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# Ability of Azathiacyclen Ligands to Stop Cu(A $\beta$ )-Induced Production of Reactive Oxygen Species: [3N1S] is the Right Donor Set

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## Abstract

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is an incurable neurodegenerative disease that leads to the progressive and irreversible loss of mental functions. The amyloid beta (A $\beta$ ) peptide involved in the disease is responsible for the production of damaging reactive oxygen species (ROS) when bound to Cu ions. A therapeutic approach, which consists in removing Cu ions from A $\beta$  to alter this deleterious interaction, is currently developed. In this context, we report the ability of 5 different 12-membered thiaazacyclen ligands to capture Cu from A $\beta$  and to redox silence it. We propose that the presence of a sole sulfur atom in the ligand increases the rate of Cu capture and removal from A $\beta$ , while the kinetic aspect of the chelation was an issue encountered with the 4N parent ligand. The best ligand in removing Cu from A $\beta$  and inhibiting the associated ROS production is the 1-thia-4,7,10-triazacyclododecane [3N1S]. Indeed the replacement of more N by S atoms makes the corresponding Cu complexes easier to reduce and thus able to produce ROS on their own. In addition, the ligand with three sulfur atoms has a weaker affinity for Cu(II) than A $\beta$ , and is thus unable to remove Cu from CuA $\beta$ .

## Introduction

Among neurodegenerative diseases, Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most widespread one.<sup>[1]</sup> AD is undoubtedly a multifactorial disease, but displays well-defined pathological markers as the Tau tangles or the amyloid plaques. These plaques are made of the amyloid beta peptides (A $\beta$ ) that aggregate according to a process named as the amyloid cascade.<sup>[2]</sup> This process spans from the secretion of A $\beta$  from the amyloid precursor protein (APP) to its oligomerisation, fibrillation and the final plaques formation.<sup>[3, 4]</sup> It is commonly admitted that A $\beta$  is mainly composed of 40/42 amino acid residues. The sixteen first residues encompass metal ions binding sites.<sup>[5, 6]</sup> In line with this ability, it has been reported that the plaques are enriched in metal ions, Zn, Fe and Cu bound to A $\beta$ .<sup>[7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12]</sup> More than only modifying the metal-free aggregation of A $\beta$ , Cu bound to A $\beta$  is associated to the catalytic production of reactive oxygen species (ROS), implicated in the overall oxidative stress observed in AD brain.<sup>[5, 13]</sup>

Years of investigations have led to the determination of the Cu coordination sites within the peptide, but the elucidation of the ROS production mechanism is still in progress. Within the peptide, Cu(II) is coordinated by the N-terminal amine, the adjacent carbonyl group from the peptide backbone, and

two imidazole rings from the His residues in a square-planar geometry with an apparent affinity constant of  $10^9$ - $10^{10}$  M<sup>-1</sup> at pH 7.4.<sup>[14, 15, 16]</sup> ROS are believed to be produced *via* an “in between state” (IBS) that the peptide can adopt when bound to Cu.<sup>[17, 18]</sup> In this particular geometry Cu is able to redox cycle very fast in presence of a reductant (*e.g.* ascorbate) and O<sub>2</sub>, leading to the incomplete reduction of O<sub>2</sub> and the formation of ROS.<sup>[18]</sup>

In order to disrupt the deleterious coordination interaction between Cu ions and A $\beta$  peptide, chemists have developed Cu ligands able to remove Cu from A $\beta$  and redox silence it.<sup>[19, 20, 21]</sup> Among the family of molecules studied in this context, azamacrocyclic ligands hold an important place, including the simplest cyclen (1,4,7,10-tetraazacyclododecane, [12]aneN4) and cyclam (1,4,8,11-tetraazacyclotetradecane, [14]aneN4) ligands.<sup>[19]</sup> The use of cyclen and cyclam ligands was a relevant choice in AD context due to (i) their ability to remove Cu from CuA $\beta$ ,<sup>[22]</sup> and (ii) to form kinetically inert complexes in biologically relevant media,<sup>[22]</sup> (iii) their water solubility and (iv) their high tunability (binding atoms, pendant arms...). These properties have been clearly established through their wide use in pharmaceutical chemistry, as therapeutic agents and/or for diagnostic imaging.<sup>[23]</sup>

More precisely, in AD context, cyclen,<sup>[24]</sup> cyclam<sup>[25]</sup> and their mono or bis N-functionalized derivatives (N-(2-(pyridin-2-yl)ethyl)acetamide<sup>[26]</sup> or methylpicolinate<sup>[22]</sup>) have been used for their high ability to form Cu(II) complexes with good thermodynamic stability and kinetic inertness. They have been used as modulators of the metal-induced A $\beta$ <sub>40</sub> aggregation; in particular, they seem able, at superstoichiometry, to inhibit CuA $\beta$ <sub>40</sub> aggregation, disassemble CuA $\beta$ <sub>40</sub> aggregates and restore its metal free random coil conformation.<sup>[24, 25, 26]</sup> Moreover, it has been recently shown, that the conjugation of cyclen to silica nanoparticles as delivery carriers was a successful strategy to improve the blood brain barrier penetration for such hydrophilic small molecules. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that the silica–cyclen conjugates and their Zn(II) or Cu(II) complexes were non-toxic towards the cells.<sup>[24]</sup>

An effect against the CuA $\beta$ -induced ROS formation is also reported for those ligands.<sup>[22, 24]</sup> In a previous study, the removal of Cu(II) from CuA $\beta$  by cyclen has been investigated and has shown that the efficiency in Cu(II) removal was impeded by kinetic issues.<sup>[22]</sup> Cyclen was unable to stop the ROS production when added to a mixture of CuA $\beta$ , O<sub>2</sub> and ascorbate under ROS producing conditions, *i. e.* after the production of ROS was started. The reduction of Cu(II)A $\beta$  was faster than the Cu(II) removal by the cyclen thus allowing the production of ROS. The addition of methylpicolinate pendant arms on the azamacrocycle accelerates the Cu(II) capture from A $\beta$  and makes the ligand efficient against ROS production in contrast to the parent cyclen. We established here a new strategy to overcome the ligand kinetic efficiency that aims at targeting the reduced state of Cu. Indeed, Cu(I) needs to be removed from A $\beta$  as soon as the reduced Cu(I)A $\beta$  complex is generated in order to avoid its quick and harmful reaction with O<sub>2</sub>, and thus ligands able to withdraw Cu(I) from A $\beta$  are also highly appropriate. Following the HSAB theory, the addition of S donor atoms into the azamacrocyclic ligands appeared as a valuable choice in this strategy and should help to increase the affinity of the macrocyclic ligands for the Cu(I). To efficiently avoid the ROS production, the generated Cu(I)-azamacrocyclic complexes will need either to be air stable or to be oxidized to form a corresponding Cu(II) complex resistant to ascorbate reduction.

However, as a side effect, the addition of S donor atoms into the macrocycle will decrease the reduction potential of the Cu(II) complexes generated.<sup>[27, 28, 29]</sup> The parent Cu(II) cyclen complexes are resistant to the reduction by biologically relevant reductant as ascorbate<sup>[22]</sup> but adding S donor atoms into the coordination sphere will make the Cu(II) complexes easier to reduce<sup>[27, 28, 29]</sup> and the complexes themselves unable to inhibit the redox cycling of Cu in presence of O<sub>2</sub> and ascorbate. Hence, a fine tuning needs to be found between the Cu(I) affinity constant and the redox potential of the Cu-complexes; while increasing the number of sulfur atoms should help the Cu(I) removal, the Cu(II/I) redox potential needs to be controlled in order to inhibit the ROS production. These two aspects will be illustrated in this article.

In the present report, the effect of the one by one replacement of nitrogen atoms by sulfur atoms in the cyclen framework, against CuA $\beta$ -induced ROS production was investigated and compared to the parent cyclen [12]ane, 4N (**L1**). Four thiaazacyclen ligands (Figure 1) were evaluated, including the *cis*

and *trans* 2N2S species in order to find the most efficient set of donor atoms in preventing CuA $\beta$ -induced ROS production.

- L1:** cyclen; [12]aneN; 4N;  
**L2:** 1-thia-4,7,10-triazacyclododecane or [12]ane; 3N1S;  
**L3:** 1,7-dithia-4,10-diazacyclododecane or [12]ane; NSNS;  
**L4:** 1,4-dithia-7,10-diazacyclododecane or [12]ane; 2N2S;  
**L5:** 1,4,7-trithia-10-azacyclododecane or [12]ane; 1N3S;

For solubility reasons, the 1,4,7,10-tetrathiaazacyclododecane [12]ane; 4S, was excluded from the study.

