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- Nodes of Ranvier during development and repair in the central nervous system
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12 Abstract

Saltatory conduction of action potentials along myelinated axons depends on small 13 unmyelinated axonal domains, the nodes of Ranvier, where voltage-gated sodium channels are 14 concentrated. Our knowledge on the complex molecular composition of these axonal domains 15 still accumulates, whereas mechanisms of nodal assembly, established in the peripheral nervous 16 system, remain only partially understood in the central nervous system. Apart from their key 17 role in accelerating conduction, novel results have suggested that nodal variations allow to 18 finely tune axonal conduction speed, to meet information processing needs. In addition, through 19 their multiple glial contacts, nodes now appear as key actors for neuro-glial interactions. In 20 pathology, disorganization of axonal domains is involved in the pathophysiology of various 21 neurological diseases. In multiple sclerosis, nodal and perinodal disruption upon demyelination, 22 with subsequent changes of ion channels distribution leads to altered axonal conduction and 23 integrity. Nodal clusters then reform, coincident - but also prior to - remyelination, allowing 24 restoration of axonal conduction. Here, we will review the current knowledge on nodes of 25 Ranvier organization and function in the central nervous system; then discuss their dynamic 26 changes during demyelination and remyelination, highlighting their impact on neuronal 27 physiology in health and diseases and the related therapeutic perspectives. 28

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31 Bullet points

- Nodes of Ranvier allow high-speed, saltatory propagation of action potentials along
 myelinated fibers
- Multiple mechanisms contribute to nodal proteins clustering in the central nervous system
- Multiple glial contacts at the nodal surface suggest that CNS node might act as an axo glial hub, opening new perspectives of neuro-glia communication
- Variations of nodes of Ranvier length and diameter allow to finely tune axonal conduction speed, to meet information processing needs at the network scale
- Nodal domains might represent sites of axonal vulnerability in demyelinating diseases
- Disruption of node of Ranvier and paranodal junctions in CNS demyelinating diseases
 is associated with Nav and Kv channels redistribution, impacting action potential
 propagation and axonal integrity.
- 44

45 Introduction

Nodes of Ranvier, small axonal domains flanked by paranodal junctions, are characteristic of 46 myelinated fibers ^{1–3}. In contrast to internodal segments, the axonal membrane at the node is 47 not wrapped by myelin, but in the peripheral nervous system (PNS) Schwann cells microvilli 48 cover the nodal domain⁴. Nodes of Ranvier allow fast saltatory propagation of action potentials 49 (AP), due to nodal clusters of voltage dependent Na⁺ channels (Na_V) and the insulating property 50 of myelin. Our knowledge on the complex molecular composition of the nodal domains, 51 actively explored during the last decade, is still advancing, in particular with the recent 52 discovery, in mammals, of the presence of specific nodal K⁺ channels, independent of voltage 53 and responsible for rapid axonal membrane repolarisation ^{5,6}. The multifactorial process leading 54 to nodal proteins assembly in the central nervous system (CNS) during development is partially 55 understood, with the recent hypothesis that these mechanisms might differ depending on 56 neuronal sub-populations. Concerning nodal function, apart from their key role in saltatory 57 conduction, established long ago, recent data have highlighted other functions for nodes of 58 Ranvier, in particular a critical impact for regulation/adjustment of AP propagation – a crucial 59 need for coincident arrival of synaptic inputs from multiple axons ⁷. Moreover, the multiple 60 contacts of nodal domains with the surrounding glial environment has led to the hypothesis that 61 nodes might act as a functional "hub", representing a novel way for neuron-glia interactions. In 62

pathology, nodal disruption drastically impact axonal function and integrity ^{2,8}. Such alterations 63 are not restricted to demyelinating diseases, but have been observed in different types of 64 neurological injury. Although some nodal constituents have been identified as the primary 65 target of the disease process in peripheral demyelinating neuropathies, such demonstration is 66 still lacking in CNS demyelinating pathology. However, nodal domains, lacking the trophic 67 support of myelin, might represent a site of axonal vulnerability. In this review, we provide an 68 update on the molecular organization of CNS nodes of Ranvier and our current understanding 69 of their physiological function. We review nodal domain alterations in multiple sclerosis (MS) 70 and related experimental models, and how these changes impact neuronal physiology, paving 71 the way to therapeutic perspectives for neuroprotection. 72

73

74 1) The discovery of nodes of Ranvier

Working at Collège de France in Paris, and studying isolated myelinated fibers, Ranvier showed 75 that, contrary to the current view that myelin was a continuous and impermeable sheath, there 76 were specific sites of myelin interruption, that he described as "annular constrictions" (Figure 77 1A), where the crystalline water soluble dye picrocarminate was able to reach the axonal 78 membrane. Ranvier's first hypothesis (which might make us smile now) was that these 79 constrictions had a mechanical role: "since myelin is essentially a liquid material.... if it was 80 uninterrupted, in the human sciatic nerve for example, which is mostly in the upright position, 81 then the myelin would flow, by gravity, to the more sloping portion of the nerve, ... but this is 82 not the case; the myelin sheath is interrupted by lateral constrictions which retain it"⁹. Ranvier 83 also postulated that these constrictions, allowing the diffusion of soluble cues, could be 84 important for nutrition of the nerve cell. He attributed to the myelin sheath a protective role 85 against compression. Last but not least, he postulated that myelin, even if not needed for 86 transmission of sensory and motor "impressions" -because such transmission also takes place 87 in non myelinated fibers- would result, acting as an electrical insulation, in a "more perfect" 88 transmission...⁹; a pioneering hypothesis! that would not be confirmed before several decades 89 10 90

2) Nodes of Ranvier: structural and molecular organization

This paragraph will provide an update on the current knowledge on nodes of Ranvier organization, as well as on the mechanisms of nodal assembly, which have been actively explored and debated. Perinodal domains, tightly linked to nodal organization will also be
briefly described.

