

**Respiratory Complexes III and IV Can each Bind Two Molecules of Cytochrome c  
at Low Ionic Strength**

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## **Abstract**

The transient interactions of respiratory cytochrome *c* with complexes III and IV is herein investigated by using heterologous proteins, namely human cytochrome *c*, the soluble domain of plant cytochrome *c*<sub>1</sub> and bovine cytochrome *c* oxidase. The binding molecular mechanisms of the resulting cross-complexes have been analyzed by Nuclear Magnetic Resonance and Isothermal Titration Calorimetry. Our data reveal that the two cytochrome *c*-involving adducts possess a 2:1 stoichiometry – that is, two cytochrome *c* molecules per adduct – at low ionic strength. We conclude that such extra binding sites at the surfaces of complexes III and IV can facilitate the turnover and sliding of cytochrome *c* molecules and, therefore, the electron transfer within respiratory supercomplexes.

**Keywords:** Cytochrome *c*, Cytochrome *bc*<sub>1</sub>, Cytochrome *c* oxidase, ITC, NMR, , Supercomplex.

### Highlights:

- Plant cytochrome  $c_1$ , at its two binding sites, recognizes human cytochrome  $c$ .
- Docking of human cytochrome  $c$  at plant cytochrome  $c_1$  is electrostatically driven.
- Cytochrome  $c$  oxidase can likewise house two molecules of cytochrome  $c$ .
- Extra binding sites for cytochrome  $c$  can facilitate its sliding in supercomplexes.

## Abbreviations

Chemical-Shift Perturbations (CSP)

Cytochrome  $bc_1$  ( $Cbc_1$ )

Cytochrome  $c$  ( $Cc$ )

Cytochrome  $c$  Oxidase ( $CcO$ )

Cytochrome  $c_1$  ( $Cc_1$ )

Complex III (III)

Complex IV (IV)

Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS)

Electron Transfer (ET)

Equilibrium dissociation constant ( $K_D$ )

Heteronuclear Single-Quantum Correlation (HSQC)

Human Cytochrome  $c$  ( $hCc$ )

Human Cytochrome  $c_1$  ( $hCc_1$ )

Intermembrane Mitochondrial Space (IMS)

Inner Mitochondrial Membrane (IMM)

Isothermal Titration Calorimetry (ITC)

Luria-Bertani (LB)

Mitochondrial Matrix (MM)

Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR)

Plant Cytochrome  $c$  ( $pCc$ )

Plant Cytochrome  $c_1$  ( $pCc_1$ )

Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

Reduced Cytochrome  $c$  Oxidase ( $CcO_{red}$ )

Reduced human Cytochrome  $c$  ( $hCc_{red}$ )

Reduced plant Cytochrome  $c_1$  ( $pCc_{1red}$ )



## Introduction

Cytochrome  $c_1$  ( $Cc_1$ ) is the subunit of mitochondrial complex III (III), or Cytochrome  $bc_1$  ( $Cbc_1$ ), responsible for electron transfer (ET) to Cytochrome  $c$  ( $Cc$ ) and, in turn, to complex IV (IV), or Cytochrome  $c$  Oxidase ( $CcO$ ) [1-5]. This function is essential for mitochondrial respiration, the major source of energy in eukaryotic cells. The organization of the mitochondrial electron transport chain is a subject of intense debate at present, where two different models are being considered: the fluid model, that proposes a random organization for individual respiratory protein components, and the solid model, suggesting a stable association between individual complexes [6-8]. Apart their role in respiration,  $Cc$  and  $Cc_1$  are clearly involved in the development of programmed cell death [9-15]. Such a dual role of  $Cc$  is regulated by post-translational modifications – namely, phosphorylation and nitration of tyrosine residues – that affect the binding of  $Cc$  to its physiological counterparts, either in the mitochondria or in the cytoplasm [16-23].

The ET reactions between  $Cc$  and its partners  $Cbc_1$  and  $CcO$  have been characterized by time-resolved spectroscopy and steady-state enzyme kinetic studies [24-28]. Both, reduction and oxidation of  $Cc$  show multiphasic kinetic traces in polarographic and spectrophotometric studies. This suggests the presence of at least two binding sites in the  $Cc$  partners: a catalytic ET site, along with an adjacent, non-productive site. In agreement with this, we have recently reported that plant  $Cc$  (pCc) docks at two binding sites of plant  $Cc_1$  (pCc<sub>1</sub>) [29]: The first, *proximal* site is suitable for ET between both heme proteins and resembles that previously determined by X-ray diffraction in yeasts [30]; the second, *distal* site localizes close to the Rieske subunit and seems to be involved in channeling of  $Cc$  molecules towards  $CcO$  [29, 31, 32]. Classical crosslinking assays between  $Cc$  and  $Cbc_1$  had already pointed out that residues from the *distal* site of  $Cc_1$  could be involved in the interaction with  $Cc$  [33].

The study of heterologous complexes, also known as cross-complexes, is a widely accepted approach to get insight into the binding mode of interprotein complexes [34-35]. To provide further insight into the nature of the interactions between Cc and Cc<sub>1</sub>, we analyze here the cross-complex between human Cc (hCc) and pCc<sub>1</sub>, and compare it with the natural pCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complex in plants in terms of binding affinity, specificity and dynamics. **Actually, the turnover number for reduction of mammalian Cc by potato Cbc<sub>1</sub> is similar than that for the mammalian Cc-Cbc<sub>1</sub> system [28].** As there are substantial differences in the electrostatic potential surface of pCc and hCc, the analysis of the hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complex is a very useful approach to better understand the Cc-Cc<sub>1</sub> binding mode. In fact, the major differences between the two Cc orthologs are at their respective surfaces in contact with pCc<sub>1</sub> (Figure 1). Given the relevance of electrostatics in Cc-Cc<sub>1</sub> complexes, the ionic-strength dependence of the binding event has also been addressed, so revealing a crucial role in both the binding affinity between the partners and the definition of the binding sites on the pCc<sub>1</sub> surface. In addition, the hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> interaction has been compared with that between hCc and bovine CcO. Notably, Cc also interacts with two binding sites on CcO. Altogether, our data provide a better comprehension of the molecular recognition processes involved in mitochondrial respiration.

