



Proteomic approach for identification of immunogenic proteins of *Mycoplasma mycoides* subsp. *capri*



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ABSTRACT

In this study, an immunoproteomic approach was used to identify immunodominant proteins from *Mycoplasma mycoides* subsp. *capri* isolates. Membrane proteins, extracted through TX-114 phase partitioning, were separated using mono- and two-dimensional electrophoresis and detected by Western blotting with pooled sera from naturally infected goats. A total of 27 immunoreactive spots, corresponding to 13 different proteins, were identified using nanoLC–ESI–MS/MS. Function annotation revealed that most of these proteins were metabolic enzymes involved in carbohydrate and energy metabolism. The immunogenic proteins identified in this study: pyruvate dehydrogenase, dihydrolipoamide acetyltransferase, dihydrolipoyl dehydrogenase, phosphate acetyltransferase, phosphopyruvate hydratase, adenine phosphoribosyltransferase, transketolase, translation elongation factor G, translation elongation factor Ts, FMN-dependent NADH-azoreductase, peptide methionine sulfoxide reductase, inorganic diphosphatase and trigger factor may be used as biomarkers for the serological diagnosis of contagious agalactia caused by *M. mycoides* subsp. *capri*.

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1. Introduction

The *Mycoplasma mycoides* cluster consists of five closely related mycoplasmas that cause disease in ruminants. The five species belonging to this cluster are: *M. mycoides* subsp. *mycoides* (Mmm), *M. mycoides* subsp. *capri* (Mmc), *Mycoplasma capricolum* subsp. *capricolum* (Mcc), *M. capricolum* subsp. *capripneumoniae* (Mccp), and *Mycoplasma leachii* (MI) (Manso-Silvan et al., 2009; Thiaucourt et al., 2011). Concerning the species Mmc, it now includes strains previously referred to as *M. mycoides* subsp. *mycoides* Large Colony (MmmLC) (Vilei et al., 2006; Manso-Silvan et al., 2009). Mmc causes the “MAKePS”

syndrome in goats, characterized by mastitis, arthritis, keratoconjunctivitis, pneumonia and septicaemia specifically in goats (Thiaucourt and Bolske, 1996). Furthermore, Mmc can also be recovered from the external ear canal of healthy dairy goat herds and from semen samples of asymptomatic goat bucks (Mercier et al., 2007; Tardy et al., 2007; Gómez-Martín et al., 2012). The presence of these asymptomatic carriers represents a potential risk in the transmission and maintenance of the infection (Amores et al., 2011). Therefore, control and eradication of Mmc infection can be obtained through better diagnostic tests and more effective vaccines. Efficient diagnostic methods could also be used to identify asymptomatic carriers in herds. The practical approach in the diagnosis of Mmc infection has been so far the serological detection of antibodies against Mmc using a home-made ELISA based on soluble crude antigens extracted from field isolates (Assunção et al., 2004) or a latex agglutination test adapted from the one used for *M. capricolum* subsp. *capripneumoniae* (Al-Momani et al., 2011). Nowadays, no serological commercial tests are available. So, it is very important to

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identify potential diagnostic markers characterizing the risk of infection and vaccine candidates for protection. Immunoproteomics, combining conventional proteomics with serology, is a powerful method to identify antigens with diagnostic and protective values.

Although the full genome sequence of Mmc strain GM12 is available since 2009 (Lartigue et al., 2009), no proteomic study has been accomplished on expressed immunoproteins. Since lipoproteins are considered to be highly immunogenic due to their membrane surface exposure and their functions in various important cellular processes, we analyzed only the liposoluble proteome of Mmc isolates.

In this study, we applied immunoproteomics to identify proteins extracted by means of Triton X-114 using sera collected from goats with Mmc infection.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. *Mycoplasma* isolates and growth conditions

In this study, we used the Mmc 49055, 74751, 14349 and 22200 field strains, isolated from infected goats in Sardinia (Italy), during the period 2004–2011. Isolates were grown at 37 °C in 300 ml of modified Hayflick medium containing 8% equine serum. Mycoplasmas were harvested by centrifugation at 20,000 × *g* for 30 min and washed twice with phosphate buffered saline (PBS, 0.1 M phosphate, 0.33 M NaCl, pH 7.4). The final pellet was resuspended in one-tenth of the original volume and used immediately or stored at –80 °C. Protein concentration of washed whole cell suspension was quantified using the Bradford method (Bio-Rad DC Protein Assay Reagent, Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA) according to the manufacturer's protocol.

