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## **Three little-known botanical gardens at Versailles (1762–1851): A comparative analysis of their project and of the social and intellectual trajectory of their creators**

ALTHOUGH MANY ASPECTS still remain to be studied, the botanical significance of the Trianon gardens during the reign of Louis XV is relatively well known.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand three other “botanical gardens” created, cultivated and finally closed between 1755 and 1851 at Versailles seem to have received very little if any attention. This paper proposes to follow the instigators of these gardens and to present their respective goals. The social and intellectual trajectory of these men and the examination of the conceptual project of these gardens, for as much as they can be determined as exemplary, seems to support the hypothesis of a transition, during this period, from a medical and aesthetic approach to botany to an agronomic and popularizing one. As the three principal protagonists of these three botanical gardens were all active members of the “Société d’agriculture” of Versailles, we will look closely at the role of this society.

Louis-Guillaume Le Monnier (1717–1799) was born into a rich and highly educated family. He became professor of botany at the Jardin du Roi in Paris and one of the principal doctors of Louis XVI at Versailles. He was instrumental in the creation of the botanical garden at Trianon but he also participated in the creation in the 1760’s, and finally became the proprietor in 1792, of a private botanical garden situated in the Versailles Montreuil neighborhood. This garden was destroyed soon after his death in 1799.

Antoine-Nicolas Duchesne (1747–1827) was the son of a Superintendant of the Royal buildings of Versailles. He published a botanical treatise at the age of seventeen (1764) and is best known as the author of a treatise on strawberries (*Essai sur l’histoire naturelle des fraisiers*, 1766) and of another on squash (*Essai sur l’histoire naturelle des courges*, 1786 and 1793). But he was also the author of a proposal to convert a large portion of the King’s Kitchen Garden at Versailles into a botanical garden under the responsibility of the “Société d’agriculture”. This botanical garden existed starting in 1798 with Antoine Richard as gardener and, it seems, with Duchesne as director. In 1805, the King’s Kitchen Garden was returned to the State and the botanical garden dismantled.

François-Haken Philippar (1802–1849) was the son of one of the head gardener’s of Trianon. Working first as a gardener and then as manager in several different establishments he is said to have accumulated an important collection of notes and documents. At the creation of the Agriculture School at Grignon (future National Institute of Agronomy), he was invited to teach there and to manage the plantations. In 1834, based on a project submitted by Philippar, the city of Versailles opened a municipal botanical garden. Although he continued to teach at Grignon, Philippar was its first and only director. The garden was closed in 1851, shortly after Philippar’s death.

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<sup>1</sup> See Gabriela LAMY, “L’éducation d’un jardinier royal au Petit Trainon: Antoine Richard (1734–1807)”, *Polia — Revue de l’art des jardins*, n. 4, automne 2005, p. 57–74.