

1 **Communal metabolism by *Methylococcaceae* and *Methylophilaceae***
2 **is driving rapid aerobic methane oxidation in sediments of a**
3 **shallow seep near Elba, Italy**

4 Martin Taubert^{1,2,#,*}, Carolina Grob^{2,#}, Andrew Crombie³, Alexandra M. Howat², Oliver J. Burns³,
5 Miriam Weber^{4,5}, Christian Lott^{4,6}, Anne-Kristin Kaster^{7,8}, John Vollmers^{7,8}, Nico Jehmlich⁹, Martin von
6 Bergen^{9,10,11}, Yin Chen¹², and J. Colin Murrell^{2,*}

7 ¹Aquatic Geomicrobiology, Institute of Biodiversity, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Dornburger Str.
8 159, 07743 Jena, Germany

9 ²School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4
10 7TJ, UK

11 ³School of Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4 7TJ,
12 UK

13 ⁴HYDRA Marine Sciences GmbH, Sinzheim, Germany and HYDRA Field Station Elba, Italy

14 ⁵Microsensor Group, Max Plank Institute for Marine Microbiology, Celsiusstr. 1, 28359 Bremen,
15 Germany

16 ⁶Department of Symbiosis, Max Plank Institute for Marine Microbiology, Celsiusstr. 1, 28359 Bremen,
17 Germany

18 ⁷Institute for Biological Interfaces (IBG5), Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Hermann-von-Helmholtz-
19 Platz 1, 76344 Eggenstein-Leopoldshafen, Karlsruhe, Germany

20 ⁸Leibniz Institute DSMZ - German Collection of Microorganisms and Cell Cultures, Inhoffenstrasse 7B,
21 38124 Braunschweig, Germany

22 ⁹Department of Molecular Systems Biology, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ,
23 Leipzig, Germany

24 ¹⁰Institute of Biochemistry, Faculty of Biosciences, Pharmacy and Psychology, University of Leipzig,
25 Brüderstraße 32, 04103 Leipzig, Germany

26 ¹¹Department of Chemistry and Bioscience, University of Aalborg, Fredrik Bajers Vej 7H, 9220 Aalborg
27 East, Denmark.

28 ¹²School of Life Sciences, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL, UK.

29 #contributed equally

30 *Corresponding authors:

31 Martin Taubert, Aquatic Geomicrobiology, Institute of Biodiversity, Friedrich Schiller University Jena,
32 Dornburger Str. 159, 07743 Jena, Germany; Email: martin.taubert@uni-jena.de; Tel: 00493641 9494
33 59; Fax:00493641 949462

34 J. Colin Murrell, School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park,
35 Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK; Email: j.c.murrell@uea.ac.uk; Tel: 00441603 592959; Fax: 01603 591327

36

37 Running title: (50 characters): Aerobic methane oxidation at a shallow seep

38 The authors declare no conflict of interest.

40 **Originality-Significance Statement**

41 Methane is a potent greenhouse gas contributing substantially to global warming, and emissions
42 from marine seeps contribute up to 10% of methane in the atmosphere. Methanotrophic
43 microorganisms can use methane as carbon and energy source, and thus significantly mitigate global
44 methane emissions from seep areas, acting as an important 'benthic filter'. This study reports on the
45 efficiency and function of the 'benthic filter' at a shallow methane seep, by quantifying the rates of
46 methane oxidation, identifying the microbial key players involved in this process and assessing their
47 function. Compared to the well-studied deep-sea seeps, shallow seeps represent distinct
48 hydrogeochemical settings, where the risk of emitted methane reaching the atmosphere is much
49 higher. The findings we present are highly relevant to evaluate the impact of shallow seeps on global
50 atmospheric methane budgets.

53 **Abstract**

54 Release of abiotic methane from marine seeps into the atmosphere is a major source of this potent
55 greenhouse gas. Methanotrophic microorganisms in methane seeps use methane as carbon and
56 energy source, thus significantly mitigating global methane emissions. Here we investigated
57 microbial methane oxidation at the sediment-water interface of a shallow marine methane seep.
58 Metagenomics and metaproteomics, combined with ¹³C-methane stable isotope probing,
59 demonstrated that various members of the gammaproteobacterial family *Methylococcaceae* were
60 the key players for methane oxidation, catalyzing the first reaction step to methanol. We observed a
61 transfer of carbon to methanol-oxidizing methylotrophs of the betaproteobacterial family
62 *Methylophilaceae*, suggesting an interaction between methanotrophic and methylotrophic
63 microorganisms that allowed for rapid methane oxidation. From our microcosms, we estimated
64 methane oxidation rates of up to 871 nmol of methane per gram sediment and day. This implies that
65 more than 50% of methane at the seep is removed by microbial oxidation at the sediment-water
66 interface, based on previously reported *in situ* methane fluxes. The organic carbon produced was
67 further assimilated by different heterotrophic microbes, demonstrating that the methane-oxidizing
68 community supported a complex trophic network. Our results provide valuable eco-physiological
69 insights into this specialized microbial community performing an ecosystem function of global
70 relevance.

74 **Introduction**

75 Methane is the most abundant hydrocarbon in the atmosphere, and acts as a harmful greenhouse
76 gas (Reeburgh, 2007). Approximately one third of the global methane flux to the atmosphere is
77 derived from natural sources (Judd et al., 2002b). Reports on the contribution of oceanic methane
78 emissions, primarily originating from natural cold seeps along continental margins (Etiope, 2012),
79 vary from 1 to 10% of the total flux (Kvenvolden et al., 2001; Judd et al., 2002b). The methane flux
80 from the subsurface sea bed, however, is even higher (Reeburgh, 2007). Biological activity of
81 methane-oxidizing microorganisms in seafloor sediments and the water column considerably reduces
82 the amount of methane that reaches the atmosphere. These microorganisms, termed
83 methanotrophs, use methane as their sole carbon and energy source. The methanotrophs act as a
84 'benthic filter' (Boetius and Wenzhöfer, 2013) modulating methane emission from the sea, and
85 supply methane-derived carbon to a broad range of other organisms. Hence, in the seep
86 environment, methanotrophs carry out a key role in the microbial community that is comparable to
87 autotrophic primary producers, and their activity is affected by the microbial satellite community
88 present (Yu and Chistoserdova, 2017). To understand the modulation of methane emission by the
89 benthic filter, various studies have targeted microbial communities at methane seep areas, especially
90 in the deep sea (see (Boetius and Wenzhöfer, 2013) for a review). Deep-sea sediments are typically
91 characterized by fine-grain particles that limit the circulation of pore water. As the deep-sea seafloor
92 is not influenced by hydrodynamic forces from waves or tidal movement, stable layers with steep
93 hydrogeochemical gradients exist. Oxygen is consumed within the first few millimeters of the
94 sediment through the degradation of organic matter deposited by sedimentation of particulate
95 organic carbon (de Beer et al., 2006; Glud, 2008). Aerobic methane oxidation is hence restricted to a
96 thin layer of sediment, or occurs in microbial mats covering the sediment (Boetius and Wenzhöfer,
97 2013; Ruff et al., 2016; Paul et al., 2017). In subsurface layers, anaerobic oxidation of methane (AOM)
98 by methanotrophic archaea in combination with sulfate-reducing bacteria takes place, typically

99 representing the predominant process for methane removal beneath the seafloor (Knittel and
100 Boetius, 2009; Boetius and Wenzhöfer, 2013).

101 Shallow methane seeps, in contrast, can feature highly permeable sandy sediments, which allow
102 advection-driven pore water circulation that introduces oxygen into deeper layers. The gas flow
103 upwards additionally leads to a downstream of oxic sea water (O'Hara et al., 1995). Further,
104 hydrodynamic forces result in mixing of the sediment and impede the formation of overlying
105 microbial mats. Hence, in contrast to the stable conditions in deep-sea sediments, shallow sediments
106 comprise a highly variable and heterogeneous environment with fluctuating oxygen concentrations.
107 The frequent influx of oxygen restricts the highly oxygen-sensitive AOM consortia to deeper
108 sediment layers (Knittel and Boetius, 2009). Thus, aerobic methane oxidation in the upper layers and
109 at the sediment-water interface might be the predominant process for methane removal at shallow
110 seeps.

111 Methane originating from depths below 100 m typically does not reach the sea surface due to
112 dissolution processes of methane bubbles and oxidation of dissolved methane (Schmale et al., 2005;
113 McGinnis et al., 2006). Hence, deep-sea seeps play little to no role in atmospheric methane emission.
114 For shallow methane seeps, models suggest site specific parameters such as depth and initial bubble
115 size along with aqueous methane concentration and upwelling flows to be major factors determining
116 methane emission (Leifer and Patro, 2002; McGinnis et al., 2006). Emission from such shallow seeps
117 has been estimated as $310 \text{ g CH}_4 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$ at the Kattegat coast, Denmark (Dando et al., 1994), up to
118 $550 \text{ g CH}_4 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$ at Torry Bay, UK (Judd et al., 2002a), $260 \text{ g CH}_4 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$ at Isla Mocha, Chile
119 (Jessen et al., 2011), and $400 \text{ g CH}_4 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$ at the Santa Barbara Channel, CA, USA (Luyendyk et al.,
120 2003). The total emissions of the small Kattegat and Torry Bay seeps, covering an area of only a few
121 thousand square meters, are in the range of one metric ton per year, while the Isla Mocha and Santa
122 Barbara Channel seep, covering several square kilometers, are estimated to release 800 to 7200
123 metric tons of methane per year into the atmosphere.

124 Little is known about the identity and filter function of aerobic methanotrophic bacteria in such
125 shallow seep areas. In this study, we investigated the diversity and function of aerobic
126 methanotrophs at a shallow methane seep located off the coast of the Island of Elba, Italy, at only 12
127 meters depth. Discovered in 1995, the Elba shallow methane seep is located in a tectonically-active
128 site (Greve et al., 2014) and is characterized by a gentle, constant bubbling of gas, consisting of up to
129 73% (Meister et al., 2018) to more than 85% abiotic methane (Ruff et al., 2016; Sciarra et al., 2019),
130 leading to an efflux of $145 \text{ g CH}_4 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$ into the water column (Sciarra et al., 2019). A previous
131 investigation of AOM at the seep site revealed predominantly sulfur-coupled methane oxidation by
132 consortia resembling those found in deep-sea seeps, but restricted to sediment layers more than 20
133 cm below the seafloor (Ruff et al., 2016). AOM exhibited only a low methane removal efficiency, and
134 the authors concluded that aerobic methane oxidation is probably more important at this site (Ruff
135 et al., 2016).

136 Here, we explored the microbial community in the top 2-3 centimeters of the sediment at the Elba
137 methane seep, and its potential for methane oxidation. The aims of our study were (I) to determine
138 the activity of aerobic methanotrophs and estimate their efficiency in methane removal, (II) to
139 identify the key players of methane oxidation active in the oxic sediments, and (III) to follow the flux
140 of methane-derived carbon through the microbial community, assessing the role of methanotrophs
141 as key suppliers of organic carbon at the seep. We combined a ^{13}C -methane stable isotope probing
142 (SIP) approach with metagenomics, to obtain metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs) of the
143 microorganisms present, as well as metaproteomics, to verify their predicted metabolic functions
144 and assess their activity. This allowed us to gain an understanding of structure and function of the
145 specialized, methanotrophy-driven microbial community at the methane seep.

