



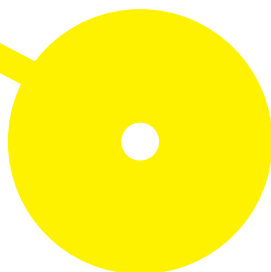
MESTRADO

BIOQUÍMICA EM SAÚDE- RAMO BIOTECNOLOGIA

Comparative analysis of the binding of punicalagin and silibinin in PDIA 1 and PDIA 3

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2018/2019



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Comparative analysis of the binding of punicalagin and silibinin in PDIA 1 AND PDIA 3

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Dissertação apresentada para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em **Bioquímica em Saúde** – Ramo **Biotecnologia** pela Escola Superior de Saúde do Instituto Politécnico do Porto.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Fabio Altieri, for all the dedication, guidance, patience and kindness provided since the very first day, as well as for always pushing me to try harder and reach further.

Secondly, I would like to thank Giuliano Paglia, my lab partner, for all the time and thought provided. With no concrete obligation to the project, Giuliano, replied to my questions and concerns promptly and thoroughly, providing useful help throughout the entire project. For that and for all the comforting words, I am thankful.

I also would like to express my most sincere gratitude to Dr. Ricardo Ferraz, my institutional supervisor for the help, patience and kindness provided.

Lastly, I would like to specially thank Bianca Silva (Bioquímica em Saúde Masters student), with whom I developed a strong connection from the first day. Her friendship and support kept me strong and positive, even during the most discouraging times throughout this whole process.

Resumo

Polifenóis isolados a partir da romã e do cardo mariano possuem várias propriedades farmacológicas como anti-inflamatória, hepatoprotetora, antígenotóxica e anticoagulante. O presente estudo foca-se na interação das proteínas PDIA1 e PDIA3 com as substâncias polifenólicas punicalagina e silibilina. As proteínas acima mencionadas fazem parte da família de proteínas dissulfeto isomerase, envolvidas em várias funções celulares associadas a diferentes doenças humanas, concedendo-lhes assim potencial de alvo terapêutico.

A interação dos polifenóis com a PDIA1 e a PDIA3 foi estudada por fluorescência e técnicas calorimétricas e o seu efeito na actividade das proteínas também foi descrito.

Os dois polifenóis são capazes de se ligar a ambas as proteínas, mas a interação produz efeitos diferentes. Isto está ligado ao facto das duas moléculas se ligarem em diferentes sítios nas proteínas e à própria conformação das mesmas. Isto faz da punicalagina um inibidor promissor para a PDIA3. Ao mesmo tempo, a silibilina, embora não demonstre uma ação inibitória específica, se não for limitada à PDIA1, pode ser usada para modular a interação das próprias PDIs com outras proteínas de substrato, que estejam envolvidas na formação de complexos macromoleculares responsáveis pelas atividades celulares das PDIA1 e PDIA3.

Abstract

Polyphenolic compounds isolated from pomegranate fruit from seed fruits of milk thistle possess several pharmacological activities including anti-inflammatory, hepatoprotective, antigenotoxic and anticoagulant activities. The present work focuses the attention on PDIA1 and PDIA3 interactions with punicalagin and silibinin. PDIA1 and PDIA3, are members of the protein disulfide isomerase family involved in several cellular functions, associated with different human diseases and it has the potential to be a pharmacological target.

The interaction of polyphenols with PDIA1 and PDIA3 was explored by fluorescence quenching and calorimetric techniques and their effect on the activity of the proteins were investigated.

The two polyphenols are able to bind both proteins but the interaction that is established produces different effects. This is certainly connectable to a different site of interaction of the two molecules and with the different conformation structure of the proteins themselves. This makes punicalagin a promising selective inhibitor for PDIA3. At the same time silibinin, although not showing a particular inhibitory action, if not limited towards PDIA1, could be used to modulate the interaction of the PDIs themselves with other substrate proteins involved in the formation of macromolecular complexes responsible for the cellular activities of the two PDIAs.

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Abbreviations list

CNX: calnexin

CRP-XL: collagen-related peptide

CRT: calreticulin

DMSO: dimethyl sulfoxide

DSB: disulphide bond formation

DTT: dithiothreitol

ECM: extracellular matrix

EDTA: ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid

ER: endoplasmic reticulum

FBS: fetal bovine serum

Grx: glutaredoxin

GSSG: oxidized glutathione

HEPES: 4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazineethanesulfonic acid

KSV: Fluorescence quenching constant

MAPK: mitogen activated protein kinases

MHC: major histocompatibility complex

PBS: phosphate buffered saline

PDIA1: Protein disulfide isomerase A1

PDIA3: Protein disulfide isomerase A3

PDIs: protein disulfide isomerases

PF4: platelet factor 4

PKC: protein kinase C

PLA2: phospholipase A2

PLAA: phospholipase A2 activating protein

PLC: peptide-loading complex

PLC: phospholipase C

SERCA: sarco/endoplasmic reticulum calcium ATPase

STAT: Signal Transducer and Activator of Transcription

STAT: Signal Transducer and Activator of Transcription

TAP: transporter associated with antigen processing

TCEP: tris(2-carboxyethyl) phosphine

Trx: thioredoxins

TSN: tapasin

TXA2: Thromboxane A2

VEGF: vascular endothelial growth factor

α IIb β 3: glycoprotein IIb/IIIa or fibrinogen receptor

β -DG: one of the two subunit of the extracellular receptor dystroglycan (DG)

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1. Introduction

1.1. Protein Disulfide Isomerase family: a member of the thioredoxin superfamily

Thioredoxins (Trx) are small globular proteins that are found in all living cells from archeabacteria to humans (Holmgren, 1985). The 3-D structures of Trx proteins are highly conserved and are characterized by a central core, consisting of five β -sheets surrounded by four α -helices and their active sites are characterized by the CXXC sequence, also known as the “Trx-motif” (Fig. 1) (Holmgren, 1995; Martin et al., 1995). This structural configuration is known as thioredoxin fold and is present in different protein families, such as protein disulfide isomerases (PDIs), in DSB (disulphide bond formation) proteins, in glutaredoxin (Grx), in the glutathione reductase and glutathione peroxidase. The structural features that are conserved in Trx family members, such as the Trx-fold and the specific primary and secondary structures, lead to a different reactivity in catalyzing protein disulfide interchange reactions. It has been shown that both active site cysteine residues play an important role in the differentiation of the properties across the family and the relative stability (depending on cysteines nucleophilicity) of thiolates determines whether these enzymes catalyze oxidation, reduction or isomerization of thiol residues in protein substrates (Cheng et al., 2011; Hatahet et al., 2009; Carvalho et al., 2009).

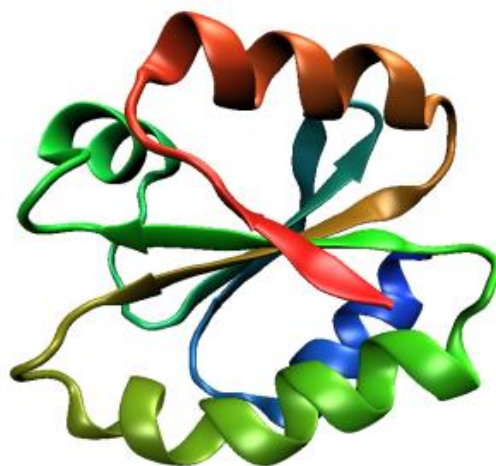


Figure 1. The typical Trx-fold. From (Giagamonte, 2019)

The protein disulfide isomerase (PDI) proteins with active Trx-domains are generally localized in the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER), where they mediate thiol-disulfide interchanges critical during post-translational protein folding (Galligan & Petersen, 2012). This family is composed of 21 known proteins in humans, that belong to the thioredoxin superfamily, classified by sequence and structural homology (Fig. 2).

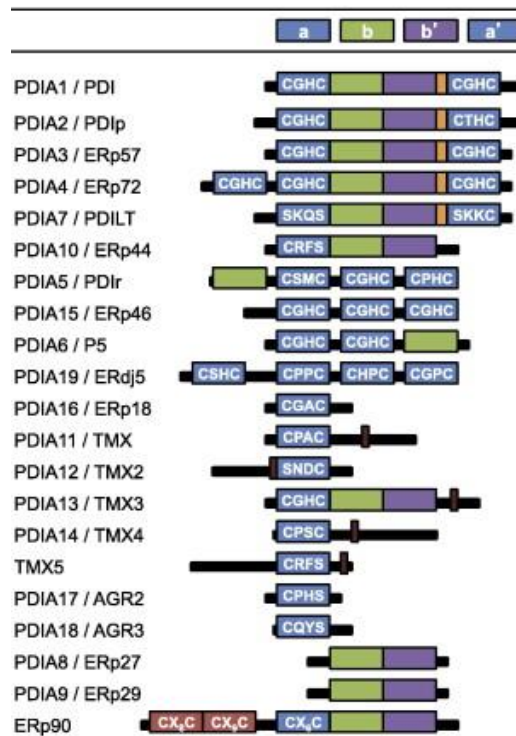


Figure 2. PDI family members in humans. In blue: catalytic domains a and a', in green and purple non-catalytic b and b' domains. From: Andreu et al, 2012

These enzymes catalyze the formation, reduction or isomerization of disulfide bonds of newly synthesized proteins in the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER). They are also part of a quality-control system, thanks to their molecular chaperone function. These proteins show a structural organization with multiple domains; each domain shows the typical Trx-fold and two or three of these domains contain the redox-active -CXXC- motif, while the others are considered Trx inactive domains (Turano et al., 2002). Because of these redox-inactive domains, PDIs have the ability to bind peptides or proteins and to exert a molecular chaperone function (Ferrari et al., 1999; Ellgaard et al., 2005). The number, the arrangement of thioredoxin-like domains and the specific sequence of the catalytic -CXXC- motif can be used to differentiate the members of this family. These differences determine their distinct role in the oxidative folding, but also contribute to their

specific functions in other pathways. Furthermore, the differences in their redox active motifs can reflect separated roles in oxidation, reduction and isomerization (Kozlov et al., 2006).

1.2. PDIA3 protein

1.2.1. PDIA3 structure and functions

PDIA3, also known as ERp57, ERp60, GRP58, and 1,25D3-MARRS, is a prominent member of the PDI family that has attracted significant attention by the research community. PDIA3 was first detected as a stress-responsive protein with upregulated expression following glucose depletion-induced cellular stress (Lee et al., 1981). Trx-like domains of the PDI proteins are present as catalytically active domains (a or a') or inactive domains (b or b'). Each domain contains a Trx-like fold with alternating α -helices and β -strands (Ferrari et al., 1999; Kozlov et al., 2006; Silvennoinen et al., 2004). PDIA3 is structurally similar to PDI, containing four TRX-like domains (a-b-b'-a'), with matching redox active CGHC motifs and similar reduction potentials of the enzymes dual catalytic domains (Hatahet & Ruddock, 2009; Kozlov et al., 2006).

The catalytically inactive central domains, b and b', have a vital role in the specific functionality of PDIA3 in protein binding and folding. The N-terminal signal sequence directs initial ER localization while the C-terminus contains a QDEL ER retention/retrieval motif (Khanal & Nemere, 2007). PDIA3 is classically considered an ER resident protein, but also contains a nuclear location sequence. Indeed, there are evidences that the stimulation with various macrophage differentiation-inducing agents and cellular stressors is able to induce PDIA3 transfer from cytoplasm to nucleus (Grillo et al., 2006; Grindel et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2010). PDIA3 has also been detected on cell surface (Khanal & Nemere, 2007), as well as in mitochondria (He et al., 2014; Ozaki et al., 2008). Regardless of the mechanism(s) underlying PDIA3's subcellular localization, it is clear that the enzyme's activity is not limited to those attributed to classical ER-resident proteins (Fig. 3).

