

1 Olive fruit fly rearing procedures affect the vertical transmission of the bacterial symbiont

2 *Candidatus* Erwinia dacicola

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27 **Abstract**

28

29 **Background:** The symbiosis between the olive fruit fly, *Bactrocera oleae*, and *Candidatus Erwinia*  
30 *dacicola* has been demonstrated as essential for the fly's larval development and adult physiology.  
31 The mass rearing of the olive fruit fly has been hindered by several issues, including problems  
32 which could be related to the lack of the symbiont, presumably due to preservatives and antibiotics  
33 currently used in the laboratory. To better understand the mechanisms underlying symbiont removal  
34 or loss during the rearing of lab colonies of the olive fruit fly, we performed experiments that  
35 focused on bacterial transfer from wild female flies to their eggs. In this research, eggs laid by wild  
36 females were treated with propionic acid solution, which is often used as an antifungal agent, a  
37 mixture of sodium hypochlorite and Triton X, or water (as a control). The presence of the bacterial  
38 symbiont on eggs was evaluated by real-time PCR and scanning electron microscopy.

39 **Results:** DGGE analysis showed a clear band with the same migration behavior present in all  
40 DGGE profiles but with a decreasing intensity. Molecular analyses performed by real-time PCR  
41 showed a significant reduction in *Ca. E. dacicola* abundance in eggs treated with propionic acid  
42 solution or a mixture of sodium hypochlorite and Triton X compared to those treated with water. In  
43 addition, the removal of bacteria from the surfaces of treated eggs was highlighted by scanning  
44 electron microscopy.

45 **Conclusions:** The results clearly indicate how the first phases of the colony-establishment process  
46 are important in maintaining the symbiont load in laboratory populations and suggest that the use of  
47 products with antimicrobial activity should be avoided. The results also suggest that alternative  
48 rearing procedures for the olive fruit fly should be investigated.

49

50 **Keywords:** *Bactrocera oleae*, disinfectant, propionic acid, qPCR, DGGE, egg morphology, insect  
51 rearing

52

53

## 54 **Background**

55

56 Insects display a great variety of symbiotic relationships with microorganisms that allow them to

57 exploit almost every substrate as food source and to colonize any habitat on earth. Such

58 microorganisms comprise viruses as well as bacteria, fungi, protozoa and multicellular symbionts

59 [1]. The relationships between insects and microorganisms range from clear mutualism to

60 relationships involving unbalanced benefits or costs to one member up to pathogenesis [2, 3].

61 Moreover, insect symbioses can vary from temporary associations to long-life obligate partnerships

62 and from external, loose coalitions to very close alliances [2]. The microorganisms involved can be

63 found in the environment, growing outside the insect's body, or they can be harbored within the

64 body cavity in specialized cells or organs (extracellular or intracellular endosymbionts) and

65 transmitted through successive generations, typically via vertical transmission from mother to

66 progeny (maternal inheritance) [4]. The manifold and intricate functions played by the wide

67 assortment of microorganisms have not been fully studied in detail, and only some metabolic

68 interactions are fully understood [5]. Regardless, the crucial roles played by symbionts in the

69 survival and evolution of their insect partners have been repeatedly demonstrated, and different

70 mechanisms of transmission through host populations and generations have evolved [2].

71 The nonpathogenic bacterial symbionts of insects have been classified as ranging from primary,

72 ancient obligate symbionts that are restricted to specialized cells (bacteriomes) and are necessary

73 for the host to secondary, recent facultative symbionts that are located in insect organs and are non-

74 essential for insect survival [1, 6]. The transmission of primary symbionts (P-symbiont) in plant-

75 feeding insects has been investigated in detail in aphids [7, 8], various sucking insects [9, 10, 11]

76 and beetles [12, 13]. Bacterial P-symbionts are transferred vertically to offspring through

77 contamination of the egg surface, deposition of bacterial capsules on eggs, or consumption of the

78 mother's excrement or through transovarial transmission; that is, direct penetration of the female  
79 germ cells [11]. Maternal inheritance is also the typical transmission route for secondary symbionts,  
80 although there is substantial evidence of horizontal transmission as well as rare paternal  
81 transmission [14, 15].

82 Similarly to sucking insects, Tephritid fruit flies display many types of symbiotic associations  
83 involving both intracellular (e.g. Wolbachia), and extracellular symbionts. Lauzon [16] critically  
84 reviewed this topic, commenting on known features and highlighting important issues with possible  
85 practical consequences for insect pest control. Many tephritids are insect pests of economic  
86 importance, causing damage to agricultural crops in tropical, subtropical and temperate areas [17].

87 By studying the relationships of fruit fly species with symbiotic bacteria, new control strategies  
88 might be developed and established [18]. During the last decade, research on the symbiotic  
89 relationships of fruit flies has often focused on potential pest control applications. Moreover,  
90 following Lauzon's review [16], research on this topic was greatly increased by the advent of  
91 molecular techniques, which enabled the investigation of uncultivable bacteria and thus the  
92 identification of previously unknown or misidentified microorganisms.

93 An example of a symbiotic relationship that was clarified via molecular techniques is that between  
94 the olive fruit fly, *Bactrocera oleae* (Rossi), which is the major insect pest of olive crops in  
95 countries where it occurs, and the bacterium *Candidatus* *Erwinia dacicola*, which was named in  
96 2005 [19]. This symbiosis was the first one involving tephritids to be described, discovered at the  
97 beginning of the twentieth century, although the bacterium was erroneously identified as  
98 *Pseudomonas savastanoi*, the agent of olive knot disease. Relying only on microscopic  
99 observations, Petri [20, 21] carefully described a specialized foregut organ that harbored the  
100 symbiont (a cephalic evagination later named "oesophageal bulb") as well as female hindgut  
101 pockets from which bacteria were released to be deposited on the egg surfaces and transmitted to  
102 the next generation. Since Petri's investigations, several authors have increased knowledge on the  
103 olive fruit fly and bacterium symbiosis, providing indirect evidence of the essential role of the

104 symbiont for the insect's survival (see the reviews by Drew and Lloyd, [22], and Lauzon, [16]).  
105 However, there were no major findings until the discovery of PCR amplification and 16S rRNA  
106 gene sequencing techniques which have significantly improved our knowledge on olive fruit fly  
107 symbiotic associations.

108 To summarize recent findings, we know that *Ca. E. dacicola* is an unculturable bacterium that  
109 belongs to the Enterobacteriaceae family of gammaproteobacteria [19]. This bacterium is  
110 considered an obligate symbiont (P-symbiont) that coevolved with its host *B. oleae* wherein it  
111 dwells extracellularly inside the adult gut (in the oesophageal bulb, crop, midgut and female rectal  
112 pockets) and the larval midgut (gastric caeca) [19, 23]; it also lives intracellularly inside epithelial  
113 cells of the larval midgut [23]. *Ca. E. dacicola* forms bacteriomes in the larval gut, whereas in  
114 adults, it typically develops biofilms that line the inner surfaces of organs or fills the lumen of  
115 different organs with abundant free bacterial masses [23, 24]. The species occurs as two different  
116 haplotypes in Italian populations of *B. oleae* [25, 26]. Regarding its roles in host physiology, the  
117 symbiont is essential for larvae, allowing them to feed on olives, mainly when they are unripe, and  
118 neutralizing the negative effects of the phenolic compound oleuropein [27]. Moreover, *Ca. E.*  
119 *dacicola* is necessary for adults of the olive fruit fly as it metabolizes complex nitrogen compounds  
120 and supplies growth factors that can promote fly survival and reproduction in food-inadequate  
121 habitats such as olive orchards [28, 29].

