

Egyptian belief that
the king could ascend
to



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Egyptian architecture dates back to 3100 BC during the prehistoric and predynastic periods. Maya architecture dates back to 2000 BC. Both ancient civilizations heavily incorporate light into their design of monumental buildings. In this essay, I will be explaining how The Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and the El Castillo in Mexico both incorporate light as a symbol of high prestige and respect.

The Great Pyramid of Giza located on the Giza plateau near the city of Cairo in Egypt was built during the 4th dynasty of the Old kingdom under the reign of King Khufu. The tomb was finished around 2560 BC in a belief that the king could ascend to the heavens and resurrect into a god. Currently, the pyramid stands 450 feet high and is estimated to be built with 2.3 million stone blocks weighing 3 - 15 tons each.

In Egypt, light, sun, moon and the stars are all sacred elements related to the gods and thus is respected and used in monuments. Egyptians call the pyramid "Ikhet" meaning glorious light, shown in the form and materiality of the pyramid. The pyramid's form represents sunrays that descend from the heavens, and the original pyramid was covered in casing stones made of highly polished white limestone, allowing the pyramid to shine and light up as it reflected sunlight, incorporating light as a method and symbol to showcase the greatness of the king and the Egyptian civilization.

Furthermore, the pyramid is perfectly aligned to the constellation of Orion. - a constellation associated with the Egyptian god Osiris. Light allows the pyramid to be mystical and complex for example, there is a phenomenon where the centre of each side of the pyramid indents and can only be seen in the air under certain circumstances of light (at dawn and sunset during the

spring and autumn equinoxes when the sun casts shadows on the pyramid.) El Castillo is located in the centre of Chichen Itza. The structure is of s a stepped pyramid served as a temple of sacrifice and preaching to the god Kukulcan, perceived to be a passageway to the heavens.

El Castillo has nine levels representing the nine levels of the afterlife and 365 stairs that represent the days of the year, with every slant exactly 45 degrees. Alike the great pyramid of Giza, El Castillo also incorporates the use of light on monuments to convey a spiritual idea and respect to the heavens. During the spring and autumn equinoxes, the sun casts a shadow down the pyramid to create the illusion of a serpent crawling down the pyramid symbolizing a sky-serpent climbing down the sky to the sacred cenote believed to be the opening to the Underworld. In both civilizations, serpents are intelligent beings, often associated with royalty and the gods. In conclusion, both ancient Egyptian and Maya civilization perceived light to be a bridge that connected earth to the sky and heavens and thus incorporated the use of light into their monument's structure, form and function to emphasise their respect to their gods, and their hope for ascendance.