



## ABASKŪN

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**ABASKŪN** (ĀBASKŪN), a port of the medieval period on the southwest shore of the Caspian Sea in Gorgān province. Perhaps it should be connected with the Sōkanda river in ancient Hyrcania mentioned by Ptolemy (*Geographia* 6.9.2.). It seems to have been at or near the mouth of the Gorgān river (the Herand river in *Hodūd al-ālam*). According to Swedish archeologists “Abaskun should be identified with Gumüş Tepe with its wealth of ruins” (T. J. Arne, *Excavations*, p. 16).

The Arab geographers place the city at one or three days’ journey from the town of Gorgān. It was certainly a populous and flourishing port in pre-Mongol times, the most prosperous one on the Caspian Sea (which was sometimes called Baḥr Abaskūn), from where ships and merchants traded to Daylam, Darband, and the Khazar lands on the lower Volga. The *Hodūd al-ālam* (p. 134) mentions among its products shagreen, woolen cloth, and various kinds of fish; and it was also famed for seabirds’ feathers, used for decorating garments. In the 4th/10th century it possessed a citadel built of fired brick and a congregational mosque in the market quarter. Its position made it vulnerable to attack by the Rūs or Viking raiders through the Caspian. The historians record that in 297/909-10 and the following year the Rūs landed in Gorgān, pillaging Abaskūn and Sārī and carrying off Muslims as slaves, till the people of Daylam drove them off and the Šīrvānšāh of eastern Transcaucasia destroyed their ships (Ebn Esfandiār, p. 199). However, a further raid took place at some time after 300/912-13, when Abaskūn and Bākū and all the southern shores of the Caspian were attacked and the Rūs



penetrated into Azarbaijan as far as Ardabīl (Mas'ūdī, *Morūj* II, pp. 20-21) In 612/1220 the fugitive K̄vārazmšāh 'Alā'-al-dīn Moḥammad fled from Hamadān before the Mongol invaders and hid on an island close to Abaskūn, perhaps one of the Ašorāda (q.v.) group of islands, where he soon afterwards died (Nasavī, Jovaynī, Ebn al-Aṭīr; cf. W. Barthold, *Turkestan* <sup>3</sup>, p. 426). Thereafter Abaskūn drops out of mention; Mostawfī, writing in the 8th/14th century, says that Abaskūn was actually an island which had in his time disappeared beneath the Caspian, since the sea had risen through the increase in waters caused by the Oxus' temporarily changing its course and flowing into the Caspian instead of the Aral Sea (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, tr., pp. 231-32)

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