



Anaerobic fungal communities differ along the horse digestive tract

Mura, E., Edwards, J., Kittelmann, S., Kaerger, K., Voigt, K., Mrázek, J., ...
Fliegerova, K.

This is a "Post-Print" accepted manuscript, which has been published in "Fungal
Biology"

This version is distributed under a non-commercial no derivatives Creative Commons



([CC-BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)) user license, which permits use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and not used for commercial purposes. Further, the restriction applies that if you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

Please cite this publication as follows:

Mura, E., Edwards, J., Kittelmann, S., Kaerger, K., Voigt, K., Mrázek, J., ...
Fliegerova, K. (2019). Anaerobic fungal communities differ along the horse digestive tract. *Fungal Biology*, 123(3), 240-246.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.funbio.2018.12.004>



Anaerobic fungal communities differ along the horse digestive tract

Erica Mura^{1#}, Joan Edwards², Sandra Kittelmann³, Kerstin Kaerger^{4,5}, Kerstin Voigt^{4,5},
Jakub Mrázek⁶, Giuseppe Moniello¹ and Katerina Fliegerova^{6*}

¹ Department of Veterinary Medicine, University of Sassari, Via Vienna 2, 07100 Sassari, Italy

² Laboratory of Microbiology, Wageningen University & Research, Wageningen, 6708 WE, The Netherlands

³ Wilmar International Ltd., Wil@NUS Corporate Lab, National University of Singapore, Singapore 117599, Singapore

⁴ Institute of Microbiology, University of Jena, Neugasse 25, 07743 Jena, Germany

⁵ Leibniz Institute for Natural Product Research and Infection Biology, Jena Microbial Resource Collection, Adolf-Reichwein-Str. 23, 07745 Jena, Germany

⁶ Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics, CAS, Vídeňská 1083, Prague 14220, Czech Republic

#All the authors contributed equally to this work.

*Corresponding author: Katerina Fliegerova. Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics, Czech Academy of Sciences, Vídeňská 1083, Prague 14220, Czech Republic. Telephone: +420267090504. Fax: +420267090500. E-mail: fliegerova@iapg.cas.cz

Abstract

Anaerobic fungi are potent fibre degrading microbes in the equine hindgut, yet our understanding of their diversity and community structure is limited to date. In this preliminary work, using a clone library approach we studied the diversity of anaerobic fungi along six segments of the horse hindgut: caecum, right ventral colon (RVC), left ventral colon (LVC), left dorsal colon (LDC), right dorsal colon (RDC) and rectum. Of the 647 ITS1 clones, 61.7% were assigned to genus level groups that are so far without any cultured representatives, and 38.0% were assigned to the cultivated genera *Neocallimastix* (35.1%), *Orpinomyces* (2.3%), and *Anaeromyces* (0.6%). AL1 dominated the group of uncultured anaerobic fungi, particularly in the RVC (88%) and LDC (97%). Sequences from the LSU clone library analysis of the LDC, however, split into two distinct phylogenetic clusters with

60
61
62 low sequence identity to *Caecomyces* sp. (94-96%) and *Liebetanzomyces* sp. (92%)
63 respectively. Sequences belonging to cultured *Neocallimastix* spp. dominated in LVC (81%)
64 and rectum (75.5%). Quantification of anaerobic fungi showed significantly higher
65 concentrations in RVC and RDC compared to other segments, which influenced the
66 interpretation of the changes in anaerobic fungal diversity along the horse hindgut. These
67 preliminary findings require further investigation.
68
69
70
71

72
73 **Keywords:** Anaerobic fungi; Diversity; Uncultured; ITS1; Horse; Hindgut
74
75

76 1. Introduction

77
78 Horses evolved as free-ranging herbivores of grassland environments, with an enlarged
79 hindgut adaptation enabling them to obtain energy and nutrients from plant structural
80 polysaccharides through microbial fermentation. The hindgut is comprised of two main
81 fermentative chambers, the caecum and colon, which together constitute two-thirds of the
82 volume of the digestive tract. The hindgut has a combined capacity of over 200 L (Frape
83 2010) and accounts for 75% of the mean transit time (23-48h) of dietary particles (van
84 Weyenberg et al. 2006). The hindgut is home to bacteria, anaerobic fungi, methanogenic
85 archaea and protozoa. Of these, the anaerobic fungi (Neocallimastigomycetes) are the most
86 potent in terms of degrading plant fibres due to their complete and very efficient set of plant
87 cell-wall degradation enzymes (Gruninger et al. 2014, Haitjema et al. 2014). Despite their
88 presence in the horse hindgut within a few weeks of birth (Julliand et al. 1996), almost all the
89 current knowledge of anaerobic fungi is derived from ruminant based studies.
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97

98 Nine genera of anaerobic fungi validly described based on cultivated representatives,
99 including those with filamentous monocentric (*Neocallimastix*, *Piromyces*, *Oontomyces* and
100 *Buwchfawromyces*), filamentous polycentric (*Orpinomyces*, *Anaeromyces* and *Pecoromyces*)
101 and bulbous (*Caecomyces* and *Cyllamyces*) mycelium (Gruninger et al. 2014, Edwards et al.
102 2017), have been recently extended by new monocentric genera *Feromyces* (Hanafy et al.
103 2018) and *Liebetanzomyces* (Joshi et al. 2018). These genera, however, represent only part of
104 anaerobic fungal diversity as indicated by the large and growing numbers of internal
105 transcribed spacer region 1 (ITS1) sequences in public databases that belong to potentially
106 novel, as yet uncultured clades within the Neocallimastigomycetes. Based on the re-
107 evaluation of publicly available ITS1 sequences, which took into account both primary
108 sequence and secondary structure information, Kittelmann et al. (2012) and later Koetschan
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118

119
120
121 et al. (2014) proposed a revised phylogeny and pragmatic taxonomy of anaerobic fungi,
122 which resulted in 37 reproducible species or genus-level clades. Eighteen of these clades have
123 not been cultured, containing only environmental derived sequences, and the number of not
124 yet cultivated clades was recently increased to twenty-five (Paul et al. 2018).
125
126
127

