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# 1 Functional analysis of the three major PGRPLC isoforms in the 2 midgut of the malaria mosquito *Anopheles coluzzii*

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## 17 Abstract

18 Peptidoglycan recognition proteins (PGRPs) constitute the primary means of bacterial recognition in  
19 insects. Recent work in the model organism *Drosophila* has revealed the mechanisms by which the  
20 complement of PGRPs refine the sensitivity of different tissues to bacterial elicitors, permitting the  
21 persistence of commensal bacteria in the gut whilst maintaining vigilance against bacterial infection.  
22 Here, we use *in vivo* knockdowns and *in vitro* pull-down assays to investigate the role of the three  
23 major isoforms of the transmembrane receptor of the Imd pathway, PGRPLC, in basal immunity in the  
24 *Anopheles coluzzii* mosquito midgut. Our results indicate that the mosquito midgut is regionalized in its  
25 expression of immune effectors and of PGRPLC1. We show that PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 are pulled  
26 down with polymeric DAP-type peptidoglycan, while PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate in the  
27 presence of TCT, a peptidoglycan monomer. These data suggest that, as found in *Drosophila*,  
28 discrimination of polymeric and monomeric PGN by *Anopheles* PGRPLC participates in the regulation  
29 of the Imd pathway.

## 30 Introduction

31 In insects, bacteria are mainly perceived by the detection of the bacterial cell wall component  
32 peptidoglycan (Leulier et al. 2003). Upon recognition, the Imd pathway is one of the major means of  
33 signal transduction to initiate antibacterial responses. *Drosophila* Imd pathway activation is tightly  
34 regulated in a tissue specific manner, with the gut epithelium being adapted to tolerate the presence of  
35 the microbiota. This is achieved through several mechanisms including regulation of ligand availability  
36 (Paredes et al. 2011; Zaidman-Remy et al. 2006; Costechareyre et al. 2016), regulation of receptor  
37 signaling capacity (Basbous et al. 2011; Maillet et al. 2008; Aggarwal et al. 2008; Kleino et al. 2008;  
38 Neyen et al. 2016) and regulation of effector gene transcription (Ryu et al. 2008).

39 *Drosophila* also employs different peptidoglycan recognition proteins (PGRPs) in different tissues as  
40 immune receptors or regulators. A diversity of PGRP receptors allows discrimination of the type, the  
41 polymerisation status and the level of peptidoglycan that is able to stimulate antimicrobial gene  
42 expression (Bosco-Drayon et al. 2012; Neyen et al. 2012). Transmembrane PGRP-LC (FBgn0035976)  
43 encodes six isoforms resulting from a combination of 3 splice variants in the extracellular domains  
44 (PGRP-LCx, PGRP-LCa and PGRP-LCy) and 2 splice variants in the intracellular domain (Neyen et  
45 al. 2016). PGRP-LCx binds both polymeric and monomeric peptidoglycan whilst PGRP-LCa has no  
46 peptidoglycan binding capacity (Chang et al. 2005; Mellroth et al. 2005). The pathway can be  
47 stimulated by either polymeric peptidoglycan inducing PGRP-LCx-LCx homodimerization or by TCT  
48 (tracheal cytotoxin, a peptidoglycan monomer released by growing bacteria) inducing PGRP-LCx-LCa  
49 heterodimerization (Chang et al. 2005; Chang et al. 2006; Kaneko et al. 2004; Neyen et al. 2012).  
50 PGRP-LCx is shown to be necessary and sufficient for resistance to systemic infection by Gram-  
51 negative bacteria, indicating that polymeric peptidoglycan is the primary immune elicitor in the  
52 haemolymph, with PGRP-LCa-dependent TCT-induced dimers amplifying the strength of the response  
53 (Neyen et al. 2012). The function of PGRP-LCy is less well established (Kaneko et al. 2004; Werner et  
54 al. 2003), but could be related to recognition of other types of pathogen-associated molecular patterns  
55 (PAMPs) such as the microbial metabolite acetate (Kamareddine et al. 2018). The intracellular splicing  
56 variant including exon 4 encodes Imd signaling-inducing PGRP-LC, while the variant including exon 5  
57 encodes regulatory PGRP-LC (rPGRP-LC), which sends PGRP-LC to degradation upon specific  
58 sensing of polymeric peptidoglycan (Neyen et al. 2016). This downregulation of the Imd pathway via  
59 receptor degradation is considered as a way to resolve Imd activation while polymeric peptidoglycan  
60 released by lysed bacteria is still present in the haemolymph.

61 A second Imd pathway receptor, PGRP-LE (FBgn0030695), is localized intracellularly where it binds  
62 TCT, inducing receptor oligomerization and Imd pathway activation (Kaneko et al. 2006; Lim et al.  
63 2006). PGRP-LE is strongly enriched in the *Drosophila* midgut (excluding the cardia) where it is  
64 thought to play a significant role in detecting live bacteria and TCT (Bosco-Drayon et al. 2012; Neyen  
65 et al. 2012). This PGRP compartmentalization reflects a fine-tuning of the responsiveness of different  
66 tissues to their different levels of bacterial exposure. The haemolymph, being a nominally sterile  
67 environment, uses extracellular receptors to be highly responsive to both polymeric peptidoglycan and  
68 TCT. The posterior midgut, meanwhile, relies largely on an intracellular TCT receptor; here, the Imd  
69 pathway is stimulated only when bacterial growth reaches such a threshold that TCT is transported  
70 intracellularly. This is appropriate for a tissue that is in constant contact with microbiota.

71 *Anopheles* mosquitoes also rely on the Imd pathway for their response to bacterial infection and for  
72 controlling microbiota load, which increases significantly following blood feeding (Meister et al. 2009;  
73 Dong, Manfredini, and Dimopoulos 2009). *A. gambiae* PGRPLC (AGAP005203) has a similar genetic  
74 architecture to its *Drosophila* orthologue, encoding three main isoforms (PGRPLC1, PGRPLC2 and  
75 PGRPLC3) that vary in their extracellular PGRP domains. These PGRP domains have derived from  
76 independent duplications between the mosquito and fruit fly lineages, which have been therefore  
77 assumed to acquire different functions (Christophides et al. 2002). It has been reported that all  
78 mosquito isoforms contribute to resistance to systemic Gram-negative infection, whilst PGRPLC1 and  
79 PGRPLC3 only are necessary for resistance to Gram-positive infection (Meister et al. 2009).  
80 Additionally, in two mosquito derived cell lines it is found that PGRPLC1 is the only isoform that is  
81 necessary for induction of the antimicrobial peptide (AMP) *CEC1* following bacterial challenge (Lin et  
82 al. 2007). Overexpression of PGRPLC1 is found to be sufficient for *CEC1* induction even in the  
83 absence of bacterial challenge, with PGRPLC3 overexpression having a similar but milder effect (Lin  
84 et al. 2007). A non-peptidoglycan-binding PGRP, PGRPLA, is also known to be a positive regulator of  
85 the pathway in the gut (Gendrin et al. 2017). Notably, *A. gambiae* does not have a PGRP-LE  
86 orthologue. A model has not so far emerged regarding the functions of the different PGRPLC  
87 ectodomains in the *A. gambiae* immune response.