122 According to the observations by Petri [21], the symbiont is vertically transmitted to the progeny:  
123 When eggs exit the oviduct, they pass through the terminal rectal tract, where the rectal sacs open  
124 and bacterial masses are deposited onto the eggs' surfaces. Then, at eclosion, larvae ingest bacteria  
125 breaking through the micropylar pole. This hypothesized mechanism of transmission is supported  
126 by ultrastructural investigations using SEM and TEM [23, 30], that show the presence of abundant  
127 bacteria stored in rectal evaginations in association with the genital and anal openings.

128 Having established the importance of *Ca. E. dacicola* for the regular development and adult fitness  
129 of the olive fruit fly, we can understand how the symbiotic relationship might be manipulated to

130 improve the control of this pest. A few years ago, Estes and colleagues [31] reviewed knowledge on  
131 the possible application of the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) for the olive fruit fly, highlighting  
132 critical issues, possible improvements and future directions. They emphasized the necessity of  
133 understanding the interactions between the insect pest and its symbiont in wild populations as well  
134 as the insect's interactions with different bacteria in laboratory colonies. In nature, *B. oleae* larvae  
135 develop only in olives; a group of Greek scientists devoted more than 20 years to developing an  
136 artificial substrate suitable for its mass rearing [31, 32]. The symbiont *Ca. E. dacicola* has never  
137 been retrieved from lab-reared olive flies, which appear to be associated with a variety of bacteria,  
138 typically species that are common in colonies of lab-reared insects [23, 33, 34]. It is likely that the  
139 presence of the symbiont is prevented by the usage of preservatives and antibiotics that are typically  
140 added to larval and/or adult diets [32]. Moreover, the yield and quality of mass-reared olive fruit  
141 flies, in term of fitness and behavior, have yet to reach satisfactory levels [35, 36]. Therefore, only a  
142 few pilot trials of SIT application have been attempted, with unsatisfactory results [37, 38, 39]. The  
143 first step toward developing feasible SIT programs is to reevaluate the mass rearing of the olive  
144 fruit fly, taking into consideration what we know about its symbiont. We believe that two  
145 approaches should be pursued: a) supply lab flies with diet-enriched transient bacteria to potentially  
146 replace the role played by the natural symbiont *Ca. E. dacicola* and b) begin the colonization  
147 process anew from wild symbiotic olive fruit flies while avoiding symbiont-removing or symbiont-  
148 suppressing procedures in the rearing protocol.

149 The first approach was recently initiated with promising results [40], while the second approach has  
150 to be initiated, although the rearing of wild olive fruit flies on an antibiotic-free diet for eight  
151 generations has been attempted [41].

152 The present study is part of a long-term research program addressing the multiple relationships  
153 between *B. oleae* and bacteria and aimed at identifying target points that might be used to develop  
154 new control strategies. To evaluate the effects of commonly used procedures to rear olive fruit flies  
155 in the laboratory on *Ca. E. dacicola*, we assessed the effects of disinfectants that are used for

156 handling eggs, which is the first step in both small-scale and large-scale rearing efforts, through  
157 PCR amplification-denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (PCR-DGGE), quantitative real-time  
158 PCR and Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM). In addition, by evaluating the impacts of  
159 germicides, we ascertained the transmission mechanism of *Ca. E. dacicola* from wild olive fruit fly  
160 females to their progeny reared in laboratory.

161

## 162 **Methods**

### 163 **Insects**

164 The adults of wild olive flies used in this study developed from pupae that had been collected from  
165 infested drupes in several olive orchards in Vaccarizzo Albanese (Cosenza; Italy). Flies had been  
166 housed in plastic cages (BugDorm-1, MegaView Science, Taiwan), with approximately 800 flies  
167 per cage, supplied with sugar and water, and maintained at room temperature (18-20 °C). To  
168 enhance egg production, flies were transferred into a conditioned rearing room with conditions of  
169  $25\pm 2$  °C,  $60\pm 10\%$  RH and a 16:8 (L:D) photoperiod and supplied a diet of sugar, hydrolyzed  
170 enzymatic yeast (ICN Biomedicals) and egg yolk (40:10:3).

### 171 **Egg collection**

172 The eggs of wild flies were collected using wax domes that had been washed previously with 2%  
173 hypochlorite solution and then rinsed twice with deionized water. The domes were inserted into the  
174 bottom of tissue culture dishes (35/10 mm) containing approximately 3 mL of deionized water.  
175 These measures were taken to minimize the occurrence of contaminating bacteria and prevent egg  
176 dehydration and subsequent shrinkage. The domes were placed inside the adults' cage and left there  
177 for 24 hours. Eggs were then collected by washing the internal surface of the domes with sterile  
178 deionized water under a laminar flow hood and sieving with a sterile cloth; the eggs were then  
179 placed in a sterile beaker. Finally, the eggs were collected with a sterile micropipette and transferred  
180 to three different sterile containers.

181 The three containers contained the following treatments, respectively: a 0.3% propionic acid  
182 solution (PA) ( $\text{pH}=2.82\pm 0.03$ ) commonly used as disinfectant in rearing procedures of the olive  
183 fruit fly [32]; a mixture (1:1) of 1% sodium hypochlorite + 0.1% Triton X (SHTX) previously used  
184 to externally sterilize all of the developmental stages of the olive fruit fly by Estes *et al.* [42]; and  
185 sterile water as a control (C). All the eggs were vortexed for 30 s, and then the eggs of the  
186 treatments PA and SHTX were rinsed twice in deionized sterile water (in order to remove treatment  
187 residues which would have hampered DNA extraction). Eggs of each group (PAE, SHTXE, CE,  
188 respectively) were designated for microbiological analyses as well as for morphological  
189 observations or larval development. Egg collection was performed four times during the  
190 experiment, each time from a different cage.

191 In addition, and in order to evaluate the bacterial titer of the water or rinse water where eggs were  
192 taken from, liquid samples were also collected for further molecular analysis: egg collection water  
193 of the control treatment (CW), the second rinse water after 0.3% propionic acid treatment (PAW)  
194 and the second rinse water after SHTX treatment (SHTXW).

195 An explanatory list of the samples analyzed in the experiment is summarized in Table 1.

196

197 Table 1 Explanatory legend of samples analyzed in the egg treatment experiment

Sample description	Sample name
Eggs washed with water (control)	CE
Eggs treated with 0.3% propionic acid	PAE
Eggs treated with a mixture (1:1) of 1% sodium hypochlorite + 0.1% TritonX	SHTXE
Water from control eggs	CW
Second rinse water after treatment with PA	PAW
Second rinse water after treatment with SHTX	SHTXW

198

199 **Progeny development**



200 This experiment was carried out in the same conditioned rearing room described above. Eggs  
201 intended for larval development were spread over a black fabric disk soaked in water and positioned  
202 in a Petri dish. After 48 hours, the hatched and unhatched eggs were counted. Each group of larvae  
203 from the different egg treatments (CE, PAE, SHTXE) was transferred to a cellulose-based artificial  
204 diet [32] until pupation. Then, the pupae were collected and placed in vials for adult emergence.  
205 Newly emerged adults were singly placed in small cages and fed with water and sugar until they  
206 were 15 days old, when they were dissected for bacterial DNA extraction.