146 **Results**

147 **Activity of methanotrophs in microcosms and estimation of the benthic** 148 **filter efficiency**

149 A rapid consumption of methane was observed in microcosms containing sediment and water from
150 the Elba shallow methane seep, when supplemented with 1% (v:v, headspace) of ^{12}C - or ^{13}C -
151 methane. Methane consumption started immediately after setup of the microcosms. After 7 days of
152 incubation, methane consumption rates of $439 \pm 42 \text{ nmol d}^{-1} \text{ g sediment}^{-1}$ (average of microcosms
153 with ^{12}C and ^{13}C methane, $n = 12$, $\pm \text{SD}$) were observed, with no difference between ^{12}C and ^{13}C
154 incubations (Figure 1). As the high consumption rates led to frequent depletion of methane, we
155 increased the headspace concentration to 2% after 25 days of incubation. This resulted in a
156 significant increase ($p < 0.001$, Student's t -test) of methane consumption to $871 \pm 123 \text{ nmol d}^{-1} \text{ g}$
157 sediment^{-1} (average of microcosms with ^{12}C and ^{13}C methane, $n = 8$, $\pm \text{SD}$) (Figure 1). For individual
158 microcosms, methane consumption up to $2.26 \mu\text{mol d}^{-1} \text{ g sediment}^{-1}$ was observed (Dataset S1). In
159 comparison, reported methane consumption rates for AOM at the same site were only up to
160 $200 \text{ nmol d}^{-1} \text{ g sediment}^{-1}$ under 1.5 atmospheres of $\text{CH}_4:\text{CO}_2$ (90:10) (Ruff et al., 2016).

161 Using the average rate of methane consumption for 2% headspace concentration, we estimated the
162 annual methane consumption in the Elba methane seep. Based on the sediment porosity given in
163 (Ruff et al., 2016), we calculated a methane consumption of approximately $12 \text{ mol m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$
164 (Supplementary Information). Previous studies have reported a gas flow of $0.72 \text{ L m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$ from the
165 sediment (Sciarra et al., 2019), containing approximately 85% (v:v) methane, resulting in a release of
166 $9 \text{ mol m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$ methane into the water column. Hence, based on our estimated rates, more than
167 50% of the methane flowing through the sediment is consumed at the sediment water interface.
168 Indeed, this is likely a considerable underestimation of the *in situ* methane consumption. The
169 methane concentration in the water phase of our microcosms was approximately $22 \mu\text{M}$ (2%
170 methane), according to calculations based on Henry's Law (Supplementary Information). *In situ*

171 concentrations at the Elba methane seep are up to one order of magnitude higher, with 50 μM to
172 550 μM reported for pore water (Ruff et al., 2016). Considering the increase of methane
173 consumption observed in our microcosms when increasing the headspace methane concentration
174 from 1% to 2%, *in situ* consumption could be considerably higher than our estimates. Given that this
175 aerobic removal of methane at the sediment-water-interface exceeds previously reported AOM rates
176 (Ruff et al., 2016), we aimed to explore the function of the underlying microbial methane oxidizing
177 processes.

178 **Identifying the key methane oxidizers**

179 We used an integrated approach combining different 'omics' techniques with SIP to elucidate the key
180 players responsible for the methane consumption observed in our microcosms. Taxonomic profiles of
181 the microbial communities in the microcosms sampled after 25, 45 and 65 days were investigated by
182 metaproteomics to determine the dominant microbial taxa. The majority of peptides identified were
183 consistently related to *Proteobacteria*, with *Alphaproteobacteria* and *Gammaproteobacteria*
184 (including *Betaproteobacteriales*, based on the current Silva taxonomy release 132 (Quast et al.,
185 2013)) being the dominant classes (Figure S1). At the family level, the presence of various taxa
186 implicated in C_1 metabolism was revealed, including *Methylococcaceae* (*Gammaproteobacteria*),
187 *Methylophilaceae* (*Betaproteobacteriales*) and *Rhodobacteraceae* (*Alphaproteobacteria*)
188 (Kalyuzhnaya et al., 2006; Kalyuzhnaya et al., 2012; Ruff et al., 2015). To identify the active
189 methanotrophs, ^{13}C incorporation in peptides extracted from the microcosms amended with ^{13}C -
190 methane was investigated. Peptides related to *Methylococcaceae* as well as *Methylophilaceae*
191 showed ^{13}C relative isotope abundances (RIA) and incorporation patterns suggesting a direct uptake
192 of ^{13}C from methane (Figure 2, Figure S2). Peptides of *Rhodobacteraceae*, however, as well as those
193 of several other taxa, showed incorporation patterns that suggested ^{13}C uptake by cross-feeding
194 rather than by direct uptake of a ^{13}C -labelled substrate. The ^{13}C isotopologue patterns acquired using
195 SIP-metaproteomics allow a differentiation between such modes of carbon assimilation (Seifert et
196 al., 2012; Taubert et al., 2012).

197 Furthermore, PCR analysis targeting key functional genes for C₁ metabolism was linked with DNA-SIP
198 by investigating the heavy DNA fractions obtained from ¹³C microcosms. The presence of *pmoA*,
199 encoding the small subunit of the copper-dependent particulate methane monooxygenase (pMMO),
200 as well as of *xoxF*, encoding a lanthanide-dependent methanol dehydrogenase (MDH) (Keltjens et al.,
201 2014; Taubert et al., 2015; Howat et al., 2018) were observed. However, no *mmoX* encoding the
202 alpha-subunit of soluble methane monooxygenase (sMMO), or *mxoF*, encoding a calcium-dependent
203 MDH were found. Interestingly, *pmoA* sequences were exclusively affiliated with *Methylococcaceae*,
204 while *xoxF* sequences were mainly affiliated with *Methylococcaceae*, *Betaproteobacteriales* and
205 *Rhodobacteraceae* (Figure S3). Complementary functional analysis of the metaproteomes likewise
206 revealed that peptides of the pMMO, covering all three subunits PmoCAB, were exclusively affiliated
207 to *Methylococcaceae*. No peptides of other methane oxidizing enzymes, such as sMMO or methyl-
208 coenzyme M reductase (Friedrich, 2005), were found. Peptides of methanol dehydrogenases were
209 exclusively related to XoxF and not to MxoF, and were affiliated to multiple taxonomic groups,
210 including *Methylococcaceae*, *Methylophilaceae* and different *Alphaproteobacteria* (Figure 3). Hence,
211 while multiple taxa were potentially involved in downstream functions like the oxidation of methanol
212 to formaldehyde, only *Methylococcaceae* were able to catalyze the first step in methane
213 degradation, the oxidation of methane to methanol.

214 To explore the key players for methane oxidation more closely, we conducted SIP-metagenomics by
215 Illumina MiSeq sequencing of the DNA obtained from heavy fractions of the ¹³C microcosms. Ten
216 million MiSeq reads were assembled and binned, resulting in 99 metagenome-assembled genomes
217 (MAGs), with two MAGs considered complete genome drafts (> 90% completeness, < 5%
218 contamination (Parks et al., 2015; Vollmers et al., 2017a)) and another eight intermediate quality
219 genome drafts (> 70% completeness, < 10% contamination (Bishara et al., 2018) (Figure S4).
220 Surprisingly, eighteen different MAGs affiliated with *Methylococcaceae* were found (Table 1),
221 indicating multiple closely related methane oxidizers. To provide a more accurate taxonomic
222 classification and to estimate relatedness between the different *Methylococcaceae* MAGs, we

223 performed phylogenetic analysis based on amino acid sequences of single copy marker genes (SCMG)
224 (Wu et al., 2013). All *Methylococcaceae* MAGs contained marker genes that were most closely
225 related to those of *Methylomonas* spp., creating a sister lineage of this genus (Figure 4A). The amino
226 acid identity between the MAGs was typically less than 85%, indicating that indeed multiple closely
227 related species were present.

228 Genes encoding subunits of pMMO, i.e., *pmoC*, *pmoA* and *pmoB*, were present exclusively in MAGs
229 affiliated with *Methylococcaceae*. The same MAGs typically also contained genes of an ortholog to
230 the *pmoCAB* operon, dubbed *pxmABC* (Figure S5). These orthologs also encode copper-dependent
231 monooxygenases, which are potentially involved in methane oxidation under oxygen limited and
232 nitrite rich conditions (Kits et al., 2015b; Kits et al., 2015a). Potentially linked to these putative
233 alternative pMMOs, several MAGs contained genes involved in denitrification, such as *narG* and
234 *napABC*, encoding nitrate reductases, and *nirS*, encoding nitrite reductase. The expression of the
235 *pmoCAB* genes was confirmed for multiple MAGs (Table 2, Table S1), but no expression of *pxmABC*
236 genes, as well as of the genes involved in denitrification, was observed. No other functional genes for
237 methane-oxidizing enzymes were observed in the metagenomes. Based on both genomic and
238 proteomic data, these bacteria utilized XoxF-type MDHs for oxidation of methanol to formaldehyde.
239 The classification of the MDH genes was verified by phylogenetic analysis using a custom reference
240 database of *xoxF* and *mxoF* genes, clearly placing the detected genes in the *xoxF5* clade (Figure S6).
241 Furthermore, genes of the tetrahydromethanopterin (H₄MPT) pathway for formaldehyde oxidation,
242 as well as key genes of the ribulose monophosphate (RuMP) cycle for formaldehyde assimilation, 3-
243 hexulose-6-phosphate synthase and 3-hexulose-6-phosphate isomerase, were expressed. The
244 identified key players hence showed the typical metabolic traits of type I methanotrophs, in
245 agreement with their taxonomic affiliation within the *Gammaproteobacteria* (Trotsenko and Murrell,
246 2008).

247 The gene expression profiles of the different *Methylococcaceae*, as well as the enrichment of their
248 DNA in the heavy fraction and the ¹³C incorporation in their peptides, demonstrated that several of

249 these closely related bacteria were active and responsible for methane oxidation in the microcosms.
250 Considering the heterogeneity of the sediment present at the methane seep, these bacteria can have
251 differing environmental preferences, and so their distribution might be driven by hydrogeochemical
252 factors beyond the availability of methane. Hence, despite their taxonomic similarity, these bacteria
253 might inhabit different environmental niches.

254 **Role of non-methanotrophic methylotrophs**

255 In addition to the key methanotrophs, non-methanotrophic organisms affiliated with
256 *Methylophilaceae* were also found to be highly active in the microcosms, as deduced from ¹³C
257 incorporation. Despite their lack of the ability to oxidize methane, evident from metaproteomic,
258 metagenomic and functional gene data, the ¹³C incorporation patterns in their peptides were
259 indistinguishable from those of the methanotrophic *Methylococcaceae* (Figure 2, Figure S2),
260 resembling a direct uptake of a ¹³C labelled substrate (Seifert et al., 2012). Phylogenetic analysis of
261 the six MAGs related to *Methylophilaceae* in our metagenomic dataset, based on amino acid
262 sequences of SCMGs, demonstrated an affiliation with *Methylophilus* spp. and *Methylotenera* spp.
263 (Figure 4B). Functional classification of peptides identified in the metaproteomics analysis showed
264 the presence of XoxF-type methanol dehydrogenases affiliated with the *Methylophilaceae* (clades
265 XoxF4 and XoxF1, Figure S6), as well as enzymes of the H₄MPT pathway for formaldehyde oxidation
266 and the RuMP cycle for formaldehyde assimilation, supporting a methylotrophic lifestyle. The
267 identified peptides could be mapped to several of the six *Methylophilaceae* MAGs observed (Table 2,
268 Table S1), indicating that also from this taxon, different methylotrophs were active in our
269 microcosms.

270 As no genes or proteins involved in methane oxidation in the *Methylophilaceae* in our microcosms
271 were present, we can exclude that these organisms used methane directly as a carbon source, and
272 instead have more likely been labelled by cross-feeding. For cross-feeding organisms, a shift in the
273 peptide RIA with incubation time can often be detected when newly synthesized, ¹³C-labelled
274 compounds from the primary consumers mix with pre-existing, unlabelled compounds (Seifert et al.,

275 2012; Taubert et al., 2012). In our study, we observed such shifts, for instance, in autotrophic
276 *Nitrospirales* (Figure S2) that became labelled due to the enrichment of the carbonate pool in the
277 incubations by $^{13}\text{CO}_2$ released from ^{13}C -methane oxidation. However, a low concentration of the
278 respective pre-existing compound, e.g., caused by a starvation period or a rapid uptake by the cross-
279 feeding organisms, will not result in sufficient amounts of intermediately labelled peptides to be
280 detected by metaproteomics analysis. Given the presence of key methylotrophic functions in the
281 *Methylophilaceae*, the most likely explanation for the ^{13}C labelling of these organisms is the uptake of
282 ^{13}C methanol released from the methanotrophic *Methylococcaceae*, implying a transfer of carbon
283 from methanotrophs to methylotrophs.

