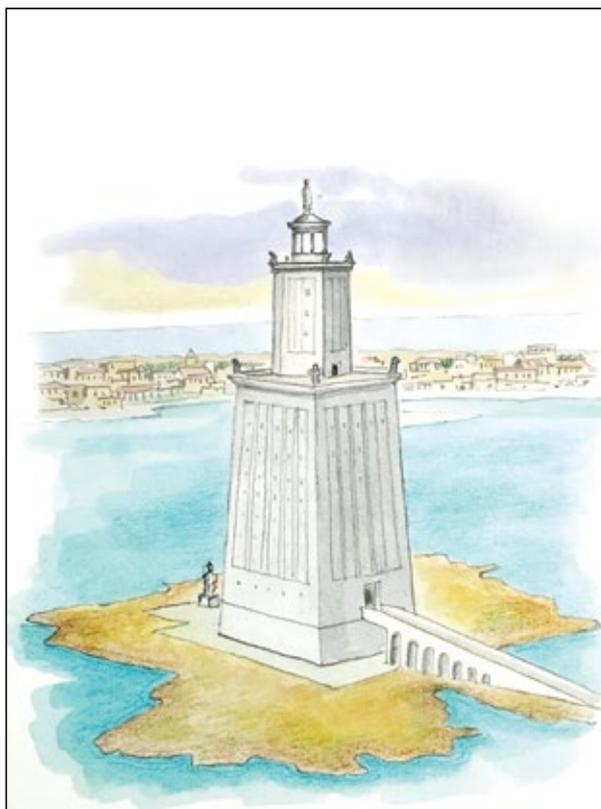




**Egyptian hieroglyphics
at Temple of Kom Ombo.**
Peter Unger



The Pharos Lighthouse. Illustration by Jim M'Guinness, 1999

Editorial

The Pharos of Alpha Omega Alpha

Richard L. Bynny, MD, FACP

GREETINGS

The Directors of Alpha Omega Alpha Society in presenting to the members of this first number of The Pharos bespeak for it a kindly reception and express the hope that it will serve as a "Beacon" and worthy exponent of the aims and purposes of our society.

There has been a demand for a medium of exchange through which the views of individuals, reports from chapters, and other interesting information could be made available to the entire membership.

The Pharos will be published semi-annually in the fall and the spring.

The society is most fortunate in having Mrs. William W. Root as managing editor. Through many years of association with the Founder of Alpha Omega Alpha, her lamented husband, she has gained an intimate knowledge of the organization of the society and familiarity with all its activities throughout its entire existence that ensures the success of this new venture.

—Walter L. Bierring, president¹

Alpha Omega Alpha first published *The Pharos* in January 1938. The inaugural greeting was from Walter L. Bierring, then-President of AΩA. The first page contained the AΩA key, recognition of founder, William W. Root, MD, and the AΩA motto.

Since its first issue, *The Pharos* has been a leading scholarly journal that represents medicine and humanities.²

Ernest S. Moore, MD, published "The Early Days of Alpha Omega Alpha" in *The Pharos* in May 1944, wherein he introduced the context under which Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society was established.

The medical educational pot was boiling briskly in 1900. Fundamental changes in medical education had begun to make themselves felt. Many schools had been, or still were, commercial ventures. Admission requirements were elastic; instruction largely by lectures and text-book study; laboratories generally inadequate, sometimes none.³

This was before Abraham Flexner began his reform of medical education, and prior to medical school accreditation.



Treasures of the Nile, on papyrus.

The medical students were...a primitive group. They were emotionally hair-trigger men, quick to resent an affront, and prompt to avenge an injury. Their behavior in halls and classrooms was rough and boorish. They were loyal to their friends and to each other. Class spirit ran high, and class clashes, often of riotous proportions, were of weekly occurrence. They respected neither authority nor property. Whenever a class was lined up for supplies for a class period, more or less roughhousing was present.³

However, several of the students were primarily and sincerely interested in becoming doctors. Moore went on, "They respected and admired superior studentship."³

Root was different than most students of that era. He was 35-years-old, had earned a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry from Cornell University, had taught science, and had been a graduate student in chemistry at the University of Chicago. He was shocked by the behavior of the raucous students, and found cheating to be repugnant.

He and some of his fellow students decided to provide leadership by establishing Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society in 1902 to foster scholarship, honesty, and to promote high medical ideals.

