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Strong gradient of benthic biogeochemical processes along a macrotidal temperate estuary: focus on P and Si cycles

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate the role of spatial and temporal physical, biological and biogeochemical gradients on sediment biogeochemistry along a macrotidal and Si-rich estuary. Scanning and biogeochemical analyses were performed in the inner, mid and outer Aulne Estuary (France) at four seasons. The inner estuary shows high diagenetic activity linked to fluid mud dynamics and river loads. The highest authigenic phosphorus (Aut-P) concentrations ever found in the literature are observed in the inner estuary (18 µmol g^{-1} PS sediment). This is explained by a combination of favorable factors, i.e. the high organic matter and nutrient loads, the reductive conditions, the freshwater properties (low pH, OH^-, sulfate and Mg^{2+} concentrations), the increase of particle residence time by the upward convergence of particles due to residual currents, and allochthonous riverine Aut-P. We suggest that the high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations (>400 µM) may even increase Aut-P precipitation through the increase of Fe–P formation in these low salinity conditions. In the mid estuary, erosion–deposition dynamics dominate in point bars and lead to the succession of poor and rich organic and authigenic phosphorus layers, recording thus the seasonality of matter loads and its seasonal translocation from the inner estuary. In the outer estuary, deposition rates are high and constant and biogeochemical properties are characteristic of marine environments. The precipitation of Aut-P from free phosphate (PO_4^{3-}) is lower than in the inner estuary and might be limited by higher Mg^{2+} concentrations in saline waters. This study highlights that small macrotidal estuaries, and especially their freshwater sediments, may constitute an important phosphorus sink through the precipitation of Aut-P. This precipitation could even be enhanced in fresh or brackish environments, thus increasing long term phosphorus storage and altering benthic fluxes of PO_4^{3-} to the pelagic ecosystem.

Keywords: Early diagenesis ; Silicate ; Phosphate ; Authigenic phosphorus ; Macrotidal ; Estuary

1. Introduction

Over the past century, estuarine and coastal ecosystems have suffered eutrophication in response to increased anthropogenic loads of nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) (Nixon 1995; Seitzinger et al. 2005). Eutrophication has led to drastic changes in N:P:Si ratios and ecosystem functioning (Cloern 2001; Ragueneau et al. 2002), resulting in seasonal limitations of phytoplankton growth by N, P and/or silicon (Si) (Conley 2000; Beucher et al. 2004). During the last decades, P and N have been identified to limit phytoplankton growth in fresh and marine waters, respectively (Smith 1984; Howarth and Marino 2006). Si and P limitations are now implicated in estuarine and coastal waters (Howarth et al. 2011) in response to Si retention - due to river damming (Conley et al. 1993) - and P removal - associated to the improvement in sewage treatment plants (Némery and Garnier 2006).

Nutrient loads and limitations not only depend on riverine fluxes, but also on benthic-pelagic coupling. In shallow ecosystems such as estuaries, benthic sediments constitute either 1) a nutrient source through the mineralization of deposited biogenic matter and diffusion processes generating benthic fluxes, and/or 2) a sink of deposited - allochthonous and/or autochthonous - biogenic matter (Prastka et al. 1998; Soetaert et al. 2000; Laruelle 2009). It is therefore very important to study the relative fate of N, P and Si upon the deposition of organic matter at the sediment-water interface, in particular in shallow ecosystems e.g. estuaries.

Along the land-sea continuum, estuaries are among the most productive ecosystems, but also the most hydrologically variable ones, due to river discharge, tides and winds (Day et al. 1989; Cloern 2001; Aller 2004). As tides can lead to a succession of different sedimentary facies

in estuaries (Aller 1994), it is essential to determine the sedimentary properties that exert a profound influence on vertical distributions of chemical species. Estuaries are also characterized by sharp gradients of environmental conditions - pH, salinity, temperature, nutrient concentrations - which can lead to strong gradients of biogeochemical processes (Yamada and D'Elia 1980; Sharp et al. 1984), but also to interactions between biogeochemical cycles, e.g. between P and Si cycles (Tallberg et al. 2008).

Estuaries play a major role in the transport and transformation of key elements (e.g. P and Si) and their bioavailability in the coastal zone. Estuaries are characterized by high buffering capacity due to the quick adsorption and desorption of dissolved inorganic P (phosphate, PO_4^{3-}) onto and from particles (Froelich 1988; Sundby et al. 1992), which permit the transport of adsorbed PO_4^{3-} along the land-sea continuum and its progressive release in brackish and marine waters. The deposition and mineralization of organic P (Orga-P) also generates PO_4^{3-} in sediment pore waters. In oxic sediment, PO_4^{3-} quickly adsorbs onto mineral particles, and reacts with iron oxides to form iron-bound phosphorus (Fe-P), thus buffering benthic PO_4^{3-} fluxes to the water column (Sundby et al. 1992; Anschutz et al. 1998). In deep and anoxic sediments, Orga-P mineralization and Fe-P dissolution generate PO_4^{3-} which can precipitate - e.g., with Ca^{2+} - to form a less reactive authigenic phase (Aut-P) favoring P storage (Ruttenberg and Berner 1993; Slomp et al. 1996). However, Aut-P is not often measured and accounts for a small fraction of P in existing estuarine studies.

The Si cycle is generally less studied than N or P cycles in estuaries. The availability in dissolved Si (silicic acid, $Si(OH)_4$) is however essential for the growth of diatoms, which constitute 50-75 % of coastal phytoplankton production (Nelson et al. 1995). The incorporation

of Si by living organisms also participates in increasing the deposition rate of organic matter through the ballast effect of amorphous biogenic silica (Smetacek 1985). The amorphous silica - e.g., diatom skeleton, sponges, plants - settles at the sediment-water interface and dissolves into $Si(OH)_4$ that diffuses back to pelagic waters. As with PO_4^{3-}, $Si(OH)_4$ also undergoes sorption processes onto particles, in particular in resuspended sediments (Gehlen and Van Raaphorst 2002).

Estuaries have however been given low attention with respect to Si-P interactions. Competition between Si and P cycles - i.e., between $Si(OH)_4$ and PO_4^{3-} for sorption sites - were suggested in lakes, rivers and/or laboratory conditions (Hartikainen et al. 1996; Tuominen et al. 1997; Mayer and Jarrell 2000; Koski-Vähälä et al. 2001). $Si(OH)_4$ was shown to enhance PO_4^{3-} desorption and benthic fluxes (Mayer and Jarrell 2000; Koski-Vähälä et al. 2001), prevent PO_4^{3-} adsorption, but also increase iron-bound P (Fe-P) formation (Mayer and Jarrell 2000; Koski-Vähälä et al. 2001; Loucaides et al. 2010). Because high concentrations of $Si(OH)_4$ could alter the P cycle, it is essential to investigate simultaneously benthic chemical species of Si and P cycles, and to consider and discuss the impact of Si-P interactions on the biogeochemistry of Si-enriched benthic sediments. Importantly, the role of $Si(OH)_4$ has never been related to authigenic P (Aut-P) formation.

The Aulne Estuary - the main tributary flowing into the Bay of Brest (Fig. 1) - is a shallow macrotidal ecosystem characterized by high anthropogenic nutrient inputs (due to intense agricultural activities, fisheries and urbanization), Si inputs resulting from weathering of Si-enriched soils and terrestrial phytoliths, and intense hydrodynamic regime (e.g. high tidal range and currents). These properties of the Aulne Estuary may be favorable for Si-P interactions, as

recently suggested by the increased PO_4^{3-} benthic fluxes linked to high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations of the Bay of Brest (Tallberg et al. 2008).

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of environmental factors on the benthic biogeochemical processes and the distribution of P and Si forms along an estuarine gradient. This study was undertaken in benthic sediments of the Aulne Estuary, as a model of $Si(OH)_4$ enriched sediments in a small macrotidal estuary.

2. Methods

2.1. Study site

Located in Northwestern France, the macrotidal Aulne Estuary (averaged tidal amplitude of 4 m, 35 km long; Fig. 1) receives N and Si enriched waters from the Aulne River that drains an area of about 1800 km² and brings annually 60 % of fresh water to the Bay of Brest. Nitrate (NO_3^-) concentrations at the Aulne River outfall were maximal in winter (~ 500 µmol L^{-1}) and minimal in summer (~ 100 µM; Réseau ECOFLUX, http://www-iuem.univ-brest.fr/ecoflux; Table 1). Free PO_4^{3-} concentrations through the year were consistently low (~ 1 µM; Réseau ECOFLUX; Table 1) due to PO_4^{3-} adsorption onto particles (Mayer and Gloss 1980). Mean $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations were close to 130 µM with sporadic variations between 50 and 200 µM (Réseau ECOFLUX; Table 1). The oceanic climate of the region leads to higher precipitations - associated to frequent storms - in winter than in summer, thus modifying river discharge. In 2009, river flow ranged from 1.7 to 189 m^3 s^{-1} (mean = 24.4 m^3 s^{-1}; Fig. 2). The spatial distribution of

salinity ranging from 0 to 35 throughout the Aulne Estuary depends on season, river discharge and tide. The concentrations of NO_3^-, PO_4^{3-} and $Si(OH)_4$ decreased with salinity (Table 1) to 0-35, 0-0.5, and 0-10 µM, respectively, in the Bay of Brest (Service d'Observation en Milieu Littoral SOMLIT, somlit.epoc.u-bordeaux1.fr).

