Annual Meeting

GIBB
Italian Group of Biomembranes and Bioenergetics

June, 21-23, 2018
Comparto di San Geminiano
Via San Geminiano 11, Modena
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he primary aim of the Italian Group of Biomembranes and Bioenergetics (GIBB) is to promote Bioenergetics, i.e. the discipline that studies energy transformation at the ‘energy-conserving’ membranes. This area of research is key to biology and physiology in all forms of life, and has major implications for our understanding of health and disease. GIBB stimulates research networking in Italy and abroad. One of its major goals is the training of young scientists, an attitude that is reflected in the unique format of its annual meeting, where the core of scientific program is represented by oral presentations by young scientists, while established Investigators chair sessions and promote discussion. From 2017 the meeting is open to the International Community.

GIBB was created in 1973 by a group of Italian Scientists coming from a variety of disciplines – Biological Chemistry, Biophysics, Pathology, Pharmacology, Physiology – with the idea of promoting Bioenergetics in the Country and to establish an interface with the growing International Bioenergetics Community. GIBB is actively involved in the promotion and organization of the European Bioenergetics Conferences (EBEC), a biannual series that was started in Urbino (Italy) in 1980.

GIBB is managed by an Executive Committee (Consiglio Direttivo) of eight members elected for a two-year term. The Executive Committee nominates the President, the Vice-President and the Secretary-Treasurer. Membership is open to scientists qualified in the field of Bioenergetics and Biomembranes. New applicants are presented by active members and admission is decided at the General Assembly, which gathers at the Annual Meeting.
GIBB Executive Board

Paolo Bernardi (Padova)
Alessandro Giuffrè (Roma)
Giovanna Lippe (Udine)
Vito De Pinto (Catania)
Francesco Francia (Bologna)
Cesare Indiveri (Cosenza)
Luigi Palmieri (Bari)
Claudia Piccoli (Foggia)
Organizing Committee

Marcello Pinti
Lara Gibellini
Anna De Gaetano
Elena Bianchini
Anita Neroni
Beatrice Lusenti
Venue

The Meeting will be held in the Monastery of San Geminiano, a beautiful ex monastery in the city centre of Modena, which currently hosts the Faculty of Law of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

Transportation
Modena is 40 km far from Bologna; it is well connected to Italy and Europe thanks to the airport of Bologna – Guglielmo Marconi, served by the major airlines and low-cost carriers (www.bologna-airport.it), to the railway station, to the high speed train station of Reggio Emilia AV (20 km from Modena), and to the A1 and A22 motorways.

Accomodation
The official website of Modena Tourism Promotion (www.visitmodena.it) can provide all the information necessary for organizing your trip, including transport, accommodation, restaurants and more.
Welcome to Modena

Modena is a friendly city, with an interesting history and plenty of modern creations, where visitors can discover ancient flavours and music on the city theatres. The historical centre recalls the greatness of the House of Este, thanks to whom Modena became State Capital from the end of the sixteenth-century to 1859. The emblem of all this magnificence is Palazzo Ducale, designed by the architect Avanzini on which other architects also worked, including Vigarani and Soli. Since the Unification of Italy, this building has been home to the prestigious Military Academy.

The centre of Modena is based around the Via Emilia, as in the past the Roman city developed along the consular road, whose construction in 187 BC preceded foundation of the Modena colony by a few years (183 BC). Remains and monuments from the Roman city can be admired in the Museum of Archaeology, in the Estense Lapidary Museum and the Roman Epigraphic Museum, which houses the monumental altar of Vetilia Egloge.

An old Roman road can be walked along by visitors to the NoviArk archaeology park, after the latter was created following digs in the Novi Sad area during building of an underground carpark.

Modena has a good number of churches, full of masterpieces, from the oldest Santa Maria della Pomposa in the square of the same name that is the heart of Modena’s nightlife, to Baroque churches such as San Biagio, Sant’Agostino, called the Pantheon of the Estensi, through to San Vincenzo where the Este family tombs are. The San Pietro abbey complex is particularly interesting, including the Abbey full of works of art like that of Begarelli and a Benedictine monastery with beautiful cloisters open to the general public and the old dispensary, stocked with products made following ancient recipes.
A byword for the industrious city, Modena boasts a long list of ingenious entrepreneurs, among them the Panini brothers, trading card manufacturers now celebrated in the Museo della Figurina. Housed in Palazzo Santa Margherita, the museum is the only one of its kind, with a collection of some 500,000 collectible cards.

Modena is also synonymous with photography and contemporary art. Since October 2017, as well as the Museo della Figurina, FONDAZIONE MODENA ARTI VISIVE has also been in charge of the 2 locations of the city’s art museum, Galleria Civica di Modena (Palazzo Santa Margherita and Palazzina dei Giardini), Fondazione Fotografia Modena, housed in a former tobacco factory known as MATA, and the city’s higher-education institute specializing in the contemporary image (Scuola di Alta Formazione sull’immagine contemporanea).

Just a few minutes from the train station and the historical centre is the MEF, the Enzo Ferrari Museum, a modern building in the shape of a yellow aluminium car bonnet that houses the cars that have written the History of Ferrari and its founder, explained in videos and multimedia effects. It is also home to temporary exhibitions. This museum is linked to the Ferrari Museum in Maranello, a must-visit for car fanatics.
### Program

#### Thursday 21st

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<tr>
<td>14:00-15:30</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:30-16:00</td>
<td>Welcome Address (Authorities, GIBB President, Organizing Committee)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00-17:00</td>
<td><strong>Opening Plenary Lecture</strong> &lt;br&gt;Chair: Paolo Bernardi &lt;br&gt;<strong>Thorsten Friedrich</strong>, University of Freiburg (Germany) &lt;br&gt;On the mechanism of respiratory complex I</td>
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<td>17:00</td>
<td><strong>Session I: ATP synthase and complexes of respiratory chain</strong> &lt;br&gt;Chair: Giovanna Lippe</td>
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<td>17:00-17:20</td>
<td>Andrea Urbani (University of Padova) &lt;br&gt;Electrophysiological properties of channel formed by bovine FOF1 ATP synthase in planar lipid bilayer</td>
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<td>17:20-17:40</td>
<td>Chiara Galber (University of Padova) &lt;br&gt;Role of F-ATP synthase f subunit in dimer formation and PTP modulation</td>
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<td>17:40-18:00</td>
<td>Elisa Astro (University of Bologna) &lt;br&gt;Dissecting the effects of MT-ND1 and NDUFS3 suppression on respiratory Complex I assembly and supercomplex biogenesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>18:00-18:20</td>
<td>Luisa Iommarini (University of Bologna) &lt;br&gt;Respiratory complex I ablation in aggressive cancers induces oncocytic indolence but triggers macrophage-mediated adaptive response</td>
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<td>18:20-18:40</td>
<td>Antonio Gnoni (University of Bari) &lt;br&gt;Functional and expression study identifying plasma membrane ecto-ATP synthase as a novel player in the early phase of Liver regeneration</td>
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<tr>
<td>18:40-20:00</td>
<td>Welcome cocktail</td>
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<td>20:00-21:00</td>
<td>Tour “A spasso con lo scienziato” in the historical centre of Modena</td>
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Program

Friday 22nd

9:00-10:00  
**Plenary lecture**  
Chair: Luigi Palmieri  
**Paolo E. Porporato, University of Torino**  
*Mitochondrial metabolism in cancer: impact on metastasis and tumor progression*