284 Interestingly, further putative methylotrophs related to the alphaproteobacterial family
285 *Rhodobacteraceae* were present and active in our microcosms, but showed only indirect ^{13}C
286 incorporation patterns slowly increasing in RIA over time (Figure 2). The low ^{13}C -labelling ratio
287 observed indicated a much slower growth rate than for *Methylophilaceae*. Of 14 MAGs affiliated with
288 *Alphaproteobacteria*, seven were related to the *Roseobacter* clade within the *Rhodobacteraceae*,
289 while the remaining were related to *Hyphomonadaceae*, *Stappiaceae* and an unknown
290 *Rhodobacterales* family (Table 1, Figure S7). Only for one of the MAGs affiliated with the *Roseobacter*
291 clade was a gene encoding a *xoxF5*-type MDH found, as well as the corresponding gene product,
292 indicating that the majority of these bacteria were not able to utilize methanol. Nevertheless, most
293 of the 14 MAGs revealed a metabolic potential for C_1 utilization, typically including glutathione- and
294 tetrahydrofolate-(THF)-dependent pathways for C_1 oxidation/reduction as well as key genes of the
295 serine cycle for formaldehyde assimilation, including hydroxypyruvate reductase, glycerate 2-kinase,
296 malate thiokinase, malyl coenzyme A lyase, isocitrate lyase and crotonyl-CoA reductase.
297 Furthermore, in two of the MAGs affiliated with the *Roseobacter* clade, a gene encoding ribulose
298 biphosphate carboxylase required for CO_2 fixation was present. The coverage of our metaproteomic
299 analysis was insufficient to verify the metabolism of these alphaproteobacterial organisms. The
300 potential for C_1 utilization suggested that they might assimilate other C_1 compounds potentially

301 derived from methane oxidation, such as formaldehyde. However, the ^{13}C RIA in the peptides
302 affiliated with *Alphaproteobacteria* was significantly lower than that of *Methylophilaceae* ($p < 0.001$
303 for all time points, Student's *t*-test), while not significantly different to the autotrophic *Nitrospirales*.
304 This suggested that some of these organisms could have assimilated carbon from CO_2 , while using C_1
305 compounds as energy source (Figure 5). However, the lower RIA observed for *Alphaproteobacteria*
306 might also result from recycling of unlabelled organic compounds in the microcosms. Hence, while
307 our results strongly indicate that the different alphaproteobacterial taxa were continuously active
308 and oxidized C_1 compounds to gain energy in our microcosms, the nature of their carbon source
309 remains uncertain.

310 **Discussion**

311 Previous studies indicated that the activity of methane oxidizing microorganisms leads to a massive
312 reduction of methane emission from marine seeps. Boetius and Wenzhöfer summarized that
313 between 20 and 80% of methane released from cold seeps of continental slopes is removed by this
314 process, depending on the seep environment, with fluid flow rate and oxygen availability as
315 influential parameters (Boetius and Wenzhöfer, 2013). Here we confirmed that this notion holds true
316 for a shallow methane seep near Elba, characterized by highly permeable sandy sediment that allows
317 an increased oxygen circulation into deeper layers. The methane oxidation potential estimated at 12
318 $\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{year}^{-1}$, based on rate measurements in microcosms, was in the same range as the methane
319 flux in the water column of 9 $\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{year}^{-1}$, measured *in situ* (Sciarra et al., 2019), indicating that a
320 major portion of the methane is removed at the sediment-water interface before reaching the water
321 column (Figure 5).

322 We identified members of the *Methylococcaceae* within the order *Methylococcales* as the key
323 methane oxidizers. Previous studies indicated that *Methylococcales* are typically found at high
324 relative abundance at methane seeps, independent of seep hydrogeochemistry and geographic
325 location (Ruff et al., 2015). Here we showed that the key methane oxidizers present at the Elba seep

326 formed a sister lineage to *Methylomonas* sp. within the *Methylococcaceae*, potentially comprising a
327 new genus, and that multiple closely related organisms of this taxon were present. This co-
328 occurrence of bacteria from the same functional guild suggests the existence of different niches for
329 methane oxidizers at the sediment-water interface. Parameters like the availability of oxygen and
330 other electron acceptors, the methane concentration and the presence of alternative reduced
331 molecules might drive the distribution of methane oxidizers with different metabolic capabilities. The
332 presence of *pxmABC* genes hints to the potential for nitrite-dependent methanotrophy in the Elba
333 sediments, given suitable conditions (Kits et al., 2015b; Kits et al., 2015a). Furthermore, the
334 substrate-specificity of pMMO-like proteins is often not clear (Tavormina et al., 2013; Khadka et al.,
335 2018), so some *Methylococcaceae* might additionally be capable of oxidizing alternative compounds
336 like short chain alkanes. These divergent metabolic traits would allow the methanotrophs to occupy
337 various niches and thrive under different biogeochemical conditions. Such a functional redundancy
338 provides multiple advantages for ecosystem functions, such as enhanced stability against
339 environmental disturbances (Griffiths and Philippot, 2013). In the shallow, sandy sediment,
340 disturbances can easily occur, e.g., by hydrodynamic forces like waves and currents, or by seasonal
341 changes (Ruff et al., 2016). Moreover, the adaptation of microorganisms to specific environmental
342 niches optimizes their function and hence results in a fine-tuning of the methane oxidation
343 machinery.

344 Furthermore, the association of methanotrophs with non-methanotrophic methylotrophs seems to
345 be of major importance for the efficiency of methane oxidation. Our results suggested a transfer of
346 methane-derived carbon from the *Methylococcaceae* to methylotrophs related to *Methylotenera*
347 spp. and *Methylophilus* spp. of the *Methylophilaceae*. Interactions of *Methylococcaceae* with other
348 bacteria, e.g., leading to aggregate formation, have been previously reported at deep-sea methane
349 seeps (Ruff et al., 2013). Typically, *Methylophaga* spp. or other gamma- and alphaproteobacterial
350 species are the most abundant methylotrophs associated with the methanotrophic
351 *Methylococcaceae* (Lösekann et al., 2007; Ruff et al., 2013; Ruff et al., 2015; Paul et al., 2017).

352 *Methylophilaceae* related to *Methylothera*/*Methylophilus* spp., in contrast, are only rarely observed
353 at marine methane seeps (Ruff et al., 2013; Paul et al., 2017). With the notable exception of the
354 OM43 clade (Giovannoni et al., 2008), members of the *Methylophilaceae* family are typically not
355 abundant in marine environments, and seem to prefer environments with lower salinity such as
356 estuaries or freshwater (Kalyuzhnaya et al., 2006; Kalyuzhnaya et al., 2012; Deng et al., 2018).
357 Intriguingly, in sediments of Lake Washington (WA, USA), a well-studied freshwater lake featuring
358 high methane fluxes, cooperations between *Methylococcaceae* and *Methylophilaceae* have been
359 observed as well (Kalyuzhnaya et al., 2008; Beck et al., 2013). Incubation experiments revealed
360 specific relationships between *Methylosarcina* spp. and *Methylophilus* spp. at high oxygen
361 concentrations, as well as *Methylobacter* spp. and *Methylothera* spp. at lower oxygen
362 concentrations (Hernandez et al., 2015). Synthetic culture experiments with methanotrophic and
363 non-methanotrophic isolates from Lake Washington also revealed *Methylomonas* spp. to be included
364 in such partnerships, and to be highly competitive (Yu et al., 2017). While the non-methanotrophic
365 partners of such interactions obviously benefit from the release of methanol from the
366 methanotrophs, the gain for the methanotrophs is still unclear. An exchange of public goods, such as
367 vitamin B12, or interspecies electron transfer contributing to methane activation have been
368 discussed (Yu and Chistoserdova, 2017). Regardless, the interaction of methanotrophs and
369 methylotrophs is a common theme across various environments featuring high methane fluxes, and
370 seems to be a major factor for efficient functioning of the benthic methane filter (Ho et al., 2014).

371 Methanol and other C₁ compounds are typically produced in marine environments as byproducts of
372 algal growth or decomposition of organic compounds such as osmolytes, resulting in concentrations
373 in the nM to μM range (Naqvi et al., 2005; Beale et al., 2015). Hence, methylotrophs that degrade
374 these compounds are commonly found in marine habitats. These methylotrophs, however, are
375 distinctly different from those present at methane seeps, and are typically dominated by members of
376 the *Roseobacter* clade, the *Methylophilaceae* group OM43 or the SAR11 clade (Giovannoni et al.,
377 2008; Sun et al., 2011; Zhuang et al., 2018). In our microcosms, we found members of the

378 *Roseobacter* clade and other *Alphaproteobacteria* with the genetic potential for C₁ utilization. These
379 bacteria showed low, but consistent activity throughout 65 days of incubation. To succeed in the
380 open sea water, these bacteria are optimized for the uptake of the low concentrations of organic
381 compounds present, and usually utilize various C₁ compounds as well as multi-carbon substrates
382 (Brinkhoff et al., 2008), and typically exhibit slow growth rates. In our microcosms, we observed an
383 uptake of methane-derived carbon by these bacteria, but were unable to discern whether they
384 assimilated methanol or other C₁ compounds as byproducts of methane oxidation, or multi-carbon
385 compounds released by the primary C₁ utilizers, or if they fixed CO₂ and used organic carbon
386 compounds solely as energy sources. Such a chemoorganoautotrophic lifestyle, often supported by
387 anoxygenic photosynthesis, has been reported for various marine methylophiles, termed
388 “methylophiles” (Sun et al., 2011; Pinhassi et al., 2016). Hence, although the methane seep recruits a
389 distinct and specific community of C₁-utilizing organisms, apparently the typical marine
390 methylophiles can also sustain their activity in this environment, and potentially benefit from the
391 increased levels of organic compounds produced by the methanotrophs.

392 Interestingly, all methanotrophs and methylophiles of the *Methylococcaceae*, *Methylophilaceae* and
393 other *Alphaproteobacteria* detected in our incubations employed lanthanide-dependent, XoxF-type
394 methanol dehydrogenases instead of the calcium-dependent methanol dehydrogenase MxaFI. The
395 high diversity of *xoxF* gene sequences in marine habitats, especially *xoxF4* and *xoxF5*, as well as their
396 prevalence over *mxoF* gene sequences, has previously been described (Ramachandran and Walsh,
397 2015; Taubert et al., 2015). The lanthanides required for these enzymes, belonging to the rare earth
398 elements, are typically present in sufficient concentrations in coastal environments from sediments
399 or coastal run-off, despite their low solubility (Elderfield et al., 1990; Keltjens et al., 2014).

400 In summary, we showed that the microbial community present in the oxic sediments at the Elba
401 methane seep is highly efficient in methane removal, exceeding the methane oxidation rates
402 reported for AOM at this site (Ruff et al., 2016), likely due to the high oxygen levels in the sediment
403 precluding AOM. We identified members of the *Methylococcaceae* as the key players of aerobic

404 methane oxidation, and obtained several genome drafts of different active, closely related members
405 of this group. We observed a tight association of these methanotrophs with non-methanotrophic
406 methylotrophs of the *Methylophilaceae*, likely through exchange of methanol, contributing to the
407 efficiency of methane oxidation. Finally, methane-derived carbon was also transferred to other
408 microorganisms not able to utilize methanol, supporting the hypothesis that methanotrophs fuel a
409 complex trophic network and can be considered as primary producers in the methane seep
410 environment. The gain of knowledge on methane removal by the 'benthic filter' at shallow seeps
411 provided by our study will facilitate future estimations of the global methane budget, and highlights
412 the relevance of methanotrophs as model systems to study principles of microbial interactions.

