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Fungal flora and ochratoxin A production during wine grape maturation in French vineyards during three years

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9 Abstract

A survey was conducted in France over three years (2001-2003) in 10 vineyards 10 from four winemaking regions with different geographical locations and climatic 11 conditions. Aspergillus and Penicillium were isolated from the grapes. During 2001 12 and 2002, from setting to harvest, the total numbers of fungal isolates were 13 respectively 721 and 711 increasing in 2003 to reach 1035. The Aspergillus genus 14 15 was essentially represented by Nigri section (99%) and was predominant (80%) ± 4.6) when compared to *Penicillium* (20% ± 4.6). Regardless of sampling year, 16 32.5% ($\pm \sigma = 1.26$) of the fungal isolates were OTA producers and 93% ($\pm \sigma = 2.65$) 17 belonging to black aspergilli. The ochratoxigenic potential of the isolates and their 18 occurrence on grapes revealed that A. carbonarius was the main OTA producer on 19

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French grapes. At harvest time, the fungal population was maximal and this was the most critical period influencing OTA contamination. Grapes from Languedoc-Roussillon region were most infested with ochratoxigenic fungi and had the highest concentrations of OTA. All these results could be of prime importance for further preventive action against ochratoxigenic species in vineyards to limit the contamination of grapes and grape products in France.

Keywords: Ochratoxin A; grapes; Black aspergilli; *A. carbonarius*; *A. niger*aggregate.

30 **1. Introduction**

In the last few years, OTA has received increasing interest from both scientific communities and food committees because of its nephrotoxic (Krogh et al., 1974; Mortensen et al., 1983) teratogenic (Arora et al., 1981; Mayura et al., 1989), genotoxic (Dirheimer, 1998), immunosuppressive (Haubeck et al., 1981; Creppy et al., 1983) and carcinogenic (Boorman, 1989) properties. Its ingestion by humans, which occurs mainly through different plant-based foods and beverages, could lead to deterioration of liver or kidney function (Sweeney and Dobson, 1998).

Grapes and derived products such as dried vine fruit (McDonald et al., 1999), grape
juices and wines (Scott and Kanhere, 1995; Zimmerli and Dick, 1996; Jorgensen,
1998; Burdaspal and Legarda, 1999; Visconti et al., 1999; Otteneder and Majereus,
2000) have been reported as potentially contaminated with OTA. Provisional
estimates of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, based on limited European data,

suggested that red wine is the second major source of human exposure to OTA, 43 following cereals and preceding coffee and beer (Walker, 1999). Swiss authors 44 were the first to detect OTA in table wines collected from various European 45 countries (Zimmerli and Dick, 1996) and red wines had higher concentrations than 46 white ones (Ottender and Majerus, 2000). Two genera raised particular attention as 47 the source of OTA, *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus* (Varga et al., 2001). Among the 48 Aspergillus, the section Nigri was responsible for OTA production (Cabañes et al., 49 2002; Sage et al., 2002; Pechavy et al., 2003) and the species A. niger aggregate 50 and A. carbonarius were considered to be particularly important (Abarca et al., 51 2001; Cabañes et al., 2002). According to different surveys grape products from the 52 Mediterranean regions of south Europe (Burdaspal and Legarda, 1999; Battilani et 53 al., 2003; Belli et al., 2004) and north Africa (Filali et al., 2001) were the most 54 contaminated by OTA. In France, two preliminary studies revealed the presence of 55 OTA in samples of grapes, musts and wines recovered from the South (Ospital et 56 al., 1998: Sage et al., 2002). 57

This study was intended to assess the potential for ochratoxin A contamination of French grapes. It was done on a large sampling pattern of grapes recovered from different French vineyards in four winemaking regions with a variability of climatic conditions during three years. Screening the presence of OTA-producing species in *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus* section Nigri, following the dynamic of

these fungi during growing season and determining OTA contents in grapes werethe principle objectives of this survey.