128
129 A survey of anaerobic fungi in faeces of 30 different ruminant and non-ruminant herbivore
130 species, found that members of the family Equidae clustered apart from the other non-
131 Equidae herbivores studied (Liggenstoffer et al. 2010). The different domesticated and non-
132 domesticated equines sampled in the Liggenstoffer et al. (2010) study shared a similar
133 anaerobic fungal community, which was mainly composed of two novel genus level groups
134 that are now termed AL1 & AL3 (Koetschan et al. 2014). Cultivated anaerobic fungal genera
135 were found in equine samples only in limited relative abundance (4-12% of *Caecomyces*, 2%
136 of *Neocallimastix*, 0.3% of *Piromyces*, 0.1-0.3% of *Anaeromyces*). These results suggest that
137 the digestive tract of horses is largely occupied by novel, as yet uncultured anaerobic fungi,
138 which differ from those previously described from foregut herbivores.
139
140
141
142
143
144

145 Whilst molecular based analysis of equine anaerobic fungal diversity has been performed on
146 faecal samples (Liggenstoffer et al., 2010), it is known that bacterial, protozoal and archaeal
147 community composition differs with hindgut segment (Julliand and Grimm 2016; Fliegerova
148 et al. 2016). Therefore, there is a clear need to assess if the anaerobic fungal community
149 composition also differs along the hindgut, particularly as niche differentiation within the
150 anaerobic fungi has previously been proposed (Griffith et al. 2009). In this preliminary study,
151 the anaerobic fungal community composition along the hindgut of a mature horse was
152 determined using ITS1 based clone libraries.
153
154
155
156
157
158

159 **2. Materials and Methods**

160 2.1. Collection of digesta samples from the horse hindgut

161
162 Gut content samples were taken from the six segments of the hindgut of an Anglo-Arabian
163 gelded male (24 years old) euthanised for non-research purposes in a local abattoir. The horse
164 was maintained on a mixed diet of grass, meadow hay and complementary feed as described
165 by Fliegerova et al. (2016), and was healthy with no history of any intestinal disorders. The
166 segments sampled were: caecum, right ventral colon (RVC), left ventral colon (LVC), left
167 dorsal colon (LDC), right dorsal colon (RDC) and rectum (representing faeces). Gut
168 segments were tied off to prevent mixing between neighbouring segments, and the whole
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177

178
179
180 content from a section mixed thoroughly before a sample (approx 500 g) was taken. Samples
181 were placed in labelled plastic containers and transported on wet ice back to the laboratory
182 where they were frozen (at -20°C) and then freeze-dried. Freeze-dried material was stored at -
183 20°C until DNA extraction.
184
185
186

187 2.2. DNA extraction

189 Freeze-dried gut content (5 g) was homogenized using a mortar and pestle with liquid
190 nitrogen. Genomic DNA was then extracted from 400 mg of the resulting powder using the
191 cetyltrimethylammonium bromide extraction protocol of Gardes and Bruns (1993) after
192 modification with the respect to the amount of sample material used. The concentration and
193 purity of extracted nucleic acids was checked using a NanoDrop 2000c UV-Vis
194 spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific, U.S.A), and DNA extracts were stored at -20°C until
195 use.
196
197
198
199
200

201 2.3. PCR amplification

202
203 Amplification of the anaerobic fungal ITS1 region from each sample was carried out with the
204 combination of the fungal universal ITS1 forward primer (Gardes and Bruns 1993) and the
205 Neocallimastigomycetes specific 5.8S rRNA gene reverse primer (Edwards et al. 2008). This
206 resulted in an amplicon of approximately 350 bp in length, as described previously by
207 Fliegerova et al. (2010). The PCR reaction (50 µl) was performed with a PPP Master Mix kit
208 (Top-Bio, Czech Republic) and 0.3 µM of each primer using the following thermal cycling
209 conditions: 33 cycles of denaturation at 94°C for 1 min, annealing at 58°C for 30 s and
210 extension at 72°C for 45 s with an initial cycle of 94°C for 4 min and final cycle of 72°C for 2
211 min. Each sample was PCR amplified in quadruplicate and then pooled after successful
212 amplification and verified by agarose gel electrophoresis.
213
214
215
216
217
218
219

220 For one sample, the LDC, the ribosomal large subunit 28S rRNA (LSU) was also amplified
221 in quadruplicate with universal primers NL1 and NL4 as described previously by Fliegerova
222 et al. (2006). The rationale for this analysis is explained in the results section.
223
224
225

226 Pooled PCR amplicons of the correct length were excised from an agarose gel with a sterile
227 scalpel blade, purified and concentrated using a QIAquick Gel Extraction Kit (Qiagen,
228 Germany).
229
230

231 2.4. Construction of clone libraries and sequencing

232
233
234
235
236

237
238
239 The TOPO[®] TA Cloning[®] Kit for Sequencing (Life Technologies, USA) was used for the
240 preparation of the ITS1 clone libraries for each segment of equine hindgut, and the LSU
241 clone library of the LDC segment. Ligation of the PCR amplicons into pCR4-TOPO vector
242 was performed at room temperature for 30 min followed by transformation into competent
243 One Shot TOP10 *Escherichia coli* cells (30 min on ice). Randomly selected clones of *E. coli*
244 grown overnight in lysogeny broth plates with ampicillin (50 µg/ml) were checked by PCR
245 with M13 primers for the presence of the ITS1 and LSU fragments of expected length.
246 Plasmid DNA was then isolated from 881 ITS1 clones and 20 LSU clones using a
247 GenElute[™] HP Plasmid Miniprep Kit (Sigma-Aldrich, USA). Purified plasmid DNAs were
248 quantified using a NanoDrop ND-1000 UV-Vis Spectrophotometer (NanoDrop Technologies,
249 USA) and Sanger sequenced (SEQme, Czech Republic). Generated sequences were checked
250 for errors and any vector contamination removed. Of the clones sequenced, 647 of the ITS1
251 clones and 17 of the LSU clones yielded clear and unambiguous sequence data that were used
252 for further analysis.
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260

