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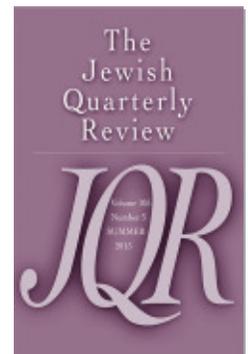
The Contested Ownership of Yosef Trumpeldor's
Arm-Reliquary: A View from a Christian Perspective

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The Contested Ownership of Yosef Trumpeldor's Arm-Reliquary: A View from a Christian Perspective

GALIT NOGA-BANAI

LET ME BEGIN WITH A TEASER. In 1964, after two years in Rome, the American artist Paul Thek (1933–88, New York) returned to New York. Inspired by a visit to the Capuchin catacombs near Palermo, he created “Technological Reliquaries” (1964–67), a series of wax sculptures of meat and human body parts set inside Plexiglas vitrines.¹ One of these, *Warrior's Arm* (1967), today in the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, represents a Roman gladiator's arm covered with leather straps and resting on a wooden panel (fig. 1).² It is a cast of Thek's own upper limb provocatively dislocated by ancient-looking straps and displayed in a case of modern material and design. It is not only set apart from the human body and away from the (Roman) period it is supposedly designed to represent; it is also set far from the arena in which the games took place, where the performing gladiators found their deaths. Thek's gladiator's leather straps imply that the arm belonged to a man who died young in bloody entertainment; the transparent case designates it as *spolia*, the reuse of older material or objects outside of their original place and order.³ Moreover,

I am grateful to the Mandel Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in the Humanities and Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for its support of this study.

1. See, for instance, Philipp Wittmann Friedland, *Paul Thek—Vom Frühwerk zu den ‘Technologischen Reliquiaren’* (Friedland, 2004); most recently, Susanne Neubauer “Framed Devices: Paul Thek's Technological Reliquaries,” in *Sculpture and the Vitrine*, ed. J. C. Welchman (Leeds and Farnham, 2013), 143–58.

2. Pittsburgh, Carnegie Museum of Art, Acc. no. 2010.3: Paul Thek, *Warrior's Arm* (from the series *Technological Reliquaries*), 1967, wax, paint, leather, metal, wood, resin, and Plexiglas, 24.1 x 99.1 x 24.1 cm.

3. For relics as *spolia*, see Jaś Elsner, “From the Culture of *Spolia* to the Cult of Relics: The Arch of Constantine and the Genesis of Late Antique Forms,” in *Papers of the British School at Rome* 68 (2000): 149–84; for *spolia* in a Christian

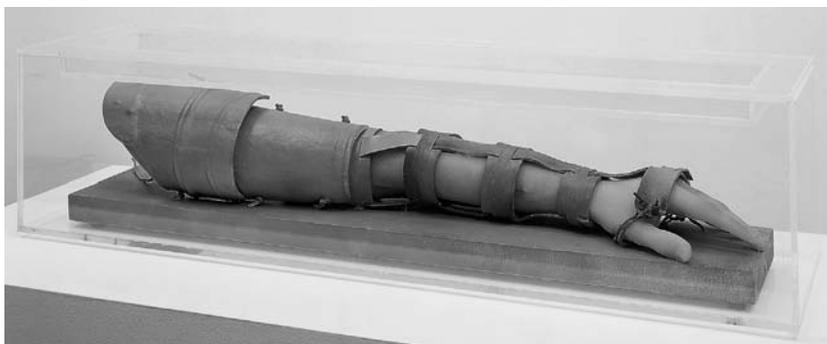


Figure 1. Paul Thek, *Warrior's Arm*, 1967, from the series *Technological Reliquaries*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Henry L. Hillman Fund, Mr. and Mrs. James H. Rich Fund, Carnegie Mellon Art Gallery Fund, A. W. Mellon Acquisition Endowment Fund, and Tillie and Alexander C. Speyer Fund for Contemporary Art, 2010. © The Estate of George Paul Thek; courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. Photograph by Jason Mandella.

the vitrine turns the item called “arm” into a particular object of spectacle; it provides the inanimate body part with a new social life and environment.⁴

The innovative combination of the gladiator’s hand, the modern case, and the artist’s body as the mock-up model was unexpected in the 1960s, roughly two decades before the installation of vitrines made by Joseph Beuys and Damian Hirst.⁵ Thek’s overwhelming series stimulated discussions ranging from the boundary between pop art and minimalism to the escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam at the time. The arm may call to mind associations of wounded soldiers and battlefields; however, when the arm is displayed in a museum or gallery, the viewer is expected to associate the vitrine containing the upper limb with anthropomorphic reliquaries, especially arm-reliquaries—particularly in light of the series’ title. Thanks to the contemporary viewer’s education and cultural knowl-

context, see Maria Fabricius Hansen, *The Eloquence of Appropriation: Prolegomena to an Understanding of Spolia in Early Christian Rome* (Rome, 2003); Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, eds., *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Burlington, 2011).

