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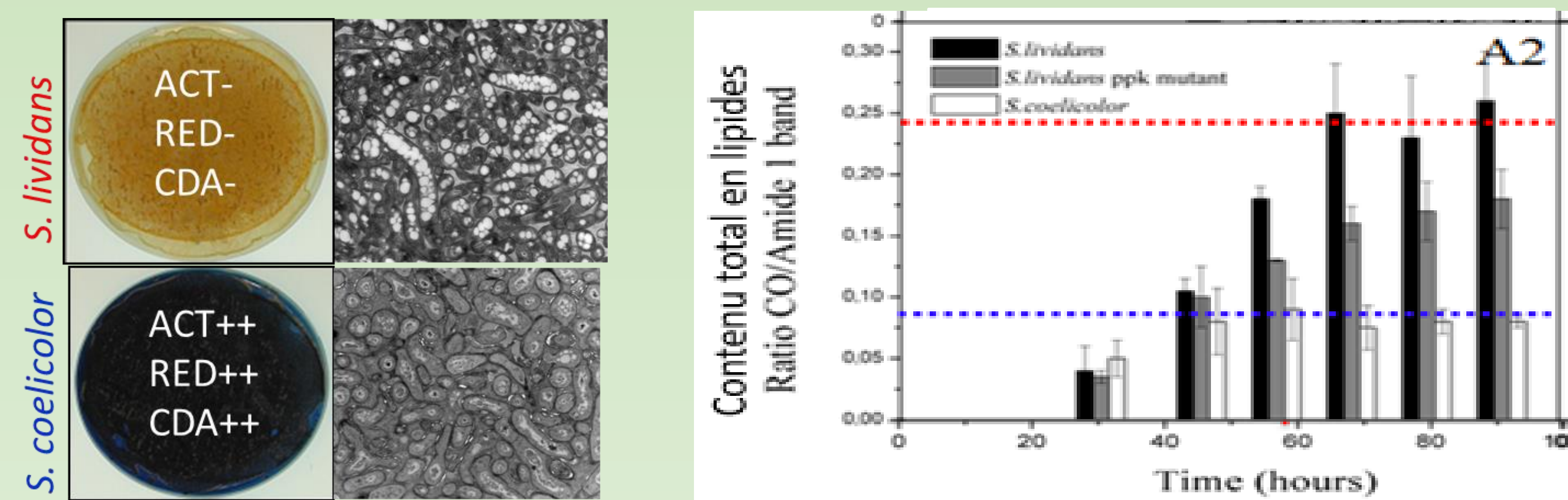
Introduction

Streptomycetes are efficient producers of chemically diverse bio-active molecules useful to human health including life-saving antibiotics. The biosynthesis of these metabolites usually occurs in the period of slow or no growth and is thought to be triggered by nutritional limitations, especially in phosphate, that are correlating with energy shortage. Despite numerous important scientific contributions over the past 40 years, a systemic understanding of the complex regulation of the biosynthesis and of the function of these bio-active metabolites for the producing bacteria remains incomplete.

The model strains, *Streptomyces lividans* (SL) and *Streptomyces coelicolor* (SC), are extensively studied by the scientific community to address these questions. These closely related species possess identical biosynthetic pathways directing the synthesis of three well characterized secondary metabolites (CDA, RED and ACT) but only *S. coelicolor* expresses them at a high level. A comparative proteomic analysis of these strains, grown on phosphate limited R2YE medium, with glucose as main carbon source, was carried out in order to establish the **specific metabolic features linked to weak (SL) and strong (SC) antibiotic production. A possible cause of such differences and a novel view of the function of the antibiotics for the producing bacteria** in the specific context of their production was inferred from this study.