65 **2. Materials and Methods**

66 2.1. French Study area

The French mainland has almost a regular hexagonal form with 551,602 Km² area. From North to South, it extends between the parallels 51°5'27'' and 42°20' (Latitude North) and from West to East between the meridians 5°56' (Longitude West) and 7°9' (Longitude East). This large sweep shelters a big variety of climatic zones.

Ten vineyards located in 4 French winemaking regions with different climatic 72 conditions were chosen in this study (see figure 1): Poitou-Charentes (PC) 73 (vineyard 1), Languedoc-Roussillon (LR) (vineyards 2 to 8), Provence-Alpes Côtes 74 d'Azur (PACA) (vinevard 9), and Alsace (Als) (vinevard 10). Eight varieties were 75 analysed: Ugni Blanc (UB) from PC, Riesling (R) from Als, Cinsault (CN) from 76 PACA and from LR, 5 varieties were considered: Sauvignon (SA), Muscat (Mu), 77 Syrah (S), Carignan (CA) and Grenache (G). For the Syrah variety, three areas 78 were considered (a, b and c). All the varieties analysed except Ugni Blanc, Riesling 79 and Muscat were red vines. 80

81 2.2. Samples collection

Samples were taken during three growth stages: green berry, early veraison and
ripe berry (harvest time). For each vineyard and each stage, 10 bunches were

collected by following the two diagonals. After their rapid transport to the laboratory in cool boxes, mycological analyses were immediately done. The remaining samples were frozen at -20°C for subsequent analysis.

87 2.3. Mycological analysis of grapes

Five randomly choosed berries from each bunch were put onto the surface of the 88 DRBC (Dichloran Rose Bengale Chloramphenicol) agar (Oxoid) (Cahgnier, 1998) 89 and plates incubated at 25°C for 7 days. Samples were examined daily with a 90 stereomicroscope and all Aspergillus and Penicillium species isolated on CZ 91 (CZAPEK) (Cahgnier, 1998) medium and purified on CYA (CZAPEK Yeast 92 extract Agar). All fungi isolated were identified by morphological characters 93 according to the most accepted criteria of classification (Raper and Fennell, 1965; 94 Klich and Pitt, 1988; Pitt and Hocking, 1997). 95

96 2.4. Ochratoxigenic ability of the isolates

97 OTA production ability of 2467 isolates was tested on CYA using the method of 98 Bragulat et al. (1998). OTA was analysed by HPLC and ochratoxigenic potential 99 was expressed as $\mu g g^{-1}$ CYA. 86 isolates were deposited into ITEM and IMI 100 collections.

101 2.5. Ochratoxin A analysis in grapes

Each year, at harvest time, the 10 samples recovered from each vineyard were
weighed and crushed for 2 minutes at room temperature. The juice was recovered

after centrifugation and its exact volume was measured. 10 ml were adjusted to pH 104 7.8 with KOH 2 M and diluted to make a final volume of 20 ml with PBS buffer (r-105 Biopharm, St Didier Au Mont D'Or, France). The diluted sample was loaded onto 106 an OchraPrep (r-Biopharm, St Didier Au Mont D'Or, France) immunoaffinity 107 column operating at a steady flow rate of 2 ml min⁻¹. The immunoaffinity column 108 was washed with 20 ml of sterile distilled water, and then dried with an air strain. 109 OTA was eluted by applying successively 1.5 ml of methanol/acetic acid (98:2) 110 and 1.5 ml of sterile distilled water. The eluted extract was further analysed by 111 HPLC and OTA concentrations expressed in $\mu g Kg^{-1}$ grapes. 112

