



# TOWER OF HERCULES

## Lighthouses from ancient times

Although references on the origin and early development of the lighthouses are scarce, it seems only logical that such references go back to early days of navigation when mankind sought to go beyond the visual limits of the first ports.

At first, when navigation was only done during daytime, without separating from the coast or ever losing sight of solid ground, aids to navigation were confined to the mere recognition of the geographical features of the landscape. Things changed when such identifications became more difficult and elements that made it possible to identify the coastline had to be introduced, thus giving rise to artificial aids to navigation, in other words, lighthouses.

In this regard, examples are found in all five continents, although they greatly differ as to typologies. First, they were all associated to mythological characters and magical properties were attributed to them but with the passing of time men became the builders of their own lighthouses.

In all ancient civilisations whether in the Mediterranean area – Egyptians, Phoenicians Greeks or Romans or in the Eastern area –the China of the Shang and Zhou dynasties - or in America –Aztecs, Mayan and Inca – a variety of more or less complicated aids to the navigation systems were developed. Such systems have not reached us or, when they have, they have done so in the form of mere archaeological evidence.

In this regard, the Tower of Hercules is the last link of a great of chain made up by the great lighthouses of Ancient Times, which includes such emblematic cases as the lighthouse of Alexandria or the Colossus of Rhodes, which were listed by Antipatros of Tesseloniki as part of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

In sheer contrast to other lighthouses lost to time such as the lighthouse of Ostia, that of Naples (Italy) or the abovementioned one of Alexandria (Egypt), the Tower of Hercules is the only aid to navigation that has remained operational of all the towers guiding ships that were built by the Romans whether in the Mediterranean or the Atlantic Ocean.

### Lighthouse of Alejandria (Egipt)

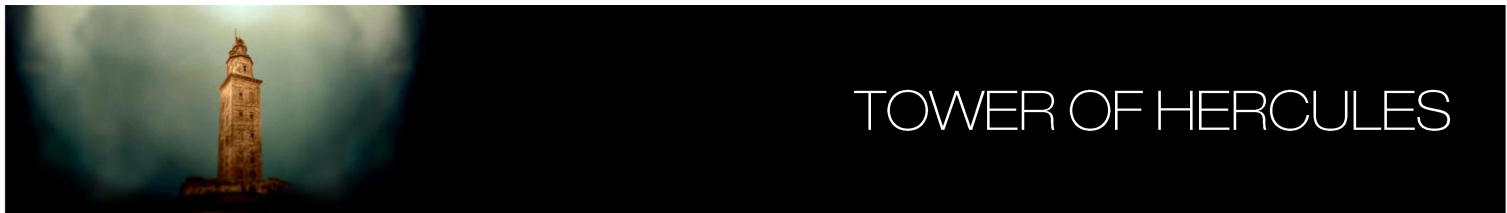
It was the most famous of all lighthouses in Ancient times. It was located at the mouth of the Nile River, opposite the city of Alexandria, on the island of Pharos and gave access to the harbour. It was presumably built in times of Ptolomeo Soter, one of Alexander Magno's generals under the direction of architect Sostratos of Cnidus.

According to numerous descriptions that have reached us, it was a three-section tower of decreasing height. The first one of them had a quadrangular section and had a slight bank on the walls: the second section had an octagonal plan and was shorter; and the third or top section was used as the base for the statue. In Roman coins from the times of Trajan, Adrian and Antonino Pio there are representations of the newts at the balcony of the first section. As far as dimensions is concerned, sources disagree and its height, which has been put somewhere between 110 and 122 metres.

Of this impressive building nothing has survived. In early 8th century, following the conquest of Egypt by Arabs, the latter began to disassemble it on the belief that at its foundations huge treasures were kept. In 736, an earthquake destroyed the upper section. In the time of Sultan Ahmed-Ben-Tutún part of the structures were restored, but a new earthquake in 995 resulted in damaged to the structure of the lighthouse. In 1274, sultan Bibars removed the top dome to build a small mosque. In 1302, yet another earthquake caused damages to the structure of the building and must have left it in ruins as in 1349 there remained almost nothing. In 1477 Sultan Quait-Bay visited the city and decided to erect a fortress on the foundations of the ancient lighthouse. By way of testimony of the ancient construction, there remains a great size, square tower which is believed to be the foundations of the lighthouse.

### The Colossus of Rhodes (Greece)

It was considered one of the Seven Wonders of World by Antipatros of Tesseloniki, although there is no evidence confirming that it was used as a lighthouse. It was located on the island of Rhodes at the mouth of the harbour and represented the figure of Helios. It was built at around 300 B.C. and works lasted some twenty years. Its builder was sculptor Chares of Lindos, one of Lysippus disciples. He died before it was completed and work was continued by Lachus who brought the project to fruition. The Colossus had a very short life. It only stood for some years as in 225 B.C. an earthquake broke the sculpture at the knee and it collapsed. Years later, according to tradition, it was rebuilt as in the *Chronicle* by Miguel Sirio (8th century) details are giving of the conquest of the island by the Arabs who sold the statue to a Jewish



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trader. This trader needed as many as one thousand camels to transport the pieces. The remaining plot was used to erect the fortress of Saint Nicholas.

The legend tells of a bronze figure some 50 metres high, naked and with spread legs, each of them supported on a different pier. Under his legs sailed the fleets that moved within the archipelago and across the Aegean sea. His right arm rose to the sky and in his hand he held a great cup where the bonfire aiding to navigation was lit every day.