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Genome-wide association analyses identify new Brugada syndrome risk loci and highlight a new mechanism of sodium channel regulation in disease susceptibility

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- Genome-wide association meta-analysis identifies novel Brugada syndrome susceptibility loci and highlights a new mechanism of sodium channel regulation in disease susceptibility
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47 Brugada syndrome is a cardiac arrhythmia disorder associated with sudden death in 48 young adults. With the exception of SCN5A, encoding the cardiac sodium channel $Na_v 1.5$, 49 susceptibility genes remain largely unknown. Here we performed a genome-wide 50 association meta-analysis comprising 2,820 unrelated cases with Brugada syndrome and 51 10,001 controls and identified 21 association signals at 12 loci (10 novel). SNP-heritability 52 estimates indicate a strong polygenic influence. Polygenic risk score analyses based on the 53 21 susceptibility variants demonstrate varying cumulative contribution of common risk 54 alleles among different patient sub-groups, as well as genetic associations with cardiac 55 electrical traits and disorders in the general population. The predominance of cardiac 56 transcription factor loci indicates that transcriptional regulation is a key feature of 57 Brugada syndrome pathogenesis. Furthermore, functional studies conducted on MAPRE2, 58 encoding the microtubule plus-end-binding protein EB2, point to microtubule-related 59 trafficking effects on Na_v1.5 expression as a novel underlying molecular mechanism. 60 Taken together, these findings broaden our understanding of the genetic architecture of 61 Brugada syndrome and provide new insights into its molecular underpinnings.

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64 Brugada syndrome (BrS) is a cardiac disorder characterized by hallmark ST-segment elevation in the right precordial leads of the electrocardiogram (ECG) and increased risk of 65 sudden death in young adults^{1,2}. Rare coding variants in SCN5A, encoding the cardiac 66 sodium channel Na_v1.5 which underlies the sodium current (I_{Na}) , are reported in 67 approximately 20% of cases^{3,4}. Other susceptibility genes contributing to the disorder 68 remain largely unknown. In a genome-wide association study (GWAS) conducted in 312 69 70 patients with BrS, we previously identified 3 common susceptibility variants and provided evidence for a complex genetic architecture⁵. Here we extended this original association 71 scan to a large meta-analysis comprising 2,820 unrelated cases and 10,001 controls of 72 European ancestry (Supplementary Table 1, Supplementary Table 2), testing 6,990,521 73 74 variants with a minor allele frequency (MAF) ≥ 0.01 (Figure 1, Supplementary Fig. 1, 75 Supplementary Fig. 2). A total of 12 loci (10 novel) reached the genome-wide statistical significance threshold of P<5x10⁻⁸ (Table 1; Supplementary Fig. 3, panels a-I). Conditional 76 77 analysis uncovered 7 additional association signals at genome-wide significance at the 78 chromosome 3 locus, and an additional signal at the chromosome 6 and the chromosome 7 loci (Table 1; Supplementary Fig. 3, panels m-u). Analysis of SNP-based heritability (h^2_{SNP}) 79 demonstrated that a substantial portion of susceptibility to BrS is attributable to common 80 genetic variation. h_{SNP}^2 estimates ranged from 0.17 (standard error, SE, 0.035) using LDSC⁶ 81 to 0.34 (SE 0.02) using GREML⁷, assuming a disease prevalence of 0.05%⁸, with 24% of the 82 83 total SNP-based heritability being explained by the 12 loci reaching genome-wide 84 significance (Supplementary Table 4).

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Seven association signals (defined by the lead SNP and SNPs with $r^2 \ge 0.6$) at the 86 87 chromosome 3 locus overlapped SCN5A and one overlapped the neighboring SCN10A gene 88 encoding the sodium channel isoform $Na_v 1.8$ (Supplementary Fig. 4, panels a-h). While previous work⁹ proposed that the latter signal may act through regulation of SCN5A 89 expression, a possible involvement of SCN10A itself is suggested by a significant eQTL in left 90 ventricular tissue (P= 5.29×10^{-6} , colocalization posterior probability (CLPP) = 0.16) 91 92 (Supplementary Fig. 4, panel h, Supplementary Table 3), whereas no eQTL was detected 93 for SCN5A (P=0.27). Notably, 6 association signals overlapped genes encoding cardiac

