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### When synthetic cells and ABC-transporters meet

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# **When ABC-transporters and synthetic cells meet**

**Hendrik R. Sikkema**



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faculty of science  
 and engineering



The work described in this thesis was performed in the Membrane Enzymology group of the Groningen Biomolecular Sciences and Biotechnology Institute (GBB) at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. The work was funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and by the European Research Council (ERC).

Cover design: Hendrik R. Sikkema, courtesy illustration synthetic cell to Bert Poolman.

Cover image: The construction of a synthetic cell, with OpuA represented in green and the enzymes arginine deiminase, ornithine transcarbamoylase, carbamate kinase, and the arginine/ornithine antiporter of the ADI pathway represented in orange

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# When ABC-transporters and synthetic cells meet

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Prof. dr. P.C.A. van der Wel

*I dedicate this dissertation to  
Valentina, my family and my close friends  
who provided me with the inspiration and energy to write it.*



*Enjoy the little things,  
for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.*

Robert Brault





# Contents

<b>Scope of this thesis</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>1 Cell Fuelling and Metabolic Energy Conservation in Synthetic Cells</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	3
1.1.1 Synthetic life	3
1.1.2 Coupling of exergonic and endergonic reactions and measure of energy status	4
1.2 Cell fueling systems	5
1.2.1 Arginine breakdown pathway	6
1.2.2 Decarboxylation pathways	7
1.2.3 Artificial photosynthetic cells	9
1.2.4 Molecular rheostat	9
1.3 Compartmentalization and vesicle systems	12
1.3.1 Building blocks for membranes	12
1.3.2 Membrane crowding	12
1.3.3 Vesicle systems	13
1.3.4 A metabolic network for energy and physicochemical homeostasis	14
1.3.5 Sensors to measure the energy and physicochemical status of cells	14
1.4 How much ATP does a synthetic cell need?	15
1.4.1 Synthesis of proteins	16
1.4.2 Synthesis of information carriers	16
1.4.3 Lipid synthesis for compartmentalization	17
1.4.4 Membrane transport for osmotic, ionic and pH control	18
1.4.5 Maintenance energy	18
1.4.6 Quantification of ATP demand of minimal synthetic cell	19
1.5 Outlook and perspectives	20
1.6 Open questions	21
1.7 Acknowledgements	21
References	21
<b>2 A synthetic metabolic network for physicochemical homeostasis</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1 Introduction	33
2.2 Results	34
2.2.1 A system for sustained production of ATP	34
2.2.2 Engineering of the metabolic network for ATP	34
2.2.3 Arginine breakdown and control of futile hydrolysis and pH	38
2.2.4 Load on the metabolic network	43
2.2.5 Physicochemical homeostasis	45

