DNA methylation regulates transcriptional homeostasis of algal endosymbiosis

in the coral model Aiptasia

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Abstract

The symbiotic relationship between cnidarians and dinoflagellates is the cornerstone of

coral reef ecosystems. Although research is focusing on the molecular mechanisms underlying

this symbiosis, the role of epigenetic mechanisms, which have been implicated in transcriptional

regulation and acclimation to environmental change, is unknown. To assess the role of DNA

methylation in the cnidarian-dinoflagellate symbiosis, we analyzed genome-wide CpG

methylation, histone associations, and transcriptomic states of symbiotic and aposymbiotic

anemones in the model system Aiptasia. We find methylated genes are marked by histone

H3K36me3 and show significant reduction of spurious transcription and transcriptional noise,

revealing a role of DNA methylation in the maintenance of transcriptional homeostasis. Changes

in DNA methylation and expression show enrichment for symbiosis-related processes such as

immunity, apoptosis, phagocytosis recognition and phagosome formation, and unveil intricate

interactions between the underlying pathways. Our results demonstrate that DNA methylation

provides an epigenetic mechanism of transcriptional homeostasis during symbiosis.

Introduction

Coral reefs are ecologically important marine ecosystems, which cover less than 0.2% of

our oceans but sustain an estimated ~25% of the world's marine species and 32 of 33 animal

phyla (Spalding and Grenfell 1997; Davidson 2002; Sylvain 2006). Coral reefs are also

economically important by providing food and livelihood opportunities to at least 500 million

people; worldwide, they have a net present value of almost USD 800 billion, and they generate

USD 30 billion in net economic benefits annually (Sylvain 2006). Unfortunately, these

ecosystems are under severe threat from anthropogenic stressors including global warming and

water pollution, among others, which can cause coral bleaching (loss of intracellular

endosymbionts from coral) and overall coral reef decline. Despite increasing efforts on studying

the mechanisms underlying the regulation and environmental stress related breakdown of this

symbiotic association (Davy et al. 2012; Meyer and Weis 2012), we still lack knowledge on

basic molecular processes, for instance whether epigenetic mechanisms are involved in

symbiosis regulation and could potentially contribute to increased resilience in response to

environmental stress as reported in other organisms (Rando and Verstrepen 2007; Lämke and

Bäurle 2017).

DNA methylation plays an important role in many biological processes of plants and

animals (Bird 2002; Suzuki and Bird 2008; He et al. 2011; Jones 2012). It has been proposed as a

mechanism for organisms to adjust their phenotype in response to their environment in order to

optimize organismal response to changing environmental conditions (Richards 2006; Rando and

Verstrepen 2007). For instance, recent findings in mice show an important function for DNA

methylation in inhibiting spurious transcription along the gene body, allowing for reduction of

nonsense transcripts from highly expressed loci (Neri et al. 2017). Similar functions have also

been proposed in plants, suggesting a general role of DNA methylation in the maintenance of

transcriptional homeostasis (Zilberman 2017).

Several studies on DNA methylation in cnidarians have been published recently (Dixon

et al. 2016; Putnam et al. 2016), however, its role and function in cnidarians is, at present, mainly

unknown (Torda et al. 2017). The sea anemone Aiptasia is an emerging model to study the

cnidarian-dinoflagellate symbiosis. Like corals, it establishes a stable but temperature sensitive

symbiosis with dinoflagellates of the genus *Symbiodinium* but, unlike corals, can also be

naturally maintained in an aposymbiotic state. This, compounded with its ease of culture,

provides a tractable system to study the molecular mechanism underlying symbiosis without the

impeding stress responses associated with coral bleaching stress (Voolstra 2013; Baumgarten et

al. 2015).

Using the model system Aiptasia (strain CC7, sensu *Exaiptasia pallida*), we obtained

whole-genome CpG DNA methylation, ChIP-Seq and RNA-Seq data from aposymbiotic (Apo)

and symbiotic (Sym) individuals to study the function of DNA methylation in transcriptional

regulation and its role in the cnidarian-dinoflagellate symbiosis.

Results

Aiptasia DNA Methylation patterns change with symbiotic states

To assess changes in DNA methylation in response to symbiosis, we performed whole-

genome bisulfite sequencing with an average coverage of 53× per individual on 12 anemones,

providing 6 biological replicates per treatment (symbiotic vs. aposymbiotic). Methylation calling

using the combined dataset identified 710,768 CpGs (6.37% of all CpGs in Aiptasia genome),

i.e. methylated sites in the Aiptasia genome. Notably, the percentage of CpGs is much lower than

in mammals (60–90%) (Tucker 2001), but comparable to the coral *Stylophora pistillata* (7%)

(Liew et al. 2017). We identified 10,822 genes (37% of all 29,269 gene models identified in the

Aiptasia genome) with at least 5 methylated positions that were subsequently defined as

methylated genes. On average, these genes had 18.4% CpGs methylated, 3-fold higher than the

average methylation density across the entire genome (Chi-squared test *p* value $< 2.2 \times 10^{-16}$)

and 167-fold higher than the methylation levels in non-coding regions. These findings indicate

that the distribution of CpG methylation is non-random and mainly located in gene bodies,

similar to corals (Dixon et al. 2017; Liew et al. 2017) and other invertebrate species (Feng et al.

2010; Gavery and Roberts 2010; Wang et al. 2013; Gonzalez-Romero et al. 2017).

To analyze the relationship between methylation density (percentage of CpGs) and gene

density (the number of genes per 10,000 bp), we ran a sliding window (window size: 40 kb, step:

30 kb) and visualized the results in a Circos plot (Fig. S1) (Krzywinski et al. 2009). The

correlation of CpG content and distribution of methylation showed a negative correlation

(Pearson correlation coefficient: $r = -0.31$, p value $< 2.2 \times 10^{-16}$) suggesting that methylation

tends to preferentially occur in CpG-poor regions (Fig. S2). Gene density had a positive

correlation with methylation density ($r = 0.21$, p value $< 2.2 \times 10^{-16}$) consistent with the finding

that methylation is predominantly located in gene bodies (Fig. 1). We also observed that within

gene bodies, introns showed significantly higher methylation densities than exons (Fig. 1B).