2.2. Sampling design

Cruises were performed in February, May, July and October 2009. Three stations were located from upstream to downstream of the Aulne Estuary (A1, A2, A3; Fig. 1) at salinity of ~ 0, ~ 20 and ~ 30. Sampling was always performed at mid-tide (+/- 1.5 h) in subtidal shores. Note that the presence of highly consolidated and unpenetrable sediment at station A2 previously sampled in February and May prevented core sampling at the exactly same site in July and October. Core sampling was consequently performed 200 m downward the site previously sampled in February and May.

Gravity corer (UWITEC®) was used to sample plexiglass cores (9.5 cm diameter x 60 cm long). Corer weight was adjusted to allow 30 cm penetration into the sediment without disturbing the sediment-water interface.

Two sediment cores were sampled at each station in February, July and October - but not in May - to characterize the sedimentary structure by using Computer axial tomography (CAT scan). These cores were exposed to aerated waters in laboratory prior to their analysis. Three other cores were sampled at each station in February, May, July and October for assessment of

benthic biogeochemistry. These sediment cores were immediately sliced at a resolution of 0.5 cm (0-2 cm depth), 1 cm (2-4 cm depth), 2 cm (4-12 cm depth), and 4 cm (12-20 cm depth). Sediment sections were placed in sealed 50-ml centrifuge tubes containing Vectaspin 20 filters (0.45 µm pore size, Whatman®) according to Andrieux-Loyer et al. (2008).

Interstitial waters were extracted by centrifuging the sub-sampled sediments at 3500 rpm for 10 min (2 times) at cooled temperature and later acidified to pH = 2. One aliquot of the extracted pore water was preserved at 4 °C for analyses of $Si(OH)_4$*, Fe^{2+} and Mn^{2+} concentrations and the other aliquot was frozen for PO_4^{3-}†, NH_4^+ and (NO_3^- + NO_2^-) analyses (Andrieux-Loyer et al. 2008).

Comparisons were performed between our technique (pore waters extracted from sediments, centrifuged in a Vectaspin tube, and acidified) and Rhizons® (without any contact with air). The two extraction techniques showed similar results in Fe^{2+} concentrations, confirming that quick core slicing, centrifuging, acidification, and storage gave confident concentrations of dissolved species, and thus in particulate P forms.

The bulk sediment samples that were not centrifuged were stored at 4 °C for less than 15 days to determine granulometry. Centrifuged sediments were freeze-dried during 48 h, put at 60 °C to ensure the complete sediment dryness, and ground for further analyses of P forms in the solid fraction.

2.3. Laboratory analyses

* Silicate (or orthosilicic acid) is noted $Si(OH)_4$ for simplification and is mainly present as H_4SiO_4.

† Inorganic phosphate (or orthophosphate) is noted PO_4^{3-} for simplification. The predominant forms are HPO_4^{2-} and $H_2PO_4^-$ in fresh and marine waters.

The cores were analyzed with a Philips scanner (MX 8000 IDT 16) between 3 and 6 days after their sampling. Core tops were sealed with paraffin for stabilizing sediment according to Michaud et al. (2003) in the morning before the analysis. During the analysis, cores were horizontally placed on a table sliding through a crown consisting of a rotating X-ray source with x vertical receptors. The principle of this technique has been widely described in the literature (e.g., De Montety et al. 2003; Michaud et al. 2003). Core slices of 1 mm overlapping every 0.5 mm were scanned with the power settings of 120 Kv, 45 mA and a pitch of 1. We used a matrix of 512 × 512 and the field of view was 115, which gave a pixel resolution on each transverse section of 0.22 mm. The 2D longitudinal sections, which were perpendicularly reconstructed from the transverse sections, had a pixel resolution of 1 mm.

Sediment grain size analyses were performed using LS 200 Beckman Coulter laser granulometry. The fraction of fine particles - silt and clay (< 63 µm) - was chosen to characterize sediment granulometry (Lesourd et al. 2003). Porosity was obtained after drying wet sediment of precise volume for 5 days, when the loss of weight was determined (Berner 1980).

P forms expressed in µmol g^{-1} were determined using the sequential analytical procedure detailed in Andrieux-Loyer et al. (2008) and adapted from widespread extraction methods (Psenner et al. 1988; Ruttenberg 1992; Aspila 1976). Adsorbed and iron-oxide bound P (Fe-P) was extracted in the first extraction step with dithionite-bicarbonate (0.1 µM, 8h, 20°C). Na-acetate buffer (1 µM, pH=4, 6h, 20°C) followed by $MgCl_2$ wash (1 µM, pH=8, 0.5h, 20°C) were then used to recover authigenic P (carbonate fluoroapatite $Ca_5(PO_4,CO_3)_3F$, biogenic hydroxyapatite $Ca_{10}(PO_4)_6(OH)_2$, $CaCO_3$-bound P) noted Aut-P (step 2). The detrital

fluoroapatite-bound P (Det-P) was determined in a third step of HCl (1 µM) overnight. Organic P (Orga-P) was finally determined by ashing at 550 °C for 4h and using HCl (1 µM) overnight (step 4).

PO_4^{3-}, NH_4^+ and (NO_3^- + NO_2^-) concentrations were analyzed using segmented flow analysis (SFA; Aminot et al., 2009) and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations were determined with an AutoAnalyzer III (Bran+Luebbe®) using the method of Tréguer and Le Corre (1975). Fe^{2+} concentrations were measured with the ferrozine method (Sarradin et al. 2005) and Mn^{2+} with the leuco-malachite green method (Resing and Mottl 1992), both adapted for SFA. The precision of the analyses was 0.5 %.

2.4. Data processings

Pictures of longitudinal sections were obtained in dicom format to be later analyzed by image J® software. We analyzed the sedimentary structure of each core by using a tomogram representing tomographic intensities (TI) expressed in Hounsfield units (HU) along a longitudinal plane for the entire length of the core (Gagnoud et al. 2009; Michaud et al. 2003). The calibration gave specific values for tomographic intensities according to analyzed materials (i.e., TI_{air} = -1000; TI_{water} = 0; $TI_{calcite}$ = 2500). To simplify illustrations, picture and TI profile are presented for only one core because of the low variability of duplicates. Duplicate variability was studied in February and July at stations A2 and A3. At each sediment depth, the variability was very low in

the outer estuary (CV[‡] < 10%) and slightly higher in the mid estuary (CV < 20%). Higher heterogeneity between duplicates was only locally observed below 5 cm depth, with CV reaching a maximum of 50 % at A3 and 60-80 % at A2 at some local depths. This local heterogeneity in deep sediment layers was mostly explained by the presence of a rock or bioturbation in the outer estuary, and by a small vertical shift of deep layers between duplicates in the mid estuary because of the sloping core layers. Except these local and deep heterogeneities, the general form of TI profiles was similar between duplicates. This confirms that the analysis of one core is enough to highlight the sedimentary facies at each station.

Surfer® software was used to interpolate measured values year round and create contour maps for P form concentrations, dissolved species concentrations, and dissolved species molar ratios (i.e., NH_4^+:PO_4^{3-} and Fe^{2+}:PO_4^{3-} ratios).

All statistical analyses were performed with R software (http://cran.r-project.org). The normality and homoscedasticity of data sets were first assessed with Shapiro and Bartlett tests to determine the suitability of these data sets for parametric or non-parametric statistical tests. Wilcoxon or *t*-tests were performed to determine significant differences of porosity and grain size between stations or seasons. Pearson or Spearman correlations were used to evaluate relationships between all measured variables (Orga-P, Fe-P, Aut-P, Det-P, PO_4^{3-}, NH_4^+, (NO_3^- + NO_2^-), $Si(OH)_4$, Fe^{2+}, Mn^{2+}, porosity). For all tests, values were considered significant at $p < 0.05$.

