

Table of contents

1. Introduction 6

1.1. Leishmaniasis 6

1.2. *Leishmania* specific cell biology and gene regulation 7

1.3. Life cycle stages and transmission 8

1.3.1. In the sand fly 9

1.3.2. Parasite entry and parasitophorous vacuole formation 10

1.3.3. Initiation of differentiation 11

1.3.4. Metabolic and proteomic adaptations 11

1.4. Polyphosphate (polyP) 13

1.5. Metabolism and function of polyphosphate 13

1.5.1. In prokaryotes 13

1.5.2. In mammalian cells 14

1.5.3. In yeast 15

1.5.4. In trypanosomatids 16

1.7. Linking polyP to parasite survival and virulence 18

1.8. Aims and approaches of thesis project 19

2. Results 20

2.1. Identification of Vtc proteins in *Leishmania* 20

2.2. polyP and Vtc4p in *Leishmania* 20

2.2.1. polyP in different *Leishmania* species 20

2.2.2. polyP and Vtc4p fluctuations during the life cycle 22

2.2.3. polyP chain length 24

2.3. Vtc4 in *Leishmania major* 25

2.3.1. Generation of VTC4 knock-out *L. major* parasites 25

2.3.2. vtc4- parasites are devoid of polyP and display normal promastigote growth 26

2.3.3. Complementation of vtc4- *L. major* parasites 27

2.3.4. Impaired intracellular proliferation in absence of polyP 29

2.3.5. Exploring the susceptibility of polyP deficient *L. major* parasites to different stresses 30

2.3.6. Macrophage infection by amastigotes 33

2.3.7. *in vivo* infection 34

2.4. Vtc4 knock-down in *L. guyanensis* 37

2.4.1. RNAi targeting Vtc4 in *L. guyanensis* 37

2.4.2. Decreased mRNA and polyP levels in Vtc4 knock-down *L. guyanensis* parasites 38

2.4.3. Stress response of Vtc4 knock-down *L. guyanensis* 39

2.4.4. *in vitro* infection 41

2.4.5. *in vivo* infection 41

2.5. Vtc4p and polyP localization experiments in *Leishmania* 42

3. Discussion and Perspectives 45

3.1. Impact of Vtc4p on polyP synthesis 45

3.2. polyP and Vtc4p regulation	45
3.3. Involvement of polyP in early differentiation	46
3.4. <i>in vivo</i> infections do not require polyP in <i>Leishmania</i>	46
3.5. Role of polyP in adaptation to heat and other stresses	47
3.6. Potential role of polyP in the sand fly	48
3.7. Concluding remarks	48
 4. Materials and Methods	 50
4.1. Bioinformatic Methods	50
4.2. Parasite strains and clones	50
4.2.1. Construct for <i>VTC4</i> knock out in <i>L. major</i>	51
4.2.2. Construct for <i>VTC4</i> re-expression in <i>vtc4</i> - <i>L. major</i> clones	51
4.2.3. Construct for GFP control transfection	51
4.2.4. Construct for <i>L. guyanensis</i> M4147 Vtc4-stL and GFP-stL	52
4.2.5. <i>Leishmania</i> stable transfection and selection	52
4.3. <i>Leishmania</i> culture conditions	53
4.3.1. Standard parasite cultivation	53
4.3.2. pH and high temperature stress	54
4.3.3. Nutrient starvation	54
4.3.4. H ₂ O ₂ treatment	54
4.4. Molecular Biology Techniques	54
4.4.1. Isolation of genomic DNA and PCR	54
4.4.2. Southern blot analysis	55
4.4.3. RNA extraction and qRT-PCR	56
4.4.4. Isolation of proteins	56
4.4.5. Immunoblotting	56
4.4.6. Polyphosphate extraction and quantification	57
4.5. Metacyclic isolation	58
4.5.1. PNA agglutination assay	58
4.5.2. Ficoll gradient centrifugation	58
4.6. Infection	59
4.6.1. Macrophage infection	59
4.6.2. Mouse infection	59
4.7. Amastigote isolation from footpads	59
4.8. Vtc4p and polyP localization	60
4.8.1. Constructs used	60
4.9. Statistical analysis	60
4.8.2. Vtc4p and polyP localization by microscopy	61
 5. Abbreviations	 64
 6. Acknowledgments	 67
 7. References	 68

8. Plasmids _____ **76**

9. Publications & Contributions _____ **81**

9.1. Red blood cell-derived microparticles isolated from blood units initiate and propagate thrombin generation81

9.2. The therapeutic potential of immune cross-talk in leishmaniasis93