#### Colloquio Interdisciplinare sulla Biologia

# I metalli e le malattie neurodegenerative Un rapporto sinergico tra esperimento e simulazioni numeriche

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### An example of a fruitful synergy a



# Outline

#### **Biological challenge**

understanding the molecular basis of Protein Conformational Diseases (PCD's) among which the Alzheimer disease (AD)

- misfolding and aggregation
- the A $\beta$ -peptide
- metal ions and brain

#### **Scientific instruments**

focused experiments + numerical approaches

- XAS spectroscopy
- classical and *ab initio* molecular dynamics

#### Results

unveiling the (relevant) role of metal ions

# Protein Conformational Diseases (PCD's)

Disease	Misfolded Protein
Alzheimer's Disease	Aß-peptide
Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE)	Prion protein
Parkinson's disease	a-synuclain
Type II diabetes	Amylin
Thyroid carcinoma	Procalcitonin
Atrial amyloidosis	Atrial natriuretic factor
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis	Superoxide dismutas
Huntington disease	Glutamine
Primary systemic amyloidosis	Ig light chains
Secondary systemic amyloidosis	Serum amyloid A
Senile systemic amyloidosis	Transthyretin (wild tipe)
Familial amyloidotic polyneuropathy I	Transthyretin (mutant)
Familial amyloidotic polyneuropathy II	Apolipoprotein A1
Familial Mediterranean fever	Serum amyloid A
Hemodialysis-related amyloidosis	b2-microglobulin
Finnish hereditary systemic amyloidosis	Gelsolin (mutant)
Lysozyme systemic amyloidosis	Lisozime
Insulin-related amyloidosis	Insulin
Fibrinogen systemic amyloidosis	Fibrinogen $\alpha$ chain

# Protein misfolding



# The A $\beta$ -peptide aggregation





Cross-beta fibril

### Metal ions are essential cell components

They can easily and quickly form complexes with enzymes and other biological molecules

They are involved in a wide range of biological processes

 $\approx \frac{1}{4} \div \frac{1}{3}$  of all proteins are estimated to require metals to function

Metalloproteins have many different functions in cells

- storage and transport
- enzymatic activity
- signalling and transduction
- •••
- ...

### BUT METALS HIGH REACTIVITY CAN EASILY MAKE THEM HIGHLY TOXIC FOR THE CELL

### Metals should cross the blood-brain barrier

#### Central Nervous System



- Metals are essential for neurochemical activity
- Fe, Cu and Zn are fairly abundant in grey matter
- during neuro-transmission processes, high concentrations of Zn (~300  $\mu$ M) and Cu (~30  $\mu$ M) are normally released
- Fe, Cu and Zn are continuously trafficked whithin the cell and also into and out of it
- Metals deficiency may cause dysfunctionality and metal excess may lead to toxicity
- Failure of metal trafficking (dyshomeostasis) is known to occur both in AD and in Parkinson diseases

In presence of dyshomeostasis, metal ions may

- interfere with normal nervous cells activities
- disrupt brain electrochemical balance
- •••
- promote protein misfolding and aggregation (?)

# Protein Conformational Diseases (PCD's)

 $\rightarrow$ 

Disease	Misfolded Protein
Alzheimer's Disease	A <sub>β</sub> -peptide
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APP (amyloid precursor protein): transmembrane 770 a.a.'s protein







Chen et al. J. Biol. Chem. 2011, 286:9646-9656.

## Normal aging and increased brain metal level

Maynard et al. (2002) JBC, 277: 44670



#### The triggering event is possibly metal dyshomeostasis

# World Health Organization

- The number of people aged 60 and over has doubled since 1980
- The number of people aged 80 years or older will be almost quadrupled to about 400 millions between 2000 and 2050
- The risk of dementia (like Alzheimer disease) rises sharply with age with an estimated 25-30% of people aged 85 or older having some degree of cognitive decline.

