



The Lighthouse of Alexandria: The History and Legacy of an Ancient Wonder of the World

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures.

*Includes historic accounts that describe the Lighthouse.

*Explains the debates over how the lighthouse was built and operated, and how it was destroyed.

*Includes a bibliography for further reading.

“At the harbor of Alexandria stands the tower called Pharos, the first wonder. It is held together by glass and lead and is 600 yards high” - Epiphanius the Monk

"The Pharos today is composed of four stages. The first, of a rectangular design, is remarkably built in rectangular cut stones, of which the joints are so well concealed that the whole seems to be formed of a single block of stone, remaining insensible to the ravages of time." – Al Bakri, a medieval traveler and writer.

Over 2,000 years ago, two ancient writers named Antipater of Sidon and Philo of Byzantium authored antiquity's most well known tour guides. After the two Greeks had traveled around the Mediterranean, they wrote of what they considered to be the classical world's greatest construction projects. While there is still some question as to who actually authored the text attributed to Philo and when it was authored, their lists ended up comprising the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, igniting interest in the ones they chose and inspiring subsequent generations to identify their own era's Seven Wonders.

The youngest of the Wonders also turned out to be the most practical and one of the longest-lived, surviving into the late Middle Ages. It was a lighthouse built on the northern coast of Egypt in Africa, at the Greek city founded in Alexander's name. It was the Pharos, the Great Lighthouse of Alexandria. Among antiquity's wonders, the Lighthouse of Alexandria was fairly unique both in terms of its purpose and its secular nature. While pyramids and statues served religious purposes in Egypt and Greece, and others were impressive works of art, the origins of the Lighthouse were not even as a lighthouse at all. Instead, the large formation on the island of Pharos in the harbor of Alexandria was originally meant to help sailors identify the location of the city during the day, and some speculate it was not until later that Alexandrians decided to make it a true lighthouse that would serve sailors at night. Julius Caesar himself noted the Lighthouse's other practical use in his commentaries about Rome's civil wars: "Now because of the narrowness of the strait there can be no access by ship to the harbour without the consent of those who hold the Pharos. In view of this, Caesar took the precaution of landing his troops while the enemy was preoccupied with fighting, seized the Pharos and posted a garrison there. The result was that safe access was secured for his...supplies and reinforcements."

It's easy to understand Caesar's point, because while there is still debate over its height, the Lighthouse of Alexandria was unquestionably one of the tallest man-made structures in the world at the time, if not the tallest. While ancient accounts often exaggerated its height, medieval Arab sources often claimed it was somewhere around 300-350 feet tall, with an incredibly wide base, and those sources wrote at a time where it had already required repairs due to earthquake damage. Efforts to repair it kept going until the 14th century, when the damage was so extensive that it was mostly left in ruins, the last of which were taken for other

building projects and/or slipped underneath the Mediterranean. Fortunately, due to descriptions of the lighthouse and archaeological remains, modern scholars are able to understand this wonder better than most, and there may even be future attempts to build a replica and bring it back to life.

The Lighthouse of Alexandria covers the ancient wonder's history and the mysteries surrounding it, including the debate over how it was built, operated, and destroyed. Along with pictures and a bibliography, you will learn about the Lighthouse of Alexandria like never before.

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