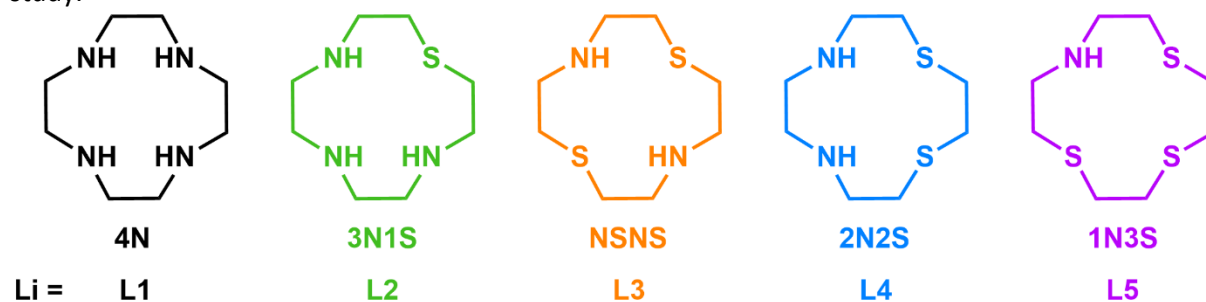


Figure 1: Schematic representation of the different Li ligands studied

For all the five ligands, the Cu(I) and Cu(II) complexes were synthesized *in situ* and characterized by UV-vis, EPR and XANES spectroscopies and electrochemistry. The effect of the substitution of N by S atoms on the different spectroscopic and electrochemical parameters was evaluated. The ability of the different ligands to remove Cu from the CuA $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> complex was monitored by UV-vis and EPR for Cu(II) and XANES for Cu(I). Then, the effect of **L1-5** on the CuA $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>-induced ROS production was evaluated in test tubes. We show that **L5** is able to target and stabilize Cu(I) but the formed complex Cu(I)**L5** is not air stable and form Cu(II)**L5** that can be further reduced by ascorbate. Hence, Cu**L5** produces ROS. The results obtained also show that the addition of a sole S atom into the cyclen framework (**L2**) makes possible the Cu removal from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> and its redox silencing in contrast to the parent cyclen.

## Results and discussion

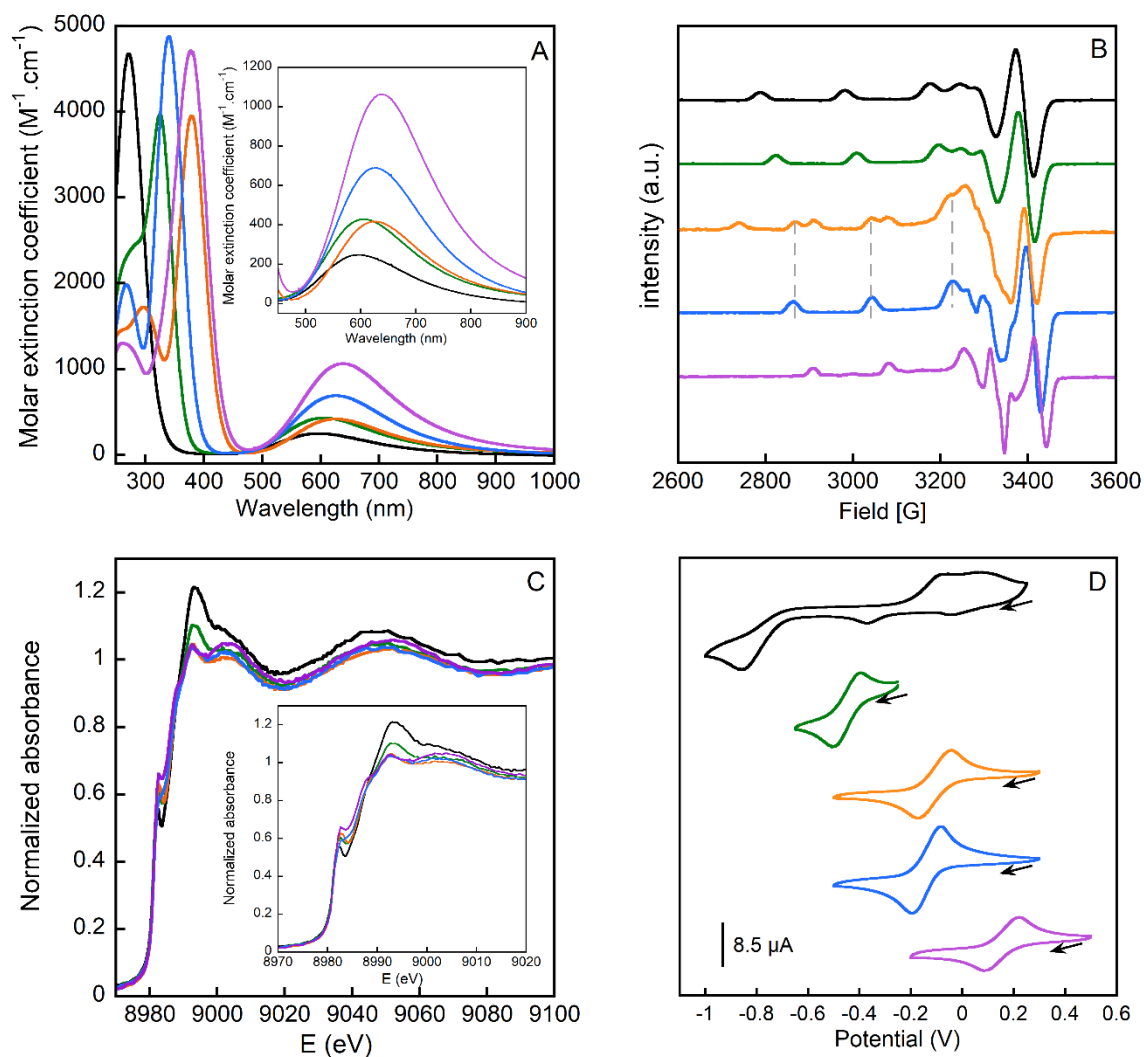
### Characterization of the CuLi complexes

#### UV-vis

The UV-vis spectra of the five complexes obtained upon Cu(II) binding of **L1-5** at pH 7.4 are depicted in Figure 2A and parameters are reported in Table 1. At this pH, the titration of Cu(II) to any Li ligand shows the formation of 1:1 complex (Figure S1). All the ligands display a transition band in the d-d region characteristic of the formation of Cu(II) complexes. A bathochromic shift is observed going from the 4N to the 1N3S ligand (Figure 2A and S2). The presence of sulfur atoms decreases the energy of the d-d transition in line with a better electron-donating characteristic of sulfur vs nitrogen atoms. As well, the molar extinction coefficient ( $\epsilon$ ) of the band increases as a function of the number of sulfur atoms (Figure 2A and S2), except for the NSNS (**L3**) ligand. This variation could arise from a difference in the geometry of this complex (*vide infra*). An intense band is observed in the 300–400 nm region for the S-containing complexes which is assigned to a S $\rightarrow$ Cu(II) charge transfer transition (LMCT) as previously reported (Figure 2A),<sup>[30, 31, 32]</sup> while the band of Cu(II)**L1** at 271 nm is assigned to a N $\rightarrow$ Cu(II) charge transfer transition (LMCT).<sup>[31, 32]</sup>

<b>Table 1:</b> Redox potentials, UV-vis and EPR parameters determined for Cu(II)Li complexes							
<b>Ligand</b>	$E_{1/2}$ vs NHE (V)	<b>UV-Vis</b>				<b>EPR*</b>	
		<b>LMCT</b>		<b>d-d</b>		$g_{\perp}; g_{\parallel}$	$A_{\perp}; A_{\parallel}$ ( $10^4 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ )
		$\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (nm)	$\epsilon$ ( $\text{M}^{-1} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1}$ )	$\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (nm)	$\epsilon$ ( $\text{M}^{-1} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1}$ )	<i><math>g_{\perp}; g_{\parallel}</math></i>	<i><math>A_{\perp}; A_{\parallel}</math></i> ( $10^4 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ )
<b>L1</b>		271	4700	590	247	2.20 <i>2.046;2.197</i>	200 <i>17;199</i>
<b>L2</b>	-0.21	325	4000	605	430	2.18 <i>2.044;2.180</i>	191 <i>14;190</i>
<b>L3</b>	0.14	379	4000	625	420	2.16 <i>2.039;2.160</i>	182 (a) <i>14;175</i>
						2.27 <i>2.049;2.258</i>	180 (b) <i>14;177</i>
<b>L4</b>	0.11	341	5000	627	690	2.16 <i>2.039;2.160</i>	181 <i>14;182</i>
<b>L5</b>	0.40	378	4700	637	1100	2.13 <i>2.039;2.135</i>	172 <i>14;174</i>

\* EPR have been measured from  $^{65}\text{Cu(II)}$ ; (a) and (b) relate to the two species found in the sample. Data from simulations are given in italic.