413 **Experimental Procedures**

414 **Sample collection and microcosm setup**

415 Samples of oxic sediment from the top 2-3 cm and water were collected in May 2014 by divers from
416 a shallow methane seep located off the coast of Elba, Italy (42° 44.628' N, 10° 07.094' E), in 12 m
417 water depth. Five 50 ml BD Falcon™ tubes were filled with ~100 g of sediment each, and two 1 L
418 bottles were filled with seawater from a maximum of 50 cm above the sediment surface. Samples
419 were transported and stored at 4°C until the start of the SIP experiments at the University of East
420 Anglia, United Kingdom, four days after sampling. Microcosms were set up in 120 ml serum bottles
421 with 20 g of sediment and 25 ml of seawater each, and marine ammonium mineral salts (MAMS)
422 were added to a final concentration of 1% of full-strength medium. Microcosms were spiked with 1%
423 (v:v, headspace) ¹³C-labelled or unlabelled (¹²C) methane (six of each), and incubated at 25°C in a
424 shaking incubator (50 rpm). Headspace methane concentrations were monitored using gas
425 chromatography (Supplementary Information). When the headspace concentrations in all
426 microcosms were below 0.1% (v:v), additional methane (1-2%, v:v) was added. Duplicate ¹²C and ¹³C
427 microcosms were sacrificed for DNA and protein extraction after 25, 45 and 65 days of incubation.

428 **DNA and protein extraction and DNA-SIP**

429 Combined DNA and protein extractions were performed from microcosms as well as from untreated
430 sediment (T0) according to a previously described protocol (Taubert et al., 2012) with minor
431 modifications (Supplementary Information). Extracted DNA was subjected to fractionation using CsCl
432 gradients, and fractions containing ¹³C-labelled DNA were selected as previously described (Neufeld
433 et al., 2007; Grob et al., 2015) with minor modifications (Supplementary Information).

434 **Amplicon and metagenomic sequencing**

435 PCR amplicons for 454 sequencing were obtained from selected fractions using the following primer
436 sets and conditions: The *pmoA* gene encoding the β-subunit of particulate methane monooxygenase
437 was amplified by nested PCR using primer pairs A189F/A682R (Holmes et al., 1995) and
438 A189F/mb661R (Costello and Lidstrom, 1999) as previously described (Horz et al., 2005). The *mmoX*
439 gene encoding soluble methane monooxygenase subunit A was amplified by nested PCR using primer
440 pairs mmoX166f/mmoX1401r (Auman et al., 2000) and mmoX206f/mmoX886r (Hutchens et al.,
441 2004) as described. The *xoxF4*, *xoxF5* and *mxoF* genes encoding different methanol dehydrogenases
442 were amplified using primer pairs xoxF4f/r, xoxF5f/r (Taubert et al., 2015) and
443 mxoF1003f/mxoF1555r (McDonald and Murrell, 1997) using PCR conditions as described by these
444 authors. Combined and purified triplicate PCR products were subjected to 454 pyrosequencing (GS
445 FLX Titanium system, MR DNA, Shallowater, TX, USA). Sequencing data were processed using mothur
446 (v.1.35.1) (Schloss et al., 2009) for quality control, demultiplexing, and removal of barcodes and
447 primers as previously described for other functional genes (Taubert et al., 2015). Sequences were
448 binned to OTUs with a 97% identity threshold and chimeras were removed using USEARCH
449 (v7.0.1090) (Edgar, 2013). Phylogeny was assigned using Megan (v.5.1.5) (Huson et al., 2011) and a
450 previously described pipeline for functional genes (Dumont et al., 2014). Raw data are available at
451 the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) database under bioproject PRJNA524087.

452 For metagenomic sequencing, separate libraries were prepared from total DNA from untreated
453 sediment (T0) as well as from ¹³C-labelled DNA obtained from the duplicate microcosms of each of
454 the three time points. Metagenomic DNA was sheared using a Covaris S220 sonication device
455 (Covaris Inc., MA, USA) with the following settings: 55 s 175 W, 5% Duty factor, 200 cycles of burst,
456 55.5 µl. Library preparation was done using the NEBNext® DNA Library Prep kit for Illumina® (E6040,
457 New England BioLabs® Inc., Ipswich, MA, USA). Sufficient material for sequencing (15 - 20 µg) was
458 obtained from SIP fractions without further amplification. Metagenome sequencing was then
459 performed on an Illumina MiSeq machine using v3 chemistry (600 cycles).

460 Metagenome reads were adapter clipped and quality trimmed using Trimmomatic v0.32 (Bolger et
461 al., 2014). Low complexity reads were removed using the DUST approach of prinseq-lite v0.20.4
462 (Schmieder and Edwards, 2011) with a cutoff of 15, and residual phiX-contaminants were filtered out
463 using FastQ Screen (Wingett and Andrews, 2018). Overlapping read pairs were then merged using
464 FLASH 1.2.11 (Magoč and Salzberg, 2011).

465 For each time point and for the untreated samples, an individual metagenome assembly was
466 produced by coassembling the corresponding libraries from experimental replicates using megahit
467 v1.0.5 (Li et al., 2015). Read coverage of assembled contigs was determined by mapping using
468 Bowtie2 (Langmead and Salzberg, 2012). Each metagenome was then binned using Maxbin v.2.1.1
469 (Wu et al., 2016). Bins were subsequently decontaminated using a z-score based differential
470 coverage approach previously described (Vollmers et al., 2017b; Pratscher et al., 2018). Bins with a
471 high likelihood of originating from the same species were identified based on similarity of coverage
472 profiles across all time points and subsamples, as well as by the presence of nearly identical universal
473 marker genes. Any such related bins were merged and coassembled by extracting the respective
474 reads from all corresponding time points and reassembly using megahit. Completeness and potential
475 contamination of the final binned MAGs was estimated using CheckM (Parks et al., 2015).

476 Phylogenetic trees to elucidate taxonomic relationships for metagenome-assembled genomes based
477 on concatenated amino acid alignments of taxon-specific single copy marker genes were constructed

478 using the ezTree pipeline (Wu, 2018). The shotgun metagenome reads, corresponding assemblies, as
479 well as binned MAGs with estimated completeness > 70% and contamination < 10% are available at
480 the NCBI database under bioproject PRJNA522277.

481 **SIP-metaproteomics**

482 Sample preparation for metaproteomics analysis was done as previously described (Grob et al.,
483 2015). Mass spectrometry was performed on an Orbitrap Fusion MS (Thermo Fisher Scientific,
484 Waltham, MA, USA) (Supplementary Information).

485 Proteome Discoverer (v1.4.0288, Thermo Scientific) was used for protein identification and the
486 acquired MS/MS spectra were searched against the NCBI nr database with taxonomy set to Archaea
487 and Bacteria using the Mascot algorithm, and against protein sequences derived from all acquired
488 MAGs using the SequestHT algorithm. Trypsin was chosen as cleavage enzyme, allowing a maximum
489 of two missed cleavages. The precursor mass tolerance (MS) was set to 10 ppm, the fragment mass
490 tolerance (MS/MS) was 0.05 Da. Carbamidomethylation of cysteine was considered as fixed and
491 oxidation of methionine was set as dynamic modification. Peptide spectrum matches (PSMs) were
492 validated using Percolator (v2.04) with a false discover rate (FDR) < 1% and quality filtered for XCorr
493 ≥ 2.25 (for charge state +2) and ≥ 2.5 (for charge state +3). Identified proteins were grouped by
494 applying the strict parsimony principle (Nesvizhskii and Aebersold, 2005). The mass spectrometry
495 proteomics data have been deposited to the ProteomeXchange Consortium via the PRIDE (Perez-
496 Riverol et al., 2019) partner repository with the dataset identifier PXD013378.

497 Taxonomic classification of peptides was done by the lowest common ancestor method using
498 UniPept (Mesuere et al., 2018). Identification of ^{13}C -labelled peptides and quantification of ^{13}C
499 incorporation was done by comparing measured and expected isotopologue patterns,
500 chromatographic retention times and fragmentation patterns as previously described (Seifert et al.,
501 2012; Taubert et al., 2012). For each taxonomic group of interest, ^{13}C incorporation was quantified in
502 10 peptides per time point, 5 from each replicate microcosm.

503 **Acknowledgements**

504 The authors are grateful for use of the analytical facilities of the Centre for Chemical Microscopy
505 (ProVIS) at the Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research, which is supported by European
506 Regional Development Funds (EFRE – Europe funds Saxony) and the Helmholtz-Association. We
507 thank the HYDRA team for supporting the field sampling campaign. This work was supported by the
508 Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation Marine Microbiology Initiative Grant GBMF3303 to J. Colin
509 Murrell and Yin Chen and through the Earth and Life Systems Alliance, Norwich Research Park,
510 Norwich, UK and by a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship to Andrew T. Crombie (ECF2016-
511 626).

512 The authors declare no conflict of interest.

513 Supplementary information is available at ISME Journal's website.

514 **References**

515

516 Auman, A.J., Stolyar, S., Costello, A.M., and Lidstrom, M.E. (2000) Molecular characterization of
517 methanotrophic isolates from freshwater lake sediment. *Appl Environ Microb* **66**: 5259-5266.

518 Beale, R., Dixon, J.L., Smyth, T.J., and Nightingale, P.D. (2015) Annual study of oxygenated volatile
519 organic compounds in UK shelf waters. *Mar Chem* **171**: 96-106.

520 Beck, D.A.C., Kalyuzhnaya, M.G., Malfatti, S., Tringe, S.G., del Rio, T.G., Ivanova, N. et al. (2013) A
521 metagenomic insight into freshwater methane-utilizing communities and evidence for cooperation
522 between the *Methylococcaceae* and the *Methylophilaceae*. *PeerJ* **1**: e23.

523 Bishara, A., Moss, E.L., Kolmogorov, M., Parada, A.E., Weng, Z.M., Sidow, A. et al. (2018) High-quality
524 genome sequences of uncultured microbes by assembly of read clouds. *Nat Biotechnol* **36**: 1067-
525 1075.

526 Boetius, A., and Wenzhöfer, F. (2013) Seafloor oxygen consumption fuelled by methane from cold
527 seeps. *Nat Geosci* **6**: 725-734.

528 Bolger, A.M., Lohse, M., and Usadel, B. (2014) Trimmomatic: a flexible trimmer for Illumina sequence
529 data. *Bioinformatics* **30**: 2114-2120.

530 Brinkhoff, T., Giebel, H.A., and Simon, M. (2008) Diversity, ecology, and genomics of the *Roseobacter*
531 clade: a short overview. *Arch Microbiol* **189**: 531-539.

532 Costello, A.M., and Lidstrom, M.E. (1999) Molecular characterization of functional and phylogenetic
533 genes from natural populations of methanotrophs in lake sediments. *Appl Environ Microbiol* **65**:
534 5066-5074.

535 Dando, P.R., Jensen, P., O'Hara, S.C.M., Niven, S.J., Schmaljohann, R., Schuster, U., and Taylor, L.J.
536 (1994) The effects of methane seepage at an intertidal/shallow subtidal site on the shore of the
537 Kattegat, Vendsyssel, Denmark. *B Geol Soc Denmark* **41**: 65-79.

538 de Beer, D., Sauter, E., Niemann, H., Kaul, N., Foucher, J.P., Witte, U. et al. (2006) *In situ* fluxes and
539 zonation of microbial activity in surface sediments of the Håkon Mosby Mud Volcano. *Limnol*
540 *Oceanogr* **51**: 1315-1331.

