

Ivan VI

- The 18th century in Russia is sometimes called “the era of palace coups.” Peter the Great himself came to power at the very end of the 17th century after a series of violent coups that left him and his half-brother, Ivan V, sharing the throne until Ivan’s death in 1696.
- Since Peter’s elder son, Alexei, was incapable of ruling, Peter changed the rules of succession: Henceforth, every monarch had to indicate a successor in his will.
- The first major crisis came in 1730 when Emperor Peter II (Peter the Great’s grandson) lay dying without designating his successor.
- There were five possible candidates for the throne: the three surviving daughters of Ivan V, namely Catherine (born 1691), Anna (born 1693) and Praskovya (born 1694), and the two surviving daughters of Peter the Great, namely Anna (born 1708) and Elizabeth (born 1709).
- After a violent internal court battle, the Russian Supreme Privy Council, led by Prince Dmitry Golitsyn decided the throne should go to the descendants of Peter the Great’s brother, Ivan V.

- That meant that next Empress should have been Catherine Ivanova, oldest surviving daughter of Ivan V.
- However, the Council decreed it would be Anne, daughter of Ivan V.
- Meanwhile, Peter's daughter, Elizabeth, was sent away from the court.
- Anne became Empress in 1730, and immediately started planning for her successor.
- Anne detested all of Peter the Great's kin, believing that Peter unjustly stole power from her father and was determined to have as her successor someone from her father's line.
- In 1730, Anne was 37, and apparently unable to conceive. So, she decided to "produce" a successor through her niece, Anna Leopoldovna, the daughter of the sister who arguably should have been Empress.



Father:

- **Anthony Ulrich**
- 28 August 1714 - 4. May 1774
- The second son of Ferdinand Albert II, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg and Princess Antoinette of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel.
- Two of his sisters became Queen of Prussia and Queen of Sweden and Denmark.
- His mother's sister, Elizabeth, wife of Charles VI, Holy Roman Emperor, arranged his marriage.

Mother:

- **Anna Leopoldovna** born **Elisabeth Katharina Christine von Mecklenburg-Schwerin**
- 18 December 1718 – 19 March 1746
- Only daughter of Karl Leopold, Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Tsarevna Catherine Ivanovna of Russia (20 October 1691 – 14 June 1733), who was herself daughter of Tsar Ivan V and niece of Peter the Great and elder sister to Empress Anna.

Marriage

- This marriage was intended to strengthen the relationships between the houses of Romanov and Habsburg.
- Anthony Ulrich was taken to Russia in 1733, so that he and Anna could get to know each other. The marriage took place in 1739.



- Grand Duchess Anna was the only niece of the childless Empress Anna of Russia, and the only granddaughter of Tsar Ivan V.
- She had lived in Russia almost all her life, and her husband had also made his home in that country moving there in 1733, marrying in 1739, in the expectation that they or their progeny would inherit the throne upon the death of the empress.
- On August 23, 1740, both Peter and Paul and Schlisselburg fortresses' cannons were firing, informing the citizens of St. Petersburg of the birth of the heir to the Russian throne — Ivan Antonovich.
- Ivan was officially adopted by his grand aunt and declared heir apparent. He was shown to the court and the public to prove that an heir existed. The young Mikhail Lomonosov wrote an ode to him.
- After her death in October 1740, the baby Ivan Antonovich became Emperor Ivan VI of Russia, the youngest Russian tsar in history, being proclaimed emperor when only two months old. The images of the baby emperor were distributed all over Europe.





Unknown artist, *Portrait of Ivan VI of Russia*, 1742, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

This newborn, Ivan, is dressed up with a cuirass and a saber hanging on his belt; a helmet can also be seen in the background.

