THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF LANGUAGE PROUDLY PRESENTS

Bringing a Script into the 21st Century:
A Mayan Epigraphic Project
Saturday, March 13, 2021, 2 - 4 pm
This is an entirely virtual program

Thomas Witten has studied Mayan writing with archeologists in the Yucatan region of Mexico. Mayan script uses pictures or glyphs that represent syllables. Witten began developing a computer program that allows a user to easily write in Mayan glyphs. The program, still in development, was used in partnership with Mayan writer Don Feliciano Sánchez Chan to produce what may be the first novel piece of glyph literature to be written in over 400 years. This talk will cover the basics of the Mayan script and the program, as well as hopes for the future of the script.

Thomas Witten with Don Cristiano

Thomas Witten is an amateur Mayan epigrapher and computer programmer. He attended College of the Atlantic (COA) in Maine where he graduated with a degree in Human Ecology in 2019. In the winter of 2017/2018 he spent three months in the Yucatan region of Mexico studying Spanish and Mayan archeology. He returned a year later to the small village of Sisbichen to study Mayan Epigraphics with Don Crisanto Cummul Chan, where he found inspiration for his senior thesis. For the thesis he digitized a subset of Mayan glyphs and wrote a piece of code that accepts a phonetic input using the Latin alphabet, and transcribes it into Mayan glyphblocks.

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