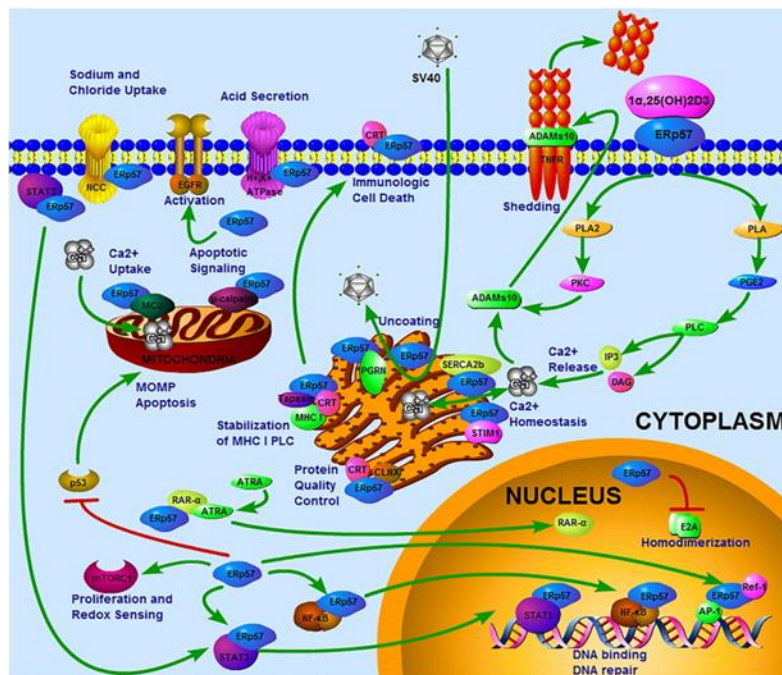


Figure 3. Representative PDIA3 cellular localizations and functions. From: Hettinghouse et al, 2018

1.2.2. PDIA3 localization in the ER

PDIA3 is mainly located in the ER, where it participates to the correct folding and to the quality control of neo-synthesized glycoproteins destined to be secreted or localized to the cell membrane. To do this, PDIA3 interacts with lectins calreticulin (CRT) or calnexin (CNX), which are responsible for recognizing and binding to monoglycosylated proteins (Oliver et al., 1997; Molinari et al., 1999; Oliver et al., 1999).

It has been reported that modifications of specific residues in the b' domain of PDIA3 reduce or abolish its binding to calreticulin, indicating that this domain is responsible for this interaction (Russell et al., 2004). PDIA3, in complex with CRT/CNX, performs disulfide shuffling, a process that requires the intermediate formation of a mixed disulfide between the glycoprotein and the proximal cysteine of one of the two active sites of PDIA3. The shuffling is then completed by the intervention of the distal cysteine present in the same active site. A second important function of PDIA3 in the ER is the participation in the assembly of the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class I (Lindquist e al., 1998). An

efficient antigen processing through the MHC I requires the formation of the peptide-loading complex (PLC). This complex consists of the transporter associated with antigen processing (TAP) as centerpiece, which recruits the major histocompatibility complex class I (MHC I) heavy-chain/ β 2-microglobulin dimer by the adapter protein tapasin (Tsn). The transient Tsn-MHC I interaction is stabilized by PDIA3, and the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) chaperone calreticulin (CRT), which recognizes the monoglucose unit of N-core glycosylated MHC I molecules.

In the PLC, PDIA3 interacts with tapasin (Dick et al., 2002); the structure of this complex has been resolved at 2.6 Å resolution (Dong et al., 2009); this was the first time in which the completely 3D structure of PDIA3 was obtained. Both α and α' domains of PDIA3 are involved in the interaction with tapasin. The cysteine 57 in the domain of PDIA3 forms a disulfide bond with cysteine 95 of tapasin, while the α' domain-tapasin interaction is entirely non-covalent. The tapasin-PDIA3 complex is essential in the assembly and the stabilization of the PLC where PDIA3 shows a structural role rather than a catalytic one. In fact, the suppression of PDIA3 affects the stability of PLC and decreases both the expression of MHC I on the cell surface and the peptide loading within the PLC (Garbi et al., 2006). PDIA3 also modulates the activity of the sarco/endoplasmic reticulum calcium ATPase (SERCA), a Ca^{2+} -ATPase that transfers Ca^{2+} from the cytosol to the lumen of the ER, by regulating the redox state of the sulfhydryl groups in the intraluminal domain of SERCA (Li et al., 2004).

1.2.3. PDIA3 localization in the cytosol

PDIA3 has been reported in the cytosol thanks to its interaction with other proteins. In this localization, it associates with STAT3 (Sehgal, 2003). STAT3 is a member of the STAT (Signal Transducer and Activator of Transcription) family. In response to cytokines and growth factors, these proteins are phosphorylated by receptor-associated kinases and then form homo- or hetero-dimers that translocate to the cell nucleus, where they act as transcription activators. STAT3 is activated through phosphorylation of tyrosine 705, in response to various cytokines and growth factors including interferons, epidermal growth factor and interleukin-6 (IL-6). The binding of IL-6 family cytokines to gp130 receptor triggers STAT3 phosphorylation by JAK2. Hyperactivation of STAT3 is frequently observed in a variety of human cancers, including head and neck cancer (Yu et al., 2004; Yu et al., 2009; Song et al., 2000). Continuous STAT3 activation allows the growth and

survival of cancer cells through modulation of cell cycle regulators (e.g., cyclin D1/D2 and c-Myc), upregulation of anti-apoptotic proteins (e.g., Mcl-1, Bcl-xl, and survivin). Downregulation of the tumor suppressor p53, and induction of angiogenesis by vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF); these mechanisms lead to tumor progression and resistance to anti-cancer drugs (Frank, 2013; Yu et al., 2004; Yu et al., 2009).

It has been reported that PDIA3 modulates STAT3 activity (Eufemi et al., 2004; Chichiarelli et al., 2010), although there are controversial results (Coe et al., 2010). For instance, PDIA3 has been reported to interact with STAT3 and enhance its activity in melanoma and hepatoma cells (Eufemi et al., 2004; Chichiarelli et al., 2010), whereas other research suggested that this PDIA3-STAT3 complex negatively affects STAT3 DNA-binding activity (Coe et al., 2010). Hence, the role of PDIA3 in the STAT3 activity regulation is not completely defined yet. As a further proof of PDIA3 presence in the cytosol, it was found in association with mTOR (Ramírez-Rangel et al., 2011). mTOR is a serine- threonine protein kinase, found in two multiprotein complexes called mTORC1 and mTORC2, which regulate cell proliferation. PDIA3 contributes to the assembly of mTORC1, activates the kinase activity of mTOR, and participates in the mechanism by which mTORC1 detects its upstream signals, such as stimulation by insulin or nutrients. PDIA3 over-expression induces cellular proliferation, while PDIA3 knockdown opposes the proliferation induced by insulin and nutrients. It is reasonable that part of this behavior is related to the mTOR-PDIA3 interaction, considering that mTOR is involved in the regulation of proliferation (Ramírez-Rangel et al., 2011).

1.2.4. PDIA3 localization in the nucleus

PDIA3 was found for the first time in the nuclei of 3T3 cells and rat spermatids (Ohtani et al., 1993) and of chicken hepatocytes, where PDIA3 was found mainly in the internal nuclear matrix fraction (Altieri et al., 1993). This observation was not easily accepted initially, because it was considered unlikely that a protein provided with an ER retention signal can escape from the endoplasmic reticulum. However, nowadays there is strong experimental evidence, provided by different laboratories with a variety of experimental techniques, that PDIA3 can be found in the nucleus. It has been shown that PDIA3 is present in the nuclei of HeLa cells and that it interacts directly with DNA (Coppari et al., 2002). PDIA3 interacts preferentially with A/T rich regions, and in general with DNA regions typical of the MARs (nuclear matrix associated regions) (Coppari et al., 2002; Ferraro et al., 1999). The DNA fragments immunoprecipitated with an anti-PDIA3 antibody from HeLa and Raji cells were enriched in sequences contained either in introns or in 5'-flanking

regions of known genes (Chichiarelli et al., 2007; Chichiarelli et al., 2010). This can be compatible with a gene expression regulatory function. Furthermore, the consensus sequences for STAT3 were found to be associated both with this transcription factor and with PDIA3 (Chichiarelli et al., 2010). Because of the relatively low affinity for DNA and its lack of stringent sequence specificity, PDIA3 cannot itself be considered as a transcription factor, but it might be considered an accessory protein for transcription regulation, possibly maintaining the transcription factors in their proper redox state.

Moreover, PDIA3 shows *in vitro* DNA-binding properties that are strongly dependent on the redox state of the protein. The DNA binds to the α' domain (Grillo et al., 2002) and the binding requires the oxidized form of PDIA3 (Ferraro et al., 1999; Grillo et al., 2007). Evidences, from M14 melanoma cells and HepG2 hepatoma cells, demonstrated the association of STAT3 and PDIA3 also in the nucleus at the level of DNA interaction (Eufemi et al., 2004; Chichiarelli et al., 2010). The PDIA3 silencing in M14 cells causes a decrease in the expression of the STAT3-dependent gene CRP (Chichiarelli et al., 2010), suggesting the possibility of a positive involvement of PDIA3 in the signalling and/or DNA binding of STAT3.

In NB4 leukemia cells, PDIA3 and NF κ B translocate to the nucleus after treatment with calcitriol and phorbol ester (Wu et al., 2010), hypothesizing, again, a role of PDIA3 in the control of gene expression through regulation of the conformation of associated transcription factors.

Finally, PDIA3 displays *in vitro* and *in vivo* affinity for Ref-1, a protein involved in DNA repair as well as in the reduction and activation of transcription factors. These two proteins appear to cooperate in the activation of a variety of transcription factors, which need to be in their reduced form in order to bind DNA (Grillo et al., 2006).

1.2.5. PDIA3 localization on cell membrane

The first time in which it was observed that PDIA3 could escape from the ER was when Hirano and colleagues noticed that the protein was being secreted from 3T3 cells (Hirano et al., 1995). Afterwards several studies showed that PDIA3 could be found on the cell surface or in complexes with cell membrane proteins.

PDIA3 has been found on the surface of the sperm head, where it is required for sperm-egg fusion (Ellerman et al., 2006). Possibly the PDIA3 role is related to the thiol-disulfide exchange reactions necessary for the gamete fusion process.

One of the functions of PDIA3 on the cell surface is the binding of the hydroxylated, hormonal form of vitamin D3, i.e., 1 α ,25- dihydroxycholecalciferol (1 α ,25-(OH)2D3, calcitriol) (Nemere et al., 2004), followed by activation of non-genomic responses and the internalization and nuclear import of PDIA3 itself.

It has been demonstrated that PDIA3 exists in caveolae, where it interacts with phospholipase A2 (PLA2) activating protein (PLAA) and caveolin-1 to initiate a rapid signaling in musculoskeletal cells via PLA2, phospholipase C (PLC), protein kinase C (PKC) and the ERK1/2 family of mitogen activated protein kinases (MAPK) (Boyan et al., 2012).

Moreover, it was recently reported that PDIA3 is associated and co-localizes with β -DG (one of the two subunit of the extracellular receptor dystroglycan, DG) at the plasma membrane of 293-Ebna cells. It has been argued that PDIA3 may assist DG during its post-translational maturation or that it could modulate DG redox state (Sciandra et al., 2012).

PDIA3 is also present on the platelet surface and it has been showed that its inhibition blocks platelet activation (Holbrook et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2012). PDIA3 is secreted by platelets and endothelial cells upon vascular injury and accumulates in the thrombus, where it regulates the activation and recruitment of other platelets (Holbrook et al., 2012).

Dihazi and colleagues (Dihazi et al., 2011) showed that PDIA3 was found to be secreted by renal cells in high amounts upon profibrotic cytokine treatment, and to interact with extracellular matrix (ECM) proteins, such as fibronectin and collagen. These data suggest that secreted PDIA3 could participate in ECM synthesis and stabilization, thus potentially leading to a progressive renal fibrosis.

1.2.6. PDIA3 and diseases

PDIA3 has been associated with several human diseases such as cancer, prion disorders, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and hepatitis (Hetz et al., 2005; Martin et al., 1993; Muhlenkamp and Gill, 1998; Seliger et al., 2001; Erickson et al., 2005; Tourkova et al., 2005). PDIA3 expression is increased in transformed cells, and it is thought that its role in oncogenic transformation is directly due to its ability to control intracellular and extracellular redox activities (Hirano et al., 1995). An increase in PDIA3 expression has also been observed in the early stages of prion disease, suggesting that it may play a

neuroprotective role in the cellular response to prion infection (Hetz et al., 2005). Parkinson's disease is characterized by the progressive loss of dopaminergic neurons of the substantia nigra. It has been shown that the treatment of cell lines with 6-hydroxydopamine (6-OHDA, a Parkinson mimetic neurotoxin that selectively kills dopaminergic neurons) induces PDIA3 oxidation and PDIA3-DNA conjugates formation. It was suggested that PDIA3 plays an early adaptive response in toxin-mediated stress (Kim-Han et al., 2007).