88 Given the emerging picture in *Drosophila* of receptor compartmentalization, and the fact that the *A.*  
89 *gambiae* genome is lacking in several of the characterized regulators in *Drosophila*, we investigated

90 the role of PGRPLC in basal immune induction in the mosquito gut. We show that the midgut of *A.*  
91 *coluzzii* (called *A. gambiae* M molecular form in earlier studies of PGRPLC) is compartmentalized in its  
92 expression of the immune effector-encoding transcripts *GAM1*, *CEC1* and *LYSC1*, and of one of the  
93 PGRPLC isoforms, *PGRPLC1*. Using isoform specific knockdown, we show that PGRPLC2 and  
94 PGRPLC3 both positively regulate REL2-responsive AMPs in the midgut. Functional analyses of  
95 recombinant PGRPLC domains indicate that PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 are pulled down with  
96 polymeric DAP-type peptidoglycan, whilst in the presence of TCT PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 co-  
97 precipitate.

## 98 **Materials and Methods**

### 99 **Mosquito rearing, blood feeding and antibiotic treatment**

100 The *A. coluzzii* N'gouso colony was maintained at 27 °C ( $\pm 1^\circ\text{C}$ ), 70-80 % humidity with a 12 h  
101 light/dark cycle. All adults were allowed *ad libitum* access to 5 % w/v fructose solution and females  
102 were maintained on human blood. 2-3 day old female mosquitoes were used in all experiments,  
103 having been exposed to only fructose solution ('sugar-fed'), or 24 h after taking a human blood meal  
104 ('blood-fed'). In antibiotic treatments, the blood meal and sugar solutions were supplemented with 60  
105 U/ml penicillin, 60  $\mu\text{g/ml}$  streptomycin and 50  $\mu\text{g/ml}$  gentamicin. Antibiotic treatment efficacy was  
106 confirmed by qRT-PCR against 16S rRNA.

### 107 **Gene expression and microbiota analysis**

108 qRT-PCR was used to assess expression levels of AMPs (*CEC1*, *GAM1* and *LYSC1*), *PGRPLC*  
109 transcripts and 16S rRNA load. Midgut tissues were dissected into subregions using a thin needle. For  
110 posterior tissue sections, either the whole posterior region (referred to as "posterior") was sampled, or  
111 each half of the posterior region (referred to as "proximal posterior" and "distal posterior") was  
112 sampled separately, as indicated. Tissues were flash frozen on dry ice and homogenized in TRIzol  
113 (Invitrogen) using a Precellys 24 homogenizer (Bertin) with 0.5-mm-wide glass beads (Bertin) or with a  
114 pestle-based motorized homogenizer. RNA was extracted according to the TRIzol (Invitrogen)  
115 manufacturer's instructions and resuspended in molecular-biology grade, RNase-free water. cDNA  
116 was synthesized using PrimeScript Reverse Transcriptase (Takara) or SuperScript III Reverse  
117 Transcriptase (ThermoFisher Scientific). qRT-PCR was performed on a 7500 Fast Real Time PCR  
118 machine (Applied Biosystems) using a SYBR premix ex Taq kit (Takara). The ribosomal transcript *S7*  
119 (*AGAP010592*) was used as normalization control. qRT-PCR primer sequences are listed in Table S1,  
120 and PGRPLC isoform-specific amplicons are represented Fig S1A.

### 121 **Double stranded RNA preparation and gene knockdown**

122 Double stranded RNA (dsRNA) was used for transient *in vivo* knockdown of target genes by RNAi.  
123 The target region was amplified from total cDNA using primers flanked with the T7 RNA polymerase  
124 promoter sequence (primer sequences listed in Table S1) with Phusion Taq polymerase (NEB). PCR  
125 products were purified using the QIAquick PCR purification kit (Qiagen). dsRNA was then synthesized  
126 from the PCR product by overnight incubation at 37 °C with T7 polymerase and dNTPs from the  
127 MEGAscript RNAi kit (ThermoFisher Scientific). dsRNA was purified using the RNeasy kit (Qiagen)  
128 and adjusted to a concentration of 6000 ng/ $\mu\text{l}$ . 69 nl of 6000 ng/ $\mu\text{l}$  dsRNA (totalling 414  $\mu\text{g}$ ) was  
129 injected into the thorax of CO<sub>2</sub>-anaesthetised 0-2-day old female mosquitoes using the Nanoject II  
130 (Drummond Scientific). dsRNA against a region of the bacterial *lac* operon (dsLACZ) was injected as a  
131 control.

## 132 **PGRP ectodomain cloning for recombinant protein production**

133 PGRP ectodomains were amplified from an *A. coluzzii* cDNA library by PCR with Phusion polymerase  
134 (NEB). The amplified products of the appropriate size were gel extracted using the QIAquick gel  
135 extraction kit (Qiagen), cloned by ligation independent cloning using the Ek/LIC cloning kit (Novagen)  
136 into the pLEX-10 vector (Novagen) for insect cell expression and verified by sequencing. pLEX-10  
137 introduces an N-terminal strep tag II, a C-terminal His-tag and a secretion signal peptide.

## 138 **Transfection and stable cell line generation**

139 Sf9 lepidopteran cells were maintained at 27 °C in adherent culture in SF900 II serum free medium.  
140 Three stable cell lines were generated, expressing PGRP1, PGRP2 and PGRP3 ectodomains  
141 respectively. For transfection, cells were seeded at 80 % confluency in 2.5 ml SF900 II medium. 2 µg  
142 pLEX-10+insert and 0.2 µg PIE1- neo (Novagen) were added dropwise with 8 µg Cellfectin II reagent  
143 (Invitrogen). PIE1-neo expresses the *neo* gene, facilitating selection in the presence of the antibiotic  
144 G418. 24 h post transfection, the medium was replaced with complete medium (SF900 II plus 10 %  
145 fetal calf serum (FCS)) and cells were re-plated in serial dilution. After 36 h, the medium was changed  
146 to complete medium plus 1 mg/ml G418. This selective medium was refreshed every 4 days for  
147 approximately 2 weeks, or until resistant colonies were observed. Selection was reduced to 0.3 mg/ml  
148 G418 in complete medium and this concentration was maintained throughout. Once the selected cells  
149 reached confluency, a sample of conditioned medium was analyzed by Western blot for expression of  
150 recombinant protein.