Fig. 1. DNA methylation landscape

(**A**) Distribution of methylated CpG across intergenic (18%), genic (82%), intronic (42%) and

exonic (40%) regions in the Aiptasia genome. (**B**) Normalized percentage of methylated CpGs in

different regions. Chi-squared test shows significant differences between intergenic and genic

regions, and between exons and intron (****p<0.0001). (**C**) Relative frequencies of methylated

positions across a normalized gene model.

99 Methylated genes are marked by H3K36me3

Analysis of methylation patterns (see above) within gene bodies showed rapidly

increasing methylation levels after the transcription start site (TSS) that are maintained before

slowly decreasing towards the transcription termination site (TTS) (Fig. S3A). Interestingly, we

found that gene body methylation in Aiptasia is positively correlated with expression (Fig. 2A),

suggesting that DNA methylation either increases the expression of genes or that DNA

methylation is increased as a consequence of transcription whereby increased expression results

in methylation of the respective loci. The latter interpretation would be in line with recent

findings in mouse embryonic stem cells (Neri et al. 2017), which demonstrated that gene body

methylation is established and maintained as a result of active transcription by RNA polymerase

II (Pol II) and recruitment of the histone modifying protein SetD2 that trimethylates histone H3

at lysine 36 (H3K36me3). This histone mark is specifically bound via the PWWP domain

present in the DNA methyltransferase Dnmt3b, which in turn methylates the surrounding DNA

accordingly, resulting in the inhibition of transcription initiation from cryptic promoters within

the gene body and thus a significant reduction of spurious transcription.

Analysis of the Aiptasia gene set identified a DNMT3 gene (AIPGENE24404) that also

encodes a PWWP domain as reported for the mouse homolog. In order to test if the mechanism

previously described in mice is conserved in Aiptasia, we performed a ChIP-Seq experiment

using a validated antibody against H3K36me3 (Fig. S4-S5). As predicted, our analysis confirmed

a significantly higher association of H3K36me3 with methylated genes ($p = 2.48 \times 10^{-20}$ for

highly methylated genes and all methylated genes, Fig. 2B and C) suggesting that DNA

methylation in Aiptasia might indeed be a consequence of expression. We then analyzed if

methylated genes also exhibited significantly lower levels of spurious transcription in Aiptasia.

Analysis of transcriptional profiles of methylated and unmethylated genes indeed showed

significantly lower levels of spurious transcription along the gene body of methylated genes ($p <$

2×10^{-6}, Fig. 3A).

A dampening effect of DNA methylation on transcription was also observed with regard

to transcriptional noise similar to findings in the coral *Stylophora pistillata* (Liew et al. 2017).

Regression analysis of median methylation levels and the coefficient of transcriptional variation

of genes showed that, given the same expression level, methylated genes always exhibited lower

levels of transcriptional variation (Fig. 3B).

Fig. 2. DNA methylation is associated with higher expression

(**A**) Gene expression is positively correlated with median methylation levels, *t*-test *p* values are

7.65×10^{-21}, 3.75×10^{-14} and 1.75×10^{-13} for the first quartile (Q1) and the second quartile (Q2)

of methylation levels, Q2 and Q3, and Q3 and Q4, respectively. (**B**) ChIP-Seq analysis of

H3K36me3 signals show significant enrichment in methylated genes (*t*-test *p* values: 2.48×10^{-20}

for highly methylated genes (HM) and all methylated genes (allM), and 1.06×10^{-72} for

unmethylated genes (UM) and allM). Highly methylated genes show the strongest enrichment

with H3K36me3 followed by all methylated genes. In contrast unmethylated genes show only

weak enrichment of H3K36me3 over input controls. (**C**) Distribution of H3K36me3 enrichment

and DNA methylation levels across two exemplary gene models. H3K36me3 and DNA

methylation show coinciding distribution patterns over genes.

Fig. 3. DNA methylation regulates transcriptional homeostasis

(A) Spurious transcription in gene bodies is significantly lower in methylated and highly

methylated genes. The *y*-axis shows the natural logarithm of the coverage fold change of exons

1–6 vs. exon 1. *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$; ****: $p < 0.0001$. (B) There is a linear

relationship between the inverse of transcriptional noise (CV^{-1}) and log expression level

($\log_{10}$fpkm). Given same expression level, methylated genes always show lower levels of

transcriptional noise. For methylated genes, n = 8,561, $r^2 = 0.46$, $p < 2.2 \times 10^{-16}$, for

unmethylated genes, n = 2,491, $r^2 = 0.52$, $p < 2.2 \times 10^{-16}$.

156   DNA methylation regulates transcriptional homeostasis during symbiosis

Based on our previous findings, we investigated if DNA methylation might also be

involved in the regulation of symbiosis by identifying differentially methylated genes (DMGs)

between symbiotic and aposymbiotic Aiptasia. Comparison of DNA methylation patterns using

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) clearly separated symbiotic and aposymbiotic individuals

by the first principal component, which accounted for ~18% of the variance (Fig. 4 and Fig. S6).

This analysis echoed the findings from a PCA analysis on gene expression where symbiosis state

was separated by the second principal component accounting for ~25% of the variance (Fig. 4B)

(Venables and Ripley 2002) and highlighted that specific changes in DNA methylation patterns

occurred in response to symbiosis. Analysis of DNA methylation and expression profiles using

correlation analyses further confirmed this finding, providing additional evidence that the

observed changes were indeed treatment specific (Fig. S6).

Subsequently we analyzed changes in DNA methylation and gene expression between

symbiotic and aposymbiotic Aiptasia to assess their correlation on potential biological functions

in symbiosis. We determined differentially methylated genes using a generalized linear model

from Foret *et al*. (Foret et al. 2012) that was modified to allow for replicate-aware analysis. This

approach identified 2,133 DMGs (FDR ≤ 0.05, Supplement Table S1) that specifically changed

their methylation status in response to symbiosis. To verify these results, we sequenced a subset

of 14 DMGs using bisulfite PCRs. The results show a strong correlation ($r^2 = 0.815$ and $p =$

1×10^{-5} for Apo, $r^2 = 0.922$ and $p = 5.2 \times 10^{-8}$ for Sym) to our WGBS and confirm the observed

methylation changes within these loci (Fig. S7).