10:00  
**Session II: Specialized transporters and pores: structure and function I**  
Chair: Cesare Indiveri

10:00-10:20  
Fabio Martinelli (University of Basilicata)  
*The ABCC6 expression is regulated by adenosine and ATP externally added to the HepG2 cells*

10:20-10:40  
Anna Stocco (University of Padova)  
*The effects of PTP inhibition in Duchenne muscular dystrophy*

10:40-11:00  
Christina Pfeiffer (Medical University of Vienna)  
*Role of MICS1, interaction partner of LETM1, in mitochondrial calcium homeostasis*

11:00-11:30  
Coffee break

11:30  
**Session III: Specialized transporters and pores: structure and function II**  
Chair: Vito De Pinto

11:30-11:50  
Andrea Magri  
*Channel activity of yeast VDAC2, the second mitochondrial porin isoform of Saccharomyces cerevisiae*

11:50-12:10  
Lara Console, University of Calabria  
*Identification and functional characterization of an exosomal cargo protein: the plasma membrane carnitine transporter (OCTN2)*

12:10-12:30  
Faustino Bisaccia (University of Basilicata)  
*The multidrug resistance inhibitor 8-(4-chlorophenyl)-5-methyl-1 8-[(2Z)-pent-2-en-1-2 yloxy]-8H-[1,2,4]oxadiazolo[3,4-c][1,4]thiazin-3-one diltiazem-like compound inhibits the ABCC6 transporter*
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<tr>
<td>12:30-12:50</td>
<td>Jessica Cosco (University of Calabria) <em>Characterization of the CAT2 transporter from Solanum lycopersicum (Tomato)</em></td>
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<td>13:00-14:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>14:30-15:30</td>
<td><strong>Plenary lecture</strong>&lt;br&gt;Chair: Marcello Pinti&lt;br&gt;<strong>Claudio Procaccini</strong>, IEOS - CNR Napoli&lt;br&gt;<em>Integrating metabolism and immunity</em></td>
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<td>15:30-15:50</td>
<td><strong>Session IV: Bioenergetics metabolism and mitochondrial dysfunctions I</strong>&lt;br&gt;Chair: Francesco Francia</td>
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<td>15:50-16:10</td>
<td>Carlos Sanchez-Martin, University of Padova&lt;br&gt;<em>Targeting the oncogenic role of the chaperone TRAP1 in tumor cell mitochondria</em></td>
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<td>16:10-16:30</td>
<td>Elena Bianchini, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia&lt;br&gt;<em>Impairment of T cell metabolism and phenotype in patients with primary progressive form of multiple sclerosis</em></td>
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<td>16:30-17:00</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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<td>17:00-17:20</td>
<td>Marco Schiavone, University of Padova&lt;br&gt;<em>A mitochondrial therapy for Duchenne muscular dystrophy</em></td>
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<td>17:20-17:40</td>
<td>Anna De Gaetano, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia&lt;br&gt;<em>Phenotypic and molecular characterization of Lonp1wt/- mouse</em></td>
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<td>17:40-18:00</td>
<td>Roberto Costa, University of Padova&lt;br&gt;<em>Mitochondrial ATP production is required for Wnt signaling modulation</em></td>
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<td>18:00-18:45</td>
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<td>20:30</td>
<td>Social Dinner&lt;br&gt;Caffè Concerto, Modena</td>
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**Saturday 23rd**

9:00-10:00  **Plenary lecture**  
Chair: Alessandro Giuffrè  
Pia Adelroth, Stockholm University  
*Organisation and regulation of respiratory chains*

10:00  **Session V: Bioenergetics metabolism and mitochondrial dysfunctions II**  
Chair: Nazzareno Capitanio

10:00-10:20  Karim Zuhra, University of Rome  
*On the regulation of human hydrogen sulfide metabolism*

10:20-10:40  Claudio Laquatra, University of Padova  
*Zebrafish (Danio rerio) as a model to study the pathophysiological role of the mitochondrial chaperone TRAP1*

10:40-11:00  Francesco Antonio Tucci, University of Foggia  
*What time is it? Rhythmic Interplay between Circadian Clock and Mitochondrial Oxidative Metabolism*

11:00-11:20  Coffee break

11:20-11:40  Vito Porcelli, University of Bari  
*Investigation of pathogenetic mechanisms of AGC1 deficiency in neuron cell models*

11:40-12:00  Giuseppe Cannino, University of Padova  
*TRAP1 regulation in cancer metabolism: identification of new interactors*

12:00-12:20  Ciro Leonardo Pierri, University of Bari  
*Adenine nucleotide transporters: apoptosis master regulators, from neglected tropical diseases to space travels, through mitochondrial rare diseases and cancer*

12:20-13:00  Concluding remarks and awards
On the mechanism of respiratory complex I

Respiratory complex I couples the electron transfer from NADH to ubiquinone with the translocation of protons across the membrane. In humans, its dysfunction is associated with several neurodegenerative diseases. While the mitochondrial complex is made up of more than 40 different subunits, bacteria contain a structural minimal form of the complex that is used as a simple structural model. The complex has a two-part structure with a peripheral arm catalyzing electron transfer and a membrane arm involved in proton translocation. For electron transfer, the peripheral arm contains one non-covalently bound flavin mononucleotide and, depending on the species, up to ten iron-sulfur (Fe/S) clusters as cofactors. The X-ray structure of the complex showed that the NADH oxidation-site is connected with the quinone-reduction site by a chain of seven Fe/S-clusters. Fast enzyme kinetics revealed that this chain of Fe/S-clusters is used to regulate electron-tunneling rates within the complex. A possible role of a special binuclear, off-pathway cluster N1a in preventing the formation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) is discussed.

Thorsten Friedrich
Full Professor of Biochemistry
University of Freiburg, Germany

He received his Ph.D in Chemistry from Dusseldorf University (Germany) in 1992. In 1994 was research fellow at the Johnson Foundation in Philadelphia, and from 1994 to 2000 at the Heinrich-Heine University in Dusseldorf. Since 2012 he is Full Professor in Biochemistry at the Albert-Ludwigs-University, in Freiburg, Germany. His main research interests are focused on the energy converting enzymes of bacterial respiratory chains, mainly on the proton pumping NADH:ubiquinone oxidoreductase, respiratory complex I, and the bd oxidase.
Mitochondrial metabolism in cancer: impact on metastasis and tumor progression

Despite neglected for a long time, mitochondrial metabolism is emerging as an essential element in fostering cancer progression and metastasis. Particularly, low levels of mitochondrial ROS (mtROS) promote breast cancer metastasis by inducing Src and Pyk2. Comparatively, high levels of mtROS are a common pro-apoptotic signal. Because several antitumor drugs, including anthracyclines, can trigger mtROS production, we decided to evaluate the effects of antimetastatic drugs targeting mtROS on the doxorubicin-mediated cell death of breast cancer cells. Breast cancer cell lines were treated with different combinations of mtROS scavenger and doxorubicin, and cell death was and clonogenicity were assessed. No protective effects of mtROS scavengers on doxorubicin-induced cell death were detectable, suggesting that there is no contraindication to combine antimetastatic mtROS scavengers with a normal doxorubicin chemotherapy regimen. Interestingly, we further found that, compared to untreated cells, breast cancer cells treated with doxorubicin consumed more oxygen, resulting in increased ROS generation. This metabolic reprogramming promoted Pyk2 activation and SNAIL expression, along with morphological changes typical of an epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition, increased migration, and invasion. mtROS scavengers prevented these responses and reduced metastatic colonization of the lung. Altogether, this study provides a strong rationale for combining anthracycline-based chemotherapy with drugs lowering mtROS production in breast cancer.

