

Tesi doctoral presentada per En/Na

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**"Ecophysiological and molecular  
characterization of estuarine microbial mats"**

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## IX. CONCLUSIONS



Figure IX. “We live in the Age of Bacteria as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, until the World ends” Stephen J. Gould (1941–2002) □

Picture from NASA that represents the evolution of life on Earth.



Microbial mats that develop in benthic marine and hypersaline environments may be living analogues to the first living biological communities. Thus, they may be useful in understanding biosphere-atmosphere interactions of early Earth. Despite their inherently high productivity and dominant role in the evolution of the biosphere, the present-day environmental distribution of cyanobacterial mats is largely restricted to environments that today could be considered extreme or stressed. However, microbial mats are extremely stable ecosystems with a high diversity, and they are a source of not-yet characterized microorganisms well adapted in the microbial community. Moreover, microbial mats are significant to the field of astrobiology because of the possibility that analogous extraterrestrial microbial systems might also contribute with gas emissions to the atmospheres of distant planets creating indicators of life. Although many studies have been performed with microbial mats as a model of microbial ecosystem, many uncertainties remain concerning biochemical cycles, cooperative associations and the identification of microbial members.

The aim of this work was the application of new techniques and combination of existing ones to give an integrated vision of the structure and physiology, and also analyze the information provided by the integrated approach and characterize less-known microbial populations involved in important processes in the mat. Therefore, we can conclude that the application of the Signature Lipid Biomarker approach in microbial mat samples has proved to be an effective method to obtain information about physiology and composition of natural microbial assemblages. However, more studies need to be performed in order to increase the sensibility and reproducibility of these techniques, and to evaluate the model of distribution of data in mat samples.

In addition, the combination of lipid analysis and nucleic acid-based methods in microbial mats at different depths has provided useful information about the temporal dynamic of populations, their phylogenetic affiliation and physiological status. This study has revealed the importance of heterotrophic bacteria in the photosynthetic layers, the presence of green non-sulfur bacteria in several ‘niches’, as well as fermentative bacteria in the deepest layers. Besides, divergence analysis has showed that depth-related changes might have a greater influence than temporal changes.

Apart from that, the application of the quinone profiling method has been useful for taxonomic purposes, biomass estimation and microbial redox state. In this case, we have observed important differences in the community structure and redox status in microbial mats from different locations that were apparently very similar. In addition, we have performed a preliminary study about the detection of intact polar lipids in mat samples that will be improved in the future because of its higher taxonomical potential. We have also detected archaeal members that might have an important role in the physiology of the system.

The mentioned approaches were also applied to microbial mat samples along a circadian cycle in order to evaluate changes as a response to daily processes. We observed a pattern of physicochemical responses of the mat that reproduces every day. This fact suggests the idea that microbial mats are predictable and stable complex ecosystems. During this study, we have also observed daily changes attributed to anaerobic microorganisms, and for this reason we have isolated representative members of anaerobic spore-formers. Future studies will be focused on the isolation and characterization of the anaerobic fermentative bacteria in mats to improve our knowledge about the daily processes in which they are involved.

As a result of the data obtained after the application of combined analysis in mats, we realized about the importance of the heterotrophic bacteria in the regulation of metabolic processes in the photic zone. Previous studies have investigated the heterotrophic diversity in mats, but the information about their role and the interactions with other microbial groups are still limiting. In this work, we have isolated and characterized two microbial strains involved in the metabolic interactions of the photic zone. We have demonstrated the metabolic capacities of *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. EBD and the relationship with cyanobacteria. However, further studies should be done to determine the interchange of nutrients between these groups. On the other hand, a member of the *Sphingomonas* genus has been also characterized and its importance in the nutrient cycling and in the polyhydroxyalkanoate dynamics will be investigated.

Finally, we have studied the microbial diversity of sulfur-oxidizers involved in the sulfur cycle of transition zones between oxygen and sulfide. In this case, previous studies performed in our group have described spirilloid and spirochaetal morphotypes that seem to be involved in the sulfur cycle. For this reason, we have investigated the morphological succession in these microbial ‘blooms’ to predict their reproducibility. We have applied molecular techniques that have provided important information about the composition of the ‘sulfur-blooms’. In addition, these molecular screenings have permitted the design of probes that will be applied in future studies for the detection of the observed microorganisms in mats. Moreover, we have observed that the detected microorganisms might be forming resistance structures to environmental perturbations, or accumulating reserve compounds as a protective strategy. Therefore, we are still focused on the detection of these structures that would be an alternative mechanism to spore formation in microorganisms.



## **X. RESUMEN DEL TRABAJO (SUMMARY)**



Figura X. Tapetes microbianos del Delta del Ebro en la ‘Punta de la Banya’.





## INTRODUCCIÓN GENERAL

### 1. TAPETES MICROBIANOS

Los tapetes microbianos son comunidades microbianas estratificadas que se desarrollan en gradientes ambientales establecidos en interfases de agua y sustrato sólido (Davey □ O'Toole, 2000). Este tipo de comunidades se desarrolla en una gran variedad de ambientes, por ejemplo lagunas hipersalinas, desiertos, lagos alcalinos, marismas, chimeneas hidrotermales, fuentes sulfurosas etc. (Oremland □ DesMarais, 1983; Cohen *et al.*, 198□; Stal, 199□; Caumette *et al.*, 199□). Estos ecosistemas microbianos son los análogos modernos de las primeras comunidades microbianas existentes en la Tierra, conocidas como estromatolitos. Los estromatolitos fueron las estructuras sedimentarias microbianas dominantes en la era Precámbrica, juntamente con los depósitos laminados de hierro (Walter *et al.*, 1976). El establecimiento de redes tróficas, la diversificación de formas de vida y el reciclaje de nutrientes hicieron posible el mantenimiento de la vida y la evolución de las células eucariotas (Guerrero, 1998). La identificación de microorganismos, los estudios del estado fisiológico y las asociaciones poblacionales en tapetes microbianos favorecen el entendimiento de la evolución microbiana.

#### **Ciclos biogeoquímicos y reciclado de nutrientes**

La comunidad de los tapetes microbianos se encuentra estratificada verticalmente debido a los gradientes de intensidad de luz y condiciones redox que se modifican durante el ciclo diario, y que crean 'micronichos' ocupados por diferentes poblaciones microbianas (Jørgensen, 199□). Las elevadas tasas de fotosíntesis que se dan en la capa fótica de los tapetes crean gradientes de pH, concentración de carbono inorgánico disuelto y concentración de oxígeno. De hecho, la zona oxigénica refleja el balance dinámico entre la producción de oxígeno fotosintético y el consumo de oxígeno por bacterias heterótrofas y oxidadoras de azufre.

### *Ciclo del carbono y del oxígeno*

Durante el día, la irradiación solar penetra en la superficie de los tapetes microbianos e induce la fijación primaria del carbono en microorganismos fototrofos oxigénicos y anoxigénicos. Las fuentes de carbono inorgánico para la producción primaria proceden de la respiración aeróbica y anaeróbica en la capa fótica, y de la actividad heterótrofa en las capas más profundas (Canfield □ DesMarais, 1993). Factores como la intensidad de luz y la temperatura regulan la tasa de producción de oxígeno en los tapetes microbianos. Estudios previos han asociado el aumento de la producción de oxígeno con la intensidad de la radiación incidente (Canfield □ DesMarais, 1993; Wieland □ Köhl, 2000); ya que el aumento de irradiación solar superficial aumenta la penetración de la luz, activa los procesos fotosintéticos en capas más profundas, e induce un aumento lineal de la producción de oxígeno.

Por otra parte, la producción de oxígeno responde a cambios de temperatura (Epping □ Köhl, 2000). Temperaturas más elevadas inducen la actividad oxigenasa de la enzima Rubisco (carboxilasa/oxigenasa) y por ello se esperaría una reducción de la fotosíntesis en concentraciones de oxígeno crecientes (Berry □ Raison, 1981). A pesar de ello, recientes estudios han observado que en concentraciones de oxígeno elevadas se da el aumento de la tasa fotosintética. Este hecho probablemente se deba a un aumento de la oxidación de materia orgánica y producción de CO<sub>2</sub> asociados a un eficiente reciclado de fotosintato en la capa fótica (Grötzschel □ de Beer, 2002).

### *Ciclo del azufre y el nitrógeno*

Los tapetes microbianos son un modelo ideal para el estudio del ciclo del azufre. La reducción de sulfato llevada a cabo por las bacterias sulfatorreductoras, es el proceso clave en la generación de compuestos reducidos del azufre que son utilizados por fototrofos anoxigénicos y oxidadores del azufre (Visscher *et al.*, 1992). Las bacterias quimiolitotrofas obtienen energía mediante la oxidación de compuestos reducidos del azufre e igualmente, las bacterias fototrofas anoxigénicas usan estos compuestos como donadores de electrones para fijar CO<sub>2</sub> en condiciones de luz. Por ejemplo, las bacterias rojas del azufre oxidan el sulfhídrico a azufre elemental que almacenan intracelularmente. Por otra parte, las bacterias sulfatorreductoras juegan un papel

importante en la regulación del flujo de donadores de electrones en el ciclo del azufre, debido a su versatilidad metabólica en la reducción de sulfato y tiosulfato. Además, recientemente se ha demostrado su papel en la reducción de sulfato en condiciones de presencia de oxígeno, lo cual activa la oxidación de materia orgánica en la capa fótica y la reducción de sulfato durante el día (Minz *et al.*, 1999; Fründ & Cohen, 1992).

La disponibilidad de nitrógeno es otro elemento clave para la producción de biomasa en los tapetes microbianos. El éxito evolutivo de estas comunidades en ambientes con limitación de nitrógeno se ha atribuido a la habilidad de microorganismos específicos para fijar nitrógeno atmosférico (fototrofos oxigénicos y anoxigénicos, quimiolitotrofos, heterotrofos; Paerl *et al.*, 1990). Otras fuentes de nitrógeno para el sistema son el amonio, los nitratos y nitritos que deben ser reducidos a amonio por procesos de asimilación, y materia orgánica disuelta (Nielsen & Sloth, 1990).

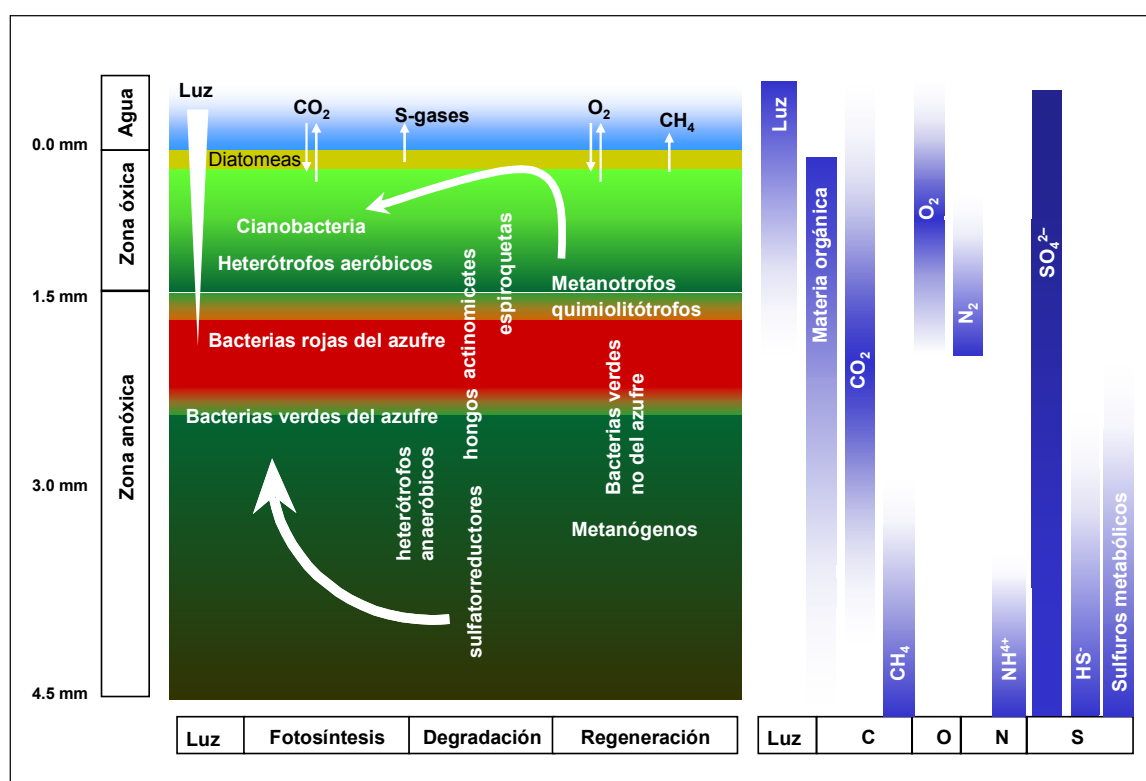


Figura X.1. Esquema de las relaciones fisiológicas entre las poblaciones microbianas y gradientes establecidos en tapetes microbianos (Navarrete, 1999).

## Composición de la comunidad microbiana

A pesar que el conocimiento de las principales poblaciones microbianas es amplio, poco se sabe de aquellos microorganismos que no se encuentran distribuidos en capas definidas pero que contribuyen de forma significativa a la dinámica poblacional. El proceso más importante de la mayor parte de estos sistemas es la fotosíntesis llevada a cabo por las cianobacterias (unicelulares y filamentosas, p.ej. *Synechocystis*, *Phormidium*, *Microcoleus*, *Lyngbya*, *Pseudoanabaena*, etc. García-Pichel *et al.*, 1998; Urmeneta *et al.*, 2003). Posteriormente, las bacterias sulfatorreductoras (p.ej. *Desulfovibrio*, *Desulfobacter*, etc. Teske *et al.*, 1998) usan los productos resultantes de la producción de las cianobacterias como fuente de carbono y además producen sulfhídrico. El sulfhídrico puede ser reoxidado a sulfato por las bacterias oxidadoras del azufre (p.ej. *Beggiatoa*, *Thiomicrospira*, *Thiobacillus* etc. Mills *et al.*, 2000; Brinkhoff & Muyzer, 1997) y bacterias rojas y verdes del azufre (p.ej. *Chromatium*, *Thiocapsa*, *Chlorobium* etc. Imhoff & Pfenning, 2001; Caumette, 1989). Las bacterias aerobias heterotrofas son funcionalmente importantes ya que su actividad reduce en contenido de oxígeno en el sistema; por otra parte, los microorganismos fermentadores proporcionan sustratos de crecimiento a las bacterias sulfatorreductoras. En los tapetes microbianos, estos grupos metabólicamente diferentes establecen funciones metabólicas asociadas que favorecen el reciclado de materia orgánica y energía en el sistema.

## Perspectivas

Las técnicas microbiológicas tradicionales son insuficientes para el estudio de comunidades microbianas, y la aplicación de técnicas moleculares ofrece alternativas para el estudio de la estructura y composición microbiana. Por ello, la integración de técnicas moleculares basadas en ácidos nucleicos, lípidos, proteínas etc., con enfoques más clásicos proporciona una visión más amplia de la dinámica y composición de comunidades microbianas. El éxito ecológico y la amplia gama de actividades metabólicas en los tapetes microbianos sugieren su aplicación en el biorremedio de lugares contaminados o en la biogeneración de productos (Bender & Phillips, 2000), así como en la caracterización de los requerimientos para la vida microbiana.

## 2. BIOMARCADORES LIPÍDICOS para el estudio de comunidades microbianas

### Clasificación de los lípidos

A continuación proponemos una clasificación de los lípidos en la cual se ha dado más importancia a aquellas clases lipídicas analizadas en la metodología de los Biomarcadores Lipídicos Señal. Una clasificación más completa puede encontrarse en Raddledge □ Wilkinson (1988).

#### Lípidos simples

- Ácidos grasos: Se clasifican en función de su estructura y presencia de dobles enlaces.

Tabla X.1. Estructura y clasificación de los ácidos grasos.

| Ácido graso <sup>1</sup>   | Estructura |
|--|------------|
| <b>Saturado:</b> cadena de carbonos sin dobles enlaces   |            |
| <b>Ramificado:</b> grupos metilo. Con determinada configuración son <i>iso</i> y <i>anteiso</i> . Pueden tener anillo ciclopropanoico (' <i>cy</i> '). |            |
| <b>Monoenoico:</b> una doble enlace que puede tener forma <i>cis</i> o <i>trans</i>  |            |
| <b>Polienoico:</b> más de un doble enlace  |            |

<sup>1</sup>La nomenclatura de ácidos grasos es la forma de "A:BωC", donde 'A' indica el número de carbonos, 'B' el número de dobles enlaces, y 'C' la distancia a la insaturación más próxima desde el extremo alifático de la molécula (ω). Los sufijos '*c*' y '*t*' se refieren a los isómeros *cis* y *trans*. Los prefijos '*i*', '*a*' y '*Me*' se refieren a la ramificación de metilo *iso* y *anteiso*, y a la ramificación de metilo en medio de la cadena. Los anillos ciclopropilos se indican con el prefijo '*cy*'.

- Ácidos grasos esterificados: Entre ellos destacamos los poliésteres y como ejemplo los polihidroxicanoatos (PHAs). Estos compuestos han sido a veces considerados como carbohidratos pero sus características de solubilidad los clasifican como lípidos.

Los polímeros de hidroxicanoatos se han detectado en una gran variedad de organismos procariotas y también en plantas y células animales, aunque únicamente en procariotas se acumulan PHAs en forma de gránulos citoplasmáticos. El interés aplicado de estos biopolímeros se debe al desarrollo de plásticos biodegradables debido a las propiedades físico-químicas de este compuesto (Steinbüchel □ Valentin, 1995). Los PHAs se clasifican en tres clases en función del número de carbonos en sus unidades monoméricas: PHAs de cadena corta (3–5 carbonos; butirato, valerato), de cadena media (6–1□ hexanoato, octanoato), y de cadena larga (>1□ carbonos) (Steinbüchel *et al.*, 1992). Entre ellos, el polihidroxibutirato (PHB) es el más común en bacterias.

- Aldehídos y vinil-éteres: Los aldehídos de cadena larga se encuentran frecuentemente incluidos en lípidos complejos en la forma de vinil-éteres formando los plasmalógenos (p.ej. plasmalógenos de fosfatidilcolina y fosfatidiletanolamina). El primer carbono del glicerol está unido a la cadena carbonada a través de un enlace vinil-éter:  $[-C-O-C=C-]$ . Este enlace es sensible al tratamiento ácido y genera aldehídos de cadena larga que en presencia de metanol pasan a ser dimetilacetales.

- Amino-ácidos grasos: Ácidos grasos unidos a aminoácidos que se encuentran en fosfolípidos de diversas especies microbianas. Por ejemplo, el ácido serratámico (serina-lípido) que parece estar implicado en la virulencia de especies de *Serratia* (Cartwright, 1957); el flavolípido de *Flavobacterium* (serina-lípido; Kawai *et al.*, 1988); lípidos con contenido en ornitina en especies de *Bordetella*, *Pseudomonas*, *Flavobacterium*, etc., que se ha relacionado con funciones de virulencia y como respuesta a crecimiento con limitación de fosfato (Kawai *et al.*, 1999; Taylor *et al.*, 1998).

- Amino-alcoholes: Son ácidos grasos con grupos ‘amida’ que suelen encontrarse formando formas complejas llamadas esfingolípidos. Las ceramidas son ácidos grasos con un grupo ‘amida’ con bases di o trihidroxiladas de cadena larga. Los amino-

alcoholes o bases esfingoides de cadena larga más comunes son la ‘esfingosina’ (18 carbonos y un doble enlace, C18:1) y la ‘dihidro-esfingosina’ (C18:0).

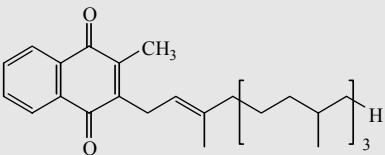
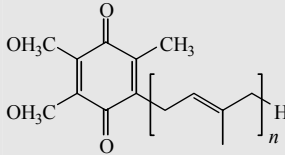
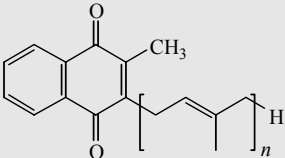
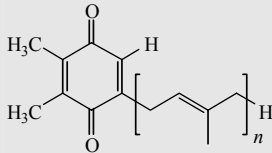
- Lípidos terpenóicos: Su estructura está basada en varias unidades isoprenoides. En función del número de unidades se distinguen los diterpenoides (2 unidades isoprenoides), p.ej. el fitol y el geranil-geraniol; los triterpenoides (6 unidades), p.ej. los ‘esteroles’ que se encuentran en las membranas de eucariotas y también en bacterias (Taylor, 1980), y los ‘hopanoides’, más comunes como constituyentes de las membranas procariotas; los tetraterpenoides (8 unidades), p.ej. los carotenoides (pigmentos naturales); y los politerpenoides (>8 unidades), entre los cuales se encuentran las quinonas isoprenoides y los isopranil éteres.

Las quinonas isoprenoides están implicadas en el transporte electrónico y en los procesos de fosforilación oxidativa, y por lo tanto están asociadas a membranas plasmáticas de bacterias, membranas mitocondriales de eucariotas y membranas tilacoidales en fotótrofos. Las quinonas isoprenoides se clasifican en naftoquinonas y benzoquinonas. Las naftoquinonas a su vez se dividen en ‘Filoquinonas’, ‘Menaquinonas’ (MK) y ‘Demetilmenaquinona’ (DMK). La filoquinona o vitamina K<sub>1</sub> se encuentra en organismos fotosintéticos (Collins & Jones, 1981). Las benzoquinonas están integradas por las ubiquinonas (Q) y las plastoquinonas (PQ) que se encuentran únicamente en tejidos fotosintéticos de plantas superiores, algas y cianobacterias (Threlfall & Whistance, 1971). Las quinonas isoprenoides se denominan seguidas de un número que indica el número de unidades isoprenoides (Tabla X.2).

La presencia de isopranil éteres en los fosfolípidos y glicolípidos de membrana es una de las características que distingue a las Arqueobacterias de las Eubacterias y Eucariotas. La configuración del residuo de glicerol con cadenas hidrocarbonadas unidas por enlaces tipo éter caracteriza la estructura llamada ‘arqueol’ (2,3-di-*O*-fitanil-*sn*-glicerol). Los diéteres de arqueol se encuentran habitualmente en las membranas de halófilos extremos y metanógenos del dominio *Archaea*. Igualmente, los metanógenos pueden tener tetraéteres (‘caldarqueol’) en sus membranas, que es a su vez el componente polar principal en las membranas de termófilos extremos (Nishihara *et al.*, 1987; Hopmans *et al.*, 2000).



Tabla X.2. Estructura y clasificación de quinonas isoprenoides.

| Quinona  | Estructura  | Quinona                   | Estructura  |
|--|---|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Filoquinona o vitamina K<sub>1</sub></b>                  |  | <b>Ubiquinona Q-n</b>     |  |
| <b>Menaquinona MK-n</b><br>DMK es una MK sin metilo en el C2 |  | <b>Plastoquinona PQ-n</b> |  |

### Lípidos complejos

Los lípidos complejos se clasifican en fosfolípidos, glicolípidos y lipoaminoácidos. Los fosfolípidos se caracterizan por un residuo de fosfato, una molécula de glicerol y amino-alcoholes o ácidos grasos. Mayoritariamente se clasifican en dos categorías: los glicerofosfolípidos, derivados del ácido fosfatídico (p.ej. fosfatidil glicerol, etanolamina, colina etc.); y los esfingolípidos que contienen fósforo y una base de cadena larga (base esfingoide). Los glicerofosfolípidos son compuestos habituales en las membranas plasmáticas, en cambio los esfingolípidos se encuentran específicamente en membranas de *Sphingomonas* y *Bacteroides*, en el caso de bacterias (Kawasaki *et al.*, 199□; Kato *et al.*, 1995). Por otra parte, los glicolípidos constituyen una clase heterogénea donde cabe destacar los lipopolisacáridos, componentes importantes de la membrana externa de Gram-negativos. Finalmente, los lipoaminoácidos son los lípidos complejos que presentan las estructuras anteriormente mencionadas como aminoácidos unidos a ácidos grasos.

### Estudio de Biomarcadores lipídicos

El análisis de lípidos microbianos es un método sensible que se basa en la extracción, separación y cuantificación de lípidos de muestras ambientales que pueden ser usados como biomarcadores para la caracterización de poblaciones microbianas (White *et al.*, 1998). La explicación de esta metodología se divide en tres partes que

corresponden con las fracciones lipídicas obtenidas tras la separación mediante cromatografía de ácido silícico de los lípidos totales de una muestra.

- Fracción de lípidos polares: Esta fracción incluye los ácidos grasos de los fosfolípidos (PLFA) cuya identificación y cuantificación son útiles para determinar la biomasa microbiana viable, el estado fisiológico y la composición de la comunidad.

La determinación de PLFAs proporciona una medida de la biomasa viable ya que todas las células vivas poseen membranas intactas con PLFAs que serán transformados a diacilglicéridos tras la muerte celular por la acción de fosfolipasas celulares (White *et al.*, 1979). Por otra parte, los microorganismos o comunidades microbianas responden a cambios en su 'microambiente' mediante cambios en su composición lipídica. En este aspecto, se ha observado que en situaciones de estrés fisiológico y crecimiento estacionario, los microorganismos pueden aumentar la proporción de ácidos grasos con configuración 'cis' respecto a la 'trans'. Así mismo, también se aumenta la proporción de ácidos grasos ciclopropanoicos con el objetivo de reducir la fluidez de membrana para limitar el transporte y facilitar la conservación de energía (Heipieper *et al.*, 1992; Guckert *et al.*, 1986). Además, como diferentes grupos de microorganismos sintetizan una variedad de PLFAs a través de diferentes vías bioquímicas éstos son biomarcadores taxonómicos efectivos. A pesar de su versatilidad, el análisis de PLFA presenta limitaciones porque algunos grupos microbianos presentan perfiles solapados (Ratledge □ Wilkinson, 1988).

- Fracción de glicolípidos: En esta fracción no solo se recuperan compuestos glicolipídicos, sino que además puede analizarse el contenido de polihidroxicanoatos (PHA). Una gran variedad de microorganismos presentan la capacidad de acumular estos compuestos de reserva si disponen de fuentes de carbono y energía en exceso, pero algún elemento esencial para el crecimiento está limitante (Dawes *et al.*, 1973). El nivel de PHA puede variar rápidamente como respuesta a variaciones en el estado nutricional (Elhottová *et al.*, 1997), por ello la determinación del índice de la concentración de PHA respecto a la cantidad de PLFAs es un marcador importante del crecimiento y del estado fisiológico (Tunlid □ White, 1992).

- Fracción de lípidos neutros: En esta fracción pueden analizarse los esteroides (marcadores de microeucariotas), los diglicéridos, triacilglicéridos y las quinonas respiratorias. La función de las quinonas respiratorias es la de transportadores de electrones en cadenas respiratorias y sistemas de transporte electrónico fotosintético. Además de su importancia biológica, la variación estructural de las quinonas las convierte en biomarcadores de importancia taxonómica (Crane, 1965; Collins □ Jones, 1981). Igualmente, estudios recientes han demostrado que el contenido en quinonas está correlacionado con la biomasa microbiana (Hiraishi *et al.*, 2003). Las quinonas isoprenoides también pueden ser utilizadas para evaluar el estado redox de comunidades microbianas. Estudios realizados por Hedrick y White (1986) propusieron a las quinonas como indicadores sensibles del metabolismo aeróbico y anaeróbico en comunidades microbianas.

- Expansión del método de biomarcadores lipídicos: Uno de los puntos más importantes incluye el análisis de DNA presente en el residuo no lipídico tras a extracción de lípidos totales. Este DNA puede ser utilizado para estudios de caracterización taxonómica, detección de genes de expresión proteica, etc. (Stephen *et al.*, 1999).