261 262 2.5. Taxonomic and phylogenetic analysis

263
264 Taxonomic assignment of ITS1 sequences (97% identity threshold) was done in QIIME
265 version 1.8 (Caporaso et al. 2010) by BLAST against the anaerobic fungal ITS1 reference
266 database (Koetschan et al. 2014). The 647 cloned sequences with taxonomic assignment from
267 the six libraries were concatenated into a single fasta file, and a sequence map (seqs_otus.txt)
268 was manually built for input into the script “make_otu_table.py”. The resulting relative
269 abundance table was summarized at the clade level. A similar process was followed with the
270 LSU sequence data, except the similarity search was carried out using BLAST against
271 GenBank.
272
273
274
275
276
277

278 Evolutionary analyses of ITS1 sequences and the LSU sequences from the LDC sample were
279 separately performed using the software MEGA 6 (Tamura et al. 2013) to construct
280 phylogenetic trees, with 1,000 replicates for bootstrap analysis, using the UPGMA method.
281 LSU genes of described genera *Caecomyces* (JQ782555, KM878679), *Cyllumyces*
282 (DQ273829, KY386297), *Piromyces* (JF974096, JF974119, JN939159), *Buwchfawromyces*
283 (KP205570, NG058679), *Feromyces* (MG584197, MG584228, MG605676), *Neocallimastix*
284 (JF974094, JN939158, KT274174, KR920745), *Pecoramyces* (JN939127, KX961618),
285 *Orpinomyces* (HQ703476, JN939163, KM878680), *Anaeromyces* (JN939157, JN939170,
286
287
288
289
290
291
292
293
294
295

296
297
298 JN939172), *Liebetanzomyces* (MH468763) and *Oontomyces* (JX017314, JX017315) were
299 used as reference sequences.
300

301
302 The ITS1 nucleotide sequences generated from the horse hindgut have been deposited in the
303 GenBank database under the following accession numbers: MH038102 - MH038269
304 (caecum), MH038399 - MH038497 (RVC), MH038498 - MH038612 (LVC), MH038272 -
305 MH038398 (LDC), MH038613 - MH038694 (RDC) and MH038695 - MH038784 (rectum).
306
307 The LSU sequences of the LDC have been deposited in the GenBank database under the
308 accession numbers MH125212 - MH125228.
309
310

311 312 2.6. qPCR analysis

313
314 The MX 3005P QPCR System (Stratagene) and the Kapa SYBR Fast qPCR Master mix
315 (Kapa Biosystems) was used for the qPCR determination of ITS1 gene copy numbers in each
316 sample using the ITS1 primer pair and cycling conditions as described above (see PCR
317 amplification). The standard curve was created (in triplicate) using a 10-fold dilution series of
318 a pCR4-TOPO plasmid containing the ITS1 region of a *Piromyces* isolate (NCBI Accession
319 No. KY368107). ITS1 copy numbers were determined (in triplicate) from 1 μ l of ten-fold
320 diluted DNA, and data expressed per g of dry matter of digesta. Three replicates of a negative
321 control sample without DNA template were also included in the qPCR assay. The qPCR
322 assay efficiency was 101.5%, and quantitation was linear over eight orders of magnitude (10^1
323 to 10^8 gene copy μ l⁻¹). The unpaired t-test (Microsoft Excel 2010) was used to identify
324 significant differences in the counts of anaerobic fungi among all the samples. Significant
325 differences were declared when $P < 0.05$. A quantitative profile of the anaerobic fungi was
326 then calculated, using the ratio between the total ITS1 gene copy number and relative
327 abundance of each clade for each hindgut segment.
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337

338 3. Results

339 3.1. ITS1 based diversity analysis of anaerobic fungi in the horse hindgut

340
341 Of the 647 successfully sequenced ITS1 clones from all six segments of the horse hindgut,
342 the 645 clones appeared to be anaerobic fungal in origin and only 2 of these sequences
343 (0.3%) could not be further taxonomically assigned within the class Neocallimastigomycetes
344 using either the anaerobic fungal ITS1 reference database or GenBank. On average 61.7% of
345 all the sequences were represented by genus-level groups that have so far only been described
346 in the literature based on sequence data: AL1, AL7, DT1 and KF1 (as defined by Koetschan
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354

355
356
357 et al. 2014). The cultured genera *Neocallimastix*, *Orpinomyces* and *Anaeromyces* represented
358 the remaining 38.0% sequences that could be taxonomically assigned. Phylogenetic
359 relationships of ITS1 sequences of uncultured anaerobic fungi generated from the horse
360 hindgut and cultured genera is shown in Fig. S1.
361
362
363

364 3.2. Distribution and quantification of anaerobic fungi along the horse hindgut 365

366 The relative abundance of the different anaerobic fungal clades (as defined by Koetschan et
367 al. 2014) along the six segments of the horse hindgut are shown (Fig. 1.). The AL1 clade
368 represented 53% of the total sequences and was present throughout the hindgut, however, its
369 relative abundance differed among gut segments. AL1 represented almost all of the anaerobic
370 fungi in the RVC (88%) and LDC (97%), and was the most abundant clade in the caecum
371 (62%) and RDC (53%). In contrast, the relative abundance of AL1 in the LVC (4%) and the
372 rectum (3%) was very low. Generally, the decreased abundance of AL1 in certain gut
373 segments seemed to be associated with an increase in the abundance of the *Neocallimastix* 1
374 clade. This clade was the second most abundant (35.1% of the total sequences) and was
375 detected in all segments. The third most abundant clade was AL7 (4.3% of the total
376 sequences), and was also detected in all segments. In contrast, the KF1 clade (4.2% of the
377 total sequences) was only detected in the LVC (7%), RDC (3%) and rectum (17%).
378 Sequences of the other less abundant fungi (*Orpinomyces* 1a, *Orpinomyces* 1b, *Anaeromyces*
379 1 and DT1) were relatively minor (13.7% of total sequences) and detected only in some
380 hindgut segments.
381
382
383
384
385
386
387
388
389
390

