

1           **Genomic and phenotypic heterogeneity of clinical isolates of the human**  
2           **pathogens *Aspergillus fumigatus*, *Aspergillus lentulus* and *Aspergillus***  
3   ***fumigatiaffinis***

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14

15 **Keywords:** *Aspergillus*, antifungal drug susceptibility, genomics, strain  
16 heterogeneity, drug resistance, cryptic species, virulence, genetic determinants of  
17 virulence.

18 ABSTRACT

19 Fungal pathogens are a global threat to human health. For example, fungi from the genus  
20 *Aspergillus* cause a spectrum of diseases collectively known as aspergillosis. Most of the  
21 >200,000 life-threatening aspergillosis infections per year worldwide are caused by  
22 *Aspergillus fumigatus*. Recently, molecular typing techniques have revealed that  
23 aspergillosis can also be caused by organisms that are phenotypically similar to *A.*  
24 *fumigatus* but genetically distinct, such as *Aspergillus lentulus* and *Aspergillus*  
25 *fumigatiaffinis*. Importantly, some of these so-called cryptic species exhibit different  
26 virulence and drug susceptibility profiles than *A. fumigatus*, however, our understanding  
27 of their biology and pathogenic potential has been stymied by the lack of genome  
28 sequences and phenotypic profiling. To fill this gap, we phenotypically characterized the  
29 virulence and drug susceptibility of 15 clinical strains of *A. fumigatus*, *A. lentulus*, and *A.*  
30 *fumigatiaffinis* from Spain and sequenced their genomes. We found heterogeneity in  
31 virulence and drug susceptibility across species and strains. Genes known to influence  
32 drug susceptibility (*cyp51A* and *fks1*) vary in paralog number and sequence among these  
33 species and strains and correlate with differences in drug susceptibility. Similarly, genes  
34 known to be important for virulence in *A. fumigatus* showed variability in number of  
35 paralogs across strains and across species. Characterization of the genomic similarities  
36 and differences of clinical strains of *A. lentulus*, *A. fumigatiaffinis*, and *A. fumigatus* that  
37 vary in disease-relevant traits will advance our understanding of the variance in  
38 pathogenicity between *Aspergillus* species and strains that are collectively responsible  
39 for the vast majority of aspergillosis infections in humans.

## 40 INTRODUCTION

41 Aspergillosis is a major health problem, with rapidly evolving epidemiology and new  
42 groups of at-risk patients (Patterson et al., 2016). Aspergillosis infections are usually  
43 caused by inhalation of airborne asexual spores (conidia) of *Aspergillus fumigatus* and a  
44 few other *Aspergillus* species (Rokas et al., 2020). Aspergillosis covers a spectrum of  
45 diseases (Latgé and Chamilos, 2020). For example, non-invasive diseases caused by  
46 *Aspergillus*, such as aspergilloma, are currently classified as chronic pulmonary  
47 aspergillosis and are commonly associated to pulmonary tuberculosis (Denning et al.,  
48 2016). In atopic patients, the most severe form of aspergillosis is allergic  
49 bronchopulmonary aspergillosis (ABPA), which develops following sensitization to *A.*  
50 *fumigatus* allergens in atopic patients with cystic fibrosis or individuals with genetic  
51 predisposition to ABPA (Agarwal et al., 2013). However, the most common invasive type  
52 of infection is invasive pulmonary aspergillosis (IPA), whose risk is significantly increased  
53 in immunocompromised individuals, in patients with acute leukaemia and recipients of  
54 hematopoietic stem cells transplantation, or in solid-organ transplant recipients (Brown et  
55 al., 2012). Importantly, IPA has recently been described in new groups of traditionally low-  
56 risk patients, such as patients in intensive care units recovering from bacterial sepsis  
57 (Latgé and Chamilos, 2020).

58

59 Although *A. fumigatus* is the major etiologic agent of aspergillosis, a few other *Aspergillus*  
60 species, such as *Aspergillus flavus*, *Aspergillus terreus*, *Aspergillus niger*, and *Aspergillus*  
61 *nidulans*, can also cause infections (Zakaria et al., 2020). While most of these pathogens  
62 can be phenotypically easily distinguished, infections can also be caused by *Aspergillus*

63 species that are morphologically very similar to *A. fumigatus* (Rokas et al., 2020). These  
64 close pathogenic relatives of *A. fumigatus* are considered sibling species or cryptic  
65 species because they are undistinguishable from each other and from *A. fumigatus* by  
66 classical identification methods (Alastruey-Izquierdo et al., 2014); these species vary  
67 mostly in their colony growth, robustness of the production of conidia, conidial surface  
68 markings, presence and absence of septation in phialides, and maximum growth  
69 temperatures (Taylor et al., 2000; Balajee et al., 2005; Katz et al., 2005). As a result of  
70 their near identical morphological characteristics, most of these cryptic species have only  
71 recently been described. For example, *Aspergillus lentulus* was first described in 2005 in  
72 a case of human aspergillosis (Balajee et al., 2005). Similarly, *A. fumigatiaffinis*, another  
73 pathogenic species that is closely related to *A. fumigatus*, was first described in 2005  
74 (Hong et al., 2005). Even though cryptic species were only discovered relatively recently,  
75 understanding their genetic and phenotypic similarities and differences from the major  
76 pathogen *A. fumigatus* is important for two reasons. First, their prevalence in the clinic  
77 has been estimated to be between 11 and 19% (Balajee et al., 2009; Alastruey-Izquierdo  
78 et al., 2014; Negri et al., 2014). Second, several of these species, including *A. lentulus*  
79 and *A. fumigatiaffinis*, have been shown to differ in their drug susceptibility to  
80 amphotericin B and azoles compared to *A. fumigatus* (Alastruey-Izquierdo et al., 2014).

81

82 An emerging realization in the study of fungal pathogens is the presence of phenotypic  
83 heterogeneity among strains of the same species, especially with respect to virulence  
84 and antifungal drug susceptibility (Keller, 2017). For example, a recent study reported  
85 strong correlation between *in vitro* hypoxic growth phenotypes and virulence among *A.*

86 *fumigatus* strains (Kowalski et al., 2016). Similarly, *A. fumigatus* strains have previously  
87 been show to exhibit great quantitative and qualitative heterogeneity in light response  
88 (Fuller et al., 2016); in this case, heterogeneity in light response was not associated with  
89 heterogeneity in virulence. Finally, Ries *et al.* found a high heterogeneity among *A.*  
90 *fumigatus* strains with regard to nitrogen acquisition and metabolism during infection and  
91 correlation between nitrogen catabolite repression-related protease secretion and  
92 virulence (Ries et al., 2019). These studies highlight the biological and clinical relevance  
93 of understanding strain heterogeneity in *Aspergillus* pathogens. However, comparisons  
94 of strain heterogeneity in virulence and drug resistance profiles among clinical strains in  
95 *A. fumigatus* and closely related cryptic species, such as *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis*,  
96 are lacking.

97

98 To address this gap in the field, we phenotypically characterized and sequenced the  
99 genomes of 15 clinical strains of *A. fumigatus*, *A. lentulus*, and *A. fumigatiaffinis* from  
100 Spain. We found strain heterogeneity in both virulence and drug susceptibility profiles  
101 within each species as well as differences between the three species. We found that  
102 genes known to influence drug susceptibility, such as *cyp51A*, exhibit variation in their  
103 numbers of paralogs and sequence among these species and strains. Similarly, we found  
104 variability in the number of paralogs within and between species in many genes known to  
105 be important for virulence in *A. fumigatus*. Characterization of the genomic similarities  
106 and differences of clinical strains of *A. lentulus*, *A. fumigatiaffinis*, and *A. fumigatus* that  
107 vary in disease-relevant traits will advance our understanding of the variation in

108 pathogenicity between *Aspergillus* species and strains that are collectively responsible  
109 for the vast majority of aspergillosis infections in humans.

## 110 MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 111 Strains and species identification

112 To understand the degree of genomic heterogeneity among strains, we sequenced six  
113 clinical strains of *A. fumigatus*, five of *A. lentulus* and four of *A. fumigatiaffinis* available in  
114 the Mycology Reference Laboratory of the National Center for Microbiology (CNM) in  
115 Instituto de Salud Carlos III in Spain (Supplementary Table 1). For initial species  
116 identification, we sequenced the Internal Transcribed Spacer region (ITS) and beta-  
117 tubulin (*benA*) gene amplicons (primer pairs in Supplementary Table 2). We downloaded  
118 reference sequences for the type strains of *A. fumigatiaffinis* IBT12703 and *A. lentulus*  
119 IFM54703, and of *Aspergillus clavatus* NRRL1 (section *Clavati*), which we used as the  
120 outgroup. We aligned DNA sequences with MAFFT v.7.397 (Kato and Standley, 2013),  
121 followed by model selection and phylogenetic inference in IQ-TREE v.1.6.7 (Nguyen et  
122 al., 2015).

123

### 124 Characterization of virulence and antifungal susceptibility profiles

125 To understand the pathogenic potential of the 15 clinical strains, we carried out virulence  
126 assays using the moth *Galleria mellonella* model of fungal disease (Fuchs et al., 2010).  
127 Briefly, we obtained moth larvae by breeding adult moths that were kept for 24 hr prior to  
128 infection under starvation, in the dark, and at a temperature of 37 °C. We selected only  
129 larvae that were in the sixth and final stage of larval development. We harvested fresh  
130 asexual spores (conidia) from each strain from yeast extract-agar-glucose (YAG) plates  
131 in PBS solution and filtered through a Miracloth (Calbiochem). For each strain, we  
132 counted the spores using a hemocytometer and created a  $2 \times 10^8$  conidia/ml stock

133 suspension. We determined the viability of the administered inoculum by plating a serial  
134 dilution of the conidia on YAG medium at 37°. We inoculated a total of 5µl (1x10<sup>6</sup>  
135 conidia/larvae) to each larva (n=10). We used as the control a group composed of larvae  
136 inoculated with 5µl of PBS. We performed inoculations via the last left proleg using a  
137 Hamilton syringe (7000.5KH). After infection, we maintained the larvae in petri dishes at  
138 37° C in the dark and scored them daily during ten days. We considered larvae that did  
139 not move in response to touch as dead. To evaluate whether there was significant  
140 heterogeneity in the virulence profiles of the different strains within each species, we  
141 performed log-rank (Mantel-Cox) and Gehan-Breslow-Wilcoxon tests in Graph Pad  
142 (Supplementary Table 3).

143

144 To measure the antifungal susceptibility of the clinical strains, we applied the EUCAST  
145 (European Committee for Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing) reference method version  
146 9.3.1 (Arendrup et al., 2017). For all strains, we tested their susceptibility to four antifungal  
147 drug classes: a) Polyenes: Amphotericin B (AMB, Sigma-Aldrich Quimica, Madrid, Spain);  
148 b) Azoles: itraconazole (ICZ, Janssen Pharmaceutica, Madrid, Spain), voriconazole  
149 (VCZ, Pfizer SA, Madrid, Spain), posaconazole (PCZ, Schering-Plough Research  
150 Institute, Kenilworth, NJ, USA); c) Echinocandins: caspofungin (CPF, Merck & Co. Inc,  
151 Rahway, NJ, USA), micafungin (MCF, Astellas Pharma Inc., Tokyo Japan), anidulafungin  
152 (AND, Pfizer SA. Madrid, Spain); and d) Allylamine: Terbinafine (TRB, Novartis, Basel,  
153 Switzerland). The final concentrations tested ranged from 0.03 to 16 mg/liter for  
154 amphotericin B, terbinafine, and caspofungin; from 0.015 to 8 mg/liter for itraconazole,  
155 voriconazole and posaconazole; from 0.007 to 4 mg/liter for anidulafungin; and from 0.004



156 to 2 mg/liter for micafungin. *A. flavus* ATCC 204304 and *A. fumigatus* ATCC 204305 were  
157 used as quality control strains in all tests performed. MICs for amphotericin B,  
158 itraconazole, voriconazole, posaconazole, and terbinafine, and minimal effective  
159 concentrations (MECs) for anidulafungin, caspofungin and micafungin were visually read  
160 after 24 and 48 h of incubation at 35°C in a humid atmosphere. To assess the relationship  
161 between antifungal susceptibility and strain/species identification, we carried out Principal  
162 Component Analysis (PCA) with scaled MIC/MEC values with the R package FactoMineR  
163 (Lê et al., 2008), and data visualization with the factoextra v.1.0.6 package.

