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GUEST EDITORIAL

Pioneers of plankton research: Eugène Canu (1864–1952)

Eugène Canu made many contributions to copepod research in the late 19th century. Between 1886 and 1901 he published dozens of papers and a volume on copepods of the eastern English Channel. Interestingly, he did not pursue a career in academia. He went on from copepod research to become an aquaculture and fisheries scientist, then a high school administrator, then a ship owner and an official in fisheries organizations. Finally, Canu had a long career in politics. Eugène Canu, in one of his last roles as the Mayor of the city in Boulogne-sur-Mer is shown in Fig. 1. Here we tell the story of Canu, a man whose life shows very clearly that plankton research can lead to many different destinations.

EUGÈNE CANU'S WORK ON COPEPODS

Eugène Canu was born on 11 September 1864 at Trith-Saint-Leger, close to Valenciennes, in the North of France. He studied at the Faculty of Sciences of Lille, in the field of natural sciences. He worked under Alfred Giard, who founded the Wimereux Marine Station in 1874. At that time Wimereux was a small resort in the coast of Eastern English Channel. Eugène Canu earned his Bachelor of Natural Sciences in 1883. His first publications were not on copepods, but rather translations of current articles published in German or English into French. These translations covered a diverse range of topics, including the role of chlorophyll in animal kingdom (Canu, 1884, 1885), and the nervous system of a crustacean (Canu, 1885), as well as his own research on peritrich ciliates, epibionts on crustaceans (Canu, 1886a), all published in Giard's journal. Canu was apparently first



Fig. 1. Eugène Canu when he was Mayor of the city of Boulogne-sur-Mer from age 54 to 58.

headed to medical studies. He signed his paper on ciliates as “Eugène Canu, Bachelor of Science, medical student”

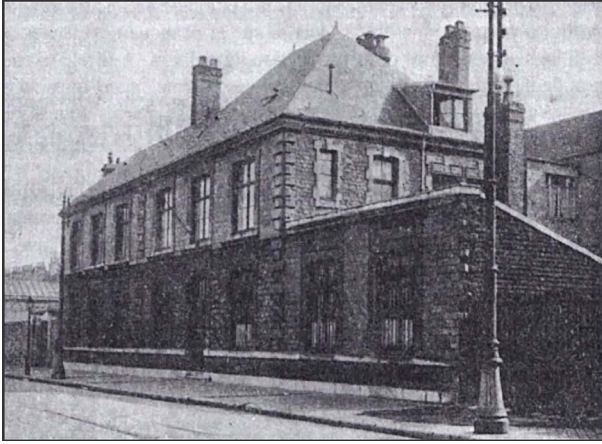


Fig. 3. The Aquaculture Station (*Station Aquicole*) of Boulogne-sur-Mer, a center for applied fisheries research. Eugène Canu began working there first an assistant, then deputy director and was the director of the Station from 1894 to 1902.

mission of the station (Fig. 3) was to aid the local fishing industry by investigating and promoting all matters affecting fisheries and fishermen. For example, the determination and promotion of the best salts for preserving fish and investigating the possible uses for fishing discards. The work of the Aquaculture Station was then completely applied. Canu worked on fisheries and on fishing methods. However, he did not completely abandon studies of copepods and continued publishing on copepods, especially parasitic copepods (e.g. Canu, 1893a, 1893b). In an applied research framework, he studied copepods in relation to exploited species of fish. Copepods were rightly seen as an important part of the diet of many fishes, especially herring, and therefore of importance for the fishermen of Boulogne-sur-Mer.

The Aquaculture station published its own periodical, the *Annales de la Station Aquicole de Boulogne-sur-Mer*, from 1892 to 1909, in which Canu published many works. Besides his studies of copepod parasites of fish and mollusks, he published on the mackerel salting techniques required for sales in the United States as recommendations to the French fish industry to penetrate the American market (Canu, 1893c). He advocated the development of fish farming as a remedy for over-fishing. He proposed hatching of fish eggs in aquaculture farms and then the release of larvae in the sea (Canu, 1894). Some of his publications were translations of works originally in German or in English, on the impact of cholera on the fishing industry in Germany, or other information on the fishing industry in Europe or in the US (from the Boston fish Bureau).