## Material and Methods

### Modelling

pCc and pCc<sub>1</sub> models were built in previous work [29]. hCc structure was taken from Protein Data Bank (PDB ID: 3zcf) [36]. Human cytochrome c<sub>1</sub> (hCc<sub>1</sub>) model was built following the same procedure reported for pCc<sub>1</sub> model [29]. The electrostatic potential surfaces of pCc, pCc<sub>1</sub>, hCc, and hCc<sub>1</sub> structures were calculated using DelPhi [37] and Chimera [38]. The electrostatic potential surfaces were calculated assuming an ionic strength of 250 mM.

### Protein Expression and Purification

*Escherichia coli* BL21 (DE3) cells transformed with pBTR1 plasmid were used to produce recombinant hCc [39]. <sup>15</sup>N-labeled hCc was expressed in M9 minimal medium for Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) titrations, whereas unlabeled hCc was produced in Luria-Bertani (LB) medium for Isothermal Titration Calorimetry (ITC) measurements. Expression and purification protocol was similar to that recently described for pCc [29], excepting the cell culture was at 30 °C and the elution gradient for the cationic exchange column, which ranged from 0.036 to 0.36 M NaCl. The optimization of the expression and purification steps was carried out according to specific protocols for c-type cytochromes [40-43]. The yield of hCc was 15-20 mg / L in LB and 10-15 mg / L in M9 minimal medium.

Unlabeled pCc<sub>1</sub> was expressed and purified as described previously [29].

Bovine CcO was purchased from Sigma and used after exchanging its buffer in Millipore 3K NMWL centricons to 10 mM sodium phosphate buffer (pH 7.4) containing 0.2% n-Dodecyl-β-D-maltoside and 5 mM sodium dithionite. The pH of the buffer was checked before and after the sample preparation. Fresh samples were used to carry out the experiments. Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS) assays were performed to

evaluate the oligomerization state of the CcO at the protein concentration used in ITC titrations, in which CcO was predominantly monomeric (75%). DLS experiments were conducted at 25 °C in a Zetasizer Nano ZS (Malvern).

### **NMR measurements**

NMR assignments of the  $^{15}\text{N}$  and  $^1\text{H}$  nuclei of reduced hCc (hCc<sub>red</sub>, BMRB accession number 5406) were taken from a previous work [44].

NMR titrations of 100  $\mu\text{M}$  of  $^{15}\text{N}$  labeled hCc<sub>red</sub> with aliquots of unlabeled reduced pCc<sub>1</sub> (pCc<sub>1red</sub>) were performed at 25 °C and recorded on a Bruker Avance 700 MHz. Titrations were performed in 5 mM sodium phosphate pH 6.3 with 10% D<sub>2</sub>O, in the presence and in the absence of 50 mM NaCl. Each titration step was prepared in an independent NMR tube (Shigemi) up to a 0.28 mL volume. The Chemical-Shift Perturbations (CSP) were monitored in a series of [ $^1\text{H}$ ,  $^{15}\text{N}$ ] Heteronuclear Single-Quantum Correlation (HSQC) experiments. The data were processed using Bruker TOPSPIN and analyzed with SPARKY (Goddard and Kneller, SPARKY 3, University of California, San Francisco). CSP titration curves were analyzed using one-site and two-site binding models, as previously described [29].

Additionally,  $^{15}\text{N}$ -labeled hCc<sub>red</sub> and unlabeled pCc<sub>1red</sub> at a ratio of 1:2, was titrated with increasing concentrations of NaCl. Each titration step was prepared in the same tube and the pH of the samples was also checked for each spectrum. The chemical-shift changes were monitored, processed and analyzed as described before. Data were also analyzed by Principal Component Analysis (PCA) according to previous work [29].

### **ITC Measurements**

All ITC experiments were performed using an Auto-ITC200 instrument (MicroCal, GE Healthcare) at 25 °C. The reference cell was filled with distilled water. The titration experiments between hCc<sub>red</sub> and pCc<sub>1red</sub> consisted in 2  $\mu\text{L}$  injections of 0.4 mM hCc<sub>red</sub>

in 10 mM sodium phosphate buffer pH 7.4 in the absence and in the presence of additional 50 and 100 mM NaCl into the sample cell, initially containing a 20  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{pCc}_{1\text{red}}$  solution in the same buffer. A titration was also carried out with the oxidized forms of hCc and  $\text{pCc}_1$  in 10 mM sodium phosphate buffer pH 7.4 in the absence of additional NaCl. Besides, a titration of reduced CcO ( $\text{CcO}_{\text{red}}$ , 3.85  $\mu\text{M}$ ) with  $\text{hCc}_{\text{red}}$  (0.10 mM) was performed in 10 mM sodium phosphate pH 7.4 containing 0.2% n-Dodecyl- $\beta$ -maltoside and 5 mM sodium dithionite. All solutions were degassed before titrations. Titrant was injected at appropriate time intervals to ensure that the thermal power signal returned to the baseline prior to the next injection. To achieve homogeneous mixing in the cell, the stirring speed was kept constant at 1,000 rpm. The data, specifically the heat per injection normalized per mol of injectant *versus* molar ratio, were analyzed with Origin 7 (OriginLab) using one-site and two-site binding models [45]. Calibration and performance tests of the calorimeter were carried out conducting  $\text{Ca}^{+2}$ -EDTA titrations with solutions provided by the manufacturer.

## Results and Discussion

### The heterologous hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complex

The cross complex was first studied by NMR. [<sup>1</sup>H, <sup>15</sup>N] HSQC spectra were recorded along a titration of <sup>15</sup>N-labeled hCc with unlabeled pCc<sub>1</sub>. Several amide signals exhibited significant CSP (Figure 2a,b). The perturbation pattern was consistent with a fast/intermediate exchange rate on the NMR time scale. The CSP data in Figure 2b,c show that few residues have  $\Delta\delta_{\text{avg}}$  larger than 0.075 ppm, namely Gln16, Ala50, Ala51, Lys72, Gly77, Ile81 and Lys86. These residues are surrounding the heme crevice and constitute the interaction surface (Figure 2c), which is very well-conserved among complexes involving c-type cytochromes [14, 29, 46-55]. In addition, significant CSP are detected ( $\Delta\delta_{\text{avg}} \geq 0.05$  ppm) for Lys7, Lys13, Val20, Ser47, Lys73, Val83, Lys88 and Ala92. Interestingly, Lys8, Lys13, Lys27, Lys72, Lys86 and Lys87 are all in contact with pCc<sub>1</sub>, as previously reported in chemical modification studies and molecular dynamics simulations [56-58].

