



University
of Victoria

GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Light and Night in the Ancient Maya World of Mesoamerica

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11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Online – via Zoom

(zoom meeting link on the website)

www.uvic.ca/socialsciences/anthropology/research/colloquium/index.php

Article to read before the talk (mandatory for ANTH grad students) at the link above.

The modern desire for abundant nocturnal lighting is often presumed to be a cultural universal that transcends time, and most modern humans take light at night for granted. These reasons may account for the lack of investigation by archaeologists who study the Late Classic Lowland Mayas (600-900 CE) of Mesoamerica. However, the study of ancient lighting devices is a research pursuit well known in Classical archaeology and pertains to lychnology, and to the anthropology of luminosity, as put forth by Bille and Sørensen (2007), who regard light as something to be manipulated, a matter that is used in cultural practices. The topic of ancient Maya lighting also falls under the umbrella of the archaeology of the night, a relatively recent perspective on the past that explores the evidence for nightways and the meaning of the nocturnal in the past. Ample evidence for ancient lighting is contained in a wide variety of material remains and diverse sources. Apart from the material evidence for lighting, the metaphorical place of the night and darkness in the Classic Maya worldview is examined. In many circumstances, lower lighting is preferable for the performance of a variety of activities that were best conducted under the cover of darkness. Humans accomplish much without the brightness of day, as other senses come to dominate the nightscape and it is only through light that darkness is visible. The past is considered anew from a nocturnal viewpoint.

EVERYONE WELCOME

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