

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Structural characterisation of a MAPR-related archaeal cytochrome b_{5M} protein

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We recently reported that the membrane-associated progesterone receptor (MAPR) protein family (mammalian members: PGRMC1, PGRMC2, NEUFC and NENF) originated from a new class of prokaryotic cytochrome b₅ (cytb₅) domain proteins, called cytb_{5M} (MAPR-like). Relative to classical cytb₅ proteins, MAPR and cytb_{5M} proteins shared unique sequence elements and a distinct heme-binding orientation at an approximately 90° rotation relative to classical cytb₅, as demonstrated in the archetypal crystal structure of a cytb_{5M} protein (PDB accession number 6NZX). Here, we present the crystal structure of an archaeal cytb_{5M} domain (*Methanococcoides burtonii* WP_011499504.1, PDB:6VZ6). It exhibits similar heme binding to the 6NZX cytb_{5M}, supporting the deduction that MAPR-like heme orientation was inherited from the prokaryotic ancestor of the original eukaryotic MAPR gene.

Keywords: cytochrome b₅; membrane-associated progesterone receptor; steroidogenesis

We recently investigated a possible eukaryogenic role of MAPR proteins in early eukaryotic origins [1], prompted by the discovery that some mitochondrial genes had co-evolved with PGRMC1 [2], and that introducing point mutations at known phosphorylation sites on PGRMC1 had an effect on mitochondrial shape and mitochondrial protein abundance [3]. Several PGRMC1 functions also appear to be ancient in eukaryotes [1], including regulation of heme synthesis

[4], cytP450 interactions [5] and sterol metabolism [2]. That investigation led to the discovery of the newly identified yet ancient cytb_{5M} subclass of cytb₅-domain proteins, which were more similar to MAPR than to classical eukaryotic cytb₅ proteins and which therefore gave rise to MAPR proteins [1].

PGRMC1 is the archetypal and best characterised member of the heme-binding eukaryotic MAPR family [1,6] in which the heme-interacting tyrosine residue is

Abbreviations

CPR, candidate phyla radiation; cytb₅, cytochrome b₅; cytb_{5M}, MAPR-like cytochrome b₅; cytb_{5MY}, tyrosine-(Y)-containing cytb_{5M} proteins; cytP450, cytochrome P450; FPLC, fast protein liquid chromatography; GST, glutathione S-transferase; MAPR, membrane-associated progesterone receptor (a eukaryotic family of cytochrome b₅ domain proteins); MIHIR, MAPR-specific interhelical insertion region; NENF, Neudeisin; NEUFC, Neuferricin; PDB, Protein Data Bank; PGRMC1, progesterone receptor membrane component 1; PGRMC2, progesterone receptor membrane component 2; RMSD, root-mean-square deviation; TEV, tobacco etch virus.

Y113, and residues Y107, K163 and Y164 hydrogen bond (H-bond) with heme [7]. A group of $cytb_{5M}$ -like proteins from candidate phyla radiation (CPR) bacteria appear to exhibit similar tyrosinate heme chelation to MAPR proteins, because polar heme-interacting residues are strongly conserved with PGRMC1. We called these tyrosine-(Y)-containing $cytb_{5M}$ -like proteins $cytb_{5MY}$. It has so far not been possible to determine whether MAPR proteins evolved from a CPR $cytb_{5MY}$, or whether $cytb_{5MY}$ arose after horizontal gene transfer of a MAPR gene into CPR bacteria [1].

In this study, we solved the crystal structure of a second $cytb_{5M}$ protein, which demonstrated substantial overall three-dimensional similarity to our previous $cytb_{5M}$ structure [1]. These results will contribute to our future characterisation of MAPR origins, and the understanding of how eukaryotes adapted ancient functions and invented novel ones to produce the first MAPR protein, whose strongly conserved inheritance into phylogenetically diverse eukaryotes suggests it performed essential roles in a very early eukaryote [1,6].