94 developmental transcription factors (HEY2, TBX20, ZFPM2, GATA4, WT1, TBX5) and 4 were <300kb from such genes (TBX20, IRX3/IRX5, HEY2)¹⁰. In support for the involvement of 95 transcription factor genes, an enrichment in genes encoding DNA binding proteins was 96 found at BrS GWAS loci by permutation testing (one-tailed permutation $P = 1 \times 10^{-4}$; 97 98 Supplementary Fig. 5). The transcription factors HEY2, TBX20, GATA4, TBX5 and IRX3/IRX5 99 are established regulators of ion channel expression in the adult heart, including that of $Na_v 1.5^{11-15}$, suggesting that modulation of ion channel expression is an important 100 mechanism in BrS. Potential regulatory effects of the transcription factors WT1 and ZFPM2 101 102 on ion channel expression have not yet been investigated. One association signal overlapped *PRKCA* (supported by a co-localizing eQTL (P=4.63 $\times 10^{-28}$, CLPP = 0.99); 103 (Supplementary Fig. 4, panel s, Supplementary Table 3), which encodes protein kinase C 104 alpha involved in contractility and calcium handling in cardiomyocytes¹⁶. Lastly, two 105 association signals overlapped genes encoding microtubule or myofiber associated proteins, 106 namely MAPRE2¹⁷ and MYO18B¹⁸. A full annotation of the association signals (see Online 107 Methods) is presented in Supplementary Table 3 and Supplementary Fig. 4. 108

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We performed a transcriptome-wide analysis (TWAS)¹⁹ based on predicted gene expression 110 in cardiac tissues²⁰ and identified 24 associations corresponding to 20 unique genes at the 111 Bonferroni-corrected threshold of P<5.2x10⁻⁶ (Supplementary Table 5). Eighteen of these 112 genes are within ≈0.5 Mb of GWAS signals while two point to additional loci 113 (Supplementary Table 5). MAGMA gene property analysis for tissue specificity²¹ as well as 114 enrichment analysis using LDSC-SEQ²² and GARFIELD²³ identified left ventricle, right 115 ventricle and fetal heart, respectively, as significantly associated with BrS (Supplementary 116 Fig. 6 and 7, Supplementary Tables 6 and 7). MAGMA gene-set analysis²¹ identified, 117 118 amongst others, gene sets related to heart development and regulation of heart growth 119 (Supplementary Table 8), which may point to a broader role of transcriptional dysregulation 120 in the pathogenesis of BrS, beyond regulation of ion channel expression.

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MAPRE2 overlaps the association signal tagged by rs476348 and its causal role is supported 122 123 by chromatin interaction between its promoter region and the association signal and by a 124 significant eQTL (P=2.9x10⁻⁵, CLPP=0.10) Supplementary Fig. 4, panel t, Supplementary Table 3), where the BrS risk allele is associated with lower MAPRE2 expression in left 125 126 ventricular tissue compared to the non-risk allele. MAPRE2 encodes the microtubule plus-127 end binding protein EB2, a regulator of microtubule organization¹⁷. While effects on 128 transcription factor expression and ion-channel patterning are established molecular mechanisms associated with BrS susceptibility^{5,13}, mechanisms involving microtubule 129 130 function and ion channel trafficking, as suggested by the association signal near MAPRE2, 131 have not yet been explored. We therefore generated loss-of-function mutants (KO) using 132 CRISPR/Cas9 in both zebrafish (Supplementary Fig. 8) and human induced pluripotent stem 133 cell derived cardiomyocytes (hiPSC-CMs) (Supplementary Fig. 9) to study the role of 134 MAPRE2 in cardiac electrophysiology. Using optical mapping, we observed a significantly 135 lower conduction velocity and action potential upstroke velocity (V_{max}) in zebrafish hearts 136 isolated from mapre2 KO compared to control (CTRL) larvae (Fig. 2a,b). Similarly, V_{max} observed in single MAPRE2 KO hiPSC-CMs was lower than isogenic control hiPSC-CMs 137 measured using manual patch clamp (Fig. 2d,e). The lower V_{max} observed in both mutant 138 139 zebrafish and hiPSC-CMs suggested lower I_{Na}. This was confirmed by automated patch-140 clamp measurements which demonstrated ≈50% less I_{Na} density in MAPRE2 KO compared to