They wrote in the first Constitution of AQA:

The mission of AQA is to encourage high ideals of thought and action in schools of medicine and to promote that which is the highest in medical practice.⁴

They defined the AQA motto:

To be worthy to serve the suffering.⁴

They established that membership in AQA was to be based on both scholarly achievement and professional conduct. Root defined the duties of AQA members:

...to foster the scientific and philosophical features of the medical profession, to look beyond self to the welfare of the profession and of the public, to cultivate social mindedness, as well as an individualistic attitude toward responsibilities, to show respect for colleagues, especially for elders and teachers, to foster research and in all ways to ennoble the profession of medicine and advance it in public opinion. It is equally a duty to avoid that which is unworthy, including the commercial spirit and all practices injurious to the welfare of patients, the public, or the profession.⁵

Root and his colleagues provided the leadership and recruited exceptional leaders in academic medicine to join them in forming AQA.

For nearly 115 years, election to Alpha Omega Alpha has been an honor signifying a lasting commitment to professional excellence and achievement, scholarship, leadership, service, teaching and professionalism.

The Pharos

The Pharos of Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society is named after the Pharos lighthouse of Alexandria. It is unknown how this symbol was chosen, but we know that our journal was to serve as a "Beacon" and worthy exponent of the aims and purposes of the medical society. *The Pharos* first featured the lighthouse of Alexandria on the cover in 1949.⁶

The Pharos lighthouse in Alexandria was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world built in Alexandria, Egypt in 279 B.C.

Ninety-five percent, or 380,000 square miles, of Egypt lies within in the Sahara desert of North Africa, with the Mediterranean Sea to the north, and the Red Sea to the east.

The Nile River, the longest river in the world at 4,258 miles, has made Egypt and the surrounding area habitable by man. On either side of the river is a band of fertile land.

The Nile, which terminates into the Mediterranean Sea, has shaped Egypt's geography, molded its civilization, and determined its destiny. Circa 450 B.C., Herodotus wrote, "Egypt is the Nile and the Nile is Egypt."⁷

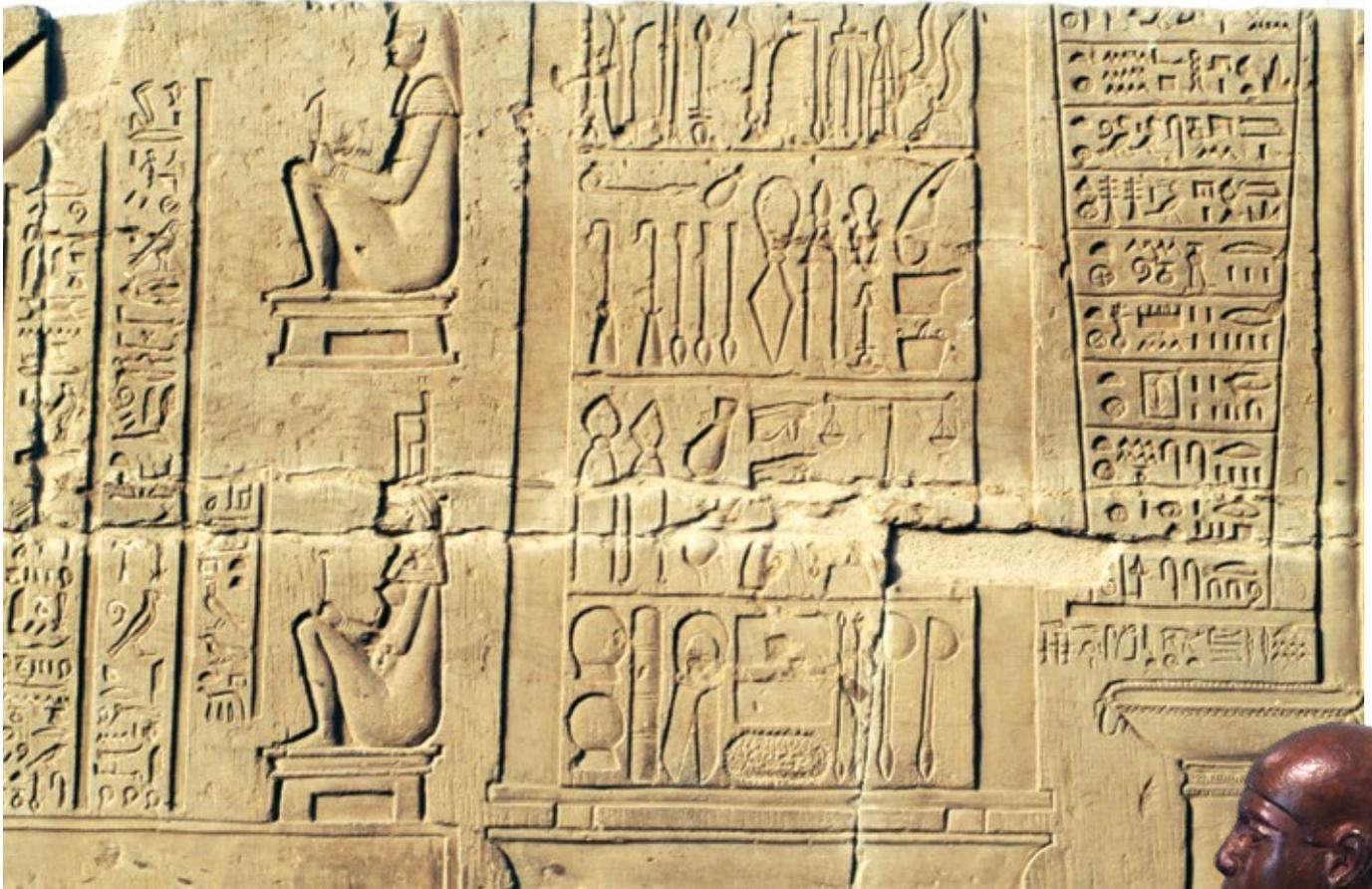
In 3,200 B.C., the Egyptians had developed a hieroglyphic language for communicating and archiving information and knowledge. They recorded hieroglyphics in stone, on pottery vessels, and on papyrus for those who could read to have access to learning and knowledge.