Methods

The archaeal *Methanococcoides burtonii* WP_011499504.1 protein selected for this study was previously identified as a $cytb_{5M}$ protein [1]. To produce pure protein to determine the structure by protein crystallisation, protein constructs were expressed and purified in *Escherichia coli* *PLysS* cells as previously described [1]. Briefly, the codon-optimised WP_011499504.1 open reading frame was subcloned into pGEX-4T-1-H expression vector (Genscript) to create pGEX4T1_WP011499504. Competent *E. coli* BL21(DE3) *PLysS* cells (Novagen, Darmstadt, Germany, #69451; 50 μ L) were transformed with 1 μ L of plasmid DNA using heat-shock method and cell recovery. Eighty microliter of cells were spread onto Luria base plates containing ampicillin (100 μ g·mL⁻¹) and incubated overnight at 37 °C. Luria broth containing ampicillin (100 μ g·mL⁻¹) was inoculated with the bacterial colonies and incubated overnight at room temperature at 220 r.p.m. MiniPrep (Qiagen, Aarhus, Denmark) was performed using the transformed *E. coli* cells as per the manufacturer's protocol. Large-scale cultures were produced using the transformed *E. coli* cells by adding 500 μ L of cells to 500 mL of autoinduction expression base media containing 1% tryptone, 0.5% yeast extract, 1 mM MgSO₄, 5% 20 \times NPS (50 mM Na₂HPO₄, 50 mM KH₂PO₄ and 25 mM (NH₄)₂SO₄), 2% 50 \times 5052 (0.5% glycerol, 0.05% glucose and 0.2% lactose) and ampicillin (100 μ g·mL⁻¹). Cells were incubated at 30 °C at 80 r.p.m. for approximately 28 h. To perform glutathione S-transferase (GST) affinity chromatography using fast protein liquid chromatography (FPLC), the soluble cell

extracts were injected using a superloop at 2 mL·min⁻¹ into a GST column equilibrated with GST cell lysis buffer. The column was washed with 10 column volumes of GST buffer (50 mM Tris(hydroxymethyl)aminomethane, 125 mM NaCl, pH 7.4). Competitive binding using GST buffer containing 10 mM glutathione eluted purified GST-tagged protein from the column. To cleave the N-terminal GST tag from the protein, 100 μ L of tobacco etch virus (TEV) protease was added to the protein eluate and incubated at 4 °C overnight with TEV. Size exclusion chromatography was performed using AKTA FPLC with S200 20/60 filtration column equilibrated with 50 mM Tris. The purity of the samples and the complete cleavage of the $cytb_{5M}$ domain from the affinity tag were assessed using SDS/PAGE analysis.

Diffraction protein crystals were produced in an optimised condition from the PEG ION 2 screen (Hampton Research) using purified protein at 8 mg·mL⁻¹ in a condition containing 0.1 M succinic acid, 12% PEG6000 incubated at 23 °C. Crystals produced from a crystal optimisation were flash frozen using liquid nitrogen in a 20% glycerol stock and sent for x-ray diffraction to the Australian Synchrotron Facility, Melbourne. Crystal data were collected using the MX2 (Eiger 16 M detector) crystal beamline [8,9] and BLU-ICE software [10] at the Australian Synchrotron Facility. The data were integrated in IMOSFLM [11] scaled and reduced in AIMLESS [12]. The structure was determined by molecular replacement using PDB ID 1J03 in PHASER [13], REFMAC [14], PHENIX [15] and COOT [16].

Sedimentation velocity experiments were performed at 25 °C in a Beckman Coulter XL-A analytical ultracentrifuge as previously described [17]. Double-sector cells containing synthetic quartz windows were loaded with 380 μ L of protein at 1 mg·mL⁻¹ and 400 μ L of 50 mM Tris as a reference. Cells were centrifuged at 100 000 *g* using a 4-hole An-50 Ti rotor while data were collected in continuous mode without averaging at 280 nm with a radial step size of 0.003 cm. Solvent density (0.9997 g·mL⁻¹), solvent viscosity (0.01017 cp) and estimated protein partial specific volume (0.7386 mL·g⁻¹) were computed using SEDNTERP [18]. SEDFIT was used to fit absorbance as a function of radial position to the Lamm equation to determine the continuous sedimentation and mass coefficient distributions [18,19].

Results

Methanococcoides burtonii WP_011499504.1 $cytb_{5M}$ protein purification

Both the *M. burtonii* $cytb_{5M}$ protein and our previously described *Hadesarchaea* $cytb_{5M}$ protein structure (PDB: 6NZX) [1] are from the archaeal Euryarchaeota taxon. The archaeal *M. burtonii* $cytb_{5M}$ domain was recombinantly expressed and purified (Fig. 1A–C)

prior to successful crystallisation and structural comparisons with the crystal structure of the cytb₅ domains of PGRMC1 (PDB: 4X8Y) [7] and the *Hadesarchaea* cytb_{5M} protein structure (PDB: 6NZX) [1]. The *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain existed predominantly as an ~ 8 kDa monomer in solution on S200 gel filtration profile (Fig. 1B), and a peak at ~ 50 kDa is also present on the gel filtration profile, representing a dimer of the GST affinity tag (Fig. 1B). The results were confirmed in analytical ultracentrifugation experiments, which resulted in peaks spanning sedimentation coefficient ranges of 0.4–2 S and 3.2–4.5 S. These values are consistent with species of ~ 8 kDa and ~ 50 kDa, respectively, based on $c(M)$ analyses (Fig. 1D,E).