1.2.7. PDIA3 and platelet aggregation

Platelets play a central role in the hemostatic process, including recognizing the site of injury, recruiting additional platelets by intercellular signaling, adhering to each other, and interacting with the coagulation cascade to form a haemostatic plug. Inappropriate platelet activation, and subsequent thrombus formation, is important in the clinical complications of arterial atherosclerosis and thrombosis. Platelets are activated by a variety of agents which act to recruit additional platelets to the site of injury, leading to the consolidation of the aggregate.

This activation process is initiated by the engagement of a range of specific cell surface receptors and associated to intracellular signaling pathways:

Exocytosis of granular products: ADP, serotonin, calcium and fibrinogen are important in the recruitment of platelets to the site of injury.

- Expression of granular membrane proteins: Adhesive proteins (e.g., GPIb, P-selectin, CD63, and several integrins) have been shown to be present on the membranes of intracellular granules and are expressed on the surface of activated platelets.
- Eicosanoid formation: The arachidonic acid cascade is initiated, leading to Thromboxane A₂ (TXA₂) synthesis. TXA₂ is a platelet agonist that plays a pro-aggregatory role.
- Surface expression of adhesive receptors: There is a conformational change in the α IIb β 3 integrin on the platelet surface from an inactive to an active configuration, exposing a fibrinogen and von Willebrand.

Factor binding domain on the α IIb β 3 integrin that facilitates inter-platelet binding (McNicol and Israels, Critical Review, 2003). PDIA3 is also present on the platelet surface and it is secreted by endothelial cells upon vascular injury and accumulates in the thrombus, where it regulates the

activation and recruitment of other platelets (Holbrook et al., 2012). In fact, it has been demonstrated through proteomic approach that PDIA3 is upregulated and released after GPVI activation, a glycoprotein receptor for collagen (Holbrook et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2014). Anti-PDIA3 antibody inhibits platelet aggregation, ATP secretion, calcium mobilization and activation of glycoprotein IIb/IIIa or fibrinogen receptor (α IIb β 3) in platelets stimulated with collagen-related peptide (CRP-XL), while platelet factor 4 (PF4) and P-selectin expression is minimally altered (Wang et al., 2013; Holbrook et al., 2012). Genetically engineered mice lacking platelet-derived PDIA3 have prolonged tail bleeding times. PDIA3-null platelets reveal decreased platelet aggregation and decreased activation of α IIb β 3 (Wu et al., 2012). β 3 integrins pair with α IIb on the surface of platelets to create fibrinogen receptor α IIb β 3, the integrin activation is accompanied by several conformational changes that require a new pattern of disulfide bond formation (Zhou et al., 2014). PDIA3 binding β 3 integrin in thrombin-activated platelets is probably involved in platelets aggregation, due to its redox activity; however, the underlying mechanism is not completely understood. (Schulman et al., 2016).

1.3. PDIA 1 protein

Protein disulfide isomerase A1 (PDIA1) is an endoplasmic reticulum (ER)-localized thiol-disulfide oxidoreductase that is an important folding catalyst for secretory pathway proteins. PDIA1 contains two active-site domains (a and a'), each containing a Cys-Gly-His-Cys (CGHC) active-site motif. The two active-site domains share 37% sequence identity and function independently to perform disulfide-bond reduction, oxidation, and isomerization. Numerous inhibitors for PDIA1 have been reported, yet the selectivity of these inhibitors toward the a and a' sites is poorly characterized (Cole et al., 2018).

PDIA1 was the first PDI family member to be discovered. (Xu et al, 2014; Hatahet and Ruddock, 2009; Goldberger et al, 1963, Venetianer and Straub, 1963) and it is a 57 kDa oxidoreductase and molecular chaperone that is located in the lumen of the ER and accounts for roughly 0.8% of the total cellular protein (Freedman, 1984). PDIA1 catalyzes the oxidation, reduction, and isomerization of disulfide bonds between cysteine residues on its protein substrates and is organized into four globular domains, a, b, b', and a', as well as a highly acidic C-terminal extension with a KDEL ER retention sequence (Xu et al, 2014; Hatahet and Ruddock, 2009). The a and a' domains functionally resemble thioredoxin and contain redox catalytic Cys-Gly-His-Cys (CGHC) active-site motifs. It is known that the a and a' domains operate independently of each other because mutation of either active-site cysteine eliminated 50% of the catalytic activity of PDIA1 in

vitro, while mutations in both active sites completely abolished activity (Vuori et al, 1992). The noncatalytic domains, b and b', have primary functions of spacing and substrate recruitment. The b' domain is the major substrate binding site of PDIA1, containing a large hydrophobic cavity between helices $\alpha 1$ and $\alpha 3$ to interact with unfolded protein substrates (Kozlov et al, 2010; Klappa et al 1998).

The dysregulation of PDIA1 activity has been implicated in a variety of diseases, including cancer (Xu et al, 2014 The Cancer Genome Atlas Research Network, 2008; Shai et al, 2003; Van et al 2009) cardiovascular diseases (Shibata et al, 2001; Severino et al, 2007; Laurindo et al, 2008), and neurodegenerative diseases (Uehara et al, 2006; Unterberger et al, 2006; Hoozemans et al, 2007; Hoffstrom et al 2010). PDIA1 is retained in the ER through a C-terminal KDEL retention signal sequence; however, the presence of PDIA1 in the extracellular milieu is well-documented (Xu et al, 2014; Khan et al, 2011; Jiang et al 1999). Extracellular PDIA1 is involved in many biological processes such as platelet activation, thrombus formation, and viral infection (Khan et al, 2011).

For example, PDIA1 can catalyze the reduction of structural disulfides on gp120, which results in a major conformational change, allowing the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) to interact with the cell surface (Khan et al, 2011).

The demonstrated role of increased PDIA1 activity in various diseases has spurred the development of a variety of small- molecule inhibitors targeting PDIA1. For example, Juniferdin, which was discovered in a high-throughput screen of natural products, inhibits extracellular PDIA1-mediated disulfide-bond reduction of gp120 and inhibits the entry of HIV into host cells (Khan et al, 2011) Quercetin 3- rutinoside binds to the b'x region of extracellular PDIA1 to induce a compact conformation and inhibit thrombus formation (Lin et al, 2015) T8, along with derivative JP04-042, sensitizes cancer cells to subtoxic concentrations of etoposide through inhibition of PDIA1 by reversible binding (Eirich et al, 2014). Another reversible inhibitor of PDIA1, LOC14, was identified from a high- throughput screen of approximately 10000 compounds and induces an oxidized conformation that is neuroprotective in PC12 cells expressing mutant huntingtin protein (Kaplan et al 2015)

1.4. Polyphenols

Flavonoids are a large class of polyphenolic compounds ubiquitous in plants and mostly present in fruits, vegetables and plant-based beverages such as tea and wine (Perez-Jimenez et al.,

2010). Flavonoids are further sub-classified in to flavones, flavonols, isoflavones, flavanones, flavanols and anthocyanidins (Manach et al., 2004; Bravo 1998).

These physiologically active compounds have multiple well-known health beneficial effects. Many studies have suggested an association between consumption of flavonoids-rich food or beverages and the prevention of many degenerative diseases, including cancer, neurodegeneration and coronary heart disease and stroke (Woo et al., 2013; Hui et al., 2013; Hertog et al., 1993). The protection offered by flavonoids is believed to be due to their antioxidant activity. The aromatic rings of the flavonoid molecule allow donation and acceptance of electrons from free radical species (Halliwell 2006). In addition, many polyphenols regenerate the traditional antioxidant vitamins, vitamin C and vitamin E (Mandel et al., 2008) and act as metal chelators (Moridani et al., 2003). It has been suggested that, in lower amounts, flavonoids as well as polyphenols may exert pharmacological activity within the cells, having the potential to modulate intracellular signaling pathways. Many polyphenols can induce antioxidant enzymes such as glutathione peroxidase, catalase, superoxide dismutase, and inhibit the expression of enzymes such as xanthine oxidase, which is involved in the generation of free radicals (Alvarez-Suarez et al., 2011; Moskaug et al., 2005). However, for many of them the molecular and cellular bases of these activities are not known yet.

Besides, data from literature indicate that several phytochemicals can be found in pomegranate fruits and can be a valuable aid in counteracting oxidative stress and preventing some major diseases. Pomegranate extracts have important biological properties, including anti-atherosclerotic, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and antigenotoxics, properties that can help in preventing the development of chronic and debilitating diseases such as cardiovascular illnesses, type 2 diabetes and cancer (Jurenka 2008; Adams et al., 2006). These activities have been attributed to the high content of phenolic compounds (Turrini et al., 2015; Medjakovic et al., 2013). The nutraceutical properties of pomegranate are not limited to the edible part of the fruit; in fact, non-edible fractions of fruit and tree (e.g., peel, flower, ...) contain even higher amounts of biologically active components. The peel of the pomegranate is rich in ellagitannins, such punicalagin, punicalin, gallagic acid, ellagic acid and glycosides (Fig. 6) (Akhtar et al., 2015; Masci et al., 2016). Furthermore, another important polyphenol that can be found in milk thistle is silibinin.

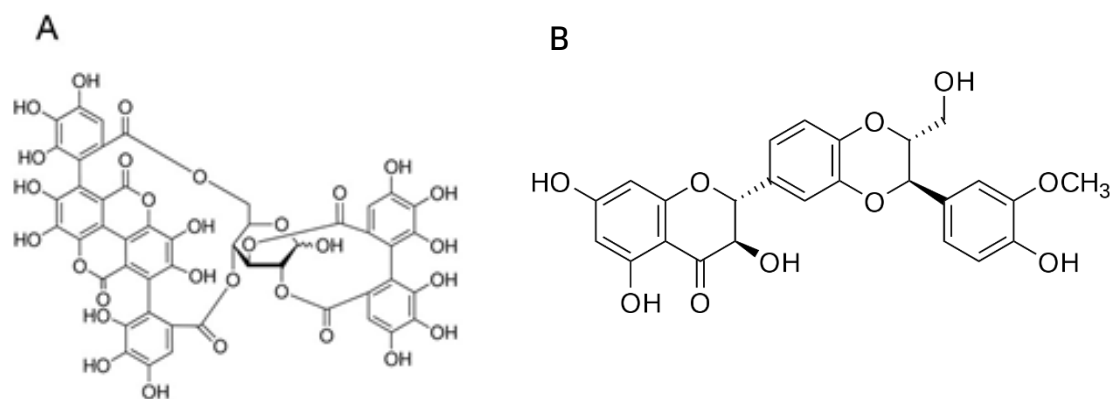


Figure 4. Chemical structure of punicalagin (A) silibinin (B)

Punicalagin, a unique pomegranate compound of high molecular weight soluble in water, is the predominant ellagitannin. Punicalagin features important biological activities, including anti-inflammatory, hepatoprotective and anti-genotoxic activities. However, there are currently few studies on punicalagin biological efficacy (Seeram et al., 2006).

Silibinin or silybin, the active component of silymarin, isolated from seed fruits of milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*) is a natural polyphenolic flavonoid (Sibai et al., 2005) Silibinin exhibits potent antioxidant, immunomodulatory, antifibrotic, antiproliferative, and antiviral activities, although the mechanism of action is incompletely understood (Gazak et al, 2007; Cheung et al 2010; Polyak et al, 2013). The medicinal benefits of this plant were first reported by Theoprastus of Eresos (fourth century B.C.), Pedanios Dioscorides (50 A.D.), and Plinius the Elder (first century A.D.) (Flora et al, 1998). There are more than 12,000 papers published on silibinin related substances, used as antioxidants, chemopreventives, anticancer agents, and especially as hepatoprotectants in the last 10 years (Carvalho and Festi, 2011).