541 Deng, W.C., Peng, L.L., Jiao, N.Z., and Zhang, Y. (2018) Differential incorporation of one-carbon
542 substrates among microbial populations identified by stable isotope probing from the estuary to
543 South China Sea. *Sci Rep-Uk* **8**: 15378.

544 Dumont, M.G., Lüke, C., Deng, Y.C., and Frenzel, P. (2014) Classification of *pmoA* amplicon
545 pyrosequences using BLAST and the lowest common ancestor method in MEGAN. *Front Microbiol* **5**:
546 34.

547 Edgar, R.C. (2013) UPARSE: highly accurate OTU sequences from microbial amplicon reads. *Nat*
548 *Methods* **10**: 996-998.

549 Elderfield, H., Upstill-Goddard, R., and Sholkovitz, E.R. (1990) The rare earth elements in rivers,
550 estuaries, and coastal seas and their significance to the composition of ocean waters. *Geochim*
551 *Cosmochim Ac* **54**: 971-991.

552 Etiope, G. (2012) Climate science: Methane uncovered. *Nat Geosci* **5**: 373-374.

553 Friedrich, M.W. (2005) Methyl-coenzyme M reductase genes: Unique functional markers for
554 methanogenic and anaerobic methane-oxidizing Archaea. *Method Enzymol* **397**: 428-442.

555 Giovannoni, S.J., Hayakawa, D.H., Tripp, H.J., Stingl, U., Givan, S.A., Cho, J.C. et al. (2008) The small
556 genome of an abundant coastal ocean methylotroph. *Environ Microbiol* **10**: 1771-1782.

557 Glud, R.N. (2008) Oxygen dynamics of marine sediments. *Mar Biol Res* **4**: 243-289.

558 Greve, S., Paulssen, H., Goes, S., and van Bergen, M. (2014) Shear-velocity structure of the Tyrrhenian
559 Sea: Tectonics, volcanism and mantle (de)hydration of a back-arc basin. *Earth Planet Sc Lett* **400**: 45-
560 53.

561 Griffiths, B.S., and Philippot, L. (2013) Insights into the resistance and resilience of the soil microbial
562 community. *FEMS Microbiol Rev* **37**: 112-129.

563 Grob, C., Taubert, M., Howat, A.M., Burns, O.J., Dixon, J.L., Richnow, H.H. et al. (2015) Combining
564 metagenomics with metaproteomics and stable isotope probing reveals metabolic pathways used by
565 a naturally occurring marine methylotroph. *Environ Microbiol* **17**: 4007-4018.

566 Hernandez, M.E., Beck, D.A.C., Lidstrom, M.E., and Chistoserdova, L. (2015) Oxygen availability is a
567 major factor in determining the composition of microbial communities involved in methane
568 oxidation. *PeerJ* **3**: e801.

569 Ho, A., de Roy, K., Thas, O., De Neve, J., Hoefman, S., Vandamme, P. et al. (2014) The more, the
570 merrier: heterotroph richness stimulates methanotrophic activity. *ISME J* **8**: 1945-1948.

571 Holmes, A.J., Costello, A., Lidstrom, M.E., and Murrell, J.C. (1995) Evidence that participate methane
572 monooxygenase and ammonia monooxygenase may be evolutionarily related. *FEMS Microbiol Lett*
573 **132**: 203-208.

574 Horz, H.P., Rich, V., Avrahami, S., and Bohannon, B.J.M. (2005) Methane-oxidizing bacteria in a
575 California upland grassland soil: Diversity and response to simulated global change. *Appl Environ*
576 *Microb* **71**: 2642-2652.

577 Howat, A.M., Vollmers, J., Taubert, M., Grob, C., Dixon, J.L., Todd, J.D. et al. (2018) Comparative
578 genomics and mutational analysis reveals a novel XoxF-utilizing methylotroph in the *Roseobacter*
579 group isolated from the marine environment. *Front Microbiol* **9**: 766.

580 Huson, D.H., Mitra, S., Ruscheweyh, H.J., Weber, N., and Schuster, S.C. (2011) Integrative analysis of
581 environmental sequences using MEGAN4. *Genome Res* **21**: 1552-1560.

582 Hutchens, E., Radajewski, S., Dumont, M.G., McDonald, I.R., and Murrell, J.C. (2004) Analysis of
583 methanotrophic bacteria in Movile Cave by stable isotope probing. *Environ Microbiol* **6**: 111-120.

584 Jessen, G.L., Pantoja, S., Gutiérrez, M.A., Quiñones, R.A., González, R.R., Sellanes, J. et al. (2011)
585 Methane in shallow cold seeps at Mocha Island off central Chile. *Cont Shelf Res* **31**: 574-581.

586 Judd, A.G., Sim, R., Kingston, P., and McNally, J. (2002a) Gas seepage on an intertidal site: Torry Bay,
587 Firth of Forth, Scotland. *Cont Shelf Res* **22**: 2317-2331.

588 Judd, A.G., Hovland, M., Dimitrov, L.I., García-Gil, S., and Jukes, V. (2002b) The geological methane
589 budget at continental margins and its influence on climate change. *Geofluids* **2**: 109-126.

590 Kalyuzhnaya, M.G., Bowerman, S., Lara, J.C., Lidstrom, M.E., and Chistoserdova, L. (2006)
591 *Methylotenera mobilis* gen. nov., sp nov., an obligately methylamine-utilizing bacterium within the
592 family *Methylophilaceae*. *Int J Syst Evol Micr* **56**: 2819-2823.

593 Kalyuzhnaya, M.G., Beck, D.A.C., Vorobev, A., Smalley, N., Kunkel, D.D., Lidstrom, M.E., and
594 Chistoserdova, L. (2012) Novel methylotrophic isolates from lake sediment, description of
595 *Methylotenera versatilis* sp nov and emended description of the genus *Methylotenera*. *Int J Syst Evol*
596 *Micr* **62**: 106-111.

597 Kalyuzhnaya, M.G., Lapidus, A., Ivanova, N., Copeland, A.C., McHardy, A.C., Szeto, E. et al. (2008)
598 High-resolution metagenomics targets specific functional types in complex microbial communities.
599 *Nat Biotechnol* **26**: 1029-1034.

600 Keltjens, J.T., Pol, A., Reimann, J., and Op den Camp, H.J.M. (2014) PQQ-dependent methanol
601 dehydrogenases: rare-earth elements make a difference. *Appl Microbiol Biot* **98**: 6163-6183.

602 Khadka, R., Clothier, L., Wang, L., Lim, C.K., Klotz, M.G., and Dunfield, P.F. (2018) Evolutionary history
603 of copper membrane monooxygenases. *Front Microbiol* **9**.

604 Kits, K.D., Klotz, M.G., and Stein, L.Y. (2015a) Methane oxidation coupled to nitrate reduction under
605 hypoxia by the Gammaproteobacterium *Methylomonas denitrificans*, sp nov type strain FJG1. *Environ*
606 *Microbiol* **17**: 3219-3232.

607 Kits, K.D., Campbell, D.J., Rosana, A.R., and Stein, L.Y. (2015b) Diverse electron sources support
608 denitrification under hypoxia in the obligate methanotroph *Methylomicrobium album* strain BG8.
609 *Front Microbiol* **6**.

610 Knittel, K., and Boetius, A. (2009) Anaerobic oxidation of methane: Progress with an unknown
611 process. *Annu Rev Microbiol* **63**: 311-334.

612 Kvenvolden, K.A., Lorenson, T.D., and Reeburgh, W.S. (2001) Attention turns to naturally occurring
613 methane seepage. *EOS, Transactions American Geophysical Union* **82**: 457-457.

614 Langmead, B., and Salzberg, S.L. (2012) Fast gapped-read alignment with Bowtie 2. *Nat Methods* **9**:
615 357-359.

616 Leifer, I., and Patro, R.K. (2002) The bubble mechanism for methane transport from the shallow sea
617 bed to the surface: A review and sensitivity study. *Cont Shelf Res* **22**: 2409-2428.

618 Li, D., Liu, C.M., Luo, R., Sadakane, K., and Lam, T.W. (2015) MEGAHIT: an ultra-fast single-node
619 solution for large and complex metagenomics assembly via succinct *de Bruijn* graph. *Bioinformatics*
620 **31**: 1674-1676.

621 Lösekann, T., Knittel, K., Nadalig, T., Fuchs, B., Niemann, H., Boetius, A., and Amann, R. (2007)
622 Diversity and abundance of aerobic and anaerobic methane oxidizers at the Haakon Mosby mud
623 volcano, Barents Sea. *Appl Environ Microb* **73**: 3348-3362.

624 Luyendyk, B., Washburn, L., Banerjee, S., Clark, J., and Quigley, D. (2003) A methodology for
625 investigation of natural hydrocarbon gas seepage in the northern Santa Barbara channel. *OCS Study*
626 *MMS 2003* **54**: 1-66.

627 Magoč, T., and Salzberg, S.L. (2011) FLASH: fast length adjustment of short reads to improve genome
628 assemblies. *Bioinformatics* **27**: 2957-2963.

629 McDonald, I.R., and Murrell, J.C. (1997) The methanol dehydrogenase structural gene *mxoF* and its
630 use as a functional gene probe for methanotrophs and methylotrophs. *Appl Environ Microb* **63**: 3218-
631 3224.

632 McGinnis, D.F., Greinert, J., Artemov, Y., Beaubien, S.E., and Wüest, A. (2006) Fate of rising methane
633 bubbles in stratified waters: How much methane reaches the atmosphere? *J Geophys Res-Oceans*
634 **111**.

635 Meister, P., Wiedling, J., Lott, C., Bach, W., Kuhfuss, H., Wegener, G. et al. (2018) Anaerobic methane
636 oxidation inducing carbonate precipitation at abiogenic methane seeps in the Tuscan archipelago
637 (Italy). *PLoS One* **13**.

638 Mesuere, B., Van der Jeugt, F., Willems, T., Naessens, T., Devreese, B., Martens, L., and Dawyndt, P.
639 (2018) High-throughput metaproteomics data analysis with Unipept: A tutorial. *J Proteomics* **171**: 11-
640 22.

641 Naqvi, S.W.A., Bange, H.W., Gibb, S.W., Goyet, C., Hatton, A.D., and Upstill-Goddard, R.C. (2005)
642 Biogeochemical ocean-atmosphere transfers in the Arabian Sea. *Prog Oceanogr* **65**: 116-144.

643 Nesvizhskii, A.I., and Aebersold, R. (2005) Interpretation of shotgun proteomic data - The protein
644 inference problem. *Mol Cell Proteomics* **4**: 1419-1440.

645 Neufeld, J.D., Vohra, J., Dumont, M.G., Lueders, T., Manefield, M., Friedrich, M.W., and Murrell, J.C.
646 (2007) DNA stable-isotope probing. *Nat Protoc* **2**: 860-866.

647 O'Hara, S.C.M., Dando, P.R., Schuster, U., Bennis, A., Boyle, J.D., Chui, F.T.W. et al. (1995) Gas seep
648 induced interstitial water circulation - observations and environmental implications. *Cont Shelf Res*
649 **15**: 931-948.

650 Parks, D.H., Imelfort, M., Skennerton, C.T., Hugenholtz, P., and Tyson, G.W. (2015) CheckM: assessing
651 the quality of microbial genomes recovered from isolates, single cells, and metagenomes. *Genome*
652 *Res* **25**: 1043-1055.

653 Paul, B.G., Ding, H.B., Bagby, S.C., Kellermann, M.Y., Redmond, M.C., Andersen, G.L., and Valentine,
654 D.L. (2017) Methane-oxidizing bacteria shunt carbon to microbial mats at a marine hydrocarbon
655 seep. *Front Microbiol* **8**: 186.

656 Perez-Riverol, Y., Csordas, A., Bai, J., Bernal-Llinares, M., Hewapathirana, S., Kundu, D.J. et al. (2019)
657 The PRIDE database and related tools and resources in 2019: improving support for quantification
658 data. *Nucleic Acids Res* **47**: D442-D450.

