points. First, the year of the substantial division was not in 395 CE, but 364 CE when Valentinian I and Valens divided the 'resources' of the empire, and the same division was just repeated upon the death of Theodosius I. Second, the significance of the year 395 CE for the Byzantine history is not clear due to ongoing debates on periodization.

This consensus reveals the obscurity of the exact chronology, the actual circumstances, and the historical significance of this division, which had once been given great importance as one of the turning points in the histories of the Roman and Byzantine Empires, by such eminent scholars as C. Zakrzewski, S. Mazzarino, and E. Demougeot. There is still no comprehensive explanation to surpass Demougeot's book, despite the indispensable works of J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz and Al. Cameron. Recent leading scholars of Late Antiquity, including P. Brown and G. W. Bowersock, too consider this affair less important according to their social, religious, and cultural perspectives, as seen in the historiographical survey in Chapter 1.

The division of the Roman Empire was not a straightforward event, although on the surface it may have seemed to be just a simple separation represented by a borderline drawn through the central regions of the empire on the map. Rather, this affair was the consequence of complicated conflicts between the eastern and the western courts. These caused not only the administrative division but also the fatal disruption of the empire that marked the epoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. It is therefore important to define the chronology of demarcation, to elucidate the inherent features of the governmental

structure of this age, and to re-evaluate the historical significance of this division, or, as I will call it, rupture.

The protagonists in this book are not the emperors, who were generally described as despotic or absolute rulers, but the civil and military bureaucrats. They exercised real political power at imperial courts in both the East and West. To investigate and adequately evaluate the exact circumstances of this rupture is, therefore, possible only by analysing their actions in detail.

Chapter 2 addresses the political and economic conditions of the city of Rome. Q. A. Symmachus was a senatorial aristocrat and the city prefect of Rome (*praefectus urbis Romae*) in 384 CE. He struggled in handling the food crisis that struck the city that year. His official reports (*Relationes*) sent to the western court at Milan reveal the powerlessness of the Senate at Rome and the exclusivity of the senatorial aristocrats who formed closed relationships, which Ammianus Marcellinus resented. The Cosmopolitanism of the old 'capital city' disappeared; the city of Rome in this period was no longer the real 'capital' city, but just a 'symbolic' one.

In contrast to the old one, the new eastern capital, Constantinople, greatly developed during the reign of Theodosius I. Rufinus, the praetorian prefect of the East (*praefectus praetorio Orientis*), was one of the most influential figures at the eastern court in this age. Chapter 3 analyses the process of the formation and transmission of the image of him as a corrupt bureaucrat as found in historical sources from the period (Claudian, Eunapius of Sardis, Zosimus, John Lydus, the Count Marcellinus, Jordanes, and John Malalas). They demonstrate that the bureaucrat in this age should be seen more as a politician than a standard bureaucrat, which is how we now perceive them. Thus, the government of the Roman Empire was dependent not on the young and weak emperors but on strong individual bureaucrats.

Lucianus, the prefect of the East (*comes Orientis*), was executed by Rufinus in 395 CE. This incident, described by Zosimus, has long been interpreted as an example of the patronage between emperors and bureaucrats, as one of dependency of the bureaucrats on the emperors. The details of this execution, which are examined in Chapter 4, reveal, however, that the most important factor for the bureaucrats in maintaining power in the empire was individual personality rather than the patronage of the emperor. Bureaucrats had their base in the imperial consistory (*consistorium*) which came to function practically as a 'control tower'. Moreover, such individualism as exemplified by the lives of Rufinus and Lucianus was a significant characteristic of the Byzantine world.

Another important figure in the Byzantine World was that of the eunuch. Eutropius, the grand chamberlain (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*), was the most powerful

eunuch during the reign of Arcadius. Chapter 5 discusses the process of establishing a eunuch's power at the eastern court by considering the legislation of Eutropius preserved in the *Theodosian Code* and his reforms as recorded by John Lydus. A survey of his legislation shows his deep involvement in political decisions, and that the majority of these were not rooted merely in self-interest. His reforms, however, allowed Eutropius not only to dominate the *consistorium* but, furthermore, to gain control of all imperial finances. This might consequently have affected the increase in their number at the eastern court, as described in the *Suda* lexicon.

In the western court at Milan, Stilicho, a semi-barbarian military commander (*magister militum*), is generally understood as having secured his power by establishing matrimonial relations between his and the imperial families. Chapter 6 examines these relations, especially the marriages of two of his daughters to Honorius, and uncovers the meaning of the fundamental differences in logic between Stilicho's '*pater*' (father) and the imperial family's '*sanguis*' (literally blood, or descent), found in the poems by Claudian. Stilicho utilised the logic of '*pater*' to become a member of the imperial family; but this logic never coincided with the imperial logic of '*sanguis*', which was supported by the dynastic ideology. This serious inconsistency between the two logics resulted in the death of Stilicho in 408 CE.

The conflicts between the eastern and western courts were due to questions of territorial sovereignty of the regions of Illyricum. This 'Illyricum problem' is the key to the administrative division and fatal rupture of the empire. Chapter 7 discusses the chronology and process of demarcation of the prefecture of Illyricum. The present consensus is that the year of division of the empire was in 364 CE. What was in fact divided in this year was, however, not the prefecture of Illyricum but just the imperial courts; then, in 395 CE, the prefecture of Illyricum was indeed divided in two, but just administratively. The rupture was caused by the appointment by Eutropius of Alaric to the position of military commander for Illyricum (*magister militum per Illyricum*) in 399 CE, in order to resolve the 'political vacuum' caused by frequent earthquakes and repeated barbarian invasions; but this paradoxically changed it into the domain *de facto* controlled by Alaric and his fellow barbarians. Furthermore, this disbanded the Roman Empire both in name and substance.

The Conclusion recapitulates my argument that: (1) the rupture of the Roman Empire was caused by conflicts between the eastern and the western courts over the Illyrian regions in the year 399 CE; and (2) the political and administrative structure of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century was different between the East and West, namely between the *consistorium* politics at Constantinople and the military politics at

Milan. These contrasting conditions between East and West and the rupture in this age provided the basis in all senses for the Byzantine Empire and post-Roman Europe.