### 207 **DNA extraction from eggs and DGGE analysis**

208 Ten eggs per treatment were sampled under the stereomicroscope and transferred into a 1.5 mL tube  
209 containing 50  $\mu$ L of InstaGene Matrix (BioRad Laboratories, Hertfordshire, UK) plus a small  
210 quantity (approximately 8 mg) of sterile silica powder to ease egg tissue and cell disruption. Then,  
211 the content of each tube was mashed with a sterile pestle and processed for DNA extraction  
212 following the manufacturer's instructions. DNA extraction was also performed from liquid samples  
213 of the water or rinse water from treated eggs: 1.5 mL of CW, 1.5 mL of PAW and 1.5 mL of  
214 SHTW, were transferred in Eppendorf tubes and centrifuged at 13,000 rpm for 8 min. The  
215 supernatant of each sample was replaced by 25  $\mu$ L of InstaGene Matrix and processed for DNA  
216 extraction following the manufacturer's instructions. Finally, the supernatant of each vial  
217 (containing DNA from eggs or liquids) was transferred into another 1.5 mL tube and preserved at -  
218 20 °C until the molecular analyses. According to the DNA extraction, a DGGE analysis was  
219 performed to determine the presence of *Ca. E. dacicola* in the DGGE bacterial profiles before  
220 performing real-time PCR. Amplification of the V6-V8 region of the 16S rRNA gene was carried  
221 out with the universal primer pair 986F-GC and 1401R [43] in a 25- $\mu$ L mixture containing 2  $\mu$ L of  
222 template DNA, 1.5 mmol L<sup>-1</sup> MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 200 mmol L<sup>-1</sup> of each deoxynucleotide triphosphate (dNTP)  
223 (Promega Corporation), 10 pmol of each primer (TIB MolBiol), 1x green GoTaq<sup>®</sup> flexi buffer  
224 (Promega), and 1 U of GoTaq<sup>®</sup> polymerase (Promega). The reaction conditions were as follows: 94  
225 °C for 4 min, followed by 35 cycles of denaturation at 95 °C for 45 s, annealing at 55 °C for 45 s,

226 and extension at 72 °C for 45 s; and final extension at 72 °C for 7 min. Three independent PCR  
227 amplifications were performed for each sample, and the triplicate amplification products were  
228 pooled to minimize the effect of PCR biases. The amplification products were loaded onto a  
229 polyacrylamide gel (acrylamide/bis 37.5:1; Euroclone), with a linear denaturing gradient obtained  
230 with a 100% denaturing solution containing 40% formamide (Euroclone) and 7 M Urea  
231 (Euroclone). The gels were run for 17 hours in 1X TAE buffer at constant voltage (80 V) and  
232 temperature (60 °C) using the INGENY phorU-2 System (Ingeny International BV). Then, gels  
233 were stained with SYBR<sup>®</sup>GOLD (Molecular Probes) diluted 1:1,000 in 1X TAE, and the gel  
234 images were digitized using a Chemidoc XRS apparatus (Bio-Rad).

### 235 **DNA extraction from flies**

236 *B. oleae* flies were killed by freezing at -20 °C for 15 min, washed with a 2% sodium hypochlorite  
237 solution and then rinsed twice in deionized sterile water in a laminar flow hood. Each adult's head  
238 was dissected under a stereoscopic microscope with sterile tools, and the oesophageal bulb was  
239 extracted. DNA extraction of each bulb was carried out as described above for eggs. DNA extracted  
240 from the oesophageal bulbs of wild *B. oleae* flies was amplified as described above and used as a  
241 *Ca. E. dadicola* positive control in end-point PCR and as a marker in DGGE analysis, and it was  
242 used to construct the standard curve for the real-time PCR. DNA was also extracted from the  
243 oesophageal bulbs of *B. oleae* flies developed from eggs than had been externally treated with the  
244 SHTX mixture. Amplification followed by DGGE was performed as described above.

### 245 **Real-time PCR**

246 Quantitative real-time PCR analysis was performed with primers EdF1 [23] and EdEnRev [44] was  
247 used to determine the relative abundance of *Ca. E. dadicola* varied across eggs surface treatments.  
248 Amplifications were carried out using a CFX96 Real-Time PCR Detection System (Bio-Rad  
249 Laboratories, Hertfordshire, UK) in a 20- $\mu$ L mixture containing 2X SsoAdvanced Universal  
250 SYBR<sup>®</sup> Green Supermix (Bio-Rad), 400 nmol/L of each primer and 2  $\mu$ L of template DNA. The

251 amplification conditions involved denaturation at 95 °C for 3 min, followed by 40 cycles of 95 °C  
252 for 15 s and 60 °C for 30 s. Fluorescence data were collected at the end of the hybridization step.  
253 Amplicon specificity was tested with a dissociation curve analysis by increasing the temperature by  
254 0.5 °C every 30 s from 65 to 95 °C. Negative controls and standard curves were run on each plate.  
255 The standard curve was prepared with a sample of DNA extracted from the bulb of a wild *B. oleae*  
256 female with *Ca. E. dacicola* and 5-fold serially diluted. The efficiency of the primer pair (E) was  
257 determined by calculating the slope of the log-scale standard curve and applying the following  
258 equation:  $E=10^{(-1/\text{slope})}$  [45]. Each standard dilution and unknown sample was run in triplicate, and  
259 the threshold cycle (Ct) of these technical replicates were averaged for each individual sampled.  
260 The relative abundance of *Ca. E. dacicola* (R) was calculated according to Estes et al. [42]. The  
261 number of copies of *Ca. E. dacicola* 16S rRNA gene in egg samples treated with sodium  
262 hypochlorite (SHTXE) or propionic acid (PAE) or in water samples where eggs had been taken  
263 (CW, PAW, SHTXW) ( $E_{\text{sample}}$ ) was normalized relative to the number of copies of *Ca. E. dacicola*  
264 16S rRNA gene found in egg samples washed with water ( $E_{\text{CE}}$ ) according to the formula:

265

$$266 \quad R = E_{\text{CE}}^{(\text{Ct CE})} / E_{\text{sample}}^{(\text{Ct sample})}$$

267

268 Four separate real-time PCR amplifications were performed using egg samples from four  
269 experimental replicates conducted over time, and the data from each treatment were averaged over  
270 the four replicates. Quantitative real-time PCR analysis was also performed with universal primers  
271 338F-518R [46], as described above, to determine the relative abundance of bacteria on eggs  
272 surface and rinse water as well as.

### 273 **Sequence analysis**

274 The middle portions of several DGGE bands were aseptically excised from the gel and directly  
275 sequenced by Macrogen Service (Macrogen LTD, The Netherlands). The sequence chromatograms  
276 were edited using Chromas Lite software (v.2.1.1; Technelysium Pty Ltd.;

277 <http://www.technelysium.com.au/chromas-lite.htm>) to verify the absence of ambiguous peaks and  
278 to convert them to FASTA format, DECIPHER's Find Chimeras web tool  
279 (<http://decipher.cee.wisc.edu>) was used to uncover chimeras in the 16S rRNA gene sequences. The  
280 sequences were analyzed via the web-based BLASTN tool (NCBI;  
281 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/BLAST>) of GenBank to identify bacterial species of highest  
282 similarity. The nucleotide sequences were deposited in the GenBank database under accession  
283 numbers MG800838 to MG800842.

### 284 **Scanning electron microscopy**

285 Fifty eggs of each treatment were dehydrated in a series of graded ethanol from 50% to 99%, with  
286 15 min at each grade. After dehydration, the eggs were allowed to dry under a hood at room  
287 conditions. On each aluminum stub, at least 5 eggs were mounted, taking care to arrange them  
288 horizontally to obtain a clear view of the area underlying the micropylar cup, which corresponds to  
289 the base of the egg anterior pole. Mounted eggs were gold-sputtered using a Balzers Union® SCD  
290 040 unit (Balzers, Vaduz, Liechtenstein). For the observations carried out at the Electronic  
291 Microscopy Labs at SIMAU, Polytechnic University of Marche, a FE-SEM Zeiss® SUPRA 40  
292 scanning electron microscope (Carl Zeiss NTS GmbH, Oberkochen, Germany) and a Philips® XL  
293 30 scanning electron microscope (Eindhoven, The Netherlands) were used. Additional  
294 investigations were conducted at the Department of Agricultural, Food and Agro-Environmental  
295 Sciences, University of Pisa, using a FEI Quanta 200 high-vacuum scanning electron microscope.  
296 The densities of the bacterial colonies present on the eggs from the three treatments were  
297 determined by counting the number of visible rods in a sample area enclosed by an electronic  
298 rectangular frame (approximately 800  $\mu\text{m}^2$ ) applied to the SEM screen where the base of the egg  
299 anterior pole was visible.