2.3	Materials and methods . . . . .	47
2.3.1	Materials . . . . .	47
2.3.2	Construction of expression strains . . . . .	48
2.3.3	Expression of genes . . . . .	49
2.3.4	Preparation of cell lysates and membrane vesicles . . . . .	50
2.3.5	Purification of ArcA, ArcB, and ArcC1 . . . . .	50
2.3.6	Purification of PercevalHR . . . . .	51
2.3.7	Enzymatic assays for ArcA and ArcB . . . . .	51
2.3.8	Enzymatic assays for ArcC1 . . . . .	51
2.3.9	Purification of ArcD2 and OpuA . . . . .	53
2.3.10	Light scattering for oligomeric state determination . . . . .	53
2.3.11	Co-reconstitution of ArcD2 and OpuA . . . . .	53
2.3.12	Encapsulation of the arginine breakdown pathway . . . . .	54
2.3.13	Cryo-EM analysis of vesicles . . . . .	56
2.3.14	Transport assays . . . . .	56
2.3.15	Internal ATP:ADP ratio measurements with PercevalHR . . . . .	57
2.3.16	Internal pH measurements with pyranine . . . . .	57
2.3.17	External pH measurements with pyranine . . . . .	58
2.3.18	Amino acid and ammonia analysis . . . . .	59
2.3.19	Membrane permeability with stopped-flow fluorescence . . . . .	59
2.4	Acknowledgements . . . . .	62
2.5	Contributions . . . . .	63
	References . . . . .	63
<b>3</b>	<b>Gating by ionic strength and safety check by cyclic-di-AMP in OpuA</b>	<b>69</b>
3.1	Introduction . . . . .	71
3.2	Results . . . . .	71
3.2.1	Functional properties of OpuA . . . . .	71
3.2.2	Architecture of OpuA . . . . .	72
3.2.3	Substrate loading of OpuA . . . . .	79
3.2.4	Regulation of OpuA by ionic strength . . . . .	82
3.2.5	Regulation of OpuA by cyclic-di-AMP . . . . .	83
3.2.6	Transport cycle of OpuA and conclusions . . . . .	90
3.3	Materials and methods . . . . .	90
3.3.1	Materials . . . . .	90
3.3.2	Expression of OpuA and preparation of membrane vesicles . . . . .	91
3.3.3	Purification of OpuA . . . . .	92
3.3.4	Labeling of OpuA and accessibility of scaffold domain . . . . .	92
3.3.5	Purification of MSP1D1 . . . . .	92
3.3.6	Reconstitution of OpuA in MSP1D1 nanodiscs . . . . .	93
3.3.7	ATPase activity assays . . . . .	93
3.3.8	Cryo-EM sample preparation and data acquisition . . . . .	94
3.3.9	Image processing . . . . .	94
3.3.10	Model building . . . . .	95
3.3.11	Labeling of OpuA for single-molecule FRET . . . . .	96
3.3.12	Single-molecule FRET . . . . .	96

3.3.13	Co-reconstitution of ArcD2 and OpuA in liposomes . . . . .	97
3.3.14	Encapsulation of the arginine breakdown pathway . . . . .	97
3.3.15	<i>In vitro</i> transport assays. . . . .	98
3.3.16	<i>In vivo</i> transport assays . . . . .	98
3.4	Data availability . . . . .	98
3.5	Acknowledgments . . . . .	99
3.6	Author contributions . . . . .	99
	References . . . . .	99
<b>4</b>	<b>Heterodimer formation of the homodimeric ABC transporter OpuA</b>	<b>105</b>
4.1	Introduction . . . . .	107
4.2	Results . . . . .	109
4.2.1	Verification of activity with different affinity tags . . . . .	109
4.2.2	Heterodimer formation . . . . .	109
4.2.3	Homologous recombination . . . . .	111
4.2.4	Optimization of induction . . . . .	111
4.2.5	TwinStrepII-tag. . . . .	113
4.2.6	Optimization of reconstitution . . . . .	114
4.2.7	Purification of the OpuA-HSS heterodimer . . . . .	114
4.3	Discussion . . . . .	115
4.3.1	Spatial separation. . . . .	115
4.3.2	Multimerization interface. . . . .	117
4.3.3	Expression conditions . . . . .	117
4.4	Materials and methods . . . . .	117
4.4.1	Materials. . . . .	117
4.4.2	Construction of strains and growth conditions. . . . .	117
4.4.3	Expression of <i>opuABC</i> genes . . . . .	119
4.4.4	Optimization of the induction conditions . . . . .	119
4.4.5	Isolation and preparation of membrane vesicles . . . . .	120
4.4.6	Purification of OpuA . . . . .	120
4.4.7	SDS-PAGE and Western blotting analysis. . . . .	122
4.4.8	ATPase activity assay. . . . .	122
4.5	Acknowledgements. . . . .	122
	References . . . . .	122
<b>5</b>	<b>A versatile <i>in silico</i> approach to find residues for FRET/EPR pairs</b>	<b>127</b>
5.1	Introduction . . . . .	129
5.2	Results . . . . .	130
5.2.1	The ABC-transporter OpuA . . . . .	130
5.2.2	<i>In silico</i> distance mapping . . . . .	130
5.2.3	Filtering of the results . . . . .	131
5.2.4	Mutations in OpuAC, the substrate-binding domain of OpuA . . . . .	134
5.2.5	Mutations in the full-length transporter OpuA . . . . .	135