Northern and southern Egypt were unified in 3,150 B.C., and a series of Egyptian dynasties, with pharaohs followed. The first pharaoh of the first dynasty was Narmer.

The first Egyptians worshiped Gods who exemplified aspects of nature and represented deities that the people felt held power over them.

Each god had an individual identity with a name and unique set of characteristics. These gods determined everything that happened to the people—good and bad. Each god was something in the natural world and had a physical reality.

Early Egyptians built magnificent temples and palaces for their gods. They provided the gods with servants and priests, to provide for their every need.



Relief with offering to the deity, exterior corridor, Temple of Sobek and Haroeris, Kom Ombo, Egypt.
Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images.

They created special images of gods in the form of a man, woman, or animal with the body or head representing the animal god. The Pharaoh would stand before the god, address it with proper name, and acknowledge its power and greatness in the form of various prayers. They then offered the god the very best of all things that humans desired, including food, drink, clothing, jewelry, and perfumes.

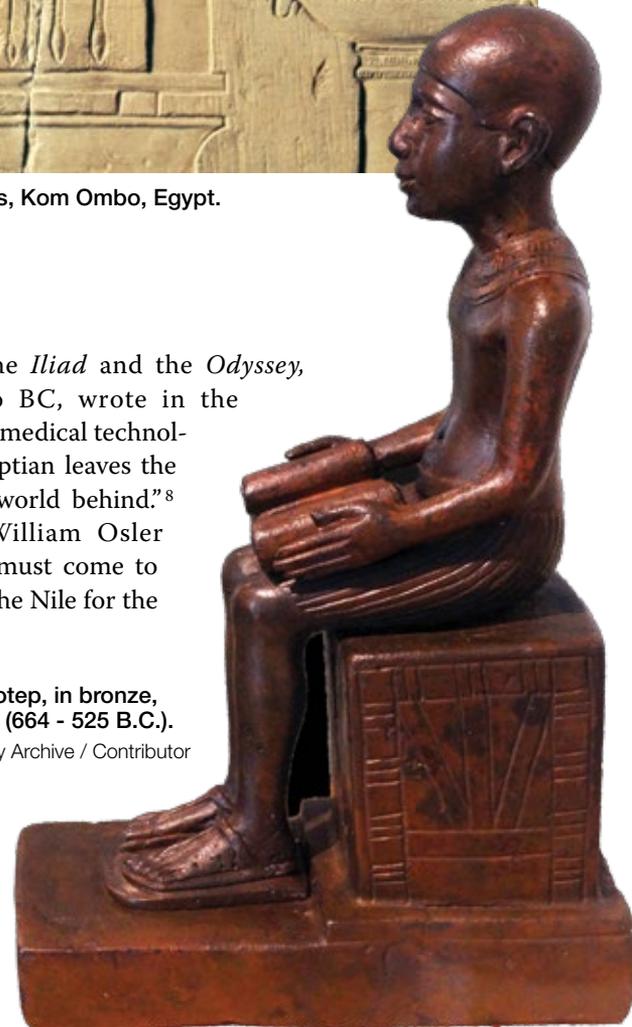
Since the sun rose daily in the east, and provided light there was the sun god, Amman, whose temples were located on the east side of the Nile. And, because the sun set in the west, the tombs for afterlife were located on the west side of the Nile.

