

Grigory Rasputin

January 10, 1869 – December 16, 1916

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Grigory Rasputin, a wandering peasant who eventually exerted a powerful influence over Nicholas II and Aleksandra, the last Tsar and Tsarina of Imperial Russia, is one of the most mysterious and dark individuals of Russian history.

Grigory Rasputin was born 10 January 1869 in the small and remote Siberian village of Pokrovskoe. Even as a young man he astonished people; there was talk about him having visions and the ability to heal. According to one legend, one day Rasputin was lying in bed sick when a group of peasants walked in to find out who had stolen a horse. Grigory rose from his bed and pointed at the thief among them. The insulted peasant denied it, and Grigory was beaten. That night, two wary peasants followed the suspect and saw him leading the horse out of his shed and into the forest. Rasputin gained a reputation as a visionary, although some were scared of the boy and thought he was possessed by the devil. It was a time and place where all possible magic and healing powers were a way of life. Grigory himself thought that he was taken over by a higher force. He was also a drunk, got into fights and harassed women. He got married when he was around twenty and had four children.

Even before his arrival in St. Petersburg in 1903, the city was agog with mysticism and **aristocrats** were obsessed with anything occult. Rasputin met Bishop Theophan, who was at first shocked by Rasputin's dirty look and strong smell, but he was nonetheless mesmerized by the 'holy' man and shortly introduced him to the Montenegrin princesses, Militsa and Anastasia, who also fell under his spell. He was then introduced by the sisters to Nicholas II and Aleksandra (the Tsar and Tsarina). Aleksandra was impressed by him straight away and he became a regular visitor to the palace; she spent hours talking to him about religion. Rasputin would tell her that she and the Tsar needed to be closer to their people, that they should see him more often and trust him, because he would not betray them, to him they were equal to God, and he would always tell them the truth, not like the ministers, who don't care about people and their tears. These kinds of words touched Aleksandra deeply; she absolutely believed that he was sent to the royal family by God, to protect the dynasty. To her, Rasputin was the answer to their hopes and prayers.

The Tsar and Tsarina shared with him their concerns and worries, most importantly, over their son Aleksey's (the only male heir to the throne) health. He suffered from hemophilia. Rasputin was the only one who was able to actually help their son, how he did it will always remain a mystery, but Aleksey got better. The palace governor wrote in his memoirs: "From the first time that Rasputin appeared at the heir's bed, he got better. Everybody at court remembers the episode in Spala, when no doctor could help the suffering and moaning child, but as soon as a telegram was sent to Rasputin, and they received an answer that the

boy would not die, his pain eased straight away.” Everyone who met Rasputin remarked on his eyes and how hypnotic they were. Elena Dzhanumova wrote in her diary: “What eyes he has! You cannot endure his gaze for long. There is something difficult in him, it is like you can feel the physical pressure, even though his eyes sometimes glow with kindness, but how cruel can they be and how frightful in anger...”

Nicholas also trusted Rasputin. He became his advisor whose one word was enough to place an unknown person as a minister at court. But Nicholas sometimes decided government questions of a higher scale by himself. Rasputin was strongly against the First World War (1914 - 1918) and tried to convince the Tsar to make peace with Germany, but Nicholas held his ground and took Russia to war, which was a disaster for his country, with more than four million Russians losing their lives.

Rasputin lived in an apartment on Gorohovaya Street. There, peasants and aristocrats came to visit him. Peasants and the city's poor worshiped Rasputin and believed in his holiness and sometimes asked for help and money, and aristocrats, knowing his influence at court, visited him only to gain his favor and use it for their career growth or just because it was 'fashionable.' He also preached and entertained.

In December 1916 Rasputin sent a letter to Nicholas about his own death: “I feel that I shall leave life before January 1st. I wish to make known to the Russian people, to Papa (the Tsar), to the Russian Mother (the Tsarina) and to the Children what they must understand. If I am killed by common assassins, and especially by my brothers the Russian peasants, you, the Tsar of Russia, will have nothing to fear for your children, they will reign for hundreds of years. But if I am murdered by boyars, nobles, and if they shed my blood, their hands will remain soiled with my blood for twenty-five years and they will leave Russia. Brothers will kill brothers, and they will kill each other and hate each other, and for twenty-five years there will be no peace in the country. The Tsar of the land of Russia, if you hear the sound of the bell which will tell you that Grigory has been killed, you must know this: if it was your relations who have wrought my death, then none of your children will remain alive for more than two years. And if they do, they will beg for death as they will see the defeat of Russia, see the Antichrist coming, plague, poverty, destroyed churches, and desecrated sanctuaries where everyone is dead. The Russian Tsar, you will be killed by the Russian people and the people will be cursed and will serve as the devil's weapon killing each other everywhere. Three times for 25 years they will destroy the Russian people and the orthodox faith and the Russian land will die. I shall be killed. I am no longer among the living. Pray, pray, be strong, and think of your blessed family.”

Rasputin was mostly hated among the nobles, especially Nicholas's family members. He appeared to them as a drunk, a dirty man who infiltrated his way into the royal family, who appointed and dismissed ministers, and for over ten years was the central figure in Petersburg's scandal news and at the same time ruled over the Tsar in some strange way. Prince Felix Yusupov (husband of the Tsar's niece Irina) wanted him dead

and wasn't alone. The Tsar's cousin, Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich, and Vladimir Purishkevich, a member of parliament wished to get rid of Rasputin and his demonic influence. The three invited Rasputin to the Yusupov Palace on December 30, 1916 to meet the Tsar's niece. While waiting for her to appear, Rasputin was offered wine and his favorite cakes laced with a tremendous amount of cyanide. Hours went by and the poison did not affect Rasputin. Dismay and fear came over Yusupov who reached for his gun and shot Rasputin. Everyone was sure that it was the end of him, but miraculously he staggered out of the palace. Vladimir Purishkevich ran after Rasputin and shot him again in the back, but it was only when they threw his body into the Neva River that he died. Just ten weeks after his death, the Romanov dynasty was overthrown during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Less than two years later, Nicholas and his entire family were executed.

The topic of Rasputin to this day comes up in literature, cinema and even music. More recently in Fox's animated film, "Anastasia," Rasputin is portrayed as the traitor monk who casts a curse on the Romanov family. Rasputin aroused different feelings in the people who surrounded him. Some felt fear, others deep veneration, and still others hatred - and even now the attitude towards him is ambiguous. He's either a holy miracle worker or a charlatan.

1. Where was Rasputin born?
2. Aleksandra took a liking to Rasputin right away. What was it that they would discuss together?
3. Though Tsar Nicholas trusted Rasputin, they disagreed on what major decision?
4. How did World War I go for Russia?
5. In 1916 Rasputin prophesied his own death. What did he say that outcome would be if he was killed by common assassins?
6. What did he predict would happen if he was killed by a member of the Tsar's family?
7. Why did the nobles dislike Rasputin?
8. What was the first way Rasputin's enemies tried to kill him?
9. What was the second way they tried?
10. How did he finally die?
11. What happened to the royal family after Rasputin's death?