Paolo Ettore Porporato
Assistant Professor of Experimental Biology
University of Torino, Italy

Paolo Porporato is a tenured-track Assistant Professor at the Department of Molecular Biotechnologies at the University of Torino. Following a PhD thesis on the role of ghrelin in preventing skeletal muscle atrophy and a postdoctoral experience at Université catholique de Louvain in defining the metabolic determinants of tumour metastasis, he is currently working on defining the impact of metabolism on the progression of cancer cachexia.
The field of immunometabolism has thrived over the last decade, revealing not only the major roles played by immune cells in metabolic homeostasis but also the impact of metabolic pathways on immune cell function. Epidemiological evidence and recent experimental data have suggested that the prevalence of autoimmune disorders in affluent countries has reached epidemic proportion. In this context, we have hypothesized the metabolic workload can modulate immunological tolerance, acting on regulatory T cells (CD4+CD25+FoxP3+ T cells).

In Multiple Sclerosis (MS), a chronic demyelinating disease affecting the central nervous system, a correlation between the occurrence of autoimmunity and the functional impairment in Treg cells has been reported. The transcription factor FoxP3 has a key role in the development and proper function of Treg cells. Recent studies have shown the link between metabolic programs and lymphocyte activation. We recently found that proliferation of Treg cells is impaired in subjects with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (RRMS) and this is associated with decreased expression of the forkhead box P3 (FoxP3) 44- and 47-kDa splicing forms and overactivation of mTOR pathway. Moreover, we identified a dominant proteomic signature at the metabolic level that primarily impacted the highly-tuned balance between glucose and fatty-acid oxidation in human Treg and Tconv cells, changing during culture conditions. We next evaluated FoxP3 expression in natural and inducible regulatory T cells (iTreg) generated in vitro from CD4+CD25- (Tconv) cells in MS patients and healthy subjects, respectively. We evaluated whether and how metabolic changes may influence the FoxP3 expression and the activity of regulatory T cells in physiological and pathological conditions. We found an impairment of iTreg cells suppressive function in MS subjects, which associated with an altered expression of specific FoxP3 splicing variants; these phenomena were secondary to a reduced glycolytic metabolism. Our results unveil a novel key molecular mechanism linking the highly tuned balance between glucose and lipid metabolisms with the induction of specific FoxP3-splicing variants, pivotal for the generation and function of Treg cells, thus accounting for the control of peripheral immune tolerance.

Claudio Procaccini
CNR Napoli
Italy

After the degree in 2004 at the University of Naples "Federico II", in 2008 Dr Procaccini obtained his PhD in Molecular Pathology and Pathophysiology, at the same University under the supervision of Prof. Giuseppe Matarese. Then he was Visiting Scientist at the David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), under the supervision of Prof. Antonio La Cava. From 2016 he is Researcher in the Institute of Experimental Endocrinology and Oncology of the National Research Council (CNR-IEOS) in Naples. He is member of several scientific societies (AINI, SIICA, SIPMET) and he has been awarded with the Prize Space Export-Import (in 2008 and 2011), “Piernicola Boccuni Prize” (2008) and with “Ricercatamente Award”, in 2015 as the best young researcher working in CNR.
Organisation and regulation of respiratory chains

The respiratory chain in aerobic organisms is composed of a number of membrane-bound protein complexes through which electrons are transferred to finally reach oxygen. In mitochondria, Complex III (cyt. bc1) links the two-electron oxidation of quinol (QH2) to the one-electron reduction of water-soluble cyt. c., which delivers electrons to Complex IV (cytochrome c oxidase, cyt. aa3), which catalyzes the reduction of O2 to H2O. The respiratory-chain enzymes in mitochondria are to a varying degree also parts of so-called supercomplexes composed of two or more individual complexes. In Saccharomyces cerevisiae, the composition and activity of these supercomplexes are regulated by the so-called Rcf proteins (respiratory complex factor) 1 and 2, the structure and functional role of which will be discussed. There are also an increasing number of reports of supercomplexes in bacteria, where the bc1-aa3 supercomplexes from Corynebacterium glutamicum and Mycobacterium smegmatis will be discussed. In these gram-positive bacteria, there are no soluble cyt. cytochromes, and instead, the bc1 complex harbours an additional heme c bound in the c1 subunit which presumably mediates the electron transfer between the two complexes.

Pia Adelroth
Stockholm University
Sweden

Pia received her Ph. D. in Chemistry from Göteborg University, Sweden in 1998 with a thesis entitled ‘Pathways and mechanisms for proton transfer in cytochrome c oxidase’. In 1999-2001, she was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of California, San Diego, working on proton transfer reactions in the bacterial photosynthetic reaction center. Since 2002, she is employed at the University of Stockholm, where she became a full professor of biochemistry in 2012. Her research interests include structure-function relationships in the diverse heme-copper oxidase superfamily, regulation of the respiratory chain in mitochondria and biological proton transfer reactions.
Electrophysiological properties of channel formed by bovine FOF1 ATP synthase in planar lipid bilayer

Andrea Urbani¹, Valentina Giorgio¹,², Andrea Carrer¹, Chimari Jiko³, Christoph Gerle⁴, Ildikò Szabô⁵, Paolo Bernardi¹,²

¹Dept. of Biomedical Sciences, University of Padova, Padova (Italy); ²Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Institute of Neuroscience (Italy); ³Kyoto University, Kyoto (Japan); ⁴Laboratory of Protein Crystallography, Institute for Protein Research, Osaka University, Osaka (Japan); ⁵Department of Biology, University of Padova, Padova (Italy)

Permeability transition (PT) in mitochondria is triggered by Ca²⁺ and specific activators and finally leads to increased permeability to ions and solutes of the inner mitochondrial membrane (IMM). In the 1970s the idea was advanced that PT is mediated by a Ca²⁺-regulated pore, named the Permeability Transition Pore (PTP). By means of patch clamp on mitoplasts the PTP was identified as a high-conductance channel, named Mitochondrial Mega Channel (MMC). Despite many years of study and the key role of PTP opening in cell death and several diseases, the molecular nature of the pore remains unclear. In 2013 Giorgio et al. provided evidence that dimers of mammalian FOF₁ ATP synthase purified from native gels can form the PTP/MMC [1] but the exact molecular mechanism is still unclear. The present work aimed at further understanding whether mammalian FOF₁ ATP synthase generates channel in single channel recordings in planar lipid bilayer (PLB). Highly pure FOF₁ ATP synthase was prepared from bovine hearts using the very mild, lipid-like detergent LMNG [2]. The resulting preparation was analyzed by clear native PAGE, SDS-PAGE, mass spectrometry, and negative stain electron microscopy and was shown: (i) to be intact and inclusive of all subunits; and (ii) to be active and highly sensitive to oligomycin (>95%). After incorporation into the PLB channel activity was assessed in the presence of different concentrations of Ca²⁺ and Bz-423, a compound that is able to sensitize the PTP to Ca²⁺. Here we provide evidence of high conductance, Ca²⁺-dependent mammalian FOF₁ ATP synthase channel activity resembling the MMC-PTP key features, including inhibition by PTP specific compounds.