### **3. OBJETIVO DEL TRABAJO**

Esta tesis doctoral está integrada en los objetivos generales del grupo de 'Ecogenética microbiana' del departamento de Microbiología de la Universidad de Barcelona. Nuestro grupo de investigación está centrado en el estudio de los tapetes microbianos como sistema microbiano complejo en el cual se establecen relaciones ecofisiológicas entre sus miembros. Desde 1999, el grupo de 'Ecogenética microbiana' se ha interesado en la caracterización ecofisiológica mediante métodos moleculares basados en el DNA y biomarcadores lipídicos señal. Este interés es el resultado de la colaboración con el Prof. D. C. White del 'Center for Biomarker Analysis' (TN, EUA) y con el Dr. Roland Geyer del 'UF□ Center for Environmental Research' (Leipzig, Alemania). Por lo tanto, el objetivo general de esta tesis fue la caracterización ecofisiológica y molecular de tapetes microbianos de diferente localización, y el aislamiento y caracterización de nuevas especies microbianas implicadas en las relaciones fisiológicas de este ecosistema modelo.

# VALIDACIÓN DEL MÉTODO DE BIOMARCADORES LIPÍDICOS SEÑAL EN TAPETES MICROBIANOS

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN Y OBJETIVOS

En la fracción de lípidos polares, los PLFAs han sido ampliamente estudiados pero también están presentes otras clases lipídicas como plasmalógenos presentes en *Clostridia* y otros microorganismos anaeróbicos (Moore *et al.*, 199□); esfingolípidos de *Sphingomonas* y *Bacteroides* (Busse *et al.*, 1999; Kato *et al.*, 1995); lipoaminoácidos indicadores de diversos géneros microbianos y de condiciones de limitación de fosfato (Taylor *et al.*, 1998); y alquil-éteres presentes en *Archaea*. Por lo tanto, el fraccionamiento secuencial y cuantificación de estos lípidos puede ser usado para la caracterización de microorganismos (White *et al.*, 1997). Estudios previos han descrito un método para el análisis de ácidos grasos esterificados y unidos por enlaces ‘amida’ (Mayberry □ Lane, 1993), pero uno de los problemas de éste es el análisis de los componentes al mismo tiempo ya que puede llevar a identificaciones erróneas.

Los objetivos de este capítulo fueron (i) desarrollar y validar un protocolo de fraccionamiento secuencial para el análisis de clases lipídicas en la fracción de lípidos polares, (ii) validar la detección de polihidroxicvalerato, y (iii) determinar la variabilidad de muestras de tapetes microbianos y la aplicabilidad de los métodos validados.

## 2. MATERIALES Y MÉTODOS

Muestras de cultivos puros de *Sphingomonas paucimobilis* (contenido en bases esfingoides), *Clostridium butyricum* (plasmalógenos), *Staphylococcus aureus* (lipoaminoácidos) se obtuvieron en los medios de cultivos adecuados. Además *Pseudomonas putida* se cultivó en medio R2A con 0.3 g (‘fosfato alto’) y 0.05 g (‘fosfato bajo’)  $K_2HPO_4$  para inducir el aumento de lípidos de ornitina en condiciones de limitación de fosfato (Kawai *et al.*, 1988). Muestras de tapetes microbianos se recogieron a las 12:00 am en Marzo y Mayo del 200□ Las lípidos totales de las muestras se extrajeron por el método modificado de Bligh □ Dyer (1959) y se separaron

en lípidos polares, glicolípidos y lípidos neutros por cromatografía de ácido silícico (White *et al.*, 1997).

La fracción de lípidos polares se trató en el protocolo secuencial descrito en la Fig. X.2. Fosfatidiletanolamina bovina con un contenido del 60% de plasmalógenos se usó para la identificación de dimetilacetales (DMAs) derivados de plasmalógenos. La fracción de glicolípidos se analizó según el protocolo descrito por Elhottová *et al.* (2000). Cultivos de *Cupriavidus necator* en un medio con valerato sódico como fuente de carbono y energía se usaron para validar la detección de monómeros derivatizados de polihidroxicvalerato.

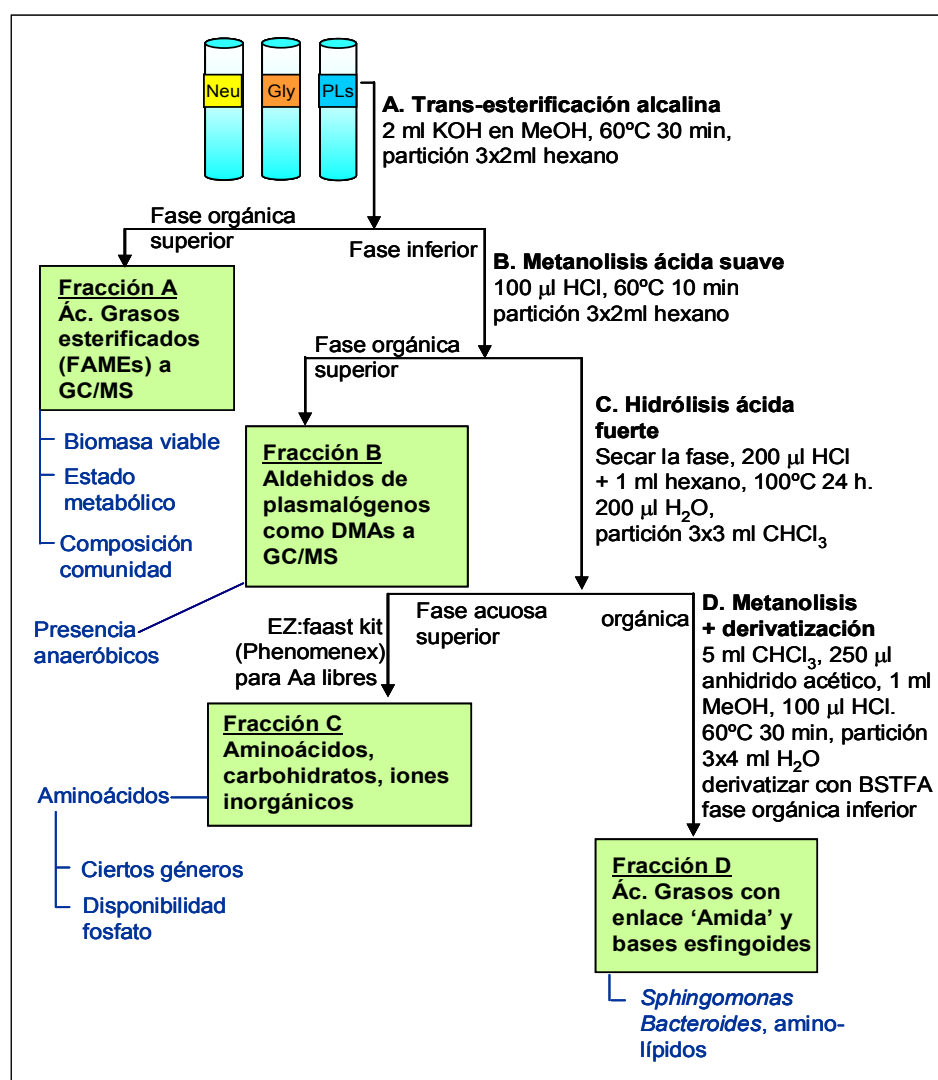


Figura X.2. Protocolo secuencial. PLs (lípidos polares), Gly (glicolípidos), Neu (neutros), MeOH (metanol), GC/MS (cromatografía de gases/espectrometría de masas), Aa (aminoácidos), DMAs (dimetilacetales), CHCl<sub>3</sub> (cloroformo), BSTFA (trimetilsililtrifluoroacetamida).

### **3. RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN**

Para validar el protocolo secuencial desarrollado, se estimaron los %mol (picomoles por g de peso seco respecto al total) de los FAMES recuperados en el paso 'A' en las muestras de cultivos puros y de tapetes microbianos. Los FAMES mayoritarios en *Staphylococcus aureus* fueron *a15:0* y ácidos grasos saturados ramificados terminalmente; *Sphingomonas paucimobilis* presentó un elevado porcentaje de *16:0*; *Clostridium butyricum* *16:0* y *cy19:0*; y los cultivos de *Pseudomonas putida* 'fosfato alto' y 'fosfato bajo' mostraron abundancia de los FAMES *16:1 $\omega$ 9c*, *16:1 $\omega$ 7c* y *16:0*. Las muestras de tapetes microbianos presentaron mayor %mol en los FAMES monoenoicos *16:1 $\omega$ 7c*, *18:1 $\omega$ 9c*, *18:1 $\omega$ 7c* y en *16:0*. La desviación estándar fue baja en todos los casos a excepción a aquellos FAMES con %mol más elevados o aquellos que tienden a coeluir y han de ser integrados manualmente (p.ej. *18:1 $\omega$ 9c*).

Los FAMES también se recuperaron en el paso 'B' del protocolo lo cual indica que cierta fracción de la fase orgánica del paso 'A' permanece en la interfase no recuperada o en las paredes del tubo de ensayo. El porcentaje y la reproducibilidad de la fase orgánica del paso 'A' que se recupera en 'B' depende del manipulador, y se estimado en un 3–5% (datos obtenidos en cultivo puro). Los porcentajes relativos de los FAMES recuperados en el paso B se esperaban que fueran similares a los obtenidos en el paso 'A', pero se detectaron diferencias en el porcentaje de recuperación. En los cultivos de *Pseudomonas putida*, los ácidos grasos *16:1 $\omega$ 9c* y *18:1 $\omega$ 9c* presentaron un mayor porcentaje de recuperación en el paso 'A' y *16:1 $\omega$ 7c* y *16:0* en el 'B' (Fig. X.3). Por el contrario, las muestras de tapetes microbianos mostraron %mol superiores en *18:1 $\omega$ 7c* y *cy19:0* en el paso 'A', y *16:0* y *18:1 $\omega$ 9c* en el 'B'. No parece existir una correspondencia entre los ácidos grasos con diferentes % de recuperación entre los cultivos y las muestras de tapetes microbianos, pero sí parece existir una recuperación preferente de ácidos grasos monoenoicos.

A pesar de ello, la recuperación preferente de *16:0* en ambos tipos de muestra puede estar relacionada con la estructura química del ácido graso o por un aumento en la liberación de este ácido graso esterificado tras la metanolisis ácida del paso 'B'. Aunque el % de recuperación de *cy19:0* en el paso 'A' no fue muy evidente, podría

estar relacionado con la sensibilidad de los ácidos ciclopropanoicos en condiciones ácidas (Mayberry □ Lane, 1993). Este hecho podría explicar las diferencias en el % de recuperación debido a una degradación parcial del FAME en el paso ‘B’.

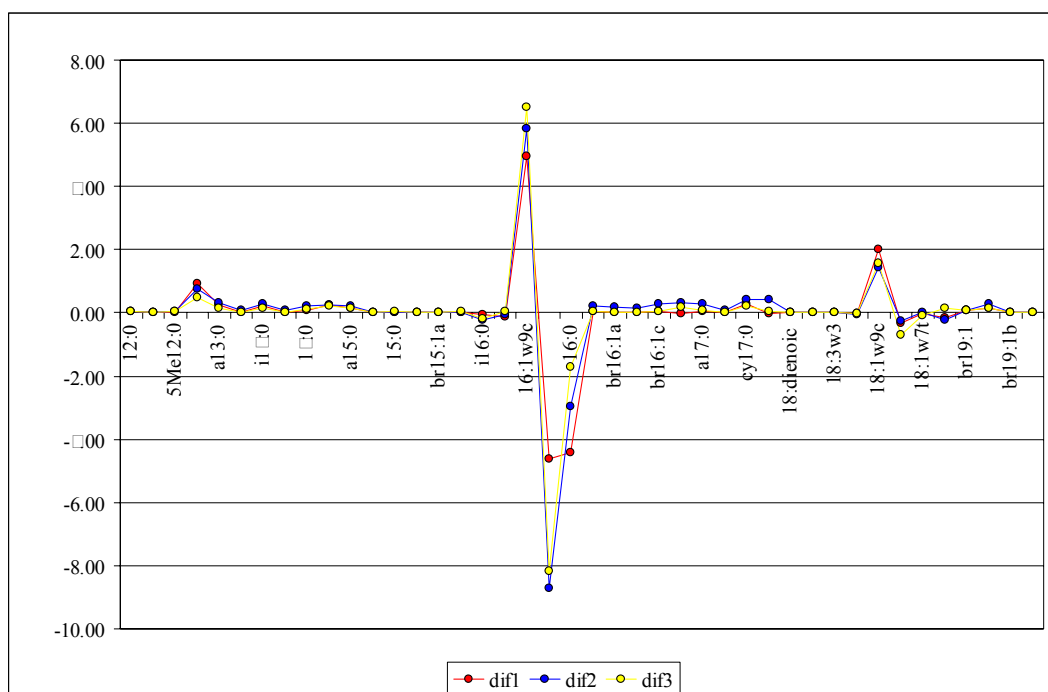


Figura X.3. Diferencias en el % de recuperación de FAMEs en el paso ‘A’ y ‘B’.

*Pseudomonas putida* ‘fosfato bajo’. Las diferencias entre el porcentaje mol (%mol) de cada ácido graso en el paso ‘A’ con el correspondiente valor en el paso ‘B’ son ‘dif1’, ‘dif2’ y ‘dif3’ referidas a la sustracción entre las tres réplicas.

La importancia de la recuperación de FAMEs en el paso ‘A’ y ‘B’ fue también evaluada para el cálculo de los índices metabólico ( $[(cy17:0/16:1\omega7c) + (cy19:0/18:1\omega7c)]$ ) y de estrés ( $[(16:1\omega7t/16:1\omega7c) + (18:1\omega7t/18:1\omega7c)]$ ) en muestras de tapetes microbianos. Se observó que el valor de los índices era el mismo con los datos del paso ‘A’ y sumando los valores de ambos pasos y recalculando el % de nuevo.

La identificación de dimetilacetales (DMAs) en el paso ‘B’ se realizó por comparación con el patrón de fragmentación de la muestra de fosfatidiletanolamina bovina. El cultivo de *Clostridium butyricum* reveló la presencia de DMAs de 16 a 20 carbonos con una predominancia de DMAs 19:1. En las muestras de tapetes

microbianos, el DMA más representativo fue el 15:0 y las muestras de recogidas en Mayo presentaron el doble de DMA cuantificados. Las desviaciones estándar fueron bajas para las muestras de cultivos puros, aunque en las muestras de tapetes se observó mayor variabilidad. La baja reproducibilidad de los valores de DMAs puede deberse a su labilidad en condiciones ácidas. Para evitar este proceso, la fase resultante del paso 'A' debería secarse para evitar la presencia de agua y añadir anhídrido acético durante el proceso del paso 'B'. Otro proceso que puede inducir a esta variabilidad en la cuantificación de DMAs puede ser la tendencia de los 16:0 y 18:0 DMAs a coeluir con los FAMES *i*16:0 y *i*18:0.

La detección de aminoácidos en el paso 'C' no dio resultado y diversos problemas deberían solucionarse en este aspecto. Las condiciones ácidas del paso 'C' permiten la rotura de los enlaces 'amida' pero no podemos predecir el efecto de un pH cercano a 1 en la estructura de los aminoácidos y en la extracción sólida y derivatización del kit E $\square$ faast. En el paso 'D' del protocolo las bases esfingoides no pudieron ser cuantificadas debido a su tendencia a coeluir en el mismo pico. Para solucionar este problema, debería utilizarse una columna de separación cromatográfica más adecuada para separar compuestos estructuralmente similares. La detección de polihidroxicolesterol por el método de Elhottová *et al.* (2000) fue validado. A pesar de ello, la variabilidad de las réplicas fue alta y deben buscarse métodos alternativos con mayor sensibilidad, mejorar la reproducibilidad del análisis y buscar estándares internos más adecuados.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONES**

- Se ha evaluado un método de fraccionamiento secuencial de la fracción polar que integra la detección de FAMES, DMAs, y otros compuestos como bases esfingoides, aminolípidos y potencialmente lípidos de arqueas. La detección de DMAs, aminoácidos y bases esfingoides debe ser mejorada para aumentar la reproducibilidad y detección.
- Cierta proporción de FAMES del paso 'A' son detectados en 'B'. Aunque el %mol se esperaría similar en ambos pasos, se han detectado diferencias en el % de recuperación.
- Se ha validado la detección de polihidroxicolesterol en muestras de tapetes microbianos por el método desarrollado por Elhottová *et al.* (2000).



# **CARACTERIZACIÓN VERTICAL A ‘MICROESCALA’ DE LA DIVERSIDAD BACTERIANA Y DEL ESTADO FISIOLÓGICO**

## **1. INTRODUCCIÓN**

La caracterización de la estructura de una comunidad microbiana mediante la evaluación de cambios en su composición de ácidos grasos de los fosfolípidos (PLFAs), se ha aplicado en diversos estudios de muestras ambientales (White □ Findlay, 1998). Este concepto metodológico ha llevado a la identificación y la cuantificación de la biomasa viable, el estado fisiológico y la composición de la comunidad en diversos ecosistemas (Ringelberg *et al.*, 1988; Navarrete *et al.*, 2000; Ibekwe *et al.*, 2001). A pesar de la versatilidad de este análisis, existe una limitación en la identificación de los grupos o géneros que integran una comunidad microbiana, ya que la identificación de PLFA solo clasifica a nivel de grandes grupos (Gram-positivos, anaeróbicos, etc.). Para superar esta limitación, los análisis de PLFA se han complementado con técnicas basadas en ácidos nucleicos (Macnaughton *et al.*, 1999).

Además de la determinación de la composición de la comunidad a nivel de género y especie, es importante conocer la diversidad de las poblaciones que integran este tipo de ecosistemas. Algunas teorías han relacionado la diversidad de especies con la función de los ecosistemas, de tal forma que la estabilidad del ecosistema se encontraría correlacionada positivamente con la diversidad (Naeem *et al.*, 1995; Tilman *et al.*, 1996). Por ello, los objetivos planteados en este estudio fueron: (i) determinar las diferencias en el estado fisiológico y en la diversidad microbiana mediante un enfoque combinado de análisis lipídico y de ácidos nucleicos, (ii) identificar los miembros microbianos que integran la comunidad, y (iii) investigar cómo los cambios abióticos afectan a la diversificación y la dinámica de las poblaciones en los tapetes.

## **2. MATERIAL Y MÉTODOS**

Muestras de tapetes microbianos de la Camarga (delta del Rhone, Francia) se recogieron en Abril del 2002 a las 8:00 am GMT y a las 3:00 pm GMT. Las muestras se seccionaron por criomicrotomía y se generaron 16 muestras en profundidad (15

primeras de 500  $\mu\text{m}$  de profundidad y la última de 1.25 mm. Total 8.75 mm analizados). Los lípidos totales de las muestras (por duplicado) se extrajeron y se separaron por cromatografía de ácido silícico. La fracción de lípidos polares se trans-esterificó a ésteres de metilo de ácidos grasos (FAMES) que se identificaron y cuantificaron por cromatografía de gases/espectrometría de masas (GC/MS).

Los ácidos nucleicos de la fase acuosa resultante de la extracción de lípidos totales se precipitaron. El DNA se empleó en una amplificación por PCR con oligonucleótidos para la amplificación de un fragmento de la molécula del 16S rDNA. Los fragmentos obtenidos se separaron en un gel de gradiente desnaturizante (DGGE) con un gradiente de 30–50% (Muyzer *et al.*, 1993). Las bandas separadas por el gel se recortaron y se reamplificaron para ser clonadas o secuenciadas directamente.

El índice de divergencia ( $D$ ) (Iwasaki  $\square$  Hiraishi, 1998; Hiraishi, 1999) se calculó con los datos de %mol de los PLFA detectados, para estimar las diferencias existentes entre las muestras. Posteriormente, se construyó un dendrograma basado en la matriz de valores  $D$  con el algoritmo de ‘neighbor-joining’ (Saitou  $\square$  Nei, 1987). Los geles de DGGE se escanearon y se analizaron con el software ‘NIH Scion Image’ para transformar la intensidad de cada banda en porcentaje. Los índices de diversidad de Shannon-Weaver y Simpson (Shannon  $\square$  Weaver, 1963; Simpson, 1969) se calcularon con los datos de %mol de los PLFAs detectados y de la intensidad de las bandas de los geles DGGE. Ambos tipos de datos se normalizaron a una sensibilidad analítica común antes del cálculo de los índices (Hedrick *et al.*, 2000).

### **3. RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN**

La biomasa viable máxima (determinada por el contenido total de PLFAs) a las 8:00 am se observó en la superficie del tapete. Este hecho puede deberse a la migración de cianobacteria a la superficie para evitar la exposición tóxica al sulfhídrico (generado durante la noche por la actividad de sulfatorreductores), y bacterias rojas del azufre que empezarían a usar la luz incidente para iniciar la fotosíntesis. Por el contrario, a las 3:00 pm el máximo de biomasa viable se detectó en las capas subyacentes a la superficial; lo cual podría explicarse como resultado de lisis celular en la superficie debido a la elevada irradiancia o por un aumento de la presencia de heterotrofos aeróbicos en la

capa fótica en asociación metabólica con los productores primarios (Grötzschel & Beer, 2002).

Los perfiles vertical indicaron una tasa de crecimiento menor (índice  $cyclo/\omega 7c$  alto) en las capas más profundas. Con ello, se sugiere un aumento en la actividad de bacterias sulfatorreductoras y anaeróbicos fermentadores especialmente en las muestras recogidas por la mañana, ya que las condiciones anóxicas nocturnas inducen el desarrollo de estas poblaciones que usan el exceso de carbono producido durante el día pero se ven limitados de otros nutrientes. Por otra parte, a las 3:00 pm se observó una reducción de la tasa de crecimiento en la superficie y en las capas medias del tapete. Esto podría deberse al estado fisiológico en el que se encuentran las cianobacterias y bacterias rojas del azufre que, tras la fotosíntesis activa que se da por la mañana, se encontrarían limitadas en su crecimiento por nutrientes esenciales. La reducción en la tasa de crecimiento también podría atribuirse a los heterotrofos que se encuentran en la capa fótica y reciclan el fotosintato generado por los fototrofos y aumentan el consumo de oxígeno en este nicho (Epping & Kühl, 2000). El estrés metabólico se determinó como el índice de ácidos grasos con configuración *trans* respecto a la *cis* (Heipieper *et al.*, 1992), y se detectó el máximo nivel de estrés (valor de 1.5) en las capas superficiales en las muestras de las 8:00 am.

La caracterización de la comunidad mediante PLFAs indicó una dominancia de Gram-negativos por la mañana (PLFAs monoenoicos). Además, los PLFAs propios de Gram-positivos presentaron un mayor porcentaje en las capas medias y profundas (máximo 21.6%). Por la tarde, la proporción de PLFAs de anaeróbicos fue mayor (12.1%) que a las 8:00 am, y aumentó con la profundidad. Los análisis de DGGE (Fig. X.) observaron una importante contribución de heterotrofos aeróbicos en las capas superiores sobretodo por la mañana. Este hecho apoya la hipótesis anteriormente mencionada sobre el papel de este grupo en la mineralización de fotosintatos en la capa fótica. Un gran número de bandas secuenciadas presentaron homología con el género *Halanaerobium* (fermentadores anaeróbicos), que se ha descrito en ecosistemas marinos (Ollivier *et al.*, 1991; Edder *et al.*, 2001). Estos datos concuerdan con la predominancia detectada por PLFAs de Gram-positivos a las 8:00 am, ya que probablemente esta población de Gram-positivos podría explotar los ‘micronichos’ anaerobios con alto

contenido en compuestos orgánicos abundantes a primera hora de la mañana. La presencia de bandas homólogas al género *Chloroflexus* sp. fue abundante e indica la importancia de este grupo en tapetes microbianos (Nübel *et al.*, 2001, 2002; Fourçans *et al.*, 200□). El dendrograma del índice de divergencia *D* indicó que las diferencias entre las muestras relacionadas con la profundidad parecen tener una mayor influencia que los cambios temporales.

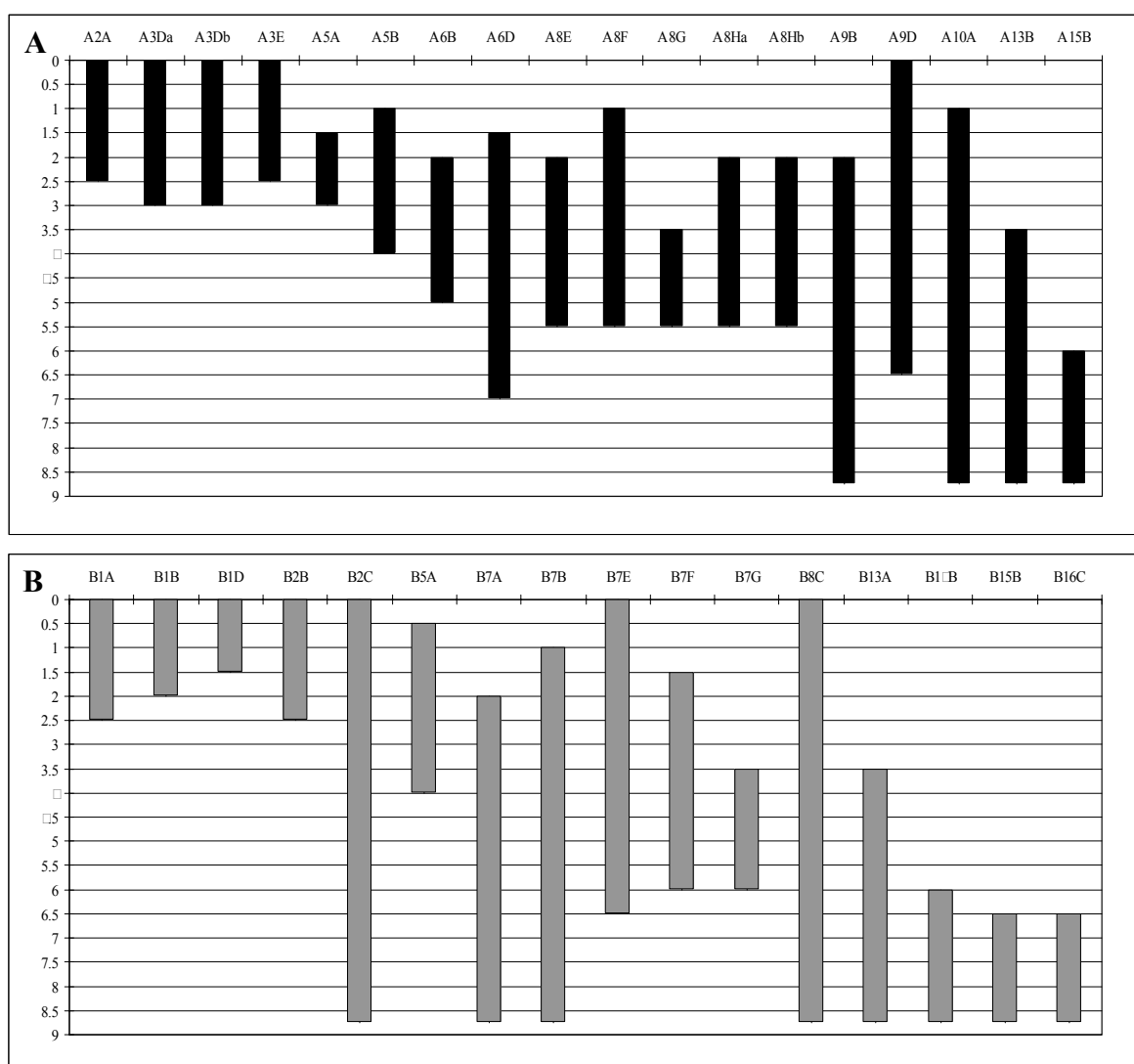


Figura X. □ Distribución de las bandas DGGE a las 8:00 am (A) y a las 3:00 pm (B).

Homología: A2<sub>A</sub>, B1<sub>A</sub>, B1<sub>D</sub> *Psychroflexus*; A5<sub>A</sub>, A5<sub>B</sub>, A6<sub>D</sub>, A10<sub>A</sub>, B13<sub>A</sub> *Halanaerobium*; A3<sub>E</sub>, B2<sub>B</sub>, *Marinobacter* ( $\gamma$ -Proteobacteria); A6<sub>B</sub>, A9<sub>B</sub>, A9<sub>D</sub>, B5<sub>A</sub>, B7<sub>A</sub>, B7<sub>F</sub>, B7<sub>G</sub>, B16<sub>C</sub>, *Bacteroidetes*; A8<sub>E</sub>, A8<sub>G</sub>, A8<sub>H</sub>, B15<sub>B</sub>, *Chloroflexi*; A15<sub>B</sub>, Clostridia; B2<sub>C</sub>, *Microcoleus*.