### 300 **Statistical analyses**

301 Quantitative data from real-time PCR and data on the bacterial colonies on the egg surface (after  
302 square-root transformation to satisfy normality requirements) were analyzed through one-way

303 analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test for  
304 means separation ( $P \leq 0.05$ ) [47]. All of the analyses were performed using Statistica 6.0 (Statsoft,  
305 Italy).

306

## 307 **Results**

### 308 **DGGE analysis**

309 The first experiment was conducted to detect the presence of *Ca. E. dadicola* on the surface of *B.*  
310 *oleae* eggs. The PCR-DGGE profiles of egg samples washed with water (CE) showed more  
311 complex band patterns than did those obtained from egg samples treated with propionic acid (PAE)  
312 and the mixture hypochlorite + TritonX (SHTXE) or samples of water CW, PAW and SHTXW  
313 (Fig. 1). In each DGGE profile of eggs treated with water, a clear band was consistently present that  
314 showed the same migration behavior as the band formed by the sample of the oesophageal bulb of  
315 *B. oleae* used as marker of *Ca. E. dadicola* (M). This band was also present in the other DGGE  
316 profiles and showed a decreasing intensity from CE > PAE > SHTXE and rinse water samples.

### 317 **Relative abundance of *Ca. E. dadicola* in *B. oleae* eggs**

318 The analysis of the presence of *Ca. E. dadicola* on *B. oleae* eggs laid by wild females and treated  
319 with disinfectants showed that the amount of the symbiont was decreased in the eggs of the various  
320 treatments relative to eggs of the control treatment (Fig. 2). Specifically, the quantity of the  
321 symbiont was reduced nearly by 2 times in eggs handled with the propionic acid solution  
322 ( $0.503 \pm 0.066$  relative abundance of *Ca. E. dadicola* in PAE vs *Ca. E. dadicola* in CE), whereas in  
323 SHTXE, the bacterial load was decreased by approximately 5 times ( $0.211 \pm 0.125$  relative  
324 abundance of *Ca. E. dadicola* in SHTXE vs *Ca. E. dadicola* in CE) relative to the quantity in the CE.  
325 One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences among the treatments ( $F_{2,9} = 95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and  
326 post hoc HSD tests revealed significant differences between the various treatments and the control  
327 treatment.

328 Real-time PCR was performed on the rinse water of the three treatments to evaluate *Ca. E. dacicola*  
329 presence (Fig. 3). As expected, the relative abundance of the symbiont in the two rinse waters PAW  
330 and SHTXW was very low ( $0.00109 \pm 0.00017$  and  $0.0003 \pm 0.00021$  relative abundance of *Ca. E.*  
331 *dacicola* in PAW and SHTXW, respectively, *vs Ca. E. dacicola* in CE). The water CW contained a  
332 greater quantity of *Ca. E. dacicola* ( $0.2349 \pm 0.31225$  relative abundance of *Ca. E. dacicola* in CW *vs*  
333 *Ca. E. dacicola* in CE). Statistically significant differences were detected among treatments, with  
334 the bacterial content of the control rinse water comparable to the bacterial load on the eggs treated  
335 with both disinfectants ( $F_{2,15} = 59$  M,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, considerable amounts of the *B. oleae*  
336 symbiont are lost even when eggs are washed with water; the load was assessed via real-time PCR  
337 analysis as representing approximately 20% of the original load.

### 338 **Morphological observations**

339 Eggs treated with the two disinfectants (PAE and SHTXE) or washed only with water (CE) were  
340 observed via SEM. The egg of *B. oleae* is elongated and slightly curved (whole egg not shown); it is  
341 characterized by a well-developed anterior pole with an overturned cup-like protrusion that is  
342 supported by a short peduncle, forming the micropylar apparatus (Fig. 4A and 4C). The protrusion  
343 margins display several knobs forming a festooned rim, which give the micropylar apparatus the  
344 overall appearance of a balloon tuft. The micropylar aperture is located in the center of the  
345 protrusion, and the peduncle shows several large openings connected with internal chambers (Fig.  
346 4). Eggs washed with water showed many rod-shaped bacterial colonies scattered on the micropylar  
347 apparatus as well as on its base, around the openings of the internal cavities (Fig. 4B). In contrast,  
348 all the samples of eggs treated with SHTX or PA showed a total lack or negligible quantity of  
349 bacterial masses on the chorionic surface of the anterior pole (Fig. 4A, 4C, 4D). Counts of the  
350 number of bacterial colonies within an electronic frame confirmed that treatment with the  
351 disinfectants greatly affected the presence of bacteria ( $F_{2,12} = 23.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). PAE and SHTXE  
352 showed significant reductions of bacterial colonies relative to the colonies on CE (Fig. 5).

### 353 **Progeny development**

354 Egg hatchability was low and did not differ among the treatments: on average, it was  $35.99 \pm 8.01\%$   
355 for CE,  $34.29 \pm 7.13\%$  for PAE and  $36.64 \pm 21.11\%$  for SHTXE (4 replications; the number of eggs  
356 per treatment varied from approximately 30 to 100). Moreover, the pupal recovery was very low  
357 and variable among treatments: 6.43% (from 184 eggs) for CE, 3.42% (from 147 eggs) for PAE and  
358 13.56% (from 189 eggs) for SHTXE (percentages from the pooled data of 3 replications).  
359 Ultimately, only a few adults per treatment emerged from pupae reared on artificial diet: 11 from  
360 CE, 5 from PAE and 11 from SHTXE. A positive amplification product was obtained only from  
361 four oesophageal bulbs of flies that developed from SHTXE and their PCR-DGGE profiles are  
362 reported in Fig. 6. Each amplicon showed a characteristic migration pattern that differed from that  
363 produced by the *Ca. E. dadicola* marker. Bands were removed from the DGGE gels and sequenced,  
364 revealing their similarities to *Stenotrophomonas rhizophila* (100% similarity to GenBank accession  
365 number NR\_121739), *Microbacterium schleiferi* (100% similarity to GenBank accession number  
366 NR\_112003), *Brevundimonas diminuta* (99% similarity to GenBank accession number  
367 NR\_113602) and *Acinetobacter septicus* (100% similarity to GenBank accession number  
368 NR\_116071).

369

## 370 **Discussion**

371 The main objective of this research was to evaluate the impact of disinfectants on the presence of  
372 *Ca. E. dadicola* on *B. oleae* eggs that had been laid by wild females. The goal of our research  
373 program is to establish a symbiotic olive fruit fly strain comprised of vigorous adults and with  
374 stable, high performance to produce males that can compete with wild specimens in sterile insect  
375 technique applications. Our findings show that only those eggs washed with water (CE) maintained  
376 most of the bacterial load delivered by the mother to the egg surface during oviposition. The  
377 bacterial symbiont on the collected eggs was *Ca. E. dadicola*, as evidenced by PCR-DGGE analysis,  
378 confirming previous studies [41].



379 According to our real-time PCR and SEM observations, eggs treated with PA, the antifungal agent  
380 recommended as part of standard olive fruit fly rearing procedures [32, 48], can lose up to half of  
381 the content of the symbiont transferred by the mother. Propionic acid was first evaluated and  
382 selected from among several disinfectants for its non-negative effects on egg hatching in the 1970s,  
383 when rearing procedures of the olive fruit fly were first established [49]. Propionic acid and  
384 propionates are considered as “Generally Recognized As Safe” (GRAS) food preservatives for  
385 humans. They are used as mold inhibitors and disrupt proton exchange across membranes, thereby  
386 negatively affecting amino acid transport [50]. In insect rearing protocols, propionic acid solutions  
387 are commonly recommended and used as antifungal agents, but they are considered ineffective  
388 against bacteria [51, 52]. It is likely that in our experiments, PA treatment significantly reduced the  
389 symbiont presence by facilitating the mechanical removal of bacteria from the egg surface during  
390 egg washing. Regardless of the mechanism, we can conclude that its usage eliminates most of the  
391 *Ca. E. dacicola* cells transferred from the mothers to their eggs.