113 2.6. *High performance liquid chromatography (HPLC)*

OTA was detected and quantified by reversed-phase HPLC. The analysis was 114 performed using a BIO-TEK HPLC System (Milan, Italy) equipped with a Solvent 115 delivery system 525, column thermostat 582, autosampler 465, diode array detector 116 545V, acquisition data Kroma System KS3000 and Spectra System FL3000 117 fluorescence detector (λ_{ex} =332 nm; λ_{em} =466 nm). The analytical column was a 150 118 x 4.6 mm, 5 µm, C18 reversed-phase ODB Uptisphere fitted with a guard column 119 (10x4 mm) having the same stationary phase. During analysis, the column was 120 maintained at 30°C, and OTA was eluted with a mobile phase consisting of a 121 mixture of HPLC grade acetic acid in water 0.2 % (A) and acetonitrile (B) at a flow 122 rate of 1 ml min⁻¹. Analysis of OTA in grape juices was done over 45 min with a 123

linear gradient from 10 % to 50 % of B over the first 30 min followed by a linear 124 gradient to 90 % of B from 30 to 35 min, then a steady flow of 90 % of B for 8 min 125 finally reduced to 10 % for 2 min. Analysis of OTA produced by grape isolates was 126 done using a run time of 20 min and an isocratic method [A (59%)-B (41%)]. 127 Ochratoxin A was identified by its retention time according to a standard (Sigma 128 Aldrich, Steinheim, Germany) and quantified by measuring peak area according to 129 a standard curve. The detection limit was 0.025µg l⁻¹. All analysis were done in 130 triplicate. 131

132

133 **3. Results**

134 *3.1. Total fungi isolates*

During three years, genera of penicillia and aspergilli on wine French grapes were systematically isolated, counted and identified. In 2001 and 2002, the total fungal isolates were respectively 721 and 711 increasing in 2003 to reach 1035. Penicillia represented only 20% (±4.6) and the species included *P. expansum*, *P. spinulosum*, *P. glabrum*, *P. crustosum*, *P. brevicompactum*, *P. oxalicum*, *P. citrinum*, *P. glandicola* and *P. adametzoides*.

141 The *Aspergillus* genus was predominant $(80\% \pm 4.6)$ and especially those belonging

142 to the Nigri section (Black aspergilli) (99%). Among the remaining aspergilli (1%),

143 isolates of A. flavus, A. parasiticus and A. fumigatus were sometimes found. Black

144 aspergilli were represented by three populations: A. carbonarius, A. japonicus and

A. niger aggregate. Except for A. japonicus, all these species were biseriate. A. *carbonarius* was microscopically recognised and distinguished by conidial size and
ornamentation. All the other black biseriate aspergilli isolates will be referred as A. *niger* aggregate. Of the total black aspergilli isolated, A. japonicus was in the
minority, representing 16, 8 and 2% respectively in 2001, 2002 and 2003. From
2001 to 2003, A. niger aggregate increased (36, 56 and 72%) whereas A. *carbonarius* decreased (48, 36 and 26%).

152 *3.2. Ochratoxigenic fungal isolates*

For all isolates, the capacity for producing ochratoxin A was determined on a solid laboratory medium (CYA) after 7 days at 25°C. Whatever the sampling year, 32.5 % (±1.26) of the total fungal isolates were ochratoxigenic. The OTA producing capacity of the isolates deposited in the ITEM and IMI collections are represented in table 1.

Over the three years a total number of 1974 black aspergilli were isolated. 745 of 158 them were found to produce OTA (i.e. 37% regardless of the year). Whatever the 159 year, among 148 A. japonicus tested, OTA producers never exceeded 20% with 160 OTA production of between 0.001 and 0.01 μ g g⁻¹ CYA. For 691 isolates of A. 161 carbonarius, OTA producers represented respectively 72% and 80% in 2003 and 162 2001 and reached 100% in 2002, with OTA production of between 0.1 and 7 μ g g⁻¹ 163 CYA. Among 1102 of A. niger aggregate, ochratoxigenic isolates never exceeded 164 20% and had OTA production of between 0.01 and 0.06 μ g g⁻¹ CYA. 165