1.5. The aim of the thesis

The aim of this work is to make a comparative study between PDIA1 and PDIA3, the two main cellular disulfide isomerases, and to characterize their interaction with two polyphenols. The two selected polyphenols, silibinin and punicalagin, present in pomegranate and milk thistle, are easily accessible and their beneficial properties on human health are well known. Furthermore, punicalagin and silibinin have been chosen because previous studies have shown their ability to bind

PDIA3, and punicalagin has been shown to be an excellent inhibitor of PDIA3 reductase activity itself. In this study the interaction of the two molecules with the two proteins was compared to highlight a possible selective activity and to evaluate how the analyzed substances are able to modify the activity and the structure of the two proteins.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Identification of specific natural PDIA3 interactors able to bind and modulate its activity

2.1.1. Chemicals

Punicalagin, silibiline, phosphate buffered saline (PBS), tris(2- carboxyethyl) phosphine (TCEP), dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), 4-(2- hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazineethanesulfonic acid (HEPES), dithiothreitol (DTT), oxidized glutathione (GSSG), eosin isothiocyanate, glutamine, sodium pyruvate, fetal bovine serum (FBS), penicillin and streptomycin were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich. EDTA (ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid) 0.5 M solution pH 8.0 was from IBI Scientific and sodium 3´-(1-(phenylaminocarbonyl)- 3,4- tetrazolium)-bis (4-methoxy- 6-nitro) benzene sulfonic acid hydrate (XTT) from Biotium. SYPRO Orange was from Invitrogen.

2.1.2. Protein expression and purification

Human recombinant PDIA3 was cloned and expressed in *Escherichia coli* strain BL21 using the expression vector pET21 (Novagen) as previously described (Coppari et al., 2002). The coding sequence for the second redox-active domain (a' domain, residues 377-505) was amplified by PCR as previously described and cloned in the expression vector pET29 (Novagen) (Grillo et al., 2007). Recombinant proteins were expressed in *E. coli* strain BL21 and purified by ammonium sulphate fractionation, ion exchange and heparin chromatography (Grillo et al., 2007; Grillo et al., 2006). Protein purification was evaluated by SDS-PAGE and concentration was determined spectrophotometrically (PDIA3 ϵ_{280} reduced form = 44,997 M⁻¹cm⁻¹).

Human recombinant PDIA1 was obtained from Lloyd W. Ruddock laboratories' and expressed in *E. coli* strain BL21 using the expression vector pET21 (Novagen). The coding sequence of the protein was fused at the N terminal with an HisTaq. Recombinant proteins were expressed in *E. coli* strain BL21 and purified by nickel chromatography, followed by ions exchange chromatography. Protein purification was evaluated by SDS-PAGE and concentration was determined spectrophotometrically. (PDIA1 ϵ_{280} reduced form = 44,567 M⁻¹cm⁻¹).

2.1.3. Fluorescence Quenching Measurements

The PDIA3/PDIA1 interactions with punicalagin and silibinin were evaluated by fluorimetric titration. Fluorescence spectra were recorded using a SPEX- FluoroMax spectrofluorimeter (Horiba Scientific) from 300 to 400 nm with excitation at 290 nm using a 10 mm path length quartz cuvette and under continuous stirring. The excitation and emission slits were both set to 2 nm and scan speed was 120 nm·min⁻¹.

First, PDIA3 was reduced adding 1 mM DTT to 65 μ M PDIA3 working solution. Then, aliquots of freshly reduced PDIA3 (0.2 μ M final concentration) was diluted in PBS containing EDTA 0.2 mM final concentration and DTT 0.1 mM final concentration, and titrated in quartz cuvette by stepwise additions (addition of 4 μ L for 5 times), at 5 min time intervals, of silibinin solution (1 mM in PBS/DMSO 40:1 freshly prepared from a 40mM stock solution in DMSO) or of punicalagin solution (1mM in PBS freshly prepared from a 5 mM stock solution in water). PDIA1 was reduced adding 1 mM DTT to 75 μ M working solution. Then, aliquots of freshly reduced PDIA1 (0.2 μ M final concentration) was diluted in PBS containing EDTA 0.2 mM final concentration and DTT 0.1 mM final concentration, the following procedure was the same.

Silibinin and punicalagin can both absorb light at the excitation and emission wavelengths. To minimize the inner-filter effect, we limited the highest concentration reached in the titration test up to 10 μ M. All experiments were carried out at 25°C. The blank spectra (punicalagin or silibinin without protein) were recorded under the same experimental conditions and subtracted from the corresponding polyphenol-protein system to correct the fluorescence background. Fluorescence intensities recorded at 338 nm were used for quenching analysis and obtained data, as the average of at least three independent titration experiments.

2.1.4. Isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC)

The thermodynamic analysis of PDIA3/PDIA1- punicalagin/silibinin interactions were obtained using the MicroCal ITC (Malvern Instruments Ltd.). PDIA3 were extensively dialyzed and polyphenols were dissolved in the same buffer. The sample cell (0.2 ml) was filled with PDIA3 (25 μ M) and the syringe with punicalagin or silibinin (250 μ M solution). Ligand solution was then injected into the cell in 19 aliquots of 2 μ L for 4 s (the first injection was 0.4 μ L for 0.8 s) with delay intervals between injections of 200 s. Syringe stirring speed was set to 750 rpm. PDIA3-poliphenols interactions were analyzed in both non-reducing and reducing conditions. In the end, 1 mM DTT was

added to protein and ligand solutions to ensure protein reduction. To correct the heat of dilution, titration of punicalagin and silibinin into a buffer without PDIA_s were carried out. The thermodynamic data were processed with Origin 7.0 software provided by MicroCal and used to calculate molar enthalpy, affinity constant and the stoichiometry of the reactions.

2.1.5. Statistical analysis

Fluorescence quenching constant (K_{SV}) values were given as means ± standard deviation and values of disulfide reductase activity were expressed in percentage of control sample ± relative standard deviation. All measurements were repeated at least three times. Dunnett's test was used to compare the obtained reductase activity data with the activity of the untreated protein and a p-value of < 0.01 was considered as statistically significant. Statistical comparisons were performed using ONE-WAY or TWO-WAY Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and post hoc Bonferroni's test, with different polyphenols treatments as variables, using GraphPad Prism 5.0. The means of the data are presented with SEM. Statistical significance threshold was set to $p < 0.05$.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Protein extraction and purification

To proceed with the comparative analysis between the two proteins it was necessary to obtain them in recombinant form through expression in bacteria and subsequent purification by chromatographic techniques.

3.1.1. PDIA3

The supernatant, containing PDIA3 and obtained from the centrifuge performed after dialysis, is passed into a Macro-Prep anion exchange column Q (Biorad); after washing with Tris-HCl buffer 20 mM pH 8.0, NaCl 20 mM, the column is eluted first using a solution at the concentration of 150 mM NaCl in Tris-HCl 20 mM, pH 8.0 and then increasing the concentration of NaCl up to 1M (Figure 7). We have collected the non-related and the obtained eluate at the two salt concentrations in two different eppendorfs for the electrophoretic run, the result of which is visible in the image below. In the gel in figure 5 we see (from left to right): the marker, which indicates the molecular weight of our protein; the pellet derived from the last centrifugation before precipitation with ammonium sulphate; the supernatant derived from the last centrifugation before the addition of ammonium sulphate; the centrifuge pellet derived after 30% ammonium sulfate precipitation; the pellet derived from the centrifuge carried out after the precipitation with 75% ammonium sulphate where our protein is present; the pellet derived from the centrifuge performed after dialysis; the supernatant of the same centrifuge; the non-related; the eluate at 150 mM of the first anionic exchange chromatography; the 1 M eluate of the same chromatography.

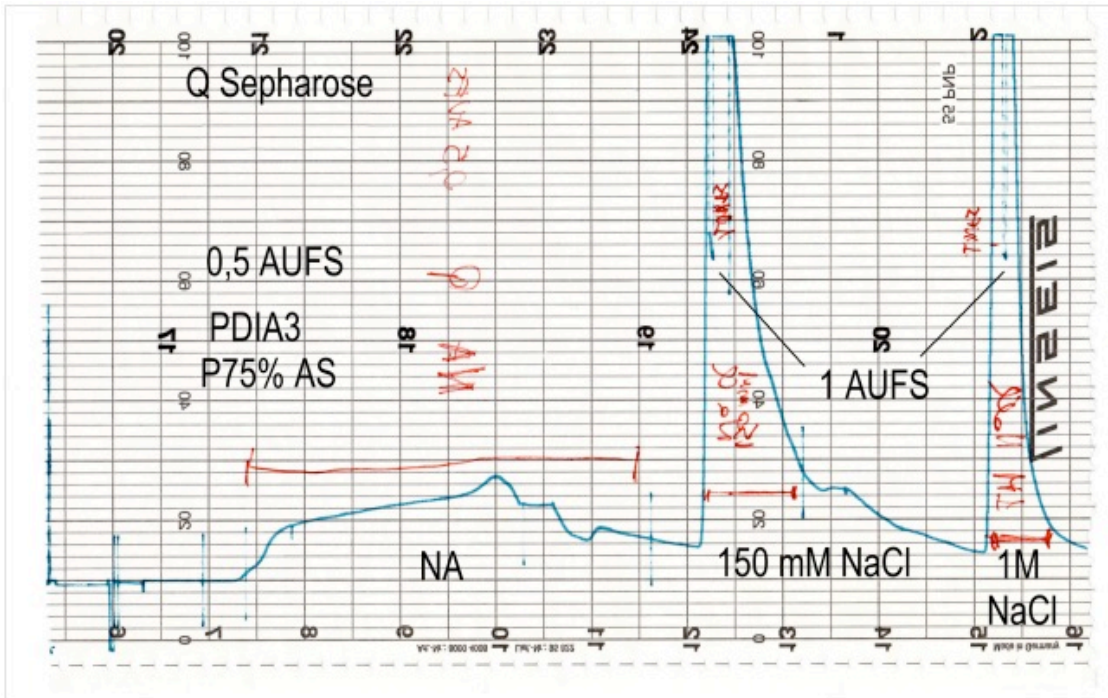


Figure 5. Chromatogram of the Macro-Prep anion exchange column Q

As we see, the protein is present in the supernatant to which 30% ammonium sulfate will be added, in the pellet obtained after precipitation with 75% ammonium sulphate; in the supernatant to be dialyzed and naturally in the eluate at 150 mM of the anion exchange chromatography. The other samples act as a negative control.

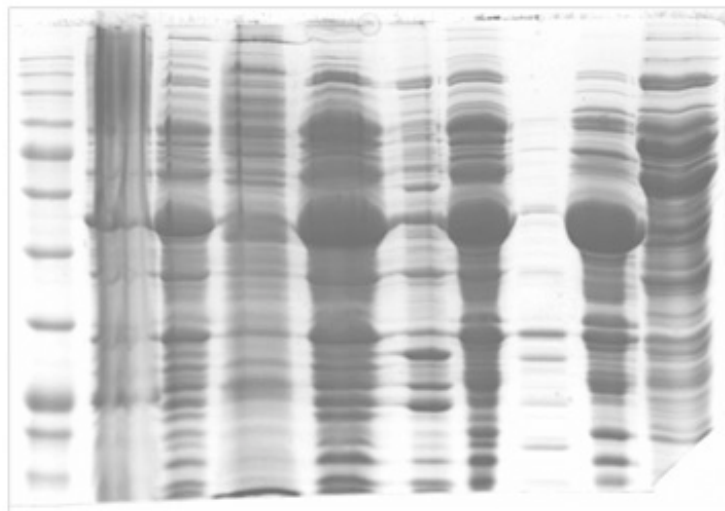


Figure 6. SDS-PAGE of the fractions obtained during sonication, precipitation in ammonium sulphate and eluted from the column

The 150 mM saline eluate is passed into a chromatographic column containing heparin (Figure 7). The column is eluted using a linear gradient from 20 to 1M of NaCl in Tris-HCl 20 mM, pH 8.0 (elution for 60 minutes, flow 1 ml / min).