#### Horizon 2020: improve healthy ageing

The challenge is: understand, control and (possibly) stop PCD's evolution



### X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy - XAS

# Photons are produced by synchrotrons





## X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy - XAS

- It can be used to study samples in any aggregation state (not necessarily crystallized, frozen or transparent)
   *proteins can be studied in physiological or controlled solution condition*
- There are no selection rules for absorption *a XAS spectrum can always be obtained*
- Spectra registered in a relatively short time (few min's to few msec's) limited radiation damage
- High chemical selectivity -

local atomic environment around a selected absorber

1s ionization energy (K-edge)  $_{26}$ Fe  $\approx$  7112 eV ;  $_{29}$ Cu  $\approx$  8993 eV;  $_{30}$ Zn  $\approx$  9673 eV

### XAS of a multi atomic system



### Numerical simulations

CPMD (*Car Parrinello Molecular Dynamics*) a (smart) parallelized implementation of DFT (Density Functional Theory) that uses the Kohn and Sham reformulation of the Schroedinger equation for the calculation of the electron ground-state energy

**Density Functional Theory** -> the electronic structure (in the ground state)

The electronic energy is a functional of the electronic density,  $n(\vec{r})$ 

$$E_{DFT} = \Gamma_{HK} \left[ n(\vec{r}) \right] + \int n(\vec{r}) V(\vec{r}) d\vec{r}$$

the potential seen by the atoms can be determined by E[n]The value of n(r) at which E[n] is minimum is the ground-state electronic density.

The mimimum can be found by solving the Kohn-Sham equations

$$\begin{bmatrix} -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \nabla^2 + V(\vec{r}) + V_H(\vec{r}) + V_{xc}(\vec{r}) \end{bmatrix} \psi_i(\vec{r}) = \varepsilon_i \psi_i(\vec{r})$$

$$V_H(\vec{r}) = e^2 \int \frac{n(\vec{r}')}{|\vec{r} - \vec{r}'|} d\vec{r}' \quad \text{Hartree potential}$$

$$V_{xc}(\vec{r}) \quad \text{Exchange-correlation potential}$$

$$n(\vec{r}) = (2) \sum_i |\psi_i(\vec{r})|^2 \qquad \left\langle \psi_i |\psi_j \right\rangle = \delta_{ij}$$

# CP simulations



- 1 "prepare" the initial state of the system (classical MD) type of atoms: number of electrons and bands → pseudopotentials atomic coordinates dimension of system cell cut-offs → plane wave expansion FFT grid spacing
- 2 electronic minimization (Steepest Descent, SD) with fixed ions  $\rightarrow$  ground state
- 3 ionic positions minimization (SD or damped dynamics )  $\rightarrow$  to relax the system
- 4 start the Car-Parrinello dynamics

NOTE: in order to reach the desired temperature ions are coupled to Nosè-Hoover thermostat

QM key feature: bonds not imposed (like in MD) but derived by solving the Schroedinger equation

# **MD** simulations

#### The simulation strategy

. . .



- 1 "prepare" the initial state of the system atomic coordinates atomic velocities force field choice (effective potential) dimension of system box water
- 2 system equilibration: potential energy minimization (T=0 K)
- 3 system heating: rise temperature to the desired value
- 4 start MD: solve the Newton's equation of motion for the atoms

# 1. Zn-ion-induced aggregation pattern <sup>2</sup>

# XAS has allowed to identify the $Zn^{2+}$ -binding site sequence in A $\beta_{1-40}$ DAEFRHDSGYEVHHQKLVFFAEDVGSNKGAIIGLMVGGVV

Besides the whole peptide, we measured the XAS spectra of the following samples



V. Minicozzi ... S.M. et al., *J Biol Chem* (2008) **283**: 10784 F. Stellato ... S.M. et al., *Eur Biophys J* (2006) **35**: 340

### <u>1° Zn-ion-induced aggregation pattern</u><sup>2</sup>

#### Synopsis of XAS results: comparing spectra

**Zn<sup>2+</sup>-**  $A\beta_{17-40} = Zn^{2+}$ - buffer  $\rightarrow Zn^{2+}$  is unable to bind  $A\beta_{17-40}$ 

**Zn<sup>2+</sup>-**  $A\beta_{1-16} = Zn^{2+} A\beta_{1-28} = Zn^{2+} A\beta_{1-40} \rightarrow Zn^{2+}$  always bind to the first 16 a.a. fragment <sup>1</sup>DAEFR<sup>6</sup>HDSGYEV<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup>HQKLVFFAEDVGSNKGAIIGLMVGGV<sup>40</sup>

Zn<sup>2+</sup> always binds with the same (very crowded) binding structure to the first 16 a.a.'s

**Zn<sup>2+</sup>-A** $\beta_{1-16}$ 



Many cases where Cu (not Zn) is coordinated to four His's side-chains belonging to the same monomer...