Role of F-ATP synthase f subunit in dimer formation and PTP modulation

Chiara Galber¹, Giovanni Minervini¹, Giuseppe Cannino¹, Andrea Carrer¹, Silvio Tosatto¹, Giovanna Lippe², Valentina Giorgio¹, Paolo Bernardi¹

¹Dept. of Biomedical Sciences and CNR Neuroscince Institute, University of Padova, Padova (Italy); ²Dept. of Agricultural, Food, Environmental and Animal Sciences, University of Udine, Udine (Italy)

The mitochondrial F-ATP synthase is a large multisubunit complex of 600 kDa organized into a catalytic part (F₁) and a membranous moiety (Fo) linked by central and peripheral stalks. Recently, it has been demonstrated that purified dimers of F-ATP synthase added to a lipid bilayer form channels matching features of the permeability transition pore (PTP) [1]. The PTP is a mitochondrial mega-channel which induces cell death through the sudden membrane permeabilization to solutes and collapse of membrane potential. Although many candidates have been proposed as components of the PTP, there is now the evidence that the F-ATP synthase is its major constituent [2], even if the subunits directly involved in PTP formation and regulation remain undefined. We have proposed that channel formation takes place in F-ATP synthase dimers at the interface between two monomers. Structural data of the enzyme suggest an important role of f subunit in dimer stabilization in Yarrowia lipolytica and Saccharomyces cerevisiae. Based on bioinformatics analysis we have focused on f subunit to characterize its role as a possible pore-forming site. Electrophysiological studies are under investigation. We have used the CRISRP-Cas9 and the shRNA interference technologies to generate human cells lacking or with a decreased level of subunit f, respectively. We will report our progress at characterizing cell viability, mitochondrial morphology, F-ATP synthase catalysis and PTP features in these models.


Dissecting the effects of MT-ND1 and NDUFS3 suppression on respiratory Complex I assembly and supercomplex biogenesis

Elisa Astro¹, Luisa Iommarini¹, Erika Fernandez-Vizarra², Ivana Kurelac³, Laura B. Amato³, Giuseppe Gasparre³, Massimo Zeviani²*, Anna M. Porcelli**

¹Dept. of Pharmacy and Biotechnology (FABIT), University of Bologna, Bologna (Italy); ²Mitochondrial Biology Unit (MBU), Medical Research Council, Cambridge (UK); ³Dept. of Medical and Surgical Sciences (DMEC), University of Bologna, Bologna (Italy); *Co-last author

Complex I (CI) or NADH-ubiquinone oxidoreductase is the largest multiprotein complex of the OXPHOS system, composed of 45 subunits, encoded by either nuclear or mitochondrial DNA [1]. CI can associate with CIII and CIV, forming “supercomplexes” (SCs), but the assembly pathways of either CI or SCs are still controversial [2]. In this study we investigated CI and SCs biogenesis in cell models lacking two CI structural subunits, namely the mtDNA-encoded ND1 and the nDNA-encoded NDUFS3. A residual amount of functional CI was found within SCs in both models and it interacted preferentially with pre-CIII² (missing the catalytic Rieske Fe-S subunit) rather than the fully-assembled CIII², suggesting that CI and CIII interact with each other before their assembly is completed. The absence of NDUFS3 did not compromise neither CIII nor CIV steady state levels, whereas a reduction of the assembly/stability of these two respiratory complexes was observed in the lack of full-length ND1. Moreover, a quantitative differential proteomic approach allowed us to identify several putative CI interactors, with a possible role as assembly factors in the early stages of CI biogenesis. Since most of the identified proteins are involved in metabolic pathways, we hypothesize a correlation between such pathways and CI biogenesis.

Respiratory complex I ablation in aggressive cancers induces oncocytic indolence but triggers macrophage-mediated adaptive response

Luisa Iommarini1, Ivana Kurelac2, Renaud Vatrinet1,2, Laura B. Amato2, Lara Gibellini3, Andrea Cossarizza3, Manuela Sollazzo1, Daniela Grifoni1, Giuseppe Gasparre2, Anna Maria Porcelli1

1Dept. of Pharmacy and Biotechnology (FABIT), University of Bologna, Bologna (Italy); 2Dept. of Medical and Surgical Sciences (DIMEC), University of Bologna, Bologna (Italy); 3Dep of Medical and Surgical Sciences for Children and Adults, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Modena (Italy)

Converting aggressive cancers in benign oncocytomas has been suggested as a potential anti-cancer strategy. Since lack of respiratory complex I (CI) is a hallmark of oncocytomas, we successfully use genetic ablation of this enzyme to induce indolence in two types of aggressive cancers, and show this is reversed by allowing the stabilization of Hypoxia Inducible Factor 1 alpha (HIF1α). We further show that on the long run CI-deficient tumors re-adapt to their inability to respond to hypoxia, concordantly with the persistence of human oncocytomas. Due to the low toxicity of metformin and its potential use in a wide-spectrum of human solid neoplasms, it is of great interest to identify adaptive mechanisms activated upon CI inhibition to design combinatorial therapies. We indeed demonstrate that CI-deficient tumors survive by triggering non-cell-autonomous mechanism of angiogenesis, independent of HIF1α. Such adaptive response is mediated by tumor associated macrophages (TAMs), whose blockage by the use of clodronate improves the effect of CI targeting. Based on these results, we propose CI inhibitors in cancer therapy should be used in combination with TAM targeting agents to guarantee a synergistic effect.
Functional and expression study identifying plasma membrane ecto-ATP synthase as a novel player in the early phase of Liver regeneration

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ATP synthase, canonically mitochondrially located, is reported to be ectopically expressed on the plasma membrane outer face of several cell types [1]. We analysed, for the first time, the expression and catalytic activities of the ecto- and mitochondrial ATP synthase during liver regeneration. Liver regeneration was induced in rats by two-thirds partial hepatectomy. The protein level and the ATP synthase and/or hydrolase activities of the hepatocyte ecto- and mitochondrial ATP synthase were analysed on freshly isolated hepatocytes and mitochondria from control, sham-operated and partial hepatectomized rats. During the priming phase of liver regeneration, 3 h after partial hepatectomy, liver mitochondria showed a marked lowering of the ATP synthase protein level that was reflected in the impairment of both ATP synthesis and hydrolysis. The ecto-ATP synthase level, in 3 h partial hepatectomized hepatocytes, was decreased similarly to the level of the mitochondrial ATP synthase, associated with a lowering of the ecto-ATP hydrolase activity coupled to proton influx. Noteworthy, the ecto-ATP synthase activity coupled to proton efflux was completely inhibited in 3 h partial hepatectomized hepatocytes, even in the presence of a marked intracellular acidification that would sustain it as in control and sham-operated hepatocytes. At the end of the liver regeneration, 7 days after partial hepatectomy, the level and the catalytic activities of the ecto- and mitochondrial ATP synthase reached the control and values. The specific modulation of hepatocyte ecto-ATP synthase catalytic activities during liver regeneration priming phase may modulate the extracellular ADP/ATP levels and/or proton influx/efflux trafficking, making hepatocyte ecto-ATP synthase a candidate for a novel player in the liver regeneration process.