Results

Anti-correlation between the ability to produce antibiotics and that to accumulate storage lipids of the TriAcylGlycerol family in *S. lividans* and *S. coelicolor*



The two component system PhoR/PhoP is weakly expressed in *S. coelicolor*

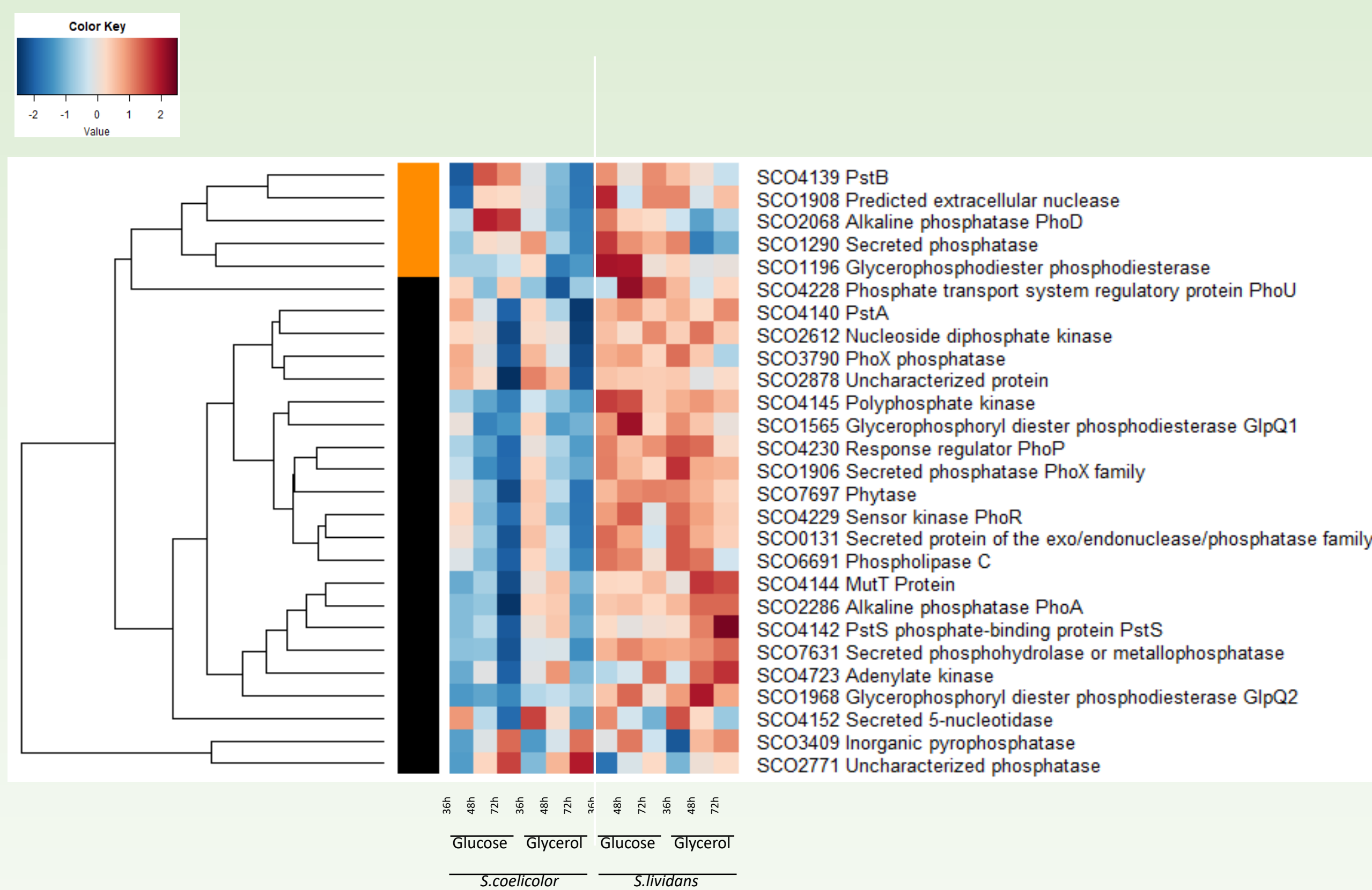


Figure 1: Heatmap representation of proteins of the Pho regulon belonging to phosphate metabolism with significant abundance change (ANOVA, adjusted p value < 0.01) between *S. coelicolor* and *S. lividans* grown on R2YE medium limited in phosphate (1mM) with either glucose or glycerol as main carbon source, for 36, 48 and 72 h at 28°C. The quantification methods are displayed in the vertical bar indicating those proteins quantified by SC (orange) or XIC (black).