4. Bill Brown, “Things Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (2001): 1–22, esp. 6–8.

5. Most recently, see John C. Welchman, ed., *Sculpture and the Vitrine* (Burlington, 2013); specifically, see in this volume Tag Gronberg, “Through the Vitrine: Damien Hirst’s *For the Love of God*,” 47–68, and Claudia Mesch, “Sculpture in Fog: Beuys’s Vitrines,” 121–42.

edge, the inanimate object is updated with constantly shifting contexts and associations, and thus is always a relevant Thing in the sense of Bill Brown's theory.⁶

Hundreds of medieval arm-reliquaries are found today in church treasuries or museum collections around the world—including New York, where the public first encountered Thek's modern reliquaries.⁷ They are often made of precious metals and decorated with gems (fig. 2). The association between these reliquaries and Thek's work is even more obvious when viewing another of Thek's modulated arms, today in the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, this one made of wax and covered on its upper part with a fragile armor of real butterfly wings (fig. 3).⁸ The forearm wears the gladiator's straps with a corset rail and a touch of paint in different colors. The color of the wings and the paint classify the arm as a precious object. The wooden panel seen in the first arm is absent, but the leather straps and corset give the impression of a mechanical support to the valuable arm. It seems more a prosthetic arm than a fleshy one.

THE MARTYR, THE GLADIATOR, AND THE SOLDIER-SAINT

Thek's enshrined arms can serve to introduce the prosthetic arm of Jewish war hero and pioneer Yosef Trumpeldor (1880–1920) in a new context. Made of metal and leather, the arm was installed within a glass and wood vitrine, most likely in the 1940s or 1950s (fig. 4), and kept in Trumpeldor's House (Beit Trumpeldor), a museum and archive at Kibbutz Tel Yosef in the Jezreel Valley (northeastern Israel). Like Thek's gladiator arms, this prosthetic arm is a spoil of body, dislocated from its original context as relics usually are. The transparent framed container indicates that this material thing of the past is meant to be seen and

6. Cf. Brown, "Things Theory," 13–16.

7. Bruno Reudenbach, "Visualizing Holy Bodies: Observations on Body Part Reliquaries," in *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, N.J., 2008), 95–106; Reudenbach, "Körperteil-Reliquiare: Die Wirklichkeit der Reliquie, der Verismus der Anatomie und die Transzendenz des Heiligenleibes," in *Zwischen Wort und Bild: Wahrnehmungen und Deutungen im Mittelalter*, ed. H. Bleumer, H.-W. Goetz, S. Patzold, and B. Reudenbach (Cologne, 2010), 11–31; Cynthia J. Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–Circa 1204* (University Park, Pa., 2012), 117–41.

8. Untitled (from the series *Technological Reliquaries*), 1967, wax, metal, paint, butterfly wings, Plexiglas, 23 x 88 x 23 cm. Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Photo: D. James Dee, courtesy of archives Witte de With, Rotterdam; Margrit Brehm, Axel Heil, Roberto Ohrt, *Paul Thek: Tales the Tortoise Taught Us (Future of the Past)* (Cologne, 2009), 80.



Figure 2. Arm Reliquary of Saint Bernward, ca. 1194, Hildesheim.
Photo: © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

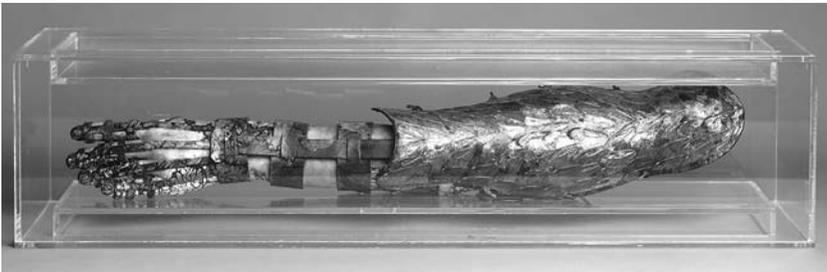


Figure 3. Paul Thek, *Untitled*, 1967. Photo: © Rheinisches Bildarchiv,
D. James Dee; rba_c009994.