Crystal structure of the *Methanococcoides burtonii* WP_011499504.1 cytb_{5M} domain

Protein crystals were produced in an optimised condition from the PEG ION 2 screen (Hampton Research) using purified *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain protein at 8 mg·mL⁻¹ in a condition containing 0.1 M succinic acid, 12% PEG6000 incubated at 23 °C (Fig. 2A). The structure of the *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain was solved to a resolution of 2.1 Å (Table 1) and contained a well-ordered heme molecule in the cofactor binding site (Fig. 2B). This is consistent with the red coloration of the protein in solution and of the protein crystals (Fig. 2A) and was also evidenced through absorbance at ~ 412 nm using spectroscopy (not shown). Although the heme is not covalently bonded in the structure of the *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain, it is buried within the protein (Fig. 2C).

Diffraction data were indexed and integrated in the space group P 41 2 2, with unit cell dimensions of $a = 67.495$, $b = 67.495$ and $c = 48.132$, and angles of $a = 90$, $b = 90$ and $c = 90$. Following rebuilding and refinement in COOT and REFMAC, respectively, the final model had an R_{work} and R_{free} of 0.1622 and 0.1953, respectively, no Ramachandran outliers, and good stereochemistry (Table 1). The structure was analysed using Proteins, Interfaces, Structures and Assemblies (PISA) [20]. The protein and heme ligand complex had an interface area of 524.4 Å (Fig. 2C). The coordinates and associated structural data were deposited and validated to the Protein Data Bank (PDB) and issued the code 6VZ6.

As predicted from the protein sequences, there is high structural similarity between the *M. burtonii* and the *H. archaeon ynp_n21* cytb_{5M} domains (Fig. 3A). The main polar interactions with heme include the side chains of S34, H42 and H61 (Fig. 3B). The H-bond

interactions are shown in Fig. 3E. The structure of *H. archaeon ynp_n21* cytb_{5M} domain showed heme chelation through residues H42 and H61 (Fig. 3C). The cognate residues were involved in H-bonding in *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain (Fig. 3B). Differences in the residues that interact with heme between cytb_{5M} and MAPR proteins indicate the appearance of novel heme-binding properties in the evolutionary transition from prokaryotic cytb_{5M} to eukaryotic MAPR proteins, as exemplified by PGRMC1 (4X8Y [7]; Fig. 3D,G).

A heuristic PDB search was performed using DALI protein structure comparison by alignment of distance matrices [21] to identify the protein structures, from those available on the PDB, with the highest structural homology to the *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain (Table 2). As expected, the *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain showed highest homology to the *H. archaeon ynp_n21* cytb_{5M} domain with a root-mean-square deviation (RMSD) of 0.7 and %ID of 54%. The protein identified with the second highest confidence score was the PGRMC1 cytb₅/MAPR domain, although comparatively, the similarity was much lower, with an RMSD of 2.2 and %ID of 23%. All other identified sequences belong to the classical type cytb₅ group, underlining the novelty of the cytb_{5MY} structural fold and its similarity to the only solved MAPR crystal structure, that of PGRMC1.

Discussion

MAPR proteins originated from a prokaryotic cytb_{5M} domain protein, or possibly from the subclass cytb_{5MY}, rather than from the conventionally recognised cytb₅ proteins that gave rise to classical mammalian cytb₅ proteins [1]. Here, we present the second structure of a cytb_{5M} protein, from *M. burtonii* (WP_011499504.1). Unlike PGRMC1, the heme iron atom of both the archaeal *H. archaeon ynp_n21* and *M. burtonii* WP_011499504.1 cytb_{5M} domains are coordinated by two conserved histidine residues that serve as axial ligands (H42 and H61). The dual histidine mode of heme chelation (Fig. 3) is conserved in cytb_{5M} domain proteins such as the previous 6NZX cytb_{5M} structure, as well as classical cytb₅ domain-containing proteins [1]. The heme is buried within the cleft, further supported through conserved H-bonding at S34. This differs from the tyrosinate Y113-mediated heme Fe chelation observed in PGRMC1 [7]. The situation in other MAPR proteins remains unknown but is presumed to resemble PGRMC1. Differences in heme binding are attributable to evolutionary modification of heme-interacting residues in PGRMC1 relative to the cytb_{5M} proteins (Figs 3 and 4).