2-1) Structural organization. Since the first electron microscope description of nodes of
 Ranvier in 1960 ¹¹⁻¹³, our knowledge of the nodal ultrastructural organization has extended
 (Figure 1B).

Although the typical size of the node of Ranvier ranges from 1.0-2.0 μ m¹⁴, it was recently 99 shown that it can vary (by several fold) between axons, including in an axon-diameter 100 independent manner¹⁵. Furthermore, nodal length could partly depend on the neuronal subtype 101 considered, as they are shorter in cortical GABAergic neurons compared to non-GABAergic 102 neurons ^{16,17}. The axonal diameter at the nodes is reduced in size compared to the internode ¹⁸, 103 suggesting reduced phosphorylation of neurofilaments and/or their higher packing at the nodes 104 ^{14,19}. Variations of nodal diameter between axons, but also along the same axon, was recently 105 identified ²⁰. As we will discuss below, both nodal length and diameter are potential regulators 106 of conduction speed. Beneath the nodal axolemma, the electron-dense granular cytoplasmic 107 layer likely corresponds to the cytoskeletal network of scaffold proteins ²¹. In the CNS the 108 density of mitochondria at the node is similar or reduced compared to paranodal and internodal 109 areas ^{22,23}, in contrast to PNS. STimulated Emission Depletion (STED) super-resolution 110 microscopy has opened fascinating new insight into PNS nodal organization, highlighting 111 preserved periodic cytoskeleton organization at nodes compared to internodal areas ²⁴, but also 112 the importance of lateral organization of proteins at nodal gaps ²⁵. Such nanoscale investigation 113 is still lacking for CNS nodes, but could clarify some of the mechanisms of protein assembly at 114 CNS nodes. 115

Contrary to the PNS, where Schwann cells microvilli contact the nodal surface, myelinating 116 oligodendrocytes in the CNS do not form nodal microvilli. Instead, some nodes are contacted 117 by perinodal astrocyte and/or oligodendrocyte precursor cell (OPC) processes ^{26–32}. In addition, 118 we and others recently identified by light and electron microscopy that microglial processes 119 also contact the node ³³ (Ronzano, Roux et al, in preparation). These multiple glial contacts at 120 the nodal surface (Figure 2), suggest that CNS node might act as an axo-glial "hub", opening 121 new perspective on neuroglial communication. The CNS nodal gap is further embedded in 122 extracellular matrix (ECM), as described below ³⁴. 123

Surrounding the nodes are the paranodes, which are formed by the tight interaction between the distal, uncompacted loops of myelin and the axolemma. Electron microscopy has revealed the existence of transverse bands, corresponding to intercellular periodic densities, between each paranodal loop and the axon ^{35,36}. Neighboring the paranodes are the juxtaparanodes, located at the interface between the internode and the paranode, underneath the myelin sheath (Figure 3).

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2-2) Molecular composition of the nodal area

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The ability of nodes of Ranvier to regenerate and propagate AP along the axon relies

on their specialized molecular composition associating ion channels, cell adhesion molecules

(CAMs), cytoskeletal scaffold proteins and extra-cellular matrix net (Figure 3). This

molecular organization is partly similar to the axon initial segment (AIS), located at the axon

hillock and where the AP are generated 37

The nodes of Ranvier are highly enriched in Nav channels, consisting of a 260kDa pore-forming 135 α -subunit, enabling inward Na⁺ fluxes and depolarization phase of the AP, and one or more 136 subtypes of 30-40 kDa accessory β -subunits, which modulates α -subunit membrane targeting 137 and the opening threshold of the pore $^{38-43}$. Five out of the ten existing α -subunits isoforms are 138 found at the CNS nodes in physiological contexts (Nav1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.6 and 1.8). Nav1.3 is 139 restricted to embryonic and developmental stages and mostly absent from adult CNS ⁴⁴. Nav1.1 140 expression depends on the neuronal subtype and is detected in GABAergic neurons in the 141 hippocampus and cortex ⁴⁵⁻⁴⁹, as well as in retinal ganglion cells (RGCs) and Purkinje cells 142 ^{50,51}. Nav1.2 is the major isoform in immature nodes, with a later switch to Nav1.6 ^{52–55}, which 143 allows for higher discharges frequencies ^{56,57}. In the adult CNS, a subset of nodes also express 144 Nav1.2 and Nav1.8 58. 145

There are four different β Nav isoforms (β 1Nav to β 4Nav), encoded by the *SCNB* genes ^{42,59}, 146 β 1Nav and β 3 Nav being non-covalently associated to α -subunit, while β 2 or β 4 subunits are 147 linked to α -subunit through disulfure bonds. β 1, β 2 and β 4Nav subunits are found at the nodes 148 of Ranvier 41,60-63. BNav subunits have an immunoglobulin-like domain on the N-terminal 149 portion, which confers their adhesive properties and allows for direct interaction with other 150 nodal CAMs, such as contactin or neurofascin 186 (Nfasc186), as well as extracellular matrix 151 proteins, such as tenascins 62,64,65 . β 1 and β 2Nav subunits can further bind the scaffold protein 152 ankyrin-G (AnkG) through their intracellular domain, which also plays a role in signaling ^{66,67}. 153

The voltage-gated potassium channels $K_V7.2/3$ (*KCNQ2/3*, belonging to the delayed rectifier K_V7 family) have also been described at nodes ^{68–70}. These potassium channels are thought to

stabilize the membrane resting potential, thus allowing to maximize AP amplitude 71 . Ky3.1b 156 channels are also present in a subset of nodes in the CNS, in particular on large myelinated 157 axons, where they could participate in high-frequency firing ^{72,73}. New comers at the node are 158 the very recently described voltage-independent, thermosensitive and mechanosensitive TREK-159 1 and TRAAK channels (belonging to the 2-pore domain potassium leak channels (K2P) 160 family). Rather than conventional voltage-gated K⁺ channels, these K2P channels drive AP 161 regeneration. Moreover, they permit high-speed and high-frequency AP conduction in 162 mammalian myelinated afferent nerves. Although it remains to be determined whether the role 163 of K2P channels in rapid AP conduction can be extrapolated to all myelinated nerves, these 164 results represent a real breakthrough in our understanding of axonal conduction. They may also 165 have clinical implications in demyelinating pathologies ^{5,6}. 166