**Figure 2:** Characterization of the Cu(II)Li complexes, Cu(II)L1 (Black), Cu(II)L2 (green), Cu(II)L3 (orange), Cu(II)L4 (blue) and Cu(II)L5 (violet). Panel (A) UV-vis spectra (molar extinction coefficient vs wavelength), inset shows an enlargement of the d-d transition region, [Li] = 290  $\mu$ M, [Cu(II)] = 240  $\mu$ M, [HEPES] = 100 mM, pH 7.4, T = 25  $^{\circ}$ C; panel (B) X-band EPR spectra, vertical dotted grey lines indicate that a species found in Cu(II)L3 mixture has the same coordination sphere as Cu(II)L4. [Li] = 600  $\mu$ M, [ $^{65}$ Cu(II)] = 500  $\mu$ M, [HEPES] = 100 mM, pH 7.4, 10% of glycerol as cryoprotectant, 120 K; panel (C) normalized Cu(I) X-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) spectra, [Li] = 1 mM, [Cu] = 0.9 mM, [HEPES] = 50 mM, pH 7.4 Copper was reduced with dithionite at 10 mM and the solution was kept under an Ar atmosphere. Glycerol 10% v/v was used as a cryoprotectant. T = 20 K; panel (D) cyclic voltammograms, arrows indicate the starting point (the open circuit potential) [Li] = 600  $\mu$ M, [Cu(II)] = 500  $\mu$ M, [HEPES] = 100 mM, pH 7.4, scan rate 100 mV/s at room temperature, reference electrode is SCE (+ 0.242 mV versus NHE).

### EPR

EPR spectra of each *in situ* formed Cu(II) complexes at pH 7.4 are depicted in Figure 2B, and S4 (as a function of pH) and EPR parameters (*g*-values and hyperfine couplings, A) are gathered in Table 1. Two sets of different EPR parameters are clearly observable for Cu(II)L3 (Cu(II)NSNS). This feature is

indicative of the presence of two different complexes in the frozen sample. One of the species (named Cu(II)**L3<sup>a</sup>**) shares almost the same EPR parameters than the one recorded for Cu(II)**L4**. The other species is named Cu(II)**L3<sup>b</sup>**. The EPR parameters have been directly measured on the spectra from the position of the second and third hyperfine lines, which are clearly defined due to the use of isotopically pure <sup>65</sup>Cu source. The  $g_{//}$  value corresponds to the half-sum of magnetic field of these two lines and the  $A_{//}$  to the field difference between them. In addition, the EPR signatures of the six complexes were fitted (Figure S5) to release the  $g_{//}$  and  $g_{\perp}$ , as well as the corresponding hyperfine values (parameters are gathered in Table 1, *in italic*). It is worth noting that the measurement of these parameters from the position of the second and third hyperfine lines that allows to minimize second order effects give very similar data than the simulation. Typical axial spectra ( $g_{//} > g_{\perp}$ ) are observed for all the compounds. Based on the values determined using simulation, the  $g_{iso}$  parameter was calculated and plotted as function of the ligand binding site (Figure S3A, Table 1). It mirrors the level of covalence in the Cu(II) complexes,<sup>[33]</sup> with higher  $g_{iso}$  corresponding to weaker covalence. As previously documented and expected, the addition of sulfur atoms in the coordination sphere of Cu(II) causes a decrease in both parameters due to the more electron donating properties of sulfur atoms vs nitrogen atoms.<sup>[34]</sup> In addition the  $A_{//} = f(g_{//})$  values (Figure S3B) follows an linear trend, except for Cu(II)**L3<sup>a</sup>** and Cu(II)**L3<sup>b</sup>**. The variation in the ( $g_{//}; A_{//}$ ) (x,y) coordinates on that plot is perfectly in line with the replacement of nitrogen by sulfur atoms as described by Peisach-Blumberg.<sup>[34]</sup> Last the fairly high  $A_{//}$  values obtained indicate a square-planar geometry rather than a tetrahedral one. This is in line with the reported crystal structures available for Cu(II)**L2**.<sup>[29, 35]</sup> Cu(II)**L3<sup>a</sup>** has weaker  $A_{//}$  values than Cu(II)**L4** despite having the same first coordination ligands. This indicates that Cu(II)**L3<sup>a</sup>** has a stronger tetrahedral distortion than Cu(II)**L4**.<sup>[34, 36]</sup> Cu(II)**L3<sup>b</sup>** has a higher  $g_{//}$ -value and a smaller  $A_{//}$ . It has been reported previously that depending on the geometry of the complex, the same set of donor atom could give different  $g_{//}$  and  $A_{//}$  parameters.<sup>[37]</sup> Thus, looking at their EPR parameters, Cu(II)**L3<sup>b</sup>** could share the same binding site than Cu(II)**L4** but with a highly strong distortion towards a tetrahedron. Nevertheless, it is more likely that Cu**L3<sup>b</sup>** has another set of coordinating atoms. To gain insight into the coordination of Cu(II)**L3<sup>b</sup>**, EPR spectra were recorded at various pH between 6.4 and 9.1. Increasing the pH is followed by the disappearance of the Cu(II)**L3<sup>a</sup>** set of signals (Figure S4). As the formation of Cu(II)**L3<sup>b</sup>** is pH-driven, we favor the formation of the Cu(II)**L3OH** (Cu(II)**L3<sup>b</sup>**) complex with a HO<sup>-</sup> exogenous ligand in the equatorial position concomitantly to the decoordination of an S-atom from the macrocycle ligand in line with Peisach-Blumberg trends,<sup>[31, 34]</sup> rather than the previously described possible change in geometry<sup>[37]</sup> (Scheme S1). No indication of the existence of these two species can be detected by UV-vis spectroscopy (*i.e.* only one maximum of absorption, no broadening of the absorption bands). Nevertheless, Cu(II)**L3** does not follow the trends observed for the other compounds in terms of molar extinction coefficient (Figure S2). This behavior indicates that a rapid exchange exists in solution and that only an average spectrum is observed, which is not the case anymore in the frozen EPR sample in which the different spectra appear resolved. The pH-dependency of the Cu(II) complexes formed were monitored using EPR (Figure S4) and no modification of the EPR fingerprints was observed in the pH range [5.4 ; 8.4] for CuLi (i=1,2,4) complexes indicating that only one species prevail near neutral pH. For Cu**L5**, at pH above 7.4, new species appear where the  $g_{//}$  and  $A_{//}$  values indicate a change in the coordination sphere of one or two sulfur atoms by oxygen donor atoms, in line with the likely binding of HO<sup>-</sup> when increasing the pH and the associated decoordination of sulfur atoms. In addition, the selectivity of the **Li** ligands for Cu(II) with respect to Zn(II) and to Fe(II), an important parameter to be taken into account has been measured using EPR (Figure S6 for an illustration with **L2**) and is found to be fully appropriate.

## XANES

The Cu(I) coordination by the set of the **Li** macrocycles was probed by X-ray near-edge absorption structure (XANES). As expected, the absorption corresponding to the transition from the 1s orbital to the 4p orbitals of the Cu(I) are observed in the 8980-8985 eV region of the spectrum (Figure 2C). The position and the intensity of the absorption pre-edge peaks is indicative of a three coordinated complexes and the signatures are reminiscent of  $[\text{Et}_4\text{N}]_2[\text{Cu}(\text{SC}_6\text{H}_4\text{-}p\text{-Cl})_3]$ ,<sup>[38, 39]</sup>  $[(\text{C}_6\text{H}_5)_4\text{P}]\text{Cu}(\text{SPh})_3]^{2-}$ ,<sup>[40, 41, 42]</sup> or  $\text{Cu}(\text{His})_3$  complexes.<sup>[43]</sup> Indeed, in trigonal configuration it has been shown that the decrease in intensity corresponds to the spitting of the 4p<sub>xy</sub> orbitals, being higher in energy than the 4p<sub>x</sub> levels (polarized along the C3 axis).<sup>[44]</sup> Moreover, it has been reported that the absorption peak is shifted to higher energy (8985 eV) when the Cu(I) sits in a tetrahedral geometry.<sup>[38, 44]</sup> The shoulder at 8987.5 eV clearly visible for 1N3S could suggest the presence of a tetrahedral coordination as well, reminiscent of  $[\text{Cu}(\text{C}_5\text{H}_5\text{NS})_3]_2\text{Cl}_2$  complex.<sup>[38, 45]</sup> 12-membered ligands are relatively small rings, when incorporating large sulfur atoms it might be too tight to coordinate Cu(I) with the 4-heteroatoms of the ring. While the position and intensity of the pre-edge peak don't vary too much depending on **Li**, the additional features on the higher energy side are affected. The intensity of the high energy features at 8993 eV decreases from 4N to 2N2S. The position and the intensity of the features have been shown by calculations to be dependent on the SCuS angle in three coordinated complexes (120° purely trigonal and 180° T-shape).<sup>[38]</sup> Similarly to what have been observed for  $\text{Cu}_2(\text{GSH})_5$  the ratio between the two first absorption peaks of the spectra would suggest a distorted geometry (between T-shape and trigonal). The modification of the spectra with the different ligands would indicate geometry changes due to modification of the donor atoms (N replaced by S) along the series.