It is thought this *Portrait of the Emperor Ivan Antonovich* was commissioned by his parents, his mother in particular. In this painting, you can see a baby sitting next to a cat. The little boy is clothed in a red Russian dress. His right hand is raised. Above it is the royal coat of arms and a cartouche with the inscription "Ioann Antonovich." The baby's left hand holds or is stroking the cat's ear. Below the cat is an inscription in German:



Unknown artist, *Portrait of the Emperor Ivan Antonovich*, circa 1743, private collection



Because of the mystery that shrouded Ivan's life, some portraits of other Romanov children are confused. This portrait is said to be Ivan Antonovich but it may be of Tsarevich Peter Petrovitch

- The Empress Anna also declared that her longtime lover and advisor, Ernst Johann von Biron, duke of Courland, would serve as regent until Ivan came of age.
- She had relied exclusively on Biron, who became for all practical purposes the ruler of the Empire. Biron's enemies and rivals were swept out of the way quite literally; he is said to have caused over 1000 executions and exiled 20,000–40,000 to Siberia .
- So, initially, Duke Ernst Johann von Biron was regent.
- Biron wielding power was not acceptable either to Ivan's parents nor to most of the nobility. During his years as Anna's lover he had made many enemies, and was tremendously unpopular at court. Within three weeks Ivan's father had engineered Biron's fall. Rumours surfaced that Biron planned on exiling Anthony and Anna to Germany. They staged a coup and at midnight on 18/19 November 1740 Biron was seized in his bedroom by partisans of the royal couple including his ancient rival, Field Marshal Münnich.
- He was banished to Siberia. Biron's regency had lasted exactly three weeks.
- Ivan's 22-year-old mother, Grand Duchess Anna Leonoldovna, took the





WELSH MUSEUM, LONDON 1841

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- However, the regency of Anna Leopoldovna was to last a very short time (October 1740- December 1741). She was too inexperienced to rule such a vast country and the influential Count Osterman really held the reins of state power. Osterman stood at the height of his power, and the French ambassador, Marquis de La Chetardie, reported to his court that "it is not too much to say that he is tsar of all Russia"
- Incidentally, Marquis de La Chétardie is recorded as demanding that Ivan VI be physically present on the throne while Chetardie read an official letter from his king. So little Ivan had to occupy the throne through the royal proceedings.
- When Marquis de la Chetardie had arrived in St. Petersburg as French Ambassador in 1739, he found all the key positions in the imperial administration in the hands of ethnic Germans. In order to counterbalance their influence, La Chetardie approached his compatriot, Count Lestocq, and the Swedish ambassador, who was preparing for war with Russia.
- Their complex manoeuvring resulted in the coup which made Peter the Great's daughter Elizabeth the new Empress.



- So barely one year of Ivan's reign had passed before Tsarevna Elisabeth Petrovna (the daughter and only surviving child of Peter the Great) seized the throne.
- On the night of Nov. 25,(Dec 6th) 1741 in the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The reign of the youngest Russian emperor ended when Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, is said to have entered the bedroom of Ivan's parents, accompanied by soldiers of the royal guard.
- "It's time to get up, sister!" shouted Elizabeth to Ivan's mother and regent, Anna, while the guards, loyal to Peter's daughter, were sent to detain Anton Ulrich, Ivan's father, and the baby himself.
- Elizabeth forbade the guards to scare the little emperor, so they waited for an hour at his cradle before the 1-year old boy opened his eyes and cried at the sight of soldiers. "Little one, you're guilty of nothing!" said Elizabeth when Ivan was brought to her. The soldiers were not so careful with his four-month sister Catherine. They dropped her on the floor, which deafened the girl for the rest of her life.
- Elizabeth left the Winter Palace with the boy in her lap, but she didn't know what to do with Ivan, who was the only person with a legitimate right to the Russian throne.

- Elizabeth originally thought merely to exile the Brunswick family to Europe and at this point the family were detained at Riga.
- Her advisers, however, knew a legitimate heir could become a weapon in the wrong hands and lead to another coup. So it was decided to keep the Brunswicks in Russia.
- Consequently, in December 1742, Ivan and his parents and siblings were moved to Dünamünde castle. The siblings all of whom were born in prison were Catherine Antonovna of Brunswick (1741–1807), Elizabeth Antonovna of Brunswick (1743–1782), Peter Antonovich of Brunswick (1745–1798) and Alexei Antonovich of Brunswick (1746–1787)
- In June 1744, following the Lopukhina Affair, the Empress transferred Ivan to Kholmogory on the White Sea where, isolated from his family and seeing no one other than his jailer, he remained for the next twelve years. His parents and siblings were also here but not aware that Ivan was here as well.
- When news of his confinement at Kholmogory circulated more widely, young Ivan was secretly transferred to the fortress of Shlisselburg (1756) where he was still more rigorously guarded, not even the commandant of the fortress knowing the true identity of "a certain prisoner".

