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# SarcOptiM for ImageJ: high frequency online sarcomere length computing on stimulated cardiomyocytes

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## 11 Running Head:

- 12 Sarcomere length computing with ImageJ
- 13

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## 31 Abstract

32 Accurate measurement of cardiomyocyte contraction is a critical issue for scientists working on 33 cardiac physiology and physiopathology of diseases implying contraction impairment. Cardiomyocytes contraction can be quantified by measuring sarcomere length but few tools are 34 35 available for this and none is freely distributed. We developed a plug-in (SarcOptiM) for the 36 ImageJ/Fiji image analysis platform developed by the National Institute of Health. SarcOptiM 37 computes sarcomere length via FFT analysis of video frames captured or displayed in ImageJ and thus 38 is not tied to a dedicated video camera. It can work in real time or offline, the latter overcoming 39 rotating motion or displacement related artifacts. SarcOptiM includes a simulator and video 40 generator of cardiomyocyte contraction. Acquisition parameters such as pixel size and camera frame 41 rate were tested with both experimental recordings of rat ventricular cardiomyocytes and synthetic 42 videos. It is freely distributed and its source code is available. It works under Windows, Mac or Linux 43 operating systems. The camera speed is the limiting factor since the algorithm can compute online 44 sarcomere shortening at frame rates above 10 kHz. In conclusion, SarcOptiM is a free and validated 45 user-friendly tool for studying cardiomyocyte contraction in all species including human.

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47 <u>Keywords</u>: cardiomyocyte contractility; sarcomere dynamic; video analysis; ImageJ plug-in; fast
 48 Fourier transform.

## 50 Introduction

Isolated cardiomyocyte (CM) contractions can be recorded and measured with two main methods: cell shortening and sarcomere shortening. The latter is probably the most common and reliable technique used to characterize isolated CM contractile performance, because it does not depend on cell shape and size (4). Sarcomere shortening technique has applications in different research fields including cardiovascular physiology, pathophysiology such as heart failure, pharmacology and toxicology (2, 3, 6–8, 11).

57 Under transmission light microscopy, striated muscle cell sarcomeres show a transverse pattern due 58 to the alternation of light (isotropic; I) and dark (anisotropic; A) bands corresponding to the very 59 regular organization of thin filaments of actin associated with regulatory proteins such as 60 tropomyosin and troponin (I band) and thick filaments of myosin (A band). These bands have a 61 profile that can be assimilated to a sinusoidal curve. The frequency of this sinusoid, which represents 62 the distance between the dark bands of the myosin filaments and therefore the sarcomere length 63 (SL), can be extracted from Fourier spectrum analysis of the CM image. The sarcomere shortening 64 method consists of computing the sarcomere spatial frequency and thus SL in each frame of a live or 65 recorded video of a contracting CM. There are commercially available software for the analysis of SL 66 and SL shortening but they are tied to dedicated video cameras and microscope systems (e.g., 67 IonOptix and Aurora Scientific Inc). Several laboratories have developed their own software, but 68 under licensed languages such as LabVIEW<sup>™</sup>(1, 5) or MATLAB<sup>™</sup>(8, 10).

An open source algorithm has also been developed in Python to compute sarcomere length (9). However, it is not implemented in a program and requires users to develop their own software to interface their camera with the analysis algorithm. This unfortunately makes that software very difficult to use by people without programming skills.

73 The aim of our work was to provide scientists working on CM – or any other structure presenting a 74 striated pattern (e.g., transverse tubules, ryanodine receptors distribution, collagen structure, etc.) – 75 with powerful, ultrafast and accurate software compatible with most of the video cameras and finally 76 not affected by cell displacement and rotation in the field. Moreover, this software has to be easy 77 and ready to use, free and open source. Thus, we developed SarcOptiM, a plug-in for the open 78 source microscopy image analysis software of the NIH: ImageJ. It has two operating modes. Online 79 mode allows the real time analysis and display of the contraction of a cell along a line (1 pixel thick or 80 more) drawn along its longitudinal axis (*i.e.*, on cell axis mode). Offline mode is dedicated to the 81 analysis of pre-recorded videos of contracting CM. This mode can be used in two ways: on cell axis 82 mode, as above or on entire frame, which extracts data from the entire video image. SL 83 measurements with the on entire frame mode avoid artifacts due to rotation and/or movement of 84 the cell.

