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## Review

# The endoplasmic reticulum and junctional membrane communication during calcium signaling<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

The endoplasmic reticulum is a major organelle in all eukaryotic cells which performs multiple functions including protein and lipid synthesis and sorting, drug metabolism, and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage and release. The endoplasmic reticulum, and its specialized muscle counterpart the sarcoplasmic reticulum, is the largest and most extensive of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage organelle in eukaryotic cells, often occupying in excess of 10% of the cell volume. There are three major components of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage organelles which mediate their major functions:  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake, mediated by pumps and exchangers; storage enhanced by luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding proteins, and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilization mediated by specific ion channels.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilization from the endoplasmic reticulum plays a central role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling. Through  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels in its membrane, the pervading and plastic structure of the endoplasmic reticulum allows  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release to be rapidly targeted to specific cytoplasmic sites across the whole cell. That several endoplasmic reticulum  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels are also activated by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  itself, contributes to endoplasmic reticulum membrane excitability which is the principal basis for generating spatio-temporal complex cellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals, allowing specific processes to be regulated by this universal messenger. In addition, the endoplasmic reticulum forms discrete junctions with the plasma membrane and membranes of organelles such as mitochondria and lysosomes, forming nanodomains at their interfaces that play critical roles in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling during key cellular processes such as cellular bioenergetics, apoptosis and autophagy. At these junctions key  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transport and regulatory processes come into play, and a recurring theme in this review is the often tortuous paths in identifying these mechanisms unequivocally. This article is part of a Special Issue entitled: Functional and structural diversity of endoplasmic reticulum.

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## 1. Introduction

$\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions are the most commonly employed signal transduction element in intracellular signaling [1]. In contrast with other intracellular messengers,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is neither synthesized or metabolized. Instead its storage and circulation are controlled in cells by the regulation of channels, pumps and exchangers, which act to determine spatially and temporally the precise concentrations in the cytoplasm and other cellular compartments.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions are highly buffered in the cytoplasm, with individual free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions on average diffusing less than 1  $\mu\text{m}$  over a few  $\mu\text{s}$  before being captured by binding proteins or translocated by pumps or transporters [2].  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions are thus inherently highly localized messengers, and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entry across the plasma membrane will only affect sub-plasma membrane targets. In contrast,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage organelles may be positioned throughout the cell to target  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  precisely to cytoplasmic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  effector proteins throughout

the cell. It is important to consider  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  changes on both sides of the organellar membrane. Increased  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  loading of stores may itself be an important luminal trigger for opening of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels from within [3]. Release of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  into the cytoplasm from the ER will also lower luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations and this is in itself a signal for capacitative calcium entry, and may modulate the other major functions of the ER given its multi-tasking roles in protein synthesis and folding, at least over prolonged periods of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling [4]. Chronic ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  depletion, for example, in Darier's disease due to mutations in SERCA2a pumps, results in abnormalities in protein synthesis and targeting in keratinocytes which rely exclusively on this pump isoform [5].

The ER plays a central role in cellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis and signaling. First it acts as an important component of the cell's  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffering systems, which act to maintain cytoplasmic free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations at extremely low levels, typically around 100 nM.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  pumps and exchangers in the ER membrane are critical for this role, which allow the sequestration of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  into the lumen yielding luminal free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations as high as 100–500  $\mu\text{M}$ , as direct measurements using luminally-targeted  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  probes have indicated. This role was first discovered over fifty years ago, when vesicles of fragmented SR were found to cause the relaxation of permeabilized muscle fibers through ATP-dependent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake [6]. Some years later, the family of proteins

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responsible, the sarco-endoplasmic reticulum  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ATPases (SERCA pumps) were purified, sequenced and cloned [7]. They were found to be inhibited by the plant sesquiterpene lactone, thapsigargin, which has been a major tool in the study of ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage and the consequences of perturbing it [8]. The role of the SR/ER as a source of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals in cellular processes was again led by studies of striated muscle, with the discovery of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release (CICR) from the SR [9,10]. The role of the ER as a source of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  for cell signaling was noted with the finding that intracellular pools of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  play a major role in stimulus-secretion coupling in exocrine glands [11]. This was extended with the discovery that inositol 1,4,5 trisphosphate ( $\text{IP}_3$ ) mobilized  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  from non-mitochondrial stores in permeabilized pancreatic acinar cells [12], and the identification of specific  $\text{IP}_3$ -gated calcium channels ( $\text{IP}_3$  receptors,  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$ ) expressed in ER membranes [13].

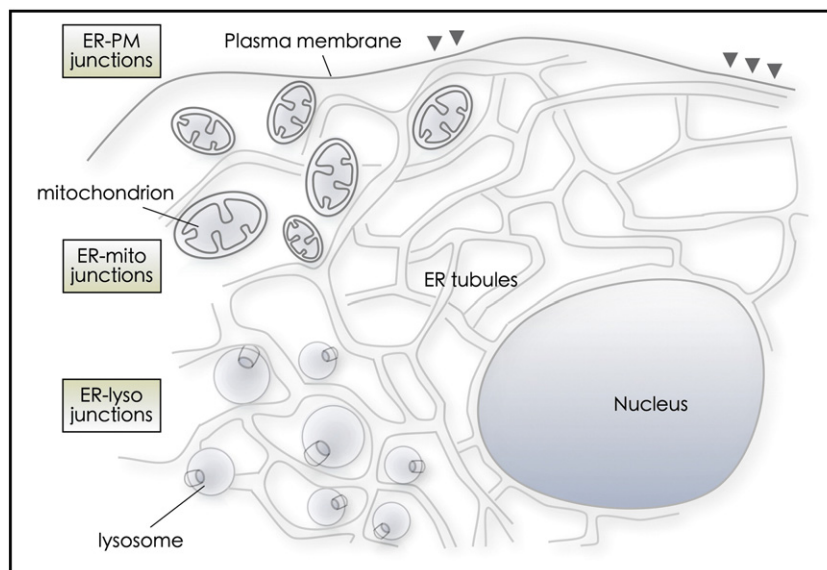
Studies on the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels of the ER, showed that  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  in common with RyRs are also activated by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in addition to  $\text{IP}_3$  [14], and that RyRs can be activated by another  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilizing intracellular messenger, cyclic ADP-ribose (cADPR) [15]. These messengers serve to modulate the process of CICR mediated by these intracellular channels, allowing the ER network to function as an excitable system displaying regenerative propagating cytoplasmic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  waves. For this reason, the ER, when discussed in terms of neuronal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling, has been termed a “neuron within a neuron” [16], with the chemical excitability of this intracellular membrane network showing several striking parallels with the electrical excitability of the neuronal plasma membrane. Indeed, isolated SR vesicles, when reconstituted into an agarose matrix, can be demonstrated to support regenerative  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  waves [17]. This analogy can be further extended with the nervous system by using the term “ $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  synapses” to describe the close appositions of ER regions with either the plasma membrane or organelles such as mitochondria or lysosomes. Such ER junctions, sites of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer, are emerging as key intracellular microdomains for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling [18] (Fig. 1). They are now considered crucial for generating, coordinating and integrating intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals which are a major focus of this review article, along with the molecular components of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and ion signaling, which are often concentrated at these sites.

## 2. Morphology and architecture of the ER

The ER was described and named by Keith Porter in his pioneering studies of cell ultrastructure by the then emerging technique of electron microscopy in the 1940s and 1950s [19]. Given the multifarious roles of the ER in cells, the size of this organelle varies between cells depending on their specializations. In terms of its role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling, it was perhaps not surprising that studies of striated muscle led the way, with the SR, given its specialized role in excitation–contraction coupling, identified as  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -accumulating structures in skeletal muscle by visualizing calcium oxalate accumulation by electron microscopy [20].

### 2.1. Structure and heterogeneity of $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ stores

The ER is a continuous membranous network with distinct morphologies in all nucleated eukaryotic cells. In the case of rough ER, which is particularly well developed in cells that secrete proteins, it appears as flattened sacs or cisternae, where membranes are studded with ribosomes at sites of protein synthesis of integral membrane proteins or those destined for vesicular trafficking including exocytosis. Smooth ER often appears as comprised of more tubular structures, and is a site of lipid synthesis, and plays a major role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage and release. The nuclear envelope is contiguous with the ER, but may also act as a discrete  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  store in the perinuclear region of the cell. Under physiological conditions, the ER network has been shown to be a continuous structure [21,22], and may function as a connected  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  store. In a series of elegant experiments, Petersen and colleagues showed that  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  diffuses more rapidly in the ER lumen of pancreatic acinar cells than it does in the cytoplasm on account of lower luminal buffering. Taking advantage of the polarized nature of acinar cells, they showed that  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake by the ER in the basolateral domain could refill fingers of ER in the secretory pole via a lumen rather than a cytoplasmic route, a process they termed “tunneling” [23]. However, functionally in some cells the ER may operate as a series of discrete heterogeneous  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores. Heterogeneity of the ER in terms of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling is due to the spatial distribution



**Fig. 1.** The ER and junctional membrane communication during  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling. Schematic depicting the nanometer-scale junctions formed between the ER and the plasma membrane, mitochondria and lysosomes. The elaborated tubular system of the ER allows multiple parallel, dynamic interactions with organellar membranes, allowing for real-time information exchange using  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  as a signaling messenger. The emerging view is that the ER processes and integrates the multiple inputs from various interacting organelles to elicit a resultant  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  response of a particular phenotype which may also be modulated in real-time. Supporting this view, loss or malfunction of any of the organellar inputs can result in defects in eliciting the ‘intended’ or ‘default’  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  phenotype. For example,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  oscillations (‘default’) are switched to a sustained low amplitude  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  elevation when mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release is inhibited [56] or complete cessation of oscillatory  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients when SOCE is inhibited [148].

of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channels,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding proteins and pumps/transporters. In astrocytes and smooth muscle cells the major  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels of the ER/SR,  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  and  $\text{RyRs}$  are found to segregate to different regions [24]. Such discrete localization of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels can manifest itself functionally in smooth muscle in a striking way, with  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release via  $\text{RyRs}$  situated in SR under the sarcolemma stimulating openings of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -activated potassium channels leading to relaxation, whereas  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from  $\text{IP}_3$ -sensitive stores situated in the cell's interior leads to myosin light chain kinase activation and hence contraction [25].

