

Archaeologists unearth military arsenal from the era of Ivan the Terrible

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An archaeological expedition from the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, while conducting a rescue excavation dig near Zvenigorod (Moscow Region) involving the new Central Circular Highway, has unearthed the private arsenal of a military commander from the era of Ivan the Terrible.

The location of the find was formerly the 16th-century village of Ignatievskoe, once the homeland of the famous Boyar family of the Dobrynins. A member of this family once figured amongst Ivan the Terrible's "hand-picked thousand"—the top brass of the notorious Tsar's army, an elite officer group formed in October 1550. A royal edict ordered that the cities of Dmitrov, Zvenigorod and Ruza should be "brought to heel" by a specially formed unit of "the best officers, sons of Boyars." The "hand-picked thousand" became the new elite officer corps of the Russian army.

The remains of around 60 village buildings were uncovered during the dig. On the western side of the former village, archaeologists unearthed a building with a very large underground timber-lined storehouse, uncovering the remains of a large private arsenal. They found helmets stored in leather boxes, kolchugs (a kind of cuirass), sections of military sabres, belts, and arrows and more. It seems possible that this was a cache of weapons for a military expedition, stored in special boxes, including even sections of camp tents and billy cans. This warlike inventory, along with the status of its owner, probably indicated the existence of a standing army of troops in readiness, who were armed, billeted and fed at the cost of members of the nobility as part of their

responsibility as courtiers.



"We've never encountered such finds in Moscow region before, neither in cities and especially not in small villages. If this rescue archaeology dig hadn't been undertaken, all this material would have been completely destroyed during the building of the Central Circular Highway," said the deputy director of the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Asya Engovatova.

The highlight of the items so far uncovered are spiked helmets, practically undamaged by rust.

"They are the typical military headgear of Russian knights—spherical helmets adorned with gold and silver. Similar helmets are on display in the Kremlin Armoury Museum, the Hermitage Museum, and the State History Museum," said Alexei Alexeyev, the scientific specialist in charge of the excavations. Alexeyev said that these finds are unique, since they were found along with their leather storage boxes, textile linings, and richly-decorated ear-pieces.



"This gives us a much better idea how a Russian noble would have prepared for setting out on a military campaign—each nobleman would have had his own arsenal in readiness. This excavation enables us to 'see' for the first time the preparations made by the noblemen who made up the officer corps elite of the Russian army at the time of the flowering of Muscovy as a Russian state," Mr. Alexeyev remarked.

This arsenal can't be described as a horde or treasure trove in the normal sense—it wasn't deliberately hidden. As far as we can see, it was simply

in storage in the basement of a boyar's mansion in the mid-16th century, when the house burned down in a fire. This means these weapons were never used in battle during the Time of Troubles interregnum, and thus they were preserved to be found again now.



Provided by Russian Academy of Sciences

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