Los índices de diversidad de Shannon-Weaver y Simpson, que se calcularon con los datos de PLFA y DGGE, mostraron valores similares en todas las muestras lo cual sugiere un mantenimiento estable de este tipo de comunidades microbianas. Aun así, se observó una disminución en los valores de los índices a las 3:00 pm entre 5 y 5 mm de profundidad. Este hecho, podría atribuirse a la estratificación de la comunidad por el establecimiento de gradientes opuestos de oxígeno y sulfhídrico (quimioclina).

#### **4. CONCLUSIONES**

- Las determinaciones de biomasa viable (PLFAs totales), índice metabólico (*cyclo/ω7c*) y estrés fisiológico (índice *trans/cis*) en muestras de tapetes microbianos tomadas a las 8:00 am y a las 3:00 pm, sugieren la existencia de procesos dinámicos durante un ciclo diario. Estos procesos, estarían relacionados con la actividad de los organismos fototrofos, con los heterotrofos asociados a éstos en procesos de remineralización de carbono y respiración, y con bacterias sulfatorreductoras y anaerobios fermentadores especializados en nichos anaeróbicos.

- La determinación de la composición de la comunidad por análisis de PLFAs y DGGE, observó una mayor distribución de anaerobios en todo el perfil vertical a primera hora de la mañana y la presencia de Gram-positivos en las capas medias y profundas. La secuenciación de las bandas DGGE demostró la presencia de bandas homólogas al *Halanaerobium* (anaerobio fermentador) que podría aprovechar las condiciones anaeróbicas del tapetes cuando aún no se han iniciado los procesos fotosintéticos. A las 3:00 pm, se observó una estratificación más marcada de las poblaciones integrantes con mayor proporción de anaerobios en las capas más profundas. Las secuencias DGGE mostraron también homología con miembros de *Cytophaga-Flavobacterium-Bacteroides* en las capas superficiales y miembros relacionados con el género *Chloroflexus*.

- Los análisis de los índices de divergencia y diversidad demostraron que las diferencias relacionadas con la profundidad tenían más influencia que los cambios temporales. Este hecho fue corroborado por los índices de diversidad que indicaron el mantenimiento estable de la diversidad.

# ESTADO REDOX Y COMPOSICIÓN MICROBIANA EN TAPETES MICROBIANOS DE DIFERENTE LOCALIZACIÓN

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

El análisis de quinonas respiratorias ha ganado reconocimiento como un enfoque simple y útil para estudiar la estructura de comunidades microbianas, determinar su estado redox y establecer su biomasa (Hedrick □ White, 1986; Hiraishi, 1998; Hiraishi *et al.*, 2003). La composición de la comunidad también se ha determinado por el análisis de PLFAs, pero tienden a ser comunes y no permiten una clasificación correcta. Por ello, el estudio de lípidos polares intactos se ha propuesto como alternativa para determinar las fuentes de los lípidos polares mayoritarios (Ward *et al.*, 199□). Los lípidos polares intactos son objetivos analíticos interesantes ya que son taxonómicamente más específicos, y evitan la exclusión de señal de microorganismos con lípidos-éter presentes en arqueas y diversas bacterias.

Los miembros del dominio *Archaea* representan una fracción considerable en ecosistemas marinos y terrestres, lo cual indica que este dominio debe tener un gran impacto en los ciclos globales de materia y energía. El dominio *Archaea* está dividido en *Euryarchaeota*, *Crenarchaeota*, *Korarchaeota*. Estudios moleculares recientes, han demostrado la presencia de miembros de este dominio en tapetes microbianos (Ramirez-Moreno *et al.*, 2003; Blumenberg *et al.*, 2005), aunque la afiliación y fisiología de este grupo es todavía desconocida. El objetivo de este capítulo fue: (i) determinar cómo los cambios relacionados con la profundidad y la lugar de muestreo afectan a la composición de quinonas de diferentes tapetes microbianos, (ii) identificar lípidos polares intactos de grupos microbianos específicos, y (iii) clonar y secuenciar fragmentos del 16S rDNA de arqueas amplificadas de muestras de tapetes microbianos.

## 2. MATERIAL Y MÉTODOS

Se muestrearon tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro, de la Camarga y de un estanque hipersalino. Los dos primeros se seccionaron por criomicrotomía generando 15 muestras de 500 μm de profundidad (7.75 mm total), aunque los tapetes del delta del

Ebro también se trataron como un ‘core’ entero. Los lípidos totales de las muestras se extrajeron y fraccionaron por cromatografía de ácido silícico. La fracción de lípidos neutros se analizó por cromatografía líquida/espectrometría de masas en tandem (LC-MS/MS) según lo descrito en Geyer *et al.* (200□). Ubiquinonas (Q-*n*), menaquinonas (MK-*n*), demetilmenaquinonas (DMK-*n*), plastoquinonas (PQ-*n*), filoquinona (K<sub>1</sub>). El índice de divergencia microbiana de ubiquinonas y menaquinonas (*MD* ub+mk), el índice bioenergético (*BD* ub+mk) y el índice de divergencia entre las muestras (*D*), se calcularon según Iwasaki □ Hiraishi (1998). Los valores *D* se emplearon para la construcción de un dendrograma según ‘Neighbor-joining’ (Saitou □ Nei, 1987).

Los lípidos polares intactos se analizaron de la fracción polar resultante de la cromatografía mediante LC-MS/MS según Fang *et al.* (2000) con modificaciones. Muestras de tapetes del delta del Ebro y de la Camarga como ‘cores enteros’ se liofilizaron y homogeneizaron. El DNA de estas muestras se extrajo con el kit ‘Power Soil™’ de Mobio Labs, y se amplificó un fragmento del 16S rDNA con oligonucleótidos específicos de arqueas (Bano *et al.*, 200□). Los fragmentos amplificados se clonaron en el vector pGEM-T (Promega) para ser secuenciados posteriormente.

### **3. RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN**

La abundancia detectada de Q-8 y Q-10 a todas las profundidades en tapetes del delta del Ebro, sugiere dominancia de  $\alpha$ -,  $\beta$ -, y  $\gamma$ -Proteobacteria (probablemente *Rhodobacteraceae*, bacterias rojas del azufre, *Halomonas*, *Beggiatoa*, *Thiomicrospira*, y *Alteromonadaceae*). Los tapetes de la Camarga mostraron una mayor presencia de MK-9 en las capas superficiales y de Q-8 en las capas más profundas, lo cual es consistente con una importante contribución de *Firmicutes*, *Actinobacteria* y *Bacteroides* en la capa fótica (Fig. X.5). Además el elevado %mol de MK-□ 8 y 10 en las capas superficiales de estos tapetes también sugiere la presencia de bacterias verdes no del azufre (*Chloroflexus*) que han sido previamente detectadas por análisis de polimorfismo de longitud de fragmentos de restricción (T-RFLPs; Fourçans *et al.*, 200□).

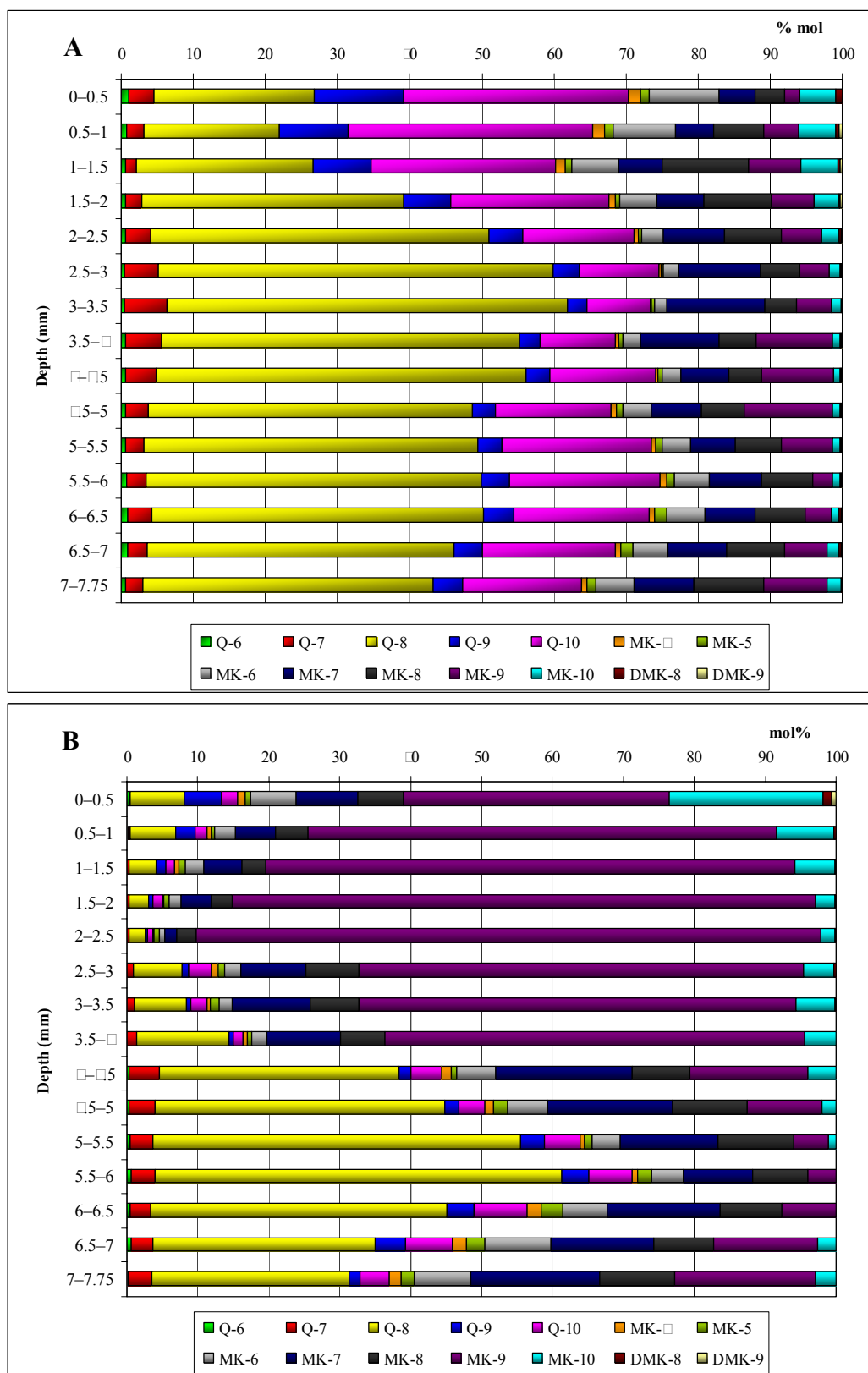


Figura X.5. Composición de quinonas en tapetes del delta del Ebro (A) y Camarga (B).



También se detectaron cantidades considerables de quinonas fotosintéticas (PQ-9 y K<sub>1</sub>) en ambos tapetes, y aunque en los tapetes de la Camarga la cantidad fue un orden de magnitud mayor, ambos sistemas presentaron la misma distribución vertical. Este hecho apoya la idea que cuando una muestra de tapete se analiza como un ‘core’ entero se están determinando más una unidad funcional de tapete microbiano, y por ello tras una disminución progresiva en capas profundas de las quinonas fotosintéticas éstas empezaron a incrementar de nuevo.

La composición de quinonas del ‘estanque salino’ presentó un porcentaje abundante de MK-8, marcador de arqueas, que coincide con una importante contribución de *Halobacteriales* halofilicos en estos ecosistemas (Mouné *et al.*, 2003). La MK-7, atribuida a *Bacillus* halofilicos (Yoon *et al.*, 200□a,b) y la Q-8 ( $\gamma$ -Proteobacteria; *Salinimonas*, *Salinivibrio*, *Halomonas*; Yeon *et al.*, 2005) también fueron predominantes. La muestra de tapete del delta del Ebro tratada como un ‘core entero’ presentó diferencias con la muestra del mismo tapete seccionada en capas, ya que el ‘core entero’ presentó una elevada contribución de MK-9 (y de K<sub>1</sub> y Q-8), que puede deberse a que el análisis en profundidad de un ‘core entero’ es aproximadamente □ veces más que los 7.75 mm analizados en fracciones, por lo cual las capas subyacentes estarían sometidas a condiciones anóxicas que favorecerían en desarrollo de poblaciones microbianas anaeróbicas. El estado redox de las comunidades se determinó según el índice ubiquinonas/menaquinonas (UQ/MK), y se observó un estado más aeróbico o microaerofílico en todas las capas del tapete del delta del Ebro. Además, el dendrograma construido con los datos del índice de divergencia (*D*) determinó que las muestras parecían estar más influenciadas por diferencias relacionadas con la profundidad.

Paralelamente, se realizó la detección de lípidos polares intactos en las fracciones de lípidos polares de las muestras del delta del Ebro. Los lípidos más abundantes fueron los fosfatidilgliceroles (PG), aunque también se detectó la presencia de sulfoquinovosildiacilgliceroles (SQD) que se han descrito como uno de los lípidos mayoritarios en cianobacterias (Gage *et al.*, 1992; Keusgen *et al.*, 1997). La mayor cuantificación de fosfolípidos se detectó en 2.5–3 mm de profundidad, a excepción de C18:0/C18:1-SQD con valores máximos en 3–3.5 mm y C18:0/C18:1-PG en 0.5–2.5

mm. En este estudio, se ha llevado a cabo una detección preliminar de lípidos con enlaces tipo éter de arqueas en tapetes microbianos, pero no hemos podido asignar los valores  $m/z$  (masa-carga) de los espectros de masas a lípidos-éteres específicos. En este aspecto, las futuras investigaciones estarán centradas en la detección de estos lípidos de arqueas que se supone que contribuyen de forma importante al contenido de lípidos polares en los tapetes. Este hecho está avalado por la abundancia de MK-7 y 8, marcadoras de arqueas, en estos ecosistemas. Además, las secuencias clonadas de los tapetes del delta del Ebro mostraron homología con miembros de *Euryarchaeotas*, en concreto con *Methanomicrobiales* y *Thermoplasmatales*; y este tipo de secuencias se han detectado previamente en diferentes localizaciones (Eder *et al.*, 1999; Benlloch *et al.*, 2002). Otras secuencias detectadas presentaron homología con *Crenarchaeotas*.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONES**

- La composición de la comunidad microbiana y el estado redox de tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro y de la Camarga se ha determinado mediante el estudio de las diferencias estructurales de las quinonas respiratorias. La composición de quinonas ha revelado una predominancia de Q-8 y Q-10 ( $\alpha$ - y  $\gamma$ -Proteobacteria) en tapetes del delta del Ebro, y de MK-9 (*Firmicutes*, *Actinobacteria* y *Bacteroides*) en la superficie de los tapetes de la Camarga. La detección de quinonas fotosintéticas (PQ-9 y K<sub>1</sub>) indicó que los tapetes de la Camarga presentaban mayor biomasa fotosintética. La composición de quinonas en el ‘estanque salino’ reveló la predominancia de miembros de arqueas, *Bacillus* halofílicos y  $\gamma$ -Proteobacteria.
- El índice UQ/MK determinó que los tapetes del delta del Ebro eran más aeróbicos o microaerofílicos. La representación gráfica del índice de divergencia (*D*) destacó que las muestras se encontraban más influenciadas por diferencias relacionadas con la profundidad.
- La determinación de lípidos polares intactos en tapetes del delta del Ebro reveló la predominancia de fosfatidilgliceroles y sulfoquinovosildiacilglicerol, propio de cianobacterias. Por otra parte, las secuencia de arqueas clonadas en este ecosistema presentaron afiliación con miembros de los filos *Euryarcheota* y *Crenarchaeota*.

## VARIACIONES ECOFISIOLÓGICAS EN UN CICLO CIRCADIANO

### 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Tal y como se mencionó en la introducción y en el primer capítulo, el análisis de biomarcadores lipídicos señal proporciona información de la biomasa viable, el estado fisiológico y la composición de la comunidad microbiana. Esta información suele venir aportada por los ácidos grasos de los fosfolípidos (PLFAs) que se analizan en la fracción de lípidos polares y que son uno de los biomarcadores lipídicos de mayor interés. Aparte de los PLFAs, otras clases lipídicas pueden aportar información sobre la composición de las poblaciones y del estado nutricional, por ejemplo los plasmalógenos (propios de anaeróbicos estrictos, Clostridia y algunos Gram-negativos; Moore *et al.*, 199□) y los esfingolípidos encontrados en *Sphingomonas* y *Bacteroides*, entre otros (Kato *et al.*, 1995). En este estudio se ha aplicado la metodología de biomarcadores lipídicos señal con la identificación y el análisis de las diferentes clases lipídicas incluidas en las fracciones de lípidos polares, glicolípidos y lípidos neutros.

Por ello, los objetivos de este capítulo fueron: (i) monitorizar los cambios en la biomasa microbiana y evaluar situaciones de privación de nutrientes, estrés fisiológico, crecimiento no balanceado y estado redox, (ii) analizar la composición de la comunidad por PLFAs, contenido en quinonas y presencia de biomarcadores lipídicos específicos de grupos, y (iii) aislar cepas representativas de bacterias sulfatorreductoras y Gram-positivos anaeróbicos y analizar el contenido de dimetilacetales en sus membranas.

### 2. MATERIALES Y MÉTODOS

Muestras de tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro se muestrearon como ‘cores enteros’ en Octubre del 2002 durante un ciclo diario cada tres horas. Se extrajeron los lípidos totales de las muestras y se fraccionaron mediante cromatografía de ácido silícico. La fracción de lípidos polares se analizó según el protocolo secuencial explicado en el primer capítulo, y se obtuvieron los FAMEs, los dimetilacetales (DMAs) derivados de los plasmalógenos y los componentes detectados en el paso ‘D’ tras la hidrólisis ácida fuerte. El polihidroxitirato (PHB) y valerato (PHV) se detectaron y cuantificaron según el método de Elhottová *et al.* (2000) que se validó

previamente. El contenido de quinonas respiratorias se evaluó en la fracción de lípidos neutros tal y como se mencionó en capítulos previos. Los índices de divergencia microbiana (*MD* ub+mk) y de divergencia bioenergética (*BD* ub+mk) se calcularon con los datos de %mol de las quinonas detectadas.

El aislamiento de bacterias sulfatorreductoras y Gram-positivos anaeróbicos de tapetes microbianos se realizó con medios selectivos en condiciones de anaerobiosis y tras un choque térmico en el caso de los endoesporulados. Las cepas aisladas se caracterizaron por microscopía electrónica y por secuenciación del 16S rDNA. Los lípidos totales de las cepas liofilizaron se extrajeron y fraccionaron. La fracción polar se trató para la cuantificación de FAMES y DMAs. Las quinonas respiratorias también se determinaron.

### **3. RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN**

Los valores máximos de biomasa viable como PLFA y contenido de quinonas se detectaron a las 15:00. Posteriormente, a las 18:00 se observó una disminución drástica del contenido de PLFAs que coincidió con un aumento de DMAs. A pesar que el contenido de DMA aumentó al doble en este punto, solo representó el 13% del total de PLFA en picomoles por gramo de peso seco. El aumento de DMA puede atribuirse al aumento de la actividad de microorganismos anaeróbicos formadores de plasmalógenos (Gram-positivos de bajo %G+C como *Clostridium* y algunos sulfatorreductores; Rütters *et al.*, 2001). La composición de la comunidad determinada por los PLFAs indicó que los porcentajes relativos de los diferentes grupos permanecían estables a excepción del punto de las 18:00, ya que debido a la disminución de PLFAs se observó un mayor porcentaje relativo de anaeróbicos a expensas de la reducción de Gram-negativos. La composición de la comunidad según el contenido en quinonas también observó que los %mol eran similares en todos los puntos menos a las 18:00, donde se detectó una importante reducción en el contenido de todas las quinonas especialmente la MK-9, y un ligero aumento de la Q-8. Además se detectó que el contenido en quinonas disminuía durante la noche pero volvía a alcanzar los valores detectados en el día anterior, lo cual es consistente con la repetición de la dinámica diaria en este tipo de tapetes. La drástica disminución de la MK-9 puede estar asociada con la disminución de miembros de

*Firmicutes*, *Actinobacteria* y *Bacteroides*. Lo que parece sorprendente es que el aumento de DMAs a las 18:00 no se correspondió con un aumento en ninguna clase de quinona existente en los microorganismos con plasmalógenos en sus membranas.

Paralelamente, se aisló una cepa de bacterias sulfatorreductoras y una cepa Gram-positiva anaeróbica formadora de endosporas que fueron caracterizadas y nombradas *Desulfovibrio* sp. EBD y *Clostridium* sp. EBD (Fig. X.6). A pesar que estudios recientes han caracterizado la presencia de especies de *Clostridium* en tapetes microbianos antárticos (Spring *et al.*, 2003), este es el primer estudio que acredita la presencia de especies de *Clostridium* en tapetes microbianos de estuario. *Desulfovibrio* sp. EBD presentó abundancia de MK-6 en su fase de lípidos neutros, mientras que la quinona mayoritaria en *Clostridium* sp. EBD fue la MK-9, que se detectó con valores muy bajos en comparación con los valores observados en otros cultivos puros. La presencia de plasmalógenos se detectó únicamente en *Clostridium* sp. EBD.

Relacionado con lo mencionado anteriormente, un aumento en la actividad de miembros de este género a las 18:00 podría explicar el aumento de los DMAs sin suponer un aumento en un tipo de quinona. La MK-9 también podría atribuirse a miembros del género *Bacteroides*, que contribuyen de forma importante a la población de tapetes microbianos de la Camarga (capítulos anteriores). Este género también se caracteriza por la presencia de esfingolípidos en sus membranas. A pesar que en este estudio no se pudieron cuantificar las bases esfingoides en el paso 'D' del protocolo secuencial, se detectaron bases esfingoides de 18 y 19 carbonos. Además, se cuantificaron los ácidos grasos hidroxilados liberados en este paso y que, en teoría, proceden de los esfingolípidos. La cuantificación de éstos indicó una disminución a las 18:00 que podría explicar la reducción de miembros de este género y por lo tanto la reducción del contenido de MK-9.

A las 18:00 se detectó un aumento en el índice metabólico (*cyclo/ω7c* alto, tasa de crecimiento menor), aumento del estrés fisiológico (*trans/cis*), una mayor proporción de microorganismos anaeróbicos, mayor cuantificación de DMAs, mayor actividad respiradora (índice quinonas/PLFA), un carácter más aeróbico (índice UQ/MK mayor), mayor acumulación de PHB y PHV, y una menor proporción de biomasa viable. Este

hecho puede deberse a una mayor actividad de microorganismos heterótrofos aeróbicos o facultativos que aprovecharían el exceso de carbono generado por los fotótrofos, llegando a una situación de crecimiento no-balanceado con falta de nutrientes esenciales que induciría la acumulación de polímeros de reserva. La reducción de PLFAs y el aumento de los índices *cyclo/ω7c* y *trans/cis* a las 18:00 está claramente correlacionada con un situación de privación de nutrientes que no tiene porque implicar muerte celular, sino que puede deberse a una reducción del volumen celular y un uso preferente de ácidos grasos *cis* como mecanismo de supervivencia en situación de inanición (Guckert *et al.*, 1986).

#### **4. CONCLUSIONES**

- El análisis combinado de lípidos polares, glicolípidos y lípidos neutros en muestras de tapetes microbianos durante un ciclo diario mostró un cambio en la dinámica poblacional a las 18:00, con una disminución en la biomasa viable, un aumento de estrés metabólico, disminución de la tasa de crecimiento, aumento de dimetilacetales derivados de plasmalógenos, una mayor proporción de bacterias anaeróbicas, una mayor acumulación de biopolímeros, una mayor actividad respiradora y un carácter más aeróbico.

- En este punto, el aumento del contenido en DMAs no se correspondió con un aumento de ningún tipo de quinona propia de los microorganismos formadores de endosporas (*Clostridium* y microorganismos cercanos), y además se observó una disminución brusca de la MK-9. La incapacidad general de los miembros del género *Clostridium* de sintetizar quinonas y el hecho que la cepa aislada *Clostridium* sp. EBD presente plasmalógenos en sus membranas pero su contenido en MK-9 sea muy bajo, parece explicar la falta de aumento de quinonas relacionado con un aumento de DMAs. La reducción de MK-9 en este punto podría asociarse con una disminución del género *Bacteroides*, con contenido en esta menaquinona, y que estaría también relacionado con la disminución de ácidos grasos hidroxilados con enlaces amida de esfingolípidos sintetizados por este género.

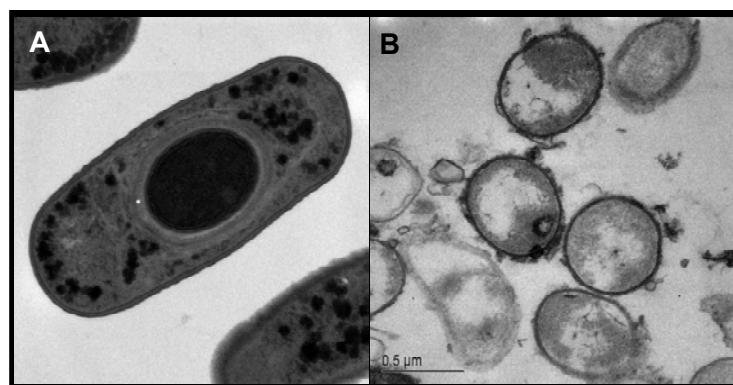


Figura X.6. Cepas aisladas: (A) *Clostridium* sp. EBD; (B) *Desulfovibrio* sp. EBD.

Tabla X.3. Biomarcadores microbianos medidos en los tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro.

| Muestra                         | 12:00    | 15:00    | 18:00   | 21:00   | 24:00    | 3:00    | 6:00     | 9:00    |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| <i>Biomasa</i> <sup>1</sup>     |          |          |         |         |          |         |          |         |
| <b>Total PLFA</b>               | 13570.□□ | 26882.51 | 7668.70 | 8933.01 | 110□5.57 | 8060.82 | 12772.□□ | 9708.78 |
| <b>Total DMA</b>                | 1675.6□  | 18□□18   | 3513.86 | 3□□08   | 11□1.13  | 128□81  | 1960.99  | 1073.33 |
| <i>Composición</i> <sup>2</sup> |          |          |         |         |          |         |          |         |
| <b>Nsats</b>                    | 3.97     | 7.87     | 6.69    | 7.33    | 6.1□     | 11.37   | 5.05     | 9.28    |
| <b>BrM-MBrSats</b>              | 29.□5    | 22.16    | 56.□6   | 3□07    | 36.33    | □1.1□   | □3.96    | □6.□□   |
| <b>TBrSats</b>                  | □11      | 9.26     | 10.83   | 7.18    | 8.09     | 10.99   | 8.□1     | 9.□1    |
| <b>Monoenóicos</b>              | 53.36    | 50.65    | 18.□3   | □2.16   | 39.□9    | 27.52   | 33.06    | 28.7□   |
| <b>Polienóicos</b>              | 9.11     | 10.05    | 7.59    | 9.26    | 9.95     | 8.98    | 9.53     | 6.12    |
| <b>MD ub+mk</b>                 | 758.88   | 75□25    | 863.32  | 708.12  | 789.99   | 812.52  | 831.31   | 833.15  |
| <i>Fisiología</i> <sup>3</sup>  |          |          |         |         |          |         |          |         |
| <b>cyclo/ω7c</b>                | 0.23     | 0.□1     | 0.5□    | 0.31    | 0.37     | 0.□6    | 0.26     | 0.□8    |
| <b>trans/cis</b>                | 0.07     | 0.09     | 0.32    | 0.15    | 0.12     | 0.□0    | 0.18     | 0.21    |
| <b>PHB/PLFA</b>                 | □87      | 8.07     | 13.77   | 11.96   | 7.19     | 10.11   | 9.26     | 9.60    |
| <b>PHV/PLFA</b>                 | 35.08    | 27.87    | 190.17  | □8.85   | 56.65    | 77.77   | 50.09    | 83.5□   |
| <b>UQ/MK+DMK</b>                | 0.□1     | 0.37     | 0.62    | 0.28    | 0.□1     | 0.□□    | 0.□5     | 0.55    |
| <b>BD ub+mk</b>                 | 190.9□   | 188.62   | 197.22  | 182.52  | 190.7□   | 192.18  | 192.66   | 195.65  |
| <b>Q/PLFA</b>                   | 2.□8     | 1.65     | 2.78    | 2.16    | 1.87     | 1.6□    | 1.□6     | 1.88    |

<sup>1</sup>Datos de biomasa como picomoles g<sup>-1</sup>, DMA dimetilacetales; <sup>2</sup>Composición de la comunidad: NSats Saturados-Todos los géneros, BrM-MBrSats Ramificados monoenoicos y saturados ramificados en la mitad de la cadena-Anaerobicos, TBrSats Saturados ramificados terminalmente-Gram positivos, Monoenoicos-Gram negativos, Polienoicos-Microeucariotas, MD ub+mk índice de divergencia microbiana de ubiquinonas y menaquinonas; <sup>3</sup>Estado fisiológico: índices *cyclo/ω7c* y *trans/cis*, PHB/PLFA polihidroxibutirato/PLFA en pmol g<sup>-1</sup>, PHV/PLFA polihidroxivalerato/PLFA en pmol g<sup>-1</sup>, UQ/MK+DMKs calculado con datos en %mol, BD ub+mk índice bioenergético, Q/PLFA quinonas totales/PLFA en pmol g<sup>-1</sup>.