Analysis of gene expression changes in the same 12 samples (i.e., 6 symbiotic and 6

aposymbiotic anemones) identified 1,278 differentially expressed genes (DEGs, FDR $\leq$ 0.05,

Supplement Table S2), of which 14 genes were subsequently confirmed via qPCR (Fig. S8).

However, analysis of the overlap between DMGs and DEGs showed only 103 genes that were

shared, suggesting that differentially expressed genes are not necessarily the same cohort of

genes that are differentially methylated. Functional enrichment analyses based on Gene Ontology

(GO) and Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) pathways of all DMGs and

DEGs identified several symbiosis relevant functions and pathways in both groups (Supplement

Table S3-S10).

Based on the finding that gene body DNA methylation is likely a consequence of active

transcription, we hypothesized that changes in DNA methylation patterns might also provide a

record of transcriptional activity over longer periods of time. We therefore tested if differential

methylation and acute transcriptional changes, obtained from our RNA-Seq analysis, provide a

complementary view of the processes underlying symbiosis. For this we compared enrichment of

symbiosis-specific pathways across the sets of 2,133 DMGs, 1,278 DEGs, and the combined set

of both DMGs and DEGs (3,308 DEMGs). Interestingly, we observed that the combined data set

(DEMGs) provided significantly lower p-values for previously identified symbiosis-related

pathways, including apoptosis, phagosome formation, nitrogen metabolism, and arginine

biosynthesis, among others (paired *t*-test: DEMG vs. DEG $p = 0.015$; DEMG vs. DMG $p = 0.009$)

(Fig. 4C and Supplement Table S11). This suggested that changes in methylation and

transcription indeed provide complementary information with regard to transcriptional

adjustments in response to symbiosis.

Fig.4. PCA and KEGG pathway enrichment analysis

(**A**, **B**) PCA (Principal Component Analysis) of gene expression and median methylation levels

of Aiptasia genes. Both gene expression and DNA methylation separate samples by symbiosis

state. (**C**) KEGG pathway enrichment analysis. The combined sets of differentially expressed

and differentially methylated genes (DEMG) provides significant lower p values (front ranks) for

symbiosis related pathways.

DMGs and DEGs are involved in all stages of symbiosis

Analysis of the combined DMG and DEG gene set showed significant enrichment of

genes involved in the distinct phases of symbiosis, that is symbiosis establishment, maintenance,

and breakdown (Davy et al. 2012). Using an integrated pathway analysis based on known

molecular interactions between proteins we found that these processes are linked through several

DMGs and/or DEGs (Fig. S9 and Fig. S10, and see Supplement Table S11-S12 and

Supplementary discussion).

For instance, we found numerous symbiosis-related receptors to respond to symbiosis on

a transcriptional and/or methylation level (Fig. S9), including C-type lectins (Fig. S9.3), Toll-like

receptors (Fig. S9.5), and the scavenger receptor SRB1 (Fig. S9.2) that has previously been

implicated in symbiont recognition in the sea anemone *Anthopleura elegantissima* (Rodriguez-

Lanetty et al. 2006; Neubauer et al. 2016). Following symbiont recognition, we also found

several known engulfment and sorting-related genes to change in methylation and/or expression

such as Rab5 (Fig. S9.10), sorting nexin (Fig. S9.17), Rac1 (Fig. S9.6), the lysosomal-associated

membrane protein 1/2 (Fig. S9.22), and many genes related to the cytoskeleton and movement

(Fig. S9.33-39).

As expected in a metabolic symbiosis (Muscatine 1990; Davy et al. 2012) we also identified a

large number of genes involved in nutrient exchange. These included genes involved in the

provision of inorganic carbon in the form of CO_2 or bicarbonate (HCO_3^-) to fuel symbiont driven

photosynthesis (Rädecker et al. 2017) (Fig. S10.1) as well as genes involved in the exchange of

fixed carbon in the form of lipids (Fig. S10.11), sugars and amino acids (Fig. S10.10, S10.4)

(Oakley et al. 2016). Concordantly, we also found that genes involved in nitrogen acquisition,

such as ammonium transporter (Fig. S10.2) and genes involved in glutamate metabolism (Fig.

S10.5-7), respond to symbiosis.

Finally, our analysis also highlighted genes putatively involved in the expulsion or

degradation of symbionts in response to environmental stress or as a means to control symbiont

densities. Autophagy is of interest in this regard because it links to other membrane trafficking

pathways and to apoptosis, and evidence suggests that autophagy also plays a role in removal of

symbionts during bleaching (Dunn et al. 2007; Downs et al. 2009). Intracellular degradation of

the symbiont is a result of reengagement of the phagosomal maturation process or autophagic

digestion of the symbiont by the host cell (Davy et al. 2012), and we find both apoptosis- and

autophagy-related genes to significantly change in their methylation and/or expression level.

These include the apoptosis genes RAC serine/threonine-protein kinase (Fig. S9.25), Caspase 7

(Fig. S9.31), Caspase 8 (CASP8) (Fig. S9.30), Nitric oxide synthase (Fig. S9.21) and Bcl2 (Fig.

S9.27), as well as the Autophagy proteins 5 and 10 (Fig. S9.14-15), among others.

Discussion

To assess the role of CpG methylation in the cnidarian-dinoflagellate symbiosis, we

undertook a global analysis of changes in the DNA methylomes and transcriptomes of

aposymbiotic and symbiotic Aiptasia. In contrast to their vertebrate counterparts, only 6.37% of

the CpGs in the Aiptasia genome are methylated, but their distribution is highly non-random ($p <$

3×10^{-300}) and that methylated CpGs are most highly localized in gene bodies (18.4% of CpGs).