164

## 165 [Genome sequencing](#)

166 To understand the genomic similarities and differences within and between these  
167 pathogenic *Aspergillus* species and how they are associated with differences in drug  
168 susceptibility and virulence profiles, we sequenced the genomes of all 15 strains. Each  
169 strain was grown in glucose-yeast extract-peptone (GYEP) liquid medium (0.3% yeast  
170 extract and 1% peptone; Difco, Soria Melguizo) with 2% glucose (Sigma-Aldrich, Spain)  
171 for 24 h to 48 h at 30°C. After mechanical disruption of the mycelium by vortex mixing with  
172 glass beads, genomic DNA of isolates was extracted using the phenol-chloroform method  
173 (Holden DW, 1994). The preparation of DNA libraries was performed using the Nextera®  
174 TM DNA Library PrepKit (Illumina Inc., San Diego, CA, USA) according to manufacturer's  
175 guidelines. DNA quantification was carried out using the QuantiFluor® dsDNA System  
176 and the QuantiFluor® ST Fluorometer (Promega, Madison, WI, USA) and its quality was  
177 checked with the Agilent 2100 Bioanalyzer (Agilent Technologies Inc., Santa Clara, CA,  
178 USA). Sequencing was performed in the Illumina platform NextSeq500, following the

179 manufacturer's protocols (Illumina Inc, San Diego, CA, USA). We performed an initial  
180 quality analysis of the sequence reads using FastQC, v.0.11.7  
181 (<https://www.bioinformatics.babraham.ac.uk/projects/fastqc/>). We inspected sequence  
182 reads for contaminants using BLAST (Altschul et al., 1990) and MEGAN5 (Huson and  
183 Weber, 2013). We trimmed low quality bases (LEADING = 3; TRAILING = 3;  
184 SLIDINGWINDOW: windowSize = 4 and requiredQuality = 15), removing both short  
185 sequences (< 90 bp) and Nextera adaptors, with Trimmomatic v.0.38 (Bolger et al., 2014).

186

### 187 [Genome assembly and annotation](#)

188 We assembled the genomes of all strains with SPAdes v3.12.0 (Bankevich et al., 2012).  
189 We corrected bases, fixed mis-assemblies, and filled gaps with Pilon, v.1.22 (Walker et  
190 al., 2014). We assessed assembly quality using QUAST, v.4.6.3 (Gurevich et al., 2013).  
191 We assessed genome assembly completeness using Benchmarking Universal Single-  
192 Copy Orthologs (BUSCO) (Simão et al., 2015) and the 4,046 Eurotiomycetes BUSCO  
193 gene set (genes from OrthoDB that are thought to be universally single copy). We carried  
194 out gene prediction with AUGUSTUS v.3.3.1 (Stanke et al., 2004) using the gene models  
195 of *A. fumigatus* as reference. We carried out functional annotation with InterProScan 5.34-  
196 73.0 (Jones et al., 2014).

197

### 198 [Orthogroup identification](#)

199 To identify orthologs (and closely related paralogs) across strains, we performed all-vs-  
200 all searches with blastp 2.7.1+ (Altschul et al., 1990) using the strains' predicted

201 proteomes. We used OrthoFinder v.2.3.3 (Emms and Kelly, 2015) to generate  
202 orthogroups using pre-computed BLAST results (-og option) and a Markov Clustering  
203 (MCL) inflation value of 1.5. We considered an orthogroup “species-specific” if it  
204 possessed one or more protein sequences from only one species.

205

#### 206 Identification of single nucleotide polymorphisms and insertions / deletions

207 To characterize genetic variation within and between the three pathogenic *Aspergillus*  
208 species, we assessed single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) and insertions / deletions  
209 (indels). We used BWA-MEM v.0.7.17 (Li and Durbin, 2009) with default parameters to  
210 map reads to the reference genome sequences for *A. fumigatus*, *A. lentulus* and *A.*  
211 *fumigatiaffinis* (CNM-CM8686, CNM-CM7927, and CNM-CM6805, respectively). We did  
212 not use type strains as reference genomes for the species under study, because they are  
213 not from Spain. Duplicate reads were identified using PICARD MarkDuplicates v.2.9.2  
214 (<http://broadinstitute.github.io/picard>). We indexed genomes using SAMTOOLS v.1.8 (Li  
215 et al., 2009) for subsequent variant detection analyses. We used GenomeAnalysisTK  
216 (GATK) v.3.6 for SNP calling with the recommended hard filtering parameters (McKenna  
217 et al., 2010; Depristo et al., 2011). We used SnpEff v.4.3t (Cingolani P, Platts A, Wang le  
218 L, Coon M, Nguyen T, Wang L, Land SJ, Lu X et al., 2013) to annotate and predict the  
219 functional effect of SNPs and indels. We aligned protein and coding sequences for genes  
220 of interest with MAFFT v.7.397 (Kato and Standley, 2013), using the –auto mode. We  
221 used Jalview v.2.10.3 (Waterhouse et al., 2009) to visualize SNPs, and a Python script  
222 to recover non-synonymous mutations compared to the reference, *A. fumigatus* A1163.

223 Enrichment analysis of GO terms in genes with high impact SNPs and indels for each  
224 species was carried out with GOATOOLS v.0.9.9 (Klopfenstein et al., 2018).

225

## 226 Genetic determinants important for virulence

227 To examine whether SNPs, indels, and number of paralogs in a given orthogroup were  
228 associated with virulence, we recovered 215 genes in *A. fumigatus* Af293 considered  
229 genetic determinants of virulence based on their presence in PHI-base (Winnenburg,  
230 2006) and in previously published studies (Abad et al., 2010; Kjærboelling et al., 2018).  
231 We obtained functional annotation of these virulence-related genes from FungiDB  
232 (Basenko et al., 2018).

233

## 234 Maximum-likelihood phylogenomics

235 To reconstruct the evolutionary history of our 15 strains and closely related *Aspergillus*  
236 species, we first downloaded or assembled genomes of other strains of the three  
237 pathogenic species or their closely relatives that are publicly available. Specifically, we  
238 downloaded the genomes of *Aspergillus novofumigatus* IBT16806 (Kjærboelling et al.,  
239 2018), *Aspergillus lentulus* IFM 54703<sup>T</sup> (Kusuya et al., 2016), *Aspergillus fischeri*  
240 NRRL181 (Fedorova et al., 2008), *Aspergillus udagawae* IFM46973 (Kusuya et al., 2015),  
241 and *Aspergillus viridinutans* FRR\_0576 (GenBank accession: GCA\_004368095.1). To  
242 ensure our analyses also captured the genetic diversity of *A. fumigatus*, we also included  
243 additional *A. fumigatus* genomes that spanned the known diversity of *A. fumigatus* strains  
244 (Lind et al., 2017). Specifically, we downloaded the genomes of *A. fumigatus* A1163

245 (Fedorova et al., 2008) and *A. fumigatus* Af293 (Nierman et al., 2005). Additionally, we  
246 obtained the raw reads of *A. fumigatus* strains 12-750544 and F16311 (SRA accessions:  
247 SRR617737 and ERR769500, respectively). To assemble these genomes, we first quality  
248 trimmed the sequence reads using Trimmomatic, v0.36 (Bolger et al., 2014) using  
249 parameters described elsewhere (leading:10, trailing:10, slidingwindow:4:20, and  
250 minlen:50). The resulting quality-trimmed reads were then used for genome assembly  
251 using SPAdes, v3.8.1 (Bankevich et al., 2012), using the ‘careful’ parameter and the ‘cov-  
252 cutoff’ parameter set to ‘auto.’ Altogether, we analyzed a total of 24 genomes.

253

254 To identify single-copy orthologous genes among the 24 genomes, we implemented the  
255 BUSCO, v.2.0.1 (Waterhouse et al., 2013; Simão et al., 2015) pipeline. Specifically, we  
256 used the BUSCO pipeline to identify single-copy orthologous genes from genomes using  
257 the Eurotiomycetes database of 4,046 orthologs from OrthoDB, v9 (Waterhouse et al.,  
258 2013). Among the 4,096 orthologs, we identified 3,954 orthologs with at least 18 taxa  
259 represented and aligned the protein sequence each ortholog individually using Mafft,  
260 v7.294b (Kato and Standley, 2013), with the same parameters as described elsewhere  
261 (Steenwyk et al., 2019). We then forced nucleotide sequences onto the protein alignment  
262 with a custom Python, v3.5.2 ([www.python.org](http://www.python.org)), script using BioPython, v1.7 (Cock et al.,  
263 2009). The resulting nucleotide alignments were trimmed using trimAl, v1.4 (Capella-  
264 Gutierrez et al., 2009), with the ‘gappyout’ parameter. The trimmed alignments were then  
265 concatenated into a single matrix with 7,147,728 sites. We then used the concatenated  
266 data matrix as input into IQ-TREE, v1.6.11 (Nguyen et al., 2015), with the ‘nbest’  
267 parameter set to 10. The best-fitting model of substitutions was automatically determined

268 using the Bayesian information criterion. The best-fitting model was a general time  
269 general time-reversible model with empirical base frequencies, a discrete Gamma model  
270 with 4 rate categories, and a proportion of invariable sites (GTR+I+F+G4) (Tavaré, 1986;  
271 Yang, 1994; Yang, 1996; Vinet and Zhedanov, 2011). Lastly, we evaluated bipartition  
272 support using 5,000 ultrafast bootstrap approximations (Hoang et al., 2018).

273

274 In order to build the phylogeny with Cyp51 paralogs, we recovered protein sequences  
275 from two orthogroups that included Cyp51A and Cyp51B from *A. fumigatus* Af293  
276 (Afu4g06890 and Afu7g03740, respectively). We generated a maximum-likelihood  
277 phylogeny in IQ-Tree v. 1.6.12 (Nguyen et al., 2015), using 1000 Ultrafast Bootstrap  
278 Approximation (UFBoot) replicates. The LG+G4 model was chosen as the best according  
279 to Bayesian Information Criterion.

280

#### 281 [Data availability](#)

282 All genomes sequenced as part of this work can be accessed through BioProject  
283 PRJNA592352; the raw sequence reads are also available through the NCBI Sequence  
284 Read Archive. BioSample and Assembly identifiers are presented in Supplementary  
285 Table 4. Codes and scripts used in this project are available on the Gitlab repository under  
286 [https://gitlab.com/SantosRAC/afum\\_afma\\_alen2020](https://gitlab.com/SantosRAC/afum_afma_alen2020).