391 Total anaerobic fungal concentrations differed between segments, with the exception of the
392 caecum and LDC (Fig. 2.). The RVC followed by RDC was found to contain the highest
393 concentrations of anaerobic fungi, and the lowest concentrations of anaerobic fungi were
394 detected in the LVC and rectum. It can be clearly seen that the lower concentrations of total
395 anaerobic fungi in these segments is associated with a substantial decrease in the amount of
396 the AL1 clade, rather than an increase in the *Neocallimastix* 1 clade (as indicated by Fig. 1.).
397
398
399
400

401 Fig. 1

402 Fig. 2

403 3.3. LSU based diversity analysis of the LDC 404 405

406 As 97% of the ITS1 sequences from the LDC segment belonged to the monophyletic AL1
407 clade (Fig. 3), this segment was also analysed using an LSU based clone library in order to
408
409
410
411
412
413

414
415
416 better elucidate the taxonomic position of this uncultured clade. Tree topology showed that
417
418 the LSU sequences obtained (n=17) formed two distinct clusters (Fig. 4). The clones
419
420 representing cluster I (n=8) had highest sequence identity (94 - 96%) to a sequence belonging
421
422 to a cultured *Caecomyces communis* (KM878679), and formed a sister group to the
423
424 *Caecomyces/Cyllamyces* group. The clones representing cluster II (n=9) had highest sequence
425
426 identity (91 - 92%) to a sequences belonging to a cultured *Liebetanzomyces* sp. (MH468763)
427
428 and *Anaeromyces* sp. (MG605690), however, the cloned sequences clustered distantly from
429
430 the reference anaerobic fungi present in the tree.

431
432 Fig. 3.

433
434 Fig. 4.

435 436 **4. Discussion**

437 Gut microbes are essential colonizers of the mammalian digestive tract. They are involved in
438
439 food decomposition, production of vitamins and micronutrients. Microbial fermentative end-
440
441 products (especially acetate, propionate and butyrate) supply the host body by energy.
442
443 Microbiota of digestive tract is also involved in a variety of other metabolic and physiological
444
445 functions including the shaping of the immune system. The importance of the equine
446
447 intestinal microbial ecosystem for animal health and performance is well established (Dicks
448
449 et al. 2014), however, research has primarily focussed on only bacteria. The investigation of
450
451 the anaerobic fungi in the equine hindgut to date has been limited and, to the best of our
452
453 knowledge, there is no study of the diversity of anaerobic fungi in the different anatomo-
454
455 physiological segments of the horse hindgut.

456 Our work showed that an uncultured *Neocallimastigales* clade named AL1 was prevalent in
457
458 the equine hindgut. This finding is in agreement with an ITS1 based next generation
459
460 sequencing study that found the NG1 (=AL1 in Kittelmann et al. 2012) group could account
461
462 for 56.7%-99.9% of the total anaerobic fungi in the faeces of certain horses and zebra
463
464 (Liggenstoffer et al. 2010). It was surprising to observe that the AL1 clade was greatly
465
466 decreased in the LVC and rectum, with the reason for these decreases not clear.

467 The AL1 clade is not specific to equines, as it was also detected (17.8- 49.5%) in a variety of
468
469 other foregut fermenters (Liggenstoffer et al. 2010). However, ITS1 sequences of the AL1
470
471 clade retrieved in this study were most similar or identical only with those from the zebra and
472
horse (deposited in the GenBank database). The effort to elucidate the phylogenetic

473
474
475 relationships of the ITS1 defined AL1 clade using the LSU resulted in splitting of the
476 sequences into two non-related clusters. As this contrasted the monophyletic clade seen with
477 ITS1, further work is needed to confirm the basis of this finding.
478
479

480
481 The second most numerous clade of uncultivated anaerobic fungi identified in horse faeces
482 by Liggenstoffer et al. (2010), clade NG3 (=AL3 in Kittelmann et al. 2012), has not been
483 found in any part of the horse hindgut sampled in this study. On the other hand, sequences of
484 the group NG7 (=AL7 in Kittelmann et al. 2012) retrieved by Liggenstoffer et al. (2010) in
485 low relative abundance only from Somali wild ass faeces (0.6%), represented 4% of total
486 clones in the present study. Sequences of another group of anaerobic fungi, the KF1 clade,
487 which represented 17% of the sequences in the horse rectum in this study, were first detected
488 in cow manure and were described as an undistinguished *Cyllamyces/Caecomycetes* cluster of
489 uncultured fungi (Fliegerova et al. 2010).
490
491

492
493 Regarding the known cultivable anaerobic fungi, only the clade *Neocallimastix* 1 colonized
494 the hindgut of the studied horse with a dominant relative abundance in the LVC and rectum.
495 However, quantitative profiling showed that this was due to the absence of clade AL1, rather
496 than an increased amount of *Neocallimastix* 1 in these segments. The *Neocallimastix* 1
497 sequences were mostly similar to those obtained from ruminants, especially from cow, bison
498 and yak. *Neocallimastix* is known by its excellent hydrolytic properties and multi-functional
499 cellulosomal enzymes, and is presumed to be a very effective (hemi)cellulose degrader
500 (Gruninger et al. 2014, Wei et al. 2016). In horse, zebra and donkey faeces analysed by
501 Liggenstoffer et al. (2010) this genus was either absent or represented at very low relative
502 abundance (< 2%). However, in a sample from a Somali wild ass, *Neocallimastix* represented
503 45% of all sequences.
504
505