SarcOptiM has been validated and packaged with a number of control features including a means of
 constructing synthetic videos of a model cell contracting according to user defined parameters.

SarcOptiM has been tested under Linux, Windows and Mac OS. It is freely available in the plug-in
 section of ImageJ website and on http://pccv.univ-tours.fr/ImageJ/SarcOptiM/.

## 90 Materials and methods

## 91 Isolation of rat ventricular cardiomyocytes

92 All protocols have been approved by the local ethical committee (Comité d'Ethique en 93 Expérimentation Animale Val de Loire, Tours, France). Adult male Wistar rats were anesthetized with 94 pentobarbital (60 mg/kg). The heart was rapidly removed and coronary circulation was retrogradely 95 perfused through the aorta. Enzymatic digestion was performed by perfusion of 0.1 UI/mL Liberase™ 96 Research Grade in Krebs-Ringer-Bicarbonate solution (in mM: 35 NaCl, 25 NaHCO<sub>3</sub>, 4.75 KCl, 1.19 97 KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 16 Na<sub>2</sub>HPO<sub>4</sub>, 134 sucrose, 10 HEPES, and 10 glucose, pH adjusted to 7.4) at 37°C. At the end 98 of the digestion, ventricles were separated and gently mechanically dissociated with Pasteur 99 pipettes.

## 100

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## Experimental setup and protocol

102 Cardiomyocytes were placed in a perfusion chamber mounted on an inverted microscope (Nikon 103 Diaphot 300) for online sarcomere analysis and video recording of contraction at 25°C. Myocytes 104 were superfused with Tyrode's solution containing (in mM): 140 NaCl, 5.37 KCl, 1.36 CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 1 MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 105 0.33 NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 10 HEPES, 11 glucose, at pH 7.4, adjusted with NaOH. Myocytes were electrically field 106 stimulated at 1 Hz with square wave pulses (80 mA, 2 ms) delivered through a pair of platinum 107 electrodes.

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## Recording of cardiomyocyte contraction

The videos of rat left ventricular myocytes contracting under electrical stimulation at 1 Hz were captured with an IDS UI-1220LE-M-GL camera (Imaging Development Systems, Germany). Online experiments in ImageJ used the plug-in HF\_IDS\_Cam (available on ImageJ website). Video recording for subsequent offline analysis used the camera supplier software uEye Cockpit. The camera was connected to an USB port of a PC workstation (Xeon E3 1241v3 3.5 GHz processor) running under either Linux or Windows 7 (64 bits) operating systems.

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## 117

## Synthetic videos of a cardiomyocyte contraction simulation

118 Each sarcomere measurement mode of SarcOptiM has been validated with synthetic videos of a 119 modeled contracting CM. These were created with the Video synthesis tool which is implemented in 120 SarcOptiM. In these synthetic videos, frame rate, pixel size and CM features (length, width, resting 121 SL, sarcomere shortening and contraction/relaxation speed factor), as well as CM movement and 122 rotation in the video field can be user defined to match particular experimental preparations and test user hardware. The equation:  $SL_t = SL_{\min} \times e^{-\exp(-t \times SF) - t \times SF + 1}$  (with  $SL_t$ : SL at t time;  $SL_{\min}$ : minimum 123 sarcomere length at maximum peak shortening; t: time; SF: contraction/relaxation speed factor 124 125 which adjusts the theoretical model to fast or slow twitches) is used to model the CM contraction. In 126 our examples the standard parameters were as follows: resting SL: 1.8 µm, sarcomere shortening: 5 127 % of the resting SL, pixel size: 0.3 µm, video frame rate equivalent: 100 Hz, number of frames: 40 128 (i.e., a total equivalent of 400 ms record), angle of the CM in the frame: 30° from the horizontal,