## 151 **Recombinant protein purification**

152 Recombinant proteins were purified from conditioned medium by His-tag affinity. TALON beads  
153 (Takara; approx. 250 µl per 150 ml conditioned medium) were equilibrated with two washes in 10  
154 volumes of equilibration buffer (50 mM NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 300 mM NaCl, pH 7.0). The beads were incubated  
155 with conditioned medium, rotating at room temperature, for 2 h. Beads were then washed twice with  
156 20 volumes of wash buffer (50 mM NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 300 mM NaCl, 10 mM imidazole, pH 7.0) for 15 min  
157 followed by one wash with 5 volumes of wash buffer for 5 min, both at room temperature. His-tagged  
158 proteins were eluted in elution buffer (50 mM NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 300 mM NaCl, 150 mM imidazole, pH 7.0).  
159 Purified proteins were then dialyzed (Amicon Ultra 4 ml dialyzer, 10 kDa pore size) overnight at 4 °C  
160 into wash buffer to remove the imidazole for further processing. Where specified, the C-terminal His-  
161 tag was cleaved with ProTEV plus protease (Promega), using the TEV cleavage site that was  
162 introduced with the reverse primers during cloning. Approximately 200 µg recombinant protein was  
163 incubated with ProTEV cleavage buffer, 1 mM DTT and 100 units of ProTEV protease for 3 h at 30 °C.  
164 Cleaved protein was isolated from the His tag and the protease itself, which also has a His-tag, using  
165 TALON beads as described above (retaining the flow through).

## 166 **Peptide:N-glycosidase (PNGase F) treatment**

167 5 µg recombinant protein was incubated in denaturation buffer (0.02 % SDS, 10 mM β-  
168 mercaptoethanol) at 100 °C for 10 min before being incubated with 2.5 units PNGase F and 0.8 %  
169 Triton X-100 at 37 °C for 3 h.

## 170 **Western blotting**

171 After separation by SDS-PAGE, proteins were transferred to a nitrocellulose membrane by semi dry  
172 transfer (15 V for 30 min) and membranes blocked in phosphate buffered saline plus 1 % Tween-20  
173 (PBST) with 3 % bovine serum albumin (BSA), either overnight at 4 °C or for 1 h at room temperature.  
174 Primary antibody was added in fresh blocking buffer at the specified concentration and incubated  
175 overnight at 4 °C. After three 10 min washes in PBST, blots were incubated with the specified  
176 secondary antibody conjugated with horseradish peroxidase (HRP) at a 1:10000 dilution in PBST with

177 3 % BSA for 1 h at room temperature, before three further washes in PBST. Blots were exposed with  
178 ECL chemiluminescence substrate (Pierce) and visualized with a Biorad Chemidoc Imager.

### 179 **Peptidoglycan preparation**

180 DAP-type peptidoglycan polymer was purified from the *E. coli* BW25113  $\Delta lpp::Cm^R$  strain that does  
181 not express the Lpp lipoprotein, as described (Leulier et al. 2003). The GlcNAc-MurNAc(anhydro)-L-  
182 Ala-D-iGlu-*meso*-DAP-D-Ala peptidoglycan monomer fragment (designated as TCT, tracheal  
183 cytotoxin) was obtained by peptidoglycan digestion with SltY transglycosylase and purified by HPLC  
184 as previously described (Stenbak et al. 2004).

### 185 **Peptidoglycan co-precipitation assay**

186 Recombinant protein (100  $\mu$ g/ml) was incubated with insoluble peptidoglycan from *Escherichia coli* (1  
187 mg/ml) in 50  $\mu$ l binding buffer (150 mM NaCl, 20 mM HEPES, pH 7.5) for 1 h at room temperature,  
188 rotating. The insoluble peptidoglycan was then pelleted by centrifugation (13000 g, 5 min). The pellet  
189 was washed three times in 1 ml binding buffer and resuspended in 50  $\mu$ l binding buffer. Pellet and  
190 supernatant fractions were analyzed by Western blot, using a primary antibody against the N-terminal  
191 strep tag II.

### 192 **PGRPLC co-precipitation assay**

193 For protein-protein co-precipitation assays, recombinant protein after cleavage of the His-tag (100  
194  $\mu$ g/ml) was incubated with recombinant protein that retained its His-tag (100  $\mu$ g/ml) in the presence of  
195 an approximately 5-fold molar excess of TCT (20  $\mu$ M) in 50  $\mu$ l binding buffer for 1 h at room  
196 temperature, rotating. His-tagged protein and any interacting protein were then purified by His-tag  
197 affinity. The flow through and bead bound fractions were analyzed for their protein content by Western  
198 blot, probing for the N-terminal strep tag II.

### 199 **Statistical analysis**

200 qRT-PCR expression data (including 16S analysis) were analyzed with linear mixed effect regression  
201 models using the lme4 package in R (version 3.1.2). Mosquito batch (i.e., experimental replicate) was  
202 included as a random effect, with tissue section and/or dsRNA as fixed effects. When examining the  
203 effect of dsRNA in different tissues, a tissue:dsRNA interaction term was fitted first (together with the  
204 main effect terms). If this significantly improved the fit of the model (as assessed by ANOVA), we go  
205 on to report the effect of dsRNA in each tissue independently (expression  $\sim$  dsRNA + (1|replicate)).  
206 Otherwise, the reported p value is the result of an ANOVA test after removing dsRNA from the full  
207 model (expression  $\sim$  tissue + dsRNA + (1|replicate)).

## 208 **Results**

### 209 **AMP expression and PGRPLC1 expression are spatially heterogeneous along the mosquito** 210 **midgut**

211 We examined whether the *A. coluzzii* gut tissue is spatially heterogeneous in its immune activity, and  
212 how this putative heterogeneity might be related to the presence of the gut microbiota. Midguts were  
213 micro-dissected into three main regions: the cardia, anterior and posterior (Fig 1A). The abundance of  
214 bacterial 16S rRNA and the expression of transcripts of the microbiota-dependent antimicrobial  
215 peptides (AMPs; Rodgers et al. 2017) *CEC1* (AGAP000693), *GAM1* (AGAP008645) and *LYSC1*  
216 (AGAP007347) were analyzed by qRT-PCR. We observed that bacterial proliferation upon blood  
217 feeding is limited to the posterior section of the gut, the region which harbours the blood bolus (Fig  
218 1B). Strikingly, all three AMPs analyzed were heterogeneously expressed across the length of both

219 sugar-fed and blood-fed guts, with expression being higher in the cardia and anterior regions than the  
220 posterior (Fig 1C-E), despite the abundance of the microbiota in this region after blood feeding. We  
221 assessed whether all regions of the gut are able to respond transcriptionally to the microbiota by  
222 comparing AMP expression in control mosquitoes with mosquitoes that have been treated with a  
223 robust cocktail of antibiotics (Fig 1C-E). Expression of one AMP (*GAM1* in the sugar-fed posterior  
224 region) or all three AMPs (in all other regions) was lower after antibiotic treatment; thus, we conclude  
225 that the whole length of the gut epithelium is able to respond to microbiota-derived bacterial elicitors.

