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R. Malcolm Errington. *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. xii + 336 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3038-3.

Reviewed by Michael Blodgett (History Department, California State University Channel Islands)
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Policy, Administration, and Empire

R. Malcolm Errington is extending the work of Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977), into late antiquity. Specifically, he argues that Millar's basic thesis–that the Roman imperial government was inherently reactive, that it was fundamentally a system of bureaucratic responses to local challenges–can be tested by studying Roman actions in the late third and early fourth centuries. It was during this period, Errington argues, that the Roman Empire formally split, specifically during the reign of Valentinian I and Valens, although the size of the Roman Empire had led to the development of regional differences for decades if not centuries. The political organization of the Roman Empire encouraged these regional differences, as local bureaucracies responded to local conditions. Centralization, in this context, came in the form of dynastic unity. Thus, as the Roman Empire was being pulled apart by centrifugal local forces, Roman emperors–Constantine I, Valentinian I and Valens, and Theodosius I–were trying to maintain unity through dynastic relationships.

Errington makes a profound point while discussing the impact of local conditions on Roman bureaucratic development. The Eastern Empire faced a foreign empire–Persia–that was in conflict with the empire, but that conflict was usually managed diplomatically. This does not mean that the Eastern Empire could not find itself at war with Persia, nor does it imply that Constantinople could maintain a smaller military force. But, it did mean that methods other than violence could have been used to manage the Persian relationship. The Western Empire, however, faced local kings, clans, and tribes that had no greater political organization. The result was that the Western Empire tended to have few options other than violence to manage relations with the peoples along its borders.

This observation has important implications for Roman history in the fifth century. First, it helps to explain the greater importance that military men had in the Western Empire during the fifth century relative to the Eastern Empire. In an environment where diplomatic skills could not contain foreign threats, it is not accidental that bureaucrats lost power in the Roman government relative to men like Aetius. In contrast, in Constantinople, which faced a threat that could be contained diplomatically, bureaucrats appear to have enjoyed much greater power than their counterparts in Ravenna. Errington's observation suggests that anything that threatened the ability of the Western Empire to maintain military force–such as the loss of Africa in the fifth century–would mean that Ravenna had few alternatives on which to fall back. Does this, perhaps, suggest why, in the fifth century, Ravenna was willing to allow the creation of foreign kingdoms–Goth, Hun, and Vandal–either inside Roman territory or along its borders? It is, after all, easier to manage relations with settled kingdoms than with mobile clans and tribes.

In terms of religious policy, Errington argues that the religious split between the Eastern and Western Empires can be understood within the context of challenge and response. Regardless of dynastic relationships, the emperors in both Ravenna and Constantinople were primarily interested in responding to local demands and maintaining peace in their respective empires, rather than in imposing a single, unified religious stance on the entire empire. Thus, decisions by eastern and western bureaucracies (and the emperors who sat at the apex of those bureaucracies) tended to mirror local interests rather than a single imperial policy and had the effect of encouraging the development of differences in eastern and western churches.

Errington has implicitly tackled an important question–Roman Empire or empires?–and has suggested that the very nature of the Roman Empire, particularly its size, had a centrifugal force that ultimately ripped the Roman Empire apart. Dynastic relationships were an attempt to maintain unity within the empire, and Erring-

ton points out that Roman political history in the fourth and early fifth centuries can be understood in the context of maintaining dynastic power. This is an excellent work of political history covering a period when our sources tend to be religious, and is highly recommended.

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