[‡] CV is the coefficient of variation e.g. the standard deviation as a percentage of the mean

3. Results

3.1. Surface sediment grain size

Even not significant (Table 2), the proportion of fine sediments (% < 63 µm) in surface sediments was slightly lower in February (78 ± 6 %) than during other seasons (82 ± 3 %; Table 1) in the inner estuary (station A1). The proportion of fine surface sediments was lower in the intermediate estuary (station A2; 37-64 %) than at stations A1 and A3 (> 70 %; Table 1).

3.2. Porosity and salinity

In the inner estuary (station A1), porosity in surface sediments was significantly lower in February (0.82; Fig. 3, A1) compared to other months (> 0.9; Table 2). The porosity decreased with depth from 0.82 to 0.75 in February and from 0.95 to 0.8 in May, July and October. The intermediate estuary (station A2) showed a particular pattern with layers of low (0.65-0.75) and high porosity (0.8-0.9) alternated along the core in February, July and October (Fig. 3, A2), but profiles decreasing progressively over depth in May (0.88 to 0.6). In the outer estuary (station A3), the porosity decreased with depth from 0.88 to 0.76 except some local discontinuities in July and October (Fig. 3, A3). Contrary to the vertical decrease in porosity, pore water salinity was constant over depth in May or very slightly increased along each core in February (analyses not

performed in July and October), and increased from station A1 to station A3 (Khalil et al. submitted).

3.3. Tomographic intensity

In the inner estuary, the tomogram indicated two different levels of TI in February and July (Fig. 3, A1). A layer of low density sediments (TI < 400 HU), corresponding to fluid muds observed during core samplings, was pointed out at 0-3 cm depth in February and at 0-15 cm depth in July, while more dense sediments (TI = 700 HU) were observed deeper. Homogeneous TI values (350-450 HU) were measured over depth in October, when fluid muds were observed throughout whole cores.

In the mid estuary, TI values varied over a large range over depth (200 to > 1100 HU; Fig. 3, A2). In February, the lowest density (< 400 HU) was measured at 0-2 cm, while the highest and very variable density (600 to 1100 HU) was observed at 3-20 cm. Two thick bands of white color on the CAT scan pictures indicated particularly dense deposits (1100 HU) at 12 and 14 cm depth. These dense deposits (>1100 HU) were found at 6 and 8 cm depth in July. They were separated by relatively soft deposits (TI ~ 200 HU; plant detritus observed during core slicing). More (800 HU) and less (200-500 HU) dense deposits alternated every 1 or 2 cm at 0-15 cm. Below 15 cm depth, the TI range was smaller (500 to 800 HU). In October, we observed the same pattern as in July. The same dense deposits (TI value > 1000 HU) were observed at 0-2, 6 and 8 cm depth. These dense layers were still separated by very soft sediments (200 HU) at 4, 7, and 9

cm depth.

In the outer estuary, deposit properties were less variable over depth (500-800 HU) than in the mid estuary, but varied over the seasons (Fig. 3, A3). In February, the density of deposits averaged at 500 HU, whereas four layers of denser deposits (800 HU) appeared at 10, 12, 16 and 20 cm depth. In July, the same dense deposits (800 HU) were observed 2-3 cm deeper and a new layer of dense sediments appeared at 10 cm depth. In October, the same dense deposits occurred 3-4 cm deeper than in July (at 16, 18, 22 and 26 cm depth) and a new layer of dense sediments appeared at 10 cm depth (800 HU).

3.4. Particulate P forms

In the inner estuary (station A1), maximal Orga-P concentrations occurred in surface sediment in July (up to 15.6 µmol g^{-1}; Fig. 4, A1). Orga-P concentrations generally decreased with depth, with the lowest concentrations occurring in February and October (< 6 µmol g^{-1}). Fe-P profiles showed a relatively similar pattern as those of Orga-P. The lowest concentrations occurred in depth in February and October (about 13-15 µmol g^{-1}) and coincided with Aut-P maximal concentrations (16-18 µmol g^{-1}). Low concentrations and seasonal variations of Det-P were observed (5.4 ± 1.1 µmol g^{-1}).

The mid estuary (station A2) was characterized by a vertical succession of Orga-P poor and rich layers with two marked gaps (< 1 µmol g^{-1}) in May (6-12 cm) and October (8-20 cm; Fig. 4, A2). As observed in the inner estuary, these low Orga-P concentrations in February and

May were observed with the lowest Fe-P concentrations (< 8 µmol g^{-1}) and the highest Aut-P concentrations. In October, low Orga-P concentrations coincided however with the highest Fe-P and Aut-P concentrations. Det-P concentrations generally increased with depth and from February to October.

The outer estuary (station A3) showed relatively little seasonal variations regarding the vertical profiles of phosphorus forms. Orga-P and Fe-P concentrations decreased with depth (Fig. 4, A3), whereas Aut-P and Det-P concentrations varied little over depth (annual and vertical average concentrations of Aut-P = 6.9 ± 1.6 µmol g^{-1} and Det-P = 5.4 ± 1.1 µmol g^{-1}).

3.5. Dissolved chemical species

At all stations, the oxygen penetration depth varied from 0.5 mm to 5 mm (Khalil et al. submitted). The limit between suboxic (0.2-0.0 mg L^{-1}) and anoxic (0.0 mg L^{-1}) conditions - according to the classification of Tyson and Pearson (1991) - was thus always reached within the first 5 mm. All pore water NO_3^- profiles showed a strong decrease of concentrations with depth (Fig. 5). At all stations, NO_3^- was below the detection limit at a depth of 2-4 cm. The lowest penetration depths were observed in May (A1) or in July (A2, A3).

In the inner estuary, pore water PO_4^{3-} concentrations were always low (< 12.1 µM; Fig. 5, A1). Pore water concentrations of NH_4^+, Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+} and $Si(OH)_4$ increased with depth at all seasons and were much higher in February and May (up to 2800, 35, 900 and 580 µM, respectively). NH_4^+:PO_4^{3-} and Fe^{2+}:PO_4^{3-} ratios increased up to 300, especially in February and

May (Fig. 6, A1).

In the mid estuary, on the opposite to the inner estuary, PO_4^{3-} concentrations sharply increased with depth, especially in February and July (up to 259 and 193 µM; Fig. 5, A2). NH_4^+ concentrations never exceeded 1000 µM and decreased from February to October. Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+} and $Si(OH)_4$ were characterized by very high concentrations in subsurface sediment in February and May (550-800, 1500-3000 and 28-60 µM, respectively). NH_4^+:PO_4^{3-} ratios were higher than 16 in surface layers in February and in deepest layers in May but never reached the high values observed at A1 (Fig. 6, A2). The highest Fe^{2+}:PO_4^{3-} ratios occurred in May but never exceeded 70.

In the outer estuary, dissolved species showed vertical distributions observed typically for sediments undergoing diagenesis. PO_4^{3-}, NH_4^+ and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations increased with depth, while Mn^{2+} and Fe^{2+} showed maximal subsurface concentrations (Fig. 5, A3) . The deepest part of the sediment core contained the highest PO_4^{3-} concentrations in May, and the highest NH_4^+ and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations in July. Mn^{2+} and Fe^{2+} showed maximal subsurface concentrations never exceeding 252 µM and 42 µM, respectively, in October. On the opposite to the inner estuary, NH_4^+:PO_4^{3-} and Fe^{2+}:PO_4^{3-} ratios rarely exceeded values of 16 and 2, respectively, and decreased over depth (Fig. 6, A3).

3.6. Correlations between benthic properties

Pearson correlations were calculated on the matrix of measured variables (Table 3). In the

inner and outer estuary (stations A1 and A3), Orga-P was positively correlated to (NO_3^- + NO_2^-), Fe-P and porosity, and negatively correlated to $Si(OH)_4$, NH_4^+, Mn^{2+} and Det-P. In the mid and outer estuary (stations A2 and A3), positive correlations were observed for $Si(OH)_4$ *vs* PO_4^{3-}, $Si(OH)_4$ *vs* NH_4^+, and PO_4^{3-} *vs* NH_4^+. Negative correlations of Orga-P with PO_4^{3-} and Aut-P were only found in the inner estuary. At this station (A1), positive correlations were observed between $Si(OH)_4$, NH_4^+, Fe^{2+}, Mn^{2+} and Det-P *vs* Aut-P, while negative correlations were observed for PO_4^{3-}, Fe-P and Orga-P *vs* Aut-P, and NH_4^+ and $Si(OH)_4$ *vs* PO_4^{3-}. In the mid estuary, Aut-P was positively correlated with Fe-P, and negatively correlated with Aut-P.