Returning to the SR of striated muscle,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels ( $\text{RyRs}$ ) and SERCA  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  pumps also appear to be segregated, with specific regions of this organelle separately effecting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release and uptake [26]. SR is often used to refer to the entire ER in striated and smooth myocytes. However, some authors, correctly in our view, use the term SR when describing the extensive network of smooth reticular membranes that surround myofilaments and closely about the t-tubule-investigations of the plasma membrane (sarcolemma) whose primary role is to store and release  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  during excitation–contraction coupling. In contrast, the ER proper in these cells, especially in the peri-nuclear regions, is a site of protein synthesis (rough ER) and cell growth (including hypertrophy), and may play a major role in cellular stress such as the unfolded protein response [27]. This division may be too dogmatic since there is some evidence that protein synthesis, for example, may also occur in the SR.

$\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  are not distributed evenly in the ER but may form clusters that may be preformed [28,29] or induced by  $\text{IP}_3$  itself [30,31], and these sites may act as hotspots for  $\text{IP}_3$ -evoked  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release resulting in the formation of strategically positioned  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling microdomains for signaling [32]. However, the mechanisms responsible for the crucial localization of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling proteins are poorly understood. Regional variations in organelle  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffering proteins are also an important source of store heterogeneity. The abundance of calsequestrin, the major luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding protein in the SR, and its ER counterpart, calreticulin has been demonstrated, which will serve to create non-uniformity in luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  [33]. For example, calsequestrin is very abundant in terminal cisternae, the site of major SR  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release during excitation–contracting coupling in striated muscle, but almost absent in longitudinal SR. Calsequestrin has been found to oligomerize to form dense core structures that could act to provide islands of discrete  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  rich pools within the SR [34]. Regional variations in luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  are important for signaling events, since the major SR/ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels are all sensitized to cytoplasmic messengers by increased luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release by  $\text{RyRs}$  in striated muscle may cause local depletion of luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  visualized with lumenally targeted  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  indicators (see Section 3) as SCRAPs, discrete regions of low  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in the SR [35]. This phenomenon may help to terminate CICR during excitation–contraction coupling. Local reductions in ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  may be important for activating specific regional ER–plasma membrane communication sites or puncta for capacitative  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entry (see Section 6.2). Elevation of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and activation of PKC have been suggested to induce ER fragmentation [36], and fragmentation due to cell permeabilization protocols may explain the quantal nature of  $\text{IP}_3$ -evoked  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release, whereby the release of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  by sub-optimal concentrations of  $\text{IP}_3$  is graded [37].

## 2.2. Dynamics and plasticity

Although the traditional view of the ER is a fairly static rigid tubular network, this belies the ability of this organelle as a continuously flexing and dynamic reticular structure. A particularly noteworthy example of the plasticity of the ER comes from the study of the maturation of oocytes to eggs competent for fertilization. During the maturation process the ER elaborates particularly in cortical regions where it envelops cortical granules [38]. The cortical ER is relatively static while internal ER displays more mobile and flexing cisternae. Generally the formation of cortical ER is associated with a higher

sensitivity to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilizing messengers and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  excitability, to ensure that a robust  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  wave is generated upon fertilization. After fertilization the ER is again reorganized with the result that it now resembles that of the immature egg.

## 2.3. ER specializations

In addition to the major subdomains of the ER, the rough and smooth ER and the nuclear envelope, several other specialized regions have been proposed to impact upon  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling. The cisternal organelle is a neuronal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage organelle which closely abuts the plasma membrane at the axon's initial segment [39], and is predominantly found in association with GABAergic synapses in for example, pyramidal cells. It is rich in  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$ , SERCA pumps and calreticulin, and has been proposed to regulate membrane excitability, possibly coupling surface membrane depolarization to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release which may in turn regulate GABA<sub>A</sub> receptor signaling, and thus is an important modulator of action potential initiation.

The spine apparatus is a membrane-bound organelle consisting of stacked smooth ER situated in dendritic spines, and proposed to play a key role in the modulation of synaptic plasticity [40]. These organelles colocalize with the actin-binding protein, thrombospondin [41]. Whether  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  and  $\text{RyRs}$  are present on spine apparatus is not known, however, the SA colocalizes with an intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  pool within the dendritic spine that impacts on mechanisms underlying synaptic plasticity.  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  activation is associated with depression of synaptic strength and  $\text{RyR}$  activation with potentiation.

Annulate lamellae (AL) are cytoplasmic organelles and a sub-domain of the ER. They are rich in nucleoporins and are well studied in the context of nuclear envelope breakdown during the cell cycle. ALs have been reported to deliver  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  to the cortical ER patches of eggs to enhance the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  excitability of the ER during fertilization as described in Section 2.2 [42]. Conversely,  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  in AL membranes appear to have a lower sensitivity to  $\text{IP}_3$ , but the mechanism for this is unclear [43].

The nuclear envelope is a relatively well characterized  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  store and in recent years  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from this sub-domain of the ER has been proposed to modulate nuclear pore permeability and hence mRNA transport between nucleus and cytoplasm [44], as well as selective control of nuclear events [45]. The discovery of deep invaginations in the nuclear envelope [46] which express  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  [47] and  $\text{RyRs}$  [48] termed the nucleoplasmic reticulum allow for focal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  delivery deep within the nucleus. This has been demonstrated by highly localized two-photon uncaging of  $\text{IP}_3$ , and this membrane system also shows excitability in that they can support  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  waves [47]. It is proposed that such localized  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release may selectively activate specific processes such as the activation of nuclear calcium-regulated transcription factors.

## 3. Monitoring ER luminal $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ levels

Understanding ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  responses under different pathophysiological conditions requires direct monitoring of ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels, which can only be indirectly surmised from monitoring cytoplasmic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals. In most cases, cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients only crudely correlate in time with ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  changes and cannot be used as surrogates for luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  changes despite their ER origin [49,50]. It is therefore imperative to directly monitor in real time  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{ER}}$  when precise measurement is desired. Luminal measurements of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  report free concentrations in the range of 500  $\mu\text{M}$ –1 mM [51]. A variety of approaches based on fluorescent imaging has been employed to report ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  dynamics in real time. These methods rely on fluorescent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensors that are selectively targeted to the ER lumen and are either genetically encoded, i.e. fluorescent protein-based, or synthetic, with appropriate  $K_{\text{d}}$ s for luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ .

Genetically encoded  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  indicators (GECIs) are fluorescent protein(s) concatenated with biological  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensors [52–55].  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding either causes an increase in fluorescent intensity or change in FRET efficiency between the two fluorescent proteins, which can be converted into  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]$  [54]. An important advantage of GECIs is that they can be specifically targeted to distinct subcellular compartments such as the nucleus, ER, mitochondria or the plasma membrane. ER-targeted GECIs commonly contain an N-terminal ER signal sequence and a C-terminal KDEL motif to enable their targeting and retention in the ER lumen. The most commonly used ER-targeted GECIs are the YC4.3ER ( $K_d = 0.8$  &  $700$   $\mu\text{M}$ ) [52], D1ER ( $K_d = 0.8$  &  $60$   $\mu\text{M}$ ) [50] and the split cameleon YC7.3ER ( $K_d = 130$   $\mu\text{M}$ ) [56]. These sensors are all FRET-based and hence are ratiometric, allowing the precise measurement of ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  level. However, these FRET-based sensors all suffer from a narrow dynamic range and slow response kinetics, implying that small and/or fast changes in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  may not be readily detected, although D1ER appears to be capable of resolving relatively fast  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients occurring at 5 Hz in skeletal myocytes [57]. Interestingly, a recent study reported the engineering of a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -binding site on the green fluorescent protein (GFP), named CatchER, that allows it to act as a low affinity  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensor itself [58]. Using a kinetically well-defined  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient, CatchER appeared to exhibit a 2.5-fold faster response kinetics and a considerably larger fluorescent change when compared to that reported by D1ER [58].

$\text{Ca}^{2+}$  indicator dyes are fluorescent derivatives based on the specific  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  chelators EGTA and/or BAPTA [59,60].  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  dyes are rendered permeant to biological membranes by esterification with an acetoxymethyl group and are retained in the cell through the activity of endogenous esterases [61]. Cellular esterases are ubiquitous and can be found in the cytosol and other subcellular compartments including the ER lumen. Hence, loading is not selective for the cytoplasmic compartment and dye compartmentalization is often a concern during cytoplasmic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  measurements, which can affect both the dynamics and kinetics of the intended signal [62]. However, this normally undesirable property can be harnessed to yield, depending on the dye properties, selective accumulation in organelles such as the mitochondria and the ER lumen under favorable conditions, for example at 37 °C [62,63]. Unless the fluorescence intensity of the dye is low at resting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels, the dye molecules accumulated in the cytosol often have to be dialyzed out through either cell permeabilization using mild detergents such as saponin/digitonin or equivalents [51,64,65], or through a patch pipette in the whole-cell configuration [49,51,66,67]. By combining simultaneous dye loading from the same patch pipette (an indicator with different spectral properties), simultaneous recording of ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and electrophysiological changes has been successfully employed to investigate the temporal and causal relationship between organellar  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  dynamics, and has engendered some important and otherwise overlooked insights [49,67].

The most commonly used low affinity  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  indicators for ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  measurement are magFura-2 ( $K_d = 25$ – $50$   $\mu\text{M}$ ) and Fluo-5N ( $K_d = 90$   $\mu\text{M}$ ). Fluo-5N is probably unique among most other indicators given its very appropriate  $K_d$  for measuring  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{ER}}$  and its low resting fluorescence, which allows it to report selectively fluorescent signals originated from the ER lumen with little contamination by cytosolic signals [63]. A recent study has reported an additional modifying approach which successfully increased the selectivity of ER luminal loading of Fluo-5N. These authors generated stable cell lines that express an ER-targeted rat carboxylesterase, which enhanced esterase activity selectivity in the ER lumen, and shortened the loading period to achieve selective loading [68]. Using this approach, they demonstrated ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  changes in response to typical agonists without significant contamination by cytosolic signals [68]. This novel approach should be of interest given its ease of use and that it preserves the high dynamic range and fast on/off kinetics typical of synthetic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  indicator dyes.