When compared with pCc upon binding to pCc<sub>1</sub> [29], the map of CSP on the hCc surface differs at the level of those residues located far from the heme cleft. In particular, the hydrophobic patch containing Ile11 was not affected in hCc, whereas two basic regions of hCc were substantially perturbed (Figure 2c). These regions comprise many charged residues, such as Lys25, Lys27, Lys86, Lys88 and Arg91. The observed differences in the binding surface, of the two Cc molecules correlated well with the differences in the electrostatic potential maps and the sequence alignments of both Cc species shown in Figure 1 and Figure S1. Notably, several amino acid changes (Lys39 by Gln, Pro167 by Lys and Thr171 by Asp) modify the charge configuration at the *proximal* binding site of hCc<sub>1</sub> with respect to that of pCc<sub>1</sub>. Still, these differences seem not to affect the affinity between the partners (see below). This suggests a higher contribution of the electrostatic forces in the cross complex, which can modulate the

specificity and dynamics of the interaction. On the other hand, the differences in the electrostatic potential surfaces and sequences of hCc and pCc might be correlated with the sequence differences found at the *proximal* site of hCc<sub>1</sub> and pCc<sub>1</sub> (Figure S1), insofar as the ET may be optimum within the physiological complexes [59, 60]. In addition, Lys27, which is involved in the binding of hCc to Apaf-1 to trigger programmed cell death [39], was affected in the cross-complex but not in the pCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complex (Lys35 in pCc).

The CSP binding curves consistently fitted to a 2:1 binding model assuming two independent sites on pCc<sub>1</sub> with distinct affinities (Figure 2d and Figure S2a). The R<sup>2</sup> and  $\chi^2$  values were 0.9931 and  $1.1 \times 10^{-4}$ , respectively. Remarkably, the binding curves of CSP hardly fitted to a 1:1 binding model, as shown for the –NH group of Gln16 (Figure 2e). In this case, the R<sup>2</sup> and  $\chi^2$  values were 0.7872 and 0.1076, respectively. Therefore, our data clearly suggest the presence on the pCc<sub>1</sub> surface of two independent binding sites for hCc, as does for pCc. The equilibrium dissociation constants ( $K_D$ ) were 0.30  $\mu$ M and 40  $\mu$ M for the *proximal* and *distal* binding sites, respectively (Table 1), similar to those previously reported for the physiological plant pCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complex [29]. However, when the two sites were forced to show a similar  $K_D$ , the resulting fit was not so good, with R<sup>2</sup> and  $\chi^2$  values of 0.9782 and  $5.5 \times 10^{-3}$ , respectively.

In order to obtain accurate data on the binding affinities for oxidized complexes, ITC experiments were performed (Figure 3). The experimental data for both redox states fit to a 2:1 model with distinct  $K_D$  values. Reduced  $\chi^2$  values were 464 and 286 for the reduced and oxidized proteins, respectively. As shown in Figure 3 and Table 1, data are consistent with a first site for tight binding and another site for a weaker, more transient interaction, in agreement with a previous report [29]. Notably, the redox state of the hemeproteins hardly affected the observed affinities. The differences in  $K_D$  values obtained by ITC and NMR can be explained by the distinct physical phenomena

measured. The binding reaction was endothermic and entropically driven in both reduced and oxidized complexes, being the enthalpic contribution to the binding quite unfavorable (11.7 and 6.2 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, respectively). Once again, the fit was slightly worse when forced to a single  $K_D$  value for the two sites (reduced  $\chi^2$  values were 2,453 and 447). In that case,  $K_D$  values were 9.1  $\mu$ M and 13.0  $\mu$ M for the reduced and oxidized complexes, respectively.

### **Ionic strength dependence on the hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> interaction**

Given the relevance of electrostatic forces in transient interactions [61-64] and, in particular, in the Cc-Cc<sub>1</sub> complex [1, 5, 56-58], we analyzed the ionic strength dependence of the binding mode of hCc on pCc<sub>1</sub>. [<sup>1</sup>H, <sup>15</sup>N] HSQC spectra were recorded on a hCc:pCc<sub>1</sub> (2:1) sample, over a range of NaCl concentrations (0 - 320 mM). At 80 mM NaCl, the magnitude of the  $\Delta\delta_{\text{bind}}$  values decreased by 60% on average, as shown for both dimensions (Figure 2f and Figure S2b), which indicated a strong electrostatic contribution to the complex formation. PCA of such titration showed that the three main components explained 95.7% of the changes (Figure S3). The first component accounted for a 68.6% and its projection decreased monotonically with ionic strength. The second one accounted for a 20.8% and showed a minimum value at 45 mM ionic strength. The third one accounted for a 6.3% and showed a more complex pattern, but still displaying a minimum at 45 mM.

Additional NMR and ITC titrations at different NaCl concentrations were performed in order to understand how the stoichiometry and the binding affinity of the interaction between hCc and pCc<sub>1</sub> were modulated by ionic strength. First, a direct NMR titration was carried out in the presence of additional 50 mM NaCl. [<sup>1</sup>H, <sup>15</sup>N] HSQC spectra were recorded along a titration of <sup>15</sup>N-labeled hCc with unlabeled pCc<sub>1</sub>. Only a few amide signals exhibited CSP, whose magnitudes were smaller than those calculated at



low ionic strength (Figure 2d, Figure S4). Notably, binding curves of CSP for these amide groups could be reliably fitted to a 1:1 model with a single  $K_D$  of ca. 12.8  $\mu\text{M}$  (Figure S4). The  $R^2$  and  $\chi^2$  values were 0.9821 and 0.01314, respectively. According to statistical criteria, the fit did not improve significantly when using a 2:1 binding model. In that case, the  $R^2$  and  $\chi^2$  values were 0.9828 and 0.01077.

