

100 Years Ago This Month in The American Mathematical Monthly
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“The zero and principle of local value used by the Maya of Central America” is the subject of an interesting historical note by Professor FLORIAN CAJORI in *Science*, Nov. 17, 1916. Attention is called to the early use of a symbol for *zero* and the principle of local value of number symbols employed by the Maya probably dating back near the beginning of the Christian era. The Maya glyphs first deciphered by FÖRSTEMANN of Dresden, 1886, and independently by GOODMAN of California, relate for the most part to the calendar, to chronology, and to astronomy. The unit of this number system was 20, for which a special symbol, a half closed eye with a dot above, was used. Separate symbols of dots and bars represented the numbers from 1 to 19, each dot representing a unit, and each bar representing five units.

Excerpted from “Notes and News” **24** (1917) 44-47.