287

## 288 RESULTS

### 289 Clinical strains show varying antifungal drug susceptibility

290 By performing PCA on the antifungal drug susceptibility values of all 15 strains, we found  
291 that the strains exhibited high heterogeneity in their drug resistance profiles (Figure 1A).  
292 In many cases, we found that strains from different species exhibited more similar  
293 susceptibility patterns to each other (e.g., strain CNM-CM8686 from *A. fumigatus* with  
294 strain CNM-CM6069 from *A. lentulus*) than to other strains from the same species (e.g.,  
295 strain CNM-CM8686 with strain CNM-CM8057 from *A. fumigatus*), highlighting the  
296 magnitude of heterogeneity in drug susceptibility of these species and strains. Principal  
297 Component 1 (PC1) explained 37.2% of the variation and separated almost all *A.*  
298 *fumigatus* strains from those of the other two species. Principal Component 2 (PC2)  
299 explained 21% of the variation, but did not separate species. The individual contributions  
300 of each antifungal drug to each PC are shown in Supplementary Figure 1. We identified  
301 that the susceptibility of three antifungals was negatively correlated: micafungin (MCF)  
302 *versus* amphotericin B (AMB) and terbinafine (TRB) *versus* AMB (Supplementary Figure  
303 1). In contrast, anidulafungin (AND) and voriconazole (VCZ) were positively correlated  
304 (Supplementary Figure 2).

305

306 We also looked at the differences in susceptibility between strains for each antifungal  
307 drug (Figure 1B). Our data show that clinical strains of *A. fumigatus* exhibit lower MICs to  
308 AMB compared to *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigati*affinis, albeit different levels are observed  
309 among different strains (one-way ANOVA;  $\alpha < 0.05$ ; Tukey multiple comparisons of  
310 means for AMB) (Table 1). With the exception of susceptibility of *A. fumigatus* and *A.*

311 *lentulus* to AMB, for which a significant difference is observed between these two species,  
312 we observed high heterogeneity among strains of different species for the other drugs  
313 (Table 1). Among azoles, itraconazole (ICZ) and VCZ displayed higher levels of variability  
314 across strains. With respect to TRB, the four *A. fumigatiaffinis* strains exhibited low MICs,  
315 whereas four *A. fumigatus* strains displayed higher MICs (MIC values >1mg/L) and the  
316 other two *A. fumigatus* strains even higher; finally, one *A. lentulus* strain (CNM-CM8694)  
317 displayed the highest MICs across all strains (albeit other strains showed in general lower  
318 MICs). Among echinocandin drugs, caspofungin (CPF) showed high MECs for the three  
319 species. In particular, one strain of *A. fumigatiaffinis* and three of *A. lentulus* were notable  
320 in exhibiting very high MECs (MECs  $\geq$  1mg/L). MECs for MCF and AND were low  
321 ( $\leq$ 0.125mg/L) for all strains.

322

### 323 Clinical strains show varying levels of virulence

324 Given functional similarities of the greater wax moth *Galleria mellonella* innate immune  
325 system with that of mammals, and prior work showing that moth larvae and mice exhibit  
326 similar survival rates when infected with *A. nidulans* (Fernandes et al., 2017), we infected  
327 *G. mellonella* larvae with all 15 strains (Figure 2).

328

329 Survival curves revealed high heterogeneity in virulence across clinical strains in the three  
330 species (Figure 2). We observed highly virulent strains for which all ten larvae were dead  
331 at day 10, such as *A. fumigatus* Af293 (one of our reference strain), *A. fumigatiaffinis*  
332 CNM-CM5878 and *A. lentulus* CNM-CM8927. In contrast, other strains were less virulent



333 and >25% larvae survived to the last day of data collection, such as *A. lentulus* CNM-  
334 CM6069 and CNM-CM8060. Moreover, we confirmed a high heterogeneity in virulence  
335 across strains in the same or in different species (Mantel-Cox and Gehan-Breslow-  
336 Wilcoxon tests are shown in the Supplementary Table 3). For example, a similar survival  
337 curve is shared between *A. fumigatus* CNM-CM8812 and *A. fumigatiaffinis* CNM-  
338 CM5878, whereas *A. fumigatus* CNM-CM8812 and CNM-CM8714 lead to different  
339 results.

340

#### 341 [Genomic variation within and between Spanish strains of \*A. fumigatus\*, \*A. lentulus\*, and](#) 342 [\*A. fumigatiaffinis\*](#)

343 To begin exploring the potential genetic underpinnings of species and strain variation in  
344 drug susceptibility and virulence, we conducted comparative genomic analyses. The  
345 genomes of all 15 strains were of high quality and contained 97-98% of expected  
346 complete and single-copy BUSCOs (Supplementary Table 4).

347

348 *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis* genomes had larger gene repertoires (9,717 - 9,842 and  
349 10,329 – 10,677, respectively) than *A. fumigatus* (8,837 – 8,938), consistent with previous  
350 genome studies of *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatus* (Nierman et al., 2005; Fedorova et al.,  
351 2008; Kusuya et al., 2016). A genome-scale phylogenetic analysis using the nucleotide  
352 sequences of BUSCOs with previously sequenced strains (Figure 3A) supports the close  
353 relationship between *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis*.

354

## 355 Genome diversity among and within species across clinical strains

356 Examination of orthogroups across the fifteen strains and three species revealed that  
357 most genes (7,938) are shared by all three species (Figure 3B). *A. fumigatiaffinis* has a  
358 larger set of species-specific genes (1,062) than *A. lentulus* (656) or *A. fumigatus* (645),  
359 consistent with its larger genome size and gene number. The numbers of shared genes  
360 between *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis* are also higher than intersections between each  
361 of them with *A. fumigatus*, consistent with their closer evolutionary affinity (Figure 3A).  
362 Within each species, most orthogroups are found in all strains (9,008, 8,321, and 9,423  
363 in *A. lentulus*, *A. fumigatus*, and *A. fumigatiaffinis*, respectively); approximately 5.4-6.13%  
364 of genes in each species appear to vary in their presence between strains  
365 (Supplementary Figure 3). Among these, we noted that orthogroups that are present all  
366 but one strain are usually the most frequent (Figure 3C).

367

368 We identified a total of 114,378, 160,194, and 313,029 SNPs in *A. fumigatus*, *A.*  
369 *fumigatiaffinis* and *A. lentulus*, respectively. We identified 406, 493, and 747 SNPs in *A.*  
370 *fumigatus*, *A. fumigatiaffinis* and *A. lentulus*, respectively as high-impact polymorphisms;  
371 these polymorphisms are those whose mutation is presumed to be highly deleterious to  
372 protein function). Similarly, out of a total of 11,698 (*A. fumigatus*), 20,135 (*A.*  
373 *fumigatiaffinis*) and 34,506 (*A. lentulus*) indels segregating within each species, we  
374 identified 615, 1,739, and 1,830 high-impact indels in *A. fumigatus*, *A. fumigatiaffinis*, and  
375 *A. lentulus*, respectively.

376

377 Gene Ontology (GO) enrichment analysis was carried out for genes with high impact  
378 SNPs and indels ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). *A. fumigatus* only showed GO terms identified as  
379 underrepresented in “cellular process” and several cellular compartments (“protein-  
380 containing complex”, “intracellular organelle part”, “organelle part”, “cytoplasmic part”,  
381 “cell part”). *A. lentulus* had “nucleoside metabolic” and “glycosyl compound metabolic  
382 processes” enriched, and *A. fumigatiaffinis* showed enriched terms for “modified amino  
383 acid binding”, “phosphopantetheine binding”, “amide binding”, “transition metal ion  
384 binding”, “zinc ion binding”, “chitin binding”, and “ADP binding”. *A. lentulus* and *A.*  
385 *fumigatiaffinis* genes with high impact SNPs and indels also showed underrepresented  
386 GO terms (Supplementary Table 5). We also analysed SNPs and indels separately  
387 (Supplementary Table 5).

388

### 389 Polymorphisms in major antifungal target genes correlate with antifungal susceptibility

390 Given the observed variation within and between species in antifungal drug susceptibility,  
391 we examined DNA sequence polymorphisms in genes known to be involved in antifungal  
392 susceptibility to azoles and echinocandins. In particular, we examined patterns of  
393 sequence variation in the 14 $\alpha$ -sterol demethylase gene *cyp51A* (Afu4g06890) and in the  
394 1,3-beta-glucan synthase catalytic subunit gene *fks1* (Afu6g12400). Using *A. fumigatus*  
395 A1163 as reference, we identified important species- and strain-specific polymorphisms  
396 in both *cyp51A* and *fks1* (Figure 4A; Table 2 shows a detailed breakdown of all SNP and  
397 indel polymorphisms per strain).

398

399 An alignment of Cyp51A protein sequences in the three species shows possible insertions  
400 in different sites (Figure 4A - red arrow). We observed substitutions in at least one of the  
401 clinical strains in the three species in 42 positions that might be correlated with the strains'  
402 varying drug susceptibility levels. For instance, Cyp51A in *A. fumigatus* CNM-CM8714  
403 revealed a well-documented substitution related to azole resistance at position 98 (L98H)  
404 (Figure 4A - blue arrows), which might be correlated to its lower susceptibility to ICZ or  
405 VCZ compared to other *A. fumigatus* strains (Figure 1B).

406

407 We also looked at the promoter region of the *cyp51A* gene (Figure 4B) and identified the  
408 Tandem Repeat (TR) insertions TR34 and TR46, previously reported in antifungal  
409 resistant strains (Dudakova et al., 2017). These changes were specific to certain clinical  
410 strains of *A. fumigatus*. For example, *A. fumigatus* CNM-CM8714 carries the TR34  
411 insertions whereas *A. fumigatus* CNM-CM8057 has a TR46 (region highlighted between  
412 blue arrows). There are other variations (short indels) that were exclusive to either *A.*  
413 *lentulus* or *A. fumigatiaffinis*, or both.

414

415 Examination of the Fks1 protein sequence alignment from strains of the three species  
416 also revealed substitutions in 39 sites (Figure 4A). We also observed an insertion at  
417 position 1,626 of *A. lentulus* CNM-CM8927 (red arrow). Fks1 also showed substitutions  
418 at positions comprising an important hot-spot 2 (HS2) (blue arrows): all *A. lentulus* strains  
419 have a substitution at position 1,349 (I1349V) and all *A. fumigatiaffinis* have a substitution  
420 at position 1,360 (T1360I).

421

422 Examination of orthogroups revealed that the orthogroup that includes the *cyp51A* gene  
423 (Afu4g06890) contained additional paralogs of the *cyp51* family. Thus, we carried out a  
424 phylogenetic analysis with the amino acid sequences with the orthogroups containing  
425 *cyp51A* and *cyp51B* genes in *A. fumigatus* Af293 (Figure 4C) that comprises the three  
426 species in this work. We observed three well-defined clades. The *A. fumigatiaffinis*  
427 paralog related to *cyp51A* is likely to represent *cyp51C*, which has been previously  
428 reported in other *Aspergillus* species (Hagiwara et al., 2016). Sequence identity between  
429 the putative Cyp51C protein in *A. fumigatiaffinis* CNM-CM6805 and Cyp51C  
430 (XM\_002383890.1) and Cyp51A (XM\_002375082.1) of *A. flavus* (Liu et al., 2012) is  
431 471/512 (92%) and 391/508 (77%), respectively.

432

### 433 Genetic determinants involved in virulence: single-nucleotide polymorphisms, insertions 434 / deletions across strains and within species conservation

435 To explore the genetic underpinnings of the observed strain heterogeneity in virulence  
436 we next examined the SNPs and indels in 215 genes that have previously been  
437 characterized as genetic determinants of virulence in *A. fumigatus* (Supplementary Table  
438 6).