166 *3.3. Fungi population evolution*

167 *3.3.1. During the growing season*

Temporal changes in total and ochratoxigenic black aspergilli during the growing 168 season are shown in Fig. 2. At the green berry stage, no OTA producer isolates 169 were found regardless of year. In early veraison, a few OTA producer fungi were 170 recovered and predominantly A. carbonarius. At harvest time, in all three sampling 171 vears, fungal contamination highly increased. About 66% (±11) of the total isolates 172 and 90% (± 3.1) of the ochratoxigenic ones were isolated. At this time, 96% (± 0.5) 173 of these ochratoxigenic isolates were black aspergilli. A. carbonarius species were 174 98% (±0.67) in 2001 and 2002 and 48% in 2003. Ochratoxigenic A. niger 175 aggregates were only found in 2003 and reached 50% of the total ochratoxigenic 176 black aspergilli isolates. 177

178 *3-2- Regional variations and varieties*

Eight grape varieties from four winemaking regions were analysed. The most
fungal isolates were from the Languedoc-Roussillon region (ranged between 91
and 132), followed by CN from Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur (between 17 and 56),
R from Alsace (between 0 and 56) and finally UB from Poitou-Charentes (between
2 and 17) (Fig. 3).

No ochratoxigenic fungi were isolated on the UB variety and only three on Rieslingone. On those two grapes varieties OTA was never detected.

- On CN variety, no ochratoxigenic isolates were found in 2001, 3 *A. carbonarius* in 2002 and 13 *A. niger* aggegates in 2003. OTA content in this variety was about 0.18 ppb in 2002 and 0.11 ppb in 2003.
- On Languedoc-Roussillon varieties, ochratoxigenic isolates were in majority represented by *A. carbonarius* (98% (±2)) in 2001 and 2002 and by 52% *A. carbonarius* and 48% *A. niger* aggregate in 2003. The highest OTA concentrations in grapes from this region were observed in 2001 in CA (0.38 ppb), in 2002 in S (2.78 ppb) and in 2003 in SA (0.46 ppb).
- 194

195 Discussion

In our study, Aspergillus and Penicillium genera were isolated as they are potential 196 OTA producers in various foodstuffs (Varga et al., 1996; Abarca et al., 1997; 197 Sweenv and Dobson, 1998). In grapes, the predominance of Aspergillus compared 198 199 to Penicillium was observed among total (80% versus 20%) and ochratoxigenic (93% versus 7%) isolates. It is known that *Penicillium* species appear more often in 200 temperate and cold climates such as in northern Europe (Pitt and Hocking, 1997; 201 Frisvad et al., 1999) whereas Aspergillus species are commonly associated with 202 warmer and tropical regions (Pitt and Hocking, 1997; Pittet, 1998). Creppy et al. 203 (1991) also outlined that ochratoxicosis in France was connected to aspergilli 204 whereas in Germany or Scandinavia it could be linked to penicillia (Creppy et al., 205 1991). Although commonly reported in cereal and cereal products as principle 206

OTA producers (Pitt, 1987; Frisvad, 1989; Frisvad and Filtenborg, 1990), 207 Penicillium verrucosum and Aspergillus ochraceus have never been isolated on 208 French grapes. This observation was already demonstrated for grapes from south of 209 France (Sage et al., 2002) and from Argentina (Da Rocha Rosa et al., 2002). P. 210 *verrucosum* has never been mentioned as part of the normal microbiota of grapes 211 (Cabañes et al., 2002; Sage et al., 2002; Serra et al., 2003; Da Rocha Rosa et al., 212 2002), whereas, A. ochraceus was already isolated among Aspergillus genus, on 213 Brazilian (6%) (Da Rocha Rosa et al., 2002), Spanish (2.5%) (Belli et al., 2004), 214 Portuguese (<1%) (Serra et al., 2003) and Italian (<0.6%) (Battilani et al., 2003) 215 berries. 216

In our study, among *Aspergillus* species, the black aspergilli were the most common (99%). This group was also predominant on Italian (97%) (Battilani et al., 2003), Spanish (97%) (Belli et al., 2004) and Portuguese (90%) (Serra et al., 2003) grapes. In 2003, the total fungal isolates highly increased (+44.5%) principally due to the increase in *A. niger* aggregate. Their highest growth rate and their tolerance to high temperatures (higher than 37°C) (Battilani et al., 2003), registered in weather stations in 2003, could explain their tendency to increase.