The beginnings of the medical profession

The roots of Western medicine are thought to have begun in ancient Egypt. Homer, the Greek poet who

authored the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, around 850 BC, wrote in the *Odyssey*, “in medical technology the Egyptian leaves the rest of the world behind.”⁸ And, Sir William Osler noted, “we must come to the land of the Nile for the

The god Imhotep, in bronze, 26th Dynasty (664 - 525 B.C.).
Universal History Archive / Contributor



origin of many of man's most distinctive and highly cherished beliefs.”⁹

The most famous Egyptian physician and medical professor was Imhotep, meaning “he comes in peace,” who lived in Egypt around 2,700 B.C.

Osler wrote that Imhotep was, “the first figure of a physician to stand out clearly from the mists of antiquity,” as he was practicing medicine, surgery and treating illnesses many generations before the famous and revered Greek, Hippocrates.

Ancient Egyptians, led by Imhotep, recorded details of their medical procedures on papyrus, and made important observations in human anatomy. They performed surgeries, set fractured bones in place, performed amputations, sutured large gaping wounds, and bandaged injuries and wounds. They immobilized injuries using splints, plaster, and tape, and incised and drained abscesses. They knew the properties of many plants that could be extracted and used to treat maladies—many of which are still used today. They were well rounded and had knowledge of magic, astronomy, philosophy, rituals, and formulas.

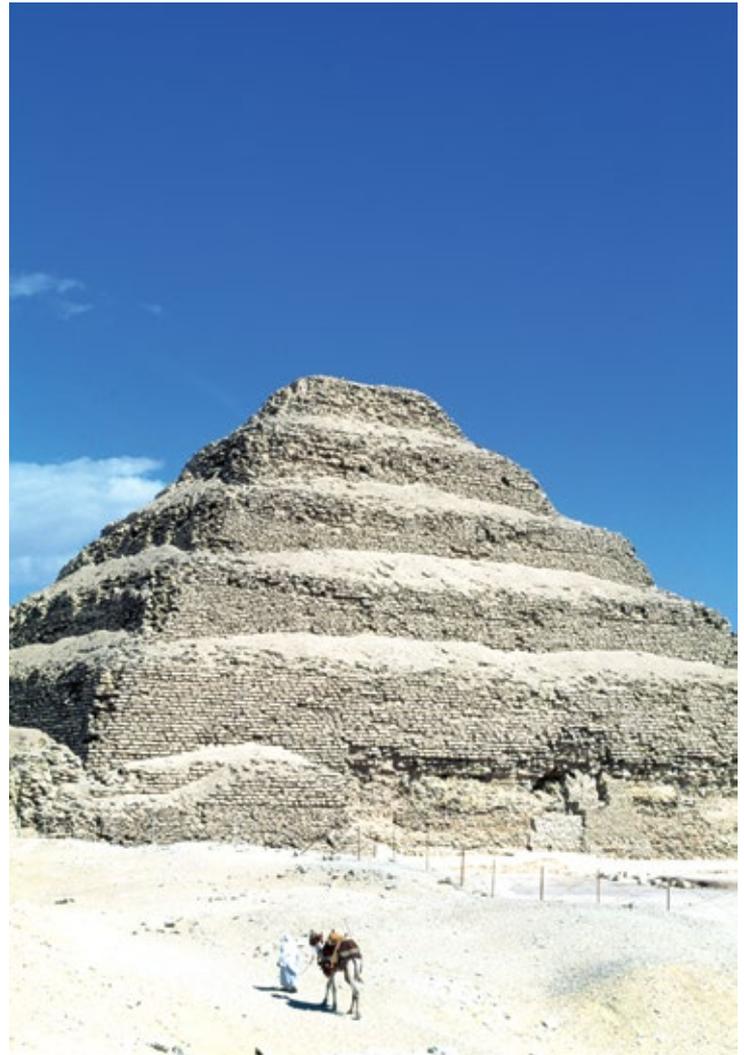
Imhotep and others are thought to have conceived of the human body as a system of channels or vessels to distribute air and fluids from the heart, lungs, kidneys, and digestive tract. They began to understand physiology and the importance of blood.