# CARACTERIZACIÓN DE BACTERIAS HETEROTROFAS AISLADAS DE LA CAPA FÓTICA

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Los tapetes microbianos son áreas de intensa producción primaria. Durante la fotosíntesis, se producen compuestos orgánicos que son liberados parcialmente al ambiente. Existen pocos estudios basados en la diversidad y el papel de bacterias aeróbicas heterotrofas aunque algunos estudios han identificado filogenéticamente las poblaciones dominantes y han sugerido que las cepas aisladas están especializadas en la degradación de fotosintatos excretados por los productores primarios del sistema (Epping *et al.*, 1999; Van Trappen *et al.*, 2002; Jonkers □ Abed, 2003).

Algunos estudios han destacado la importancia de las bacterias aerobias heterotrofas de la capa fótica en la degradación de contaminantes (Cohen *et al.*, 1992; McGowan *et al.*, 200□). El ‘microhábitat’ que rodea a las cianobacterias asegura la disponibilidad de oxígeno y nutrientes que son requisitos indispensables para la degradación aeróbica. Diversos géneros bacterianos se han caracterizado por presentar esta capacidad biodegradadora, p.ej. *Pseudomonas*, *Rhodococcus*, *Marinobacter*, *Sphingomonas*, etc. (Bartha □ Atlas, 1977; Van Hamme □ Ward, 2001). Los objetivos de este capítulo fueron los siguientes: (i) el aislamiento y caracterización de bacterias heterotrofas asociadas con cianobacterias en la capa fótica, y (ii) el aislamiento y caracterización de miembros del género *Sphingomonas* sp. y la detección de esfingolípidos en sus membranas y en muestras de tapetes microbianos como indicadores de la capacidad ‘potencial’ de la comunidad de degradar contaminantes.

## 2. MATERIALES Y MÉTODOS

Cianobacterias filamentosas extraídas de tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro, fueron micromanipuladas (micromanipulador Skerman) sobre placas de agar MN (agar mineral para el crecimiento de cianobacterias). El crecimiento heterotrofo generado entorno a las vainas de las cianobacterias se transfirió a placas de agar nutritivo salino (SWYP) para aislar las cepas en cultivo puro. La cepa aislada se caracterizó



morfológicamente por microscopía óptica y electrónica, y bioquímicamente mediante pruebas de degradación en placa, API 50CH, API 20NE y API YM (Biomèrieux). También se secuenció la molécula del 16S rDNA y se determinó su posición filogenética.

Se testó la capacidad de la cepa aislada de producir compuestos anti-bacterianos o auto-inhibidores según el método de Rao *et al.* (2005). Para determinar la relación entre la cepa aislada y las cianobacterias filamentosas del tapete se realizó un experimento basado en la inhibición de la fotosíntesis con DCMU ([3-(3',4'-diclorofenil)-1,1-dimetilurea). Una especie de cianobacterias filamentosas se traspasó a medio líquido con DCMU para inhibir la fotosíntesis. Posteriormente, los filamentos se transfirieron a placas de agar mineral con o sin DCMU y con inóculo y sin inóculo de la cepa del heterotrofo aislada. Por otra parte, muestras de cianobacterias filamentosas recogidas de tapetes se fijaron y se hibridaron con las sondas fluorescentes PSA18 (específica del género *Pseudoalteromonas*) y con EUB388 (de eubacterias).

El aislamiento de cepas del género *Sphingomonas* se realizó en tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro y de la Camarga mediante el método propuesto por Vanbroekhoven *et al.* (200) basado en la resistencia de este género a concentraciones altas de estreptomycin y a su pigmentación amarilla. La cepa aislada se caracterizó morfo-bioquímicamente y su molécula del 16S rDNA se secuenció. Paralelamente, se extrajeron los lípidos totales de la cepa aislada, de cepas de *Sphingomonas* de colección y de muestras de tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro y de la Camarga., y se trataron mediante el protocolo de Leung *et al.* (1999) para la determinación de esfingolípidos.

### **3. RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN**

Una única cepa se aisló del crecimiento heterotrofo entorno a la cianobacteria filamentosas micromanipulada (Fig. X.7). La cepa se identificó como Gram-negativa, anaeróbica facultativa, oxidasa y catalasa positiva, de 0.5–0.8 µm de ancho y 1.7–µm de largo, no forma endosporas ni acumula PHB. La cepa se caracterizó por ser muy versátil con un amplio rango de crecimiento en diferentes pH (5–10), temperatura (–35°C), y salinidad (1.5–10% NaCl), una amplia gama de actividades enzimáticas (lipasa, proteinasa, hemolisina, DNasa, amilasa, etc.). Además, se observó actividad

biosurfactante en el sobrenadante de cultivos de la cepa, y sensibilidad a diferentes antibióticos. La quinona mayoritaria detectada fue la Q-8 y los ácidos grasos principales de la membrana fueron 1□0, 16:0, *a*17:0, y *br*16:1. La secuenciación del 16S rDNA sugirió su clasificación como miembro del género *Pseudoalteromonas*, y aunque presentó un elevado porcentaje de homología con la especie *Pseudoalteromonas elyakovii* (Sawabe *et al.*, 2000), sus características metabólicas recomiendan su clasificación como especie nueva. Hasta ese momento, le asignaremos el nombre de *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. EBD.

El ensayo de interacción entre cianobacterias filamentosas y *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. EBD determinó que en las placas de agar de medio mineral con DCMU inoculadas con la cianobacterias y las cepas de *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. EBD se desarrollaron colonias de heterótrofos mayores en aquellas zonas en contacto con el inóculo de cianobacterias. Por otra parte, Las placas control inoculadas únicamente con la cianobacteria y sin DCMU demostraron que las cianobacterias se recuperaban tras el tratamiento con el inhibidor del fotosistema II, por lo cual la incubación con DCMU no era letal. Estos resultados sugirieron que *Pseudoalteromonas* puede crecer a expensas de otros compuestos asimilables aparte del fotosintato generado por las cianobacterias, como por ejemplo componentes estructurales de la vaina de éstas. De hecho, la vaina de las cianobacterias proporciona un ambiente donde se concentran los nutrientes y actúa como elemento de protección para los heterótrofos (Lange, 1979). Las actividades enzimáticas de cepas de *Pseudoalteromonas* y su elevada versatilidad, pueden indicar la existencia de relaciones cooperativas de esta población de heterótrofos y de otros géneros como *Halomonas* (también aislada en los tapetes microbianos) en el reciclaje de nutrientes en la capa fótica y en relación directa con la población de cianobacterias. Relaciones cooperativas similares se han descrito en algas del género *Fucus* (Ivanova *et al.*, 2002a,b). Además, la aplicación de hibridación *in situ* con fluorescencia (FISH) demostró la presencia dominante de miembros del género *Pseudoalteromonas* entorno a las vainas de cianobacterias filamentosas en tapetes (Fig. X.8).

Por otra parte, se ha realizado el aislamiento de otras bacterias heterótrofas de la capa fótica con capacidades metabólicas interesantes. El método de aislamiento de Vanbroekhoven *et al.* (200□) permitió el aislamiento de una cepa del género

*Sphingomonas* en tapetes de la Camarga. La cepa aislada es aerobia estricta, catalasa y oxidasa positiva, acumula PHB, y presenta un rango de crecimiento entre 20–37°C, pH 5–8, salinidad 0–2.5% NaCl. La secuenciación del 16S rDNA sugirió su clasificación como miembro de la especie *Sphingomonas melonis* (Buonario *et al.*, 2002) y la cepa se denominó *Sphingomonas* sp. Camargue. El análisis de bases esfingoides por el método de Leung *et al.* (1999), determinó la presencia de bases tanto en la cepa de *Sphingomonas* sp. Camargue como en los tapetes del delta del Ebro y la Camarga. La presencia de bases esfingoides en tapetes de la Camarga con un orden de magnitud mayor que en el delta del Ebro, y el hecho de que solo se hayan aislado miembros del género *Sphingomonas* en este sistema sugiere una mayor importancia de este grupo en estos tapetes. A pesar de ello, la abundancia de bases esfingoides también puede ser atribuida a miembros del género *Bacteroides*, que a su vez se detectaron en este tipo de tapetes mediante DGGE en uno de los capítulos anteriores.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONES**

- Se ha aislado una cepa Gram-negativa, anaeróbica facultativa, sin capacidad de acumular PHB, muy versátil a nivel enzimático, metabólico, y con un rango amplio de crecimiento en diferentes condiciones de pH, temperatura y salinidad, del crecimiento heterotrofo entorno a las vainas de cianobacterias filamentosas previamente micromanipuladas. La cepa se ha denominado *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. EBD.

- Ensayos de interacción de *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. EBD con cianobacterias inhibidas por DCMU, sugirieron la capacidad de la cepa heterotrofa de crecer a expensas de otros compuestos asimilables aparte de los fotosintatos, por ejemplo la vaina gelatinosa de las cianobacterias. Además, los ensayos FISH han demostrado la presencia de miembros del género *Pseudoalteromonas* entorno a las mencionadas vainas.

- Se ha aislado un miembro del género *Sphingomonas* en tapetes de la Camarga con capacidad de acumular PHB. Sus características morfoquímicas y filogenéticas sugieren su clasificación en la especie *Sphingomonas melonis*. Una mayor cuantificación de bases esfingoides mayor en los tapetes de la Camarga y el aislamiento del género *Sphingomonas* únicamente en este sistema, sugiere una mayor importancia de este grupo en estos tapetes microbianos.

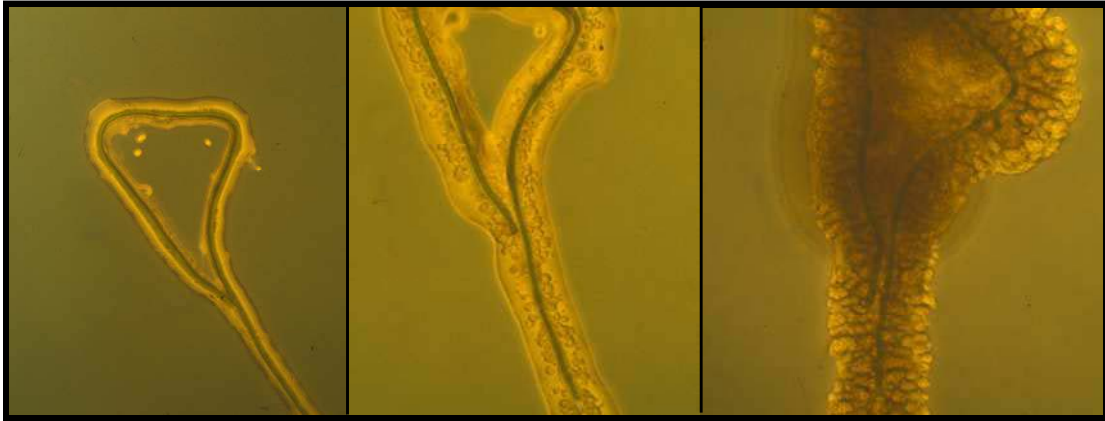


Figura X.7. Cianobacterias filamentosas micromanipuladas con un crecimiento heterotrofo entorno a las vainas.

De izquierda a derecha, incubación de 2, 4 y 12 días sobre agar mineral para cianobacterias a 20°C y en condiciones de luz/oscuridad. Aumento 200×.

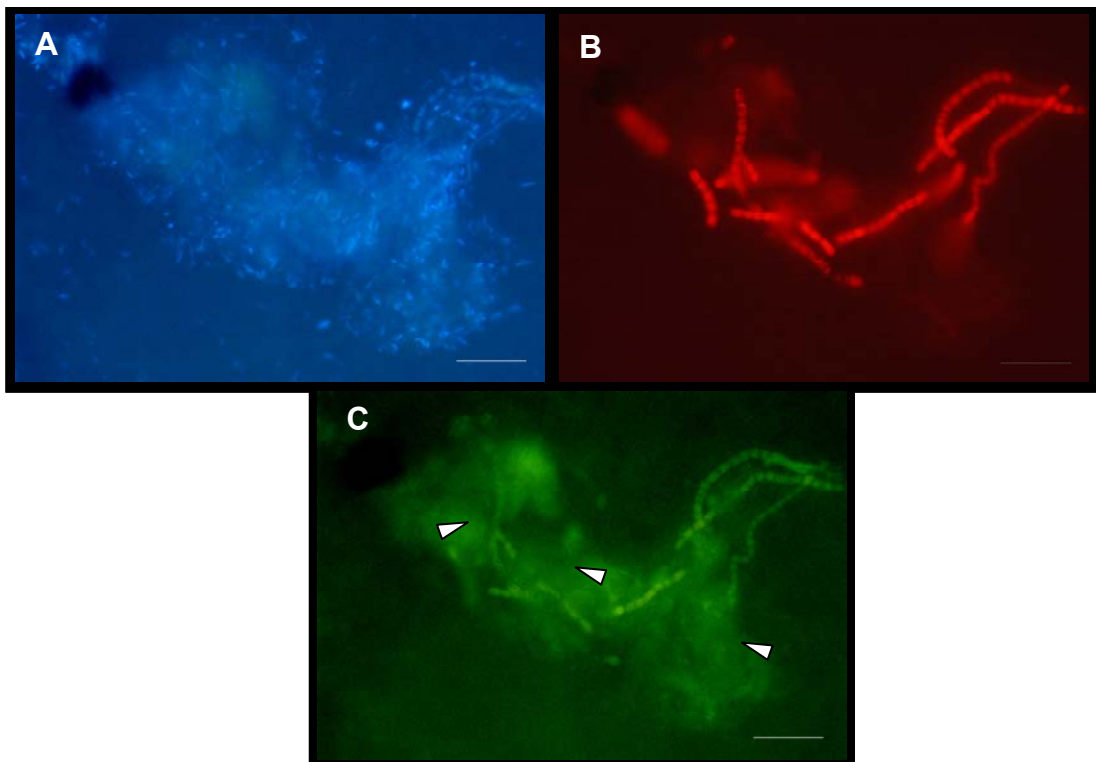


Figura X.8. Hibridación *in situ* con fluorescencia (FISH) de cianobacterias de tapetes microbianos con la sonda PSA18 marcada con fluoresceína (FITC).

(A) Tinción DAPI; (B) Autofluorescencia de las cianobacterias; (C) Señal de fluorescencia de la fluoresceína. Las flechas indican tinción difusa en las vainas. Barra = 10  $\mu$ m.

# SUCESIÓN BACTERIANA EN AMBIENTES SULFUROSOS DE TAPETES MICROBIANOS

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Los tapetes microbianos son sistemas dinámicos en los que se establecen zonas de transición por oposición de gradientes oxígeno-sulfhídrico (Fründ □ Cohen, 1992). Estas zonas son potencialmente inestables y su posición cambia durante los ciclos diarios, por lo cual los microorganismos que las ocupan desarrollan estrategias, tienen capacidad de migración y suelen oxidar compuestos reducidos del azufre para obtener energía. Se han realizado estudios para caracterizar la morfología de estos microorganismos microaerofílicos y móviles, pero aun se desconoce su afiliación taxonómica (Thar □ Kühn, 2002; Thar □ Fenchel, 2005). Entre estos microorganismos se han descrito miembros de bacterias oxidadoras del azufre como *Beggiatoa*, *Thiomicrospira*, *Thiovulum*, *Thiobacillus* y más recientemente *Arcobacter* (Nelson, 1992; Brinkhoff □ Muyzer, 1997; Wirsen *et al.*, 2002). Aparte de estas zonas de interfase, se han descrito otros ambientes ricos en azufre en los cuales se establecen relaciones simbióticas, p.ej. en los tapetes sulfurosos ‘*Thiodendron*’ en los cuales se han observado consorcios de espiroquetas y sulfidogénicos (Dubinina *et al.*, 200□).

Por ello, los objetivos de este capítulo fueron: (i) el estudio de la sucesión bacteriana en ambientes ricos en azufre establecidos en el agua superficial de los tapetes, (ii) la caracterización morfológica y molecular de espiroquetas y espirilos observados en crecimientos masivos, y (iii) diseñar y aplicar sondas para la detección *in situ* por fluorescencia de grupos bacterianos previamente detectados en estos ambientes.

## 2. MATERIALES Y MÉTODOS

Tapetes microbianos del delta del Ebro se mantuvieron en el laboratorio como ‘microcosmos’ en condiciones similares a las del ambiente (luz/oscuridad, desecación, etc.). Se desarrollaron crecimientos masivos con alto contenido en azufre en el agua superficial de los tapetes, en los cuales se observaron sucesiones de poblaciones que se recogieron y fijaron para microscopía, FISH y análisis moleculares. La caracterización y

evolución de las sucesiones se siguió por microscopía de contraste de fases, campo oscuro y tinción con azul de metileno. Las muestras obtenidas de ‘blooms’ de espiroquetas y espirilos se fijaron con glutaraldehído 2.5% para ser tratadas y visualizadas por microscopía electrónica de rastreo y transmisión. Las muestras se filtraron sobre filtros de policarbonato y se hibridaron las muestras con las sondas fluorescentes ARC82 (marcada con Cy3™) y UnSpiro (marcada con FITC), las cuales se optimizaron a diferentes concentraciones de formamida.

Para el aislamiento de miembros de los géneros *Thiomicrospira*/*Thiobacillus* en muestras de tapetes microbianos y ‘blooms’, se realizaron enriquecimientos en medios selectivos y diferenciales. Una vez aisladas en cultivo puro, las cepas crecidas en placa se trataron con doble fijación al vapor para microscopía de rastreo. La detección de la presencia de *Thiomicrospira* se realizó mediante la PCR de detección específica de género diseñada por Brinkhoff y Muyzer (1997). Por otra parte, para determinar la composición de los ‘blooms’ observados, se realizó una amplificación PCR con oligonucleótidos universales para el 16S rDNA y el producto obtenido se clonó, seleccionó y secuenció posteriormente. La presencia de quimeras se descartó *in silico*.

### **3. RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN**

El primer paso en la sucesión bacteriana observada en este tipo de ‘blooms’ fue la aparición de filamentos de *Beggiatoa*. Este hecho se ha asociado a una actividad reductora de sulfato alta en las capas profundas del tapete que aumenta la cantidad de sulfhídrico producido provocando un movimiento vertical de la interfase oxígeno-sulfhídrico y una migración vertical de *Beggiatoa*. Después del crecimiento masivo de *Beggiatoa*, se formó una matriz mucosa con alto contenido en azufre. La formación de estos velos se ha interpretado como un mecanismo de adaptación para reducir el intervalo de profundidad donde se solapan los gradientes oxígeno-sulfhídrico y como lugar de anclaje de microorganismos (Thar y Kühl, 2002). Inicialmente, los velos aparecieron dominados por diferentes morfotipos de células vibriodes-espiriloides. Un morfotipo helicoidal de mayor tamaño presentaba acumulaciones de azufre en su citoplasma y podría estar relacionado con miembros del género *Thiospira* (Dubinina *et al.*, 1993). El movimiento de estas células helicoides estaba caracterizado

por un direccionamiento hacia deposiciones de azufre y probablemente se encuentre relacionado con una 'quimiotaxis' hacia sustancias liberadas tras la degradación de células acumuladoras de azufre. Las observaciones de microscopía de rastreo indicaron la presencia de estructuras polares en este morfotipo que se asemejan al orgánulo polar multilaminar observado en miembros de  $\epsilon$ -Proteobacteria (Ritchie *et al.*, 1966). El clonaje del 16S rDNA amplificado de estos 'blooms' determinó la presencia de secuencias homólogas al género *Arcobacter* (92% homólogas a '*Candidatus Arcobacter sulfidicus*'; Wirsén *et al.*, 2002). A partir de esta secuencia, se diseñó la sonda específica ARC82 que se aplicó a la muestra del 'bloom' por hibridación FISH. La hibridación fluorescente demostró la presencia de microorganismos con la mencionada secuencia en una elevada proporción y cuyo morfotipo no se correspondía con las células helicoides de mayor tamaño.

El siguiente paso en la sucesión bacteriana fue la aparición de un 'bloom' de espiroquetas de gran tamaño. La observación de la muestra reveló la presencia de una gran población de bacterias en forma de bacilo y de pequeño tamaño. Esta población de bacterias fue identificada como miembros del género *Thiobacillus/Thiomicrospira* mediante secuenciación del 16S rDNA, técnicas de cultivo selectivas, y la PCR específica diseñada por Brinkhoff y Muyzer (1997). En este tipo de hábitat, los miembros de estos dos géneros tienen que competir con otras especies por el sulfhídrico como donador de electrones. Las espiroquetas de gran tamaño se observaron por microscopía de rastreo sobre filtros de 3  $\mu\text{m}$  de diámetro de poro (Fig. X.10), y también a partir de estos se realizó la amplificación del 16S rDNA de la población existente en la muestra. La secuencia de uno de los clones obtenidos presentó homología con miembros del género *Spirochaeta* y más concretamente con *Spirochaeta* sp. M6 descrita por Dubinina *et al.* (2000) como una espiroqueta aerotolerante con capacidad de reducir compuestos del azufre como mecanismo de protección. Esta secuencia se empleó para diseñar la sonda fluorescente UnSpiro65 que fue hibridada sin éxito sobre la muestra en cuestión. En este caso, las espiroquetas observadas en el 'bloom' no presentaron inclusiones de azufre citoplasmáticas durante los primeros estadios pero se detectaron inclusiones birrefringentes cuando la motilidad de las células y la concentración de sulfhídrico se redujo considerablemente. Por lo tanto, estas estructuras podrían

atribuirse a compuestos de reserva, gránulos de azufre o estructuras de resistencia. Por otra parte, estas espiroquetas presentaron una respuesta quimiotáctica hacia ambientes ricos en azufre o sustancias liberadas por bacterias oxidadoras de azufre. Este hecho podría asociarse con una relación entre espiroquetas y otros grupos, tal y como se ha descrito en estudios previos sobre la relación de *Spirochaeta plicatilis* y *Beggiatoa* (Blakemore □ Canale-Parola, 1973). En conclusión, las respuestas de taxis bacterianas en interfases de ‘clina’ se consideran como ventajas de supervivencia, al igual que la formación de matrices mucosas como lugares de anclaje microbiano. La diversidad de espiroquetas y espirilos en este tipo de ambientes sugiere la existencia de relaciones metabólicas cooperativas entre diferentes grupos implicados en el ciclo del azufre.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONES**

- La ocurrencia y sucesión bacteriana se ha estudiado en ambientes ricos en azufre de tapetes microbianos, y se ha observado un primer estadio de dominancia de bacterias oxidadoras del azufre como *Beggiatoa*, posteriormente abundancia de morfotipos vibriodes–espiriloides y finalmente la aparición de poblaciones de espiroquetas.
- Los ‘blooms’ con morfotipos vibriodes–espiriloides estaban formados por células helicoides de gran tamaño, con gránulos de azufre citoplasmáticos, y con estructuras polares similares al orgánulo polar de  $\epsilon$ -Proteobacteria. El clonaje del 16S rDNA indicó la presencia de secuencias similares a ‘*Candidatus Arcobacter sulfidicus*’, y a partir de ésta se diseñó la sonda ARC82 □ La hibridación FISH de esta sonda detectó la presencia de bacterias cuyo morfotipo no se correspondía con las células helicoides.
- En el ‘bloom’ de espiroquetas se observó la presencia de *Halothiobacillus* y *Thiomicrospira* mediante cultivo y detección específica por PCR. Las espiroquetas de gran tamaño presentaron inclusiones citoplasmáticas birrefringentes a medida que envejecían. El clonaje del 16S rDNA de la muestra demostró la presencia de secuencias homólogas al género *Spirochaeta* y se diseñó la sonda UnSpiro □65 que se aplicará en el futuro para detectar y observar la dinámica de espiroquetas en tapetes microbianos.



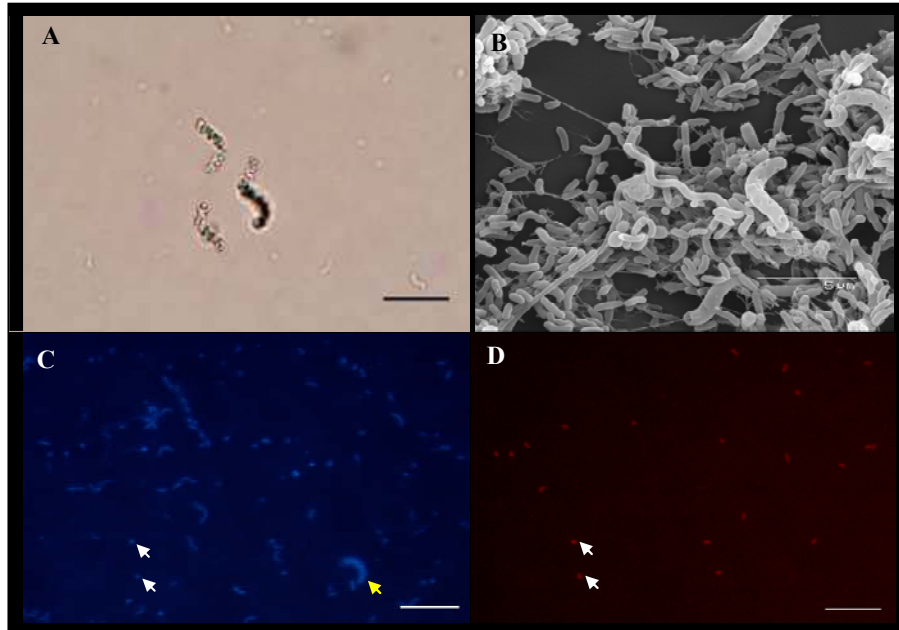


Figura X.9. ' Bloom' de microorganismos vibrioides–espiriloides.

(A) Células helicoides de gran tamaño con los inclusiones de azufre citoplasmáticas; (B) Microscopía de rastreo que muestra la presencia de bacterias vibrioides de pequeño tamaño y espiroquetas; (C) Tinción DAPI de la muestra fijada; (D) Hibridación FISH con la sonda ARC82. Las flechas blancas indican el morfotipo hibridado y en amarillo las células helicoides grandes. Barra = 10  $\mu\text{m}$ .