ITC titrations were further performed in the presence of additional 50 and 100 mM NaCl. In both cases, binding could only be accurately fitted to a 1:1 model, with a  $K_D$  value equal to 69 and 230  $\mu\text{M}$ , respectively (Table 1, Figure S5). The affinity is smaller than that obtained for both the *proximal* and *distal* sites at low ionic strength (11 and 54  $\mu\text{M}$ , respectively). There was also an increase in the enthalpic contribution at 100 mM NaCl in comparison with the titration performed at low ionic strength. This finding can be attributed to the lower electrostatic attraction between the two partners at higher ionic strength.

The salt titrations thus revealed that a single binding site for hCc on the pCc<sub>1</sub> surface remains populated enough to be detected by CSP at high ionic strength. Actually, the crystal structure of the yeast Cc-Cbc<sub>1</sub> complex shows a single binding site for Cc, as it was solved at an ionic strength of ca. 120 mM [30]. Given the negative charge of the *distal* site of pCc<sub>1</sub> and its weak affinity for Cc at low ionic strength [29], we can assume that it is the *proximal* site which remains at high ionic strength although its binding affinity decreases along NaCl titration. On the other hand, the *distal* site may remain as a local minimum of the interaction path, forming part of the encounter ensemble or showing a highly dynamic behavior. Like in analogous ET complexes in photosynthesis, CSP may be insensitive enough to describe the whole ensemble [54, 65], so further work will be required to display these features.

### **Interaction between hCc and bovine CcO**

Kinetic-based models have proposed the existence of alternative, non-productive binding sites for horse Cc in bovine CcO [26, 27]. Recently, the surface residues of hCc contacting bovine CcO have been mapped by NMR [52]. However, no evidences on the stoichiometry and binding affinity of the Cc-CcO complex were elucidated by NMR. Direct binding studies performed by gel filtration between several mammalian Cc and bovine CcO evidenced a 2:1 stoichiometry, in which Cc binds to a first site with a dissociation constant in the nanomolar range and to a second site with less affinity [66]. Hence, we performed ITC titration experiments to compare its binding mode with that of the hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> interaction and to confirm the stoichiometry of the hCc-CcO complex in equilibrium conditions.

Our experimental data using hCc and bovine CcO accurately fit to a model of two independent binding sites with distinct affinity values for hCc on CcO at low ionic strength, being the  $K_{D1}$  equal to 30 nM and the  $K_{D2}$  equal to 0.30  $\mu$ M (Figure 4).  $\chi^2$  value was 84,825. The monomeric state of bovine CcO was predominant at the concentration used for this titration, as was estimated by DLS assays (Figure S6). Notably, binding isotherms could not be accurately fitted to a 1:1 binding model. Nevertheless, binding isotherms could be fitted to a model of 2 independent sites with an identical  $K_D$  value of 0.27  $\mu$ M for the two binding sites. In this case,  $\chi^2$  value was 92,208, suggesting that this fit is slightly worse than the previous 2:1 binding model with distinct  $K_D$  values. This result is consistent with direct binding studies performed by gel filtration [66]. The binding affinity for this complex was one-two orders of magnitude tighter than those calculated for the hCc on the *proximal* site of pCc<sub>1</sub>, according to the  $K_D$  values provided by ITC. These differences could be ascribed to the use of the entire membrane-bound CcO in contrast with pCc<sub>1</sub>, as well as to the distinct organisms employed, as previously suggested for cyanobacterial respiratory complexes [67]. In addition, the hCc-CcO binding reaction was exothermic. The value for the enthalpic contribution ( $\Delta H$ ) was - 6.8 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup> for the 2:1 binding model with an identical  $K_D$

value, whereas  $\Delta H_1$  and  $\Delta H_2$  were - 6.6 and - 5.4 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, respectively, when the 2:1 binding model with distinct  $K_D$  values was used. In addition, the reaction was favored by both enthalpic and entropic contributions, thereby suggesting that both polar and non-polar interactions control the complex formation, as previously suggested [52]. The entropic contribution ( $-T\Delta S$ ) was - 2.1 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup> for the 2:1 binding model with an identical  $K_D$  value, whereas  $-T\Delta S_1$  and  $-T\Delta S_2$  were - 3.6 and - 3.4 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, respectively, when the 2:1 binding model with distinct  $K_D$  values was used.

The presence of additional binding sites for Cc in both pCc<sub>1</sub> and CcO could open new perspectives on the mitochondrial electron transport chain, where membrane respiratory complexes can be either in independent, free diffusional motion or forming macromolecular assemblies, the so-called supercomplexes [3]. In this context, such new binding sites for Cc on the surface of its physiological counterparts, Cbc<sub>1</sub> and CcO, could facilitate the turnover and sliding mechanisms of Cc molecules in plant and mammalian supercomplexes (Figure 5) [29, 32, 55]. Indeed, the accommodation of several Cc molecules between Cbc<sub>1</sub> and CcO in supercomplexes could provide a path for Cc diffusion from Cbc<sub>1</sub> to CcO. That diffusion path might have physiological significance in the electron flow, which is controlled in supercomplexes to optimize the use of available substrates [68]. The existence of extra binding sites could also be useful just to attract Cc molecules near its ET binding domains.

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## Figure Legends

### Figure 1. Electrostatic surface potential of hCc and pCc.

Negatively and positively charged regions of hCc (*upper*) and pCc (*lower*) surfaces are depicted in red and blue colors, respectively. The color scale ranges from -5 (red) to +5 (blue)  $k_B T$ . Some residue numbers have been mapped to better show the orientation of hCc and pCc in the figure. The arrows highlight two electropositive regions at the hCc surface. The simulation was performed using DelPhi aided by Chimera, assuming an ionic strength of 250 mM. The interior and exterior dielectric constants were fixed to 2 and 80, respectively.