The ABCC6 expression is regulated by adenosine and ATP externally added to the HepG2 cells

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The ABCC6 protein is an ATP dependent transporter mainly found in the basolateral plasma membrane of hepatic and kidney cells. Mutations in ABCC6 gene were associated to the Pseudoxanthoma elasticum (PXE), a disease characterized by the mineralization of connective tissues [1]. Has been reported that the over-expression of ABCC6 in HEK293 cells results in the cellular efflux of ATP and other nucleoside triphosphates [2]; in the extracellular space, ATP is converted by an ecto-nucleosidase in PPI (inhibitor of mineralization) and AMP; the latter is in turn transformed into adenosine and phosphate, then, ABCC6 is involved in the production of adenosine. Our previous studies showed that in ABCC6 knockdown HepG2 cells the expression of some genes, related with the calcification processes, is dysregulated [3]. In this study, experiments have been designed in order to verify if ABCC6, besides supplying the pyrophosphate necessary to prevent the mineralization of soft tissues, also plays a role in the purinergic system activation. In the liver, purinergic signaling has been shown to regulate key cellular functions. For this purpose, the ABCC6 transport activity was inhibited with Probenecid, a drug used for gout, and the expression of ABCC6 and NT5E was analyzed with real-time PCR and western blotting. The results of this study showed that both proteins are downregulated in the presence of Probenecid and upregulated in the presence of adenosine or ATP.

The effects of PTP inhibition in Duchenne muscular dystrophy

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Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) is a severe X-linked muscle disease caused by mutations in the gene encoding for dystrophin. Lack of dystrophin leads to muscle weakness, low resistance to stress, impairment of muscle regeneration and eventually fiber demise. The main trigger of these alterations is probably the increase of Ca²⁺ levels in the sarcoplasm of the affected fibers. Increased Ca²⁺ levels in DMD muscle fibers lead to mitochondrial dysfunction, which contributes to the vicious cycle of Ca²⁺ deregulation that eventually triggers fiber death [1]. One of the potential mechanisms involved in DMD pathogenesis is opening of the mitochondrial permeability transition pore (PTP), a high-conductance channel located in the inner membrane, whose activity is positively regulated by cyclophilin (CyP) D and high matrix Ca²⁺ levels. The PTP is desensitized by cyclosporin A and its non-immunosuppressive derivatives NIM811 and Alisporivir, which can inhibit CyPD binding. Alisporivir allowed recovery of respiration, rescue of muscle ultrastructure and improvement of survival in the sapje zebrafish model of DMD [2]. However, Alisporivir is not specific for CyPD and thus inhibits all cyclophilins. To further identify specific PTP inhibitors, a high-throughput screening has been performed, which led to identification of novel compounds that do not target CyPD [3]. Following optimization, compound MF1 showed promising results in vivo using the sapje zebrafish model, such as recovery of muscle structure and motor impairments. Given the results with Alisporivir and MF1, a combined treatment could be done. Since Alisporivir inhibits all CyPs, is also reasonable to observe if this inhibition causes side effects. So, we plan to obtain a genetic knockdown of the CyPA, CyPB and CyPD isoforms both in the wild type and the sapje zebrafish model. As preliminary data, in the wild type zebrafish, by CyPB knockdown, some embryos exhibit developmental delay and phenotypic abnormalities.

Role of MICS1, interaction partner of LETM1, in mitochondrial calcium homeostasis

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The vital role of LETM1 in maintaining the mitochondrial osmotic homeostasis by regulating K⁺-H⁺ exchange was challenged by a proposed function as a mitochondrial Ca²⁺-H⁺ exchanger. In order to clarify the debated function of this single span membrane protein, we performed a proteomic-based screening for interaction partners with a potential role in mitochondrial K⁺ or Ca²⁺ exchange against H⁺. We have identified several potential novel LETM1 interaction partners. Validation assays confirmed the oligomerisation of LETM1 with a novel mitochondrial protein belonging to the highly conserved protein family TMBIM with regulatory functions in intracellular Ca²⁺ homeostasis. We are presenting data on TMBIM5, also known as MICS1, and its role in the control of transmembrane Ca²⁺ exchange.
Channel activity of yeast VDAC2, the second mitochondrial porin isoform of Saccharomyces cerevisiae

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The permeability of Mitochondrial Outer Membrane in all eukaryotes is conferred by the presence of Voltage-Dependent Anion Channel (VDAC) proteins, a conserved group of β-barrel porins allowing mainly ATP/ADP and ions exchange between cytosol and mitochondria. The budding yeast Saccharomyces cerevisiae has two genes encoding for two distinct VDAC proteins (yVDAC). The yVDAC1 is the main porin and is particular important during respiration: cells lacking VDAC1 (Δpor1), indeed, show a strong impairment of yeast growth in non-fermentable condition. The yVDAC2 is less known and one of the most elusive member of VDAC family. Since its discovery, yVDAC2 function was controversial: if on one side the lacking of yVDAC2 has no consequence for the yeast growth, questioning the channel formation, on the other side the overexpression of yVDAC2 restores yeast growth in Δpor1 cells [1], supporting the channel activity. In order to definitely understand yVDAC2 function, the corresponding encoding sequence was overexpressed in Δpor1 cells and the protein was purified from mitochondria under native conditions. Reconstitution experiment, performed at the Planar Lipid Bilayer system, have clearly shown that yVDAC2 forms voltage-dependence channels with a conductance of about 3.6 nS in 1M KCl [2]. Moreover, the application of a KCl gradient between two sides of the membrane resulted in shifts in the current/voltage curve slope, allowed for identification of up to three different states with different calculated parameters of ionic selectivity for yVDAC2 [2]. Interestingly, two of them appear to be high-conductance states but with opposite selectivity. In conclusion, our results give the definitive message that yVDAC2 is another member of the VDAC family.

Identification and functional characterization of an exosomal cargo protein: the plasma membrane carnitine transporter (OCTN2)

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Several studies showed that eukaryotic cells release small vesicles, among which exosomes. Initially, they were considered to be platelet “dust” or cellular debris but it is becoming clear that exosomes play important roles in cell-to-cell communication and are involved in the immune response, angiogenesis, inflammation, cell death and cancer progression. Several recent studies focus on characterization of cargos of exosomes derived from body fluids as well as from medium of cell cultures. Large-scale proteomic analyses show the presence of peptides deriving from several solute transporters (SLCs), which are fundamental for cell physiology and are linked to many human pathologies. However, no or few data on the function of exosomal SLCs is available, so far. We have revealed the presence in exosomes of a transporter which has a crucial role in cell homeostasis: SLC22A5 also known as OCTN2 (Organic Cation Transporter Novel 2). It is a sodium dependent carnitine transporter and plays a crucial role in the cellular uptake of L-carnitine which is an essential co-factor for the mitochondrial beta oxidation pathway. OCTN2 was detected by Western Blot analysis in both HEK293 and urinary derived exosomes. To investigate the functional properties of the exosomal OCTN2, proteins extracted from vesicles were reconstituted in proteoliposomes and the transport function was measured as uptake of 3H-carnitine. Data showed that exosomal OCTN2 is fully functional. Furthermore, the pro-inflammatory cytokine, INFγ, increases the level of OCTN2 in exosomes. The data suggest that OCTN2 maintains its native functional properties also in exosomes and that its presence in this extracellular location may be related to inflammatory states. The fact that OCTN2 is present in urinary exosomes might represent the starting point to discover a novel, non-invasive candidate biomarker for inflammation related pathologies.
The multidrug resistance inhibitor 8-(4-chlorophenyl)-5-methyl-1 8-[(2Z)-pent-2-en-1-2 yloxy]-8H-[1,2,4]oxadiazolo[3,4-c][1,4]thiazin-3-one diltiazem-like compound inhibits the ABCC6 transporter

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Proteins mostly involved in multidrug resistance (MDR), one of the major causes of cancer treatment failure, are members of the ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporters superfamily [1]. With the aim to reduce MDR, several molecules were synthesized and tested for their ability to inhibit ATP-binding cassette transporters activity and between them the 8-(4-chlorophenyl)-5-methyl-1 8-[(2Z)-pent-2-en-1-2 yloxy]-8H-[1,2,4]oxadiazolo[3,4-c][1,4]thiazin-3-one namely 2c, related to the myocardial-calcium-channel-modulator diltiazem [2]. Our study showed that 2c compound, at the concentration suggested to prevent drug resistance, inhibits the activity of ABCC6 transporter, a member of the ABCC subfamily associated to low resistance to some chemotherapeutic agents [3]. As 2c also inhibits esterase activity and histone acetylation we believe that these biological activities must be taken into account as possible side effects.