According to our study, the low number of *A. japonicus* species, the few ochratoxigenic isolates recovered and their low OTA-producing potential showed that *A. japonicus* was unimportant in OTA French grape contamination.

The number of A. carbonarius (230 ± 26 per year), the high frequency of 227 ochratoxigenic isolates (between 70 and 100%) and their potential to produce OTA 228 show that this species is the most OTA producer on grapes in France. Previous 229 studies showed its invasive character to colonise and penetrate berries even without 230 skin damage (Battilani and Pietri, 2002). A. carbonarius also reported as the main 231 OTA producer in Spanish (Abarca et al., 2001; Cabañes et al., 2001), Portuguese 232 (Serra et al., 2003) and Italian grapes (Battilani et al., 2003). Its ochratoxigenic 233 potential was not only occasioned by its intrinsic toxigenic character but also due to 234 its aggressiveness (Battilani et al., 2002). 235

The consistent presence of A. niger aggregate on grapes during the growing season 236 and their important number compared to A. carbonarius could explain their 237 importance. However, the lower frequency of ochratoxigenic A. niger aggregate 238 (20%) and their lower ability to produce OTA compared to A. carbonarius, make 239 them of second importance in OTA contamination. According to the literature 4%, 240 16.6% and 30% of A. niger aggregate isolated respectively on Portuguese (Serra et 241 al., 2003), Argentinean and Brazilian (Da Rocha Rosa et al., 2002) grapes were 242 potential OTA producers. 243

During the growing season, the harvest time was considered as a critical period for fungal development. This was also reported on Portuguese grapes (Serra et al., 2003) and on Spanish berries (Belli et al., 2004). Acidity decrease, sugar accumulation and cuticule embrittlement in grapes may explain fungal abundance.

At this time, about 90% of ochratoxigenic isolates were from ripe berries and 92% were *A. carbonarius*. This has also been observed in Portuguese vineyards (Serra et al., 2003).

According to regions, in the western (Poitou-Charentes) or Eastern (Alsace) vineyards, limited fungal population was found. Over the three years, *A. carbonarius* was absent. Ochratoxigenic fungi isolated in those regions were also not relevant and only 3 *A. niger* aggregate from Alsace have been confirmed as OTA producers. Moreover, very low concentrations of OTA were measured in grapes from Poitou-Charentes (oceanic climate) and Alsace (continental climate).

French Mediterranean southern vineyards (LR and PACA) had a large fungal flora, 257 especially of black aspergilli. These fungi were reported to be resistant to high sun 258 exposure and to very hot (frequently achieving temperatures of 40°C during 259 summer time) and dry environments with low rainfall levels characterising this 260 climate (Serra et al., 2003). The presence of OTA on grapes from this area and the 261 important ochratoxigenic isolates confirmed the high contamination in the 262 Mediterranean region. High levels of OTA in wines were previously reported in 263 South Europe (Battaglia et al., 1996; Zimmerli and Dick, 1996) and especially in 264 Mediterranean areas (Zimmerli and Dick, 1996). However samples from PACA 265 were less contaminated by ochratoxigenic fungi than those from LR and presented 266 less OTA concentrations. This difference could not only due to species involved 267 on grapes but also to variety, soil and growing area. 268

In conclusion, *A. carbonarius* followed by *A. niger* aggregate play a major role in OTA contamination of French grapes. Harvest time is the critical time where almost all ochratoxigenic fungi were detected and the highest amounts of OTA were measured in grapes. Southern Mediterranean regions and especially Languedoc-Roussillon were the most contaminated with OTA.

