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Crimea Cuts Protected Heritage Site Boundaries for Hotel Project Linked to Putin Allies

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Balaklava Bay, Crimea. **Tomasz Wojtyś (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Authorities in annexed Crimea have reduced the protected boundaries of a medieval archaeological heritage site in Sevastopol to clear land for a hotel project linked to President Vladimir Putin's billionaire childhood friends Boris and Arkady Rotenberg, exiled investigative outlet The Insider reported, citing documents from a state historical and cultural review.

The decision concerns the Northern Settlement of the Cembalo Fortress archaeological site, a medieval settlement dating from the 13th to 18th centuries located near the Genoese fortress of Cembalo in Balaklava.

A company called Port Lamos, which The Insider said is linked to the Rotenbergs, is building a hotel complex on the site of a former Soviet Navy research base on Balaklava's Nazukin Embankment. Demolition of the former military facility began this winter.

Part of the construction area overlaps with the protected heritage site. To remove land from the site's boundaries, archaeologists excavated 245 square meters, including 211 square meters within the officially protected area.

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Specialists conducting the excavations in March and April discovered more than 2,000 pottery fragments dating from the 14th to 18th centuries, including local, Byzantine, Ottoman and Italian artifacts from the Republic of Genoa.

Despite the findings, a state review concluded the area had been fully studied and could be released for development.

As a result, 211 square meters were removed from the protected site. Once approved by Sevnaslediye, Sevastopol's cultural heritage authority, that section will no longer qualify as an archaeological monument.

The Insider said Port Lamos is also constructing another hotel nearby and acquiring historic properties around Balaklava Bay, including the Yusupov Hunting Lodge and other historic mansions slated for conversion into hotels and restaurants.

The Balaklava marina development is among the Rotenbergs' largest projects in Crimea, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Launched in 2018 under a federal development program ordered by Putin, it aims to create a tourism cluster with berths for 600 yachts, hotels and recreational facilities by 2030.

Construction is being handled by companies linked to the Rotenberg brothers, including a firm previously involved in building the Crimean Bridge.

Read this article in Russian at The Moscow Times' Russian service.

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