226 We next analyzed the expression pattern of the three major PGRPLC isoforms. We found that the  
227 expression of *PGRPLC1* correlates well with that of the AMPs analyzed, being more highly expressed  
228 in the cardia and anterior regions than in the posterior (Fig 1F). *PGRPLC2* and *PGRPLC3* do not vary  
229 in their expression across the length of the gut (Fig S1). Altogether, these data show that the  
230 expression of *CEC1*, *GAM1*, *LYSC1* and *PGRPLC1* vary significantly along the length of the gut,  
231 though their expression pattern appears to be uncoupled from levels of exposure to commensal  
232 bacteria in the different regions.

### 233 **PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 are positive regulators of REL2-responsive AMPs in the midgut**

234 Given that PGRPLC-dependent activation of the Imd pathway plays a role in controlling the mosquito  
235 gut microbiota (Dong, Manfredini, and Dimopoulos 2009; Meister et al. 2009), we next sought to  
236 decipher which PGRPLC isoforms are responsible for stimulating Imd activity in the midgut.

237 We first determined which AMPs are transcriptionally responsive to the Imd pathway in the sugar-fed  
238 and blood-fed gut by monitoring the expression of *GAM1*, *LYSC1* and *CEC1* after injection of dsRNA  
239 against the Imd pathway transcription factor REL2 (AGAP006747) (Fig 2, Fig S2, Fig S3). Of the  
240 AMPs analyzed, we found *GAM1* expression to be responsive to *REL2* knockdown across the sugar-  
241 fed gut ( $p < 0.05$ , Fig 2A). *REL2* knockdown had no significant effect on *CEC1* or *LYSC1* expression in  
242 the sugar-fed gut (Fig S3A-B).

243 We next injected dsRNA against each specific PGRPLC ectodomain, trying to recapitulate the effect  
244 on *GAM1* expression (Fig 2A). As observed previously (Meister et al. 2009), we achieved limited and  
245 variable knockdown efficiency against individual PGRPLC isoforms (Fig S2). Nevertheless, we found  
246 that *PGRPLC2* dsRNA caused a significant reduction in *GAM1* expression in the cardia ( $p < 0.05$ ) and  
247 anterior ( $p < 0.05$ ) regions of the sugar-fed midgut. *PGRPLC3* dsRNA had no effect in any region of the  
248 sugar-fed midgut. *PGRPLC1* dsRNA resulted in a significant increase in *GAM1* expression in the  
249 anterior region ( $p < 0.05$ ), but interestingly not in the cardia despite this region having very high  
250 *PGRPLC1* expression.

251 After blood feeding, *GAM1* remained responsive to REL2 throughout the gut ( $p < 0.05$ , Fig S3C),  
252 though no PGRPLC isoforms had any effect on *GAM1* expression. We also observed a significant  
253 reduction in *LYSC1* expression upon REL2 knockdown in the cardia ( $p = 0.05$ ) and anterior ( $p < 0.05$ )  
254 regions, with the posterior region showing the same trend (Fig 2B). Concurrently, we found PGRPLC2  
255 dsRNA to cause a reduction in *LYSC1* expression in the posterior region ( $p < 0.05$ ) and PGRPLC3  
256 dsRNA to cause a reduction in *LYSC1* expression in the cardia ( $p < 0.05$ ) and posterior ( $p < 0.01$ )  
257 regions.

258 Altogether, these data confirm that the AMPs *GAM1*, *CEC1* and *LYSC1* are REL2-responsive in at  
259 least some regions of the midgut. PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 also both act as positive regulators of two  
260 of these AMPs. Despite PGRPLC1 being known to be able to induce the Imd pathway (Lin et al.  
261 2007), we did not find evidence for this isoform acting as a positive Imd regulator in the midgut. Our  
262 data rather suggests that PGRPLC1 could be acting as a negative regulator, though we cannot rule  
263 out that PGRPLC1-dependent signaling to other pathways induces dysbiosis, causing the observed  
264 induction of *GAM1* expression.

## 265 **PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate with polymeric DAP-type peptidoglycan**

266 In order to understand further the differing functions of the PGRPLC isoforms, their PGRP domains  
267 were recombinantly produced and subjected to *in vitro* functional analysis. The recombinant PGRP  
268 domains of the three major isoforms were secreted from Sf9 lepidopteran cells and purified from  
269 conditioned media with a C-terminal His-tag (Fig S4A). The His-tags were cleaved before further  
270 functional analysis to avoid artefactual interaction between them and peptidoglycan (Basbous et al.  
271 2011; Persson, Oldenvi, and Steiner 2007). PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 were observed to migrate as a  
272 double and triple band, respectively, whilst PGRPLC2 migrates as a single band (Fig S4B). We  
273 hypothesized that this may be due to glycosylation, a common posttranslational modification in  
274 secreted and membrane bound proteins. All of the ectodomains have predicted O-glycosylation sites,  
275 whilst PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 additionally have two and three predicted N-glycosylation sites,  
276 respectively (Fig S4C). Treatment with PNGase F, an N-glycosidase, indeed resulted in a shift in the  
277 migration of PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 with no effect on PGRPLC2 (Fig S4D), suggesting that  
278 PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 undergo N-glycosylation.

279 We first looked at the ability of the three PGRPLC ectodomains to interact with peptidoglycan. As the  
280 vast majority of bacteria present in the gut microbiota are Gram-negative, we used DAP-type  
281 peptidoglycan purified from *E. coli* for this purpose. Each PGRPLC isoform was incubated with  
282 insoluble peptidoglycan, and the supernatant and washed pellet analyzed by Western blot. Under the  
283 conditions used, PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 were both pulled down with the polymeric peptidoglycan,  
284 whilst PGRPLC2 remained in the supernatant fraction (Fig 3A). When isoforms were combined  
285 pairwise and co-precipitated with peptidoglycan, we observed a protein migrating as a single band  
286 (likely PGRPLC2) in the supernatant fraction of both the PGRPLC1/PGRPLC2 and  
287 PGRPLC2/PGRPLC3 combinations (Fig 3B). Whilst we cannot rule out some level of PGRPLC2-  
288 peptidoglycan interaction, we conclude that PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate with polymeric  
289 DAP-type peptidoglycan, both alone and in the presence of other PGRPLC isoforms.