2.2. Integral membrane proteins

Extraction of integral membrane proteins was carried out through Triton X-114 phase partitioning as described by Bordier (1981) and adapted with some modifications (Reithman et al., 1987). Liposoluble proteins were processed for one- and two-dimensional gel electrophoresis and immunoblotting.

2.3. Antisera

For the present study, we used 4 sera collected from infected goats from different areas of Sardinia. All sera came from goats with clinical symptoms of contagious agalactia (i.e. mammary gland enlargement and altered milk production). We isolated Mmc 49055, 74751, 14349 and 22200 from their milk samples. As negative control serum, we used 5 samples collected from goats belonging to herds without a clinical history of *M. mycoides* subsp. *capri* infection. All sera were tested by immunoblotting. Sera were pooled, aliquoted and stored at –20 °C.

2.4. One-dimensional SDS-PAGE and immunoblotting (IB)

Integral membrane proteins were electrophoresed on 12% (w/v) polyacrylamide gels containing 0.1% SDS. The apparent molecular weight of mycoplasma proteins was

determined using appropriate molecular weight markers (Kaleidoscope pre-stained standards, Bio-Rad). After electrophoresis, separated proteins were either stained with 0.25% Coomassie blue R-250 (Bio-Rad), 25% methanol and 10% (v/v) acetic acid or transferred to reinforced nitrocellulose membranes (0.45 μm pore size, Whatman, Germany) in a Trans-Blot-semidry-apparatus (Bio-Rad) as described by the manufacturer. Blots were incubated for 1 h at 37 °C with a pooled serum of infected goats diluted 1:100 in PBS-2% skim milk. After several washings with PBS-2% skim milk, blots were incubated for one more hour at 37 °C with anti-goat IgG (whole molecule)-alkaline phosphatase antibody produced in rabbit (Sigma). After five more washes, blots were developed with 5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate/nitro blue tetrazolium (BCIP/NBT, Promega, Madison, WI) in alkaline phosphatase buffer (100 mM NaCl, 5 mM MgCl₂, 100 mM Tris, pH 9.5).

2.5. Two-dimensional gel electrophoresis and immunoblotting

For 2-DE analysis, Triton X-114 detergent was removed from samples by the use of 2-D-Clean-up Kit (GE Healthcare, Freiburg, Germany) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Integral membrane proteins were dissolved in isoelectric focusing buffer (IEF buffer) containing 8 M urea, 4% (w/v) CHAPS, 40 mM dithiothreitol (DTT) and 1% (v/v) ampholytes, pH 3–11. IPG strips (13 cm pH 3–11 NL, Immobiline DryStrips, GE Healthcare) were rehydrated with 300 μl of IEF buffer containing 1X protease inhibitors mix and DeStreak rehydration solution (GE Healthcare). Proteins were focused using a Ettan IPGphor (GE Health) at 16 °C, by applying the following voltages: 30 V (10 h), 500 V (4 h), 1000 V (gradient step, 1 h), 8000 V (gradient step, 2.30 h), 8000 V (3.20 h). After focusing, proteins were reduced by incubation of the IPG strips with 1% (w/v) DTT in 4 ml of equilibration buffer (75 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.8, 6 M urea, 30% (w/v) glycerol, 2% (w/v) SDS and a trace of bromophenol blue) for 15 min, and alkylated with 3% (w/v) iodoacetamide in 4 ml of equilibrated buffer for 15 min. In the second dimension, IPG strips were run vertically onto 12% SDS-PAGE gels using a PROTEAN II xi 2D Cell (Bio-Rad) with 200 V applied for about 4 h, until the dye front reached the bottom of the gel. 2-DE gels were stained with plusOne Silver staining kit (MS compatible, GE Health) according to the manufacturer's instruction. Immunoblotting was carried out as described above.

