
Interview of the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia with Rossiyskaya Gazeta



Alexander Bastrykin's Royal Case

Alexander Bastrykin reveals the mysteries of the murder of the royal family

The head of the Investigative Committee reveals all the secrets of the murder of the Romanovs

For decades, there have been ongoing discussions in society about the circumstances of the murder of the royal family although more than a hundred years have passed since the tragedy.

A lot of books have been written and lots of films made about the authenticity of the remains found near Yekaterinburg. A few years ago, the Investigative Committee resumed a criminal case on the circumstances of those events. A book and a film devoted to the investigation of this tragedy have

recently been released, and the Investigative Committee has a direct relationship to this. Rossiyskaya Gazeta asked Alexander Bastrykin, the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, about the findings and secrets of this one-of-a-kind criminal case.

Alexander Ivanovich, why was it necessary to resume the investigation in 2015 at all, and how did it differ from the previous investigations?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: Some researchers are still arguing about the identity of the remains found near Yekaterinburg, despite the findings of the 1993 investigation, which established their belonging to the royal family and their entourage. Therefore, we considered it necessary to fill in possible gaps by continuing the investigation. Over the past years, science has taken a very serious step forward, opening up new opportunities, including in genetics. As many as 40 forensic examinations have been carried out on the renewed criminal case in six years, including comprehensive and commissioned forensic (anthropological) examinations, molecular genetic, historical and archival examinations and others. For the first time, the investigators examined materials from closed archival funds.

Also, earlier, in the 1990s, investigative actions were carried out, in fact, behind closed doors. This time, on the contrary, it was decided to make everything transparent for public and in cooperation with a special church committee. Intermediate results were carefully discussed, specific actions were planned. The Russian Orthodox Church and the Investigative Committee have done everything to ensure that the new examinations are completely unbiased, and their results are well-reasoned and undeniable.

In the process of removing samples from burials in the Peter and Paul Cathedral in St. Petersburg, each bone fragment was divided into two parts: the one for the Russian Orthodox Church research, and the other for the investigation experts. Moreover, His Holiness the Patriarch himself personally recoded the samples in order to completely exclude the influence of the human factor on the findings. Later on, representatives of the church forwarded them to laboratories that conducted research in parallel with the investigation and independently of each other.

Absolutely new examinations were also carried out during this investigation.

Can you tell us in more detail about these new examinations, which few people know about?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: This is about a comparison of a stereolithographic copy of the prosthesis of Dr. Evgeny Sergeevich Botkin, which is stored in the US, with the jaw of the remains No. 2 and with a photograph of the prosthesis of Botkin, the Physician in Ordinary to the Emperor's family, found in mine No. 7. The fact is that in 1918, the investigation found two false jaws: the one in the Ipatiev House, and the other at the bottom of a small well of mine No. 7 at Ganina Yama. Examinations suggested that both prostheses belong to the remains of No. 2, that is, Dr. Evgeny Botkin.

A handwriting examination of the inscription in the basement room of the Ipatiev House has established that the inscription from the poem by Heinrich Heine was most likely made by commissioner Jānis Svikke. For a more specific conclusion, the experts need a text written by Svikke in Latin characters, which, unfortunately, was not found in the archives of the Russian Federation.

The authorship examination and handwriting examination of “Yakov Yurovsky’s Note” and his speech at a closed meeting of old Bolsheviks have proved that it was Yurovsky who was the author of both documents. An examination of the composition of the soil at Porosenkov Log has proved the soil is sandy loams, and not peat.

Finally, I would like to specifically note the unique genetic examination for the first time carried out by Professor Evgeny Ivanovich Rogaev to trace the signs of hemophilia.

Outsourced documents

What experts, from which institutions, were involved in the examinations on this case? Which new documents are we talking about?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: Experts of the central DNA Laboratory of the Investigative Committee did the principal job on molecular genetic identification. Experts from Moscow State University, Russian State University for the Humanities, the Institute of Archeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of History and Archeology of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Ural Regional Forensic Center of the Ministry of Justice of Russia, the RANEPА Russian Presidential Academy, the Center for the Study of the History of Religion and the Church at the RAS Institute of World History, the Church History Department of the Moscow Theological Academy, the Vavilov Institute of General Genetics, and other institutions also took part in the examinations.

Experts have studied documents from more than 20 federal, regional and departmental archives and museums of Russia, as well as foreign archival collections such as the Foundation of Russian History, Jordanville, NY, Houghton Library of Harvard University, the Bakhmeteff Archive of Columbia University in the US, and the National Archives of the UK.

Documents from personal archives were also studied. So, the investigation took into account archival collections of different ownership and status. Notably, experts mainly dealt with the originals to avoid contradictions and doubts.

