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Between the salon and the laboratory (and beyond). The “new chemistry” of Marie-Anne Paulze-Lavoisier (1758-1836)

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Marie-Anne Paulze-Lavoisier (1758-1836) is known today as an active promoter of the so-called “new chemistry”, a set of theoretical and methodological assumptions that affected chemistry in the late eighteenth-century. This reputation is largely due to her collaboration with her husband, the French chemist Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743-1794), whom she supported through illustration and translation of chemical texts and laboratory assistance. This presentation aims to provide a more complex picture, highlighting Paulze-Lavoisier’s attempts to gain a reputation of her own. I will focus, in particular, on the spaces in which the Lavoisiers lived, worked, and experimented together, especially their residence at the Arsenal, in the eastern outskirts of Paris. We will then move beyond the domestic walls, following the couple in some of their trips in the French provinces. Finally, I will focus on Paulze-Lavoisier’s trajectories as a widow, when her working routine underwent profound changes. Even in this phase, as we shall see, spaces remained crucial, both as sites for knowledge-production and as resources for the construction of personal reputations.

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