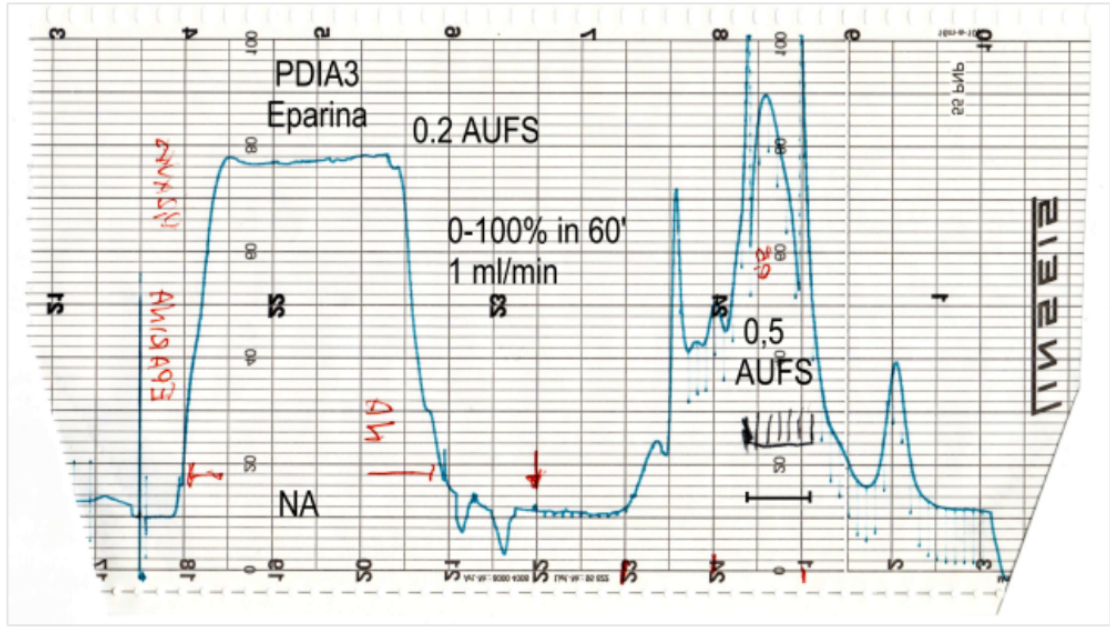


Figure 7. Chromatogram of the column containing heparin.

The eluted fractions are analyzed by SDS-PAGE to see which contain the greatest amount of PDIA3 (Figure 8).

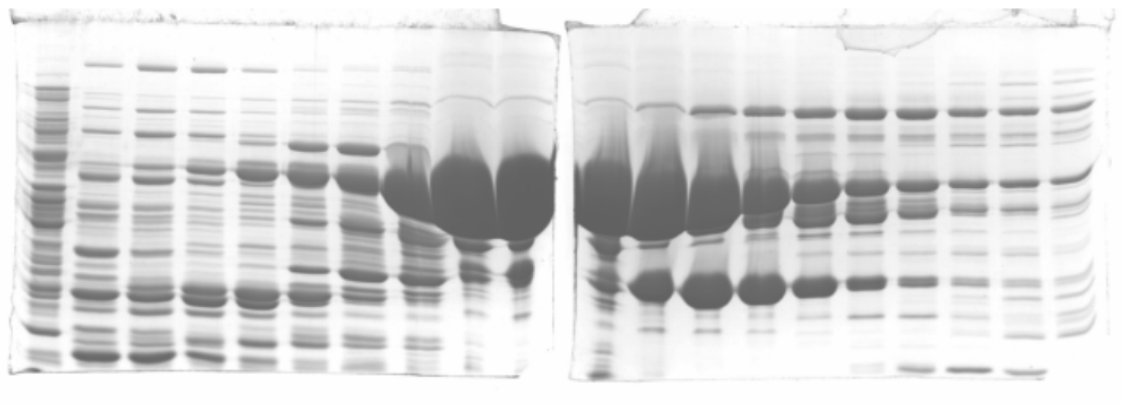


Figure 8. SDS-PAGE of the fractions eluted from the column containing heparin

The selected fractions are combined and dialysed in Tris HCl 20mM pH 8.0 NaCl 20mM buffer overnight. After dialysis, the solution is again passed on a Macro-Prep Q anion exchange column (Figure 9). The elution is carried out in an increasing gradient of NaCl in Tris-HCl pH 8.0 from 0 to 250 mM (elution for 35 minutes, flow 1 ml / min).

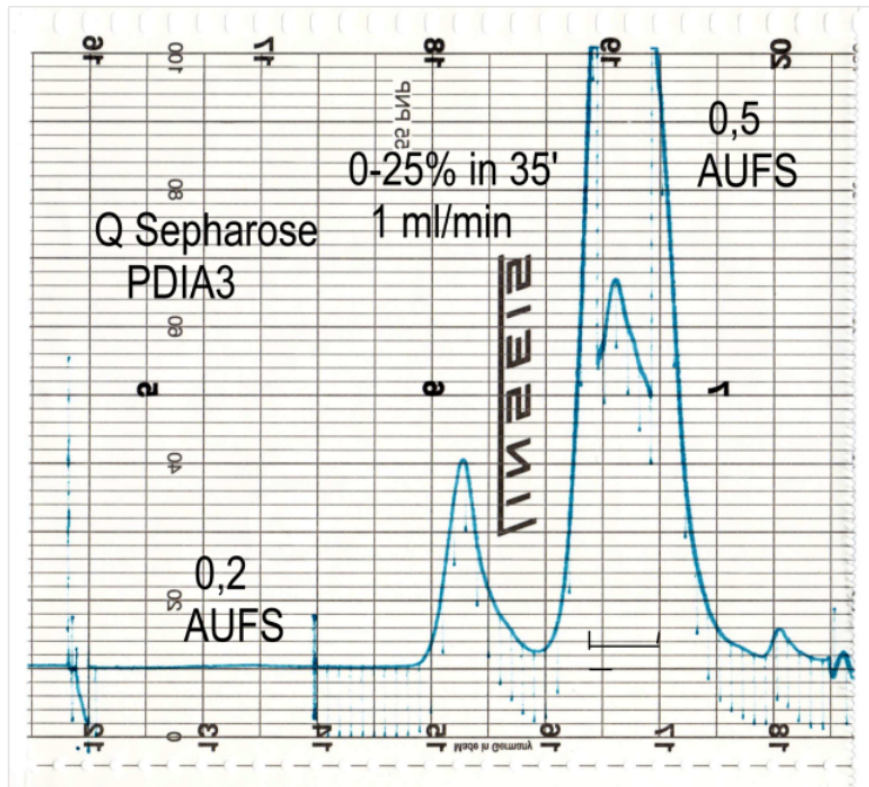


Figure 9. Chromatogram of the Macro-Prep anion exchange column Q

Again, with an SDS-PAGE the samples with the highest amount of protein are highlighted (Figure 10).

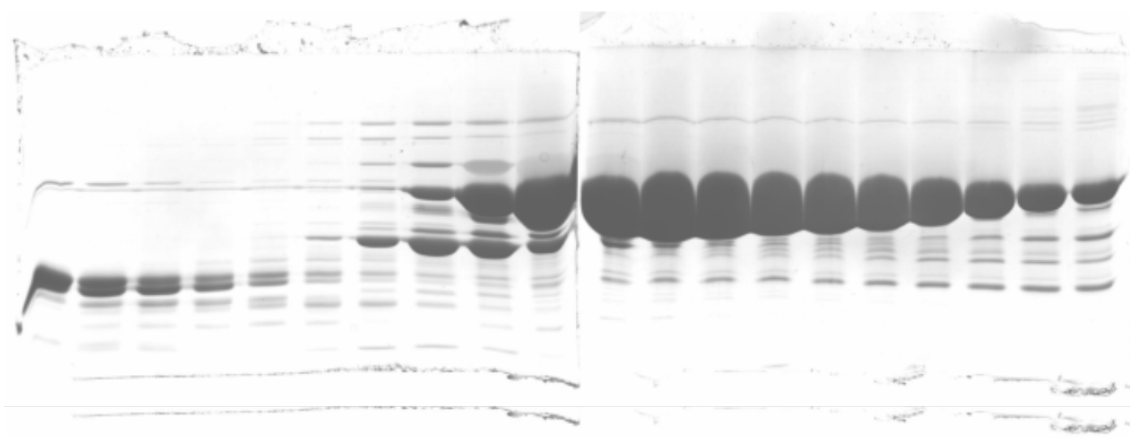


Figure 10. SDS-PAGE of the fractions eluted from the Macro-Prep column Q

Samples with greater amounts of protein are combined and used to determine the latter's concentration by spectrophotometry, using the estimated molar extinction coefficient ($\epsilon_{280\text{nm}} / 1\text{M} = 44947.5$).

3.1.2 PDIA 1

After the dialysis the solution is centrifuged and the supernatant is passed into a column containing nickel, to which the histidine tag of our protein will bind; the column is eluted using a gradient from 0 to 150 mM in 30 minutes of a solution containing 20 mM Tris-HCl, 100 mM NaCl and 1 M imidazole pH 8 (figure 11).

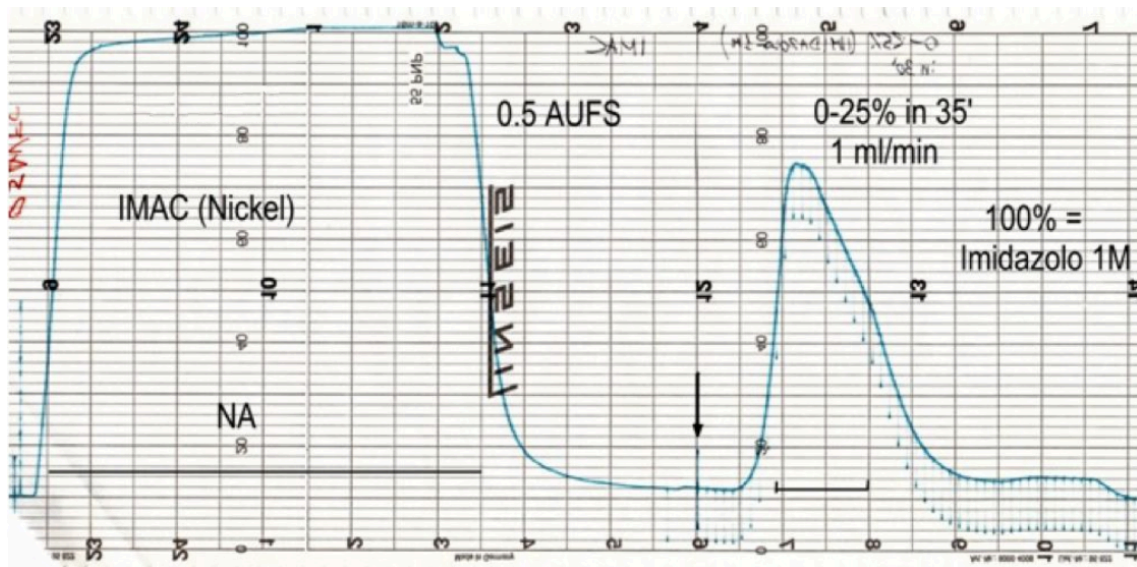


Figure 11. Chromatogram of the column containing nickel

The eluted fractions are analyzed by SDS-PAGE to see which of these contain the greatest amount of protein. In Figure 12 we see (from left to right): a) the supernatant derived from the last centrifugation before the addition of ammonium sulphate; b) the pellet derived from the last centrifugation before precipitation with ammonium sulphate; c) the centrifuge pellet derived after 30% ammonium sulfate precipitation; d) the pellet derived from the centrifuge carried out after the precipitation with 75% ammonium sulphate (where our protein is present); e) the supernatant derived from the centrifuge performed after dialysis; f) the pellet of the same centrifuge; the non-related; the eluate of nickel chromatography; the PDIA1; the marker.

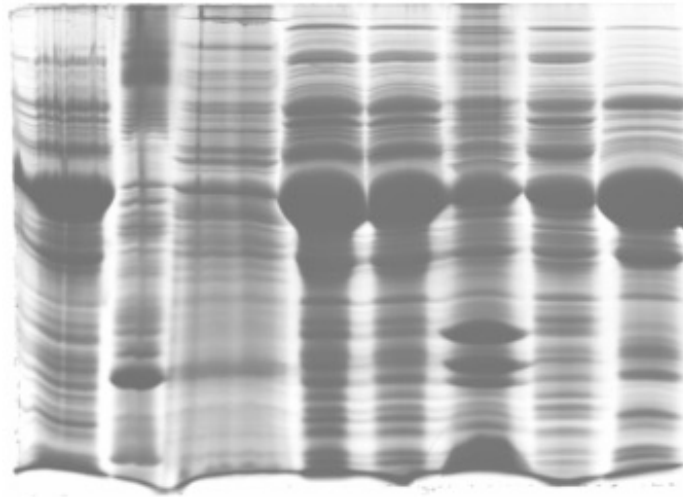


Figure 12. SDS-PAGE of the fractions obtained during sonication, precipitation in ammonium sulphate and eluted from the nickel column.

