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**Autor:** Grant, Jason / Vust, Mathias

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE SYMPOSIUM « THE BOTANICAL  
LEGACY OF JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC CHAILLET »  
AT THE CONFERENCE « USES, PRACTICES  
AND FUNCTIONS OF HISTORICAL HERBARIA »,  
NOVEMBER 5-9, 2023, ASCONA, SWITZERLAND

JASON GRANT & MATHIAS VUST<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

This is an introduction to the proceedings of the symposium « The botanical legacy of Jean-Frédéric Chaillet » that was held at the conference « Uses, practices and functions of historical herbaria », Monte Verità Conference and Cultural Centre in Ascona, Switzerland on November 5-9, 2023. This was the closing conference of the Swiss National Science Foundation funded grant « Botanical legacies from the Enlightenment: unexplored collections and texts at the crossroads between humanities and sciences », FNS Grant number CRSII5\_186227. Of the twelve original presentations making up the programme on November 8, 2023, six have been developed into articles and are published here. These papers are devoted to 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century botanists in Europe who made significant advances in botany and mycology.

**Keywords:** conference proceedings, herbaria, botanical history, 18<sup>th</sup> century, 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Résumé**

Il s'agit d'une introduction aux actes de la journée intitulée « L'héritage botanique de Jean-Frédéric Chaillet » qui se sont tenus lors du colloque « Usage, pratiques et fonctions des herbiers historiques », au Centre de congrès du Monte Verità à Ascona, en Suisse, du 5 au 9 novembre 2023. Il s'agissait du colloque de clôture du projet financé par le Fonds national suisse « Héritages botaniques des Lumières : exploration de sources et d'herbiers historiques à l'intersection des lettres et des sciences », FNS Grant number CRSII5\_186227. Sur les douze présentations originales composant le programme du 8 novembre 2023, six ont été développées en articles et sont publiées ici. Ces articles sont consacrés aux botanistes européens des XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles qui ont réalisé des avancées significatives en botanique et en mycologie.

**Mots-clés :** actes de colloque, herbiers, histoire botanique, XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

<sup>1</sup> Université de Neuchâtel, Institut de biologie, rue Émile-Argand 11, 2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Author for correspondence: jason.grant@unine.ch

### Zusammenfassung

Dies ist eine Einführung in die Beiträge des Symposiums «Das botanische Erbe von Jean-Frédéric Chaillet», das auf der Konferenz «Verwendung, Praktiken und Funktionen historischer Herbarien» vom 5. bis 9. November 2023 im Konferenz- und Kulturzentrum Monte Verità in Ascona, Schweiz, stattfand. Dies war die Abschlusskonferenz des vom Schweizerischen Nationalfonds finanzierten Stipendiums «Botanische Vermächtnisse aus der Aufklärung: unerforschte Sammlungen und Texte an der Schnittstelle zwischen Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften», FNS-Stipendium Nr. CRSII5\_186227. Von den zwölf ursprünglichen Präsentationen, die das Programm am 8. November 2023 bildeten, wurden sechs zu Artikeln weiterentwickelt und werden hier veröffentlicht. Diese Artikel sind Botanikern des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts in Europa gewidmet, die bedeutende Fortschritte in der Botanik und Mykologie gemacht haben.

**Stichwörter:** Kolloquiumsbeiträge, Herbarien, Botanische Geschichte, 18. und 19. Jahrhundert.

### INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce a series of articles stemming from the symposium «The botanical legacy of Jean-Frédéric Chaillet» that was held at the conference «Uses, practices and functions of historical herbaria», Monte Verità Conference and Cultural Centre in Ascona, Switzerland on November 5-9, 2023. The other two include a «Portrait of the botanist from his herbarium: Jean-Jacques Rousseau» and «Collection practices among travelers», the proceedings of which will be published elsewhere.

This was the closing conference of a Swiss National Science Foundation grant, «Botanical legacies from the Enlightenment: unexplored collections and texts at the crossroads between humanities and sciences», FNS Grant number CRSII5\_186227. This project ran for 52 months from February 2020 to May 2024 and spanned the entire Covid-19 pandemic, which led to numerous challenges and opportunities. The conference was hosted and financed by the FNS and Congressi

Stefano Franscini, a conference platform of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH).

### THE BOTANICAL LEGACY OF JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC CHAILLET

The Chaillet symposium was dedicated to 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century botanists in Switzerland and elsewhere who made significant advances in botany and mycology. A self-effacing, modest naturalist in the mould of an Abraham Gagnebin or a Jean-Antoine D'Ivernois, Jean-Frédéric Chaillet (1747-1839) catalogued the plant life of the Neuchâtel region of Switzerland, the watchmaking «Silicon Valley» of the Enlightenment. He amassed an exhaustive herbarium of flowering plants, bryophytes, algae, lichens and fungi from the region. A scientific go-between writing about these collections and others, Chaillet, like Gagnebin to Haller, cultivated a broad correspondence network that lubricated the flow of information accumulation and exchange in the Republic of Letters. However, since he, like many female botanists of the period, published little

**Usages, pratiques et fonctions des herbiers historiques** 5.-9.11.2023  
**Uses, practices and functions of historical herbaria**