### Figure 2. NMR binding experiments with reduced hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complex.

**a)** Detail of the superimposed [<sup>1</sup>H, <sup>15</sup>N] HSQC spectra of <sup>15</sup>N-labeled hCc along titration with pCc<sub>1</sub>. hCc concentration was 100 μM at each titration step. Signals corresponding to distinct titration steps are colored according to the code in the panel. **b)** Plot of CSP of <sup>15</sup>N-labeled hCc as a function of residue number. Proline and non-assigned residues are marked by asterisks. The color bars point out the  $\Delta\delta_{\text{avg}}$  categories, as follows: insignificant <0.025 ppm (blue), small 0.025-0.050 ppm (yellow), medium 0.050-0.075 ppm (orange) and large >0.075 ppm (red). **c)** CSP map of reduced hCc upon addition of reduced pCc<sub>1</sub>. Residues are colored according to the  $\Delta\delta_{\text{avg}}$  categories, as indicated in b). **d)** Curves representing the best global fit of several amide signals in the direct dimension for an hCc:pCc<sub>1</sub> binding model with two different global  $K_D$  values. **e)** Binding curves of the Gln16 residue in the direct dimension. Lines represent the best fit to 1:1 (red) or 2:1 (black) binding models. **f)** Salt dependence of the  $|\Delta\delta_{\text{bind}}|$  values in the direct dimension for all backbone amide resonances observed in the hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complex.

**Figure 3. ITC binding experiments corresponding to the reduced and oxidized hCc-pCc<sub>1</sub> complexes.**

Binding assays corresponding to the complexes between hCc and pCc<sub>1</sub> were performed under reducing (*left*) or oxidizing conditions (*right*). Experimental data for both redox states were fitted to a two-site binding model. Thermograms and isotherms are shown at the *upper* and *lower* panels, respectively.

**Figure 4. ITC binding experiment corresponding to the reduced hCc-CcO complex.**

Binding assay corresponding to the complex between hCc and bovine CcO was performed under reducing conditions. Experimental data were fitted to a two-site binding model. The thermogram is shown at the *upper* panel and the binding isotherm at the *lower* panel.

**Figure 5. Two different models for the role played by Cc in transferring electrons between complexes III and IV.**

Diagrams of the respiratory mitochondrial chain including two different scenarios, the formation of the supercomplex composed by dimeric Cbc<sub>1</sub> and CcO complexes (*left*) or free Cbc<sub>1</sub> and CcO complexes in diffusional motion (*right*). Complexes are viewed parallel to the plane of the inner mitochondrial membrane (IMM) with the intermembrane space (IMS) oriented to the top (*upper*), as well as perpendicular to the plane of the IMM (*down*). Cc is represented as red balls at its binding sites on Cbc<sub>1</sub> (tan) and CcO (green). Two binding sites are represented in each complex. Channeling of Cc molecules between Cbc<sub>1</sub> and CcO is marked by arrows in the supercomplex rearrangement. Mitochondrial matrix (MM) is also indicated in the upper diagram.

**Supplementary Material:**

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found in the online version.

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**Table 1. Equilibrium and thermodynamic parameters for the interaction of hCc at the two sites of pCc<sub>1</sub>.**

Equilibrium dissociation constants ( $K_{D1}$  and  $K_{D2}$ ), enthalpies ( $\Delta H_1$  and  $\Delta H_2$ ), entropies ( $-T\Delta S_1$  and  $-T\Delta S_2$ ), Gibbs free energies ( $\Delta G_1$  and  $\Delta G_2$ ) and stoichiometry of the reaction ( $n$ ) were determined by CSP or ITC for the reduced (hCc<sub>red</sub>-pCc<sub>1red</sub>) and oxidized (hCc<sub>ox</sub>-pCc<sub>1ox</sub>) complexes. Parameters for the hCc<sub>red</sub>-pCc<sub>1red</sub> interaction in the presence of 50 or 100 mM NaCl are also shown.

Protein couple	Proximal site				Distal site				n
	$K_{D1}$ ( $\mu\text{M}$ )	$\Delta H_1$ (kcal mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$-T\Delta S_1$ (kcal mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$\Delta G_1$ (kcal mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$K_{D2}$ ( $\mu\text{M}$ )	$\Delta H_2$ (kcal mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$-T\Delta S_2$ (kcal mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$\Delta G_2$ (kcal mol <sup>-1</sup> )	
hCc <sub>red</sub> -pCc <sub>1red</sub> <sup>a</sup>	0.3	n.d.	n.d.	-8.9	40.0	n.d.	n.d.	-6.0	2
hCc <sub>red</sub> -pCc <sub>1red</sub> <sup>b</sup>	11.5	11.7	-18.4	-6.7	54.0	10.5	-16.3	-5.8	2
hCc <sub>ox</sub> -pCc <sub>1ox</sub> <sup>b</sup>	9.4	6.2	-13.0	-6.8	86.0	14.6	-20.1	-5.5	2
hCc <sub>red</sub> -pCc <sub>1red</sub> <sup>a*</sup>	12.8	n.d.	n.d.	-6.6					1
hCc <sub>red</sub> -pCc <sub>1red</sub> <sup>b*</sup>	69	7.8	-13.4	-5.6					1
hCc <sub>red</sub> -pCc <sub>1red</sub> <sup>b**</sup>	230	17.4	-22.3	-4.9					1

n.d., not determined.

<sup>a</sup> CSP.

<sup>b</sup> ITC.

