

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA: MEXICO

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CODOLMAG: Basic Outline of the Committee

In August of 1981 the heads of four Government Institutions, who had met to exchange their conservation problems and try to find suitable solutions, organized a National Seminar of Conservation for Books, Documents and Graphic Materials, held in Mexico City at the conference area of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These institutions were: AGN: the National General Archives, S.R.E.: the General Office of Archive, Library and Publications of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNAM: National Library of the Institute of Bibliographical Research, and the Center of Historical Studies and Documents A.C. One recommendation of this Seminar was to create a Committee which would try to organize at a national level all or most of the paper conservation and restoration criteria of the official institutional workshops, or ateliers.

So, in November 1981, the Comité Permanente de Conservación de Documentos, Libros y Materiales Gráficos, CODOLMAG (the Permanent Committee of Conservation for Documents, Books and Graphic Materials), which I will call from now on CODOLMAG or the Committee, was created. It held monthly general meetings and was organized as an Executive Secretariat with an Executive Secretary and two members. The first task was to contact the directors or chiefs of other institutions, official or otherwise, and to begin periodic meetings to discuss the conservation problems each had to face to assure the long-term survival of their archives.

CODOLMAG's first achievement was the organization in August 1982 of the First International Seminar of Conservation for Documents, Books and Graphic Materials held in Mexico City at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with several Mexican specialists on paper restoration and international conservators Mr. Paul N. Banks (USA), Mr. Ludovico Santucci (Italy), Mr. Vicente Viñas Torner and Javier Peinado-Fernandez (Spain) and Mrs. Keiko Mizushima Keyes (USA). At the end of this Seminar the speakers and the restorers who attended it came to the following conclusions: 1) it is of the utmost importance that the Mexican restorers, as well as the official institutions, get in touch with foreign specialists and restoration centers, 2) it is very important to make known at the government level the lack of trained personnel and 3) it is important to increase inter-institutional contact, at the national level as well as at the international level.

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In October of the following year, 1983, CODOLMAG organized the First National Seminar of Conservation for Documents, Books and Graphic Documents held in Mexico City at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Then in October 1984 the Committee organized the First National Seminar of Conservation for Photographic and Film Archive Materials, held in Mexico City at the Cineteca Nacional. The conclusions were the same as those reached at the end of the International and First National Seminars, though they applied specifically to photographic and film materials, and included some new ones: 1) increase contacts with others in the field both nationally and internationally in order to avoid duplication of efforts, 2) program high-priority research, 3) investigate related areas in which there are direct applications of knowledge or information needed within restoration and conservation, 4) analyze restoration techniques, and 5) create working groups in the fields of documentation, teaching or training, photography, films and paper.

Up to November 1984, when the last proposal was put into practice with the creation of practical and research work groups, CODOLMAG held 18 general meetings and incorporated 22 members into its ranks. Only the directors or chiefs of official institutions were present at the general meetings of CODOLMAG. They decided that trained conservators (initially, those working in the institutional ateliers) should attend the work groups.

Last May the Executive Secretariat was reorganized to become a General Secretariat, with a General Secretary, Fernando Osorio Alarcon, two Executive Secretaries, Luis Torres Montes and Agustin Espinoza, and as many coordinators as there are work groups, which at this moment are three--photography, documentation and paper.

Finally, I want to explain how CODOLMAG works. First of all, the institutions represented are directly or indirectly related with the conservation of national documental patrimony in some way. Secondly, most of the persons who are present at the work sessions are restorers who attend on their own initiative, for their institution's interest as well as their own. The organization of special activities such as the seminars, courses and publications was managed with funds and material help from the institutions that form CODOLMAG. CODOLMAG has also had other economic help, mainly from: the UNESCO, the OAS, the LANFI, the Fundación Zevada, the UAP, the INAH and SRE. For its general and daily activities, CODOLMAG has no economic backing, which in itself is a dual position: on the one hand, we cannot work as fast as we would like on our commitments, but on the other, we are almost completely free of any kind of pressure or orientation in our work.

It has been a long and not always easy task, but we are seeing the first results, and it is merely the beginning.

Working Groups

1) The Documentation Group began work at the end of 1983 and formed a small bibliographical index covering several fields of restoration. In 1986 the group was assimilated by the Paper Group. The current coordinator is Carlota Creel Algara.

2) The Teaching or Training Group held its first meetings in mid-1983 and finally was assimilated by the creation of the paper group.

3) The Photography Group, coordinated originally by Mercedes Pedroza Macias and now by Fernando Osorio Alarcon and Eleazar López Zamora started in 1984 and has been very active. Its home is the Mexican Council of Photography. It holds monthly meetings. Its activities have been:

- 1st National course on Conservation and Restoration of Fixed Images, given by Joao Socrates de Oliveira in Pachuca at the Phototheque of the INAH in April 1985. It lasted two days and was organized and financed by CODOLMAG, UNESCO and the University of Puebla (UAP). The last published the translation of the handbook of Joao Socrates de Oliveira.

- 2nd National course on Conservation and Restoration of Fixed Images, given by Grant B. Romer and Michael Hager from the International Museum of Photography of Rochester, New York, in November 1986, also in Pachuca. It included 5 visits to photographic collections and was organized and financed by CODOLMAG, UNESCO and the UAP.

- 1st National course of Applied Optics for Photography in September 1986 at the INADE in Tonanzintla, Puebla, organized and financed by CODOLMAG, the INADE, the UAP and the Sub-Ministry of Superior Education and Scientific Research of the Ministry of Education.

-Two practical work sessions: Chemical Processes for Permanence (published) and Catalog Procedures for Photographic Images.

As a result of its activities, many institutions have applied to the group for information and practical consultations and research has begun.

4) The Paper Group initiated its activities in October 1984, coordinated originally by Cristina Treviño Urquijo, then by myself and now by Jorge Salas Estrada. Its home is in the General Direction of Archive, Library and Publications of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It holds weekly sessions.

The Paper Group has nine handbooks ready for press, some to be published in the U.S.A. The Committee represented Mexico at the

meeting in Santo Domingo** and will be represented at the meeting to be held in Mexico City in October 1988 for which CODOLMAG was appointed as Organization Committee.

Requests for further information will be gladly received at any of the following institutions:

- Universidad Autonoma de Puebla.
- Dirección de Archivo Biblioteca y Publicaciones de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.
- Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía.
- Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas. UNAM.
- Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas. UNAM.

** Representatives from Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Venezuela met in Santo Domingo in September of 1987 at a meeting sponsored by the Organization of American States. One of the topics discussed at the meeting was the formation of a conservation organization for Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking conservators of Central and South America. (L.O.)