Colloque de clôture du projet « Héritages botaniques des Lumières : exploration de sources et d'herbiers historiques à l'intersection des lettres et des sciences » (FNS, n° 186227)

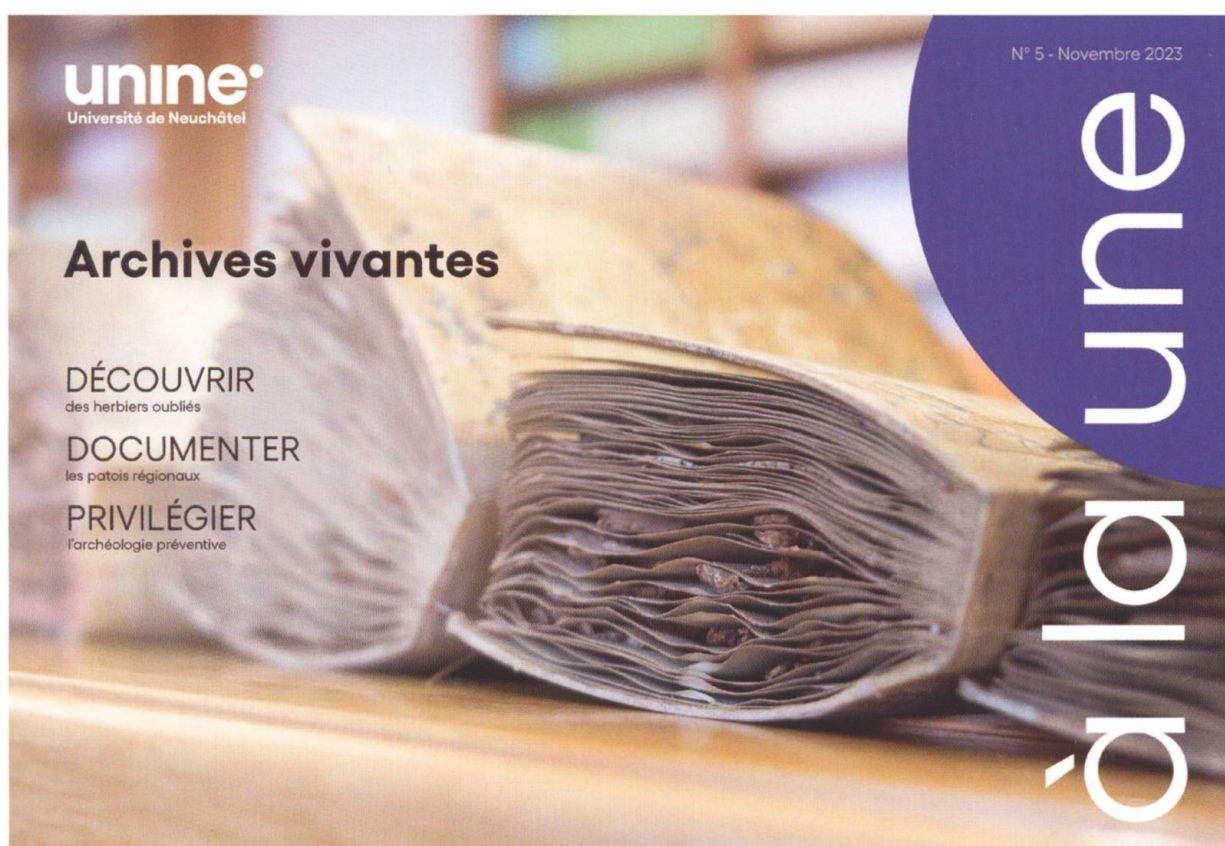
Closing conference of the project "Botanical legacies from the Enlightenment: Unexplored collections and texts at the crossroads between the humanities and the sciences" (SNF, Nr. 186227)

Ascona, Centre de congrès du Monte Verità  
Ascona, Monte Verità Conference and Cultural Centre

botanical-legacies.unine.ch



Figure 1. Conference poster.



**Figure 2.** Research into Chaillat's forgotten herbaria has been the subject of articles in the November 2023 issue of « A la UNE », a brochure of the University of Neuchâtel. The cover photo is an image of the bound volumes of fungi made by Jean-Frédéric Chaillat.

or nothing, Chaillat's place in history has been largely obscured. The recent identification and study of his catalogues demonstrate his importance as a compiler of knowledge of European organismal biology, especially mycology.

Chaillat's herbarium and associated material kept at the University of Neuchâtel have been data-based and cross-referenced to understand his work methods. His collections of bryophytes, lichens and fungi in bound volumes are nearly unique in science and are some of the oldest known collections of cryptogams. This technique demonstrates a passion and meticulousness rarely seen in herbaria, leading us to a study of

the history of the object itself. Comparison with botanical practices of other 18<sup>th</sup>-century savants, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who also collected herbarium specimens, has revealed a conscientious and humble figure content to remain in the shadows; his discoveries, in particular, new fungal species were published by others, notably Alphonse Pyramus de Candolle (1806-1893) in Geneva and the founding father of systematic mycology, Christian Hendrik Persoon (1761-1836), in Paris. Therefore, we ask, what is Chaillat's place in history? Is he one of the earliest «citizen scientists»? May he even be seen as a reluctant hero of the Enlightenment Republic of Letters?



