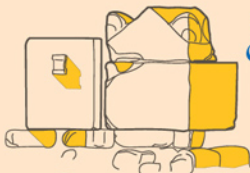


Sidon



Sidon, (Saidoon being the Phoenician name, Saida in Arabic), on the coast 45 kilometers south of Beirut, is one of the most famous names in ancient history. The largest city in south Lebanon, Sidon is a busy commercial center with the pleasant, conservative atmosphere of a small town. The old town is a typical medina with its bazaars, khans, hammams and mosques etc .... Since Persian times this was known as the city of gardens and even today it is surrounded by citrus and banana plantations.

## A Long and Glorious History

There is evidence that Sidon was inhabited as long ago as 4000 B.C. and perhaps as early as Neolithic times (6000-4000 B.C.). The ancient city was built on a promontory facing an island, which sheltered its fleet



The sea castle

from storms and served as a refuge during military incursions from the interior. Sidon is said to have surpassed all other Phoenician city states in terms of religious significance...

Sidon's Phoenician period began in the 12th century B.C. and reached its height during the Persian Empire (550-330 B.C.). The city provided Persia, a great land power, with the ships and seamen to fight the Egyptians and Greeks, a role that gave it a highly favored position. The Persians maintained a royal park in Sidon and it was during this time that the temple of Eshmoun was built.

Glass manufacturing was Sidon's most important enterprise in the Phoenician era, being conducted on a vast scale along with the production of purple dye being almost as important. The small shell of the Murex trunculus was broken in order to extract the purple pigment that was so rare and became the mark of royalty.

Like other Phoenician city states, Sidon suffered from a succession of conquerors. At the end of the Persian era in 351 B.C., unable to resist the superior forces of the emperor Artaxerxes III, the desperate Sidonians locked their gates and set fire to their city rather than submit to the invader. More than 40,000 died in the conflagration. After this disaster the city was too weak to oppose the triumphal march of Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.; it sued for peace and the Hellenistic age of Sidon began.

Under the successors of Alexander, Sidon, the "holy city" of Phoenicia, enjoyed relative freedom and organized games and competitions in which the greatest athletes of the region participated.

When Sidon, like the other cities of Phoenicia, fell under Roman domination, it continued to mint its own silver coins. The Romans also built a theater and other major monuments in the city. During the Byzantine period when the great earthquake of 551 A.D. destroyed most of



Sidon Harbor

the cities of Phoenicia, Beirut's School of Law took refuge in Sidon. The town continued quietly for the next century, until it was conquered by the Moslems in 636.

In 1111 Sidon was besieged and stormed by the Crusader Baldwin, who was soon to become king of Jerusalem. Under Frankish rule, the city became the chief town of the Seigniorie of Sagette and the second of the four baronies of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Sidon surrendered to Saladin in 1187, but it was re-occupied when the Crusader Templars recaptured it briefly. They abandoned it for good in 1291, after the fall of Acre to the Mamluk forces.

In the 15th century, Sidon was one of the ports of Damascus and it flourished once more during the 17th century when it was rebuilt by Fakhreddine II, then ruler of Lebanon. Under his protection and encouragement, French merchants set up profitable business enterprises in Sidon for trade between France and Syria. By the beginning of the 19th century, however, Sidon was relatively obscure and remained so until the mid-20th century when it developed into an important commercial and agricultural center.





### The Historic City

- 1- The Sea Castle
- 2- Khan el Franj
- 3- Bab el Saray Mosque
- 4- Abou Nakhleh Mosque
- 5- El Kikhia Mosque
- 6- Hammam el Sheikh
- 7- Hammam el Ward
- 8- The Great Mosque
- 9- Emir Fakhr Eddine Palace
- 10- St. Elias Maronite Church
- 11- Batah Mosque
- 12- Hammam el Sabeh Banat
- 13- The Audi Soap factory
- 14- St. Nicolas Church
- 15- The Debbaneh Palace
- 16- Khan el Ruz
- 17- Qalaat el Muizz
- 18- The Murex Hill

Plan of Sidon

Plan of the site: Asaad Seif

## Archaeological Excavations

Early French excavations led by Ernest Renan in the late 19th century uncovered the large necropolis of Magharat Abloun outside the city. The royal necropolis at nearby Ayaa and Ain el-Helwe were found, by Hamdi Bey, shortly thereafter.

