

# Ivan VI Antonovich of Russia



A great-grandson of Tsar Ivan V of Russia (1666-1696), Ivan VI Antonovich of Russia (1740-1764) occupied the Russian throne for only 13 months, while still a baby. He lived the remainder his life in isolated confinement without sunlight or conversation, maturing neither emotionally nor mentally.



Ivan VI was born on August 23, 1740, as the eldest son of Duke Anton Ulrich of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel (1714-1776) and his wife Anna Leopoldovna (1718-1746, *right*). Anna Leopoldovna was a daughter of Duke Karl Leopold of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (1678-1747), who had already been twice divorced before he married her mother, Yekaterina Ivanovna of Russia (1691-1733). Karl Leopold preferred other women to his thick-set, little wife; he even installed his niece, a daughter of his brother

Friedrich Wilhelm, as his official mistress. Anna Leopoldovna, born in 1718, was the only child of this unhappy marriage. By 1722, Yekaterina had had enough of her husband's rages and infidelities, and returned to Russia with her daughter.



After Yekaterina's death, her sister, Tsarina Anna Ivanovna (1693-1740), took an interest in her only niece and heir, and married Anna Leopoldovna to Anton Ulrich on July 14, 1739. The next year Ivan was born.

Within 2 months of his birth, Ivan VI became Tsar in October 1740, when his great-aunt, Tsarina Anna, died. He was transferred to the Winter Palace in an extravagant ceremony. Tsarina Anna's favourite, the notorious Ernst Johann Bühren (1690-1772), acted as regent. His way of treating everything and everyone Russian with a contemptuous superiority caused deep offence. He caused further dissatisfaction by the heavy taxes he imposed. Ivan's parents, Anton Ulrich and Anna Leopoldovna, were ignored.

After 22 days, Bühren was arrested and put aside to be replaced as regent by Ivan's mother, the young and gay Anna Leopoldovna. She was assisted by Burkhard of Münnich, who was given the title of Prime Minister. Bühren was beaten, imprisoned, and exiled to Siberia.

Still dazed by her sudden rise to power, Anna Leopoldovna immediately recalled count Moritz Karl of Lynar (1702-1796), who had been exiled shortly before her marriage. Tall and slender, with a fine complexion and sparkling eyes, Lynar was immediately welcomed into Anna's bedroom. During encounters with the Count, she had a lady-in-waiting stand guard to avoid any interruptions by her husband. From time to time, Anton Ulrich would make a brief and artificial show of indignation. When Lynar left for Germany "for some urgent family matters" (taking a large quantity of precious stones with him), Anna needed some consoling, and thus allowed her husband to share her bed - until her lover's return.



Married to a docile Prince, Anna Leopoldovna had always lived a life of pleasure. Her new position, and the power that came with it, served mainly to stimulate her more bizarre appetites. Pregnant again, Anna Leopoldovna spent most of her time in her private apartments with her favourite lady-in-waiting, Julie Mengden. They were very close. The English Edward Finch noted: "A lover's passion for a new mistress is nothing compared to this". According to the Prussian Axel von Mardefeld, the late Tsarina had made Mengden undergo a rigorous examination, and the report was favourable "in that she is a girl in every part, without any appearance of maleness".

To her delight, a marriage was arranged between Anna's two favourites, Lynar and Mengden. Satisfying the two of them, Lynar allowed himself every licence and become more and more insolent. For a while, Anton Ulrich also fell in love with Julie Mengden, sharing his bed with her, too.



Anna would spend long hours lying in bed, get up late, hang about her private chambers, scantily dressed. It was said that she never bothered to fasten her clothes, unless she was attending a reception; that way, she could get out of her clothes more quickly, when her lover came to visit her. On July 26, 1741, Anna gave birth to a daughter, Yekaterina.

In the fall of 1741, officers of the Russian Imperial guard began to see a more acceptable ruler in Elizabeth (1709-1761), a daughter of Tsar Peter I "the Great" (1672-1725). One cold December night, Elizabeth, riding on a sledge over the snow, led the Petersburg guards regiment on to the Winter Palace. There, she woke the regent and her husband. No hands were raised in defence of Anna Leopoldovna (*right*) and she herself did not protest either. She merely begged that no harm should befall her little son Ivan. Elizabeth went into Ivan's room. Disturbed by the commotion, Ivan, lying in his cradle, draped with voile and lace, opened his eyes and started crying. Elizabeth picked up the infant in her arms, and

said loudly: "*Pour little dear, you are innocent! Your parents alone are guilty!*" She took little Ivan with her.