## 4. ER channels

### 4.1. $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ release channels

Various ion channels are known to participate in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from the ER in response to agonist stimulation. The two major channel families are the  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  [69] and  $\text{RyRs}$  [70], although the TRP channel TRPP2 (polycystin 2) may also function as an ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channel [71,72]. A hallmark of all these ER resident channels is that these channels all display  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensitivity and are all non-selective cation channels that also permeate  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . This  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensitivity underlies the phenomenon known as CICR which serves to amplify local  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release into global  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals and/or propagating  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  waves that invade the whole cytoplasm [73]. This is analogous to action potential propagation mechanisms on the plasma membrane of excitable cells, although orders of magnitude slower, and therefore, although the ER is probably not electrically excitable itself, it provides an excitable medium that underlies the generation of global  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients when triggered by intracellular messengers such as  $\text{IP}_3$ , cyclic ADP-ribose (cADPR) and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  itself.

### 4.2. The $\text{IP}_3$ receptor channel

The  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  was first identified as the cerebellar  $\text{P}_{400}$  protein and subsequently shown to display  $\text{IP}_3$  binding activity and mediate  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from microsomes [13,74,75]. It is a large conductance non-selective cation channel that also conducts  $\text{K}^+$  and other mono/divalent ions with a  $P_{\text{divalent}}:P_{\text{K}}$  of  $\sim 3.2$ – $11$ , although slight  $\text{Cl}^-$  permeability is also detectable [69,76]. Since there is no  $\text{K}^+$  gradient across the ER membrane,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  are the main ions that pass through  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  channels. A recent study has measured the unitary  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  conductance of single  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  (rat, type 3), taking advantage of the presence of native  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  in the nuclear envelope that can be patch clamped more readily than other parts of the ER, and shown to be  $\sim 11$  pS [77]. The channels also exhibit block by permeant divalent ions at high concentrations [77,78]. Given that negligible membrane potential is present across the ER membrane (see below),  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from the ER is driven solely by the steep chemical gradient maintained by the SERCA pump. The  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  has also been suggested to mediate its own  $\text{K}^+$  countercurrent to oppose membrane depolarization by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  fluxes which would otherwise inhibit further  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release ([79], see below).

$\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  are sensitive to cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , although this may vary depending on isoform [69]. Channel activity is regulated by both  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{IP}_3$  as co-agonists [69,80]. The  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  displays biphasic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensitivity, being activated in the range of submicromolar and inhibited in the range of micromolar at moderate concentrations of  $\text{IP}_3$  [14,69,81].  $\text{IP}_3$  binding broadens the concentration window where  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is activatory by removing tonic inhibition by resting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels and above [69,81]. Elevation of cytosolic  $\text{IP}_3$  concentrations thus sensitize individual  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  clusters to activation by resting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and beyond certain thresholds,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients from individual clusters coalesce into a global  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient and/or a propagating  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  wave [82]. Excess  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  inhibits the  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$ , a property that is believed to be important in the generation of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  oscillations, among other mechanisms [83].

The  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  has also been reported to be sensitive to luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , which was initiated by the observation of ‘quantal’ events [84,85]. This property was, however, not observed in bilayer studies where  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration on both sides of the membrane can be accurately controlled [86], and may reflect ER heterogeneity rather than an intrinsic property of the channels themselves as described above (Section 2.1). A recent study using carefully clamped voltage and  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]$  on both sides of the ER membrane suggested that luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  may act via a feed-through mechanism depending biphasically

on cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels [87]. However, this notion remains a subject of debate at present.

The  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  is a homo- or hetero-tetrameric ~1000 kDa protein complex formed by four  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  subunits [88]. This huge protein complex is essentially a large cytoplasmic structure connected to much more modestly sized transmembrane channel domains with bulbous domains projected into the cytosol serving as important signaling scaffolds for modulation and integration of a wide range of cellular signals. Each subunit has six transmembrane helices located at the C-terminus and has a large cytosolic N-terminal domain that contains multiple regulatory domains including the  $\text{IP}_3$  binding core [88]. Atomic resolution structures have informed our ideas about the gating of the channels by  $\text{IP}_3$ , with many favoring the “clam-shell” model for conformational changes [80], originally invoked for the gating of ionotropic glutamate receptors [89]. The clam-shell-like  $\text{IP}_3$  binding core binds  $\text{IP}_3$  and is regulated by the N-terminal suppressor domain [88,90]. Interactions with  $\text{IP}_3$  have been proposed to pull the alpha and beta-domains together, causing the clam-shell to close, and allosteric changes are propagated to the pore region via the N-terminal suppressor domain [80].  $\text{IP}_3$  binding is also regulated by an  $\text{IP}_3$  receptor interacting protein IRBIT which acts as a pseudoligand by competing with free  $\text{IP}_3$  thereby decreasing the apparent affinity of  $\text{IP}_3$  [91,92]. Thus,  $\text{IP}_3$  sensitivity *per se* is tightly regulated depending on the  $\text{IP}_3$  receptor isoform and the endogenous levels of IRBIT. In addition, the activity of the  $\text{IP}_3$  receptor can be modulated by its phosphorylation state which is regulated by the coordinated action of various serine/threonine kinases including PKA [93], Akt/PKB [94], PKC [95], PKG [96,97], the tyrosine kinase Lyn [98], Fyn [99] and the serine/threonine phosphatases PP1 [100] and PP2A [93]. In most cases, the kinase itself is associated with the  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  cytosolic domain via their respective adaptor proteins for example IRAG for PKG and BANK for Lyn, allowing rapid activity modulation in response to stimulation.

#### 4.3. Ryanodine receptors

The ryanodine receptor channel (RyR) was first identified as the skeletal/cardiac SR  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channel that shows high affinity binding to the plant alkaloid ryanodine [101,102]. Individual RyR isoforms (RyR1–3) as for  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$  form homotetramers and have tissue-specific expression where skeletal muscles express high level of RyR1, cardiac muscle expresses high levels of RyR2 while RyR3 expression can be found at low levels in a wide range of tissues [103]. In general, all isoforms are large conductance non-selective cation channels that also conduct  $\text{K}^+$  and other mono/divalent ions with a  $P_{\text{divalent}}:P_{\text{K}}$  of ~6:1 [104–106]. There is little selectivity within the monovalent and divalent ion groups [104–106]. The unitary  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  current of RyR2 under quasi-physiological ionic conditions has been estimated and measured to be around 1 pA [107,108]. This compares with an estimate of <0.5 pA for the  $\text{IP}_3\text{R}$  [69]. Such high unitary  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents of the RyR are well-suited to mediate rapid and efficient  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release in striated muscle cells during excitation–contraction coupling (ECC) to sufficiently saturate  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  effector targets such as troponins [109]. On the other hand, its non-selectivity among ions suggests that the conducting properties of the RyRs are prone to modulation by changes in cellular ion concentrations, for example, in those observed under pathological conditions.

RyRs are gated by cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . In general, all RyRs are activated in the range of 1–10  $\mu\text{M}$   $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{cyto}}$ , while the individual isoforms display different low affinity  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  inhibition ([70] and the references therein). RyR1 is completely inhibited when  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{cyto}}$  approaches 1 mM, while RyR2 and RyR3 are only partially inhibited [70]. The physiological significance of the partial low affinity inhibition of the RyR2 and RyR3 is yet to be understood, as supraphysiologically high  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{cyto}} > 1$  mM is probably never realized inside the cell, although local concentrations within tens of nanometers away from the channel mouth may attain  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]$  of  $> 100 \mu\text{M}$  [110–113]. Some studies

have also observed heterogeneity within the single RyR populations, while RyR2 and RyR3 appear to be more homogeneous [70]. In addition, the RyRs are also sensitive to regulation by various cytosolic ligands such as  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  [114,115], ATP [115,116] and the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilizing messenger, cyclic ADP-ribose [15,117,118].

RyRs are also sensitive to luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in the range of 0.1–10 mM. For RyR2, increasing luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  appeared to increase the maximal open probability elicited by cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  [119], while for RyR1, the effect of luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  appeared to be agonist-dependent and not apparent when cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is the sole agonist [120]. This difference in sensitivity to luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  between RyR1 and RyR2 appears to correlate with the different probability of the occurrence of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sparks [121], spontaneous local  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients generated by small numbers of clustered RyRs, in skeletal and cardiac myocytes, more frequently observed in the latter. The sensitivity to luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is an intrinsic property of the RyR as indicated by single channel studies using RyR1/2 chimeras [121]. This is also an intrinsic property of the luminal portion of the RyR as this does not require a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  current flowing to the cytosolic side, is independent of the identity of the charge carrier and independent of cytosolic buffering by fast chelators [119,120,122].

RyRs form homotetrameric channels of ~2000 kDa together with a growing list of protein binding partners, notably calmodulin, FKBP12 and FKBP12.6 from the cytosolic side, and junctin, triadin and calsequestrin from the transmembrane and luminal side [70,103]. Each subunit contains 4–10 transmembrane helices at the C-terminus, leaving an enormous N-terminal cytosolic domain, as also seen for  $\text{IP}_3\text{Rs}$ , that can be regulated by the aforementioned cytosolic ligands and modulators. One important feature of the enormous N-terminal cytosolic portion is that the N-terminal domain interacts with the central domain to stabilize the closed RyR, and loss of such interaction, known as domain unzipping, contributes to physiological activation as well as mutational and non-mutational mechanisms in the pathogenesis of a range of RyR-mediated myopathies [123,124]. Of these regulatory modulators, the FKBP immunophilins have attracted considerable interest as removal of these proteins from the RyR has been shown to destabilize the channels [125,126], although much debate exists [70]. In addition, the activity of the RyRs is also modulated through their phosphorylation and redox state [124]. Phosphorylation by PKA and CaMKII represents a major mechanism of sympathetic modulation of SR excitability which in part underlies the positive chronotropic and inotropic effects observed during an adrenergic response [127]. Deregulation of phosphorylation, however, can contribute to arrhythmogenesis and the progression to heart failure [124].