## CV

The cyclic voltammograms (CV) of the complexes are shown in Figure 2D and the redox potential values are given in Table 1. As previously reported **CuL1** complex exhibits a non-reversible redox process  $\text{Cu(II)} \rightleftharpoons \text{Cu(I)}$  with a cathodic potential at -0.85 V and an anodic potential at -0.05 V *versus* SCE. This phenomenon is explained by the release of the Cu(I) from the ligand as soon as Cu(II) is reduced.<sup>[29, 46, 47]</sup> Conversely, the cyclic voltammograms of **CuL2-5** show reversible redox processes corresponding to the reduction of Cu(II) to Cu(I) and the oxidation of Cu(I) to Cu(II) on the reverse scan. The reversibility indicates that the introduction of one sulfur atom is enough to avoid the Cu(I) release upon the Cu(II) reduction.<sup>[29]</sup> The redox potential increases with the number of S atoms inserted into the macrocycle in line with the more donating effect of S atoms compared to N atoms.<sup>[27, 28]</sup> Again, **CuL3** exhibits only one redox process which did not allow to identify the presence of two species (*i.e.* **CuL3<sup>a</sup>** and **CuL3<sup>b</sup>**), indicating the possible existence of a fast equilibrium between **CuL3<sup>a</sup>** and **CuL3<sup>b</sup>** in solution (faster than the scan rate). Moreover, **CuL3** and **CuL4** have almost the same redox potential as previously reported in aqueous<sup>[31]</sup> and in organic solvent.<sup>[48]</sup>

## **Impact of Aβ<sub>16</sub> on CuLi coordination: determination of the relative affinities**

The impact of addition of Aβ<sub>16</sub> on the Cu(II) chelation by **L2-5** was studied and monitored by UV-vis, EPR and XANES for Cu(I). Different behaviors are observed depending on the ligand, which mirror the Cu-relative affinity of Aβ<sub>16</sub> vs **L2-5**. The sixteen first amino-acids of Aβ are implied in Cu coordination, so the C-terminally truncated Aβ<sub>16</sub> was used in this study, to avoid the complications linked to the aggregation of Aβ<sub>40/42</sub>, which is not considered here.<sup>[6]</sup> Such peptide (Aβ<sub>16</sub>) is well accepted as a valid model of the full-length peptide with respect to metal binding.<sup>[49]</sup>



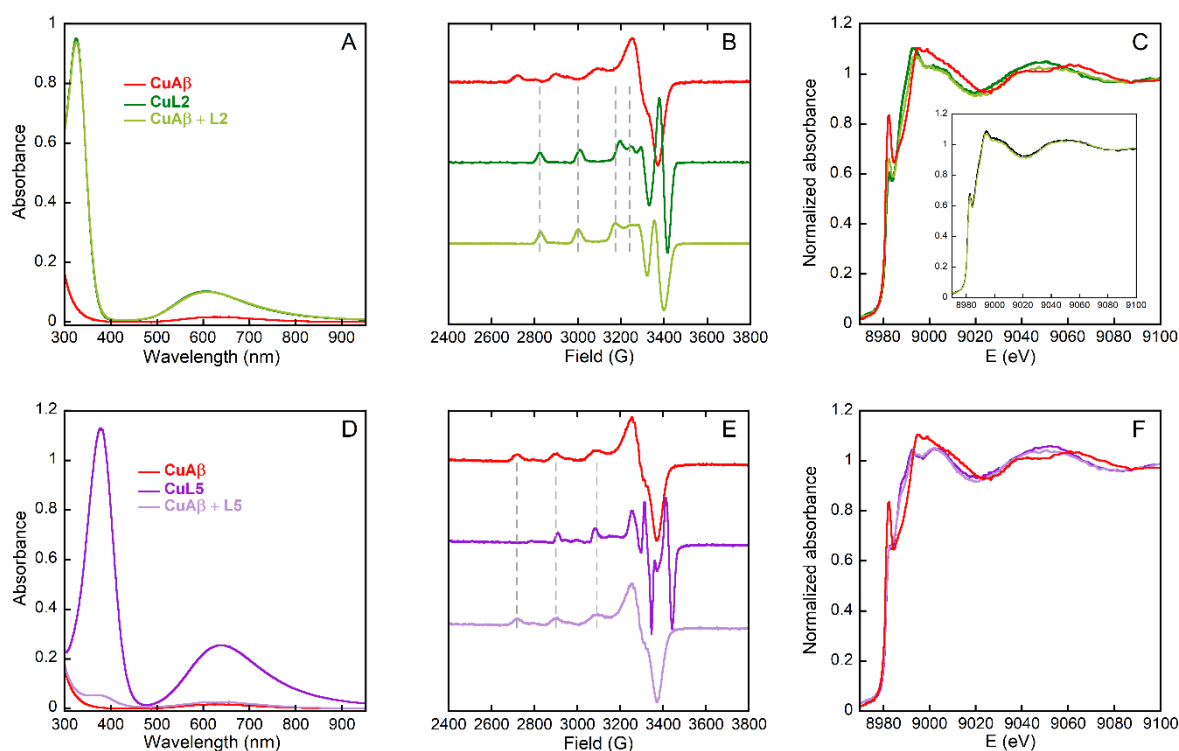
The UV-vis spectra of Cu(II)**L2** (Figure 3A) and Cu(II)**L4** (Figure S7B) are not modified in presence of  $A\beta_{16}$  pointing out the preservation of Cu(II)**L2** and Cu(II)**L4** in solution, linked to a better affinity of **L2** and **L4** for Cu(II) compared to  $A\beta_{16}$ . Conversely, a UV-vis spectra modification is observed when  $A\beta_{16}$  is added to Cu(II)**L5** (Figure 3D). The UV-vis characteristic features of Cu(II)**L5** (absorbance at 378 and 637 nm) disappear almost totally in presence of  $A\beta_{16}$  while keeping a weak absorbance at 625 nm, strongly indicating the disassembly of Cu(II)**L5** and the formation of Cu(II) $A\beta_{16}$ .  $A\beta_{16}$  is thus able to withdraw Cu(II) from **L5**. **L3** displays an intermediate behavior as  $A\beta_{16}$  is able to remove about 50% of Cu(II) from it (Figure S7A). It has to be noted that the spectra obtained are the same regardless the order of addition of the different chemicals. This direct competition assays are in line with the respective affinity of Cu(II) for  $A\beta_{16}$  on the one hand and **Li** on the other hand (Table S1).