¹⁶⁷ The nodal voltage-gated ion channels are further stabilized by cell-adhesion molecules (CAM) ¹⁶⁸ such as the neuronal neurofascin isoforms, Nfasc186 and Nfasc140 (the latter expressed only ¹⁶⁹ during development) ^{74,75}, NrCAM ^{76–78} and the GPI-anchored protein contactin ⁷⁹. Through ¹⁷⁰ its IgG domain, Nfasc186 can directly interact with NrCAM, β 1Nav as well as contactin ^{62,80,81}.

This transmembrane complex is further anchored to the actin cytoskeleton through its direct interaction with the scaffold protein ankyrin-G (AnkG), which binds in turn to β IVspectrin 37,69,74,82–86.

Various extracellular matrix proteins (ECM) are also enriched at the CNS nodes, namely the extracellular domain of NrCAM, Bral1, Tenascin-R, as well as the chondroitin proteoglycans Brevican, neurocan, phosphacan, and Versican V2^{87–95}. The CNS nodal ECM, which is similar to the perineuronal nets surrounding soma and dendrites of various neuronal populations ⁹⁶ may play a role in buffering the nodal environment, through the negative charges of chondroitin sulfate chains ^{88,92,97}, and influence neuronal physiology.

The paranodal septate-like axoglial junctions, which delimitate the node, comprise the axonal adhesion proteins Caspr (contactin associated protein or paranodin) and contactin, which interact with the glial isoform of neurofascin, Nfasc155 ⁹⁸. The absence of any of these constituents leads to a loss of the axoglial junction ^{98–106}. A specialized cytoskeleton further stabilizes the septate-like junctions, by the interaction of Caspr with the cytoskeletal adapter 4.1B, which binds to ankyrin-B (AnkB) and α II/ β IIspectrin ^{107,108}. In mammals, the main feature of juxtaparanodes is their high density in delayed rectifier voltage-gated potassium channels (K_V1.1, 1.2 and K_Vb2 subunit), which may play a role in internodal resting potential support, in particular during development and injury ^{109–111}. K_V channels associate with Caspr2, a transmembrane Caspr-related protein, and the GPI-anchored TAG1 (contactin-2), which is expressed on both the axonal and glial side. The neuronal TAG1 binds in *trans* homophilically to its glial counterpart and to Caspr2 in *cis* ¹¹².

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2-3) Mechanisms of nodal assembly and maintenance

Node of Ranvier assembly in the CNS is a complex process, not fully understood to
 date. Three main mechanisms, implicating paranodal junction, cytoskeleton and ECM,
 participate to node formation, but their respective role may vary depending of the neuronal
 subtype considered ^{3,92,113,114}.

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The paranodal axo-glial junction

Several studies have shown that CNS nodes form after the paranodal junction, leading to the assumption that CNS node formation relies primarily on the flanking paranodal junctions 92,115,116 . The axoglial junction formed by axonal Caspr and contactin interaction with the glial Nfasc155 is required to establish an effective paranodal membrane diffusion barrier, with an essential role of its anchoring to neuronal paranodal cytoskeleton, by interaction with 4.1B, α II spectrin and β II spectrin ^{117,118}. This barrier restricts accumulation of nodal proteins and participates in nodal clusters localization ^{107,118,119}.

However, paranodal axo-glial junctions might not be essential for nodal clustering, as shown 205 in mutant models where nodes of Ranvier still assemble in the absence of paranodal junctions 206 ^{100,101,120–122}. In addition, we and others have shown that early nodal clusters, that we named 207 prenodes, can form on some neuronal subpopulations prior to paranodal formation and myelin 208 deposition ^{63,123–126}. That nodal cytoskeleton and nodal CAMs (Nfasc 186) interaction with 209 ECM might be sufficient to promote Nav clustering highlights that several mechanisms operate 210 together for correct node formation in the CNS. It is likely, as shown by knock-out studies, that 211 compensation takes place whenever one mechanism fails. In addition, different mechanisms 212 might drive nodal clustering depending on different neuronal subpopulations. 213

214

The cytoskeletal scaffold proteins ankyrin and βIV spectrin

²¹⁵ Cytoskeletal AnkG has been shown to be a key factor for nodal assembly. Most major nodal ²¹⁶ markers, including Na_V, $K_V7.2/3$ channels, Nfasc 186, NrCAM, and β IV spectrin have AnkG binding domains 69,85,127,128 . It is established that AnkG, through binding to β IV spectrin provides a scaffold that recruits nodal proteins and anchors them to the cytoskeleton^{86,92,127,129,130}. Although compensatory expression of AnkR in the absence of AnkG can rescue nodal assembly in the CNS, Nav channels fail to cluster when both AnkG and AnkR are absent ¹³¹.

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The nodal ECM

In the CNS, nodes of Ranvier are surrounded by a nodal ECM. Some ECM proteins, such as NrCAM, BraL1, Brevican and Versican, can directly interacts with the axonal CAM Nfasc186³, which plays a major role in Nav channel clustering. Although ECM-CAMs interactions might play a role in localizing the nodal clusters, it is now hypothesized that it might be involved in long-term stabilization rather than the initial assembly of the CNS Nodes ^{92,132–134}.

229

Aside to this tripartite scenario, the role of oligodendroglial secreted cues in early events of nodes of Ranvier formation, already shown long ago has been revisited by our group, with the subsequent demonstration that clusters of nodal proteins (prenodes) form in subpopulations of CNS axons prior to myelin deposition/paranodal junction formation and that oligodendroglial secreted contactin is a key factor for the aggregation of prenodes constituents.