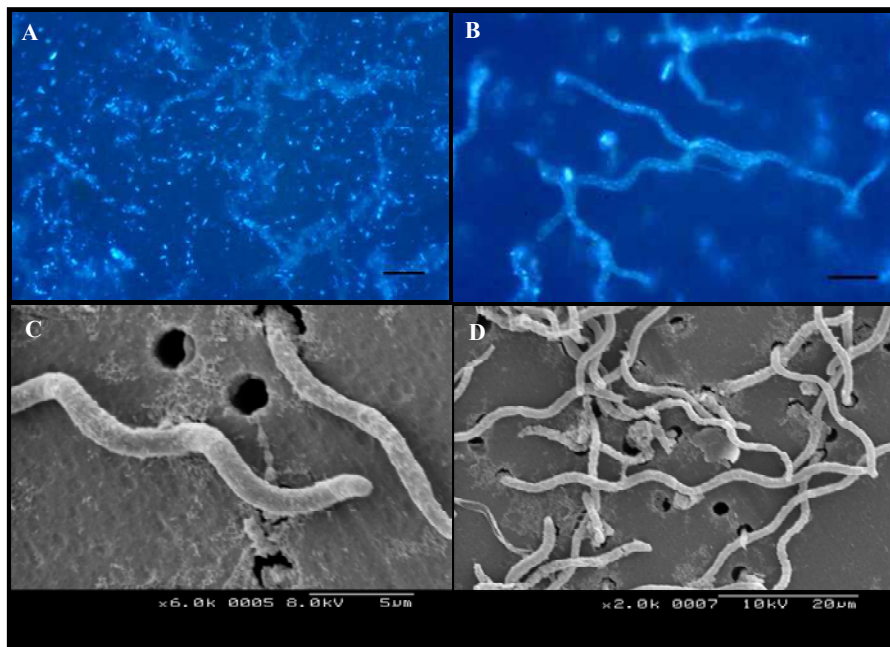


Figura X.10. ' Bloom' de espiroquetas.

(A) DAPI de la muestra; (B) DAPI tras filtrar por filtro de 3  $\mu\text{m}$ ; (C y D) Microscopía de rastreo. Barra= 10  $\mu\text{m}$ .

## **CONCLUSIONES**

Los tapetes microbianos son ecosistemas estables que presentan una gran diversidad, por lo cual son una fuente de microorganismos no caracterizados y adaptados a la comunidad microbiana. Aunque se han realizado muchos estudios de los tapetes microbianos como modelo de ecosistema microbiano, aun existen muchas incógnitas sobre los ciclos bioquímicos, las asociaciones cooperativas y sobre la taxonomía de los miembros que integran este sistema.

El principal objetivo de este trabajo fue la aplicación de técnicas nuevas y la combinación con otras existentes para obtener una visión integrada de la estructura y fisiología, y también analizar la información obtenida por éstas para caracterizar poblaciones microbianas menos conocidas pero implicadas en procesos importantes. Se puede concluir que la aplicación de la técnica de biomarcadores lipídicos señal ha demostrado ser un método efectivo para obtener información sobre este tipo de ecosistemas. Sin embargo, se necesitan más estudios para aumentar la sensibilidad y la reproducibilidad con muestras naturales. Además, la combinación del análisis lipídico con métodos basados en ácidos nucleicos en tapetes microbianos a diferente profundidad, ha proporcionado información muy útil sobre la dinámica temporal y espacial de las poblaciones y sobre su afiliación taxonómica. Este estudio, ha revelado la importancia de bacterias heterotrofas en las capas fotosintéticas, la presencia de bacterias verdes del azufre en numerosos nichos, y de bacterias fermentadoras en las capas más profundas. Por otra parte, los análisis de divergencia han sugerido que los cambios relacionados con la profundidad parecen tener mayor influencia que los cambios temporales.

El análisis de quinonas respiratorias en muestras de tapetes ha aportado estimaciones de biomasa, composición taxonómica y estado redox de la comunidad. En este caso, se han observado importantes diferencias en la estructura de la comunidad y en el estado redox en tapetes microbianos de diferente localización, y que eran aparentemente bastante similares. Además, se ha realizado una detección preliminar sobre la composición de lípidos polares intactos que será mejorada en el futuro debido a su gran potencialidad taxonómica. Por otra parte, también se han detectado miembros

del dominio *Archaea* en tapetes microbianos que podrían jugar un papel importante en la fisiología del sistema.

Las metodologías mencionadas anteriormente se aplicaron en tapetes microbianos durante un ciclo circadiano para evaluar la respuesta de la comunidad a cambios diarios. Se observó un patrón de respuestas fisiológicas que se reproducía diariamente, lo cual sugiere que los tapetes microbianos son ecosistemas complejos altamente predecibles. Durante este estudio, también se aisló una cepa anaeróbica esporulada, pero los estudios futuros se basarán en el aislamiento y caracterización de la diversidad de este grupo y cómo está implicado en los procesos diarios de los tapetes.

Los resultados obtenidos tras la aplicación de los análisis combinados, destacaron la importancia de las bacterias heterotrofas en la regulación de procesos metabólicos de la capa fótica. En este trabajo, se aislaron y caracterizaron dos cepas microbianas de las capas fotosintéticas. Se han demostrado las capacidades metabólicas de *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. EBD y su relación con las cianobacterias. A pesar de ello, se requieren más estudios que determinen el intercambio de nutrientes entre estos grupos. Por otra parte, se ha caracterizado un miembro del género *Sphingomonas* aunque se deberá determinar su importancia en el reciclaje de nutrientes y en la dinámica de polihidroxicanoatos.

Finalmente, se ha estudiado la diversidad de oxidadores del azufre en las zonas de transición oxígeno-sulfhídrico. En este caso, estudios previos realizados en el grupo habían descrito morfotipos espiriloides y espiroquetas implicados de alguna forma en el ciclo del azufre. Por ello, se ha investigado la sucesión morfológica en estos crecimientos ‘masivos’ a fin de predecir su reproducibilidad. La aplicación de técnicas moleculares ha proporcionado información importante sobre la composición de estos crecimientos, y ha permitido el diseño de sondas que serán aplicadas en el futuro para detectar los microorganismos observados en tapetes. Además, se ha observado que los microorganismos detectados podrían formar estructuras de resistencia o acumular compuestos de reserva ante perturbaciones ambientales. Por ello, se está trabajando en esta línea para la detección de este tipo de estructuras que supondría un mecanismo microbiano alternativo a la formación de esporas.

## XI. REFERENCES



Figure XI. Sampling in the ‘Halophilic ponds’ of the ‘Salines de la Trinitat’ (Ebro delta, Spain).



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## XII. APPENDIXES

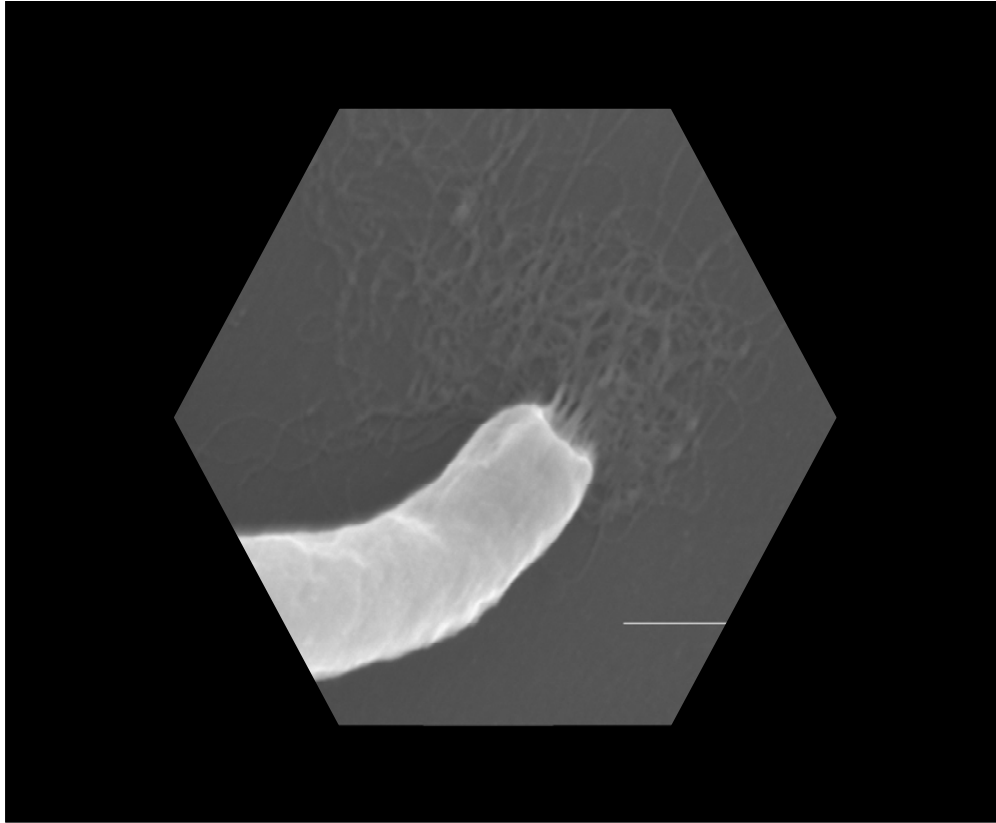


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## USEFUL WEBSITES

**Bioedit software package:**

<http://www.mbio.ncsu.edu/BioEdit/page2.html> (updated 31<sup>st</sup> May 2005)

**Biopolymer calculator or Primer calculator:**

<http://paris.chem.yale.edu/extinct.html>

**BLAST:**

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/BLAST/> (updated 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2005)

**ClustalW Multalign on-line:**

<http://www.ebi.ac.uk/clustalw/> (updated 18<sup>th</sup> May 2005)

**Check\_Chimera:**

<http://rdp8.cme.msu.edu/cgis/chimera.cgi?su=SSU>

**The Lipid library:**

<http://www.lipidlibrary.co.uk/> (updated 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2005)

**Cyberlipid:**

<http://www.cyberlipid.org> (updated 26<sup>th</sup> September 2005)

**Denaturing Gradient Electrophoresis (DGGE) protocol:**

[http://www.nioo.knaw.nl/CL/ME/protocol\\_DGGE.pdf](http://www.nioo.knaw.nl/CL/ME/protocol_DGGE.pdf) (updated March 2004)

**MEGA evolutionary software package:**

<http://www.megasoftware.net/>

**PubMed (Service of the National Library of Medicine):**

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi>

**Ribosomal database project (RDP):**

<http://rdp.cme.msu.edu/>

**SeaWiFS (Sea-viewing Wide Field-of-view Sensor) project from NASA:**

<http://oceancolor.gsfc.nasa.gov/SeaWiFS/>

**Spirochetes information (photographs and videoclips):**

<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/bacteria/spirochetes.html>

<http://www.microscopy-uk.org.uk/mag/artmay99/vidmaya.html>

**Movies of microaerophilic bacteria in the oxic gradient (by M. Kühl):**

<http://www.mbl.ku.dk/mkuhl/DSGC/survey.html>

**ProbeBase (Database of molecular probes for FISH):**

<http://www.microbial-ecology.net/probebase/>



## PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

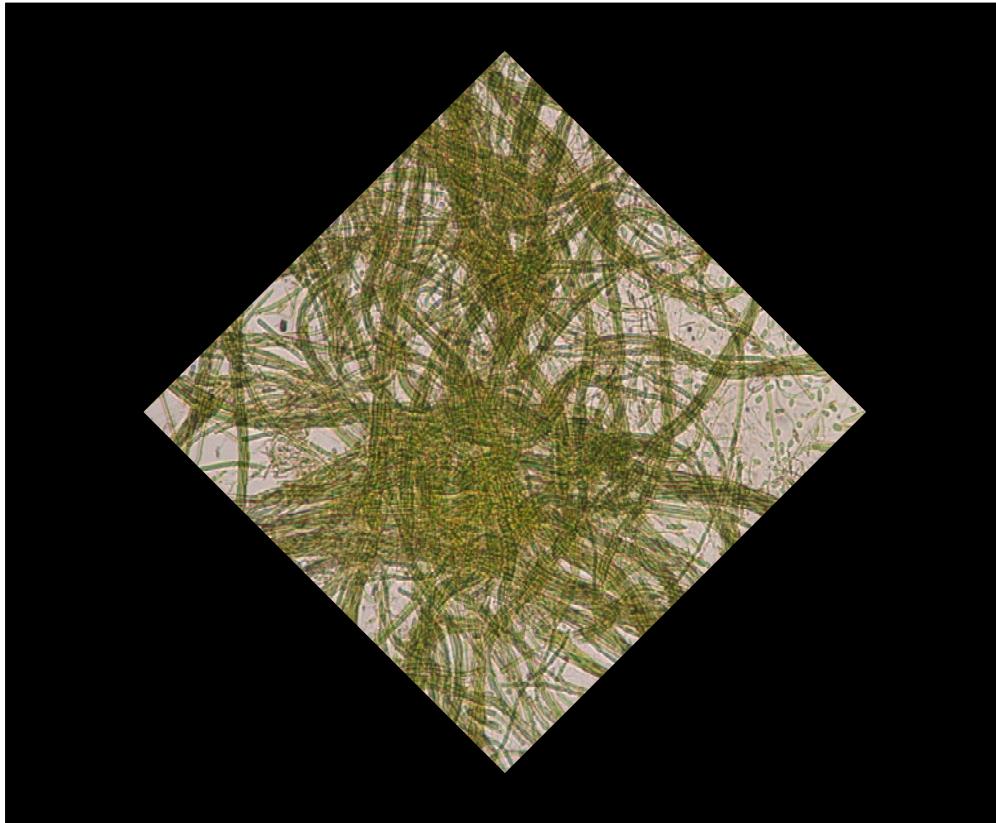


Figure XII.2. Filamentous cyanobacteria from Ebro delta microbial mats.





## **Characterization of Estuarine Microbial Mats from different Locations by Quinone Profiling and Intact Lipid Biomarkers**

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Ricardo Guerrero<sup>1</sup>, and Roland Geyer<sup>2</sup>

**Running title:** Quinone and intact lipid profiling in microbial mats

**Keywords:** Microbial mats, quinone, polar lipids

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**Increased Metabolic Stress, Slowed Growth, Anaerobic  
Microniches and Increased Polyhydroxyalkanoates Induced  
by Photosynthetic Activity during a Circadian Cycle in an  
Estuarine Microbial Mat**

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Ricardo Guerrero<sup>1</sup>, and D. C. White<sup>3</sup>

**Running title:** Analysis of polar, neutral and glycolipids in microbial mats

**Keywords:** Microbial mats, quinone, polar lipids, polyhydroxyalkanoates

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## **Heterotrophic Bacteria Associated with Cyanobacteria in the Photic Zone of Estuarine Microbial Mats**

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**Running title:** Heterotrophic bacteria in microbial mats

**Keywords:** Microbial mats, heterotrophic bacteria, cyanobacteria, photic zone

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## **Diversity of Sulfur-Blooms in Microbial Mats**

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and Ricardo Guerrero

**Running title:** Microbial diversity of sulfur-blooms in microbial mats

**Keywords:** Microbial mats, spirochetes, spirilloid-bacteria, sulfur-blooms

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## Combined Phospholipid Biomarker-16S rRNA Gene Denaturing Gradient Gel Electrophoresis Analysis of Bacterial Diversity and Physiological Status in an Intertidal Microbial Mat

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**A combined lipid biomarker-16S rRNA gene denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis analysis was used to monitor changes in the physiological status, biomass, and microbial composition of a microbial mat. In the morning hours, an increase in the biomass of layers containing a high density of phototrophs and a decrease in the growth rate in the deep layers were observed. The combined approach also revealed differences in major groups of microorganisms, including green nonsulfur, gram-positive, and heterotrophic bacteria.**

Photosynthetic microbial mats are sedimentary structures composed of different populations of bacteria distributed in multilayered communities (2, 10, 21, 22). The use of signature lipid biomarker analysis in microbial ecology studies provides an estimate of the viable microbial biomass (25) and physiological status of the microbial community, since phospholipid fatty acids (PLFAs) reflect the phenotypic response of microorganisms to environmental conditions. Despite its versatility, PLFA analysis has limited application to the analysis of gram-negative bacteria (28). To overcome this, PLFA studies have been complemented by nucleic acid-based analyses (15, 24). In the present report, differences in the metabolic status and microbial diversity of estuarine microbial mats were monitored by means of a combined lipid-nucleic acid approach.

Mat samples were taken from the Camargue (Rhône Delta, France) in April 2002 at two times during the day, 8:00 a.m. Greenwich mean time (GMT) (A samples) and 3:00 p.m. GMT (B samples). Each sample was cut by microtomy into layers 50  $\mu\text{m}$  thick, and 10 cuts were grouped to form each sample group (from sample groups 1 to 15; group 16 contained 25 slices 50  $\mu\text{m}$  thick). Samples were extracted with the single-phase chloroform-methanol-buffer system of Bligh and Dyer (1), as modified by White et al. (26, 27). The total lipid extract was fractionated by silicic acid chromatography, and the polar lipid fraction was transesterified to fatty acid methyl esters (8, 18). Nucleic acid was precipitated from the PLFA aqueous phase of the total lipid extraction (13). PCR amplification of 16S rRNA gene and denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (DGGE) were carried out as described by Muyzer et al. (17). Excised DGGE bands served as templates in PCRs as noted above, and the purified PCR products were sequenced. Amplification products that failed to directly generate legible sequences were

cloned into the pGEM-T Easy System II (Promega, Madison, Wis.) cloning vector according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Maximum viable biomass as measured by total PLFAs (Fig. 1) accumulated at the top of the mat early in the day; however, in the afternoon, the highest levels of biomass were found underlying the uppermost layers.

An increase in the concentration of cyclopropanoic fatty acids represents the shift to conditions that slow down the growth rate (23). In addition, gram-negative communities make *trans*-monoenoic fatty acids in response to changes in their environment (9, 11). In the morning hours, the reduction in the growth rate (the ratio of cyclopropyl fatty acids to monoenoic PLFAs) increased with depth (Fig. 2A), whereas in the afternoon, the slowest growth was detected at the top and in the middle of the mat. Data concerning metabolic stress (Fig. 2B) indicated maximum stress at the topmost layers in the morning; however, the ratio of *trans* to *cis* monoenoic PLFAs increased at the bottom of the mat in the afternoon.

In the morning (Fig. 3A), the microbial community consisted mainly of gram-negative bacteria, as indicated by the presence of monoenoic PLFAs (30). Terminal branched saturated fatty acids (characteristic of gram-positive bacteria) comprised a high proportion of the total PLFA in the middle layers of the biomat and from samples at the deepest layers (maximum 24.6%). Branched monoenoics and mid-chain branched saturated fatty acids, representative of anaerobic microorganisms (3), were constant along the vertical profile. In the afternoon (Fig. 3B), the proportion of anaerobic microorganisms was higher and increased with depth. The prominent DGGE bands were sequenced, and their corresponding vertical positions and phylogenetic affiliations are shown in Fig. 4 and Table 1, respectively.

Determining the viable biomass of a microbial community provides an estimate of the amount of active microorganisms and their capacity for metabolic transformation (25). The maximum viable biomass (Fig. 1) observed in the morning hours

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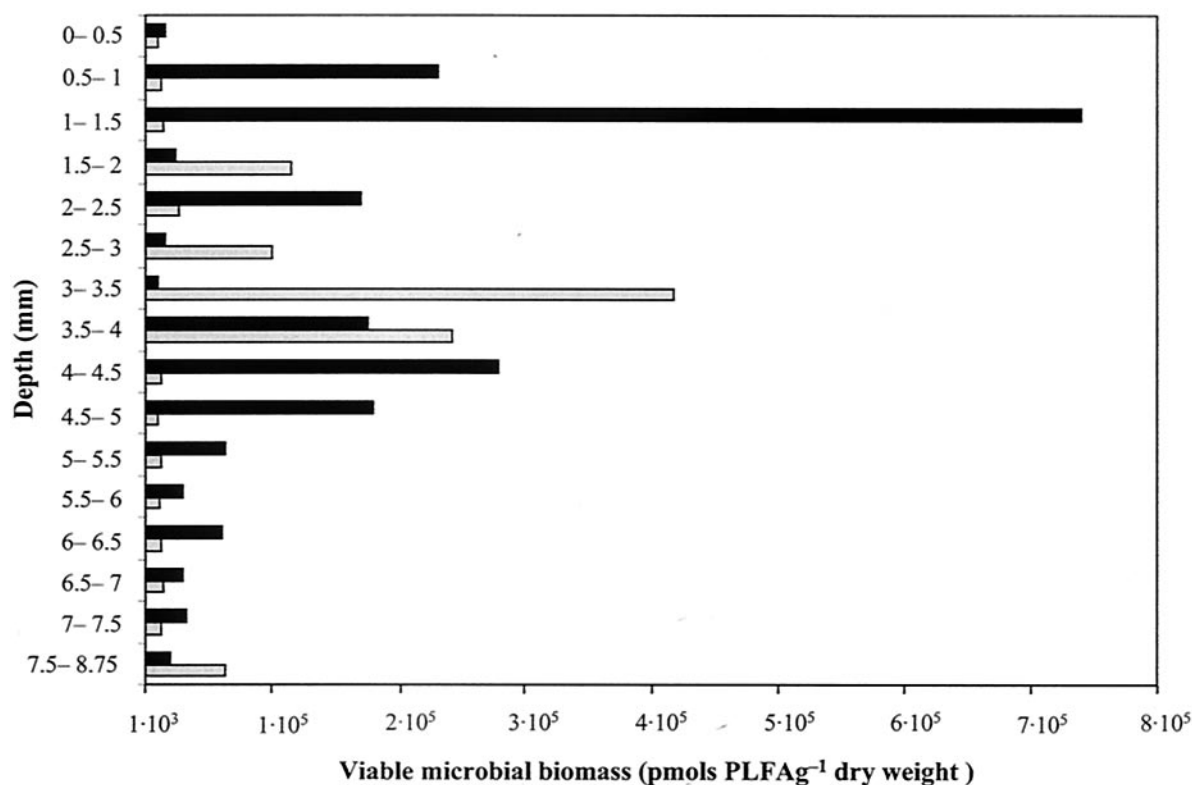


FIG. 1. Viable microbial biomass as measured by total PLFA, expressed as picomoles of PLFAs per gram (dry weight). Determination of the total PLFA provides a quantitative measure of the viable or potentially viable biomass. Viable microorganisms have an intact membrane that contains phospholipids (and PLFAs) which are turned over rapidly after cell death by means of cellular enzymes that hydrolyze the phosphate group from phospholipids, resulting in formation of diacylglycerols. ■, A samples, collected at 8:00 a.m. GMT; □, B samples, collected at 3:00 p.m. GMT.

might be explained by the migration (i) of cyanobacteria towards the top of the mat in order to avoid toxic exposure to sulfide (produced by sulfate-reducing bacteria and accumulated during the night) and (ii) of purple sulfur bacteria, which use the light in the early morning to begin photosynthetic processes. In fact, recent studies have reported an increase in bacterial biomass in layers containing a high density of phototrophs (6, 7, 14). The slow growth rate at the bottom of the mat (Fig. 2A) might be due to an increase in the activity of sulfate-reducing bacteria, especially at 8:00 a.m. In fact, during the night, anoxic conditions trigger the development of this population, which uses organic matter and produces sulfide. Limiting amounts of organic carbon (low C/N rate) may account for the slow growth of the sulfate reducers. The reduction in the growth rate at the top and in the middle of the mat at 3:00 p.m. (Fig. 2A) can be explained by photosynthesis and carbon fixation carried out by cyanobacteria and purple sulfur bacteria, resulting in the generation of abundant organic compounds and limiting amounts of nitrogen (high C/N rate). The exposure of cyanobacteria to sulfide (accumulated during the night) most likely accounts for the high degree of metabolic stress observed at the topmost layer in the morning. In this layer, a major contribution of aerobic heterotrophic bacteria during the morning hours has been reported. Indeed, previous

studies provided evidence of cross-feeding of heterotrophs by excretion of photosynthates in microbial mats (4, 5, 12).

It is noteworthy that the DGGE band pattern showed high similarity to that of genus *Halanaerobium*. These data are consistent with the PLFA community composition analysis at 8:00 a.m. (Fig. 3A), since PLFAs of gram-positive bacteria were predominant in middle and deep layers of the microbial mat. PLFAs representative of gram-negative bacteria were dominant between a depth of 2.5 and 3.5 mm at 8:00 a.m. (Fig. 3A). These results are in agreement with the DGGE pattern, which showed a predominance of bands related to green nonsulfur bacteria (19, 20). A higher proportion of polyenoic fatty acids (indicative of microeukaryotes and cyanobacteria) in the afternoon was consistent with results of previous studies (16) in which an increase in the eukaryotic population in the anoxic region was reported. Finally, the detection at both sampling times of bands homologous to those from gamma-proteobacteria and purple nonsulfur bacteria supports recent findings for Orkney Island microbial mats (29).

The data provide a complete picture of the response of microbial mats to physicochemical variables influenced by time and depth, since ecological processes affect the cycling of nutrients at a community level. Changes in metabolic status can be attributed mainly to the activity of phototrophs, which in-

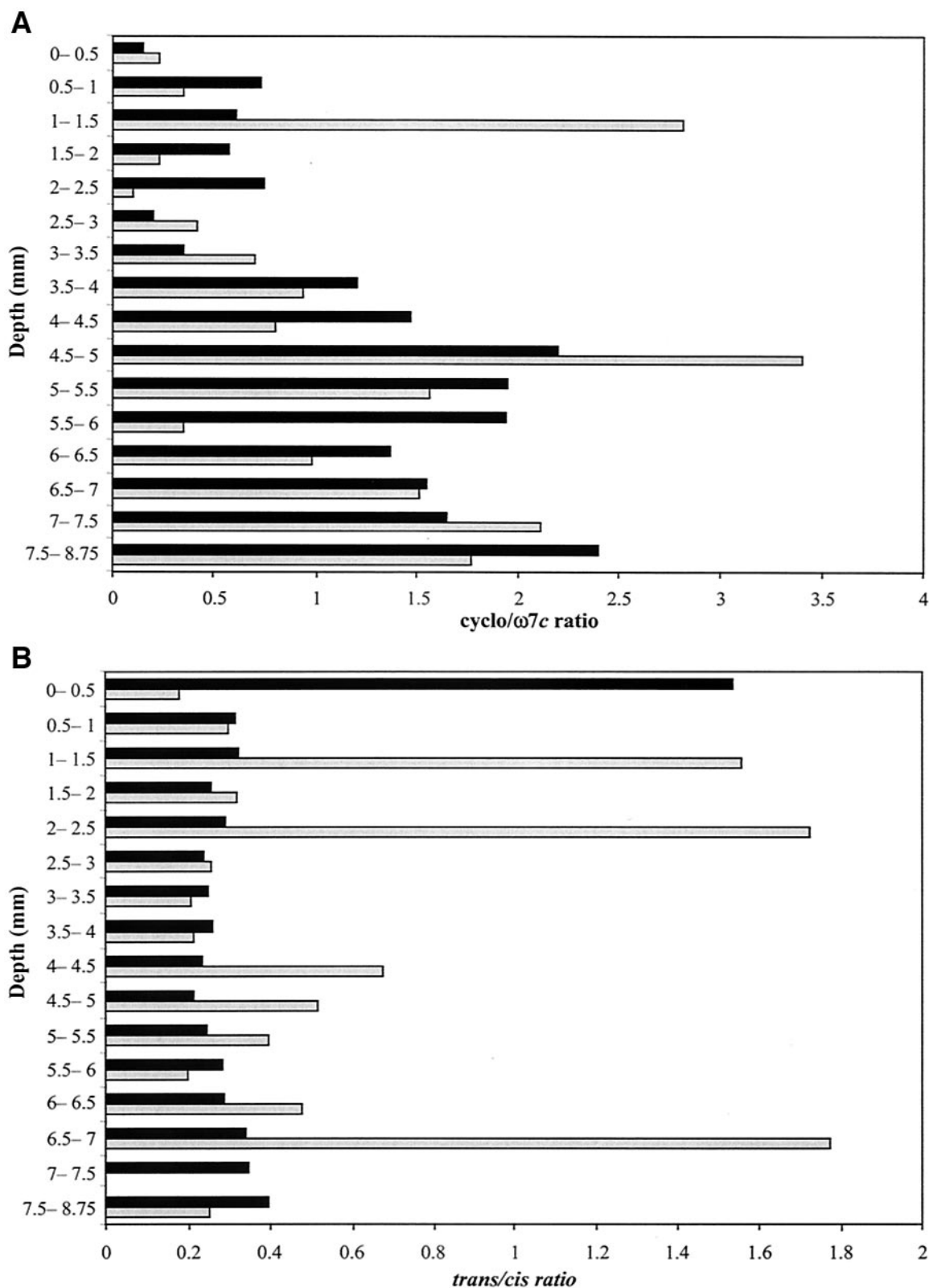


FIG. 2. (A) Metabolic status or starvation index as the ratio of cyclopropyl fatty acids to monoenoic PLFAs (cyclo/ $\omega$ 7c ratio). An increase in the concentration of cyclopropanoic fatty acids represents the shift to conditions that slow down the growth rate. This ratio ranges from 0.05 (exponential phase) to 2.5 or higher (stationary phase) in gram-negative bacteria. (B) Metabolic stress expressed as the *trans/cis* ratio of monoenoic PLFAs. Gram-negative bacterial communities make *trans*-monoenoic fatty acids in response to changes in their environment (exposure to solvent, toxic metals, or starvation). *Trans/cis* ratios greater than 0.1 indicate starvation in bacterial isolates, while ratios of 0.05 or lower are found in nonstressed microbial populations. ■, A samples, collected at 8:00 a.m. GMT; □, B samples, collected at 3:00 p.m. GMT.

