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In the field of surgery, plastic operations have become increasingly important, particularly in recent years. This is due, on the one hand, to the introduction of modern methods - transplantations with vessel and nerve anastomoses.
through microsurgery - and on the other hand, to indications arising from these methods - replantations of extremities, tissue replacement and so on. In addition, plastic-reconstructive measures for inherited and acquired defects have become commonplace.

In the past, plastic surgery was largely limited to the skin. Today, it also involves other organs, justifying the need for training in general and special surgery as a prerequisite for plastic surgery.

The term ‘plastic’ surgery is derived from the Greek ‘plassein’. Thus, etymologically it is related to plastic art and consequently has inherited expressions associated with sculpture. In addition to general surgery, which is largely an artisan’s skill acquired only with long years of study, plastic operations demand an aptitude for forming and shaping, in other words, an ‘artistic vein’. Therefore, a plastic surgeon must have imagination, a sense of spatial and visual effects, powers of deduction, and artistic skill as well as a certain degree of courage, because, in contrast to almost all other fields of medicine, each success or failure can be seen immediately. This is particularly true of first operations using a procedure introduced by the surgeon, as can be seen from the conditions of the first rhinoplasty by Carpue or by Barnard’s first heart transplantation.

It is not surprising therefore, that numerous methods have been described since this special field was introduced and, comparing with syndromes, all procedures of a proper new type of incision are given their inventor’s name. This is meant to show that the ‘new and better method’ was inaugurated by this and no other author. However, for someone who has dealt with all facets of plastic surgery and its masters, this doubtlessly welcome fact has something about it that is questionable and sometimes even somewhat alarming, when one considers that long known but forgotten methods are often published as one’s own. Yet, it is an entirely understandable omission when the many types of incisions introduced for certain operations are considered. Very few people can outline all of the various incisions and their modifications. In addition, divergent interpretations exist in
several languages and the distribution of plastic surgery facilities differs throughout the world. Doubtless, the cradle of plastic surgery has resided in only a few countries, all separated by language. Thus, there are excellent Italian and French masters, English and American pioneers of plastic surgery and, last but not least, German surgeons who published fundamental studies in the field of plastic surgery. These studies, reported during the last century, from the extremely important publications of the Englishman Carpue on Indian Rhinoplasty through the studies of Chopart and Desault to those of Graefe, Dieffenbach, Langenbeck and others, were available in the language of the respective country. Nevertheless, at that time - when the publications could still be counted - there was an exchange of ‘new ideas’ with many arguments about priorities, so that the literature on plastic surgery could be surveyed in its entirety.

Also, it was during this period that the first handbook of plastic surgery was published by Zeis [1838] who gained the lasting gratitude of those interested in plastic surgery for his supplementary literature index. With this marked growth in scientific publications in this century the language barrier has become increasingly stronger, so that few Anglo-American plastic surgeons are informed about the great pioneering achievements of surgeons in other countries, particularly France and Germany. In this connection, special thanks are due to McDowell [1977], who recently reported on this subject in a collection of the most important reprints (The Source Book of Plastic Surgery). This book and the famous Zeis index made a certain view of the history of plastic surgery possible. However, this book is not intended as a history of plastic surgery. Rather its purpose is to clearly show that modern plastic surgeons still follow in the footsteps of the old masters. Many of our own procedures, which we initially thought we had actually inaugurated by ourselves, can be found in books published during the last century; this should increase the plastic surgeon’s modesty and
force us to respect the surgeons who operated without 
asepsis and anesthesia.
This atlas, deliberately entitled Plastic Surgery - Past 
and Present compares modem types of incisions, introduced 
by today’s plastic surgeons, with early original 
descriptions and illustrations. In addition, the first original 
data and pictures for a number of methods now used 
routinely, are presented. Clearly, present results have 
often been considerably improved by only a slight modification 
and some new discoveries, such as double epithelization, 
free grafts, better suture technique, and so on.
As most of these plastic operations were described at a 
time when asepsis did not exist, it is quite understandable 
that current surgeons achieve greater success than the 
masters of those bygone days, who operated under more 
difficult conditions. After all, Robert Koch first succeeded 
in isolating the tubercle bacillus in 1882, thus establishing 
an authentic connection between carriers and diseases. 
This and later bacteriologic discoveries created the need 
for asepsis and reinforced the demands made by Semmelweis, 
which were translated into action by Lister. By this 
time, the legendary Dieffenbach, who in Germany is 
called the ‘father of plastic surgery’, had been dead for a 
long time (1847).
Time passes quickly and, involved as we are in our 
own eventful lives, the achievements of others are forgotten, 
especially since time is a relative factor.
In conclusion, for the benefit of all plastic surgeons, 
this atlas presents modem incisions that to a large extent 
resemble those of the old masters, and an attempt is being 
made to compare the original illustrations of the first 
authors with present methods. This book is intended to 
provide the proper impetus for modesty and enable all to 
correct the list of references to the literature on plastic 
surgery. Moreover, we would like to present the biographies 
of the surgeons and scientists up to the 19th century 
which were most important for plastic surgery.

Although this book could be considered ‘didactic’, certain 
methods, although described earlier, were not practicable 
at that time for most surgeons. The great merits
gained by Le Mesurier in cleft lip surgery are well known. Nearly all of the more modern incisions in harelip operations are based on Le Mesurier’s technique, and we are all grateful to this famous Canadian. Also we discussed the original incision of Hagedorn, who at the end of the last century decided to change the linear scar to a zigzag one. Hagedorn’s zigzag scar, however, was not generally accepted at that time, because it lacked the prerequisite for Le Mesurier’s technique - as well as for many other new procedures - a precise measurement, which is now done on anesthetized patients. Because of the problems involved in elementary pain at that time - a contrast to modern anesthesiology - this type of incision could not find worldwide acceptance. This example is only meant to show that, both in the past and the present, great plastic surgeons have introduced individual types of incisions. However, if a particular method is to be successful, another factor must be considered - the time required for advances in medicine to become apparent.

Finally, we extend our special appreciation to Mrs. Use Meyer, who typed the manuscript and to Mr. Wolfgang Huisgen, who translated this book. We are also grateful to Mrs. Helga Berthold and Mrs. Isolde Rösel for drawing and photographing the illustrations. May this book show how today’s plastic surgeons have built up the achievements of European and American plastic surgeons of the 19th century. Their efforts form the foundation on which modern plastic surgery rests.

St. Wolfgang and Berlin 1983 Joachim Gabka
Ekkehard Vaubel

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