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The aggregating oligodendroglial secreted cues

Early cytochemical and freeze fracture studies have provided evidence for the differentiation 237 of the axon membrane prior to formation of compact myelin in spinal nerve roots ¹³⁵. In rat 238 developing optic nerve axons, clusters of intramembranous particles on the axolemma precede 239 the formation of any compact myelin¹³⁶. In the developing rodent optic nerve, Na_V clusters 240 colocalize with AnkG and Nfasc186 and are transiently detected, either isolated or flanked on 241 one side by paranodal Caspr (i.e., heminodal structure) ^{92,115,125}. Immunostainings in retinal 242 ganglion cell cultures have demonstrated the presence of such Nav channels clusters regularly 243 spaced along axons, which are induced by protein(s) secreted by oligodendrocytes, in the 244 absence of glial cell contact 63,123. 245

These results were reproduced by Freeman et al. in 2015, showing that nodal protein assembly (prenodes) occurs under the influence of oligodendroglial secreted cues, without the need of direct oligodendroglial contact on hippocampal parvalbumin and/or somatostatin expressing GABAergic neurons. In addition, selective expression of Ky1.2 channels has been detected

along GABAergic hippocampal neurons with prenodes ¹³⁷. Formation of these early nodal 250 protein clusters along unmyelinated GABAergic axons requires also intrinsic neuronal factors 251 such as AnkG and β 2Nav ^{124,126}. To identify the oligodendroglial cues inducing formation of 252 prenodes, a mass spectrometry analysis of oligodendrocyte conditioned medium was 253 performed, resulting in the identification of contactin-1 combined with RPTP/Phosphacan and 254 Tenascin-R¹²⁵. Contactin expression is detected in neurons and oligodendroglial cells¹³⁸, and 255 binds both to RPTP/Phosphacan and TenascinR¹³⁹⁻¹⁴², suggesting that the oligodendroglial 256 aggregating activity might be related to the formation of a multi-molecular complex. Nfasc186 257 and NrCAM are not critical for contactin-1 induced prenodal clustering, but interactions with 258 RPTP/phosphacan or Tenascin-R may bridge oligodendrocyte-derived contactin with other 259 neuronal CAMs (contactin, $\beta 1$ or $\beta 2Na_V$ subunits) ^{64,143}. In addition to the optic nerve and the 260 hippocampus, prenodes have also been detected in Purkinje cells in the mouse cerebellum (A. 261 Desmazières, unpublished results), as well as in the Xenopus optic nerve (B. Zalc unpublished 262 results) suggesting that it might be a more general mechanism for nodal clustering. What 263 distinguishes axons that form prenodes from axons without prenodes is still unclear. Prenode 264 formation might be related to different modalities of axonal differentiation. Alternatively, it 265 might be developed to meet the need for early establishment of neuronal connections during 266 development ^{124,144–146}. That formation of prenodes is an intrinsic property of subpopulations of 267 neurons is illustrated by the fact that in the same culture, oligodendroglial conditioned medium 268 will induce prenodes on GABAergic, but not on pyramidal axons, a specificity that is 269 reproduced *in vivo* on tissue sections of developing hippocampus ¹²⁴. 270

What is the fate of these early nodal clusters has been recently addressed using *in vitro* live imaging methods, showing that prenodal clusters participate in heminode formation (and thus ultimately in mature nodes of Ranvier) when myelination proceeds, by fusion with existing heminodal structures when myelin progresses towards them, or by guiding myelin deposition initiation at their direct vicinity ¹²⁶.

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3) The Node of Ranvier as a regulator of nerve conduction

The nerve impulse propagation results from a transient influx of Na⁺, responsible for the rapid depolarization, and an efflux of K⁺ which causes repolarization, as described by the Hodgkin and Huxley model ¹⁴⁷ established from voltage-clamp measurements in the squid giant axon. Voltage-gated Na⁺ channels are critical drivers for active conduction along the axon, and

their clustering at nodes of Ranvier in myelinated fibers allows regeneration of AP and saltatory 283 conduction ^{148,149}. Using computational modeling in combination with high-speed voltage-284 calibrated optical recordings across the nodal and internodal axolemma of myelinated 285 neocortical pyramidal axons, as well as electron microscopy analysis, Cohen et al ¹⁵⁰ recently 286 provided evidence for a second longitudinal conducting pathway formed by the periaxonal and 287 paranodal submyelin spaces, therefore a double cable model for axonal conduction. 288 Morphological axonal parameters, notably axon diameter, internodal length and myelin 289 thickness are critical parameters for conduction velocity ^{151–154} (Figure 4), and might be 290 regulated by neuronal electrical activity. This adaptive process contributes to strengthening and 291 synchronization of circuits and improves performances during learning ^{155,156}. In addition, 292 nodes of Ranvier length and diameter are potential regulators of conduction speed as they 293 determine the capacitance of the node and the speed with which nodal Nav channels activate 294 ^{15,20}. In this context, variability of node length even at constant axon diameter was recently 295 shown between different axons in the optic nerve and in the grey matter of the cortex, 296 contrasting with similar length along the same axon. Using simulation studies, such length 297 modifications resulted in large variations of conduction speed (increased node length 298 decreasing conduction speed and decreased node length increasing conduction speed). Taken 299 together this suggests that axons may be able to adjust their node lengths in order to tune their 300 conduction speed, to optimize information processing. (Figure 4B). It was recently shown that 301 perinodal astrocytes, by altering myelin thickness and increasing nodal gap length might also 302 impact conduction speed ³¹. Concerning node of Ranvier diameter, a progressive increase along 303 the distal segments has been observed in auditory brainstem axons, and simulation studies 304 suggest that it contributes to temporal processing for sound localization ²⁰. In addition to these 305 morphological changes of nodes of Ranvier, clustering of Nav prior to myelin deposition 306 (prenodes) may constitute an early mechanism to accelerate conduction velocity, ^{124,157} (Figure 307 4A). Indeed, single-axon electrophysiological recordings on hippocampal GABAergic neurons 308 with and without prenodes show that the conduction velocity is higher in neurons with prenodes 309 compared to same caliber axons without prenodes ¹²⁴. These data suggest another level of 310 influence by oligodendrocytes on the regulation of conduction velocity beyond the production 311 of a myelin sheath. Prenodes with high-density Nav clusters could serve as acceleration point, 312 allowing microsaltatory conduction ^{158,159,160} and could therefore help to overcome axonal 313 branch point failures and maintain reliable propagation of AP ^{153,161}. 314