So, what have the genetic examinations’ conclusions about the authenticity of the remains of Emperor Nicholas II confirmed or refuted?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: The bone fragments of remains No. 4, which were identified as

Nicholas Romanov, were compared during examinations with biological samples obtained from the remains of Alexander III. Their results confirmed the probability of paternity by 99.9999988 percent, which confirms that these remains belong to Nicholas II. They were also compared with a genetic profile of the blood taken from the shirt of Nicholas Romanov, which is stored in the Hermitage. And in this case, it was also established that the blood on the shirt was left by a deceased person, whose remains are conventionally designated No. 4.

A separate comparison was made for the male line of the Romanovs. A DNA sample was isolated from biological tissues and blood collected from the clothes of Alexander II. In this case, the experts made sure of the profile's uniqueness and concluded that there was a close consanguinity between its bearer and the profile from the remains, which we identified as belonging to Nicholas II.

Have members of the royal family also been identified?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: Yes, they have been identified. The genetic traits of all 11 people have been established, while seven of them form a family group, and four more belong to individuals who are not related by blood to the family group or to each other. The family group includes a male, five females and a teenage boy.

The experts have established the presence of a father-children relationship between remains No. 4 and five more remains. Then, based on the children's DNA, their family relationship with a woman whose remains (No. 7) were also in the burial has been confirmed; she was their mother. So, the investigation has concluded that the remains discovered in 1991 and 2007 belong respectively to Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra Feodorovna, their four daughters and Crown Prince Alexei. In fact, the examinations have established the probability of relationship between them at 99 percent and a few more 9's after the decimal point.

The remains discovered in 2007 have been identified as belonging to a teenager and a young girl, which is comparable to the data of Crown Prince Alexei and his sister Maria. Famous anthropologists D.V. Pezhemsky, M.V. Dobrovolskaya, T.Yu. Shvedchikova, as well as geneticists from various laboratories examined these remains and identified, among other things, their gender and age.

As I said earlier, genetic examinations confirmed their relationship when compared with the remains of other family members. In this burial, fragments of bones from different parts of the human skeleton were found such as teeth, occipital bones from two skulls, scapular, pelvic and others, in particular, the femur of a male teenager.

Another important argument is the discovery of the hemophilia gene in some samples. From historical documents it is known that crown prince Alexei suffered from hemophilia, which was transmitted to him through the maternal line. The examination of the bone remains of a male child confirmed the presence of this disease. It was also established that Alexandra Feodorovna and Grand

Duchess Anastasia were carriers of the disease.

A scar will be seen in a century

There were lots of discussions about other signs allowing experts to talk about the belonging of the remains to members of the royal family. For example, a mark was left on the head of Nicholas II after the attack on him committed in Japan in 1891.

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: This issue has been thoroughly examined by anthropologists, physicians and other experts under the new investigation. The facts found by anthropologists have been later confirmed by tomographic and rare X-ray studies at a 100x magnification. Science and technology have made a significant progress over the past two decades. Under the resumed investigation with high-tech equipment, including the latest tomography technology, which examines objects ten times more accurately, specialists were able to identify these injuries on skull No. 4.

According to experts, these changes in the bone tissue of the skull indicate long-term intravital healed fractures near the frontoparietal suture on the right. They just could be caused by a chopping object. As you know, traces of a saber strike can also be found on the hat of Nicholas Romanov, which is now in the Hermitage.

Why has the information that Nicholas Romanov had problems with his spine, which was reflected in his gait, not been examined until recently?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: These data were established earlier as part of forensic medical examinations. This time, the investigation evaluated the aggregated findings of both expert examinations and historical and archival documents. Indeed, the examination found age-related, degenerative-dystrophic changes in the spine on the remains belonging to Nicholas II. And there is evidence of Nicholas Romanov himself confirming this. In his diary, literally in the last weeks of his life, he writes that he experiences severe pain in his legs and back, and notes that he has not gotten out of bed for about six days. He even notes with regret that he spent the birthday of his beloved wife Alix in bed due to severe pain in his legs and other places.

As for changes in the gait of Nicholas Romanov, the inevitability of which some researchers point out, there are memories of Viktor Netrobin, one of the guards of the internal team of the Ipatiev House. He says that “in his appearance, Nicholas looked quite fresh. However, his step was unsteady. It seemed that his knees were somehow vibrating...”

What other moments of those distant events have been checked during your investigation?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: The investigation has carefully examined, analyzed and systematized all available materials, including not only official documents, but also accounts of eyewitnesses, memoirs of participants in those events. All this made it possible to form a more complete picture

and eliminate contradictions.

The organizers and participants in the murder of the royal family and their retainers have been identified. Also, data from the materials of the investigation file of Nikolai Alekseevich Sokolov were for the first time compared with the contents of his book “The Murder of the Royal Family”. It turned out that there are certain inconsistencies between the materials of the investigation file and the book, which relate to the details and circumstances of the discovery of certain traces and objects. All this is of great importance.

The findings of our investigation coincided with the conclusions of experts about the circumstances of the actual execution of the royal family and their retainers, about preparations for the murder, the efforts to conceal the traces of the crime and attempts to destroy the bodies. So, at first they tried to hide the bodies of the executed at Ganina Yama. And then nine of them were buried under the roadbed at Porosenkov Log, and a wooden planking of crossties was made over the burial. They tried to burn the bodies of Alexei and Maria not far from this place. After burning, their remains were poured with sulfuric acid, buried, and a fire was lit from above again.