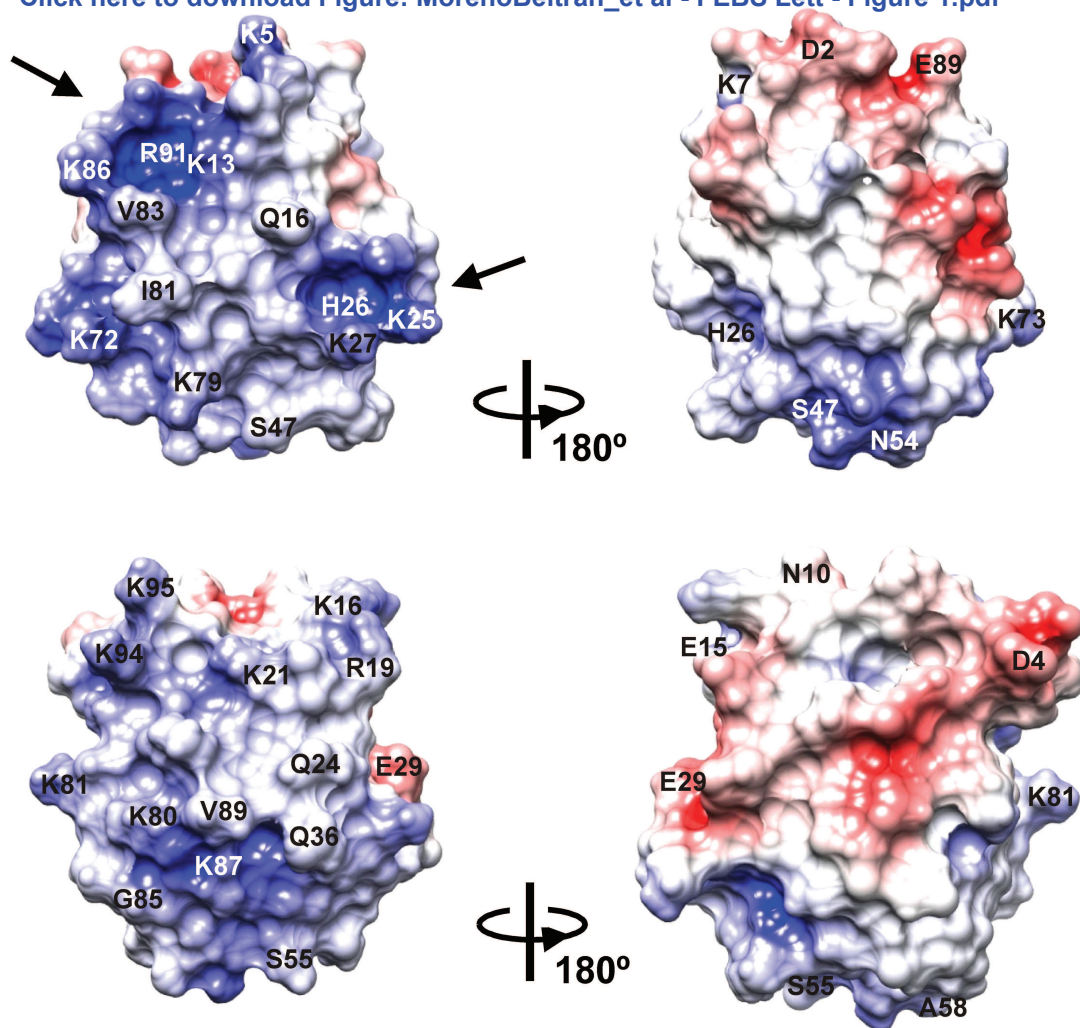
\* 50 mM NaCl added.

\*\* 100 mM NaCl added.

Relative errors:  $K_D$  20%,  $\Delta H$  and  $-T\Delta S$  5%,  $\Delta G$  2%.