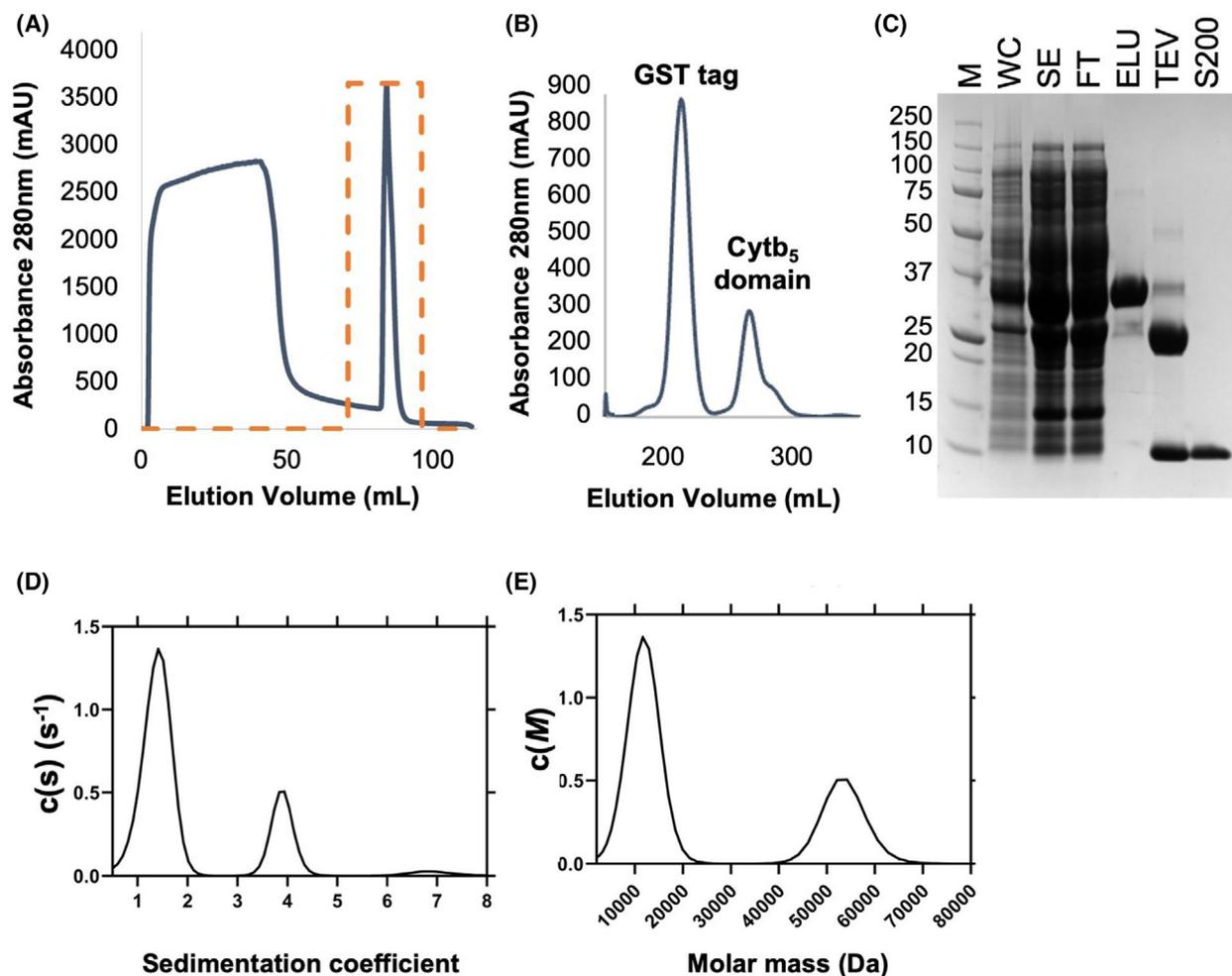


Fig. 1. *Methanococcoides burtonii* WP_011499504.1 $cytb_{5M}$ domain expression and purification. (A) GST affinity purification of the *M. burtonii* $cytb_{5M}$ domain UV trace (blue) and fractions containing purified protein (purple). (B) S200 size exclusion chromatography of the $cytb_{5M}$ domain. (C) SDS/PAGE analysis showing a purified protein band at ~ 8 kDa. M, marker; WC, whole-cell extract; SE, soluble extract; FT, flow through; GST, GST-tagged purified protein (~ 33 kDa); TEV, cleavage of GST tag (~ 25 kDa) with TEV protease from purified protein (~ 8 kDa); S200, purified protein (~ 8 kDa). (D) The continuous sedimentation coefficient distribution and (E) the continuous mass coefficient distribution resulting from sedimentation velocity analysis of the *M. burtonii* $cytb_{5M}$ domain at a concentration of $1 \text{ mg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$ by analytical ultracentrifugation. Continuous sedimentation coefficient distribution analysis resulted in peaks at ~ 1.5 S and ~ 4 S, which are consistent with the $cytb_{5M}$ monomer and GST-tag dimer, respectively, as determined by the continuous mass coefficient distribution.

While the prokaryotic $cytb_{5M}$ and $cytb_{5MY}$ proteins share a conserved surface patch and heme-binding pocket similarities with MAPR proteins, they lack a MAPR-specific interhelical insertion region (MIHIR) sequence that is found in MAPR proteins. The PGRMC1 MIHIR extends from L130 to E157 in the protein sequence (Fig. 4), between