



golden

LI Holocaust survivor's family can keep ancient tablet

BY SOPHIA CHANG
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An ancient Assyrian gold tablet, looted from a German museum in the chaos of postwar Europe, is legally the property of the family of a Great Neck Holocaust survivor who bartered goods in exchange for the relic in Berlin, according to the ruling of a Nassau County judge.

"To the victor goes the spoils," said lawyer Steven Schlesinger of Garden City, who represents Riven Flamenbaum's daughters, Hannah and Helen.

Flamenbaum, a Polish native who was interred at Auschwitz for four years, made a living after World War II dealing in black market goods in Berlin, Schlesinger said.

He traded goods for small silver and gold pieces that could be easily carried to America, where he started a new life in New York in 1949.

He acquired the stamp-sized thin gold tablet covered in Assyrian script, which the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin had in its collection before being looted by Russian soldiers in the 1940s, Schlesinger said.

The 3,200-year-old tablet, which describes the construction of a sacred temple, was discovered in 1913 by German archaeologists in what is now northern Iraq, and exhibited at the museum, which specializes in Middle Eastern artifacts.

The gold tablet may be the only one of its kind, though a similar tablet made of silver remains with the museum, Schlesinger said.

Messages left for the museum's attorney, John Fisher of Manhattan, were not returned yesterday.

In the 1950s, the museum learned that the tablet was seen in the hands of a New York dealer but did not take action then to reclaim the item, according to court documents.

Flamenbaum, who went on to operate a liquor store in Manhattan, died in Great Neck in 2003 at the age of 92, and bequeathed his estate to his three children: Israel, Hannah and Helen.

A dispute arose among the survivors over the value of the tablet, Schlesinger said. A coin appraiser first told the family it was worth \$100, based solely on its gold value.

Troubled by the tablet's tumultuous history, Israel Flamenbaum contacted the Berlin museum in 2006, said his lawyer, David Reilly of Mineola.

"It's important if you find out something is someone else's, that you raise the issue as the appropriate thing to do," Reilly said. The museum filed a claim in late 2006 for the return of the tablet.

Nassau County Surrogate Judge John Riordan ruled March 30 that the Flamenbaum estate owns the tablet because the museum did not claim ownership for decades after it became aware that Flamenbaum had the tablet.

"I think [the ruling] is 100 percent correct," Schlesinger said. "You just can't sit on your rights forever."

The family has not decided what to do with the tablet, he said.

While the judgment may seem like cosmic karma benefiting a Holocaust survivor's family at the expense of the German establishment, Schlesinger said ultimately the decision was rendered on technical issues.

"The issue is one more of law than justice," he said.



PHOTO BY DANIELLE FINKELSTEIN

Eric Leefe is helped onto an Able-Ride bus by operator Robert Golding. Cuts to the Able-Ride budget may eliminate his ride.

Mangano tries to restore Able-Ride

BY SID CASSESE
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Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano is trying to make up for the cuts scheduled next week for physically challenged residents who use the LI Bus' "Able-Ride" program, but admits he doesn't have the money yet to do it.

"These cuts hurt our most vulnerable citizens who use Able-Ride," said Mangano, who added that \$1.2 million was cut from the program. "But I will continue to try."

Last year, the service provided about 395,000 trips. The proposed cuts would be made throughout the year.

Long Island Bus spokesman Jerry Mikorenda noted that the first cuts would be about 32,000, or 9 percent, of the program's rides because they are outside the boundaries stipulated by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act — within three-quarters of a mile on either side of a route.

Another 3,200 rides will be eliminated by making a feeder service to regular routes, thereby ending some door-to-door service; 2,900 rides will end by applying more rigorous procedures for ADA eligibility; another 1,800 rides by using car services instead of a bus, and 500 rides by determining on a trip-by-trip basis, rather than by season, for conditional eligibility.

Mangano, a Republican, has asked Democratic State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli to

audit the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the bus company's parent, saying its management failure "has allowed a culture of waste and abuse to spiral out of control."

In addition, Mangano has asked Assemb. Harvey Weisenberg (D-Long Beach), a well-known advocate for disabled children, for help in Albany on restoring the funds. "He's got it, too," Weisenberg said.

The county executive has reached out to Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-Roslyn) for help in seeking federal aid.

Ackerman, who has put the appropriation request in for 2011, is seeking \$1.8 million.

"We're trying to secure funding for this project working together with the county executive," Ackerman said. "We agreed to move this item to the top of the list, and that I was willing to make it a priority for funding."

Aaron Liebowitz, executive director of Adults and Children with Learning and Developmental Disabilities, based in Bethpage, along with other groups, is taking another course. They are set to file a lawsuit in federal court against the MTA and LI Bus this morning to stop the cuts.

"People of all different kinds of backgrounds, especially the disabled and the elderly, depend on the public transit system to live their lives," he said. "These cuts are going to disproportionately hurt these very people."

CORRECTIONS

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

- 1862** Union forces led by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant defeated the Confederates at the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee.
- 1927** The image and voice of Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover were transmitted live from Washington to New York in the first successful long-distance demonstration of television.
- 1939** Italy invaded Albania, which was annexed less than a week later.
- 1949** Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical "South Pacific" opened on Broadway.
- 1953** The UN General Assembly elected Dag Hammarskjold of Sweden to be secretary-general.
- 1969** The Supreme Court, in *Stanley v. Georgia*, unanimously struck down laws prohibiting private possession of obscene material.
- 1978** President Jimmy Carter announced he was deferring development of the neutron bomb, a high-radiation weapon.
- 1983** Space shuttle astronauts Story Musgrave and Don Peterson took the first U.S. spacewalk in almost a decade as they worked in the open cargo bay of Challenger for nearly four hours.