Characterization of the CAT2 transporter from Solanum lycopersicum (Tomato).

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The vacuole is the largest organelle in plant cells and it is essential for life. Although the vacuole has always been associated with turgor regulation and storage of water and metabolites, it is now clear that this organelle is also involved in pH homeostasis, cell energetics and signal transduction. Among metabolites exchanged in vacuoles, amino acids are particularly represented since they play both metabolic and signaling functions. In particular Arginine is crucial for plant cells, being a precursor for nitric oxide and polyamine. We have very recently expressed the CAT2 transporter from Solanum lycopersicum in E.coli. The recombinant protein has been reconstituted in the artificial membrane of proteoliposomes and the transporter has been functionally characterized. The ability for CAT2 to transport cationic amino acids has been demonstrated measuring the uptake of several radiolabeled amino acids in proteoliposomes. Arginine, Lysine and the non-proteogenic amino acid Ornithine are the most efficiently transported. Arginine transport is stimulated by the presence of cholesterol in the membrane. Since the physiological pH of vacuoles is acidic inside, the transport activity has been recorded as a function of the pH gradient. Optimal transport was observed in the presence of intraliposomal pH 5.5 and external pH 8.0-8.5. The possible mechanism of pH control has been predicted on the basis of the homology model of CAT2 obtained using the 3D structure of the ApoC transporter from Geobacillus Kaustophilus as a template. Glu 142 has been hypothesized of being involved in proton binding. Since the existence of a non-neuronal cholinergic system has also been ascertained in plants, the possible role of CAT2 in Acetylcholine transport in the vacuoles has been investigated. Acetylcholine transport mediated by CAT2 has been revealed. This data suggests that CAT2 can promote the Acetylcholine storage into the vacuole.
Targeting the oncogenic role of the chaperone TRAP1 in tumor cell mitochondria

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We have previously shown that the mitochondrial chaperone TRAP1, a conserved member of the Hsp90 family, is involved in the metabolic rewiring of tumor cells [1] by down-regulating the oxidative phosphorylation through inhibition of succinate dehydrogenase (SDH), the complex II of the respiratory chain. In this way, TRAP1 prompts tumor growth through a succinate-dependent stabilization of the transcription factor HIF1α [2]. Moreover, SDH inhibition has an antioxidant effect that shields neoplastic cells from oxidative insults [3]. We have also found that TRAP1 is involved in a mitochondrial signaling cascade following deregulated activation of the Ras/ERK kinase pathway. In mitochondria, active ERK1/2 phosphorylates TRAP1 and this enhances TRAP1-dependent inhibition of SDH activity and contributes to neoplastic growth [4]. These findings suggest that TRAP1 could be a good target to develop innovative therapeutic strategies for cancer treatment. In this context, we have exploited computational approaches based on the characterization of TRAP1 internal dynamics in order to identify potential regions that can be targeted by selective TRAP1 inhibitors in an allosteric way. Based on this approach, we have tested a set of putative TRAP1 allosteric inhibitors, finding that all these molecules inhibit TRAP1 activity in a highly selective way. At a cellular level, these lead compounds completely reverse the inhibition of the SDH activity exerted by TRAP1 in both murine and human malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumors, while TRAP1 knockout cells are completely insensitive to the effects of these molecules. Our studies provide evidence that novel computational approaches can be used to design highly selective TRAP1 inhibitors. These molecules are useful tools for the comprehension of the role played by TRAP1 in the regulation of signaling and metabolic pathways in tumor cell mitochondria and can be further developed in order to find novel antineoplastic strategies.

Impairment of T cell metabolism and phenotype in patients with primary progressive form of multiple sclerosis

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Cellular metabolism and its dynamic reprogramming are essential for T cell function. Inappropriate remodeling underlies aberrant immune responses and T cells from autoimmune models exhibit altered metabolic profiles. Multiple sclerosis is an immune-mediated disease triggered by autoreactive T cells. We focused on its progressive forms, investigating the metabolic, mitochondrial (mt) and phenotypic features of T cells, to understand if there were peculiarities that could account for the heterogeneous clinical courses. We enrolled 50 patients, 29 with secondary progressive (SP) and 21 with primary progressive (PP) form, and 20 controls (CTR). First, we evaluated T cell metabolism and mt function. Basal and maximal respiration of CD4+ naïve T (TN) cells from SP patients were higher than PP patients and CTR. Mitochondria of PP patients had lower mass and membrane potential than those from the other groups. Second, we analyzed the expression of key metabolic transcription factors, and the activation of mTOR by GLUT1 expression and pS6 phosphorylation. PP patients had an upregulation of glycolysis-activating genes and a downregulation of quiescence-promoting genes, an upregulation of GLUT1 in CD4+ T cells, and increased CD4+ and CD8+ effector memory T (TEM) cells with phospho-pS6. Finally, to investigate if these metabolic differences reflect modifications in T cell phenotype, we characterized activation, differentiation and proliferation. PP patients had higher levels of CD4+ TEM cells and CD8+ effector memory T cells re-expressing CD45RA, and lower levels of CD8+ TN cells than SP patients. All CD4+ T cell subsets and CD8+ TN cells from PP patients had low proliferative potential. Thus, a dysregulation of T cell metabolism exists in PP patients, who appear more prone to activate glycolysis; this could favour a more rapid shift toward effector cells, and a faster disease progression.

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A mitochondrial therapy for Duchenne muscular dystrophy

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Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) is a life-threatening X-linked muscle disease caused by mutations in the dystrophin gene. It is characterized by progressive degeneration of muscle fibers and an effective, or generally applicable therapy is lacking. Studies in animal models (hamster, chicken and mouse) demonstrated the presence of mitochondrial dysfunction during the disease pathogenesis. Opening of the mitochondrial Permeability Transition Pore (PTP, a mitochondrial high-conductance channel), due to an increase of calcium concentration in both sarcoplasm and mitochondria, was observed to be one of the main mechanisms involved in DMD pathogenesis [1]. Since the mdx⁻/⁻ mouse (the best-characterized mouse model of the disease) displays a rather mild dystrophic phenotype, we took advantage of the severe sapje zebrafish mutant, which lacks dystrophin and shows ultrastructural muscle defects close to those of DMD patients [2]. Our aim is to explore in vivo a possible mitochondrial therapy targeting the PTP with non-immunosuppressive derivatives of cyclosporine A and new PTP inhibitors developed by our research group. As previously observed in muscle biopsies from DMD patients, we show that sapje zebrafish (i) display a dramatic disruption of muscle structure, (ii) a strong decrease of respiratory reserve capacity and (iii) are prone to mitochondrial dysfunction due to opening of the PTP, whose features in zebrafish are the same as those of mammals. Treatment with the FDA-approved cyclophilin inhibitor Alisporivir - a cyclosporin A derivative that desensitizes the PTP but does not inhibit calcineurin - and the new PTP inhibitor MF1 led to a striking recovery of muscle structure, motor impairments and respiratory function [3]. Improvement of sapje zebrafish survival was observed as well. As Alisporivir has an excellent safety profile, it could be used in combination with MF1 for treatment of DMD.