4. Discussion

Enhancement of benthic biogeochemical processes in inner estuary

The inner estuary is characterized by the presence of fluid muds (Fig. 3, A1). This estuarine feature is commonly observed at water salinity ranging between 0 and 10 due to suspended matter flocculation, sedimentation, upward transport by residual bottom currents, and tidal asymmetry (Allen et al. 1980; Postma 1967; Woodruff et al. 2001). The increase of fluid mud thickness over the year - from ~ 2 cm in February to 15 cm in July and > 20 cm in October (Fig. 3) - is associated to the river discharge decrease (Fig. 2) and the progressive accumulation of sediments in the inner Aulne Estuary (Bassoulet 1979). The seasonal increase of the fluid mud thickness leads to seasonal variations of vertical profiles of porosity and particulate and dissolved

species (Figs. 3, 4 and 5) which are correlated (Table 3), especially Fe-P and Orga-P. The high Fe-P concentrations in fluid muds highlight the potential stocks of quickly available P due to the sorption of P onto sediments (Mayer and Gloss 1980). The high Orga-P concentrations show that fluid muds are also enriched in organic matter. These results are consistent with the general description of fluid muds that are considered as reactors for intense organic matter recycling (Aller 2004).

The high pore water NH_4^+, Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+} and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations in the inner estuary in February indicate (1) the high benthic mineralization resulting from the high loads of organic and silicified matter associated to fluid muds, (2) the sediment re-oxidation after erosion, and (3) the presence of older sediments. High pore water concentrations of NH_4^+, Mn^{2+} and Fe^{2+} (Fig. 5, A1) and low oxygen penetration depth (< 5 mm; Khalil et al. submitted) in the inner estuary in winter, when fluid muds are absent, highlight intense organic matter degradation mediated by bacteria (Berner 1980; Soetaert et al. 1998), thus leading to the vertical decrease of Orga-P concentrations (Fig. 4, A1). Even if fluid muds are absent in winter (during the short period of higher river discharge), organic matter is brought year-round by the accumulation of fluid muds in the inner estuary, which increase benthic mineralization processes. High pore water $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations in the inner estuary indicate that amorphous Si is associated with this organic matter and characterized by intense benthic dissolution (Berner 1980). This load of amorphous Si was confirmed by the high amorphous Si concentrations observed in the Aulne surface freshwater in February (Raimonet et al. 2013). Additionally, the high discharge of river waters enriched with O_2 and NO_3^- lead to an increase of (NO_3^- + NO_2^-) concentration and penetration in surface sediments. The enhanced penetration depth of highly oxidative O_2 and NO_3^- in February then

intensifies mineralization processes (Berner 1980), anaerobic reduced metabolite re-oxidation (Aller et al. 2004) and decreases the use of other electron acceptors. Increasing Mn^{2+} and Fe^{2+} concentrations and decreasing Fe-P concentrations over depth suggest that Mn and Fe oxides facilitate mineralization down to (NO_3^- + NO_2^-) penetration depth in sediment. These high concentrations of NH_4^+, Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+} and $Si(OH)_4$ (Fig. 5, A1) and the vertical decrease in Orga-P and Fe-P concentrations which are particularly high in surface layers (Fig. 4, A1) highlight thus the high mineralization activity of re-oxidized sediments after fluid mud displacement, which has already been observed in the Amazon Shelf (Aller 2004). Finally, the erosion of fluid muds exposes older and more compact sediments, which were similar by low % < 63 µm (and porosity, this study) to sediments collected in the Seine and Palmones estuaries after flooding events (Lesourd et al. 2003; Avilés and Niell 2005). The presence of reducing conditions in the old exposed sediments in the inner estuary, in association with higher initial P-bearing components (Orga-P and Fe-P) and lower salinity compared to the mid and outer estuary, might have enhanced the precipitation of Aut-P (detailed below), as all these conditions are favorable for Aut-P precipitation (Ruttenberg and Berner 1993; Slomp et al. 1996).

The precipitation of Aut-P in sediment is highlighted by NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} and Fe^{2+}: PO_4^{3-} ratios much higher than 16 and 2, respectively (Fig. 6). High NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} ratios indicate that mineralization alone cannot explain the vertical profiles of dissolved species, and that NH_4^+ formation and/or PO_4^{3-} removal may take place in these sediments (Ruttenberg and Berner 1993). Even if NH_4^+ might have formed from dissimilatory NO_3^- reduction to NH_4^+ (DNRA) (Laverman et al. 2006; Gardner and McCarthy 2009), the production of NH_4^+ would have not led to such high NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} ratios in the inner estuary in February. Moreover, Fe^{2+}: PO_4^{3-} ratios would have

been close to the theoretical ratio of 2 iron oxyhydroxide molecules linked to each $H_2PO_4^-$ ion (Lijklema 1977; Lehtoranta and Heiskanen 2003). In our study, the high Fe^{2+}: PO_4^{3-} ratios (Fig. 6) indicate Fe^{2+} release during Fe oxide reduction, and PO_4^{3-} removal through precipitation. These simultaneously high NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} and Fe^{2+}: PO_4^{3-} ratios - previously reported for freshwater sediments (Hartzell et al. 2010) -, and the low PO_4^{3-} concentrations (< 5 µM) are consistent with the presence of Aut-P (Slomp et al. 1996), confirming that Aut-P precipitation happened (Berner 1980).

Precipitation of Aut-P generally results from the removal of free PO_4^{3-} in pore waters, issued from Fe-P dissolution and from Orga-P mineralization in anoxic conditions (Ruttenberg and Berner 1993; Reimers et al. 1996; Slomp et al. 1996). In this study, the negative correlations of Fe-P and Orga-P *vs* Aut-P (Table 3), and the vertical decrease of Fe-P concentrations (Fig. 7) in the inner estuary indicate that Aut-P precipitates from PO_4^{3-} originated from both Orga-P and Fe-P. Such high Aut-P concentrations (> 14 µmol g^{-1}) have never been observed in other systems (Table 4). The intense precipitation of Aut-P in the inner estuary results of the presence of reducing conditions in older sediments, which conditions are known to increase the preservation of P (Jilbert et al. 2011) and thus Aut-P precipitation (Slomp et al. 1996). The presence of lower pH, sulfate and Mg^{2+} concentrations in fresh compared to marine waters also favors the formation of Aut-P by limiting the competition of PO_4^{3-} with OH^- and sulfate for sorption sites, and the competition of Mg^{2+} with Ca^{2+} (Caraco et al. 1989; Mayer and Jarrell 2000; Gunnars et al. 2004; Hyacinthe and Van Cappellen 2004). Other factors - that have been shown to potentially constrain sorption processes along estuaries, in laboratory conditions - are also expected to influence the precipitation of Aut-P, e.g. specific surface area and mineral composition of

particles, cation exchange capacity, bacterial uptake, presence of arsenate, organic, humic or fulvic acids (Fontes and Weed 1996; Sundareshwar and Morris 1999; Violante et al. 2002; Cao et al. 2007; Loucaides et al. 2010). More studies are however needed to investigate the role of these factors in estuarine environments.

As the formation of Fe-P was reported to be highly increased in the presence of $Si(OH)_4$ that leads to Si-enriched Fe oxides, especially at low pH (Mayer and Jarrell 2000), we also explored the indirect role of high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations in the precipitation of Aut-P in inner estuary where the freshwater is more Si-enriched and acid than marine waters. In this study, $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations associated with high Aut-P concentrations reach more than 400 µM in the inner estuary in February. We hypothesize that high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations increase first Fe-P formation during Fe oxidation in surface sediments, which is known to favor Aut-P formation (Slomp et al. 1996). In the deepest anoxic sediments, high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations saturate mineral sorption sites, and thus release free PO_4^{3-} (Mayer and Jarrell 2000). High free PO_4^{3-} concentrations mediated by high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations favor then Aut-P formation observed in these same layers. The high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations suggest that continuous and high dissolution of Si-enriched Fe oxides happen in deep sediments. Even if high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations and resuspension events were shown to potentially enhance benthic fluxes of PO_4^{3-} (Tallberg et al. 2008; de Vicente et al. 2010), the present study also suggests that these conditions could indirectly increase Aut-P precipitation in low salinity waters.

Additionally to these numerous favorable conditions for Aut-P precipitation in inner estuarine sediments, Aut-P might have also been partly brought by upper riverine freshwaters. Aut-P concentrations in surface sediments reached up to 11 µmol g^{-1} which can attest of erosion

of surface Aut-P poor sediments and/or of loads of allochthonous riverine Aut-P. Aut-P indeed preferentially precipitates in freshwater environmental conditions i.e. low pH, sulfate and Mg^{2+} concentrations (see above). The decrease of surface Aut-P concentrations towards the outer estuary indicates the dilution and the settlement of Aut-P along the estuary. The higher Aut-P contents in the inner estuary thus results from a combination of reducing conditions, high loads of Orga-P, Fe-P and Aut-P, and the presence of freshwaters (low pH, OH^-, sulfate and Mg^{2+} concentrations, high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations).