To complete what was left unfinished in 1919

But how could it happen that there were contradictions between your criminal case and Nikolai Sokolov’s book?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: In his book “The Murder of the Royal Family”, Nikolai Sokolov argues that the bodies of the emperor and his family were completely burned down. But Sokolov’s investigative case, which was carried out before the writing of the book, on the contrary, suggests his confidence that the bodies of the murdered were hidden, and he was on the right track carrying out their search. In 1919, Sokolov surveyed the area and photographed the “bridge of crossties” at Porosenkov Log already known to our contemporaries. A railroad crossing was 414 steps away from this bridge, as the investigator pointed out, and remains of similar crossties were at the gatehouse.

Sokolov managed to interrogate the watchman of this crossing and his son. They reported that this “bridge of crossties” had appeared a year ago, on the night of July 19, when the Bolsheviks were driving from Ganina Yama. Having compared the facts, the investigator could have checked this place if he had been given enough time. But due to the approach of enemy forces to Yekaterinburg, on the day of the interrogation of the father and son Lobukhins, he received an order for an urgent evacuation from the city. The investigator indicates this in his report of the inspection of the area, without completing the investigative action. The next day, July 11, 1919, Sokolov left the city and was no longer able to return there to continue his investigation.

Over the years, the opinions of researchers – who did not have access to official documents – have evolved based on what has been written in this book.

As we know, investigator Sokolov never completed his investigation, which was ongoing until his death. For objective reasons, he also did not have the opportunity to study all archival documents, accounts of eyewitnesses of those events, to which we now have access. In the presence of the said data, he would have easily discovered the burial places of the royal family and their retainers.

Scanned and duly certified copies of the materials of Sokolov's investigative case kept in the state archives of the Russian Federation and Harvard University (Robert Wilton's copy) are included as evidence in the criminal case.

Execution room in detail

Why was it necessary to reconstruct the events in the Ipatiev House? After all, the investigation had enough documents and materials.

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: Indeed, there are eyewitness accounts in the case file, but there were certain inconsistencies and inaccuracies in them. Some researchers also expressed versions that that it was impossible to place 11 people and a firing squad for execution in such a small room. That is why it was decided to conduct an investigative experiment with the participation of forensic experts and historians in order to clarify and verify the facts.

The investigation had at its disposal photographs of the room itself in the Ipatiev House, measurement data and descriptions of mechanical damage and traces of blood on its walls and on the floor, recorded by the investigators of that time: I.A. Sergeev and N.A. Sokolov. A model of the room was created based on the data.

The investigative action made it possible to find out that some inaccuracies in the descriptions can be attributed to the different location of the eyewitnesses at the time of the murder. The investigation made sure that the room was large enough to accommodate both members of the royal family and their retainers, as well as those who carried out the execution.

In addition, it was necessary to make sure that the memories of the people who had watched the scene through the windows could also be true. For this end, photographs of basements and facades were studied, the relative position of windows and door openings, the difference between ground and floor levels by the beginning of the 20th century were determined. This made it possible to compare the situation with the accounts of eyewitnesses and establish what exactly they could see through the windows of the house from the places where they were at the time of the execution.

And most importantly: the process of killing was reconstructed in dynamics - the experiment shows that all the victims could receive the injuries that were found on the remains. Moreover, this simulation helped the experts better understand how certain injuries could have been received.

Some researchers say that it is impossible to isolate DNA as the remains fell into peat soil.

Could you explain to me, as an outsider, if such statements are justified?

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN: The conducted soil science examinations suggest that the soil in this area consists of loams. For research, its samples were taken at various distances and depths from both places where the remains were found. The argument that the soil could have been brought to the burial site and it completely replaced the natural soil has not been confirmed. No signs of soil mixing with peat have been found either. In addition, it is very difficult to imagine that the road that passed in this place was laid through a peat bog.

Documents from Sokolov's investigation file testify that there were traces of clay – not peat – on the car that was used to transport the bodies of those killed in the Ipatiev House. In addition, the so-called peat tanning can affect soft tissues, whereas DNA was obtained from the deepest layers of bone fragments. Also, experts from several laboratories independently obtained results that coincided with each other.

I guess it's hard to discuss all aspects of this case in one interview...

ALEXANDER BASTRYKIN:

Absolutely. “The Crime of the Century. Materials of the Investigation”, a three-volume book published on the official website of the Investigative Committee, has been prepared for general readers. It summarizes the collected materials related to the murder of the former Russian Emperor Nicholas II, members of his family and their retainers, as well as related to the concealment of their remains and the longstanding investigation of this crime. This is a very large joint work of both professionals of the beginning of the 20th century and modern investigators, forensic experts, scientists, archivist historians, priests and simply caring people. As we have said, the investigation takes an open position. Everyone can read the published materials to make sure the investigation was complete and unbiased.

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