Phenotypic and molecular characterization of Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-} mouse.

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LONP1 protease is a nuclear genome encoded protein located in the mitochondrial matrix belonging to the ATPase associated with diverse cellular activities (AAA+) superfamily. Its main function is to degrade misfolded, oxidized and damaged proteins but also it actively participates in mitochondrial function and mtDNA maintenance and functionality. Mutations in \textit{LONP1} gene are linked to CODAS (cerebral, ocular, dental, auricular, and skeletal anomalies) syndrome, a rare recessive disorder. \textit{In vitro}, in colon carcinoma cells, LONP1 downregulation affects mitochondrial proteome including proteins involved in stress response, ribosome assembly, mitochondrial and mtDNA architecture and energetic metabolism. These modifications deeply impair cellular respiration and mitochondrial functionality and morphology. To evaluate the effects of LONP1 downregulation \textit{in vivo}, we generated and characterized a heterozygous \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-}} mouse model. \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-}} ♂ x \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-}} ♀ mating produces no \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{-/-}} mice, confirming the embryonic lethality of \textit{Lonp1} inactivation in mouse, previously shown in another mouse model. \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-}} reveals no altered phenotype or development, and morphometric study of organs and bones shows no impairment. Quantification of multi-tissue expression of proteins related to mitochondrial functionality and of mtDNA levels, histological and fertility analysis reveal no significant difference between heterozygous and wild-type mouse. \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-}} express the same amount of LONP1 protein compared with \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/wt}}, suggesting an unknown mechanism of expression compensation by the intact allele. Comparing the number of offspring, a significant difference is found between \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/wt}} ♂ x \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/wt}} ♀ and \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/wt}} ♂ x \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-}} ♀ mating. Further studies regarding mitochondrial respiration and Oxidative Phosphorylation on Mouse Embryonic Fibroblasts derived from \textit{Lonp1\textsuperscript{wt/-}} mice are ongoing.
Mitochondrial ATP production is required for Wnt signaling modulation

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Mitochondria are central organelles for cellular metabolism and are involved controlling both cell proliferation and death. The way(s) how mitochondrial function/dysfunction affects downstream signaling pathways in the context of proliferation is still poorly defined. While Wnt signalling, crucial for cellular proliferation and differentiation and often upregulated in cancer, is known to influence mitochondrial function, the possibility that mitochondrial function affects Wnt signaling has not been explored so far. We show that sub-lethal concentrations of different pharmacological compounds all able to decrease mitochondrial ATP production down-regulate canonical Wnt signaling in different cancer cell lines. The same pharmacological treatments led to reduced Wnt signaling in vivo, in Danio rerio (zebrafish) reporter lines, while leaving other important signaling pathways such as Sonic hedgehog (Shh) unaffected, indicating specificity of the mitochondria-Wnt signaling axis. In accordance, fibroblasts from patients harbouring a genetic mutation leading to impaired function of the respiratory chain complex III, displayed reduced Wnt signaling with respect to healthy cells. The new paradigm proposed here further underlines the importance of mitochondrial fitness and suggests that chemotherapeutics causing mitochondrial dysfunction may have an additional benefit.
On the regulation of human hydrogen sulfide metabolism

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Hydrogen sulfide (H2S), currently viewed as the third ‘gasotransmitter’ in addition to nitric oxide (NO) and carbon monoxide (CO), has been recognized to play a regulatory role in cell bioenergetics. While inhibiting complex IV in the mitochondrial respiratory chain at higher levels, at lower concentrations H2S acts as a respiratory substrate, stimulating ATP synthesis. H2S is synthesized by cystathionine β-synthase (CBS), cystathionine γ-lyase and 3-mercaptopyruvate sulfurtransferase, and is oxidatively catabolized in the mitochondrion where H2S-derived electrons are transferred to coenzyme Q by sulfide quinone reductase (SQR). Several metabolic, neurodegenerative and oncologic diseases are associated to dysregulation of H2S metabolism. Hence, the importance of understanding how H2S bioavailability is regulated under (patho)physiological conditions. Relevant for the crosstalk between the three gasotransmitters, we showed that both CO and NO negatively modulate CBS with high efficacy [1], particularly in the presence of its allosteric activator S-adenosyl-L-methionine [2], and that a CBS variant responsible of a rare genetic disease (classical homocystinuria) displays unusually high propensity to inhibition by CO, suggesting a novel pathogenic mechanism [3]. Here, by investigating the effect of hypoxia on H2S metabolism in SW480 colon cancer cells, we report that, compared to control cells, hypoxia-treated cells display mitochondria with reduced mass, but higher SQR content, overall accounting for a lower mitochondrial sulfide-detoxifying activity. These data suggest that under hypoxic conditions the lower sulphide-detoxifying activity may contribute to ensure higher protective H2S levels, while SQR enrichment of mitochondria may protect cellular bioenergetics preventing toxic accumulation of H2S.

1) Vicente et al. (2014) J. Biol. Chem. 289, 8579-87
2) Vicente et al. (2016) J. Biol. Chem. 291, 572-581
Zebrafish (Danio rerio) as a model to study the pathophysiological role of the mitochondrial chaperone TRAP1

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Expression of the Hsp90-family chaperone TRAP1 is restricted to mitochondria and increased in most tumor types. We have previously shown that TRAP1 elicits the stabilization of the transcriptional factors HIF1α, thus generating a pseudohypoxic state that supports neoplastic growth. Following oncogenic activation of the Ras/ERK pathway TRAP1 is phosphorylated by ERK1/2, leading to inhibition of succinate dehydrogenase (SDH), the complex II of respiratory chain, and to the ensuing accumulation of the oncometabolite succinate, which eventually stabilizes HIF1α. However, little is known about the timing and importance of TRAP1 induction during the process of neoplastic onset and growth, as well as on the role of TRAP1 in the physiology of non-transformed cells. To answer these questions, we decided to exploit the Zebrafish model, whose bioenergetics features are still poorly investigated. We found that TRAP1 is highly expressed during the early stages of Zebrafish embryo development, but its levels are dramatically decreased at 96 hpf. Notably, an increase in TRAP1 mRNA and protein level was detected after HIF1α stabilization, causing a reduction in SDH activity, and an in silico analysis of Zebrafish TRAP1 promotor showed the presence of hypoxic responsive elements motifs. Moreover, TRAP1 is highly expressed in a Zebrafish model of pancreatic adenocarcinoma induced by KrasG12D expression in Ptf1a positive cells where it causes a strong decrease of SDH activity, while it is absent in normal pancreas.