439

440 Most virulence genetic determinants (146 genes) were found in single-copy in all strains  
441 (Supplementary Table 7), whereas 57 genes varied in their number of paralogs across  
442 clinical strains (Figure 5). We also identified four virulence determinants that had no

443 orthologs in either *A. lentulus* or *A. fumigatiaffinis*, such as Afu6g07120 (*nudC*), which is  
444 an essential protein involved in nuclear movement (Morris et al., 1998), and considered  
445 an essential gene in *A. fumigatus* (Hu et al., 2007). Interestingly, we noted 17 virulence  
446 determinants that are present in *A. fumigatus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis* but absent in *A.*  
447 *lentulus* (Figure 5 – top panel), such as Afu8g00200 (*ftmD*), one of the genes in the  
448 fumitremorgin biosynthetic gene cluster (Abad et al., 2010).

449

450 Several virulence determinants exhibited larger numbers of paralogs in one or more  
451 species. For example, the conidial pigment polyketide synthase *alb1* (Afu2g17600), which  
452 is involved in conidial morphology and virulence (Tsai et al., 1998), is one of the  
453 determinants with highest number of paralogs in *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis* (n=7)  
454 when compared to *A. fumigatus* strains (n=4). For determinants that contained a gene in  
455 at least one strain, we tested correlations between number of paralogs and virulence  
456 (lethal time 50: day at which 50% of the larvae were dead, or “ND-end”: the number of  
457 dead larvae at the end of the experiment) and we observed no significant correlation  
458 suggesting paralog number does not associate with virulence.

459

## 460 DISCUSSION

461 *A. fumigatus* and the closely related species *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis* are  
462 important causal agents of aspergillosis (Zbinden et al., 2012; Lamoth, 2016). Importantly,  
463 the emergence of antifungal resistance is of increasing worldwide concern (Fisher et al.,  
464 2018) and antifungal resistant strains of *A. lentulus*, and *A. fumigatiaffinis* (Alastruey-

465 Izquierdo et al., 2014) have been identified. Heterogeneity in virulence across different  
466 strains of *A. fumigatus* has also been known for some time (Mondon et al., 1996).  
467 Analyses of strain phenotypic and genetic heterogeneity allow us to identify correlations  
468 between phenotype and genotype in strains of *Aspergillus* pathogens.

469

470 We found that high heterogeneity exists in drug susceptibility and virulence across  
471 different strains of *A. fumigatus*, *A. lentulus*, and *A. fumigatiaffinis*. For one specific  
472 antifungal drug, amphotericin B, our results confirmed previous findings that *A. fumigatus*  
473 is more susceptible to AMB than strains of cryptic species (Balajee et al., 2004). Studies  
474 on the intrinsic resistance to AMB reported for *A. terreus* highlight the importance of stress  
475 response pathways, in particular heat shock proteins (such as Hsp90 and Hsp70), as well  
476 as enzymes detoxifying reactive oxygen species (Posch et al., 2018). Future work  
477 involving genomics on the cryptic species will be able to exploit changes in genetic  
478 determinants involved in AMB susceptibility, although this drug is not commonly used in  
479 clinical settings.

480

481 Regarding virulence, previous work (Sugui et al., 2014) compared survival curves  
482 between different species of *Aspergillus* and concluded that *A. fumigatus* is significantly  
483 more virulent than *A. lentulus* based on type strains. However, using the *Galleria* model  
484 of fungal infection we found that observed within-species variance is greater than it would  
485 be intuitively expected for different species. While additional testing using diverse models  
486 of fungal disease will be required to test the validity of these observations, our findings

487 reinforce the emerging view that examining within-species variation in *Aspergillus*  
488 pathogens is an important, yet poorly studied and understood, dimension of fungal  
489 virulence.

490

491 The advent of whole genome sequencing boosted our understanding of the biology of the  
492 genus *Aspergillus* (de Vries et al., 2017). Several works have previously analysed  
493 genomic data of *A. fumigatus* strains (Abdolrasouli et al., 2015; Takahashi-Nakaguchi et  
494 al., 2015), uncovering *cyp51A* mutations in *A. fumigatus* populations (Abdolrasouli et al.,  
495 2015). Some studies have also focused on antifungal drug susceptibility (Garcia-Rubio et  
496 al., 2018) or virulence potential (Puértolas-Balint et al., 2019) using only the genome  
497 sequencing data for strains of *A. fumigatus*. Correlations between phenotypic traits, such  
498 as antifungal susceptibility or virulence and genetic traits have been also studied in other  
499 well-studied pathogens, such as the opportunistic yeast *Candida albicans* (Hirakawa et  
500 al., 2015). However, to our knowledge, this is the first study that examines the phenotypic  
501 and genetic heterogeneity among strains of species closely related to *A. fumigatus*.

502

503 The three main classes of antifungal drugs comprise polyenes, azoles, and  
504 echinocandins, involved in ergosterol composition of fungal membrane, ergosterol  
505 biosynthesis, and the cell wall biopolymer (1,3)- $\beta$ -D-glucan, respectively (Robbins et al.,  
506 2017). Due to toxicity to host cells, polyenes are only used in exceptional cases, and first-  
507 line prophylaxis and treatment of aspergillosis is usually carried out with azoles (Garcia-  
508 Rubio et al., 2017; Garcia-Vidal et al., 2019). In *A. fumigatus*, research has focused on



509 azole susceptibility testing and correlation with point mutations in the *cyp51A* gene and  
510 tandem repeat insertions in its promoter region (Chen et al., 2020; Zakaria et al., 2020).  
511 Studies on echinocandins have focused on the (1,3)- $\beta$ -D-glucan synthase enzyme,  
512 encoded by the *fks1* gene (Robbins et al., 2017). Particularly, two hot-spots have been  
513 studied (Gonçalves et al., 2016). Although most studies report mutations in *Candida*,  
514 previous work reported point mutations in *fks1* hot spot 1 associated with echinocandin  
515 resistance in *A. fumigatus* (Jiménez-Ortigosa et al., 2017). This work did not find changes  
516 among *A. fumigatus* clinical strains, but we did observe changes in hot spot 2 that were  
517 specific to the cryptic species; further examination of these changes with respect to  
518 echinocandin susceptibility is an interesting future avenue of research.

519

520 Major changes in protein Cyp51A that correlated with azole resistance include the  
521 TR34/L98H and the TR46/Y121F/T289A changes (Beardsley et al., 2018). In previous  
522 studies, alterations such as the insertion of TR34 and TR46 (Dudakova et al., 2017) were  
523 only found in the *cyp51A* promoter of *A. fumigatus* strains. However, as Dudakova et al.  
524 previously mentioned, “data on *cyp51* promoter alterations are scarce” outside *A.*  
525 *fumigatus* (Dudakova et al., 2017). Our work explored the promoter region of the *cyp51A*  
526 gene in *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis*, two closely related pathogenic species, and  
527 identified these promoter region changes only in two strains of *A. fumigatus* and not in  
528 either of the two cryptic species. We also identified other changes in proteins encoded by  
529 *cyp51A* and *fks1* that can be used in the future to generate mutants and test the effect of  
530 mutations in well-studied wild-type strains of *A. fumigatus* (Chen et al., 2020).

531

532 The evolution of the gene families that contain genes involved in drug resistance might  
533 also give us clues on how drug resistance evolves in fungal populations; previous studies  
534 (Hawkins et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2019) report two paralogs of *cyp51* in *Aspergillus*  
535 *fumigatus*, *Penicillium digitatum*, *Magnaporthe oryzae* and *A. nidulans*, while *Fusarium*  
536 *graminearum* and *A. flavus* have three *cyp51* genes (Dudakova et al., 2017). Interestingly,  
537 our study found a paralog of the *cyp51A* gene in *A. fumigatiaffinis* that likely corresponds  
538 to *cyp51C*. Whole-genome sequence analysis in *A. flavus* reported substitutions in the  
539 three paralogous genes (*cyp51A*, *cyp51B*, and *cyp51C*) in the context of antifungal  
540 resistance (Sharma et al., 2018). Novel substitutions identified in *cyp51C* and modelling  
541 of protein changes suggested possible effects on drug binding. Next steps in studies of  
542 azole susceptibility in *A. fumigatiaffinis* strains could include the analysis of this putative  
543 *cyp51C* gene and its role in the organism's observed drug susceptibility profile.

544

545 While we extended the understanding of strain heterogeneity to strains in the three  
546 different species of *Aspergillus* pathogens in terms of virulence and drug susceptibility,  
547 phylogenomic analyses support the between-species groupings (e.g. closer relationship  
548 between *A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis* than each of these species to *A. fumigatus*)  
549 inferred when using single phylogenetic markers (e.g., from analyses of *benA*). While the  
550 analysis of disease-relevant genes (e.g., *cyp51A* and *fks1*) and patterns of paralogous  
551 gene number of the genetic determinants of virulence support the relationships depicted  
552 in phylogenies, we see many strain-specific changes. Our work is a first opportunity to

553 exploit these specific variants that must be related to variance in virulence and drug  
554 susceptibility (if the source is genetic variation).

555

556 Albeit this study focused on substitutions in genes *cyp51A* and *fks1*, there is also  
557 increasing research on non-*cyp51* (Zakaria et al., 2020) and non-*fks1* (Szalewski et al.,  
558 2018) genetic changes. Future exploitation of genomic data on strains of *A. fumigatus*  
559 and closely related species could also exploit these additional genes. These future  
560 studies could also exploit new antifungal drugs, such as olorofim, which has also been  
561 tested on cryptic species of *Aspergillus* (Rivero-Menendez et al., 2019). Finally, future  
562 phenotypic and genomic analyses can help us to better understand more complex topics  
563 involving antifungal drugs, such as resistance, persistence and tolerance (as well as the  
564 role of tolerance in resistance) (Berman and Krysan, 2020). Given possible emergence  
565 of antifungal resistance in agriculture (Hawkins et al., 2019), future work could also exploit  
566 correlations in antifungals and the origin of these isolates.

567

## 568 AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

569 R.A.C.S., J.L.S., M.E.M., A.A.I., G.H.G., and A.R. designed the experiments. L.P., O.R.M.  
570 and R.W.B. performed experiments. R.A.C.S. and J.L.S. ran bioinformatic analyses.  
571 R.A.C.S., M.E.M., J.L.S. and A.R. wrote the manuscript. All authors revised the  
572 manuscript.

573

574 FUNDING

575 R.A.C.S. holds Brazilian São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) scholarships  
576 17/21983-3 and 19/07526-4. J.L.S. and A.R. are supported by the Howard Hughes  
577 Medical Institute through the James H. Gilliam Fellowships for Advanced Study program.  
578 M.E.M. and A.R. were supported by a Vanderbilt University Discovery Grant. Research  
579 in A.R.'s lab is also supported by the National Science Foundation (DEB-1442113), and  
580 GHG by the Brazilian São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) (grant number  
581 2016/07870-9) and Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico  
582 (CNPq). A.A.I is supported by research projects from the Fondo de Investigación  
583 Sanitaria (PI13/02145 and PI16CIII/00035).

584

585 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

586 This work used resources of the "Centro Nacional de Processamento de Alto  
587 Desempenho em São Paulo (CENAPAD-SP). Computational infrastructure was provided  
588 by The Advanced Computing Center for Research and Education (ACCRE) at Vanderbilt  
589 University.