Analysis of the distribution of the histone modification H3K36me3 further showed significant

enrichment of this epigenetic mark in methylated genes, echoing findings in mammals and

invertebrates (Nanty et al. 2011). More importantly, we find that methylated genes show

significant reduction of spurious transcription and transcriptional noise (Fig. 2B), suggesting that

both the underlying mechanism of epigenetic crosstalk as well as the biological function of DNA

methylation is evolutionarily conserved throughout metazoans. These results highlight a tight

interaction of transcription and epigenetic mechanisms in optimizing gene expression in response

to changing transcriptional needs (Neri et al. 2017). Further support for such a role is provided

by the analysis of differentially methylated and differentially expressed genes, which, when

combined, showed significant increase in enrichment of symbiosis relevant processes. This

suggests that DNA methylation and transcriptome analyses provide complementary views of

cellular responses to symbiosis whereby methylation changes provide a transcriptional record of

longer-term transcriptional adjustments.

While our analysis identified several genes, processes, and pathways previously reported

to be involved in symbiosis, it further highlights their intricate molecular interactions. Symbiosis

recognition, sorting and breakdown are interconnected processes, which is reflected in the

observed changes in methylation and expression. The molecular machinery involved in

phagosome maturation is tightly linked to autophagy and apoptosis enabling the host to respond

to potential pathogen invasion but also to degrade and remove dead or unsuitable symbionts.

This is strongly supported by immunofluorescence examinations of *Aiptasia pulchella*

gastrodermal cell macerates, showing that Rab5 appears around healthy, newly ingested and

already established *Symbiodinium*, but is replaced by Rab7 in heat-killed or DCMU-treated

newly ingested *Symbiodinium*. Conversely, Rab7 is absent from untreated newly infected or

already-established *Symbiodinium* (Chen et al. 2003; Chen et al. 2004).

Rab5 is also required for the exosomal release of CD63 (Baietti et al. 2012), which

mediates the endocytotic sorting process and transport to lysosomes (Latysheva et al. 2006). This

process is further regulated by Rac1 (Anitei et al. 2010) in conjunction with sorting nexin and the

GTPase Rho, all of which were also identified in our analyses. The sorting of phagocytosed

Symbiodinium is critical to symbiosis establishment as *Symbiodinium* cells are phagocytosed at

the apical end and transported to the base of the cell, where they are protected from digestion. In

contrast, *Symbiodinium* staying at the apical end of the cell are degraded (McAuley and Smith

1982).

Similar to the processes of symbiosis initiation and breakdown, we also found significant

enrichment of genes involved in nutrient exchange and many of these transporters have

previously been implicated in symbiosis maintenance (Davy et al. 2012; Lin et al. 2015).

Notably, this also included genes involved in the transport and assimilation of ammonium.

Nitrogen is a main limiting nutrient in coral reefs (Cook et al. 1992; Grover et al. 2008; Radecker

et al. 2015), and the coral-dinoflagellates symbiosis has been proposed to increase the efficiency

of nitrogen utilization by both partners (Wang and Douglas 1998b) whereby the underlying

nature of this mechanism is currently debated (Wang and Douglas 1998a; Aranda et al. 2016).

Conclusions

This study provides the first analysis of the function and role of DNA methylation in a symbiotic

anthozoan. Our results show that the epigenetic crosstalk between the histone mark H3K36me3

and gene body methylation is conserved in cnidarians and reveal a role of gene body methylation

in reducing of spurious transcription and transcriptional noise. Furthermore, we show that

changes in DNA methylation patterns are specific to symbiosis and imply a functional in the

establishment, maintenance, and breakdown of this important symbiotic association. Our

findings therefore provide evidence for a role of DNA methylation as an epigenetic mechanism

involved in the maintenance of transcriptional homeostasis during the cnidarian-dinoflagellate

symbiosis. The premise that epigenetic mechanisms play a role in organismal acclimation

warrants future experiments targeted to investigate if DNA methylation could also contribute to

resilience through the epigenetic adjustment of transcription in response to environmental stress

in Aiptasia and corals.

Data availability

306 Sequencing data of Bis-Seq, RNA-Seq and ChIP-Seq were deposited in NCBI Sequence Read

307 Archive (SRA) under BioProject codes PRJNA415358.

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Author contributions

316 M.A. conceived and coordinated the project. Y.L., G.C., M.J.C. and N.Z. performed

317 experiments. M.A., C.R.V. and Y.J.L. provided tools and/or data. C.T.M. constructed libraries

318 for whole genome bisulfite sequencing, ChIP-Seq and RNA-Seq. Y.L., Y.J.L. and M.A. analyzed

319 expression, methylation and ChIP-Seq data. M.A. and Y.L. wrote the manuscript with input from

320 Y.J.L. and C.R.V. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Supplementary Materials for

DNA methylation regulates transcriptional homeostasis of algal endosymbiosis

in the coral model Aiptasia

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Materials and methods

Exaiptasia pallida **Culture and DNA/RNA Extraction**

Exaiptasia pallida of the clonal strain CC7 (Sunagawa et al. 2009) was used for this study.

Anemones were maintained in polycarbonate tubs with autoclaved seawater at ~25 °C on a 12 h:

12 h light: dark cycle at 20-40 μmol m^{-2} s^{-1} light intensity and fed freshly hatched *Artemia*

nauplii (brine-shrimp) approximately twice per week. To generate aposymbiotic anemones,

animals were subjected to multiple cycles of cold-shock treatment and the photosynthesis

inhibitor diuron (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) as described in Baumgarten (2015)

(Baumgarten et al. 2015). Aposymbiotic anemones were kept individually in 15 ml autoclaved

seawater in 6-well plates and inspected by fluorescence stereomicroscopy to confirm complete

absence of dinoflagellates. In order to exclude potential batch effects as source of DNA

methylation changes we first generated four separate batches of aposymbiotic anemones and

maintained them for a period of 1 year before beginning of the experiment described below.