residues that H-bond with heme, but which loop away to the opposite protein surface from the heme-binding site in the folded protein structure [1,7]. A conserved motif in the MIHIR region of PGRMC1 resembles a coiled-coil motif found in several myosin proteins, suggesting that PGRMC1 may

interact with some of the same proteins as myosins, that is components of the actin cytoskeleton [6]. PGRMC1 was co-immunoprecipitated with actin cytoskeleton-associated proteins including RACK1 and α -Actinin-1 [22,23]. Therefore, the MIHIR, a eukaryotic invention, may be involved with actin cytoskeletal interactions. Point mutations at known phosphorylation sites on PGRMC1 including tyrosine residue 180 affected cell motility and altered the protein abundance of actin cytoskeleton-associated proteins [3,24]. It is probable that interactions between PGRMC1 and components of the actin cytoskeleton, predicted to occur within the

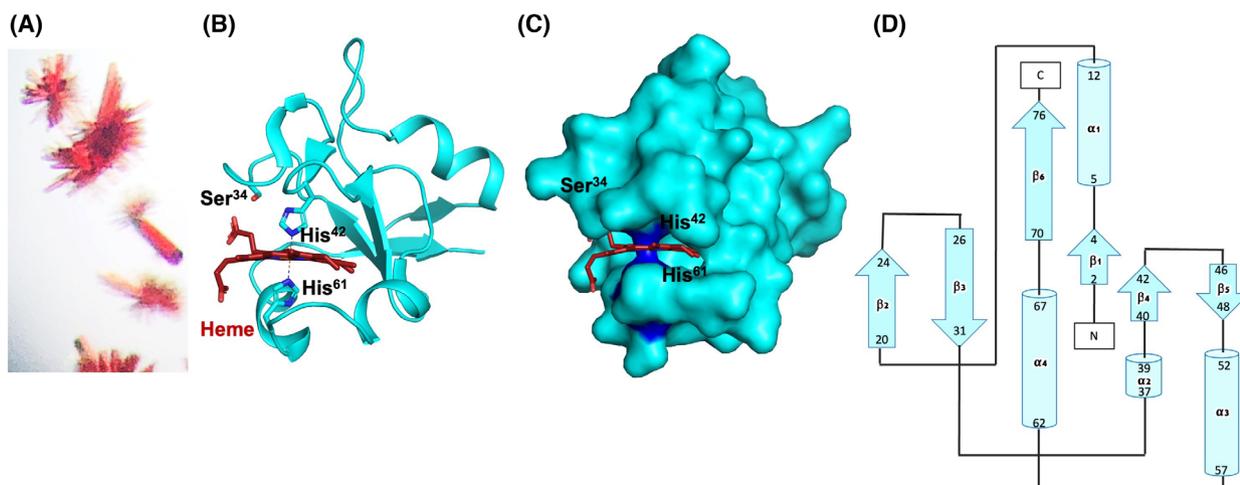


Fig. 2. Schematic representation of the structure of the *Methanococcoides burtonii* WP_011499504.1 $cytb_{5M}$ domain. (A) Crystals were obtained in 0.1 M succinic acid, 12% PEG6000 at 23 °C. The red coloration is due to the presence of the heme ligand. (B) The structure of the $cytb_{5M}$ domain (blue) showing a heme-bound ligand (red). (C) Surface representation (blue) and the heme ligand (red), which is buried within the $cytb_{5M}$ domain. Key interacting residues (S3, H42 and H61) are shown. (D) Topology map obtained from PDBsum showing alpha helices (cylindrical) and beta sheets.

