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HISTORY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY IN MEXICO

Mexican Society of Ophthalmology Logo. “Summary of Values and History”

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A logo is a visual, graphic element used by people, organisations or institutions to present and promote their recognition.

Having a logo arises from an implicit need found in each individual's nature to find a sense of identity, and this becomes imperative when some individuals decide to come together by identifying themselves with similar interests. That is why different groups have used flags, seals and emblems, among other symbols, as a form of recognition and identify since time immemorial.

To support my contribution to this special issue by our Mexican Society of Ophthalmology, I share these definitions of identity and emblem or logo: *identity*, “group of interests and information concerning a person or a group, which differentiate from the rest”, and *logo*, “figure or symbols clearly associated with those it represents and generally accompanied by text”.

The history of the logo starts with the roots of human expression and has evolved over thousands of years. The value of symbols continues to be the most important element in a logo's design.

It is known that the ancient Egyptians used it on their domestic animals to establish evidence of ownership; the Romans and the Greeks also pressed distinctive marks into their ceramics. All the world's major religions have adopted symbols to aid in their recognition. Since the 12th century and through the Middle Ages, coats of arms also identified belonging and rank amongst the nobles.

In general, the earliest logos were even used to recognise the origin or quality of a product. One example of this are

the marks that are still present to identify the purity of a precious metal.

Starting in the 20th century, with the advent of colour printing and the marketing industry, the logo has evolved to include words, images and symbols to create an identity amongst the public. In recent years, its design has been adapted to act as a product promotion tool, designed to spark the interest of a preselected target population.

A logo generally shows symbols or emblems to identify who it represents and is a pillar of identity: to create a “brand” and to make a social impact, by promoting through it the mission, values, and culture of an organisation. Therefore, a logo should ideally be simple, but include enough elements to represent its identity.

As our medical specialisation was the first to formally organise itself on our American continent, by founding the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology in 1893 and having a formal publication, *Anales de la Sociedad Mexicana de Oftalmología* [Annals of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology] in 1898, I decided to investigate evidence of a logo with the material available to me, and I believe that I have found the first of them, shown in Figure 1. I was able to recover it from one of the first official documents displayed by our Mexican Society of Ophthalmology, by extending membership to one of its founders in 1893, in this case to the distinguished Dr Lorenzo Chávez Aparicio. Following this document, I could not find any evidence that this emblem was kept in later years, since even the continuity of new academic encounters among its members at the start of the second decade of the 20th century were interrupted by the turbulent period of the Mexican

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Figure 1

Revolution. It wasn't until the start of the 1920s that academic activities were restarted at the behest of its members.

It was during this period that the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology decided to invite the members of the Society of Otorhinolaryngology to merge, holding joint meetings and sharing one journal for publishing academic experiments. This lasted for nearly three decades. However, after also reviewing several of these publications from different decades, I could not identify any emblem or logo that was used on its covers.

When you take on a group consciousness, it becomes easier to interpret the needs of yourself and your peers, which leads to exploring new efficient and effective ways. And it is through this that the need arises to organise yourselves to defend the group's values and display a sense of belonging before the community and related organisations.

It was in this scenario that awareness arose of the need to newly define a personality for our Mexican Society of Ophthalmology. Upon deciding to separate from the Society of Otorhinolaryngology in 1946, it was decided with full autonomy to hold the 1st National Congress of Ophthalmology (modern period), held in Mexico City in 1949 under the management of its president that year, Dr Francisco Martínez Hinojosa (my father). In valuing the significance of this act, with time and opportunity he issued a call to all active members (of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology) to design an institutional emblem or logo.

With the 1st Congress approaching, for which Dr Lino Vergara was appointed chairman and Dr Feliciano Palomino Dena the treasurer, upon receiving no response to this request, and so as not to leave this call unanswered, Dr Martínez Hinojosa, with guidance from an anthropologist friend, finally succeeded in designing the logo with the head of Quetzalcoatl, which

has practically endured until today, requiring only minor modifications, which shall be mentioned further on.

To understand the design of this original emblem, I suggest going back to the currents of nationalism that were still flourishing in Mexico in the forties. These sentiments openly exalted our sense of identity to include being aware of our vast pre-Columbian culture, which has a high degree of symbolism in the majority of pre-Columbian peoples, which were active during the Conquista. Thus these generations were encouraged to recognise values and roots, to reaffirm a sense of identity.

Our organisation's logo was comprised of the head of Quetzalcoatl, as this is one of the most representative figures in our main pre-Columbian civilisations for which there is a broad testimony of its importance in paintings, codices and pyramids in the better organised of these main cultures. They identify it as a humanised god, a priest possessing extraordinary wisdom as well as being a sailor.

Traditionally, Quetzalcoatl was defined as the "feathered serpent god", which comes from the meaning of the two elements that make up the name: quetzal, which references a bird prized for its colourful plumage which generally inhabits the Central American rain forest, and coatl, which in Nahuatl means serpent.

It is also necessary to share the concept that prevailed in the main Mesoamerican cultures, a magical thought in which the presence of a deity was associated with an animal, which was identified as the Nahuatl. This was common among the most well-known civilisations, be it the jaguar god in the Olmec culture or the feathered serpent god in the Teotihuacan culture. However, in most of the other civilisations the figure of Quetzalcoatl had great influence as a deity, and evidence is found in the Olmec, Toltec and Teotihuacan codi-



Figure 2 Reconstructed model of the Quetzalcoatl palace in Teotihuacan.

ces, paintings and sculptures, and it is even present in the Mayan culture, although under the name "Kukulkan" (Fig. 2).

That our logo has endured for more than six decades allows us to consider that the choice of the Quetzalcoatl head was assertive, since in addition to representing the organ of vision in the foreground, it gives us a sense of coherence with the interest of our specialty. On the other hand, by being broadly dispersed in the different pre-Columbian civiliza-

tions, the figure of Quetzalcoatl is familiar to most of us here in our vast Mexican territory.

Lastly, very few modifications have been made to it since its original design. The first was an allegory that intended to preferentially frame it in its lower sector. The second modification was to incorporate text, "La Luz de la Verdad al Servicio del Ojo" [The Light of the Truth in the Service of the Eye], which was later changed to Latin "Veritatis Lux Oculo Inserviens". This change must have been introduced in the eighties, probably in 1984, under the initiative of the then president of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology, Dr Luis González y Gutiérrez. A collage to illustrate these changes is shown in Figure 3.

By selecting a figure or symbol whose design seeks to identify an organised group and last through time, it is institutionalised, thus perfectly meeting its objective.

I should mention that, with the intention of updating the design and content of our Journal, a new logo design was also proposed in 1985 during the Board meeting of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology. It was based on a serious work of the findings in the codices and sculptures in the Nahua Olin culture in which the sun and the representation of an eye were identified with a cosmogonic meaning, offering a balanced image. However, it did not succeed, in all likelihood due to the fact that after 34 continuous years of using our logo, already ingrained amongst our colleagues as a sign of identity, it was apparent that the existing logo was fit for purpose.



Figure 3 A) Original logo used for more than 3 decades. B) Logo modified for the 90th anniversary of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology. C) A modification in 1984. D) Version from the second half of the eighties to date. E) Design or project to modify our Mexican Society of Ophthalmology logo that did not succeed.

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