Regardless of the factors leading to Aut-P precipitation, the formation of Aut-P both (1) decreases PO_4^{3-} fluxes, and (2) increases P retention. The trapping of PO_4^{3-} through Aut-P precipitation might indeed decrease benthic fluxes of PO_4^{3-} to the water column, which means that benthic fluxes may have even been higher if PO_4^{3-} reprecipitation into Aut-P had not occurred. Aut-P forms - which have a higher potential of long term sinking in comparison with the more reactive P forms - also contribute to an efficient storage of P in benthic sediments (Ruttenberg and Berner 1993). The contribution of Aut-P formation in P storage in the inner Aulne Estuary ranges between 24 and 36 % of total P forms regardless of the season (not shown), agreeing with the high values (28 to 50 %) reported previously (Ruttenberg and Berner 1993; Andrieux and Aminot 1997), and suggesting high potential for long term P storage in the inner estuarine sediments.

Role of point bar hydrodynamics in modulating the benthic biogeochemistry in the mid-estuary

The succession of sediment layers highlights the turbulent hydrodynamic conditions (e.g. bottom currents, tides) in mid estuarine point bars. Turbulent hydrodynamic conditions in estuaries are generally associated to low concentrations of clay, organic matter and chlorophyll a (Moreno and Niell 2004). In our study, the low clay and silt contents and the generally lower Orga-P than Det-P concentrations in the mid estuary confirm highly dynamic conditions. The vertically heterogeneous sediment tomographic intensity observed in CAT scan cores (Fig. 3, A2) and the succession of muddy and detrital sediments (described above) moreover indicate the variability of dynamic conditions over time in the mid estuary, where the highest tidal energy occurs (Dyer 1989). Related to intense erosion-deposition events, the vertical heterogeneity in sediment cores was also observed along and across the mid estuary through an extensive investigation of spatial heterogeneity of pore water $Si(OH)_4$ profiles (Raimonet et al. 2013). High heterogeneity in sediments from the mid Aulne Estuary is expected and consistent with the highest variability observed in the mid Palmones and Penzé estuaries (Avilés and Niell 2005; Andrieux-Loyer et al. 2008) resulting from the hydrodynamic regime (Dyer 1989).

Contrary to the inner estuary, Aut-P concentrations do not increase with depth in the mid estuary but are associated to a succession of poor and enriched layers (Fig. 4), consistent with the presence of less and highly dense sediments (Fig. 3). The succession of layers of different properties suggests that the properties of sediment loads vary over time, each layer corresponding to different periods and origins. The Aut-P enriched layers suggest the translocation and deposition of freshwater or less marine sediments, as Aut-P preferentially precipitates in freshwater environmental conditions (as detailed above). The Aut-P present in subsurface sediment layers might have been formed upstream, e.g. in the river or the inner estuary, and then

transported to the mid estuary. The presence of high Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+} and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations in these same Aut-P enriched layers confirms that this translocation from the inner to the mid estuary might happen.

The high Mn^{2+} and Fe^{2+} concentrations, associated to high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations in subsurface layers in February and May in the mid-estuary (Fig. 5, A2), also highlight the presence of detrital terrestrial materials in deposits. The co-occurrence of these high concentrations might indeed result from the dissolution of the generally high Fe and Mn oxide concentrations associated with detrital terrestrial materials (Aller et al. 2004). These layers might result from the deposition of the terrestrial plant material exported from river and estuarine borders to estuarine waters (Bassoulet 1979), which commonly happen in temperate macrotidal estuaries during winter (Anderson et al. 1981). The export of silicified plants growing in estuarine marshes - mainly *Phragmites australis* in the Aulne Estuary - is known to be high after the high productive period in fall and during the high winter river discharge (Findlay et al. 1990; Querné 2011). This is consistent with the export of Si enriched materials and the high amorphous Si concentrations observed in February in the upper estuary (80 µM; Raimonet et al. 2013). A part of this exported matter may settle in mid estuarine point bars. It is however difficult to go further on the correspondence between layers and matter origin, because of the erosion-deposition cycles that perturb the vertical sequence.

The vertical profiles of particulate and dissolved matter and the scan images allow, however, estimating net seasonal deposition and erosion rates. The temporal deepening of the maximal subsurface Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+} and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations (observed at 1-4 cm in February, and at 2-7 cm in May; Fig. 5, A2) suggests the deposition of ~ 1-3 cm of sediment between February

and May. TI and CAT scan cores also show that sediment erosion happens between May and July (Fig. 3, A2). After erosion, older sediments - that were initially deeper - are exposed to pelagic waters. In contrast to the inner estuary (A1) where the downward displacement of fluid muds in February leads to high NH_4^+, Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+} and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations, sediments in the mid estuary have lower concentrations after erosion. These lower concentrations in mid compared to inner estuarine sediments after erosion are related to the presence of coarser sediments associated to lower porosity and lower organic matter content (e.g. Orga-P concentrations; Fig. 4, A2) due to more turbulent hydrodynamic conditions.

Such as in the inner estuary, evidence of *in situ* Aut-P precipitation in the mid Aulne Estuary is indicated by NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} and Fe^{2+}: PO_4^{3-} ratios higher than 16 and 2, respectively (Fig. 6, A2), and by the negative correlation between Aut-P and Orga-P (Table 3). Vertically stable Fe-P concentrations in the mid estuary in October indicate that PO_4^{3-} leading to high Aut-P concentrations is not originated from Fe-P dissolution, but rather from Orga-P oxidation in the mid estuary (mirror profiles of Orga-P and Aut-P; Fig. 7). The decrease of NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} down to 12 cm emphasizes that the remineralization of P relative to N increases with depth, consistent with the increasingly reductive conditions (Jilbert et al. 2011). As the effect of high $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations on the benthic P cycle is mainly mediated through the increased formation of Fe-P, the preferential origins of Aut-P from Orga-P indicate that the interactions between Si and P cycles may be low in the mid estuary.

Marine-type benthic biogeochemistry in the outer estuary

Continuous deposition of sediments takes place throughout the year in the outer estuary. The net deposition rate is high (2-3 cm) from February to July and even higher (~ 4 cm) from July to October (Fig. 3). Lower hydrodynamic energy - explaining high deposition rates - leads to classical diagenetic profiles and low seasonal variability for solid and dissolved species in the outer estuary. During the productive period in May, chlorophyll a concentrations were higher (Raimonet 2011), and expectedly related to the occurrence of the maximal Orga-P concentrations in surface sediments, and the vertical decrease of Orga-P and Fe-P concentrations. In contrast to the inner and mid estuary, the lowest Orga-P concentrations measured in the outer estuary may also be related to the presence of bioturbation at this station (pers. obs.) - known to enhance organic matter degradation (Aller 1994) and to the higher degradability of marine compared to terrestrial organic matter. High PO_4^{3-} and low Fe-P concentrations may be due to the proximity of oceanic waters in the outer estuary. Indeed, the presence of sulfate-rich marine waters commonly leads to the formation of Fe sulfides in anoxic conditions, limiting Fe-P formation (Caraco et al. 1989; Hyacinthe and Van Cappellen 2004). As excepted, the increase in NH_4^+ concentrations from the inner to the outer estuary in May, July and October may also be related to increasing salinity known to enhance NH_4^+ desorption from particles (Hartzell et al. 2010).

NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} ratios are expected to be close to the Redfield ratio (16) in conditions of organic matter regeneration. The NH_4^+: PO_4^{3-} ratios < 16 (this study) provides evidence of Fe-P dissolution, as already shown in the Baltic Sea (Jilbert et al. 2011). This is confirmed by decreasing Fe-P and increasing PO_4^{3-} profiles. The general enhancement of pH and OH^- concentrations from inner to outer estuaries (http://www.donnees.bretagne.developpement-durable.gouv.fr), the high pore water $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations (Fig. 5, A3) and the sulfate-enriched

marine waters are indeed expected to increase PO_4^{3-} desorption (Caraco et al. 1989; Mayer and Jarell 2000; Hyacinthe and Van Cappellen 2004). In spite of high pore water PO_4^{3-} concentrations, Aut-P concentrations are generally lower (< 10 µmol g^{-1}) in the outer than in the inner and mid estuary, in particular in February and May. The precipitation to Aut-P is rather limited by the low Orga-P and Fe-P concentrations (Fig. 4, A3) and the high Mg^{2+} concentrations of marine waters that compete with Ca^{2+} in outer brackish estuaries (Gunnars et al. 2004; Cao et al. 2007).