506
507 Whilst the cause of the considerable difference in anaerobic fungal diversity between the
508 RVC and LVC is not clear, the difference between the neighbouring LVC and LDC may be
509 related to the pelvic flexure. This narrow junction is responsible for the selective retention of
510 coarse particles. Less digested particles are retained in the caecum and LVC, whereas liquid
511 and finer particles move on into the LDC. These retropulsive-propulsive movements keep the
512 caecum and the whole ventral colon filled, increasing the fermentation time of plant biomass.
513 These segments of the hindgut are, therefore, the sites with the highest digesta mean retention
514 time of (about 9 hours) and represents the main site of lignocellulose degradation (Van
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531

532
533
534 Weyenberg et al. 2006). As well as a longer time to degrade the structural polysaccharides,
535 this also provides more time for the propagation of microorganisms.
536
537

538 The implication of the RVC ecosystem in forage degradation has been highlighted already by
539 de Fombelle et al. (2003), due to the decreased proportion of cellulose in the digesta after
540 passing through the RVC. This corresponds well with our finding of highest anaerobic fungal
541 concentrations in the RVC compared to the other hindgut segments. On the other hand, the
542 segments with the lowest anaerobic fungal concentrations (LVC and rectum) were associated
543 with a decrease in the amount of the AL1 clade. Variations in the concentration of anaerobic
544 fungi found among different gut segments in this study, however, contrasts with study of
545 Dougal et al. (2012) where no effect of gut segment was seen based on the caecum, RDC and
546 rectum sites that were sampled.
547
548
549
550
551
552

553 The RDC is the site of another selective mechanism (known as the colonic separation
554 mechanism). This mechanism is responsible for the prolonged retention of fluid and smaller
555 food particles (Drogoul et al. 2000). How this mechanism may contribute to the decrease of
556 the AL1 clade in the rectum is not clear. Digesta samples from this part of the hindgut, could
557 in future studies be separated into a liquid and a solid fraction to provide further insight, as
558 anaerobic fungal vegetative biomass (as opposed to the motile zoospores) is tightly attached
559 to plant particles.
560
561
562
563
564

565 Faeces samples are often used as reference samples to describe the microbial population of
566 the digestive tract, because the faecal microbiota might be expected to contain representatives
567 from all regions of the large intestine. Our study provides evidence that horse faecal samples
568 can serve as qualitative reference samples, as almost all clades of anaerobic fungi found in
569 the hindgut were also present in the faeces sample. The only exception was *Anaeromyces*,
570 which was only detected in some segments and at very low relative abundances. However,
571 the relative abundance and concentrations of anaerobic fungi differed considerably along the
572 horse hindgut and the functional implications of this variation requires further investigation.
573
574
575
576
577
578

579 Differences in anaerobic fungal concentrations along the ruminant digestive tract is known to
580 occur (Davies et al., 1993). Furthermore, a cultivation based study by Griffith et al. (2009)
581 compared the anaerobic fungi in the rumen and faeces of the same cow, and found
582 considerable differences in the abundance of the different taxa. Fungi with bulbous
583 morphotypes (*Caecomyces* and *Cyllamyces*) were the most abundant genera in fresh faeces,
584 where they comprised a 5-fold greater proportion of the total fungal population than in the
585
586
587
588
589
590

591
592
593 rumen. Polycentric morphotypes (*Orpinomyces* and *Anaeromyces*) were less frequently
594 isolated from fresh faeces as compared to rumen digesta. Conversely, a cultivation
595 independent study showed no difference in anaerobic fungal community composition in the
596 rumen, duodenum and faeces of three different cows (Jimenez et al. 2007).
597
598
599

600 We acknowledge that no general conclusion can be made from the analysis of samples from
601 one horse, and the findings of this preliminary study should be used cautiously. Nevertheless,
602 the data presented here provide an important next step in revealing the considerable, as yet
603 largely uncharacterised, anaerobic fungal diversity in the equine hindgut. It also highlights
604 the need to conduct further studies to look at the activity, concentrations and diversity of the
605 anaerobic fungi throughout the digestive tract, due to evidence of differences between
606 hindgut segments.
607
608
609
610
611

612 **Acknowledgement**

613 This work was supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech
614 Republic, grant no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/15_003/0000460 OP RDE) and programs of the
615 University of Sassari Erasmus+, Master and Back 2014/2015 and Visiting Professor
616 2016/2017 Regione Autonoma Sardegna. JEE acknowledges funding from an EU H2020
617 Marie Curie Fellowship (706899).
618
619
620
621
622

623 **References**

624 Caporaso J.G., Kuczynski J., Stombaugh J., Bittinger K., Bushman F.D., Costello E.K.,
625 Fierer N., Pěa A.G., Goodrich J.K., Gordon J.I., Huttley G.A., Kelley S.T., Knights D.,
626 Koenig J.E., Ley R.E., Lozupone C.A., McDonald D., Muegge B.D., Pirrung M., Reeder J.,
627 Sevinsky J.R., Turnbaugh P.J., Walters W.A., Widmann J., Yatsunenko T., Zaneveld J.,
628 Knight R., 2010. QIIME allows analysis of high-throughput community sequencing data.
629 *Nat. Methods* 7, 335-336.
630
631
632
633
634

635 de Fombelle A., Varloud M., Goachet A.G., Jacotot E., Philippeau C., Drogoul C., Julliand
636 V., 2003. Characterization of the microbial and biochemical profile of the different segments
637 of the digestive tract in horses given two distinct diets. *J. Anim. Sci.* 77, 293–304.
638
639
640

641 Davies D.R., Theodorou M.K., Lawrence M.I.G., Trinci A.P.J., 1993. Distribution of
642 anaerobic fungi in the digestive tract of cattle and their survival in feces. *J. Gen. Microbiol.*
643 139, 1395-1400.
644
645
646
647
648
649

650
651
652 Dicks L.M.T., Botha M., Dicks E., Botes M., 2014. The equine gastro-intestinal tract: An
653 overview of the microbiota, disease and treatment. *Livest. Sci.* 160, 69-81.
654
655

656 Dougal K., Harris P.A., Edwards A., Pachebat J.A., Blackmore T.M., Worgan H.J., Newbold
657 C.J., 2012. A comparison of the microbiome and the metabolome of different regions of the
658 equine hindgut. *FEMS Microbiol. Ecol.* 82, 642–652.
659
660

