Zeis’ Manual of Plastic Surgery (1838): Translated by T.J.S. Patterson—A Commentary and Book Review

Blair O. Rogers, M.D.
New York, New York, USA

Tom Patterson, more formally listed as T.J.S. Patterson, of Oxford University, one of the world’s foremost medical historians especially in the field of plastic and reconstructive surgery, has amazed us once again with his most recent (1988) translation of a veritable milestone in the history of plastic surgery! He has translated the Handbuch der plastischen Chirurgie from German into very readable English—the Handbuch or “Manual” written by Eduard Zeis of Dresden and published in 1838, 150 years ago (Fig. 1) [1]. Patterson’s translation is now available from the Oxford University Press in a superbly concise, comfortable 225-page book, held easily in one’s hands for detailed or leisurely reading.

Tom, who is fluent in German, is already known to many of us as the translator and/or compiler of the first two volumes of The McDowell Series of Plastic Surgery Indexes: Volumes I and II [2–3]. It was Patterson who translated with additional comments and revisions The Zeis Index and History of Plastic Surgery: 900 B.C. to 1863 A.D., Volume I, published in German by the same Eduard Zeis in 1863 [2]. The Patterson Index of Plastic Surgery: 1864 A.D. to 1920 A.D., Volume II, an extensive compilation of the world’s plastic surgery articles, further added to our general and specific knowledge of the techniques and the entire development of plastic and reconstructive surgery [3]. At the time of the publication of these first two McDowell Indexes, Patterson was Clinical Lecturer in Plastic Surgery at Oxford University, Consultant Plastic Surgeon of the United Oxford Hospitals, and Hunterian Professor of The Royal College of Surgeons.

Address reprint requests to Blair O. Rogers, M.D., 875 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021, USA

Fig. 1. Edward Zeis (1807–1868). The portrait is dated ‘c. 1842’ (reproduced by kind permission of the Department of Prints and Drawings of the Zentralbibliothek, Zürich) (from Patterson [1])

Perhaps the readers of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery would like to know a little more about T.J.S. Patterson. Tom was born November 27, 1920 in Melbourne, Australia. After his family migrated to the United Kingdom in 1923, ‘‘.. . at the appropriate time [(he)] started medical studies at the University of Basle, where he became proficient in both the German language and fencing (he represented the University at fencing for the Swiss championship). He finished his medical training at Cambridge University and St. Thomas’ Hospital (London) qualifying in 1944. After Army service in World War II and general surgical training, he took his training in
plastic surgery (1952–1957) at St. Thomas’ Hospital and The Hospital for Sick Children under Richard Battle and David Matthews. . . . In 1957 Tom went to Oxford where he spent 11 very happy years working with Eric Peet. After the latter’s death in 1968, Mr. Patterson became Head of the Department at the Churchill Hospital. In 1959 he became Hunterian Professor of The Royal College of Surgeons of England, and in 1963 he was given the Mowlem Award by the British Association of Plastic Surgeons. . . . In July 1978, . . . Patterson resigned all clinical work to become a fulltime Associate in the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine in Oxford, so that he could pursue this work in depth. Tom’s hobbies include music of all sorts, especially playing the viola in string quartets, and tramping with a backpack over most of the long distance paths in the UK’’ [3].

In this present translation, Patterson takes us back to Eduard Zeis’ first major book, the Zeis Manual published in 1838, 25 years prior to the Zeis Index and considered by all of us plastic surgery historians as the first major definitive manual and history of plastic surgery describing the development of our fascinating specialty.

In quoting and paraphrasing Frank McDowell’s Foreword to Volume II, The Patterson Index . . . this reviewer merely wishes to confirm McDowell’s praise who wrote as follows: “All plastic surgeons, present and future, are endlessly indebted to Mr. Patterson for the colossal task of compiling this Volume II” [3].

In addition to his unchallenged and widely acknowledged skill as a medical historian, Patterson also had the time over these many years to contribute numerous experimental and clinical papers to the plastic surgery literature dealing with a wide variety of subjects including keloid scars, congenital ear deformities, congenital deformities of the hand, lumbar myelomeningoceles, congenital ring constrictions, experimental skin grafts with studies of their survival and blood supply, congenital defects of the mouth, the treatment of vaginal stenosis, etc., etc. These aforementioned subjects should be enough of an indication of the wide variety of Patterson’s interests and should certainly settle any question by those who occasionally ask the question whether he is primarily a historian. As one can see, he has been and is a very accomplished clinician as well.

In the correspondence exchanged between Patterson and this reviewer about his translation of Zeis’ Manual, it is perhaps interesting to quote a brief paragraph from one of his letters written more than a year prior to the publication of the present translation. He wrote as follows: “I am increasingly interested and excited by the translation—Zeis and his contemporaries were thinking about, and sometimes solving, many of the problems in plastic surgery that I had thought were developed as a result of World War I. Perhaps the start of ‘modern’ plastic surgery should be put back about 80 years. . . . Zeis’ original is a big book, but there are many duplications, and his style is very verbose. I am tightening this up to make for easier reading, while insuring that it all makes ‘surgical’ sense. I am adding footnotes where I think interpretations and corrections would be helpful, and I have started on an introductory essay to put the whole thing in context” [4].

With the above brief biography as an opener, is it any wonder then that Patterson’s most recent translation of Zeis’ “Manual” comes at an appropriate time as more and more young residents and younger plastic surgeons throughout the world are taking a more lively and curious interest in the history of our specialty.

As someone who has been involved in the writing of medical history since 1950, especially in the fields of transplantation and plastic surgery, this reviewer literally stands in awe in the presence of a mind as fertile as Tom Patterson’s, especially as it is evidenced by his translation of the very verbose and difficult German of that period in order to make this Zeis’ Manual so very, very readable.

For anyone interested in the earliest history of the development of our specialty, this translation of Zeis’ Manual is an absolute “must,” such that any present-day plastic surgeon writing an article on the development of a so-called “new” surgical procedure in this year 1988, should first look back to both Zeis’ Manual (1838) and Zeis’ Index (1863) to see whether any similar operation might have been described 100 or 150 years earlier.

Included in Patterson’s translation are chapters and sections dealing with the biography of Eduard Zeis (1807–1868); plastic surgery outside Germany; the history of plastic surgery; the reunion of completely separated parts; the Italian method of nasal reconstruction; Graefe’s modification of the Italian method—the German method of nasal reconstruction; the Indian method of nasal reconstruction; the indications for plastic surgery; the physiology and pathology of skin flaps; the care of the patient after operation; general operative technique; rhinoplasty; blepharoplasty; cheiloplasty; stomatoplasty; cheekplasty; lacrimal fistula; filling the orbit after removal of the eye; soft palate staphyloplasty; otoplasty; bronchoplasty for tracheal fistula; transplantation of skin to prevent recurrence of cancer; foreskin reconstruction—posthioplasty; scrotum reconstruction—oscheoplasty; prolapse of the uterus and vagina; urethral fistula—urethroplasty; vesico-vaginal fistula—cystoplasty or elytroplasty; artificial anus; hernia; tenotomy, clubfoot; wry neck; and finally, contracture of the fingers.