## 290 **PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate in the presence of TCT**

291 Next, we considered which of the PGRP domains could interact with one another in the presence of  
292 the peptidoglycan monomer, TCT. To do this, we combined one isoform with its His-tag with another  
293 isoform whose His-tag had been cleaved off, in the presence of TCT. Purifying by His-tag affinity, we  
294 then pulled down the His-tagged protein and observed whether the other, non-His tagged, isoform  
295 pulled down with it or remained in the flow-through fraction (Fig 4A). When probing initially with anti-  
296 strep tag II, we found that the PGRPLC2/PGRPLC3 combination led to near complete pull down (Fig  
297 4A), with no free PGRPLC3 being observed in the flow-through fraction. This was not due to residual  
298 His-tag being retained on PGRPLC3, as in combination with both PGRPLC3(His) and PGRPLC1(His)  
299 a large proportion of PGRPLC3 is found in the flow-through fraction. To validate this finding, we  
300 performed the reciprocal experiment, pulling down PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC2 with PGRPLC3(His) (Fig  
301 4B). As expected, PGRPLC2 appears almost entirely in the bound fraction whilst PGRPLC1 appears  
302 mostly in the free fraction, again with a small proportion in the bound fraction. In addition to the  
303 PGRPLC2/LC3 interaction, we also observed the appearance of bands at sizes that correspond to  
304 dimers and higher oligomers (Fig 4). These bands were present largely in the bound fractions, i.e., in  
305 the presence of the His-tag. We cannot therefore rule out these dimers being an artefact caused by  
306 the presence of the His-tag, a proposition that has some precedence (Wu and Filutowicz 1999).  
307 Nevertheless, we conclude that, in the presence of TCT, PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 show specific co-  
308 precipitation with one another.

## 309 **Discussion**

310 We demonstrate here that the mosquito midgut is heterogeneous in its expression of immune effectors  
311 and at least one immune receptor. In particular, we observe higher expression of the AMPs *GAM1*,  
312 *CEC1* and *LYSC1* in the cardia region compared with the posterior region of sugar-fed and blood-fed

313 midguts. The *Drosophila* midgut is already understood to be compartmentalized in its immune and  
314 digestive function (Buchon and Osman 2015), with enrichment of Imd dependent immune genes in the  
315 cardia region (Buchon et al. 2013; Tzou et al. 2000). This likely both ensures that exogenous bacteria  
316 entering the gut encounter a robust initial immune response and allows the microbiota in the posterior  
317 region to persist. A question arising from this finding is the mechanism by which the gut epithelium  
318 mediates this heterogeneity, given that it is exposed to, and indeed responds to, bacterial ligand along  
319 its length. Despite observing a very similar spatial heterogeneity in the expression of PGRPLC1, we  
320 were not able to detect any clear isoform-specific functionality in this region, perhaps suggesting that  
321 PGRPLC receptor variation does not underlie this basal variation in immunogenicity.

322 Previous structural modelling predicted that dimerization of all isoform-isoform combinations was  
323 feasible, except for PGRPLC3 homodimers (Meister et al. 2009). To our knowledge, the experiments  
324 presented here are the first to explore *in vitro* the functionality of the mosquito PGRPLC isoforms. Our  
325 results show that PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate with polymeric DAP-type peptidoglycan. In  
326 the presence of TCT, PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate with one another. These data are  
327 consistent with a model whereby PGRPLC2 plays a similar role to *Drosophila* PGRP-LCa, which acts  
328 as an adaptor to PGRP-LCx in the presence of TCT, while PGRPLC3 is a PGRP-LCx equivalent.

329 This model is supported by previously published data on the functionality of the PGRPLC isoforms. All  
330 isoforms contribute to resistance to systemic Gram-negative infection, whilst only PGRPLC1 and  
331 PGRPLC3 are necessary for resistance to Gram-positive infection (Meister et al. 2009). Given that  
332 only Gram-negative bacteria shed TCT, this is consistent with PGRPLC2 only playing a role in the  
333 presence of Gram-negatives. In *A. gambiae* cultured cells, overexpression of either PGRPLC1 or  
334 PGRPLC3, but not PGRPLC2, is sufficient to induce *CEC1* expression in the absence of infection (Lin  
335 et al. 2007). Again, this is consistent with PGRPLC2 acting as an adapter and alone being unable to  
336 dimerize with itself.

337 In the knockdown experiments presented here, we find both PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 acting as  
338 positive regulators of REL2 responsive AMPs. We also observed *GAM1* to be responsive to REL2  
339 after blood feeding, but did not observe knockdown of any single PGRPLC isoform to reproduce this  
340 effect. This could suggest that there is redundancy amongst the three PGRPLC isoforms under these  
341 conditions, or indeed that PGRPLC is able to dimerize with other partners to stimulate the pathway,  
342 such as PGRPLA (Gendrin et al. 2017). This model is also consistent with our observation that  
343 PGRPLC3 is not necessary for AMP induction in the sugar-fed gut, suggesting that PGRPLC2 can  
344 dimerize with another partner under these conditions.

345 Interestingly, PGRPLC1 silencing was found to lead to stimulation of the Imd pathway in the anterior  
346 part of the midgut. This is intriguing, considering that the same isoform is known to be able to induce  
347 the Imd pathway (Lin et al. 2007). However, it has been shown in the *Drosophila* gut that a single  
348 peptidoglycan receptor, PGRP-LE, induces the Imd pathway in response to infectious bacteria, while  
349 promoting tolerance to the microbiota via induction of Imd negative regulators (Bosco-Drayon et al.  
350 2012). *Drosophila* PGRP-LC also has a dual role in Imd induction and negative regulation, depending  
351 on its intracellular domain (Neyen et al. 2016).

352 Together, our data indicate that *Anopheles* PGRPLC isoforms can discriminate polymeric and  
353 monomeric peptidoglycan. They also suggest that PGRPLC2 acts as an adapter to PGRPLC3 for the  
354 specific sensing of TCT, leading to the induction of the Imd pathway. Finally, they add a putative  
355 regulatory role for PGRPLC1, besides its shown Imd-inducing activity.

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361 **Figure legends**

362 **Figure 1. Spatial heterogeneity of *AMP* and *PGRPLC1* expression in the mosquito gut.**

363 (A) Schematic of the mosquito gut, with dissected midgut regions indicated. (B) 16S rRNA distribution  
364 throughout the gut of sugar-fed and blood-fed females, determined by qRT-PCR on cDNA using  
365 universal 16S primers. Each point represents a pool of tissues from 15-30 individual mosquitoes,  
366 derived from 5 (blood-fed) and up to 8 (sugar-fed) independent batches of mosquito. Bacterial load  
367 significantly increases in the posterior region after blood feeding:  $p < 0.05$ , ANOVA following linear  
368 mixed effect regression model fitting. (C-E) Expression of *CEC1*, *GAM1* and *LYSC1* throughout the  
369 gut of sugar-fed and blood-fed females, with or without antibiotic feeding. Each point represents a pool  
370 of tissues from 15-30 individual mosquitoes, derived from 5 (blood-fed) and up to 6 (sugar-fed)  
371 independent batches of mosquito. For all three AMPs, tissue of origin had a statistically significant  
372 effect on AMP expression level: *CEC1*  $p < 0.001$ , *GAM1*  $p < 0.001$ , *LYSC1*  $p < 0.01$ , ANOVA following  
373 linear mixed effect regression model fitting. (F) Expression of *PGRPLC1* throughout the gut of sugar-  
374 fed mosquitoes. Each point represents a pool of tissues, of 15-30 individual mosquitoes per pool,  
375 derived from 5 independent batches of mosquito. Tissue of origin had a statistically significant effect  
376 on *PGRPLC1* expression level:  $p < 0.01$ , ANOVA following linear regression model fitting. In graphs B-  
377 F, the shapes of the points for the sugar-fed posterior region indicate whether samples were from the  
378 whole posterior region (circles), the proximal half (squares) or the distal half (triangles).

