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The Meudon Observatory park

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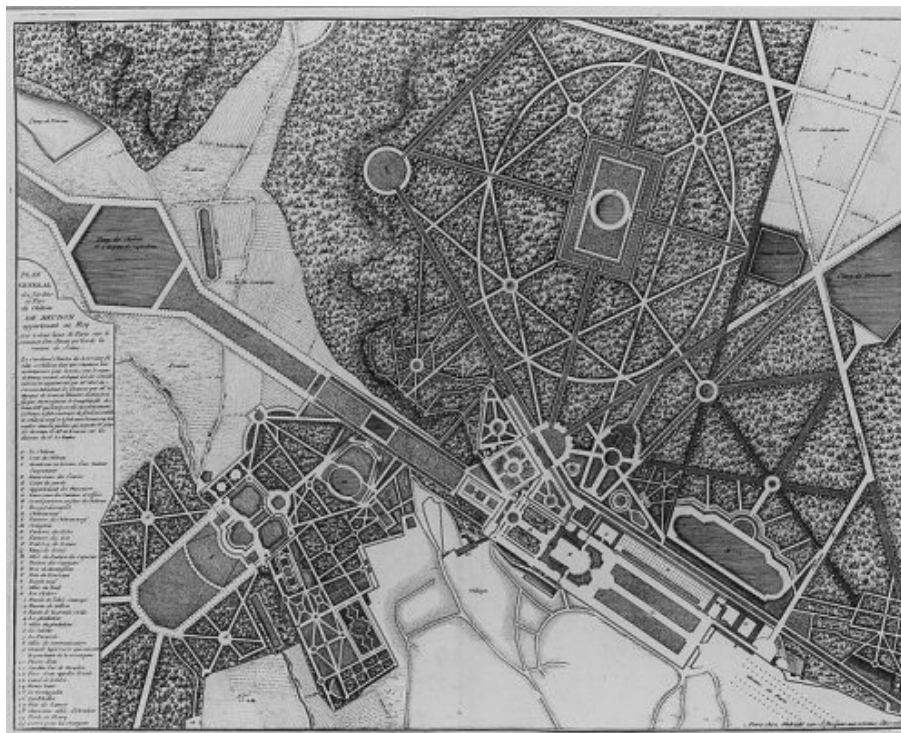
**Observatoire de Paris - PSL Centre de recherche en astronomie et
astrophysique**

The heights of Meudon have always been noted for their beauty. French style gardens and royal hunting grounds in the past, they enclose today an outstanding and protected biodiversity.

When Servien, superintendent of finances and baron of Meudon, bought the château perched above Meudon, in 1655, there was no park. He spent his fortune to buy the land, to create the large terrace held up by the magnificent wall which can still be seen today, to lay out the paths, to dig out the pools, right up to his death four year later.

French style gardens

Louvois bought the domain in 1679 ; he employed architects, gardeners, fountain designers etc. who had worked at Versailles, and in particular Le Nôtre who was asked to arrange the gardens and the pools, and to set up a complete hydraulic system to supply water for the decorative fountains. This was the apogee of French style gardens.



General layout of the King's gardens and park at the Meudon Château... Publisher : Mariette (Paris)

Enamoured by the marvellous gardens, by the magnificent layout, by the effects induced by the changes in height and by the view of Paris, Louis XIV bought the domain for his son in 1695. He planted tens of thousands of flowers and 8000 chestnut trees. The forest, traversed by alleyways wide enough for horse-drawn carriages, became a place where the Court could go and hunt.

Royal hunts

After the death of Louis XIV, the Royal domain was increasingly neglected. Louis XV and Louis XVI used it for hunting. The latter sold the lower gardens to the peasants. To separate the pleasure gardens from the hunting grounds, he built a wall, which is still there, and destroyed the water reservoirs and pools.

After 1800 the domain was divided up. Napoleon bought a part of the grounds ; he tore out the boxwood hedges and the old arbours so that his troops could parade on the large terrace.

In 1876 a part of the domain was given to the astronomer Janssen to create an observatory. In 1913 the domain was classed as a historical monument and registered as a protected site in 1930. This classification ensures the conservation of monuments and sites. In spite of the damage caused by the storms in 1990 and 1999, the forest still has a large number of very large trees, a significant variety of species, and is home to an important population of birds and insects.

Historical Monuments and protected areas

The ministry responsible for the environment, acting on a European directive (sand-chalk lawns) concerning protected zones with birds, insects and rare plants, declared in 2009 the « afforestations and prairies of the Meudon Observatory » to be a Nature Reserve for ecology, flora and fauna (Zone Naturelle d'Intérêt Ecologique Faunistique et Floristique).

The management of the Observatory, using the most appropriate methods, is doing its best to preserve this exceptional asset.