392 The second washing treatment used in our experiment was a mixture containing sodium  
393 hypochlorite and Triton X (SHTX). This mixture was used to obtain results that can be compared to  
394 those obtained by Estes et al. [42]. Sodium hypochlorite is widely used at mild concentrations to  
395 surface-sterilize insect adults before dissection, but it is also recommended for the surface  
396 sterilization of eggs for insect rearing [53]. Since bleach is a very effective bactericide, we expected  
397 a severe reduction of *Ca. E. dacicola* following the treatment of *B. oleae* eggs with the treatment  
398 mixture. Moreover, some of the bacteria present on the egg surfaces were likely removed by the  
399 combined surfactant action of Triton X. A detectable quantity of other bacteria, as evidenced by  
400 amplification with universal primers, was observed only for the control water (CW) (data not  
401 shown). Exposure of DNA to sodium hypochlorite causes cleavages in DNA strands, breaking the  
402 DNA into small fragment or individual bases that precluded its amplification [54]. Therefore, we  
403 hypothesize that both PA and SHTX destroyed bacterial DNA, precluding the 16S rRNA gene  
404 amplification in rinse water.



405 Considering our findings along with those of Estes et al. [42], we can better understand the  
406 importance of avoiding the loss of the symbiont from eggs. The relative abundance of *Ca. E.*  
407 *dacicola* in eggs laid by wild females had been estimated as being approximately 5,000 times lower  
408 than that in the larval stage [42]. Furthermore, the symbiont can grow and colonize the gastric caeca  
409 in the larval midgut. Thus, we speculate that common lab rearing procedures may reduce or remove  
410 the bacterial load under a minimum threshold symbiont egg load necessary to maintain the  
411 symbiotic relationship. We believe that to prevent reductions in bacterial transmission, efforts  
412 should be made to avoid the usage of disinfectants in egg collection and/or to establish an  
413 oviposition substrate like olives where females can directly oviposit, as has been attempted with  
414 various fruits [55, 56].

415 It is generally known that common procedures used in lab rearing can affect the presence of  
416 microorganisms that are associated with insects in complex symbioses. The importance of the gut  
417 microbiota in the mass rearing of the olive fruit fly has been recently noted, and new rearing  
418 methods and diets have been recommended [31, 57].

419 When insects are reared in a laboratory, small-scale insectary or large-scale facility, they are  
420 exposed to several sources of contamination, which are enhanced by diverse factors such as the  
421 artificial, constrained environment; the non-natural diet; and the high population density [53, 58].

422 For this reason, various antimicrobials are used to prevent the growth of potentially harmful  
423 microorganisms (pathogenic or non-pathogenic contaminants) in different phases of the rearing  
424 process [52, 58]. The current procedure used to rear the olive fruit fly [48] was established after  
425 numerous experimental tests to evaluate several technical conditions as well as all diet ingredients;  
426 however, the maintenance of the bacterial symbiont in the insect colony was not considered.

427 Moreover, lab populations of the olive fruit fly, reared for successive generations under artificial  
428 conditions, have shown deleterious biological, genetic and behavioral changes [59, 60, 61]. Such  
429 alterations might be due to different causes, and antimicrobials and antibiotics are likely to be  
430 important modifying agents. Streptomycin has been shown to negatively affect *B. oleae* larval

431 growth [62], and nipagin has been shown to change the fly's microflora composition, causing  
432 variations in Adh allele frequencies [63]. Fitness reductions caused by antimicrobial agents have  
433 been documented in other insects, such as members of Hemiptera [64] and Lepidoptera [65]. Taking  
434 into consideration recent findings on the olive fruit fly endosymbiont, *Ca. E. dacicola*, the indirect  
435 effects of piperacillin on adult fitness in *B. oleae* have been evaluated [28]. In addition, the toxicity  
436 of the different disinfectants used in artificial larval diets should be tested for potential destructive  
437 effects on the symbiont.

438 It is believed that bacterial symbionts are transmitted from olive fruit fly females to the progeny via  
439 eggs: this process was hypothesized by Petri [20, 21] and well documented by Mazzini and Vita  
440 [30]. Through SEM and TEM observations, these latter authors described the ovarian eggs and  
441 female reproductive organs as being devoid of bacteria, whereas the rectal, finger-like diverticula  
442 that converge into the ovipositor base harbor many bacterial masses. However, bacterial colonies  
443 have since been found close to the anogenital opening of the olive fruit fly female [24]. The absence  
444 of bacteria in ovarian eggs was also confirmed [66] in a study of the structure and morphogenesis of  
445 the *B. oleae* egg shell and micropylar apparatus. Moreover, submicroscopic observations have  
446 confirmed the absence of bacteria inside the vitelline membrane and the occasional occurrences of  
447 bacteria in the micropylar canal [30]. Based on these previous investigations, we can state that  
448 newly hatched larvae acquire bacterial symbionts from the cavities that underlie the micropylar  
449 apparatus, where bacteria likely grow during olive fruit fly embryogenesis and where the larva  
450 mouthparts burst at egg eclosion [67]. Our observations revealed the presence of bacterial cells over  
451 and around the micropylar apparatus, with some cells occurring inside the cavity opening.

452 Further insight into the symbiont's transfer can be drawn from the egg morphology of *B. oleae*.  
453 Based on previous studies [30, 66] and our SEM observations, we hypothesize that the peculiar  
454 morphology of the micropylar apparatus might be related to the transmission of the symbiont. The  
455 balloon tuft-like protrusion of the anterior pole appears to be a potentially advantageous structure  
456 for scraping bacteria from the lumen of the rectal tract, where the diverticula release their bacterial

457 content. According to earlier studies [68] and our investigations, *B. oleae* eggs exit from ovaries  
458 with the posterior pole directed toward the ovipositor. In this way, eggs entering the ovipositor  
459 cross throughout the poky passage and are covered with bacteria that occur mainly around and  
460 below the protrusion of the micropylar apparatus. Eggs are then laid inside the olive, oblique to the  
461 surface and with the anterior pole close to the pierced fruit skin [69, unpublished observations of the  
462 authors). The egg morphology of different species belonging to or closely related to the *Bactrocera*  
463 genus has not received much attention: apart from some notes on *Zeugodacus cucurbitae*  
464 (Coquillet) and *B. dorsalis* (Hendel) [70], only one research, carried out using SEM, investigated  
465 the eggs of *B. carambolae* Drew and Hancock and *B. papayae* Drew and Hancock [71], the latter,  
466 recently synonymized to *B. dorsalis* [72]. None of these species display the characteristic shape of  
467 the anterior pole of *B. oleae* egg. Furthermore, eggs of *Anastrepha* species, which have been  
468 thoroughly studied, have a different micropylar shape [73]. Thus, it would be interesting to analyze  
469 and compare the micropylar structures of different species with reference to symbiont transmission.  
470 Our initial findings on the development of eggs treated with antimicrobials appear to suggest that  
471 different bacteria may settle in the oesophageal bulb after the removal of most of the bacterial load  
472 from the eggs, including the symbiont load, as occurred after washing the eggs with SHTX. The  
473 four bacterial species recovered from flies are very different: *Stenotrophomonas*, *Brevundimonas*  
474 and *Acinetobacter* are genera of gammaproteobacteria belonging to the Pseudomonadales order,  
475 whereas *Microbacterium* is a genus of Actinobacteria. These species may be considered ubiquitous.  
476 *M. schleiferi* and *S. rhizophila* have been isolated from air, soil, water, and plants as well as from  
477 larval and insect guts [74]. *B. diminuta* is considered a major actor in the process of tissue  
478 decomposition as one of the most common organisms in the soil and other moist environments [75].  
479 Isolates of *Brevundimonas vesicularis* were retrieved from the oesophageal bulb of wild olive flies  
480 using culture-dependent techniques in a survey aimed at studying the microbial ecology of *B. oleae*  
481 in Tuscany [33]. Although ubiquitous, *A. septicus* has mainly been isolated from animal and insect  
482 specimens (for example, *Anopheles gambiae*) and nosocomial infections [76].