# Figure 1

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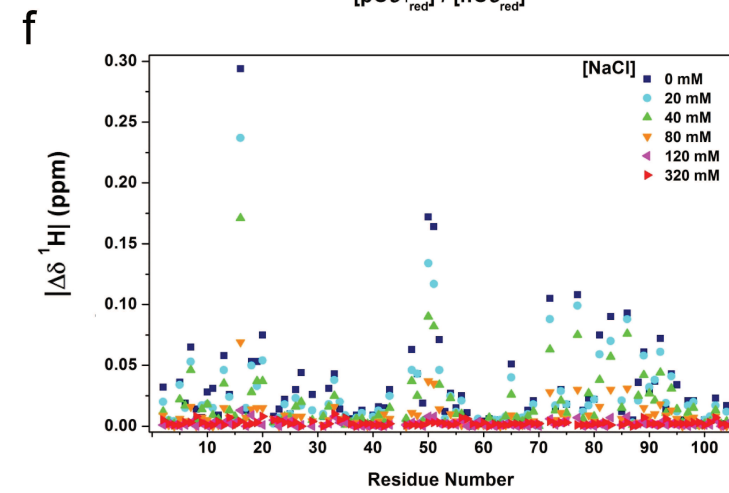
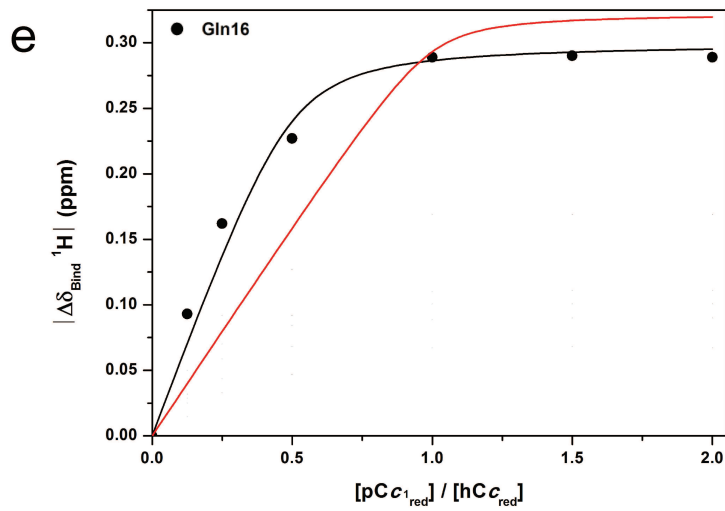
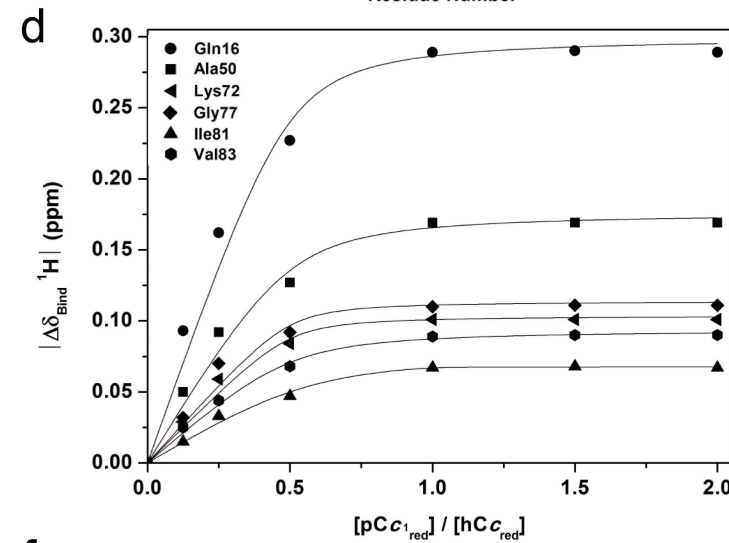
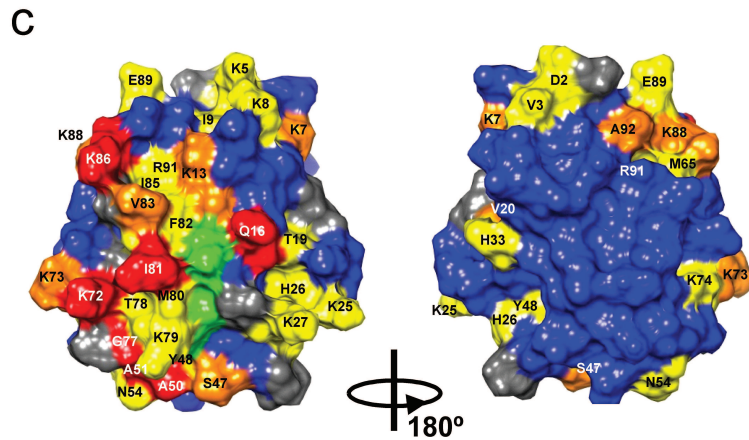
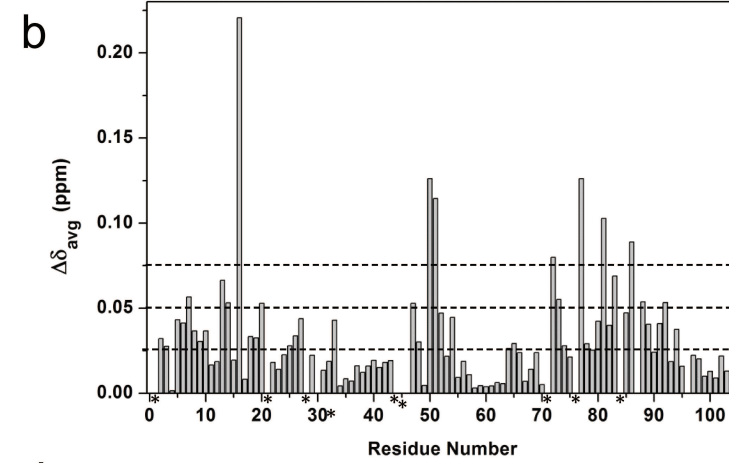
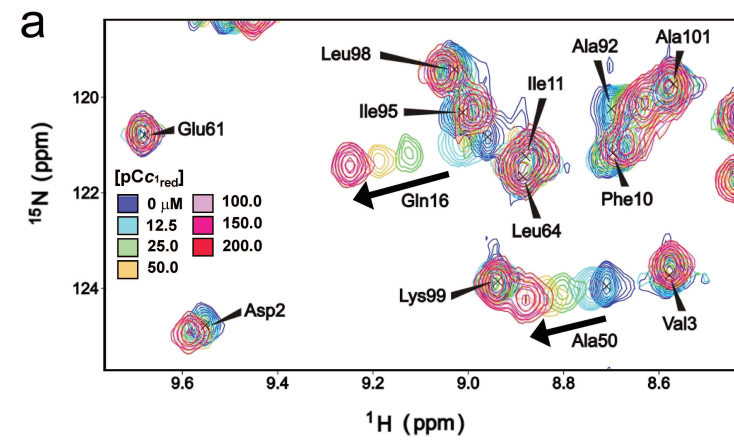
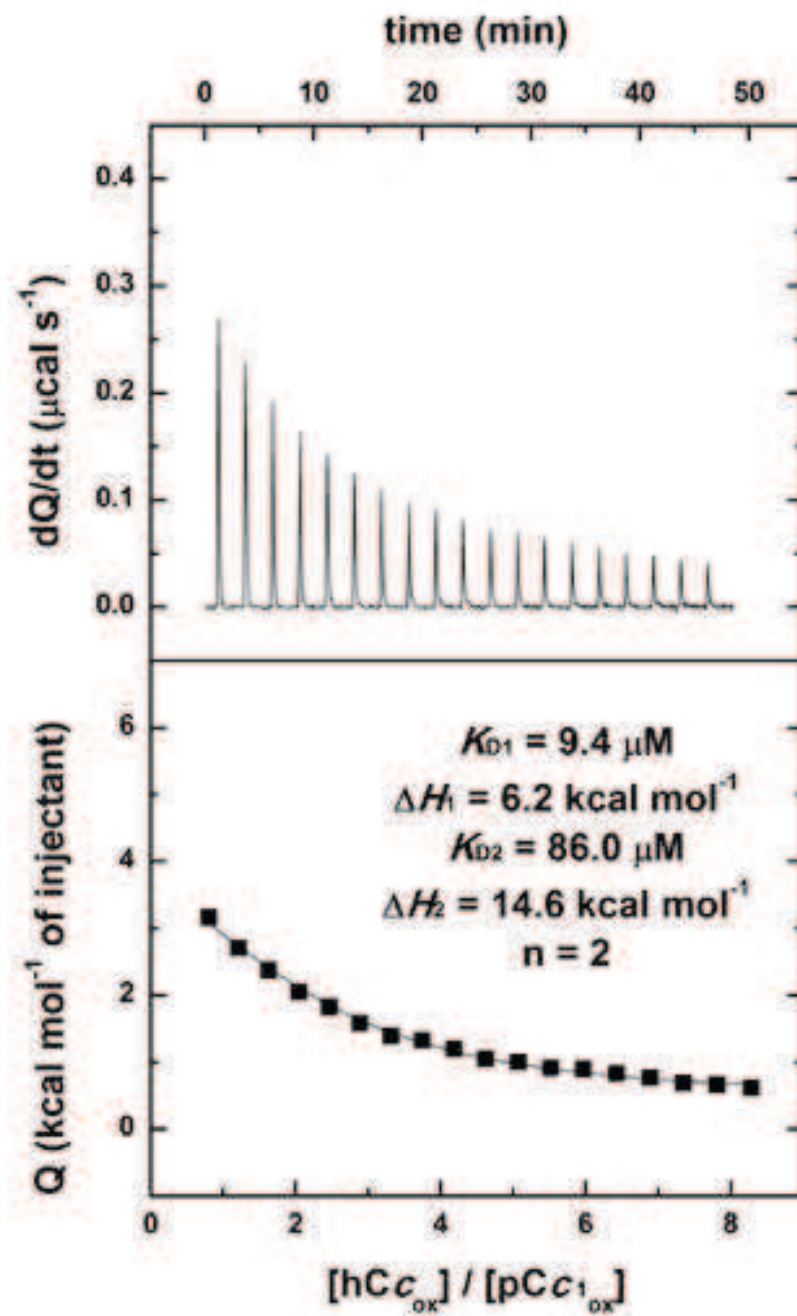
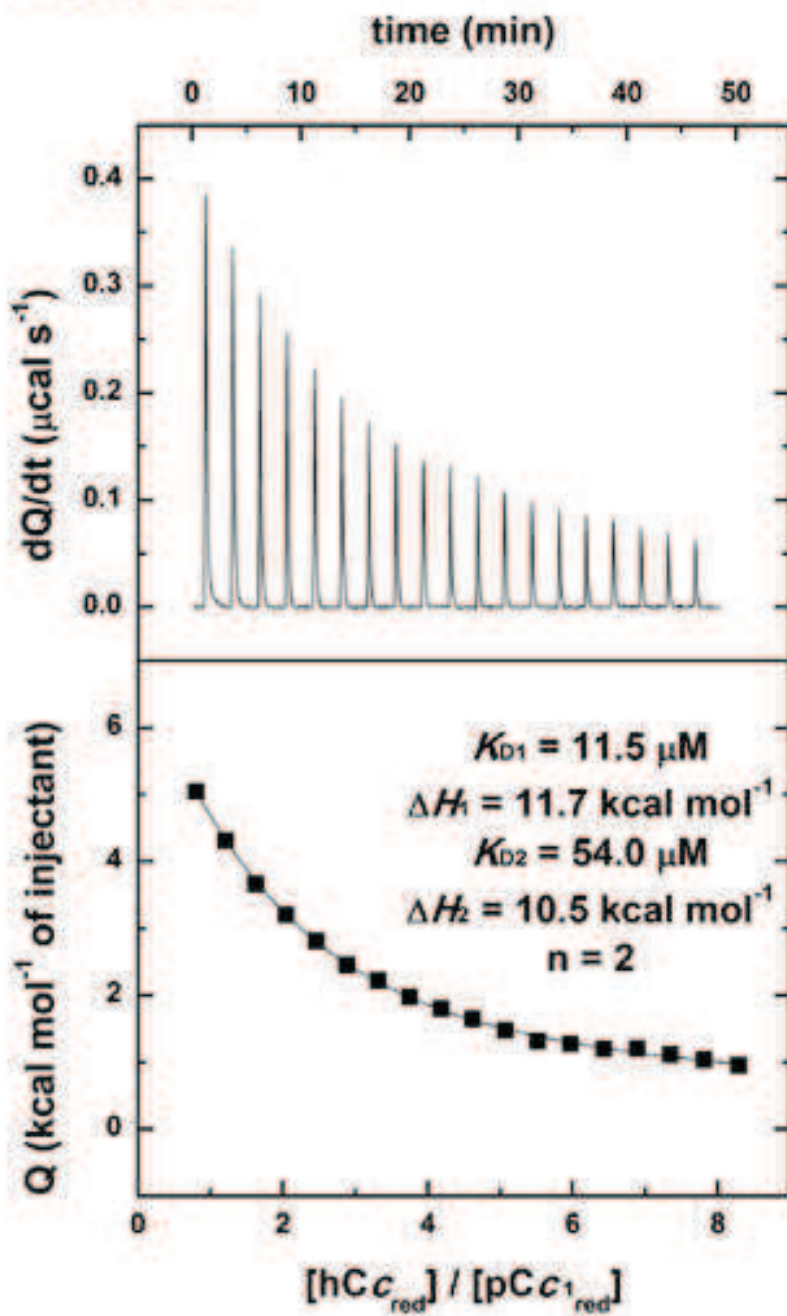