Figure 4. Yosef Trumpeldor's Prosthetic Arm, 1904, Beit Trumpeldor Tel Yosef. Photo: Author.

esteemed by the viewer and to activate his or her conscience. Unfortunately, hardly any visitors come to Tel Yosef to view Trumpeldor's personal belongings, including the artificial arm. Most people associate his commemoration with the Tel Hai Courtyard Museum, which commemorates the area's history and is located in the Upper Galilee, some sixty miles north of Tel Yosef.

Although related to the subject matter, the primacy of Tel Hai over Tel Yosef in the public consciousness and collective memory is a matter of research for sociologists. The focus of attention here belongs to the field of material culture: Trumpeldor's prosthetic arm and the conflict between the two sites over its custody. As will be shown, the visual and conceptual association of the prosthetic arm with the technological reliquaries made by Thek in New York, and the association of the modern objects with the traditional medieval arm-reliquaries, is far deeper than would at first appear, integrating questions of alienability and inalienability and how material objects shape the significance of the sites they inhabit. The evaluation of the prosthesis from the perspective of medieval reliquaries will shed light on the contested object and memory, revealing it as more than

a mere object of sentimental pursuit or obsession, as it may at first appear to be.

Before delving into the issues of ownership, commemoration, and display, we must briefly review the relevant details of Trumpeldor's biography. Yosef Trumpeldor lost his arm in 1904 during the Russo-Japanese War. Equipped with both the prestige of a mighty hero and the artificial left arm he received while a prisoner in Japan, he arrived in Palestine for the first time in 1912. After the outbreak of the First World War, he went to Egypt with Ze'ev Jabotinsky, where they initiated the British Army's Mule Corps (*Gduḏ Nahage Ha-Preḏot*). When the war ended, Trumpeldor founded the He-Ḥalutz (pioneer) youth movement in Russia. In 1919 he returned to Palestine. The Galilee settlements had recently been transferred to French rule (in a postwar reconfirmation of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement) and were suffering in the Arab revolt against the French. In December of that year Trumpeldor was asked to arrange and command the defense of Tel Hai in the Upper Galilee. On March 1, 1920, at the age of thirty-nine, he was killed in battle together with the last guards of Tel Hai.⁹ According to two witnesses, Trumpeldor's last words were some variation on "Never mind, it is good to die for our country." One of the eulogies published in the daily newspapers compared the heroic commander and his testament to the Roman gladiator's salute "morituri te salutant" (those who are about to die salute you), implying that his death was that of a martyr.¹⁰

The fallen victims were buried together twice: they first were interred in Kibbutz Kfar Giladi and later were moved to a permanent location between Kfar Giladi and Tel Hai, not far from where they were killed. In 1934 a monumental sculpture of a roaring lion was erected over the tomb. Made by Avraham Melnikoff (1892–1960), it was one of the earliest memorials in the country, if not the first. During the unveiling ceremony, Eliezer Krol, one of Kibbutz Kfar Giladi's founders, referred to the victims of Tel Hai as "holy heroes."¹¹ Tel Hai became a landmark in the

9. For details of the last months in Tel Hai, see Shulamit Laskov, *Trumpeldor, sipur hayav* (3rd ed.; Haifa, 1972; Jerusalem, 1995), 202–38.

10. Suetonius's *Life of the Divine Claudius*, 21.6. The eulogy was written by Alexander Aharonson from Zichron Yaacov, published in *Doar ha-yom* on March 9, 1920.

11. Quoted on the first page in the daily newspaper *Davar*, February 23, 1934: http://jpress.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI_Heb/?href=DAV%2F1934%2F02%2F23&page=1 (last accessed February 19, 2014). For a photo of Yitzhak Ben Zvi, one of the founders of Ha-Shomer, and Eliezer Krol, a founder of Kfar Giladi, at the ceremony establishing the roaring lion on 7 Adar 1934, see Central Zionist

history of the Land of Israel and the Zionist movement, a defeat that was transformed in the Yishuv's collective memory into a spectacular failure.¹² The historic site became the Tel Hai Museum, where even today the anniversary of Trumpeldor's death is commemorated as a testimony to the courage and devotion of the people to their land.