483 Finally, considering that 1) we demonstrated a negative effect of disinfectants on the olive fruit fly  
484 symbiont, 2) olive flies can be reared on artificial diet without antibiotics for eight generations [41],  
485 3) genetic changes can be avoided by refreshing lab colonies every five to eight generations with  
486 wild flies [36], and 4) *Ca. E. dadicola* can be transferred horizontally among adults through  
487 cohabitation, as recently shown [26], we assert that a stable symbiotic strain of the olive fruit fly  
488 can be established and maintained under lab conditions.

489

## 490 **Conclusions**

491 Wild populations of the olive fruit fly benefit from the symbiont *Ca. E. dadicola* in the larval and  
492 adult stages, while lab colonies, which lack the symbiont, display reduced fitness. However, SIT  
493 applications rely on the availability of high-quality, mass-reared insects. To establish a symbiotic  
494 laboratory strain of the olive fruit fly, *Ca. E. dadicola* must be maintained in all of the fly's  
495 developmental stages to produce high performing males and females. This research demonstrated  
496 that common disinfectants and antimicrobials used in egg collection strongly affect symbiont  
497 transmission from mother to progeny, with severe consequences, especially considering the  
498 bacterial “bottleneck” that naturally occurs in the transfer from female to larvae via the eggs.  
499 Negative effects of antibiotics on both wild and lab populations have been documented. This study  
500 demonstrated a direct detrimental effect of disinfectants commonly used in olive fruit fly rearing on  
501 *Ca. E. dadicola*. To maintain the bacterial-insect symbiotic relationship in lab strains, "it is crucial  
502 to provide rearing conditions that allow the normal maintenance of the interaction", as Cohen stated  
503 [52]. Future research is needed to test different compounds and conditions for compatibility with  
504 symbiont presence in olive fruit fly lab colonies, especially during larval rearing using artificial  
505 diets, in which molds must be prevented. The findings of this research can be considered as a  
506 starting point for a general review of the entire rearing process for *B. oleae*.

507

## 508 **Author contributions**

509 All of the authors conceived of and designed the experiments. PS, GB and RG reared the insects  
510 and performed the experiments. PS, GB and RG carried out insect dissection and DNA extraction.  
511 RP, GB and CV designed and performed the molecular biology techniques. SR and AB conducted  
512 the SEM observations. PS and RP analyzed the data. PS, RP, GB and AB wrote the manuscript. All  
513 of the authors participated in the revision of the initial draft and approved the final manuscript.

514

### 515 **Acknowledgements**

516 The authors are grateful to the farm “Tenute Librandi Pasquale”, Vaccarizzo Albanese (Italy) and to  
517 Dr. Michele Librandi for providing olive fruit fly pupae used in the research. Thanks are also to  
518 Gabriele Ferrini for his valuable help in laboratory analyses. Antonio Belcari and Patrizia Sacchetti  
519 acknowledge the International Atomic Energy Agency of Vienna, Austria, for supporting their  
520 participation in the CRP “Use of Symbiotic Bacteria to Reduce Mass-Rearing Costs and Increase  
521 Mating Success in Selected Fruit Pests in Support of SIT Application” (D41024).

522

### 523 **Funding**

524 This research was partially funded by the University of Florence (Fondi d’Ateneo) and by the  
525 “Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze”.

526

### 527 **Availability of data and materials**

528 The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding  
529 author on reasonable request.

530

### 531 **Competing interests**

532 The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

533

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727

## 728 **Figure captions**

729

730 Figure 1

731 PCR-DGGE profiles of the 16S rRNA gene fragments obtained by amplification of DNA extracted  
732 from egg samples and rinse water. DGGE denaturing gradient 42-68%. Arrowed band indicates a  
733 DNA fragment obtained by amplification of DNA extracted from wild fly oesophageal bulbs and  
734 used as species marker of *Ca. E. dacicola*. L, ladder; M, 16S rRNA gene fragment obtained by  
735 amplification of DNA extracted from the oesophageal bulb of a wild fly and used as marker of *Ca.*  
736 *Erwinia dacicola*; CE, eggs washed with water (control eggs); PAE, eggs treated with 0.3%  
737 propionic acid; SHTXE, eggs treated with sodium hypochlorite + Triton X mixture; CW, water  
738 from control eggs; PAW, second rinse water after treatment with PA; SHTXW, second rinse water  
739 after treatment with SHTX.

740

741 Figure 2

742 Relative abundance of *Ca. E. dacicola* (mean  $\pm$  SD) in eggs washed with water (CE, control eggs)  
743 considered equal to 1 in comparison with eggs treated with 0.3% propionic acid solution (PAE), or  
744 with sodium hypochlorite + Triton X (SHTXE). One-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's test at  
745  $P \leq 0.05$  (n=4) was performed; different letters above bars indicate significant differences between  
746 treatments.

747

748 Figure 3

749 Relative abundance of *Ca. E. dacicola* (mean  $\pm$  SD) in eggs washed with water (CE, control eggs)  
750 considered equal to 1 in comparison with eggs treated with 0.3% propionic acid solution (PAE),  
751 sodium hypochlorite + Triton X (SHTXE) and the respective rinse water CW, PAW, SHTXW.  
752 One-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's test at  $P \leq 0.05$  (n=3) was performed; different letters above  
753 bars indicate significant differences between treatments.

754

755 Figure 4

756 Scanning electron micrographs of the anterior pole of *B. oleae* eggs. (A) Anterior pole of an egg  
757 treated with 0.3% propionic acid showing the reduction in the number of bacterial cells on the egg  
758 surface. (B) Magnification of an egg washed with water (control) showing the bacterial cells  
759 scattered on the micropylar apparatus and around the openings of the internal cavities. (C) Anterior  
760 pole of an egg treated with sodium hypochlorite + Triton X mixture (SHTX) showing the absence  
761 of bacteria on the egg surface. (D) Magnification of the base of the micropylar apparatus of an egg  
762 treated with sodium hypochlorite + Triton X mixture (SHTX) displaying a single bacterial cell  
763 (arrow) in an internal cavity opening. Arrows indicate rod-shaped bacteria; (co) cavity opening; (e)  
764 exochorionic layer with characteristic sponge-like feature; (k) knobs on protrusion margins; (m)  
765 micropylar opening.

766

767 Figure 5

768 Number of bacteria (mean  $\pm$  SD) counted within an electronic frame in the area close to the cup-like  
769 protrusion of *B. oleae* eggs washed with water (CE) or after treatment with 0.3% propionic acid  
770 solution (PAE) or sodium hypochlorite + Triton X mixture (SHTXE). One-way ANOVA followed  
771 by Tukey's test at  $P \leq 0.05$  (n=5) was performed; different letters above bars indicate significant  
772 differences between treatments.

773

774 Figure 6

775 PCR-DGGE profiles of the 16S rRNA gene fragments obtained by amplification of DNA extracted  
776 from the oesophageal bulb of wild *B. oleae* flies and *B. oleae* flies developed from eggs externally  
777 treated with SHTX (1% sodium hypochlorite + 0.1% Triton X mixture). DGGE denaturing gradient  
778 48-65%. Arrowed bands indicate band excised; GenBank accession number and % sequence  
779 similarity of the nearest BLAST match are also reported. L, ladder; M, 16S rRNA gene fragment  
780 obtained by amplification of DNA extracted from the oesophageal bulb of a wild fly and used as  
781 marker of *Ca. Erwinia dacicola*; EM2, EM25-27, sample codes.