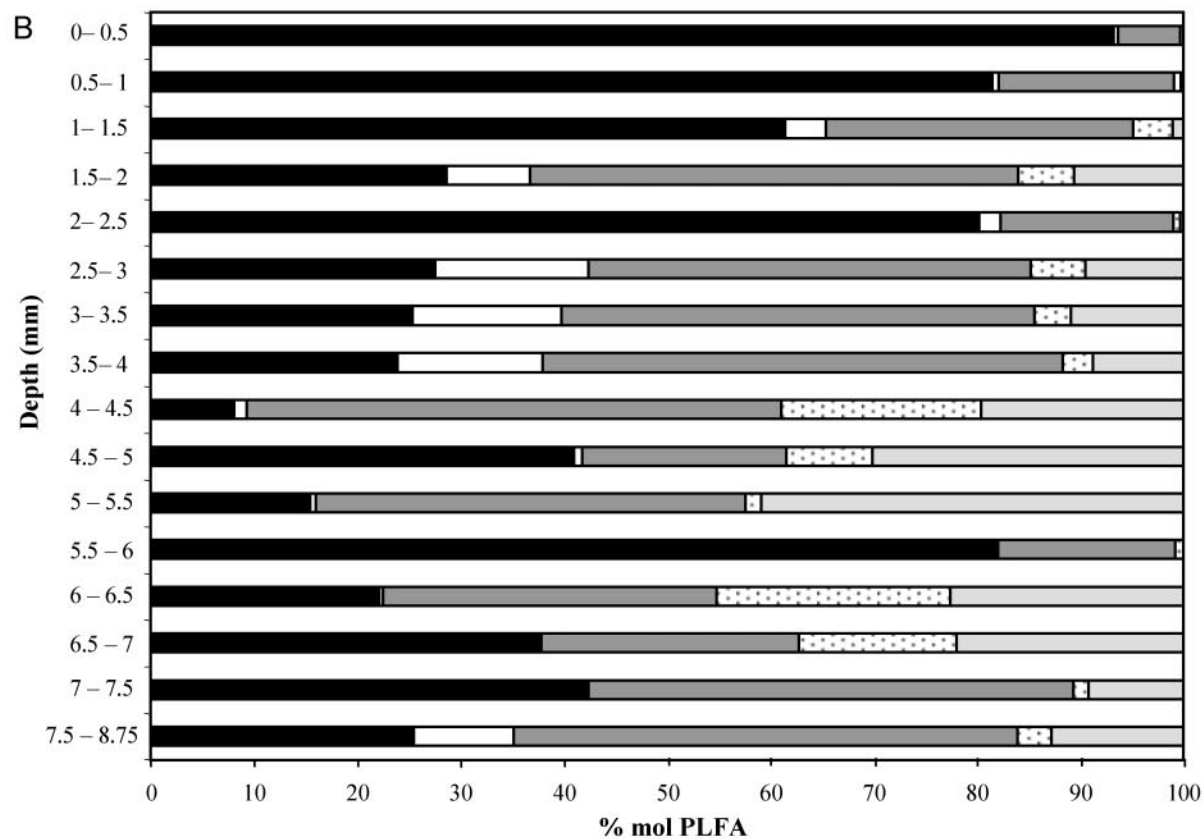
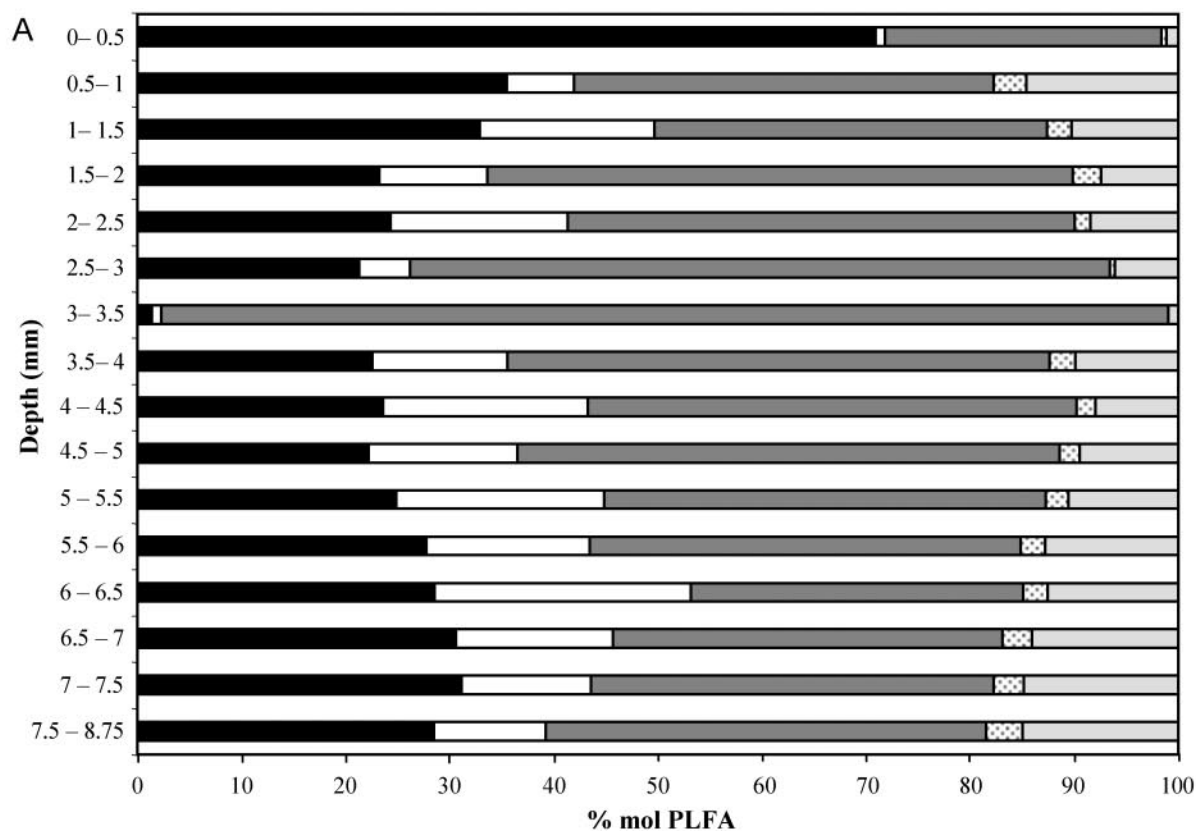


FIG. 3. Community composition expressed as moles percent PLFA. (A) Samples taken at 8:00 a.m. GMT; (B) samples taken at 3:00 p.m. GMT. The presence of certain groups of microorganisms can be inferred by the detection of unique lipids. For example, specific PLFAs are prominent in microbial groups as follows: as normal saturated PLFAs (all genera) (black bars), as terminal branched saturated PLFAs (gram-positive bacteria) (white bars), as monoenoic PLFAs (gram-negative bacteria) (dark-gray bars), as polyenoic PLFAs (microeukaryotes) (dotted bars), and as branched monoenoic and mid-branched saturated PLFAs (anaerobic microorganisms) (light-gray bars).

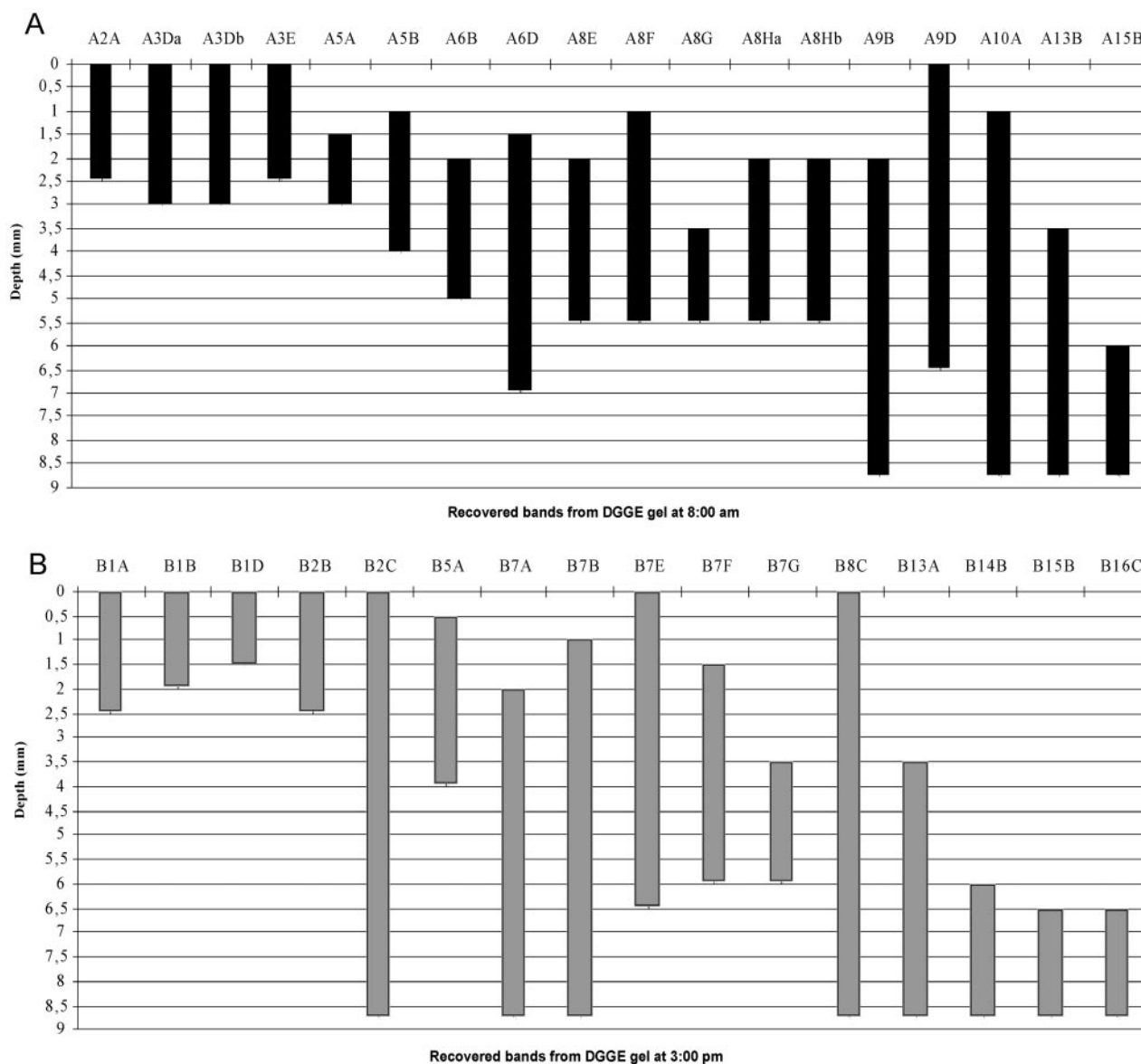


FIG. 4. DGGE analysis of the microbial mat community at two sampling times. Amplified products were separated on a gradient of 30 to 65% denaturant. Labeled bands were excised from the gel, reamplified, and sequenced. Bands that failed to generate legible sequences were cloned. The vertical distribution of DGGE bands recovered from gel A at 8:00 a.m. (A) and from gel B at 3:00 p.m. (B) is shown. For example, band A2<sub>A</sub> was obtained from a sample taken at a depth of 0 to 2.5 mm.

duce the exudation of photosynthates, the cross-feeding of associated heterotrophic bacteria, and the growth of anaerobic microorganisms. Combining phenotypic analyses based on PLFA with DNA analyses provides greater insight into the dynamic shifts in metabolism in microbial mat communities than that obtained from nucleic acid studies alone.

The DGGE and PLFA data strengthen the idea of the model of microbial mats as complex and dynamic ecosystems in which vertical migrations and physiological adaptations oc-

cur over intervals of hours and progress through day-night cycles.

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TABLE 1. Similarity between DNA recovered from DGGE gels and closest relatives

| Band code        | GenBank accession no. | Similarity (%) | Closest relative                                    |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---|
| A2 <sub>A</sub>  | AY525644              | 100            | <i>Psychroflexus tropicus</i>                       |
| A3 <sub>D</sub>  | AY525677              | 95             | Uncultured <i>Spirochaetaceae</i> bacterium         |
|                  | AY525676              | 87             | Uncultured bacterium clone C11-F10                  |
| A3 <sub>E</sub>  | AY525645              | 99             | Gamma-proteobacterium GWS-SE-H242b                  |
| A5 <sub>A</sub>  | AY525647              | 97             | <i>Halanaerobium saccharolyticum</i>                |
| A5 <sub>B</sub>  | AY525648              | 98             | <i>Halanaerobium saccharolyticum</i>                |
| A6 <sub>B</sub>  | AY525646              | 93             | Uncultured bacterium clone s22                      |
| A6 <sub>D</sub>  | AY525654              | 100            | <i>Halanaerobium saccharolyticum</i>                |
| A8 <sub>E</sub>  | AY525658              | 94             | Uncultured green nonsulfur bacterium                |
| A8 <sub>F</sub>  | AY525662              | 89             | <i>Bdellovibrio</i> sp. strain JS7                  |
| A8 <sub>G</sub>  | AY525665              | 95             | Uncultured green nonsulfur bacterium                |
| A8 <sub>H</sub>  | AY525666              | 98             | Uncultured bacterium clone ZB56                     |
|                  | AY525667              | 94             | Uncultured <i>Chloroflexi</i> bacterium clone       |
| A9 <sub>B</sub>  | AY525668              | 93             | Bacteria from anoxic bulk soil                      |
| A9 <sub>D</sub>  | AY525660              | 93             | Bacteria from anoxic bulk soil                      |
| A10 <sub>A</sub> | AY525649              | 100            | <i>Halanaerobium saccharolyticum</i>                |
| A13 <sub>B</sub> | AY525656              | 97             | Uncultured <i>Rhodobacter</i> sp.                   |
| A15 <sub>B</sub> | AY525675              | 92             | <i>Peptoniphilus harei</i>                          |
| B1 <sub>A</sub>  | AY525652              | 99             | <i>Psychroflexus tropicus</i>                       |
| B1 <sub>B</sub>  | AY525651              | 93             | <i>Psychroflexus tropicus</i>                       |
| B1 <sub>D</sub>  | AY525669              | 96             | <i>Psychroflexus tropicus</i>                       |
| B2 <sub>B</sub>  | AY525670              | 97             | Gamma-proteobacterium GWS-SE-H242b                  |
| B2 <sub>C</sub>  | AY525671              | 98             | Uncultured cyanobacterium ( <i>Microcoleus</i> sp.) |
| B5 <sub>A</sub>  | AY525655              | 88             | Uncultured bacterium clone C11-F10                  |
| B7 <sub>A</sub>  | AY525650              | 93             | Uncultured bacterium GR-Sh2-12                      |
| B7 <sub>B</sub>  | AY525674              | 98             | Uncultured <i>Bacteroidetes</i> bacterium clone     |
| B7 <sub>E</sub>  | AY525663              | 91             | Uncultured bacterium clone ZB69                     |
| B7 <sub>F</sub>  | AY525657              | 93             | Bacteria from anoxic bulk soil                      |
| B7 <sub>G</sub>  | AY525664              | 94             | Uncultured bacterium clone s22                      |
| B8 <sub>C</sub>  | AY525661              | 94             | Uncultured delta-proteobacterium clone              |
| B13 <sub>A</sub> | AY525653              | 100            | <i>Halanaerobium saccharolyticum</i>                |
| B14 <sub>B</sub> | AY525659              | 95             | Uncultured gamma-proteobacterium clone              |
| B15 <sub>B</sub> | AY525673              | 95             | Uncultured green nonsulfur bacterium clone          |
| B16 <sub>C</sub> | AY525672              | 91             | Bacteria from anoxic bulk soil                      |

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## PHYSIOLOGICAL STATUS AND MICROBIAL DIVERSITY ASSESSMENT OF MICROBIAL MATS: THE SIGNATURE LIPID BIOMARKER APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

Molecular fingerprinting using signature lipid biomarker (SLB) analysis and nucleic-acid-based techniques provides a quantitative and comprehensive method to assess the viable biomass, community composition and physiological status of microbial communities. Photosynthetic microbial mats are sedimentary structures composed primarily of different populations of bacteria in multilayered communities. Traditionally, microbial ecology studies of microbial mat communities have been incomplete because of the inability to identify and quantify all contributing populations. In fact, classical methods often revealed less than 1% of the microbial diversity. Examination of the lipid components of microbial mat samples allows a sensitive assessment of the *in situ* microbial community that is independent of the isolation and culture of certain microorganisms. Numerous studies based on SLB analysis of microbial mats have established a relationship between physiological activities, daily and seasonal processes and microniches within the mat. Expansion of the SLB approach and concomitant analysis of the nucleic acids derived from the lipid extraction provide a powerful tool for improving our understanding of complex microbial communities such as intertidal microbial mats.

*Key Words:* Lipid analysis, Phospholipid fatty acids, Poly- $\beta$ -hydroxyalkanoates, Ecophysiology, Microbial mats.

### INTRODUCTION

Microbial mats are laminated sedimentary structures composed of a consortium of bacteria dominated by photoautotrophic cyanobacteria, anoxygenic phototrophs (purple and green bacteria), colorless sulfur bacteria, and sulfate-reducing bacteria. The niches for the different groups of microorganisms are steep environmental microgradients of oxygen and

sulfide that are spatially separated or overlapped. Photosynthetic mats represent the remains of one of the first ecosystems that evolved on Earth, about 3.5 billion years ago, which testifies to their capacity in adapting to and modifying hostile environments through cellular and community-mediated activities (Van Gernerden 1993).

The driving force of microbial mats is the photosynthetic activity carried out by cyanobacteria and algae. Consequently, sulfate-reducing bacteria reduce sulfate to sulfide using the end-products of cyanobacterial metabolism, and the sulfide is further reoxidized to sulfate by colorless and anoxygenic phototrophs. The microbial mat community is vertically stratified into four distinct phototrophic populations (Des Marais 1990, Stolz 1990) that can be distinguished according to their pigment and species composition. The uppermost layer consists of *Navicula*, *Rhopalodia* and other diatom species as well as cyanobacteria, such as *Aphanathece* sp., *Phormidium* sp., *Microcoleus chthonoplastes*, *Chroococcidiopsis* sp., *Lyngbya* sp., *Oscillatoria* sp., *Spirulina* sp., and *Gloeocapsa* sp. (Vincent et al. 2004, Urmeneta et al. 2003). Below, the anoxygenic phototrophs predominate. Among anoxygenic phototrophic anaerobes, some genera of purple sulfur bacteria have been isolated in microbial mats, such as *Chromatium* sp., *Thiocapsa* sp., *Thioflaviccoccus* sp., *Thiorhodococcus* sp., *Halorhodospira* sp., *Rhodospirillum*, and *Ectothiorhodospira* sp. (Zaar et al. 2003, Imhoff & Pfenning 2001, Pfenning et al. 1997, Caumette et al. 2004, Hirschler-Rea et al. 2003). Data strongly suggest that the diversity of filamen-

tous green phototrophs (*Chloroflexus* sp., *Oscillochloris* sp.) is abundant in these kind of microbial ecosystems (Klappenbach & Pierson 2004). Furthermore, several groups of microorganisms that do not form stable layers have also been found in microbial mats. These heterotrophic bacteria, consisting of purple non-sulfur bacteria, psychro- or salt-tolerant bacteria, spirochetes, and spirilla, are important for maintenance of the microbial mats, and many genera, such as *Rhodobacter* sp. (Heising et al. 1996), *Rhodoferrax* sp. (Jung et al. 2004), *Roseospira* sp. (Guyoneaud et al. 2002), *Roseospirillum* sp. (Glaeser & Overmann 1999), *Marinobacter* sp., *Halomonas* sp., *Roseobacter* sp. (Jonkers & Abed, 2003), *Psychroflexus* sp., *Pseudoalteromonas* sp. (Teske et al. 2000), *Spirochaeta* spp., *Spirosymplokos deltaeiberi* (Margulis et al. 1993), *Titanospirillum velox* (Guerrero et al. 1999), and *Mobilifilum chasei* (Margulis et al. 1990), have been identified in these environments.

Together with purple sulfur bacteria, colorless sulfur bacteria play a role in maintaining the level of sulfide and avoiding its inhibitory action on cyanobacteria. Among the sulfur bac-

teria, most abundant are the genera *Beggiatoa* (Mills et al. 2004), *Thiomicrospira* (Brinkhoff & Muyzer 1997), *Thiobacillus*, and *Thiovulum* (Thar & Kühl 2002).

Sulfate-reducing bacteria are mainly found at the bottom of the mat where they form a thick black layer. However, an unexpected distribution of this population in the oxic chemocline has been recently observed (Minz et al. 1999). The slightly halophilic sulfate reducers of mats have been allocated to the genera *Desulfovibrio*, *Desulfobacter*, *Desulfococcus*, *Desulfosarcina*, and *Desulfonema*. Likewise, other anaerobic microorganisms have been isolated in microbial mats, such as psychrophilic clostridia and members of the Halanaerobiaceae family (Spring et al. 2003, Ollivier et al. 1994).

The study of microbial mats, including their community composition, metabolic relationships and physiological status, can expand our knowledge of these first microbial ecosystems to have evolved on Earth. Likewise, their ecological success and their broad array of metabolic activities suggest that microbial mat ecosystems will have useful applications in the

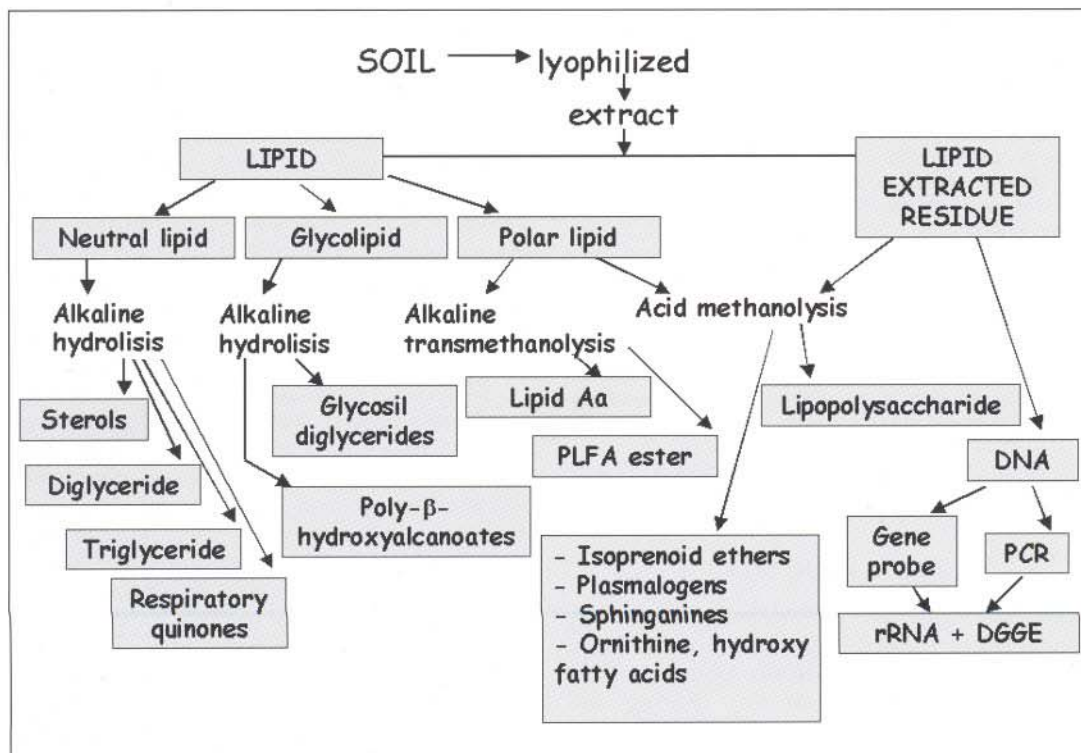


FIG. 1. Signature lipid biomarker/ environmental nucleic-acid probe analysis showing each of the lipid fractions that can be identified and quantified.

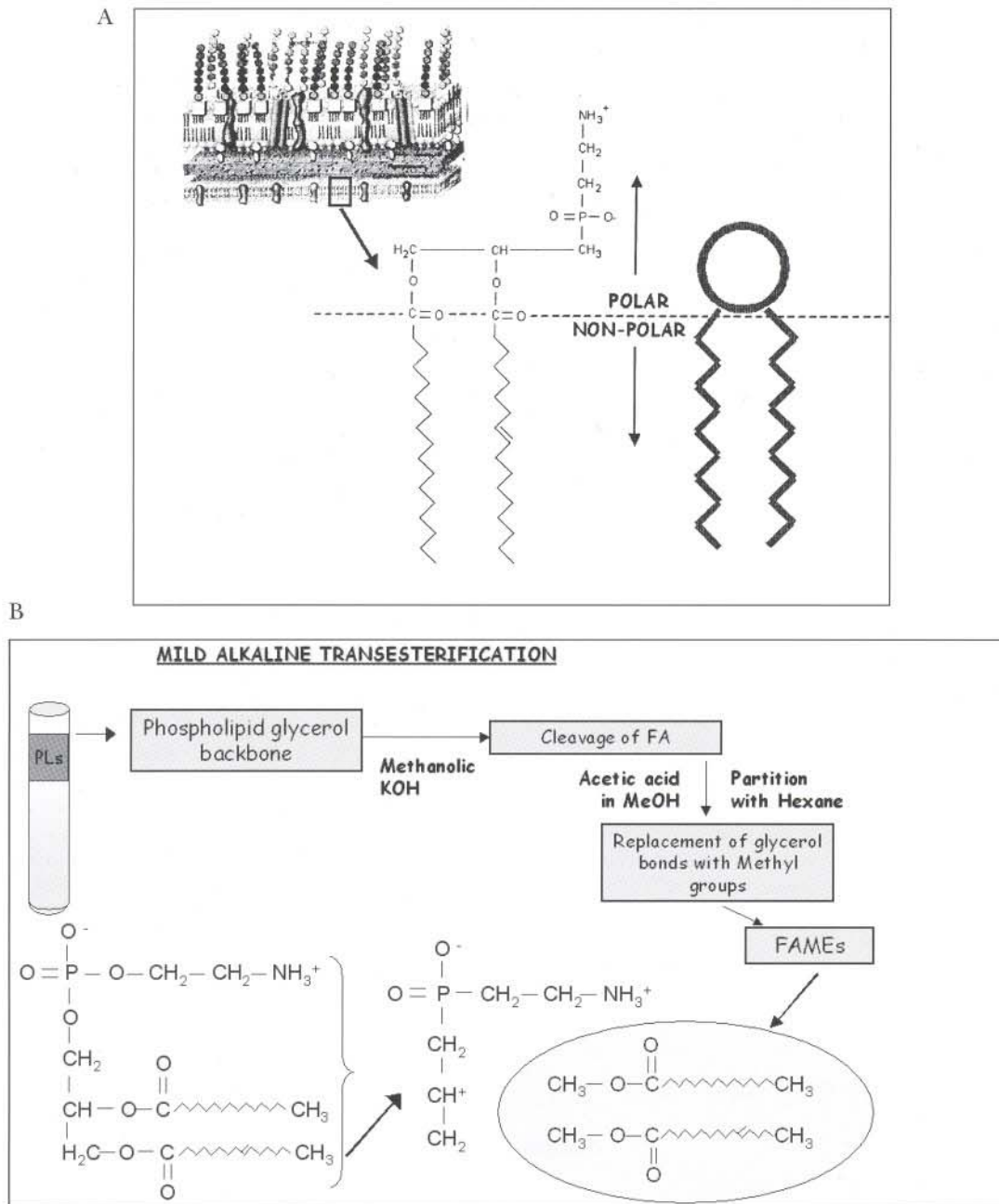


Fig. 2. (A) Lipid bilayer and structure of phospholipids: Phosphate head group, glycerol backbone, and phospholipid fatty acids (PLFA) linked to C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>2</sub> (modified from Madigan et al., p. 74, Brook Biology of Microorganisms, 9<sup>th</sup> edition).