To generate symbiotic anemones, we then separately infected aposymbiotic CC7 individuals

from each of the four aposymbiotic cultures described above using the compatible Clade B

Symbiodinium strain SSB01, originally isolated from Aiptasia strain H2 (Xiang et al. 2013;

Baumgarten et al. 2015). The four batches of symbiotic anemones were maintained for further 12

months under regular culture condition as described above. The corresponding four aposymbiotic

cultures were maintained in darkness until 3 months before collection. For the last 3 months

individuals from these aposymbiotic cultures were subjected to the same culture conditions as

the symbiotic cultures in order to monitor for unwanted spontaneous re-establishment of

symbiosis under light.

After the 12-month experimental period, we collected six biological replicates from each of

the four aposymbiotic and symbiotic cultures (one additional replicate was taken from batches 1

and 2 of each treatment) for subsequent DNA and RNA extraction as described below.

For each treatment, 6 biological replicates, weighing 20-28 mg (wet weight), were extracted

using the AllPrep DNA/RNA/miRNA Universal Kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). The

manufacturer's protocol was followed with the omission of the optional step 4 (temporal storage

at 4°C if not performing DNA purification immediately). DNA concentrations were determined

using a Qbit dsDNA HS Assay Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA). RNA

concentrations and integrity were determined using a Bioanalyzer Nano RNA Kit (Agilent

Technologies, Santa Clara, CA).

RNA-Seq and Bisulfite Sequencing

Directional mRNA libraries were produced using the NEBNext® Ultra™ Directional RNA Library Prep Kit for Illumina® (NEB) following the manufacturer's protocol.

Bisulfite DNA libraries were prepared following a modified version of the NEBNext® Ultra™ II DNA Library Prep Kit for Illumina® (NEB). Methylated TruSeq Illumina® adapters (Illumina) were used during the adapter ligation step followed by bisulfite conversion with the EpiTect Bisulfite kit (QIAGEN), with the following cycling conditions (95°C – 5 min, 60°C – 25 min, 95°C – 5 min, 60°C – 85 min, 95°C – 5 min, 60°C – 175 min, and 3 cycles of 95°C – 5 min, 60°C – 180 min, hold at 20°C ≤ 5 hours) (reference is Illumina Bisulfite).

The final libraries were enriched with the KAPA HiFi HotStart Uracil+ ReadyMix (2X) (KAPA Biosystems) following the standard protocol for bisulfite-converted NGS library amplification. Final libraries were quality checked using the Bioanalyzer DNA 1K chip (Agilent), and quantified using Qubit 2.0 (Thermo Fisher Scientific), and then pooled in equimolar ratios and sequenced on the HiSeq2000.

Identification of methylated CpGs

Sequencing of the 12 libraries (2 conditions, 6 biological replicates each) resulted in 819 million read pairs from 8 lanes of the Illumina HiSeq2000 platform. Adapters were trimmed from the raw sequences using cutadapt v1.8 (Martin 2011). Subsequently, trimmed reads were mapped to the *Exaiptasia pallida* genome (Baumgarten et al. 2015) using Bowtie2 v2.2.3 (Langmead and Salzberg 2012), and methylation calls was performed using Bismark v0.13

(Krueger and Andrews 2011).

Three filters were used to reduce false positives. Firstly, for each position with k methylated

reads mapping to it, the probability of it occurring through sequencing error (i.e. unmethylated

position appearing as methylated) was modelled using a binomial distribution $B(n, p)$, where n is

the coverage (methylated + unmethylated reads) and p the probability of sequencing error (set to

0.01). We kept positions with k methylated reads if $P(X \geq k) < 0.05$ (post-FDR correction).

Secondly, retained methylated positions had to have ≥ 1 methylated read in all six biological

replicates of at least one growth condition. Finally, median coverage of retained positions across

all 12 samples had to be ≥ 10.

Assignment of genomic context to methylated cytosines

Based on the gene annotation of the *Exaiptasia pallida* genome (GFF3 file) (Baumgarten et

al. 2015) and the positional coordinates of the methylated cytosines produced by Bismark, we

annotated every methylated cytosine based on the genomic context, including whether the

methylated position resides in a genic or intergenic region, and the distances to the 5' and 3' end

of each genomic feature (gene/intergenic region/exon/intron).

CpG bias

Methylated cytosines are frequently spontaneously deaminated to uracil which can be

subsequently converted to thymine after DNA repair. As a result of this process, methylated

CpGs are expected to decrease in abundance over evolutionary time, and the ratio of observed to

expected CpGs (CpG O/E) has previously been used to predict putatively methylated and

unmethylated genes (Suzuki et al. 2007; Wang and Leung 2008). CpG O/E of *Exaiptasia pallida*

protein coding genes were calculated according to J. Zeng *et al* (Zeng and Yi 2010).

Identification of differentially methylated genes

Using the methylation level of aposymbiotic genes as a control, generalized linear models

(GLMs) (Hastie and Pregibon 1992) were implemented in R (R Core Team 2016) to identify

genes that were differentially methylated in the symbiotic treatment. The general formula used

was:

glm(methylated, non_methylated ~ treatment * position, family="binomial")

where "methylated, non_methylated" was a two-column response variable denoting the

number of methylated and non-methylated reads at a particular position. For predictor variables,

"position" denoted relative position of the methylated site in the gene, while "treatment" denoted

symbiotic or aposymbiotic conditions. Data from individual replicates were entered separately to

assign equal weightage to each replicate, as pooling results in a disproportionate skew towards

the replicate with the highest coverage. Genes with < 5 methylated positions were filtered out to

reduce type I errors; and genes with FDR ≤ 0.05 were considered as differentially methylated

genes (DMGs).

Identification of differentially expressed genes

RNA-Seq generated 889 million raw read pairs from six lanes on the Illumina Hiseq2000

platform. Adaptors, primers and low quality bases were removed from the ends of raw reads

using Trimmomatic v0.33 (ILLUMINACLIP:TruSeq2-PE.fa:4:25:9 LEADING:28

TRAILING:28 SLIDINGWINDOW:4:30 MINLEN:50). The resulting trimmed reads were

mapped to the *Exaiptasia pallida* genome using HISAT v2.0.1 (Kim et al. 2015) and transcripts

were assembled based on the *Exaiptasia pallida* gene models (GFF3 file) using StringTie v1.2.2

(Pertea et al. 2015). Trinity (align_and_estimate_abundance.pl – Bowtie2 v2.2.7/RSEM

v1.2.22/edgeR v3.10.5) (Robinson et al. 2010; Grabherr et al. 2011; Li and Dewey 2011;

Langmead and Salzberg 2012; Haas et al. 2013) was run against the transcripts using trimmed

reads for expression abundance estimation, then differentially expressed genes (DEGs) were

identified with FDR ≤ 0.05.