Figure 1

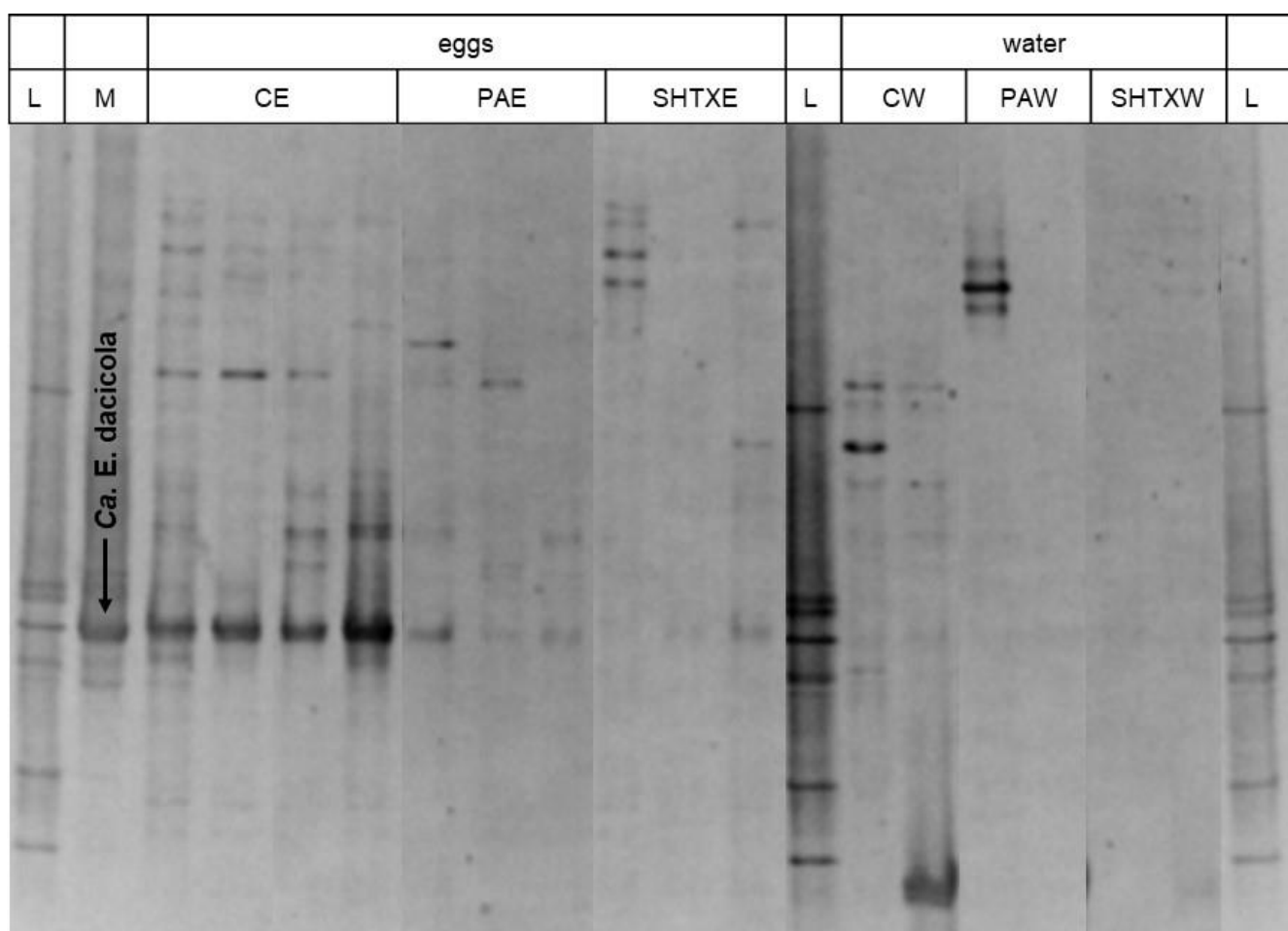




Figure 2

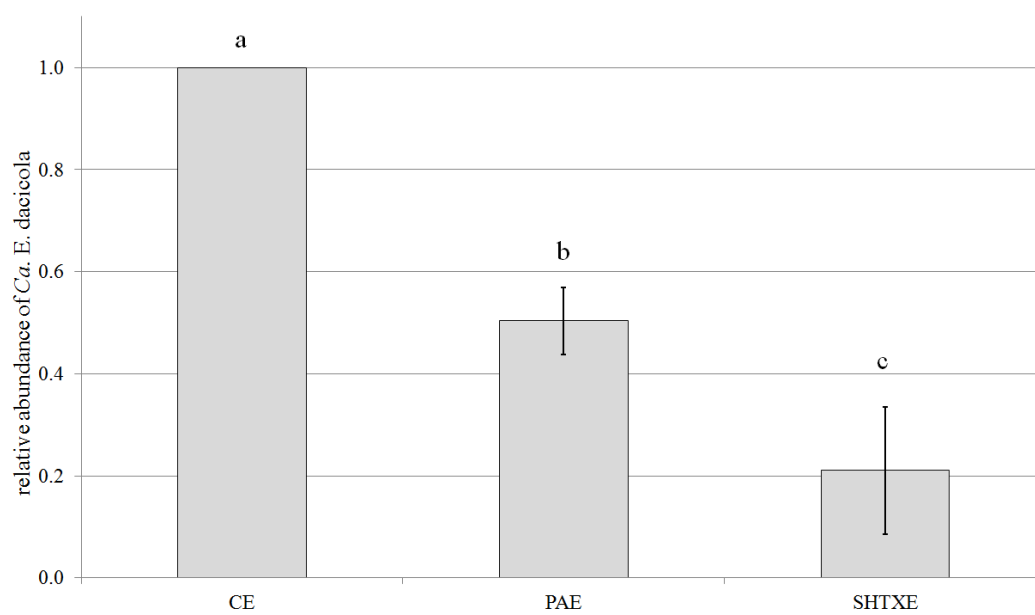


Figure 3