659 Pinhassi, J., DeLong, E.F., Bèjà, O., González, J.M., and Pedrós-Alió, C. (2016) Marine bacterial and
660 archaeal ion-pumping rhodopsins: genetic diversity, physiology, and ecology. *Microbiol Mol Biol R* **80**:
661 929-954.

662 Pratscher, J., Vollmers, J., Wiegand, S., Dumont, M.G., and Kaster, A.K. (2018) Unravelling the
663 identity, metabolic potential and global biogeography of the atmospheric methane-oxidizing upland
664 soil cluster alpha. *Environ Microbiol* **20**: 1016-1029.

665 Quast, C., Pruesse, E., Yilmaz, P., Gerken, J., Schweer, T., Yarza, P. et al. (2013) The SILVA ribosomal
666 RNA gene database project: improved data processing and web-based tools. *Nucleic Acids Res* **41**:
667 D590-D596.

668 Ramachandran, A., and Walsh, D.A. (2015) Investigation of XoxF methanol dehydrogenases reveals
669 new methylotrophic bacteria in pelagic marine and freshwater ecosystems. *FEMS Microbiol Ecol* **91**.

670 Reeburgh, W.S. (2007) Oceanic methane biogeochemistry. *Chem Rev* **107**: 486-513.

671 Ruff, S.E., Biddle, J.F., Teske, A.P., Knittel, K., Boetius, A., and Ramette, A. (2015) Global dispersion
672 and local diversification of the methane seep microbiome. *P Natl Acad Sci USA* **112**: 4015-4020.

673 Ruff, S.E., Arnds, J., Knittel, K., Amann, R., Wegener, G., Ramette, A., and Boetius, A. (2013) Microbial
674 communities of deep-sea methane seeps at Hikurangi continental margin (New Zealand). *PLoS One* **8**:
675 e72627.

676 Ruff, S.E., Kuhfuss, H., Wegener, G., Lott, C., Ramette, A., Wiedling, J. et al. (2016) Methane seep in
677 shallow-water permeable sediment harbors high diversity of anaerobic methanotrophic
678 communities, Elba, Italy. *Front Microbiol* **7**: 374.

679 Schloss, P.D., Westcott, S.L., Ryabin, T., Hall, J.R., Hartmann, M., Hollister, E.B. et al. (2009)
680 Introducing mothur: open-source, platform-independent, community-supported software for
681 describing and comparing microbial communities. *Appl Environ Microbiol* **75**: 7537-7541.

682 Schmale, O., Greinert, J., and Rehder, G. (2005) Methane emission from high-intensity marine gas
683 seeps in the Black Sea into the atmosphere. *Geophys Res Lett* **32**.

684 Schmieder, R., and Edwards, R. (2011) Quality control and preprocessing of metagenomic datasets.
685 *Bioinformatics* **27**: 863-864.

686 Sciarra, A., Saroni, A., Etiope, G., Coltorti, M., Mazzarini, F., Lott, C. et al. (2019) Shallow submarine
687 seep of abiotic methane from serpentinized peridotite off the Island of Elba, Italy. *Appl Geochem*
688 **100**: 1-7.

689 Seifert, J., Taubert, M., Jehmlich, N., Schmidt, F., Volker, U., Vogt, C. et al. (2012) Protein-based stable
690 isotope probing (protein-SIP) in functional metaproteomics. *Mass Spectrom Rev* **31**: 683-697.

691 Sun, J., Steindler, L., Thrash, J.C., Halsey, K.H., Smith, D.P., Carter, A.E. et al. (2011) One carbon
692 metabolism in SAR11 pelagic marine bacteria. *PLoS One* **6**: e23973.

693 Taubert, M., Grob, C., Howat, A.M., Burns, O.J., Dixon, J.L., Chen, Y., and Murrell, J.C. (2015) *XoxF*
694 encoding an alternative methanol dehydrogenase is widespread in coastal marine environments.
695 *Environ Microbiol* **17**: 3937-3948.

696 Taubert, M., Vogt, C., Wubet, T., Kleinstaub, S., Tarkka, M.T., Harms, H. et al. (2012) Protein-SIP
697 enables time-resolved analysis of the carbon flux in a sulfate-reducing, benzene-degrading microbial
698 consortium. *ISME J* **6**: 2291-2301.

699 Tavormina, P.L., Ussler, W., Steele, J.A., Connon, S.A., Klotz, M.G., and Orphan, V.J. (2013) Abundance
700 and distribution of diverse membrane-bound monooxygenase (Cu-MMO) genes within the Costa Rica
701 oxygen minimum zone. *Env Microbiol Rep* **5**: 414-423.

702 Trotsenko, Y.A., and Murrell, J.C. (2008) Metabolic aspects of aerobic obligate methanotrophy. *Adv*
703 *Appl Microbiol* **63**: 183-229.

704 Vollmers, J., Wiegand, S., and Kaster, A.K. (2017a) Comparing and evaluating metagenome assembly
705 tools from a microbiologist's perspective - Not only size matters! *PLoS One* **12**: e0169662.

706 Vollmers, J., Frentrup, M., Rast, P., Jogler, C., and Kaster, A.K. (2017b) Untangling genomes of novel
707 planctomycetal and verrucomicrobial species from Monterey Bay kelp forest metagenomes by
708 refined binning. *Front Microbiol* **8**: 472.

709 Wingett, S.W., and Andrews, S. (2018) FastQ Screen: A tool for multi-genome mapping and quality
710 control. *F1000Research* **7**: 1338.

711 Wu, D.Y., Jospin, G., and Eisen, J.A. (2013) Systematic identification of gene families for use as
712 "markers" for phylogenetic and phylogeny-driven ecological studies of bacteria and archaea and their
713 major subgroups. *PLoS One* **8**: e77033.

714 Wu, Y.W. (2018) ezTree: an automated pipeline for identifying phylogenetic marker genes and
715 inferring evolutionary relationships among uncultivated prokaryotic draft genomes. *BMC Genomics*
716 **19**: 921.

717 Wu, Y.W., Simmons, B.A., and Singer, S.W. (2016) MaxBin 2.0: an automated binning algorithm to
718 recover genomes from multiple metagenomic datasets. *Bioinformatics* **32**: 605-607.

719 Yu, Z., and Chistoserdova, L. (2017) Communal metabolism of methane and the rare earth element
720 switch. *J Bacteriol* **199**.

721 Yu, Z., Beck, D.A.C., and Chistoserdova, L. (2017) Natural selection in synthetic communities
722 highlights the roles of *Methylococcaceae* and *Methylophilaceae* and suggests differential roles for
723 alternative methanol dehydrogenases in methane consumption. *Front Microbiol* **8**: 2392.

724 Zhuang, G.C., Peña-Montenegro, T.D., Montgomery, A., Hunter, K.S., and Joye, S.B. (2018) Microbial
725 metabolism of methanol and methylamine in the Gulf of Mexico: insight into marine carbon and
726 nitrogen cycling. *Environ Microbiol* **20**: 4543-4554.

727

728

730

731 **Figure and Table Legends**

732 **Figure 1: Methane consumption in microcosms with sediment from the Elba methane seep.** Values
733 given are the cumulative amount of methane consumed in the microcosms. Separate averaged
734 values for microcosms with ^{12}C -methane and microcosms with ^{13}C -methane are depicted by cross
735 and diamond symbols, respectively. Error bars indicate standard deviation. Arrows indicate time
736 points of methane addition. Brackets display the amount of methane (% headspace, v:v) of each
737 addition and number of replicate microcosms (n) each supplemented with ^{12}C - or ^{13}C - methane.

738 **Figure 2: ^{13}C incorporation into peptides of different bacterial taxonomic groups.** Values depict (A)
739 the ^{13}C relative isotope abundance (RIA), i.e., the amount of carbon replaced by ^{13}C , and (B) the
740 labelling ratio, i.e., the abundance of ^{13}C -labelled compared to unlabelled molecules, of peptides
741 specific to the given taxonomic groups after incubation of sediment for 25, 45 and 65 days with ^{13}C -
742 methane. Values are based on n = 10 peptides per time point, error bars show standard deviation.

743 **Figure 3: Functional classification of identified peptides.** The numbers of peptides affiliated to
744 different enzymes and pathways of different functional categories relevant for C_1 metabolism are
745 shown. Colors depict the taxonomic distribution of the peptides in each functional category based on
746 the lowest common ancestor of each peptide. Peptide identification is based on metaproteomics
747 analysis of samples from microcosms with ^{12}C -methane of all three time points (n = 6). The peptides
748 were identified using NCBI nr and the metagenome-assembled genomes obtained in this study as
749 reference databases. MMO: methane monooxygenase, MDH: methanol dehydrogenase, FAE:
750 formaldehyde-activating enzyme, H4MPT: tetrahydromethanopterin pathway for formaldehyde
751 oxidation, THF: tetrahydrofolate pathway for formaldehyde oxidation, glutathione: glutathione
752 pathway for formaldehyde oxidation, formate DH: formate dehydrogenase, RuMP: ribulose
753 monophosphate pathway, based on the key enzymes 3-hexulose-6-phosphate synthase and 3-
754 hexulose-6-phosphate isomerase. For the serine cycle, the key enzymes hydroxypyruvate reductase,

755 glycerate 2-kinase, malate thiokinase, malyl coenzyme A lyase, isocitrate lyase and crotonyl-CoA
756 reductase were taken into account. For the Calvin cycle, the key enzyme ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate
757 carboxylase/oxygenase was taken into account.

758 **Figure 4: Phylogenetic affiliation of the key methanotrophs and methylotrophs identified at the**

759 **Elba methane seep.** (A) Phylogenetic tree representing key methanotrophs, based on a concatenated
760 amino acid alignment of 36 single copy marker genes with a total of 6 329 positions. Only
761 metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs) related to *Methylococcaceae* with at least 50%
762 completeness are shown. *Pseudomonas oryzae* (*Pseudomonadales*) was included as an outgroup to
763 root the tree. (B) Phylogenetic tree representing key methylotrophs, based on a concatenated amino
764 acid alignment of 94 single copy marker genes with a total of 21 475 positions. Only MAGs related to
765 *Methylophilaceae* with at least 35% completeness are shown. *Sulfuricella denitrificans*
766 (*Gallionellaceae*) was included as an outgroup to root the tree. Both trees were inferred with the
767 Approximately-Maximum-Likelihood approach of FastTree using the JTT-CAT model for amino acid
768 evolution, local support values were calculated using the Shimodaira-Hasegawa test from 1 000
769 resamples. The scale bars indicate the number of amino acid changes per site.

770 **Figure 5: Conceptual overview of communal methane metabolism at the Elba seep.** The character C
771 in red indicates methane-derived carbon. OC: organic carbon compounds released from the primary
772 methane utilizing community of *Methylococcaceae* and *Methylophilaceae*. *Methane consumption
773 of the microbial community estimated based on average consumption rates in microcosms from this
774 study. †Methane flux from sediments to hydrosphere as reported in Ruff et al., 2015 (Ruff et al.,
775 2015).

776 **Table 1: Statistics for metagenome-assembled genomes affiliated with *Methylococcaceae*,**

777 ***Methylophilaceae* and other *Alphaproteobacteria*.** Taxonomic relationships were elucidated based
778 on concatenated amino acid alignments of taxon-specific single copy marker genes using the ezTree

779 pipeline (Wu, 2018). ¹Based on CheckM analysis (Parks et al., 2015). N50: 50% of the genome
780 assembly is contained in scaffolds equal to or larger than this value.