590

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## 878 **Figure Legends**

879

880 **Figure 1.** High heterogeneity in drug susceptibility profiles among Spanish strains of three  
881 closely related *Aspergillus* pathogens. **(A)** Antifungal susceptibility testing was carried out  
882 using EUCAST 9.3. FactoMineR v. 2.1 PCA function was used to scale variables (drug  
883 MIC/MECs) and compute Principal Components (PCs), and factoextra v.1.0.6 was used  
884 to plot results. PC1 (Dim1) explains most of the variation (37.2% of the variation) and is  
885 able to separate *A. fumigatus* from other two species, whereas an overlap is observed in  
886 cryptic species (*A. lentulus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis*). **(B)** Antifungal susceptibility testing was  
887 carried out using EUCAST 9.3. The Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) was obtained  
888 for AMB, VCZ, PCZ and ICZ and the Minimum Effective Concentration (MEC) was  
889 obtained for TRB, CPF, MCF and AND. A lower scale is shown for echinocandins (bottom  
890 panel). Antifungal classes are A: Polyenes; B: Azoles; C: Allylamines; D: Echinocandins.  
891 AMB: AmphotericinB; ICZ: itraconazole; VCZ: voriconazole; PCZ: posaconazole; CPF:  
892 caspofungin; MCF: micafungin; AND: anidulafungin; TRB: Terbinafine.

893

894 **Figure 2.** High heterogeneity of virulence levels among Spanish strains of three closely  
895 related *Aspergillus* pathogens. Cumulative survival in the model moth *Galleria mellonella*.  
896 Larvae infection was carried out via inoculation of  $10^6$  conidia. For inoculations, 10 larvae  
897 were infected per clinical strain. Experiments were carried out with clinical strains of *A.*  
898 *fumigatus* (upper), *A. lentulus* (middle), and *A. fumigatiaffinis* (lower).

899

900 **Figure 3.** Genomics of the three closely related *Aspergillus* pathogens. **(A)** Genome-  
901 scale phylogeny of the section *Fumigati* species used in this study and additional species  
902 with sequenced genomes. The *A. viridinutans* clade is presented as a sister clade.  
903 Spanish strains sequenced in this work are colored in red (*A. fumigatus*), blue (*A. lentulus*)  
904 and black (*A. fumigatiaffinis*). The newly sequenced *A. fumigatiaffinis* strains form a  
905 separated group that is closely related to *A. novofumigatus*. All *A. lentulus* strains in this  
906 work group together and share an ancestor with *A. lentulus* IFM54703, the only  
907 sequenced strain in this species to date. The *A. fumigatus* strains sequenced in this work  
908 form different internal groups in the clade with other strains in the species (e.g. strains  
909 CNM-CM8714 and CNM-CM8812 group together and strains CNM-CM8686 and CNM-  
910 CM8689 form another group). **(B)** *A. fumigatiaffinis* and *A. lentulus* shares the highest  
911 number of common orthogroups and *A. fumigatiaffinis* displays the highest number of  
912 exclusive orthogroups. OrthoFinder v.2.3.3 was used to group proteins in all clinical  
913 strains into orthogroups. *In house* Perl scripts were used to recover orthogroups in each  
914 species and VennDiagram in R (Chen and Boutros, 2011) was used to draw intersections.  
915 We considered species-specific orthologs those that were present in at least one strain  
916 of a given species, with no representative from another species. **(C)** Orthogroups shared  
917 by all and “all but one” strains are the most frequent in three closely related *Aspergillus*  
918 pathogens. OrthoFinder v.2.3.3 (Emms and Kelly, 2015) was used to group proteins in all  
919 clinical strains into orthogroups. *A. lentulus*, *A. fumigatus* and *A. fumigatiaffinis* presented  
920 9,008, 8,321, and 9,423 orthologous genes present in all strains, respectively. The five  
921 largest combination of orthogroups are shown. As expected, the most frequent  
922 combination of orthogroups are those in all strains but one. A high number of orthogroups

923 are shared between *A. fumigatus* CNM-CM8714 and CNM-CM8812, reflecting their close  
924 phylogenetic relationship.

925

926 **Figure 4.** Changes in important genes related to antifungal susceptibility in the three  
927 *Aspergillus* pathogens. **(A)** Products of genes related to antifungal resistance, *Cyp51A*  
928 (azoles) and *Fks1* (echinocandins), display species- and strain-specific polymorphisms.  
929 MAFFT v.7.397 (--auto mode) was used to align protein sequences. Alignments were  
930 imported in Jalview v.2.10.3 (Waterhouse et al., 2009), colored in Clustal mode, and non-  
931 polymorphic positions were hidden. Only the positions with changes in at least one strain  
932 are shown (substitutions or insertions/deletions). Blue triangles highlight amino acid  
933 changes in position 98 in *Cyp51A* and in hot spot 2 (HS2) of *Fks1*. Red triangles indicate  
934 insertions/deletions. **(B)** Promoter region of the *cyp51A* gene displays strain-specific  
935 mutations among Spanish strains of three closely related *Aspergillus* pathogens. A *in*  
936 *house* python script was used to recover 400 bp upstream to the *cyp51A* gene and the  
937 three initial codons. MAFFT v.7.397 (--auto mode) was used to align the nucleotide  
938 sequences in all clinical strains. Well-known Tandem Repeat regions in antifungal-  
939 resistant strains of *A. fumigatus* are shown between positions 70-140 in the alignment  
940 (i.e. TR34 and TR46, observed in CNM-CM8714 and CNM-CM8057, respectively,  
941 delimited by two blue arrows in upper part). Polymorphisms in cryptic species were also  
942 identified, for instance, the short deletions exclusively found in the cryptic species (either  
943 in *A. fumigatiaffinis* or *A. lentulus*) around positions 230-250. Red arrow and red font  
944 indicates the start codon. **(C)** Phylogeny of *Cyp51* gene family (protein sequences)  
945 reveals three different members (*Cyp51A*, *Cyp51B*, and the putative *Cyp51C*) in *A.*

946 *fumigatiaffinis*. A maximum-likelihood phylogeny was generated in IQ-Tree (v. 1.6.12),  
947 using 1000 Ultrafast Bootstrap Approximation (UFBoot) replicates. LG+G4 model was  
948 chosen as the best according to Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). UFBoot and SH-  
949 aLRT support values are shown.

950

951 **Figure 5.** Orthogroups for virulence determinants reveals variable number of paralogs  
952 among the three closely related *Aspergillus* pathogens. We searched for 215 known  
953 genetic determinants of virulence in *A. fumigatus* Af293 in the species of interest and  
954 found they were grouped into 203 orthogroups. 146/203 were found in single copy across  
955 all strains and are not shown here. The cladogram above the species reflects similarities  
956 between strain presence/absence patterns. *A. fumigatus* Af293 shows a different pattern  
957 compared to other strains of *A. fumigatus*, grouping with one of the *A. lentulus* strains  
958 (CNM-CM8927). This may reflect the phylogenetic divergence of *A. fumigatus* strain  
959 Af293 from other species members. Conidial pigment polyketide synthase *alb1*  
960 (Afu2g17600) is one of the genetic determinants of virulence with highest number of  
961 copies in cryptic species (n=7) when compared to *A. fumigatus* strains (n=4). Gene  
962 identifiers in *A. fumigatus* Af293 are highlighted in bold.

963

964 **Tables**

965 **Table 1.** Susceptibility profile of cryptic *Aspergillus* species isolated in the Mycology

966 Reference Laboratory of Spain.

Species	Strain Identifier	MIC (mg/L)				MEC (mg/L)			
		AMB	ICZ	VCZ	PCZ	TRB	CPF	MCF	AND
<i>Aspergillus lentulus</i>	CNM-CM6069	8	0.5	2	0.12	0.5	1	0.015	0.015
	CNM-CM6936	16	0.5	4	0.25	2	2	0.03	0.03
	CNM-CM7927	8	0.5	2	0.12	0.5	0.06	0.015	0.007
	CNM-CM8060	0.12	0.25	1	0.12	0.5	2	0.06	0.03
	CNM-CM8694	2	0.12	0.25	0.06	32	0.03	0.03	MD
	CNM-CM8927	16	2	1	0.25	2	0.25	0.015	0.015
<i>Aspergillus fumigatiaffinis</i>	CNM-CM5878	1	0.25	0.5	0.06	0.25	1	0.03	0.015
	CNM-CM6457	16	16	2	0.25	1	0.25	0.03	0.007
	CNM-CM6805	16	0.25	2	0.12	0.25	0.5	0.03	0.03
	CNM-CM8980	16	0.5	2	0.5	0.5	0.12	0.007	0.015
<i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	CNM-CM8057	0.25	>8	>8	1	16	0.5	0.06	0.12
	CNM-CM8714	0.25	>8	4	1	4	0.25	0.007	0.03

	CNM-CM8812	0.25	0.25	0.5	0.12	1	0.25	0.03	0.03
	CNM-CM8686	0.5	0.25	0.25	0.12	2	0.25	0.015	0.015
	CNM-CM8689	1	1	8	0.25	16	0.5	0.125	0.03
	Af293	0.5	1	1	0.125	2	0.125	0.007	0.007
One-way ANOVA (between species)	P-value	0.025*	0.435	0.209	0.171	0.492	0.364	0.462	0.242
Tukey multiple comparisons of means	<i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i> - <i>Aspergillus fumigatiaffinis</i>	0.0245507*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<i>Aspergillus lentulus</i> - <i>Aspergillus fumigatiaffinis</i>	0.5595621	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<i>Aspergillus lentulus</i> - <i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	0.0982057	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