The two component system PhoR/PhoP is known to regulate positively phosphate (Pi) scavenging and uptake and negatively nitrogen (N) assimilation (1). The weak expression of PhoR/PhoP in SC and thus the toning down of its regulatory role was correlated with low abundance of proteins involved in Pi scavenging and uptake leading to **severe Pi limitation** as well as with **high N availability**. High N availability is likely to be responsible for the inhibition of TAG biosynthesis in *S. coelicolor* as in most micro-organisms and thus for the low TAG content of this strain (2, 3). Inhibition of TAG biosynthesis is predicted to lead to high acetylCoA availability, that together with high N availability, would fuel the Krebs cycle to support the oxidative metabolism characteristic of this strain (2). The noticed up-regulation of enzymes generating reduced co-factors belonging to the Krebs cycle or to amino acid degradative pathways in SC is consistent with the previously reported high ATP content of this strain (2).

The activation of the oxidative metabolism in *S. coelicolor* is seen as an attempt to **restore its energy balance**. To do so most of the acetylCoA, generated by glycolysis or amino acids degradation, is used to feed the Krebs cycle rather than being stored as TAG.

However, an active oxidative metabolism requires sufficient Pi to generate ATP. Indeed *S. coelicolor* was shown to actively consume its polyphosphate stores (2) but at some point, it will face a situation of Pi starvation due to the weak expression of proteins of the Pho regulon involved in Pi supply. Oxidative phosphorylation cannot proceed in this context and should be stopped.

We propose that the benzochromane quinone ACT might fulfill such a function.

ACT biosynthesis occurs in a context of active oxidative metabolism and is correlated with an abrupt drop in the ATP content of *S. coelicolor*

ACT, like other molecules possessing quinone groups (melanine, humic acid ...) is proposed to act as electron acceptor reducing electron flow through the respiratory chain and thus respiration efficiency.

The function of ACT would thus reduce ATP synthesis in order to adjust it to low Pi availability.

