

Russia's Last Tsar Exhumed as Murder Case Reopened

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The Romanov family pictured in 1911.

Russian investigators on Wednesday exhumed the remains of Russia's last tsar and his wife, who were slaughtered by the Bolsheviks in 1918 together with their children and servants, after reopening the investigation into the century-old murder.

The Investigative Committee said in a statement Wednesday it was reopening the probe in order to confirm the identity of remains believed to belong to two of the royal children: the Tsarevich Alexei and Grand Duchess Maria Nikolayevna.

A previous investigation concluded that the remains were indeed those of Maria and Alexei, but a working group set up at the instigation of the Russian Orthodox Church insisted that further tests be carried out, the statement said.

On Wednesday, the bodies of Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra were exhumed at the Peter

and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg and samples taken from them, Interfax reported.

Investigators also took samples from a blood-soaked coat that Tsar Alexander II — Nicholas' grandfather — was wearing when he was fatally injured by a terrorist's bomb in 1881, Interfax reported.

They are also seeking access to the remains of the empress' sister, Grand Duchess Elisabeth of Russia, the Investigative Committee statement said, adding that her remains are in Israel and have never been examined by Russian investigators.

The remains of Maria and Alexei were planned to be buried with those of the rest of the family on Oct. 18, TASS news agency reported earlier this month. But the Russian Orthodox Church protested, saying additional research was needed.

Nicholas and Alexandra were killed together with their five children, four servants and family dog in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg by the Bolsheviks in 1918, the year after revolution ended their rule.

The remains of all the members of the royal family except for Alexei and Maria were found in woods outside Yekaterinburg in 1979. A criminal investigation into the murder of the tsar and his family was opened in 1993, but in 1998 the investigation was closed on the grounds that all the suspects were already dead. That same year, the remains of Nicholas, Alexandra and their other three daughters were finally laid to rest at the Peter and Paul Fortress.

In 2007 the remains of Alexei and Maria were discovered close to the first burial spot.

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