2.6. Image acquisition and immunogenic proteins identification

Stained gels images were acquired by using GS-800 calibrated densitometer (Bio-Rad) and analyzed using the PDQuest software (Bio-Rad) which allowed automatic spot detection and spot aligning/matching within gels. After comparison with immunoblotting results, 27 protein spots were manually excised from gels and then sent to Proteome Factory (<http://www.proteomefactory.com/>) for protein identification analysis by nanoLC-ESI-MSMS. The MSMS peptide mass fingerprint (PMF) data were

automatically searched against NCBI nr protein database (<http://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) using MASCOT software package (Matrix Science, UK). In MASCOT searches, protein scores > 83 were significant ($p < 0.05$). Protein scores as well as the original PMF data such as extent of sequence coverage, number of peptide matched were used to accept protein identification. The prediction of protein subcellular localization was searched in the PSORT server (<http://www.psort.org/>).

3. Results

3.1. One dimensional SDS-PAGE and immunoblotting

Analysis of TX-114 phase fractionated Mmc isolates by SDS-PAGE followed by immunoblotting with pooled serum

isolate 49055 74751 14349 22200 PG3

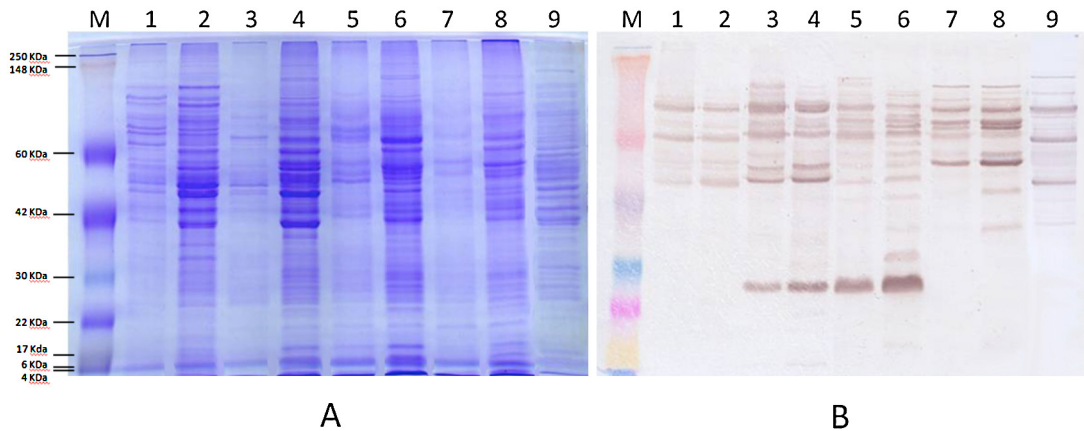


Fig. 1. SDS-PAGE and Western blot analysis of 4 *Mycoplasma mycoides* subsp. *capri* isolates and Reference strain PG3. (A) Coomassie G-250-stained gel of whole cell proteins (lanes 1–3–5–7) and TX-114 phase proteins (lanes 2–4–6–8) from Mmc isolate 49055 (lanes 1–2), Mmc isolate 74751 (lanes 3–4), Mmc isolate 14349 (lanes 5–6) and Mmc isolate 22200 (lanes 7–8). Lane 9: whole cell proteins from Reference Strain PG3. (B) Western blot analysis of the same isolates and PG3 against pooled sera from naturally infected goats. The numbers on the left indicate the molecular weight standards (kDa).