The Cu(II)-exchange experiments were then monitored by EPR spectroscopy. For **L1-4** (Figure 3B, E and S8), the spectrum obtained in presence of the 3 partners does not resemble neither the Cu(II) $A\beta_{16}$  spectrum nor the Cu(II)**L1-4** spectra. This result would suggest the formation of a ternary species:  $A\beta_{16}$ -Cu(II)**L1-4**. For **L1**, **L2** and **L4**, the modification of the signal only appears in the perpendicular region of the spectrum when comparing Cu(II)**L1,2,4** spectrum with  $A\beta_{16}$ -Cu(II)**L1,2,4**. Modifications in this area indicate that, first the ligands displace Cu(II) from  $A\beta_{16}$ , incorporating the metal ion into the macrocycle ligands, and second,  $A\beta_{16}$  would coordinate the Cu(II) through histidine residues as reported earlier,<sup>[50, 51]</sup> with minimal modification of the equatorial coordination, hence in apical position. In order to verify this hypothesis, imidazole was directly added to the different complexes as a mimic of the histidine residues of  $A\beta_{16}$  (Figure S8). The resulting spectra are identical to the ones recorded in presence of Cu(II), **L1,2,4** and  $A\beta_{16}$  indicating that an imidazole group is indeed coordinated to the copper in presence of  $A\beta_{16}$  generating a ternary species,  $Im$ -Cu(II)**Li** (i=1, 2, 4). It has to be noted that the ternary species were not seen by UV-vis spectroscopy due to the small spectral modifications induced by the modification on the apical positions. Addition of **L3** to Cu $A\beta_{16}$  led to the formation of only one species which is different from Cu(II) $A\beta_{16}$ , Cu(II)**L3**<sup>a</sup> and Cu(II)**L3**<sup>b</sup>. Nevertheless, the  $g_{//}$  values of this new entity is close to the one of Cu(II)**L3**<sup>b</sup> which could be compatible with the formation of  $A\beta_{16}$ -Cu(II)**L3**<sup>c</sup> while depopulating the Cu(II)**L3**<sup>a</sup> species. Conversely to what has been observed by UV-vis, it seems that **L3** removes entirely Cu(II) from  $A\beta_{16}$  as no Cu(II) $A\beta_{16}$  signal is seen in EPR. Correlating EPR and UV-vis results might suggest that the presence of Cu(II)**L3**<sup>b</sup> allows the formation of one ternary species with  $A\beta_{16}$ , in line with similar Cu(II) affinity (Table S1). This new species,  $A\beta_{16}$ -Cu(II)**L3**<sup>c</sup>, would be in equilibrium with Cu(II)**L3**<sup>b</sup> and would have too close EPR parameters to be distinguished. The Cu(II) environment in this ternary species would be N4 with two imidazole rings coming from  $A\beta_{16}$  and the two amine groups from **L3** (Scheme S1). This equilibrium would explain why the  $S \rightarrow Cu(II)$  is seen with a smaller intensity by UV-vis (Figure S7A). This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that here, the addition of 1 equivalent of imidazole did not allow to reproduce entirely the  $A\beta_{16}$ -Cu(II)**L3** signature (Figure S8C), conversely to what has been seen for all the other macrocycles. However adding 5 equivalents of imidazole allows to obtain virtually the same spectrum that has been obtained for  $A\beta_{16}$ -Cu(II)**L3**<sup>c</sup>.

When  $A\beta_{16}$  is added to Cu(II)**L5**, the resulting EPR spectrum resembles the one of Cu(II) $A\beta_{16}$ .  $A\beta_{16}$  is thus able to remove Cu(II) from Cu**L5** which is in total agreement with the results obtained by UV-vis spectroscopy.

XANES was employed to evaluate the Cu(I) exchange between  $A\beta_{16}$  and the ligands. The removal of Cu(I) from  $A\beta_{16}$  by **L1-5** was monitored. The fingerprints of Cu(I)**L3-5** are superimposable to the ones

obtained for a mixture of Cu(I)A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> + **L3-5** respectively indicating the complete removal of Cu(I) by **L3-5** (Figure 3F and S9) from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>. For **L2** (Figure 3C and S9) the removal of Cu(I) from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> is not total. It can be calculated from the resulting spectrum that about 67% of the Cu(I) is linked to the macrocycle ligand and that 33% remains coordinated to A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>. **L1** which does not have any S atom is not able to remove Cu(I) from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> (Figure S9). Those results are in line with the HSAB theory, the more sulfur-rich the ligand is, *i. e.* a soft base, the higher affinity it has for Cu(I) which is a soft acid.



**Figure 3:** Cu(II) and Cu(I) coordination competition between A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> and **L2** (top) and between A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> and **L5** (bottom) followed by UV-vis panels **(A)** and **(D)**, by X-band EPR panels **(B)** and **(E)** and by X-ray absorption panels **(C)** and **(F)**. All the panels contain 3 curves representative of Cu(II)A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> (red curve), Cu(II)Li (green curve for **L2** and violet curve for **L5**), Cu(II) + A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> + Li (light green curve for **L2** and light violet curve for **L5**). In panel **(C)** the inset shows the normalized Cu(I) X-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) spectra of Cu(I)A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> + **L2** (light green curve) and a calculated spectra (black curve) with 67 % of Cu(I)L2 and 33% of Cu(I)A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>. Experimental conditions for UV-vis : [Cu(II)] = 240  $\mu$ M, [Li, A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>] = 290  $\mu$ M, [HEPES] = 100 mM, pH 7.4, T = 25  $^{\circ}$ C; for EPR [<sup>65</sup>Cu(II)] = 500  $\mu$ M, [Li, A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>] = 600  $\mu$ M, [HEPES] = 100 mM, pH 7.4, 10 % of glycerol as cryoprotectant, 120 K; for XANES [Li] = [A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>] = 1 mM, [Cu(II)] = 0.9 mM, [HEPES] = 50 mM, pH 7.4 Copper was reduced with dithionite at 10 mM and the solution was kept under an Ar atmosphere. Glycerol 10% v/v was used as a cryoprotectant, T = 20 K.

As a brief summary, **L2-4** are able to remove Cu(II) from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> but are probably forming ternary species with the Cu(II) linked into the macrocycle ligand in equatorial position and by a histidine residue of A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> in axial position (at concentration above 200  $\mu$ M). **L3-4** are able to fully remove Cu(I) from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> while **L2** is only able to remove it partially (67%). Conversely, **L5** is able to remove Cu(I) but is not able to withdraw Cu(II) from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>.

## ROS experiments

The ability of **L2-5** to prevent and stop ROS production was investigated in the absence and the presence of A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> peptide. Results are presented in Figures S10-13 and Figure 4 respectively. The impact of cyclen (**L1**) on ROS production is also reported as a reference experiment.

Firstly, the ability of the ligands to stop the ROS production by their own was investigated with an ascorbate (Asc) consumption assay followed by UV-vis. This is a commonly used test.<sup>[22, 52, 53, 54]</sup> It has been previously shown that the Asc consumption assays perfectly mirrors H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> formation,<sup>[22, 52, 53, 55]</sup> HO<sup>•</sup> release.<sup>[19, 52, 56]</sup> The ligands able to avoid the redox cycling of Cu (Cu(II)  $\rightleftharpoons$  Cu(I)) and thus preventing the interaction of Cu(I) with O<sub>2</sub> either by stabilizing the Cu(II) or the Cu(I) oxidation states are easily distinguishable by the absence of ascorbate consumption, keeping the absorbance of the ascorbate at 265 nm constant.<sup>[22, 52, 53]</sup>

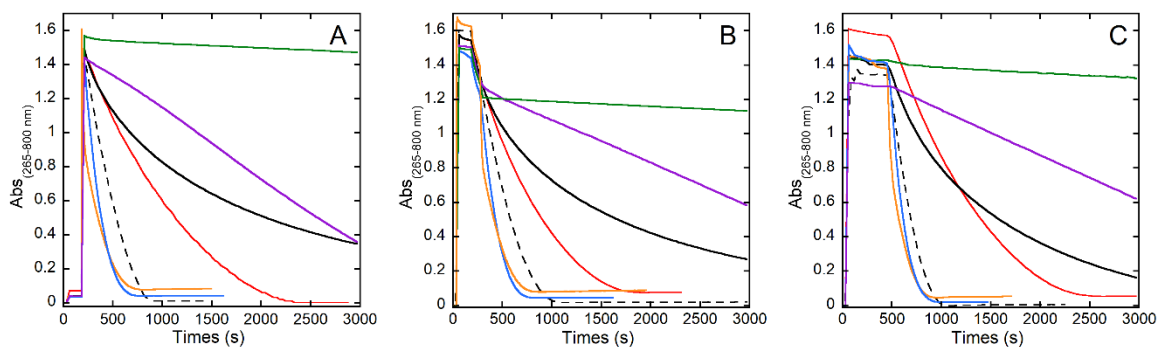
### Cu(II)

In presence of **L3** and **L4**, ascorbate is quickly consumed (Figure S10). **L3** and **L4**, sharing the particularity that both contain the same set of donor atoms made of two sulfur and two nitrogen atoms, one in the configuration *cis* (2N2S) and the other one in the configuration *trans* (NSNS), are the less efficient in the series to inhibit the ascorbate consumption. **L3** is even more efficient in catalyzing the production of ROS than Cu alone. As seen in electrochemistry, Cu(II)**L3** is slightly easier to reduce than Cu(II)**L4** (0.141 vs 0.106 V vs NHE, respectively) and we hypothesize that this explains the differences in ROS production.<sup>[57]</sup>

**L5** slows down the ascorbate consumption (Figure S10); **L5** is better in preventing the ROS production than **L1** (which has been shown to be slow in complexing the Cu(II)) and both **L3-4** with a short incubation time. The Cu(II)**L5** complex, which is easier to reduce than Cu(II)**L3-4** as seen by electrochemistry, is reduced by ascorbate to the corresponding Cu(I)**L5** complex. Nevertheless, the ascorbate consumption is slow and might suggest that **L5** is able to stabilize the Cu(I) redox state and avoid its quick oxidation to Cu(II).