Canu was the deputy director of the Aquaculture station in 1891, and he became the second director of the

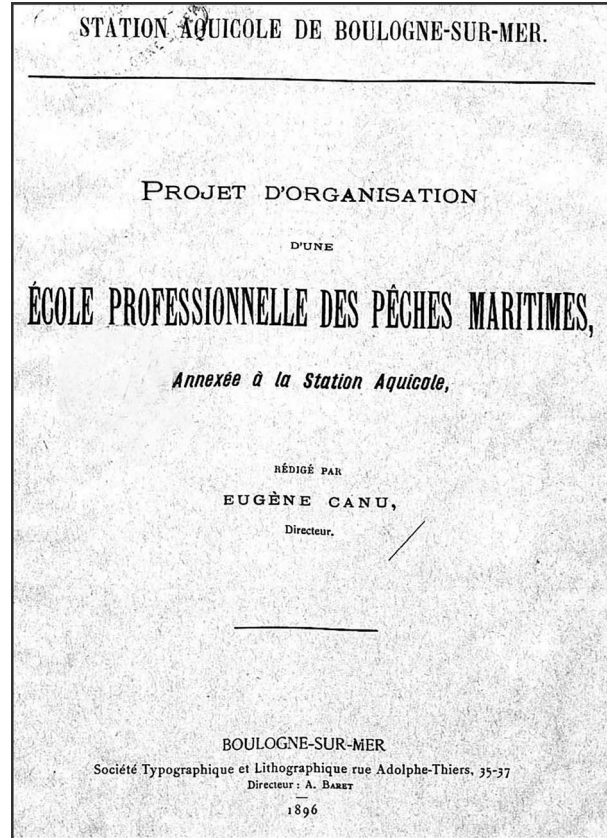


Fig. 4. The cover page of Canu's project, the creation of a professional high school devoted to training students to work in the fisheries industry, from Canu (1896).

Aquaculture station in 1894, a position he occupied until 1902. During this period he also founded and was the first director of a professional high school dedicated to training students to work in the fishing industry (*Ecole professionnelle des Pêches Maritimes*) from 1897 to 1901 (Fig. 4). Such a high school still exists today in Boulogne-sur-Mer, as the *Lycée Professionnel Maritime et Aquacole Boulogne-Le Portel*.

When Canu resigned his position of Director of the Aquaculture Station, he ended all his scientific activities. He became a ship owner and devoted himself entirely to the fishing industry. Canu assumed some important roles in the field of fisheries administration. He was president of the fisheries section of the central committee of French ship owners, then vice-president of the Scientific and Technical Office of Maritime Fisheries (*Office Scientifique et Technique des Pêches Maritimes*). He also became involved in social issues, for example by defending retired fishermen pensioners, the orphans of fisherman and by promoting public education. This no doubt led to his long political career (32 years) that actually



Fig. 5. The illustration from the announcement of the three candidates in the election for senator of the Pas de Calais region in an article that appeared in the newspaper *Grand Echo du Nord de la France*, 29 September 1933. Eugène Canu, the 69 years old, is shown in the far left, appropriate as he was the candidate of the Radical Socialist party. Canu was not elected.

began when he was still Director of the Aquaculture Station.

Political career

Canu’s political career began when he was only 36 years old. In 1900, he was elected a city councilor of Boulogne-sur-Mer, as a member of the radical socialist party. Canu later served as President of the General Council of Pas-de-Calais (roughly a county administration) from 1928 to 1934. In 1928, Canu was also elected to national office. He served as a member of Parliament for Pas-de-Calais until 1932. He later returned to local office and served as Mayor of Boulogne-sur-Mer from 1935 to 1940. During World War II, he was removed from office by the German-directed Vichy regime and expelled from Boulogne-sur-Mer. He became Mayor again when the city was liberated on 19 September 1944 until the election of 1945. His political career was not all successful. Canu ran for election as a Senator for the Pas de Calais region in the national government in 1933, at age 69 (Fig 5), but was not elected. There are few records of his activities in the latter part of Canu’s life. He died in Boulogne-sur-Mer on 6 January 1952, at the age of 88.

Eugène Canu was a man of several professions. He was, successively, a copepodologist, an aquaculture and fisheries scientist, a high school administrator, a ship owner, an official in fisheries organizations and

finally a politician. Canu’s life provides an early and excellent example of career mobility of a plankton researcher!

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