As we can see from the figure 12, PDIA1 (present in the eluate of nickel chromatography) is much less clean compared to PDIA3 which, not having a tag, was purified using the series of chromatographies described above. To eliminate the residual contaminants, the eluate of the nickel chromatography is dialysed in Tris HCl 20mM pH 8.0 NaCl 20mM buffer overnight and then passed on a Macro-Prep Q anion exchange column (Figure 13). The elution is carried out in a growing gradient of NaCl in Tris-HCl pH 8.0 from 0 to 25% (elution for 35 minutes, flow 1 ml / min).

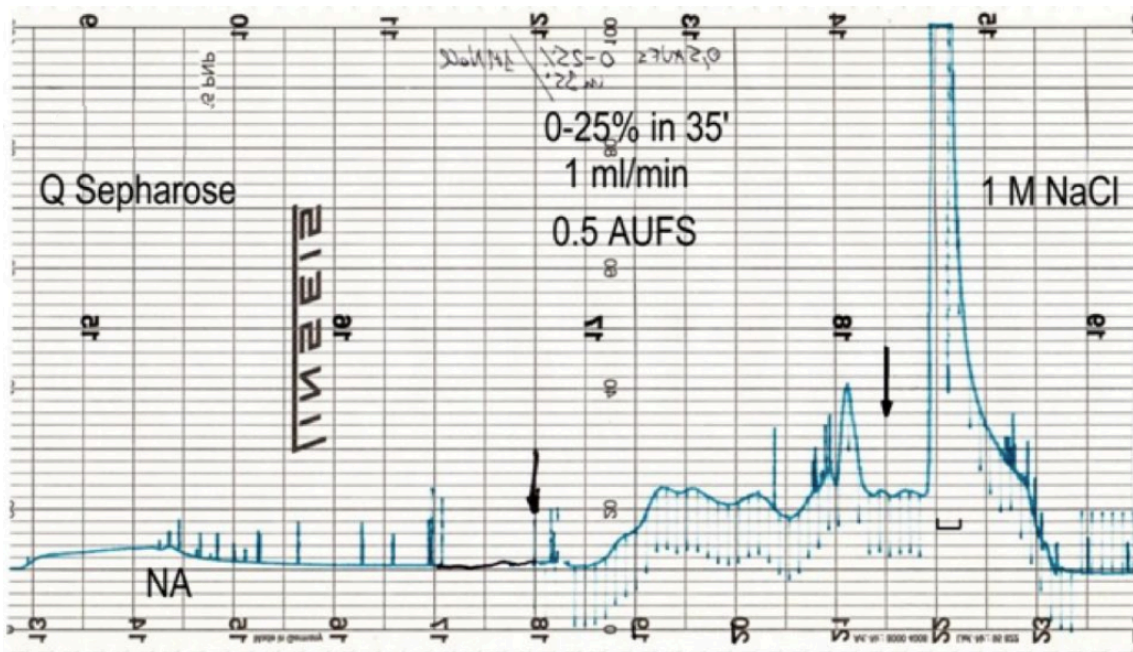


Figure 13. Chromatogram of the Macro-Prep anion exchange column Q

With an SDS-PAGE (Figure 14) the samples with the highest quantity of protein are highlighted and these are joined and used to determine the concentration of the latter by spectrophotometry, using the estimated molar extinction coefficient ($\epsilon_{280\text{nm}} / 1\text{M} = 44947,5$).

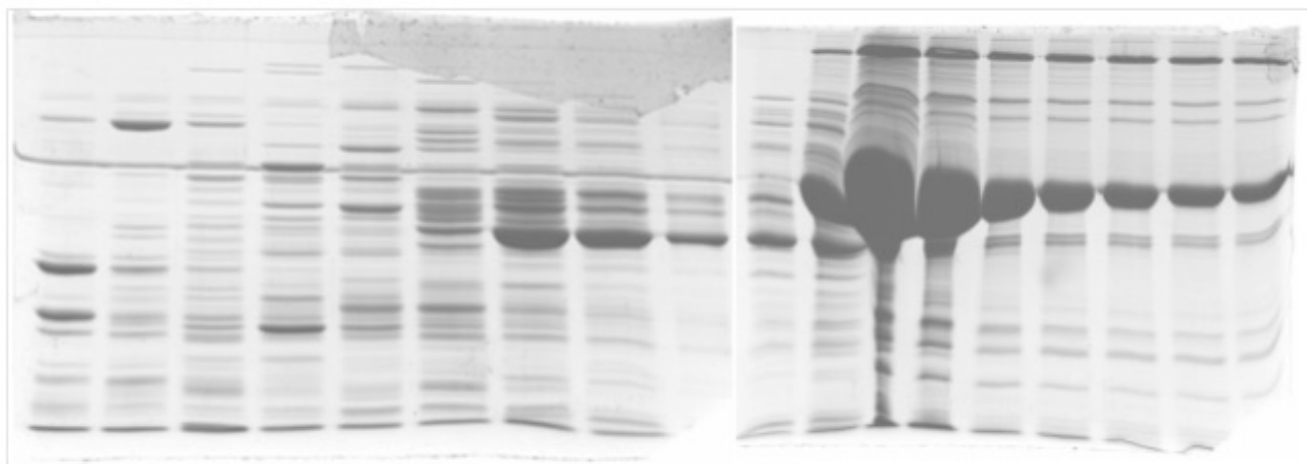


Figure 14. SDS-PAGE of the fractions eluted from the Macro-Prep column Q

3.2 Fluorescence Quenching Analysis

The first comparative study between the two proteins, PDIA1 and PDIA3, was performed by quenching analysis of the intrinsic fluorescence of each protein. Both proteins possess an intrinsic fluorescence due to the presence of tryptophan residues. PDIA3 contains 3 tryptophan residues, 2 of which are located near the active redox sites, W56 and W405 and a third on the domain b' and partially exposed (Figure 15).

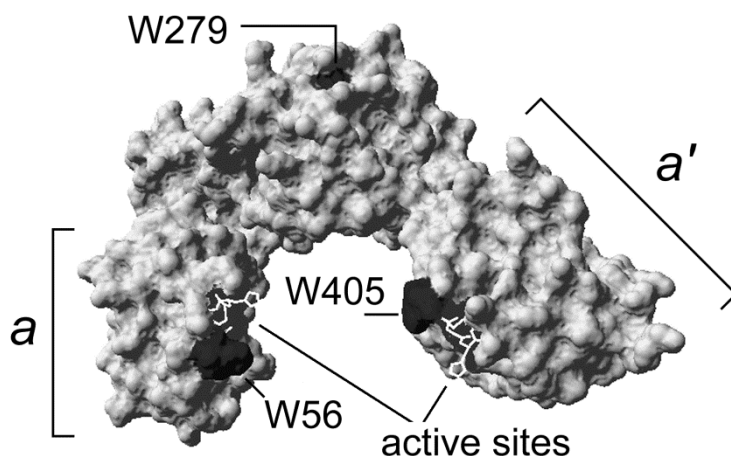


Figure 15. Three-dimensional structure of PDIA3 with the three tryptophan residues highlighted

PDIA1 instead contains 5 tryptophan residues W52, W128 present on domain a, W364, W396, W407 on domain a'. While the residues W52 and W396 located near the redox sites are totally exposed, the residues W128 and W407 are internal and the residue W364 is partially exposed (Figure 16).

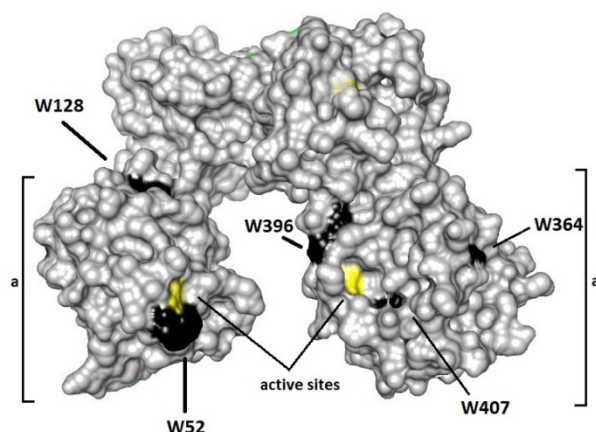


Figure 16. Three-dimensional structure of PDIA1 with the 5 residues of tryptophan highlighted

The protein concentrations and the protein / ligand ratios used for all the experiments are the result of a compromise between the absorption of the ligands used and of the protein with respect to the recorded fluorescence intensity. The reason for this is to avoid the problems connected with the inner-filter effect, namely the absorption of light mainly by the polyphenols used at the excitation or emission wavelengths used for fluorescence analysis, equal respectively to 290 nm for excitation and 338 nm for emission. Absorption at these wavelengths could lead to a reduction in the fluorescence emission not due to direct quenching (i.e. interaction between ligand and protein).

Since the polyphenols used have a significant absorption in the frequency range corresponding to the wavelengths used for the excitation and emission of the fluorophore it was necessary to minimize their final concentration. Correspondingly, the protein concentration has also been reduced to maintain an adequate protein-ligand ratio. For this reason, after an initial screening at protein concentrations of 0.1 μM , 0.2 μM and 0.5 μM all the experiments were then conducted at the intermediate concentration maintaining a protein / ligand ratio not exceeding 1:20, or a final ligand concentration of 4 μM .

At each addition of ligand aliquots the emission spectrum of the protein from 300nm to 400nm was recorded three times and the average reading value at each wavelength was then used in subsequent quenching analyzes. Each protein was analyzed both in a completely reduced form and in a non-reduced form. Figures 17 and 18 show the fluorescence emission spectra of the two PDIA's in the presence of increasing ligand concentrations and analyzed under completely reduced conditions (figures 17A and 17B) and not reduced (figures 20A and 20B).

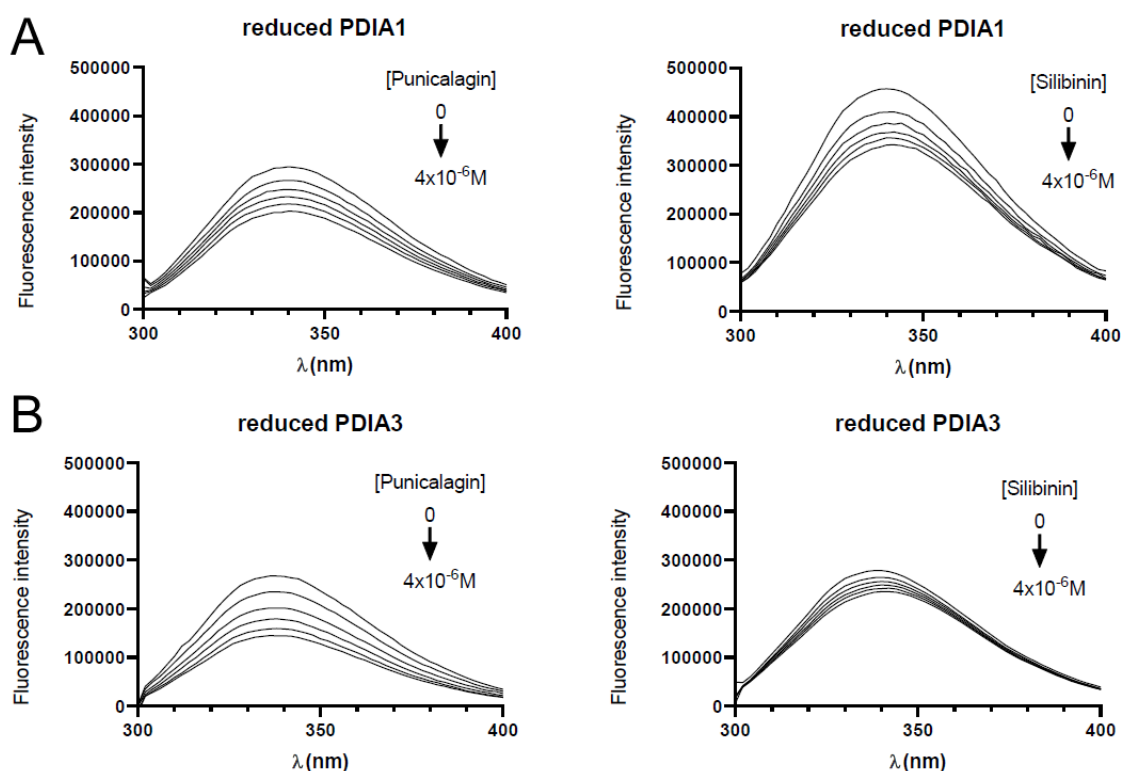


Figure 17. Emission spectrum of the fluorescence of PDIA1 (A) and PDIA3 (B) in the reduced forms at increasing concentrations of punicalagin (left) and silibinin (right). The protein concentration is 0.2 μ M and the final protein ligand ratio is 1:20.