(B) Mild alkaline transesterification of the polar lipid fraction to obtain fatty acid methyl esters (FAMES), which can be identified and quantified by gas chromatography (GC).

bioremediation of polluted sites as well as in the bioregeneration of useful products (Bender & Phillips 2004). Photosynthetic microbial

matS contain ecophysiological strategies to support life under a broad range of environmental conditions (Paerl et al. 2000) and can be used

to characterize the requirements for microbial life on Earth and, potentially, on other planets.

*Signature Lipid Biomarker Analysis and Molecular Fingerprinting in Microbial Mats*

Microbial lipid analysis is a relatively sensitive, quantitative method to detect most of the microorganisms present in a particular environment. The method is based on the liquid extraction and separation of microbial lipids from environmental samples, followed by quantitative analysis using gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS). Several unique classes of lipids, including sterols, diglycerides (DG), respiratory quinones (RQ), poly- $\beta$ -hydroxyalkanoates (PHA), phospholipid fatty acids (PLFA), lipo-amino acids, plasmalogens, acyl ethers, sphingolipids and lipopolysaccharide hydroxy fatty acids (LPS-OHFA), can be used as signature lipid biomarkers (SLB) in order to characterize microbial populations (White et al. 1998). Using this methodology, microbial population changes due to physical or chemical environmental perturbations can be followed over time. A scheme proposed for SLB/environmental nucleic-acid probe analysis is diagrammed in Fig. 1.

*1. Polar lipid fraction: Phospholipid fatty acid*

Phospholipids fatty acids (PLFA) (Fig. 2A, 2B) are essential membrane components of living cells and thus one of the most important classes of SLB. The extraction, identification, and quantification of PLFA can therefore provide

valuable information about the microbial communities present in natural ecosystems, such as microbial abundance, community structure, and nutritional status (White & Ringelberg 1997).

**Viable Microbial Biomass.** Total PLFA is a quantitative measure of the viable or potentially viable biomass. Viable microorganisms have an intact membrane that contains PLFAs, whereas cellular phospholipases hydrolyze and release the phosphate group within minutes to hours following cell death (White et al. 1979). Since the resulting diglyceride contains the same signature fatty acids as the original phospholipid, at least for a short time thereafter, comparison of the ratio of phospholipid fatty acid to diglyceride fatty acid profiles provides a measure of the viable to nonviable microbial abundance (Fig. 3).

The SLB approach was applied for the first time in a study of estuarine microbial mats by Navarrete et al. (2000). Samples from microbial mats in the Ebro Delta (Spain) were taken in spring over a day-night cycle every six hours. The results reflected the daily variations of viable microbial biomass in mat samples. The same approach was later applied in a study of several estuarine microbial mats in order to identify the physicochemical variables relevant for the establishment and maintenance of those microbial ecosystems (Navarrete et al. this issue). Samples were obtained from uncontaminated and contaminated locations during different seasons. The viable biomass distribution along the vertical profile of the mat sam-

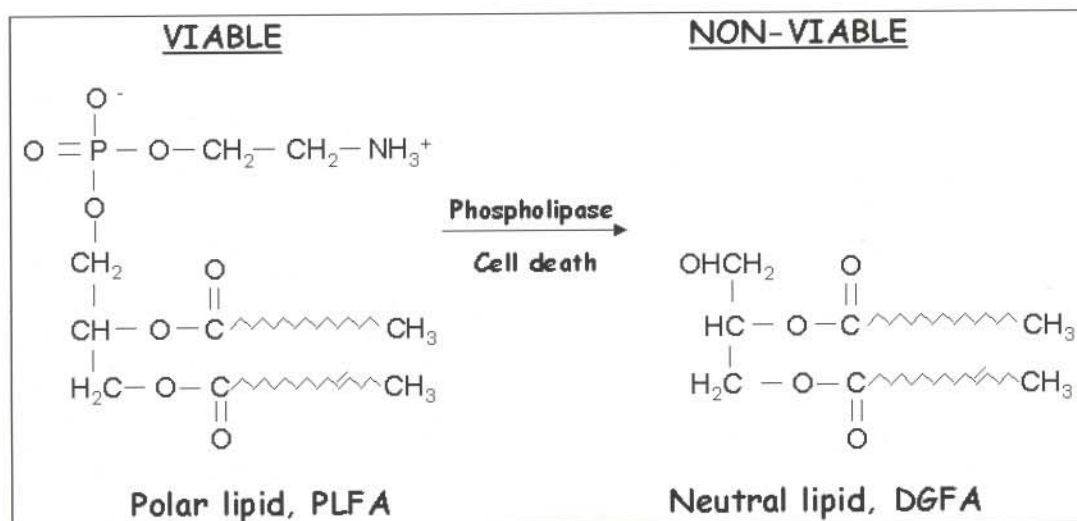


FIG. 3. Conversion of phospholipid fatty acid (PLFA) to diglyceride fatty acid after cell death.

ples was also investigated in that work and showed differences between seasons. Indeed, the effectiveness of the SLB method in analyzing microbial mat layers along the vertical profile has led to recent studies in which estuarine microbial mats were sampled at both different times and different depths (Villanueva et al., 2004).

**Physiological status.** Insights into the nutritional and physiological status of the microbial community can also be determined through SLB analysis, since PLFA are products of biosynthetic pathways and thus reflect phenotypic responses of microorganisms to environmental conditions.

Many components of the microbial community respond to specific conditions in their microenvironment with shifts in lipid composition. In fact, conversion of the monoenoic PLFA 16:1 $\omega$ 7c and 18:1 $\omega$ 7c to the cyclopropyl fatty acids cy17:0 and cy19:0, respectively, increases in gram-negative bacteria as the microorganisms shift from exponential to stationary growth (starvation index *cyclo*/ $\omega$ 7c). This ratio varies from organism to organism and environment to environment, but usually falls within the range of 0.05 (exponential

phase) to 2.5 or even higher (stationary phase) (Mickell et al. 1987).

In addition, starvation can lead to minicell formation and a relative increase in specific *trans* monoenoic PLFA compared to the *cis* isomers. Increases in the ratios of *trans*/*cis* monoenoic PLFAs in cells are indicative of metabolic stress (Guckert et al. 1986), and *trans*/*cis* ratios higher than 0.1 have been shown to indicate starvation in bacterial isolates (Heipieper et al. 1992). This value is usually 0.05 or less in healthy non-stressed communities (Fig. 4).

With respect to the physiological assessment of mats using SLB, Navarrete et al. (2000) reported a similar tendency in the daily variation of both the starvation index and metabolic stress, and observed that an increase of the latter is coupled with a shift to slow-growth conditions. Likewise, in the study applying SLB to compare changes in several microbial mats during different seasons (Navarrete et al. this issue), a correlation between a higher slow-growth rate and better development of the mat was noted. Finally, data from the study in which estuarine microbial mat were sampled at several different times and depths showed fluctuations in the starvation and metabolic stress

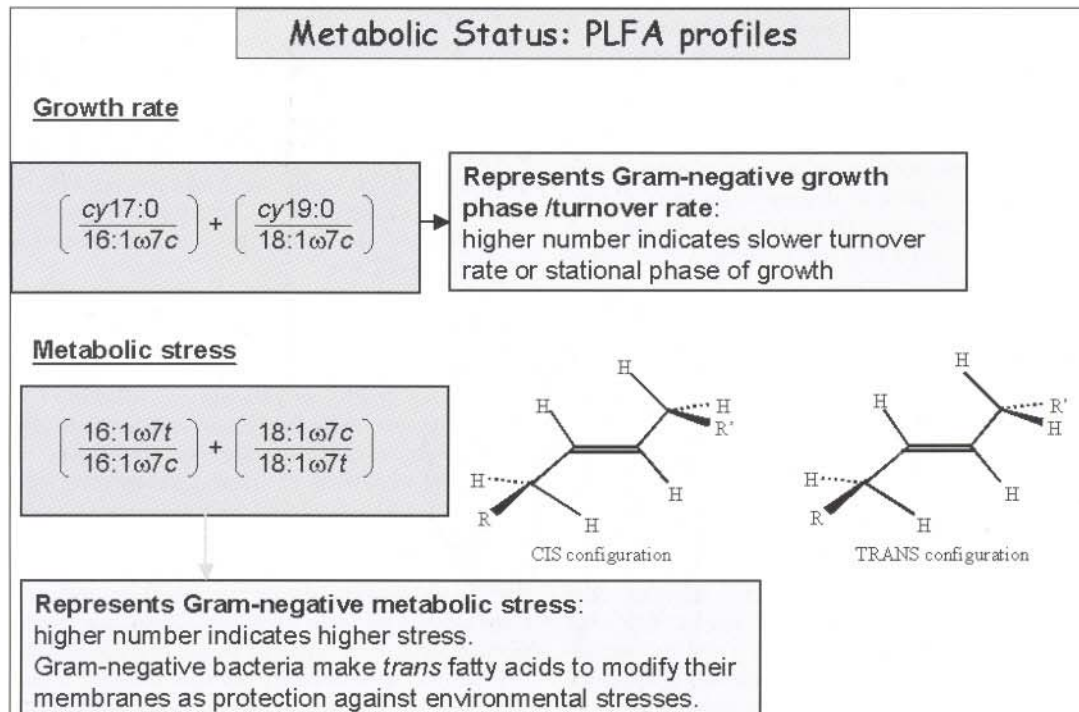


FIG. 4. Phospholipid fatty acids (PLFA) ratios reflect phenotypic responses of microorganisms to environmental conditions: *cyclo*/ $\omega$ 7c and *trans*/*cis* ratio.

indexes during the day and along different depths.

**Community composition.** Because different groups of microorganisms synthesize a variety of PLFA through various biochemical pathways, PLFA are effective taxonomic markers. Furthermore, the induction of microbial community compositional shifts by alterations in the microenvironment also results in characteristic changes in SLB that are dominant in certain groups of microorganisms. However, despite its versatility, PLFA analysis of the community structure of gram-negative bacteria is limited since they have overlapping PLFA patterns dominated by monoenoic saturated and cyclopropanoic fatty acids (Wilkinson et al. 1988). Thus, while quantitative comparisons of total community PLFA patterns accurately show shifts in community composition, they may not allow the identification of species of microorganisms in an environmental sample or provide a definitive analysis of shifts in specific microbial groups. To overcome this problem, a complementary nucleic-acid-based analysis can be applied (see below).

Data concerning community composition was obtained by Navarrete and coworkers (Navarrete et al. 2000), who monitored specific PLFA in microbial mats samples during a daily cycle (2000). These authors showed a microbial community composed mainly of gram-negative bacteria and relevant variations in the microbial composition of the community between day and night. Moreover, based on the PLFA composition of microbial mats at several locations and at different seasons a coupling effect between the increased presence of particular groups and the sampling season was demonstrated.

A recent study of microbial mats in the Camargue (France) involving several sampling times and different depths combined SLB data with results of denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (DGGE) in order to obtain a more complete picture of community composition as well as the distribution of microorganisms over time and along the vertical axis. Analyses of community structure according to both DGGE and PLFA profiles suggested a predominance of certain groups at specific depths that changed between day and night. Indeed, DGGE analysis revealed the relative importance of green non-sulfur bacteria, gram-positive, aerobic heterotrophic bacteria, members of the phylum Bacteroides, and uncultured spirochetes.

### 2. *Glycolipid fraction: Poly- $\beta$ -hydroxyalkanoates*

Some bacteria undergo unbalanced growth and cannot divide when provided with sufficient carbon and terminal electron acceptors but insufficient essential nutrients (e.g. phosphate, nitrate, trace elements). In response, these bacteria form intracellular lipid storage compounds called poly- $\beta$ -hydroxyalkanoates (PHAs). When the essential component that was lacking becomes available, the bacteria catabolize PHA, subsequently forming PLFA as they grow and divide. Cells that can accumulate large quantities of PHA are viable for longer periods of time than low-PHA-accumulating cells.

The level of PHA in a community can change rapidly due to variations in nutritional status (Elhottová et al. 1997); thus, the ratio of PHA concentration to the total concentration of microbial biomass is an important marker of the growth and nutritional status of microbial communities (Tunlid & White 1992). PHA/PLFA ratios can range from 0 (dividing cells) to over 40 (carbon storage). Ratios higher than 0.2 usually indicate the beginnings of unbalanced growth in at least part of the microbial community (White et al. 1995).

Results from the study of a circadian cycle in Ebro Delta microbial mats (Navarrete et al. 2000) supported the view of a correlation between slower growth and a maximum in the glycolipids/PLFA ratio. They also reinforced the hypothesis that an excess of carbon assimilates, produced by photosynthetic processes, accumulates in cells as biopolymers, since under the conditions of "unbalanced growth" observed in the mats the resident bacteria accumulated PHA.

### 3. *Neutral lipid fraction: Isoprenoid quinones*

Isoprenoid quinones act as electron carriers in respiratory chains and in photosynthetic electron-transport systems. Early studies on the occurrence of quinones showed that inherent structural variations of these lipid-soluble substances can be correlated with taxonomic criteria (Hiraishi 1999). Accordingly, a biomarker approach, quinone profiling, was developed for the determination of microbial community structures. Quinone profiling allows the detection of structural types of respiratory and photosynthetic quinones in microbial cells. It has been useful not only in microbial chemotaxonomy (Collins & Jones 1981) but also in estimating community structures (Hiraishi et al. 1998)

and microbial redox states (Hedrick & White 1986).

Hedrick and White (1986) first demonstrated the value of quinone analysis in ecological studies in which menaquinone/ubiquinone ratios were used to evaluate the redox state of microbial communities. Almost all aerobic gram-negative bacteria examined thus far have ubiquinones (UQs), whereas in anaerobic gram-negative bacteria that have quinones menaquinones (MKs) predominate, and some facultative gram-negative bacteria have DMKs (desmethylmenaquinones) as well as UQs and/or MKs (Collins & Jones 1981). Thus, changes in quinones reflect changes in the availability of oxygen in the environment.

#### 4. Combined nucleic acid and SLB analysis

It has recently been shown that solvent extraction in SLB analysis liberates cellular nucleic acids that can be used for gene amplification. The DNA recovered from the lipid extraction is of high quality and suitable for enzymatic amplification (Macnaughton & Stefen 2001). As a result, new techniques based on combining lipid analysis and PCR of rDNA, with subsequent separation of the amplicons by DGGE, can be applied in order to obtain a complete picture of the activities, dynamics and diversity of a microbial community (Stefen et al. 1999, Villanueva et al., 2004). Since SLB analysis involves detection by mass spectrometry, rates of incorporation of non-radioactive  $^{13}\text{C}$  and  $^{15}\text{N}$  mass-labeled precursors into signature biomarkers can be used to gain further insight into specific metabolic activities (Fang et al. 2004). Moreover, the application of other techniques, e.g. Real-time PCR, analysis of the expression of certain genes, and microarrays, would provide an even better understanding of complex ecosystems such as those of microbial mats.

#### 5. Conclusions

Measurement of SLB is one of the most useful culture-independent techniques to study microbial communities. It offers a quantitative approach to assessing the effects of environmental disturbances and internal ecophysiological dynamics in microbial mats. Since the method is based on the response of microniche environments, it could also be useful in predicting long-term responses or potential responses in bioremediation processes.

Although chemical biomarker and molecular methods are innovative approaches with

respect to their applications in microbial ecology and environmental microbiology, they still have limitations, especially regarding taxonomic characterization. To compensate for these limitations, a polyphasic approach is required. The combined use of molecular biology techniques and SLB analysis in the study of natural microbial communities, e.g. microbial mats, provides more accurate data and increases our knowledge about the population dynamics and community structure of these ecosystems.

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# ANÁLISIS COMBINADO DE BIOMARCADORES LIPÍDICOS SEÑAL Y 16S rDNA-DGGE PARA EL ESTUDIO DE LA BIODIVERSIDAD Y EL ESTADO FISIOLÓGICO DE TAPETES MICROBIANOS



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## INTRODUCCIÓN

Los tapetes microbianos son comunidades procarionticas compuestas de poblaciones microbianas que forman capas horizontales de crecimiento activo. Se han realizado estudios sobre tapetes microbianos de diferentes localizaciones pero aun se desconocen aspectos de su biodiversidad y dinamica fisiologica. Por otra parte, estudios preliminares han destacado el papel significativo que pueden tomar en el biomedio de zonas costeras contaminadas por hidrocarburos (Al-Hasan et al., 1998).

La extraccion, identificacion y cuantificacion de los acidos grasos de los fosfolipidos (PLFA) puede proporcionar informacion sobre la biomasa microbiana viable (ya que todas las celulas contienen fosfolipidos que se degradan tras la muerte celular), el estado fisiologico (cambios en la composicion lipidica debidos a variacion del microambiente, p.ej. un aumento en la concentracion de ac. grasos ciclopropanicos es indicativo de una tasa de intercambio inferior o crecimiento no balanceado en bacterias Gram negativas, y un aumento de ac. grasos trans respecto a sus homologos cis es indicativo de un estres toxico) (Heipieper et al., 1992), y de la comunidad microbiana presente en ecosistemas naturales (Navarrete et al., 2000).

A pesar de la importancia del analisis lipidico, son necesarios metodos basados en acidos nucleicos para realizar un estudio taxonomico mas exacto. La combinacion del analisis lipidico con una amplificacion por PCR del 16S rDNA seguida de un analisis DGGE (denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis) (Muyzer et al., 1993), permite enumerar, establecer el estado fisiologico e identificar los componentes microbianos mayoritarios de la comunidad de estudio.

El objetivo de este estudio era incrementar el conocimiento del estado fisiologico y caracterizar la comunidad microbiana de los tapetes microbianos de la Camarga (delta del Rhone, Francia) mediante la combinacion de ambos analisis, y establecer variaciones diarias en este ecosistema.

## MATERIAL Y MÉTODOS

Se recogieron muestras de la parte superior del tapete microbiano en dos momentos del dia (8:00 am y 3:00 pm GMT, Abril 2002) y posteriormente se cortaron mediante cromatografia en capas de 500 µm de espesor. Se levó a cabo la extraccion de lipidos totales de las muestras (White et al., 1979) y se conservó la fase acuosa resultante de la extraccion para efectuar analisis moleculares posteriores. Los lipidos totales se fraccionaron mediante cromatografia en columna y se obtuvieron los lipidos polares, con contenido en fosfolipidos, existentes en el extracto total. Los lipidos polares se transestificaron, mediante una metanolisis alcalina, a acidos grasos metil esteres (FAME) que se identificaron y cuantificaron por cromatografia de gases/espectrometria de masas (GC/MS). El analisis de PCR-DGGE se realizo con el DNA contenido en la fase acuosa (Fig. 1). Las bandas mayoritarias obtenidas se secuenciaron y se observó un posicionamiento especifico de ciertas bandas en los puntos horarios del estudio así como una migracion vertical. El patron de bandas se analizó digitalmente y se cuantificó la importancia relativa de cada banda a fin de realizar analisis estadisticos basados en los datos del indice de diversidad de Shannon-Weaver (Shannon et al., 1963).

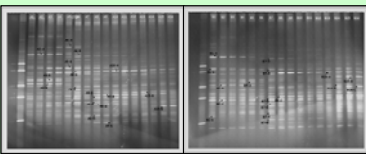


Fig. 1. Geles DGGE de las muestras recogidas a las 8:00 am (muestras A) y a las 3:00 pm (muestras B), nombradas del 1 al 16 en función del aumento de profundidad (500 µm de espesor cada una, a excepción de las muestras 16 de 1,25 mm). Profundidad total: 8,75 mm

## RESULTADOS y DISCUSIÓN

### Biomasa microbiana viable en términos de PLFA totales

El máximo de biomasa viable en términos de PLFA totales a las 8:00 am (Fig. 2) (rango del perfil de 1·10 a 7·10<sup>6</sup> pmols PLFA/g peso seco), se observó en la superficie del tapete, mientras que a las 3:00 pm, el máximo se encontró en capas subsuperficiales (rango del perfil de 2·10<sup>6</sup> a 1·10<sup>7</sup> pmols PLFA/g peso seco). Se detectaron ciertas diferencias según la profundidad y en ambas horas de muestreo, especialmente a las 3:00 pm ya que el máximo de células viables estaba concentrado en la zona de 2 a 4 mm en comparación con el resto de muestras.

Los tapetes microbianos de la Camarga, en este caso, muestran un mínimo de biomasa viable en el fondo del tapete sobretodo en las muestras recogidas a las 3:00 pm.

A las 8:00 am, el máximo de biomasa viable estaría formado por cianobacterias que se disponían en la superficie del tapete para evitar la exposición tóxica al sulfhídrico (producido por bacterias sulfato-reductoras y acumulado en el tapete durante la noche) y por bacterias rojas del azufre que usarían la luz a primeras horas del día para realizar la fotosíntesis. El máximo de biomasa viable observada a las 3:00 pm en capas subsuperficiales puede ser debido a lisis celular en la superficie por la elevada irradiación solar o por migraciones verticales.

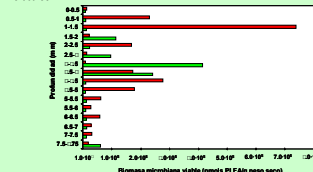


Fig. 2. Biomasa microbiana viable cuantificada como PLFAs totales. ■ Muestras A, 8:00 am; □ Muestras B, 3:00 pm.

### Estado fisiológico de los tapetes microbianos

El análisis de los PLFA indicativos del estado fisiológico estableció un máximo de crecimiento no balanceado (Fig. 3) (relación de PLFA cyclo/w7c alta) en las capas más profundas sobretodo a las 8:00 am, donde el crecimiento no balanceado aumentó con la profundidad y los valores más altos se localizaron entre 0-8 mm y en las muestras más profundas (máximo 2,5). Por otra parte, a las 3:00 pm los perfiles verticales mostraron un aumento del crecimiento no balanceado en la superficie y en las capas medias (1,5 mm y 5,5 mm) con un valor máximo cyclo/w7c de 3,5. El máximo crecimiento no balanceado localizado en las capas profundas, puede ser debido a la actividad de bacterias sulfato-reductoras, especialmente a las 8:00 am, ya que durante la noche las condiciones anóxicas potencian el desarrollo de esta población (que consume materia orgánica y produce sulfhídrico). Probablemente la razón del crecimiento no balanceado de los sulfato-reductoras, sea la limitación de carbono orgánico (relación C/N baja) agotado durante la noche. En cambio, el aumento de crecimiento no balanceado a las 3:00 pm puede ser implicado por procesos fotosintéticos y de fijación de carbono llevados a cabo por cianobacterias y bacterias rojas del azufre, ya que aumentaría la presencia de compuestos orgánicos pero una limitación de nitrógeno (relación C/N alta).

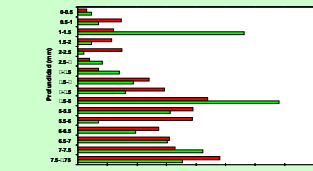


Fig. 3. Estado metabólico expresado como la relación de ácidos grasos ciclopropanicos/monoenicos y ácidos grasos trans/cis. ■ Muestras A, 8:00 am; □ Muestras B, 3:00 pm.

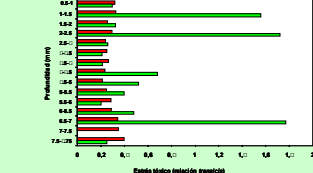


Fig. 3. Estado metabólico expresado como la relación de ácidos grasos ciclopropanicos/monoenicos y ácidos grasos trans/cis. ■ Muestras A, 8:00 am; □ Muestras B, 3:00 pm.

El nivel más elevado de estrés metabólico (Fig. 3) se observó en la superficie del tapete a las 8:00 am (relación de PLFA trans/cis aprox. 1.5) mientras que a las 3:00 pm el nivel máximo se localizó en las capas medias con dos valores destacables en las profundidades 1-1,5 mm y 2-2,5 mm, y en las zonas más profundas del tapete (6-7,5 mm). En este caso, una explicación plausible para el alto nivel de estrés tóxico en la superficie a las 8:00 am, podría ser la exposición al sulfhídrico (acumulado durante la noche por la actividad de sulfato-reductoras) al cual se encontrarían sometidas las cianobacterias.

### PCR 16S rDNA y análisis DGGE

Los resultados obtenidos tras la secuenciación y clonaje de las bandas seleccionadas se resumen en la Tabla 1 y 2. Las diferencias entre los gels A y B muestran la heterogeneidad de las poblaciones microbianas y migraciones verticales, acopladas con los gradientes fisicoquímicos desarrollados en los tapetes durante un ciclo día-noche. Se puede destacar la importancia relativa de las siguientes especies en el mantenimiento de las relaciones tróficas aunque son necesarios estudios de aislamiento y caracterización fisiológica.

Tablas 1 y 2. Porcentaje de similitud, homólogos más cercanos y afiliaciones filogenéticas del DNA recuperado de las bandas recortadas en el gel A y B (8:00 am y 3:00 pm).

| Bandas | % Similitud | Homólogo                              | NP Accesor | Profundidad relativa |
|--------|-------------|---------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|
| A2     | 100         | Phaeobryon sp. L-11                   | AJ23243    | 6-12 mm              |
| A4     | 95          | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | AF01953    | 6-3 mm               |
| A7     | 97          | Sphaerobacterium-like sp.             | Z99912     |                      |
| A8     | 98          | Alphaproteobacteria L-20              | AF13944    | 6-1,5 mm             |
| A9     | 97          | Alphaproteobacter sp. KT-23-3         | AF06101    | 1,5-3 mm             |
| A10    | 98          | Alphaproteobacter sp. KT-23-3         | AF06101    | 1-4 mm               |
| A11    | 95          | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | AF01977    | 2-5 mm               |
| A12    | 100         | Alphaproteobacteria                   | Z99909     | 1,5-7 mm             |
| A13    | 95          | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | AF01953    | 2-5,5 mm             |
| A14    | 99          | Alphaproteobacter sp. 37              | AF06102    | 1-1,5 mm             |
| A15    | 95          | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | AF01977    | 3,5-5,5 mm           |
| A16    | 100         | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | Z99909     | 3-5,5 mm             |
| A17    | 94          | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | AF13944    |                      |
| A18    | 95          | Bacteria de modo oxidante (grupo CTB) | AJ23247    | 3-4,5 mm             |
| A19    | 95          | Bacteria de modo oxidante (grupo CTB) | AJ23246    | 6-4,5 mm             |
| A20    | 100         | Alphaproteobacteria                   | Z99909     | 1-3,5 mm             |
| A21    | 97          | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | AF13953    | 1,5-4,5 mm           |
| A22    | 92          | Chlorococcoides, Rhodospirillum       | Z99911     | 6-7,5 mm             |

### Análisis de diversidad-gel DGGE

A las 8:00 am (rango entre 0,55 y 0,75), el índice de diversidad de Shannon (Fig. 5) permanece estable a excepción de la muestra entre 3-3,5 mm. El parámetro H' a las 3:00 pm, oscila de 0,15 a 0,65 y muestra fluctuaciones verticales. Es posible que las condiciones anaeróbicas en el tapete a primera hora de la mañana induzcan el posicionamiento de las poblaciones microbianas. Esto puede explicar la homogeneidad del índice de Shannon a las 8:00 am. En cambio, a las 3:00 pm las oscilaciones pueden deberse a una estratificación y los gradientes fisicoquímicos. El aumento de H' en las capas medias del tapete (entre 2,5 - 4 mm) puede coincidir con la zona de interfase (quimoclina).