#### 4.4. ER/SR membrane potential and counter-ion channels

Like other biological membranes, the resting potential of the ER/SR is governed by electrochemical mechanisms. Isolated SR vesicles exhibit a large  $\text{K}^+$ -selective cation conductance in the range of 0.1 S/cm<sup>2</sup> that constitutes the major ionic conductance of the SR [128]. The SR membrane potential is thus clamped at the Nernst potential of  $\text{K}^+$ , which is 0 mV as the  $[\text{K}^+]$  in the cytosol and the SR lumen are similar [129]. This conductance is mediated by a  $\text{K}^+$ -selective cation channel that has also been observed in single channel recordings which has a similar ionic selectivity and sensitivity to blockade by quaternary ammonium derivatives and  $\text{Cs}^+$  [130–132]. Given its large conductance, the SR membrane potential will always be shunted near 0 mV and is only minimally depolarized during  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release. In addition, the SR membrane is also known to be permeable to  $\text{Cl}^-$  and  $\text{H}^+$  [133], although their physiological significance is relatively less well understood.

For long-lasting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release (comparable to or longer than the sub-millisecond charging time of the ER/SR membrane) to occur, counter-ion channels must operate in parallel to prevent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  from charging up the ER/SR membrane [79]. As mentioned above, the

SR  $K^+$ -selective cation conductance is believed to be the predominant countercurrent mechanism in the ER/SR. However, substituting  $Cs^+$  for  $K^+$ , which does not permeate the putative SR  $K^+$  channels,  $Ca^{2+}$  release is still supported [134], suggesting the existence of additional countercurrent mechanisms. One such mechanism has been proposed by a recent study, which suggested that the RyRs and likely  $IP_3$ Rs may mediate their own countercurrent given their ionic non-selectivity and the physiological  $K^+$  and  $Mg^{2+}$  gradients [79]. This proposal is consistent with genetic evidence where in mice whose all SR  $K^+$  channels have been knocked out (see below), robust caffeine-induced  $Ca^{2+}$  transient can still be observed [135]. However, the likely scenario is that different countercurrent mechanisms operate in a cooperative manner under physiological conditions to ensure the  $Ca^{2+}$  release ability of the ER/SR if one or the other mechanisms fail.

The SR  $K^+$  channel has recently been shown to be formed by a transmembrane protein named TRIC channels (TRIC-A and -B, Trimeric Intracellular Cation), formerly known as mitsugumin (Japanese for Intra-cellular) 33 [135]. These proteins are ubiquitously expressed and are particularly enriched in heart and skeletal muscle [135], consistent with the presence of the large  $K^+$  conductance observed in isolated SR vesicles and the particular need of a counter- $K^+$  conductance in striated myocytes. When expressed heterologously, purified TRIC-A and -B channels appeared to satisfy the permeation properties of the SR  $K^+$  channels, being non-selective among  $K^+$  and  $Na^+$  while restricting permeation by  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $Mg^{2+}$  [135]. The identification of the two TRIC channel isoforms has subsequently revealed that the SR  $K^+$  conductances may in fact be due to the stochastic openings of both TRIC-A and TRIC-B channels, rather than by a single channel with multiple subconductance states [136]. Further, TRIC-A and TRIC-B channels appear to be gated by different stimuli, with TRIC-A being voltage-sensitive and TRIC-B tending to be opened at micromolar  $[Ca^{2+}]_{cyto}$  and closed at high micromolar  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$  [136]. The different gating and conductance properties of the TRIC channel isoforms may underlie their tissue-specific roles observed in TRIC single knockout mice, for example TRIC-A is implicated in the control of vascular tone [137], while TRIC-B appears to play an important role in perinatal lung development [138].

#### 4.5. Calcium leak pathways

In addition to regulated  $Ca^{2+}$  release pathways in the ER, there are also leak pathways [139]. These can be revealed, for example, by  $Ca^{2+}$  loss from ER stores when SERCA pumps are inhibited by thapsigargin. Two types  $Ca^{2+}$  release pathways have been proposed. The first are primary  $Ca^{2+}$  leak channels, the second are mechanisms by which normally physiologically regulated  $Ca^{2+}$  release channels are deregulated by interactions with, or loss of, modulator proteins. A number of channel proteins have been implicated in basal  $Ca^{2+}$  release pathways including translocons [140], the protein pores associated with ribosomes in rough ER, pannexins which may form hemichannels in the ER [141], and presenilins, whose mutations are associated with decreased  $Ca^{2+}$  leak from the ER [142] and neurodegenerative diseases. Examples of signaling proteins interacting and affecting leak through  $Ca^{2+}$  release channels include the anti-apoptotic protein Bcl-x1 which interacts with  $IP_3$ Rs to enhance openings [143], and FKBP proteins whose dissociation from RyRs destabilizes them and renders them leaky [125]. Presenilins have also been proposed to exert their effects by direct interaction and modulation of  $IP_3$ R openings too [144,145].

### 5. ER junctions in cells

The membrane of the ER abuts and forms discrete junctions with other membranes in the cell, both with the plasma membrane, and with intracellular membranes of various organelles [146]. These junctions were first noted from studies of electron micrographs, but in

recent years progress has been made in our understanding of the molecular components of these junctions, as well as a growing appreciation of their functional roles. An important principle is that the membranes do not fuse, but require specialized proteins in apposing membranes to form stable yet often dynamic contacts. These key tethering proteins are diverse in structure and may specifically mediate membrane interactions depending on the origin of the membrane that interacts with that of the ER [147]. Such junctions occur both in excitable and non-excitable cells, but as described below, the key components may differ depending on cell type reflecting functional specializations, for example in the control of  $Ca^{2+}$  entry across the plasma membrane. Two major functions of these junctions have emerged. The first is transfer of lipids, and the second, the focus of this review, is the transfer of ions, and in particular  $Ca^{2+}$ . Such junctions are pivotal for the generation and coordination of  $Ca^{2+}$  signals throughout the cell, and are a major way in which organelles communicate to coordinate their various functions. These sites not only serve as conduits for  $Ca^{2+}$  transfer between compartments, controlling the amount of  $Ca^{2+}$  in various junctional spaces as well as organelle lumina, but also provide a local environment whereby junctional  $Ca^{2+}$  levels may control feedback mechanisms to modulate organellar communication. Junctions occur between the ER and all organelles of the cell, in addition to the plasma membrane. The three ER junctions that have been investigated prominently are those with the plasma membrane, the mitochondrion and the lysosome, and will be discussed here since they also are the most relevant for  $Ca^{2+}$  signaling.

### 6. ER–plasma membrane junctions

Functional interactions exist between the SR/ER and the plasma membrane (PM). Cross-talk between the two membranes is bidirectional:  $Ca^{2+}$  influx through the PM can trigger  $Ca^{2+}$  release from the SR/ER by CICR [70,127,148], while  $Ca^{2+}$  depletion in the SR/ER lumen can signal to activate further  $Ca^{2+}$  influx [149,150]. Localized spontaneous  $Ca^{2+}$  transients originating from the ER/SR can also modulate PM excitability in excitable cells [25,151]. These events are effected either via direct protein–protein interactions and/or via changes in local ion concentrations, for example, by modulating the activity of  $Ca^{2+}$  regulated channels, which occur at specialized ER–PM junctions where the required protein machinery is localized/assembled. In the case of ER–PM junctions, the proteins that tether the membranes together include the machinery for actual  $Ca^{2+}$  transfer and regulation rather than specialized structural tethering proteins as in the case of mitochondria or lysosome–ER interactions. However, very recently three new families of ER–PM tethering proteins have been reported from yeast proteomic analyses [152]. The other key aspect is the stability of dynamic nature of such interactions. In the case of PM–SR interactions, there is stable tethering which has important structural determinant of striated myocytes [153], whereas PM–ER interactions in capacitative  $Ca^{2+}$  entry are dynamic and organized during the  $Ca^{2+}$  signaling events [154].

#### 6.1. Dyads and triads

Physical or functional interactions between plasma membrane (sarcolemma) and SR proteins provide a mechanistic basis for excitation–contraction coupling in both skeletal and cardiac muscle cells, resulting in concerted  $Ca^{2+}$  release from the SR. The former involves direct protein–protein interaction between the sarcolemmal L-type voltage-gated  $Ca^{2+}$  channels (VGCC) and the SR-located skeletal muscle RyR1, while the latter relies on  $Ca^{2+}$ -mediated coupling between L-type VGCC and the SR-located cardiac RyR2. Depolarization induces conformational changes in the skeletal muscle L-type VGCC which is propagated to the SR RyR1 through direct physical contact, while  $Ca^{2+}$  influx through the cardiac L-type VGCC leads to  $Ca^{2+}$  activation of the SR RyR2 for CICR, although RyR1 can also be

activated by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  [70,127,155]. Importantly, these events occur in specialized junctions formed between the sarcolemmal T-tubule system and junctional SR called the dyads or triads reflecting the number of participating membranes. These specialized junctions have been revealed by electron microscopy, where the two membranes were shown to be as close as 12 nm [156]. Immunolabeling studies also revealed the selective presence of L-type VGCC in T-tubular membranes apposed to junctional SR membranes [157], and that RyR1 and RyR2 are concentrated in junctional SR membranes as electron-dense structures known as 'feet' [158]. Dual labeling experiments further showed that these channels selectively colocalize [159,160]. Together with the closely apposed sarcolemmal and SR membranes, L-type VGCCs and the RyRs have been suggested to function as a 'couplon', with each couplon containing arrays of channel clusters [161,162]. Dyads appear to regulate the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  phenotype of cardiomyocytes, as subcellular regions of neonatal ventricular myocytes and atrial myocytes lacking these junctions appeared to have a slower onset of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient in response to an electrical pulse and hence altered excitation-contraction coupling [163]. Therefore, these observations together suggest that precise organization of signaling components is employed for the precise spatiotemporal transduction of sarcolemmal excitability into SR  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  permeability essential for the proper function of striated muscles.