In myelinated fibers, Kv1.1 and Kv1.2 channels, restricted to the juxtaparanodal compartment, 315 contribute to internodal resting potential and act to prevent repetitive firing ². At nodes, K⁺ 316 conductance mainly relies on leak-type channels belonging to the K2P channel subfamily (see 317 above), recently identified as TRAAK and/or TREK-1^{5,6} and also on slowly opening K_V7.2/7.3 318 channels ⁶⁸. Their activity largely contributes to repolarizing the nodal membrane during a 319 spike, and is also important for the stabilization of a negative resting potential and maximum 320 spike amplitude ^{5,6,68,71}. The activity of K2P channels can be diversely regulated to control 321 cellular excitability, notably by force applied directly through the lipid bilayer ^{162,163} and could 322 serve a mechano-protective role in node of Ranvier or respond to mechanical component of the 323 action potential ¹⁶⁴. Other K⁺ channels also repolarizes membrane at nodes, such as $K_{Ca}3.1$, a 324 calcium-activated potassium channel, which is a key determinant for generation of fast 325 frequency spikes and safe conduction in Purkinje cell axons ¹⁶⁵. 326

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4) Nodes of Ranvier alterations in demyelinating pathologies

Whether nodal structures can be the direct target of auto-immune CNS demyelinating pathologies, as demonstrated for several auto-immune peripheral neuropathies, is not clear to date. Major changes at and near the node, however, take place as a consequence of myelin loss. These structural changes are associated with profound modifications of Na_V and K_V channels expression, and alteration of neuronal physiology.

4-1) Nodal clusters alterations and ion channels changes at and near nodes upon CNS
 demyelination.

In experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE), a model of inflammatory CNS 336 demyelination, disruption of nodes of Ranvier with loss of Nay nodal clusters has been reported 337 in both optic nerves ¹⁶⁶ and spinal cord ¹⁶⁷. Loss of nodal clusters is associated with extended 338 expression of Nav channels along demyelinated axons. Similar findings with drastic reduction 339 of Nav nodal clusters were reported in the corpus callosum upon cuprizone-induced 340 demyelination, a toxic, non-inflammatory model ^{168,169}. In dysmyelinating mutants, changes of 341 Nav channels expression appear more heterogeneous : in *myelin-deficient (md)* rats and *jimpy*, 342 mice, two proteolipid protein (PLP) mutants ^{58,170}, where myelination is drastically reduced, 343 Nay channels clusters persist despite lack of myelin and axoglial junctions; similarly, in 344 ceramide galactosyltransferase deficient mice, which undergo spontaneous adult-onset 345 demyelination, Nay channels clusters persist after myelin sheaths are lost ¹⁶⁸. In contrast, in 346

shiverer mice, a myelin basic protein (MBP) mutation resulting in non-compacted myelin, Nav
channel clusters are reduced in number ¹¹⁵ while Nav channel immuno-reactivity is detected
throughout adult axons ⁵⁵. Different type of myelin pathology and different life expectancy
between these different mutants might explain this heterogeneity.

These alterations of Nav localization upon experimental demyelination are associated with 351 changes in Nav isoform expression. Reduced expression of Nav1.6 (the mature isoform of Nav 352 expressed at nodes in the adult normal CNS, see above) associated with detection of Nav1.2 353 (normally restricted to immature nodes and unmyelinated fibers) has been reported in different 354 models ^{55,166,167,169,171}. That Nav1.2 expression might correspond to *de novo* synthesis was 355 addressed in the EAE model, where the increased expression of Nav1.2 channels along 356 demyelinated axons of the optic nerve was accompanied by upregulated Nav1.2 channel mRNA 357 levels in retinal ganglion cells¹⁷². In addition to Nay1.2 and 1.6, Nay1.8 is ectopically expressed 358 by Purkinje neurons in EAE, where it perturbs electrical activity ^{173,174}. 359

In addition to changes in Nav channels, major modifications of K_V channels are associated with demyelination. In the dysmyelinating mutants (*md* rats and *jimpy* mice) the localization of K_V channels, which in mammals normally reside at the juxtaparanodal region beneath the myelin sheath (*e.g.*, K_V 1.1 and K_V 1.2), is strongly altered and K_V 1.1/ K_V 1.2 channels abut the nodal clusters of Na_V ^{58,72,170}. Similar findings were reported in the spinal cord of EAE mice ^{175,176}. Finally, upon cuprizone demyelination K_V 1.1 and K_V 1.2 channels disperse all along the axon ¹⁷⁷.

Most of these studies have been focused on white matter axons. Recently, using a murine cuprizone model, Hamada et al ¹⁷⁸ addressed the changes induced by demyelination in the cortex, by focusing on L5 pyramidal neurons of the somato-sensory cortex. They showed that, contrary to white matter tracts, Na_V1.6 expression was heterogeneously distributed along these cortical denuded axons, either dissolved or extended into the paranodal domains with increased nodal area. This was in contrast with the K_V 7.3 channels, which redistribute extensively along the demyelinated internodes.

