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## Tradition and Propaganda in the Venetian *Madonna della Pace*

This article examines one of the lesser known miraculous images in Venice, Italy - an early 14<sup>th</sup>-century icon of the *Hodegetria* belonging to the Dominican friars of the monastery of SS. Giovanni e Paolo. The icon is unique in the manner in which it was promoted, its history among the many miraculous images in the city, and its function. The image was sent from Constantinople in 1350 by Polo Morosini, whose family had strong ties to the Dominicans. For 150 years it sat on the altar in the chapter room of the cloister, but as a result of a new building campaign initiated by the adjacent *Scuola Grande di San Marco* after a fire in 1485, the decision was made to build a chapel for the icon and promote it to the general public.

As a result, the icon is unique in its promotion, approximating the function of the great palladium of the *Serenissima*, the *Nicopeia*. Rather than performing miracles and rising from a devotional phenomenon among the populace, it was deliberately presented and promoted by the friars as the icon before which St. John of Damascus recovered his hand after its amputation by the Iconoclastic emperor Leo the Isaurian. It quickly gained a reputation for resolution of family disputes, which was apparently bolstered by the Dominicans' offers to mediate in such matters without the intervention of lawyers or exorbitant legal fees.

At the same time, the Greek Orthodox community of Venice, operating without its own church until the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, came every Saturday to sing litanies before the icon, and continued this devotional practice into the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Three pamphlets outlining the history of the icon were written in 1636, 1647, and 1675. Two of these were polyglot editions, written in Italian, Latin, and Greek - indicating the wide range of devotees among the Venetian populace. These pamphlets, written by Dominicans or their colleagues, strove to invest the legend of St. John Damascene with historical veracity through the use of patristic writing rather than the popular legend associated with the icon in the late middle ages. In doing so, the Dominicans appropriated the icon as propaganda in the Counter Reformation battle against heresy and Orthodox schismatics in early modern Venice.