661 Drogoul C., Poncet C., Tisserand J.L., 2000. Feeding ground and pelleted hay rather than
662 chopped hay to ponies: 1. Consequences for in vivo digestibility and rate of passage of
663 digesta. *Anim. Feed. Sci. Technol.* 87, 117-130.
664
665

666 Edwards J.E., Forster R.J., Callaghan T.M., Dollhofer V., Dagar S.S., Cheng Y., Chang J.,
667 Kittelmann S., Fliegerova K., Puniya A.K., Henske J.K., Gilmore S.P., O'Malley M.A.,
668 Griffith G.W., Smidt H., 2017. PCR and omics based techniques to study the diversity,
669 ecology and biology of anaerobic fungi: insights, challenges and opportunities. *Front.*
670 *Microbiol.* 8, 1657. DOI: 10.3389/fmicb.2017.01657
671
672
673
674

675 Edwards J.E., Kingston-Smith A.H., Jimenez H.R., Huws S.A., Skøt K.P., Griffith G.W.,
676 McEwan N.R., Theodorou M.K., 2008. Dynamics of initial colonization of nonconserved
677 perennial ryegrass by anaerobic fungi in the bovine rumen. *FEMS Microbiol. Ecol.* 66, 537-
678 545.
679
680
681

682 Fliegerová, K., Mrázek, J., Voigt, K., 2006. Differentiation of anaerobic polycentric fungi by
683 rDNA PCR-RFLP. *Folia Microbiol.* 51, 273-277.
684
685

686 Fliegerova K., Mrazek J., Hoffmann K., Zábranská J., Voigt K., 2010. Diversity of anaerobic
687 fungi within cow manure determined by ITS1 analysis. *Folia Microbiol.* 55, 319-325.
688
689

690 Fliegerova K., Mura E., Mrazek J., Moniello G., 2016. A comparison of microbial profiles of
691 different regions of the equine hindgut. *Livest. Sci.* 190, 16-19.
692
693
694

695 Frappe, D. 2010. Equine Nutrition and feeding, fourth ed. Blackwell Publishing, Australia.
696
697

698 Gardes M., Bruns T.D., 1993. ITS primers with enhanced specificity for Basidiomycetes -
699 application to the identification of mycorrhizas and rusts. *Mol. Ecol.* 2, 113-118.
700
701

702 Griffith G.W., Ozkose E., Theodorou M.K., Davies D.R., 2009. Diversity of anaerobic fungal
703 populations in cattle revealed by selective enrichment culture using different carbon sources.
704 *Fungal Ecol.* 2, 87-97.
705
706
707
708

709
710
711 Gruninger R.J., Anil K., Puniya A.K., Callaghan T.M., Edwards J.E., Youssef N., Dagar S.S.,
712 Fliegerova K., Griffith G.W., Forster R., Tsang A., McAllister T., Elshahed M.S., 2014.
713 Anaerobic fungi (phylum Neocallimastigomycota): Advances in understanding of their
714 taxonomy, life cycle, ecology, role, and biotechnological potential. *FEMS Microbiol. Ecol.*
715 90, 1-17.
716
717
718

719
720 Haitjema C.H., Solomon K.V., Henske J.K., Theodorou M.K., O'Malley M.A., 2014.
721 Anaerobic gut fungi: Advances in isolation, culture, and cellulolytic enzyme discovery for
722 biofuel production. *Biotechnol. Bioeng.* 111, 1471-1482.
723
724

725
726 Hanafy R.A., Elshahed M.S., Youssef N.H., 2018. *Feramyces austinii*, gen. nov., sp. nov., an
727 anaerobic gut fungus from rumen and fecal samples of wild Barbary sheep and fallow deer.
728 *Mycologia* 110, 513-525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00275514.2018.1466610>
729
730

731
732 Jimenez H.R., Edwards J.E., McEwan N.R., Theodorou M.K., 2007. Characterisation of the
733 population structure of anaerobic fungi in the ruminant digestive tract. *Microb. Ecol. Health*
734 *Dis.* 19, 40.
735

736
737 Joshi A., Lanjekar V.B., Dhakephalkar P.K., Callaghan T.M., Griffith G.W., Dagar S.S.,
738 2018. *Liebetanzomyces polymorphus* gen. et sp. nov., a new anaerobic fungus
739 (Neocallimastigomycota) isolated from the rumen of a goat. *Myckeys* 40, 89-110.
740 <https://doi.org/10.3897/mycokeys.40.28337>
741
742

743
744 Julliand V., Grimm P., 2016. Horse species symposium: The microbiome of the horse
745 hindgut: History and current knowledge. *J. Anim. Sci.* 94, 2262-2274.
746 <https://doi.org/10.2527/jas.2015-0198>
747
748

749
750 Julliand V., De Vaux A., Villard L., Richard Y., 1996. Preliminary studies on the bacterial
751 flora of faeces taken from foals, from birth to twelve weeks. Effect of the oral administration
752 of a commercial colostrum replacer. *Pferdeheilkunde* 12, 209-212.
753

754
755 Koetschan C., Kittelmann S., Lu J., Al-Halbouni D., Jarvis G.N., Müller T., Wolf M., Janssen
756 P.H., 2014. Internal transcribed spacer 1 secondary structure analysis reveals a common core
757 throughout the anaerobic fungi (Neocallimastigomycota). *PLoS ONE* 9, e91928.
758 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0091928>
759
760

761
762 Kittelmann S., Naylor G.E., Koolaard J.P., Janssen P.H., 2012. A proposed taxonomy of
763 anaerobic fungi (class Neocallimastigomycetes) suitable for large-scale sequence-based
764
765
766
767

768
769
770 community structure analysis. *PloS ONE* 7, e36866.
771
772 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0036866>
773