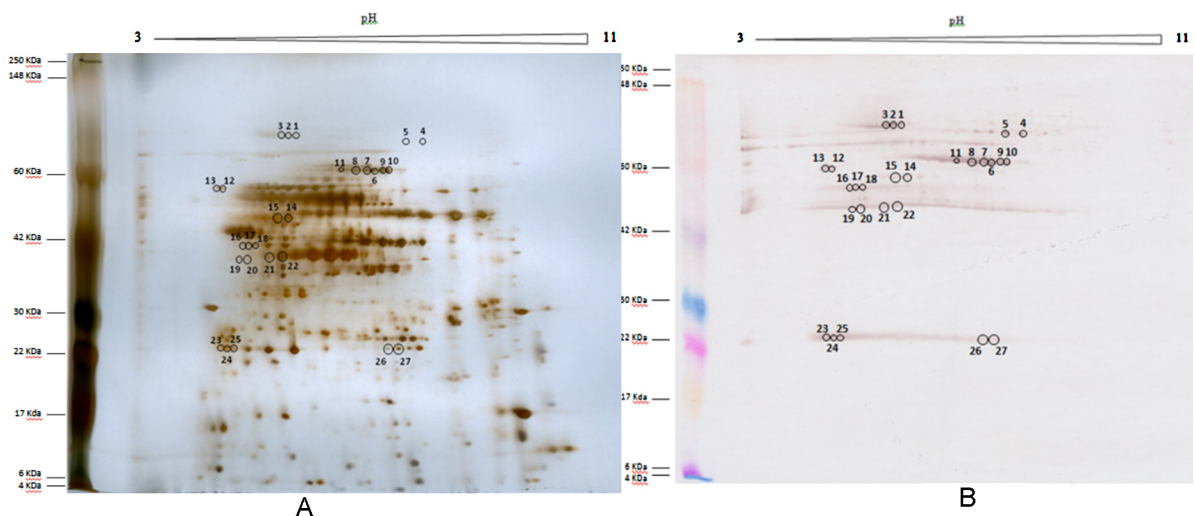


Fig. 2. 2-DE and immunoblot of membrane protein fraction from 4 pooled *Mycoplasma mycoides* subsp. *capri* isolates. (A) Liposoluble proteins were separated by IEF using 13 cm IPG strips, pH 3–11 NL, followed by SDS-PAGE on 12% and stained with plusOne Silver staining kit. Molecular weight markers are on the left in kilodalton. (B) Identification of immunogenic proteins from Mmc isolate 49055: another gel run in parallel was used for Western blotting using a pooled sera from infected goats. Spots identified by nanoLC-ESI-MS/MS are circled and indicated by numbers.

from infected goats was compared with immunoblot of whole cell proteins (Fig. 1). The lack of any difference in bands number and size between total and liposoluble proteins confirms that, in Mmc too, the most common antigens are membrane proteins. Most proteins was included in the range 46–100 kDa, few immunoreactive proteins were detected with molecular masses lower than 40 kDa. Two proteins of apparent molecular weights of about 90 and 60 kDa were observed within all isolates.

3.2. 2-D electrophoresis and immunoblotting

Proteins extracted with Triton X-114 from Mmc isolates 49055, 74751, 14349 and 22200 were pooled and resolved by 2-DE. Two-dimensional separation profile is shown for separation by isoelectric point (pI) on the first dimension

using a pH ranges of 3–11 NL (Fig. 2A) The separation profile was highly reproducible in 2-DE followed by Western blot analysis with pooled serum from naturally infected goats (Fig. 2B).

Based on immunoblot results using pooled positive and negative serum, twenty-seven protein spots were detected and identified by nanoLC–ESI-MS/MS. Four proteins were identified as single spots whereas 9 proteins were represented by two, three and six isoforms, indicating post-translational modifications of these proteins. The thirteen immunoreactive proteins were identified as dihydrolipoyl dehydrogenase, dihydrolipoamide acetyltransferase, transketolase, pyruvate dehydrogenase (lipoamide)-alpha chain, phosphate acetyltransferase, phosphopyruvate hydratase, adenine phosphoribosyltransferase, translation elongation factor G, translation elongation factor Ts, FMN-dependent NADH-azoreductase, peptide methionine sulfoxide reductase, inorganic diphosphatase and trigger factor. Their identities, isoelectric point (pI), molecular weight (MW), identification score, number of peptide matches and sequence covered by the peptides are shown in Table 1. The sequence coverage ranged from 25 to 83% and the identification scores were from 513 to 2667. Of 13 identified proteins, 12 matched with *M. mycoides* subsp. *capri* strain GM12 and 1 showed homology to proteins from *M. mycoides* subsp. *mycoides* reference strain PG1. The protein subcellular localization was predicted by PSORTb version 3.0 software: most of proteins were annotated as cytoplasmic proteins, only one as unknown (Table 1). These proteins are metabolic enzymes that are involved in translation, pyruvate and energy metabolism.