141 control hiPSC-CMs (Fig. 2f, left panel). Additionally, a small positive shift in voltage 142 dependency of activation was observed, while voltage dependency of inactivation and 143 recovery from inactivation were not different between control and KO cells (Supplementary 144 Fig. 10a,b,c). Whereas no repolarization abnormalities were observed in intact mapre2 KO 145 zebrafish hearts (Fig. 2c), significant action potential duration (APD) prolongation was 146 observed in single MAPRE2 KO hiPSC-CMs (Fig. 2d and e). This APD prolongation may be 147 explained by the significantly lower repolarizing outward current (Ioutward) amplitude in the KO hiPSC-CMs (Fig. 2f, right panel), although the voltage-dependency of activation was 148 149 unchanged (Supplementary Fig. 10d,e). Together with the multiple levels of evidence that 150 implicate conduction slowing and decreased I_{Na} in the pathogenesis of BrS, and previous 151 work linking end-binding proteins to ion channel targeting to the plasma membrane²⁴, our 152 data suggest that modulation of microtubule function and subsequent alterations in ion 153 channel trafficking may be a novel molecular mechanism contributing to BrS. Future work is 154 needed to address the underlying molecular mechanisms and provide insight into the ion 155 channels that underlie the observed abnormalities in repolarization, although a role for prolonged repolarization is not reconcilable with current hypotheses on BrS pathogenesis ²⁵. 156

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158 To further explore the genetic architecture of BrS in specific patient subgroups as well as the 159 association of common variants in aggregate with disease severity, we calculated a 160 polygenic risk score (PRS_{Brs}) per individual based on the 21 risk alleles and their 161 corresponding effect sizes. Of the 2,469 study participants tested, 454 (18.4%) carried a rare 162 pathogenic or likely pathogenic variant in SCN5A (SCN5A⁺). SCN5A⁺ cases had a lower mean 163 PRS_{Brs} compared to cases without such variants (SCN5A⁻) (8.8±1.1 vs. 9.3±1.0; P=2.1x10⁻¹; Fig. 3a), suggesting a higher burden of BrS-associated common variants in SCN5A⁻ patients, 164 as similarly shown in other heritable diseases^{26,27}. Using LDSC, we observed a strong 165 166 genome-wide correlation between the genetic contributors in $SCN5A^{+}$ and $SCN5A^{-}$ patient 167 subgroups (r_g =0.82; SE=0.2), suggesting the involvement of the same risk alleles. Out of 168 2,367 BrS cases with complete data, 228 had a life-threatening arrhythmic event (LAE) at 169 diagnosis or during follow-up (median age at last follow-up was 50.0 years, interquartile 170 range 39.5 - 60.7). Although SCN5A⁺ cases had a higher risk for LAE compared to SCN5A⁻ cases (HR 1.87; 95% CI 1.37-2.55; P=8.1x10⁻⁵; Supplementary Table 9), PRS_{BrS} was not 171 172 significantly associated with LAE in BrS cases (P=0.30, Supplementary Fig. 11). On the other 173 hand, PRS_{Brs} was significantly higher in BrS cases that presented with a spontaneous type 1 BrS ECG compared to those with a type 1 BrS ECG after sodium channel blocker challenge 174 175 $(9.3\pm1.1 \text{ vs. } 9.1\pm1.1 \text{ P}=1.7 \times 10^{-5};$ Fig. 3b), an effect that seemed more pronounced in the subgroup of SCN5A⁻ cases (9.2 \pm 1.0 vs. 9.5 \pm 1.1; P=3.5x10⁻⁸; Supplementary Fig. 12). These 176 177 data support the concept that disease susceptibility in different individuals relies upon 178 varying contributions of multiple factors including both rare and common genetic variations 179 and exposure to sodium channel blockade.