**L2** shows the best ability to prevent the ROS formation. **L2** is fast in coordinating Cu(II) and the resulting Cu(II)**L2** complex is resistant to ascorbate reduction.

Globally, in presence of A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> the same trends are observed for **L2-4** which is in line with their ability to remove Cu(II) from A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> as seen by UV-vis and EPR spectroscopies (Figure 4A). For **L3** two ascorbate rate consumptions are visible and might be related to the time needed to form the A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub>-Cu(II)**L3**<sup>b</sup> ternary species (Figure S10-S12). The complex is catalyzing the ROS production very fast at the beginning and a bit slower when the ternary species is formed. A clear decrease in the ability of **L5** to stop the ROS production is observed. Again, this result is totally in line with its lower affinity for Cu(II) compared to A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> as seen by UV-vis and EPR spectroscopy (Figure 3D and 3E).



**Figure 4:** Kinetics of ascorbate consumption in presence of  $A\beta_{16}$  followed by UV-visible spectroscopy at 265 nm starting from Cu(II) panel (A), from Cu(II/I) panel (B) and from Cu(I) panel (C). **L1** (black curve), **L2** (green curve), **L3** (orange curve), **L4** (blue curve) and **L5** (violet curve), Cu alone (dashed curve),  $CuA\beta_{16}$  (red curve).  $[Li, A\beta_{16}] = 12 \mu M$ ,  $[Cu(II)] = 10 \mu M$ ,  $[Asc] = 100 \mu M$ ,  $[HEPES] = 100 \text{ mM}$ , pH 7.4,  $T = 25 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , for more details see SI.

#### Cu(I) and Cu(I/II)

ROS experiments from Cu(I) and  $Cu(I)A\beta_{16}$  were carried out as well and the results are presented in Figure S11 and Figure 4C, respectively. As previously described for Cu(II)-containing experiments, ascorbate is quickly consumed for **L3-4** (Figure 4C) regardless the presence of  $A\beta_{16}$  (Figure S11). In the presence of Cu(I), no ascorbate was consumed for **L2** (Figure 4C) regardless the presence of  $A\beta_{16}$  (Figure S11). This means that **L2** is forming an oxygen stable complex or that the  $Cu(I)L2$  complex is quickly oxidized to the ascorbate-reduction stable  $Cu(II)L2$ . When the UV-vis cuvette is opened to the air, the d-d transition band of  $Cu(II)L2$  forms rapidly and quantitatively (Figure S13), thus indicating that  $Cu(I)L2$  does not resist to  $O_2$  oxidation. For **L5** in absence of  $A\beta_{16}$ , the ascorbate consumption is slowed down (Figure S11) indicating that the  $Cu(I)L5$  can slowly cycle between the two Cu redox forms. Nevertheless, conversely to what has been observed for **L2**, the d-d transition band does not grow in presence of air (Figure S13). This phenomenon might indicate that  $Cu(I)L5$  is slowly oxidized to  $Cu(II)L5$  in line with the slow ascorbate consumption and that when formed, the  $Cu(II)L5$  complex is quickly reduced by ascorbate. This result supports the fact that **L5** is able to stabilize Cu in its reduced form. Again, in the presence of  $A\beta_{16}$ , the ability of **L5** to remove Cu from  $A\beta_{16}$  is impaired, resulting in greater ascorbate consumption. It may be envisaged that the small part of  $Cu(I)L5$  which is oxidized to  $Cu(II)L5$  would transfer its Cu(II) to  $A\beta_{16}$  and that  $Cu(II)A\beta_{16}$  produces ROS, in line with the relative affinity determined by UV-vis and EPR spectroscopy. However, once generated, the  $Cu(I)A\beta_{16}$  can interchange its metal ions with **L5**. To secure the results of such Cu(I) experiment, another set up was also used for ligand **L2** and **L5** (taken as examples), in which instead of opening the UV-Vis cuvette to air, we added a dioxygen-saturated solution to the Cu(I) solution. The data obtained are identical (Figure S14).

The same observations can be made from the experiment starting from a mixture of Cu(II/I) (Figure 4B and S12).

Note, that to secure the fact that the use of  $A\beta_{16}$  instead of the full-length  $A\beta_{40}$  doesn't induce artefacts in these ROS experiments, we have reproduced those with **L2** and **L5** in presence of  $A\beta_{40}$ . The results are the same than with  $A\beta_{16}$  (Figure S15).

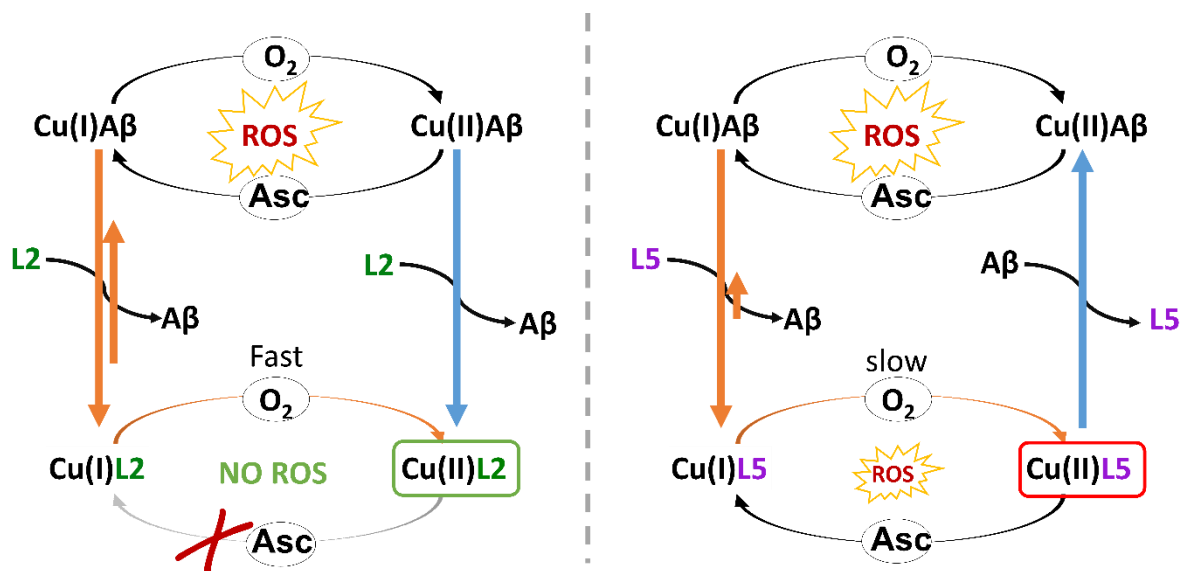
### Kinetic inertness of the formed Cu(II)L2

Because **L2** is the most suitable ligand, we also evaluated the rate of Cu(II) release by Cu(II)L2 in competition with HSA (Human Serum Albumin) using EPR with (Figure S16) and in competition with the no3pa (tris-picolylamine-1,4,7-triazacyclononane) and **L1** ligands using UV-Visible (Figure S17). The Cu(II)L2 complex was mixed with one equivalent of each competitor. The experiments give very interesting results, which are (i) HSA is not able to extract Cu from Cu(II)L2, in line with the respective Cu(II) affinity of HSA and **L2** (Table S1) but forms a ternary species reminiscent to the one obtained with imidazole, Im-Cu(II)L2, (ii) both no3pa and **L1** are thermodynamically able to remove Cu(II) from Cu(II)L2 in line with respective affinity (Table S1), (iii) no3pa is able to remove Cu(II) from Cu(II)L2 with a  $t_{1/2}$  of about 10 hours; (iii) **L1** extracts Cu(II) from Cu(II)L2 but with a very slow rate (compared to no3pa) and a  $t_{1/2} > 10$  days. This indicates that when the reaction goes through an association mechanism (in case of the no3pa ligand, reminiscent of what was previously observed with picolinato-armed cyclen and cyclam ligands<sup>22</sup>), the rate of extraction is fast (hours' time scale). In contrast, when it proceeds via a dissociation mechanism (in case of **L1**) it is much slower (days' time scales). The latter case mirrors the rate of Cu(II) release by CuL2 that is thus extremely slow.