774 Liggenstoffer A.S., Youseff N.H., Couger M.B., Elshahed M.S., 2010. Phylogenetic diversity
775 and community structure of anaerobic gut fungi (phylum Neocallimastigomycota) in
776 ruminant and non-ruminant herbivores. *ISME J.* 4, 1225-1235.
777
778

779 Paul S.S., Bu D., Xu J., Hyde K.D., Yu Z., 2018. A phylogenetic census of global diversity of
780 gut anaerobic fungi and a new taxonomic framework. *Fungal Divers.* 89, 253–266.
781
782 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13225-018-0396-6>
783
784

785 Tamura K., Stecher G., Peterson D., Filipski A., Kumar, S., 2013. MEGA6: Molecular
786 Evolutionary Genetics Analysis version 6.0. *Mol. Biol. Evol.* 30, 2725-2729.
787
788

789 Van Weyenberg, S., Sales, J., and Janssens G.P.J., 2006. Passage rate of digesta through the
790 equine gastrointestinal tract: A review. *Livest. Sci.* 99, 3-12.
791
792

793 Wei Y.Q., Yang H.J., Luan Y., Long R.J., Wu Y.J., Wang Z.Y., 2016. Isolation,
794 identification and fibrolytic characteristics of rumen fungi grown with indigenous
795 methanogen from yaks (*Bos grunniens*) grazing on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. *J. Appl.*
796
797 *Microbiol.* 120, 571-587.
798
799
800
801
802
803

804 **Figure captions**

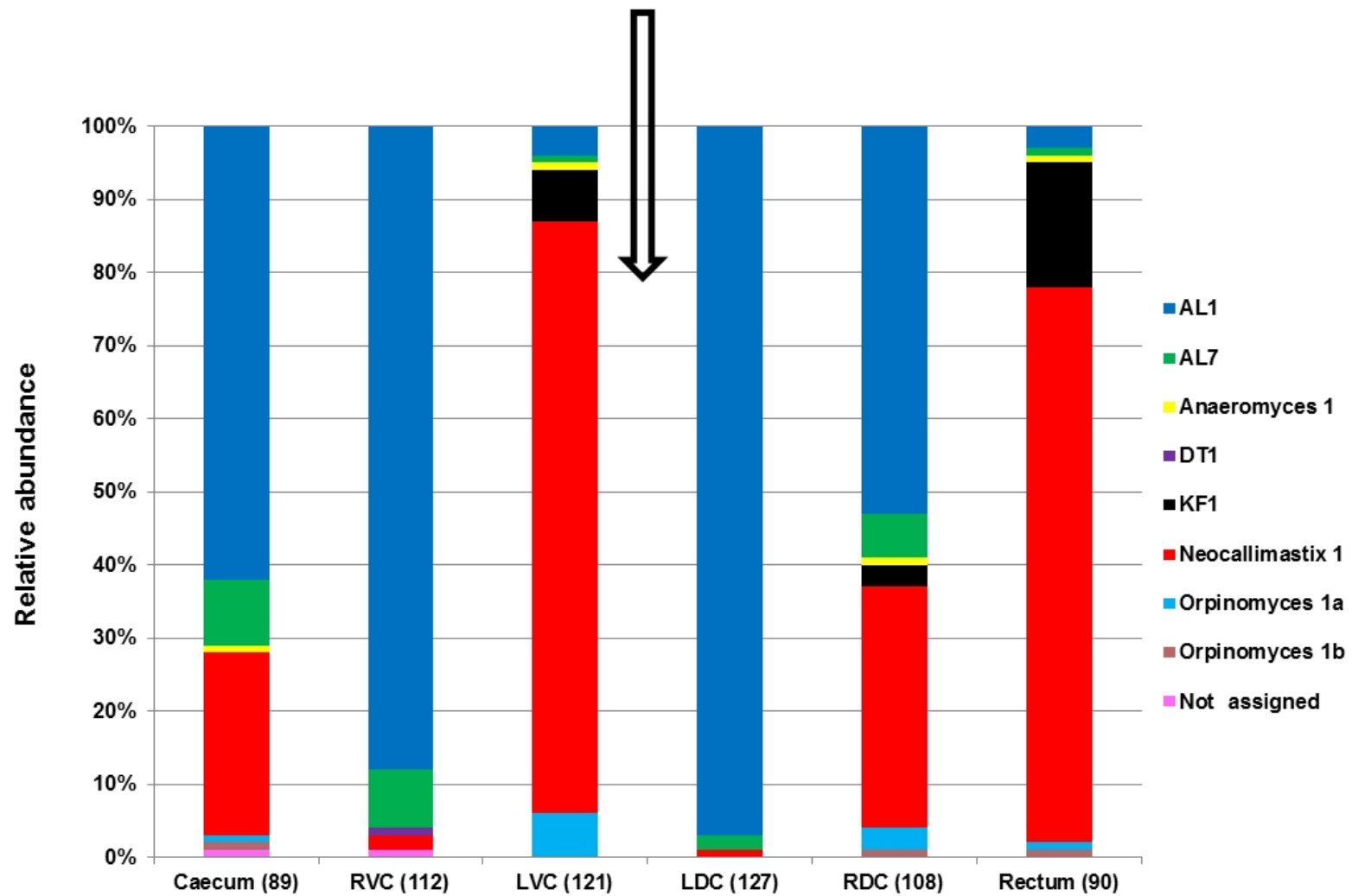
805
806
807 **Fig. 1.** Relative abundances of anaerobic fungal clades (as defined by Koetschan et al. 2014)
808 in the ITS1 clone libraries constructed from six segments of the horse hindgut. The total
809 number of clones in each library is indicated in parentheses on the x-axis. The arrow indicates
810 the pelvic flexure position between the LVC and LDC.
811
812