- 129 contraction/relaxation speed factor: 1. Example of synthetic CM generated by this module is130 available in the Data Supplement (Video\_1.mp4).
- 131 Setting up and use
- 132 To install SarcOptiM in ImageJ:
- 133 1. Unzip the SarcOptiM.zip file;
- 134 2. Put the SarcOptiM folder into the "ImageJ\plugins" folder;
- 135 3. Put the SarcOptiM.ijm file into the "ImageJ\macros\toolsets" folder.
- The user guide on our institutional website and on the ImageJ website contains more information and a video demonstration of its use is available in the Data Supplement (Video\_2.mp4). It is important to note that another plug-in is necessary to acquire video flow from digital, *e.g.*, HF\_IDS\_Cam and Webcam Capture, or analog *e.g.*, PixelSmart Frame Grabbers cameras.
- 140

## 141 Statistics

- 142 All boxplots indicate minimum, first quartile, median and mean, third quartile and max values. All
- 143 statistics have been performed with R and SigmaStat. For the comparison between groups, ANOVA
- 144 tests were performed. Differences are considered significant when the P value is inferior to 0.05.

#### Results 145

Analysis algorithm description and outputs 146

147 In on cell axis mode (Figure 1), the sarcomere measurement algorithm searches for a peak in the fast 148 Fourier transform (FFT) of the grey level profile of the myocyte longitudinal axis along the line 149 positioned on the image by the user (Fig. 1A, B). The position of the peak located in the FFT spectrum 150 within the limits for SL values defined by the user is determined (Fig. 1C). Then given the pixel size, 151 the sarcomere length is calculated.

152 For an analysis with on entire frame mode, the algorithm is similar, except that the FFT is calculated 153 over the entire image and is not confined to the myocyte. The peak is sought with native "find 154 maxima" ImageJ function in a 2D plane within the limits for SL values defined by the user (Fig. 2). 155 Then given the pixel size, the x-y coordinates of the peak and its Euclidian distance from the center of 156 the Fourier spectrum, the SL is calculated.

157 At the end of the sarcomere measurement computation, each SL value is plotted versus time in a 158 new window (Fig. 1D, 2C). Time is determined by video frame rate. The XY data can be saved as a 159 comma separated values file (.csv) or copied into the clipboard for further analysis.

160 For a more complete understanding of the analysis, please consult the source code.

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## 162

## Accuracy of the SL measurement with different pixel sizes

Since the accuracy of sarcomere measurement depends on the spatial resolution of the acquired 163 164 image, the effect of pixel size upon SL parameters has been investigated with the on cell axis mode of 165 SarcOptiM. In this test, we used a synthetic video of a mathematically modeled CM contraction with 166 the standard parameters (see Materials and methods) and six realistic pixel sizes. The sarcomere 167 measurement on each frame during the contraction and relaxation was compared to the value 168 assigned to that point in the model. Absolute differences between each measured and each 169 theoretical value are shown as boxplot in Fig. 3A. For a pixel size between 0.20 and 0.35 µm, the 170 error of the measurement is, in the worst case, inferior or equal to 0.005  $\mu$ m. For a pixel size of 0.40 171 and 0.45  $\mu$ m, the measurement error lies between 0.006 and 0.007  $\mu$ m. These values are far below 172 the pixel size since there are obtained with a frequency analysis by FFT and not by a simple metric 173 measurement (7).

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#### Comparison between on cell axis and on entire frame modes of analysis 176

177 The on cell axis mode is much faster than the on entire frame mode because the latter requires a 178 two-dimensional FFT calculation instead of a single one. However, it could fail if the contracting cell 179 moves and leaves the measurement axis. Analysis mode on entire frame avoids this problem since no 180 measurement axis is required as illustrated by the video of a rat ventricular CM moving and rotating 181 in the field (see Data Supplement (Video 3.mp4 and Video 4.avi)). Moreover, multiple dead cells in 182 the analyzed field do not affect the SL measurement. However, this mode restricts application to 183 offline analysis of pre-recorded experimental videos since actual performances of current computer