781 **Table 2: Presence and expression of functional genes for C₁ metabolism in metagenome-assembled**
782 **genomes.** White fields indicate presence of functional genes for the respective function, red fields
783 indicate expression of the encoded enzymes based on metaproteomics analysis. Numbers in the
784 fields indicate number of genes expressed / number of genes present. ¹Based on key genes 3-
785 hexulose-6-phosphate synthase and 3-hexulose-6-phosphate isomerase. ²Based on key genes
786 hydroxypyruvate reductase, glycerate 2-kinase, malate thiokinase, malyl coenzyme A lyase, isocitrate
787 lyase and crotonyl-CoA reductase. ³Based on key gene ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate
788 carboxylase/oxygenase.

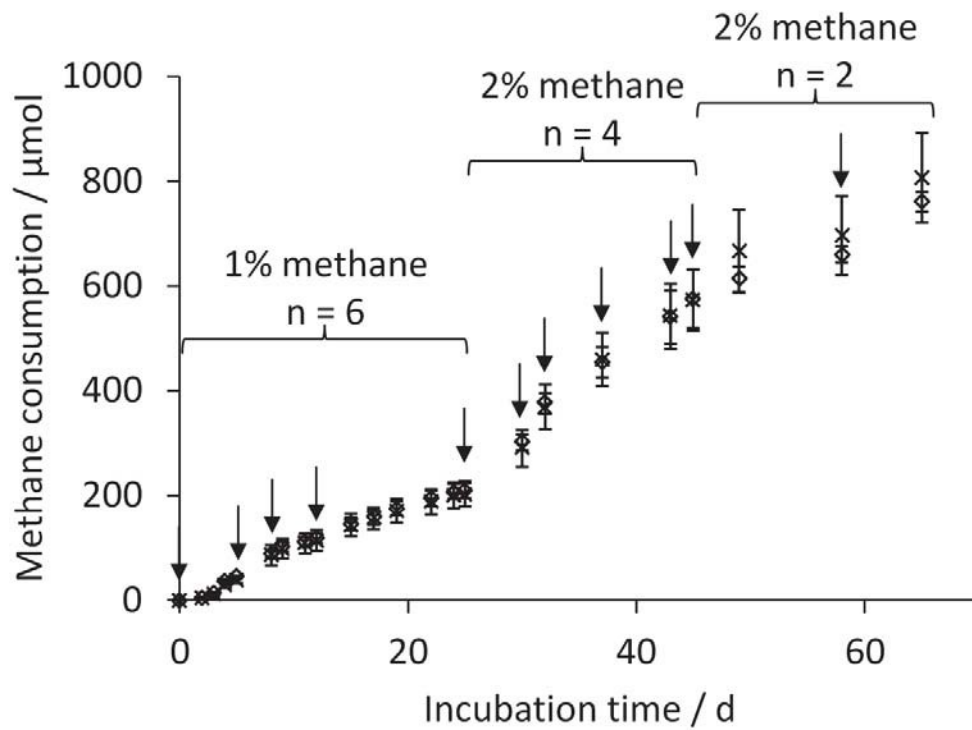


Figure 1: Methane consumption in microcosms with sediment from the Elba methane seep. Values given are the cumulative amount of methane consumed in the microcosms. Separate averaged values for microcosms with ^{12}C -methane and microcosms with ^{13}C -methane are depicted by cross and diamond symbols, respectively. Error bars indicate standard deviation. Arrows indicate time points of methane addition. Brackets display the amount of methane (% headspace, v:v) of each addition and number of replicate microcosms (n) each supplemented with ^{12}C - or ^{13}C -methane.

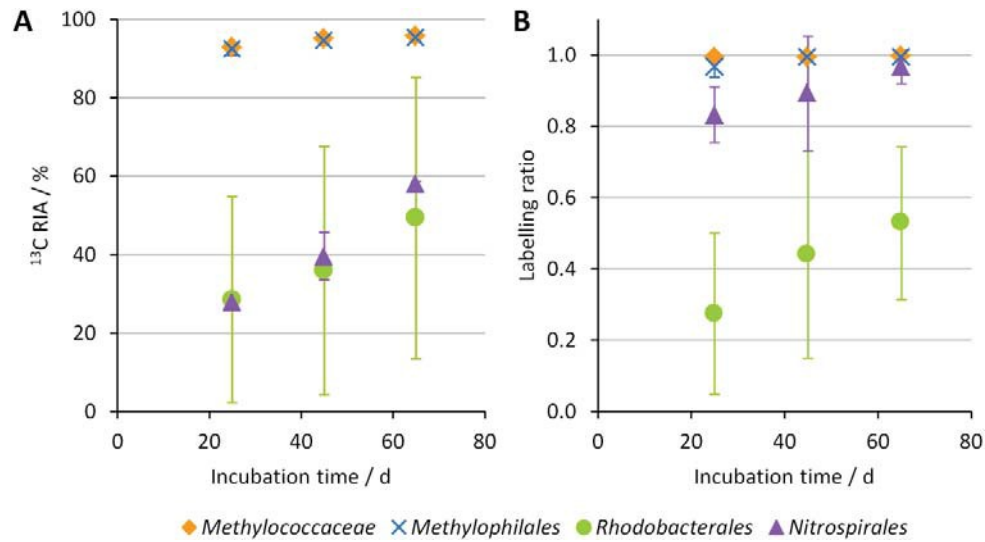


Figure 2: ^{13}C incorporation into peptides of different bacterial taxonomic groups. Values depict (A) the ^{13}C relative isotope abundance (RIA), i.e., the amount of carbon replaced by ^{13}C , and (B) the labelling ratio, i.e., the abundance of ^{13}C -labelled compared to unlabelled molecules, of peptides specific to the given taxonomic groups after incubation of sediment for 25, 45 and 65 days with ^{13}C -methane. Values are based on $n = 10$ peptides per time point, error bars show standard deviation.

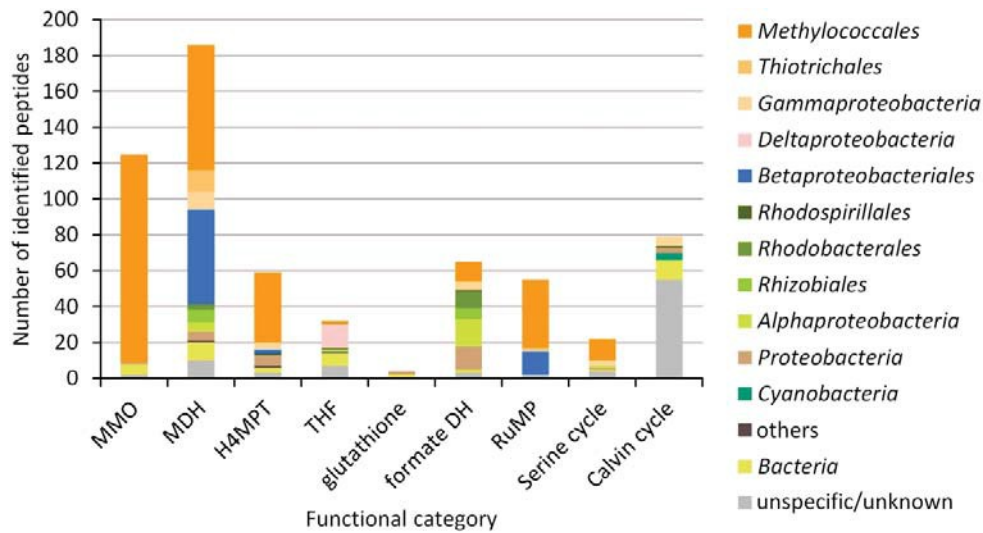


Figure 3: Functional classification of identified peptides. The numbers of peptides affiliated to different enzymes and pathways of different functional categories relevant for C₁ metabolism are shown. Colors depict the taxonomic distribution of the peptides in each functional category based on the lowest common ancestor of each peptide. Peptide identification is based on metaproteomics analysis of samples from microcosms with ¹²C-methane of all three time points (n = 6). The peptides were identified using NCBI nr and the metagenome-assembled genomes obtained in this study as reference databases. MMO: methane monooxygenase, MDH: methanol dehydrogenase, FAE: formaldehyde-activating enzyme, H4MPT: tetrahydromethanopterin pathway for formaldehyde oxidation, THF: tetrahydrofolate pathway for formaldehyde oxidation, glutathione: glutathione pathway for formaldehyde oxidation, formate DH: formate dehydrogenase, RuMP: ribulose monophosphate pathway, based on the key enzymes 3-hexulose-6-phosphate synthase and 3-hexulose-6-phosphate isomerase. For the serine cycle, the key enzymes hydroxypyruvate reductase, glycerate 2-kinase, malate thiokinase, malyl coenzyme A lyase, isocitrate lyase and crotonyl-CoA reductase were taken into account. For the Calvin cycle, the key enzyme ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase was taken into account.

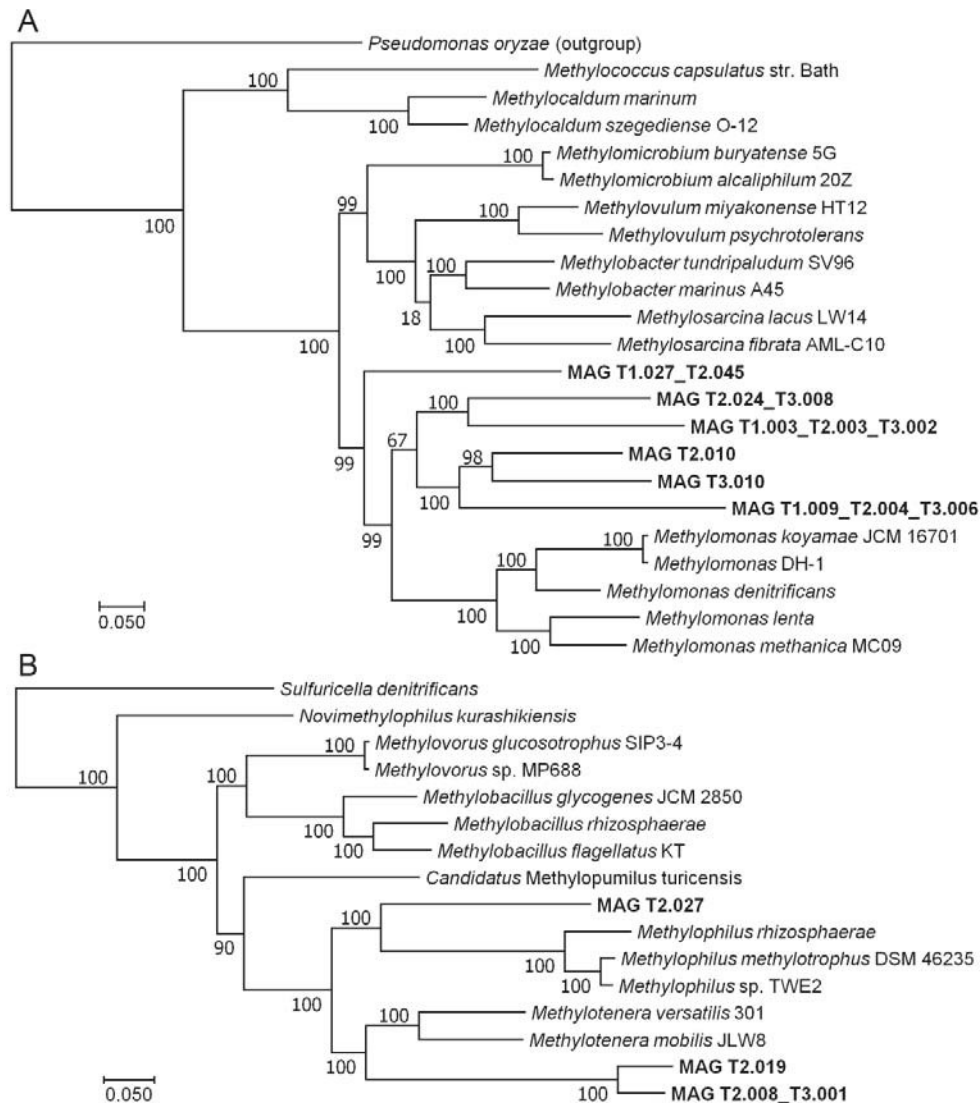


Figure 4: Phylogenetic affiliation of the key methanotrophs and methylotrophs identified at the Elba methane seep. (A) Phylogenetic tree representing key methanotrophs, based on a concatenated amino acid alignment of 36 single copy marker genes with a total of 6 329 positions. Only metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs) related to *Methylococcaceae* with at least 50% completeness are shown. *Pseudomonas oryzae* (*Pseudomonadales*) was included as an outgroup to root the tree. (B) Phylogenetic tree representing key methylotrophs, based on a concatenated amino acid alignment of 94 single copy marker genes with a total of 21 475 positions. Only MAGs related to *Methylophilaceae* with at least 35% completeness are shown. *Sulfuricella denitrificans* (*Gallionellaceae*) was included as an outgroup to root the tree. Both trees were inferred with the Approximately-Maximum-Likelihood approach of FastTree using the JTT-CAT model for amino acid evolution, local support values were calculated using the Shimodaira-Hasegawa test from 1 000 resamples. The scale bars indicate the number of amino acid changes per site.

