***The Holy Blood Ostensory and its Shifting Legend***

The small crystal ampoule containing the Holy Blood is one of two blood relics proven to have been present in St. Mark’s Basilica since the late Middle Ages and likely, based either on assertions in the sources or on the relics’ appearance, to have originated in Constantinople.[[1]](#footnote-1) The crystal vial containing the blood of Christ is first mentioned, along with a relic from the Cross and the skull of John the Baptist, in Reniero Zeno’s report on miracles; it is also explicitly described there as being part of the plunder from 1204. The political implications of this claim become evident if we specifically consider the spring of 1265, as argued above. But just how important did the Doges view the subsequent, continuing assertion of the sacred object’s holy provenance to be?

The case of the blood relic makes particularly clear that the reference to Constantinople was by no means of such great relevance in Venice as researchers like to believe. As argued above, the Doge, with his spring 1265 diplomatic campaign that aimed to gain favor with the pope, was primarily seeking official recognition by the Roman church’s spiritual leader of the holy objects and their cult as well as the institutionalization of indulgences in a papal bull. With regard to the authenticity and thus the sanctification of the relics involved in the miraculous “test by fire,” Reneiro’s reference to Jerusalem as the original provenance of the relics seems to me at least as important as his reference to the looting of those relics in Constantinople – especially with respect to the Holy Blood.



1. See Polacco 2002 for a discussion of other blood relics not proven to be present in St. Mark’s until later. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)