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Lion of Salakta Mosaic, Tunisia by GREG BALAGIAN

Tunisia issued a set of four stamps depicting archaeological sites and artifacts on October 20, 2017. One of the stamps depicts the illustrious Roman lion mosaic from Salakta which was discovered in 1958 and is currently part of the incredible collection of the Bardo National Museum in Tunis.

The mosaic pictures the Barbary lion (*Panthera leo leo*), a North African subspecies of the African lion which was found in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia and is now considered extinct in the wild.

This subspecies, also known as North African lion, Berber lion, or Atlas lion since it inhabited Atlas Mountains, were described as having grayish-tawny fur and very dark and long-haired manes and stomachs for males.

These lions were the largest lion subspecies reaching up to 9.2 feet in length and weighing up to 660 pounds. They were observed living usually in pairs of a male and a female with one or two cubs, and sometimes they were seen hunting in a group of two males and a lioness.

Although the North African lion is certainly extinct in the wild, there is possibly a handful of lions in captivity around the world that may be descended from the original Barbary lion.

In ancient Rome these lions were used in gladiators' tournaments and are on numerous works of art.



Barbary Lion Mosaic, Salakta, Tunisia (2017)



Lion of Salakta Mosaic, Tunisia

The name of the village of Salakta derives from the Latin word *Sullectum* which means "Blessed Place." It is located in the coastal area of eastern Tunisia which is called Sahel, and throughout millennia it has been occupied by Phoenicians, Byzantines and Romans. Most of the archaeological sites in Salakta are currently under water, but thankfully many artifacts such as this mosaic survived. 🐾