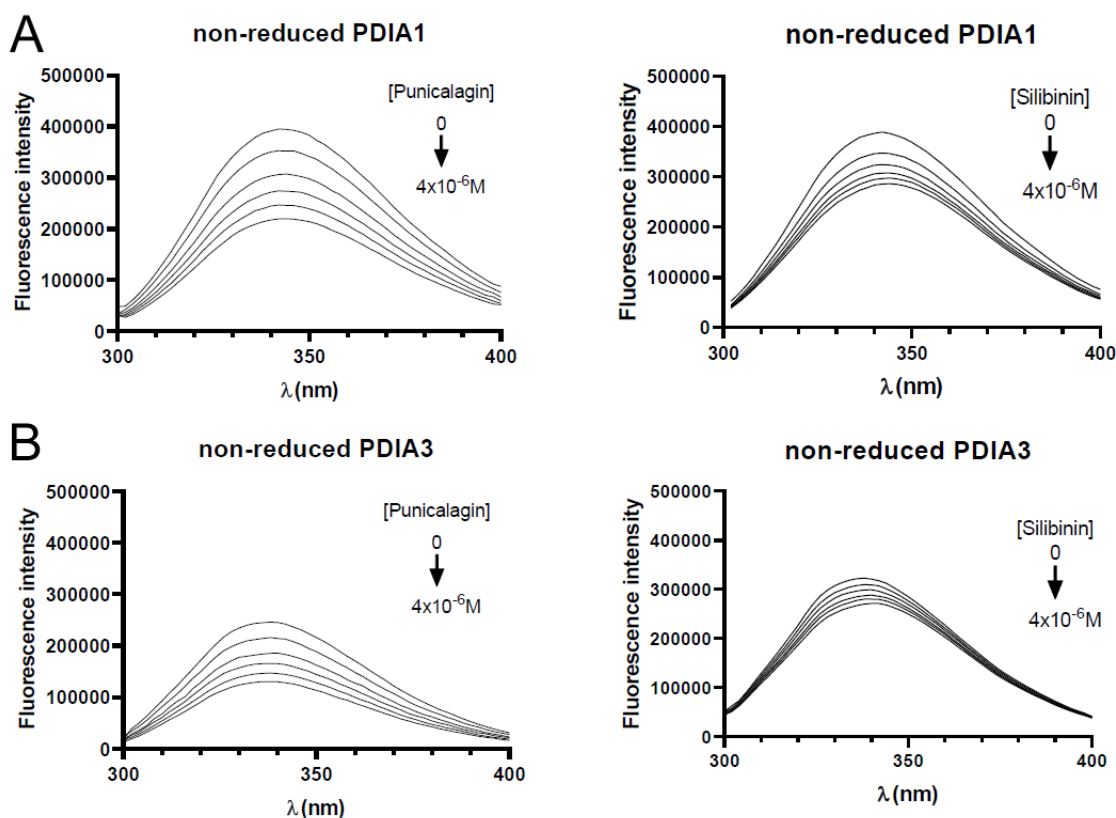


Figure 18. Emission spectrum of the fluorescence of PDIA1 (A) and PDIA3 (B) in the non-reduced forms at increasing concentrations of punicalagin (left) and silibinin (right). The protein concentration is 0.2 μ M and the final protein ligand ratio is 1:20.

To obtain the Stern-Volmer constant (K_{sv}) for each interaction the fluorescence emission value at 338nm of the protein (F_0) was compared with the fluorescence value always at 338nm in the presence of increasing concentrations of ligand (F) and the values obtained were graphically analyzed using the following equation: $(F_0/F = 1 + K_{sv}[L])$, (figures 19A and 19B).

Based on the results obtained, it can be observed that both silibinin and punicalagin are able to generate a quenching effect with Stern-Volmer constants always greater than 10^4 M^{-1} . Considering that the Stern-Volmer constant is equal to the quenching constant for the average life time of the fluorophore ($K_{sv}=K_q\tau$) and that for the residue of tryptophan tau is in the order of 10^{-8} sec, the calculable values of K_q they are always greater than 2×10^{10} suggesting that an interaction is established between the analyzed polyphenols and the two PDIA.

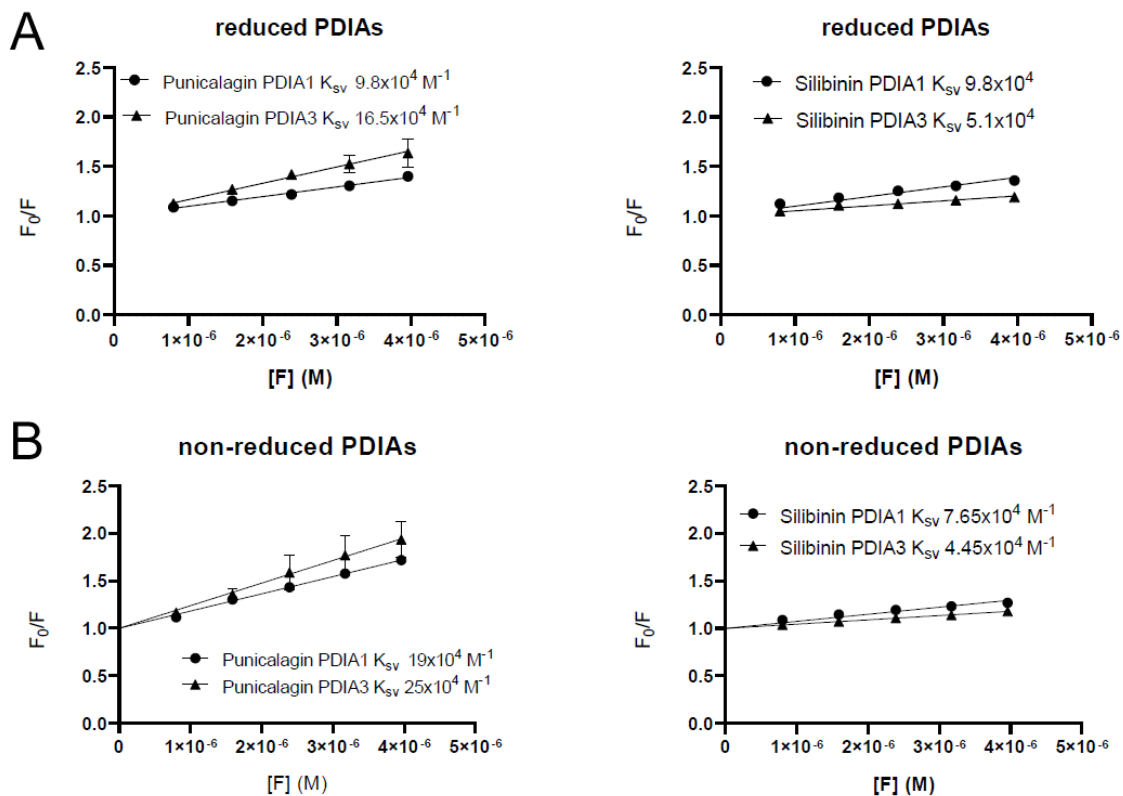


Figure 19. Analysis of fluorescence quenching data of PDIA1 and PDIA3 proteins in reduced form (A) and not reduced (B) in the presence of increasing concentrations of punicalagin (left) and silibinin (right).

By analyzing the fluorescence spectra of the two proteins in the presence of silibinin and punicalagin, a red shift in the maximum emission can also be seen, suggesting that the microenvironment around the tryptophan residue becomes more polar (figures 17 and 18). The values of K_{SV} constants, which may be correlated with affinity, obtained by the interaction of the two proteins in reduced and non-reduced forms with punicalagin and silibinin, are shown in Figure 20.

Punicalagin and silibinin have opposite affinity profiles towards the two PDIA proteins. In fact, punicalagin has a greater affinity for PDIA3 both in the reduced form and in the non-reduced form, while the silibinin shows a better affinity for PDIA1 (Figure 20). The values of the dissociation constants K_d and the number of interaction sites n together with the K_q values were calculated and reported in Table 1.

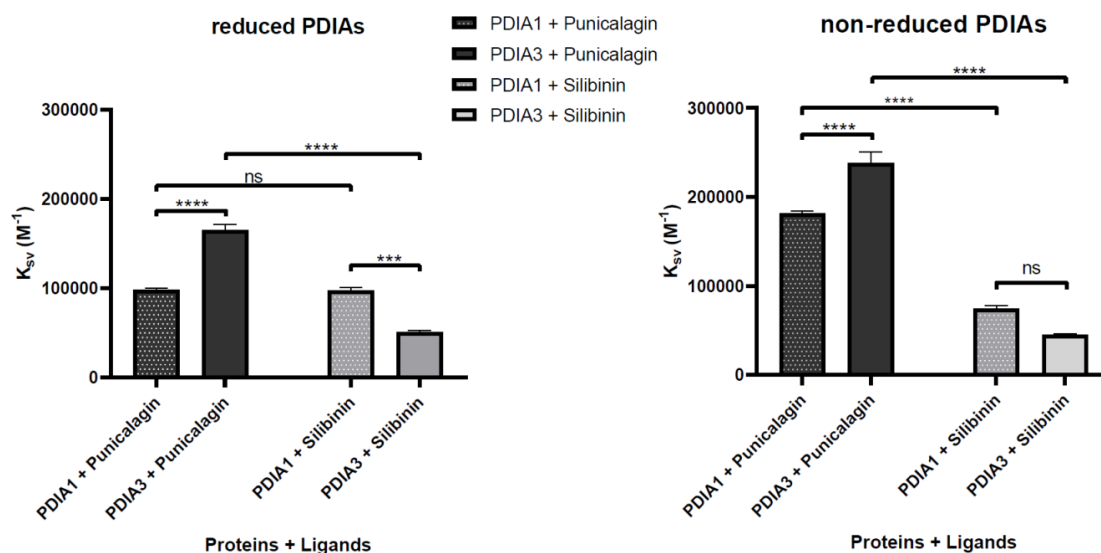


Figure 20. Comparison between the K_{sv} values obtained for PDIA1 and PDIA3 proteins in reduced (left) and non-reduced (right) form in the presence of increasing concentrations of punicalagin and silibinin. The data were analyzed by t-test and the statistically significant differences are indicated with asterisks.

Table 1: Parameters related to the interaction between PDIA1 and PDIA3, in reduced and non-reduced form, with punicalagin and silibinin. The protein concentration is $0.2\mu\text{M}$ and the final protein ligand ratio is 1:10.

	K_{sv} (M^{-1})	K_q ($\text{M}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$)	K_d (M)	n
Reduced PDIA1 + silibinin	7.5×10^4	7.5×10^{12}	18.2×10^{-6}	0.675
Reduced PDIA3 + silibinin	4.2×10^4	4.2×10^{12}	30.1×10^{-6}	0.812
Reduced PDIA1 + punicalagin	9.9×10^4	9.9×10^{12}	11.9×10^{-6}	0.934
Reduced PDIA3 + punicalagin	16.2×10^4	16.2×10^{12}	5.9×10^{-6}	1.005
Non-reduced PDIA1 + silibinin	7.65×10^4	7.65×10^{12}	15.8×10^{-6}	0.764
Non-reduced PDIA3 + silibinin	4.45×10^4	4.45×10^{12}	23.1×10^{-6}	0.972
Non-reduced PDIA1 + punicalagin	18.6×10^4	18.6×10^{12}	4.9×10^{-6}	1.119
Non-reduced PDIA3 + punicalagin	24.7×10^4	24.7×10^{13}	4.03×10^{-6}	1.085

As already mentioned, all the values of K_q are higher than $10^{10} \text{M}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$, highlighting that the nature of the link between silibinin and punicalagin is not dynamic but involves the formation of stable complexes. The K_d values are between $5\mu\text{M}$ and $30\mu\text{M}$ indicating a good affinity between the proteins and the polyphenols used. The values of n are always close to the unit indicating that the

binding site is only one, even if the tryptophan residues that are able to give quenching are greater than one and mainly present on the two redox domains (a and a').