5. Conclusion

We highlight the influence of a combination of factors on benthic biogeochemical processes along a salinity gradient in a small macrotidal estuary. These results emphasize that P retention might be important in freshwater estuaries, due to favorable conditions to the precipitation of low reactive Aut-P (i.e. high organic and iron-bound P loads, anoxic conditions, low pH, sulfate and Mg^{2+} concentrations) and to the settlement of riverine P. In these freshwater conditions, we suggest that Aut-P precipitation could be additionally enhanced in Si-rich sediments by increasing the formation of Fe-P, a precursor of Aut-P. More studies are however needed to highlight that interactions between Si and P cycles could have a significant role in the long term storage of P. In the mid estuary, frequent erosion-deposition events, including translocation, lead to a succession of heterogeneous sediment layers and biogeochemical properties in point bar. More studies are needed to define seasonal origins of the deposited

matter, and erosion-deposition dynamics in point bars. Contrary to the inner and mid estuary, the outer estuary is representative of less perturbed and more marine ecosystems. This study emphasizes the strong estuarine gradient of benthic biogeochemical properties, and especially the long term storage of P in inner estuaries and high benthic stocks (and thus fluxes) of dissolved species, especially NH_4^+ and $Si(OH)_4$, which have important implications for coastal ecosystems, and should be accounted for in ecological studies.

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Tables

Table 1: Environmental parameters in the inner (A1), mid (A2) and outer (A3) Aulne Estuary in February, May, July and October 2009. General parameters are the Aulne River discharge Q, the tidal range in Brest, and the water depth D at each station. Overlying waters are characterized by temperature T, salinity S, total suspended sediment TSS, and concentrations of (NO_3^-+NO_2^-), NH_4^+, PO_4^{3-} and $Si(OH)_4$ (n=3). The grain size (% < 63 µm) of surface sediment is also given (n=3).

Station	Sampling date	Q	Tidal range	D	T	S	TSS	(NO_3^- +NO_2^-)	NH_4^+	PO_4^{3-}	Fe^{2+}	Mn^{2+}	$Si(OH)_4$	< 63 µm
		(m^3 s^{-1})	(m)	(m)	(°C)	(-)	(mg l^{-1})	(µM)						(%)
A1	14/02/2009	64.6	5.2	2.5	7.7	0		546	3	0.3	1.3	0.2	97	78 ± 6
	07/05/2009	10.4	5.1	2	14.4	0	45	333	4	0.6	3.8	0.4	120	82 ± 2
	25/07/2009	4.24	6.2	0.5	19.7	0	248	242	4	0.9	1.0	0.4	98	82 ± 3
	30/10/2009	3.67	3.7	1	14.2	8.7	182	384	5	2.3	1.9	0.4	111	82 ± 3
A2	15/02/2009	54.1	4.2	3	7.4	13.7		392	2	0.6	0.2	0.3	79	51 ± 6
	08/05/2009	9.95	5.2	3	14	22.5	39	122	3	0.7	0.2	0.4	44	64 ± 8
	24/07/2009	5.01	6.4	1.5	19.5	27.5	33	47	5	1.1	0.3	1.0	17	42 ± 8
	31/10/2009	3.47	4.5	1	15.5	29.9	33	46	11	1.7	0.3	0.2	29	37 ± 4
A3	16/02/2009	49.7	3.2	1.75	8	20		199	2	0.6	0.1	0.2	53	74 ± 3
	06/05/2009	10.7	4.7	2	13.5	24.6	21	86	3	0.4	0.2	0.3	31	74 ± 3
	26/07/2009	3.59	5.7	3	19.1	30.9	48	25	4	1.0	0.3	0.4	12	71 ± 8
	01/11/2009	4.91	5	2.5	15	33	20	7	4	0.8	0.3	0.1	16	73 ± 1

Table 2: Statistical t-test for seasonal changes of grain size (% < 63 µm) and porosity (ϕ) in surface sediments in the inner Aulne Estuary (station A1, n=3).

	% < 63 µm		ϕ	
	Shapiro test *p*=0.03		Shapiro test *p*=0.023	
	t	*p*	*t*	*p*
Feb ~ May	-1.14	0.357	-5.91	0.01
Feb ~ Jul	-1.055	0.367	-6.13	0.021
Feb ~ Oct	-1.176	0.33	-4.72	0.042

Table 3: Correlations between surface sediment properties along the Aulne Estuary (stations A1, A2 and A3). n=12 (P forms) or 36 (dissolved forms). Significant correlations (p<0.5) are in **bold**.

		$(NO_3^-+NO_2^-)$	NH_4^+	PO_4^{3-}	Fe^{2+}	Mn^{2+}	$Si(OH)_4$	ϕ	Fe-P	Aut-P	Det-P
Station A1	NH_4^+	-0.216									
	PO_4^{3-}	0.15	**-0.605**								
	Fe^{2+}	-0.242	**0.741**	**-0.578**							
	Mn^{2+}	**-0.442**	**0.75**	**-0.726**	**0.79**						
	$Si(OH)_4$	**-0.4**	**0.787**	**-0.503**	**0.892**	**0.82**					
	ϕ	0.032	**-0.602**	0.176	**-0.513**	**-0.473**	**-0.644**				
	Fe-P	**0.477**	**-0.525**	0.27	**-0.656**	**-0.558**	**-0.738**	**0.415**			
	Aut-P	-0.088	**0.711**	**-0.736**	**0.695**	**0.575**	**0.674**	**-0.395**	**-0.48**		
	Det-P	-0.273	0.227	**-0.592**	**0.363**	**0.594**	0.266	**-0.362**	**-0.389**	**0.378**	
	Orga-P	**0.479**	**-0.342**	0.251	**-0.396**	**-0.477**	**-0.481**	**0.641**	**0.506**	**-0.335**	**-0.433**
Station A2	NH_4^+	-0.278									
	PO_4^{3-}	-0.193	**0.452**								
	Fe^{2+}	-0.078	-0.025	-0.07							
	Mn^{2+}	-0.207	0.073	-0.095	**0.83**						
	$Si(OH)_4$	-0.24	**0.381**	**0.398**	**0.791**	**0.7**					
	ϕ	0.347	**-0.63**	-0.327	0.091	-0.083	-0.136				
	Fe-P	0.135	**-0.582**	**-0.441**	-0.227	**-0.386**	**-0.471**	**0.369**			
	Aut-P	-0.265	0.014	-0.112	0.056	-0.118	0.109	-0.234	**0.555**		
	Det-P	-0.251	0.049	-0.233	0.093	0.162	0.013	**-0.456**	0.253	**0.336**	
	Orga-P	0.127	-0.179	0.048	0.092	0.112	-0.052	**0.449**	-0.102	**-0.518**	-0.155
Station A3	NH_4^+	-0.237									
	PO_4^{3-}	-0.192	**0.929**								
	Fe^{2+}	-0.247	**-0.497**	**-0.436**							
	Mn^{2+}	**-0.494**	-0.041	-0.045	0.15						
	$Si(OH)_4$	-0.39	**0.934**	**0.835**	-0.259	-0.044					
	ϕ	**0.499**	**-0.408**	-0.273	-0.107	-0.083	**-0.597**				
	Fe-P	**0.305**	**-0.576**	-0.471	0.159	0.236	**-0.678**	**0.646**			
	Aut-P	0.144	0.281	0.204	**-0.349**	-0.109	0.194	0.213	0.098		
	Det-P	-0.269	**0.351**	0.257	-0.266	0.353	**0.291**	0.024	-0.155	**0.307**	
	Orga-P	**0.458**	**-0.367**	**-0.297**	-0.1	**-0.45**	**-0.508**	**0.459**	**0.345**	0.054	**-0.461**

Table 4: Summary of Aut-P, Fe-P, Orga-P, Det-P concentrations (µmol g^{-1}) and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations (µM) in freshwater, estuarine and marine ecosystems. All P forms were extracted with the SEDEX method (modified or not).

Site	System type	Auth-P	Orga-P	Fe-P	Det-P	$Si(OH)_4$	Reference
			(µmol g^{-1})			(µM)	
Middle Adriatic	marine	0-2.7	1.5-5.4	1.9-11.9	0.4-3.4		Matijević et al. (2009)
Patuxent River Estuary	brackish	1-4.5	4-10	15-55	2-4.5		Jordan et al. (2008)
St Laurent Gulf	marine	8.6-13.6	4-5	7-28		200*	Louchouarn et al. (1997) *Thibodeau et al. (2010)
Amazon River	fresh	4.7	4.5	4.1	2.2		Berner and Rao (1993)
	mixing zone	3.6	4.3	7.5	1.0	50-250*	*Michalopoulos and Aller (2004)
Penzé Estuary	inner estuary	8-12	17	22	up to 8.6		Andrieux-Loyer et al. (2008)
	outer estuary	1.5-2	2	2	4-5		
Yangtze River	fresh	1.7-8.2	0.6-2.8	0.1-3.7	1.1-12.6	200-600*	Rao and Berner (1997) *Aller et al. (1985)

Figures

Figure 1: Location of stations A1, A2 and A3 along the Aulne Estuary.