- It was forbidden to mention Ivan's name. All books and coins with images of Ivan, and even copies of Lomonosov's ode, were ferreted out and destroyed. By 1745, possession of such items was a crime against the state. Even in official proceedings, papers relating to Ivan were referred to as "documents under a certain title."
- In 1746, Ivan's Mother, Anna Leopoldovna, died and was buried with ceremony in St. Petersburg as a member of the imperial family.
- In 1756, when news of Ivan's confinement at Kholmogory circulated more widely, young Ivan was secretly transferred to the fortress of Schlisselburg where he was still more rigorously guarded, not even the commandant of the fortress knowing the true identity of "a certain prisoner" and guards were forbidden to speak with him.
- From that time on, Ivan was called Grigory or *arestant* (prisoner), and he was forbidden to write.
- These guards were also in solitary confinement because they were unable to leave for fear of them telling others where Ivan was being held.
- Upon the accession of Peter III in 1762, Ivan's situation seemed about to improve, for the new emperor visited and sympathized with his plight.
- Yet another coup and Peter himself was deposed a few weeks later.



- In 1762, Catherine the Great visited Ivan in his cell and saw that he was mentally disturbed, but with far more right to the throne than she, he remained a threat.
- Still more stringent orders were sent to the officer in charge of "the nameless one"; if any attempt were made from outside to release him, the prisoner was to be put to death. Under no circumstances was he to be delivered alive into anyone's hands, without an express written order in the Empress' handwriting. By this time twenty years of solitary confinement had disturbed Ivan's mental equilibrium, though he does not seem to have been actually insane.
- The guards reported that the prisoner was in constant anxiety, "complaining about malicious witchcraft against himself," and springing to an upright position during his sleep at the slightest noise. Having spent all his life in confinement, he needed help with everything.
- Nevertheless, despite the mystery surrounding him, he was well aware of his imperial origin and always called himself Gosudar (Sovereign). Instructions had been given not to educate him, but he had been taught his letters and could read his Bible.
- But since his presence at Schlisselburg could not remain concealed forever, its eventual discovery was the cause of his demise.