Figure 3

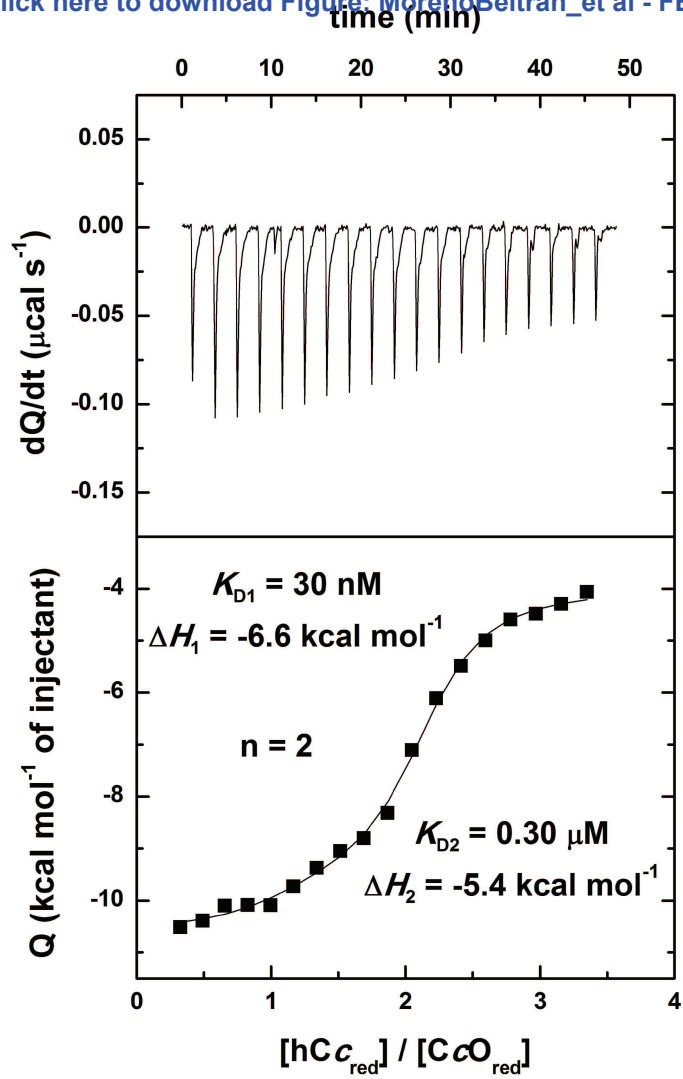
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Figure 3



**Figure 4**

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**Figure 5**