379 **Figure 2. The effect of REL2 and PGRPLC isoform knockdown on *GAM1* and *LYSC1* expression**  
380 **in the mosquito gut.**

381 (A) *GAM1* expression in different regions of the sugar-fed midgut following injection of dsRNA against  
382 LACZ (control), REL2 or specific PGRPLC isoforms. REL2 dsRNA causes a significant reduction in  
383 *GAM1* expression independently of tissue of origin ( $p < 0.05$ ), PGRPLC1 dsRNA causes a significant  
384 increase in *GAM1* expression in the anterior region ( $p < 0.05$ ), and PGRPLC2 dsRNA causes a  
385 significant reduction in *GAM1* expression in the cardia ( $p < 0.05$ ) and anterior regions ( $p < 0.05$ ). The  
386 shape of the data points indicate whether the sample represents the whole posterior region (circles),  
387 the proximal half (squares) or the distal half (triangles). (B) *LYSC1* expression in different regions of  
388 the blood-fed midgut following injection of dsRNA against LACZ (control), REL2 or specific PGRPLC  
389 isoforms. REL2 dsRNA causes a significant reduction in *LYSC1* expression in the cardia ( $p = 0.05$ ) and  
390 anterior ( $p < 0.05$ ) regions, PGRPLC2 dsRNA causes a significant reduction in *LYSC1* expression  
391 specifically in the posterior region ( $p < 0.05$ ), and PGRPLC3 dsRNA causes a significant reduction in  
392 *LYSC1* expression in the cardia ( $p < 0.05$ ) and posterior ( $p < 0.01$ ) regions. In both panels, each point  
393 represents a pool of tissues from 10-20 individual mosquitoes, derived from 3 (REL2, PGRPLC1 and  
394 PGRPLC2) or 4 (PGRPLC3 and LACZ) independent batches of mosquito. P values are derived from  
395 ANOVA tests following linear mixed effect regression model fitting.

396 **Figure 3. PGRPLC1 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate with polymeric DAP-type peptidoglycan.**

397 (A) Pull down assays using insoluble, polymeric DAP-type peptidoglycan and single PGRPLC  
398 isoforms. Blot shows one of three independent replicates, each giving the same result. (B) Pull down  
399 assays using insoluble, polymeric DAP-type peptidoglycan and combinations of PGRPLC isoforms, as  
400 indicated. Blot shows one of two independent replicates, both giving the same result. Western blots  
401 are non-reducing and were probed with anti-strep tag II antibody (1:1000 in 3% BSA). In=input  
402 (recombinant PGRP that had not been exposed to peptidoglycan); F=free; B=bound.

403 **Figure 4. PGRPLC2 and PGRPLC3 co-precipitate in the presence of TCT.**

404 (A-B) The PGRPLC2 ectodomain interacts with the PGRPLC3 ectodomain in the presence of TCT.  
405 His-tagged PGRPLC isoforms were incubated with non-His tagged PGRPLC isoforms, pulled down by

406 His tag affinity and the free (F) and bound (B) fractions analyzed. Western blots are non-reducing and  
407 were probed with anti-strep-tag II antibody (1:1000 in 3% BSA).

408 **Figure S1. Expression of *PGRPLC2* and *PGRPLC3* does not vary along the length of the gut.**

409 (A) Schematic indicating qRT-PCR primer positioning on the *PGRPLC* transcript. (B) Expression of the  
410 *PGRPLC2* and *PGRPLC3* transcripts throughout the gut of sugar-fed mosquitoes. Each point  
411 represents a pool of tissues, of 15-30 individual mosquitoes per pool, derived from 5 independent  
412 batches of mosquito.

413 **Figure S2. Knockdown efficiencies of *REL2* and *PGRPLC* isoforms in different regions of the  
414 sugar-fed and blood-fed gut.**

415 Each point represents a pool of tissues, of 10-20 individual mosquitoes per pool, derived from 3  
416 (*REL2*, *PGRPLC1* and *PGRPLC2*) or 4 (*PGRPLC3* and *LACZ*) independent batches of mosquito. For  
417 the sugar-fed posterior region, point shapes indicate whether the sample represents the whole  
418 posterior region (circles), the proximal half (squares) or the distal half (triangles). Knockdown was  
419 quantified concurrently with AMP expression analysis, 24 h (sugar-fed) or 48 h (blood-fed) after  
420 dsRNA injection.

421 **Figure S3. The effect of *REL2* and *PGRPLC* isoform knockdown on *GAM1*, *CEC1* and *LYSC1*  
422 expression in the mosquito gut.**

423 (A) *CEC1* expression in different regions of the sugar-fed midgut following injection of dsRNA against  
424 *LACZ* (control), *REL2* or specific *PGRPLC* isoforms. *PGRPLC2* dsRNA causes a significant reduction  
425 in *CEC1* expression in the cardia region ( $p < 0.05$ ). (B) *LYSC1* expression in different regions of the  
426 sugar-fed midgut following injection of dsRNA against *LACZ* (control), *REL2* or specific *PGRPLC*  
427 isoforms. (C) *GAM1* expression in different regions of the blood-fed midgut following injection of  
428 dsRNA against *LACZ* (control), *REL2* or specific *PGRPLC* isoforms. *REL2* dsRNA causes a significant  
429 reduction in *GAM1* expression independently of tissue of origin ( $p < 0.05$ ). (D) *CEC1* expression in  
430 different regions of the blood-fed midgut following injection of dsRNA against *LACZ* (control), *REL2* or  
431 specific *PGRPLC* isoforms. (A-D) Each point represents a pool of tissues, of 10-20 individual  
432 mosquitoes per pool, derived from 3 (*REL2*, *PGRPLC1* and *PGRPLC2*) or 4 (*PGRPLC3* and *LACZ*)  
433 independent batches of mosquito. p values are the result of ANOVAs following linear mixed effect  
434 regression model fitting. For the sugar-fed posterior region, point shapes indicate whether the sample  
435 represents the whole posterior region (circles), the proximal half (squares) or the distal half (triangles).

436 **Figure S4. Production of recombinant *PGRPLC* ectodomains.**

437 (A) Schematic of the expression region in the pLEX-10 vector used for recombinant protein production.  
438 (B) Coomassie stained gel of purified proteins before and after His-tag cleavage. (C) Glycosylation  
439 sites predicted using the GlycoEP server (Chauhan, Rao, and Raghava 2013) using Binary Profile of  
440 Patterns (BPP) prediction with SVM threshold set to 0.0. (D) PNGase F treatment of recombinant  
441 PGRPs. Western blot probed with anti His antibody (1:2000 in 3% BSA).