967

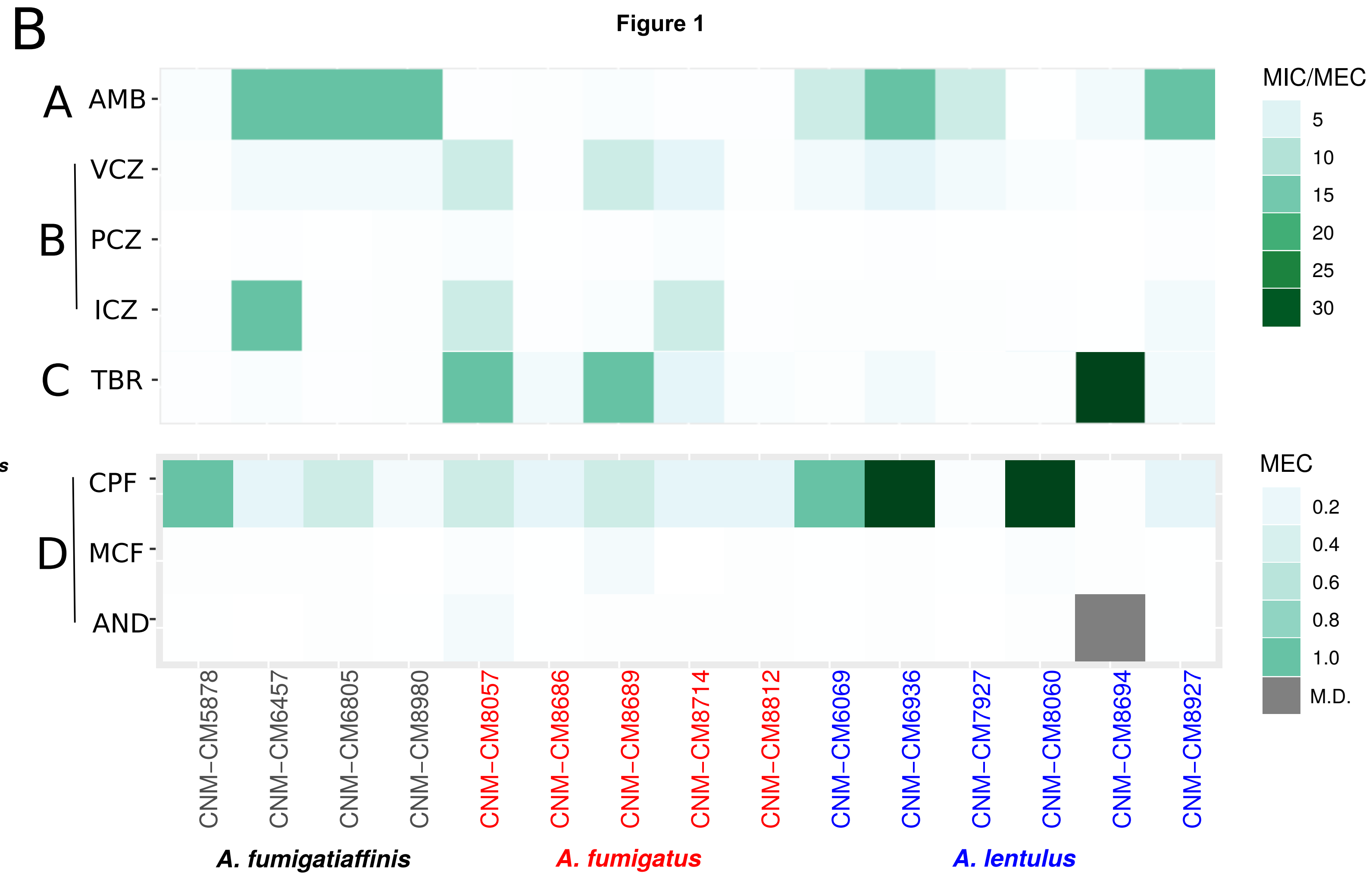
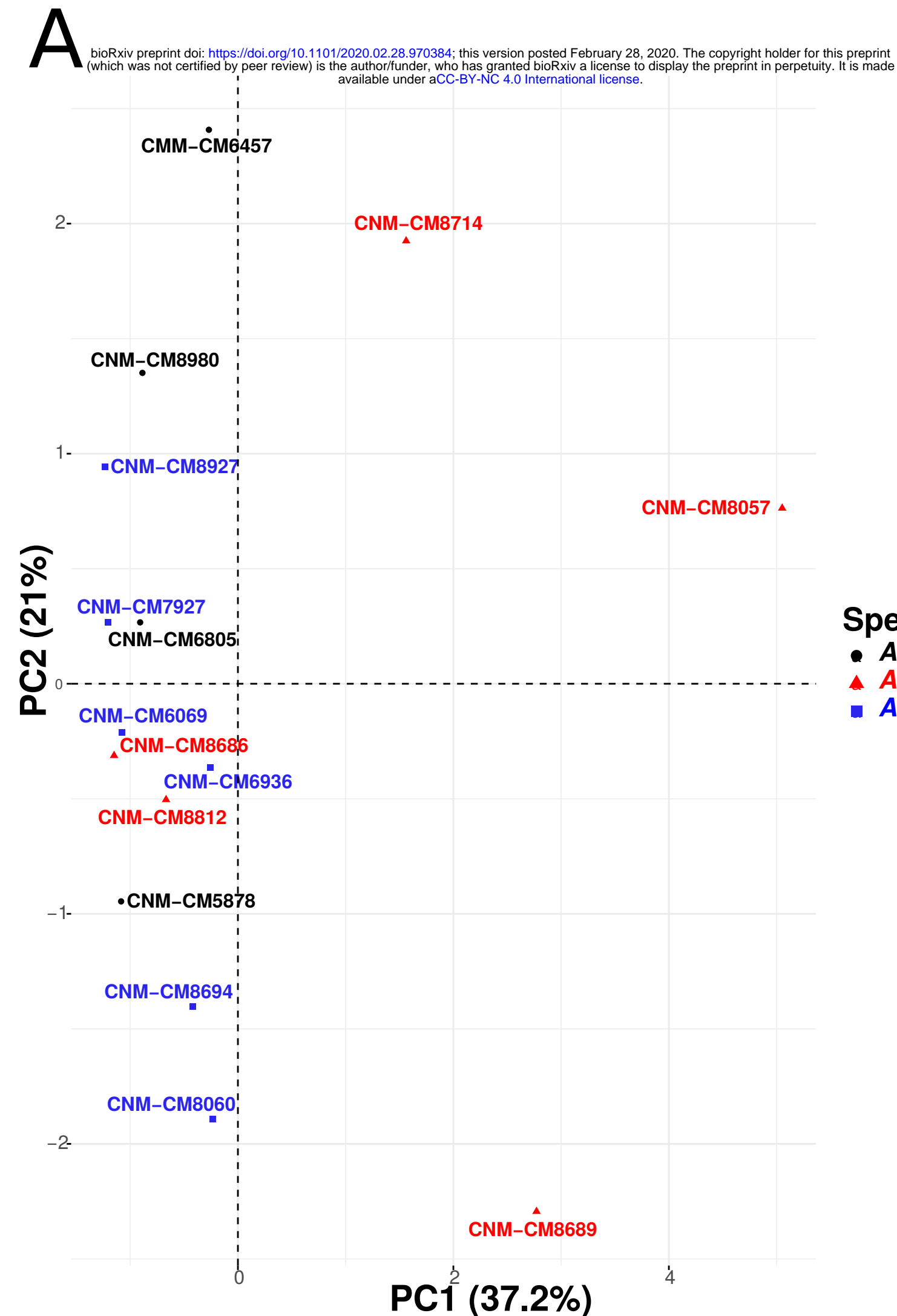
968



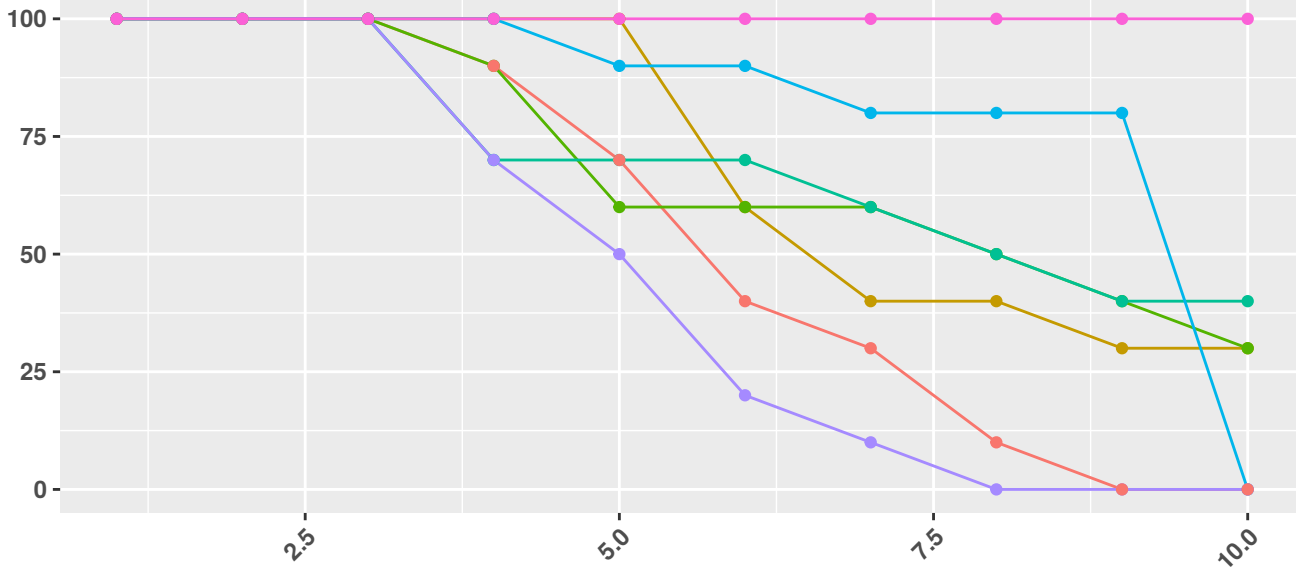
969 **Table 2.** Single-nucleotide polymorphisms and insertions / deletions in *cyp51* family and  
 970 *fks1* genes in each species individually.

Species	Polymorphism type	Gene	High impact variant	Low impact variant	Moderate impact variant	Modifier impact variant
<i>A. fumigatus</i>	INDELs	<i>cyp51A</i>	0	0	0	6
<i>A. fumigatus</i>	SNPs	<i>cyp51A</i>	0	0	5	23
<i>A. lentulus</i>	INDELs	<i>cyp51A</i>	0	0	0	10
<i>A. lentulus</i>	SNPs	<i>cyp51A</i>	0	8	3	92
<i>A. fumigatus</i>	INDELs	<i>cyp51B</i>	0	0	0	1
<i>A. fumigatus</i>	SNPs	<i>cyp51B</i>	0	1	1	7
<i>A. lentulus</i>	INDELs	<i>cyp51B</i>	0	0	0	1
<i>A. lentulus</i>	SNPs	<i>cyp51B</i>	0	0	0	2
<i>A. fumigatiaffinis</i>	INDELs	<i>cyp51C</i>	0	0	0	28
<i>A. fumigatiaffinis</i>	SNPs	<i>cyp51C</i>	0	10	1	157
<i>A. fumigatiaffinis</i>	INDELs	<i>fks1</i>	0	0	0	45
<i>A. fumigatiaffinis</i>	SNPs	<i>fks1</i>	0	23	5	143
<i>A. fumigatus</i>	INDELs	<i>fks1</i>	0	0	0	3
<i>A. fumigatus</i>	SNPs	<i>fks1</i>	0	4	0	10
<i>A. lentulus</i>	INDELs	<i>fks1</i>	4	0	0	50
<i>A. lentulus</i>	SNPs	<i>fks1</i>	0	43	5	218

