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The PHAROS: Mother Of Lighthouses

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The Pharos Lighthouse of Alexandria, Egypt was the world's first lighthouse and one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Alexander the Great founded the city of Alexandria in 332 B.C. during his campaign against the Persians. The Macedonian conqueror was much impressed with Alexandria's double harbor and dreamt of one day making it a hub for Mediterranean trade. Whether he also envisioned a soaring lighthouse standing at the harbor's entrance is unknown. Alexander died in Asia Minor and his vast empire fell to his comrades-in-arms. The decision to build the lighthouse, therefore, was not his but that of his successors.

Alexander's loyal general, Ptolemy I Soter, became the ruler of Egypt and is believed to have authorized the building of the lighthouse. But construction was not begun until the reign of his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Ptolemy II acquired the famous sculptor Sostratus from the Greek city of Cnidus and asked him to begin work on the beacon. The towering lighthouse was built in three sections and was surmounted by a dome and a statue of Poseidon holding his trident. An Egyptian stamp (Scott C230) illustrates the lighthouse with an inset of the head of Alexander the Great.



Egypt #C230
May 20, 1998



Congo #466
Aug 12, 1978



Mongolia #1888
Sept 25, 1990

The name Pharos was taken from the island on which the ancient structure stood. Soon the name of the island became indistinguishable from that of the lighthouse. In English, French, and Spanish, the word Pharos came to mean lighthouse. When the beacon was dedicated in 279 B.C., it was the tallest building in the world except for the Great Pyramid. Faced with gleaming white marble, it soared to 384 feet, the equivalent of a 40-story office building. It was depicted on many stamp issues that portrayed the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World.