In 1937 Middle Bronze Age tombs were opened in several mountain villages overlooking Sidon and at this time a number of archaeological surveys were conducted in and around the city. Since 1998 Claude Doumit Serhal with the D.G.A and the British Museum have begun archeological excavations unearthing remains and items dating back to the Bronze Age.

## Sidon Today

Sidon is famous for a variety of local sweets which you can watch being made in the old souk or in shops on the main street. The particular speciality of Sidon is known as "senioura", a delicious crumbly cookie.

A growing city with a modern seaport, Sidon is the South's commercial and financial center. The commercial port, the third largest in Lebanon, accommodates small freighters.

## Visiting the Sites

The old section of modern Sidon developed at the end of the Crusader period. Here the visitor will enjoy wandering along the sea front to the Crusader sea castle and looking around the old souks, khans (caravansaries) and other medieval remnants.

**The Sea Castle (1):** It is a fortress built by the Crusaders in the early 13th century on a small island connected to the mainland by a causeway. A climb to the top leads to the roof where there is a good view of the port and the old part of the city. Today the castle consists primarily of two towers connected by a wall. In the outer walls, Roman columns were used as horizontal reinforcements, a feature often seen in fortifications built on or near former Roman sites. The west tower is the better preserved of the two.

Old prints of the fortress show it to be one of great beauty, but little remains of the embellishments that one decorated its ramparts. After the fall of Acre to the Mamluk all the sea castles were destroyed to prevent the Crusaders from re-establishing footholds on the coast.

**The Resthouse** on the waterfront next to the castle offers good food and refreshments. Situated in a restored medieval building, the Resthouse is set in a landscaped seaside terrace.

**Old Ports.** The ancient Egyptian Port, so called because it faced south towards Egypt. An active harbor in phoenician times, it has silted up over the centuries.



*Khan el Franj*

Today the North channel harbor is used only for local fishing boats because Fakhreddine filled it in, during the 17th century, to deny entry to the Turkish fleet.

**The Souks.** Between the Sea Castle and the St. Louis Castle, stretches the old town. In the picturesque vaulted souk of Sidon, workmen still ply their trades. On the edge of the souk is a traditional coffee house where male clientele meet to smoke the narguileh (water pipe) and drink Turkish coffee.

**The Rice Caravanserail (16):** built during the reign of Fakhreddine II, it was used as a lodge for travelers and as rice dump for rice imported from Egypt.

**Khan el Franj (2):** It is one of the many khans or caravansaries built by Fakhreddine II for merchants and goods. This is a typical khan with a large rectangular courtyard and a central fountain surrounded by covered galleries. The ground floor would have been used as workshops, storehouses and stables while the upper floor served as living quarter. The center of economic activity for the city of the 19th

century, the khan also housed the French consulate. Today it is being renovated by Hariri foundation to serve as Sidon's cultural and social center. The former stables are used for occasional exhibitions.

**Qalaat El Muizz (17):** or The Castle of St. Louis. The Castle of St. Louis was erected on the emplacement of a Fatimid fortress, during the Crusade led by French King Louis IX, popularly known as St. Louis. Built in the mid-13th century, the present state of the castle makes it easy to observe various stages of the restoration carried out in the Mamluk era, particularly work done in the 17th century by Emir Fakhreddine II. At the foot of the hill, Roman columns are scattered on the ground.