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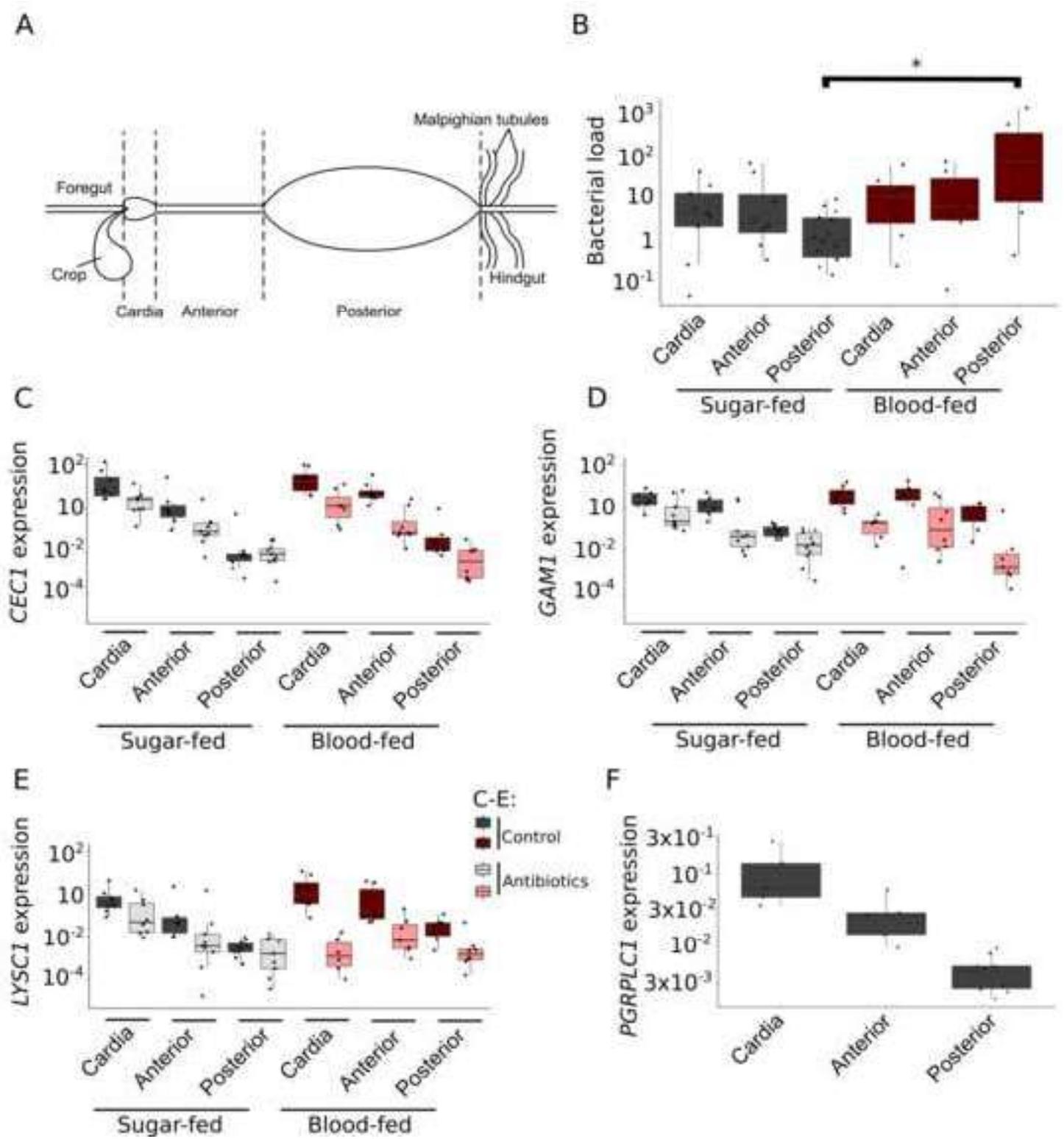
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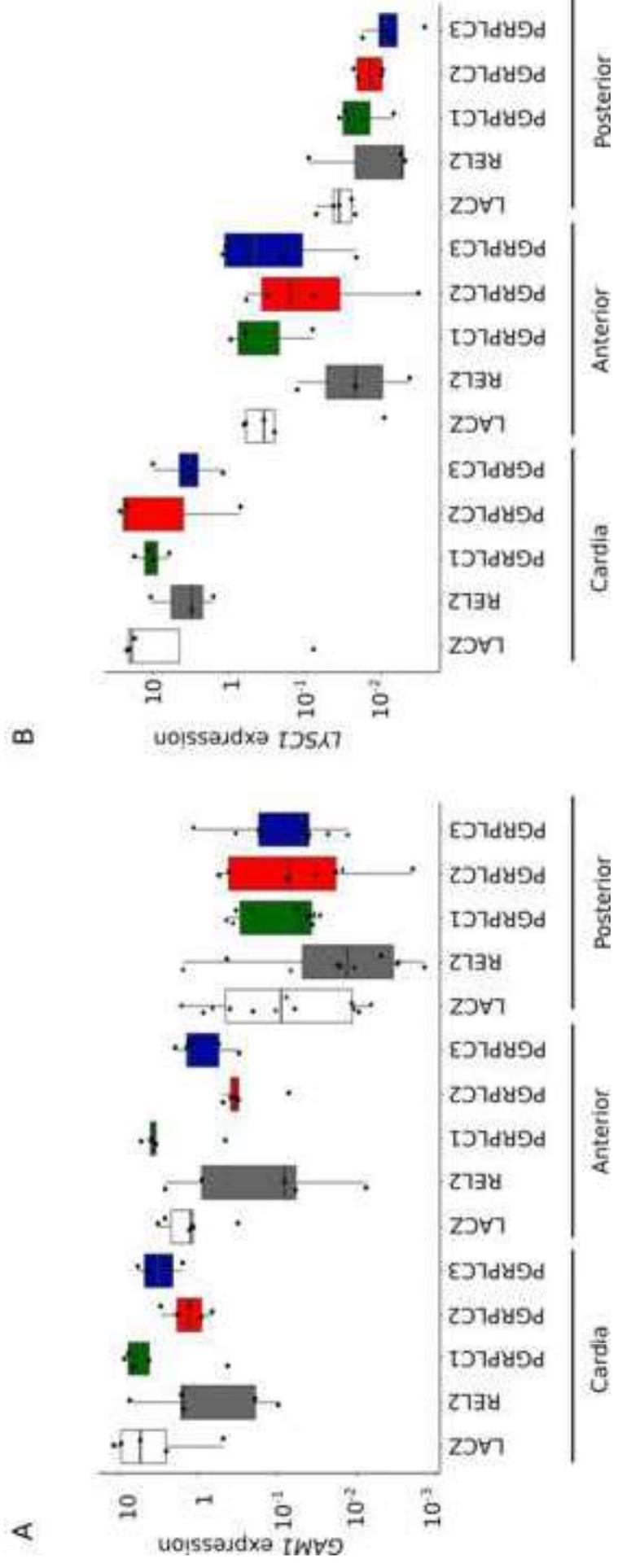