Table 1. Crystallography data collection and refinement statistics. Statistics for the highest-resolution shell are shown in parentheses.

Resolution range	67.5–2.1
Space group	P 41 2 2
Unit cell	67.495 67.495 48.132 90 90 90
Reflections	6908
Multiplicity	7.1 (4.8)
Completeness (%)	98.0 (95.0)
Mean I/sigma(I)	14.3 (5.1)
R-merge	0.089 (0.297)
R-meas	0.096 (0.334)
R-pim	0.033 (0.149)
CC1/2	0.997 (0.946)
Reflections used in refinement	6717 (631)
R-work	0.1622
R-free	0.1953
Number of nonhydrogen atoms	726
Macromolecules	617
Ligands	43
Solvent	66
Protein residues	79
RMS (bonds)	0.0102
RMS (angles)	1.04
Ramachandran favoured (%)	98.67
Ramachandran allowed (%)	1.33
Ramachandran outliers (%)	0.00
Rotamer outliers (%)	0.00
Clashscore	4.84
Average B-factor	24.8
Macromolecules	24.2
Ligands	22.1
Solvent	32.7

previously described MIHIR sequence, could be regulated by tyrosine phosphorylation [6].

Neither of the archaeal $cytb_{5M}$ proteins exhibited a heme-dependent dimerization, as reported for PGRMC1 [7]. We note heme-stacking interactions observed in the PGRMC1 crystal structure could also potentially facilitate even larger multimer formation. This merits future investigation. PGRMC1 dimers or higher-order structures have been observed not only in the bacterially expressed crystallised protein [7], but also in mammalian cells [25], where an anti-FLAG tag antibody can immunoprecipitate FLAG-tagged as well as endogenous PGRMC1. Endogenous PGRMC1 precipitation was dependent upon heme availability. Also, the molecule glycyrrhizin (the active compound in liquorice), and derivatives, binds to PGRMC1 residues involved in the dimeric interface, disrupting the protein complex and favouring monomer formation [25].

Although the structure of a $cytb_{5MY}$ protein could be informative, we have so far been unable to obtain one. Future determination of the structures of other MAPR proteins and $cytb_{5MY}$ proteins will be required to determine whether tyrosinate heme chelation is commonly accompanied by heme-mediated dimerisation. The shared $cytb_{5M}$ /MAPR orientation of heme binding is presumably related to an important MAPR-dependent eukaryotic function. In light of the current understanding of the structural differences between MAPR proteins, $cytb_{5M}$ and classical $cytb_5$ proteins,