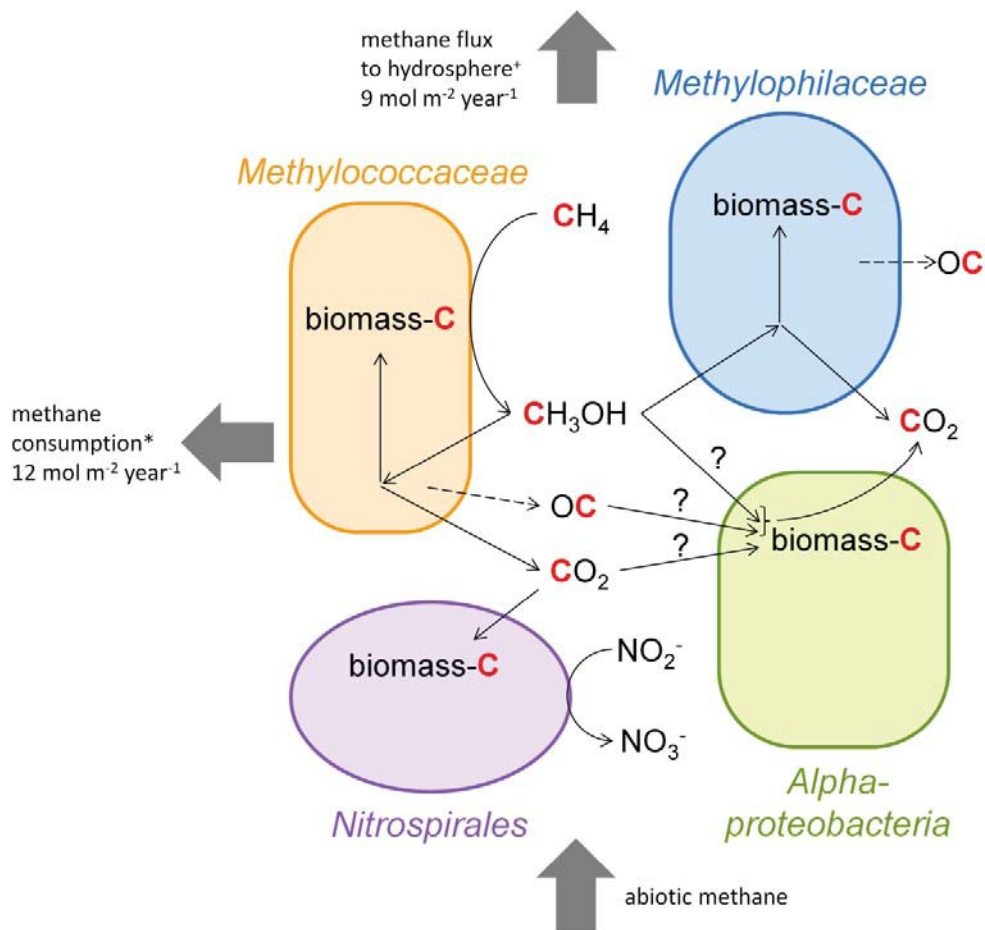


Figure 5: Conceptual overview of communal methane metabolism at the Elba seep. The character C in red indicates methane-derived carbon. OC: organic carbon compounds released from the primary methane utilizing community of *Methylococcaceae* and *Methylophilaceae*. *Methane consumption of the microbial community estimated based on average consumption rates in microcosms from this study.

+Methane flux from sediments to hydrosphere as reported in Ruff et al., 2015 (Ruff et al., 2015).

Table 1

MAG ID	Completeness ¹ / %	Contamination ¹ / %	Genome size / bp	# scaffolds	N50 / bp	Longest scaffold / bp	GC-content / %	Taxonomy
T2.024_T3.008	100	1.7	3683201	376	34899	93907	44.2	<i>Methylococcaceae</i>
T1.009_T2.004_T3.006	83	0.0	2300148	655	4880	22077	41	
T1.003_T2.003_T3.002	83	1.7	3077222	293	75471	205488	45.4	
T2.010	79	12.9	2913017	643	6449	30650	43.2	
T3.010	70	1.7	1589959	663	2776	11559	39.9	
T1.027_T2.045	54	0.0	2190210	498	6013	23572	50.7	
T1.007_T2.016_T3.009	48	21.9	2527797	1237	2234	22330	46.4	
T1.019_T2.038	44	10.0	890090	349	3371	21537	41	
T1.030	32	0.0	555941	75	11159	37635	43.5	
T1.008	28	0.0	1494445	617	3100	17312	40	
T2.043	22	0.0	362264	189	2000	6705	43.8	
T3.014	19	0.0	758301	465	1669	5485	42.2	
T2.026	18	0.0	717869	348	2219	9852	42.4	
T1.022	17	1.9	412297	304	1307	3810	40.5	
T2.011	17	3.5	444422	193	2739	15981	45	
T1.002	13	1.7	389904	210	1836	8026	45.4	
T2.056	12	0.0	433371	233	1946	5949	41.5	
T1.005	12	1.7	357089	217	1700	5296	42.9	
T2.027	90	7.6	1688246	192	19805	82017	43.8	<i>Methylophilaceae</i>
T2.008_T3.001	84	8.6	2242488	316	40778	107604	44.5	
T2.019	36	0.0	1151259	154	18334	44712	45.4	
T2.058	20	0.0	313978	123	2860	10416	44.3	
T2.018	16	0.0	672373	229	3746	22975	44.5	
T2.053	8	2.7	237367	104	2715	8566	44.5	
T2.009	91	0.0	2013842	46	107948	212351	54.8	<i>Rhodobacterales</i>
T2.007	88	0.0	2945199	280	15984	62688	57.7	<i>Rhodobacterales</i>
T2.006_T3.003	71	1.7	3450492	222	63712	159910	56.7	<i>Rhodobacterales</i>
T2.015	57	0.3	2302051	202	19356	68546	59.1	<i>Hyphomonadaceae</i>
T2.014	47	1.7	1805201	302	10348	38924	58.2	<i>Rhodobacterales</i>
T2.023	45	7.5	1925340	1179	1653	8054	54.3	<i>Alphaproteobacteria</i>
T2.054	42	0.0	1519802	590	3097	12667	50.4	<i>Alphaproteobacteria</i>
T3.011	36	0.0	1629932	595	3299	11661	57.4	<i>Hyphomonadaceae</i>
T1.014	35	0.0	826762	285	3403	12803	49.6	<i>Rhodobacterales</i>
T2.029	25	1.0	1825719	1003	1936	7230	56.9	<i>Labrenzia</i>
T1.018	18	3.8	803406	573	1353	4436	57.9	<i>Hyphomonadaceae</i>
T1.016	17	0.0	1413249	817	1778	10583	57.9	<i>Rhodobacterales</i>
T2.033	13	3.5	251432	198	1245	2899	58.2	<i>Alphaproteobacteria</i>
T1.015_T2.022	4	0.0	593602	408	1414	5020	64.1	<i>Rhodobacterales</i>

Table 2

	MAG ID	methane oxidation			methanol oxidation		C ₁ oxidation				C ₁ assimilation		
		methane monoxygenase/ammonia monoxygenase (<i>pmo</i>)	soluble methane monoxygenase (<i>mmo</i>)	methyl-coenzyme m reductase (<i>mcr</i>)	methanol dehydrogenase (<i>mxoA</i> F)	methanol dehydrogenase (<i>xox</i> F)	tetrahydromethanopterin (H4MPT) pathway for formaldehyde oxidation	tetrahydrofolate (THF) pathway for formaldehyde oxidation	glutathione pathway for formaldehyde oxidation	formate dehydrogenase	ribulose monophosphate pathway ¹	serine pathway ²	Calvin-Benson-Bassham cycle ³
<i>Methylococcaceae</i>	T2.024_T3.008	3 / 3				1 / 1	3 / 14	0 / 3			3 / 3	0 / 4	
	T1.009_T2.004_T3.006	2 / 5				1 / 1	3 / 14	0 / 2		0 / 2	2 / 4	0 / 4	
	T1.003_T2.003_T3.002	1 / 8				1 / 1	1 / 9	0 / 3	0 / 1	1 / 1	1 / 2	0 / 4	
	T2.010	0 / 6					1 / 21	0 / 4	0 / 2	0 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 7	
	T3.010						2 / 9	0 / 1		0 / 1		0 / 3	
	T1.027_T2.045	0 / 2				1 / 1	1 / 8	0 / 3		0 / 1	2 / 2	0 / 1	
	T1.007_T2.016_T3.009	0 / 7					1 / 23	0 / 9	0 / 1	0 / 3		0 / 1	
	T1.019_T2.038					2 / 2	0 / 9			0 / 1		0 / 2	
	T1.030											0 / 3	
	T1.008	1 / 1				1 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 1				0 / 3	
	T2.043						0 / 2					0 / 3	
	T3.014	2 / 4					0 / 4	0 / 1				0 / 3	
	T2.026						1 / 5	0 / 2				0 / 2	
	T1.022	0 / 1					0 / 2	0 / 1		0 / 1		0 / 4	
	T2.011	0 / 9					0 / 5	0 / 1		0 / 1			
	T1.002	3 / 4					0 / 3						
	T2.056						0 / 2	0 / 1					
T1.005	1 / 3						0 / 1						
<i>Methylophilaceae</i>	T2.027					1 / 1	1 / 9	0 / 3		0 / 1	0 / 3		
	T2.008_T3.001					2 / 4	0 / 7	0 / 3		0 / 1	2 / 3		
	T2.019					0 / 1	0 / 7	0 / 2		0 / 2	0 / 1		
	T2.058							0 / 1					
	T2.018						0 / 3	0 / 3		0 / 1			
	T2.053					2 / 2	1 / 4			0 / 1	0 / 1		
<i>Alphaproteobacteria</i>	T2.009							0 / 2	0 / 1			0 / 3	
	T2.007							0 / 3	0 / 2	1 / 2		0 / 7	0 / 1
	T2.006_T3.003							0 / 3	1 / 3			0 / 12	0 / 1
	T2.015							0 / 2	0 / 2			1 / 5	
	T2.014							0 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 1		0 / 3	
	T2.023							0 / 2	0 / 2	1 / 3		0 / 3	
	T2.054							0 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 1		0 / 1	
	T3.011							0 / 1	0 / 3			0 / 4	
	T1.014							0 / 1				0 / 1	
	T2.029							0 / 2	0 / 2	2 / 2		0 / 2	
	T1.018							0 / 1	0 / 3			0 / 5	
	T1.016							0 / 2				0 / 3	
	T2.033											0 / 1	
	T1.015_T2.022					1 / 1	1 / 1	1 / 3				0 / 2	