5.3	Discussion . . . . .	135
5.4	Methods . . . . .	137
5.4.1	Construction of expression strains . . . . .	137
5.4.2	Expression of genes . . . . .	137
5.4.3	Isolation and purification of OpuAC . . . . .	137
5.4.4	Labeling of OpuAC for single-molecule FRET . . . . .	137
5.4.5	Isolation and purification of OpuA . . . . .	138
5.4.6	Reconstitution of OpuA in MSP1D1 nanodiscs . . . . .	138
5.4.7	Labeling of OpuA for ATPase assay . . . . .	139
5.4.8	ATPase activity assays . . . . .	139
5.4.9	Single-molecule FRET . . . . .	139
5.4.10	Python code for automatization . . . . .	140
5.5	Acknowledgements . . . . .	143
5.6	Contributions. . . . .	143
	References . . . . .	143
<b>6</b>	<b>Perspectives</b>	<b>147</b>
6.1	Introduction . . . . .	149
6.2	Synthetic cell. . . . .	149
6.2.1	Energy and other requirements . . . . .	149
6.2.2	Physicochemical- and other constraints . . . . .	149
6.2.3	Building the synthetic cell and startup . . . . .	150
6.2.4	Bridging the gap . . . . .	150
6.2.5	Bio-orthogonal expansion . . . . .	150
6.2.6	Cyclic-di-AMP and osmoregulation. . . . .	151
6.3	OpuA . . . . .	151
6.3.1	Single-molecule FRET . . . . .	152
6.3.2	Cryo-Electron microscopy . . . . .	153
6.4	A brief view on the future of the field. . . . .	154
	References . . . . .	155
<b>7</b>	<b>Appendices</b>	<b>161</b>
7.1	Scientific summary . . . . .	162
7.2	Wetenschappelijke samenvatting . . . . .	164
7.3	Popular summary. . . . .	166
7.4	Samenvatting voor leken . . . . .	168
7.5	Резюме для неспециалистов. . . . .	170
7.6	Acknowledgements . . . . .	172

# Scope of this thesis

This thesis covers multiple aspects of (synthetic) biochemistry. Starting from a global point of view and then going deeper into signalling on the single protein level. It provides insight into the state-of-the-art (synthetic) biochemistry and showcases the importance by zooming in on details and zooming out to see the broader context.

The first chapter provides a detailed analysis of important design principles of synthetic cells. The focus lies on the energy balance of the cell. We discuss several systems to (re)generate metabolic energy and give an estimation on how much energy in terms of ATP is needed to maintain a (synthetic) cell.

In chapter 2 we use one of the systems that was presented in chapter 1 in the context of a cell-like environment. We have developed a system in liposomes that is able to use external arginine as a fuel to regenerate ATP on the inside of the vesicle. We show basic physicochemical homeostasis and use the ATP that is produced to fuel one of the key proteins in osmoregulation, the ABC transporter OpuA. In case of an osmotic upshift, OpuA is activated by ionic strength and is able to import the compatible solute glycine betaine against large concentration gradients, which is powered by ATP.

In chapter 3 we focus on this protein. With use of single particle cryo-electron microscopy we have obtained a number of structures of OpuA in multiple conformations that help in understanding the transport mechanism. We also show that OpuA is regulated by the second messenger cyclic-di-AMP, which acts as an emergency brake.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on methodological advances towards single-molecule FRET studies on OpuA. First we demonstrate how we turned OpuA from a homodimeric into a heterodimeric protein complex (chapter 4). When homodimeric proteins are labeled with probes for *e.g.* smFRET or DEER spectroscopy, any mutation introduced in one protomer also arises in the subunit of the dimer. Transforming the protein into an apparent heterodimer, by tagging the two identical subunits differently, circumvents this problem.

Then, in chapter 5 we introduce an *in silico* approach to find new positions for labeling that can be used for smFRET or DEER spectroscopy. The approach uses two or more crystal structures as input and then systematically assesses all possible residue pairs and filters out positions with suitable accessibility and spacing.

The final chapter (chapter 6) places the work presented in this thesis into perspective and provides a view on the possible future of the research.