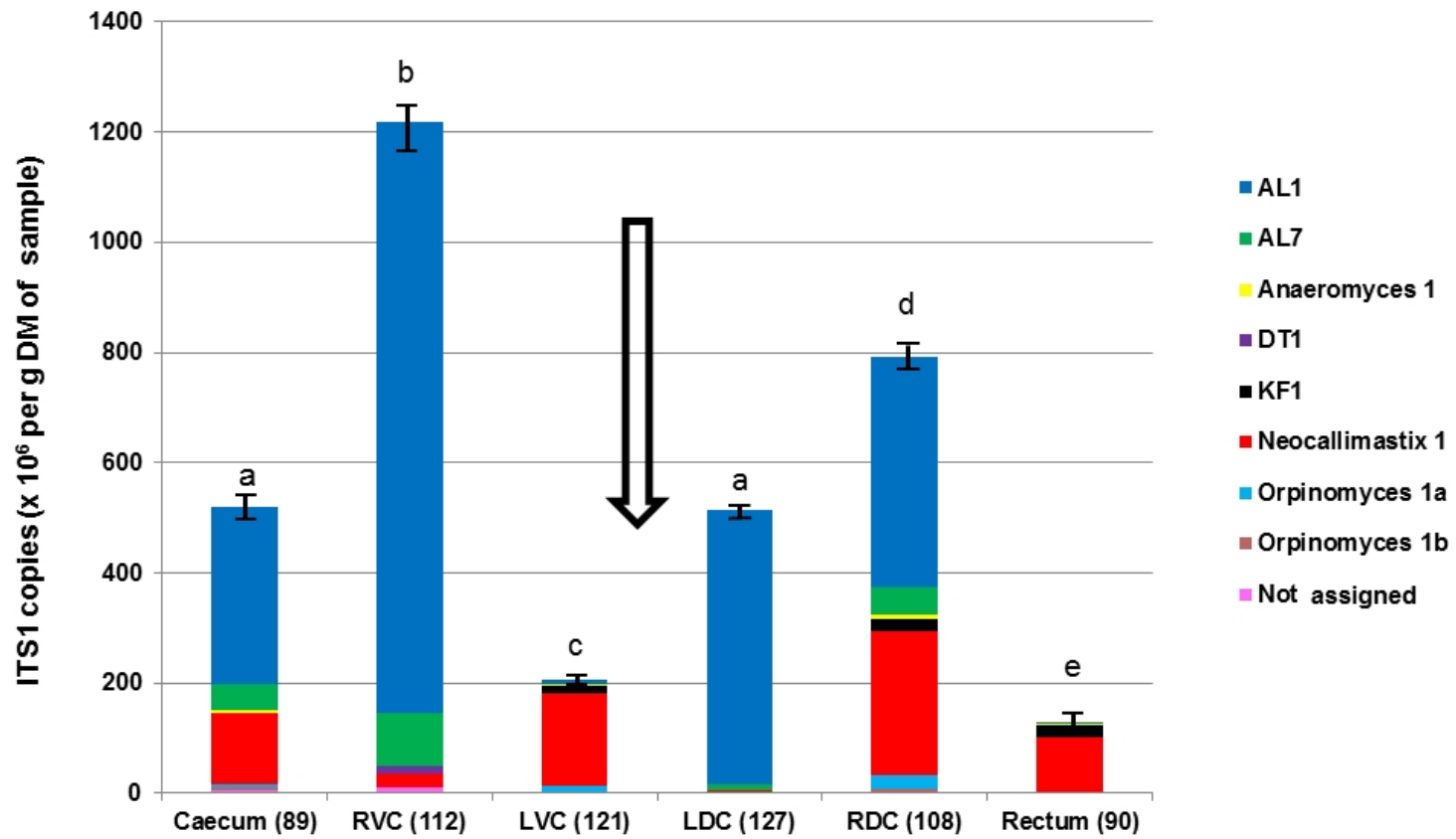
813
814 **Fig. 2.** Quantitative profiles of anaerobic fungal clades (as defined by Koetschan et al. 2014)
815 in the ITS1 clone libraries constructed from six segments of the horse hindgut. The top of the
816 bars indicate mean concentrations (n=3) of total anaerobic fungal ITS1 gene copies in six
817 different segments of horse hindgut, and different letters indicate significant differences (P
818 < 0.05). Quantitative profiles were then generated from clade relative abundances and the
819
820
821
822
823
824
825
826

827
828
829 ITS1 concentrations in each segment. The arrow indicates the pelvic flexure position between
830 the LVC and LDC.
831
832

833 **Fig. 3.** Phylogenetic relationships of ITS1 sequences of anaerobic fungi generated from the
834 LDC inferred using the UPGMA method with bootstrap values from 1,000 replications. The
835 evolutionary distances were computed using the Jukes-Cantor method. The analysis involved
836 a total of 142 nucleotide sequences (127 sequences generated from the LDC in this study and
837 14 of the most closely related sequences plus 1 outgroup sequence).
838
839
840
841

842 **Fig. 4.** Phylogenetic relationships of anaerobic fungal LSU gene sequences generated from
843 the LDC inferred using the UPGMA method with bootstrap values from 1,000 replications.
844 The evolutionary distances were computed using the Jukes-Cantor method. The analysis
845 involved a total of 45 nucleotide sequences (17 sequences generated from the LDC, 27
846 sequences of the cultured genera of anaerobic fungi plus 1 outgroup sequence).
847
848
849
850
851
852
853
854
855
856
857
858
859
860
861
862
863
864
865
866
867
868
869
870
871
872
873
874
875
876
877
878
879
880
881
882
883
884
885





100 AL 1

43

LDC ITS1 seq118

LDC ITS1 seq60

82 Uncultured Neocallimastigales clone WildAss01AOJA5 (GQ686305)

AL 7

97 Caecomyces sp. W101 (DQ067604)

Caecomyces communis OF1 (KM878677)

60

100 LDC ITS1 seq175

Uncultured fungus clone 1F1-41 (JX184439)

Neocallimastix 1

64

100 Anaeromyces sp. JB-1999 isolate AUC2 (AF170188)

100 Anaeromyces sp. AMG-2014 isolate AIB16 (KF789509)

Issatchenkia sp. YS5 (AM233510)

0.3

0.2

0.1

0.0