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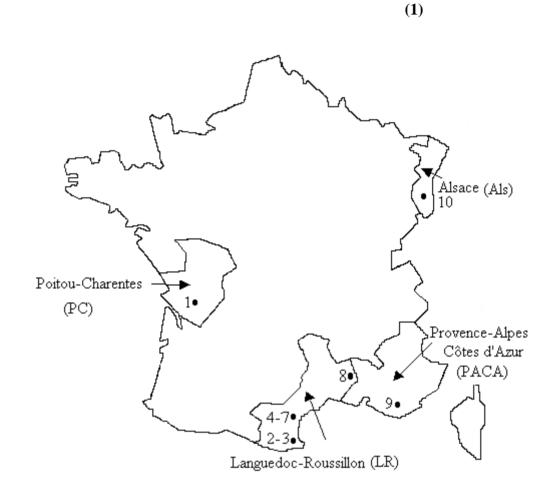
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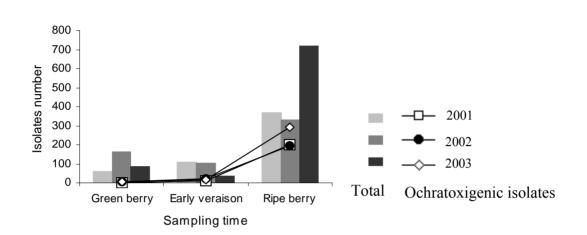
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422 Fig 1: Location of the regions and vineyards (each number represented one423 vineyard) studied in France.

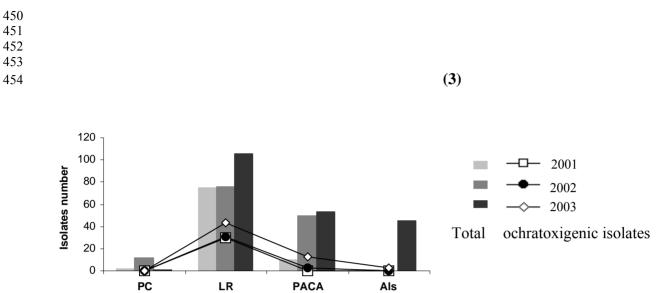


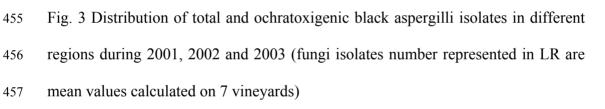


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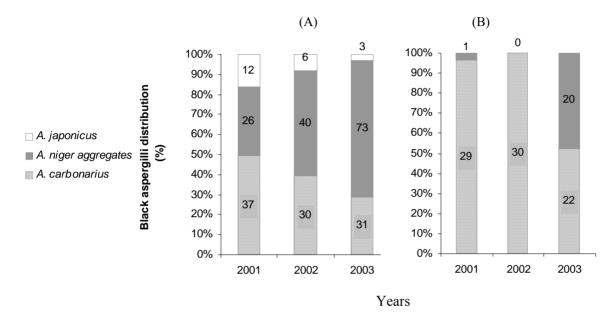
428 Fig. 2: Evolution of total and ochratoxigenic isolates of black aspergilli during

429 growing season





Regions



473 Fig. 4: Black aspergilli species distribution among total (A) and ochratoxigenic (B)

- isolates in Languedoc-Roussillon region and during 2001, 2002 and 2003.
- 475 (values mentioned on the graphics are average isolate numbers calculated on 7
- 476 vineyards of LR region)

(4)