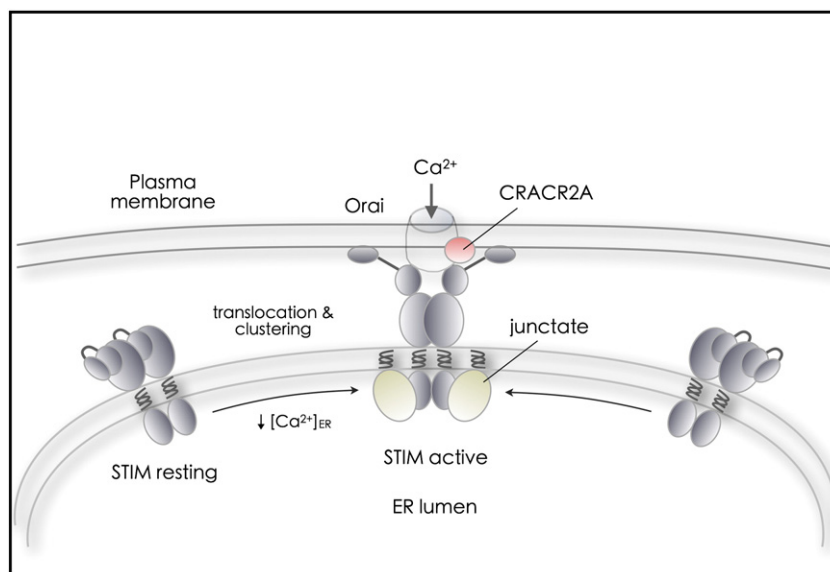
## 6.2. STIM–Orai ER–PM junctions

$\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from the ER lowers the concentration of free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  within the ER lumen, which leads to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx through the PM. This phenomenon has been termed capacitive or store-operated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entry (SOCE), and the degree of SOCE depends on the degree of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  depletion in the ER. Recently, significant advances have been made concerning the identity of the molecular machinery involved in this process (Fig. 2). As originally proposed, such a phenomenon must involve a system consisting a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensor that senses the fall in ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels which in turn activates a PM-localized  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -permeable channel that allows for subsequent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx [164]. Using siRNA screens, STIM1 and STIM2 have been identified as ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensors that cluster and translocate toward the

PM to activate SOCE [165–167]. The nature of the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx pathway has long been debated, with initial focus on members of the transient receptor channels (TRPs) [168]. However, the PM-localized  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -permeable channel was subsequently identified, also by employing siRNA screens, as Orai1-3 proteins, which, appear to recapitulate all the biophysical hallmarks of the  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  channels believed to mediate SOCE [169–171]. These two classes of protein appear to be the two essential components that mediate SOCE, where oligomerized STIM cytosolic domains bind directly to gate Orai channels, allowing  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx [149,172].

Activation of Orai1-mediated SOCE requires the translocation of oligomerized STIM molecules to pre-existing ER/PM junctions without global movements of the ER [173]. Such ER/PM junctions have been observed using electron microscopy, where STIM molecules were enriched after store-depletion [173,174]. The two membranes were found to be ~17 nm apart, a distance that may be spanned by the STIM cytosolic domain in an extended, active conformation [175]. The translocation of STIM toward the PM has been resolved using time-lapsed TIRF microscopy, and the half-time of the translocation process was reported to be 20–52 s [165,173], which paralleled or just preceded the onset of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  as monitored using simultaneous patch-clamp recordings [174]. As STIM molecules translocate to form punctate structures at ER/PM junctions, Orai channels were also redistributed from diffusely distributed clusters into punctate structures [174,176,177] that overlapped with STIM where localized SOCE occurred [174]. Interestingly, STIM translocation appears to be dynamic and can occur as a 'transient'. Such translocation 'transients' to ER/PM junctions have been observed using time-lapsed TIRF microscopy, which coincided with the decay phase of each  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient during  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  oscillations [148]. Such dynamic behavior of translocation was not observed when extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  was removed upon which  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  oscillations ceased [148], indicating the importance of store-refilling in maintaining the integrity of particular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  phenotypes during agonist stimulation.

Co-clustering of STIM1 and Orai depends on the direct association of STIM1 with Orai, phosphoinositides (PIs) and other protein components. The STIM1 cytosolic domain contains an alpha-helical domain that is required for Orai binding and gating termed SOAR or CAD (residues 344–442) [177,178]. SOAR/CAD appears to be an important



**Fig. 2.** ER–PM junction and the SOCE complex. STIM and Orai proteins constitute respectively the ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensor and the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx pathway required for SOCE. Upon store depletion, resting STIM dimers sense the drop in the luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  level and adopt an extended, active conformation. Active STIM dimers translocate to pre-existing ER–PM junctions in puncta, which redistributes Orai into discrete clusters. Through the removal of an autoinhibitory mechanism within the SOAR/CAD region of STIM [304], oligomerized SOAR/CAD directly activates Orai channels on the plasma membrane. Activation of Orai channels leads to selective  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx, which can be sustained or temporally coincident with individual  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients during  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  oscillations. The assembly and disassembly of the SOCE complex is coordinately regulated by junctate, CRACR2A/B and SARAF (not shown) and is stabilized by phosphoinositide interaction with the poly-lysine domain of STIM. These interacting proteins likely function to accelerate the assembly/disassembly of the SOCE complex and consequently sharpen the transient of SOCE complex formation, which may facilitate the onset of SOCE while reducing the risk of store over-refilling.

requirement for the assembly of the SOCE complex at ER/PM junctions as deletion of which abolished store depletion-induced clustering of Orai and dramatically reduced SOCE [177,178]. Overexpression of this domain alone also caused clustering of Orai as indicated from size-exclusion chromatography [177]. However, clustering of Orai appeared to be independent of gating as the C437G mutation within the SOAR/CAD region preserved the ability of STIM1 to cluster Orai while dramatically abolished SOCE activity [177], suggesting additional gating effects of this domain.

The STIM–Orai complex is additionally regulated by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  through the interaction with  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -binding proteins. Two EF hand  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -binding proteins CRACR2A/B and junctate have been implicated in the clustering process. The ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -binding junctate senses the decrease in luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  level and acts as a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent switch that binds STIM1 upon store depletion, which facilitates STIM1 recruitment toward junctional ER [179]. Constitutive SOCE has been observed upon overexpression of the EF hand junctate<sup>EFmut</sup> mutant without store depletion [179], suggesting that junctate may induce the activation of STIM1 despite that STIM1 is in its  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -bound resting state. At the cytosolic face, CRACR2A/B act as  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent regulators of the SOCE complex.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding dissociates CRACR2A/B from Orai1 and STIM1. Mutations in the EF hand (CRACR2A<sup>EFmut</sup>) induced constitutive clustering of STIM1, suggesting that  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding may serve to provide negative feedback which may force the disassembly of the SOCE complex [180], mostly likely after  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx has been initiated. An additional regulator SARAF, an ER transmembrane protein, has recently been identified. SARAF interacts with STIM at the cytosolic face and negatively modulates basal SOCE activity, showing activity reminiscent of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent inactivation that is not observed when the fast chelator BAPTA is present [181]. Together, it can be seen that the assembly and disassembly of the SOCE complex is accelerated through the action of the above protein regulators, which may allow for better temporal coordination with cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients during  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  oscillations such as those observed in [148], while minimizing the risk of store over-refilling.

In addition to protein–protein interactions, the C-terminal polylysine stretch of STIM1 also binds PIs [182]. Mutations of which (STIM1 $\Delta$ K) or acute PI depletion prevented store depletion-induced STIM1 translocation or SOCE activity, suggesting that plasmalemmal PIs may facilitate translocation of activated STIM1 [177,183], likely through electrostatic attraction given the complementary charge of the polylysine domain. The relative importance of PIs may depend on the endogenous levels of Orai, as Orai overexpression alone can completely rescue the translocation defect of STIM1 $\Delta$ K [177,179]. Thus, under physiological conditions, each of the above interactions likely contributes in a cooperative manner to coordinate the assembly and disassembly of the SOCE complex in a timely fashion.

Mitochondria, in particular, have been demonstrated to play a key role in capacitive  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entry by taking up  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  released from the ER and thus contributing to lowering of luminal ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations. In addition, they are also important in modulating  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations due to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entry via CRAC channels that would otherwise feedback and inactivate IP<sub>3</sub>Rs and CRAC channels themselves [184]. These effects of mitochondria are further discussed below.

## 7. ER–mitochondria junctions

Mitochondria have long been known to play an important role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis where they can take up  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transiently followed by subsequent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release [185]. Their inner membranes express a plethora of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transporters, and they store  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in their matrix whose levels may regulate key bioenergetic functions. In addition, they act as important  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffering mechanisms that particularly impact at regions of close apposition to the ER. In one study, it has been estimated that between 25 and 50% of the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from

the ER/SR is taken up by mitochondria depending on cell type and the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channel involved [186].