3.3 ANALYSIS BY MEANS OF ITC CALORIMETRY

The binding affinities between the two PDIA1s and the polyphenols have been further studied by ITC. This technique is not affected by the absorption characteristics of the ligands used and also provides information on the thermodynamics and stoichiometry of the interaction between the two PDIA1s and the analyzed polyphenols. All experiments were performed on the reduced forms of PDIA1s. Figures 21 and 22 show the titration profiles of the two PDIA1s in reduced forms in the presence of increasing concentrations of punicalagin and silibinin.

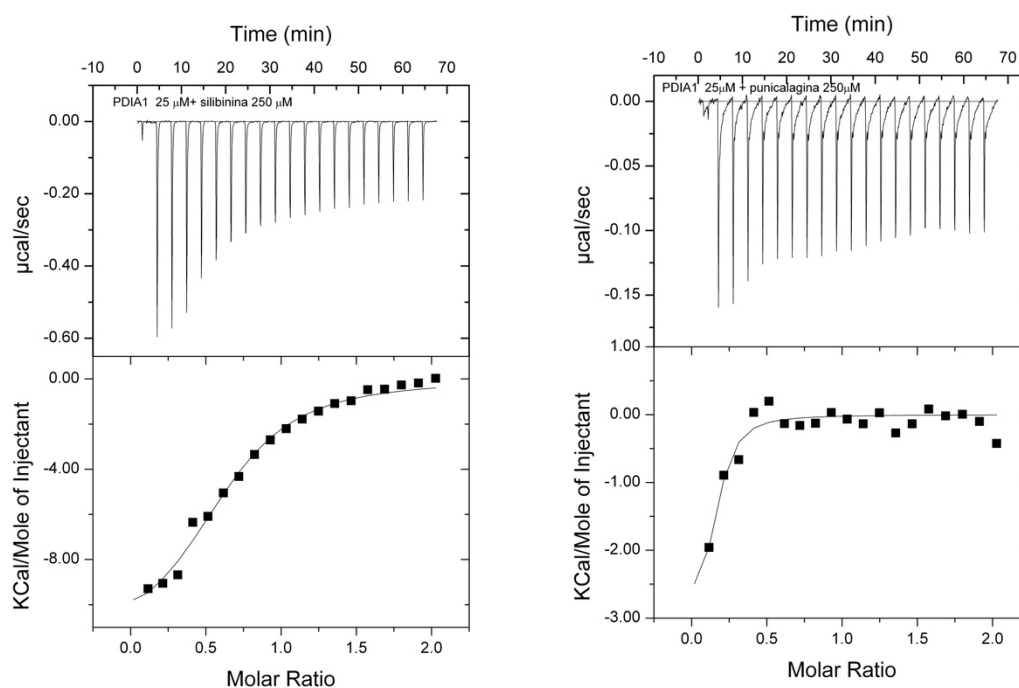


Figure 21. Titration profile of PDIA1 protein in reduced form in the presence of increasing concentrations of silibinin and punicalagin at a temperature of 25 °C. The protein concentration is 25 μ M and the final protein: ligand ratio is 1: 2.

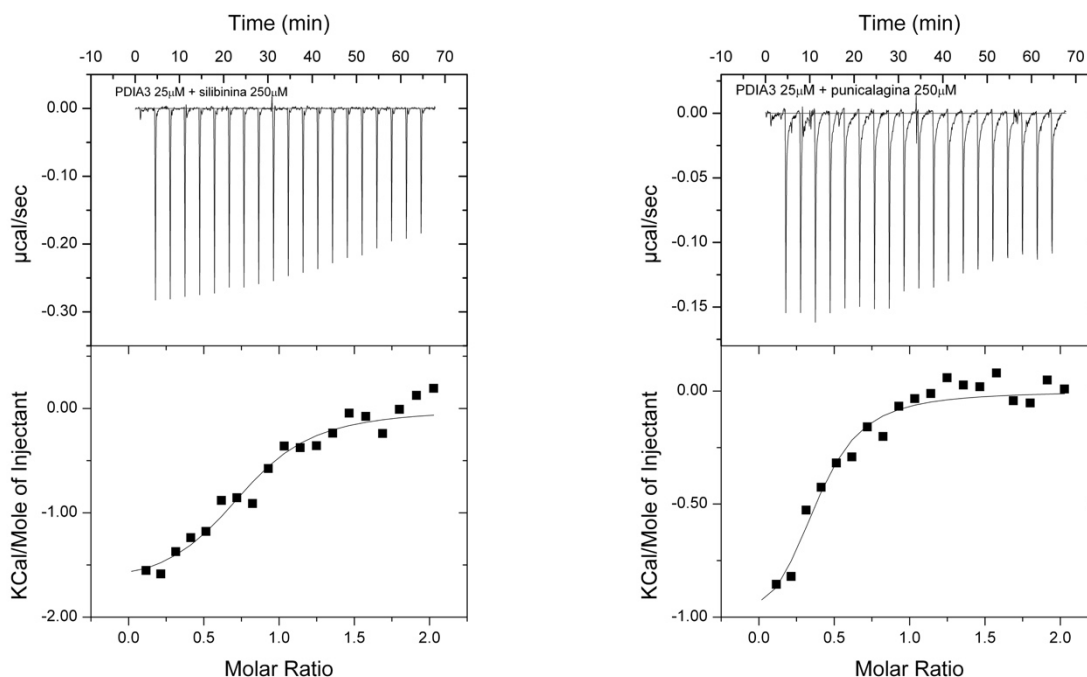


Figure 22. Titration profile of PDIA3 protein in reduced form in the presence of increasing concentrations of silibinin and punicalagin at a temperature of 25 °C. The protein concentration is 25 μ M and the final protein: ligand ratio is 1: 2

These analysis, performed in duplicate, confirmed the formation of the protein–ligand complexes with K_d values which in all cases are in the order of micromolar concentration (Table 2) and which are lower than the values obtained from the quenching assays of the fluorescence (Table 1). Furthermore, there is no appreciable variation in the values of the association constants between the two proteins and the ligands considered, indicating a similar affinity, with the exception of the interaction between PDIA1 and punicalagin, characterized by a greater affinity even if with a value of n plus low compared to other interactions. We can explain this apparent inconsistency with the data obtained from the quenching analysis considering that the fluorimetric technique, unlike the ITC, has limits. In fact, in addition to the inner effect phenomenon, the fluorescence quenching is also affected by the distance of the ligand binding site from the fluorophore. The more the ligand is away from the tryptophan, the less quenching of the fluorescence can be observed.

With this assumption we can motivate the ever higher values of K_d found in the quenching with respect to the ITC. We can also hypothesize always comparing the values of K_d obtained with the two techniques that the interaction with silibinin, characterized by lower quenching values, concerns a binding site further from the fluorophore than punicalagin in both PDIA3 and PDIA1 . However, we must also consider the presence of two tryptophan residues for each redox domain, but positioned

differently, in PDIA1 which may explain the lower degree of quenching observed for this protein. The thermodynamic parameters obtained from the analysis by ICT are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Thermodynamic parameters related to the interaction between PDIA1 and PDIA3 with punicalagin and silibinin at a temperature of 25 ° C. The protein concentration is 25µM and the final protein ligand ratio is 1: 2.

	N	K _a (M ⁻¹)	K _d (M)	ΔH (cal/mol)	ΔS (cal/mol/deg)
Reduced PDIA1 + silibinin	0.631	3.07x10 ⁵	3.26x10 ⁻⁶	-11850	-14.7
	0.596	3.80x10 ⁵	2.63x10 ⁻⁶	-9865	-7.56
Reduced PDIA3 + silibinin	0.924	5.75x10 ⁵	1.74x10 ⁻⁶	-1358	21.8
	0.773	4.48x10 ⁵	2.23x10 ⁻⁶	-1746	20.0
Reduced PDIA1 + punicalagin	0.136	1.07x10 ⁶	0.93x10 ⁻⁶	-3263	16.6
	0.314	2.56x10 ⁷	0.04x10 ⁻⁶	-1122	30.1
Reduced PDIA3 + punicalagin	0.818	3.83x10 ⁵	2.61 x10 ⁻⁶	-705.7	23.2
	0.374	4.78x10 ⁵	2.09x10 ⁻⁶	-1139	22.2

The interactions between punicalagin and PDIA1 and PDIA3 as well as that between silibinin and PDIA3 are enthalpically and entropically favored. The enthalpic negative values are due to the contribution of H bonds and Van der Waals forces in favoring protein-ligand interactions. The hydrophobic interactions and the greater degree of freedom of the solvent instead justify the positive entropic values. The ΔH of the PDIA1-silibinin interaction is much more negative than the other characterized interactions and is compensated by a strong negative entropic contribution. It can therefore be assumed that in addition to the Van der Waals forces and the hydrogen bonds there are other conditions that favor or are induced during this interaction. In fact, negative ΔS suggests that PDIA1, following interaction with silibinin, undergoes a conformational change that exposes a greater number of polar amino acid residues which structure the solvent water molecules. The result is a decrease in the degree of freedom of the solvent and a decrease in the entropic value associated with the interaction. This conformational change can be confirmed by the red fluorescence shift observed during the quenching analysis, which can be associated to a tryptophan exposure in a more polar environment and a consequent negative entropic effect on the solvent molecules

4. Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to compare the binding of two polyphenols, punicalagin and silibinin, with the two main proteins belonging to the disulphide isomerase protein family, PDIA1 and PDIA3. Although the two proteins share a good structural similarity and similar enzymatic functions, within the cell their role is differentiated with PDIA3 involved in a greater number of functions besides the canonical ones performed within the endoplasmic reticulum. During studies conducted in the laboratory, several molecules with polyphenolic structure were found to be good ligands of the PDIA3 isoform of the disulfide proteins isomerase and in particular, it was recently observed that punicalagin is a powerful inhibitor of its reductase activity.

Given the different role played by the two disulfide isomerase proteins inside the cell, it is important to be able to compare both the binding and the effect on the activity and conformation of the two proteins by punicalagin to evaluate a possible selective effect. At the same time the analysis was extended to another polyphenol, silibinin, which, although not having a particular inhibitory activity on PDIA3, instead showed an affinity comparable to punicalagin. From the comparative analysis it emerged that the two polyphenols are able to bind both proteins but the interaction that is established produces different effects. This is certainly connectable to a different site of interaction of the two molecules, both between them and in relation to the two PDIs. In fact, while the punicalagin interacts with regions near to the site to redox activity, with consequent reduction of the enzymatic activity, clearly more pronounced in comparison to the PDIA3, the silibinin very probably interacts with a site more distant from the sites to redox activity. This can certainly be due to the different structure of the two ligands, planar in the case of silibinin, and with a three-dimensional shape more complex in the case of punicalagin.

Moreover, the two molecules show a different interaction with the two PDI, which can be connected with the different conformation structure of the proteins themselves. This makes punicalagin a promising selective inhibitor for PDIA3 and the further characterization of the interaction site may allow for possible changes to its chemical structure that accentuate this selectivity. At the same time silibinin, although not showing a particular inhibitory action, if not limited towards PDIA1, could be used to modulate the interaction of the PDIs themselves with other substrate proteins involved in the formation of macromolecular complexes responsible for the cellular activities of the two PDIs. Indeed, a stabilizing effect on the conformation of PDIA1 alone by this polyphenol was observed. Also in this case a diversified interaction with the two PDIs would make silibinin a selective modulator. Further studies, extended to other polyphenolic substances, will allow the identification of PDI modulators / inhibitors with high specificity and selectivity.

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