Altogether, these data suggest the existence of a positive feedback loop between HIF1α and TRAP1, in which HIF1α stabilization induces TRAP1 expression acting at the transcriptional level, and in turn TRAP1, through SDH inhibition, leads to HIF1α stabilization. This regulatory mechanism could play an important role for the adaptation of cells to fluctuating level of oxygen both in embryogenesis and during the process of neoplastic transformation.
What time is it? Rhythmic Interplay between Circadian Clock and Mitochondrial Oxidative Metabolism

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Mounting evidences are disclosing the tight correlation between circadian rhythms and cell metabolism to align bioenergetic demand to environmental variants. In the last few years we focused on the interplay between the clock gene machinery and the mitochondrial physiology. Using well-established in-vitro-synchronized cultured cells, we demonstrated a BMAL1-dependent ultradian oscillation of the mitochondrial respiratory activity [1] as well as of the glycolytic activity. This translated in a rhythmic change of the cellular energy charge. The rhythmic respiratory activity was associated with: i) oscillation in cellular NAD content; ii) clock-genes-dependent expression of NAMPT, NMNAT3 and Sirtuins 1/3; iii) reversible acetylation of a single subunit of the mitochondrial respiratory chain Complex I; iv) reversible phosphorylation state of the pyruvate dehydrogenase (PDH). In this context the mitochondrial-endoplasmic reticulum (ER) calcium homeostasis appears to be involved as inhibition of either of the mitochondrial calcium uniport, the ER Ca2+-channel(s), the cyclic ADP-ribose (cADPR) synthesis resulted in alteration of the rhythmic respiratory activity. Notably, pharmacological inhibition of the mitochondrial OxPhos system resulted in dramatic deregulation of the clock-gene expression in synchronized cells and a similar result was attained with mtDNA depleted (Rho0) cells [2].

All together our findings provide novel levels of complexity in the interlocked feedback loop controlling the interplay between cellular bioenergetics and the molecular clockwork.

2. 2. R. Scrima, et al., Clock-genes and mitochondrial respiratory activity: Evidence of a reciprocal interplay, Biochimica Et Biophysica Acta (BBA) - Bioenergetics. 1857 (2016) 1344–1351. do
Investigation of pathogenetic mechanisms of AGC1 deficiency in neuron cell models

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Mutations in the SLC25A12 gene cause AGC1 deficiency (OMIM 612949), an early infantile encephalopathy associated with severe neuromuscular delay, hypomyelination, epilepsy and reduction of brain N-acetyl-aspartate (NAA), the precursor of the myelin synthesis in CNS [1]. The SLC25A12 gene encodes for the aspartate/glutamate carrier AGC1 which is mainly expressed in brain, heart and muscle, the carrier catalyzes a Ca2+-regulated entry of glutamate into mitochondria in exchange for aspartate and is a component of the mitochondrial malate-aspartate NADH shuttle (MAS) that is essential for the correct oxidation of glucose in neurons.

In order to elucidate the pathogenesis of AGC1 deficiency, we down-regulated the gene encoding AGC1 by RNAi in the mouse brain-derived Neuro2A cells. Undifferentiated Neuro2A cells with down-regulated AGC1 showed a significant proliferation deficit associated with reduced mitochondrial respiration, and were unable to synthesize NAA properly. In the presence of high glutamine oxidation, cells with reduced AGC1 restored cell proliferation, although oxidative stress increased and NAA synthesis deficit persisted. Our data suggest that the cellular energetic deficit due to AGC1 impairment is associated with inappropriate aspartate levels to support neuronal proliferation when glutamine is not used as metabolic substrate, and we propose that delayed myelination in AGC1 deficiency patients could be attributable, at least in part, to neuronal loss combined with lack of NAA synthesis occurring during the nervous system development [2].

TRAP1 regulation in cancer metabolism: identification of new interactors

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The metabolic rewiring of cancer cells is a multifaceted process, and how mitochondria contribute to it remains poorly defined. Recently we demonstrated that the mitochondrial chaperone TRAP1 binds and inhibits succinate dehydrogenase. The consequent succinate accumulation causes HIF1α stabilization even under normal oxygen tension, setting a pseudohypoxic phenotype instrumental in prompting tumor growth. In addition, ERK-dependent phosphorylation enhances this oncogenic effect of TRAP1. In analogy with its cognate chaperone Hsp90, it is possible that TRAP1 has multiple interacting partners endowed with relevant functions in the oncogenic process. In order to identify novel TRAP1 interactors, we used a mass spectrometry analysis on TRAP1 immunoprecipitated by a human glioblastoma cell model; cells where TRAP1 was knocked-out with a CRISPR/Cas9 approach were used as a negative control. Among the potential TRAP1 partners fished out by MS, we found proteins involved in OXPHOS, tricarboxylic acid cycle and glutaminolysis. Interestingly, we found some subunits of the ATP synthase, the central enzymatic complex in the process of energy conservation. Our preliminary data indicate that the absence of TRAP1 markedly inhibits the activity of ATP synthase dimers.
Adenine nucleotide transporters: apoptosis master regulators, from neglected tropical diseases to space travels, through mitochondrial rare diseases and cancer.

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The mitochondrial ADP/ATP carriers (AACs) specifically translocate the ATP synthesized within mitochondria to the cytosol in exchange for the cytosolic ADP, playing a key role in energy production, in promoting cell viability and regulating mitochondrial permeability transition pore opening [1, 2]. In Homo sapiens four genes code for AACs with different tissue distribution and expression patterns. Since AACs are dysregulated in several cancer types and involved in mitochondrial dysfunction observed in several rare diseases, the employment of AAC inhibitors or agonists might be crucial for inducing or preventing mitochondrial-mediated apoptosis in human cells [1,2 and ref therein]. In this regard carboxyatractyloside (CATR) and bongkrekic acid (BKA) are known to be powerful and highly selective AAC inhibitors. CATR shows pro-apoptotic features whereas BKA shows anti-apoptotic features. Recently, we estimated for the first time their affinity for the human recombinant AAC2 by in vitro transport assays. We found that the inhibition constants of CATR and BKA are 4 nM and 2.0 mM, respectively [1]. Given the crucial role played by AAC in triggering or preventing mitochondrial apoptosis we searched for new AAC modulators by performing a docking-based virtual screening of an in-house developed chemical library and we identified 2 highly selective inhibitors, namely suramin and chebulinic acid, showing inhibition constants equal to 0.3 mM and 2.1 mM, respectively. We also demonstrated that chebulinic acid and suramin are “highly selective” AAC2 inhibitors, since they poorly inhibit other human mitochondrial carriers (namely ORC1, APC1 and AGC1) [1]. The newly identified AAC inhibitors among CATR analogs will be assayed for their ability in triggering mitochondrial apoptosis in cancer cell-lines, whereas the newly proposed AAC modulators identified among BKA analogs will allow to test them for preventing mitochondrial apoptosis in neuro/muscular degenerative diseases showing an excess of apoptosis. Notably, preventing mitochondrial apoptosis could also be a winning approach for limiting the muscular/bone loss and/or neurological disorders observed in astronauts living for long periods in microgravity conditions or after prolonged exposure to cosmic rays.

Finally, considering that mitochondrial apoptosis is the only apoptotic pathway shared by several protista, fungi, plants and mammalia, it becomes intriguing to identify new apoptosis modulators acting through the species-specific AACs. It was indeed ascertained that AACs are present in several fungi and protista pathogens like candida albicans, botrytis cinerea and aspergillus clavatus, from fungi; and leishmania infantum, trypanosome brucei, plasmodium falciparum and toxoplasma gondii from protista. AACs from the cited species show specific structural features that will allow to draw new species-specific AAC inhibitors starting from the characterized pro-apoptotic human AAC inhibitors (i.e. CATR, suramin, chebulinic acid).
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Thank you