**Figure 3.** Conference room.

ORIGINAL PROGRAM OF  
THE SYMPOSIUM «THE  
BOTANICAL LEGACY OF JEAN-  
FRÉDÉRIC CHAILLET» HELD ON  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2023

Organizers: Jason Grant, Mathias Vust,  
Edouard Di Maio.

**David Mabberley** (Wadham College,  
University of Oxford, United Kingdom) – *The  
botanical legacy of the incomplete, the disre-  
garded and the discriminated against*

**Marcel Jacquat** (Musée d'histoire  
naturelle de La Chaux-de-Fonds) – *De la  
Montagne jurassienne à une reconnaissance  
européenne: essai sur la contribution du  
médecin-chirurgien-botaniste-paléontologue*

*Abraham Gagnebin (1707-1800) aux travaux  
d'Albert de Haller, Carlo Allioni, etc.*

**Jurriaan De Vos** (Universität Basel) – *The  
botanical specimens of Abraham Gagnebin  
at the Herbaria Basel: Collection contexts as  
botanical interaction networks*

**Maura Flannery** (St. John's University,  
New York, USA) – *Seeing cryptogams in  
early modern botany*

**Michelle Price** (Conservatoire et Jardin  
botaniques de Genève) – *The founding of mod-  
ern bryology and the legacy of Johannes Hedwig*

**Jason Grant** (Université de Neuchâtel)  
– *Jean-Frédéric Chaillet (1747-1839) and the  
flora of Neuchâtel*



**Figure 4.** Edouard Di Maio giving his presentation on Jean-Frédéric Chaillet.



**Figure 5.** Preconference excursion to the Isole di Brissago.



Figure 6. Michelle Price and Jason Grant. Photo: Scott LaGreca.



Figure 7. View from the Monte Verità Conference and Cultural Centre.



**Figure 8.** David Mabberley giving his public talk.

**Mathias Vust** (Université de Neuchâtel)  
– *Les débuts de la lichénologie en Suisse*  
– *Chaillet ou le chaînon manquant*

**Scott LaGreca** (Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA) – *400 years of colonization: human impacts on Bermuda’s mycobiota*

**Edouard Di Maio** (Université de Neuchâtel)  
– *À la découverte de l’herbier Chaillet*

**Christian Forney and Martin Stuber** (Universität Bern) – *Historical plant species and herbarium specimens as a challenge for the digital humanities*

**Jason Grant** (Université de Neuchâtel)  
– *Table ronde sur Chaillet*

**David Mabberley** (Wadham College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom)  
– PUBLIC TALK – *Sir Joseph Banks to Robert Brown: The transition to professionalism in botany*

The abstracts are available at:  
[https://botanical-legacies.unine.ch/pdf/conference\\_2023\\_abstracts.pdf](https://botanical-legacies.unine.ch/pdf/conference_2023_abstracts.pdf)

#### WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS

Of the 12 oral presentations given in French or English, 6 have been developed into articles and listed below. The oral presentations on Jean-Frédéric Chaillet have been adapted as chapters of the forthcoming publication

entitled «“*Pour n'en avoir pas connu une, il a voulu les connaître toutes*” - *Études sur le botaniste Jean-Frédéric Chaillet (1747-1839)*» that will be published in the *Mémoire de la Société neuchâteloise des sciences naturelles*, Volume XV, 2025.

MABBERLEY David. 2024. *The botanical legacy of the incomplete, the disregarded and the discriminated against*.

JACQUAT Marcel. 2024. *De la Montagne jurassienne à une reconnaissance européenne. Essai sur la contribution du médecin-chirurgien-botaniste-paléontologue Abraham Gagnebin (1707-1800) aux travaux d'Albert de Haller et Carlo Allioni*.

DE VOS Jurriaan. 2024. *Ascribing an unknown historic herbarium to Johann Ludwig Buxtorf (1736-1804) of Basel, Switzerland*.

FLANNERY Maura. 2024. *Seeing cryptogams in early modern botany*.

PRICE Michelle. 2024. *The founding of modern bryology and the legacy of Johannes Hedwig: Eight good practices for bryophyte taxonomy*.

VUST Mathias, DI MAIO Edouard, FORNEY Christian & STUBER Martin. 2024. *Les herbiers historiques, défi pour les humanités numériques - l'herbier des lichens de J.-F. Chaillet comme projet pilote*.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The oral presentation of this article was given at the closing conference of the Sinergia project «Botanical Legacies from the Enlightenment: unexplored collections and texts at the cross-road between humanities and sciences / Héritages botaniques des Lumières: exploration de sources et d'herbiers historiques à l'intersection des lettres et des sciences», funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation between 2020 and 2024 (Grant no. CRSII5\_186227). The conference entitled «Uses, practices and functions of historical herbaria / Usages, pratiques et fonctions des herbiers historiques» was held on November 5–9, 2023, and hosted and partially financed by the Congressi Stefano Franscini, a conference platform of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH).