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To explore the genetic relationship of BrS with other traits, we performed a phenome-wide association study (PheWAS) in the UK Biobank using PRS_{BrS}, applying Bonferroni correction (P<7x10⁻⁴) to define statistical significance (**Supplementary Tables 10-12** and **Fig. 4A**). PRS_{BrS} was associated with greater risk for atrioventricular conduction disorders (*P*=1.5x10⁻⁹; OR=1.16 [1.10-1.21] per SD increase), as well as longer ECG activation/conduction times reflected in the P-wave duration (*P*=5.3x10⁻⁹; β=0.76 ms, SE=0.13), PQ interval duration (*P*=1.9x10⁻⁴⁵; β=2.70 ms, SE=0.19), and QRS duration (*P*=4.2x10⁻⁵⁵; β=1.23 ms, SE=0.08). This 188 underscores the important role of conduction slowing in the pathogenesis of BrS, and is 189 further supported by a significant positive genome-wide correlation between BrS and QRS duration²⁸ (r_g =0.44, *P*=1x10⁻⁸; **Supplementary Table 13**). In contrast, PRS_{Brs} was negatively 190 associated with the QT interval duration ($P=4.8 \times 10^{-16}$; $\beta=-1.56$ ms, SE=0.19), consistent with 191 suggestions of higher cardiomyocyte phase 1 repolarizing drive in BrS^{13,25}. PRS_{BrS} was also 192 negatively associated with the occurrence of atrial fibrillation (AF) or flutter ($P=6.2 \times 10^{-13}$; 193 194 OR=0.94 [0.92-0.95]). The effects of each of the 21 BrS risk alleles in previously published GWAS of PQ²⁹, QRS²⁸, QT³⁰ and AF³¹ are generally concordant with the aggregate effect of 195 those alleles (PRS_{BrS}) in the PheWAS (Fig. 4B, Supplementary Table 14-17, Supplementary 196 197 Fig. 13). One exception is the BrS risk allele near MYO18B (rs133902-T) which was also associated with greater risk for AF ($P=9x10^{-10}$ in Nielsen et al³², and $P=1x10^{-7}$ in Roselli et al³¹; 198 Supplementary Fig. 13). This suggests that although changes in conduction velocity through 199 200 sodium channel expression effects modulate risk for AF and BrS in opposite directions, some 201 disease mechanisms such as those involving structural proteins (e.g. MYO18B) may be 202 shared in both arrhythmias, with concordant effects. We also observed novel associations of 203 PRS_{BrS} with non-electrical phenotypes namely body mass index (log-transformed; P=6.2x10⁻⁶; 204 β = 0.0012, SE=0.0003) and systolic blood pressure (*P*=4.3x10⁻⁵; β =0.12 mmHg, SE=0.03; Supplementary Table 12). Of note, a recent study identified a modulatory effect of 205 hypertension in cardiac sodium channel disease³³. Lastly, a lookup of loci previously 206 207 associated with ECG traits and AF identified 9 additional novel loci associated with BrS at a 208 Bonferroni-corrected $P < 1.9 \times 10^{-4}$ (Supplementary Table 18).

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210 In conclusion, several important findings emerge from this work: (1) We identified a total of 211 12 loci, of which 10 novel, associated with BrS, a rare disease and a significant cause of 212 sudden cardiac death in young adults. Of these loci, 3 harbour multiple association signals. 213 (2) The 8 independent association signals at the SCN5A-SCN10A locus highlight the primacy 214 of reduced sodium channel function in BrS susceptibility, whereas the 8 loci harboring 215 cardiac transcription factor genes point to transcriptional regulation as a key feature of BrS 216 pathogenesis. (3) Functional studies of MAPRE2 support a novel mechanism of $Na_V 1.5$ 217 modulation via the microtubule network in BrS pathogenesis. (4) Analyses using the UK 218 Biobank highlight a genetic overlap between the BrS and cardiac electrical traits and 219 common disorders in the general population. (5) Polygenic risk score analyses support the 220 concept that disease threshold in different individuals with BrS is reached by varying 221 contributions of rare SCN5A variants, common risk alleles and sodium channel blockade. 222 Taken together, these findings broaden our understanding of the genetic architecture of BrS 223 and provide new insights into its molecular underpinnings.