The few neuropathological studies addressing the fate of nodal structures in MS tissue demonstrated that nodes of Ranvier on white matter demyelinated axons are profoundly altered or disrupted, while a diffuse redistribution of Na_V channels is detected along denuded axons 172,179 . Other changes such as lengthening of nodes have also been reported 176,179 . Although ³⁷⁸ Na_V channels of mature nodes in the normal CNS are Na_V1.6, redistributed Na_V channels along ³⁷⁹ demyelinated axons consist both of Na_V1.6 and Na_V1.2 ¹⁷². In addition, in MS, similarly to ³⁸⁰ EAE, Na_V1.8 is ectopically expressed in axons of Purkinje neurons, and it has been suggested ³⁸¹ that variants of *SCN10A* gene (encoding Na_V1.8) predict the degree of cerebellar dysfunction ³⁸² in MS ^{173,180}. Changes of K_V channels also occur, with loss of juxtaparanodal K_V clusters and ³⁸³ extensive expression of K_V channels along the denuded portion of the axon ¹⁷⁹.

Whether these nodal alterations occur at the onset of myelin damage or whether they are 384 secondary to paranodal junction disruption has been extensively studied. In experimental 385 demyelinating models (EAE, cuprizone) ^{176,181}, early breakdown of paranodes is detected 386 contrasting with persisting nodal clusters. ^{2,58,170}. However, nodal changes have been detected 387 prior to or coincident to disruption of paranodal junctions in an EAE model using coherent anti-388 Stokes Raman scattering microscopy (CARS)¹⁸². In a model of autoimmune optic neuritis both 389 nodes and paranodes were increased in length during the late induction phase of the disease, 390 prior to onset of the demyelination and immune cell infiltration ¹⁸³. Similarly, in a cuprizone 391 model with different treatment durations, a small but significant decrease in nodes density was 392 observed at the onset of demyelination and before significant change in Caspr 393 immunoreactivity ¹⁸⁴. Analyzing MS normal appearing white matter (NAWM), Howell et al 394 showed an early elongation and alteration of paranodal structures¹⁷⁶. Moreover, a displacement 395 of K_V1.2 channels closer to the nodes is observed indicating that disruption of paranode 396 precedes alterations at the node itself. Similar findings were reported in the borders of lesions 397 of patients with chronic progressive MS^{176,185}. In line with these results, loose/extended clusters 398 of nodal proteins are detected on some denuded axons within MS demyelinated lesions ¹⁷⁹. 399 likely corresponding to remaining nodal structures after paranodal breakdown. Altogether, the 400 chronology of nodal versus paranodal alteration upon demyelination remains elusive, with the 401 difficulty to ascertain a temporal pattern from human post-mortem studies. Whether, as 402 highlighted for nodal formation, the temporal pattern of nodal disaggregation might vary 403 depending on neuronal subpopulations is an open question. 404

405 4-2) The consequences of demyelination-induced nodal disruption on neuronal physiology.
 406 Disruption of nodal and perinodal domains have a profound impact on nerve conduction and
 407 excitability. Moreover, Nav channels redistributed along the axon might act as a double sword,
 408 participating to an adaptive response to injury on the one hand, to neurodegeneration on the
 409 other hand.

Change in neuronal conduction and excitability

In the spinal cord, optic nerve, corpus callosum and neocortex myelin loss is known for long to 411 cause a substantial slowing in conduction velocity and often a transitory conduction block 412 ^{184,186–188}. More recently, optical Voltage-Sensitive Dye Recordings of cortical L5 pyramidal 413 neurons allowed to demonstrate that demyelination is associated with a switch of the modality 414 of AP propagation from saltatory fast conduction to continuous slow conduction ¹⁷⁸, consistent 415 with the observation that even low Nav channel densities at the denuded internode axolemma 416 suffice to ensure propagation of axonal APs ¹⁸⁹. In addition, hyperexcitability, ectopic spikes 417 generation and failure of AP propagation at the presynaptic terminals have been recorded in 418 these demyelinated fibers ^{178,190} (Figure 4C). The impact of K⁺ channels redistribution along 419 demyelinated axons remains unclear. The functional role of K_V7, redistributed into the 420 demyelinated internodes, remains to be further examined. To date no data are reported 421 concerning K2P channels during demyelination. Ky 1.1 and 1.2 channels become exposed from 422 under the myelin, contributing to alteration of AP propagation. Blockade of these channels 423 using 4-amidopyridine (4-AP) is a current treatment in MS and other demyelinating diseases. 424 However, it has been suggested that K⁺ channels targeted by 4-AP are also found at synaptic 425 terminals rather than along demyelinated axons⁸. 426

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Redistribution of Nav channels induces neurodegeneration

Whereas redistribution of Nav channels allow persistent, albeit slow, nerve conduction, it might 429 however be maladaptive, as suggested by the seminal work of Craner et al. ¹⁷², which has 430 demonstrated that the Nav1.6 isoforms, producing persistent Na⁺ current might be a key driver 431 of neurodegeneration, with accumulation of intra-axonal sodium and subsequent calcium 432 overload. In contrast, redistribution of the Nav1.2 isoform was considered as less damaging due 433 to less Na⁺ persistent current production than the Na_V1.6 channels. This hypothesis was only 434 recently tested in vivo using gain and loss of function experiments. In mice floxed for Scn8a, 435 the gene that encodes the α subunit of Nav1.6, elimination of Nav1.6 from murine retinal 436 ganglion cells using intra-vitreal injection of an AAV vector harboring the Cre recombinase has 437 resulted, during EAE, in increased neuronal survival. Interpretation of the impact of Nav1.6 438 suppression on neuroprotection was however complex because loss of Nav1.6 also resulted in 439 reduced inflammation ¹⁹¹ likely related to the expression of Nav1.6 on non neuronal cells, 440 among them microglia and macrophages. Concerning Nav1.2, gain-of-function achieved by 441 inserting a human mutation in the mouse Nav1.2-encoding gene has resulted in increased neuro-442

axonal degeneration and increased disability during EAE ¹⁹² with no impact on the immune
response; such gain of function was not tested for Nav1.6, due to the induction of epileptic
seizures. Altogether these results strengthen the hypothesis that demyelination-induced
redistribution of Nav channels along the axon play a major role in neurodegeneration.