184 are insufficient to allow online analysis. To compare the quality of analysis in both modes, two 185 synthetic videos with standard parameters (see Materials and methods) were used. In the second 186 video, a rotary motion from 30° down to the horizontal was applied to the CM. The first video was 187 analyzed with on cell axis and on entire frame modes. The second video was analyzed with the on 188 entire frame mode alone. As above, SL data obtained through a contraction-relaxation cycle were 189 compared to their model values and the results are shown in Fig. 3B. The on cell axis mode allows the 190 best accuracy of measurement with a maximum error in the worst case less than 0.005  $\mu$ m. With the 191 on entire frame mode, the worst case error is slightly higher since it can reach 0.009  $\mu$ m due to the 192 pixel interpolation when the cell axis is not exactly horizontal or vertical. However, with this mode, 193 the SL measurement is not affected and the maximum error is not significantly increased by the cell 194 rotation in the visual field (Fig. 3B and 3C). Thus, the on cell axis analysis mode is recommended in 195 standard conditions. The on entire frame analysis mode has to be used when the CM moves or 196 rotates in the field despite this will result in a slightly higher variability of SL measurement.

197 A supplemental tool based on the offline on entire frame mode has also been developed to 198 simultaneously measure contractions of several cardiomyocytes. It should be noted that this tool can 199 be used only if the cells do not have exactly the same orientation in the video field. This is required 200 to separate and distinguish the peaks corresponding to each cell in the FFT spectrum.

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## 203

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Effect of the sampling frequency upon the quality of the 202 measurement of rat cardiomyocyte contractions under basal following β-adrenergic conditions and stimulation with isoproterenol 205

206 Several video capture frequencies were tested to determine the optimal frame rate for sarcomere 207 measurement of a rat ventricular CM before and after superfusion of 100 nM isoproterenol (known 208 to increase contraction kinetic and amplitude). Examples of sarcomere measurements (on cell axis 209 mode) in control conditions at video frame rates of 25, 50, 100, 250, 500, 1000 Hz are shown Fig. 4. 210 The optimal frequency was determined by measuring for each rate the minimum sarcomere length 211 (minSL) and maximum sarcomere shortening speed (dSL/dt<sub>max</sub>; Fig. 5A, B). The acquisition frequency 212 is considered sufficient when minSL and dSL/dt<sub>max</sub> vary by less than 5 % from the values determined at 1000 Hz. In control conditions, 100 Hz is enough to record minSL (1.708 vs. 1.708 µm at 1000 Hz) 213 and dSL/dt<sub>max</sub> (-2.26 vs. -2.27 µm.s<sup>-1</sup> at 1000 Hz). However, the sampling rate must be increased to 214 250 Hz in the presence of isoproterenol to obtain an accurate dSL/dt<sub>max</sub> (minSL: 1.576 vs. 1.576 μm at 215 216 1000 Hz and dSL/dt<sub>max</sub>: -6.68 vs. -6.98 µm.s<sup>-1</sup> at 1000 Hz). The effect of 100 nM isoproterenol on the 217 contraction of a rat CM recorded at 250 Hz is shown in Fig. 5C, D. The increases of sarcomere 218 shortening and of contraction and relaxation rates are clearly visible (Fig. 5D). Therefore, with this 219 preparation and under these experimental conditions a frame rate of 250 Hz is recommended for SL 220 measurements but this parameter has to be optimized for other experimental conditions.

221

## 223 Discussion and conclusions

SarcOptiM is the first open source, easy to use and freely available software plug-in for the analysis of cardiomyocytes contractions with the sarcomere shortening method. We validated the measurement algorithms with synthesized videos with defined parameters. Tests were also conducted on isolated rat ventricular myocytes.