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Locus	Lead SNP	Genomic position (hg19)	Risk allele	Other allele	Risk allele frequency in cases	Risk allele frequency in controls	OR [95% CI]	P value	Nearest gene
1	rs7638909*	3:38594973	G	Т	0.32	0.24	1.28 [1.17 - 1.40]	2.79E-08	SCN5A
	rs62241190*	3:38607468	G	А	0.06	0.03	1.96[1.63 - 2.32]	8.56E-14	SCN5A
	rs7374540*	3:38634142	С	А	0.51	0.39	1.72 [1.61 - 1.81]	3.56E-57	SCN5A
	rs7433206*	3:38657708	А	Т	0.45	0.42	1.48 [1.37 - 1.60]	9.52E-24	SCN5A
	rs34760424*	3:38683018	G	Т	0.98	0.94	2.32 [1.96 - 2.70]	3.03E-23	SCN5A
	rs41310232*	3:38689242	А	G	0.16	0.09	1.56 [1.40 - 1.74]	1.19E-15	SCN5A
	rs6782237*	3:38696553	С	G	0.78	0.68	1.74 [1.61 - 1.87]	1.05E-47	SCN5A
	rs6801957	3:38767315	Т	С	0.65	0.42	2.49 [2.34 - 2.65]	1.30E-180	SCN10A
2	rs6913204*	6:125664540	С	Т	0.51	0.47	1.22 [1.13 - 1.29]	1.30E-08	HDDC2
	rs9398791	6:126115821	С	Т	0.61	0.51	1.53 [1.44 - 1.63]	1.49E-39	HEY2, NCOA7
3	rs11765936	7:35349146	G	Т	0.18	0.15	1.37 [1.25 - 1.49]	4.30E-11	TBX20
	rs340398*	7:35413788	С	Т	0.42	0.38	1.22 [1.15 - 1.30]	1.76E-09	TBX20
4	rs804281	8:11611865	G	А	0.63	0.58	1.22 [1.15 - 1.30]	1.22E-09	GATA4
5	rs72671655	8:106347897	Т	А	0.97	0.95	1.85 [1.59 - 2.22]	2.51E-13	ZFPM2
6	rs72905083	11:32474374	А	G	0.1	0.08	1.43 [1.27 - 1.60]	2.09E-09	WT1
7	rs883079	12:114793240	С	Т	0.34	0.28	1.25 [1.16 - 1.33]	1.59E-10	TBX5
8	rs11645463	16:54456353	А	G	0.59	0.54	1.22 [1.15 - 1.30]	1.27E-09	IRX3
9	rs72622262	16:54662944	С	G	0.87	0.83	1.36 [1.25 - 1.49]	1.37E-11	CRNDE, IRX5
10	rs12945884	17:64300281	Т	С	0.58	0.53	1.2 [1.12 - 1.28]	3.31E-08	PRKCA
11	rs476348	18:32670021	С	Т	0.73	0.69	1.25 [1.16 - 1.33]	2.64E-09	MAPRE2
12	rs133902	22:26164079	Т	С	0.48	0.43	1.21 [1.13 - 1.29]	7.73E-09	MYO18B

Table 1: Lead SNPs and effect estimates for genome-wide significant association signals (P<5x10⁻⁸) in the BrS GWAS meta-analysis 548

549 *Variants associated with BrS in conditional analyses. Abbreviations: 95% CI, 95% confidence interval; OR, odds ratio referring to each unit increase in the risk 550 allele. Confidence intervals are given for a nominal p-value of 0.05 in order to allow comparability with other studies and reports.



Fig 1: Manhattan plot of genome-wide association meta-analysis comprising 2820 unrelated Brugada Syndrome cases and 10001 controls. The association P values were derived from a meta-analysis of the 10 GWAS strata using a fixed effects model with an inverse-variance weighted approach. The y-axis has breaks to emphasize the novel loci. The red and blue lines indicate the genome-wide significance ($P < 5x10^{-8}$) and suggestive significance ($P < 1x10^{-6}$) thresholds, respectively. Genes at novel loci are depicted in red.



Fig 2: Loss of *MAPRE2* leads to lower conduction velocity, action potential upstroke velocity and sodium current. (a) Left panel. Representative isochrone maps of hearts isolated from 5 day post-fertilization zebrafish larvae injected with tracrRNA/Cas9 and multiple gRNAs targeting *mapre2* (mapre2 KO) or tracrRNA/Cas9 without gRNA (CTRL). The dotted squares reflect the main ventricular area in the hearts from which the various parameters are measured. **Right panel**. Average ventricular conduction velocity (CV) in CTRL and *mapre2* KO hearts. (b) Left panel. Representative maximum action potential (AP) upstroke velocity (V_{max}) maps from zebrafish hearts. **Right panel**.