PCA and correlation matrices

Median methylation levels and log FPKM (base 2) of genes were shifted to be zero

centered and analyzed by Principal Component Analysis (PCA) using the prcomp function in R.

Using the same data we calculated correlation matrices (Pearson correlation coefficient)

and clustered samples with hclust implemented in R using complete linkage and euclidean

distance .

Spurious transcription analysis

Trimmed reads were mapped to the *Exaiptasia pallida* genome using HISAT2 v2.1.0 and

mapping coverage per position was extracted using BEDtools v2.17.0. Coverage per exon was

calculated and normalized across all 6 replicates (assuming every replicate had 1 million

coverage in total), then average coverage ratios of exon 2 to 6 versus exon 1 per gene were

calculated to determine spurious transcription levels.

GO enrichment of DMGs and DEGs

GO (Gene Ontology) (Ashburner et al. 2000) annotation was based on the previously published *Exaiptasia pallida* genome (Baumgarten et al. 2015). Functional enrichment of DMGs and DEGs was carried out with topGO respectively (Adrian Alexa 2016) using default settings. GO terms with $p \leq 0.05$ were considered significant, and the occurrence of at least ≥ 5 times in the background set was additionally required for DMGs. Multiple testing correction was not applied to the resulting p-values as the tests are considered to be non-independent (Adrian Alexa 2016).

KEGG enrichment of DMGs and DEGs

KEGG (Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes)(Kanehisa and Goto 2000; Kanehisa et al. 2016) orthology (KO) annotation was carried out by combining the KEGG annotations provided in the original *Exaiptasia pallida* genome publications and a separate set of annotations based on the KAAS (KEGG Automatic Annotation Server, http://www.genome.jp/tools/kaas/) (parameters: GHOSTZ, Eukaryotes, Bi-directional Best Hit) (Moriya et al. 2007). A KEGG pathway enrichment analysis of both DMGs and DEGs was carried out using Fisher's exact test and pathways with $p \leq 0.05$ were considered significant.

Validation of gene expression changes from RNA-Seq by qPCR

Three randomly picked RNA libraries per treatment were used for qPCR validation of

RNA-Seq results. cDNA was synthesized using Invitrogen SuperScript III First-Strand Synthesis

SuperMix kit. A total of 14 genes were validated for differential expression using qPCR

(Supplement Table S13-S15). RPS7, RPL11 and NDH5 were used as internal reference

standards (Lehnert et al. 2014). qPCR was carried out using Invitrogen Platinum SYBR Green

qPCR SuperMix-UDG kit on Applied Biosystems 7900HT Fast Real-Time PCR System. All

protocols were strictly followed.

Validation of methylation changes using bisulfite PCR

Three randomly picked DNA libraries per treatment were used for methylation validation.

Bisulfite conversion was done using the EZ-96 DNA Methylation-Gold Kit (Zymo Research). 18

genes were used to design primers, 14 of 18 obtained effective amplifications (Supplement Table

S16), then the fragments were enriched by PCR amplification using Promega PCR Master Mix.

Sequencing indices were added to enriched fragments using Illumina Nextera XT Index Kit.

Enriched fragments were sequenced on the Illumina MiSeq platform. All protocols were strictly

followed. 1,870x data per replicate were obtained, methylated CpGs were identified using

Bismark as described above. The correlations between whole genome bisulfite conversion and

bisulfite PCR were calculated using generalized linear model.

Chromatin Immunoprecipitation – ChIP

We used the Zymo-Spin ChIP Kit to conduct histone bound chromatin extraction, with

minor adjustments to manufacturer's protocol. Briefly, three biological replicates, each

consisting of two symbiotic anemones, were used for this experiment. Each anemone was first

washed with PBST (phosphate-buffered saline with 0.1% triton). Anemones were then fixed in

1X PBS with 1% formaldehyde for 15 minutes. To stop cross-linking reactions glycine was

added to the solution and left to rest for 10 more minutes. Following manufacturer's protocol, we

centrifuged and washed whole anemones. We prepared the Nuclei Prep Buffer according to

protocol and crushed the two anemones of each replicate together using a douncer for

homogenization. Samples were then sonicated for 15 cycles on ice (15 sec ON, 30 sec cooling)

to ensure fragmentation to 200-500 bp. Thereafter the protocol was followed without further

modifications.

Immunoprecipitation was achieved using a target specific antibody to histone 3 lysine 36

tri-methylation (H3K36me3) (ab9050, Abcam), which has been validated in many eukaryotic

species, including mouse(Soboleva et al. 2017), *Arabidopsis thaliana*(Wollmann et al. 2017),

yeast(Janke et al. 2017) and zebrafish(Vastenhouw et al. 2010; Wu et al. 2011) *et al*. Comparison

of Aiptasia histone H3 to the respective homologs from several species for which this antibody

has been previously validated showed high conservation of the N-terminal tail containing

position H3K36 (Fig. S4) whereby 100% conservation to the zebrafish homolog was observed.

Corresponding input controls for each of the 3 replicates were generated as suggested by

the manufacturer. DNA fragment quality and quantity were confirmed using High Sensitivity

DNA Reagents (Agilent Technologies, California, United States) on a bioanalyzer, after which

ChIP libraries were constructed using the NEBNext® ChIP-Seq Library Prep Master Mix Set

(#E7645, New England Biolabs, Massachusetts, United States).

Sequencing resulted in 10M read pairs per replicate. These read pairs were trimmed using

Trimmomatic and mapped to the *Exaiptasia pallida* genome using HISAT2 as described above.