## 228 Versatility

229 SarcOptiM works with any analog or digital camera that can be interfaced with ImageJ, Fiji and 230 Micromanager as shown by examples available on the software download webpage. This is not 231 necessarily the case for licensed software which may work only with dedicated cameras. A nonexhaustive list of cameras working with ImageJ is available on the ImageJ website 232 233 (Plugins>Acquisition section). Another list for Micromanager is available on micromanager website 234 device section. Thus, a camera can be chosen to meet the requirements of the experiment, in 235 particular with regards to the best resolution-sensitivity-speed compromise. Moreover, SarcOptiM 236 allows sarcomere measurement on pre-recorded videos. This offline analysis is useful for 237 experiments requiring several analyzes or if the CM moves or rotates in the optical field. Finally, the 238 total analysis time can be significantly reduced with SarcOptiM. Indeed, the analysis could also be 239 simultaneously performed on several cells with the offline multiple cells on entire frame mode, 240 provided that cells do not have exactly the same orientation in the video field.

## 241 **Performance**

242 The reliability of the sarcomere measurement provided by SarcOptiM has been demonstrated by 243 tests on synthetic videos. Measurements can be performed as long as CM sarcomeres are visible on 244 the video, even in low light conditions. In addition, they are not affected by light oscillations as the 245 calculations are done on the image FFT and not on their brightness. The limitation is sufficient grey-246 scale definition to separate signal-noise in the FFT (Fig. 1C). With these features, the use of mid-247 range cameras, such as the IDS UI-1220LE-M-GL, is possible. This camera is able to record sarcomere 248 shortening at frequencies above 1000 Hz, although we found that a sampling rate of 250 Hz is usually 249 enough for rat ventricular cardiomyocytes (Fig. 5). For other cell types, such as skeletal muscle, which 250 require a high sampling rate, the measurement algorithm is not a limiting factor for online 251 computing: at full speed, it can calculate SL at sampling rates far above 10 kHz.

In addition to its free distribution and versatility, SarcOptiM presents several other advantages since it is integrated into an image processing software. It is thus possible to work on the video as well as on images, to adjust brightness or contrast, to define areas of interest or other processing. With this plug-in, sarcomere measurement can be done whatever the orientation of the cell in the video frame, unlike most licensed software and the Python algorithm (9) which require a perfect horizontal orientation of the cell. Moreover, it allows an easy adjustment of the measuring axis during the analysis.

A model of myocyte contraction is included in SarcOptiM, which is another asset of the software. This is used to construct video simulations with user defined parameters. Users can thus test, evaluate and optimize pixel size, video frame rate, upload time and computer performance for their own experimental conditions and hardware configuration. SarcOptiM has been developed to work under Windows, Mac OS and Linux operating systems;
 however, under identical computing conditions we found that the best performance of the algorithm
 was obtained in Linux.

## 266 Known limits

Native video import in ImageJ is limited to AVI encoded in MJPEG or images series *e.g.,* TIFF series. However, additional plug-ins can open other video formats *e.g.,* MovieIO. Moreover, given the ability of ImageJ to analyze video, it is likely that the number of importable video formats will increase. A limitation of SarcOptiM is the impossibility to receive a synchronization signal, for example to indicate the moment when electrical stimulation is applied to the cell.

## 272 Perspectives

This open-source plug-in developed in ImageJ macro language and Java can be modified by anyone to improve existing functions or add new ones such as analysis with autocorrelation function or measurement method by edge detection.

Analysis with *on entire frame* mode of SarcOptiM cannot currently be used for real time analysis since there is insufficient processor power for the online computation of the two dimensional Fourier spectrum (Fig. 2). In the future with improved processor performances, not only should this be possible but should also allow the analysis of several contracting isolated myocytes at the same time as well, whatever their orientations in the visual field and without motion artifacts.

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## 287 Disclosures

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## 289 Author contributions

- Author contributions: C.P., F.G., P.B., and V.M. conception and design of research; C.P., F.G., A.Y.
- 291 performed experiments; C.P., F.G. analyzed data; C.P. and F.G. interpreted results of experiments;
- 292 C.P., F.G., A.Y., C.O.M. prepared figures; C.P. drafted manuscript; C.P., F.G., A.Y., C.O.M., P.B., and
- 293 V.M. edited and revised manuscript; C.P., F.G., A.Y., C.O.M., P.B., and V.M. approved final version of
- 294 manuscript.