In direct line with these pathophysiological concepts, therapeutic strategies aimed at blocking 447 Na⁺ channels to promote neuroprotection were developed: the lamotrigin trial evaluating a 448 partial Na⁺ channels blocker in secondary progressive MS¹⁹³, with brain volume as a primary 449 outcome measure was negative; the phase 2 trial of phenytoin in patients with optic neuritis ¹⁹⁴, 450 showed a 30% reduction of retinal thickness loss (quantified using optical coherence 451 tomography) with phenytoin compared with placebo. The lack of specificity for Nav1.2 and/or 452 Nav1.6 of the therapeutic compounds tested in these trials, the lack of robust surrogate markers 453 for neuroprotection in MS (except for the optic nerve) might have prevented further 454 development. These strategies might however be re-actualized with the development of more 455 specific Na⁺ channels blockers. 456

In addition, novel perspectives might emerge based on K⁺ channels blockade. Blocking K⁺ channels on denuded axons (see above), 4-aminopyridine (4-AP), have some minor symptomatic efficacy, likely related to reduced axonal excitability, but it lacks specificity. Some relatively specific drugs now available might represent a promising approach. Finally visualizing K⁺ channels expression might open to novel imaging perspectives. A recent PETscan study using [18F]3-F-4-AP ligand in dysmyelinating *Shiverer* mice lacking compact myelin has suggested that it might be a valuable PET tracer for detecting CNS demyelination¹⁹⁵.

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465 *4-3)* Nodes of Ranvier: a primary target of the inflammatory attack?

Whether node of Ranvier might represent sites of axonal vulnerability has been suggested. In 466 this context, live imaging of spinal cord in an EAE model, has shown that initial disruption of 467 the axon often occurs at putative nodes of Ranvier ¹⁹⁶. This might reflect the vulnerability of 468 the nodal domains in an inflammatory environment, due to the lack of myelin protection at the 469 nodal axonal surface. Interestingly, using a spinal cord in vivo multiphoton imaging approach 470 in combination with calcium reporter mouse lines in mice with EAE, Witte et al have shown 471 that calcium permeable membrane nano-ruptures might influence axonal fate, and that axons 472 with maintained elevated calcium levels are prone to degenerate ¹⁹⁷. Importantly, demyelination 473 increased the probability of calcium permeable membrane nano-ruptures, probably because loss 474 of the myelin sheaths facilitates access to the axonal membrane along the internode, and, in this 475

context, it can be hypothesized that nodes of Ranvier might represent a preferential site for
 calcium induced axonal membrane injury

In addition, microglia infiltration was shown to be correlated with nodal and paranodal alterations in MS patients and in EAE ¹⁷⁶, whereas the inhibition of microglia activation minimized the nodal/paranodal alterations. This indicates that inflammation can participate in MS etiology by affecting node organization prior to demyelination.

Alternatively to this hypothesis of nodal vulnerability, the possibility that nodal antigens might 482 be the target of the immune response has been actively studied. The first report ¹⁹⁸ that 483 autoantibodies recognizing the extracellular domain of both Nfasc155 and Nfasc186 were 484 detected in some MS patients, more frequently in chronic progressive than relapsing remitting 485 MS, has led to the hypothesis that recognition of Nfasc186 at the node of Ranvier by these 486 antibodies might exacerbate axonal injury and accelerate disease progression. Another report, 487 however, described no difference in the prevalence of anti-Nfasc seropositivity between 488 patients with primary progressive MS (4.8%) or relapsing-remitting MS (0.6%) and healthy 489 controls (2.0%)¹⁹⁹, and three later studies indicate that Nfasc is not the dominant target of 490 antibodies in MS 200-202. Contactin-2, expressed at juxta-paranodes, was identified as an 491 autoantigen targeted by T cells and autoantibodies in MS, with the hypothesis that a contactin-492 2-specific T-cell response contributes to the development of gray matter pathology ²⁰³, but this 493 has not been confirmed to date. 494

Taken together, and even if both technical issues to detect seropositivity and underestimation due to the lack of systematic screening might account for this low prevalence of antinodal/perinodal antibodies in MS, there is no clear evidence for an immune response targeting nodal antigens in MS.

This is in contrast with peripheral nervous system (PNS) inflammatory diseases, where antibodies targeting Nfasc and contactin-1 have been detected in patients with chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP). These antibodies were in most cases directed against Nfasc155, the glial isoform of neurofascin expressed at paranodes ^{204,205} but in few cases against Nfasc186 ^{206–208} or contactin-1 ^{206,209,210}. In patients with both CNS and PNS demyelinating lesions (a rare, not yet well defined condition named combined central and peripheral demyelination, CCPD), anti-Nfasc155 antibody were detected, but their prevalence strikingly varies between studies ^{211,212}. These discrepancies likely reflect technical issues
 related to the detection of the seropositivity.

⁵⁰⁸ 4-4) Nodes of Ranvier reform during remyelination. Can it impact myelin repair?