492 Table 1 : Deposited isolates in ITEM and IMI collections

493 494 495

Isolate N°	Identification	IMI N°	ITEM N°	OTA
				production
				level (µg g ⁻¹
				CYA)
A2215	A.japonicus	389196	5322	0
A411	A.japonicus	389195	5321	0
AX35	A.japonicus	389197	5323	0
B111	A.japonicus	389198	5325	0
B712	A.japonicus	389199	5326	0
C133	A.carbonarius	388568	4781	13,1
C134	A.carbonarius	388490	4796	10,6
C135	A.carbonarius	388569	4782	17
C232	A.carbonarius	388478	4791	3,46
C234	A.carbonarius	388488	4797	8,2
C235	A.carbonarius	388458	4810	1,23
C336	Acarbonarius	388479	4792	3,48
C338	A.carbonarius	388459	4811	0
C432	A.niger	388498	4823	0,25
C513	A.japonicus	389200	5327	0
C518	A.japonicus	389201	5328	0
C535	A.niger	388560	4815	0,11
C536	A.carbonarius	388570	4783	10,86
C633	A.carbonarius	388486	4809	0
C637	A.carbonarius	388480	4793	6,76
C933	A.carbonarius	388484	4798	4
CA122	A.japonicus	389206	5333	0
CA223	A.japonicus	389207	5334	0
CA332	A.carbonarius	388572	4789	25,3
CA532	A.carbonarius	388496	4805	26
CA924	A.japonicus	389208	5335	0
CA932	A.niger	388483	4830	0
CaX34	A.niger	388505	4828	0
CAX38	A.niger	388566	4821	0
CN311	A.japonicus	389205	5332	0
CX33	A.niger	388499	4824	0,09
G132	A.japonicus	389213	5339	0
G221	A.japonicus	389210	5336	0
G231	A.japonicus	388506	4814	0
G431	A.niger	388507	4829	0
G522	A.japonicus	389211	5337	0
G731	A.carbonarius	388573	4790	2,82
G732	A.carbonarius	388494	4806	2,63
G738	A.carbonarius	388495	4807	37,5
G921	A.japonicus	389212	5338	0
G936	A.japonicus	389214	5340	0

01240	Aminar	200507	4000	0
GX312 Mu141	A.niger	388567 388574	4822 4785	0 4,05
Mu141 Mu143	A.carbonarius	388561	4785	,
Mu143 Mu148	A.niger			0
	A.niger	388502	4826 5329	0
Mu212	A.japonicus	389202	5329	0
Mu245	A.carbonarius	388489	4047	0
Mu246	A.niger	388487	4817	0
Mu247	A.carbonarius	388481	4794	8,78
Mu249	A.niger	38562	4818	0
Mu343	A.niger	388563	4819	0
Mu412	A.japonicus	389203	5330	0
Mu441	A.carbonarius	388575	4786	15
Mu541	A.japonicus	389204	5331	0
Mu543	A.carbonarius	388491	4801	6
Mu642	A.carbonarius	388576	4787	13,16
Mu644	A.carbonarius	388492	4802	14
Mu649	A.carbonarius	388577	4788	9,45
Mu7412	A.carbonarius	388485	4804	7,43
Mu746	A.carbonarius	388493	4803	10,84
Mu747	A.niger	388564	4831	0
Mu848	A.niger	388503	4832	0
Mu943	A.niger	388504	4827	0
MuX42	A.carbonarius	388482	4795	6,5
MuX44	A.niger	388565	4820	0
SA332	A.carbonarius	388497	4799	25
SA411	A.japonicus	389209	5324	0
SA436	A.carbonarius	388500	4808	0
SA636	A.carbonarius	388571	4784	1,64
SA731	A.niger	388501	4825	0
2A138	A.niger	390084		0
2A215	A.japonicus	390080		0
2A235	A.carbonarius	390090		14,96
2B437	A.carbonarius	390093		3,62
2C236	A.carbonarius	390094		1,82
2CA331	A.niger	390089		0
2CA332	A.carbonarius	390092		4,94
2CA432	A.niger	390087		0
2CN331	A.niger	390088		0
2G221	A.japonicus	390083		0
2G621	A.japonicus	390082		0
2MU135	A.niger	390086		0
2MU531	A.carbonarius	390091		2
2SA 511	A.japonicus	390081		0
2SA331	A.niger	390085		0 0
				-

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