

Russia says new DNA tests confirm last tsar's remains (Update)

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New DNA tests on the remains of the last tsar Nicholas II confirm their authenticity, Russia said Wednesday, after exhuming them in a bid to end a dispute with the Orthodox Church.

The remains of Nicholas II, his wife and five children, shot by the Bolsheviks in 1918 and hastily buried in the provincial city of Yekaterinburg, are still disputed by the Russian Orthodox Church and some of the family's descendants.

The latest tests, which are still ongoing, could finally lead to the burial of the whole family with full funeral rites.

The influential Church has declared all the slain Romanov family saints—but has not recognised any of their remains, insisting there are still doubts over their authenticity despite DNA testing by Russian and international scientists.

The bodies of Nicholas's heir Alexei and his daughter Maria, found in 2007—separately from the rest of the family's remains discovered more than a decade earlier—remain unburied, stored in the State Archive.

Russia's government ordered the latest tests—which included exhuming Nicholas and his wife from Saint Petersburg's Peter and Paul Cathedral, where they were buried in 1998—on the Church's request as it attempts to finally bury Alexei and Maria.

This time, the Church has been allowed to closely supervise the process.

Tests on the skulls of Nicholas and his wife Alexandra "once more show the authenticity of the 'Yekaterinburg remains'," the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said in a statement.

The Church announced it would give its official position on Friday.

German Lukyanov, a spokesman for one group of Romanov descendants, told Interfax news agency that "we will wait for the results of all the tests lined up and listen to the opinions of all the experts."

Burnt and soaked in acid

So far tests have shown that samples from Nicholas's jaw bone and a vertebra match DNA from a bloody shirt he wore in a previous assassination attempt, investigators said.

The DNA from his skull, which had not previously undergone testing, also matches that of other bones tested earlier.

Tests on the skull of Nicholas' wife Alexandra matched DNA of descendants of Britain's Queen Victoria, her grandmother.

"The first stage of the investigation has concluded with a positive result but work will continue and we are expanding it," investigator Vladimir Solovyov told Interfax.

Further tests will include a comparison with the DNA from the bloodied clothing of Tsar Alexander II, Nicholas's grandfather assassinated in 1881, the Investigative Committee said.

Investigators are also preparing to exhume Nicholas II's father, Tsar

Alexander III, from the same cathedral.

The Russian scientist in charge of the testing, Evgeny Rogaev, said the remains will be tested more rigorously than a crime scene.

Rogaev has already carried out ground-breaking research on the remains, writing in 2009 in US journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that he had provided "unequivocal evidence" that all the remains were identified.

Nevertheless the Church has cited historical accounts suggesting the bodies—which the Bolsheviks burnt and then soaked in acid—could not belong to the Romanovs.

The tsar and his family were shot with their doctor, maid, cook and valet.

An official on the government commission dealing with the remains told Interfax on Wednesday that Alexei and Maria's burial was provisionally being planned for early February 2016.

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