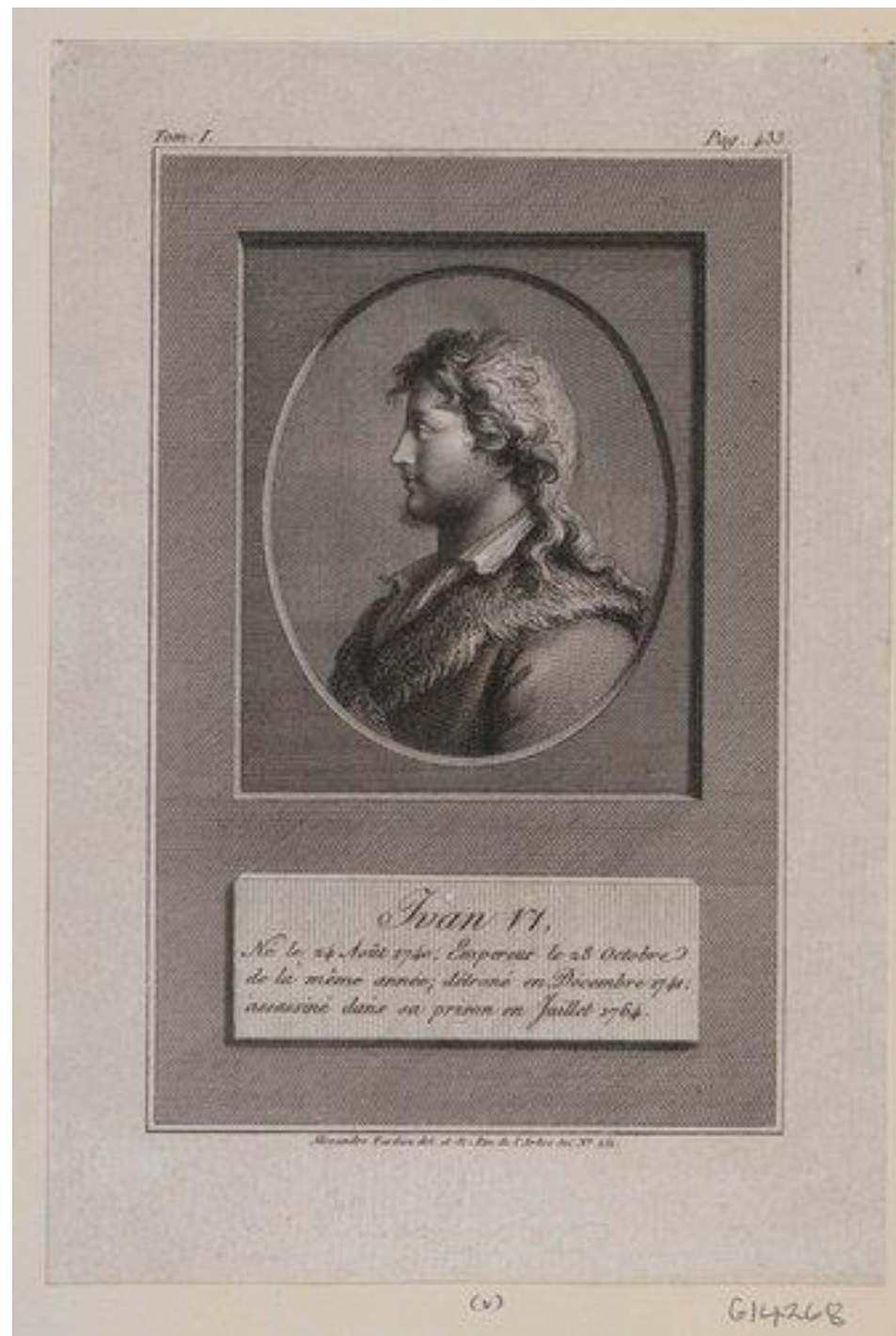
- The end came at midnight on 5th July 1764 when Vasily Mirovich, a sub-lieutenant of the garrison, made a desperate attempt to free Ivan.
- Mirovich had learned of Ivan's identity and formed a plan for freeing and proclaiming him Emperor. He won over some of the garrison, arrested the commandant, Berednikov, and demanded the release of Ivan.
- His jailers, on orders of their commander, an officer surnamed Chekin, immediately murdered Ivan in compliance with the secret instructions already in their possession.
- Mirovich and his supporters were arrested and executed.
- Ivan was buried quietly somewhere in Schlisselburg.
- The question that remains unanswered is whether Catherine conspired to instigate Mirovich's attempt to free Ivan, and thus eliminate the unfortunate heir, who was one of the few people that the almighty empress feared.

Painting:
*Mirovich Standing
over the Corpse of
Ivan VI* (1884)
by Ivan
Tvorozhnikov





Portrait of Ivan VI Romanov (St Petersburg, 1740 - Slisselburg, 1764), Tsar of Russia, engraving. Russia, 18th century.



Ivan VI (Emperor of Russia, Son of Elisabeth, Duchess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, Great-grandson of Ivan V, Emperor of Russia)

PIERRE ALEXANDRE TARDIEU (1756-1844)
The Royal Collection Trust

The family of Ivan VI

- When in 1762, Empress Elizabeth died, the new Empress Catherine offered the Duke permission to leave Russia, with the condition he leave his children behind; but he declined.
- He lost his eyesight before he died in 1774. He was buried secretly and the soldiers were forbidden to reveal the place of his burial, but his coffin was decorated with silver.
- In 1780, the surviving children, who had been born in prison, were released from prison into the custody of their aunt, the Danish queen dowager Juliana Maria of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel.
- They were taken to Novodvinsk fortress the night of 27 June and left Russia on 30 June. They settled in Jutland, where they lived in under a comfortable house arrest in Horsens for the rest of their lives, under the guardianship of Juliana and at the expense of Catherine.
- General Melgunoff, visited the family after Ivan's death, at Catherine the Great's request, and stated that Ivan's siblings lived peacefully and in friendship: even though they often needed the most necessary things. Despite the isolation and hardships of imprisonment, members of the Brunswick family were said to be kind, shy, and sincere.
- Having lived as prisoners, they were not used to social life, and kept a small "court" of 40/50 people, all Danish except for the priest. The pension granted them by Catherine was paid until the last of them died in 1807