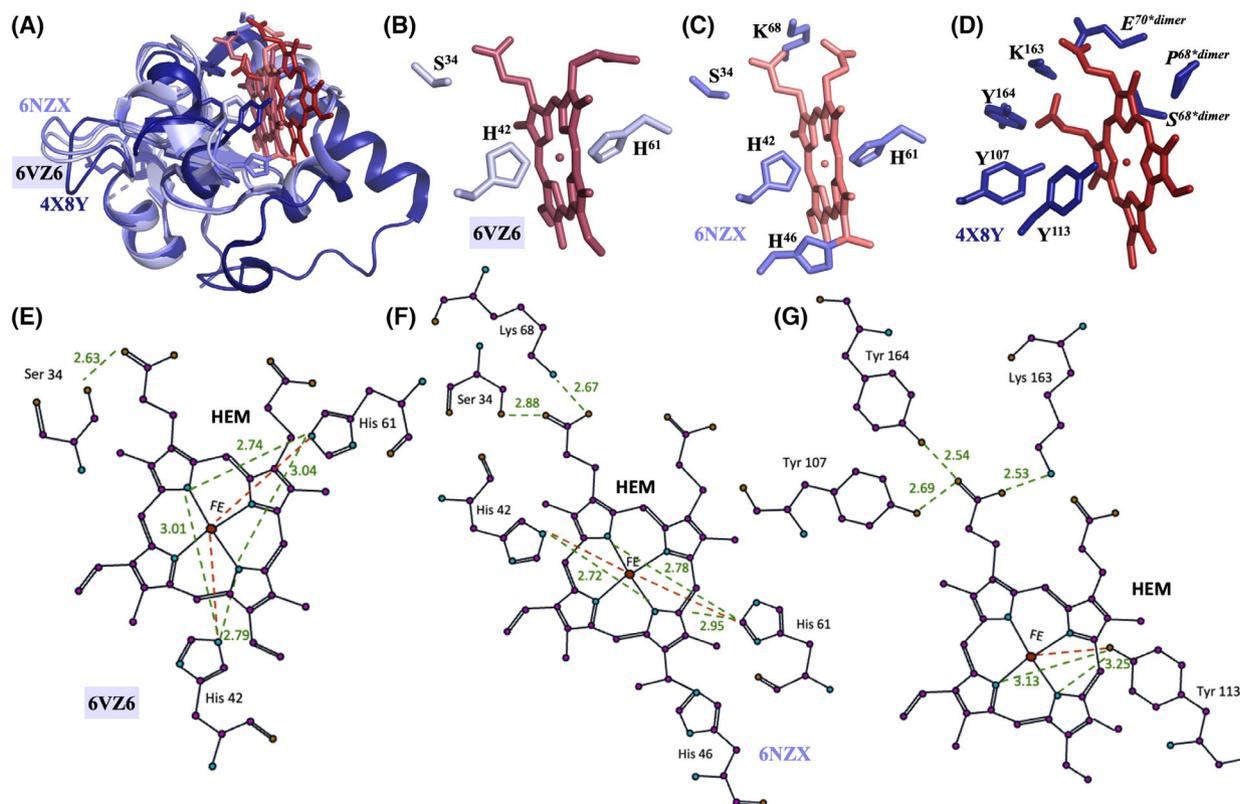
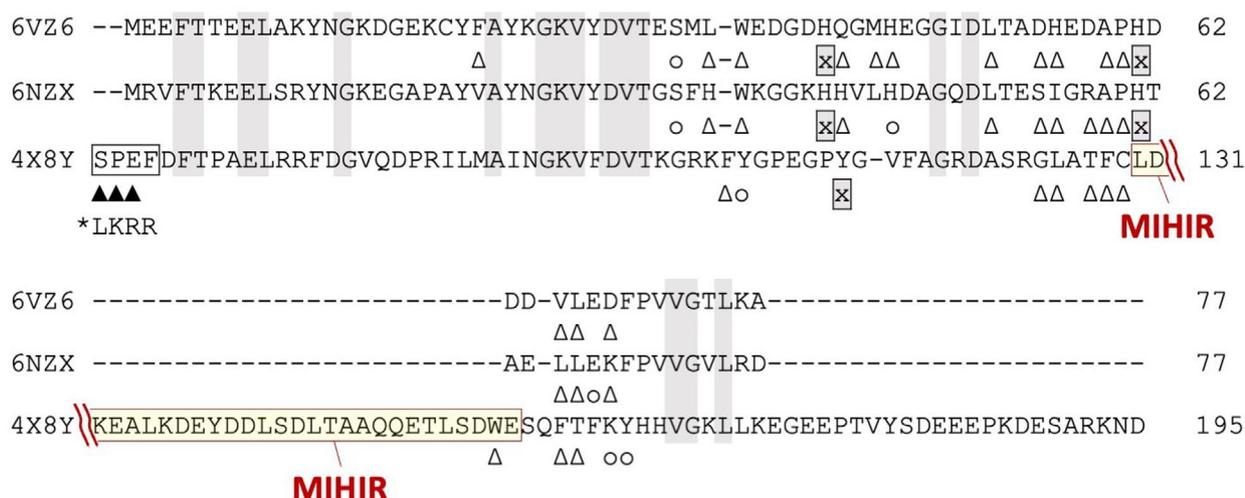