The fact that remyelination is associated with reclustering of nodes of Ranvier has been shown 509 in different experimental models ^{169,172}. Remyelinated axons, characterized by short internodal 510 lengths, indicating that new nodes are formed, have restored conduction ²¹³. In MS, Coman et 511 al ¹⁷⁹ showed that, within shadow plaques, nodal clusters, flanked by paranodes, and 512 undistinguishable from nodes of Ranvier present in the periplaque, in the NAWM and in control 513 tissue (Figure 5A), were a hallmark of these remyelinated areas. The chronology of this re-514 aggregation is still unknown. In addition, Coman et al ¹⁷⁹ reported that, although remyelinated 515 internodes were always flanked by heminodal clusters, aggregates of Nav channels were often 516 detected on denuded axons in the vicinity of remyelinated axons. These isolated clusters might 517 represent nodes of Ranvier persisting after demyelination. Alternatively, they might represent 518 early clusters of nodal proteins (prenodes), clustered prior to remyelination (as they occur prior 519 to myelination). Further reinforcing this hypothesis is the detection of prenodes prior to 520 remyelination, in an ex-vivo model of murine cerebellar slices, where demyelination, induced 521 by lysophosphatidylcholine, is followed by axoglial junction formation and remyelination (our 522 unpublished results, figure 5B). The role of these prenodes during the remyelination process 523 remains to be determined. It can be envisaged that they impact conduction speed, allowing 524 increased velocity prior to/in the absence of remyelination. In agreement with this hypothesis 525 are the seminal results by Smith et al. ²¹⁴ in a murine model of spinal cord demyelination, where 526 conduction velocity increased prior to myelin wrapping. It was suggested by the authors that 527 this increased conduction was related to "precursors of nodes of Ranvier also named phi-nodes" 528 distributed along myelinated nerve fibers, and that it "may indicate aggregates of sodium 529 channels which form along the demyelinated axolemma prior to remyelination". 530

Alternatively, prenodes might influence the position of the new myelin sheaths. Indeed, our live imaging approach, showing that myelin wrapping often begins at, or near the site of contact between an oligodendroglial process and a prenode ¹²⁶ suggests that prenodes might guide the myelin wrapping onset. In line with the long-term imaging of myelin remodeling after myelin ablation in zebrafish, which has shown that new sheaths are positioned almost exactly where the ablated ones were, it can therefore be hypothesized that prenodes could serve as landmarks for myelin positioning of regenerating sheaths ^{126,215}.

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539 *Conclusion / perspectives*

The granularity of our knowledge on the molecular composition of the nodal and perinodal axonal domains, as well as our understanding of the impact of nodes of Ranvier in neuronal physiology, has moved forward recently.

Deciphering the structural and molecular alterations of the nodal components, in particular of the Na⁺ and K⁺ ion channels upon demyelination and remyelination, together with the development of more specific channels blockers, might pave the way for novel therapeutic perspectives favoring neuroprotection and restoration of function to prevent disability progression in MS. In addition, even if this is a more general mechanism of axonal damage, novel perspectives of neuroprotection might emerge from the recent results of calcium induced nano-ruptures ¹⁹⁷.

There is also growing evidence that nodal abnormalities can occur in other, non 550 de/dysmyelinating diseases (traumatic injury, cerebral hypoperfusion, hyperoxic model of 551 premature brain injury) in which demyelination is secondary to the initial insult ^{8,216–219}. In 552 addition alterations of ion channels have been identified in the pathophysiology of several 553 disorders of neuronal excitability such as epilepsy, linked to mutations in Nav or Kv channels 554 or alterations in channel trafficking [reviewed in ^{220,221}], but also migraine and psychiatric 555 diseases. It is not clear, however, whether ion channel dysfunctions specifically at the nodes 556 alone underlie the development of these diseases, since there are also high densities of these ion 557 channels at the AIS. Loss of function of the TREK-1 and TRAAK (K2P) channels required for 558 high speed conduction, detected at node of Ranvier, and not at the AIS (see above) is associated 559 in vivo with altered sensory behavioral responses. Mutations of TRAAK causes a syndrome 560 associating facial dysmorphism, hypertrichosis, epilepsy, intellectual disability ²²². The 561 consequences of demyelination on K2P channels is unknown to date, but changes of these 562 recently identified thermo- and mechano-sensitive channels at the nodes might impact 563 conduction and function. 564

Finally, it can be envisaged that favoring nodal clustering might be a promising therapeutic perspective of neuroprotection in demyelinating pathologies. Clustering Nav channels prior to remyelination might be beneficial, as it might accelerate conduction velocity prior to remyelination, -similarly to developmental myelination-, therefore allowing to maintain physiological functions. In addition, preventing diffuse expression of ion channels along demyelinated axons and the related damaging cascade, by promoting early clusters of nodal proteins might also have a neuroprotective effect. In this context, and with the caveat that *in vivo* evidence is still lacking, the recent discovery of oligodendroglial cues inducing clustering
 might open to promising perspectives.

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588 Figure Legends

Figure 1 (A) Original drawings of sciatic nerves stained with silver nitrate. Louis-Antoine
 Ranvier, in "Leçons sur l'Histoire du Système Nerveux", 1878. (B) Longitudinal view of a node
 of Ranvier in human brain tissue by electron microscopy. The boxed area shows paranodal
 loops. Scale Bar : 1 μm. Gift of Prof J. M. Vallat, CHU de Limoges, France.

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Figure 2 Schematic representation of neuroglial interactions at the node of Ranvier in the central nervous system. OPC : oligodendrocyte precursor cell.

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⁵⁹⁷ **Figure 3** Schematic representation of nodal and perinodal molecular organization

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Figure 4 Overview of the impact of prenodes and nodes of Ranvier on action potential (AP) conduction velocity during development (A); possible physiological modifications of myelin and nodes increasing AP conduction velocity (B); in demyelinating pathologies, alterations of the nodal-paranodal region and ion channels diffusion, perturbating axonal physiology and conduction velocity (C).

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Figure 5 (A) Myelinated fiber organization in human cerebellar post-mortem tissue: the nodes 605 of Ranvier (Nav, red, zoomed in the boxed area) are surrounded by the paranodes (Caspr, 606 green). Myelin is detected using MBP (blue). Scale Bar : 5µm (B) Myelinating, myelinated and 607 remyelinating organotypic cultures of mouse cerebellar slices stained for myelin (PLP, green), 608 nodal structures (Nav, red) and paranodes (Caspr, white). Mature nodes of Ranvier are 609 presented in the boxed area of the myelinated condition. Prenodal structures (in red) are 610 indicated by arrowheads in the boxed area of myelinating and remyelinating conditions. Scale 611 bar : 20 µm; box : 5 µm. 612

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