Beyond his role as commander, the combination of Trumpeldor's crippled body and immortal words (whether he actually uttered them or not) singled out his memory from that of the rest of the guards killed at Tel Hai. His myth was woven into narratives of truth and legend. His commemoration began shortly after his death with the founding of the Yosef Trumpeldor Work Brigade (*Gduđ Ha-'Avoda al šhem Yosef Trumpleđor*) by his friends and disciples. In 1921 the members of the brigade rebuilt and resettled Kfar Giladi. In the same year they also founded Kibbutz Tel Yosef (named for Trumpeldor), where in 1949 the Trumpeldor House Museum and Archive was founded.¹³ Planned by the architect and kibbutz member Samuel Bickels, the magnificent neoclassical monument constructed on a hill at the center of the kibbutz with an expansive lawn at the front was intended to house Trumpeldor's personal belongings as well as the archive of the Work Brigade. In addition to his artificial arm, Trumpeldor's watch, a spoon, two shirts, a small fabric purse, military awards, and medals reside there. But the building has known better days. It is currently closed—indefinitely—for renovation and restoration.¹⁴

THE DISPUTE OVER THE PROSTHETIC ARM

In current scholarship on Trumpeldor, historians and sociologists, inspired by Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, have focused primarily

Archive, Kfar Giladi archive, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BenZvi_Kroldedication934.jpg (last accessed February 16, 2014).

12. Idith Zertal, *Death and the Nation: History, Memory, Politics* (Hebrew; Or Yehuda, 2002), 42–44.

13. Avital Efrat, "Let There Be Light," *Eretz Magazine*, January–February 2011, 58.

14. For the Israeli government's plan to preserve Beit Trumpeldor under the national heritage sites program, see <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/trumpeldor-house-in-danger-of-ruin-despite-national-heritage-status-1.264803> (last accessed February 24, 2014). According to Amir Rochel, a kibbutz member with whom I coordinated my visit on January 28, 2014, the government has agreed to support the renovation of the ground floor, but there are insufficient funds to renovate the entire building. For further reading on the politics of Israel's national heritage museums, see Tamar Katriel, "Remaking Place: Cultural Production in Israeli Pioneer Settlement Museums," in *Grasping Land*, ed. E. Ben-Ari and Y. Bilu (New York, 1997), 147–75.

on the memory and commemoration of Trumpeldor and the Tel Hai battle in Israeli culture, education, geography, and historiography.¹⁵ The prosthetic arm receives only perfunctory mention.¹⁶ Trumpeldor's prosthetic arm, however, recently became the subject of a final project written by Or Rosenstein, a student of graphic design in Haifa, for a book-design course. Her inquiries and interviews with, inter alia, Uri Horwitz of Kfar Giladi, a former director of the Tel Hai Museum whose father participated in Trumpeldor's burial, and Rachel Zaas, the curator of the Trumpeldor House in Tel Yosef, culminated in an unpublished Hebrew book titled *Trumpeldor's Arm: A Biography of Missing Objects* (Haifa, 2013).¹⁷ According to Rosenstein's research, Trumpeldor used (at least) two prosthetic arms, one for the Sabbath and the other for the rest of the week. The Sabbath arm ended with a solid gray palm made of leather. The other, which Trumpeldor most likely received while a prisoner in Japan, was made of metal and black leather, with a hook at its end. It is known that one arm, and perhaps both, were at some point in Kibbutz Degania. Two different testimonies confirm that the Sabbath arm was eaten by mice or buried with Trumpeldor while the other found its way to Tel Yosef.¹⁸ Subsequent to Rosenstein's investigation, Arik Weiss presented a short documentary report on Trumpeldor's arms on Israeli television (channel 10).¹⁹ The subject appealed to both Rosenstein and Weiss

15. Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1941) (= Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. L. A. Coser [Chicago, 1992]); Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1984–92); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–25; Yael Zerubavel, "The Politics of Interpretation: Tel Hai in Israeli Collective Memory," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 16 (1991): 133–60; Zerubavel, "The Historic, the Legendary and the Incredible: Invented Traditions and Collective Memory in Israel," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. J. R. Gillis (Princeton, N.J., 1994), 105–25; Zerubavel, *Collective Roots, Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995), 39–47, 147–77; Zerubavel, "Between History and Legend: The Transformation of Tel Hai in Popular Memory" (Hebrew), in *Le-bantzi' uma: Antologia*, ed. Y. Dahan and H. Wasserman (Tel Aviv, 2006), 199–216 (reprinted from David Ohana and Robert Wistrich, eds., *Mitos ve-historia* [Jerusalem, 1996], 135–48); Maoz Azaryahu, "Ha-geographia ha-mitit shel yod-aleph be-Adar: Mi-Tel Hai le-Byria ve-Eilat," *Ofakim Hadasim* 46–47 (1997): 9–20. See also Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000), 38–39.