### 7.1. Mitochondria and $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ homeostasis

Isolated mitochondria have long been known to take up  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  when supported by exogenous electron transport chain (ETC) substrates [187]. Mitochondrial matrix  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations are crucial for regulating the many  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensitive enzymes of the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle [188] and for regulating cell death mechanisms [189]. In addition, activation or inhibition of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake by mitochondria strongly modulates  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling mediated by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from the ER [190,191], presumably by affecting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  feedback inhibition on IP<sub>3</sub>Rs illustrating the importance of mitochondria in shaping  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals from adjacent structures. Mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients were first observed using a mitochondrially targeted aequorin variant which directly demonstrated that [ $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ] in the matrix ([ $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ]<sub>mito</sub>) can reach tens of micromolars or higher during intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from the ER [192–194]. As also observed for isolated ER/SR vesicles, isolated mitochondria can in vitro act as an excitable  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling network supporting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  waves of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release [195]. Recently, key molecular components of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake and release by mitochondria have been identified. In terms of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transport mechanisms, there are key differences between this organelle and the ER. First, unlike the ER, there is a large electrical gradient across the inner membrane of the mitochondrion ( $\Delta\psi$ ), negative inside, which acts as a driving force for the uptake of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  [185]. In contrast to the ER,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake appears to be principally mediated by a channel, whereas  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release occurs by the action of ion exchangers [196]. The concerted activity of both mechanisms leads to prodigious cycling of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  across the inner mitochondrial membrane [197]. Another difference is that buffering of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in the mitochondrial matrix is largely due to formation of inorganic precipitates such as calcium phosphate in a labile gel, rather than due to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding proteins, which serve to keep free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  remarkably low [185].  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake by the mitochondria is mediated by mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uniporter (MCU) activity on the inner mitochondrial membrane [198], while the outer mitochondrial membrane is permeant to low molecular weight substrates including ions. Given the low apparent affinity for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  of the MCU [198] and that cytosolic [ $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ] seldom reaches the functional [ $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ] range of the MCU, extra mechanistic features must exist for mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake to occur under physiological stimulation. This apparent paradox is generally solved by hypothesizing the existence of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  nano/microdomains with high local [ $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ] at the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  source and the strategic localization of the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  effector within such domain. In this case, the MCU is the effector that must be located within nanometers from the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  source, ER IP<sub>3</sub> receptors or RyRs. Consistent with this hypothesis, mitochondria have been shown to be in close contact with the ER, ~20 to 100 nm apart, in a number of independent studies [199–201].

### 7.2. Mitochondrial $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ signaling proteins

As highlighted above,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake into the mitochondrial matrix is mediated through the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -selective channel MCU on the inner mitochondrial membrane, and recently its molecular identity and that of regulators have been reported. A hallmark of MCU transport activity is its sensitivity to high affinity blockade by the polycation ruthenium red [198,202], which has been used to indicate the involvement of the MCU, despite the compound's non-selectivity. The MCU has a  $K_m$  for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  of 20 mM and mediates inwardly rectifying  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents [198], ensuring unidirectional  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx into the matrix under physiological conditions, i.e. within the IP<sub>3</sub> receptor  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  nano/microdomain. Such a current–voltage (I–V) relation is also consistent with the requirement of ETC substrates [187], which ensures a highly hyperpolarized inner membrane potential for efficient  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$



uptake. The molecular identity of this putative MCU has been contentious, with a number of candidates, proposed such as the mitochondrial uncoupling proteins, UCP2 and UCP3 [203,204]. However, the search appears to have ended with more recent candidates discovered through *in silico* genomic search, which revealed a transmembrane protein with two predicted transmembrane helices and a highly acidic putative pore loop [205,206]. This protein likely forms the pore-forming subunit that permeates  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  as mutation of acidic residues in the putative pore-loop abolished observable single channel currents in bilayer and largely reduced mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake [205]. One of these mutations also rendered considerable resistance to ruthenium red blockade [206], consistent with the voltage-dependent blocking action of ruthenium red [198].

The MCU appears to exist in a macromolecular complex of ~300–400 kDa and is regulated by the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -binding EF hand protein MICU1 [206,207]. Like MCU, shRNA silencing of MICU1 largely reduced mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake and is thus considered to be a key component of the MCU complex [207]. It was, however, not considered to be the pore-forming subunit as MICU1 has only one transmembrane. Through rescue experiments, the EF hand was found to be crucial to the regulatory effect of MICU1 [207]. This observation suggests that mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake, in addition to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding-unbinding at the MCU pore, may also be regulated by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . However, a recent study reported that MICU1 may negatively regulate mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake by elevating the threshold for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake [208]. Thus, although MICU1 appears to regulate the activity of the MCU, its precise role remains controversial. In addition, a protein termed MCUR1 has also been identified and found to regulate MCU-mediated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake into mitochondria too [209].

An additional pathway for mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  efflux is through the permeability transition pore (PTP) [210]. However, the molecular identity of this pore is unknown. The voltage-dependent anion channel (VDAC) and adenine nucleotide translocase may regulate or influence pore activity rather than being components as originally envisaged [211]. This conductance pathway seems to have low and high conductance states. The pathway allows rapid  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  reduction of matrix  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  preventing  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  overload, but also causes the dissipation of the mitochondrial membrane potential. In the high conductance state it may lead to cell death and is the major pathway for release of activators of intrinsic apoptotic pathways such as cytochrome c.

A number of mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ion exchanger proteins have also been identified at the molecular level. These include a  $\text{Na}^+/\text{Ca}^{2+}$  exchanger (NCLX) [212] proposed to play a role in the exit of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  from the mitochondrial matrix, and Letm1, proposed as a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}/\text{H}^+$  transporter [213], but perhaps more prominent in regulating mitochondrial  $\text{K}^+$  and volume through  $\text{K}^+/\text{H}^+$  mechanisms [214].

Mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transport mechanisms serve to shape  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals originating from the ER, but also have direct consequences for mitochondrial physiology [215]. ER–mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer plays an important role in cell energetics and survival including the control of apoptosis and necrosis [216]. As mentioned above,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  has long been known to stimulate mitochondrial respiration by activating matrix dehydrogenases [217–219]. Increased ATP production may allow increased activity of ER SERCA pumps to take up  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . In cardiac myocytes, elementary RyR openings in the SR drive local and transient changes in matrix  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations termed “marks” have been visualized [220], which may in turn regulate cardiac excitability through local control of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . A recent study has further shown that basal ‘spontaneous’  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients originated from the ER are essential in driving the basal metabolic rate of the mitochondria [221]. Blocking these transients and/or mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake inhibits substrate flux into the TCA cycle and activates AMPK-mediated pro-survival mechanisms [221], illustrating the importance of constitutive  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer at mitochondrial associated membrane (MAM). On the other hand, excess  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  accumulation in

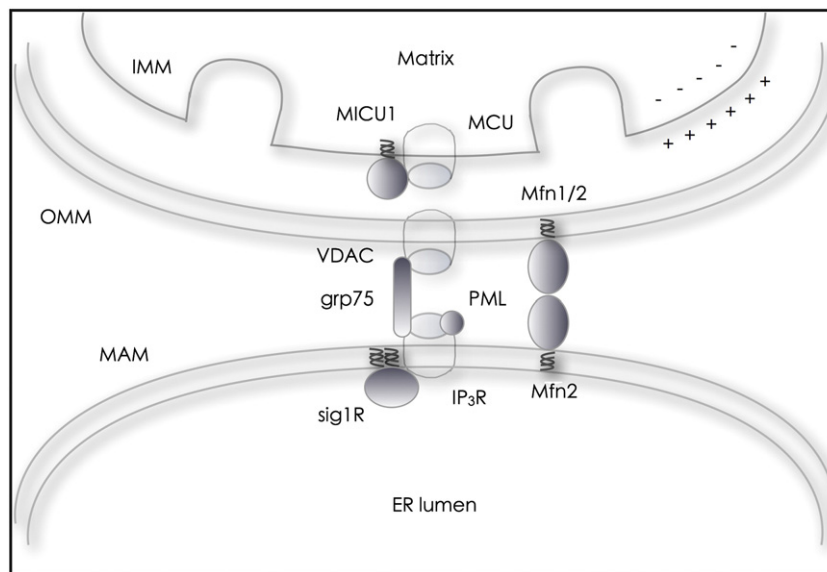
the matrix can induce a process crucial to the initiation of apoptosis known as mitochondrial permeability transition [216,222]. Indeed, a decrease in the ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  level or  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release rate and consequent decrease in ER–mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer appear to be correlated with the decrease in the sensitivity to various pro-apoptotic stimuli [94,223]. These may have important implications in the pathogenesis of apoptosis-related diseases such as autoimmune diseases, cancer and neurodegeneration [94,224–228].

### 7.3. Structural basis of ER–mitochondrial contacts

Juxtaposed ER and mitochondria are held by protein contacts (Fig. 3) [199]. These contacts appeared to be formed by the homo- and hetero-typic interactions between mitofusins (Mfn), a dynamin-related outer mitochondrial protein previously known to participate in mitochondrial fusion [229]. Through elegant rescue experiments using Mfn-double knockout fibroblasts, Mfn2 on the ER and Mfn1 or Mfn2 on the outer mitochondrial membrane were shown to be crucial to the formation of ER–mitochondria contacts [200]. These contacts are likely subjected to dynamic regulation, for example, by the Mfn-interacting protein trichoplein/mitostatin, which seems to negatively regulate ER–mitochondria contacts formed by Mfns [230]. Consistent with the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  nano/microdomain hypothesis, Mfn2 knockout fibroblasts, which had loosened ER–mitochondria contacts, exhibited defects in mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake upon agonist stimulation [200].

Beyond structural associations, the ER–mitochondria interface is also a specialized platform for inter-organellar communication. In addition to specific protein machinery that is required for proper contacts, a large number of proteins with diverse functionalities are also specifically enriched in these membrane domains. In particular, these membrane domains can be enriched through sucrose gradient centrifugation and are known as mitochondria-associated membranes (MAMs), separate from the ER and mitochondrial fractions [231].

