



ASTRAKHAN

ASTRAKHAN (Tatar and Persian *Ḥājjī Tarḵān*, also *Ādarḵān*, *Haštarkān*, and *Aštarakān*), a town (Russian since 1556) at 46° 21' north latitude and 48° 2' east longitude. It lies on the river Volga, about 100 km from the delta on the Caspian Sea, in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. Astrakhan is 22 m below sea level and 4-7 m above the level of the Caspian; it shows great temperature fluctuations. The town has a river port 30 km long, as well as a seaport and an airport. In 1897 the population was 113,000 (among them 12,000 Persians and 6,200 Armenians); in 1939 253,655; in 1965, 332,000; and in 1970, 411,000 (mostly Russians, some Tatars, Bashkirs, and Kalmyks, and a few Armenians). Astrakhan is an important industrial town with an extensive fishing and caviar business and a port—which, however, is subject to silting, as is the Volga canal to the Caspian. The major cargo in Astrakhan is petroleum, mostly from Baku, which is handled at the roadsteads in the Caspian about 200 km south of the town. At the beginning of the twentieth century some 4,215 ships from the Caspian Sea and around, 1,775 from the Volga reached Astrakhan yearly. Astrakhan has been, next to Baku the leading Russian port for receiving goods (chiefly cotton and fruit) from Iran.

Ebn Baṭṭūṭa (Paris, II, pp. 410-12) mentions the town for the first time in 1333. He says it had been founded by a noble who made the pilgrimage to Mecca, hence the name *Ḥājjī Tarḵān*. It was situated then on a hill some 11 km above the modern center of town. The Genoese merchants in the Crimea called it Citracano. Islamic coins from Astrakhan are attested from 1374-75. Tīmūr destroyed the town in 1395. In 1466, with the decline of the Golden Horde,



Astrakhan became the capital of an independent Tatar khanate which fell into Russian hands, first in 1554 and finally in 1556-57. Since then the town has stood on the present site. In 1569 the Ottomans tried to free the town but failed. After that the Russians built there a fortress (*kremľ*) between 1589 and 1692 and walled the town. Wine-grapes began to be grown around Astrakhan after 1613. During the seventeenth century Astrakhan suffered from earthquakes, as well as from several attacks by neighboring peoples, especially Tatars. In 1667-68 it was in the hands of the rebellious Cossack leader Sten'ka Razin, who staged his raids on Gīlān from there. In 1705 an insurrection of the Russian troop (*strel'tsy*) was put down. From 1717 to 1785 and again after 1832 Astrakhan was the capital of a Russian governmental district (*Gouvernement*). In 1772 Peter the Great founded here a military port for his enterprises against Gīlān and Central Asia. Only in 1867 were the military port and the admiralty transferred to Baku. By the end of the nineteenth century Astrakhan had six mosques for Shi'ites and one for Sunnites, three *madrasas* and three *maktabs* (for Tatars). A university has existed in Astrakhan since 1919.

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