16. Laskov, *Trumpeldor*, 30.

17. Or Rosenstein has generously made a copy available to me.

18. Rosenstein, *Trumpeldor's Arm*, 70–73

19. The reportage can be found at <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleId=1013685&sid=126> (last accessed February 4, 2014).

because the story of the arm reveals a long and emotional debate over which of the two memorial places is the rightful heir of the prosthetic arm: the site where events occurred in the Upper Galilee or the site of commemoration in the Jezreel Valley. Neither Rosenstein nor Weiss associated the debate over the prosthetic arm with the cult of Christian relics.

In 2010, on the ninety-year anniversary of the Tel Hai battle, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chaired a cabinet meeting in the historic courtyard of the Tel Hai Museum. In honor of the occasion, the prosthetic arm was transferred from Tel Yosef to Tel Hai,²⁰ and respectfully taken back to Tel Yosef when the meeting was over. This *translatio* was not trivial: the ceremonial movement illuminates the object's potency in the sense of its ability to organize public affection.²¹

The 2010 cabinet meeting is only the latest scene in what has been a long struggle over the ownership of the prosthetic arm. Uri Horwitz from Kfar Giladi served as director of the museum in Tel Hai for years. In that capacity, he drove to Tel Yosef on a weekly basis to try to convince the director of the museum and archives there—first the late Tamar Knaani, and later her successor Rachel Zaas—to give him the arm. Interviewed by Rosenstein, Zaas described his efforts and her resistance:

For as long as I am alive the arm (*yad*) will not leave [Tel Yosef] and others will not allow it [to be moved] either . . . [Trumpeldor] spent only a few days in Tel Hai! What did he do there? The Work Brigade was named for him! He led this whole story . . . This is why the Histadrut [General Federation of Laborers in the Land of Israel] decided in 1935 that Tel Yosef should receive the arm . . . The arm is important to Uri Horwitz from Tel Hai. He lost the arm! . . . He believes Tel Hai should have the arm and all of the documents . . . more than the clothes. He stated that if the arm reached him it would not return! And I told him that if the arm did not return I would send the police . . . He wants the arm. Nothing else, only the arm . . . And we have never let it out, except for one time when he convinced us to let him make a replica in Jerusalem.²²

20. I use the verb “translating” rather than any other word describing transfer, shift, or relocation because the verb *translatio* has been used to describe the moving of relics since the very early records of the cult of relics. See, for instance, Gillian Clark, “Translating Relics: Victricius of Rouen and Fourth-Century Debate,” *Early Medieval Europe* 10.2 (2001): 161–76.

21. Brown, “Things Theory,” 7.

22. Rosenstein, *Trumpeldor's Arm*, 35–37. The translation is mine.

The replica, produced in the laboratories of the Israel Museum sometime in the 1980s, hangs on the wall in Tel Hai to this day. Horwitz told Rosenstein that he had initially intended to take the original and give the copy to Tel Yosef but had second thoughts and eventually returned the original.²³

THE CHRISTIAN CULT OF RELICS

The zeal surrounding the object in Tel Yosef and the longing for it in Tel Hai demonstrate the approach and emotions regarding the prosthetic; it is treated almost as if it were Trumpeldor's flesh. The emotions, tension, and terminology involved in the debate between the two people representing the two sites call to mind encounters around the Christian cult of relics. Zaas repeatedly uses the word *yad* (arm/hand). Only recently, in January 2014, a relic with the blood of Pope John Paul II was stolen from the Church of San Pietro della Lenca in Italy's Abruzzo region.²⁴ The relic was a piece of cloth from the vestment the Pope wore when he was shot and wounded at St. Peter's Square in 1981. Three such relics commemorating the event and bearing his blood have been treasured since the assassination attempt. The pope himself—the source of the relic—asked that the specific relic be given to the small Abruzzo chapel, which he liked to visit. In other words, while still alive he was planning the distribution of his relics!