MAMs, in addition to lipid synthases, are enriched with protein machinery that mediates ER–mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer. There, ER  $\text{IP}_3$  receptors and the outer mitochondrial voltage-dependent anion channel (VDAC), together with the 75 kDa glucose-regulated protein (grp75) and additional protein regulators (see below), were found to be contained in a >1200 kDa macromolecular complex, which presumably facilitates  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  shuttling between the two organelles by concentrating VDAC within the  $\text{IP}_3$  receptor  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  nano/microdomain [232]. Signals may also be additionally conveyed from the  $\text{IP}_3$ R N-terminal domain to the VDAC complex via grp75 [232], although the underlying molecular details have yet to be elucidated. At the luminal end of  $\text{IP}_3$ R, there are also molecular interactions with other protein regulators, for example, the sigma-1 receptor (Sig1R), an ER transmembrane chaperone targeted by many psychotropic drugs. Sig1R chaperone activity is mediated by its ER luminal domain and is unleashed by the removal of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  [233]. Thus, upon  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release, local depletion of ER luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is expected to enhance its chaperone activity and indeed this was found to attenuate ubiquitination of the  $\text{IP}_3$ R thereby preventing the degradation of MAM-associated  $\text{IP}_3$ Rs [233]. Sig1R appears to have additional functions through yet uncharacterized mechanisms in supporting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer at MAMs since its removal causes a reduction in the magnitude of agonist-induced mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient [233]. Further regulation has been shown to involve the  $\text{IP}_3$  R cytosolic domain which appears to be coordinately regulated by the tumor suppressor protein promyelocytic leukemia (PML) and Akt/PKB. PML, Akt and the protein phosphatase 2A (PP2A) which exist in the same >1200 kDa protein complex (see above), regulate the phosphorylation state of the  $\text{IP}_3$  receptor, thereby modulating the efficiency of mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake and consequently the extent of pro-apoptotic signaling [94]. Thus, it is clear that in addition to the intimate spatial relationship between the ER and the mitochondria, tightly controlled molecular regulation of the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer machinery



**Fig. 3.** ER–mitochondria junction. The ER and the mitochondria form a specialized  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  shuttling junction that contributes to cellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  dynamics. Tethering between the ER and mitochondria is mediated by *trans*-interaction between Mfns, which ensures a high efficiency of ER–mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer. ER–mitochondria junctions are enriched with  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling proteins including channels and their modulators. At these junctions,  $\text{IP}_3$  receptors form a macromolecular complex with the outer mitochondrial VDAC to allow for efficient shuttling of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  into the intermembrane space. Mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake is mediated by the MCU on the inner mitochondrial membrane, which mediates unidirectional  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx into the mitochondrial matrix. ER–mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer depends also on the steep electrochemical gradient generated by the electron transport chain and is subjected to coordinated regulation by protein regulators of  $\text{IP}_3$ Rs including PML and Sig1R, and phosphorylation state of  $\text{IP}_3$ Rs. This is further fine-tuned by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent regulation of MCU activity through the EF hand protein MICU1, although the precise action of MICU1 and the underlying molecular details are currently unclear.

also occurs within the MAMs. It is also expected that additional regulators exist, further fine-tuning ER–mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transfer.

Recent studies have provided quantitative measurements of the MAM  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  microdomain and have come to reasonably good agreement. Two studies employed a GECI (with appropriate  $K_d$ ) specifically targeted to the outer mitochondrial membrane (OMM) which would be expected to report precisely local  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{MAM}}$ . Using this approach, in a series of elegant experiments,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  hotspots were visualized in intact cells upon agonist stimulation and estimated the absolute  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]$  to be between  $4 \mu\text{M}$  and  $16 \mu\text{M}$  [234]. In a parallel approach, an EGTA-resistant  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  increase was visualized using the OMM-targeted GECI in permeabilized cells under high buffering conditions ( $100 \mu\text{M}$  EGTA/ $40 \mu\text{M}$   $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ) and estimated the  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]$  to be  $>4 \mu\text{M}$  [235]. EGTA is a slow  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  chelator which allows the isolation of local  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  events [112,113], illustrating the localized nature of this  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  nano/microdomain. By controlling the distance between the ER and the mitochondria using recombinant protein tethers, demonstration that the localized  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  domain in the MAMs is significantly compromised if the distance between the ER and the mitochondria is  $<7 \text{ nm}$  was established [235]. These observations may suggest that an optimal gap width may be required for the proper enrichment of MAM proteins and architecture, for example to accommodate the large  $\text{IP}_3$ R cytosolic domain [235].

## 8. ER–lysosome junctions

Lysosomes and other acidic stores are emerging multifunctional organelles that play a number of important roles in the cell [236] including the generation and modulation of cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals. Although traditionally being viewed solely as a terminal acceptor of endosomal and/or autophagic cargoes, increasing evidence has pointed to lysosomes as a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage organelle being capable of releasing and buffering  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , likely through specific permeation pathways on their delimiting membranes [237,238]. Although by comparison with the ER, endolysosomal stores may be small, they nevertheless can exert a powerful influence on  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling in several ways critically dependent on their cellular location. Local  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release has been demonstrated by the targeting of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  reporter proteins to lysosomal membranes on their cytoplasmic face [239,240]. Mechanisms

for controlling the positioning of lysosomes in cells are poorly understood. However, it is dependent on the cell's nutritional status [241,242] and involves the activity and membrane targeting of the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR complex), a serine/threonine protein kinase and the master regulator of cell growth, autophagy and cell survival in cells [243]. In the presence of nutrients, lysosomes are peripherally located, whereas in starvation, lysosomes migrate to the perinuclear region [241]. As well as regulating autophagic fluxes, lysosomal positioning is likely to affect their role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling and homeostasis. Endolysosomal luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release and have been proposed to be critical in endolysosomal fusion and trafficking [244,245], as well as triggering  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling events involving the ER [237,238]. The concept of endolysosomes as  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage organelles playing a central role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling has been advanced by the finding that a specific  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilizing messenger, nicotinic acid adenine dinucleotide phosphate (NAADP) uniquely targets endolysosomes [237].

### 8.1. Lysosomes as $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ signaling organelles

Endolysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and its release, along with luminal pH regulation are key factors in controlling the multifarious roles of this acidic membrane system, including vesicular trafficking, macromolecular degradation, autophagy and the myriad of functions associated with these organelles in health and disease [237,246]. Luminal  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{of}}$  lysosomes have been found to be in the range of  $200\text{--}500 \mu\text{M}$  [247,248], not dissimilar to measurements of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  the ER lumen. Endosomes and lysosomes are highly acidic organelles, with the vacuolar proton pump ( $\text{V-H}^+\text{-ATPase}$ ) playing the major role in acidification, with chloride channels such as CLC5 and CLC7 [249], and cation channels [250] implicated as acting as counter-ion channels to regulate acidification throughout the endosomal network. Lysosomes have also been found to have a modest membrane potential across their membrane of around  $20 \text{ mV}$ , lumen positive [251].

Recent focus on endolysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release channels has shown that members of the TRP superfamily are expressed in the membranes of the endolysosomal system, including TRPMLs (mucoplins), two-pore channels (TPCs), and TRPM2 [252]. All three have been suggested as

targets for the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilizing messenger, NAADP [253]. In contrast, little is known about how  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is taken up or sequestered in the endolysosomal system.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake is thought to be largely luminal proton-dependent and impaired in Niemann–Pick C disease, a lysosomal storage disease [248]. In platelets, SERCA3 pumps have also been implicated in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sequestration by acidic organelles, known as dense granules. In other acidic stores, such as the acidocalcisomes of parasitic protozoa, polyphosphate matrices may have a role in luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffering [254]. In mammalian lysosomes luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffering mechanisms are unknown.

Endolysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and its release are key factors in the multifarious roles of this membrane system including vesicular trafficking, macromolecular degradation, autophagy and the myriad of functions associated with these organelles in health and disease [237,246].

## 8.2. Functional lysosomal–ER interactions

Lysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release evoked by the potent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  mobilizing, NAADP [255] can provide a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  trigger necessary for the excitation of the ER by CICR in response to various agonists acting at cell surface receptors [256–261], much like CICR that occurs in the dyads/triads of striated muscle (Fig. 4).

NAADP was initially identified as an NADP derivative that mobilizes  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  via a distinct mechanism/receptor from that of  $\text{IP}_3$  and cADPR) and targets non-ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores in sea urchin egg homogenates [262,263]. Subsequently, NAADP was shown to release  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  from reserve granules of sea urchin eggs, lysosome-like organelles, that could be inhibited by GPN which selectively disrupts lysosomes [264]. In echinoderm eggs, NAADP evokes a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  wave that propagates across the egg [265–267]. However, such  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  wave becomes observably non-regenerative when ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release by both  $\text{IP}_3$ Rs and RyRs is inhibited, revealing the buffering effect exerted by the egg cytoplasm [265]. A recent study from our laboratory has furthered these studies, where we observed that concomitantly with NAADP-induced  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release, a luminal alkalization of acidic stores is seen [268]. Using organelle pH as a reporter of NAADP action, it was shown that  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  may also be transferred from ER to lysosomes during  $\text{IP}_3$  or cADPR signaling, which causes NAADP-dependent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release [269]. This may be due to both local  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent NAADP production, or luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sensitization of NAADP-sensitive channels by increased acidic store luminal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  [270,271]. This bidirectional shuttling of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  between ER and lysosome may play an important role in NAADP-mediated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  oscillations. Importantly, such physiological  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent cross-talk was unaffected by the slow  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffer EGTA, indicative of local,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  microdomain-driven phenomena between lysosome and ER [269]. Recently in mammalian cell lines, lysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake can modulate the amplitude of ER  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release [272], analogous to the buffering action of the mitochondria.