295

## 296 Endnote

- 297 At the request of the authors, readers are herein alerted to the fact that additional materials related
- to this manuscript may be found at the institutional website of one of the authors, which at the time
- of publication they indicate is: [http://pccv.univ-tours.fr/ImageJ/SarcOptiM/]. These materials are not a
- 300 part of this manuscript, and have not undergone peer review by the American Physiological Society
- 301 (APS). APS and the journal editors take no responsibility for these materials, for the website address,
- 302 or for any links to or from it.

## 304 **Figure legends**

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306 <u>Figure 1</u>: Flow diagram of the algorithm for SarcOptiM *on cell axis* analysis. (A) An example of an 307 input image opened with ImageJ. The white line represents the axis positioned for sarcomere 308 measurement. (B) Grey level profile along the axis of measurement. (C) Fourier spectrum of the grey 309 level profile. Double headed arrow indicates the limits between which the algorithm searches for the 310 peak. This interval is user defined as the minimum and maximum sarcomere lengths set before the 311 analysis. The vertical arrow shows the detected peak corresponding to sarcomere spatial frequency 312 in A. (D) Example of output plot representing sarcomere lengths *vs*. time.

313 <u>Figure 2</u>: Flow diagram of the algorithm for SarcOptiM *on entire frame* mode. (A) An example of the 314 input image opened with image J. (B) 2D Fourier spectrum of the image (left) and 3D surface plot of 315 the FFT spectrum (right). Rings indicate the limits set for searching the peak defined by the user as 316 minimum and maximum sarcomere lengths before the analysis. Arrows show the detected peak 317 corresponding to sarcomere spatial frequency in this frame. (C) Example of output plot representing 318 sarcomere lengths *vs*. time

319 Figure 3: (A) Absolute error of the sarcomere length measurement corresponding to the difference 320 between the measured and the model values during a simulated cardiomyocyte contraction were 321 recorded for different pixel sizes with on cell axis mode. n = 40 frames for runs for each pixel size. (B) 322 Effect of different analysis modes on absolute error of the sarcomere length measurement during a 323 simulated cardiomyocyte contraction with or without myocyte rotation. (n = 40 frames). L: on cell 324 axis mode without cell rotation, F: on entire frame mode without cell rotation, FR: on entire frame 325 mode with cell rotation. Pixel size was 0.3 µm. In panels (A) and (B), boxplots indicate minimum, first 326 quartile, median and mean, third quartile and max values for each condition. \*: p<0.05 with ANOVA 327 and Bonferroni post-hoc t-test; NS: non-significant. (C) Example of offline sarcomere length 328 measurements with both on entire frame (grey line) and on cell axis (black line) modes during cell 329 contraction and rotation. The video used for these measurements is available in the Data 330 Supplement (Video 4.avi). Note that the entire frame mode allows undisturbed sarcomere length 331 measurement during the cell rotation, especially during the diastole.

Figure 4: Effect of video frame rate on sarcomere length measurement during contraction of a rat left
ventricular cardiomyocyte electrically stimulated at 1 Hz under basal conditions (*on cell axis* mode).
(A-F) Sarcomere length measurements at frame rates of 25, 50, 100, 250, 500 and 1000 Hz. Pixel size
was 0.3 μm.

336 Figure 5: Measurement of rat left ventricular cardiomyocyte contractions electrically evoked at 1 Hz 337 under basal conditions and following superfusion by 100 nM isoproterenol (iso) with on cell axis 338 mode. (A-B) Effect of video sampling rate on the measurement of minimum sarcomere length 339 (minSL; A) and maximum sarcomere shortening speed (dSL/dt<sub>max</sub>; B) in control conditions (grey) and 340 in the presence of isoproterenol (black). (C-D) Effect of isoproterenol on the contraction recorded at 341 a video frame rate of 250 Hz and a pixel size of 0.3 µm. (C) Continuous recording of sarcomere 342 measurement during the superfusion of isoproterenol (bar above the trace). (D) Examples of 343 sarcomere shortening before and after superfusion of isoproterenol (arrows in C). 's' indicates the 344 time of electric stimulation.

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Figure 5