...but ALL of them concern proteins belonging to the wide class of Cu,Zn-SOD proteins.

(Actually a fully Zn-substituted SOD enzyme has been shown to be at least as stable as the wild-type heterodinuclear protein)

5854 PDB entries containing at least one Zn

in only one case Zn is coordinated to four His side-chains belonging to the same protein monomer

• PDB code 1PB0: Organism: E-Coli; Function: unknown

in two more instances the four His side-chains coordinated to Zn belong to different monomers:

- PDB code 1HWT: Organism: Saccharomyces Cerevisiae; Function: gene regulation/DNA and
- PDB code 1QP9: Organism: Saccharomyces Cerevisiae; Function: transcription/DNA

#### Models and *ab-initio* calculations

#### Question:

which structure stabilizes this (very crowded), 4 His's - Zn<sup>2+</sup> coordination?

- XAS: structure information only within 5-6 Å from the absorber
- *ab-initio* simulations: structural information up to a longer distance <u>without</u> <u>enforcing Zn coordination mode</u>

#### Model building

- 1. XAS  $\rightarrow$  4 His's coordination  $\rightarrow$  two A $\beta_{1-16}$  peptides (denoted A and B) with a single Zn atom bridging N $_{\delta}$ (His $_{14}$ (A)) and N $_{\delta}$ (His $_{14}$ (B))
- minim + Monte Carlo Random Walk (MCRW) ("bad" contact discarded) →
   only configurations that fulfill structural constraints of point 1. are retained
- 3.  $A\beta_{1-16}$  truncated to  $A\beta_{11-16}$  and put in a cell with periodic conditions filled with TIP3P water molecules
- 4. Four trial binding geometries are chosen for *ab initio* computations



Besides the two His <sub>14</sub> , also the
two His <sub>13</sub> happen to be within
3 Å from Zn

Name	Initial configuration
S1	Zn: 4N <sub>His</sub> + 10 <sub>W</sub>



Name	Final configuration	
S1	Zn: 3N <sub>His</sub> + 10 <sub>W</sub>	



Only three His's. One of the
His's is also bound by the main
chain oxygen

Name	Initial configuration
S2	Zn: 3N <sub>His</sub> +10 <sub>His</sub> + 10 <sub>W</sub>



Name	Final configuration
S2	Zn: 3N <sub>His</sub> + 10 <sub>W</sub>



modified S1: the H $\epsilon$ of a		
$His_{14}$ is substituted by a		
second Zn		

fa	Name	Initial configuration	
/ a	S3	$\frac{\text{Zn}_{\text{a}}: 4\text{N}_{\text{His}} + 10_{\text{W}}}{\text{Zn}_{\text{b}}: 1\text{N}_{\text{His}} + 20_{\text{Glu}}}$	



Name	Final configuration	
\$3	$\frac{\text{Zn}_{\text{a}}: 4\text{N}_{\text{His}} + 10_{\text{W}}}{\text{Zn}_{\text{b}}: 1\text{N}_{\text{His}} + 10_{\text{Glu}} + 20_{\text{W}}}$	



modified S3: a third	Name	Initial configuration
peptide is bound to the		$7n \cdot 4N + 10$
second Zn	S4	$Zn_{h}: 3N_{His} + 10_{Glu}$



Name	Final configuration
S4	$\frac{\text{Zn}_{\text{a}}: 4\text{N}_{\text{His}} + 10_{\text{W}}}{\text{Zn}_{\text{b}}: 3\text{N}_{\text{His}} + 10_{\text{Glu}}}$





Comparing the experimental XAS spectrum with the theoretical one of the S4 model



His's "crowding" in SOD enzymes is helped by the presence of two metal ions bridged by the His imidazole (in the unusual form of an imidazolate anion)

