

A Daughter of a Greek Deity and a Legendary Hero

Sfax in Greek Mythology

The Tunisian city Sfax is called after the name of the historic leader Sevaks (Sufax or Sefax). Sufax is one of the heroes of mythology. The name is also associated with Greek beliefs as Sufax appears in the Greek mythology as the son of the deity Tinja Aotengjis who was at first the wife of the legendary hero A'ante (Antallos or Ante in the Amazigh language). Antallos was in charge of protecting the Amazigh land. He was only defeated by deceit, as the poet Bindas tells us when he comments on the defeat of Ante by the Greek hero Hercules. After the death of Ante, Tinga, a widow, remained without a partner. Then, she married with Hercules (or Herakles) after dealing and trading with him. As a result of this coupling, she gave birth to a son named Sefax who became later a hero of the Amazighs through defending their land. He was also considered as the father of whom most of the Amazigh kings are descendants.

The Tangiers legend tells that Sefax had built the city of Tangiers and gave it the name of his mother Tinja.

Diodoros, a son of Sufax, formed the city of Maysina retained by his grandfather Hercules supported in his action by a Greek army composed of Olympian soldiers. He was able to subjugate several African tribes. According to the Greek writer Plutarch, who narrated these stories, the myths were recounted to glorify and build up the esteem of the Numidic Amazigh King Yuba I, who considered himself as the son of Diodoros and grandchild of Sefax. The Tunisian city was founded in 849 A.D. on the ruins of two ancient Roman villages (Tabrorah and Tina). By the tenth century, Sefax became a state city. Then, it became under the reign of Roger of Sicily who occupied it in 1148, and remained so, until it was liberated by local forces in 1156. Spaniards occupied Sfax for a short period in the sixteenth century. Then, Venice attempted to occupy it in 1785, however, that attempt failed. In 1804, the city entered, along with countries of the Barbaric Sahel (coast), into a war with the United States. France occupied it in the first half of the 19th century. During the Second World War, the Axis nations seized Sfax as a major base until they were defeated by the British troops. After the Second World War, Tunisia was once again under French colonialism. The North African country got its independence only in 1956.

There are a number of historical monuments that date back to the Aghlabite era when Sfax was exploited as a port city. Around the Old City (Medina), a huge wall of fitted with giant towers stands currently and can be accessed through the Eddiwan gate. There is also the Great Mosque surrounded with the jewellery and Sabbaghin Streets. The Museum of Sfax is located in front of the city hall and Dar Al-jalouli; it is a marvelous palace built in the eighteenth century in the Bey Street and it hosts an interesting folklore museum.

The Medina is surrounded by a towering wall fitted with old gates such as Bab Ejibli, bab Eddiwan and Bab al-Kasabah. It is a highly active commercial city which hosts loads of traditional handicrafts. Urbanization is expanding rapidly Sfax. The city is expanding at a rapid pace outside the walls of the Medina and more particularly to the west. Parts



of the city of Sfax are Sukra, Menzel Shaker, Grimdah, Al-ain, Al-Afran, Tanyour, Sidi Mansour, Sakiyat Ezzit, Sakiyat Eddayer, Gayed M'hamed, Hay Ennour and Al-awabid.

Sfax is characterized by its hemispherical plan. We find the Medina in the centre, from where 15 known routes bifurcate from north to south: Sidi Mansour, Habana, Essaltia, Al-mahdia, Tunis, tanyour, Gayed M'hamed, (Then Buzayan) Grimdah, Al-Afran, Al-ain, Menzel Shaker (or Atya road), Agarib road, Su-



kra, and M'harza routes. Sidi Mansour is a small coastal town located about 14 kilometers north-east of the city. It was called so for hosting the tomb of the spiritual leader Sidi Mansour who is said to be a black man.

The road linking this town with the city centre, as well as the summer theatre located on this road bear the name of Sidi Mansour. The Summer Theatre hosts each year the Sfax International Festival. The Tunisian city is mostly a residential area with some industrial zones that include the Olive oil factories in Grimdah. Tourist facilities, like hotels and restaurants, are spread in the city centre and in the two coastal towns (Sidi Mansour and Alchaffar).

In earlier times, the city's economy was based primarily on olive oil, fishing and phosphate. Since 1960, light industries have sprouted and the services sector has developed. Despite this development, agriculture and the industry of olive oil continue to occupy a significant position in the economy of the region as farm lands stretch over 90% of the area of the governorate.

Sfax produces 40% of the Tunisian olive oil output and 30% of the almonds harvest. It is, hence, considered as one of the most important governorates in the country. Bir Ali Ben Khalifa ranks as the first globally as far as the production of bio-olives is considered.

Concerning the energy sector, Sfax has Mscar field of natural gas, which has a reserve estimated at some 22.7 billion cubic meters. The field extends over an area of 352 sq/kms. The annual production is estimated at 1.18 million tons.

The labour force in Sfax is distributed as follows: agriculture and fisheries (25.3%), services (25.6%) and industry (24.4%). The governorate of Sfax is considered as the economic capital of Tunisia. It is the second most important industrial city in the country; the main products are phosphate, wool, and leather. It is also characterized by the cultivation of olive, almond and fishing.

The port of Sfax, founded in 1905, is one of the oldest ports of Tunisia, and comes second in importance. The amount of goods exported amount to two million tons while the amount of imported materials may reach three million tons. The port is teeming with thousands of small and large well-equipped boats used for fishing on the city coasts and near the Islands of Kerkena. The region is especially famous for octopus. Sfax is the pearl of the Gulf of Gabes (the old Sirtes Gulf as it was called before). It lies in the eastern part of the country and is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea. To the south-east of the city, the island of Djerba lies, and to the north-east, we find the islands of Kerkena. Among the most important cities in the Gulf are the cities of Gabes and Sfax.

Sfax, covering an area of 7,545 sq/kms (that is 4.6% of the total area of the country), was declared Governorate on June 21st, 1956. Its population was estimated at 881,600 inhabitants in 2006, (and thus it ranks as the second governorate in terms of population number subsequent to the capital Tunis). Sfax is divided administratively into 16 districts (including Kerkena) and 126 Chieftaincies. There are also 16 municipalities in this governorate. Sfax derives its commercial and economic importance from its distinctive geographical location and its 235 km-long coastline, as well as the large port that has enabled it to contribute significantly to the national and international economic exchange.