Fig. 3. Heme axial binding within the cytb_{5M} domain. (A) Overlay of archaeal cytb_{5M} domains and PGRMC1 cytb₅/MAPR domain structures from PDB. The PGRMC1 cytb₅ domain has a longer helix than the *H. archaeon ynp_n2* and *M. burtonii cytb_{5M}* domains, which is shifted away from the heme molecule. (B) Heme binding within the *M. burtonii* WP_011499504.1 cytb_{5M} domain involves H-bonding at S34 and heme Fe axial ligand support at H42 and H61. (C) Heme binding within the *H. archaeon ynp_n21* cytb_{5M} domain involves binding at H46, H-bonding at S34 and K68 residues and heme axial ligand support at H42 and H61. (D) Heme binding within the PGRMC1 cytb₅/MAPR domain is coordinated through Y113 residue and H-bonding at Y107, K163 and Y164. Note the absence of Fe-interacting axial histidine residues, indicating that this type of heme interaction differs from that seen for the archaeal cytb_{5M} proteins. (E–G) are adapted from figures produced using LIGPLOT [28]. Note the residues in orange (S68, P69 and E70) are interactions from the bacterial expression vector with the heme, not PGRMC1 residues, as previously discussed [1]. (E) Heme binding in the *M. burtonii* WP_011499504.1 cytb_{5M} domain. (F) Heme binding in the *H. archaeon ynp_n21* cytb_{5M} domain. (G) Heme binding within the cytb₅/MAPR domain of PGRMC1.

Table 2. Structural comparison of proteins with the highest structural homology to archaeal *Methanococcoides burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain with the structure of 6VZ6. %ID, per cent identity; LALI, total number of aligned residues; Nres, total number of residues; RMSD, root-mean-square deviation across the aligned sequences; Z, z-score confidence in similarity significance.

PDB ID	z	RMSD	LALI	Nres	%ID	Protein name	Gene	Organism
6NZX	16.4	0.7	76	76	54	Cytochrome b5	APU95_03975	<i>H. archaeon YNP_N21</i>
4X8Y	8.3	2.2	73	112	23	Progesterone receptor membrane component 1	PGRMC1	<i>Homo sapiens</i>
1SOX	8.2	2.0	69	463	25	Sulfite oxidase	SUOX	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
1X3X	8.0	2.4	71	82	25	Cytochrome b5	N/A	<i>Ascaris suum</i>
1KBI	5.9	2.4	67	504	30	Cytochrome b2	CYB2	<i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i>
2I96	5.8	2.8	69	108	25	Cytochrome b5	CyB5A	<i>Homo sapiens</i>
2KEO	2.6	3.6	46	92	28	Probable E3 ubiquitin-protein ligase HERC2	HERC2	<i>Homo sapiens</i>



Heme interactions

Δ hydrophobic interactions; o H-bonds; ☒ axial ligation

Fig. 4. Sequence alignment of *M. burtonii* (6VZ6) and *H. archaeon ynp_n21* (6NZX) cytb_{5M} domains and PGRMC1 (4X8Y) cytb₅ domain from a structural comparison using the *M. burtonii* cytb_{5M} domain protein sequence (6VZ6) as the reference. Residues conserved in all three proteins are highlighted in grey. Filled triangles (▲) at the N-terminus of 4X8Y represent heme interactions with non-PGRMC1 residues in 4X8Y that are contributed by the bacterial protein expression cloning vector (boxed). The asterisked PGRMC1 residues 67–71 show the wild-type PGRMC1 sequence. Numbering refers to PGRMC1 (O00264) residues. The gapped alignment of the top (6VZ6 1–62) is based on the alignment of 1620 cytb₅ domain proteins of clades-1 and -2 from Tamarit et al. ([1], Fig. 3A), as is the position off the MAPR-specific interhelical insertion region (MIHIR) of PGRMC1. The lower alignment (6VZ6 63–77) is generated here based upon heme interactions.

including MAPR tyrosinate coordinated heme binding, heme orientation, and the presence and function of the MIHIR binding region, future research should investigate the origins and function of MAPR proteins, with particular focus on the PGRMC1 membrane trafficking function [26,27].

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Author contributions

Conceptualization (MAC), designed and performed experiments (ST, MM, ST and ERRM), x-ray diffraction and data collection (DA), data analysis (JKF, ST, ERRM and TPSC), manuscript preparation (ST and MAC) and manuscript revision (JKF, ERRM and TPSC).

Additional information

This research was undertaken in part using the MX2 beamline at the Australian Synchrotron, part of ANSTO, and made use of the Australian Cancer Research Foundation (ACRF) detector. The Full wwPDB X-ray Structure Validation Report for the resulting structure is provided as Appendix S1.

Data accessibility

Data to support the findings of this study are openly available in the Protein Data Bank at <https://www.rcsb.org/>, reference number 6VZ6.

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Supporting information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix S1 Full wwPDB X-ray Structure Validation Report.