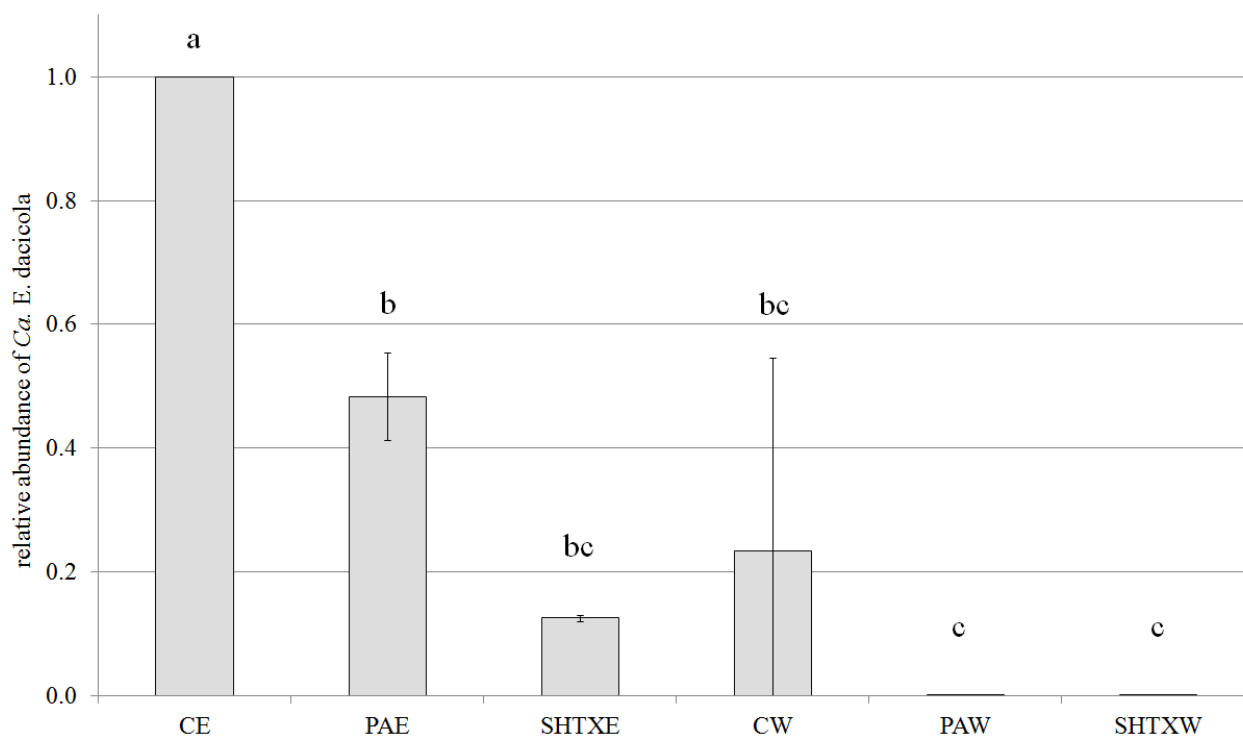


Figure 4

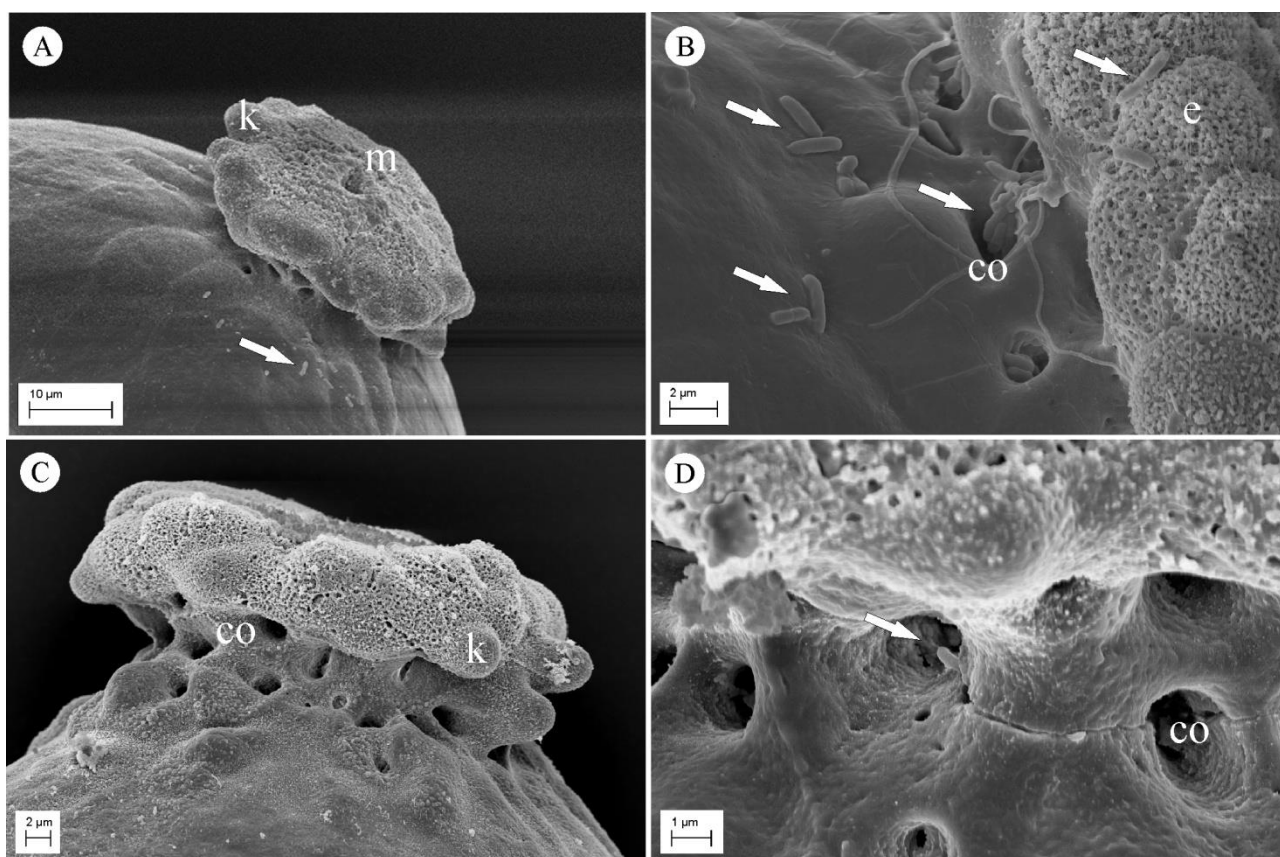


Figure 5

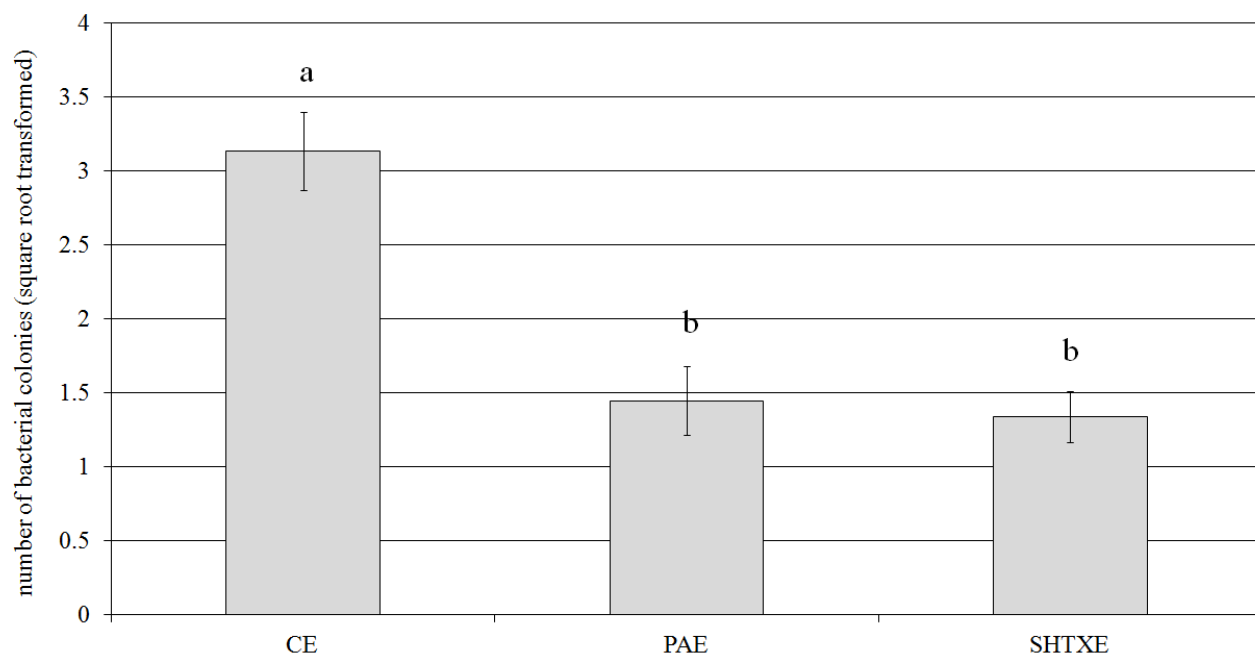


Figure 6