4. Discussion

The combination of 2-DE, immunoblotting and mass spectrometric analysis is an effective approach for

identification of immunoreactive proteins potentially suited for the development of diagnostic tools. This strategy has been used for some small ruminants mycoplasmas, such as *M. mycoides* subsp. *mycoides*, *Mycoplasma agalactiae* and *M. capricolum* subsp. *capripneumoniae* (Jores et al., 2009; Cacciotto et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2012). In our study, we applied this approach to identify immunogenic proteins of *Mmc* isolates collected in Sardinia. The *M. mycoides* subsp. *capri* strains GM12 and 95010 have been sequenced (Lartigue et al., 2009; Thiaucourt et al., 2011) whereas its proteome was not analyzed. In this study, a total of 27 immunoreactive spots, corresponding to 13 different proteins, were identified by IB with sera from infected goats. The majority of these proteins were linked to housekeeping function such as pyruvate metabolism, or, in general, energy production. In this study, all major components of pyruvate dehydrogenase complex (PDC): pyruvate dehydrogenase (spots #14-15-16), dihydrolipoamide acetyltransferase (spots #6-7-8-9-10-11) and dihydrolipoyl dehydrogenase (spots #1-2) were strongly immunogenic. The immunogenicity of the PDC has been observed in *M. mycoides* subsp. *mycoides* SC and *M. capricolum* subsp. *capripneumoniae* (Jores et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2012), belonging the same cluster “*M. mycoides*” and, in other *Mycoplasma* species such as *M. pneumoniae* (Dallo et al., 2002) and *M. hyopneumoniae* (Pinto et al., 2007). In eukaryotes, the PDC is located on mitochondria where it controls the flow of carbon from the glycolytic pathway into the citric acid cycle. In spite of its usually cytoplasmic localization, confirmed also by pSORT bioinformatics tool, previous studies link mycoplasma pyruvate dehydrogenase with non-cytoplasmic activity (Wallbrandt et al., 1992; Layh-Schmitt et al., 2000). In *M. pneumoniae*, its localization has been observed on the cell surface where it mediates adhesion in close association with the major P1 adhesin (Layh-Schmitt et al., 2000; Dallo et al., 2002). The several pI isoforms observed for PDC are

Table 1
Identification of immunoreactive proteins of 4 pooled *Mycoplasma mycoides* subsp. *capri* isolates using serum from naturally infected goats.

| Spot no. | Protein name | NCBI ID | Species | pI | MW (kDa) | MASCOT score | Peptide match (sequence coverage, %) | PSORTb localization | PSORTb probability |
|---------------|---|--------------|----------------------|------|----------|--------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1-2 | Dihydrolipoyl dehydrogenase | gi 256385136 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 5.53 | 67.75 | 1739 | 30 (50%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.97 |
| 3 | Translation elongation factor G | gi 256383728 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 5.29 | 76.10 | 2202 | 53 (63%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.97 |
| 4-5 | Transketolase | gi 256384392 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 7.05 | 72.90 | 1338 | 30 (37%) | Unknown | – |
| 6-7-8-9-10-11 | Dihydrolipoamide acetyltransferase | gi 256384401 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 6.42 | 46.94 | 995 | 17 (36%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.67 |
| 12-13 | Trigger factor | gi 256384284 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 4.86 | 49.11 | 2667 | 40 (83%) | Cytoplasmic | 7.50 |
| 14-15-16 | Pyruvate dehydrogenase (acetyl-transferring), alpha chain | gi 256384125 | <i>Mmm</i> SC GM12 | 5.47 | 41.87 | 1377 | 31 (53%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.97 |
| 17-18 | Phosphate acetyltransferase | gi 256383812 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 5.46 | 35.61 | 729 | 15 (43%) | Cytoplasmic | 7.50 |
| 19-20 | Phosphopyruvate hydratase | gi 256384154 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 5.32 | 49.47 | 647 | 11 (25%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.97 |
| 21 | Peptide methionine sulfoxide reductase | gi 42561299 | <i>Mmm</i> SC PG1 | 5.45 | 35.75 | 762 | 16 (40%) | Cytoplasmic | 7.50 |
| 22 | Translation elongation factor Ts | gi 256383861 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 5.47 | 32.57 | 986 | 18 (56%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.97 |
| 23-24 | Inorganic diphosphatase | gi 256384354 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 4.92 | 21.44 | 759 | 19 (49%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.97 |
| 25 | FMN-dependent NADH-azoreductase | gi 256383765 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 5.48 | 22.29 | 707 | 14 (53%) | Cytoplasmic | 7.50 |
| 26-27 | Adenine phosphoribosyltransferase | gi 256384269 | <i>Mmc</i> str. GM12 | 6.29 | 19.26 | 513 | 10 (37%) | Cytoplasmic | 9.97 |

caused by changes in phosphorylation states; in fact, activation and inactivation of PDC components is regulated by phosphorylation of several serine residues located on their chains (Korotchkina and Patel, 1995).