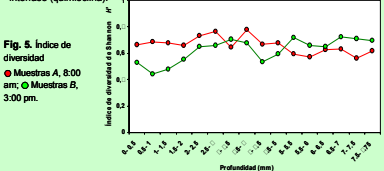


Fig. 5. Índice de diversidad de Shannon. ■ Muestras A, 8:00 am; □ Muestras B, 3:00 pm.

El principal objetivo de este estudio era conocer mejor la dinámica de los tapetes microbianos combinando diferentes métodos, y de esta manera determinar el estado fisiológico, la biomasa microbiana viable y la estructura de la comunidad microbiana de este ecosistema natural. Observando los resultados de los análisis conjuntos de PLFA y de PCR-DGGE, es evidente que mientras que cada uno de los métodos proporciona información única sobre comunidades microbianas, son métodos complementarios. Los datos obtenidos sugieren que la biodiversidad microbiana en los tapetes microbianos es mayor de lo que previamente se había observado basándose en técnicas microscópicas. Además, cabe destacar que las condiciones ambientales no actúan al azar y modelan, a su vez, la estructura de las mencionadas comunidades microbianas.

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# Daily Variations of Bacterial Diversity and Physiological Status in an Estuarine Microbial Mat

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## ABSTRACT

Microbial mats are prokaryotic communities used as model systems to study microbial metabolism and ecophysiological strategies for survival under certain environmental conditions. Here, we report a combined lipid biomarker and 16S rDNA PCR-denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (DGGE) analysis to determine the response of microorganisms to physicochemical variables that are influenced by time and vertical stratification. Data concerning total phospholipid fatty acid (PLFA) have revealed an increase of viable biomass in layers of high density of phototrophs in the morning. This observation, as well as the contribution of aerobic heterotrophic bacteria assessed by DGGE profiles, supported a close coupling of the activity of phototrophs and heterotrophs. Growth rates increased in the deep layers in the early morning and at the uppermost layers after midday, which corresponded to active physiological processes inhibited if essential nutrients are not available. In addition, a higher degree of metabolic stress was detected in the photo zone, which can be due to a toxic effect of sulfide on photosynthetic microorganisms. DGGE analysis revealed the importance of members of green sulfur bacteria, gram-positive and aerobic heterotrophic bacteria groups that are more fringing in estuarine microbial mats. Analyses of the community structure suggested an increase of anaerobic microorganisms at deep layers in the afternoon, however a homogeneous distribution was reported in the morning. The daily ecological succession in the microbial mats studied showed a correlation with variables such as time and depth, and shifted in response to photobiological adaptations and metabolic status of the microbial community.

## MATERIAL and METHODS

The hypersaline microbial mats studied are located at the bottom of a pre-concentration pond (41° 11' E, 1° 57' E; 1° 10' N, 1° 17' 0' N) in the Salin de Grand saut salt works in the Camargue (Rhône delta, southern France). Sediment samples were taken in April 2002 at two selected times during the day (8:00 am GMT named A samples and 3:00 pm GMT named B samples). Each sample was cut by microscopy into layers 50 µm thick, and ten cuts were grouped to form each sample group (from sample group 1 to 15; group 10 contained 25 slices 50 µm thick). Samples were extracted with the single-phase chloroform:methanol:butanol system of Bligh and Dyer, as modified by White et al., 1998 (Fig. 2). The total lipid extract was fractionated by silicic acid chromatography and the polar lipid fraction was transferred to fatty acid methyl esters (FAMEs). Nucleic acid was precipitated from the PLFA aqueous phase of the total lipid extraction. PCR amplification of 16S rRNA gene and denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (DGGE) were carried out as described by Muyzer et al., 1993. Excised DGGE bands served as templates in PCR reactions as noted above, and the purified PCR products were sequenced. Amplification products that failed to diversify generate legible sequences were done into the pGEM-T19 easy system II (Promega, USA) cloning vector according to the manufacturer's instructions.

## RESULTS

Maximum viable biomass as measured by total PLFAs (Fig. 3A) accumulated at the top of the mat early in the day; however, in the afternoon, the highest levels of biomass were found underlying the uppermost layers. An increase in the concentration of cytoplasmic fatty acids represents the shift to conditions that slow down growth rates. In addition, gram-negative communities make trans-monoenoic fatty acids in response to changes in their environment. In the morning hours, the reduction in the growth rate (high cyclo<sup>18:2</sup> ratio) increased with depth (Fig. 3B), whereas in the afternoon the slowest growth was detected at the top and in the middle of the mat. Data concerning metabolic stress (Fig. 3C) indicated maximum stress at the topmost layers in the morning; however, the ratio of aerobic monoenoic PLFA increased at the bottom of the mat in the afternoon.

In the morning (Fig. 3A), the microbial community consisted mainly of gram-negative bacteria, as indicated by the presence of monoenoic PLFA. Terminal branched saturated fatty acids (characteristic for gram-positive bacteria) comprised a high proportion of the total PLFA in the middle layers of the mat and from samples at the deepest layers (maximum 2:1). Branched monoenoic and mid-chain branched saturated fatty acids, representative of anaerobic microorganisms, were constant along the vertical profile. In the afternoon (Fig. 3B), the proportion of anaerobic microorganisms was higher and increased with depth. The prominent DGGE bands were sequenced and their corresponding vertical positions and phylogenetic affiliations are shown in Figure 5-4 and Table 1.

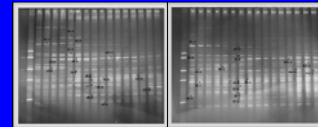


Figure 4. DGGE substructural community profiles of microbial mat samples taken at 10:00 am GMT (A) and at 3:00 pm GMT (B). Excised bands correspond to 16S rDNA sequence types described in Table 1.

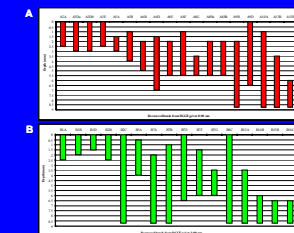


Figure 5. Vertical distribution of DGGE bands recovered from mat A at 10:00 am (A) and from mat B at 3:00 pm (B) shown. For example, band A1, was obtained from a sample taken at a depth of 0 to 2.5 cm.

## DISCUSSION

The maximum of viable biomass (Fig. 3A) observed in the morning might be explained by the migration of cyanobacteria towards the top of the mat in order to avoid toxic exposure to sulfide produced by sulfate-reducing bacteria and accumulated during the night, and of purple sulfur bacteria, which use the light in the early morning to begin photosynthetic processes. The slow growth rate at the bottom of the mat (Fig. 3B) might be due to an increase in the activity of sulfate-reducing bacteria, especially at 8:00 am. In fact, during the night, anaerobic conditions trigger the development of the population, which uses organic matter and produces sulfide. Limiting amounts of organic carbon (OC) may account for the slow growth of the sulfide-reducers. This reduction in the growth rate of the top and in the middle of the mat at 3:00 pm (Fig. 3B) can be explained by photosynthesis and carbon fixation carried out by cyanobacteria and purple sulfur bacteria, resulting in the generation of abundant organic compounds and limiting amounts of nitrogen (high C:N ratio). It is noteworthy that the DGGE pattern showed high similarity to that of green heterotrophic bacteria. These data are consistent with the PLFA community composition analysis at 8:00 am (Fig. 3A), since PLFAs of gram-positive bacteria were predominant in middle and deep layers of the microbial mat. PLFAs representative of gram-negative bacteria were dominant between a depth of 2.5 and 3.5 cm at 8:00 am (Fig. 3A). These results are in agreement with the DGGE pattern, which showed a predominance of bands related to green non-sulfur bacteria (Nobel et al., 2001).

The data provide a complete picture of the response of microbial mats to physicochemical variables influenced by time and depth, since ecological processes affect the cycling of nutrients at a community level. Combining phenotypic analyses based on PLFA with DNA analyses provides greater insight into the dynamic shifts in metabolism in microbial mat communities than obtained from nucleic acid studies alone.

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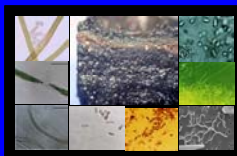


Figure 1. Ebro Delta estuarine microbial mat. The upper layer of the phototrophic microbial mat is fringed mainly by unicellular and filamentous cyanobacteria. Below, there are different populations of anaerobic photosynthetic bacteria (purple and green sulfur bacteria, Chloroflexales and Chlorobiaceae, and green non-sulfur bacteria, Chloroflexales). In the bottom layer, sulfate-reducing bacteria (SRB) are abundant. Heterotrophic, sulfur-oxidizing, sulphuric and methanogenic bacteria, but in non-defined layers, have also been detected in many microbial mats.

## INTRODUCTION

Phototrophic microbial mats are sedimentary structures composed primarily of different populations of bacteria in milligrammed communities (Fig. 1). The determination of total PLFA provides a quantitative measure of the viable or potentially viable biomass, because the viable microbes have an intact membrane with PLFA that turn over rapidly after cell death. The presence of certain groups of microorganisms can be inferred by the detection of unique lipids. For example, specific PLFA are prominent in microbial groups (e.g. monoenoic PLFA typical of gram-negative bacteria). Despite its versatility, PLFA analysis has limitations for the analysis of gram-negative bacteria community because their PLFA profiles are dominated by monoenoic saturated and cyclopentenoic fatty acids, and it is difficult to detect species of microorganisms since many have overlapping PLFA patterns. To overcome this, a complementary nucleic acid based analysis has been applied. Indeed, the recent extension in Signature Lipid Biomarker (SLB) analysis has been shown to liberate cellular nucleic acids, which can be used for gene amplification.

Moreover, insights into the nutritional status of the microbial mat community can be determined (Navarrete et al., 2000), since PLFA are products of biosynthetic pathways and reflect the phenotypic response of microorganisms to environmental conditions.

This study was undertaken to gain insight on the dynamics and biodiversity of an estuarine microbial mat in order to evaluate the responses of metabolic processes at the community level. The combined lipid biomarker and 16S rDNA-denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (DGGE) analysis can provide an integrating determination of ecological succession and physiological adaptation in microbial mats.

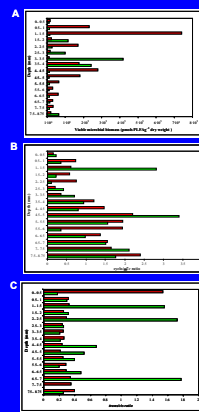


Figure 3. (A) Total viable biomass as measured by total phospholipid fatty acids (PLFA), expressed as PLFA g dry weight viable microorganisms base on total biomass that contains phospholipids and PLFA which are turned over rapidly after cell death by means of cellular enzymes that hydrolyze the phosphate group from phospholipids, resulting in formation of fatty acid/glycerol. (B) Bacterial status in microbial mat in order to changes in their environment (response to nutrient, toxic levels or interaction). Taxonomic ratios greater than 0.1 indicate alteration in bacterial biomass while ratios of 0.05 or lower are found in non-altered microbial population. (C) Metabolic stress, expressed as aerobic ratio of monoenoic PLFA. Gram-negative bacterial communities usually have a lower cyclo<sup>18:2</sup> ratio in response to changes in their environment (response to nutrient, toxic levels or interaction). Taxonomic ratios greater than 0.1 indicate alteration in bacterial biomass while ratios of 0.05 or lower are found in non-altered microbial population.

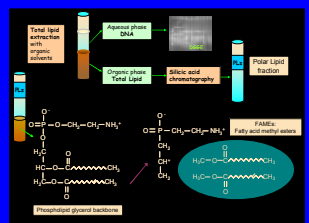


Figure 2. The signature lipid biomarker approach. Total lipid extraction by the modified Bligh & Dyer method and silicic acid chromatography. The organic phase of the polar lipid fraction was transferred to fatty acid methyl esters by a methylation reaction. The DNA isolated in the aqueous phase was precipitated and used as a template in a PCR reaction for the 16S rDNA of estuarine, and then DGGE was carried out.

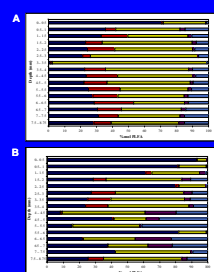


Figure 4. Community composition as % total PLFA. (A) Samples taken at 10:00 am GMT. (B) Samples taken at 3:00 pm GMT. Legend: Terminal branched saturated PLFA, gram-positive bacteria; Monoenoic PLFA, gram-negative bacteria; Polyenoic PLFA, microzooplankton; Branched monoenoic and mid-branched saturated PLFA, anaerobic microorganisms.

| Band | Accession | Similarity (%) | Closest relative                            |
|------|-----------|----------------|---|
| AL   | AT2506    | 95             | Psychroflexus sp.                           |
| A1   | AT2507    | 95             | 40 Uncultured Spirochaetales bacterium      |
| AL   | AT2503    | 77             | 50 Uncultured bacterium clone C1-F16        |
| A1   | AT2508    | 99             | Genus proteobacterium GR5-56-02_2b          |
| AL   | AT2507    | 97             | Mesobrevium acetivorium                     |
| AL   | AT2506    | 97             | Mesobrevium acetivorium                     |
| AL   | AT2508    | 97             | Uncultured bacterium clone 422              |
| AL   | AT2506    | 98             | Mesobrevium acetivorium                     |
| A1   | AT2508    | 97             | Uncultured green non-sulfur bacterium       |
| A1   | AT2502    | 97             | Bacteroides sp. 227                         |
| A1   | AT2502    | 97             | Uncultured green non-sulfur bacterium       |
| A1   | AT2504    | 97             | 40 Uncultured bacterium clone 2566          |
| AL   | AT2502    | 97             | 90 Uncultured Chloroflexus bacterium clone  |
| AL   | AT2508    | 97             | Bacteria from anoxic lake soil              |
| AL   | AT2502    | 97             | Bacteria from anoxic lake soil              |
| AL   | AT2502    | 97             | Mesobrevium acetivorium                     |
| AL   | AT2508    | 97             | Uncultured Rhodospirillum sp.               |
| AL   | AT2507    | 96             | Psychroflexus sp.                           |
| AL   | AT2502    | 99             | Psychroflexus sp.                           |
| AL   | AT2502    | 98             | Psychroflexus sp.                           |
| AL   | AT2502    | 98             | Psychroflexus sp.                           |
| AL   | AT2507    | 97             | Genus proteobacterium GR5-56-02_2b          |
| AL   | AT2507    | 97             | Uncultured Spirochaetales bacterium         |
| AL   | AT2507    | 97             | Uncultured bacterium clone C1-F16           |
| AL   | AT2508    | 97             | Uncultured bacterium GR-DNA-12              |
| AL   | AT2507    | 97             | Uncultured Bacteroides bacterium clone      |
| AL   | AT2508    | 95             | Uncultured bacterium clone 2868             |
| AL   | AT2507    | 95             | Bacteria from anoxic lake soil              |
| AL   | AT2508    | 9              | Uncultured bacterium clone 422              |
| AL   | AT2502    | 9              | Uncultured delta proteobacterium clone      |
| AL   | AT2502    | 98             | Mesobrevium acetivorium                     |
| AL   | AT2508    | 98             | Uncultured green non-sulfur bacterium clone |
| AL   | AT2507    | 95             | Uncultured green non-sulfur bacterium clone |
| AL   | AT2507    | 95             | Bacteria from anoxic lake soil              |

Table 1. Similarity between DNA recovered from DGGE gels and closest relatives



# Increased Metabolic Stress, Slowed Growth, Anaerobic Microniches and Increased Poly-β-hydroxyalkanoate Induced by Photosynthetic Activity during a Circadian Cycle in an Estuarine Microbial Mat

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## ABSTRACT

Microbial mats are prokaryotic communities that are thought to represent the present-day analogues of the first ecosystems on Earth. Their study reveals microbial strategies for survival under a broad range of environments. Here, we report an integrated lipid biomarker characterization to determine changes in the physiological status, viable biomass and community composition, in microbial mats from the Ebro Delta (NE Spain) during a daily cycle every 3 hours. Physicochemical variables (light, conductivity and sulfide) were measured. Total lipid fraction was extracted and then fractionated into polar, glycolipid, and neutral lipids. Phospholipid fatty acid (PLFA) profiles of the polar fraction indicated shifts in viable cell biomass, community composition and metabolic conditions. The polar lipids were also examined for plasmalogens, indicative of bacteria of the genus *Clostridium*. The glycolipid fraction was processed for poly-β-hydroxyalkanoates (PHA) and the neutral lipid fraction was used to evaluate the quinone content (reflecting the redox state of the community). The slowest growth rate was detected before sunset, which coincided with an increase in metabolic stress, a higher proportion of anaerobic bacteria (as well as an increase of the plasmalogen content), and a lower viable biomass. Maximum values of PHA were detected at the same sampling time, which is not consistent with a typical PHA production during the night and suggest a possible role of cyanobacteria in the PHA dynamics of mats. The quinone analysis reported that the matobion was mainly aerobic with anaerobic niches. The integrated results of the lipid analysis suggest that a high photosynthetic activity in the morning leads to an excess of carbon-assimilated compounds that induces an unbalanced growth situation. The maximum values of metabolic stress and PHA storage were shown to shift in response to the excess of organic compounds. Analyses to date indicate a similar tendency in circulation cycles that remain stable between seasons and years and support the idea that microbial mats are a relatively stable complex ecosystem.



Figure 1. Ebro Delta estuarine microbial mat. The upper layer of the photosynthetic microbial mat is formed mainly by cyanobacteria and filamentous cyanobacteria. Below, there are different populations of anaerobic phototrophic bacteria (purple and green sulfur bacteria, *Clostridium* and Chloroflexus), and green non-sulfur bacteria, *Clostridium*. In the bottom layer, sulfate-reducing bacteria (SRB) are abundant. Mesophilic, sulfur-oxidizing and methanogenic bacteria, but in non-differentiated layers, have also been detected in every microbial mat.

## INTRODUCTION

Photosynthetic microbial mats are sedimentary structures composed primarily of different populations of bacteria in polydiverse communities (Fig. 1). The determination of total PLFA provides a quantitative measure of the viable or potentially viable biomass, because the viable microbes have an intact membrane with PLFA that turn over rapidly after cell death (Ivaldi et al., 1989). The presence of certain groups of microorganisms can be inferred by the detection of unique lipids. For example, specific PLFA are pertinent in microbial groups (e.g. monosaturate PLFA typical of gram-negative bacteria). In this study, the analysis of other lipids such as plasmalogens-derived dimethylacals (DMA), found in *Clostridia* as well as some gram-negative bacteria, have provided a more detailed community composition view.

Insights into the nutritional status of the microbial community can be determined, since PLFA are products of biosynthetic pathways and reflect the phenotypic response of microorganisms to environmental conditions (Duckert and White, 1998). Moreover, the relative amount of PHA (endogenous storage compound) compared to the PLFA, provide a measure of the physiological status. Apart from that, respiratory quinone composition can be used for the evaluation of the redox state in microbial communities (Heffrich and White, 1998).

This study was undertaken to gain insight on the dynamics of an estuarine microbial mat during a daily cycle. In order to evaluate the responses of metabolic processes at the community level, the signature lipid biomarker (SLB) approach can provide a powerful integrating and comprehensive determination of ecological succession and physiological adaptation in microbial mats.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The microbial mat studied are located in the coastal area of the Ebro Delta (Spain, 41° 07' N, 0° 57' E). Mat samples were taken in Fall 2002, over a day-night cycle. The upper part of the mat was sampled (one core at each time) every 3 hours starting at midday (12:00, 15:00, 18:00, 21:00, 2:00, 3:00, 6:00, 9:00, GMT). Physicochemical conditions of the surrounding water were analyzed at each sampling time. Samples were extracted with the single-phase chloroform-methanol-phosphate buffer system of Bligh and Dyer, as modified by White et al. (1998). The total lipid extract was fractionated into neutral, glycolipid, and polar lipids by silica acid chromatography (Fig. 2A). The polar lipid fraction was transferred to fatty acid methyl ester (FAMES, Fig. 2B), with the Meyers and Lane (1983) method to release plasmalogens esters as dimethylacals (Fig. 2C). The FAMES and dimethylacals were analyzed by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC/MS). The poly-β-hydroxyalkanoate included in the glycolipid fraction, was hydrolyzed by a mild alkaline methanolysis to release the β-hydroxyalkanoate (β-OH C<sub>n</sub>) monomers, and then they were detected by Methyl-derivatized poly-β-hydroxyalkanoate (MBSFTA) and analyzed by GC/MS (Elshout et al., 2000). The neutral lipid fraction was examined for respiratory quinones and mesophilic isoprenoids by high-resolution lipid chromatography-pressure photoionization tandem mass spectrometry (HPLC-PPH/MS/MS) (Lytle et al., 2007).

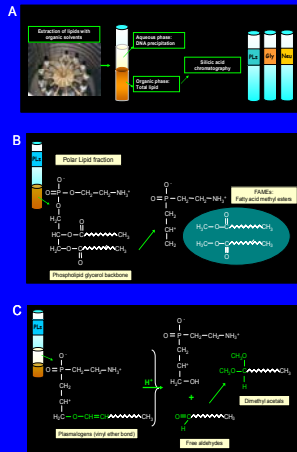


Figure 2. The signature lipid biomarker approach. (A) Total lipid extraction by the modified Bligh & Dyer method and silica acid chromatography. (B) The organic phase of the polar lipid fraction was transesterified to fatty acid methyl esters by a mild alkaline reagent. (C) The plasmalogens in the remaining organic phase were released as dimethylacals by a mild acidic methanolysis.

## RESULTS

**Physicochemical conditions.** Light intensity (Fig. 3A) measured on the sampling point, decreased reaching a minimum value at night time. Conductivity values were other stable (2,600-27,500 μS cm<sup>-1</sup>). Sulfide reached its maximum value at 6:00 am (18 μM) and it was practically undetectable during the rest of the daylight cycle (Fig. 3A).

**Viable microbial biomass.** The minimum value of total PLFA was found at 18:00. Microbial biomass DMA was maximum at 18:00 (5.5 × 10<sup>10</sup> prok. DMAG dry weight). The DMA biomass trend was coincident with the PLFA biomass profile except from a lag time at the maximum peaks.

**Physiological and respiratory status.** At 18:00 and 3:00, there was a decrease of the growth rate (high cyclohex<sup>14</sup>C ratio) and a shift to a higher metabolic stress (high heptaco<sup>14</sup>C ratio) (Fig. 3C). The ratio of ubiquinolone to mesophilic PLFA (Fig. 3D) is proportional to the ratio of anaerobic respiration to aerobic respiration. In this case, values around 1.0 were indicative of a metabolically aerobic system with anaerobic niches or microaerophilic environment. The ratio of total quinones to PLFA is indicative of respiratory activity (Fig. 3E). These results suggested a low respiratory activity, but the differences along the circadian cycle are not significant. The increased recovery of PHA/PLFA ratio was found at the same sampling time (Fig. 3). Ratios greater than 0.2 usually indicate the beginning of unbalanced growth in at least part of the microbial community. Therefore, data suggested a situation of carbon storage by most of the microbial populations in the mat during the circadian cycle.

**Community structure by PLFA analysis and DMA.** The community consisted mainly of Gram-negative bacteria (including cyanobacteria) at 12:00 and 15:00, as confirmed the presence of a high percentage of monosaturate PLFA (Fig. 3B). Maximum values of PLFA indices of Gram-negative microorganisms, were found at 12:00 and minimum values at 18:00 (18.2%). From 12:00 to 15:00 sampling times, normally branched saturated fatty acids, PLFA typical of Gram-positive bacteria, increased slightly (1.14 to 5.20%) and lipid representatives of anaerobic microorganisms (branched monosaturated and mid-chain branched saturated) decreased (3.3% to 2.21%). At 18:00, an increase in the profile dominated by Gram-negative bacteria was observed, showing an increase of PLFA typical of anaerobic bacteria (52.3%) in comparison with the rest of the sampling times. Moreover, at this sampling time, a maximum of DMA, common in ester anaerobes as *Clostridium* sp. and also in soil bacteria grown under anaerobic conditions, was detected.

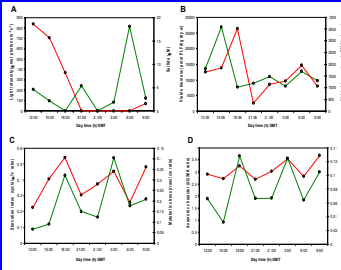


Figure 3. (A) Physicochemical conditions of the mat. Light intensity (Fig. 3A) was measured with a LiCOR Li-190 meter, and sulfide concentration (Fig. 3A) was measured by the Phosphorimetric method (Guerrero et al., 2005). (B) Microbial biomass as total PLFA (Fig. 3B) and PLFA indices of Gram-negative bacteria (Fig. 3B), Gram-positive bacteria (Fig. 3D) and anaerobic bacteria (Fig. 3E) and mesophilic bacteria (Fig. 3F) were measured by GC/MS. (C) PLFA indices of Gram-negative bacteria (Fig. 3B) were measured by GC/MS. (D) PLFA indices of Gram-positive bacteria (Fig. 3D) were measured by GC/MS. (E) PLFA indices of anaerobic bacteria (Fig. 3E) were measured by GC/MS. (F) PLFA indices of mesophilic bacteria (Fig. 3F) were measured by GC/MS.

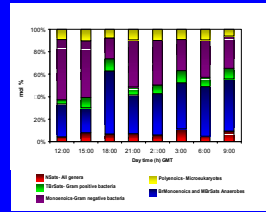


Figure 4. Community composition as a function of PLFA during the circadian cycle. Note: Branched saturated fatty acids, Methyl-branched saturated fatty acids, Mesophilic, Monosaturate and monosaturated fatty acids, Polyunsaturate, Polyunsaturate and polyunsaturate fatty acids, Polyunsaturate and MSA, Branched monosaturated and mid-chain branched saturated fatty acids.

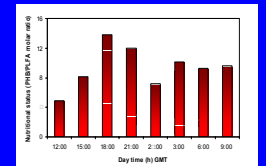


Figure 5. Metabolic and respiratory status on ester index of PHA (poly-hydroxyalkanoate) [index of MBSFTA] hydrolyzed by dry weight phospholipid fatty acids (PLFA) dry weight, in the Ebro Delta microbial mat circadian cycle.

## DISCUSSION

The maximum viable microbial biomass found at 15:00 could be explained by an increase of photosynthetic microorganisms that are doing active metabolic processes after the maximum light intensity value at 12:00 am.

The decrease of the growth rate and the higher metabolic stress detected at 18:00 and 3:00, has been previously reported in Ebro Delta microbial mats during a 24 h daylight cycle in Spring of 1997 (Navarrete et al., 2009) but in that case, the maximum values of cyclohex<sup>14</sup>C and heptaco<sup>14</sup>C ratios were observed at 18:00 and 6:00. In this regard, the minimum viable biomass values in samples taken in Spring 1997 were found at 18:00 and 6:00.

At 18:00, an increase of the starvation index was detected, which coincided with an increase in the metabolic stress, a higher proportion of anaerobic bacteria (Fig. 3), a maximum of DMA from plasmalogens-forming anaerobes, and a lower proportion of viable cell numbers on total PLFA. This can be explained because during the day, there is a high organic and anaerobic photosynthetic activity that predominates over sulfate reduction process and aerobic respiration within the mat. In that situation, there is an excess of carbon assimilated in comparison with other compounds that changes the C/N ratio and leads to an unbalanced growth situation. Apart from that, the excess of carbon assimilated were not used for growth, was accumulated in the cells as biopolymers, and this is a suitable explanation for the maximum values of metabolic stress before sunset (Fig. 3C) and the maximum PHA/PLFA ratio at the same sampling point (18:00, Fig. 3). Maximum value of PHA detected in the afternoon, is not consistent with a typical PHA production by purple sulfur bacteria during the night, according to the model suggested by Rothstein et al. and suggest a possible role of cyanobacteria in the PHA dynamics of mats.

It seemed to be a good correspondence between an increase of unbalanced growth, high metabolic stress and decrease of viable cell numbers. The comparison between the presented data and the data summarized in Navarrete et al. (Navarrete et al., 2009), reported a similar tendency in microbial mat activities along a daylight cycle that remained stable between seasons and years. Although further studies need to be done in order to assess this hypothesis, these data support the idea that microbial mats are a relative stable complex system in which the development is related by different microbial populations and the physicochemical conditions of the surrounding environment.

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