

# ARCH/BIOANTH LUNCH TALK

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 12:00PM  
SOC SCI 1, 261

## HOLLEY MOYES

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### *THE ANCIENT MAYA COLLAPSE: A VIEW FROM THE CAVE*

For 200 years archaeologists have puzzled over the ancient Maya and what caused the "collapse" of their civilization. Paleoclimate evidence suggests that a prolonged drought occurred in the Late Classic period (AD 700-900). This in turn destabilized their political system resulting in the fall of ancient Maya kingdoms in the southeastern lowlands. I am interested in the processes of social change and the role that ritual and religion plays in those processes.

In this talk, I will demonstrate how ancient Maya cave use tells us something about how Maya people responded to environmental changes. Although caves were used as ritual venues beginning in the the Early Preclassic period about 1200BC, work at Chechem Ha Cave in Belize demonstrates that ritual practice in caves changed over time in both form and intensity. I suggest that major changes in cave use in the Late Classic period are evidence for a ritual response to drought conditions that constitute a Late Classic drought cult.

Holley Moyes is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education at UC Merced. As a specialist in the archaeology of religion and ancient Mesoamerican civilizations, Professor Moyes is carrying out two research projects in Belize: "Las Cuevas Archaeological Reconnaissance" and the "Belize Cave Research Project." Professor Moyes published *Sacred Darkness: A Global Perspective on the Ritual Use of Caves* (University Press of Colorado) in 2014.