The thieves in Abruzzo are the most recent example of a tradition of sacred theft (*furta sacra*) that began in the early Middle Ages.²⁵ One well-known example was reported in the first half of the ninth century by Einhard, Charlemagne's biographer. In his treatise *The Translation and Miracles of the Blessed Martyrs Marcellinus and Peter*, Einhard relates how he sent his trusted man to Rome to acquire relics of local martyrs.²⁶ After

23. Ibid., 103.

24. Alan Johnston, "Pope John Paul II Relic Stolen from Chapel in Italy," BBC News, January 27, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-25911872>.

25. Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1991).

26. Georg Waitz, ed., "Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri auctore Einhardo," in *MGH, Scriptores* 15, pt. 1 (Hannover, 1888), 238–64. For a full English translation, see P. E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier: The Complete Einhard* (Peterborough, N.H., 1998), 69–130; Hans Reinhard Seeliger, "Einhard's römische Reliquien: Zur Übertragung der Heiligen Marcellinus und Petrus ins Frankenreich," *Römische Quartalschrift* 83 (1988): 58–75; Martin Heinzelmann, "Einhard's 'Translatio Marcellini et Petri': Eine hagiographische Reformschrift von 830," in *Einhard Studien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. H. Schefers (Darmstadt, 1997), 269–98; Julia M. H. Smith, "'Emending Evil Ways and Praising God's

describing the place of St. Marcellinus's entombment, and before elaborating on how the corpse was stolen (to be brought to him), he notes that the marble tablet placed near the martyr's head contained "an inscription clearly indicating (*evidens indicium dabat*) which martyr's limbs lay there."²⁷ Stating that the relics sought for him were original, he then recounts in detail the *translatio* of the relics to their final destination in Mulinheim (Seligenstadt). The path was full of obstacles and miracles, including a confrontation with a fellow courtier, Hilduin from St-Médard of Soissons, whose people managed to rob some of the relics that were destined for Einhard.

The possibility of dividing and distributing relics was based on the *pars pro toto* principle, according to which the part carries the sanctity and power of the whole.²⁸ Thus, a piece of cloth with Pope John Paul II's blood bears his sacred qualities. Einhard, however, wanted all fragments back. Other narratives related to relics may end differently, but like Einhard's treatise, they all document the manipulations involved in the cult of relics, including their invention, their division and distribution, their translation and liturgical processions.²⁹

The closer the relic was to the generation of the founders—Christ and his disciples—the more significant it was considered to be. But the relics

Omnipotence': Einhard and the Use of Roman Martyrs," in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, ed. K. Mills and A. Grafton (Rochester, N.Y., 2003), 189–223.

27. "Vident sacratissimum sancti Marcellini corpus in superioribus eiusdem sepulchri partibus positum tabulamque marmoream ad caput positam, quae titulo quem continebat evidens indicium dabat, cuius in eo loco martyr's membra iacuisent." Cf. Georg Waitz, ed., "Translatio et miracula," 241; Eng. trans. in Dutton, "Charlemagne's Courtier," 74. This may refer to the epigram found in the Via Labicana written by Pope Damasus and recorded in stone by Filocalus; see Ursula Reutter, *Damasus, Bischof von Rom (366–384): Leben und Werk* (Tübingen, 2009), no. 28.

28. Galit Noga-Banai, *The Trophies of the Martyrs: An Art Historical Study of Early Christian Silver Reliquaries* (Oxford, 2008), 130–46, and sources and bibliography there.

29. For additional work on relics, see Holger A. Klein, "Sacred Things and Holy Bodies: Collecting Relics from Late Antiquity to the Early Renaissance," in *Treasures of Heaven, Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. M. Bagnoli et al. (Baltimore, Md., 2010), 55–67; Bruno Reudenbach, "Von der Wirkmacht heiliger Gebeine: Reliquienkult im Dienste der Christianisierung," in *Credo: Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, ed. C. Stiegemann et al. (Ausstellung im Erzbischöflichen Diözesanmuseum, im Museum in der Kaiserpfalz und in der Städtischen Galerie am Abdinghof zu Paderborn), vol. 1, *Essays* (Petersberg, 2013), 87–93.



Figure 5. The Holy Right Hand (*szent jobb*) of King Stephen I, St. Stephen's Basilica in Budapest. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

of the martyrs who died as a result of torture (some of them as gladiators) during the persecutions of the Christians under the Roman emperors, from Nero (54–68) to Diocletian (284–305 C.E.), were also high on the sacred ladder. These relics belonged to the period before Christianity was institutionalized and became the religion of the Roman Empire; this was the founders' generation, and their ideological offspring were ready and willing to sacrifice their life for Christ. Possessing a part of their bodies was more than taking part in the foundation, myth, and tradition; it was having open access to imagine active participation within it.