H3K36me3 enrichments were calculated as $\log_2$(average signal/average input control) for all

genes, unmethylated genes and highly methylated genes (methylation level > 70 and methylation

density > 40). P-values were calculated using t-test.

Antibody affinity validation through Western blotting

Total protein was extracted from a snap-frozen anemone crushed in 10% TCA

(Trichloroacetic acid). The homogenized sample was left to incubate overnight at -20 °C to allow

proteins to precipitate. The solution was centrifuged at 20,000g at 4 °C for 20 minutes to collect

suspended proteins. The pellet was then washed three times in 80% acetone and then spun down

again as previously. The final pellet was then air-dried for 10-15 minutes to remove residual

acetone. The final protein was suspended in urea lysis buffer (7 M urea, 2 M thiourea, pH 7.5) by

vortexing for 2 hours.

Samples were then prepared for western blot by adding 4x sampling buffer (0.38 M Tris

base, 8% SDS, 4mM EDTA, 40% glycerol, 4mg/ml bromphenol blue) to a final concentration of

1X. After a 2 minute incubation at 90°C samples were ready to be run on a gel at 10-12 mA. The

gel was transferred to a PVDF nitrocellulose membrane, rinsed with TBS buffer (150mM NaCl,

25mM Tris pH7.4, 0.1% Triton X-100) and blocked for 30 min at RT in TBS containing 5% fat-

free powder milk. The primary antibody was diluted in TBS/milk and incubated on an undulating

orbital shaker overnight at 4 °C. After three washes in TBS for 10 minutes each, the membrane

was again blocked in TBS/milk for 20 minutes at RT before proceeding with secondary antibody

staining. The horseradish peroxidase-linked-antibody (Anti-Rabbit IgG HRP conjugate W4011

and Anti-Mouse IgG HRP conjugate W4031, Promega. Wisconsin, United States) was diluted in

TBS/milk (1:10000) and incubated for 2 hours at RT. After final triplicate 10 minute washes in

TBS, membranes were developed.

Supplementary Figures

ⓐ **TE density (0~0.8 TEs/kb)**
ⓑ **Gene density (0~0.2 genes/kb)**
ⓒ **mCpG content - sym (1~20 mCpGs/kb)**
ⓓ **mCpG content - apo (1~20 mCpGs/kb)**
ⓔ **CpG content (15~32 CpGs/kb)**

Fig. S1. Circos visualization of different data at the genome-wide level

(**a**) TE density. (**b**) Gene density. (**c**) Fraction of methylated CpGs in symbiotic treatment. (**d**) Fraction of methylated CpGs in aposymbiotic treatment. (**e**) CpG content.

Fig. S2. Methylated genes in Aiptasia have lower CpG O/E

CpG distribution of methylated genes (represented by red curve) peaks at around 0.5, which is lower than in unmethylated genes (represented by green curve) peaking at around 0.9. mC to T conversion skews the CpG O/E distribution of all genes as expected (represented by blue curve), but methylated and unmethylated genes still show a large overlap of their CpG O/E distributions.

649 These results indicate that gene body methylation cannot be accurately inferred from CpG O/E in

650 Aiptasia.

Fig. S3. Methylation patterns

Fig. S3. Methylation patterns

(**A**) DNA methylation is mainly located in the proximal part of gene bodies with slightly

decreasing levels towards the end. (**B**) Methylation pattern over intergenic regions. (**C**)

Methylation pattern around splice donor sites show increasing levels immediately after donor

sites. (**D**) Methylation pattern around acceptor sites show decreasing levels immediately after

splice acceptor sites. (**E**) Methylation pattern over initial exons show increasing methylation

levels (3,147 exons with 35,885 methylation sites were used). (**F**) Methylation pattern over

internal exons show decreasing methylation levels (7,977 exons with 139,009 methylation sites

were used). (**G**) Methylation pattern over terminal exons show decreasing methylation levels

(7,905 exons with 102,162 methylation sites were used). (**H**) Methylation pattern over introns

from single-exon genes follow a similar trend as observed for multi exon genes with increasing

methylation levels in the proximal and decreasing levels in the posterior part of the exon (298

exons with 4,735 methylation sites were used). (**I**) Methylation pattern over initial introns show

increasing methylation levels (3,381 introns with 39,262 methylation sites were used). (**J**)

Methylation pattern over internal introns maintain stable methylation levels (7,371 introns with

211,950 methylation sites were used). (**K**) Methylation levels over terminal introns decrease

slightly (3,959 introns with 34,246 methylation sites were used). (**L**) Methylation levels over

introns from one-intron genes change gently with initial increase followed by a decrease (1,055

introns with 10,709 methylation sites).

```
                            ************************:*******:**********:.*******
aiptasia_AIPGENE3063        MARTKQTARKSTGGKAPRKQLATKAARKSAPATGGVKKPHRYRPGTVALR   50
zebrafish_XP_002666951.1    MARTKQTARKSTGGKAPRKQLATKAARKSAPATGGVKKPHRYRPGTVALR   50
mouse_AAA37813.1            MARTKQTARKSTGGKAPRKQLATKAARKSAPATGGVKKPHRYRPGTVALR   50
human_CAB02546.1            MARTKQTARKSTGGKAPRKQLATKAARKSAPATGGVKKPHRYRPGTVALR   50
Arabidopsis_AAA32809.1      MARTKQTARKSTGGKAPRKQLATKAARKSAPATGGVKKPHRFRPGTVALR   50
yeast_PJP07865.1            MARTKQTARKSTGGKAPRKQLASKAARKSAPSTGGVKKPHRYKPGTVALR   50
                            1.......10........20........30........40........50

                            ***:.*******************************: ****: **
aiptasia_AIPGENE3063        EIRRYQKSTELLIRKLPFQRLVREIAQDFKTDLRFQSSAVMALQEASEAY   100
zebrafish_XP_002666951.1    EIRRYQKSTELLIRKLPFQRLVREIAQDFKTDLRFQSSAVMALQEASEAY   100
mouse_AAA37813.1            EIRRYQKSTELLIRKLPFQRLVREIAQDFKTDLRFQSSAVMALQEACEAY   100
human_CAB02546.1            EIRRYQKSTELLIRKLPFQRLVREIAQDFKTDLRFQSSAVMALQEACEAT   100
Arabidopsis_AAA32809.1      EIRKYQKSTELLIRKLPFQRLVREIAQDFKTDLRFQSSAVAALQEAAEAY   100
yeast_PJP07865.1            EIRRFQKSTELLIRKLPFQRLVREIAQDFKTDLRFQSSAIGALQESVEAY   100
                            ........60........70........80........90.......100
```