971



### *A. fumigatus*

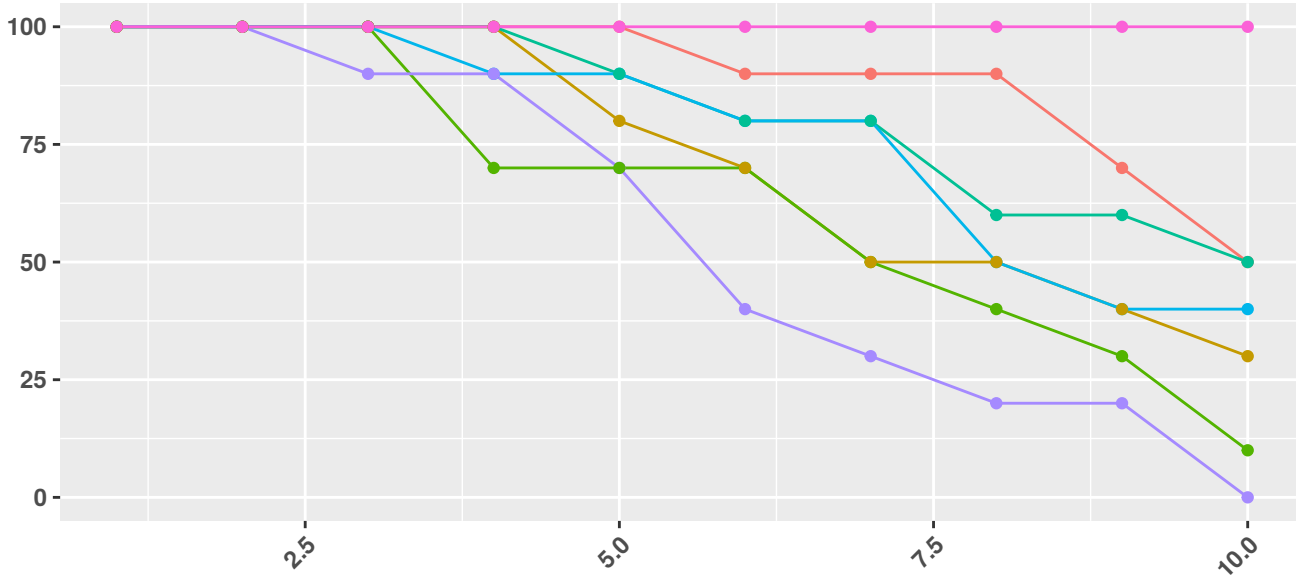


## Figure 2

### Strain

- Af293
- CNM-CM8057
- CNM-CM8686
- CNM-CM8689
- CNM-CM8714
- CNM-CM8812
- PBS

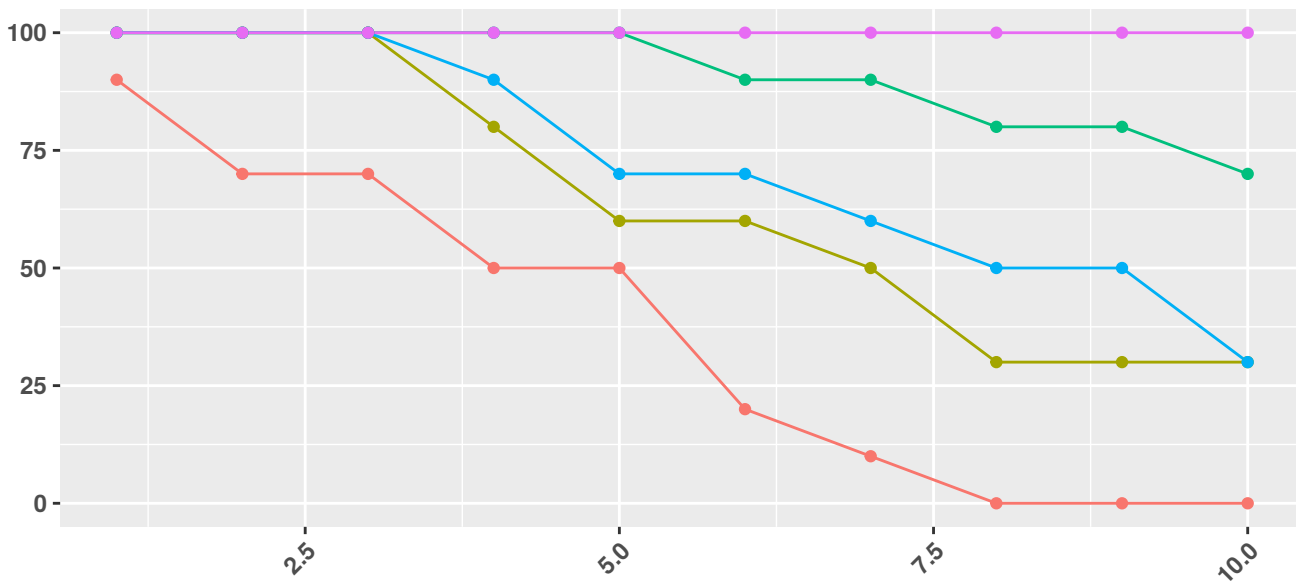
### *A. lentulus*



### Strain

- CNM-CM6069
- CNM-CM6936
- CNM-CM7927
- CNM-CM8060
- CNM-CM8694
- CNM-CM8927
- PBS

### *A. fumigatiaffinis*

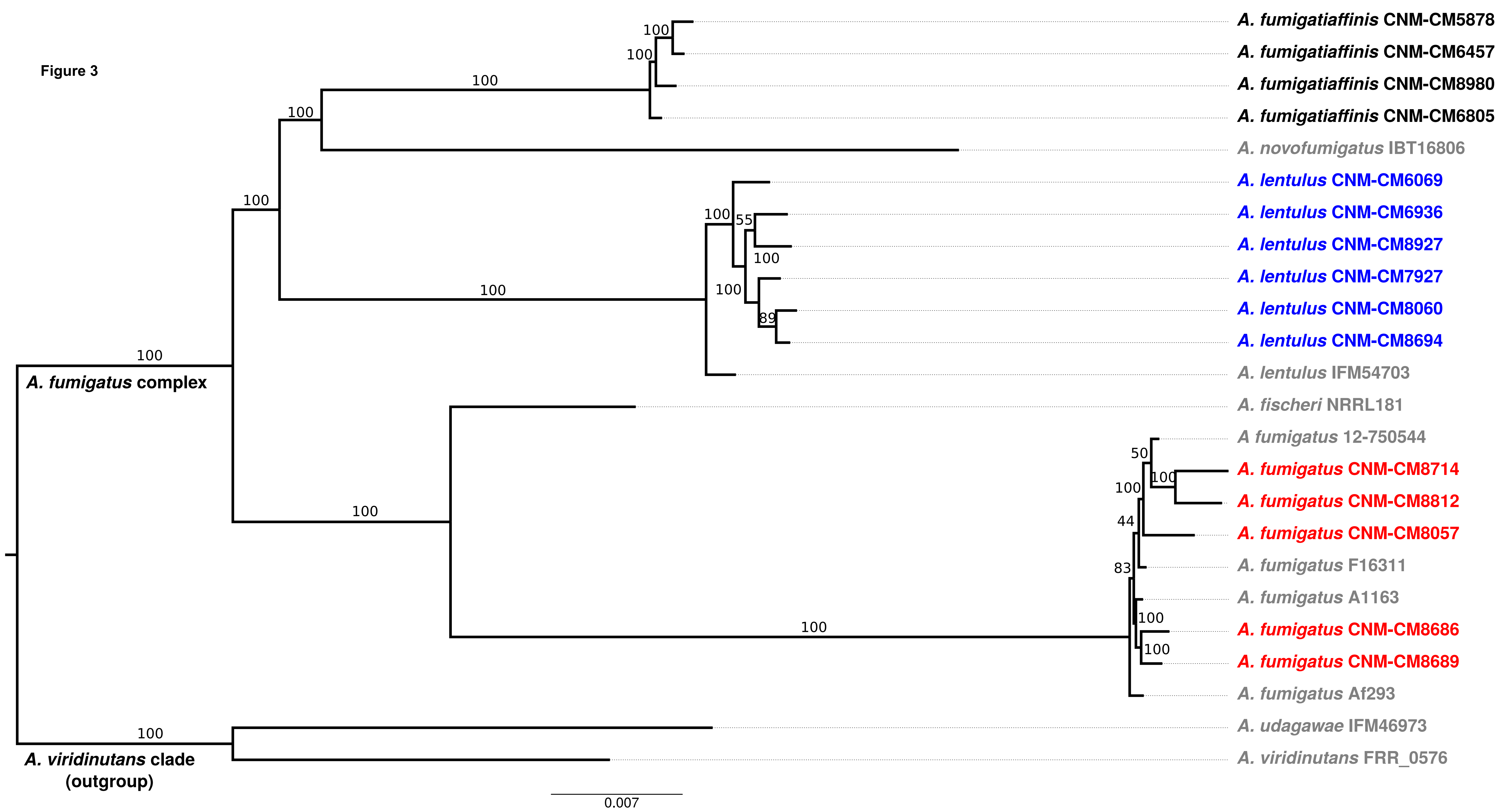


### Strain

- CNM-CM5878