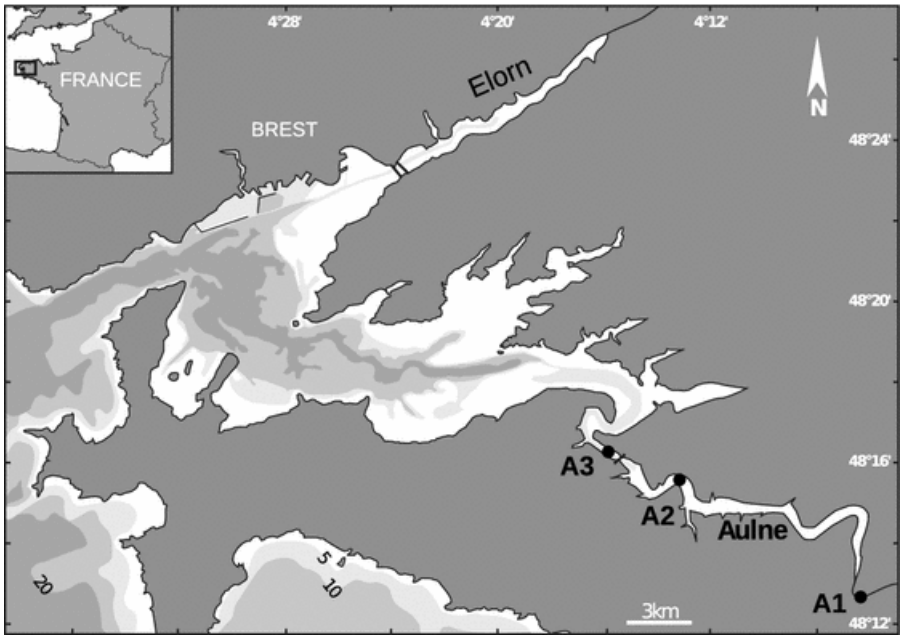

Figure 2: Aulne River discharge (m^3 s^{-1}) at Chateaulin in 2009. Source: DREAL Bretagne/HYDROMEDD/DE. Sampling periods are represented by grey areas.

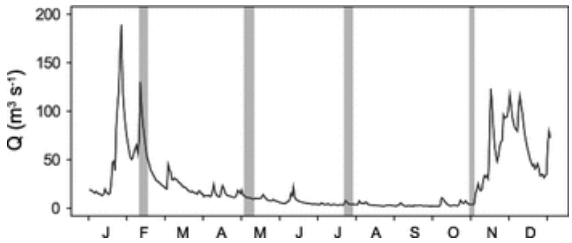

Figure 3: Vertical profiles of porosity and tomographic intensity (TI, HU) and bi-dimensional CT scan pictures from the inner to the outer Aulne Estuary (stations A1, A2 and A3, rows) in February, May, July and October 2009 (columns). Horizontal dashed lines illustrate the temporal evolution of specific layers described in the text. Fluid muds and sediment deposition are indicated on CT scan pictures.

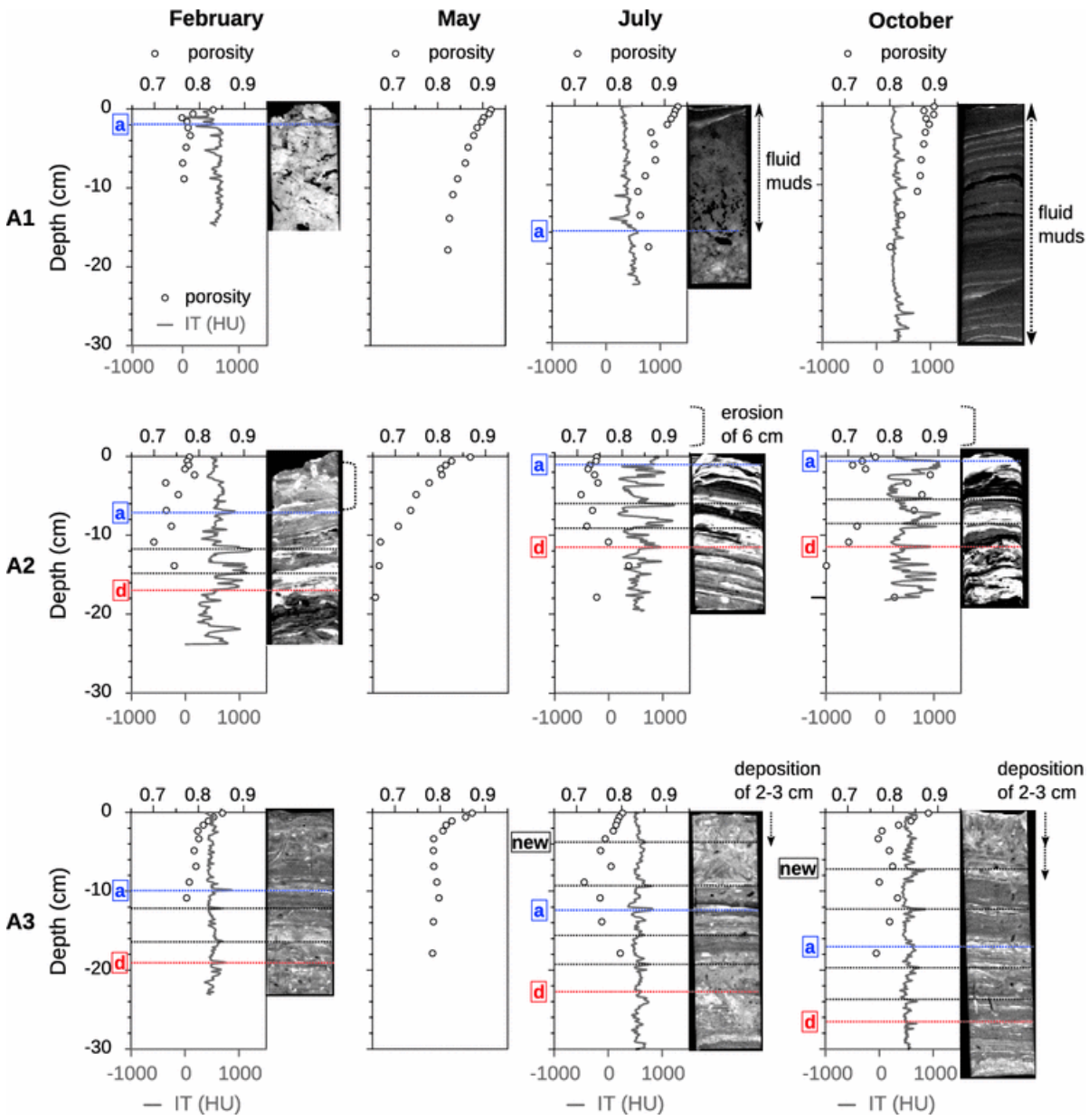

Figure 4: Contour maps of phosphorus forms (rows: Orga-P, Fe-P, Aut-P, Det-P; µmol g^{-1}) in benthic sediments along the Aulne Estuary (columns: A1, A2 and A3) in 2009. Measured values are represented by black points (n=1) in February, May, July and October. The horizontal dashed lines represent the temporal evolution of specific layers observed in Fig. 3.