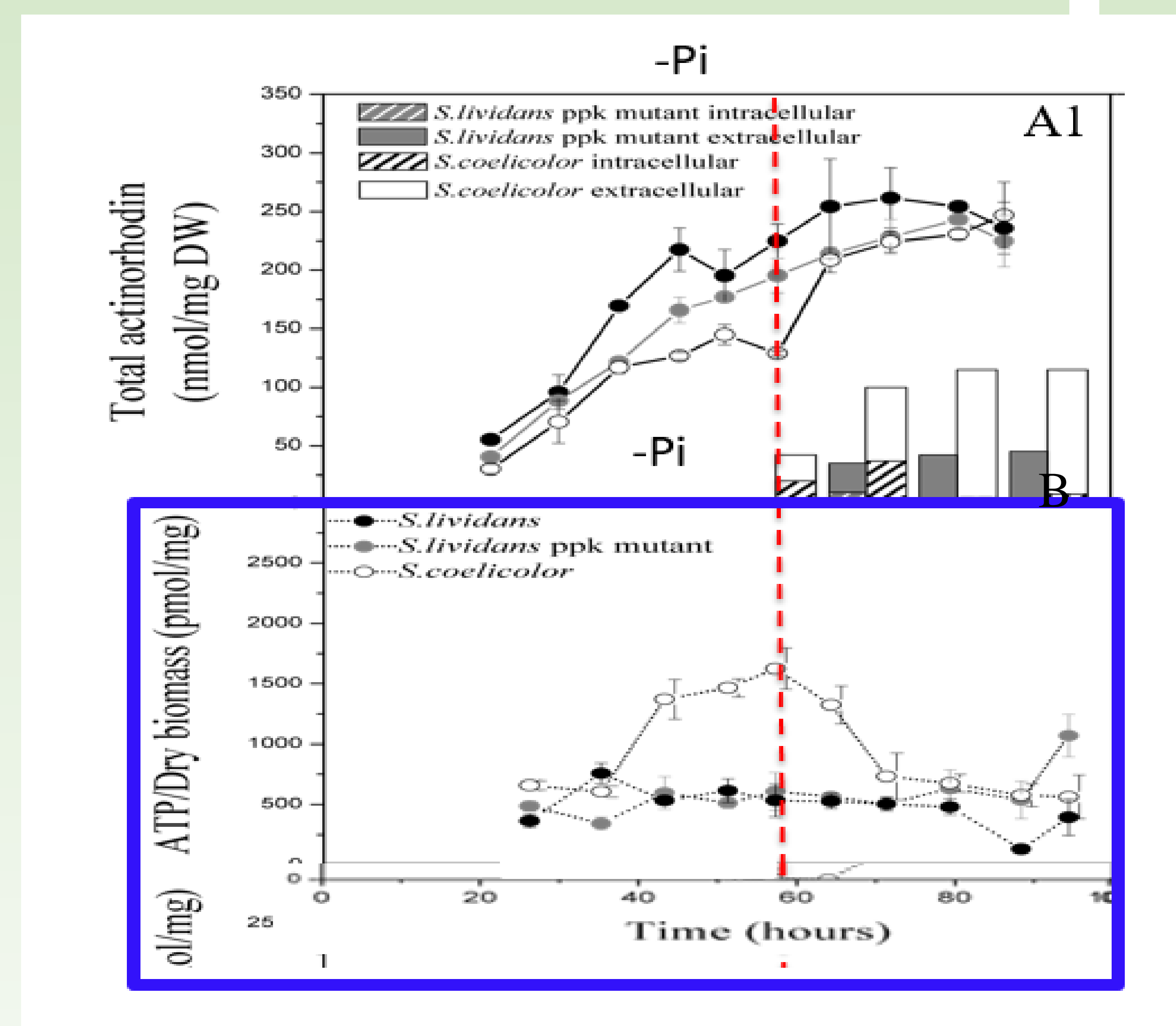


Figure 2: Cultures of *S. lividans*, its *ppk* mutant (3, 5, 6) and *S. coelicolor* grown on R2YE glucose limited in phosphate (1mM). Estimation of growth (continuous lines, mg of dry biomass per plate) of *S. lividans* (black circles), its *ppk* mutant (grey circles) and *S. coelicolor* (white circles), and evolution of the levels of ACT produced extracellularly and intracellularly by the *ppk* mutant of *S. lividans* (grey and grey hatched histograms, respectively) and *S. coelicolor* (plain white and hatched histograms, respectively) (A). Quantification of intracellular ATP levels in *S. lividans* (black circles), its *ppk* mutant (grey circles) and *S. coelicolor* (open circles). The error bars represent the standard deviation of at least three independent experiments. (2)

Conclusions

We demonstrated that the ability of *S. lividans* and *S. coelicolor* to produce antibiotics was anti-correlated with their ability to accumulate TAG (2, 3) and that the expression of the two component system PhoR/PhoP was low in *S. coelicolor*. This led to a severe Pi limitation and thus energy shortage that the strain tries to compensate by activating its oxidative metabolism. The activation of the oxidative metabolism requires the feeding of the Krebs cycle by acetylCoA resulting into the very low TAG content of this strain. TAG and antibiotics biosynthesis thus compete for common precursors, acetylCoA or its derivatives. This is true for the biosynthesis of polyketide antibiotics (ACT) that are directly using acetylCoA or malonylCoA as precursors but that is also true for that of peptidic antibiotics (CDA and RED) that are synthesised from amino acids, often derived from intermediates of the Krebs cycle. Furthermore, we proposed that the produced antibiotics are playing **important roles in the regulation of the energetic metabolism** of the bacteria in condition of phosphate scarcity. For instance, CDA and RED, produced before ACT, are thought to promote cell death and lysis of a fraction of the population, *via* membrane damages, to feed and especially provide phosphate to the surviving one (7). The provided phosphate would allow the temporary activation of the oxidative metabolism of the strain to re-establish its energy balance. However when phosphate is exhausted, oxidative phosphorylation has to be stopped and ACT was proposed to fulfill such function.

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