Fig. S4. Sequence conservation of histone H3 homologs

Sequence conservation of Aiptasia histone H3 protein and histone H3 homologs from species for which antibody (ab9050, Abcam) has previously been validated. The N-terminal tail of Aiptasia H3 is identical to the fragment from the zebrafish *Danio rerio* (the first 100 amino acid fragment from human was used to produce this antibody).

Fig. S5. Western blot

Western blot result for antibody affinity validation, target band is 15kDa in size as expected from

molecular weight analysis.

Fig. S6. Correlation matrices of replicates

Correlation matrices of replicates based on median DNA methylation level of genes (**A**) and log

gene expression values (base 2) (**B**). Replicates from the same treatments showed higher

correlation and clustered together both based on DNA methylation as well as gene expression

profiles, further supporting the findings obtained from the PCA analyses (figure 4) that changes

in DNA methylation and expression are treatment specific.

Fig. S7. Validation of methylation level

Validation of methylation level using bisulfite PCR on selected genes. (**A**, **B**) validation of

methylation level on genes (median methylation levels of methylated CpGs were used to

represent genes). (**C**, **D**) validation of methylation level on locus (methylated CpGs). WGBS:

whole genome bisulfite sequencing; Amplicon: MiSeq sequencing results of bisulfite PCR

amplicons on selected genes.

Fig. S8. qPCR validation of gene expression levels

Validation of gene expression changes using qPCR. Expression levels are shown as $\log_{10}$(fold

change). All genes show similar expression changes as determined by RNA-seq and q-PCR.

Symbiosis establishment and breakdown

Fig. S9. Schematic diagram of symbiosis establishment and breakdown associated

genes. Every node represents a category of genes, and generally has multiple corresponding

genes. The inside colors of nodes represent the expression changes of corresponding genes,

including non-DEGs (cyan), up-regulated (red), down-regulated (blue) and up- and down-

regulated DEGs (light red). The colors of node edges represent the methylation level changes

of corresponding genes, including non-DMGs (light blue), hypermethylated (red),

hypomethylated (blue) and hyper- and hypo-methylated DMGs (light red). Numbers in

circles denote genes/proteins as detailed below.

1. Complement receptor

2. Scavenger receptor

3. C-type lectin

4. Integrin

5. Toll-like receptor

6. Ras-related C3 botulinum toxin substrate 1 - rho family (RAC1)

7. Collagen

8. Vesicle-associated membrane protein (VAMP)

9. Autophagy-related protein 16 (ATG16)

10. Ras-related protein 5 (Rab5)

11. Ras-related protein 7 (Rab7)

12. NADPH oxidase (NOX)

13. Syntaxin 12

14. Autophagy-related protein 5 (ATG5)

15. Autophagy-related protein 10 (ATG10)

16. Programmed cell death 6-interacting protein

17. Sorting nexin (SNX)

18. Cytoplasmic dynein

19. Tubulin alpha chain (TUBA)

20. Tubulin beta chain (TUBB)

21. Nitric oxide synthase (NOS)

22. Lysosome-associated membrane glycoprotein/Cluster of differentiation (LAMP/CD)

23. Cathepsin L

24. Kinesin

25. Phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate 3-kinase (PI3K)

26. RAC serine/threonine-protein kinase (AKT)

27. Bcl-2-antagonist of cell death (BAD)

28. TNF receptor-associated factor (TRAF)

29. Nuclear factor of kappa light polypeptide gene (NFKB)

30. Caspase 8 (CASP8)

31. Caspase 7 (CASP7)

32. Apoptosis regulator/Bcl-2 (BCL2)

33. Ras homolog (RHO)

34. Rho-associated protein kinase (ROCK)

35. Phosphatidylinositol 4-phosphate 5-kinase / Phosphatidylinositol 5-phosphate 4-kinase / Phosphatidylinositol 3-phosphate 5-kinase (PI4P5K/ PI5P4K/ PI3P5K)

36. Vinculin

37. Radixin

38. Profilin

39. Actin

40. CD63

41. Lysosomal-associated transmembrane protein

42. V-type proton ATPase

PI3P: phosphatidylinositol-3-phosphate

PIP3: Phosphatidylinositol (3,4,5)-trisphosphate

Fig. S10. Schematic diagram of symbiosis maintenance associated genes. Every node

represents a category of genes, and generally has multiple corresponding genes. The inside

colors of nodes represent the expression changes of corresponding genes, including non-DEGs

(cyan), up-regulated (red), down-regulated (blue) and up- and down-regulated DEGs (light red).

The colors of node edges represent the methylation level changes of corresponding genes,

including non-DMGs (light blue), hypermethylated (red), hypomethylated (blue) and hyper- and

hypo-methylated DMGs (light red).

1. Carbonic anhydrase (CA)

2. Ammonium transporter

3. Glucose transporter

4. Amino acid transporter

5. Glutamine synthetase (GS)

6. Glutamate synthase

7. Glutamate dehydrogenase (GDH)

8. Phosphate transporter

9. V-type proton ATPase

10. Sugar transporter

11. Lipid transfer protein

12. Aquaporin 3 (Glycerol transporter)

13. Monocarboxylate transporter

14. Alcohol dehydrogenase

15. Aldehyde dehydrogenase

16. Nitric oxide synthase (NOS)

17. Arginase

18. Carbamoyl-phosphate synthase / Aspartate carbamoyltransferase / Dihydroorotase (CAD)

19. Carbamoyl-phosphate synthase (ammonia) (CPS1)

20. ABC transporter

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