Among immunoreactive proteins identified in the liposoluble proteome, the elongation factors G (spot # 3) and Ts (spot # 22) may be used for the development of a serological assay. In this study, we did not detect the elongation factor Tu (EF-Tu), reported as highly immunogenic in Mmm, Mcc and other mycoplasma species (Jores et al., 2009; Cacciotto et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2012). Translation elongation factors are responsible for two main processes during protein synthesis on the ribosome. EF-Tu is responsible for the selection and binding of the cognate aminoacyl-tRNA to the A-site (acceptor site) of the ribosome. EF-G is responsible for the translocation of the peptidyl-tRNA from the A-site to the P-site (peptidyl-tRNA site) of the ribosome. EF-Ts is a nucleotide exchange factor that is required to regenerate EF-Tu from its inactive form (EF-Tu-GDP) to its active form (EF-Tu-GTP) (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/interpro/entry/IPR001816?q=elongation_factor). The predicted molecular weight of EF-G (76.10 kDa) matched with the size of *Escherichia coli* EF-G (77 kDa) whereas EF-Ts presented a molecular mass of 37.57 kDa, much smaller than *E. coli* EF-Ts, corresponding to 74 kDa. EF-G has been described as immunogenic protein in *M. synoviae* (Bercic et al., 2008) while this study also showed the immunoreactivity of EF-Ts.

Other immunoreactive proteins identified in this study and potentially suited for the development of serological assays are: transketolase (spots # 4–5), enolase (spots # 19–20), trigger factor (spots # 12–13) and FMN-dependent NADH azotoreductase (spot # 25). Transketolase (TKT) is a key enzyme in the non-oxidative branch of the pentose phosphate pathway that transfers a two-carbon glycoaldehyde unit from ketose-donor to aldose-acceptor sugars. It is typically cytosolic enzymes with a molecular mass of 70–75 kDa. Recent studies have demonstrated the immunogenicity of the transketolase in *M. mycoides* subsp. *mycoides* small colony type (Jores et al., 2009) and *M. capricolum* subsp. *capripneumoniae* (Zhao et al., 2012). Enolase (phosphopyruvate hydratase) is one of the most abundantly expressed cytosolic proteins in many organisms. It is an essential enzyme for the degradation of carbohydrates via glycolysis even if it was also found on the cell surface of pathogenic streptococci (Pancholi and Fischetti, 1998). Prior to this study, the immunogenicity of enolase has been observed in *Mycoplasma synoviae* (Bercic et al., 2008) and *M. capricolum* subsp. *capripneumoniae* (Zhao et al., 2012). Trigger factor (TF) is a very abundant ribosome-associated chaperone that assists early folding steps of nascent polypeptides in bacteria. In *E. coli*, the N-terminal domain of TF mediates ribosome binding, whereas the middle domain harbors peptidyl-prolyl isomerase activity (Hestekamp et al., 1997). The fact that these cytosolic proteins elicit a specific antibody response may depend on (1) by their abundance and (2) since their release during infection, due to the death of Mmc cells. Anyhow, a cell surface localization cannot be excluded for these antigens, as it has been demonstrated for PDH and elongation factor Tu (Dallo et al., 2002). In this study, we

did not detect any lipoproteins although we analyzed liposoluble proteome of Mmc isolates. This could be attributed to the fact that (1) we did not identify all immunoreactive spots on blots, (2) we lost the integral membrane proteins because of low solubility, their tendency to aggregate and precipitate in aqueous solutions and their difficulty to transfer from first to second dimension (Gorg et al., 2009), and/or (3) we did not identify other immunoreactive spots because of the denaturing conditions of the technique 2-DE with loss of conformational structure of proteins; as a consequence, most antibodies directed against conformational epitopes may have lower specificity when tested against denatured proteins.

In conclusion, we reported herein a total of 13 immunogens of *M. mycoides* subsp. *capri* identified by an immunoproteomic approach. These immunogenic proteins may represent candidate markers for the diagnosis of “MAKEPS” syndrome caused by *M. mycoides* subsp. *capri* in small ruminants.

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