- CNM-CM6457
- CNM-CM6805
- CNM-CM8980
- PBS

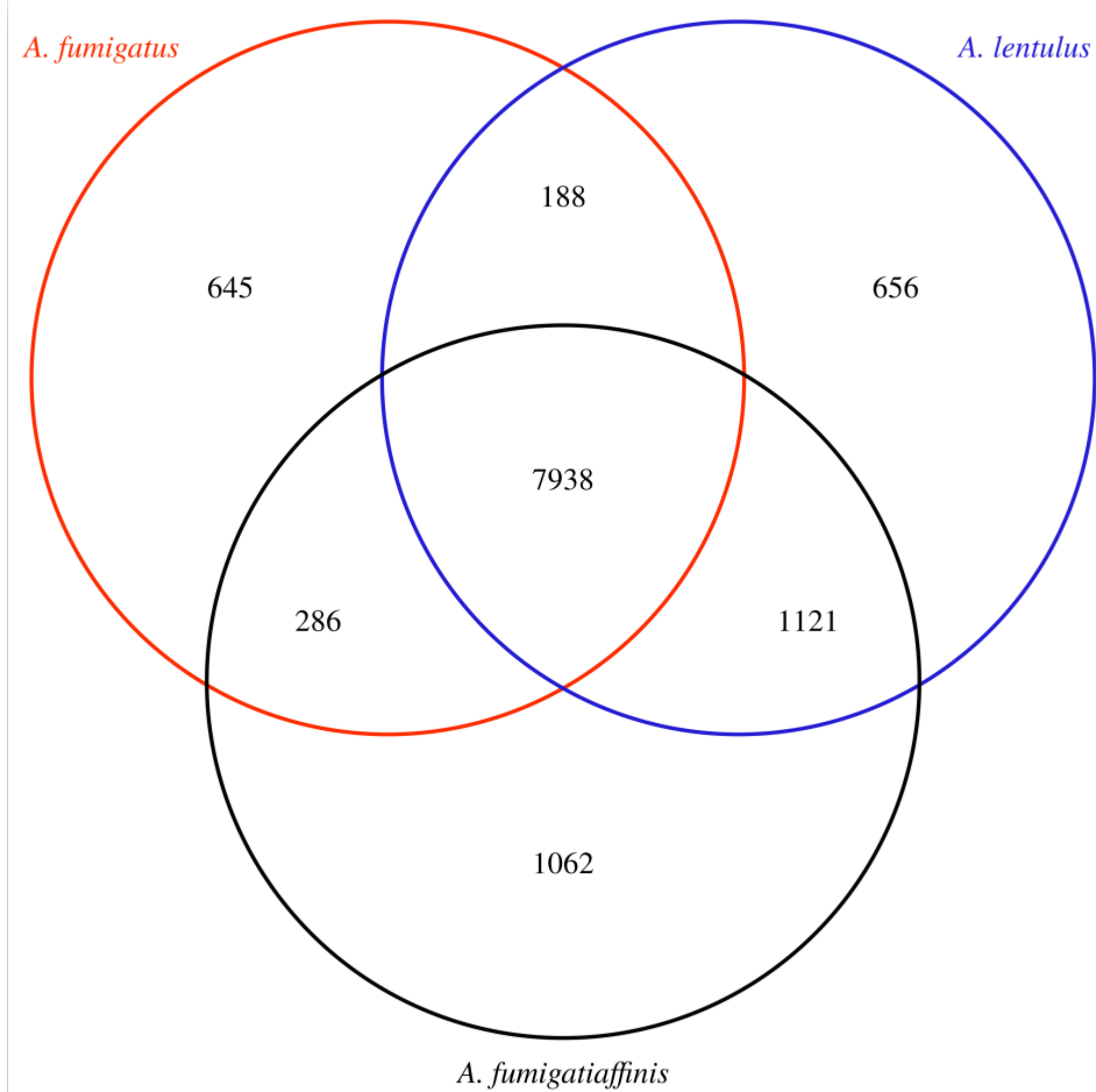
A

Figure 3

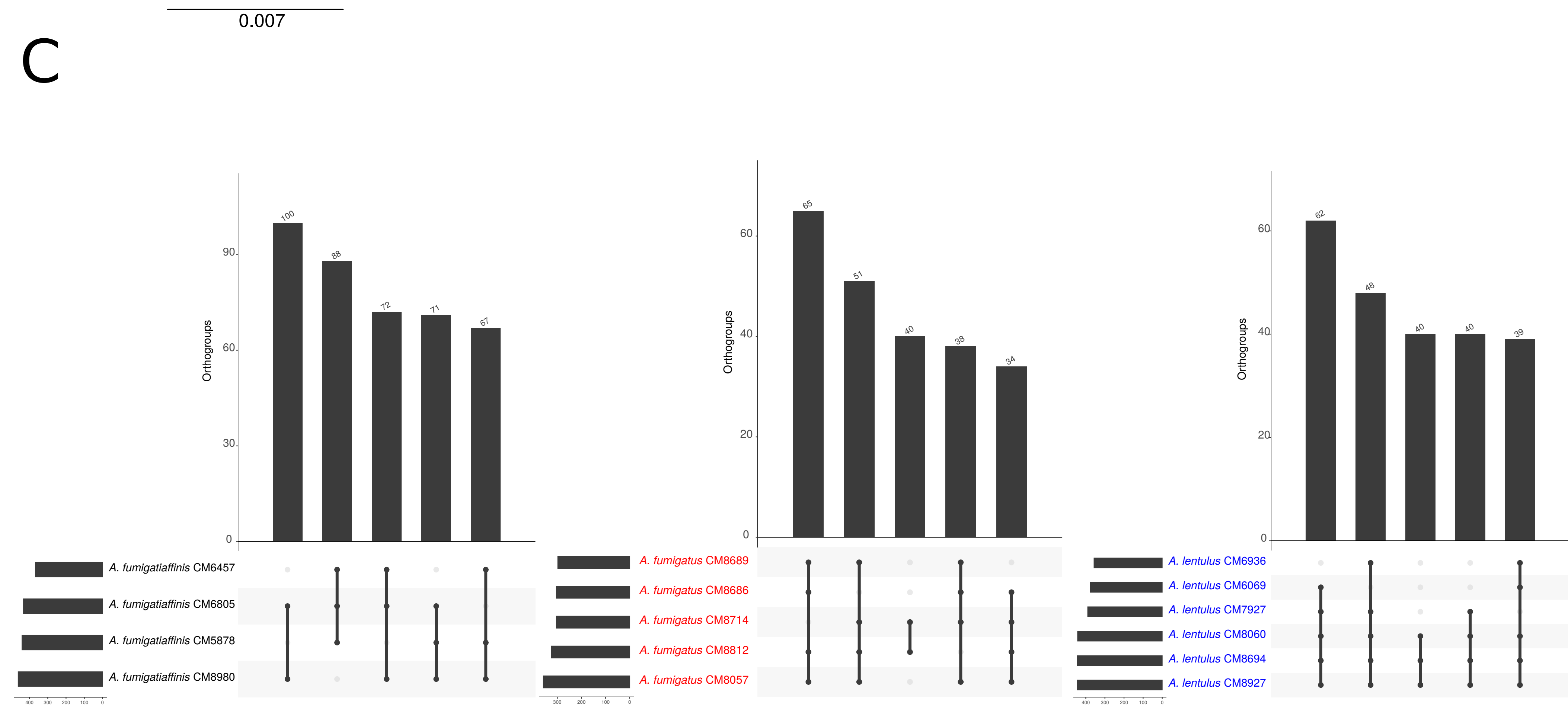


B

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C



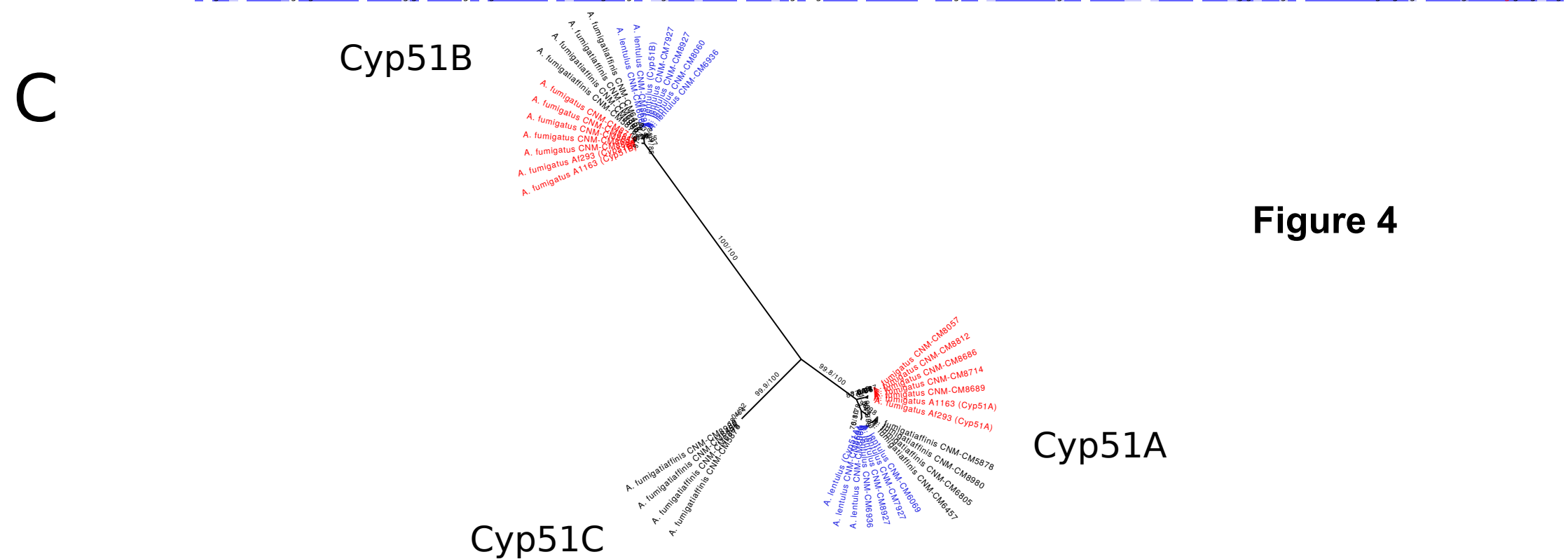
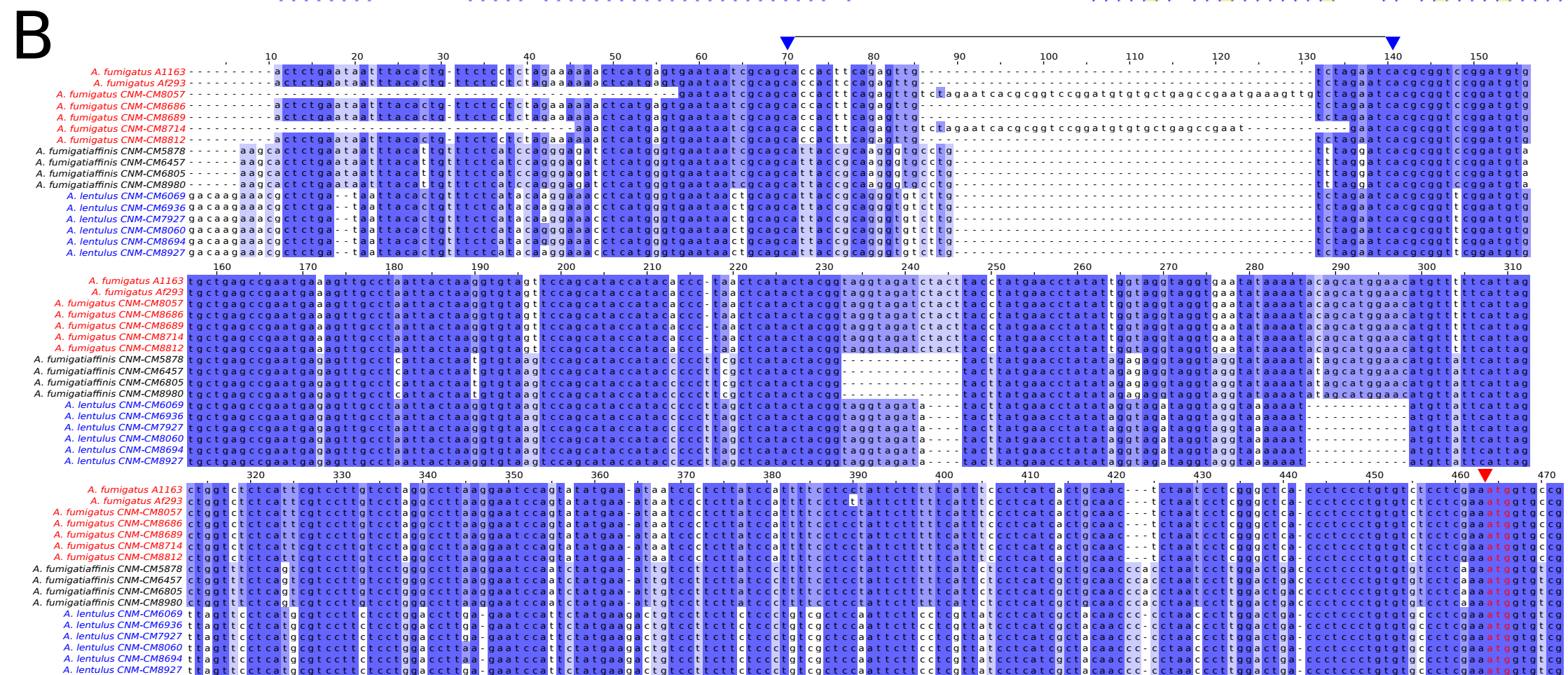
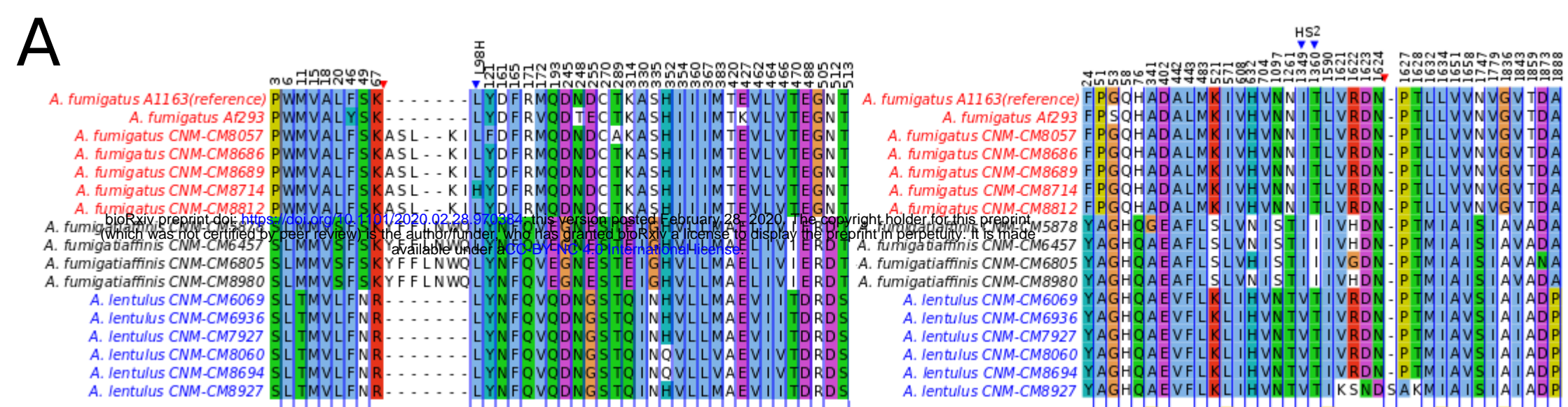


Figure 4

# Figure 5

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