#### Conclusions

• Zn promotes oligopeptides formation





- XAS cannot discriminate among different structural models, but
- empirical + first-principle simulations  $\rightarrow$  stable Zn-His-Zn structure ( $\approx$  SOD)
- Zn binding stability largely depends on the formation of a Zn–His–Zn bridge assisted by an unusual deprotonated imidazole ring (imidazolate) (≈ SOD)

# 2° Cu<sup>2+</sup>-Zn<sup>2+</sup> cross modulation in A $\beta$

#### XAS measurements: Cu and Zn K-edge

Sample	A $\beta_{1-16}$ :Cu:Zn	K-edge		Metal ions	
name		energy		addition order	
		Cu	Zn		
S1	1:1:1	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	Simultaneously	15 hc
S2	1:1:4	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	Simultaneously	e sec
S3	1:1:1	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	Cu first	of inc
S4	1:1:1	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	Zn first	meta
S5	1:1:4	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	Cu first	al is a tion of
S6	1:1:4	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	Zn first	adde of the
bCu	Cu in buffer	$\checkmark$		Only Cu	ed aft First
bZn	Zn in buffer		$\checkmark$	Only Zn	er t one

# 2° Cu<sup>2+</sup>-Zn<sup>2+</sup> cross modulation in A $\beta$

# Conclusions ...

The order in which metals are added matters

- When  $Zn^{2+}$  is added first, it prevents  $Cu^{2+}-A\beta$  complex formation
- When  $Cu^{2+}$  is added first, it does not completely prevent  $Zn^{2+}-A\beta$  complex formation
- Cu<sup>2+</sup> and Zn<sup>2+</sup> bind to the peptide through different numbers of histidines (2/1 and 3)

# ... but

it would be of the utmost importance to know what happens, to the whole peptide structure as a result of the metal binding competition, ...

... we are going to investigate this problem via MD and CPMD simulations

E. De Santis, V. Minicozzi, , S. Morante, O. Proux, G. C. Rossi, S. Saxena, K. I. Silva, F. Stellato "Cu(II)-Zn(II) cross-modulation in Ab peptide binding: an X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy study" (2015) *J. Phys. Chem. B.* **119(52)**: 15813-20

#### **MD** simulations

- Αβ<sub>1-40</sub>
- Soto breaker
- Soto breaker + taurine
- Soto breaker  $D \rightarrow N$
- = Ac-LPFFD-NH<sub>2</sub> = Tau-LPFFD-NH<sub>2</sub>

 $= Ac-LPFFN-NH_2$ 

Newly tested

Already studied in the literature

#### Simulated systems

abeta =  $A\beta_{1-40} + 3 \text{ Na}^+ + \text{water}$  *lpffd* =  $A\beta_{1-40} + 10 \text{ LPFFD} + 13 \text{ Na}^+ + \text{water}$  *taulpffd* =  $A\beta_{1-40} + 10 \text{ Tau-LPFFD} + 13 \text{ Na}^+ + \text{water}$ *lpffn* =  $A\beta_{1-40} + 10 \text{ LPFFN} + 3 \text{ Na}^+ + \text{water}$ 

Taurine

immersed in ~ 122,300 H<sub>2</sub>O [A $\beta_{1-40}$ ]:[BSBp] = 1:10 [A $\beta_{1-40}$ ] ~ 400mM Na<sup>+</sup> added to neutralize the systems

Note: D: Aspartic acid (hydrophilic); N: Asparagin (hydrophobic)

### **MD** Simulations

The simulation strategy



- 1 "prepare" the initial state of the system atomic coordinates atomic velocities force field choice dimension of system box water
- 2 system equilibration: potential energy minimization (T=0 K)
- 3 system heating: rise temperature to the desired value
- 4 start MD: solve the Newton's equation of motion for the atoms

### Step 1: prepare the initial state

BSB's are located at the same (randomly chosen) starting positions

inside the simulation box



# 3° Beta sheet breakers: targeting A $\beta$ fibrils

#### Time evolution of the A $\beta_{1-40}$ structure



# 3° Beta sheet breakers: targeting A $\beta$ fibrils

abeta



Colour code purple: a-helix; steel blue: turn; light yellow: b-helix; orange: isolated bridge; red: p-helix; white: coil

In agreement with Ito et al. (PLoSONE, 2012, 7/1:e30510; PLoSONE, 2011, 6/3:e17587)





