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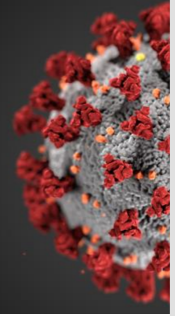
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, July 22, 2021

United States Seizes Funeral Scrolls and Manuscripts Taken from Pre-Holocaust Jewish Communities in Eastern Europe

Jacquelyn Kasulis, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent-in-Charge, Homeland Security Investigations, New York (HSI), announced today the seizure of 17 Jewish Funeral Scrolls, Pinkas Manuscripts (“Scrolls and Manuscripts”) and Community Records that had been taken from Jewish communities in Romania, Hungary, Ukraine and Slovakia during World War II. The Scrolls and Manuscripts, which date from the mid-19th century to World War II, were confiscated from Jewish communities and disappeared during the Holocaust. The artifacts were found through a Brooklyn auction house that offered them for sale, as well as a consigner and a purchaser. Three additional artifacts are believed to be in Israel and one in upstate New York.

“The Scrolls and Manuscripts that were illegally confiscated during the Holocaust contain priceless historical information that belongs to the descendants of families that lived and flourished in Jewish communities before the Holocaust. This Office hopes that today’s seizure will contribute to the restoration of pre-Holocaust history in Eastern Europe.” stated Acting U.S. Attorney Kasulis. “I commend the efforts of this Office’s Civil Division and HSI in recovering these important religious artifacts.”

“The recovery of these 19th century Judaica Manuscripts and Scrolls looted during the Holocaust from Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Ukraine in the midst of our world’s darkest of times, is the culmination of an extensive HSI cultural property investigation, and we are fortunate to be part of the team that is able to return these artifacts to their rightful Jewish communities,” stated HSI Special Agent-in-Charge Fitzhugh. “The HSI NY Cultural Property, Art & Antiquities Investigations unit works tirelessly with the United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York to investigate the looting, theft and sale of critical pieces of history, and will continue to bring to justice the individuals and transnational criminal organizations who profit from the trafficking of these cultural treasures.”

As set forth in the search warrant affidavit, in February 2021, law enforcement learned that an auction house located in the Eastern District of New York had offered for sale 21 Manuscripts and Scrolls originating from Jewish communities that existed before World War II and the Holocaust. The members of those communities from which the Scrolls and Manuscripts were taken had been gathered in ghettos, robbed of their property and deported to Nazi death camps, where the majority of them were killed. After the end of World War II, surviving members of the communities returned to find their homes ransacked and buildings emptied of property. Among the items that were stolen were the Scrolls and Manuscripts that contained information related to the Jewish communities from as early as 1840 and up through and including the Holocaust. These Scrolls and Manuscripts contained prayers for the dead, memorial pages and/or the names of deceased members of the Jewish communities, operating rules of the society, society member payments, obligations, society regulations, the identity of society religious leaders, and, in some cases, the names of the society members who were deported by the Nazis to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The Manuscripts and Scrolls were confiscated by individuals who had no right to do so during and after the Holocaust. Absent any provenance or documentation of conveyance from any survivors of those communities, there is no legitimate means by which the Manuscripts and Scrolls could have been imported into the United States.

The government’s case is being handled by Assistant United States Attorney Artemis Lekakis of the Office’s Civil Division and the investigation was conducted by Department of Homeland Security Agents Megan Buckley and Robert Mancene.

E.D.N.Y. Docket No.: 21-MJ-837 (PK)

Attachment(s):

Download Scrolls SW Affidavit

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Topic(s):

Asset Forfeiture

Component(s):

USAO - New York, Eastern

Updated July 22, 2021