Average V_{max} in CTRL and mapre2 KO hearts. (c) Left panel. Representative maps of AP duration at 80% repolarization (APD80) in isolated 583 584 hearts paced at 100 bpm. Right panel. Average APD80 in CTRL and mapre2 KO hearts. (d) Representative APs at 1 Hz pacing from single human induced pluripotent stem cell derived cardiomyocytes (hiPSC-CMs) with CRISPR/Cas9-mediated MAPRE2 knockout and isogenic control 585 586 (CTRL) hiPSC-CMs. A constant ohmic current was injected to set the membrane potential just before the APs at approximately -80 mV to 587 overcome the depolarized state of the hiPSC-CMs (see Online Methods). Inset. First derivative of the AP upstroke velocity (Vmax). (e) Average 588 Vmax and APD at 30 and 90% repolarization (APD₃₀ and APD₉₀. respectively) in CTRL and MAPRE2 KO hiPSC-CMs. Maximal diastolic potential 589 and AP amplitude did not differ significantly between CTRL and MAPRE2 KO hiPSC-CMs (data not shown) (f) Left panel. Average current-590 voltage relationships of the sodium current (I_{Na}). **Right panel.** Average repolarizing outward current (I_{outward}) in CTRL and MAPRE2 KO hiPSC-CMs. Insets. Voltage protocol used. Results are expressed as mean ± s.e.m. Numbers in the bar graph refer to the number of hearts or cells 591 592 studied. * P < 0.05, ** P < 0.01 vs. CTRL.



598 Fig 3: Distribution of PRS_{Brs} in specific patient sub-groups. (A) Histograms displaying PRS_{Brs} 599 distribution in BrS cases carrying a rare pathogenic or likely-pathogenic variant in SCN5A 600 (SCN5A⁺; blue) compared to BrS cases without such variants (SCN5A⁻; red). (B) Histograms 601 displaying PRS_{BrS} distribution in BrS cases presenting with a spontaneous type 1 BrS ECG 602 (blue) compared with those presenting with a type 1 BrS ECG only after sodium channel blocker challenge (drug-induced; red). PRS_{BrS} was calculated per individual based on the 21 603 604 BrS risk alleles and their corresponding effect sizes. Reported P values refer to the 605 difference in PRS_{BrS} units between two groups. Dashed lines showing the mean PRS_{BrS} for 606 each group.

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610 Fig 4. Associations between polygenic susceptibility to Brugada syndrome and common 611 cardiovascular diseases and traits. Panel A shows the results of the phenome-wide association 612 analysis (PheWAS) for the Brugada syndrome (BrS) polygenic risk score (PRS_{BrS}) among individuals of 613 European ancestry from the UK Biobank. Phenotypes significantly associated with PRS_{Brs} and 614 phenotypes relevant to the heart are shown on the x-axis (5 electrocardiographic traits are depicted 615 on the right of the plot); the P values from multiple regression are depicted on the y-axis. Red circles 616 indicate that polygenic predisposition to BrS is associated with a positive beta (e.g. increased risk of 617 the condition or higher value for continuous traits), whereas blue circles indicate that polygenic 618 predisposition to BrS is associated with a negative beta (e.g. decreased risk of the condition or lower

619 value). We set the significance threshold to P < 0.0007 after Bonferroni correction (P < 0.05/70), 620 shown as dotted colored lines. The grey dotted lines indicate the nominal significance threshold (P <621 0.05). The complete PheWAS results are shown in Supplementary Tables 11 and 12 for dichotomous 622 and continuous traits, respectively. Panel B depicts a heat-map of associations between BrS risk 623 alleles and atrial fibrillation/flutter (AF), PR-interval (PR), QRS-complex duration (QRS) and QT interval duration (QT) from previously published GWAS²⁸⁻³¹. Each row represents an independent 624 625 BrS risk allele, while each column represents a phenotype. Red indicates that the BrS risk allele (or a 626 proxy with $R^2 > 0.8$) is associated with higher risk of AF or prolongation of the electrocardiographic 627 interval; blue indicates that the BrS risk increasing allele is associated with lower risk of AF or 628 shortening of the interval. The darkest red and blue colors represent conventional genome-wide 629 significance in the published GWAS ($P < 5 \times 10^{-8}$). 630