**Murex Hill (18).** (100 meters long and 50 meters high) was formed by the accumulation of refuse from the purple dye factories of Phoenician times. Mosaic tiling found at the top of the mound, suggests that Roman buildings were erected there. The hill today is covered by houses and buildings as well as a cemetery. Broken murex shells can still be seen on the lower part of the hill, but because of extensive construction, it is increasingly inaccessible to the public.

**The Necropolis of Sidon:** The three main necropolis of Sidon lie beyond the ancient city limits and were in use until the late Roman and early Christian era and are: the necropolis of Magharat Abloun and



*Sarcophagus*

the royal necropolis of Ayaa which yielded masterpieces now on display at Istanbul museum; the present village of Helalie and the necropolis of Ain el Helwe to the southeast yielded the antroipoid sarcophagi exhibited at the National Museum in Beirut. Located in what are now residential areas, no excavations are in progress at any of these sites.

South of the city an ancient cemetery known as Dekerman was used until this century. It is also an archaeological site, with an extensive collection of objects, mostly sarcophagi and tombs in situ, as well as fragments, inscriptions and sculptures. A number of circular Chalcolithic (4000 B.C.) foundations can also be seen here.

## THE MOSQUES

**The Great Mosque (8).** South of the souk on the way to the Castle of St. Louis, is the Great Mosque, formerly the Church of St. John of the Hospitalers... affected by time and war, it had been restored between 1983-86 and received in 1989 the prestigious Agha Khan Award for Architecture. The four walls of this rectangular building, date to the 13th century. Originally a fortress-like Crusader compound with its own chapel, it is still an imposing structure, especially viewed from the seaside.

**Bab Al Saray Mosque (3):** so called because of its vicinity to the saray of Fakhreddine II. It is one of the oldest mosques of Sidon, built in 1201. It is endowed with a large dome and its vaults are carried by huge arches.

**Abou Nakhleh Mosque (4):** it was built as a soufi zawiya. It is endowed with a little minaret cast according to Moroccan architectural style.

**Kikhia Mosque (5):** built by Kitkhida Mustafa in 1624 AD. Famous for its six domes and its four columns decorated with geometrical patterns. The





*The Great Mosque el Omari*

Minbar is built in white and blue marble stone. At the yard side one can see the Dervish rooms.

#### THE CHURCHES

**Saint Nicolas Cathedral (14):** The church was first built during the 8th century, but the actual feature is from 1690. A wall divides it into two parts with the catholic part now closed. At the entrance of the Bishopric we can see the room in which rested St Paul and where he, according to tradition, met St Peter.

**The Maronite saint Elias church (10):** basically a soap factory complex turned in 1616 into a church.

**The Greek Catholic Bishopric:** built in 1924, possibly over the Mithraum location (The Temple of the God Mithra).

#### HAMMAMS

**The Sheikh Hammam (6):** located by the Kikhia mosque, it was mentioned in the 17th century by the traveler Abd el Ghani el Naboulsi. Its is endowed with beautiful bathes tubs and paved with firry red slabs.

**The al Ward Hammam (7)** built in 1730 by the Hammoud family according to an ottoman Italian architectural style. It has a wide hall and beautiful adornment.

#### OTHER CURIOSITIES

**The Audi Soap Factory:** purchased in 1880 by the Audi family. It is a two floors complex. The ground floor is the workshop enclosing the boiler, the vat and lixiviation basins and the hot soap spreading area... in 1998 the Audi foundation decided to convert it into a soap museum. The Audi house is on the first floor.

**Debbaneh Palace:** located at the end of the gold market, built in 1730 by the Hammoud family and purchased in 1765 by the Debbaneh family. It is a sample of domestic architecture. Carvings, engravings and calligraphy decorate its walls.

**Riyad el-Soleh Museum:** Where the independence leader and the former Prime Minister Riyad el-Soleh grew up. It is managed in order to commemorate the memory of a great Lebanese national.



*The Audi Soap Factory*

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