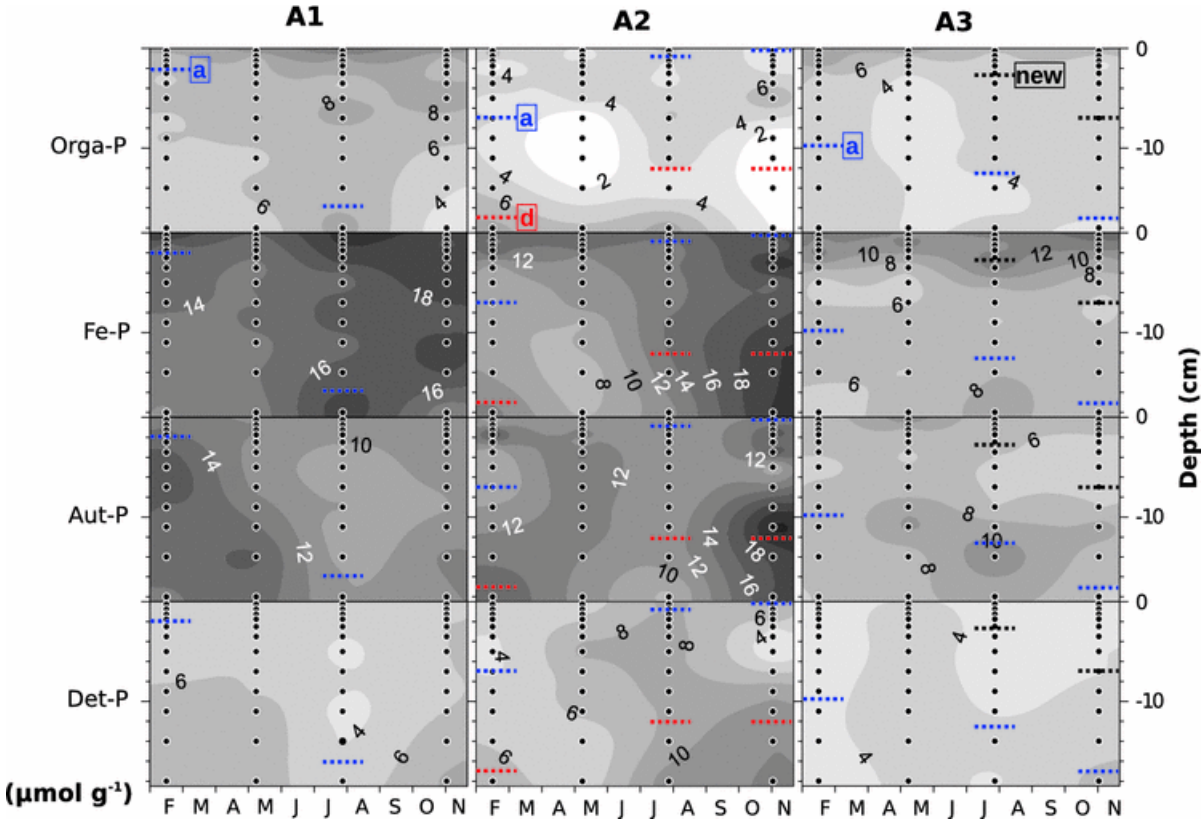

Figure 5: Contour maps of dissolved species concentrations (rows: PO_4^{3-}, NH_4^+, $Si(OH)_4$, NO_3^{2-},
Fe^{2+}, Mn^{2+}; µM) in pore waters along the Aulne Estuary (columns: A1, A2 and A3) in 2009. Measured values are represented by black points (n=3) in February, May, July and October.

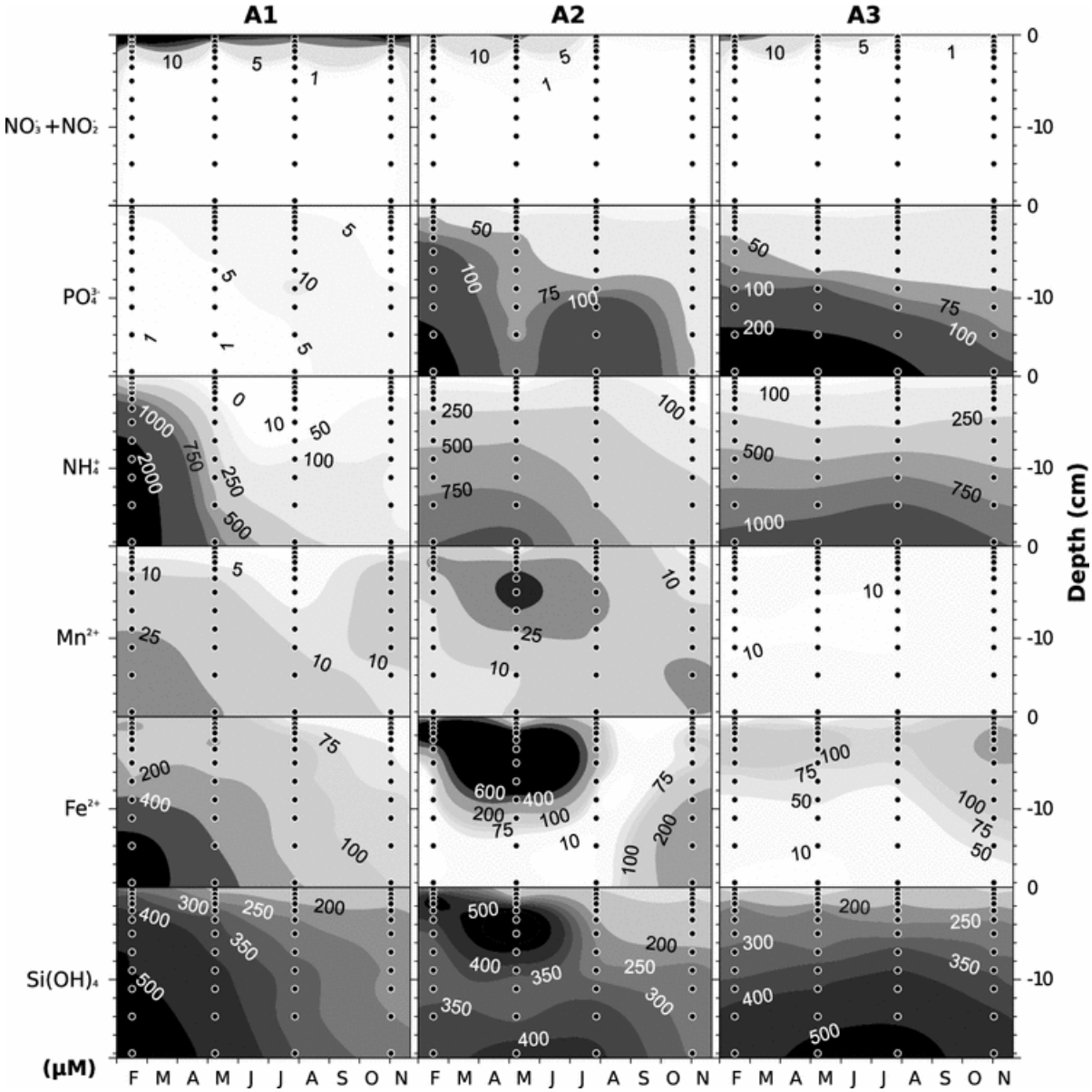

Figure 6: Contour maps of dissolved species molar ratios (rows: $NH_4^+:PO_4^{3-}$, $Fe^{2+}:PO_4^{3-}$) in pore waters along the Aulne Estuary (columns: A1, A2 and A3) in 2009 (rows). Measured values are represented by black points (n=3) in February, May, July and October.

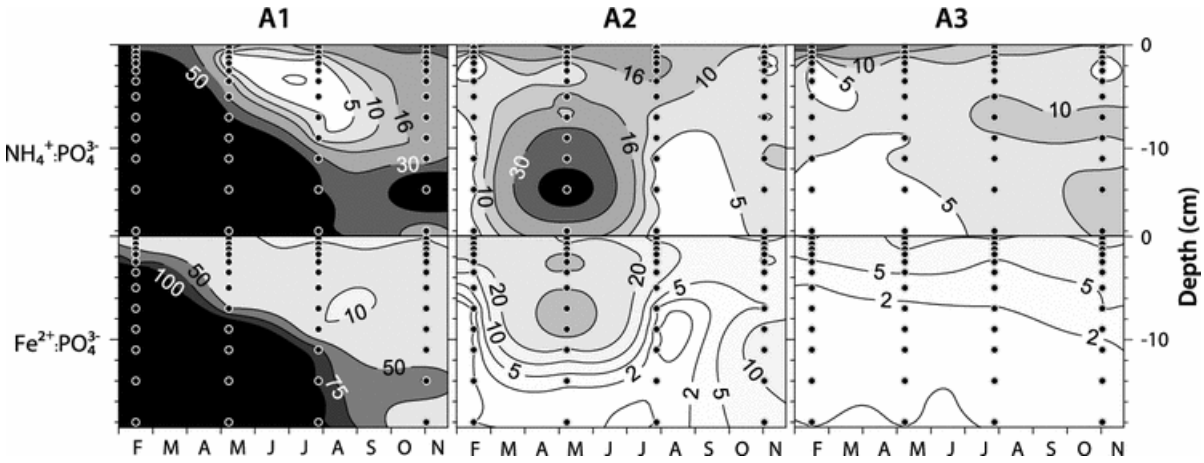

Figure 7: Vertical profiles of $NH_4^+:PO_4^{3-}$ and Fe2+:PO_4^{3-} ratios, PO_4^{3-} and $Si(OH)_4$ concentrations (µM), Orga-P, Fe-P and Aut-P concentrations (µmol g^{-1}) at station A1 in February and at station A2 in October.