(80÷90) ns

(90÷100) ns

# 3° Beta sheet breakers: targeting A $\beta$ fibrils



Colour code purple: a-helix; steel blue: turn; light yellow: b-helix; orange: isolated bridge; red: p-helix; white: coil

# 3° Beta sheet breakers: targeting A $\beta$ fibrils

tau-lpffd



Colour code purple: a-helix; steel blue: turn; light yellow: b-helix; orange: isolated bridge; red: p-helix; white: coil

lpffn



Colour code purple: a-helix; steel blue: turn; light yellow: b-helix; orange: isolated bridge; red: p-helix; white: coil

# 3° Beta sheet breakers: targeting A $\beta$ fibrils





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# 3° Beta sheet breakers: targeting A $\beta$ fibrils

#### BSB's within (backbone-backbone) 8 Å from A $\beta_{1-40}$



5 - 8

7

1 - 5

#### **Residue Mobility**

$$\sigma_R^2 = \frac{1}{T} \sum_k \frac{1}{N_R} \sum_{i=1}^{N_R} |\vec{r_i}(t_k) - \langle \vec{r}(t_k) \rangle|^2$$

T: trajectory length (30÷80 ns) R: amino acidic residue  $N_R$ : number of atoms belonging to R residue side chain  $\{r_i(t_k); i: 1, \ldots, N_R\}$ : position of the R residue n<sup>th</sup> atom  $(r(t_k))$ : mean residue position at time  $t_k$ 









### 3° Beta sheet breakers: targeting A $\beta$ fibrils

#### ThT fluorescence

ThT fluorescence intensity increases proportionally to  $A\beta_{1-40}$  fibril formation



The longer the lag phase, the higher the inhibition of  $A\beta_{1-40}$  fibril formation

#### all BSBp's lengthen the lag phase duration

a:  $A\beta_{1-40}$  alone : 600 min b:  $A\beta_{1-40}$  +Ac-LPFFD-NH<sub>2</sub> : 1000 min c:  $A\beta_{1-40}$  +Ac-LPFFN-NH<sub>2</sub> : 3000 min

Ac-LPFFN-NH<sub>2</sub> The most effective one

## Conclusions ...

#### **LPFFN** is the most "efficient" BSB

- Highest number of BSB's stay near  $A\beta$
- Highest  $\alpha$ -helix content stably conserved in A $\beta$
- Strongest effect on Aβ mobility
- Smallest RMSD  $\rightarrow$  smallest A $\beta$  structural modifications

## ... but

It would be of great interest to study how BSB's affect metals-A $\beta$  interaction

... we are on the way of performing experimental studies of the same systems in the presence of Cu or/and Zn

# General conclusions



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## **Aggregation & Misfolding: industrial applications**

Amyloid-like aggregates are now widely studied also in **non-medical** contexts: food science, pharmacology, nanomaterials ...

- Gel and foam production (drugs, food integrators, ...)
- Bio-material and bio-electronic device developments (nanowires, bio-sensors, ...)
- Food preservatives and taste enhancers, ...



### An important example: $\beta$ -lactoglobulin



In extreme conditions (@ pH=2 & 80-110 °C for > 20 h) it is able to form amyloid fibrils

It is the most abundant protein in the milk whey (mainly as a dimer). 38% is in a  $\beta$ -sheet secondary structure.

It is considered a potential new food ingredient both as an enhancer of gel propensity and as a nutritional ingredient.



M. Carbonaro, A. DiVenere, A. Filabozzi, P. Maselli, V. Minicozzi, S. Morante, E. Nicolai, A. Nucara, E. Placidi, F. Stellato "Role of dietary antioxidant (-)-epicatechin in the development of b-lactoglobulin fibrils" (2016) *BBA proteins and proteomics*, submitted

# **Phase diagram**



Ako K, Nicolai T, Durand D, Brotons G. (2009) "Micro-phase separation explains the abrupt structural change of denatured globular protein gels on varying the ionic strength or the pH" *Soft Matter* **5(20)**:4033–41.

A diffuse cutting-edge experimental and numerical laboratory for the study of protein misfolding and aggregation. An application to food science.



### The Biophysics Group Tor Vergata



#### biophys.roma2.infn.it

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