### **Proposed mechanisms for L2 and L5**

Combining all the results, a mechanism describing **L2** and **L5** actions, which are the best ligands of the series, can be proposed (Figure 5). **L2** is a ligand capable of forming Cu(II)L2 which is a ROS dead-end complex as it does not generate ROS by its own in the presence of an excess of ascorbate as reductant and O<sub>2</sub>. In the presence of Cu(II)Aβ<sub>16</sub>, **L2** is able to retrieve Cu(II) from Aβ<sub>16</sub> and then inhibit the CuAβ<sub>16</sub> toxicity through the formation of Cu(II)L2. Starting from Cu(I)Aβ<sub>16</sub> or from Cu(II/I)Aβ<sub>16</sub>, leads to the rapid formation of Cu(II)L2 by O<sub>2</sub> oxidation of Cu(I)L2. **L2** is able to remove both Cu(I) (67%) and Cu(II) (quantitatively) from Aβ<sub>16</sub>, so it is difficult to determine if **L2** removes Cu(I) from Aβ<sub>16</sub> directly or if Cu(I)Aβ<sub>16</sub> is oxidized first and then **L2** removes Cu(II). Regardless of the pathway, the Cu(II)L2 species is generated quickly enough to stop the ROS production.

In presence of Cu(II), **L5** is only able to slow down the ROS production, meaning that ascorbate reduces Cu(II)L5. In presence of Aβ<sub>16</sub> the ability of **L5** to slow down the ROS production is almost abolished due to complete formation of the Cu(II)Aβ<sub>16</sub> complex over the Cu(II)L5 species. Nevertheless, despite the fact that **L5** cannot compete for Cu(II) in presence of Aβ<sub>16</sub> (as shown by EPR) the ascorbate is not consumed as fast as for Cu(II)Aβ<sub>16</sub> indicating that an exchange also occurs at the Cu(I) level.



**Figure 5:** Summary of Cu chelation and ROS production in presence of Aβ<sub>16</sub> with L2 (left) and L5 (right) illustrating the preferred redox state of Cu for the two ligands.

### Concluding remarks.

#### -Chemical properties of the thiazacyclen ligands in buffered medium at pH 7.4.

In this work, we have studied the coordination of Cu(I) and Cu(II) to four thiazacyclen ligands in aqueous medium at pH 7.4. This first step is helpful to study further the complexes for biological purposes. While thiazacyclen macrocycles are known for decades, their Cu complexes have still poorly been studied in buffered aqueous media. During our investigations, it appears that deeper physico-chemical characterizations of the Cu(I)Li and Cu(II)Li and counterparts with other [N,O,S] sites using EXAFS and multifrequency and pulsed EPR could deserve a full independent benchmark study. The coordination properties of L2, L4 and L5 follow the expected trend for the progressive substitution of N to S atoms into the cyclen scaffold, while L3 shows a peculiar trend. Indeed, for L3 two complexes are observed by EPR spectroscopy showing different parameters. One set of signals is identical to the one of Cu(II)L4 and we thus propose a similar coordination. For the second species that becomes predominant at higher pH, L3 probably forms a CuL3OH complex where the OH replaces one of the macrocycle atom.

The redox processes of the complexes are reversible with the substitution of the first S atom. The more S atoms are added, the more the  $E_{1/2}$  is shifted to higher values from -0.21 to 0.4 V vs NHE for L1 and L5 respectively. L5 is thus able to strongly stabilize Cu(I).

#### -Removal of Cu from CuAβ<sub>16</sub> by the Li ligands.

Cu chelation competition experiments followed by spectroscopy techniques with Aβ<sub>16</sub> and Li have been conducted. L1-4 are able to remove Cu(II) totally or partially from Aβ<sub>16</sub>, while L5 cannot compete with Aβ<sub>16</sub>. L3-5 are able to remove Cu(I) totally from Aβ<sub>16</sub> while L2 removes it only partially and L1 cannot. This is fully in line with the HSAB theory.

#### -Effect of Li ligands on CuAβ<sub>16</sub>-induced ROS production

**L2** is remarkably efficient in arresting the Cu-induced ROS production regardless the starting Cu redox state. **L2** does not suffer from a slow coordination kinetic as encounter with the parent cyclen. The coordination of Cu(II) is fast as shown by the ROS experiment starting from Cu(II), where there is no need of pre-incubation time to obtain the total inhibition of the ROS production. Once Cu(II)**L2** is formed it cannot be reduced by ascorbate.

**L3,4** are able to remove Cu(II/I) from  $A\beta_{16}$  but are not able to stop the ROS production. Even more, they are favoring the cycling between Cu(II) and Cu(I) compared to free Cu. This phenomenon could be attributed to the redox potential of the Cu(II)**L3-4** in the appropriate range to be efficiently reduced by ascorbate and oxidized by dioxygen, and by the geometry of the complexes requiring a minimal structural reorganization between the two redox states.

Cu**L5** can produce moderately ROS, as it appears that Cu(II)**L5** can be reduced by ascorbate and that the Cu(I)**L5** can be (re)oxidized. Nevertheless, the oxidation by  $O_2$  is slow.

Substitution of N by S atom(s) in the thiaazamacrocycle increases the overall kinetic of Cu capture. At this point it is not possible to conclude on the pathway by which the Cu(II) complex is formed after demetallation of  $CuA\beta_{16}$  species: Cu(II) taken faster out of the  $A\beta_{16}$  than in absence of S atoms and/or Cu(I) taken out of the  $A\beta_{16}$  and reoxidized (both rapidly). In the former case, the replacement of a nitrogen by a sulfur atom would have similar kinetic effects as the one previously reported for the addition of picolinato-arms to cyclen and/or cyclam ligands,<sup>[22]</sup> that is to say allowing a faster Cu(II) capture. In case of the picolinato armed cyclen or cyclam, this is the duty of this additional moiety. Here in case of the sulfur, it might be anticipated that the replacement of the nitrogen atoms by the bulkier sulfur one induces a less rigid cycle, more prone to distortion to anchor the Cu(II).

Changing N for S atoms has also two other consequences: (i) it changes significantly the redox potential, making some of the CuLi complexes able to form ROS on their own and (ii) it affects the affinity for both Cu(I) and Cu(II). Hence a good balance should be found between the thermodynamic and kinetic of the Cu capture and its redox silencing. In the series studied, **L2** providing a 3N1S coordination sphere with a 12-membered metallacycle is the sole to fulfill all the required criteria.

**L3** and **L4** are able to extract Cu(II) and Cu(I) from  $A\beta_{16}$  but produce higher amount of ROS than  $CuA\beta_{16}$  while **L5** can remove Cu(I) from  $A\beta_{16}$  and slow down ROS production, but can get slowly oxidized with the Cu(II) going back to  $A\beta_{16}$ .

#### -Kinetic inertness of the Cu(II)**L2**.

In addition to the ability of removing Cu from  $CuA\beta_{16}$ , its ability to keep it (or not) in the biological medium is an important parameter to know. Here we show that at pH 7.4, **L2** keeps its bound Cu(II) for several hours. Actually, the fate of the Cu(II) once coordinated to **L2** is either further decoordination to bind to another biomolecules or excretion from the brain as the complex, and this will mainly depends on the residence time of the metal ion inside the ligand. In contrast to what is searched for  $^{64}Cu$  ligands in case of PET imaging complexes, the transfer to other biomolecules is not an issue here. It has even been proposed as an interesting therapeutic strategy to transfer Cu from the extracellular space to the inside of cells, in order to counterbalance the extracellular excess and intracellular deficiency proposed in AD.<sup>[58, 59, 60, 61]</sup>

Further studies of such azamacrocycles could include enlarging the series with 14,15,16-membered ring macrocycles, other donor atoms (O-containing macrocycles for instance), and the use of penta-coordinating N,S,O-containing macrocycles.<sup>[29, 62]</sup> In addition, it is crucial to take the interference of Zn(II) in Cu removal from A $\beta$  and redox silencing by **Li** since Zn(II), the other biometal ion present in millimolar quantity in the synaptic cleft, can impede Cu detoxification by chelators.<sup>[19, 21, 63]</sup> This study is currently under progress. Not only the thermodynamic selectivity of Cu(II) over Zn(II) is at play in that case (in contrast to previous reports<sup>[63, 64, 65, 66]</sup>) but also kinetics. The results obtained, their interpretation and the mechanisms at play are very complex and will be reported in a forthcoming publication.

## Experimental methods

**All chemicals** are from Sigma-Aldrich, Fluorochem and TCI chemicals. A $\beta$ <sub>40</sub> (DAEFRHDSGYEVHHQKLVFFAEDVGSNKGAIIGLMVGGVV) and A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> peptides (DAEFRHDSGYEVHHQK) were purchased from Genecust. **L1-L5** were synthesized following the published protocol.<sup>[29, 67]</sup> <sup>65</sup>Cu was obtained from a <sup>65</sup>Cu foil from Eurisotop. The no3pa ligand was purchased from EasyChelators.