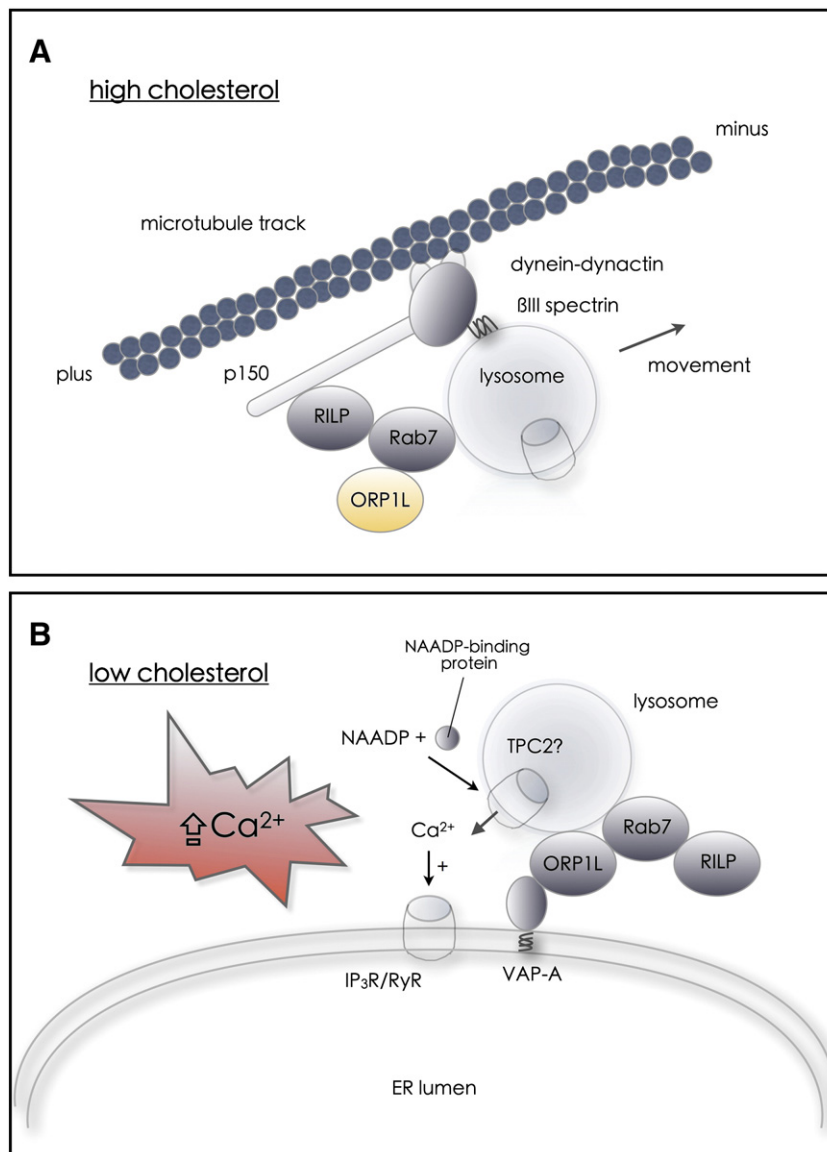
In mammalian cells, a hallmark of NAADP-induced  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release, as in intact sea urchin eggs, is that it often appears to be a two-component response, consisting of the release from two pools of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sequestering compartments. The initial component is often thought of as a small lysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release, which is only marginally reported by high affinity cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  dyes and is sensitive to a variety of inhibitors that lower lysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  content [273–276]. The second component is often more pronounced, subsequent to the initial lysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release, which can be observed as a global  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient that is readily reported by cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  dyes and shows sensitivity to a variety of inhibitors that prevent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from the ER [273–275]. Based on these observations, the prevailing view is that a small, potentially local lysosomal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release is subsequently amplified by the action of CICR channels on the ER, which leads to a large cytoplasmic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient. This has been referred to as the ‘trigger hypothesis’ [237,238,277], a hypothesis that implicates an obligate cross-talk between the lysosomes and the ER. Lysosomes

have been shown to closely associate with RyRs [273,275] and these are the sites of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signal initiation in response to both endothelin-1 and NAADP.

As is the case for many  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transport mechanisms in organelles, as outlined above, it will come as no surprise that the molecular nature of NAADP-gated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channels is controversial. The first candidate to emerge was TRPML1 or mucopolin1 [278,279], a member of the TRP family of ion channels, which is exclusively expressed in endolysosomes. Mutations in this channel are associated with the lysosomal storage disease mucopolidosis IV [280]. However, the candidature of this channel as an NAADP-gated channel has been ruled out by others [281] and this channel may instead be regulated by phosphatidylinositol 3,5-bisphosphate ( $\text{PtdIns}3,5\text{P}_2$ ) [282]. Recently, much steam has gathered behind a novel class of endolysosomal ion channel, the three member family of two-pore channel proteins (TPCs) as the target for NAADP [283–285]. Over the last three years, compelling evidence has been presented by a number of different laboratories using a variety of approaches, to support this view [286], with particular emphasis on TPC2 since it is the major form expressed in lysosomes. These include reconstitution of NAADP-gated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channels in lipid bilayers by immunopurified TPCs [270], mutation of TPC2 leading to a change in ion selectivity of NAADP-gated currents in patch-clamped lysosomes [287], and redirection of TPC2 to the plasma membrane yielding an NAADP-gated current at the plasma membrane dissociated from ER coupling [288]. However, subsequent work showed that NAADP probably does not directly bind TPCs directly [289], but instead its effects are mediated by an NAADP-binding protein which was shown to associate with TPCs in sea urchin egg preparations [290,291]. This may in part explain the failure of some groups to see NAADP modulation of TPCs in patch clamp studies of vacuolin-enlarged lysosomes [292,293], with other regulators including  $\text{PtdIns}3,5\text{P}_2$  [292], and indirect action of ATP via mTOR proposed [293], apparently regulating a TPC-mediated sodium current. If this later assertion proves to be correct, then it is possible that TPCs may act to provide a pathway for counterion movement to facilitate  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from lysosomes by a yet-to-be identified NAADP-gated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel, rather like the proposed role of TRIC channels in facilitating  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release from the SR (see Section 4.3).

## 8.3. Molecular aspects of lysosomal–ER junctions

An important model for understanding ER–lysosomal interactions has come from parallel studies in yeast examining the interactions of the vacuole (the yeast equivalent of a lysosome) with the membrane of the nucleus, which as discussed above, is contiguous with the ER. Lysosome–ER contact sites have been observed in electron micrographs, forming junctions of ~20 nm separation [294,295]. Like other membrane contact sites, lysosomes and the ER are held juxtaposed via protein contacts. Lysosomal movements are determined by bidirectional cytoskeletal motor proteins (kinesins and dyneins) under the control of small GTPases such as those of the Rab and Arf families [241], with members of the kinesin family promoting positive end movement, and dyneins favoring minus-end movement. Tethering and movement are controlled by a single molecular unit assembled on the late endosomal/lysosomal GTPase Rab7 protein complex. GTP-bound Rab7 forms a tripartite complex with its two effectors RILP and the cholesterol-sensing ORP1L [296]. RILP regulates minus-end movement, which is connected to the molecular motor dynein through its interaction with the adaptor protein p150<sup>glued</sup> [296,297]. ORP1L, under permissive conditions, is recognized by the ER transmembrane protein VAP-A through its FFAT motif, allowing the juxtaposition of lysosomes and the ER [294,298]. Switching between tethering and movement is regulated by the ORP1L ligand cholesterol and the conformational state of ORP1L. Through elegant FRET and biochemical experiments, it has been shown that cholesterol



**Fig. 4.** Dynamic regulation of ER–lysosome junction. A. An endo-lysosomal organelle undergoing minus-end movement under high cholesterol conditions. Minus-end movement of lysosomes is mediated by the dynein/dynactin complex. Cholesterol induces a closed conformation of ORP1L, allowing the interaction between p150<sup>Glued</sup> and RILP thereby forming a complete physical linkage between motor proteins and the organelle. Dynactin binding to the organellar motor receptor beta-III spectrin depends on the function of cholesterol-bound ORP1L. B. ER–endolysosomal junctions are formed under low cholesterol conditions. Endolysosomal tethering to the ER is mediated by the ER transmembrane protein VAP-A, which recognizes the FFAT motif of ORP1L exposed when ORP1L is in a cholesterol-free open conformation. This displaces p150<sup>Glued</sup> from the Rab–RILP–ORP1L complex and thus minus-end movement and tethering are counteractive. The current model hypothesizes that NAADP together with the putative NAADP-binding protein(s) [289,291] may activate lysosomal two-pore channels (TPC2) [283], allowing CICR between the lysosome and the ER within ER–lysosome junctions and subsequent global increase in Ca<sup>2+</sup> [269,275].

binds to ORP1L and induces a conformational change of ORP1L, thereby allowing graded alternation between the ORP1L/VAP-A interaction and the RILP/p150<sup>Glued</sup> interaction, and thus switching between ER tethering and minus-end movement [294]. Indeed, lysosomes tethered to the ER are more peripherally located, which also leads to the redistribution of the ER VAP-A into peripheral clusters that overlap with late endosomal/lysosomal markers [294,299]. In addition, lysosomes also undergo plus-end movements. This has recently been shown to be regulated by a novel lysosomal GTPase Arl8b and its effector SKIP [300]. SKIP interacts directly with the plus-end motor kinesin-1 through its WD domain thereby activating plus-end movement [300]. As this complex can exist in parallel with the Rab7/ORP1L/VAP-A complex that tethers lysosomes to the ER, plus-end movement of ER-juxtaposed lysosomes may occur and hence

ER-tethered lysosomes may not be static and may promote protein translocation to the ER membrane. Interestingly, movement of lysosomes along ER tubules has recently been observed [272].

To date, it is not known at the molecular level how Ca<sup>2+</sup> signaling between lysosomes and the ER is related to their juxtaposition. Although mammalian lysosome-associated ER membrane proteins have not been identified, a MAM-like domain is envisaged. There, NAADP-regulated channels and ER Ca<sup>2+</sup>-sensitive Ca<sup>2+</sup> release channels, for example the RyR/IP<sub>3</sub> receptor may be found, thereby forming a local Ca<sup>2+</sup> amplification unit that may underlie the 'trigger hypothesis'. Further, the unprecedented link between cellular cholesterol level and lysosome–ER tethering implies the potential role of cholesterol in regulating lysosome–ER signaling. This may be of particular interest given that cellular cholesterol level is dysregulated under

certain pathological conditions, such as those seen in familial hypercholesterolemia, atherosclerosis [301,302] and congenital diseases such as Niemann–Pick type C (NPC) disease [248,303].

## 9. Conclusions

The ER is now established as the major  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  storage organelle in cells, and pivotal to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling and homeostasis. However, it generally does not work in isolation, and by forming junctions with the plasma membrane and the membranes of other organelles, it acts to coordinate intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling not only throughout the cytoplasm but also by regulating and recruiting additional  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  pools. Studies of the structural and molecular basis of organellar interactions with the ER and visualization of local  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling at inter-organellar junctions, are suggestive of a key role for organelle architecture in the control and spatial aspects of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling, crucial for the specific regulation of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -sensitive processes that abound in all cell types. Clearly the mechanisms for the formation of organellar junctions, the identification and localization of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling proteins at these interfaces, and the regulation of their stability and dynamics will prove to be an emerging major theme in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling in the future.

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