Imhotep used the standard history of the problem and a physical examination including inspection, palpation, and auscultation to acquire the clinical information for diagnosis and prognosis. He and his team looked for recognizable clinical patterns to determine the cause, and select an appropriate treatment. They would decide if they could treat the illness or trauma, simply provide care and comfort for the patient, or not treat the patient at all.

Imhotep diagnosed and treated more than 200 diseases. He learned by getting ideas or concepts from areas outside of his role as a physician. He was a poet, a priest, a judge, engineer, prime minister for the Pharaoh Zoser, and an architect. He designed and supervised the building of the first pyramid, the step pyramid of Saqqara. He was believed to be the only mortal to reach the position as a true and full god.

The Pharos and Alexander the Great

Homer wrote in the *Odyssey*, “Out of the tossing sea where it breaks on the beaches of Egypt, rises an isle from the waters; the name that men give it is Pharos.”⁸ This is where the Nile flows through a delta and into the Mediterranean Sea.



Step Pyramid of Djoser (or Zoser), Saqqara, Memphis, Old Kingdom, Dynasty III. De Agostini / W. Buss

The island of Pharos was a strip of white, sparkling, calcareous stone washed all around by the sea. It had a causeway connecting the island to the delta.

Alexander the Great succeeded his father, Philip II, to the throne of the Kingdom of Macedon at the age of 20. He conquered countries throughout Asia and Northern Africa, and created the largest empire of the ancient world. He was undefeated in battle.

He advanced on Egypt in 332 B.C., where he was considered a liberator, and deified as the King of Egypt.

Alexander founded 20 cities that have his name, most east of the Tigris. The first, and greatest, was Alexandria, Egypt, in 331 B.C.

According to one rendition, Homer appeared to Alexander in a dream and recited lines from the *Odyssey* about the island of Pharos. Plutarch then wrote:

Alexander left his bed and went to Pharos, which at that time was an island lying slightly south of the Canopic mouth of the Nile....He no sooner cast his eyes upon the place than he perceived the advantages of the site. It was a tongue of land, not unlike an isthmus, whose breadth was proportional to its length. On one side it had a great lake and on the other the sea, which there formed a capacious harbour.¹⁰

Alexandria's harbor held more ships than any other port in the world, was a center of world commerce, and was the capital of Egypt for more than 1,000 years.

Alexander observed that the harbor near the island of Pharos provided the only safe anchorage along the Mediterranean coastline. There was no typical landmark, and numerous treacherous limestone reefs near the shore. A beacon for incoming ships was needed. Thus, he ordered the world's first lighthouse—The Pharos—be designed and built.

Construction of The Pharos was begun by Ptolemy I in 299 B.C., and finished by his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, in 279 B.C. The tower was designed and built by the architect Sostratus, who used large blocks of stone made up of three stages. A lower, square section 240 feet by 100 feet, sat on a stone platform with a central core and a long ramp leading to a door. The middle section was an octagonal tower, and a towering cylindrical section topped off the lighthouse. All totaled, the Pharos was 450 feet tall.

On the top, there was an open cupola where a continuous fire burned. A large, curved mirror, thought to be of polished bronze, was used to project the fire's light into a beam that reflected sunlight during the day. The light was reported to be visible day and night, as far as 29 miles away.

The Pharos was the first lighthouse in the world, and the highest man-made structure in the ancient world, other than the great pyramids at Giza. It became the model for other lighthouses for centuries, and remained in use for 1,500 years.¹¹

Two earthquakes—one in 1303 A.D., and 1323 A.D.—reduced the Pharos to rubble.

ΑΩΑ's beacon

The November 1949 issue of *The Pharos* stated, "It seems appropriate to adopt the 'Ancient Beacon of the Mediterranean' as the Pharos of our Society, a fitting symbol of the spirit and purposes of Alpha Omega Alpha.

It was with great forethought and foresight that ΑΩΑ's journal, *The Pharos*, took its name from this ancient beacon. Like the great light that once shone forth at Alexandria signifying light, truth, knowledge, learning, wisdom, worthiness, duty, hope, strength, scholarship, vigilance, integrity, reason, and clarity of vision, so does *The Pharos* serve as a beacon for the medical humanities—humanness, medical history, ethics, literature, law and politics, art, poetry, music, language, philosophy, and culture.

It is with this spirit that we continue to produce *The Pharos* 78 years after it was first published. Like the original Pharos, ΑΩΑ's journal will continue to guide the future of medicine, and will shine well into the future.

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