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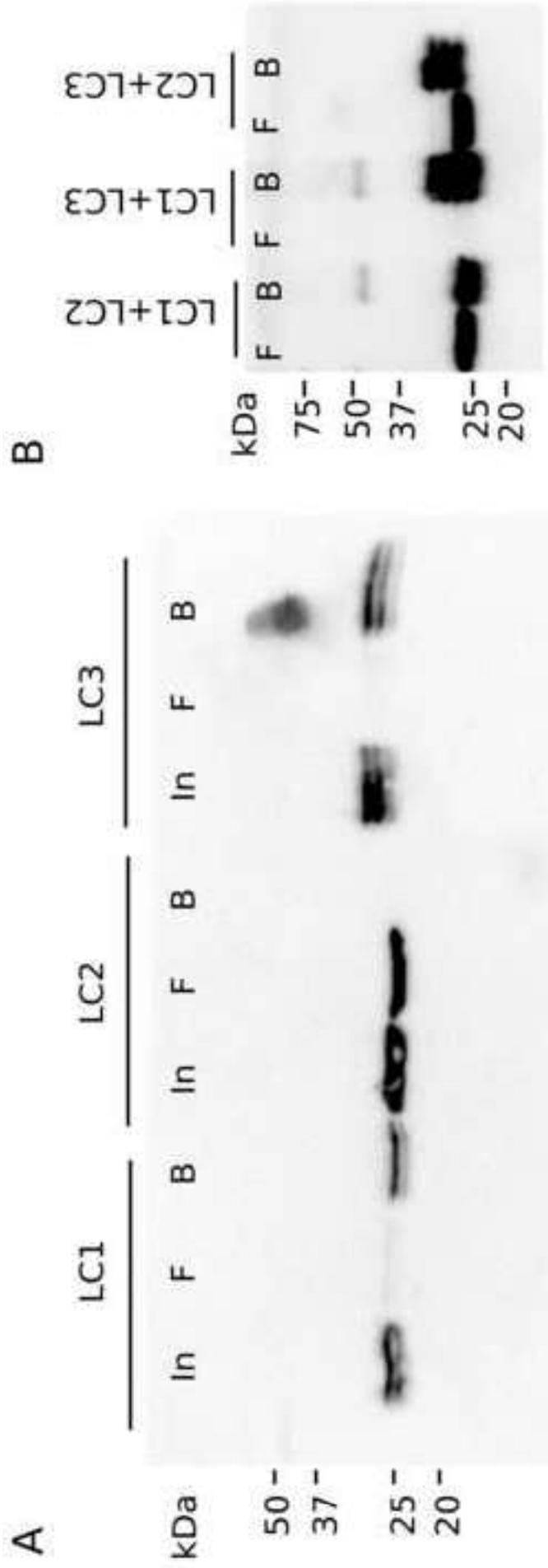
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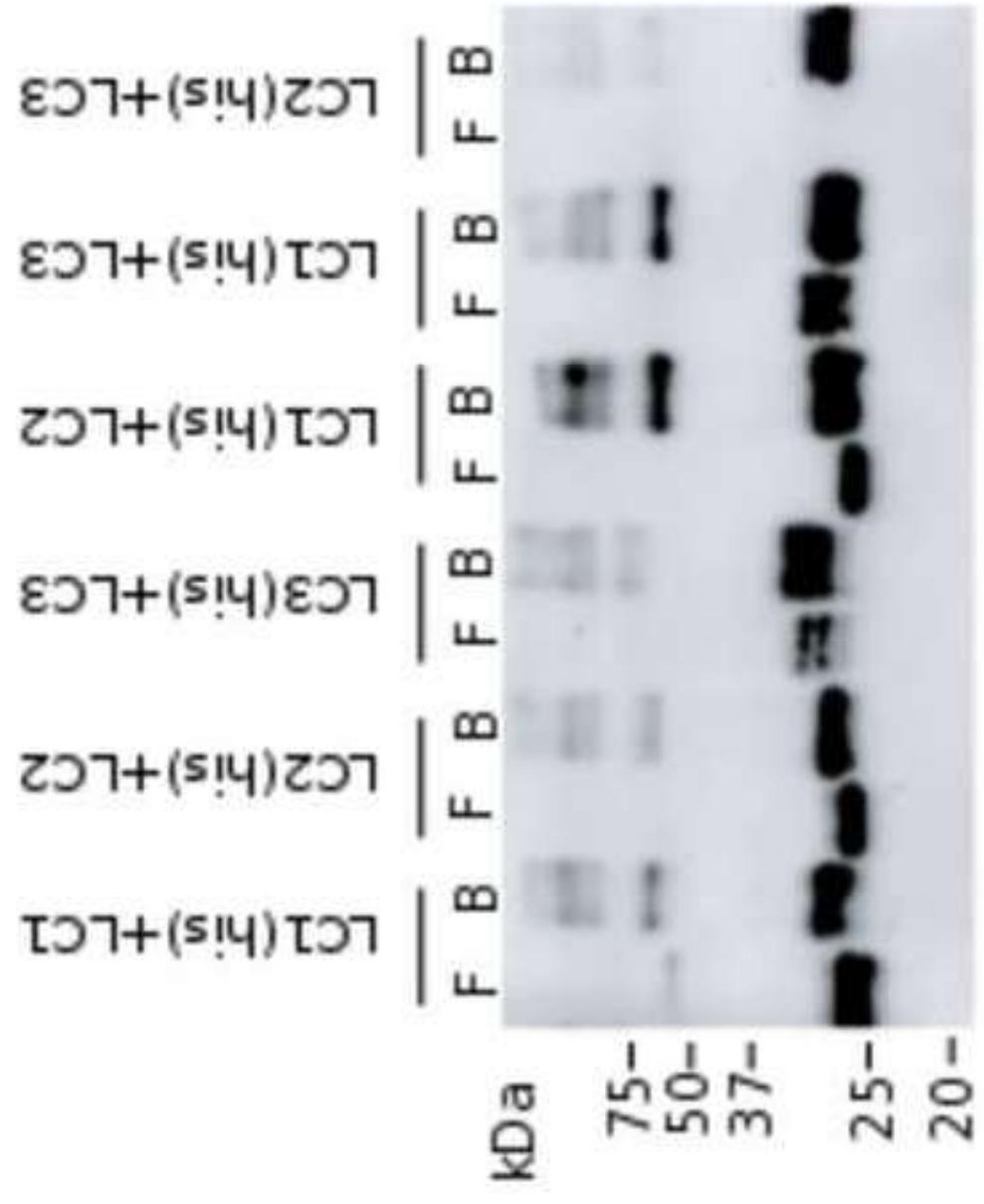
537







A



B