Coins, issued in the name of the Baby Tsar, were removed from circulation, and large numbers of papers with the oath of loyalty to him were publicly burned. Meanwhile, the Brunswick family was transported to Riga and incarcerated in its citadel. Elizabeth had intended to send the Brunswick family back to their Duchy, but a small revolt in their support made her realise that they would always be a threat to her reign.

In December 1742, they were instead imprisoned in the fortress of Dünamünde. In January 1744, the whole family was transported to the fortress of Ranenburg, southeast of Moscow. There, 3-year-old Ivan was separated from his family. Finally, in November of the same year, they all ended up in Cholmogory.

In captivity Anna Leopoldovna had finally learned to appreciate Anton Ulrich (*right*). As a result, she had given birth to 3 more children<sup>3</sup>. The youngest, Alexei, was born on March 10, 1746. On the 18th, Anna Leopoldovna died of puerperal fever at the age of 27. With much splendour, her remains were buried in the Alexander-Nevsky monastery.

Ex-Tsar Ivan remained separated from his family. Around 1756, as a teenager, Ivan was placed under strong guard in an isolated casemate of the island fortress Schlüsselburg in the Neva River. In the evenings, his jailers, the army officers Wlassjew and Tschekin, joined him for dinner, but Ivan was always kept out of sight of visitors. When he became excited, his warders were ordered to chain him to the wall.

By 1762, when Peter III (1728-1762), Elizabeth's unsuitable successor, visited him, Ivan had become - likely through *psychosocial deprivation* - an idiot. Peter III interviewed Ivan, possibly with the objective of naming him as his heir. The visit, however, showed that the pretender was in no shape for such a role. Ivan confided to Peter that he was not really Ivan, the man who had once been Tsar of Russia, but another man, an imposter; the real Ivan had been in heaven for years. Then Peter III sadistically ordered that if Ivan misbehaved by calling himself a Prince or angered his wardens, he was to be put in chains and beaten. When Peter was dethroned himself later that year, he was meant to be incarcerated at Schlüsselburg, too, but he was strangled before he could be transferred. Later that year Tsarina Catharine II "the Great" (1729-1796) went to see the "nameless convict" and she concluded that "*apart from his painful and almost unintelligible stammering, he was bereft of understanding and human intelligence*".

Ivan VI remained a prisoner of the Crown. As long as he lived, conspirators could use him as the figurehead of a plot to depose the reigning Tsarina. In this confinement, separated from his family, Ivan experienced *neither sunlight nor conversation*. He was dressed in rags and often hungry, and his wardens, escaping their boredom in drinking bouts, often ill-treated him. He never matured emotionally or mentally. He never saw his parents or siblings back.

On July 16, 1764,<sup>3</sup> an army officer named Vasily Mirovich tried to liberate Ivan. His guards did what they had long ago been instructed to do should anyone try to free him: they executed Ivan. Catherine II had his would-be liberator executed too. Ivan's death gave rise to a new wave of accusations against the Tsarina, claiming she now had murdered *two* Tsars.

In Cholmogory the widowed Anton Ulrich was allowed to play games of chess, but he was forbidden to teach his children to read or write. Every year, he wrote a letter to the Tsarina, pleading for the release of his remaining children, but his letters were largely ignored. Near the end of his life, Anton Ulrich suffered from rheumatism, swollen legs and scurvy. He gradually lost his sight. Thus, Anton Ulrich remained imprisoned until his death on May 15, 1776<sup>4</sup>.

Ivan's younger siblings were released and exiled<sup>5</sup> around 1780.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> This is a Gregorian date. In Russia the Julian calendar was used with - in the 18th century - a date 12 days earlier. <sup>2</sup> Ernst Johann Bühren, also Ernst Johann von Biron.