In the context of enshrined limbs, a relevant example is the most venerated relic in Hungary: the Holy Right Hand (*szent jobb*) of King Stephen I (997–1038) (fig. 5). King Stephen I converted the Hungarian tribes to Christianity and established the first unified and independent Christian kingdom of Hungary, for which he was the first Christian king.³⁰ The

30. "Hartvic, Life of King Stephen of Hungary," introduction and translation by Nora Berend, in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. T. Head (New York, 2001), 378–98; Nora Berend, József Laszlovszky, and Béla Zsolt Szakács, "The Kingdom of Hungary," in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus', c. 900–1200*, ed. N. Berend (Cambridge, 2010), 319–68; Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526* (London, 2001), 27–29.

king was buried in the basilica at Székesfehérvár. At some point he was reburied in the lower catacomb of the basilica. It was then that his right arm was removed and elevated from the crypt to be preserved. This spatial change indicated new social life; the limb became an independent object of adoration and veneration. However, the man in charge of the basilica treasury stole it at some point and hid it on his estate in the county of Bihar (in what is today Romania). In 1083 the arm was found and a monastery was erected on the spot. The “apostolic king” was canonized on August 20, 1083, and pilgrimages to Bihar began. The saint thus became accessible through the mummified palm of his right hand, signifying his mythical acts in the genesis of the kingdom. Up to 1950, when the relic arrived at St. Stephen’s Basilica in Budapest (its current home), the mobile relic passed through various owners and locations during efforts to hide it in wartime and to maintain its safety until it reached its final resting place. Although I have touched only briefly on its history, the material relic is clearly seen as indispensable for the collective consciousness of the Hungarian people, beyond its religious value. The material arm in this case is also a national relic, a national icon.

THE PROSTHETIC AND THE ARM-RELIQUARY

The body-part relic, like an icon, is a visible form of the invisible, presenting rather than representing the source. It contains and encompasses the charisma and sacred power of its source (or its model, when it is an icon).³¹ Church authorities and patrons first came to understand the power of the body in the tenth century, when anthropomorphic reliquaries shaped like a head or bust began to appear. The most popular form, from the twelfth century onward, was that of an arm-reliquary. Unlike the right hand of Stephen I, the relics enshrined in those reliquaries were not necessarily seen, though at times the reliquaries contained a small window through which one could peek to see the body-part relic. The relics were also not necessarily one of the arm bones; the shape of the reliquary in the form of an arm was enough to symbolize the active saint and his deeds.³² The distribution of arm-reliquaries in the medieval Christian world indicates the potency that was attributed to the hand.

Trumpeldor’s prosthetic arm contains and encompasses his charisma although it is not a sacred relic in the religious sense. Biblical legislation

31. Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2011), 116–66.

32. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps des images: Essais sur la culture visuelle au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2002), 279–85; Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 135–41.

does not approve of the cult of bodies. The dead body is impure; one is forbidden from being in its vicinity (Lev 21.1–3; Num 6.6–7; 19.11, 14, 18, 22. 31.19). Bones and other mortal remains must be buried in the ground as soon as possible.³³ While there were times when graves of the “very special dead,” such as Jewish martyrs, became pilgrimage/cult sites, veneration of corporeal fragments within reliquaries was not a Jewish idea.³⁴ Trumpeldor, the bearer of the specific prosthetic arm under discussion, may be considered one of the very special dead. He is a part of a foundation myth, performing heroism and personal sacrifice on the altar of ideology and land prior to the declaration of the state of Israel (1948). His (mass) grave became a site of veneration and his artificial arm provides an opportunity to keep the remains of a body on the earth rather than beneath it, to pursue a material object within a Jewish context.

The prosthetic limb was tied in unmediated fashion to Trumpeldor’s body. It constitutes and narrates the story of his public life. It was with him when he was fighting, although crippled, in battle; it was with him when he founded the British Army’s Mule Corps and the He-Ḥalutz youth movement in Russia. The identification of the prosthetic arm with the acts of the amputee was so total that it became his trademark attribute (streets were named “Ha-Gidem” [the amputee] in his memory) in the context of his martyrdom in Palestine as well—even though he lost his left arm in the Russo-Japanese War. The intimacy of the arm with the body it belonged to bestows sanctity upon the object; as a result, the presence of the (sacred) body is actualized by the object. Thus, whoever possesses it not only holds the most authentic and direct testimony of Trumpeldor’s life and activity but mediates Trumpeldor’s presence.³⁵

In translating the relic of Trumpeldor from Tel Yosef to Tel Hai on the ninety-year anniversary in 2010, the initiators may have been seeking the presence of Trumpeldor in the cabinet meeting not in spirit but in flesh. The prosthetic arm would indicate that Prime Minister Netanyahu shared Trumpeldor’s ideology, maybe even his charisma. Perhaps the people in Tel Hai were thinking that the *translatio* and display, even for a short

33. bSan 46a.