**Stock Solutions.** Stock solutions were prepared in Milli-Q water (resistivity: 18.2 M $\Omega$ .cm). HEPES buffer was prepared at an initial concentration of 500 mM, pH 7.4. CuSO<sub>4</sub>·5H<sub>2</sub>O was the source of Cu(II). A stock solution was prepared at 100 mM and titrated by UV-Vis spectroscopy. The concentration was determined at 800 nm with  $\epsilon_{800\text{ nm}} = 12\text{ cm}^{-1}\text{ M}^{-1}$ . A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> peptide and **L1-5** stock solutions of about 10 mM were prepared and titrated by UV-Vis spectroscopy. A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> peptide concentration was determined using the Tyr chromophore with  $\epsilon_{276\text{ nm}} = 1410\text{ cm}^{-1}\text{ M}^{-1}$  at acidic pH. The precise concentrations of **L1-5** were determined by Cu(II) titration with a solution of CuSO<sub>4</sub> of known concentration using the d-d transition absorption of the complex to determine the equivalence point. **L5** was moderately soluble in water. **L5** was first dissolved in water; the supernatant was filtered and the soluble fraction was titrated. **L5** was soluble at about 5 mM. All stock solution were stored at 4 °C.

## UV-Visible Spectrophotometry

UV-Visible absorption spectra and ROS kinetic experiments were recorded on a Hewlett Packard Agilent 8453 or 8454 spectrophotometer at a controlled temperature of 25 °C in a 1 cm path length quartz cuvette, with 800 rpm stirring. For competition absorption spectra, the samples were prepared *in situ* from stock solutions of **L1-5**, A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> and Cu(II) diluted to 290  $\mu$ M, 290  $\mu$ M and 240  $\mu$ M respectively in 100 mM HEPES buffer, pH 7.4. The final volume in the cuvette was adjusted to 2 mL with Milli-Q water. For ROS kinetic experiments, samples were prepared *in situ* from stock solutions of **L1-5**, A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> and Cu(II) at 1 mM diluted to 12  $\mu$ M for **L1-5**, A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> and 10  $\mu$ M for Cu(II), in 100 mM HEPES buffer, pH 7.4. Ascorbate was freshly prepared and diluted to 100  $\mu$ M in the cuvette. The final volume in the cuvette was adjusted to 2 mL with Milli-Q water.

## Electrochemical experiments

Electrochemical experiments were performed in an argon-flushed cell. A three-electrode setup was used, consisting of a glassy carbon (3 mm in diameter) disk as a working electrode, a platinum wire auxiliary electrode and a Saturated Calomel Electrode as reference electrode directly dipped into the solution. Cyclic voltammograms were recorded with an Autolab PGSTAT302N potentiostat piloted by EC-Lab software. The working electrode was carefully polished before each measurement on a red disk NAP with 1  $\mu$ m AP-A suspension during at least one minute (Struers). Additional support electrolyte was not added because of the high concentration of HEPES buffer in the solution. The scanning speed



was  $0.1 \text{ V.s}^{-1}$ . The samples were prepared from stock solutions of **L1-5** and Cu(II) diluted to the desired concentration.

### Electron paramagnetic resonance

EPR spectra were recorded using an ELEXSYS Electron E500 Bruker spectrometer from 2600 to 3600 G, 0.5 mT amplitude modulation, approximately 9.5 GHz. The spectra were recorded using a microwave power of 5 mW and the experiments were carried out at 120 K using a liquid nitrogen cryostat.

For the competition experiments, in an Eppendorf tube,  $^{65}\text{Cu}$  was first mixed with  $\text{A}\beta_{16}$  (1.2 equiv.) in HEPES at pH 7.4. **L1-5** ligands were then added to the solution. The mixture was stirred for 10 minutes (unless stated otherwise in the figures' captions). Samples were frozen in a quartz tube after addition of 10% glycerol as a cryoprotectant and stored in liquid nitrogen until used.

### XANES

Cu-K edge XANES spectra were recorded on the FAME beamline at the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF, Grenoble, France) during an 15-shift session in Avril 2017 (experiment number A30-2 1125-CRG FAME-BM30B). The measurements were performed on mM solutions at low temperature (He-cryostat) in the fluorescence mode using a 30-element high-purity Ge detector (Canberra) in frozen liquid cells. The energy was calibrated with a Cu metallic foil spectra in transmission mode, with an energy set at 8979 eV corresponding to the maximum of the first derivative of the XANES transmission spectrum. For each sample, at least 3 XANES spectra were recorded and averaged. Samples for XANES measurements were prepared in the presence of 10% of glycerol as a cryoprotectant. A  $\text{Cu}(\text{SO}_4)$  solution was used as source of Cu(II) and the  $\text{CuA}\beta_{16}$  complexes formed *in situ* were further reduced by dithionite 10 mM under an inert argon atmosphere, and in HEPES buffer 7.4 100mM, according to previous reported methodology.<sup>[56, 68]</sup> Possible drop of the pH due to dithionite addition was checked after the experiments and no acidic shift higher than +0.2 pH unit was measured.

Note that in our study, we have focused on Cu(I) complexes for two main reasons: (i) For  $d^{10}$  ion, X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy is a leading if not the sole investigation method in contrast to Cu(II) and (ii) for Cu(II) species, photo-reduction is a main issue to deal with,<sup>[69]</sup> that we were not able to solve during the beamtime allocated.

### ROS measurement

The decrease of the ascorbate UV absorption band at  $\lambda_{\text{max}} = 265 \text{ nm}$  ( $\epsilon = 14\,500 \text{ M}^{-1}\cdot\text{cm}^{-1}$ ), corrected at 800 nm, was plotted against time. The samples were prepared *in situ* from stock solutions at 1 mM diluted to 12  $\mu\text{M}$  for **Li** and  $\text{A}\beta_{16}$  and to 10  $\mu\text{M}$  for Cu(II), in 100 mM HEPES buffer, pH 7.4. The final volume in the cuvette was adjusted to 2 mL with milliQ water.

The ROS experiments were performed following three different procedures: starting from Cu(II), starting from Cu(I) and starting from a mixture of Cu(I) and Cu(II).

For the first experiment, **Li** was added to a Cu(II) or Cu(II) +  $\text{A}\beta_{16}$  mixture under aerobic conditions and then ascorbate was introduced in the cuvette.

For the second one, **Li** was injected with Hamilton syringe to Cu(I) or Cu(I) +  $\text{A}\beta_{16}$  in a sealed cuvette under anaerobic conditions. Then the cuvette was open to air and air was bubbled in the cuvette to ease the fast solubilization of dioxygen. The Cu(I) was generated from the *in situ* reduction of Cu(II) with ascorbate. All the solution were previously degassed with argon 15 min before being introduced in the sealed UV-vis cuvette under argon. For Figure S14, instead of bubbling air in the cuvette, 500  $\mu\text{L}$  of HEPES buffer (100 mM, pH 7.4) saturated with  $\text{O}_2$  were added in the cuvette. For the last one (mixture of Cu(I) and Cu(II)), ascorbate was introduced first into the cuvette under aerobic conditions,

then either Cu(II) or Cu(II) + A $\beta$ <sub>16</sub> was added. When the concentration of ascorbate was reaching about 1.2, Li was added.

Note Bene: the level of O<sub>2</sub> was probed using Clark electrode, during the Cu(A $\beta$ )-induced ascorbate consumption to secure that no bias occurs during the UV-Vis experiments of ascorbate consumption. The level of O<sub>2</sub> starts at 0.25  $\pm$  0.01 mM and decreases by less than 15% along the same kinetics than ascorbate consumption, and increases back to the initial level once the ascorbate has been fully consumed (Figure S18 and related comments in the supporting information). This indicates that the level of O<sub>2</sub> is not limiting for the whole reaction at play.

### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare

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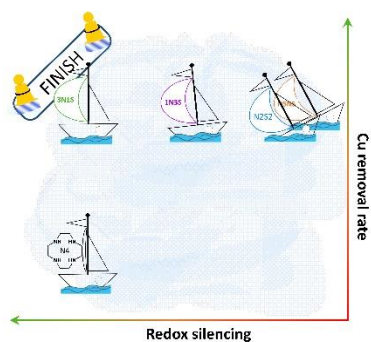
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## TOC.



Five 12-membered macrocycles ranging from [4N] to [1N3S] binding set were challenged for their ability to stop and prevent the formation of Reactive Oxygen Species induced by the Cu(A $\beta$ ) complex, where A $\beta$  is the Alzheimer-related peptide. The most appropriate ligand is the [3N1S] that combines redox silencing of the copper ion with quickness of Cu removal from A $\beta$ .