<sup>3</sup> Ivan's younger siblings were: Yekaterina (1741-1807), Elisabeth (1744-1782), Peter (1745-1798) and Alexei (1746-1787).

<sup>4</sup> Both May 15, 1776, and May 4, 1774, are mentioned in sources as Anton Ulrich's death date. I've taken the date mentioned in the most recently published sources.

<sup>5</sup> Ivan's younger siblings were exiled to Denmark. There they were watched over by their father's sister, Juliane Marie, widow of King Frederick V of Denmark and stepmother of *mad* King Christian VII of Denmark.

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## Иван VI Антонович

Иван VI Антонович (12.8.1740-5.7.1764), император Всероссийский (17.10.1740—25.11.1741). Сын генералиссимуса герцога Антона-Ульриха Брауншвейгского и мекленбургской принцессы Анны Леопольдовны, племянницы российской императрицы Анны Ивановны.

Манифестом Анны Ивановны от 16.10.1740 назначен наследником престола. После ее смерти и возведения на престол Ивана VI регентом до его совершеннолетия назначен по ее завещанию герцог Э.И. Бирон. В результате произведенного гвардией во главе с фельдмаршалом графом Б.Х. Минихом дворцового переворота 9.11.1740 Бирон был свергнут и арестован, регентшей при Иване VI манифестом от его имени назначена Анна Леопольдовна. В борьбе за власть различных придворных группировок Миних в марте 1741 уволен в отставку. Фактически управление государством оставалось в руках Кабинета министров (граф А И Остерман, канцлер князь А.М. Черкасский, вице-канцлер граф М.Г. Головкин, до марта 1741 также Миних).

Борьба в придворных кругах и недовольство гвардии и части дворянства немецким засильем при дворе привели к дворцовому перевороту 25.11.1741, возглавленному дочерью Петра I Елизаветой Петровной с помощью гвардии Иван VI был свергнут с престола Манифест о воцарении Елизаветы Петровны оправдывал акт переворота восстановлением династических прав, порядка в государстве и «желанием подданных». Последовал указ о высылке Ивана VI с семьей за границу, но в пути они были задержаны в Риге, откуда перевезены в крепость Динамюнде, в 1744 - в Раненбург Воронежской губернии, затем в село Холмогоры Архангельской губернии В Холмогорах Иван VI был отлучен от родителей и содержался в одиночестве. В 1756 тайно перевезен в Шлиссельбургскую крепость, где его имя держалось в секрете даже от коменданта, в официальных рапортах он назывался «безымянным колодником», не мог знать свое местонахождение.

Охрана Ивана VI подчинялась непосредственно Канцелярии тайных розыскных дел, после ее упразднения в 1762 - лично графу Н.И. Панину; охране запрещались любые сношения с внешним миром. При Елизавете переплавлялись монеты с изображением Ивана VI, переделывались печати на документах периода его царствования, сжигались манифесты и присяжные листы с его именем. При императоре Петре III, посетившем Ивана VI в марте 1762, его положение еще более ухудшилось; секретная инструкция от 1.1.1762 разрешала караульным офицерам применять к нему силу и сажать на цепь, а также предписывала в случае попытки его освобождения не выдавать его живым; последнее подтверждалось и инструкцией Панина охране Ивана VI от 3.8.1762 (по восшествии на престол Екатерины II, также посетившей узника в августе 1762).

Донесения охранявших Ивана VI в Шлиссельбурге офицеров свидетельствуют о знании им тайны своего происхождения, владении грамотой, о чтении церковных книг, об его исключительной памяти, хотя и отмечают при этом психическую неуравновешенность и агрессивное поведение.

Убит в ночь на 5.7.1764 охранявшими его капитаном Я. Власьевым и поручиком Л. Чекиным при попытке освобождения, предпринятой В.Я. Мировичем. Похоронен в Шлиссельбургской крепости. В 1780 остававшиеся в живых его братья и сестры (отец умер в 1774) высланы в Данию на попечение тетки, датской королевы; со смертью последней из них, Екатерины, в 1807 эта ветвь Брауншвейгской династии пресеклась. Было несколько самозванцев, выдававших себя за Ивана VI (последний - в 1788). Доступ к документам об Иване VI был открыт лишь в 1860-х гг.