34. Most recently on the Jewish cult of the dead and approach to relics, after the “material turn,” and including extensive bibliography: Ra’anan Boustan, “Jewish Veneration of the ‘Special Dead’ in Late Antiquity and Beyond,” in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. C. Hahn and H. Klein (Washington, D.C., forthcoming). I am grateful to the author for letting me read the article prior to publication.

35. On icons and agency, see Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 164–66.

while, of the original (in addition to the permanent display of the replica) would revitalize and enhance the authenticity of the place and the relevance of the annual ceremony. Tel Yosef's desire to maintain custody of the artificial body-part relic stemmed at least in part from a desire to possess Trumpeldor's aura.

TEL HAI AS *LOCUS SANCTUS* AND TRUMPELDOR
AS PATRON SAINT

From the perspective of Christian worship and the cult of relics/saints, Tel Hai in the Upper Galilee is a holy site: not only did Trumpeldor spend several months there but he was killed and buried there. This is not the case with Tel Yosef in the Jezreel Valley, which was founded after Trumpeldor was killed. He was never there. Tel Yosef may be considered a significant and potent locus not because it is named after Trumpeldor but because it is where his agency, in the form of the arm, resides. We can compare it, for instance, to the Holy Sepulcher church complex in Jerusalem, which was built in the fourth century on the place of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Many churches in the world are named for the Holy Cross. None of them is built over Golgotha but they are in the possession of relics of the True Cross.³⁶ Another example is St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, built in the fourth century and again in the sixteenth century over St. Peter's tomb not far from the place where, according to the Christian tradition, he was crucified.³⁷ St. Peter's churches around the world are not built on his tomb, but they enshrine his relics. Thus, Tel Hai is a *locus sanctus*, the site of the martyrdom, and that is where the martyr-soldier-saint's tomb is found, along with the monumental symbol of the roaring lion; Tel Yosef contains Trumpeldor's relic. If Tel Yosef were to relinquish the contested prosthetic arm to Tel Hai, the sanctity of its "patron saint" would go with it. When Rachel Zaas expressed her tenacity to keep the prosthetic arm by saying "[Trumpeldor] spent only a few days in Tel Hai! What did he do there?" she was not thinking in terms of holy places, relics, or icons. Her zeal and obstinacy in insisting

36. The first time such a translation of the True Cross occurred was in the fourth century, probably during Constantine's lifetime; he or a member of his family had a relic of the True Cross installed at the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, at that time called *Hierusalem* after the relic. Richard Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 24; Sible de Blaauw, "Jerusalem in Rome and the Cult of the Cross," in *Pratum Romanum: Richard Krautheimer zum 100. Geburtstag*, ed. R. L. Colella et al. (Wiesbaden, 1997), 55–59.

37. Recently, Hugo Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen in Rom* (3rd ed.; Regensburg, 2013), 96–107 and bibliography there.

on keeping the arm came from an intuitive apprehension that losing it would mean surrendering the patronage of its titled saint and the identity of Tel Yosef as his *yad* in the biblical sense of the word, a memorial.³⁸

My point of departure in analyzing the conflict over the contested relic was the visual association of the prosthetic arm enclosed in a transparent glass vitrine at Beit Trumpeldor with arm-reliquaries, which opened a door to comparing the artificial arm of a local Jewish and Zionist martyr with the dynamic of the Christian cult of relics. The visibility of the amputee through the enshrined prosthetic arm completes the equation of immortality composed of body, text (those unforgettable final words, whether uttered in reality or not), and site (the roaring lion over the tomb) and burned into the local collective culture, geography, and history. Throughout the years, other mottos and bywords were added to the local history pages, as were tombs, heroes, memorial days, and sites, all of which eroded Trumpeldor's memory. However, Trumpeldor is the only one designated as a (Zionist) *martyr*; this was accomplished when his upper (prosthetic) limb was enshrined in a transparent glass case.

38. 1 Sam 15.12.