Book Reviews


The distinguished German medievalist, Johannes Fried, has decided that the fabrication of the document known as the Constitutum Constantini, enshrining the influential and notorious Donation of Constantine, did not occur in Rome in the second half of the eighth century, where most historians have agreed to put it. With a wealth of erudition and an appeal to the transformative impact of historical memory he undertakes to establish two principal points. The first is that the Donation of Constantine, as it was known from the twelfth century onwards, must be separated from the document called the Constitutum Constantini. The second is that the document was forged in the ninth century in the Frankish kingdom of Louis the Pious.

Anything from Fried is worth reading, although the diffuse and turgid English of his book makes one long for the author's native German. Fried allows himself ample space to introduce and justify his argument through a series of questionable and overstated claims. Right at the beginning we read that the Donation "is the most infamous forgery in the history of the world." Perhaps, but the Protocols of the Elders of Zion are no less infamous, and have arguably done more harm in far less time. Fried thinks that the historical impact of the Donation had little to do with the Constitutum, because the later picture was based on distorted recollections (p. 9): "Contemporary memory shaped the remembered past to suit its own present, and abstracted it from all legal and constitutional matters, from all history, even from the document itself." It is hard to believe that Nicholas of Cusa or Lorenzo Valla, for whom the document itself was absolutely fundamental in exposing the forgery, could have possibly agreed. Fried's assertion at the end of chapter II that his book addresses the "re-formation of cultural memory through the practice of recollection" is little more than jargon and almost meaning-
less (who practices recollection?). Fortunately all this fades away as the book goes on.

Current agreement on a later eighth-century date for the confection of the *Constitutum* is largely based on the revival of the cult of St. Sylvester by Popes Stephen II and Paul, stylistic parallels in the style of the papal chancery of the period, the contemporaneous occurrence of two examples of the word satrap, which the forger grotesquely included in describing the retinue of Constantine, and an alleged echo of the document in the report of the Synod of 798 at Rome. Inasmuch as Charlemagne had the papal letters collected together in 791 into the so-called Codex Carolinus, Fried seems to assume that they could only have been seen in the Frankish kingdom. Since they must obviously have been seen at Rome when they were originally written, this argument seems very weak. As for the synod, Fried says that the forger may have echoed the synod's prefatory text, but an argument of this kind has little probative value. It is distressingly characteristic of Fried's mode of argument. On p. 54, for example, we read, "nothing forces us to attribute the forgery to Rome" and on p. 55, "Nothing prevents us from assuming ..."

Fried draws special attention to *Constitutum* 18 on Constantine's decision to leave Rome for his new capital at Byzantium and to establish his empire there, so that Rome would be left to the popes. Astonishingly Fried claims on p. 50 that there was "no mention of a departure from Rome" in the medieval tradition until Charlemagne's frescoes in the new palace at Ingelheim. Therefore, the forger must have been working after this date and among the Franks. His point seems to be that although Constantine founded Constantinople he was not thought to have left Rome definitively. But from late Antiquity onwards Constantine's physical transplantation to the new capital was widely recognized in the East, and in the West it is explicitly recognized in the *Historia Tripartita* (2.18,3 [CSEL v. 71, p. 113]), for which the earliest extant manuscript dates from the beginning of the ninth century. After contemplating a new capital at Troy Constantine was divinely instructed to take up residence in Byzantium: *Haec agenti per noctem deus apparuit monens, ut alium quaereret locum, eumque movens ad Byzantium Thraciae illic eum habitare iussit*. The new city is designated here, as so often, the Second Rome (2.18,4).

Towards the end of chapter VI Fried saddles the hapless Hilduin of St. Denis with responsibility for bringing the Codex Carolinus to Cologne, where it subsequently turned up in the possession of the archbishop Willibert. Since Hilduin was not averse to the invention of historical facts, Fried does not hesitate to register him as an assistant to the forger. "How all this happened," says Fried on p. 109, "must remain open, but Hilduin certainly enjoyed counterfeit-