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A SELECTIVE HISTORY OF GROIN HERNIA SURGERY IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY: The Anatomic Atlases of Astley Cooper, Franz Hesselbach, Antonio Scarpa, and Jules-Germain Cloquet

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One of the most important eras in the evolution of groin hernia surgery is that of the early nineteenth century. It was a time when cadaver dissections and diverse clinical studies culminated in a more thorough anatomic understanding of the inguinal canal. Many of these successes were built on late-eighteenth-century observations of surgeons and anatomists, such as Pieter Camper (1722–1789; *Icones Herniarum*, Frankfurt; Varrentrapp & Wermer, 1801), Antonio Gimbernat (1734–1816; *Nuevo Metodo de Operar en la Hernia Crural*, Madrid: Widow Ibarra, 1793), and August Richter (1742–1812; *Abhandlung von der Bruch*, Göttingen, JC Dieterich, 1778). In most instances, these pre-nineteenth-century (and eventually eponymic) hernia descriptions were dutifully presented in sparsely illustrated monographs and treatises.

For reasons cloaked in permanent historical uncertainty, the style of hernia textbook publishing dramatically changed at the turn of the nineteenth century, when sumptuous anatomic atlases, exemplified by those of Astley Cooper, Franz Hesselbach, Antonio Scarpa, and Jules-Germain Cloquet, began to appear. Characterized by the presence of numerous detailed engravings, these texts were expensive to publish and often had limited print runs. As a result, almost 2 centuries later, original copies of these atlases are difficult to locate and, for the bibliophile, increasingly expensive to purchase. Their rarity makes the sense of historical oneness that can be achieved by physically holding and perusing the text of an esteemed past colleague—a practical impossibility for most surgeons.

This article breaches this historical ravine and reintroduces these marvelous works to a new generation of scalpel bearers. The texts under discussion, including the various translations, are part of my personal library and represent a small portion of a growing collection on hernias. I have attempted to preserve these old books because as a surgical historian, if I am to adequately understand the evolution of hernia surgery, then it is important to have ready access to original sources. In addition, the flow of scientific information from one country to another (i.e., translations) must be appreciated. For these reasons, I have diligently researched and present, for the first time, the publishing history of these texts. Admittedly, other books from this period have proved significant in their own right; however, from both a national and international standpoint, these four authors and their illustrative efforts represent the most influential hernia tomes of their day and their country.



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